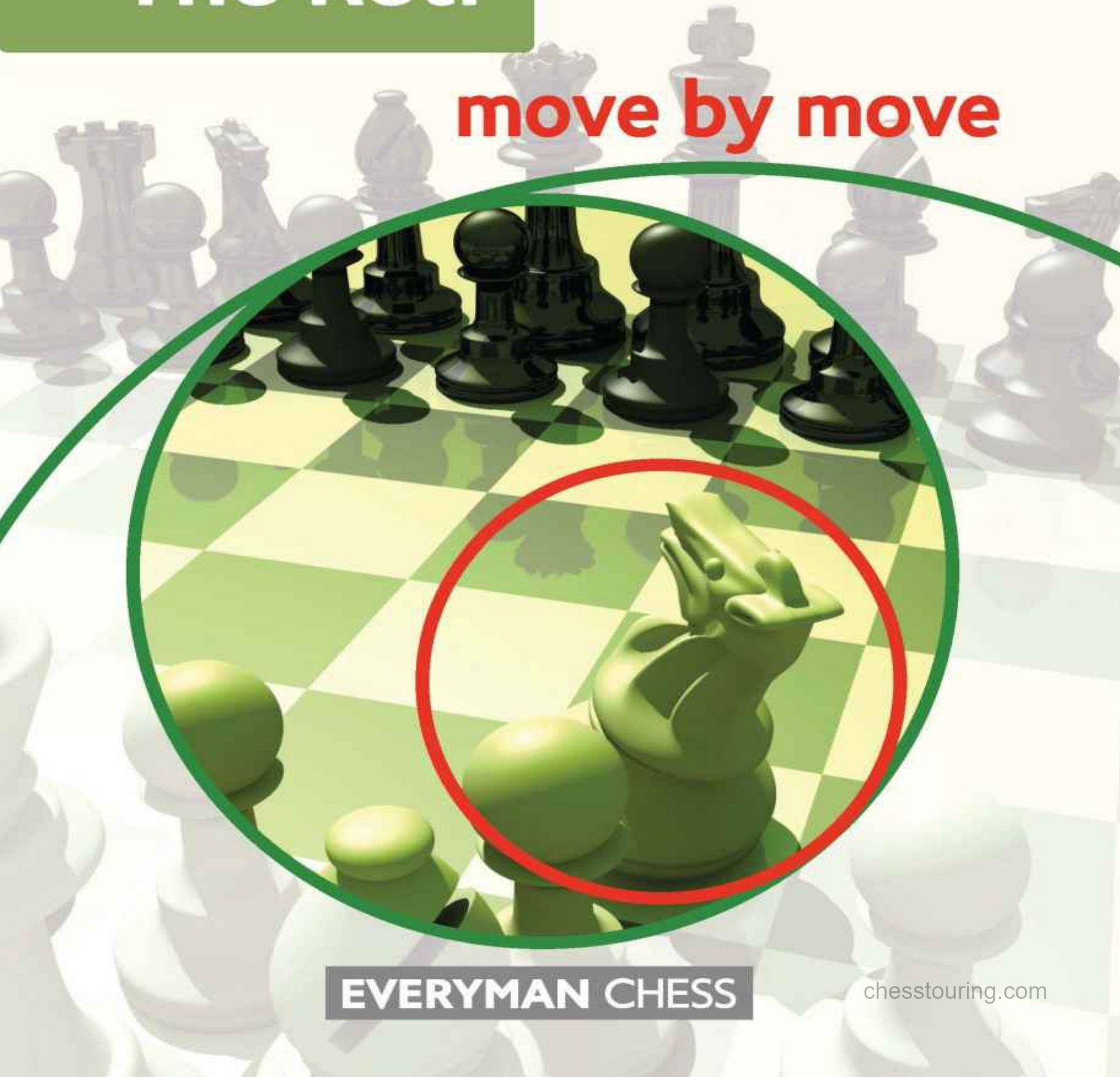


Sam Collins

# The Réti

move by move



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**Sam Collins**

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## About the Author

**Sam Collins** is an International Master with three Grandmaster norms, and a former Irish and Japanese Champion. He has represented Ireland at eight Olympiads, winning an individual gold medal at Bled 2002. He has a wealth of teaching and writing experience, and has produced many books, DVDs and magazine articles on chess.

### **Also by the Author**

*The French Advance*

*Gambit Busters*

*The Greatest Ever Chess Strategies*

*The Tarrasch Defence: Move by Move*

*Karpov: Move by Move*

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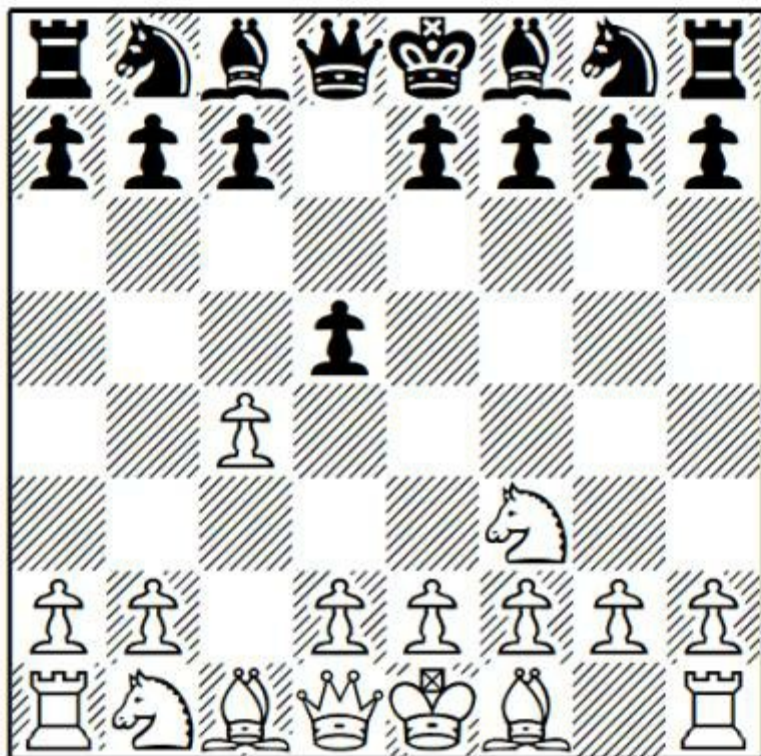
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# Introduction

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4



This book discusses the position after 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 (the Réti), with some brief bonus coverage of 2 g3.

I have selected examples where White generally plays g3 over the next couple of moves, avoiding alternatives such as systems with an early e3. If you're interested in those lines, I can recommend *e3 Poison* by GM Axel Smith (Quality Chess, 2017). Instead, g3 in combination with e4 signifies the King's Indian Attack, already discussed in a book in this series by GM Neil McDonald.

I have not aimed to create a complete repertoire for White, which was admirably accomplished by GM Demuth (and, before him, GM Delchev) in recent works. Instead, I have sought to find and analyse the most interesting recent games in the above terrain, with a particular focus on instructive middlegames (and, in some cases, even typical endgames). These games are roughly distributed across all of the main lines you're likely to meet after 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4. But it's important to note that this book does not form a full repertoire, and is best used as a compliment to one of the repertoire series given in the bibliography.

When I started working on this book I made liberal use in particular of the games of Aronian and Kramnik. In his preview of the Candidates tournament in Berlin 2018 (which, famously, did not go well for either of these players), Jan Gustafsson praised Aronian's White repertoire, saying, "I don't think there's a tougher draw in chess than Black against Levon Aronian. He's so well prepared. Even though he's not a 1 e4 player, in this 1 d4/ 1 Nf3/ 1 c4 complex he keeps coming up with fresh ideas. He has a great support system."

[chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)

Regarding Kramnik, Gustafsson commented, “Opening preparation is still an asset for him ... With White, he will come armed. I’ve no idea what he’s going to do, if he’s going to go for 1 Nf3 and 2 g3, 1 e4, 1 d4, 1 c4, but that’s also a strength. No one really knows, we only know that he will be extremely well prepared.”

Certainly, in this book, we’ll see games where both of these players managed to set their opponents huge problems out of the opening and they have used these systems as a very useful complement to their main repertoire. Of course, Kramnik has now retired, and Aronian is increasingly essaying 1 e4 in his games, but I don’t think the problems they posed in the Réti were reliably or consistently solved by their opponents.

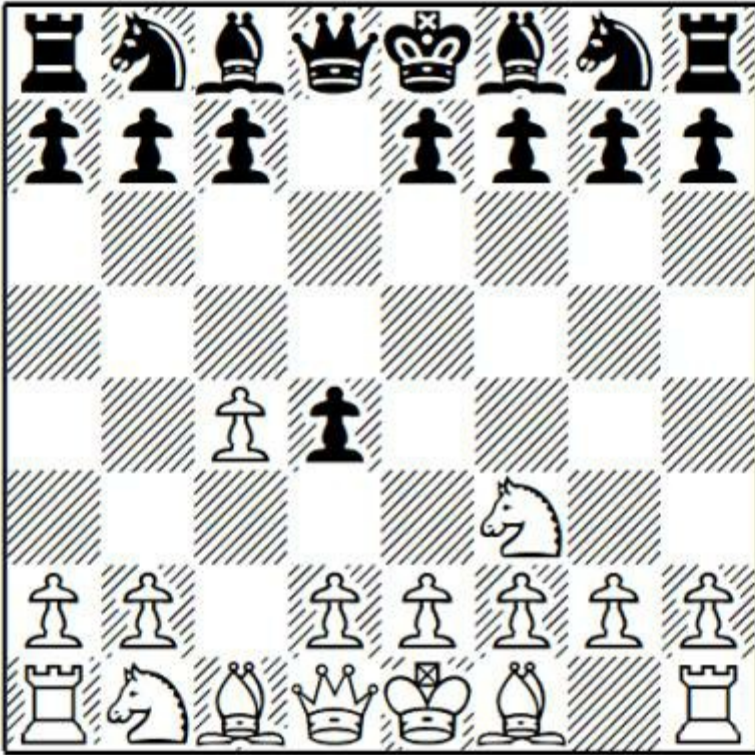
Looking at the new guard, the top younger players like Duda, Artemiev and Rapport make frequent use of the Réti and other closed systems, so we can confidently expect further developments in these lines, although I must confess that I was disappointed not to find any examples from the AlphaZero-Stockfish matches.

I won’t suggest that principled chess with 1 e4 or 1 d4 has had its time and that the lines discussed in this book are the best way to play with White. However, I think that a good understanding of what both sides are trying to achieve in these systems will make you a better all-round player and help in understanding current top level chess where such lines make a frequent appearance. My particular focus is on typical middlegames arising from the Réti. Many of the themes are relevant to other openings, the Catalan in particular.

Sam Collins,  
Dublin, September 2020

# Chapter One

## 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4



This is the critical test of White's chosen move order.

**Question:** What are the advantages of 2 ... d4?

**Answer:** White threatened the straightforward 3 cxd5, with a favourable trade (c-pawn for d-pawn). Moreover, the pawn could not be conveniently recaptured, since ... Qxd5 would misplace the queen and lead to a loss of time after Nc3.

Black's basic approaches to White's threat are as follows:

- Trade on better terms (2 ... dxc4). We'll look at this in a featured game later.
- Defend the pawn with 2 ... c6 or 2 ... e6. Which of these moves Black might choose depends on his repertoire against 1 d4, his preference for various forms of the Slav and the Queen's Gambit Declined, and perhaps his preferred system against the Catalan.
- Advance (2 ... d4). This is the most ambitious approach, by analogy with the position after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 where 3 d5 is critical. By seizing extra central space, Black hopes to set up a middlegame where White will struggle to find comfortable squares for his pieces.

The main move I've covered for White is the most ambitious approach, trying to encircle the d4-pawn:

**3 b4!?**

Black now has to find a way to meet White's threats of Bb2 (and e3, if required). We will look at several games on this theme.

*Game 1*

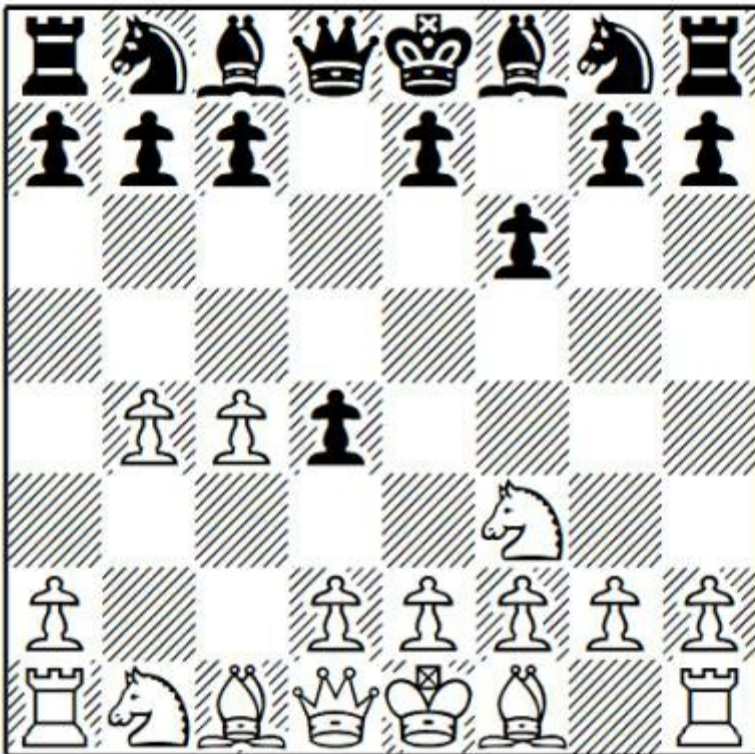
**K.Kulaots-M.Arnold**

Riga Open 2018

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4**

Trying to attack the d4-pawn before it can be supported with ... e5 is toothless, e.g. 3 e3 Nc6! has long been known to be fine for Black, especially if he knows the following nuance. 4 exd4 Nxd4 5 Nxd4 Qxd4 6 Nc3 c6 7 d3 Nh6! and Black has equalised since the knight will be excellently placed on f5.

**3 ... f6**



**Question:** What's the point of this move?

**Answer:** Black prepares ... e5. Although the combination of the moves 1 ... d5, 2 ... d4, 3 ... f6 and 4 ... e5 would normally not be a great idea against more active and centrally-focused openings, here White has only brought out one knight and is a long way from completing development. Having said that, this line does often lead to striking tactical complications, since Black needs to make major commitments to bolster the centre.

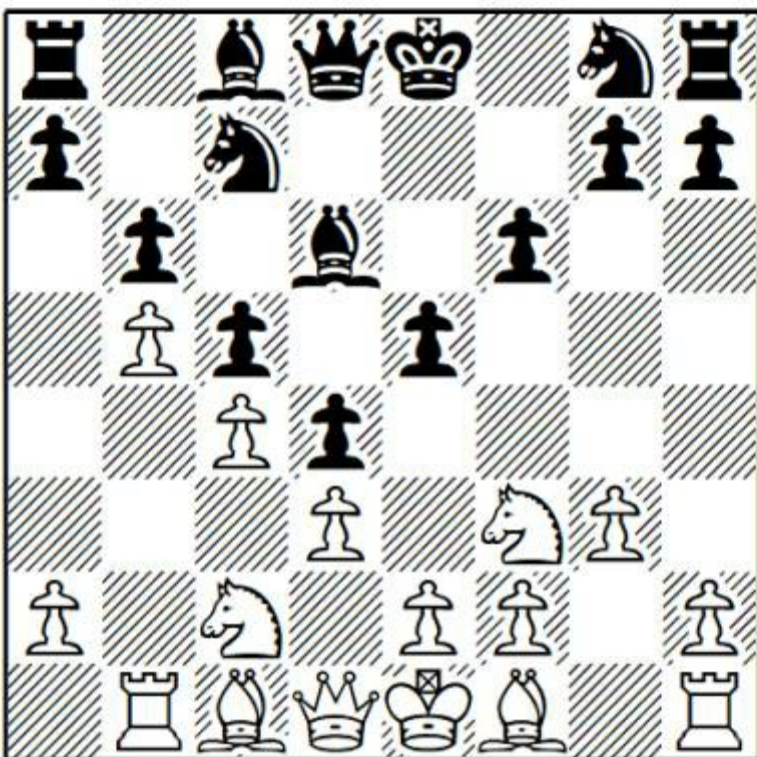
**4 e3**

Challenging in the centre is critical.

If White dislikes the complications of the text game he can opt for the less forcing 4 Na3!? e5 5 Nc2 supporting the b4-pawn. This often results in positions where White (after ... a5 or ... c5) pushes his pawn to b5 and fianchettoes his light-squared bishop, resulting in a large queenside space advantage in a relatively blocked position. This leads to fresh positions which are particularly attractive to leading

players at faster time controls (rapid and blitz), avoiding long forced equalising lines. Now Black can choose from several moves:

a) 5 ... Na6!? was suggested by Semko and Delchev and essayed by Topalov. Of course the knight will go to c5 if White imprudently pushes his b-pawn, but the real aim of this development is to put the knight on c7 after ... c5 b5. 6 Rb1 (6 c5?! was an unsuccessful attempted improvement in T.Hillarp Persson-M.Rodshtein, Batumi 2018) 6 ... c5 7 b5 Nc7 8 d3 Bd6 9 g3 b6 (it's probably a prudent approach to contest the long diagonal and, ultimately, trade light squared bishops).



**Question:** Surely White wants to trade light-squared bishops since his bishop on g2 will be bad? After all, it's on the same colour as his pawn chain from b5 to e2.

**Answer:** When assessing the quality of bishops, the concepts of “good” (i.e. operating on a different colour to one's central pawn chain) and “bad” (i.e. operating on the same colour as one's central pawn chain) are useful but incomplete. Another important question is whether a bishop is active or passive.

In this position, the g2-bishop is extraordinarily active, both down the long diagonal and as an important defender of the white king (covering all the light-squared holes on the kingside).

A similar analysis can be carried out for the dark-squared bishops. The white bishop on c1 is technically “good” but is completely limited by the black pawn chain, hence it is passive. And what about the black bishop on d6? Although this bishop is on the same colour as its pawn chain (and will have no moves after ... Ne7), it's not a passive piece. It contests the f4-square and supports a later kingside expansion by Black if he can achieve ... f5 under good conditions. Black has a considerable central space advantage which means the d6-bishop is unlikely to be passive.

10 Bg2 Ne7 11 Nd2 Rb8 12 Ne4 0-0 13 Nxd6!?. (engines really dislike this move although, for the

reasons given earlier, I think the d6-bishop is not a bad piece) 13 ... Qxd6 14 0-0 Bb7 15 Bxb7 Rxb7 16 e3 Ne6 17 Qf3 Rd7 18 e4 Nc8 19 Qg2. Here Black is well-placed to seize the initiative on the kingside with 19 ... g5!? or 19 ... f5, while after the more conservative 19 ... Qe7?! 20 f4 White is better thanks to his space advantage, and went on to win an instructive game in L.Aronian-V.Topalov, Paris 2016.

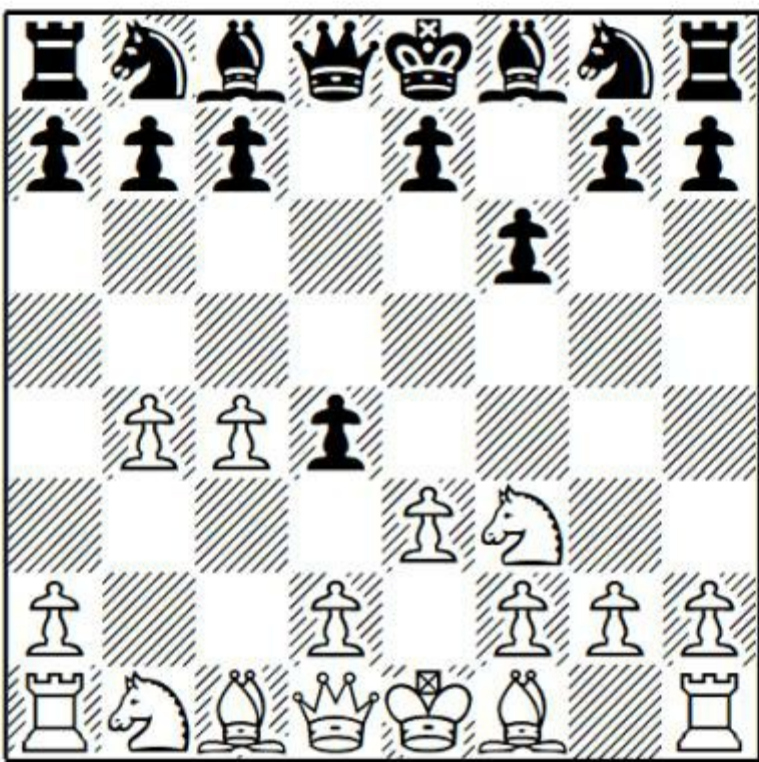
b) 5 ... c5 6 bxc5 Bxc5 7 d3 Nc6 8 g3 has scored well for White (an example is L.Aronian-F.Caruana, Paris 2016) who has easy play on the queenside.

c) 5 ... a5 6 b5 Nd7 7 d3 Nc5 8 g3!? b6 9 Bg2 Bb7 10 0-0 and I prefer White: R.Londyn-L.Cernousek, Prague 2016.

d) 5 ... Bd7 (with a possible idea of ... Ba4) 6 b5 a6 7 e3 dxe3 8 Nxe3 was pleasant for White in C.Bauer-R.Edouard, Switzerland 2016.

e) 5 ... g5!? 6 h3 Bg7 7 d3 led to complicated play in E.Bacrot-R.Edouard, Saint-Quentin 2015.

f) 5 ... b5? 6 cxb5 a6?, with a winning position for White, is one of the most bizarre Benko Gambits you're likely to see: T.Hillarp Persson-J.Hector, Orebro 2013.



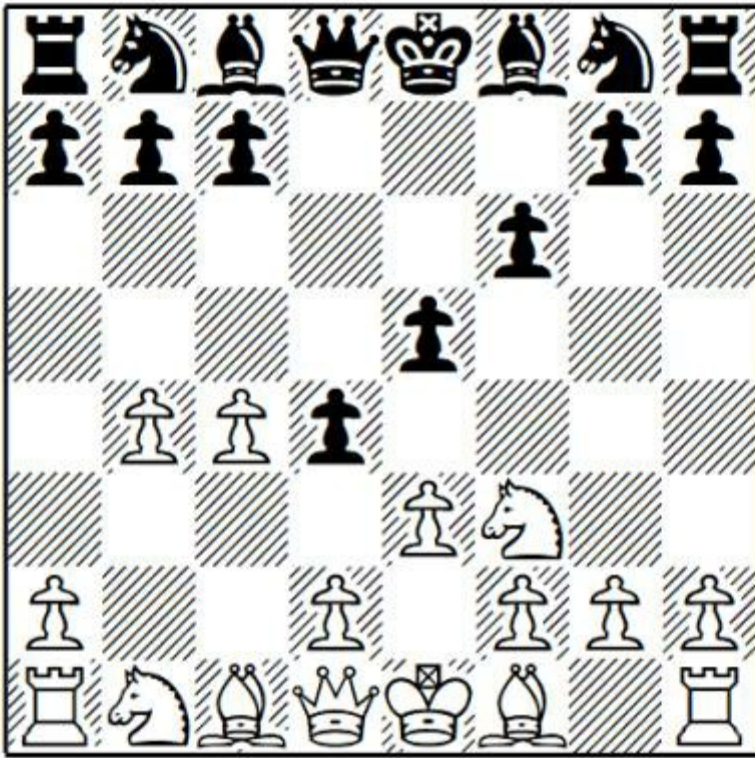
#### 4 ... e5

Of course this was the point of Black's last move. As a bonus, the b4-pawn is attacked.

4 ... dxe3?! 5 fxe3 e5 is less principled. 6 c5 Bg4 7 Bb2 Nc6 8 b5 Nb4 9 Qb3 (Demuth suggests 9 Qa4!) 9 ... Bxc5 10 Bc4 e4 11 Ng5 (11 Nd4! is better) and now:

a) 11 ... fxg5?? led to a rout in the World Team Championship match between Egypt and China from 2015. 12 Bxg7 Ne7 (the engine suggests alternatives but Black is dead lost in any case so there is no reason to criticise Yu's choice) 13 0-0! Kd7 14 Nc3! Bf5 15 Bf6 Bg6 16 Be6+ Kd6 17 Bf7 Bxf7 18 Nxe4+ Kd7 19 Nxc5+ Ke8 20 Qxb4. White has navigated the complications admirably and emerged with an extra pawn, an attack and a completely winning position in S.Shoker-Y.Yu, Tsaghkadzor 2015.

b) 11 ... Qe7! or 11 ... Nd3+ were much better alternatives.



**Question:** How should White meet the attack on the b4-pawn after 4 ... e5?

**5 c5!**

**Answer:** Seizing space, dealing with the attack on b4 and beginning to encircle the d4-pawn. The position is becoming extraordinarily sharp and non-standard.

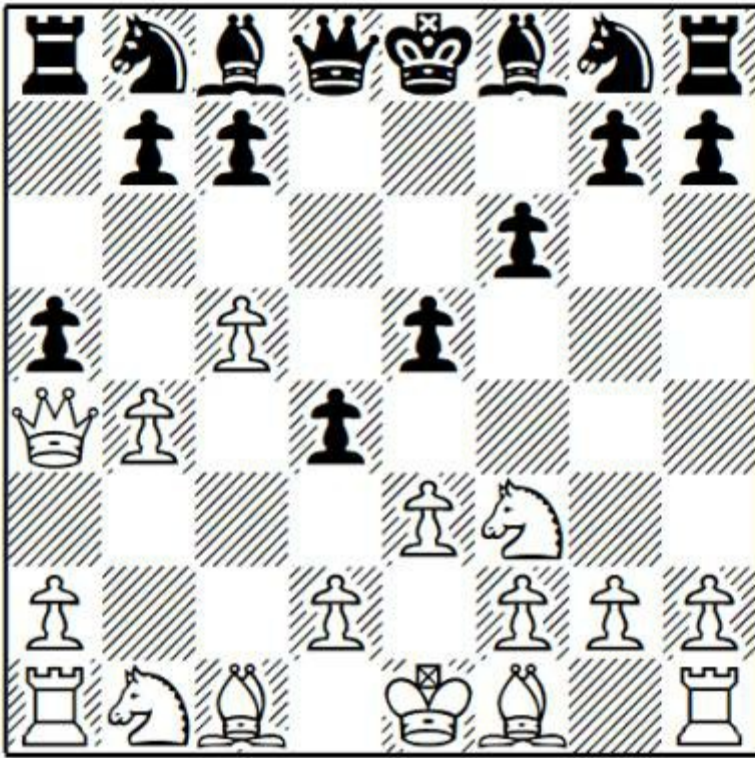
**Question:** How can Black undermine White's queenside pawn chain?

**5 ... a5!**

**Answer:** A very typical strike, especially when 6 a3?? is impossible.

5 ... b6? is also a thematic move to undermine the c5-pawn, but it simply doesn't work due to Black's development deficit. 6 Bc4! bxc5 7 Nxe5! and Black is busted.

**6 Qa4+!?**



The latest fashion, as played, endorsed and analysed by Demuth. White has to act quickly since his queenside structure is disintegrating. Alternatives fail to impress:

a) Delchev's recommendation 6 Bb5+ has fallen out of fashion.

b) The straightforward attempt to make an immediate draw with 6 Nxe5?! fxe5 7 Qh5+ Kd7 8 Qf5+ (which worked in S.Pavlov-S.Movsesian, Pardubice 2017 after the black king retreated to e8) falls short after 8 ... Ke7 9 Qxe5+ Be6 10 Bc4 Qd7, when White has insufficient compensation for the piece: L.Van Wely-V.Kramnik, Nice 2008.

### 6 ... Bd7

The main line. We'll look at alternatives later.

### 7 b5

Giving up the c5-pawn but maintaining the queen on a somewhat active square while pressuring the d4-pawn. Also, concretely, the text is the only decent move:

a) 7 Qc2? (D.Dardha-A.Sterck, Roux 2019) was played by 13-year old Daniel Dardha en route to his impressive victory in the Belgian Championship, but Black would have been much better after 7 ... axb4.

b) 7 Bb5?? fails to 7 ... Nc6! when the queenside collapses and White doesn't have enough activity to compensate. 8 bxa5 Rxa5 9 Qc4 allows 9 ... Rxb5! 10 Qxb5 e4 when taking on d4 loses material while 11 Ng1 Ne5 12 Qxb7 Bc6 13 Qa6 Qd7 and ... Nd3+ leads to a winning attack.

### 7 ... Bxc5

Taking an important pawn, developing a piece and defending the centre, all in one move! 7 ... dxe3 (E.Agrest-H.Tikkanen, Sweden 2015) is well met by 8 Ba3! exf2+ 9 Kxf2 when I don't see how Black will complete development.

### 8 Bc4!

Developing the bishop to its most active diagonal, especially in view of Black's central pawn

construction. This isn't the moment for White to become conservative or materialistic, he needs to play for activity and, basically, for mate.

8 exd4 exd4 9 Bc4 (White can't regain the sacrificed pawn with 9 Nxd4? since after 9 ... Qe7+ his pieces are hanging, his position is replete with weaknesses and Black's lead in development is threatening) allows Black the additional option of 9 ... Qe7+!?: G.Hertneck-L.Jarmula, Germany 2017.

### 8 ... Ne7

This developing move is soundest. Others moves have fared worse:

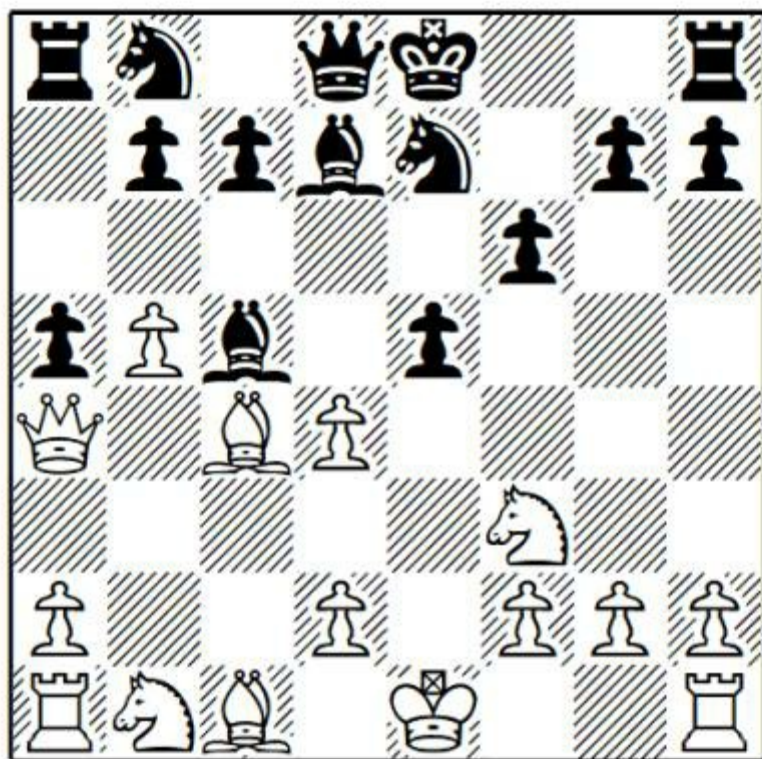
a) 8 ... Bg4?? is a famous blunder: 9 Bxg8! and White won a piece (but not the game) in F.Caruana-V.Anand, Leuven 2016.

b) 8 ... Qe7 9 0-0 dxe3 10 fxe3! (an improvement over 10 dxe3?! as played in S.Mareco-V.Anand, Doha 2016) 10 ... e4 11 Nd4 was much better for White in S.Mareco-J.Iglesias, chess.com INT 2017 and N.Getz-E.Mikalsen, Larvik 2019.

c) 8 ... Nh6? 9 exd4 exd4 10 0-0 Nf5 11 Re1+ led to a rout in the GM clash A.Rasmussen-I.Farago, Amantea 2014.

### 9 exd4

It's in White's favour to open the e-file, since the Black can't castle kingside. Queenside castling seems a long way off, but (as we will see in the main line) can become a real possibility after Black's best sequence of moves.



### 9 ... exd4 10 Ba3!

The only decent move. 10 Bb2 and 10.0-0 have been tried without success. The c5-bishop is Black's best piece (supporting the d4-pawn and e7-knight) and White has to exchange it.

### 10 ... Na6!

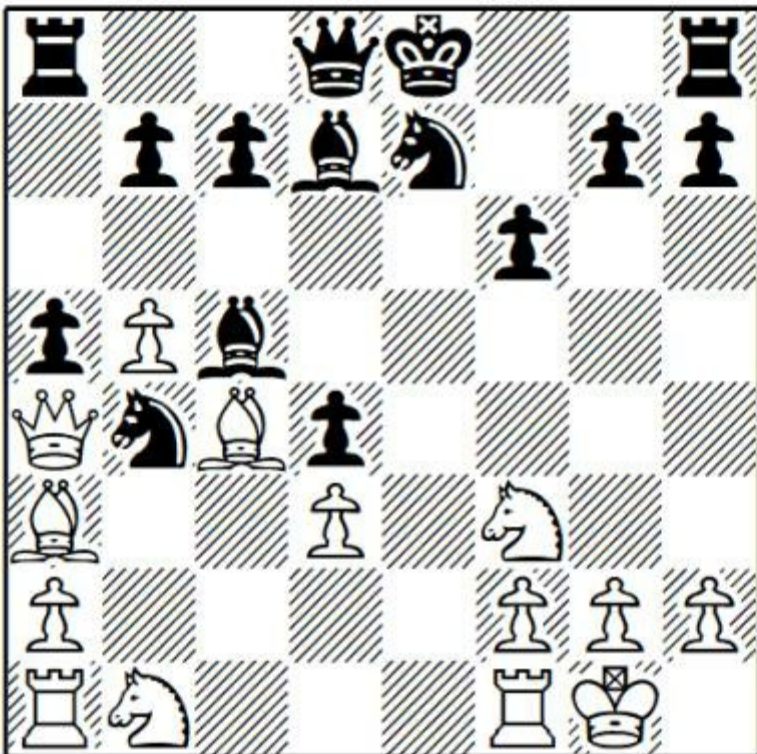
Not just defending the c5-bishop, but preparing to come to b4. After 10 ... Bxa3 (F.Caruana-

V.Topalov, St Louis 2016) Demuth's recommendation 11 Qxa3! is important, with chances of an advantage, although Gustafsson gives 11 ... c6 (instead of Demuth's 11 ... Bg4) 12 Nxd4 cxb5 13 Nxb5 Bxb5 14 Bxb5+ Nbc6 15 0-0 0-0 16 Nc3 Kh8 with equality.

### 11 0-0 Nb4

The knight wasn't attacked yet, but Black's next move would be impossible if the knight didn't move.

### 12 d3



Preparing further development with Nbd2, which will connect the rooks. Also possible:

a) A leading theoretician essayed 12 Bb2? in M.Marin-L.Vrencian, Calimanesti Caciulata 2017 but after 12 ... Bg4! White would have been much worse.

b) Demuth's recommendation 12 Re1, which has been extensively tested in correspondence chess, has yet to be played over the board.

### 12 ... c6

Challenging the b5-pawn and preparing to develop the queen to b6 when queenside castling will be on the cards.

12 ... Bf5 is also playable. Romain Edouard's instructive analysis runs 13 Re1! (improving on 13 Rc1 from A.Demuth-J.Duda, Ruzomberok 2014) 13 ... Bxd3 (or 13 ... b6? 14 Qb3 with an attack) 14 Bxd3 Nxd3 15 Bxc5 Nxc5 16 Qc4 Qd6 17 Nbd2 0-0-0 18 Rac1 b6 19 Ne4 Nxe4 20 Rxe4 Nd5 (20 ... Rd7!? 21 Rxd4 Qc5 leads to equality) 21 Rxd4 Qc5 with an equal position.

### 13 Nbd2 Qb6

Preparing to castle queenside while threatening to win a piece with ... cxb5.

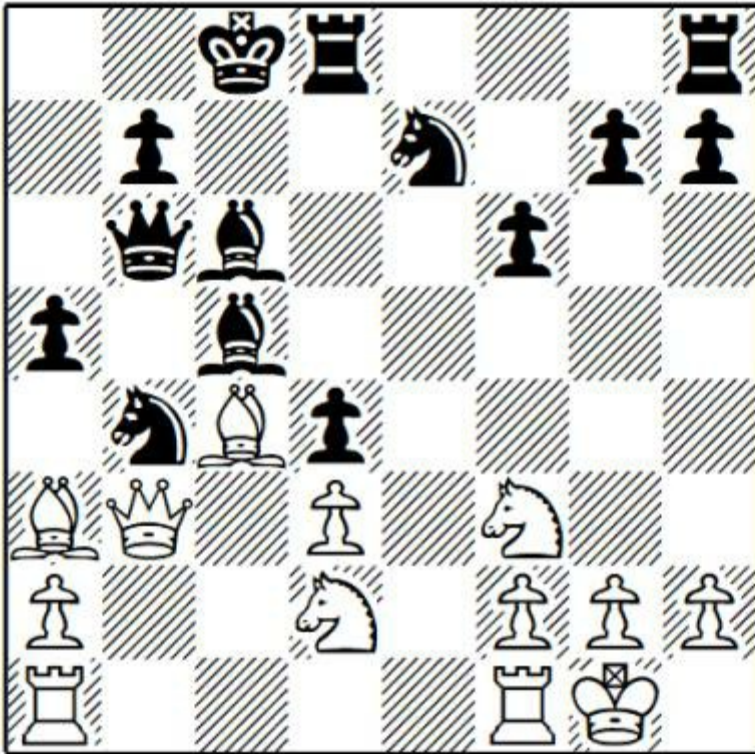
### 14 bxc6

14 Qb3? is a big mistake. After 14 ... cxb5 15 Bf7+ Kf8 and my compatriot (playing Black) was already winning in D.Horvath-C.O'Donnell, Balatonboglar 2016.

14 ... Bxc6

14 ... Qxc6? 15 Qb3 was slightly better for White in I.Bukavshin-N.Shukh, Saratov 2013.

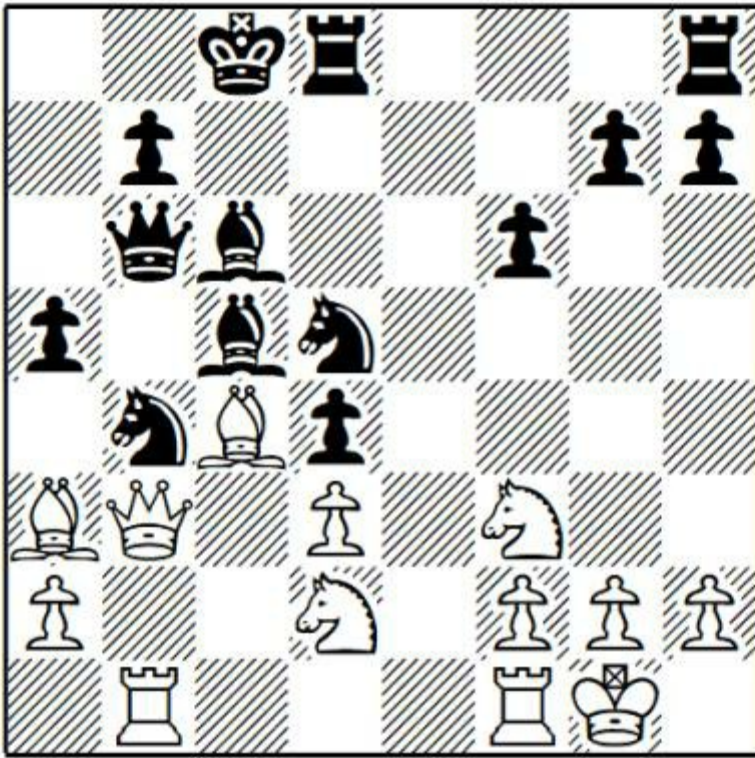
15 Qb3 0-0-0



**Question:** Is the black king safe on the queenside?

**Answer:** Good question! Certainly the black queenside structure is non-standard, with an open c-file and a pawn on a5. As against that, Black's extra pawn (on b7) cements his structure. The black pieces on the queenside have stable positions and are tough to attack. White has no pawn breaks yet and needs to rely on piece pressure on the open files.

16 Rab1 Ned5

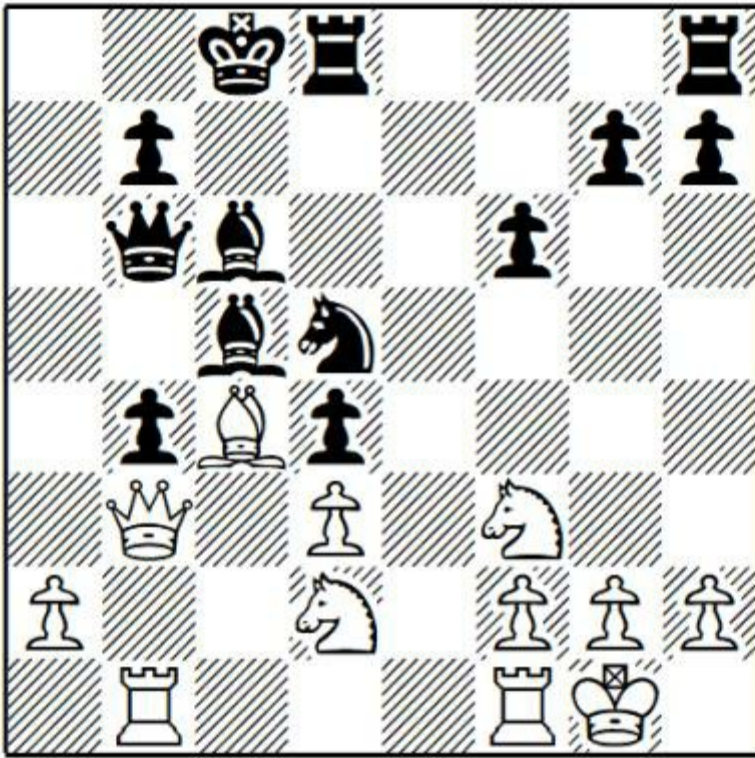


**Question:** How should White continue?

**17 Bxb4!!**

**Answer:** The best move and, in my view, a brilliant one. The knight on b4 was cementing the queenside and, with its exchange, White will get strong pressure on the b-file. After any alternative move Black would be better.

**17 ... axb4**



A principled choice, although now White will have a pawn break with a3.

17 ... Bxb4 was a decent alternative. All three results are possible after 18 Ne4, for example 18 ... f5 19 Neg5 Nc3 20 a3 h6! 21 Nf7 Bxf3 22 Be6+ (avoiding an immediate draw after 22 gxf3 Qg6+ 23 Kh1 Qc6 24 Kg2 Qg6+) 22 ... Kb8 23 gxf3 Qc6 and White can make a draw after 24 axb4 Qxf3 or a different draw after 24 Kg2 Ne2 25 axb4 Nf4+ 26 Kg3 Ne2+ with a repetition of moves.

### 18 Bxd5!?

A consecutive non-standard exchange of a bishop for a knight.

18 a3 is logical but allows 18 ... Nc3 when White should probably sacrifice the exchange with 19 axb4 Nxb1 20 Rxb1 but I'm not convinced he has full compensation.

### 18 ... Bxd5 19 Qc2 Kb8 20 a3!

Finally executing the standard break to open lines on the queenside.

### 20 ... Rc8 21 axb4 Bd6

After very logical play from both sides, the position is balanced.

### 22 Qb2?!

22 Qa4 is more active, with equality.

### 22 ... Rc3!

Occupying an excellent square and threatening the d3-pawn.

### 23 Ne4

23 Nc4 Bxc4 24 dxc4 Rxc4 is much better for Black, who has an extra pawn for limited compensation.

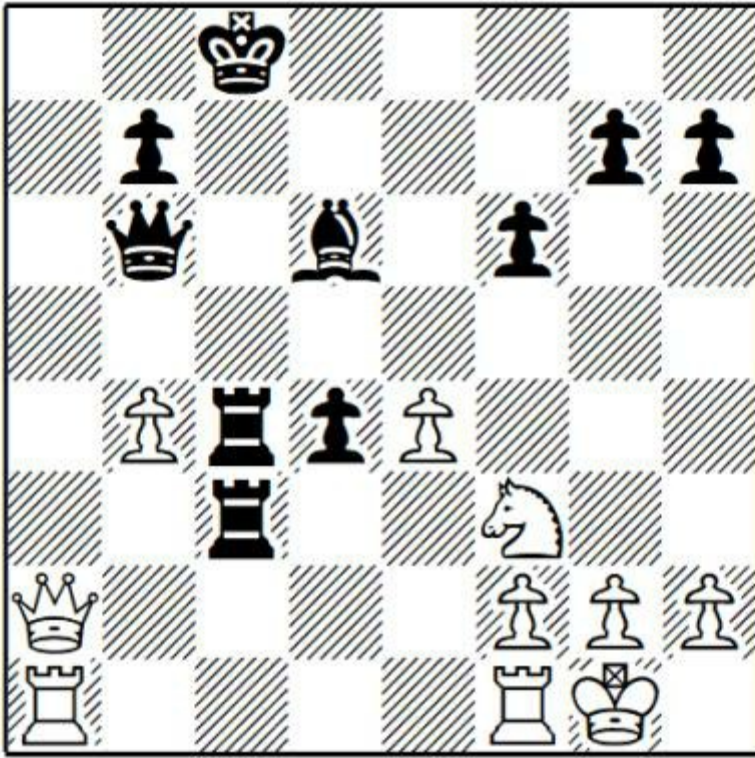
### 23 ... Bxe4 24 dxe4 Rhc8!

Black is slightly better since he dominates the c-file, the b4-pawn is weak, and the d6-bishop appears stronger than the f3-knight. White's hopes are connected with the open a-file, and Kulaots sends his forces there immediately.

### 25 Qa2 R8c4?

The rook fulfilled an important defensive function on the back rank. 25 ... d3! leads to complications favouring Black.

### 26 Ra1 Kc8??



Black could maintain the balance with 26 ... Qa6 or 26 ... Rc8!? but in such positions with a direct attack it's easy for humans to go wrong.

### 27 Nd2!

Turning the tables and gaining a winning advantage. The queen will arrive on g8 with fatal consequences. Black's last two moves created this tactical problem out of thin air.

### 27 ... Rxb4 28 Qg8+ Kc7 29 Ra8

In this position the black king can't survive such a construction on the back rank. He ventures forward, hoping to find safety amongst the black pieces and pawns on the queenside (as sometimes happens in the sharper lines of the Botvinnik Semi-Slav), but Kulaots finds a route through.

### 29 ... Kc6 30 Qe8+ Kc5 31 Rc8+ Bc7 32 Qd7! 1-0

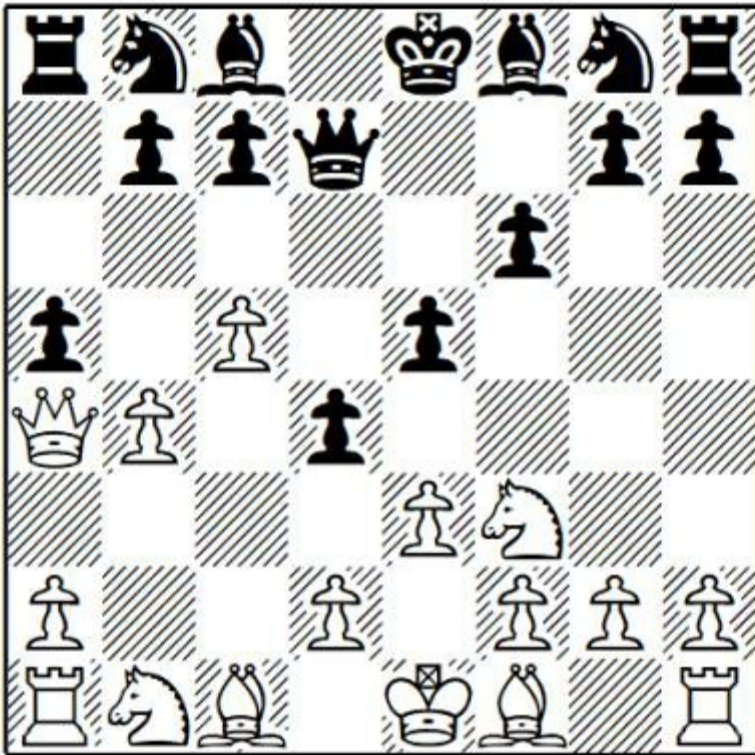
The threats on c7 and d5 force resignation. A hard fought game which illustrates White's aims in this line (mate!) and the rich resources at Black's disposal.

### Game 2

### J.Duda-A.Grischuk

Grand Chess Tour Rapidplay, Paris 2019

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4 f6 4 e3 e5 5 c5 a5 6 Qa4+ Qd7



This is much less popular than 6 ... Bd7 but was tried in 2019 by Grischuk, So and Wang Hao, so I expect further developments.

Alternatives also look quite playable:

a) 6 ... Nc6 7 b5 Nb4 8 a3 Nd5 (Black has spent a lot of time with this knight, but it's occupied a central square and in chasing it around White hasn't developed more pieces but, instead, has weakened his queenside pawn chain) 9 exd4 (Demuth's 9 Qc2!? gives rise to interesting positions) 9 ... exd4 10 Qxd4 led to a balanced endgame in A.Demuth-W.So, Montpellier 2015 and S.Mareco-Ni Hua, Baku 2015.

b) 6 ... c6 (S.Plischki-P.Schlosser, Pardubice 2018) also deserves further tests.

### 7 Bb5

This move works (unlike after 6 ... Bd7) and should be played. At least, it's the only move to be tested over the board. If you're looking for original positions then, by analogy with the 6 ... Bd7 line, 7 b5! could be considered, though I give no guarantee of its soundness!

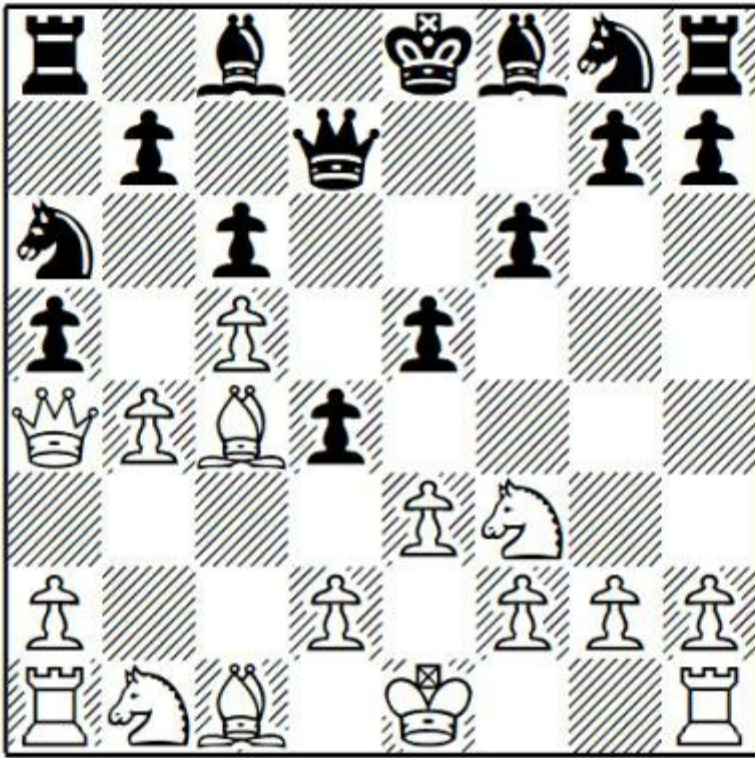
### 7 ... c6

7 ... Nc6?, which won the game after 6 ... Bd7 7 Bb5?!, doesn't create a threat here, and White has a crushing advantage after 8 0-0.

### 8 Bc4

Returning to its favourite diagonal.

### 8 ... Na6



Pressuring the white queenside pawn chain has been endorsed by both Grischuk and So. Others:

a) 8 ... Ne7 9 b5 Nd5 10 Ba3 Nc7 11 bxc6 Nxc6 12 0-0 Nb4 13 Qb3 Bxc5 14 exd4 b5 was agreed drawn in P.Maghsoodloo-Wang Hao, Sharjah 2019, but Black has the better chances in the final position. I'd recommend 11 b6!? with unclear play.

b) 8 ... dxe3 (N.Petrov-S.Fenil, Barcelona 2018) is well met by 9 fxe3! with a slight advantage to White.

**9 exd4!**

Much stronger than 9 0-0?! (J.Christiansen-H.Gretarsson, Helsingor 2016 and E.Cordova-W.So, chess.com INT 2019).

**9 ... e4**

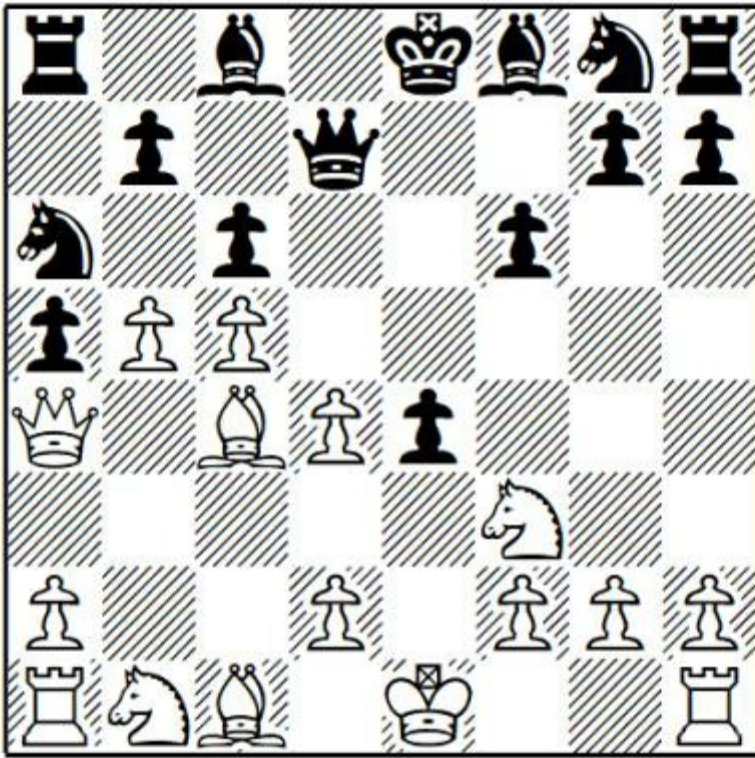
Or:

a) 9 ... exd4 10 0-0 axb4 transposes into the next note.

b) 9 ... axb4 10 0-0 exd4 and the open e-file is bad news for the black king. 11 Re1+ Kd8 12 a3 and I prefer White's initiative to Black's extra pawn.

c) 9 ... Nxb4? is even worse after 10 0-0!, when Black has no way to prevent a collapse in the centre.

**10 b5!**



**10 ... Nb4?!**

The forcing sequence arising from this move doesn't end well for Black. Instead 10 ... exf3 11 bxa6 fxf2 12 Rg1 b5! 13 cxb6 Bxa6 bears a closer resemblance to a normal game of chess. It seems that Black can eventually equalise after 14 Rxf2 (I haven't found anything better in the alternatives 14 Nc3, 14 Qxa5 and 14 Ba3) 14 ... Bxc4 15 Qxc4 Ne7.

**11 a3! exf3!**

11 ... Nd5 12 Ng1! Nf4 13 Nc3! leads to a winning advantage for White since he maintains his extra pawn and his centre is impregnable (of course, the d-pawn isn't hanging in view of Bf7+).

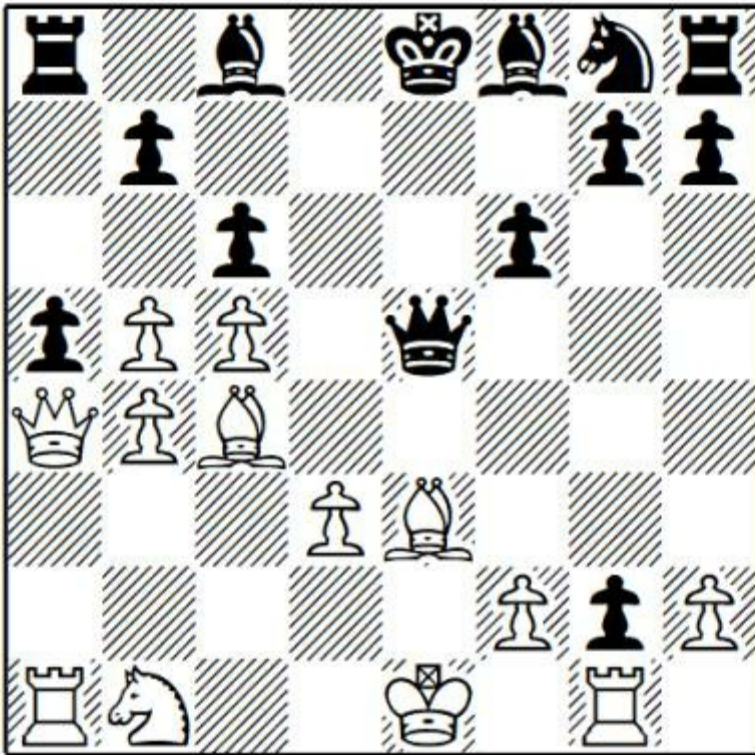
**12 axb4 Qxd4 13 d3!**

The only move, but leading to a wonderful position for White.

**13 ... Qe5+**

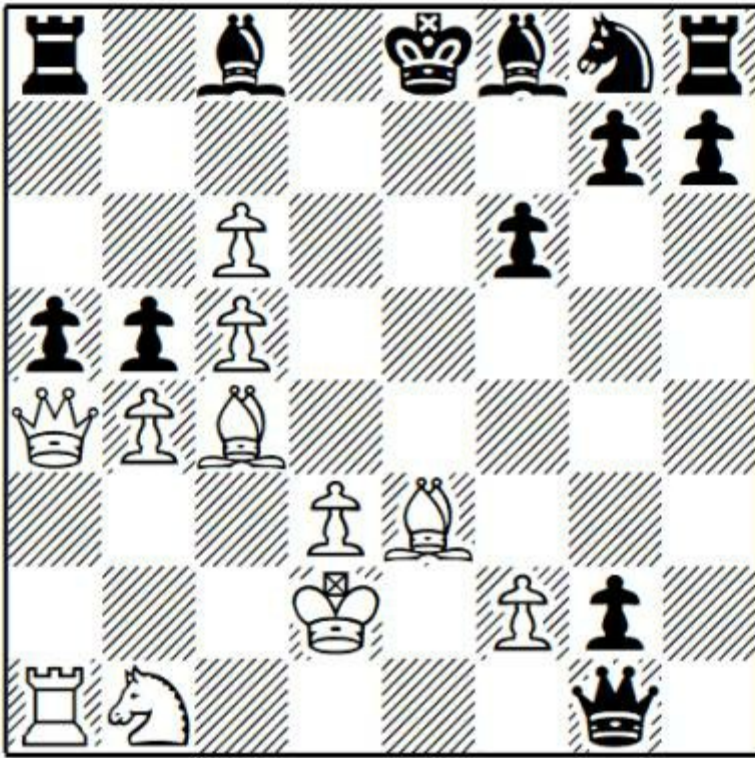
13 ... fxf2 14 Rg1 Qe5+ 15 Be3 transposes.

**14 Be3 fxf2 15 Rg1**



### 15 ... Ne7

Finally varying from a game played five years previously between two creative Swedish GMs, whose battles will feature heavily in this book. That game continued 15 ... Qxh2 16 bxc6!! (giving up a rook with check is always beautiful – when it works! – though the engine points out that White could transpose moves with 16 Kd2!!) 16 ... Qxg1+ 17 Kd2 b5!/? makes for a good tactical exercise.



**Question:** What should White play?

**Answer:** 18 cxb6! wins (not 18 Qxb5?? Qh2 with a clear advantage to Black) 18 ... Bxb4+ 19 Nc3! (19 Kc2 also works but it's very aesthetic to complete development) 19 ... Qh2 20 b7 Rb8 21 c7+ (an amazing position!) 21 ... Kf8 22 cxb8Q Qxb8 23 bxc8Q+ Qxc8 and White's extra piece and lead in development soon decided the game in T.Hillarp Persson-J.Hector, Denmark 2014.

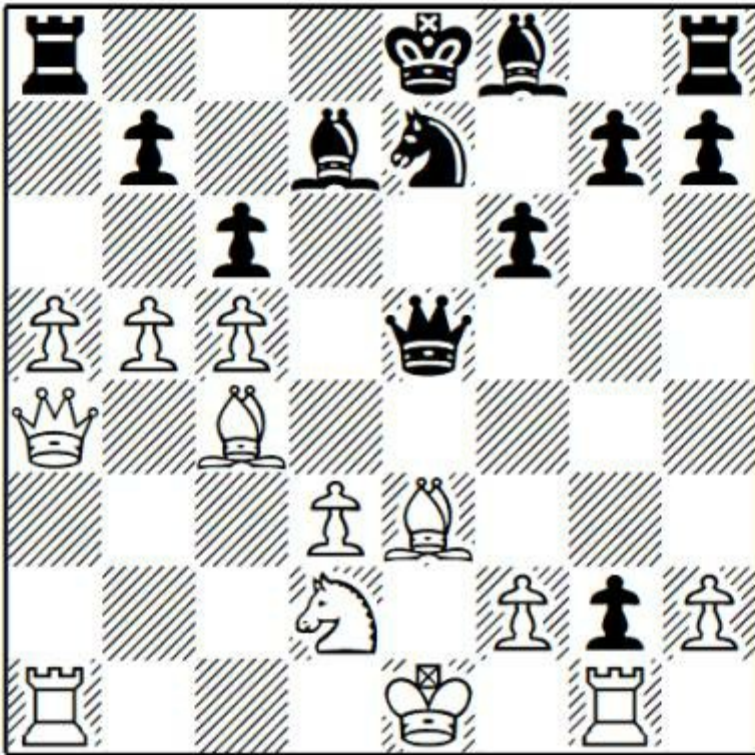
**16 Nd2?!**

This leads to an unbelievable game, so we must be grateful to Duda. However, 16 Rxc2! is a much simpler move, with a winning advantage. Black has no material or other compensation for White's much more active position.

**16 ... Bd7**

16 ... Qxh2 17 0-0-0! and I don't think Black can survive.

**17 bxa5?**



Again 17 Rxc2! was very strong, with a clear advantage, but Duda keeps pouring fuel on the fire.

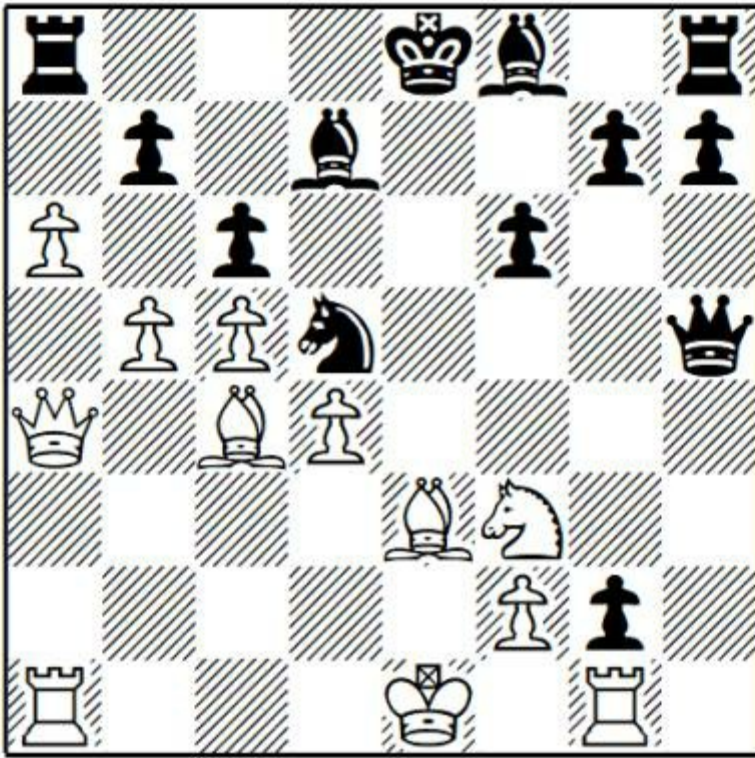
**17 ... Nd5**

17 ... Nf5 is also possible. 18 Nf3 Qb2 (18 ... Qc3+ 19 Bd2 Qb2 20 Qd1! (threatening Ra2) 20 ... Nd4 21 Nxd4 Qxd4 22 Be3 Qc3+ 23 Ke2 is much better for White) 19 Ra2! cxb5 20 Rxb2 bxa4 21 Rxb7 Bc8 22 a6! leads to very difficult endgames for Black, for example 22 ... Nxe3 23 fxe3 Bxc5 24 Rxc2 Bxb7 25 axb7 Rb8 26 Rxc7 a3 and Black needs to continue playing with computer precision to survive.

**18 d4**

18 Bxd5 would keep the game in more understandable territory, for example 18 ... Qxd5 19 b6 Qxd3 20 Rxc2 Kf7 21 Qc4+ Qxc4 22 Nxc4 Be6 23 Nd6+ Bxd6 24 cxd6 Ra6 with a blockade and a fortress.

**18 ... Qxh2 19 Nf3 Qh5 20 a6!**



This position is unbelievably complex and almost impossible for humans to play well at any time control, which makes Duda's performance quite remarkable.

**20 ... Be7**

20 ... Bd6 21 cxd6 Qxf3 22 Qd1! Qxd1+ 23 Kxd1 is another computer line ending in equality.

**21 axb7!**

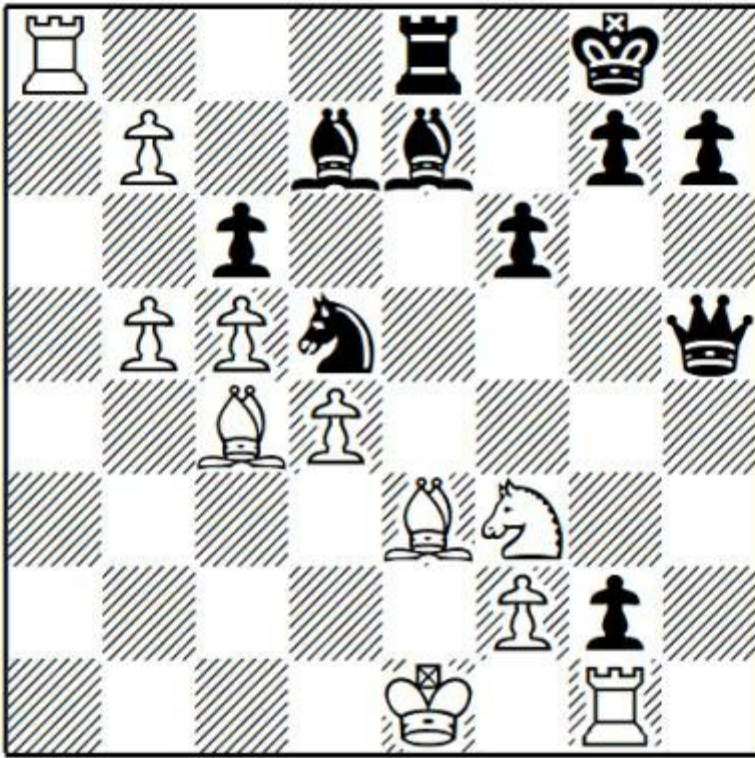
A queen sacrifice, although one which most players couldn't resist in view of the queenside pawn roller.

**21 ... Rxa4 22 Rxa4 0-0**

Not a bad move objectively, although the possibility of back rank checks will prove significant in several variations.

22 ... Kf7! is a cleaner solution. 23 Ra8 Qxf3 24 Rxh8 Bg4 25 Kd2 cxb5 26 b8Q bxc4 and the game will end in perpetual check.

**23 Ra8 Re8?**



Allowing a stunning finish.

23 ... cxb5 was essential. 24 Bb3 (Perhaps Grischuk [down to seconds, no doubt] missed that after 24 Rxf8+ Bxf8 25 b8Q?? [25 Bb3!] 25 ... bxc4 the white position immediately collapses!) 24 ... Qxf3 25 Rxf8+ Bxf8 26 b8Q Bg4 27 Qxb5 h5 with a highly unclear position where all three results are possible.

**Question:** White to play and win after 23 ... Re8.

**24 Kd2!!**

**Answer:** A gorgeous move, connecting the rooks and completing development. The white king is completely safe on d2 and, with an extra queen and a pawn on g2, Black has no particularly useful moves. This reminds me of several of Kasparov's best games where, before the final attack, he tucks his king into safety (even when material down), after which all the variations work perfectly. Others:

a) Going for the same construction with 24 Rxe8+?? Qxe8 25 Bxd5+ cxd5 is a horrible blunder since Bf4 is impossible, so Black wins.

b) 24 Rxc2 kept some advantage but is nowhere near as good as Duda's move.

**24 ... Kf8 25 Rxe8+ Qxe8 26 Bxd5 Bd8**

26 ... cxd5 27 Bf4 doesn't change anything.

**27 Bf4 Ba5+ 28 Kd1 1-0**

A stunning game, and one of several recent efforts by Duda which show his potential as a future world championship contender.

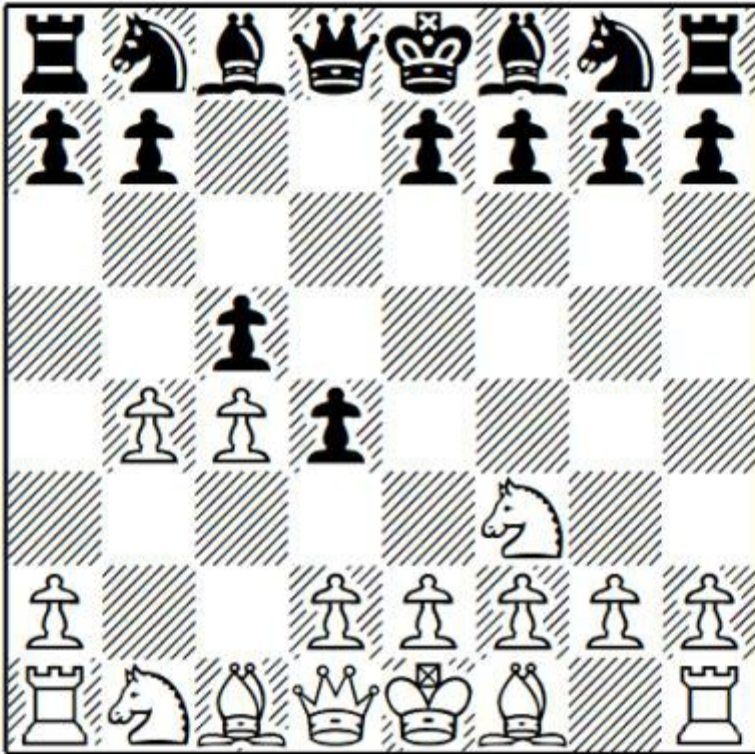
Game 3

**B.Adhiban-V.Anand**

chesstouring.com

Baskaran Adhiban is one of my favourite players, and his notes (both in print and on YouTube!) are always inspiring and deeply instructive. His performance in the 2018 Tata Steel A-Group wasn't as impressive as his debut the previous year (when he finished second and secured a winning position against Magnus Carlsen using the Scandinavian), but he still showed the optimism and fighting spirit we've come to expect. This game was also notable in being the first classical game between Adhiban and Anand (after a simul when Adhiban was aged 10!).

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4 c5**



One of the most ambitious options, and a very logical one. 3 ... a5 is sometimes played, also with the aim of disrupting the white pawn chain. I think it can be met quite simply with 4 b5 g6 (4 ... c5 5 e3! followed by exd4 and g3 is similar) 5 g3 Bg7 6 d3 e5 7 Bg2 Ne7 8 0-0 with an unbalanced position in I.Hera-I.Farago, Hungary 2014.

**4 g3!?**

Aiming for a reversed Benko Gambit.

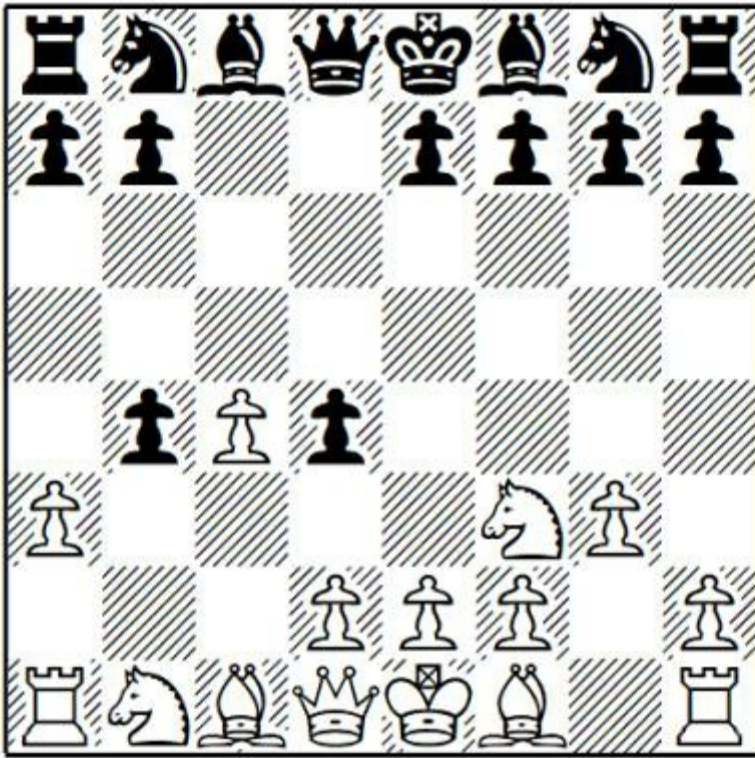
**4 ... cxb4**

Or:

a) 4 ... a5 5 b5 g6 6 Bg2 Bg7 7 0-0 Ra7 8 a4 b6 9 Ra2 e5 10 d3 was more pleasant for White in V.Ivanchuk-J.Hammer, Skopje 2015.

b) 4 ... Nc6? 5 b5 Nb8 (B.Damljanovic-Z.Xu, Novi Sad 2019) is unlikely to attract many followers.

**5 a3**



### 5 ... b3!?

As Adhiban points out, “A solid alternative as playing the Benko a move down could really be nasty.” Examples of other approaches are:

a) 5 ... e6 6 Bg2 Nc6 7 0-0 a5 (7 ... Nf6 (S.Ernst-J.Van Foreest, Amsterdam 2018) 8 e3!? gives adequate compensation) was played in P.Svidler-N.Vitiugov, St Petersburg 2018 and now I like 8 e3!?.

b) 5 ... bxa3 6 Bg2 Nc6 7 Bxa3 (7 0-0?! (K.Bischoff-Li Chao, Germany 2016 and A.Hoffman - S.Mareco, Buenos Aires 2018) looks less convincing since it doesn't disrupt Black's development) and now:

b1) 7 ... e5 8 Bxf8 Kxf8 9 d3 g6 10 0-0 Kg7 11 Nbd2 Nf6 led to an eventual draw in W.So-M.Adams, London 2017.

b2) 7 ... Nf6 8 d3 e5 9 Bxf8 Kxf8 is similar: L.Pantsulaia-A.Korobov, Baku 2016.

b3) 7 ... g6 8 d3 Bg7 9 Nbd2 Nf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Nb3 Re8, again with standard Benko compensation in T.Gareyev-E.Gasanov, Baku 2018.

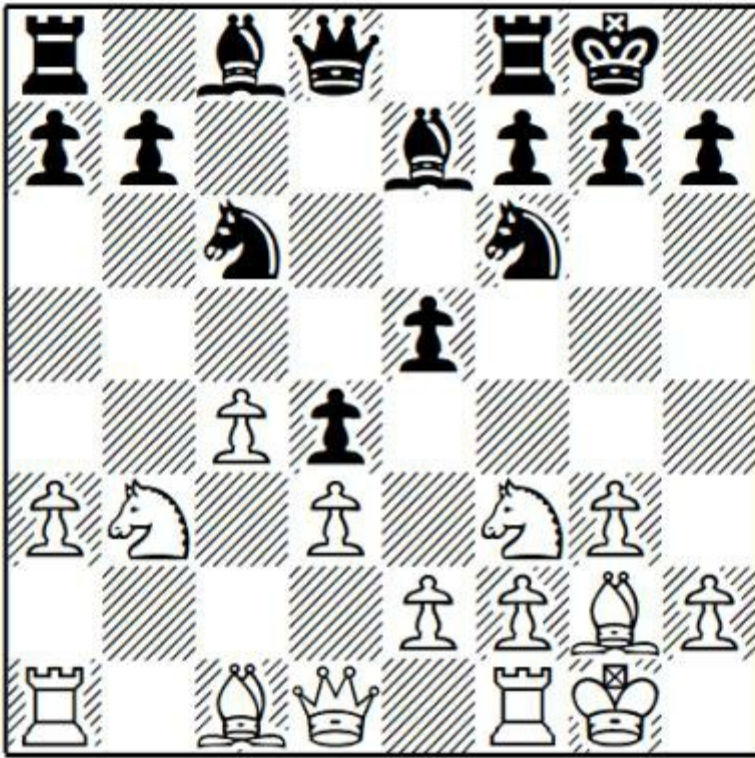
c) Adhiban tested 5 ... f6 6 Bg2 e5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 d3 in 2011, making a draw against Kunte.

### 6 d3 Nc6 7 Nbd2 e5 8 Bg2 Nf6 9 0-0 Be7

Black has comfortably completed his kingside development and has a good centre so he can hardly be worse. A dynamic struggle is in prospect.

Adhiban suggests 9 ... Bd6 10 Nxb3 0-0 11 e3 dxe3 12 Bxe3 Be6 with equality.

### 10 Nxb3 0-0



White now carries out a very effective light-squared strategy.

**Question:** How would you continue?

**11 Bg5!**

**Answer:** I suppose I gave you a clue, but trading the knight which competes for the d5 and e4 squares is an excellent approach. Engines dislike this choice but it's very logical.

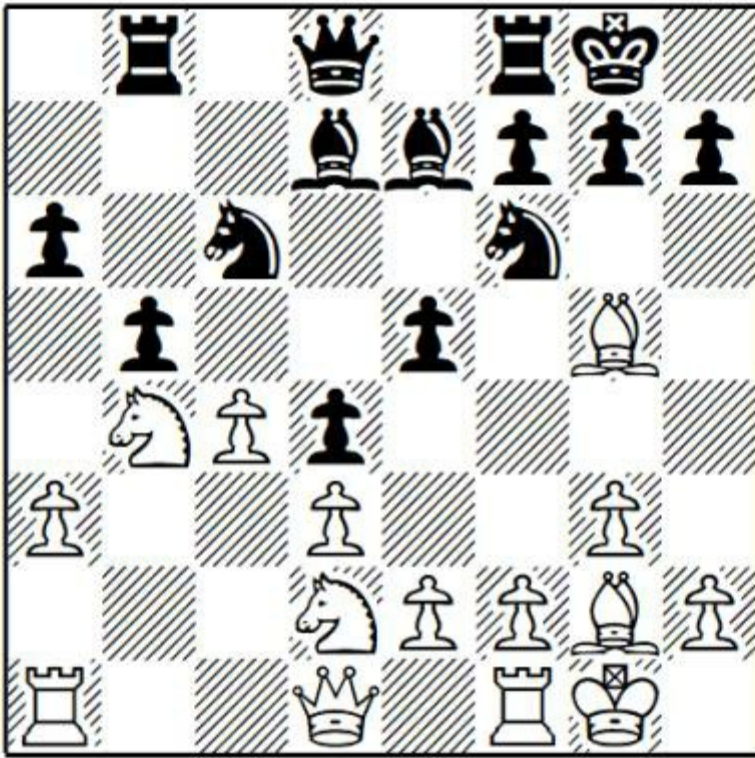
**11 ... Rb8 12 Ne1!**

Unleashing the g2-bishop and bringing the knight to c2 from where it supports e3, pressurises d4 and can jump to b4 under good conditions.

**12 ... Bd7**

An example of the difference between computer and human evaluations of these positions arises after Adhiban's line 12 ... Bg4 13 Nc2 h6 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Nb4 "with a nice position for White (but the computer disagrees)".

**13 Nc2 b5 14 Nd2 a6 15 Nb4**



Adhiban was critical of Anand's queenside operation and tries to seize the initiative with this move. However, the position remains balanced.

**15 ... Nxb4 16 axb4 bxc4?**

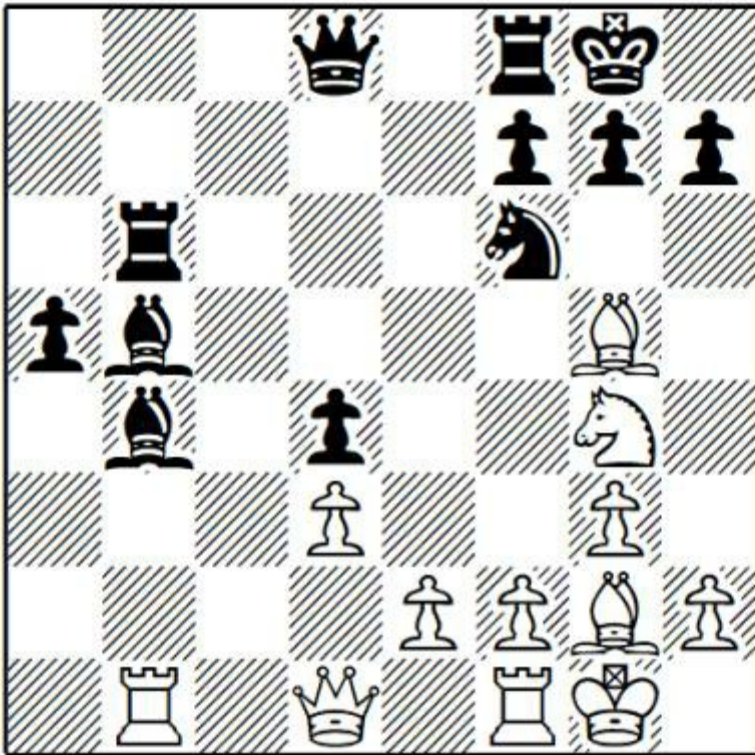
Activating the white knight seems to be a mistake.

Adhiban gives 16 ... Bxb4 17 Rxa6 Bc8 18 cxb5!? Rxb5 (18 ... Bxa6 19 bxa6 Qa5 20 Bb7 with full compensation. Probably Black will take on b7 over the next few moves, with a draw.) 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 Ra8 "and the fight will continue on the light squares."

**17 Nxc4 Bb5**

Adhiban doesn't comment on this, and I haven't been able to find a good alternative.

**18 Nxe5 Bxb4 19 Rb1 a5 20 Ng4 Rb6**



**Question:** How can White build a threatening attacking position?

**21 Qc1?**

**Answer:** Adhiban gives 21 Bxf6! gxf6 22 Nh6+ Kh8 23 Be4 followed by Qc1 with a strong attack.

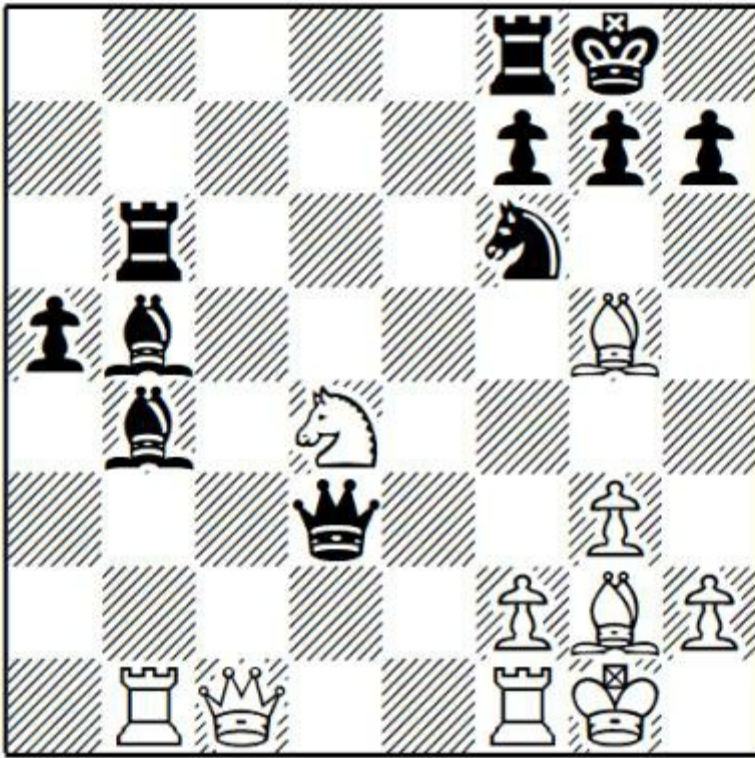
**21 ... Qc8!**

Offering the exchange of queens. Over the next couple of moves Adhiban loses the thread before refocusing and securing a draw.

**22 Ne5?**

Adhiban suggests 22 Nxf6+ gxf6 23 Bh6 Qxc1 24 Rfxc1 Re8 25 Bf3.

**22 ... Qe6 23 Nf3 Qxe2 24 Nxd4 Qxd3**



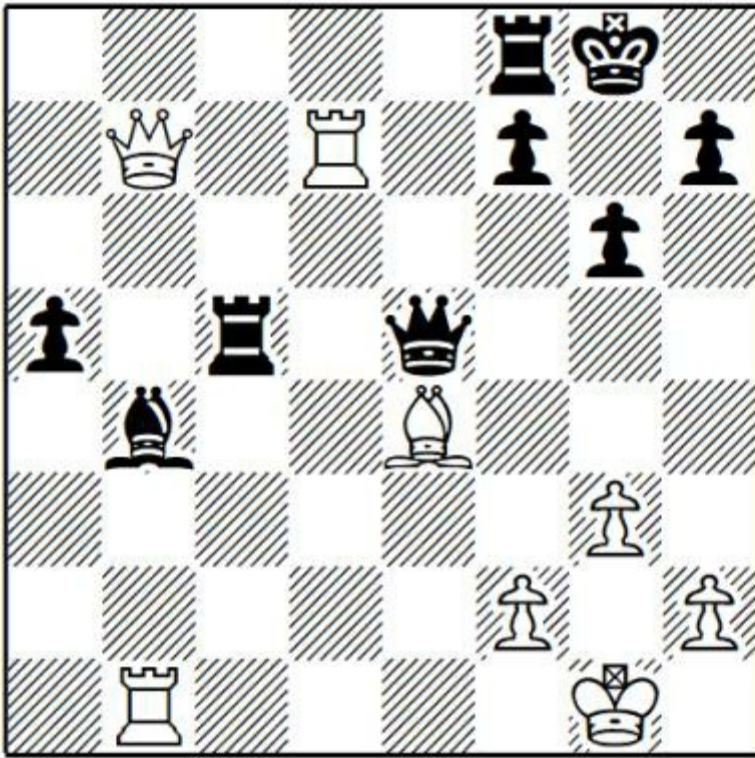
**25 Rd1?!**

Adhiban gave up on 25 Bxf6! Rxf6 26 Rd1 Qc4 27 Qxc4 Bxc4 28 Nc6 on seeing 28 ... Bc5, but in his notes he points out that 29 Rd2! regains the pawn in view of the threatened Rc1.

**25 ... Qg6 26 Bxf6 Qxf6 27 Nxb5 Rxb5 28 Qc6! Qf5**

28 ... Rf5 29 Qxf6 Rxf6 should be tenable.

**29 Be4 Qe5 30 Rd7 Rc5 31 Qb7 g6?**



Allowing a sequence which forces the draw. Adhiban's suggested 31 ... Rc3 maintains some chances.

**32 Bd5! Qf6 33 Rb3! Rc3 34 Rxc3 Bxc3 35 Rxf7!**

A clean tactical solution. Taking with the bishop could transpose (since 35 ... Kh8 isn't threatening) but it's better technique to play the more forcing move to avoid mistakes at the end of a long game.

**35 ... Rxf7 36 Bxf7+ Qxf7 37 Qc8+ Qf8 38 Qc4+!**

Precise, although taking on c3 was also fine.

**38 ... Qf7 ½-½**

Black can't profitably avoid the repetition, and a draw was agreed.

#### *Game 4*

**M.Adams-D.Howell**

British Knockout Championship 2019

This game was played in the British Knockout Championship, won by Mickey Adams ahead of the leading British players of the next generation (McShane, Howell and Jones). It was played at a punishing rapid or blitz time control, which accounts for several errors by these two superb players.

**1 Nf3**

Adams is a lifelong 1 e4 player. Apart from some occasional outings with the Trompowsky, he has generally steered clear of 1 d4 (M.Adams-G.Kasparov, Dortmund 1992, was a cautionary tale of taking White against Kasparov in a Shabalov-Shirov gambit in the Meran).

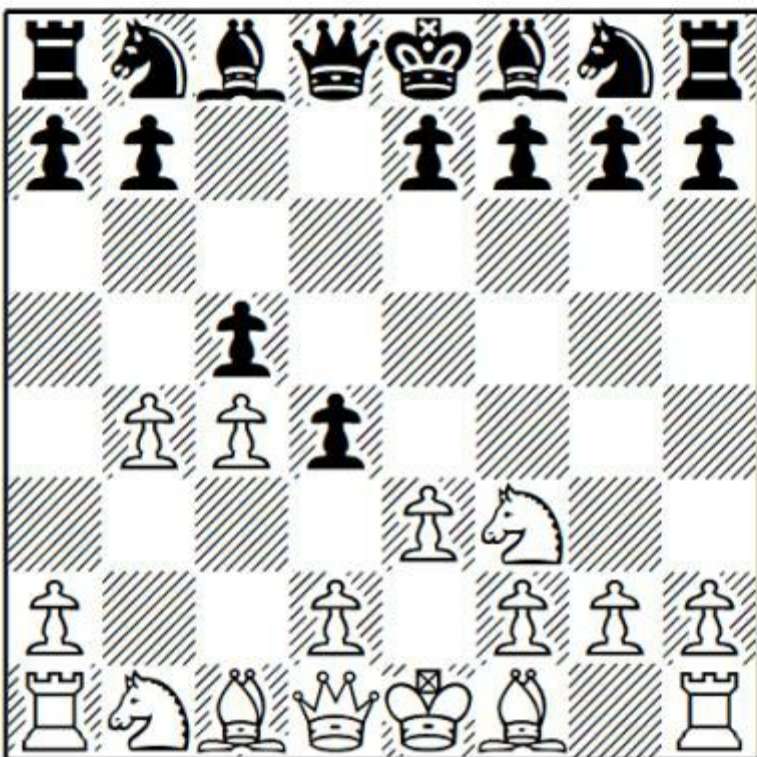
I had noticed, over the past few years, that he added 1 c4 to his repertoire, scoring heavily based on the type of fianchetto systems we're discussing (generally, he hasn't avoided transpositions to Fianchetto King's Indians, or to a main line Catalan once early ... dxc4 and ... Bb4+ options have been

avoided). He tried this in his previous white game against Howell in the same tournament. Patriotically, Howell replied to the English Opening with the English Defence, 1 ... b6!?, gaining an excellent position before the game eventually ended in a draw. Clearly there was no time for opening repairs between rounds of rapid and blitz chess played on the same day, so Adams varied.

**1 ... d5! 2 c4 d4!**

In the circumstances, a very good choice, keeping Adams out of his familiar English repertoire.

**3 b4 c5 4 e3**

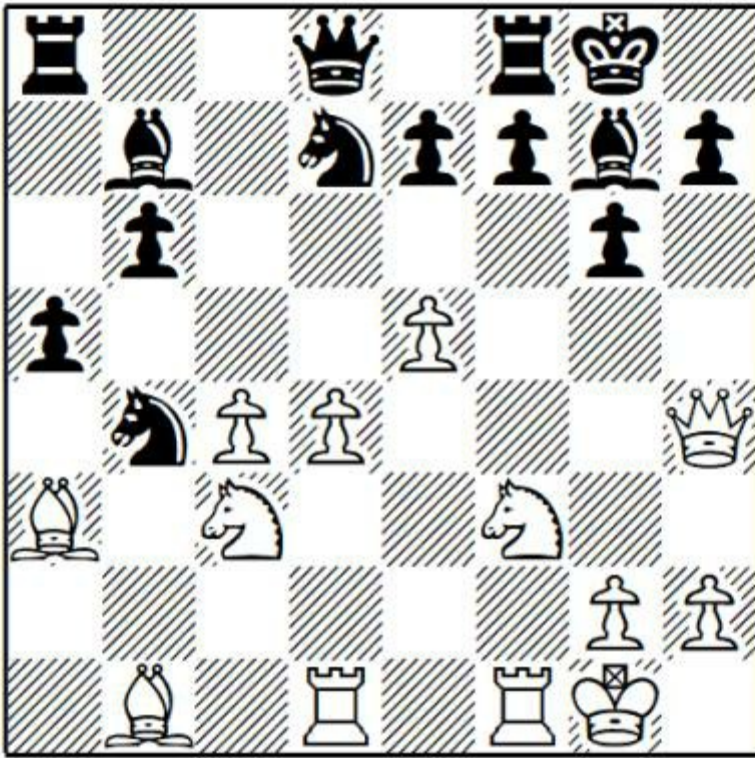


Demuth's recommendation. As the French GM observed, the game takes on contours of a Blumenfeld Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5!?) with colours reversed. Adams used to play the Benko gambit in his youth and has often shown a willingness to play for Benko-style compensation (see M.Adams-M.Kanep, Gibraltar Masters 2013, which is discussed in the chapter on Slav structures).

**4 ... Nf6!?**

A clever move order which seeks to limit White's options. The main line continues 4 ... dxe3 5 fxe3 cxb4 6 d4 (the bishop can go directly to a3) 6 ... Nf6 (6 ... g6 7 Qa4+ Nc6 8 d5 Qa5 9 Qb3 Nb8 10 Bb2 Nf6 looks like an odd choice, but was essayed in 2019 by Sakaev and Hammer, both very strong theoreticians. Black has lost time and allowed White a mobile centre – which can gain further time on the f6-knight – but in return he's secured the c5-square for a knight, resulting in an unclear position) 7 Bd3 and now:

a) Fianchettoing both bishops with 7 ... b6 8 0-0 Bb7 9 a3 bxa3 10 Bxa3 g6 leaves White with a free hand in the centre, which was excellently exploited in the following game: 11 Nc3 Bh6 12 Qe1 0-0 13 Rd1 a5 14 e4 Na6 15 Qh4 Bg7? (apparently the bishop had to go to e3, but Black's position was poor in any case) 16 e5 Nb4 17 Bb1! (17 exf6? Bxf6 and Black will regain his material with a clear advantage since the c3-knight hangs after ... Bxf3 and ... Bxd4+.) 17 ... Nd7



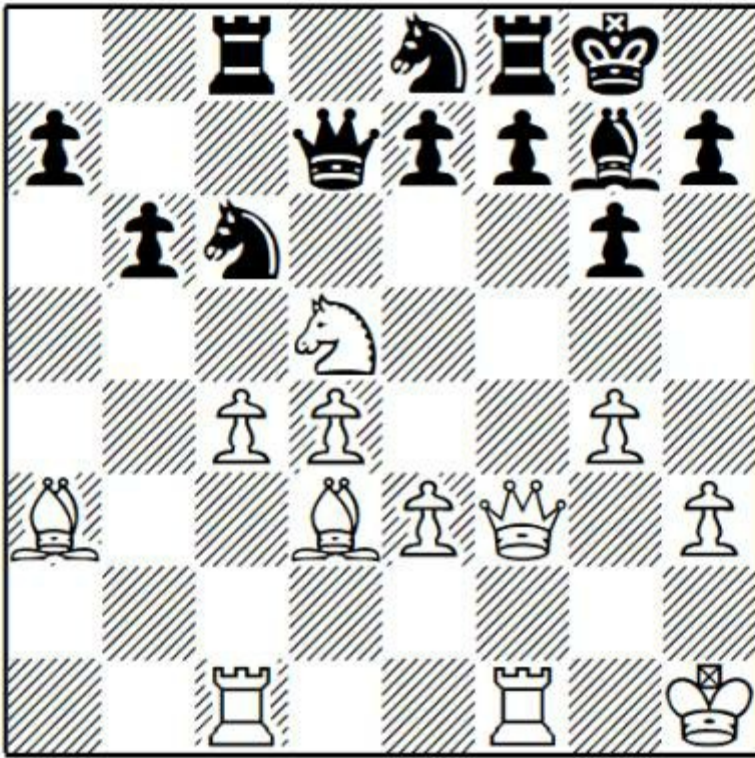
**Question:** How can White bring more pieces into the attack?

**Answer:** 18 Bc1! (full marks also for 18 Ng5! and 18 Be4!, but I really like this regrouping, intending to trade the black king's main defender; note that, thanks to the white central pawns, a black knight has been driven away from f6) 18 ... Rc8 19 Ng5 h6 20 Bxg6?! (this retains a big advantage but either capture on f7 was even stronger) 20 ... fxg6 21 Ne6 Qe8? (to continue fighting Black had to free the g6-square for the queen with 21 ... g5!! 22 Bxg5 Qe8! but, first, no-one plays like this and, second, White remains much better after 23 Nxg7 Qg6 24 Qxh6 Qxh6 25 Bxh6) 22 Bxh6 Rxf1+ 23 Rxf1 Bh8 24 Ng5 Nf6 (the engine recommends the lovely 25 d5! but Berczes' move is more than good enough) 25 exf6 exf6 26 Nge4 f5 27 Nd6 Qc6

**Question:** Has White blundered?

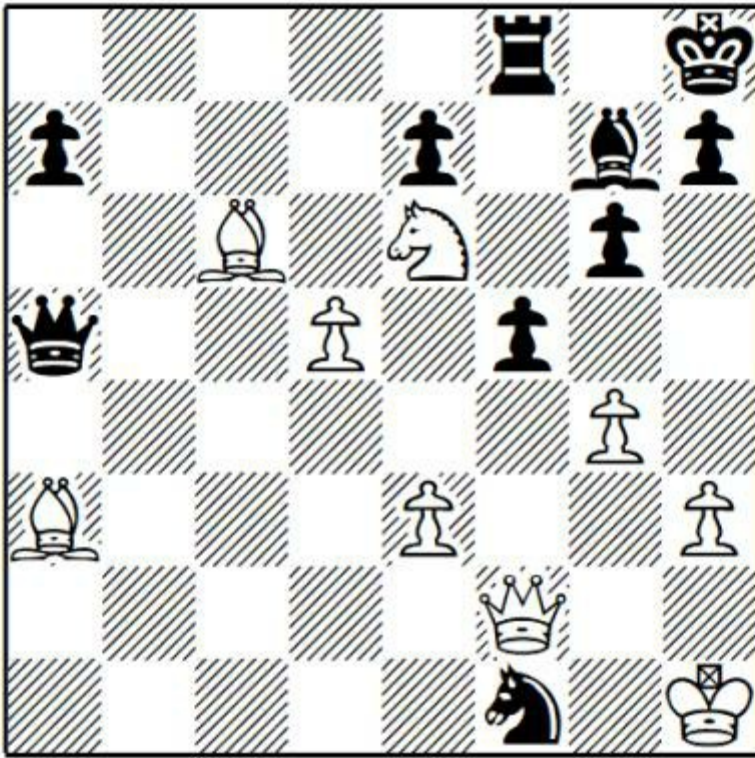
**Answer:** 28 Nce4!! No! This is the only move to retain a winning advantage. 28 ... Bxd4+ 29 Kh1 Re8. Now in D.Berczes-T.Ringoir, Charlotte 2018, Black resigned (or lost on time) after 30 Qg3 Kh7, but it's a shame that White didn't end with a flourish: 30 Qf6!!.

b) 7 ... g6 8 a3 bxa3 9 0-0 Bg7 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Bxa3 b6 12 Kh1 Nc6 13 Rc1 Bg4 14 h3 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Rc8 16 Nd5 Qd7 17 g4 Ne8



**Question:** How can White increase the pressure on Black's position?

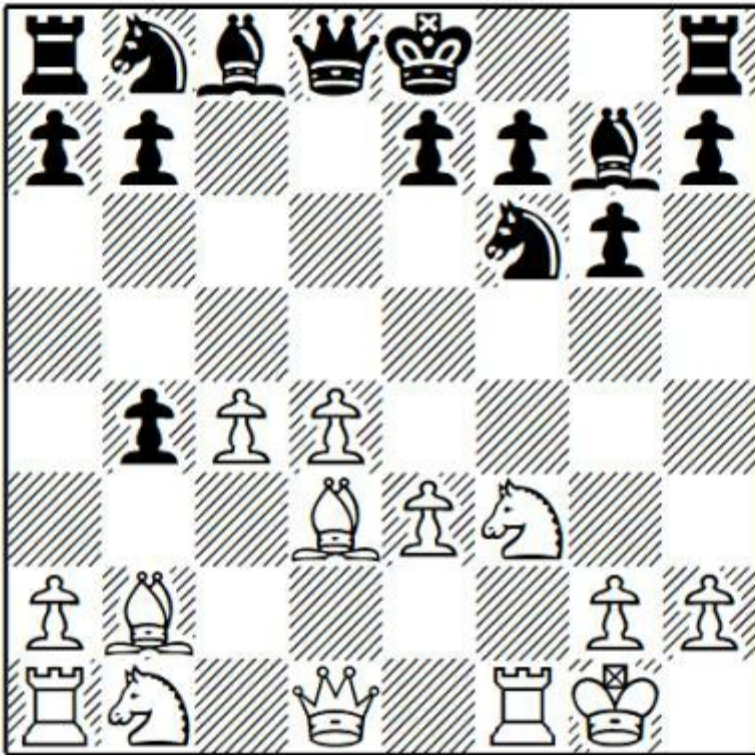
**Answer:** 18 Bc2! is a lovely regrouping, bringing the bishop to a4 from where it pins the knight on c6. The immediate 18 c5 was also strong but I prefer Wei Yi's patient approach, since Black has no counterplay. 18 ... Nd6 19 Ba4 Kh8 20 c5 bxc5 21 Rxc5 (this was a good time to cash in with 21 dxc5 Nb7 22 Bxc6 Rxc6 23 Nxe7 when the passed c-pawn, coupled with the extraordinarily active white pieces, gives a decisive advantage) 21 ... f5 22 Nf4? (losing the thread; 22 Rfc1 was still excellent for White) 22 ... Ne4! 23 Rxc6?! Rxc6? (it's easy to miss defensive resources when you've been grimly holding a difficult position, but Inarkiev had an opportunity here: 23 ... Nd2! would hold, for example, 24 Rxc8 Qxc8 25 Qf2 Nxf1 26 Qxf1 fxg4 and Black is okay after 27 Qd3 gxh3 28 Qe4 Qc4 29 Bxe7 Rb8 when the engines start giving 0.00 evaluations) 24 d5! Nd2 (one move too late) 25 Bxc6 Qc7? (25 ... Qc8 would have retained some defensive chances) 26 Ne6 Qa5 27 Qf2 Nxf1



**Question:** Does White have nothing better than agreeing to an opposite colour bishop position with 28 Nxf8?

**Answer:** 28 Bb2! is a lovely intermediate move, which is easy to miss from afar. Taking on b2 leads to mate. 28 ... Ng3+ 29 Qxg3 Bxb2 30 Nxf8 and Black now did his best to create complications but he's a piece down with a hopeless position, and went on to lose in Wei Yi-E.Inarkiev, Magas 2018.

**5 Bb2 dxe3 6 fxe3 cxb4 7 d4 g6 8 Bd3 Bg7 9 0-0**



### 9 ... 0-0

It's a good idea for White to clarify the queenside structure before committing to kingside action, as illustrated by the following example: 9 ... Nbd7 10 Qe1 (10 a3 bxa3 11 Rxa3 , with compensation for the missing pawn, is an interesting alternative) 10 ... 0-0 11 Nbd2 b6 12 Qh4 Bb7 13 a3 and now:

a) 13 ... a5 would simply return a pawn if the queen was on d1 (after axb4 axb4 Qb3), but with the queen committed to h4 the b4-pawn remains a nuisance. After 14 axb4 axb4 15 Rxa8 Bxa8 16 Ra1 e6 17 Bc2 Qc7 White had insufficient compensation for the pawn in A.Adly-A.Moiseenko, Tsaghkadzor 2015.

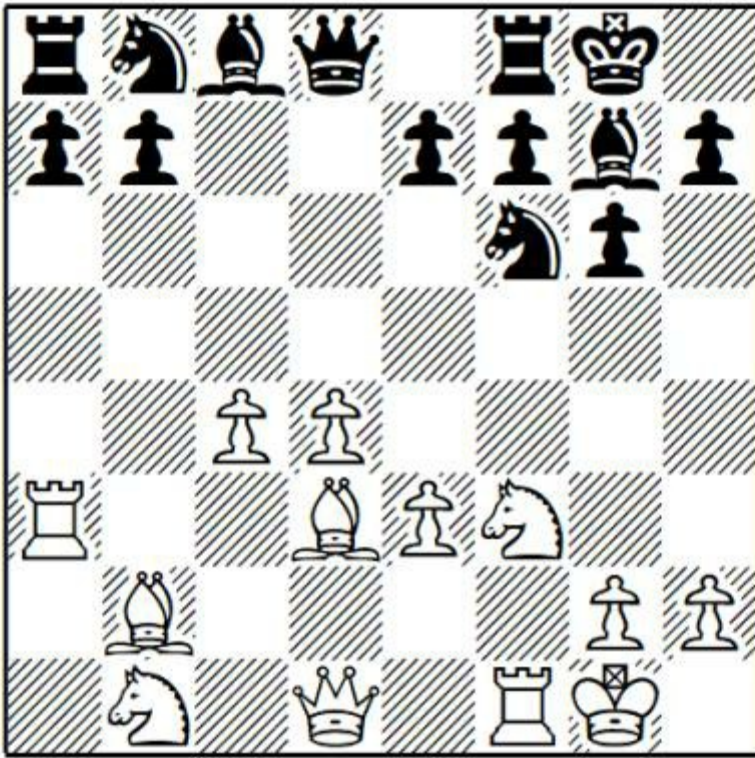
b) The more ambitious 13 ... bxa3 14 Rxa3 doesn't look convincing for White either. Black has completed development and there's no pressure on a7.

c) Although not necessary in this position, 13 ... Nc5 is a tactical possibility showing another downside of not having the rook on a3.

### 10 a3

10 Nbd2 is Demuth's recommendation.

### 10 ... bxa3 11 Rxa3



**Question:** How would you assess this position?

**Answer:** White has sacrificed a pawn for a strong centre and prospects of pressure both on the queenside (down the half-open a- and b-files) and against the black king (with the Grand Prix style Qe1-h4 and Ng5, using the half open f-file to threaten Rxf6 shots). Black is a pawn up with no weaknesses. The position is balanced and which side to prefer is a matter of taste.

**11 ... Nc6 12 Qe1?!**

The more conservative 12 Nbd2 a5 13 Bc3 might have been more prudent.

**12 ... a5 13 Nc3 Nb4 14 Bb1 b6 15 Na2 Nxa2 16 Bxa2**

Black has dramatically improved his position and is a pawn up for no real compensation.

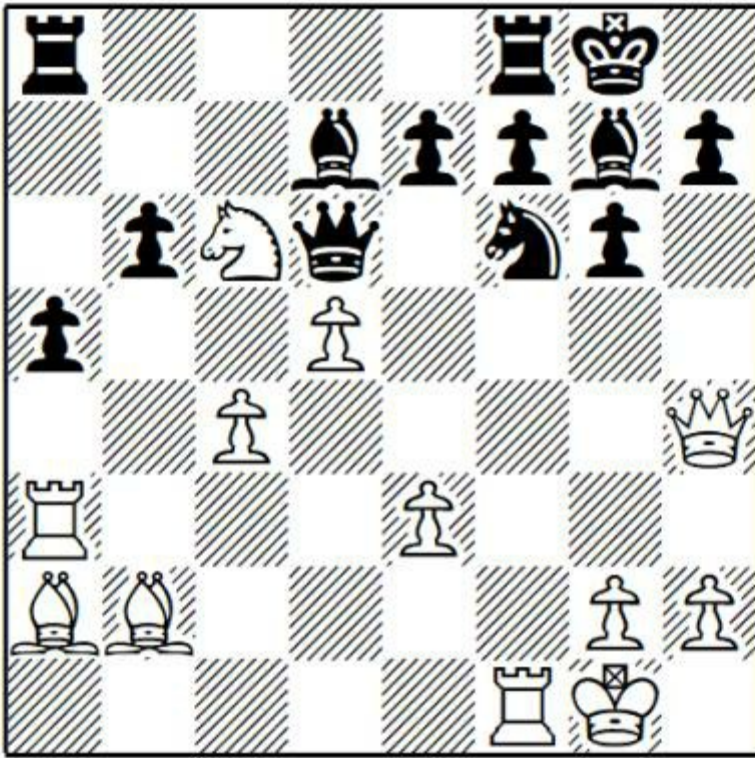
**16 ... Bf5 17 Ne5 Be4 18 d5?!**

18 Qe2 is more resilient, though Black retains a clear advantage.

**18 ... Qd6! 19 Qh4 Bf5**

19 ... a4! was better, with a winning advantage.

**20 Nc6 Bd7??**



Allowing a lovely tactical shot, which was missed by both players.

**Question:** White to play and win!

**21 Nd4??**

**Answer:** White can exploit the black queen's lack of squares with 21 c5! Qxc5 (21 ... bxc5 22 Be5 and the black queen is caught) 22 Rc3 g5 (22 ... Qd6 23 Ba3 g5 24 Qe1 again traps the queen; 22 ... Qb5 23 Nxe7+ Kh8 24 Rb3 hitting the queen and the knight, winning) 23 Rxc5 gxh4 24 Nxe7+ Kh8 25 Rc7 Black has managed to avoid losing his queen, but decisive material losses follow.

**21 ... Ng4**

Black is again in control and the rest of the game is torture for White, except for the final result.

**22 Rd3 Bf6 23 Qg3 Qxg3 24 hxg3 Rfc8 25 Rc1 a4 26 Kf1 Rc7 27 Ke2 Rac8 28 Ba3 Ne5 29 Rdc3 Kg7 30 Kd2 h5 31 R3c2 Kh7 32 Rc3 Kg7 33 R3c2 Bf5 34 Nxf5+ gxf5 35 Ke2 Kg6 36 Kd2 Kg5 37 Ke2 Kg4 38 Rf1 Kg5 39 Rfc1 Kg4 40 Rf1 Kg5 ½-½**

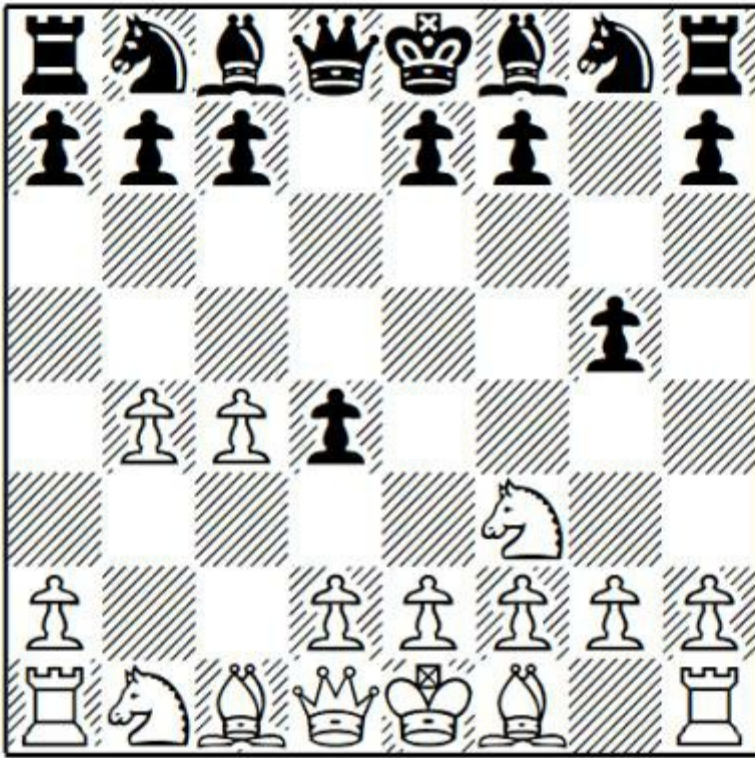
Black still has a huge advantage, but for the fact that 41 Rfc1 is a threefold repetition.

*Game 5*

**N.Markovitz-Y.Kuzubov**

Benasque Open 2017

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4 g5!?**

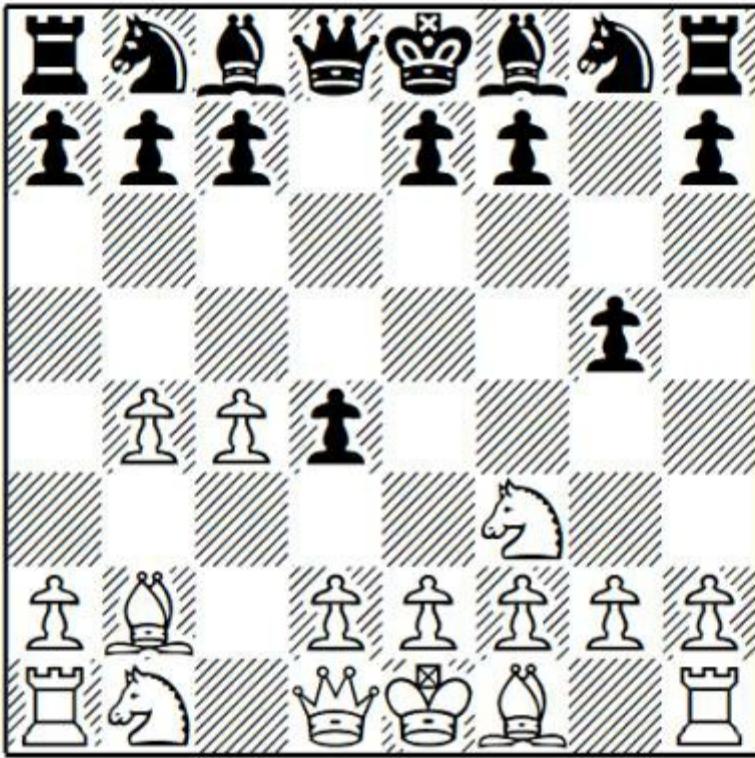


This remarkable move was introduced by Navara in 2011. I became aware of it by reading Alexander Morozevich's wonderful article in *Chess Informant 120*, and then seeing Morozevich's games where he played this system with impressive results. I used the line myself, gaining a winning position after the opening but going on to spoil the advantage and lose. In fact, many of the notes to this section were written while preparing for a rematch against the same opponent, so hopefully the additional adrenaline (tempered by Stockfish's sober assessments) helps me spot some extra opportunities for both sides!

The line is not mentioned in Delchev's book "The Modern Réti", but is very well covered in Morozevich's article and Demuth's "The Modernized Réti", to which I will make frequent reference.

The more conservative 3 ... g6 is also playable, e.g. 4 g3 Bg7 5 d3 e5 (5 ... b6 6 Bg2 Bb7 7 0-0 e5 A.Horton-R.Ruck, Pontevedra 2018 is well met by 8 e3!?) 6 Bg2 Ne7 (6 ... h6 7 0-0 Ne7 8 a4 0-0 9 Nfd2 a5 10 b5 c5 was similar in A.Delchev-F.Vallejo Pons, Plovdiv 2012) 7 0-0 0-0 8 a4 a5 (8 ... Nbc6 9 b5 Nb4 10 a5 a6 11 Ba3 c5 12 bxc6 Nbxc6 13 Nbd2 gave White an edge in D.Howell-E.Can, Dubai 2016) 9 b5 c5 10 Ra2 Nf5 11 e3 dxe3 12 fxe3 Be6 13 Nc3 Nd6 14 e4 h6 15 Be3 Nd7 16 Qd2 Kh7 17 Nh4 and White had the more pleasant game thanks to his space advantage in J.Duda-Y.Kuzubov, Brest 2018.

#### 4 Bb2

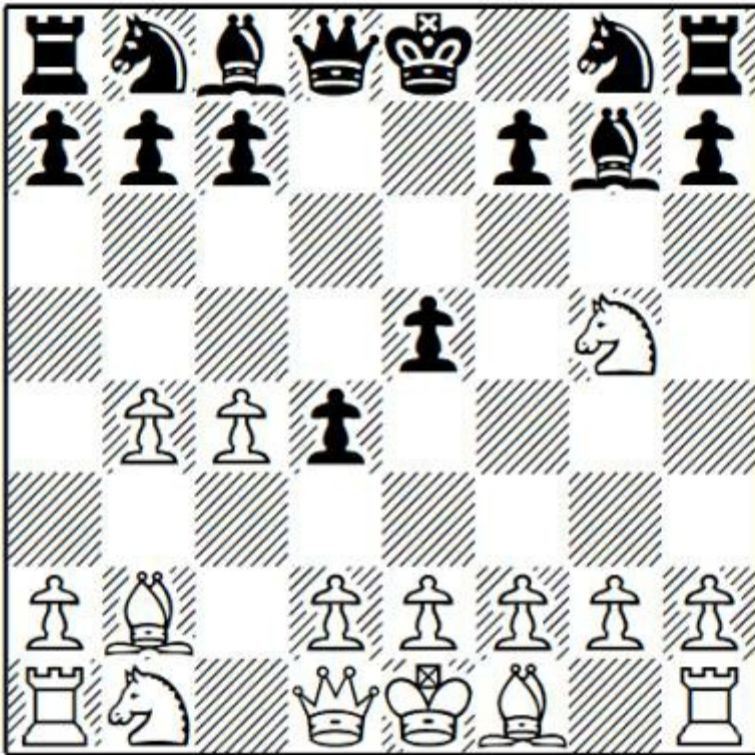


This is the main line, and Demuth's main recommendation. Others:

a) Demuth gives 4 Qb3 as a backup line. Both Morozevich and Demuth quickly arrive at the following position: 4 ... Bg7 (White threatened Nxd4 and this is by far the most constructive way to meet the threat) 5 Nxd4 e5 6 Qg3!? (several alternatives are analysed by Morozevich, for example 6 Ne4 f5 7 Nc5 [7 Ng3 Nf6 8 d3 0-0 9 Bg5 Qe8 10 Bxf6 Rxf6 was played in D.Di Benedetto-D.Kollars, Rome 2016; Black's bishop pair and mobile central pawns provide him with more than sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn] 7 ... e4!? 8 Bb2 b6 9 Qa4+ c6 10 Nb3 Bb7 with "a very complex position, which is pretty difficult to evaluate precisely; as is usually said in positions like this: the better player wins") 6 ... Ne7 7 Ne4! (7 Ne6 Bxe6 8 Qxg7 Rg8 9 Qxe5 Nbc6 10 Qf6 is given by Morozevich as equal, and Demuth continues 10 ... Nxb4 11 Na3 Qd7 with unclear play) 7 ... Ng6 8 h4 f5 9 h5 (9 d3!? Morozevich) 9 ... fxe4 10 hxg6 h5 11 d3 e3! (11 ... Nc6 12 a3 e3 13 fxe3 transposes) 12 fxe3 Nc6! 13 a3 Bg4! (13 ... dxe3? 14 Nc3 Nd4 15 Ra2 Bg4 16 Qxe3 gives White a clear advantage, as analysed by Demuth). This position is assessed as unclear by Morozevich, who concludes, "The g6-pawn will soon be recaptured and, for the measly price of one pawn, Black has wonderful compensation." Demuth continues the line: 14 e4 Qd7 15 Bg5 Ne7 16 Nd2 Nxd4 17 Nf3 with counterplay.

b) 4 Nxd4 e5 5 d3 Bxb4+ 6 Bd2 Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 was A.Morozevich-J.Christiansen, Moscow 2019, which saw Morozevich fighting against his own weapon at the World Blitz Championships. Black is fine after several moves, I particularly like 7 ... b6.

**4 ... Bg7 5 Nxd4 e5**



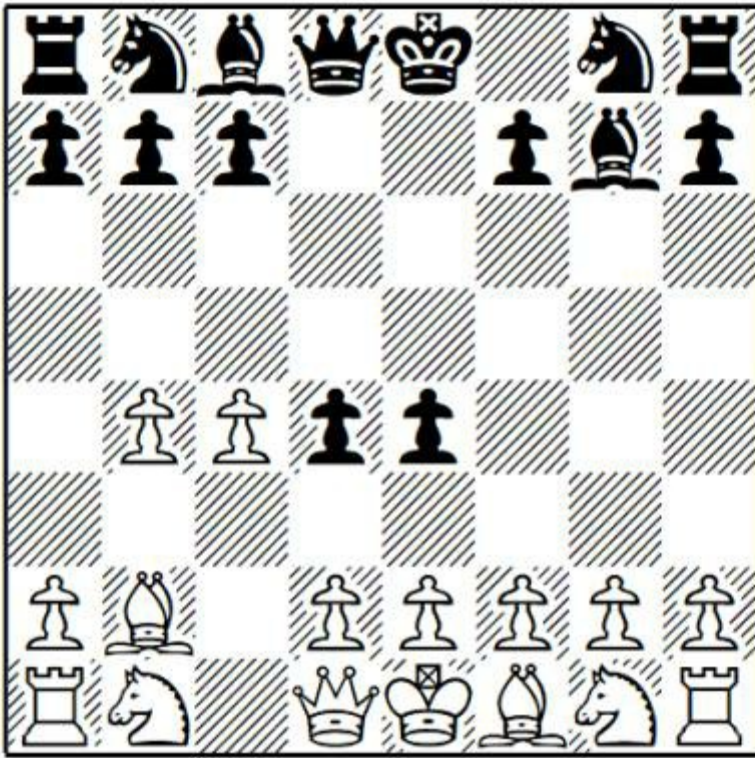
**Question:** What compensation does Black claim for the pawn?

**Answer:** Black's strong and mobile centre forces White to play very precisely. The black central pawns restrict White's queenside development (the b2-bishop is stifled and the b1-knight can't develop to c3), with the possibility of advancing with gain of time against the g5-knight.

**6 Ne4**

Others:

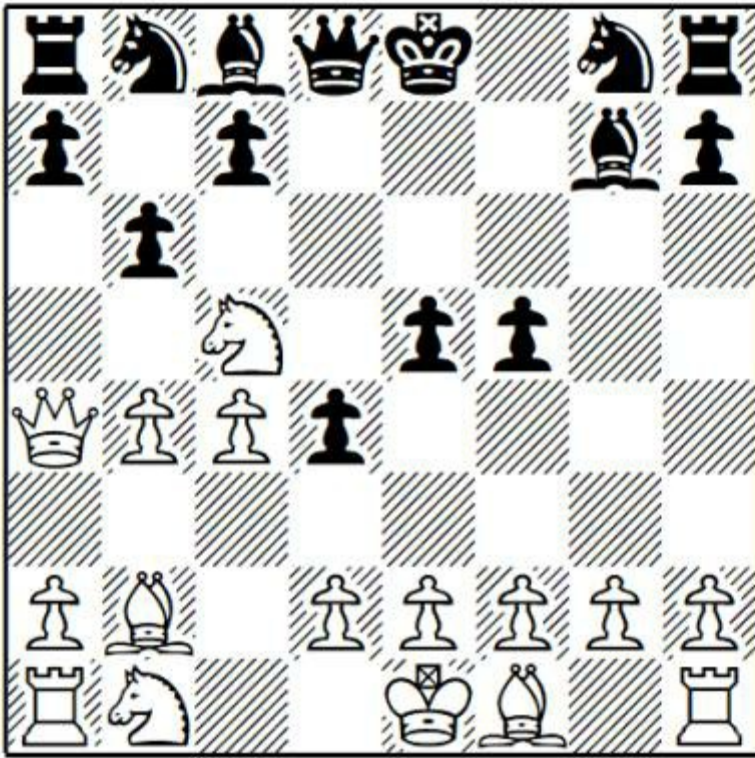
a) 6 Nf3?! e4 7 Ng1 was chosen in M.O'Connell-S.Collins, Kilkenny 2014.



After 7 ... Nh6 8 g3 0-0 9 Bg2 Re8 10 Nh3 Nc6 11 Qb3 a5! 12 b5 (12 a3 a4!) 12 ... a4 13 Qd1 Ne5 14 Qc1 Nf3+ 15 Kf1, instead of my 15 ... Nh4, 15 ... Ng4! wins on the spot: 16 exf3 exf3 17 Bxf3 (17 Nf4 fxg2+ and the light squares are too weak) 17 ... Ne5 18 Ng1 (18 Bg2 Nd3 is similar) 18 ... Nd3 19 Qc2 Re1+ 20 Kg2 Nb4 and the queen is caught.

b) 6 h4 h6 7 Ne4 f5 led to similar play to the main game in T.Gareyev-Z.Andriasian, Philadelphia 2019.

**6 ... f5 7 Nc5 b6 8 Qa4+**



I prefer this to the

immediate 8 Nd3 (J.Duda-M.Bartel, Warsaw 2018).

**8 ... Kf7 9 Nd3 Ne7**

Morozevich recommends starting with 9 ... Bb7 to prevent g3.

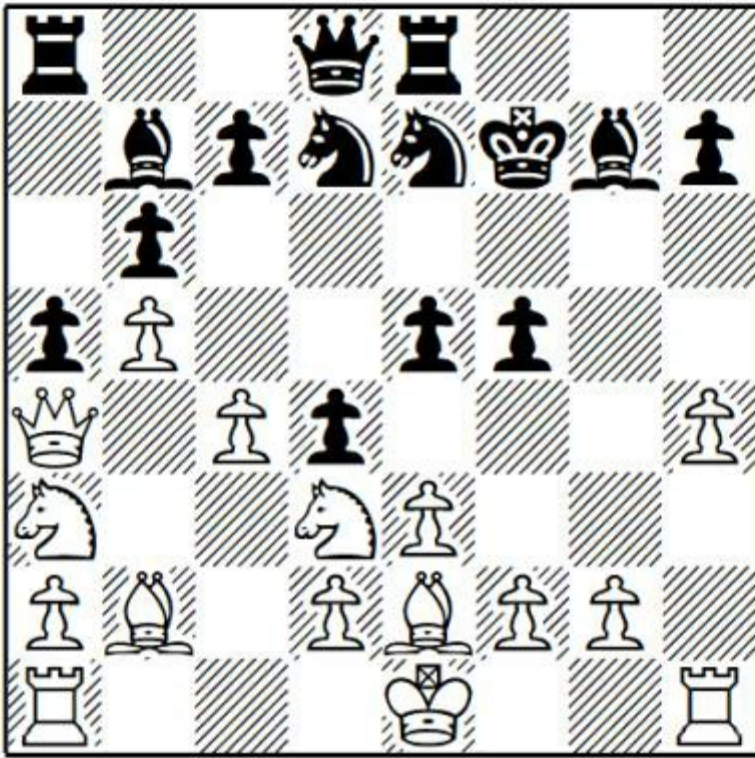
**10 h4**

Alternatives:

a) 10 Na3!? is a strong novelty proposed by Demuth. White retains options of play against Black's pawns with f4, e3 and c5 but can castle long at a moment's notice. Play can continue 10 ... a5 11 f4 Nd7 (11 ... exf4 is not mentioned by Demuth; 12 0-0-0 leads to a position which is very difficult to assess) 12 fxe5 Nxe5 13 Nxe5+ Bxe5 14 0-0-0 is given by Demuth, who notes that White has the initiative. The position obviously remains quite wild and all three results are possible.

b) No one appears to have tested Morozevich's suggestion 10 g3 Bb7 11 f3 "with the idea Bh3 and 0-0, after which White somehow manages to develop his pieces." This seems to lead to unclear play after 11 ... Nd7 12 Bh3 h5, though White might want to delay castling since after 13 0-0 Nf8!? followed by ... Ne6, Black threatens ... h4 with a strong initiative.

**10 ... Bb7 11 e3 Re8 12 Be2 Nd7 13 Na3 a5 14 b5**



This position is highly non-standard and both players make several mistakes during the following moves.

**14 ... Be4?**

This square should have been kept for the pawn, e.g. 14 ... e4! 15 Nf4 Nc5 16 Bh5+ Ng6 17 Qc2 Nd3+! 18 Nxd3 exd3 19 Qxd3 dxe3 20 Qxd8 exf2+ 21 Kxf2 Raxd8.

**15 exd4?**

Opening the e-file, unsurprisingly, is going to hurt White. The immediate 15 c5! would have led to unclear play.

**15 ... exd4 16 c5**

16 0-0-0 was a better try, when Black only has a slight advantage.

**16 ... Bxd3?**

16 ... bxc5 was better, with a clear advantage for Black.

**17 Qb3+?**

The final mistake. White had to try 17 Bxd3, stepping into a dangerous discovered check. 17 ... Nd5+ 18 Kf1 Nxc5 19 Qc2 Nxd3 20 Qxd3 Qd7 and Black is better but doesn't appear to have a knockout punch.

**17 ... Nd5!**

A very elegant solution. 17 ... Kf8 18 Qxd3 Nxc5 was also winning.

**18 Qxd5+ Kf8 19 0-0-0 Bxe2 20 Qxf5+ Kg8 21 Rde1 Nxc5 0-1**

Material down and facing a decisive attack, White resigned.

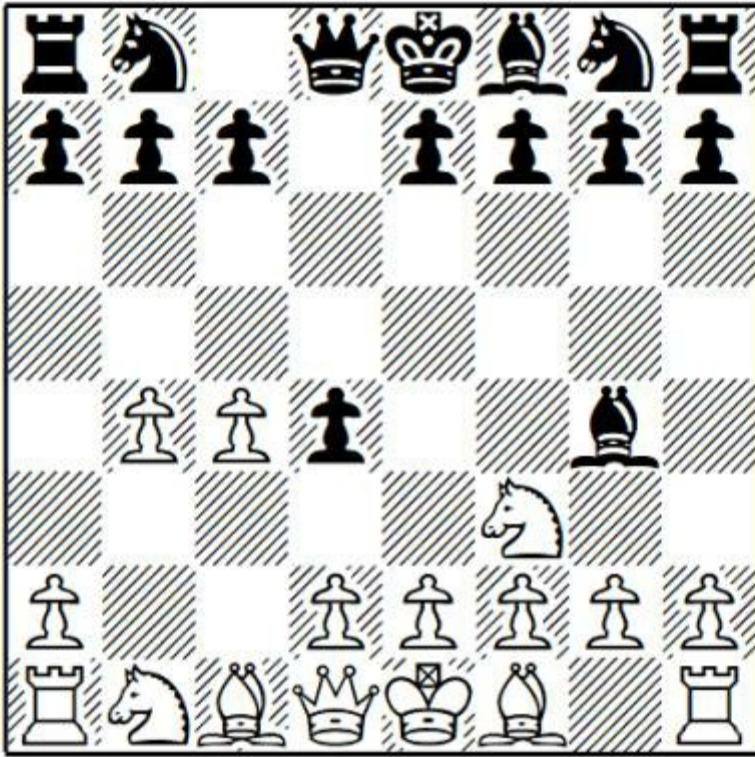
*Game 6*

**J.Christiansen-D.Navara**

European Cup, Antalya 2017

chesstouring.com

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4 Bg4



A logical developing move used by, amongst others, Short. 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 is a common Anti-Benko line so it doesn't take much imagination to see the parallels.

**4 g3**

4 Qb3 c6 5 Ne5 Bf5 P.Eljanov-R.Edouard, Heraklion 2017 and now Demuth's novelty 6 e3!, endorsed by Edouard, remains untested. I recommend going here since the main game doesn't turn out at all well for White.

**4 ... Bxf3 5 exf3 e5!**

Seizing the centre and gaining a tempo on the b4-pawn.

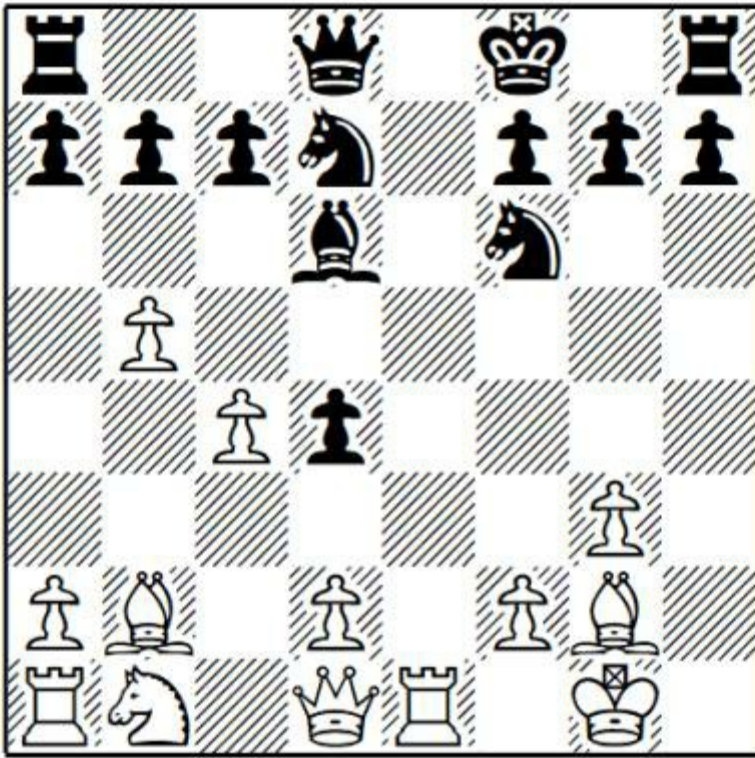
**6 b5 Nf6 7 Bg2 Nbd7**

Now the knight has an excellent square on c5.

**8 0-0 Bd6 9 f4**

Trying to break the black centre.

**9 ... exf4 10 Re1+ Kf8 11 Bb2 fxg3 12 hxg3**



**Question:** How can Black start an attack in this position?

**12 ... h5!!**

**Answer:** I'm amazed at how Navara manages to whip up dangerous attacks on the black side of the Réti, which doesn't have a reputation as a particularly risky opening for White. Here, the attack is fully justified, for the following reasons:

a) White's kingside has been fundamentally compromised by the exchange of his h2-pawn. Now, after ... h4, Black will be threatening simply to win the g3-pawn, rather than having to make any sacrifices work.

b) Black has a serious advantage in the "attacking ratio" (the ratio of attacking pieces to defensive pieces), for the following reasons:

1) White's king lacks defenders. Although the g2-bishop must always be taken seriously, particularly where (as here) it has no opponent, the f3-knight has been traded, and its replacement on b1 will take several moves to reach the kingside.

2) Black is attacking with the h5-pawn, the h8-rook, and the d6-bishop. The f6-knight and the queen can reach the kingside in one move, and the d7-knight is ready to jump to e5.

In short, Navara's plan is both objectively strong and, in practical terms, almost impossible to defend against.

**13 Bxd4 h4 14 Qf3 Nh5!?**

The most direct attempt. Instead:

a) The engine slightly prefers 14 ... Bc5 but after 15 Be3 the position isn't completely clear.

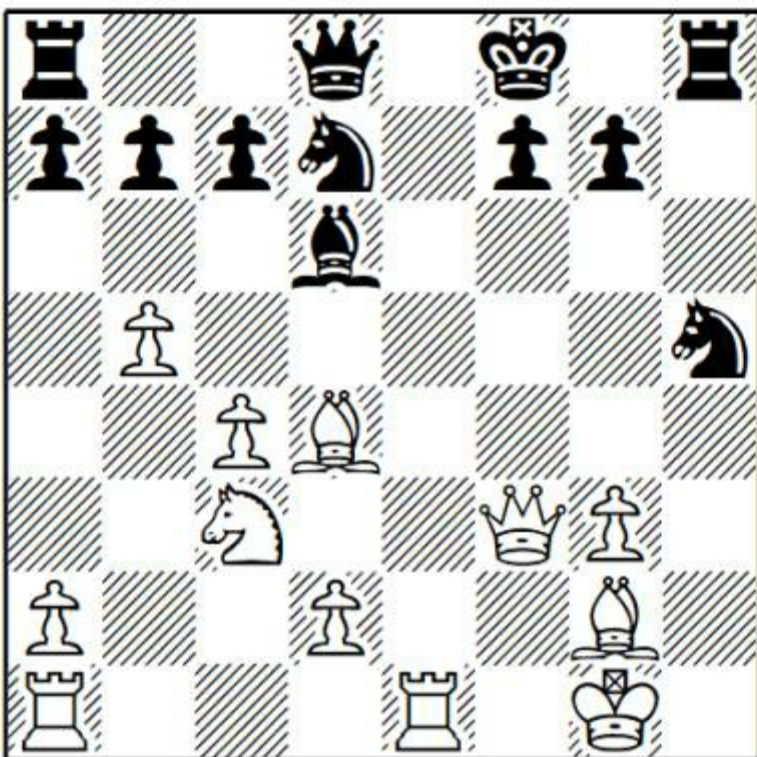
b) 14 ... hxg3 15 fxg3 Nh5 might be even stronger than Navara's move. Presumably he was wary of opening the f-file (or maybe freeing f2 for the bishop to defend the g3-pawn), but White's counterplay

isn't especially serious: 16 Rf1 Ndf6 17 Bf2 Be5, with excellent play for Black.

**15 Nc3?**

White ought to have tried to keep the kingside closed with 15 g4 although, to human eyes, the position after 15 ... Nf4 remains very dangerous. But I haven't found anything clear here for Black, though he is certainly not worse.

**15 ... hxg3 16 fxg3?!**



Allowing more pieces into his position, although by this point it was difficult to suggest good alternatives.

**16 ... Nxc3 17 c5 Nxc5**

White has tried to open lines and confuse matters, although Black now attacks with two extra pawns.

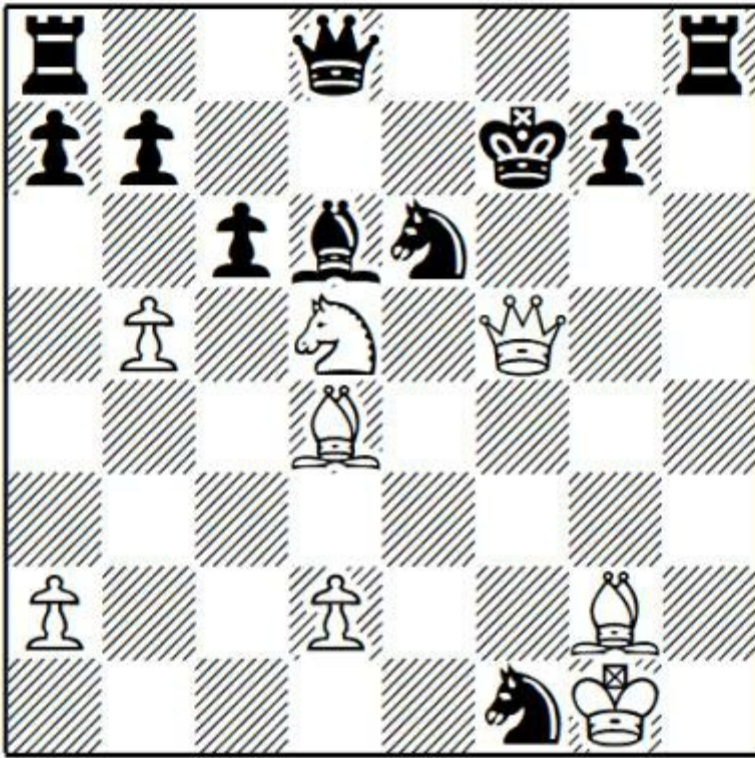
**18 Qg4 Nh5 19 Nd5 c6 20 Rf1**

Committing entirely to the counterattack. Black can simply take the knight on d5 but Navara's solution is safe and very convincing.

**20 ... Ne6! 21 Rf5**

21 Qxe6 Bh2+ 22 Kxh2 Nf6+ wins the queen and the game.

**21 ... Ng3 22 Rxf7+ Kxf7 23 Rf1+ Nxf1 24 Qf5+**



**Question:** Black to play!

**24 ... Qf6!**

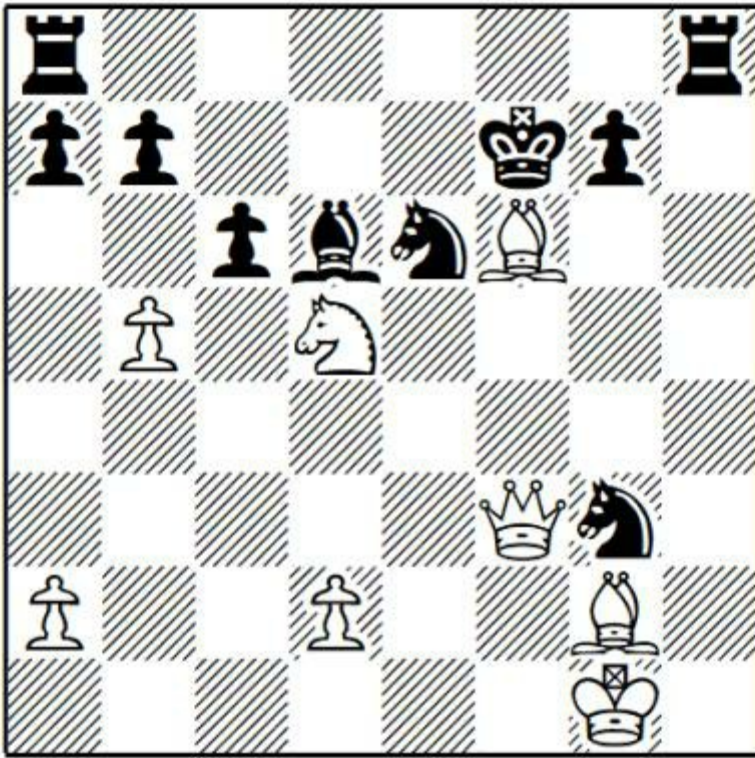
**Answer:** Such moves can be difficult to spot, especially from afar, but Black gets ample material for the queen, together with a continuing initiative. However, to justify this move as a winning attempt, it was already necessary to see Black's resource at move 26.

24 ... Kg8?? would be a horrible mistake, with perpetual after 25 Qxe6+ Kf8 26 Qf5+ Ke8 since 27 Qe6+ Be7?? (27 ... Kf8 repeats) 28 Qg6+ Kd7 29 bxc6+ bxc6 30 Nb6+! wins.

**25 Bxf6**

25 Nxf6 Ng3 wins.

**25 ... Ng3 26 Qf3**



**Question:** Black isn't home and dry yet, and needs to find a strong move here.

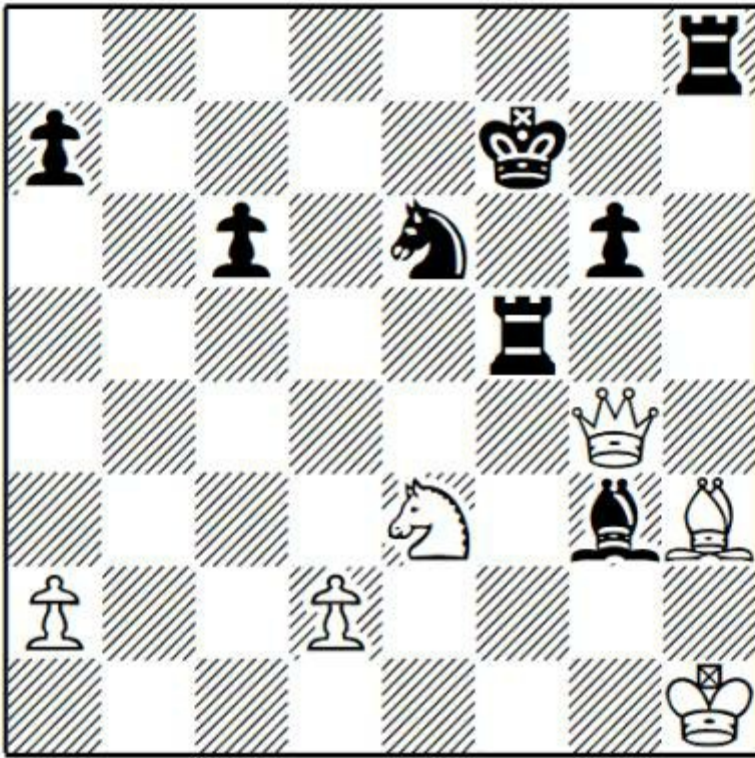
**26 ... Rh5!**

**Answer:** Wonderful coordination of the black pieces. 26 ... Ne2+ 27 Qxe2 gxf6 and the exposed black king gives White excellent drawing chances.

**27 bxc6 bxc6 28 Be5+ Rf5 29 Qxg3 Bxe5 30 Qh3 g6**

Materially, Black is doing well (two rooks and a pawn for a queen), but the most important factor is his continuing attack, with control of the h- and f-files.

**31 Ne3 Rh8 32 Qg4 Bh2+ 33 Kh1 Bg3+ 34 Bh3**



**Question:** Black to play and win.

**34 ... Rxh3+! 35 Kg2**

**Answer:** 35 Qxh3 Rh5 wins.

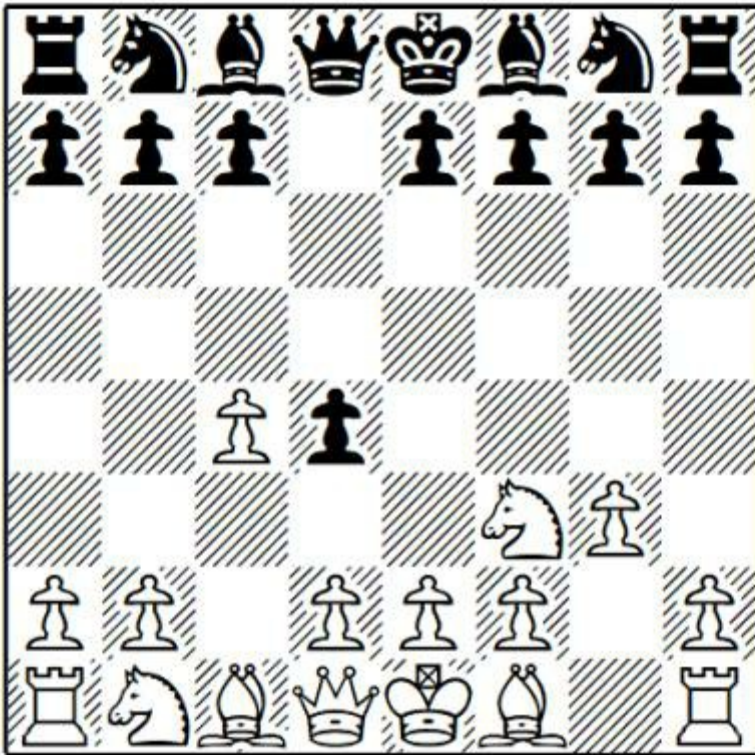
**35 ... Rh4 36 Qd1 Rg5 37 Qb3 Rb4 38 Qc2 Bc7+ 39 Kh3 Rg3+ 0-1**

*Game 7*

**S.Jessel-B.Lalith**

Gibraltar Masters 2017

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 g3**



I don't like this approach at all, and have included this game as a cautionary tale.

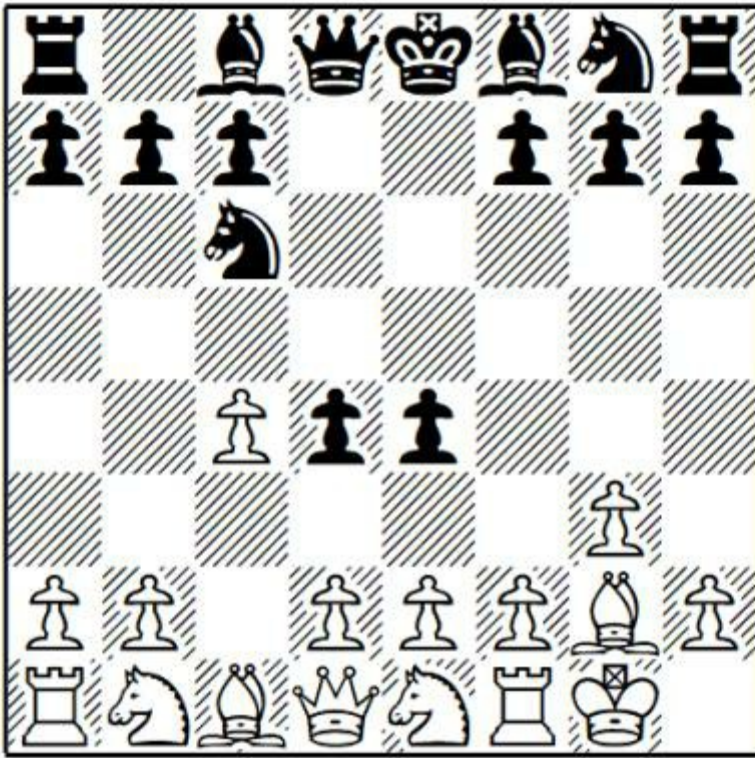
**3 ... Nc6! 4 Bg2 e5 5 0-0?!**

I would definitely prefer 5 d3, though I find it hard to believe that Black can have any problems after 5 ... Bb4+ 6 Bd2 a5 7 0-0 Nf6 8 Na3 0-0 (S.Mareco-K.Alekseenko, Moscow 2018) with healthy development and a strong centre.

**5 ... e4**

In *The Modern Réti*, Delchev (who, admittedly, thought this line was perfectly fine for Black) gave 5 ... Nf6 without comment. However, by the time of *Attacking the English/Réti*, he gave excellent coverage of this dynamic approach.

**6 Ne1**



**Question:** What would AlphaZero play?

**6 ... h5!**

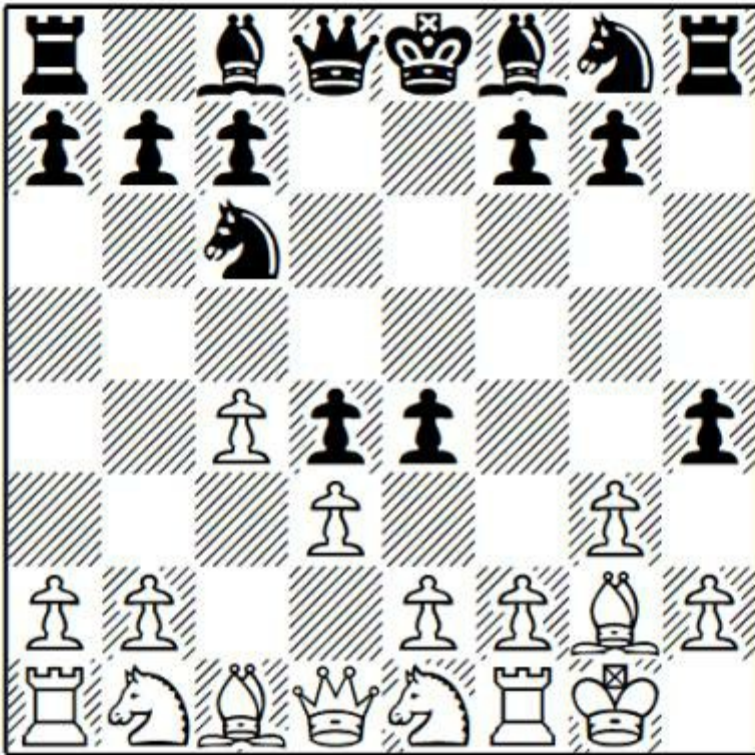
**Answer:** Playing for mate is much stronger than simply trying to defend the centre, which will be further attacked by d3 etc.

**7 d3**

My teammate on the Irish Olympiad team and a frequent participant in the Irish Championship, Stephen has a rather unusual and quite fixed opening repertoire, particularly with White. I find it remarkable that he would go for this position, in particular since he had been completely busted in a game a couple of years previously. If White lands in this position, he will be attacked in any case so he might as well grab a pawn.

7 Bxe4 h4 8 d3 Bh3 9 Ng2 (9 Qb3!?) 9 ... Qd7?! (I think it's better to open lines with 9 ... hxg3 when White falls under a strong attack after either recapture on g3) 10 Bf4 (10 Nxe4!? leads to unclear play) 10 ... Nf6 11 Bf3 Bd6 (11 ... hxg3 12 Bxg3 Bd6 is also much better for Black) 12 Qc1 was V.Malakhov-E.Tomashevsky, Jurmala and now taking on g3 would lead to a huge attack.

**7 ... h4**

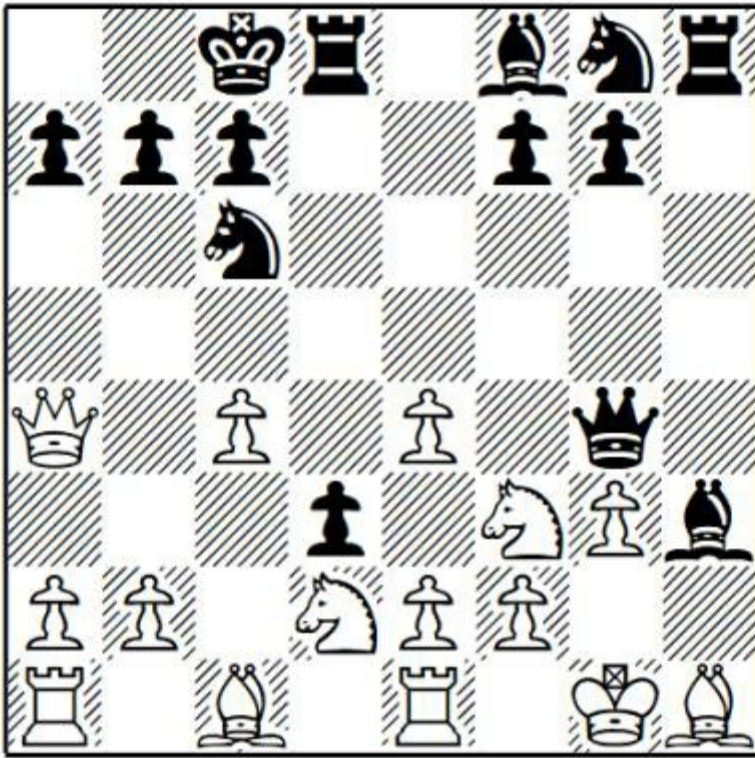


7 ... e3!? 8 fxe3 h4 might be even stronger than Lalith's approach. 9 Nf3? (the engine initially likes 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 gxh4 for White but this is very difficult to believe. 10 ... Bd6 11 Nf3 Bg4 12 Qe1 Bxf3 13 exf3 Rxh4 14 f4 Qf6 and I would take Black, who has a strong initiative for a minimal material investment) 9 ... hxg3 10 hxg3 Nf6 11 exd4 Nxd4 12 Nc3 was S.Jessel-C.O'Donnell, Dublin 2015 and here, instead of taking on f3, Black has several moves which retain a clear advantage, including 12 ... Bc5 and Delchev's suggestion 12 ... Nf5 13 Bg5 Be7 14 Qe1 c6.

**8 dxe4 Be6 9 Nf3 hxg3 10 hxg3**

10 fxg3 Qd7 11 e5 0-0-0 also leads to a dangerous attack.

**10 ... Qd7 11 Re1 0-0-0 12 Nbd2 Bh3 13 Bh1 Qg4 14 Qa4 d3**



White is busted.

**15 e3 a6**

Prophylaxis against White's queenside attack wasn't strictly necessary, but it is a good practical choice. 15 ... Kb8! was another move in the same vein, with the advantage that it avoids creating a hook.

**16 Qd1**

After this passive move, the play is all one way, but Black was winning after the best 16 b4 in view of 16 ... Bd6! with a decisive attack.

**16 ... Qh5 17 Nh2 Qh6 18 f4 Nb4 19 Ndf3 Nf6 20 Nh4 g5 21 fxg5 Qxg5 22 Kf2 Rxh4 23 Nf3 Nxe4+ 0-1**

# Chapter Two

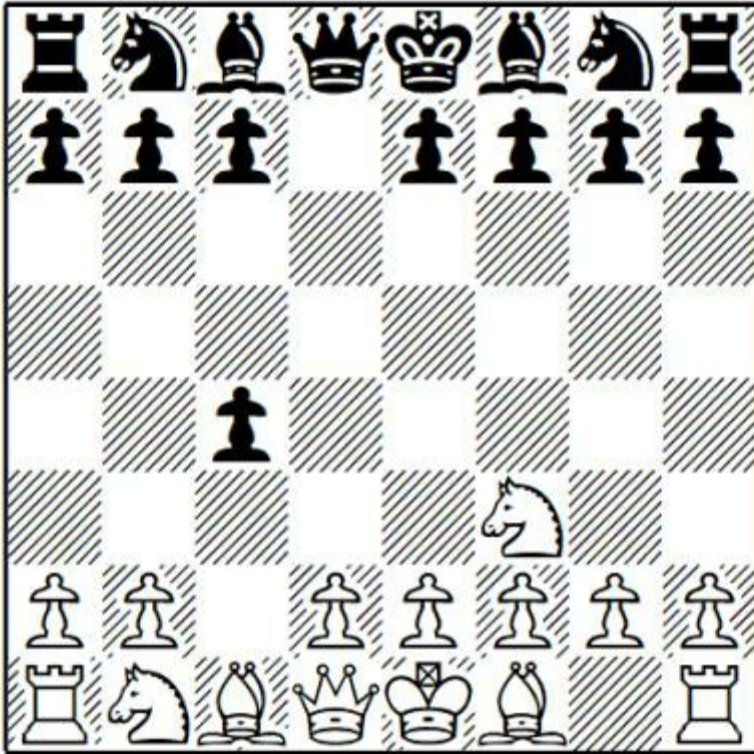
## 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 dxc4

Game 8

M.Ragger-E.Postny

French Team Championship, Belfort 2012

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 dxc4



This is a serious line, and one which has been favourably reviewed by opening expert (and part of the World Champion's team during several matches) GM Jan Gustafsson.

**Question:** What are the pros and cons of 2 ... dxc4?

**Answer:** As in the Queen's Gambit Accepted (1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4), instead of defending his central pawn with ... c6 or ... e6, Black trades it for White's less valuable c-pawn. Neither line is a real gambit (due to Qa4+ if nothing else), and White will have a central majority which ought to provide some advantage. In exchange, Black hopes to develop his pieces rapidly to good squares while White is regaining the pawn.

**3 e3**

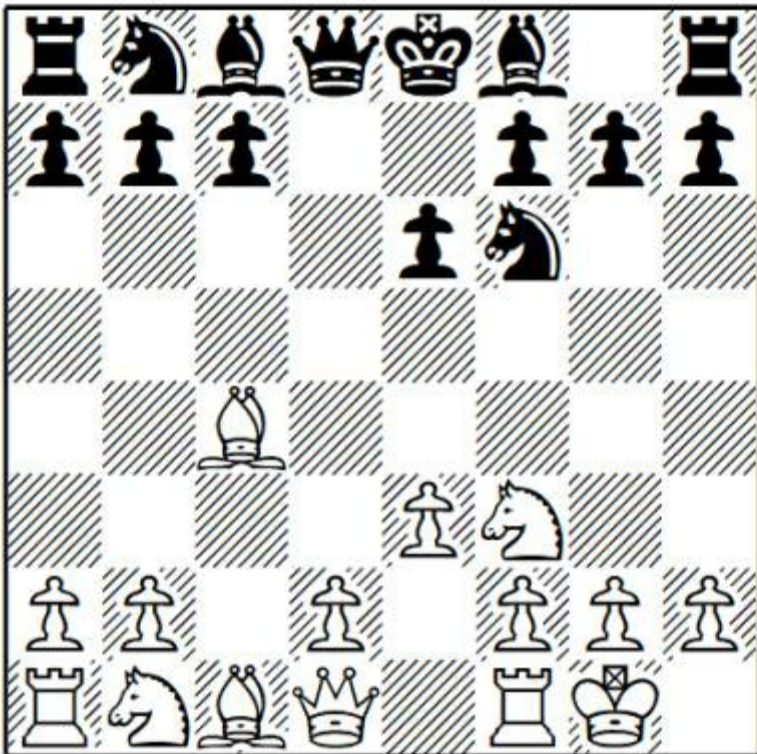
Others:

a) 3 Na3 is recommended by Bologan. Play can continue 3 ... a6 4 Nxc4 b5 5 Ne3 Bb7 which is dismissed by Delchev as offering comfortable equality for Black.

[chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)

b) 3 e4!? is possible but weakening d4 gives Black a few options to achieve comfortable play. I like the approach adopted by QGA specialist Hrvoje Stevic: 3 ... Bg4 4 Bxc4 e6 (there is an analogous line in the Queen's Gambit Accepted – 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 Bg4!? – but the weakness of d4 in the present line seems to give better prospects for counterplay) 5 0-0 (in the comparable QGA line, Black often sacrifices his b-pawn after 5 Qb3, and he gets a decent version here with 5 ... Bxf3 6 gxf3 Nc6 – 6 ... Bc5!? 7 Qxb7 Nd7 might be even better – 7 Qxb7 Nd4 gave Black good compensation for the pawn in M.Cornette-H.Stevic, Drancy 2016) 5 ... Nf6 6 e5 Nd5 7 Qa4+ Qd7 8 Bb5 c6 9 Qxg4 cxb5 10 Nc3 with unclear play in A.Kosten-H.Stevic, Brest 2019.

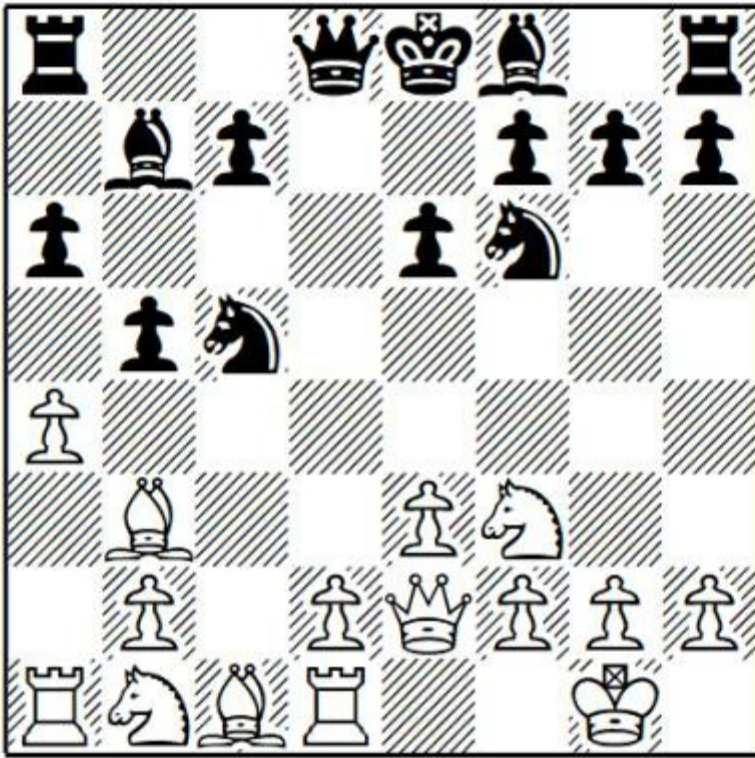
**3 ... Nf6 4 Bxc4 e6 5 0-0**



**5 ... a6**

Or 5 ... c5 6 Qe2 a6 7 Rd1. In *Understanding the QGA* Delchev and Semkov warn Black players against trying to transpose to the QGA against the Réti, writing about the present position as follows, “This position is unpleasant for Black. If you push 7 ... b5, White will attack it with a4, Nc3, aiming to provoke ... b4. Then he will limit the scope of your b7-bishop with pawns on d3 and e4, leaving you without an active plan.” 7 ... b5 8 Bb3 Bb7 9 a4 Nbd7 10 axb5 axb5 11 Rxa8 Qxa8 12 Na3 b4 13 Nc4 Be7 14 d3 Nd5 (14 ... 0-0 15 e4 Nb8!? is a sensible alternative, re-routing the knight to c6 where it is well placed in the changed structure) 15 e4 N5b6 16 Nxb6 Nxb6 was better for White in V.Bukal-H.Stevic, Mali Losinj 2019.

**6 Qe2 b5 7 Bb3 Nbd7 8 Rd1 Bb7 9 a4 Nc5**



Instead of transposing to the note to Black's 5th move with 9 ... c5, Black seizes the opportunity to trade minor pieces and win the bishop pair.

**10 Bc2 Nxa4 11 Bxa4 bxa4 12 d4**

12 d3 and 13 e4 is a decent alternative, but there is nothing wrong with Ragger's choice.

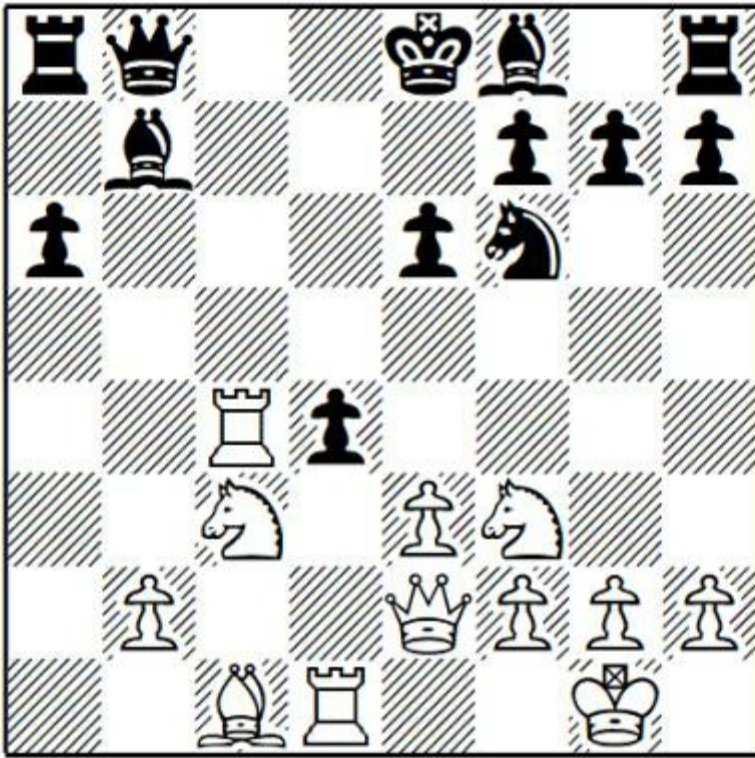
**12 ... c5**

12 ... Be7 and ... 0-0 is more conservative, but Postny continues playing very ambitiously.

**13 Nc3 Qc7 14 Rxa4 cxd4?**

14 ... Be7 would have retained balanced chances.

**15 Rc4 Qb8**



**Question:** How can White develop his initiative?

**16 Qc2!**

**Answer:** Threatening a disruptive check on a4. 16 Nxd4 allows Black to complete development with no problems after 16 ... Bd6 17 g3 0-0.

**16 ... Bd6**

16 ... Be7 17 Qa4+ Kf8 also leaves White with a promising initiative, and it's hard to see how the h8-rook will come into the game.

**17 Qa4+ Ke7 18 Rcx d4 Bxf3 19 gxf3 Rd8 20 Kg2!**

I haven't found a convincing defence for Black here.

**20 ... Qb6**

Trading a pair of rooks with 20 ... Bc7 leaves Black facing strong pressure after 21 Rxd8 Bxd8 22 e4.

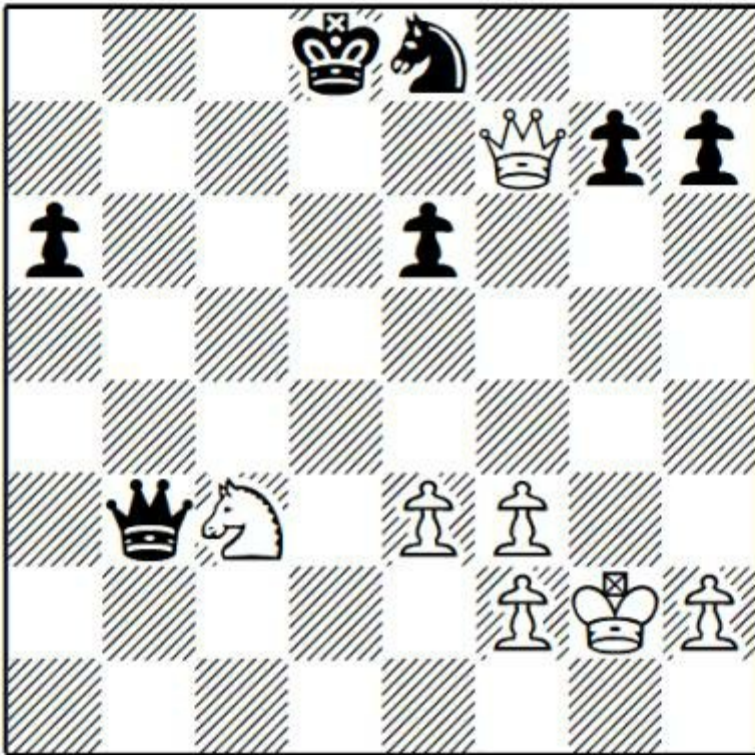
**21 b3 Bc5 22 Ba3 Bxa3?**

22 ... a5! was more resilient.

**23 Qxa3+ Ke8 24 Qa4+ Ke7 25 Qa3+ Ke8 26 Rxd8+ Rxd8 27 Rxd8+ Kxd8**

27 ... Qxd8 28 Qxa6 leaves White with an extra pawn and excellent winning chances.

**28 Qf8+ Ne8 29 Qxf7 Qxb3**



Playing the pawn down endgame after 29 ... Qc7 was a better try, although White remains clearly better.

**Question:** Black has re-established material equality. How can White exploit the lack of co-ordination between the black pieces?

**Answer:**

**30 Ne2!!**

Bringing the knight to d4 or f4 causes the black position to collapse immediately. White remains better after 30 Ne4 Qd5 but Black is very much in the game.

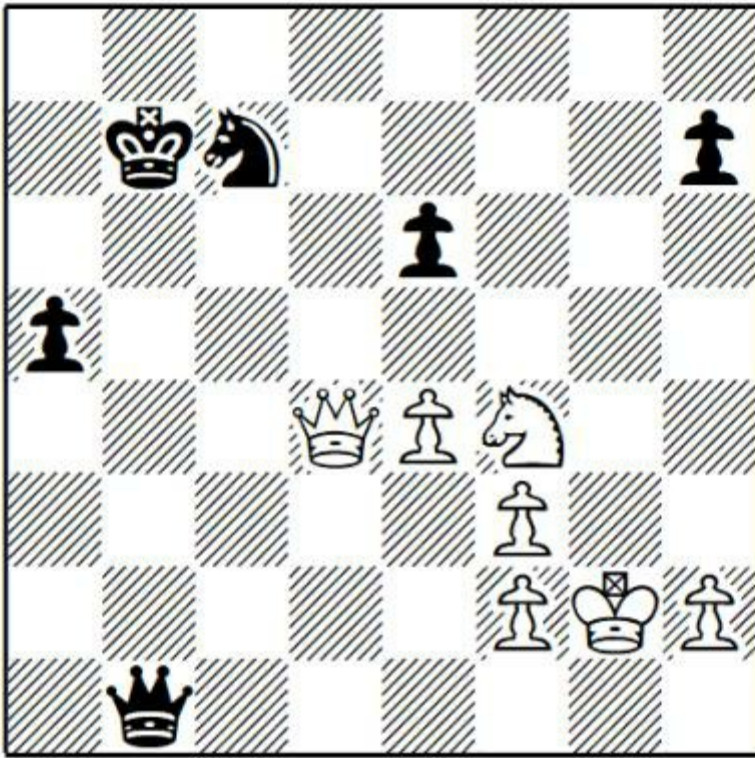
**30 ... Qb1 31 Nf4 Nc7 32 Qf8+ Kd7 33 Qxg7+ Kc6 34 e4?!**

34 Qc3+ Kb7 35 Nd3 was more precise, restricting Black's counterplay.

**34 ... a5?**

After 34 ... Qb3! 35 Qxh7 a5 Black would obtain serious counterplay thanks to his fast-running passed a-pawn. At a minimum, this was a better practical attempt than the game.

**35 Qc3+! Kb6 36 Qd4+ Kb7**



**Question:** How can White increase his advantage?

**37 Nxe6!**

**Answer:** A straightforward tactical shot.

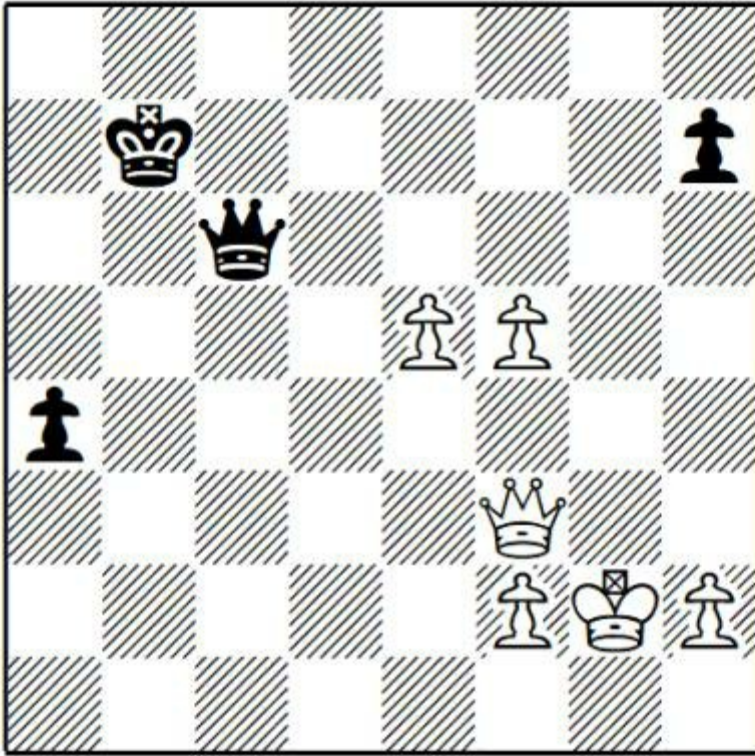
**37 ... Nxe6 38 Qd5+ Kc7 39 Qxe6 Qb6**

White can't trade queens (now or on subsequent moves) since the a5-pawn would queen, but his e- and f-pawns can run without much opposition. The doubled f-pawns are very useful since the f2-pawn covers the white king.

**40 Qe7+ Kc8 41 f4 Qc7 42 Qe6+ Qd7 43 Qa6+ Qb7 44 Qe2 Qc6 45 f5 a4 46 Qg4 Kb7 47 Qf3 Qf6**

Inviting a transition into a pawn endgame, followed by another queen and pawn endgame.

**48 e5+ Qc6**



**Question:** White to play!

**49 f6!**

**Answer:** This had to be seen in advance, since all other moves lose.

**49 ... Qxf3+ 50 Kxf3 a3 51 f7 a2 52 f8Q a1Q**

The queen and pawn endgame is trivially winning for White.

**53 Qg7+ Kc6 54 Qf6+ Kb7 55 Kg2 Qd4 56 Qf3+ Kc7 57 e6 Kd6 58 e7! Kxe7 59 Qe3+ Qxe3 60 fxe3**

Yet another pawn endgame, but this one isn't very challenging.

**60 ... Ke6 61 Kf3 Kf5 62 e4+ Ke5 63 Ke3 Ke6 64 Kf4 Kf6 65 h3 Ke6 66 h4 Kf6 67 h5 1-0**

# Chapter Three

## Queen's Gambit Declined: Systems with ... dxc4

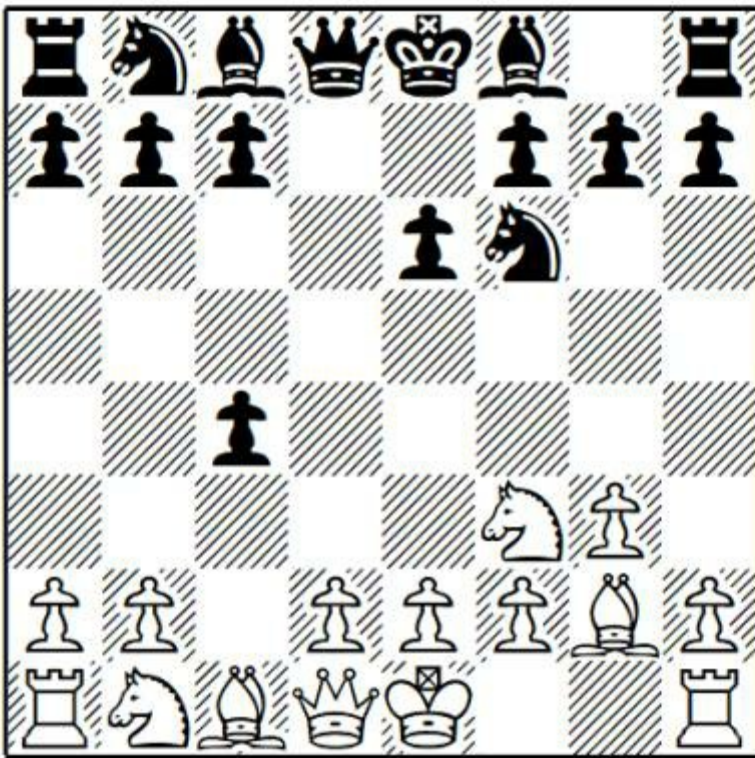
This is the first of our chapters dealing with Queen's Gambit Declined systems ( ... d5, ... e6 and ... Nf6). Of course, these positions are rife with transpositional possibilities if White plays d4 at any point in the first five or six moves.

The position after ...

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2**

... creates some move order issues for black players, depending on their repertoire against the Catalan (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 g3). The classical main line against the Catalan has always been 4 ... Be7 5 Bg2 0-0, which has the advantage of being a universal system which can be employed against any move order. However, many Black players prefer sharper alternatives against the Catalan such as 4 ... Bb4+ or 4 ... dxc4. In our Réti move order, clearly 4 ... Bb4? isn't a serious move. However,

**4 ... dxc4**



is an important independent line, after which a transposition to the Catalan is pretty much off the table.

White has three principled approaches to meet ... dxc4, two of which I've covered in this section.

The line I've omitted is 5 Na3, which leads to unusual gambit play after 5 ... Bxa3 6 bxa3. This was recommended by Mihail Marin in his groundbreaking series of books on the English (published a decade ago by Quality Chess), but in his recent Chessbase DVD series he preferred 5.0-0, which I've covered.

5 Qa4+, immediately regaining the pawn, is Demuth's recommendation. I've also covered some

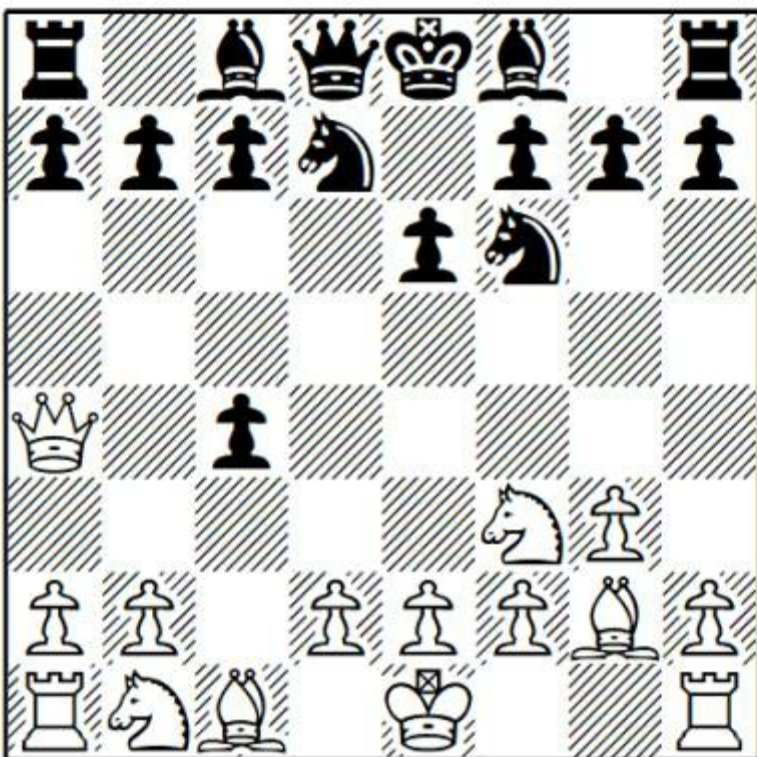
interesting games here.

*Game 9*

**Ding Liren-M.Carlsen**

Sinquefield Cup, St Louis 2019

**1 c4 Nf6 2 g3 e6 3 Bg2 d5 4 Nf3 dxc4 5 Qa4+ Nbd7**



**Question:** What is the idea of Black's setup?

**Answer:** Black would love to play ... a6, ... b5 and ... Bb7 as soon as possible, developing his "problem piece" (the c8-bishop, which is restricted by the e6-pawn and which can struggle to get into the game).

**6 Qxc4**

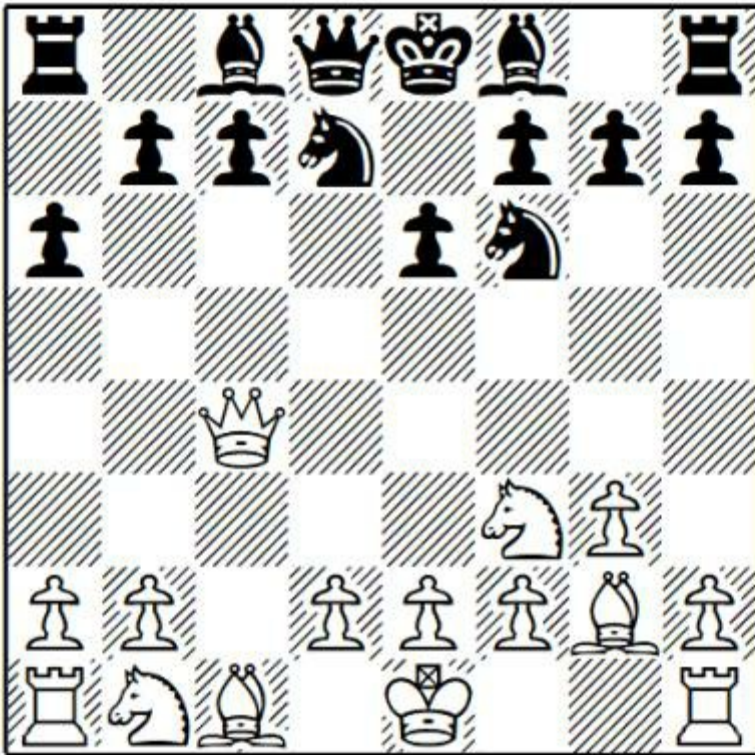
**Question:** Can White delay this recapture and continue developing with 6 0-0?

**Answer:** Although this position has been contested between strong players (from different move orders and, often, at abridged time controls), this is known to be a poor move order since 6 ... a6! 7 Qxc4 b5 allows the bishop to develop to b7 next move (8 Qc6 Rb8 doesn't help White), with a comfortable game.

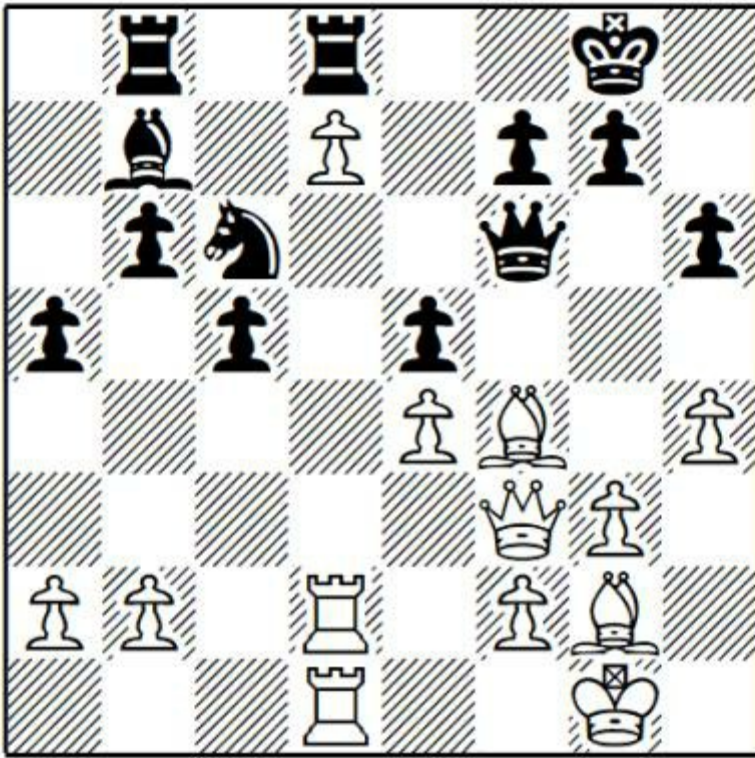
Instead, 6 Qxc4 aims to withdraw the queen from Black's attack with ... b5, which makes it more difficult to develop the c8-bishop.

**6 ... a6**

chesstouring.com



Clearly aiming for ... b5. Instead 6 ... c5 aims to develop the bishop with ... b6 and ... Bb7. Play can continue 7 Qb3 Rb8 8 0-0 b6 9 d3 Bd6 10 Na3 a6 11 Nc4 Bc7 12 d4 0-0 13 Rd1 Qe7? (13 ... b5 14 Nce5 c4 is endorsed by the engines as a sounder alternative) 14 Nfe5! Nxe5 15 dxe5 (15 Nxe5! was stronger) 15 ... Nd5 16 Nd6 Rd8 17 h4 h6 18 e4 Nb4. Stockfish assesses this position as level, but it seems clear that White has considerable pressure. His doubled e-pawns control important central squares and support the knight on d6. Black's queenside majority is immobile at the moment, and the outpost on d4 seems to be insufficient compensation for White's trumps. 19 Bf4 Nc6 20 Qe3 Qf8 (20 ... Nd4 is an empty shot after 21 Rac1) 21 Qc3 Bb7 (21 ... a5!? followed by ... Ba6 is a harmonious way of completing development) 22 Rd2 Qe7 23 Rad1 a5 24 Qf3 Bxd6? (it's hard to tolerate such a knight indefinitely, but that's what the position required; 24 ... Nd4 maintains a level position according to Stockfish, while I would continue to prefer White's practical chances) 25 exd6 Qf6? (25 ... Qd7 was required, limiting White to a slight advantage) 26 d7! (this pawn is far too strong) 26 ... e5

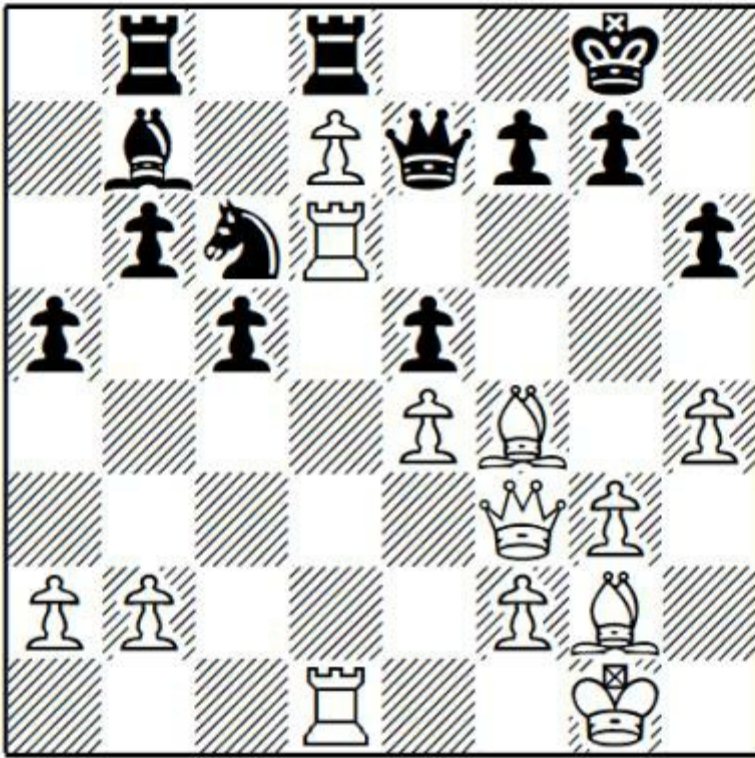


**Question:** Must White acquiesce to the exchange of queens, after which ... Nd4 will follow and the d-pawn will fall?

27 Rd6!

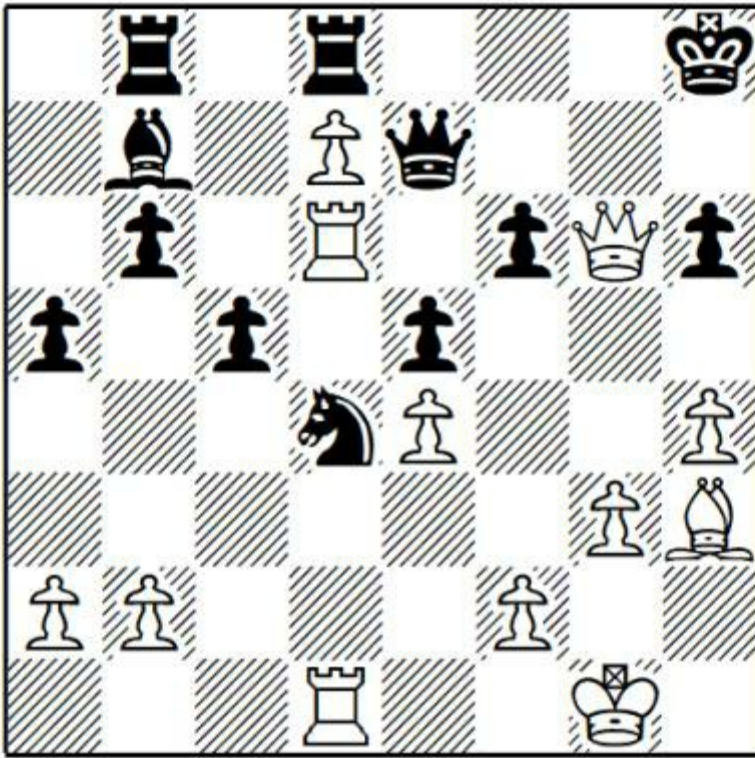
**Answer:** No! I suspect that this is the move Black missed, since she would be clearly better after the alternatives.

27 ... Qe7



**Question:** And what now?

**Answer:** 28 Bxh6!! Nd4 (the attack is decisive after 28 ... gxh6 29 Rxh6) 29 Qg4 f6 30 Bh3 Kh8 31 Qg6! gxh6

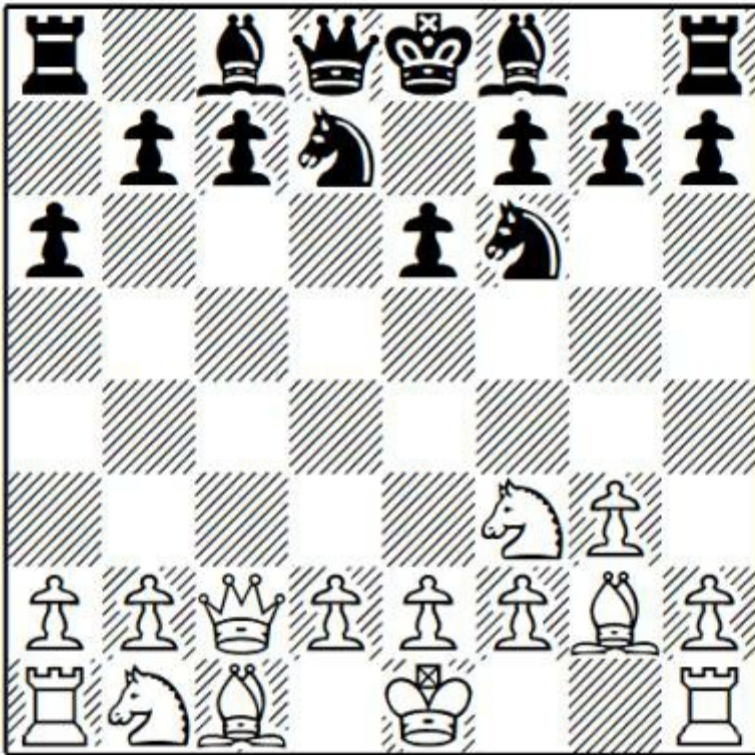


**Question:** How should

White continue?

**Answer:** 32 R1xd4! (Black escapes after 32 Qxh6+? Qh7) 32 ... cxd4 33 Qxh6+ Qh7 34 Qxf6+ Qg7 35 Qf5! d3 36 Qh5+ Kg8 37 Rg6 and Black resigned in S.Ganguly-D.Saduakassova, Douglas 2019. A really impressive attacking display by the strong Indian GM.

7 Qc2

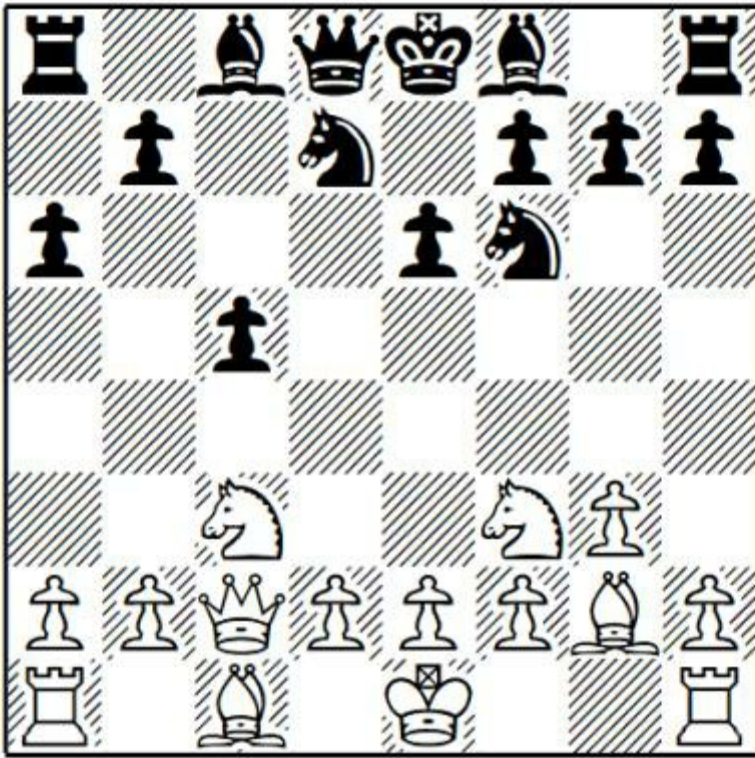


This is the main line. Others:

a) 7 Qb3 is preferred by Demuth in his repertoire book, and is also endorsed by Ntirlis in *Playing 1 d4 d5*. As I was finishing work on this book, I spotted the following impressive miniature by David Howell against a strong Norwegian IM: 7 ... c5 8 a4! (as Demuth notes, Black's last move is inaccurate because of this response, which restricts the b5-advance) 8 ... Qc7 (Demuth gives 8 ... Bd6 9 d3! preparing to play a5 and protect the pawn with Bd2) 9 a5 b5? 10 axb6 Nxb6 (Black has taken on a clear structural disadvantage for no compensation) 11 d3 Bd6 12 Na3!? (the most flexible development, for a reason we'll see in a moment) 12 ... Rb8 13 Bd2 (the a5-square is often important in Catalan positions, and here the bishop prepares to establish an unpleasant pin) 13 ... e5? 14 Ba5 Be6 15 Qc2 Qe7 16 Bxb6! (not an easy move to consider, but once you see the resulting position it's clear that White has outstanding play) 16 ... Rxb6 17 Nd2 Nd5? (The prophylactic 17 ... Bc8 was more resilient, though White remains clearly better) 18 Qa4+ Kf8 19 Ndc4 Rb8 20 Qc6 and Black resigned in D.Howell-G.Ostmoe, Eliteserien 2020.

b) I always thought that 7 a4 was ineffective since it allows the immediate 7 ... b5 and 8 ... Bb7, but a slower approach was adopted in a recent high level game. 7 ... Bd6 8 a5 0-0 9 0-0 Rb8 10 Qc2 b5 11 Nd4 Bb7 12 Bxb7 Rxb7 13 Nc6 Qa8 14 d4 Nb8 15 e4 Nxc6 16 Qxc6 Be7 was played in P.Maghsoodloo-S.Karjakin, Douglas 2019, and now 17 Be3 would retain some chances of a bind.

**7 ... c5 8 Nc3!?**



The highest-scoring move in the position, although 8 0-0 is more popular.

### 8 ... Qc7

Others:

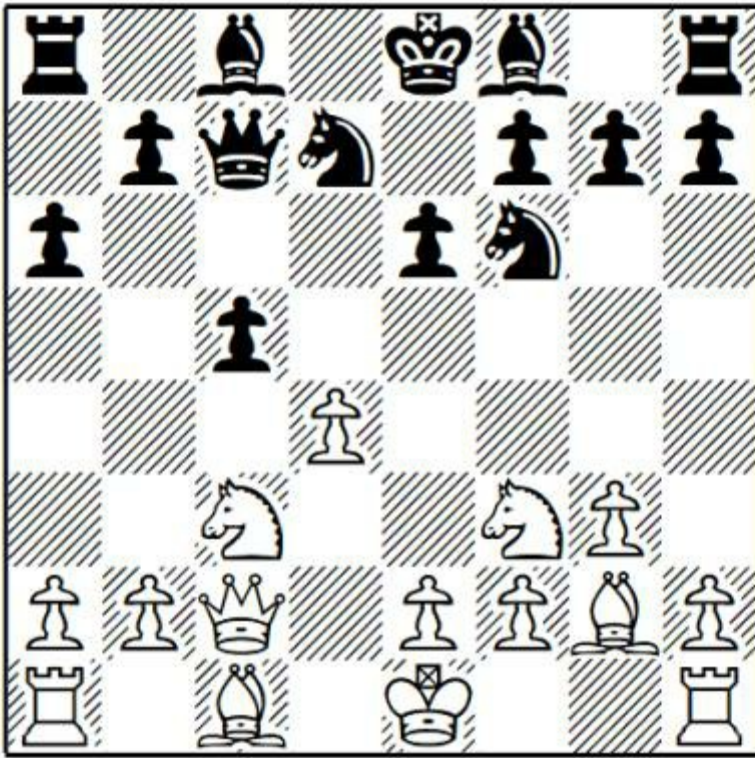
a) 8 ... Ra7 9 0-0 (9 a4 b6 was okay for Black in D.Fridman-S.Ernst, Germany 2017) 9 ... b5 (9 ... b6 is less ambitious and led to a white edge after 10 d4 in G.Meier-A.Filippov, Tromsoe 2014) 10 d3 Bb7 11 a4 b4 12 Nb1 Be7 13 Nbd2 0-0 14 Nc4 was T.Banusz-B.Socko, Slovakia 2019. I think White's play is easier due to the outpost on c4 although the engines are unimpressed.

b) In a previous game Carlsen essayed 8 ... Bd6 and now:

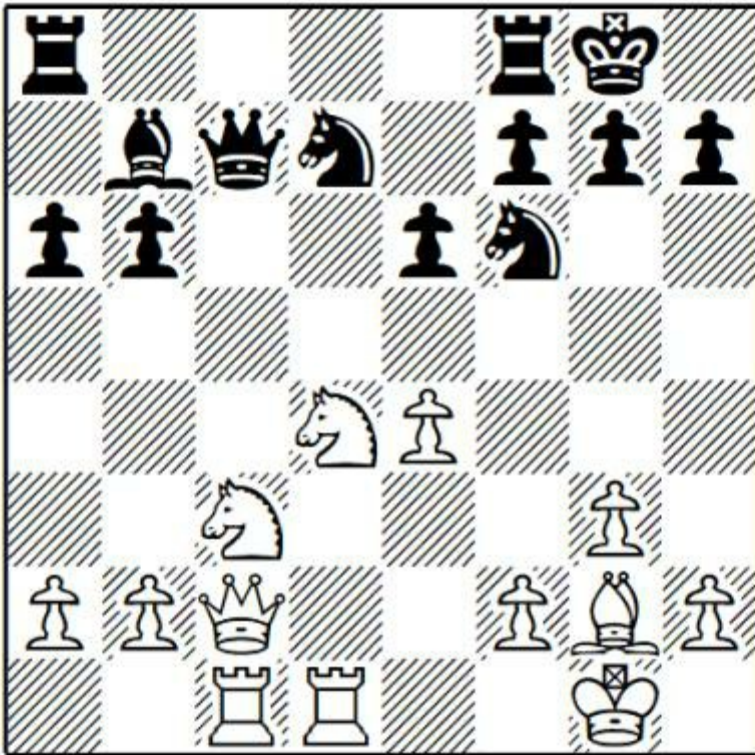
b1) 9 0-0 0-0 10 d4 Qe7 11 Rd1 h6 12 Bf4 Bxf4 13 gxf4 cxd4 14 Nxd4 Rd8 15 e3 Nf8 16 Na4 Rb8 17 Qc5 Qxc5 18 Nxc5 was N.Grandelius-M.Carlsen, Stavanger 2016. Carlsen held this slightly inferior endgame.

b2) 9 d4 Qc7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Rd1 b6 12 d5 e5? (12 ... exd5 was a better try, with a slight advantage for White) 13 Nh4 g6 14 Bg5 Bb7 15 Qd2 b5 16 Rac1 Kh8 17 b3 Rae8 18 e4 was played in G.Oparin-S.Maze, Brest 2019. White was clearly better with a protected passed pawn on d5 (which gives a huge space advantage and restricts Black's pieces, especially the bishop on b7) and strong attacking prospects on the kingside, especially against the weakened dark squares which the d6-bishop can't defend. Black's queenside majority can't advance without creating weaknesses.

### 9 d4



Or 9 0-0 b6 10 d4 Bb7 which has been tested in several top GM clashes. For example 11 Bf4 (11 dxc5 Bxc5 12 Bf4 Bd6 13 Bxd6 Qxd6 14 Rfd1 Qc7 15 Rac1 Rc8 looked okay for Black in L.Aronian-R.Wojtaszek, Wijk aan Zee 2015) 11 ... Bd6 12 Bxd6 Qxd6 13 Rfd1 0-0 14 e4 (Black is well developed with no weaknesses, and the engines assess the position as equal) 14 ... cxd4 (14 ... Qe7 15 Qe2 b5 16 e5 Nd5 17 Nxd5 Bxd5 18 dxc5 Nxc5 19 Rac1 Rac8 20 Qe3 Qb7 21 Rxc5 Rxc5 22 Qxc5 Bxf3 23 Bxf3 Qxf3 and a draw was soon agreed in T.Radjabov-S.Mamedyarov, Shamkir 2014) 15 Nxd4 Qc7 16 Rac1



and now:

a) 16 ... Rad8! 17 f4 e5 18 Nd5 Qxc2 19 Nxc2 exf4 20 gxf4 Nc5 21 Nce3 Bxd5? (21 ... Ncxe4 equalised) 22 exd5 and White went on to win in A.Giri-S.Karjakin, Riga 2019.

b) 16 ... Rac8 17 f4! (17 Qd2 was less incisive in M.Adams-S.Karjakin, London 2017) 17 ... Qb8 18 e5 Nd5 19 Bxd5 Bxd5 20 Nf5! exf5 21 Rxd5 Qa7 22 Qxf5 and White won a fine technical game in S.Vidit-T.Batchuluun, Chengdu 2017.

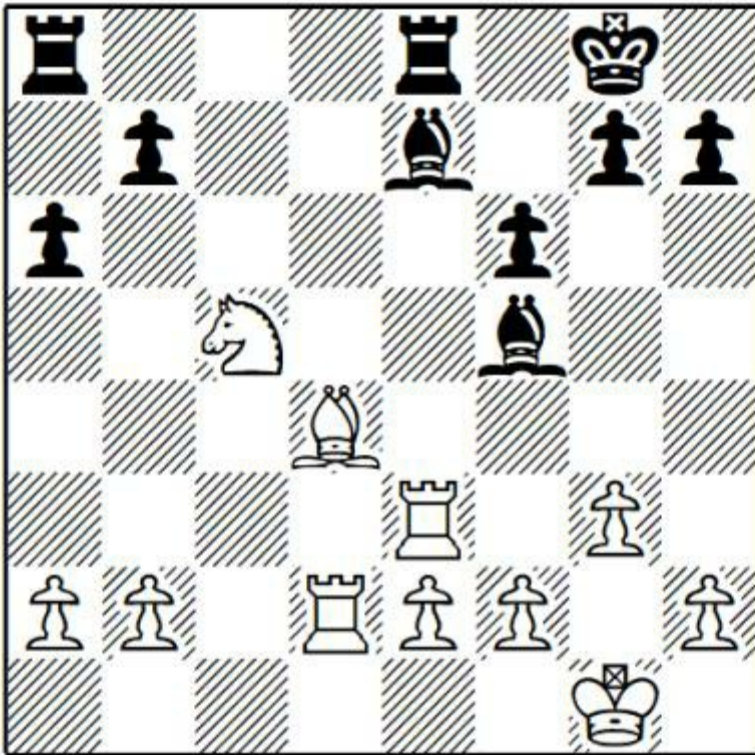
**9 ... cxd4**

9 ... b6 10 Bf4 Bd6 11 Bxd6 Qxd6 was L.Dominguez Perez-S.Sethuraman, Tromsoe 2014 and now 12 dxc5 Qxc5 13 Ne5 Ra7 14 Nd3 would have been more pleasant for White, whose d3-knight is ideally placed in this structure.

**10 Nxd4 Bc5 11 Nb3 Bd6 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rd1**

13 Be3 Ne5 14 Rac1 Neg4 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bxf6 Nxf6 17 Ne4 Qxc2 18 Nxf6+ gxf6 19 Rxc2 G.Sargissian-R.Wojtaszek, Dubai 2014 would have been fine for Black after 19 ... Rb8 with equality.

**13 ... Be5 14 Be3 Nd5 15 Bxd5 exd5 16 Rac1 Nf6 17 Nxd5 Nxd5 18 Rxd5 Qxc2 19 Rxc2 Bf6 20 Nc5 Re8 21 Bd4 Be7 22 Re5 f6 23 Re3 Bf5 24 Rd2**



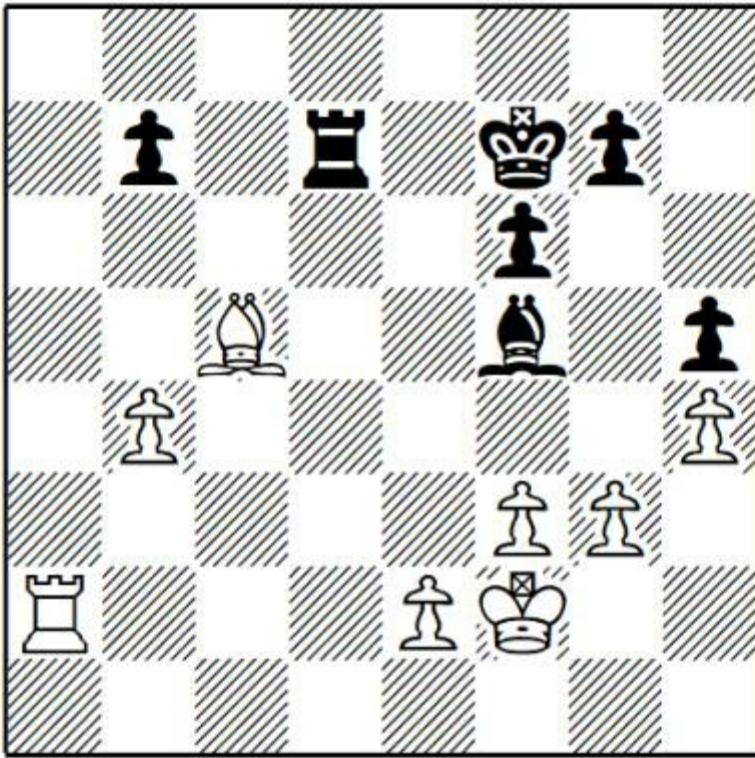
**24 ... Bxc5**

A responsible decision, trading down into a very unpleasant rook and opposite-coloured bishop endgame. Black could continue to play for compensation based on his bishop pair with 24 ... b5. In either case White obviously has winning chances.

**25 Rxe8+ Rxe8 26 Bxc5 Rc8 27 b4 a5**

Trading pawns is good defensive technique. However, Carlsen will be unable to trade the entire queenside, which would have eased his defence.

**28 a3 axb4 29 axb4 Rc7 30 f3 Rd7 31 Ra2 h5 32 Kf2 Kf7 33 h4**

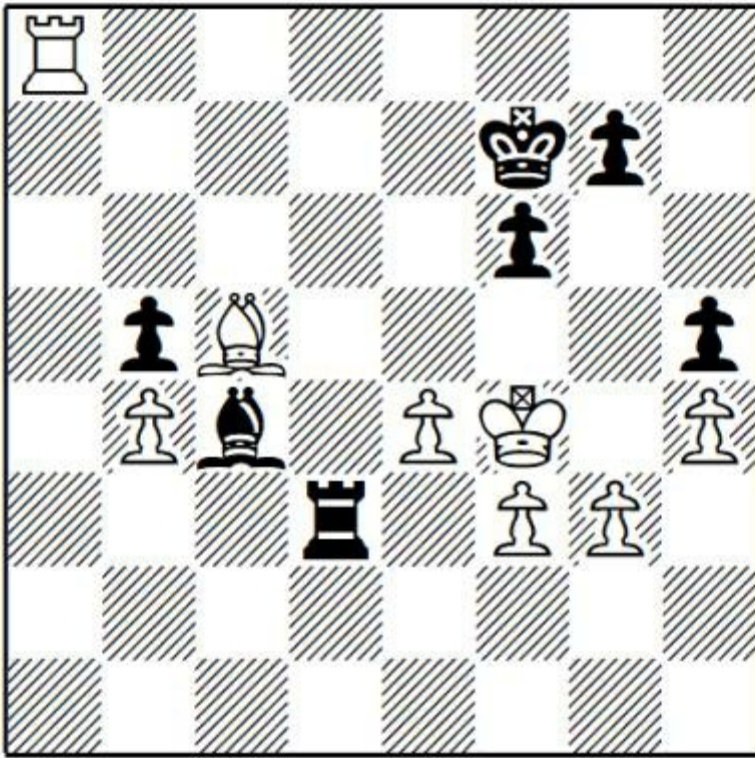


**33 ... Be6**

**Question:** Since the weaker side wants to trade pawns, what do you think of 33 ... g5 here?

**Answer:** It's a bad idea. After 34 hxg5 fxg5 35 Ra5 Black has created weaknesses along the fifth rank and given his opponent a mobile passed pawn on e4 (or, if White wishes, connected passed pawns once he pushes f4). I think White should win this position.

**34 Ra8 b5 35 e4 Bc4 36 Ke3 Rd3+ 37 Kf4**

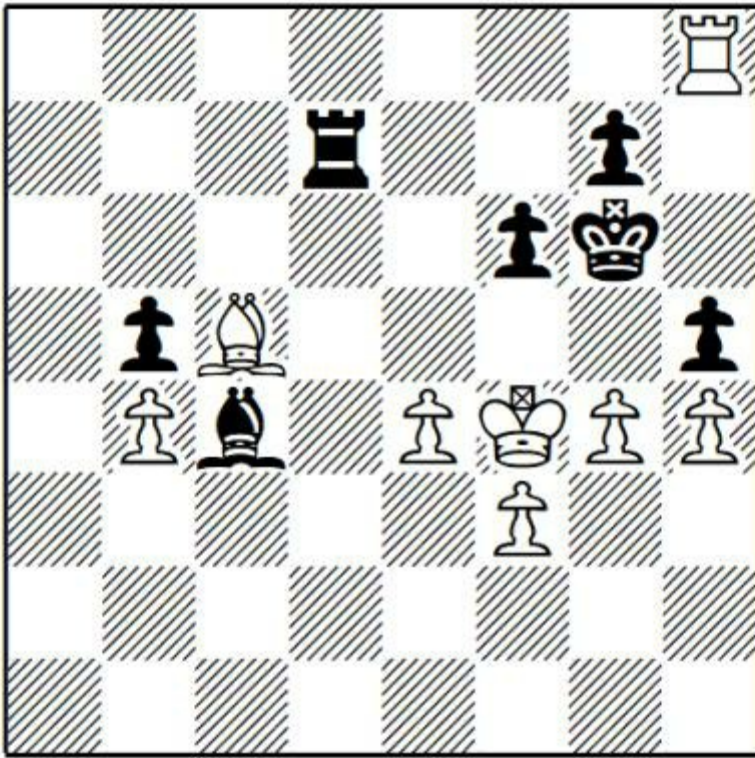


**Question:** Black missed a saving chance here. What was it?

**37 ... Rd7?**

**Answer:** 37 ... Rb3! sets up counterplay with ... Be2. Although it is frightening to abandon the king to the combined attack of the three white pieces, this defence holds, for example 38 Ra7+ (38 Ra2 Rxf3+ 39 Kxf3 Bxa2 is an immediate draw) 38 ... Kg8 39 Bd6 Be2 40 Kf5 Bxf3 41 Re7 Kh7 42 e5 Rd3 43 Bc7 Bg4+ 44 Ke4 Rd7! 45 exf6 Kg6 46 Rxd7 Bxd7 47 fxg7 Kxg7 with a dead draw.

**38 Rh8 Kg6 39 g4!**

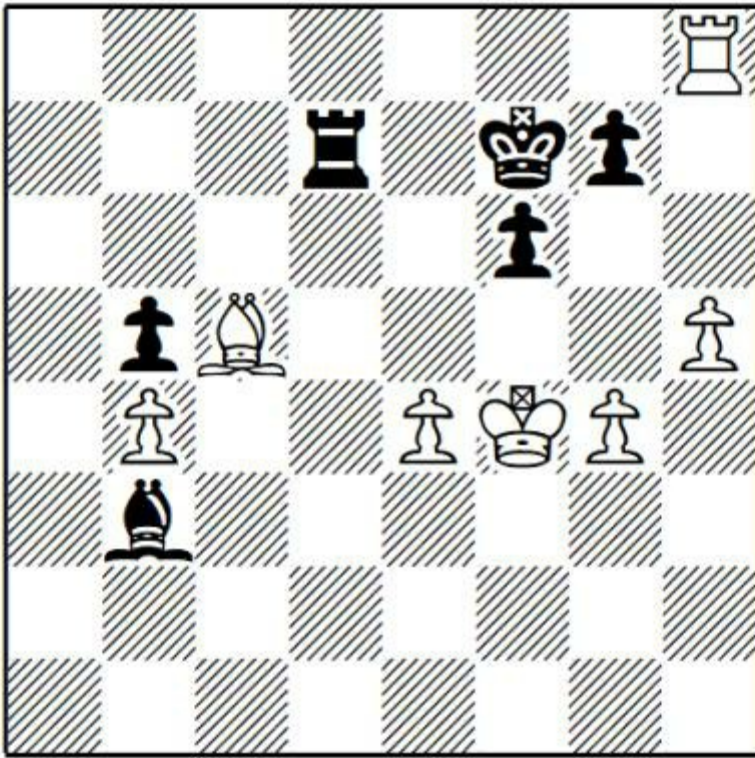


Correctly playing for the attack.

**39 ... hxg4 40 fxg4**

40 h5+ Kf7 41 Kxg4 might have been more accurate to avoid Black's resource on move 41.

**40 ... Kf7 41 h5**



**41 ... Bb3??**

In his notes for Chessbase, Saravanan gives 41 ... g5+ as leading to a draw. I haven't found anything promising for White here.

**Question:** How should White continue after 41 ... Bb3?

**42 e5?**

**Answer:** Several sources give 42 g5! as winning, with the point that 42 ... fxg5+ 43 Kf5 leaves no good defence to the threatened Rf8 mate.

**42 ... fxe5+?**

Again Saravanan notes that 42 ... g5+ was a better chance. Here, however, 43 Kg3 Rd3+ 44 Kf2 fxe5 45 Rf8+ Ke6 46 Be3 leaves Black with a difficult, perhaps impossible, defence.

**43 Kxe5**

White now has a winning position which he didn't let slip for the rest of the game, although both players were down to increment.

**43 ... Rd5+ 44 Kf4 Rd1 45 Rf8+ Ke6 46 Re8+ Kf7 47 Rf8+ Ke6 48 Kg5 Bc2 49 Re8+ Kf7 50 Re7+ Kg8 51 Rb7 Rd5+ 52 Kh4 Bd3 53 g5 Rd8 54 g6 Bc4 55 Kg5 Rd5+ 56 Kf4 Rd8 57 Bd6 Be2 58 Be5 Bxh5 59 Kg5 Be2 60 Rxc7+ Kf8 61 Rf7+ Ke8 62 Kf6**

Notes published on Chess24 gave 62 Bf6! with the neat point 62 ... Rd7 63 Rh7!, winning.

**62 ... Bc4 63 Rh7 Rd1 64 Re7+ Kd8 65 Ra7 Rf1+ 66 Kg7 Ke8 67 Bf6 Re1 68 Kh8 Rh1+ 69 Kg7 Re1 70 Rb7 Re2 71 Ra7 Re1 72 Rc7 Re2 73 Ra7 Re1 74 Ra3 Re2 75 Ra8+ Kd7 76 Kf8 Rf2 77 Kg7 Rg2 78 Rd8+ Ke6 79 Re8+ Kd7 80 Re5 Kd6 81 Re3 Kd7 82 Re7+ Kd6 83 Re3 Kd7 84 Kh6 Rh2+ 85 Kg7 Rg2 86 Bd4 Rg4 87 Bc5 Rg2 1-0**

Carlsen lost on time while executing this move. This led to a must-win situation for him in the

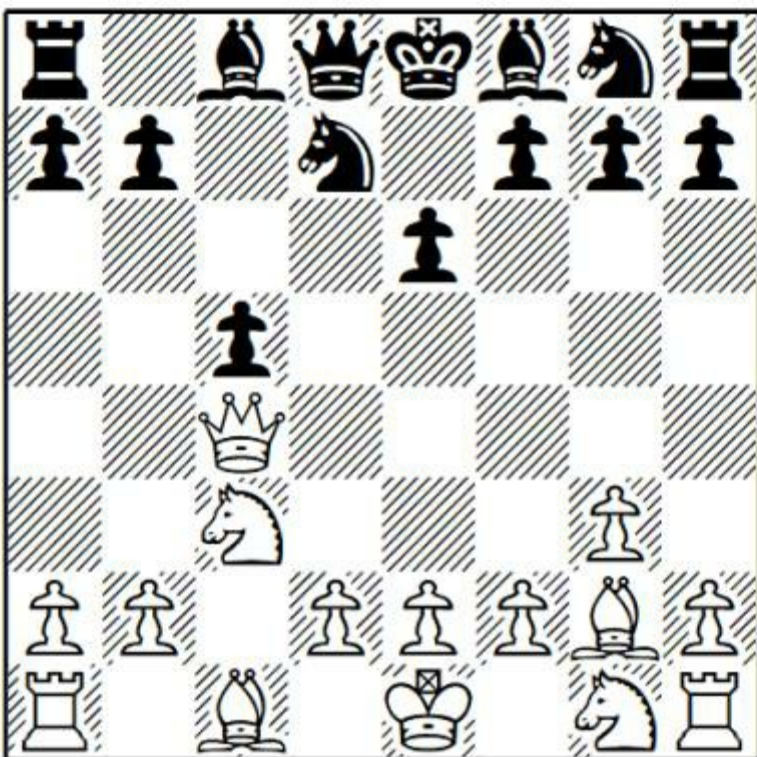
second blitz game, where Ding again prevailed with the gorgeous 40 ... Ne7!! shot.

*Game 10*

**L.Aronian-P.Eljanov**

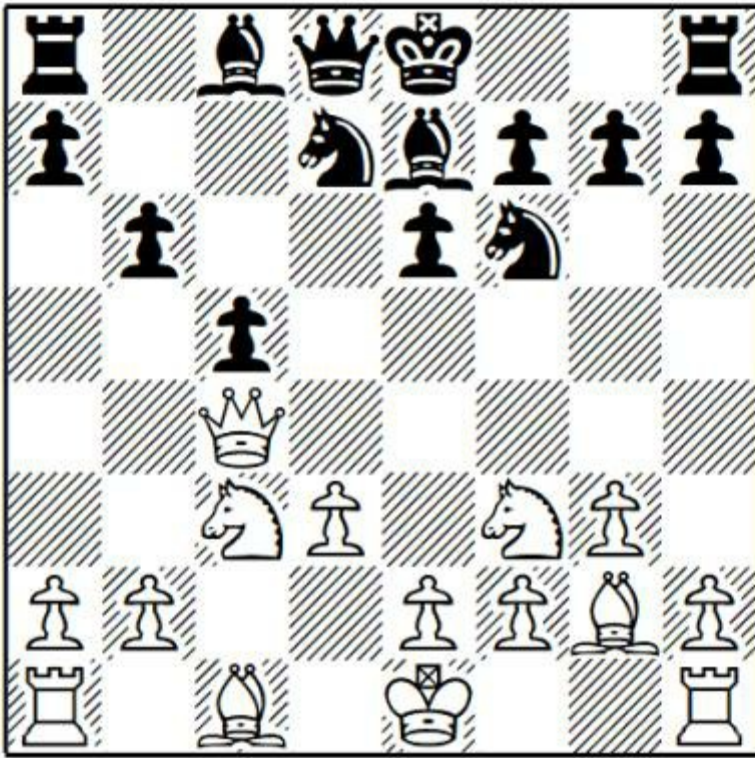
Norway Chess, Stavanger 2016

**1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 dxc4 4 Qa4+ Nd7 5 Qxc4 c5 6 Nc3!?**



Marin observes, “A rather unusual move order. An old rule in this line claims that White should not hurry with developing the queen’s knight and that an early queen retreat is essential to delay the c8-bishop’s development. Aronian will break the rule in both its essential aspects.”

**6 ... Ngf6 7 d3 Be7 8 Nf3 b6!?**



A novelty which hasn't found any followers, perhaps because of the result of this game, but in fact Eljanov equalised before going wrong later.

**9 Ng5**

9 Nh4 is likely to transpose, for example 9 ... Rb8 10 0-0 Bb7 11 Bf4 Bxg2 12 Kxg2 Rb7 and White doesn't have anything more convincing than 13 Nf3.

**9 ... Rb8 10 0-0 Bb7 11 Bf4 Bxg2 12 Kxg2 Rb7 13 Nf3 0-0 14 e4**

Marin makes another wonderfully instructive comment here, "This thematic move is usually effective with the light-squared bishops on the board, when it limits the black one. This is a paradox, since in any ending the white bishop would become "bad". But the way it is, the last move does not seem to offer White chances for anything concrete as Black can deal with the threats in the centre, d3-d4 and e4-e5."

14 a4!? is suggested by Marin as a promising alternative.

In these structures Black often struggles to find a good spot for his queen, where it is safe, active and allows the rooks to connect. Once White pushes d4, the c- and d-files are likely to open. The white queen has a natural spot on e2, but the e7-bishop takes this square from his queen.

**Question:** How can Black solve this problem?

**14 ... Qa8!**

**Answer:** A perfect spot for the queen. On a8 it's safe from attack and occupies the same diagonal as the white king. Now pushing d4 (or e5) will increase the queen's activity. In the meantime the f8-rook can occupy a good square on c8 or d8.

**15 a4 Rd8 16 Nb5?!**

This should have been a shot in the dark. Moving either rook to d1 would maintain the balance.

16 a5? sharply activates the b7-rook after 16 ... bxa5 17 Rxa5 Now. 17 ... Nb8! or 17 ... h6 gives a good position, but not the immediate 17 ... Rxb2?! in view of 18 Qa4 with at least sufficient compensation for the pawn.

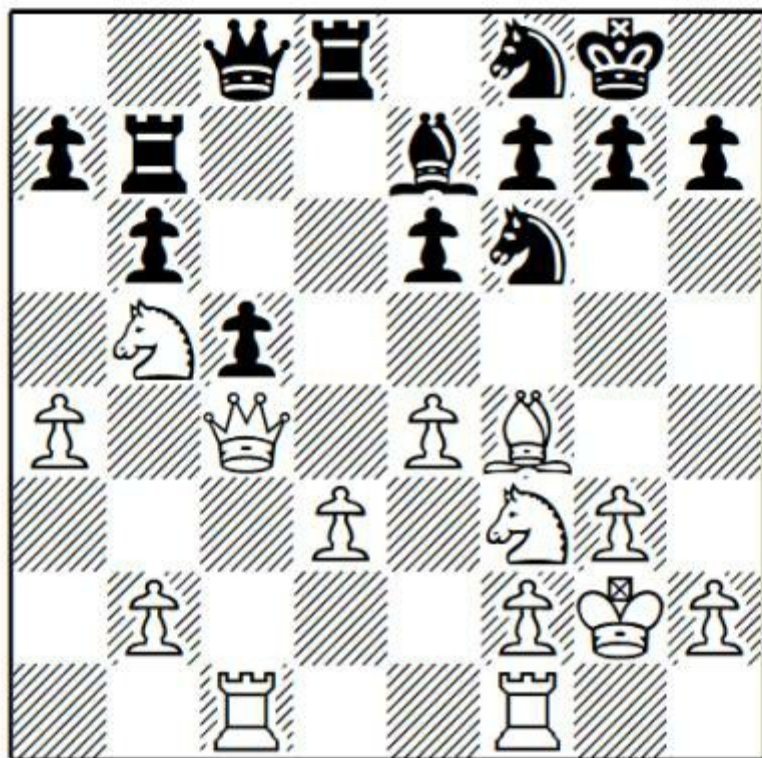
**16 ... Qc8**

16 ... Nf8! gives Black an excellent game.

**17 Rac1**

Engines like 17 a5 a6 18 Nd6 Bxd6 19 Bxd6 b5 for White, which looks unclear to me.

**17 ... Nf8**



**18 d4?!**

White isn't well prepared for this break. 18 h3 would maintain equality.

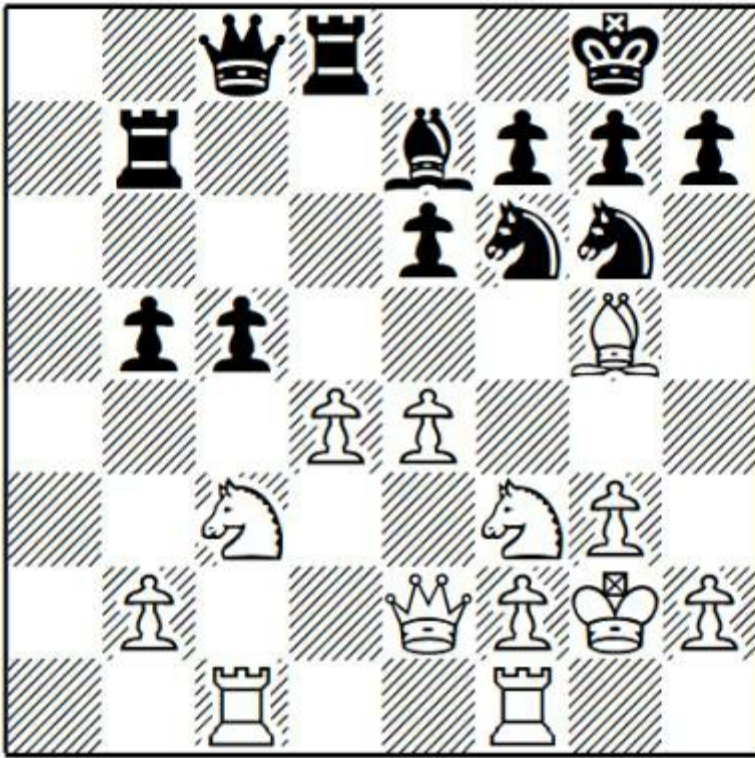
**18 ... Ng6 19 Bg5**

This allows a tactic but not one which changes the assessment of the position. 19 Be3 was more conservative, when I slightly prefer Black.

**19 ... a6**

A decent move. 19 ... Nxe4!? 20 Bxe7 Nxe7 is fine for Black since the queen is defended after 21 dxc5? (21 Rfe1, with an edge for Black, is suggested by Mekhitarian) 21 ... Nxc5 22 b4 Nd3 with a healthy extra pawn.

**20 Nc3 b5 21 axb5 axb5 22 Qe2**



### 22 ... c4

A tempting choice, after which the queenside pawns look quite threatening. Starting from here, Aronian puts on a masterclass, but there is nothing wrong with Eljanov's play. Perhaps Eljanov rejected 22 ... cxd4 because of 23 Nd5 (23 Bxf6 gxf6 24 Nd5 Qb8 25 Nxe7+ Rxe7 and White still needs to demonstrate compensation for the pawn) 23 ... Qb8 24 Nxe7+ Rxe7 25 Rfd1 (25 e5? looks crushing but 25 ... Nd5! is a crucial shot) 25 ... Red7 with unclear play.

### 23 Rfd1 h6

23 ... b4? just leaves weaknesses after 24 Na4, with a clear advantage for White.

### 24 Bxf6 Bxf6 25 h4!

A thematic move, gaining space on the kingside.

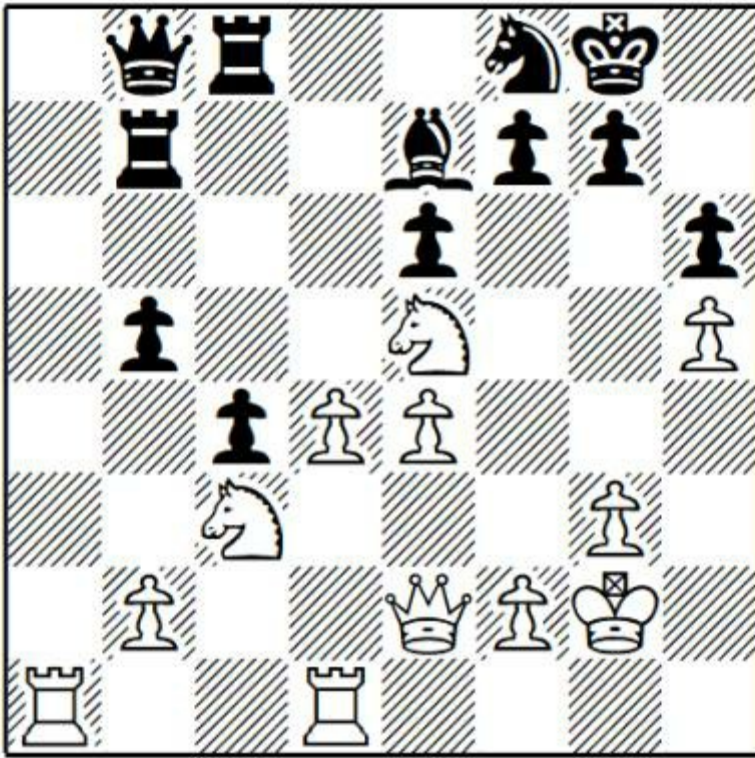
### 25 ... Qb8

Mekhitarian suggests 25 ... h5. It's always a tough decision in such positions whether to play ... h5 (effectively giving White an outpost on g5, and leaving an exposed pawn on h5 which might have to be further defended with ... g6, weakening the kingside) or to allow White to play h5 (when h6 is a target and White can prepare a breakthrough with g4-g5). I wouldn't criticise Eljanov's choice.

### 26 Ra1

The thematic 26 e5 Be7 27 d5 leads to instructive variations after 27 ... b4 (27 ... exd5 28 Nxd5 gives some initiative) 28 dxe6!? (28 d6 bxc3 29 dxe7 Nxe7 30 Rxd8+ Qxd8 31 bxc3 is level) 28 ... bxc3 29 exf7+ Kxf7 30 Rxd8 Bxd8 (30 ... Qxd8 31 Qxc4+ Kf8 32 Rxc3 with a decisive attack) 31 Qxc4+ Kf8 32 Rxc3 Rc7 33 Qe4 Rxc3 34 bxc3 with three pawns for the piece and a likely draw.

### 26 ... Be7 27 h5 Nf8 28 Ne5 Rc8



### 29 Ra6 Rb6

The computer defends after 29 ... Rbc7 30 d5 b4 31 Na2 Qb7 32 Rc6 c3 but this line is tough to find. Eljanov's move, trading the active rook, makes more sense.

### 30 Rxb6 Qxb6 31 Qf3 f6?!

Leading to a very dangerous position with a white pawn embedded on g6. This is the first real mistake made by Eljanov in the game. 31 ... Bf6! leads to wholesale liquidation after 32 Nxf7 Kxf7 33 e5 Nh7 34 Ne4 Kg8 35 exf6 Rf8 with a likely draw, for example 36 d5 Nxf6 37 dxe6 Nxe4 38 Qxe4 Qxf2+ 39 Kh3 Qf6 and Black is out of danger.

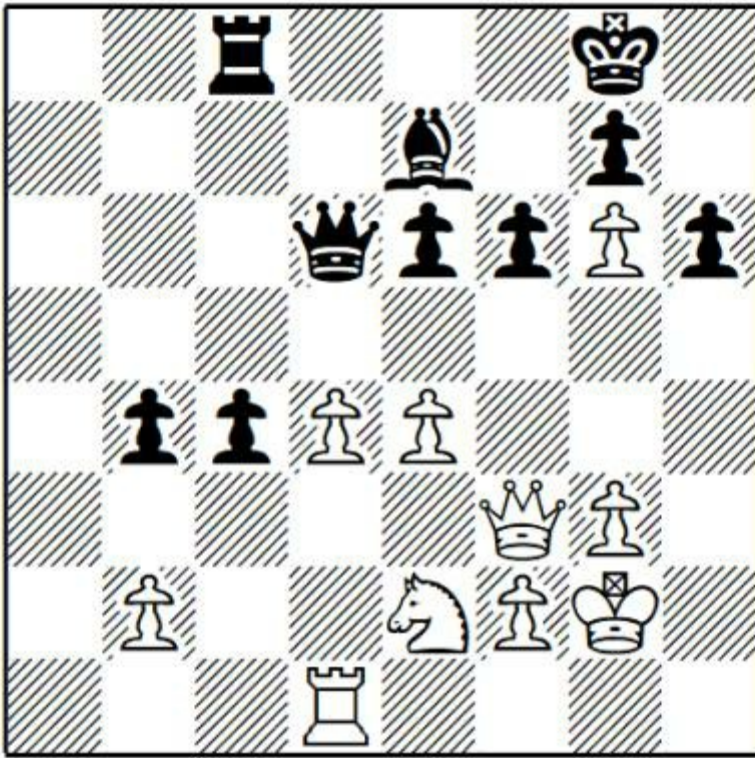
### 32 Ng6! Nxe6

It's tough to tolerate the g6-knight for long.

### 33 hxg6

The black king is now chronically weak, even in the endgame. Moreover, the kingside structure is vulnerable, and tactical shots will always present themselves with a pawn this close to the queening square.

### 33 ... b4 34 Ne2 Qd6



**Question:** How can White create more outposts for his knight?

**35 d5!**

**Answer:** Winning control of the f5-square. Allowing the knight to come to d4 or f4 is horrible so Eljanov tries to establish a blockade.

**35 ... e5**

**Question:** How can White manoeuvre his knight to f5?

**36 g4!**

**Answer:** Vacating the f3-square and increasing his light-square control.

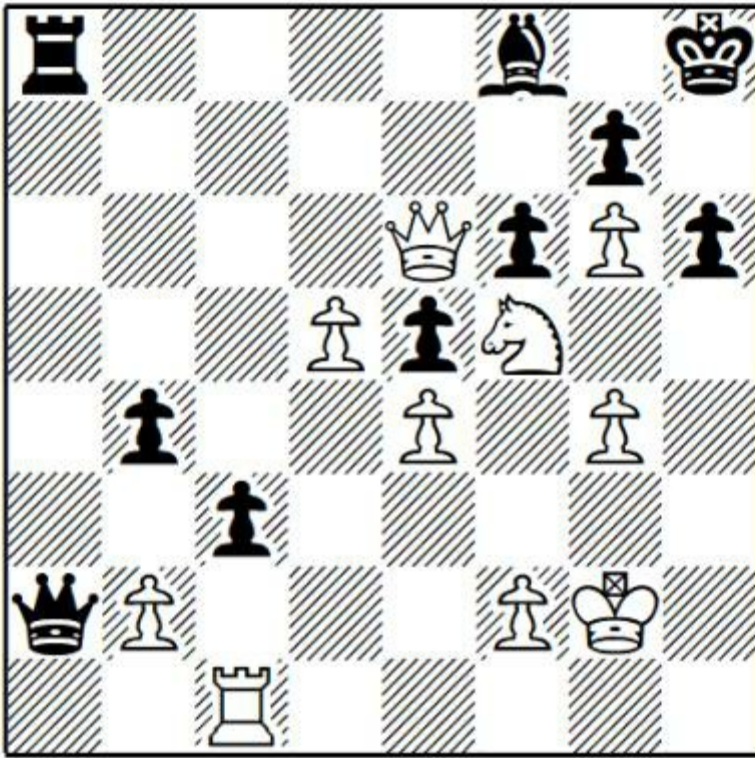
**36 ... Bf8 37 Qf5**

37 Ng3 is more logical but Aronian's choice doesn't spoil the position.

**37 ... Ra8 38 Rc1 Qa6 39 Ng3 Kh8 40 Qe6! Qa2**

40 ... Qxe6 41 dxe6 Re8 42 Rxc4 Rxe6 43 Rc8 Kg8 44 Nf5 and White delivers mate with Ne7+ and Rxf8 once Black runs out of pawn moves.

**41 Nf5 c3**



**Question:** A cardinal principle of attacking play is to include all the pieces. How can White do this here?

**42 Rh1!**

**Answer:** Threatening 43 Rxh6+ with mate.

**42 ... Qa7**

**Question:** How does White conclude the attack?

**43 d6!**

**Answer:** Cutting the queen off from the defence of the kingside.

**43 ... Qb7 44 d7! Qxe4+ 45 f3 1-0**

The checks run out immediately.

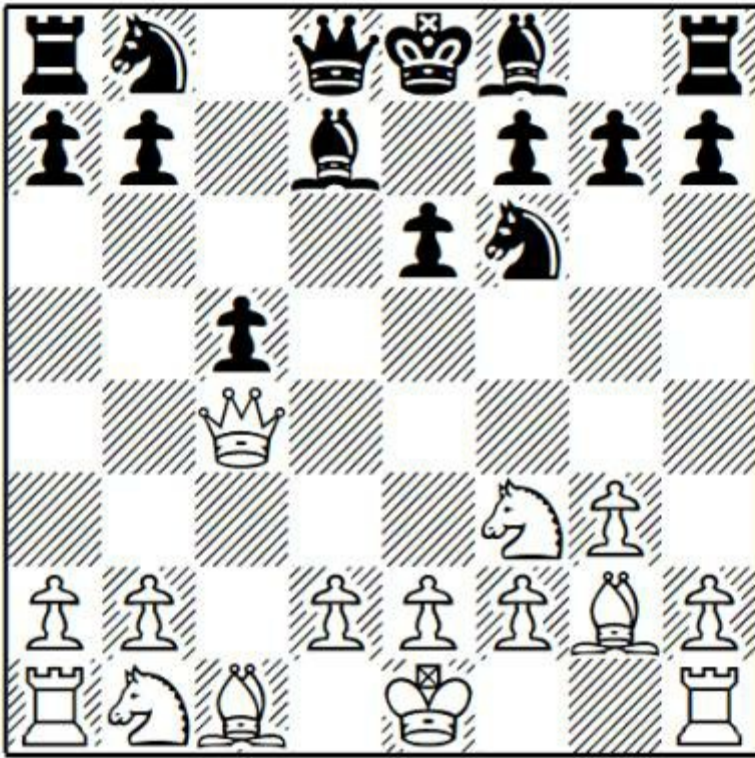
*Game 11*

**L.Aronian-S.Sethuraman**

Gibraltar Masters 2018

**1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 Nf6 4 Nf3 dxc4 5 Qa4+ Bd7 6 Qxc4 c5**

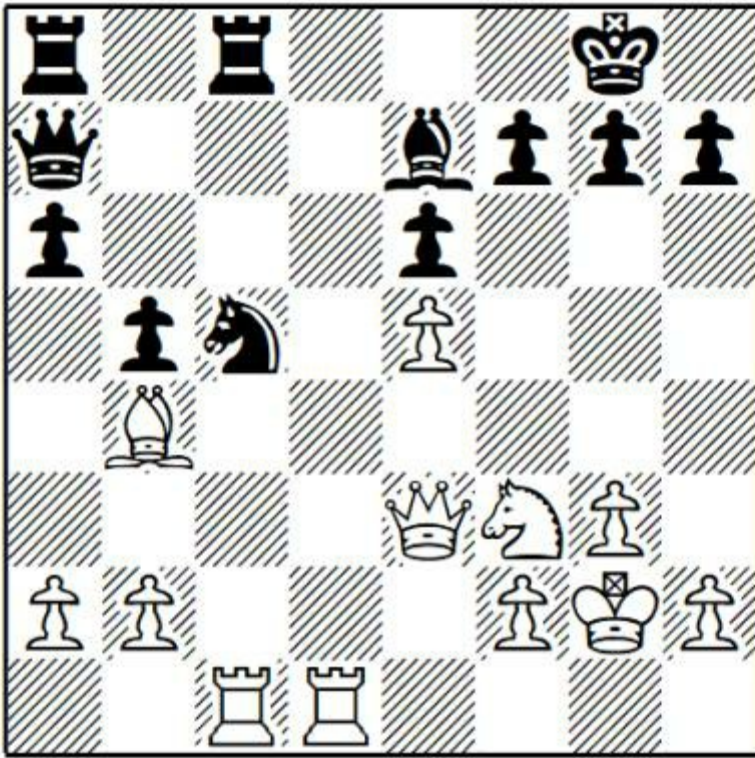
This is Ntirlis' recommendation for Black, so readers can expect to face it in their own games.



### 7 Ne5

The critical move. 7 d4 Bc6 (which can also arise from a Catalan move order) is well known to be fine for Black. Now:

a) After 8 0-0 Nbd7 the position is assessed by Kasparov as follows, “The opening has turned out favourably for Black – he has achieved the maximum he can hope for in the Catalan: his minor pieces are controlling the centre, and the advanced position of the white queen gives him tempi for development. It is already White who has to play accurately.” Unsurprisingly, Kasparov is correct, although the following miniature provides food for thought. 9 Be3 cxd4 10 Nxd4 Bxg2 11 Kxg2 Nd5 (11 ... Rc8 followed by ... Bc5 is a good alternative) 12 Bd2 (12 Nc3!? is possible, since White gains some initiative to compensate for his spoiled structure if Black takes on e3) 12 ... a6 13 e4 N5f6 14 Nf3 b5 15 Qe2 Nc5? (15 ... Be7 maintains equality) 16 e5 Nd5 17 Nc3 Be7 18 Rfd1 0-0 19 Nxd5 Qxd5 20 Bb4 (20 Bg5 Qb7 21 Bxe7 Qxe7 22 Qe3 is also unpleasant for Black) 20 ... Qb7 21 Qe3 Rfc8? (21 ... Qb6 is more resilient, although it’s very difficult to self-pin like this) 22 Rac1 Qa7



**Question:** White to play and win.

**Answer:** 23 Rd6! Black resigned in Li Chao-I.Cheparinov, China 2019, since he loses decisive material after 23 ... Bxd6 24 exd6.

b) 8 dxc5 Nbd7 9 Be3 Bd5 (9 ... Nd5? 10 Bd4 and Black struggled to regain the pawn in X.Bu-C.Dai, Daqing 2019) 10 Qa4 (10 Qc2!? was played in Ding Liren-L.Aronian, Berlin 2018, while after 10 Qb4, which was played by Korchnoi against Kasparov in game 6 of their 1983 Candidates match in London, Kasparov recommends 10 ... a5! with equality) 10 ... Bc6 11 Qc4 Bd5 12 Qa4 Bc6 13 Qc4 Bd5 led to a draw by repetition in P.Leko-P.Harikrishna, Porto Carras 2018.

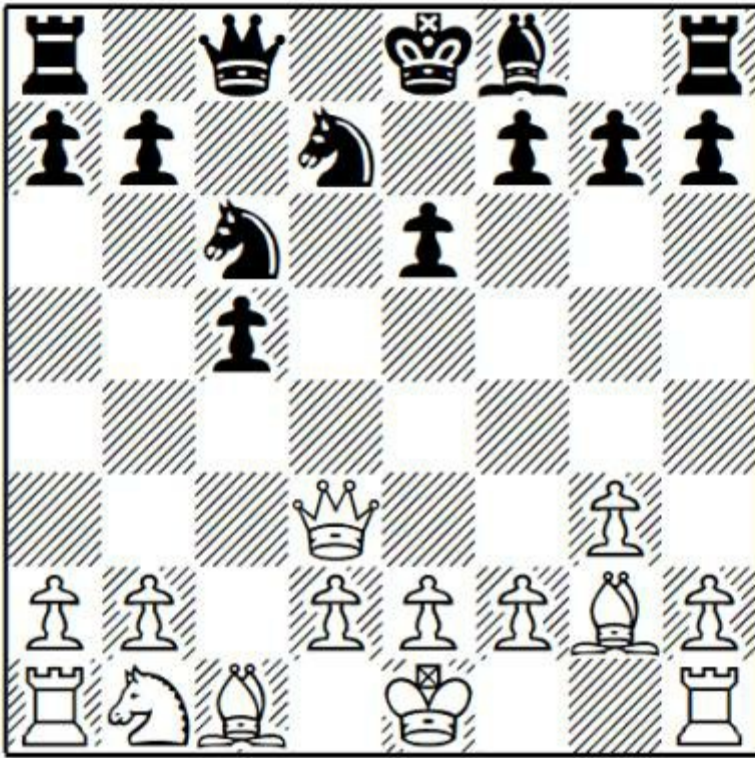
**7 ... Qc8!**

Preparing ... Nc6 without spoiling the black structure.

**8 Qd3!?**

A sophisticated attempt, which became the main line after its introduction by Grischuk. 8 Nc3 Nc6 9 Nxd7 Qxd7 10 0-0 Be7 11 d3 Rc8 12 Bg5 Nd4 led to similar, balanced play in L.McShane-P.Idani, Astana 2019.

**8 ... Nc6 9 Nxd7 Nxd7**



### 10 Nc3

A very logical developing move, though not the most popular move in the position. Others:

a) 10 Qb5 Nd4 (10 ... Nde5 11 f4 a6 12 Qa4 Nd7 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Na3 Nb6 15 Qe4 Be7 16 b3 was slightly better for White in A.Grischuk-R.Wojtaszek, Doha 2016) 11 Qa4 Be7 has been extensively tested, having been recommended by Ntirlis. For example 12 Na3 (12 Nc3, 12 d3 and 12 e3 have also been tried) 12 ... 0-0 13 e3 Nb6 14 Qd1 Nc6 15 0-0 Qd7 16 Qb3 Rfd8 17 Rd1 Nd5 18 Nc4 Rab8 19 a4 Ndb4 was excellent for Black in N.Meskovs-K.Kulaots, Liepaja 2017.

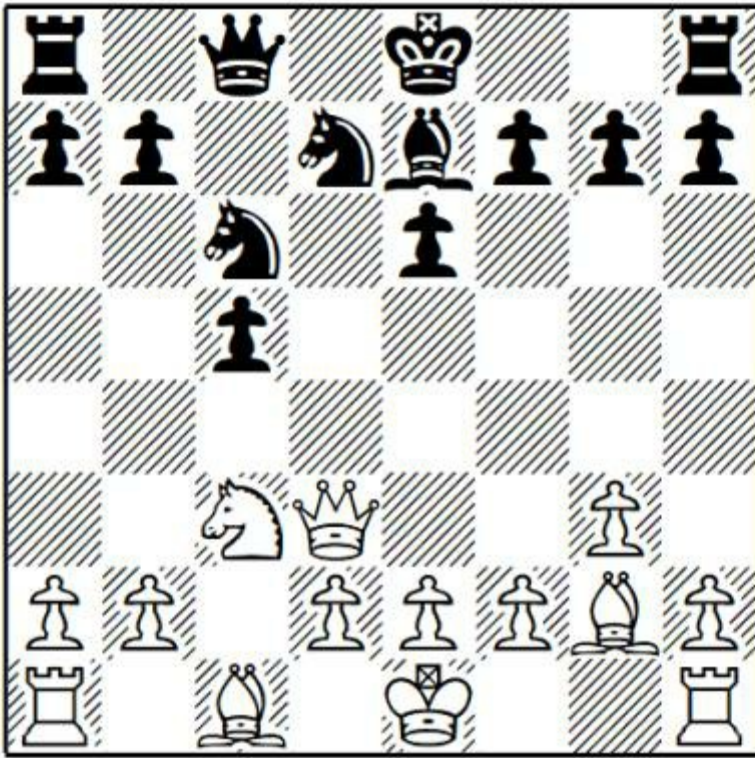
b) 10 Qb3 was tried by Aronian previously. For example 10 ... Be7 (10 ... Nd4 11 Qd1 Be7 12 Nc3 0-0 13 0-0 Rd8 14 d3 was agreed drawn in V.Papin-A.Demuth, Melbourne 2017; another game didn't continue much longer – 14 ... Ne5 15 Bf4 Ng6 16 Be3 Qd7 17 Rc1 Nf5 18 Bd2 Nd4 and the players repeated moves in B.Lalith-A.Das, Patna 2017) 11 Nc3 (11 0-0 0-0 12 d3 Rb8 13 Be3 Nd4 14 Bxd4 cxd4 was W.Claridge Hansen-I.Gourlay, England 2018 and now 15 Qa4 would give White a pleasant game) 11 ... 0-0 12 0-0 (12 d3 Nd4 13 Qd1 Nf6 14 0-0 Qd7 15 b3 Rac8 16 Bb2 Rfd8 17 Rc1 b6 18 Qd2 h6 19 Rfd1 Nc6 was agreed drawn in V.Papin-R.Praggnanandhaa, Adelaide 2017) 12 ... Rd8 13 d3 Nb6 14 Be3 Nd4 15 Bxd4 Rxd4 16 Rfc1 Rd7 17 a4 Qd8 18 a5 Nd5 19 Nxd5 exd5 20 d4!? cxd4 21 Rc2 (21 Ra4!?) 21 ... g6 22 Bh3 Rc7 23 Rac1 Rxc2 24 Rxc2 was soon drawn in L.Aronian-L.Ding, Tbilisi 2017.

c) 10 b3 Be7 11 Bb2 0-0 12 Nc3 Rd8 13 Rc1 Nf6 14 Qb1 was A.Giri-R.Wojtaszek, Dortmund 2018 and I.Cheparinov-N.Grandelius, Germany 2019 is a viable alternative, with equality. The alternatives on move 13 are no better. Now:

c1) 13 0-0 Nf6 14 Qc2 Nb4 15 Qc1 Qd7 16 Rd1 Rac8 was equal in D.Anton Guijarro-S.Karjakin, Douglas 2019.

c2) 13 Rd1 Nf6 14 Qb1 Qc7 15 0-0 was also equal in G.Oparin-P.Prohaszka, Charlotte 2019.

### 10 ... Be7



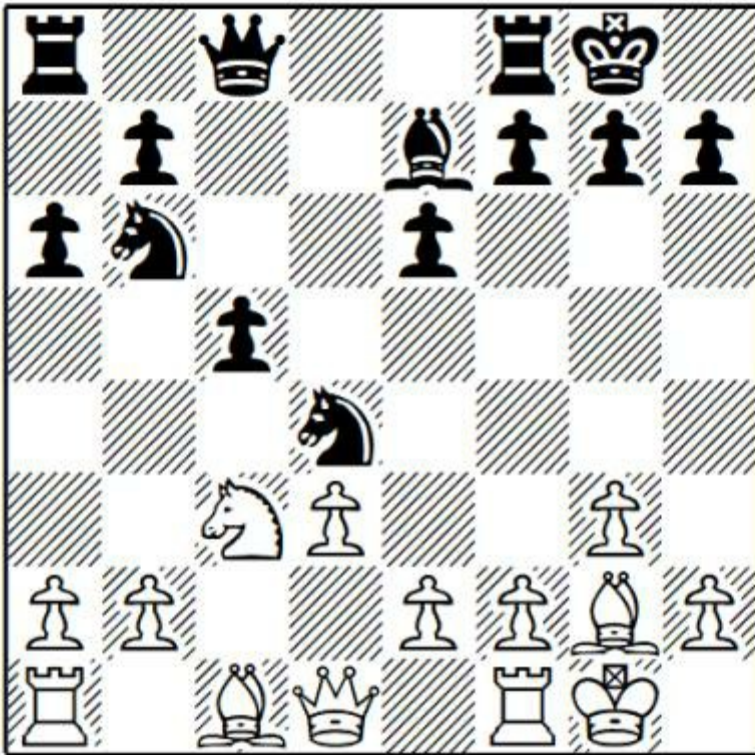
### 11 Qb5

11 0-0 0-0 12 Qb5 Nb6 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Qa5 c4 15 b3 Rd8 16 Rb1 c5 was fine for Black in B.Chatalbashev-K.Holm, Kragero 2018.

### 11 ... a6

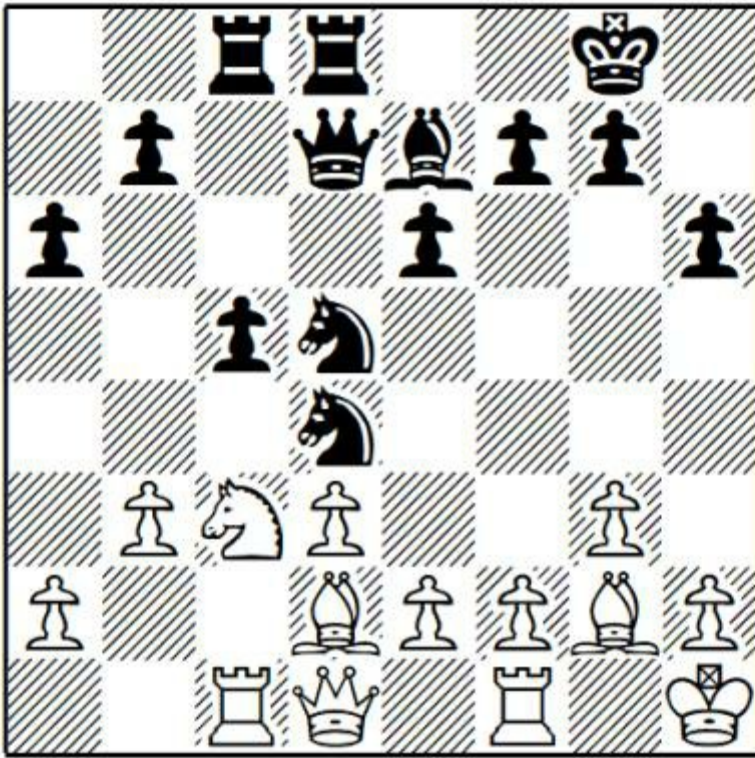
Black can also let White execute his threat. For example 11 ... 0-0 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Qd3 Nb6 14 b3 c4! 15 bxc4 Qa6 16 0-0 Bf6 17 Rb1 Rfd8 18 Qf3 Nxc4 and Black had sufficient activity to compensate for his slightly weakened pawn structure in R.Edouard-V.Akopian, St Louis 2018.

### 12 Qa4 Nd4 13 0-0 0-0 14 d3 Nb6 15 Qd1



Black hasn't achieved much by posting his knights on d4 (which will be driven back by e3) and b6 (which is poorly placed). The engine thinks this position is equal but I prefer White due to the bishop pair (in particular, the monster on g2) and his plan of kingside expansion, which seems to offer him an easier game.

**15 ... Rd8 16 Bd2 Qd7 17 Rc1 Rac8 18 b3 h6 19 Kh1 Nd5**



**Question:** What are the pros and cons of this move, and do you think it was a good decision by Black?

**Answer:** The pro is that the knight, which was probably Black's worst piece, occupies a good central square. The con (which, I think, is more serious) is that, by allowing the structural change  $Nxd5$  and ...  $exd5$ , Black closes the d-file, meaning that it will be much harder to attack the white pawn on d3 which, in turn, allows White to play e3, driving away the knight on d4. Others:

a) Initially I thought that Black could improve the knight with 19 ...  $Na8$  followed by ...  $b6$ , ...  $Nc7$  and, thereafter, perhaps ...  $Ne8-f6$  (or  $d6$ ). However, this might be a little slow after 20  $f4$ !?

b) Perhaps a waiting move like 19 ...  $Bf8$  was best, when it remains difficult for either side to improve their position.

**20  $Nxd5!$   $exd5$  21  $e3$   $Nc6$**

21 ...  $Ne6$  does not look like a safe square in view of 22  $f4$ .

**22  $Qh5$**

Finally getting some activity. The pawn on h6 is a hook for White's kingside attack.

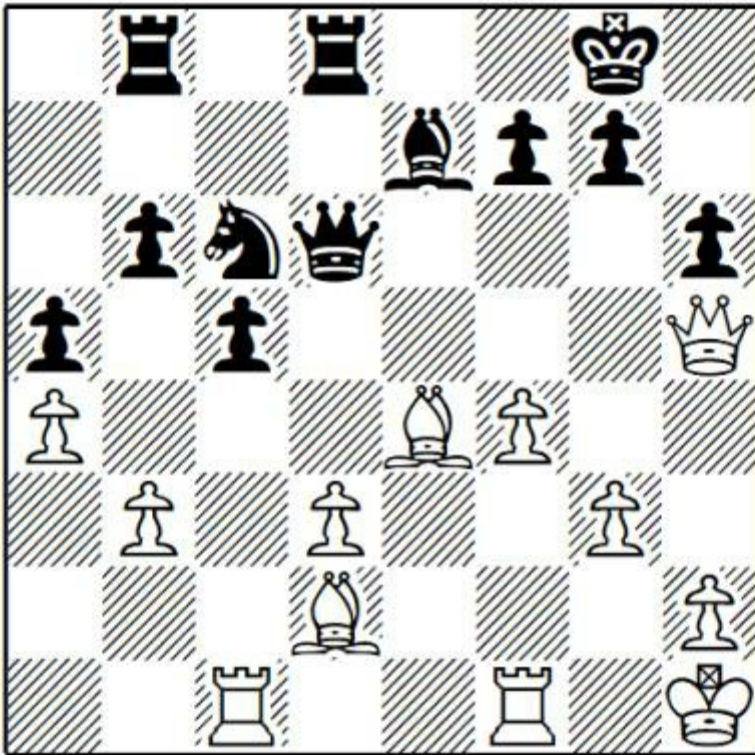
**22 ...  $Qd6$**

22 ...  $Ra8$  23  $f4$   $a5$  24  $a4$  is similar to the game.

**23  $f4$   $a5$  24  $a4$   $Rb8$  25  $e4$   $dxe4$  26  $Bxe4$**

The white initiative looks more and more menacing.

**26 ...  $b6$**



26 ... b5 is well met by the same move as in the game.

**Question:** How should White continue after 26 ... b6?

**27 g4!**

**Answer:** Preparing to open lines on the kingside with g5.

**27 ... Nd4 28 Bc3**

Black now makes an interesting attempt to hold the a1-h8 diagonal, but it's not sufficient to save the game.

**28 ... f5!?**

28 ... Nxb3 29 Be5 Qe6 30 Rce1 Rd6 31 g5! and the attack continues.

**29 gxf5 Bf6 30 Rg1 Re8??**

30 ... Kh8 had to be played. I do not believe that the position can be held after 31 Rg6 Qf8 32 Rcg1 Rd6, but Black had to try this.

**31 Qxh6**

Winning an important pawn and breaking Black's defences on the kingside.

**31 ... Rbd8 32 Rce1 Re7 33 Re3! 1-0**

The rook comes to g3 or h3, with mate.

*Game 12*

**L.Aronian-V.Ivanchuk**

FIDE World Cup, Tbilisi 2017

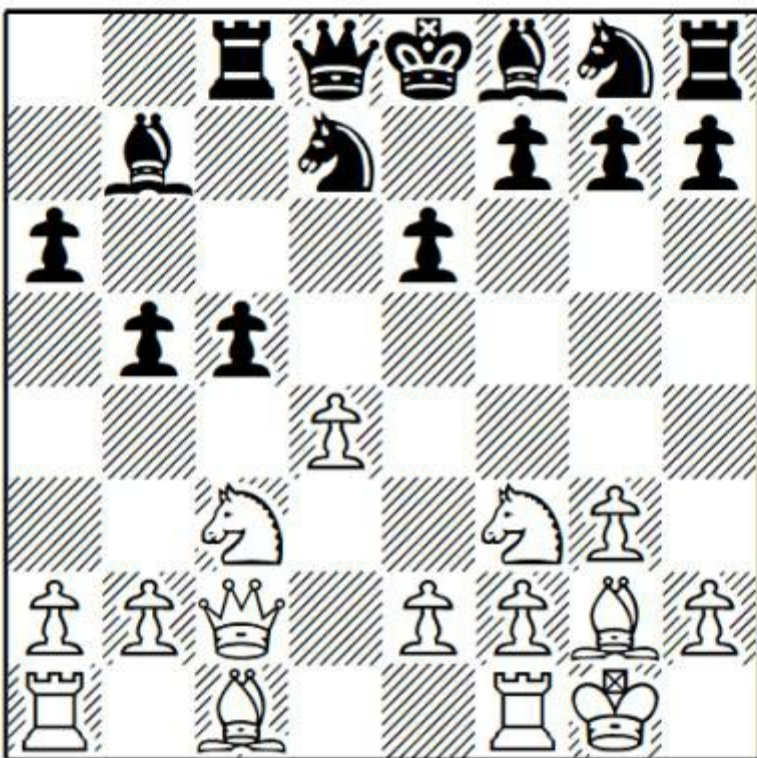
I watched this game live online and could not recall a previous occasion on which Ivanchuk had been

caught so badly in the opening. The Ukrainian genius is one of the most prolific innovators and experts across his extremely broad repertoire, and the featured opening is one of his pet lines: in his best games collection, Vishy Anand tells a story of Ivanchuk sharing novelties in the Catalan when they were both juniors.

**1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 dxc4**

3 ... Nf6 4 Nf3 and then 4 ... dxc4 is more usual. Ivanchuk seeks to delay ... Nf6, accelerating his queenside play with a view to achieving ... c5.

**4 Qa4+ c6 5 Qxc4 b5 6 Qc2 Bb7 7 Nf3 Nd7 8 Nc3 Rc8 9 0-0 a6 10 d4 c5?!**



10 ... Ngf6 would transpose to a line of the Catalan which has been defended by Aleksandrov but, as indicated above, Ivanchuk's intention was to push ... c5.

**Question:** How should White respond?

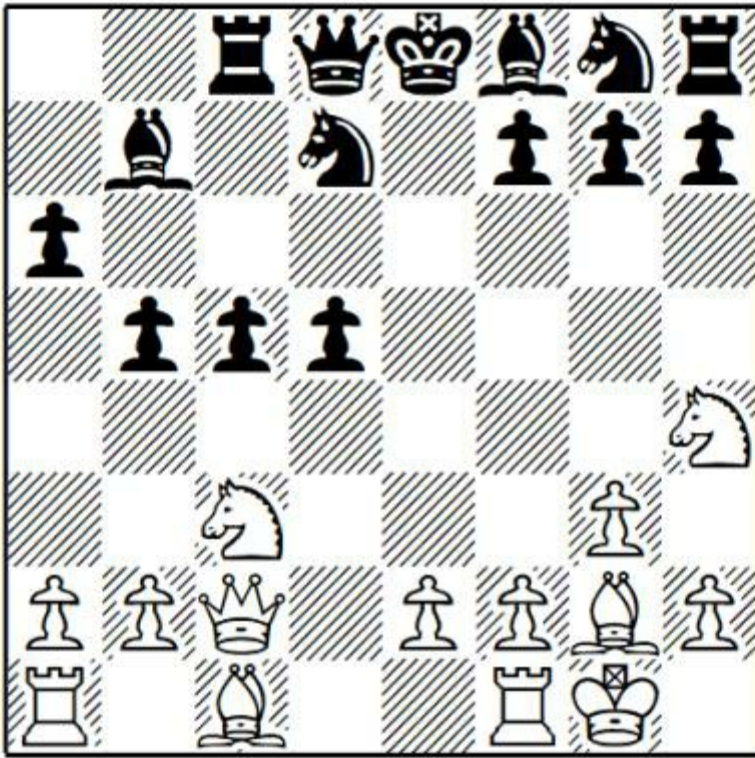
**11 d5!**

**Answer:** No prizes for other moves. 11 dxc5 Bxc5 is a dream Catalan for Black, who has effortlessly achieved ... c5 and might already have the more comfortable game.

**11 ... exd5**

11 ... Bxd5 avoids pins on the long diagonal, but giving up this bishop is too high a price to pay. 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 Rd1 Ngf6 14 e4! and White decisively opens the centre.

**12 Nh4**



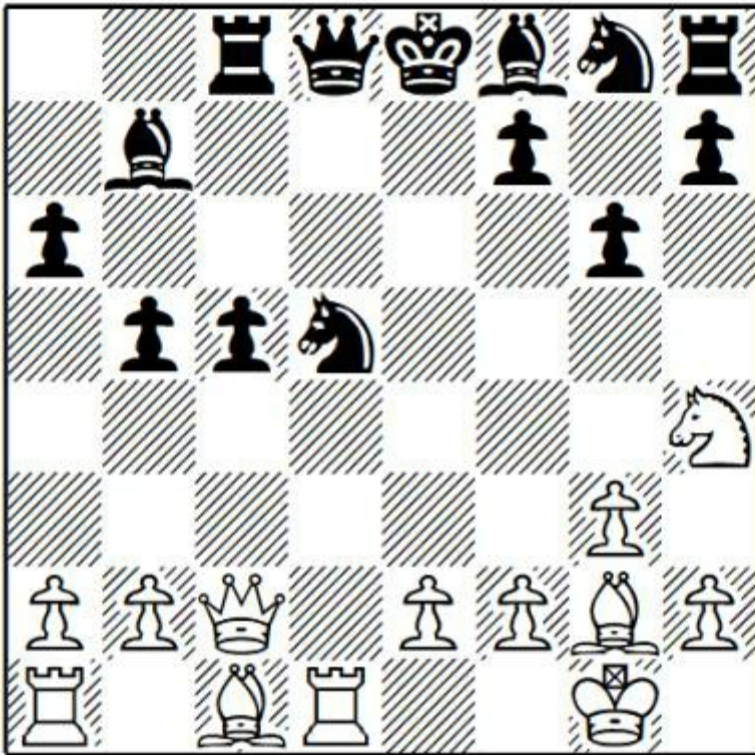
**12 ... Ndf6?**

Compounding the problems. 12 ... Ngf6 occurred in T.Nguyen-S.Gvetadze, Ekaterinburg 2007, when White should proceed by analogy with the text game: 13 Rd1 Qb6 14 Nxd5 Nxd5 15 Bxd5 Bxd5 16 Rxd5, with the better game.

**13 Rd1 g6**

This loses, but Black's play was not making much sense around this point.

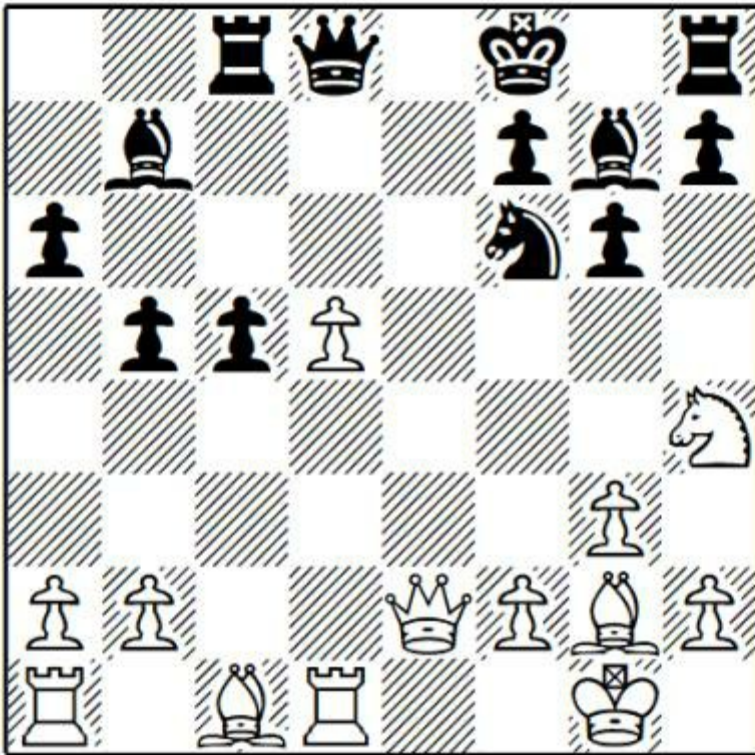
**14 Nxd5! Nxd5**



**15 e4!**

An easy tactic, even if the engine suggests that starting with 14 a4 was even stronger.

**15 ... Bg7 16 exd5 Nf6 17 Qe2+ Kf8**

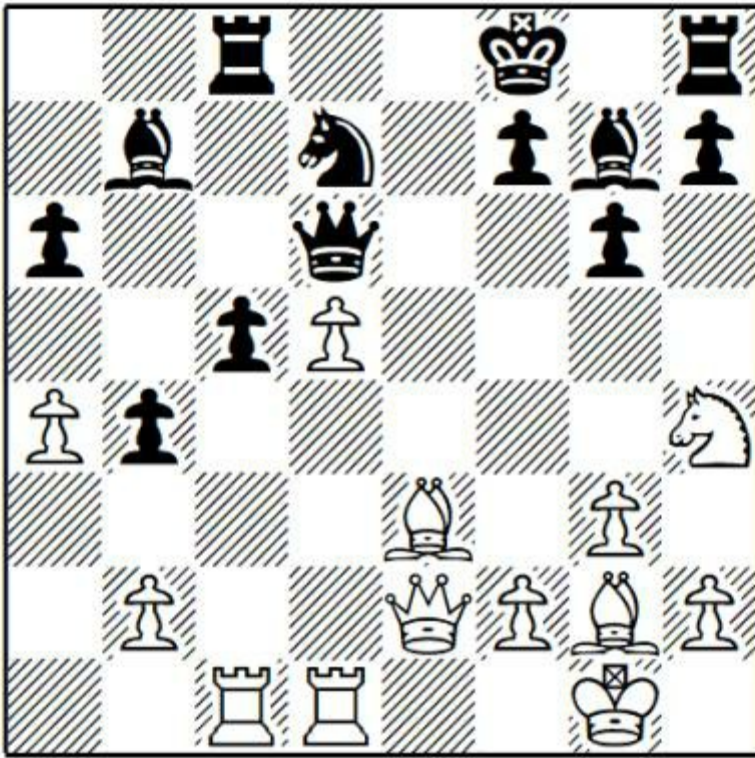


**Question:** How can White create further weaknesses in the black position?

**18 a4!**

**Answer:** Not the only move, but a very good one. White is unlikely to succeed with a direct attack against the black king, but the black queenside pawns are exposed and cannot be supported by the pieces locked on the kingside.

**18 ... b4 19 Be3 Qd6 20 Rac1 Nd7**



**Question:** How can White break the blockade of the d5-pawn?

**21 Nf3!**

**Answer:** Bringing the knight, via d2, to c4 or e4. 21 Re1, threatening Bf4, was also good enough to win.

**21 ... h6 22 Nd2 Kg8 23 Ne4 Qf8 24 d6 1-0**

Resignation appears slightly early, although against Aronian the chances of survival from such a position are not good at all.

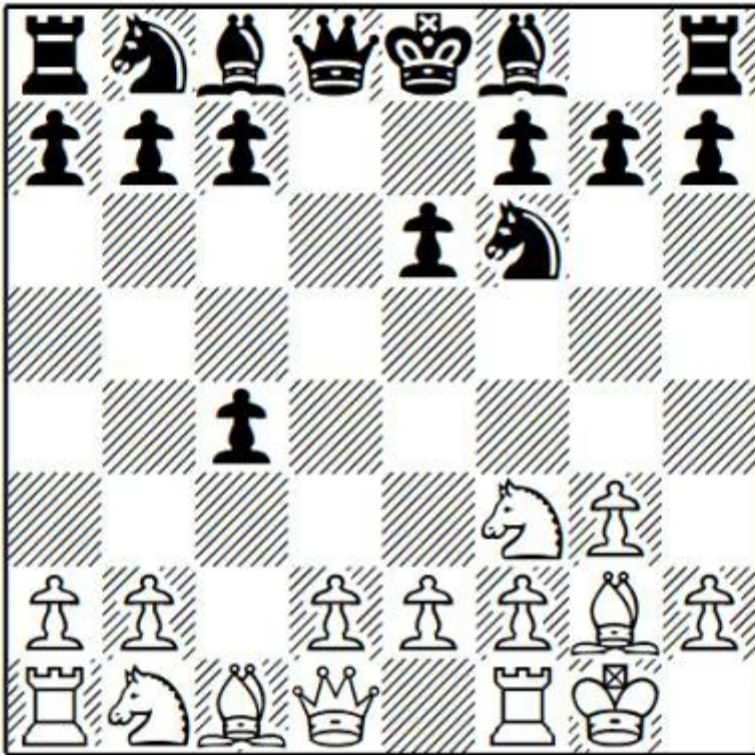
*Game 13*

**L.Aronian-A.Naiditsch**

Grenke Chess Classic 2017

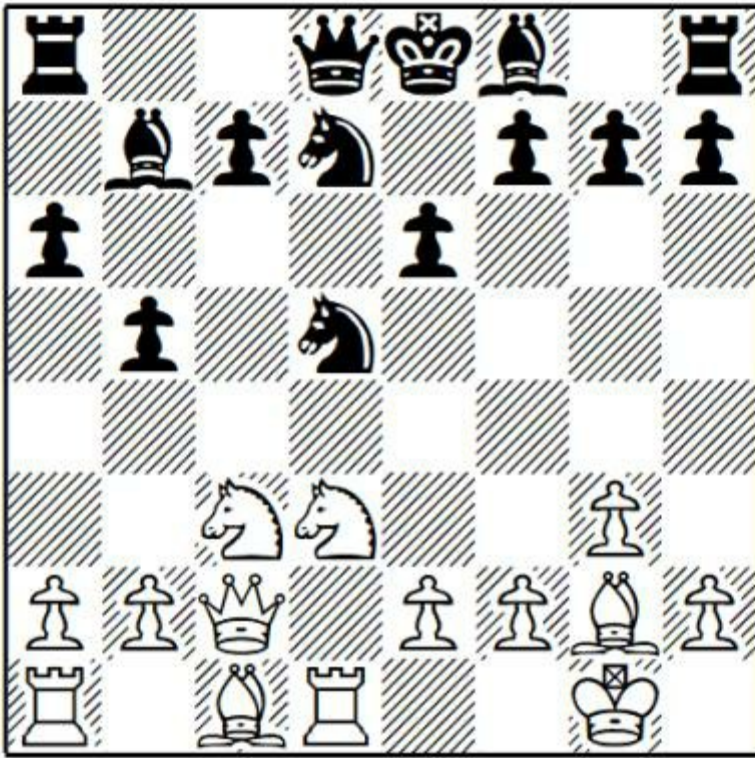
This game is remarkable in a number of respects. First, a 2700+ player gets into severe trouble from the opening. Secondly, Aronian's play (in particular, in the endgame) is excellent. Finally, Aronian himself annotated this game for several sources, and I highly recommend you go through his notes!

**1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 Nf6 4 Nf3 dxc4 5 0-0**



**5 ... Nbd7**

Aronian points out that after 5 ... a6 6 Qc2 b5 White has 7 Ne1!? “with the intention of counting on his compensation after d2-d3, c4xd3, Ne1xd3 on account of the excellent position of the knight on d3 and his good development.” For example, 7 ... Nd5 8 d3 cxd3 9 Nxd3 Bb7 10 Rd1 Nd7 11 Nc3

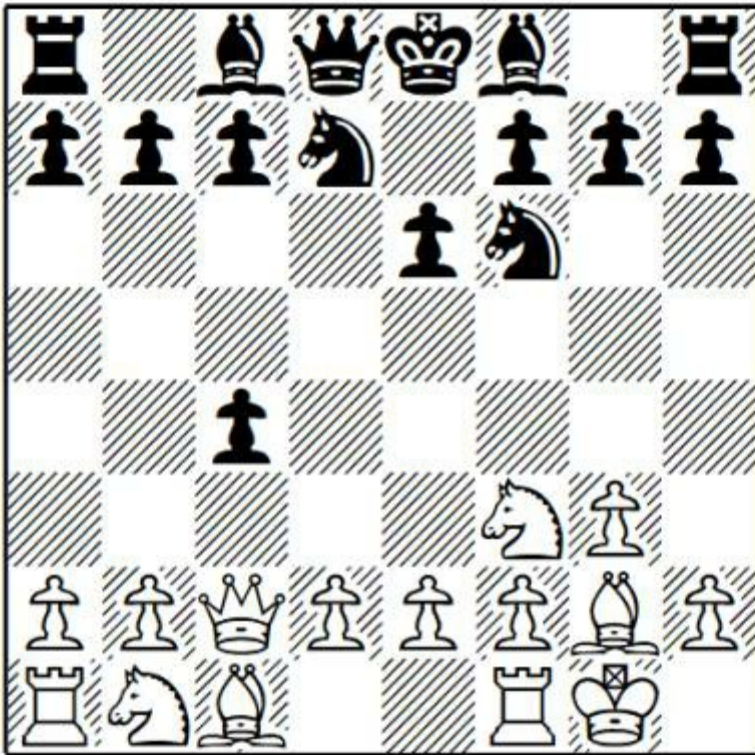


and now:

a) 11 ... Bd6 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 Bf4 (13 Nf4 c6 14 e4 is also possible, with promising compensation for the sacrificed pawn: D.Bocharov-A.Esipenko, Taganrog 2018) 13 ... 0-0 (13 ... Qe7 14 Rac1 0-0 15 Bxd6 cxd6 16 Qc7 was excellent for White in S.Mareco-N.Abdusattorov, Moscow 2018) 14 Bxd6 cxd6 15 Nf4 Nb6 16 Nxd5 Rc8 17 Qb3 Bxd5 18 Bxd5 Nxd5 19 Rxd5 with an enduring advantage in S.Sjugirov-A.Pridorozhni, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

b) 11 ... Nxc3?! 12 Qxc3 Bxg2 13 Kxg2 Qc8! 14 Qc6 Bd6 15 Bf4. Now Black should castle, with a playable position, since 15 ... Ke7? 16 Rac1 Rb8? 17 f3 Qb7? 18 Nb4 forced resignation in A.Pridorozhni-V.Korchmar, Taganrog 2017.

**6 Qc2**



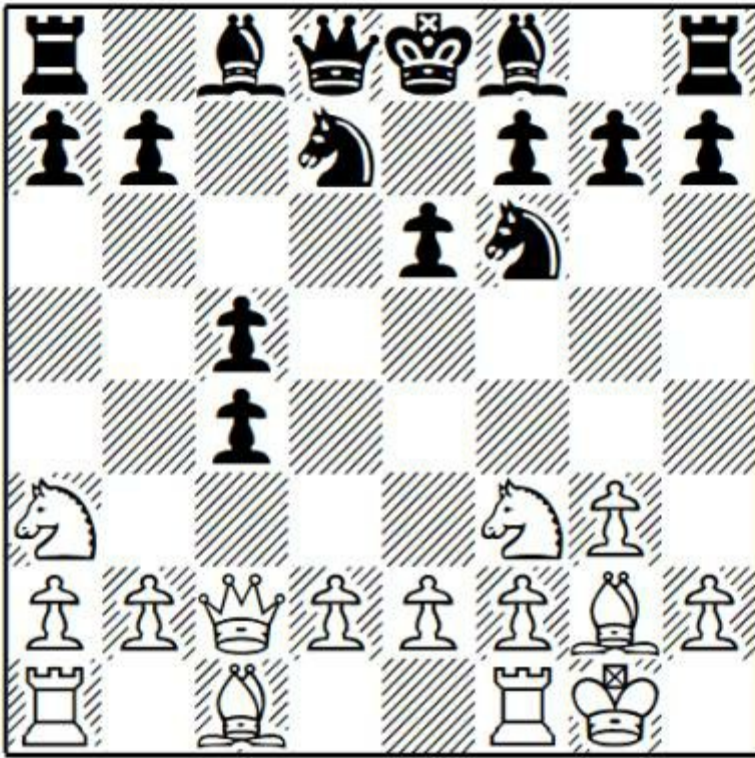
### 6 ... c5

Alternatives:

a) After 6 ... Nb6, Aronian recommends Rd1 and d3, with or without 7 Na3. An interesting example of this plan, albeit with Rxd3 prepared in a different way, was shown by one of Aronian's strong GM compatriots: 7 a4 a5 8 Na3 Bxa3 9 Rxa3 0-0 10 d3 (we will see Wei Yi take a different approach in his game with Ponomariov) 10 ... cxd3 11 Rxd3 Nbd5 12 Rdd1 Qe7 13 Ne5 Ra6 14 b3 Nb4 15 Qc4 Rd6 16 Ba3 Qd8 (16 ... Rxd1 17 Rxd1 c5 looks okay for Black) 17 Rc1 (17 Rxd6!?) 17 ... Nd7? (17 ... Nfd5 is much more solid) 18 Nd3! (leaving Black's pieces very badly co-ordinated) 18 ... c5 19 Nxc5 Nxc5 20 Bxb4 axb4 21 Qxc5 b6 22 Qxb4 e5?? (a final blunder, but the position was very difficult) 23 Rxc8! and Black resigned in H.Melkumyan-F.Peralta, Sitges 2017.

b) Aronian also gives the long line 6 ... a6 7 a4 Nc5 8 Qxc4 Qd5 9 Qa2 Qxa2 10 Rxa2 e5 11 Nxe5 Be6 12 b3 0-0-0. I suspect Aronian and his team are working with much more powerful hardware than mine, which gives White a good advantage after 13 Rb2.

### 7 Na3

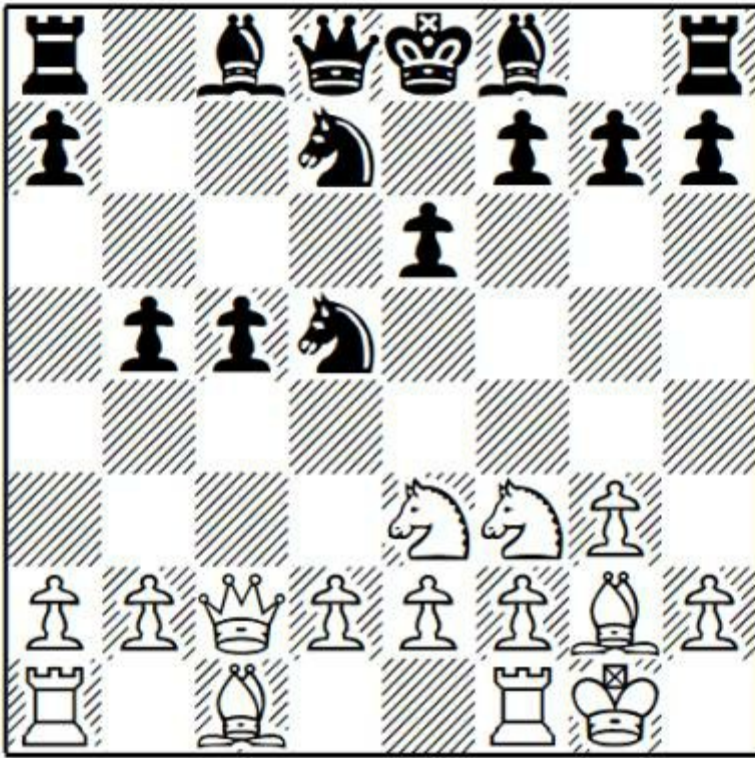


**7 ... Nd5?**

Aronian gives 7 ... b6 as acceptable for Black.

Black could also try 7 ... Rb8 8 Nxc4 b5 9 Nce5 Bb7 This is a much better version of what happened in the game, for example 10 Nxd7 Nxd7 11 b3 Be7 12 Bb2 0-0 13 Rac1 Qb6 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 Bxe5 Rbc8 16 Bxb7 Qxb7 17 d3 Rfd8 18 Qb2 Bf8 19 Rc2 Rc6 and a draw was agreed in Y.Galburd-A.Huzman, Israel 2012.

**8 Nxc4 b5 9 Ne3**



### 9 ... Bb7?

Categorised by Aronian as “an almost decisive mistake!” Instead:

a) Aronian gives 9 ... Nb4 as best.

b) After 9 ... Nxe3 Aronian was planning to recapture with the f-pawn, but in his notes suggested 10 dxe3 Bb7 11 Rd1 with a more pleasant position for White: after b2-b3 with further development he has not only active pieces but also a slight target to attack-the c5-pawn “which is hanging in mid air”.

### 10 Nxd5! Bxd5

10 ... exd5 11 b4! is a powerful suggestion by Aronian.

### 11 e4 Bb7 12 d4 cxd4

Forced according to Aronian, in view of 12 ... Be7 13 d5 exd5 14 exd5 0-0 (14 ... Bxd5 15 Rd1 wins) 15 d6 Bf6 16 Ng5 Bxg5 17 Bxb7 Rb8 18 Bxg5 Qxg5 19 Bc6 and “the d-pawn will probably decide the outcome of the struggle.”

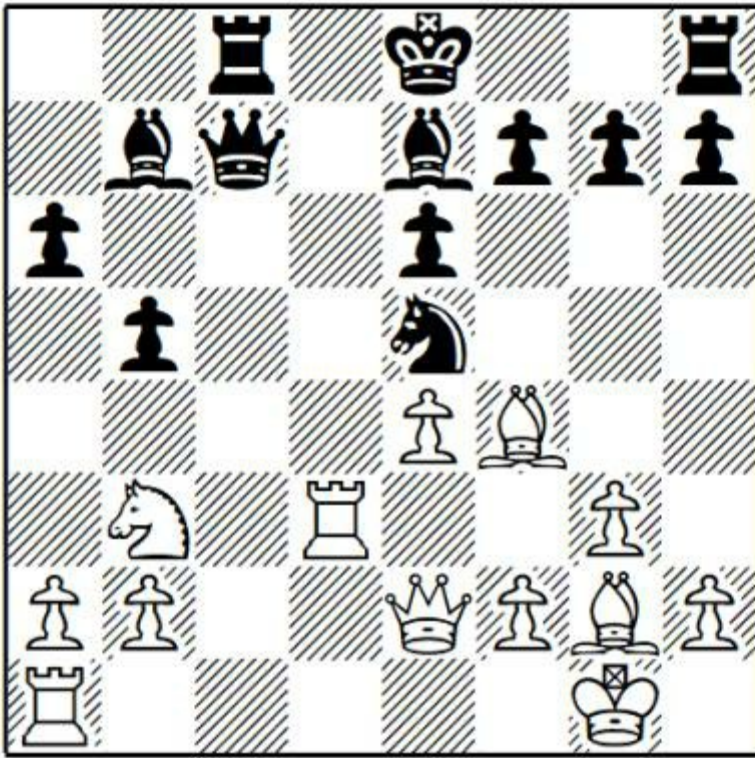
### 13 Nxd4 Rc8

Aronian gives 13 ... Qb6 14 Rd1 Rc8 15 Qe2 b4 as more stubborn, “with a bad, but at least an active, position.”

### 14 Qe2 a6 15 Rd1 Bc5

Aronian intended to meet 15 ... Be7 with 16 Bh3 when sacrifices on e6 are difficult to parry.

### 16 Nb3 Be7 17 Rd3 Qc7 18 Bf4 Ne5



### 19 Rc3

Starting here White commits some inaccuracies, resulting in a late chance for Naiditsch and, ultimately, a very instructive opposite-coloured bishop endgame. 19 Rc1 Qb8 20 Rxc8+ Bxc8 21 Na5 is given by Aronian as a simpler win.

### 19 ... Qb8 20 Qh5 Bd6

Aronian gives the nice lines 20 ... Bf6 21 Rxc8+ Bxc8 22 Rc1 g6 23 Bxe5 Bxe5 24 Rxc8+ and 20 ... Rxc3 21 Bxe5 Rc7 22 Bxg7, winning in both cases.

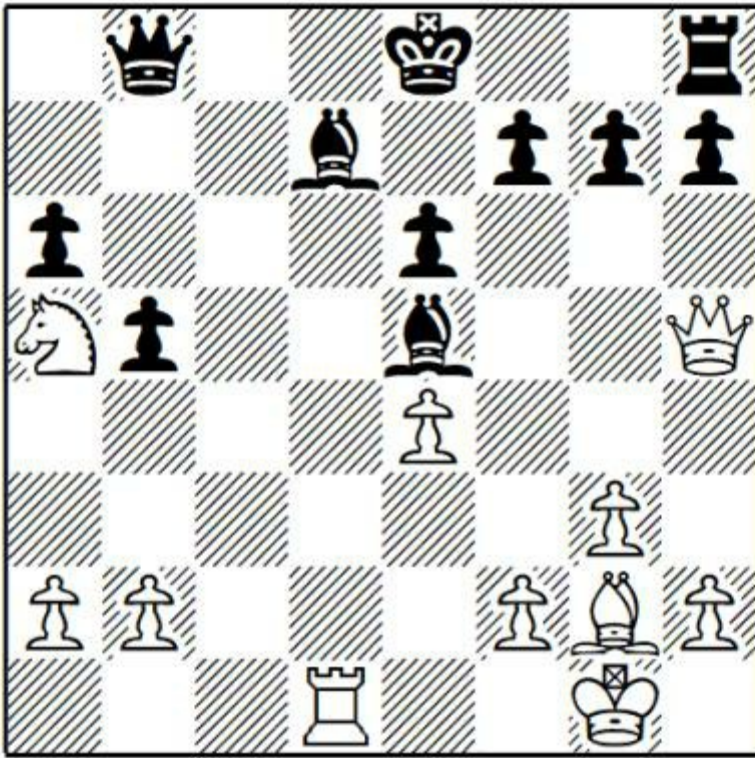
### 21 Rxc8+

Aronian's original intention was 21 Nc5, which he rejected in view of 21 ... Rxc5 22 Rxc5 Bxc5 23 Bxe5 g6 24 Qg5 Be7 25 Qf4 g5 with "only a "lost" ending", remarking wryly that "If I had known that in the future course of the game I would have to use every shred of my knowledge in order to almost manage to draw the game, I would probably rather have gone into the easily won endgame mentioned above with an extra pawn."

### 21 ... Bxc8 22 Rd1 Bc7 23 Na5 Bd7

23 ... 0-0 24 Bxe5 Bxe5 25 Nc6 Qc7 26 Nxe5 g6 is another variation given by Aronian where Black loses a pawn, with the instructive comment: "Naturally in this case too the white position would be winning, but as Boris Gelfand appositely remarks in such cases, play would move into the "one-mistake-zone"."

### 24 Bxe5 Bxe5



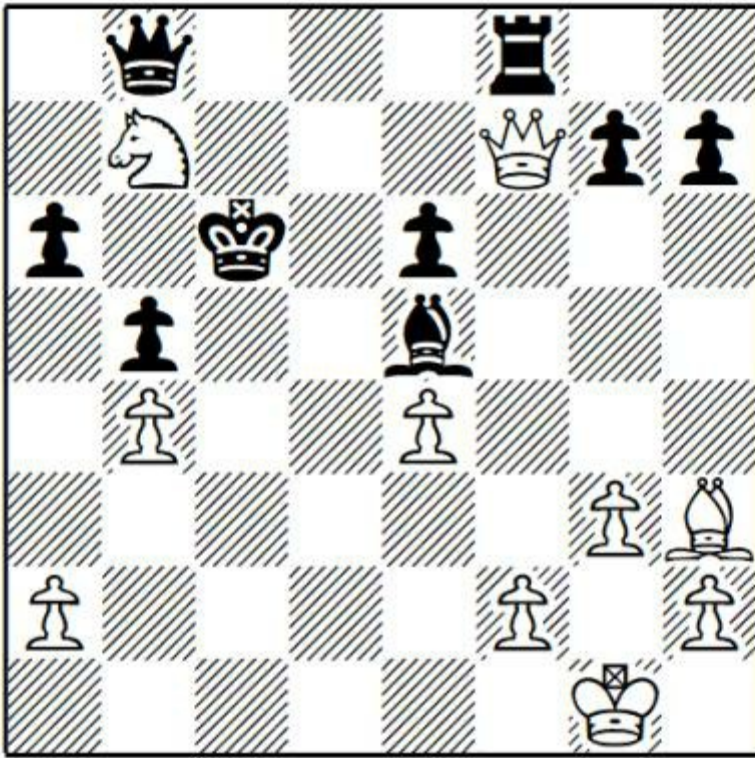
**25 Rxd7!**

A very natural sacrifice, wholly in Aronian's dynamic style.

**25 ... Kxd7 26 Qxf7+ Kd6 27 Bh3 Re8 28 Nb7+**

Aronian had intended 28 f4 here, only to realise that there is no mate after 28 ... Bxb2.

**28 ... Kc6 29 b4 Rf8**



**30 Qe7?**

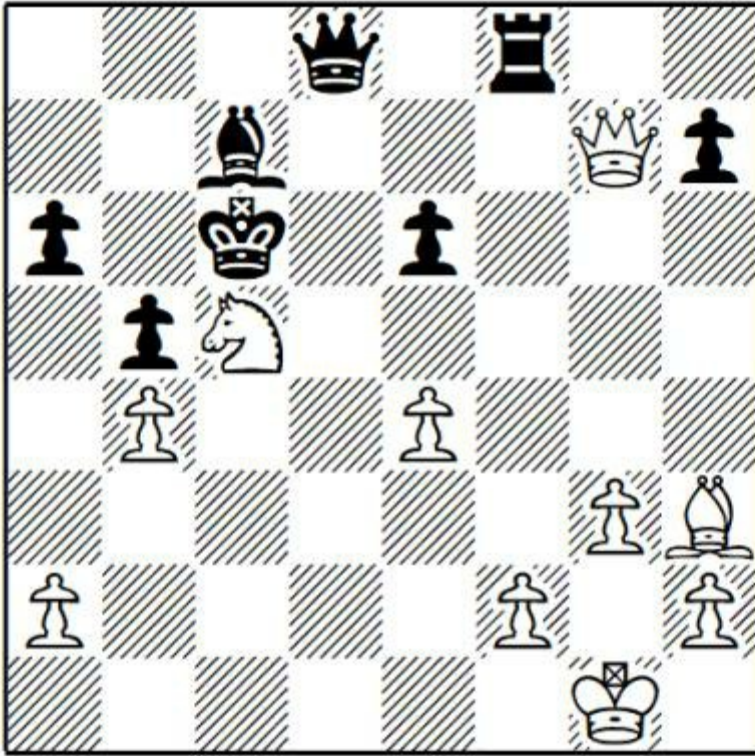
Aronian gives the beautiful line 30 Na5+ Kb6 31 Qe7 Qc8 32 Nc6!! when 32 ... Kxc6 33 Bxe6 wins material, and 32 ... Qxc6 33 Qxf8 leads to similar positions to those which arose in the game.

**30 ... Bd6?**

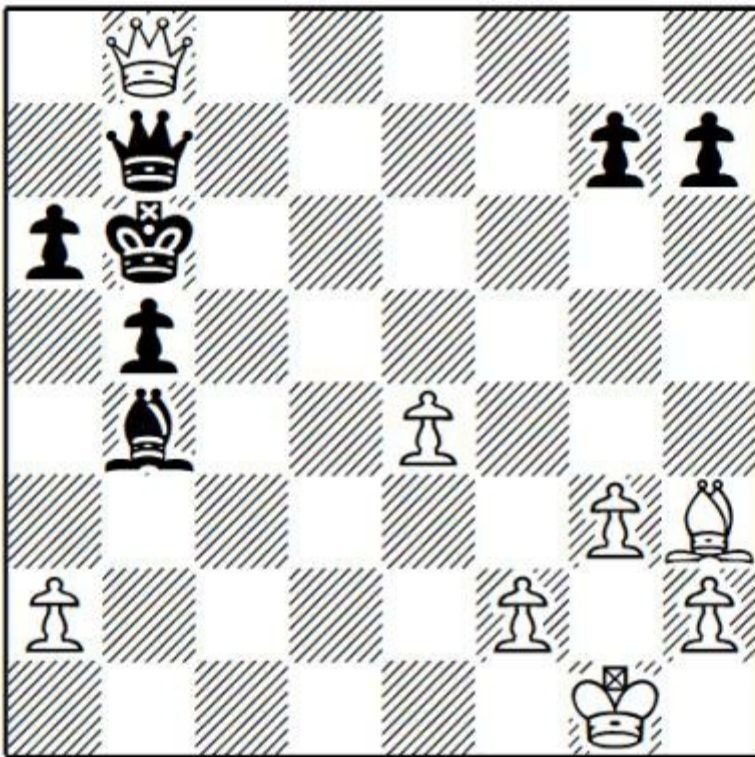
30 ... Bc7 31 Nc5 (31 Na5+ Bxa5 32 Bxe6 Bxb4 33 Qxb4 Rf6 and Black survives) 31 ... Qd8 32 Qxg7 (32 Qxe6+ might be a better attempt, but Black should hold after 32 ... Qd6)

This looks decisive, but in fact Black has a big chance in this position.

**Question:** What should Black play after 32 Qxg7?



*Answer:* 32 ... Rxf2!! 33 Kxf2 Qd2+ with perpetual check.  
**31 Na5+ Kb6 32 Qxe6 Re8**  
 Aronian gives 32 ... Rf6 33 Qb3 with a continuing attack.  
**33 Qd7 Bxb4 34 Nc6 Qd6 35 Qxe8 Qxc6 36 Qb8+ Qb7**



I was tempted to give this position as a puzzle, but Aronian's solution is both really difficult and (probably) not the only winning move.

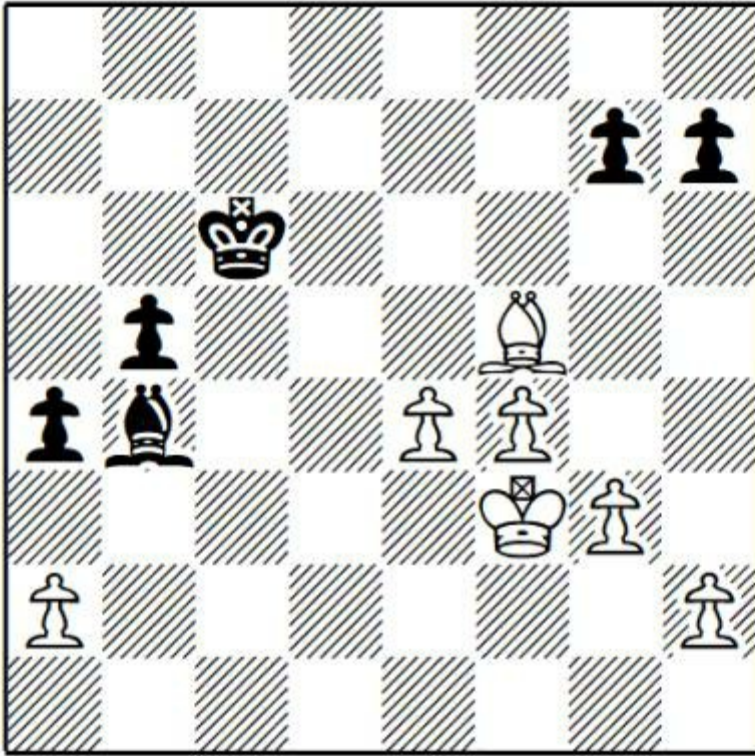
**37 Qxb7+!!**

For me, the most impressive and difficult move of the game. It would be so easy, simply on instinct, to retain the queens, but Aronian has assessed the resulting opposite coloured bishop endgame as winning. His comment regarding the previous move is one of the most instructive of the game, in terms of elite players suffering from the same natural reactions as normal players, but overcoming them: "I had almost played 36 Bd7 like lightning and without my head taking any part in the decision. But then I took some time and after ten minutes thought convinced myself that I did not need to fear an exchange of queens-which later turned out to be correct."

**37 ... Kxb7 38 f4**

Aronian: "The white plan is simple: force h7-h6, achieve the pawn structure h5-g4-f4-e5, hold up Black's queenside pawns on a5-b4 and push forward g4-g5. Although some strong players were of the opinion that Black could hold on here, I would gladly get this position again because of late I have had less and less belief in fortresses." Another instructive comment, even with the final joke (Magnus Carlsen's comment that he didn't believe in fortresses received huge attention in the chess media).

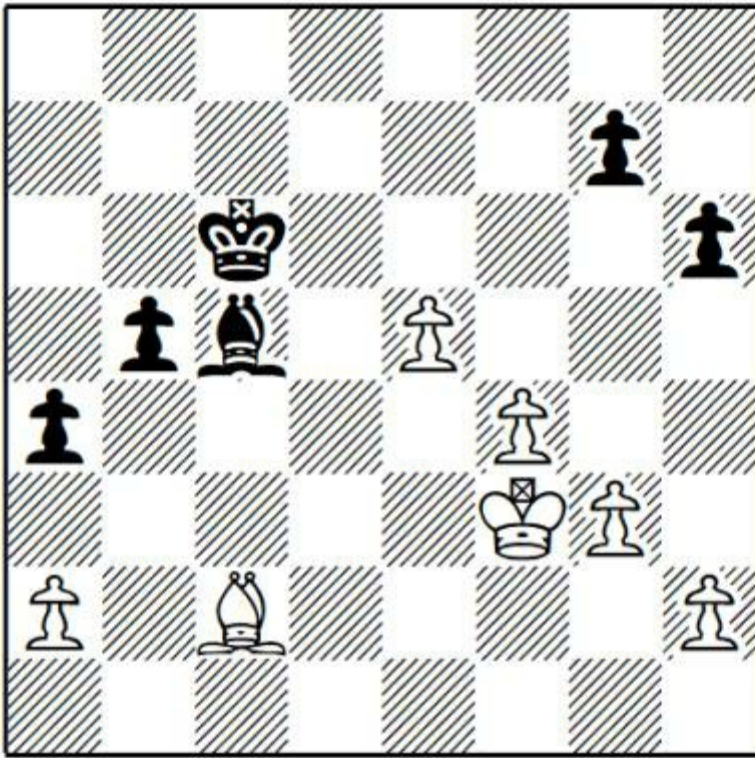
**38 ... Kc6 39 Kf2 a5 40 Kf3 a4 41 Bf5**



**41 ... h6**

“41 ... g6 does not save him on account of 42 Be6 Bc3 43 e5 b4 44 Ke4 h5 (or else by means of g3-g4 and f4-f5 White creates a pair of passed pawns) 45 Kd3 followed Be6-f7 and the collection of the pawns.” (Aronian)

**42 Bg6 Kd7 43 e5 Bc5 44 Bd3 Kc6 45 Bc2**



#### 45 ... Kd5

Aronian gives 45 ... Bg1 46 h4 Kd5 47 h5 Bd4 48 Bg6 b4 49 Bf7+ Kc5 50 Ke4 and although “Black manages to exchange his a- and b-pawns for the a2-pawn, he does not succeed in bring his king back to e7 in time.”

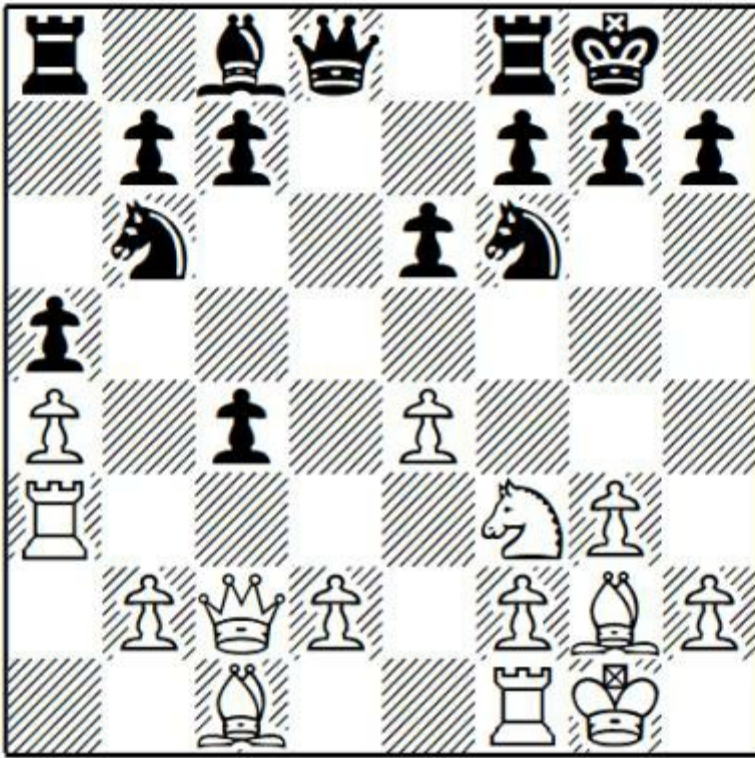
46 Be4+ Kc4 47 Bc6 Bg1 48 h4 Kc5 49 Be8 Bd4 50 h5 Bc3 51 Ke4 Be1 52 g4 Bd2 53 Kf5 a3 54 g5 b4 55 Ba4 Kd5 56 gxh6 gxh6 57 Bb3+ Kc5 58 Ke4 1-0

*Game 14*

**Wei Yi-R.Ponomariov**

Danzhou 2017

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 0-0 Nbd7 6 Qc2 Nb6 7 a4 a5 8 Na3 Bxa3 9 Rxa3 0-0 10 e4!?



I find this game remarkable for how Wei Yi manages to bring his trademark aggression and tactical prowess to a Réti position, and even to an endgame. I suspect that 10 d3 is the best move in this position.

**10 ... e5!?**

An interesting attempt to free his game immediately by temporarily returning the extra pawn. Alternatives are:

a) 10 ... Bd7 11 Ne5 Qe8 (11 ... c5!?) 12 Nxd7 (12 Nxc4 Bxa4 13 b3 Nxc4 14 Rxa4 Ne5 15 d4, with excellent compensation, is a reasonable alternative) 12 ... Qxd7 13 d3 cxd3 14 Rxd3 Qxa4 15 Qxc7 Qb5 16 Rfd1 Rac8 17 Qxb7 Rxc1 18 Rxc1 Qxd3 19 Qxb6 Qd2 was level in P.Arnaudov-J.Schroeder, Germany 2019.

b) 10 ... Qe7 led to a very instructive game after 11 b3! Qb4 12 Ne5 cxb3 (White gets overwhelming compensation after this move, but allowing the recapture on c4 leaves White with a dominating position – two bishops, extra central pawn – at no cost) 13 Rxb3 Qxa4 14 Bb2 Kh8 15 Ra1 Qe8 16 Qxc7 Nbd7 17 Rxa5 Rxa5 18 Qxa5 Nxe5 19 Qxe5 Taking with the bishop was even stronger, but in either case White retained an overwhelming advantage in M.Marin-M.Luch, Roquetas de Mar 2019.

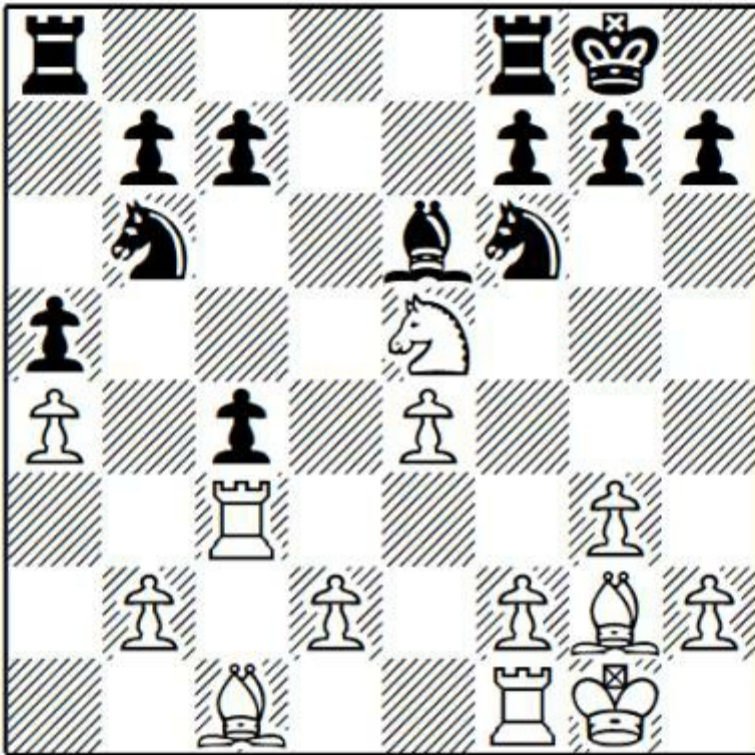
**11 Nxe5**

11 b3!? cxb3 12 Rxb3 retains promising positional compensation for the pawn.

**11 ... Qd4 12 Qc3 Qxc3**

12 ... Rd8 is also reasonable.

**13 Rxc3 Be6**



**Question:** Should White defend the a3-pawn?

**14 d4!**

**Answer:** No! Wei Yi finds an excellent way to generate compensation, instead of the horribly passive 14 Ra3?

14 f4 Nxa4 15 Rc2 is also interesting but I prefer Wei Yi's central approach.

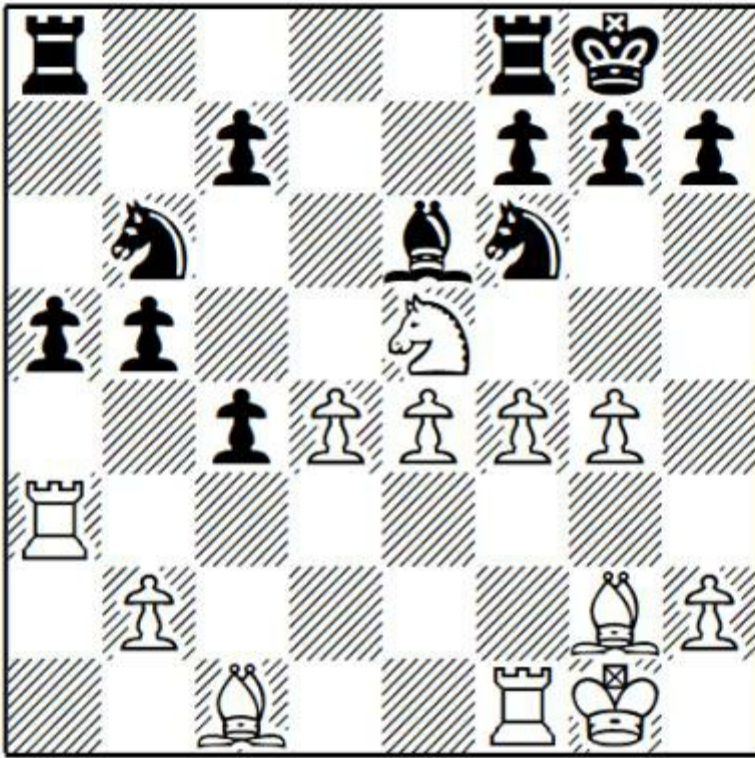
**14 ... Nxa4**

14 ... cxd3 15 b3 and the d3-pawn will fall, with excellent play for White.

**15 Ra3 b5 16 f4 Nb6**

This looks like a typical battle between Black's extra pawn and White's central dominance. Standard play might continue 17 d5 or 17 f5, with unclear play. However, Wei Yi plays I move which, I suspect, few players would even consider. The engine suggests 16 ... Ng4, but White retains wonderful compensation after 17 Nc6.

**17 g4?!**



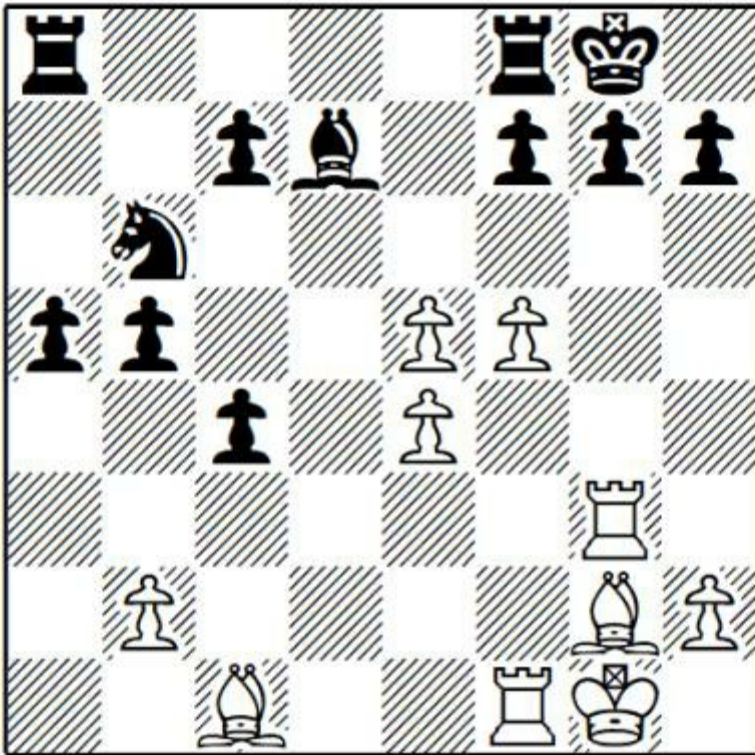
This is an amazing concept which works wonderfully in the game, but objectively it's quite dubious.

**17 ... N<sub>x</sub>g4**

a) 17 ... b4 18 Rg3 improves White's kingside prospects, though the position remains quite unclear.

b) 17 ... B<sub>x</sub>g4 18 f5 leaves the bishop short of squares, though this might have been the best choice for Black. After 18 ... Be2 19 Re1 Bd3 20 N<sub>x</sub>d3 b4! 21 N<sub>x</sub>b4 a<sub>x</sub>b4 22 Rg3 the position remains very difficult to assess. Normally I would expect that the bishop pair and powerful mobile centre would provide more than enough compensation for a mere pawn. However, if either white central pawn advances, it will make squares available to the black knights.

**18 f5 N<sub>x</sub>e5 19 d<sub>x</sub>e5 Bd7 20 Rg3**



Even without queens, White's kingside initiative looks threatening.

**20 ... Bc6?**

20 ... b4 21 Bh6 g6 is a far better version of the game for Black.

**21 Bh6 g6 22 Rg5?**

22 Bh3! Bxe4 23 fxc6 hxc6 24 e6 seems to lead to a draw with best play.

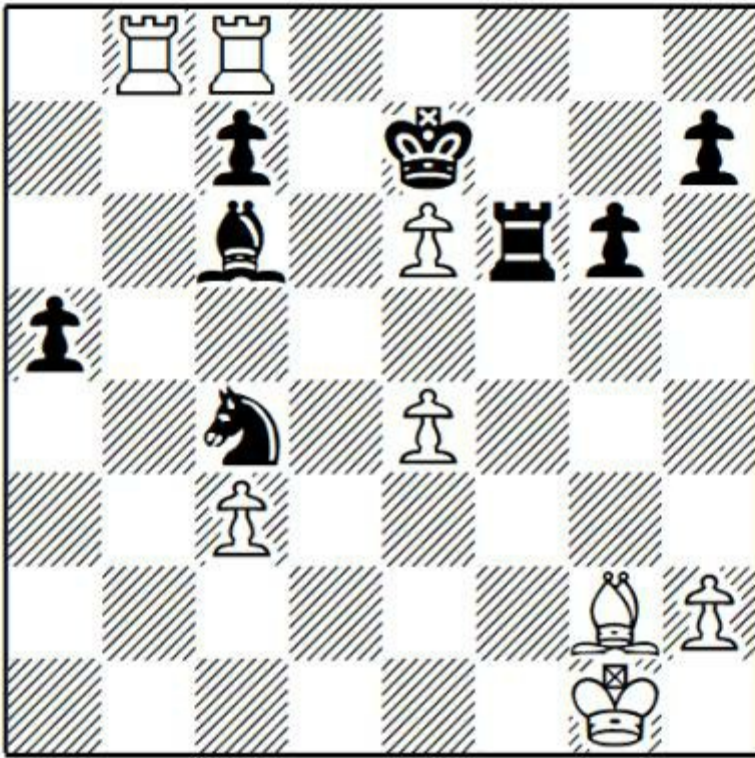
**22 ... c3?**

22 ... Na4 and the advantage would again be with Black.

**23 bxc3 Nc4 24 fxg6**

24 Bxf8 Rxf8 25 e6!, winning, is even stronger.

**24 ... fxg6 25 Bxf8 Rxf8 26 e6! Be8 27 Rd1 Rf6 28 Rd8 Kf8 29 Rxb5 Ke7 30 Rbb8 Bc6 31 Rdc8**



Wei Yi has a winning advantage and converts with impressive technique.

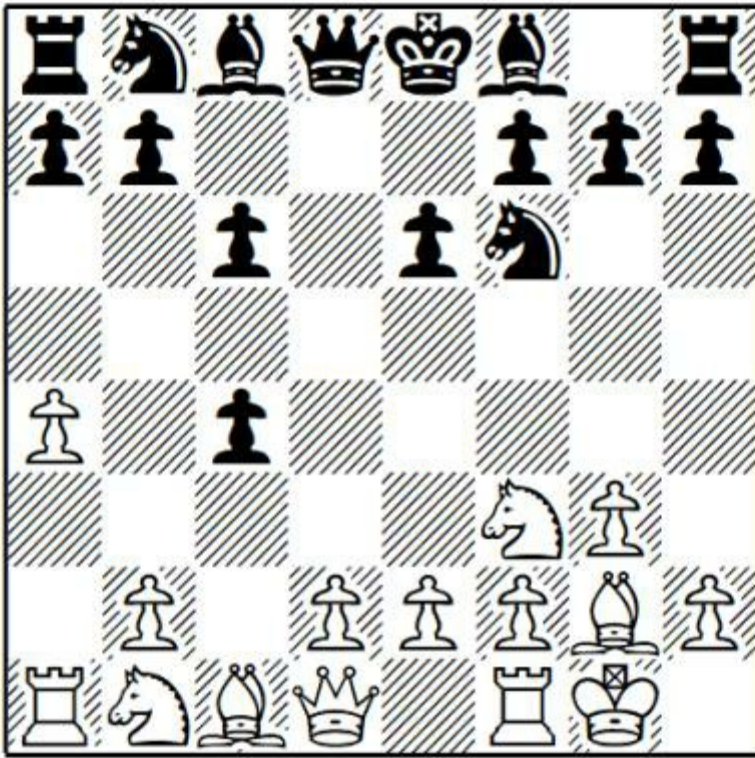
**31 ... Rxe6 32 Rxc7+ Kd6 33 Rxh7 a4 34 Ra7 Kc5 35 e5 Bxg2 36 Kxg2 a3 37 Rc7+ Rc6 38 Rxc6+ Kxc6 39 Rc8+ Kd5 40 e6 1-0**

*Game 15*

**L.Aronian-B.Bok**

World Blitz Championship, Doha 2016

**1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 0-0 c6 6 a4!**



**Question:** What are the ideas of this move?

**Answer:**

1. White prevents (or discourages) ... b5.

2. White prepares Na3 when, after ... Bxa3, he can recapture with the rook, maintaining his queenside structure. The rook can often find useful work on the third rank, for example after d3 cxd3 it can recapture on d3, gaining control of the crucially important d-file.

**6 ... Na6!**

One of the best responses, aiming to bring the knight to the b4-outpost. Instead:

a) 6 ... a5 is also very logical, controlling b4 and preventing further expansion by White on the queenside, e.g. 7 Na3 (7 Qc2 Na6 8 Ne5, M.Cornette-P.Wells, London 2017, is well met by 8 ... Bd6! 9 Nxc4 Bc7 and Black is well placed) 7 ... Bxa3 (7 ... Na6 8 Nxc4 Be7 9 d4 0-0 was very pleasant for White in E.Tomashevsky-S.Sjugirov, Budva 2009) 8 bxa3 Qb6 (8 ... 0-0 9 Qc2 b5?! 10 Rb1 Ba6 11 axb5 cxb5 12 Nd4! Qxd4 13 Bxa8 Nd5 14 Bb2 Qa7 15 Bxd5 exd5 16 Qf5 with a clear advantage, which White converted in E.Tomashevsky-O.Korneev, Dresden 2007) 9 Qc2 Qb3 10 Qxb3 cxb3 11 Nd4 Nd5 12 Nxb3 with the better endgame in Y.Wen-Y.Xu, Sanya City 2017.

b) 6 ... Qd5 (B.Leer Salvesen-H.Nakamura, Eilat 2012) can be well met by 7 b3 cxb3 8 d4 with excellent compensation.

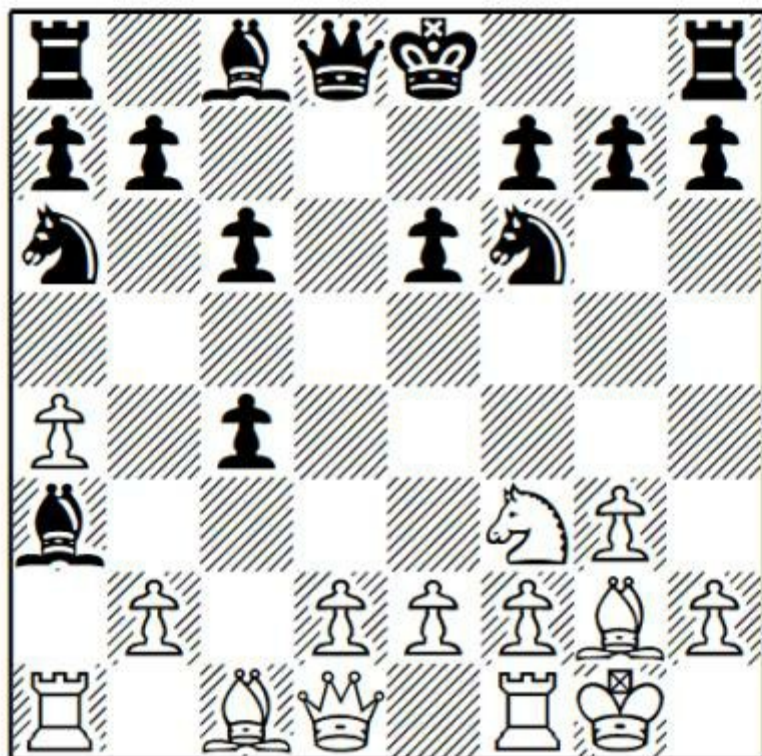
c) 6 ... b6 7 Ne5 Nd5 (7 ... Bb7 (E.Miroshnichenko-A.Beliavsky, Austria 2008) is also well met by 8 Nxc4) 8 Nxc4 was P.Arnaudov-K.Georgiev, Skopje 2015. White regained his pawn in ideal circumstances and Black had weakened his queenside for no reason.

d) 6 ... c5 7 Na3 Nc6 8 Nxc4 Be7 9 b3 0-0 10 Bb2 Qc7 was M.Prusikin-K.Kulaots, Augsburg 2011 and now I like 11 Nfe5 when the white bishops are far stronger than their counterparts.

e) 6 ... Be7 rules out ... Bxa3 due to the loss of time, and after 7 Na3 0-0 8 Nxc4 White was very comfortable in D.Khismatullin-E.Ovod, Sochi 2016.

f) 6 ... Nbd7 7 Na3 Bxa3 8 Rxa3. Here this recapture makes sense since the knight is committed to d7 and Black can only occupy b4 with loss of time. 8 ... a5 9 Qc2 Nb6 (it's probably better to simply castle, since White gets an excellent game after 10 b3!?, while 10 e4!? is also strong) 10 b3 cxb3 11 Rxb3 Nbd5 12 Ba3 Nb4 13 Bxb4 axb4 14 Rxb4 0-0 15 Rfb1 Qe7 16 Ne5 h6 17 d4 and White had a clear advantage, with a better position in the centre and strong pressure on the queenside, in N.Potpara-M.Savic, Bar 2015.

### 7 Na3 Bxa3



**Question:** How would you recapture on a3?

**Answer:** Both options are decent!

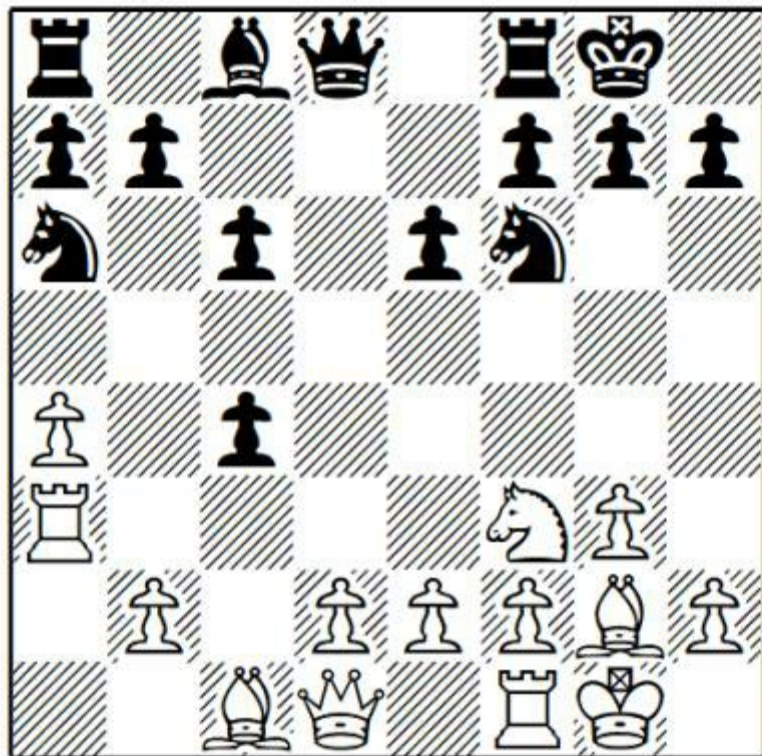
### 8 Rxa3

This maintains the integrity of White's structure, and allows the rook to come into play along the third rank.

8 bxa3!? is another good option, covering the b4-square and opening the b-file for pressure on Black's queenside. Now 8 ... Nc5 9 Rb1 has led to quick wins for White in some grandmaster games, e.g. 9 ... Qa5 (9 ... 0-0 10 Qc2 Qd5? 11 Bb2 Qe4? 12 d3! Qd5 13 d4! Nb3 14 Ne5 Qd8 15 Rfd1 Na5 16 Bc3 and White was already winning in D.Bocharov-V.Belous, Taganrog 2013) 10 Rb4!? c3 11 dxc3 0-0 12 Qc2 (Demuth suggests the immediate 12 Rh4!? which is also very dangerous) 12 ... Nd5? (losing a lot of time to a simple tactic) 13 e4! Ne7 (13 ... Nxb4 14 cxb4 wins material) 14 e5 (14 Bf4 is also strong but Tiger plays consistently for the attack) 14 ... Qc7 15 h4 Nd5 16 Re1!? b6 (this time taking the exchange with 16 ... Nxb4 falls into a very strong attack after 17 axb4 Nd7 18 Ng5 g6 19 Bf4) 17

Rd4 f5 18 exf6 gxf6 19 Bh6 Rf7 20 c4 and White has an overwhelming advantage and soon won in T.Hillarp Persson-A.Dreev, Helsingor 2009.

**8 ... 0-0**

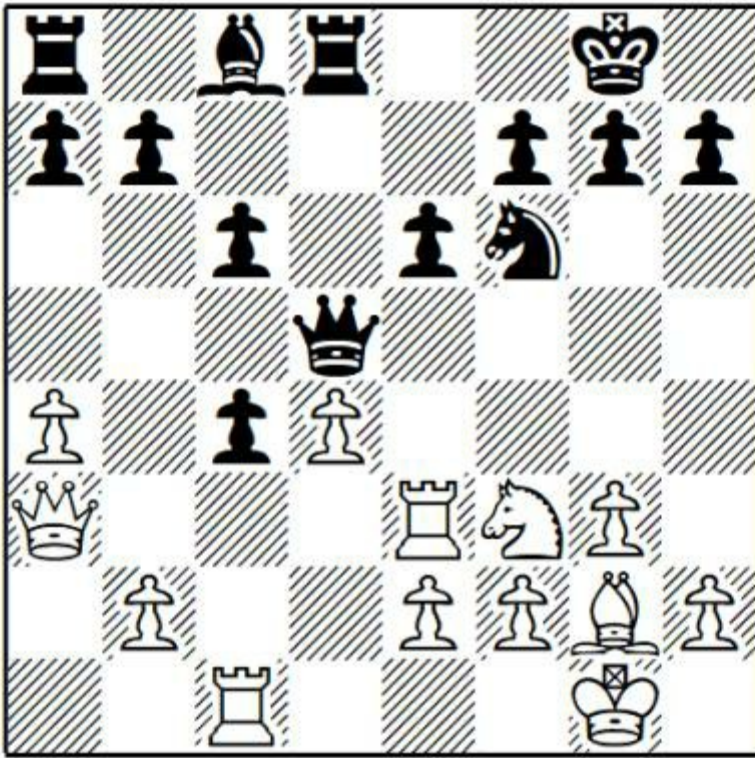


After 8 ... Nb4 9 a5! is an important move, preventing Black from supporting the b4-knight with ... a5. Black could play ... c5 with the same intention but this is far more double edged-the pawn can be challenged by d4, and the long diagonal is horribly weakened. 9 ... 0-0 10 b3! cxb3 11 d4 b6 12 axb6 Qxb6 13 Qxb3 a5 with good compensation in D.Dvirnyy-B.Firat, Yerevan 2014.

**9 Qc2 Qd5 10 Re3**

10 b3 was also possible, with good compensation.

**10 ... Nb4 11 Qc3 Na2 12 Qa3 Nxc1 13 Rxc1 Rd8 14 d4!**



White has other logical moves, but I like Aronian's treatment which aims to open the position while Black's queenside is undeveloped. Black should take en passant since otherwise the d4-pawn will give White a large advantage in the centre.

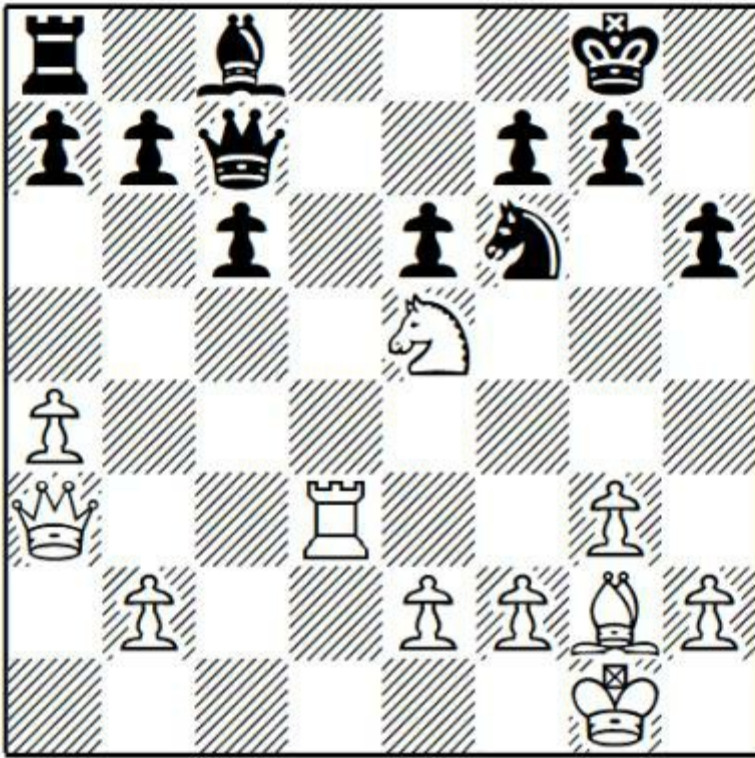
**14 ... cxd3 15 Rxd3 Qa5 16 Ne5 Qc7**

16 ... Bd7! is a good option, achieving co-ordination between the rooks by bringing the bishop to e8 (where it also defends f7). I think White retains sufficient compensation but not more, for example 17 Nc4 Qc7 18 e4 e5! 19 Qc5 Be6 20 Nxe5 Qb6, when Black has returned the pawn but completed development and equalised.

**17 Rcd1 Rxd3 18 Rxd3**

Here Black struggles to develop the bishop since 18 ... Bd7?? fails to 19 Qe7. 18 ... c5 or 18 ... Nd5 are the best options but the position is more difficult to play for Black (especially in blitz) even if he is objectively fine.

**18 ... h6**



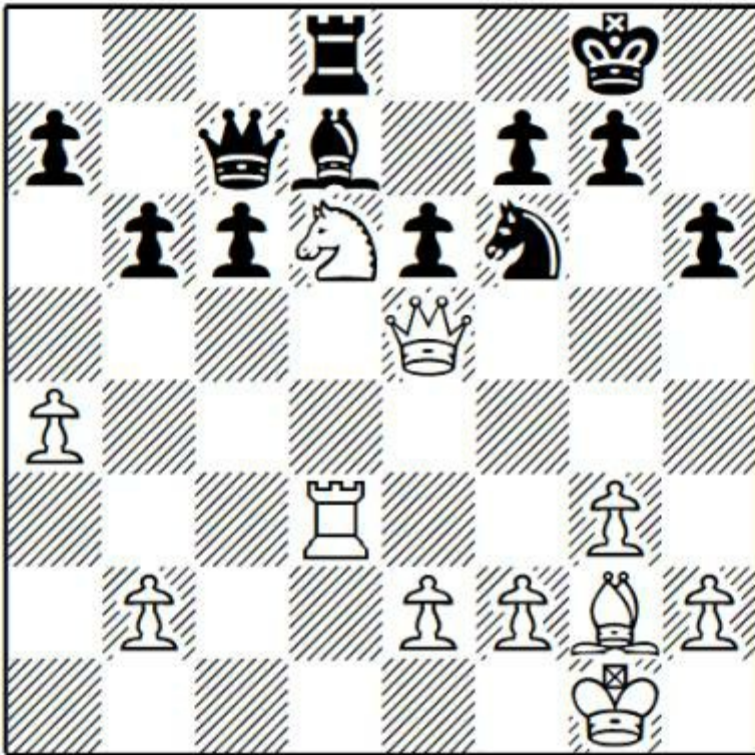
**19 Nc4**

The endgame after 19 Qd6! is also tempting, for example 19 ... Qxd6 20 Rxd6 Kf8 21 Rd8+ Ke7 22 Rh8. It's hard for Black to complete development, but it's also not clear how White can improve his position.

**19 ... Bd7 20 Qe7**

This is an empty shot, so 20 a5 should be preferred, with decent compensation for the pawn.

**20 ... Re8 21 Qc5 b6 22 Qe5 Rc8! 23 Nd6 Rd8??**



A huge error. Black has consolidated and with 23 ... c5! he could play for a win.

**Question:** White to play and win!

**24 Nxf7!**

**Answer:** An easy tactic, winning two pawns.

**24 ... Qxe5**

Allowing a losing endgame but the position was hopeless. 24 ... Rc8 25 Nxf6+! wins another pawn and the game.

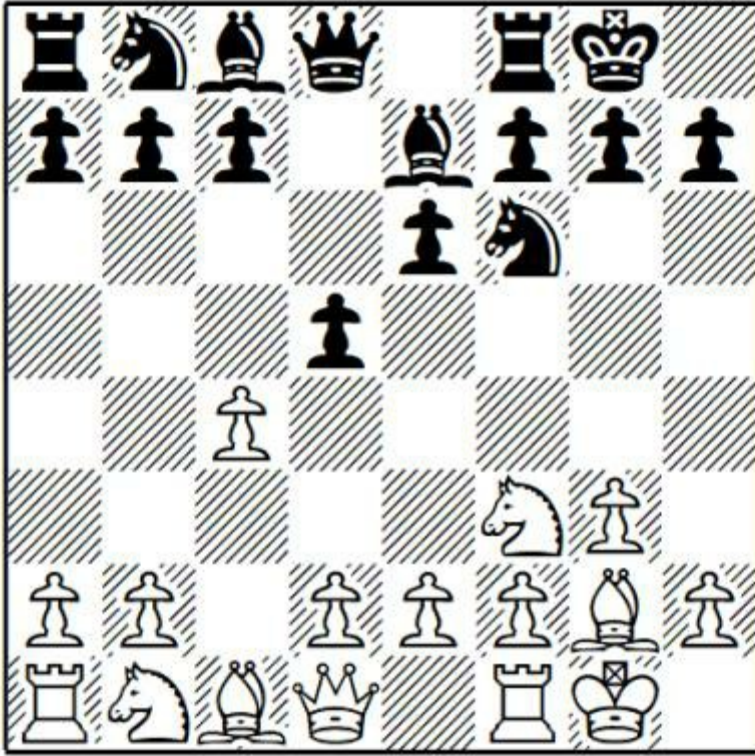
**25 Nxe5 Kf8 26 Bxc6 Ke7 27 Bxd7 1-0**

Black doesn't even get to check the king and pawn endgame, since either recapture on d7 drops an exchange.

# Chapter Four

## Queen's Gambit Declined: Closed Systems

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Be7 5 0-0 0-0



In this chapter, we look at Black's most classical approach while staying in QGD territory, simply holding his centre and developing his queenside as quickly as possible.

Not all QGD players will be able to employ these systems. If, for example, your repertoire against the Catalan involves 4 ... Bb4+ or 4 ... dxc4, after 6 d4 in the present position, White achieves a main line Catalan while avoiding all these early deviations.

However, White has interesting alternatives to avoid the Catalan, in particular **6 b3!?**

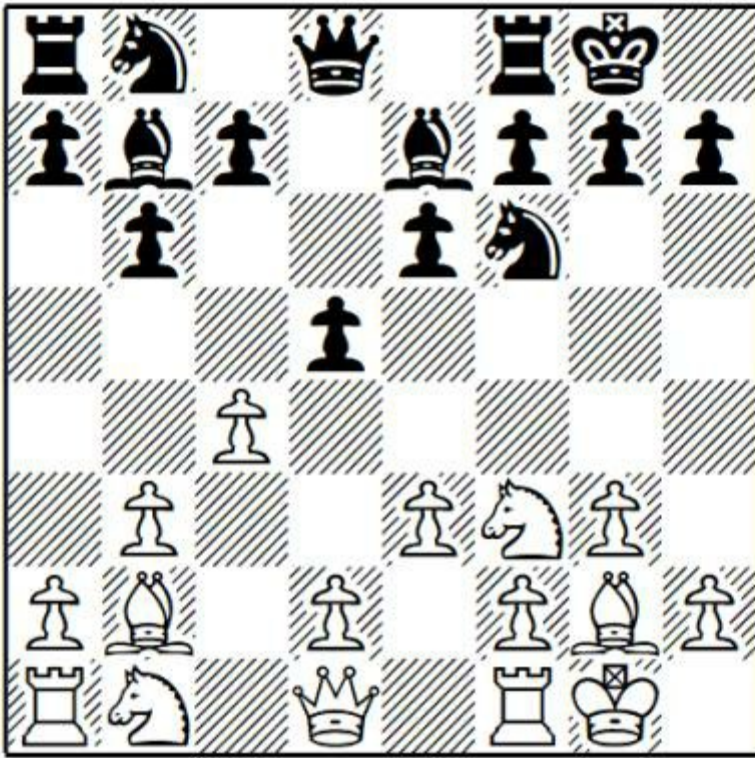
I was pleased to see Jan Gustafsson characterise this as a serious and annoying move in one of his chess24 video series. I will also briefly discuss 6 Ne5!?, which is designed to make ... dxc4 less attractive. Vidit won a nice game with this move.

*Game 16*

**R.Rapport-Wei Yi**

Gibraltar Masters 2014

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Be7 4 Bg2 0-0 5 0-0 d5 6 b3 b6 7 Bb2 Bb7 8 e3



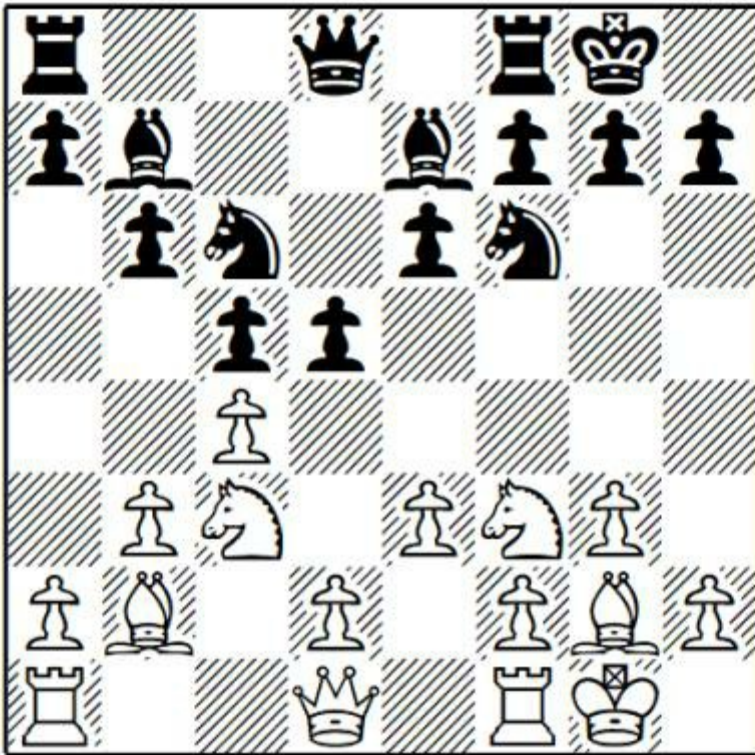
### 8 ... c5

8 ... Nbd7 9 Nc3 (Kasparov suggests 9 Qe2!? to avoid Black's next move) 9 ... Ne4! (the exclamation mark is Kasparov's) is a rare but logical continuation, looking to trade a pair of knights and, possibly, dark-squared bishops. This position has been wonderfully analysed by Marin and Kasparov and rather than reproducing their notes here I would urge interested readers to consult the original sources. Lines are:

a) 10 Ne2 was Kasparov's choice in the final, 24th game of his 1987 World Championship match against Karpov, as evocatively annotated in *Garry Kasparov on Modern Chess Part Three: Kasparov vs. Karpov 1986-1987*. Karpov chose the unfortunate 10 ... a5?! and ended up losing a heartbreaking technical display. Instead Makarychev suggests 10 ... Bf6 11 d4 c5 "with an excellent game", while Taimanov's 10 ... c5 11 d3 Bf6 12 Qc2 Bxb2 13 Qxb2 Qf6 also looks fully playable for Black.

b) 10 cxd5, M.Marin-Y.Kryvoruchko, Reykjavik 2015, is wonderfully analysed by Marin in Chessbase Magazine #170.

### 9 Nc3 Nc6



Black develops his pieces rapidly to their most active squares. Because of some small problems after White's next move, many black players have preferred alternative setups, although it is notable that Dominguez chose this line with Black in an important blitz game against Wesley So.

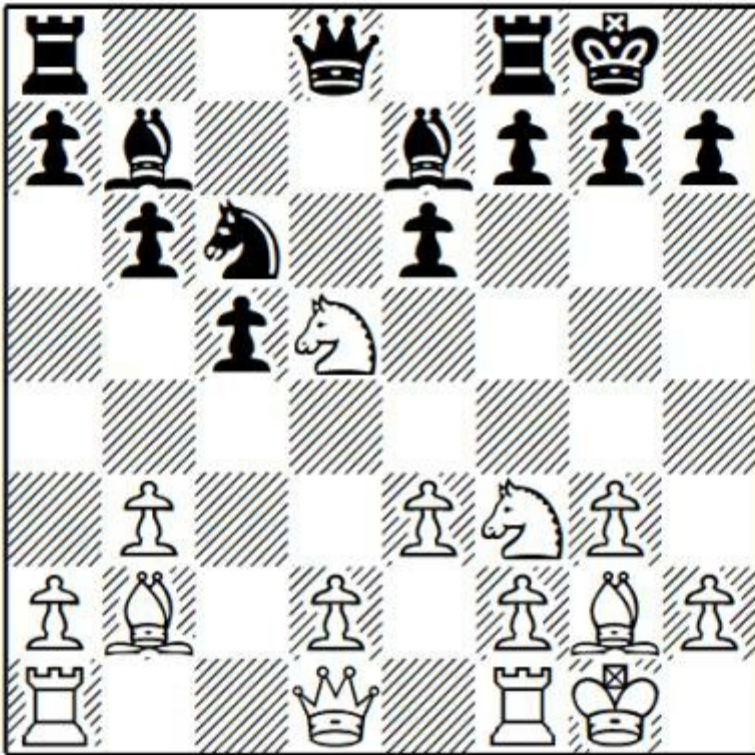
**10 cxd5!**

Black faces a choice on this and the next move, namely whether to endure some tactical discomfort on the long diagonal (by taking with pieces) or a minor structural disadvantage by taking with the pawn. All options are playable and it's a matter of taste, but I believe White has the better chances in most lines.

**10 ... Nxd5**

10 ... exd5 makes sense since in the arising structures (where Black has a potential isolated queen's pawn or hanging pawns), Black often relies on dynamic play and having more pieces on the board is consistent with this aim. 11 d4 Ne4 (11 ... Re8 12 Rc1 was more pleasant for White in N.Vitiugov-D.Frolyanov, Olginka 2011) 12 dxc5 Nxc3 13 Bxc3 bxc5 14 Qe2 Re8? (14 ... Qb6 is a better try) 15 Rfd1 Bf8 16 Qb5 Qb6 17 Qxb6 axb6 18 Rxd5 Nd4 19 Nxd4 Bxd5 20 Bxd5 cxd4 21 Bxd4 White was better and went on to win a model game in V.Kramnik-G.Jones, London 2012.

**11 Nxd5**

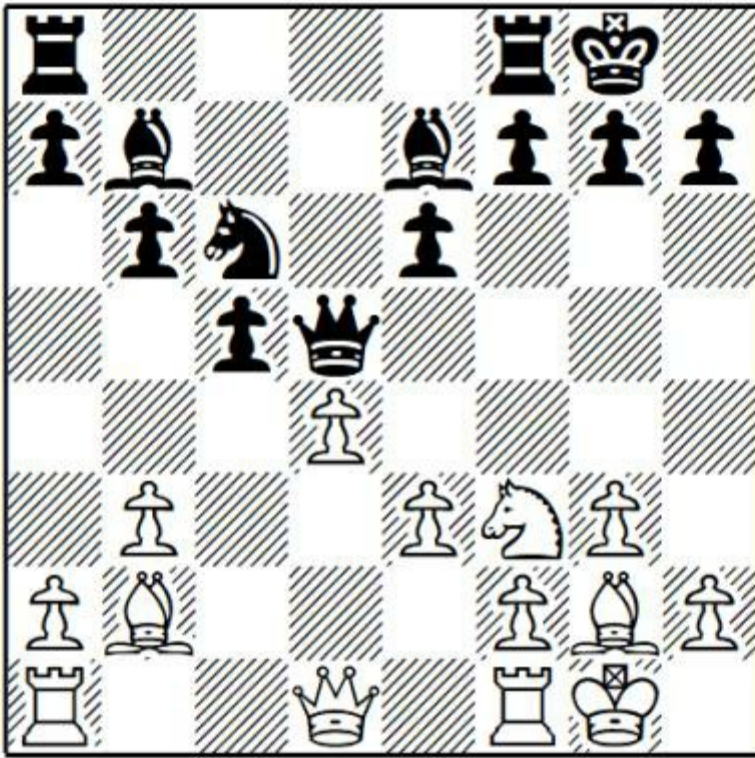


### 11 ... Qxd5

11 ... exd5 12 d4 (E.Cordova-Y.Quesada Perez, Merida 2013) leaves White with a better structure but Black has good development. In my book on the Tarrasch I recommended 12 ... a5!?, which I tested against Gawain Jones in Bunratty 2016. After 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 Bxe5 Ra6!? 16 Qc2 Qa8 17 Rfd1 a4 18 Qf5, instead of my 18 ... axb3, Jacob Aagaard recommended 18 ... Rd8 when Black isn't worse.

### 12 d4

White's next move is likely to be Ne5, while dxc5 is also a significant idea. Black has a wide choice.

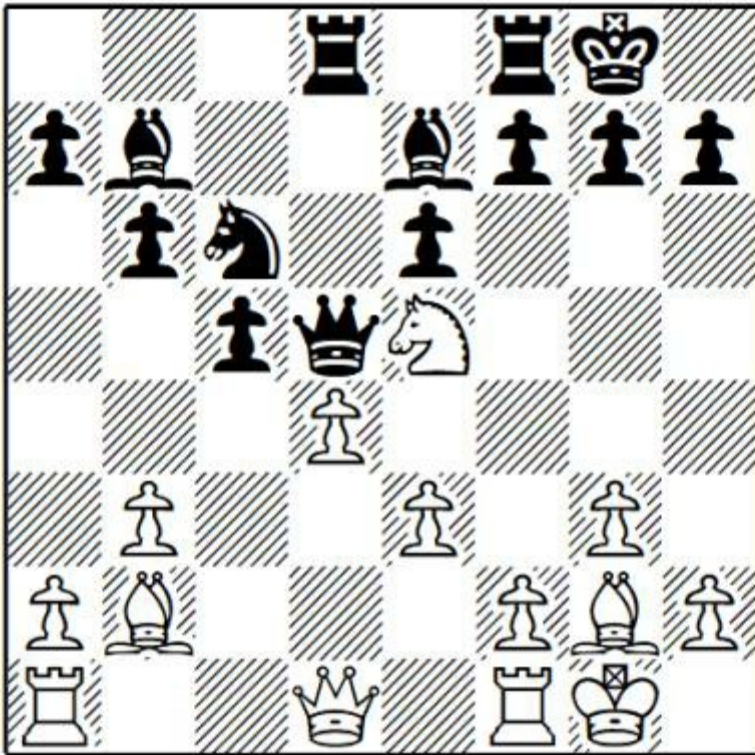


### 12 ... Qf5

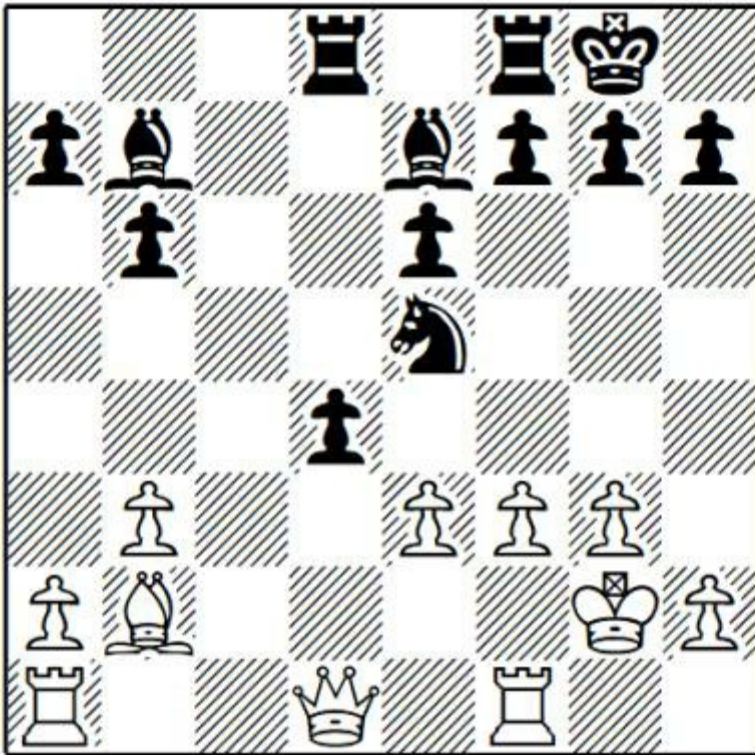
This has come into fashion and is the simplest route to a sound position. Instead:

a) 12 ... Qd8 is quite passive, e.g. 13 dxc5 (White hardly needs an improvement here but 13 Ne5 is another option, for example 13 ... Nxe5 14 Bxb7 Rb8 15 Bg2 cxd4 16 exd4 Nd7 17 d5 exd5 18 Qxd5 Bf6 19 Rad1 Bxb2 20 Qxd7 a5 21 Rfe1 Qxd7 22 Rxd7 and White ground out a win after further adventures in V.Kramnik -T.Radjabov, Kazan 2011) 13 ... Bxc5 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 Bxb7 Rb8 16 Be4 Nd7 17 b4 Be7 18 Qa4 was much better for White in D.Reinderman-T.Gharamian, Belgium 2017, A.Moskalenko-A.Zabotin, Orsha 2019 and several other games. White has the bishop pair and a strong initiative for free.

b) 12 ... Rad8 is the traditional main line, leaving Black a principled choice after 13 Ne5:

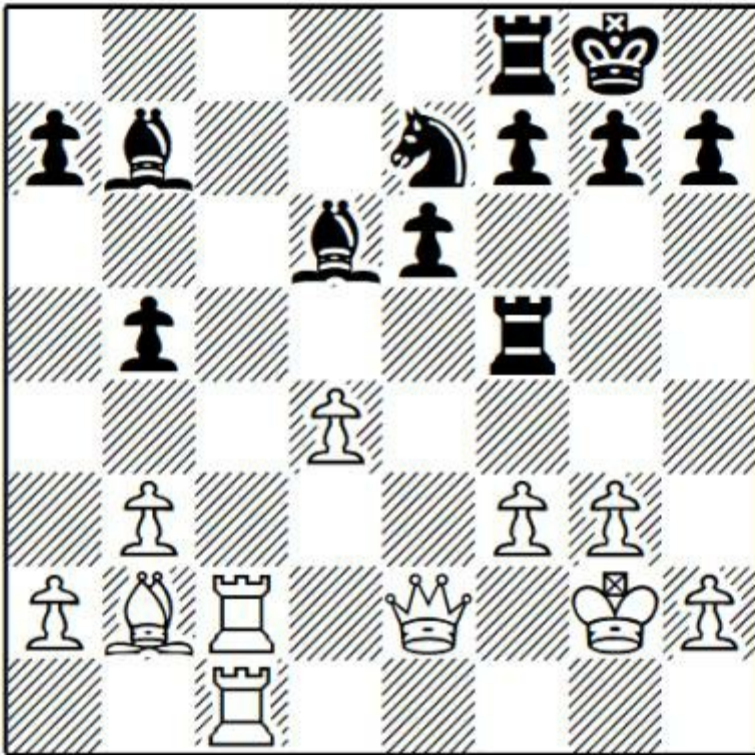


b1) 13 ... Qxg2+!? is a remarkable queen sacrifice which has been used to gain draws against Kramnik and Ehlvest. After 14 Kxg2 Nxe5+ 15 f3 and now 15 ... cxd4 is the main try but 15 ... Ng4 16 Qe2 cxd4 17 exd4 Nf6 was tested in the stem game M.Andrijevic-M.Jovicic, Belgrade 1980. Since Black is trying to erect a fortress White's most principled approach is to open lines with 18 a4 Nd5 19 a5. This is assessed as winning by the engines, although admittedly not with a significantly higher evaluation than after 15 ... cxd4. However, White seems to have more prospects here than after 15 ... cxd4 and, in any event, 15 ... Ng4 has been completely abandoned. After 15 ... cxd4:



b11) 16 exd4 Nc6 and your engine will assess this as totally winning for White, but in fact Black's positional compensation makes the position unclear (although the play is for two results) 17 Rc1 (17 Qe2 Rd5 18 Rac1 Rfd8 was tried in J.Ehlvest-H.Nakamura, St Louis 2009; after 19 Rc4 Ba6 20 Qe4 Bxc4 21 bxc4 R5d6 22 Rd1 Bf6 23 Ba3 Rxd4 24 Rxd4 Nxd4 White was unable to break through) and now Black has tested several moves:

b111) 17 ... Rd5 18 Rc4 b5 19 Rc2 Bd6 20 Qe2 Ne7 21 Rfc1 Rf5 and now:



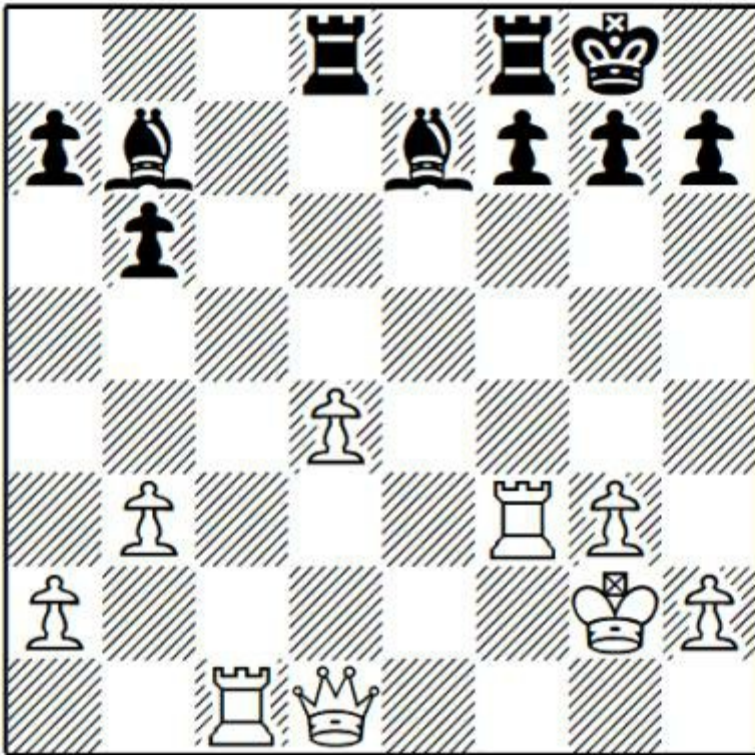
b1111) 22 Bc3?! was A.Morozevich-V.Bologan, Poikovsky 2014. Now Marin suggests 22 ... Bxf3+ 23 Qxf3 Rxf3 24 Kxf3 h5 25 Ba5 g5 26 Bc7 Ba3. This is a more understandable material balance (a pawn for the exchange) where Black appears to have good drawing chances since he retains his rook for the moment and his knight will have a stable square on d5.

b1112) Marin's suggestion 22 d5! is strong, e.g. 22 ... Bxd5 (22 ... Nxd5 23 Kg1!) 23 Kg1 Bxf3 24 Qd3, for example 24 ... Bd5 (more tenacious than Marin's 24 ... Nd5, which loses immediately to 25 Rc8) 25 Qxb5 Be4 26 Qa6 Rd5 27 Rf2 (as given by Demuth) and the asymmetrical pawn majorities are inconsistent with Black's desired fortress.

b112) 17 ... Rd7 seems less principled since White retains the option of sacrificing his d-pawn. 18 a3 (18 d5 Rxd5 19 Qe2 Nb4 20 Rfd1 Ba6 21 Qe4 Bd3? 22 Qg4 g6 23 Qf4 with a decisive attack in S.Azaladze-A.Nadanian, Batumi 2015) 18 ... Rfd8 19 Qe2 Bf6 20 b4 e5 (20 ... Ne7 21 d5 Bxb2 22 Qxb2) 21 d5 Rxd5 22 Rfd1 Nd4 23 Bxd4 exd4 24 Rc7 Bc8 was V.Kramnik-M.Ezat, Antalya 2013 and now Marin gives 25 Qc4 Be6 26 Qa6 d3 27 Rd2 Bg5 28 f4 Bf6 29 Rxa7 Bf5(?) 30 Ra8 Be4+ 31 Kf1 as winning for White, but Black retains defensive prospects after 29 ... R5d6!.

b12) 17 ... Bf6 18 Rc4 Rd7 (opening lines with 18 ... Nxd4 is rejected by Marin based on 19 Qa1 e5 20 Rc7 Ba6 21 Rf2 when the black queenside is vulnerable and, of the fortress variations, this one seems more brittle to me, although a lot of analysis would be required to definitively assess the position) 19 Qc2 Ne7 20 Rc7 Rfd8 21 Rxd7 Rxd7 22 Kf2 Nd5 23 a3 h5 24 h4 g6 and in A.Mikaelyan-A.Nadanian, Jermuk 2014 White won after a king march to the queenside (preparing the g4 break).

b12) In his notes to Morozevich-Bologan, Marin gives one of his blitz games, which proceeded 16 Bxd4!? Nxf3 17 Rxf3 e5 18 Rc1 exd4 19 exd4 and now:



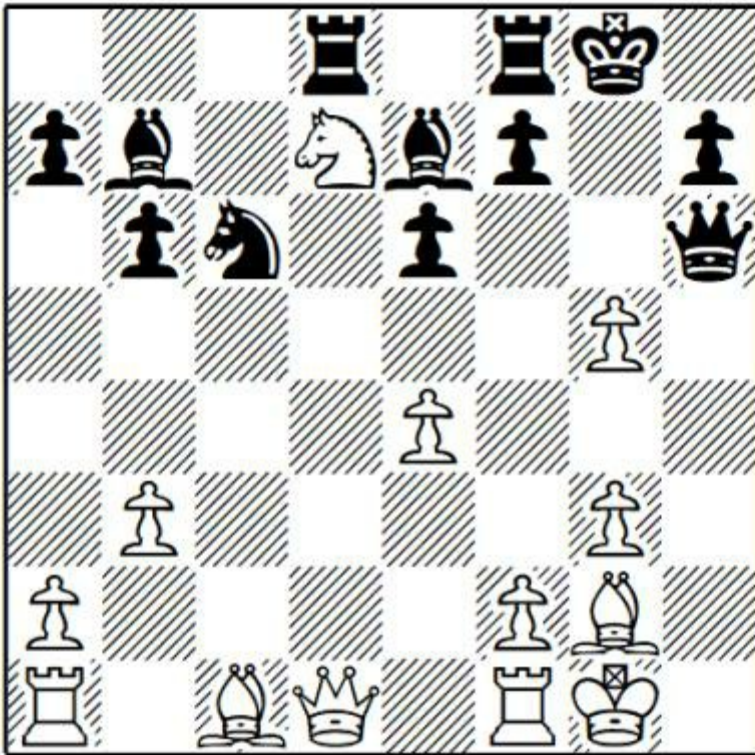
b121) 19 ... Bc5 20 dxc5!? Rxd1 21 Rxd1 bxc5 22 Rd7 Bxf3+ 23 Kxf3 was M.Marin-T.Gelashvili, World Chess Network (blitz) 2003). As Marin notes, despite Black's (temporary) extra pawn, this endgame is difficult for him.

b122) The analysts have differed in their suggested alternatives here. Marin gives 19 ... Bf6 20 Rc7 Rxd4 21 Qc1 as slightly better for White. 20 Kh3! Bxf3 21 Qxf3 Bxd4 is stronger, when Black retains hopes of building a fortress.

b123) Demuth gives 19 ... Bxf3+ 20 Kxf3 Rd7 with prospects of a fortress. Compared to 19 ... Bf6, I don't know how to assess this variation, where White retains his d-pawn. This pawn blocks the d-file (for both sides) and its route to d8 is very well controlled by the black pieces, so it seems to me that White's winning chances are roughly equivalent in both lines.

b2) The most popular move is 13 ... Qd6 14 dxc5! (14 Rc1 Nxe5 15 Bxb7 V.Ivanchuk-M.Carlsen, Cap d'Agde 2008 is less ambitious though Black still needs to be precise to equalise completely) 14 ... Qxc5 15 Nd7!. This position is wholly unpromising for Black and, over 40+ games, White has scored very heavily. Marin gives a very detailed coverage but I have sought only to give the key variations since it's a bad line for Black and White has alternatives along the way.

b21) 15 ... Qf5 16 e4 Qg5 17 h4 Qh6 18 Bc1 g5 19 hxg5 and now:



b211) 19 ... Qg7 20 e5 Kh8 (20 ... Nb8 21 Nf6+ Bxf6 22 exf6 Rxd1 23 Rxd1! Qg6 24 Bxb7 with overwhelming compensation for the queen in B.Khotenashvili -Z.Tan, Jiangsu Wuxi 2012) 21 Bf4 Bxg5 22 Bxg5 Qxg5 23 Nxf8 Rxd1 24 Raxd1 and White went on to win in E.Miroshnichenko-G.Nakhbayeva, Al Ain 2014. He clearly has the better chances, though Black should try 24 ... h5!? to generate some kingside counterplay although, admittedly, the black king might feel uncomfortable after 25 Rfe1! h4 26 Re3.

b212) 19 ... Bxg5 20 f4 Be7 (20 ... Qg7 21 fxg5 Qxa1 22 Nf6+ Qxf6 23 gxf6 Rxd1 24 Rxd1 left Black with a very difficult endgame in O.Ruggieri-A.Kovacs, ICCF email 2013) 21 Qg4+ Qg6 22 Qxg6+ hxg6 23 Nxf8 was clearly better for White in V.Malakhov-B.Savchenko, Konya 2012.

b22)15 ... Qg5? 16 h4! Qh6 17 Rc1 Na5 (17 ... e5 18 Qg4 with a winning advantage in D.Flores-A.Hoffman, Buenos Aires 2017) 18 Rc7 Bxg2 19 Kxg2 and White won easily in D.Howell-A.Neiksans, Tromsø 2014. David Howell had a magnificent Olympiad in Tromsø but here Neiksans fell into a known opening trap.

c) 12 ... Rfd8?! is a well known error: 13 Ne5 Qd6 (Black should probably speculate with 13 ... Qxg2+ 14 Kxg2 Nxe5+ 15 f3, as in A.Mikaelyan-H.Hayrapetyan, Yerevan 2016, with comparable play to the 12 ... Rad8 13 Ne5 Qxg2+ line) 14 Qf3 Nxe5 15 Qxb7 with the bishop pair for free and a clear advantage (for example, S.Brunello-M.Brunello, Biella 2011).

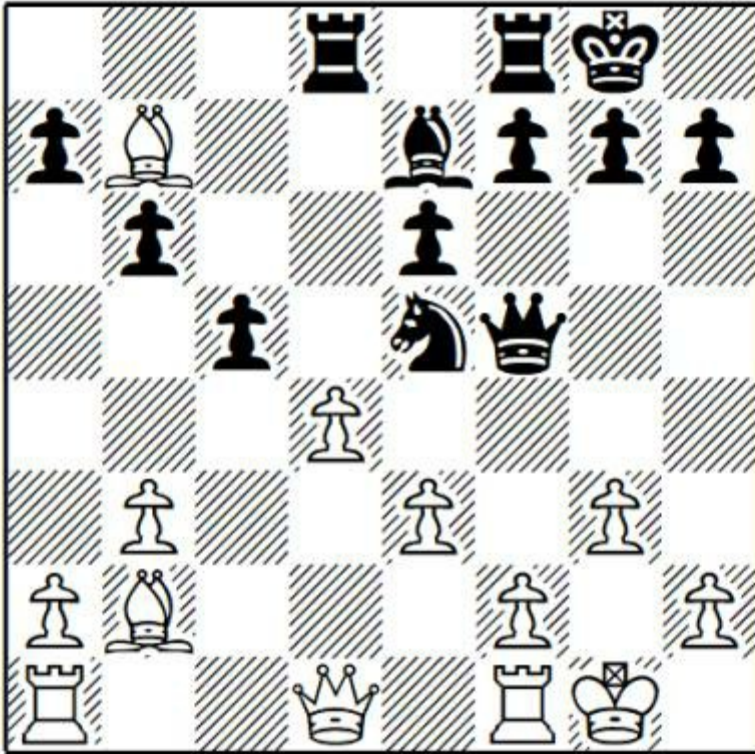
d) 12 ... Nb4 13 Nh4 Qd7 14 dxc5 Qxd1 15 Rfxd1 Bxg2 16 Kxg2 Bxc5 17 a3 Nd5 and now Marin (and the engines) endorse Nogueiras' suggestion 18 b4! (18 e4 Nf6 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 b4 Be7 21 Rd7 Rfe8 with a level endgame which has been tested in several games), for example 18 ... Be7 (18 ... Bxe3 19 Rxd5 exd5 20 fxe3 is also better for White) 19 Nf5 Bf6 (19 ... exf5 20 Rxd5 and Black will lose the f5-pawn for insufficient compensation) 20 Bxf6 Nxf6 21 Ne7+ Kh8 22 Rac1 (Marin) with a much better endgame for White.

e) 12 ... Na5 is well met by 13 dxc5! when the a5-knight is misplaced.

### 13 Ne5

Getting the bishop pair is the most principled option. 13 dxc5 is less ambitious, e.g. 13 ... Rad8 14 Qe2 Bxc5 15 Rac1 Qh5 16 a3 a5 17 Qc4 was L.Van Wely-J.Schroeder, Germany 2019 and now Black could force matters with 17 ... Ne7 18 b4 (18 Qe2 f6 is level) 18 ... axb4 19 axb4 Bxf3 20 bxc5 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 bxc5 22 Qxc5 Qxc5 23 Rxc5 with a draw.

### 13 ... Nxe5 14 Bxb7 Rad8



### 15 Qe2

15 Qb1 (D.Gordievsky-F.Berkes, Moscow 2017) is well met by 15 ... Qxb1 16 Raxb1 Nd3 17 Ba1 cxd4 18 Bxd4 Bc5 (18 ... Bf6 leads to a similar endgame to So-Dominguez) 19 Ba1 Rd6 when Black's activity full compensates for the bishop pair.

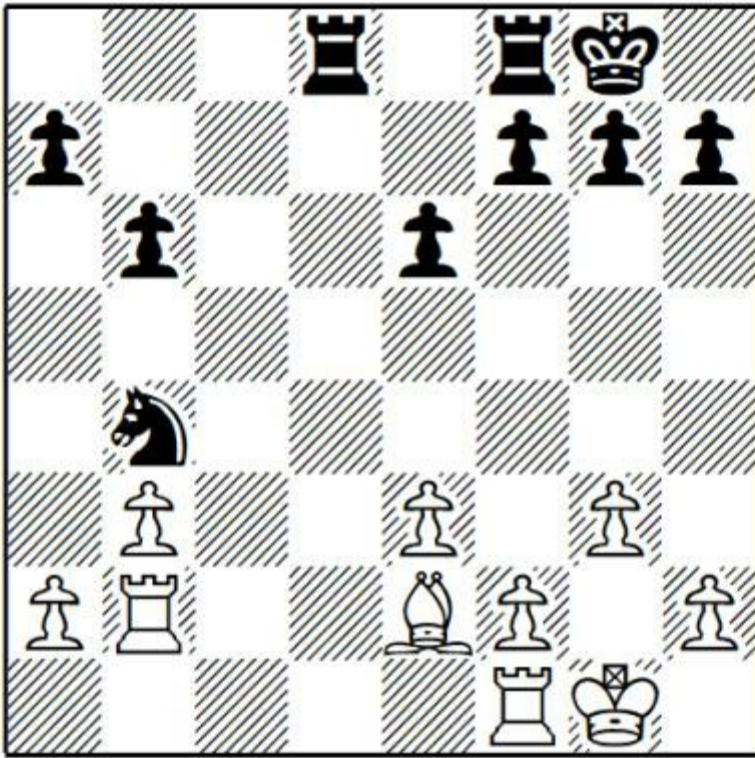
### 15 ... Qd3!

The idea behind ... Qf5.

### 16 Ba6!

The best hope at retaining an advantage. 16 Rae1 Qxe2 17 Rxe2 Nd3 18 Ba1 cxd4 19 Bxd4 Bf6 20 Bxf6 gxf6 was equal in W.So-L.Dominguez Perez, St Louis 2017.

### 16 ... Qxe2 17 Bxe2 cxd4 18 Bxd4 Nc6 19 Bc3 Ba3 20 Rab1 Nb4 21 Bb2 Bxb2 22 Rxb2



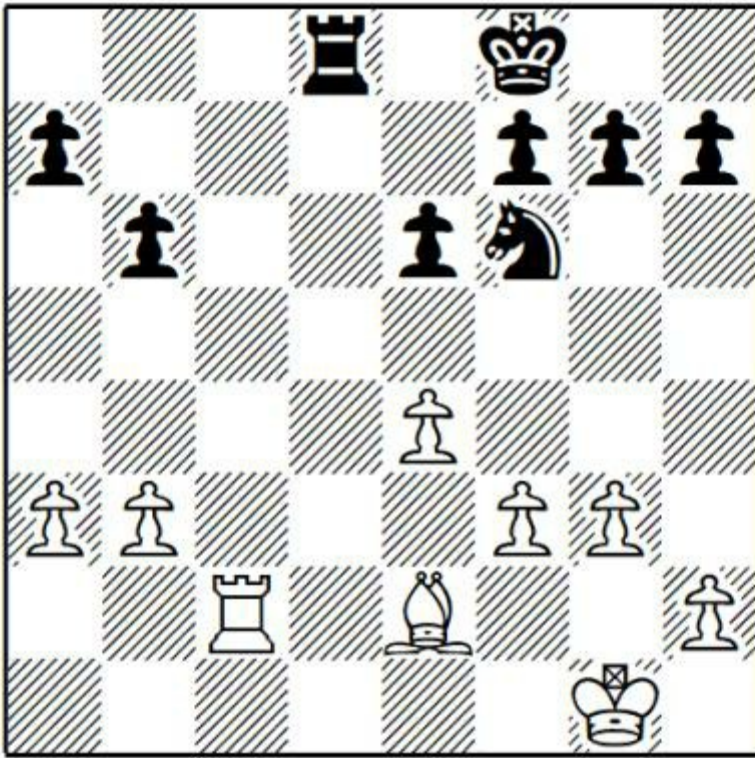
**22 ... Rc8**

22 ... Nd3 23 Rc2 was agreed drawn in A.Ipatov-M.Mchedlishvili, Izmir 2016 in view of 23 ... Nb4 24 Rb2 Nd3. It is possible to continue with 25 Bxd3 Rxd3 26 Rc1 Rfd8 where White's advantage is cosmetic.

**23 Rd1 Rfd8 24 Rxd8+ Rxd8 25 a3 Nd5 26 Rc2**

White has more to play for in this line than after 22 ... Nd3, since he has retained the better minor piece.

**26 ... Kf8 27 e4! Nf6 28 f3**



Restricting the black knight and preparing to invade on the seventh rank.

**28 ... Ke7 29 Kf2**

29 Rc7+ Rd7 leads nowhere.

**29 ... Ne8 30 Bb5 Rd1 31 Ke2**

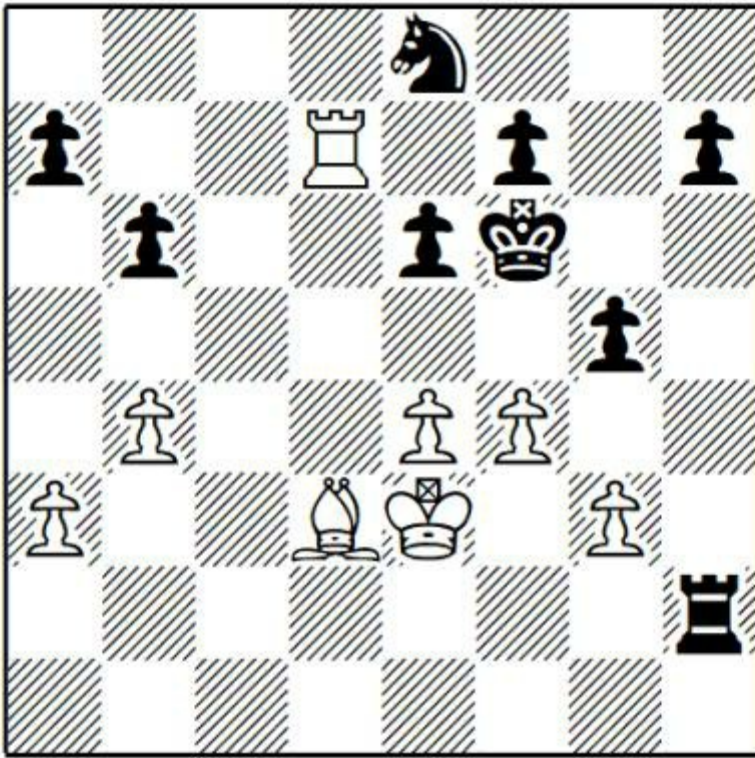
31 f4 was a good alternative, with an edge.

**31 ... Rb1 32 b4 Rh1 33 Rc8 Nd6 34 Rc7+ Kf6 35 Bd3 Rxb2+ 36 Ke3 g5?**

36 ... e5 was a sounder defence, although after 37 Rxa7 Ra2 38 Ra6 Ke6 White retains the better chances.

**37 Rd7 Ne8 38 f4!**

Threatening to win the knight after e5+ and Re7.



**38 ... Rh3 39 e5+ Kg7 40 Kf2?**

Now Black obtains counterplay along the third rank. 40 Kf3 gxf4 41 Kxf4 would leave Black in serious trouble.

**40 ... gxf4 41 gxf4 Kf8**

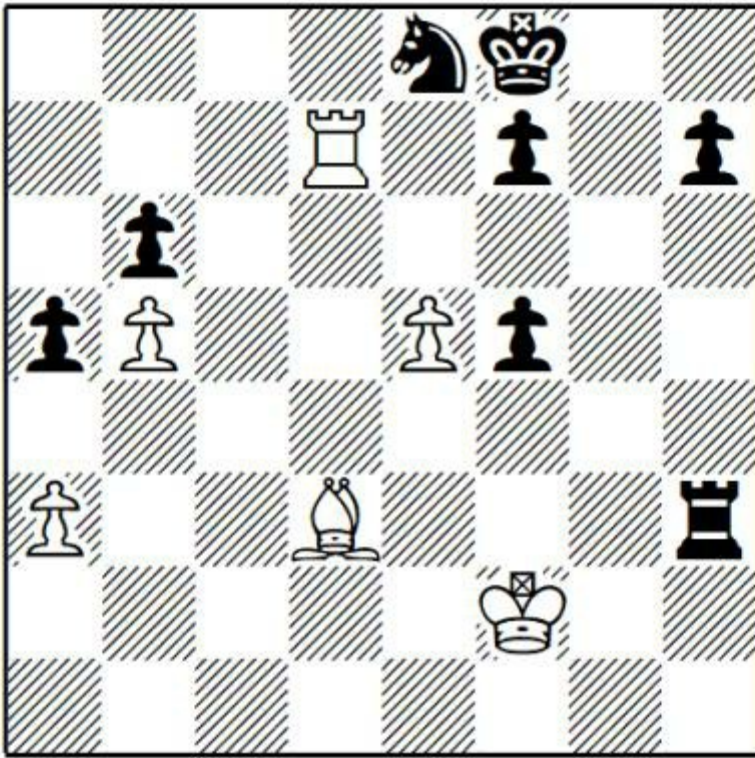
41 ... a5!? looks like a better defence, limiting White to an edge.

**42 f5! a5 43 b5!**

A very natural decision, keeping more pawns on the board and fixing the weakness on b6. White loses the option of Bb5 (after Re8) but Black's position remains grim.

43 f6 locks out the black knight and threatens Re8 and Bb5. Perhaps Rapport was worried that all his pawns would be eliminated, but I don't see how Black could achieve this, for example 43 ... Rh5 44 bxa5 bxa5 45 Rd8 Rxe5 (threatening ... Rd5) 46 Ra8 Rh5 47 a4 Rh6 48 Bb5 Rxf6+ 49 Ke3 and White should win.

**43 ... exf5**



**44 Bc4! Rxa3 45 Rxf7+ Kg8 46 Rf6+ Kg7 47 Rxb6**

Despite his pawn deficit, White is winning since he has two mobile passed pawns and the black pieces are atrociously placed.

**47 ... Rc3 48 Rb7+ Kh6 49 Bf7 Rc8 50 Re7 Nc7 51 b6 Na6 52 Ra7 Nb4 53 e6 Nd3+ 54 Ke3 Ne5 55 b7 Rb8 56 e7 Nxf7 57 Ra8 1-0**

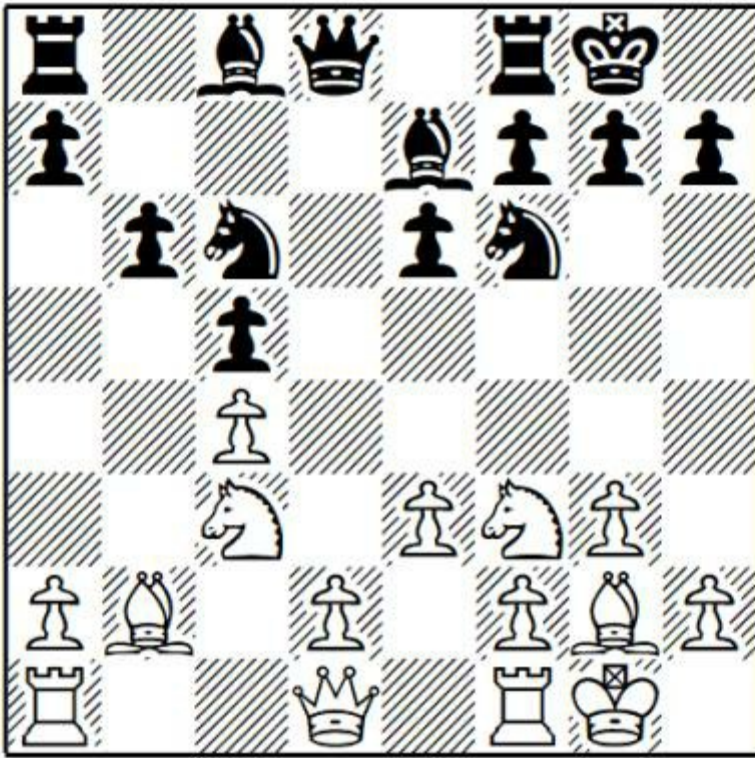
A very fine technical display.

*Game 17*

**V.Artemiev-H.Nakamura**

Gibraltar Masters 2019

**1 Nf3 Nf6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Be7 5 c4 0-0 6 b3 c5 7 Bb2 Nc6 8 e3 b6 9 Nc3 dxc4 10 bxc4**



**Question:** Why would Black go in for this exchange (trading his d5-pawn for the b3-pawn)?

**Answer:** As we saw in the previous games, when Black tries to maintain a pawn on d5, after cxd5 he will either take on a structural weakness with ... exd5 (when the d5-pawn can no longer be defended by another pawn, and structures with an isolated queen's pawn or hanging pawns often arise), or have to neutralise White's initiative after taking on d5 with pieces.

9 ... dxc4 indicates a different approach. Now, if White pushes d4, he will be left with hanging pawns after ... cxd4, exd4. Black has no structural weaknesses and, if he can complete development and exchange some minor pieces (to reduce the effect of White's space advantage after d4), he will be doing very well.

White, in his turn, has a different way to handle this position, namely playing his pawn to d3, trading light squared bishops, and advancing his kingside pawns to gain attacking chances. The plan sounds (and, perhaps, is) quite primitive, but it is dangerous and effective, as illustrated by the present game.

**10 ... Bb7**

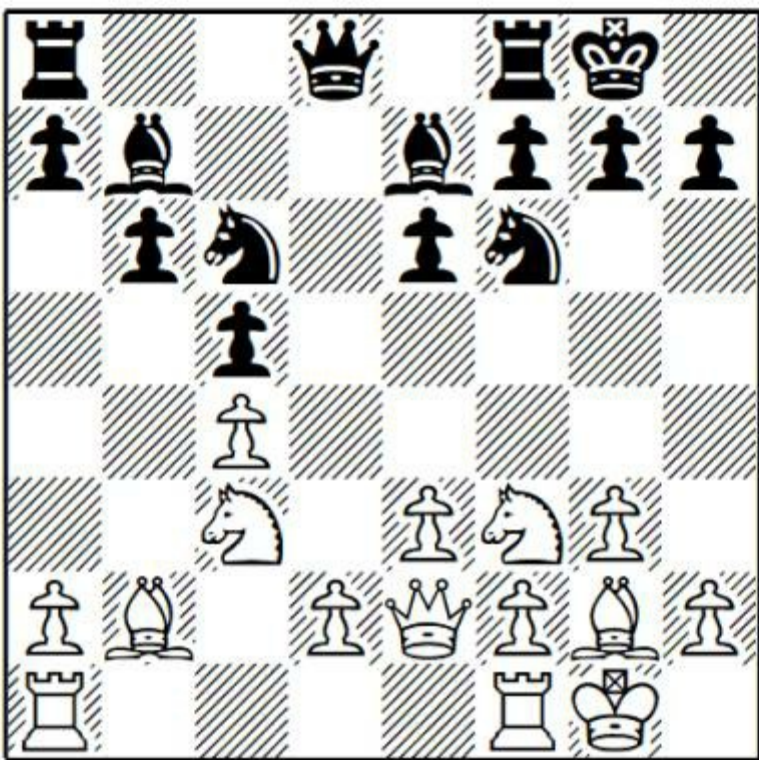
The rare 10 ... Qd3 is directed against White's central expansion with d4. However, it gives White some tempi for the same slow attacking setup as Artemiev used in the game (where Ne1 is essential to free the f-pawn). 11 Ne1 Qd7 12 Qe2 Bb7 13 f4 Rfd8 14 Rd1 Nb4 15 d3 Bxg2 16 Nxc2!?

This is a good way to activate the knight; the best guide I've seen to this type of decision was set out by Delchev in *The Modern Réti*: "I was often hesitant during my analyses how to recapture on g2 when Black exchanges the bishops himself. Perhaps there is no general recipe, but I suggest to take by knight-Nxc2, when our rook is on f1. We may send it later to f4-h5. In the setup with Rfd1, our attack

will often feature g4-g5 instead of f4-f5. Then we'll need our knight on another route-f3-e5-g4(f7)-f6/h6, so we should prefer Qxg2 (or Rf1-f2xg2).”

16 ... a6 17 a3 Nc6 18 g4 Ne8 19 f5 Nd6 20 f6!? (the type of decision we've come to associate with Kramnik in recent years; White sacrifices material for long term attacking chances) 20 ... Bxf6 21 Rxf6 gxf6 22 Nf4 Ne5 23 Nh5 Qe7 24 Rf1 Nd7 was V.Kramnik-D.Fridman, Dortmund 2013. At the moment White merely has full compensation (0.00 in all lines, as I'm sure you've noticed), but Kramnik went on to win a brilliant game.

### 11 Qe2



### 11 ... Rc8

It's generally viewed as more flexible to start with 11 ... Qc7, since Black needs ... Rfd8 while he can sometimes delay or avoid ... Rac8. Now White has a wide choice:

a) 12 Ne1 Rfd8 (12 ... a6 13 Rb1 Rfd8 14 Ba1 Na7 15 d3 Bxg2 16 Nxc2 was fine for Black in L.Lenic-M.Kravtsiv, Germany 2015; I think White would have done better to avoid his queenside manoeuvres and launch immediate play on the kingside with 13 f4 or 13 g4) 13 Rd1 a6 14 g4 Na5 15 f4 and now:

a1) 15 ... Ne8 A bit too passive. 16 d3 Bxg2 17 Nxc2 and now:

a11) 17 ... Nc6? 18 f5 Bd6 19 Nf4 with better chances for White in I.Chirila-A.Tang, Las Vegas 2019.

a12) 17 ... b5 was again better, although now White can ignore it with 18 f5! (18 cxb5 axb5 19 Nxb5 Qb7 gives Black reasonable compensation) with dangerous threats.

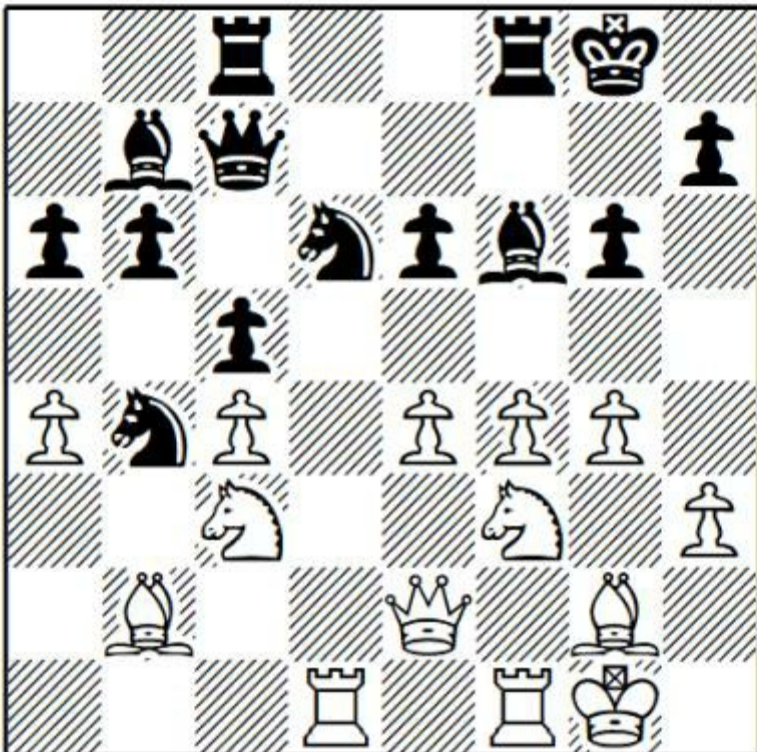
a2) Black should get his queenside play going with the thematic sacrifice 15 ... b5!, leading to unclear play. 16 g5 Ne8 17 cxb5 Bxg2 18 Nxc2 axb5 19 Nxb5 Qb7 and for the pawn, Black has gained much. First, the c4-pawn has been eliminated, permitting Black to use the d5-square (for example, 20

f5 exf5 21 Rxf5 Rd5!). Second, the a- and b-files have been opened, which can be used for counterplay.

b) 12 Rac1 Rfd8 13 Rfd1 Na5 14 Ne1 Bxg2 15 Nxd2 Qb7 16 f4 a6 17 Ba1 Ne4 18 Nxe4 Qxe4 19 d3 Qg6 20 Rb1 Rab8 was F.Caruana-L.Aronian, St Louis 2017. The simplifications have drawn some strength from 21 g4 (which was Caruana's choice), and switching to queenside play with 21 Be5 Rb7 22 Bc3 Nc6 23 Qf3 Rc8 would have been balanced.

c) Tang has successfully defended 12 Nb5 Qc8 13 Rab1 Rd8 14 Rfd1 a6 15 Nc3 Qc7 16 Ba1 Rab8, drawing blitz games in 2018 with Levan Pantsulaia and Evgeny Miroshnichenko.

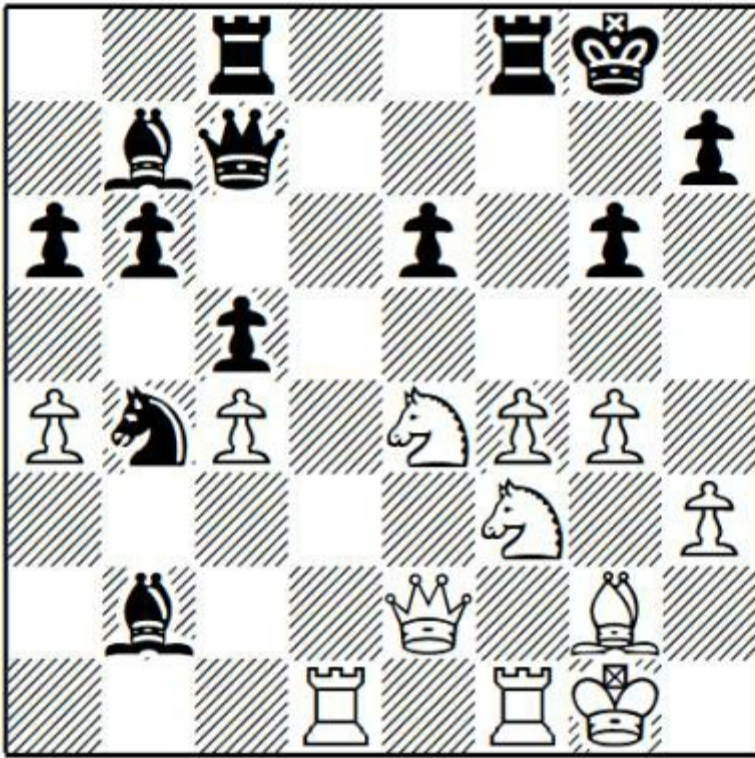
**12 Rad1 Qc7 13 Ne1 Ne8 14 f4 Nd6 15 Nf3 a6 16 a4 f5 17 d3 Bf6 18 h3 Nb4 19 g4 g6 20 e4 fxe4 21 dxe4**



### **21 ... Nxe4?**

A bad miscalculation by Nakamura. 21 ... Bd4+ leads to very complicated play, e.g. 22 Kh2! (22 Kh1? Bxc3 23 Bxc3 Nxe4 is much better for Black; White is also struggling after 22 Nxd4? cxd4 23 Rxd4 Qc5) 22 ... Bxc3!? (22 ... Rxf4? 23 Nxd4 Rxf1 24 Nxe6 wins material). This can lead to a complex endgame after 23 Bxc3 Rxf4 24 Be5 Rxe4 25 Qf2 Rxe5 26 Nxe5 Nxc4 27 Rd7 Qxe5+ 28 Kg1 Qe3 29 Qxe3 Nxe3 30 Bxb7 Rf8 31 Rxf8+ Kxf8 32 Rxh7 c4 White is pressing but I don't know whether his winning chances are greater than Black's drawing chances.

### **22 Nxe4 Bxb2**



**Question:** What did Nakamura miss?

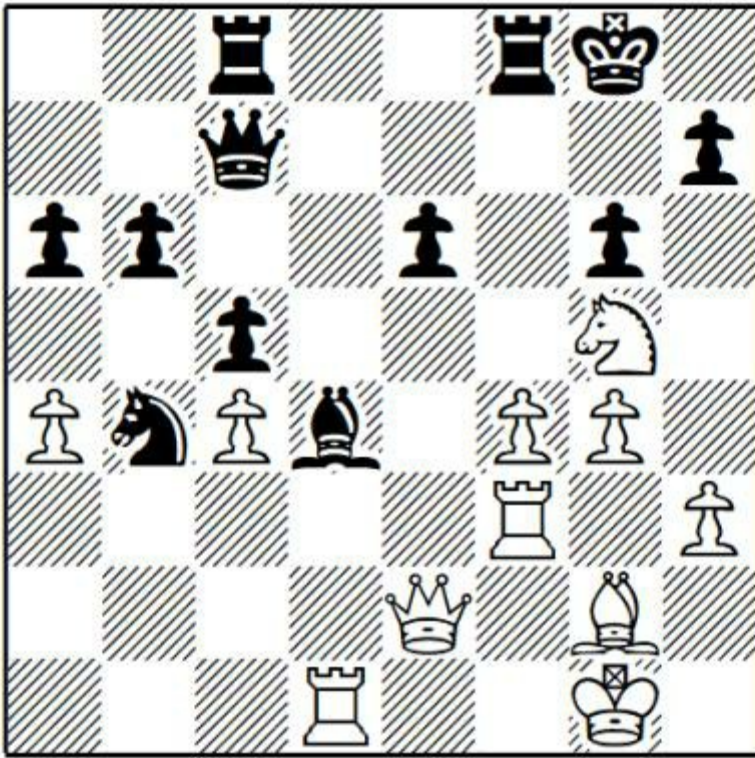
**23 Neg5!**

**Answer:** Creating horrible threats of Qxe6+. 23 Qxb2 Bxe4 would have been fine for Black.; 23 Nd6!? is also good for White but Artemiev's choice is much stronger.

**23 ... Bxf3**

23 ... Bg7 loses to anything, most simply 24 Qxe6+ Kh8 25 Rd7 Qc6 26 Nf7+ Rxf7 (26 ... Kg8 27 Nh6+ Kh8 28 Qg8+ Rxc8 29 Nf7 mate is unlikely to happen at this level!) 27 Qxf7, picking up a bishop and remaining a rook to the good.

**24 Rxf3 Bd4+**



**Question:** How should White respond to this check?

**25 Kh1!**

**Answer:** The safest square for the king. Others:

a) The over-enthusiastic 25 Rxd4?? would be an awful decision: 25 ... cxd4 26 Nxe6 Qxc4 wins.

b) 25 Kh2? Rce8 is already better for Black since 26 Nxe6? Qd6! 27 Re3!? Rf6! wins material.

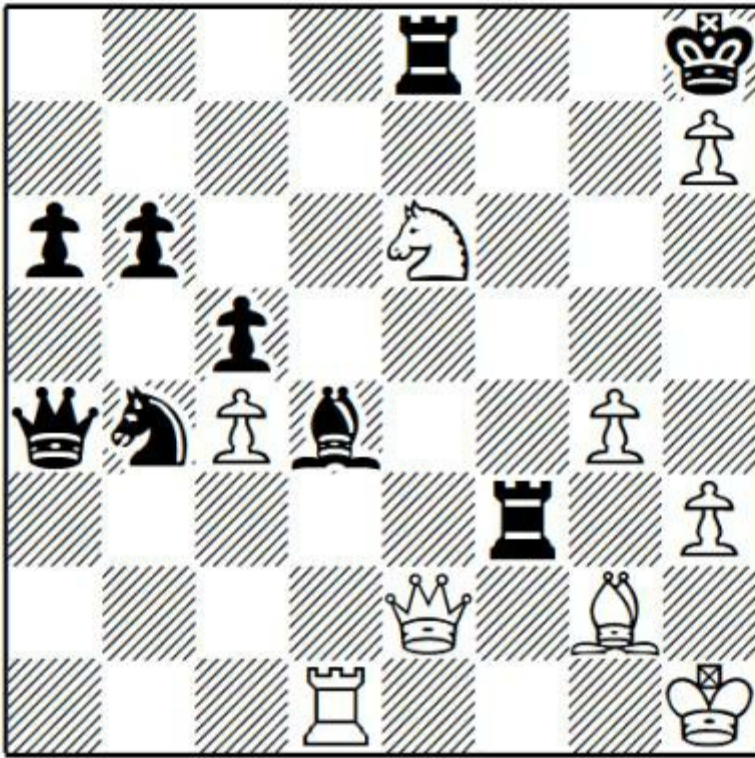
**25 ... Rce8 26 Nxe6 Qc6**

26 ... Qd6 27 f5! is the difference compared to putting the king on h2 on move 25.

**27 f5 Qxa4**

A very typical practical decision (see Black's 26th move from game 6 of the 1984/85 match between Karpov and Kasparov for a classic example). Black is lost and will fall under an attack in any event, so he takes on a4 to have "something to suffer for" and forces White to calculate rather than play on autopilot. Although the objective evaluation of the black position plummets, Nakamura's decision can't be criticised and came very close to bearing fruit.

**28 fxg6 Rxf3 29 gxh7+ Kh8**



**Question:** How should White recapture on f3?

**30 Bxf3??**

**Answer:** 30 Qxf3 wins with zero fuss. The knight is immune and, in view of the threatened 31 Rxd4, the engine thinks it's best for Black to take on d1.

**Question:** How can Black take advantage of his momentary reprieve?

**30 ... Nc6?**

**Answer:** The only move 30 ... Nd3! is a typical engine shot which would keep the game going. 31 Qxd3 (31 Rxd3? Qxc4 is level) 31 ... Rxe6 leaves Black facing an imposing pawn armada after 32 h4 or 32 g5 but he retains some hope of resisting.

**31 Nxc5! 1-0**

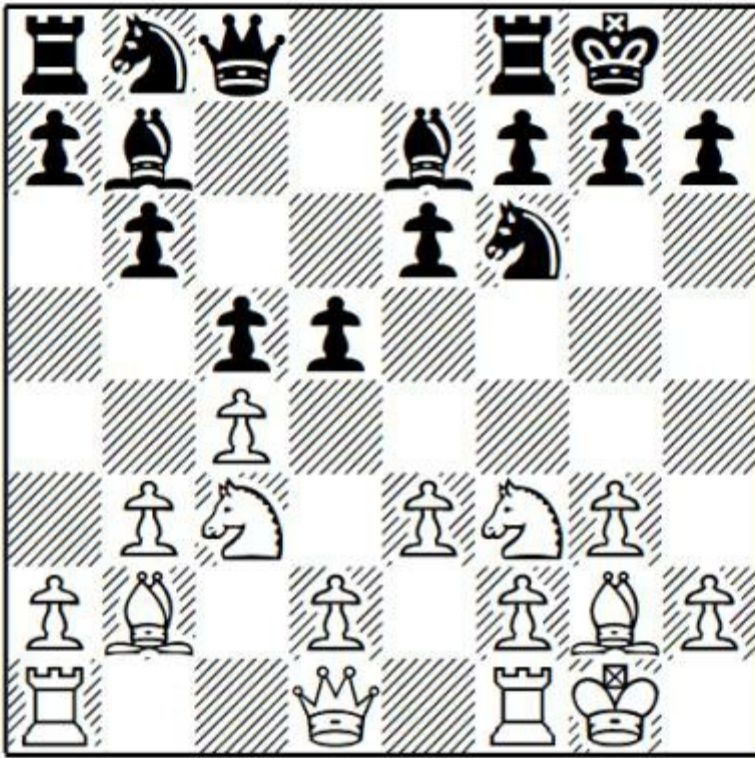
Everything hangs and Nakamura stopped the clock.

*Game 18*

**E.Cordova-M.Adams**

Baku Olympiad 2016

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 e6 4 c4 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 c5 7 e3 b6 8 Bb2 Bb7 9 Nc3 Qc8!?**



An interesting idea, which was not mentioned by Delchev or Demuth in their white repertoire books. Despite a couple of earlier games, the move came to popular attention after Sam Shankland used it to draw with Ray Robson in the US Championship 2016.

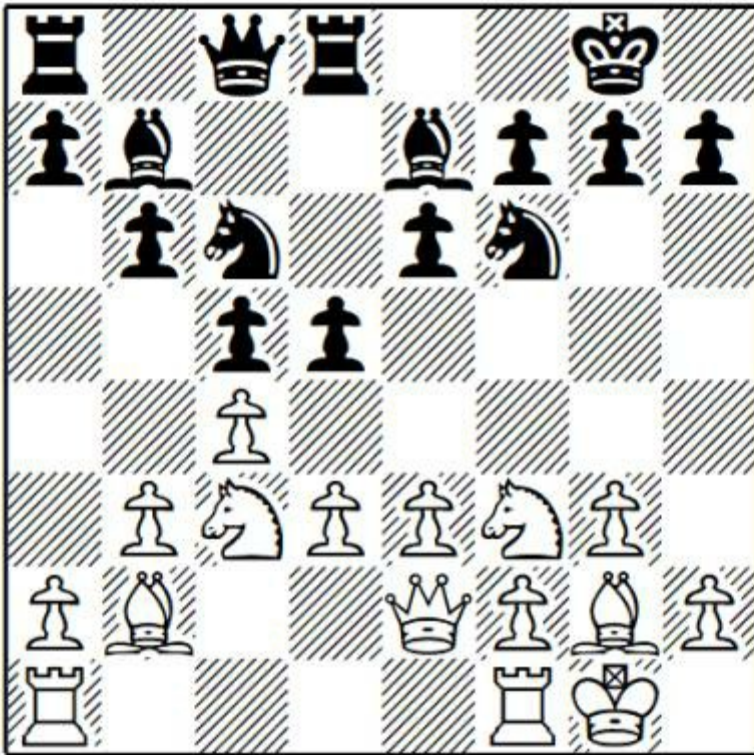
**10 Rc1**

Others:

a) 10 Ne5 Nc6 11 Nxc6 Bxc6 12 cxd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Bxd5 14 Qg4 g6 15 e4 Bc6 16 h4 was fine for Black in G.Kamsky-A.Riazantsev, Sochi 2017.

b) After 10 Qe2 Rd8 White's attempts have not been convincing:

b1) 11 d3 Nc6 and now:



b11) 12 Rfd1 d4 13 exd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 cxd4 is very comfortable for Black:

b111) 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Bxe4 a5 17 Rab1 Bxe4 18 Qxe4 Qd7 19 Bc1 Bc5 20 Bd2 Re8 21 f4 g6 22 Re1 Bb4 and a draw was agreed in D.Gordievsky-S.Shankland, Greensboro 2017.

b112) 15 Nb5 Bc5 16 Na3 was played in R.Edouard-E.Blomqvist, Novi Sad 2016, and would have been well met by 16 ... Bxg2 17 Kxg2 e5! since 18 Qxe5? Qc6+ 19 Kg1 Re8 and 20 ... Re2 with a huge initiative, more than compensating for the pawn. In fact the engines assess this position as winning for Black.

b113) 15 Bxb7 Qxb7 16 Nb1 Qc7 17 Nd2 e5 was pleasant for Black in G.Kaidanov-A.Erenberg, Caleta 2018.

b12) 12 Rac1 d4 13 exd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Bxg2 15 Kxg2 cxd4 was very comfortable for Black in K.Piorun-K.Sychev, Tallinn 2016.

b13) 12 Rad1 d4 13 exd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 cxd4 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 dxe4 e5 17 f4 was V.Sanal-R.Haria, Lisbon 2018, when Black would have been much better after 17 ... f6.

b2) 11 Rfd1 d4 12 exd4 cxd4 13 Nb5 d3 14 Qe5 Nc6 15 Qc7 Qxc7 16 Nxc7 Rac8 with a better endgame in D.Howell-E.Blomqvist, London 2016.

b3) 11 Rfc1 dxc4 12 bxc4 Nc6 13 d3 Rd7 was fine for Black in S.Matsenko-Y.Borges Feria, Matanzas 2017.

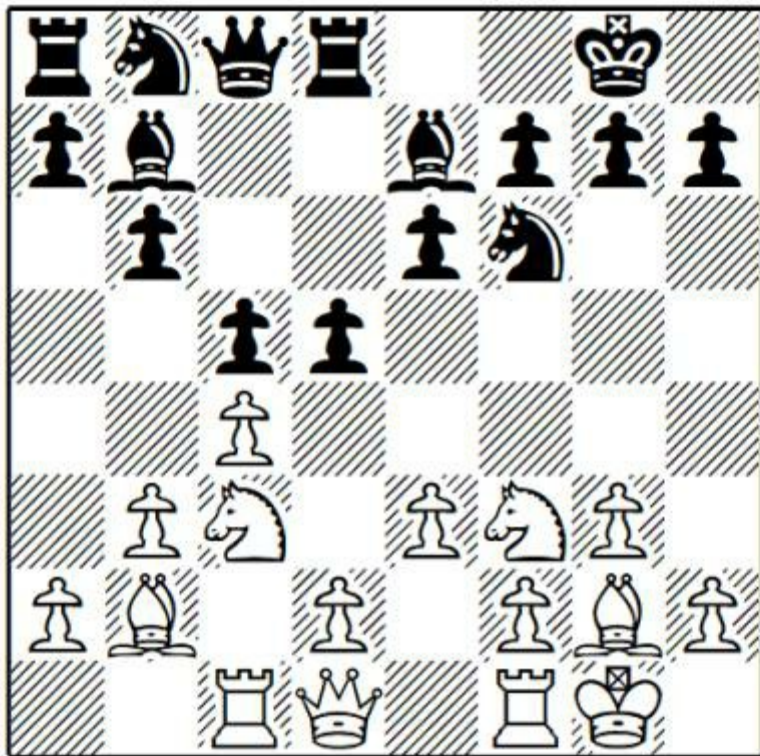
c) 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Bxd5 12 d4 led to an instructive game in V.Mikhalevski-R.Faizrahmanov, Novi Sad 2016: 12 ... Nd7 13 Re1 Be4! (a typical method of preventing the e4-push, or demanding favourable exchanges) 14 Nd2 Bxg2 15 Kxg2 cxd4 16 exd4 Nf6 17 Qf3 Nd5 18 Nc4 Qa6 19 a4 Bf6 20 Rec1 Rfd8 21 Ne5 Qb7 22 Kg1 Rac8 (Black's position is easier to play since White needs to keep active pieces to justify the weakness of his isolated pawn on d4) 23 Rc4 a6 24 Rac1 b5 25 axb5 axb5 26 Rc5? (missing a tactical shot; taking on c8 was better, when Black has a slight advantage but nothing more) 26 ... Bxe5 27 dxe5? (27 Rxc8 was essential, although Black is much

better after 27 ... Rxc8 28 dxe5 Rxc1+ 29 Bxc1 Qc7) 27 ... Rxc5 28 Rxc5

**Question:** What had White missed?

**Answer:** 28 ... Nf4!! 28 ... Ne3 works as well. White resigned.

**10 ... Rd8**



10 ... dxc4 11 bxc4 Ne4 12 d4 Nxc3 13 Rxc3 Rd8 was fine for Black in E.Tomashevsky-I.Popov, Sochi 2017, but perhaps White could try 12 Ne2.

**11 a3**

Or:

a) 11 cxd5 Nxd5 12 Nxd5 (12 d4 Nxc3 13 Bxc3 Be4 14 Ne5 Bxg2 15 Kxg2 Qb7+ 16 Qf3 Qxf3+ 17 Nxf3 Nc6 18 dxc5 Bxc5 was level in R.Robson-S.Shankland, St Louis 2016) 12 ... Bxd5 13 Qe2 (13 d4 a5 14 dxc5 bxc5 was fine for Black in V.Artemiev-V.Kramnik, Douglas 2018) 13 ... Qb7 14 Rfd1 Nd7 15 d4 Bf6 and Black had no problems in E.Iturrizaga Bonelli-G.Oparin, Monzon 2016.

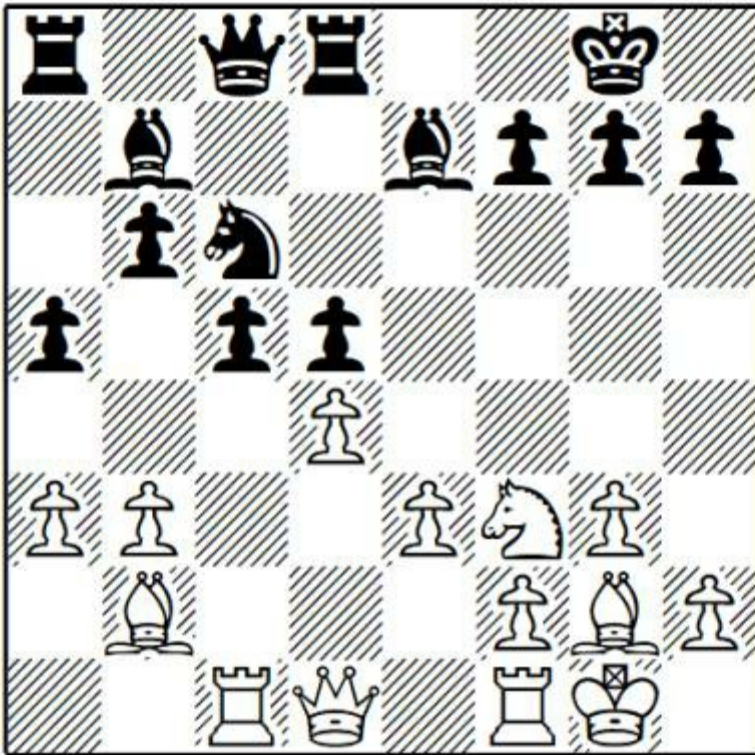
b) 11 Re1 Nc6 12 cxd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Rxd5 14 d4 Rd7 15 Qc2 was played in N.Meskovs-R.Berzinsh, Riga 2017 and now I think Black should have traded everything in the centre: 15 ... cxd4 16 Nxd4 Nxd4 17 Qxc8+ Rxc8 18 Bxd4 Ba3 19 Rxc8+ Bxc8 with a level endgame.

**11 ... Nc6 12 cxd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 exd5**

13 ... Rxd5 is also fine for Black but Adams handles hanging pawns really well from both sides.

**14 d4 a5**

This is the same advance I used in my game with Gawain Jones in a similar structure. It's useful to have options of ... a4 in some cases, and to prevent (or discourage) b4 by White.



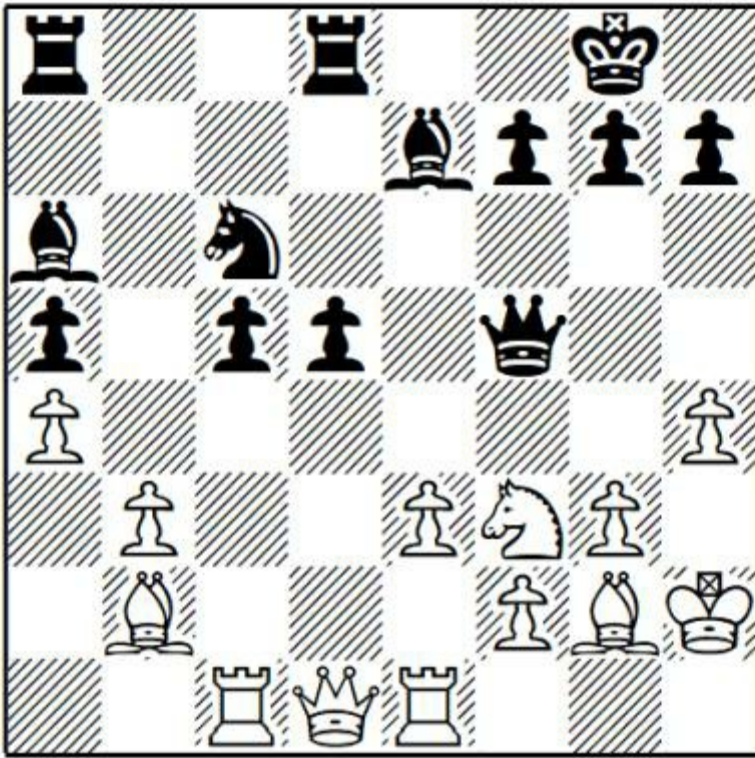
**15 h4**

15 Qc2 looks more prudent, with balanced chances.

**15 ... Qf5 16 Kh2 Ba6 17 Re1 Bb5 18 dxc5**

White is not particularly well placed to attack the hanging pawns so I would have preferred to delay this capture, although this is hardly a mistake.

**18 ... bxc5 19 a4 Ba6**



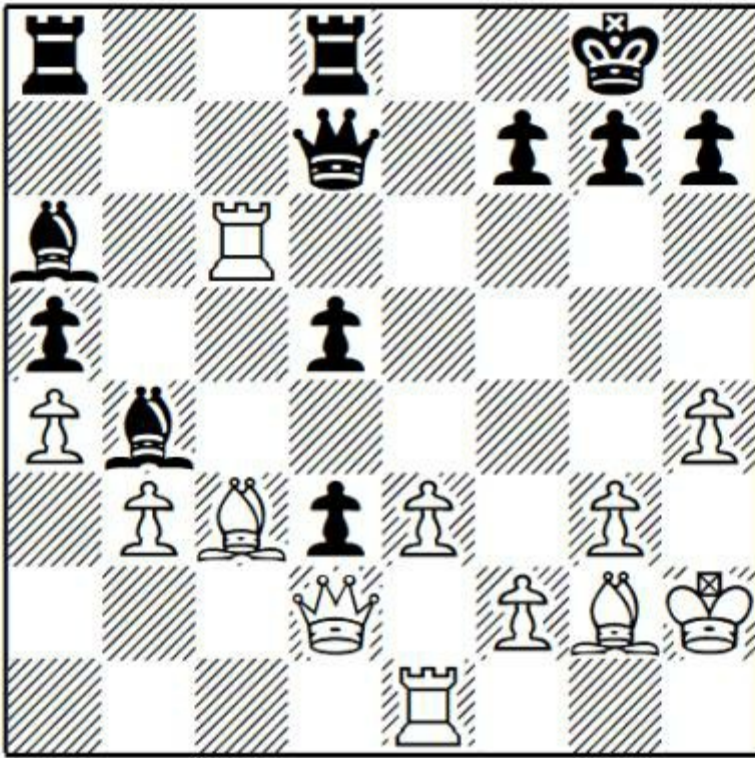
**20 Nd4!?**

Dramatically changing the course of the game. I'm not sure if Cordova thought he would gain the upper hand with this transformation, or if he felt that he was running out of useful moves. 20 Bd4 tries to do something similar. Black can take on d4 with complications, or play 20 ... c4 with a balanced position.

**20 ... cxd4 21 Rxc6 d3!?**

The most ambitious approach. 21 ... Qxf2 22 Bxd4 is unclear.

**22 Qd2 Bb4 23 Bc3 Qd7**



### 24 Bxb4

24 Rb6 Qa7 is also dynamically balanced, for example (24 ... Rdb8 25 Rxb8+ Rxb8 26 Bxb4 Rxb4 is unclear) 25 Bxb4 Qxb6 26 Bxa5 Qxb3 27 Bxd8 Rxd8 28 Qa5 Rf8.

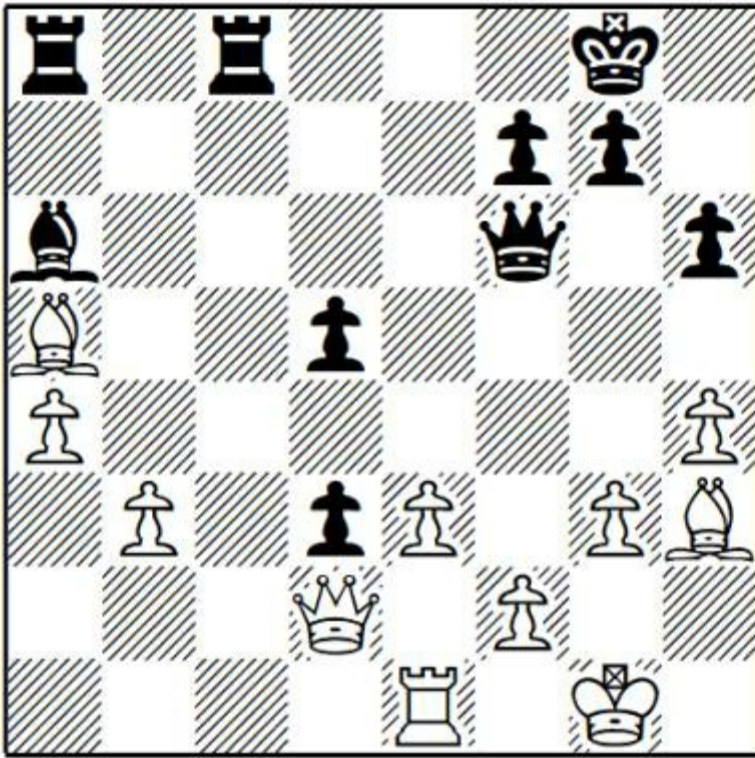
### 24 ... Qxc6 25 Bxa5 Rdc8 26 Bh3??

A very natural move, but a losing one! The main factors in the position are the opposite coloured bishops and the potentially weak white king, both of which mean that White can't afford to concede the initiative at any price. 26 e4! was better, with unclear play.

### 26 ... h6

The right idea (returning the exchange for the initiative and control of the c-file), but the wrong execution. The immediate 26 ... Qf6! 27 Bxc8 Rxc8 was stronger, winning immediately, since the threat of ... Rc2 can't be met in a sensible way.

### 27 Kg1 Qf6?



27 ... Rcb8 would retain a winning position.

**Question:** This position is a wonderful exercise in defensive calculation. How should White play?

**28 Rc1?**

**Answer:** 28 Bxc8! Rxc8 (28 ... Bxc8 29 Bc3 Qf5 30 e4 dxe4 31 Qf4 also gives reasonable drawing chances) 29 Rc1 is a very unpleasant position for White, who faces a tough task defending his king while blockading the d3-pawn. However, I haven't found a clear win for Black, for instance 29 ... Rxc1+ 30 Qxc1 Qf3 31 e4!? dxe4 32 Qe3 Qd1+ 33 Kh2 and the game continues.

**28 ... Rxc1+ 29 Qxc1 d4!**

Opening the d-file to support the passed pawn, and the h1-a8 diagonal to attack the king. Adams doesn't slip up in the technical phase.

**30 Bg2 Rc8 31 Qe1 Rc2 32 Bd2 Qe6 33 Bf3 dxe3 34 fxe3 Ra2 35 b4 Rxa4 36 e4 Ra2 37 Qe3 Qe5 38 Kf2 Qb2 39 Ke1 Qb1+ 40 Bd1 Ra1 41 Qf3 Qc2 0-1**

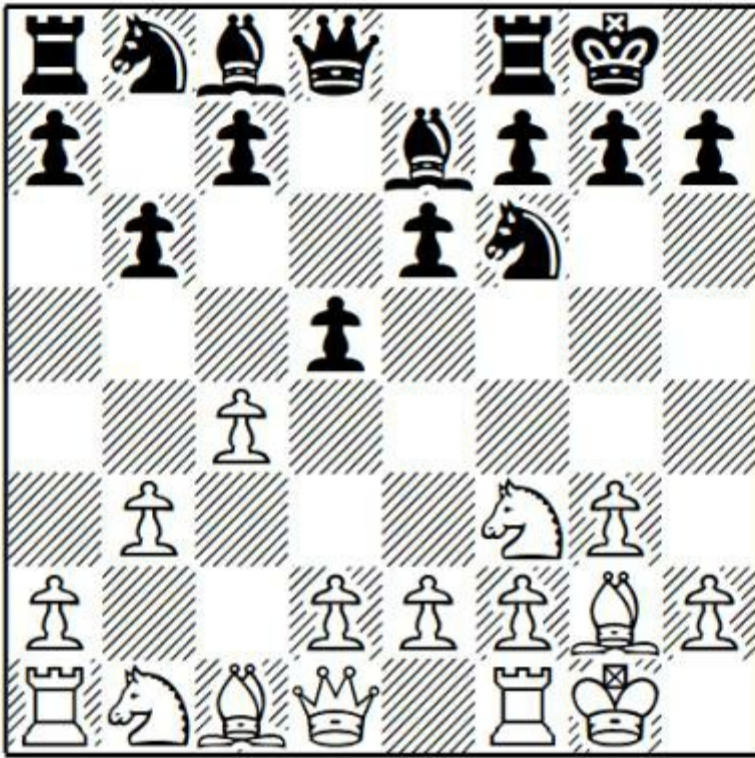
*Game 19*

**V.Kramnik-L.Aronian**

London Classic 2016

In the next few games we examine the very important structure with open c- and d-files, which can arise from many variations of the Queen's Gambit, Nimzo Indian etc.

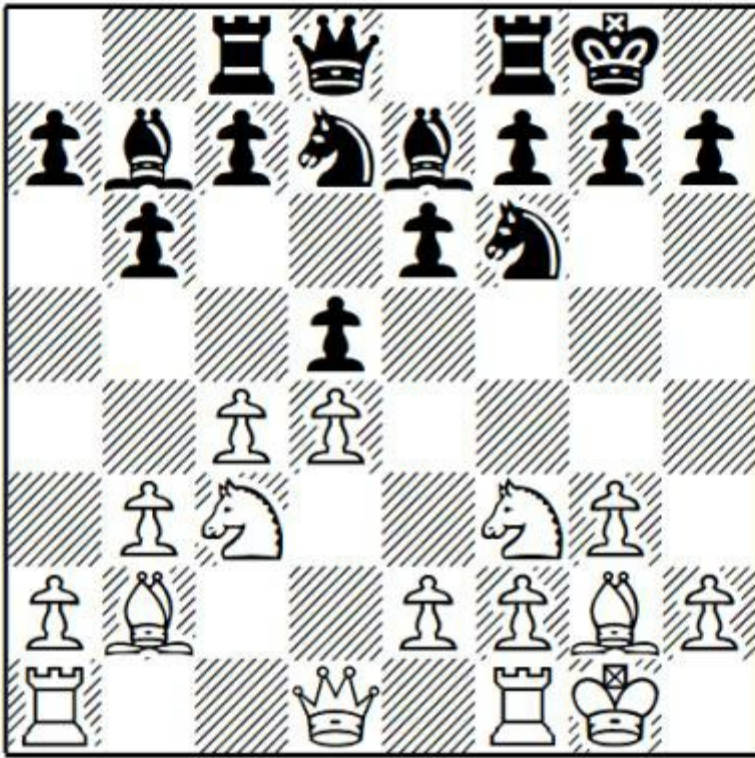
**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Be7 5 c4 0-0 6 b3 b6**



**7 Nc3**

We looked at 7 Bb2 Bb7 8 e3 in the game between Richard Rapport and Wei Yi. In the present game, Kramnik goes for a more direct approach.

**7 ... Bb7 8 d4 Nbd7 9 Bb2 Rc8**



Black is prepared for ... c5 (with or without an exchange on c4), and Kramnik decides to clarify the structure.

**10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Bxd5**

11 ... exd5 followed by ... c5 leads to hanging pawns, one of the many structures where Kramnik has won several model games.

**12 Qd3 c5**

A sound move, executing Black's typical freeing advance under reasonable conditions. Instead:

a) 12 ... Nf6 is a typical move, restraining White from advancing with e4. After 13 Rfd1 Be4 White seems to have very little.

b) Engines also suggest the radical 12 ... f5!?, where Black's light-square control compensates for his structural weaknesses, at least at the moment. I would be very reluctant to give Kramnik an outpost on e5 though, and it's possible that Aronian didn't even consider this move.

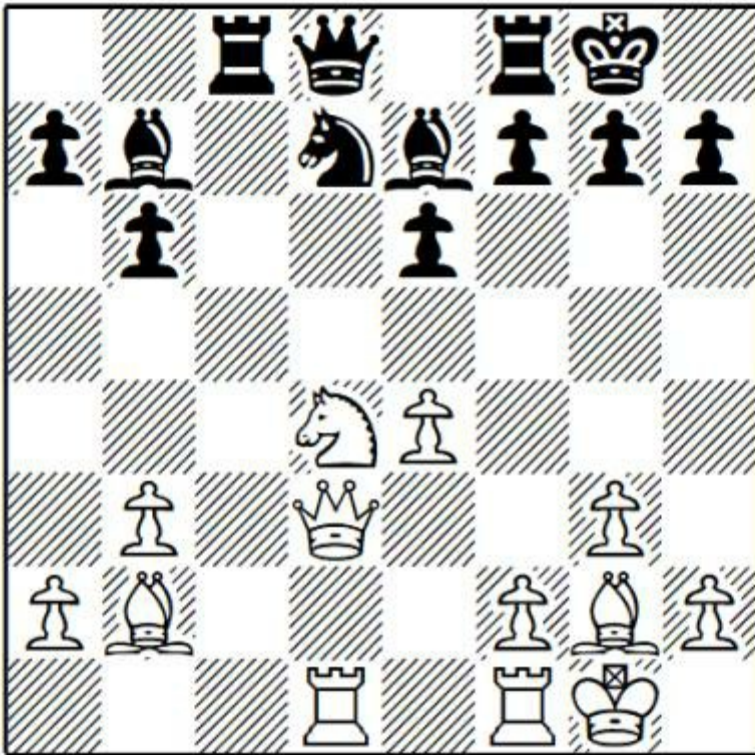
**13 e4 Bb7**

13 ... Ba8 leaves the bishop more tactically secure (see the note to White's 15th move) but also more passive-for example, the a6-square would be weak.

**14 Rad1**

The question of "which rook?" is often a difficult one, even with hindsight. A case could be made for 14 Rfd1, since the c- and d-files are likely to open. Conversely, perhaps Kramnik wanted to avoid exchanges of major pieces down those files?

**14 ... cxd4 15 Nxd4**



These symmetrical structures can be deceptively dangerous for Black, due to a number of factors:

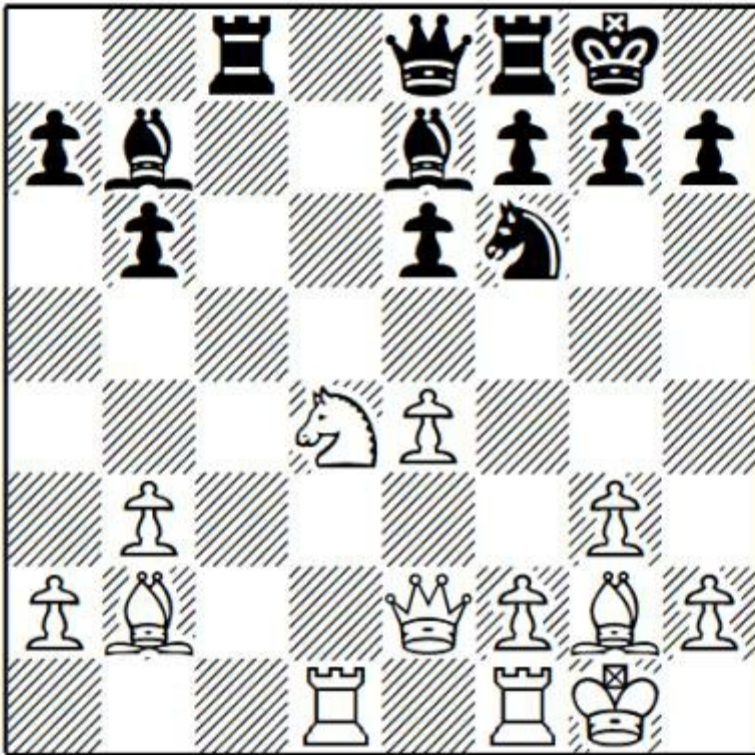
- 1) The tension on the h1-a8 diagonal favours White, who can choose when to push e5. In particular, the b7-bishop is undefended, while the white king can conveniently recapture on g2.
- 2) The bishop on b2 is much more active than its black counterpart.
- 3) The d7-knight is a tactical target and must move.
- 4) White has been the first to occupy the open d-file.
- 5) White has more space.
- 6) White will find a safe square for his queen more easily than Black.

It's not at all unusual to see rapid white wins in this structure, due to the above factors. However, in the game, Aronian manages to equalise.

### 15 ... Nf6

Engines suggest 15 ... Nc5 as a sound alternative. Aronian is a very dangerous attacker himself and I suspect he was reluctant to move pieces away from the kingside. In addition, the knight on c5 is unstable, and if Black supports it with the typical ... a5 he would weaken the b5-square and the b6-pawn.

### 16 Qe2 Qe8!?



16 ... Qc7 was another good option, when the queen can go to b8 if needed. Again, perhaps Aronian didn't want to allow Kramnik a shot at his king.

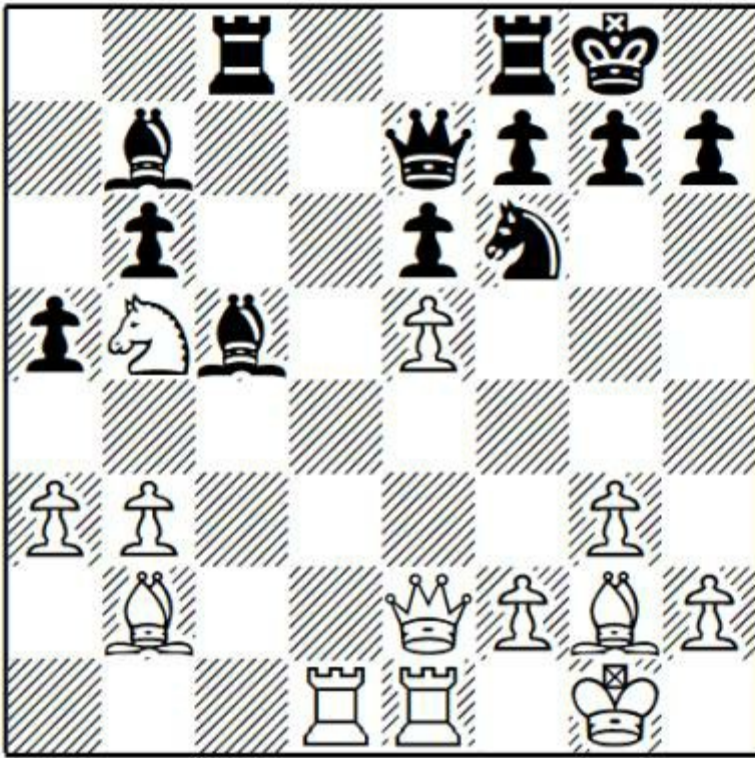
**17 a3 a5!**

Creating a safe square for the bishop on c5, which will free e7 for the queen. This is more stable than having a knight on c5 with a pawn on a5, since the black pieces control the b4-square very well.

**18 Rfe1 Bc5 19 Nb5**

19 Nc2 might have been better, though this depends on the assessment of a very complex variation which occurs in the game.

**19 ... Qe7 20 e5**



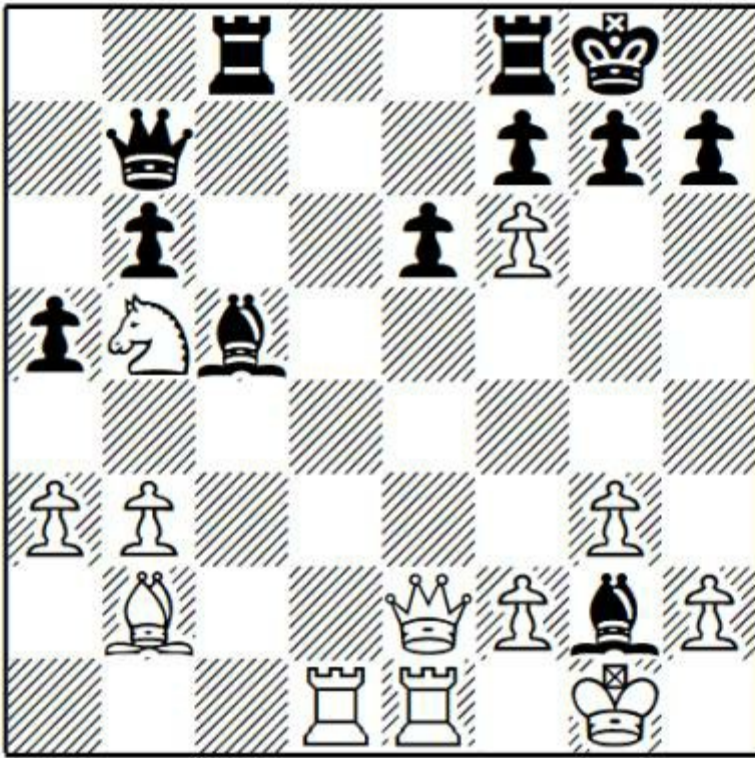
**20 ... Bxg2!?**

20 ... Nd5 is pretty safe but Aronian has gone deep into a forced line which looks, at first glance, losing for Black.

**21 exf6**

21 Nd6 Ne8 22 Nxc8 Qb7 leads to full compensation in all lines, for example 23 Nd6 Nxd6 24 exd6 Bh1 25 Qf1 Bd5 26 Rd3 Bxd6 and bishop pair plus a pawn for the exchange is fully sufficient to level the game, in view of White's permanent light squared weaknesses on the kingside.

**21 ... Qb7!**



The only move.

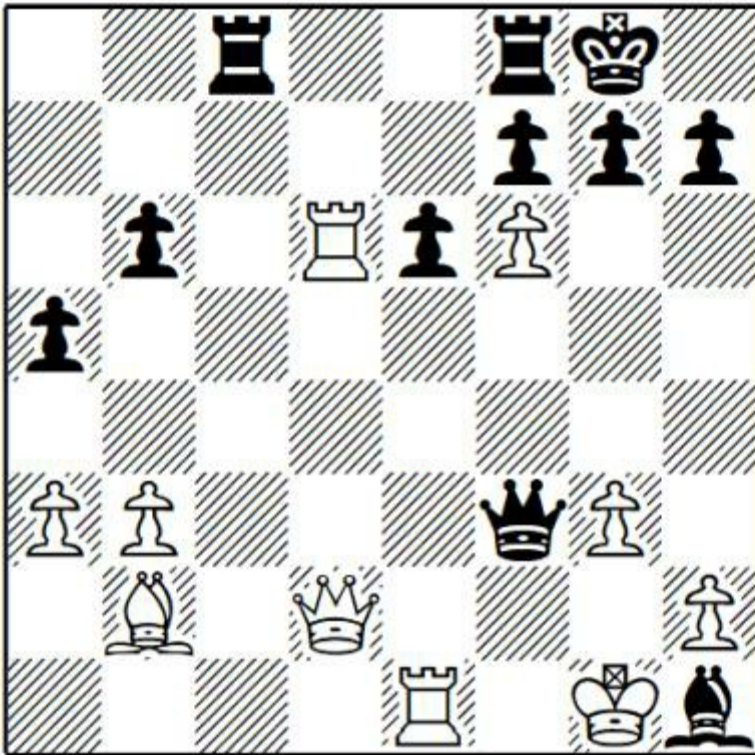
**22 Nd6**

22 fxg7 is no better, for example 22 ... Rfd8 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Rd1 Rxd1+ 25 Qxd1 Qd5 with equality.

**22 ... Bxd6 23 Rxd6 Bh1 24 f3**

24 f4 g6 leads to a bizarre situation where both kings are in permanent mating nets. 0.00 I'd say.

**24 ... Qxf3 25 Qd2**



25 Qxf3 Bxf3 26 fxg7 Rfe8 is very similar.

**25 ... Qg2+!**

Forcing the same endgame as in the last note. Black could continue the game with 25 ... Qa8!? with unclear play, but Aronian saw no reason to depart from his calculations.

**26 Qxg2 Bxg2 27 fxg7 Rfe8 28 Re2**

Or:

a) 28 Kxg2 Rc2+ is, of course, an important detail.

b) 28 Rc1 looks more dangerous for Black than for White, and I'm not sure why Kramnik rejected it, e.g. 28 ... Bh3 29 Rxc8 Rxc8 30 Rxb6 Rd8! 31 Bc3 Rc8! and White doesn't have a safe square for the bishop to keep the g7-pawn and avoid the repetition, for example 32 Be5 f6 33 Rb8 (33 Bxf6?? loses the bishop to 33 ... Rc1+ 34 Kf2 Rf1+) 33 ... Rxb8 34 Bxb8 e5! Black will eliminate one of White's queenside pawns, with a trivial draw.

**28 ... Bf3 29 Rf2 Be4 30 Re2 Bf3 31 Rf2 Be4 32 Re2 ½-½**

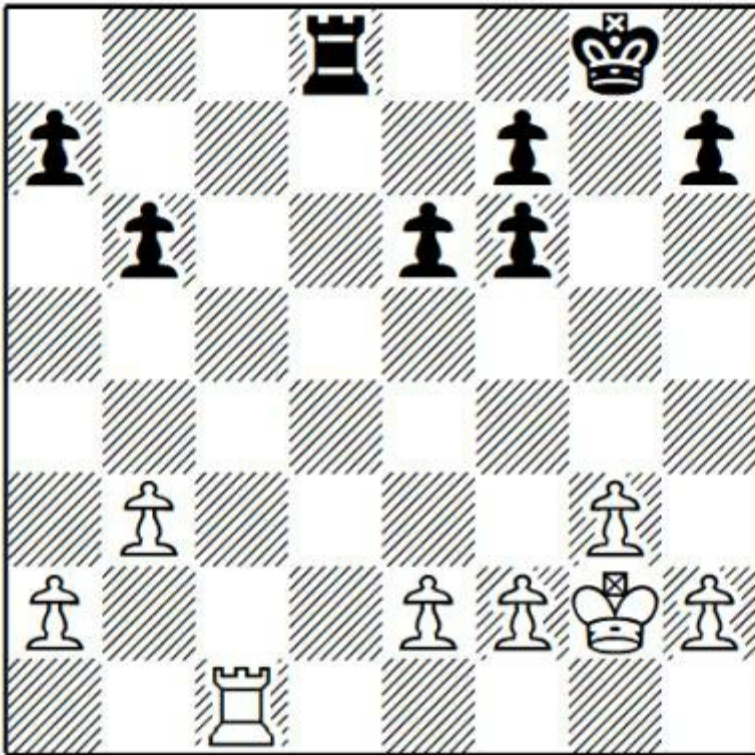
A very impressive game by both sides. I particularly liked Aronian's ... Qe8, ... Bc5 and ... Qe7 manoeuvre.

*Game 20*

**V.Kramnik-V.Anand**

Grand Chess Tour Rapidplay, Leuven 2016

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Be7 5 c4 0-0 6 b3 c5 7 Bb2 Nc6 8 cxd5 Nxd5 9 Nc3 Nxc3 10 Bxc3 Bd7 11 Qb1 Rc8 12 Rd1 Bf6 13 d4 Qe7 14 Qb2 cxd4 15 Nxd4 b6 16 Nxc6 Bxc6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 Qxf6 gxf6 19 Rac1 Bxg2 20 Kxg2 Rxc1 21 Rxc1 Rd8**



A very typical endgame, and so a very instructive one to study, especially when contested by two giants. The quality remains extremely high even with the reduced time control (my favourite example on this theme is Carlsen-Kramnik, Tal Memorial Blitz 2013, which you can find on YouTube).

**22 Rc7!**

An automatic move, activating the rook.

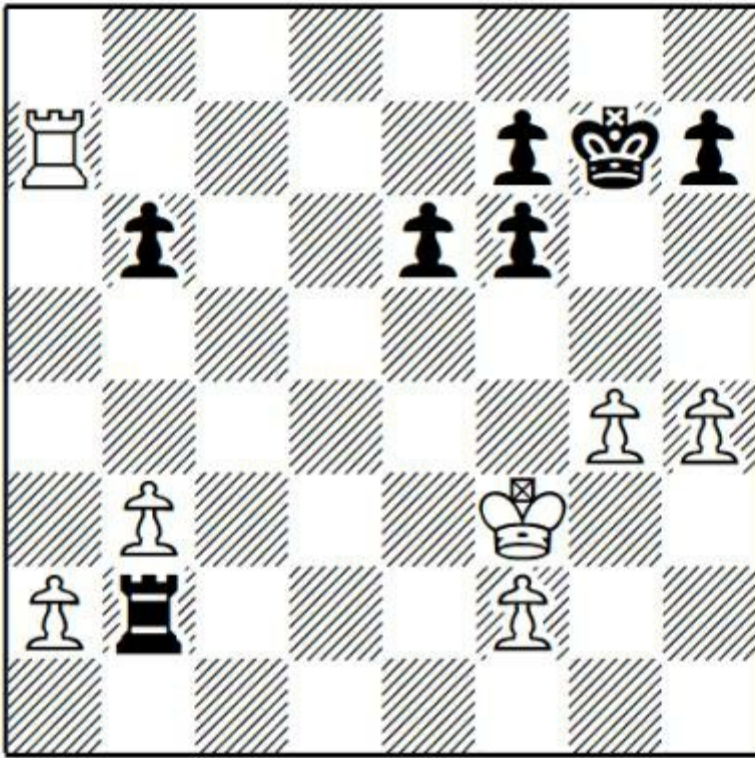
**22 ... Rd2!**

And an equally automatic response. Others:

a) 22 ... a5 23 Rc6 Rd2 24 a4 Rxe2 25 Rxb6 f5 is also logical.

b) 22 ... Ra8?? is horrible and would never be played by one of these guys, since the rook is condemned to passivity.

**23 Rxa7 Rxe2 24 Kf3 Rb2 25 g4 Kg7 26 h4**



**26 ... e5**

This creates some potential targets on the kingside, but seems to be good enough. Alternatives:

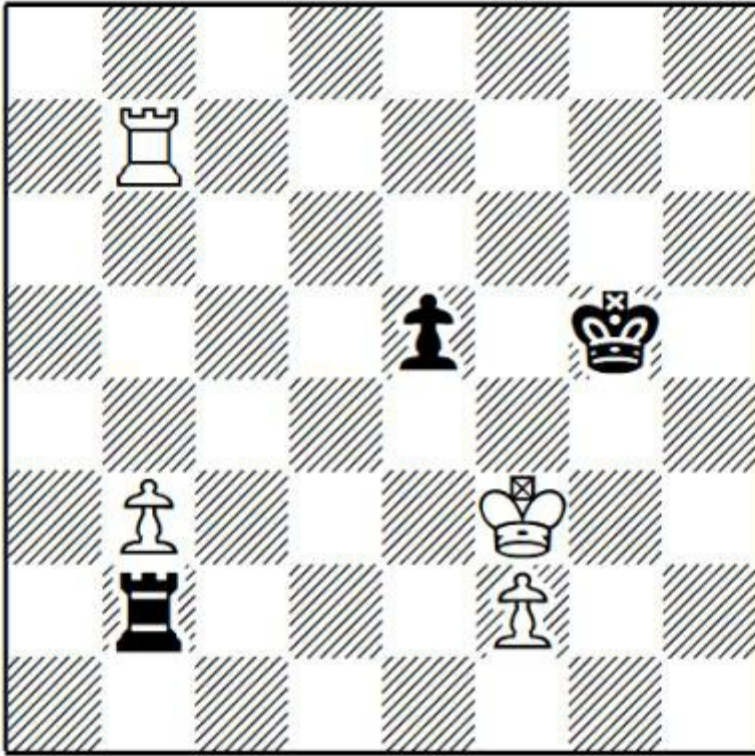
a) 26 ... f5 27 gxf5 exf5 looks structurally horrible, but Black gets good counterplay against the white pawns on the kingside.

b) 26 ... b5 27 Ra5 h5 28 gxh5 Kh6 is another promising defence, which seems to draw comfortably after 29 Rxb5 Rxa2 30 b4 Rb2.

**27 Ra6**

Or 27 h5 f5 28 g5 e4+ with counterplay.

**27 ... Kg6 28 Rxb6 Rxa2 29 g5 Kh5! 30 Rxf6 Kxh4 31 Rxf7 Kxg5 32 Rxh7 Rb2 33 Rb7**



This is, unsurprisingly, a draw according to the tablebases.

**33 ... Kf5 34 Ke3 Rc2**

34 ... Ke6 is a simpler defence.

**35 Kd3! Ra2**

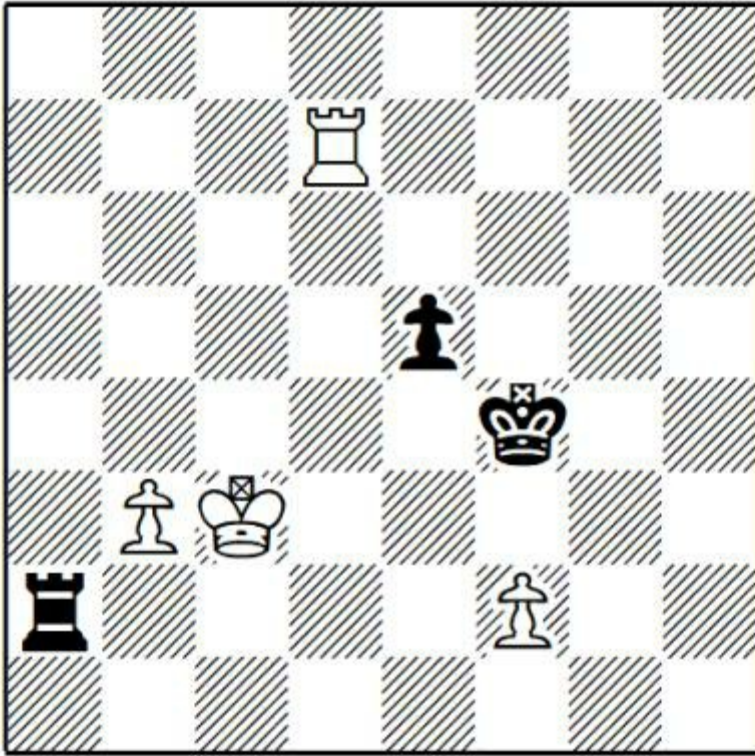
35 ... Rxf2?? 36 Rf7+.

**36 Rc7 Rb2 37 Kc3 Ra2 38 Rd7!?**

A good attempt, though the position remains a draw.

**38 ... Kf4??**

Both 38 ... Ke4 and 38 ... Ra8 were good enough to draw.

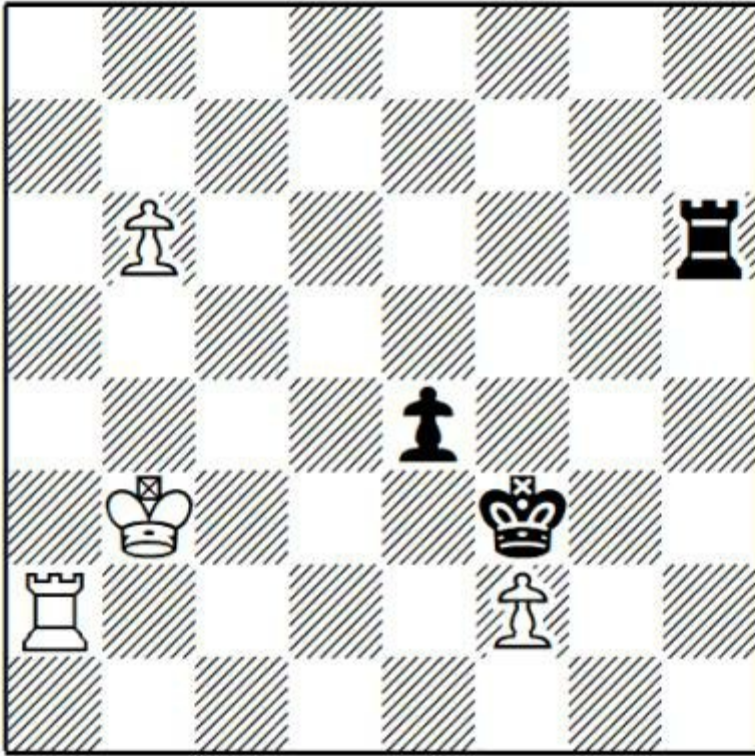


**Question:** White to play and win!

**39 Rd2!**

**Answer:** The only winning move, putting the rook on b2 from where it supports both pawns in an optimal way.

**39 ... Ra8 40 b4 Rc8+ 41 Kb3 Rb8 42 Rd6!? Ke4! 43 Rd2! Kf3 44 Rb2! e4 45 Ra2 Rh8 46 b5 Rh2 47 b6! Rh6**



**Question:** Has White blundered the pawn?

**48 Ra6**

**Answer:** No! Threatening 49 b7.

**48 ... Rh1**

Black should have tried 48 ... Kxf2 49 b7 Rxa6 50 b8Q although he can't setup a fortress.

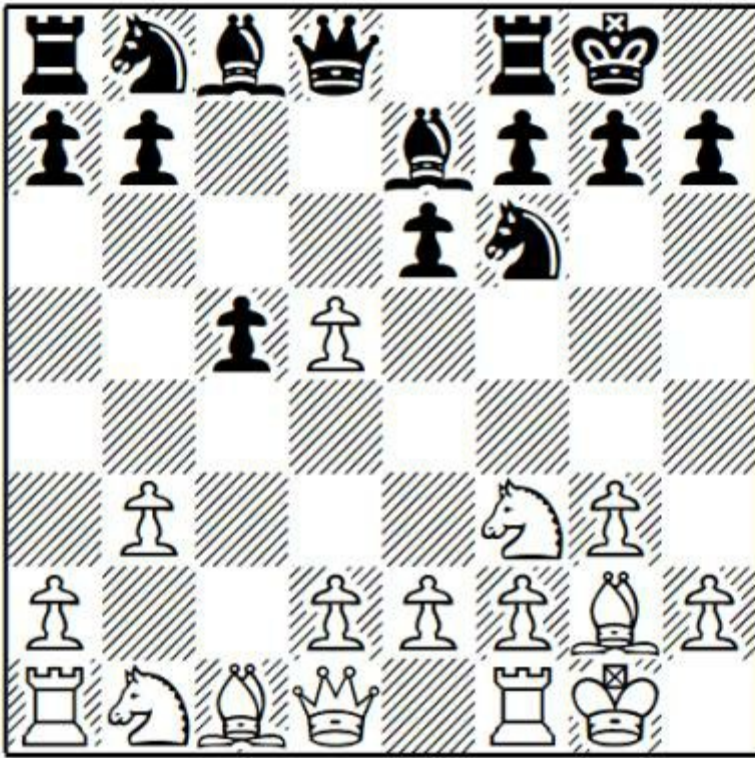
**49 Kc2 Rh6 50 Ra3+! Kxf2 51 b7 1-0**

*Game 21*

**G.Jones-E.Safarli**

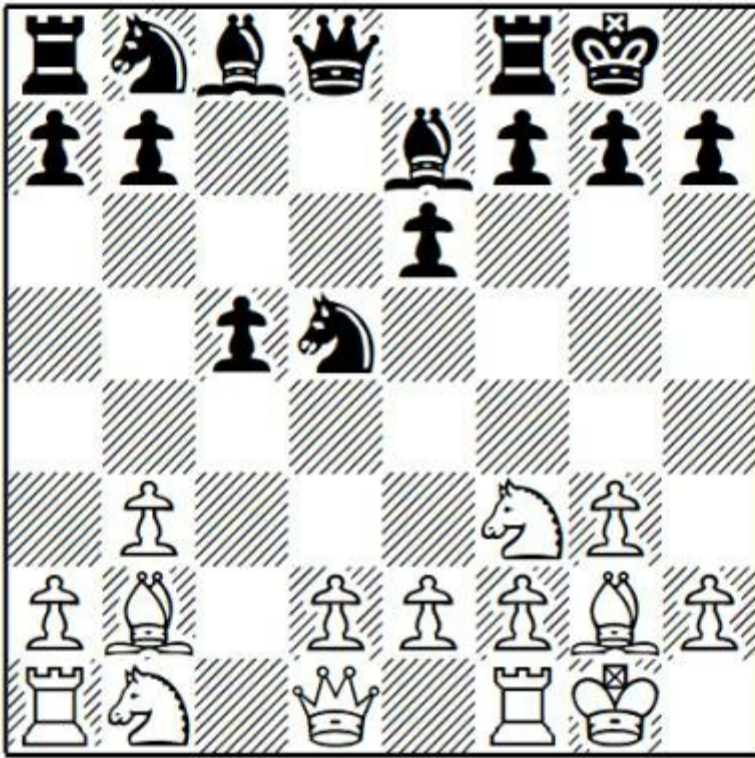
World Team Championship, Astana 2019

**1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 c5 7 cxd5**



Suggested to Gawain by Jon Speelman before the game. The top English players have recently reclaimed their national opening, with thematic games by Adams, Howell and McShane.

**7 ... Nxd5 8 Bb2**

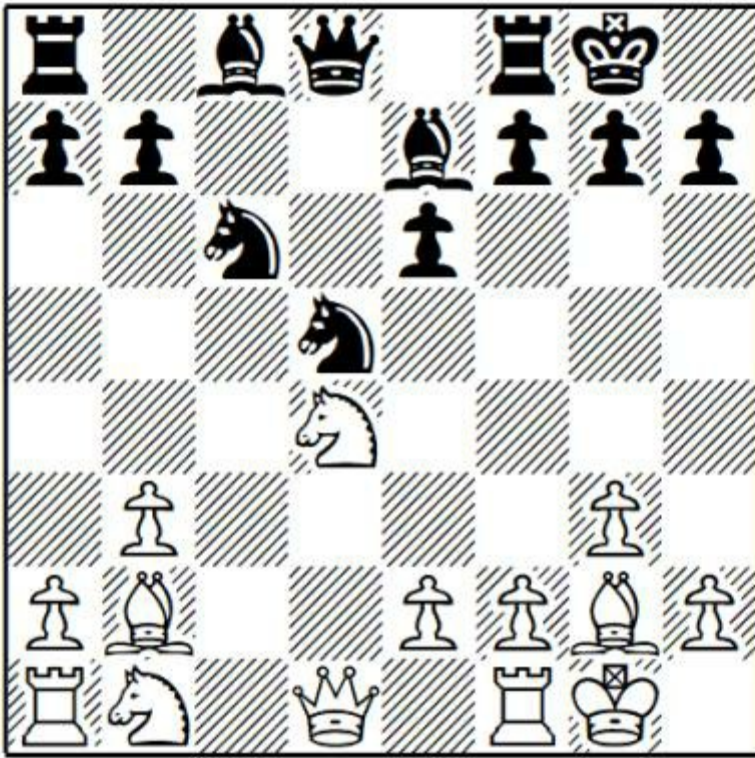


### 8 ... Nc6

This relatively fresh position has been extensively tested by top players with both colours, for example in the rapid tournament in Leuven in 2016. It's remarkable to see the elite defending the same position with both colours, coming up with minor improvements much like in the great QGD clashes of the past like the Capablanca-Alekhine match in 1927.

Jones points out 8 ... b6!? as an additional option, which looks very solid. 9 d4 (9 Nc3 Bb7 10 d4 Nd7 11 Nxd5 Bxd5 12 Rc1 Rc8 was fine for Black in N.Vitiugov-M.Matlakov, Izhevsk 2019) 9 ... Bb7 10 dxc5 (10 e4 Nc7 11 Nbd2 Nc6 12 Nc4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 cxd4 14 Bxd4 I.Cheparinov-Wang Yue, China 2018 and now 14 ... Rc8 looks fine) 10 ... Bxc5 11 Nc3 Nd7 12 Nxd5 (12 h4?! D.Andreikin-P.Leko, Hengshui 2019 is well met by 12 ... Nxc3 13 Bxc3 Rc8 with counterplay) 12 ... Bxd5 13 Qd3 Qe7 equalised in W.So-V.Kramnik, Paris 2018.

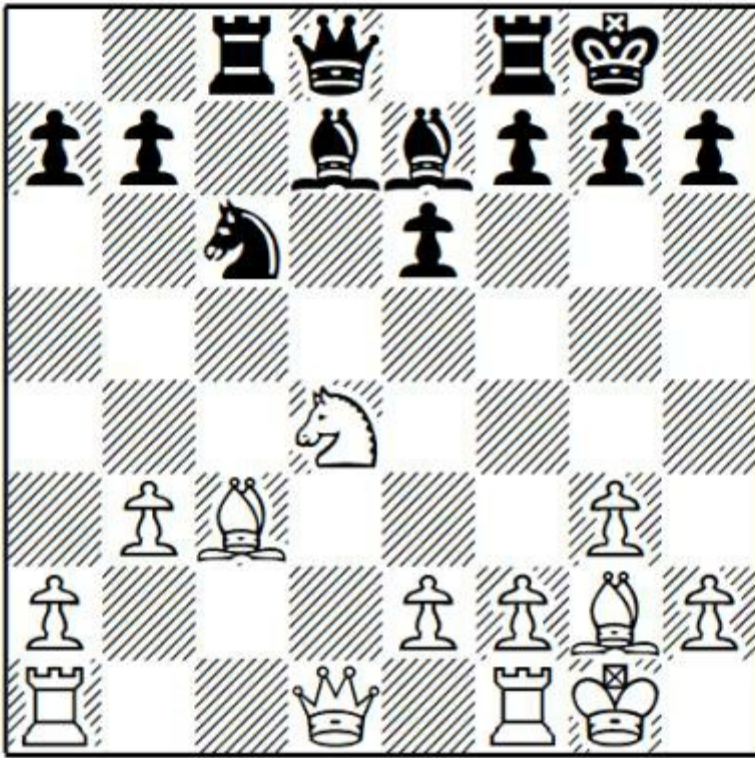
### 9 d4 cxd4 10 Nxd4



**10 ... Nxd4**

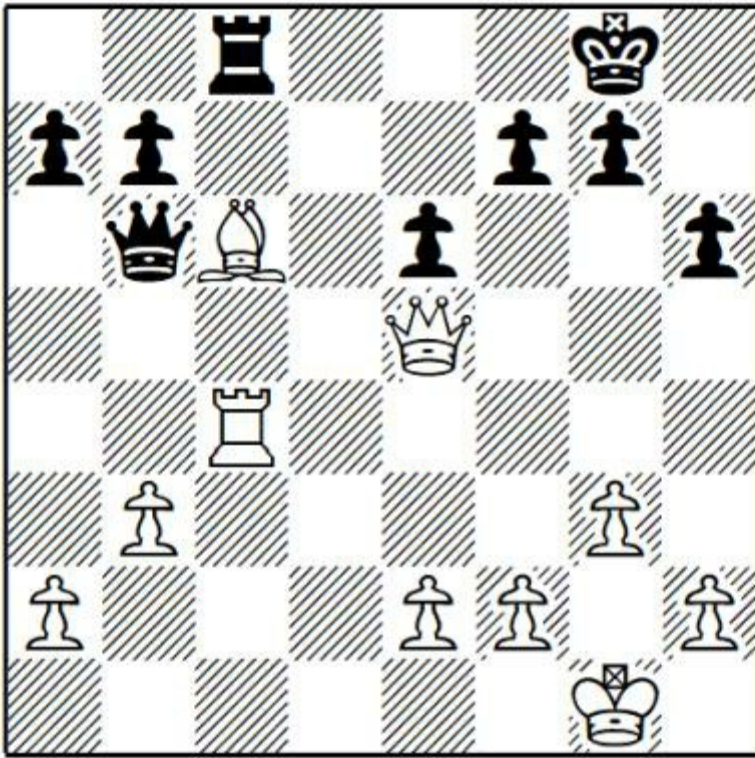
Or 10 ... Bd7 and now:

a) 11 Nc3 was Gawain's intention. Play can continue 11 ... Nxc3 12 Bxc3 Rc8 and now:



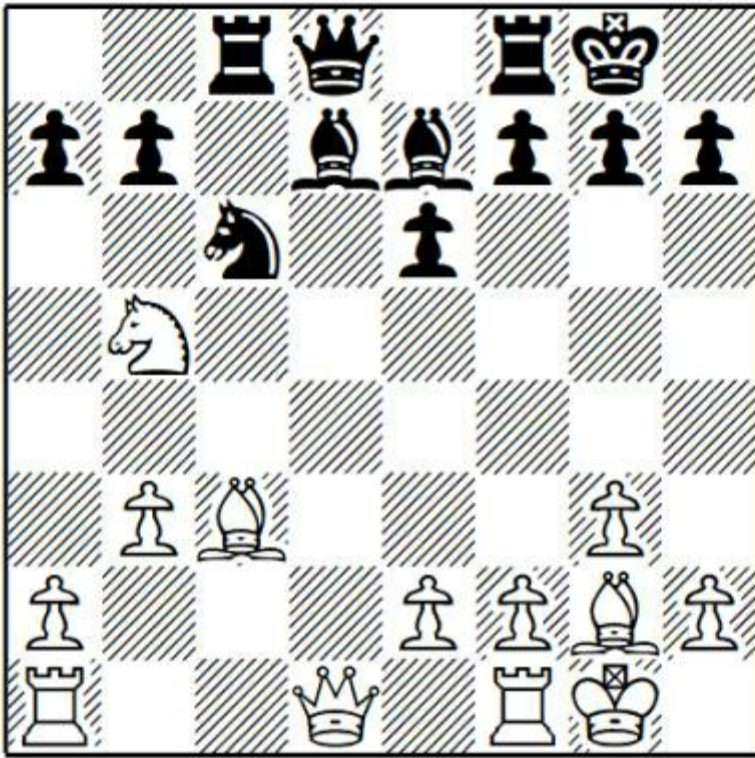
b1) 13 Rc1 Nxd4 14 Qxd4 (14 Bxd4 b6 15 Qd2 Rxc1 16 Rxc1 Bb5 17 Qc3 f6 18 Bf3 Ba3 and Black equalised in W.So-L.Dominguez Perez, St Louis 2017) 14 ... Bf6 15 Qd3 Bxc3 16 Rxc3 Rxc3 17 Qxc3 Qb6 18 Rc1 is an important position to understand. An engine will hold this pretty effortlessly with Black, but a human needs to be accurate with relatively little upside, e.g. 18 ... h6 19 Qe5 (19 Qc7?! Rc8! doesn't win in view of 20 Qf4, but is still an improvement of Black's position) 19 ... Bc6 20 Bxc6 Rc8 21 Rc4

**Question:** How should Black recapture on c6?



*Answer:* Not 21 ... bxc6?? which is a horrible move on positional grounds (for example, 22 Qc3 is seriously better for White), but also on tactical grounds, as Van Kampen demonstrates. I suppose we all have bad days at the office, even those of us rated above 2740. Instead 21 ... Rxc6 is fine for Black, for example 22 Rg4 g6. After 21 ... bxc6?? 22 Rg4! g5 (presumably 22 ... g6 23 Rxc6+ fxg6 24 Qxe6+ is what Black missed) 23 Qf6 Qd8 24 Qxh6 f6 25 h4 and Black resigned in R.Van Kampen-R.Wojtaszek, Germany 2016.

b2) 13 Nb5?? provided a good tactical puzzle in P.Svidler-Y.Yu, Riyadh 2017.



**Question:** Black to play and win!

**Answer:** 13 ... Nb8! makes a decisive material gain, for example 14 Bxb7 Rc5 15 a4 Bxb5 16 Qxd8 Rxd8 17 Bb4 Bxe2 18 Bxc5 Bxc5 and Black should win.

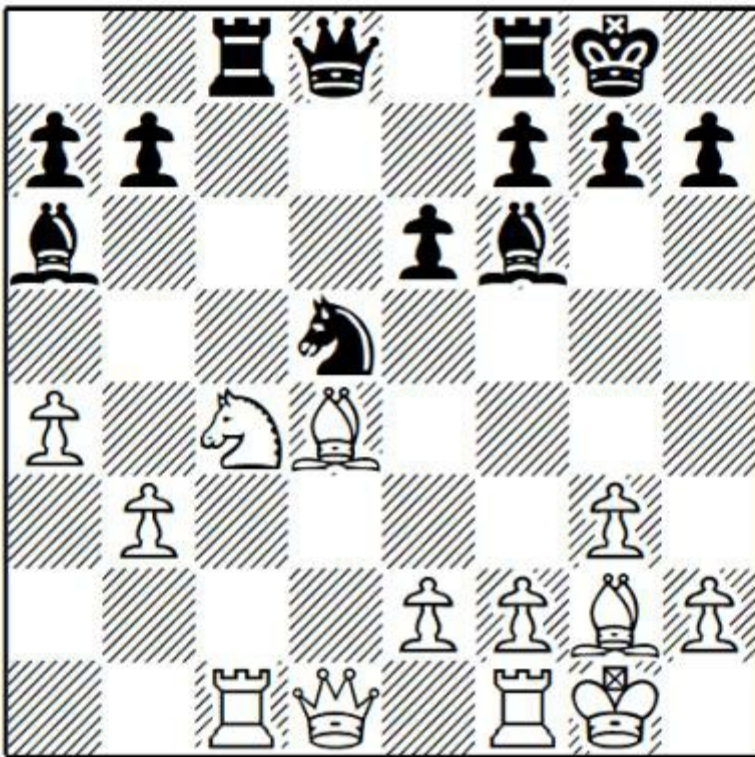
b3) 13 Qd3 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 has been tried by Giri a couple of times, presumably with the idea of avoiding exchanges on the c-file:

b31) 14 ... Bc6 15 Be4 (or 15 Bxa7 Qxd3 16 exd3 Ba3 with full positional compensation for the pawn) 15 ... Bxe4 16 Qxe4 Qc7 17 Be3 Qc6 18 Qxc6 Rxc6 19 Rac1 a6 20 Rxc6 bxc6 and White went on to win an impressive endgame in A.Giri-W.So, chess.com INT 2017.

b32) 14 ... Bb5?! 15 Qxb5 Qxd4 16 Qxb7 Ba3 17 Rad1 Qb6 18 Qxb6 axb6 and Vishy held the draw pretty effortlessly in A.Giri-V.Anand, Leuven 2016 but this seems unnecessary for players less skilled in fortresses.

b33) I haven't found anything wrong with 14 ... b6 followed by ... Bc6, when Black retains level material.

b) 11 Na3 Bf6 (11 ... Rc8 12 Nc4 Nxd4 13 Qxd4 Bf6 14 Qxa7 Bxb2 15 Nxb2 and I haven't found full compensation for the pawn in H.Nakamura-L.Dominguez Perez, St Louis 2017) 12 Nc4 Nxd4 13 Bxd4 Bb5 (13 ... Bc6 is more natural and was essayed by Karjakin; 14 Ne5 was A.Grischuk-S.Karjakin, Paris 2017 and now I like 14 ... Bxe5!? 15 Bxe5 Qg5 16 Bb2 Nb4 when White has a minimal advantage in the endgame) 14 Rc1 Rc8 15 a4 Ba6 and now:

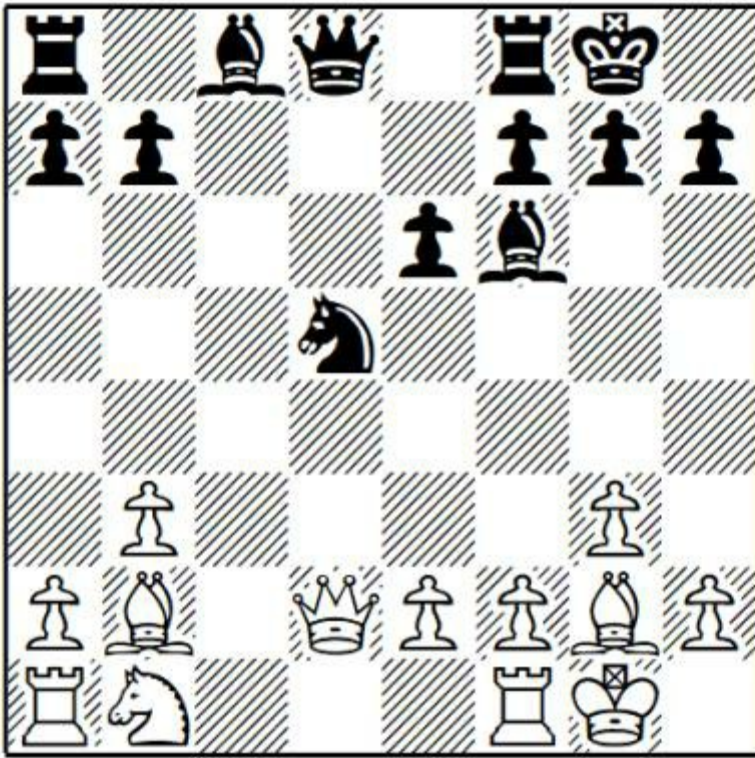


b1) 16 e3 is Kramnik's improvement over his game against Giri: 16 ... b6 (Roiz suggests 16 ... b5!? 17 axb5 Bxb5 18 Re1 Nb4 19 Qd2 Be7 "and Black is close to full equality.") 17 Bxd5 Qxd5 (in his excellent notes to this game, Roiz gives 17 ... Bxd4 18 Bxe6 fxe6 19 Qxd4 Qxd4 20 exd4 Rf3! 21 Ne5 Rfc3 "and the activity of the pieces offers Black full compensation for a pawn.") 18 Bxf6 Qxd1?! (the engine gives 18 ... gxf6 19 Qxd5 exd5 20 Nd6 Rcd8 21 Nb5 Bxb5 22 axb5 d4 with a drawn rook endgame) 19 Rfxd1 gxf6 20 Rd7 Bxc4 21 bxc4 a6? (Roiz gives 21 ... a5 22 Rd6 Rb8 23 Kf1 Rfc8 24 Ke2 Kf8 25 Kd3 Ke7 26 Rd4 Rc6 with a defensible endgame) 22 Ra7? (22 Rd6 Rb8 23 Rb1 Rfc8 24 Rxb6 Rxb6 25 Rxb6 and the a-pawn falls with an endgame which I suspect is lost, though I'm far from sure) 22 ... b5? (Black would have been okay after 22 ... a5) 23 axb5 axb5 24 c5! Ra8? (Roiz gives 24 ... Kg7 25 Ra6 – Roiz points out that 25 Rb7? Rb8 26 c6? fails to 26 ... Rxb7 27 cxb7 Rb8, showing one of the points of 24 ... Kg7 – 25 ... b4 26 Rb6 Rb8 27 Rc4 b3 and Roiz concludes "Black manages to keep the passed b-pawn, though the position still seems difficult after 28 Rg4+ Kh6 29 Rgb4 Rbc8 30 Rc4 Rb8 31 Kg2 Rfc8 32 Rcb4 Ra8 33 Rb7 with a clear advantage for White") 25 Rb7 Rfb8 26 c6! b4 (of course not 26 ... Rxb7 27 cxb7 Rb8 28 Rc8+ when White wins) 27 Rc4 b3 28 Kg2! (denying Black a check on the back rank) 28 ... Kg7 29 Rg4+ Kf8 30 Ra4! (30 Rgb4 as given by Roiz also wins) 30 ... Kg7 31 Rxa8 Rxa8 32 Rxb3 and White soon converted in V.Kramnik-H.Nakamura, Leuven 2016.

b2) 16 Re1 b6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 Bxd5 exd5 19 Qxd5 Rfd8 20 Qe5 Qxe5 21 Nxe5 Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Bxe2 with a level endgame in W.So-Y.Kryvoruchko, Baku 2016.

b3) 16 Bxf6 Qxf6 17 Bxd5 Rcd8 18 e4 exd5 19 exd5 with a healthy extra pawn in A.Giri-V.Kramnik, Paris 2016, but after 16 ... Nxf6! White would have had nothing.

**11 Qxd4 Bf6 12 Qd2**



White has scored heavily from this position. As often happens in these symmetrical structures with the c- and d-pawn exchanged, although he has no weaknesses Black struggles to complete development and connect his rooks without concessions.

**12 ... Bxb2**

Or:

a) Forcing exchanges with 12 ... Nf4 13 gxf4 Qxd2 14 Nxd2 Bxb2 15 Rab1 (Gawain Jones suggests the immediate 15 Rad1!?) 15 ... Bf6 16 Rbc1 led to a trademark squeeze in V.Kramnik-S.Mamedyarov, Paris 2018, though objectively Black can't have much to worry about here.

b) 12 ... Ne3?? 13 Qxd8 1-0 was an unfortunate end to the game D.Anton Guijarro-C.Aravindh in the World Rapid Championship in Moscow 2019.

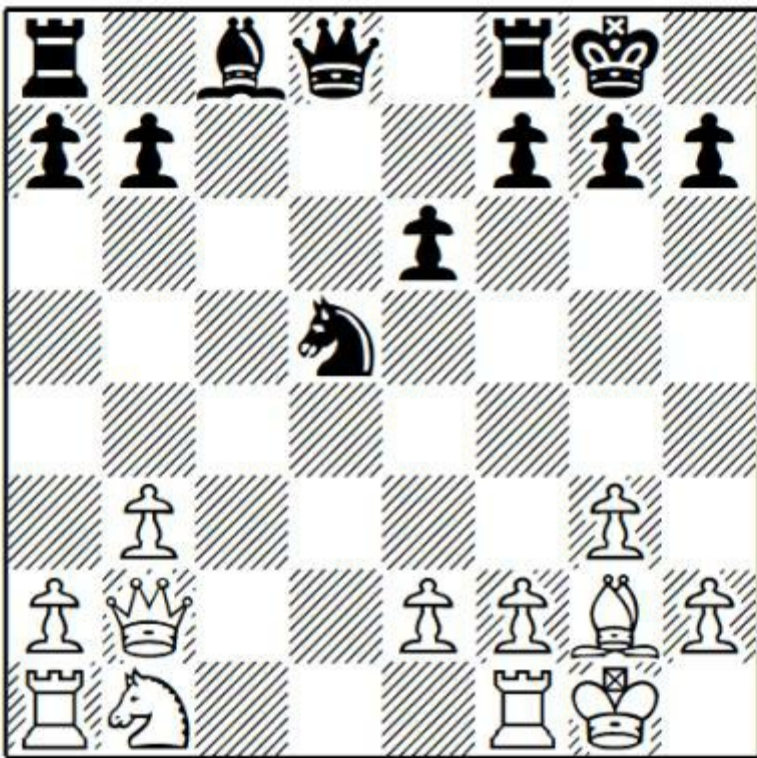
c) 12 ... b6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 Nc3 Rd8 15 Nxd5 exd5 left Black with an unpleasant IQP position in M.Petrosyan-M.Kravtsiv, Gjakova 2016. White played 16 Rfd1 with an edge, presumably worried that it would be difficult to break the blockade after 16 Bxd5 Be6 17 e4 Bxd5 18 exd5 Rd6.

d) 12 ... Bd7 is given as critical by Jones: 13 Bxd5 (13 Na3 Bc6 has been tested in a couple of games but looks comfortable for Black) 13 ... exd5 14 Rd1 Rc8 15 Nc3 (15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 Na3 Rfe8 17 Nc2 was played in H.Melkumyan-M.Thejkumar, Abu Dhabi 2016; Black has enough activity to compensate for his inferior structure after 17 ... Bg4, or even the AlphaZero/Dubov style 17 ... h5!?) 15 ... Bc6 16 Nxd5 Bxb2! (16 ... Qxd5 17 Qxd5 Bxd5 18 Bxf6 Be6 "is asking to get tortured for no reason, though the opposite-colored bishops and the incoming rook to c2 give great chances for a draw." (Ramirez)) 17 Qxb2 Bxd5 18 e4 Bxe4! 19 Rxd8 Rfxd8 and White couldn't break down the fortress in V.Kramnik-H.Nakamura, Zuerich 2015.

I like Ramirez' explanation, "your computer might give a serious advantage for White, but it is a lie. It's impossible to break down Black's defenses. White's king is permanently weak and there are no weaknesses to attack." Nakamura has a penchant for positional queen sacrifices in the Réti (see

J.Ehlvest-H.Nakamura, US Championship 2009 for another example).

**13 Qxb2**



**13 ... Rb8**

13 ... Bd7 L.Martinez Duany-R.Garcia Pantoja, Havana 2018 is well met by 14 Rd1 with pressure.

**14 Rd1 Qf6 15 Qd4!?**

Jones' attempted improvement over the 15 Qxf6 of L.Pantsulaia-S.Ter Sahakyan, Martuni 2008.

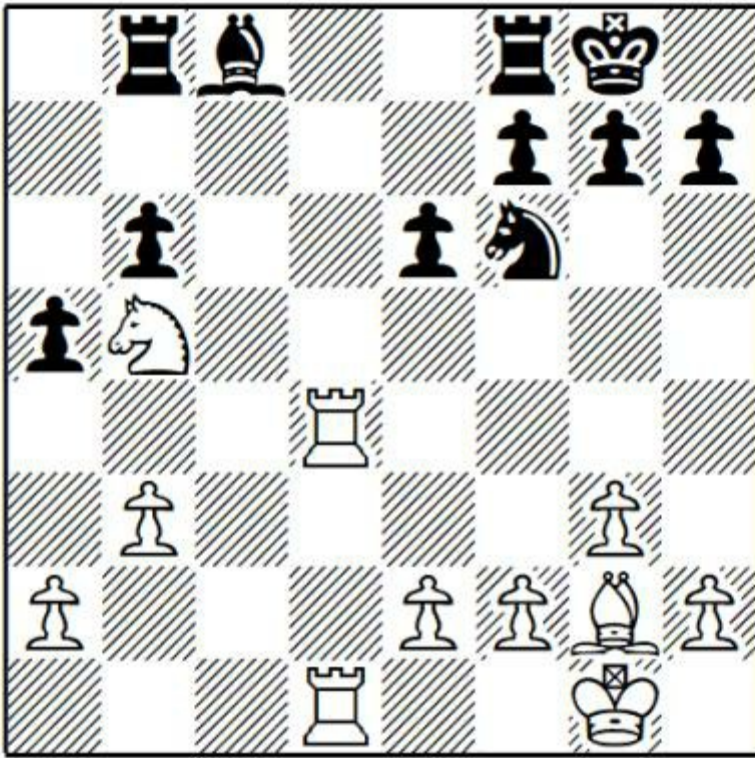
**15 ... Qxd4 16 Rxd4 Nf6 17 Na3**

Aiming at both b5 and c4.

**17 ... b6 18 Nb5 a5**

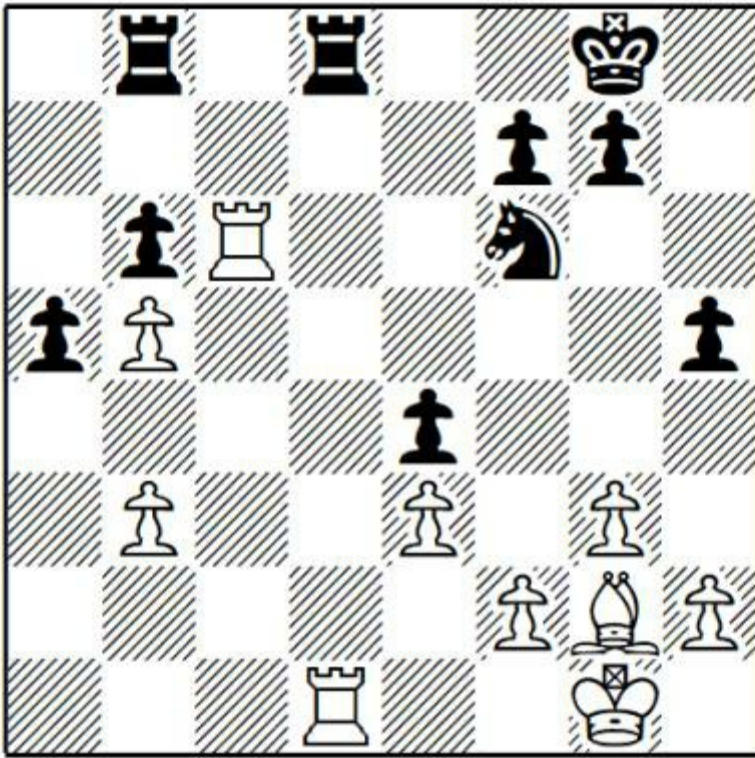
Jones gives convincing analysis to show that 18 ... a6 and 18 ... Ba6 were no better.

**19 Rad1**



Having secured control of the d-file, White has a clear advantage. Jones went on to win a fine game which he has fully analysed for Chessbase Magazine (and which you can find in Megabase 2020). Here I'll just give an outline of some of his main conclusions.

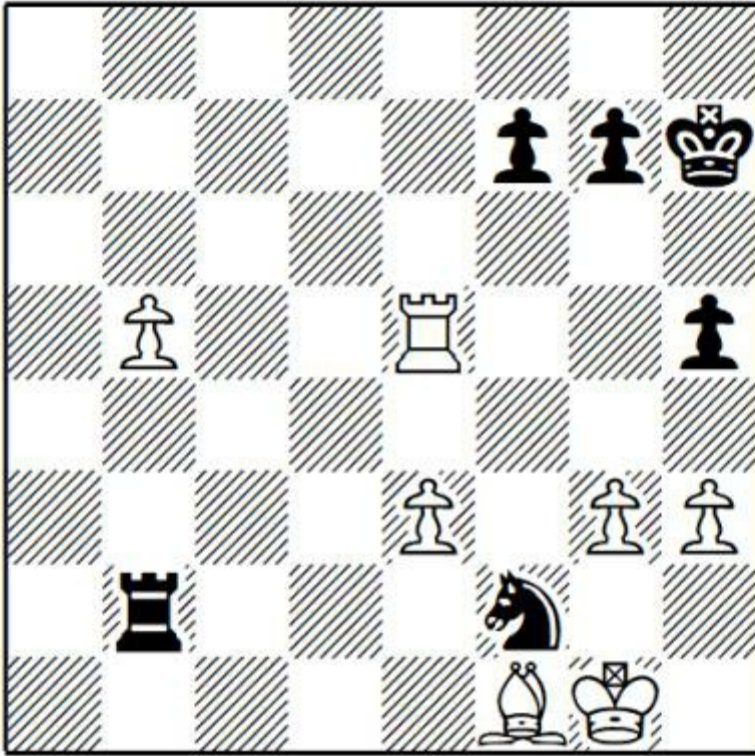
**19 ... Ba6 20 a4 e5 21 Rd6 Bxb5 22 axb5 e4 23 Rc6 h5 24 e3?! Rfd8?!**



Black can equalise with very accurate play after 24 ... Rfc8 as shown by Jones, who recommends avoiding this line with 24 Rdd6.

**25 Rxd8+ Rxd8 26 Rxb6 Rd1+ 27 Bf1 Rb1 28 Ra6 Rxb3 29 Rxa5 Ng4 30 Ra4 Rb2 31 Rxe4 Nxf2 32 Re5 Ng4 33 Re8+ Kh7 34 h3 Nf2 35 Re5**

Jones gives 35 b6! as a strong alternative although, in the game, no clear draw for Black is apparent.



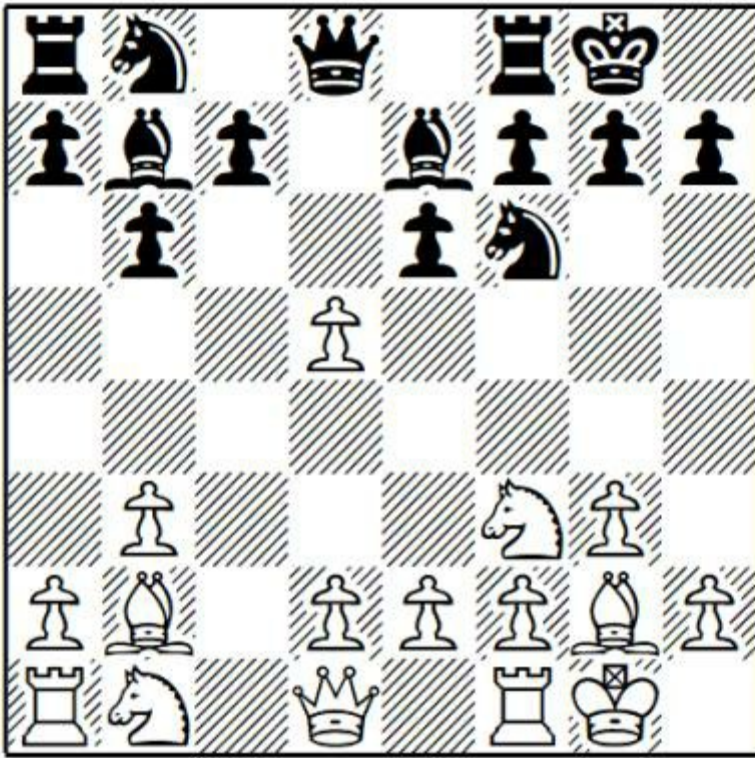
35 ... Nd1 36 Rxf5+ Kg6 37 Re5 Kf6 38 Re4 g5 39 h4 Nc3 40 Rc4 Nd1 41 Rc6+ Kg7 42 h5 f6 43 Bd3 g4 44 h6+ Kxh6 45 Rxf6+ Kg5 46 Rg6+ Kh5 47 Re6 Nf2 48 Re5+ Kh6 49 Bf5 Nh3+ 50 Kf1 Kh5 51 Rc5 Ng5 52 Bc2 Kh6 53 Ke1 Nf3+ 54 Kd1 Kg7 55 Kc1 Rb4 56 Bd3 Kf6 57 Kc2 Ne5 58 Kc3 Ra4 59 Bc2 Ra3+ 60 Kd4 Nf3+ 61 Kd5 Rxe3 62 b6 Re5+ 63 Kc4 Re2 64 Kb4 Nd4 65 b7 Nxc2+ 66 Kc3 1-0

*Game 22*

**W.So-A.Onischuk**

US Championship, St Louis 2017

1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Be7 5 c4 0-0 6 b3 b6 7 Bb2 Bb7 8 cxd5



Again, 8 e3 brings us to Rapport-Wei Yi.

**8 ... Nxd5**

As always, Black is not forced to enter the symmetrical structure and can play for hanging pawns with 8 ... exd5 if he likes.

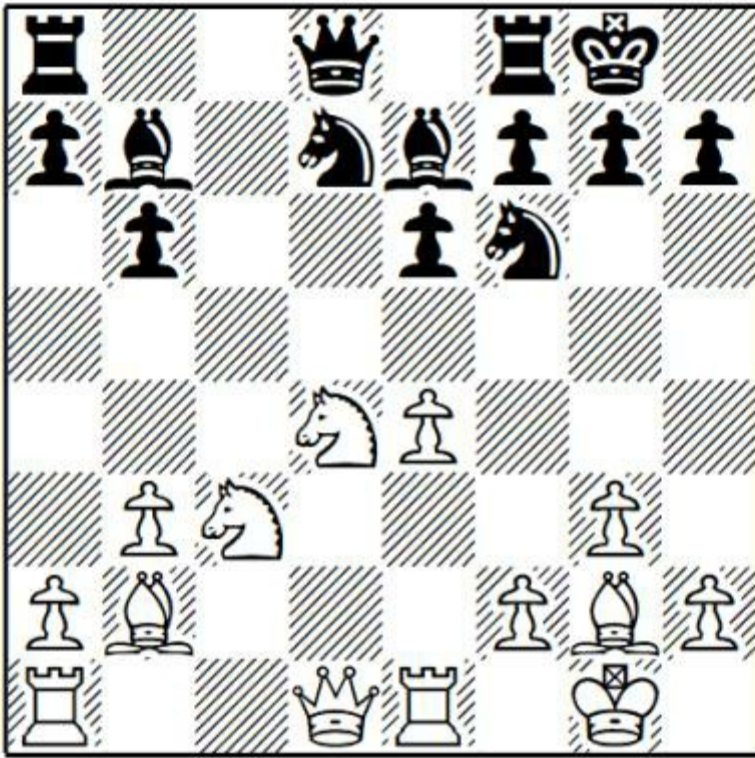
**9 d4 Nd7**

The immediate 9 ... c5 10 dxc5 Bxc5 is also sound and has been played by Kramnik (more than once), Leko, Aronian, Dominguez ...

**10 Re1**

White prepares to defend a pawn on e4, while the immediate 10 e4 N5f6 forces White to advance (11 e5) or awkwardly defend (11 Nfd2) the pawn.

**10 ... c5 11 e4 N5f6 12 Nc3 cxd4 13 Nxd4**



### 13 ... Ne5

After 13 ... Bc5 14 Re2! is a strong novelty introduced by Grischuk, and now:

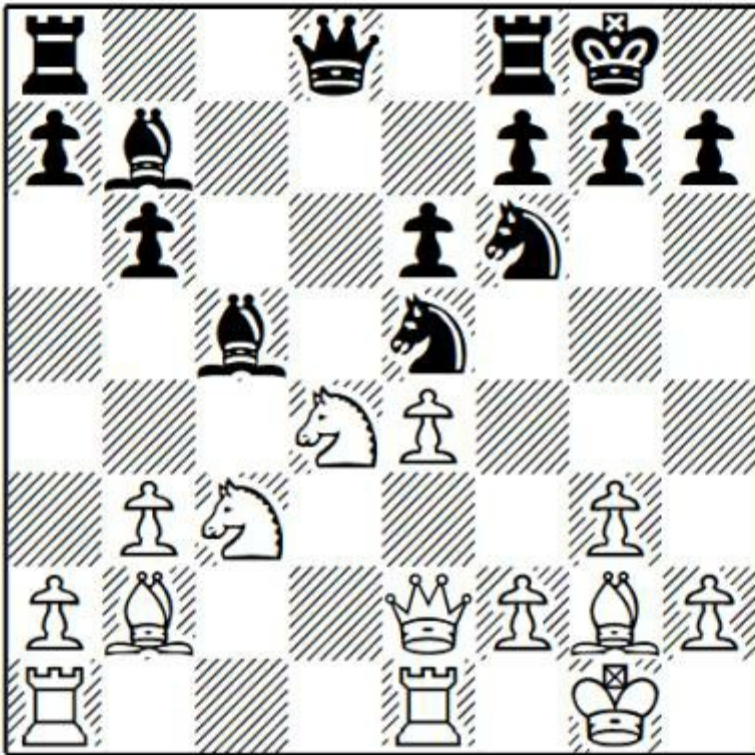
a) 14 ... Qb8 15 Rd2 a6 16 Qe2 Ra7 17 Re1 Ne5 18 Kh1 Qa8 19 f4 Ng6 20 Nc2 Rd8 was A.Grischuk-L.Aronian, London Classic 2015 and now Marin suggests 21 Rxd8+! Qxd8 22 Na4 Nd7 (or 22 ... Be7 23 Bd4 Nd7 24 Nxb6! Nxb6 25 Qf2 is much better for White) 23 f5 Nge5 24 Rd1 with a significant advantage.

b) 14 ... Ne5 15 Na4 Bxd4 16 Bxd4 Nc6 17 Bb2 Qe7 18 Qe1 Rfd8 19 Rd1 Rxd1 20 Qxd1 Rd8 21 Rd2 Rxd2 22 Qxd2 Qd7 23 Bc3 Qxd2 24 Bxd2 and White, with the slight advantage of the bishop pair in an open position, went on to win an instructive endgame in V.Artemiev-I.Lysyj, Moscow 2017.

### 14 Qe2

A cute tactical detail. 14 f4 Ng6 15 f5 was tried in D.Anton Guijarro-S.Grigoriant, Riadh 2017. At a classical time control I'm sure Grigoriant would have found 15 ... exf5! 16 exf5 Bc5 17 Bxb7 Bxd4+ 18 Kg2 Rb8 when Black is no worse.

### 14 ... Bc5



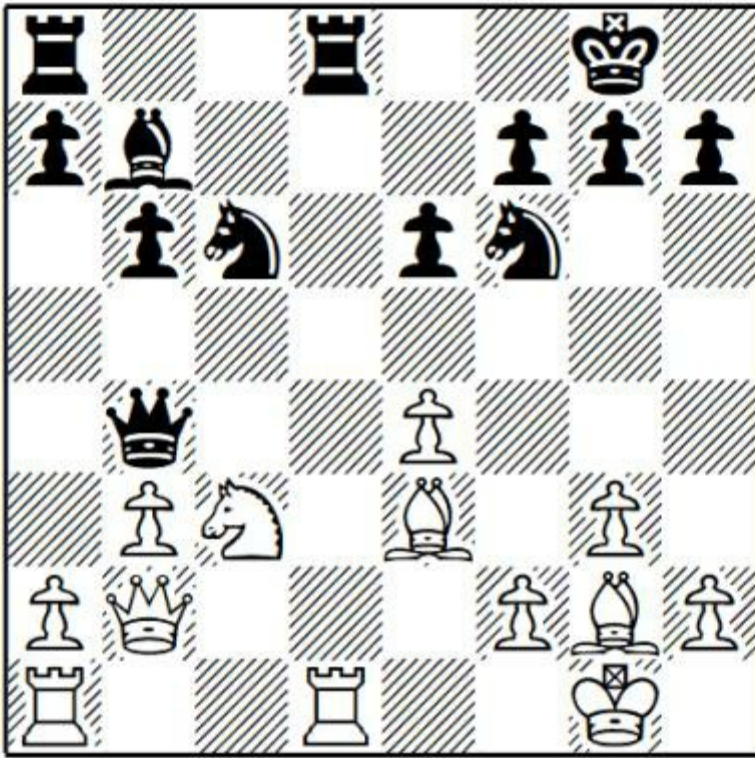
### 15 Red1

So had already won this position as Black, in a blitz game against Anish Giri, who immediately went wrong with 15 Ncb5? a6 16 Rad1 axb5 17 Nxe6 Qe7 18 Nxf8 was A.Giri-W.So, Paris 2016 and now 18 ... Rxa2! would have left White in deep trouble.

### 15 ... Qe7

Moradiabadi gives 15 ... Bxd4 16 Nb5 Bxb2 (or 16 ... Bxf2+ 17 Qxf2 Qb8 18 Nd6 Nfd7 when White has more than enough compensation for the pawn, but no knockout blow is apparent) 17 Rxd8 Bxa1 18 Rd1!, catching the bishop and winning.

**16 Na4 Bxd4 17 Bxd4 Nc6 18 Be3 Rfd8 19 Nc3 Qb4 20 Qb2**



Provoking Black into a kingside attack.

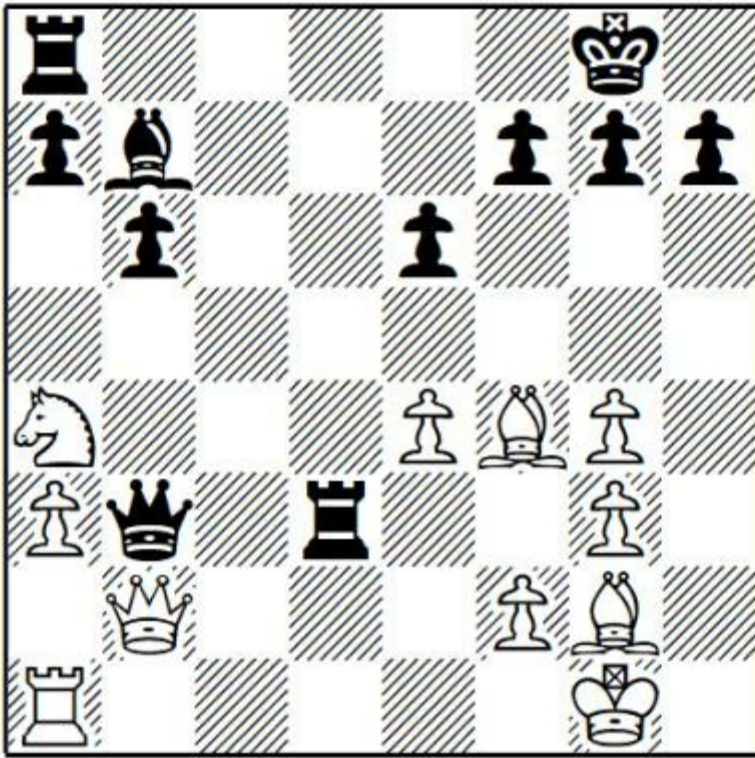
**20 ... Ng4!**

Duly provoked!

**21 Bf4 Nce5 22 a3 Qc5 23 Na4 Qb5 24 Nc3 Qc5 25 Na4 Qb5 26 h3!?**

Declining the draw by repetition.

**26 ... Nd3 27 Rxd3 Rxd3 28 hxg4 Qxb3**



28 ... Rxb3 29 Qd4 Rc8 30 Bf1 Qe8 was suggested by Nakamura and looks balanced.

**Question:** How would you play as White after 28 ... Qxb3?

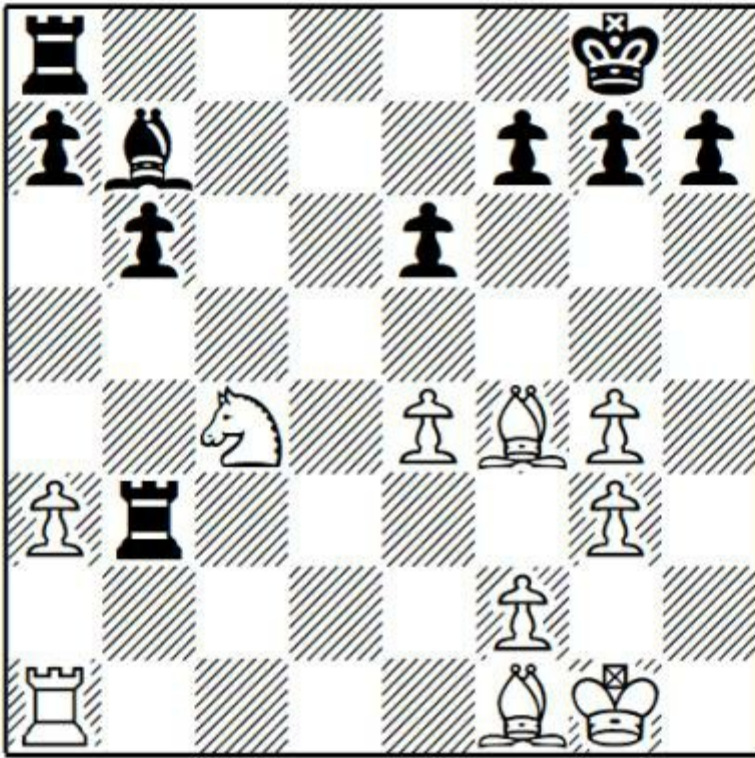
**29 Bf1!**

**Answer:** A tough move to spot from a distance, but one which dramatically improves White's coordination by bringing the a4-knight into play.

**29 ... Qxb2**

29 ... Bxe4 30 Bxd3 Qxd3 31 Qc3 leaves Black with insufficient compensation for the exchange.

**30 Nxb2 Rb3 31 Nc4**



**31 ... Rd8**

31 ... Bxe4? 32 Nd2! is an important detail.

**32 Nd6 Ba8 33 g5!?**

Stopping the threat of ... g5 and fixing the black kingside. 33 Rc1! was also very strong.

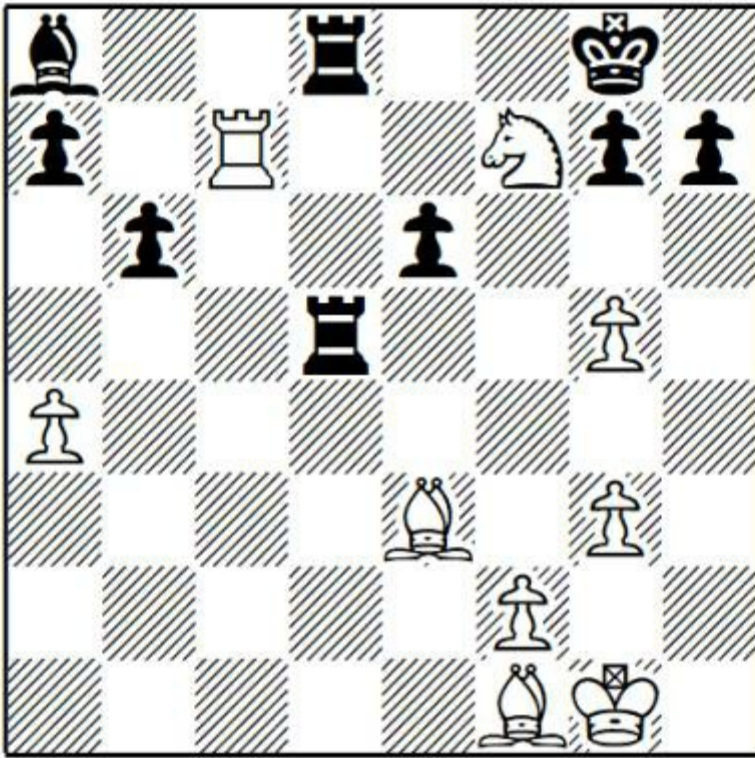
**33 ... Rc3 34 a4 Rc5 35 e5 Rd7 36 Be3!**

A perfectly-calculated transformation of the advantage.

**36 ... Rxe5 37 Rc1 Rd8 38 Rc7**

The f7-pawn collapses.

**38 ... Rd5 39 Nxf7**



**39 ... Rf8**

When playing an exchange up, or with a rook against two minor pieces, it's generally in one's interest to trade a pair of rooks. However, after 39 ... R5d7 40 Nxd8 Rxc7 41 Nxe6 Rc3 42 Bb5 White shouldn't have much difficulty wrapping up the game.

**40 g6!**

Another advantage of 33 g5. Now the black kingside is destroyed.

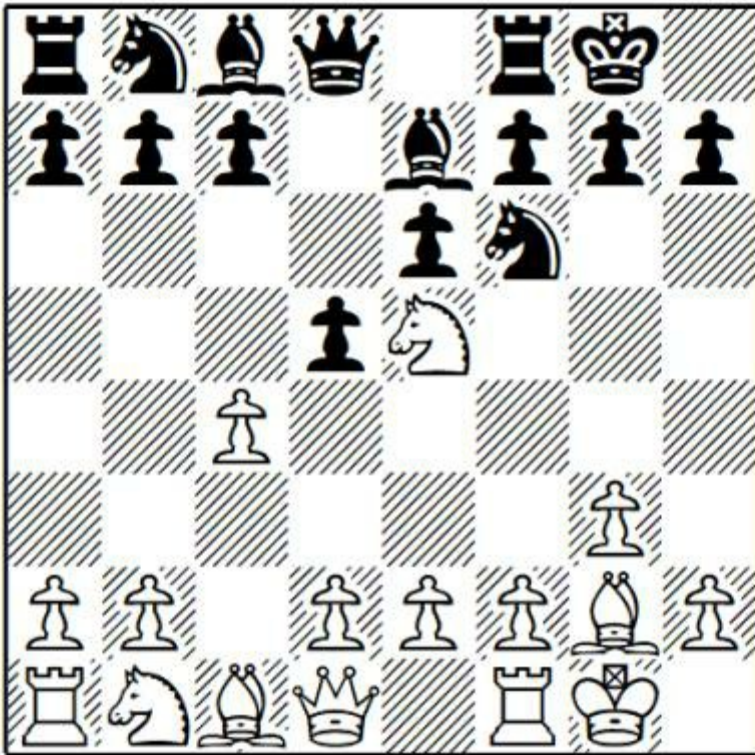
**40 ... hxg6 41 Ng5 Rd1 42 Nxe6 Re8 43 Rxc7 Kh8 44 Rxc6 Be4 45 Bd4+ 1-0**

*Game 23*

**G.Vidit-R.Wojtaszek**

World Team Championship, Khanty-Mansisk 2017

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Be7 5 c4 0-0 6 Ne5!?**



A remarkable move, aimed at cutting out ... dxc4 options.

**6 ... c5**

Black can comfortably adopt a closed Catalan setup with 6 ... Nbd7 7 d4 c6 and now:

a) 8 Nc3 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Nd7 10 cxd5 exd5 11 f4 with a position assessed as unclear by Yermolinsky, in the blitz game A.Giri-W.So, chess.com INT 2017.

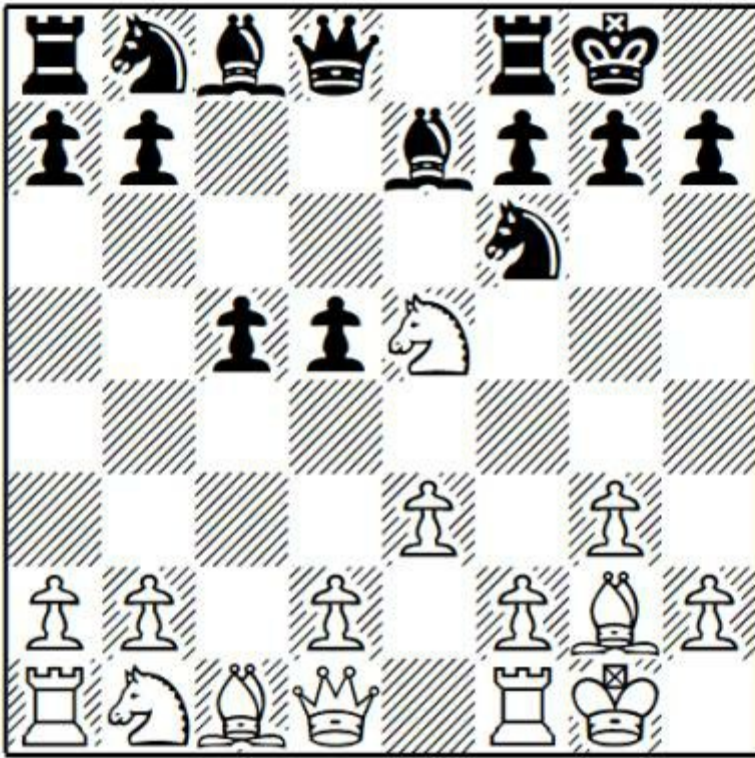
b) 8 b3 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Nd7 10 Bb2 b6 11 Nd2 Ba6 12 Rc1 Rc8 13 Qc2 b5 with good counterplay in J.Vakhidov-H.Melkumyan, London 2017.

c) 8 Nd2 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Nd7 10 Nf3 Nb6 11 cxd5 exd5 was agreed drawn in A.Kosten-C.Horvath, Izmir 2004.

**7 cxd5 exd5**

7 ... Nxd5!? is a good alternative which worked out well in D.Dragicevic-M.Turner, Lund 2017.

**8 e3**



### 8 ... Qd6?!

Categorised as “very academic” by Yermolinsky, who suggests ... Nc6 here or on the next move. Alternatives:

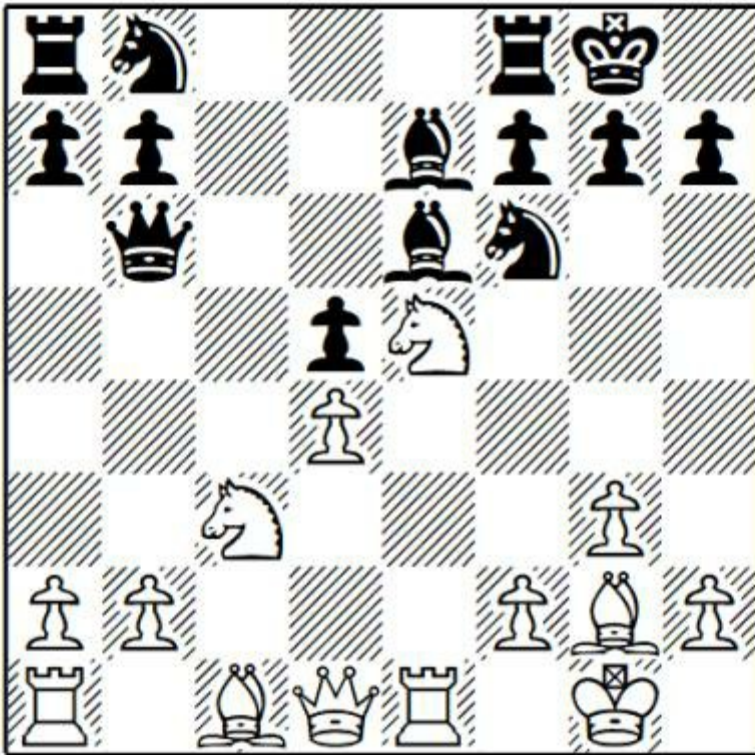
a) The early trade on d5 gives Black the option of developing his bishop actively with 8 ... Bf5 9 d4 Qc8 (9 ... Nc6 10 Nc3 Rc8 was fine for Black in R.Praggnanandhaa-I.Sukandar, Adelaide 2017) 10 Nc3 Rd8 11 b3 cxd4 12 Qxd4 Bc5 13 Qf4. This was played in the blitz game V.Kramnik-L.Aronian, Leuven 2017 and now 13 ... Nc6!? 14 Nxc6 bxc6 would give Black a comfortable game.

b) 8 ... Nc6 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Nc3 (Yermolinsky gives 10 d3 h5!?) 10 ... Ba6 11 d3 Rb8 12 Re1 was G.Jones-A.Longson, Llandudno 2017 and now I like re-routing the knight with 12 ... Nd7!? and ... Ne5, when Black has sufficient activity to compensate for his structural defects.

### 9 d4 cxd4

Yermolinsky suggests the more dynamic 9 ... Nc6 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 dxc5 Qxc5 12 b3 Qa5 13 Bb2 Bf5.

### 10 exd4 Be6 11 Nc3 Qb6 12 Re1!



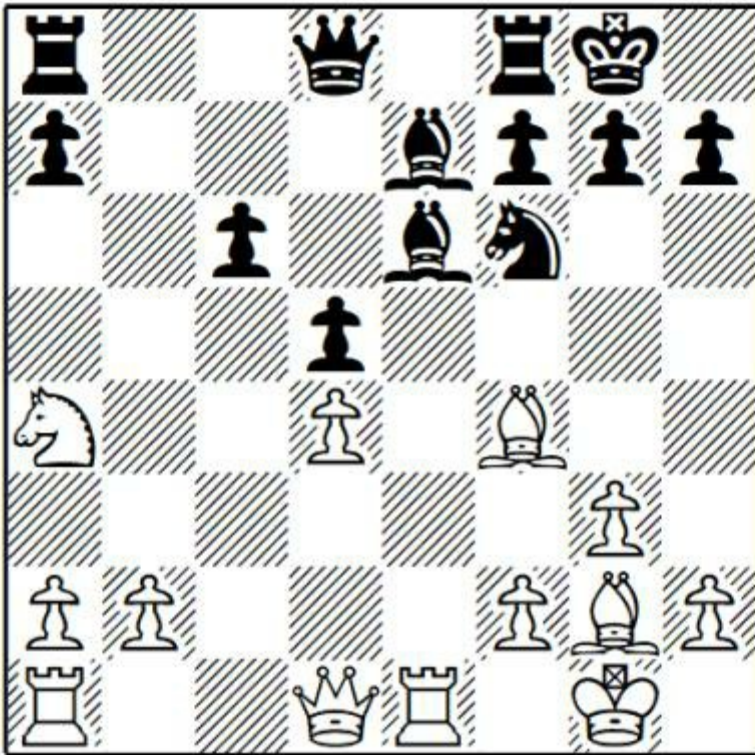
**Question:** How would you assess this position?

**Answer:** White has a very pleasant advantage. Wojtaszek has been careful to avoid an inferior structure, even if this would have been compensated by piece activity. The arising position is completely symmetrical, but White's pieces are notably more active than their counterparts. The knight on c3 and bishop on g2 attack the d5-pawn, and the knight on f6 and bishop on e6 are tied to its defence. The e5-knight is excellent. White has to develop his bishop from c1, but Vidit has a good plan for achieving this, based on Na4 and play on the queenside.

**12 ... Nc6 13 Na4 Qd8**

13 ... Qa6 14 Bf1 is Yermolinsky's suggestion, forcing a weakness on the queenside.

**14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 Bf4**



Black now has a slightly inferior structure, under worse conditions than he could have obtained at move 8 or 9. Engines typically assess such positions as level, but in practice they are much easier to play for White, since most exchanges favour him and Black needs to generate some activity to compensate for his long-term disadvantages.

**15 ... Re8**

15 ... Ne4!? is the engine's top line. White should probably continue with 16 Rc1, since taking the pawn with 16 Bxe4 dxe4 17 Rxe4 Bf6 gives Black full compensation with his strong bishop pair.

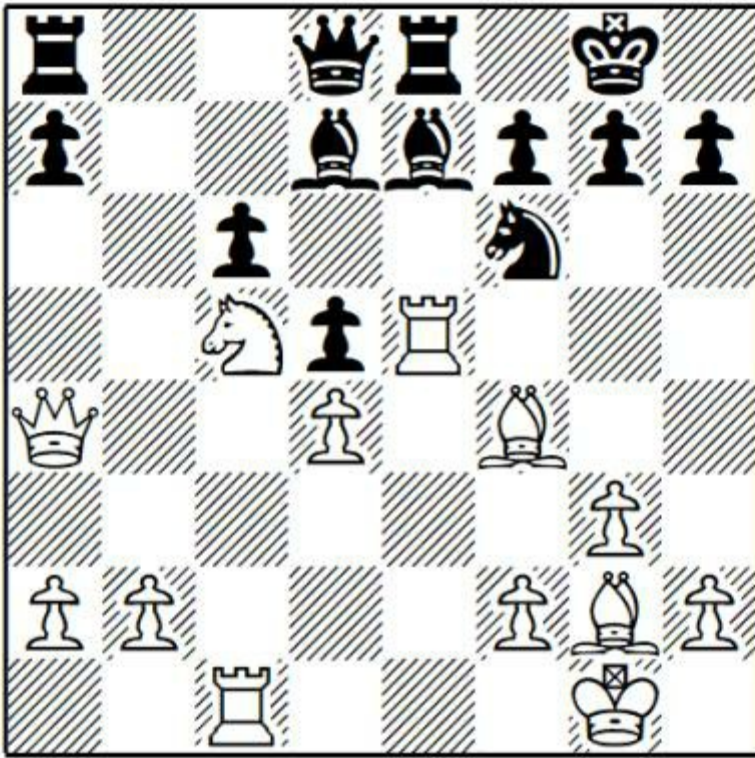
**16 Rc1 Bd7?!**

16 ... Qd7 17 Qc2 Bh3 is a more active option, based on the tactical point 18 Qxc6? (18 Nc5 Bxc5 19 Qxc5 Rxe1+ 20 Rxe1 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 Ne4 should be okay for Black) 18 ... Qxc6 19 Rxc6 Bd7 20 Ra6 Bb5 21 Ra5 Bd8 22 Rxe8+ Bxe8 23 Rxd5 Nxd5 24 Bxd5 Rc8 and Black is not worse in the endgame.

**17 Nc5 Bf5 18 Re5 Bc8**

Yermolinsky notes that Black had to go for 18 ... Bxc5 19 Rxf5 Bd6 20 Rxc6 Bxf4 21 Rxf4 though White is much better.

**19 Qa4 Bd7**



**Question:** How should White continue?

**20 Nxd7!**

**Answer:** Winning the c6-pawn immediately. It can be easy to overlook a move such as Nxd7, since the light-squared bishop is so passive, but once seen it's clear that White is winning. If you had trouble spotting this one, I suggest you study game 9 of the Fischer-Petrosian Candidates match in 1971, where Fischer's 22nd move caused a global sensation!

**20 ... Nxd7 21 Re2 g5 22 Bd2 Nb6 23 Qxc6 Rc8 24 Qh6 Rxc1+ 25 Bxc1 f6 26 Bh3!**

Bringing the bishop into the attack via e6 or f5.

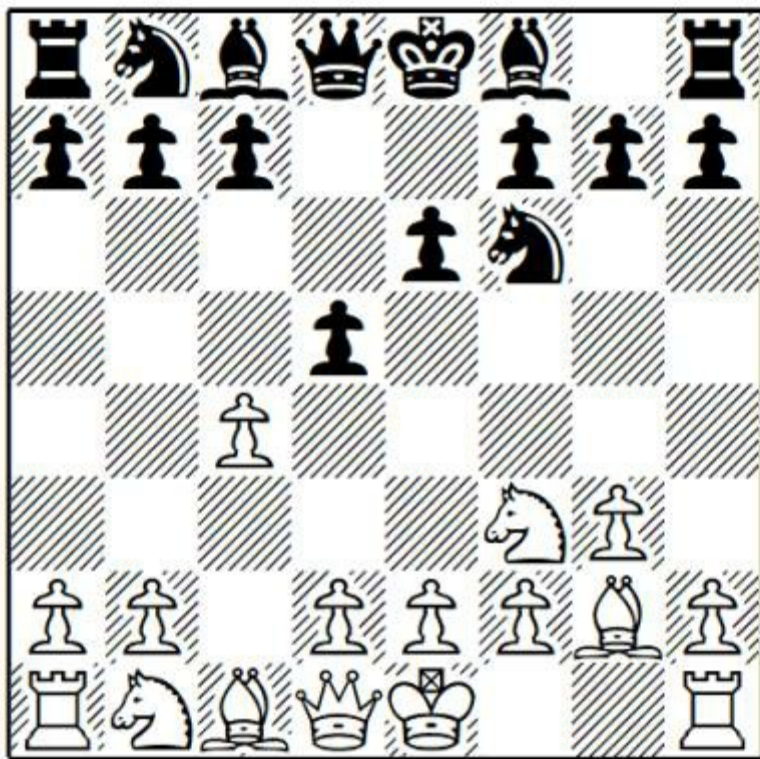
**26 ... Bf8 27 Rxe8 1-0**

The f6-pawn falls.

## Chapter Five

### Queen's Gambit Declined: Reversed Benoni

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2



One of Black's most principled approaches to this position is to seize central space with ... d4. Compared to playing this move on move 2, a later ... d4 leads to less sharp positions, but Black retains his intention of getting a favourable Benoni structure (as is reached, for example, after 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 exd5) with colours reversed.

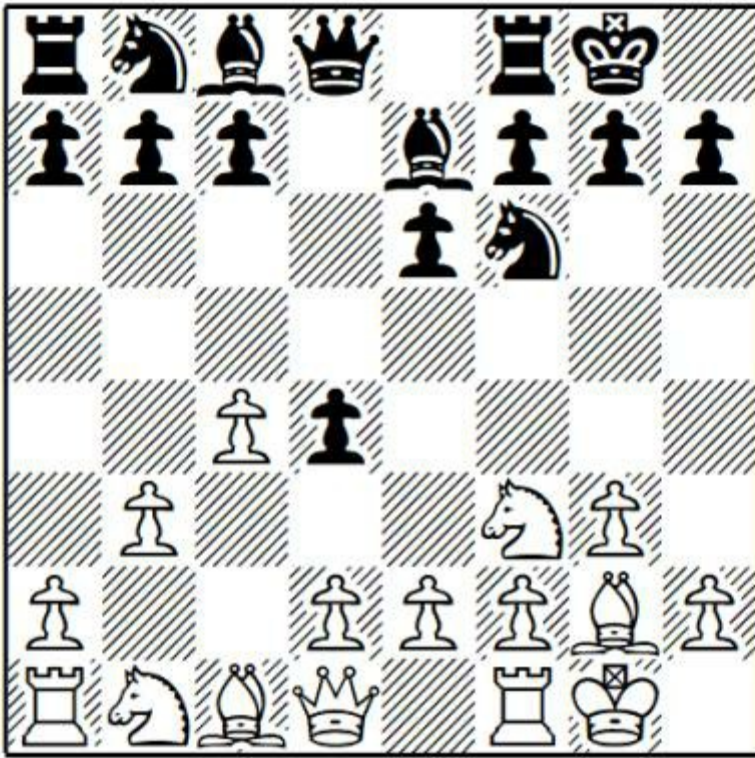
Black can play ... d4 on move 3, 4, or later. Each of these positions is quite concrete and I encourage white players to study this chapter carefully, since lacklustre play over the next 5 to 10 moves will result in a prospectless middlegame.

*Game 24*

**L.McShane-P.Eljanov**

Netanya Masters 2019

1 c4 Nf6 2 g3 e6 3 Bg2 d5 4 Nf3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 d4



**Question:** What are the pros and cons of this move?

**Answer:** On the plus side, Black gains central space. If given time to consolidate with some combination of ... c5, ... Nc6 and ... e5, he will be able to develop his pieces easily to good positions and will be immune from danger. Indeed, if White doesn't generate quick counterplay, Black could start playing for an advantage.

These advantages don't come for free, however. For one thing, Black moves a pawn off the h1-a8 diagonal. This could make the g2-bishop an even more effective piece, unless the diagonal is completely vacated (which could leave the bishop without targets).

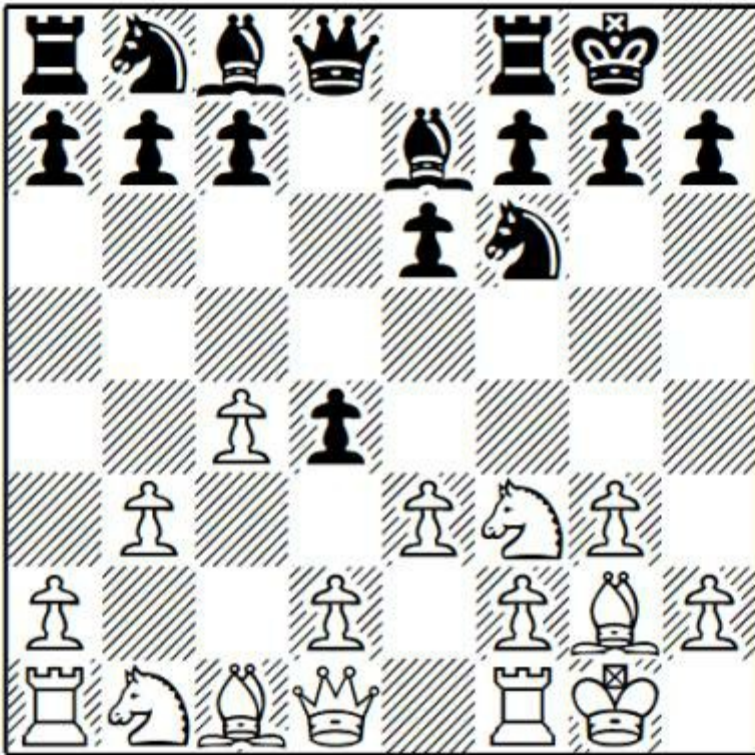
Then there is the time component. Having put his pawn on e6, Black will likely lose a tempo playing ... e6-e5. In this version, the bishop on e7 might also lose time moving to d6 (to protect e5) or c5 (to protect d4). If Black falls too far behind in development, he won't be able to consolidate his centre.

Finally, there is the question of whether Black has overextended in the centre. The further forward the black pawns advance, the easier they are to attack. I have a feeling that Réti himself, and other pioneers of the Hypermodern school of chess, would have been delighted to see a move like ... d4.

All in all, these lines see a sharp battle where Black plays for three results.

6 ... c5 7 Bb2 Nc6 8 e3 d4 9 exd4 cxd4 10 Re1 is another popular move order, which transposes to the game, but with the white bishop already committed to b2 (see the notes to White's 10th move).

**7 e3!**



This move is vital, now or later. White can't simply allow Black to consolidate with ... c5, ... Nc6 and ... e5.

**7 ... c5**

Aiming to maintain a pawn on the d4-square.

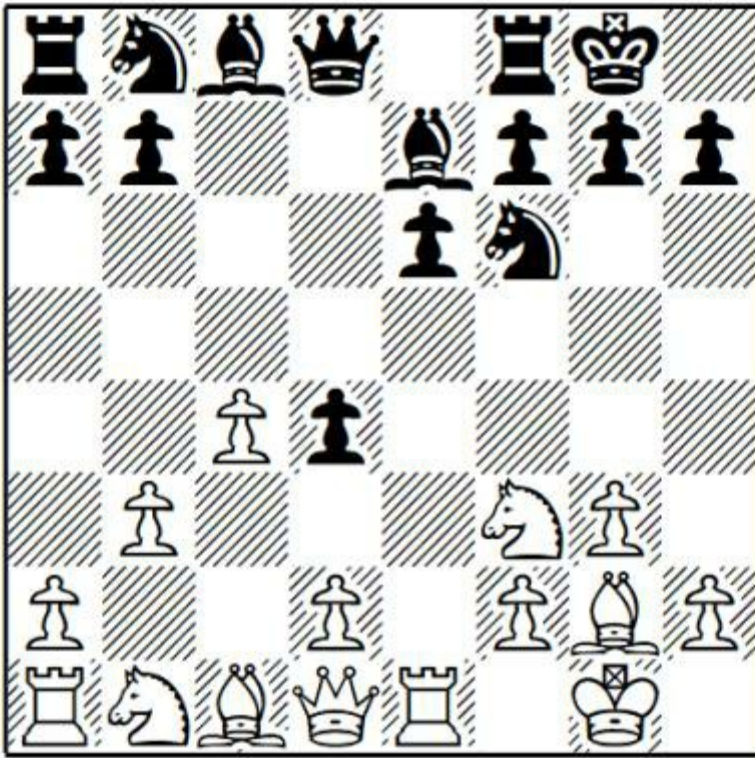
The alternative 7 ... Nc6 aims to maintain an outpost on d4, e.g. 8 exd4 Nxd4 9 Bb2 Bc5 (9 ... Nxf3+ 10 Bxf3 was played in D.Bocharov-A.Kamrukov, Sochi 2017 and now Black could have tried 10 ... Qd3!? maintaining the blockade) and now:

a) 10 Ne5!? is the most ambitious move, not allowing Black to trade pieces: 10 ... c6 11 Nc3 Qd6 12 Re1 was N.Lubbe-R.Skytte, Kolding 2016 and now Black should reinforce his control of d4 with 12 ... Rd8 with unclear play.

b) 10 Nc3 Nxf3+ 11 Bxf3 Bd4 established a stable blockade with equality in I.Almasi-A.Boruchovsky, Budapest 2018.

c) 10 Nxd4 Bxd4 11 Bxd4 Qxd4 12 Nc3 c6 13 Ne2 Qd3 14 Nf4 Qd4 15 Ne2 and the players repeated moves in E.Romanov-L.Nisipeanu, Teplice 2019.

**8 exd4 cxd4 9 Re1**



McShane is happy to head for the main line (with Re1 and Bb2). He had an opportunity to deviate on this or the next move with d3, to avoid committing his bishop to b2.

**Question:** Why should White think twice about putting his bishop on b2?

**Answer:** Black is aiming to establish a Reversed Benoni structure with a pawn on d4 (preferably supported by a pawn on e5). This will give him a central space advantage, at the cost of considerable time (discussed more below).

In the Benoni (for example, 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6), there are several common truths about the c8-bishop:

a) It's good to exchange this bishop, which often struggles to find a role given Black's lack of space. Black often aims for ... Bg4 (and, less often, ... b6 and ... Ba6) to trade the bishop for its white counterpart or a white knight.

b) The bishop is, typically, very rarely fianchettoed on b7. Not only can it not be easily traded from this square, but it looks at a well defended pawn on d5 (the ... f5-break is normally difficult to achieve) and blocks the b-file for Black's typical plan of queenside counterplay with ... a6, ... Rb8 and ... b5).

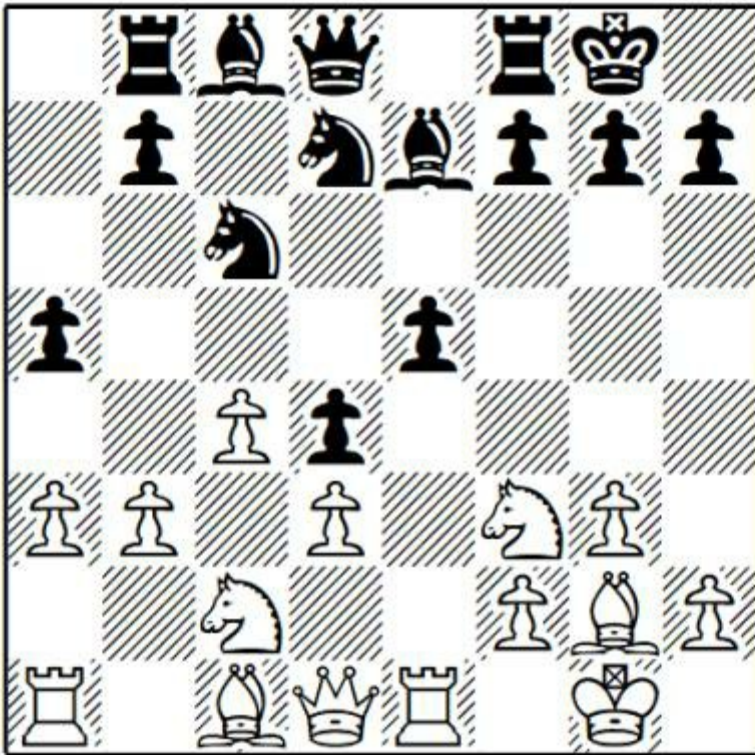
All of these standard ideas apply to the current position, where we have a Benoni with reversed colours. Accordingly, the 6 ... d4 move order gives White some additional options which are worth considering.

9 d3 Nc6 and now:

a) 10 Re1 with a further split:

a1) 10 ... Nd7 and:

a11) 11 Na3, bringing the knight to c2 to support a b4-advance: 11 ... e5 12 Nc2 a5 13 a3 Rb8? (Black should have defended his centre with 13 ... f6 or 13 ... Bf6).



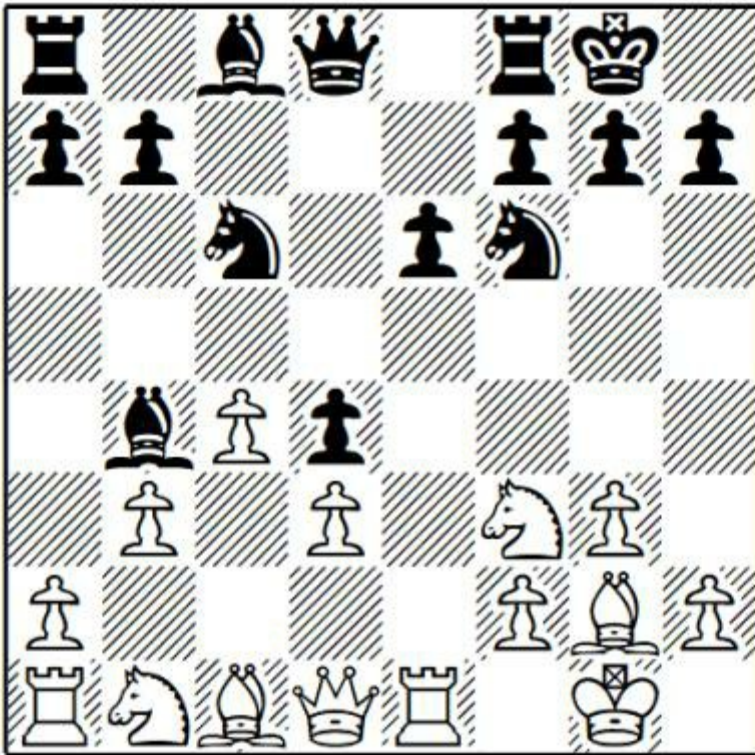
**Question:** Can you see the tactical drawback to Black's last move?

**Answer:** 14 b4! is a typical trick, overloading the c6-knight. Trading the White b-pawn for the Black e-pawn would be a very unfavourable exchange for Black: 14 ... axb4 15 axb4 b5! 16 c5 and White had achieved a favourable structure with a protected passed pawn on c5 in L.Van Wely-E.Bacrot, Brest 2019.

a12) 11 Ba3 is the other standard approach, trading the passive bishop. Although White saves a tempo by not playing Bb2 first, this doesn't seem enough to upset the evaluation of the position, which remains level. See the notes to L.Aronian-H.Nakamura, St Louis Rapidplay 2017 for details.

a2) 10 ... Bb4!? is quite an annoying disruptive move, and is probably the principal argument against White's move order.

Now:



a21) 11 Re2 a5 (11 ... Bd6 12 Ba3 trades dark-squared bishops, with balanced chances), as played in V.Kazakovskiy-B.Abdusattorova, Tashkent 2019, seems premature in view of 12 Na3!? followed by Nb5.

a22) 11 Bd2 Bd6 12 a3 (12 Qc1 Nd7 was comfortable for Black in L.Gonda-L.Lenic, Hungary 2019) 12 ... a5 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 was level in Z.Efimenko-M.Kravtsiv, Rivne 2016.

b) 10 Qe2 Nd7 11 Ba3 (I prefer this to 11 Nbd2?! tested in F.Caruana-H.Nakamura, Paris 2016, after which White can't trade the bishops) 11 ... e5 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Re1 a5 14 Nbd2 was played in Z.Efimenko-D.Mastrovasilis, Porto Carras 2018. Black has consolidated his centre but still needs to develop his queenside. White has exchanged his potentially passive dark-squared bishop and has no bad pieces. The position is balanced.

c) 10 Na3 Nd7 11 Nc2 e5 transposes to the rapid game J.Duda-H.Nakamura, St Louis 2019. After 12 Rb1 a5 13 a3 Nc5 14 b4 axb4 15 axb4 Na4 16 Bd2 Black could have tried the interesting 16 ... Nc3 17 Bxc3 dxc3 when the c3-pawn is tough to round up, for example 18 Rb3 Re8 19 Rxc3 Bxb4 20 Nxb4 Nxb4 with approximate equality.

### 9 ... Nc6 10 Bb2

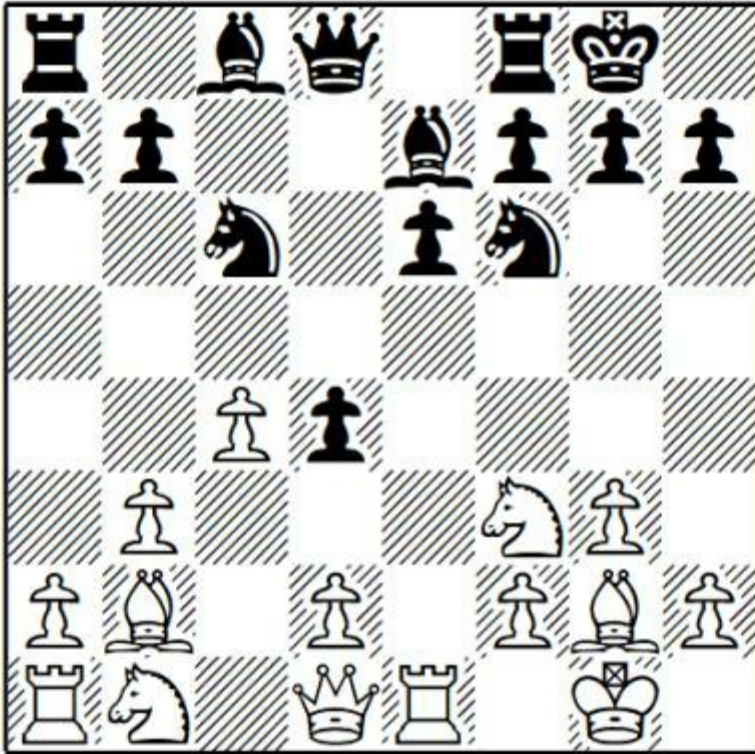
Discussing this position in the notes to his win against Gawain Jones, Mickey Adams commented "A popular and ambitious way to play. If things go well there is considerable upside, but the number of tempi Black is missing seems a bit concerning."

Indeed, in addition to the tempo which Black lacks (compared to White in the Modern Benoni) by virtue of not moving first, his pawn on e6 will need to move again if possible (gaining space, supporting the d4-pawn and liberating the light-squared bishop), which will cost another tempo. However, a simple tempo count is never sufficient to assess the merits of an opening played with reversed colours, for two reasons.

First, openings which may be perfectly playable for Black might not be enough for a White

advantage, even with one or two extra tempi.

Secondly, we must look at how the tempi have been spent. Here, White has spent two moves fianchettoing his bishop on b2, a construction which is never played in the Modern Benoni since the bishop is severely restricted by the d4-pawn (especially once ... e5 is played) and it is inconsistent with standard queenside counterplay of pushing a3 and b4.

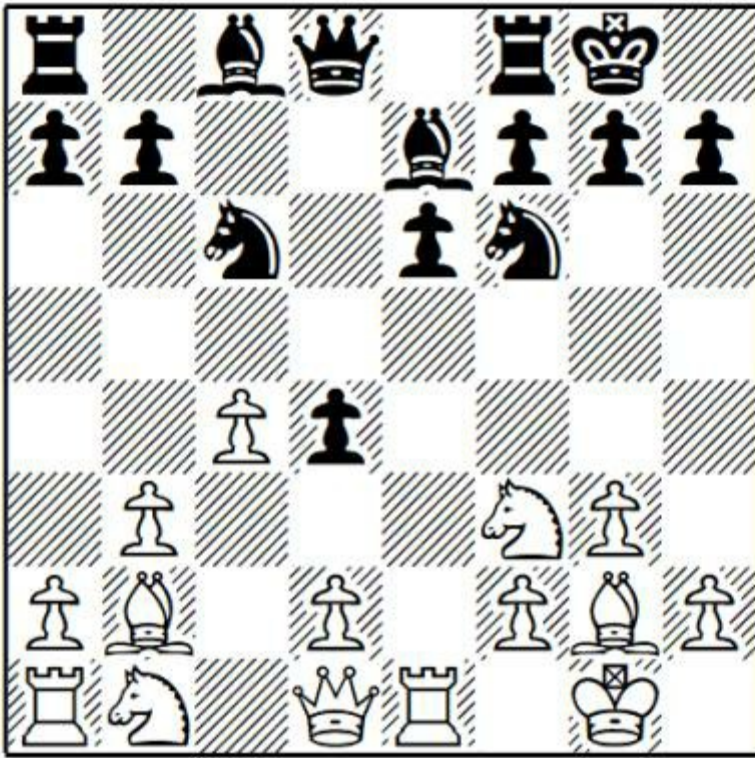


In fact, as appears from Jones-Adams (discussed below), White's strategically soundest approach is generally to spend a move on Ba3, trading off a bishop whose passivity might cost the game. In the text game, Luke McShane finds a different way for his dark-squared bishop to have a starring role.

### 10 ... Re8

Others:

a) 10 ... Bd6 is a natural attempt to support ... e5, but with the defect that the d4-pawn is hanging. After the exchanging operation 11 Nxd4! Nxd4 12 Bxd4 Bxg3 13 hxg3 Qxd4 14 Nc3 a recent game showcased White's resources: 14 ... Ng4 (14 ... Rd8 15 Qe2 Rb8 was Y.Yakovich-N.Vitiugov, Serpukhov 2008 and now I like 16 Rad1 followed by Qe3 when White has the better structure since his queenside majority is mobile and Black's kingside majority is not) 15 Qf3 f5 16 Nb5 Qb6 17 Qf4! e5 (otherwise White is simply better after 18 d4).



**Question:** Did White overlook this, or does he have a resource?

**Answer:** 18 Rxe5! Nxe5 19 Qxe5 is a very strong exchange sacrifice. White immediately gets a pawn, coupled with threats of Bd5+ and Nd6, and the black rooks are unable to display any activity: 19 ... Bd7? (this loses but 19 ... f4 20 gxf4 is also excellent for White) 20 Nd6 Bc6 21 Bxc6 Qxc6 22 Qe6+ Kh8 23 Nf7+ Rxf7 24 Qxf7 and White was winning with an extra pawn and a safer king in V.Artemiev-A.Korobov, Poikovsky 2019.

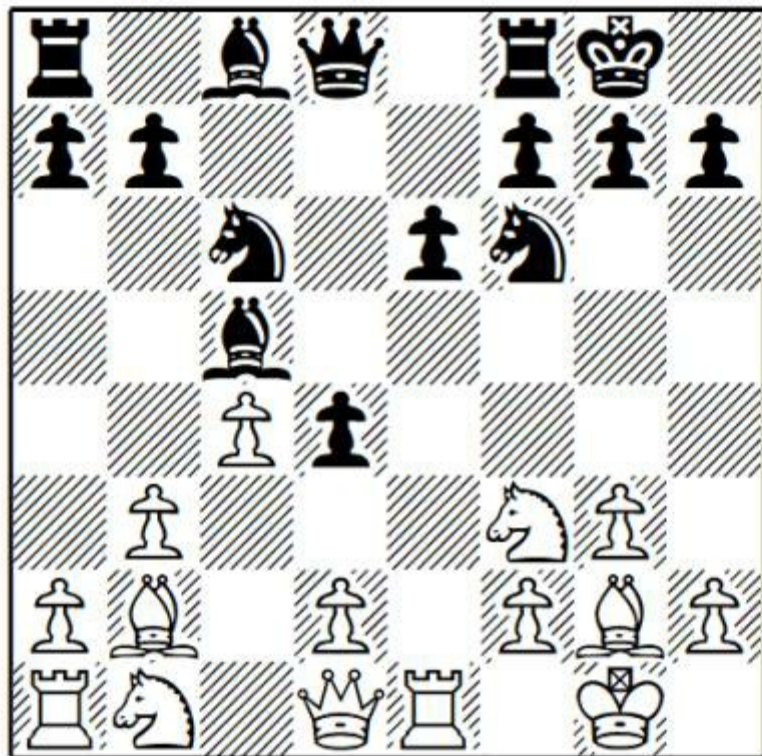
b) 10 ... Ne8 is the most popular move, preparing ... f6 and ... e5. Now:

b1) 11 Ne5! is a useful exchange for White, after which his light-squared bishop begins to operate at full capacity on the long diagonal. Nakamura has obtained wonderful positions with Black in elite blitz events in St Louis after the alternatives. Play can continue 11 ... Nxe5 12 Rxe5 f6 13 Re1 e5 (13 ... Nc7 14 f4 a5 15 d3 Rb8 16 Nd2 b5 was a decent alternative in D.Reinderman-H.Sonntag, Germany 2016) and here White faces a principled choice. 14 Ba3 (the direct 14 f4!? exf4 15 gxf4 Nc7, J.Bakalchuk-V.Mikhalevski, Maalot Tarshiha 2018, leads to unclear play where both sides have compromised pawn structures and long term king safety is an issue) 14 ... Bxa3 (14 ... Nd6 15 d3 Nf7 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 Nd2 Qc7 18 b4 was A.Giri-H.Nakamura, Paris 2016; White has achieved b4 and exchanged dark-squared bishops, while Black has consolidated his centre, so the game is balanced) 15 Nxa3 Rb8 16 b4 Nc7 17 d3 b6 (T.Petrosian-P.Eljanov, Sharjah 2018) with, yet again, dynamic equality after 18 Nc2 Qd6 19 Qd2 (preparing f4) 19 ... g5!?

b2) 11 Na3 f6 12 d3 e5 13 Nc2 Nc7 14 a3 a5 was very pleasant for Black in J.Duda-H.Nakamura, St Louis 2019.

b3) 11 d3 f6 12 Nbd2 e5 13 Ne4 Nc7 also didn't impress for White in F.Caruana-H.Nakamura, St Louis 2016.

c) 10 ... Bc5 is a logical move and a favourite of strong Cuban GM Lazaro Bruzon Batista.



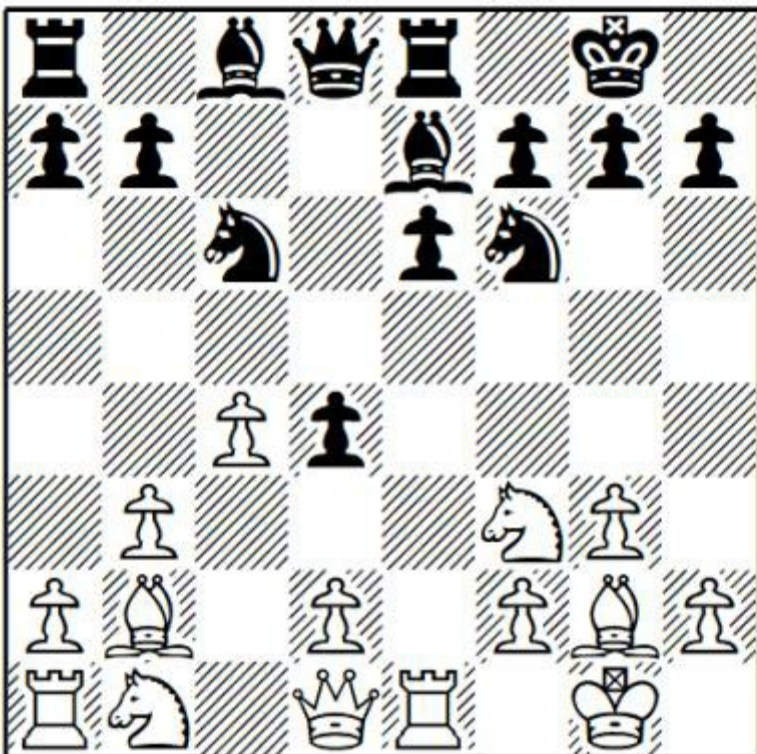
11 Ne5 (Black is well placed to meet 11 Ba3, as in E.Tomashevsky-S.Ganguly, Doha 2016 with 11 ... Nd7!) 11 ... Nxe5 12 Rxe5 and now:

c1) 12 ... Nd7 13 Re2 e5 14 d3 Rb8 15 Nd2 b6 16 Qf1!? is an unusual setup but a very harmonious one. From f1, the queen supports the f4-break and permits the rooks to be doubled on the e-file, e.g. 16 ... Bb7?! (16 ... Bd6!? is directed against f4 and looks like a better defence) 17 Bxb7 Rxb7 18 f4 exf4 (18 ... Qc7 was better, not activating the white queen) 19 Qxf4 (this position is slightly more pleasant for White but Black quickly went wrong) 19 ... Bb4?! 20 Nf3 Nc5 21 Qxd4 Qxd4+ 22 Bxd4 Nxd3?? (22 ... Rd7 limits White to a slight advantage) 23 Re3! and, facing the loss of a piece, Black resigned in V.Mikhalevski -L.Bruzon Batista, Calgary 2016.

c2) I thought that 12 ... Qc7 allowed favourable exchanges, but in fact it's quite playable. 13 Rxc5! Qxc5 14 Ba3 Qb6 (14 ... Qc7 15 Bxf8 Kxf8 16 d3 didn't change much in J.Salomon-R.Lagunow, chess.com INT 2019) 15 Bxf8 Kxf8 16 d3 Bd7 17 Nd2 Bc6 18 Nf3 was E.Cordova-D.Otero Acosta, Monterrey 2015, where Black's position was quite sound.

d) I was interested to see that the rare 10 ... Qb6 has been essayed by Dominguez and Shankland, both of whom are excellently prepared: 11 Na3 (11 d3 Nd7 12 a3?! a5 was quite comfortable for Black in P.Harikrishna-S.Shankland, Edmonton 2015, but 12 Na3 would have been similar to the main line) 11 ... Nd7 12 Nc2 e5 13 d3 a5 (13 ... Re8 14 Rb1 a5 15 a3 Qc7 was agreed drawn in M.Hoffmann-A.David, Belgium 2012, but White should have played on with the thematic 16 b4! based on the tactical point 16 ... axb4 17 axb4 Nxb4? 18 Nfxd4! with a big advantage) 14 Rb1 Bd6 (14 ... Bb4 15 Re2 Rd8 16 a3 Bc3? 17 Bxc3 dxc3 18 Qe1 and the c3-pawn was dropping in E.Cordova-M.Paraguay, Atlantic City 2016 since 18 ... Nd4 would leave White on top after 19 Nfxd4 exd4 20 Re8+ Nf8 21 Rxd8 Qxd8 22 Qe5 Ne6 23 Re1; the d4- and c3-pawns might look intimidating but they're going to drop after Bd5) 15 a3 Qc7. Here 16 Ba1? was played in T.Radjabov-L.Dominguez Perez, Beijing 2014

but 16 Bc1! leaves the bishop on a better diagonal, after which White will play b4 with a good game.



### 11 Ne5

Or 11 d3 Bc5 and now:

a) 12 Ne5 is Marin's recommendation. In Adams' view, trading knights is logical having regard to White's space disadvantage: 12 ... Nxe5 13 Rxe5 Bd6 (Delchev suggests 13 ... Qd6; since he assesses 13 ... Qc7 as dubious in view of 14 f4 Bd6 15 Bxd4!, it is probable that he disliked 13 ... Bd6 in view of the exchange sacrifice indicated in the next note) 14 Re1 and now Adams gives 14 Bxd4!? Bxe5 15 Bxe5 as an interesting exchange sacrifice. Certainly in this version, White's dark-squared bishop would have a more charmed career than it achieved in the game. In fact this is a tempo up on the text game (where McShane had a pawn on d2), though it is likely that White wants to play his pawn to d4 in any event so some transpositions are possible.

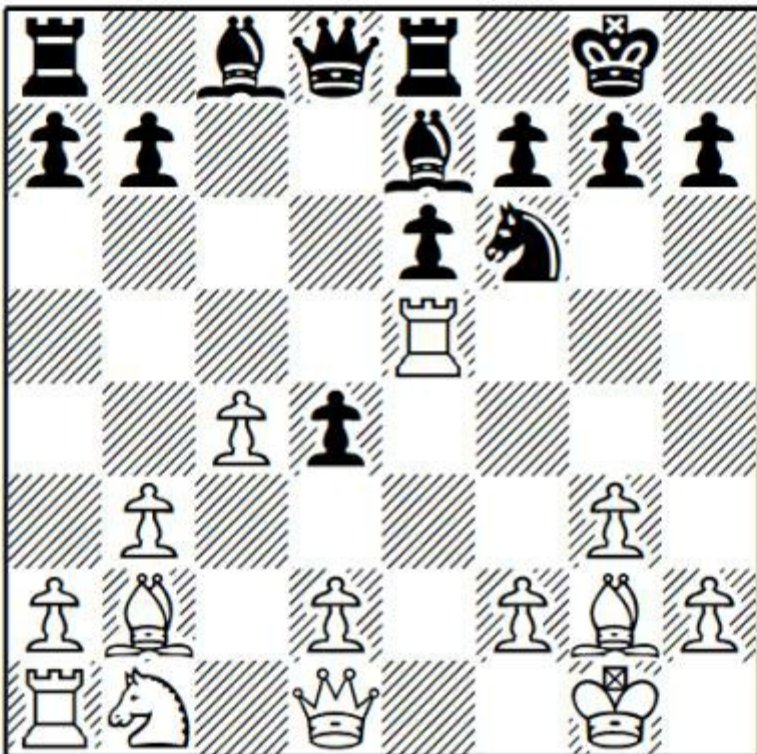
After 14 Re1 e5 15 Qc2, Adams makes the instructive comment, "Here or on the next move Gawain had to commit to Ba3 as in the game his dark-squared bishop becomes a very sad piece." 15 ... Qc7 16 Nd2? (Adams gives 16 Ba3 as necessary, suggesting the solid 16 ... Bxa3 (or the more aggressive 16 ... Qa5 17 Qc1 Bxa3 18 Nxa3 Bf5 19 Bxb7 Rab8) 17 Nxa3 Nd7) 16 ... Bf5 17 Re2 Re7 18 Rae1 Rae8 19 a3 a5 20 Qb1 Bc5 and Black was better in G.Jones-M.Adams, British Championship 2016.

b) Delchev and Demuth both suggest the immediate 12 Ba3, which seems consistent with the view of the position expressed by Adams in his notes to White's 15th move. See R.Robson-W.So, St Louis 2017 for example.

c) 12 a3 is the most popular move, but after 12 ... a5 White runs a serious strategic risk of running into the same positional bind as Jones did against Adams. Even grandmasters have been unable to convincingly handle the white position: 13 Ne5 (13 Nbd2 e5 14 Ng5 Bf8 15 Rc1 Bg4 led to White losses in C.Bauer-L.Fressinet, Nimes 2014 and D.Benidze-T.Tuncer, Izmir 2017) 13 ... Nxe5 14 Rxe5

Qd6 15 Re1 Rb8 16 Nd2 Bd7 17 Ne4 Nxe4 18 Rxe4 e5 19 Qh5 (White could try to free the bishop with 19 f4, but simply 19 ... f6 looks like a good response, when I prefer Black) 19 ... b5! (generating play on the queenside as White's kingside attack isn't getting anywhere – 20 Rh4 is well met by 20 ... Qg6). Now White makes a final attempt to free the horribly passive b2-bishop: 20 f4 bxc4 21 fxe5 Qg6 22 Qxg6 hxg6 23 dxc4 Bf5 24 Rf4 d3+ 25 Bd4 g5! and Black won material in G.Szabo-G.Kantor, Budapest 2018.

**11 ... Nxe5 12 Rxe5**



**12 ... Bd6**

Others:

a) 12 ... Nd7 13 Re1 (13 Bxd4?! Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Bf6 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the exchange) 13 ... e5 14 d3 (14 Ba3 a5 15 d3 Bxa3 16 Nxa3 Nc5 17 Bd5 Bf5 18 Qf3 Qd7 was excellent for Black in J.Salomon-G.Kjartansson, Sastamala 2016) 14 ... Bb4 15 Re2 Bf8 16 Nd2 (16 Qe1!? Be7 17 b4 a5 18 a3 was dynamically balanced in D.Oates-D.Fernandez, High Wycombe 2014) 16 ... Nc5 17 Nf3 f6 18 b4 Ne6 was J.Moussard-V.Hamitevici, Le Blanc Mesnil 2019 with a typical reversed Benoni battle where Black has a strong centre but White has achieved his key b4-break, with good prospects of counterplay on the queenside.

b) 12 ... Qd6 (A.Rohan-P.Smirnov, Olongapo City 2015) can be met by 13 f4!?, restraining the e5-advance, with an unclear game.

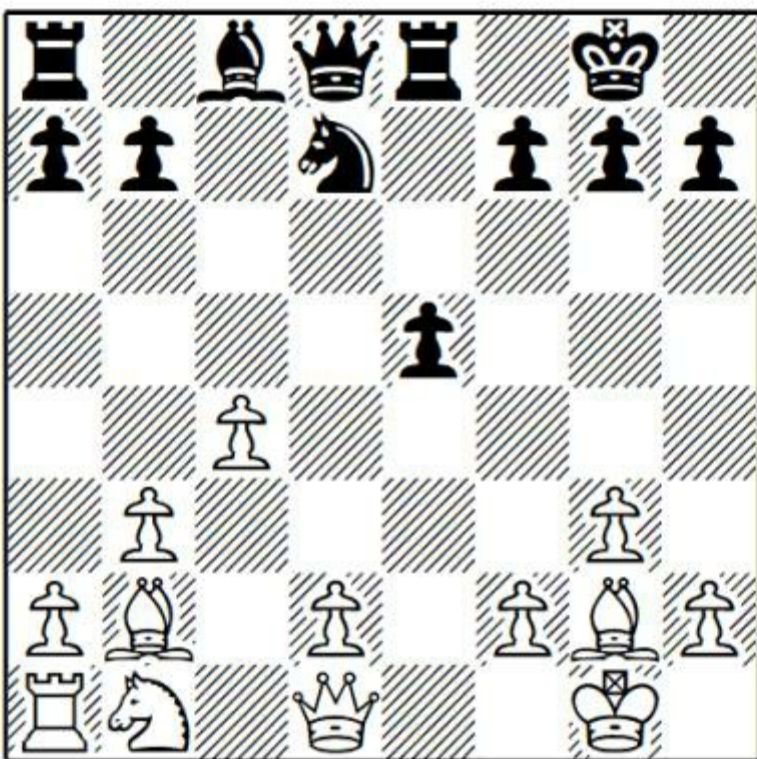
**Question:** How should White meet the threat to his rook?

**13 Bxd4!**

**Answer:** A beautiful and thematic exchange sacrifice. Whether you do or don't believe in such sacrifices, once you reach this position there are no decent alternatives. 13 Re1?! e5 was already better

for Black in S.Reschke-T.Luther, Germany 2012.

**13 ... Bxe5 14 Bxe5 Nd7 15 Bb2 e5**



A very logical approach, aiming to limit the b2-bishop (which has no opponent and menacingly targets the black kingside). The downside is that the d5-square is weakened.

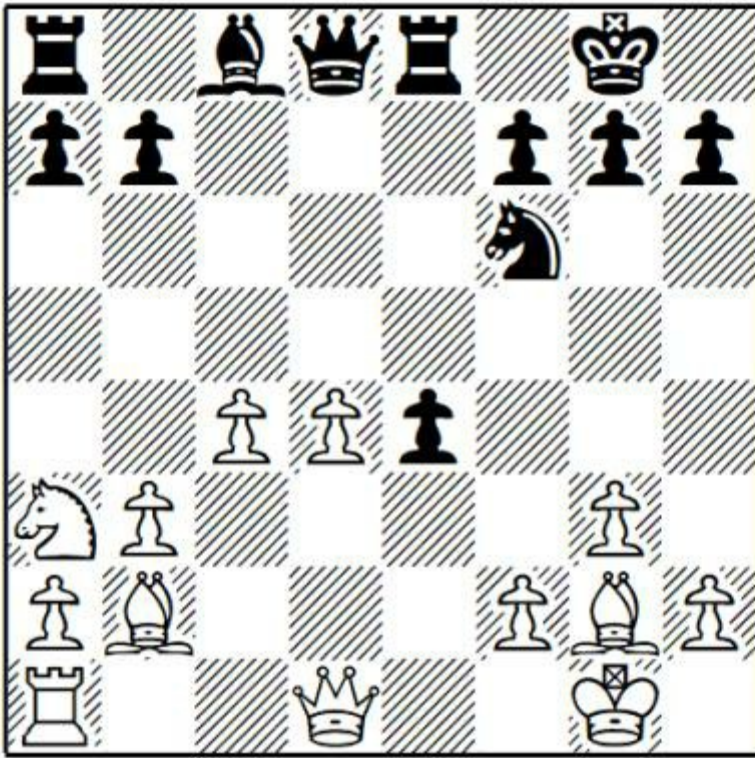
**16 Na3**

Or:

a) White can follow a central strategy with 16 Nc3 Nf6 17 Nd5 Rb8 18 Nxf6+ Qxf6 19 d4 exd4 20 Bxd4 Qd6 G.Oparin-Y.Kryvoruchko, Monzon 2016, but he isn't better here and might have to display some accuracy to draw.

b) 16 d4 exd4 17 Na3 Ne5 18 Qxd4 Qxd4 19 Bxd4 a6 20 c5 Rb8 and White didn't have full compensation in J.Bakalchuk-A.Gershon, Israel 2019.

**16 ... Nf6 17 d4 e4?**

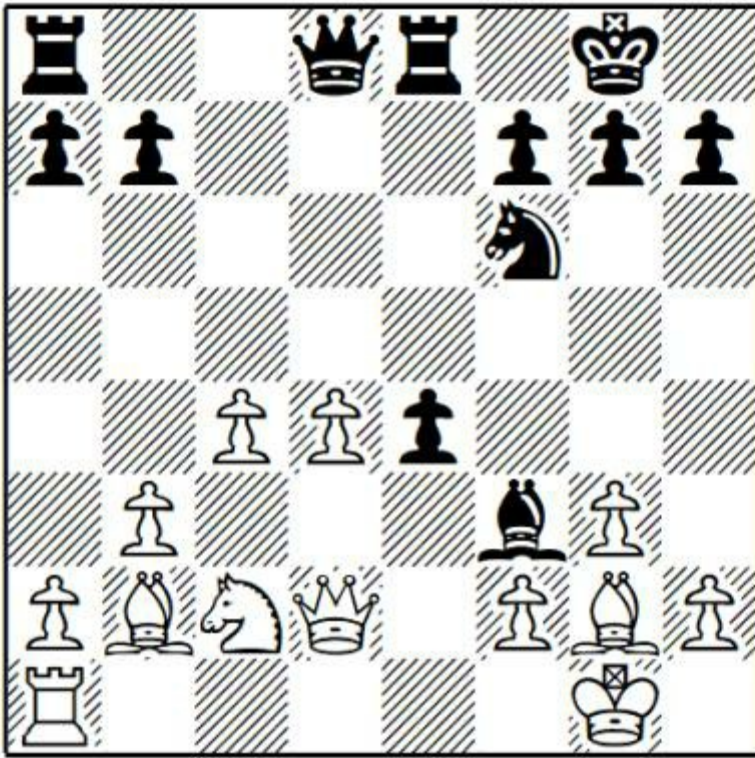


This ambitious move creates a target on e4, leaves White with a very strong centre, and prefaces a kingside attack which doesn't quite work. Importantly (given that Black is an exchange up), after this move there are no open files, while if Black had captured on d4 the d- and e-files would be open. 17 ... exd4 18 Qxd4 was better, with balanced chances in the endgame (18 ... Qxd4) or the middlegame (18 ... Qa5).

**18 Nc2**

18 d5 is also good but McShane sensibly re-routes his knight towards the ideal e3-square.

**18 ... Bg4 19 Qd2 Bf3**



### 20 Bf1

The most ambitious move, retaining the bishop pair and enduring an intimidating bishop on f3. White could also take advantage of the closed nature of the position, and Black's loss of time, with 20 d5 Nd7 21 Bxf3 exf3 22 Qd1 when he is likely to collect the f3-pawn since 22 ... Re2 23 Bc3 Qb6 24 Nd4 Rae8 isn't convincing after 25 Nxe2 Rxe2 (25 ... fxe2 26 Qd2 wins) 26 Qd4 when White is much better.

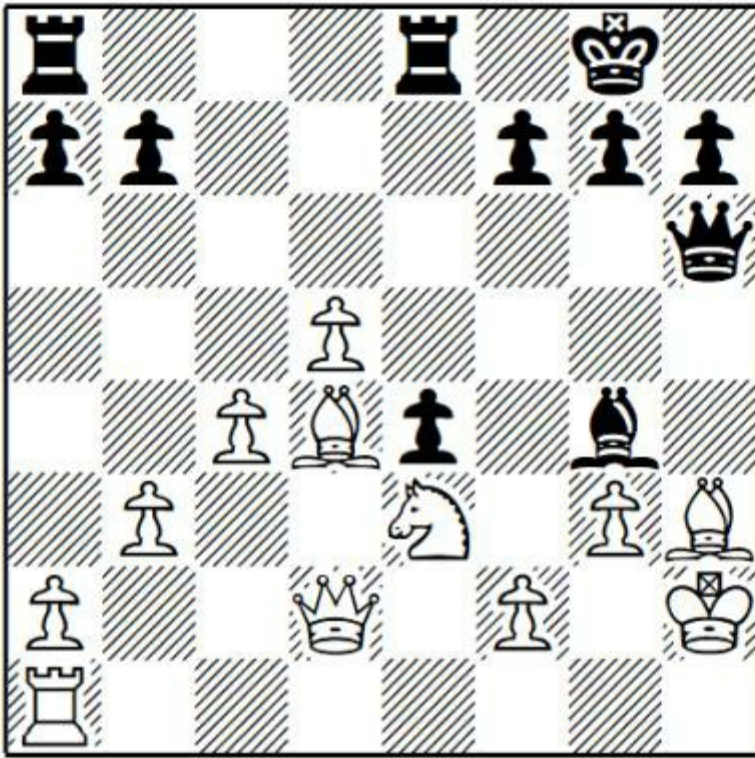
### 20 ... Ng4 21 d5 Qd6

21 ... h6 22 h3 Ne5 23 Bxe5 Rxe5 24 Re1 and White retains sufficient compensation since there are (still) no open files.

### 22 Bd4 Qg6 23 Ne3 Nxe2?

This doesn't work, but I haven't found full equality after other moves.

### 24 Kxe2 Qh6+ 25 Bh3 Bg4



**Question:** Is White losing here?

**26 Rh1!!**

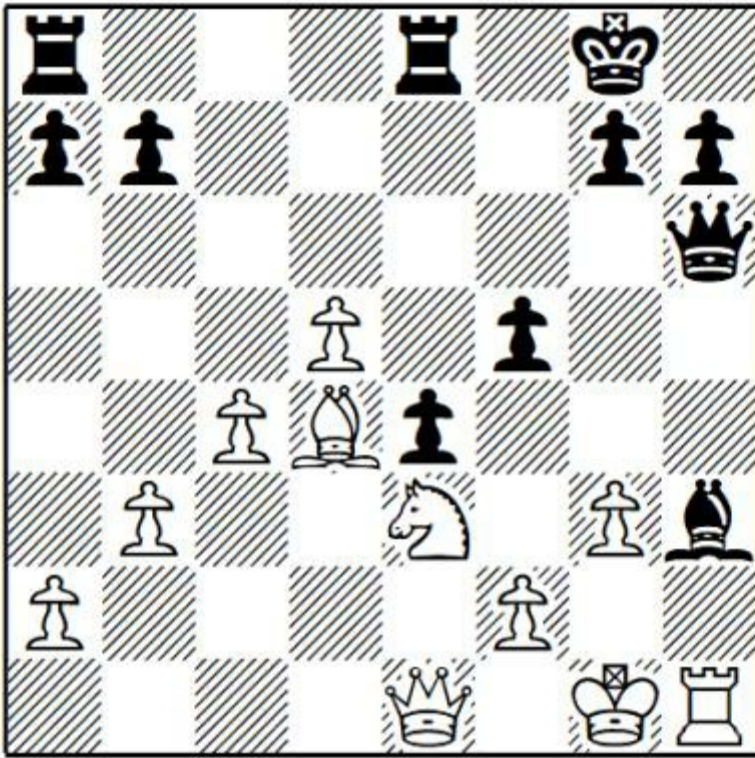
**Answer:** No! This outstanding move turns the tables (after anything else, White would have been in bad shape).

**26 ... Bxh3**

The queen is trapped after 26 ... Qxh3+ 27 Kg1.

**27 Kg1 f5 28 Qe1?**

28 Qc3 threatens Nxf5 and wins. Stockfish's best defence is 28 ... Rf8 29 Ng2 g5 (otherwise Nf4) 30 Qe3! (threatening Rxh3) 30 ... f4 31 gxf4 g4 32 f5! Qxe3 33 Nxe3 and the bishop on h3 is a dead piece while White can unravel with Kh2 (and, if allowed, Kg3-h4) and Rc1.

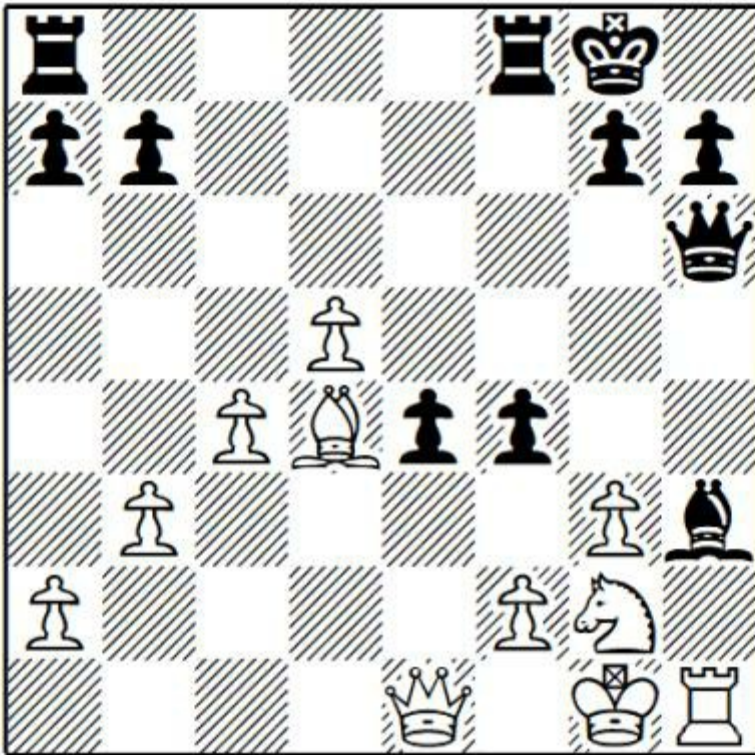


**Question:** How should Black continue?

**28 ... Rf8?**

**Answer:** Eljanov missed his chance at 28 ... f4! 29 gxf4 Qg6+ 30 Kh2 Qh5 31 Kg1 when Black has at least a draw.

**29 Ng2 f4**



### 30 gxf4?

I expect huge mutual time trouble around here, both because McShane is one of the players, and because the errors are uncharacteristic of two outstanding calculators. It's easy to reject 30 Nxf4 Rxf4 since White gets mated if he recaptures, but the stunning intermediate move 31 Qe3!! gives an advantage in all lines: 31 ... Rxf2!? (31 ... Rf5 32 Qxh6 gxh6 33 Rxh3 b5 34 d6 is very dangerous) 32 Kxf2! (32 Qxh6?? Rf1+ 33 Kh2 Rxh1+ 34 Kxh1 gxh6 and Black wins, or 32 Qxf2 Rf8 33 Qe2 Qc1+ 34 Kh2 Qh6 35 Kg1 with a repetition) 32 ... Rf8+ 33 Ke1! (the only move: 33 Kg1?? Qh5 with a winning attack, while 33 Ke2?? Bg4+ collects the rook) 33 ... Qxe3+ 34 Bxe3 Bg4. Black has drawing chances in the endgame thanks to the opposite coloured bishops.

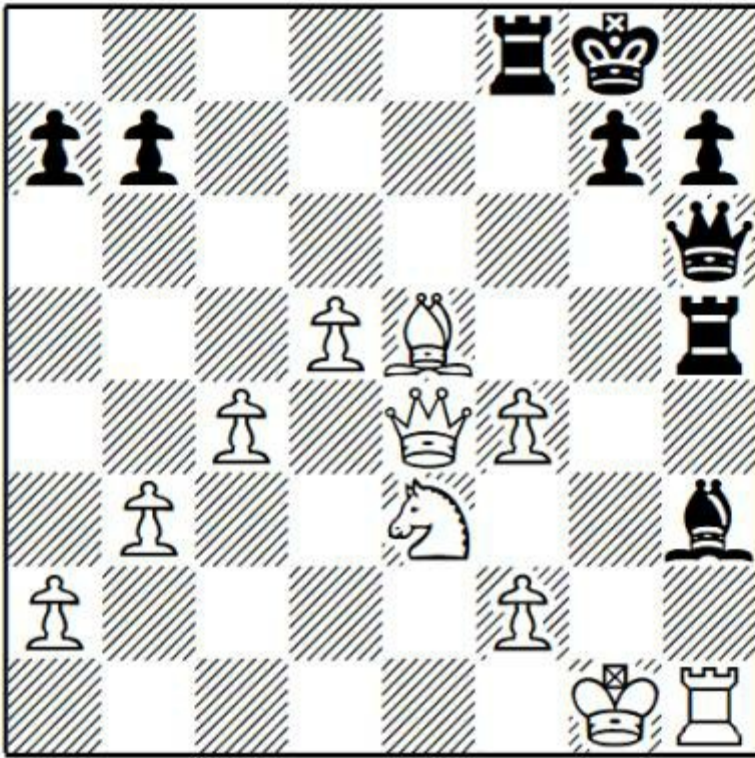
### 30 ... Rf5?!

30 ... Qh5 is a tougher defence but it's far from easy to find such a move.

### 31 Qxe4

At least Black finally has an open file to work with.

### 31 ... Rh5 32 Ne3 Rf8 33 Be5!



One of Luke's many strengths is co-ordinating his pieces in irrational positions. He has achieved central stability and, if Black does nothing, will push his queenside pawns.

**33 ... Bf5**

This gives both players a choice of several endgames. 33 ... Rh4!? was an interesting alternative.

**34 Rxh5**

34 Nxf5 Rxh1+ 35 Qxh1 Qxh1+ 36 Kxh1 Rxf5 looks less promising for White since, if Black can establish a light-squared blockade, it would be unbreakable.

**34 ... Qxh5**

34 ... Bxe4 35 Rxh6 gxh6 gives another open file but also some more passed pawns to deal with. It's unsurprising that this didn't appeal to Eljanov.

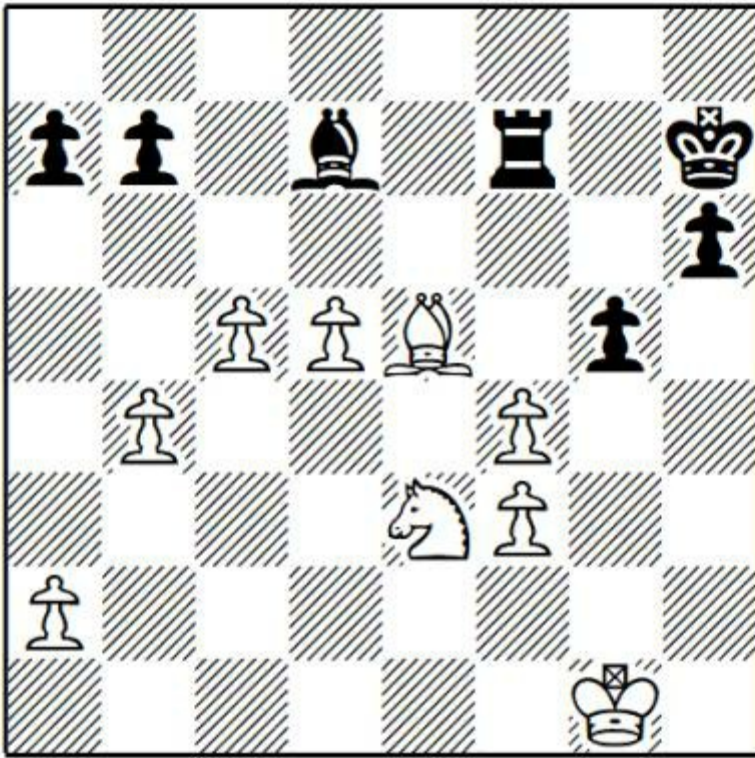
**35 Qg2 Rf7 36 c5 h6 37 b4 Bh3 38 Qg3**

38 Qe4 seems better, though the position remains quite tangled.

**38 ... Bd7**

38 ... g5!? was worth trying.

**39 f3 Kh7 40 Kf2 Qh1 41 Qg1 Qxg1+ 42 Kxg1 g5**



**43 Nc2!! gxf4 44 Nd4**

The double exclamation marks are more for originality than objective merit (though I think the last two moves were objectively strong). McShane spends two tempi and sacrifices the f4-pawn to again achieve perfect co-ordination.

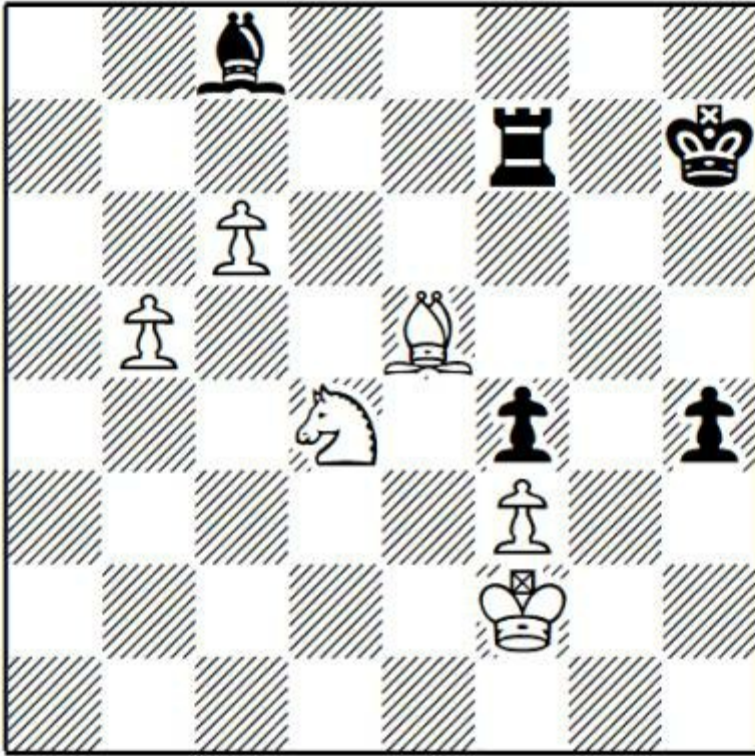
**44 ... a6**

The bishop on e5 can't be held and 44 ... Re7!? was an interesting attempt to generate activity, for example 45 Bxf4 Re1+ 46 Kf2 Rd1 47 Be3 a6 when I think Black should make a draw with precise play. For example, the direct 48 c6 (White could try other moves, but I don't see anything leading to an advantage) leads to a draw after 48 ... bxc6 49 dxc6 Rxd4! (simplest) 50 Bxd4 Bxc6 and peace breaks out.

**45 c6 bxc6**

45 ... Bc8!? is an equivalent alternative, but this is very difficult to judge at the board. After 46 c7 White could establish pawns on d6 and c7 but the light-square blockade holds firm.

**46 dxc6 Bc8 47 Kf2 h5 48 a4 h4 49 b5 axb5 50 axb5**

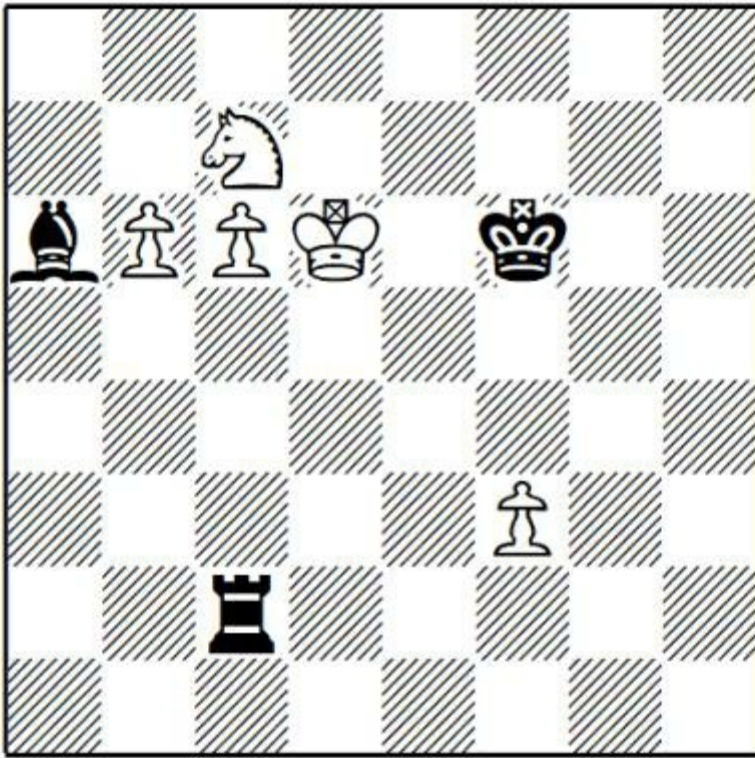


**Question:** How should Black continue?

**50 ... Ra7!!**

**Answer:** Finally displaying some activity with his rook. After 50 ... h3 51 b6 the black pieces aren't playing and White slowly consolidates, for example 51 ... Ba6 52 Kg1! Re7 53 Bxf4 Re1+ 54 Kh2 Rb1 55 b7 Bxb7 56 cxb7 Rxb7 57 Kxh3 with a winning endgame according to the Tablebases.

**51 Bxf4 Ra2+ 52 Ke3 h3 53 Ke4 h2 54 Bxh2 Rxh2 55 Kd5 Kg6 56 Kc5 Kf6 57 b6 Rb2 58 Nb5 Ba6 59 Nc7 Rc2+ 60 Kd6**



The conclusion to an epic struggle.

**Question:** Find the only drawing move.

**60 ... Rd2+??**

**Answer:** Eljanov had to play 60 ... Rb2! He'll collect the b6-pawn and, although the c7-pawn will cost a rook, White will either lose the f3-pawn or be unable to defend it from behind with his knight. Play could continue 61 Nxa6 Rxb6 62 Nc7 Kf5 63 Nd5 Ra6 64 Kd7 Ke5 65 Ne7 Kf4 66 c7 Ra7 and Black captures both pawns.

**61 Nd5+ Kf5 62 b7 Rb2 63 Kc7 Bxb7**

63 ... Ke5 64 Nb6 is hopeless.

**64 cxb7 Rc2+ 65 Kd6 Rb2 66 Kc6 Ke6**

66 ... Rc2+ 67 Kb5 Rb2+ 68 Nb4 and wins.

**67 Nc7+ 1-0**

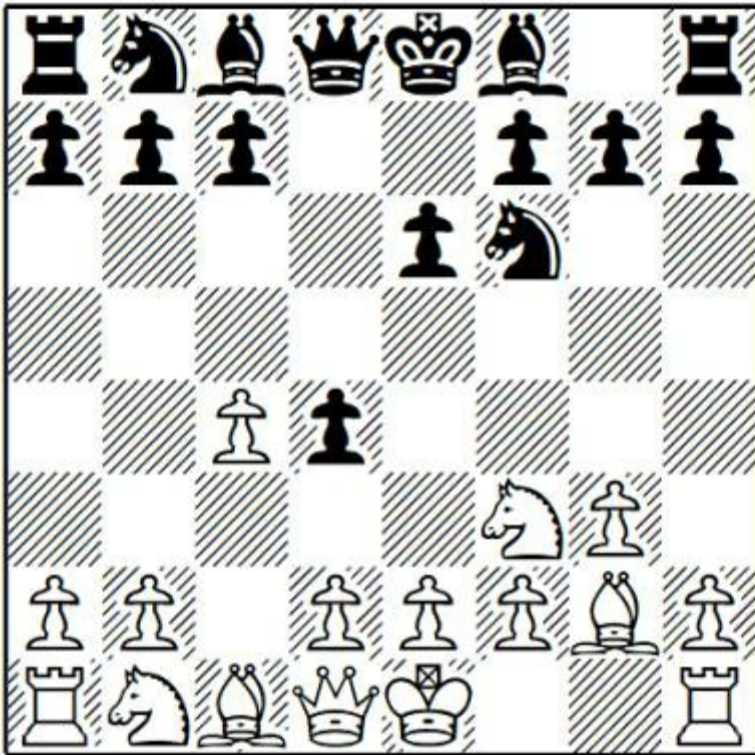
The knight comes to b5 and the b7-pawn queens. A wonderful fighting game and a credit to both players.

*Game 25*

**P.Maghsoodloo-M.Matlakov**

Sharjah Masters 2019

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 d4**



**Question:** Why would Black play this move instead of 4 ... Be7?

**Answer:** By playing his pawn to d4 immediately, Black remains flexible with the development of his dark-squared bishop, which can deploy to d6 or c5 instead of e7. There is also a practical consideration based on a player's repertoire, since after 4 ... Be7, White can transpose into a main line Catalan with 5 d4, having avoided sharp options based on an early ... dxc4 or ... Bb4+.

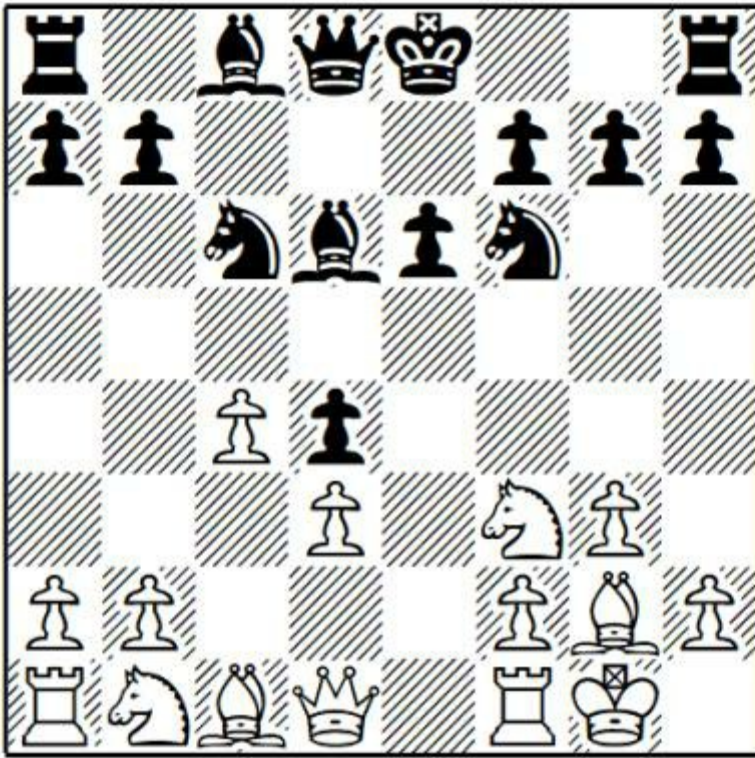
**Question:** So is this just a better version for Black than McShane-Eljanov?

**Answer:** White also gains some flexibility with his dark-squared bishop. In particular, he is not committed to an early Bb2 and can play this bishop to g5 instead. Playing a pawn to b3 might also be a wasted tempo, since after ... d4 there's no pressure on c4 and, by analogy with normal Benoni positions, b4 is generally a move White wants to play, trying to undermine the black centre.

**5 0-0 c5 6 e3!**

As we learned in the McShane game, White has to challenge the centre with this move.

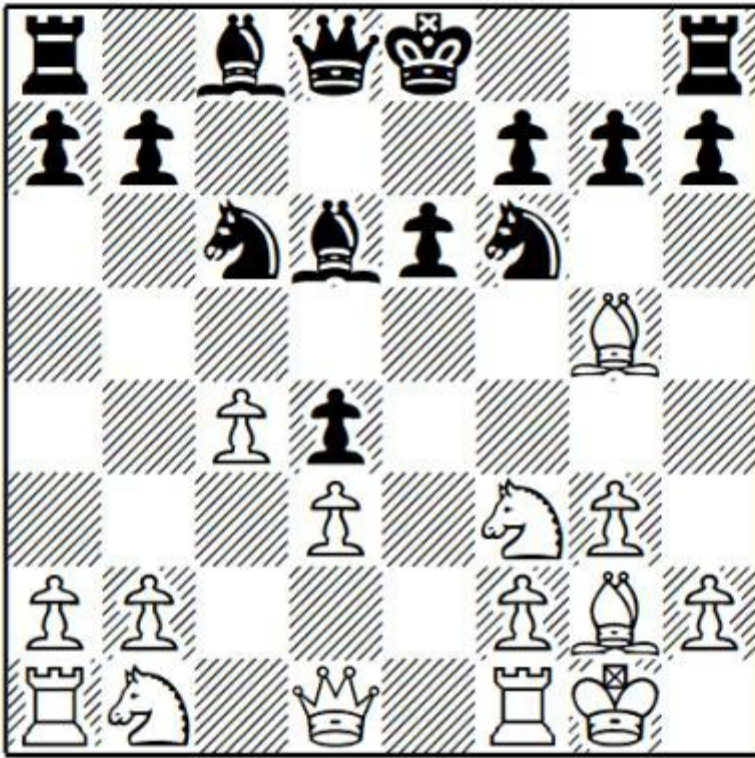
**6 ... Nc6 7 exd4 cxd4 8 d3 Bd6**



**Question:** Can Black simply play 8 ... Be7?

**Answer:** This move is possible and can, in some cases, transpose to lines discussed in McShane-Eljanov. White has some extra options however, which seek to take advantage of the fact that his bishop has not been developed to b2. 9 Re1 (9 Na3!? is also possible, generally aiming to support b4 with Nc2) 9 ... 0-0 10 b3 Re8 11 Ba3 (11 Bb2 Bc5 12 Ne5 transposes into a line recommended by Marin, discussed in the notes to McShane-Eljanov) 11 ... h6 12 Bxe7 Rxe7 13 a3 e5 14 b4 Qc7 with balanced play in P.Maghsoodloo-Q.Le, Makati 2018.

**9 Bg5**



**Question:** What is the idea behind this move?

**Answer:** White often struggles to find a useful role for his dark-squared bishop in these lines (by analogy with Black’s problem piece in the Benoni, namely the c8-bishop). It might seem that this is White’s “good” bishop, operating on a different colour complex to White’s d3 and c4 pawns. However, the bishop is limited by the black central pawns.

Sometimes White trades this bishop for its counterpart with b3 and Ba3, but trading it for a knight can also be quite effective.

We should also note that, unusually, White has less space than Black, accordingly trading a pair of minor pieces ought generally to be in his favour. Others:

a) 9 a3 a5 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 Nbd2 can transpose to the text game after 12 ... Qe7. I was quite impressed with the following game by a young English IM (perhaps a future GM): 12 ... 0-0 13 Ne4 Qe7 14 Nxd6 Qxd6 15 Rc1 e5 16 c5 Qg6 17 Re1 Re8 18 Qc2 Re7 19 Nd2 Bf5 20 Ne4 Bxe4 (a very responsible decision, preparing ... f5; Black would also be fine after more solid alternatives) 21 Rxe4 Rae8 22 Ree1 Kh8 23 Qc4 (23 Qd2! is a better way to prepare b4 since the queen isn’t exposed to ... Ne5 with tempo) 23 ... f5 24 b4 e4 25 dxe4 fxe4 26 Rcd1 axb4 27 axb4 d3 (White has to play carefully since the black central pawns are quite threatening) 28 b5 (28 Rd2 is more solid) 28 ... Ne5 29 Qc1? (the c3- or d4-squares should have been preferred for the queen) 29 ... Ng4! (the kingside attack is decisive, as Haria demonstrates beautifully) 30 c6 bxc6 31 bxc6 Qh5! 32 h3 Nxf2! 33 Kxf2 e3+ 34 Kg1 d2 and Black soon won in S.Grigoriants-R.Haria, Reykjavik 2018.

b) 9 Na3!?, bringing the knight to c2 to prepare b4, is an enterprising alternative which has been essayed by Adhiban amongst others.

c) I watched the following game live, the day after Rapport won a nice game in the Catalan against

my teammate Matthew Turner: 9 Nbd2 0-0 10 Ng5 Bd7 11 f4 h6 12 Nge4 Nxe4 13 Nxe4 Be7 14 Re1 a5 15 Bd2 f5 16 Nf2 a4. Black's pawn play has been exemplary and he had at least equalised in R.Rapport-M.Sadler, England 2019.

d) The Iranian talent hasn't had good results on the White side of this variation: 9 Re1 0-0 10 b3 h6 (10 ... Re8 11 a3 a5 12 Qc2 e5 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Nbd2 Bf8 was balanced in G.Sargissian-D.Mastrovasilis, Batumi Olympiad 2018) 11 Ba3 a5 12 Bxd6 Qxd6 13 Nbd2 e5 14 a3 (this is already a rather prospectless position for White; Generally speaking, Black can't be troubled by such a slow treatment of the position) 14 ... Bf5 15 Qc2 Nd7 16 Ne4 Qe7 17 h3! Bh7 18 g4 f5 19 gxf5 Bxf5 and Black went on to win in a few moves in P.Maghsoodloo-S.Bogner, Biel 2019.

e) The same position arose, but with Black's pawn already on e5 (which is a clear gain of tempo) in F.Caruana-R.Buhmann, Dortmund 2016, after the opening moves 1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 c5 3 Bg2 Nc6 4 0-0 e5 5 c4 d4 6 d3 Nf6 7 e3 Bd6 8 exd4 cxd4.

Now after 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 Nbd2 Bc7 13 Qa4 0-0 14 b4 Bf5 15 Qb3 Rab8 16 Rfe1 a6?! (16 ... b6 is more solid) 17 Rac1 Rfd8 18 a3 Qe7?! 19 b5 Na5 20 Qb4! Qf6 21 Ne4 Bxe4? (21 ... Qe6 is better, with an edge for White) 22 Rxe4 Black's centre had been transformed into a weakness and he went on to lose in 30 moves.

f) The position after 9 b3 has been played between strong players, but normally arises from other move orders (where White has committed to an early b3). Play can continue 9 ... 0-0 10 a3 (10 Na3 Re8 11 Nc2 e5 12 Re1 h6 13 b4 led to sharp play in L.Pantsulaia-N.Studer, Skopje 2019) 10 ... a5 and now:

f1) 11 Nbd2 e5 12 Qe2 Re8 13 h3 h6 was very comfortable for Black in J.Cori-A.Delorme, Linares 2019.

f2) 11 Re1 e5 12 Nbd2 h6 13 c5 Bxc5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Rxe5 was roughly level in E.Iturrizaga Bonelli-M.Cornette, London 2016.

f3) 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Nbd2 Qe7 14 Qc1 e5 15 Re1 Be6 16 Qb2 Bc7 17 Rac1 Bd6 18 Ra1 Bc7 19 Rac1 Bd6 20 Ra1 was agreed drawn in G.Sargissian-M.Yilmaz, Dubai 2016.

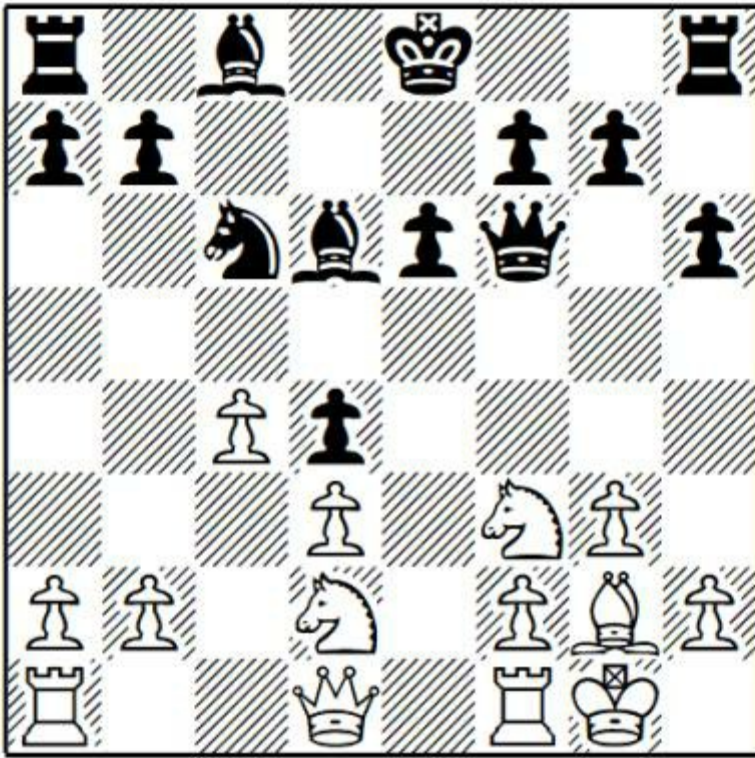
### **9 ... h6**

9 ... 0-0 10 Nbd2 Be7 11 Re1 h6 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 (P.Cramling-E.Postny, Brest 2019) is a rare defence but probably as good as 9 ... h6. White can proceed with 13 c5 followed by standard play with Rc1 and Ne4/Nc4.

### **10 Bxf6 Qxf6**

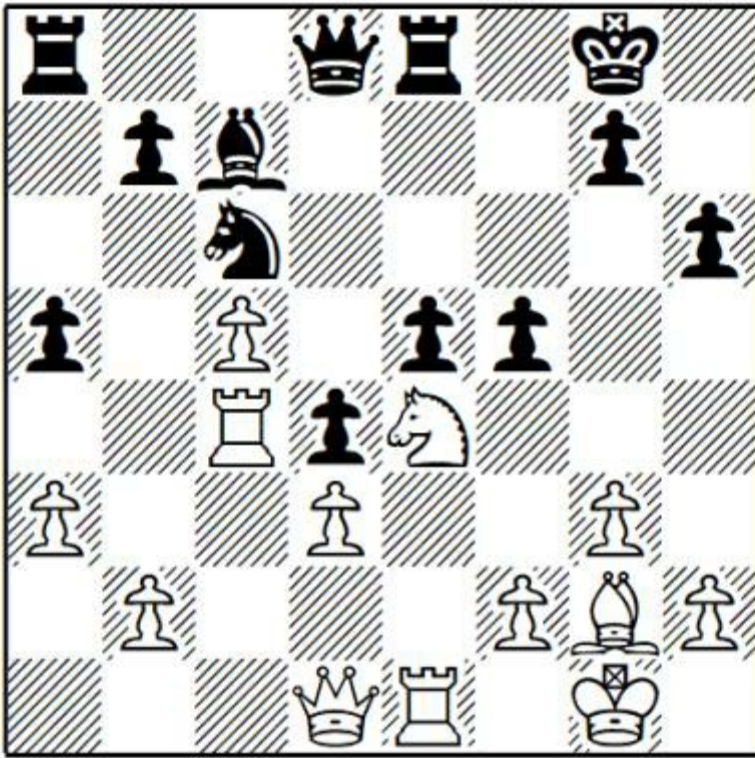
The committal 10 ... gxf6?! led to a White advantage after 11 Nbd2 f5 12 Rc1 0-0 13 c5 Be7 14 a3 a5 15 Re1 in P.Ponkratov-M.Mosadeghpour, Teheran 2019.

### **11 Nbd2**



### 11 ... Qe7

11 ... Qd8 is slightly more passive but also playable: 12 a3 a5 13 Rc1 (13 Ne4 Be7 controls b4 so White can't play in the same manner as in the main game) 13 ... 0-0 14 Re1 (this has been tested in several GM encounters, and the following game illustrates several of White's main ideas) 14 ... Re8 15 c5 Bc7 16 Nc4 e5 (16 ... a4 17 Nfd2 f5 18 f4! was also much better for White in S.Sjugirov-A.Korobov, St Petersburg 2018) 17 Nfd2! (an excellent regrouping, bringing the knight to e4 after which Nd6 will be a theme) 17 ... Be6 18 Ne4 Bxc4 (18 ... Ra6? 19 Ned6 was already winning for White in Y.Kuzubov-N.Meskovs, Karlsruhe 2017) 19 Rxc4 f5? (Black should have chosen the more conservative 19 ... Qd7, although White would retain an excellent position).



**Question:** How can White punish the weakening entailed in Black's last move?

**Answer:** 20 Qb3! (the Black position collapses on the light squares; Rxd4+, winning the queen, is the immediate threat; 20 Nd6 Bxd6 21 Qb3! was also strong but Banusz' move is even better) 20 ... Kh7 (20 ... Qc8 21 Nd6 Bxd6 22 cxd6 and the Black position can't be held) 21 Qxb7 Ne7 22 Nd6! Rb8 (22 ... Bxd6 23 Qxa8 wins more material) 23 Qa6 Rxb2. (this doesn't help but the position was hopeless in any event) 24 Nxe8 Qxe8 25 Qe6 Rd2 26 Bh3 Qf8 27 Rxd4! and Black resigned in T.Banusz-S.Zilka, Austria 2017.

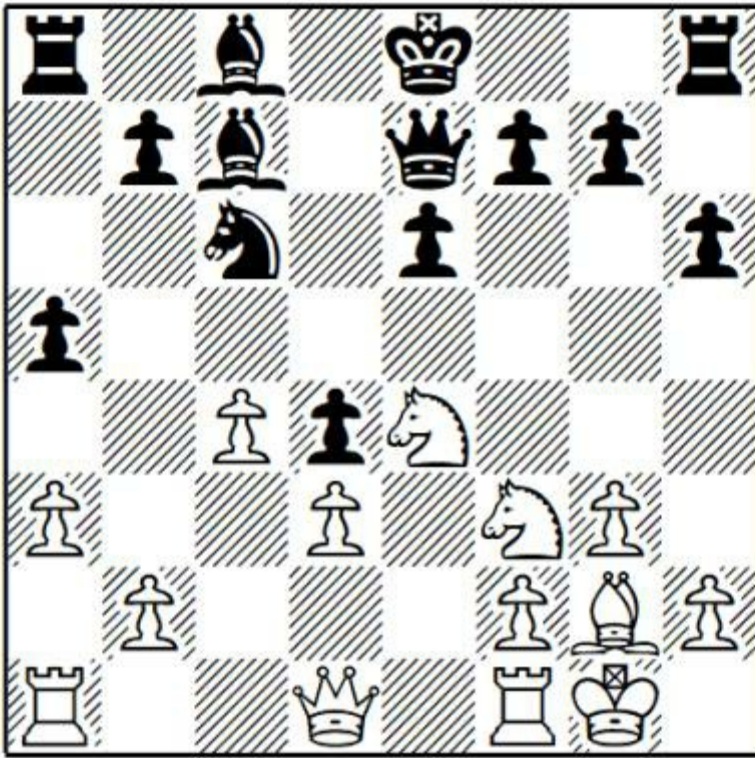
**12 a3**

Preparing b4 is the most principled approach and, in this move order, White has a tactical resource. Slower moves have also been tried here such as 12 Rc1, 12 Nb3 and 12 Ne4. For example, 12 Rc1 0-0 13 Re1 Rd8 14 Qc2 a5 15 c5 Bc7 16 a3 a4 17 Nc4 Rd5!? 18 Nb6?! Bxb6 19 cxb6 Rb5 20 Qc4 Rxb2 21 Nxd4 Rxb6 (21 ... Qf6!? is a good alternative) 22 Nxc6 bxc6 23 Bxc6 Bb7 24 Bxb7 Rxb7 with a level position in G.Oparin-M.Matlakov, Yaroslavl 2018.

**12 ... a5 13 Ne4**

13 Re1, which gives rise to less explored positions, has been tested in several recent GM encounters.

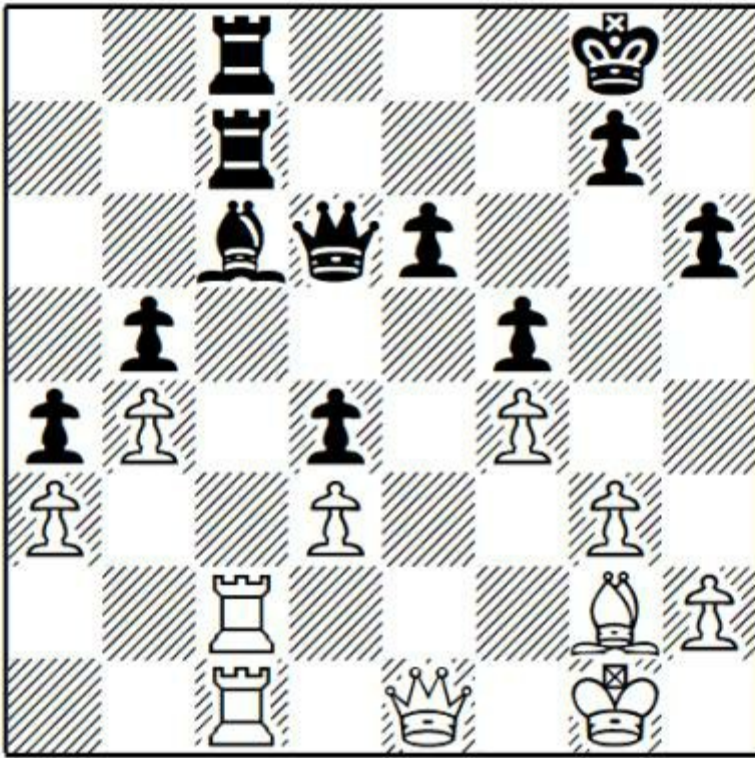
**13 ... Bc7**



#### 14 b4!?

The most forcing move, although White has been successful with alternatives:

a) 14 c5 was the choice of an Indian prodigy against an experienced French GM: 14 ... 0-0 15 Nfd2 f5 (of course this is not forced, and 15 ... a4!? is one of several decent alternatives) 16 Nd6!? Bxd6 17 cxd6 Qxd6 18 Nc4 Qc7 19 Re1 Bd7 20 Rc1 Ra6 (White has full positional compensation for the pawn and, probably, the easier game in practice; He should start with the immediate 21 f4 since, after his move in the game, 21 ... f4!? would create counterplay) 21 Re2 Re8 22 Qe1 Qb8 23 f4 b5 24 Nd2 a4 25 b4! Qd6 (25 ... axb3 26 Nxb3 Qd6 27 Nc5 is also balanced) 26 Nf3 Rc8 (Black has defended excellently but contesting the c-file will lead to his downfall; it was better to put the rook on d8 or b8, with a balanced game) 27 Rec2 Ra7?! 28 Ne5! Rac7? (28 ... Ne7 was the best defence although 29 Rc5! increases the pressure) 29 Nxc6! Bxc6 (29 ... Rxc6 30 Bxc6 Rxc6 31 Rxc6 Bxc6 32 Qe5! is also hopeless)



**Question:** How should White continue?

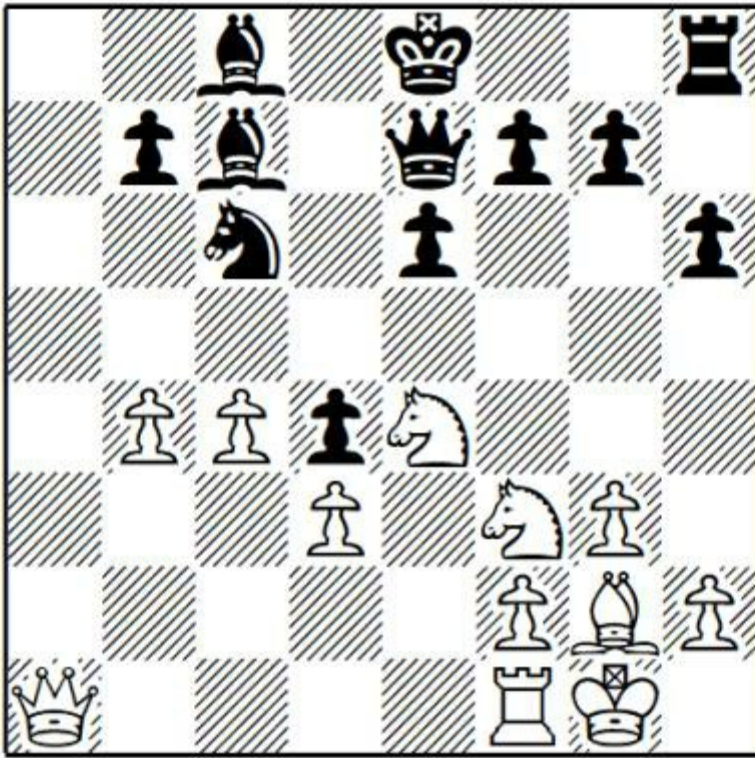
**Answer:** 30 Qe5! (the pin on the c-file is fatal and unbreakable) 30 ... Qd7 31 h4! Kf7 (losing immediately, but after 31 ... Kh7 32 Kh2 Kh8 White wins with 33 Rxc6! Rxc6 34 Qxb5) 32 Bxc6 Rxc6 33 Qxb5 and Black resigned in D.Gukesh-M.Cornette, Brest 2019.

b) 14 Qa4 Bd7 15 Qb5 a4! and now:

b1) 16 b4 (P.Svidler-N.Georgiadis, Caleta 2015) and Black could have played the excellent pawn sacrifice 16 ... axb3! 17 Qxb7 Ra7 18 Qxb3 0-0 with full compensation in view of ... f5 and ... Rb8 or ... Ra8.

b2) 16 Qxb7 Ra7 17 Qb5 Ra5 18 Qb7 Ra7 with a repetition.

**14 ... axb4 15 axb4 Rxa1 16 Qxa1**



**16 ... Qxb4**

Or:

a) 16 ... f5 17 Nc5 and now:

a1) 17 ... Nxb4 is a critical test, since Black regains the piece after 18 Qa4+ Kf7 19 Qxb4 Bd6! and now:

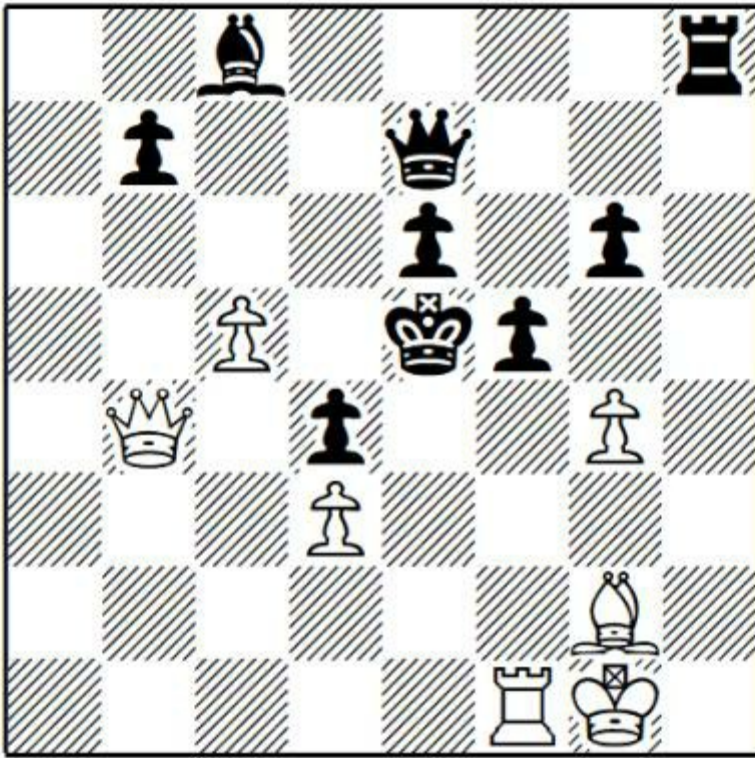
a11) 20 Qe1 Bxc5 21 Ne5+ Kf6 22 f4 h5 23 h3 Bd6 24 g4 hxg4 25 hxg4 g6 (the engine recommends 25 ... g5!! but I challenge any human to play such a move with their king on f6) 26 c5 Bc7 27 Qb4 Bxe5 (27 ... b6!) 28 fxe5+ and:

a111) 28 ... Kg7 29 gxf5 Qh4? (either recapture on f5 would maintain equality according to the engine, though I'd certainly take White) 30 f6+! Kf7 (Black must have taken comfort from the blockade of the f6-pawn and his initiative on the h-file, but White deals with it confidently) 31 Rf2!! Qh2+ 32 Kf1 Qh5 33 Re2!! (staggeringly accurate play) 33 ... Qf5+ 34 Ke1 Qxd3 ...

**Question:** White to play and win.

**Answer:** 35 c6! (Black should hold after 35 Be4 Qc3+ 36 Qxc3 dxc3) and Black can't meet the threats of taking on b7 and the queen landing on e7. After 35 ... Qg3+ 36 Kd1 Kg8 37 cxb7 Bxb7 38 Qxb7 Qd3+ 39 Rd2 he resigned in F.Mesaros-M.Bluebaum, Karpacz 2015.

a112) 28 ... Kxe5 is another good calculation exercise.



**Question:** White to play and win!

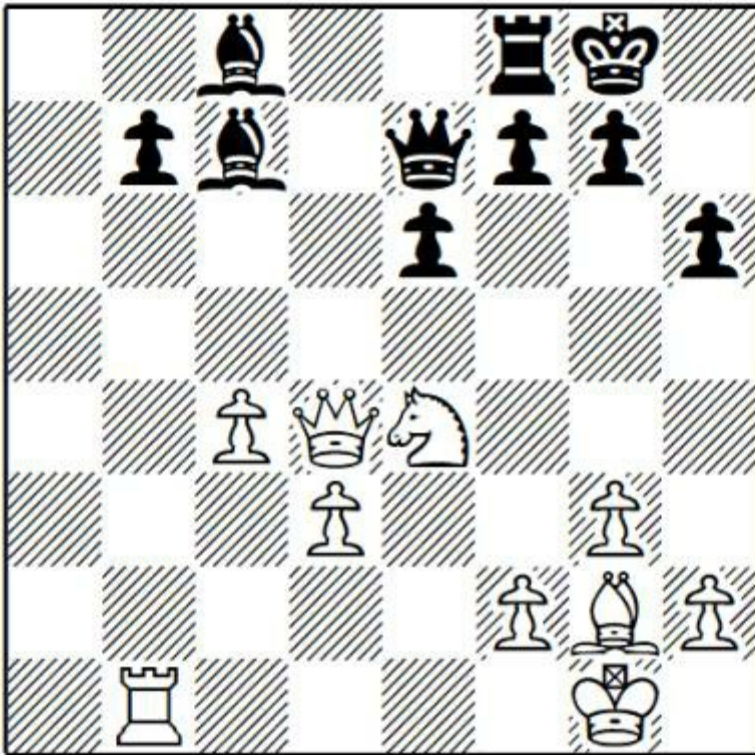
**Answer:** 29 g5!! (all other moves – such as 29 Re1+ – lead to a draw at most. This move demonstrates the concept of the “Kill Zone” explained by Jacob Aagaard in his *Attacking Manuals*. The king should not be allowed to run from the centre. After 29 ... Qxg5 30 Re1+ Kf6 31 Qxd4+ there is no ... e5 (unlike after the immediate 29 Re1+) and White wins the rook.

a12) 20 Ne5+ Bxe5 21 Qb5 Bd6 22 Nb3 (Demuth analyses 22 Nxb7 Bxb7 23 Bxb7 Rb8 24 Rb1 with equality) 22 ... Bd7 23 Qb6 Ba4 24 Nxd4 Bc5 25 Qb2 Bxd4 26 Qxd4 Rd8 27 Qe3 Bc6 28 Bxc6 bxc6 29 Rb1 c5 and a draw was soon agreed in Y.Wang-Z.Xiang, China 2019.

a2) 17 ... 0-0 18 Nxd4 (18 Re1 Nxb4 19 Nxe6 Nc2 20 Nxf8 Qxe1+ 21 Qxe1 Nxe1 22 Nxe1 Kxf8 23 Bd5 was agreed drawn in Wei Yi-D.Jakovenko, Moscow 2019, although Black could play on with no risk in view of his bishop pair) 18 ... Nxd4 19 Qxd4 b6 20 Nb3 Qxb4 was level in Z.Rahman-M.Kravtsiv, Bhubaneswar 2018.

b) Demuth notes that the untested 16 ... Nxb4?! should be met by 17 Qa4+!, gaining either the b7- or d4-pawn with a slight advantage.

**17 Rb1 Qe7 18 Nxd4 Nxd4 19 Qxd4 0-0**



### 20 c5!?

A very logical option, creating possibilities of Nd6 (even as a pawn sacrifice) and fixing the b7-pawn. An earlier game proceeded 20 Nc3 Rd8 21 Qe3 Ba5 22 Nb5 b6 23 d4 Ba6 24 d5 Qf6 25 dxe6 (25 h4!?! retains some play) 25 ... Qxe6 26 Bd5 Qxe3 27 fxe3 Bxb5 28 Rxb5 h5 29 Kf2 g6 30 e4 and a draw was agreed in H.Nakamura-V.Fedoseev, Tbilisi 2017.

### 20 ... Rd8 21 Qc3 Qd7 22 Rb3 Qa4 23 Bf3 f5

23 ... e5! was more circumspect, when I don't see why Black should be worse.

### 24 Ra3

24 Nd6 Bxd6 25 cxd6 Qa6! 26 Ra3 Qxd6 27 Ra8 transposes to the next note.

### 24 ... Qd7 25 Nd2

The tempting 25 Nd6!?! Bxd6 26 cxd6 Qxd6 27 Ra8 Qd7 28 Qc5! leaves Black in a bind after 28 ... Kh7 29 d4 Kg8 but I don't see any way for White to strengthen his position.

### 25 ... e5 26 Nc4 e4 27 dxe4 fxe4 28 Be2

28 Bxe4 Qd1+ 29 Kg2 Qh5 30 h4 Qxc5 was roughly level.

### 28 ... Kh7 29 Qc2 Qc6

29 ... Qd4! was better, with level chances.

### 30 Ne3 Rd4

30 ... Kh8 was better, for example 31 Ra4 Be5! 32 Rxe4 Bd4, regaining the pawn.

### 31 Bc4 Bd8?!

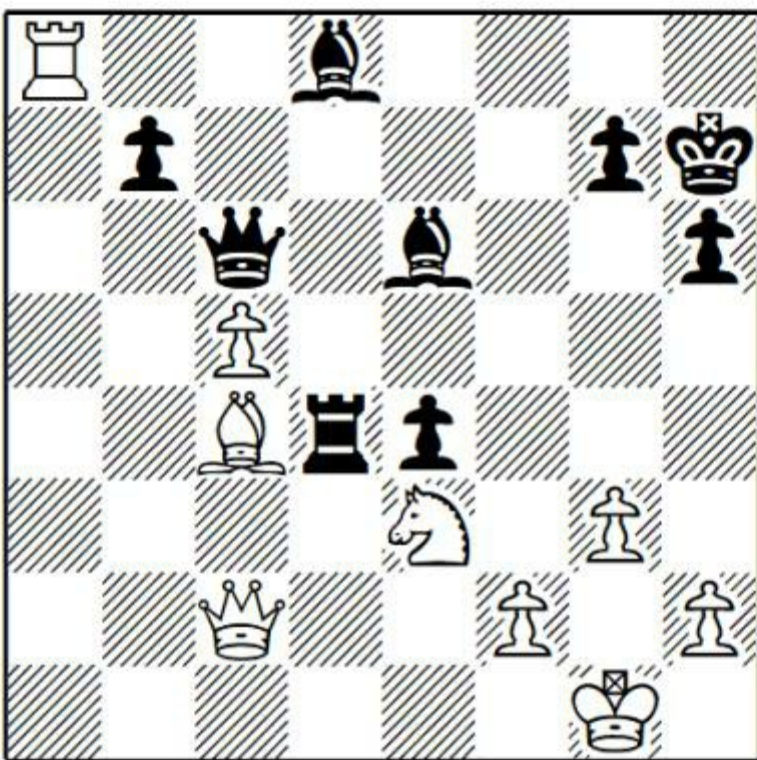
The immediate 31 ... Be6 was sounder, with an edge for White.

### 32 Ra8?

32 Ra4! and the threat of Bg8+ wins the e4-pawn, with winning chances: 32 ... Bf6 (32 ... Kh8 33 Bb5 Qf6 34 c6! is much better for White, while 32 ... Qf6 33 Bd5 Rxa4 34 Qxa4 wins the e4-pawn) 33 Bb5 Qxb5 34 Rxd4 Bxd4 35 Qxe4+ g6 36 Qxd4 Bh3 37 Qe4 (maintaining the queenside pawns with

37 Qd6 Qb1+ 38 Qd1 Qb4 39 Qc1 permits 39 ... Bd7! with a dangerous regrouping onto the long diagonal) 37 ... Qxc5 38 Qxb7+ with an ending where I suspect Black can hold but White can press for a long time.

**32 ... Be6**



**33 Bxe6**

After 33 Qb2 Black maintains equality with an attractive tactical sequence which isn't easy to spot: 33 ... Rxc4! 34 Nxc4 Bf6 and the idea of ... b5! regains material, for example:

a) 35 Qb4 b5 36 cxb6 (36 Nb6?! Be7 and 37 ... Bxc5 is good for Black) 36 ... Qxa8 37 b7 Qa1+ 38 Kg2 Bc3 39 Qe7 Qd1 40 b8Q Qf3+ with perpetual check.

b) 35 Qe2? b5 36 Nb6 Bd4 and after 37 ... Bxc5 Black's bishop pair and passed b-pawn, coupled with the clumsy b6-knight, will compensate for the minimal material deficit.

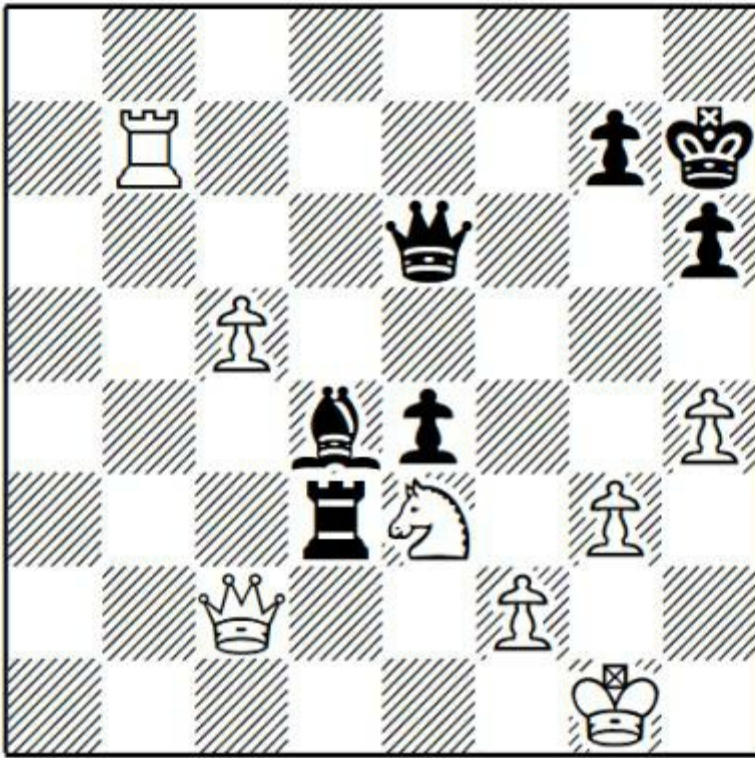
c) 35 Qc2 b5 36 Nb6 Bd4 37 Rf8 Bxc5 38 h4! h5 (38 ... Qxb6? fails to 39 Qxe4+ g6 40 Rf6!) 39 Kh2 Kg6 40 Qc1 Kh7 41 Qc2 with a bizarre computer draw.

**33 ... Qxe6 34 h4 Bf6 35 Ra7**

The prophylactic 35 Kg2 was more solid.

**35 ... Rd3! 36 Rxb7 Bd4!**

A very good practical attempt before the time control.



### 37 Qc4??

Others:

a) White's most human option was 37 Qe2 when Black is better after 37 ... Bxe3 38 fxe3 Qh3 39 Qe1 Rd5 40 Rb2 Rxc5 but White should be able to defend.

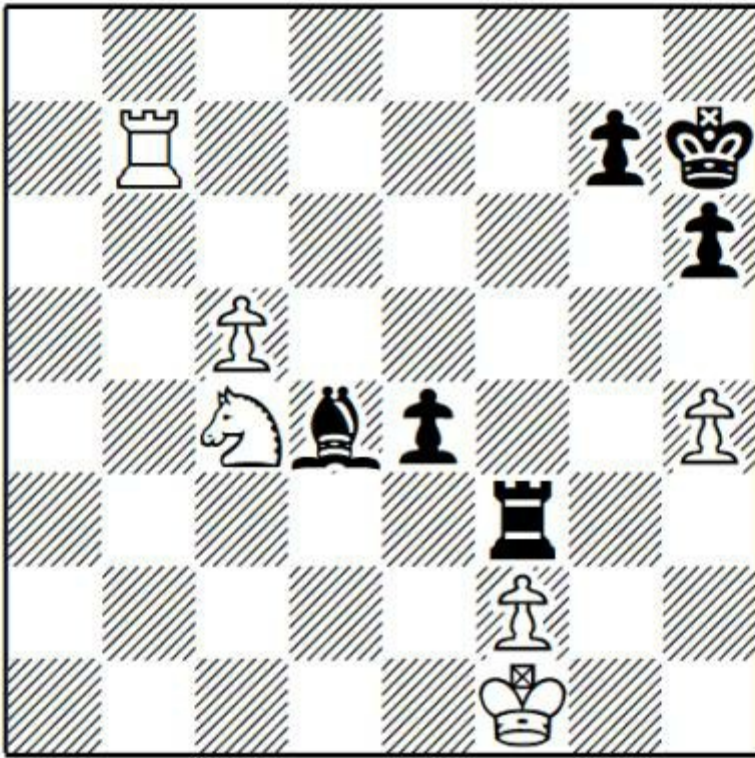
b) 37 Kh2! was also a good option. It looks frightening to allow a passed e-pawn, in combination with Black's other advantages, after 37 ... Bxe3 38 fxe3 Rxe3, but engines confirm that this is a draw.

**Question:** Black to play and win after 37 Qxc4.

### 37 ... Qxc4?

**Answer:** 37 ... Qe5! was immediately decisive since the white kingside collapses. 38 Nf1 (White can try an endgame a piece down after 38 Rb4 Bxe3 39 Qxe4+ Qxe4 40 Rxe4 Bxc5 when the limited material and absence of queenside pawns means that Black must remain vigilant, but this position should be winning with careful play; interested readers are referred to *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*, which covers this specific endgame in great detail) 38 ... Rxc3+ 39 Nxc3 Qxc3+ 40 Kh1 Qxf2 41 Rb1 gives Black a decisive attack in more than one way. The most precise continuation is 41 ... Qxh4+ 42 Kg2 Qg4+ 43 Kh2 (43 Kf1 Qf3+ 44 Ke1 Bc3+ wins the queen while 43 Kh1 allows mate in one) 43 ... Be5+ 44 Kh1 Qh3+ 45 Kg1 Qh2+ 46 Kf1 Qh1+ 47 Kf2 Qxb1 winning the rook and the game.

**38 Nxc4 Rxc3+ 39 Kf1 Rf3**



#### 40 Re7?

White had to play 40 c6! when the drawing properties of rook and pawn endgames come to his aid. 40 ... Rxf2+ (40 ... Bxf2 41 c7) 41 Ke1 Rc2! (41 ... e3 is simpler: 42 Nxe3! Bxe3 43 Rb3! and Black has nothing better than a drawn rook endgame after 43 ... Rc2 44 Rxe3 Rxc6) 42 Rb4 e3 43 c7 e2 (43 ... Bc3+ 44 Kd1 e2+ 45 Kxc2 Bxb4 46 c8Q e1Q 47 Qf5+ with perpetual check) 44 c8Q Bc3+ 45 Nd2 Bxd2+ 46 Kxe2 Rxc8 47 Kxd2 Black can try to cut the white king off from the kingside with 47 ... Re8, but 48 h5! Re5 49 Rh4 establishes a fortress, with a draw.

**40 ... Rxf2+ 41 Ke1 Rc2 42 Rxe4 Rxc4 43 Kd1**

43 Ke2 Rb4 44 c6 Rb2+ and 45 ... Bb6 comfortably controls the c6-pawn.

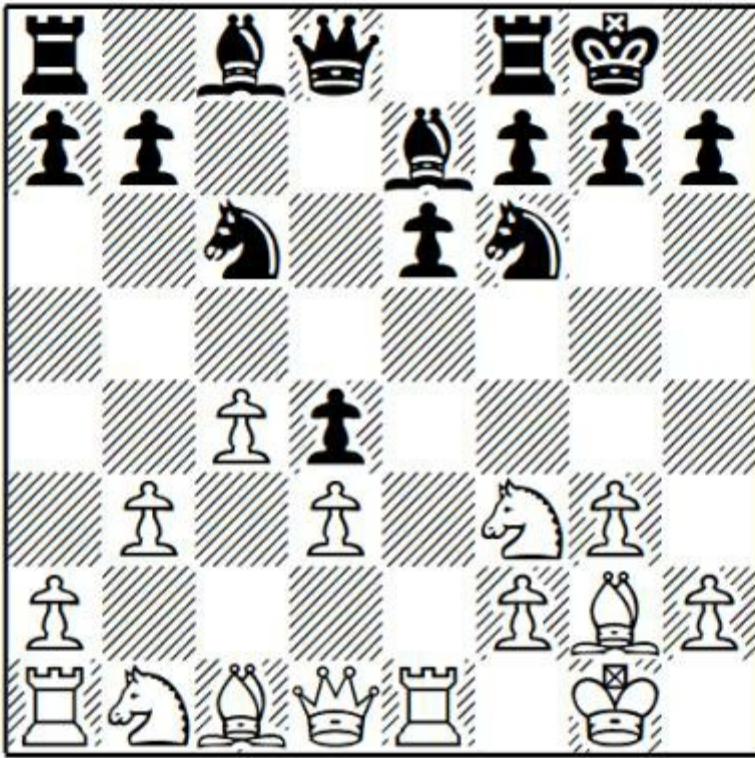
**43 ... Kg6 0-1**

#### Game 26

**L.Aronian-H.Nakamura**

St Louis Rapidplay 2017

**1 c4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 d4 5 e3 c5 6 exd4 cxd4 7 0-0 Nc6 8 d3 Be7 9 Re1 0-0 10 b3!?**



**Question:** What is the point of this move?

**Answer:** In the Benoni structure that arises if Black manages to push ... e5, White's dark-squared bishop often struggles to find a useful role and, in particular, can find itself buried on b2. Hence Aronian aims to trade the bishop on a3, before playing a3 himself to try to generate play on the queenside with b4. Nakamura had previously faced this idea when Topalov essayed it.

10 Na3! is a major alternative.

**Question:** What's the point of this move?

**Answer:** White wants to play the knight to c2, where it (incidentally) attacks d4 and prepares White's main break, b4. Again, Benoni themes are very much in evidence. Black has several options:

a) 10 ... Ne8 after which Stohl remarks, "A standard manoeuvre in this structure. Black keeps an eye on his pawn d4 while shifting his knight to c7, where it can support a future b5 advance." 11 Nc2 f6 12 b4! (the slower 12 Bd2 a5 13 a3 a4 14 Nb4 Nc7 was fine for Black in V.Ivanchuk-E.Alekseev, Jermuk 2009) 12 ... Bxb4 13 Nxb4 Nxb4 14 Qb3 Nc6 (14 ... a5!?) 15 Ba3 Rf7 was L.Ding-A.Korobov, Huaian 2017 and now 16 Nd2 would retain good compensation for the pawn.

b) 10 ... Qb6 11 Nc2 a5 12 b3 Rd8 13 Rb1 Nb4 14 a3 Nxc2 15 Qxc2 Bd7 16 Ne5 Be8 17 b4 axb4 18 axb4 Ra4 19 Bd2 was pleasant for White in S.Ganguly-V.Fedoseev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2019.

c) 10 ... Nd7?! is too ambitious, e.g. 11 Nc2! e5 (11 ... Ndb8?! looks a bit too elaborate, and 12 b3 a5 13 Bb2 Bf6 14 a3 e5 15 b4 Qc7 16 b5 Nd8 17 a4 gave White pleasant play in J.Moreno Ruiz-T.Sosa, Elgoibar 2019) 12 b4! f6? 13 Nh4 (the immediate 13 b5 was even stronger) 13 ... Nb6 14 b5 Nb4 15 f4! Na4 16 Nxb4 Bxb4 17 Bd5+ Kh8 18 Qxa4 Bxe1 19 f5! (White's thematic exchange

sacrifice has led to a strong attack, involving the d5-bishop, f5-pawn and g6-knight) 19 ... Bc3 20 Rb1 Qe8 21 Qd1! (re-routing the queen to join the attack) 21 ... g5 22 fxg6 hxg6 23 Bh6 g5 24 Bxf8 gxh4 25 Be4 f5 26 Bd5 Qxf8 27 Qh5+ Kg7 28 gxh4 (White's attack is decisive) 28 ... Qh8 29 Qg5+ Kh7 30 Kh1 Qg7 31 Qh5+ Qh6 32 Qf7+ Qg7 33 Qh5+ Qh6 34 Bg8+! and Black resigned in D.Fridman-M.Grabarczyk, Germany 2017.

d) 10 ... Re8 11 Nc2 Bd6 has been tried a couple of times by Indian GM Deep Sengupta, e.g. 12 Bg5 (12 Bd2 e5 13 b4 was Z.Efimenko-D.Sengupta, Warsaw 2017 and now 13 ... a6!? would have led to unclear play) 12 ... h6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 a3 a5 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 Rxa1 17 Qxa1 Nxb4 18 Qa4 Qe7 19 Nfxd4 Nxc2 20 Nxc2 was level in P.Vishnu-D.Sengupta, Jammu 2018.

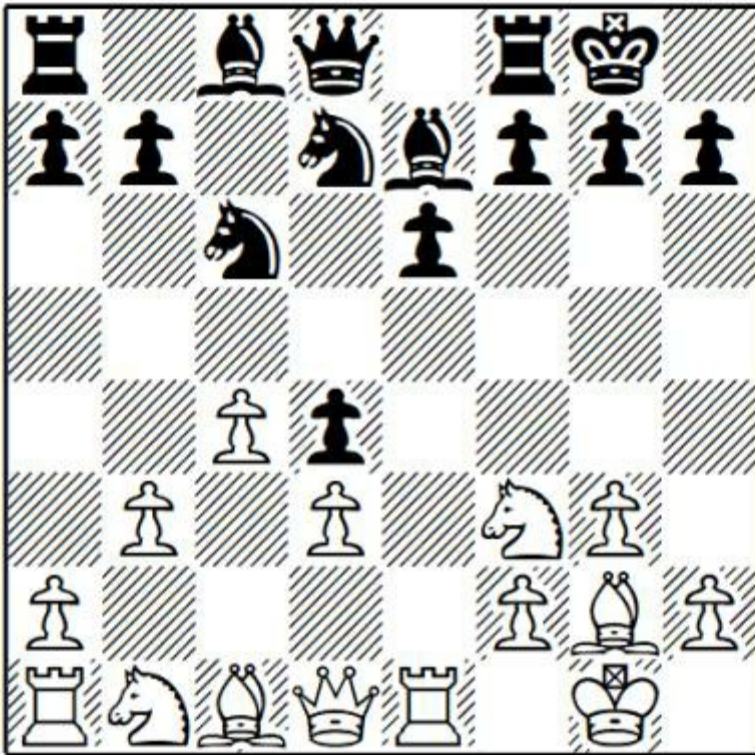
e) 10 ... h6 11 Nc2 a5 (11 ... Re8 was roughly level in O.Kobo-J.Deepan Chakkravarthy, Pardubice 2018) 12 b3 Re8 13 Ne5 Nxe5 14 Rxe5 Qc7 15 Rb5 e5 16 f4 Bd6 17 fxe5 Bxe5 18 Qf1 Ra6 19 Bf4 Rae6 20 Rxe5 Rxe5 21 Bxe5 Rxe5 22 Re1 was level in T.Petrosian-V.Bernadskiy, Tsaghkadzor 2017.

f) A game from the Batumi Olympiad in 2018 illustrated several key ideas for both players here after 10 ... Bd6 (preparing ... e5) 11 Nc2 (preparing b4 and attacking d4) 11 ... a5 (preventing b4). Note that Black waits until Nc2 before playing this move, since otherwise the white knight would occupy a strong outpost on b5. Now:

f1) 12 a3 e5 13 Rb1 a4 (a thematic move, preventing b4 but allowing a different opportunity) 14 Nb4! (trading the passive knight and undermining the e5-pawn) 14 ... Re8 15 Bg5 (now Nd5 is an option, so it makes sense for Black to trade on b4) 15 ... Nxb4 16 axb4 Bxb4 17 Rxe5 Rxe5 18 Nxe5 h6 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 f4 Bd6! (correctly exchanging the strong e5-knight) 21 Qe2 Bxe5 22 fxe5! (it's a good decision to keep the queens, since White has some attacking prospects down the f-file; her main trump is a slight lead in development) 22 ... Qb6 23 Rf1 Be6 24 Bd5 (after the trade of bishops, the position becomes very drawish) 24 ... Re8 25 Qf3 Re7 26 Rf2 Rd7 27 Qe4 Re7 28 Qf3 Qc7 29 Re2 Rd7 30 Qe4 Qb6 31 Rf2 Re7 32 Kg2 Rd7 33 Kg1 Re7 and a draw was agreed in O.Zimina-H.Koneru, Batumi Olympiad 2018.

f2) In closed structures one often sees the sacrifice of an exchange for a pawn. Here, however, it doesn't quite work: 12 Ncxd4?! Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Bb4 (getting the dark-squared bishop and a pawn for the exchange would be a good deal if White could also secure central control, but here she can't) 14 Be3 (14 Nc2 Bxe1 15 Nxe1 e5 is comfortable for Black, who controls the central dark squares) 14 ... Bxe1 15 Qxe1 Ng4 forces the exchange of White's dark-squared bishop, after which Black is, at least, not worse.

**10 ... Nd7**



Others:

a) 10 ... Ne8 was V.Topalov-H.Nakamura, Leuven 2016. Topalov chose 11 a3, which I don't understand, and instead I think 11 Ba3 was a better try.

b) 10 ... Bb4!? 11 Bd2 Bd6! was an interesting try to avoid Ba3, and after 12 a3 a5 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Nbd2 Qe7 16 Qc1 e5 Black had a comfortable game in Z.Efimenko-M.Kravtsiv, Rivne 2016. Instead I would prefer 11 Nfd2!?, when both Ba3 and f4 are on the cards.

c) 10 ... a5 aims to meet Ba3 with ... Bb4, but weakens the b5-square. I like White's play in the following example: 11 Na3 Nd7 12 Nb5 e5 13 a3 f5 (13 ... f6 is more solid) was S.Movsesian-K.Dragun, Czech Republic 2016. In the game, White played 14 h4 f4 15 Ra2, but I prefer the immediate 14 Ra2!, bringing the rook to e2 with serious pressure on Black's centre.

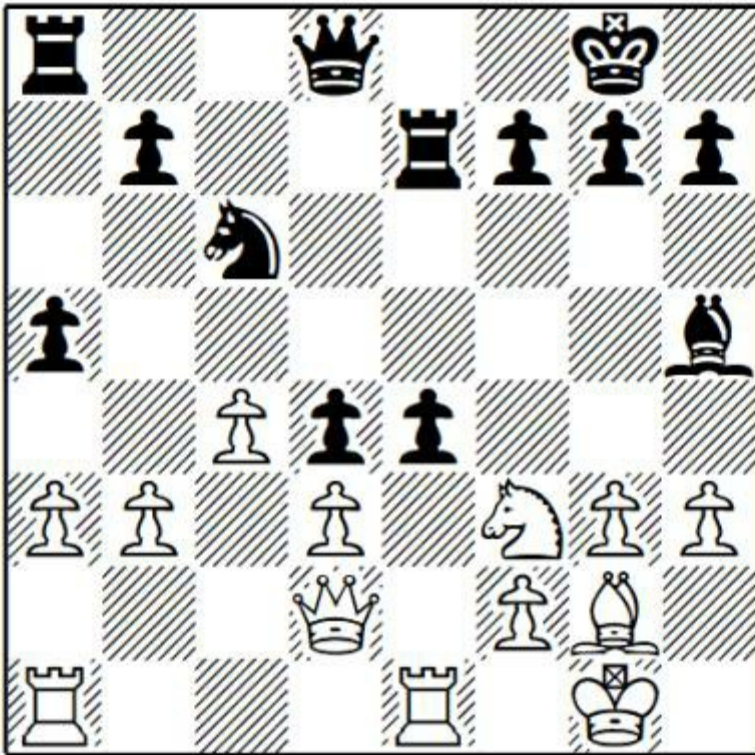
### 11 Ba3 Re8

Or:

a) 11 ... e5 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Nbd2 Nc5 14 Qe2 f6 15 Ne4 Ne6 16 a3 a5 17 Qc2 was balanced in E.Miroshnichenko-A.Lenderman, chess.com INT 2018.

b) 11 ... a5 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Nbd2 Nc5 14 Ne4 Bd7 15 Qe2 Rfd8 16 Nxc5 Qxc5 17 a3 Rab8 18 h4 h6 19 Ne5 was G.Jones-D.Swiercz, Atlantic City 2016 and now I think Black would have been fine after 19 ... Nxe5 20 Qxe5 b6.

12 Bxe7 Rxe7 13 a3 a5 14 Nbd2 Nc5 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Rxe4 e5 17 Re1 Bg4 18 h3 Bh5 19 Qd2 e4!?



A very ambitious move which worked well in rapid, but probably wouldn't have been tried against Aronian at a slower time control. 19 ... f6 is fine for Black.

**20 Rxe4**

20 Nh4 exd3 21 Qxd3 looks like an edge for White.

**20 ... Rxe4 21 dxe4 Bxf3 22 Bxf3 a4 23 Rb1 Ne5 24 Bg2?!**

The less natural 24 Bd1! seems to be a better move, for example 24 ... axb3 25 Rxb3 Nxc4 26 Qb4 Na5 27 Rd3 Nc6 28 Qxb7 with a clear extra pawn.

**24 ... axb3 25 Rxb3 Nxc4 26 Qb4 Ne5 27 Qxb7 d3**

Black now has sufficient counterplay with his strong passed d-pawn.

**28 Rb1 h5 29 Qd5 Qxd5 30 exd5 Rxa3 31 d6 d2 32 Kf1 Rd3 33 Ke2 Rxd6 34 Be4 Nd7 35 Bf5 d1B+**

Unlike Nakamura's underpromotion against Mamedyarov in St. Louis, which cost him dearly (please look it up on YouTube if you haven't seen it!), this one is okay.

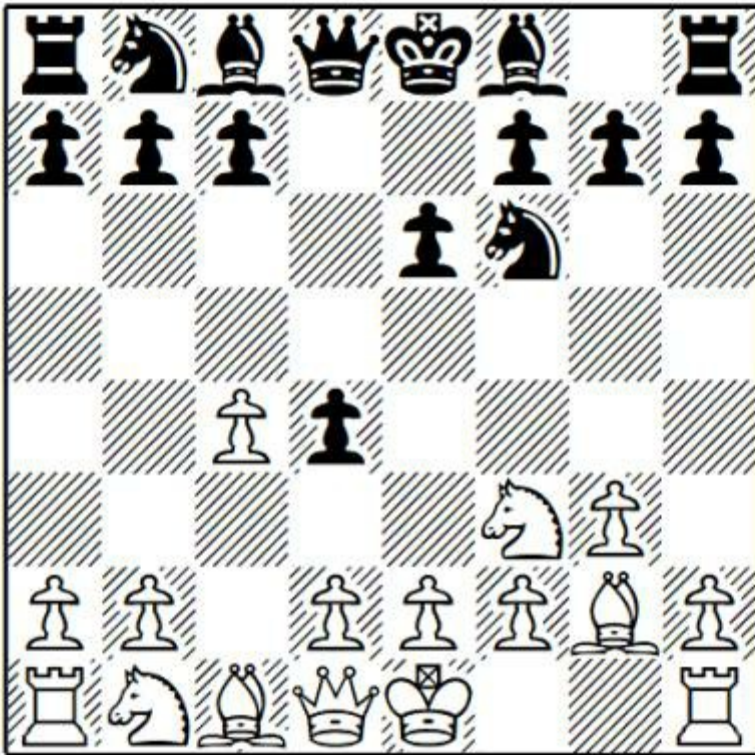
**36 Rxd1 Rxd1 ½-½**

*Game 27*

**M.Adams-N.Zhukova**

Gibraltar Masters 2019

**1 c4 e6 2 g3 d5 3 Bg2 Nf6 4 Nf3 d4**



### 5 0-0

White can adopt a closed setup with 5 d3 c5 6 e4!?, which Zhukova faced in a later game. This approach has been adopted by Réti experts Daniel Fridman and Alexander Donchenko, and is definitely worth considering: 6 ... Nc6 7 e5 Nd7 8 Bf4 (8 Qe2 Qc7 9 Bf4, as played in P.Guichard-N.Zhukova, Monaco 2019, might be less precise since, as will appear, Black is not threatening to take on e5 even if White omits Qe2) and now:

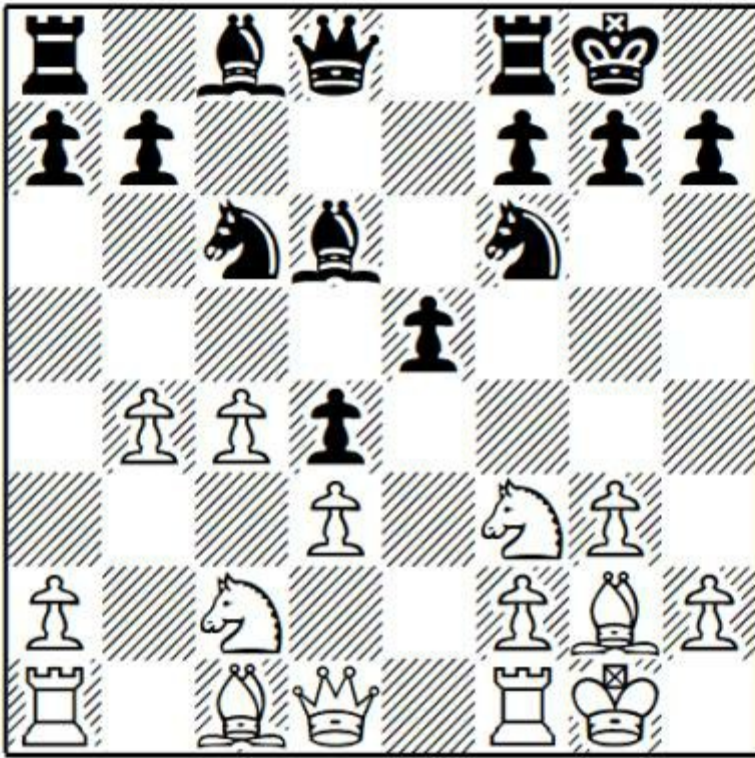
a) 8 ... Be7 9 h4 led to White victories in A.Donchenko-P.Villegas, Brest 2019 and D.Fridman-D.Mastrovasilis, Batumi 2019. The structure reminds me of a King's Indian Attack with Qe2, often used by Gawain Jones (for example, 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d3 d5 4 Qe2) where White fianchettoes his light-squared bishop and often seizes space with e5 and c4. Players who enjoy complex positions with kingside attacking potential might investigate this line, although the engine isn't impressed.

b) 8 ... Qc7 9 Nbd2 and:

b1) 9 ... Ne7 10 Ne4 Ng6 11 Qd2 Be7 12 0-0 0-0 with balanced play in A.Donchenko-M.Oleksienko, Brest 2019.

b2) 9 ... Ndx5? 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 0-0 and the pin on the knight is deeply unpleasant as ... Bd6 will always be met by Ne4. For example, 11 ... f6 12 Re1 Be7 13 Bxe5 fxe5 14 Nf3 and White regains his pawn with an excellent position.

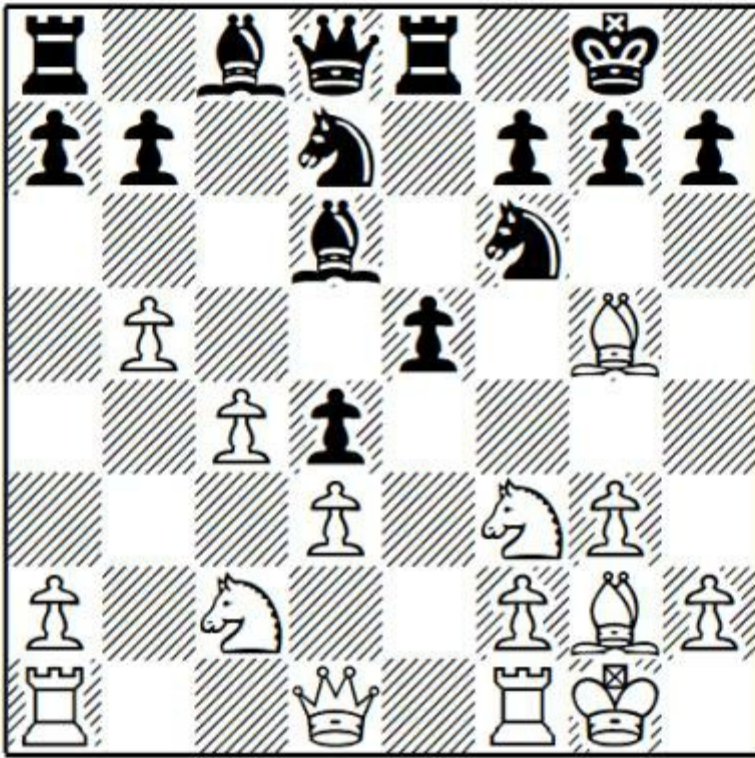
**5 ... c5 6 d3 Nc6 7 e3 Bd6 8 exd4 cxd4 9 Na3 0-0 10 Nc2 e5 11 b4**



**11 ... Nxb4?**

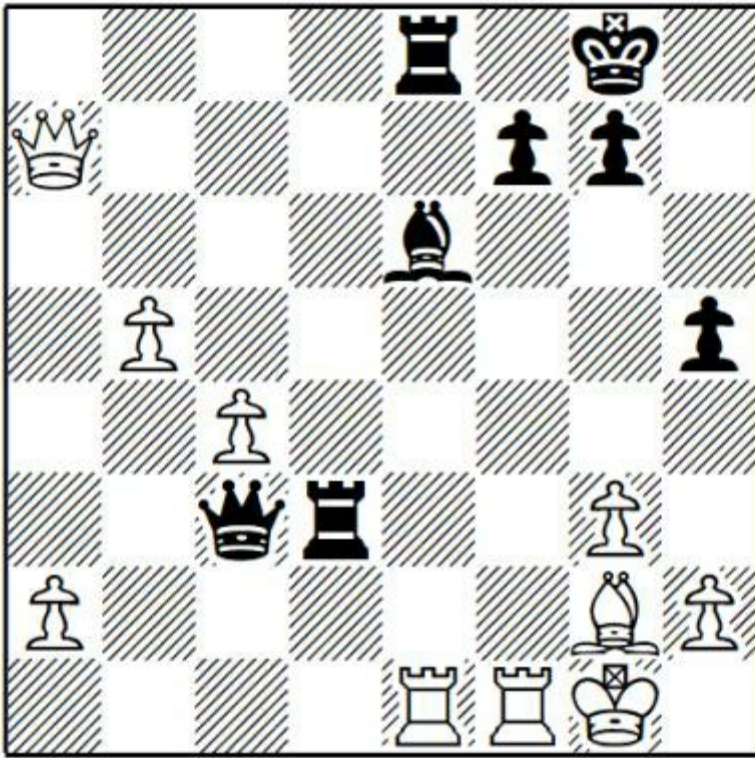
It looks very compliant to exchange the e5-pawn for the b4-pawn. Instead:

a) Holding the e5-pawn with 11 ... Re8 is logical: after 12 b5 Nb8 13 Bg5 Nbd7 the position is balanced, but I really like how Adhiban handles it.



**Question:** How should White continue?

**Answer:** 14 Nd2! is far more purposeful than something like 14 Re1, even though the engines don't view the move as anything special. White prepares to occupy e4 with a knight and, more importantly, gives himself a kingside pawn break in the form of f4. Black probably should have responded with 14 ... Nc5. Play continued 14 ... Qc7 15 f4 exf4 16 Bxf4 Nc5 17 Bxd6 (17 Nb4!?, aiming for d5, is promising, while challenging the strong c5-knight with 17 Nb3! is strong and similar to the game) 17 ... Qxd6 18 Nb3 Ng4 (The compliant 18 ... Nxb3? 19 axb3 gives White an ideal position, where the d4-pawn is likely to fall after Qf3-f2) 19 Qf3? (19 Rf4! was much better for White) 19 ... Be6? (19 ... Ne5! was better, changing the character of the game and leading to a balanced position after 20 Qd5 Qxd5 21 Bxd5 Ncx3 22 Ncx4) 20 Nxc5 Qxc5 21 Rae1 (White has very strong pressure down the e- and f-files and on the long diagonal; Rxe6 followed by Qxg4 is an immediate threat) 21 ... h5 22 Qxb7 Ne3 23 Nxe3 dxe3 (the e3-pawn is easily collected) 24 Qc6! Qd4 25 Qe4! Qc3 26 Qxe3 Rad8 27 Qxa7 Rxd3?



**Question:** White has a completely winning position after any reasonable move, but how can he force immediate resignation?

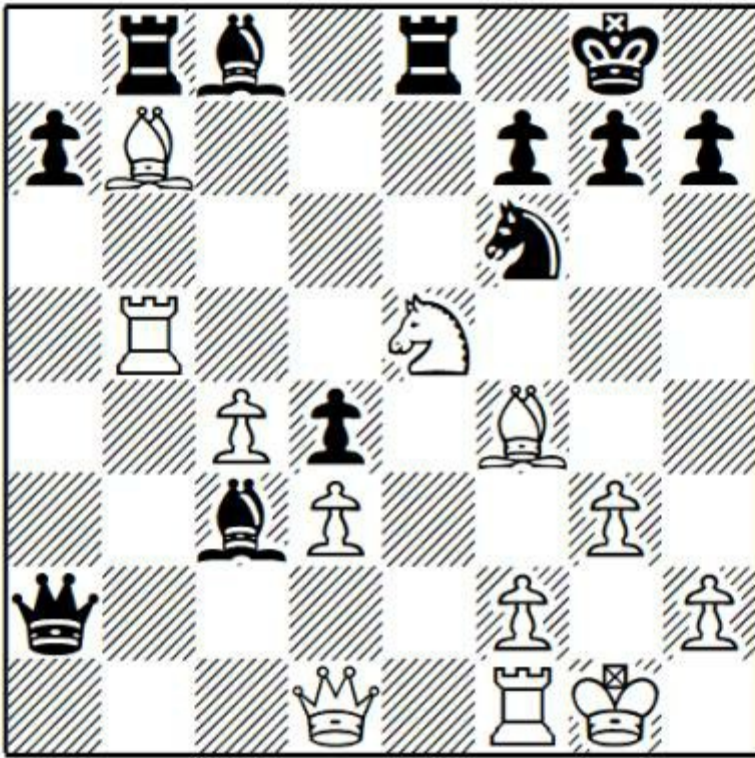
**Answer:** 28 Rxe6! and Black resigned in B.Adhiban-I.Cheparinov, Zagreb 2018.

b) Demuth suggests 11 ... a6.

**12 Nxb4 Bxb4 13 Nxe5 Bc3?**

A further mistake, after which the bishop is out of play on c3.

**14 Rb1 Qa5 15 Bf4 Re8 16 Rb5 Qxa2 17 Bxb7 Rb8?**



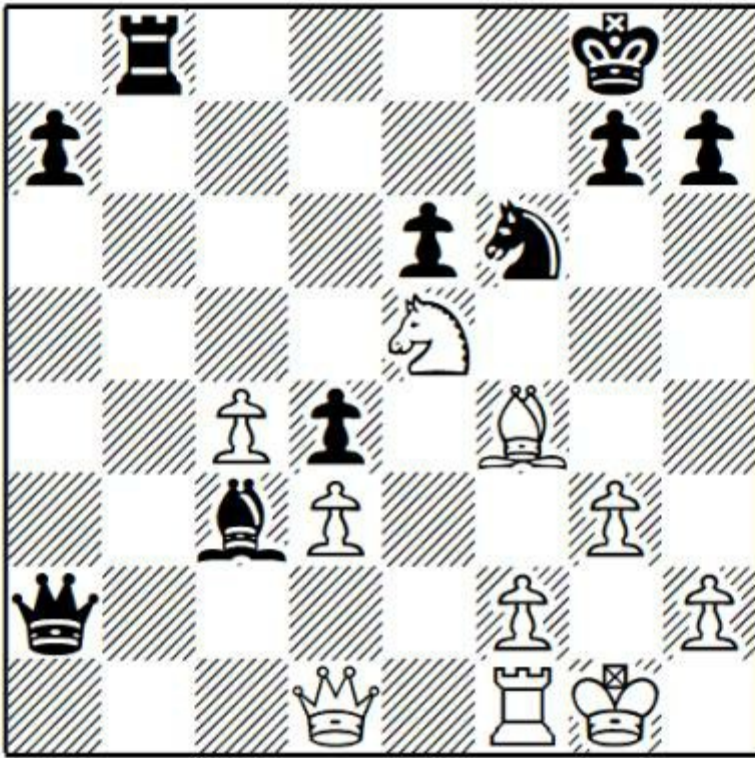
Allowing a tactical shot.

**Question:** White to play and win!

**18 Bd5!**

**Answer:** Winning material or fatally undermining Black's structure. 18 Bc6 was also very strong.

**18 ... Be6 19 Bxe6 fxe6 20 Rxb8 Rxb8**

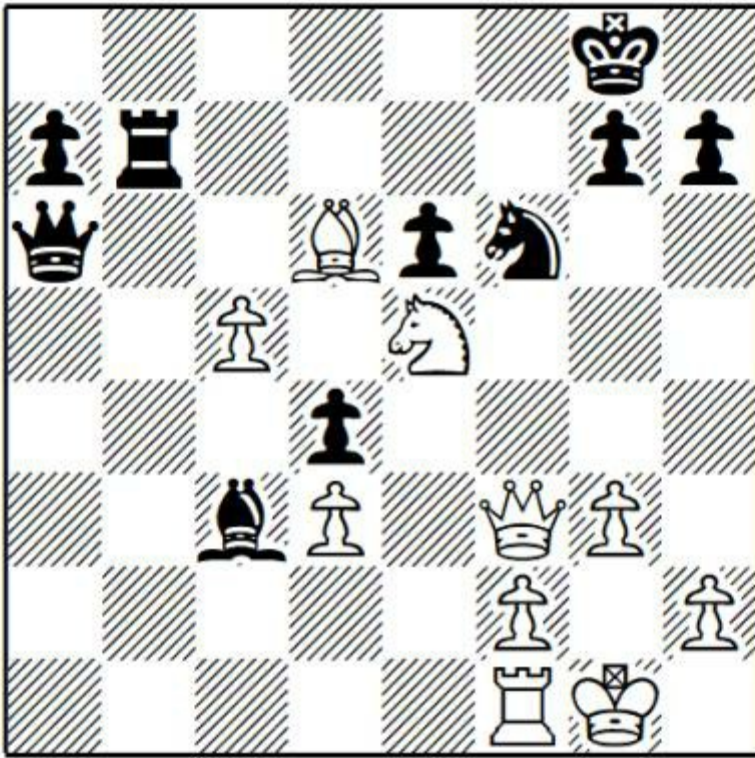


**Question:** How should White continue?

**21 Ng4!**

**Answer:** While primarily known for his subtle positional skills, Mickey Adams is more than capable of carrying out a vicious attack when the opportunity presents itself. Here, Black only has one defensive piece on the kingside, and the exchange on e6 has weakened her kingside structure. 21 Qf3 and 21 g4 were also excellent.

**21 ... Rf8 22 Bd6 Rf7 23 Ne5 Rb7 24 Qf3 Qa6 25 c5!**



Defending the bishop and reminding Black of the possibility of a promotion on c8. The d6-bishop cuts the board in two and prevents Black from effectively defending the e6-pawn.

**25 ... Bb4 26 Rb1 Bxc5 27 Rxb7 Qxd6 28 Nf7 Qa6 29 Ng5 Qd6 30 Nxh7! 1-0**

Concluding a lovely “W” manoeuvre, similar to that used to mate with bishop and knight against a lone king. Black resigned, facing decisive material losses.

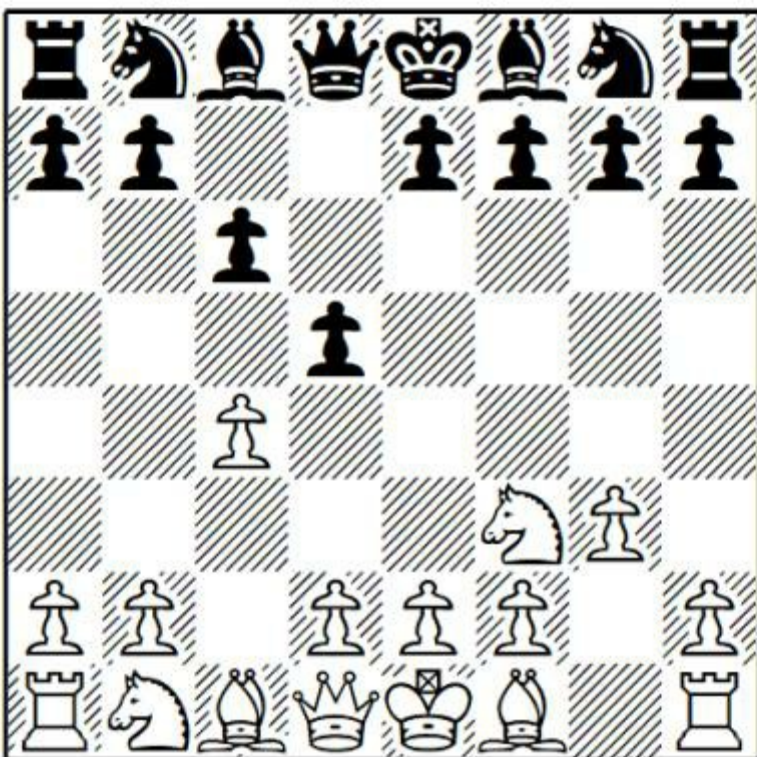
# Chapter Six

## Slav Systems

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6**

The Slav is one of the most reliable and popular defences to 1 d4 and, if anything, its reputation against the Réti is even better. For example, many players meet 1 c4 with 1 ... Nf6 and, if 2 g3, then 2 ... c6, avoiding transpositions to main line Slavs (with d4) or to lines with e3. As elsewhere in the book, I've recommended an approach based on

**3 g3**



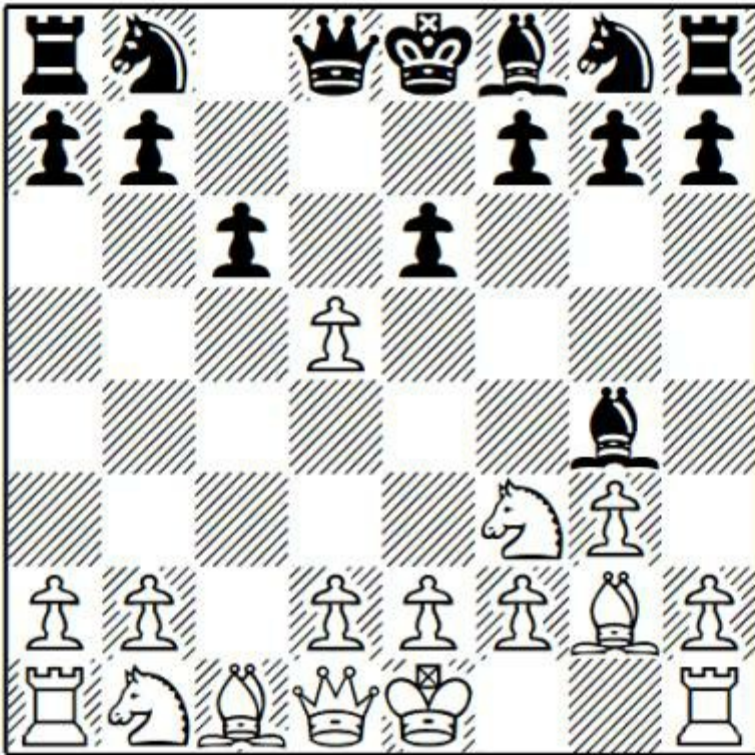
The resulting positions are very dynamic and tactical. Many take on a gambit character since, with ... c6, Black is better placed to take on c4 and defend his spoils with ... b5. Apart from those fond of the Semi-Slav, Slav players generally like to develop their c8-bishop outside the pawn chain before playing ... e6. We'll cover approaches with ... Bg4 and ... Bf5, as well as the Schlechter Slav or Grunfeld-type systems which can be reached after ... g6.

*Game 28*

**V.Artemiev-A.Motylev**

Russian Team Championship, Sochi 2019

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Bg4 3 Bg2 c6 4 c4 e6 5 cxd5**



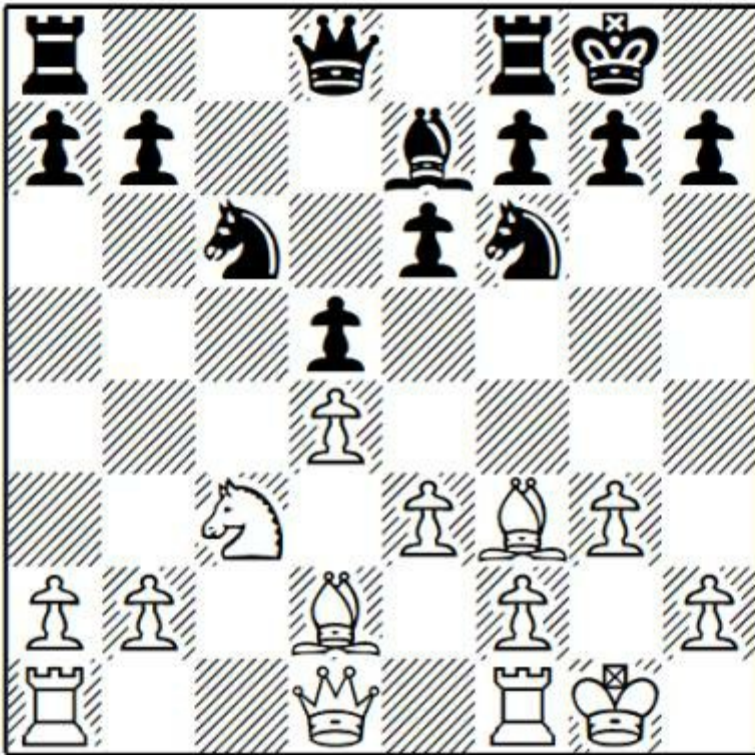
### 5 ... Bxf3

Aiming to recapture with the c-pawn (of course, 5 ... cxd5?? 6 Qa4+ isn't advisable). The important main line 5 ... exd5 6 0-0 Nf6 7 d3 Nbd7 8 Nc3 is discussed in Hillarp Persson-Hector.

### 6 Bxf3 cxd5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nc3

White can play more flexibly with 8 d3 Nf6 9 Nc3 Be7, also with prospects of a slight advantage.

### 8 ... Nf6 9 d4 Be7 10 e3 0-0 11 Bd2



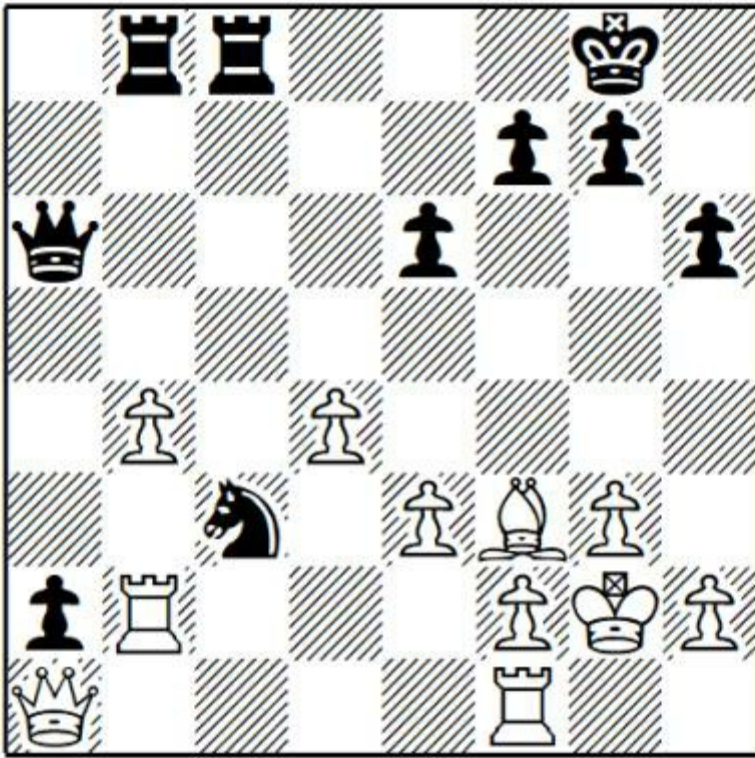
Dozens of GM games have been played from this position. The structure suggests that some (or all) rooks are likely to be exchanged down the c-file. Neither player has advanced their queenside pawns yet and, while such advances could gain space, they could also create weaknesses (for example, White playing b4 would create an outpost on c4 and give Black a pawn lever with ... a5). White has the bishop pair which is limited for the moment. The d2-bishop is inside the white pawn chain, while the g2-bishop is limited by Black's d5-e6-f7 chain. For this reason, pushing ... e5 is always risky and is likely to be a positional blunder by Black. However, White can seriously consider e4 (with or without f3), trying to open lines for his bishops, even at the cost of an isolated queen's pawn.

### 11 ... Qd7

I'll limit myself to a couple of instructive examples after 11 ... Rc8 and now:

a) 12 Rc1 and:

a1) 12 ... Ne8! (manoeuvring the knight to d6, which is an excellent square in this structure, controlling c4 and e4 and keeping an option of ... f5) 13 Ne2 Nd6 14 Nf4 Qb6 15 Bc3 Rfd8 16 a3 Nb5 17 Bd2 Bg5 18 Nd3 Nd6 19 Bc3 Nb5 20 Bd2 Nd6 21 Rc2! (declining the repetition, despite the level position; Howell's fighting spirit is one of his huge strengths, although in this game he'll need to endure some dark moments after a model display by Saric) 21 ... h6 22 Kg2 Nc4 23 Bc1 a5 24 Rc3 Be7 25 Be2 Qa7! (a good plan, preparing to play ... b5 and ... b4) 26 Qa4?! (White should defend with 26 Bd2 b5 27 Rc2 with equality, since Howell's attempted blockade with his queen proves to be brittle) 26 ... Rb8 27 Qb5 (27 Qd1!?) 27 ... Rdc8 28 Nc5 Bxc5 (28 ... b6! would have been slightly better for Black) 29 Qxc5 Qa8 (29 ... b6!? 30 Qb5 Qb7 followed by ... Na7 and ... b5 gets the pawns rolling) 30 Qb5 (or 30 b3 N6e5 31 Qb5 Nd6) 30 ... Na7 31 Qb3 b5 32 Qd1 a4 33 b3 b4! (33 ... axb3 was pleasant for Black but Saric's move is much more enterprising) 34 axb4 Nb5 35 Rd3 a3! 36 bxc4 dxc4+ 37 Bf3 Qa6 38 Rd2 a2 39 Bb2 c3 40 Rc2 cxb2 41 Rxb2 Nc3 42 Qa1 (Saric has played wonderfully, but he had to find an only move here).

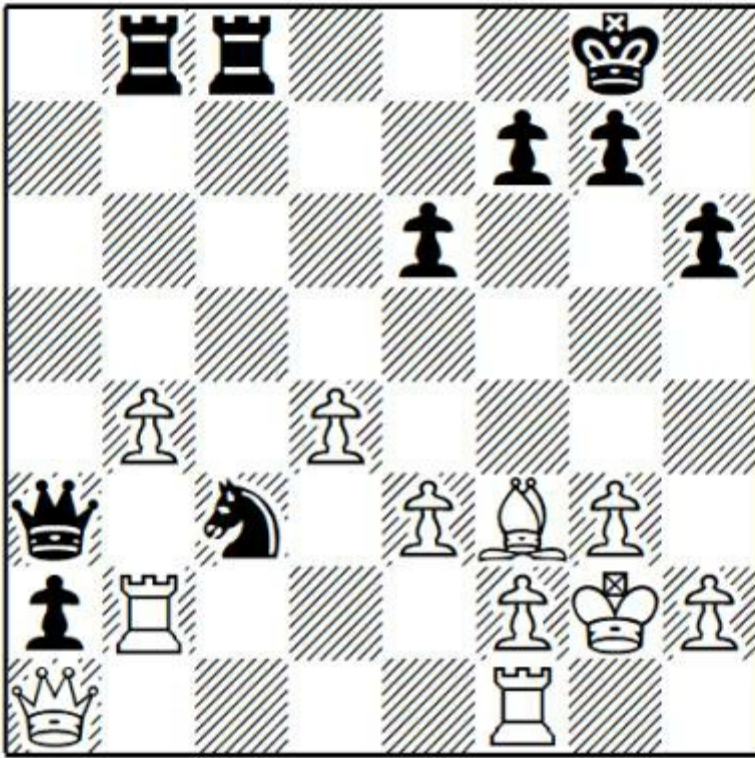


**Question:** What should Black play?

a1) **Answer:** Black had to find 42 ... Rc4!! 43 Rc1 Rxc4 44 Rxb4 Rxb4, when White will try to establish a fortress an exchange down, either with or without queens, e.g. 45 Qxc3 (45 Rxc3 Rb1 46 Rc8+ Qxc8 47 Qxa2 is the version with queens) 45 ... Rb1 46 Qc8+ Qxc8 47 Rxc8+ Kh7 48 Ra8 a1Q 49 Rxa1 Rxa1.

In both cases White's structure is immaculate (although having pawns on d3 and e2 would make f2 harder to attack) and Black has no queenside pawns, but with four pawns against five I don't know how what the relative winning and drawing chances are for White and Black respectively. I also don't know whether the fortress is more secure with or without queens.

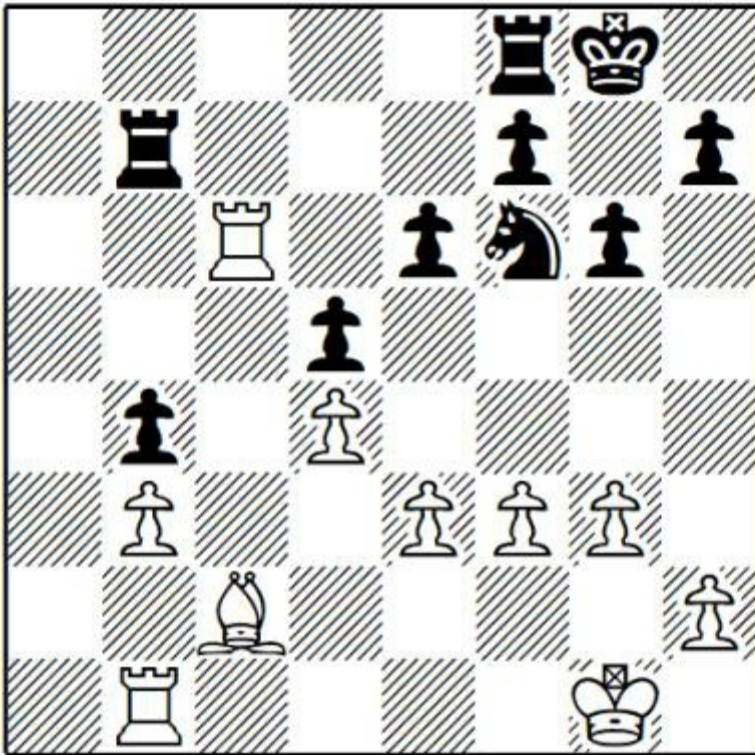
a12) 42 ... Qa3?? was played in the game.



**Question:** How can White punish Black's last move?

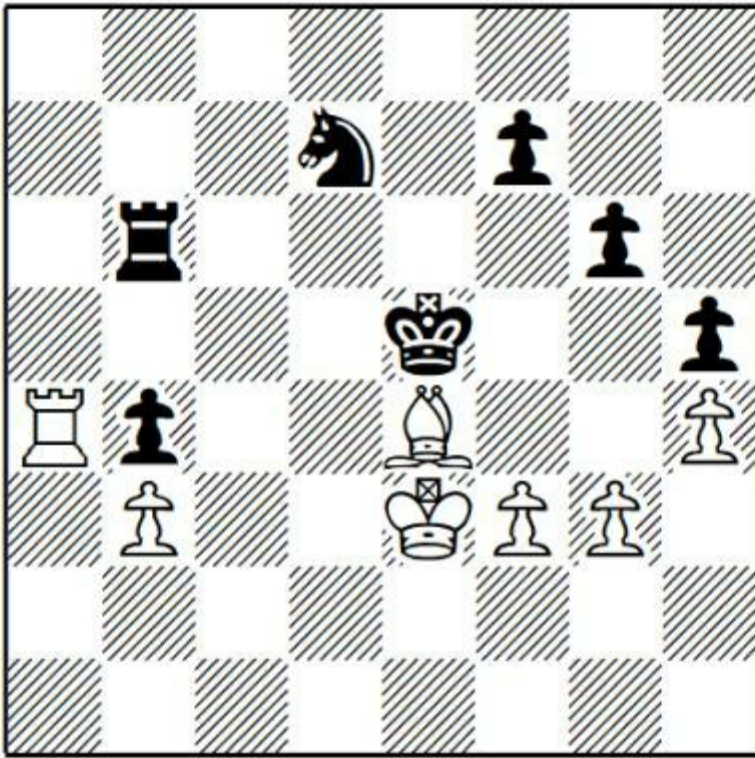
**Answer:** 43 Rc1!! and the pin on the c-file will win material: 43 ... Rxb4 (note that after 43 ... g6 White should continue with 44 b5! since the natural 44 Rbc2? Qxb4 45 Rxc3? Rxc3 46 Rxc3 Qb1 leaves White having to force a draw after the precise sequence 47 Rc1 Qxc1 48 Qxc1 Rb1 49 Qc8+ Kg7 50 Be4! Rd1 51 Qb8 a1Q 52 Qe5+) 44 Rxa2 Qxa2 45 Qxa2 Nxa2 46 Rxc8+ and White easily converted his extra pawn in D.Howell-I.Saric, Caleta 2018.

a2) The endgame that arose after 12 ... Nd7 13 Ne2 Nb6 14 Nf4 Nc4 15 Bc3 Bb4 16 b3 Nb6 17 Bb2 Qe7 18 Nd3 Ba3 19 Bxa3 Qxa3 20 Nc5 Rc7 21 Nxb7 Rxb7 22 Rxc6 Qxa2 23 Qd3 Nd7 24 Rb1 a5 25 Bd1 Nf6 26 Bc2 g6 27 f3 Qa3 28 Qc3 Qb4 29 Qxb4 axb4 was played wonderfully by Sergey Karjakin.



**Question:** How should White continue?

**Answer:** 30 Ra1! (seizing the a-file as 30 h4 Ra8 would have given Black counterplay) 30 ... h5 (I prefer 30 ... g5!?, preventing h4 and giving Black options of kingside counterplay with ... Kg7 and ... h5) 31 h4 Re8 (31 ... Rbb8 followed by ... Rfc8 was a more logical way to challenge for control of the c-file) 32 Kf2! Ree7 33 Ke2! Rec7 34 Rxc7 Rxc7 35 Kd2 (because of Black's slight delay on move 31, White has time to protect the bishop with his king, and is slightly better) 35 ... Rb7 36 Ra8+ Kg7 37 Bd3 Nd7 (37 ... Ng8!? and ... Ne7 is a good regrouping, when the knight has an option of going to f5 or, if White pushes e4, to target the d4 pawn from c6) 38 e4!? dxe4? (38 ... Nf6! was best; it's always psychologically difficult to consider moving a piece back to its former square, but the structure has changed and the knight belongs on f6, and after 39 exd5 Nxd5 40 Be4 Rb6 41 Bxd5 exd5 the rook endgame should be tenable) 39 Bxe4! (this non-standard recapture poses big problems; 39 fxe4 e5! gives the black knight more prospects of finding a stable square) 39 ... Rb6 40 Ra4 (I'd prefer 40 Ke3 Nf6 41 Ra5 to avoid the rook endgame discussed in the next note) 40 ... e5? (40 ... Nf6 41 Kd3 Nd5 is solid for Black since, as discussed previously, he should hold the rook endgame if White takes on d5) 41 Ke3 Kf6 42 dxe5+ Kxe5 (the opening of the position has emphasised Black's passive knight against an active white bishop, and the weaknesses on b4 and f7).

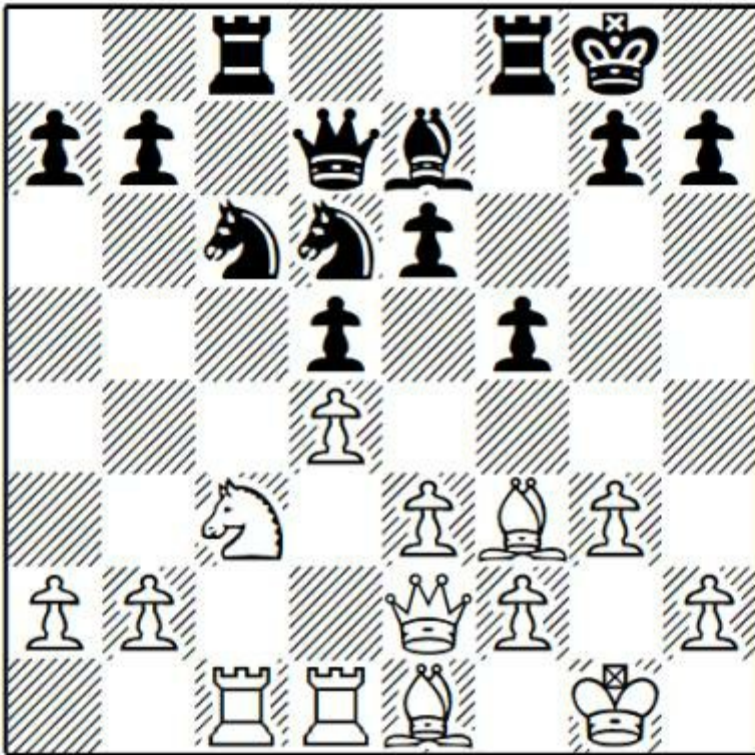


**Question:** How can White increase his advantage?

**Answer:** 43 Ra5+! Kd6 44 Kd4 (43 Ra7! Kd6 44 Kd4 was just as good).

Now White has the more active king. Black should simply wait with his king on e6 or e7 but his defence would remain very unpleasant. After 44 ... Rb8? 45 Bd5! f6 (45 ... Rf8 46 Ra7 wins material) 46 Ra6+ Ke7 47 f4! (removing the e5-square from the knight) 47 ... Nb6 48 Ra7+ Kd6 49 Bf7 Rc8 50 Ra6 Kc6 51 Bxg6 Kb7 52 Ra5 Rc3 53 Be4+ Kb8 54 Rb5 Ka7 55 Rxh5 Black resigned in S.Karjakin-P.Eljanov, Baku 2015.

b) Karjakin again trusted this line in the 2019 FIDE World Cup. After 12 Qe2 Ne8 13 Rfd1 Nd6 14 Rac1 Qd7 15 Be1, his opponent, the strong American GM Sam Sevian, played 15 ... f5.

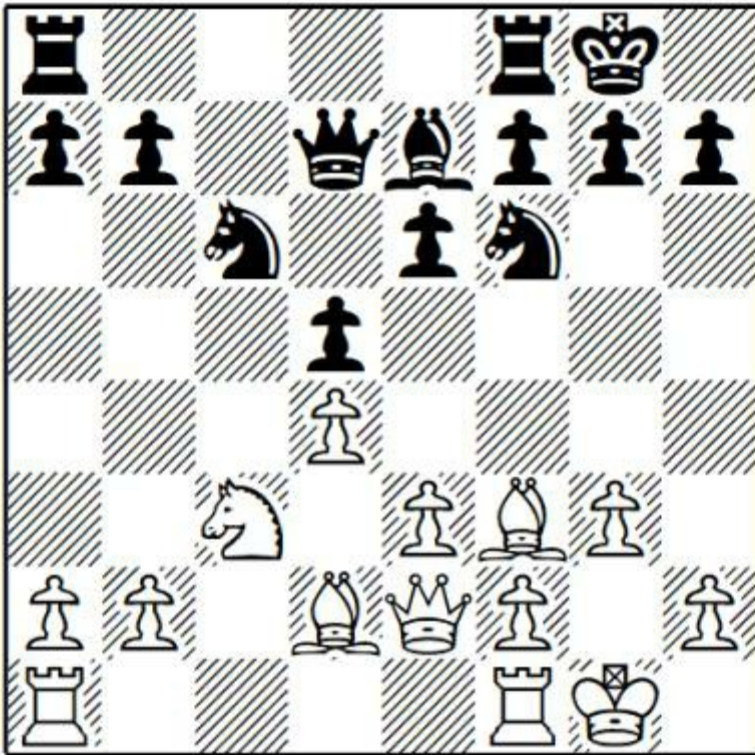


**Question:** How would you assess this move?

**Answer:** It's likely a matter of taste, but I think this is too committal and gives White targets to open the kingside (for example, in the endgame). Black is well prepared to meet e4 in any event, while starting a "Stonewall" kingside attack doesn't seem likely here.

Karjakin now put on a technical masterclass: 16 Bg2 Bf6 17 Na4 b6 18 b3 Rc7 19 Nb2 Rfc8 20 Nd3 (in case anyone doesn't like the suggested answer at move 15, I must admit that the engine claims equality here for Black after 20 ... a5, 20 ... Be7, 20 ... g6 or 20 ... g5!?) 20 ... Nd8?! (trading major pieces makes White's task easier) 21 Bf1 Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Rxc1 23 Nxc1 Qc8 24 Nd3 Nc6 25 Kg2 Be7 26 h3 g6 27 Qc2 Nd8 28 Qd1 (28 Qxc8!) 28 ... Nc6 29 a4 Kg7 30 Qc2 Nb8 31 Qxc8! Nxc8 32 Ne5 (this endgame is rather unpleasant for Black; put the f5-pawn back on f7 and the position would be roughly level, which is probably the reason why most GMs don't defend these positions in Stonewall style) 32 ... Nd6 (32 ... a5 holds the queenside but leaves the black knights very poorly placed) 33 g4 (33 a5!/? is also promising but creating kingside tension is a good option) 33 ... Nb7 34 f3 Na5 35 b4 Nac6 36 Nd3! (Black doesn't have good squares for two knights – or even one knight – while the white knight can find work on f4 or, as we will see, b4) 36 ... Nd7 37 Bc3 Kf7 38 Kf2 Bd6 39 b5 Na5 40 Nb4 Ke7 41 g5! (further restricting the black knights) 41 ... f4? (desperation; it's clear that White benefits from the inclusion of ... f4 and e4) 42 e4 dxe4 43 fxe4 e5 44 Nd5+ Kf7 45 dxe5 Bxe5 46 Bxe5 Nxe5 47 Nxf4 and White went on to convert his extra pawn in S.Karjakin-S.Sevian, Khanty-Mansiysk 2019.

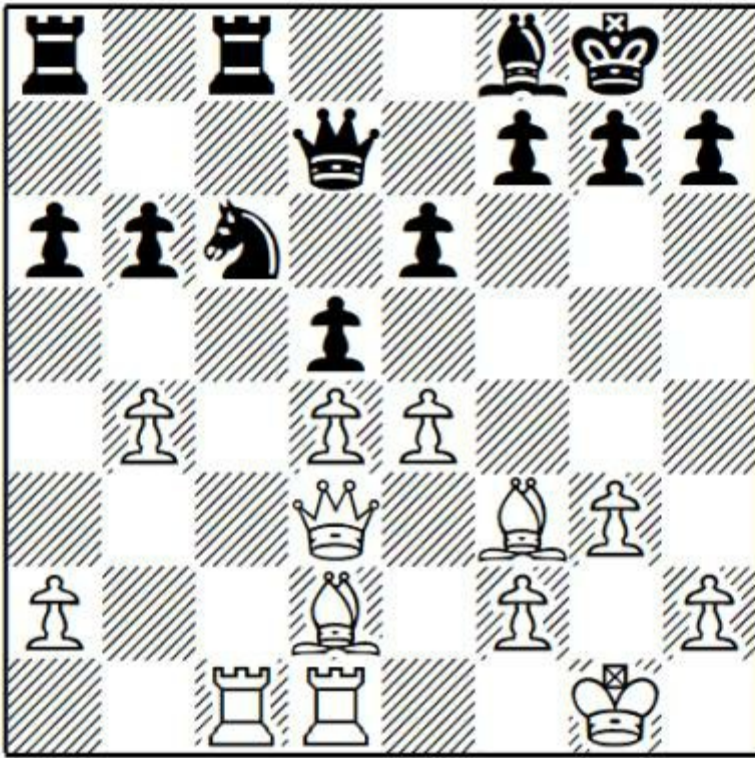
**12 Qe2**



### 12 ... Rfc8

Varying from his earlier game against Malakhov which proceeded 12 ... Rac8 13 Rac1 Rfe8 (13 ... Rc7 14 Nb5 Rcc8 15 Rfd1 Ne8 16 Be1 Nd6 17 Nxd6 Bxd6 18 Qb5 Ne5 19 Qxd7 Nxd7 20 Be2 f5!? and Black comfortably held the endgame in E.Tomashevsky-B.Grachev, Sochi 2017) 14 Rfd1 Bf8 15 Be1 g6 with a solid position in V.Malakhov-A.Motylev, Moscow 2014.

**13 Rfd1 Bf8 14 Rac1 a6 15 Qd3 Ne7 16 b3 Nc6 17 Na4 Qd8 18 Nc5 Nd7 19 b4 b6 20 Nxd7 Qxd7 21 e4!?**



Trying to create some imbalance, but Black has several ways to maintain equal chances.

**21 ... b5?**

Going into a symmetrical IQP structure gives White good chances, as Artemiev brilliantly demonstrates. Alternatives:

a) After 21 ... dxe4?? 22 Bxe4 the unopposed light-squared bishop comes to life, leaving Black with no answer to the threats on the kingside, queenside (b5 is one of White's ideas) and long diagonal.

b) The sober 21 ... Ne7! holds the central structure. If White takes on d5, Black will recapture with the knight.

c) I don't like 21 ... Nxb4 much, since after 22 Bxb4 Bxb4 23 exd5 exd5 (23 ... Rxc1 24 Rxc1 exd5 25 Qb3 is also better for White) 24 Rxc8+ Qxc8 (24 ... Rxc8 25 Qxa6 leaves Black with several weaknesses and facing a tough defence) 25 Bxd5 Ra7 the white bishop is more active than its counterpart, and the passed d-pawn is more threatening than Black's queenside majority. 26 h4 would be a good way to continue, aiming to soften up the kingside. Engines claim complete equality but I think this is an unpleasant defence, particularly against Artemiev.

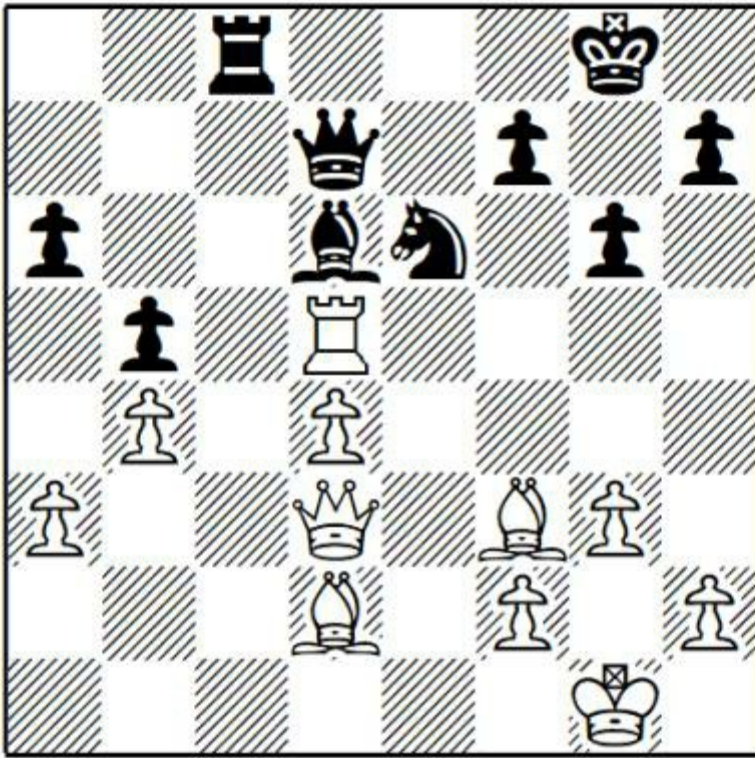
**22 exd5 exd5**

Artemiev has some wonderful games to his credit in this structure, most notably his sparkling win against Hracek en route to winning the EU Championship in 2019.

**23 a3 Nd8 24 Re1 Ne6 25 Rxc8 Rxc8 26 Re5 Bd6?!**

Going for a forcing sequence which the position doesn't justify. 26 ... Nc7 is passive and ugly but limits White to a slight advantage.

**27 Rxd5! g6**



The rook has no available squares but Artemiev quickly opens more lines.

**28 h4! h5**

28 ... Nc7 29 Rg5 and the rook escapes.

**29 Bxh5!?**

White had several promising alternatives (including 29 Be4 and 29 a4) but this is both objectively and practically strong.

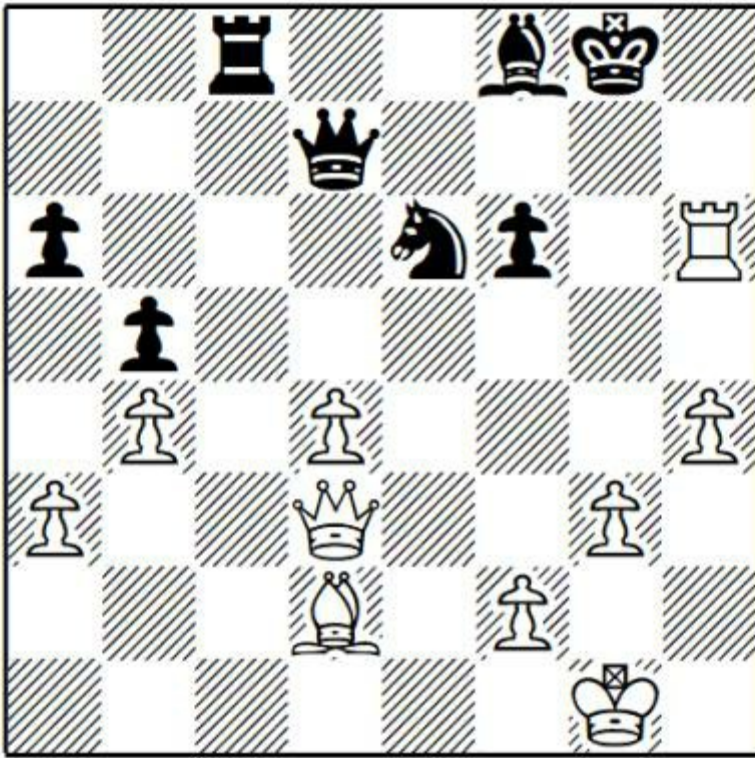
**29 ... gxh5 30 Rxh5 f6?**

30 ... Nf8 is more tenacious. With three pawns and an attack for the knight, White is clearly better, but there is no immediate breakthrough.

**31 Rh6?**

31 Qf5! threatens the brutal Qg4+, which Black can't meet while defending his f6-pawn. 31 ... Rd8 32 Qxf6 Ng7 33 Qg6 wins.

**31 ... Bf8!**



**32 Rg6+?**

Artemiev is outstanding in complex positions but here he has lost the thread. 32 Rxf6 gains a fourth pawn for the piece, but after 32 ... Bg7 33 Rg6 Qd5! Black's co-ordination is sufficient to maintain the balance.

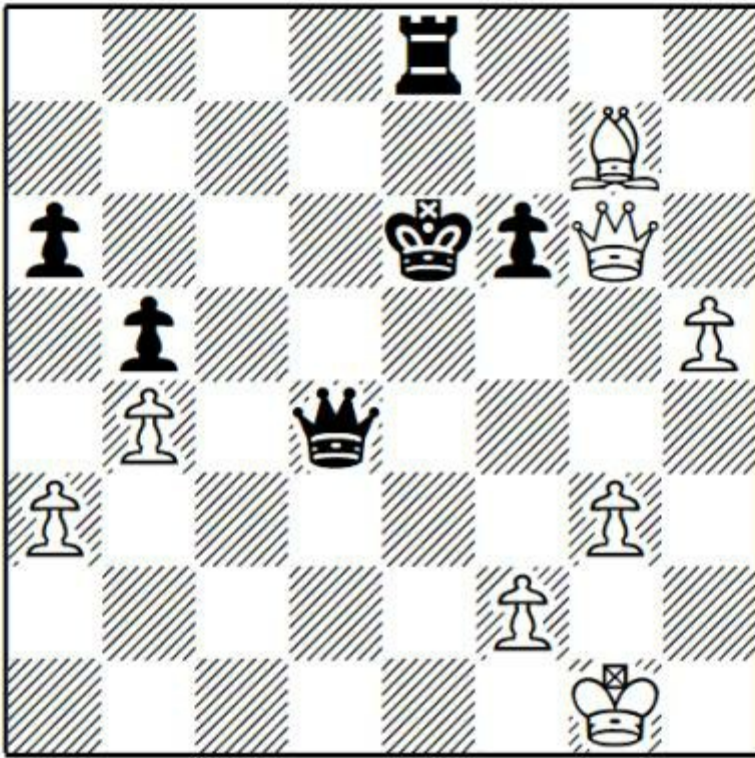
**32 ... Bg7?**

32 ... Kf7! would have won the game, for example 33 Qf5 (33 Rg4 Ng5! and wins, while 33 d5 Nc7 collects the d-pawn, with a decisive advantage) 33 ... Qxd4 34 Bg5 Nxg5 35 hxg5 Rc6 and White has run out of bullets.

**33 Qf5 Re8 34 h5**

34 Bh6 Qxd4 35 Bxg7 Nxg7 36 Qxf6 Qxf6 37 Rxf6 Re6 38 Rxe6 Nxe6 is, according to Stockfish, a level endgame, though this is far from intuitive and I'd be worried with White. The position without any queenside pawns (see M.Carlsen-A.Giri, Norway Chess 2015), which is also a draw, is more one sided!

**34 ... Qxd4 35 Bh6 Kf7 36 Rxg7+ Nxg7 37 Qg6+ Ke6 38 Bxg7**



**38 ... Rd8**

After 38 ... Rc8 White has to find 39 Kg2! when 39 ... Qd5+ 40 f3 Qf5 41 Qxf5+ Kxf5 42 g4+ Ke6 43 f4 leads to a complicated endgame which is drawn with best play.

**39 h6 Qd1+ 40 Kg2!**

Not 40 Kh2?? Qf3! and Black wins.

**40 ... Qd5+ 41 f3 Qe5 42 Kh3 Qa1 43 Qe4+ Kf7 44 Qb7+ Kg6**

44 ... Kg8?? 45 h7+ wins.

**45 Qe4+ Kf7 46 Qb7+ ½-½**

*Game 29*

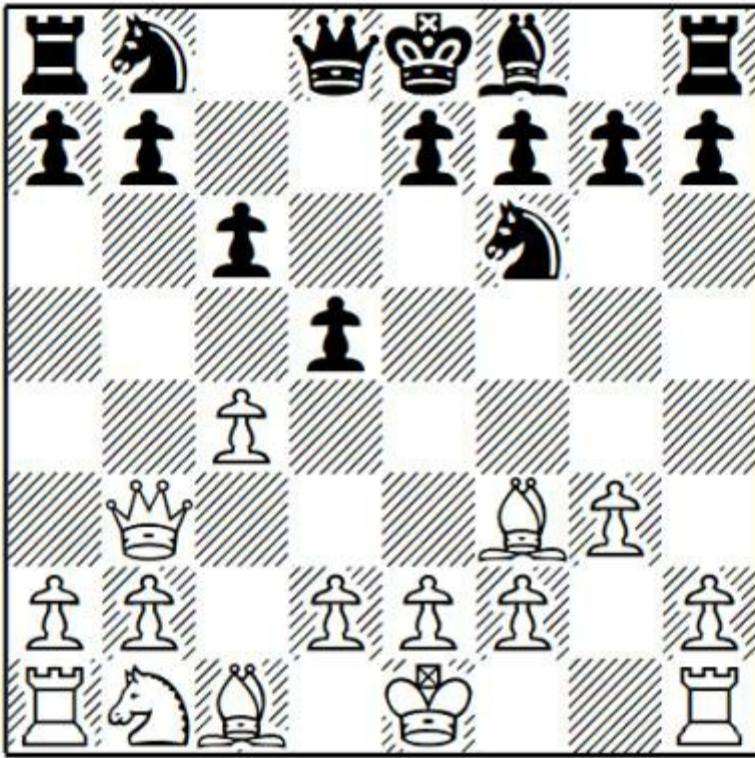
**A.Giri-G.Gajewski**

Bundesliga 2017

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 Bg4 4 c4 Bxf3**

Perhaps Black wanted to avoid the popular variation 4 ... c6 5 Ne5 Be6 6 cxd5 Bxd5 7 Nf3 c5 8 Nc3 Bc6, but the immediate trade on f3 has its own difficulties.

**5 Bxf3 c6 6 Qb3!**



Posing a tricky question: how should Black defend the b7-pawn?

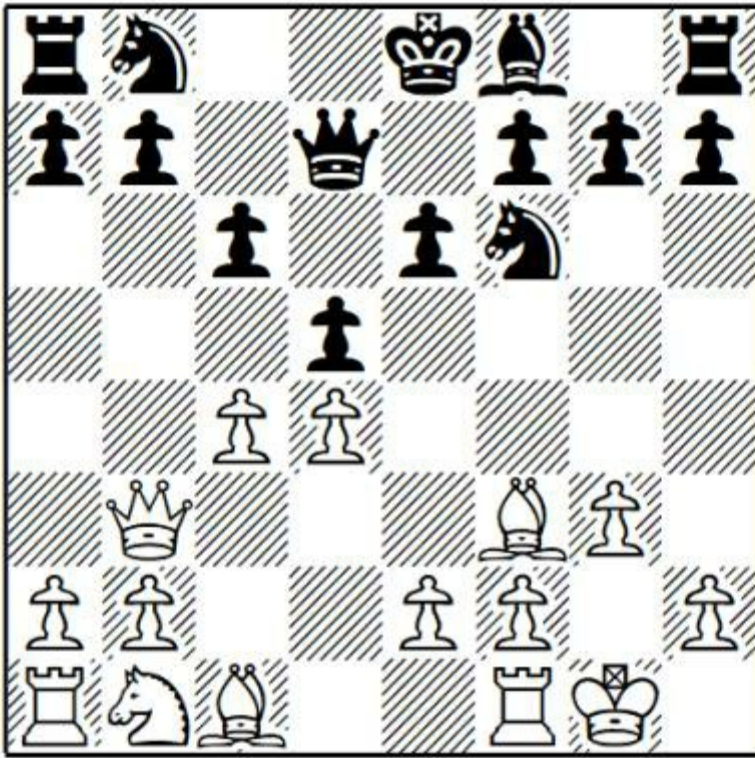
**6 ... Qd7**

Or:

a) 6 ... Qb6 7 d4 e6 8 0-0 Nbd7 9 Nc3 Be7 10 Rd1 0-0 11 Bf4 was C.Sandipan-T.Batchuluun, Qinhuangdao 2011. I prefer White with the extra space and the bishop pair, but Black is very solid with no weaknesses and no bad pieces.

b) 6 ... Qc7 7 d4 e6 8 Nc3 Nbd7 9 0-0 Qb6 (T.Seeman-H.Westerinen, Finland 2011) is just a tempo down on Sandipan-Batchuluun.

**7 d4 e6 8 0-0**



### 8 ... b5

Going for queenside activity, but this move is unlikely to gain many followers after Giri's performance in this game.

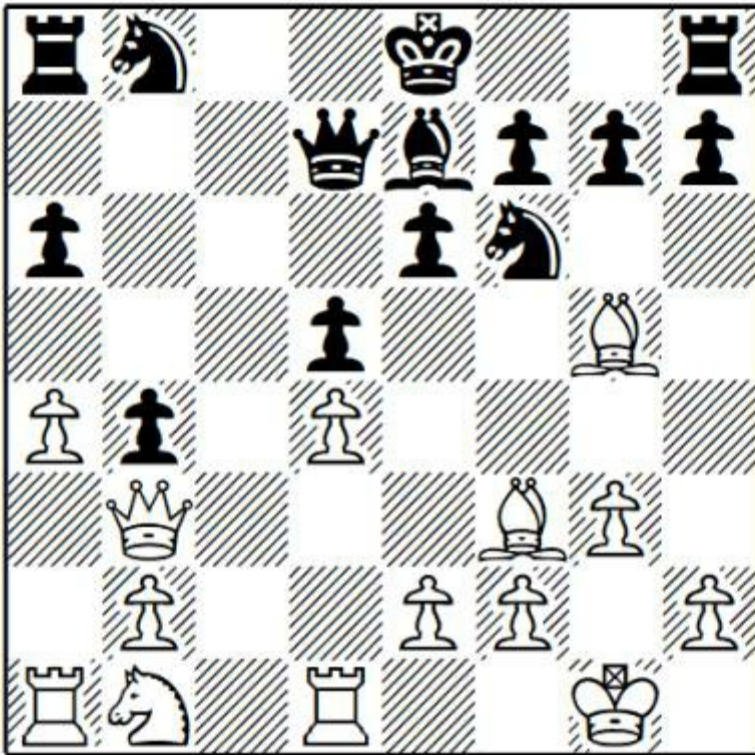
An alternative is 8 ... Be7 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Bf4 Na6 11 Rfd1 Rac8 (after 11 ... dxc4 12 Qxc4 Nd5, instead of 13 Nxd5 as played in J.Zollbrecht-A.Kunte, Biel 2001, I prefer 13 Bc1 with an edge for White thanks to his bishop pair and extra central pawn) 12 e4 dxe4 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 Bxe4 g6 15 Be3 Qc7 16 Rac1 was excellent for White in V.Malakhov-M.Mozharov, Moscow 2013.

### 9 cxb5 cxb5 10 Rd1 a6 11 a4

A thematic strike against pawns on a6 and b5. Black can't allow the a-file to open and ... bxa4 leaves a big weakness on a6, so Gajewski goes for ... b4.

Instead 11 Nc3!? intending e4 was another good option. Black should respond with 11 ... b4 12 Na4 Qb5 when White can increase the pressure with 13 Bf4 Nc6 14 Rac1 followed by e3 and Nc5 with good play on the queenside.

### 11 ... b4 12 Bg5 Be7



**Question:** How should White proceed?

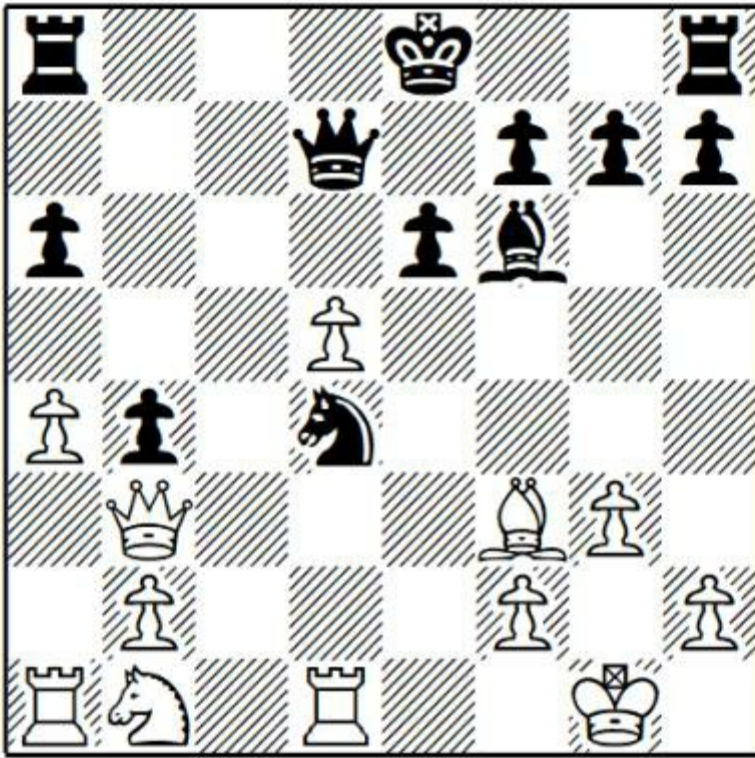
**13 Bxf6!**

**Answer:** As soon as I saw this move, the idea appeared obvious, but I am far from certain that I would even have considered taking on f6 in this position. The point is that e4 is landing with some force.

**13 ... Bxf6 14 e4! Nc6**

Opening the position with 14 ... dxe4 15 Bxe4 Nc6 looks suicidal in view of the black king in the centre and the opposite-coloured bishops. 16 d5 is strong but White can also clip a pawn with 16 Bxc6 Qxc6 17 Qxb4 with decent winning chances.

**15 exd5 Nxd4**



**Question:** How should White continue?

**16 dxe6!**

**Answer:** This move requires accurate calculation, and is the only way to retain an advantage. 16 Rxd4 Bxd4 17 Qxb4 isn't convincing in view of 17 ... e5 with unclear play.

**16 ... Nxb3 17 exd7+ Kd8?**

17 ... Ke7 was the last chance to put up some resistance. After 18 Bxa8 Nxa1 19 Bc6 the d7-pawn is obviously a huge asset, but I haven't found a clear win for White.

**18 Bxa8 Nxa1 19 Nd2 Kc7**

19 ... Nc2 20 Nb3 catches the c2-knight and wins.

**20 Rc1+ Kb8**

20 ... Kxd7 21 Bc6+ and the knight on a1 falls.

**21 Bg2 Bxb2 22 Rc4 Bc3 23 Bh3 1-0**

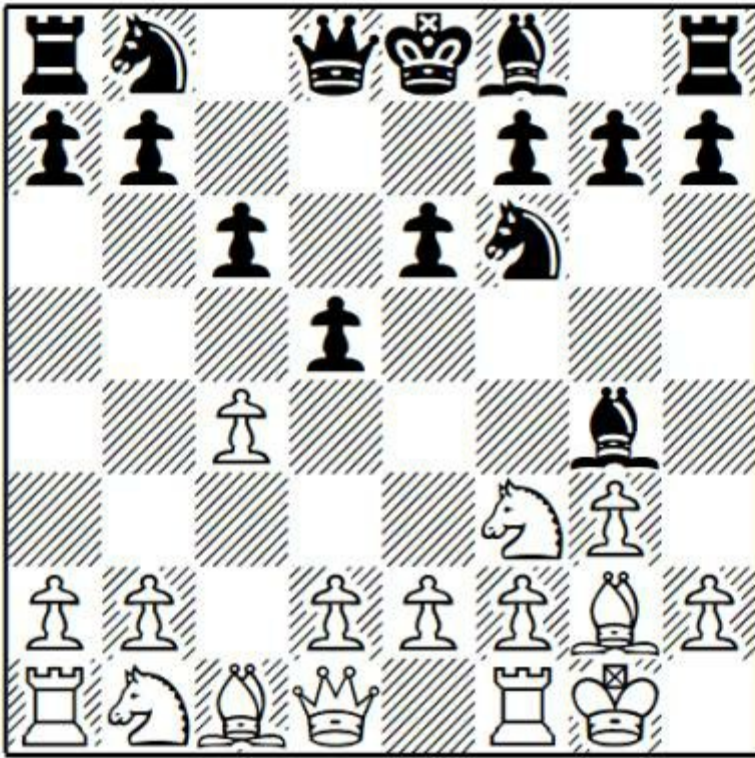
24 Rc8 is unstoppable.

*Game 30*

**L.Aronian-M.Matlakov**

FIDE World Cup, Tbilisi 2017

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Bg4 3 Bg2 c6 4 c4 e6 5 0-0 Nf6**



5 ... dxc4?! 6 Ne5 (6 Na3 and 6 b3 are also interesting) and now:

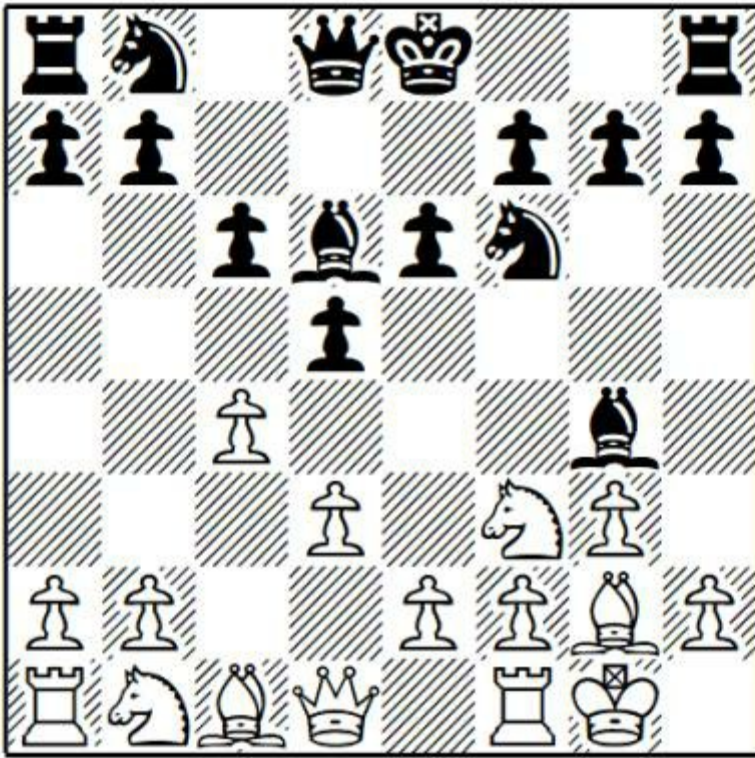
a) 6 ... h5?! V.Akopian-T.Kuybokarov, Abu Dhabi 2018 is best met by the simple 7 Nxc4 h4 8 d4 when I think White is much better.

b) 6 ... Qd4 7 Nxc4 Qxc4 8 b3 gives White more than enough compensation for the pawn.

### 6 d3

6 d4 Nbd7 7 h3 Bf5 8 Nc3 h6 9 Nd2 Be7 10 e4 dxe4 11 Ndx4 Nxe4 12 Nxe4 0-0 led to a typical position in M.Rodshtein-P.Eljanov, Israel 2019, with a structure which can arise from many openings (the Catalan, French, Caro-Kann etc). White can claim a slight edge thanks to his space advantage, but Black is very solid. Importantly, Black has traded one pair of minor pieces, and his remaining minor pieces can find comfortable positions.

### 6 ... Bd6

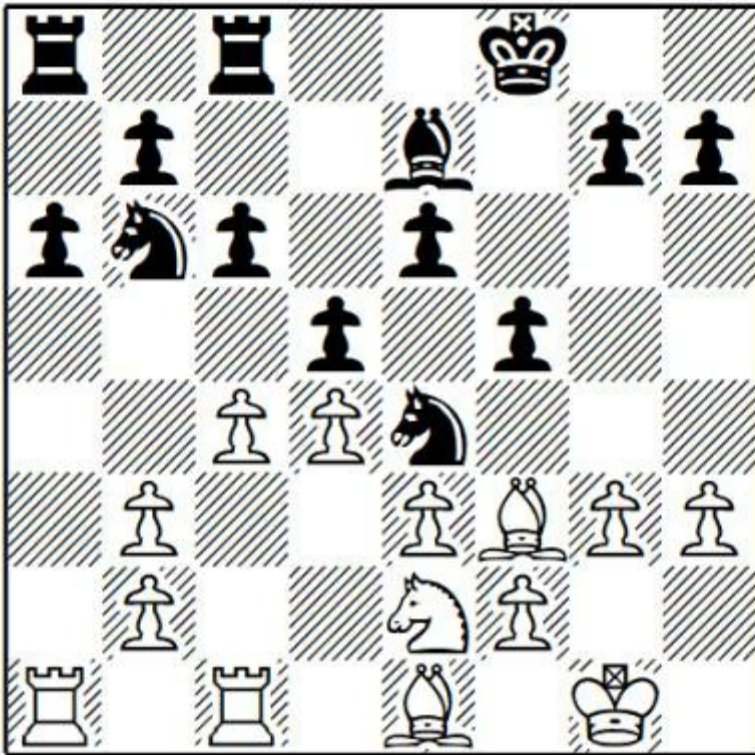


For players looking to keep pieces on the board, the rare 6 ... Be7 7 Qb3 Qc8!? is possible. Black's setup might look slightly passive but his solid central structure, coupled with White's delayed queenside development, should insure him against any early disasters. 8 Nc3 0-0 and now:

a) 9 Bf4 Nbd7 10 cxd5 exd5! (now Black can keep the c-file closed in comfort) 11 Rfc1 Nc5 12 Qd1 Bh3 (Roiz gives 12 ... Ne6! 13 Bd2 Qd8 intending to seize space with ... d4) 13 Bh1?! (White should start active play on the queenside with Roiz' 13 b4) 13 ... Ne6 14 Bd2 Qd7 15 d4 Bd6 16 a3 Qe7 17 e3 Ne4 18 Bg2 Bxg2 19 Kxg2 f5! 20 Ng1 g5! with strong kingside pressure in Z.Rahman-M.Bluebaum, Baku 2016.

b) Roiz' suggestion 9 cxd5 looks better, which the strong Israeli GM analyses to equality after 9 ... cxd5 (9 ... exd5 10 e4 dxe4 11 dxe4 Nbd7 12 Be3. with a white edge, is suggested by Roiz) 10 Ne5 Nc6 11 Nxc4 Nxc4.

**7 Qb3 Qb6 8 Be3 Qxb3 9 axb3 a6 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Nbd7 12 Rc1 Ke7 13 Nc3 Rhc8 14 d4 Kf8 15 Bd2 Be7 16 e3 Nb6 17 Ne2 Ne4 18 Be1 f5?**



A very committal move, which irreparably weakens the e5-square. Passive defence was called for, when Black can rely on the solidity of his position, and the lack of weaknesses.

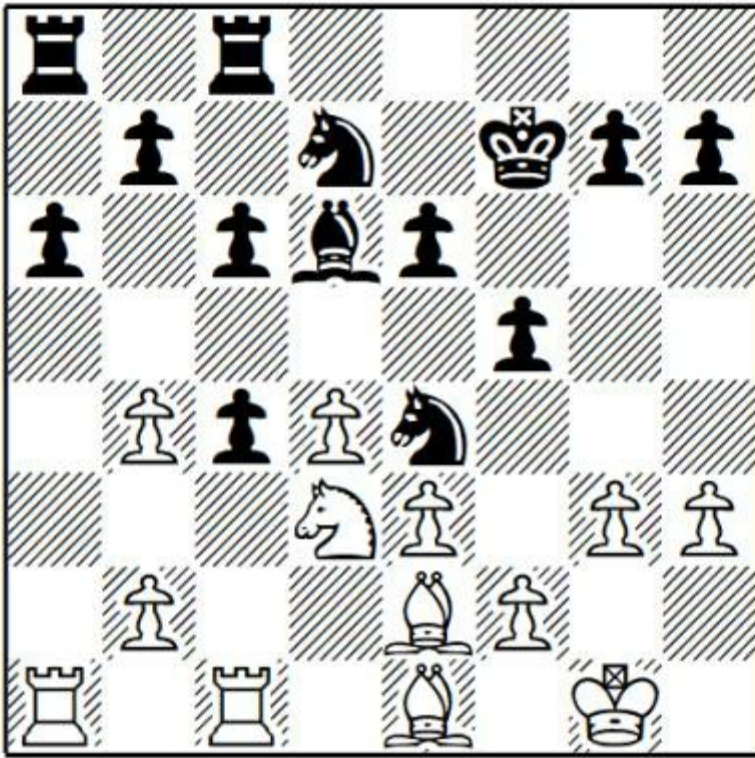
**19 Nf4 Kf7 20 Nd3**

Targeting the e5-square and forcing Black to defend it with a minor piece.

**20 ... Nd7 21 Be2**

Preparing to kick the knight from e4 with f3 at an appropriate moment.

**21 ... Bd6 22 b4 dxc4**



**Question:** What should White play?

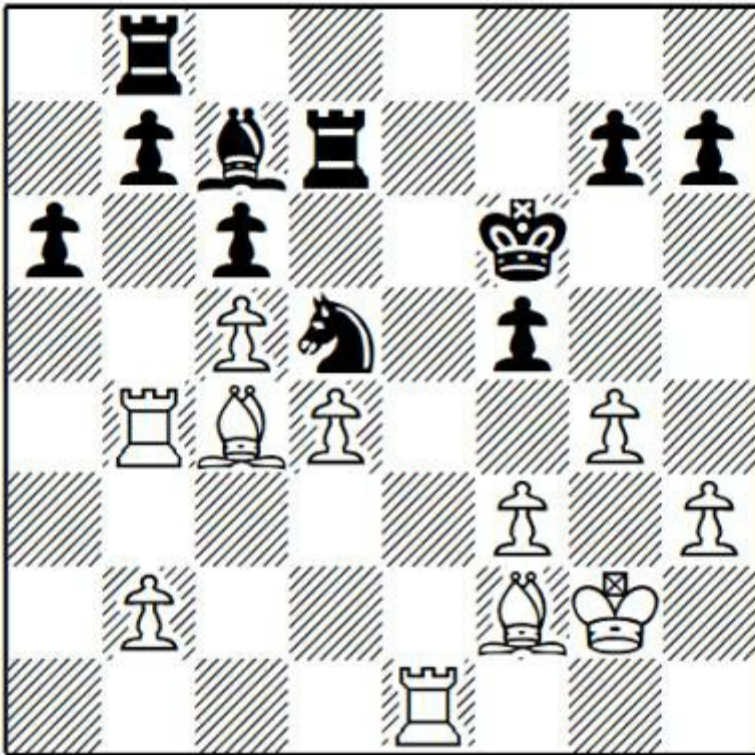
**23 Nc5!**

**Answer:** A cute tactical point. Rather than recapturing on c4 immediately, it's much stronger to play this intermezzo, strengthening the white pawn chain and allowing Bxc4.

**23 ... Ndxc5 24 bxc5 Bc7 25 Bxc4 Ke7 26 Kg2 Rd8 27 Ra4 Rd7 28 f3 Nf6 29 Bf2 e5!**

Striking in the centre before White improves his position further, and aiming to get the d5-square for his knight.

**30 Rb4 Rb8 31 g4!? exd4 32 exd4 Nd5 33 Re1+ Kf6**



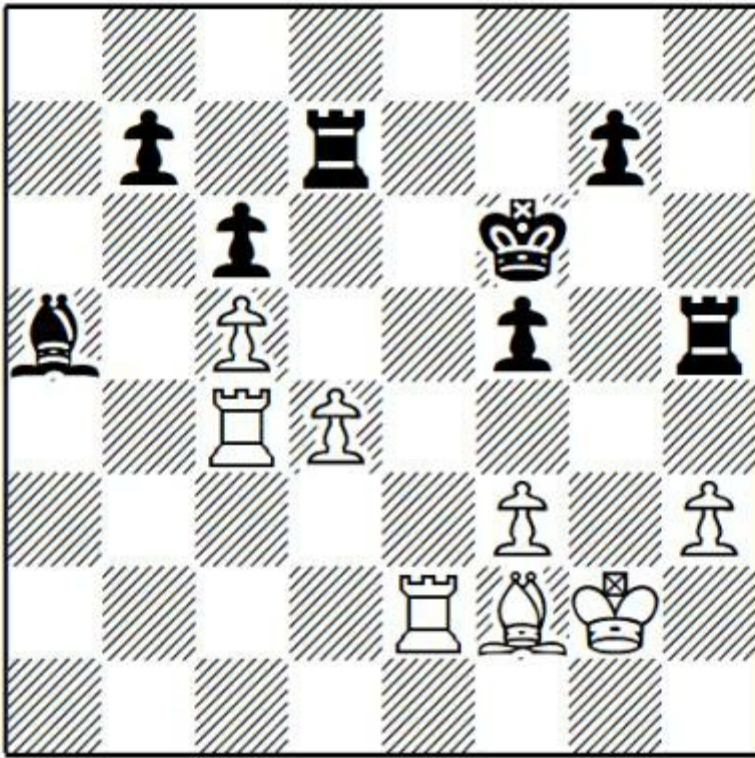
### 34 Bxd5!

The knight on d5 was too strong to be tolerated (in addition to threatening to go to f4, winning the h3-pawn, if the rook moved). White retains pressure in the endgame even after the exchange of his powerful light squared bishop.

### 34 ... Rxd5

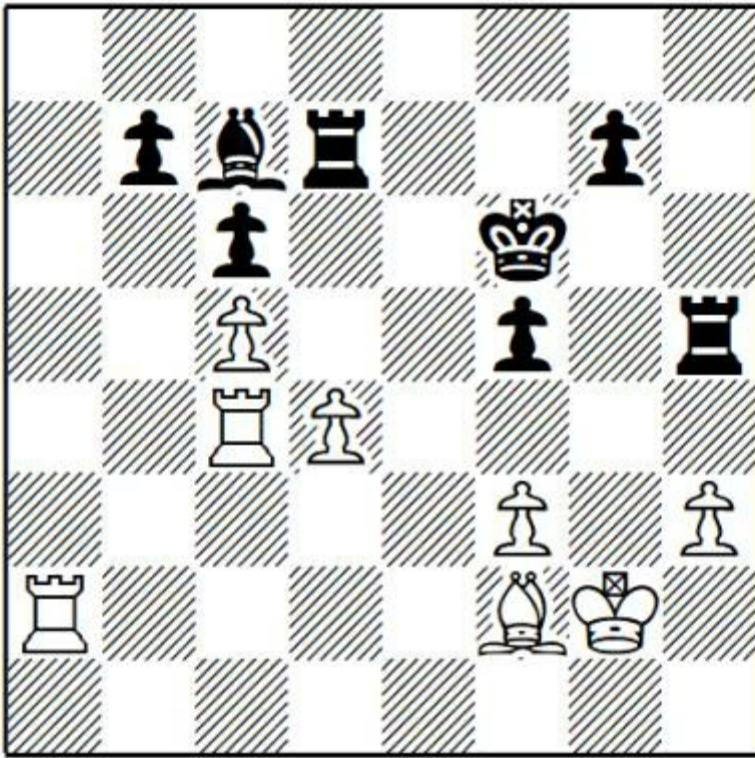
Certainly the best recapture, keeping pressure on d4. 34 ... cxd5 creates the possibility of a c6-break in some positions, and gives White several tempting options. I like starting with 35 Ra4 (not blundering to ... Ba5), with a pleasant endgame.

**35 Re2 Rd7 36 b3 h5 37 gxh5 a5 38 Rc4 Rh8 39 b4 Rxh5 40 bxa5 Bxa5**



Matlakov has defended excellently, and equalised. Aronian is brilliant in heavily simplified positions (creating some defensive masterpieces against Magnus Carlsen in recent rook endgames, for example), and it's remarkable to see how he outplays Matlakov from here.

**41 Ra2 Bc7?**

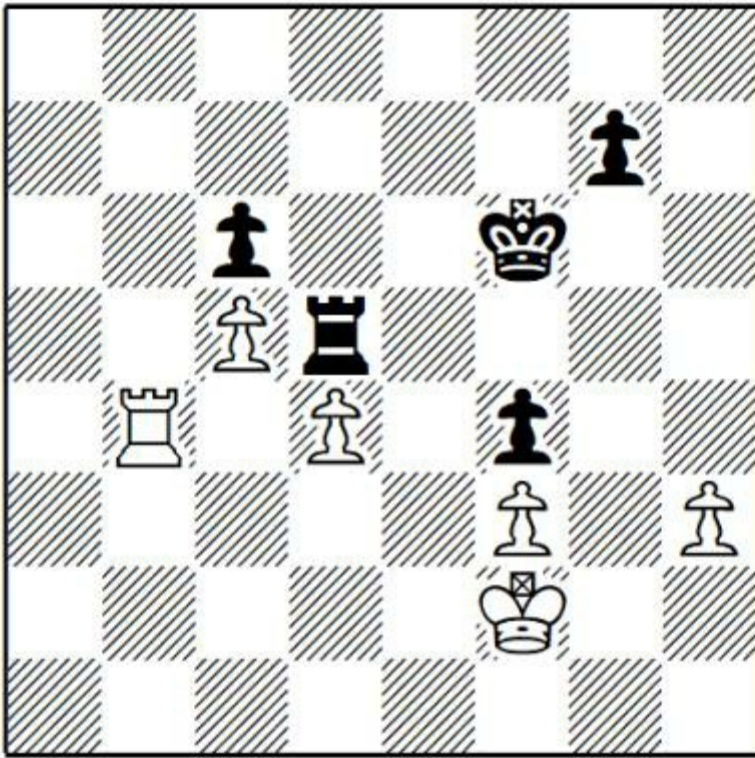


Now the b7-pawn will be difficult to defend. 41 ... Bd8! followed by ... g5 seems to be a more efficient regrouping, when b7 can be comfortably defended by rooks on d7 and h7.

**42 Rb4 Rg5+ 43 Kf1 Bg3!**

Black should have sufficient activity to hold the rook endgame a pawn down.

**44 Ra7 Bxf2 45 Kxf2 f4 46 Raxb7 Rxb7 47 Rxb7 Rd5 48 Rb4**



**Question:** How can Black hold this position?

**48 ... Kg5?!**

**Answer:** Not like this! 48 ... Ke6! seems to be a fortress, for example 49 Rb6 (49 Ke2 Rh5 should hold) 49 ... Rxd4 50 Rxc6+ Kd5 51 Rc7 (51 Rd6+ Kxc5 52 Rxd4?? Kxd4 even loses for White) 51 ... Rd2+ 52 Kf1 Rh2 53 Rxc7 Kxc5 54 Rg4 Rxh3 55 Kg2 Rh6 56 Rxf4 Kd6, with an elementary draw since 57 Re4 is well met by 57 ... Re6! (among other moves).

**Question:** How should White continue after 48 ... Kg5?

**49 Ke2!**

**Answer:** This requires excellent calculation, in view of the counterplay which Black will gain with his f-pawn, but Aronian has never lacked calculating ability.

**49 ... Kh4??**

Continuing the plan from his previous move, but this appears to be the decisive mistake. 49 ... Rd7 50 Kd3 Ra7 still held some hope for a successful defence.

**50 Kd3! Kg3 51 Rb6 Kxf3 52 Rxc6 g5 53 Rg6! 1-0**

The white pawns are much too fast, for example 53 Rg6 Rd8 54 c6 Kg3 55 Rxc6+ Kh4 56 c7 Rc8 57 Rg7 and wins.

*Game 31*

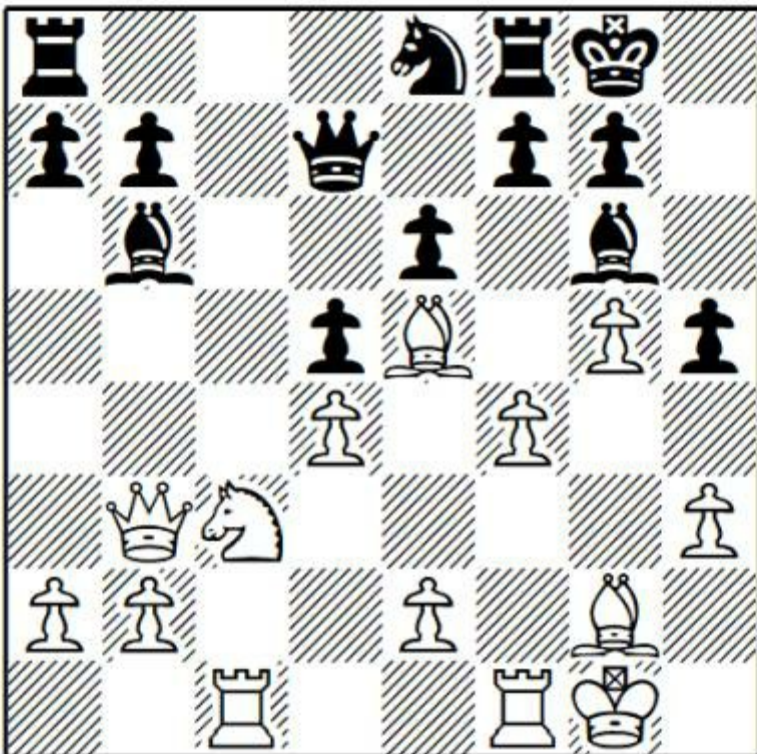
**V.Kramnik-M.Bluebaum**

Dortmund 2017

chesstouring.com

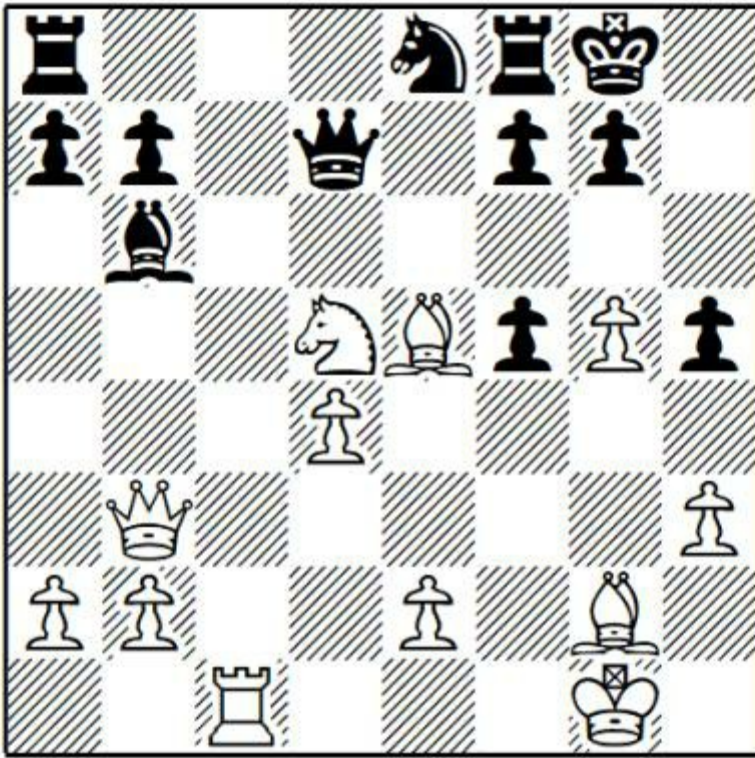
A wonderful game in the enterprising style we came to associate with Kramnik over the last couple of years of his career.

1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Bg4 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Nf6 5 d3 Be7 6 h3 Bh5 7 c4 c6 8 Qb3 Qc8 9 g4 Bg6 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 Bf4 Nc6 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Rac1 Qd7 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 Bxe5 h5 16 g5 Ne8 17 f4 Bc5+ 18 d4 Bb6



**Question:** Black is about to play 19 ... Nd6 with a comfortable game. How can White pose problems?

19 f5!? Bxf5 20 Rxf5! exf5 21 Nxd5



*Answer:* At the cost of an exchange, Kramnik has radically altered the nature of the position. His minor pieces are extremely active and, despite the mass of black pawns on the kingside, threats such as g6 are in the air. Objectively this probably isn't enough for a White advantage but Bluebaum has to solve radically different problems from those he would have expected.

**21 ... Qe6**

21 ... Rd8 is logical, since 22 g6?! Qe6! is fine for Black.

**22 Kh1 Rd8 23 Qf3 g6**

The dark squares have been badly weakened, though White shouldn't be able to break through the black pawn chain after precise defence.

**24 e3**

24 Nxb6 axb6 25 Qxb7 is another possible approach, when White has sufficient compensation for the exchange.

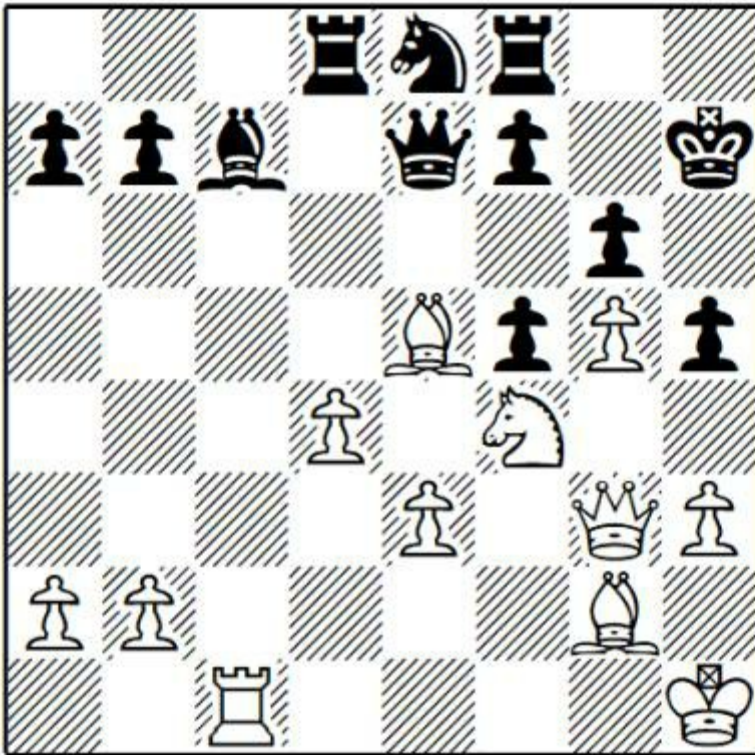
**24 ... Kh7?!**

The king doesn't seem to be any safer on this square. 24 ... Rd7! protects b7 and leaves it up to White to demonstrate sufficient compensation.

**25 Nf4 Qe7 26 Qg3**

26 Nxb6? Qxb6 is excellent for Black.

**26 ... Bc7**



**Question:** No prizes for guessing White's next move, given that we're talking about Kramnik!

**27 Rxc7!**

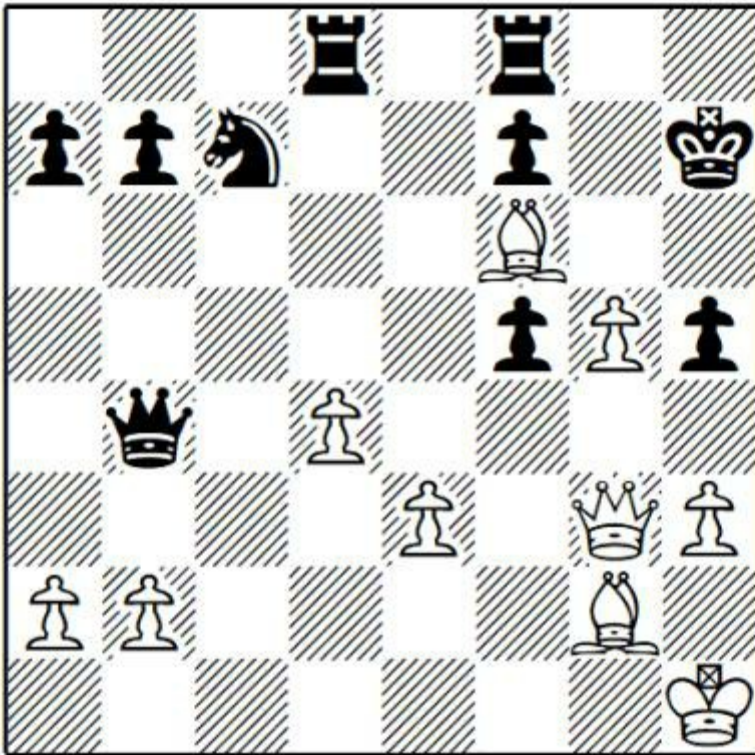
**Answer:** A second (and forced) exchange sacrifice. After 27 Bxc7 Nxc7 White's attack runs out of steam, for example 28 Nxh5 gxh5 29 Rxc7 Qd6 and the queens come off, leaving White with a difficult defensive task in the endgame.

**27 ... Nxc7 28 Bf6 Qb4 29 Nxh5!**

Continuing his inspired attacking play.

29 Qh4 is also good and likely to transpose after 29 ... Kg8 30 Nxh5 Ne8!.

**29 ... gxh5**



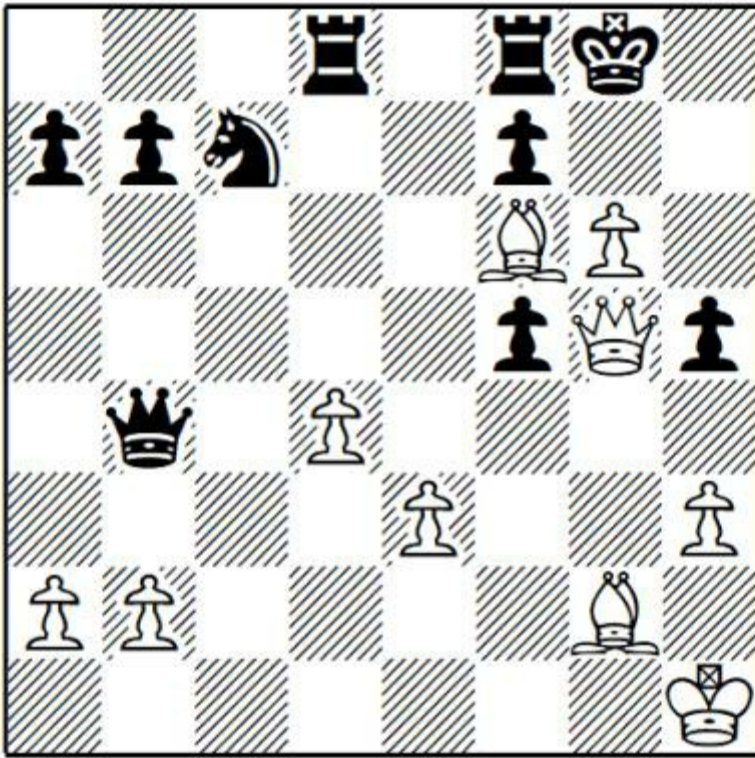
After 29 ... Ne8 30 Bxd8 gxh5 all three results are possible. The engine, of course, declares 0.00.

**Question:** How should White continue?

**30 g6+!**

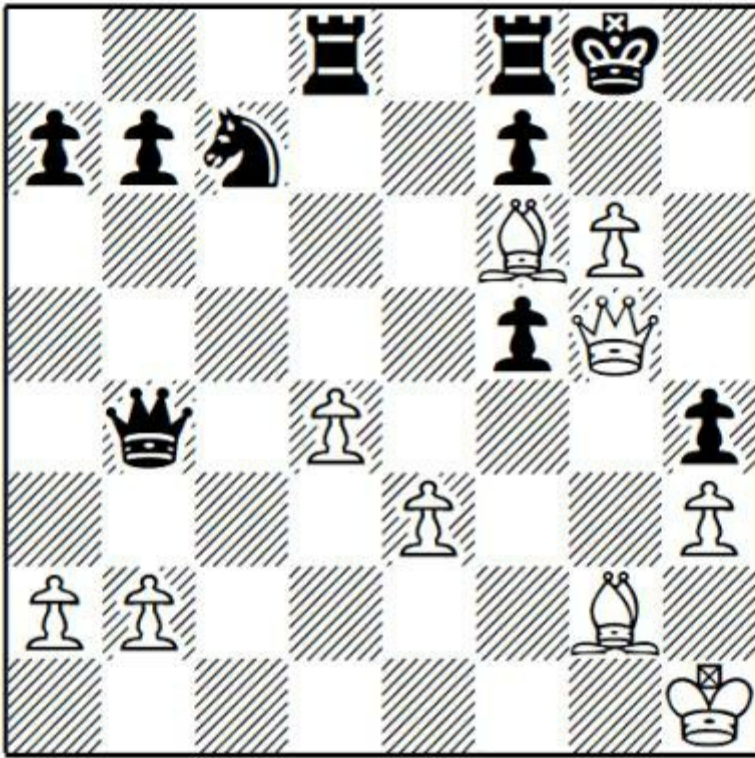
**Answer:** The pawn can't be taken since the knight would fall with check and imminent mate.

**30 ... Kg8 31 Qg5!**



**31 ... h4??**

Playing for a perpetual which doesn't work. 31 ... Nd5!! 32 Bxd8 Qd6!! keeps the position entirely unclear. A sample line is 33 gxf7+ Kxf7 34 Qxh5+ Kg7 35 Bh4. With the bishop pair, a safer king, and two pawns for the exchange, White has outstanding practical chances, but engines hold this pretty easily.



**Question:** Calculate the forced win.

**32 Qh6!!**

**Answer:** Kramnik's play has been a model of imagination and fantasy, but when his opponent's calculations contain an error, he is extremely accurate. You need to see the next six moves to consider this exercise solved, but the lines are linear.

**32 ... Qe1+ 33 Kh2 Qg3+ 34 Kg1 Qe1+ 35 Bf1 Qg3+**

From a distance this might look like a perpetual, but it's not.

**36 Kh1! Qf3+ 37 Bg2 Qd1+ 38 Kh2 1-0**

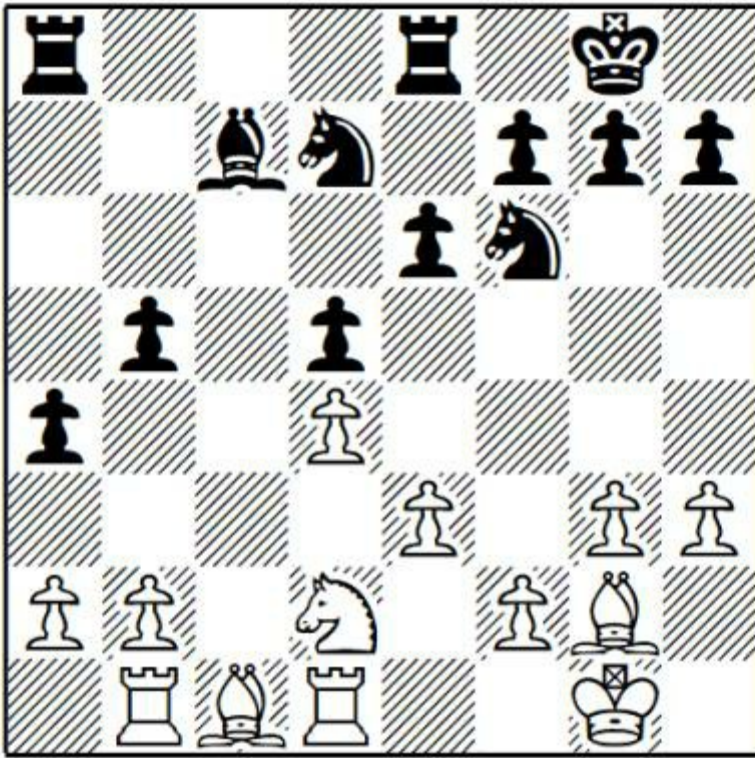
*Game 32*

**V.Kramnik-W.So**

Grand Chess Tour Blitz, Leuven 2016

A very interesting and instructive game, and a demonstration of the level of quality the top guys manage to achieve even in blitz.

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Bg4 3 Bg2 e6 4 0-0 Nf6 5 h3 Bxf3 6 Bxf3 Nbd7 7 d3 Bc5 8 Nd2 0-0 9 Bg2 a5 10 c4 c6 11 e3 a4 12 d4 Bd6 13 Qc2 Re8 14 Rd1 Qc7 15 Rb1 b5 16 cxb5 cxb5 17 Qxc7 Bxc7**

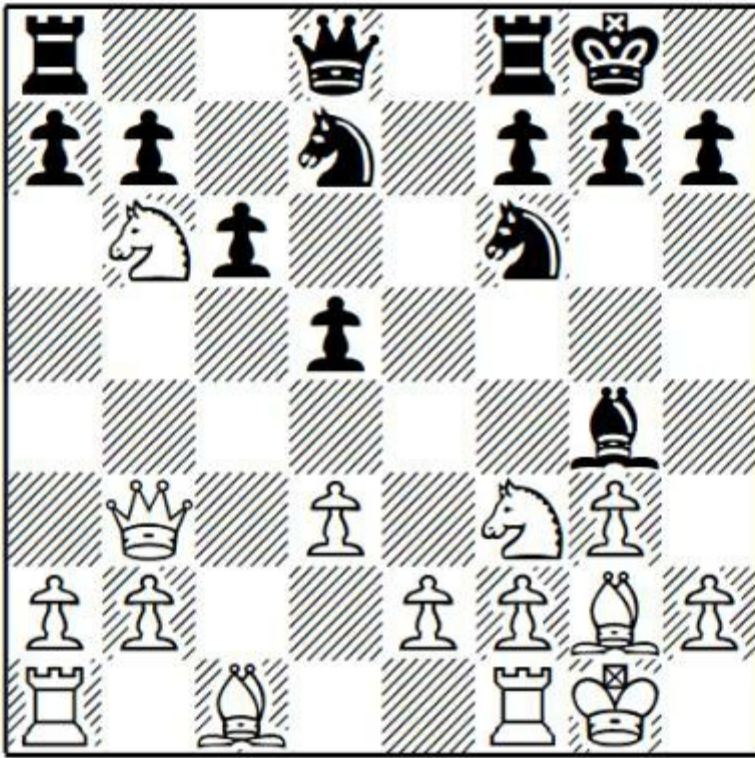


**Question:** How should White continue?

**18 e4!?**

**Answer:** For a long time I disliked such moves since I thought that Black would have better chances against the IQP in a simplified position. However, the bishop pair often works very well with this pawn. Here, White opens the game and activates the g2-bishop, which has no opponent and a lot of targets.

**18 ... dxe4 19 Nxe4**



**19 ... Rab8?**

19 ... Nxe4 20 Bxe4 Ra6 (preventing Bc6) looks better. 21 d5 (21 Bd2 Nf6 is balanced) 21 ... Nf6 22 Bd3 Rd8! 23 dxe6 (23 Bxb5 Ra5 24 Bc4 Nxd5 is okay for Black) 23 ... fxe6!? and Black has reasonable drawing chances.

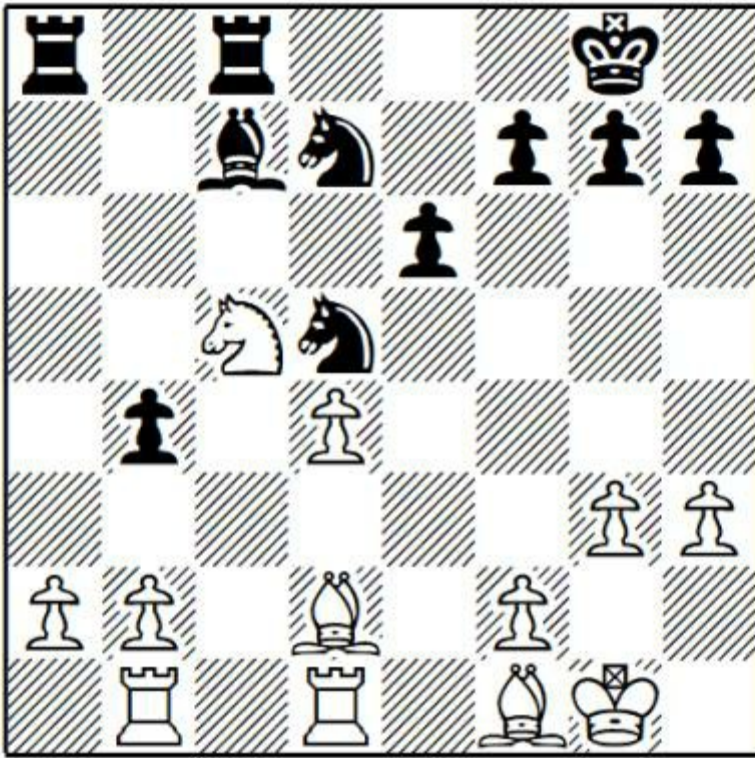
**20 Nc3**

20 Nc5! is also strong, using one of the typical advantages of an IQP (control over c5).

**20 ... Rec8 21 Bf1 b4 22 Nxa4 Nd5**

22 ... Ra8 23 Nc5 Rxa2 restores material equality, but after 24 Nxd7 Nxd7 25 d5 Black faces a tough defence against two bishops with an open centre.

**23 Bd2 Ra8 24 Nc5**



24 b3 keeps the extra pawn but makes it very difficult to make progress on the queenside.

**24 ... Nxc5**

24 ... N7b6!? is possible, limiting White to a slight advantage.

**25 dxc5 Be5**

25 ... Rxa2? 26 Bc4 followed by taking on d5 and b4 wins.

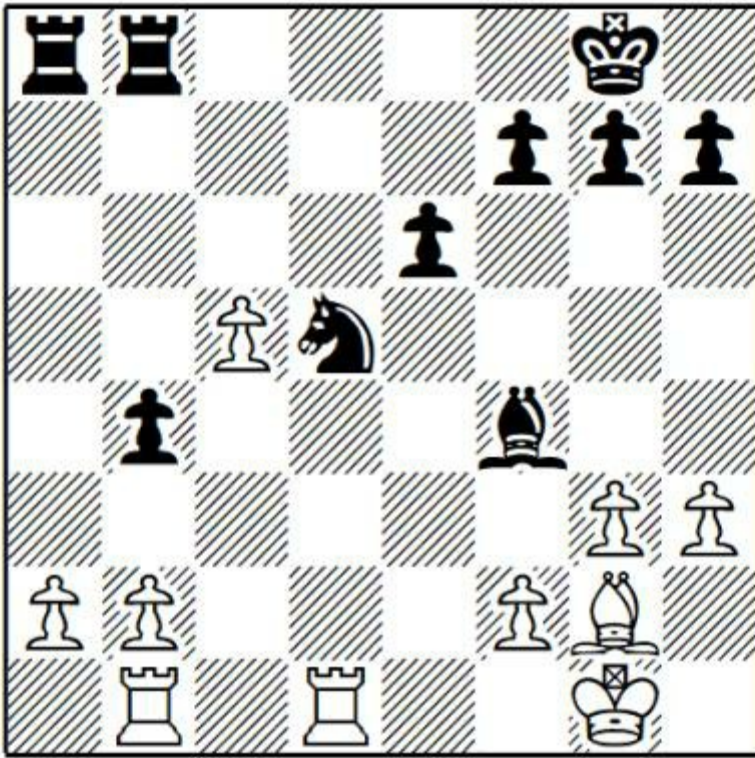
**26 Bg2 Rcb8**

26 ... Rxc5 27 Bxb4! is a nice shot.

**27 Bf4!?**

27 Bxd5 exd5 28 Be3 is also excellent for White.

**27 ... Bxf4**



**28 gxf4**

Black faces a difficult choice between various inferior rook endgames.

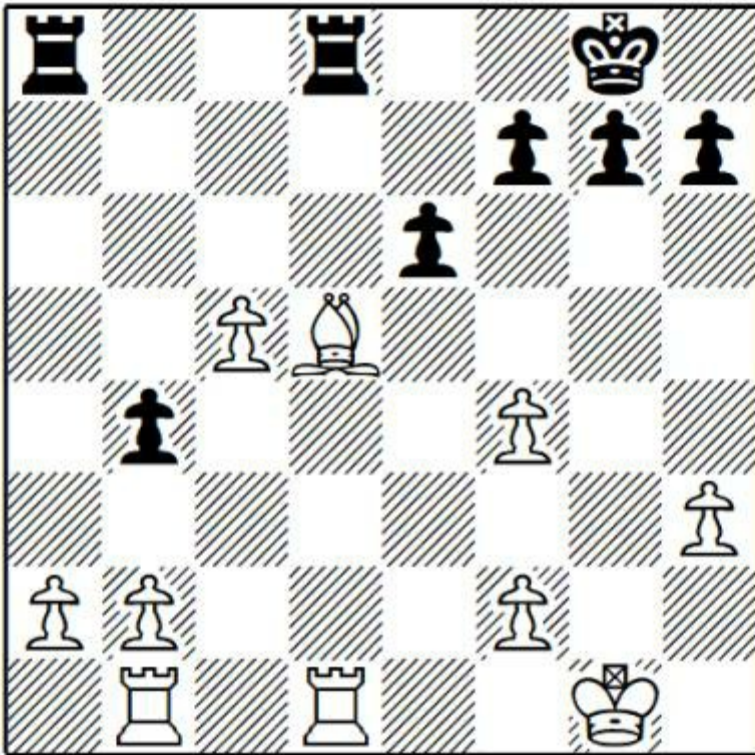
**28 ... Rd8**

Or:

a) 28 ... Rxa2 29 Bxd5 exd5 30 Rxd5 when I guess the chances of White winning and Black drawing are about 50/50.

b) 28 ... Rc8 29 Bxd5 exd5 30 Rxd5 Rxa2 is very similar, but with the rook on c8 instead of b8.

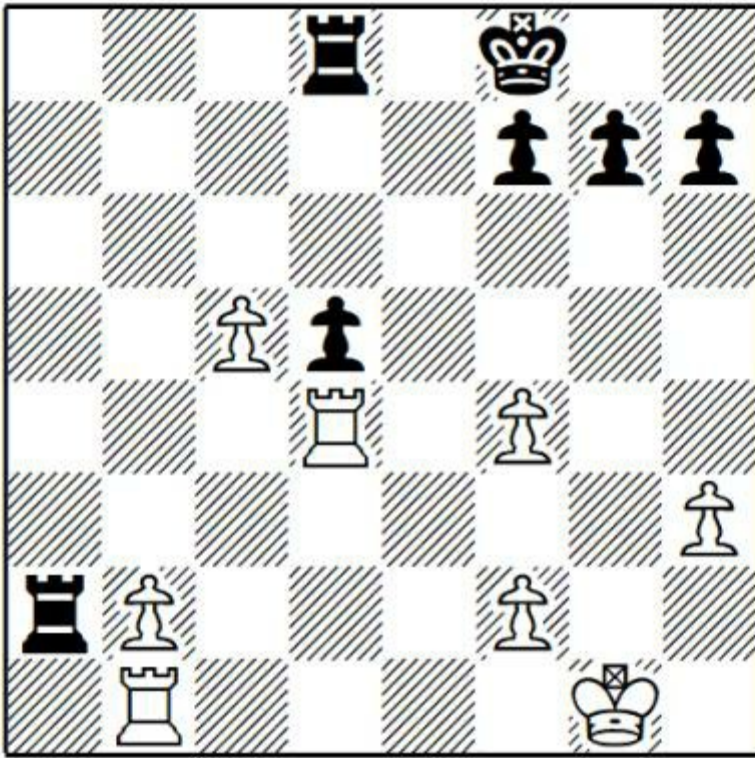
**29 Bxd5**



**29 ... exd5!**

Probably the best try. 29 ... Rxd5 30 Rxd5 exd5 31 c6 Kf8 32 c7 Ke7 33 Rc1 Rc8 34 Kf1 Kd7 (the pawn endgames are winning due to the outside passer) 35 Ke2 (35 Rc5 Kd6 36 Rc2 Kd7 doesn't make progress) 35 ... Re8+ 36 Kd2 Kc8 is a typical defence, but doesn't hold here because of 37 Re1! (otherwise Black gets very reasonable drawing chances) 37 ... Rf8 38 Re7 and there's no way this is tenable.

**30 Rd4 Kf8 31 Rxb4 Rxa2 32 Rd4**

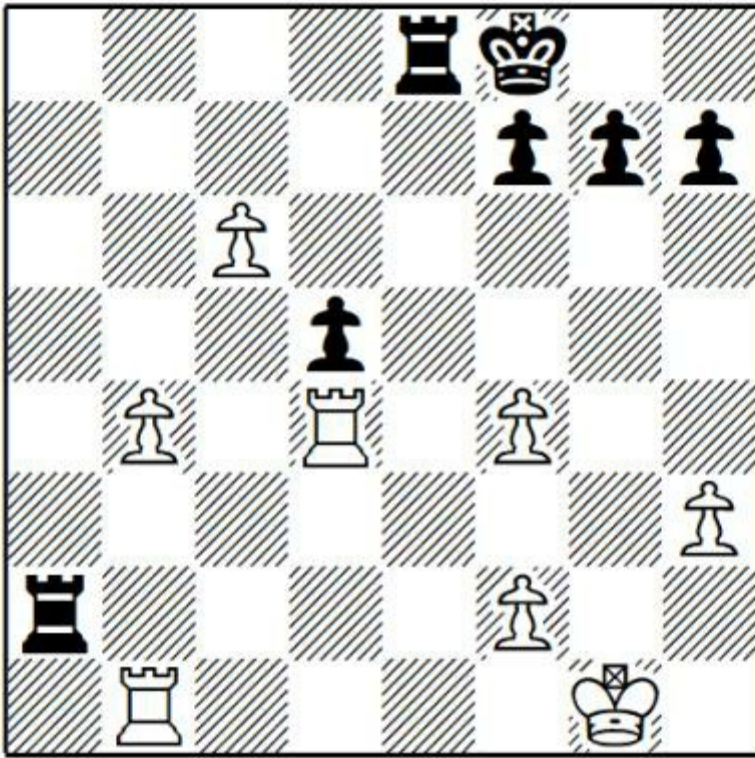


A very human approach (especially in blitz), but one that allows drawing chances. The engine views 32 Rb7 as winning, though it looks like serious counterplay after 32 ... d4.

**32 ... Rb8! 33 b4 Re8??**

Very understandable, but here doubled rooks on the seventh will not be sufficient to draw. Instead Black could have drawn based on a pin of the b4-pawn. 33 ... Ra4! 34 Kg2 Rb5! 35 Rxd5 (35 c6 Ke7 and the king stops the pawns) 35 ... Rbxb4 36 Rxb4 Rxb4 and I think Black draws.

**34 c6?**



34 b5 Ree2 35 b6 Rxf2 36 b7 and the king comes to d1, winning.

**Question:** Black has been given a last chance. Can you find it?

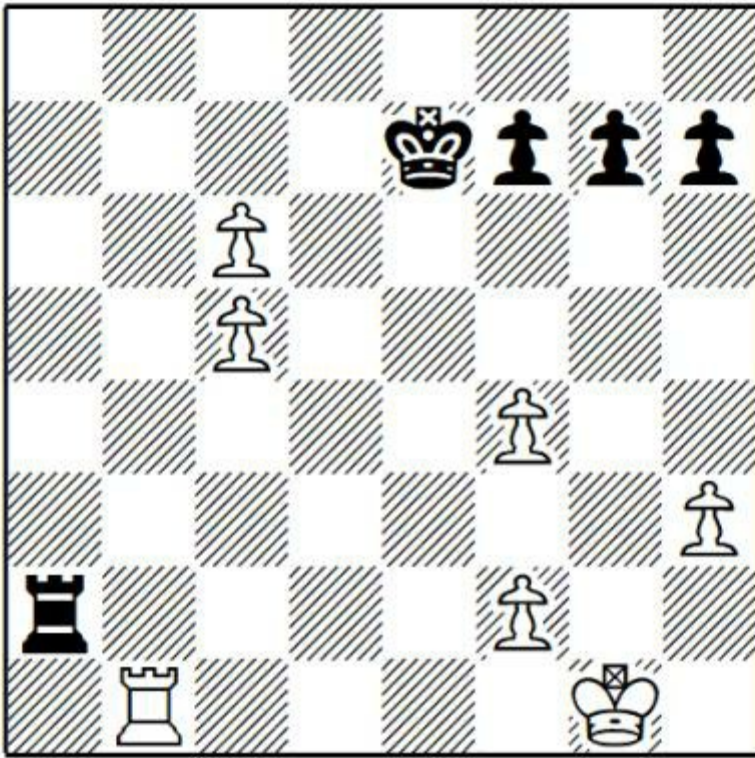
**34 ... Ree2?**

**Answer:** 34 ... Rc2! 35 b5 Rb8! uses another pin (this time of the b5-pawn). After 36 Rxd5 Rxc6 the position also looks 50/50 between a white win and a draw.

**35 Rxd5 Rec2 36 Rc5**

Not necessary, but thematic and very strong.

**36 ... Rxc5 37 bxc5 Ke7**



**Question:** Find the cleanest win for White.

**38 Rb8! 1-0**

**Answer:** 38 ... Ra7 is met by 39 Rb7+, and otherwise the pawn queens.

*Game 33*

**T.Hillarp Persson-J.Hector**

Gothenburg 2019

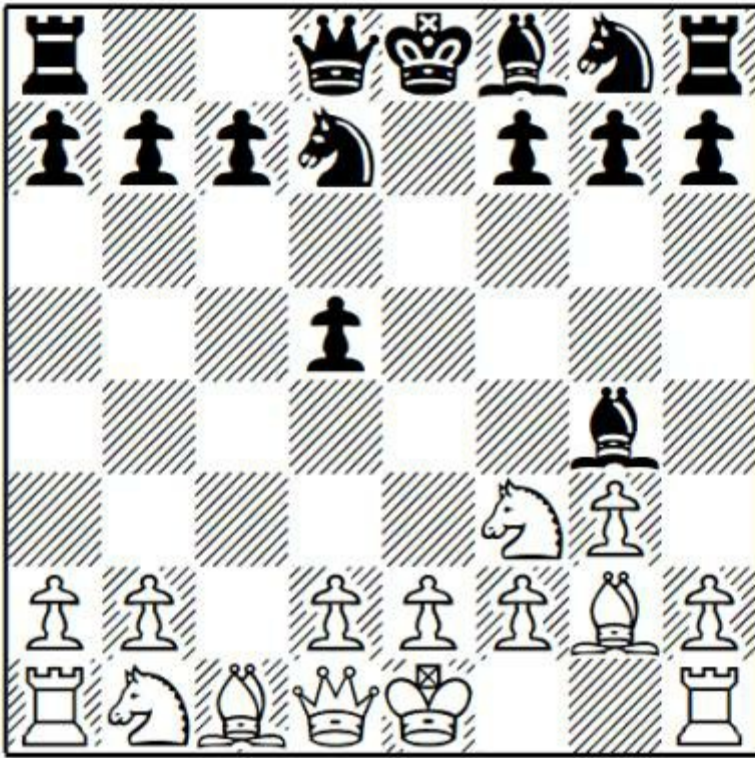
Swedish GMs Tiger Hillarp Persson and Jonny Hector have played more than 50 games against each other (55 at my rough count) which, while not matching the 180+ Kasparov/Karpov encounters, still translates to hundreds of hours across the board.

Hector is a Slav enthusiast and Hillarp Persson favours closed setups, so it's not surprising that they've had several tussles in the Réti.

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3**

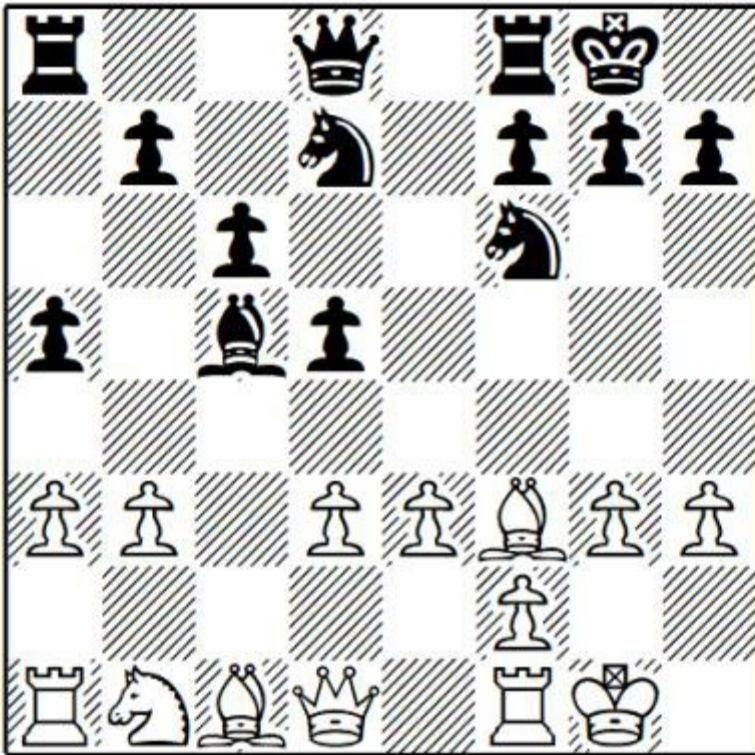
It's hard to keep track of the transpositional possibilities which this move allows and excludes relative to 2 c4. Via my recommended move order, the game position can be reached following 2 c4 c6 3 g3 Bg4 4 Bg2 e6 5 cxd5 Cutting down on Black's options. 5 ... exd5 (the solid 5 ... Bxf3 is possible in any move order and is discussed in Artemiev-Motylev) 6 0-0 Nf6 7 d3 Nbd7 8 Nc3 etc.

**2 ... Bg4 3 Bg2 Nd7 4 c4 e6 5 cxd5 exd5**

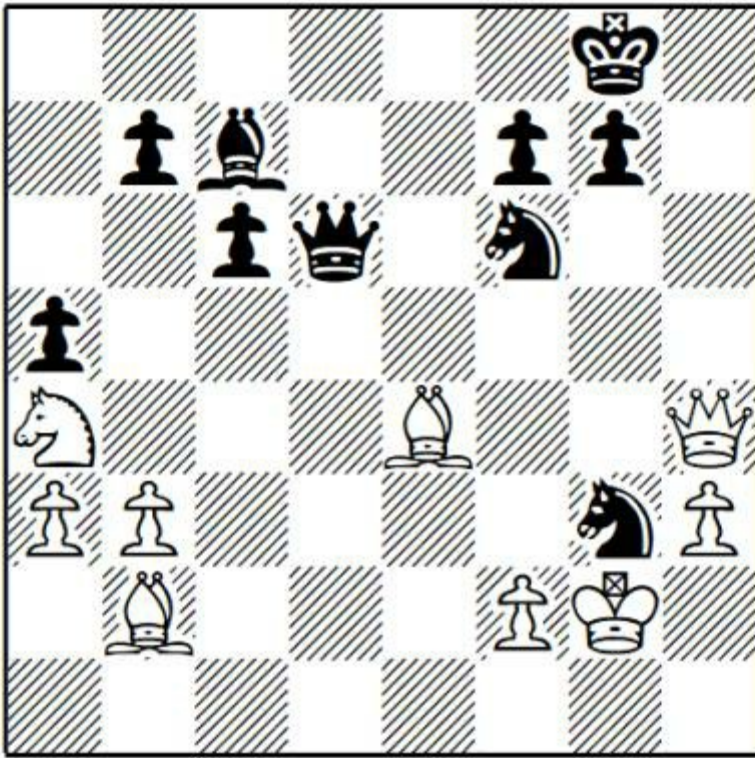


### 6 0-0

I like the following example of how Black can take advantage of overly cautious white play: 6 h3 (I think this is premature; as we'll see in a few moves, there is a case for Black to make this trade voluntarily in some positions – to seize more space with ... d4). 6 ... Bxf3 7 Bxf3 Ngf6 8 0-0 c6 9 d3 Bc5 10 e3 0-0 11 a3 a5 12 b3. White has adopted a flexible, almost Hedgehog formation, placing his faith in his flexible structure and bishop pair. Shirov has a remarkable ability to find attacking opportunities in the most sedate positions, and he sets to work here, relying on his central space advantage and active pieces.



Play continued 12 ... Ne8!? (engines dislike this move and they might be right, but it's such a creative concept I thought I had to cover it; the knight can be well placed on d6 but the main point seems to be to free the sixth rank for an audacious rook lift) 13 Bg2 Nd6 14 Ra2 Re8 15 Re2 Re6! 16 Bb2 Qe7 17 Rfe1 Re8 (for the moment, the black rooks restrict the e4-advance – in the main game, we'll see Hector trying to implement a similar idea in much less favourable circumstances) 18 Qd2 Bb6 19 Nc3 Nf5! (introducing lots of tactical content, with thematic sacrifices on g3 or e3 in the air) 20 d4 (understandably, Grachev decides to limit the b6-bishop and reduce the risks of an accident on the g1-a7 diagonal, although this comes at the cost of restricting his own bishop on b2 and making his structure less flexible) 20 ... h5! (the centre is fixed so Shirov expands on the wing) 21 Na4 Bc7 (21 ... Ba7! looks even more effective, when it's harder for White to free his position) 22 e4! dxe4 23 Rxe4 Qd6 24 Qg5? (a mistake, but the engine's top line is 24 Kf1, which no-one would ever play) 24 ... Rxe4 25 Rxe4 Rxe4 26 Bxe4 Nxd4 27 Qxh5 Nf6 28 Qh4. Black has several good moves here, but Shirov sensibly decides to cash in for a material advantage. 28 ... Ne2+ 29 Kg2 Nxe3! and now:



a) **Question:** Has Shirov blundered? And, if not, how would you meet 30 fxg3 Qd2+ 31 Kf3 ?

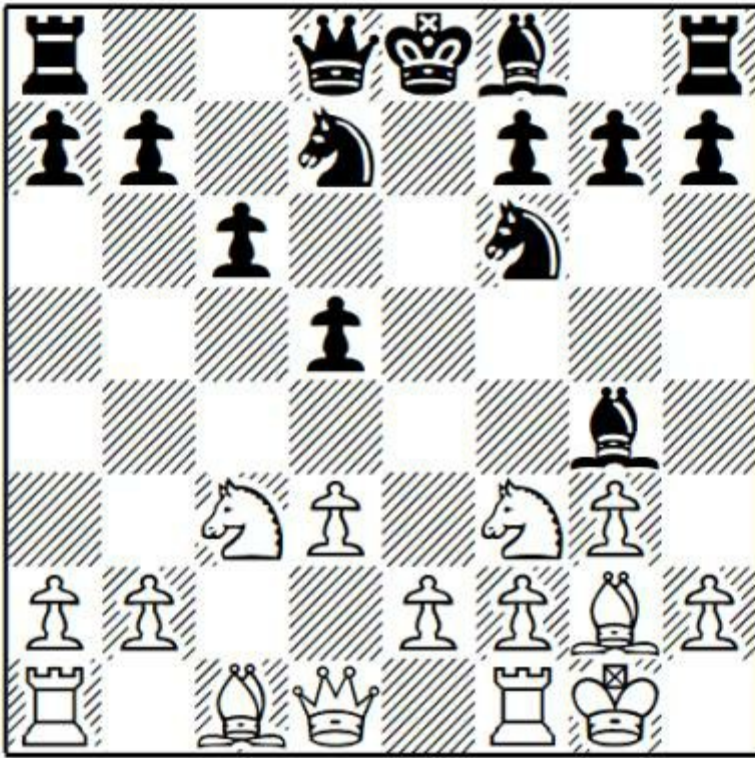
**Answer:** 31 ... g5!! A gorgeous shot, forcing 32 Bh7+ with an extra pawn, based on the idea 32 Qh6 g4+ winning the queen.

b) 30 Bxf6 Nxe4 31 Qxe4 Qh2+ 32 Kf1 Qxh3+ 33 Ke2 gxf6 with a material advantage and a continuing attack in B.Grachev-A.Shirov, Loo 2014.

**6 ... Ngf6 7 Nc3 c6**

In a rematch a few months later, Hector varied with 7 ... Be7 8 d3 0-0 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 d4 11 Ne4 Nxe4 12 dxe4!? c5 13 Bg2 Re8 14 e3 Qb6 15 f4 Rad8 16 Kh2 with unclear play in T.Hillarp Persson-J.Hector, Malmo 2019.

**8 d3**



### 8 ... Bc5

Black has several options of where to develop this bishop:

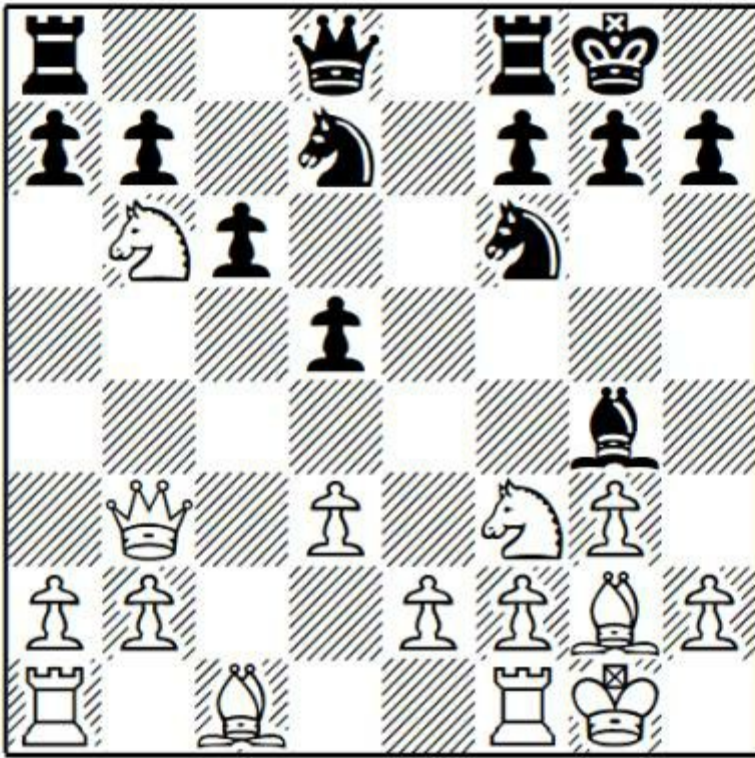
a) 8 ... Bd6 9 h3 Bh5 (9 ... Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Qe7 11 e4 dxe4 12 Nxe4!? Nxe4 13 Bxe4 0-0 14 Re1 Qd8 15 d4 Re8 led to balanced play in G.Jones-R.Hovhannisyann, Reykjavik 2019) 10 e4 (10 Be3 0-0 11 Qd2 Re8 gave Black no problems in N.Short-A.Erigaisi, Kolkata 2018) 10 ... 0-0 11 exd5! (11 g4 Bg6 12 Nh4 Nxe4! 13 dxe4 Qxh4 14 exd5 was played in G.Oparin-A.Shirov, Moscow 2016, the blitz playoff after their game in the note to move 11; now 14 ... Nf6! would have given Black excellent compensation for the sacrificed material) 11 ... Nxd5 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Qb3 Nb6 14 a4 a5 15 Be3 was excellent for White in H.Martirosyan-J.Subelj, Batumi 2019.

b) 8 ... Be7 is the most popular move and has been played in hundreds of games. Here are a couple of examples of how the game might continue. 9 h3 and now:

b1) 9 ... Bxf3 10 Bxf3 d4 (otherwise White plays e4) 11 Ne4 Nxe4 and now both recaptures on e4 have been tested in grandmaster practice, with a pleasant position for White in either case.

b2) 9 ... Bh5 10 e4 dxe4 11 dxe4 Nc5 has scored heavily for Black, but after 12 Be3! as played by Meier (one of the leading specialists in this line) and analysed by Demuth, White is doing well: 12 ... 0-0 (12 ... Nfxe4 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 g4 Bg6 15 Ne5 Nd6 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Bxc6+ Kf8 18 Bxa8 Qxa8 19 Bc5 Ne4 20 Bxe7+ Kxe7 21 Qb3 “with a huge attack coming” is good analysis by Demuth) 13 Qc2 Qd3 14 Ne1 Qxc2 15 Nxc2 Bg6 16 f3 with a pleasant endgame in G.Meier-M.Prusikin, Austria 2011.

**9 Qb3 Bb6 10 Na4 0-0 11 Nxb6**

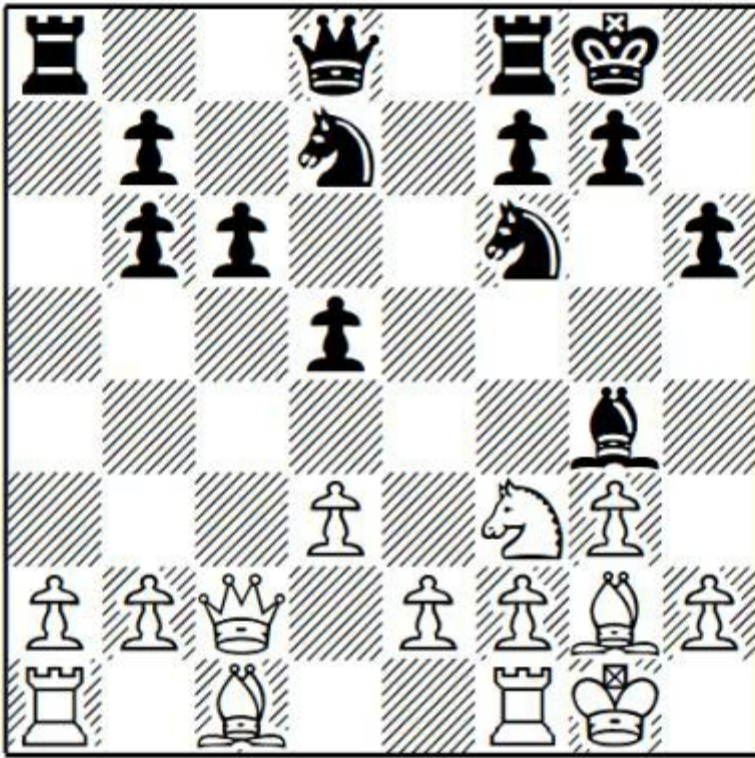


### 11 ... axb6

By far the most common recapture.

11 ... Qxb6 12 Qc2 Rfe8 13 h3 Bh5 (setting up a battle between space and bishops with 13 ... Bxf3 14 Bxf3 – 14 exf3!? is a possible alternative – 14 ... d4 also looks reasonable) 14 g4 Bg6 15 Nh4 Nf8 16 Kh1 (it's more accurate to start with 16 e3 since, after the move in the game, Black could consider 16 ... d4!?) 16 ... Ne6 17 e3 h5? 18 g5! Nxc5 19 f4 (winning material) 19 ... Nge4 20 dxe4 Nxe4 21 Nxc5 Ng3+ 22 Kg1 Nxf1 23 Bxf1 fxc5 24 Qxc5 Rxc5 25 Bxc5 Qxc5+ 26 Kh1 and Black had insufficient compensation for the piece in G.Oparin-A.Shirov, Moscow 2016.

### 12 Qc2 h6

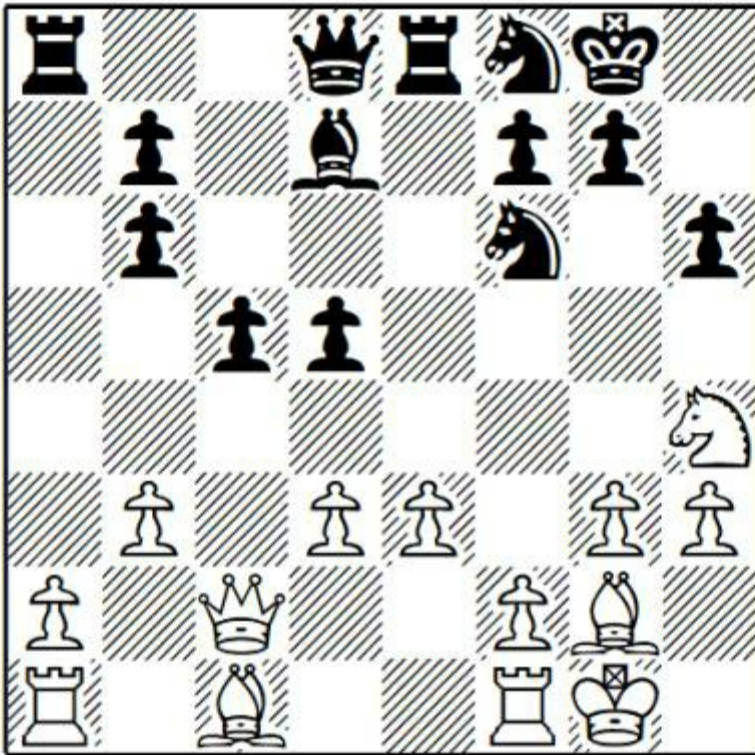


In *Beating Minor Openings*, Mikhalevski recommends the immediate 12 ... Re8 13 b3 Bxf3!? 14 Bxf3 (Demuth's recommendation 14 exf3!? remains untested) 14 ... d4, with a solid position where Black relies on his extra space and better structure against the white bishop pair.

**13 Nh4 Re8**

Engines prefer gaining space with 13 ... d4. Playing this before White plays e3 obviously gives options of meeting e3 or e4 with ... dxe3, compromising the white structure.

**14 e3 Nf8 15 h3 Bd7 16 b3 c5**



**Question:** How do you assess this move?

**Answer:** It's double-edged and, I think, a mistake. The g2-bishop was restricted by the b7-c6-d5 pawn chain. Moving the c-pawn gives this bishop useful work against the d5-pawn, and makes the b7-pawn slightly weak. As we will see, Hector has a creative rook lift in mind, but his pieces will be pushed back by White's mobile kingside majority.

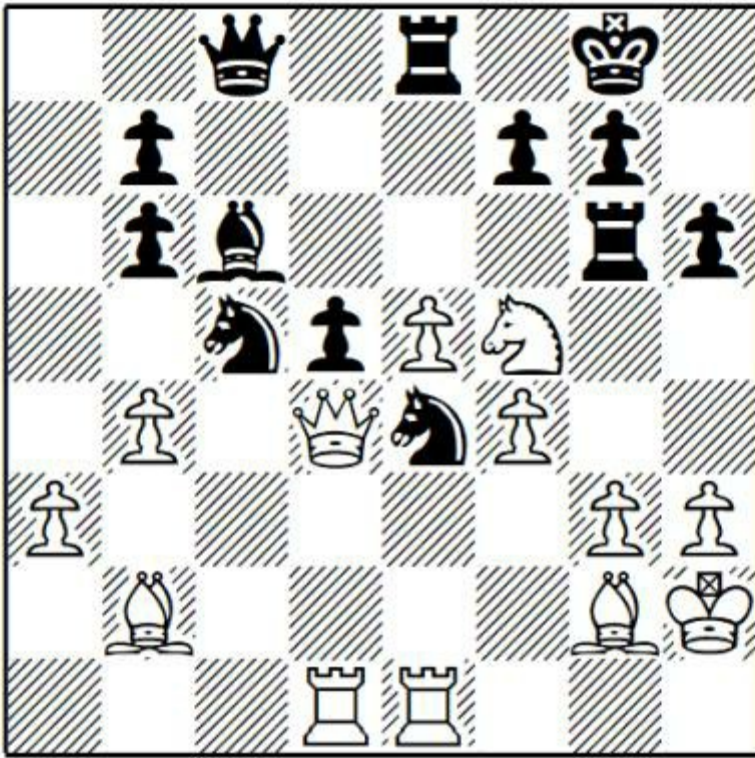
**17 Bb2 Rc8 18 Rfe1 N8h7 19 Rad1 Rc6 20 e4 Rce6**

It's unlikely that the black pieces could restrict the mobile white pawns.

**21 Qd2 Bc6 22 e5! Nd7 23 d4! cxd4 24 Qxd4 Nhf6**

24 ... Nxe5? fails tactically to 25 Rxe5 Rxe5 26 f4, winning.

**25 f4! Ne4 26 Nf5 Qa8 27 a3 Rg6 28 Kh2 Ndc5 29 b4 Qc8**



**30 Nd6**

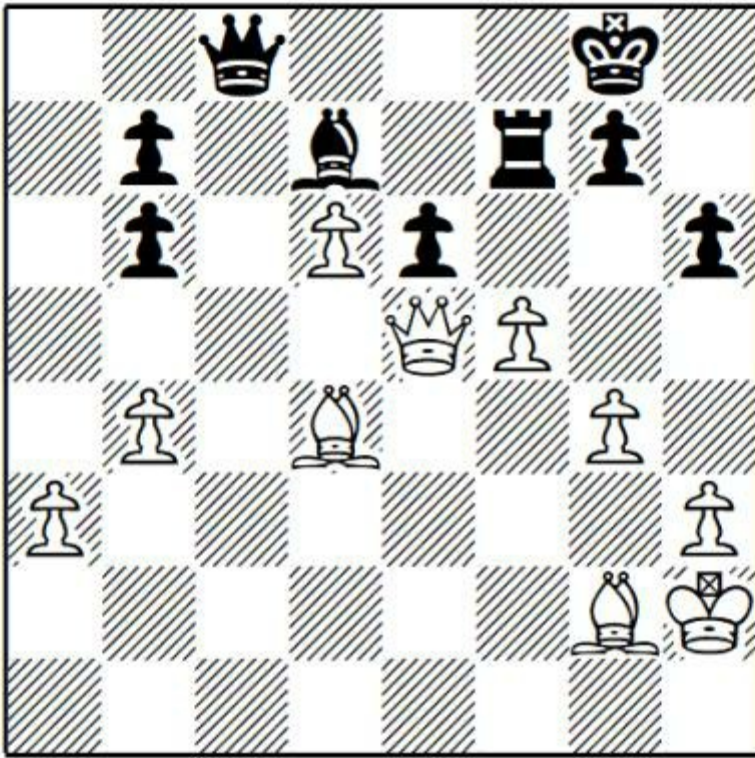
30 g4! was even stronger but there's nothing wrong with Tiger's treatment.

**30 ... Nxd6 31 exd6 Nd7?**

31 ... Rxe1 32 Rxe1 Ne4 was more resilient.

**32 f5! Rf6 33 Qf4**





**Question:** Black can force a draw in this position. How?

**40 ... Kh8?!**

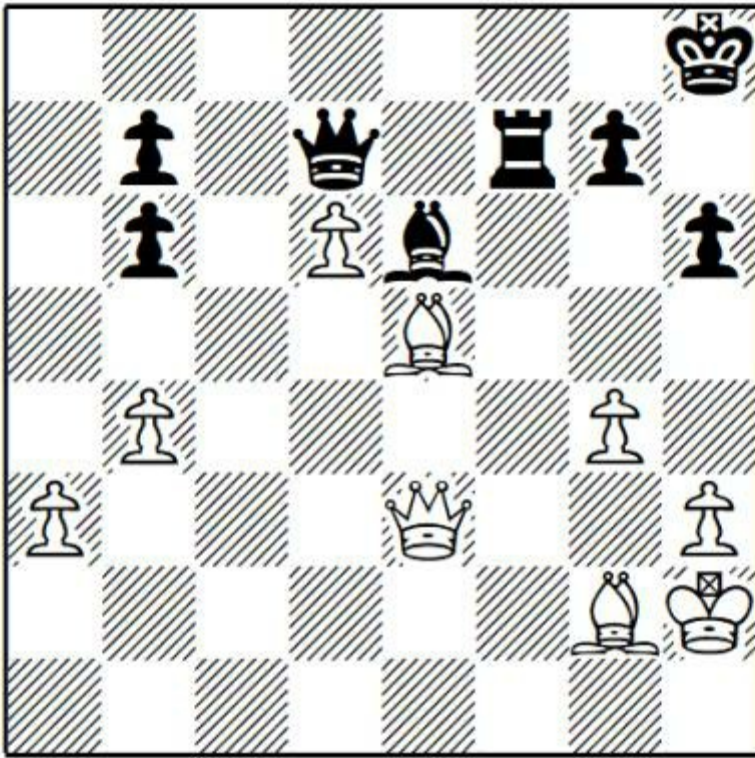
This leaves White with positional pressure, although Black should be able to hold with precise defence.

**Answer:** 40 ... exf5! was a clean draw, since 41 Bd5 Qc2+ leads to perpetual check.

**41 fxe6**

The immediate 41 Qe3 kept some pressure.

**41 ... Bxe6 42 Qe3 Qd7! 43 Be5**



**Question:** Can you spot White's threat?

**43 ... b5?? 44 Qxh6+!**

**Answer:** This was not possible on the previous move since, after ... Kg8, retreating the queen would drop the d6-pawn. Now this pawn is defended, White gains a huge advantage. It's almost impossible to regain composure after such a blunder, although perhaps an engine could still hold this.

**44 ... Kg8 45 Qe3**

45 Qg6! was more incisive.

**45 ... Bc4**

Queen retreats to the back rank are evaluated as more resilient by the engine, but Black remains in deep trouble.

**46 Qd4 Qe6 47 Kg3 Ba2 48 Be4 Qb3+ 49 Kh4!**

No fear! Tiger is happy to put his king into safety/include it in the attack.

**49 ... g5+ 50 Kxg5 Qxh3 51 d7 Rxd7 52 Qxd7 Qe3+ 53 Kf6 Qh6+ 54 Kf5 1-0**

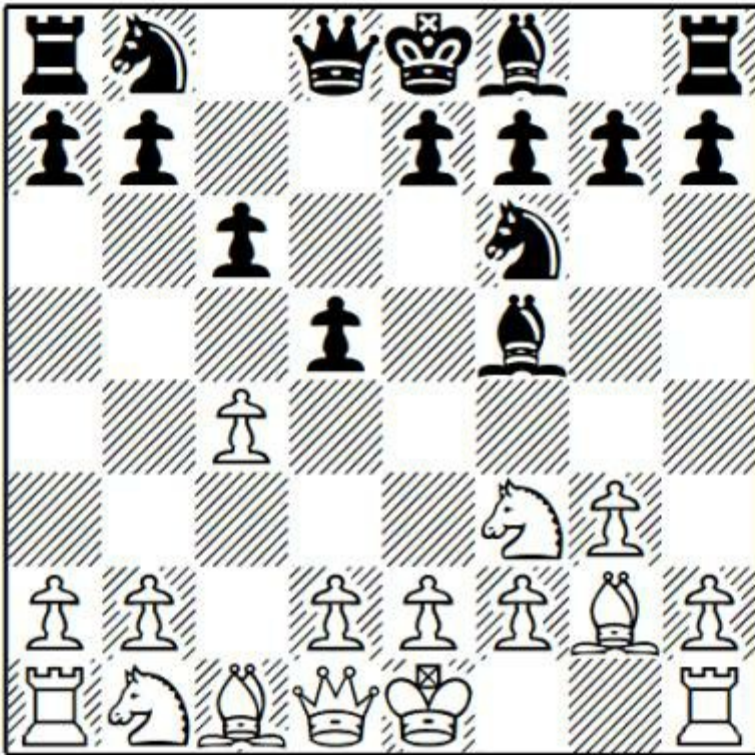
A very interesting game in all stages.

*Game 34*

**L.Pantsulaia-O.Korneev**

European Team Championship, Heraklio 2017

**1 c4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c6 3 g3 d5 4 Bg2 Bf5**



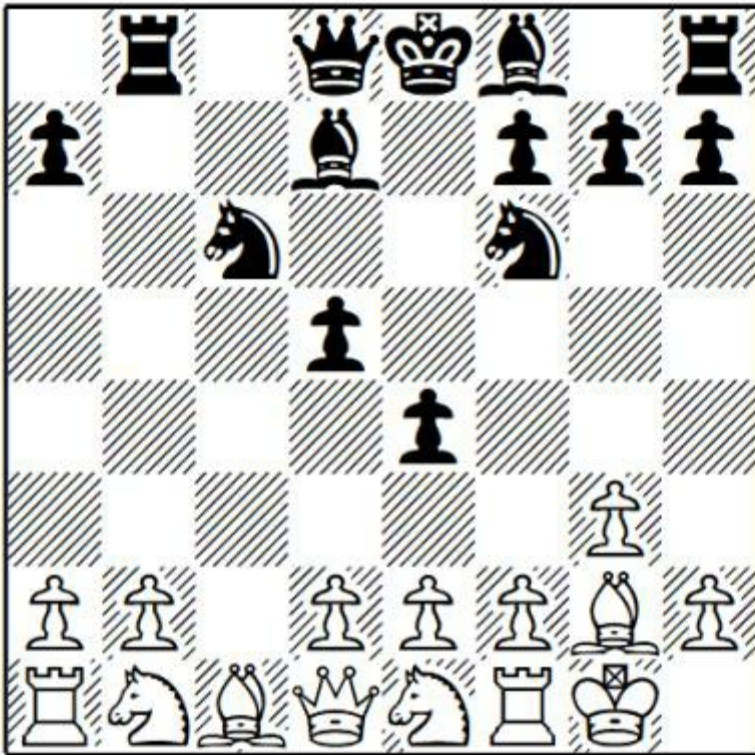
### 5 cxd5

5 Qb3 is an interesting alternative aimed at cutting out the ... Nc6 resource. After 5 ... Qb6 6 d3 e6 7 Be3 Qxb3 (7 ... dxc4 8 Qxc4! Qxb2 9 Bd4 Qb4+ 10 Nbd2 Qxc4 11 Nxc4 gave White excellent compensation in T.Hillarp Persson-K.Alekseenko, Stockholm 2018) 8 axb3 a6 White had chances of an endgame edge in A.Giri -L.Aronian, St Petersburg 2018.

### 5 ... cxd5 6 Qb3

The more sedate 6 0-0 Nc6 7 d3 e6 was tested in a game between Aronian and Carlsen from the World Rapid Championship in 2016: 8 Be3 Be7 9 Qb3 Qd7 10 Nd4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 0-0 12 Nc3 (to me, this position looks more pleasant for White, whose bishops are more active and who can execute the only pawn break at the moment with e4) 12 ... Bg6 13 Rfd1 Bd6!? (bringing the bishop to b8 – with possibilities of pushing e5 – is an interesting plan; 13 ... Rfd8 is solid but I still prefer White after 14 e4) 14 Nb5 Bb8 15 Bxf6!? (15 Rac1 e5 16 Bc5 Rd8 looks fine for Black) 15 ... gxf6 16 e4 dxe4 17 dxe4 Qe7 18 Qa3!? (playing for an endgame in which White hopes to have the better chances due to the restricted bishop on g6, a common problem for Black in Slav structures; 18 Rd2 Rd8 19 Rad1 Rxd2 20 Rxd2 a6 is level) 18 ... Qxa3 19 Nxa3 Rc8 20 Rd7 Bc7 21 b3 Rab8 22 Rc1 Bd8 23 Rxc8 Rxc8 24 Bf3 Rc1+ 25 Kg2 Bb6 26 Rxb7 Ra1 27 Nc4 Bd4 28 Rd7 e5 29 g4 Rxa2 30 h4 Bxf2!? (not even bothering to save the bishop; it's fair to say that after 30 ... h6 31 h5 Bh7 the bishop isn't getting out, but the counterplay against f2 is sufficient for a draw) 31 h5 Be3+ 32 Kh1 Ra1+ 33 Kg2 (White can try to avoid the repetition with 33 Kh2 Ra2+ 34 Bg2, but after 34 ... Bf4+ 35 Kg1 Ra1+ 36 Kf2 Ra2+ 37 Kf1 Ra1+ 38 Ke2 Ra2+ 39 Nd2 a5 40 hxg6 hxg6 he doesn't have serious winning chances) 33 ... Ra2+ 34 Kh1 (34 Kh3?? Bf4 with a mating net) 34 ... Ra1+ 35 Kg2 Ra2+ and a draw was agreed in L.Aronian-M.Carlsen, Doha 2016.

### 6 ... Nc6!

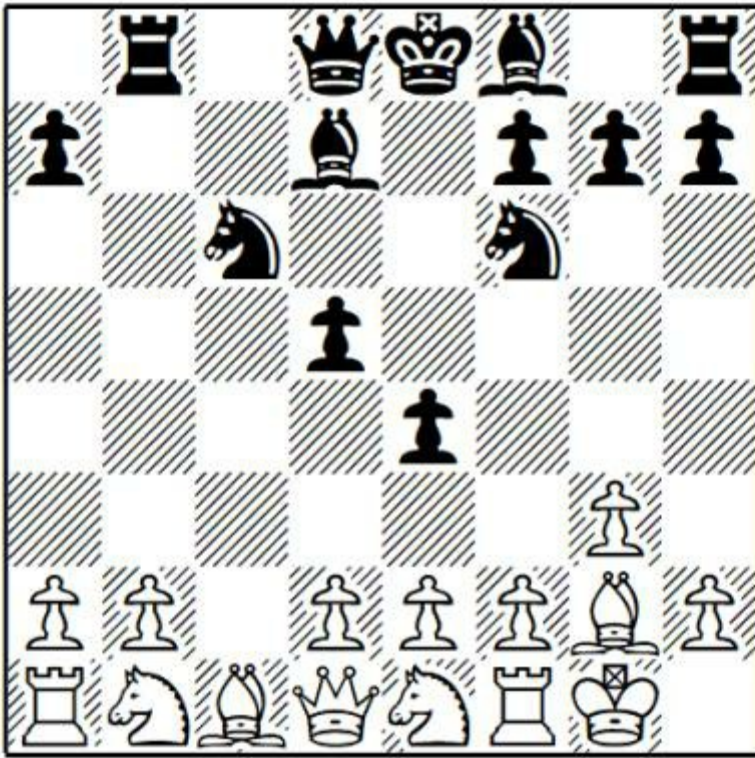


This line is the reason Demuth does not recommend the 5 cxd5 move order in his book on the Réti.

**7 Qxb7 Bd7**

This a promising pawn sacrifice.

**8 Qb3 e5 9 0-0 e4 10 Ne1 Rb8 11 Qd1**



Optically, this position looks appalling for White, and Black has a ready-made attack on the h-file. However, strong players have gone for this position with White, and Pantsulaia was repeating his own win from the Baku Olympiad.

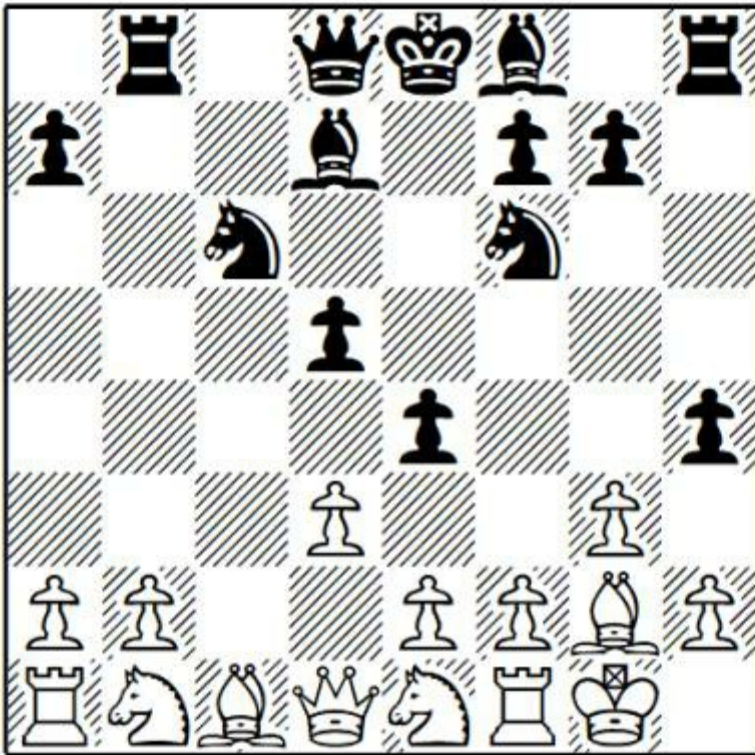
**11 ... h5!**

It seems clear that this is the best move. 11 ... Bc5? was played in Pantsulaia's previous game. 12 d3 and now:

a) 12 ... Qe7 was L.Pantsulaia-C.Repka, Baku 2016, when 13 dxe4 dxe4 14 Nc3 would have been excellent for White.

b) 12 ... h5 13 Nc3 h4 14 dxe4 hxg3 15 hxg3 Bh3 16 Bxh3 Rxh3 17 Kg2 and White soon won in D.Dubov-A.Goganov, St Petersburg 2016.

**12 d3 h4!**



Losing no time. The white position is now critical.

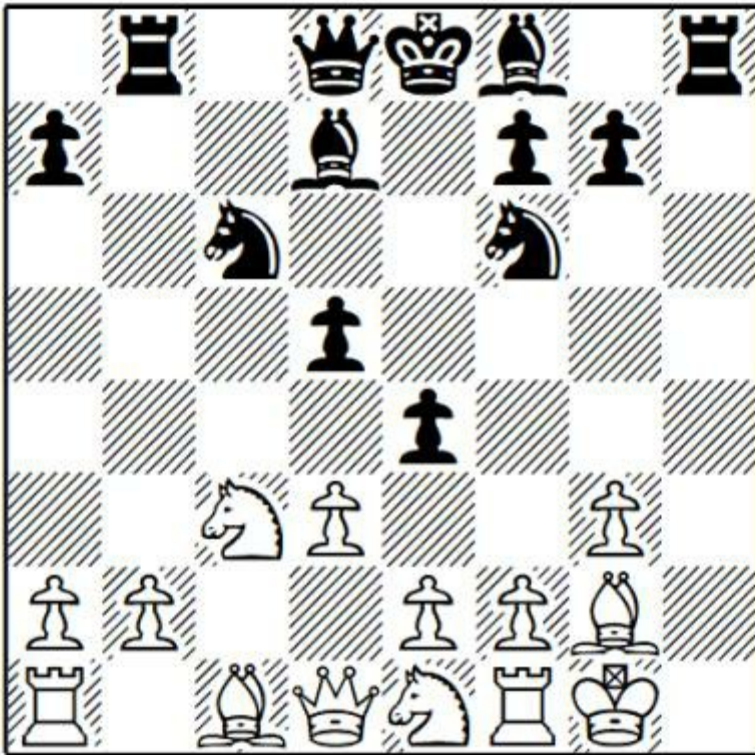
**13 Nc3?!**

I suspect Pantsulaia forgot his analysis:

a) 13 dxe4 dxe4 (13 ... hxg3! 14 hxg3 dxe4 cuts out the Bf4xg3 option) 14 Nc3 hxg3 15 hxg3? (15 fxg3 was much better, but Black retains a strong initiative after 15 ... Ng4 16 Rf4 Nce5 17 Rxe4 Qb6+ 18 e3 f5) 15 ... Qa5! and Black was already winning in N.Petrov-J.Van Foreest, Groningen 2015.

b) 13 Bf4 is an interesting option, aiming to defend the kingside by recapturing on g3 with the bishop: 13 ... hxg3 14 Bxg3 Nh5 retains a strong initiative for the pawn in an unclear position. A sample line continues 15 dxe4 dxe4 16 Nc3 f5 17 Qd2, when Black even has good compensation in the endgame after 17 ... Nxg3!? 18 hxg3 Be6 19 Qxd8+ Rxd8

**13 ... hxg3! 14 hxg3**



After 14 fxg3, 14 ... Ng4! is terribly strong, when the white kingside collapses.

**14 ... e3**

14 ... Qa5 is less natural when the d-pawns have not been exchanged, but this was also a serious option.

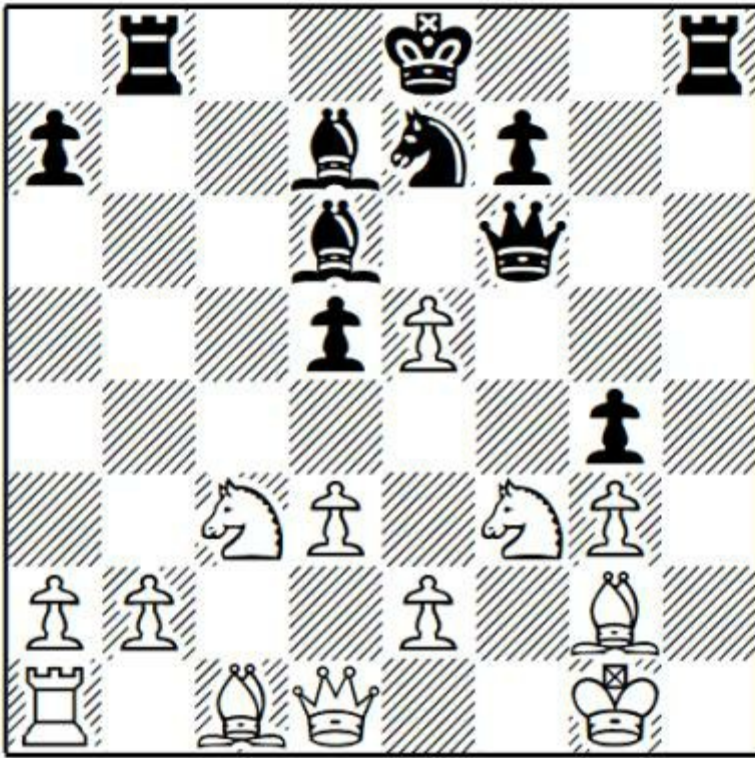
**15 fxe3??**

The first definite mistake. 15 Bxe3 was a lot tougher. 15 ... d4 16 Bf4 dxc3 17 Bxb8 cxb2 18 Rb1 Qxb8 19 Qb3 and the position appears roughly balanced.

**15 ... Bd6**

Now g3 can't be held comfortably.

**16 Rf4 g5 17 Rxf6 Qxf6 18 Nf3 Ne7 19 e4 g4 20 e5**



**Question:** How should Black continue the attack?

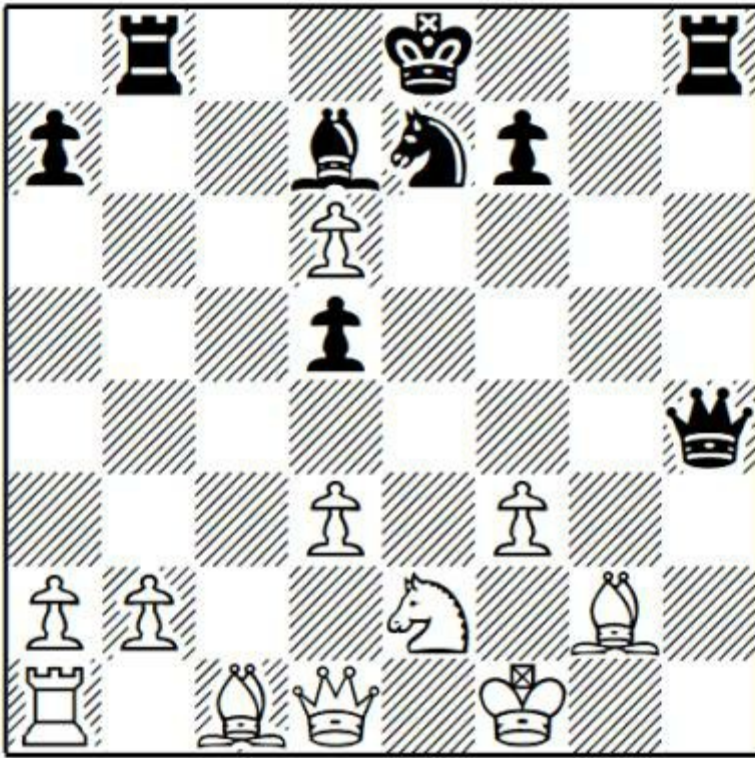
**20 ... Qg7!!**

**Answer:** Only this move wins:

a) 20 ... Qe6 21 exd6 gxf3 22 exf3 is unclear.

b) 20 ... Bxe5? 21 Nxe5 Qxe5 22 Bf4 Qd4+ 23 e3 Qb6 24 Bxb8 Qxb8 is a huge improvement of the white position.

**21 exd6 gxf3 22 exf3 Qxg3 23 Ne2 Qh2+ 24 Kf2 Qh4+ 25 Kf1**



**Question:** Basic attacking technique. How should Black continue?

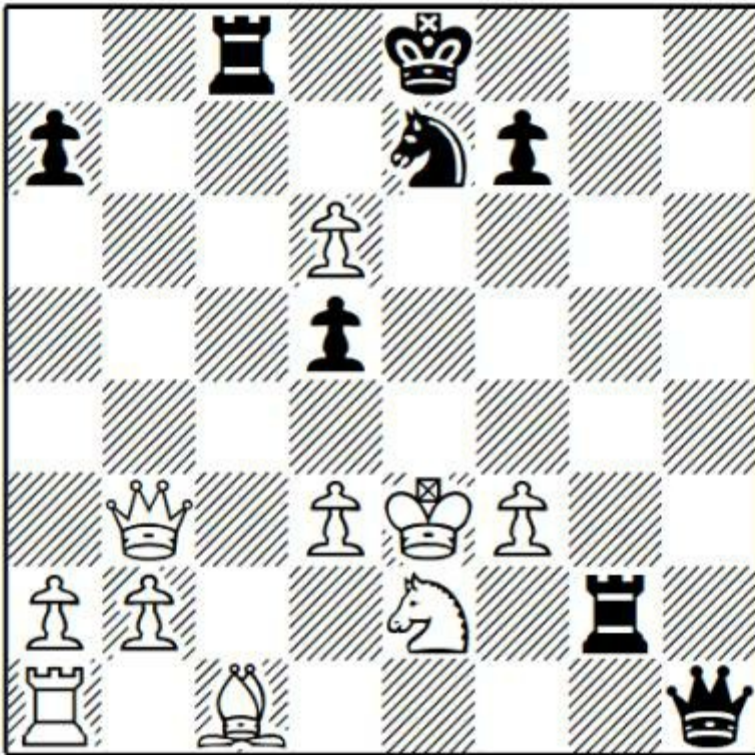
**25 ... Bh3!**

**Answer:** Bringing in all the pieces. 25 ... Nf5, following the same principle, was also strong, but Korneev's move has the advantage of trading White's best defender.

**26 Qc2 Bxg2+ 27 Kxg2 Rg8+ 28 Kf1 Rc8**

28 ... Qh1+ forced mate quicker, but Korneev's approach is more than good enough.

**29 Qb3 Qh1+ 30 Kf2 Rg2+ 31 Ke3**



**Question:** Not that it matters, but Korneev missed a mate in four here.  
Can you spot it?

**31 ... Nf5+**

**Answer:** 31 ... Qh6+! 32 Kd4 (32 f4 Qe6+ is mate next move) 32 ... Qf6+ 33 Ke3 Qe5+ 34 Kd2 Qxe2 mate.

**32 Kf4 Qh6+ 33 Kxf5 Qh5+ 0-1**

A wonderful attacking display by Korneev.

*Game 35*

**P.Svidler-J.Smeets**

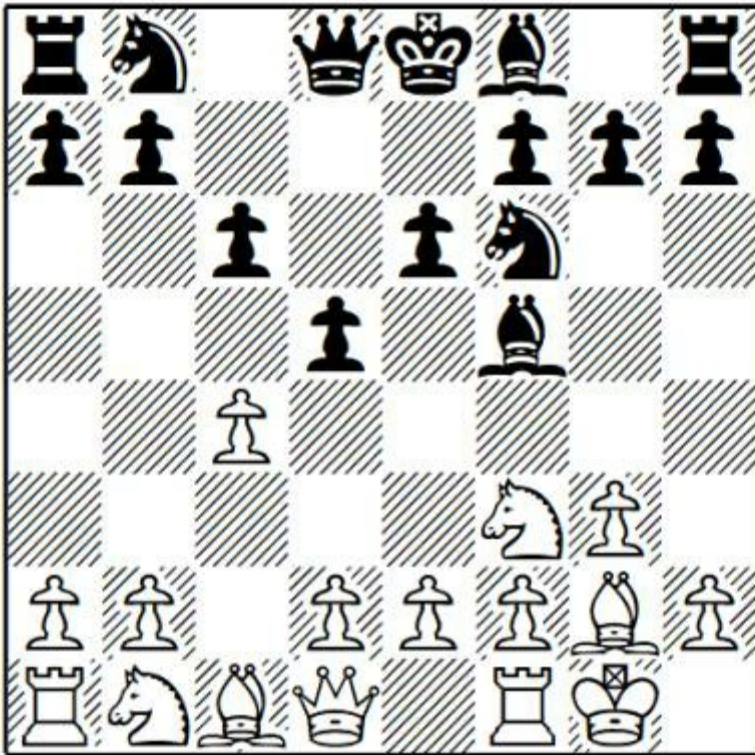
Bundesliga 2016

I think that this game is an absolute model of what White is looking for in the Réti. Svidler wins a very smooth game against strong opposition, admittedly when an inferior line is chosen.

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3**

Via our preferred move order, the position after move 7 in the game can be reached with 2 c4 c6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bf5 5 Qb3 Qc8?! (Demuth's annotation) 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 Nc3 e6.

**2 ... Nf6 3 Bg2 c6 4 0-0 Bf5 5 c4 e6**



### 6 cxd5

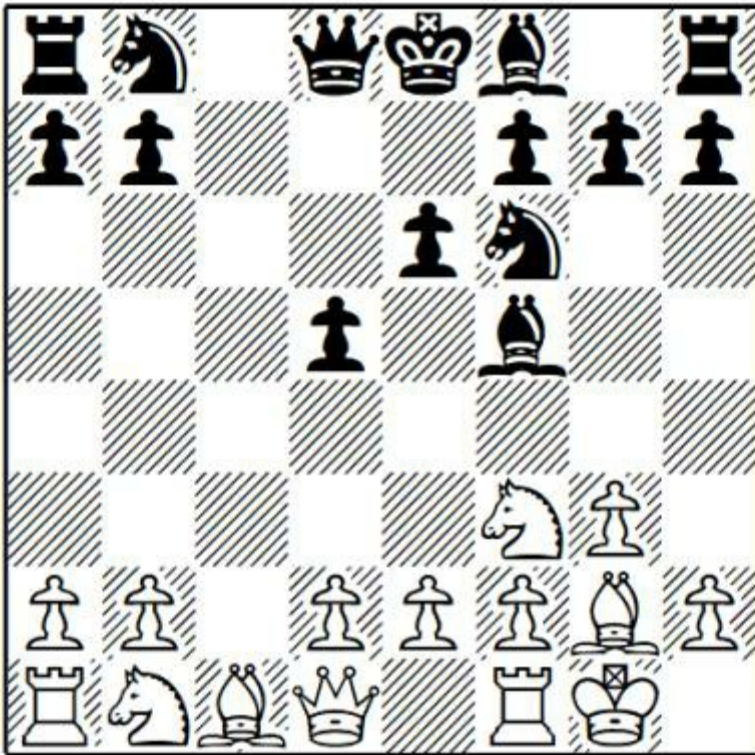
Others:

a) 6 Qb3 Qb6 7 d3 Nbd7 8 cxd5 Qxb3 9 axb3 exd5 led to quieter play in A.Grischuk-L.Aronian, St Louis 2018.

b) 6 d3 Be7 7 Nbd2 h6 8 b3 0-0 9 Bb2 Nbd7 transposes to the famous game R.Rapport-M.Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2017: 10 a3 a5 11 Qb1!? (a creative way to prepare b4) 11 ... Bh7 12 b4 axb4 13 axb4 Qb6 14 Bc3 Rxa1 15 Qxa1 Bxb4 16 Bxb4 Qxb4 17 Rb1 Qd6 18 Rxb7 e5 19 d4 exd4 20 Nxd4 c5 21 N4b3. Now, instead of simplifying with 21 ... dxc4 and a likely draw, Carlsen (who drew a winning position against Giri in the previous round, in a game featured in David Smerdon's *The Complete Chess Swindler: How to Save Points from Lost Positions*) played the over-ambitious 21 ... d4 22 Bh3 d3?! 23 e3!, after which Rapport went on to win an impressive game.

**Question:** How should Black recapture after 6 cxd5?

### 6 ... cxd5?



Allowing a poor version of the symmetrical Slav structures.

**Answer:** 6 ... exd5! is correct, as used by Carlsen against Oparin in the World Rapid Championship 2018. 7 d3 Bc5 8 Qb3 Bb6 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Na4 Re8 and now:

a) 11 Nxb6 axb6 12 Qc2 h6 13 b3 c5 14 Bb2 Nc6 15 a3 d4 with a comfortable game in G.Oparin-M.Carlsen, St Petersburg 2018.

b) 11 Re1 is well met by several moves including 11 ... c5, but not 11 ... Ba5? 12 Qxb7! Bxe1 13 Qxa8 Bxf2+? 14 Kxf2 Qd7 15 Nd4 Bh3 16 Bf4 and Black resigned in G.Meier-V.Ivanchuk, Jerusalem 2018.

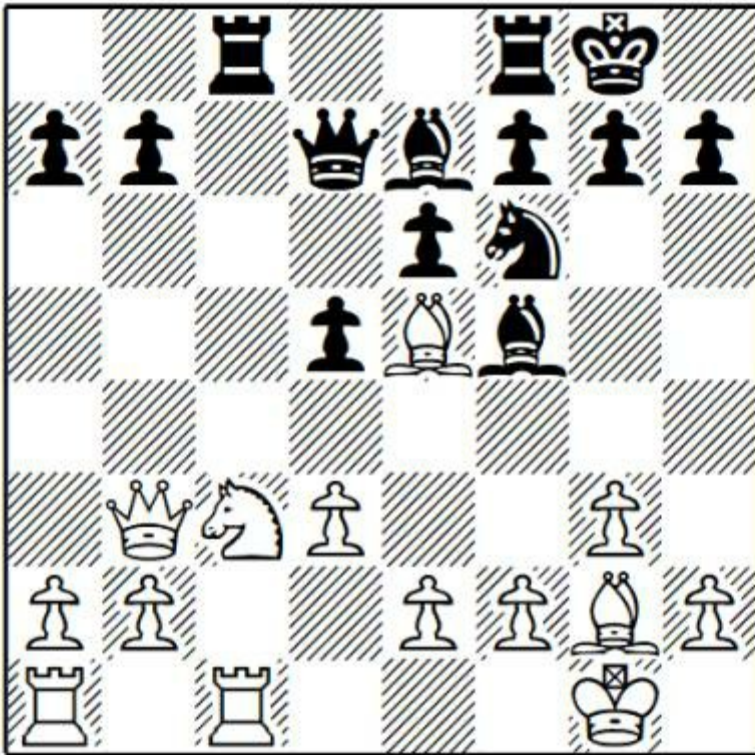
### 7 Qb3! Qc8

7 ... Qb6 8 Qxb6 axb6 gives White a very pleasant endgame with an outpost on b5.

### 8 d3 Nc6 9 Bf4 Be7 10 Rc1 Qd7

Perhaps Black should have preferred 10 ... 0-0 since Ne5 is not yet a strong threat.

### 11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 Bxe5 Rc8 13 Nc3 0-0



**Question:** How should White continue?

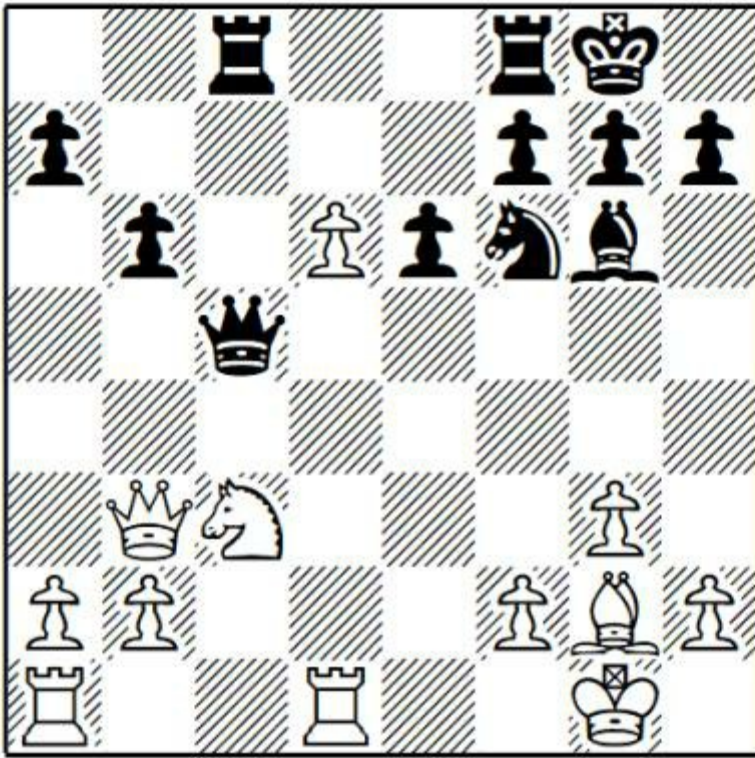
**14 e4!**

**Answer:** Active play in the centre leads to an opening of the position in White's favour. Note that, as happens in many openings, the black queen struggles to find a safe square.

**14 ... dxe4 15 dxe4 Bg6 16 Rd1 Qc6 17 Bd6!?**

Using tactics to obtain a passed d-pawn. As a lifelong Grünfeld expert, Svidler cannot have an excessive respect for such pawns. That said, he has lost a number of model games to Kramnik in these structures, so he knows exactly how White should proceed. Increasing the pressure with 17 Rac1 is very logical, and is the engine's preference, but I like Svidler's tactical solution.

**17 ... Bxd6 18 e5 Qc5 19 exd6 b6**



**Question:** How would you play?

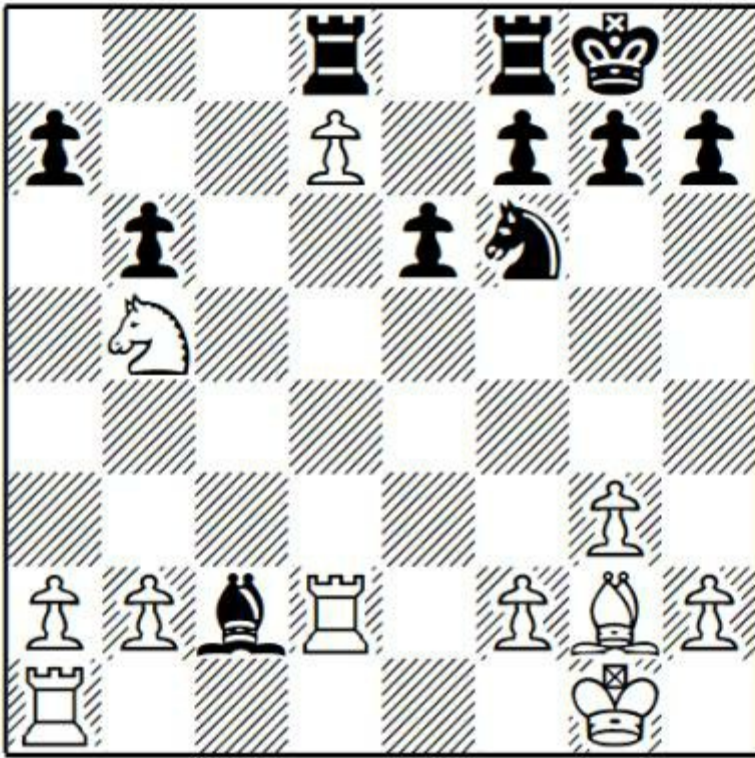
**20 d7!**

**Answer:** Really strong. It's easy to become worried about pushing such pawns in case they are surrounded and captured. However, the tactical features of a position often favour the pawn pusher. With the pawn on the seventh rank, the f8-rook can't move. The bishop on g6 can't challenge the pawn. Also, the black queenside is so weak that, even if Black arranges a challenge to the d7-pawn (as occurs in the game), White is likely to collect a queenside pawn in return, leaving him with a better structure thanks to the potential outside passed pawn.

**20 ... Rcd8 21 Qa4 Qc7 22 Nb5 Qc2 23 Qxc2 Bxc2**

Smets has done well to organise an attack on d7, but his problems aren't over.

**24 Rd2**

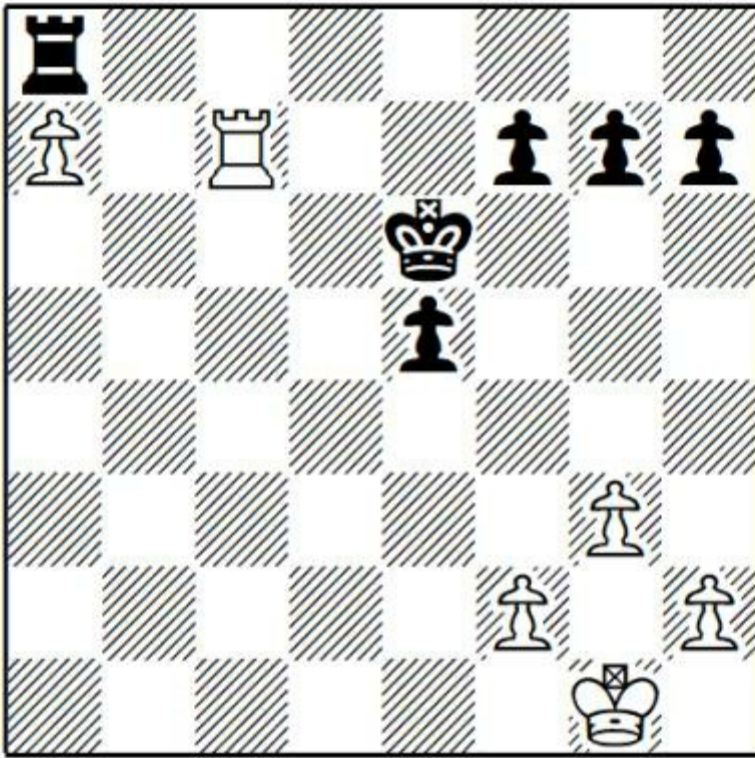


24 Rd4! is even better, leaving the bishop stranded on c2, but Svidler's move is also very logical.

**24 ... Ba4 25 Nxa7 Rxd7 26 Rxd7 Bxd7 27 Rc1**

Black's defensive task remains unpleasant.

**27 ... e5 28 Bb7 Rd8 29 Nc6 Re8 30 a4! Kf8 31 b4 Bc8 32 Bxc8 Rxc8 33 a5 bxa5 34 bxa5 Nd5 35 a6 Ne7 36 a7 Ra8 37 Nxe7 Kxe7 38 Rc7+ Ke6**



**Question:** A quip attributed to Tarrasch (or Tartakower!) is that all rook endings are drawn. How would you assess this one?

**Answer:** White has a winning advantage, despite the equal material. The black rook is completely inactive ( ... Rd8 can be met, at a minimum, by Rb7 threatening Rb8 and forcing ... Ra8) while the white rook is fantastic on the seventh rank, protecting the a-pawn and attacking all the black kingside pawns. The position becomes somewhat concrete, since Black rushes forward with his pawns to create counterplay and resigns himself to giving up his rook for the a7-pawn. However, the race isn't close.

**39 Kf1 h5 40 Ke2 g5 41 Kd3 f5 42 Kc4 f4 43 Kc5 Kf5 44 Kb6 e4 45 gxf4 gxf4 46 Kb7 Rxa7+ 47 Kxa7 Kg4 48 Rc3 f3 49 Kb6 Kh3 50 Kc5 1-0**

The white king arrives in time to deal comfortably with the counterplay.

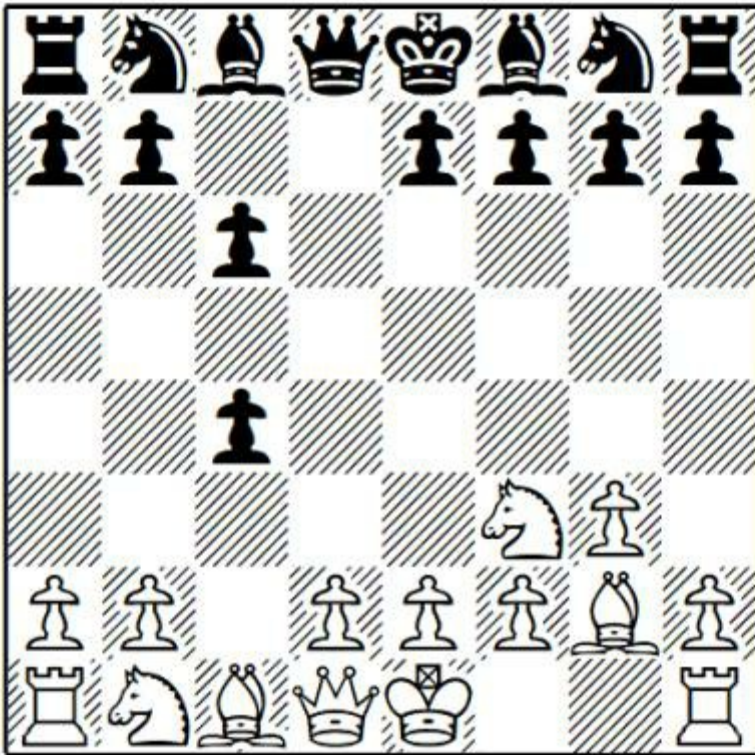
*Game 36*

**D.Dardha-A.Dgebuadze**

Belgian Championship, Roux 2019

A small sensation was caused by 13-year old Daniel Dardha's victory in the Belgian Championship in 2019, ahead of three experienced GMs. Dardha opened with 1 Nf3 in all his games with White and got off to a strong start with this victory from round one.

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 g3 dxc4 4 Bg2**



#### 4 ... b5

Of the alternatives to 4 ... Nf6, this has to be the most logical. Others:

a) The position isn't open, but 4 ... h6?! seems to take too many liberties. After 5 0-0 Nd7 6 Na3 Nb6 7 Ne5 Qd4 (7 ... Be6 8 Qc2 regains the pawn since 8 ... Qd4 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bxc6+ Bd7 11 Bxa8 Nxa8 12 Nxc4 is excellent for White) 8 Nxc4! (8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 Bxc6+ Bd7 10 Bxa8 Nxa8 is unclear) 8 ... Nxc4 9 Qa4 Qd7 10 Qxc4 White had a perfect position in D.Khismatullin-V.Fedoseev, Moscow 2017.

b) 4 ... Bf5!? 5 Na3 (5 0-0 is a viable alternative) 5 ... e5! 6 Nxc4 (6 Nxe5?? loses material to 6 ... Bxa3 7 bxa3 Qd4) 6 ... e4 7 Nfe5 Be6 gave Black reasonable play in V.Sivuk-A.Dreev, Konya 2018. Dreev is a huge expert and specialist in the Slav and his games are well worth studying.

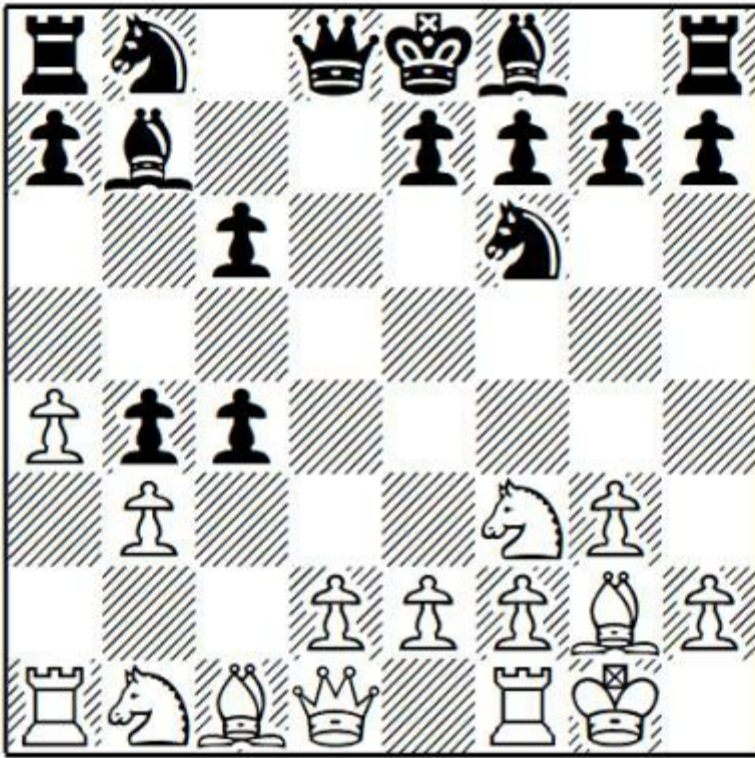
#### 5 0-0

Permitting a transposition to the more standard 3 ... Nf6 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 0-0. In this move order Demuth recommends the immediate 5 a4 Bb7 and now the novelty 6 axb5!? cxb5 7 b3, leading to complex play.

#### 5 ... Nf6 6 a4 Bb7 7 b3

The most popular move. Again Demuth has his own views, recommending 7 d3 cxd3 8 Ne5

#### 7 ... b4

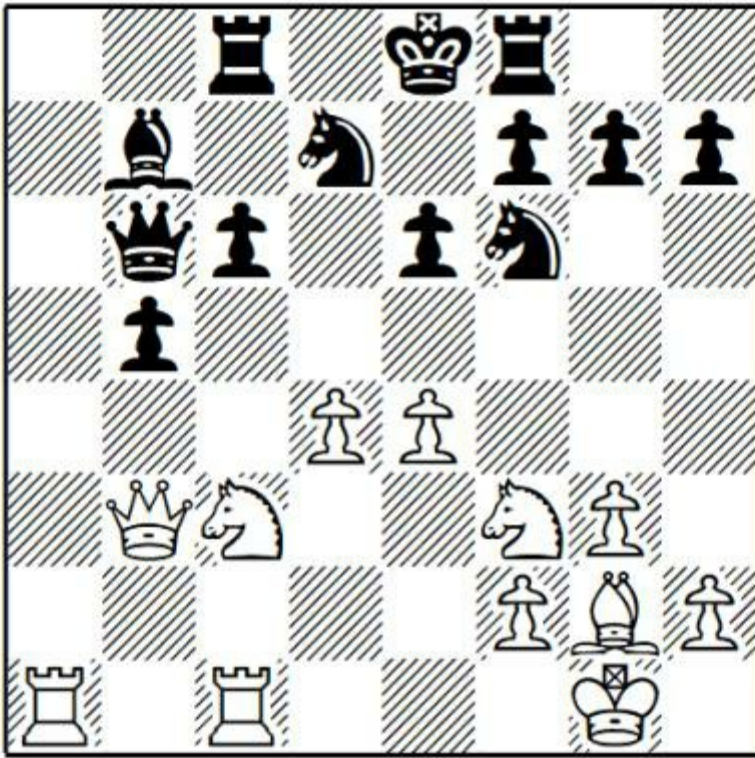


This approach looked bizarre to me, but it has strong support among those strong GMs who have essayed 4 ... b5, including Anand and Vallejo Pons. Black will have a protected passed pawn on b4 once White takes on c4 and Black plays ... c5, but since a5 (preventing ... a5 by Black) and d4 (when the b4-pawn will be deprived of support after dxc5 or ... cxd4) are likely to follow, this pawn can easily become weak. I think Black's approach is informed by the Catalan where he generally equalises once he achieves ... c5, a break which he will play under good conditions positions here.

7 ... cxb3 is more commonly played, but has a worse pedigree and leaves White with lovely compensation after 8 Qxb3 a6 9 Ba3! (9 Nc3 e6 10 Ba3 Bxa3 11 Qxa3 Qe7! eased Black's defence in D.Benidze-M.Gagunashvili, Tbilisi 2014, although White retains sufficient compensation for the pawn in the endgame after 12 Qxe7+ – the game's 12 Rfb1 allowed 12 ... c5! with excellent play for Black – 12 ... Kxe7 13 Rfb1 thanks to his strong g2-bishop and Benko-style pressure on the a- and b-files) 9 ... Nbd7 10 Rc1! (10 Nc3 e6 11 Bxf8 Kxf8, as in G.Schebler-J.Gustafsson, Dos Hermanas 2004, is less accurate since the knight on c3 interferes with rapid pressure on the c6-pawn) and now:

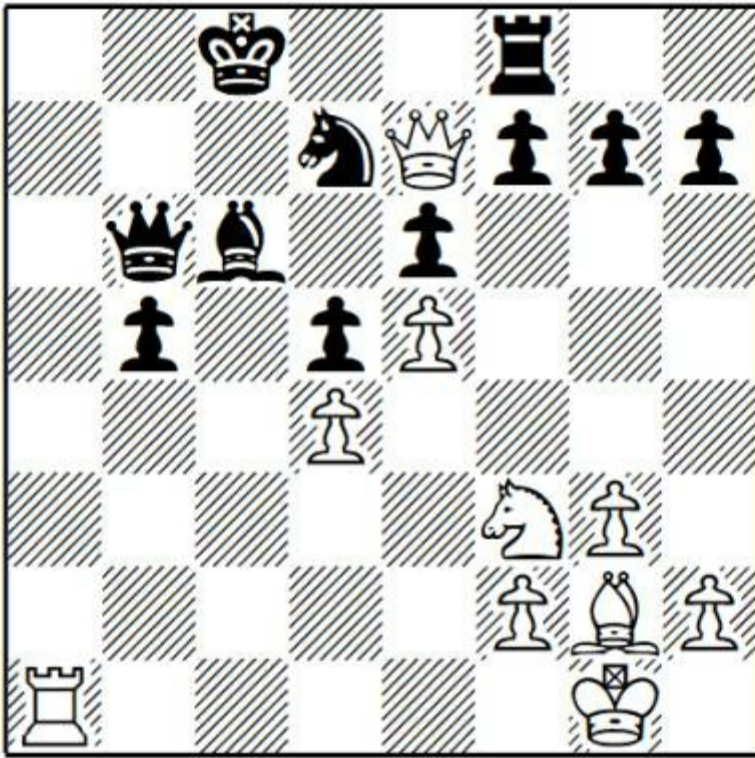
a) 10 ... e6 11 Bxf8 Kxf8 12 Nd4 Qb6 13 Nxc6, regaining the pawn with a much better position in D.Harika -E.Danielian, Beijing 2011.

b) 10 ... Rc8 11 axb5 axb5 12 Nc3 e6 13 Bxf8 Rxf8? (either other recapture on f8 was preferable, where White has "only" excellent compensation) led to a crisp attack in P.Maletin-A.Krutko, Nizhnij Tagil 2008. 14 d4! Qb6 15 e4!



**Question:** How would you assess this position?

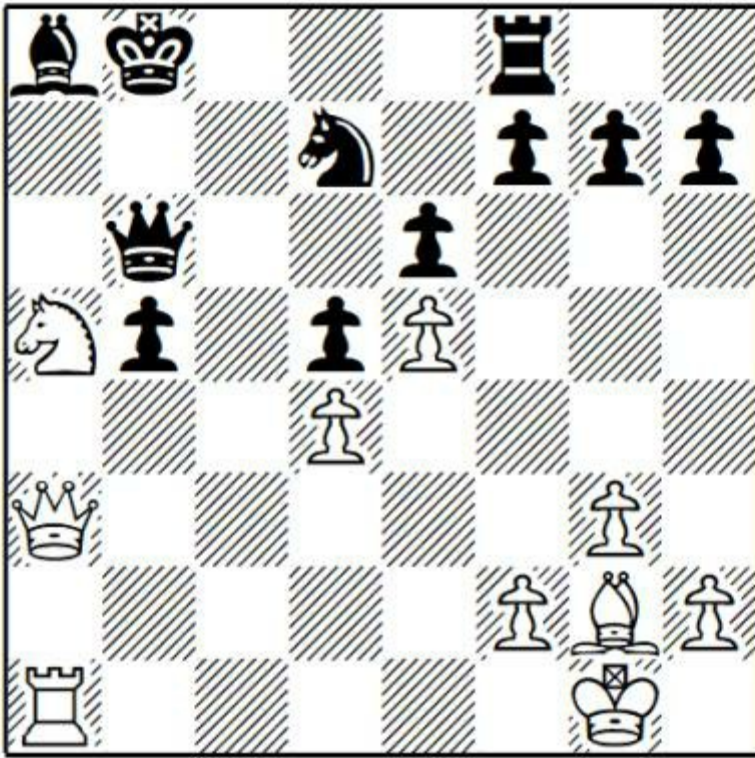
**Answer:** Black is dead lost. For a mere pawn (which can't be used and isn't felt, since both ... b4 and ... c5 merely weaken Black's position) his king is stranded in the centre and he faces immediate threats of e5 (or d5 in some lines). I can't criticise his moves from here since it's impossible to give good advice in this position: 15 ... Ke7 16 e5! (well judged; I wouldn't be completely comfortable in giving up the d5-break, but Maletin has correctly judged that his attack on the dark squares will be overwhelming) 16 ... Nd5 17 Nxd5+ cxd5 18 Qb4+ Kd8 19 Rxc8+ Kxc8 (19 ... Bxc8 20 Bf1 Ba6 21 Ne1! and the knight comes to d3 and c5, causing the black position to collapse) 20 Qe7 Bc6



**Question:** White obviously has a very strong attacking position, but how can he improve it?

**Answer:** 21 Nd2!

I really like this move, “Bringing in the last piece” (Aagaard) or “Inviting everyone to the party” (Seirawan). The knight was not participating in the attack from f3 and will be much more effective on b3 (where it will land with tempo if Black takes on d4 on this move). Black’s structure is solid and White has no useful pawn breaks so piece activity is required to destroy the defences: 21 ... Qd8 (trading rooks with 21 ... Kb7 22 Nb3 Ra8 will lose the whole central pawn chain after 23 Rxa8 – or 23 Rc1 – 23 ... Kxa8 24 Qxf7) 22 Qa3 Qb6 23 Qe7 Qd8 24 Qb4! Qb6 25 Nb3 Kb8 26 Qe7! Qd8 27 Qa3! (it might look like White is repeating moves, but in fact he’s gaining time; with the king on b8, 28 Qa7+ is a strong threat) 27 ... Qb6 28 Na5! Ba8 (blocking the a-file with the knight was not an obvious decision, but White has it all under control; 28 ... Bb7 29 Qe7 Qc7 30 Qb4! Ba6 31 Bf1 Qb6 32 Qe7 Qc7 33 Nb3! overstretches the black defences)



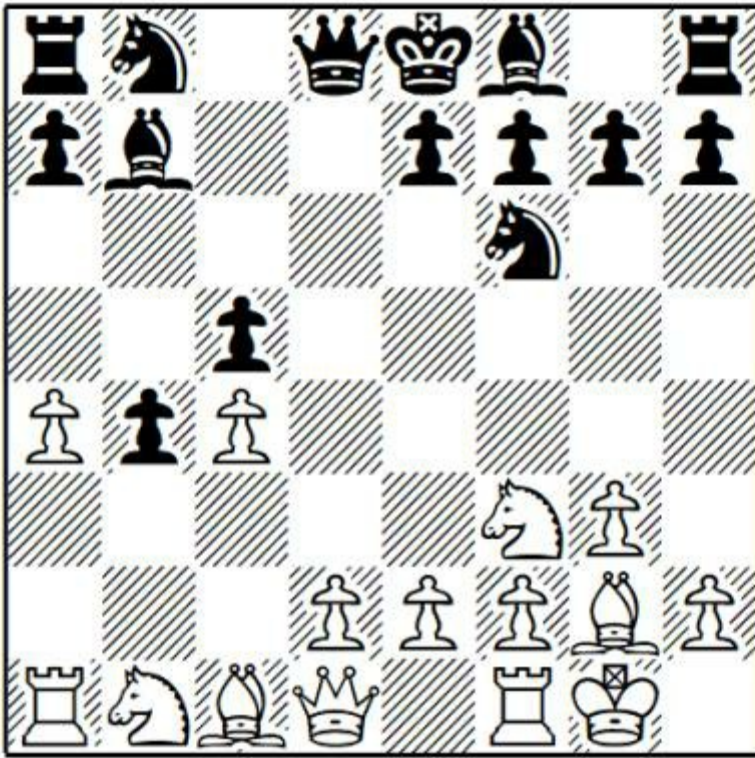
**Question:** White to play and win!

**Answer:** 29 Nc4! Qb7 (29 ... bxc4 30 Qxa8+ Kc7 31 Ra7+ wins the queen) 30 Nd6 and Black resigned.

**8 bxc4**

White can continue playing in gambit style with 8 Ne5!?. Allowing the knight to take on c4 would be a positional disaster (no protected passed pawn on b4, no easy ... c5 break, and the knight would be perfectly placed) so Black is forced to go in for 8 ... cxb3 9 Qxb3 e6 10 a5 (10 Bb2, J.Carlstedt-C.Sandipan, Germany 2016, also retains interesting compensation) 10 ... Qc7?! (10 ... Qc8 is a much better way to prepare ... c5, which White should probably prevent with 11 Qf3; now Black can insist with 11 ... a6!? 12 d3 Ra7, followed by ... c5 with unclear play) 11 d4 c5? (11 ... Bd6 was more circumspect) 12 Qa4+ Nbd7 13 Nxd7 Nxd7 14 Bf4 Qc8 15 Bxb7 Qxb7 16 a6 Qb6 was L.Pantsulaia-H.Gusain, Taleigao 2019. Now White should have played 17 dxc5! Bxc5 18 Nd2 Rc8 19 Ne4 followed by Rac1 and Rfd1 with overwhelming compensation and a winning position.

**8 ... c5**



### 9 a5

The most principled option, cutting out the possibility of ... a5 for Black (and introducing ideas of a6). Instead:

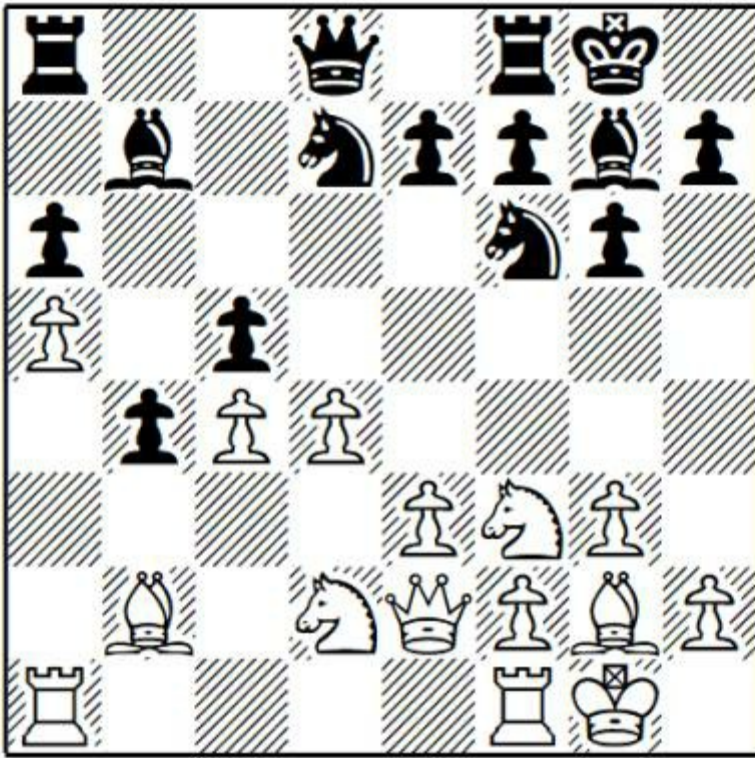
a) 9 d3 e6 10 Nbd2 Be7 11 Nb3 a5 left Black with nothing to fear in H.Nakamura-V.Anand, Zuerich 2015.

b) 9 e3 e6 10 Bb2 Be7 (10 ... a5!?) 11 d4 0-0 12 a5 Qc7 was balanced in D.Rombaldoni-R.Svane, Ruzomberok 2014.

### 9 ... a6

9 ... e6 was played in three games between good players (L.Pantsulaia-F.Vallejo Pons, Plovdiv 2012, M.Grunberg-L.Filip, Eforie Nord 2010, and Y.Gonzalez Vidal-A.Shetty, Greensboro 2018). I find it strange that no-one played 10 a6!?. In some comparable positions (for example, if White's d2-pawn were on b3, and Black's b4-pawn were on b6), a6 can be often be played with a clear conscience since, as Peter Heine Nielsen explained, the loss of the a6-pawn is unlikely to be especially significant (the a7-pawn is likely to be a target), while the loss of the a7-pawn is likely to end the game. Here the structure is quite different, since White doesn't have a b-pawn and a black pawn is already on b4. Therefore, if the a6-pawn drops, White will need to erect a blockade with pieces on a6, a5 or a4 (a black pawn landing on a3 would be fatal). The game might proceed 10 ... Bc6 (10 ... Nxa6?? 11 Rxa6 Bxa6 12 Qa4+ picks up the bishop.) 11 d3 Bd6 12 Nbd2 0-0 13 Nb3 followed by 14 Na5 looks promising to me since Black will be unable to contest the h1-a8 diagonal.

### 10 Bb2



I like 10 d4 e6 11 Nbd2 cxd4 (V.Doncea-T.Banusz, Malinska 2015) less since White's structure is spoiled.

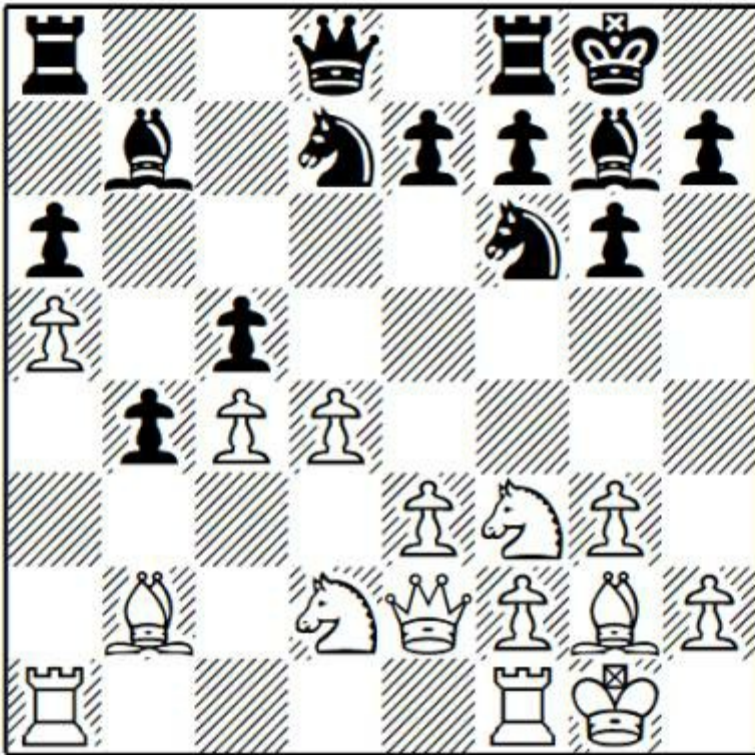
**10 ... Nbd7 11 e3 g6?!**

This seems too ambitious. 11 ... e6 is more conservative: 12 d4 (here engines like a conservative approach with 12 d3, followed either by e4 or an exchange of light-squared bishops) 12 ... Be7 13 Nbd2 0-0 and I prefer White's position, with a space advantage and more active pieces.

**12 d4 Bg7 13 Nbd2**

13 d5 is an attractive alternative, with some sort of Benoni hybrid where the bishop on b7 and knight on d7 are very poorly placed. White plans e3-e4-e5 and I don't see a convincing reply for Black.

**13 ... 0-0 14 Qe2**



Again avoiding the Benoni option with 14 d5. Black should be fine now.

**Question:** How should Black continue?

**14 ... Qc7**

Not bad, but I think there was a better alternative.

**Answer:** 14 ... Ne4! was a good thematic move, equalising. Black has less space and should aim to trade pieces. This move also makes the g7-bishop more effective, and makes both the dxc5 and d5 threats more difficult to execute.

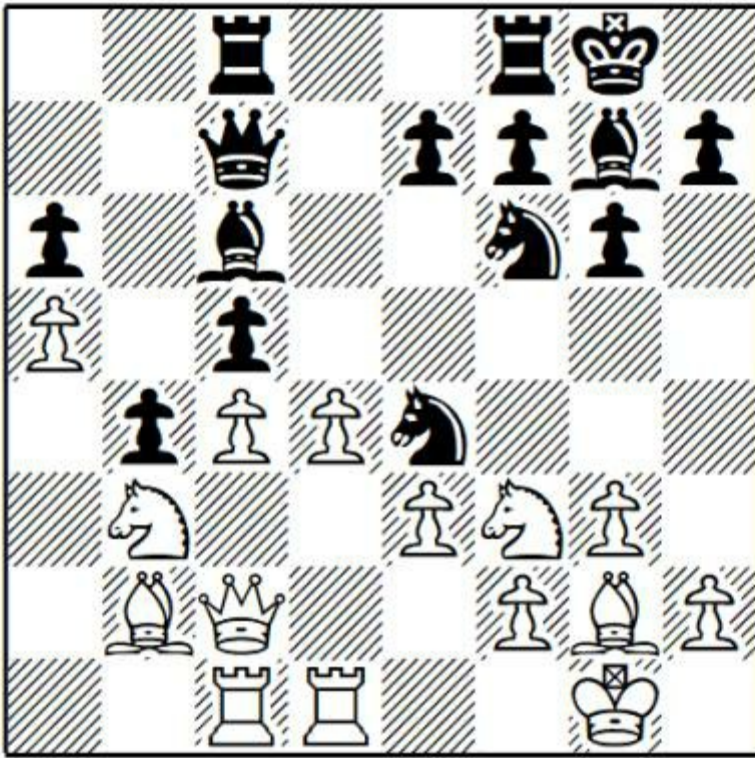
**15 Nb3**

Now 15 d5 was again possible but, by this point, it appears that both players didn't think this structure was great for White. Here Black is better placed to seek counterplay with 15 ... e6!?, when 16 dxe6 (16 e4 exd5 17 exd5 Rfe8 gives decent counterplay) 16 ... fxe6 17 e4 is unclear, for example 17 ... Rae8 18 Ne1 Nh5 19 Nb3 Bxb2 20 Qxb2 e5 21 Nd3 Ng7 22 f3 Ne6 and Black will land a knight on d4.

**15 ... Ne4 16 Rac1 Rac8 17 Rfd1 Bc6!?**

Aiming for a4 with the bishop, which is quite annoying.

**18 Qc2 Ndf6?**



18 ... f5! would give Black an active position and decent prospects.

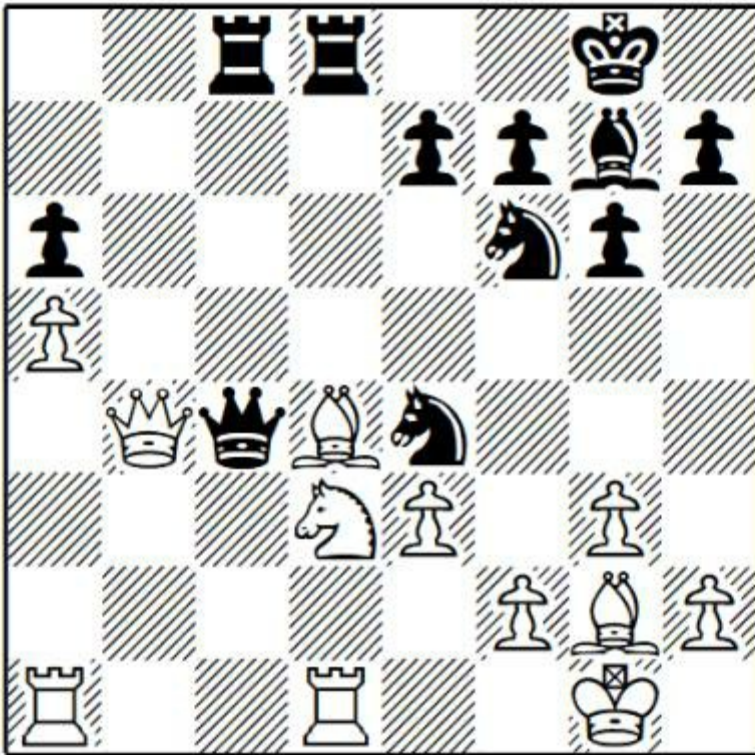
**19 Ne5! Ba4**

19 ... Ba8 is also better for White after 20 f3 cxd4 21 exd4 Nc3 (21 ... Nd6 22 Nc5 with a big advantage) 22 Bxc3 bxc3 23 Qxc3 and Black's compensation for the pawn is insufficient.

**20 Ra1 Bxb3 21 Qxb3 Rfd8 22 Nd3**

Engines don't like this move very much. White is at risk of selling his advantage too cheaply, but the resulting endgame remains very unpleasant for Black. 22 Qd3 Nc3 (22 ... Nd6? 23 Nc6 is much better for White) 23 Bxc3 bxc3 24 Qxc3 again leaves White with a healthy extra pawn. If anything, the opposite-coloured bishops are an aggravating factor, since Black can't contest the light squares and Nc6 is threatened.

**22 ... cxd4 23 Bxd4 Qxc4 24 Qxb4**



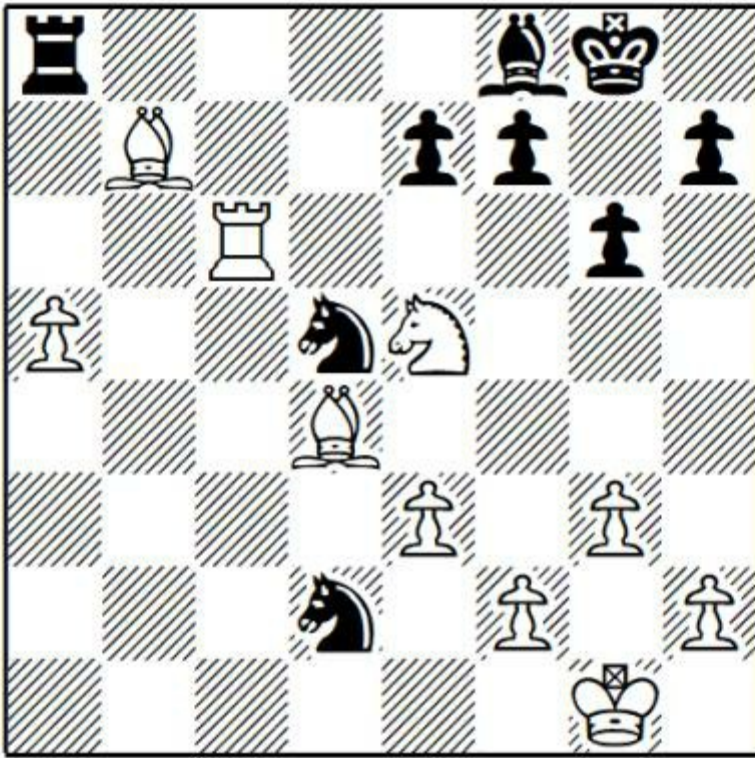
### 24 ... Bf8?

Black had to seek complications with 24 ... Nc3!, when a liquidation is forced: 25 Qxc4 (25 Qxc3? Qxc3 26 Bxc3 Rxc3 is level) 25 ... Rxc4 26 Ne5 Rcx4 27 exd4 Nxd1 28 Rxd1. This endgame is tough to assess. The a6-pawn is doomed but Black can look to the limited material and opposite coloured bishops. I think this should be tenable, for example after 28 ... e6 29 Nc6 Rd6 the direct attempt to go after the a6-pawn with 30 Rc1 (30 Rb1!?) 30 ... Kf8 31 Bf1 Nd5 32 Bxa6 leads to simplification with 32 ... Ne7 33 Bb7 Nxc6 34 Bxc6 (34 Rxc6?! is an immediate draw) 34 ... Bxd4 White should be able to press a little here but Black must hold with precise play.

### 25 Qxc4 Rxc4

Now Black has no compensation for his weakness on a6 and his opponent's bishop pair.

**26 Bf1 Ra8 27 Rdc1 Rxc1 28 Rxc1 Rb8 29 Ne5 Nd2 30 Bxa6 Ra8 31 Rc6 Nd5 32 Bb7!**

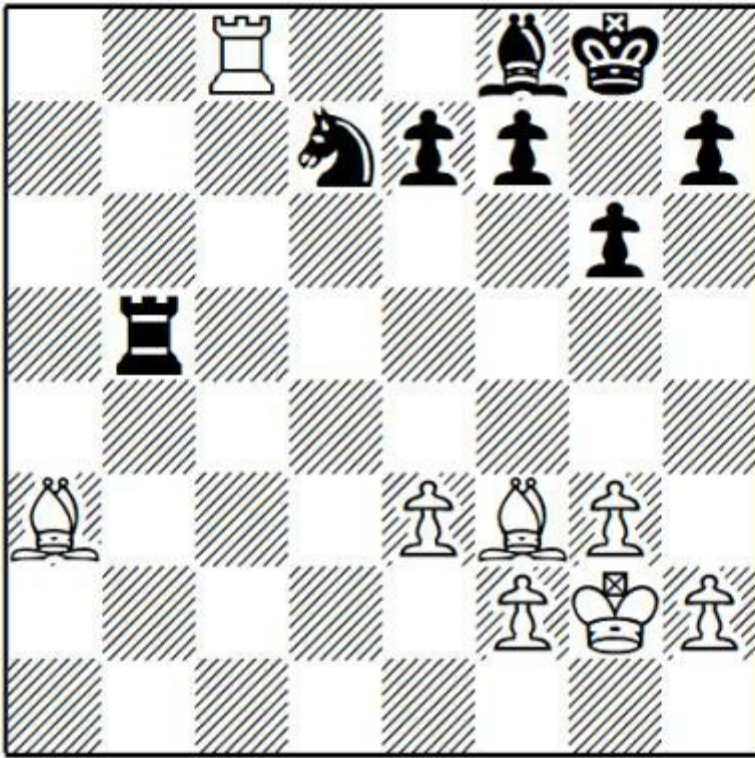


One of several good options.

**32 ... Rxa5 33 Rc8 Nf6 34 Kg2**

34 Nc6 followed by 35 Nxe7+ was simpler, although I haven't found real drawing chances after the move in the game.

**34 ... Nb3 35 Bb2 Nc5 36 Bf3 Rb5 37 Ba3 Ncd7 38 Nxd7 Nxd7**



**39 Rd8!**

Everything wins but this is the most precise.

**39 ... Nc5 40 Bc6 Ra5 41 Bb4 Ra7 42 Bxc5 Rc7 43 Bb4! 1-0**

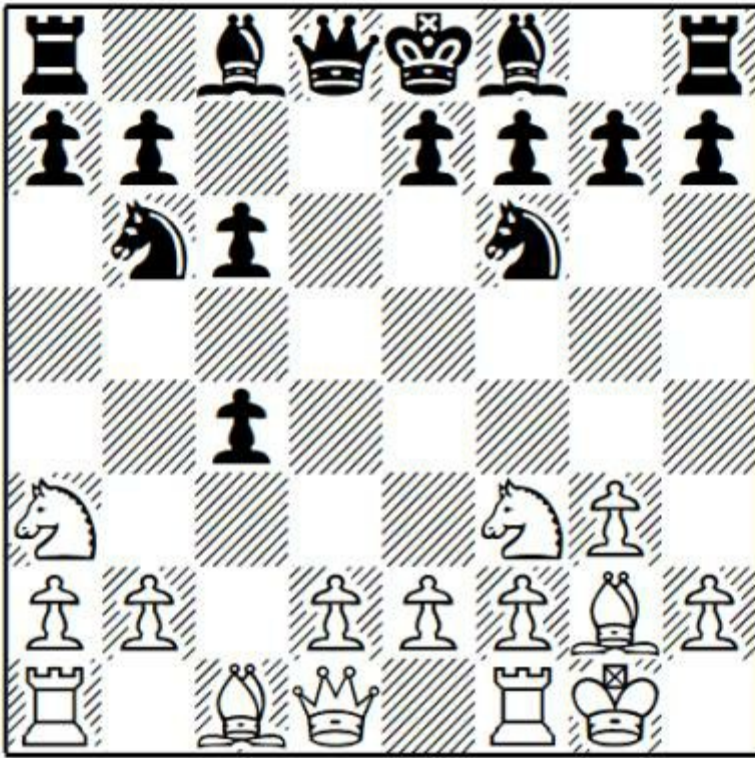
Taking the bishop on c6 will cost the one on f8 after 44 Bxe7, so Black resigned.

*Game 37*

**R.Haria-S.Volkov**

Rilton Cup, Stockholm 2018

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 c6 4 c4 dxc4 5 0-0 Nbd7 6 Na3 Nb6**

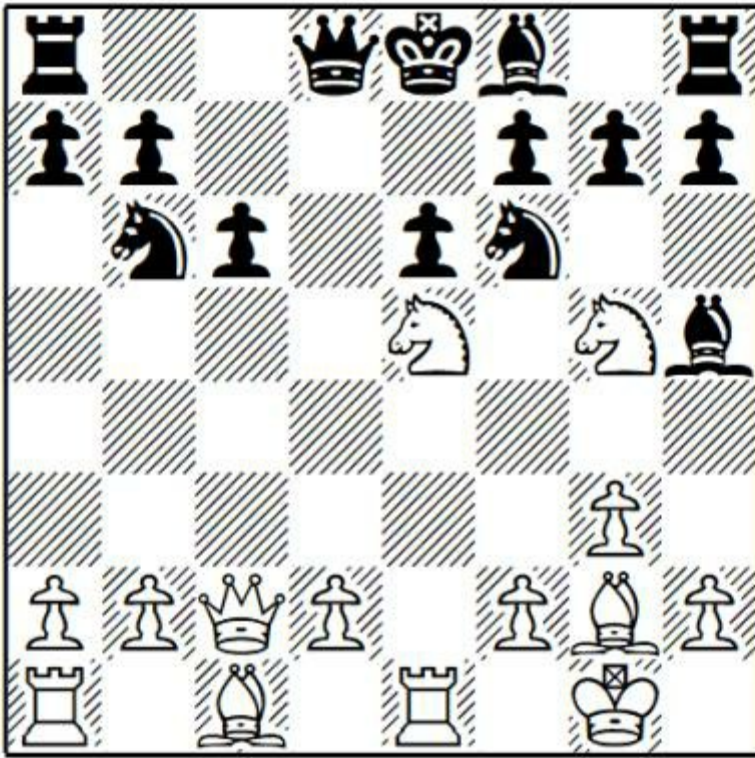


### 7 Ne5!?

A rare move which gives both sides some different options compared to the standard 7 Qc2. Most obviously, 7 ... Qd5 is ruled out.

7 Qc2 is much more common, and after 7 ... Be6 White can transpose to the game with 8 Ne5. Instead 8 Ng5 is a principled alternative: 8 ... Bg4 9 Nxc4!? (9 f3 has been suggested by Marin, but the pawn sacrifice is much sharper) 9 ... Bxe2 (otherwise White has the better game with no risk) 10 Ne5! Bh5! (unsurprisingly 10 ... Bxf1?? hasn't found any takers; 11 Ngxf7 Qc7 12 Kxf1 with an overwhelming position) 11 Re1 and now:

a) 11 ... e6?? is an opening trap which has caught several strong GMs.

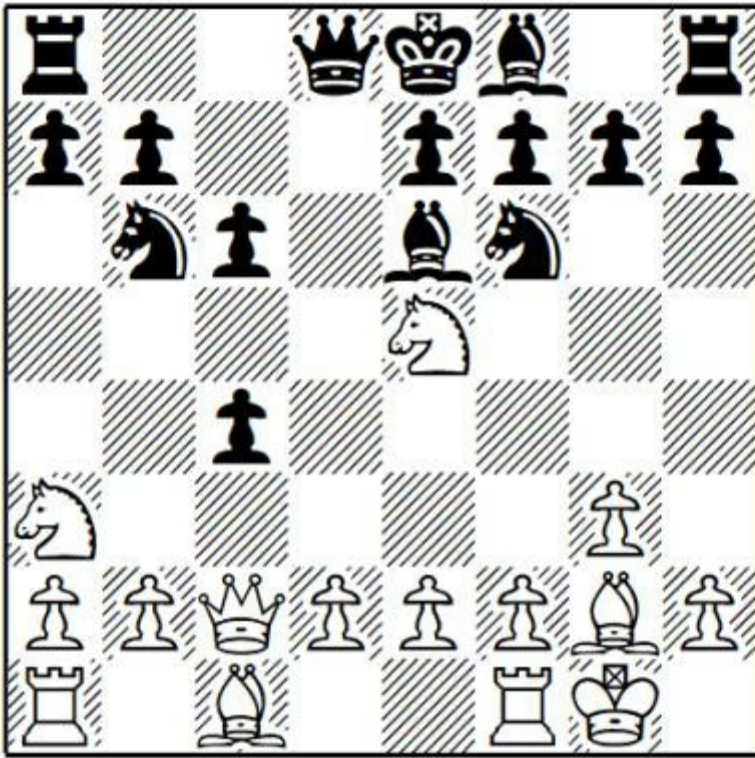


**Question:** How should White continue?

**Answer:** 12 Bf3! (distracting the h5-bishop from the defence of f7; the immediate 12 Bxc6+? bxc6 13 Qxc6+ Nbd7 14 Nxe6 is only enough for equality) 12 ... Bg6 (12 ... Bxf3 13 Nxf7! Qd5 14 Re5 Qc4?! 15 Rxe6+ picked up the queen in J.Christiansen-G.Ererdem, Antalya 2017) 13 Bxc6+ Nbd7 (resigning himself to the loss of a couple of pawns; instead 13 ... bxc6 14 Qxc6+ leads to disaster, for example 14 ... Nbd7 (14 ... Nfd7 15 Ngxf7 Bxf7 16 Nxf7 is also crushing) 15 Nxc6 hxc6 16 Nxf7 and White wins) 14 Nxc6 hxc6 15 Bxb7 and White won easily in B.Amin-R.Sadhwani, Douglas 2019.

b) 11 ... h6 12 Ne4 (12 Ngxf7!? Bxf7 13 b4, with promising compensation for the piece, was essayed in L.Pantsulaia-C.Krishna, Dubai 2013 and recommended by David Cummings in *Chess Publishing*) 12 ... e6 13 Nxf6+ gxf6 14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 Bxc6+ Nd7 16 Qf5 Bg6 17 Rxe6+ leads to a draw, for example 17 ... Be7 18 Qxf6 Rg8 19 Re1 Kf8 20 Qf4 Rc8 21 Qxh6+ Rg7 22 Qh8+ Rg8 23 Qh6+ Rg7 24 Qh8+ Rg8 25 Qh6+ with a perpetual in A.Zubov-Y.Solodovnichenko, Konya 2017.

**7 ... Be6 8 Qc2**



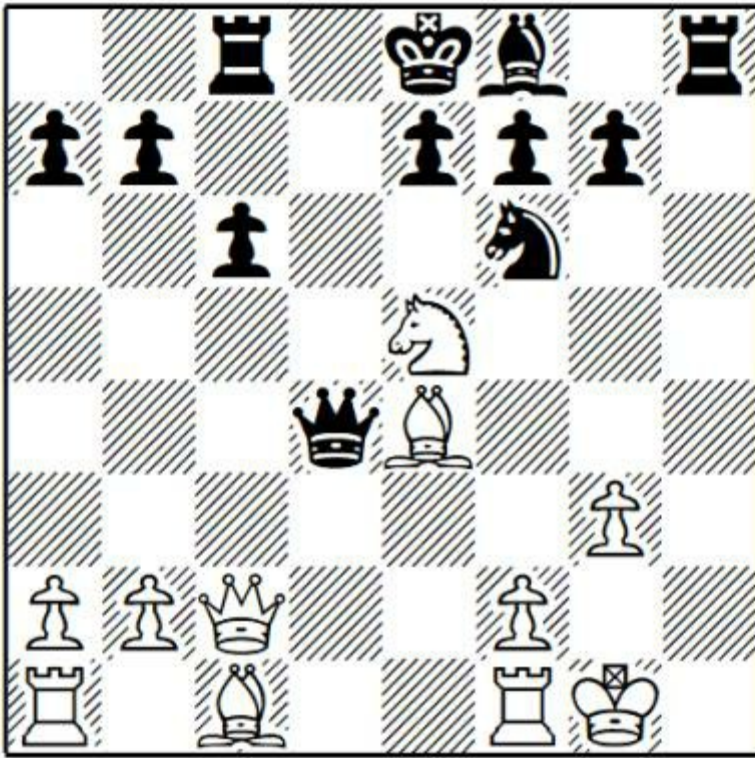
### 8 ... Qd4

Others:

a) 8 ... h5!? is an invention of Wesley So, whose opening ideas are always worth noting. He scored  $\frac{1}{2}/2$  against Aronian and Adams, but not because of the opening. Now:

a1) 9 b3!? cxb3 10 axb3 h4 11 Bb2 Qc8 12 Rfc1 hxg3 13 hxg3 with full compensation for the pawn, but probably not more, in M.Adams-W.So, Shamkir 2017.

a2) 9 Naxc4 Nxc4 10 Nxc4 h4 11 Ne5 hxg3 12 hxg3 Rc8 13 d4!? and here Black should take on d4 with unclear play, but So went for a mistaken combination (it was a blitz game after all): 13 ... Bd5? 14 e4 Bxe4? 15 Bxe4 Qxd4. Now it looks like Black regains his piece due to the fork on e4 and e5, but Aronian found a winning shot.



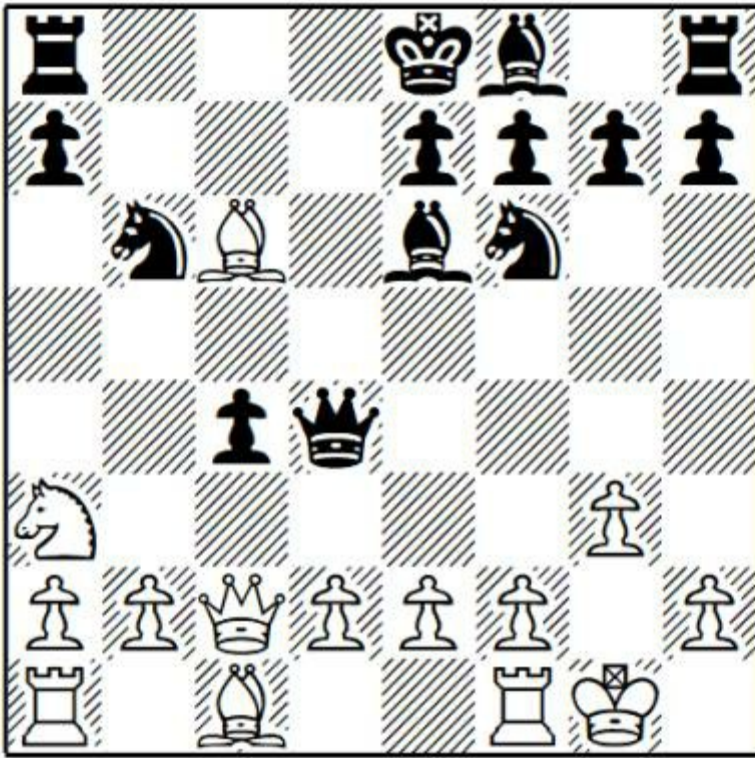
**Question:** How should White continue?

**Answer:** 16 Nxf7!! (the best move, though I should point out that 16 Ng6 and 16 Re1 were both really strong) 16 ... Kxf7 17 Bg6+! Kg8 18 Rd1 (Black's game is hopeless; the next check will be mate) 18 ... Qe5 19 Bf4 Qa5 20 Bf5 g5 21 Bxc8 Kg7 22 Be3 and Black resigned in L.Aronian-W.So, Leuven 2016.

a3) 9 h4!? has been explored in a number of correspondence games.

b) 8 ... g6 9 Naxc4 Nxc4 10 Nxc4 Bg7 11 Rd1 0-0 12 d4 Qc8 13 e4 with a White edge in S.Karjakin-V.Kramnik, Zuerich 2015.

**9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bxc6+**



### 10 ... Kd8

Alternatives are:

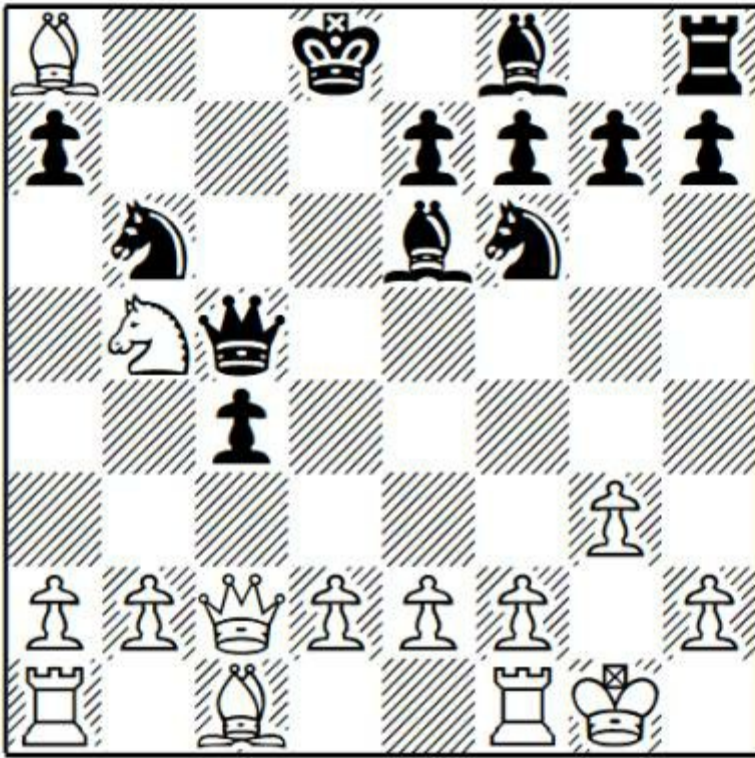
a) 10 ... Nfd7 (L.Pantsulaia-J.Magem Badals, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010) is well met by 11 Bxa8 Nxa8 12 d3! when the pawn can't be captured in view of mate on c8. Play can continue 12 ... Bh3 and now Demuth suggests the strong novelty 13 dxc4! Bxf1 14 Be3! Qf6 15 Rxf1 with excellent compensation for the piece.

b) 10 ... Bd7 11 Bxa8 Nxa8 12 Nxc4 when White has a rook and two pawns for two minor pieces and his position appears preferable: 12 ... Qd5 (12 ... Nb6 was S.Brunello-O.Korneev, Otranto 2011 and now the engines show that 13 d3 is clearly stronger than taking on b6) 13 d3 g6 14 e4 with the better game in O.Ladva-N.Kumsiashvili, Riga 2017.

### 11 Nb5!

An important intermezzo. The endgame after 11 d3 cxd3 12 Rd1 dxc2 13 Rxd4+ Bd7 14 Bxa8 Nxa8 15 Nxc2 is very comfortable for Black, as shown by G.Kaidanov-C.Holt, St Louis 2013 and A.Shimanov-V.Potkin, Tyumen 2012.

### 11 ... Qc5 12 Bxa8



**12 ... Qxb5!**

12 ... Bf5? 13 Qc3 Qxb5 14 a4 Qd7 15 Bg2 Qc7 was J.Sadorra-C.Holt, Houston 2013 and now 16 b3 would have been excellent for White.

**13 Bg2 Bf5?**

Provoking White into a useful move. Instead:

a) 13 ... Bd7 14 b3 (14 a4!? is an interesting novelty proposed by Marin and Demuth) 14 ... e5 (Marin gives 14 ... cxb3 15 axb3 a6 16 d4 e6 17 Bd2 as clearly better for White, an assessment which is probably too conservative) 15 Rb1 cxb3 16 Rxb3 Qxe2 17 Ba3 Bxa3 18 Rxa3 Qc4 19 Qb1 Ke7 20 Rxa7 Qd4 and Marin remarks "With such a centralised queen, Black should be out of danger." The game was eventually drawn in L.Aronian-D.Andreikin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

b) 13 ... h5 has been tried a couple of times by Dutch Grandmaster Jan Smeets: 14 h4 (14 d3 cxd3 15 Rd1 Bf5 16 e4 Nxe4 17 Qxd3+ Qxd3 18 Rxd3+ Nd6 was fine for Black in L.Pantsulaia-J.Smeets, Istanbul 2012) 14 ... Bf5 15 e4 Bd7 16 a4! Nxa4 17 e5! Ne8 was J.Timman-J.Smeets, Wijk aan Zee 2013 and now 18 Qe4! followed by d3 would give a crushing initiative.

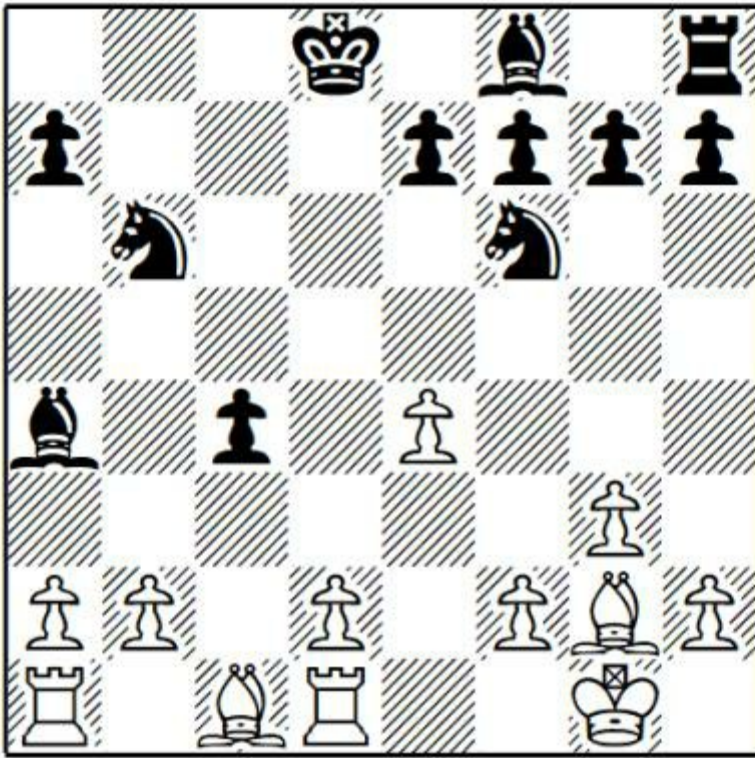
**14 e4 Bd7 15 Rd1?!**

15 a4! Nxa4 16 e5!, borrowing an idea from Timman-Smeets, is excellent for White.

**15 ... Qa4?!**

15 ... e5 gives good chances of equality.

**16 Qxa4 Bxa4**



**Question:** How should White continue?

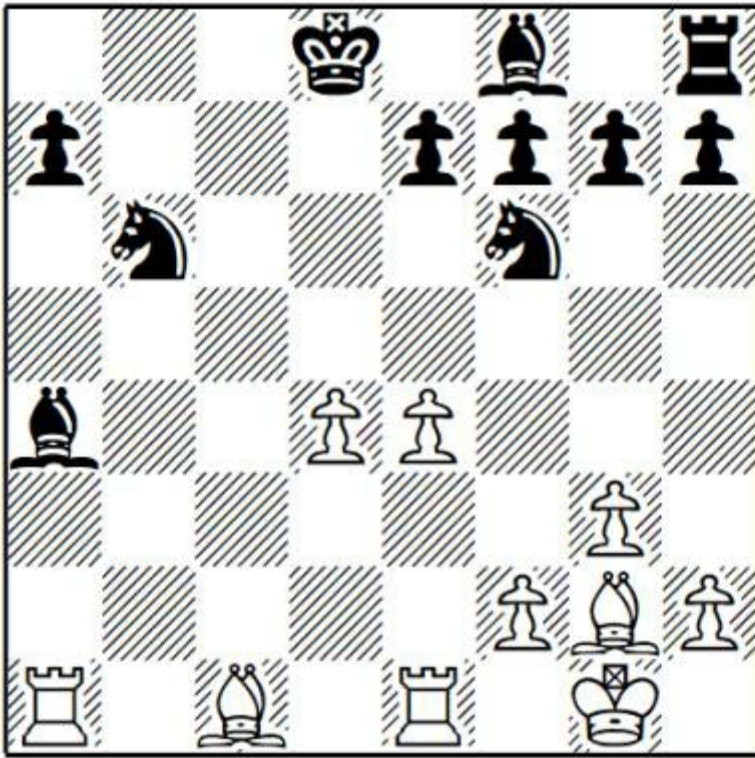
**17 b3!**

**Answer:** An excellent pawn sacrifice helps to develop the white initiative. 17 Re1 e5 is fine for Black.

**17 ... cxb3**

17 ... Bc6 18 d3! and taking on b3 drops a7, while 18 ... cxd3? isn't playable in view of 19 Rxd3+ Nfd7 20 Bf4 when White develops a strong attack on the d-file.

**18 axb3 Bxb3 19 Re1 Ba4 20 d4**



20 e5 is very strong but there's nothing wrong with Haria's solution.

**20 ... e6?!**

20 ... e5!? is an attempt at counterplay which was probably worth trying, to change the course of the game. 21 dxe5 Nfd7 22 Bd2 and Black's chances look better here than in the game.

**21 Bf4?!**

21 Bd2! is much stronger, preventing Black's next move.

**21 ... Bb4! 22 Reb1 a5**

Black should be out of danger now.

**23 Bd2!? Bxd2**

23 ... Bc2 24 Bxb4 Bxb1 25 Bxa5 Bxe4 26 Bxb6+ Kd7 is equal.

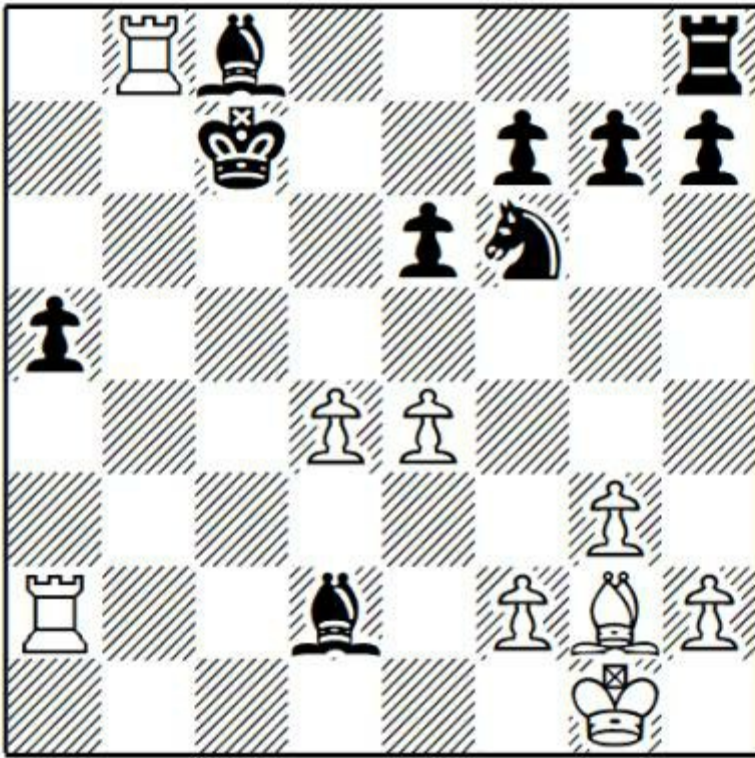
**24 Rxb6!**

A well calculated sequence, but the position remains level.

**24 ... Bd7**

24 ... Kc7? 25 Rb2! Bc3? 26 Rc1, winning the bishop and the game, is an important detail.

**25 Rb8+ Bc8 26 Ra2 Kc7??**



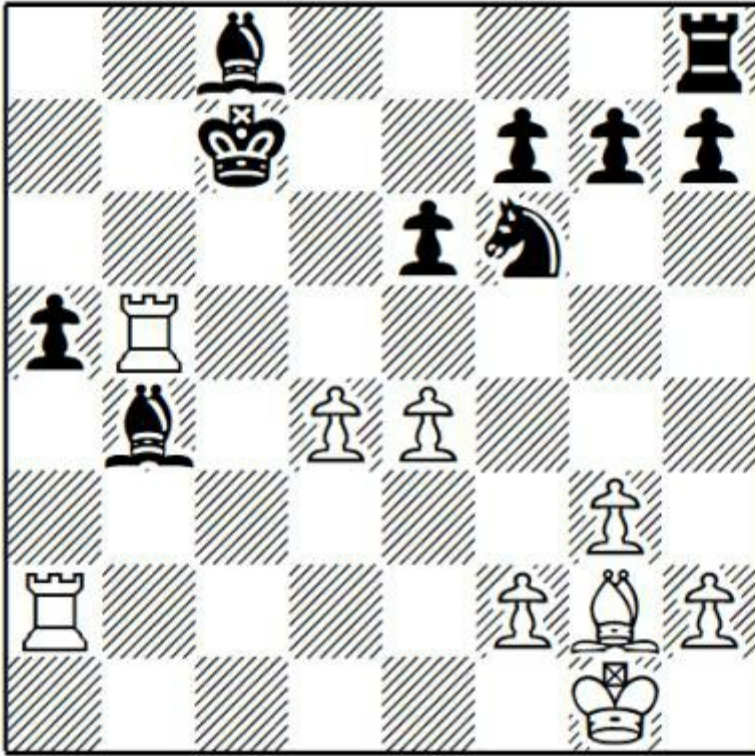
A far from obvious blunder, which the young English player exploits brilliantly. 26 ... Nd7! 27 Rxc8+ Kxc8 28 Rxd2 looks like a roughly level endgame.

**Question:** How should White continue after 26 ... Kc7?

**27 Rb5!**

**Answer:** 27 Rxc8+ Rxc8 28 Rxd2 a4 gives Black a much-improved version of the endgame we saw in the previous note.

**27 ... Bb4**

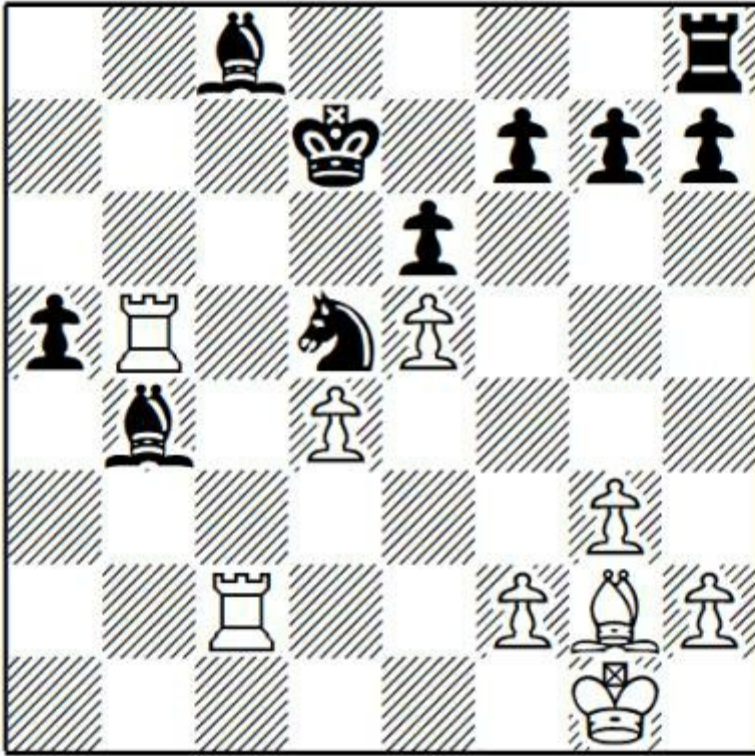


**Question:** It looks as if White only has a rook for two minor pieces.  
How does he generate threats?

**28 Rc2+! Kd7**

**Answer:** 28 ... Kd8 29 Rb8 Kd7 30 f3!! and there's no defence to Bg2-f1-b5, winning the bishop on c8.

**29 e5! Nd5**



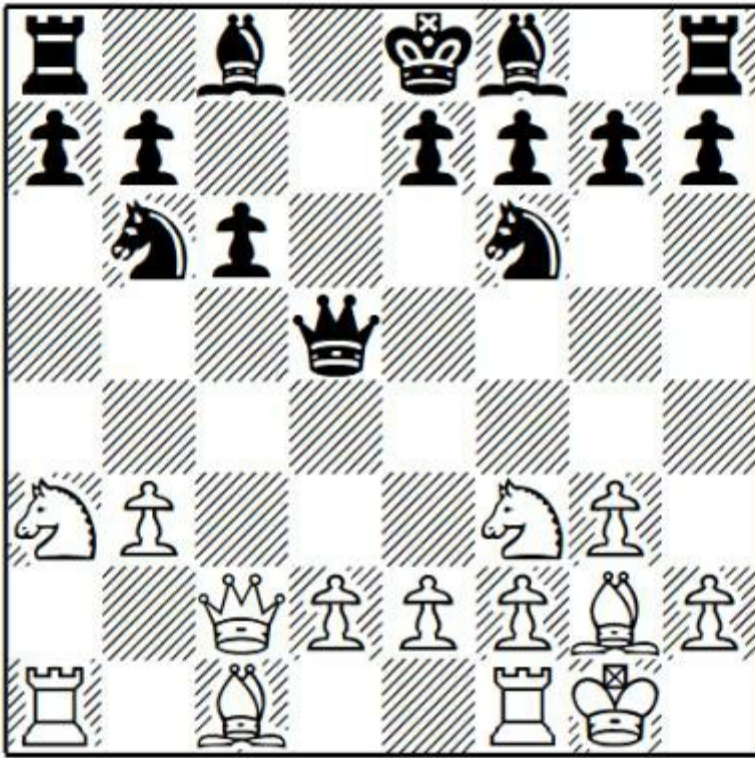
29 ... Ne8 gives White several strong options, for example 30 Bc6+ Ke7 31 d5! exd5 32 Bxd5 Be6 33 Rb7+ Kd8 34 Bxe6 fxe6 35 Rc6 and Black can barely move.

*Question:* What now?

**30 Rxd5+!**

*Answer:* An easy tactic to miss from a distance. 30 Bxd5? exd5 is fine for Black.

**30 ... exd5 31 Bh3+ Ke7**



**Question:** And now?

**32 Rc7+!!**

**Answer:** The only winning move.

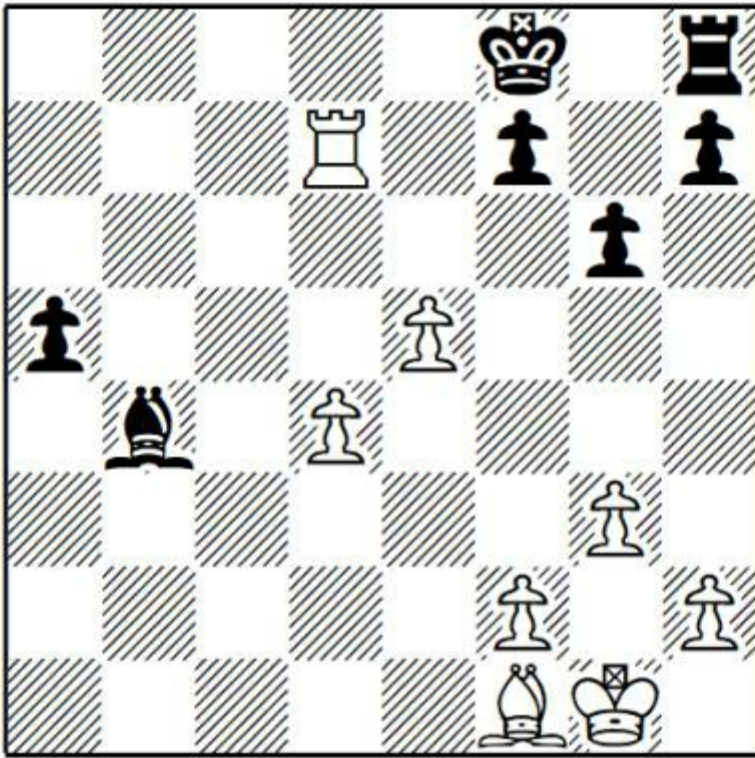
a) 32 Bxc8? Rd8 is fine for Black.

b) 32 Rxc8?? Rxc8 33 Bxc8 Bc3 and White loses material, though he retains drawing chances in view of the opposite coloured bishops.

**32 ... Bd7 33 Rxd7+ Ke8 34 Rxd5**

White is winning, but I was very impressed by Haria's technique.

**34 ... g6 35 Rd7 Kf8 36 Bf1!**



An excellent manoeuvre, re-routing the bishop to c4 from which it attacks f7 and controls the a-pawn.

**36 ... Kg7 37 Bc4 Rf8 38 f4 a4 39 Kf2 a3 40 Ke3 h5 41 Rb7 Bc3 42 Ra7 Bb4 43 Kd3**

Black now makes a desperate bid for counterplay, which results in dropping the whole kingside, but the position was hopeless in any event.

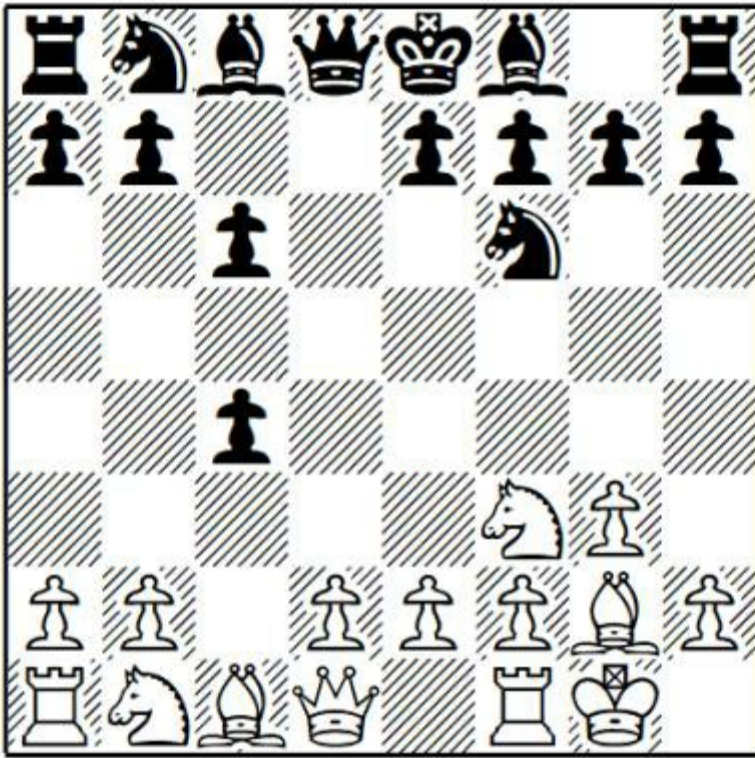
**43 ... h4 44 gxh4 Kh6 45 Bxf7 Rd8 46 Kc4 Bf8 47 Ra6 Kg7 48 Bxg6 Rc8+ 49 Kd3 Rc1 50 f5 Rd1+ 51 Ke4 Re1+ 52 Kd5 Rb1 53 Ra7+ Kh8 54 f6 1-0**

*Game 38*

**M.Sebenik- D.Ebeling**

Heraklion 2017

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 0-0**



### 5 ... Nbd7

Black can protect the c4-pawn in advance with 5 ... Be6. White can respond with 6 Na3!? or enter a typical tactical sequence with 6 Ng5 Bd5 7 e4 h6! 8 exd5 hxg5. Obviously this position is very concrete and both sides have compromised pawn structures, while Black retains his extra pawn. The game appears balanced after the accurate 9 dxc6 Nxc6 10 Na3 Qd3! (better than the more popular and more compliant 10 ... e6 11 Nxc4 Be7 12 d4 with a white edge in A.Mista-A.Hnydiuk, Gora Sw Anny 2013) 11 Qa4 0-0-0 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Qxc6+ Kb8 Now M.Marin-E.Postny, Spanish Team Championship 2009 and A.Rakhmanov-I.Rozum, Khanty-Mansiysk 2017 ended in perpetual check after 14 Qb5+ Ka8! (if the king goes to the c-file, White can exchange queens by taking the c4-pawn with check, but with the king on a8 or b8 Black can play ... Qh7 with sufficient counterplay to force a draw) 15 Qc6+, while an attempt to play on with 14 b3 soon ended peacefully in L.Pantsulaia-A.Grigoryan, Quezon City 2014.

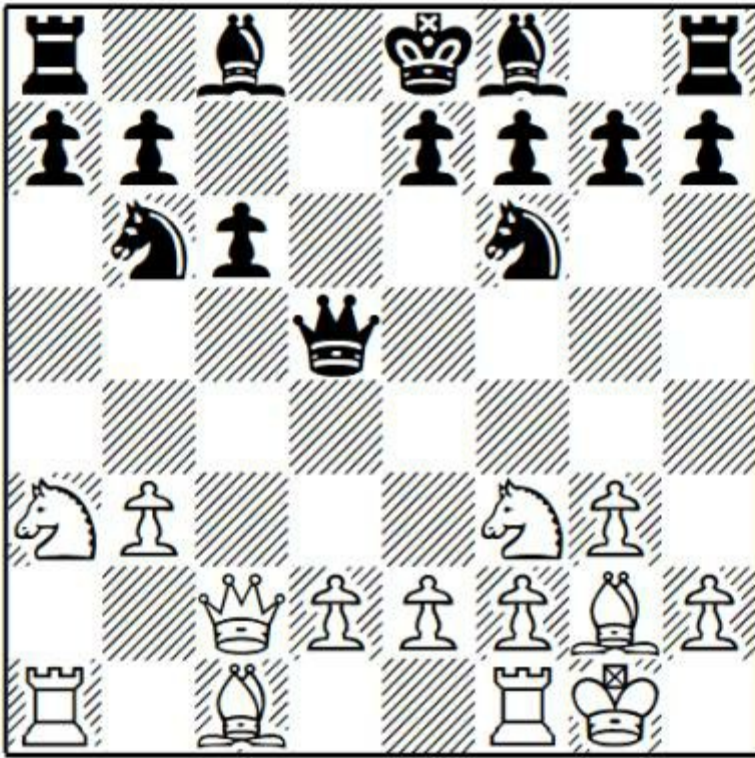
### 6 Na3 Nb6

6 ... b5 7 Nd4 a6 8 d3 Bb7 9 dxc4 b4 10 Nac2 Qc7 followed by ... c5 led to unclear play in D.Dubov-D.Anton Guijarro, Poikovsky 2017.

### 7 Qc2 Qd5 8 b3!

I find this more convincing than the knight moves 8 Nh4 and 8 Ne1, and GM attention appears to have moved towards 8 b3. Instead of trying to regain his pawn on c4, White plays a real gambit, relying on his lead in development and Benko-style pressure on the queenside.

### 8 ... cxb3 9 axb3

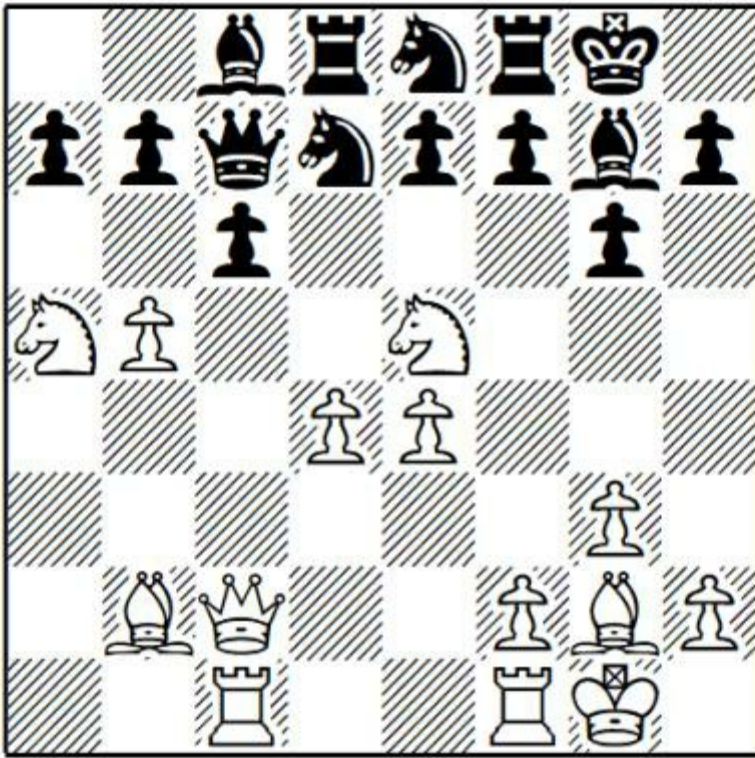


**9 ... Be6**

The most popular move. Instead:

a) 9 ... g6 and now:

a1) 10 Bb2 Bg7 11 Ne5 Qd8 12 Nac4 0-0 13 d4 Be6 14 Na5 Qc7 15 e4 Ne8 16 b4 Rd8 17 Rac1 Bc8 18 b5 Nd7



**Question:** What should White play?

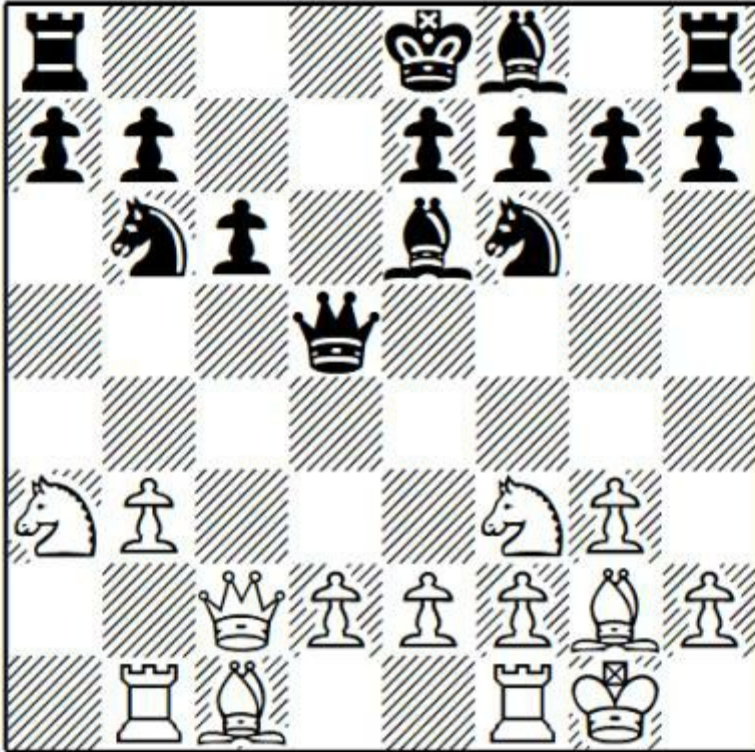
**Answer:** 19 Nexc6! (taking with the other knight first is equivalent) 19 ... bxc6 20 Nxc6 Nb6 21 Ba3! (21 e5 is also strong; at the moment Black has a piece for just a pawn, but the severe restriction of his pieces and the threats along the c-file will cost him material; note that 21 Nxd8 Qxd8 is fine for Black) 21 ... Rd7 22 Qb3 Kh8 23 Nxe7 Qd8 24 Nc6 Qg5 25 Bxf8 Bxf8 26 e5 and Black is not doing badly from a material perspective (two minor pieces for a rook and two pawns), but the white centre will advance with f4 and d5, winning the game: D.Reinderman-W.Spoelman, Dutch Rapid Championship 2015.

a2) 10 Nc4 Nxc4 11 bxc4 Qh5 (11 ... Qd8 12 Bb2 Bg7 13 Bd4 a6 14 Rfb1 left White with similar compensation in S.Arun Prasad-E.Vorobiov, Moscow 2013) 12 d3 Bg7 13 Ba3! (I find this move very instructive; instead of putting his bishop immediately on b2, Adams invites Black to weaken the long diagonal with ... c5 first) 13 ... c5 14 Bb2 0-0 15 Ra3 Bd7 16 Rfa1 a6 17 Ne5! (a move just asking to be played, attacking the bishop on d7 and unleashing the white bishop on the long diagonal) 17 ... Rab8 18 h4 Ng4 19 Nxd7 Qf5 20 Bf3 Qxd7 (20 ... Bxb2 21 Qxb2 Qxd7 is a good alternative, though White retains pressure after 22 Kg2 b5 23 cxb5 axb5 24 Ra7 Qf5 25 Bxg4 Qxg4 26 Rxe7 due to his superior structure and safer king) 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 was M.Adams-M.Kanep, Gibraltar Masters 2013 and here White would retain excellent compensation with 22 Rb1.

b) 9 ... Qh5 10 h4 Bg4 11 Bb2 Qf5 12 d3 Bh3 13 Nc4 Nxc4 14 bxc4 Bxg2 15 Kxg2 and Black had merely lost time, failing to develop his kingside, while White had his standard queenside pressure in Y.Gonzalez Vidal-L.Martinez Ramirez, Santa Clara 2019.

c) 9 ... e6 is quite passive: 10 Nc4 Qd8 E.Karavade-V.Burmakin, Abu Dhabi 2014 and I think White should seize the centre with 11 e4 Be7 12 d4 with a clear advantage.

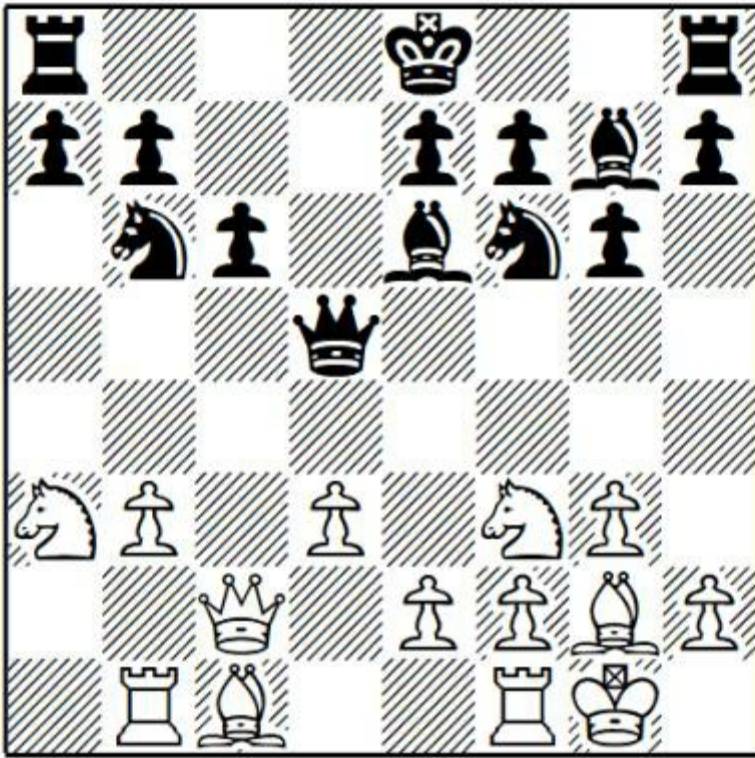
## 10 Rb1



Defending the b3-pawn and preparing Nc4 when an exchange on c4 would expose the b7-pawn.

I was very impressed with the following game. 10 b4 Qb3?! (as in the Benko, White's compensation actually increases in the endgame; 10 ... Qh5 was more challenging) 11 Qxb3 Bxb3 12 b5! c5 (permanently weakening the long diagonal and the light squares in general; 12 ... Ba4 13 Ne5 is also unpleasant for Black, but perhaps he should have preferred this defence) 13 d3 Nfd7 14 Nd2 Bd5 15 e4 Be6 16 f4! (Black had to insert 14 ... Bd5 15 e4 to close the long diagonal, but now White has a mobile pawn centre which threatens to catch the bishop with 17 f5) 16 ... f6 (16 ... g6 17 Bb2 Rg8 18 Nac4 keeps up the pressure) 17 e5! Bd5 (17 ... Rb8 18 Nac4! and the queenside collapses) 18 e6! Bxe6 19 Bxb7 Rb8 20 Bc6 g6 21 Nac4! Nc8 (trying to maintain the a7-pawn is as good as any other defence) 22 Ne4! Kf7 23 Ne5+! (continuing to play with remarkable energy) 23 ... Nxe5 (23 ... fxe5 24 Ng5+ regains the piece with an overwhelming advantage since 24 ... Kf6 trivially fails to 25 fxe5+ Kxe5 26 Re1+) 24 fxe5 Bf5 25 Nxc5 Bg7 26 d4 Rd8 27 Rxf5! (yet another perfectly calculated shot) 27 ... gxf5 28 e6+ Kg6 29 Nd7 Nd6 30 Nxb8 Rxb8 31 Rxa7 Nxb5 32 Rxe7 Bh6 33 Be8+ and Black resigned in J.Timman-S.Ernst, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

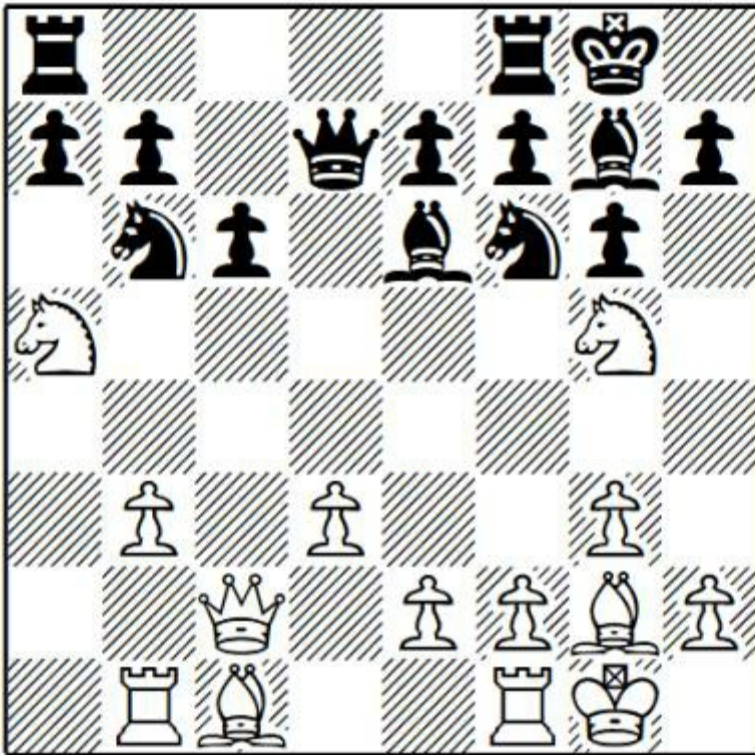
**10 ... g6 11 d3 Bg7**



**12 Nc4 0-0**

12 ... Qd8 was A.Alonso Rosell-Buhmann, Plovdiv 2012 and now, for example, 13 e4 0-0 14 Bb2 gives sufficient compensation.

**13 Ng5 Qd7 14 Na5**



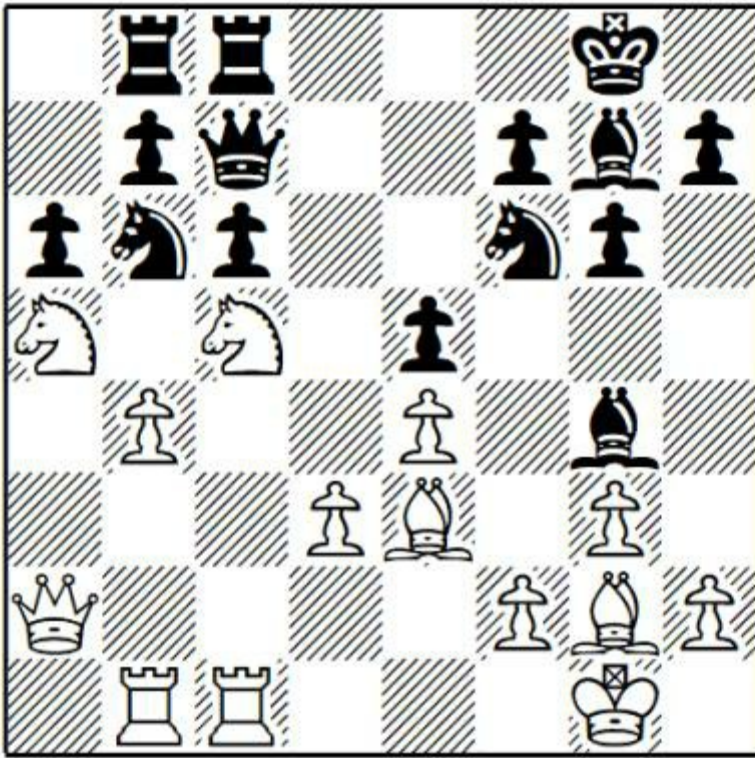
**14 ... Nfd5**

14 ... Bg4! is a better idea, for example 15 h3 h6 16 hxg4 hxg5 17 Bxg5 Nxc4 with an unclear game.

**15 Bd2**

15 Nxe6 Qxe6 16 Nxb7 Nc3 17 Rb2 Nbd5 and Black has very active pieces to compensate for the bishop pair.

**15 ... Rab8 16 Rfc1 Bg4 17 e3 e5 18 Ne4 Rfc8 19 Nc5 Qc7 20 b4 a6 21 Qa2 Qe7 22 e4 Nf6 23 Be3 Qc7?**



Overlooking a tactical detail, but the position was already quite difficult. 23 ... Rc7 was more resilient, for example 24 d4 exd4 25 Bf4 Bc8 26 Bxc7 Qxc7 27 Nab3.

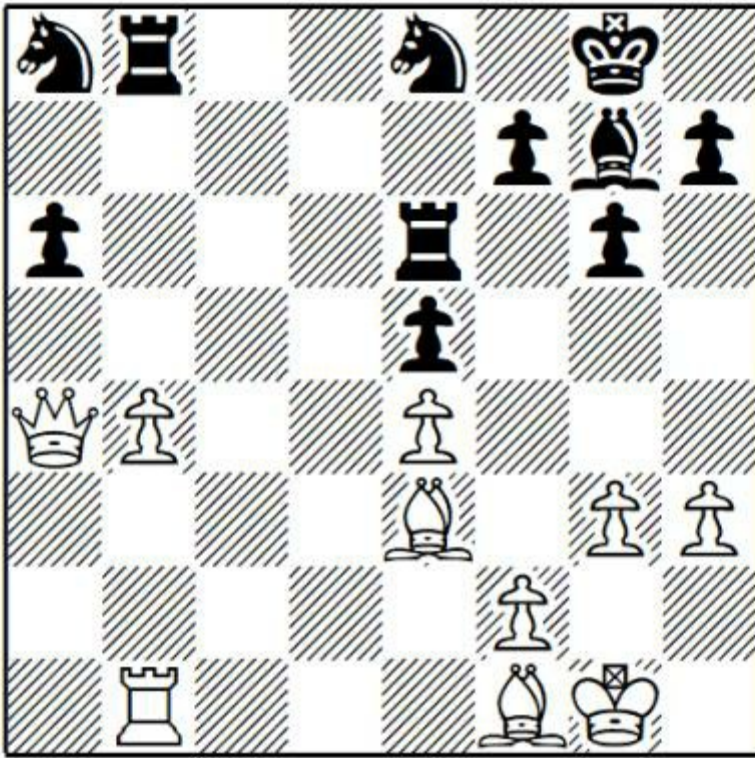
**24 h3 Bd7 25 d4! Ne8**

25 ... exd4 26 Bf4 Qd8 27 Naxb7 Rxb7 and Black collapses.

**26 d5 Na8 27 dxc6 Bxc6 28 Nxa6! bxa6 29 Nxc6 Qxc6 30 Rxc6 Rxc6**

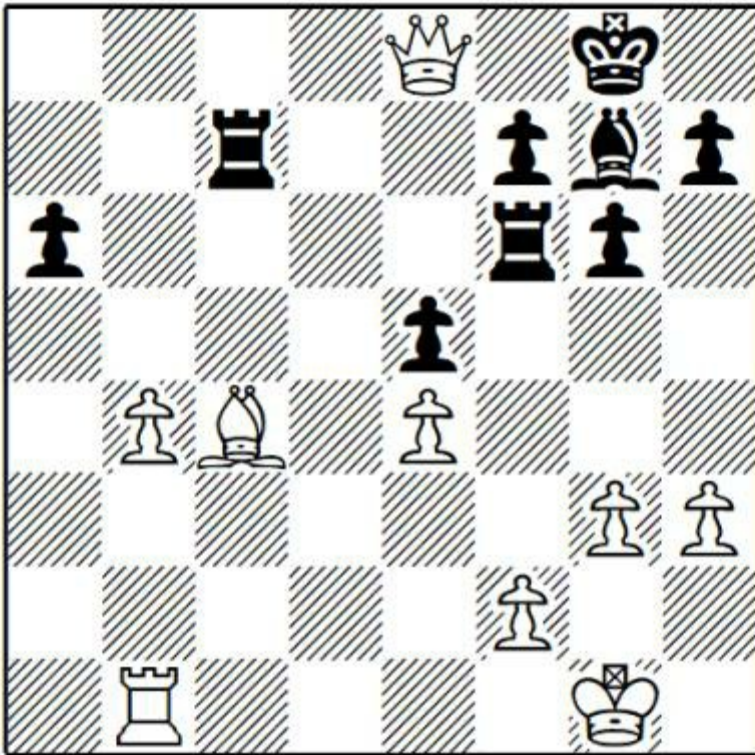
Black is far behind on material and unsurprisingly could not establish a fortress.

**31 Qa4 Re6 32 Bf1!**



Targeting the a6-pawn and bringing the bishop to c4 to exert pressure on the f7-pawn.

32 ... Nac7 33 Bc4 Rf6 34 Qd7 Ne6 35 Qa7 Rd8 36 Bb6 N6c7 37 Bxc7 Rd7 38 Qa8 Rxc7 39 Qxe8+



The rest is pretty unnecessary.

**39 ... Bf8 40 Qxe5 Rfc6 41 Bd5 Rc2 42 Qf6 Bg7 43 Qd8+ Bf8 44 e5 Re7 45 Re1 Kg7 46 Qb6 Rd2 47 Bc4 Rc2 48 Qxa6 Rc7 49 Qf6+ Kg8 50 Bd5 Rd2 51 Qd8 Rcc2 52 e6 fxe6 53 Rxe6 1-0**

*Game 39*

**L.Aronian-M.Carlsen**

Norway Chess, Stavanger 2016

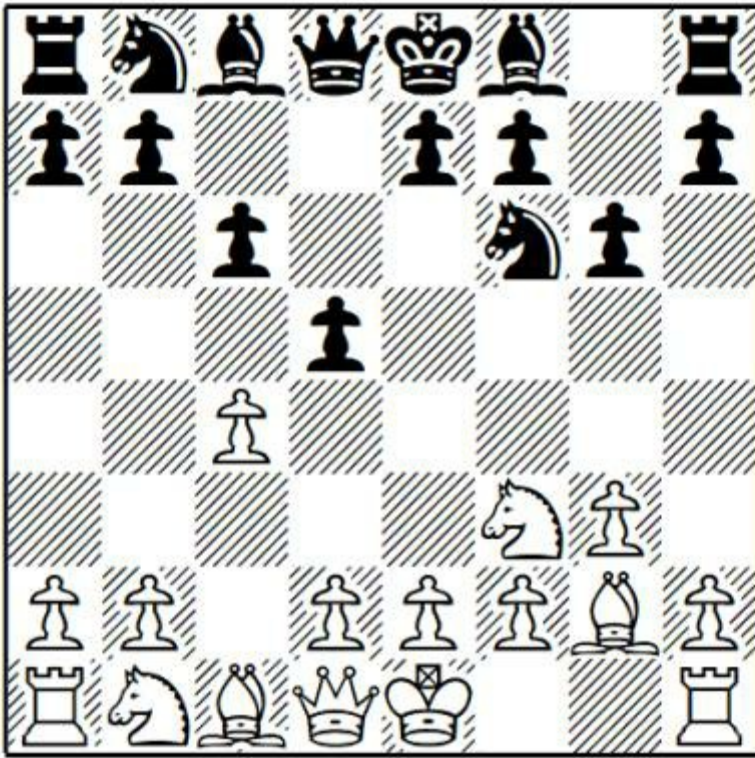
**1 c4**

The position after move 8 can also arise with Black to move, for example 1 Nf3 Nf6 2 g3 g6 3 b3 Bg7 4 Bb2 0-0 5 Bg2 d5 6 c4 dxc4 7 bxc4 c5 8 0-0. Being a whole tempo down on a known line isn't a great start, but several very strong players have used the system tried by Carlsen in this game.

**1 ... Nf6**

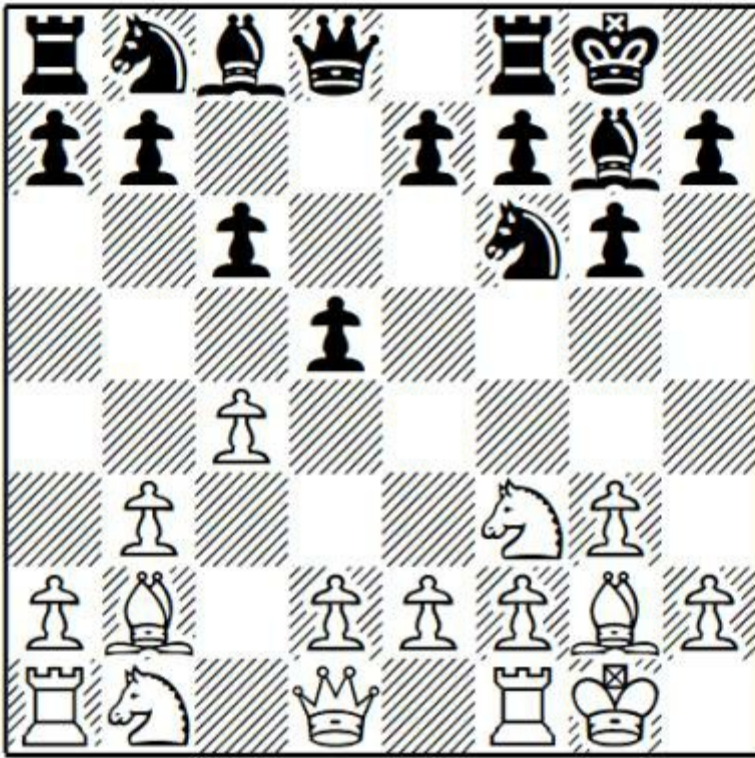
Delaying ... Nf6 with 1 ... c6 2 g3 d5 3 Nf3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 (or 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7) poses a difficult question to White-how will you meet the threat of ... e5? The most straightforward response, 5 d4, transposes into a Fianchetto Grunfeld with ... Nf6. Of course, White can't play b3 when the g7-bishop is already developed and not blocked by a knight on f6. I like Demuth's proposed 5 Qa4!? with interesting, non-standard play.

**2 g3 c6 3 Bg2 d5 4 Nf3 g6**



Developing the bishop to g7 is logical, provided that Black doesn't object to transpositions to the Fianchetto Grunfeld after d4. In this game we look at White's independent options with b3.

**5 b3 Bg7 6 Bb2 0-0 7 0-0**

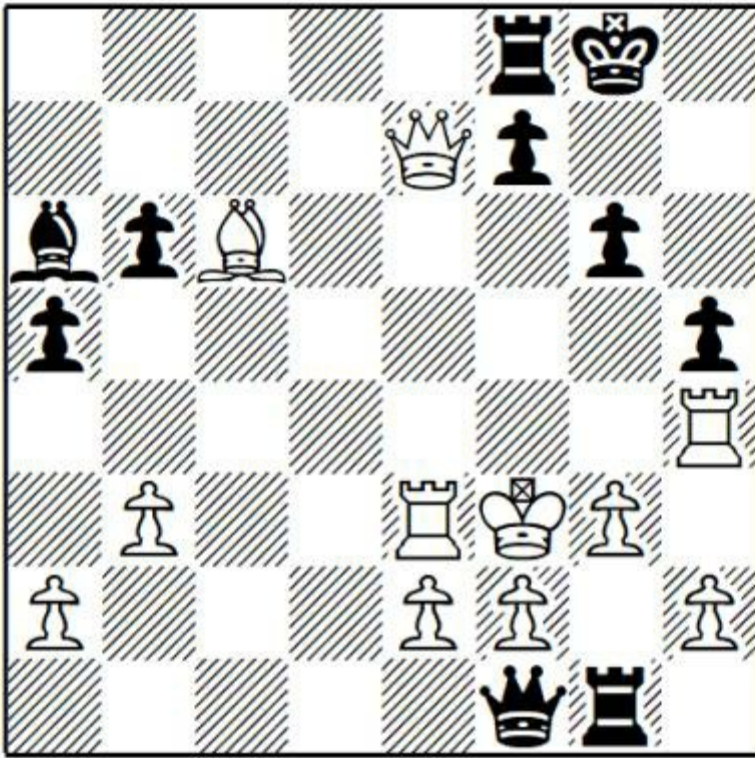


7 ... dxc4?!

Others:

a) 7 ... a5 was seen in the following game, one of the most amazing from the Batumi Olympiad 2018: 8 Nc3 Ne4 9 Na4 Bxb2 10 Nxb2 Nd7 11 d3 Nef6 12 d4 b6 13 Rc1 Bb7 14 Nd3 Rc8 15 Nfe5 Nxe5 16 dxe5!? (taking with the knight was also attractive, but this move drives the black knight away from the defence of the kingside) 16 ... Nd7 17 Qd2!? (both 17 e6 and 17 e4 are preferred by engines, but White has an enterprising gambit concept in mind) 17 ... dxc4 18 Rxc4 Nxe5 19 Rh4 h5 20 Rd1 Nxd3 21 Qh6 Qd6 22 Rxd3 Qf6 23 Be4 Ba6 24 Re3 Qg7 25 Qg5 Rcd8 26 Qxe7 Rd1+ 27 Kg2 Qa1 28 Bxc6 Rg1+ 29 Kf3 Qf1?? (29 ... Rf1! would have forced, at a minimum, a repetition of move with 30 Kg2).

**Question:** How should White meet the threat of 30 ... Qg2+?



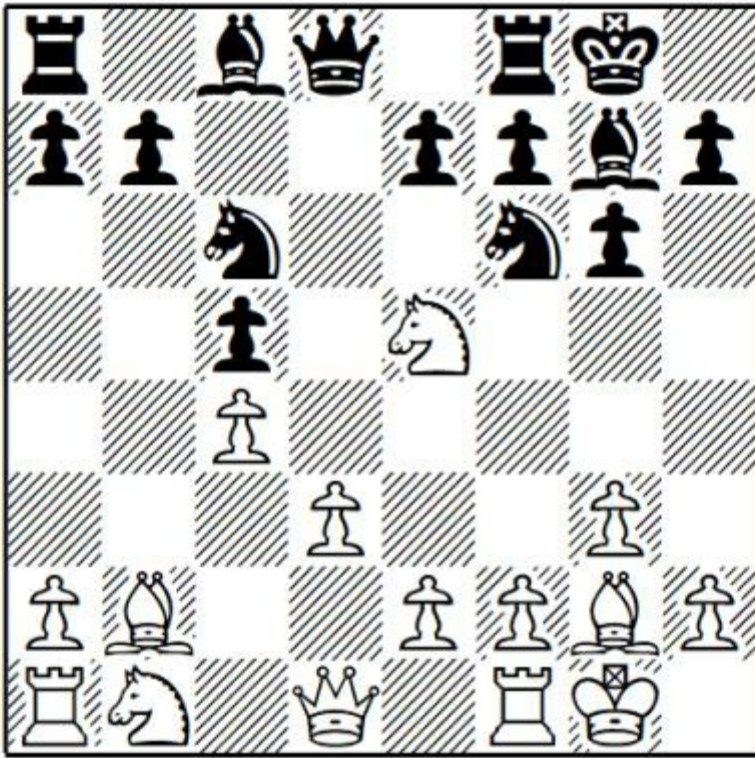
**Answer:** 30 Kf4!! (30 Rxf5 Qg2+ 31 Kf4 Qxf2+ 32 Bf3 gxh5 only leads to perpetual after 33 Qg5+) 30 ... Qxf2+? (30 ... Qa1 is the only move, although White continues attacking with 31 Kg5! Rf1 32 Bd5 Qg7 33 Qf6) 31 Kg5! Kg7 32 Rf4 Qxh2 33 Qf6+ Kh7 34 Qxg6+ Kh8 35 Kh6 and Black resigned in T.Hillarp Persson-T.Laurusas, Batumi 2018. This was a king march fully worthy of N.Short-J.Timman, Tilburg 1991.

b) 7 ... Bg4 8 d3 Bxf3 9 Bxf3 and now, rather than the solid but passive 9 ... e6 of D.Dubov-A.Korobov, Sochi 2016, I would prefer 9 ... Re8 aiming for ... e5.

**8 bxc4 c5 9 d3**

Other moves have been tested but I like Aronian's handling of the position.

**9 ... Nc6 10 Ne5**



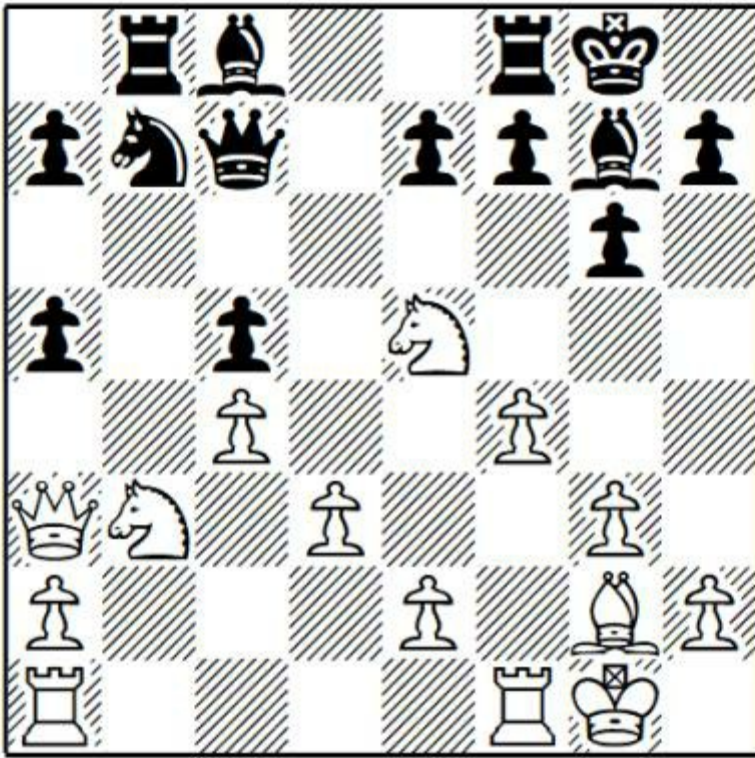
### 10 ... Na5?!

Clearly the knight on e5 dominates the position, and its counterpart on a5 is a dreadful piece. It could create pressure on c4 in combination with ... b5, but this is a long way away. Others:

a) 10 ... Nxe5 11 Bxe5 Ne8 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 Nc3 was good for White in T.Radjabov-B.Gelfand, Beijing 2014.

b) 10 ... Nd4 11 e3 Nf5 12 Qc2 was better for White in A.Giri-P.Negi, Linares 2013.

**11 Qc1 Qc7 12 Nd2 Ne8 13 f4 Nd6 14 Bc3 Rb8 15 Qa3 b6 16 Bxa5 bxa5 17 Nb3 Nb7**



**18 Bxb7!**

Not scared of ghosts on the long diagonal, Aronian grabs an important pawn.

**18 ... Qxb7**

18 ... Bxb7 19 Qxc5 is much better for White.

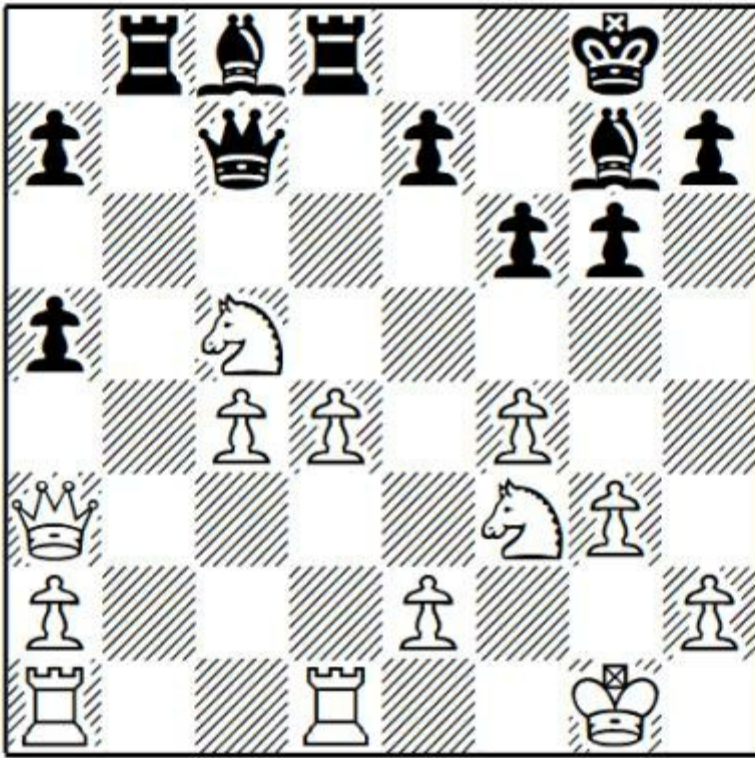
**19 Nxc5 Qc7 20 d4 Rd8**

The immediate 20 ... f6 seems to be more accurate. The knight should retreat to d3 since 21 Nf3 e5 gives reasonable compensation for the material, and serious counterplay.

**21 Rfd1**

21 Qe3 keeps more control of the position.

**21 ... f6 22 Nf3**



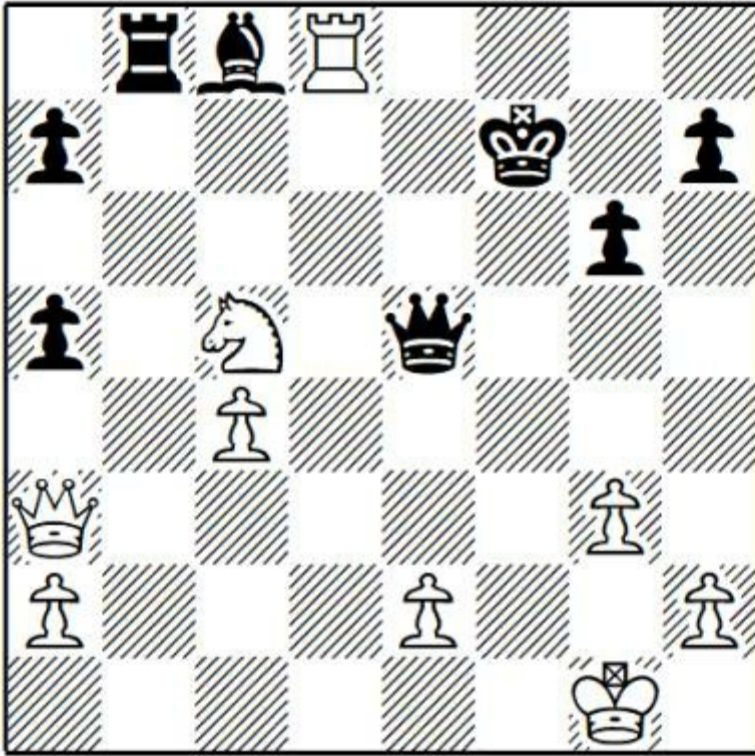
**22 ... e5!?**

Otherwise Black is a pawn down with a poor structure.

**23 fxe5 fxe5 24 Nxe5 Bxe5 25 dxe5 Rxd1+?**

Trying to grab the e5-pawn, which fails tactically. 25 ... Bh3 keeps some practical chances, though White has good winning prospects after 26 Nd3.

**26 Rxd1 Qxe5? 27 Rd8+ Kf7**



27 ... Kg7 28 Ne6+! followed by Qf8, with mate shortly.  
**28 Qf3+ Bf5 29 Rxb8 Qxb8 30 g4 Qb4**  
30 ... Qb6 31 Qf2 Qb1+ 32 Kg2 doesn't change anything.  
**31 Nd3 1-0**

# Chapter Seven

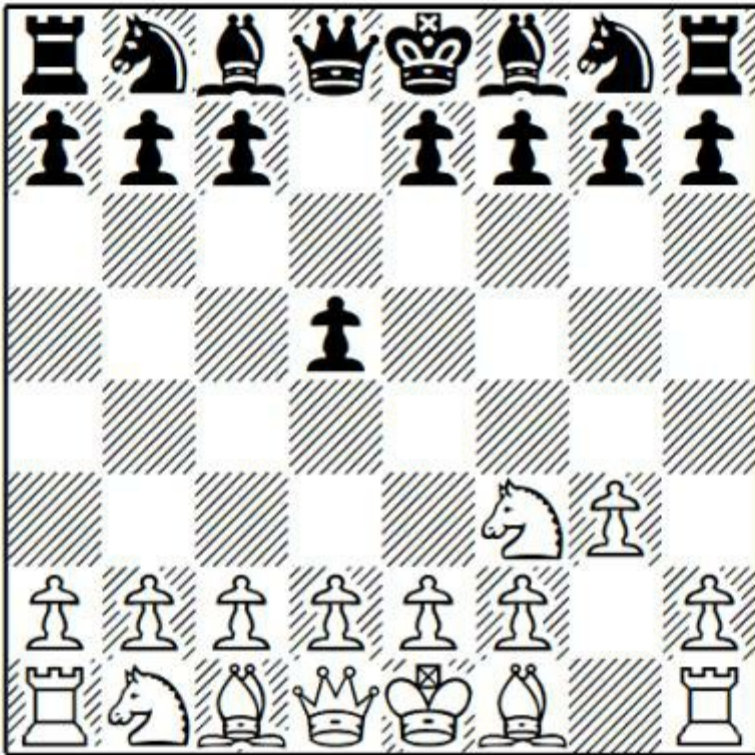
## 1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 g6/2 ... Nd7

### 1 Nf3 d5

As explained in the Introduction, my focus in this book has been on the move 2 c4 here. This has the disadvantage of allowing 2 ... dxc4 and (especially) 2 ... d4, but otherwise considerably reduces Black's options.

One of the advantages of the Réti is its flexibility, and it may be that you are facing an opponent who confidently handles the complications after 2 ... d4. If you want to vary, you can consider the move ...

### 2 g3



This may easily transpose to the lines we've considered in the book after a later c4, but it also allows Black plenty of possibilities to deviate. I've given some light coverage of two moves.

First, 2 ... g6, when White has an option of transposing into a Fianchetto Grünfeld but also has some options of keeping the game in independent waters.

Second, the odd-looking 2 ... Nd7!?, which has featured in a couple of recent high profile games.

### Game 40

#### A.Zhigalko-Ding Liren

Baku Olympiad 2016

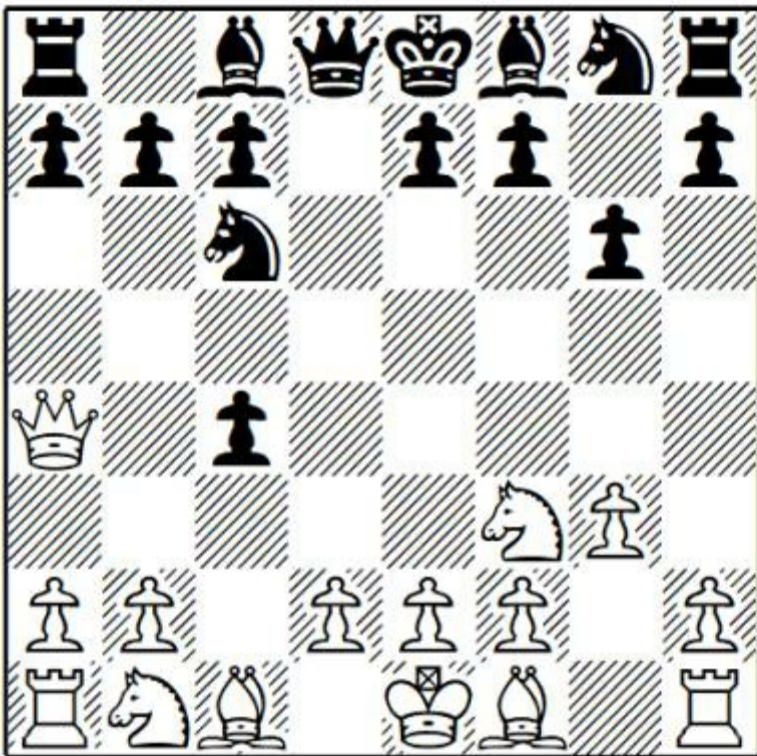
1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 g6 3 c4

I have changed the move order of this game, which went 3 Bg2 Bg7 4 0-0 e5 5 c4 dxc4 6 Qa4+ Nc6.

**3 ... dxc4**

3 ... d4 is also possible, when 4 b4 transposes into 2 c4 d4 3 b4 g6 4 g3, discussed in the notes to Markovitz-Kuzubov.

**4 Qa4+ Nc6!**

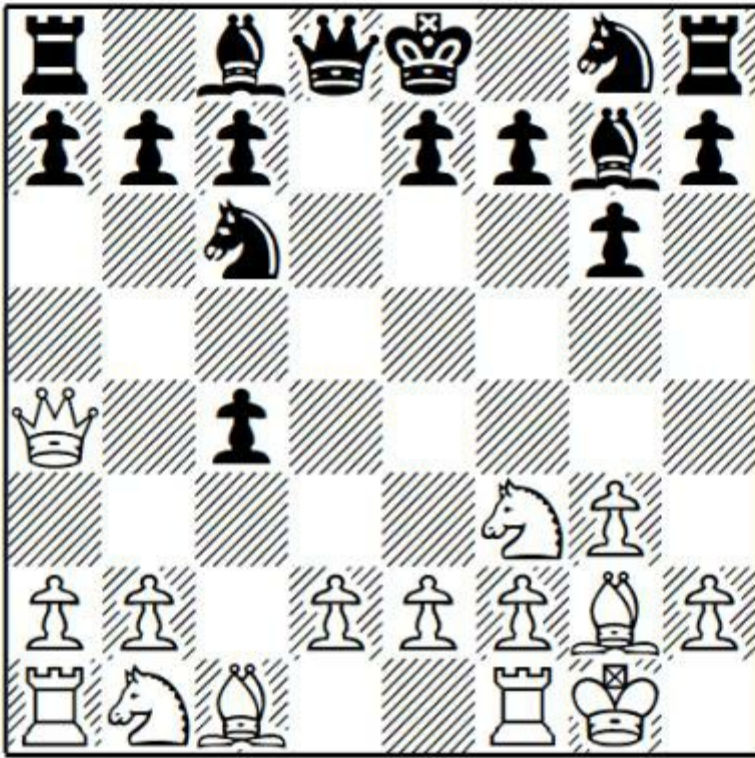


In other variations we have seen with Qa4+ (for example, 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 dxc4 5 Qa4+), ... Nc6 was a bad idea, both because of potential tactical problems (5 ... Nc6 6 Ne5!) and because the knight was inconsistently placed with Black's objectives of putting his light-squared bishop on the h1-a8 diagonal, and of pushing ... c5. In the current position, however, the knight is ideally placed on c6, supporting ... e5. White is not in time to create trouble with Ne5 jumps.

**5 Bg2**

Playing 5 Qxc4 Bg7 6 d3 e5 gives White an additional option of 7 Ng5, but this isn't threatening (as we will see, Black can choose to put the knight on h6 voluntarily in any case). For example, 7 ... Nh6 8 Nc3 Nd4 9 Nb5 0-0 10 Nxd4 exd4 was fine for Black in C.Bauer-M.Rodshtein, Heraklion 2017.

**5 ... Bg7 6 0-0**

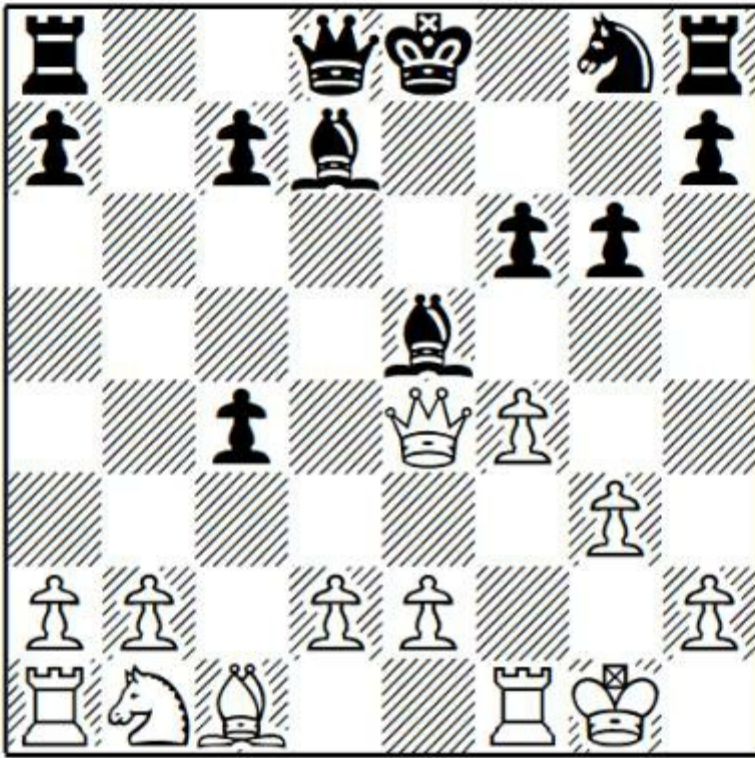


### 6 ... e5

6 ... Nh6!? 7 Qxc4 Nf5 puts the knight on an active square where it doesn't block the g7-bishop and controls d4. Black has done well here in practice, and his ideas are well illustrated in a game by Romain Edouard:

a) 8 d3 0-0 9 Qc2 (9 Nbd2 a5 transposes to M.Antipov-I.Saric, Gibraltar 2019, where Black was fine) 9 ... Nfd4 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Qd1 Bg4 12 Nc3 Qc8 13 Be3 e5 14 Rc1 c6 15 Re1 Kh8 16 Qd2 Qd7 17 Bh6 Rac8 18 Bxg7+ Kxg7 19 Nd1 (not a real mistake, but a rather passive retreat; 19 Ne4 kept the balance) 19 ... Rfe8 20 Ne3 Be6 21 b4 b6 (21 ... h5!? is also possible, generating some initiative on the kingside) 22 Nc4 Bd5 23 Qb2 Bxg2 24 Kxg2 c5 (Black has reached a favourable pawn structure which Botvinnik loved to play with both colours; Black has a significant central space advantage and prospects of a kingside attack) 25 f3? b5 26 Ne3 cxb4 27 Rxc8 Rxc8 28 Qxb4 h5 29 Kf2 (allowing the queen to invade h3 isn't a sound defence, but White had an unpleasant position in any event) 29 ... Rc6 30 a4 Qh3 31 Rh1 h4! 32 axb5





### 11 ... Bf5

Mickey Adams uncorked an interesting novelty 11 ... Bh3!? which also works tactically, though e4 seems like a better square than e3 for the queen. And now:

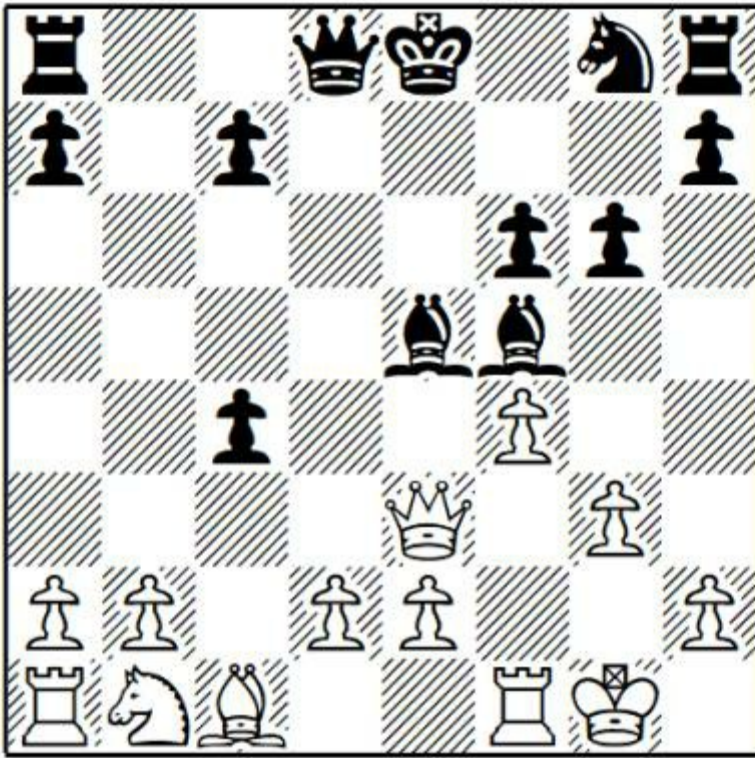
a) 12 fxe5 Bxf1 13 exf6+ Kf8! 14 Kxf1 Nxf6 15 Qxc4 Qd5 16 Qxd5 Nxd5 (White has two pawns for the exchange and the endgame is roughly level) 17 b3 Ke8 18 Bb2 Rf8+ 19 Kg1 Kd7 20 Nc3 Nxc3 21 Bxc3 h5 22 Bd4 a6 23 Rc1 Rae8 24 Be3 Re6 and, although all three results are possible, the position is level and a draw was agreed in V.Erdos-M.Adams, Germany 2016.

b) Playing by analogy with the main game with 12 Rf3?! isn't convincing after 12 ... Qd4+ 13 Re3 0-0-0 14 fxe5 fxe5 15 Nc3 Nf6 16 Qh4 Qxh4 17 gxh4 Bf5 18 Rxe5 Rd4 19 b3 Rhd8 when Black has at least sufficient compensation.

c) 12 Rf2 Bf5 13 Qc6+ Bd7 14 Qe4 Bf5 15 Qe3 Nh6 16 fxe5 Ng4 17 Qc5 Nxf2 18 Kxf2 Rf8 gives White insufficient compensation for the exchange.

d) Note that 12 Qc6+? no longer repeats the position since the rook on f1 is under attack, and after either 12 ... Kf8 or 12 ... Kf7 Black has the better chances.

**12 Qc6+ Bd7 13 Qe4 Bf5 14 Qe3**



Declining the repetition with 14 Qc6+, after which several games have ended peacefully.

### 14 ... Bh3

Others:

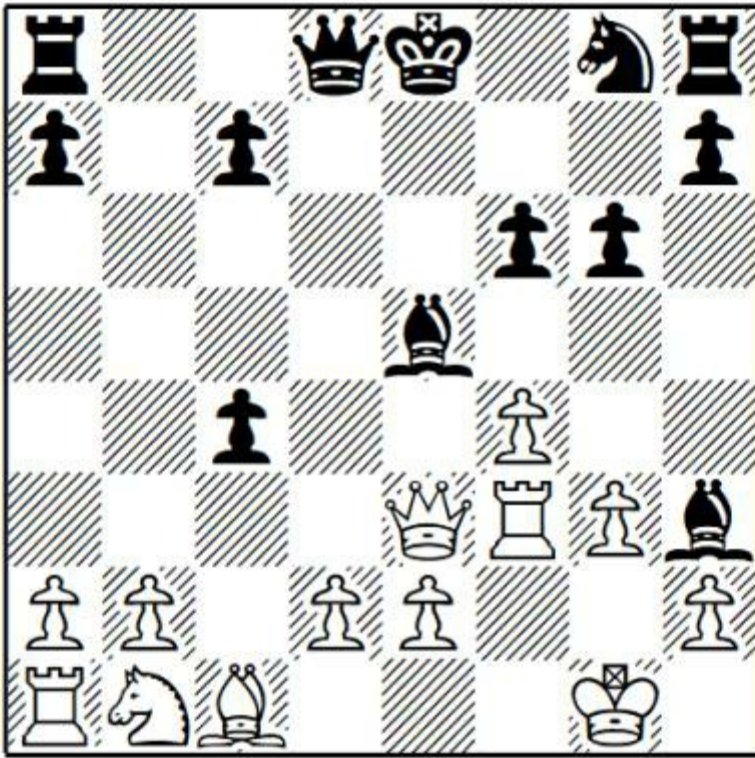
a) Black fails to equalise after 14 ... Qd4? 15 fxe5 and now:

a1) 15 ... Qxe3+ 16 dxe3 fxe5 was played in a game which showcased Kramnik's fantastic tactical ability: 17 e4!? (sacrificing a pawn for the initiative, as Kramnik did at every opportunity towards the end of his career) 17 ... Bxe4 18 Nc3 Bc6 19 Bg5 Rb8 20 Rad1 (Black is a pawn up but White has a strong initiative, aided by the opposite coloured bishops, which is particularly difficult to defend against in blitz) 20 ... h6! 21 Bf6 Rh7 (21 ... Nxf6 22 Rxf6 Bd7 23 Rxc6 Rxb2 24 Rg7 Bf5 25 Rxc7 and Black has decent drawing chances after 25 ... 0-0 26 Rxc4 Rc2 based on the reduced material and some compensation for the pawn) 22 Bxe5 Rxb2 23 Rf4 Re7 24 Bh8! Rc2 (24 ... Rh7 doesn't repeat in view of 25 Rxc4 with a clear advantage for White) 25 Rdf1 Kd7 26 Rxc4 Bb7? (26 ... Rh7 limits White to an edge) 27 Rf8! Re8 28 Rxc7+! Kxc7 29 Rxe8 and Black resigned in V.Kramnik-W.So, Paris blitz 2016 since he needs to give up the exchange to save the knight on g8.

a2) 15 ... fxe5 16 Qxd4 exd4 17 Na3 d3 18 e3 (White retains an edge after the energetic 18 e4! Bxe4 19 b4! c3 20 dxc3) 18 ... Nf6 19 Nxc4 0-0 20 b3 Ne4 with full compensation in T.Harutyunian-R.Bakunts, Yerevan 2016.

b) 14 ... Nh6 15 fxe5 Ng4 16 Qc5 Nxe5 17 Nc3 Qe7 18 Qxe7+ Kxe7 19 b3 Rhd8 20 bxc4 Nxc4 21 d3 Ne5 gave White a more pleasant endgame in M.Yilmazyerli-E.Baglan, Manavgat 2016, since Black's pawns on c7 and f6 are clearly weaker than the central pawns on d3 and e2, which limit the black pieces and can advance.

### 15 Rf3!



The immediate 15 Rf2? would be a bad mistake in view of 15 ... Nh6!, when ... Ng4 will win material.

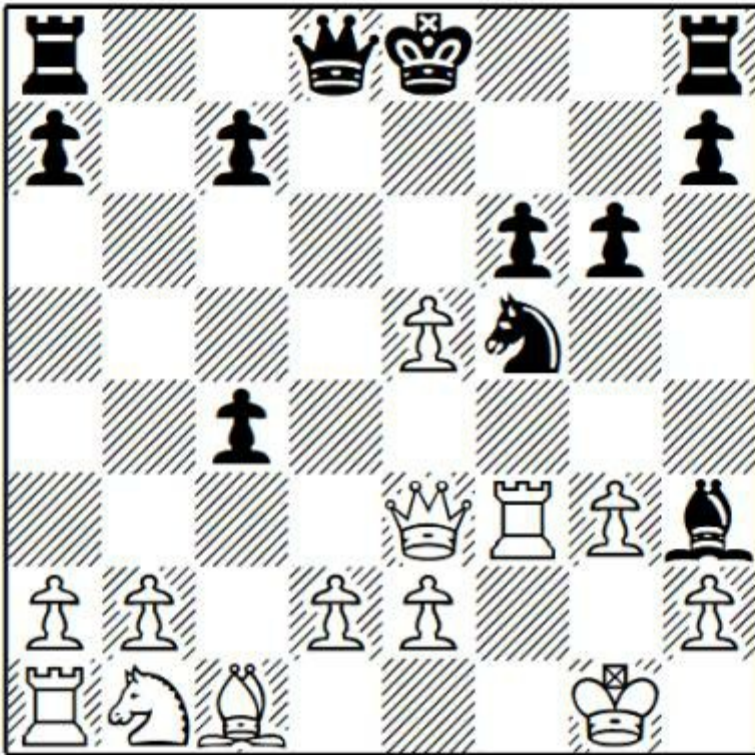
**15 ... Ne7**

Instead:

a) 15 ... Bg4? led to a powerful display by a young Richard Rapport: 16 Rf2 Qd4 17 fxe5 Qxe3 18 dxe3 fxe5 19 Na3 (19 e4 is also good) 19 ... 0-0-0 20 Nxc4 Bh3 21 Bd2! Be6 22 Bc3 (22 Rc1 Bxc4 23 Ba5 also works) 22 ... Bxc4 23 Bxe5 Nh6 24 Rc1! (24 Bxh8 is only enough for equality) 24 ... Rhe8 25 Bf4 Ng4? (25 ... Re4 is more tenacious, and after 26 Bxh6 Bxa2 the rook and opposite coloured bishop endgame, though unpleasant for Black, promises some drawing chances) 26 Rxc4 Nxf2 27 Rxc7+ Kb8 28 Rxh7+ Ka8 29 Kxf2 with too many pawns for the exchange in R.Rapport-E.Bacrot, Calvi 2013.

b) 15 ... Nh6 16 fxe5 can transpose to the game after 16 ... Nf5, while 16 ... Ng4 17 Qc5 Nxe5 leads to unclear play.

**16 fxe5 Nf5**



### 17 Qa3!?

The only try for an advantage. Others:

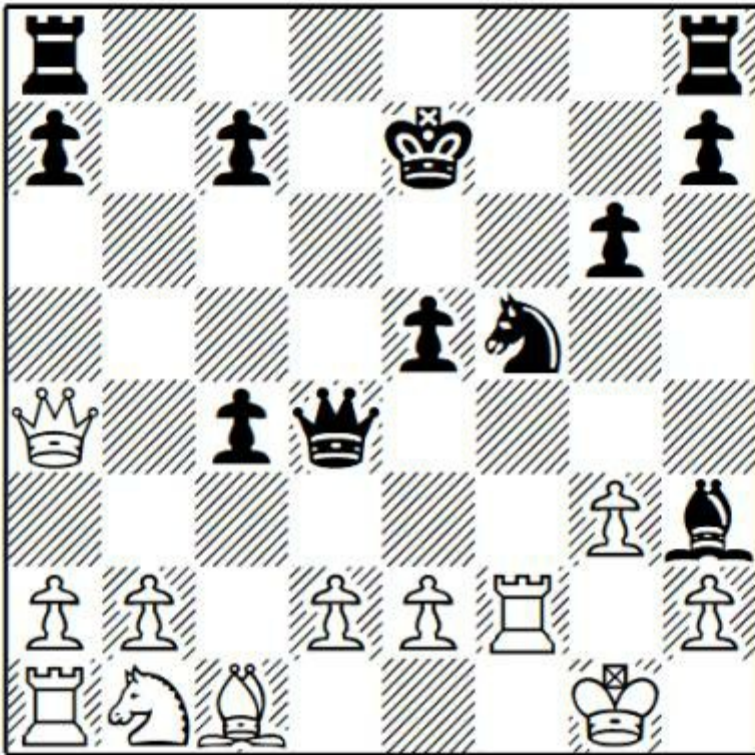
a) 17 Qc3? Qd4+ (17 ... Nd4 is also good) 18 Rf2 fxe5 was better for Black in M.Neef-T.Burg, Germany 2017.

b) 17 Rxf5!? is only enough for equality: 17 ... Bxf5 18 exf6+ Kf7 19 Nc3 Qxf6 20 Qf4 and White will collect a second pawn for the exchange.

### 17 ... Qd4+ 18 Rf2

18 e3 Qe4 doesn't change much.

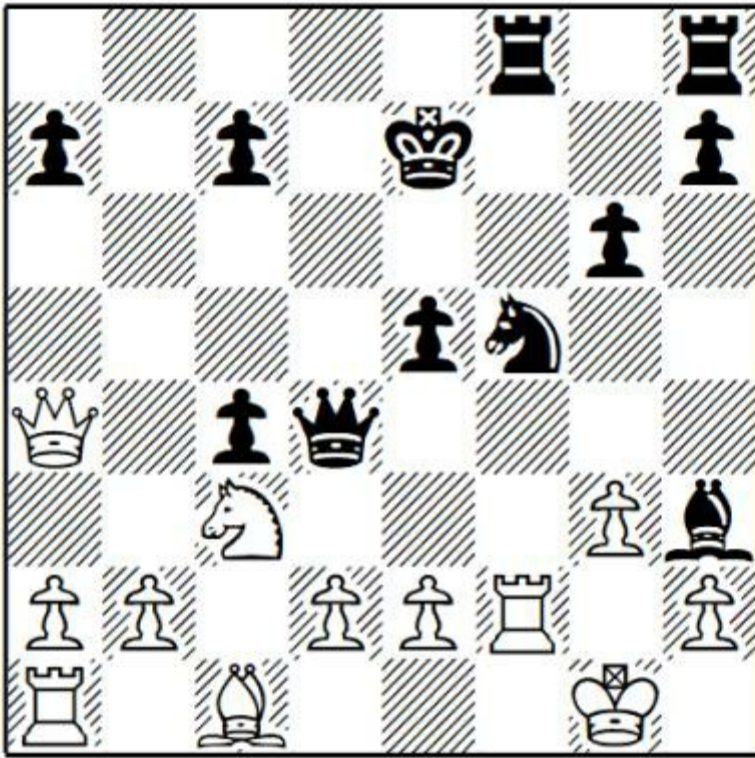
### 18 ... fxe5 19 Qa4+ Ke7



**Question:** What on earth is going on in this position?

**Answer:** This is one of those balanced positions where both sides have equally poor games! Both kings are vulnerable. White's development is very poor, while Black's structure is compromised.

**20 Nc3 Raf8**

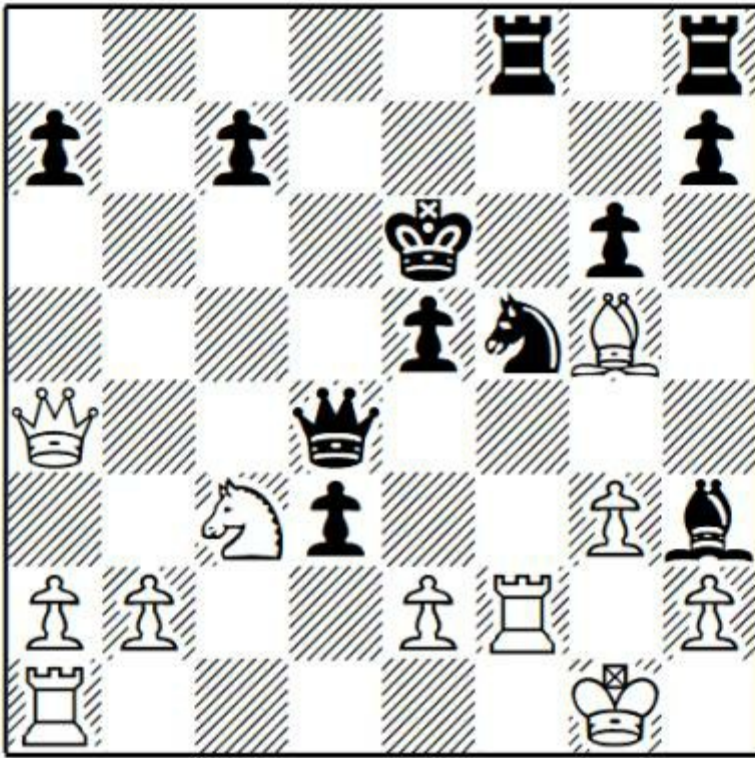


**Question:** How should White continue?

**21 d3!**

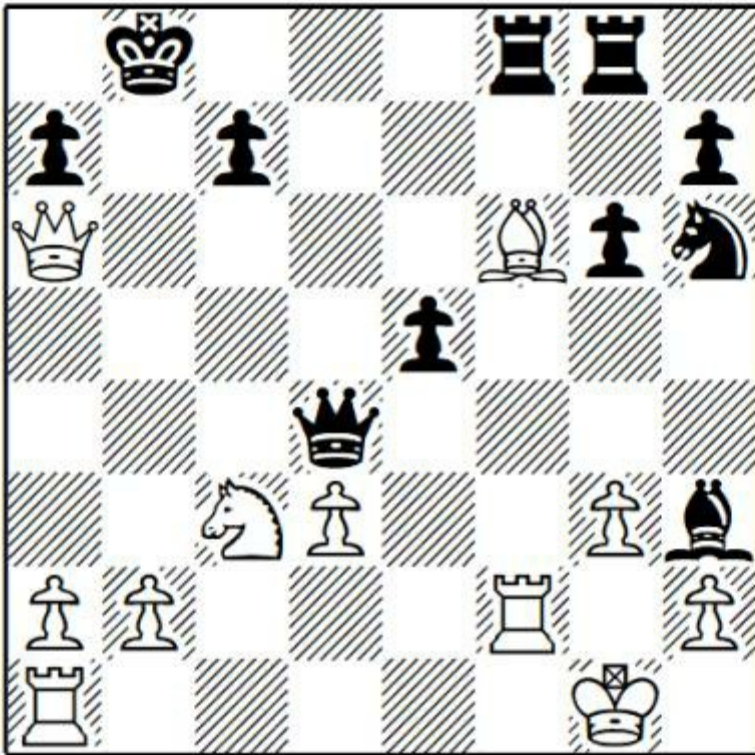
**Answer:** Aside from its thematic qualities (opening the c1-h6 diagonal so the bishop and a1-rook can develop), this is the only move to avoid an immediate loss. For example, 21 e3 Nxe3! is immediate curtains, based on 22 dxe3 (22 Qb4+ Kd7 doesn't change anything. After 23 Qb5+ Kc8 24 Qa6+ Kd8 there are no more checks) 22 ... Rxf2! with mate.

**21 ... cxd3 22 Bg5+ Ke6!**



In such a sharp position the price of a move is very high. As with White's 21st move, this is the only move not to lose on the spot.

**23 Qb3+ Kd7 24 Qb5+ Kc8 25 Qa6+ Kb8 26 Bf6! Rhg8 27 exd3 Nh6!**



Both players are playing brilliantly, which is especially impressive in such an irrational position.

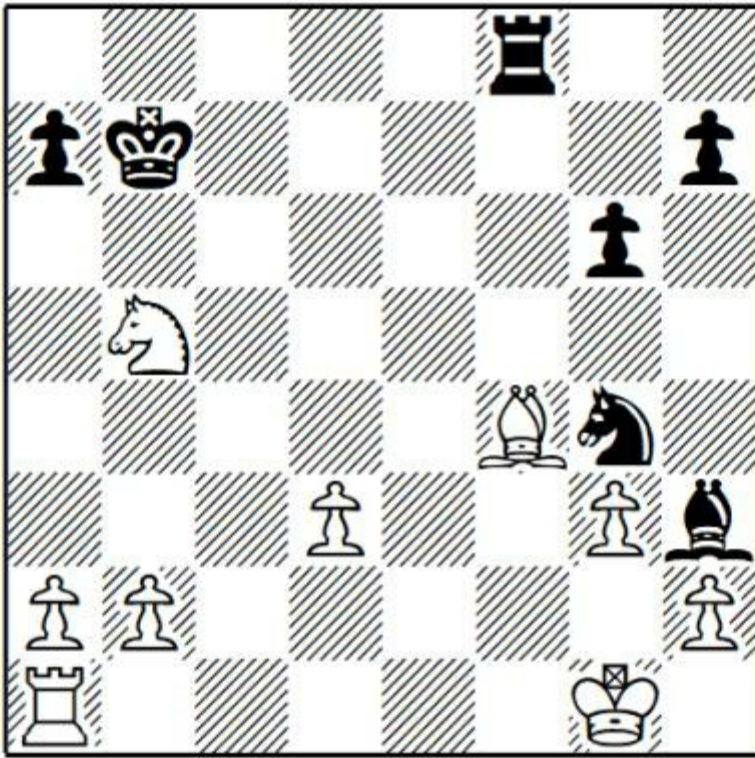
**28 Qb5+ Qb6 29 Bxe5 Qxb5 30 Rxf8+ Rxf8 31 Nxb5 Ng4!**

Black continues playing aggressively despite the reduced material, and offers a second pawn.

**32 Bxc7+?!**

32 Bd4 is safer, with equality after 32 ... Rd8 33 Bc3 Rxd3 for example.

**32 ... Kb7 33 Bf4**



**Question:** How can Black continue developing his initiative?

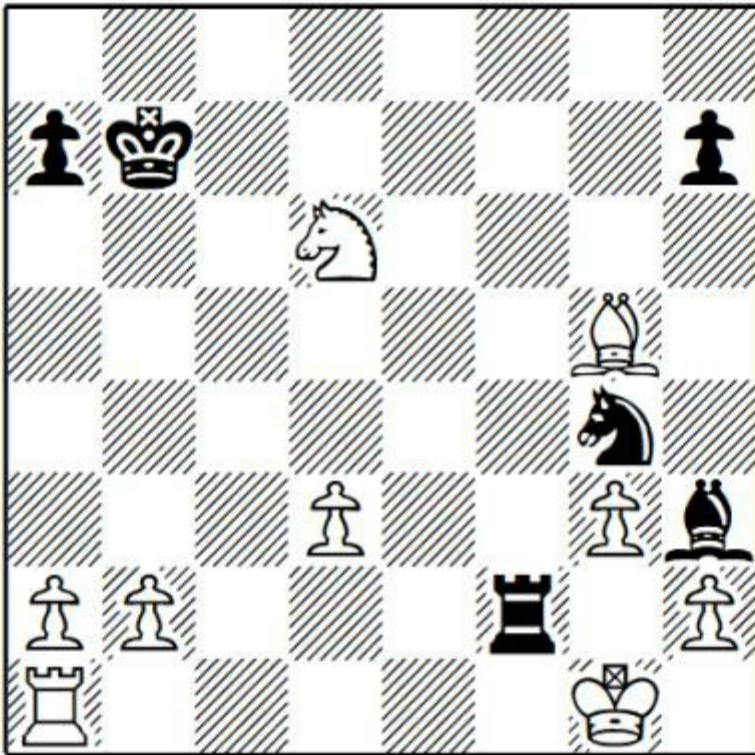
**33 ... g5!!**

**Answer:** Offering a third pawn to disrupt the blockade on the f-file and gain access to f2.

**34 Bxg5?**

Again Zhigalko takes the offered pawn, and it's another mistake. Exchanging pieces with 34 Nd6+! Ka6 35 Ne4 gxf4 36 Ng5 was better, although 36 ... fxg3 37 Nxh3 gxh2+ 38 Kg2 Kb5 still leaves Black with the advantage.

**34 ... Rf2 35 Nd6+**

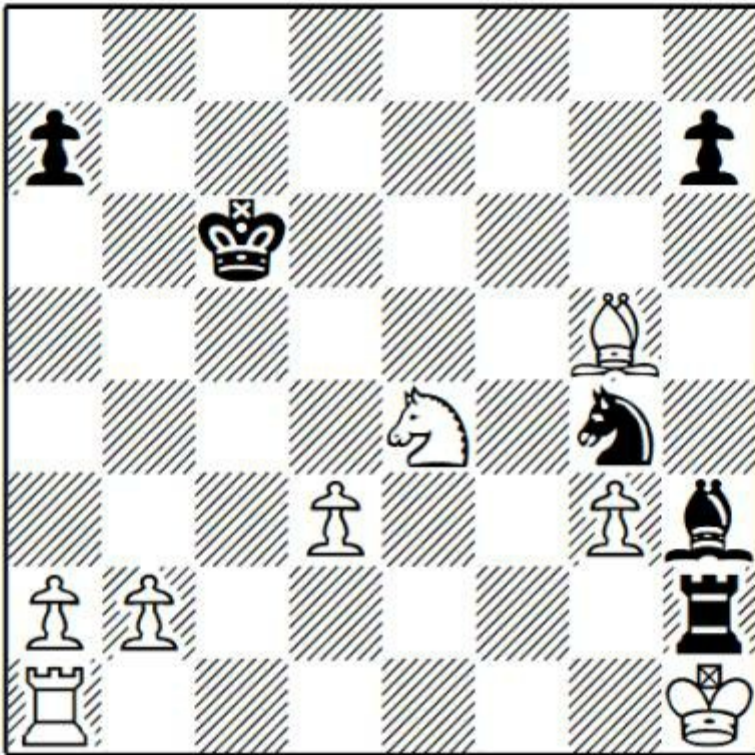


**Question:** A final tough question. Where should the black king go?

**35 ... Kc6?**

**Answer:** 35 ... Ka6! (even 35 ... Ka8! works, with the same idea) 36 Ne4 Rg2+ 37 Kh1 Rxf2+ 38 Kg1 Rg2+ 39 Kh1 Re2 gives Black a strong attack despite the reduced material.

**36 Ne4 Rg2+ 37 Kh1 Rxf2+ 38 Kg1 Rg2+ 39 Kh1 Rh2+**



Playing in the same fashion as at the note to Black's 35th move with 39 ... Re2 allows White the crucial tempo 40 Rc1+, with sufficient activity for perpetual check or to force saving simplifications.

**40 Kg1 Rg2+ 41 Kh1 Rxb2 42 Rc1+ Kd7 43 Nf6+ Nxf6 44 Bxf6 Rxa2 45 Ra1 ½-½**

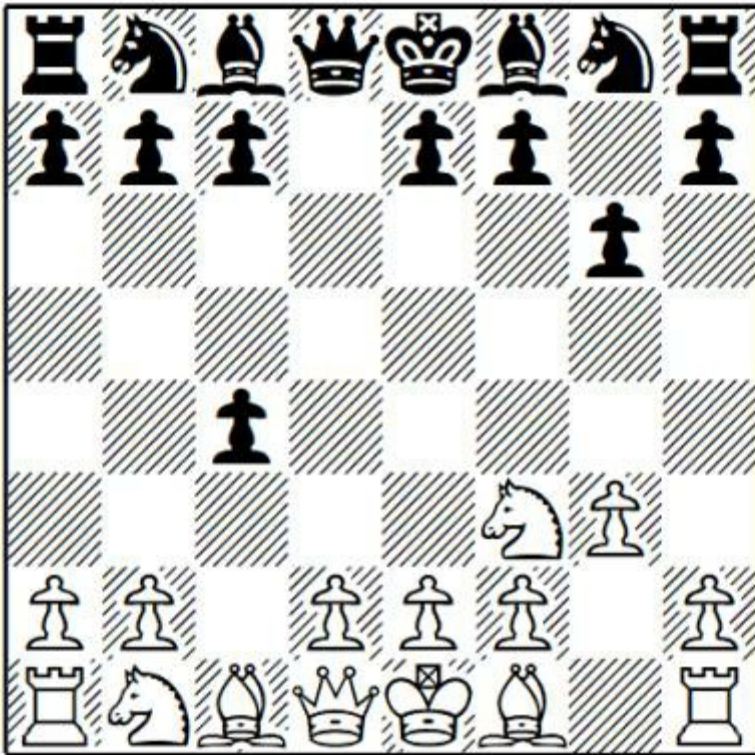
It's not immediately obvious (at least, not to me), but the opposite coloured bishop endgame is a draw. White gets his king to c1 in time, at the price of the d3-pawn, with a simple draw, while if Black tries to run with the a-pawn immediately, only he is taking any risk (since White can attack the h-pawn and divert the bishop by pushing his d-pawn), but the position remains drawn.

*Game 41*

**V.Laznicka-A.Giri**

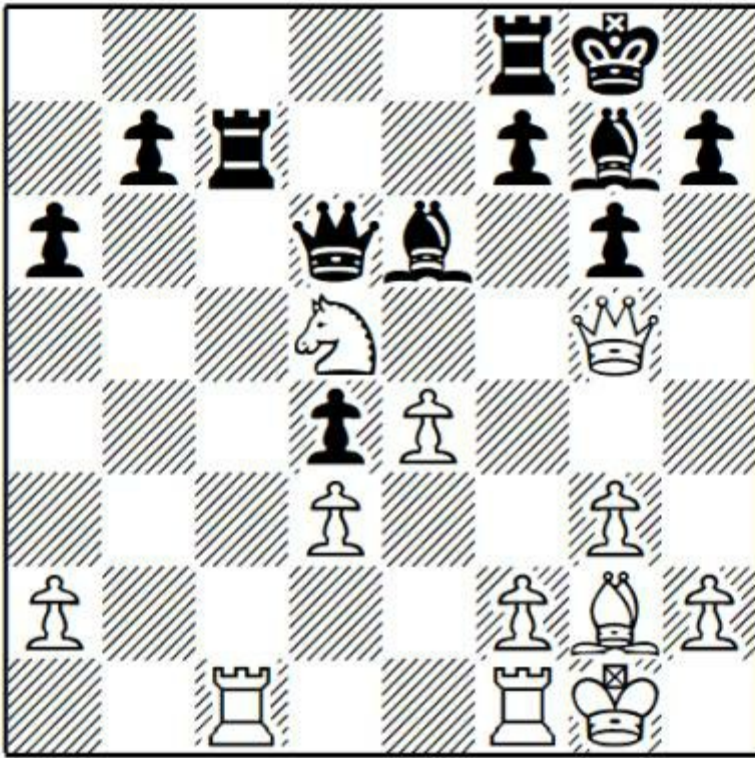
European Cup, Bilbao 2014

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 g6 3 c4 dxc4**



#### 4 Qa4+

4 Na3 Bg7 5 Nxc4 is an interesting alternative. In many Catalan type positions we saw that the knight was excellently placed on c4, but here Black's bishops are more active. I was very impressed by the following effort by Mamedyarov: 5 ... Nc6 6 d3 e5 7 Bd2 Nge7 (7 ... a5 8 Bg2 Nge7 9 Bc3 f6 was balanced in N.Grandelius-D.Anton Guijarro, Wijk aan Zee 2020) 8 b4 Be6 9 Rc1 Nd4 10 Bg2 Bd5 11 e4 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Be6 13 0-0 Nc6 14 Bc3 0-0 15 Qe3 Qd7 16 b5 Nd4 17 Bxd4 exd4 18 Qg5 a6 19 b6 Rac8 20 bxc7 (White has drifted into a slightly unpleasant position, and probably needed a better solution around here; 20 a4!? h6 21 Qd2 Bxc4 22 Rxc4 cxb6 23 Rb4 b5 24 axb5 a5 is unclear) 20 ... Rxc7 21 Nb6 Qd6 22 Nd5



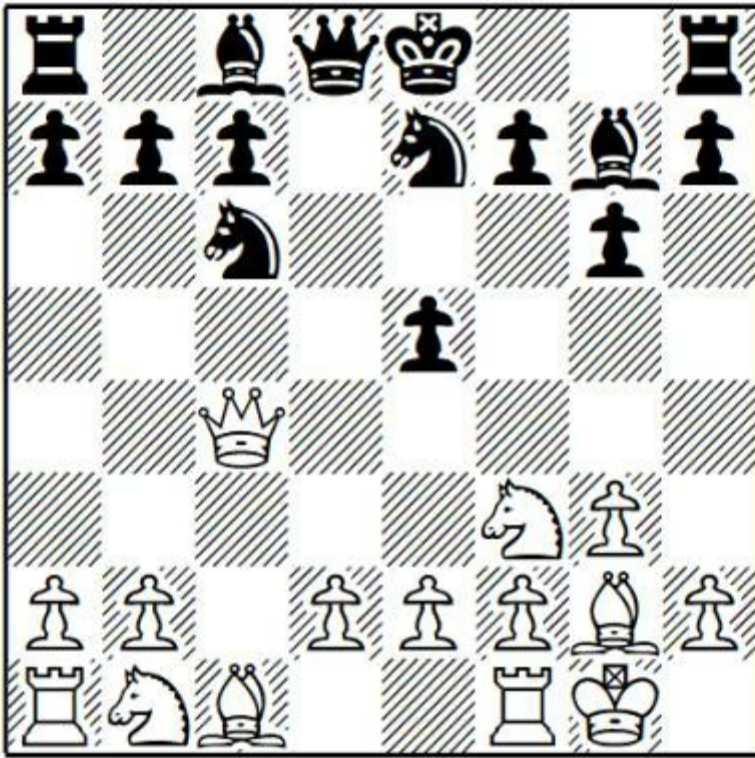
**Question:** How should Black continue?

**Answer:** 22 ... Rc3!. This is a marvelous exchange sacrifice. The rook exerts intolerable pressure on the c-file and the d3-pawn, while if it is captured, the passed c-pawn will be difficult to stop. Now:

a) 23 Rfe1 h6 24 Qd2 Rfc8 25 e5!? (trying to get some activity for his pieces) 25 ... Bxe5 26 Nxc3 dxc3 27 Qxh6 b5 28 Bh3 Re8 (28 ... Bg7 29 Qh4 Bxh3 30 Qxh3 Rd8 seems more accurate, followed by pushing pawns on the queenside) 29 Bxe6 Rxe6 30 Re4 Qxd3 31 Rce1 Qd5!? (Black could avoid structural damage with 31 ... Bg7, but 32 Qf4 Rxe4 33 Qxe4 Qd2 might end in a draw after 34 Qe2 Qd5 35 Qg4, for example 35 ... Qxa2 36 Re8+ Kh7 37 Qh4+ Bh6 38 Qd4 Bg7 with a repetition) 32 Qc1 Bd4 33 Rxe6 fxe6 34 Qc2 Kg7 35 Re4 e5 36 h4 a5 (the counterplay against the black king should be enough to secure a draw after 37 Rg4; instead, probably fatigued by the pressure he was under over the past several moves, White blunders) 37 Kh2?? Bxf2! (winning a pawn and exposing the white king, in addition to creating another passed pawn on e5) 38 Rg4 Qe6 39 Kh3 Qc6 40 Kh2 Qe6 41 Kh3 Bd4! 42 h5 e4! 43 Qd1 Bf6 44 Kh2 g5 45 Qe2 c2 46 Rxe4 Qc6 47 Re7+ Kf8 and White resigned in G.Oparin-S.Mamedyarov, Moscow 2017.

b) 23 Nxc3 dxc3 looks excellent for Black, for example 24 Qa5 b5! (24 ... Qxd3? allows counterplay with 25 e5) 25 Rfe1 Be5 (25 ... b4 26 e5 is again a major improvement of White's prospects) and White should probably return the exchange before Black consolidates with ... b4. 26 Rxc3 Bxc3 27 Qxc3 Rc8 28 Qd2 Qd4 White remains a pawn up for the moment, but his lack of activity and the threat of ... Rc3 (again!) means that Black is clearly better.

**4 ... Nc6 5 Bg2 Bg7 6 0-0 e5 7 Qxc4 Nge7**



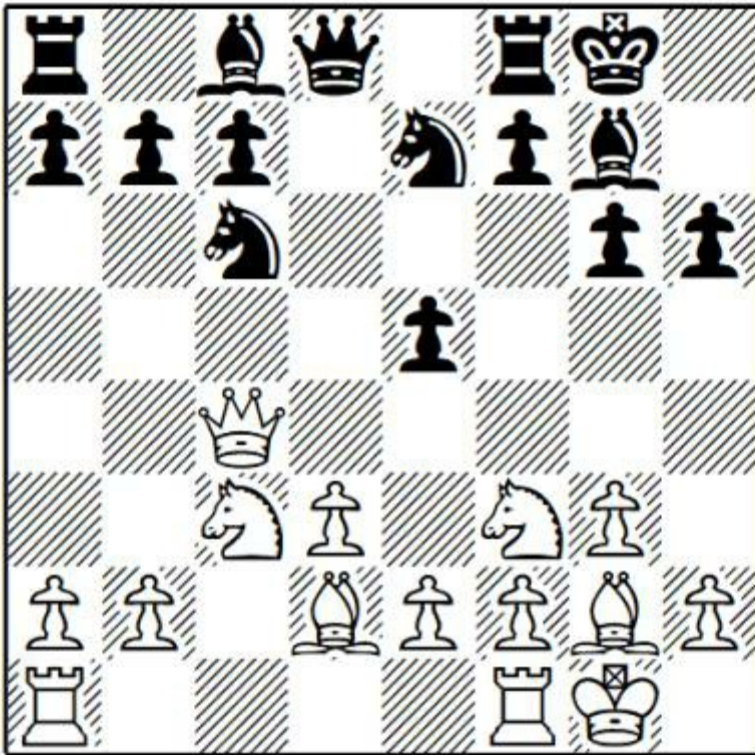
### 8 d3

8 Nc3 0-0 9 d3 is an alternative move order, where Black is best advised to transpose to the game with 9 ... h6! since 9 ... Be6 10 Qh4 f6 (10 ... Nf5 11 Qxd8 Rfxd8 12 Ng5 Bd7 13 Nge4 h6 14 b4 is given by Kotronias with some initiative for White, though Black is not worse) 11 Qa4 Qd7 12 Be3 Rad8 13 Rfc1 “can be described as a slight success for White, who can try to generate play by means of b4; the pawn on f6 obstructs the g7-bishop and reduces its influence over d4” (Kotronias)

### 8 ... h6

Obviously, anything Giri does in the opening is worth very close attention, and this might be the most accurate move order. As demonstrated by Anand in his 2013 match with Carlsen, control over g5 is important in this position. 8 ... 0-0 9 Bd2 Be6 (9 ... h6 10 Qh4 Nf5 11 Qxd8 Rxd8 with equality) 10 Qc1 Nf5 11 Nc3 Rb8 12 Ng5 Bd7 13 Nd5 (13 Re1 is level) 13 ... Ncd4 14 Re1 c6 15 Nc3 was played in E.Inarkiev-B.Gelfand, Magas 2016, and Black can establish a good Botvinnik setup with 15 ... c5!.

### 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Bd2



### 10 ... Be6

A move endorsed by both Krasenkow and Kotronias in their respective notes to game 3 of the Anand-Carlsen World Championship match in 2013.

The immediate 10 ... Nd4 also gave Anand a good position: 11 Nxd4 exd4 12 Ne4 c6 13 Bb4?! (13 Qc1! Kh7 14 Bb4 Bg4 15 Bf3 is given as level by Kotronias, though engines prefer Black) 13 ... Be6 14 Qc1 Bd5 15 a4 b6 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 a5 Rab8 18 Re1 Rfc8 19 axb6 axb6 was comfortable for Black in M.Carlsen-V.Anand, World Championship 2013 (Game 3).

### 11 Qh4?!

11 Qa4 is better, but Black has a wide choice of good moves. I like the straightforward attacking option 11 ... Qd7 (11 ... Nd4 12 Rac1 c6 13 Qa3 is given by Roiz, with approximate equality) 12 Rfc1 (12 Ne4! is better, with balanced chances after 12 ... Qc8 13 Nc5 Bg4) 12 ... f5 13 Qd1 Rad8 14 Rab1 Nd4 15 Ne1 c5 16 b3 b6. Black already has an ideal setup, and White failed to find the only opportunity for counterplay with 17 b4, instead preferring 17 Na4? Bd5 18 Bc3 Nec6 (18 ... f4! wins) 19 e3 Bxg2 20 Kxg2 Ne6 21 Qe2 f4 22 Rd1 Ng5 23 Ba1?! f3+ and White resigned in the blitz game A.Firouzja-I.Cheparinov, Doha 2016.

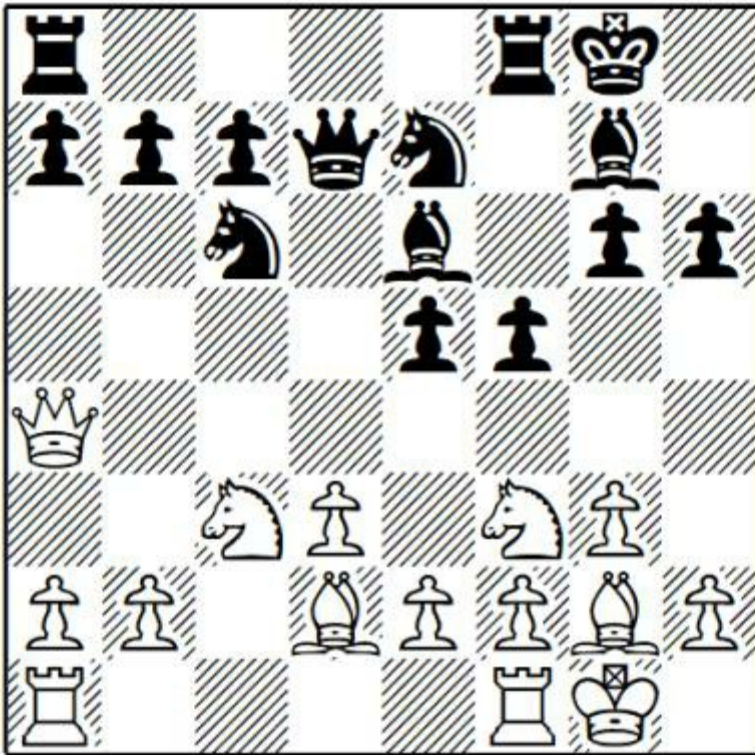
### 11 ... Qd7

Avoiding the level endgame after 11 ... Nf5!? 12 Qxd8 Rfxd8.

### 12 Qa4

Roiz gives 12 Rac1 g5 13 Qa4 f5 14 Ne1 (or 14 Be3 b6 15 Ne1 Rad8 16 Nc2 Nd4 with a strong initiative) 14 ... a6 15 Nc2 b5 16 Qa3 Rfb8 with a fine position for Black.

### 12 ... f5!



Already I think this has gone in a bad direction for White. Black's kingside play is more natural (and aimed at a higher prize, namely the white king) than the vague threat of pushing the b2-pawn.

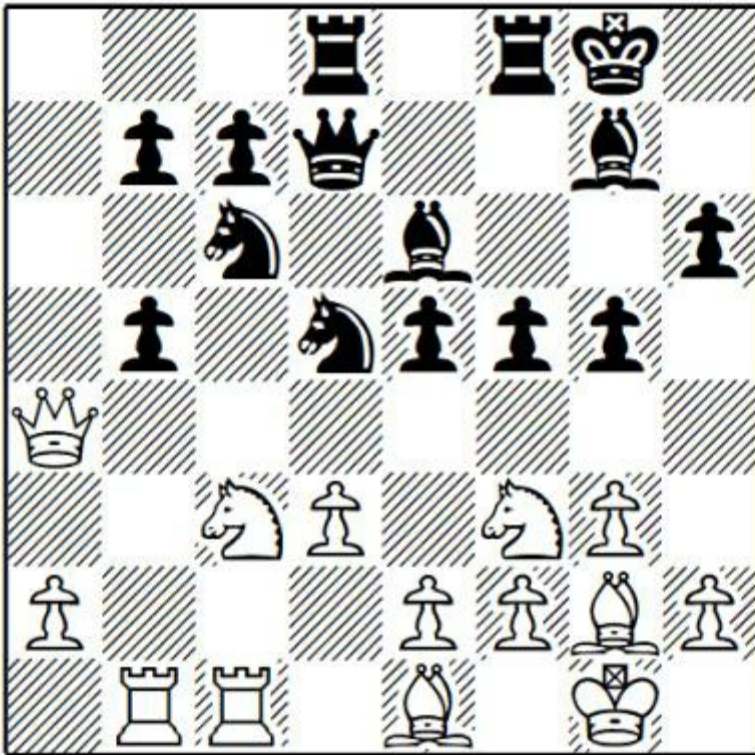
**13 Rfc1 Rad8 14 b4 a6!**

Prophylaxis against b5.

**15 Rab1 g5!?**

Continuing to methodically build on the kingside.

**16 Be1 Nd5 17 b5 axb5**



**18 Rxb5?**

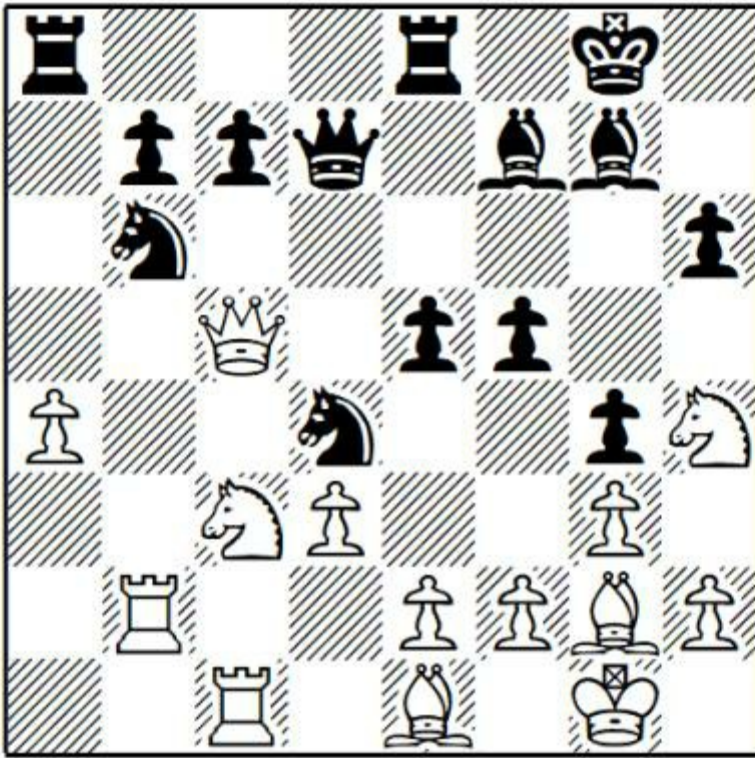
Roiz suggests 18 Qxb5! e4 19 dxe4 Nxc3 20 Bxc3 fxe4 21 Ne5 Bxe5 22 Bxe5 Rf5 23 Qxb7 Nxe5 24 Rxc7 Qd6 25 Bxe4, when White has reasonable drawing chances in view of the reduced material.

**18 ... Nb6! 19 Qa3 Ra8 20 Qc5 Rfe8!**

Improving his position and avoiding counterplay.

Roiz notes that 20 ... Bxa2 21 Nxa2 Rxa2 allows the tactical trick 22 Nxe5 (22 e3 is safer, but also gives Black an advantage) 22 ... Nxe5 23 Rxb6 cxb6 24 Qd5+ Qf7 25 Qd6 with counterplay, though Black retains the advantage with the computer line 25 ... Nc4!! 26 dxc4 Qf6

**21 a4 g4 22 Nh4 Nd4 23 Rb2 Bf7!**



Creating a horrible threat of ... Bf8, catching the white queen.

**24 Qa3**

Roiz suggests the more stubborn 24 Rxb6 cxb6 25 Qxb6 e4 26 dxe4 fxe4 27 e3 Nf3+ 28 Nxf3 exf3 29 Bf1 Rec8, though this also looks quite hopeless.

**24 ... Bf8! 25 Qa1 Nxa4 26 Nxa4 Rxa4 27 Qb1 Ba3 0-1**

A fine game by Giri.

*Game 42*

**V.Artemiev-F.Caruana**

Tata Steel, Wijk aan Zee 2020

We'll finish by taking a look at the final round of Caruana's wonderful performance at Wijk aan Zee 2020. Having taken advantage of some early luck (in particular, against Anand), Caruana started playing magnificently and won the tournament with a round to spare. He could easily have been forgiven for taking a quick draw, but no such thoughts appeared to enter his head.

**1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nd7 3 c4**

Others:

a) A few days later, Caruana lost a blitz game to Grischuk after 3 Bg2 e5 4 d3 (in his notes Sam Shankland suggested 4 0-0!? c6 5 c4 as interesting) 4 ... Ngf6 5 0-0 Bd6 6 c4 c6 7 cxd5 cxd5 8 e4 was unclear in A.Grischuk-F.Caruana, chess.com INT 2020.

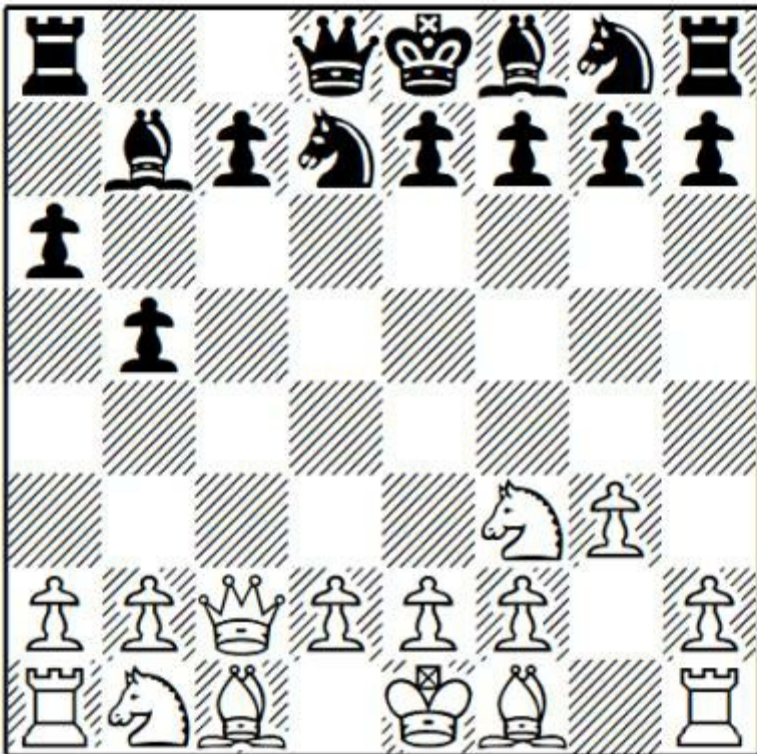
b) 3 d4 Nb6 4 Bg2 Bf5 5 0-0 e6 looks promising for White, although it led to an important black victory in S.Karjakin-K.Alekseenko, Douglas 2019.

**3 ... dxc4 4 Qa4**

Immediately going after the c4-pawn.

chesstouring.com

4 ... a6 5 Qxc4 b5 6 Qc2 Bb7



As GM Sam Shankland notes, “A general rule of thumb in the Catalan is that if Black can take on c4 and get his bishop to b7 with his pawn still on c7, he is almost always fine. This position is no exception.”

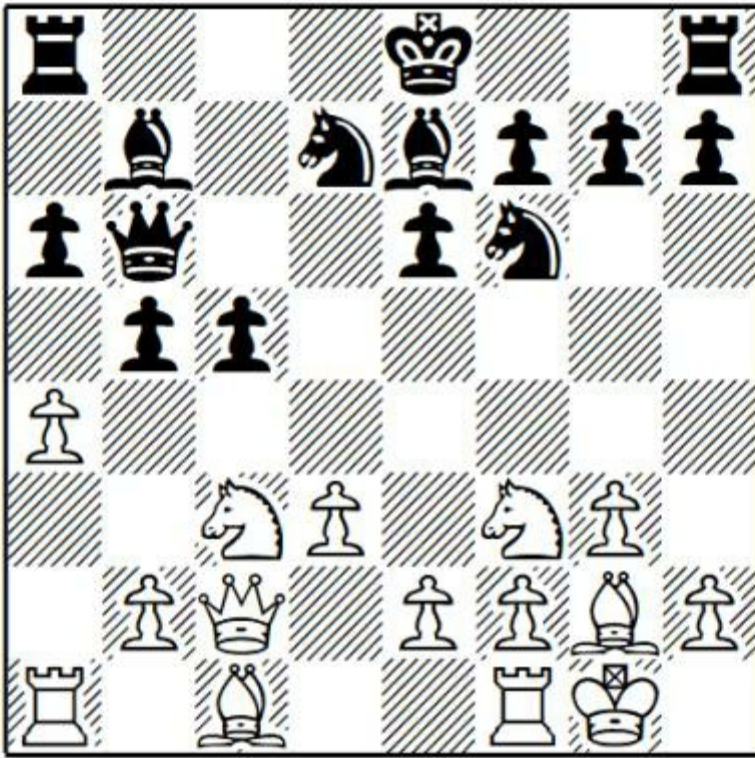
**7 Bg2 Ngf6 8 0-0 e6 9 d3**

This conservative setup is probably White’s best. Others:

a) As Shankland points out, 9 d4?! allows 9 ... c5 when White is already struggling to demonstrate equality.

b) 9 b3 Be7 10 Bb2 0-0 11 a4 c5 12 d3 Qb6 13 Nbd2 M.Vachier Lagrave-R.Wojtaszek, Beijing 2014 is a reasonable alternative.

**9 ... Be7 10 a4 c5 11 Nc3 Qb6**



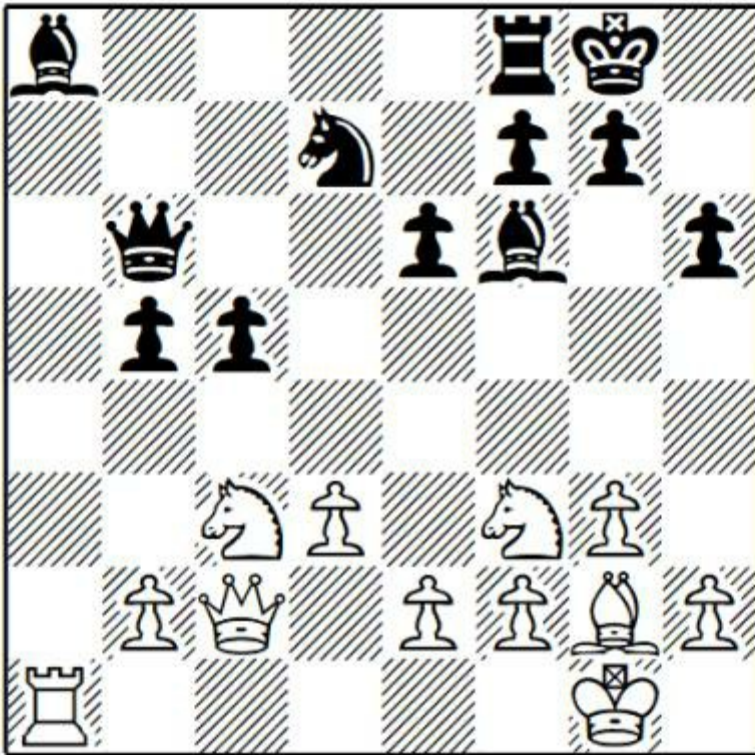
11 ... Bc6!? is suggested by the engines.

**12 axb5**

Logically opening the a-file to trade on a8 before Black has connected his rooks by castling. Others:  
 a) 12 Qb3 b4 (Svidler points out the engine recommendation of 12 ... 0-0!? 13 axb5 h6 followed by regaining the pawn on b5) is strategically dubious, since a white knight will be beautifully placed on c4. The following game is an excellent demonstration: 13 a5! (this is an important inclusion, preventing ... a5 by Black, which would consolidate his structure on the queenside) 13 ... Qd8 14 Nb1 Bd5 15 Qc2 0-0 16 Nbd2 Nb8 17 Rd1 Ra7 18 e4 Ba8 19 Nb3 Rc7 20 Be3 Nbd7 21 Qe2 Bc6 22 Nfd2 Bb5 23 Nc4 with an excellent position for White in H.Nakamura-V.Kramnik, Zuerich 2015.

b) Shankland points out an alternative plan with 12 e4!? and Be3, aiming for b4.

**12 ... axb5 13 Rxa8+ Bxa8 14 Bg5 0-0 15 Ra1 h6 16 Bxf6 Bxf6**



**Question:** Is Black simply better here, with more space and the bishop pair?

**Answer:** The position remains balanced. White has no weaknesses and control of the only open file in the position. Black's bishop pair will be "halved" once the light-squared bishops are exchanged. In Catalan structures White often exchanges his dark-squared bishop for a knight, aiming for an endgame where his knight can prove more effective than Black's dark-squared bishop (see Z.Ribli-A.Karpov, Amsterdam 1980 for a classic example, and see Svidler's comment at move 21 of the present game). However, a couple of inaccuracies quickly put Artemiev on the back foot.

**17 Nd2**

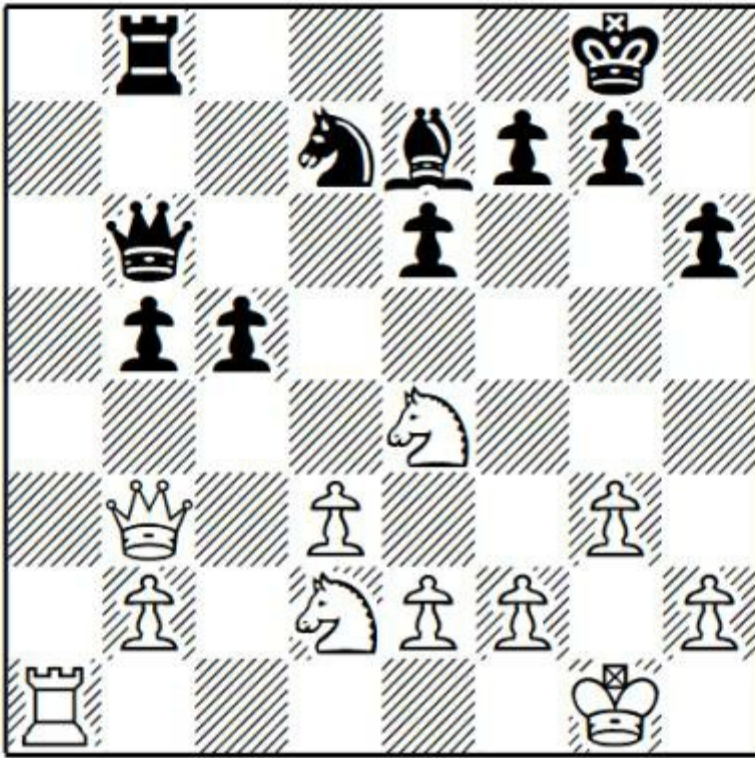
Not a bad move, but one which needs to be correctly followed up.

Shankland points out the more forcing attempt 17 Ne5 Nxe5 18 Rxa8 Rxa8 19 Bxa8, concluding "I suppose if anyone is more comfortable it is Black, with a little pressure on the queenside. But with no weaknesses and opposite-coloured bishops, I can't really imagine White losing."

**17 ... Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Rc8 19 Qb3 Rb8!?**

Caruana plays ambitiously. Svidler points out 19 ... c4 20 dxc4 Qc6+ 21 Kg1 bxc4 22 Qa4 as likely leading to "total annihilation and a draw."

**20 Nce4 Be7 21 Kg1?!**



This is a generally useful move (removing the king from the long diagonal, where it was exposed to checks), but doesn't address the main issue in the position.

Svidler and Shankland suggest 21 Qa2 Qc6 (21 ... f5 22 Nc3 Qc6+ 23 Nf3 is okay for White, since 23 ... Ne5? is well met by 24 Qa7! with a clear advantage) 22 Nf3 c4 23 Qa6. "This is like a typical Catalan endgame in which, if the queens get traded, Black is never better because the bishop on e7 is actually not a better piece than either of the white knights" says Svidler, who then points out a possible draw by repetition with 23 ... Qc7 24 Rc1 Rb6 25 Qa8+ Rb8 26 Qa6

**Question:** How can Black seize the initiative after 21 Kg1?

**21 ... f5! 22 Nc3 Ne5!**

**Answer:** Creating unpleasant pressure and threats of ... Bg5.

**23 h3**

Taking control of the g4-square, but now the idea of ... h5-h4 becomes more attractive for Black.

**23 ... h5 24 Nf3?!**

It's very understandable to want to trade the e5-knight, which is putting a lot of pressure on White's position. Perhaps Artemiev also hoped to gain counterplay down the half-open e-file against the backward e6-pawn. But this move gives Black a permanent, structural advantage, without significantly reducing his dynamic potential.

The solid 24 h4 (Shankland) was a better defence.

**24 ... Nxf3+ 25 exf3**

Now White has a weak d3-pawn, while Black can advance his kingside pawns to create another weakness.

**25 ... Bf6**

Putting the bishop on its perfect diagonal, where it exerts pressure on the queenside. If it comes to d4, it can combine with the other black pieces to exert pressure on b2.

Svidler prefers the engine suggestion of 25 ... h4 26 g4 g6 followed by ... Kf7.

**26 Re1 Kf7 27 Ne2**

Svidler points out 27 h4!, giving a sample line of 27 ... Rd8 28 Nxb5! Rb8 29 Qc4 Qxb5 30 Qxe6+ Kg6 31 g4!! with sufficient counterplay to save the game.

**Question:** Prophylactic thinking is a key skill in chess, as wonderfully taught by the late Mark Dvoretsky in many of his books and articles. What does White want after 27 Ne2, and how can Black prevent it?

**Answer:** White wants to play his knight to f4, hitting the pawns on e6 and h5, and then consolidate the knight's position with h4. So ...

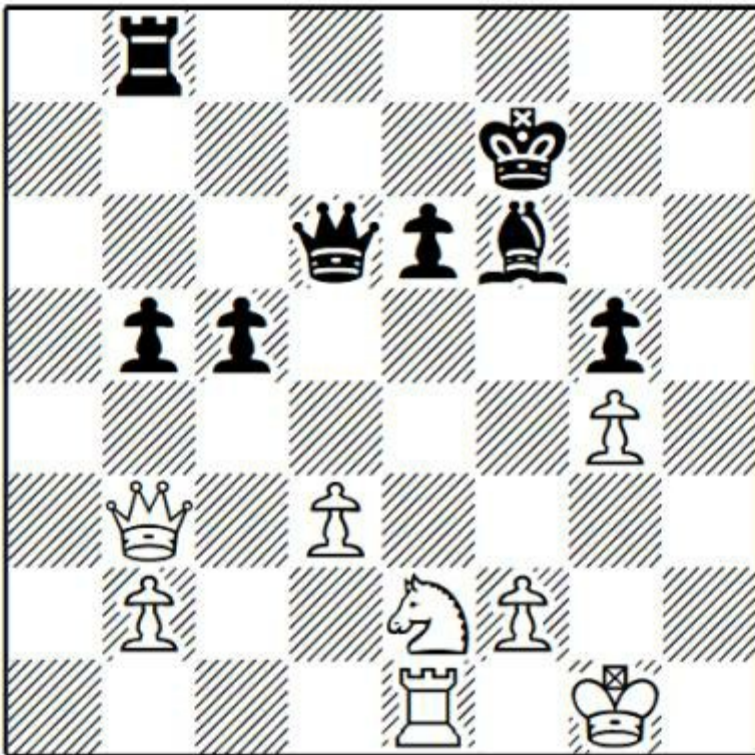
**27 ... g5!**

Restricting the knight and offering Black aggressive opportunities on the kingside. 27 ... h4! was also strong and is even slightly preferred by the engines. The idea is similar, to prevent White from consolidating a knight on f4. Now 28 Nf4? Re8 will be followed by ... g5, driving the knight away.

**28 g4!**

A very impressive move by Artemiev, correctly fighting for some squares (e4 in particular) for his knight. As well as being the strongest move objectively, 28 g4 has the benefit of changing the character of the play (a key skill when a position is trending in an unfavourable direction).

**28 ... hxg4 29 hxg4 fxg4 30 fxg4 Qd6**



**31 Ng3**

Shankland points out the more accurate route 31 Nc3! Rh8 32 Qxb5 but fairly observes “Of course, this variation is easier to find with an engine running.”

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### 31 ... Qd5!

Centralising the queen while taking control of key squares on the kingside.

### 32 Qc2

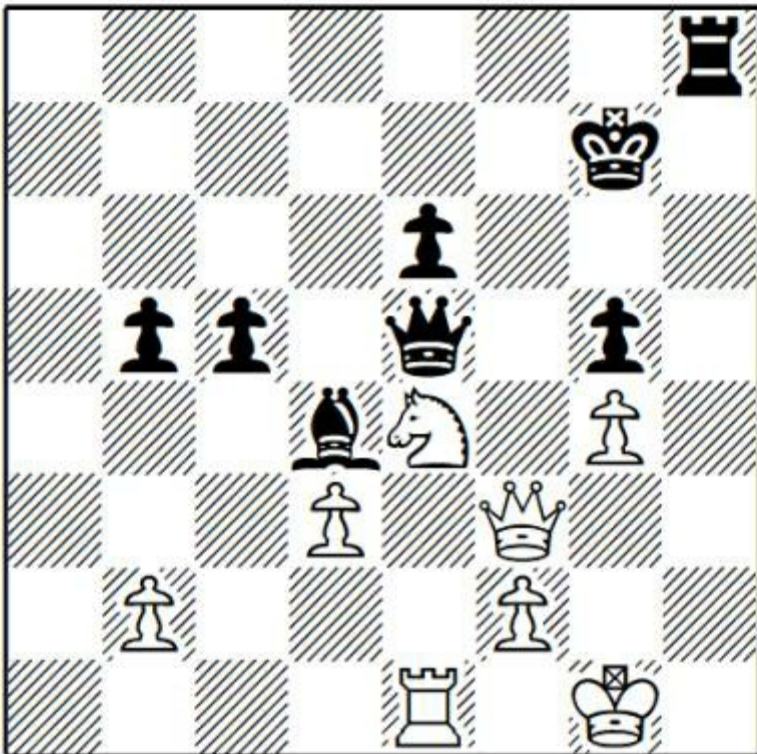
The white queen retreats since the exchange on d5 is clearly unfavourable.

32 Qxd5? exd5 improves Black's structure and leaves White facing an unpleasant defence in the endgame.

### 32 ... Bd4 33 Qe2

The immediate 33 Ne4 was a good alternative since, if Black continues as in the game with 33 ... Rh8, White can consolidate with 34 Qc1! Kg6 35 Kg2 followed by f3 or Rh1.

### 33 ... Rh8 34 Ne4 Qe5 35 Qf3+ Kg7



### 36 b3?

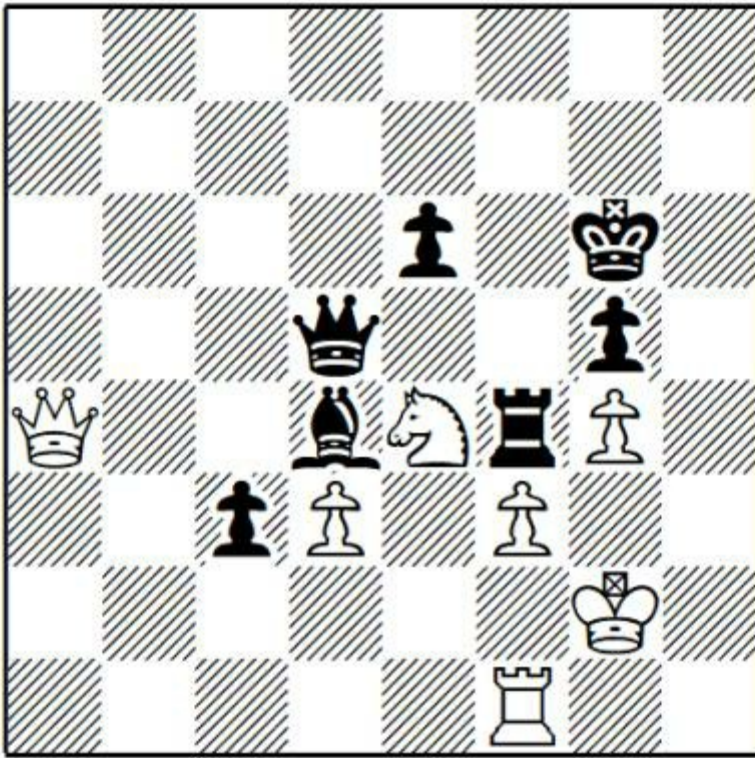
As we will see in the game, weakening the second rank has very serious consequences. As Svidler notes, Black retains pressure even after the engine suggestion of 36 Re2 (which almost looks like an attempt at help mate) 36 ... Qh2+ 37 Kf1 Rf8 38 Qg2 Qf4. Shankland's suggested 36 Kf1! is also better than Artemiev's choice.

### 36 ... Rf8 37 Qe2

The queen is forced to this square, since 37 Qg2?? Bxf2+ is unfortunate.

### 37 ... Qd5 38 Rf1 Kg6 39 Qd1 c4! 40 bxc4 bxc4 41 Kg2 Ba7

Svidler notes the strongest continuation 41 ... Rf4! 42 f3 c3, when the weakened second rank will lead to White's collapse, and gives the following sample line. 43 Qa4, threatening counterplay with Qe8+.



**Question:** How should

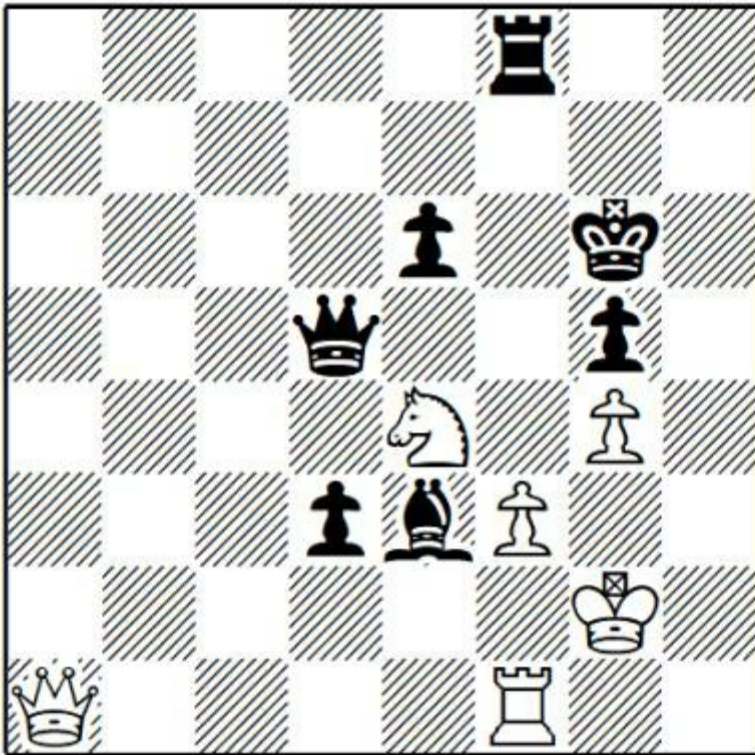
Black respond to 43 Qa4?

**Answer:** 43 ... Rf8! covering the e8 square while threatening to infiltrate on the second rank via h8, b8 or a8, for example 44 Ra1 Rh8 45 Qc4 Rb8 with a winning advantage.

**42 f3 cxd3 43 Qa1?**

As Svidler points out, in blitz (a discipline in which he excels) Artemiev would have played 43 Qd2 without thinking. Here he was likely scared by 43 ... Rf4 (43 ... Rc8 44 Rc1 Rxc1 45 Qxc1, when thanks to the blocking knight on e4, the pawn weaknesses on g5 and d3, and the reduced material, White should hold without difficulty, as Svidler notes) 44 Rd1 Rxe4 45 fxe4 Qxe4+ but, as your engine will tell you, White holds with only moves: 46 Kg3! Bb8+ 47 Kf2! and Black has nothing better than repeating moves.

**43 ... Be3**



#### 44 Rd1??

The decisive mistake, characterised by Svidler (in combination with 43 Qa1) as “fancy play syndrome.” Instead:

a) 44 Qa3 Ra8 45 Qe7 Qe5 wins for Black, as given by Svidler.

b) 44 Qe1!! was the only saving move, for example 44 ... Qa2+ (44 ... Qd4 45 Qa1! and the endgames are acceptable for White, while 44 ... Bf4 can be met by 45 Qc3) 45 Nf2 Bxf2 46 Qe4+! (an important intermediate move, since Black retains a serious advantage after 46 Rxf2 Qd5!, though White retains drawing chances due to the reduced material) 46 ... Kg7 47 Rxf2 with equality.

**44 ... Qc4!**

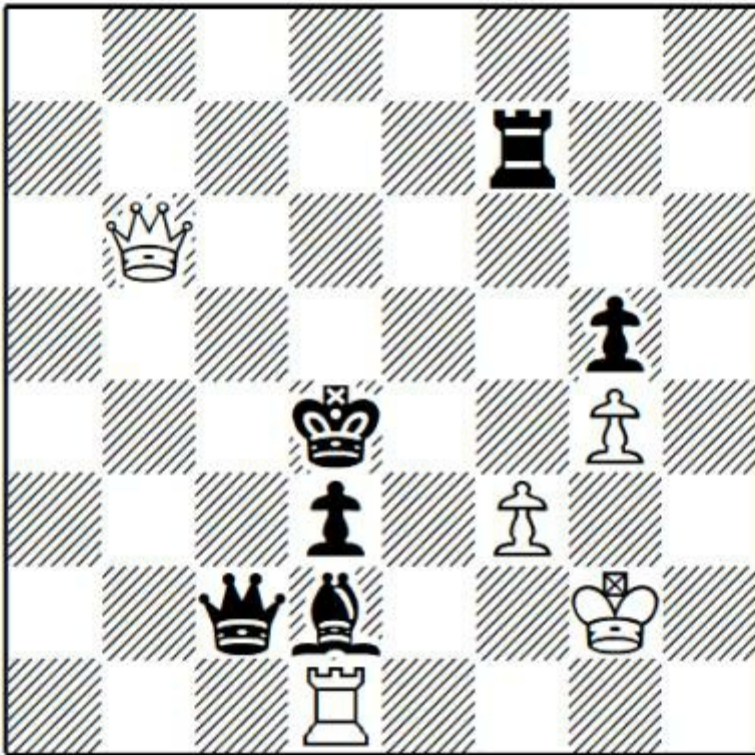
44 ... Qb3 was equally strong. The black queen infiltrates on the second rank.

**45 Qc3**

45 Nd2 Bxd2 (45 ... Qc2 46 Qe5 Bxd2 transposes to the game) 46 Rxd2 Rxf3 47 Kxf3 Qf4+ “and Black just collects everything with checks” (Svidler)

**45 ... Qa2+ 46 Nd2 Qc2 47 Qe5**





**57 ... Kc4**

Not 57 ... Kc3?? 58 Qa5+, as Svidler points out.

**58 Qe6+ Kc3 59 Qe5+ Kb3 60 Qd5+ Kb2 61 Qb5+ Bb4+**

A discovered check which ends White's attack, and the game.

**62 Kg3 Qxd1 63 Qxb4+ Qb3 64 Qd2+ Kb1 65 Qe1+ Kc2 66 Qf2+ d2 0-1**

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