

Crucial Chess Skills for the Club Player

Robert Ris

Volume 1



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By

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Key to Symbols used

!	a good move	+—	White has a decisive advantage
?	a weak move	—+	Black has a decisive advantage
!!	an excellent move	→	with an attack
??	a blunder	↑	with an initiative
!?	an interesting move	↔	with counterplay
?!	a dubious move	Δ	with the idea of
□	only move	△	better is
=	equality	≤	worse is
∞	unclear position	N	novelty
±	White stands slightly better	+	check
∓	Black stands slightly better	#	mate
±	White has a serious advantage	∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
∓	Black has a serious advantage		

Preface

From all the sorts of activities I keep myself busy with in the chess world (playing, organizing, commentating, writing, teaching etc.) I consider myself mostly a professional chess trainer. The majority of my students are rated somewhere between 1500-2200 and have the ambition of improving their play. I dare to say that players within that range of strength are most likely to learn a thing or two from studying the material in my first book. In any case, it has been my aim presenting the material in such a way that it would be understandable for a broad target group.

It has always surprised me that most people of this particular group of ambitious amateurs associate chess improvement with working on openings. I'm not disagreeing that mastering openings does harm your chess, but it's in my opinion the least efficient method to improve someone's play. After all, everybody is able to learn 25 moves of opening theory by heart and spoil a brilliant opening preparation with a mistake on move 26, wasting all the efforts...

Therefore, in my own lessons I prefer to focus on aspects which can significantly stimulate your practical abilities and decision making process. I have decided to divide Crucial Chess Skills for the Club Player into three parts: Endgame (Chapter 1- 4), Tactical Play (chapter 5 & 6) and Middlegame Strategy (Chapter 7-9).

The endgame part of the book mostly concentrates on rook endgames. I believe that every player needs to possess the knowledge of some elementary positions. This essential knowledge not only enriches your understanding of the game, but also gives confidence playing endgames in general. In the subsequent chapters 2 & 3 attention will be paid to more practical examples with an extra passed pawn and the importance of the pawnstructures. A recurring theme in endgames is the transition into a pawn ending, so I thought it would be a good idea to add an extra chapter on this topic as well.

In Chapter 5 & 6 I have tried to point some key principles concerning tactical play and which elements have to be taken into account when seizing the initiative. Most examples have recently been played and it's not a big surprise that a number of games from Aronian have been examined. For me personally, his games are the greatest source of inspiration on this topic!

In the section on Middlegame Strategy it has been my aim to make the reader more conscious about some positional aspects of the game. In chapter 7 the theme of trapped pieces has been worked out in depth and you will see some striking examples where even the world's greatest players fail to take care of mobility of their own pieces. In chapter 8 attention has been given to the principle of a weak square. How can you exploit such a weakness and how do you deal with it? In the final chapter 9 I'm quite pleased presenting the reader some examples from my own practice. I think it could be both fun and instructive to empathize with someone's else thinking process.

At last, I would like to thank Thinkers Publishing for giving me the opportunity sharing my knowledge of the game with the reader. Hope you will enjoy reading this book!

Robert Ris
December 2017

Chapter 1

Elementary rook endgames

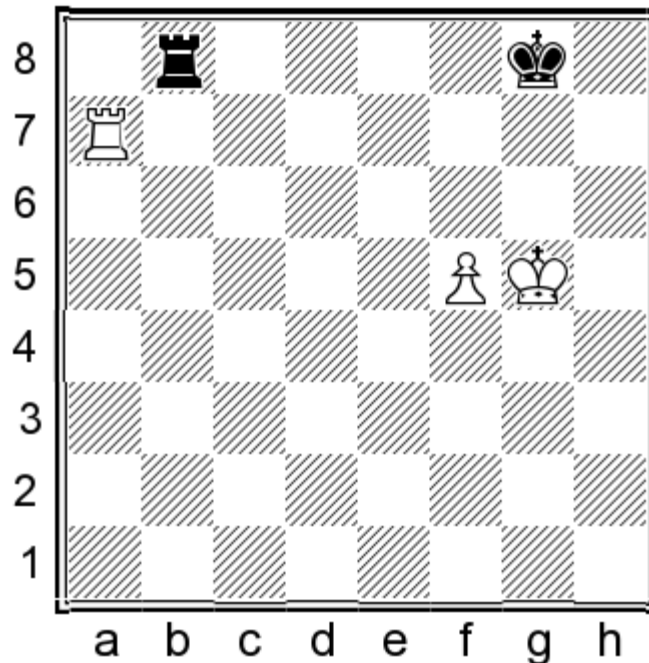
Whether you like it or not, mastering rook endgames is in my opinion one of the main keys for chess improvement. I enjoyed studying openings more in my younger days, but in most training sessions I had with different coaches over the years, more attention was paid to studying endgames (and for a good reason!).

In this chapter the focus will be on some basic rook+pawn vs. rook endgames. We will discuss four types: the Philidor Position, Lucena Position, Frontal Attack and Vancura Position. By studying these specific types of rook endgames your understanding of rook endgames in general will increase significantly, which will also benefit you when working through Chapters 2 and 3 which are about practical rook endings.

A valuable lesson taught by Philidor

Philidor 6th Rank

In the year of 1777 the Frenchman introduced an elementary drawing method in rook endgames by cutting off the king along the 6th rank.



Black to move

1...Rb6!

Preventing the white king penetrating the 6th rank. Passive defence isn't recommended, in view of 1...Rc8? 2.Kg6! (But not 2.f6? Rc1 and Black is in time to start giving checks from behind.) 2...Rb8 3.f6 Rc8 4.Rg7+ Kf8 5.Rh7! (the key move! If we move the pawn from f6 to g6 or h6 this manoeuvre wouldn't have worked, and the passive setup is sufficient for a draw) 5...Kg8 6.f7+ Kf8 7.Rh8+ and White wins.

After the text, White's only chance to make progress is advancing the f-pawn, since transferring the rook to the 6th rank leads to a drawn pawn ending.

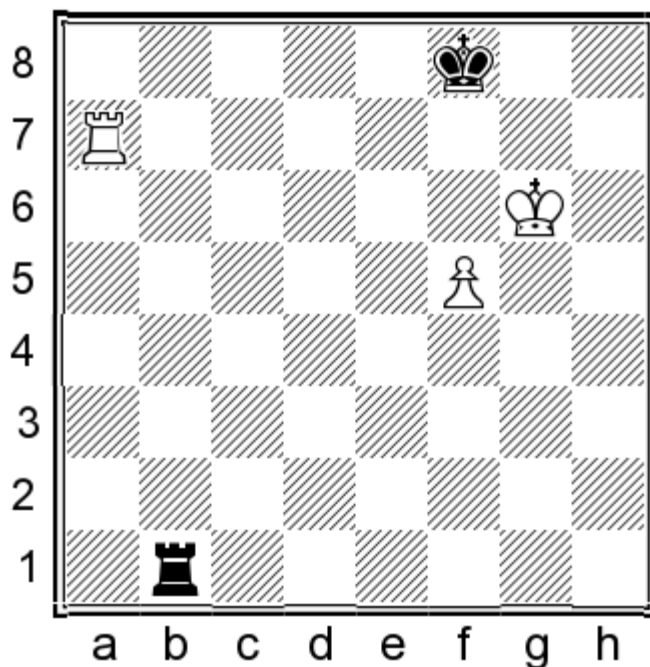
1...Rb6! 2.f6 Rb1!

White's king can no longer use the f-pawn as a shelter (umbrella) against the rain of checks.

3.Kg6 Rg1+ 4.Kf5 Rf1+ 5.Ke6 Re1+ 6.Kd6 Kf8

And White can't make any progress.

Philidor Short/Long Side



Black to move

Sometimes the weaker side is unable to prevent the opponent's king crossing the 6th rank. Fortunately, there is another drawing mechanism which can be applied in such situations.

1...Rf1!

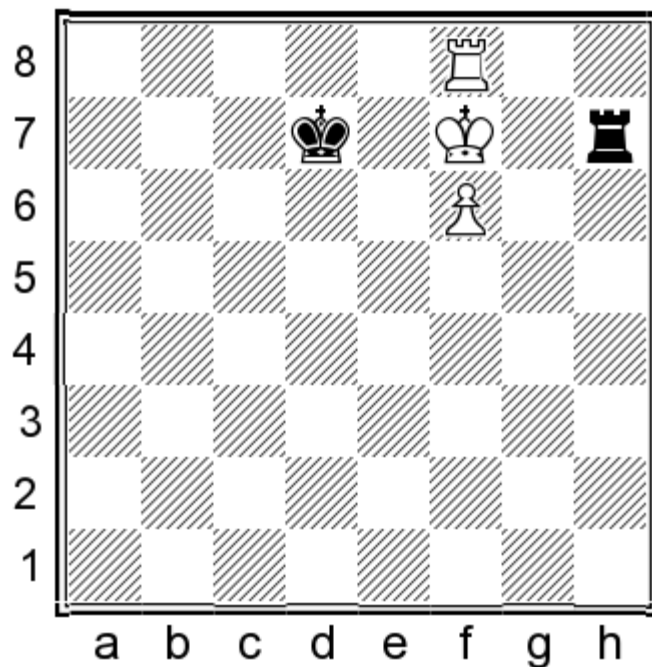
Attacking the passed pawn from the rear suffices as well. It's too late for 1...Rb6+? because of 2.f6 and White wins as we've seen in the previous example.

1...Rf1! 2.Kf6

2.f6?! eases Black's task, as now he can start giving checks again: 2...Rg1+=

2...Kg8!

As a rule of thumb, the king must go to the shorter side, leaving the longer side for the rook to attack the opponent's king. Actually 2...Ke8? would have been the losing continuation. 3.Ra8+ Kd7 4.Rf8! (Not 4.Kg6? Ke7! and the f-pawn has been brought to a halt again, as 5.Ra7+ Kf8 transposes to the main line.) 4...Rh1 5.Kg7 Rg1+ 6.Kf7 Rh1 7.f6 Rh7+



Position after: 7...Rh7+

Then becomes clear why giving checks from the shorter side are usually not sufficient for holding the game. After this quick adventure the rook has to be retreated again. 8.Kg6 Rh1 9.Rg8 (Too hasty is 9.f7? Rg1+! and Black secures a draw by giving checks.) 9...Rg1+ (9...Ke6 10.Re8+ Kd7 11.f7 and the f-pawn promotes.) 10.Kf7 Rf1 11.Rg6 Rf2 12.Kf8 Ke6 13.f7+ Kd7 14.Rg7 Rf1 15.Kg8 Ke7 16.f8=Q+ and White wins.

3.Ra8+ Kh7 4.Rf8

The other attempt to mobilize the passed pawn by 4.Ke6 can easily be met with 4...Kg7! 5.Ra7+ Kf8 6.Kf6 (6.f6 Re1+=) 6...Kg8!= and we are already familiar with this position.

4...Ra1!

The rook belongs on the longer side, as the distance to the king is too far.

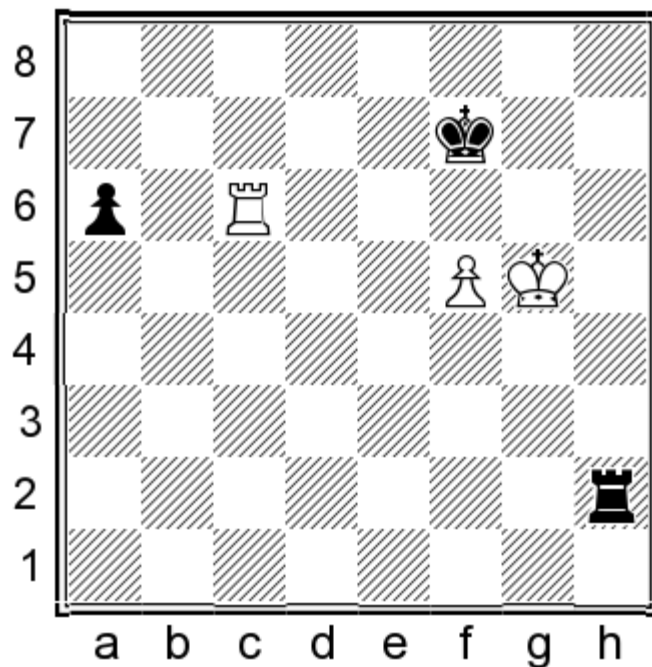
5.Re8

5.Ke7 Ra7+ 6.Kd6 Kg7 easily draws as well.

5...Rf1 6.Re7+ Kg8

And White cannot make any progress.

Pogonina, Natalija (2451)
 Soumya, Swaminathan (2302)
 Mardin 2011



White to move

Now that we've become aware of some elementary positions, it's worth having a look at a practical example. The current position differs from the previous two, as Black has an additional a-pawn. However, such an extra pawn is normally only an obstacle in the defensive process and Black better get rid of it.

57.Rc7+

Playing rook endgames actively is generally a first step in the right direction. Nothing can be gained from 57.Rxa6?! Rg2+ and Black draws on the spot.

57.Rc7+ Kg8 58.Ra7

The alternative 58.Kg6 can be answered with 58...Rg2+ 59.Kf6 Rf2! and Black draws in a similar way as has been shown in the second illustrative example.

58...Ra2?!

Objectively there's nothing wrong with this move, but it's a first sign that Black doesn't want to give up her a-pawn without a struggle. Again 58...Rg2+ 59.Kf6 Rf2 would have led to a basic drawn position.

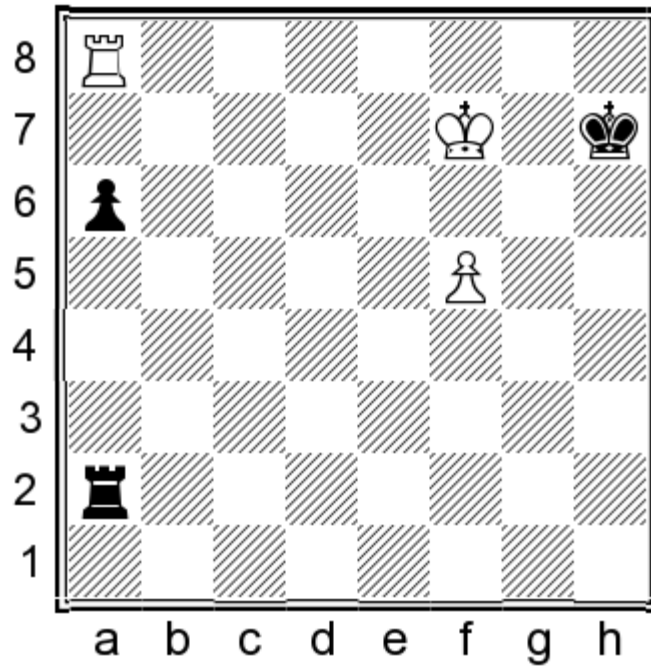
59.Kg6

59.f6 allows Black to give checks from behind after 59...Kf8 60.Kg6 Rg2+=

59...Rg2+ 60.Kf6 Ra2

Still, I would have preferred 60...Rf2 not caring about the a-pawn.

61.Ra8+ Kh7 62.Kf7



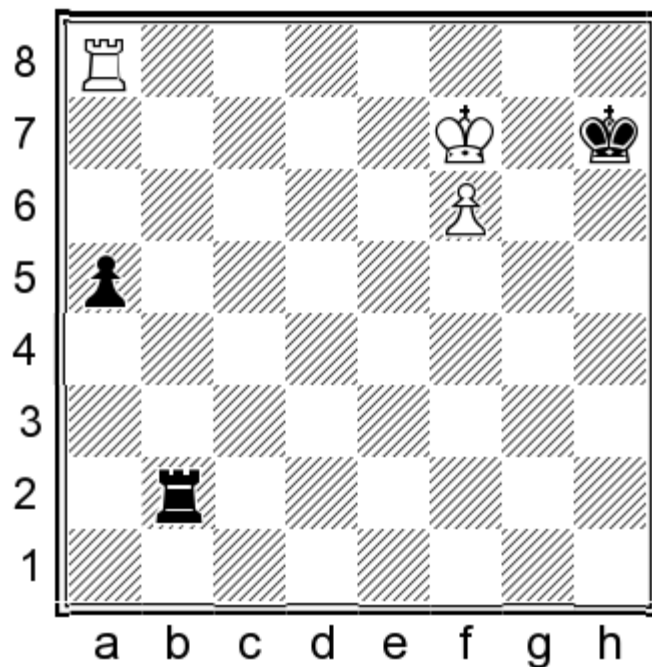
Position after: 62.Kf7

A very critical moment, as White suddenly threatens to push forward his f-pawn. Can Black do the same with her own passed pawn or should she take some drastic measures?

62...a5?

Black isn't aware of the dangers and carelessly strives for her own chances. In fact, it's the decisive mistake! However, it wasn't too late to hold the draw, if Black had chosen to activate her rook and abandon the protection of her passed pawn. Correct would have been 62...Rb2! intending to give checks from the side. 63.Rxa6 (63.f6 Rb7+ 64.Ke6 Rb6+ and when the king runs away, the black king will pick up the f-pawn.) 63...Rb7+ 64.Ke6 as long as the white rook is on the 6th rank, preventing Black from attacking her king, Black can just make waiting moves like 64...Rc7! ready to meet 65.f6 with 65...Kg6=

63.f6 Rb2



Position after: 63...Rb2

64.Kf8!

White totally ignores the a-pawn, which she has been doing for a long time now. 64.Rxa5? allows Black to draw with 64...Rb7+ 65.Ke6 Kg6=

64...a4

After 64...Kg6 White wins by means of 65.f7 Rf2 66.Ra7 (Not 66.Kg8? Rxf7 67.Ra6+ when Black still has 67...Rf6=) 66...Kh7 67.Ke8 and next, the f-pawn promotes.

65.f7!

Time plays still an important role, as 65.Rxa4? leads to a draw after 65...Kg6 66.f7 Rb8+ 67.Ke7 Rb7+ 68.Ke6 Rxf7 69.Rg4+ Kh5 70.Kxf7 Kxg4=

65...a3

Cutting off the escape route for the king with 65...Re2 can be answered by 66.Re8 Rf2 67.Ke7 and White wins.

66.Ke7 Re2+ 67.Kd6 1-0

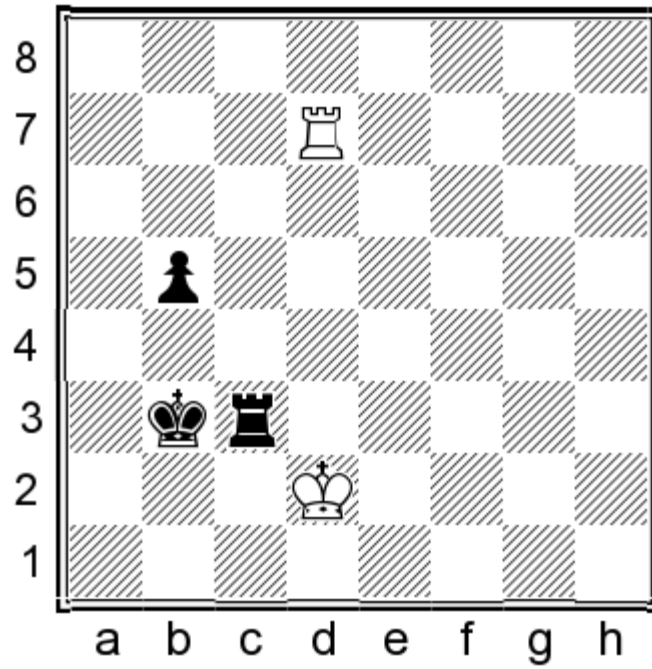
Lucena position

Gashimov, Vugar (2746)

Aronian, Levon (2808)

Monaco 2011

Black's extra b-pawn can count on the support of its king and rook. The latter ensures the opponent's king can't get in front of the pawn, something which would usually guarantee a draw. Black's main plan in certain positions is to push the b-pawn while the king assists.



Black to move

62...b4 63.Rb7 Ka3 64.Ra7+

It is worth realising that there's no way of stopping the b-pawn. If White decides to make a waiting move like 64.Rb8 Black retreats his rook first with 64...Rc7 before touching the pawn.

64...Kb2 65.Rb7 b3 66.Rb8 Rc7 67.Rd8

After 67.Rb6 Rd7+ the king has to go to the next file, losing sight of the b-pawn.

67...Kb1 68.Rb8 b2

68...Rd7+? is obviously bad now, because of 69.Kc3 and the last remaining pawn will disappear.

69.Ra8

White decides to control the a-file, thereby not allowing the king to escape. After e.g. 69.Rb6 Black can proceed with 69...Ra7! 70.Rb8 Ka1 71.Kc2 Rc7+ and the pawn promotes.

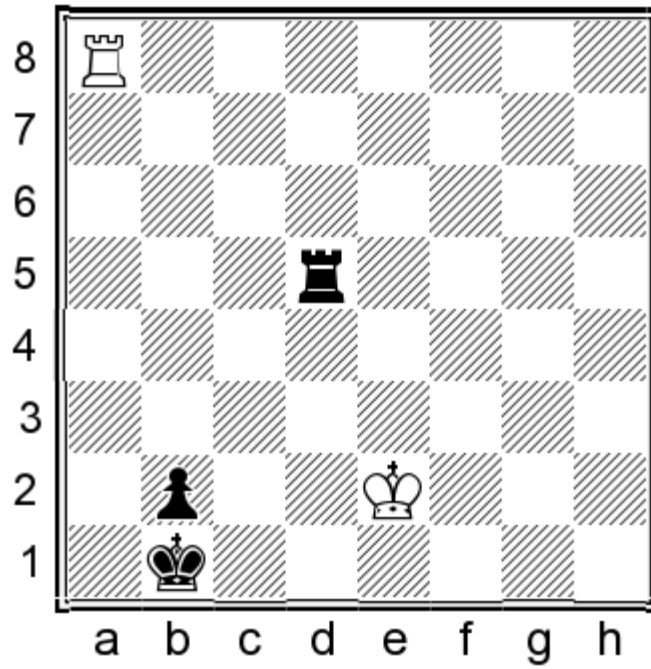
69...Rd7+!

The only way to make progress.

70.Ke2

In case of 70.Kc3 Kc1! the b-pawn queens as well.

70...Rd5!



Position after: 70...Rd5!

The absolute key move in this winning procedure. Black intends to create an umbrella against all the coming checks when the king leaves the promotional square. It's still too early for the king to leave his base, because of the following line 70...Kc2 71.Rc8+ Kb3 72.Rb8+ Kc3 73.Rc8+ Kb4 74.Rb8+ Ka3 75.Ra8+ Kb3 76.Rb8+ Ka2 77.Ra8+ Kb1 78.Rb8 and the same position has been reached. Fortunately for Black, he still has 78...Rd5! at his disposal.

71.Ra7

After 71.Rb8 Kc2 72.Rc8+ Kb3 73.Rb8+ Kc3 74.Rc8+ Kb4! 75.Rb8+ Rb5! the umbrella strategy has succeeded!

71...Kc2 72.Rc7+ Kb3 73.Rb7+ Ka3 74.Ke3

In case of 74.Rb8 the simplest way to convert the win is 74...Rd4 followed by 75...Rb4.

74...Ra5! 0-1

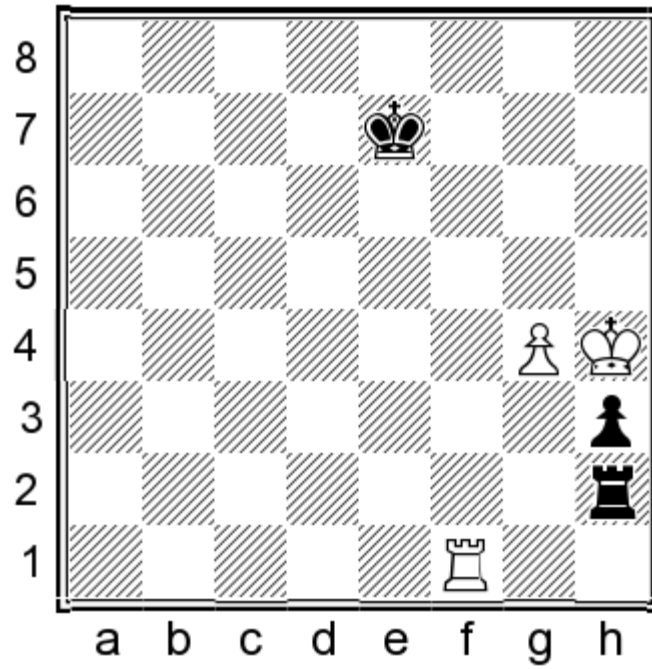
A) 74...Ra5! and White resigned, because of 75.Kd2 Ka2 76.Kc2 Rc5+ 77.Kd2 b1=Q 78.Ra7+ Kb2 79.Rb7+ Ka1! 80.Ra7+ Qa2+ and all the fun is over.

B) Less convincing, however, is 74...Rd1? 75.Ra7+ Kb4 76.Rb7+ Kc3 77.Rc7+ Kb3 78.Rb7+ Kc2 79.Rc7+ Kb1 because the process must be repeated.

Vitiugov, Nikita (2709)

Ghaem Maghami, Ehsan (2594)

Emsdetten 2011



Black to move

This example displays some similarities to the previous one. The black king is cut off from the f-file and hence unable to approach White's passed pawn. Black also has a pawn on h3, but after White's last move, 75.Kg5-h4, threatening Kg3, it's becoming clear that it will soon fall.

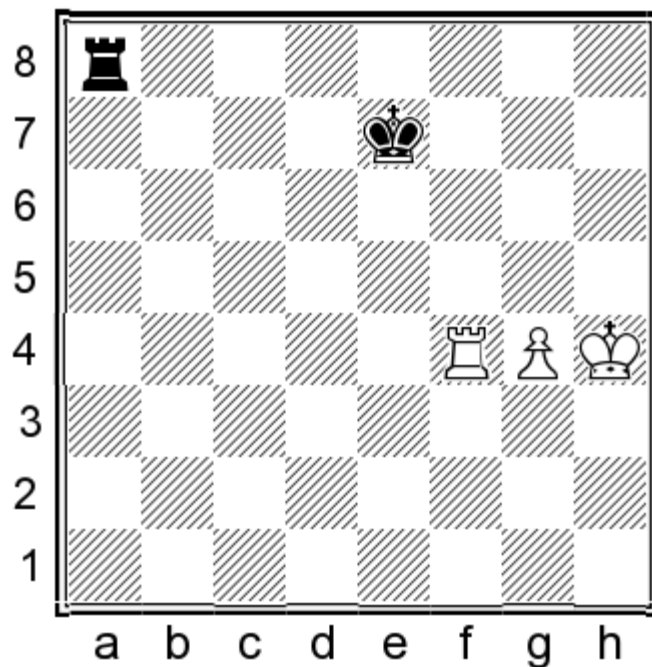
75...Re2?

The decisive error, wasting an important tempo. Black should put his rook on the other side: 75...Ra2! 76.Kxh3 Ra8!

A) White can advance his g-pawn 77.g5 but that would allow Black to offer an exchange of the rooks with 77...Rf8! 78.Rxf8 Kxf8 79.Kg4 Kg7 which results in a draw. If White avoids the exchange, the black king can cross the f-file and get in front of the g-pawn.

B) 77.Kh4 Rh8+ 78.Kg5 Rg8+ 79.Kh5 Rh8+ 80.Kg6 Rg8+! and White is unable to make progress since the king is bound to the protection of the g4-pawn. Or rather, we could state that the checking distance is too long.

75...Re2? 76.Kxh3 Ra2 77.Kh4 Ra8 78.Rf4!



Position after: 78.Rf4!

An excellent idea. The rook protects the pawn, enabling the king to advance.

78.g5 again allows 78...Rf8! while 78.Kg5 Rg8+! once more leads nowhere for White.

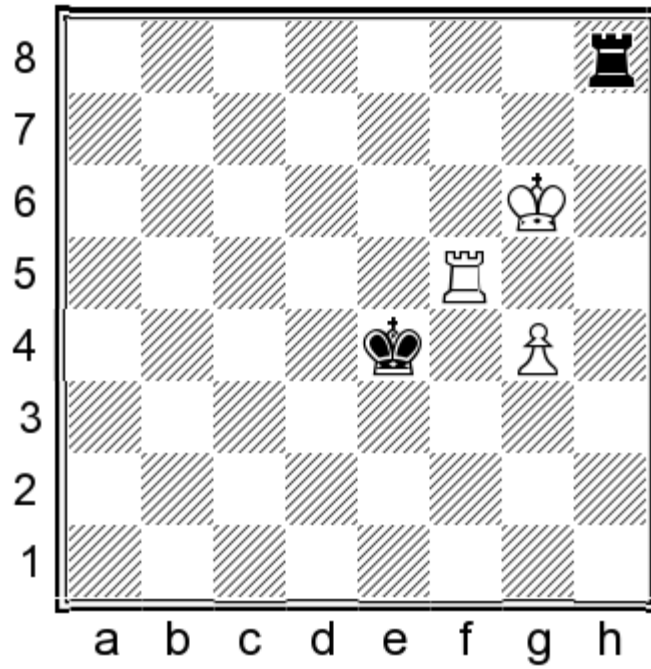
78...Rh8+ 79.Kg5 Ke6

79...Rg8+ 80.Kh6 Rh8+ 81.Kg7 Rh4 82.Rf7+ Ke6 83.g5 and the winning procedure is the one as seen in the first example.

80.Kg6 Ke5

No better is 80...Rg8+ 81.Kh7 Rg5 (81...Ke5 is met strongly by the intermediate check 82.Rf5+!) 82.Kh6 Rg8 83.g5! and when the pawn appears on the 5th rank the checking distance becomes too short.

81.Rf5+ Ke4



Position after: 81...Ke4

After 81...Ke6 White proceeds with 82.Kg7 Rh4 83.Rf6+ Ke7 84.g5! and wins.

82.Rf6!

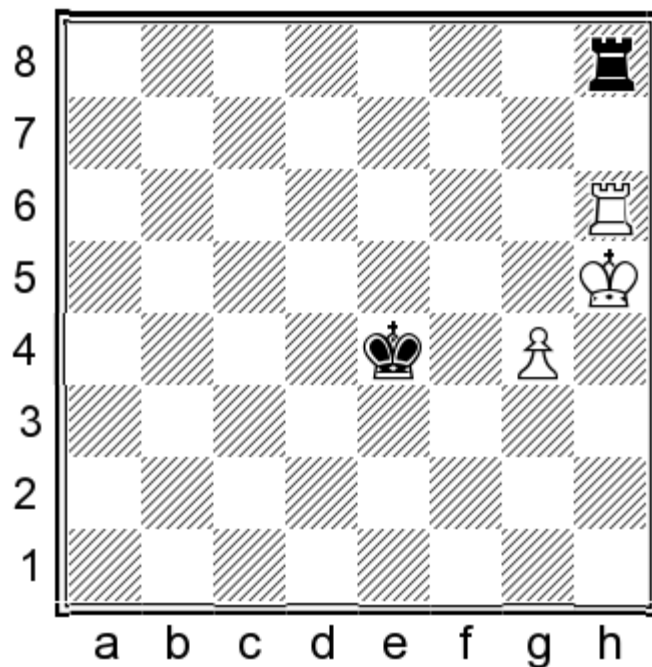
Aiming to interfere with the rook along the 6th rank. Worse is 82.Rf7? Rg8+ 83.Kh5 (83.Rg7 Rxf7+ 84.Kxf7 Kf4 and the g-pawn will be eliminated.) 83...Rh8+! and Black holds.

82...Rg8+

It also changes nothing to play 82...Ke5 83.g5! Rg8+ 84.Kh6 Rh8+ 85.Kg7 Rh1 86.g6 and White wins the same way as shown in the last example.

83.Kh5 Ke5

In case of 83...Rh8+ 84.Rh6!



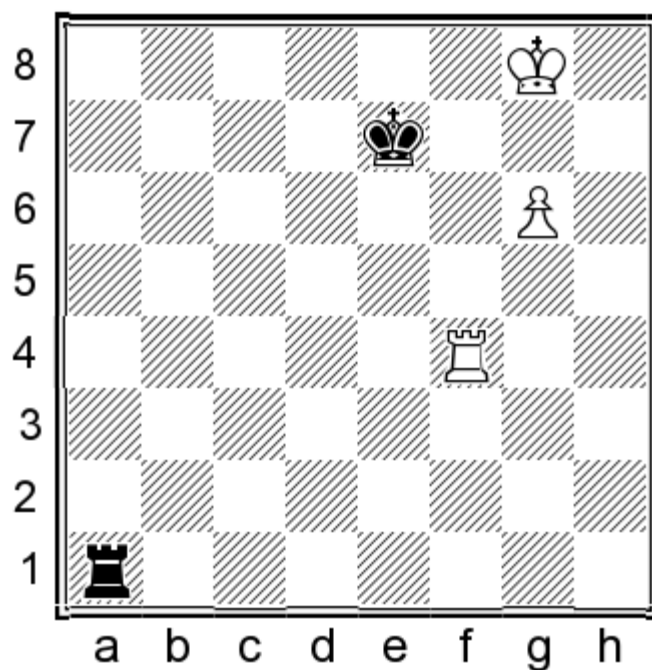
Position after: 84.Rh6!

White can temporarily leave the f-file: 84...Rf8 (84...Ra8 85.g5 Ra1 86.Rf6+--) 85.g5 Kf5 86.Rh7! Ke6 87.g6 Kf6 88.Kh6 Ra8 89.Rf7+ Ke6 90.Rf1 and White will soon use the umbrella method again.

84.g5!

And White has succeeded in advancing his pawn a rank further. After studying the first example, the rest of the game needs no further explanation.

84...Rh8+ 85.Kg6 Rh1 86.Kg7 Rg1 87.g6 Ra1 88.Rf8 Ke6 89.Kg8 Ke7 90.Rf4!



Position after: 90.Rf4!

And we've got the umbrella again!

90...Rg1 91.g7 Rg2 92.Rh4!

It still wasn't too late to go wrong with 92.Re4+? Kf6 93.Kf8 Rxc7 94.Rf4+ Ke5 95.Kxc7 Kxf4 and it's only a draw.

92...Kf6 93.Rh6+ Ke7 94.Kh8 Kf7 95.Rh7! 1-0

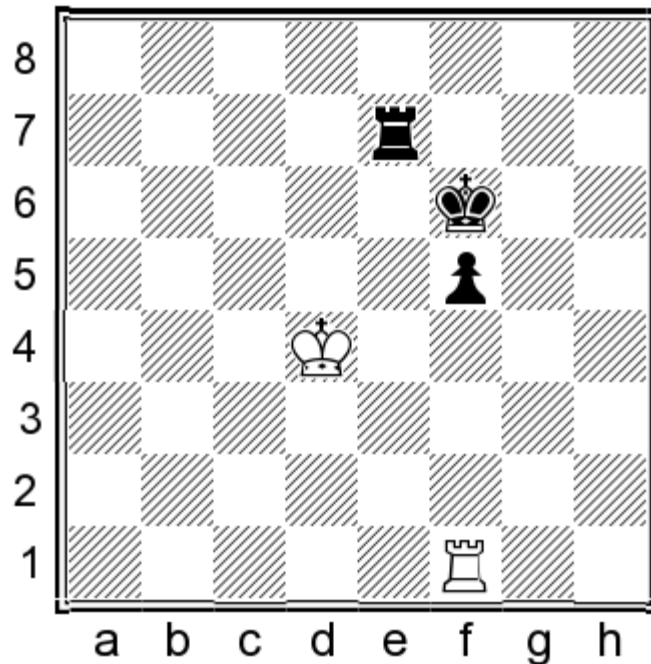
And Black resigned, as White will promote to a queen.

Frontal attack

Ris, Robert (2416)

Adams, Michael (2728)

Mulheim 2011



White to move

White's king has been cut off along the e-file and is therefore unable to get in front of the pawn. In this position White's task is to prevent the advance of the f-pawn, whereas Black just intends to advance his main asset.

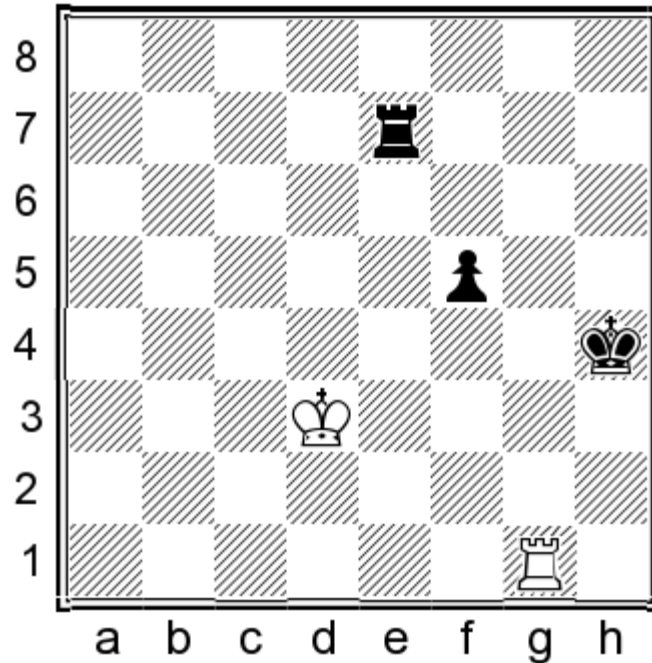
59.Kd3!

A) The only move. Other moves enable Black to mobilize the passed pawn. For example, 59.Rf2? is inferior, as the checking distance becomes too short: 59...Kg5 60.Rg2+ Kh4 61.Rf2 Kg4 62.Rg2+ Kf3 and on the next move the f-pawn will reach the 4th rank.

B) Moreover, the rook can't leave the f-file as after 59.Rg1? f4 Black wins. In the next note we discover how Black converts his advantage once his pawn crosses the board's equator.

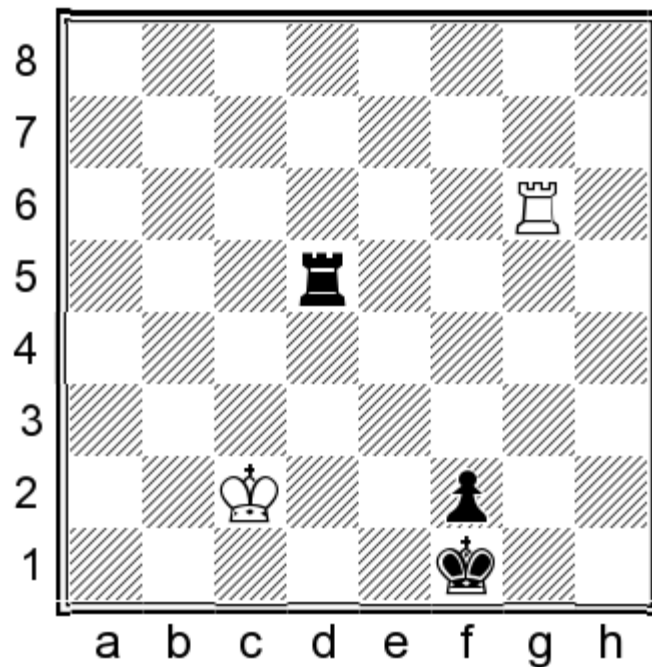
59.Kd3! Re4

An important alternative is 59...Kg5 when Black is threatening to push his pawn. 60.Rg1+! Kh4



Position after: 60...Kh4

A) Again, the only move. In case of 61.Rh1+? Black wins by means of 61...Kg3 62.Rg1+ (62.Rf1 f4 also wins.) 62...Kf2 63.Rg5 f4 When the pawn reaches the 4th rank, it's unstoppable. The following lines illustrate the winning procedure: 64.Rg8 f3 65.Rf8 Kg2 66.Kd2 f2 67.Rg8+ Kf1 68.Rg6 Rd7+ 69.Kc2 Rd5!



Position after: 69...Rd5!

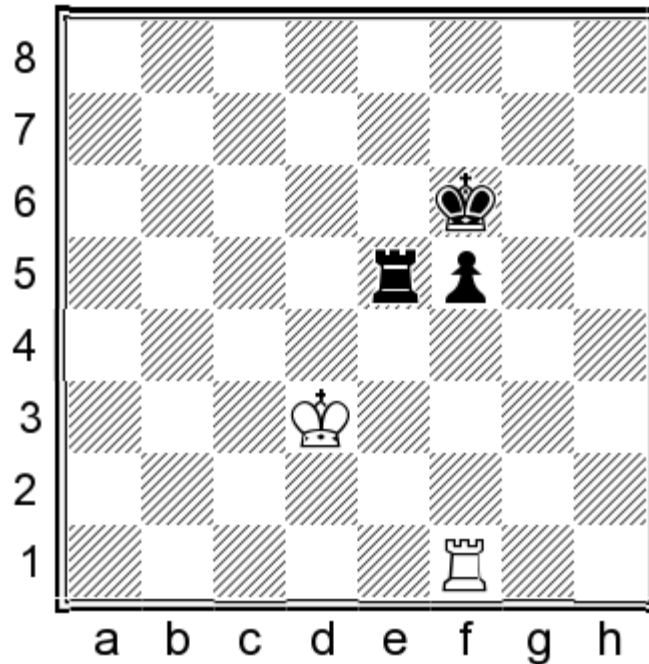
And Black builds a bridge, a technique we are already familiar with, e.g. 70.Re6 Kg2 71.Rg6+ Kf3 72.Rf6+ Ke3 73.Re6+ Kf4 74.Rf6+ Rf5+—

B) 61.Rf1! Kg4 62.Rg1+ Kh3 63.Rf1 and Black's king can't come closer. The only remaining idea is to protect the pawn with the rook, but this also has certain drawbacks: 63...Re5 (63...Rf7 allows the king to get in front of the pawn: 64.Ke3 Kg2 65.Rf2+ Kg3 66.Rf3+ Kg4 67.Rf4+ Kg5 68.Ra4 and White draws easily.) 64.Kd4! A crucial defensive resource. White must attack the rook to hold on. (A careless waiting move like 64.Kd2? is met by 64...Kg2 65.Rf4 Kg3 66.Rf1 f4 and Black wins.) 64...Re4+ 65.Kd3 Kg4 66.Rg1+= and Black fails to make further progress.

60.Rg1 Ke5 61.Ra1 Kf6

The point of White's last move is that Black still can't play 61...f4? in view of 62.Ra5+! and White actually wins due to the unfortunate placement of Black's forces.

62.Rf1 Re5



Position after: 62...Re5

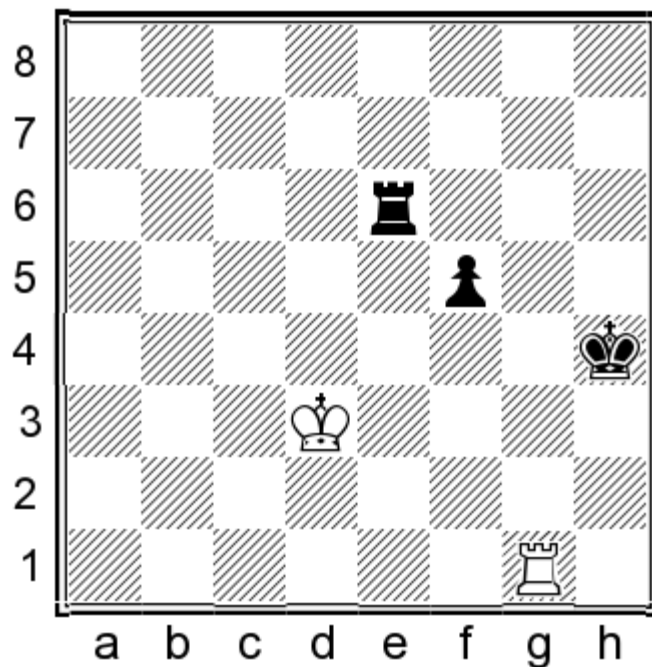
63.Kd4!

The king is keeping an eye on the rook on e5. However, in some situations, it could be an idea to play 63.Kd2? Kg5 with the intention of seizing control of the e-file with 64.Re1. Though in this particular case Black can exchange the rooks to go into a winning pawn ending with 64...Rxe1 65.Kxe1 Kg4! 66.Kf2 Kf4 and Black has the opposition. The king is ideally placed on d3 and d4 to prevent the rook protecting the passed pawn from the side.

63...Re6 64.Kd3 Re4 65.Rg1 Re5 66.Rf1 Kg5 67.Kd4 Re2 68.Kd3 Re6 69.Rg1+!

Of course not 69.Kd4? when Black wins, in view of 69...f4!

69...Kf4 70.Rf1+ Kg4 71.Rg1+ Kh4



Position after: 71...Kh4

72.Rf1!

White doesn't fall into the trap. 72.Rh1+? allows 72...Kg3! so the march of the passed pawn can't be prevented.

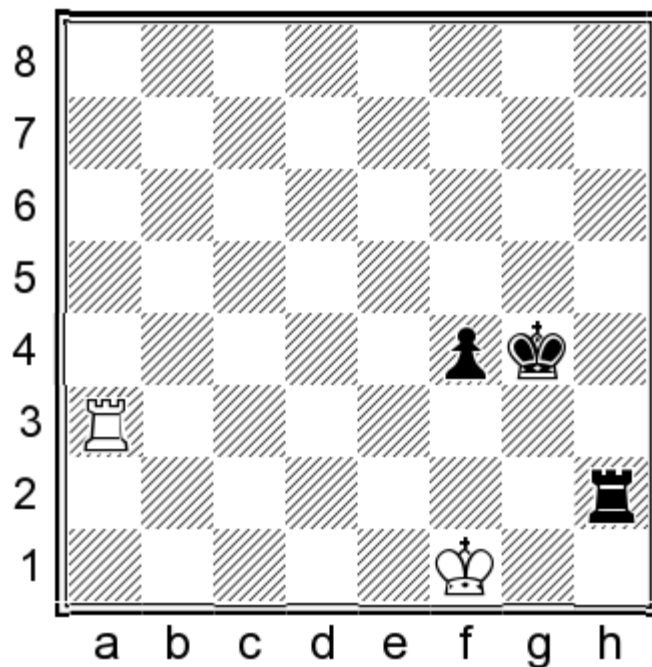
72...Re5 73.Kd4!

Attacking the rook is necessary. 73.Kd2? can just be met by 73...Kg3 and Black wins.

73...Re4+ 74.Kd3 Kg5 75.Rg1+ Rg4 76.Rf1 Re4 77.Rg1+ Kf6 78.Rf1 Re7 79.Kd4 Re6 80.Kd3 Re8 81.Kd4 Re4+ 82.Kd3 Ke5 83.Ra1 Kf4 84.Rf1+ Kg5 85.Rg1+ Rg4 86.Rf1 Rg3+ 87.Ke2 Kg4 88.Ra1

88.Kf2? would be a terrible blunder because of 88...Rf3+ 89.Kg2 Rxf1 90.Kxf1 Kf3 and Black wins.

88...f4 89.Ra8 Rg2+ 90.Kf1 Rh2 91.Ra3!



Position after: 91.Ra3!

We have reached the Philidor Position.

91...Rh3

91...f3 can be met by 92.Ra8! intending to give checks from behind.

92.Rxh3 Kxh3 ½-½

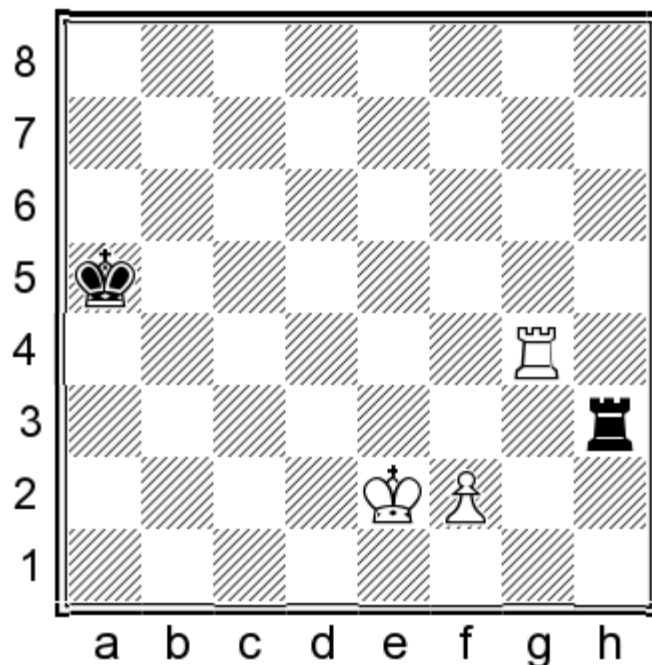
Black didn't want to test White's knowledge of this basic pawn ending: 92...Kxh3 93.Kf2 Kg4 94.Kg2 f3+ 95.Kf2 Kf4 96.Kf1! (Of course not 96.Kg1? Ke3 97.Kf1 f2 98.Kg2 Ke2 and Black promotes his pawn.) 96...Kg3 97.Kg1 f2+ 98.Kf1 Kf3=

Conclusion: The frontal attack is an extremely useful defensive weapon.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- 1) The rook is ideally placed in front of the pawn, preventing it from advancing to the 4th rank. Once the enemy king is about to support the advance, White should start to give checks and return in time to take control over the f4-square.
- 2) The white king is ideally placed on d3 or d4. From there it undermines the rook on e5, which has been aiming to free the king from that task. In some situations the white king can't reach these squares and might end up on d2 instead. In that case you might consider offering an exchange of rooks (depending on the resulting pawn ending), with the aim of crossing the e-file with the king.

So, Wesley (2653)
Navara, David (2706)
Belfort 2012



White to move

Once the weaker side manages to get his king in front of the pawn he should be able to hold with the aid of the Philidor Position. In this position, however, the black king is too far away from the f-pawn. White shouldn't allow the king approaching the pawn, and therefore the following move aims to cut off the king immediately.

57.Rc4! Rh8 58.f3!

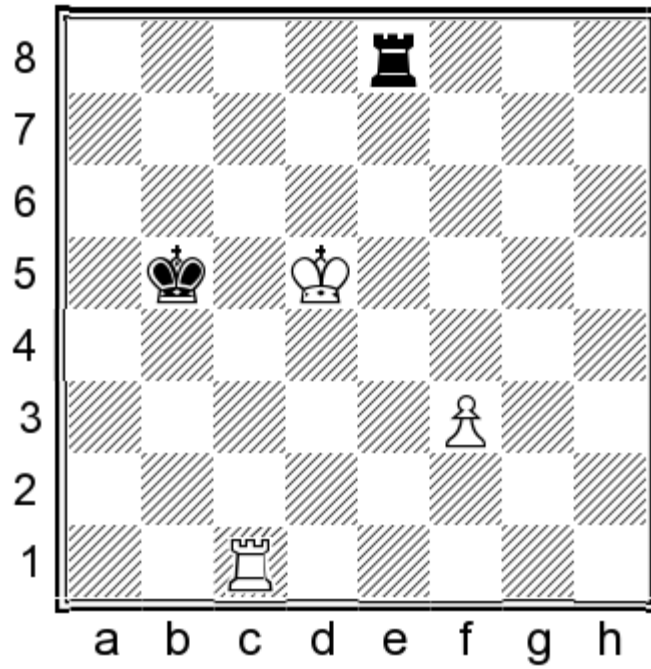
White seems to be aware of Black's drawing resources. It would be careless to play 58.f4? Kb5 59.Rc3 (59.Rc1 can be answered with 59...Rh3! when Black draws as he does in the game after 61.f4?) 59...Rh2+! 60.Ke1 (60.Ke3 leads to a drawn pawn ending after 60...Rh3+ 61.Kd4 Rxc3 62.Kxc3 Kc5=) 60...Kb4= and White's king is too far from his pawn which means White can't make progress.

58...Kb5 59.Rc1 Re8+ 60.Kf2 Rh8!?

Navara sets a less than obvious trap for his opponent. Normally the weaker side should try to stop the advance of the passed pawn by placing the rook frontally on the same file with 60...Rf8. However, in that case White would have been forced to activate his king in order to support the advance of his passed pawn.

A) In case of 61.Kg3 Rg8+ 62.Kh4 Rf8 63.Kg4 Rg8+ 64.Kh5 Rf8 65.Rf1? (Normally this is the right way to proceed, but since the white pawn is still on the 3rd rank Black has an amazing drawing resource. 65.Kg4! with the idea of going to d5 would still have won.) 65...Kc4! 66.f4 Kd3! 67.f5 Ke2 68.Rf4 Ke3 White can't keep his pawn protected and hence it's a draw.

B) 61.Ke3! The right direction. White's king should prevent its counterpart from approaching the f-pawn. 61...Re8+ 62.Kd4 Rf8 63.Ke4 Re8+ 64.Kd5!



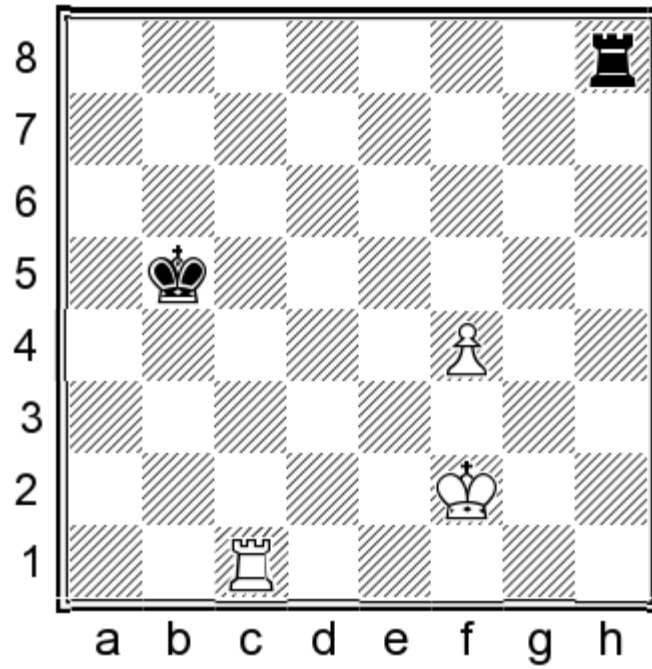
Position after: 64.Kd5!

The ideal square for the king in such situations is two squares diagonally from the pawn. Moreover, from d5 the white king also prevents the black king approaching the pawn. 64...Rd8+ (After 64...Rf8 65.Rf1 White also succeeds in advancing the f-pawn.) 65.Ke6

B1) 65...Re8+ 66.Kf7! (66.Kd7? is bad, in view of 66...Rf8 67.Rf1 Kc4 68.f4 Kd5 and Black's king is just in time.) 66...Re3 67.Rf1! and the f-pawn advances unhindered (but not 67.f4? Rf3 and Black picks up the pawn).

B2) 65...Rf8 66.Rf1 Rf4 67.Ke5 Rf8 68.f4 Kc6 69.Ke6 and the f-pawn advances which soon will bring us to the Lucena Position.

61.f4?



Position after: 61.f4?

A strange blunder by So. When he played 58.f3! it seemed he understood his king shouldn't be cut off along the 3rd rank. He could instead have played 61.Ke3! when White wins as mentioned in the previous note.

61...Rh3!

Now that the king and pawn are separated White can no longer win. Once the rook comes to help the white king pass the 3rd rank the black king will be able to get closer to the f-pawn.

62.Kg2

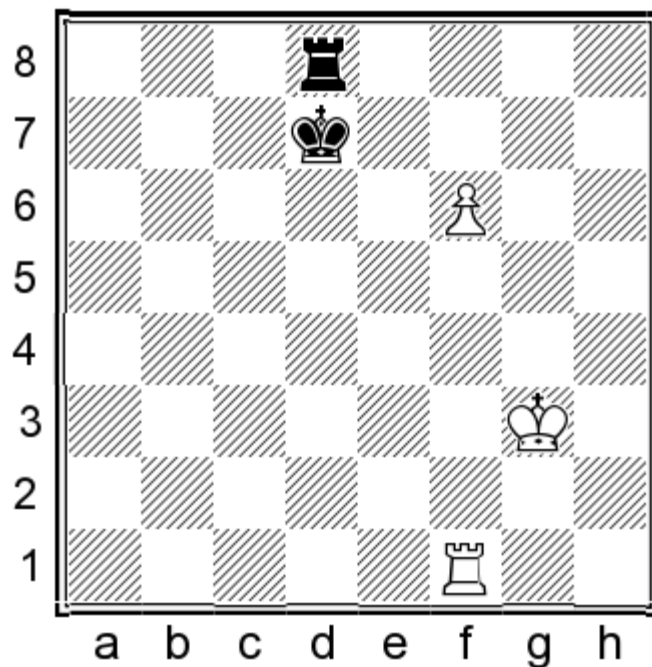
The problem is that after 62.f5 Rh5! the pawn falls.

62...Rd3 63.Rc2

It's important to realize that if White continues with 63.f5 Black should immediately attack the pawn with 63...Rd5! to save the game.

A) 64.f6 can be met by 64...Rg5+! (Not 64...Rf5? 65.Rf1! and White wins.) 65.Kh2 Rf5! =

B) 64.Rf1 Kc6 65.f6 Rd8 66.Kg3 Kd7



Position after: 66...Kd7

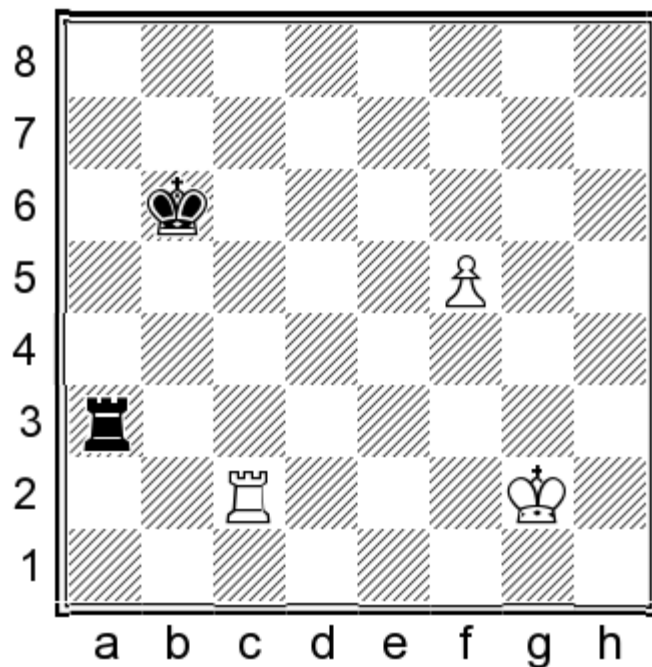
B1) Trading off rooks leads to a drawn ending after 67.Rd1+ Kc7 (67...Ke8? would be a terrible blunder because of 68.f7+! winning a rook or the f-pawn promotes.) 68.Rxd8 Kxd8 69.Kg4 Ke8 70.Kg5 Kf7=

B2) 67.Kg4 Ke6 68.Kg5 Kf7= and Black's king has managed to get in front of the pawn.

63...Kb6

Black correctly makes waiting moves with his king. It would have also been possible to make some moves with his rook on the 3rd rank, but not 63...Rd8? 64.Kf3! and White wins.

64.Rc8 Ra3 65.Rc4 Kb5 66.Rc2 Kb6 67.f5



Position after: 67.f5

67...Ra5!

Just as in the notes to 63.f5, Black has to act straight away. 67...Kb5? loses to 68.f6 Ra8 69.Kg3! (White should keep his rook on the c-file as long as possible, since after the premature 69.Rf2? Kc5 Black holds.) 69...Rf8 70.Rf2 Kc5 71.Kg4 Kd6 72.Kf5 and White's main trump will soon promote.

68.f6 Rg5+!

Very accurate. All Black's efforts would have gone to waste after 68...Rf5? 69.Rf2 and White wins.

69.Kf1 Rg8

Again 69...Rf5+? fails to 70.Rf2 .

70.Ke2

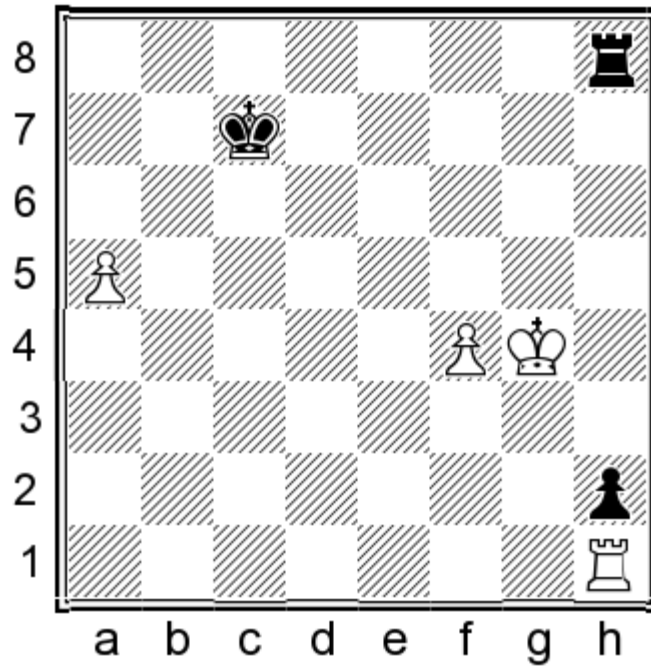
And the players agreed to a draw, since Black will eliminate the pawn with 70...Rf8.

½-½

Vitiugov, Nikita (2712)

Vachier Lagrave, Maxime (2722)

Loo 2013



Black to move

Due to the far advanced h-pawn, the white rook is passively placed in the corner of the board. White's only chance to make progress is to bring the king over to g3, intending to eliminate Black's remaining pawn. After White captures the h-pawn, the black rook should take the a-pawn so only the white f-pawn remains. Black's plan is simple: the king should be brought closer to the f-pawn.

62...Kd7 63.Kg3!

The right plan, as 63.a6? wastes valuable time. After 63...Ke6 64.Kg3 Black saves the game with a beautiful stalemate pattern initiated by playing 64...Rg8+! (Black can't get the a-pawn straightaway with 64...Ra8? in view of 65.Rxh2 Rxa6 66.Rh6+ and White picks up the rook.)

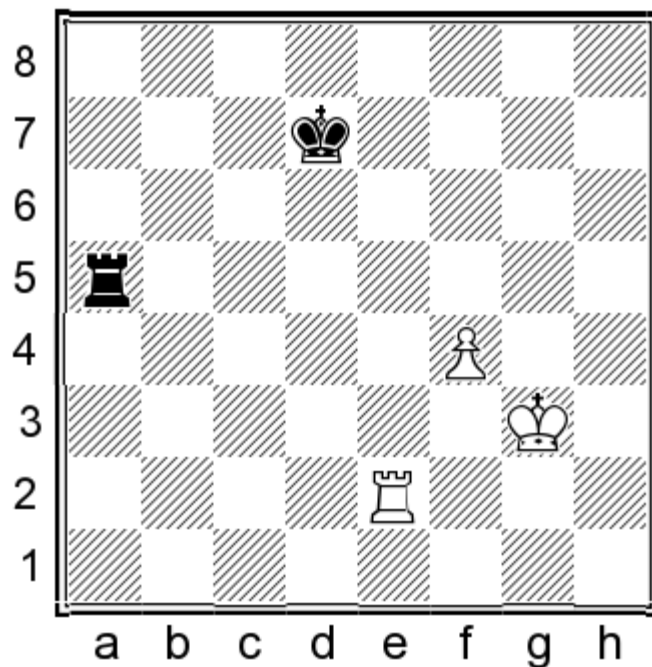
A) 65.Kxh2 Kf5 66.Rf1 (66.Ra1 Kxf4 67.a7 Ra8 and the a-pawn will soon be taken.) 66...Ra8 and Black keeps the game under control.

B) 65.Kf3 Ra8 (65...Rh8 also suffices.) 66.Rxh2 Rxa6 67.Rh6+ Kf5! 68.Rxa6 with stalemate!

63...Ra8

63...Rh5 64.Rxh2 Rxa5 65.Re2! comes down to the same situation.

64.Rxh2 Rxa5 65.Re2!



Position after: 65.Re2!

Cutting off the king is a well-known technique to prevent it getting closer to the f-pawn. After a careless move such as 65.Kg4, Black holds easily, e.g. 65...Ke7 66.f5 Kf7 67.Kg5 Ra6 68.Rh7+ Kf8 and we have reached the Philidor Position.

65...Ra8 66.Kg4

White shouldn't rush to advance his passed pawn with 66.f5? in view of 66...Re8! 67.Rxe8 (67.Ra2 Ke7 and the black king finally crosses the e-file.) 67...Kxe8 68.Kf4 Kf7 and Black saves the game.

66...Rg8+

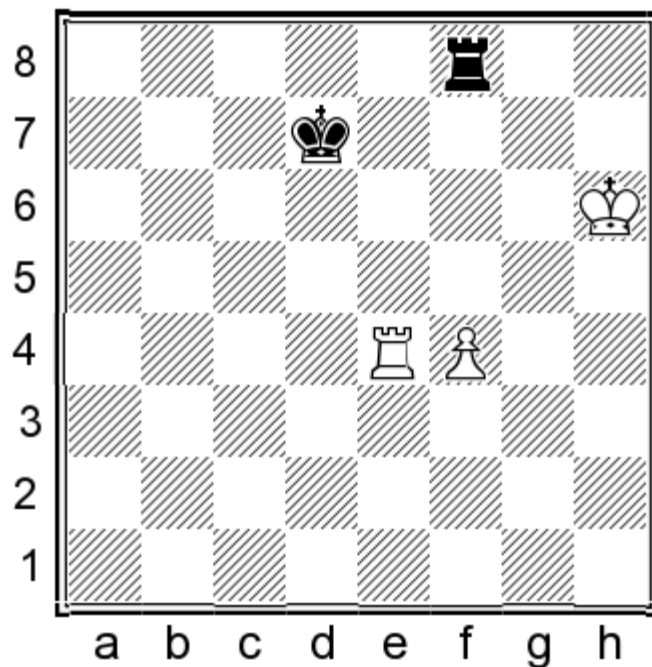
Black is unable to steer the game into a pawn ending now, since after 66...Re8 67.Rxe8 Kxe8 68.Kg5! (68.Kf5? allows 68...Kf7 and Black has the opposition.) 68...Kf7 69.Kf5 the white king will reach one of the key squares e6 or g6.

67.Kh5 Rf8 68.Kg5 Rg8+ 69.Kh6!

The king is optimally placed here. No progress can be made with 69.Kf6 Rf8+ as the king just has to return to g5, though still retaining a winning position.

69...Rf8 70.Re4!

With the king on d6 Black could have played 70...Kd5.

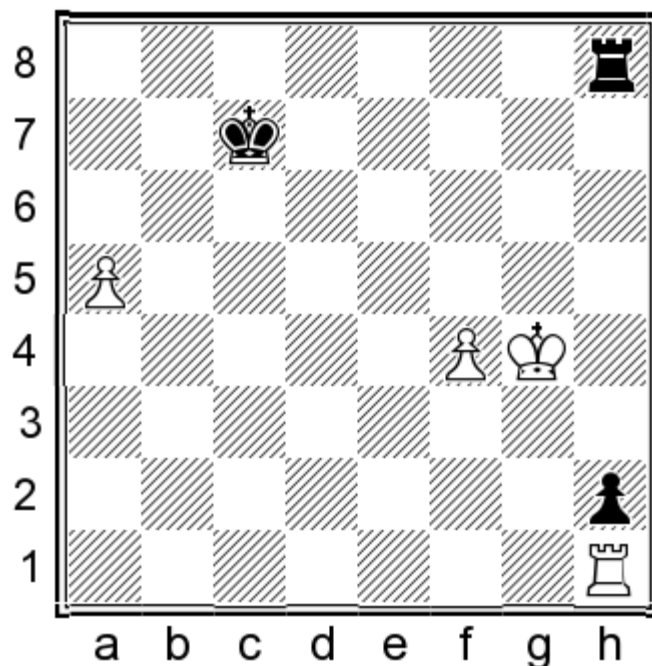


Position after: 70.Re4!

70...Kd6 71.Kg7 1-0

71.Kg7 and Black resigned, as he simply can't prevent the f-pawn crossing the 5th rank. For example, 71...Rf5 (71...Kd5 can be strongly met by the intermediate check 72.Re5+! winning the rook.) 72.Kg6 Rf8 73.f5 Kd5 74.Re1 and since the black king is still cut off and the checking distance for the rook became too short, nothing can be done against the further march of the f-pawn when the Lucena Position will be reached.

Let us now return to our starting position (first diagram). In fact, Black was pretty close to hold the position and White only succeeded in winning by one tempo. The decisive mistake was committed at the beginning of our analysis. Had Black carefully anticipated the defensive method with the frontal attack, he might have realised this.



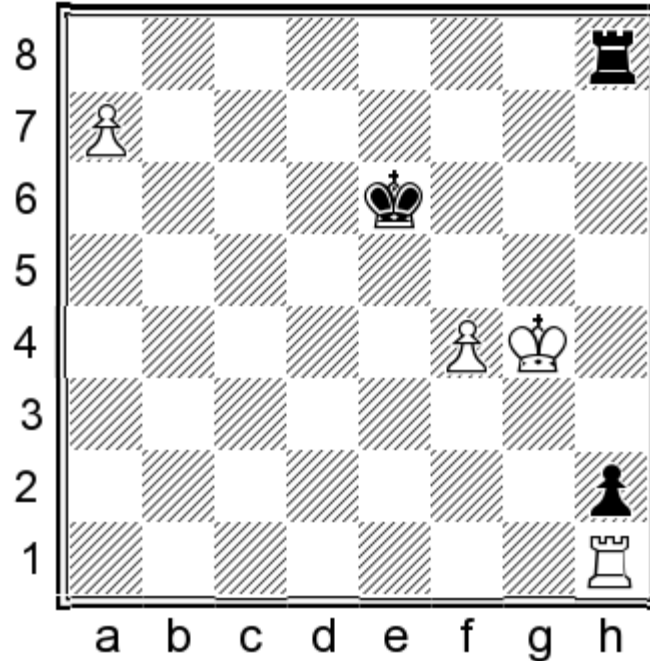
Black to move

62...Kd6!

This is absolutely the only correct move. Compared with the lines covered after 62...Kd7? the black king is now able to attack the white rook when it arrives on e4.

63.Kg3

63.a6 Ke6 64.a7



Position after: 64.a7

64...Rg8+! An important intermediate check. (Of course not 64...Ra8? 65.Rxh2 Rxa7 66.Rh6+! and now the king can't retreat to the 7th rank, while after 66...Kd5 67.f5 the black king has been cut off along the 6th rank and is not able to approach the f-pawn.) 65.Kf3 Ra8 and Black draws easily.

63...Ra8!

Very accurate, since after 63...Rh5? 64.a6! Ra5 65.Rxh2 Black simply can't capture the pawn with 65...Rxa6 in view of 66.Rh6+

64.Rxh2 Rxa5 65.Re2 Ra8 66.Kg4

If 66.f5 Black has enough time to gain control over the e-file by means of 66...Kd7 67.Kf4 Re8! when the king+pawn ending is a draw or the black king gets in front of the pawn.

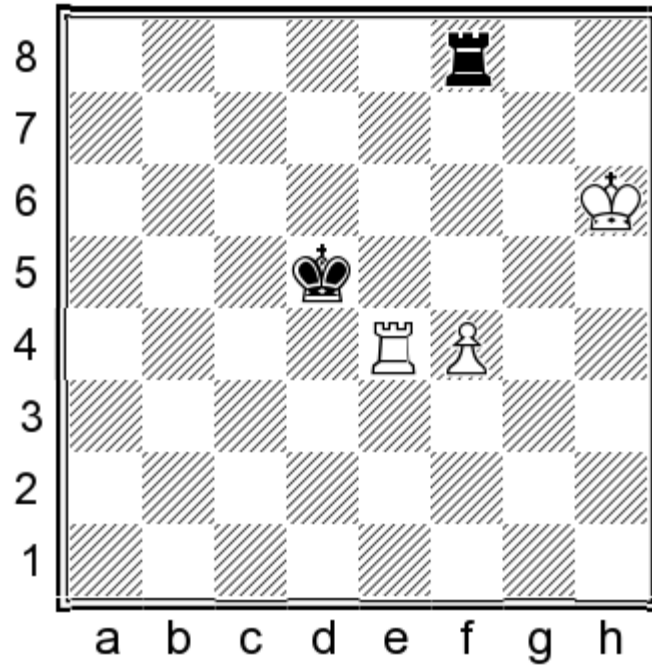
66...Rg8+!

Everything is perfectly placed, so the time has come to harass the white king. Premature would have been 66...Kd5? with the idea of taking away the e4 square for the rook, since after 67.f5! Rg8+ 68.Kh5 Rh8+ 69.Kg6 Rg8+ 70.Kf7 the f-pawn advances, as the checking distance of the rook has become too short.

67.Kh5 Rf8!

Another precise continuation, while after 67...Rh8+? 68.Kg6 Rg8+ 69.Kf7! the f-pawn comes into action again.

68.Kg5 Rg8+! 69.Kh6 Rf8! 70.Re4 Kd5!

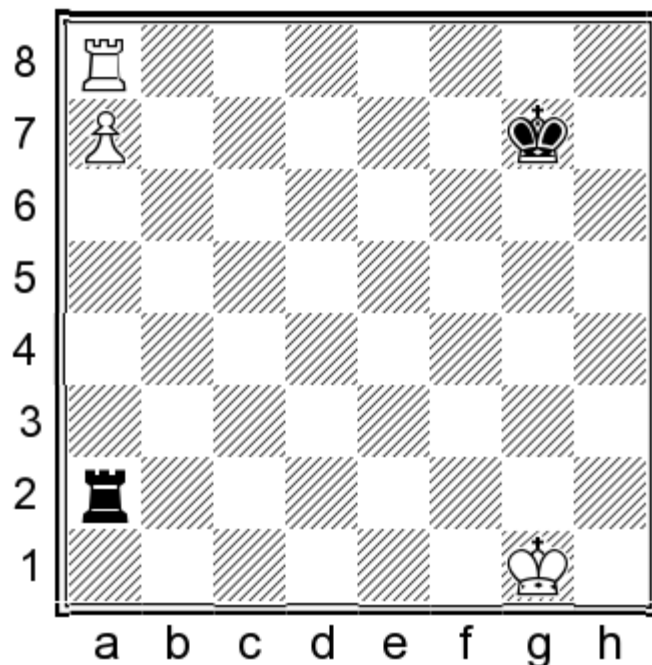


Position after: 70...Kd5!

71.Re5+ Kd6 72.Kg5 Rg8+ 73.Kh4 Rf8 74.Kg4 Rg8+ 75.Kf3 Rf8 ½-½

And it turns out that White can't make any progress.

Rook in front of a passed pawn



White to move

Unlike its counterpart, White's rook is passively placed in front of his pawn and is in fact unable to leave a8 without giving up his main trump. The black rook on a2 is doing a good job of keeping an eye on the a7-pawn from behind. The black king is unable to approach the a-pawn, though, as e.g. 1...Kf7 fails to 2.Rh8! Rxa7 3.Rh7 winning the rook,

while 1...Kf6 can simply be met by 2.Rf8 followed by 3.a8=Q.

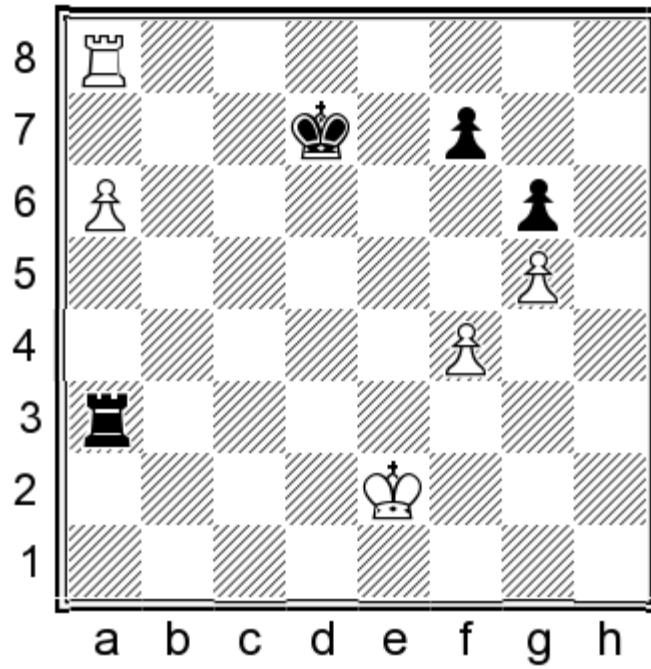
This means the black King has only two squares available to it: g7 and h7. With waiting moves also possible along the a-file Black can't be trapped in a zugzwang. So, does White have any winning chances? His only plan consists of transferring the king via b1 (necessary, as the black rook controls the second rank) to b6, protecting the a-pawn and thus threatening to withdraw the rook from a8. However, when the king reaches b6 Black starts giving checks from behind and returns to the a-file when the king has been driven away.

Hence, we can conclude that this particular example is a theoretical draw. White is also unable to alter the verdict by adding a single g- or h-pawn. An f-pawn, however, might lure the black king away from its only two safe squares by advancing to f6-f7. In general, it's worth remembering that, if possible, the stronger side should consider keeping his pawn on a6, retaining some space for the king to hide. In that case his winning plan is to install an umbrella against the checks from behind by Ka7, Rb8-b6, Kb7 followed by promoting the a-pawn.

Giri, Anish (2701)

Ponomarev, Ruslan (2764)

Dortmund 2011

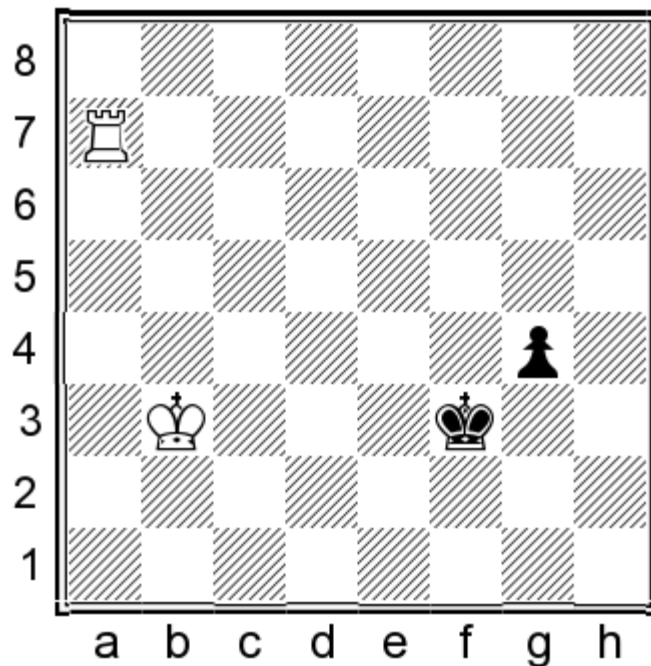


White to move

62.a7!

Since the king has left the safety zone this advance is justified. Indecisive is 62.Kd2? allowing the black king to hide and search for counterplay with 62...Ke6! 63.Ra7 (63.a7 Kf5! and the king hides in front of his own f-pawn.) 63...Kd5 64.Kc2 Ke4 65.Kb2 Ra5 66.Kb3 Kxf4 67.Rxf7+ Kxg5 68.a7

A) 68...Kg4? 69.Rc7 g5 70.Rc4+ Kf3 71.Ra4 Rxa7 72.Rxa7 g4



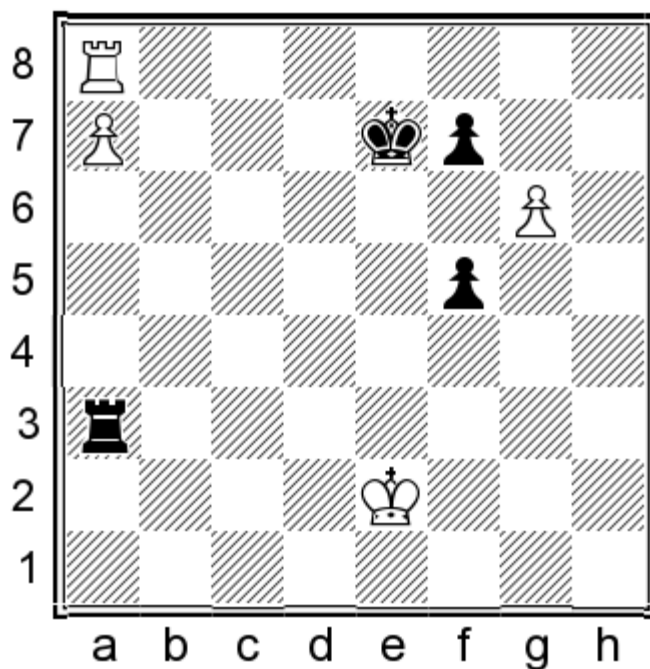
Position after: 72...g4

73.Rf7+!! Only this intermediate move assures White of a win by a single tempo: 73...Ke2 74.Rg7 Kf3 75.Kc2 g3 76.Kd2 Kf2 (76...g2 77.Ke1) 77.Rf7+! Kg1 78.Ke2 g2 79.Rg7 Kh2 80.Kf2 and the g-pawn falls.

B) Black has managed to arrange counterplay, though precision is still essential: 68...Kh5! 69.Kb4 Ra1 70.Kb5 g5 71.Kb6 Kh4! (Premature is 71...g4? 72.Rf5+ and the rook comes in between on a5.) 72.Kb7 g4 73.Rh7+ Kg3 74.Rh6 Rxa7+ (74...Kf2? is a terrible mistake, because of the interference move 75.Ra6!) 75.Kxa7 Kf3 with a draw, as the white king is too far away.

62.a7! Kc6

A) Black decides to go for the a-pawn. There was in any case no way to escape, as 62...Ke7 would have been strongly met by the thematic break 63.f5! when White wins in all lines: 63...gx f5 (63...Ra2+ 64.Kd3 Ra3+ 65.Kc4 Ra1 66.fxg6 fxg6 67.Rh8 Rxa7 68.Rh7+ winning the rook.) 64.g6!



Position after: 64.g6!

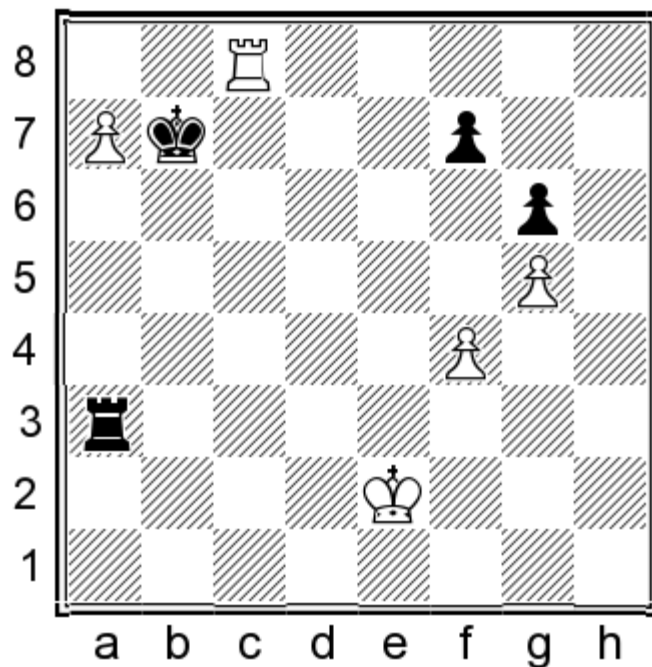
64...Ra2+ (64...fxg6 fails again to 65.Rh8; 64...Kf6 doesn't help either: 65.gxf7 Kxf7 66.Rh8) 65.Kf3 Ra3+ 66.Kf4 Ra4+ 67.Kg5 f6+ 68.Kxf5 Ra5+ 69.Ke4 Ra4+ 70.Kd5 and soon Black will run out of checks when the g-pawn decides the game.

B) Waiting along the a-file with 62...Ra2+ is also no longer an option, because of 63.Kd3 Ra3+ 64.Kc4 Ra2 65.Rf8! and White wins.

63.Rc8+

63.Rf8? doesn't work now, since after 63...Rxa7 the pawn on f7 is protected.

63...Kb7



Position after: 63...Kb7

64.Rf8!

A) 64.Rf8! and Black resigned, in view of 64...Kxa7 (64...Rxa7 65.Rxf7+ Kb6 66.Rxa7 Kxa7 67.f5!) 65.Rxf7+ Kb8 66.Rf6 Ra4 67.Kf3 and the loss of a second pawn is inevitable.

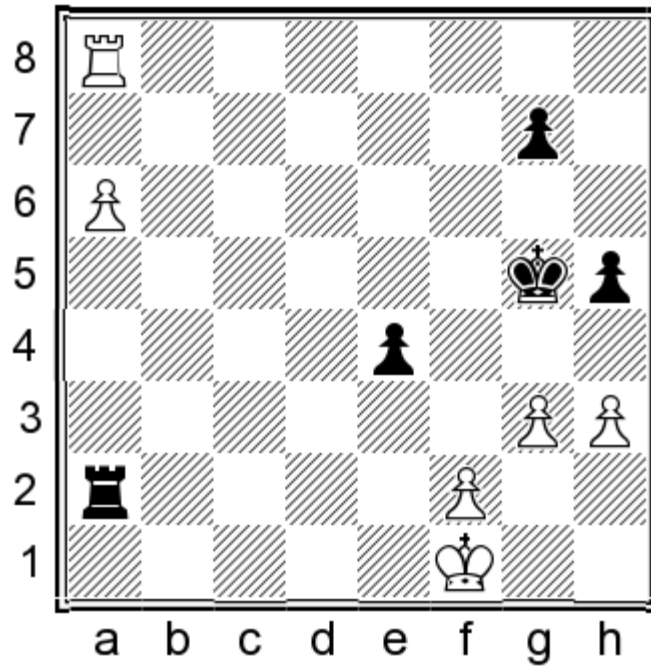
B) It still wasn't too late to spoil all the efforts, e.g. 64.a8=Q+? only leads to a draw after 64...Rxa8 65.Rxa8 Kxa8 66.Ke3 Kb7 67.Ke4 Kc7 68.Ke5 Kd7 69.Kf6 Ke8 and Black is back in time.

1-0

Kosintseva, Nadezhda (2528)

Kosteniuk, Alexandra (2457)

Kazan 2012



White to move

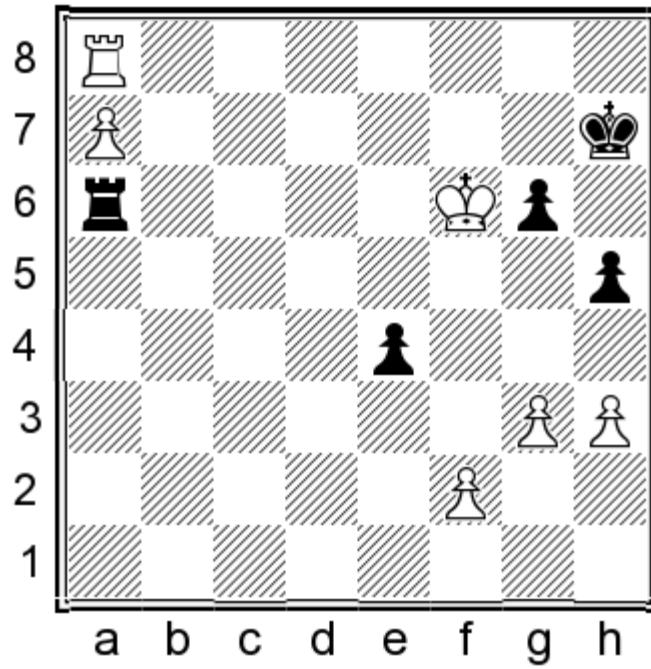
In this position White must decide on whether to advance the pawn immediately or to keep it on a6 for a while.

The advantage of the latter plan is creating a shelter for the king with the Rb6 and Kb7 construction. On the other hand, Black would then be able to generate some counterplay on the other wing by targeting the pawn on f2. Kosintseva prefers the former plan and has correctly evaluated the winning procedure.

54.a7!

Now the Black rook is tied to the a-file, as otherwise White removes her rook and promotes the pawn. The black king is restricted in its mobility as well and needs to hide behind the g-pawn or wait passively on g7/h7. Therefore, the activation of the white king simply can't be prevented.

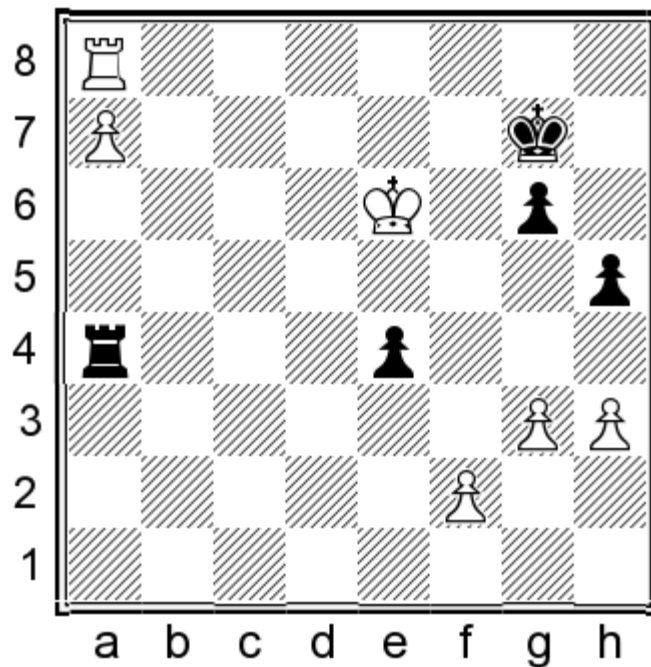
54...Ra1+ 55.Ke2 Ra2+ 56.Ke3 Ra4 57.Kd2 Ra2+ 58.Kc3 Ra4 59.Kb3 Ra1 60.Kc4 Ra5 61.Kd4 Ra4+ 62.Ke5 Kg6 63.Kf4 Kh7 64.Kf5 g6+ 65.Kf6 Ra6+



Position after: 65...Ra6+

Trying to cut off the white king from the 5th rank with 65...Ra5 can be answered strongly with 66.Re8! Ra6+ 67.Re6 (Of course not 67.Ke5? Rxa7 68.Kxe4 and although White has won a pawn the remaining 3 vs. 2 on one wing is theoretically drawn.) 67...Rxa7 68.Re7+ Rxe7 69.Kxe7 and the pawn on e4 will be picked up after which the ensuing pawn ending is easily winning for White.

66.Ke5 Ra4 67.Ke6 Kg7



Position after: 67...Kg7

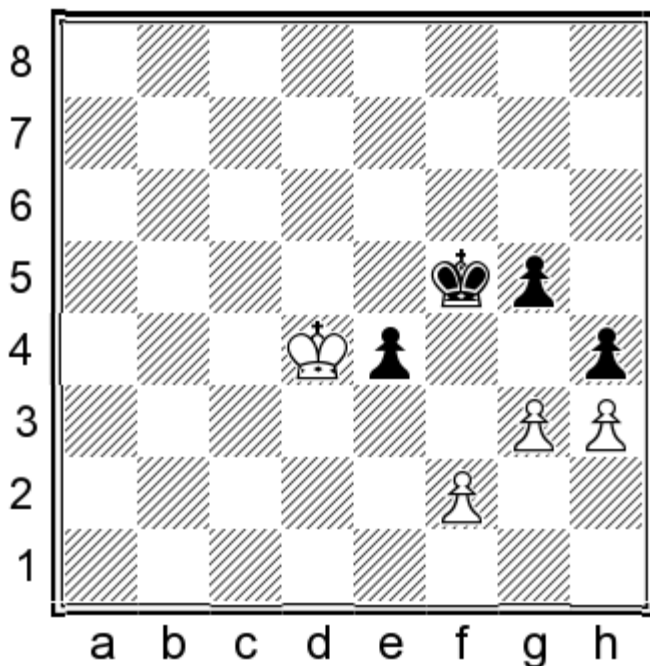
67...Ra6+ 68.Kd5 Ra4 69.Kc6!

A) 69...Kg7 can be met by 70.Kb6! and it turns out the rook is very unfortunately placed on a4. Now the pawn on a7 is protected by the king, White threatens to remove his rook from a8. Hence there's no choice but to play 70...Rb4+ 71.Ka5 Rb2 72.Rb8 Ra2+ 73.Kb6 and White secures the promotion of the a-pawn.

B) 69...Ra2 70.Rd8 Rxa7 (70...Ra6+ doesn't help because of 71.Kb7 and White wins) 71.Rd7+ Rxd7 72.Kxd7 Kg7 73.Ke6 with a winning pawn ending for White.

68.Kd5!

A) White's king sticks to the pawn, putting Black into zugzwang as the rook can't leave a4 without giving up the e-pawn or letting the a-pawn promote. It's worth mentioning that it's not recommended for White to steer the game into a pawn ending now with 68.Rd8? since after 68...Rxa7 69.Rd7+ Rxd7 70.Kxd7 Kf6 71.Kd6 Kf5 72.Kd5 g5 73.Kd4 h4



Position after: 73...h4

(73...g4? loses to 74.hxg4+ hxg4 75.Kd5+--) 74.gxh4 (74.g4+? spoils everything and even enables Black to win with 74...Kf4!) 74...gxh4 75.Ke3 Ke5 the draw becomes obvious.

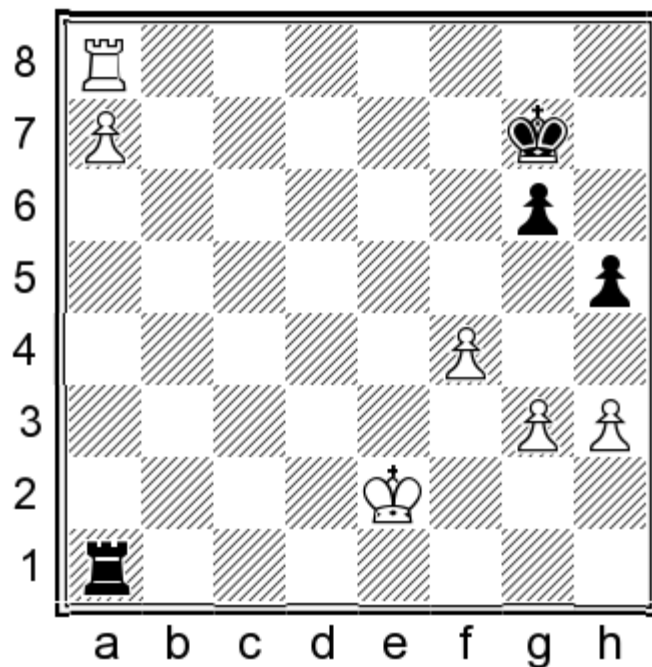
B) Moreover, 68.Re8? doesn't have the desired effect either, in view of 68...Ra6+!= and White's rook can't interfere on d6, but not (68...Rxa7? 69.Re7+ Rxe7+ 70.Kxe7 and the black king can't defend the e-pawn any longer.)

68...Ra1

A) Black voluntarily gives up the pawn on e4. After 68...Kh7 69.Kc6 play transposes to the lines we covered in the notes to 67...Ra6.

B) Another possibility is 68...g5 which has the drawback of weakening the kingside too much, e.g. 69.g4 hxg4 70.hxg4 Kh7 71.Ke5 Kg7 72.Kf5 Kh7 73.Kxg5 Kg7 74.Kf4 Kh7 75.Re8 Rxa7 76.Rxe4 and White wins easily.

69.Kxe4 Re1+ 70.Kd3 Rd1+ 71.Ke2 Ra1 72.f4!



Position after: 72.f4!

White's king has accomplished its task of eliminating the annoying pawn on e4 and is therefore no longer needed. Now White's plan is to create a passed f-pawn in order to get the black king out of its safety zone (g7-h7).

72...Ra3 73.g4 h4 74.f5 Ra2+ 75.Kd3 Ra3+ 76.Kc4 gxf5 77.gxf5 1-0

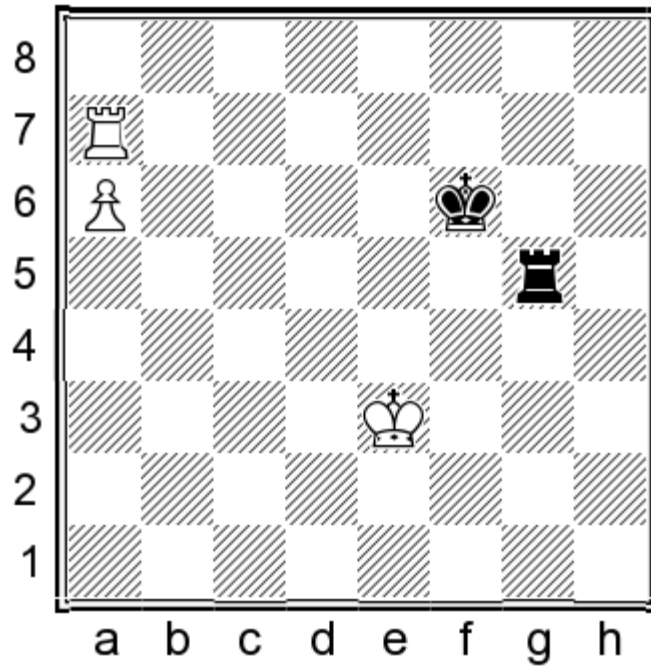
And Black resigned in view of 77.gxf5 Ra6 78.f6+! and Black's pieces are overloaded.

Vancura position

Short, Nigel D (2697)

Amonatov, Farrukh (2604)

Bangkok 2012

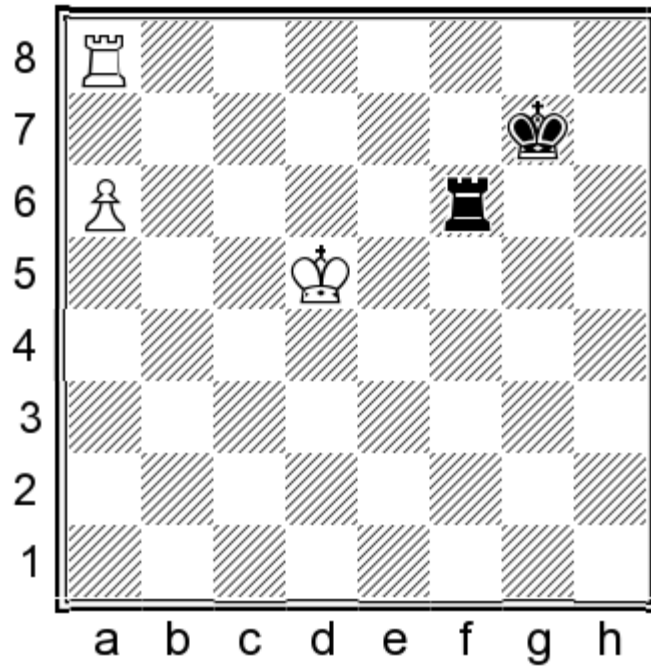


Black to move

69...Ra5?

After studying the previous examples Black's last move should come very naturally to you, but in this particular case placing the rook behind the passed pawn is the decisive mistake!

When the pawn is still on the 6th rank it's better for the rook to keep an eye on it from the side. Therefore, it would have been correct to play 69...Rd5! which also prevents the march of the white king to support the pawn. 70.Ra8 (Improving the white rook with 70.Rb7 also comes into consideration, though right now the black king is standing too close and after 70...Ra5 71.a7 Ke6 72.Kd4 Kd6 73.Kc4 Kc6 Black succeeds in eliminating White's remaining pawn.) 70...Kg7 71.Ke4 (In case White decides to play 71.a7 Black obtains a simple draw by placing his rook behind the pawn with 71...Ra5=) 71...Rd6 72.Ke5 Rg6! (The defending side generally wants to place the rook on a different file than his king in such positions, but here 72...Rf6? is tactically refuted by means of 73.Rg8+! Kf7 74.Rf8+ Kxf8 75.Kxf6 and the a-pawn promotes to a queen.) 73.Kd5 Rf6!



Position after: 73...Rf6!

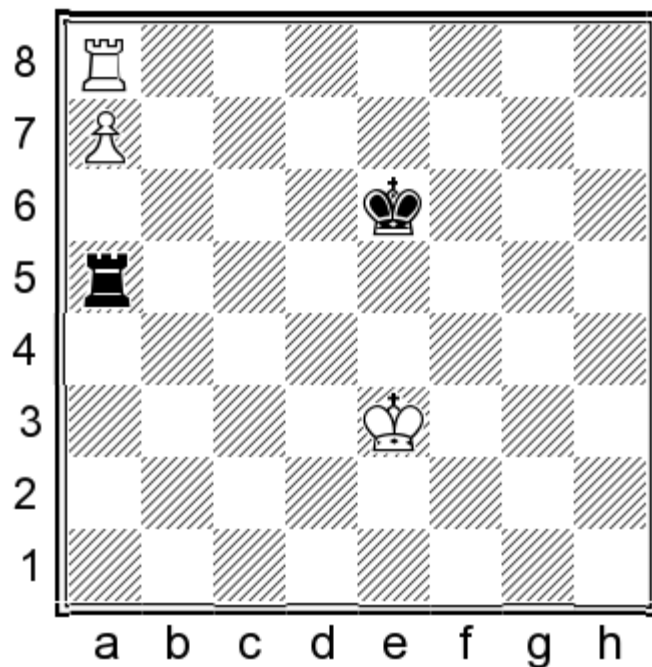
And we've finally reached the Vancura Position, which is theoretically drawn. The rook is ideally placed on f6 and is ready to attack the white king, once it protects the a-pawn, with checks from the side. White can't make further progress here, since in case of 74.a7 the rook returns to his post behind the pawn with 74...Ra6=

69...Ra5? 70.Ra8!

Very precise and in fact the only winning move. White threatens to advance his a-pawn at a suitable moment and thus prevents the black king from approaching. 70.Kd4? is bad, in view of 70...Ke6 71.Ra8 (71.Kc4 Kd6 72.Kb4 Ra1 73.Kb5 Rb1+ also leads to a draw.) 71...Kd7 72.a7 Kc7 and Black is in time to meet 73.Rh8 with 73...Rxa7 74.Rh7+ Kb6 75.Rxa7 Kxa7=

70...Ra4

After White's precise last move the black king can no longer run to the a-pawn. 70...Ke6 will be met by 71.a7!



Position after: 71.a7!

And Black can't prevent the rook from getting away from a8, since 71...Kd7 can be answered with 72.Rh8 Rxa7 73.Rh7+ winning the rook. From this variation we can come to the conclusion that the black king needs to stay on f6.

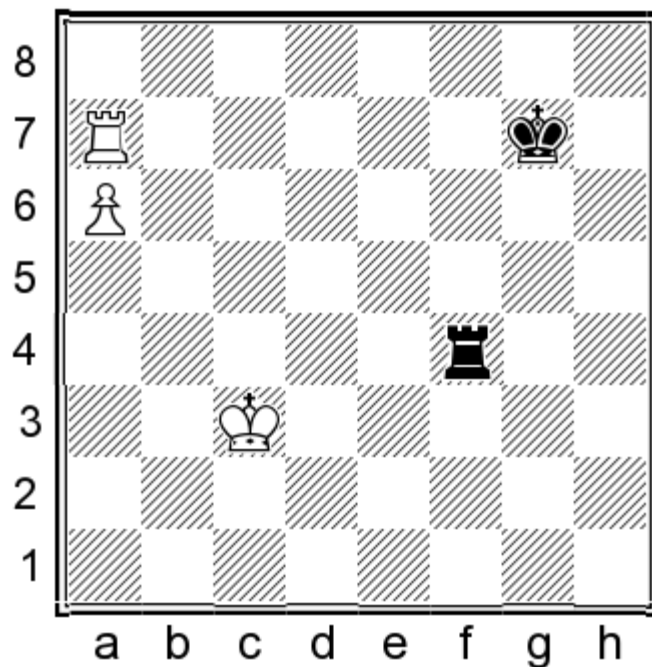
71.Kd3

71.a7? doesn't make sense now, as the black king is still within reach of its safety zone and can therefore ensure a draw with 71...Kg7!

71...Kg7 72.Kc3 Rf4

Black finally strives to reach the Vancura Position by transferring his rook to the side, but it's too late now. Let's see how White converts his advantage when Black keeps his rook behind the pawn and gives White a free pass. A sample line is 72...Kh7 73.Kb3 Ra1 74.Kb4 Kg7 75.Kb5 Rb1+ 76.Kc6 Ra1 77.Kb7 Rb1+ 78.Ka7 Ra1 79.Rb8 Kh7 80.Rb7+ Kg6 81.Kb6 Rb1+ 82.Kc7 Rc1+ 83.Kb8 and the a-pawn promotes. The advantage of the pawn on the 6th rank has become clear.

73.Ra7+!

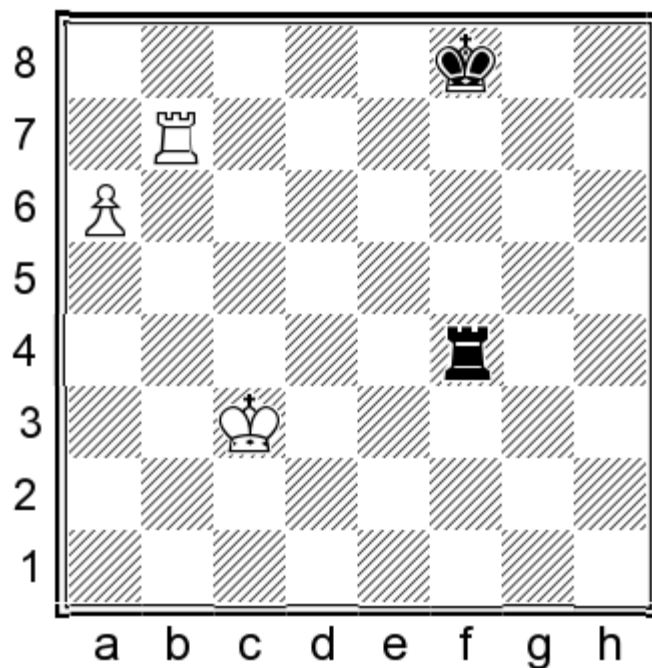


Position after: 73.Ra7+!

An extremely important check. White aims to place his pawn on the 7th rank and allows the rook to protect it from the side. A rank lower doesn't work out well for him: 73.Rb8?! Ra4 74.Rb6? (74.Ra8! would still win.) 74...Kf7 75.Kb3 Ra1 76.Kb4 Ke7 77.Kc5 Kd7 78.Rb7+ Kc8 79.Kb6 Rb1+ 80.Ka7 Rc1 with a theoretically drawn position. White is unable to make further progress.

73...Kg6

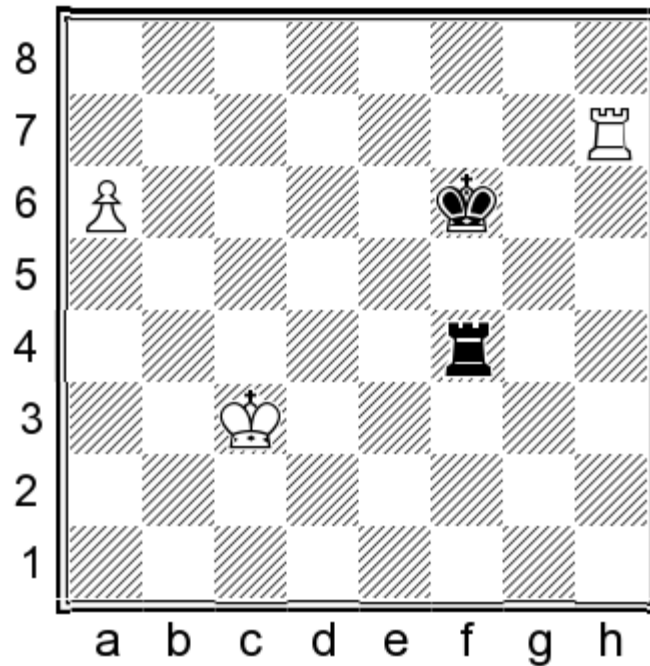
A) Other moves wouldn't have saved Black either. 73...Kf8 can simply be met by 74.Rb7



Position after: 74.Rb7

and since the king has been cut off on the 7th rank, nothing can be done against 75.a7, 76.Rb8+ and 77.a8=Q and White wins.

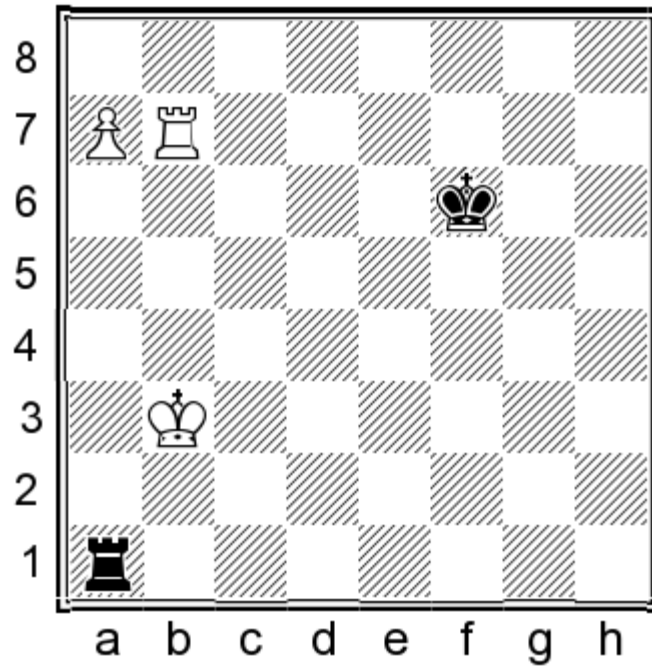
B) Black's last option 73...Kf6 might have posed more problems, as White needs to find 74.Rh7!



Position after: 74.Rh7!

The only move securing the win. (Inferior is 74.Rb7? when Black has gained an important tempo compared to the game continuation. In fact, he manages to hold after 74...Ra4 75.a7 Ke6 76.Kb3 Ra1 77.Kb4 Kd6 78.Kb5 Rb1+ 79.Kc4 Ra1!⇒) 74...Ra4 (In case of 74...Kg6 75.Rb7 we have a transposition to the game.) 75.Kb3 Ra1 (75...Rxa6 can obviously be met by 76.Rh6+) 76.a7 Ke6 77.Kb4 Kd6 78.Kb5 and White brings his king to b8, followed by Rb7 when the a-pawn can't be stopped. In this last variation you can see the importance of a single tempo in endgames with so little material left on the board.

74.Rb7 Ra4 75.a7 Kf6 76.Kb3 Ra1



Position after: 76...Ra1

77.Kc4!

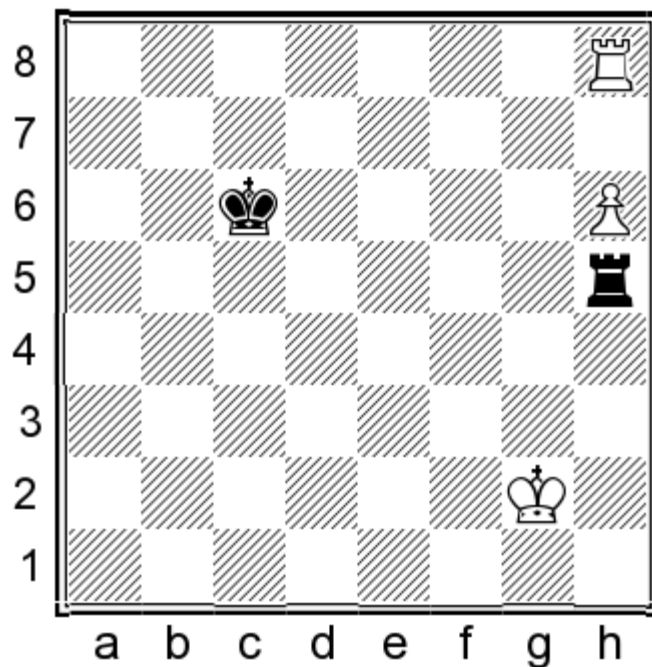
Accurate until the very end. After 77.Kb4?! Rb1+ 78.Kc5 Rxb7 79.a8=Q White still has to demonstrate the winning procedure in the queen vs. rook ending.

77...Ke6 78.Kc5

And Black resigned, as White's king will reach b8.

1-0

Gelfand, Boris (2739)
Anand, Viswanathan (2799)
Moscow 2012

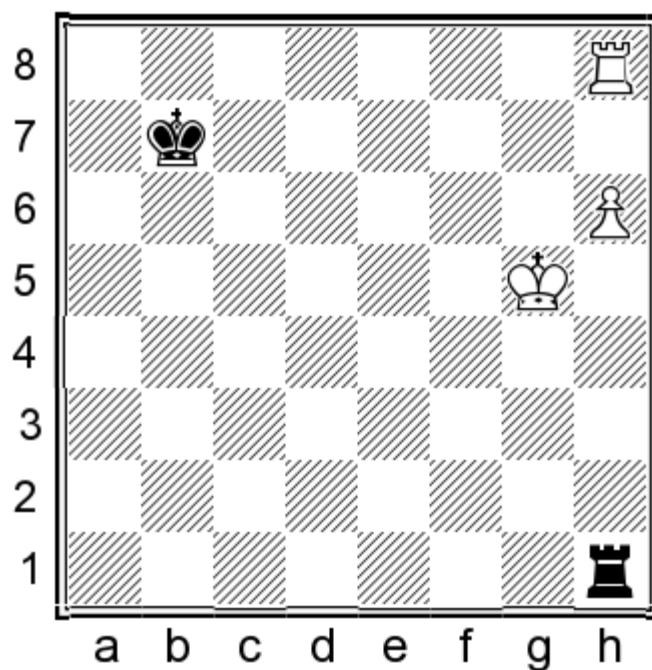


White to move

61.Rh7?

A) This strange-looking move (described by Gelfand as a “hallucination”) can sometimes be useful in this type of ending, as we witnessed in the previous example. Obviously 61.h7? Kb7 isn’t good either – once the white king protects the h-pawn, Black will start giving checks from the rear.

B) However, Gelfand could have converted his advantage had he played 61.Kg3! Kb7 (There’s no chance for the black king to approach the h-pawn with 61...Kd6 due to 62.h7! and White’s rook will be able to leave h8 on the next move.) 62.Kg4 Rh1 (62...Rc5 63.Rg8 also wins easily) 63.Kg5



Position after: 63.Kg5

and White's winning plan is as follows: the king goes to h7, the rook will be placed on g6 when the king can find a shelter against the checks on g7.

61.Rh7? Kd6 62.Kg3

After 62.Ra7 the black king also approaches with 62...Ke6 (Black shouldn't fall into the trap of 62...Rxb6? 63.Ra6+ losing the rook.) 63.h7 Kf6 with a draw.

62...Ke6 63.Kg4 Rh1

63...Rh1 and a draw was agreed. After, for example, 64.Kg5 Rg1+ 65.Kf4 Kf6 Black is in time to eliminate White's remaining pawn.

1/2-1/2

Chapter 2

Practical rook endings: extra passed pawn

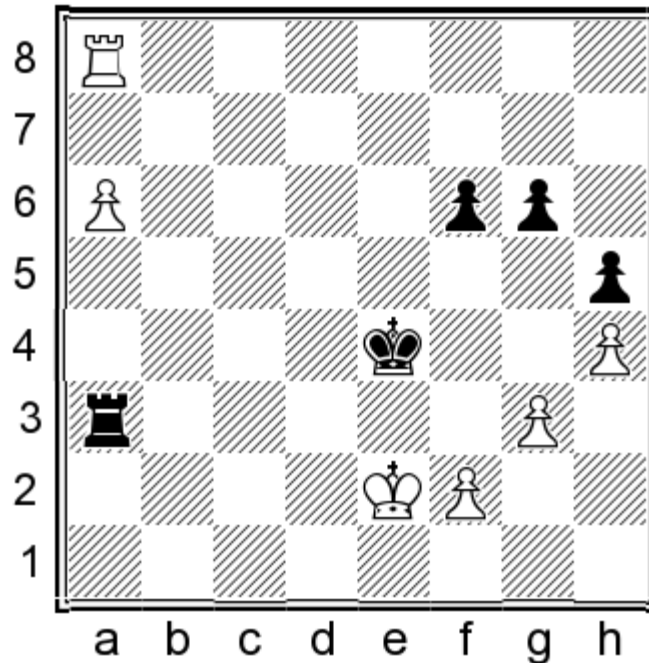
In the previous chapter we have studied the essential knowledge on theoretical rook endings with rook and pawn vs. rook. In the current chapter I would like to elaborate on this topic by showing some practical examples with more pawns on the board. As you will see the placement of the rook supporting (and defending against) the extra passed pawn will play a crucial role.

Rook in front of a passed pawn

Unzicker, Wolfgang

Lundin, Erik

Amsterdam 1954



White to move

48.f3+!

The immediate advance of the a-pawn can't be recommended, since after 48.a7? Ra2+ 49.Kd1 Kf3 the black king is safe.

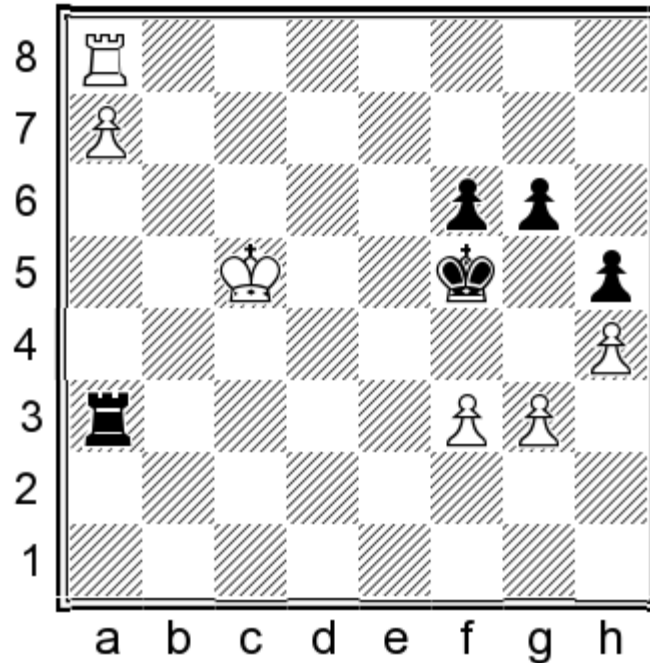
48.f3+! Kf5

48...Rxf3? fails to 49.Re8+ and White picks up the rook.

49.a7! Ra2+

Black is unable to generate any counterplay on the kingside. His king can't move, while 49...g5 doesn't work, in view of 50.hxg5 and any recapture allows White to remove his rook from the promotional square with check.

50.Kd3 Ra1 51.Kd4 Ra5 52.Kc4 Ra3 53.Kc5



Position after: 53.Kc5

53...Ra1

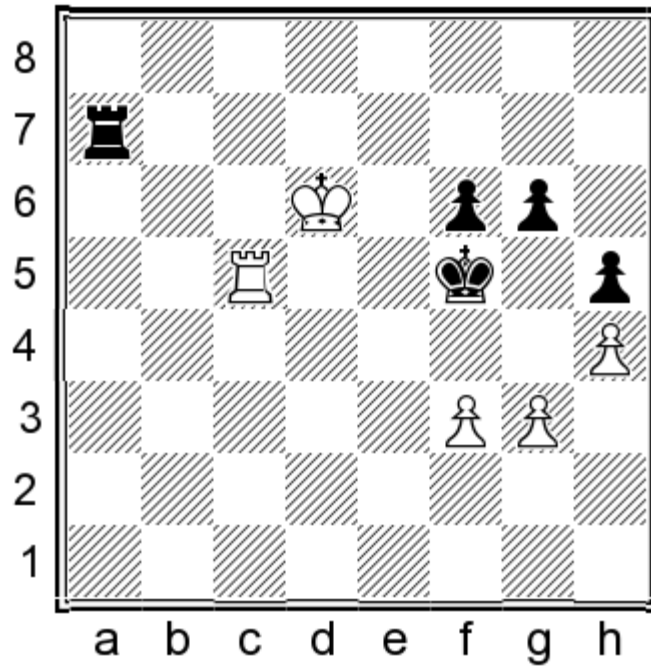
Black doesn't have time to take the pawn with 53...Rxf3 since after 54.Rb8 Ra3 55.a8=Q Rxa8 56.Rxa8 Kg4 the ensuing rook vs. pawn ending is easily winning for White as his king is so closeby. An instructive example is 57.Ra3 g5 58.hxg5 fxg5 59.Kd4 h4 60.gxh4 gxh4 61.Ke3 Kg3 62.Ra8 h3 63.Rg8+ Kh2 64.Kf2 Kh1 65.Rg1+ Kh2 66.Rg3 Kh1 67.Rxh3#

54.Kd6 Ra3

It would have been more stubborn to play 54...Ra6+ even though it doesn't prevent White's winning plan.

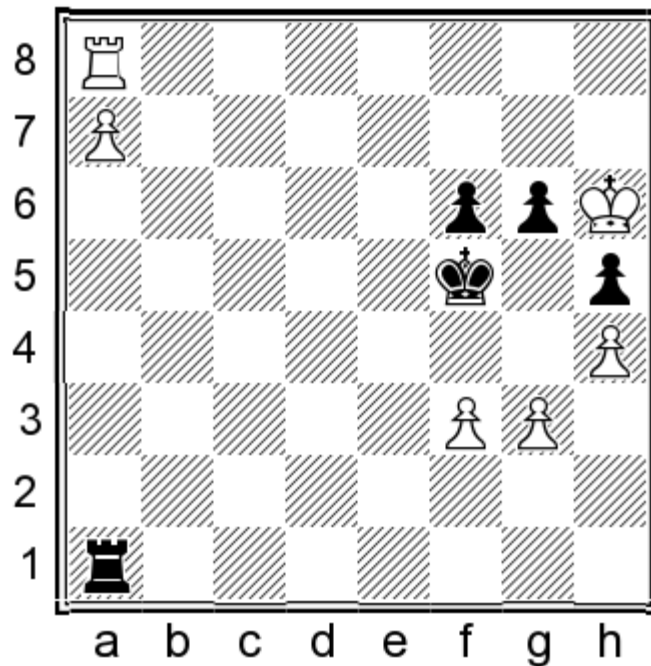
55.Ke7

White misses a great opportunity to decide the game on the spot with 55.Rc8! Ra6+ 56.Rc6 and now 56...Rxa7 enables White to mate the black king with 57.Rc5#



Position after: 57.Rc5#

55...Ra6 56.Kf7 Ra3 57.Kg7 Ra1 58.Kh6!



Position after: 58.Kh6!

Here we are. The white king has found an excellent shelter from the checks and is about to eliminate Black's kingside pawns.

Note: This plan is only possible due to the unfortunate position of the black king. For example: with a pawn on f7 and king on g7 the position would have been drawn.

58...Ra6 59.Rb8 Rxa7 60.Rb5+ Ke6 61.Kxg6 Ra8 62.Kxh5

Of course, not 62.Rxh5? Rg8+ and Black would be able to save the game.

62...Rg8

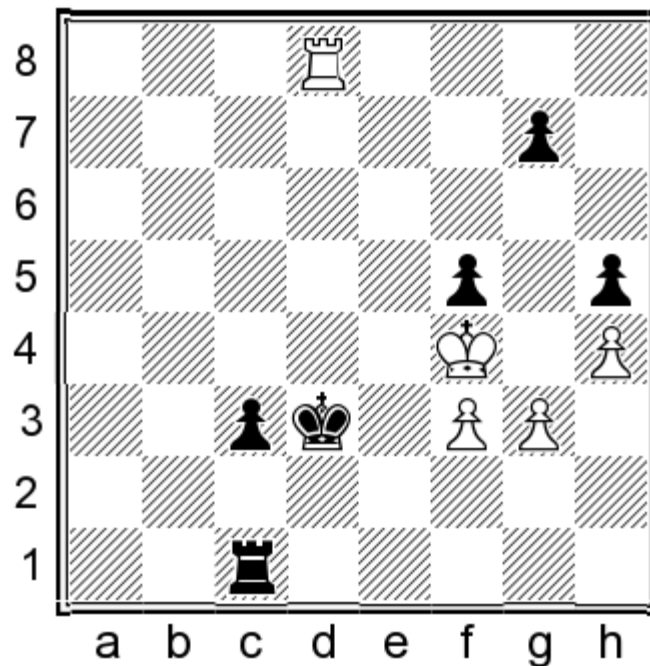
In case of 62...Rh8+ 63.Kg4, White should also win easily.

63.g4 Rh8+ 64.Kg6

64.Kg6 and Black resigned, since after 64...Rxh4 65.Rh5! White steers the game into a winning pawn ending.

1-0

Mirzoev, Azer (2565)
Aleksiev, Evgeny (2682)
Baku 2012



Black to move

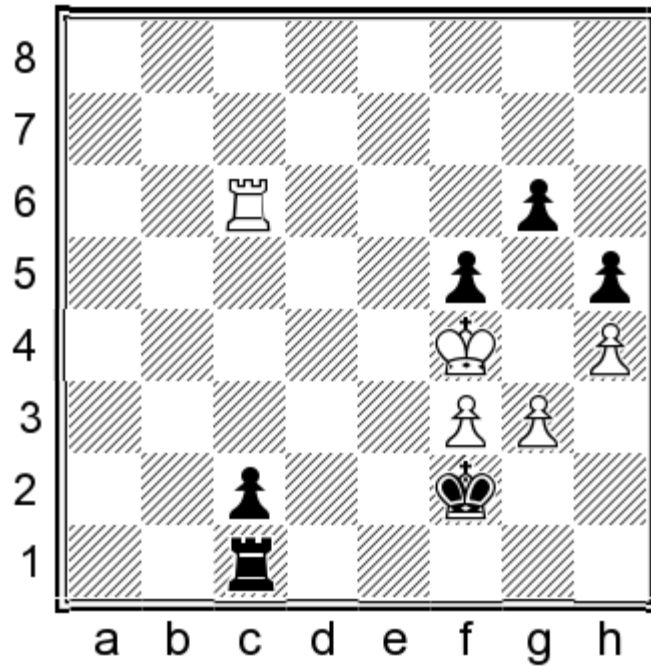
62...Ke2?

Although this move doesn't yet spoil anything, Aleksiev initiates the wrong plan. In this case the black king should support the advance of the c-pawn, e.g. 62...Kc2 63.Kxf5 Rd1 64.Rc8 Rd3 65.Kg6 Rxf3 66.Kxg7 Rxg3+ 67.Kh6 Kd2 68.Kxh5 c2 and since the white king has been cut off along the g-file, the black king approaches the pawn without any problems: 69.Kh6 c1=Q 70.Rxc1 Kxc1 71.h5 Kd2 72.Kh7 Ke3 73.h6 Kf4 74.Kh8 Kf5 75.h7 Kg6! 76.Kg8 Kh6+ 77.Kh8 Ra3 and the h-pawn falls.

62...Ke2? 63.Re8+ Kf2

63...Kd2 can transpose to the variation mentioned in the previous note.

64.Rc8 g6 65.Rc6 c2



Position after: 65...c2

Alekseev evidently knew the classic game covered in the previous example and believed that a similar king march should suffice.

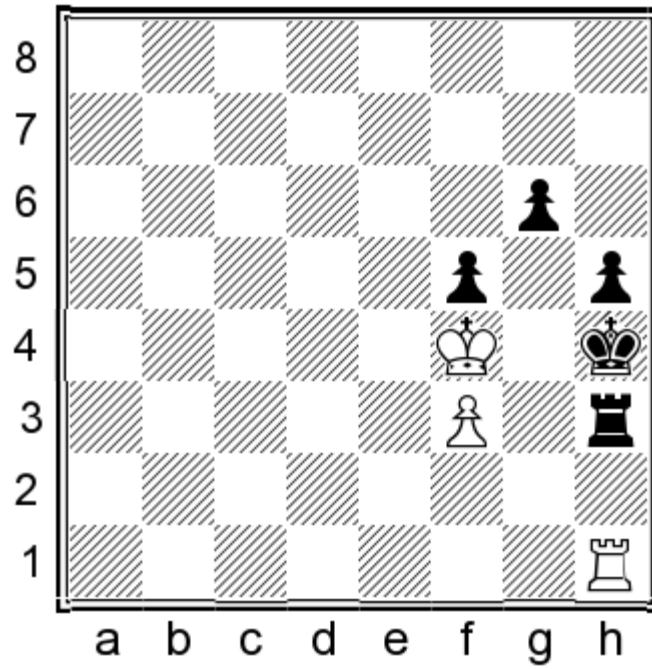
The main difference with the classic game is the different pawn structure,

which enables the weaker side to generate counterplay via the g5-square. If the pawn had been on f6 (as in Unzicker – Lundin with reversed colours), Black would indeed have been winning.

66.Rc3 Kg2 67.Rc6 Kh3 68.Rc3 Rg1

Black aims to capture the pawn on g3 with the rook, but it was worth considering 68...Rb1 69.Rxc2 Rb4+ and if the pawn had been on f6, White's following move wouldn't have been possible 70.Kg5 with accurate play White should manage to hold, e.g. 70...Kxg3 71.Kxg6 Rxf4 72.Kxf5 Rf4+ 73.Kg5 h4 74.Rc1! Rxf3 75.Rg1+ Kh2 76.Rd1 h3 77.Kg4 Rg3+ 78.Kh4 Rf3 79.Rd2+ Kg1 80.Kg4 Ra3 81.Rd1+ and Black can't make any progress.

69.Rxc2 Rxf3 70.Rc1 Kxh4 71.Rh1+ Rh3



Position after: 71...Rh3

72.Rf1!

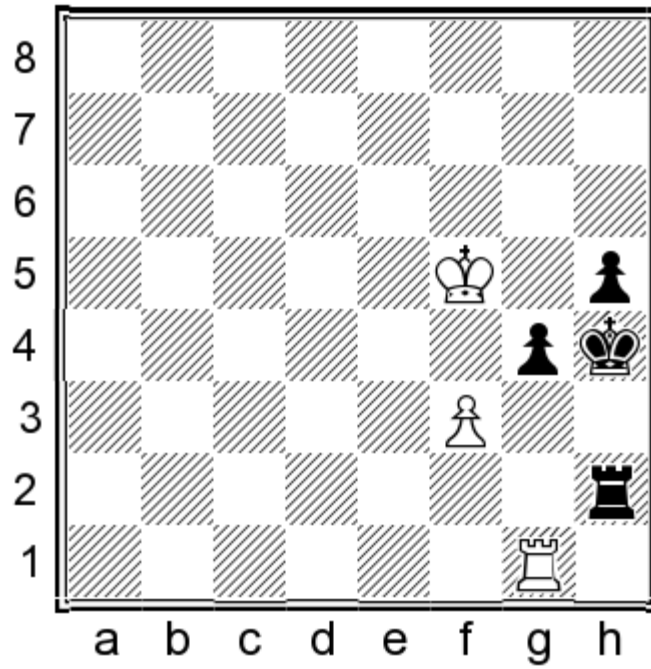
White's remaining pawn needs to be protected, since 72.Rg1? can be met by 72...g5+! 73.Rxg5 (73.Kxf5 Rxf3+ is hopeless too.) 73...Rxf3+ 74.Kxf3 Kxg5 and Black wins.

72...g5+ 73.Kxf5 Rh2

In case of 73...g4 White must reply with 74.Kf4! (74.fxg4? hxg4 75.Kf4 Rh2 76.Rc1 g3 77.Rc8 Rf2+ 78.Ke3 Kh3 and Black wins.) 74...g3 75.Rg1! and the unfortunate lack of coordination between Black's forces enables White to restore the material balance.

74.Ke4?

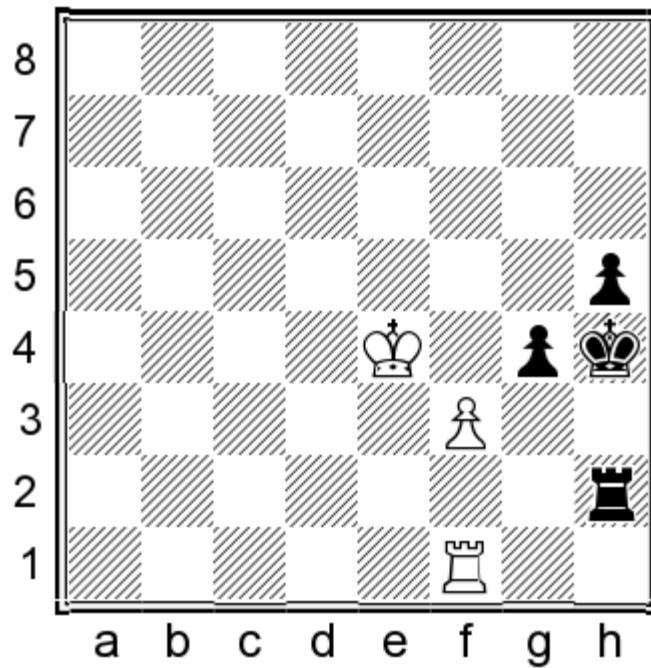
The decisive mistake. Correct was 74.Rg1! g4



Position after: 74...g4

75.Kf4! and White is able to hold on, as the black rook can't leave the h-file because of the mating threat, but not 75.fxg4? Rf2+! 76.Ke4 hxg4 and Black wins with the technique of our 'bridge building', see Chapter 1.

74...g4



Position after: 74...g4

75.fxg4

75.Kf4 makes no longer sense, in view of 75...g3! and the g-pawn soon promotes. That explains why 74.Rg1! is the only

move to save the game for White.

75...hxg4 76.Ke3

76.Kf4 wouldn't have made any difference: 76...g3 77.Kf3 Kh3 78.Rb1 Rf2+ 79.Ke3 Rf8 and Black wins.

76...Kg3

76...g3 77.Rf8 Ra2 also wins.

77.Rg1+ Rg2 78.Ra1 Rb2 79.Ra4 Kh3 80.Ra8 g3 81.Rh8+ Kg2 0-1

And White resigned, as the g-pawn is unstoppable.

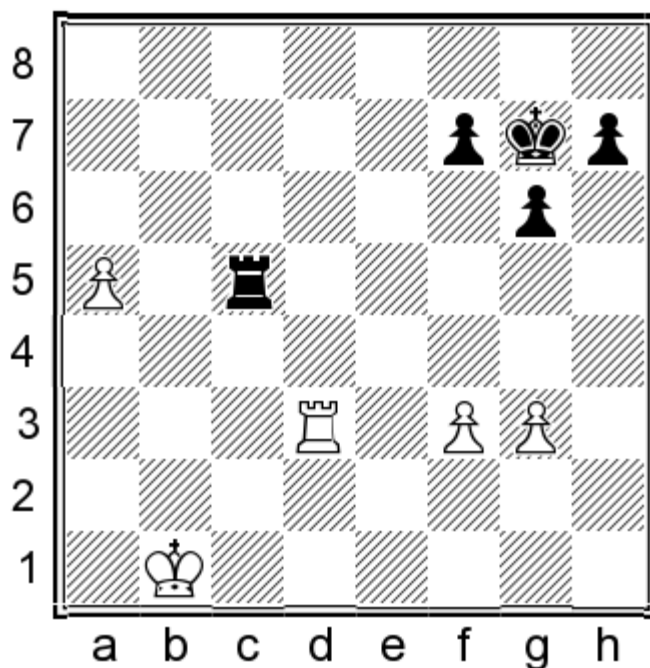
Rook behind the passed pawn

Dominguez Perez, Leinier (2710)

Robson, Ray (2583)

Lubbock 2011

The rule of thumb in rook endings is that you should place the rook behind the passed pawn; either your own or your opponent's. The following game clearly shows why one shouldn't hesitate to do so.



White to move

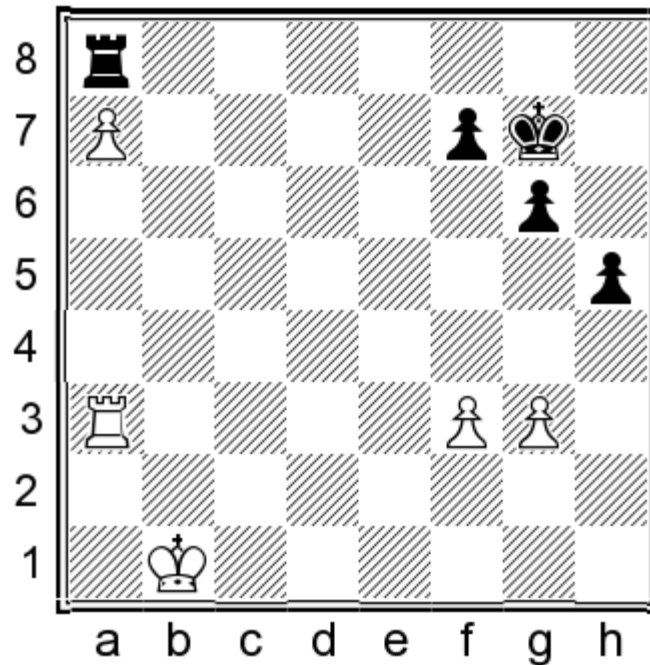
36.Ra3!

The rook belongs behind its own passed pawn. Immediately mobilizing the pawn with 36.a6? is premature, in view of 36...Ra5! 37.Rd6 h5! and White is unable to advance his passed pawn, while in the meantime Black is looking for his own chances on the kingside. A possible line is 38.f4 f6 39.Rd7+ Kh6 (39...Kf8? is a terrible blunder, because of 40.a7 Ke8 41.Rh7 and the a-pawn promotes.) 40.a7 g5 and a draw is the most logical outcome.

36.Ra3! h5

The passed pawn should generally be blocked as soon as possible. However, I doubt that after 36...Rc7 37.a6 Ra7 38.Kc2 Black would be able to hold this miserable ending.

37.a6 Rc8 38.a7 Ra8



Position after: 38...Ra8

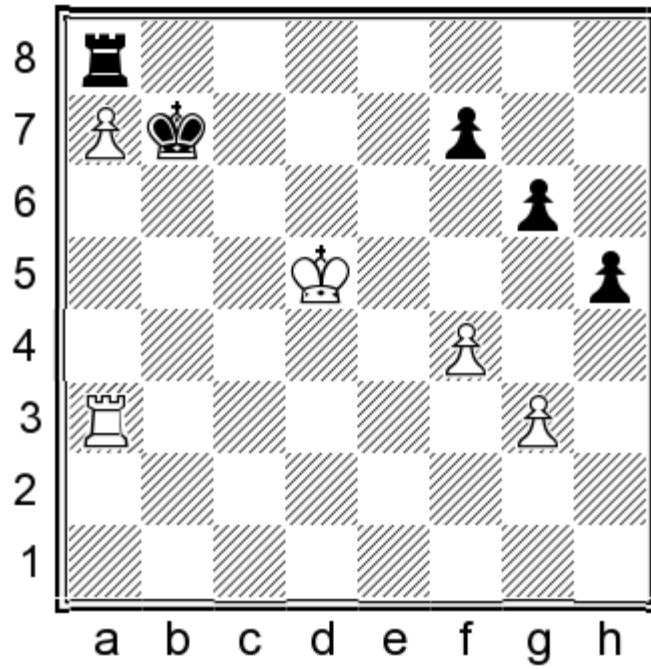
39.Kc2!

A logical and strong move. White centralizes his king, though he might have been afraid of Black generating counterplay by ...g6-g5.

However, after 39.f4? Kf6 40.Kc2

A) 40...Kf5! 41.Kd3 f6 42.Ke3 (42.Kc4 g5 43.fxg5 fxg5 44.Kc5 h4 also leads to a draw.) 42...Kg4 43.Kf2 h4 44.gxh4 Kxf4 Black's active king ensures a draw.

B) It is instructive to understand why the move 40...Ke6? would not be sufficient to save the game: 41.Kc3! Kd5 42.Kb4 Kc6 43.Kc4 Kb7 (43...f6 is met by 44.Ra6+) 44.Kd5



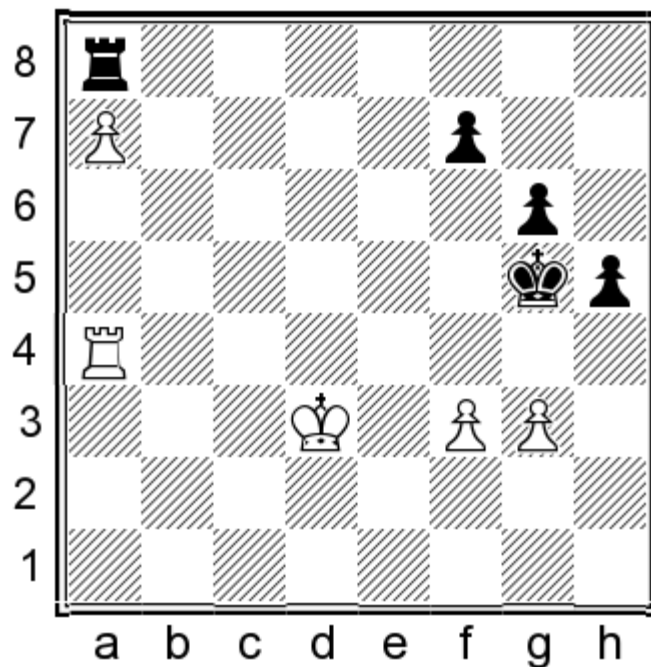
Position after: 44.Kd5

44...Rd8+ (44...Re8 would allow 45.a8=Q+! Rxa8 46.Rxa8 Kxa8 47.Ke5! and White wins – but not 47.Kd6?? allowing 47...f6= followed by ...g6-g5 and ...h5-h4.) 45.Ke5 Ka8 46.Kf6 h4 (46...Rd7 47.Re3!) 47.gxh4 Rh8 48.Rh3 Rh7 49.Ke7! Kxa7 50.Kf8 f5 51.Kg8 Rd7 52.Rg3 with a technically winning position.

39...Kf6

39...g5 doesn't offer the counterplay Black desires. After 40.Kd3 h4 41.gxh4 gxh4 42.Ke3 White will simply pick up the h-pawn. Then with the support of the rook, White's king will expel its counterpart from protecting the f-pawn.

40.Kd3 Kg5 41.Ra4!



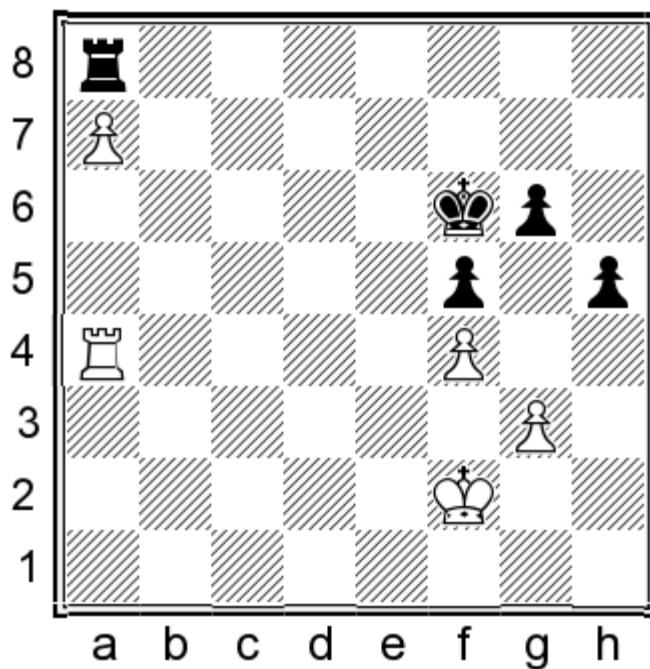
Position after: 41.Ra4!

An instructive idea. The rook covers the 4th rank and thus prevents Black from creating counterplay on the kingside. On the other hand, 41.Ke4 would also have been sufficient.

41...f6

In case of 41...f5 42.Ke2 Kf6 43.f4! White wins in a similar manner as in the game.

42.Ke3 f5 43.Kf2 Kf6 44.f4!



Position after: 44.f4!

Fixing the kingside. White's two pawns restrain Black's kingside.

44...Ke6

44...g5 can be met by 45.Ra6+ picking up a pawn.

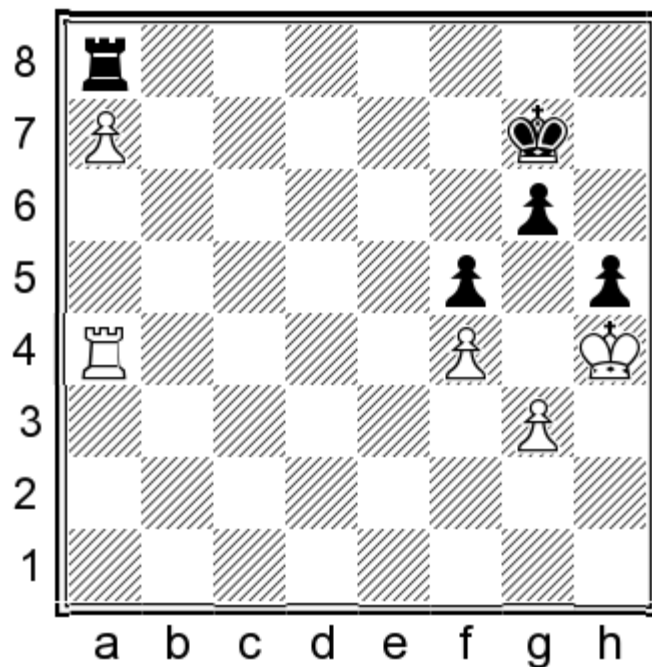
45.Kg2!

White's favourable pawn structure enables the king to invade on the dark squares via h3-h4-g5.

45...Ke7

Black could have prevented White's plan by radical means with 45...h4 but after 46.gxh4 Kd5 47.Ra6 Ke4 48.Kg3 Kd3 49.h5! gxh5 50.Kh4 Ke4 51.Ra4+ both Black's remaining pawns will soon fall.

46.Kh3 Kf6 47.Kh4 Kg7



Position after: 47...Kg7

48.Ra3!

Highlighting the difference in activity between the rooks. Moreover, White still has to be extremely careful, as the automatic 48.Kg5? simply runs into 48...h4! when the white king is suddenly trapped in a mating net. Luckily for him he can still escape with a draw: 49.g4 (49.Kxh4? Rh8+ 50.Kg5 Rh5#; 49.gxh4? Rh8 followed by 50...Rh5#.) 49...h3! (Of course, not 49...fxg4? 50.Kxh4 and White wins easily, e.g. 50...Kf7 51.Kxg4 Kf6 52.Ra1 Ke6 53.Kg5 Kf7 54.Ra6 and the g-pawn falls.) 50.gxf5 gxf5 51.Kxf5 h2 52.Ra1 Kf7 and the h-pawn provides sufficient counterplay.

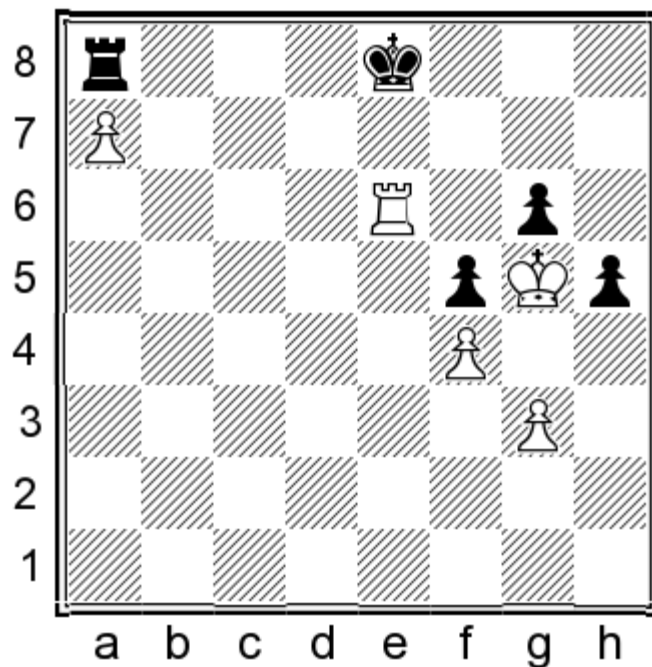
48...Kf7 49.Ra6

Another move-order is 49.Kg5 Kg7 50.Ra6 which transposes into the game.

49...Kg7 50.Kg5 Kf7 51.Rf6+ Ke8

Other moves wouldn't have helped either: 51...Ke7 52.Rxg6+-; or 51...Kg7 52.Rxg6+--.

52.Re6+!



Position after: 52.Re6+!

52...Kf8

A) In case of 52...Kf7 White retreats his rook with 53.Ra6! when Black has fallen into zugzwang, as after 53...Kg7 White captures 54.Rxg6+ with check.

B) Also after 52...Kd8 53.Rxg6 Black has no time to pick up the a-pawn, because of 53...Rxa7 54.Rg8+ Kc7 55.Rg7+ Kb8 56.Rxa7 Kxa7 57.Kxf5 and the rest is straight forward.

53.Rxg6 Rxa7 54.Rf6+

And Black resigned, as he can't avoid the loss of both his f- and h-pawns.

1-0

Conclusion: The difference in the strength of the rooks has been enormous in this example.

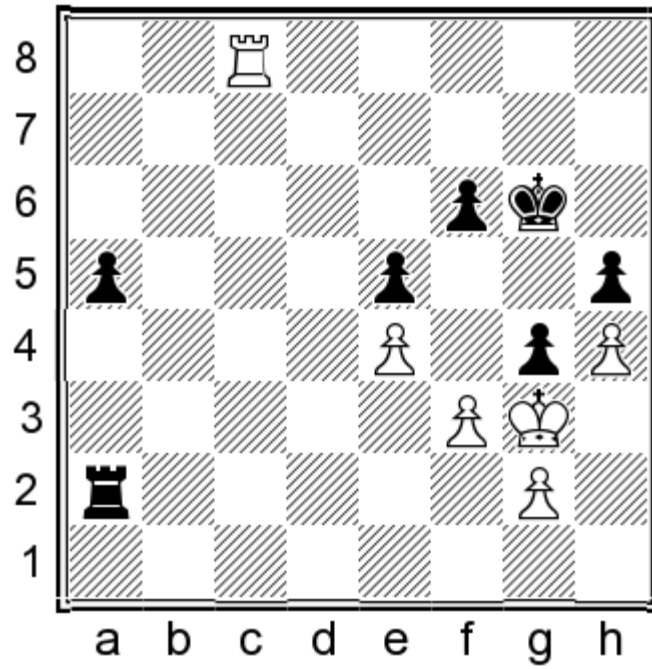
Whereas the black rook was unable to leave a8, White has an infinite number of waiting moves along the a-file at his disposal. It's instructive to note that White doesn't think of bringing his king to the a-pawn, as in some cases Black might be able to save the remaining rook vs. pawn ending.

Instead, White decided to exploit the favourable position of his rook by putting his opponent into zugzwang, gradually chasing the king away from its defensive role on the kingside.

Bacrot, Etienne (2714)

Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime (2719)

Biel 2013



White to move

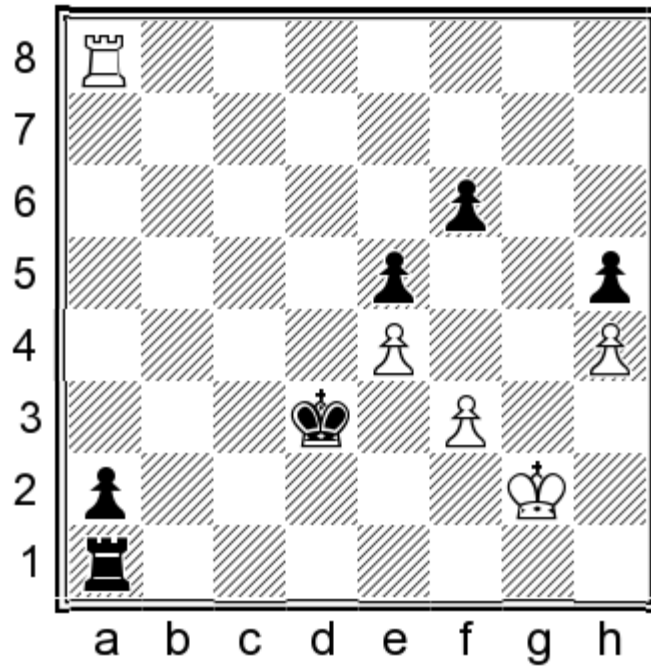
Black has an extra passed pawn, but everything depends on the situation on the kingside and whether the black king will be able to infiltrate.

As usual in this type of ending, the defending side can either try to solve his problems in a tangible way or opt for the technical solution. Bacrot chooses the first option.

43.fxg4?!

For an unknown reason Bacrot decides to alter the pawn structure which involves great strategic risk as his pawn on e4 becomes very vulnerable.

It seems that with a passive defence like 43.Ra8! White should be able to equalise, e.g. 43...gxf3 44.gxf3 a4 (44...Kf7 45.Ra7+ Ke6 46.Rh7 and White generates counterplay.) 45.Ra7! a3 46.Kh3 Ra1 47.Kg3 a2 (what else?) 48.Kg2 Kh6 and Black can't make further progress: 49.Ra6 Kg7 50.Ra8 Kf7 51.Ra7+ Ke6 52.Ra6+ Ke7 53.Ra3 Kd6 54.Ra8 Kc5 55.Ra7 Kc4 56.Ra8 Kd3



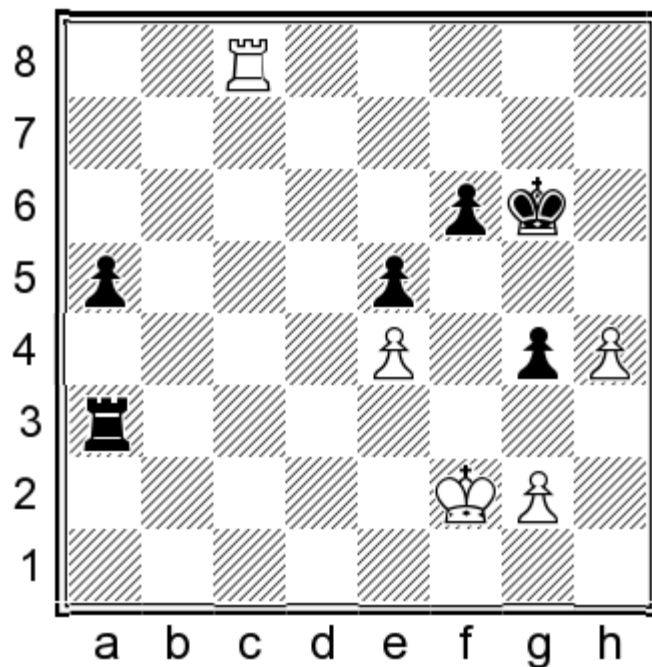
Position after: 56...Kd3

57.Ra3+ (57.Ra7? fails to 57...Rc1! 58.Ra3+ Rc3 59.Rxa2 Rc2+ 60.Rxc2 Kxc2 and the black king has the opposition.)
 57...Kd2 58.Ra8 Ke3 59.Ra3+ Kf4 60.Ra6 f5 61.exf5 Kxf5 62.Ra4= with an equal position.

43.fxg4?! Ra3+ 44.Kf2?

Strangely enough, the king isn't well placed here. Better would have been 44.Kh2! hxg4 45.Ra8 Ra4 (The point is that after 45...g3+? White keeps an eye on the g-pawn with 46.Kh3) 46.Rg8+ Kh7 47.Ra8 (47.Rxg4 Rb4 needs to be checked too.) 47...Rxe4 48.Rxa5 and since play has been reduced to only one flank, White retains good drawing chances despite being a pawn down.

44...hxg4



Position after: 44...hxg4

45.Rg8+

Consistently played, since after weakening the pawn structure he needs to go for the g-pawn. 45.Ra8 can be strongly answered by 45...g3+ 46.Ke2 a4 and White's pawns are about to be picked up.

45...Kh7!

A) The best square for the king. If 45...Kh5 46.Rh8+ the moves will be repeated.

B) 45...Kf7 isn't satisfactory either, since after 46.Rxg4 a4 47.h5 White suddenly generates counterplay with his h-pawn.

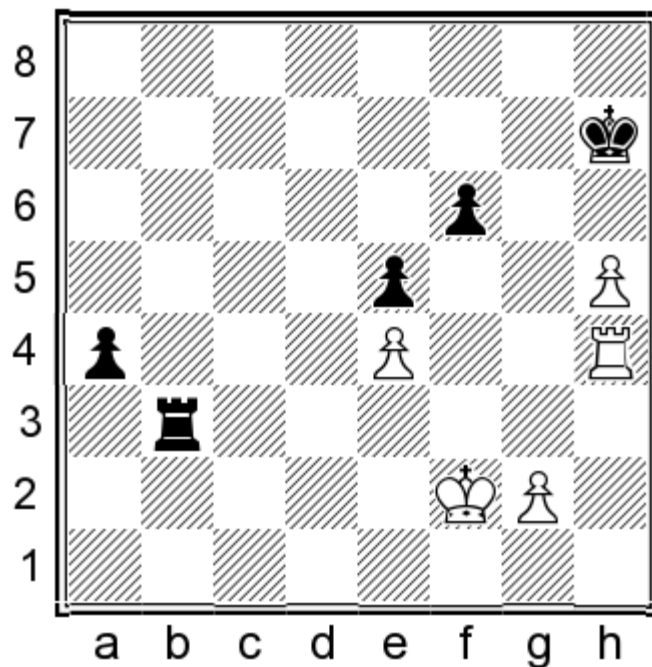
46.Rxg4 a4 47.h5

Absolutely forced, because after 47.Ke2 Rb3! the a-pawn is unstoppable.

47...Rb3!

There is no need to keep the rook in front of the pawn by means of 47...Ra2+ and slowly advancing the passed pawn. Instead Black improves the position of this rook by bringing it behind the pawn, from where it better supports the passer.

48.Rh4



Position after: 48.Rh4

White doesn't have time to bring his rook behind the passed pawn with 48.Rg6 in view of the intermezzo 48...Rb2+! when neither the first and third rank are desirable destinations for the king: (48...a3? 49.Rxf6 is unproblematic.) 49.Kf3 (49.Kg1 is met by 49...a3 50.Rxf6 a2 51.Ra6 Rb1+ and Black wins.) 49...Rb6 50.Kf2 (50.Rg3 allows 50...Rb3+) 50...a3 51.Rg3 Rb2+ 52.Kf1 a2 and the a-pawn promotes.

48...a3

Another option is 48...Rb4, intending to meet 49.Kf3 with 49...f5!, and after taking the e-pawn, the h-pawn will soon follow.

49.Rh1 Kh6

The immediate 49...a2 is equally good.

50.g4

50.Ra1 Kxh5 looks absolutely hopeless in view of the weak white pawns.

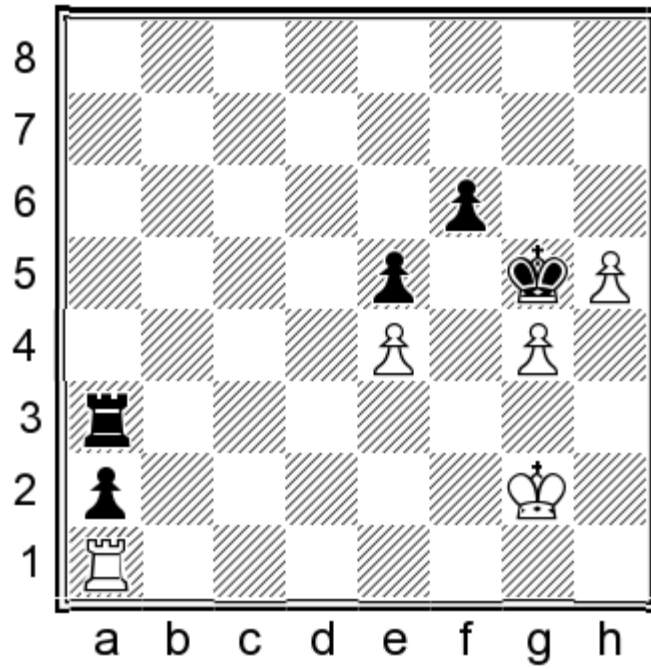
50...a2 51.Ra1 Rh3 52.Kg1

52.Rxa2 runs into 52...Rh2+.

52...Ra3

All roads lead to Rome and thus 52...Rg3+ 53.Kf2 Rxg4 54.Kf3 Rf4+ 55.Ke3 Rh4! would have sufficed too, with the point that 56.Rxa2 is met by 56...Rh3+ 57.Kf2 Rh2+ and Black wins the rook.

53.Kf2 Kg5 54.Kg2



Position after: 54.Kg2

Compared with the starting position, things have changed dramatically. White has restored the material balance but that is all that can be said about his position. Instead of dealing with the a-pawn from behind, the rook has been driven back to the worst possible square.

In fact, White's position seems hopeless and Vachier-Lagrave is about to pick up all three weak pawns on the kingside, or...?

54...Kxg4?

Too greedy, offering White counter chances with the h-pawn. Black could easily have converted his advantage had he played 54...Ra7 55.Kf3 Ra4 and White has run out of moves, e.g. 56.Ke3 (56.Kg3 Rxe4 57.Rxa2 Rxg4+ 58.Kf3 Kxh5 and Black wins.) 56...Kxg4 57.h6 Ra7 58.h7 (58.Kd3 Kf4 59.Rf1+ Kg5 60.Ra1 Kxh6 and Black wins.) 58...Rxh7 59.Rxa2 Rh3+ and Black wins the rook.

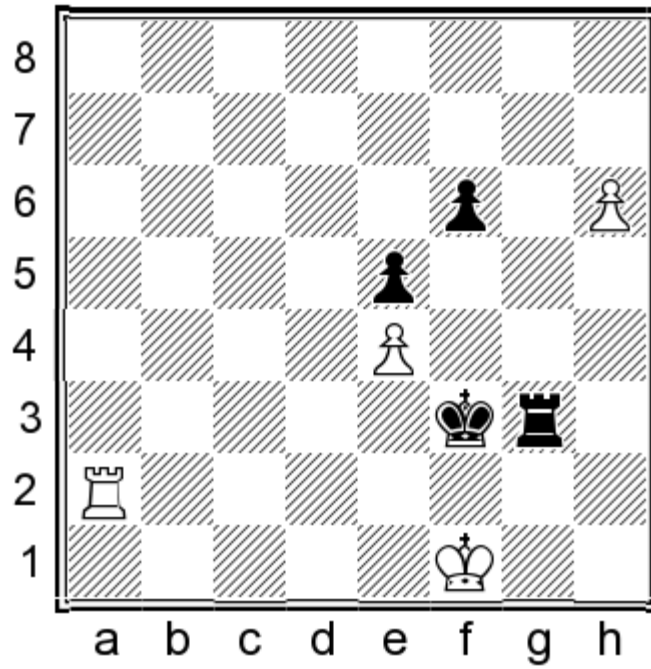
55.h6 Rg3+

Also, after 55...Ra7 56.h7 Rxh7 57.Rxa2, Black doesn't seem to be able to convert his slight material advantage due to the weakness on f6.

56.Kf1

56.Kf2 could have been tried as well.

56...Kf3 57.Rxa2



Position after: 57.Rxa2

57.h7? spoils everything, because of 57...Rh3 58.Kg1 (58.Rxa2 Rh1#) 58...Kxe4 59.Rxa2 Rxe7 and Black wins.

57...Kxe4

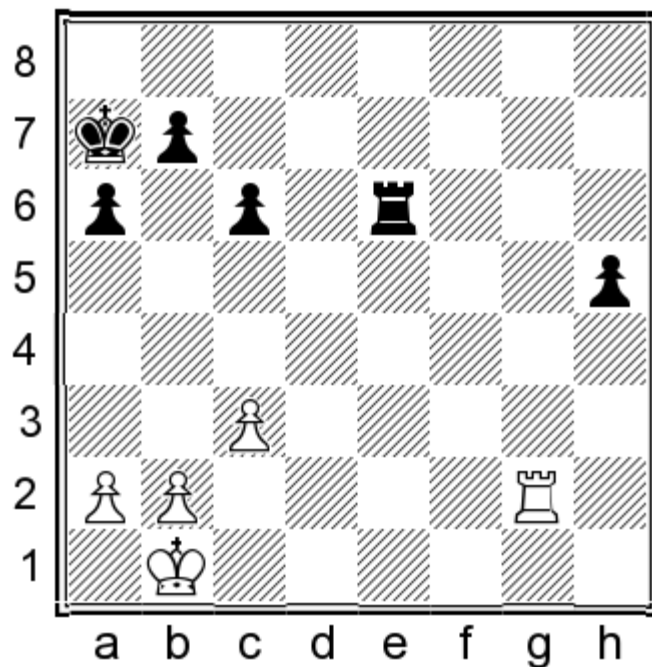
57...Rh3?? 58.Ra3+! and suddenly the tables are turned.

After the game continuation it turns out that Black is unable to capture the h-pawn without losing either his e- or f-pawn.

58.Rf2 f5 59.Re2+ Kd5 60.Rh2 Rg8 61.h7 Rh8 62.Kf2 Ke6 63.Rh6+ Kf7 64.Kg3 Kg7 65.Re6 Rxe7 66.Rxe5 Kf6 1/2-1/2

Najer, Evgeny (2643)
 Matlakov, Maxim (2632)
 Taganrog 2011

In the previous examples the advantage of a rook behind the passed pawn was perfectly demonstrated. Matters aren't that simple, and the weaker side also has defensive resources. Let's have a look at two examples where the chances for the defender are shown.



White to move

52.Rh2

We know you should strive to get your rook behind the passed pawn. However, in this case White is unable to accomplish that aim, since 52.Rg8 can easily be met by 52...Rh6! when the white rook must return to its passive post anyway.

52.Rh2 Rh6?

Black logically places his rook behind the passed pawn. However, protecting the passed pawn from the rear with 52...Re5 might have been a better option here. In comparison to the game the rook is more centralized and prevents the white king crossing the e-file.

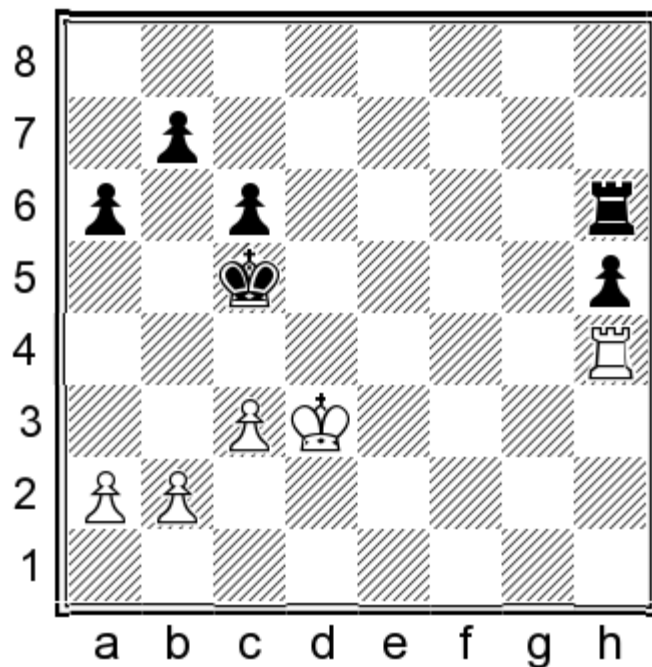
In the 7th game of the Jussupow – Timman match, Linares 1992, White made a similar mistake by playing 35.Ra1?, whereas 35.Re4! would have won.

52.Rh2 Rh6? 53.Rh4!

An instructive defensive idea: the passed pawn should be blocked as soon as possible. If White ignores such a strategy, e.g. with 53.Kc2 h4 54.Kd3 h3 55.Ke2 Kb6 Black can easily mobilize his king.

Compared with Najer's continuation, White's rook is very passive now, while in the game the rook controls the 4th rank. As in the Jussupow – Timman game mentioned above, the defender's rook plays an important role in eliminating the remaining pawns on the other wing.

53...Kb6 54.Kc2 Kc5 55.Kd3



Position after: 55.Kd3

55...a5?!

This only eases White's task of exchanging the queenside pawns. More logical would have been 55...Kd5 aiming to transfer the king to the h-pawn, even though the outcome would be no different

56.a4!

Fixing the queenside is a good strategy as White will be able to generate counterplay with a well-timed b2-b4. The immediate 56.b4+ is less accurate in view of 56...Kb5 when White's queenside pawns remain vulnerable.

56...Kd5 57.Ke3

White's aim is to switch the roles of the king and rook.

Generally, in rook endgames it's better that the king stops the opponent's passed pawn, since the rook must be activated.

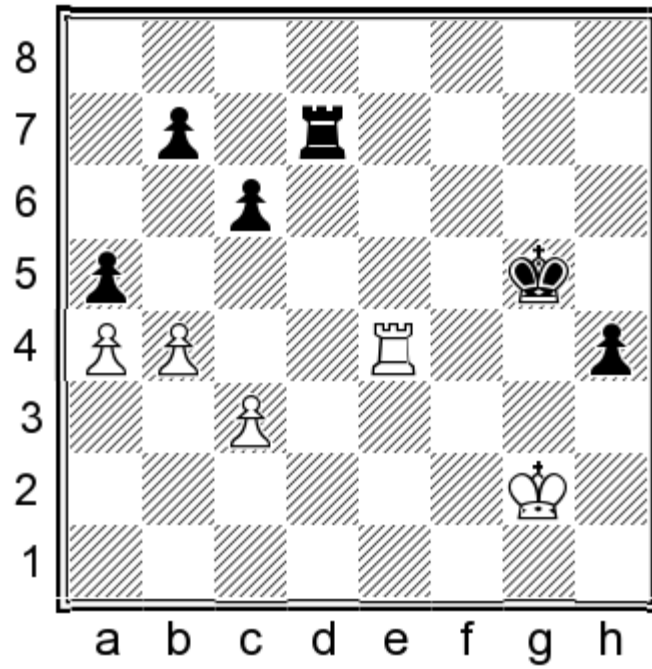
57...Re6+ 58.Kd3 Rh6

Protecting from the rear with 58...Re5 makes less sense now, as White will continue his plan by exchanging the queenside pawns with 59.b4 or even (59.Rf4 with the idea of placing the rook behind the passed pawn.)

59.Ke3 Rh7 60.Rd4+ Ke5 61.Rh4 Kf5 62.Kf3 Kg5 63.Re4 h4 64.Kg2 Rd7

64...h3+ 65.Kh2 only weakens the h-pawn.

65.b4!



Position after: 65.b4!

The long-awaited plan.

65...Rd2+ 66.Kg1

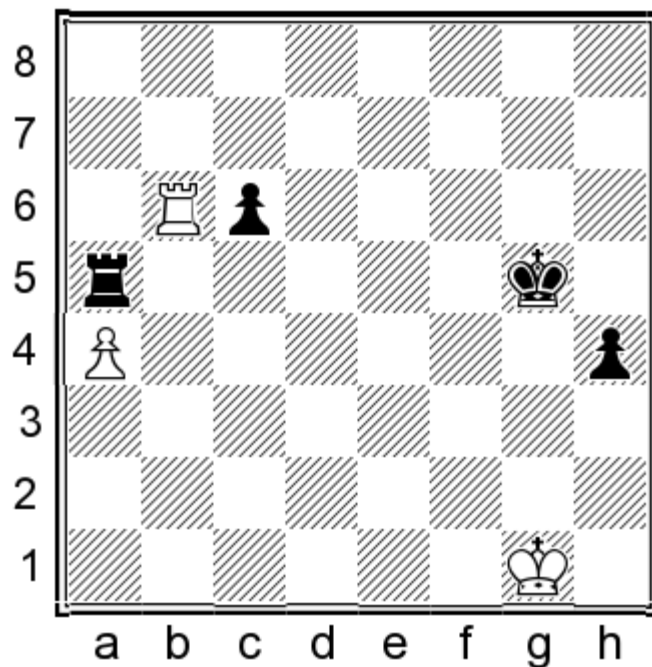
66.Kh3?! Rd3+ only complicates the defensive process.

66...Rc2

A) Alternatives can't really change anything: 66...axb4 67.cxb4 Ra2 68.a5 Rb2 69.Rc4 with the idea of a6, Rxc6 and Rxa6 assures a draw.

B) 66...b6 67.bxa5 bxa5 68.Re5+ and White regains his pawn.

67.bxa5 Rxc3 68.Rb4 Rc5 69.Rxb7 Rxa5 70.Rb6



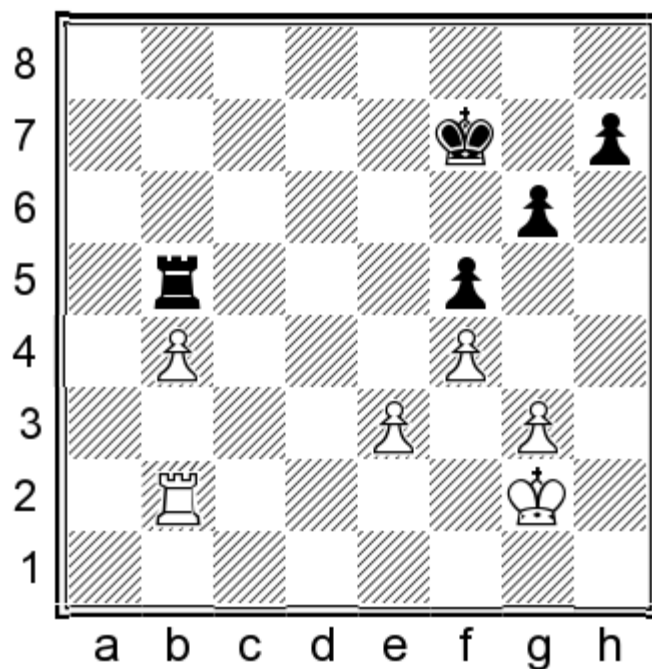
Position after: 70.Rb6

70...Rxa4

After 70...c5 71.Rb5! a draw is also inevitable: 71...Rxb5 (71...Rxa4 72.Rxc5+=) 72.axb5 c4 73.b6 c3 74.b7 c2 75.b8=Q c1=Q+ 76.Kh2=

71.Rxc6 Rf4 72.Kh2 Rf6 73.Rxf6 Kxf6 74.Kh3 Ke5 75.Kxh4 ½-½

Kramnik, Vladimir (2801)
 Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime (2722)
 Paris/St Petersburg 2013



Black to move

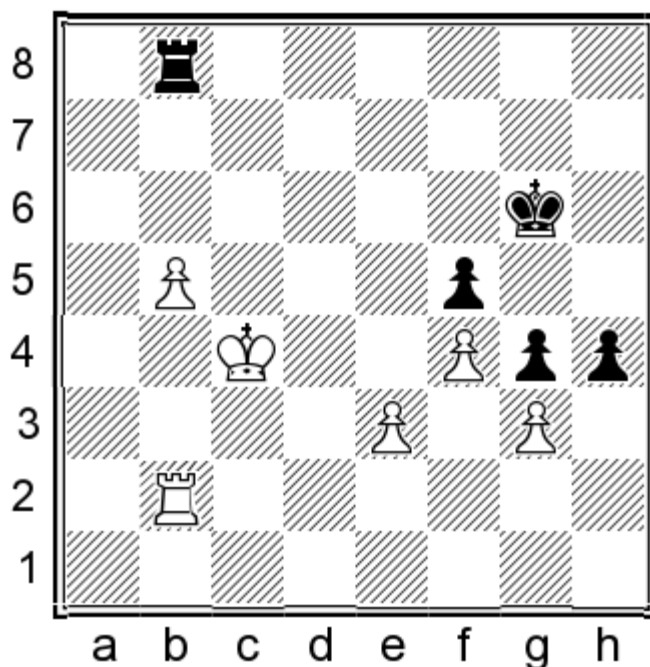
When they reached this position, Kramnik must almost have been counting on the full point already. The king will soon be activated, and it seems quite unlikely that the rook on b5 will block the pawn forever. The asymmetrical pawn structure on the kingside gives Black some hope of obtaining counterplay though. The Frenchman immediately grabs his chance.

35...g5! 36.Kf3

Trading off the pawns with 36.fxc5 doesn't lead anywhere and Black holds easily: 36...Kg6 37.Kf3 Kxc5 38.Rb1 h6 39.Rb2 Kf6 40.Kf4 Ke6 41.Rb1 Kf6 42.e4 fxe4 43.Kxe4 Ke6 44.Kd4 Kd6 45.Kc4 Rg5 46.Rb3 Kc6 and soon the pawns on the kingside will be exchanged as well.

36...g4+ 37.Ke2 Ke6

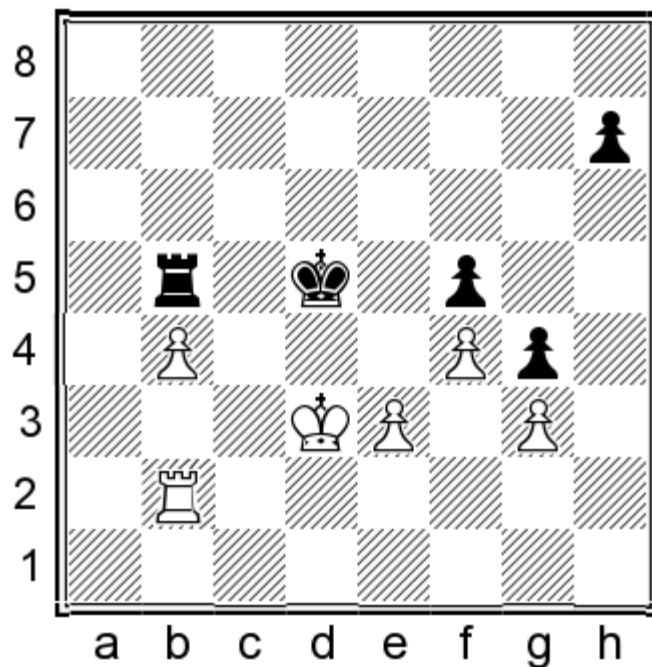
As in the previous note Black aims to centralise his king so that it can take over the job of stopping the b-pawn from the rook at any moment. However, another idea for generating counterplay on the kingside is 37...h5!? 38.Kd3 Kg6 39.Kc4 Rb8 40.b5 h4!



Position after: 40...h4!

and with the creation of a passed g-pawn Black seems to be just in time, e.g. 41.gxh4 Kh5 42.b6 Kxh4 43.Kd5 g3 44.Kc6 Kg4 45.b7 Kf3 46.Kc7 Rh8 47.b8=Q Rxb8 48.Rxb8 Kxe3 49.Kd6 Kxf4 50.Rg8 Kf3 51.Ke5 f4 52.Rf8 g2 53.Rxf4+ Kg3 54.Rf8 g1=Q 55.Rg8+ Kf2 56.Rxg1 Kxg1=

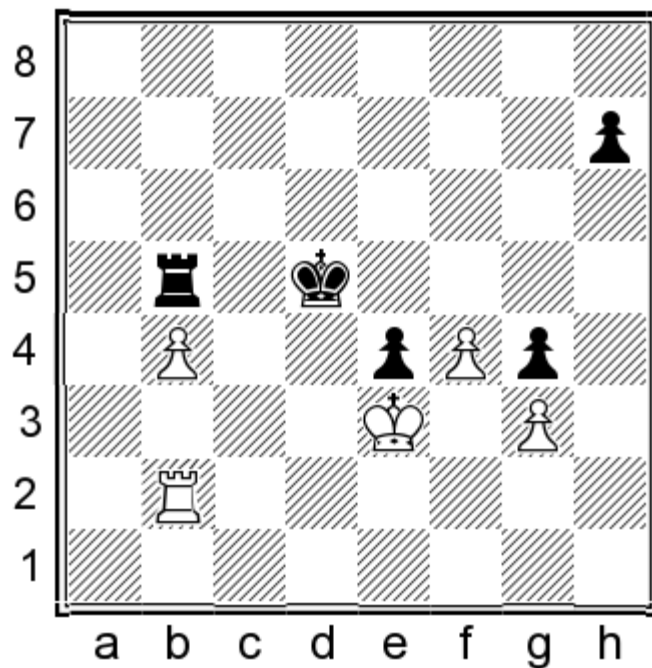
38.Kd3 Kd5



Position after: 38...Kd5

39.Rb1

After the game the players believed White could have won by 39.e4+!? fxe4+ 40.Ke3 and now there are two interesting possibilities:

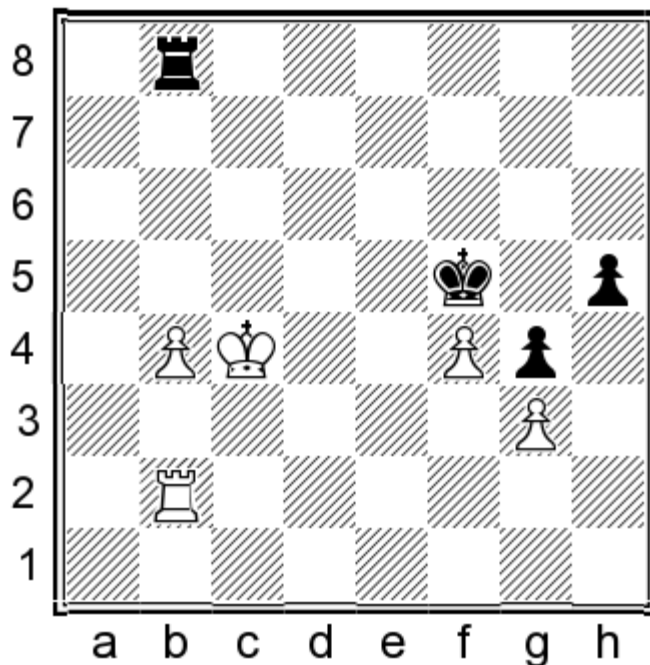


Position after: 40.Ke3

A) 40...h5 41.Rd2+ Ke6 42.Rd4 h4 (42...Rb8!? 43.Kxe4 Kf6 isn't so clear as once the white king is transferred to the b-pawn, Black counters this with ...h4!) 43.Rxe4+ Kf5 44.gxh4 g3 45.Re5+ (45.Kf3 g2 46.Re1 Rxb4 47.Re5+ Kf6 48.Rg5 leads to the famous ending of f+h which should be drawn.) 45...Rxe5+ 46.fxe5 Kg4 47.e6 Kh3 48.e7 g2 49.e8=Q

g1=Q+ and although Black should be able to save the game, the suffering continues.

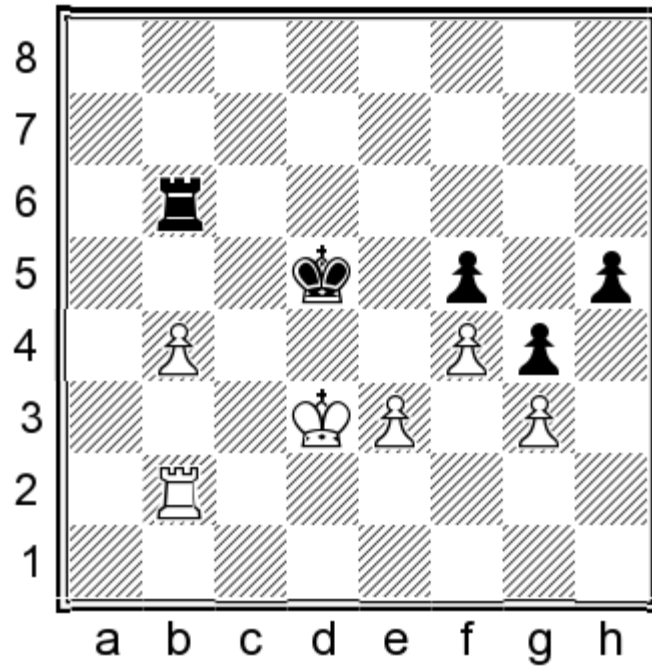
B) However, 40...Ke6! seems to be stronger, preventing White from activating the rook. 41.Kxe4 h5 42.Kd4 Kf5 43.Kc4 Rb8



Position after: 43...Rb8

and Black seems to hold in all lines. For example: 44.Re2 (44.Rh2 Ke4! 45.Rxh5 Kf3 and after taking on g3, Black has sufficient counterplay. It's worth remembering that two separate pawns don't run faster than one!) 44...Rc8+ (44...h4? is met by 45.Re5+!) 45.Kd4 (45.Kb3 allows 45...h4! 46.Re5+ Kf6 47.gxh4 Rg8 and the g-pawn is strong enough to deal with three white pawns.) 45...Rd8+ and White can't really make progress, since 46.Kc5 can be answered with 46...Rd3!

39...h5 40.Rb2 Rb6



Position after: 40...Rb6

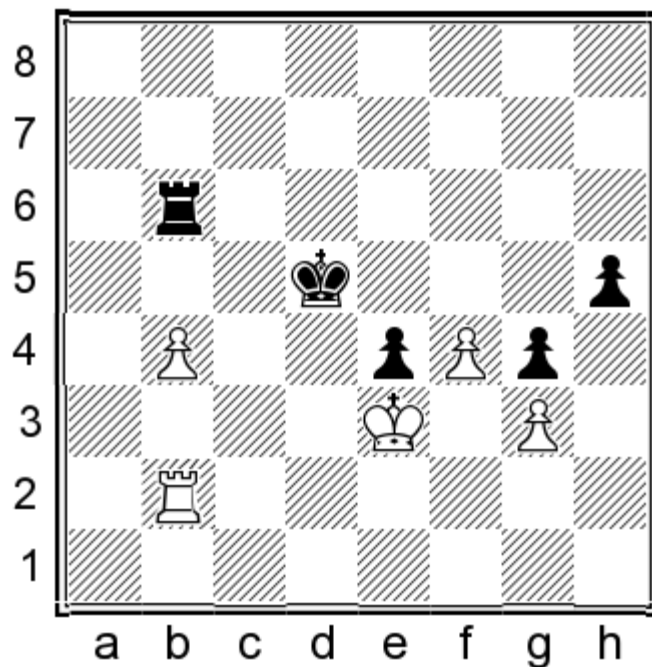
41.Rb1

Once the defensive rook moves, the passed pawn can go forwards, but in this particular case 41.b5 only leads to a drawn pawn ending after 41...Kc5 42.e4 Rxb5 43.Rxb5+ Kxb5 44.exf5 Kc6 45.f6 Kd7 46.f5 Ke8 47.Ke4 Kf7 and White can't play 48.Ke5? which even loses to 48...h4! 49.Kf4 h3!

41...Rb5 42.Rb2

From a practical point of view, Kramnik might have done better to try 42.e4+ fxe4+ 43.Ke3 h4 44.gxh4 g3 45.Rb2 g2 46.Rxg2 Rxb4 47.Rg5+ Ke6 48.h5 (48.Re5+ Kf6 49.Rxe4? Rb3+ 50.Kf2 Rh3 and the h-pawn falls.) 48...Rb1 49.Kxe4 Re1+ and, although this famous ending of f+h is theoreticly drawn, it still offers more chances than in the game.

42...Rb6 43.e4+ fxe4+ 44.Ke3



Position after: 44.Ke3

44...h4

In the live commentary from the official site, Grischuk pointed out the following variation 44...Rc6 45.Rd2+ (Another instructive line is 45.b5 Rc3+ 46.Kf2 Rf3+ 47.Kg2 e3 48.b6 e2! 49.Rxe2 Rb3 50.Re5+ Kd4 51.Rxh5 Rb2+ 52.Kg1 Ke3! and Black is rewarded for activating his forces.) 45...Ke6 46.Kxe4 Rc4+ 47.Rd4 Rc3 48.f5+ Kf6 49.Rd6+ Ke7 (49...Kg5? 50.Rg6#) 50.Re6+ Kf7 51.Kf4 Rf3+ 52.Kg5 Rxg3 53.Rb6 Rf3 54.Rb7+ Ke8 and a draw is just inevitable.

45.gxh4 g3 46.h5

Right now, and on the next move White could still have opted for the f+h ending with 46.b5 Ke6 (46...g2? 47.Rxg2 Rxb5? loses to 48.Rg5+) 47.Kxe4 g2 48.Rxg2 Rxb5 and with correct play Black draws.

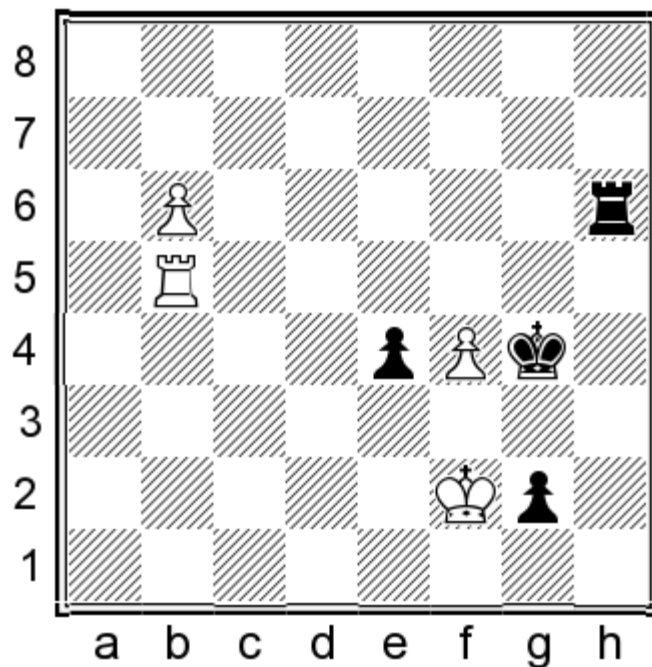
46...Ke6 47.h6

47.Kxe4 g2 48.Rxg2 Rxb4+ could still have been tried, even though according to Kramnik it's a worse version compared to the previous note.

47...Kf5 48.b5

48.h7 doesn't change the evaluation, since after 48...Rh6 49.b5 Rxh7 50.b6 g2 51.Rxg2 Rh3+ 52.Kd4 Rb3 Black saves the game.

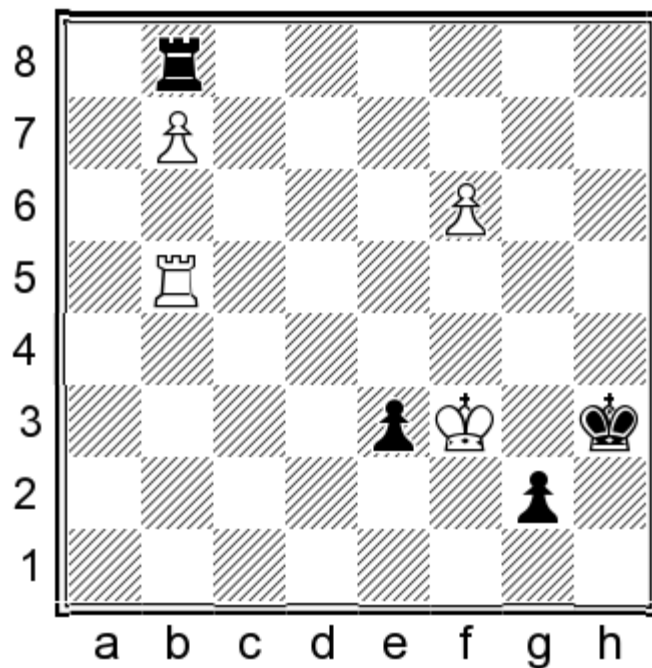
48...Rxh6 49.b6 g2 50.Rb5+ Kg4 51.Kf2



Position after: 51.Kf2

51...Kh3

It's never too late to make a mistake. In the event of 51...Rh8? 52.b7 Rb8 53.f5! the white pawns are suddenly stronger than their counterparts. 53...Kh3 (53...Kg5 54.Kxg2 is hopeless.) 54.f6 e3+ (54...Kh2 55.Rh5#) 55.Kf3!



Position after: 55.Kf3!

55...Kh2 (55...g1=Q 56.Rh5#; 55...g1=N+ 56.Kxe3 and Black can't stop both pawns: 56...Kg4 57.f7 Nh3 58.Ra5 Ng5 59.Ra8+-) 56.f7 e2 57.Rh5+ Kg1 58.Kxe2 Re8+ 59.Kf3 Rf8 60.Kg3 Kf1 61.Rf5+ Kg1 62.Rf2 Kh1 63.Rxg2 Rg8+ 64.Kf3 and White has avoided all the stalemate traps.

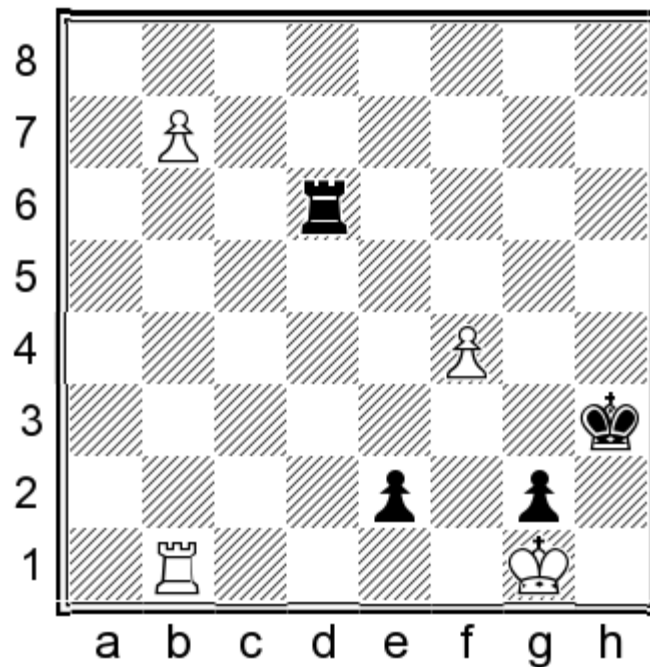
52.Kg1

White could also have gone astray with 52.b7? e3+ 53.Kg1 Kg3 54.Rg5+ Kf3 55.Rxg2 Rb6! and the tables are turned.

52...Rd6

52...e3 leads to a draw after 53.Rb3 Kg3 54.Rxe3+ Kxf4 55.Rb3 Rh8 56.b7 Rb8 and the b-pawn will soon be picked up.

53.Rb1 e3 54.b7 e2



Position after: 54...e2

55.Rb3+

55.b8=Q? would still be a terrible mistake in view of 55...Rd1+ 56.Rxd1 exd1=Q+ 57.Kf2 g1=Q#

55...Kg4 56.Re3 Rb6 57.Kxg2 Rxb7 58.Rxe2 Kxf4 ½-½

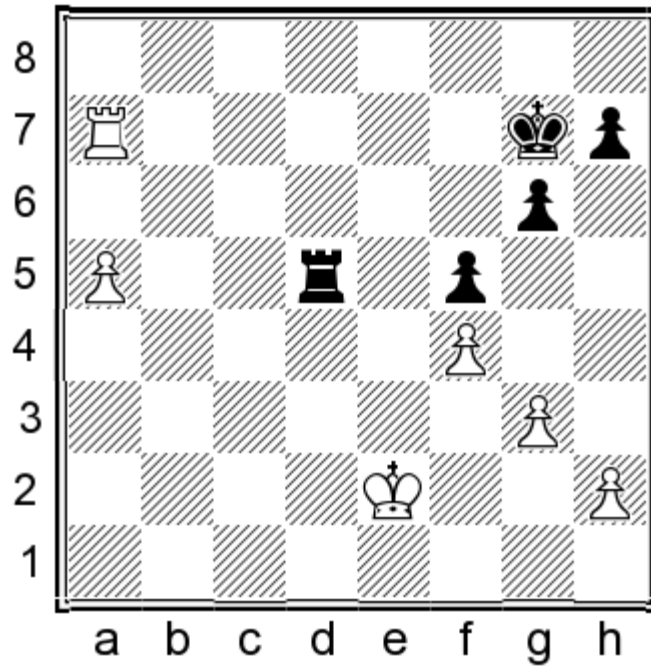
Defending a passed pawn from the side

Svidler, Peter (2769)

Hammer, Jon Ludvig (2608)

Sandnes 2013

During the press conference Magnus Carlsen attempted to improve upon the rook ending from the game Svidler – Hammer. Detailed analysis proved the World Champion to be wrong!

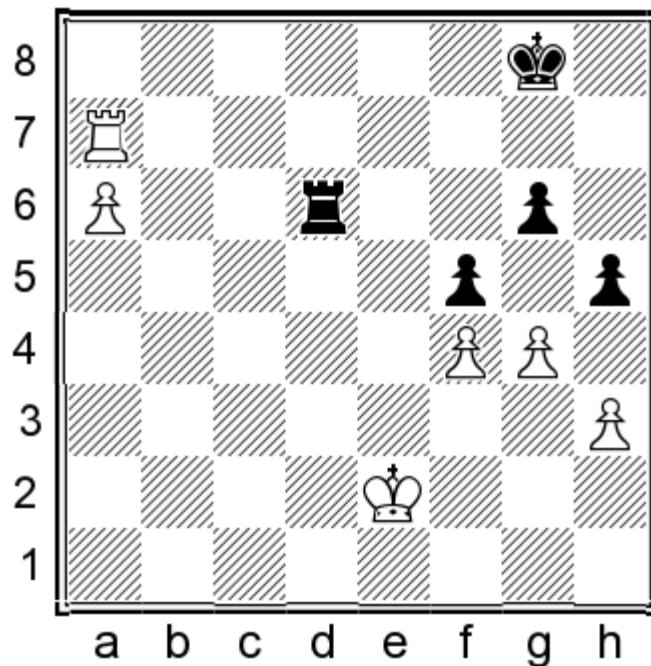


Black to move

42...Kf6

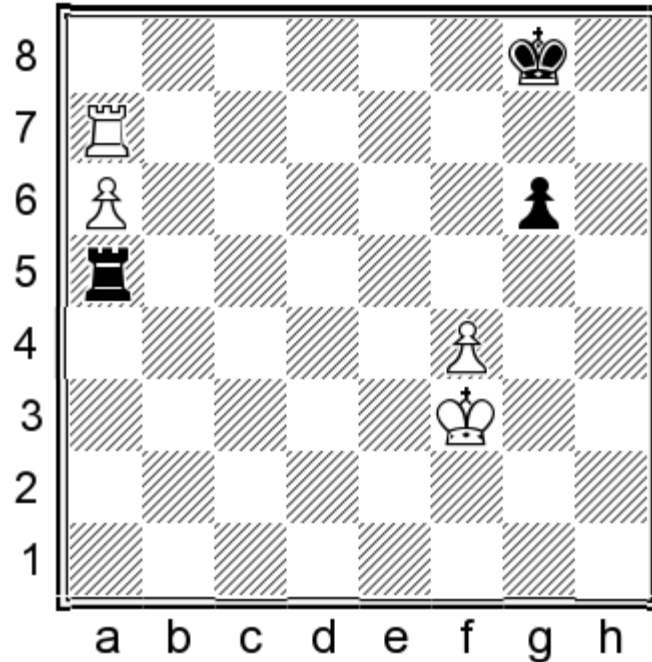
Carlsen pointed out that 42...Kf6 is the losing mistake and instead recommended 42...Kg8 when Black should be able to hold.

I found it hard to believe Black could survive with his king cut off the 7th rank. The following lines seem to confirm the correctness of my disagreement: 43.a6 Rd6 44.h3 h5 45.g4!



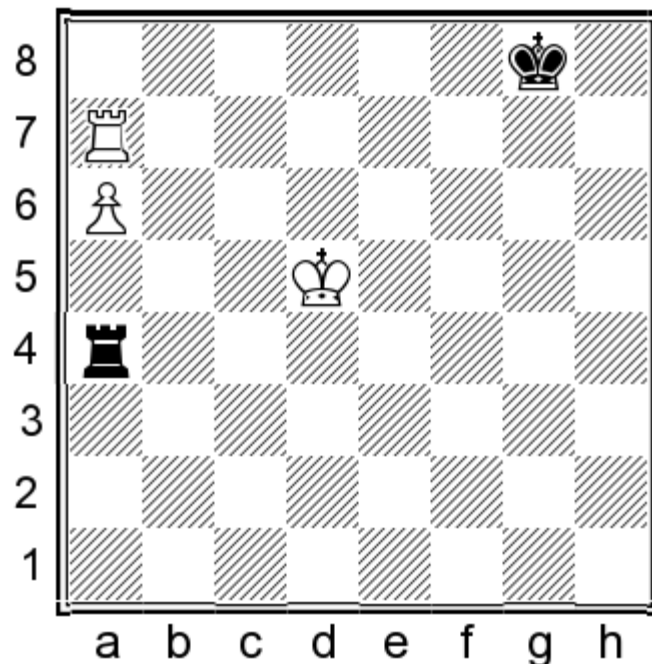
Position after: 45.g4!

45...hxg4 (45...h4 46.Ra8+! Kg7 47.gxf5 gxf5 48.a7! Ra6 49.Kd3 and White wins after picking up the f-pawn.) 46.hxg4 fxg4 47.Kf2 Rd2+ (47...Rd3 allows 48.Rb7 with the idea of 49.a7 and 50.Rb8.; 47...Kh8 also loses after 48.Kg3 Kg8 49.Kxg4 Kh8 50.Kg5 Kg8 51.Kh6! Rc6 52.Ra8+ Kf7 53.a7 Ra6 54.Rh8!+-) 48.Kg3 Ra2 49.Kxg4 Ra5 50.Kf3



Position after: 50.Kf3

A) Another instructive line is 50...Kh8 51.Ke4 Kg8 52.Kd4 Kh8 53.Kc4 Kg8 54.Kb4 Ra1 55.Kc5 Ra2 56.Kd5 Ra5+ 57.Ke6 Ra4 58.Kf6 Rxf4+ 59.Kxg6 Rg4+ 60.Kf6 Rf4+ 61.Ke5 Ra4 62.Kd5

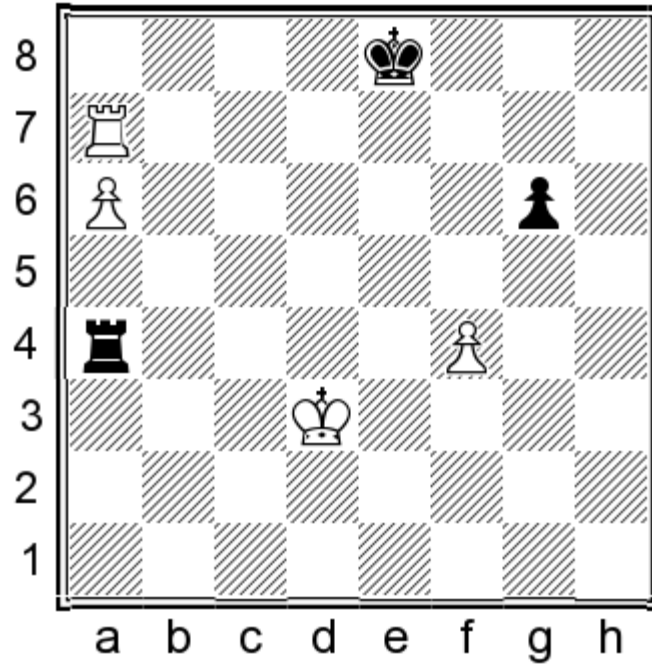


Position after: 62.Kd5

and since the black rook isn't in time to give checks from the side (Vancura Position) White is winning: 62...Rf4 63.Rc7

and the king reaches b7.

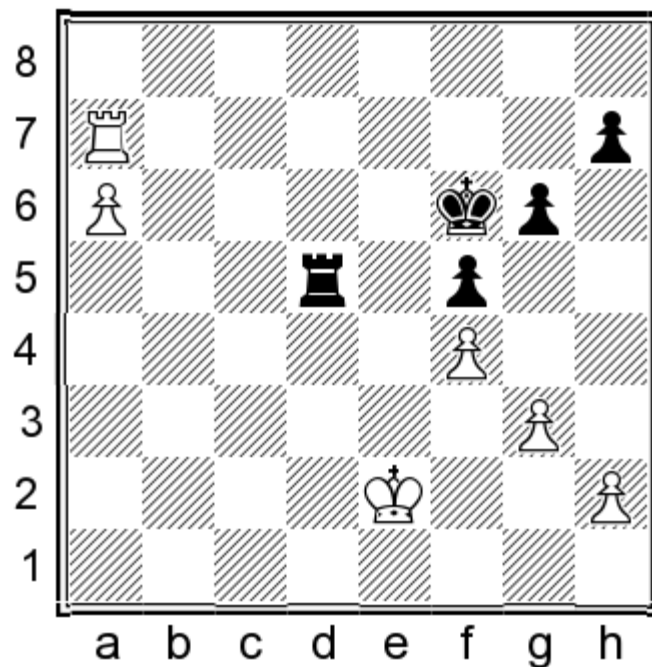
B) 50...Ra4 51.Ke3 Kf8 52.Kd3 Ke8



Position after: 52...Ke8

53.Ra8+! (53.Kc3? Kd8 54.Kb3 Ra1 55.Kb4 Kc8 and Black draws.) 53...Kf7 54.Kc3 and Black can't pick up the f4-pawn: 54...Kf6 (54...Kg7 55.Kb3 Rxf4 56.Rb8! followed by 57.a7 and White wins.) 55.Kb3 Ra1 56.Kb4 Kf5 57.a7 Kxf4 (57...Kg4 is met by 58.f5!+-) 58.Rf8+ Ke4 59.a8=Q+ Rxa8 60.Rxa8 g5 61.Rg8 Kf4 62.Kc3 and White's king is too close.

42...Kf6 43.a6



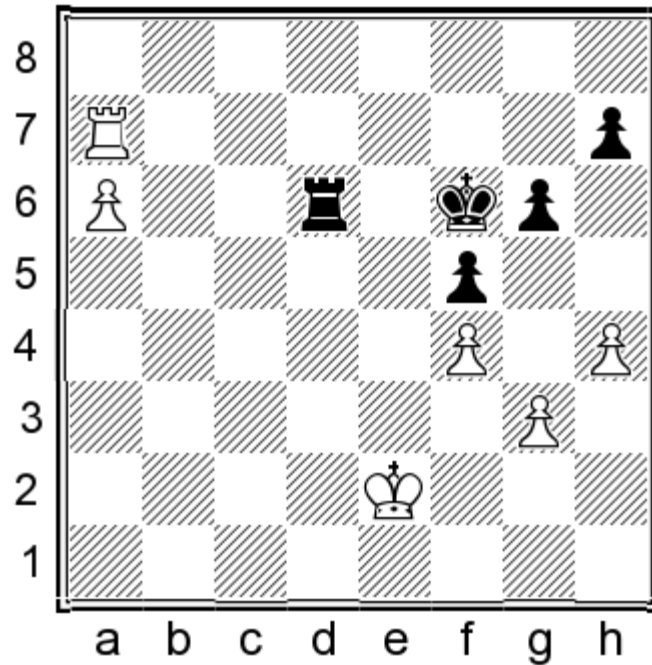
Position after: 43.a6

43...Rd6

The rook is well placed, attacking the a-pawn from the side, and it also prevents the white king from giving aid. The alternative 43...Ra5 is less appealing in view of 44.Kd3 Ra2 45.Kc4 Rxd2 46.Rd7 and Black's counterplay on the kingside is too slow.

44.h4!

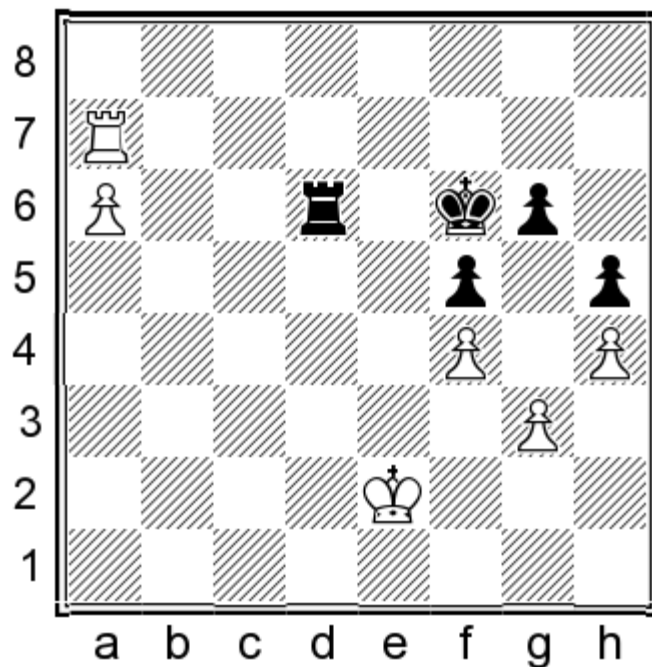
Of course, not 44.Rxh7? Rxa6 and the ensuing ending is not difficult for Black.



Position after: 44.h4!

44...Ke6

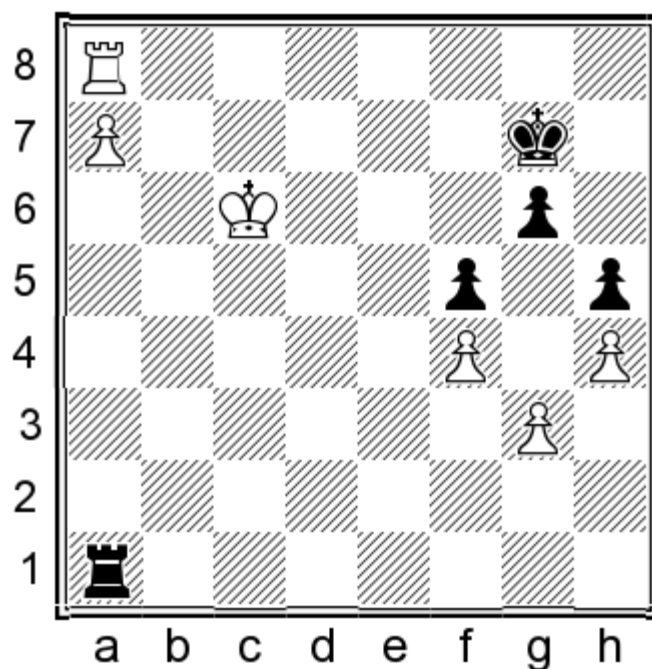
A) Initially I thought Black should have stopped the advance of the h-pawn with 44...h5



Position after: 44...h5

but it seems White is still able to convert his advantage with precise play.

A1) It isn't recommended for White to bring his pawn to the 7th rank as the following line shows: 45.Ra8 Kg7 46.Ke3 Kh7 47.a7 Ra6 48.Kd4 Ra1 49.Kc5 Kg7 50.Kc6



Position after: 50.Kc6

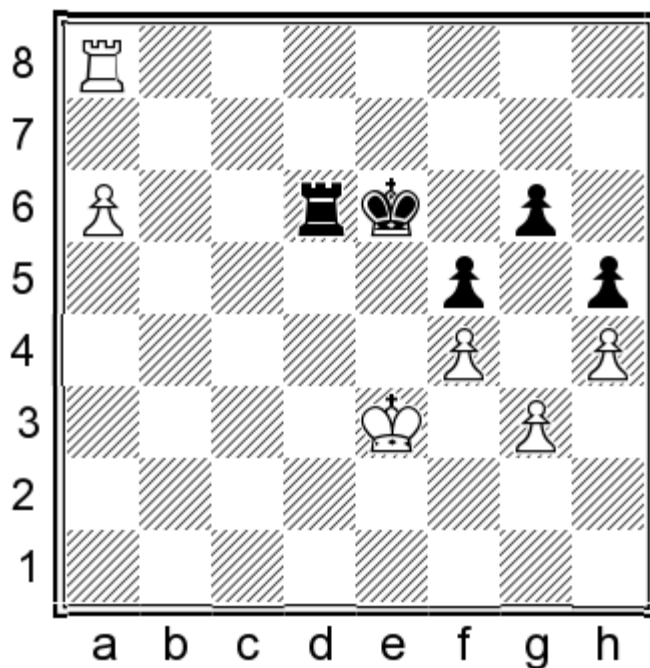
50...Rc1+! (50...Ra2? is a typical blunder, allowing 51.Rc8! Rxa7 52.Rc7+ Rxc7+ 53.Kxc7 and White has the opposition and will pick up the pawn on g6.) 51.Kd6 Rd1+ (51...Ra1? again allows the transition into a pawn ending after 52.Rc8 Ra6+ 53.Rc6 Rxa7 54.Rc7+ and White wins.) 52.Ke6 Re1+ 53.Kd5 Ra1 and White can't make any

progress.

A2) More accurate is 45.Ke3! practically forcing the black king to enter the centre.

A2.1) 45...Rd1 is met by 46.Ra8! Kg7 (46...Ra1 47.Kd4+- and Black lacks counterplay.) 47.Rb8! Ra1 48.Rb6! and White brings his king to b7.

A2.2) 45...Ke6 46.Ra8

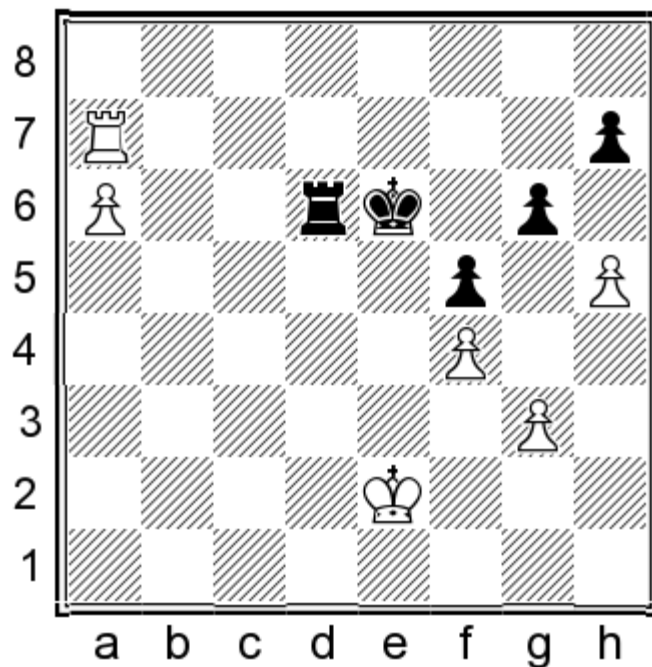


Position after: 46.Ra8

46...Kd5 (Black is too late after 46...Kf7 47.a7!) 47.a7 Rd7 48.Kd3 Kc5+ 49.Kc3 Rc7 50.Kb3 Kb6 51.Rg8 (51.Kb4 Rc6! draws on the spot.) 51...Rxa7 52.Rxg6+ Kc5 53.Rg5 Re7 54.Rxf5+ Kd4 55.Rg5 and White should be winning, even though it's not simple yet.

B) Note that 44...h6 45.Ke3 g5 doesn't offer Black the desired counterplay on the kingside in view of 46.h5 with the idea of Ra8, a7 forcing the black king to retreat to g7/h7, when the pawn on f5 is doomed to fall.

45.h5!

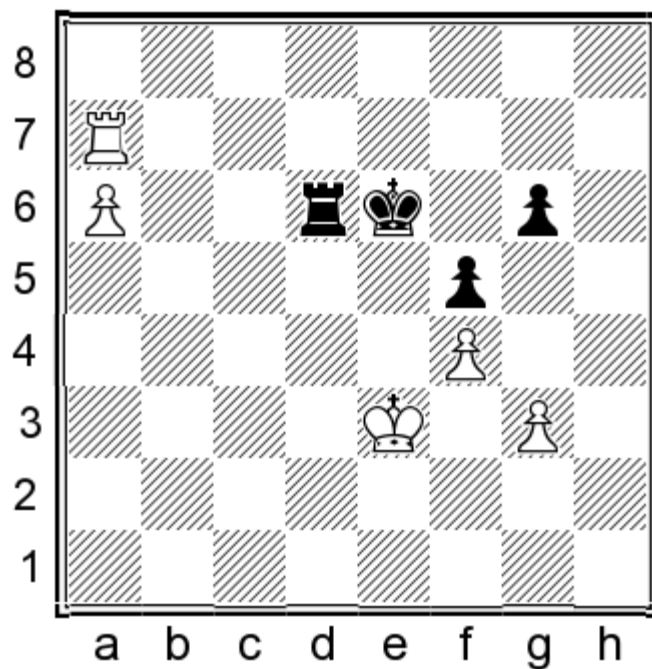


Position after: 45.h5!

45...gxh5

The alternative 45...Kf6 doesn't offer salvation either as both moves with the h-pawn seal Black's fate:

A) 46.hxg6 hxg6 47.Ke3 Ke6



Position after: 47...Ke6

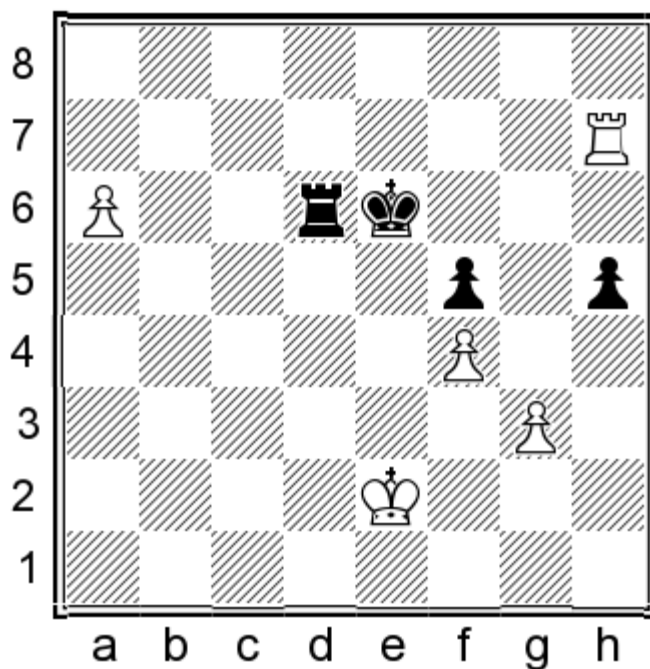
A1) Carlsen believed that after 48.Rg7? Kf6 (48...Kd5 49.a7 Ra6 is more stubborn.) 49.a7 Ra6 50.Rb7 White should win rather easily by transferring the king to the queenside, but missing the fact that Black can still prevent it by cutting

the king from the 4th rank with 50...Ra4! 51.Kd3 Ke6 52.Kc3 Kd6 53.Rg7 Kc5 54.Kb3 Ra6 and White can't make any further progress, e.g. 55.Rxg6 Rxa7 56.Rf6 Rg7 57.Rxf5+ Kd4 58.Rg5 Rxg5 59.fxg5 Ke5=

A2) And now 48.Ra8! with the threat of 49.a7. After 48...Kd5 (Black doesn't have time to retreat his king to the safe squares with 48...Kf7 in view of 49.a7! Ra6 50.Rh8+-) 49.a7 Rd7, Black has temporarily succeeded in finding a shelter for his king, but on the other hand he doesn't have any useful moves left and must wait passively with his king on the d-file. White wins easily with 50.Kf3 intending to play g4, gxf5, Kg3, Kh4, Kg5, Kxf5 and so on.

B) Even more convincing is 46.h6! Ke6 47.Ke3 Kd5 (47...Kf6 48.Ra8! followed by 49.a7 and the king can't reach g7.) 48.Rxh7 Rxa6 49.Rh8 Ra7 50.h7 Rd7 51.Kf3 and White wins.

46.Rxh7



Position after: 46.Rxh7

46...Kd5

The X-ray attack is a recurring theme and it doesn't only happen on the 7th rank! In the event of 46...Rxa6 White has 47.Rh6+!

47.Rxh5 Ke4

47...Rxa6 48.Rxf5+ Ke4 49.Re5+ Kd4 50.Kf3 is hopeless too.

48.a7 Ra6 49.Rh7 Ra2+ 50.Kd1!

But not 50.Kf1? Kf3! and in view of the mating threat, Black can pick up the pawns on the kingside.

50...Kd3

50...Kf3 can just be answered with 51.Rg7!

51.Rd7+ Kc3 52.Ke1 Kc4 53.Kf1 Kc5 54.Kg1 Kc6 55.Rf7 Kd5 56.Rxf5+ Ke6

56...Ke4 57.Rf7 Kf3 58.f5 Kxg3 59.Rg7+ and White wins.

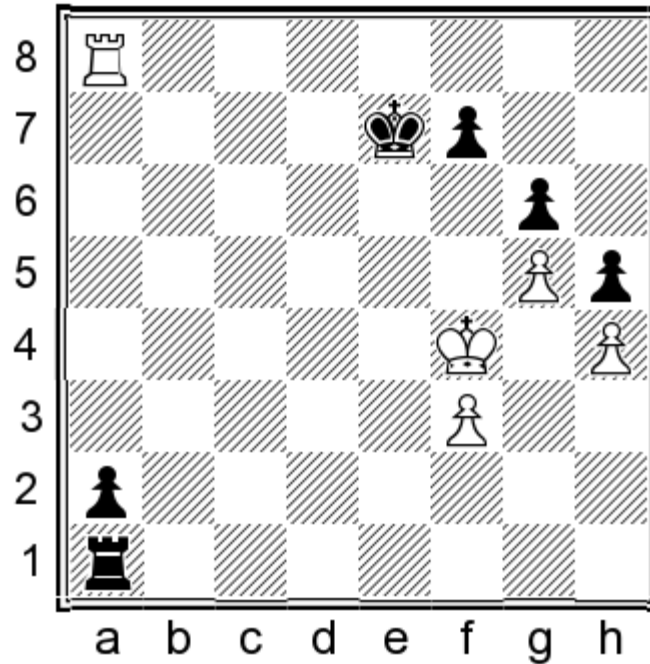
57.Rb5 Rxa7 58.Kg2

1-0

Wang Hao (2736)

Kamsky, Gata (2732)

Beijing 2011



White to move

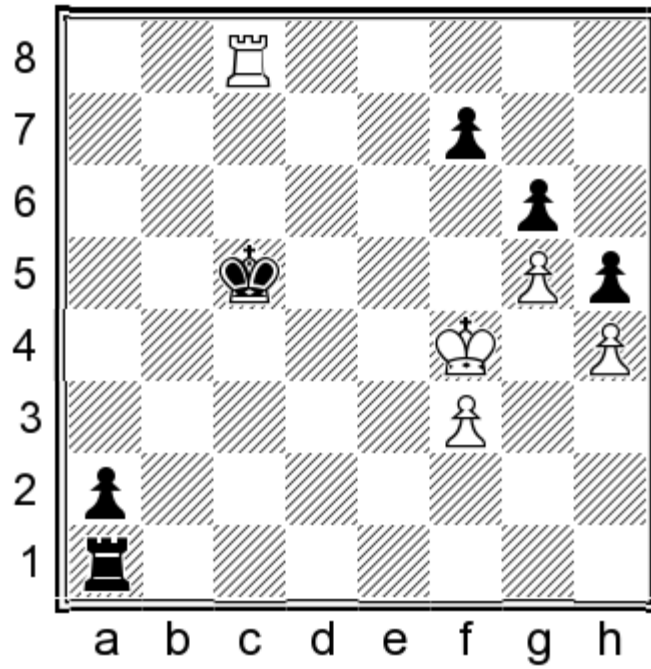
47.Ra7+?

A huge mistake, as White is just an important tempo short. Correct would have been 47.Ra3! Ke6 48.Re3+ Kd5 49.Re2! and White draws in a similar fashion to that in the game.

47.Ra7+? Ke6 48.Ra5

White is too late transferring the rook to attack the pawn from the side. After 48.Ra8 Kd5 49.Rd8+ Kc4 50.Rd2 Kb3! (threatening to move the rook from a1) 51.Rd3+ Kc2 52.Ra3 (52.Re3 Rd1+) 52...Kb2 and Black succeeds in moving the rook away from the promotional square.

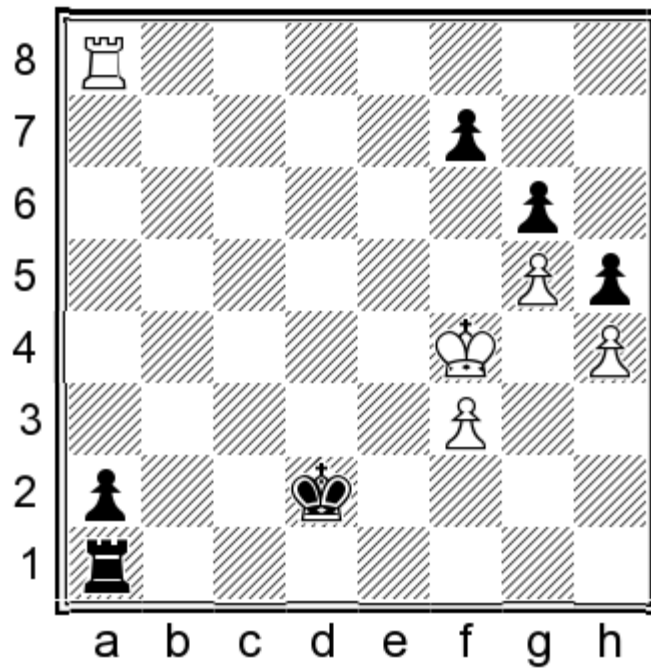
48...Kd6 49.Ra8 Kc5 50.Rc8+



Position after: 50.Rc8+

50...Kd4?

Kamsky doesn't profit from White's blunder on move 47. He could have won by means of 50...Kb4! 51.Ra8 (It's now too late for 51.Rc2 because of 51...Kb3 and the a-pawn queens.) 51...Kb3 52.Rb8+ Kc2 53.Ra8 Kd2!

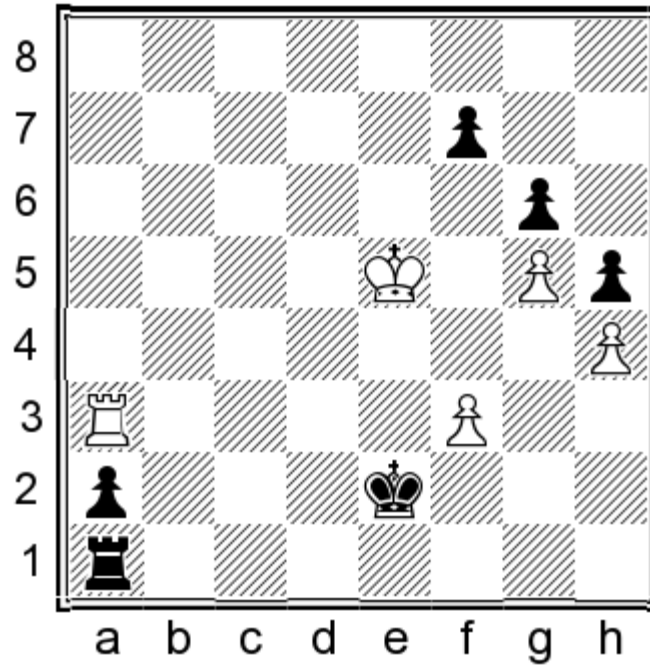


Position after: 53...Kd2!

And suddenly it becomes clear why Black has kept the h-pawns on the board, as the black king is threatening to pick up the pawn on h4.

A) 54.Ra7 Ke2 55.Ke5 Kxf3 56.Kf6 (56.Rxf7+ Kg3--+) 56...Kg3 57.Kxf7 Rf1+ 58.Kxg6 a1=Q 59.Rxa1 Rxa1 60.Kxh5 Ra5 61.Kh6 Kxh4 62.g6 Rh5+! 63.Kg7 Kg5 64.Kf7 Kh6 65.g7 Rf5+ 66.Kg8 Kg6 (Not 66...Rg5? in view of 67.Kh8! Rxf7=) 67.Kh8 Rh5+ 68.Kg8 Rh7 and Black wins.

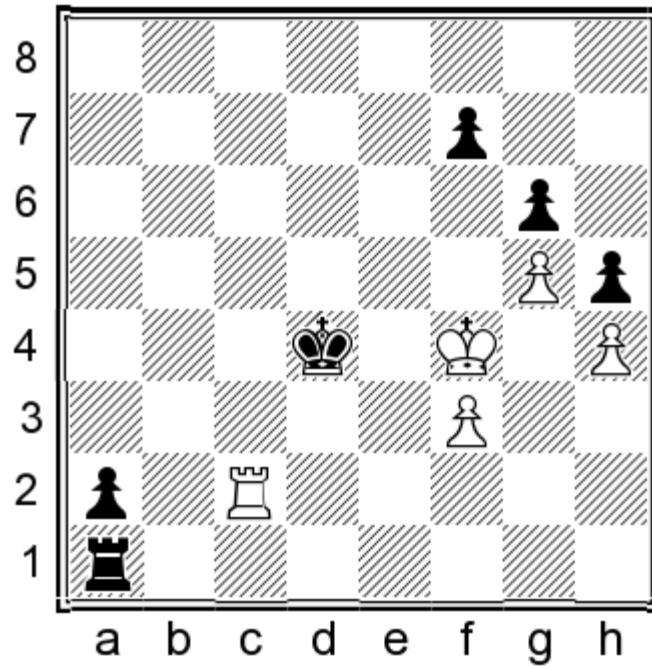
B) 54.Ra3 Ke2 55.Ke5



Position after: 55.Ke5

and since the pawn on f3 is protected, White changes plans: 55...Rf1! 56.Rxa2+ Kxf3 57.Ra4 Kg3 58.Rb4 Rf5+ 59.Kd6 f6 (The pawn ending after 59...Rf4? 60.Rxf4 Kxf4 61.Ke7 Kg4 62.Kxf7 Kxh4 63.Kxg6 even loses for Black, as the g-pawn promotes with check.) 60.gxf6 Rxf6+ 61.Ke7 Rf4 62.Rb6 Rg4 and the rest is a piece of cake.

51.Rc2!



Position after: 51.Rc2!

A fantastic defensive resource. The rook keeps an eye on the a2-pawn from the side and meanwhile prevents the black king winning the h-pawn.

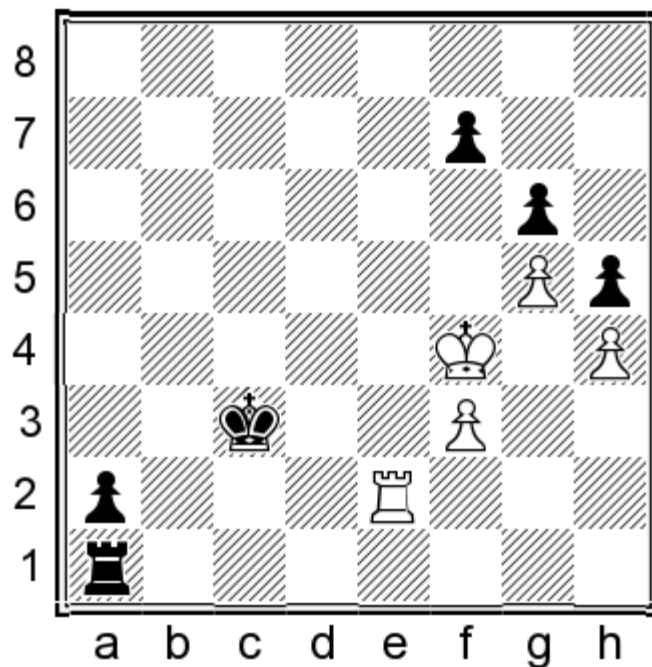
In case White decides to stay behind the passed pawn with 51.Rd8+ Kc3 52.Ra8 Kd2 Black wins as described above.

51...Kd3 52.Rb2 Kc3 53.Re2! Kb3 54.Re3+!

That's why the rook had to go to e2 on the previous move. When the king appears on b3 (or a3) White should start giving checks.

54...Kb2 55.Re2+ Kc3

Black could easily have gone too far with 55...Kc1? 56.Ke5! and White can even start thinking about playing for a win!



Position after: 55...Kc3

56.Ke4!

Absolutely the only move. The alternatives lose on the spot:

A) 56.Rf2? Kb3 and White's unable to give a check.

B) 56.Ke5? fails to 56...Kd3 57.Rb2 Re1+--

C) 56.Re3+? is premature, because of 56...Kd2 57.Ra3 Ke2 and the h-pawn will fall.

56...Kb3 57.Re3+ Kb2 58.Re2+ Kc3 59.Kf4!

Again, the only move.

After 59.f4? White will be put in zugzwang by 59...Kc4 60.Ke5 (60.Ke3 Kb3!--) 60...Kd3 61.Rb2 Re1+ and Black wins. It turns out that after the game continuation, Black had run out of tricks and therefore decided to return his king home and play the 3 vs. 2 ending on one wing.

The Chinese GM didn't make any further mistakes and managed to hold convincingly:

59...Kd4 60.Rd2+ Kc5 61.Re2 Kd6 62.Rb2 Ke7 63.Re2+ Kf8 64.Rb2 Kg7 65.Rc2 Rh1 66.Rxa2 Rxh4+ 67.Kg3 Rd4 68.Ra5 Kf8 69.Re5 Ra4 70.Rb5 Ra7 71.Re5 Ra6 72.Kf4 Re6 73.Ra5 Re1 74.Kg3 Rd1 75.Re5 Rd4 76.Kh3 Rd7 77.Kg3 Re7 78.Ra5 Ke8 79.Ra8+ Kd7 80.Ra7+ Ke6 81.Ra6+ Kf5 82.Ra5+ Re5 83.Ra6 h4+ 84.Kxh4 Kf4 85.Ra3 Rb5 86.Rc3 Re5 87.Ra3 Re2 88.Kh3 Rf2 89.Ra4+ Kxf3 90.Ra7 Ke4 91.Re7+ Kd5 92.Kg3 Rf5 93.Kg4

1/2-1/2

Chapter 3

Practical rook endings: pawn structures

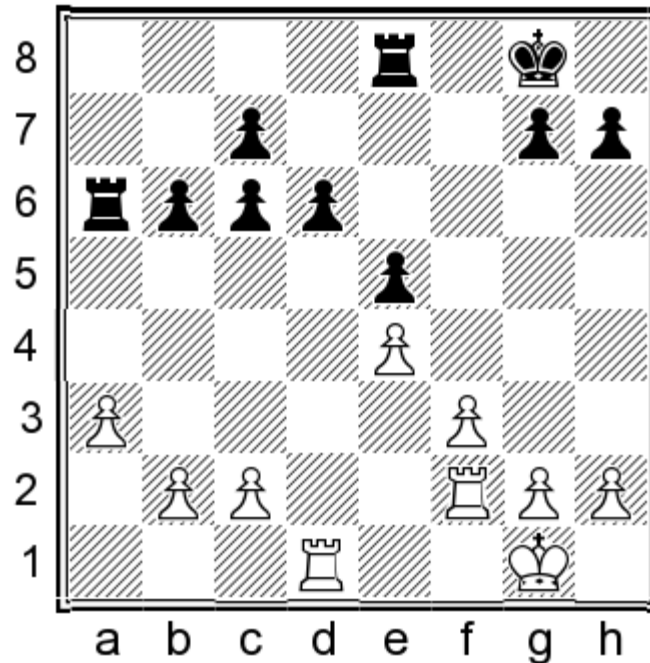
Now that we have become familiar with the elementary principles of rook endgames it's time to study more practical examples where other factors are playing a role as well. A very important aspect is the pawn structure. When pawns are connected in a chain they are usually more useful than isolated ones. Moreover, pawn structures will also provide information on how to use the king and rook; if they can become active or rather stay passive.

A dynamic pawn structure

Kan, Ilia Abramovich
Capablanca, Jose Raul
Moscow 1936

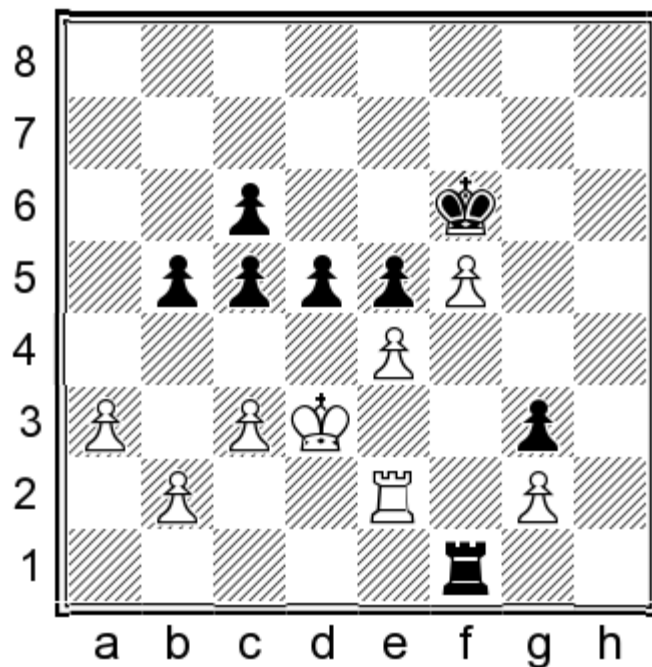
It's generally known that pawns operate more efficiently when they're part of a chain. The potency of a compact pawn centre had already been shown back in 1936 by the legendary Capablanca.

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Bc5 3.Nf3 d6 4.Na4 Bb6 5.Nxb6 axb6 6.d4 exd4 7.Qxd4 Qf6 8.Bg5 Qxd4 9.Nxd4 Bd7 10.Bc4 Ne7 11.0-0 Ng6 12.a3 0-0 13.Rad1 Nc6 14.Nxc6 bxc6 15.Bd2 Ra4 16.Bd3 Ne5 17.Bc3 f6 18.f3 Re8 19.Rf2 Bc8 20.Bf1 Ba6 21.Bxa6 Rxa6 22.Bxe5 fxe5



Position after: 22...fxe5

23.Rd3 b5 24.Rfd2 c5 25.Kf2 Ra4 26.Ke3 Kf7 27.Rd1 Ke6 28.Kd2 Rb8 29.Rc3 g5 30.h3 h5 31.Rh1 Rd4+ 32.Ke2 Rg8 33.Rd3 Ra4 34.Rhd1 g4 35.hxg4 hxg4 36.Ke3 Rh8 37.Rb3 Rh2 38.Rd2 Rd4 39.Re2 c6 40.Rc3 g3 41.Rd3 Rh1 42.f4 Rf1 43.f5+ Kf6 44.c3 Rxd3+ 45.Kxd3 d5



Position after: 45...d5

46.b3 c4+ 47.bxc4 bxc4+ 48.Ke3 Ra1 49.Kf3 Rxa3 50.Kxg3 Rxc3+ 51.Kh4 Rc1 52.g4 Rh1+ 53.Kg3 d4 54.Ra2 d3 55.Kg2 Re1 56.Kf2 Rxe4 57.Kf3

How can we explain White's defeat from a more or less balanced position? Apparently White was trying to get closer to a draw by exchanging more and more pieces. However, these exchanges contained some strategic drawbacks, as on no less than four occasions Black could recapture with one of his pawns towards the centre.

Although White could have put up more resistance and could probably have saved the game, it's not a great surprise that he ultimately failed to do so. Black's central space advantage enabled him to exert pressure on both wings and thus creat new weaknesses.

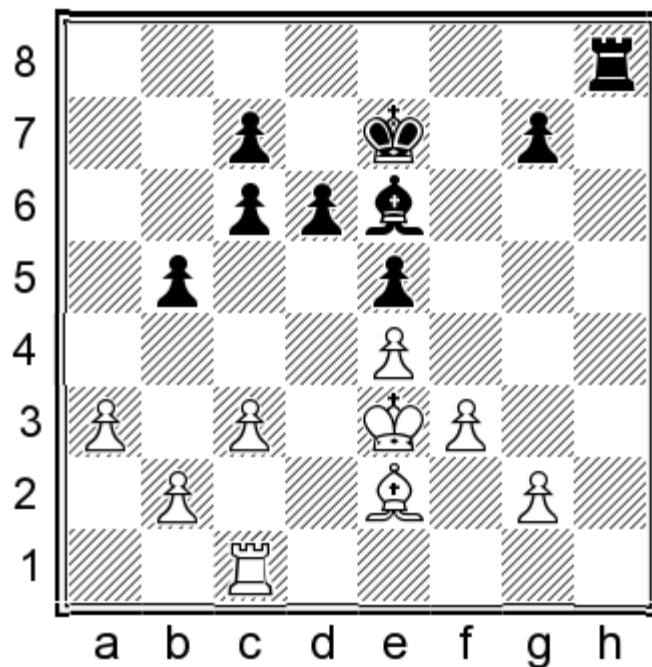
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Radjabov, Teimour (2784)

Carlsen, Magnus (2835)

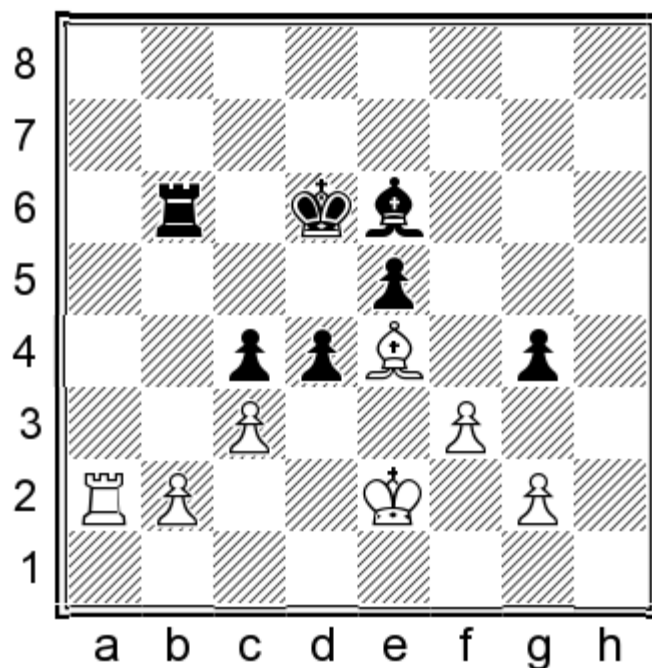
Moscow 2012

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Bc5 5.Nxc6 Qf6 6.Qf3 bxc6 7.Qg3 d6 8.Nc3 Qg6 9.Bd3 Nf6 10.Na4 Bd4 11.c3 Bb6 12.0-0 Qxg3 13.hxg3 Ng4 14.Bf4 f6 15.Rad1 h5 16.Be2 Be6 17.Nxb6 axb6 18.a3 Ke7 19.f3 Ne5 20.Kf2 b5 21.Bxe5 fxe5 22.Ke3 h4 23.gxh4 Rxh4 24.Rh1 Rah8 25.Rxh4 Rxh4 26.Rc1 Rh2 27.Kf2 Rh8 28.Ke3



Position after: 28.Ke3

28...g5 29.Bd3 Kd7 30.Ra1 Bb3 31.Rc1 Kc8 32.Kf2 Kb7 33.Kg3 Be6 34.Ra1 Kb6 35.Rc1 c5 36.Ra1 c4 37.Bc2 Kc5 38.Re1 c6 39.Bb1 Kb6 40.Bc2 Kc7 41.Kf2 Kd7 42.a4 bxa4 43.Ra1 Rb8 44.Ra2 d5 45.exd5 cxd5 46.Bxa4+ Kd6 47.Bc2 d4 48.Be4 Rb6 49.Ke2 g4



Position after: 49...g4

50.fxg4?

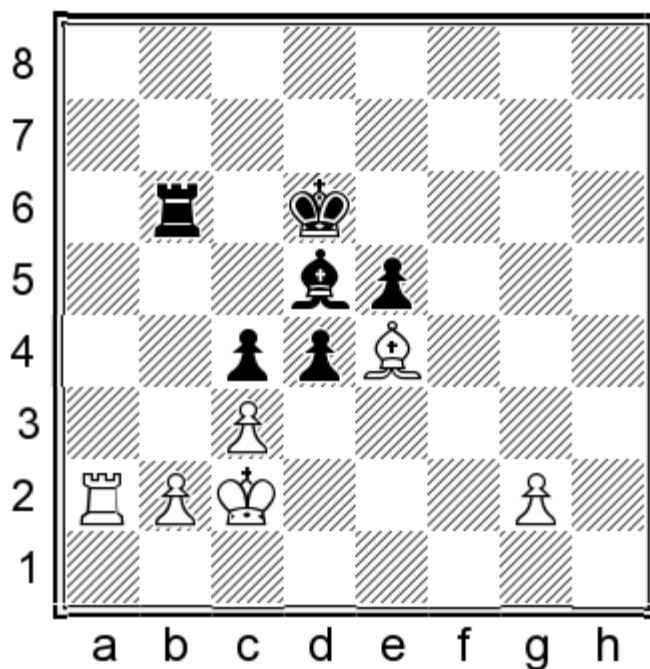
Radjabov hasn't been able to withstand the pressure, as after this exchange the g-pawn becomes an additional target.

White should have defended passively with 50.Kd2 intending to bring the king to c1 and releasing the rook from protecting the pawn on b2. On the other hand, that gives Black some extra options including fixing the kingside with 50...g3 when under certain circumstances ...Bh3 becomes a threat. After the continuation of the game Black's task becomes easier.

50...Bxg4+ 51.Kd2 Be6 52.Kc2?

Carlsen thought he was winning after this move. However, the exchange of bishops seems inevitable and after 52.Kc1 Bd5 (After 52...d3?! 53.Ra5 White holds on.) 53.Bxd5 Kxd5 54.cxd4 exd4 55.Ra5+ Ke4 56.Rc5 Kd3 57.Rf5 Ra6 58.Kb1 Ke2 however Black is winning anyway.

52...Bd5



Position after: 52...Bd5

53.Bxd5

53.Bf3 wouldn't have saved White either, e.g. 53...d3+ 54.Kd2 e4 55.Bg4 Ke5 56.Ke3 Rg6 57.Bh3 Rg3+ 58.Kf2 Kf4 followed by 59...e3 and Black wins.

53...d3+!

A very strong intermediate check. Inferior would have been 53...Kxd5 in view of 54.Ra5+ Ke4 55.cxd4 exd4

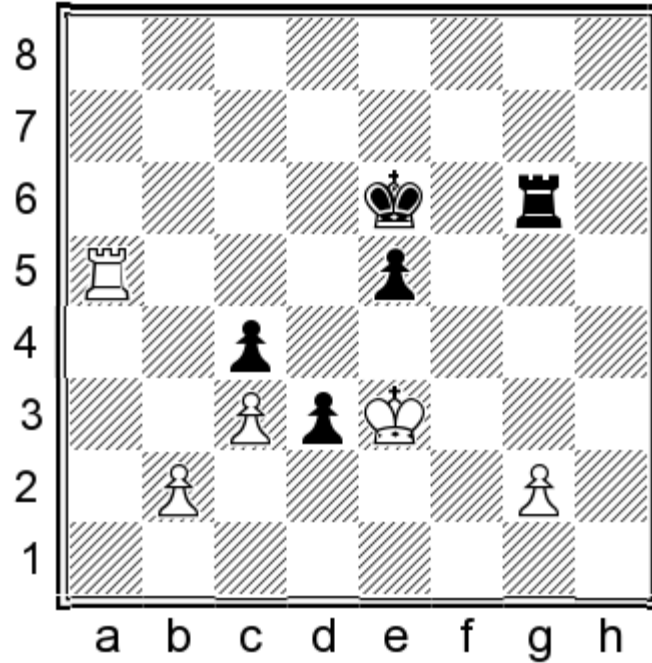
A) 56.Rc5? is met by 56...d3+ 57.Kc1 (57.Kc3 Rb3+ 58.Kxc4 Rxb2) 57...Rf6 58.Rxc4+ Ke3 and Black's activity prevails.

B) 56.Ra8! and White creates sufficient counterplay.

54.Kd2 Kxd5 55.Ke3 Rg6 56.Ra5+

56.Kf3 e4+ 57.Kf2 Rf6+ 58.Ke3 Rf1 and Black's rook succeeds in penetrating into White's camp just as it does in the game.

56...Ke6



Position after: 56...Ke6

57.Ke4

White could have traded off rooks with 57.Ra6+ though the ensuing pawn ending is lost: 57...Kf5 58.Rxg6 (58.Ra4 Rxg2 59.Rxc4 d2 and the d-pawn decides.) 58...Kxg6 59.b4 cxb3 60.Kxd3 e4+! and White's king can't deal with both passed pawns.

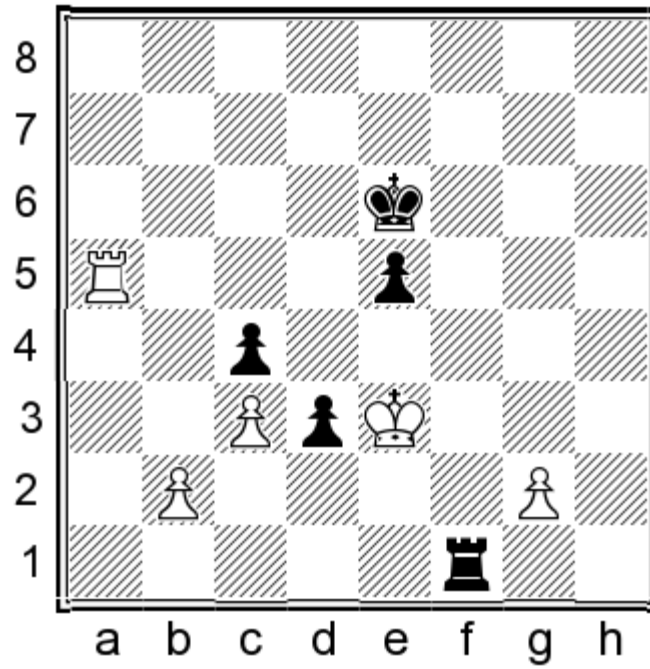
57...Rg4+ 58.Kf3

58.Ke3 Rxg2 59.b4 Re2+ 60.Kf3 e4+ is hopeless for White as well.

58...Rf4+ 59.Ke3 Rf1 0-1

And White resigned, as he couldn't prevent the further advance of Black's centre.

For example 59...Rf1



Position after: 59...Rf1

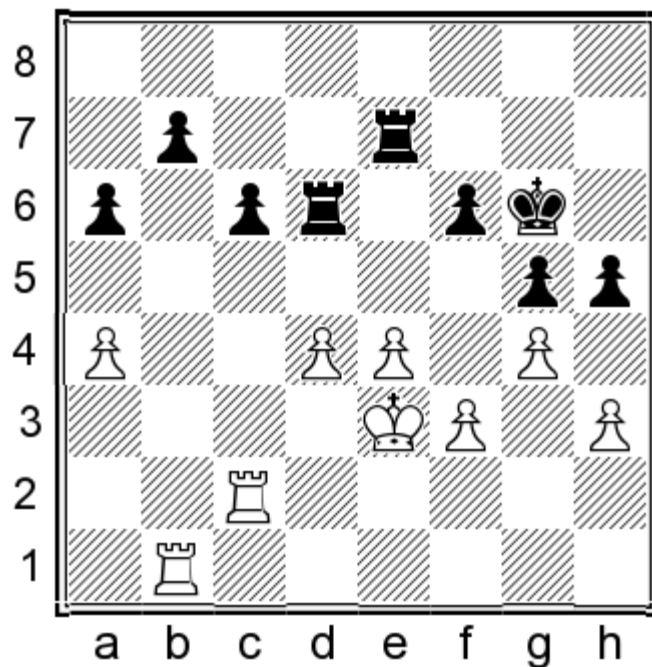
60.Rc5 Re1+ 61.Kd2 (61.Kf2 d2→) 61...Re2+ 62.Kd1 e4 (Capturing both pawns with 62...Rxg2 63.Rxc4 Rxb2 probably wins more easily.) 63.Rxc4 Ke5 (63...e3? allows White to secure a draw with 64.Rd4! Rd2+ 65.Ke1 and can't make progress.) 64.g3 Rxb2 65.Rc5+ Kf6 66.Rd5 Rc2 and Black is technically winning.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A massive central pawn chain is a useful asset, especially in endgames. In both examples we saw the weaker side finally succumb to the pressure even though the games could still have been saved with correct play. It's clear Carlsen benefited from studying the classics!

Paralysing the queenside

Ivanchuk, Vassily (2757)
 Radjabov, Teimour (2793)
 London 2013



White to move

White's space advantage in the centre enables him to play on both flanks without worrying about possible counter ideas of his opponent. White gradually increases the pressure on the queenside by fixing the pawn on b7.

48.Rb6!

A good preparatory move. Less accurate is 48.a5?! which allows 48...Rd5! 49.Rcb2 (49.Rxb7 Rxb7 50.exd5 cxd5 is not problematic for Black.) 49...c5! and Black succeeds in reducing the pressure by trading some pawns.

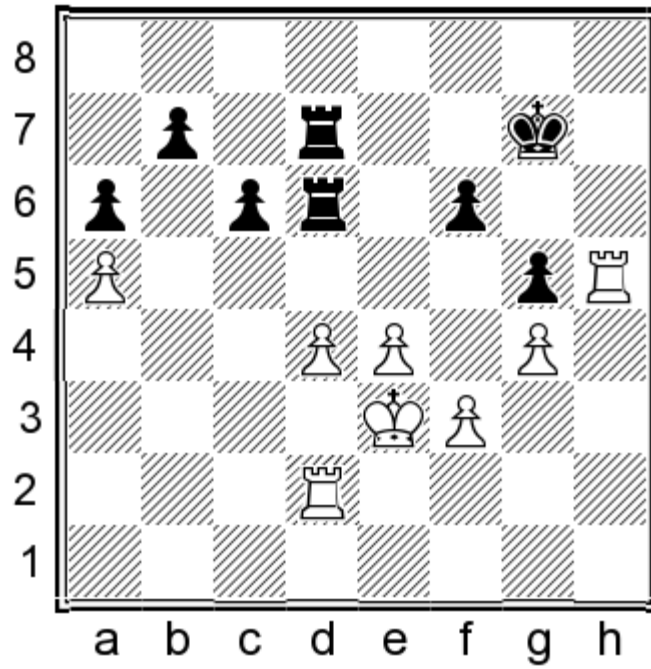
48.Rb6! Red7 49.Rd2 hxg4?

Normally the weaker side would be doing well to exchange pawns, but here it would have been better to keep the h-file closed with 49...h4, not allowing the white rooks to penetrate Black's position. However, after 50.a5 only two results are possible.

50.hxg4 Kf7 51.a5!

Right on time. The immediate transfer of the rook to the newly-opened file with 51.Rb1?! is met by 51...b5! and Black has suddenly generated active counterplay on the queenside. After the continuation of the game Radjabov might have started regretting he opened the h-file.

51...Ke7 52.Rb1 Kf7 53.Rh1 Kg7 54.Rh5



Position after: 54.Rh5

54...Rd8

Black could have overprotected the pawn on g5 with 54...Kg6 but then after 55.Rd1! Black ends up in some kind of zugzwang. If 55...Rd8 56.Rdh1! Rxd4 57.Rh7 the black king is suddenly caught in a mating net.

55.Rd1?

White should have forced matters with 55.e5! when play is very similar to the game. After White's waiting move Radjabov could have anticipated this central thrust

55...R8d7?

Evidently Black intended to keep an eye on d4, preventing the rook on d1 from swinging over to the h-file. It would have been more precise to play instead 55...R6d7! so that after 56.e5 the rook on d6 doesn't come under attack and Black can counter with 56...c5!

56.e5! Rd5

If 56...fxe5 57.Rxg5+ followed by 58.Rxe5 and the two extra pawns on the kingside decide the game.

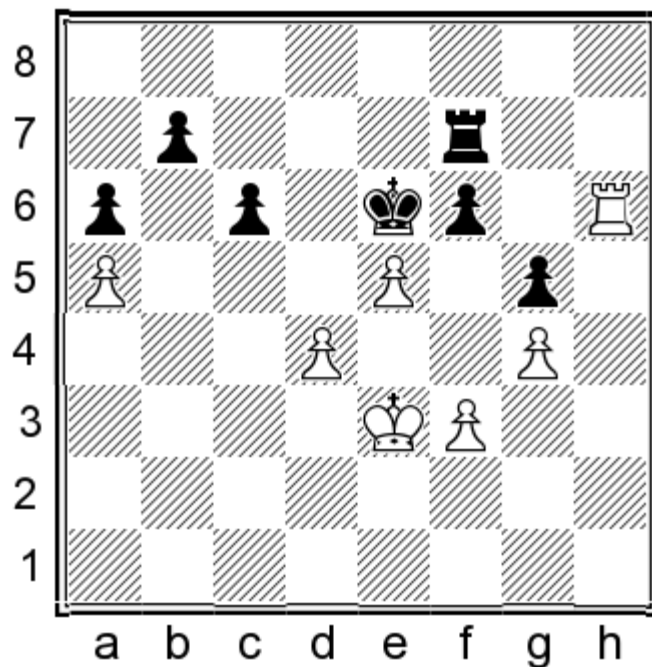
57.Rdh1 Kf7

A) Of course, Black can't play 57...Rxa5 due to 58.Rh7+ and White picks up the rook.

B) The main alternative is 57...fxe5 though White also wins after 58.Rxg5+ Kf6 59.Rf5+ Kg6 60.dxe5, thanks to his more advanced pawns and possible mating threats.

58.Rh7+ Ke6 59.Rxd7 Kxd7

The other recapture 59...Rxd7 is hardly any better, since after 60.Rh6 Rf7



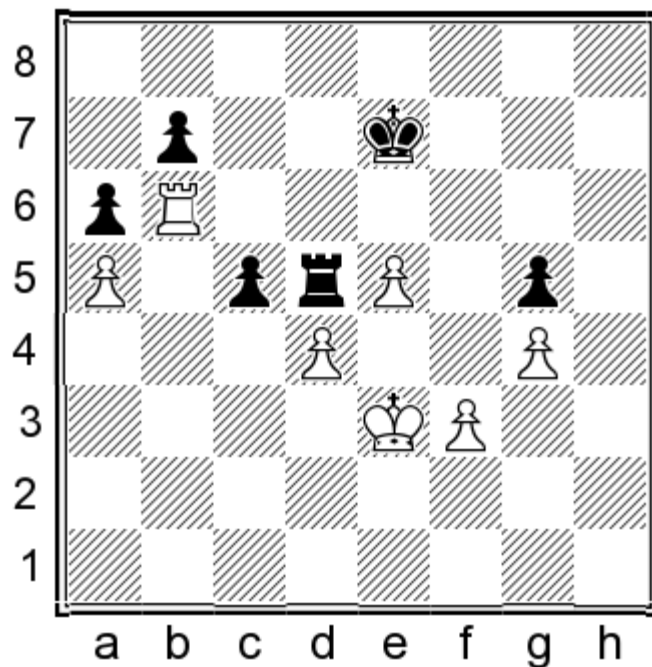
Position after: 60...Rf7

White steers the game into a winning pawn ending with 61.Rxf6+! Rxf6 62.exf6 Kxf6 63.f4 gxf4+ 64.Kxf4 Kg6 65.g5 Kg7 66.Kf5 Kf7 67.g6+ Kg7 68.Kg5 Kg8 69.Kf6 Kf8 70.g7+ Kg8 71.Kg6 and once again the advantage of having fixed the queenside formation is demonstrated.

60.Rh7+ Ke6 61.Rh6 c5

In the event of 61...Rxa5 62.Rxf6+ Ke7 63.Rg6 Ra1 64.Rxg5 Black's position remains pretty hopeless, e.g. 64...Kf8 (64...a5 65.Rg7+ and after picking up the b7-pawn the white rook can get behind Black's passer.) 65.Ke4 a5 66.e6 a4 67.Ke5 a3 68.Kf6 Re1 69.Ra5 and White wins.

62.Rxf6+ Ke7 63.Rb6

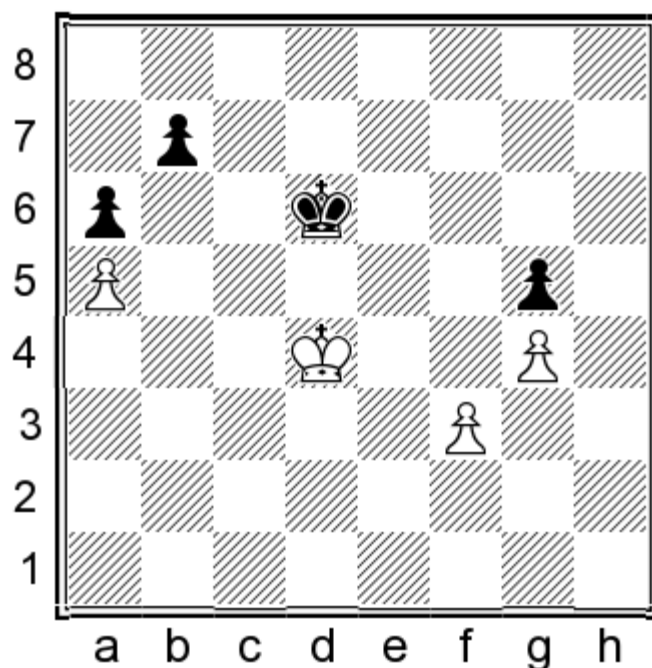


Position after: 63.Rb6

63...Rxd4

Also, worth considering is the other recapture, even though after 63...cxd4+ 64.Ke4 Black doesn't seem to be able to hold on:

A) 64...Rd7 can effectively be met by 65.Rd6! (65.e6 Rc7 66.Kxd4 also suffices.) 65...Rxd6 66.exd6+ Kxd6 67.Kxd4



Position after: 67.Kxd4

and thanks to the pawn on a5 White wins: 67...Ke6 (67...b5 68.axb6 a5 69.b7 Kc7 70.f4 gxf4 71.g5 f3 72.Ke3 a4 73.g6

a3 74.g7 a2 75.g8=Q a1=Q 76.b8=Q+ is hopeless.) 68.Ke4 Kf6 69.f4 and, as in the note to 59...Rd7, White puts his pawn on g7, forcing Black to play with his b-pawn.

B) 64...Rxa5 65.Rxb7+ Ke6 66.Rb6+ Ke7 67.Kxd4 should be technically winning for White, as the pawn on g5 is rather weak while the a-pawn can easily be stopped by placing the rook behind it.

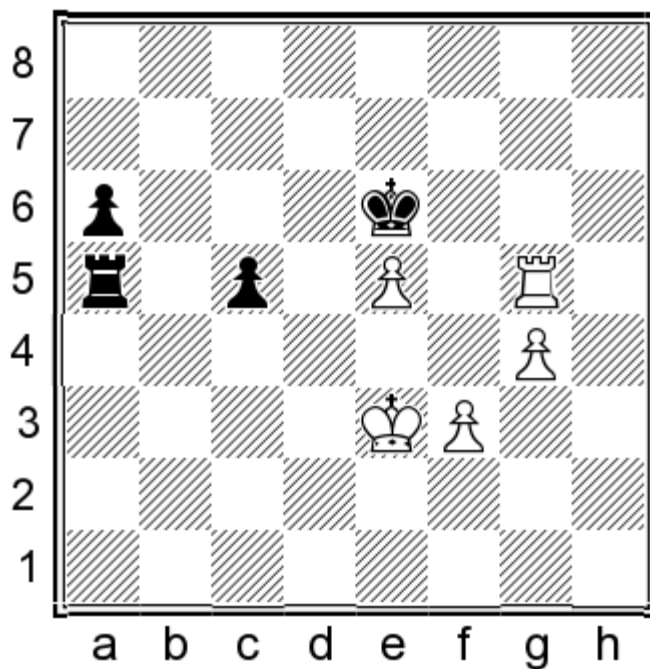
64.Rxb7+ Ke6 65.Rg7

White is keen to pick up the g-pawn first, since after 65.Rb6+ Kxe5 66.Rxa6? (66.Rg6 would still be fine, though.) 66...Ra4 the actively-placed pieces together with the passed c-pawn offer Black sufficient play for the slight material deficit.

65...Ra4

Black couldn't save himself with 65...Kxe5 either as 66.Rxg5+ Kd6 (66...Kf6 67.Rxc5 is hopeless too.) 67.Rg6+ and White is winning.

66.Rxg5 Rxa5



Position after: 66...Rxa5

The smoke has cleared and it's time to take stock. White has won a pawn, but more importantly he's created three connected passed pawns. In such cases the king isn't even needed to assist. Ivanchuk brings home the full point in straightforward fashion.

67.f4 Ra3+ 68.Kd2 Ra2+ 69.Kc3 Rf2 70.Rg6+ Kd5 71.Rd6+ Ke4 72.Rf6 a5 73.e6 Kd5 74.f5 Re2

74...a4 can be met by 75.e7 Re2 76.Re6! and the e-pawn promotes.

75.Rf8 Kd6 76.f6

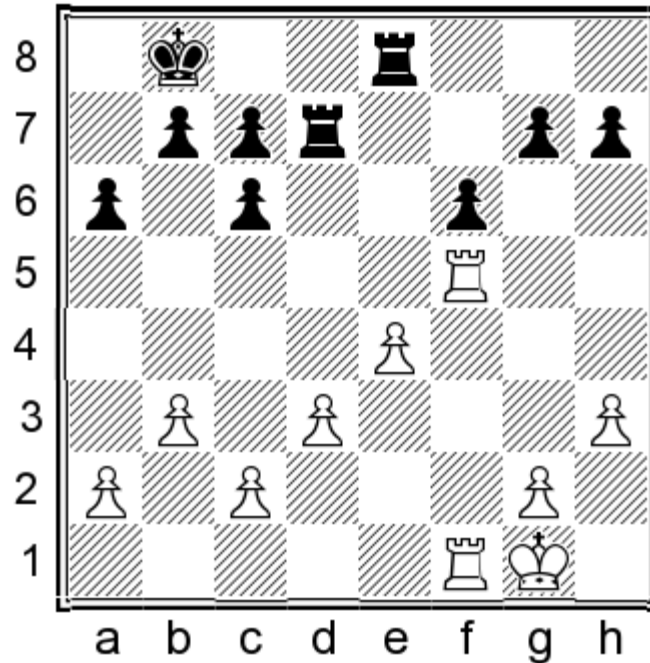
And Black resigned in view of 76.f6 Rxe6 (76...Kxe6 77.Re8+ and White picks up the rook.) 77.Rd8+ Kc7 78.f7 Kxd8 79.f8=Q+ and White wins.

1-0

Capablanca, Jose Raul
Janowski, Dawid Markelowicz
New York 1913

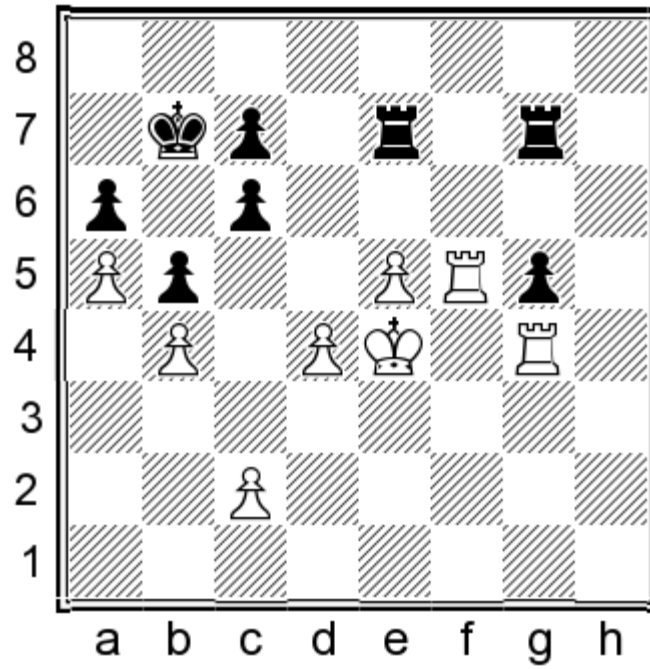
I would like to invite you going through the moves of the following masterpiece by Capablanca.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bb5 a6 5.Bxc6 dxc6 6.0-0 Bg4 7.h3 Bh5 8.Qe2 Bd6 9.d3 Qe7 10.Nd1 0-0-0 11.Ne3 Bg6 12.Nh4 Rhg8 13.Nef5 Qe6 14.f4 Bxf5 15.Nxf5 exf4 16.Bxf4 Bc5+ 17.Be3 Bf8 18.Qf2 Rd7 19.Bc5 Bxc5 20.Qxc5 Kb8 21.Rf2 Ne8 22.Raf1 f6 23.b3 Nd6 24.Rf4 Nxf5 25.Qxf5 Qxf5 26.Rxf5 Re8



Position after: 26...Re8

27.g4 b6 28.b4 Kb7 29.Kf2 b5 30.a4 Rd4 31.Rb1 Re5 32.Ke3 Rd7 33.a5 Re6 34.Rbf1 Rde7 35.g5 fxg5 36.Rxg5 Rh6 37.Rg3 Rhe6 38.h4 g6 39.Rg5 h6 40.Rg4 Rg7 41.d4 Kc8 42.Rf8+ Kb7 43.e5 g5 44.Ke4 Ree7 45.hxg5 hxg5 46.Rf5



Position after: 46.Rf5

46...Kc8 47.Rgxg5 Rh7 48.Rh5 Kd7 49.Rxh7 Rxh7 50.Rf8 Rh4+ 51.Kd3 Rh3+ 52.Kd2 c5 53.bxc5 Ra3 54.d5 1-0

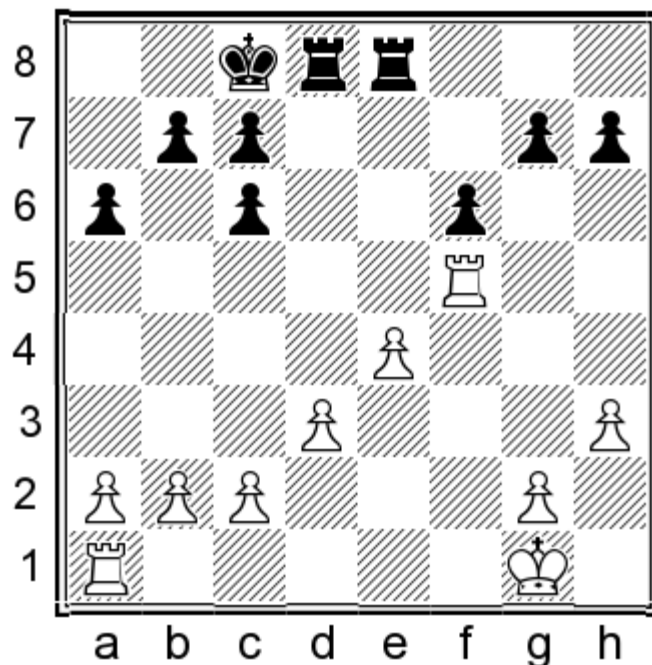
How did White manage to outplay his opponent so easily? The key to his success lies in the favourable pawn structure:

- 1) The two extra central pawns give White control over the centre of the board.
- 2) Black is unable to generate counterplay on the queenside because of his doubled c-pawns. In certain cases, Black tries to eliminate that weakness by the ...c5-c4 advance, but White prevented that plan by playing 28.b4!
- 3) The white rooks control the f-file and via f5 they can cover several important squares along the 5th rank.
- 4) Black's pawns on the kingside are restricted in their mobility due to the pawn on e4. One of White's plans is to advance his g-pawn, creating further weaknesses in Black's camp. So once White advances his g-pawn, Black needs to react accordingly. In this example Janowski decided to capture with his f-pawn, clearing a path for the white e-pawn to advance.

Hracek, Zbynek (2615)

Bosicic, Marin (2571)

Graz 2013



White to move

This particular type of pawn structure could be reached from various lines in the Ruy Lopez. Presumably Hracek was very aware of the similarities with Capablanca's game.

23.Raf1 Rd7 24.g4 b6 25.h4 Kd8

Black could have tried to generate counterplay on the queenside with 25...c5 but then White plays 26.b3! when it remains hard for Black to achieve anything. (However, a careless move like 26.Kf2? allows 26...c4! when Black gets rid of his doubled c-pawns. In the game White activates his king first.)

26.Kf2 h6 27.b4 Re5 28.Ke3

It was worth considering opening the f-file with 28.Rxe5 fxe5 29.Ke3 but since it's not clear whether White can win this, it's understandable that Hracek didn't want to change the pawn structure yet.

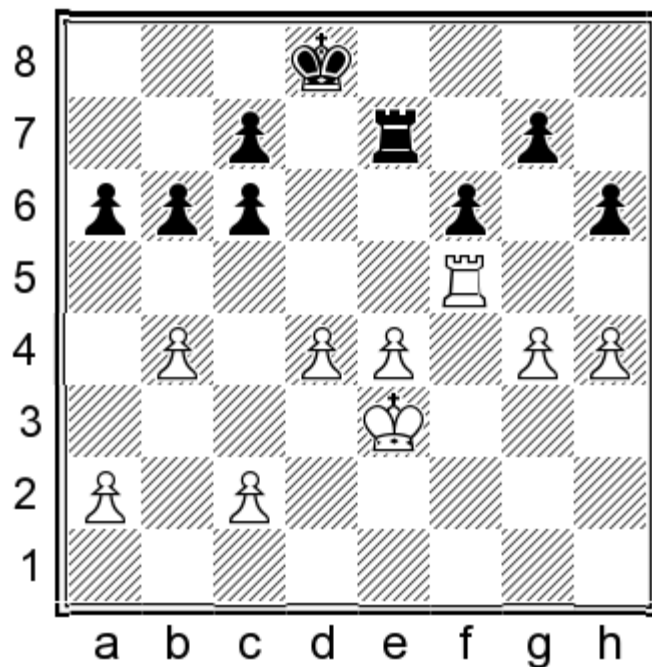
28...Rde7 29.Rxe5

There's no need to force matters yet so White could also have improved his position further with a move like 29.a4.

29...Rxe5 30.d4 Re7

Perhaps it might have been better to trade off the c-pawn with 30...Rb5 even though after 31.c3 c5 (31...a5? 32.a4 traps the rook.) 32.a4 cxd4+ 33.Kd3 Re5 34.cxd4 White retains excellent winning chances.

31.Rf5!



Position after: 31.Rf5!

A nice square for the rook, from where it occupies the half-open file and controls the 5th rank, preventing any counterplay for Black.

31...Kd7 32.a4 Ke6 33.h5

Securing the position of the rook, but on the other hand White is no longer able to break through on the kingside with 33.g5. Later it becomes clear that the pawn on g7 might become a weakness as well.

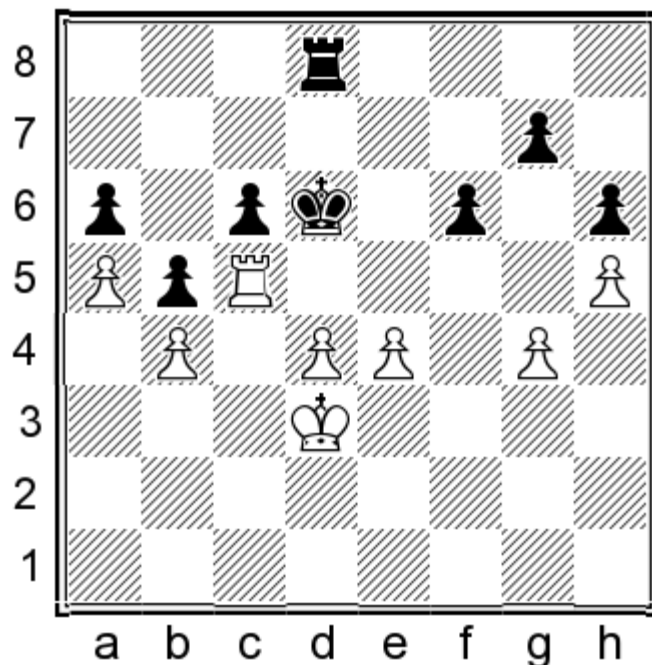
33...Re8 34.c3 Rd8 35.Kd3 Re8 36.Kd2 Kd6 37.Ke3 Ke6 38.Kd3 Kd6 39.c4 Ke6 40.c5 Rd8

In case of 40...b5 White proceeds with 41.Rf1! followed by 42.Ra1 and transferring the king to f4, when Black has problems on both sides of the board. (Inferior is 41.d5+?! because after 41...cxd5 42.exd5+ Kd7 the black rook becomes active.)

41.cxb6 cxb6 42.a5 b5?

More stubborn would have been 42...Rb8 even though after 43.axb6 Rxb6 44.Kc4 Rb8 45.Ra5 Ra8 46.Kc5 Kd7 47.d5 play remains one-sided.

43.Rc5 Kd6



Position after: 43...Kd6

44.Ke3?

Although there doesn't seem to be anything particularly wrong with the idea of transferring the king to the kingside, the question mark is given for the fact that White misses an easy win.

He could have simplified the position into a winning pawn ending with 44.d5! Rc8 (44...cxd5 45.Rxd5+ Kc7 46.Rxd8 Kxd8 47.Kd4 Kd7 48.Kd5 and White has the opposition.) 45.Kd4 Rc7 46.Rxc6+ Rxc6 47.dxc6 Kxc6 48.e5 fxe5+ 49.Kxe5 Kd7 50.Kd5! and again the white king has the opposition.

44...Re8 45.Kf4 Re7 46.Kf5 Kd7 47.Rc1 Re8 48.e5 fxe5 49.dxe5 Rf8+

After 49...Re7 50.Rc3 Re8 (50...Rf7+ 51.Kg6+--) 51.Rd3+ Ke7 52.Rd6 White also wins.

50.Kg6

And after this move Black resigned.

A sample line is 50.Kg6 Rf4 51.g5! Rg4 (51...hxg5 52.Kxg7 and the h-pawn decides matters.) 52.Kf7 Rxf5 53.e6+ Kc7 54.Rf1 and the e-pawn is unstoppable.

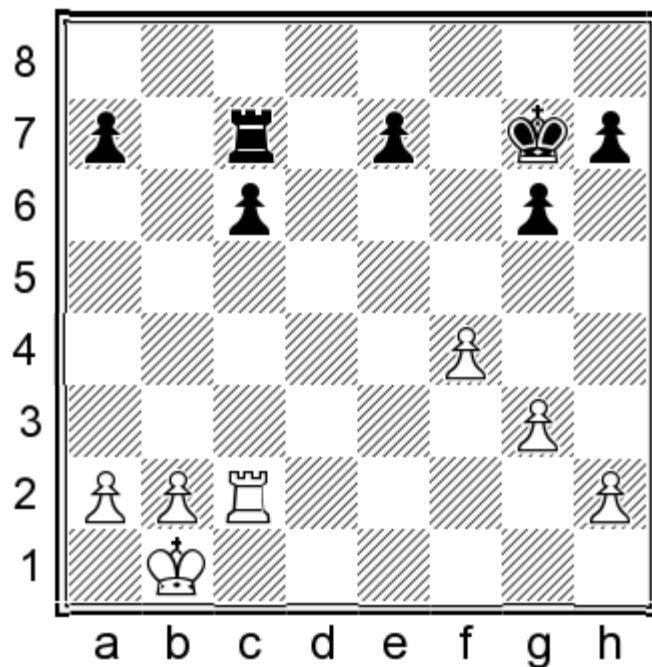
1-0

Too many weaknesses

Sokolov, Ivan (2643)

Wang Yue (2734)

Nakhchivan 2011



White to move

Before coming up with concrete ideas or calculating variations, it's good to have a look at the strategic features. Neither side has a majority on one wing, which means it's unlikely passed pawns will be created any time soon. Despite that fact, Black is in serious trouble due to his fragmented pawn structure.

32.Rc5!

White's rook is excellently placed on the 5th rank, whereas its counterpart remains very passive, protecting the weak pawns.

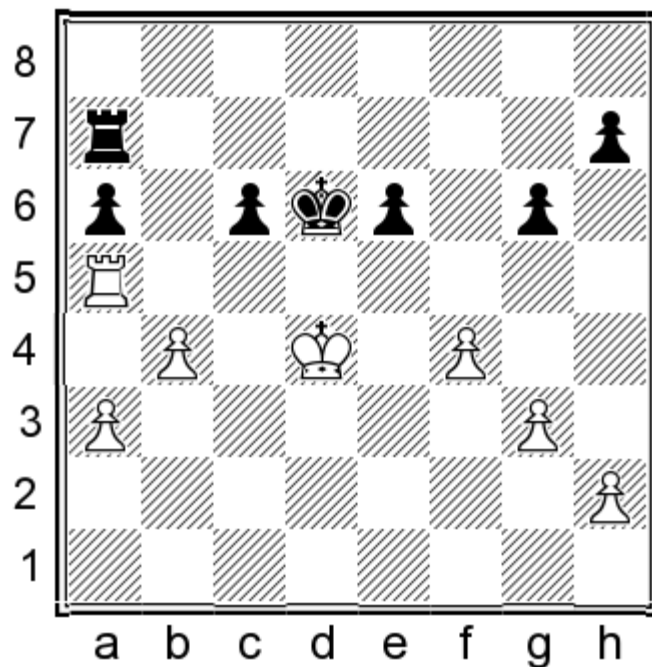
32...Kf6 33.Kc2 Ke6 34.b4 Kd7 35.Kc3 Kd6

From the defender's point of view, it's usually recommended to bring the king towards the weaknesses, freeing the rook to create counter chances. Hence 35...Kc8 comes into consideration, but it turns out that with 36.h4! White seizes the initiative on the other wing: 36...Kb7 (36...h5? loses a pawn, due to 37.Rg5) 37.h5 Rd7 (37...gxh5 38.Rxh5 e6 39.Kd4 Rd7+ 40.Ke4 and Black has problems taking care of both e6 and h7.) 38.hxg6 hxg6 39.Rg5 Rd6 40.Re5! and White wins a pawn next move either by Re6 or Rg5.

36.a3 e6 37.Kc4 a6

Apparently Black didn't like 37...Rf7 38.Ra5 Rc7 39.Ra6 when the rook keeps an eye on both a7 and c6. In a similar way to the game, White might increase the pressure by advancing his kingside, as well as with a4, b4-b5 leaving Black tied down by his weaknesses.

38.Ra5 Ra7 39.Kd4



Position after: 39.Kd4

39...Ra8

Obviously Black can no longer transfer his king to the queenside with 39...Kc7? because of 40.Ke5 and the white king invades. However, it seems Black has managed to hold his position together.

How should White increase the pressure? For the moment the situation on the queenside is optimal. Therefore, another weakness needs to be created on the other side of the board.

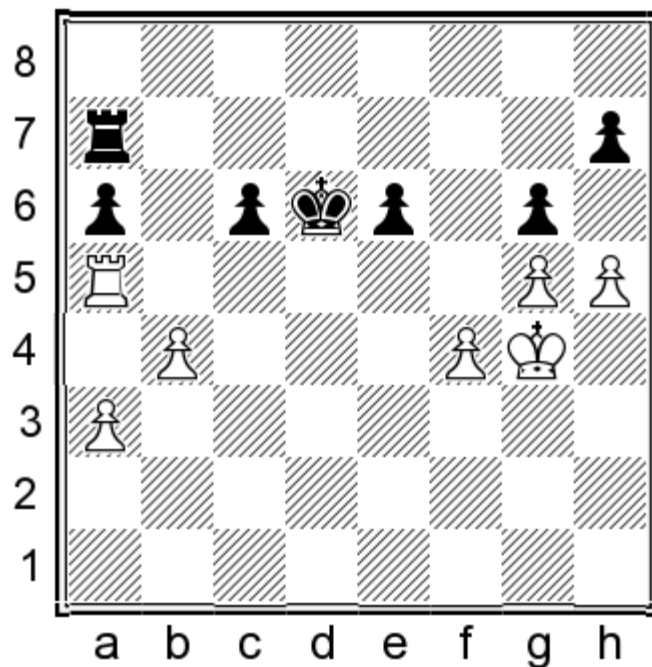
40.Ke4 Ra7 41.g4 Ra8 42.h4 Ra7

Stopping the march with 42...h6 can't be recommended either, in view of 43.h5! (But not 43.g5? h5! when White can no longer break through.) 43...gxh5 44.Rxh5 Rg8 45.Kf3 Rg6 (45...Rh8 allows 46.g5!) 46.Ra5 and the a-pawn falls.

43.g5 Ra8 44.Kf3 Rf8 45.Kg4!

It's tempting just to grab the pawn with 45.Rxa6?! though after 45...e5! Black obtains counterplay. Since there's no hurry, White takes some preparatory measures before reaping the harvest.

45...Ra8 46.h5 Ra7



Position after: 46...Ra7

47.h6!

An instructive idea. As a rule of thumb, the stronger side should avoid pawn exchanges like 47.hxg6 hxg6 because the defensive task becomes easier. Now the pawn on h7 will become another target.

47...Ra8 48.Kg3

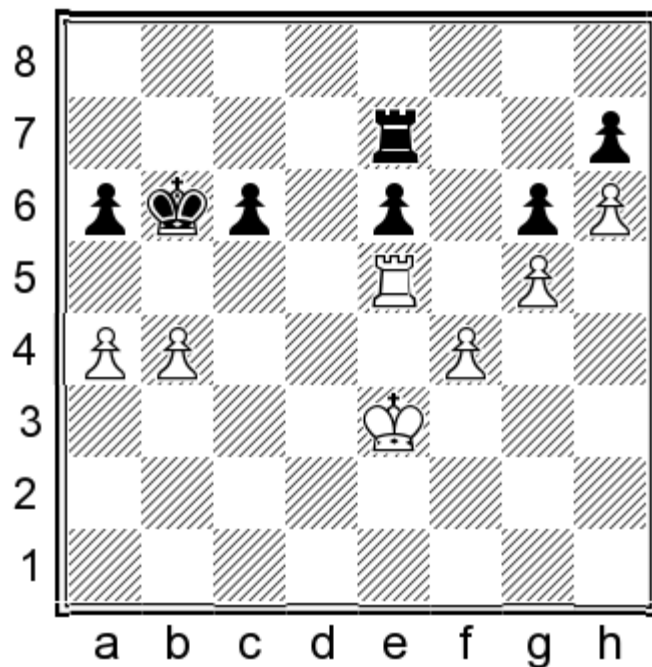
The immediate 48.Kf3 seems more straightforward.

48...Ra7 49.Kf3 Ra8 50.Ke3!

White's plan is to break through on the queenside with a4-b5. After a4, Black shouldn't hesitate to attack the pawn on b4. With the king on the 3rd rank the pawn won't be taken with check.

50...Ra7?

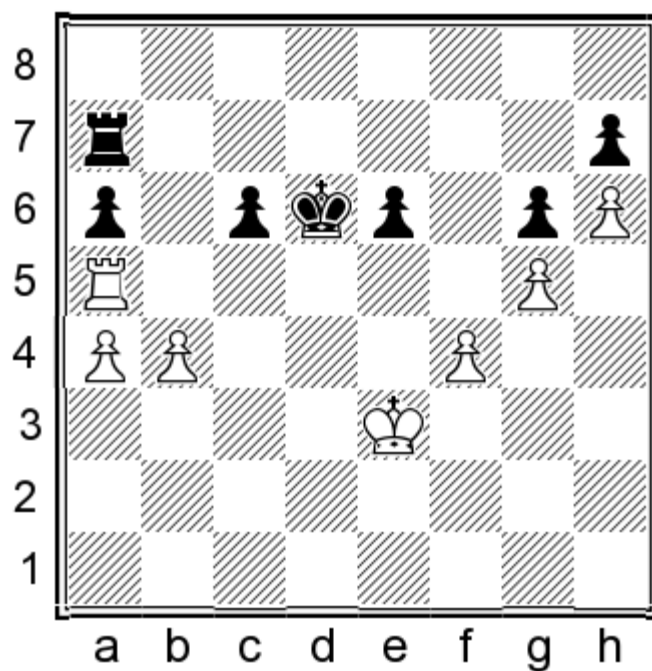
More tenacious would have been 50...Kc7!? when the winning variation requires some precision: 51.Kd4 (51.a4 can be met by 51...Kb6!) 51...Kd6 52.Ke4 Ra7 53.Ke3! (53.a4 Rb7!) 53...Kc7 (53...Ra8 54.a4 transposes to the game.) 54.a4 Kb6 55.Re5 Re7



Position after: 55...Re7

Since the black king is on the queenside, White decides matters on the other wing with 56.f5! gxf5 57.g6! hxg6 58.Kf4 Kc7 59.Re1! and the h-pawn is unstoppable.

51.a4!



Position after: 51.a4!

51...Rb7

The difference compared to the previous note is that Black doesn't have time for 51...Kc7 in view of 52.b5! Kb6

53.Rxa6+ Rxa6 54.bxa6 Kxa6 55.Kd4 Ka5 56.Kc5 Kxa4 57.Kxc6 and White wins easily.

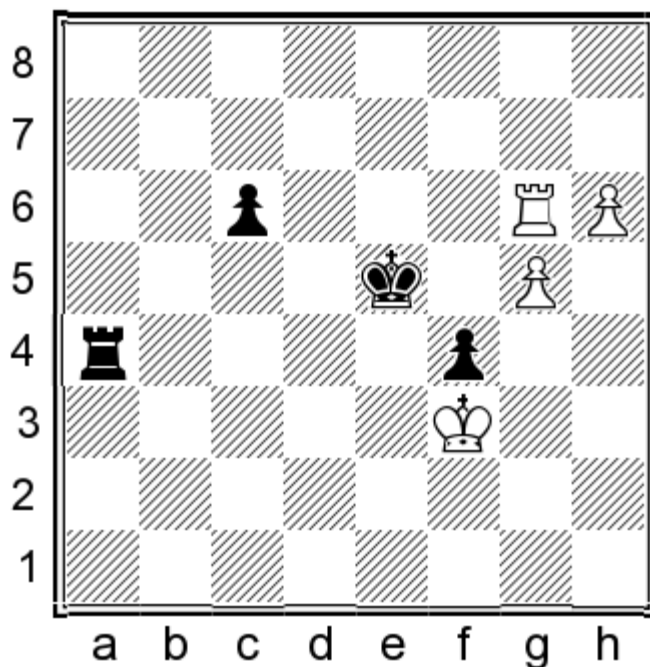
52.Rxa6 Rxb4 53.Ra7!

The point of White's 47th move suddenly becomes clear.

53...e5

Black desperately attempts to launch some counterplay now that the opponent's rook is no longer on the 5th rank.

54.Rxh7 exf4+ 55.Kf3 Rxa4 56.Rg7 Ke5 57.Rxg6



Position after: 57.Rxg6

57...Kf5

No better would have been 57...Ra3+ since after 58.Kg4 Rg3+ 59.Kh4 Rg1 60.Rxc6 f3 61.Rf6 the f-pawn is stopped, while the white king will support the advance of his pawns.

58.h7!

The simplest and cleanest win. The cumbersome method is 58.Rg7 and after the checks 58...Ra3+ 59.Ke2 Ra2+ to run away with 60.Kd3 when White wins with the standard mechanism h7-g6-Rg8 etc.

58...Ra3+

58...Ra8 fails to 59.Rg8!

59.Kf2 Ra2+ 60.Ke1 Ra1+

60...Rh2 can be answered with the interference move 61.Rh6!

61.Kd2 Ra2+ 62.Kc3 Ra3+ 63.Kb2 Kxg6 64.h8=Q

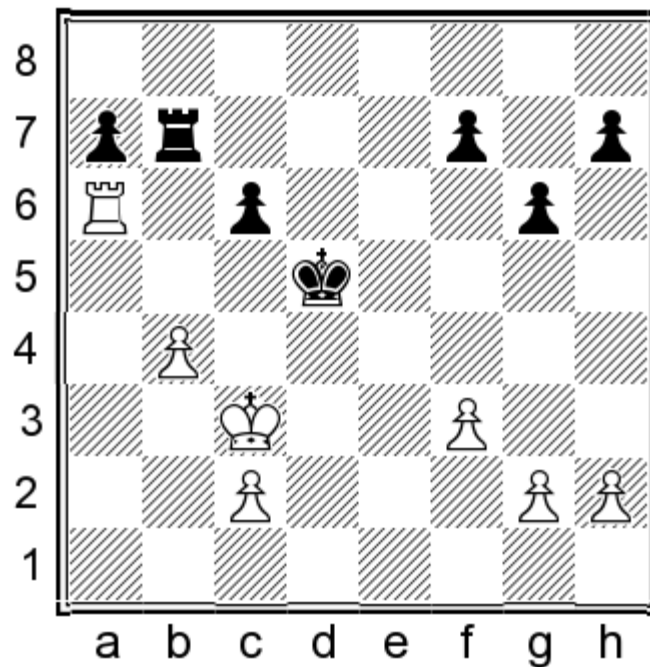
And Black resigned, since White has promoted his remaining pawn.

1-0

Safarli, Eltaj (2660)

Shanava, Konstantine (2563)

Denizli 2013



White to move

Nothing much seems to be going on in this rook ending.

White has the slightly better pawn structure on the queenside, but on the other hand Black's forces are comfortably defending the weaknesses on a7 and c6. It seems to me that objectively Black should be able to hold this ending, but from a practical point of view it is very hard to accomplish this defensive task.

White will gradually increase the pressure on his opponent by creating new targets on the king side of the board.

33.Ra5+!

A very precise move, since after 33.g4 Black eliminates one of his weaknesses with 33...c5!

33.Ra5+! Kd6 34.g4!

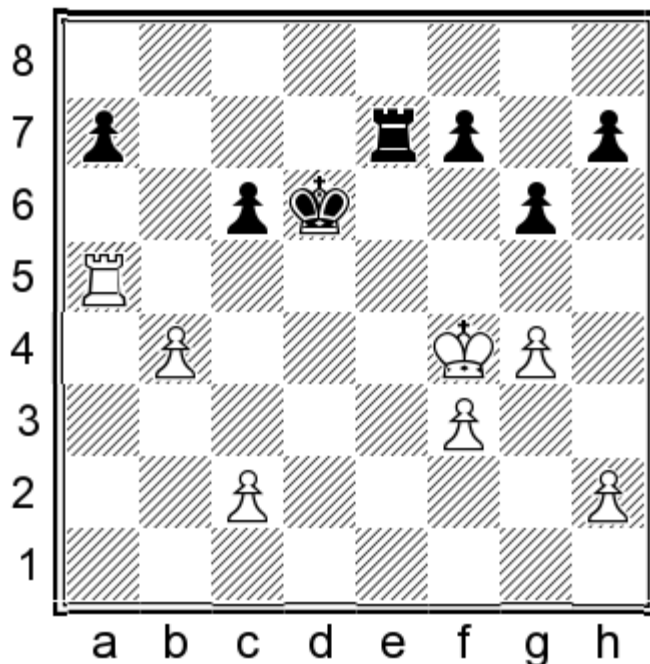
Another very useful move.

White gains space on the kingside and tries to create new targets on that side of the board. After something like 34.Kc4 Black might have given serious consideration to 34...f5 as a means of preventing this advance, as further pawn trades would favour the weaker side.

34...Re7 35.Kd3 Rd7 36.Ke4

White shouldn't allow the black king to go back to b6. If 36.h4?! Kc7+! 37.Kc3 Kb6 the weak points are protected and thus the black rook is released from its task.

36...Re7+ 37.Kf4



Position after: 37.Kf4

37...f6?

Black misses an opportunity to change the course of the game. Black should have become active with 37...Re2! 38.Rxa7 Rxc2 39.Rxf7 Rxh2 when, due to the limited material left on the board and the active placement of the pieces, Black seems to have reasonable drawing chances. In a practical game though, it is understandable that Black refrained from this option as White is about to create a passed f-pawn after Kg5, f4-f5 and so on.

38.h4! Rb7

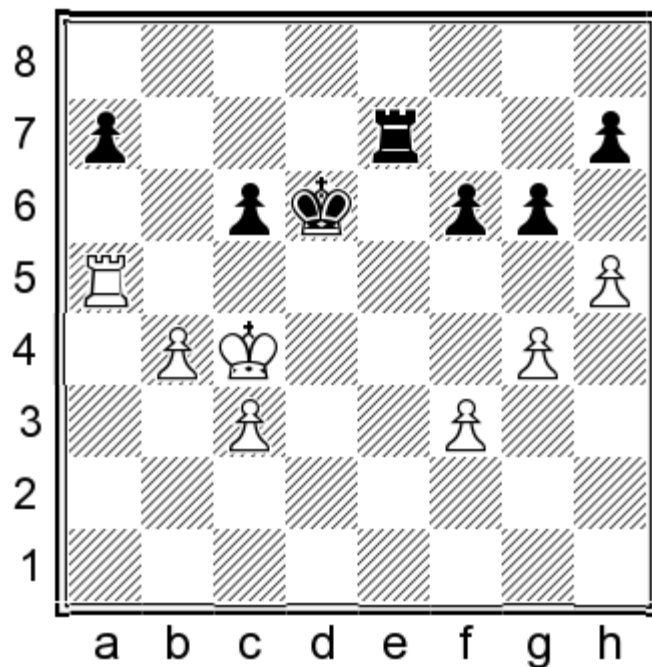
It's now too late for 38...Re2 39.Rxa7 Rxc2 40.Rxh7 Rc4+ 41.Kg3 g5 (41...Rxb4 42.Rh6 is hopeless too.) 42.hxg5 fxg5 43.Rg7 and the extra pawn in the ensuing race is decisive.

39.c3 Re7 40.h5 Rb7

A) Black had a difficult choice in view of the tension on the kingside. If 40...g5+ the white king penetrates with devastating effect: 41.Kf5 Re3 42.Kxf6 Rxf3+ 43.Kg7 Rxc3 44.Kxh7 and the h-pawn decides.

B) After 40...gxh5 41.Rxh5 leads to a pawn structure very similar to the previous game where Black couldn't cope with all his pawn islands.

41.Ke4 Re7+ 42.Kd4 Rd7 43.Kc4 Re7



Position after: 43...Re7

44.h6!

Intending to pick up the pawn on h7 once the rook reaches the 7th rank. Simplifying the position with 44.hxg6 hxg6 doesn't lead anywhere.

44...Rf7

Again, there is no time to activate the rook, since after 44...Re3 45.Rxa7 Rxf3 46.Rxh7 Rh3 (46...Rf4+ 47.Kb3 Rxf4 48.Rh8! Rh4 49.h7 Kc7 50.Ra8! and White wins.) 47.Rh8 Kc7 48.Rf8 Rxh6 49.Rf7+ Kc8 50.Rxf6 White wins easily.

45.f4 Re7 46.Kd4 Rd7 47.c4! Rb7

The plan of transferring the king to b6 with 47...Kc7+ may be thwarted by 48.Kc5 Kb7 49.Ra1! and now Black can't prevent the white rook from penetrating via one of the open central files, e.g. 49...Re7 50.Rd1 g5 51.Rd6 gxf4 52.Rxf6 and Black's position falls apart.

48.Ra6 Rd7

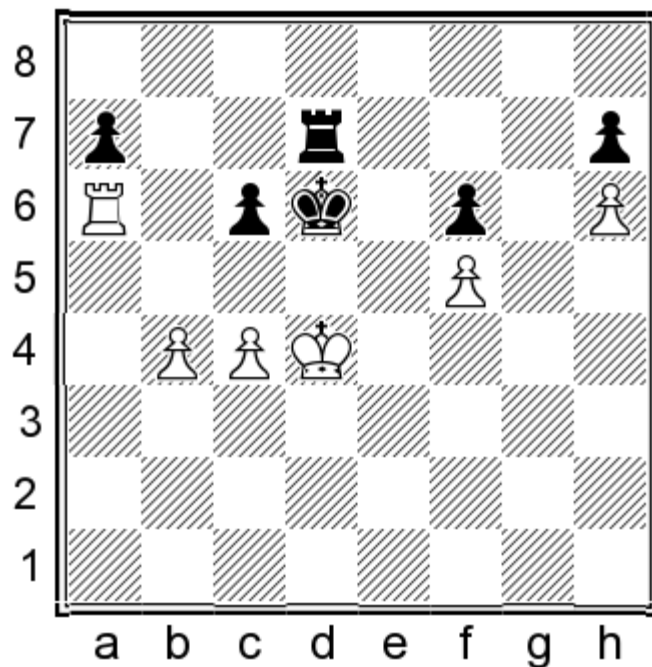
The whole point of White's play becomes clear after 48...Rxb4 49.Rxa7 when the pawn on h7 can't be saved any longer.

49.f5!

The immediate 49.b5 is possible to, but the idea of fixing the pawn on f6 fits perfectly into White's general concept.

49...g5

Also, after 49...gxf5 50.gxf5



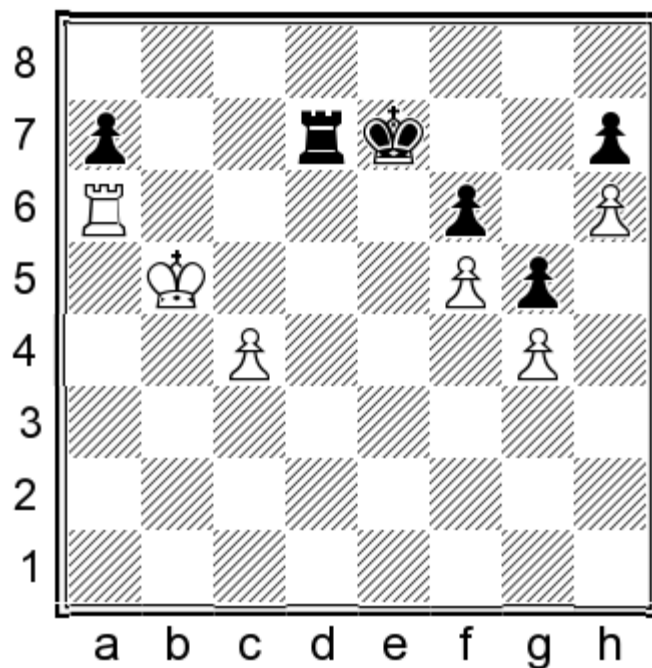
Position after: 50.gxf5

Black is simply running out of useful moves, as he is too busy himself looking after the four(!) weaknesses, e.g. 50...Rc7 51.b5 Kd7 52.bxc6+ Kd6 53.c5+ Ke7 54.Kd5 and White wins.

50.b5 Ke7+

Black doesn't have time for 50...Kc7+ 51.Kc5 cxb5 in view of the intermediate check 52.Rxa7+ and the pawn ending is easily won.

51.Kc5 cxb5 52.Kxb5



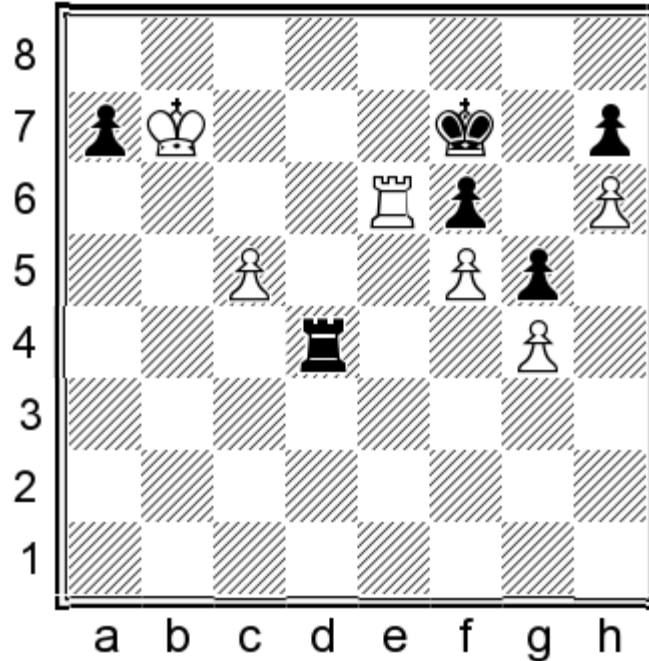
Position after: 52.Kxb5

White's advantage has grown significantly during the course of this rook ending. His rook is wonderfully placed on a6, tying the black rook and king down to protecting the weaknesses on a7 and f6. Moreover, White has created a passed c-pawn whose march will be supported by the king.

52...Rb7+ 53.Kc6 Rd7 54.c5 Kd8 55.Kb5 Rb7+ 56.Kc4 Ke7 57.Re6+ Kf7 58.Kd5 Rd7+ 59.Kc6 Rd4 60.Kb7

Since the c-pawn is unstoppable, Black threw in the towel.

The following line is illustrative: 60.Kb7



Position after: 60.Kb7

60...Rxb7 61.c6! Rb4+ 62.Kxa7 Rc4 63.Kb7 Rb4+ 64.Kc7 g4 65.Kd7 g3 66.c7 Rd4+ 67.Rd6 Rxd6+ 68.Kxd6 g2 69.c8=Q g1=Q 70.Qd7+ Kf8 71.Qe7+ Kg8 72.Qe8#

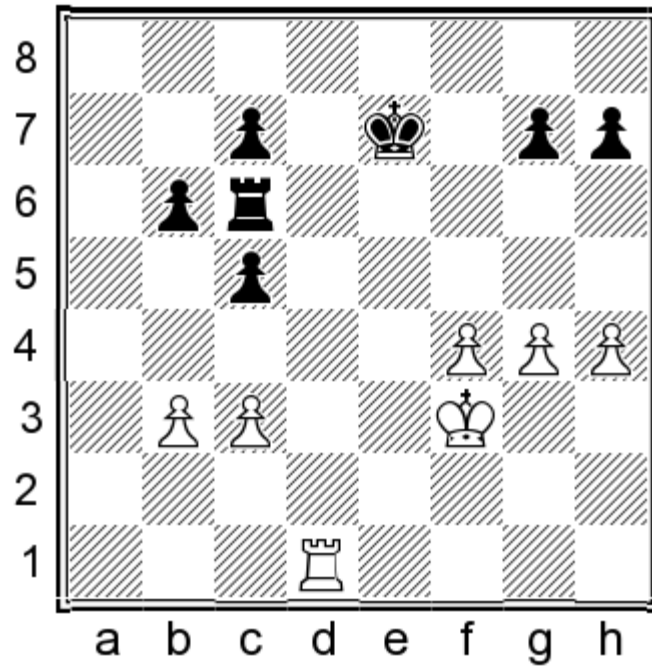
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Conclusion: Black had a very difficult time defending his fractured pawn structure on the queenside in this rook ending.

However, since these two weaknesses are pretty close together it should be easier for the black forces to defend them. But once the white h-pawn appeared on the 6th rank, Black could no longer deal with the multiple threats on both sides of the board. It's quite typical in rook endings for the best defence to involve becoming active and thus 37...Re2! should at least have been tried. After overlooking this possibility Black was in a complete stranglehold, and was given no further chances to get back into the game.

A pawn majority

Solak, Dragan (2629)
Bakre, Tejas (2509)
Stockholm 2012



White to move

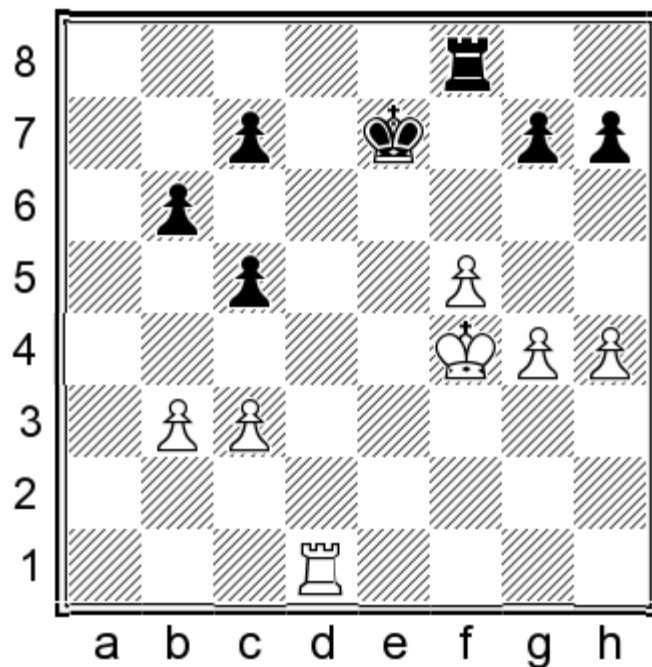
Materially speaking the position is still balanced, but it's clear that White's position must be preferred.

White has good chances of creating a passed pawn on the kingside, Black's pawn structure lacks the flexibility to achieve that on the other wing. A pawn majority is an important strategic weapon. The threat of creating a passed pawn doesn't allow the other side to exchange pieces. Counterplay must be found by activating forces.

43.f5 g6?

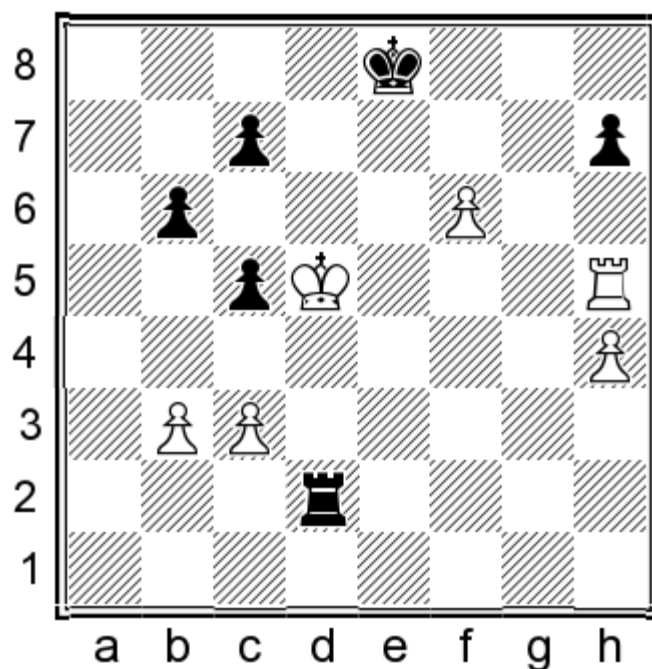
As a rule of thumb, one shouldn't move pawns on the weaker side.

After the text move White finds it easier to break through on the kingside. Black should have tried to activate his rook with 43...Rf6! even though his position remains lost. Some illustrative lines start with 44.Kf4 Rf8 when White has two interesting possibilities:



Position after: 44...Rf8

A) 45.g5 Ra8 46.Ke5 Ra2 47.f6+ gxf6+ 48.gxf6+ Ke8 (48...Kf7? 49.Rd7+) 49.Rd5! (Intending to interfere on the 5th rank against the checks. Nothing can be gained from 49.Ke6?! because of 49...Re2+) 49...Re2+ 50.Kf5 Rf2+ 51.Ke6 (Heading for the kingside with 51.Kg5? leads nowhere, in view of 51...Rg2+ 52.Kh6 Kf7 53.Rd7+ Kxf6 54.Rxc7 Rg3 and Black manages to trade off the queenside pawns.) 51...Re2+ 52.Re5 Rh2 (There's no time for pawn hunting with 52...Rc2 since after 53.c4 Rb2 54.Rh5 Rxb3 55.Rxh7 Re3+ 56.Kf5 Rf3+ 57.Ke5 Re3+ 58.Kf4 Rc3 59.h5 Rxc4+ 60.Kf5 White's far-advanced kingside decides the matters.) 53.Rh5 Re2+ 54.Kd5 Rd2+



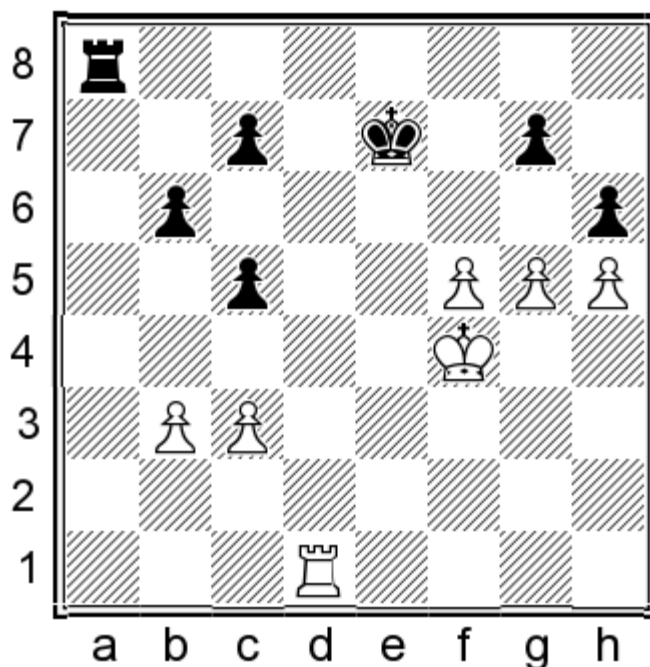
Position after: 54...Rd2+

A1) 55.Kc4 Rf2 56.Rxh7 c6 57.f7+ (57.h5 Rxf6 58.Rb7 Rh6 59.Rxb6 Kd7 and 2 vs. 1 on the same wing isn't

problematic for Black.) 57...Kf8 (Of course not 57...Rxf7? 58.Rxf7 Kxf7 59.Kd3 and the king picks up the pawns.) 58.Rh6 Rf4+ 59.Kd3 Rf3+ and Black holds on.

A2) 55.Kc6 Rd3 56.c4 Rxb3 (56...Kf7? loses to 57.Rxh7+ Kxf6 58.Rxc7 Rxb3 59.Rb7 Rh3 60.Kxb6 Rxh4 61.Kxc5 Ke6 62.Kb5 and since the black king is cut off the 7th rank, White has reached a theoretically won position.) 57.Rxh7 Rf3 58.Re7+ Kf8 (58...Kd8? 59.Re6!+-) 59.Rxc7 Rxf6+ 60.Kb5 Rh6 61.Rb7 Ke8 62.Rxb6 Rxh4 63.Kxc5 Kd7 and Black draws.

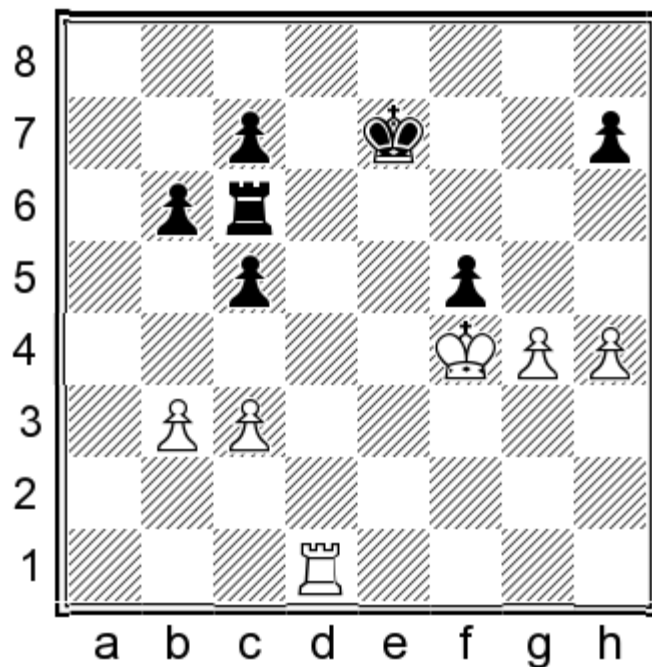
B) 45.h5 h6 (45...Ra8 allows the creation of a passed pawn with 46.h6! gxh6 47.Rh1 Kf7 48.Rxh6 Kg7 49.Rc6! and White is on top.) 46.g5 Ra8



Position after: 46...Ra8

47.f6+! (After 47.gxh6 no clear win is apparent. For example, 47...gxh6 48.Ke5 Ra2 49.f6+ Ke8 50.Rg1 Re2+ 51.Kf5 Rf2+ 52.Kg6 Kf8 53.Rg3 b5 54.Rd3 Rg2+ 55.Kxh6 b4 56.cxb4 cxb4 57.Rd7 Rg3 58.Rxc7 Rxb3 and it seems White is unable to exploit his extra pawn.) 47...gxf6 48.g6 Ra2 49.Rg1 Kf8 50.g7+ Kg8 51.Kf5 followed by picking up the h-pawn.

44.Kf4 gxf5



Position after: 44...gxf5

45.Kxf5

45.gxf5 could be good as well, although keeping the pawn structure intact is a more logical strategy.

45...Rf6+ 46.Kg5 Rg6+

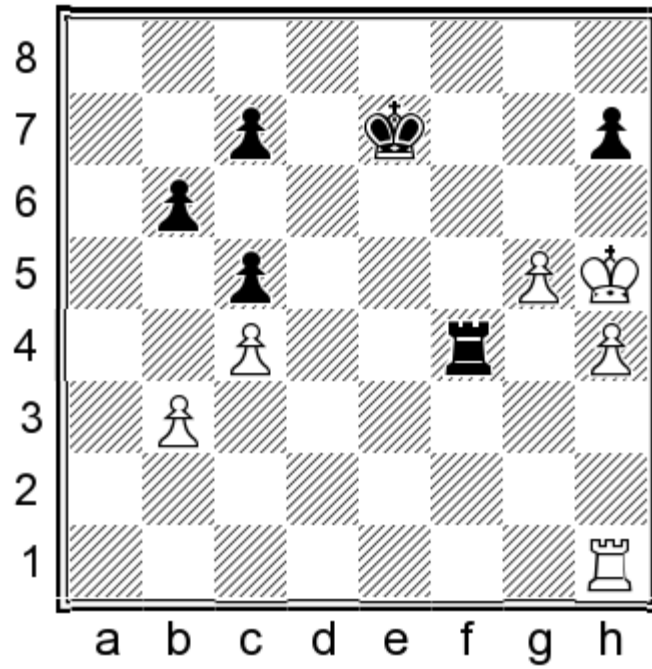
The immediate 46...Re6 would have been better, although after 47.c4 White also gradually increases his advantage.

47.Kh5 Re6 48.g5 Re4

Temporarily preventing the white king from getting to the h7-pawn.

The other option 48...Re3 wouldn't have saved Black either: 49.Kh6 Rh3 (49...Rxc3 50.Rh1! and White's two passed pawns are much faster.) 50.h5 Ke6 51.Rf1 Ke7 52.Rf5 Rh1 53.Rf3 Rh2 54.c4 Rh1 55.Kxh7 Rxh5+ 56.Kg6 Rh4 57.Kg7 and White easily wins by bringing the pawn to the 7th rank followed by building a bridge (see Chapter 1).

49.c4 Rf4 50.Rh1!



Position after: 50.Rh1!

50...Kf7

After 50...Rf3 51.Kh6 Rxb3 52.Kxh7 both passed pawns are unstoppable.

51.Kh6 Kg8 52.h5 Rd4 53.Re1 Rd6+ 54.g6 hxg6 55.hxg6 Rd8 56.Re7 Rc8

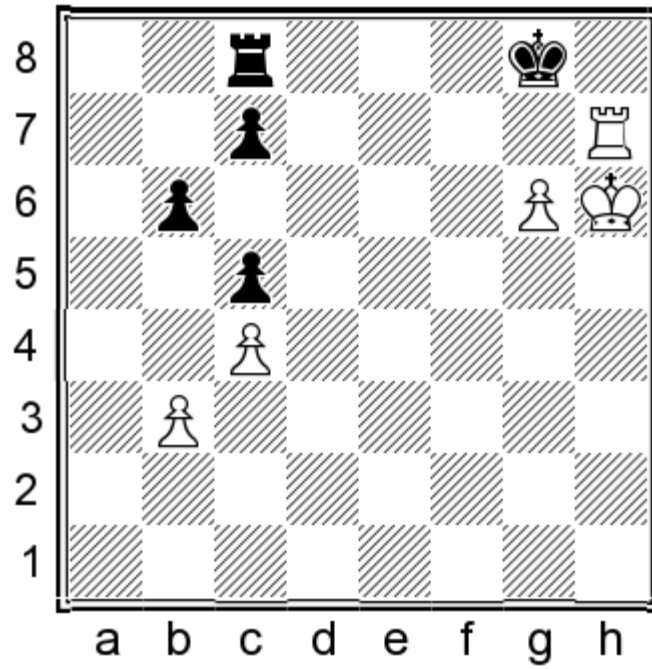
56...c6 is also hopeless, as the rook is unable to leave the back rank. White wins easily after 57.Rb7 Re8 58.Rxb6 Rc8 59.Rb7 Rd8 60.Rc7 and the remaining pawns will be picked up.

57.Rg7+ Kh8

57...Kf8 58.Rh7 Kg8 comes to the same.

58.Rh7+ Kg8

Without all the pawns on the queenside White wouldn't have been able to make further progress. Now, White has a nice tactical resource at his disposal.



Position after: 58...Kg8

59.g7!

The passively placed rook on c8 can't give a check via the 6th rank.

59...Kf7

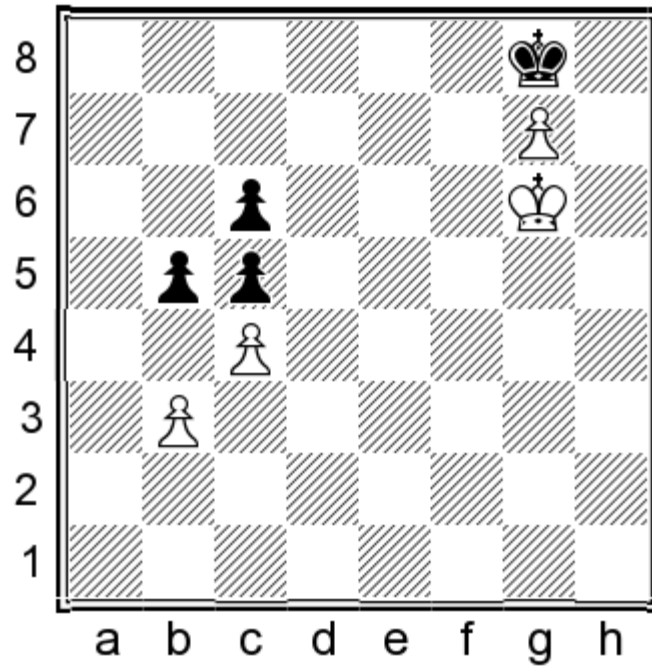
59...Re8 loses to 60.Rh8+ Kf7 61.Rxe8 Kxe8 62.g8=Q++-

60.Rh8 Rg8 61.Rxg8 Kxg8 62.Kg6

There's no stalemate!

62...c6 63.Kf6 b5 64.Ke6

Still, it wasn't too late to commit a blunder by means of 64.Kg6?



Position after: 64.Kg6?

64...bxc4 (But not 64...b4? 65.Kf6 and White still wins.) 65.bxc4 with a draw.

64...bxc4 65.bxc4 Kxg7 66.Kd6

And Black resigned, since after White picks up the pawns he's too late to get the opposition.

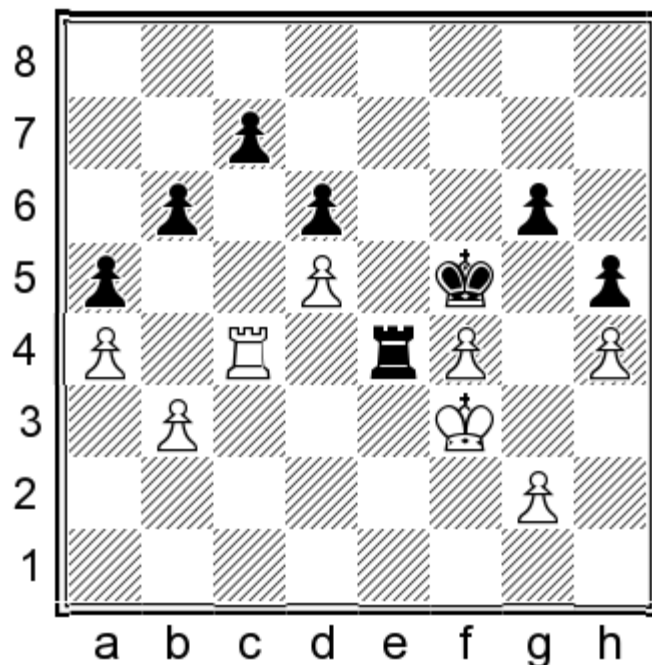
1-0

Active defence

Kramnik, Vladimir (2785)

Radjabov, Teimour (2744)

Kazan 2011



Black to move

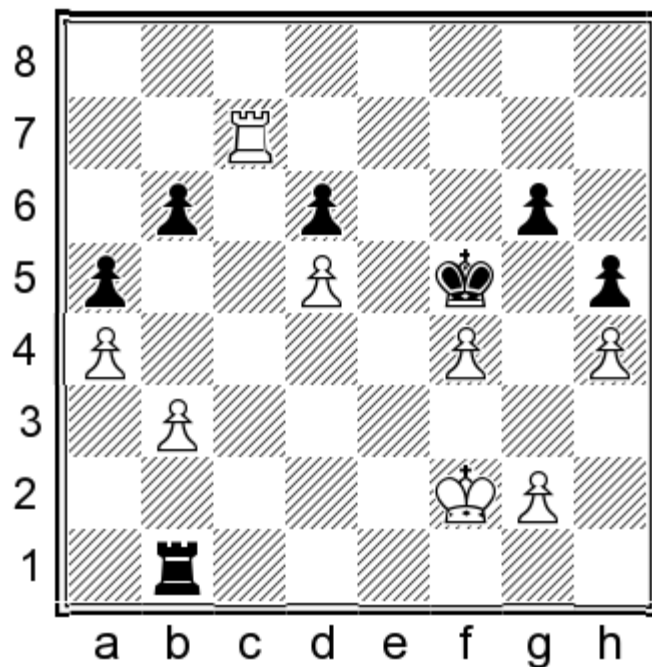
In this endgame, Black has the difficult task of deciding what to do with his rook on e4.

Is it possible to exchange rooks, can he easily build up an impregnable fortress by protecting c7, or should he simply look for his own chances?

49...Re7?

A) Not spoiling anything, but certainly the first step in the wrong direction. After 49...Rxc4? 50.bxc4 it turns out Black is unable to set his queenside majority in motion. Hence the king will be driven back, and White is able to create a passed pawn: 50...Kf6 51.g4 Kg7 (Also hopeless is 51...hxg4+ 52.Kxg4 Kf7 53.f5) 52.g5 Kf7 53.Ke4 Kg7 54.f5 Kf7 55.fxg6+ (A stupid mistake would have been 55.f6? when the white king can no longer break through.) 55...Kxg6 56.Kf4 Kg7 57.Kf5 and White wins.

B) The key to success in rook endgames is activity. Very often it's better to sacrifice a pawn (or even more) to become active than to stick to your material and stay passive. Therefore, Radjabov should have gone for 49...Re1! 50.Rxc7 Rf1+! (50...Rb1? 51.Rf7#) 51.Ke3 (51.Kg3 Rb1 52.Rc3 Ke4! and despite the extra pawn, it's White who must be careful. Note the difference in strength between White's and Black's forces.) 51...Re1+ 52.Kf2 Rb1



Position after: 52...Rb1

and it appears White's pawns are quite weak. Black's active rook in combination with the powerful king on f5 offer Black sufficient counterchances to hold the balance.

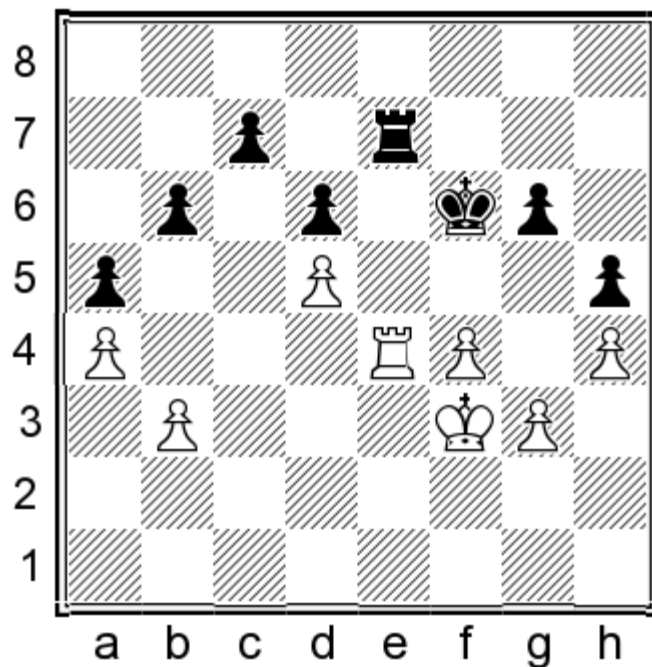
49...Re7? 50.g3

Nothing can be gained from 50.Rc3 Re4 51.g3 (51.Rc4 would just be a repetition.) 51...Rb4! and Black's rook is excellently placed, keeping an eye on the weak pawn on b3.

50...Kf6?

It was still not too late to activate the rook with 50...Re1! although it's clear the extra move g3 can only be in White's favour, as the pawns on f4 and h4 are protected now.

51.Re4!



Position after: 51.Re4!

51...Rf7

After 51...Rxe4? 52.Kxe4 Kf7 53.f5! the pawn ending is again lost because of White's outside passed pawn.

52.Re6+

Premature is 52.g4? hxg4+ 53.Kxg4 Rh7! (activating the rook via the 5th rank!) 54.Re6+ Kf7 and White is unable to make progress, as 55.Kg5? fails to 55...Rh5+!

52...Kf5

In case of 52...Kg7 53.g4 we transpose to the game after White's 57th move.

53.Re8! Kf6

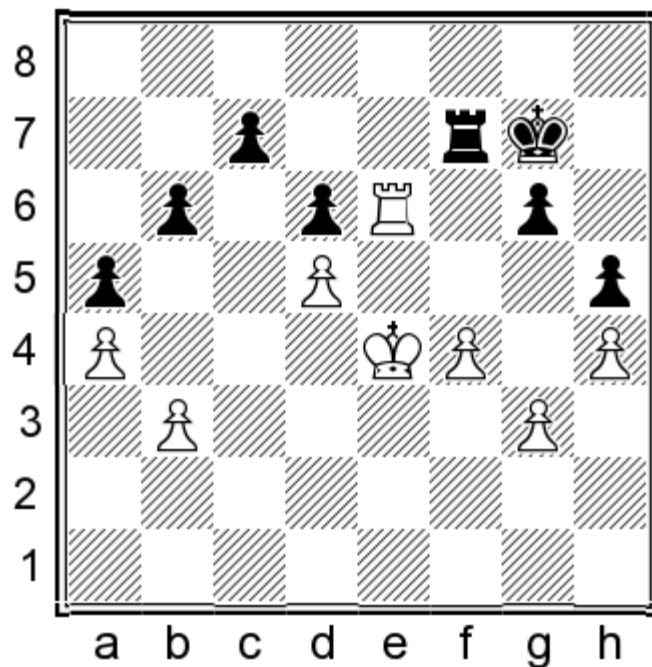
A) The only move, since both 53...Rg7? 54.Rf8+ and

B) 53...Rf6? 54.Re7 are losing for Black.

54.Ke4

Again 54.g4? will be met by 54...hxg4+ 55.Kxg4 Rh7! and White can't break through.

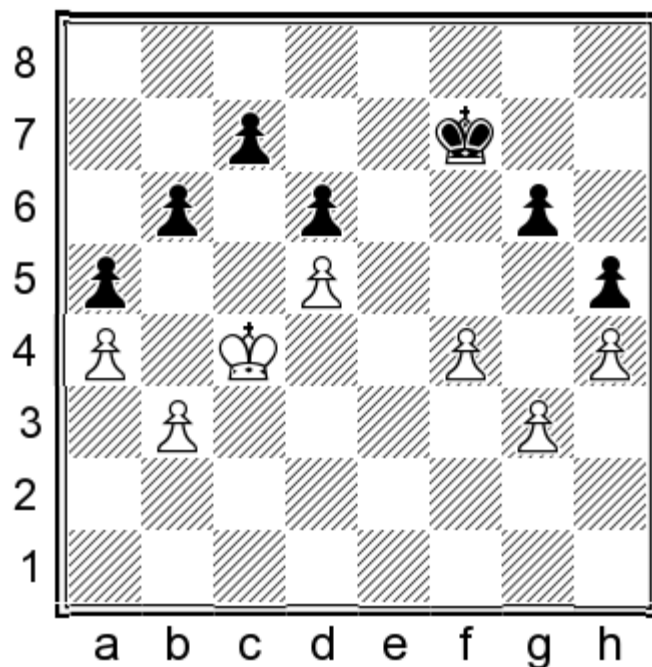
54...Kg7 55.Re6



Position after: 55.Re6

55...Kh7

Worth considering is 55...Kh6 56.Kd4 (The idea of Black's last move is to meet 56.Kf3 with 56...Rf5! 57.Ke4 Rf7=) 56...Kg7 57.Kc4 Rf5 (Passive defence with 57...Kh7 fails simply to 58.Kb5 Kg7 59.Kc6 Kh7 60.Re8 and c7 will fall.) 58.Re7+ Rf7 59.Rxf7+ Kxf7



Position after: 59...Kxf7

60.Kd4! (there was nothing to achieve on the queenside) (60.Kb5 Ke8 61.Kc6 Kd8 62.Kb7 Kd7 and Black defends.) 60...Kg7 61.Ke3 Kf7 62.Kf3 Kg7 63.g4 hxg4+ 64.Kxg4 Kf6 65.f5! gxf5+ 66.Kf4 Kg6 67.h5+! Kxh5 68.Kxf5 and

White is first to pick up the queenside pawns.

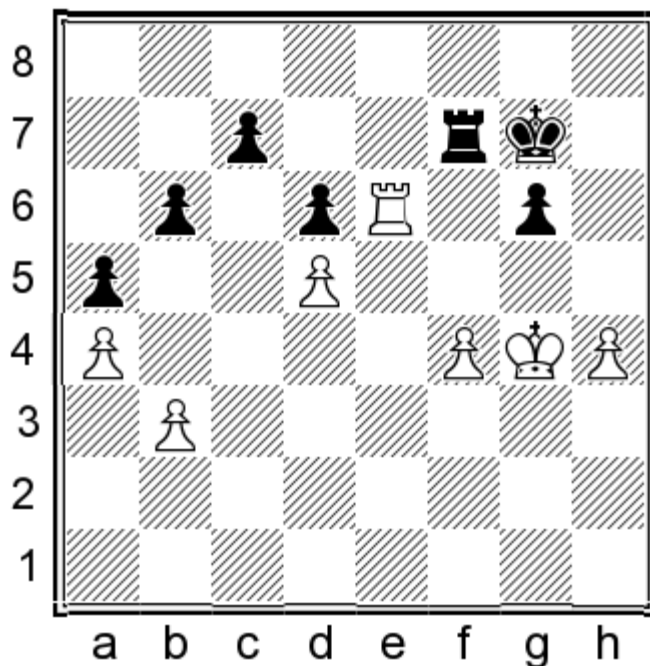
56.Kf3?

Since Black misses another chance to save the game, we can condemn Kramnik's decision. Better is 56.Kd4! Kg7 57.Kc4 with a similar winning procedure to the one in the previous note.

56...Kg7

56...Rf5? is not good now, in view of 57.Re7+ Kh6 58.Ke4! and c7 falls.

57.g4 hxg4+ 58.Kxg4



Position after: 58.Kxg4

58...Kh7?

Again, Radjabov fails to become active. Correct is 58...Rf5! 59.Re7+ Kf6 60.Rxc7 b5! (But not 60...Rxd5?! 61.Rb7!) 61.axb5 Rxd5 and despite being a pawn down Black can hold the ending, since after 62.b6 Rb5! White's b-pawn can't cause any harm.

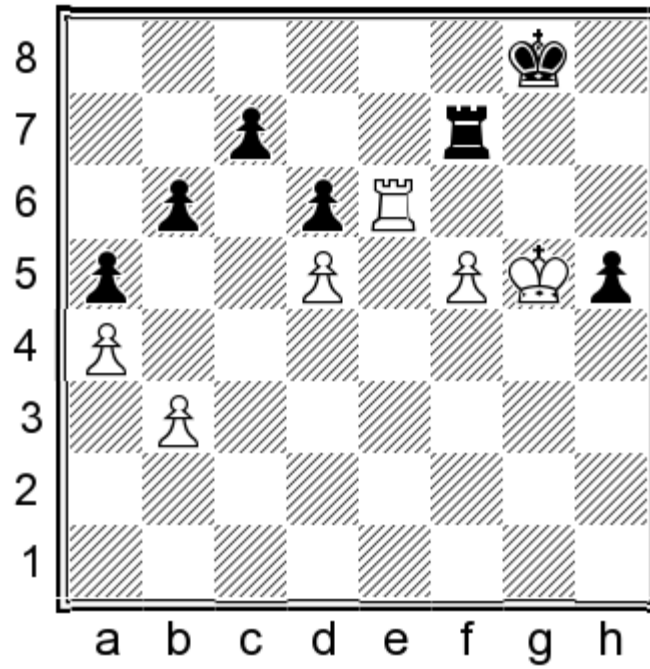
59.h5! gxh5+ 60.Kg5!

The point! Obviously, it wasn't White's intention to play 60.Kxh5? Rf5+ 61.Kg4 Rxd5 62.Re7+ Kg6 63.Rxc7 b5!= when too many pawns are traded.

60...Kg8?

The decisive mistake. More resistance could have been offered by 60...h4! although after 61.Rh6+ Kg8 62.Rxh4 Black's defensive task would still have been very difficult.

61.f5



Position after: 61.f5

61...Rh7

A) Alternatives wouldn't have saved Black either: 61...Rg7+ allows White to exchange rooks again with 62.Rg6!

B) 61...h4 62.f6 h3 63.Kg6! (note the difference in activity between both sides) 63...Kf8 (63...h2 64.Re8+ Rf8 65.f7+ Kh8 66.Rxf8#; 63...Rf8 64.Re7 h2 65.Rg7+ Kh8 66.Rh7+ Kg8 67.Rxh2+-) 64.Re3! h2 65.Rh3 and White finally picks up the h-pawn, retaining a winning position.

62.f6

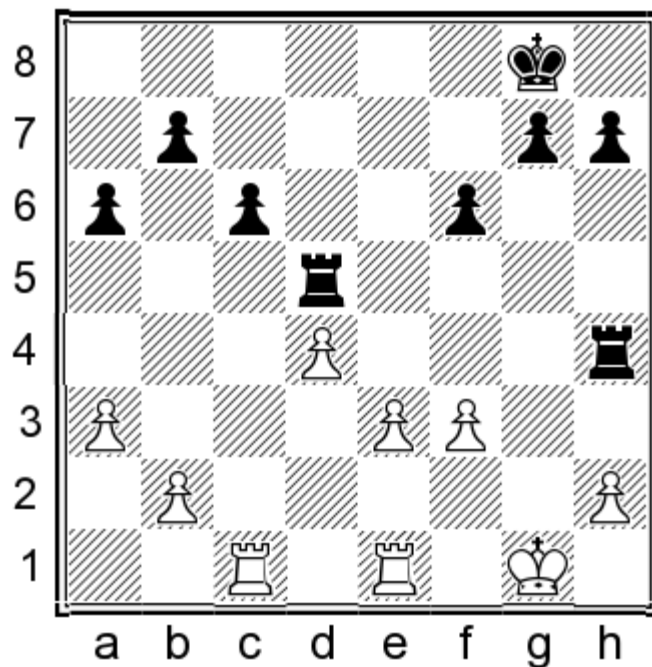
It's never too late to blunder away a winning advantage. In case of 62.Kg6? Black's king will be activated with 62...Rg7+! 63.Kxh5 Kf7 when Black will draw after : 64.Rg6 Rh7+ 65.Kg5 Rh1

62...h4 63.Kg6

1-0

And Black resigned, since mate on e8 can only be prevented by giving up the rook.

Kasimdzhanov, Ruslan (2699)
 Dominguez Perez, Leinier (2723)
 Thessaloniki 2013



White to move

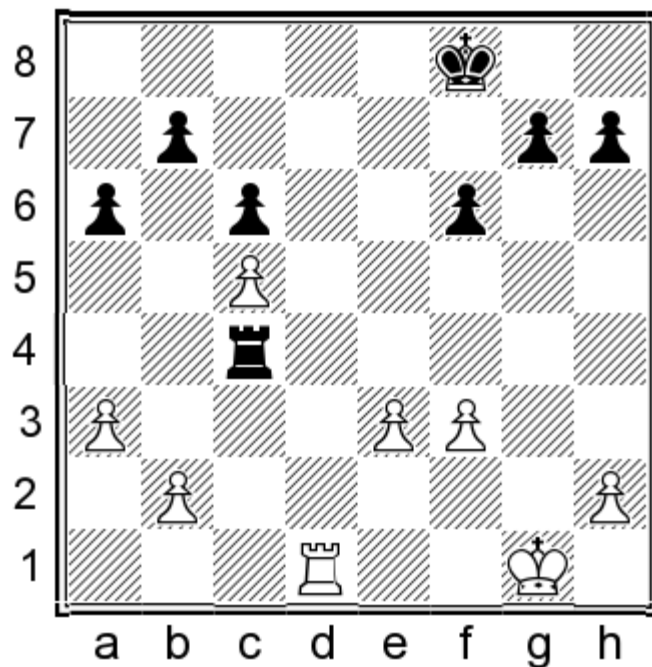
26.Rc5?

Although objectively speaking this move doesn't change the evaluation, the question mark has been attached for making the defensive task unnecessarily complicated.

A more satisfactory continuation for White would have been 26.e4! Rxd4 (Also after 26...Rg5+ 27.Kh1 Rb5 28.Re2 White is in control.) 27.Red1 Rxd1+ 28.Rxd1 and, due to the temporarily misplaced rook, Black can't take advantage of his extra pawn.

26.Rc5? Rxc5 27.dxc5 Rc4 28.Rd1 Kf8!

The pawn on c5 is a source of problems and Black shouldn't really eliminate this straightaway with 28...Rxc5? since after 29.Rd8+ Kf7 30.Rd7+ Kg6 31.Rxb7 White retains full equality.



Position after: 28...Kf8!

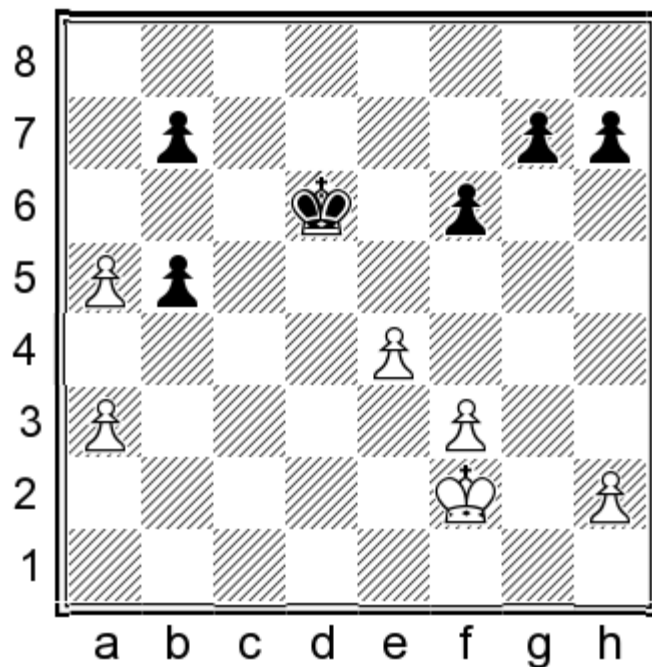
29.b4?

Again, White sticks to the extra pawn, even at the expense of deactivating his rook. It seems to me that after 29.Rd7! Rc1+ 30.Kf2 Rc2+ 31.Kg3 Rxb2 32.h4, despite minus a pawn, White retains excellent drawing chances thanks to the active placement of his forces and the potential passed e-pawn.

After the continuation of the game Black finds a new target on the queenside.

29...Ke7 30.Rd3 a5! 31.Rb3

Keeping the chain intact. A critical alternative is 31.bxa5 Rxc5 32.Rb3 Rb5! 33.Rxb5 (33.Rc3 Rxa5 should be winning for Black.) 33...cxb5 which Dominguez believed to be winning for Black. The following lines indicate the winning procedure to be harder than it looks, e.g. 34.Kf2 Kd6 35.e4

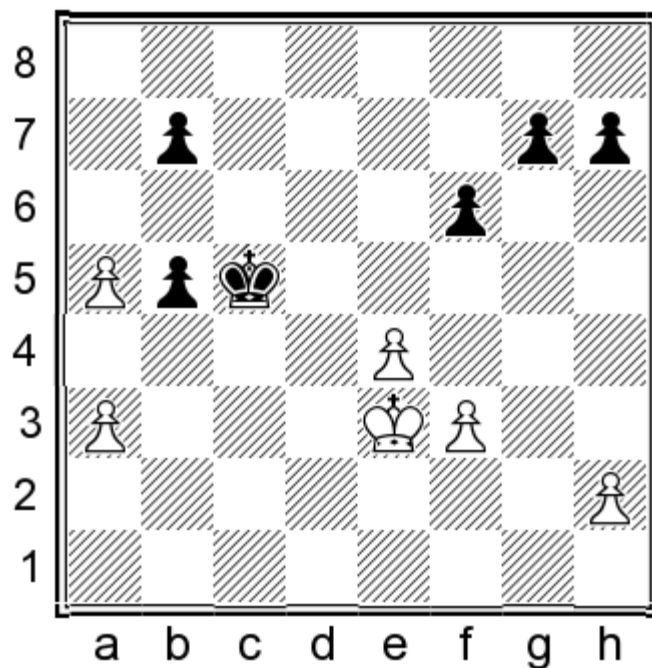


Position after: 35.e4

and now Black has three candidate moves:

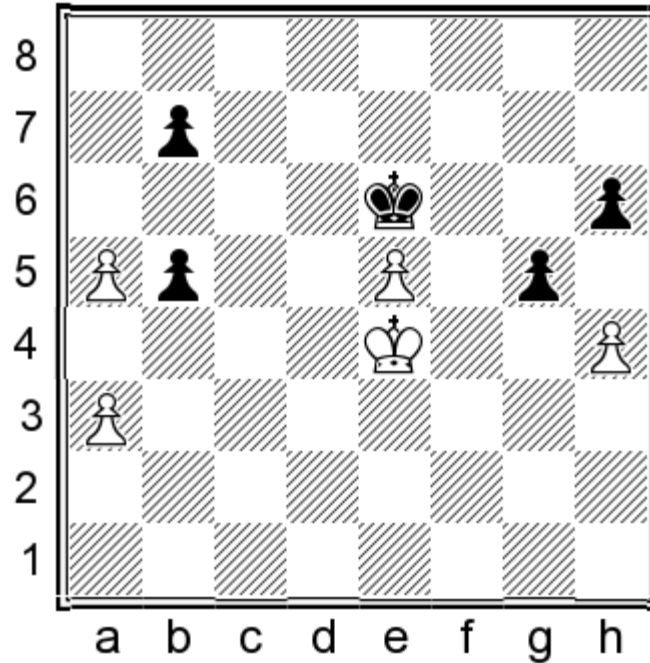
A) The attempt to exploit the weak pawn on f3 with 35...Ke5? doesn't lead anywhere, as Black's queenside is too fragile, e.g. 36.Ke3 g5 37.Kd3 h5 (37...Kf4 38.Kd4! Kxf3 39.Kc5 Kg2 40.Kxb5 Kxh2 41.Kb6 g4 42.Kxb7 g3 43.a6 g2 44.a7 g1=Q 45.a8=Q=) 38.Kc3! Kf4 39.Kb4 Kxf3 40.Kxb5 g4 41.Kb6 h4 42.Kxb7 g3 43.hxg3 hxg3 44.a6 g2 45.a7 g1=Q 46.a8=Q with equality.

B) 35...Kc5? allows a miraculous escape for White after 36.Ke3



Position after: 36.Ke3

B1) 36...Kc4 37.f4 h6 (37...Kb3? fails to 38.e5!) 38.e5 fxe5 39.fxe5 Kd5 40.Kf4 g6 41.h4 Ke6 42.Ke4 g5

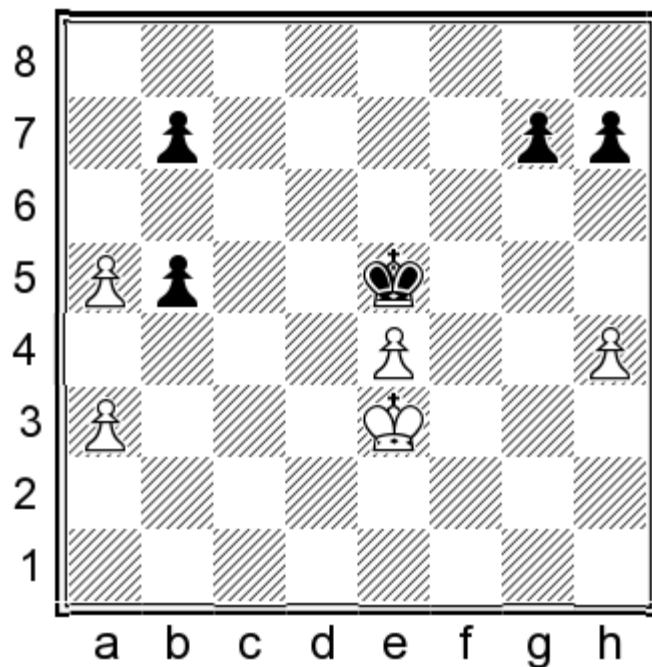


Position after: 42...g5

43.h5! (43.hxg5? hxg5 44.Kd4 g4 45.Ke4 g3 is hopeless.) 43...g4 44.Kf4 g3 45.Kxg3 Kxe5 46.Kf3 Kf5 47.Ke3 Kg5 48.Kd4 and White is just in time.

B2) And now 36...b4 37.axb4+ Kxb4 38.Kd4 Kxa5 39.f4 Kb6 (39...b5 40.Kc5 b4 41.Kc4 and White holds on, since after 41...Ka4 42.e5 White promotes with check.) 40.Kd5! Kc7 41.Ke6! b5 42.e5 b4 43.Kf7! and after this impressive king sprint, White secures the promotion of his e-pawn.

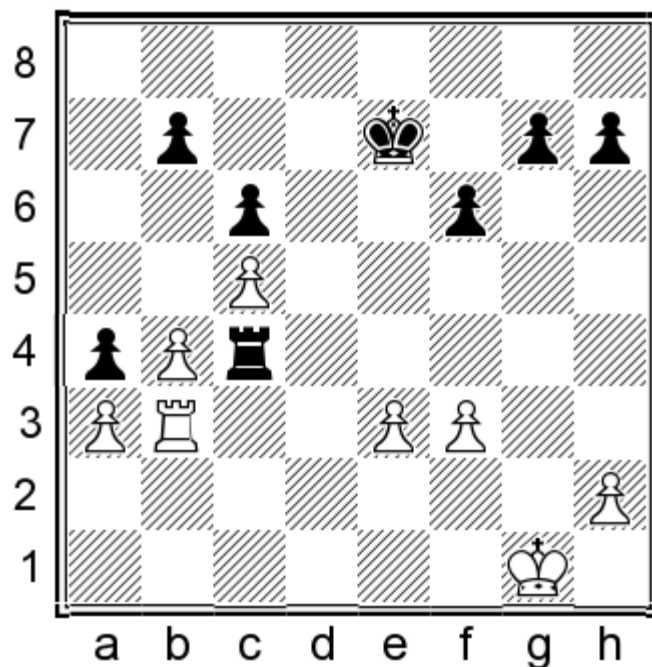
C) The right way to proceed is 35...f5! 36.Ke3 (36.exf5 Kc5! and now the black king can deal with the pawns on the queenside since White is no longer able to create a passed pawn, e.g. 37.h4 Kc4 38.h5 h6! and Black wins.) 36...fxe4 37.fxe4 (37.Kxe4 Kc5 38.Kd3 b4 and Black wins.) 37...Ke5 38.h4



Position after: 38.h4

38...g6! (Inferior is 38...h6? 39.h5! Kf6 40.Kf4 g5+ 41.hxg6 Kxg6 42.Ke5! h5 43.Kd6! Kf7 44.Kd7 Kf6 45.Kd6 and a draw is inevitable.) 39.Kf3 h6 40.Ke3 g5 and the outside passed pawn enables the black king to eliminate White's remaining pawns on the queenside.

31...a4!



Position after: 31...a4!

32.Rd3

The rook can't leave the 3rd rank since after 32.Rb2 Rc3 the white pawns will be taken.

32...Rc2

Cutting off the king is a well-known strategy in various endings. A more concrete approach is 32...Rc1+ 33.Kg2 Rc2+ 34.Kg3 Rb2 and White doesn't have a good antidote against the threat of 35...Rb3.

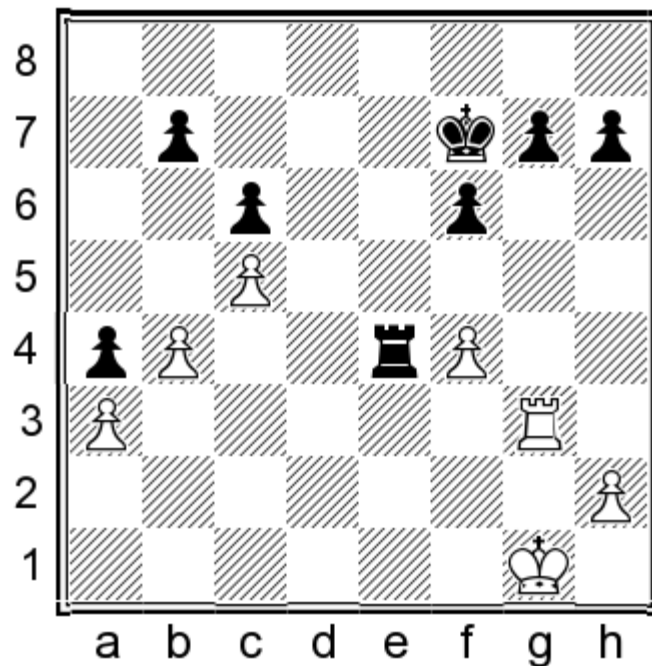
33.e4 Re2!

After 33...Rb2 White could still put up resistance with 34.f4 Rb3 35.Rg3!

34.f4

A desperate attempt to generate counterchances, but in fact White has run out of useful moves. For example, 34.Rc3 h5 35.Rd3 g5 36.Rc3 Rb2 and White's pieces have been paralyzed.

34...Rxe4 35.Rg3 Kf7



Position after: 35...Kf7

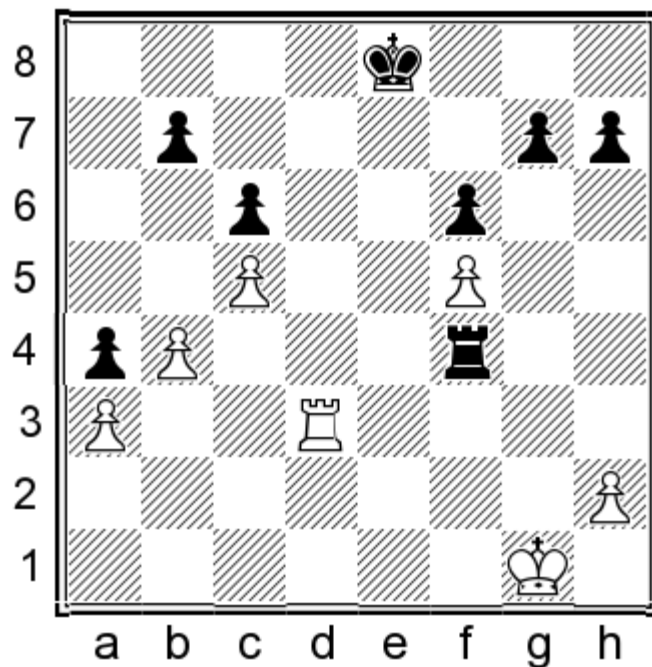
Of course, not 35...Rxf4? 36.Rxg7+ and White is still very much in the game.

36.f5

A last try to activate the rook comes too late: 36.Rd3 Ke6 37.Rd8 Re1+ (37...Re3? loses to 38.Re8+) 38.Kf2 Ra1 39.Rd3 Kf5 and things are getting worse for White.

36...Rf4 37.Rd3 Ke7 38.Rg3 Kf7 39.Rd3 Ke8

And here Kasimdzhanov stopped the fight as he has no prospects, e.g. 39...Ke8



Position after: 39...Ke8

40.Re3+ (40.Rg3 Rxf5 41.Rxg7 Rg5+ and the pawn ending is easily won.) 40...Kd8 41.Rd3+ Kc8 42.Re3 Kb8 43.Re7 (43.Rg3 Rxf5 44.Rxg7 Rg5+ 45.Rxg5 fxg5 46.Kf2 Ka7! and Black is faster in the ensuing race.) 43...Rf3 44.Rxg7 Rxa3 45.Rxh7 Rb3 and the a-pawn is unstoppable.

0-1

Chapter 4

Transition into a pawn ending

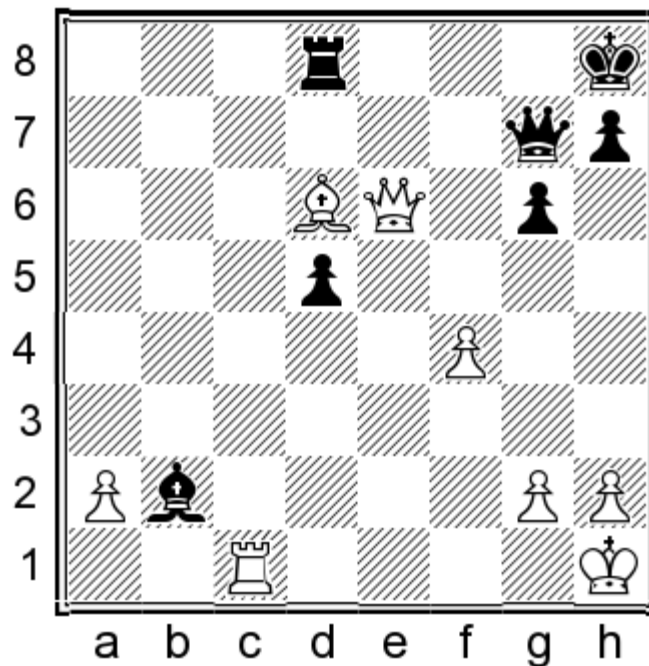
Chess is a complicated game, especially when there are still a lot of pieces on the board. In such situations simplifying is an excellent resource and it's worth considering steering the game into a pawn endgame.

In the first three chapters a transition into a pawn ending could be seen numerous times. A good understanding of pawn endings enables you to assess correctly the liquidations on the board. Even though pure pawn endgames are not frequently seen in practice, it's an elementary part of our game. Pawn endgames are by nature more tactical than most other endgames, it requires precise calculations and evaluations like "slightly better for White" or "unclear" simply don't suffice. Therefore, I believe that quite a lot of amateur players refrain from entering this complex phase of the game and prefer to keep more pieces on the board. By doing so, you are restricting your own possibilities at the chess board and don't allow yourself to become a more complete and competitive player.

Melkumyan, Hrant (2642)

Tikkanen, Hans (2566)

Albena 2012



White to move

Simplification is an essential tool in the process of converting an advantage. White is a healthy pawn up, although the presence of three pieces may give Black some hopes of survival. With a few powerful moves White puts an end to Black's illusions.

34.Rc8! Rxc8

Allowing further exchanges. The attempt to keep some pieces on the board with 34...Qf6 can be met strongly by 35.Be5! Bxe5 36.Qxe5 and White wins a rook, since 36...Qxe5 can be answered with the intermediate check 37.Rxd8+. There's no disgrace in using tactical motives to reach your strategic goal.

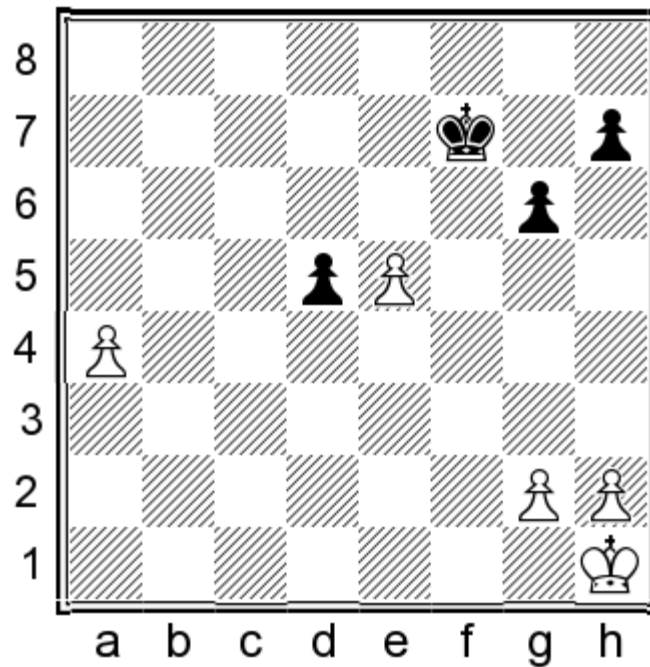
35.Qxc8+ Qg8 36.Be5+!

Far stronger than 36.Qxg8+ when White still needs to exploit his material advantage in this same-coloured bishop ending.

36...Bxe5 37.Qxg8+ Kxg8 38.fxe5 Kf7

Black can't do any harm with his passed pawn, since after 38...d4 39.Kg1 White's king is within reach.

39.a4! 1-0



Position after: 39.a4!

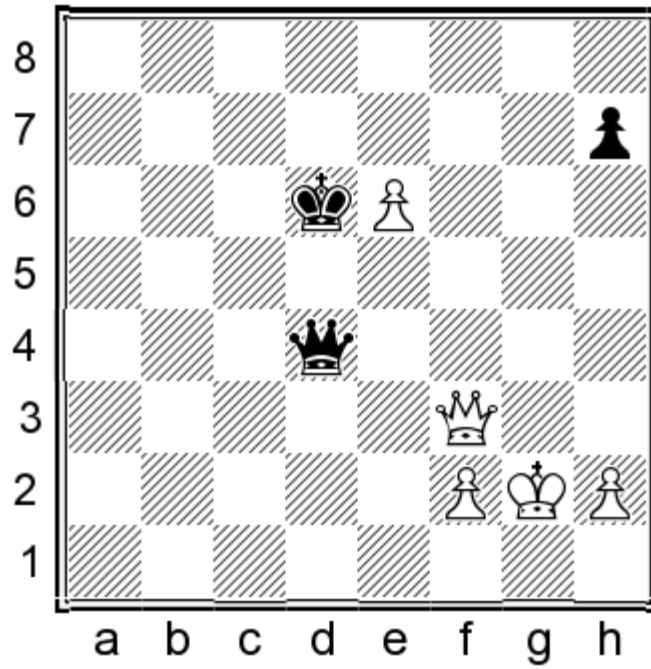
Although the black king is in time to deal with the a-pawn, he doesn't have time to spare to eliminate the e-pawn as well. The white king is within the square of the d-pawn so Black is lost.

Ragger, Markus (2670)

Postny, Evgeny (2651)

Belfort 2012

White is two pawns up, although Black's king is about to eliminate the pawn on e6. Ragger finds a simple and instructive solution.



White to move

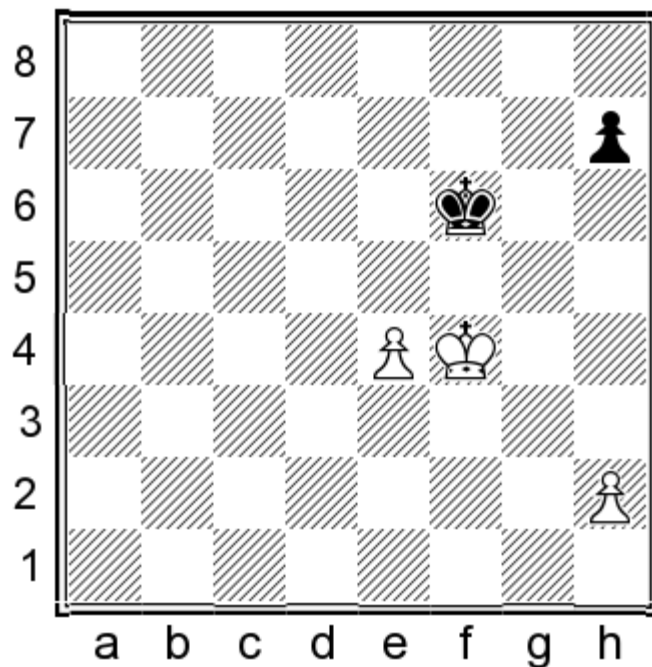
58.e7!

White doesn't mind giving up his e-pawn, as in return he ensures the queens will be traded. With queens still on the board there's always a chance of running into some checks. For example, 58.Qf7? with the idea of assisting the passed pawn, this allows Black to escape with perpetual check after 58...Qg4+ 59.Kf1 Qd1+=.

58.e7! Kxe7

Black couldn't really avoid the exchange of queens, as e.g. 58...Qg7+ can be met by 59.Qg3+ leading to a winning pawn ending as well.

59.Qe3+ Qxe3 60.fxe3 Ke6 61.Kf3 Kf5 62.e4+ Ke5 63.Ke3 Ke6 64.Kf4 Kf6



Position after: 64...Kf6

65.h3

There are various paths leading to the same result.

Another possibility is 65.e5+ Ke6 66.Ke4 Ke7 67.Kf5 Kf7 68.e6+ Ke7 69.Ke5 Ke8 70.Kf6 Kf8 71.e7+ Ke8 72.Ke6 and White has temporarily stalemated the black king: 72...h5 (or 72...h6 73.Kf6 h5 74.h4 and White wins) 73.Kf6 h4 74.h3 Kd7 75.Kf7 and White wins.

65...Ke6 66.h4 Kf6 67.h5

And Black didn't want to test White's endgame skills any further.

1-0

Zherebukh, Yaroslav (2632)

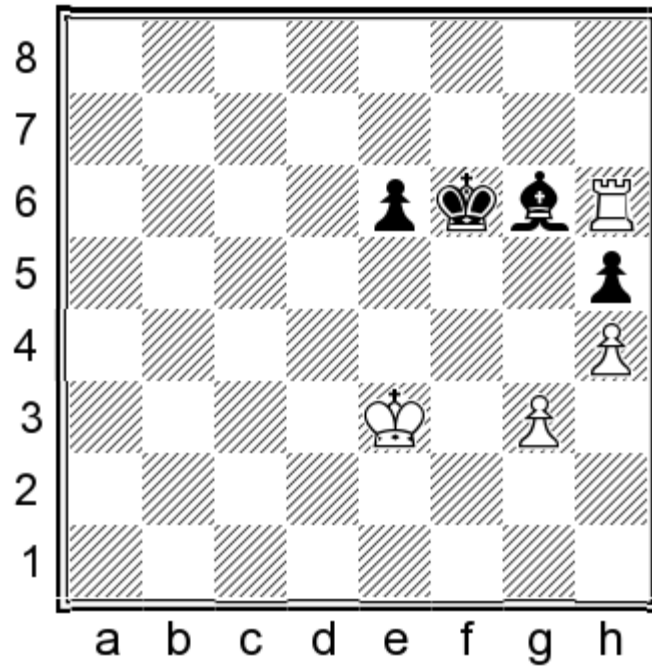
Bartel, Mateus (2677)

Lublin 2012

In chess one of the most difficult decisions to make is whether and how to exchange or not. An important rule of thumb in chess is: "what matters is not what you exchange, but what remains on the board."

Eduardas Rozentalis wrote an excellent book with only this theme for Thinkers Publishing as well: *The Correct Exchange in the Endgame*, 2nd extended edition 2018.

This rule is well explained by the following two examples where one side has a significant material advantage and decides to transform the advantage into a winning pawn ending.



White to move

58.g4!

White could have redirected his rook with 58.Rh8 but then it would have taken more effort from White to make further progress.

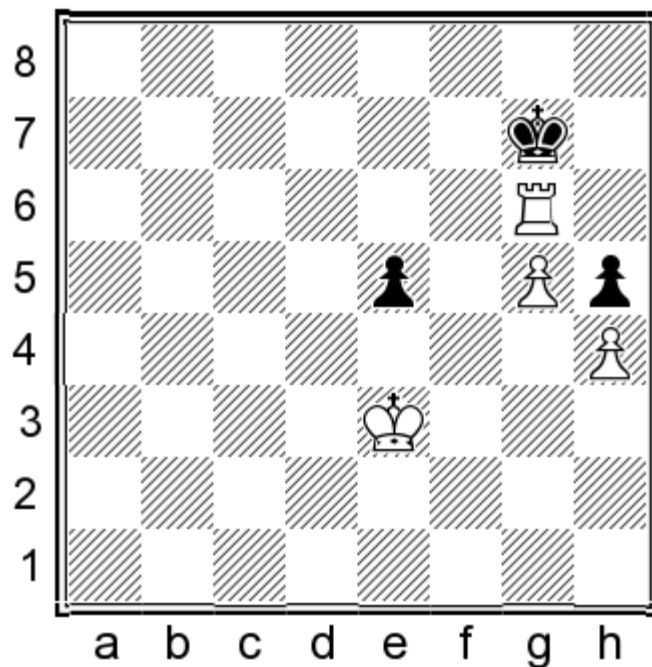
58.g4! Kg7

The point of White's last move is that 58...hxg4 drops the bishop after 59.h5!

59.g5 e5

59...Kf7 60.Kf4 Kg7 61.Ke5 is also hopeless for Black, as 61...Bf7 can be met by e.g. 62.Rxe6!

60.Rxg6+!



Position after: 60.Rxg6+!

White returns the exchange and picks up the e-pawn. The rest is quite simple.

60...Kxg6 61.Ke4 Kg7 62.Kxe5 Kf7 63.Kd6

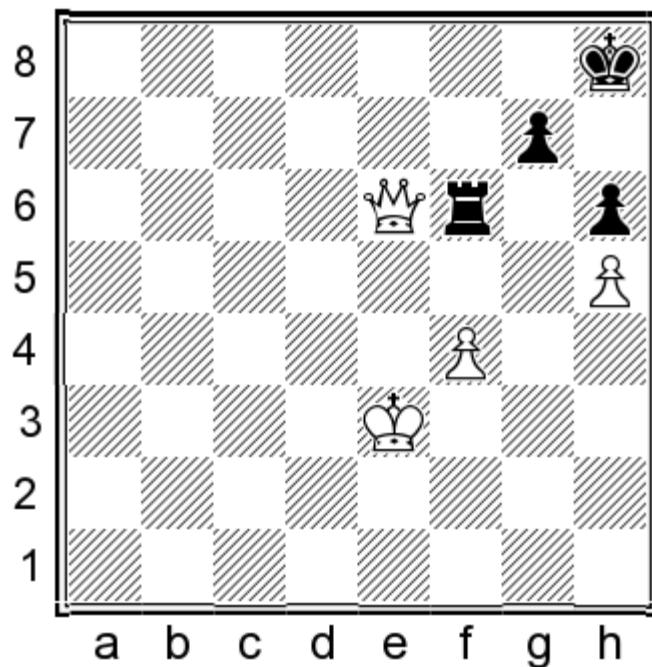
The only trap not to fall for is to play 63.Kf5 Kg7 64.g6?? Kh6 65.Kf6 with stalemate.

63...Kg6 64.Ke6 Kg7 65.Ke7 Kg6 66.Kf8

And Black resigned, because of 66.Kf8 Kh7 (66...Kf5 67.Kf7 and the g-pawn decides the game.) 67.Kf7 Kh8 68.Kg6 and White picks up the h-pawn as well, of course not 68.g6? as this is stalemate.

1-0

Jobava, Baadur (2721)
 Gagunashvili, Merab (2570)
 Tbilisi 2012



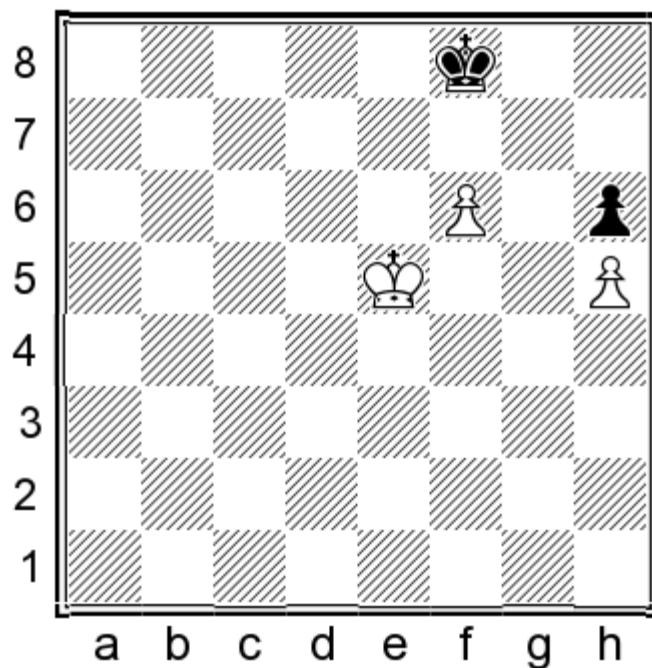
White to move

Even though Black has a huge material disadvantage, he can count on some drawing chances because of a fortress. White's next move steers the game into a winning pawn ending.

54.Qxf6! gxf6 55.Ke4 Kg7 56.f5!

The simplest continuation.

Also possible is 56.Kd5 f5 57.Ke6 Kg8 58.Kxf5 Kf7 59.Ke5 Ke7 60.f5 Kf7 61.f6 Kf8



Position after: 61...Kf8

and now White wins by the technique of triangulation: 62.Kf4 (62.Kf5 Kf7 leads nowhere; equally as good as the game is 62.Ke4 Ke8 63.Kf4 Kf8 64.Ke5! and White wins.) 62...Kg8 63.Ke4 Kf8 64.Ke5! and we've reached the same position as in the last diagram, but with the important difference that it's Black's turn now. 64...Ke8 (64...Kf7 fails to 65.Kf5 and White's king penetrates via g6.) 65.Ke6 Kf8 66.f7 Kg7 67.Ke7 Kh7 68.Kf6 and White wins (but not the careless 68.f8=Q? with stalemate!).

56...Kf7 57.Kd5 Ke7 58.Kc6 Ke8 59.Kd6 Kf7 60.Kd7 Kg7 61.Ke7

And Black resigned, as the pawn on f6 falls.

1-0

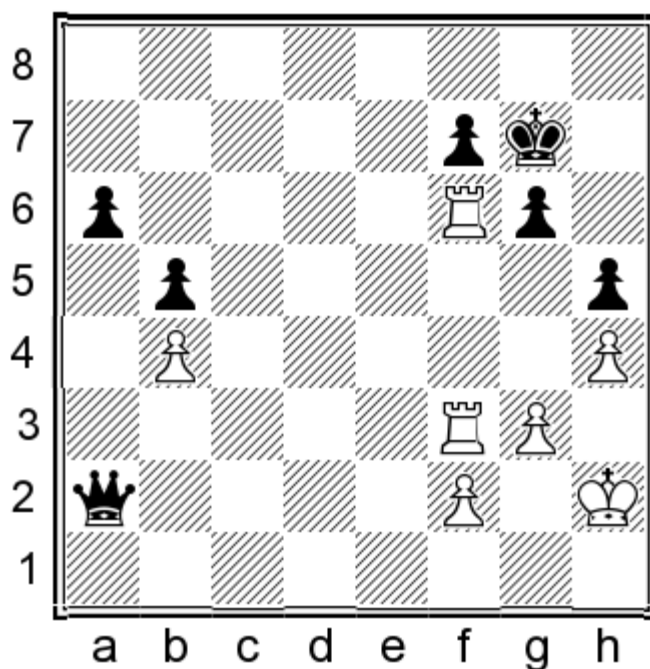
Sasikiran, Krishnan (2700)

Hou Yifan (2605)

Gibraltar 2012

Also in positions with a material imbalance (not to be confused with a material advantage!), the possibility of steering the game into a pawn ending is always present.

The following example of two rooks vs. a queen is quite instructive.



White to move

Black is forced to keep the pawn on f7 defended by both the king and queen. The transition into a pawn ending must be constantly kept in mind.

The main problem for Black is that the pawn majority on the queenside has been neutralized, while after the trade on f7 White will be able to create a passed pawn. In the following case Sasikiran wisely improves the position of his king first.

48.Kg2! Kg8 49.Rxf7! Qxf7

Ignoring the rook with 49...Qd5 doesn't change much in view of 50.R7f6 and Black capitulates. The ensuing pawn

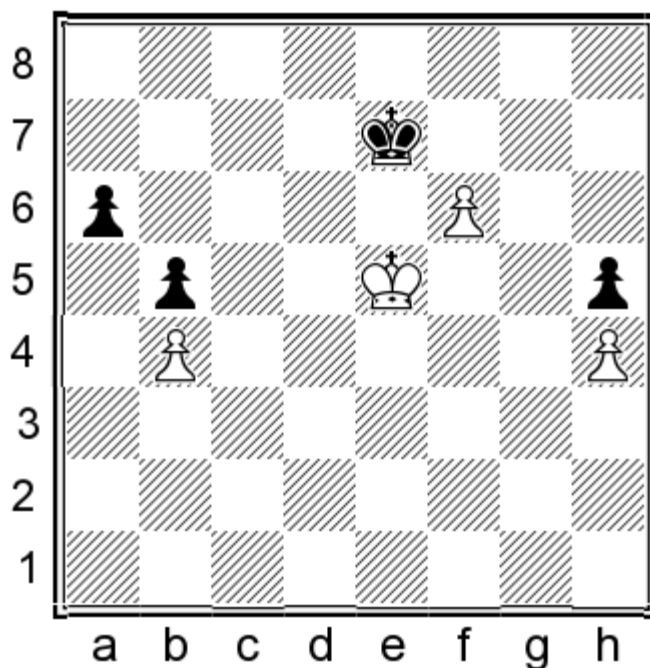
ending is pretty hopeless, as Black is unable to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

50.Rxf7 Kxf7 51.Kf3 Ke6 52.Ke4 Kd6 53.f3 Kc6

53...Ke6 wouldn't have saved Black either, e.g. 54.Kd4 Kd6 55.g4 Ke6 56.gxh5 (White can't simply pick up the pawns on the queenside with 56.Kc5? which allows 56...g5!) 56...gxh5 57.Ke4 and White wins as in the game.

54.g4 Kc7 55.gxh5 gxh5 56.f4 Kd6 57.f5 Kd7 58.Ke5 Ke7 59.f6+ 1-0

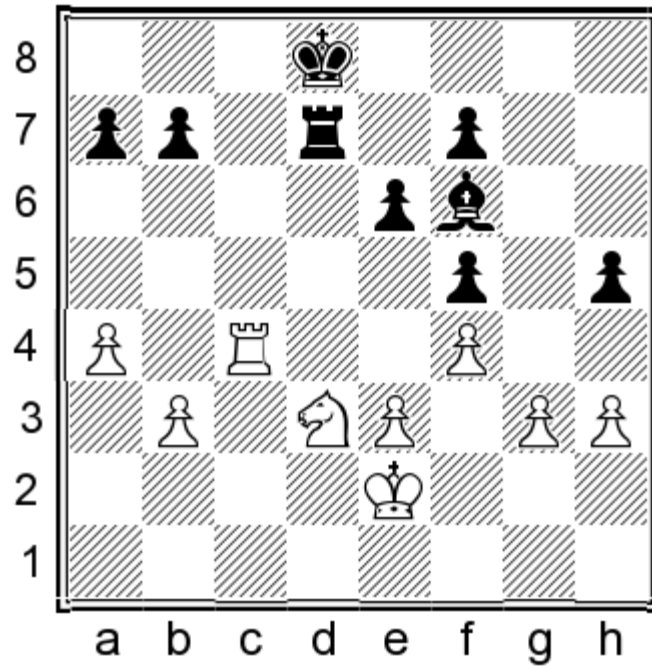
And Black resigned. A sample line goes 59.f6+



Position after: 59. f6+

59...Kf7 60.Kf5 Kf8 61.Ke6 Ke8 62.f7+ Kf8 63.Kf6 and now Black must move his a-pawn.

Carlsen, Magnus (2853)
Karjakin, Sergey (2772)
New York 2016



Black to move

Black has just transferred his king to the centre to neutralize White's pressure along the c-file. After all, it's very unpleasant to have to deal with a rook entering on the back rank from where it could attack your pawns on both sides of the board.

Hence, it's very tempting to consider trading the rooks with...

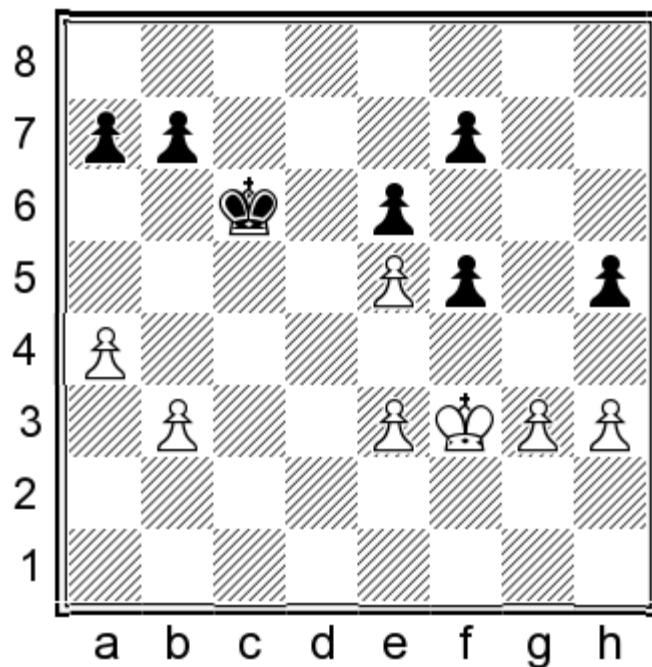
28...Rc7?

In the game Karjakin played 28...Rd5! which is obviously a better try, but also a more practical decision as unlike in the pawn ending there are no variations to calculate. The game ended in a draw after 42 moves.

28...Rc7? 29.Rxc7 Kxc7 30.Ne5!

Before playing 28...Rc7 Black should have calculated the consequences of the pawn ending arising from this move. After 30.Kf3 Kd6 31.e4 Bc3= Black should be able to hold without too many difficulties.

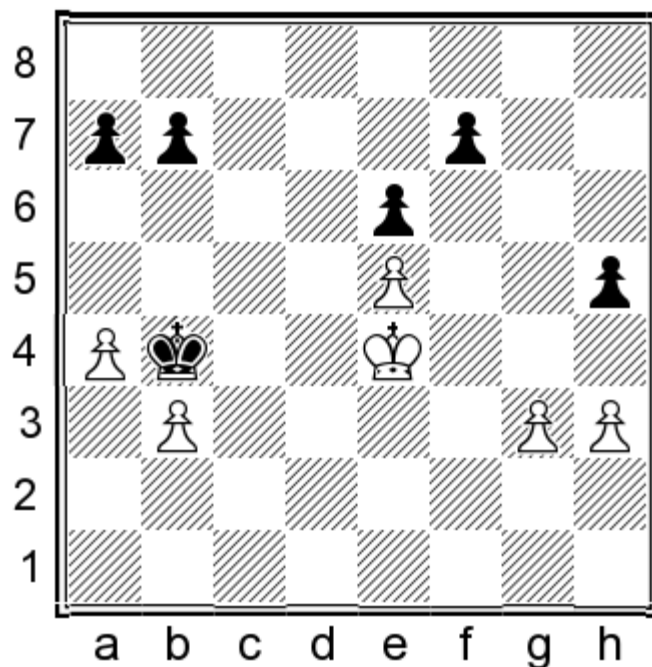
30...Bxe5 31.fxe5 Kc6 32.Kf3



Position after: 32.Kf3

32...Kd5

32...Kc5 33.e4 fxe4+ (After this move White can create a passed pawn, but also after 33...Kd4 34.exf5 Kxe5 35.fxe6 Kxe6 36.g4 h4 37.Kf4 Kf6 38.g5+ Kg6 39.Kg4 White wins, while after; 33...Kb4 34.exf5 exf5 35.Kf4 Kxb3 36.Kxf5 Kxa4 37.Kf6 b5 38.Kxf7 b4 39.e6 White promotes first with check.) 34.Kxe4 Kb4



Position after: 34...Kb4

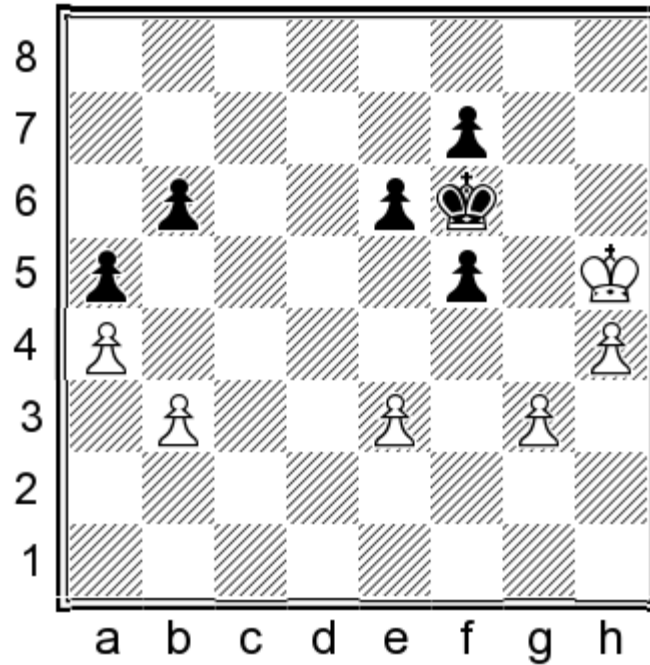
A) 35.g4?? is met by 35...h4! (but not 35...hxg4? 36.h4 and the h-pawn is decisive.)

B) 35.h4! Kxb3 36.g4 hxg4 37.h5 g3 38.Kf3 and the h-pawn is too fast.

33.Kf4 a5 34.h4!

Before going to g5 with the king, it makes sense to advance the pawn.

34...b6 35.Kg5 Kxe5 36.Kxh5 Kf6



Position after: 36...Kf6

37.Kh6

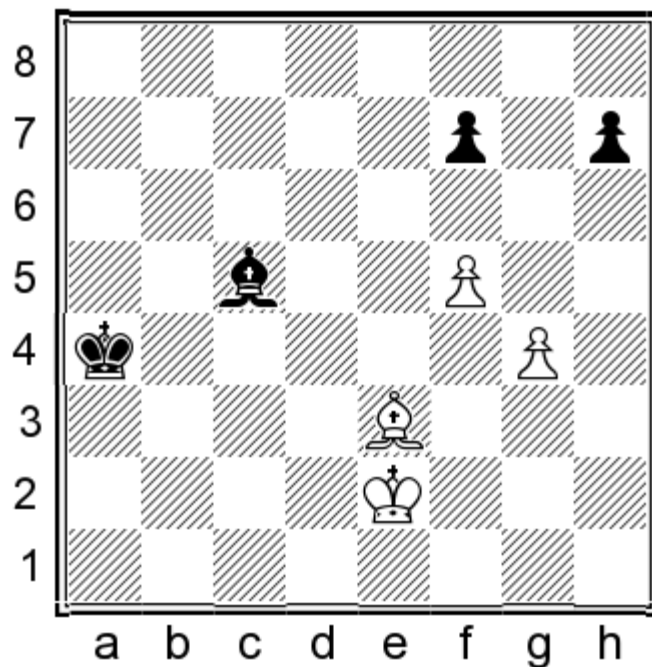
How tricky pawn endings can be, is seen in following line where one mistake turns the evaluation around and Black wins: 37.g4? e5! 38.gxf5 (38.g5+ Kg7 and the white king has been locked.) 38...Kxf5 39.Kh6 Kg4 40.h5 e4! 41.Kg7 Kxh5 42.Kxf7 Kg4 43.Ke6 Kf3—+

37...e5 38.h5 e4 39.Kh7 Kg5 40.h6 Kf6 41.Kg8

The conclusion is that Karjakin correctly judged not to go for the pawn ending. By keeping the pieces on the board his position remained more flexible and no long calculations were demanded.

½-½

Wang, Yue (2702)
Liu, Qingnan (2461)
Xinghua 2012



Black to move

White is playing for two results (win or draw), because his king is standing closer to the pawns and has the possibility of entering the kingside via g5, to attack either the f- or h-pawn. Black is facing the difficult decision whether to trade the bishops or not.

51...Kb5

Black accepts trading the bishops under favourable circumstances by bringing the king closer.

A) 51...Bxe3? 52.Kxe3 loses instantly, e.g. 52...Kb5 53.Kd4 Kc6 54.Ke5 Kd7 55.Kf6 Ke8 56.Kg7+-

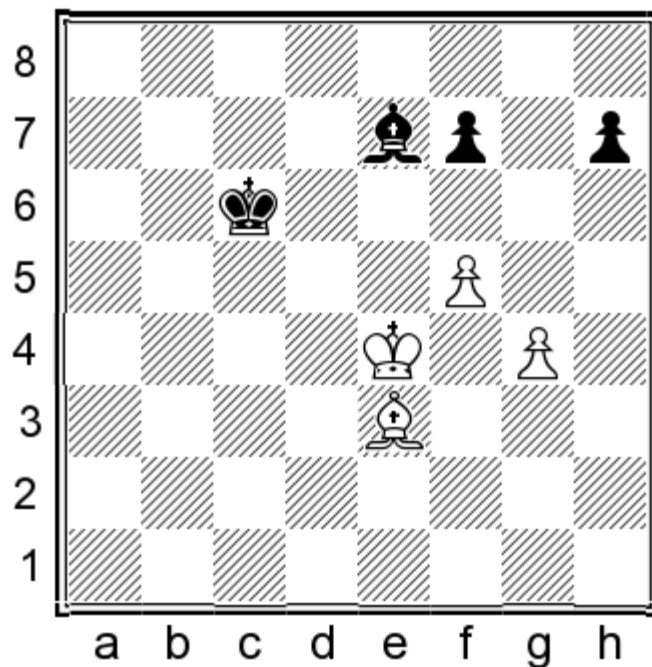
B) However, a more pragmatic approach solving this issue would have been to keep the bishops on the board. Like in pure rook endgames, the bishops normally have sufficient waiting moves available, whereas in pure pawn endings when one side can end up in zugzwang (see in the game after 56.Kh5!). After e.g. 51...Be7 52.Kd3 (52.Bg1) 52...Kb5 53.Ke4 Kc6 there is no chance White will ever be able to penetrate with his king.

51...Kb5 52.Kf3

In case White would consider exchanging bishops with 52.Bxc5 Kxc5 the black king would be closer to the kingside and Black is able to hold without too many difficulties.

52...Bxe3?!

Objectively speaking there isn't anything wrong with Black's choice, but why would Black make it so difficult for himself? By keeping bishops on the board, for example 52...Be7 53.Ke4 Kc6

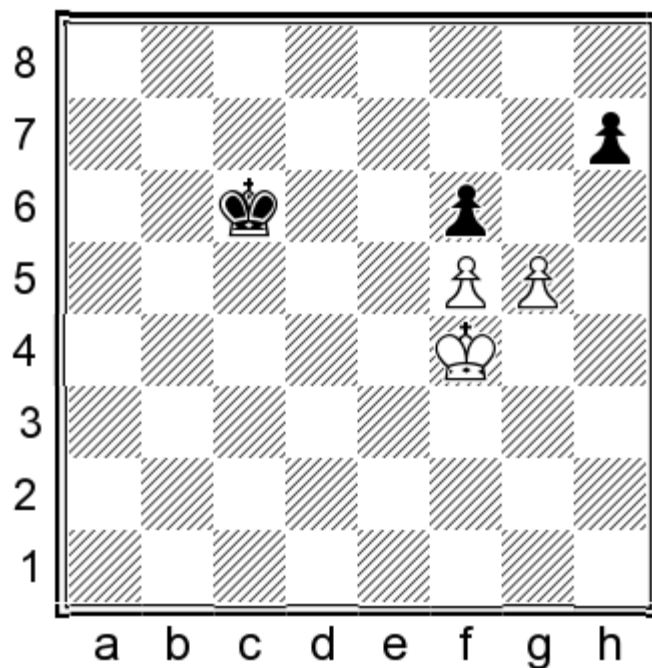


Position after: 53...Kc6

there is nothing to calculate as the white king fails to enter. Probably Black thought that he would be able to save the game by one single tempo. The following analysis show the depth of the seemingly harmless pawn ending.

53.Kxe3 Kc5?

This logical move is the decisive mistake. At first glance it's hard to imagine what could be wrong with bringing the king closer to the battlefield. After going through the analysis, you can see that Black should go for 53...Kc6! 54.Kf4 f6! (Of course, not 54...Kd6? 55.Kg5! which transposes to the game and this is winning for White.) 55.g5



Position after: 55.g5

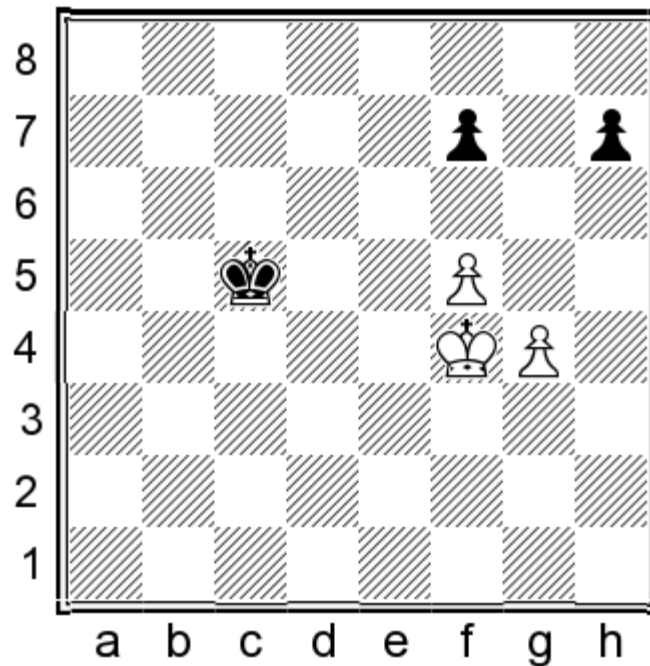
A) 55...fxg5+? 56.Kxg5 Kd7

A1) 57.Kh6! followed by 58.Kg7, which secures the promotion of the f-pawn.

A2) However, it would have been incorrect to play 57.Kf6? with the idea of putting the king on g7, in view of 57...h5! and Black is precisely in time with his h-pawn or to get his king in front of the white pawn after 58.Kg5 Ke7 59.Kxh5 Kf6=

B) 55...Kd7! 56.g6 (56.gxf6 Ke8 followed by 57...Kf7 draws easily.) 56...hxg6 57.fxg6 Ke8! (57...Ke7? 58.Kf5 and Black is in zugzwang.) 58.Kf5 Ke7= and White can't make further progress.

54.Kf4

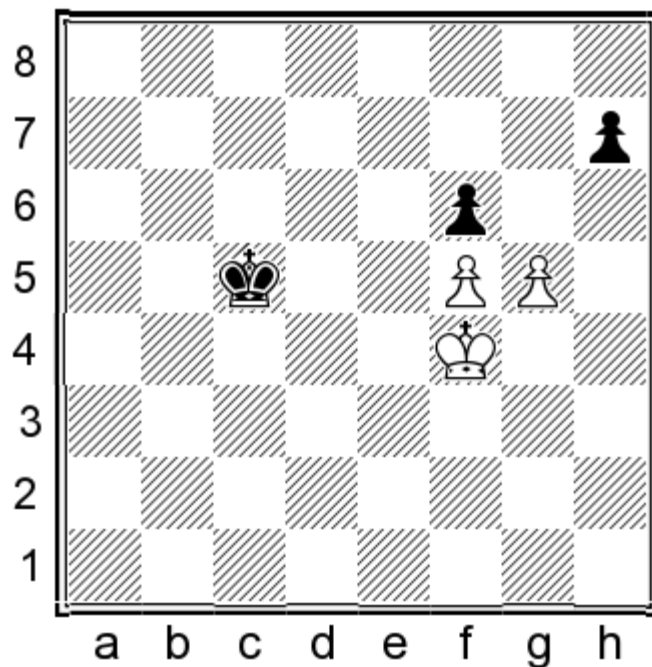


Position after: 54.Kf4

54...Kd6?

Of course not!

Black could also have tried preventing the white king entering the kingside with 54...f6 though after 55.g5!



Position after: 55.g5!

Black's position would also be desperate after:

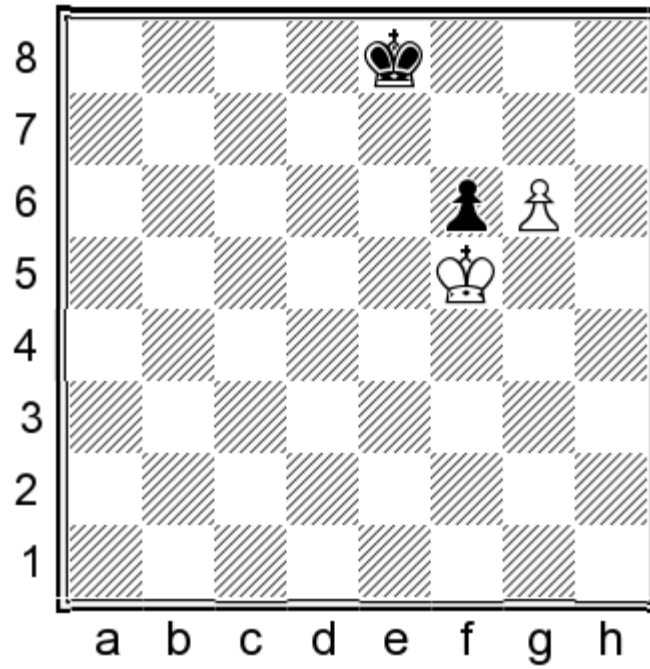
A) 55...fxg5+

A1) The tempting 56.Ke5? with the idea of shouldering the black king only leads to a draw after 56...Kc6! (inferior is 56...g4? and White promotes with check after 57.f6) 57.Ke6 g4=

A2) 56.Kxg5 Kd5 (56...Kd6 57.Kf6! h5 58.Kg7! and the f-pawn promotes with check.) 57.Kf6! Such moves can easily be overlooked, since who wants to put the king in the path of his own pawn? 57...h5 (57...Ke4 58.Ke6 and White's pawn is just faster.) 58.Kg7 h4 59.f6 h3 60.f7 h2 61.f8=Q h1=Q 62.Qa8+ and White picks up the queen.

B) 55...Kd6 56.g6! (56.gxf6? Kd7 followed by Ke8-f7 draws easily.) 56...hxg6 57.fxg6 and compared to the line with 53...Kc6, Black can't play 57...Ke8 now, which would have led to a draw.

B1) 57...Ke7 58.Kf5! and White wins as in the variation after 57...Ke7. 58...Ke8



Position after: 58...Ke8

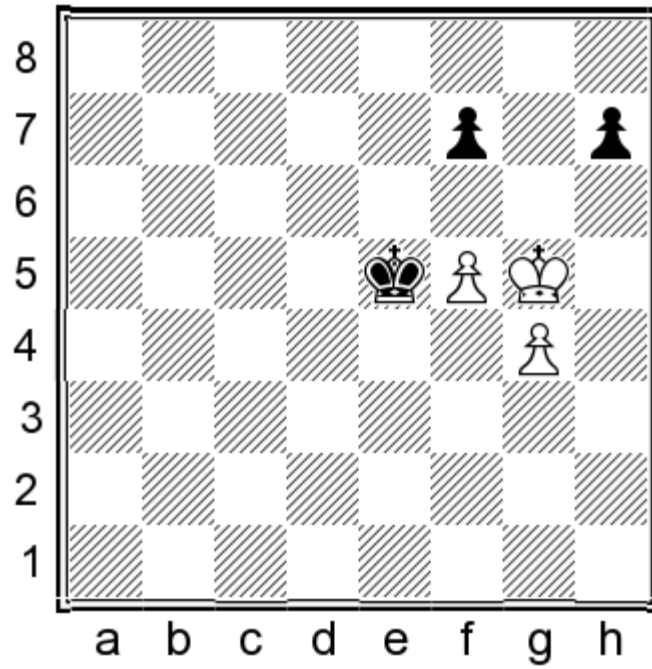
(58...Kf8 59.Kxf6 Kg8 60.g7 and White wins.) 59.Ke6! (Very precise. White should of course refrain from playing 59.Kxf6? when Black gets the opposition after 59...Kf8) 59...Kf8 (Or 59...f5 60.g7+→) 60.Kxf6 Kg8 61.g7 and White wins. 61...Kh7 62.Kf7 and White wins.

B2) 57...Ke6 58.Kg4! f5+ (58...Ke7 59.Kf5 and White wins as in the variation after 57...Ke7.) 59.Kg5 f4 (59...Ke7 60.Kxf5 Ke8 61.Ke6! doesn't save Black either.) 60.Kh6 f3 61.g7 Kf7 62.Kh7 and White promotes with check. In addition, the other attempt to cover the g5-square with 54...h6 fails too 55.Ke5!.

55.Kg5!

Now White is winning.

55...Ke5



Position after: 55...Ke5

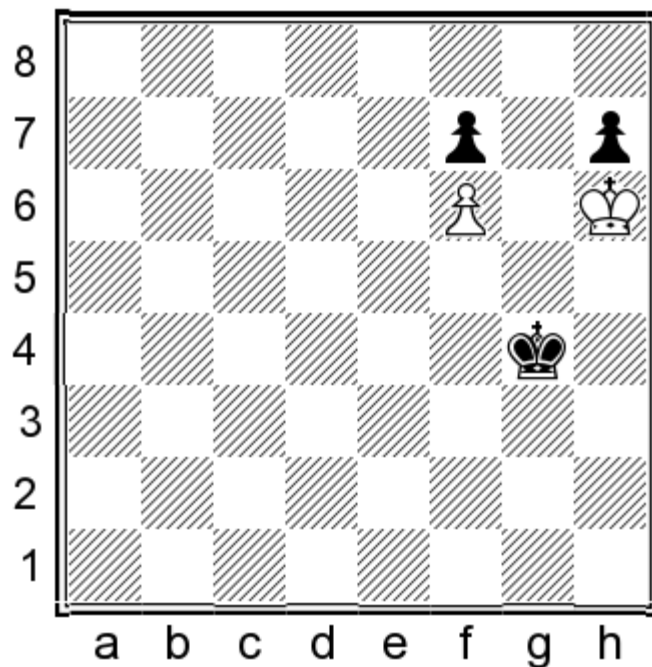
56.Kh5!

An absolutely fantastic move which must have been missed in Black's calculations.

A) Most likely he'd only counted on 56.Kh6? which indeed secures a draw for Black after 56...Kf4!

A1) 57.Kxh7 Kxg4 58.Kg7 (For those who believe the play has just been a one-sided affair, White could have spoiled all his efforts in one move by means of 58.f6? Kf5! 59.Kg7 Ke6 and since the white king is not in time to get the opposition, Black even wins.) 58...Kxf5 59.Kxf7=

A2) 57.f6 Kxg4



Position after: 57...Kxg4

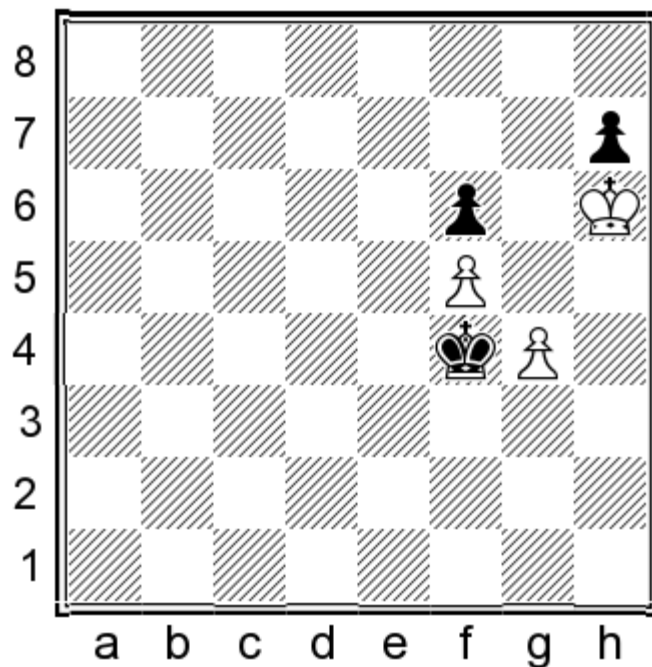
58.Kg7 (Of course, not 58.Kxh7? Kf5 and Black wins as in the variation mentioned after 57.Kxh7 Kxg4 58.f6?) 58...h5
59.Kxf7 h4 60.Kg7 h3 61.f7 h2 62.f8=Q h1=Q=

B) 56.f6? only leads to a draw after 56...Ke6 (56...h6+ also suffices.) 57.Kh6 Kxf6 58.Kxh7 Kg5 59.Kg7 f6 60.Kf7
Kxg4 61.Kxf6=

56...Kf4

The problem is that Black doesn't have a good waiting move. The following lines prove that Black is forced into a zugzwang.

A) 56...f6 57.Kh6 Kf4



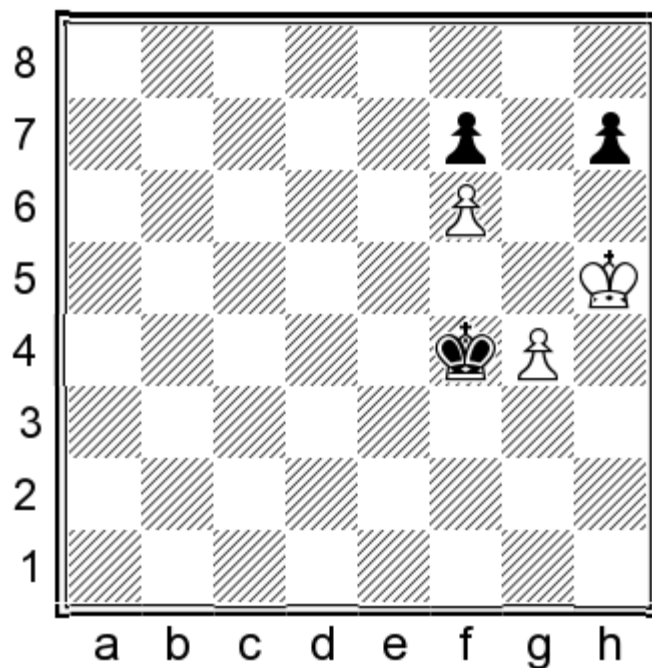
Position after: 57...Kf4

58.Kxh7 (But not 58.Kg7? Kxg4 59.Kxf6 h5 and Black is just in time.) 58...Kxg4 and the difference between the black pawn on f6 and f7 becomes obvious after 59.Kg6! and White wins.

B) 56...Kf6 can just be met by 57.Kh6! when the black king is no longer able to attack the g-pawn.

57.f6! 1-0

Black resigned in view of: 57.f6

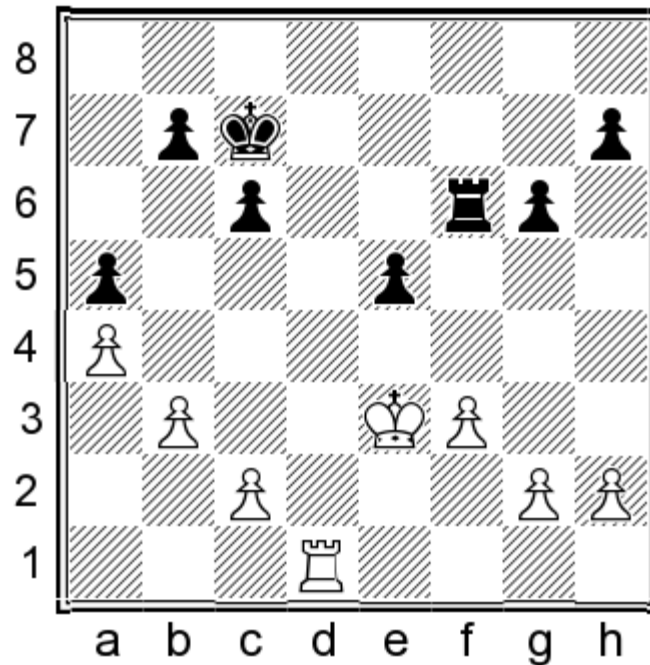


Position after: 57. f6

57...Ke5 (57...h6 58.Kxh6 Kxg4 59.Kg7! also wins for White: on the next move he can take the pawn on f7.) 58.g5 Kf5 59.Kh6 Kg4 60.Kxh7 Kxg5 61.Kg7 and White wins the f-pawn.

Swinkels, Robin (2433)
Ris, Robert (2381)
Germany 2008

In this rook endgame I felt somewhat under pressure. My king has been cut along the d-file and the pawn structure (2 vs 3 pawn islands) is also in White's favour. Since I felt very confident entering the pawn ending I didn't hesitate and decided to go for it.



Black to move

29...Rd6!

A more active move like 29...b5 should be sufficient for a draw as well, but the exclamation mark is given for the fact that there's no need to fear the ensuing pawn ending.

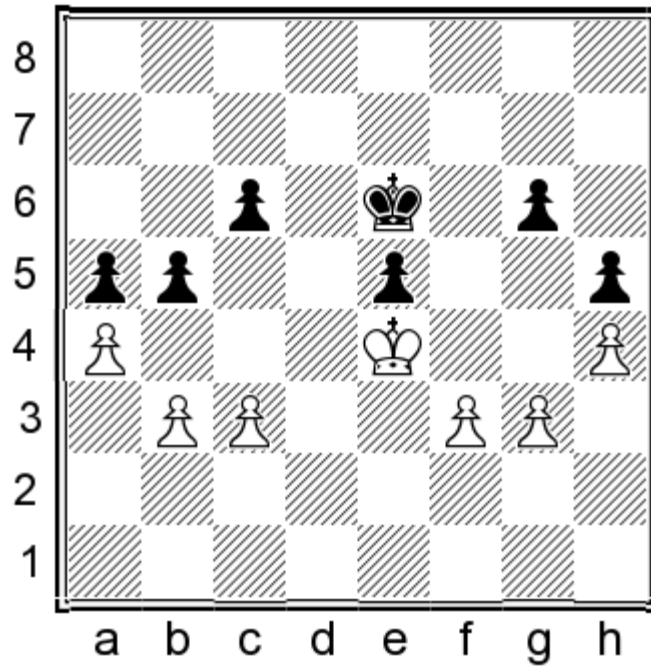
29...Rd6! 30.Rxd6 Kxd6 31.Ke4 Ke6 32.c3 b5 33.h4

33.b4? doesn't make any sense, since after 33...bxa4 White's king isn't in time to stop the a-pawn, while after 34.bxa5 a3 Black promotes first and controls the a8-square.

33...h6 34.g3 h5?!

A serious inaccuracy.

Black could have waited with a simple move like 34...Kd6=.



Position after: 34...h5?!

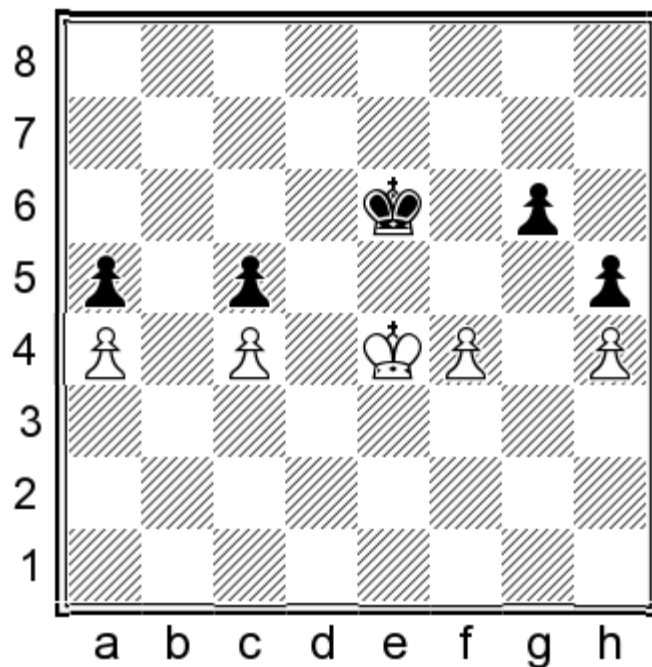
35.Kd3?!

A) I clearly remember playing my last move with the intention of setting a trap for my opponent. In case of 35.g4? Black has the nice resource 35...g5! 36.hxg5 h4 37.Ke3 bxa4 38.bxa4 Kf7 39.Kf2 Kg6 40.Kg2 Kxg5 41.Kh3 Kf4 42.Kxh4 Kxf3 43.g5 e4 44.g6 e3 45.g7 e2 46.g8=Q e1=Q+ 47.Kh5 Qh1+ 48.Kg6 Qg2+ 49.Kf7 Qxg8+ 50.Kxg8 Ke3 and Black wins!

B) It would instead have been more challenging to play 35.c4!

B1) 35...b4? loses to 36.c5! Kf6 37.g4 Ke6 (37...hxg4 38.fxg4 and White creates an outside passed pawn.) 38.g5 Kf7 39.Kxe5 Ke7 40.f4 and White's king penetrates.

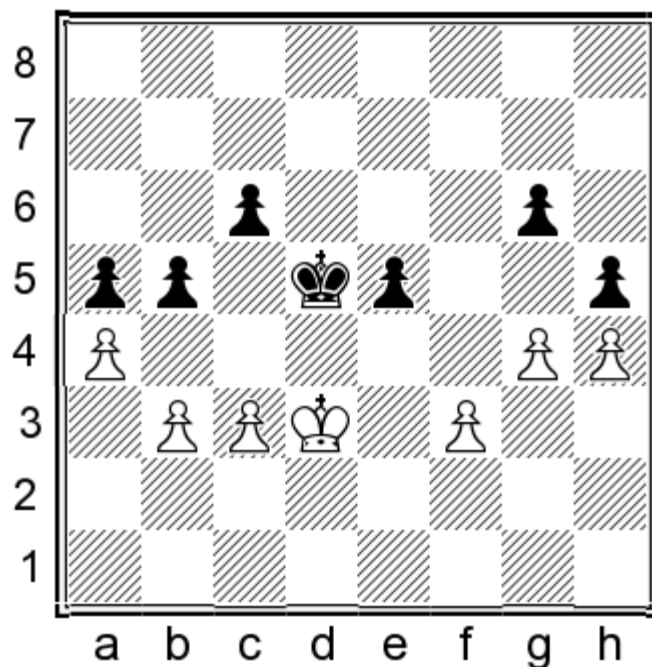
B2) And now 35...bxc4 36.bxc4 c5 (36...Kd6? runs into 37.g4! Ke6 38.gxh5 gxh5 39.c5 Kf6 40.f4 exf4 41.Kxf4 and White wins.) 37.f4 (We know that 37.g4? fails to 37...g5!) 37...exf4 38.gxf4 Zugzwang!



Position after: 38.gxf4

38...Kf6 (38...Kd6? 39.f5 is hopeless for Black.) 39.Kd5 Kf5 40.Kxc5 Kxf4 41.Kb6 g5 42.hxg5 Kxg5 43.c5 h4 44.c6 h3 45.c7 h2 46.c8=Q h1=Q 47.Kxa5 and although the queen ending should objectively be drawn it's highly unpleasant for Black to defend.

35...Kd5 36.g4



Position after: 36.g4

36...Kd6

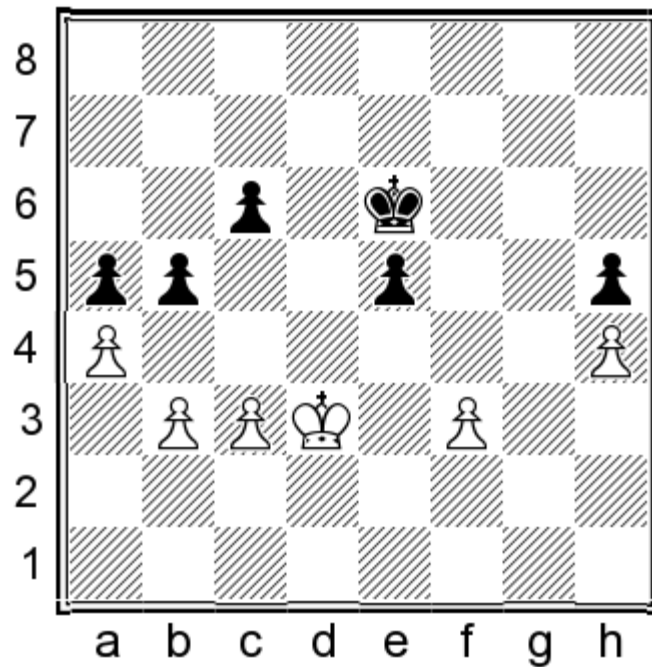
A) Inferior is 36...g5? which fails to 37.gxh5.

B) 36...Ke6 which can be met by 37.gxh5 gxh5 38.Ke4 Kf6 39.f4 exf4 40.Kxf4 and White has the opposition.

37.Ke3 Ke7 38.gxh5 gxh5 39.Kd2

Or 39.Ke4 bxa4 40.bxa4 Ke6 41.c4 c5 42.f4 exf4 43.Kxf4 Kf6 and Black holds on.

39...Kd6 40.Kd3 Kd7 41.Ke3 Ke7 42.Ke2 Ke6 43.Kd3



Position after: 43.Kd3

43...Kd7

Equally good is 43...Kd5.

44.c4 bxa4

Black should refrain from 44...bxc4+? 45.Kxc4 and White creates an outside passed pawn by playing b3-b4.

45.bxa4 c5 46.Ke3 Ke7

46...Ke6? 47.Ke4 Kf6 48.f4 gives White the opposition.

47.f4 Ke6 48.Ke4 exf4 49.Kxf4 Kf6

And a draw was agreed.

½-½

Chapter 5

Sensing tactical opportunities

Tactics are seen in almost every game and evidently mastering them plays an important role in the development of a chess player. Numerous books have been written about solving tactics and there are also excellent puzzles 'online', that can be found. In this particular chapter it's not my aim to give some new puzzles, but rather to try to explain the thinking processes behind solving those positions and how mistakes are made during that process (and how they should be avoided!).

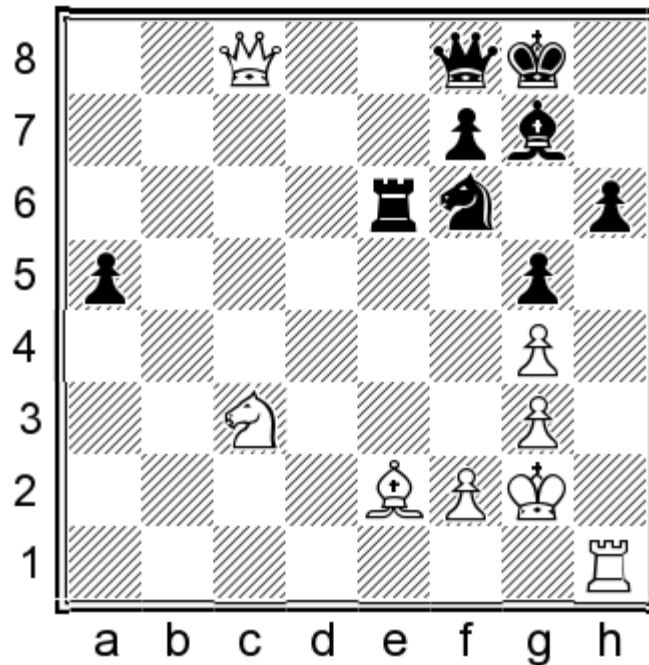
Vulnerable pieces

Some pieces are better than others, decided by their characteristics but also by the specific features of a position. A piece could become vulnerable in the following situations, when it:

- 1) can easily be attacked by any of the opponent's pieces;
- 2) has the unpleasant task of protecting another piece;
- 3) is restricted in his own mobility.

In positions 1 & 2 the vulnerability of a piece often results in some tactical possibilities.

Svane, Rasmus (2595)
Rodshtein, Maxim (2695)
Douglas 2017



White to move

36.Qc7?

A very unfortunate decision as now Black can attack the main defender (knight on c3) of the bishop on e2 with gain of tempo. After 36.Qc4 there is no immediate win for Black.

36.Qc7? Ne8!

Such a knight retreat is easy to miss. White can't avoid the loss of material

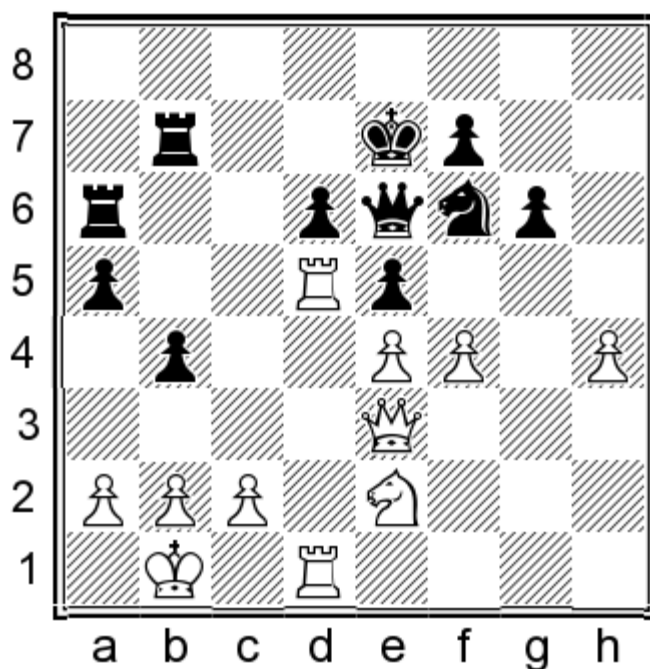
37.Qxa5 Bxc3 38.Qxc3 Rxe2—

0-1

Areshchenko, Alexander (2652)

Demchenko, Anton (2645)

Tbilisi 2017



White to moves

Black's pieces are lacking some coordination and hence with his last move 26...Nh5-f6 Black has brought his knight back into play. Obviously, the rook on d5 has been attacked now and instinctively your first thought is to move the rook away to a safe square. It should be said that this game was played with a shorter time control which explains that Areshchenko automatically retreated his rook with

27.R5d3

retaining the better chances. However, Black has now the possibility to do something about the unprotected rooks and the safety of his king. To exploit such deficiencies as king safety and unprotected pieces, one need to act immediately as the advantage is of a temporary nature.

In the next chapter about the initiative, the technique of ignoring the opponents threat will be dealt with, but that's certainly an important weapon for generating tactical opportunities as well.

Hence, White should definitely have considered 27.Qd3! which attacks the rook on a6, adds pressure to the pawn on d6 and constructs a new tactical threat. Black is defenceless as the following lines demonstrate: 27...Rab6 This allows White to release the trick. (However, there is no time to cover the back rank with 27...Ra8 because of 28.Rxd6 with a

decisive attack, while; 27...Nxd5 wins a piece for White after both 28.exd5 and 28.Qxa6.) 28.Rxe5! dxe5 29.Qd8#

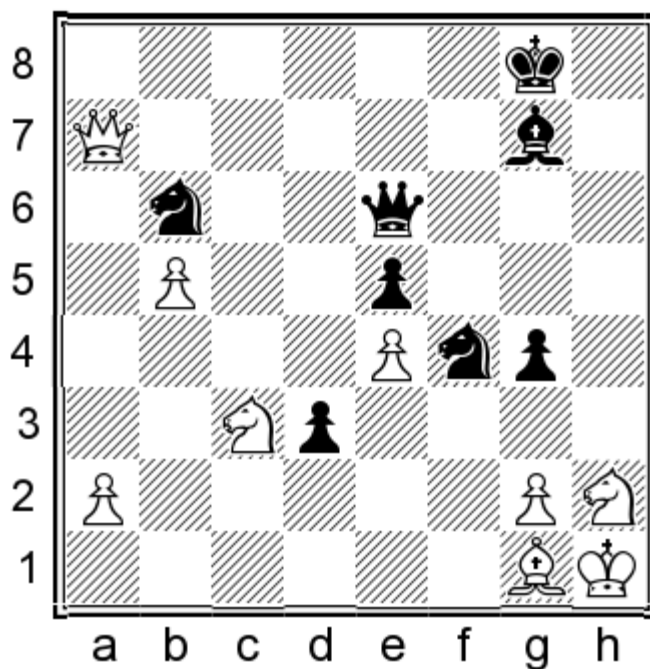
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Grischuk, Alexander (2785)

Caruana, Fabiano (2794)

Saint Louis 2017

Another very nice example of ignoring the threat was seen in the following rapid game.

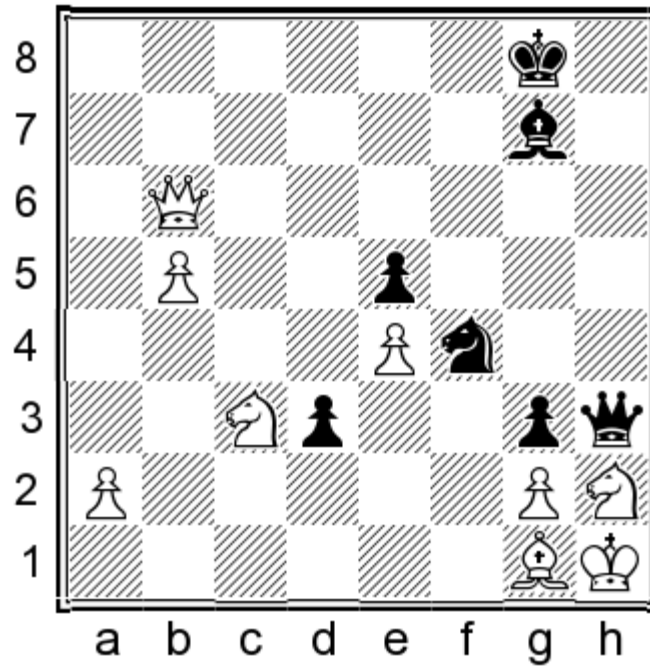


Black to move

White is a pawn up, but the position is quite a mess, meaning that other factors than just material are playing a more important role. The knight on b6 is threatened to be taken and one of the options would be to move it away to a more stable square. In the game Caruana went for...

41...Ne2

Trying to utilize the presence of the passed pawn. What he didn't notice is that at this particular moment White is having some serious coordination problems on the kingside and the fact that the queen on a7 isn't able to help in defence. This should catch the eye of a strong tactician, and Black should have opted for 41...g3 42.Qxb6 (Moving the knight away with 42.Nf3 is met by 42...Qh6+ 43.Bh2 gxh2 and Black is a full piece up.) 42...Qh3!!



Position after: 42...Qh3!!

An incredible resource! The pawn on g2 turns out to be a weak point in White's camp. The only way to defend against the mating threat is 43.Qf2 (43.gxh3 g2#) but then Black has 43...Qxh2+ 44.Bxh2 gxf2 and the f-pawn promotes. After the game continuation things are less clear:

41...Ne2 42.Nxe2

42.Qxb6? Ng3#

42...dxe2 43.Bf2 1/2-1/2

And for the moment White has neutralized the passed pawn and solved the weaknesses around his king.

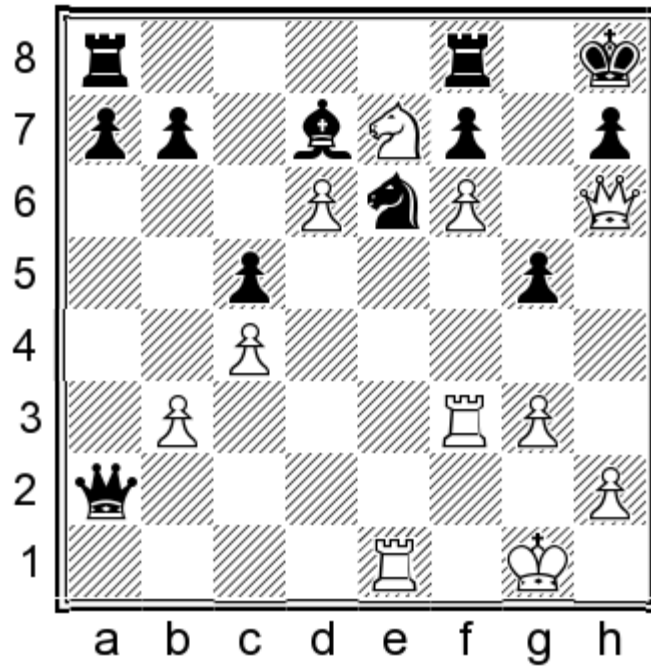
Determining all possible targets

Ris, Robert (2408)

Rombaldoni, Axel (2507)

Riga 2014

Once you have found an interesting move or plan, very often the calculation process is stopped and you execute your plan. Of course we don't have all the time in the world and decisions need to be made pragmatically. But on the flip side of the coin, some brilliant ideas or moves could be missed proceeding in this way. For that reason, I strongly recommend looking at all the possible moves, even the most odd looking ones as that could lead to some brilliant insights.



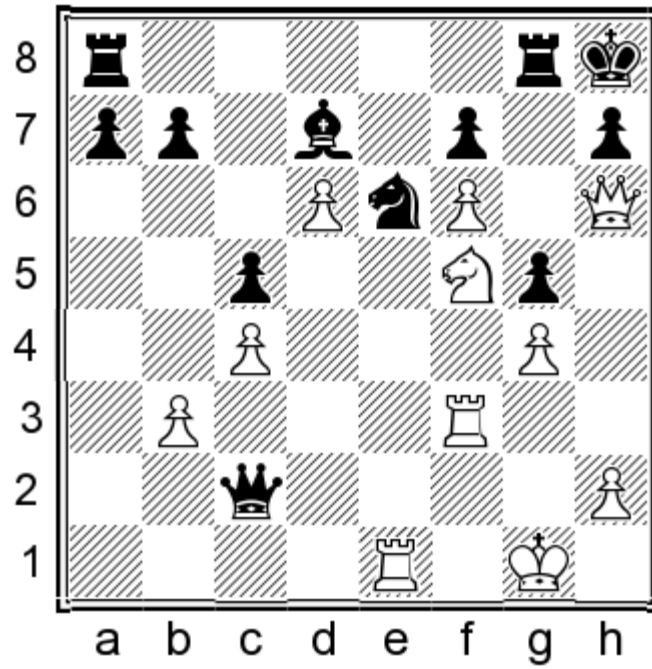
White to move

30.Rxe6?

Which eliminates the important defender of the g7 square. However, in a few moves the game ended in a repetition of moves. When I came home I was surprised to see that I missed a huge possibility with the move 30.g4! creating the threat of 31.Qxh7+ and 32.Rh3#.

In an earlier stage of the game, when I decided to sacrifice the piece, I obviously had seen similar ideas of creating a rook lift to the 3rd or 4th rank. However, in this moment I was totally obsessed by eliminating a key defender and regaining material at the same time. I was thinking what could be wrong with such a multi-purpose move that I completely forgot about looking for alternatives, let alone determining other possible targets in Black's position.

After 30.g4 Black must defend against the immediate threat on h7 with 30...Qc2 when I could have followed-up with 31.Nf5! after this powerful interfering idea it turns out that the pawn on h7 is an even bigger problem for Black than the g7 square. 31...Rg8



Position after: 31...Rg8

32.Qxh7+! (But not 32.Rh3? Nf8! and Black holds on.) 32...Kxh7 33.Rh3+ Kg6 34.Rh6#

30.Rxe6? Rg8 31.Nxg8 Rxc8

And despite being an exchange up, matters aren't that simple as my king is quite exposed. Not surprisingly the game soon ended in a repetition of moves.

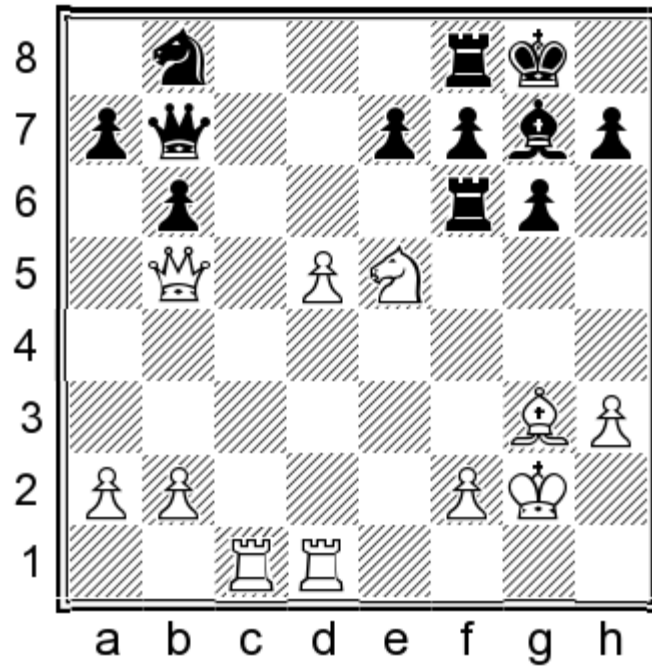
32.Re7 Qa1+ 33.Rf1 Qd4+ 34.Rf2 Qd1+ 35.Rf1 Qd4+ 36.Rf2 Qd1+

1/2-1/2

Heberla, Bartłomiej (2544)

Ris, Robert (2418)

Germany 2016



Black to move

I have managed to win the pawn on g2 in quite an unusual middlegame where my rook has ended up on f6. I realized as well that White has excellent compensation for the pawn because all his pieces are actively placed whereas I suffer from a lack of space and finding an useful plan.

Moreover, I was that much concerned about White's rook entering the seventh rank, that I completely overlooked the back-rank problems arising from my next move...

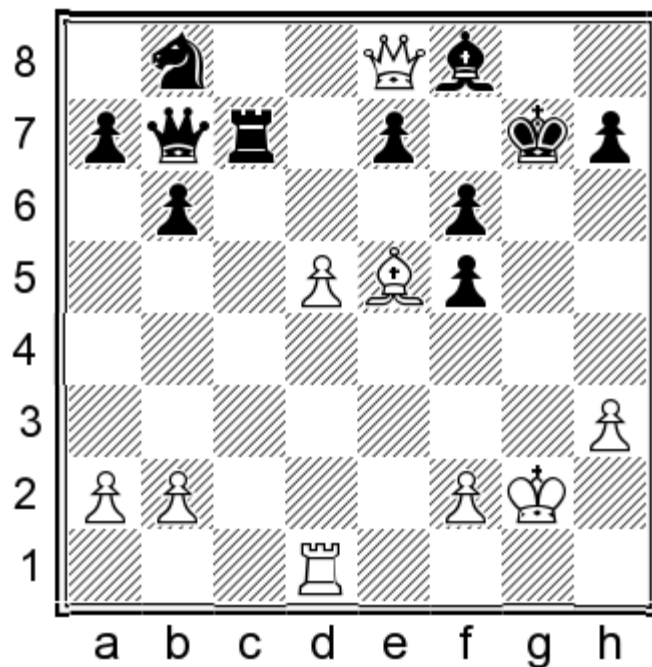
24...Rc8?

It would have been better to start with 24...Rf5 when Ng4 doesn't come with tempo. After 25.Ng4 e5 the position remains unclear.

24...Rc8? 25.Ng4 Rf5

Here I thought I had everything under control and my opponent's move as well as the next sequence came as a huge shock.

26.Rc7! Rxc7 27.Qe8+ Bf8 28.Nh6+ Kg7 29.Nxf5+ gxf5 30.Be5+ f6



Position after: 30...f6

31.Kh2!

Very accurate. In time trouble I was hoping my opponent would immediately bring his rook to the g-file with 31.Rg1? when I can still disturb his attacking ideas by means of 31...Rc1! 32.Rxc1 Qxd5+ 33.Kg1 Qxe5 34.Rc8 and the Black queen will give a perpetual.

31...Qc8

A) 31...fxe5 32.Rg1+ Kh6 33.Qxf8+ Kh5 34.Qxf5+ and mate.

B) 31...Rc8 is met by 32.Rg1+ Kh8 33.Qf7! Bh6 34.Bxf6+ exf6 35.Qxb7+–

32.Rg1+ Kh8

32...Kh6 33.Bf4#

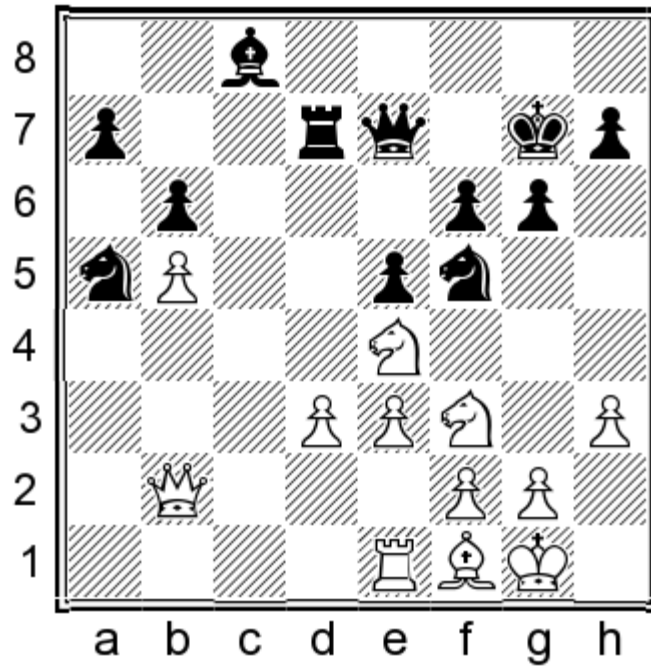
33.Qf7 Bh6 34.d6 Nc6 35.dxe7

1-0

Jobava, Baadur (2687)

Yu, Yangyi (2744)

Tbilisi 2017



White to move

At this point in time there is no interaction between both sides and hence no immediate tactics are to be seen in this position. It's quite fascinating to see how quickly Jobava succeeds in crushing through Black's position and therefore we need to specify some important issues which are playing a role here.

- 1) White has a better pawn structure as the pawn on b5 restricts Black's majority, while White has the possibility to use the extra central pawn to open the position.
- 2) Black's kingside has been weakened, but the centre needs to be opened to be able to exploit that.
- 3) The knight on a5 is momentarily out of play, so White could use one of his extra knight by playing on the other side of the board. Such an offside placed piece, makes it easier for the player to sacrifice material if needed.
- 4) Look at the white pieces. They seem to be very modestly placed, but in fact they are ready to join the attack very soon. The queen is doing very well on the a1-h8 diagonal. The rook wants to use the e-file and the knights are exerting pressure on the pawns on e5 and f6.

27.d4

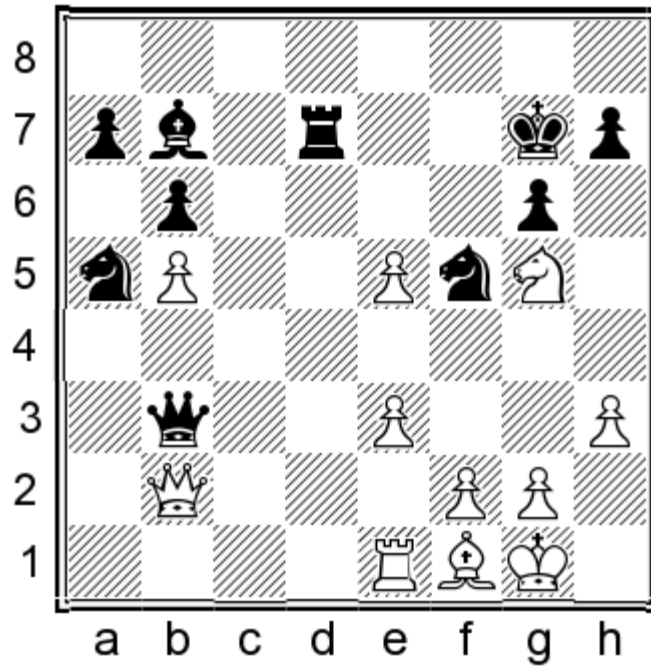
A very natural decision by Jobava. Another interesting attempt to open the centre is 27.g4 and next g5, challenging the pawn formation.

27.d4 Bb7?

A very logical move. It's very understandable that he doesn't fancy the opening of the e-file which would activate the rook, but apparently after 27...exd4 28.exd4 Qd8! Black manages to maintain control over the position. The move in the game enables Jobava to demonstrate his very efficient attacking skills.

28.Nxf6! Kxf6

28...Qxf6 29.dxe5 Qe6 (otherwise 30.e6 and winning the rook) 30.Ng5 Qb3



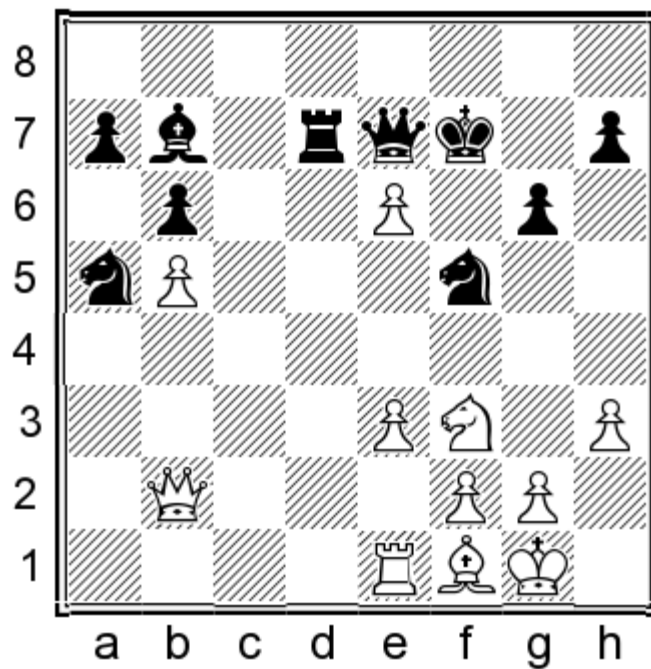
Position after: 30...Qb3

31.e6+! Qxb2 32.exd7 Qf6 33.d8=Q! Qxd8 34.Ne6+ and after recapturing the queen White remains an exchange up.

29.dxe5+ Kf7

29...Ke6 can strongly be met by 30.e4! Ng7 31.Qa2+ and Black's position falls apart.

30.e6+!



Position after: 30.e6+!

30...Kxe6

30...Qxe6 31.Ng5+ drops the queen.

31.e4!

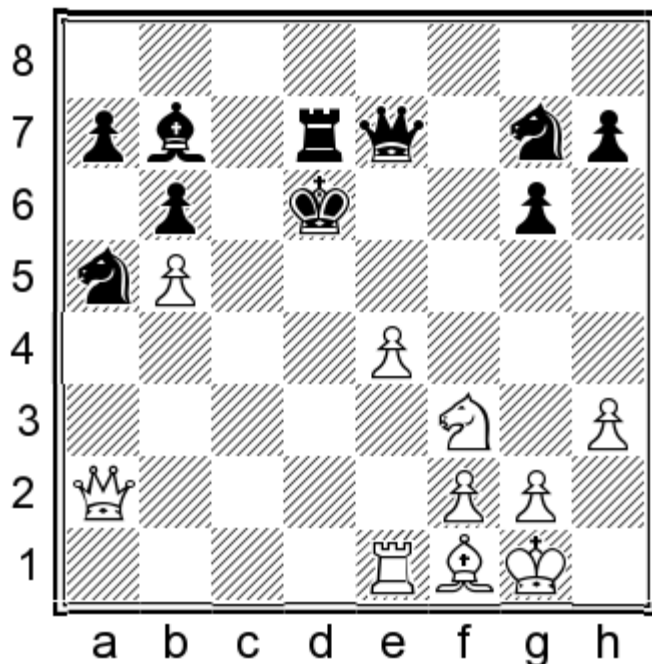
The attack never seems to come to an end! All White's pieces are participating, including the pawn on e4, which takes away some squares from the king. In the game Black eliminates that pawn, which inevitably leads to a loss of material.

31...Ng7

31...Nd6 32.Qa2+ Kf6 33.e5+ and after regaining the piece, White retains a powerful initiative thanks to his active pieces and the exposed Black king, e.g. 33...Kg7 34.Qa1 (34.exd6 is also possible) 34...Kg8 35.exd6 Qf8 (35...Qxd6 36.Re8+ Kf7 37.Qh8+-) 36.Ng5 and Black's position is hopeless.

32.Qa2+ Kd6

It looks like Black can run away with his king to the queenside, but White has seen in advance that he can stop that path effectively with his rook!



Position after: 32...Kd6

33.Rc1! Bxe4?

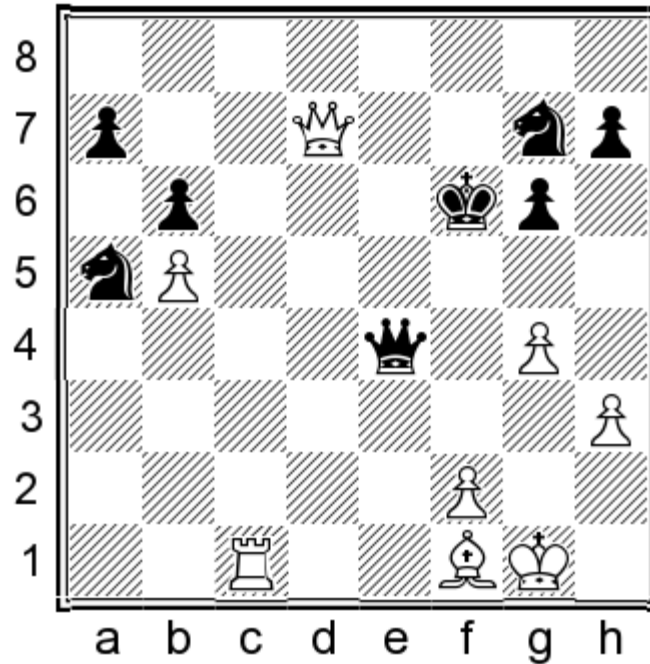
In a bad position mistakes are likely to happen. The most stubborn defensive attempt is 33...Qd8! which is very difficult to find, but even in that case after 34.Qa3+ Ke6 35.h4! (securing g5 for the knight) 35...h6 36.Qe3 White has a massive initiative as Black's extra knight on a5 is out of play.

34.Qd2+ Ke6 35.Ng5+ Kf5

A) 35...Kf6 36.Nxe4+ Qxe4 37.Qxd7+-

B) 35...Ke5 36.f4+ Kf6 (36...Kf5 37.g4+ Kf6 38.Qb2+-) 37.Qb2+ Kf5 38.g4+ Kxf4 39.Qf2+ Kxg5 (39...Ke5 40.Nxe4 Kxe4 41.Re1+-) 40.h4+ Kxg4 (40...Kh6 41.g5+ Kh5 42.Be2+) 41.Be2+ Kh3 42.Qh2#

36.g4+ Kf6 37.Nxe4+ Qxe4 38.Qxd7



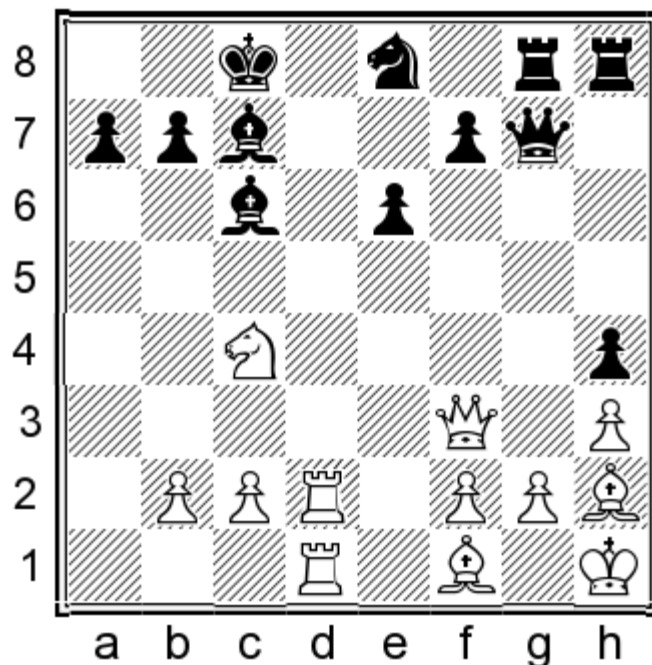
Position after: 38. Qxd7

And soon White managed to convert his material plus.

1-0

Forcing moves

When presenting calculation exercises I encourage my students to look at forcing moves in following order: 1) checks 2) captures 3) creating new threats, e.g. mate in 1. Forcing moves have the advantage compelling the opponent to solve the threat immediately and not to lose. Giving check is the most forcing option, the other type of forcing moves still enable the opponent to initiate a counterattack. The following educational example nicely illustrates the principle of forcing moves.



White to move

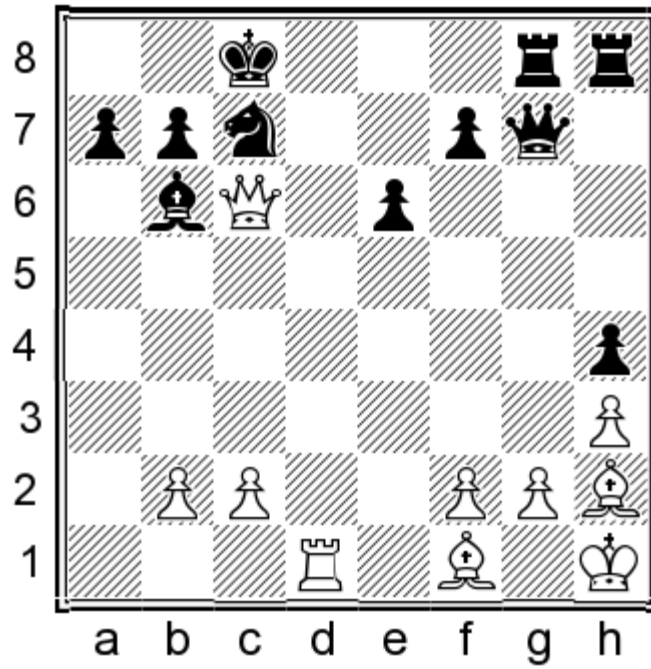
We see that both kings have been castled on opposite wings and all the pieces are concentrated on the opponent's king. White's main problem is that his queen has come under threat and if she would move away, Black takes on g2 with devastating consequences. Therefore, White is recommended to look for his own chances, so what can be done?

White's rooks are very active on the d-file, the bishop on h2 is well placed and with a bit of imagination we can see the bishop from f1 end up on a6 giving checkmate. All we need to do is a bit of puzzling with a few candidate (forcing!) moves to construct the mating net.

1.Nb6+!

A) An excellent choice. By sacrificing the knight, White clears the diagonal for his light-squared bishop. Tempting is to start with 1.Qxc6? bxc6 2.Nb6+ but then the black king has the additional option of going to b7.

B) Another suggestion which has often been mentioned by my students is the immediate 1.Rd8+? Bxd8 which has the advantage of opening the h2-b8 diagonal so that the black king doesn't have any squares available. However, the drawback is that White is one rook short! 2.Nb6+ (2.Qxc6+ bxc6 3.Nb6+ and once again the king can hide on b7 when all the fun is over.) 2...Bxb6! (2...axb6? 3.Qxc6+ would actually transpose to the main line.) 3.Qxc6+ Nc7!



Position after: 3...Nc7!

and Black wins. Had the rook still been on d2, White could have played 4.Qd7+ and mate on d8.

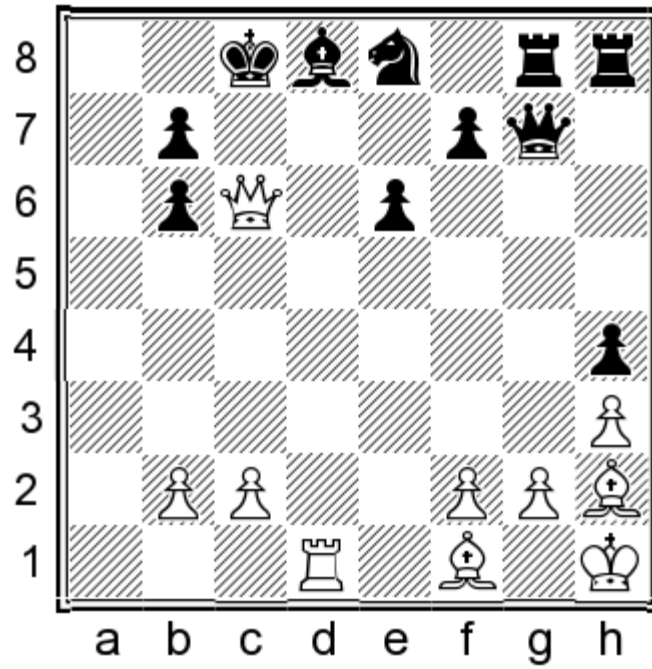
1.Nb6+! axb6

1...Bxb6 runs into mate after 2.Qxc6+! Nc7 (2...Bc7 3.Rd8#; 2...bxc6 3.Ba6#) 3.Qd7+ Kb8 4.Qd8+ Rxd8 5.Rxd8+ Rxd8 6.Rxd8#

2.Rd8+!

2.Qxc6? bxc6 3.Ba6+ Kb8 4.Rd8+ Ka7 and Black wins.

2...Bxd8 3.Qxc6+!



Position after: 3.Qxc6+!

3...Nc7

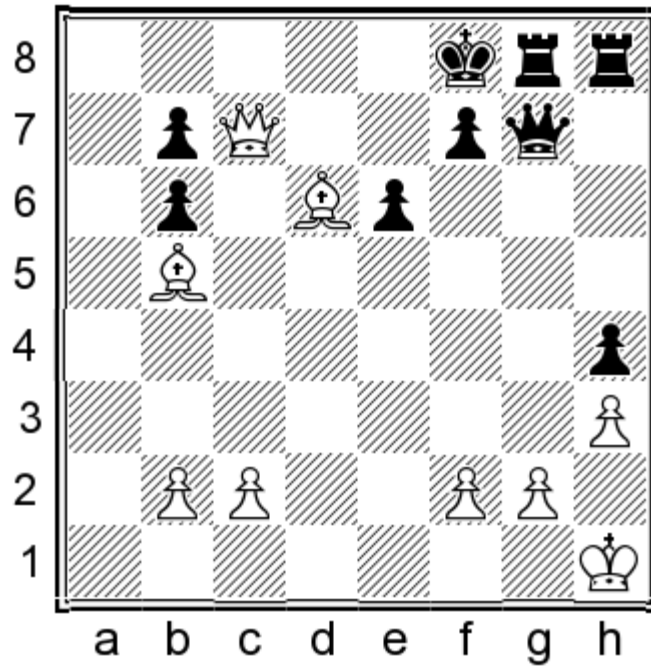
A) 3...bxc6 4.Ba6#

B) 3...Bc7 also leads to mate after 4.Qd7+ Kb8 5.Qd8+ Ka7 6.Ra1#

4.Rxd8+! Kxd8

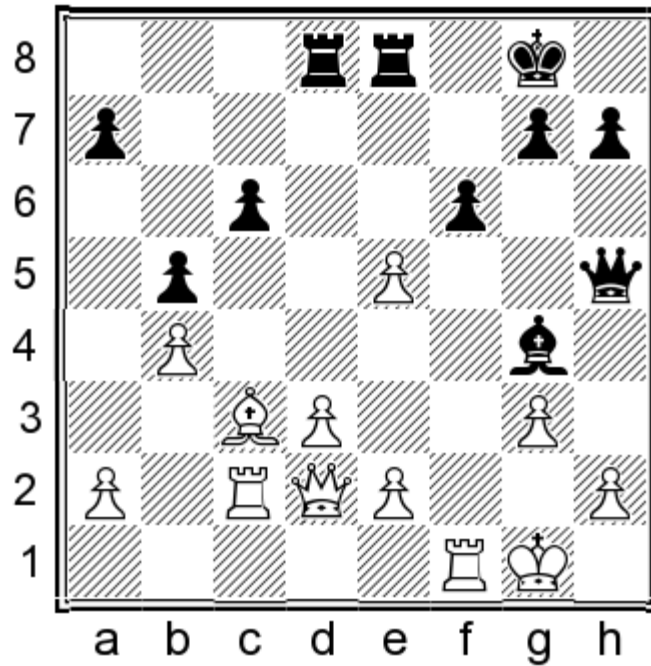
4...Rxd8 5.Qxc7#

5.Qxc7+ Ke8 6.Bb5+ Kf8 7.Bd6#



Position after: 7.Bd6#

Anand, Viswanathan (2783)
 Caruana, Fabiano (2807)
 Saint Louis 2017



White to move

In this complex middlegame with opposite coloured bishops, with all the major pieces still on the board, White has won a pawn. With his last move 21...f6 Black intends to open the e-file and enter with his rook to e2. In general, you must look at the principle move...

22.exf6

...which wins a pawn and lets see what happens after...

22...Rxe2

It looks as if Black is winning on the spot, in view of the double attack on the queen and mate on h2. Would you stop calculating here? No! You always must consider possible checks.

23.f7+ Kf8

The only move.

The other king move allows White to promote the f-pawn, while after 23...Qxf7 24.Rxf7 Rxd2 White has a sweet intermediate check with 25.Rxg7+! winning the rook.

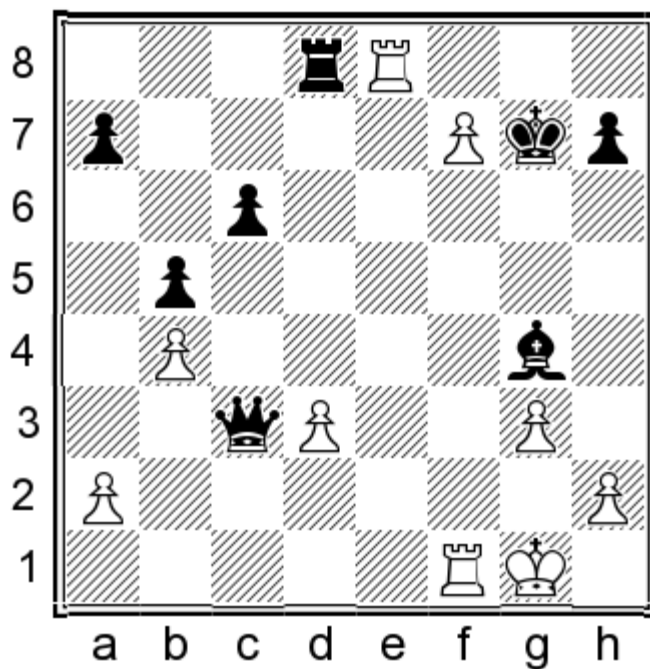
24.Bxg7+! Kxg7 25.Qc3+ Re5

A) Black decides to retreat the rook to e5, where it's actually pinning itself while the mating threat on h2 has also evaporated. The combination of those factors plus the passed pawn on f7, means that White can also consider a quiet move, improving his position. Let's check the other options to: 25...Kf8 26.Qh8+ Ke7 and now the easiest way to convert 27.Rxe2+ Bxe2 28.f8=Q+-

B) 25...Kg6 26.Qf6#

C) 25...Kh6 26.Qf6+ Qg6 27.f8=Q+-

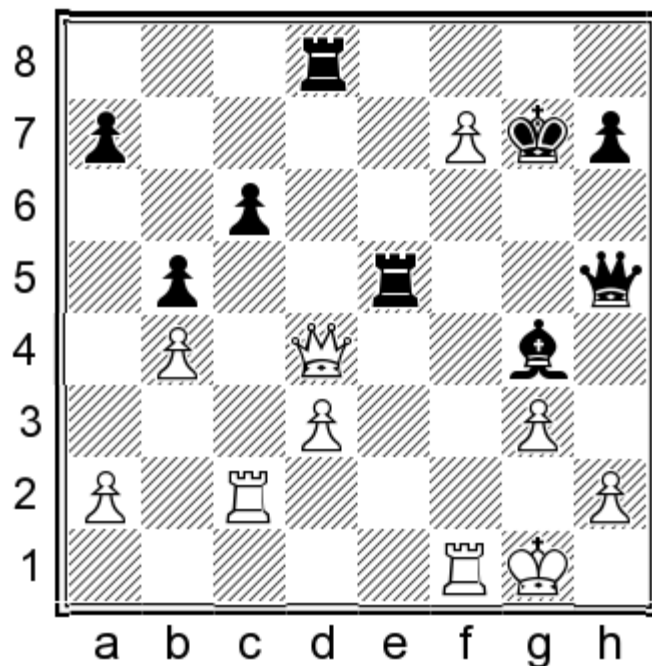
D) 25...Qe5 is beautifully met by 26.Rxe2! Qxc3 27.Re8!



Position after: 27.Re8!

and Black can't stop the f-pawn from promoting, e.g. 27...Qd4+ 28.Rf2 Qxb4 29.f8=Q+ Qxf8 30.Rxf8 with a technically winning endgame for White.

26.Qd4!!



Position after: 26.Qd4!!

An absolutely brilliant resource, because the queen can't be taken as the f-pawn promotes with mate to follow. By moving the queen one square diagonally, White clears the c-file for the rook and also threatens to attack the pinned rook on e5 with 27.Rc5.

26...Qg5

26...Rf8 27.Rc5 is similar.

27.Rc5 Rxd4

27...Qe3+ fails to 28.Qxe3 Rxe3 29.Rg5+ and White regains the piece and/or queens the f-pawn.

28.f8=Q+ Kg6 29.Qf7+

1-0

Chapter 6

Initiative

Playing with initiative is one of the biggest advantages in chess. It simply means that your opponent has been prevented from carrying out his own plans. You can seize the initiative by attacking your opponents pieces, especially the king and unprotected pieces are often a target.

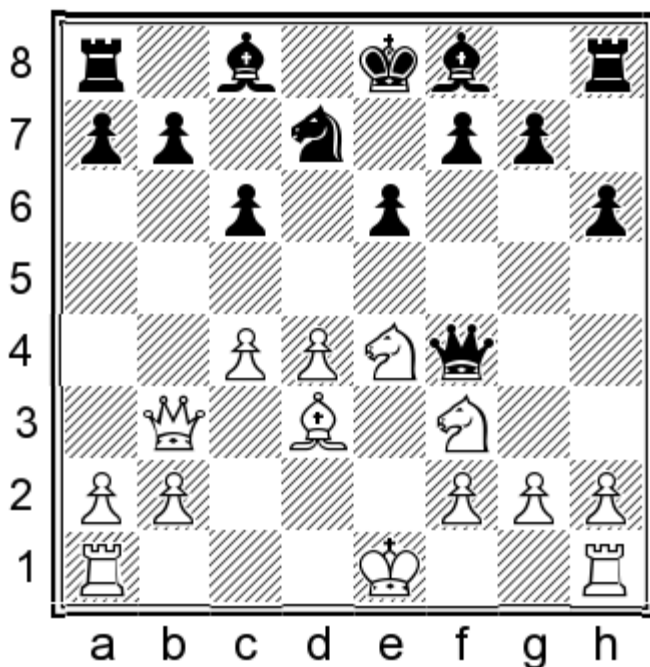
Another way of obtaining the initiative is to ignore your opponents intentions by creating a counterthreat of greater value. Also from a psychological point of view the side with the initiative has the advantage and often the weaker side succumbs under the pressure. I think the simple explanation is that it's just easier to attack than to defend!

Creating threats

Among the current world elite, Aronian is one of the most dangerous players when the initiative is on his side. In this game he aims for rapid development and tries to exploit his superior piece activity by challenging the opponents pieces (particularly the queen is a target) and generate threats against the enemies king.

Aronian, Levon (2802)
Ding, Liren (2771)
Tbilisi 2017

1.c4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Nc3 d5 4.d4 c6 5.Bg5 h6 6.Bxf6 Qxf6 7.Qb3 Nd7 8.e4 dxe4 9.Nxe4 Qf4 10.Bd3



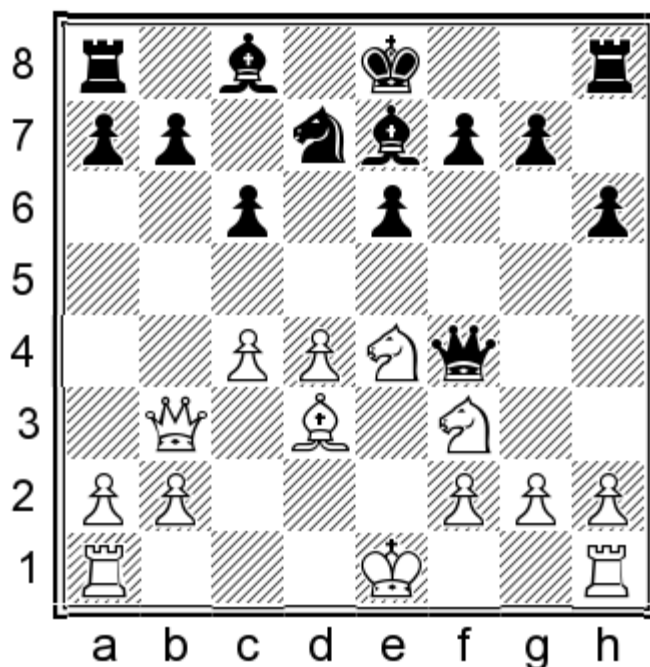
Position after: 10.Bd3

This particular variation of the Moscow Variation often leads to very exciting play. White has given up the pair of bishops and at the moment the bishop on c8 is very passive. In order to activate the bishops Black needs to open the position with either ...c6-c5 or ...e6-e5, but that also benefits White with a lead in development.

10...e5

The principled continuation, if Black refrains from this move he might end up suffering from a lack of space which eventually will lead to a powerful attack for White.

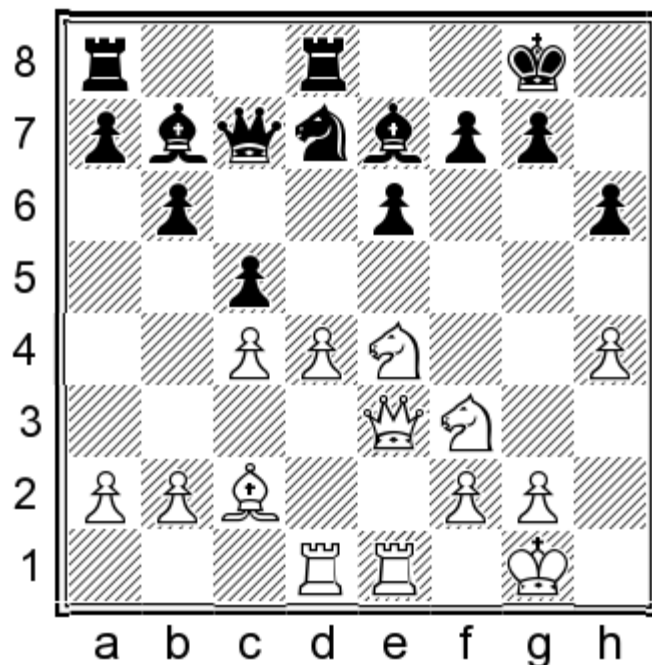
Two important examples: 10...Be7



Position after: 10...Be7

A) 11.0-0 0-0 (11...e5 would transpose to the game.) 12.Rfe1 Rd8 13.Rad1 Qc7 14.Ng3 Nf8 15.Qc3 a5 16.a3 a4 17.Ne5 Qa5 18.Qc1 Bd7 19.c5 b5 20.Be4 Qc7 21.Qc3 Be8 22.Ne2 Ra6 23.Nc1 Nd7 24.Nxd7 Rxd7 25.Nd3 Rd8 26.Ne5 Bf8 27.h4 Raa8 28.Bb1 h5 29.Qf3 g6 30.g4 hxg4 31.Qxg4 Bg7 32.Ba2 b4 33.Bc4 bxa3 34.bxa3 Qa5 35.Qe4 Qc7 36.Qf4 Rab8 37.h5 gxh5 38.Kh1 Rb7 39.Rg1 Qe7 40.Rxg7+ Kxg7 41.Rg1+ Kh7 42.Nxf7 1-0 Alekhine – Asztalos, Kecskemet 1927.

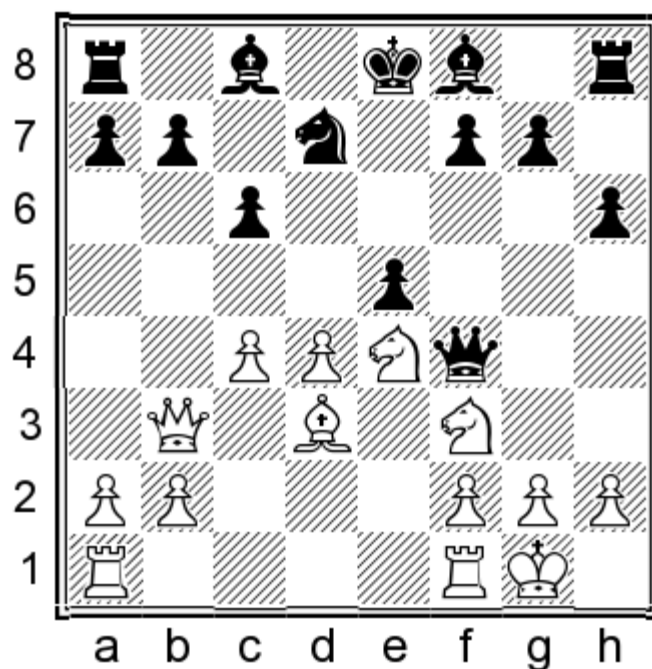
B) 11.Bc2 0-0 (11...e5 can be met by 12.g3! and thanks to the bishop retreat, the knight on f3 is still protected.) 12.0-0 Rd8 13.Rad1 b6 14.Rfe1 Bb7 15.h4 Qc7 16.Qe3 c5



Position after: 16...c5

In the game above, Alekhine demonstrated the problems Black is facing when he doesn't play ...c6-c5. Aronian now shows that White has a thematic response which offers him a great initiative thanks to the passed pawn. This is restricting the movement of Black's piece and enables White building up an attack. 17.d5! exd5 18.cxd5 Nf8 19.Ng3 Bf6 20.Be4 Re8 21.d6 Qd7 22.Qd2 Ne6 23.Bxb7 Qxb7 24.Nf5 Red8 25.Re3 h5 26.Qe2 b5 27.Ng5 Nf4 28.Qf1 c4 29.g3 Nd3 30.Rxd3 cxd3 31.Qxd3 Bxg5 32.hxg5 g6 33.Ne7+ Kh7 34.Rf3 Qxe7 35.dxe7 Rxd3 36.Rxd3 Re8 37.Rd7 a5 38.Kg2 Kg7 39.Kh3 f5 40.gxf6+ Kxf6 41.Kh4 a4 42.a3 Kf7 43.f4 Kf6 44.Rb7 Ra8 45.Rb6+ Kxe7 46.Rxg6 Rd8 47.Rg5 b4 48.Ra5 Rd2 49.Rxa4 bxa3 50.Rxa3 1-0 Aronian – Leko, Tromso 2014.

11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

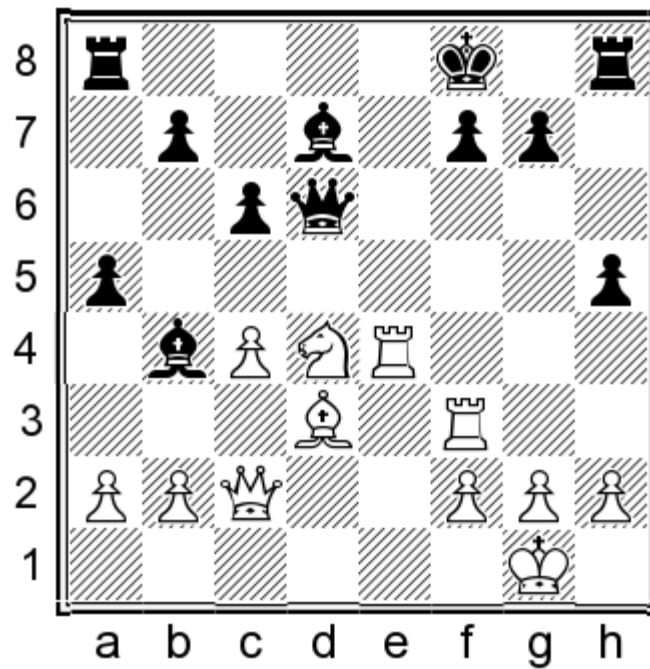
Going for rapid development is more challenging than exchanging a pair of knights by 11.dxe5 Nxe5 12.Nxe5 Qxe5 13.0-0 Be7 and next Black castles.

11...Be7

In his game, Topalov opened the centre too fast, had to give up the right to castle and got completely crushed with very energetic play by White. An absolute model game showing the power of the initiative by continuously posing new threats: 11...exd4?! 12.Nxd4

A) The problem is that Black doesn't have time to complete development with 12...Be7 followed by castling as it's White to strike by means of 13.Nf5! attacking both e7 and g7, while the knight is obviously untouchable because of the discovered check.

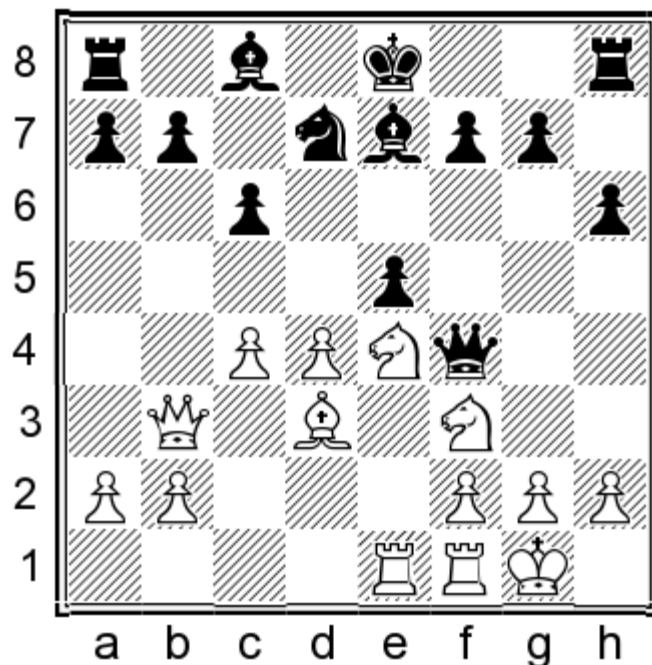
B) 12...Nc5 13.Nxc5 Bxc5 14.Rae1+ Kf8 15.Re4 Qf6 16.Qc3! (16.Rfe1 would allow 16...g6! followed by Kg7 when Black connects the rooks.) 16...a5 (16...g6 tactically fails to 17.Ne6+! winning the queen.) 17.Rfe1 Bd7 18.R1e3 Bb4 19.Qc2 Qd6 20.Rf3 h5



Position after: 20...h5

White has built up a very promising position with all his pieces having joined the attack. However there is no time to hesitate as Black is ready to trade off (major) pieces when White's attacking prospects evaporate. Mamedyarov finds a very nice way to hit the weakness of Black's position (pawn on f7). 21.c5! Bxc5 22.Bc4 f6 23.Ne6+ Bxe6 24.Rxe6 Qd7 25.Qf5 Qd4 26.Re4 Qd1+ 27.Bf1 Bd6 (27...Qd5 runs into 28.Re5!) 28.Rd3 Bxh2+ 29.Kxh2 Qxf1 30.Rd7 1-0 Mamedyarov – Topalov, Sofia 2007.

12.Rae1!?



Position after: 12.Rae1!?

A very interesting new idea, whereas in previous games White had only played 12.Rfe1 but according to theory Black is doing OK. Aronian intends to bring his bishop back to b1, without locking up his own rook on a1.

12...exd4

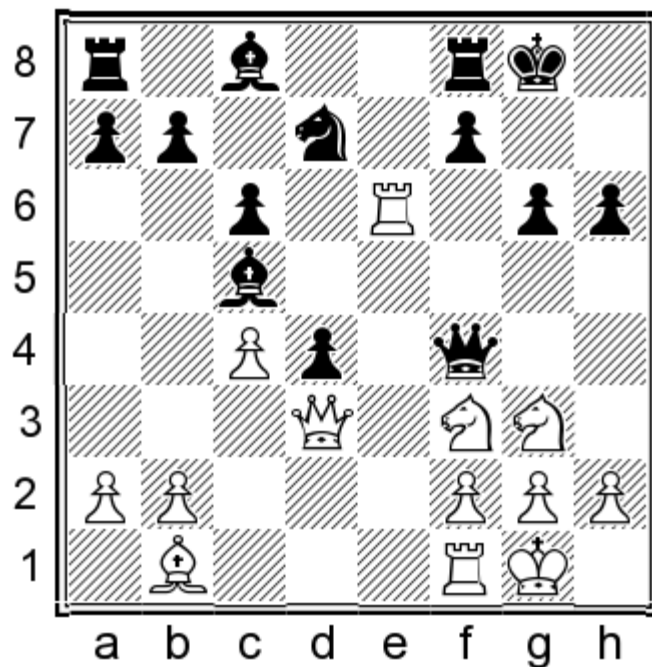
12...0-0? can't be recommended, in view of 13.Ng3! and Black is about to lose the pawn on e5, while if he tries to hold the pawn his position may quickly collapse, e.g. 13...Bd6 14.Re4 (tempo!) 14...Qf6 15.Rg4 (threatening 16.Nh5) 15...g6 16.c5! (double attack) 16...Nxc5 17.Rxg6+! Qxg6 18.dxc5 and White will get two pieces for the rook, but more importantly Black's kingside has been destroyed.

13.Bb1 0-0 14.Ng3

Another move with tempo as the rook hits the bishop. The alternative is 14.Qd3 but after 14...g6 15.Qxd4 Nc5 Black consolidates.

14...Bd8

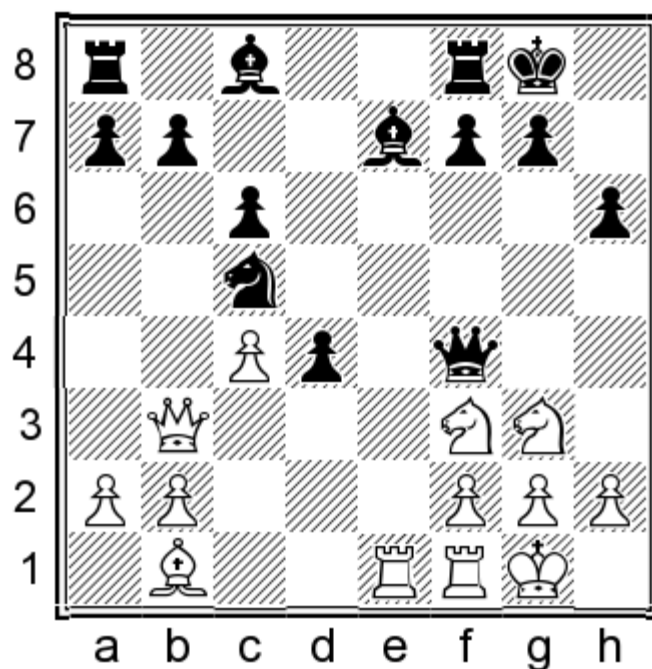
A) Retreating your bishop to the back rank, even further disconnecting the rooks is normally not the first move which should cross your mind. However, the bishop is still guarding some vital squares on the kingside, which isn't the case in the line 14...Bc5? which is nicely refuted by 15.Qd3 g6 16.Re6!



Position after: 16.Re6!

16...Kh8 (16...fxe6 17.Qxg6+ Kh8 18.Qh7#; 16...Nf6 17.Ne2 and the knight on f6 is hanging.) 17.Rxg6! fxe6 18.Qxg6 Nf6 19.Nh5 Rg8 20.Nxf4 Rxg6 21.Nxg6+ and White should be able to convert.

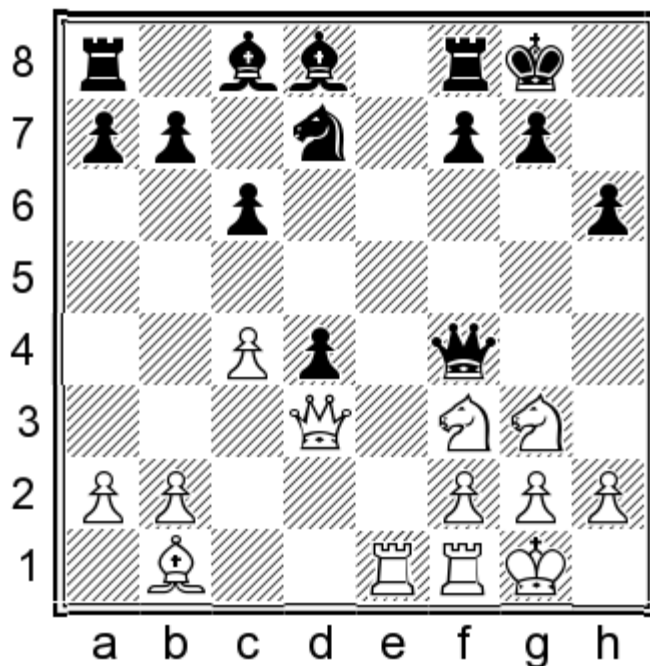
B) Instead, I think Black should have gone for 14...Nc5!



Position after: 14...Nc5!

and I believe he has good chances to equalize, e.g. 15.Qa3 Qc7 16.Nxd4 Rd8! and it seems that Black has managed to neutralize White's aggressive intentions on the kingside as 17.Ndf5 Bxf5 18.Nxf5 Bf8 is absolutely fine for Black.

15.Qd3



Position after: 15.Qd3

15...g6

The only move, because after 15...Nf6 16.Nh5! Black has to give a piece to prevent mate on h7.

16.h4

A) This move is pretty much in the spirit of White's attacking play on the b1-h7 diagonal. Tempting is 16.Re4 but after 16...Qf6 17.Rxd4 (what else as Black was threatening ...Nc5) 17...Nc5 18.Qd2 Ne6 Black is doing fine.

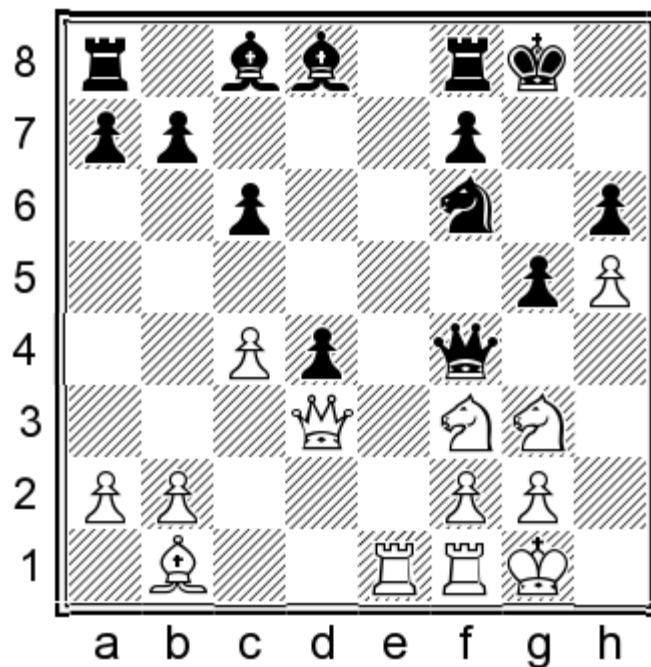
B) Compared with the line 14...Bc5, the idea of 16.Re6 is less effective, in view of 16...Nf6 when the bishop protects the knight on f6.

16...Nf6

A) This looks incredibly risky for Black as the diagonal will be opened. 16...Bxh4?! 17.Re4 Bxg3 18.Rxf4 Bxf4 this gives Black some compensation for the queen, but it's obviously not what Black is looking for.

B) It would have probably been better luring the queen temporarily away with 16...Nc5 even though after 17.Qa3! White maintains the initiative by attacking the knight and after 17...Ne6 18.h5 White succeeds in opening the kingside. However, in this case the Black queen is surrounded by more of his own pieces which means that it will be harder for White to conduct a mating attack.

17.h5 g5

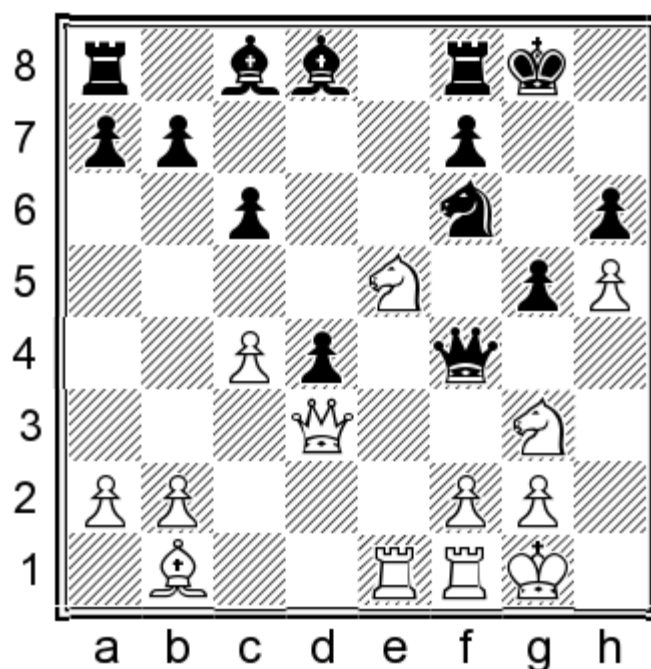


Position after: 17...g5

18.Ne5!

A) I think the majority of people would have regained the pawn by means of 18.Nxd4 thinking that material is even, while retaining the more active pieces. However, as we will see the pawn on d4 isn't really important and Aronian prefers maintaining the pressure by introducing a new threat.

B) Moreover, 18.Ne4? is met by 18...Nxe4 19.Rxe4 Bf5! and Black has neutralized all White's attacking ideas.

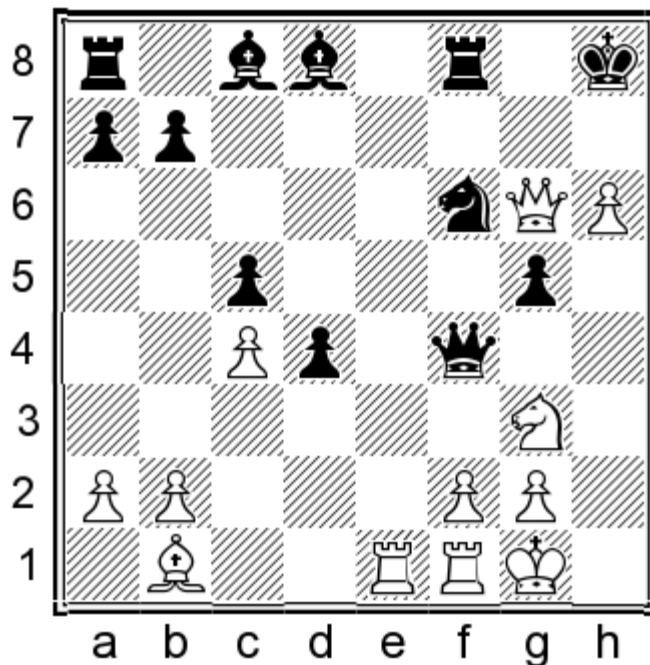


Position after: 18.Ne5!

18...Ba5

A) It's worth having a look at some alternatives, which are highlighting the impact of White's initiative. 18...Bc7
19.Ng6! fxc6 20.Qxc6+ Kh8 21.Re7 Rg8 22.Rh7+ Nxc7 23.Qxc7#

B) 18...c5 19.Ng6! and Black should give the exchange, since after 19...fxg6 White's attack is crashing like a hurricane over the board: 20.Qxc6+ Kh8 21.Qxc7+ Kg8 22.Qg6+ Kh8 23.h6

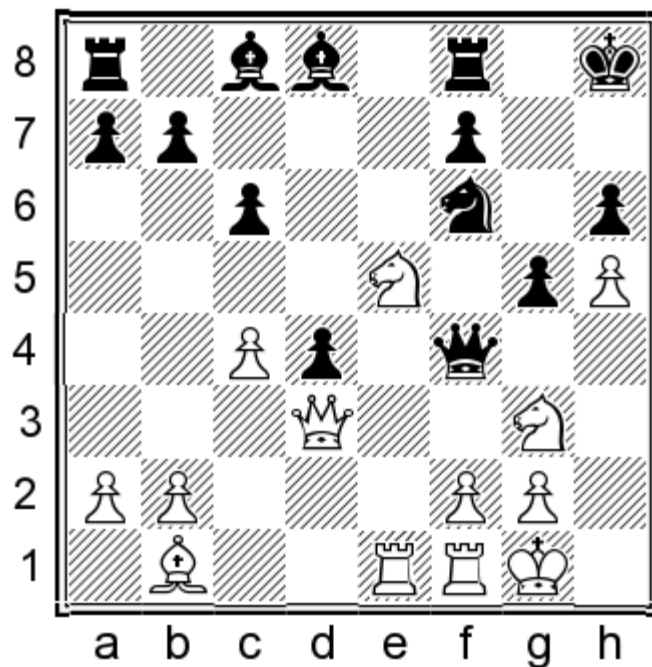


Position after: 23.h6

23...Qc7 (23...Rg8 24.Re8! is a fantastic resource!) 24.Nh5! Bg4 (24...Nxc5 25.Re8! with mate to follow.) 25.Qg7+!
Qxc7 26.hxc7+ and after capturing the rook and knight White remains an exchange up.

C) Black can't sidestep the fork with 18...Re8 because of 19.Nxf7! Kxf7 20.Qg6+ Kf8 21.Qxc6+ Kf7 22.Bg6+ and White wins.

D) Relatively best here is 18...Kh8



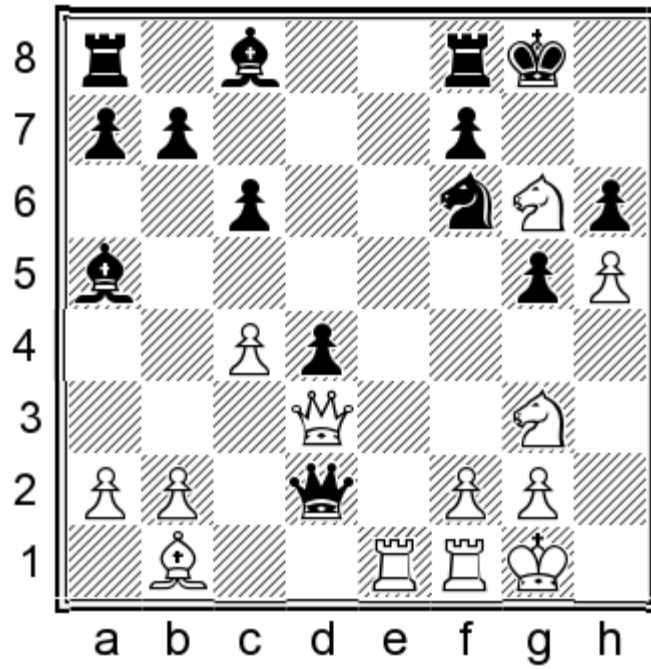
Position after: 18...Kh8

but then White retains a powerful initiative with a series of forcing moves: 19.Ne4 (19.Ng6+? doesn't work, in view of 19...fxg6 20.Qxg6 g4! and 'h6' is defended.) 19...Bf5 20.Qxd4 Bc7 21.Nf3 Bxe4 22.Rxe4 Qd6 23.Qc3 c5 24.Re5! Kg8 25.Rxc5 and White is a pawn up, as 25...Qxc5 26.Qxf6 enables White to continue the attack along the light squares.

19.Ng6?!

At this moment Aronian had a significant time advantage and played this move very fast to keep the pressure on his opponent. However, it seems to me he didn't realize the purpose of Black's move. Far stronger would have been 19.Re2! preventing Black's next move, while the threat of Ng6 is still there.

19...Qd2!

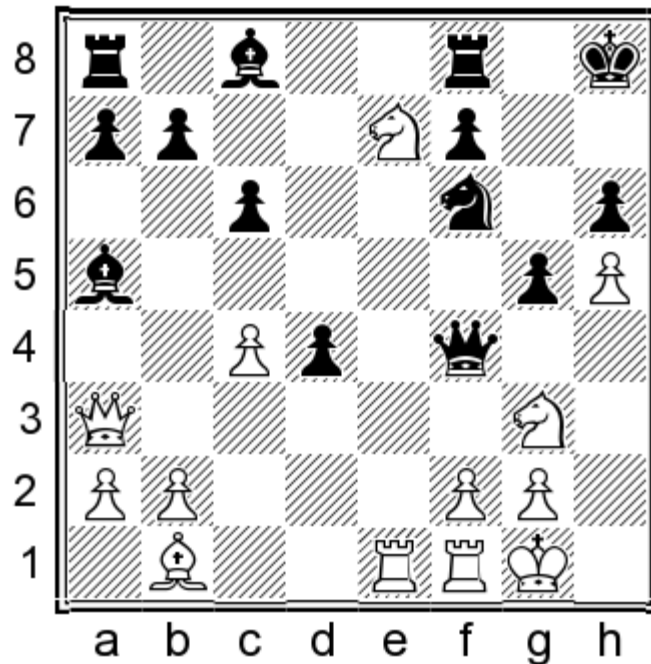


Position after: 19...Qd2!

I think it's clear that Aronian had missed this move. Although he continues to fight for the initiative in great style, there was certainly no point to allow Black offering the trade of queens.

20.Ne7+ Kg7

I thought it's somewhat strange to place the king on this square as it gives White the additional option of jumping to f5 with check. However, the alternative 20...Kh8 has the drawback that it leaves both the rook on f8 as well as the knight on f6 unprotected. The following line is very instructive: 21.Qf3! Qf4 22.Qa3!



Position after: 22.Qa3!

22...Bxe1 23.Nd5 (23.Ng6+ fxg6 24.Qxf8+ Ng8 25.Qe8 might also work for White, but is more complicated.) 23...Bb4 (23...cxd5 24.Qxf8+ Ng8 25.Rxe1 and Black has back rank problems.) 24.Qxb4 c5 25.Qxc5 Nd7 26.Qxf8+ (Perhaps even stronger is the fantastic queen manoeuvre 26.Qa5! Qd6 27.Nf5 Qc5 28.Qe1! followed by 29.Qe4.) 26...Nxf8 27.Nxf4 gxf4 28.Ne2 and the black pawns are too weak.

21.Qb3!

Of course White will not exchange the queens!

21...Qf4 22.Rd1?!

Playing for the little trick Rxd4 followed by the knight fork on f5, but more convincing is 22.Ngf5+ Bxf5 23.Nxf5+ Kh8 24.Re7 and despite the minus pawn White is very dominant on the light squares.

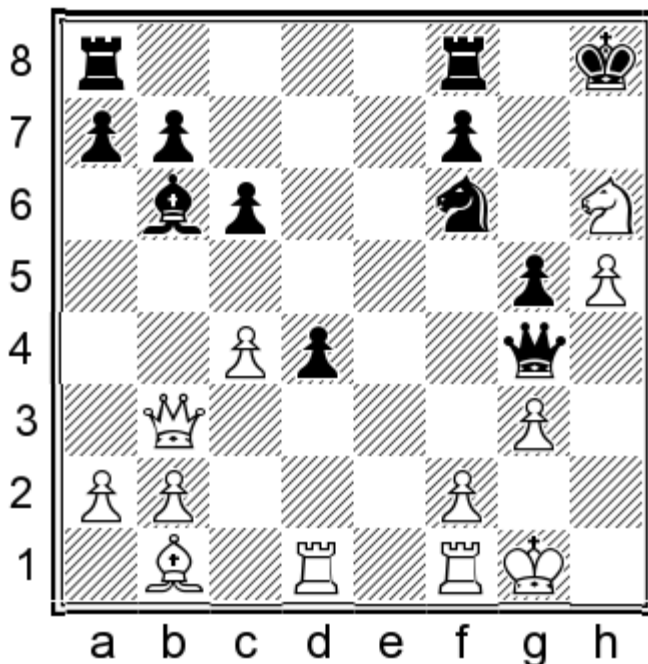
22...Bb6

Black should have tried 22...c5 but in any case his position looks unpleasant as he always needs to deal with a knight jump to f5 and a hanging pawn on h6.

23.Ngf5+ Bxf5 24.Nxf5+ Kh8 25.g3! Qg4

25...Qc7 26.Nxh6 doesn't help Black that much either.

26.Nxh6



Position after: 26.Nxh6

26...Qxh5

Black voluntarily opens the h-file when it's over in just a few moves.

However, the alternative 26...Qh3 runs into 27.c5! Bxc5 28.Nxf7+ Rxf7 (28...Kg7 29.h6+ and Black has to give up his queen.) 29.Qxf7 Rf8 30.Qg6 and White shouldn't have too much difficulties converting the exchange after trading

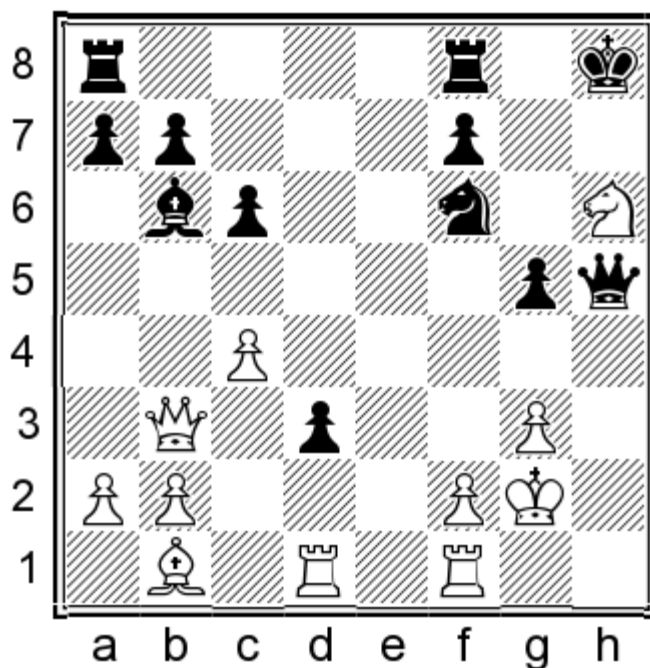
queens on h5.

27.Kg2!

Again Aronian succeeds in creating another threat.

There is no time for a quiet move like 27.Nf5 which gives Black the possibility to prevent the white rook reaching the h-file by playing 27...Qh3

27...d3



Position after: 27...d3

27...Qxh6 is met by 28.Rh1 Nh5 29.Qf3! and White wins, but not (29.g4? Nf4+ 30.Kg3 Qxh1 31.Rxh1+ Kg7 and Black can still fight.)

28.Qc3!

The automatic 28.Rh1 would have blown a decisive advantage in view of 28...Qe2! and f2 is vulnerable. Always check carefully the purpose of your opponent's last move and how that move changes the position. By playing ...d4-d3 Black not only opens the diagonal for the bishop, attacking f2, but it also opens up the long diagonal a1-h8, enabling White's queen to join the attack.

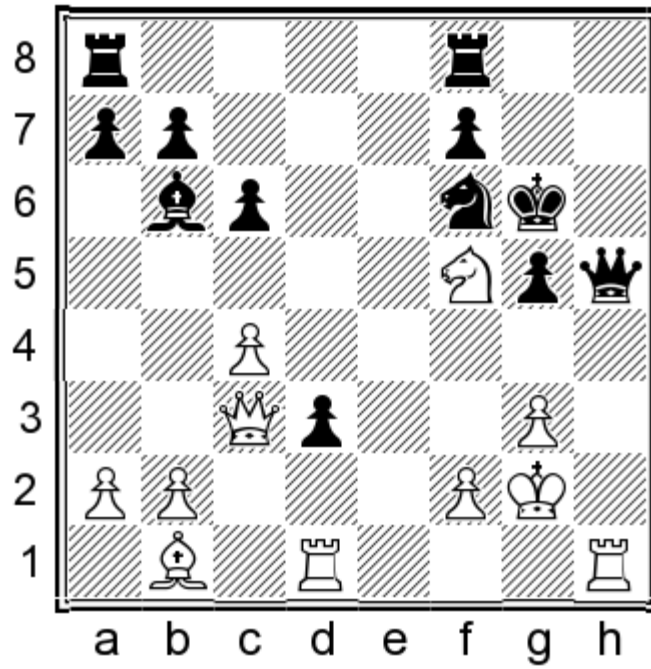
28...Kg7

A) 28...Qxh6 29.Rh1 wins the queen.

B) 28...Qg6 29.Bxd3 is also hopeless.

29.Nf5+ Kg6 30.Rh1

And Black resigned, as mate is inevitable after 30.Rh1



Position after: 30.Rh1

30...Qe2 31.Rh6+ Kxf5 32.Bxd3+

1-0

Pawn play

Pawns are ideally suited in the process of the initiative. It's not easy to ignore the threat of pawns, as they are simply worth less than pieces.

In the following example the power of pawns is nicely demonstrated. There is no single moment Black has time to relax as the pawns, being very well supported by the pieces, are raging over the board, posing new threats on every move.

Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime (2789)

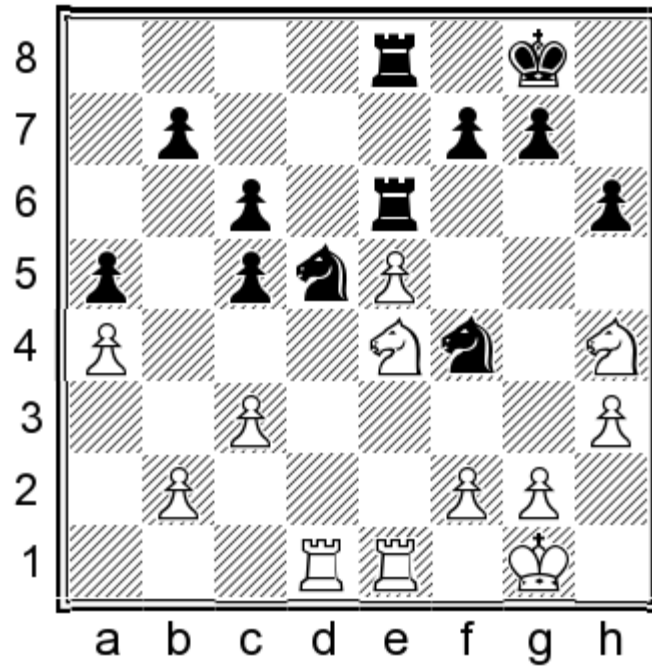
Grischuk, Alexander (2783)

Tbilisi 2017

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.0-0 Nf6 5.d3 d6 6.c3 a6 7.a4 h6 8.Re1 0-0 9.h3 a5 10.Nbd2 Be6 11.Bb5 Ne7 12.d4 exd4 13.Nxd4 Bd7 14.Nf1 Ng6 15.Ng3 Re8 16.Bc4 c6 17.Be3 Qc7 18.Ba2 Re5 19.Qc2 Rae8 20.Nf3 R5e7 21.Bxc5 dxc5 22.Rad1 Bc8 23.Bc4 Qf4 24.Qd2 Be6 25.Bxe6 Rxe6 26.Qxf4 Nxf4 27.e5 N6d5 28.Ne4 Rg6 29.Nh4 Rge6

Also in positions with queens off the board the initiative plays an important role. White has a great position here as Black's doubled c-pawn isn't really helpful and White has a kingside majority.

White is now for choice: he can win a pawn by starting to take on c5, but if he does then he need to give up the pawn on e5, the pride of his position.



Position after: 29...Rge6

30.Nd6!

As said, White can win a pawn with 30.Nxc5 Rxe5 31.Rxe5 Rxe5 32.Nxb7 but then Black suddenly becomes active with 32...Re2! when things aren't that clear at all. The white pieces are not well coordinated and perhaps even more importantly, the character of play has dramatically changed compared to the initial position.

Very often it's (practically) much more recommended not to be too greedy and instead just play for activity.

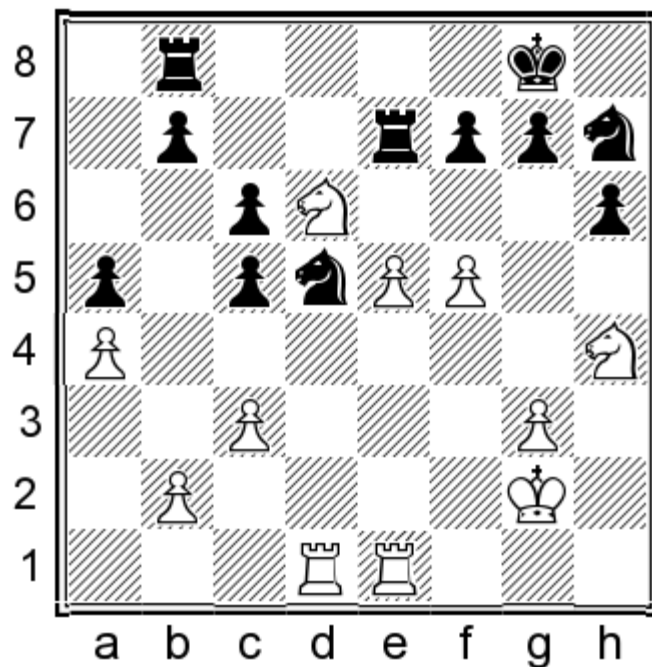
30...Rb8

The other move 30...R8e7 keeps the rook in a more central position, but at the same time the rook could also be attacked by Nf5 and besides that it also takes away a square from the other rook.

31.g3!

White could also prepare the advance of his kingside pawns with 31.Kh2 but MVL has understood well that the little pawn on h3 doesn't play a role.

31...Nxb3+ 32.Kg2 Ng5 33.f4 Nh7 34.f5 Re7



Position after: 34...Re7

35.c4!

After a forcing sequence of moves, White follows up with another powerful idea.

The immediate push 35.e6? is not recommended, in view of 35...fxe6 and now 36.Ng6? can be met by 36...Rd7! and since the knight will be kicked out, White is losing control over the centre.

35...Nc7

35...Nb4 is hardly any better, as 36.e6 Nc2 37.Re5 fxe6 38.Ng6 Rc7 39.fxe6 Nd4 40.e7 Nf6 41.Rf1 intending to eliminate the knight and queen the e-pawn looks very convincing.

36.e6! fxe6

Black can't really prevent the knight from h4 joining the attack. Also after 36...Ng5 37.exf7+ Rxf7 (37...Kf8 38.Ng6#) 38.Nxf7 Nxf7 39.Ng6 there is absolutely no hope Black will survive an exchange down as both rooks will enter the seventh rank.

37.Ng6 Rd7 38.fxe6 Rdd8 39.Ne7+ Kf8

39...Kh8 40.Nf7#

40.Nxc6! Rxd6

40...bxc6 41.e7+ and White remains an exchange up.

41.Nxb8 Ke7 42.Rxd6 Kxd6 43.Rd1+!

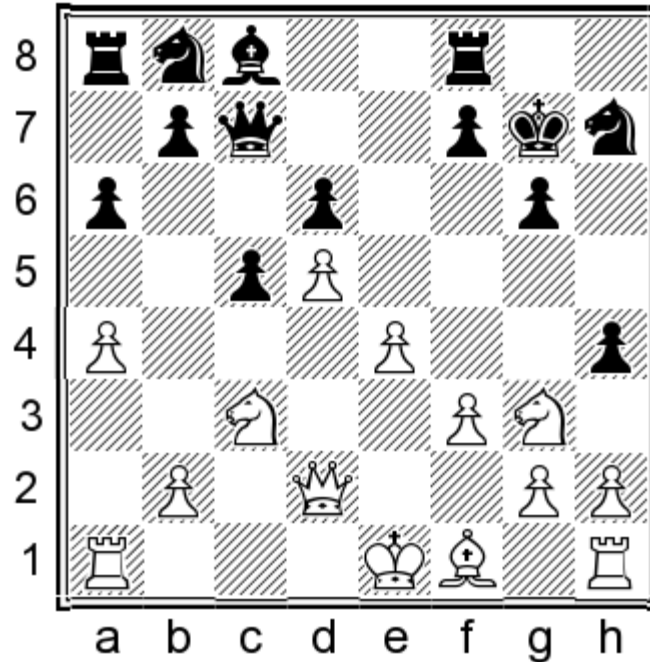
The final touch, as the rook enters on d7 and start picking up the pawns. Inferior is 43.e7? Nf6 and all of a sudden the e-pawn has been blocked and the knight on b8 can't return into play.

43...Kxe6 44.Rd7 1-0

Ignore the threat

Aronian, Levon (2802)
Vachier-Lagrave, Maxime (2804)
Tbilisi 2017

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.f3 c5 4.d5 d6 5.Nc3 e6 6.e4 Bg7 7.Nge2 0-0 8.Ng3 a6 9.a4 h5 10.Bg5 Qc7 11.Qd2 exd5 12.cxd5
Nh7 13.Bh6 h4 14.Bxg7 Kxg7



Position after: 14...Kxg7

With his last move MVL challenges the knight on g3 and many people would automatically return the knight to e2, the only square available. Of course, you should care about your pieces, but being too materialistic doesn't lead to anything. It's always an important technique to ask yourself the question what would happen when it's your opponents turn and how you would react to that move. Aronian applies this technique here and decides to ignore the threat of his opponent.

15.Bc4!?

A very smart practical decision, which was probably prepared by Aronian. 15.Nge2 Qe7 16.Nf4 Nd7 17.Be2 Ne5 with equal chances in Dreev – Gladyszev, France 2007.

15...hxg3

Of course, capturing the piece is the principled way of playing as otherwise ...h5-h4 wouldn't make too much sense.

Sometimes it's better (and at least more practical) to admit your mistake and play a move like 15...Qe7 allowing White retreating the knight under favorable chances, but not giving him the possibility of launching a mating attack.

16.hxg3 Rh8

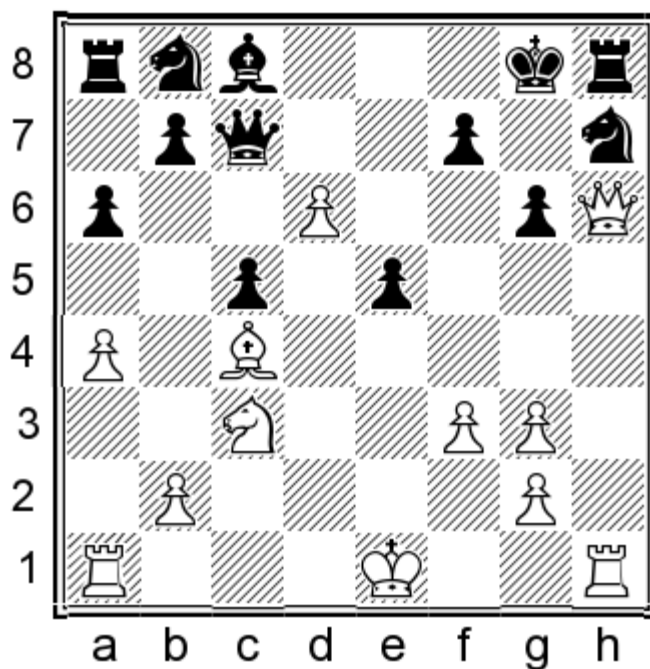
16...Nf6 17.Qh6+ Kg8 18.Qh8#

17.e5!

This central pawn break is very thematic in this type of positions. The idea is to open the files towards the Black king thereby enabling the white pieces to join the attack.

17...Qe7

A good illustration of White's attacking potential is shown in the following variation: 17...dxe5 18.Qh6+ Kg8 (18...Kf6 19.Ne4+ Ke7 20.d6+ wins the queen.) 19.d6!



Position after: 19.d6!

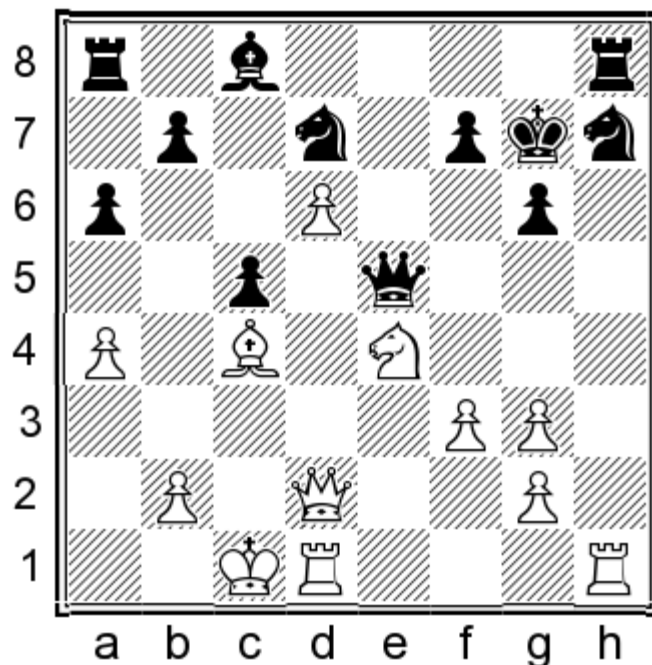
Another beautiful clearance pawn sacrifice: White opens the diagonal for the bishop (threatening Qxg6) and also the d-file for his rook to join the attack. Black is getting mated after 19...Qxd6 20.Rd1 Qe7 21.Qxg6+ Kf8 22.Rd8+ Qxd8 23.Qxf7#

18.0-0-0 Nd7

A) 18...Qxe5? 19.Rde1! and White threatens to give check on h6 and mate on e8, while 19...Qg5 fails to 20.Rxh7+

B) Perhaps it would have made more sense trying to develop counterplay immediately by means of 18...b5!?

19.exd6 Qxd6 20.Ne4 Qe5 21.d6



Position after: 21.d6

21...g5?

Black has enough of dealing with the idea Qh6 and decides to take away that possibility from White, but we will soon see that the queen finds another way of reaching the kingside.

Therefore it would have been better to play 21...Ndf8! intending to get the bishop developed. The following line more or less leads to a draw by force: 22.d7 Bxd7 23.Qh6+ Kg8 24.Rxd7 Nxd7 25.Qxg6+ Qg7 26.Bxf7+ Kf8 27.Qd6+ Kxf7 28.Qxd7+ and since White is a rook down, he has to settle for draw

22.Rhe1!

Very well timed, as the rook didn't have much to do on the h-file any more and is now ready to challenge the queen and Black's position on e7.

22...b5

Also after 22...Qf5 23.Nf2! intending Re7, Ng4 etc. White's attack is crushing.

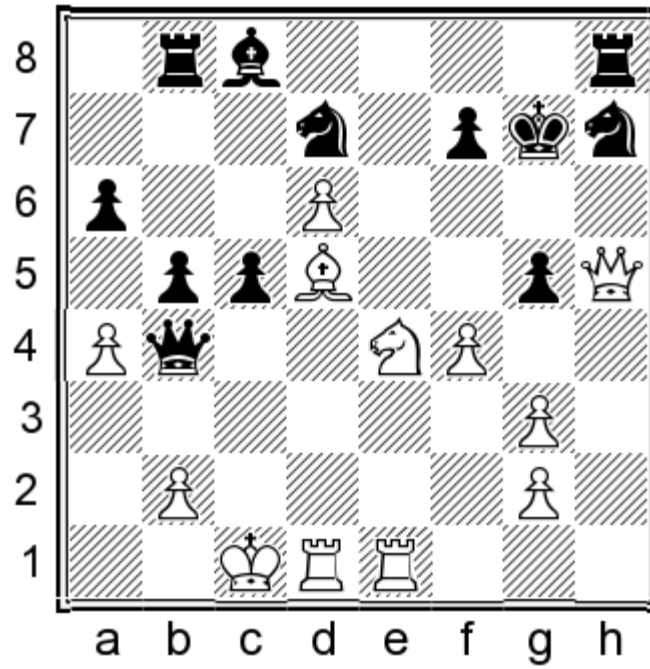
23.Bd5 Rb8 24.f4 Qd4?

After this move it's over right away. Black should have kept his queen close to the king with 24...Qf5 but also after 25.Qc3+ Ndf6 26.d7! b4 (26...Bxd7 27.Nd6! Qg4 28.Re7 and next take on f7.) 27.dxc8=Q Rbxc8 28.Qc4

thanks to the superior placement of his pieces White's advantage is beyond doubt.

25.Qe2! Qb4 26.Qh5 1-0

And Black resigned, in view of 26.Qh5



Position after: 26.Qh5

26...Rf8 27.Rh1! and mate is inevitable.

Lack of harmony

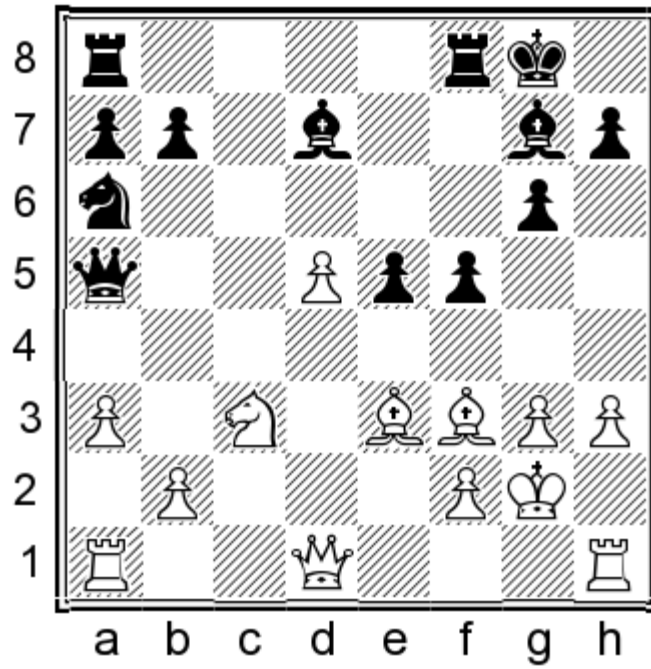
In the following three examples you will see that developing the initiative is often the result of lack of harmony between your opponents pieces or simply being misplaced on the wrong side of the board. This factor in combination with the presence of a passed pawn makes it very difficult for my opponent to deal with the upcoming attack in the following game.

Ris, Robert (2427)

Ftacnik, Lubomir (2557)

Germany 2014

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 Bg7 4.Bg2 d5 5.cxd5 Nxd5 6.e4 Nb4 7.d5 c6 8.a3 Qa5 9.Nc3 cxd5 10.Bf4 N4c6 11.exd5 Nd4 12.h3 0-0 13.Nf3 Nxf3+ 14.Bxf3 Na6 15.Kf1 e5 16.Be3 f5 17.Kg2 Bd7



Position after: 17...Bd7

On the surface this looks like a normal Grünfeld type of position where the d-pawn will either become an asset or a weakness.

During the game I felt quite confident, as I didn't like the coordination between the Black pieces.

18.h4!

I think this is an excellent move, which poses Black with a big dilemma.

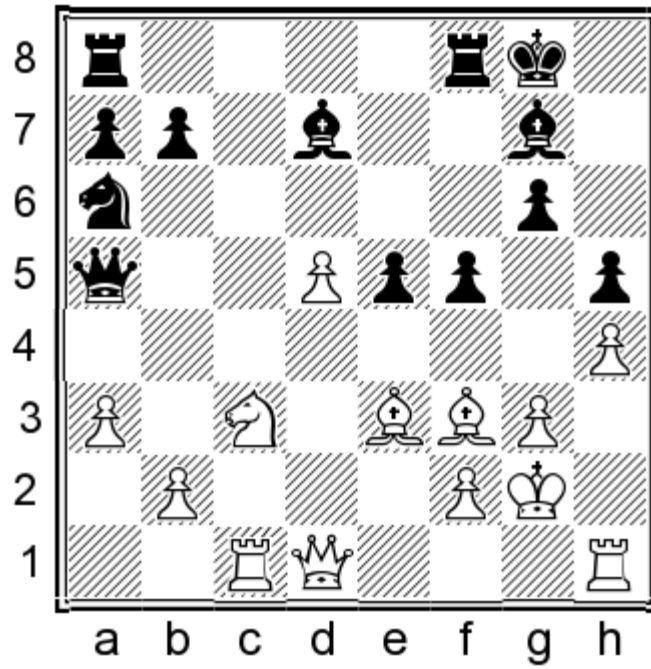
I also considered the immediate 18.d6!? but I thought the inclusion of h4 would be in White's favour which is confirmed later (move 26) in the game.

18...h5

A) A very understandable decision, as allowing White to open the h-file by h4-h5 isn't very attractive either. But soon we will see that this move further weakens Black's kingside. It looks logical to activate the bishop on g7 with 18...e4 but then the problem is that Black has given away some dark squares and there is no longer the possibility to break through on the kingside.

B) 18...f4 19.gxf4 exf4 20.Bd4 and after trading off the dark-squared bishops, White will place his queen on d4 and centralise his rooks when the d-pawn increases in strength, while Black isn't able to take advantage from White's weakened kingside.

19.Rc1



Position after: 19.Rc1

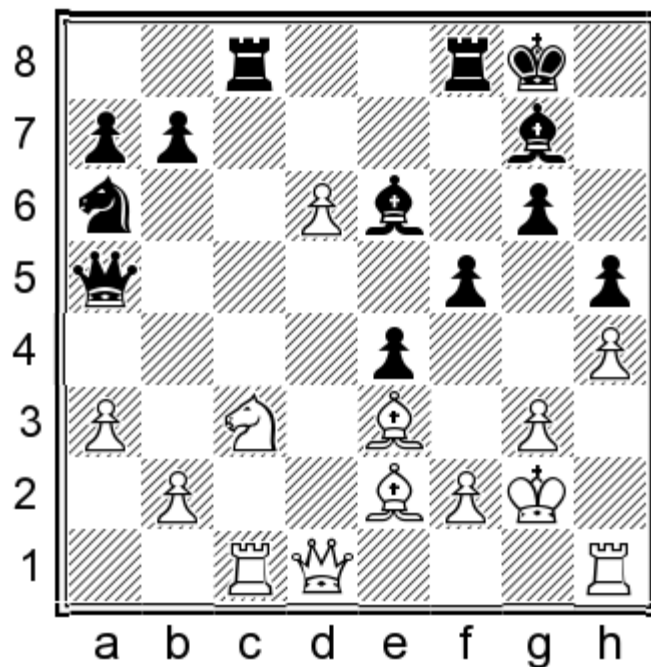
Of course, White can also start with 19.d6 but I thought it would make sense to let my rook join the game first.

19...Rac8 20.d6

Before pushing a passed pawn you should always think twice whether it's not getting separated from the other pieces.

In this particular case it's working the opposite as White opens the h1-a8 diagonal for his bishop, but more importantly it vacates the d5 square for any of his pieces.

20...e4 21.Be2 Be6



Position after: 21...Be6

This is perhaps the critical moment of the game.

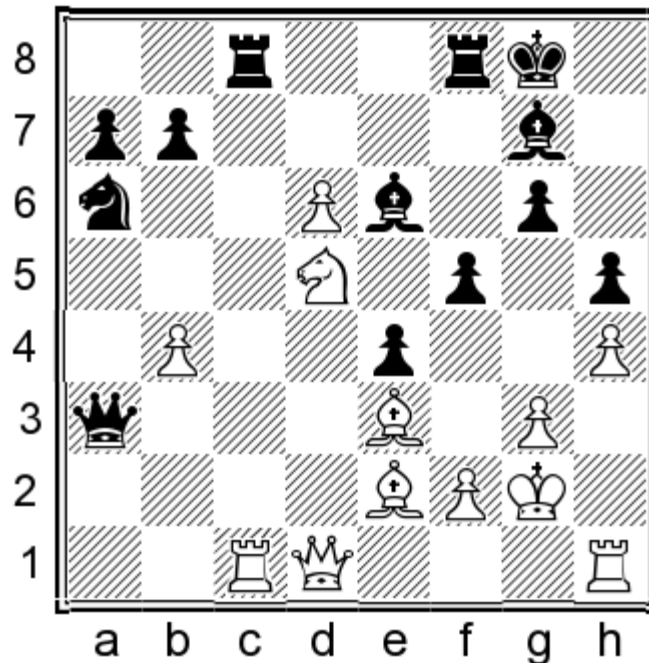
Black's bishops have been activated and are taking away some very important squares from the white pieces.

Besides that, if white doesn't act immediately Black intends to play ...Rfd8 and will try to eliminate the passed pawn. Therefore, White needs to do everything within his possibilities to support the main asset, as otherwise his initiative evaporates.

22.b4! Qxa3

Black might have considered retaining control over the d5 square with 22...Qe5 but then 23.Bf4 Qd4 24.Nb5 also gives White an overwhelming advantage.

23.Nd5



Position after: 23.Nd5

23...Rxc1

A) Other lines are no better: 23...Bxd5 24.Qxd5+ Kh7 25.Rxc8 Rxc8 26.Qxb7 and White wins.

B) 23...Rcd8 also runs into 24.Bxh5! gxh5 25.Ne7+ Kf7 26.Qxh5+ Kf6 27.Bd4#

24.Bxc1 Qa2 25.Ne7+ Kh7

25...Kf7 26.Bxh5! and Black can't protect the pawn on g6, while 26...gxh5 27.Qxh5+ Kf6 28.Bf4 leads to mate.

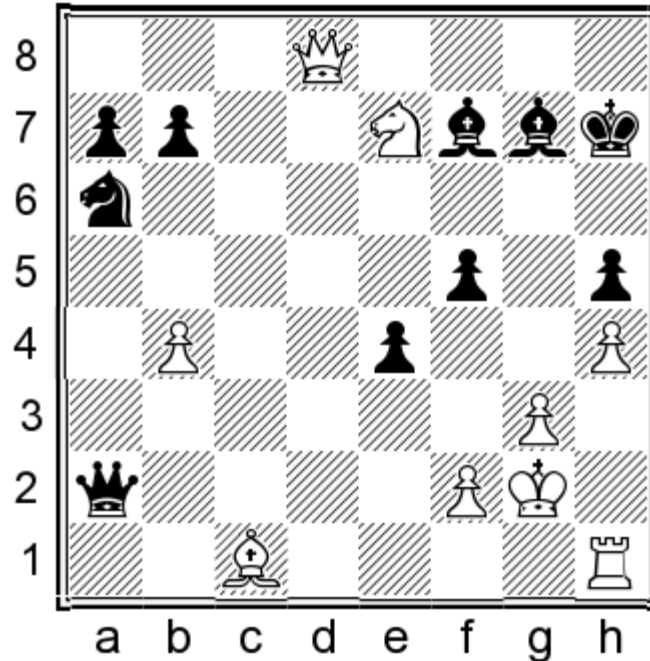
26.Bxh5! Bf7

26...gxh5 27.Qxh5+ Bh6 28.Qxh6#

27.d7?!

I assumed that after transforming my positional advantage into a material one, it would be rather simple to convert. However it's often better to maintain the material balance and continue exerting pressure. Strong would have been here 27.Be2! and then White has both a passed pawn and a strong attack (h4-h5!).

27...gxh5 28.d8=Q Rxd8 29.Qxd8



Position after: 29.Qxd8

29...Qe6?

While we were approaching the time control, I realized in order to convert my advantage I needed to play with all my pieces.

The rook has done its job on h1, so it's about time to bring it back into action before Black jumps with his knight to d3. Black naturally returns the queen into play, protecting f5 but comes one move short to consolidate.

A more practical decision would have been 29...Nxb4 and although after 30.Nxf5 White retains the better prospects, but things aren't that clear as White's king is vulnerable, while the black bishops are defending the king. (30.Qd7? is met by 30...Qe6!)

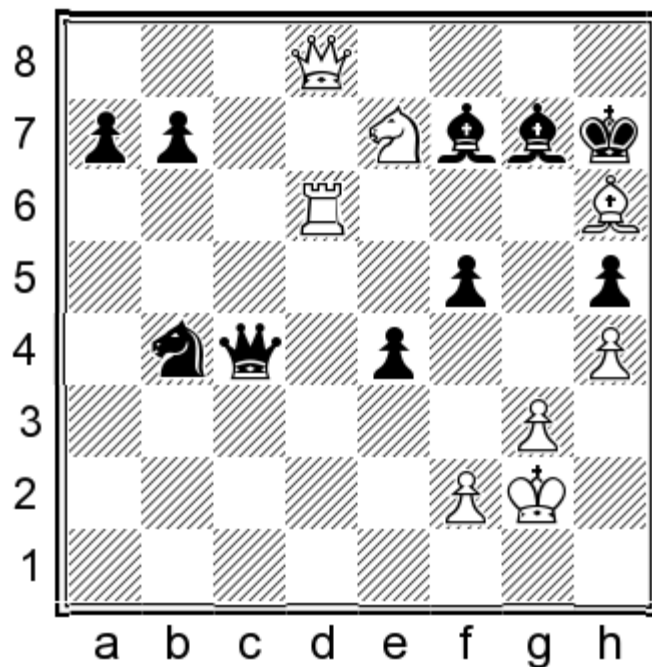
30.Rd1! Nxb4 31.Rd6 Qc4

Perhaps it would have been more stubborn to keep the queen in the centre with 31...Qe5 when I was intending to proceed with 32.Qd7 and Black's position falls apart when the pawn on f5 drops.

32.Qd7!

I was very pleased to find this resource in time trouble. It's really important to keep the pressure on your opponent and don't give him any hopes on salvation in an inferior endgame.

I also considered 32.Bh6?



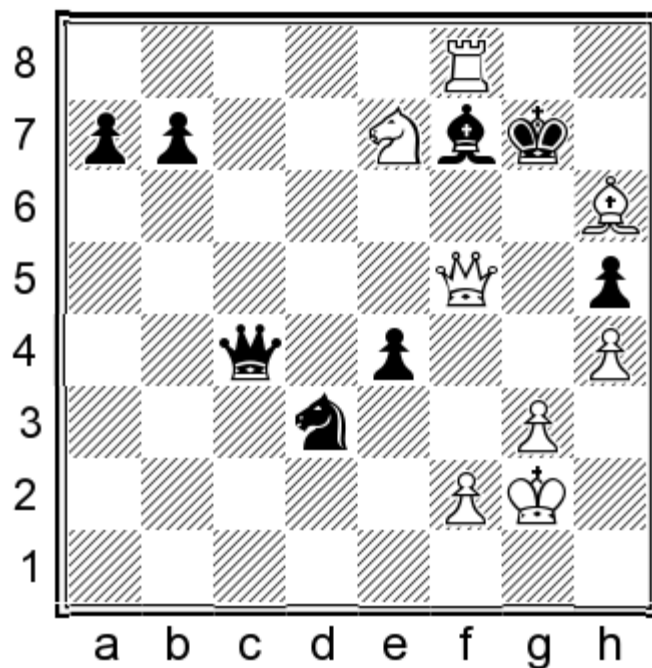
Position after: 32.Bh6?

but this move doesn't have an immediate threat and it enables Black to counter this with 32...Nc2! 33.Bxg7 Ne1+ with a perpetual!

After the continuation of the game White is able to take on f5 with check and it's all over soon.

32...Nd3 33.Qxf5+ Kh8 34.Rd8+ Bf8 35.Rxf8+ Kg7 36.Bh6+ 1-0

Black resigned in view of 36.Bh6+



Position after: 36.Bh6+

36...Kxh6 37.Qf6+ Kh7 38.Rh8#

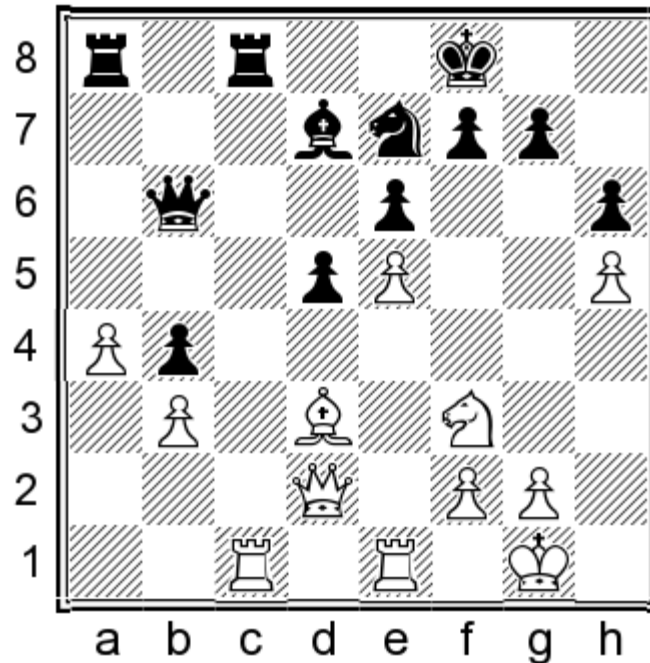
1-0

Carlsen, Magnus (2827)

Xiong, Jeffery (2633)

Douglas 2017

1.Nf3 c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.d4 e6 4.Bg5 d5 5.e3 h6 6.Bh4 Nc6 7.Nbd2 a6 8.Bd3 Be7 9.0-0 Nd7 10.Bxe7 Nxe7 11.Ne5 cxd4
12.exd4 Nxe5 13.dxe5 Bd7 14.Re1 Rc8 15.Nf3 b5 16.h4 a5 17.a3 Qb6 18.Qd2 b4 19.cxb4 axb4 20.a4 Ra8 21.b3 0-0
22.Rac1 Rfc8 23.h5 Kf8



Position after: 23...Kf8

24.g4!?

I quite like the practical decision by Carlsen to start an initiative on the kingside as all of Black's pieces are on the other side of the board.

However, objectively speaking it's not the best in the position, as with 24.Bb5! White could have annexed the vulnerable b-pawn. Black is in trouble after 24...Bxb5 25.Qxb4 Rxc1 26.Rxc1 Rb8 (26...Qa5 27.Qxb5 Qxb5 28.axb5±) 27.axb5 because 27...Qxb5? fails to 28.Rc8+! Rxc8 29.Qxb5

24...Rc3! 25.g5

The point of Black's last move is that after 25.Rxc3 bxc3 26.Qxc3 Rc8 he regains the pawn.

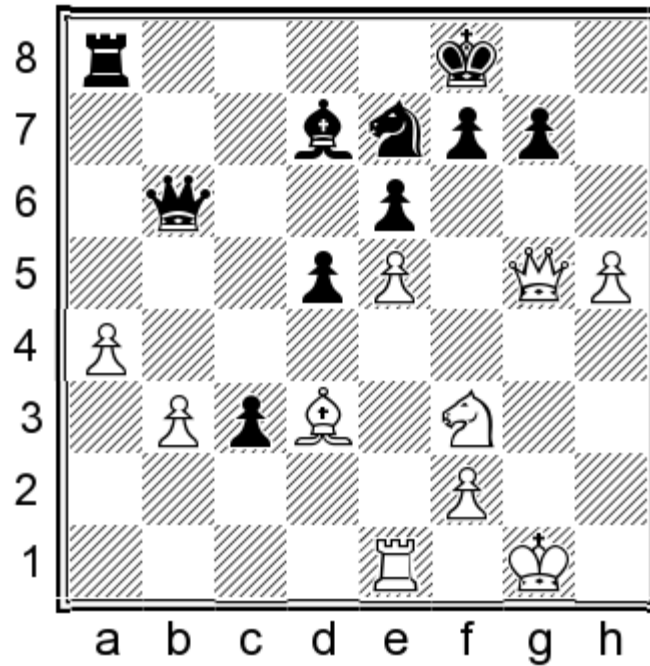
25...hxg5

25...Ng8? 26.g6! followed by 27.Qf4 looks incredibly dangerous for Black.

26.Rxc3

26.Nxg5? Qd4 and Black is taking over.

26...bxc3 27.Qxg5



Position after: 27.Qxg5

27...Nf5

A) The only move to hold the position together. 27...Qxb3? just loses to 28.h6! gxh6 29.Qxh6+ Kg8 30.Bh7+ and mate follows.

B) 27...Ng8 looks like an interesting alternative to control the h6 square, but it's too passive and will be met by 28.Kh1! when White seizes the initiative along the g-file. 28...Qxf2 29.Rf1 Qc5 30.Rg1 Bc6 31.h6! and the knight will be lost.

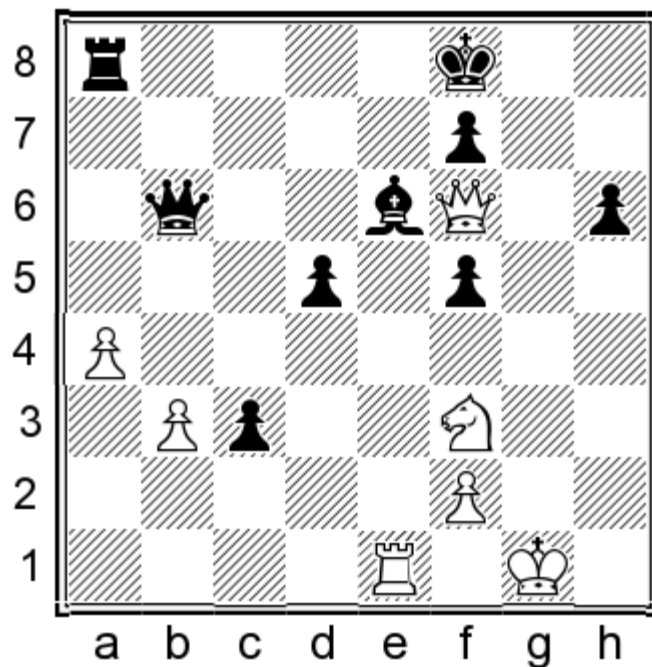
28.Bxf5! exf5 29.e6! Bxe6

29...fxe6 30.h6 gxh6 31.Qf6+ Kg8 (31...Ke8 32.Qh8+ wins the rook.) 32.Ne5 Be8 33.Kh1 and White's attack is overwhelming.

30.h6 gxh6

30...g6 31.Qf6 and the h-pawn decides.

31.Qf6!



Position after: 31.Qf6!

More challenging than 31.Qxh6+ Ke7 when the king escapes.

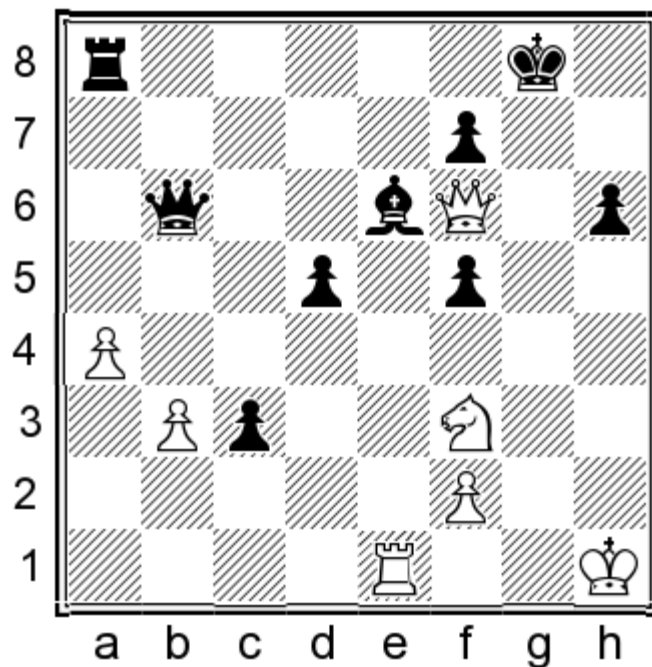
31...Kg8?

Even a very talented player like Xiong immediately cracks under pressure.

In any case, Black should have tried to slow down White's initiative by offering to trade of the queens with 31...Qd8! and now White's best option is just to take the pawn with 32.Qxc3 when his position is obviously preferable, but not winning. (32.Rxe6 Qxf6 33.Rxf6 Rc8 34.Nd4 c2 35.Nxc2 Rxc2 looks drawish.)

32.Qxh6

Also good is 32.Kh1!



Position after: 32.Kh1!

A) 32...Qxf2 33.Rg1+ Kf8 34.Ne5! and White has many threats, (But not 34.Nd4? with 34...Re8 leads nowhere.)

B) 32...Kh7 33.Ng5+! hxg5 34.Kg2 Qb4 35.Rh1+ Qh4 36.Rxh4+ gxh4 37.Qxh4+ Kg6 38.Qg3+ Kh7 39.Qxc3 and White is winning.

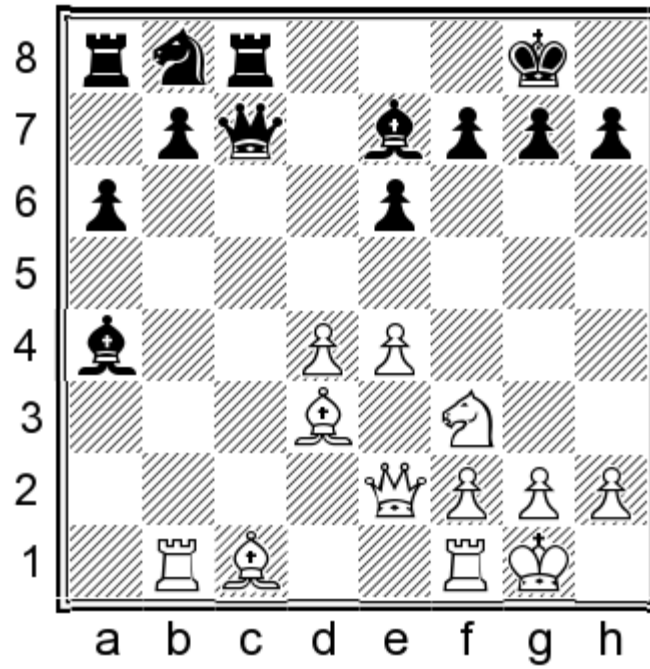
32...Qb4 33.Kh1 1-0

Matlakov, Maxim (2728)

Aronian, Levon (2799)

Tbilisi 2017

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 Nxc3 6.bxc3 c5 7.Rb1 Be7 8.Nf3 0-0 9.Bc4 Qc7 10.Qe2 a6 11.a4 cxd4 12.cxd4 Bd7 13.0-0 Rc8 14.Bd3 Bxa4



Position after: 14...Bxa4

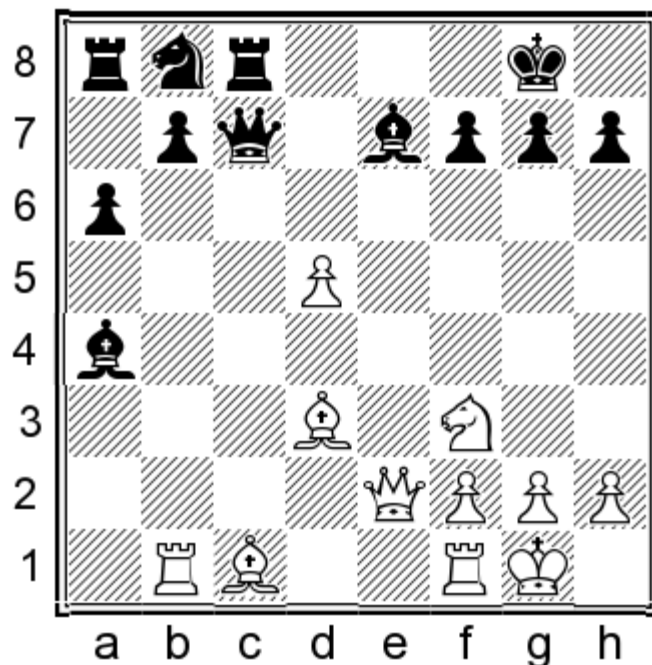
This asymmetrical pawn structure (central majority vs. queenside majority) has often been seen in popular openings like the Grunfeld and Semi-Tarrasch and offers both sides excellent chances to play for an advantage. With his last move Black has captured a pawn, which he may soon start to regret as he remains behind in development and White starts developing the initiative against the king.

15.d5!

White's strategy is based on this central break as he needs to open files in the centre in order to let his pieces join the attack. Although White's pieces aren't looking very threatening yet, keep in mind that major pieces and bishops are working from a long distance and will approach your king faster than you may think!

15...Nd7

A) A good response, since after 15...exd5 16.exd5



Position after: 16.exd5

both the e-file as well as the b1-h7 diagonal have been opened, which accelerates the process of building up the attack.

A1) 16...Bf6? loses to 17.Qe4.

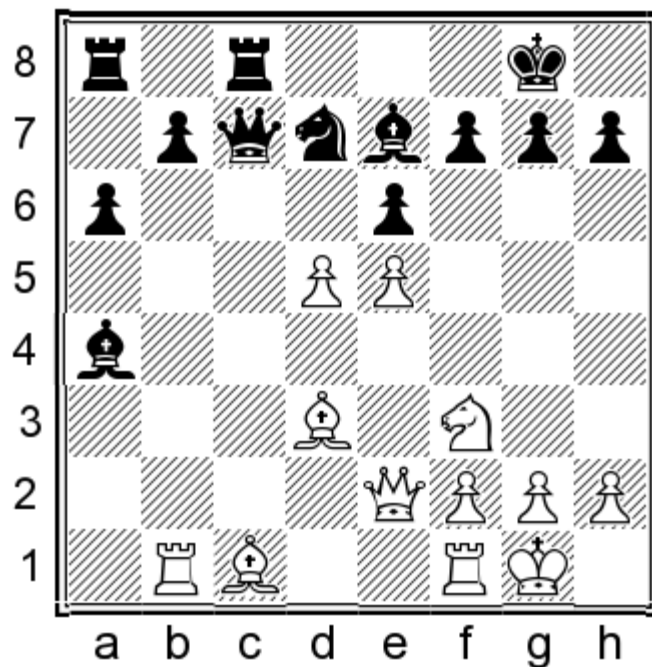
A2) 16...Bc2? runs into 17.Bxc2 Qxc2 18.Qxc2 Rxc2 19.Re1 Kf8 (19...Rc7 20.d6! Bxd6 21.Re8+ Bf8 22.Ba3+→) 20.Rxb7 and despite the queens are swapped, Black is in huge trouble as he is unable to get his queenside pieces into play.

A3) 16...Bb5 17.Re1 Bxd3 18.Qxd3 h6 (18...Bf6 19.d6 Qd7 20.Bg5! and White's position is easy to play.) 19.Bb2 and Black's position looks very suspicious. The extra pawn on the queenside doesn't play a role at all, while there are no pieces on the kingside to protect the king. White is likely to follow up with Nd4-f5.

B) Note that after 15...Bc2 16.Qxc2 Qxc2 17.Bxc2 Rxc2 18.Rxb7 White regains the pawn with interest: his pieces are simply more active.

C) Another option is 15...e5, but it's understandable that Aronian doesn't want to give his opponent a protected passed pawn for free. However, after 16.Be3 Nd7 17.Rfc1 Nc5! Black seems to be doing reasonably fine here

16.e5



Position after: 16.e5

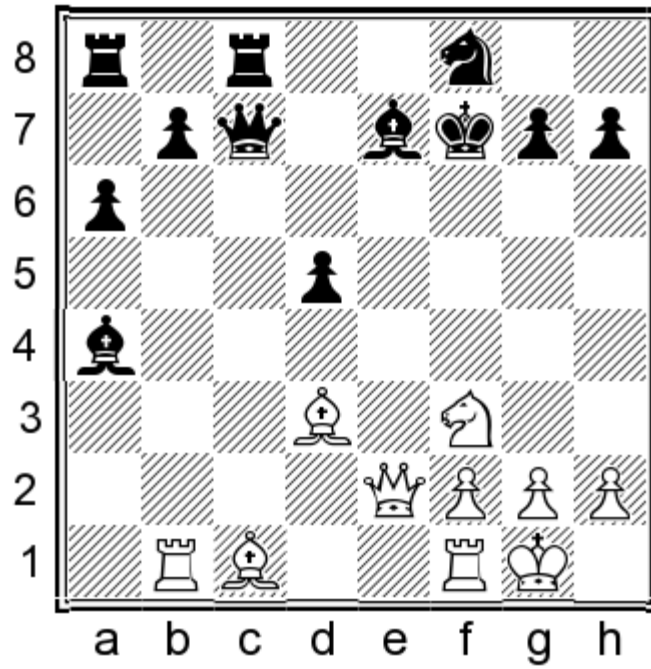
16...exd5?

After this move Black's position is falling apart. Instead he should have gone for 16...Nc5! 17.d6 Qd7 which looks still very unpleasant as it gives White a protected passed pawn, but on the other hand there is no immediate way to strike. 18.Bxh7+ Kxh7 19.dxe7 Qd3! and Black stays in the game. After the game continuation, Black's kingside will be opened.

17.e6! Nf8

With the intention of both guarding the e6 and h7 square. A move like 17...fxe6 hardly needs to be calculated, as normally you would sacrifice a piece in order to get such a promising attack: 18.Qxe6+ Kf8 19.Qf5+ Nf6 20.Ng5 Bd7 21.Nxh7+.

18.exf7+ Kxf7



Position after: 18...Kxf7

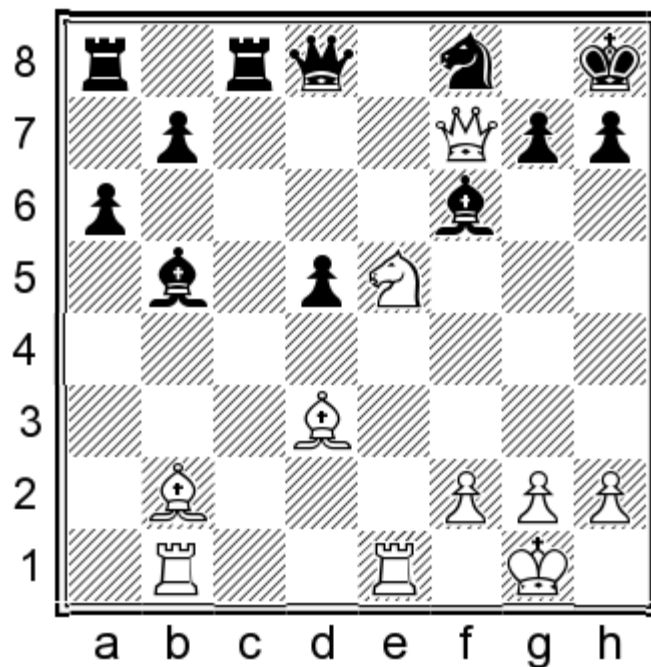
19.Nd4?

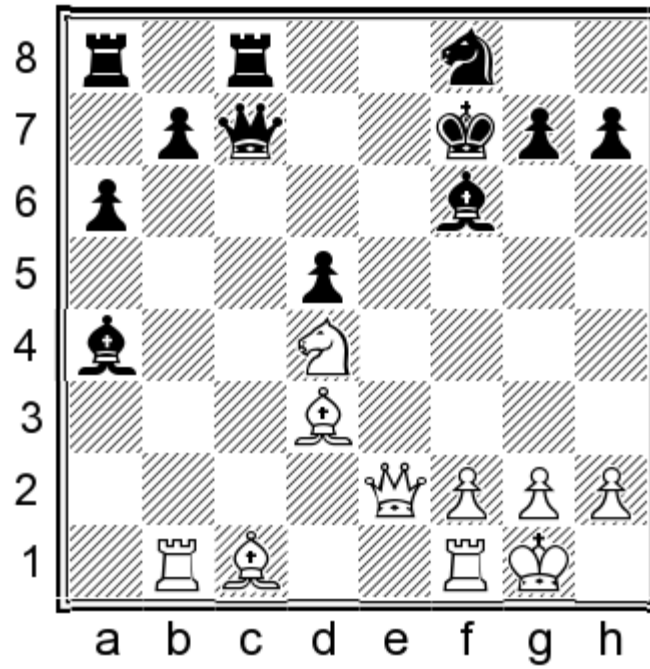
This logical move offers Black to run away with his king.

More precise is 19.Re1! which is also more logical than the game's continuation. The rook needs to be activated via e1, while the knight on f3 could also join the attack via e5 or g5.

The following lines show how White's attack benefits from this subtle difference:

A) 19...Bb5 20.Ne5+ Kg8 21.Qf3 Qd8 (21...Bxd3 22.Qxd5+ leads to smothered mate.) 22.Qf7+ Kh8 23.Bb2 Bf6





Position after: 19...Bf6?

Aronian should have played 19...Kg8! which would't have been possible with the rook on e1, as the bishop on e7 could be taken.

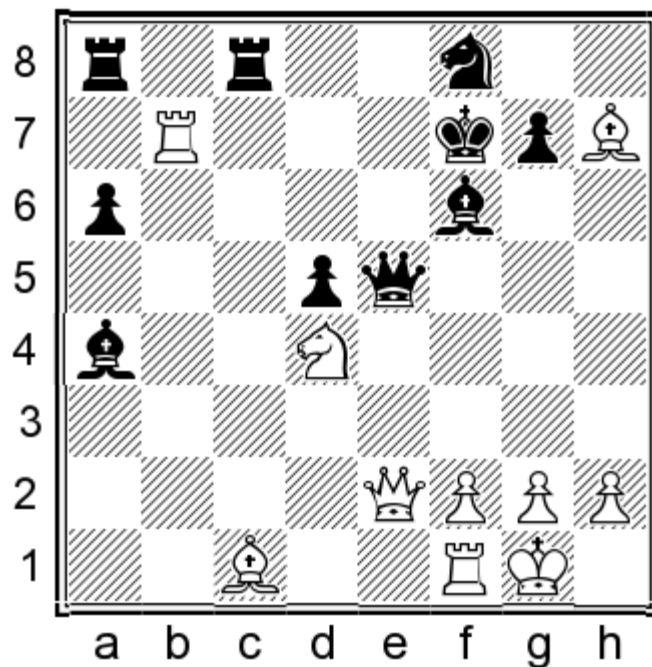
20.Bxh7!

A beautiful idea. White captures an important pawn, weakening Black's kingside and also preventing the king to hide.

20...Qe5

In case of 20...Nxh7 the white queen is able to penetrate into Black's position: 21.Qe6+ Kf8 (21...Kg6 22.Qf5+ Kf7 23.Qxd5+ Kg6 24.Ne6 followed by 25.Nf4.) 22.Ba3+ Be7 23.Qxd5 (threatening 24.Ne6) (23.Rbc1 Bxa3 24.Rxc7 Rxc7 25.Qh3 looks also strong.) 23...Bd7 24.Bxe7+ Kxe7 25.Rxb7 Nf6 26.Re1+ Kf8 27.Rxc7 Nxd5 28.Rxd7 and White has excellent winning chances in this endgame.

21.Rxb7+



Position after: 21.Rxb7+

21...Bd7

A) 21...Nd7 22.Qg4! intending to take on d7, while White's pieces are flying in after 22...Rd8 23.Qg6+ Kf8 24.Ba3+ Be7 25.Ne6+ and White wins.

B) 21...Ke8 22.Qd2! Intending 23.Re1 and when the king escapes to d8 there is a check on a5.

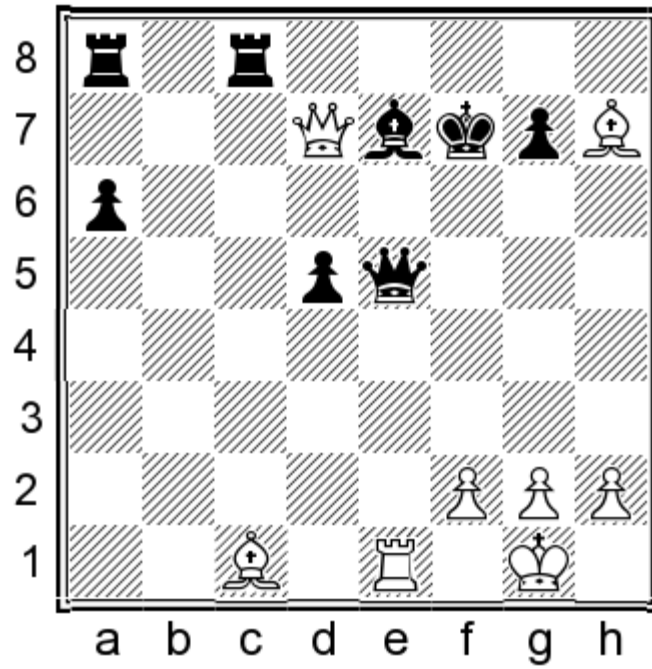
22.Qg4 Qxd4

22...Nxb7 23.Rxd7+ Kg8 24.Nf5 gives White a free attack.

23.Rxd7+! Nxd7 24.Qxd7+ Be7

24...Kf8 25.Ba3+ Rc5 26.Re1 Rd8 27.Bg6! is a beautiful form of domination.

25.Re1 Qe5



Position after: 25...Qe5

A last trick which White must have seen in advance.

With his next move he carefully solves the back rank problems and renews the threat of taking the queen.

25...Re8 26.Qe6+ Kf8 27.Qg8#

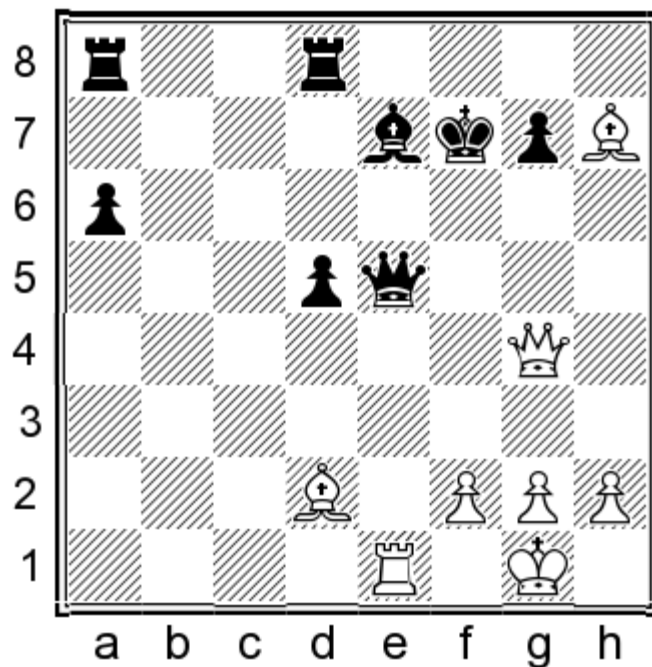
26.Bd2! Rd8

26...Rc7 27.Bg6+ Kxg6 (27...Kf6 28.Qh3 Qxe1+ 29.Bxe1 Kxg6 30.Qg3+--)

28.Qg4+ Kf6 29.Rxe5 Kxe5 30.Bf4+--

27.Qg4

And Black had seen enough as White's attack is overwhelming: 27.Qg4



Position after: 27.Qg4

27...Qf6 28.Bg5! Qxg5 29.Qe6+ Ke8 (29...Kf8 30.Qg8#) 30.Bg6+ Kf8 31.Qf7#

1-0

Open h-file

A classical chess education includes the basic rule for opening play: place your pawns in the centre, develop your minor pieces and bring your king into safety.

In modern chess you will see quite regularly those basic rules being ignored, even by world's leading players. A fascinating trend in modern opening play is the use of the h-pawn. By pushing the h-pawn, one side intends to bring his rook into the attack as quickly as possible and basically gives up his plan of castling on that side.

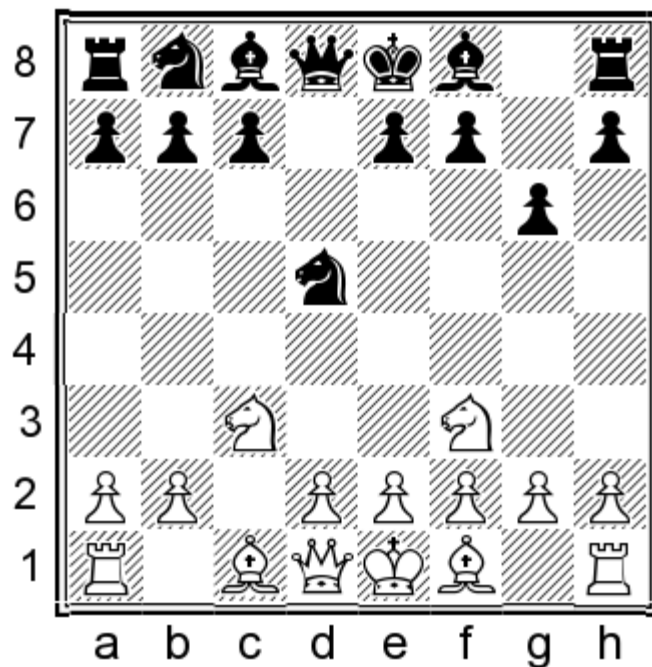
Please, fasten your seatbelts and see how Aronian crushes another elite player in just 27 moves!

Aronian, Levon (2801)

Giri, Anish (2762)

Palma de Mallorca 2017

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5



Position after: 4...Nxd5

5.d3

In the Anti – Grünfeld White players often decide to launch their h-pawn. Compared to the main lines of the Grünfeld (with pawns on d4 and e4) this strategy is more justifiable as Black isn't able develop counterplay in the centre against White's pawns. Right here, 5.h4 has also been seen in practice.

5...Bg7 6.Bd2 0-0 7.g3 c5 8.h4

A new move, whereas in earlier games White opted for the standard developing move 8.Bg2.

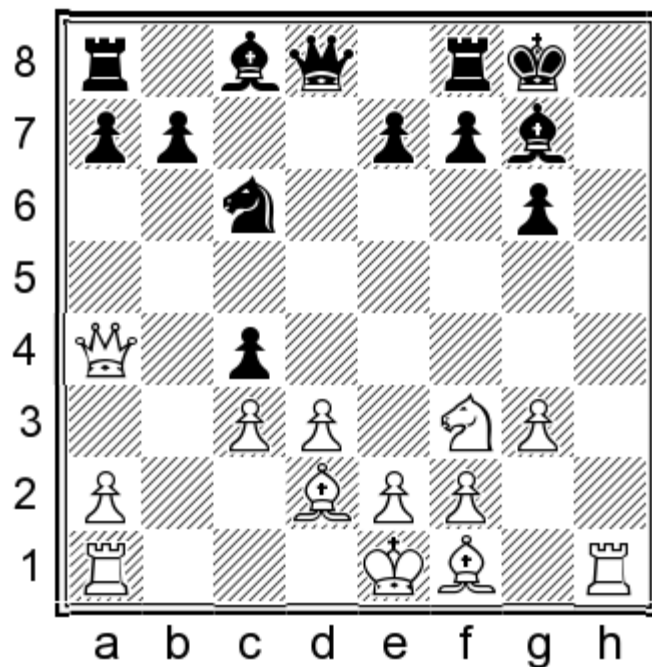
8...Nc6

Perhaps Black should have stopped the advance of the h-pawn with 8...h5!? and then, indeed, there wouldn't be such a devastating attack as in the game. On the other hand White could claim the g5 square as a nice outpost for his knight in some lines, illustrating that the h-pawn also has its positional merits.

9.h5 Nxc3 10.bxc3 c4 11.hxg6

11.d4?! e5! with excellent play for Black.

11...hxg6 12.Qa4

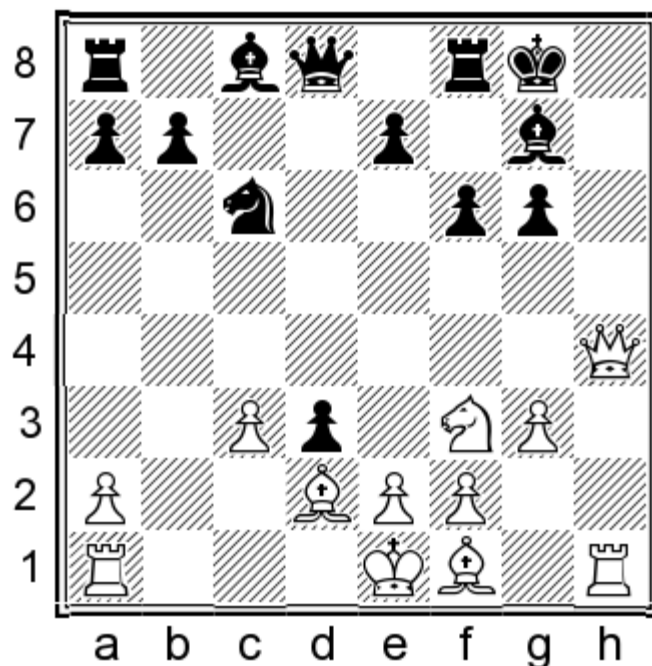


Position after: 12.Qa4

12...Na5?

A) In the (Anti-)Grünfeld the knight often ends up on this square, but in this particular case Giri's decision seems wrong as the knight will not be participating for the rest of the game. A logical alternative is 12...Qd5 not minding that White could win a pawn by taking on c4. A more critical test of Black's move is 13.e4!? and White has good chances to fight for an advantage.

B) It's interesting to see the engine mentioning 12...cxd3!? a move a human would never consider! Allowing the queen swinging over to the h-file with 13.Qh4 is precisely what White has been trying to achieve. However, apparently matters aren't that clear after Black's only saving move 13...f6!



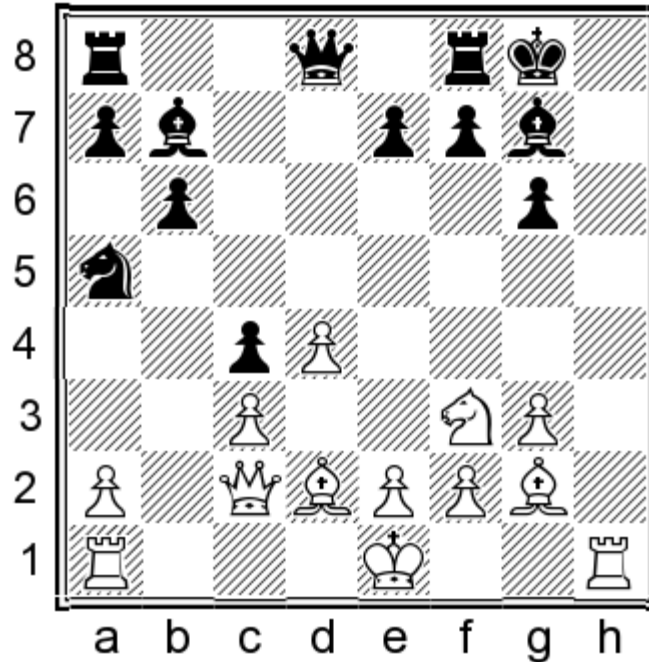
Position after: 13...f6!

14.Bh6 (The variation 14.Qh7+? Kf7 15.Rh6 Bf5! explains why 13...f5? is losing, as Black wouldn't have that last resource.) 14...Qa5 15.Qc4+ Rf7 16.Bxg7

B1) 16...Be6!? 17.Bxf6 (17.Qxe6? Qxc3+) 17...exf6 18.Qxd3 Bf5 19.Qc4 Be6= is another curious line.

B2) 16...Kxg7 17.Rh7+ Kxh7 18.Qxf7+ Kh6 19.Qf8+ Kh7 20.Qf7+ and a repetition of moves is inevitable. Now the knight will be placed on the edge of the board it makes sense for White to close the centre.

13.d4! b6 14.Bg2 Bb7 15.Qc2!



Position after: 15.Qc2!

Another excellent move. The white queen is no longer able to reach the kingside via the fourth rank and now returns to fight for controlling the centre.

15...Qd5 16.Nh4 Qd7 17.e4 e5 18.d5 Bc8

In such blocked positions with white pawns on e4 and d5 a Grünfeld player will normally consider to challenge the pawn chain by means of 18...f5? which isn't possible now, as the pawn on g6 is hanging.

19.f4 Qe7

A) 19...Qg4 fails to 20.Bf3! Qxg3+ 21.Ke2 and the queen has been trapped.

B) Since Black is lacking counterplay, it would make sense to open the position with 19...exf4 20.gxf4 Nb7 21.Be3! but then again, White has a completely dominating position and Black is unable to challenge the central pawns.

20.f5! g5

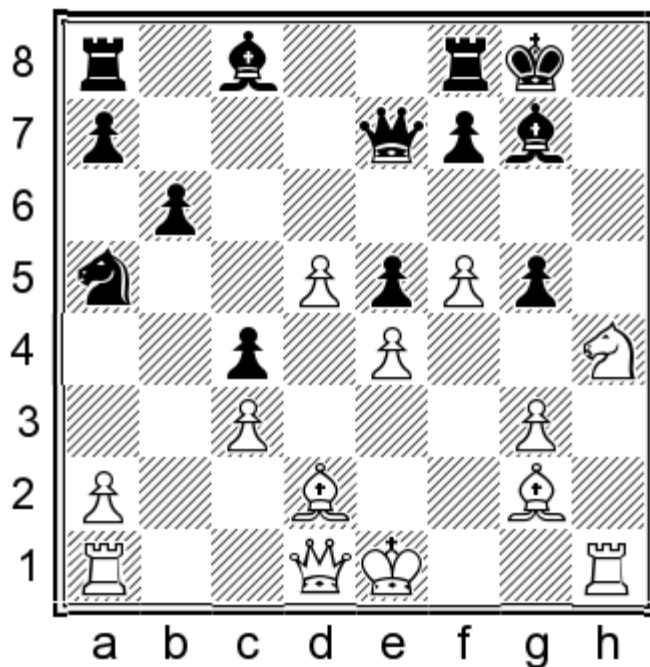
Black isn't recommended to take the pawn with 20...gxf5 since White obtains a firm grip on the light squares and in particular f5: 21.Bh3 fxe4 22.Bxc8 Raxc8 23.Nf5 Kasparov once said a knight on f5 is worth a pawn. In this case

White has a devastating attack, e.g. 23...Qf6 24.Qxe4 Rfe8 25.Bh6 Bh8 26.Qg4+ Qg6 27.Ne7+ Rxe7 28.Qxc8+ and White wins.

Instead of making a pawn move on the kingside, Black might consider playing something else but either way, White retains an overwhelming advantage.

21.Qd1!!

Brilliant! After a short journey to the queenside, the queen is back on d1 intending to join the attack on the other wing.



Position after: 21.Qd1!!

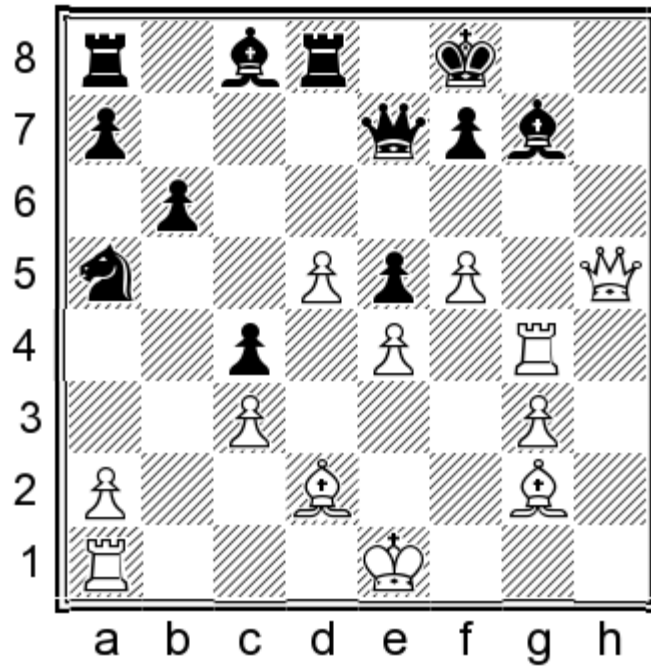
21...gxh4 22.Rxh4 Rd8

With the intention of evacuating the king. After 22...f6 23.Qh5 Rf7 24.Qh7+ Kf8 25.Bf3! it actually doesn't feel like White is a piece down because he threatens to crush Black's position with moves like Bh5 and Bh6.

23.Qh5 Kf8

Another nice line illustrating the uselessness of Black's pieces on the queenside since they are unable to help in time: 23...f6 24.Qh7+ Kf8 25.Rg4 Qf7 26.Rxg7 Qxg7 27.Bh6 Rd7 28.Qh8+ and White wins.

24.Rg4

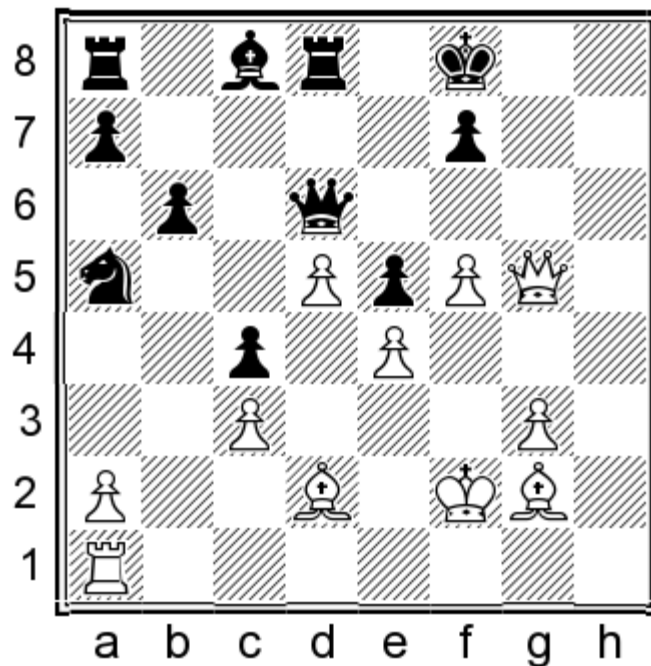


Position after: 24.Rg4

24...Bf6?

Allowing White to finish the game off in style. A tougher defensive try would be 24...Qd6! 25.Rxg7! Kxg7 26.Qg5+ Kf8 27.Kf2!

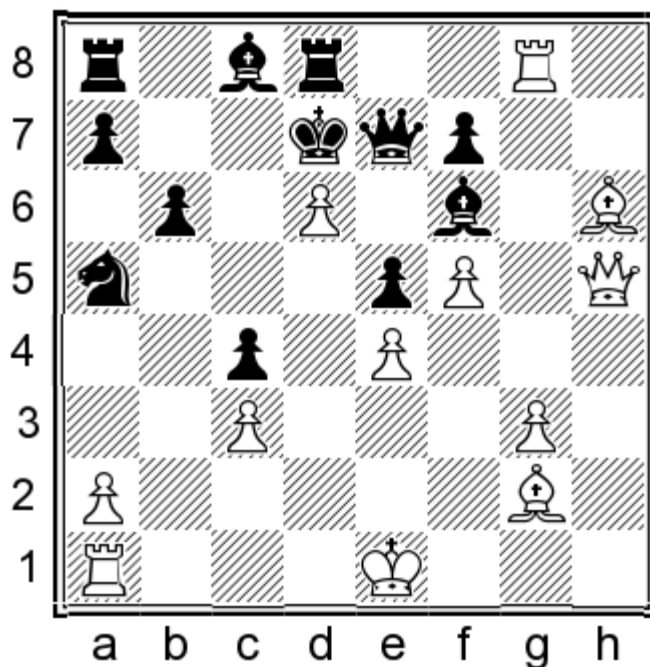
White has only one pawn for the rook, but Black is in huge trouble. White simply threatens to bring another rook into the attack.



Position after: 27.Kf2!

The following lines also illustrates that White doesn't even need to fear the exchange of the queens. 27...Ke8 (27...Qc5+ is met by 28.Be3) 28.Qg7 Kd7 (28...Qf8 29.Qxe5+ Qe7 30.Qg7 Qf8 31.Qxf8+! Kxf8 32.Bg5 and White's initiative is still very unpleasant. He could at anytime regain some part of the investment, but the threats against the black king remain.) 29.Qxf7+ Qe7 30.Qxe7+! Kxe7 31.Bg5+ Kd7 32.Bxd8 Kxd8 33.Rh1 and since Black isn't coordinated at all (look at the rook on a8 and the knight on a5!), the advance of the g-pawn is likely to be decisive.

25.Bh6+ Ke8 26.Rg8+ Kd7 27.d6!



Position after: 27.d6!

And Giri resigned, in view of 27.d6 Kxd6 (27...Qxd6 28.Rd1 also wins the queen.) 28.Rd1+ Kc7 29.Rgxd8 with a decisive material gain for White. Another great example where Aronian intuitively sacrificed a piece and rightly judged the black pieces on the queenside to be out of play.

1-0

Creative thinking

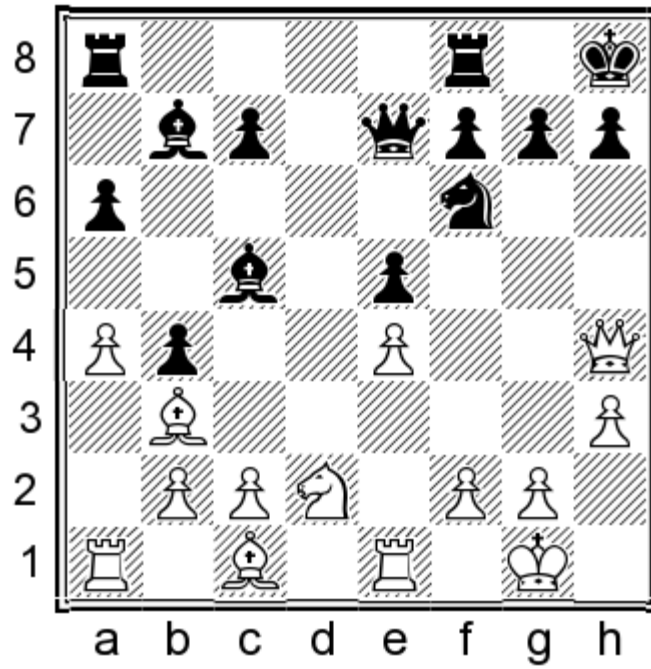
Inarkiev, Ernesto (2683)

Ding, Liren (2774)

Palma de Mallorca 2017

To conclude this chapter I would like to show a very original idea which wouldn't have been seen by many of us. This game should motivate you to look at literally all sorts of moves and ideas. If you don't search, you will not find!

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.a4 b4 9.d4 d6 10.dxe5 Nxe5 11.Nxe5 dxe5 12.Qf3 Bc5 13.h3 Bb7 14.Nd2 Kh8 15.Qg3 Qe7 16.Qh4



Position after: 16.Qh4

At first sight nothing very spectacular seems likely to happen.

The pawn structure is symmetrical with only one open d-file. Black appears to be ahead in development already, since the knight on d2 obstructs the movement of White's pieces on the queenside. Moreover, the black bishops on b7 and c5 are doing very well, exerting pressure on the centre and kingside.

However, those bishops could be neutralized very soon if White gets time to move the knight from d2 and play Be3. Very likely a struggle for the open file is about to take place, although for neither side there doesn't seem to be much to be gained here.

16...g5!!

Absolutely amazing idea by Ding Liren. Who would have expected a move like this?

First of all, Black is challenging the queen and intends bringing both his rooks to the g-file from where they can start building up an attack against the White king.

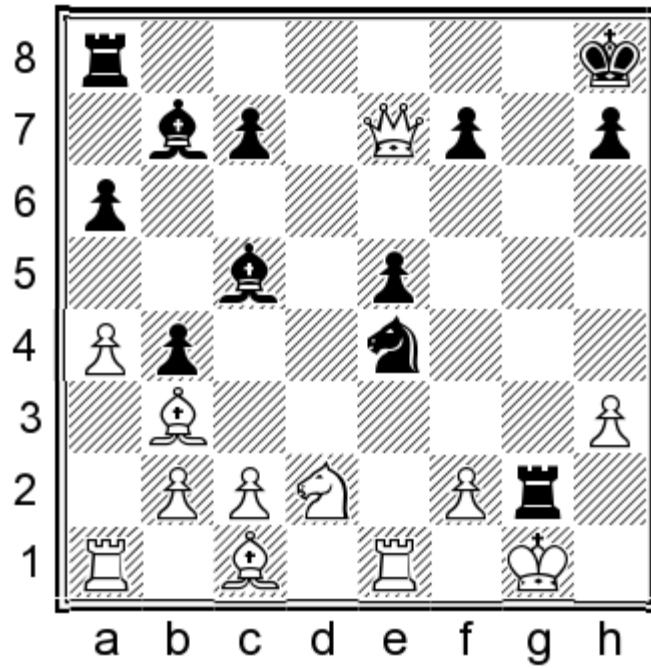
17.Qxg5

A) Ignoring the pawn is hardly any better. For example 17.Qh6? Rg8 followed by 18...Rg6 and the queen is trapped, while after

B) 17.Qg3 Rg8! Black develops a powerful initiative on the kingside as well, but the main problem for White is that the knight can't move in view of 18...Nxe4 and White's position collapses.

17...Rg8 18.Qf5

18.Qh4? is met by 18...Nxe4 19.Qxe7 Rxe2+!

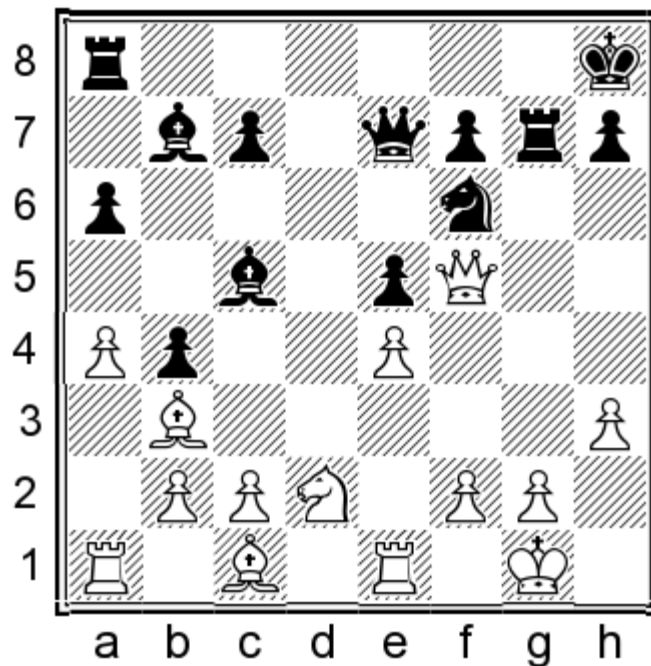


Position after: 19...Rxf2+!

20.Kxg2 Nxd2+ 21.Kh2 Nf3+ 22.Kg3 Bxe7 and White is losing as Black threatens either 23...Rg8 mate or capture the rook on e1.

18...Rg7!

Many people would have placed the rook one square further, which more looks like a multi-purpose move as the rook supports the knight and in some cases could use the f6 and/or h6 square attacking the king.



Position after: 18...Rg7!

The Chinese player has calculated very precisely and came to the conclusion that 18...Rg6 is less convincing, in view of 19.Nf3 Rag8 20.g4 Nxg4 21.hxg4 and now 21...Bc8? doesn't work, because (21...Rf6!? still favors Black, but this doesn't offer a big advantage like in the game.) 22.Qxe5+ comes with check. Now it has become clear why the rook is better placed on g7 than on g6!

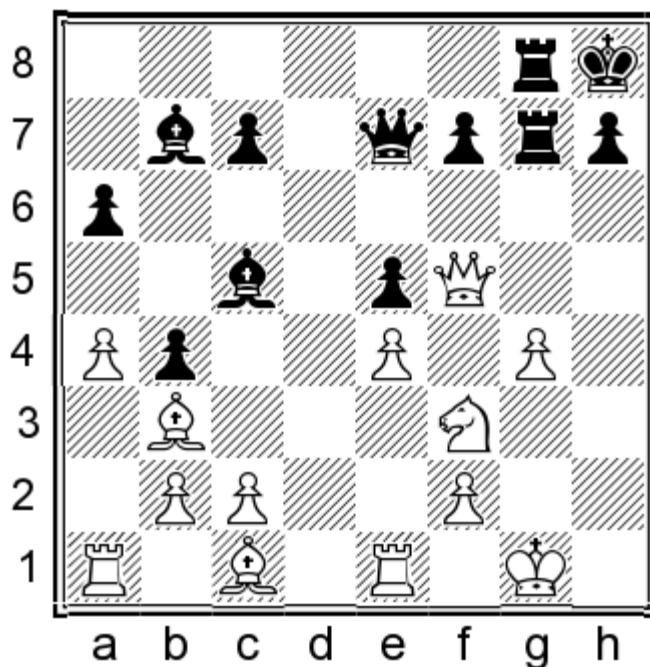
19.Nf3?

After this natural looking move White's queen is running short of squares.

A more stubborn defensive attempt would have been 19.Nf1 even though after 19...Rag8 20.g3 h5 (More precise than 20...Bc8 21.Qf3 Bxh3 22.Be3! and by returning the pawn White is still fighting to stay in the game.) 21.Be3 Bxe3 22.Rxe3 Bc8 23.Qf3 h4! Black retains a powerful initiative on the kingside.

19...Rag8 20.Bg5

A) Possibly Inarkiev thought that he would have succeeded in neutralizing Black's pressure on the g-file, overlooking Ding Liren's amazing next move. However, alternatives wouldn't have offered White any chances of survival either: 20.g4 Nxg4! (Very precise as the move-order matters. Starting with 20...Bc8? is inferior, in view of 21.Qxe5 Nxg4 22.Qxe7 Nxf2+ 23.Ng5 Bxe7 24.Kxf2 Bxg5 25.Bxg5 Rxg5 with a more or less balanced position.) 21.hxg4

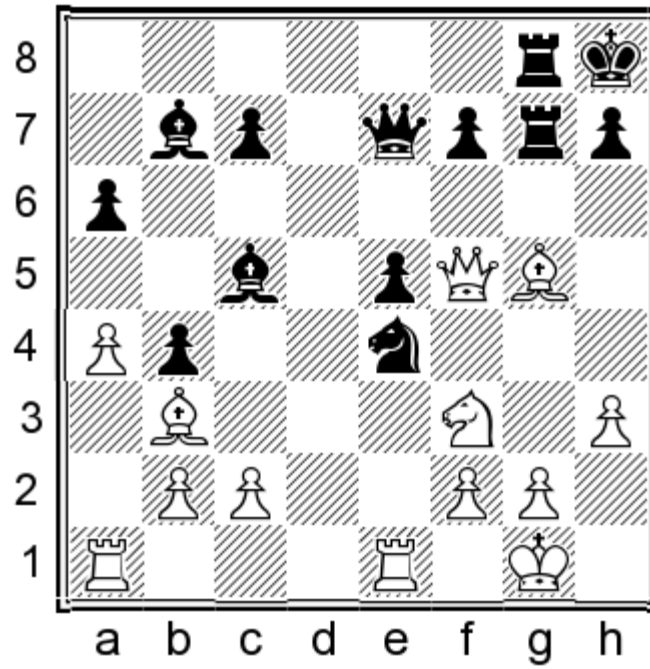


Position after: 21.hxg4

21...Bc8!! (21...Rxc4+? 22.Kf1 and White is just a piece up.) 22.Qxe5 and since Black's rook is on g7 this capture doesn't come with check and Black continues generating new threats: 22...Bxg4! 23.Qxe7 Bxf3+ 24.Qg5 (24.Kh2 Bxe7 is hopeless too.) 24...Rxc4+ 25.Bxc4 Rxc4+ 26.Kh2 Bxf2 and mate is to follow.

B) 20.Nh4 runs into 20...Bc8 21.Qf3 Rg3 22.Qe2 Bxh3 with an irresistible attack.

20...Nxe4!



Position after: 20...Nxe4!

21.h4

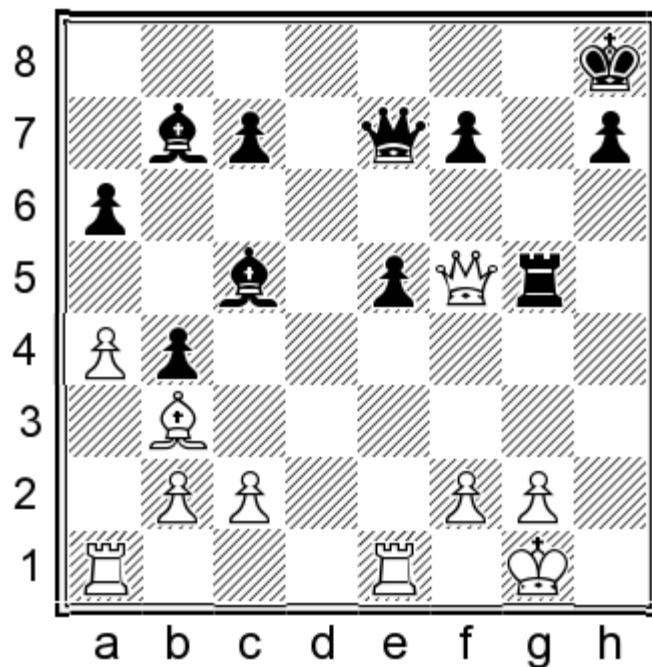
A) A clear sign that White's strategy of neutralizing Black's pressure on the g-file has become a failure, but other moves don't work either: 21.Bxe7 leads to mate after 21...Rxf2+ 22.Kh1 (22.Kf1 Rxf2#) 22...Nxf2#

B) 21.Rxe4 is met by 21...Rxf2 22.Nxf2 Rxf2 23.Qf3 f5 and Black wins a piece.

21...Nxf2

One of the many good options. Also possible is 21...Bxf2+ and now e.g. 22.Kh2 Bxe1 23.Bxe7 Rxf2+ followed by 24...Nf2 mate.

22.hxg5 Rxf2 23.Nxf2 Rxf2



Position after: 23...Rxf5

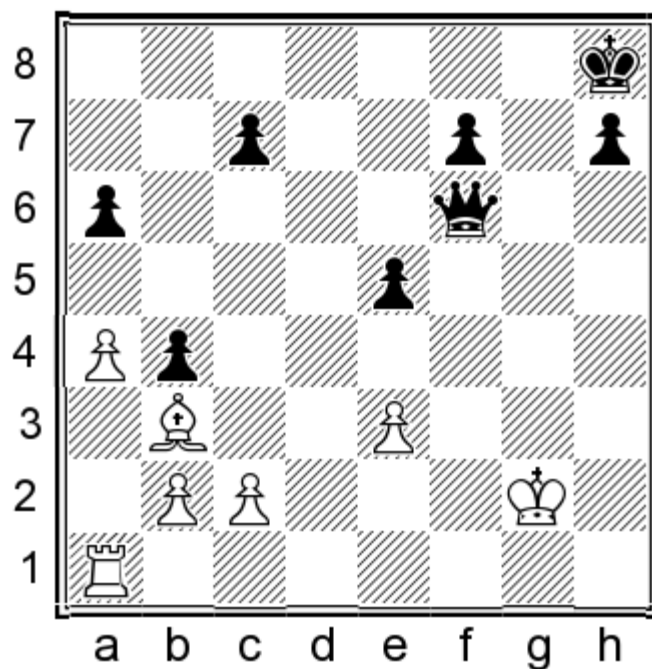
24.Qh3

24.Qxf7 Rxf2+ 25.Kf1 (25.Kh1 Qh4#) 25...Qxf7 26.Bxf7 Rxf2+ 27.Kg1 Rg2+ 28.Kf1 Bf3 and next is mate on g1.

24...Qf6 25.Re3

Protecting the pawn on f2 with 25.Re2 allows 25...Qg6 which will lead to mate soon.

25...Rxf2+ 26.Qxf2 Bxf2 27.Kxf2 Bxe3 28.fxe3



Position after: 28.fxe3

Black's initiative has been transferred into material advantage of queen + two pawns vs. rook and bishop. Inarkiev could have resigned here already, but instead decides to play some extra moves.

28...c5 29.Bc4 Qg6+ 30.Kf3 Qf5+ 31.Kg3 Qe4 32.b3 Qxe3+ 33.Kg2 Qd2+ 34.Kh1 f5 35.Rg1 Qh6+ 36.Kg2 Kg7
37.Rd1 Qg5+ 38.Kf2 Qf4+ 39.Ke2 Qh2+ 40.Ke3 f4+ 41.Ke4 Qxc2+ 42.Rd3 Kf6 43.Bxa6 Qg2+ 44.Rf3 Ke6 0-1

Chapter 7

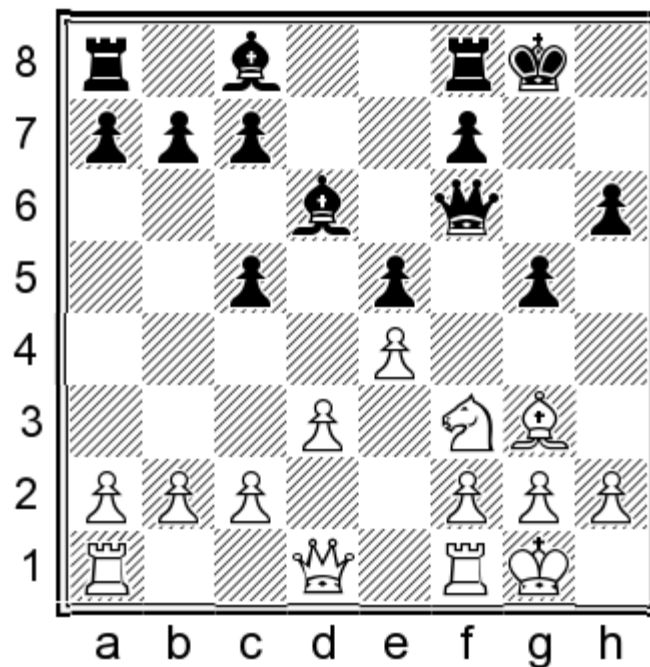
Trapped pieces

“If one piece is bad, the whole position is bad” This famous quote from Siegbert Tarrasch has often been applied for evaluating positions. Obviously that’s not always the case, but it certainly has a big impact. In this chapter we will talk about situations where a certain piece is trapped. This piece doesn’t have many squares available, therefore it practically doesn’t have a role at all. Particularly in endgames, one trapped piece may have a decisive influence on the outcome of the game, as the weaker side doesn’t have active pieces left to compensate the defects of his position.

Winter, William
Capablanca, Jose Raul
Hastings 1919

One of the most well-known games featuring this specific theme is the following game by Capablanca.

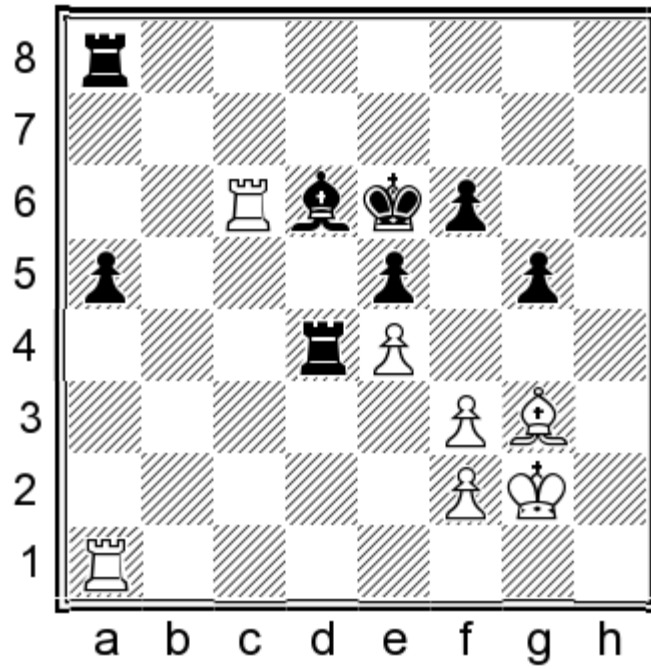
I’ll just give the game without analysis as I think everyone has seen it before.



Black to move

White’s bishop on g3 doesn’t have a great future and therefore Capablanca aims to exchange as many pieces as possible, after which White will effectively be a piece down. The legendary Cuban instructively plays around the bishop and opens another front on the wing where the bishop is unable to participate.

12...Bg4! 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Qxf3 Qxf3 15.gxf3 f6 16.Kg2 a5 17.a4 Kf7 18.Rh1 Ke6 19.h4 Rfb8 20.hxg5 hxg5 21.b3 c6 22.Ra2 b5 23.Rha1 c4 24.axb5 cxb3 25.cxb3 Rxb5 26.Ra4 Rxb3 27.d4 Rb5 28.Rc4 Rb4 29.Rxc6 Rxd4 0-1

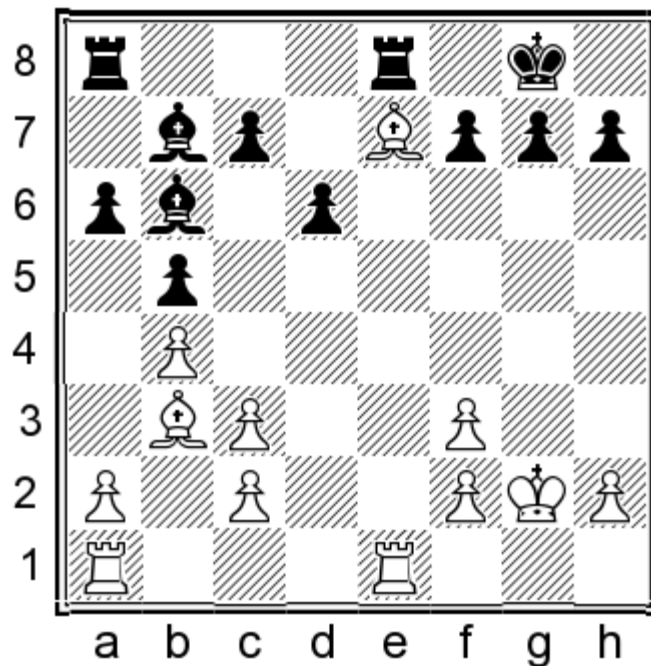


Position after: 29...Rxd4

White rested his case. The bishop on g3 is still there...

Short, Nigel D (2698)
 Kramnik, Vladimir (2800)
 London 2011

A modern classic on the theme of the buried bishop is seen in the following masterpiece by Kramnik.



Black to move

19...d5!

After this excellent move, which in fact isn't mentioned by the engines, it's already over. The white bishop is buried on b3 and will never be able to return to the battlefield.

Kramnik's plan is pretty simple and straightforward. Black will exchange all the other pieces when he'll effectively be a full piece up and be able to win any kind of ending.

20.Re5 c6 21.Rae1 Bc7 22.R5e2 Bc8

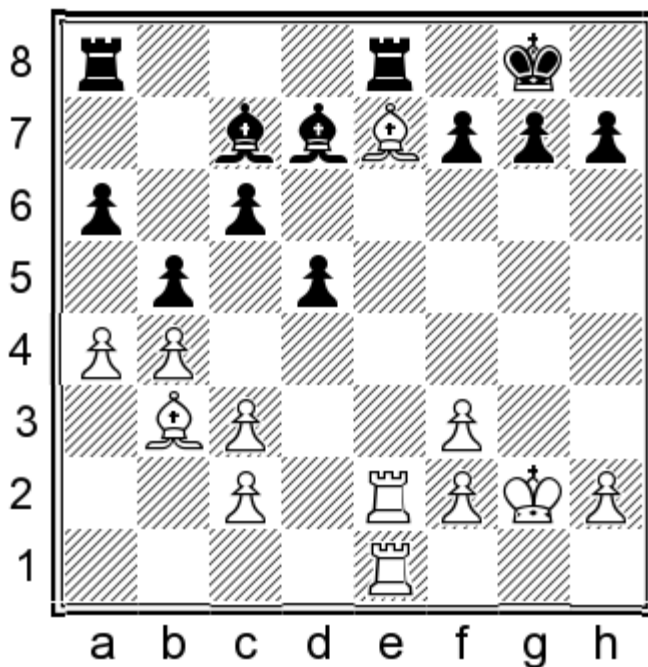
Emphasising the difference between the light-squared bishops. Black's can easily be brought back into play, whereas White's bishop has no escape route.

23.a4

White could have set a small trap with 23.Bd8!? Rxe2 (Obviously Black doesn't fall for the trick with 23...Rxd8? in view of 24.Re8+ Rxe8 25.Rxe8#) 24.Rxe2 Bh3+! 25.Kxh3 Rxd8 26.Re7 Rc8 27.Kg2 Kf8 28.Re3 (After 28.Rd7 Ke8 the rook is just trapped.) 28...Re8 29.Rxe8+ Kxe8 and White is lost as well. In spite of the presence of the opposite-coloured bishops, White doesn't have any drawing chances at all.

23...Bd7

Obviously Black simply ignores the events on the queenside.



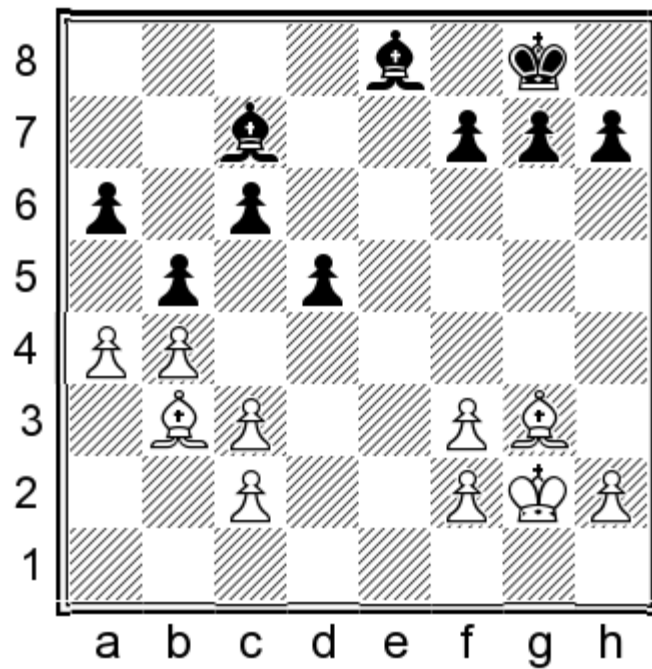
Position after: 23...Bd7

In case of 23...bxa4? the bishop would suddenly come alive.

24.Bh4

The exchange of rooks on the e-file seems inevitable. For example, after 24.h4 f6! Black threatens to play 25...Be5, when White has nothing better than retreating his bishop to c5.

24...Rxe2 25.Rxe2 Re8 26.Rxe8+ Bxe8 27.Bg3



Position after: 27.Bg3

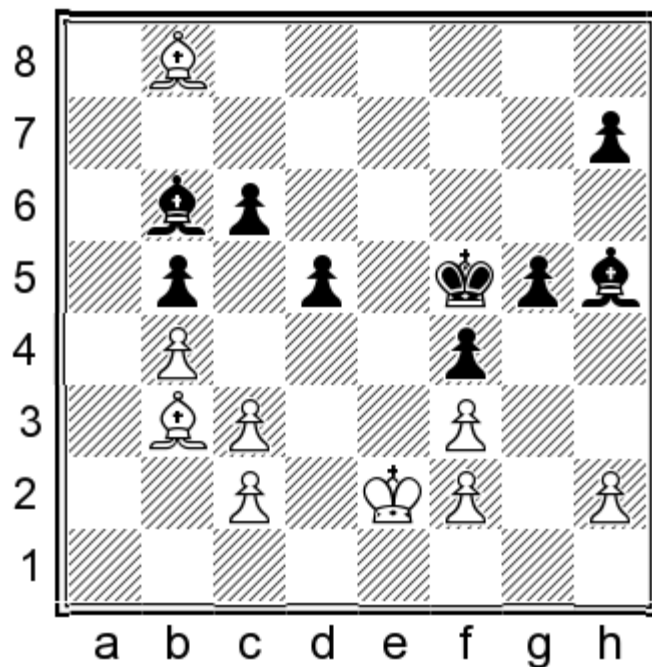
27...Bd8!

As mentioned, Black strives to exchange pieces in order to exploit the trapped bishop on b3. However, it would have been inferior to play 27...Bxg3 28.fxg3! when White improves his pawn structure and it becomes very hard for Black to break through with his king. After the game continues, Black threatens to pick up the pawns on the queenside with 28...Bf6.

28.Be5 f6 29.Bb8 Bg6 30.axb5 axb5 31.Kf1 Kf7 32.Ke2 Ke6 33.Ke3 Bb6+ 34.Ke2 Bh5

The bishops are optimally placed, eyeing the weak f2 and f3 pawns. The next step in the process is advancing the pawns on the kingside in order to open up the position, enabling the king to penetrate into White's camp.

35.Ba2 g5 36.Bb3 f5 37.Ba2 f4 38.Bb3 Kf5



Position after: 38...Kf5

39.Bd6

Preventing the opening of the kingside with 39.h3 creates another target for the light-squared bishop: 39...Ke6! 40.Ba2 Bg6 41.Bb3 Bf5 42.h4 gxh4 43.Bxf4 h3 44.Kf1 Bg6 45.Kg1 Bh5 46.Kh2 Bxf2 47.Kxh3 Bxf3 and the conversion of the extra pawn shouldn't be too problematic.

39...g4 40.Kf1

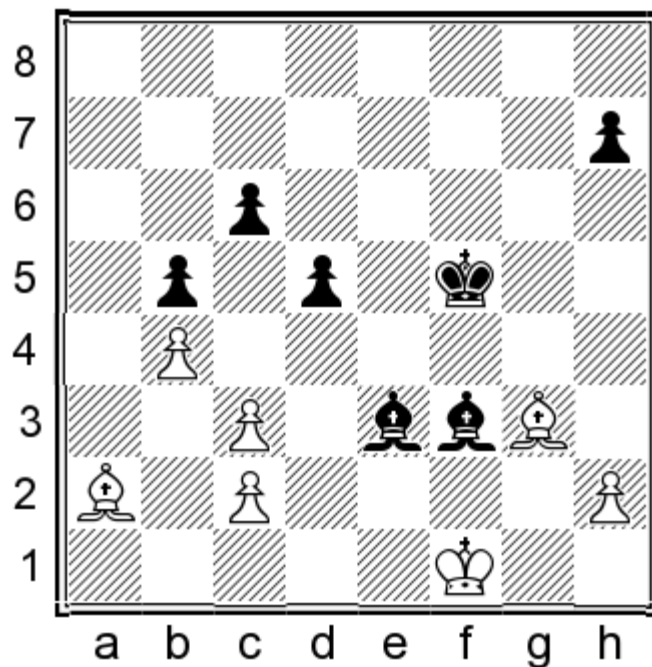
After 40.fxg4+ Kxg4 41.f3+ (41.Kf1 Kf3 42.Bc5 Bxc5 43.bxc5 Bg6 44.Kg1 Ke2 and Black wins.) 41...Kh3 42.Bxf4 Kg2 Black takes the f-pawn and will soon take the h-pawn as well.

40...g3

40...gxf3 would have been good as well.

41.fxg3 fxg3 42.Bxg3 Bxf3 43.Ba2 Be3

And Short felt he'd suffered long enough. A sample of a winning variation is 43...Be3



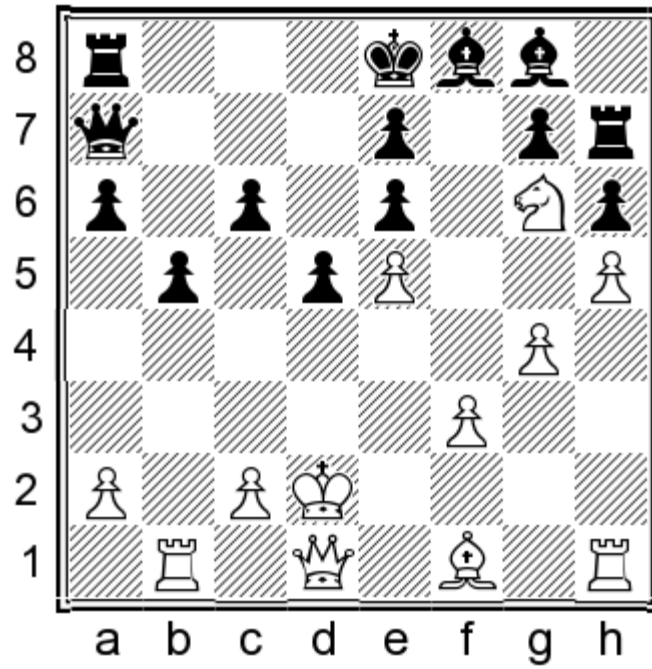
Position after: 43...Be3

44.Bf2 Bxf2 45.Kxf2 Kf4 46.Bb3 Be4 47.Ke2 (47.h3 h5→) 47...Kg4 48.Kf2 Kh3 49.Kg1 h5 50.Ba2 Bxc2 51.Kh1 h4 52.Kg1 Kg4 53.Kg2 Kf4 54.Kf2 (54.Kh3 Ke3→) 54...h3 55.Ke2 Ke4 56.Kd2 (56.Kf2 Kd3→) 56...Kf3! 57.Kxc2 Kg2 and White is too late to stop the h-pawn promoting.

0-1

Vachier Lagrave, Maxime (2722)
 Ding, Liren (2707)
 Paris/St Petersburg 2013

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 Bf5 4.h4 h6 5.g4 Be4 6.f3 Bh7 7.e6 Nf6 8.Bf4 Qb6 9.Nc3 Qxb2 10.Kd2 Qb6 11.Nge2 a6 12.Rb1 Qa7 13.Na4 b5 14.Nc5 Bg8 15.Be5 fxe6 16.Nf4 Nbd7 17.Nxd7 Nxd7 18.Ng6 Nxe5 19.dxe5 Rh7 20.h5



Position after: 20.h5

White is two pawns down, but the black pieces on the kingside are totally out of play and likely will never appear on stage.

20...c5 21.f4 Bf7 22.Qf3 0-0-0

Trading off the powerful knight with 22...Bxg6 23.hxg6 doesn't help as the rook and the bishop remain locked in.

23.Be2 c4 24.a4!

The right strategy. White should try to decide the game on that side of the board, since the rook on h8 and bishop on f8 are unable to support the defense.

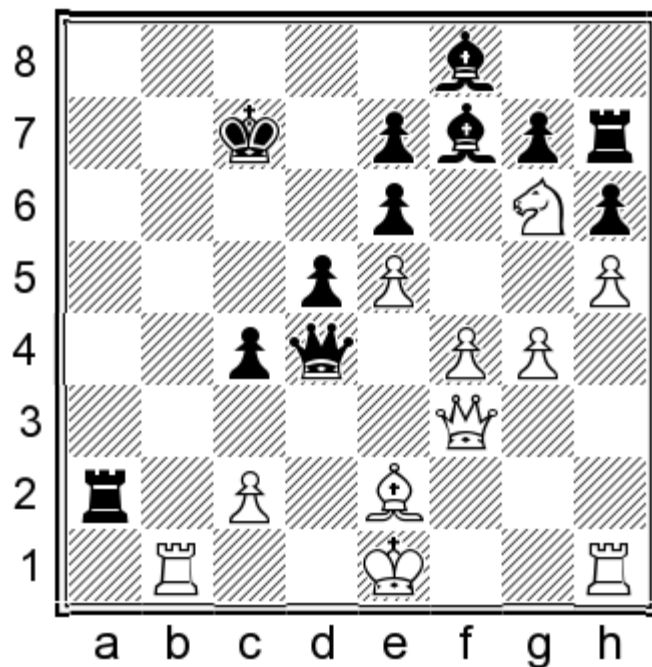
24...Kc7

Black is unable to hold on to the pawn on b5, e.g. 24...Qc5 25.axb5 axb5 26.Qc3 followed by 27.Qa5 when Black's position is falling apart.

25.axb5 axb5 26.Rxb5 Qd4+ 27.Ke1 Ra8 28.Rb1

Apparently, even stronger is 28.Kf1 since 28...Ra1+ 29.Kg2 can't pose White any problems.

28...Ra2!?



Position after: 28...Ra2!?

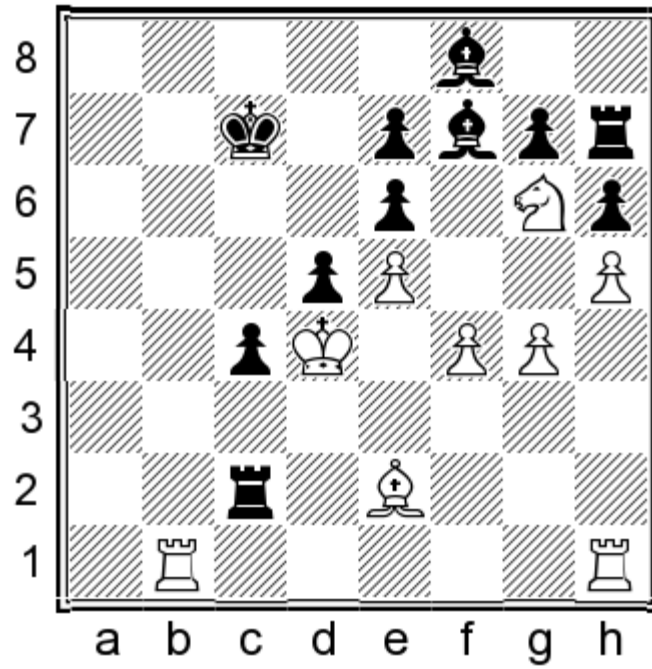
29.c3!

An instructive moment. White could have taken a full (!) piece by 29.Nxf8? but then after 29...Rh8 30.Ng6 Bxg6 31.hxg6 Rxc2 and the rook from h8 will soon join the game, Black obtains excellent counterplay. A nice illustration how a trapped piece (bishop f8) is hindering its colleague (rook on h8). For that reason White is not interested in capturing that piece now or in the next few moves.

29...Qd2+ 30.Kf2 Rc2 31.Qe3!

Good strategy: White forces the trade of Black's most dangerous piece.

31...Qxe3+ 32.Kxe3 Rxc3+ 33.Kd4 Rc2



Position after: 33...Rc2

34.Rhe1

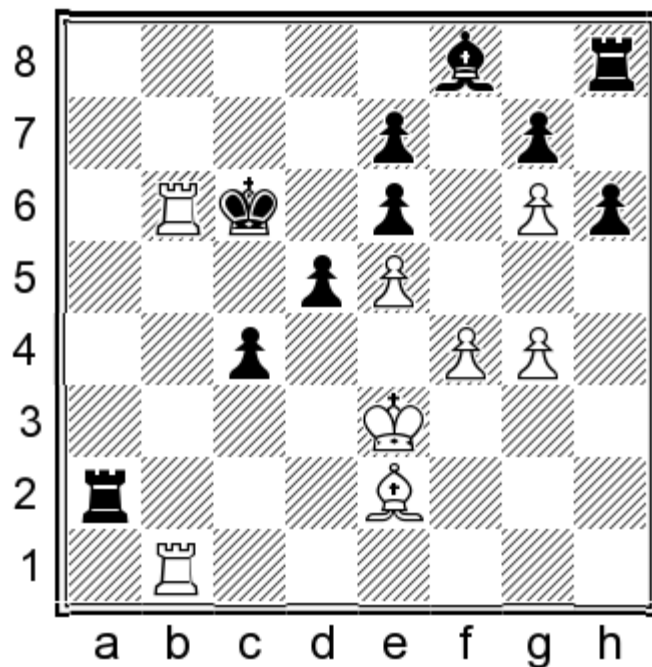
White isn't in a hurry and there is nothing wrong with the game move, but even stronger would have been 34.Rb5! Rxe2 35.Rhb1 and mate is inevitable, e.g. 35...Be8 36.Rb7+ Kc8 37.Kc5! Bd7 38.Rb8+ Kc7 39.R1b7#

34...Kc6 35.Rb8 Bxg6 36.hxg6 Rh8 37.Reb1 Rd2+

37...Rxe2 38.R1b6+ Kc7 39.Kc5 and mate is next.

38.Ke3 Ra2 39.R8b6+ 1-0

And Black resigned in view of 39.R8b6+



Position after: 39.R8b6+

39...Kc7 (39...Kc5 40.R1b5#) 40.Kd4 and White is still playing with a hypothetical rook and bishop up.

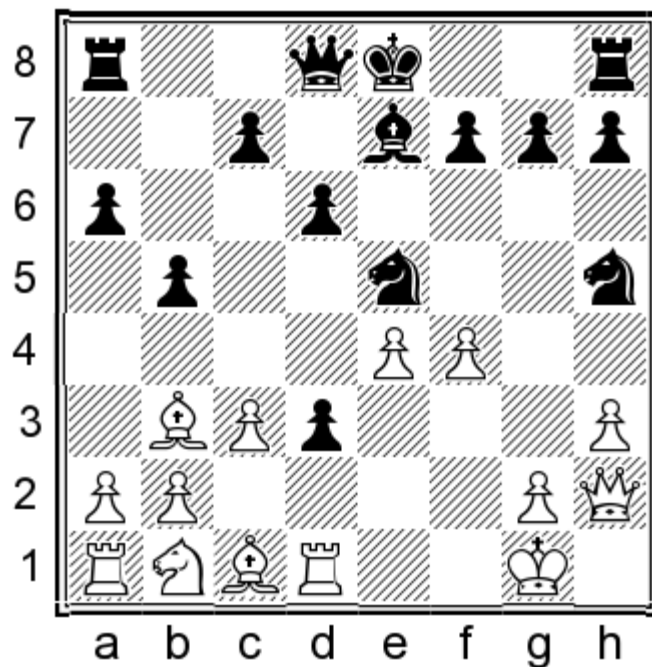
Lobron, Eric (2440)

Hort, Vlastimil (2590)

Dortmund 1982

As we have seen in all those examples so far is that minor pieces are often the subject of being trapped. It rarely happens that the queen becomes the victim on a board full of pieces.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Be7 7.d4 d6 8.c3 Bg4 9.h3 Bxf3 10.Qxf3 exd4 11.Rd1 Ne5 12.Qg3 Nh5 13.Qh2 d3 14.f4



Position after: 14.f4

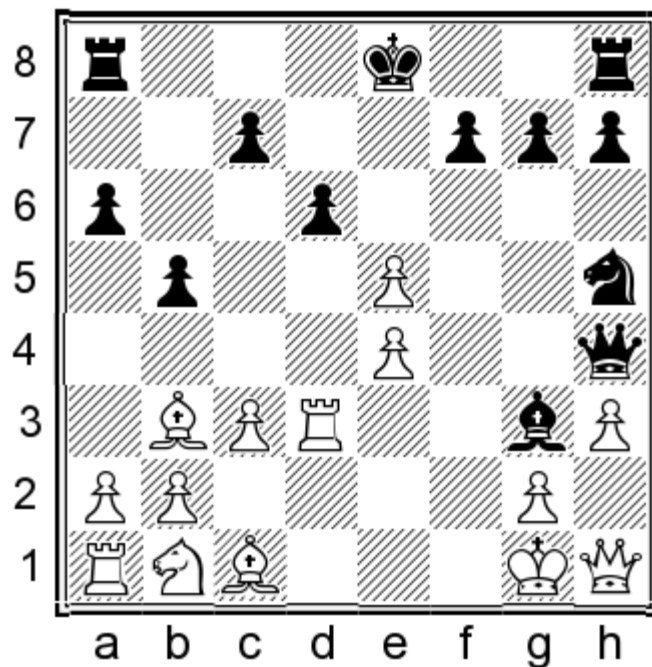
With his last move White aims to force the knight on e5 leaving its central outpost when he would be able to recapture the pawn on d3.

Meanwhile, what is striking of this position is the awkwardly looking (misplaced) white queen on h2. With such a powerful piece being locked up in the corner of the board it's more than worth sacrificing the knight.

14...Bh4! 15.fxe5 Bg3 16.Qh1 Qh4!

Time is what matters here. Black shouldn't be interested in recapturing the pawn on e5 with 16...dxe5 since after 17.Be3 Qh4 18.Nd2 White will soon start getting his pieces coordinated.

17.Rxd3



Position after: 17.Rxd3

17...Qxe4!

Being on the side with the initiative it often makes more sense creating new threats rather than being too materialistic regaining some part of the invested material (as discussed in chapter 6).

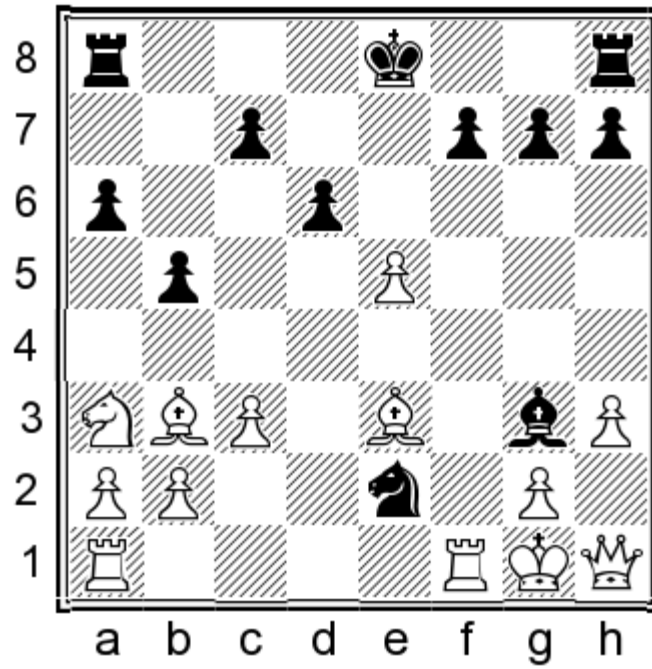
A good example is 17...Bf2+?! 18.Kf1 Ng3+ 19.Rxg3 Qxg3 20.Ke2 and soon the queen comes back into play.

18.Rd1

Another instructive line goes 18.Re3 Qf4 19.exd6+ Kd8 (19...Kf8 is apparently even stronger, but less practical.) 20.dxc7+ Kc8 (20...Kxc7? 21.Re7+ drops the queen.) 21.Re8+ (21.Rxg3 Qxc1+ 22.Kh2 Qxh1+ 23.Kxh1 Nxc3+ and Black is just an exchange up.) 21...Rxe8 22.Bxf4 Re1# and White's pieces on both the queen- and kingside in the final position are quite painful to watch.

18...Nf4 19.Bxf7+

19.Na3 allows a beautiful mating combination: 19...Qe2! 20.Rf1 Qe3+ 21.Bxe3 Ne2#

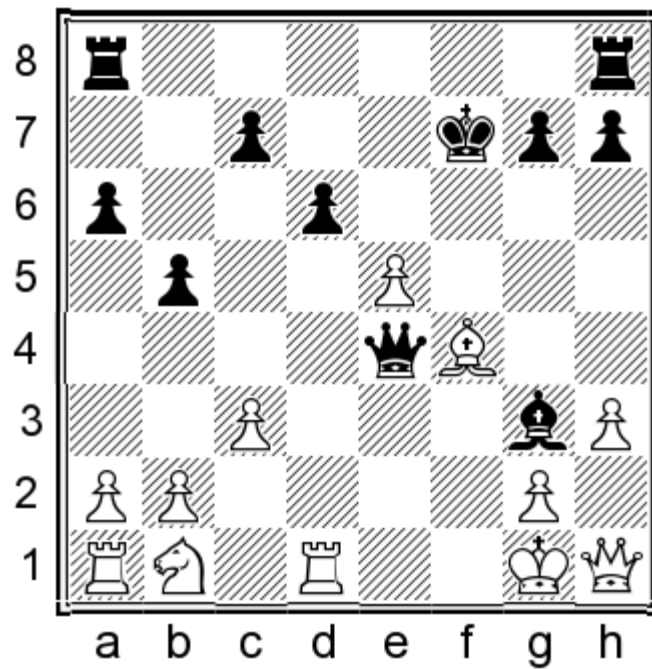


Position after: 21...Ne2#

19...Kxf7

19...Kd8 is more accurate, as after 20.Bxf4 Qxf4 in order to avoid mate White needs to give his queen.

20.Bxf4



Position after: 20.Bxf4

20...Bxf4

20...Qxf4?? 21.Rf1 explains why 19...Kd8 would have been even better.

21.g3 Qe3+ 22.Kf1 Bxe5

0-1

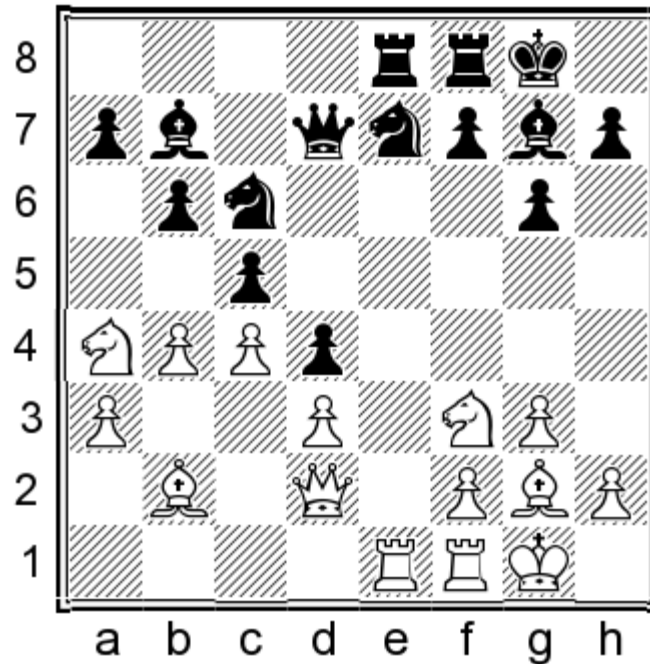
White resigned in this hopeless position, but 22...Bxg3 23.Qg2 Rhf8 would have been even more crushing.

Hemant, Sharma (2342)

Howell, David W L (2701)

Douglas 2017

1.Nf3 c5 2.c4 Nc6 3.Nc3 g6 4.g3 Bg7 5.Bg2 e6 6.0-0 Nge7 7.b3 d5 8.Bb2 d4 9.Na4 b6 10.e3 e5 11.exd4 exd4 12.d3 0-0 13.Qd2 Bb7 14.Rae1 Qd7 15.a3 Rae8 16.b4



Position after: 16.b4

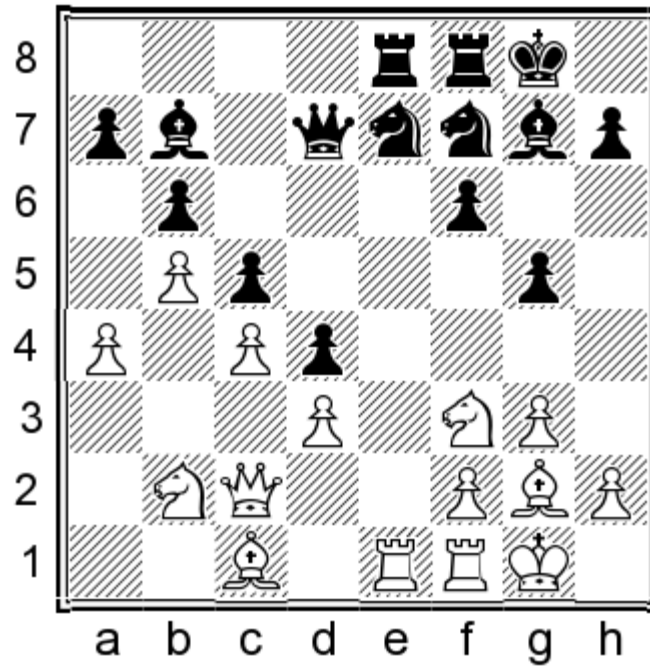
A fairly normal looking position at first glance with only one open file both sides are contending. The following manoeuvre by Black is quite instructive and highlights the misplacement of the knight on a4.

16...Nd8! 17.Qc2 Bc6 18.b5 Bb7

So by retreating the knight to d8 and wasting two tempi with the bishop, Black has succeeded in closing the queenside and removing the pressure against the pawn on c5. The knight on a4 is absolutely out of play and can only go to b2 and then d1 where it would be also struggling to get back into play. Howell moves the action to the other side of the board.

19.Bc1 f6 20.Nb2 Nf7 21.a4 g5!

A very nice thematic move, seizing space on the kingside, restricting the movement of White's pieces and also preparing to gain control over the light squares.



Position after: 21...g5!

22.a5?

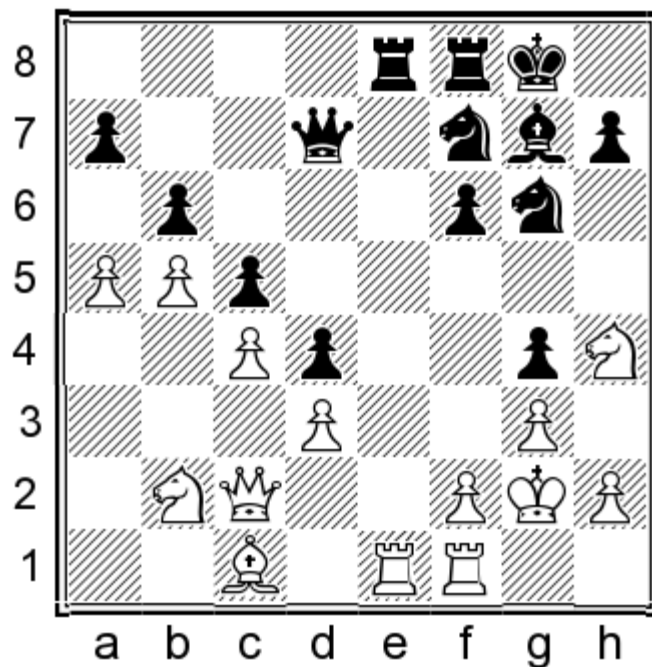
In bad positions mistakes are made easily. More stubborn would have been 22.h3 preventing Black's next move.

22...g4 23.Nh4 Bxg2 24.Kxg2

24.Nxg2 Ne5 followed by Nf3, Qf5-h5 etc. only makes Black's task easier.

24...Ng6!

Another excellent move. You might have thought that the knight on h4 is out of play and it would make quite some sense keeping it alive. However, by trading off the pair of knights, Black gains access to the f3 square.



Position after: 24...Ng6!

25.Nxg6

The very sad looking 25.f4 allows Black to destroy the pawnstructure on the kingside, which should have been tried regardless.

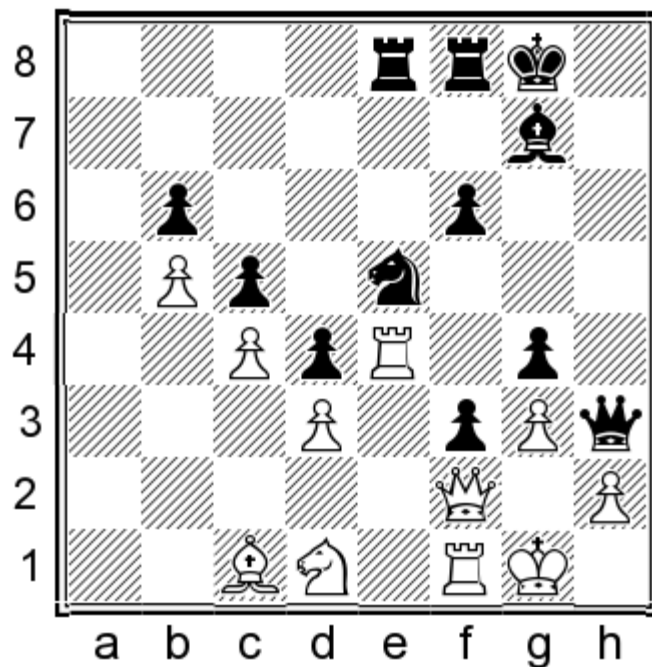
25...hxg6 26.Re4 Ne5!

Interestingly, Stockfish 8 also likes 26...Rxe4 27.dxe4 which is something a human would never consider, as it would give the knight from b2 some hope returning into the game.

27.f4

White desperately tries to stir things up as it's too late to just sit and wait for Black to strike. Aesthetically pleasing is 27.Qd1 Qb7 28.a6 Qa8 with ...f6-f5 coming next.

27...gxf3+ 28.Kg1 g5 29.Nd1 Qh3 30.axb6 axb6 31.Qf2 g4 0-1



Position after: 31...g4

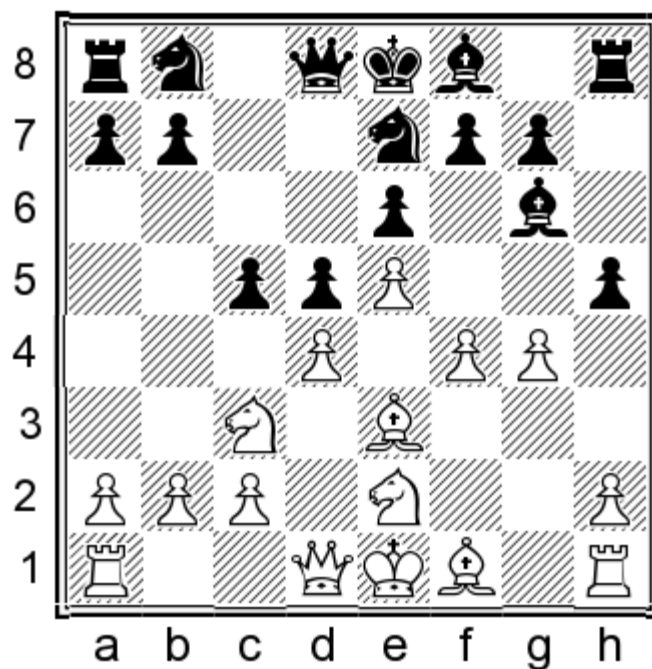
And next 32...Nxd3.

Kasparov, Garry (2812)

Navara, David (2737)

Saint Louis 2017

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 Bf5 4.Nc3 e6 5.g4 Bg6 6.Nge2 c5 7.Be3 Ne7 8.f4 h5



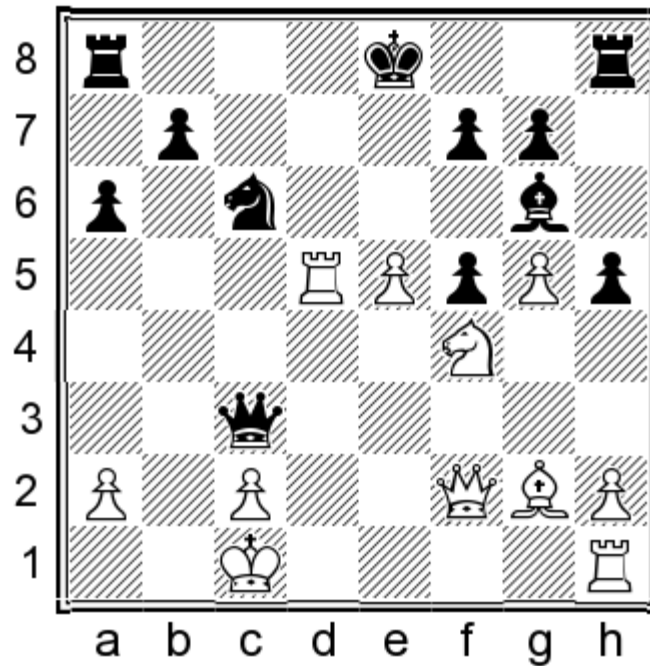
Position after: 8...h5

The following pawn sacrifice has often been seen in this particular line and aims to keep the bishop out of the game.

9.f5! exf5 10.g5 Nbc6

Judging from how the game evolved it might make sense to give back the pawn with 10...f4 but also after 11.Nxf4 Nbc6 12.Bg2 White's pieces are looking so much more active.

11.Nf4 a6 12.Bg2 cxd4 13.Bxd4 Nxd4 14.Qxd4 Nc6 15.Qf2 Bb4 16.0-0-0 Bxc3 17.bxc3 Qa5 18.Rxd5 Qxc3



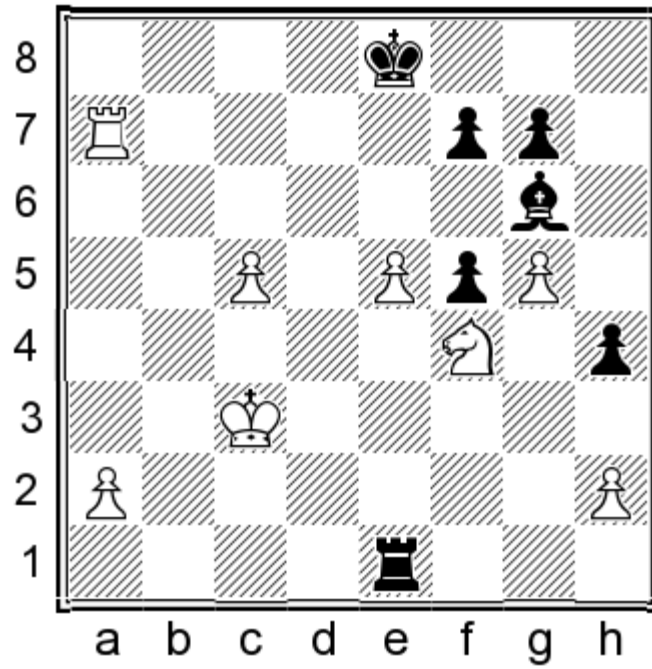
Position after: 18...Qxc3

It looks as if Black has managed to develop counterplay against White's vulnerable king, but in fact the queen is Black's only good piece. Therefore it simply has to be exchanged, reducing all counterplay.

19.Qc5! Qxc5 20.Rxc5 0-0 21.Bxc6! bxc6 22.Rd1 Rab8 23.c4

A human just aims to make sure the bishop on g6 would never come alive again, while the machine opts for the tactical solution with 23.e6. Kasparov's approach doesn't require any calculation and involves no risk as after 23.e6 it could easily be that after an inaccurate follow-up Black escapes.

23...Rfd8 24.Rd6 Kf8 25.Rcxc6 Rdc8 26.Kc2 h4 27.Rxc8+ Rxc8 28.Kc3 a5 29.Ra6 Rb8 30.Rxa5 Rb1 31.c5 Re1 32.Ra8+ Ke7 33.Ra7+ Ke8



Position after: 33...Ke8

34.Nd3?

Not in a 100 years would you ever consider removing the knight from the wonderful blockading square f4, but getting low on time, Kasparov starts panicking and loses track.

Again 34.e6! would have been an excellent move when Black is completely stuck as he can't take on e6, while 34...Re4 is met by 35.c6 and the passed pawn is decisive.

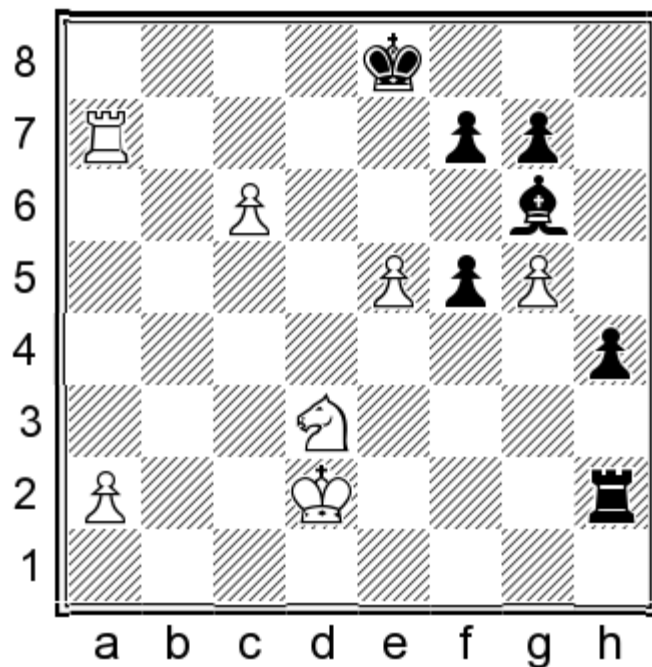
34...Re3 35.Kd2?!

35.c6 f4 36.Ra8+ Ke7 37.c7 Rxd3+ 38.Kc4 Rd2 and after promoting White will be an exchange up and should be able to convert.

35...Rh3?

Strangely enough, Navara doesn't take his chance to activate his worst piece with 35...f4 as after 36.Nxf4 Rxe5 it's not that simple any longer.

36.c6 Rxh2+



Position after: 36...Rhx2+

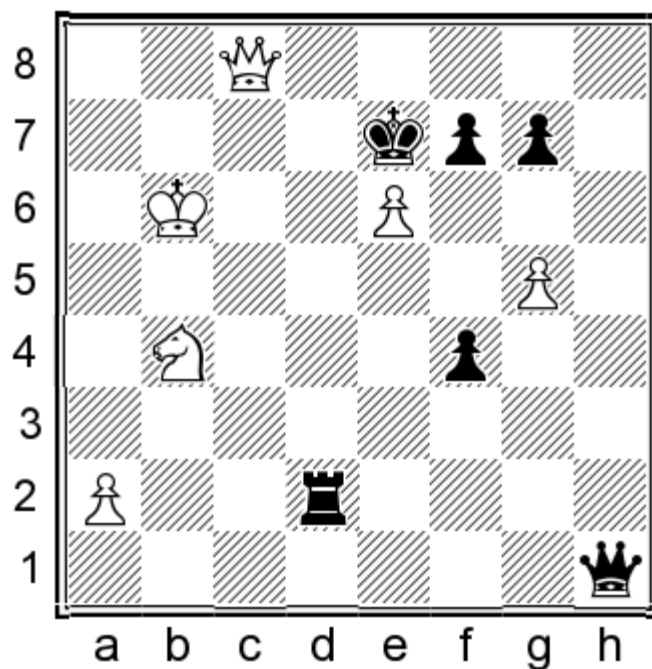
37.Ke3?

Another bizarre mistake by Kasparov as the alternative 37.Kc3 is so much more natural, preventing the black rook from getting behind the passed pawn. In time trouble, strange things sometimes happen.

37...Rc2 38.e6 h3 39.Nb4 f4+ 40.Kd4 h2 41.Ra8+ Ke7 42.Rh8 Rd2+ 43.Kc5 Be4

The light squared bishop should have never been allowed to return into the game.

44.c7 Bb7 45.Kb6 Bc8 46.Rxc8 h1=Q 47.Re8+ Kxe8 48.c8=Q+ Ke7



Position after: 48...Ke7

49.Nc6+??

A gigantic blunder. White should have made a draw with 49.Qc7+ Kxe6 50.Qc8+ but simply overlooked the impact of Black's next move.

49...Qxc6+! 50.Qxc6 Rd6

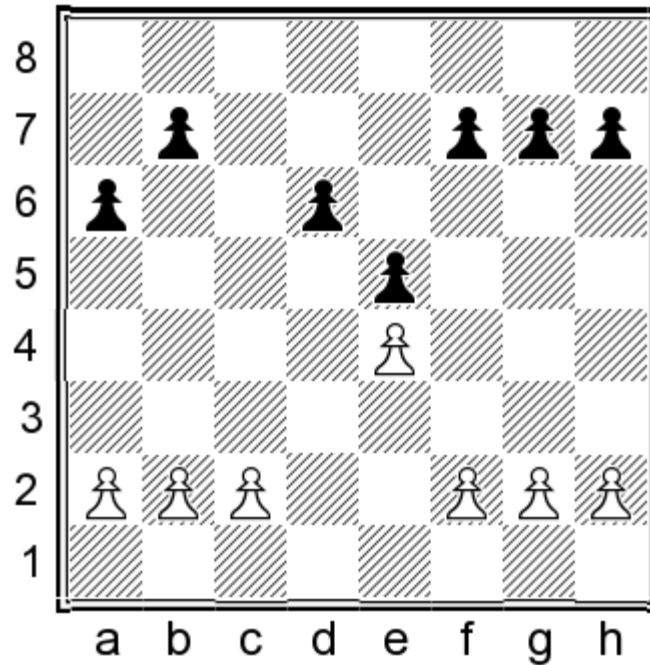
And only after a few seconds Kasparov realised what happened to him and resigned. After 50...Rd6 51.Qxd6+ Kxd6 52.exf7 Ke7 the f-pawn is too fast. An absolute dramatic finish of what should have been a positional masterpiece.

0-1

Chapter 8

Weak squares and good pieces

Since pawns only move forward, every pawn move has a big impact on the course of the game. Understanding the meaning of weak squares, how to take advantage of it and how to deal with them is the central theme of this chapter.



White to move

I have chosen to focus on the d5 square in particular, for the simple reason that in various opening variations (Sicilian and Ruy Lopez spring to mind) both sides are consciously aiming for this particular square. Studying pawn structures helps you to understand the corresponding middlegame plans and endgame principles, but also opening play as it guides you in which direction you have to develop your pieces.

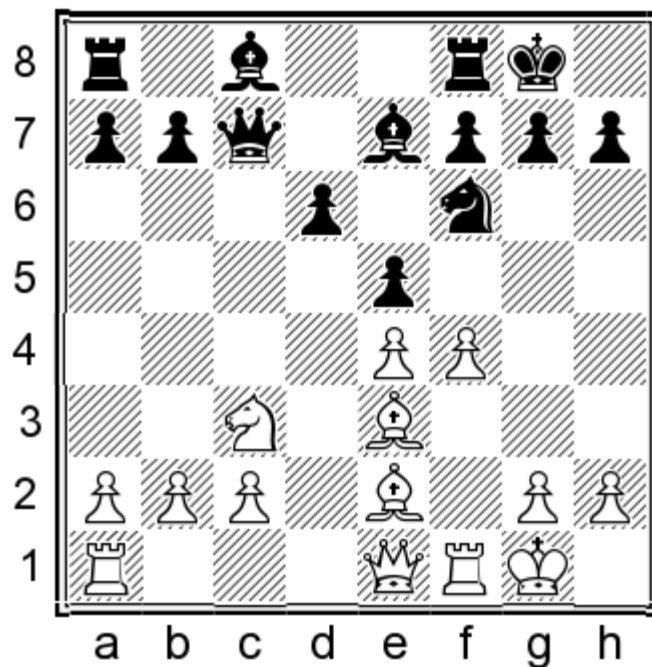
Good knight vs. bad bishop

Smyslov, Vassily
Rudakovsky, Iosif
Moscow 1945

A typical aspect of this particular pawnformation is the presence of a good knight for White on d5 versus a bad dark-squared bishop for Black on e7.

In the following examples it becomes clear that Black should be very careful not allowing White to liquidate too easily into this favorable set of minor pieces. The knight is an excellent attacking piece, while the bishop doesn't help Black that well in defending.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Be2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Be3 Nc6 9.f4 Qc7 10.Qe1 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 e5 12.Be3



Position after: 12.Be3

12...Be6?!

In later games Black players have opted for the thematic 12...exf4 followed by ...Be6, ...Nd7-e5 with a balanced position.

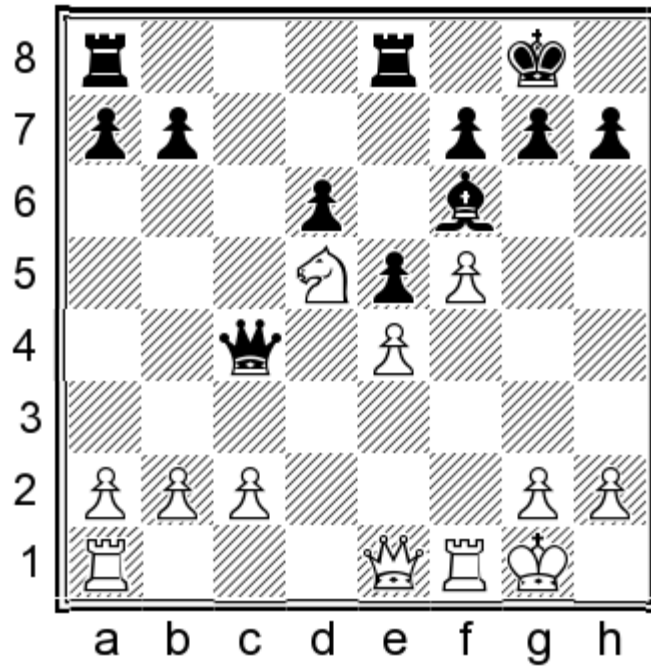
13.f5! Bc4

Perhaps better would have been 13...Bd7 avoiding the exchange of light-squared bishops. In the game White quickly obtains control over the d5 square.

14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.Bg5!

Key idea: White aims to eliminate the main defender of the d5 square.

15...Rfe8 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5



Position after: 17.Nd5

We have reached the dream position White has been aiming for.

The knight is excellently placed on the d5, while Black's bishop doesn't have a bright future, as his pawns in the centre are fixed on the same colour. With such a dominant piece in the middle of the board it's relatively simple starting an attack against the enemies king.

17...Bd8

Taking the pawn with 17...Qxc2 doesn't offer salvation either, in view of 18.Rf2! followed by Rc1 and Nc7, winning material. (Less convincing is 18.Rc1?! Qxb2 19.Nc7 Qxa2 when Black still gets a couple of pawns for the exchange.)

18.c3 b5 19.b3 Qc5+ 20.Kh1 Rc8 21.Rf3

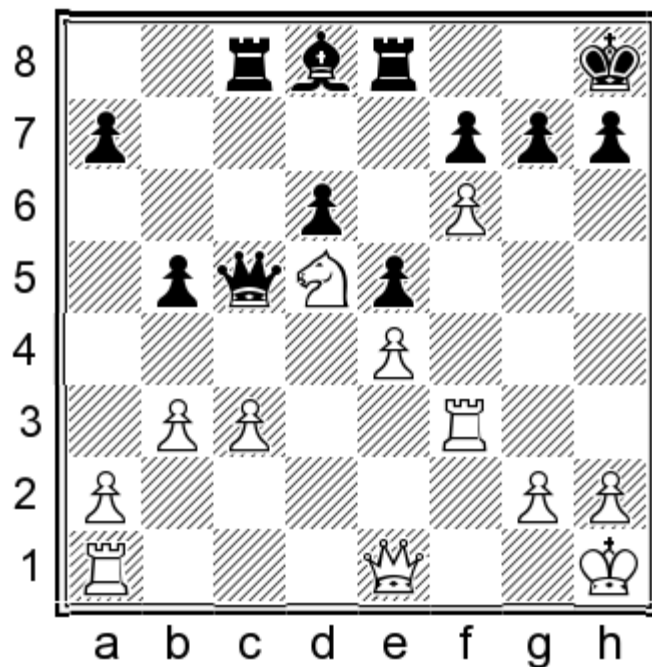
The silicon beast screams out loud to open the kingside right away with 21.f6 and White's attack is irresistible after moves like Qh4, Rf3 etc.

21...Kh8

The reason why the engine is a bit critical of Smyslov's last move is that Black could temporarily prevent the opening of the kingside with 21...f6. But then again, Black is left without any counterplay.

White isn't in a hurry and could bring new forces to the kingside, increasing the pressure on that side of the board.

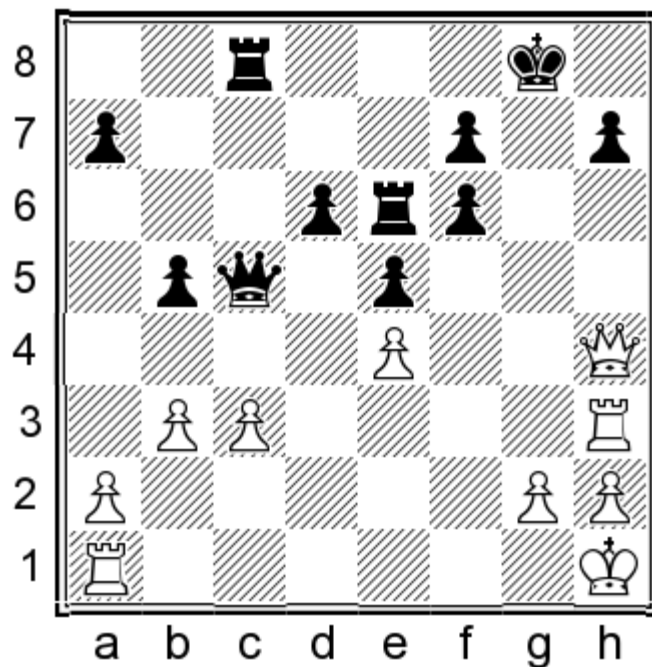
22.f6!



Position after: 22.f6!

22...gxf6

A) 22...Bxf6 23.Nxf6 gxf6 24.Qh4 Re6 (24...Rg8 25.Qxf6+ Rg7 26.Rg3 transposes to the game.) 25.Rh3 Kg8



Position after: 25...Kg8

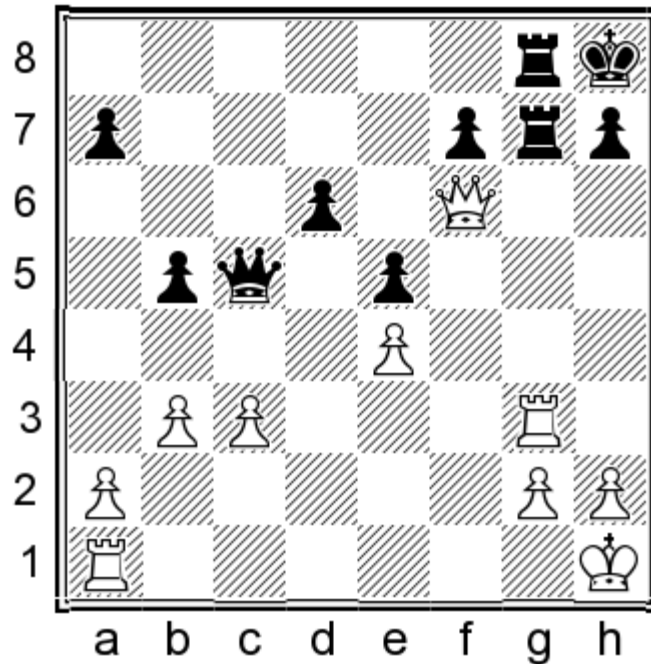
26.Qh6! (very elegant, preventing the black king to escape and threatening 27.Rg3) 26...f5 27.Qxh7+ Kf8 28.Qxf5 and next is 29.Rf1 with a powerful mating attack.

B) 22...g6 23.Qh4 and Black would need to give a lot of material averting the checkmate.

23.Qh4 Rg8 24.Nxf6 Rg7 25.Rg3 Bxf6

25...Qf2 26.Qxh7+ Rxh7 27.Rg8#

26.Qxf6 Rcg8



Position after: 26...Rcg8

Has Black managed to fend off White's attack? Thanks to White's next move his attack becomes a big success.

However, if it wouldn't have worked out that well you can say that it has been pity that White has exchanged his dominant knight for the bad bishop.

Therefore it's important to realize that going for the mating attack isn't always the best strategy in such situations. The next example demonstrates another method for White converting the positional advantage.

27.Rd1! d5

27...Qc8 28.Rxg7 Rxg7 29.Rxd6 and nothing can be done against 30.Rd8 winning the queen for the rook.

28.Rxg7 1-0

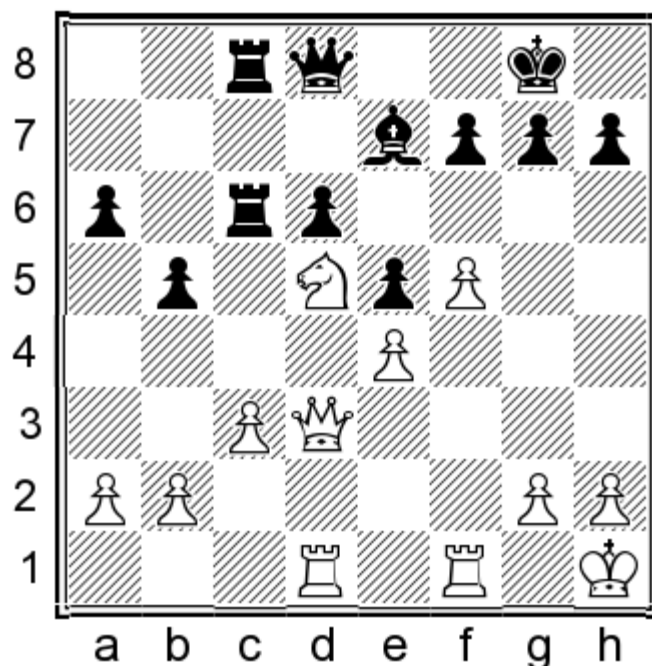
28.Rxg7 Rxg7 29.Rxd5 and White wins.

Creating a new target

Fischer, Robert James
Gadia, Olicio
Mar del Plata 1960

In the previous game White convincingly crushed through Black's kingside. On the negative side of the story this approach can't always be successful, as in certain cases the defender will survive the mating assault. The method used by Fischer in the next game is well-known, but is too important for the understanding of this type of play that I felt I

could not leave it out of the book.



White to move

21.Ra1!

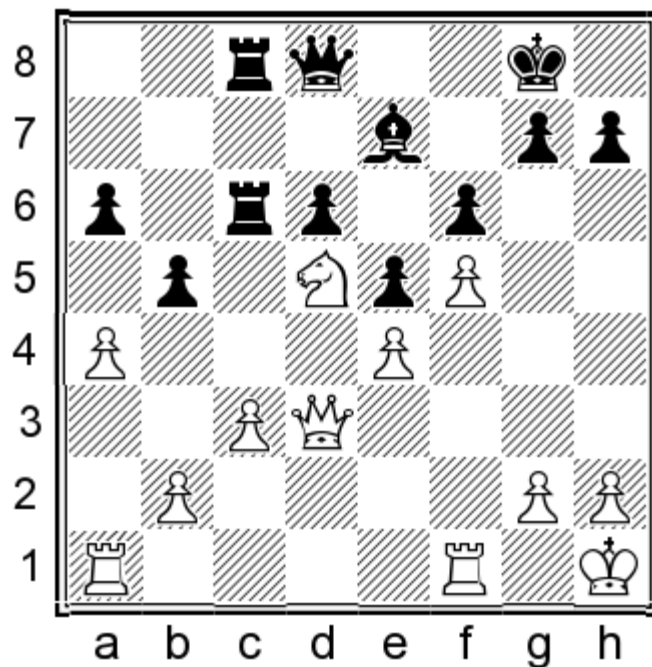
Rather than forcing matters on the kingside with a move like 21.f6 Fischer aims to maintain control over the position and doesn't initiate any further exchanges and allow Black to get rid of the impressive knight.

Instead, White shifts the attention to the other wing where he can put pressure against the pawn weaknesses on a6 and b5. The positional approach shows more effectively the deficiencies of Black's position. Under pressure Black quickly collapses.

21.Ra1! f6

A sad move, but apparently Black was still concerned about the move f5-f6, even though White just switched to the other wing. In case of a waiting move like 21...Rb8 White would have proceeded with 22.b4! intending to follow up with 23.a4 and doubling up the rooks on the a-file. Note that the knight on d5 is doing a great job guarding a lot of squares all around the board. By placing the white pawns on b4 and c3 White doesn't have to worry about any potential counterplay on the queenside.

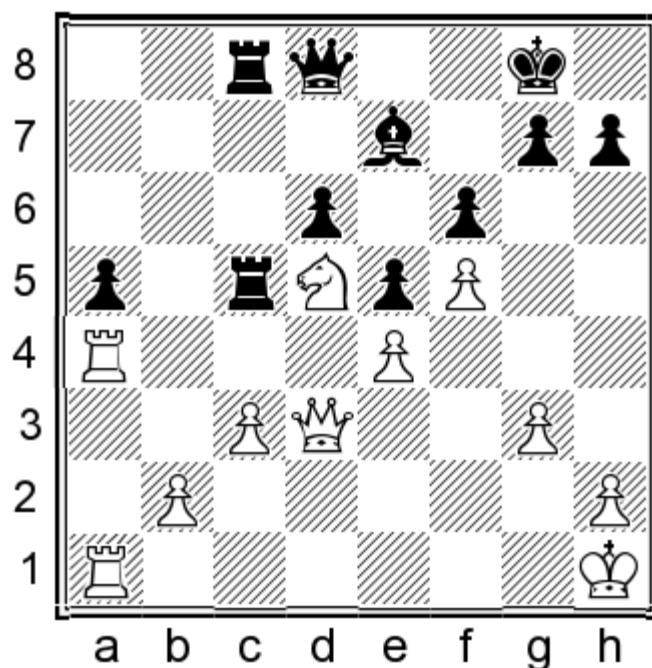
22.a4



Position after: 22.a4

22...Rb8?

A terrible blunder, which abruptly finished the game. Presumably the black player never expected his opponent trading off his wonderful piece, which explains the tactical oversight. Also after other continuations White would have converted his advantage rather smoothly. For instance 22...bxa4 23.Rxa4 a5 24.Rfa1 Rc5 25.g3! (25.b4? is premature, in view of 25...axb4 26.cxb4? Rc1+)



Position after: 25.g3!

Highlighting the problems Black is facing, there are simply no useful moves left, e.g. 25...Bf8 26.b4 axb4 27.cxb4 Rc1+

28.Rxc1 Rxc1+ 29.Kg2 Qc8 30.Ra2 and now since all the counterplay has been prevented, White can start pushing his b-pawn.

23.Nxe7+

And Black resigned, because of 23.Nxe7+ Qxe7 24.Qd5+ and White wins the rook.

1-0

Tiviakov, Sergei (2647)

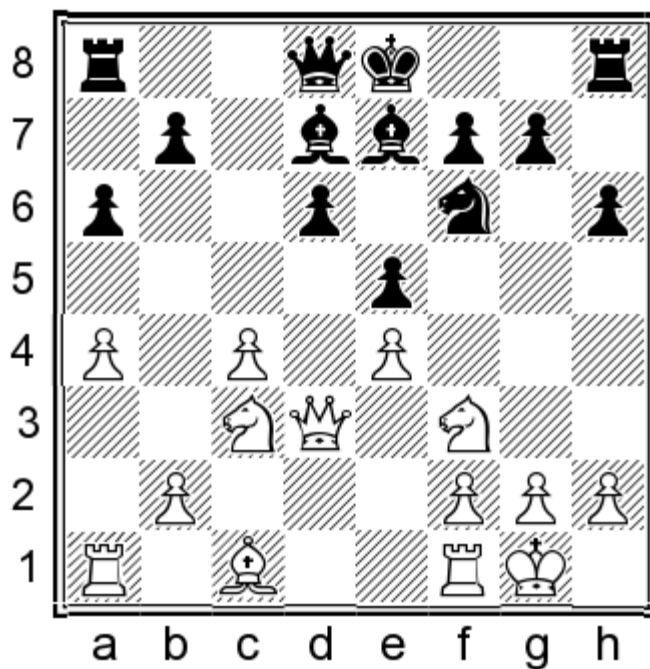
Anand, Viswanathan (2817)

Baden Baden 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bb5+ Nd7 4.d4 cxd4 5.Qxd4 a6 6.Bxd7+ Bxd7 7.c4 e5 8.Qd3 h6

More popular is the active 8...b5 which was also employed by Anand against Carlsen one year after the present game.

9.Nc3 Nf6 10.0-0 Be7 11.a4



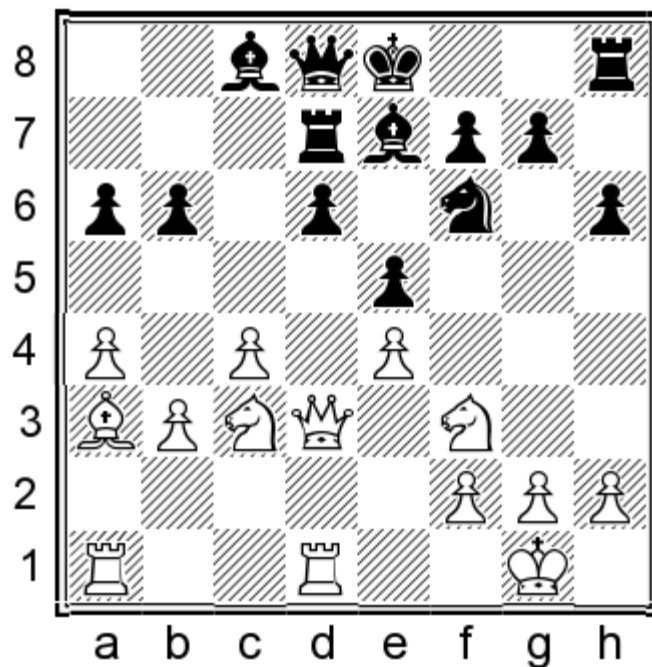
Position after: 11.a4

11...b6?

Tiviakov was very critical about this move as it creates additional weaknesses in Black's position and doesn't offer Black the dynamical play a Sicilian player is looking for.

A better option is 11...0-0 and now f.i. 12.b3 Be6 (12...b5! 13.axb5 axb5 14.Rxa8 Qxa8 15.cxb5 Rb8 gives Black equality.) 13.Be3 Ng4 14.Rfd1 Nxe3 15.Qxe3 Rc8 16.Nxe5?! (other moves may give White an edge) 16...Bg5! 17.f4 Bxf4 18.Qxf4 and now in Anand – Topalov, Saint Louis blitz 2016 Black should have gone for 18...Qb6+ 19.Qf2 Qxb3 with a good game.

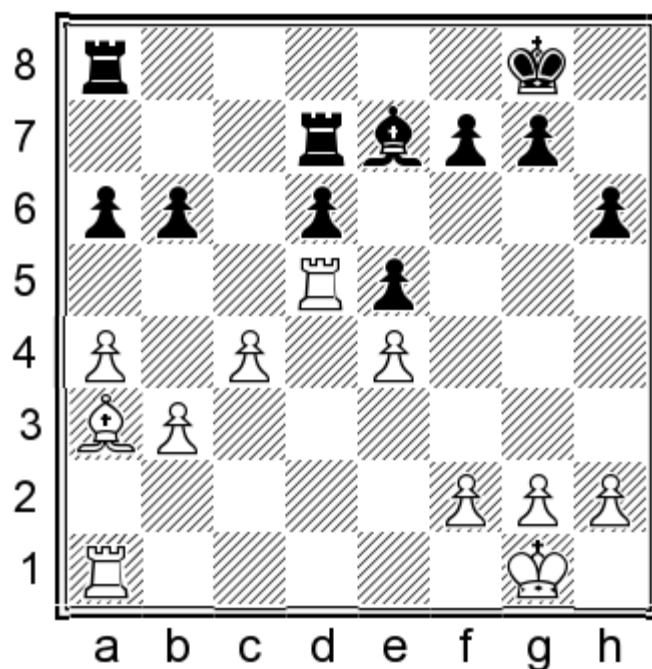
12.b3 Ra7 13.Rd1 Bc8 14.Ba3 Rd7



Position after: 14...Rd7

White has completed his development and now it's time to make a plan. The knight on f3 is normally not so well placed in these structures, which explains the following manoeuvre.

15.Nd2! 0-0 16.Nf1 Bb7 17.Ne3 Re8 18.Ncd5 Nxd5 19.Nxd5 Bxd5 20.Qxd5 Qa8 21.Qxa8 Rxa8 22.Rd5



Position after: 22.Rd5

This is the kind of structure you teach people to avoid when employing the Sicilian. White has a firm grip over the d5-square, his bishop is superior to its counterpart and moreover Black is unable to generate counterplay either on the queen- or kingside. The main weakness is the pawn on d6, which can be attacked three times by the white pieces, but

also defended the same number of times. Hence, White will have to come up with a plan to create new targets.

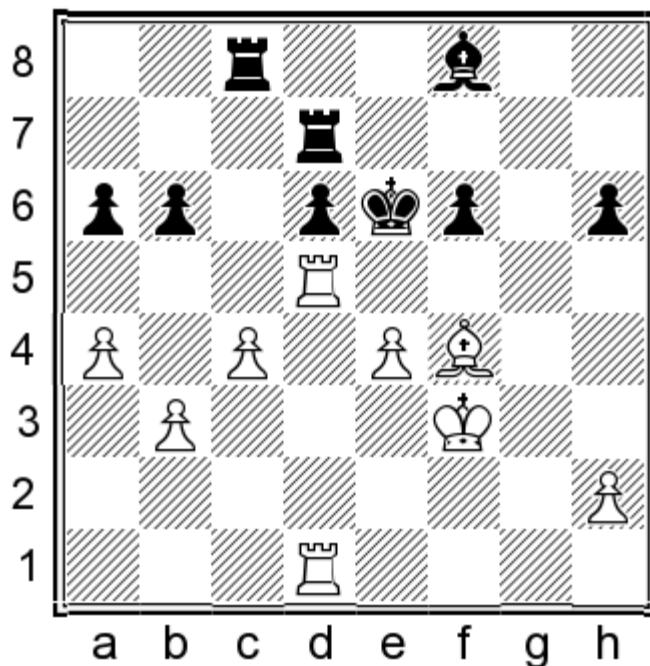
22...f6 23.Rad1 Rad8 24.g3 g5?!

Black voluntarily weakens his kingside further. More stubborn would have been 24...Kf7 when White will slowly improve his position with f4-f5, centralize the king and try to combine threats against the pawn on d6 with expansion on both the queen- and kingside.

25.f4 gxf4?

Facilitating the entrance of the White pieces on the kingside.

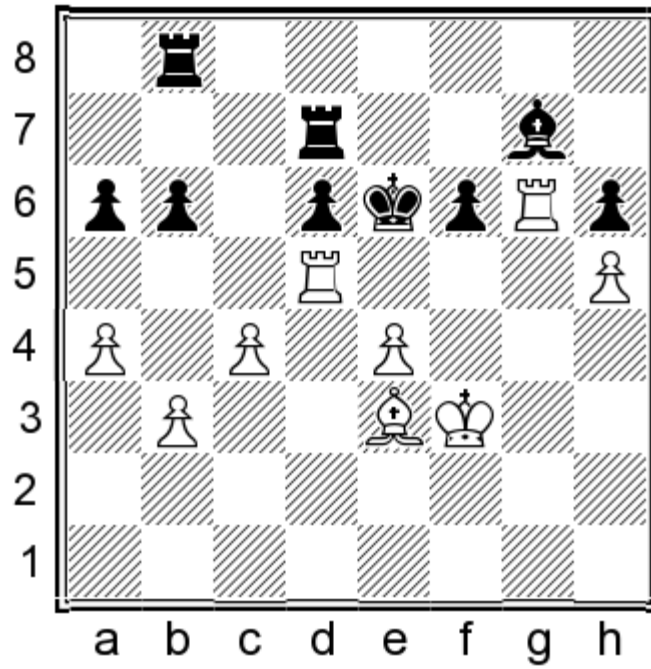
26.gxf4 Kf7 27.Kf2 exf4 28.Kf3 Ke6 29.Bc1 Rc8 30.Bxf4 Bf8



Position after: 30...Bf8

The pawn moves on the kingside have only helped White creating new targets. Apart from the pawns on b6 and d6, Black also needs to take care of the weaknesses on f6 and h6. Tiviakov thematically fixes them, while Black can only sit and wait what is about to happen to him.

31.h4! Rc6 32.h5 Rb7 33.Be3 Rb8 34.Bd4 Rc7 35.Rg1 Bg7 36.Rg6 Rf7 37.Be3 Rd7



Position after: 37...Rd7

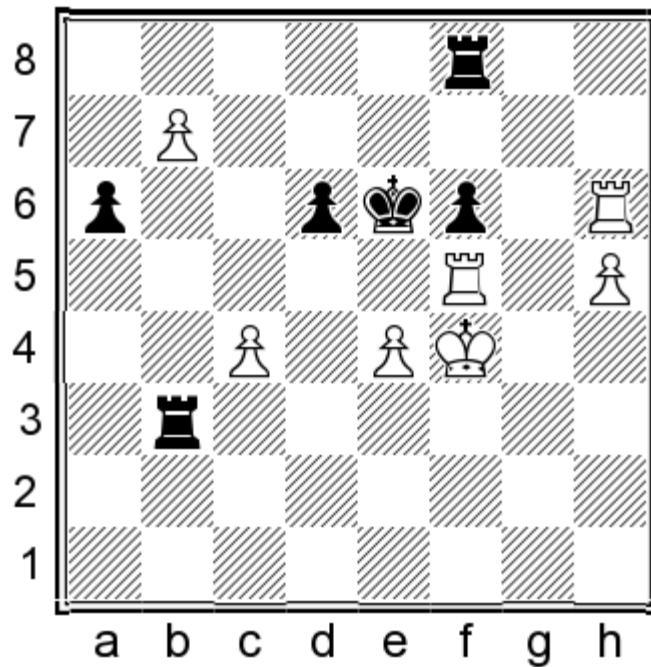
38.Rf5

38.e5! is even stronger, as 38...dxe5 39.Rxd7 Kxd7 40.Rxg7+ drops a piece.

38...Rf7 39.Kg4 Bf8 40.Bxh6 Bxh6 41.Rxh6 Rg7+ 42.Kf4

It's never too late going astray: 42.Rg6? fails to 42...Rxg6+ 43.hxg6 Rg8 44.Kh5 Rh8+ and White can't save the pawn on g6.

42...Rf8 43.a5 Rg1 44.axb6 Rb1 45.b7 Rxb3



Position after: 45...Rxb3

46.e5! dxe5+ 47.Rxe5+ Kd6 48.Rf5 Ke6

48...Rxb7 49.Rxf6+ Rxf6+ 50.Rxf6+ and White converts his material plus.

49.Rh7 Rd8 50.Rd5

And Black resigned, because of 50.Rd5 Rxd5 (50...Rg8 allows a nice tactical finish: 51.Rc5 Kd6 52.Rhc7 Rb6 53.Rc8 Rxb7 54.Rd5+ Ke6 55.Rxg8+-) 51.cxd5+ Kxd5 52.h6 Ke6 53.Rg7 and White's passed pawns are unstoppable.

1-0

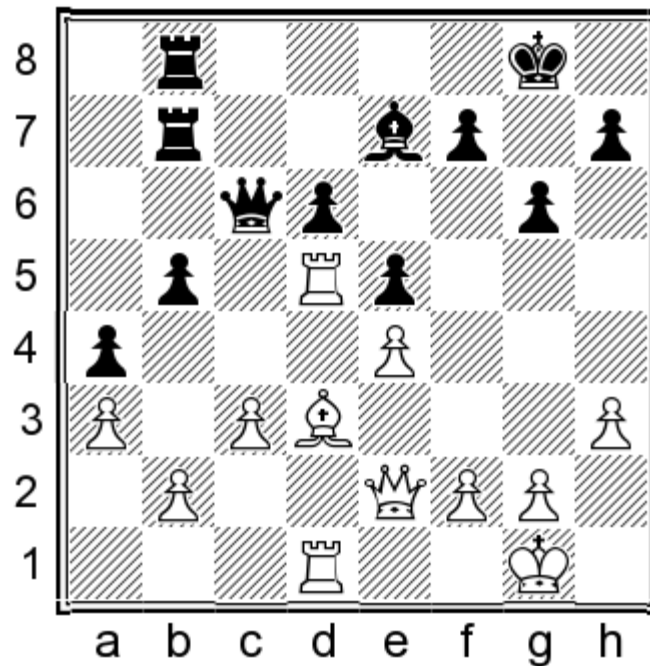
Opposite-coloured bishops

Galkin, Alexander (2608)

Anisimov, Pavel (2518)

Ulan Ude 2009

Opposite-coloured bishops have always been associated with a high drawing tendency. Indeed, in pure opposite-coloured bishop endings, the weaker side often has excellent chances to defend, however with more pieces on the board the side with the initiative will benefit from the presence of those bishops.



White to move

37.g3 Bf8 38.h4 Qe8 39.h5 Qc6 40.Kg2!

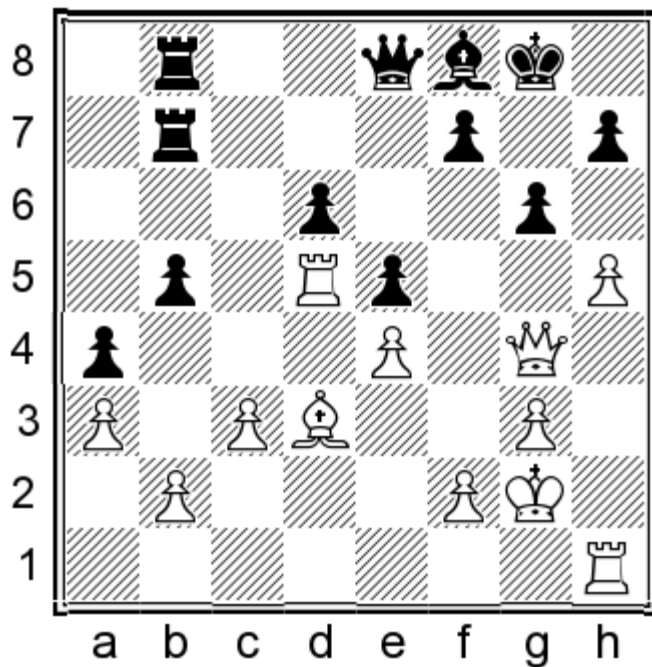
Clearing the first rank for the rook to come over to the h-file. Note that the black major pieces can hardly move as otherwise the pawn on b5 drops.

40...Be7 41.Rh1 Bf8 42.Qg4 Qe8 43.Qh4

The engines would like to see White opening the position right away with 43.f4 but for a human is psychologically

difficult weakening your kingside. Besides that White is absolutely not in a hurry to do that and instead keeps on improving his pieces.

43...Qe7 44.Qg4 Qe8

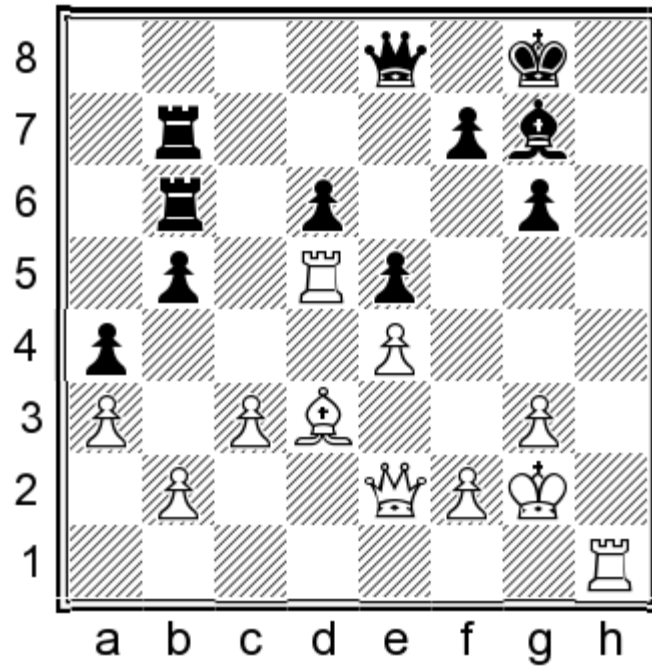


Position after: 44...Qe8

45.Be2?!

Although it doesn't spoil anything the bishop doesn't have much to do on the kingside and instead should be transferred to the a2-g8 diagonal (see game). 45.Bb1!

45...Qe7 46.Qh3 Qe6 47.Qh4 Be7 48.Qh2 Bf6 49.hxg6 hxg6 50.Qh6 Bg7 51.Qd2 Rb6 52.Bd3 Qe8 53.Qe2 R8b7



Position after: 53...R8b7

It may look White hasn't achieved that much on the kingside, but at the same time you could also ask about Black's performance. Finally Galkin activates his bishop when the difference in strength between the bishops is clearly visible.

54.Bb1! Qe6 55.Ba2 Rb8 56.Ra1!

Protecting the bishop on a2, before moving the rook from d5.

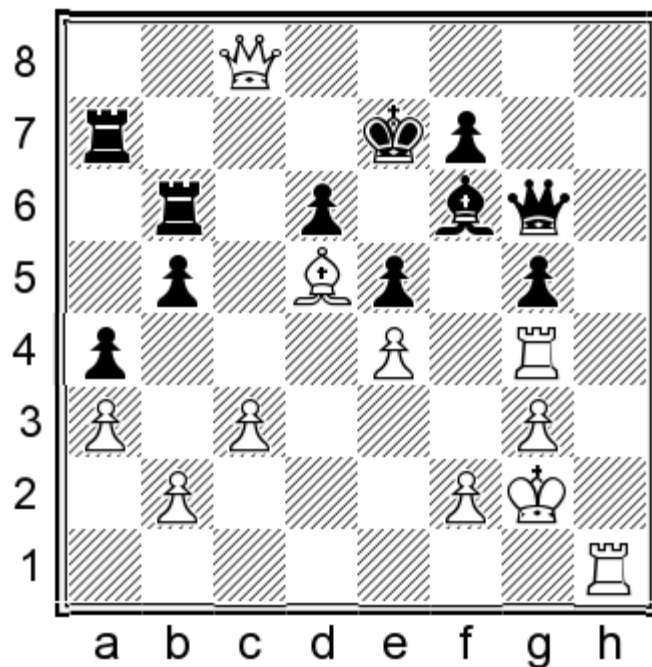
56...Qc8 57.Rd3 Qd8 58.Rh1 Qg5 59.Rh4 R8b7 60.Rg4 Qh6

60...Qf6 runs into 61.Rf3 and 62.Rxg6 is next. This tactical motif shows why the bishop is doing well on a2.

61.Qf3 Kf8 62.Rd1 g5 63.Qf5 Bf6

63...Qg6 wouldn't have saved the game either, e.g. 64.Qc8+ Ke7 65.Bd5 Rd7 66.Rh1 and Black has been completely paralyzed by the white pieces.

64.Qc8+ Ke7 65.Bd5 Ra7 66.Rh1 Qg6



Position after: 66...Qg6

The difference in activity between both sides' pieces is poignant. White only touches the f-pawn once his pieces are optimally placed and has brought Black in passivity.

67.f4! exf4

67...Qg7 68.fxg5 Bxg5 69.Rh8 and mate to follow.

68.gxf4 b4 69.axb4 a3 70.bxa3

70.bxa3 and Black realized that 70...Rxa3 is met by 71.Qc7+ picking up the rook on b6.

1-0

The liberating move ...d6-d5

So far the pawn structure of e4 vs. d6-e5 hasn't served Black well in this chapter, so now it's time to give a more objective view on this theme by showing some examples where the benefits of Black's position are displayed.

One of the key ideas you should take into account is the thematic break ...d6-d5. Once Black manages to get in this move he solves the problem of his backward d-pawn, removes his lack of space and might become very active since, very likely his pieces have been developed in such way to fight for the control over the central squares.

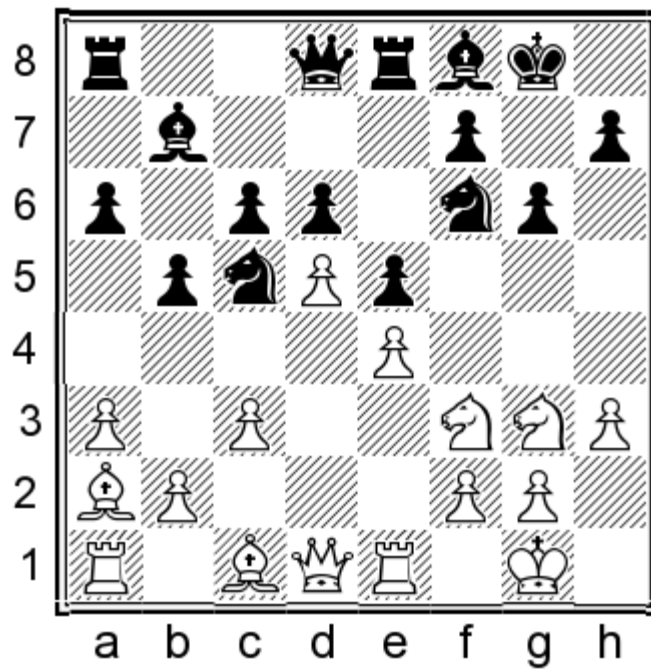
Bok, Benjamin (2620)

Vidit, Santosh Gujrathi (2702)

Douglas 2017

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Bb7 10.d4 Re8 11.Ng5 Rf8 12.Nf3 Re8 13.Nbd2 Bf8 14.a3 g6 15.d5 Nb8 16.Nf1 Nbd7 17.Ba2 Nc5 18.Ng3 c6

The pawn structure arises from the Zaitsev Variation of the Ruy Lopez where White blocks the centre with d4-d5. After this advance Black normally intends to challenge the white pawncentre with ...c7-c6 in order to activate the light-squared bishop as well as the other pieces.

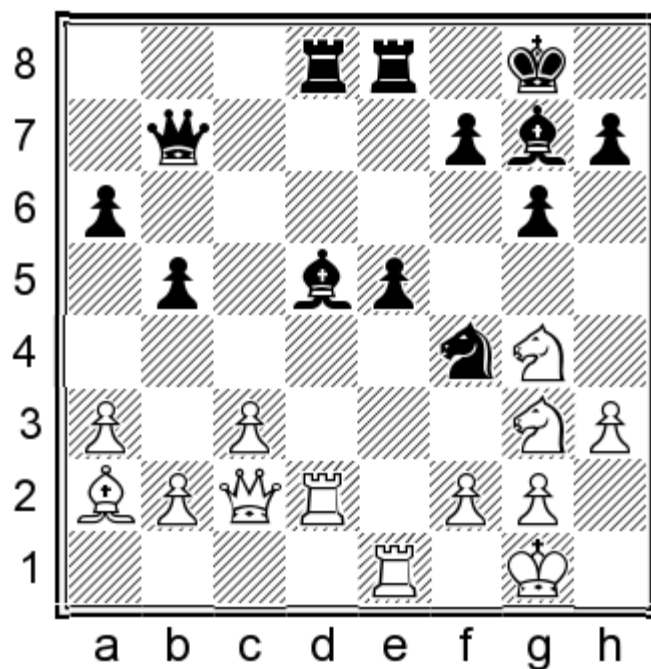


Position after: 18...c6

19.Bg5

Another option is 19.dxc6 Bxc6 but here I think Black obtains excellent play by fighting for control over the d5-square. One of the main problems for White is that the knight on g3 is not very well placed and not able to reach d5.

The following example nicely illustrates how things could go wrong for White very quickly. 20.Bg5 Bg7 21.Qd2 Qc7 22.Bxf6 Bxf6 23.Rad1 Rad8 24.Nh2 Ne6 25.Qc2 Qb7 26.Rd3 (26.Bd5 Bxd5 27.Rxd5 Nf4 28.Rdd1 d5 with excellent play for Black.) 26...Nf4 27.Rd2 d5 28.Ng4 Bg7 29.exd5 Bxd5

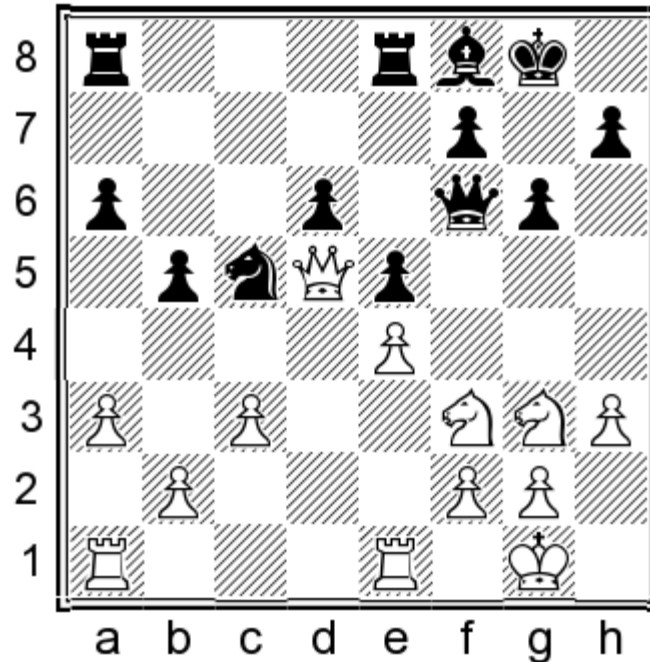


Position after: 29...Bxd5

A) Instead, 30.Bxd5 should have been tried, but after 30...Rxd5 31.Rxd5 Qxd5 32.Ne3 Qc6 Black has a very pleasant position. The break ...d6-d5 offers Black a space advantage and quite some piece activity as well.

B) 30.Red1?? Bxa2 and in Polschikov – Ambarcumova, Moscow 2010 White just blundered he can't take on d8 because of mate on g2.

19...cxd5 20.Bxf6 Qxf6 21.Bxd5 Bxd5 22.Qxd5



Position after: 22.Qxd5

It looks like White achieved exactly what he had been aiming for. The trade of the light-squared bishops gives him more control over the d5-square. However, the white knights aren't doing that well on the kingside and are too far away reaching the central outpost, while a queen or rook occupying the d5-square isn't ideal either as it could easily be chased away by the knight. Therefore Black's next move is quite understandable.

22...Na4!

A knight on the board isn't necessarily misplaced!

Black temporarily attacks the pawn on b2 and also prepares the knight going to b6 from where it fights for the d5-square. Another interesting possibility would have been 22...Qe6 but keeping the queens on the board better fits with Black's dynamical intentions.

23.Qd2

23.Re2 Nb6 24.Qd3 (24.Qc6? allows 24...Qd8 25.Rd1 Qb8! followed by 26...Rc8 and the queen has been trapped.) 24...Rad8 25.Qc2 d5 and Black's position has to be preferred.

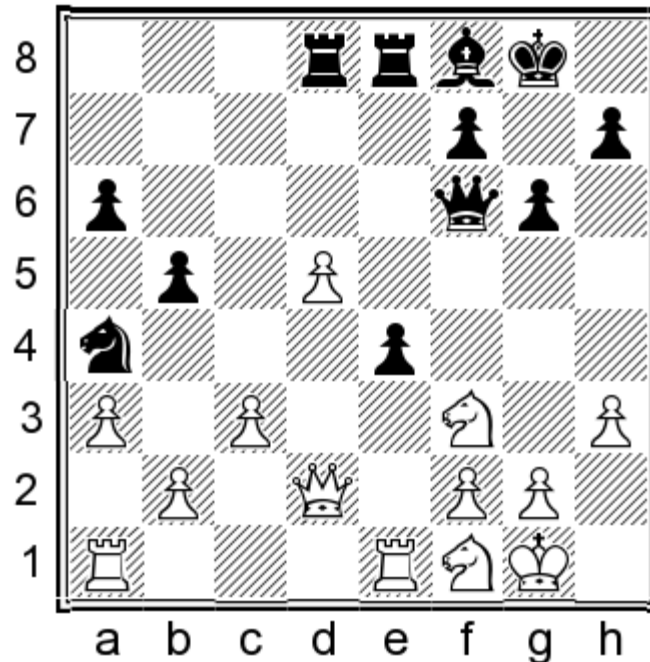
23...Rad8 24.Nf1?

Sometimes the positional ideas don't match with the dynamics of the position. The positional idea of improving the knight by bringing it to d5 is simply too slow.

Instead, White should have considered to improve another inactive piece by means of 24.Rad1 and now after 24...Nb6 an interesting strategical battle is still taking place where Black is doing absolutely fine.

Again White's problem is that the white knight isn't doing particularly well on g3, while the black bishop isn't that bad, especially when Black will get in the break ...d6-d5. (Note that 24...d5? doesn't make sense here, as after 25.exd5 the e4 square is still controlled by the knight on g3.)

24...d5! 25.exd5 e4!



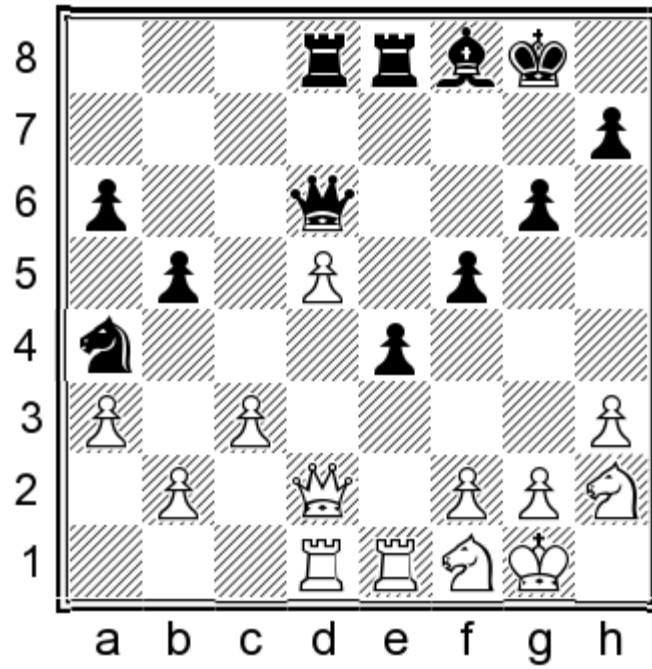
Position after: 25...e4!

26.N3h2

In case of the more active 26.Nd4 Black regains the pawn with 26...Rxd5 with fantastic play. The pawn on e4 ensures Black a very pleasant space advantage. Black could easily strengthen his position with moves like ...Nc5-d3 and prepare the advance of his f-pawn.

With the move played in the game Bok attempts to stick to his extra pawn, but deactivates his own knight at the same time. It's interesting to see that Vidit isn't interested in regaining the pawn as quickly as possible, but rather increases the pressure on White by mobilizing his pawn majority on the kingside and bringing his knight from a4 back into action.

26...Qd6 27.Rad1 f5



Position after: 27...f5

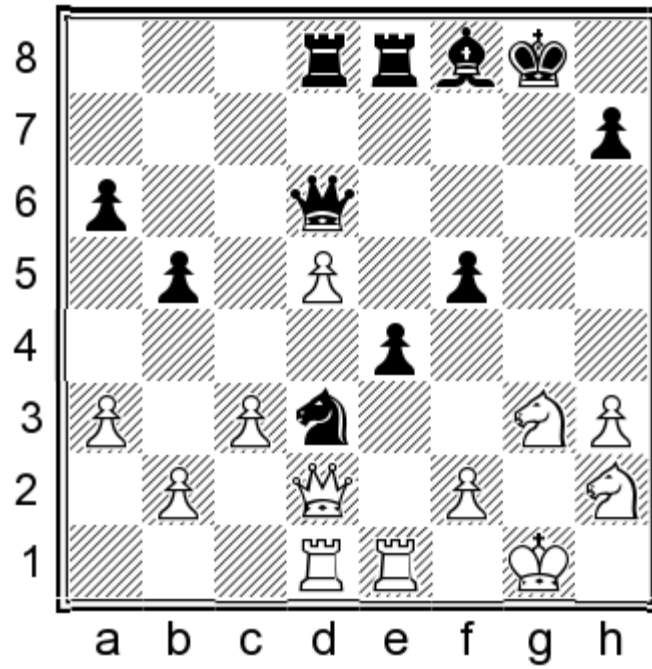
28.g4?

White's position is already clearly worse, but after this move things are starting to look very ugly for him as he voluntarily destroys his own kingside.

In my opinion he should have stayed calm with a move like 28.f3 even though after 28...Nc5 White's position remains problematic, in view of 29.fxe4? Nxe4 30.Qe3 Qf6! threatening 31...Bc5, while 31.b4 Nxc3 is hopeless too.

After the game move the Black knight returns with devastating effect.

28...Nc5! 29.gxf5 gxf5 30.Ng3 Nd3!



Position after: 30...Nd3!

It's the black knight which eventually has reached the wonderful square on d3.

31.Nxf5

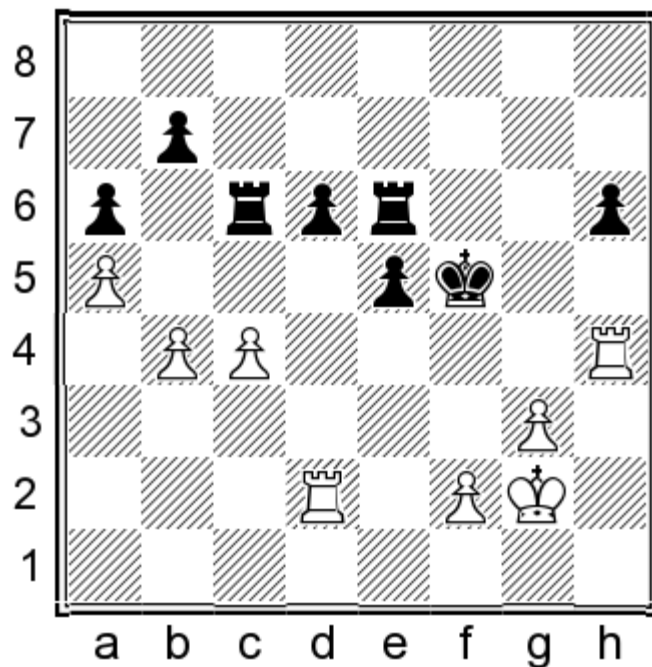
31.Qg5+ Qg6 32.Qxf5 Qxf5 33.Nxf5 Nxe1 34.Rxe1 Rxd5 doesn't give White sufficient compensation for the exchange.

31...Qg6+ 32.Ng3 Bc5!

Even stronger than immediately taking the material with 32...Nxe1, as Black now also threatens to take the knight on g3. The game is over.

33.Re3 Bxe3 34.Qxe3 Rxd5 35.Ng4 h5 36.Nxe4 hxg4 37.Nf6+ Qxf6 38.Qxe8+ Kg7 39.Qe3 gxh3 40.Kh2 Qd6+ 0-1

Adams, Michael (2738)
 Batchuluun, Tsegmed (2555)
 Tbilisi 2017

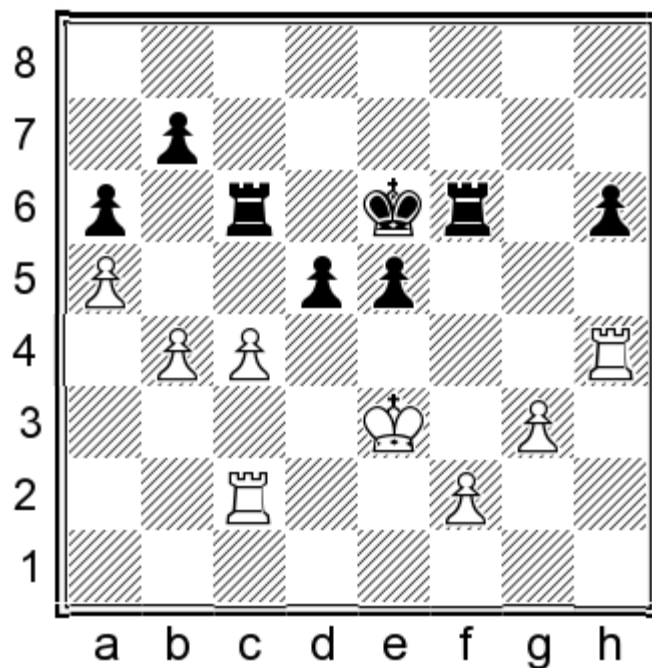


Black to move

According to the rule of pawn islands (2 vs. 3) White should be somewhat better in this double rook ending. Black on the other hand has the more active king, while the rooks are defending the pawns.

As we discussed in Chapter 2 the rooks should become active, while the king covers the weakness on d6. In the next few moves it becomes very clear that White is unable to either exert pressure against the black pawns nor using the d5 square as an outpost for his rooks.

35...Rg6 36.Kf3 Ke6 37.Rc2 Rf6+ 38.Ke3 d5!



Position after: 38...d5!

Thematically solving the backward pawn and weakness of the d5 square. Black is in control.

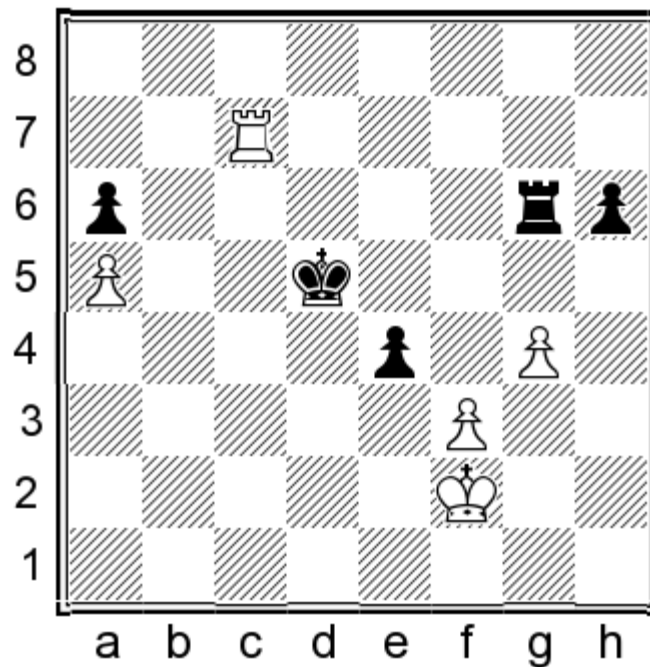
39.f3

39.cxd5+ Kxd5 40.Rxc6 (Or 40.Rd2+ Ke6 intending 41...Rc3 and Black is too active.) 40...Rxc6 and Black is comfortably holding on.

39...Rg6 40.Kf2 dxc4 41.Rhxc4 Rxc4 42.Rxc4 Kd5 43.Rc7 b6 44.g4

44.Ra7 b5! is fine for Black, as White needs to be careful not allowing any counterplay from Black and losing the pawn on b4.

44...bxa5 45.bxa5 e4!



Position after: 45...e4!

Eliminating the remaining weakness. There is not much left of the position where White symbolically controlled the central light squares.

46.Ke3 exf3 47.Kxf3 Kd4 48.Kf4 Rf6+ 49.Kg3 Rg6 50.Kh4 Rg5 51.Rc6 Rxa5 52.Rxh6 Ra1 53.g5 a5 54.Ra6 Kc4 55.g6 Rg1 56.Kh5 Kb5 57.Ra8

And soon the ensuing rook vs. pawn race is an obvious draw as the white king is too far away.

1/2-1/2

Dynamical compensation

Leko, Peter (2741)

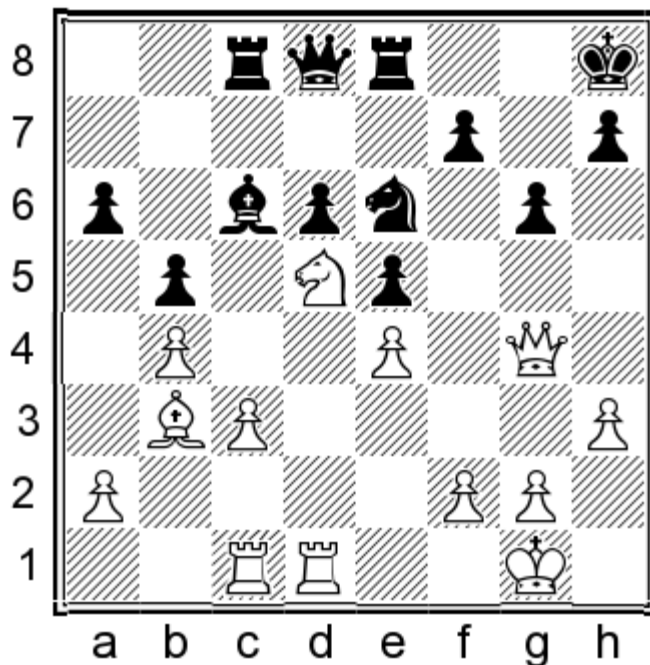
Ivanchuk, Vassily (2781)

Moscow 2008

Very often the occupation of the weak square needs to be compensated by dynamical counterplay in order not to suffer

from a positional torture.

The pawn on e4 supports the knight on d5 very well, so challenging that point might destabilize White's grip on the centre.

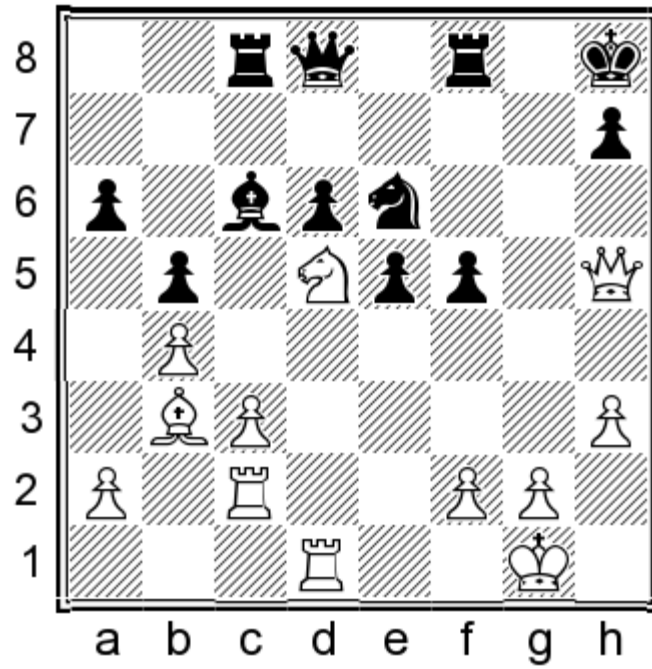


Black to move

24...Rf8 25.Rc2

In certain cases it's recommended to maintain grip in the centre with a pawn on e4. In this particular case that doesn't seem to work out well, e.g. after 25.Qe2 f5 26.f3?! Black develops fantastic dynamical counterplay on the kingside: 26...Bxd5 27.Bxd5 Nf4 28.Qd2 (28.Qf2 Qg5 29.Kh2 Nd3! and Black wins the exchange.) 28...Qh4 and Black is in perfect shape as White needs to be extremely alert with the action on the kingside so that there is no time at all pressurizing the backward d-pawn.

25...f5 26.exf5 gxf5 27.Qh5



Position after: 27.Qh5

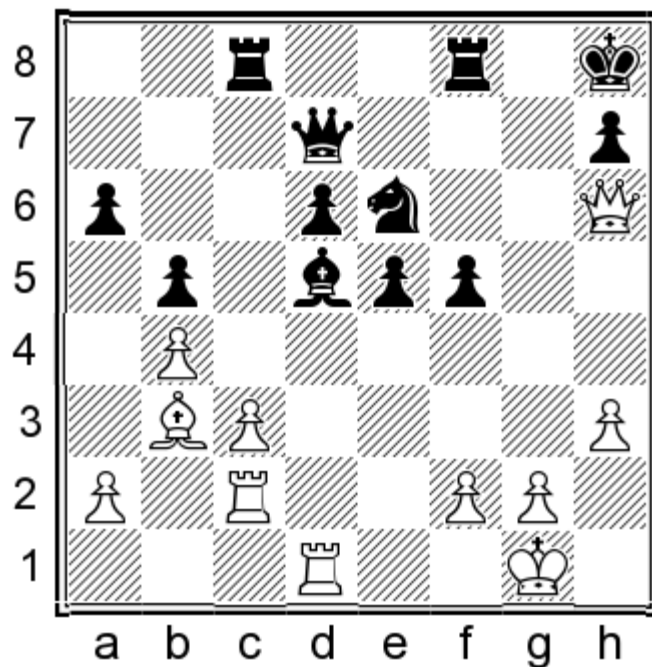
27...Qd7?!

More accurate would have been 27...Bxd5! 28.Bxd5 Nf4 29.Qf3 Qg5 followed by ...Rc7-g7 with seizing the initiative on the kingside. Similar play often arises from the Sveshnikov Sicilian. The weakness of the d5-square is not felt when you shift the attention to the other part of the board.

28.Qh6!

28.Nb6? doesn't lead anywhere, in view of 28...Qg7!. Leko's move threatens a knight jump to either b6 or f6.

28...Bxd5

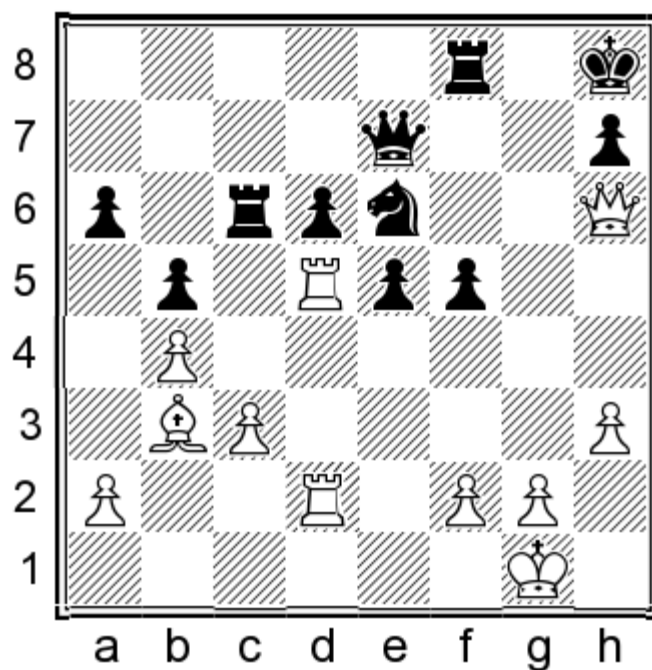


Position after: 28...Bxd5

29.Rxd5?

Remarkably White doesn't recapture with his bishop. I guess that Leko didn't rate his chances highly when Black is able to trade off his knight for the bishop, but after 29.Bxd5 Nf4 30.g3 Nxd5 (Probably more stubborn is 30...Ng6 but then 31.c4 ensures White a lasting initiative against the weaknesses on the queenside, while Black's counterplay is not at an advanced stage.) 31.Rxd5± the White major pieces are significantly stronger than its counterparts. The weakness on d6 plus an exposed king makes Black's position very unpleasant to play.

29...Qe7 30.Rcd2 Rc6



Position after: 30...Rc6

White's pieces have been concentrated around the d5-square, but Black's central pawnformation nicely covers important squares.

31.g3?

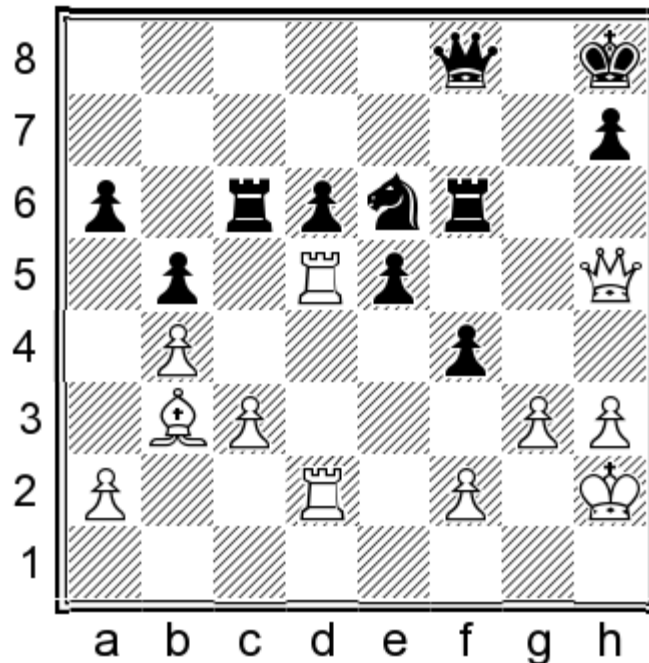
Voluntarily weakening the kingside is hardly ever a good option. White should have increased the pressure on Black with 31.a4 when the following line is mentioned by the engine: 31...Rf6 32.Qe3 Nf4 33.axb5 Qg7 (33...Nxd5? 34.Bxd5 Rc8 35.bxa6 and White's pawns are too dominant.) 34.Qxf4!? (34.f3? axb5 35.Rxb5 Rc8! first covering the back rank, before playing 36...Rg6. White is in trouble because of the weaknesses on g2 and h3.) 34...exf4 35.bxc6 Rg6 36.f3 Qxc3 37.Rxd6 Rxd6 38.Rxd6 Qxb3 39.c7 Qc3 40.Rd8+ Kg7 41.c8=Q Qe1+ 42.Kh2 Qg3+ with a repetition.

This variation is by no means forced, but it does nicely illustrate that the structural weakness on d5 can be compensated with dynamical counterplay.

31...f4!

Seizing the initiative. Obviously Black isn't interested in capturing on c3, since after 31...Rxc3? 32.Rxd6 White's pieces are becoming too active, as 32...Nd4 is met by 33.Rd7!

32.Kh2 Rf6 33.Qh5 Qf8!



Position after: 33...Qf8!

A beautiful retreat of the queen. While protecting the pawn on d6, Black prepares to open the f-file and enters the second rank.

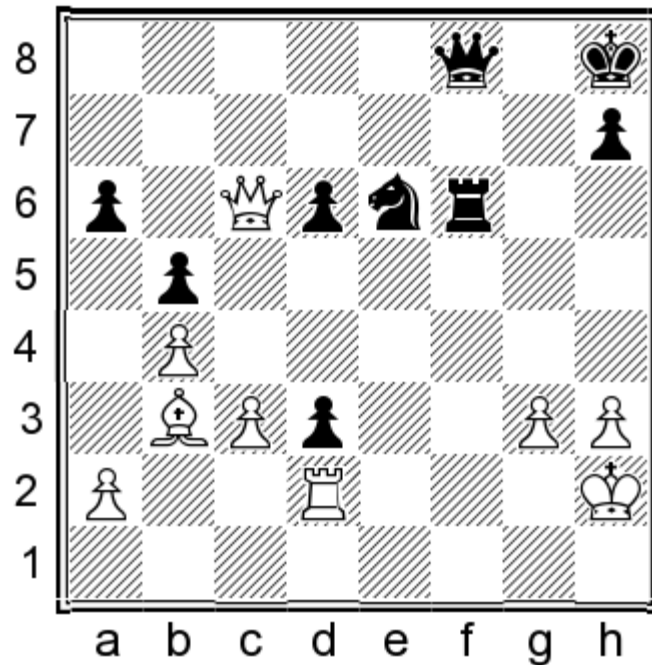
34.R5d3

34.Bc2 fxg3+ 35.fxg3 h6! intending Ng5. White is losing grip and Black threatens to enter f2 and to take on c3.

34...e4 35.Qd5

35.Rd5 runs into 35...e3! 36.fxe3 fxg3+ 37.Kxg3 Rxc3 and who cares about a weak square when you are mating the opponent!

35...exd3 36.Qxc6 fxg3+ 37.fxg3



Position after: 37.fxg3

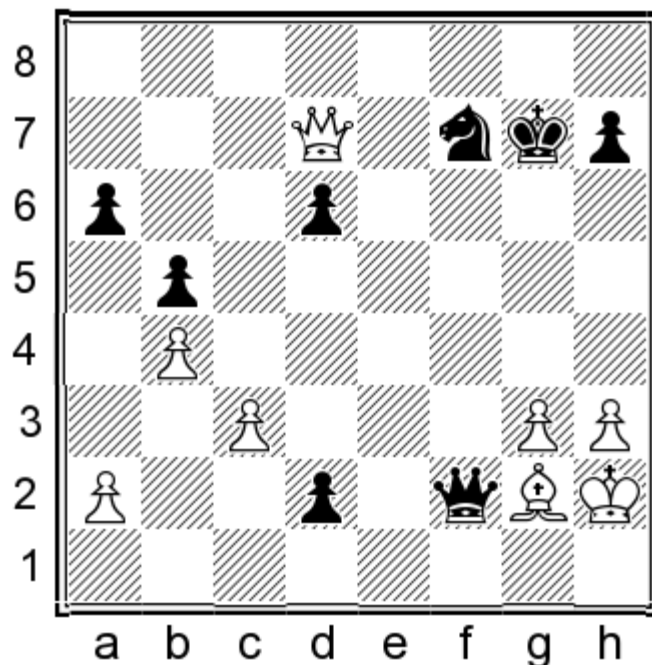
37...Ng5!

Presumably White had only counted on 37...Rf2+ but then after 38.Rxf2 Qxf2+ 39.Qg2 Black's initiative is stopped. Ivanchuk's move activates the knight and threatens to win material with a check on f3.

38.Bd5 Qh6

Most players would have gone for 38...Rf2+ 39.Rxf2 Qxf2+ 40.Bg2 d2 but perhaps Ivanchuk was afraid he would come under a lot of checks?

In any case, the following line is a good reminder that the knight is always an excellent defender, taking away a lot of checks nearby: 41.Qe8+ Kg7 42.Qd7+ Nf7!



Position after: 42...Nf7!

43.Qg4+ Kf8 44.Qc8+ Ke7 45.Qb7+ Kf6 46.Qd5 Qe2 47.Qf3+ Qxf3 48.Bxf3 Ng5 followed by Ne4xc3 and the d-pawn decides.

39.h4

The engine isn't that scared of the capture on h3 and insists on 39.Qe8+ Rf8 40.Qe1 even though Black retains a decisive advantage also after 40...Nxb3 41.Kg2 Qg5

39...Nf3+ 40.Bxf3 Qxd2+ 41.Kh3 Qxa2 42.Qb6 Qe6+ 43.Kg2 Qf5

0-1

Transformation of advantage

One of the biggest dangers in chess is being too dogmatic in evaluating situations. For example, “the bishop pair offers a stable advantage” or “a good knight vs. bad bishop always wins” are good examples of general considerations which chess players too quickly implement assessing their own positions. Every position is unique and therefore needs to be treated independently and be tested on the basis of concrete variations. The knowledge you have gained from earlier chess study could help you in the right direction, but it's for that reason not sufficient in a quest for the truth.

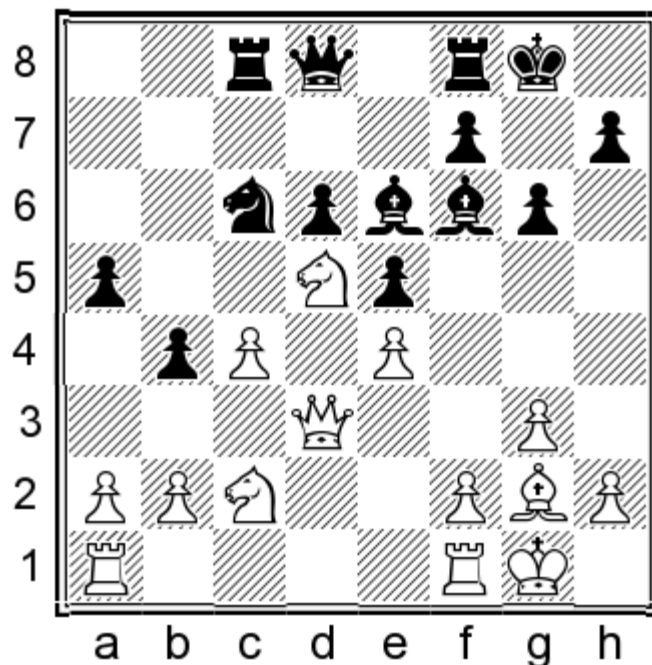
In the next game Nisipeanu comes up with a very original approach and voluntarily exchanges his good knight against the bad bishop!

Nisipeanu, Liviu-Dieter (2672)

Radjabov, Teimour (2740)

Medias 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c4 b4 12.Nc2 0-0 13.g3 Be6 14.Bg2 a5 15.0-0 Rc8 16.Qd3 g6



Position after: 16...g6

With the last move Black has revealed his intentions to develop counterplay with the thematical Bg7 and f7-f5, playing around the d5 square.

Nisipeanu comes up with a very positional decision by exchanging off his best piece.

17.Nxf6+!

White exchanges his good knight for the bad bishop, but as a general rule it's not important what you exchange, but what remains on the board.

The backward d-pawn can easily be attacked by White's major pieces. As it turns out Black can't really become active, while White slowly improves his position.

17...Qxf6 18.b3

18.Qxd6? doesn't work in view of 18...Rfd8 19.Qc5 Nd4

18...Qe7 19.Rad1 Rfd8 20.h4

A more challenging idea would have been 20.f4!? exf4 (20...f6 21.f5 Bf7 22.h4 followed by doubling of the rooks on the f-file offers White a great initiative on the kingside.) 21.gxf4 and White has the more pleasant game here as well. Black is lacking an active plan.

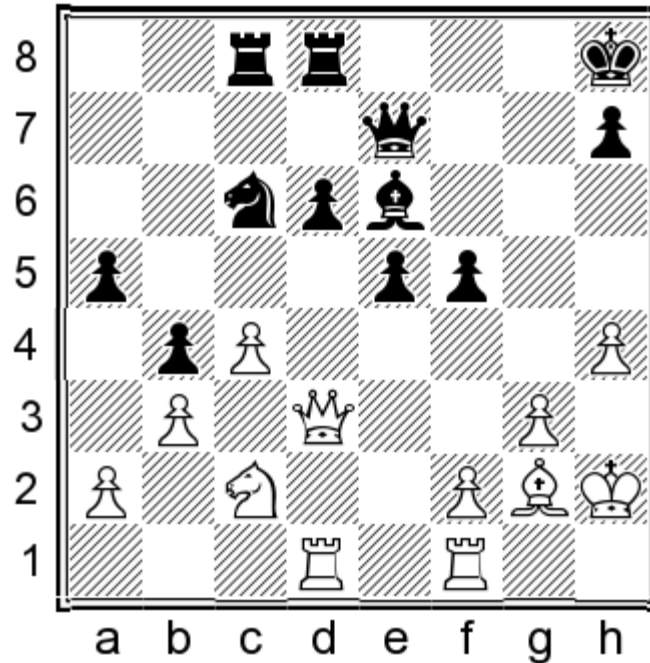
20...Kh8?!

This move in combination with the next one initiates a wrong plan. A better idea would have been 20...a4 with the intention to develop counterplay on the a-file.

21.Kh2 f5?

By committing to this horrible strategic error, Radjabov overestimates his chances.

22.exf5 gxf5



Position after: 22...gxf5

22...Bxf5 23.Be4 and has firm grip on the white squares.

23.Bxc6!

An excellent positional decision. White gives up his strong bishop in order to exert pressure on Black's centre. After the immediate 23.f4?! e4 The bishop has no longer anything to do, while Black gets rid of his backward pawn by ...d5.

23...Rxc6 24.f4! Rcc8

In case of 24...e4 25.Qd4+ Kg8 26.Ne3 Black is ending up in a position which should become a positional torture with White having all the trumps.

25.Qe3 Qg7

Threatening to play 26...d5.

26.Rf2

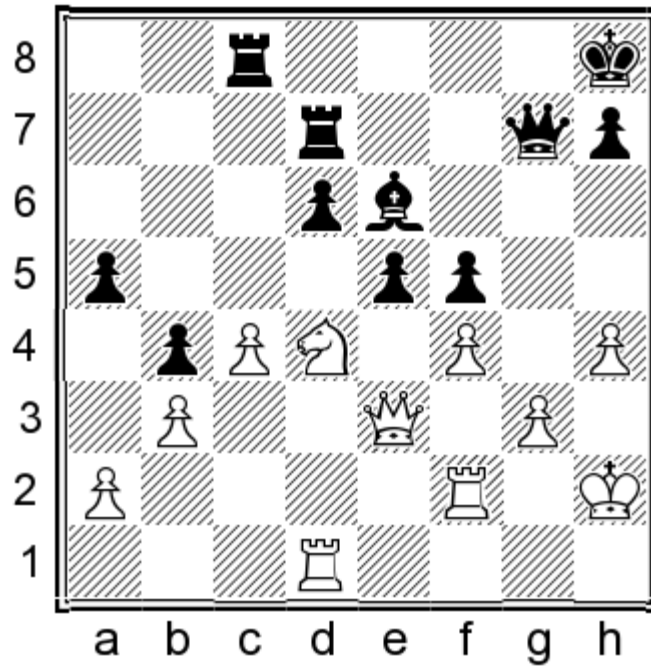
A very useful move. White protects his knight and prepares to increase pressure on the centre. 26.Nd4?! exd4 27.Qxe6 Re8 this gives Black counterplay.

26...Rd7?!

Better chances of survival would have been offered by 26...d5 27.cxd5 e4 although White remains on top after 28.Qb6!

27.Nd4!

Now it does work. The knight enters Black's position with a devastating effect. Black has too many weaknesses and is simply lost here.

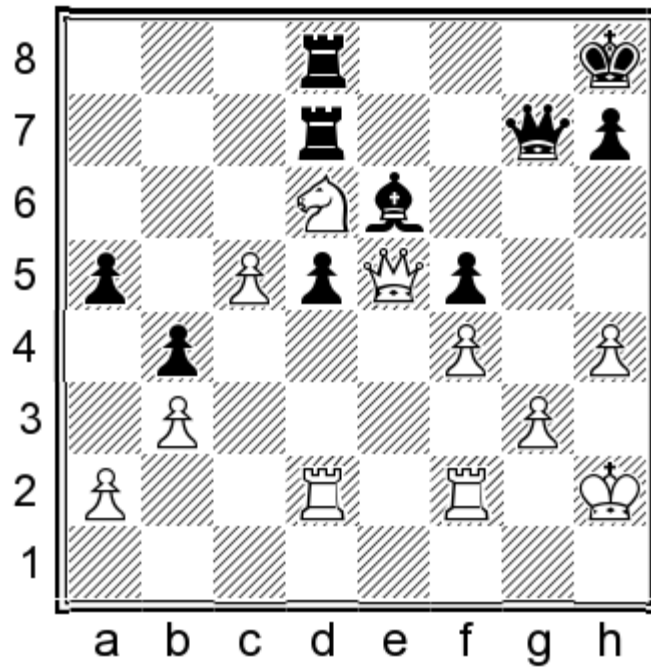


Position after: 27.Nd4!

27...Qg4 28.Rdd2 Re8 29.Nb5 d5 30.Nd6! Red8

30...Rxd6 31.Qxe5+ drops an exchange.

31.Qxe5+ Qg7 32.c5



Position after: 32.c5

The rest is very simple.

32...Qxe5 33.fxe5 Rc7 34.Rc2 d4 35.Rfd2 f4 36.gxf4 d3 37.Rxd3 Bf5 38.Nf7+ Kg7 39.Rg2+

39.Rg2+ Kxf7 40.Rxd8+-

1-0

Transformation of pawn structures

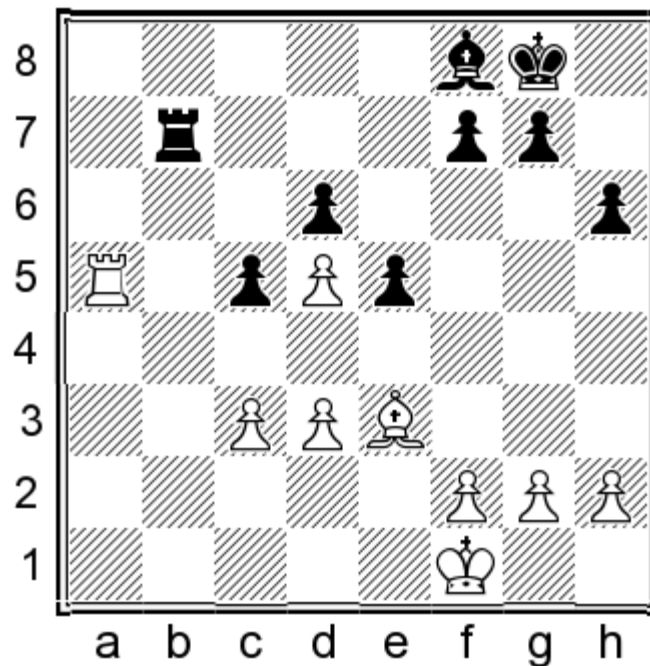
Carlsen, Magnus (2826)

Ding, Liren (2772)

Saint Louis 2017

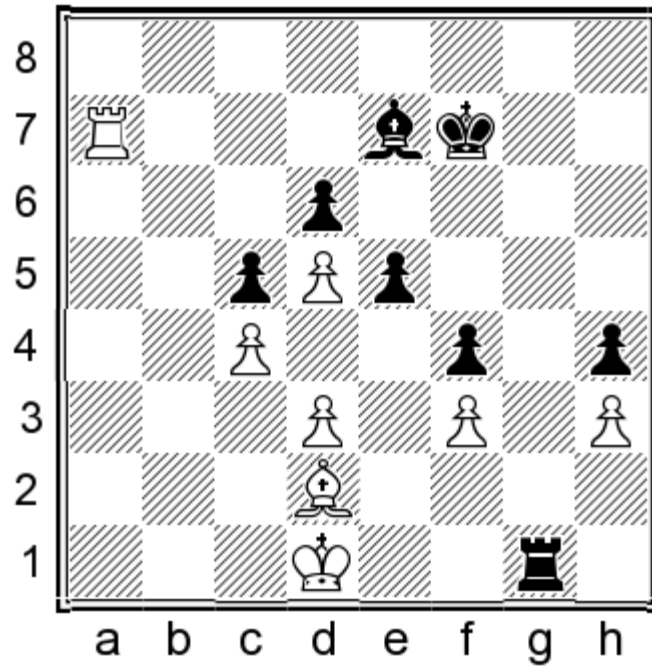
So far we have seen examples where White managed to maintain control over the d5-square with his pieces, which is normally speaking the ideal setup in order to pose more practical problems. Quite regularly Black could initiate a capture at a suitable moment when White is to take back with a pawn, which leads to a massive change in the character of play. After all, new pawn structures are accompanied by new directories for pieces to find good squares.

In rapid and blitz match between Magnus Carlsen and Ding Liren this change in the pawn structure has been seen in a couple of games. Let's see what kind of consequences the mutations in pawn structure involve.



Black to move

32...f5 33.Ke2 Kf7 34.Kd1 Be7 35.Kc2 g5 36.Ra6 h5 37.Bd2 g4 38.c4 h4 39.h3 Rb8 40.Ra7 Rg8 41.Kd1 f4 42.f3 gxf3 43.gxf3 Rg1+



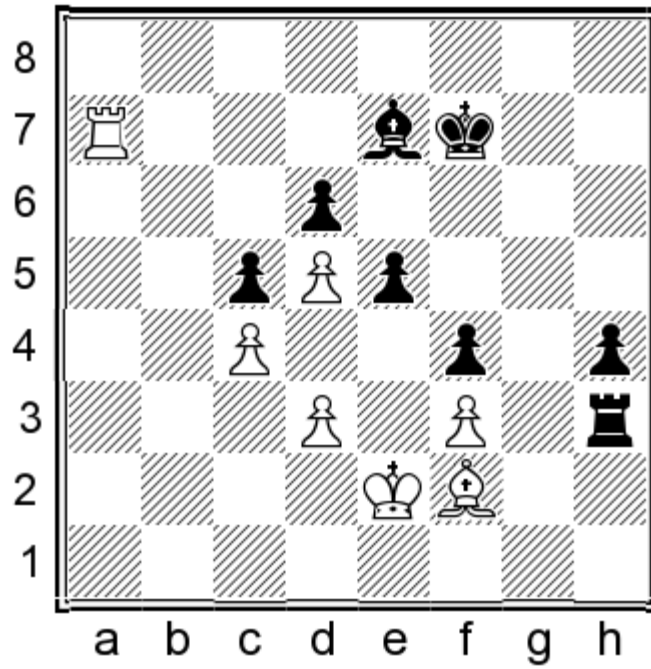
Position after: 43...Rg1+

Only here White seems to make a serious mistake which has huge consequences. However, such mistakes are not coming out of the blue and it seems to me that Carlsen also helped Black by weakening the kingside with 39.h3. “Never make pawn moves on the side where you are weaker” springs to mind.

44.Be1?

The engine shows a beautiful way out for White: 44.Ke2 Rh1 and now 45.d4! when White suddenly generates counterplay thanks to the pin along the 7th rank, while his king can stay active on d3. It should be obvious that being dependant on such tactical resources is a clear sign that something had gone wrong earlier, in what seemed a dull, drawish ending.

44...Rh1 45.Ke2 Rxd3 46.Bf2

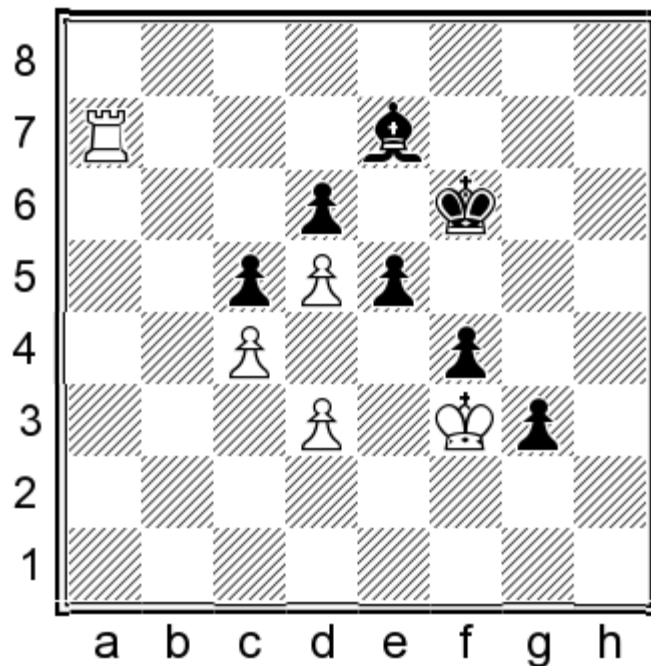


Position after: 46.Bf2

46...Kf6??

Missing an important tactical resource, which traps the rook. Black could have won with 46...Rh2! 47.Kf1 h3! 48.Kg1 (48.Bxc5 Rh1+ 49.Kf2 Kf6 50.Bb6 Rb1 and the h-pawn promotes.) 48...Rg2+ 49.Kf1 Rg8 and Black wins.

47.Kf1! Rxf3 48.Kg2 Rg3+ 49.Bxg3 hxg3 50.Kf3



Position after: 50.Kf3

Black has sufficient pawns for the exchange, but is unable to use them as the white king is blockading on the light-

squares. Therefore, neither side can make progress and a draw is inevitable.

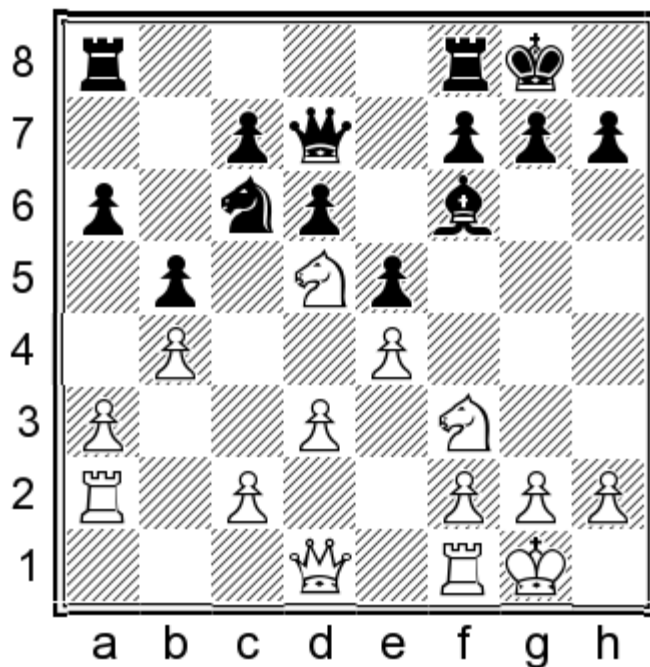
50...Bf8 51.Ke4 Be7 52.Kf3 Bf8 53.Ke4 Be7 54.Kf3 Bf8 ½-½

Carlsen, Magnus (2837)

Ding, Liren (2774)

Saint Louis 2017

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.d3 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.a3 0-0 9.Nc3 Na5 10.Ba2 Be6 11.b4 Bxa2 12.Rxa2 Nc6 13.Bg5 Qd7 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Nd5



Position after: 15.Nd5

Technically speaking the d5-square isn't weak, as the pawn on c7 is still able to take control over it. Nevertheless this game shows what impact the transformation of the pawn structure might have on the remaining pieces on the board.

15...a5

Black isn't afraid to weaken his own queenside. A predecessor: 15...Bd8 16.a4 Ne7 17.Ne3 Rb8 18.axb5 axb5 19.c3 Qe6 20.Qb1 d5! and everything got liquidated: 21.exd5 Nxd5 22.Nxd5 Qxd5 23.Re1 Bf6 24.Rae2 c5 25.Nxe5 cxb4 26.Qxb4 Bxe5 27.Rxe5 Qxd3 and soon a draw was agreed in Anand – Aronian, Bilbao 2014.

16.c4

16.Nxf6+ gxf6 17.Rb2 axb4 18.axb4 f5 19.Nh4 f4 20.Nf5 Kh8 21.d4 f6 with a more or less balanced position in Dominguez – Tomashevsky, Baku 2014.

16...Ne7

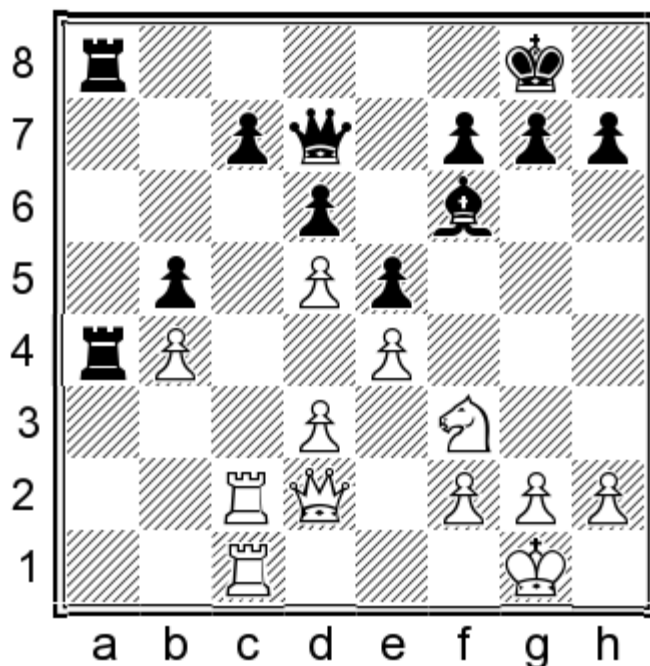
A) Both pawn captures aren't satisfying for Black: 16...bxc4 17.b5 Ne7 18.Nxf6+ gxf6 19.dxc4 and White has improved his pawn structure on the queenside.

B) 16...axb4 17.cxb5 Ne7 18.a4 and the outside passed a-pawn is potentially a decisive factor.

17.Rc2 Nxd5 18.cxd5 axb4 19.axb4

The tension has been released and White seems to have gotten the upper hand. The semi-open c-file enables White to put pressure on the backward c-pawn, while the black bishop can't be activated either.

19...Ra4 20.Qd2 Rfa8 21.Rfc1



Position after: 21.Rfc1

21...Bd8?

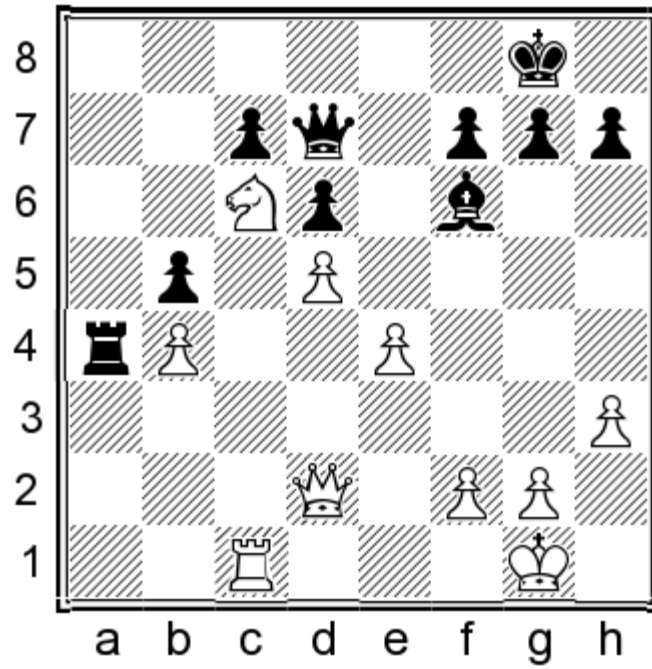
A wrong judgment by Black.

The bishop should have stayed on f6, preventing the white knight reaching c6. After 21...R8a7 22.d4 exd4 23.Nxd4 Bxd4 24.Qxd4 White's position remains easier to play, but it's not simple capitalizing on one single weakness (c7), while Black is also keeping an eye on the pawn on b4.

22.h3 Ra1 23.Rxa1 Rxa1+ 24.Rc1 Ra4

Also after trading off a second pair of rooks with 24...Rxc1+ 25.Qxc1 Black isn't out of the woods, as the pawn on b5 is likely to drop at some point. White just needs to make sure that Black isn't allowed to trade off his bishop for the knight.

25.d4 exd4 26.Nxd4 Bf6 27.Nc6!



Position after: 27.Nc6!

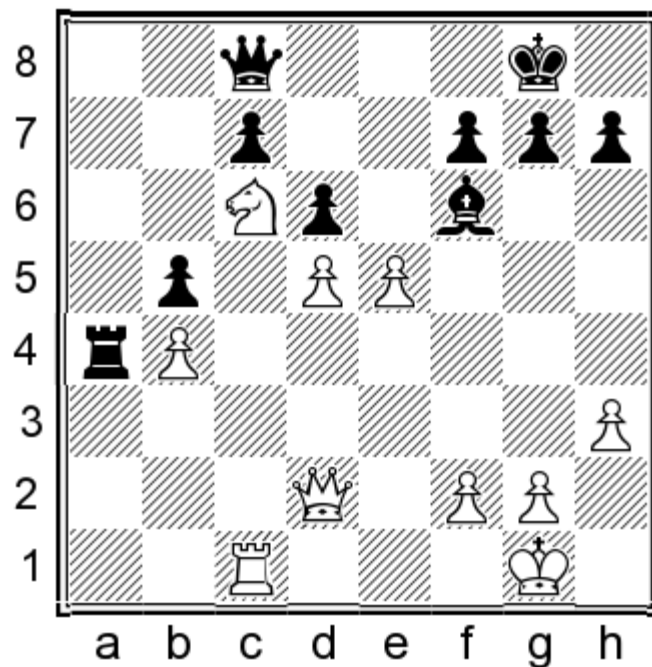
The knight is wonderfully placed on the weak c6-square. Even though White isn't really threatening anything at the moment, the knight is an absolute nuisance and disturbs the coordination of the black pieces.

Moreover, the pawn on b4 has been protected as well, so that White could play next Qd3 and take on b5.

27...Qc8?

Allowing a nice tactical sequence finishing off the game.

28.e5!



Position after: 28.e5!

28...dxe5

28...Bxe5 29.Ne7+ drops the queen.

29.d6! Ra8

Other moves wouldn't help either: 29...cxd6 30.Ne7+; or 29...Qd7 30.Ne7+ Bxe7 31.Rxc7! Qxd6 32.Rc8+ Bf8 33.Qxd6+-

30.Ne7+ Bxe7 31.dxe7

And Black is unable to eliminate the e-pawn, e.g. 31.dxe7 f6 (31...Qe6 32.Qd8+! Rxd8 33.exd8=Q+; 31...Qe8 32.Rxc7 h6 33.Rd7 intending Qd6 and Rd8.) 32.Qd5+ Kh8 33.Rd1

1-0

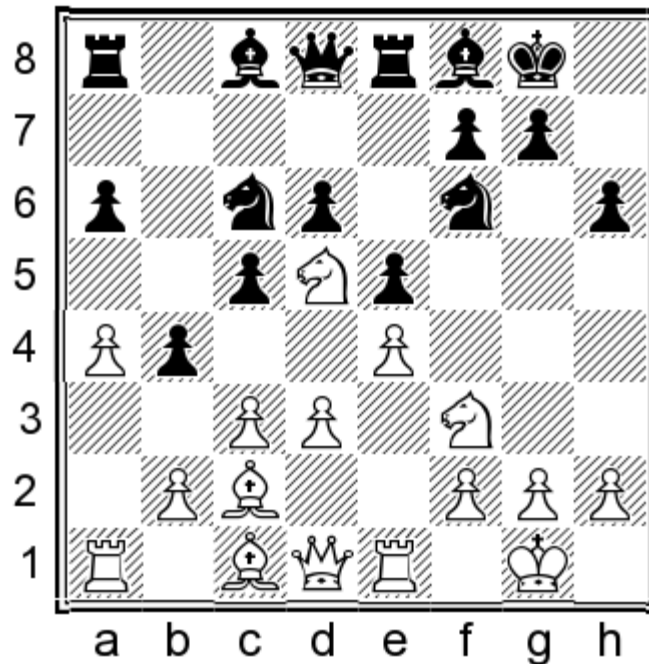
Carlsen, Magnus (2837)

Ding, Liren (2774)

Saint Louis 2017

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.d3 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.Re1 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.Nbd2 Re8 12.Nf1 Nc6 13.Ne3 Bf8 14.a4 b4 15.Nd5 h6

A fairly standard type of Ruy Lopez structure where White is aiming to gain control over the light-squares. In a few moves from now the pawn structure changes so drastically that it's hard to recognize there has ever been a weak square on d5!



Position after: 15...h6

16.a5

A very provocative decision, basically forcing Black to take on the d5 and capture the pawn on a5, as otherwise moves like Ba4 and/or Nb6 could become unpleasant. A safer continuation is for instance 16.Bb3

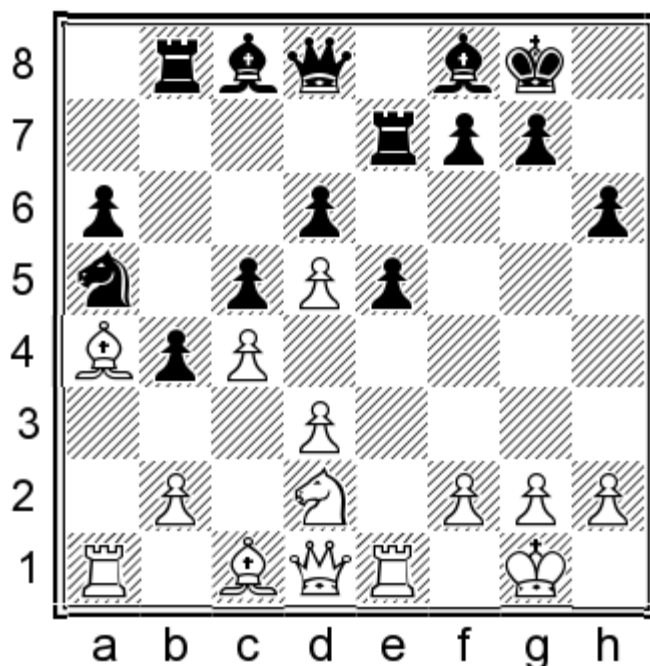
16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Nxa5 18.Ba4

Temporarily misplacing the rook on e7, but at the same time the bishop isn't looking that great either on a4. White could also have considered options to open the position, e.g.

A) 18.cxb4 cxb4 19.Bd2 Rb8 20.Ra4 Rb5! or;

B) 18.d4 cxd4 19.cxd4 Nc4! but in both cases Black is in pretty good shape nevertheless.

18...Re7 19.Nd2 Rb8 20.c4



Position after: 20.c4

20...Nb7

Possibly, Black could have postponed the decision to retreat the knight. After all, on b7 it's not doing that much more than on a5. However, I feel that 20...g6! with the idea of playing 21...f5 offers Black good initiative.

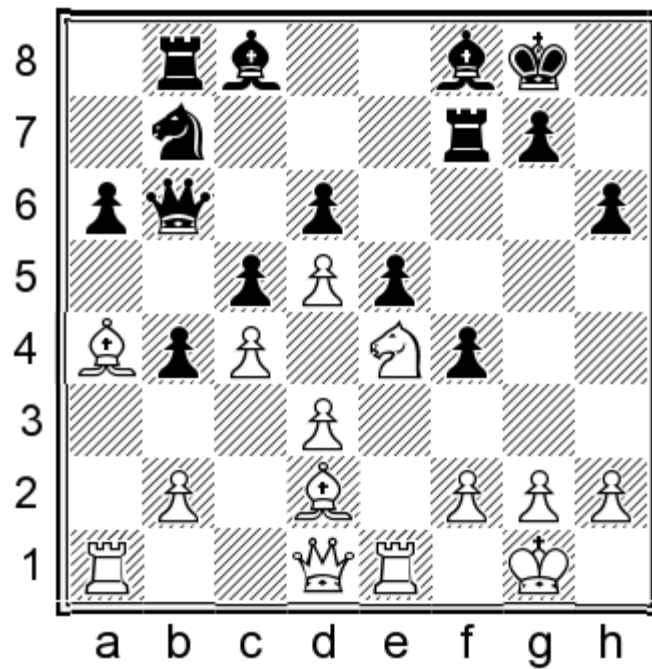
21.Ne4 f5 22.Ng3 f4?

I absolutely dislike Carlsen's manoeuvre with his knight to g3. Black should have kept the pawn on f5, when it still dominates the knight. Therefore 22...g6! has to be recommended when Black remains on top. Now the knight is able to return to the wonderful square on e4.

23.Ne4 Rf7 24.Bd2 Qb6?

Compared with the situation a few moves earlier, White has managed to obtain some reasonable compensation for the pawn, and that's mainly thanks to the fact that the knight has secured a nice outpost for himself on e4.

On the other hand the white pieces aren't well placed to exert pressure on Black, but that quickly changes after the next move.



Position after: 24...Qb6?

After 24...a5 anything could still happen.

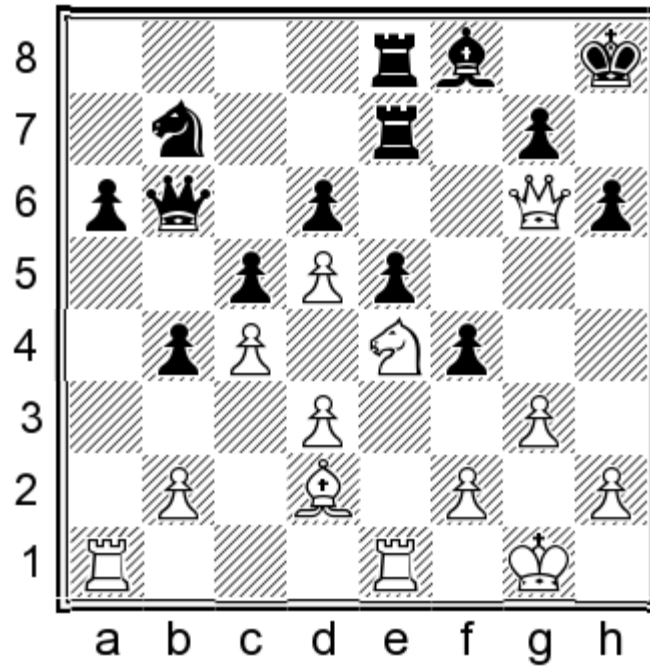
25.Be8!

In a board full of pieces you don't very often see the bishop paying a visit to the opponents camp. White quickly takes over control of the light-squares.

25...Re7 26.Qh5 Bf5

26...Bd7 can be met by 27.Qg6 as 27...Bxe8 allows 28.Nf6+ Kh8 29.Qh7# After the game's continuation the light-squared bishops will be exchanged, leaving Black in a position where his pieces are horribly coordinated.

27.Qxf5 Rbxe8 28.Qg6 Kh8 29.g3!



Position after: 29.g3!

This move was almost instantly played by Carlsen. As long as the pawn is on f4 it will take some additional efforts to activate the pieces. After the game move things go pretty fast downhill for Black.

29...Na5

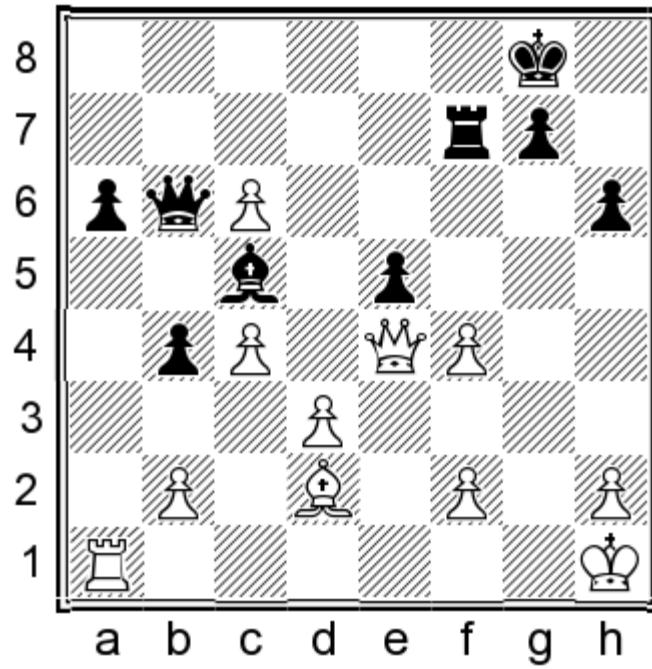
A) In case of 29...fxg3 White could simply recapture either way, but more elegant is 30.Bxh6! when Black's position falls apart: 30...gxh6 31.Nf6 Rg7 32.Qxh6+ and checkmate to follow.

B) 29...a5 30.gxf4 exf4 31.Kh1 followed by invasion of both rooks on the g-file. Black is hopelessly lost as literally all his pieces are misplaced and unable to pose White any difficulties.

30.Nxd6 Kg8 31.Rxa5 Rd8

After 31...Qxa5 32.Nxe8 White wins.

32.Rea1 Rxd6 33.Qe4 Qb7 34.Rxc5 Rf7 35.Rc6 Rxc6 36.dxc6 Qb6 37.gxf4 Bc5 38.Kh1!



Position after: 38.Kh1!

Things have become more messy over the course of the last couple of moves, but with his last move Carlsen shows that he has everything under control. Placing your king in the corner is a very safe strategy as the centralized queen on e4 stops all possible checks.

38...Bd4 39.fxe5 Rxf2 40.Bf4 Bxb2 41.Be3 Qb8 42.Rg1 Rf8 43.d4 1-0

Chapter 9

Playing against your opponents pieces

A typical misconception which I often notice when talking with club players is their complaints about the position without taking into account the possibilities of their opponent. Chess is a battle of two players and you just need to be make sure that your position, how bad or ugly it may look, should be just better than your opponents. In this chapter we will therefore deal with a very practical theme: 'How to play against your opponents pieces'. Once you have ensured that your opponents pieces are worse than yours, a great deal has already been accomplished!

One bad piece

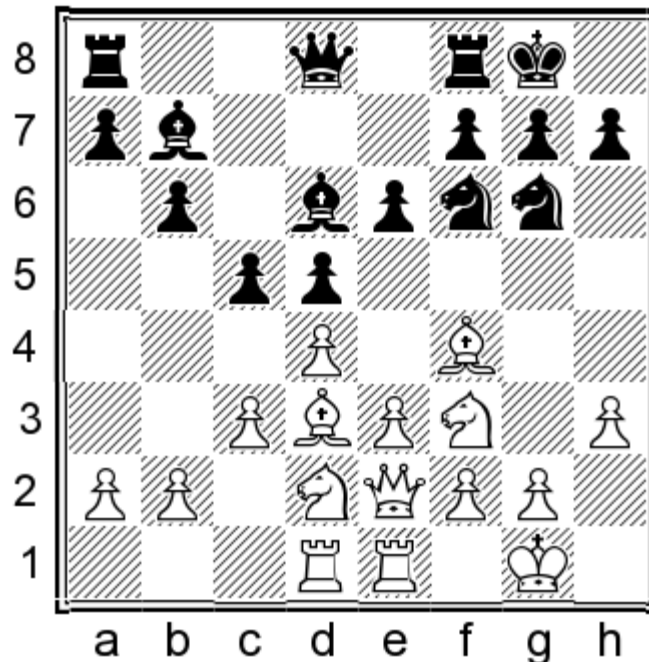
In chapter 7 we already discussed the concept of a trapped piece not being able to return into play. That chapter shows very great similarities with this particular chapter.

Honestly, for many years I didn't take the London System very seriously, which probably had something to do with the fact that it was rarely seen at top level and I only faced the opening with Black against significantly lower rated opponents. I considered it an unambitious and harmless line for White and even didn't have a clear game plan ready when I would have to play against it. The opening simply couldn't catch my interest for neither side...

We go back to January 2016 when the World Champion decided to employ the opening from the white side. I think it was particularly this game that changed my mind.

Carlsen, Magnus (2844)
Tomashevsky, Evgeny (2728)
Wijk aan Zee 2016

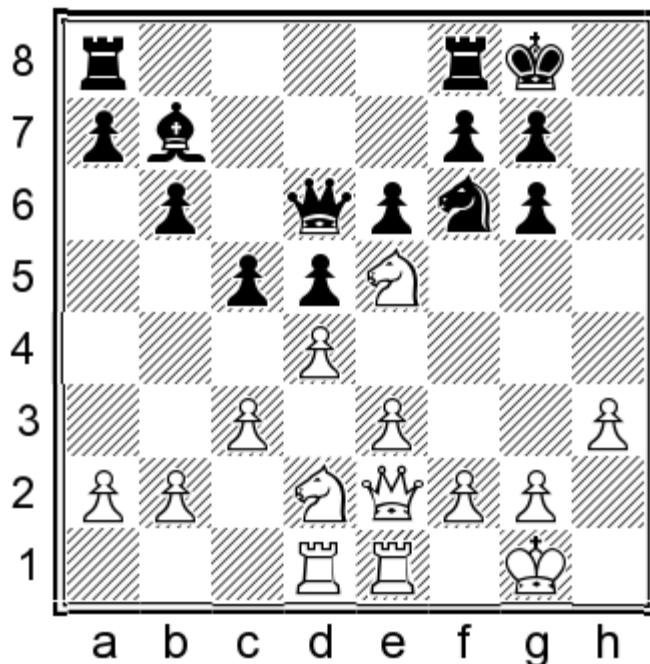
1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Bf4 b6 4.e3 Bb7 5.h3 Be7 6.Bd3 0-0 7.0-0 c5 8.c3 Nc6 9.Nbd2 d5 10.Qe2 Bd6 11.Rfe1 Ne7 12.Rad1 Ng6



Position after: 12...Ng6

I remember that during the live broadcast Yasser Seirawan and I were discussing the opening moves of this game and expecting the game to take a slow pace. Look how Magnus proves us wrong!

13.Bxg6! hxg6 14.Bxd6 Qxd6 15.Ne5



Position after: 15.Ne5

If you are unfamiliar with this type of structure the previous sequence may have come as a big surprise. White has given up his light-squared bishop, which is normally one of the stronger pieces. But as said before only what remains on the board matters. The point of White's play is that Black is left with a poor bishop on b7 and besides that the knight on e5 is very well placed. Black would really like to chase that knight away with ...f7-f6, but the problem is that the pawn on g6 will fall in that case. If you would move the pawn from g6 to h6 Black's position wouldn't actually be too bad. That's how subtle chess is!

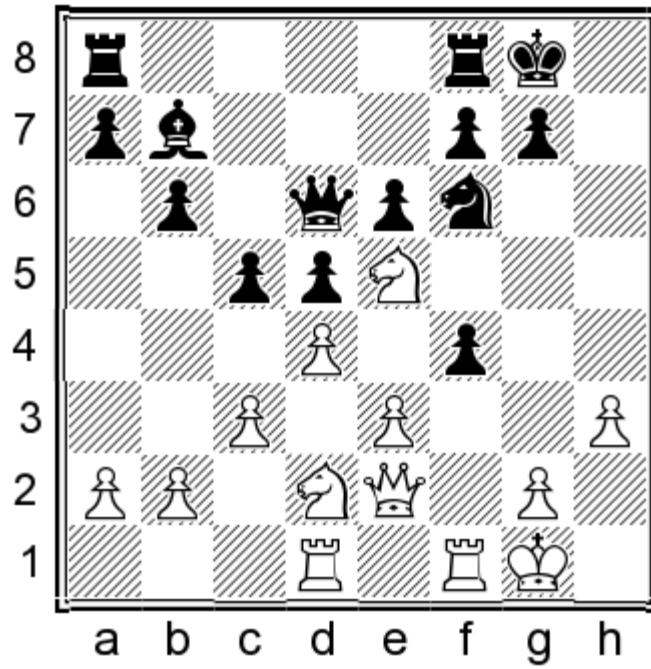
15...g5

Evidently, Tomashevsky didn't want to sit and wait and bravely pushes his g-pawn, intending to prepare a quick ...f7-f6. After 15...Nd7 16.Ndf3 the situation doesn't change that much as White maintains a knight on e5.

16.f4!

It's particularly this move in combination with the next one which puts Black under pressure. White could have considered to proceed in a slow way, but the text is equally good and, moreover, poses Black more practical problems to solve.

16...gxf4 17.Rf1!



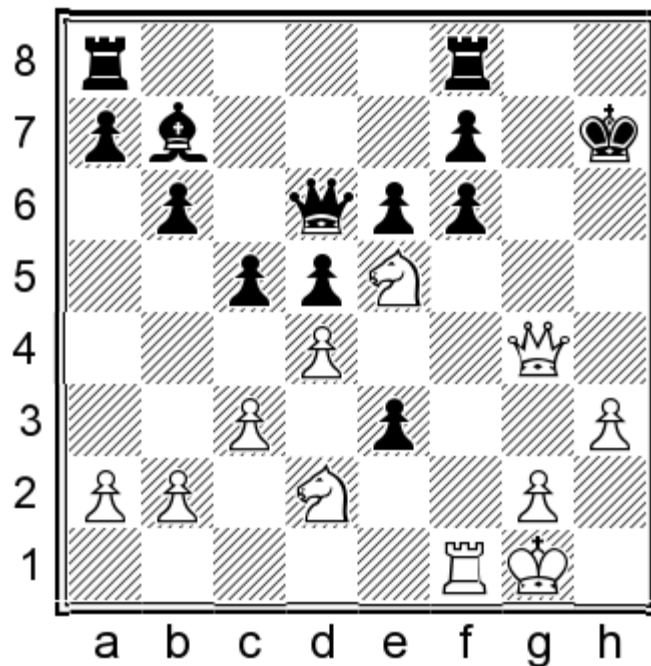
Position after: 17. Rf1!

The point of White's play: the rook is ready to use the f-file or sacrifice itself on f6. Nothing can be gained from 17.exf4 cxd4 18.cxd4 Rac8 and Black is doing fine.

17...Nd7

More critical is 17...fxe3 but then 18.Rxf6! looks incredibly dangerous, e.g.

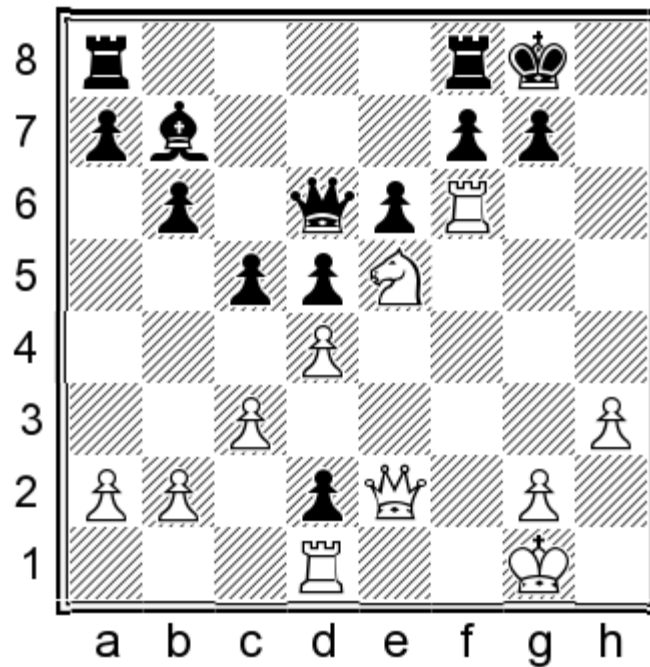
A) 18...gxf6? leads to checkmate after 19.Qg4+ Kh7 20.Rf1!



Position after: 20 Rf1!

(a wonderful quiet move, nicely illustrating the helplessness of the Black pieces) 20...fxe5 (20...exd2 21.Rf4 doesn't prevent mate either.) 21.Rf6 exd2 22.Qh5+ Kg7 23.Qg5+ Kh7 24.Rh6#

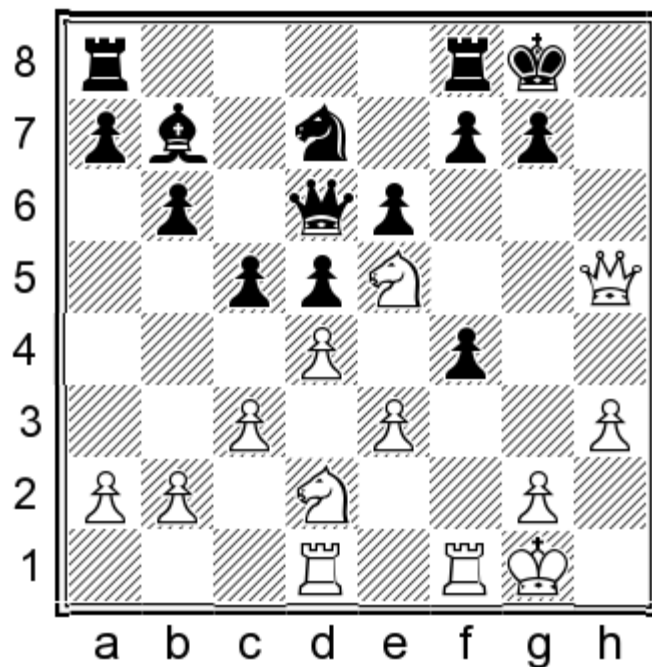
B) 18...exd2



Position after: 18...exd2

19.Rf4! This calm retreat is better than the two other options. (19.Qh5 gxf6 20.Qg4+ Kh7 21.Qh4+ Kg7; 19.Rdf1 Ba6!! (a brilliant defensive resource, disturbing White's attacking ideas) 20.Qh5 d1=Q 21.Rxd1 gxf6 and in both lines White needs to be content with a repetition.) 19...f6 20.Ng6 and even though Black has finally succeeded in chasing the knight away from e5, his position seems very unpleasant to defend.

18.Qh5



Position after: 18.Qh5

Less convincing is 18.Nxd7 Qxd7 19.Rxf4 f6 and Black holds on.

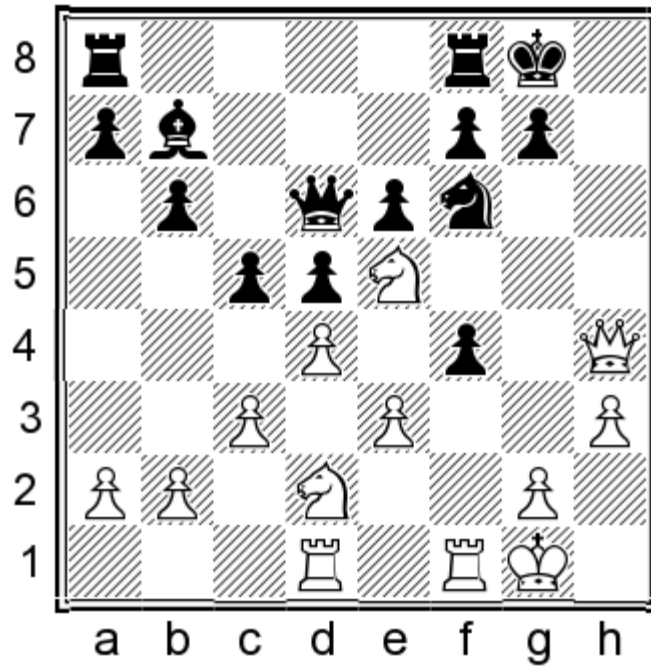
18...Nf6

It's quite sad that the return of the knight to f6 is Black's best. Other moves offer White a massive attack:

A) 18...Nxe5 19.dxe5 g6 (There is no chance to obtain counterplay along the a8-h1 diagonal, e.g. 19...Qc6 20.Rxf4 d4 21.Ne4 dxe3 22.Nf6+ gxf6 23.Rg4#) 20.Qg5 Qd8 21.Qxf4 and White's position plays itself.

B) 18...g6 19.Qh6! (More precise than 19.Nxg6? fxg6 20.Qxg6+ Kh8 21.Qh6+ which only leads to a perpetual check, as once again, White is unable to bring in new attackers.) 19...Nxe5 20.Rxf4! (20.dxe5? Qxe5 and Black is in control.) 20...f5 21.Rh4 Qd7 22.Qh8+ Kf7 23.Qxe5 and White retains a devastating attack plus control over the dark squares.

19.Qh4



Position after: 19.Qh4

19...Qd8

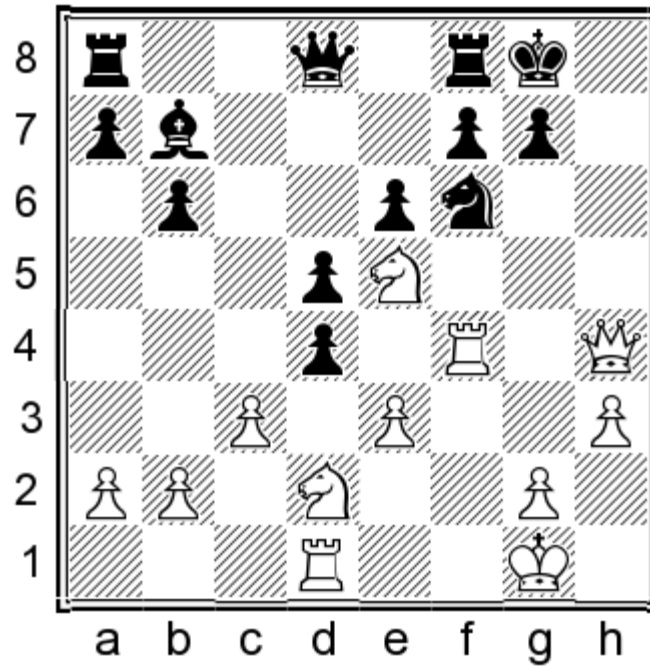
A) 19...fxe3? is strongly met by 20.Rxf6 exd2 (20...gxf6 21.Ng4 Rfd8 22.Qh6! and Black needs to give up his queen.)
 21.Rxd2 Qe7 (21...gxf6 22.Rd3! and mate) 22.Rdf2 and White has a crushing attack.

B) Possibly Black's best option is 19...Nh7 but then after 20.Rxf4 White still has easy play on the kingside.

20.Rxf4 Ne4?

The decisive mistake, allowing White to trade off the queens under favorable circumstances.

Black should have tried 20...cxd4

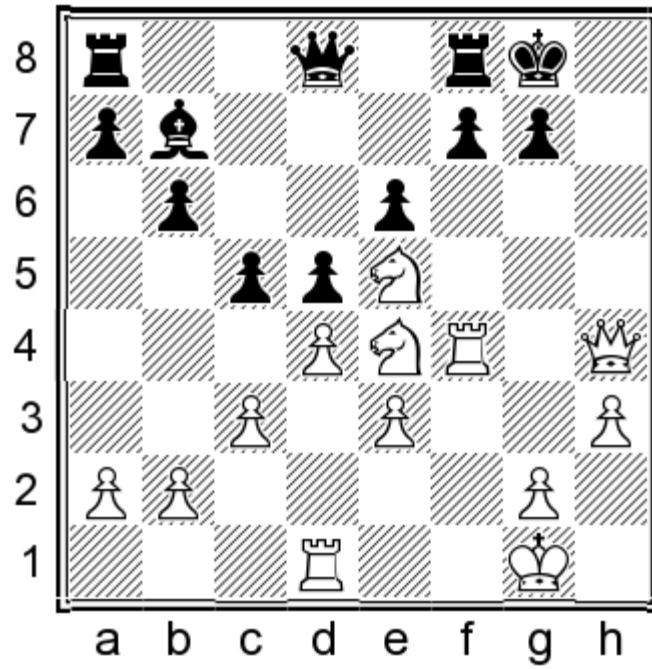


Position after: 20...cxd4

A) Perhaps the reason why Tomashevsky didn't include the capture on d4 was because he was afraid that White could ignore the pawn and strengthen the attack by means of 21.Ndf3 as now 21...Ne4? fails as well (More stubborn is 21...Nh7! when things are not as clear as after the natural reply 21.exd4) 22.Rxe4! dxe4 23.Ng5 and Black needs to give the queen.

B) 21.exd4 Ne4 and at least White doesn't invade with his rook along the d-file like in the game. However, the World Champion's second Peter Heine Nielsen points out that after 22.Qg4 f5 23.Qg6 Rf6 24.Qh5 Qe8 25.Qxe8+ Rxe8 26.Nxe4 dxe4 27.h4 White retains excellent winning chances. I agree, as White still has a powerful knight on e5 and great control over the dark squares. It's likely he will centralize his king soon and start expanding his majority on the queenside.

21.Nxe4



Position after: 21.Nxe4

21...Qxh4

There is no time for 21...dxe4 in view of 22.Qh5 and the attack continues.

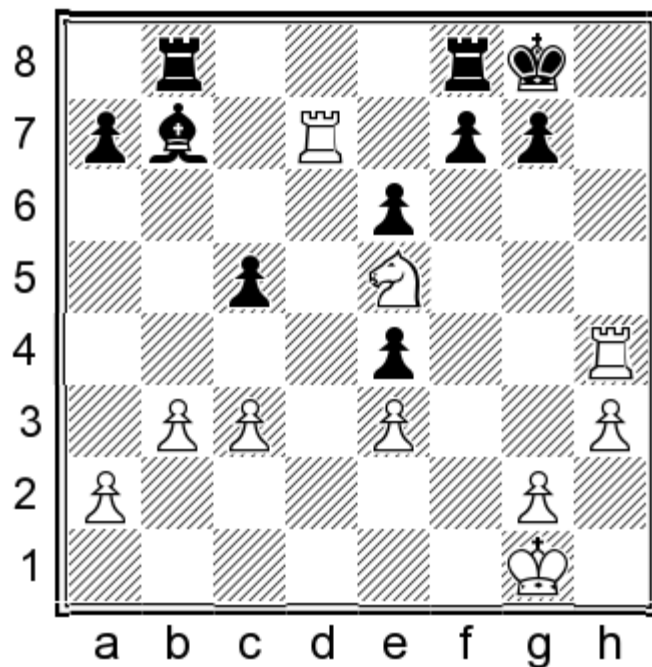
22.Rxh4 dxe4 23.dxc5!

Being under tremendous pressure, Tomashevsky probably felt relieved when the queens were traded, but underestimated this move.

23...bxc5 24.Rd7 Rab8

Even with the queens off the board, the mating threats are not gone yet. A sample line 24...Bd5 25.c4 f6 26.Ng6 Rf7 27.Rh8#

25.b3

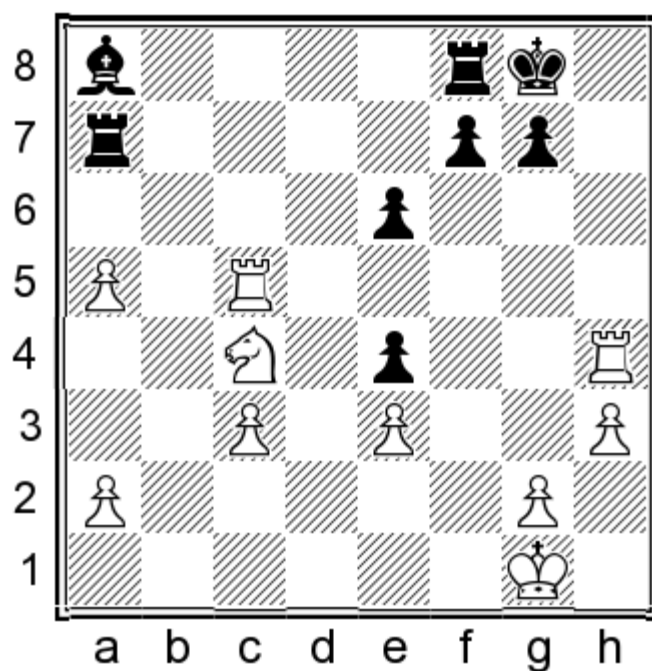


Position after: 25.b3

25...a5

After 25...Rfd8 White has several ways to convert the advantage, but the cleanest solution is 26.Rxd8+ Rxd8 27.Rh8+! Kxh8 28.Nxf7+ Kg8 29.Nxd8 and the remaining ending is hopeless for Black, as he can't dominate the knight on d8 with 29...Bd5 because of 30.c4.

26.Rc7 a4 27.bxa4 Ba8 28.a5 Rb7 29.Rxc5 Ra7 30.Nc4



Position after: 30.Nc4

And although Black's resignation seems premature, his position doesn't offer him any sort of hope.

1-0

I would like to say a few things about this game:

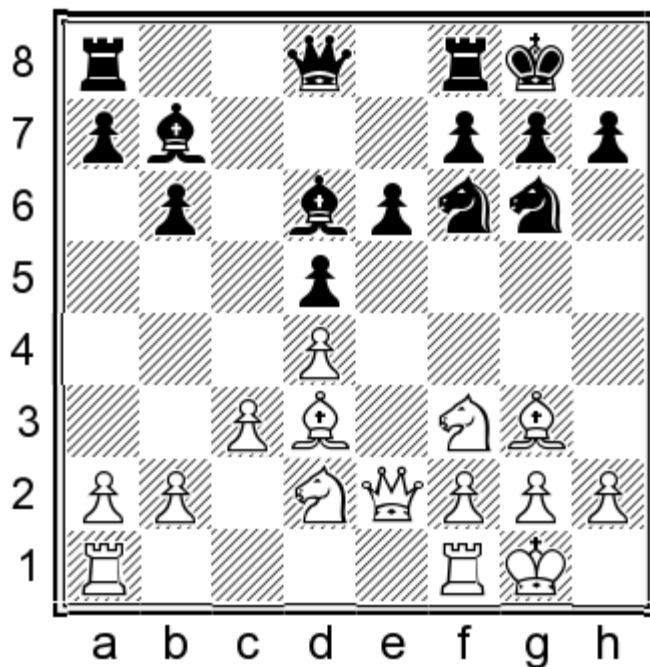
- 1) The way a very strong GM like Tomashevsky is getting crushed makes White's victory look very simple, which it actually isn't. But once you recognize the patterns it's much easier to make decisions like 13.Bxg6!. A good positional understanding facilitates the calculation process.
- 2) Carlsen won this game thanks to superior positional understanding. Evidently, also in the critical moments he calculated much better than his opponent, but that's also because he build up a nice position out of the opening.
- 3) Even though Black could have offered more resistance, it is psychologically much more difficult to defend against an aggressive intuitive continuation like 16.f4! than after any other quiet move. 1.5 year later I got the opportunity to bring the lesson I learned from the World Champion into practice. Fortunately for me I didn't have to calculate as much as Carlsen in his game.

Ris, Robert (2425)

Gonzalez Gomez, Ronier (2234)

Varadero 2017

1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 Nf6 3.e3 c5 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.Nbd2 e6 6.c3 Bd6 7.Bg3 0-0 8.Bb5 Ne7 9.Bd3 cxd4 10.exd4 b6 11.0-0 Bb7 12.Qe2 Ng6



Position after: 12...Ng6

Both sides have completed development and nothing special seems to be happening right now. Since I was familiar with the previous game I had a clear idea how to approach the middlegame.

13.Bxd6 Qxd6 14.Bxg6 hxg6 15.Ne5 Ne4

Well, it's not easy to mention good advice for Black. Like in the previous game, Black can't get in the move ...f7-f6, in view of the weakness on g6. Also after 15...Nd7 16.Ndf3 White's position is easy to play.

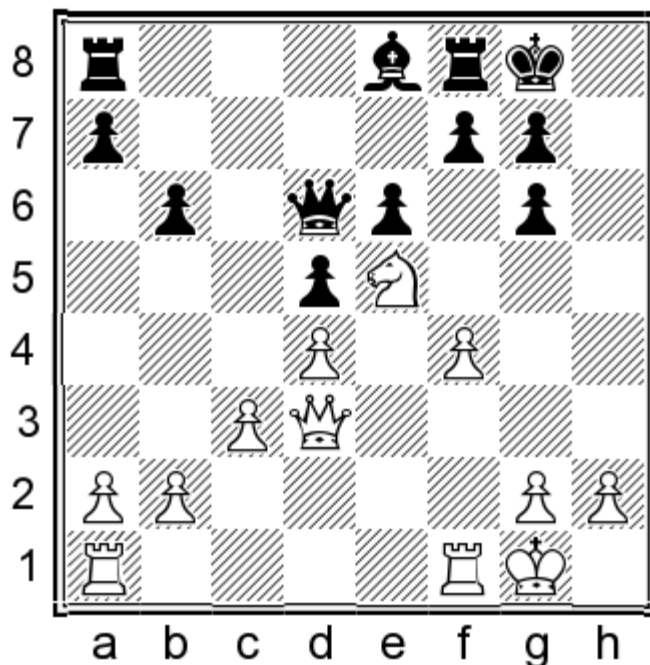
16.f3!

Interestingly, the engine prefers to take right away with 16.Nxe4 dxe4 which is what I rejected during the game. I simply didn't like the idea that Black's light-squared bishop now has some hopes to see daylight again.

16...Nxd2 17.Qxd2 Bc6

Intending to place the bishop on e8 and prepare ...f7-f6. It may seem logical to improve the bishop with 17...Ba6 but after 18.Rf2 White will play around the a6-f1 diagonal and start an attack on the kingside like in the game.

18.f4 Be8 19.Qd3!



Position after: 19.Qd3!

Simple and very effective prophylactic thinking. Inferior is 19.Rf3? which allows Black to kick the knight away.

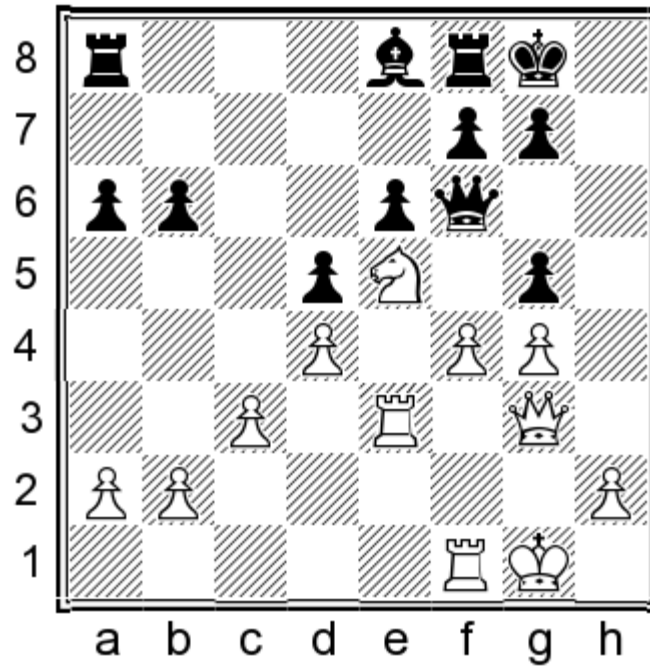
19...Qe7 20.Rae1

Normally not much attention has been paid to such moves, but they are the key to success. Before starting the attack make sure that ALL your pieces are ready to strike! 20.Rf3 also comes into consideration.

20...Qf6 21.g4 a6 22.Qg3 g5

In case of 22...Bb5 I would have played 23.Rf3 intending to go for checkmate on the h-file by means of g5, Qh4, Rh3 etc.

23.Re3



Position after: 23.Re3

Just a bit of advice. When I showed this game to some of my students I noticed that most of them wanted to force matters with 23.fxg5 and even though this move is perfectly fine for White as well, I felt that it's better to maintain the tension. In general, the side who has the initiative benefits from the tension present on the board, as it leaves the defensive side confused about what's going to happen.

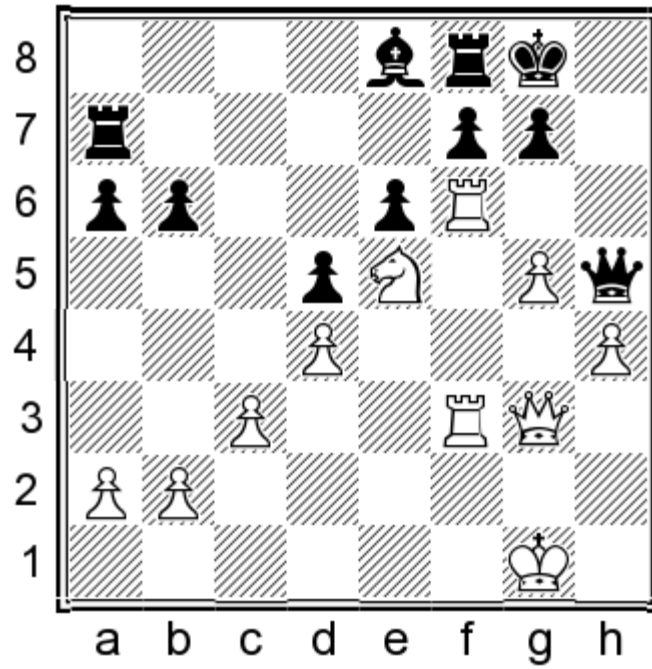
23...gxf4 24.Rxf4 Qg5 25.Ref3

25.h4 is a very natural move, but I wanted to set a small trap.

25...Ra7

Now it looks like Black is finally able to play the desirable 25...f6 but then there follows 26.h4 Qh6 27.g5! and Black's position falls apart.

26.h4 Qh6 27.g5 Qh5 28.Rf6!



Position after: 28.Rf6!

A very pleasing move, which reminded me during the game of the well known blockading motive from Fischer – Benkö, New York 1963. Black is totally paralyzed!

28...Qh7

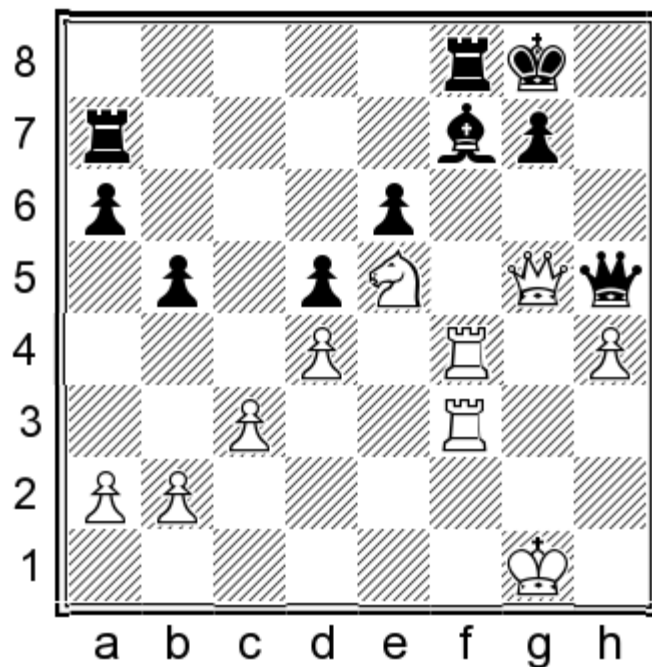
A) 28...gxf6 29.gxf6+ Qg6 (29...Kh7 30.Qg7#) 30.Nxg6 fxg6 31.h5! Kh7 32.hxg6+ Bxg6 33.Qg5 and White wins.

B) 28...Kh8 allows 29.Ng6+.

29.g6 Qh5 30.gxf7+ Bxf7 31.R6f4

Once again simple chess. By capturing on f7 White has managed to create a very unpleasant pin which Black can't resolve.

31...b5 32.Qg5!



Position after: 32.Qg5!

32...Qh6

32...Qxg5+ 33.hxg5 wins, as White threatens 34.g6, while 33...g6 can be met by 34.Nxg6.

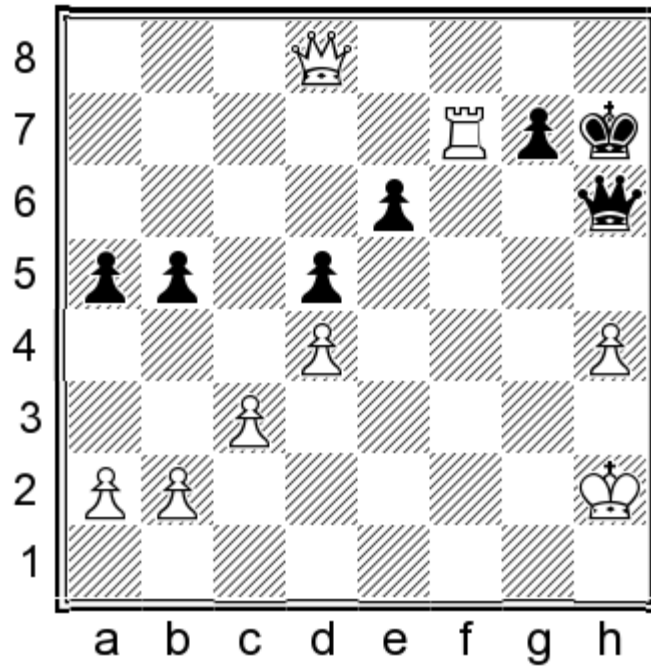
33.Kh2!

A very nice prophylactical move to play. I started to look for tactics to decide the game as quickly as possible. However, 33.Nxf7? spoils all the efforts, because of 33...Rxf7 34.Rxf7 and now I realized that Black has the intermediate move 34...Qxg5+, (but also 34...Rxf7 35.Qd8+ Kh7 36.Rxf7 Qg6+! also suffices.) Therefore, I decided to leave the g-file with my king.

33...a5 34.Nxf7 Rxf7 35.Rxf7 Rxf7

35...Qxg5 doesn't make sense, in view of 36.Rxf8+! Kh7 37.hxg5+--

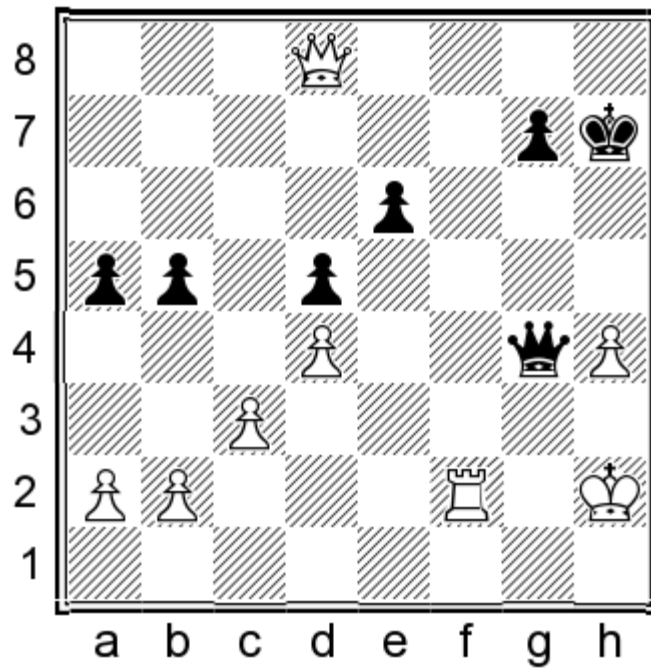
36.Qd8+ Kh7 37.Rxf7



Position after: 37.Rxf7

I have managed to win a rook, but I had to calculate a bit deeper. It would have been a pity if I had wasted such big positional advantage by allowing a perpetual check.

37...Qd2+ 38.Kg3 Qe1+ 39.Kg2 Qe2+ 40.Rf2 Qg4+ 41.Kh2 1-0



Position after: 41.Kh2

Why do I show you these two games?

I think the reader will be able to draw the parallels between both games, but at the same time there are so different as

well.

Carlsen displayed a brilliant positional concept by trading off his good bishop for the knight in order to install his own knight on e5, while I basically just stole his idea to employ it in a different version. The success of Carlsen's attack is much more dependant on concrete calculation, while in my game I only spent a bit of time working out how to avoid the perpetual at the end of the game.

I imagine that most of the readers (and me neither!) aren't sure they would have been able to calculate as precisely as Carlsen in the critical moments starting from 16. f4.

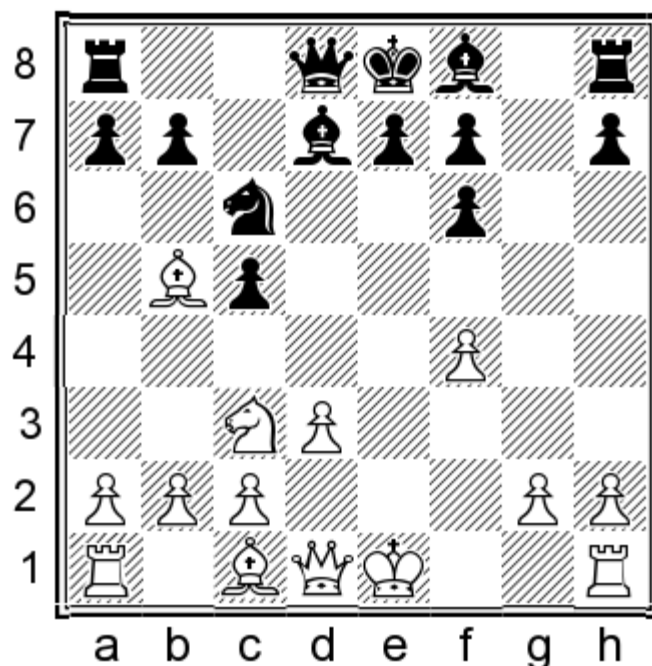
However, I believe by studying such games we can learn from the world's greatest players, start recognizing various patterns and eventually be able to implement them in our own games. By doing so, I am sure you will benefit on various aspects like building an opening repertoire, understanding typical middlegame plans and also improve the process of calculation.

Prophylaxis

Tate, Emory (2380)
Ris, Robert (2364)
Curacao 2006

Chess players are often too busy with their 'own' position and tend to forget looking at the position from their opponents point of view. Realizing your opponents intentions and preventing them is a very useful skill. By applying this so-called prophylactic thinking, possible unnecessary complications could be avoided. In the following game this technique was employed in some critical moments.

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.Nge2 Nf6 4.f4 d5 5.e5 d4 6.exf6 dxc3 7.Nxc3 gxf6 8.Bb5 Bd7 9.d3



Position after: 9.d3

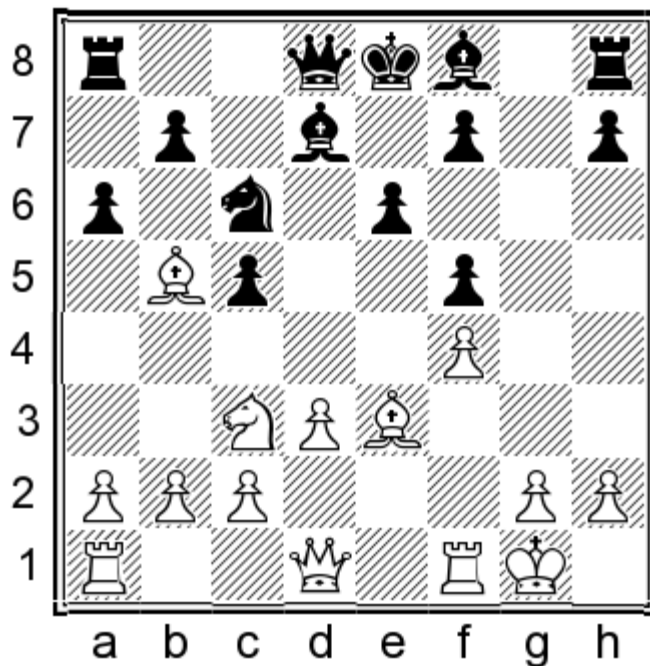
The opening has gone well for me. I have managed to gain control over the d4 square and the pawn on f4 isn't looking so great, restricting the movement of the bishop on c1. The main question I had to answer is how I would develop my pieces and in particular my bishops. I thought it would be quite nice to place my central pawns on e6 and f5, fixing the pawn structure and make the bishop on c1 look odd. At some point I could play a6 when I will manage to get my light-

squared bishop developed to c6, while my other bishop has some dark squares to cover.

9...f5!

Very accurate. It's important not to start with 9...e6?! which offers White the possibility of stirring things up with 10.f5! as the bishop from c1 comes alive. Moreover, I wanted to fix the pawn on f4 as I thought it could easily become a target for my pieces. In the game my strategy proved to be right.

10.Be3 e6 11.0-0 a6



Position after: 11...a6

12.Bxc6

I was very glad obtaining the advantage of the bishop pair, but also after 12.Bc4 b5 13.Bb3 Na5 followed by ...Bc6 Black's position is to be preferred already.

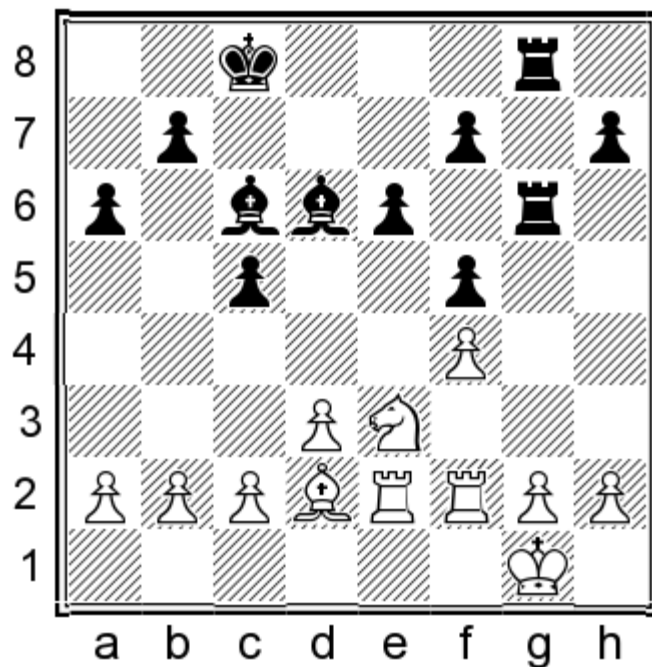
12...Bxc6 13.Qh5 Rg8 14.Rf2 Qf6 15.Re1

15.Qxh7? Rh8 loses the queen.

15...Bd6 16.Bd2 0-0-0 17.Nd1 Qg6 18.Qxg6 Rxc6

It's also possible to improve the pawn structure by means of 18...hxg6 but I wanted to keep my rooks active along the g-file, exerting pressure on g2.

19.Ne3 Rcg8 20.Ree2



Position after: 20.Ree2

So far everything has been going my way and I thought I had a very pleasant advantage thanks to my pair of bishops, better pawn structure and my active rooks on the g-file. On the other hand, I realized that I had to be very patient here as the weaknesses on f4 and g2 are well defended and there is no chance further improving my pieces, maximizing the pressure. White's pieces have to maintain control over those two pawns and therefore they can't do that much. In case it would have been White's turn now he would like to get in Nc4, attacking my bishop and next jumps with his knight to e5, forcing me to give up the pair of bishops.

PROPHYLACTIC THINKING:

How do I prevent my opponent's plan and/or next move?

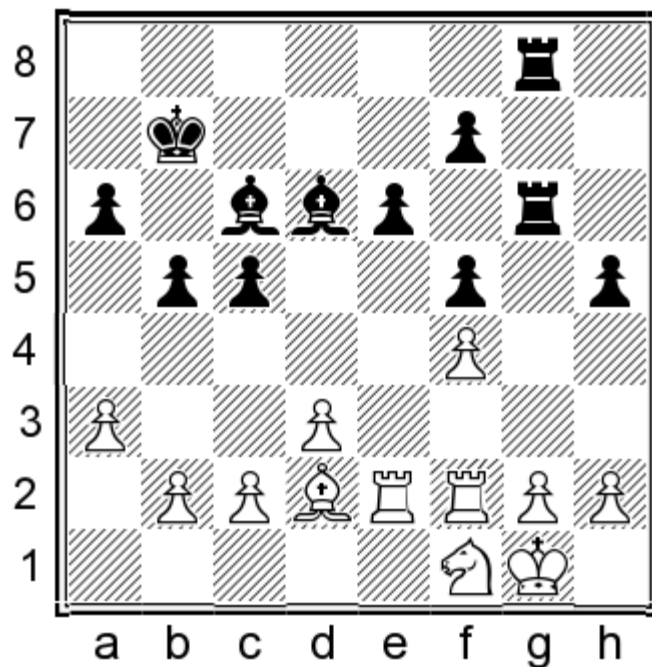
20...b5!

An excellent decision and I am sure it frustrated my opponent. White's pieces are unable to cross the middle of the board and need to stay passive. Other moves are significantly less effective, e.g. 20...h5 21.Nc4! Bc7 22.Ne5 Bxe5 23.fxe5 and trading off pieces is clearly benefitting White.

21.Nf1 h5 22.a3?

As a rule of thumb: don't make pawn moves on the side where you are weaker. Well, in this case White is weaker on all sides of the board, but still, he shouldn't voluntarily weaken his position further. Probably a waiting move like 22.Be3 would have been stubborn. In the game Black is able to create new targets, which makes it even more difficult for White holding his position together.

22...Kb7!



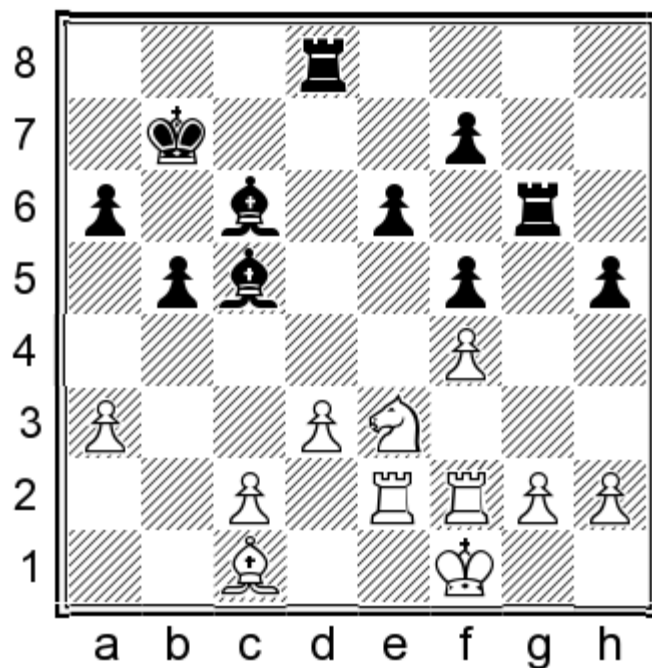
Position after: 22...Kb7!

I give this move an exclamation mark as it highlights the desperation White must have felt. There is simply no active move and just going back and forth with your pieces is offering quite sad prospects too.

23.b4?

Once again, this only helps me breaking through on the queenside.

23...Be7 24.Ne3 Bh4 25.Rf1 Bf6 26.Rff2 Rd8 27.bxc5 Bd4 28.Kf1 Bxc5 29.Bc1



Position after: 29.Bc1

29...a5!?

Of course, I also noticed I could immediately go after the a-pawn with 29...Rd4! but somehow I didn't like my rook to end up a bit strangely on the edge of the board.

Although this would probably have been even stronger, during the game I better liked my choice which aims to fix the weakness.

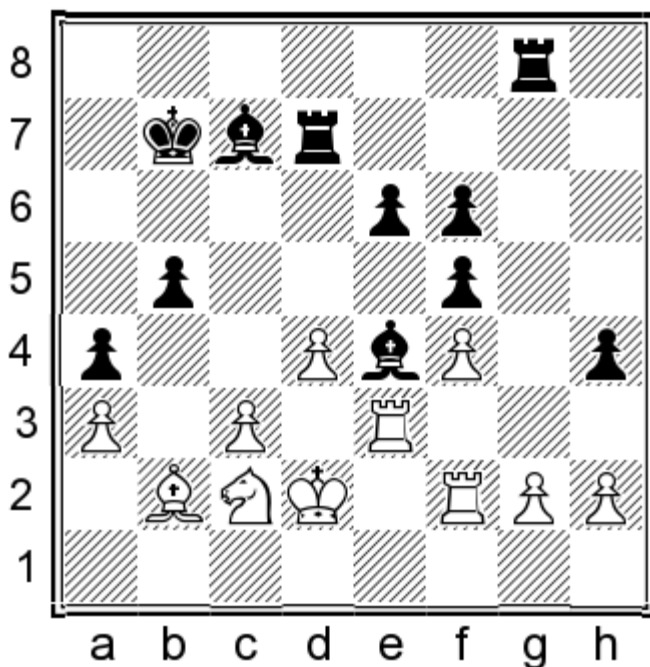
30.Bb2 a4 31.Ke1 Rd7 32.Kd2 Rg8 33.c3?

Another pawn move I don't like as White burries his bishop on b2. More stubborn would have been something like 33.Kc1 when there is still some work to be done.

33...Be4 34.d4 Bb6 35.Nc2 f6!

Another nice multi-purpose move. I have placed my rooks efficiently, being able to double either on the d- or g-file. In addition, Black now also has the option of breaking in the centre, although that was not my first priority as it would solve the pawn weakness on f4.

36.Ne3 Ba5 37.Nc2 h4 38.Re3 Bc7



Position after: 38...Bc7

39.Rh3

In case of 39.Ree2 I would have played 39...Rg4 and soon White will collapse, as his pieces are overloaded.

Now one of the rooks has left the second rank I spotted a nice little tactic which yields me a decisive material plus.

39...Bxf4+! 40.Rxf4 Rxg2+ 41.Ke3 Rxc2 42.Rf2 Rxf2

I wasn't really looking for tactical ideas and just wanted to convert my advantage by simple means. However, 42...f4+! 43.Rxf4 Bf5! is quite a nice motive to win the bishop. In the game Black is two pawns up retaining a dominant

position.

43.Kxf2 Rg7 44.Bc1 Rg2+ 45.Ke3 Rg4 46.Ke2 f4 47.Bd2 Rg2+ 48.Ke1 f3 49.Rxh4 Re2+ 50.Kd1 Bd3 51.Rf4 f2
52.Rxf6 Rxd2+ 53.Kxd2 f1=Q 54.Rxf1 Bxf1 55.h4 Bh3 56.Ke3 Kc6 57.Kf4 Kd5

0-1

Space advantage

The principle of space advantage is an aspect which has often been underestimated. The chess board only has 64 squares and the more of them you can cover, the better it normally is.

Space advantage is determined by the pawn structure. Far advanced pawns enable your pieces using the space behind those pawns and when your pieces are active you obtain better attacking chances.

Having a space advantage, it is often recommended to keep as many pieces as possible on the board (unless, there is a favorable exchange transforming the space advantage into a material one). The side with a lack of space usually suffers as there are simply not enough squares available for the pieces.

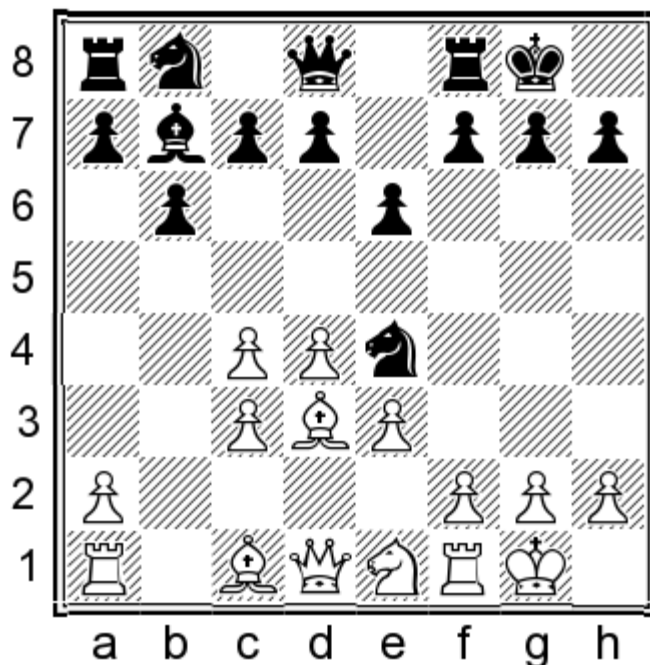
In the next three examples the pawn structure offers White a big space advantage and in all those it led to a devastating mating attack.

Carlsen, Magnus (2857)

Hossain, Enamul (2431)

Baku 2016

1.e3 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4 b6 4.Nc3 Bb7 5.d4 Bb4 6.Bd3 Ne4 7.0-0 Bxc3 8.bxc3 0-0 9.Ne1



Position after: 9.Ne1

9...c5?

Via a slightly unusual move-order we have reached a well-known position from the Nimzo-Indian.

The main continuation here is 9...f5 in order to gain more control over the e4-square. After the game move White is able to occupy the centre without any opposition.

10.f3 Nf6 11.e4 Ne8

In some lines of the Nimzo Black voluntarily retreats the knight in this way with the idea of bringing it to d6 (from where it challenges White's only weakness; the pawn on c4) and prepare ...f7-f5 in some cases. In this particular case this manoeuvre doesn't seem to make too much sense. A more logical option here is 11...d6 but perhaps didn't like 12.Bg5 and the pin is quite unpleasant.

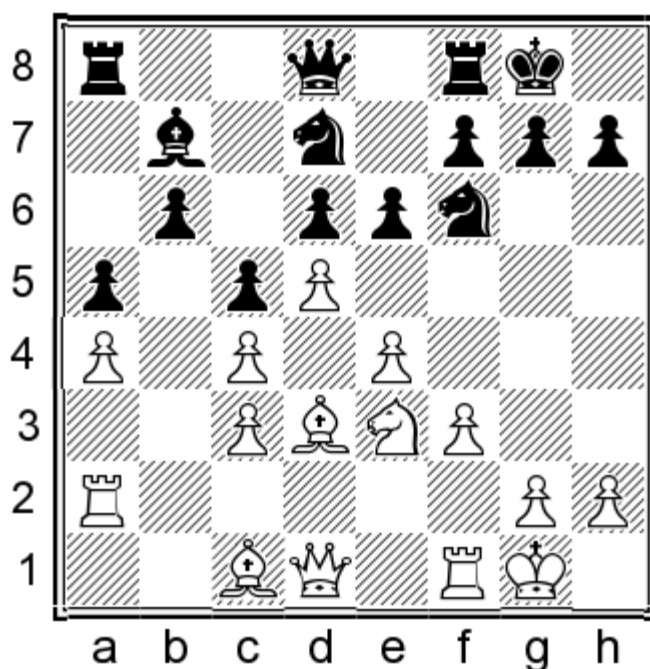
12.d5!

Closing the centre, while possessing the pair of bishops sounds paradoxical. However, by advancing the d-pawn White makes the bishop look worse on b7 and ensures it will never be able to become active on the long diagonal.

12...d6

12...Nd6 13.e5 Ne8 14.f4 and White's overwhelming space advantage enables him to start thinking of a kingside attack.

13.Nc2 Nd7 14.Ne3 Nef6 15.a4 a5 16.Ra2!



Position after: 16.Ra2!

A beautiful idea. Without moving the bishop from c1, White develops his rook along the second rank.

16...Qc7

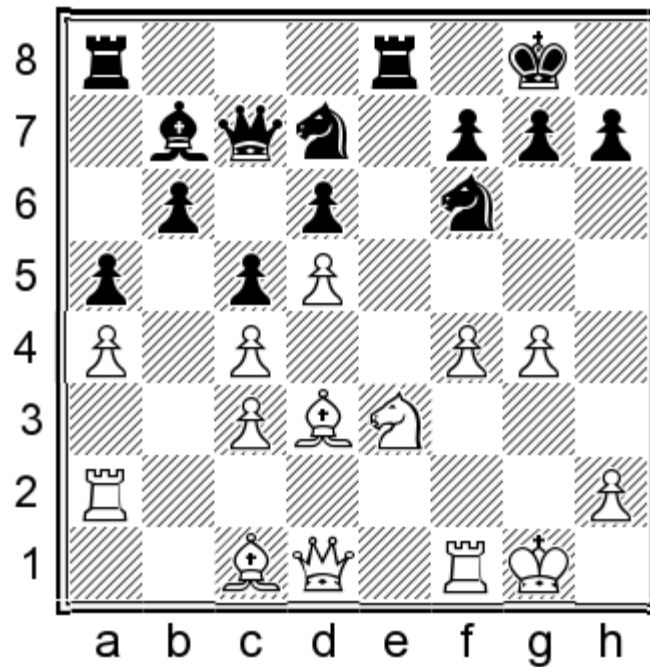
Black could have considered closing the centre totally with 16...e5 but then White also obtains a dangerous initiative on the kingside with 17.Nf5 Qc7 18.g4!

17.f4 exd5 18.exd5!

White shouldn't be tempted solving his doubled c-pawns with 18.cxd5? in view of 18...c4! and Black is back in the game thanks to the pressure against the pawn on e4.

It's interesting to see that the doubled c-pawns are actually very useful, keeping the centre closed which makes it easier for White initiating the initiative on the kingside.

18...Rfe8 19.g4!



Position after: 19.g4!

Another great move by the World Champion.

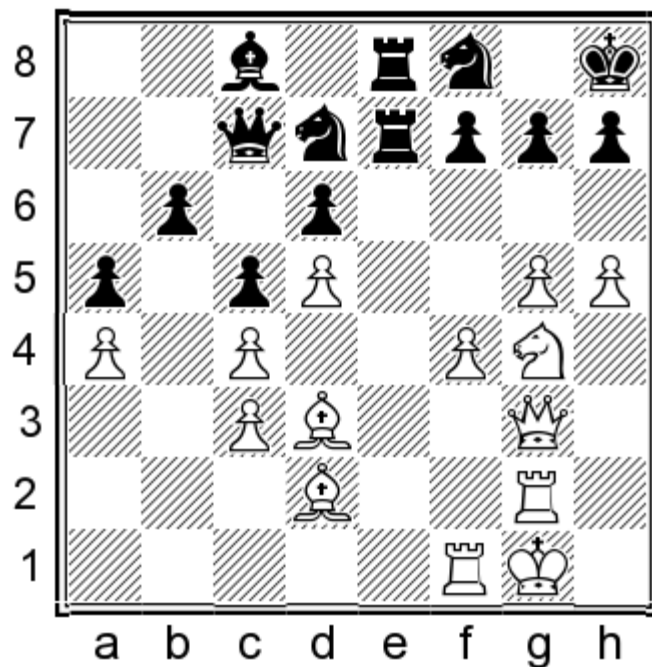
Many people would think twice before pushing a pawn in front of your own king, but here the black pieces are unable to profit from the open kingside as the centre is blocked and the e-file doesn't give possibilities to enter.

19...Nf8 20.g5 N6d7

20...Ne4 can just be met by 21.Qc2! when the knight is running out of squares, while 21...Qe7 is answered by 22.Nf5! winning the knight on e4. Therefore, the black knight has to retreat where it's hindering the other pieces as well.

The following phase is very nicely handled by Carlsen. He slowly improves his position by expanding on the kingside and slowly guides his pieces in the direction of the king. There is absolutely nothing Black could do. Even though Black will be able to double the rooks on the e-file, it's pretty useless as White is controlling all the entry squares.

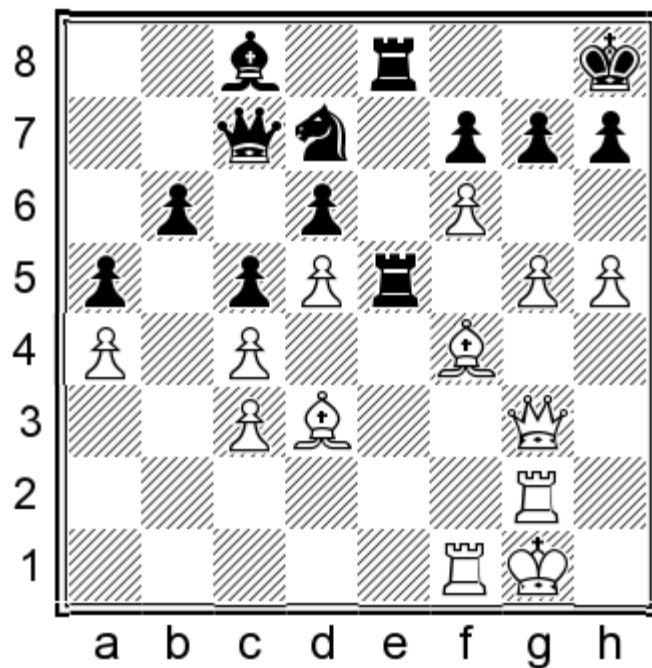
21.h4 Rad8 22.h5 Bc8 23.Ng4 Re7 24.Rg2 Kh8 25.Qf3 Rde8 26.Qg3 Rd8 27.Bd2 Rde8



Position after: 27...Rde8

The last 10 moves White has increased his influence on the kingside and all his pieces are optimally placed. It's time to enter the decisive phase!

28.f5! Ne5 29.Nxe5 Rxe5 30.Bf4 Nd7 31.f6!

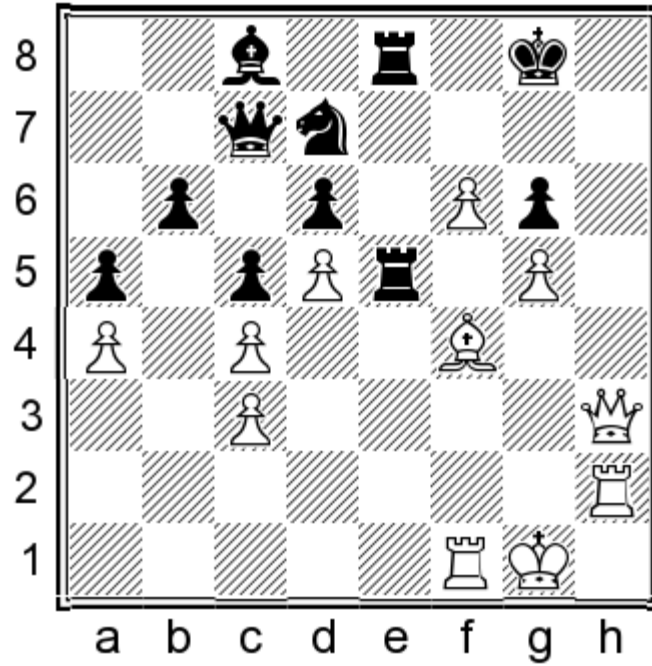


Position after: 31.f6!

Of course, White could have taken the exchange as well 31.Bxe5 Nxe5 with a completely winning position, but by ignoring the material Carlsen proves the clumsiness of Black's piece coordination.

31...g6 32.hxg6 fxg6 33.Bxg6!

And Black resigned, since after 33.Bxg6! hxg6 34.Qh3+ Kg8 35.Rh2



Position after: 35.Rh2

White delivers checkmate on the h-file.

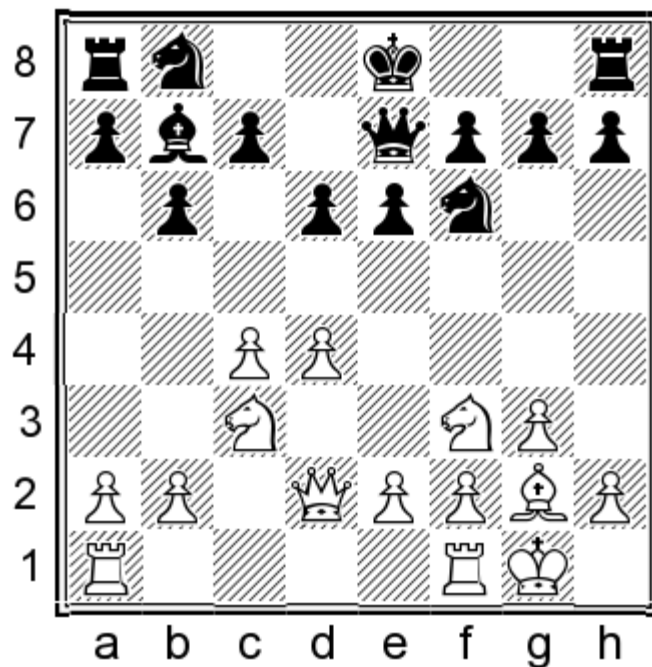
1-0

Ris, Robert (2420)

Ginderskov, Henrik (1900)

Chess.com 2014

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.c4 Bb4+ 4.Bd2 Qe7 5.g3 b6 6.Bg2 Bb7 7.0-0 Bxd2 8.Qxd2 d6 9.Nc3



Position after: 9.Nc3

9...Nbd7?!

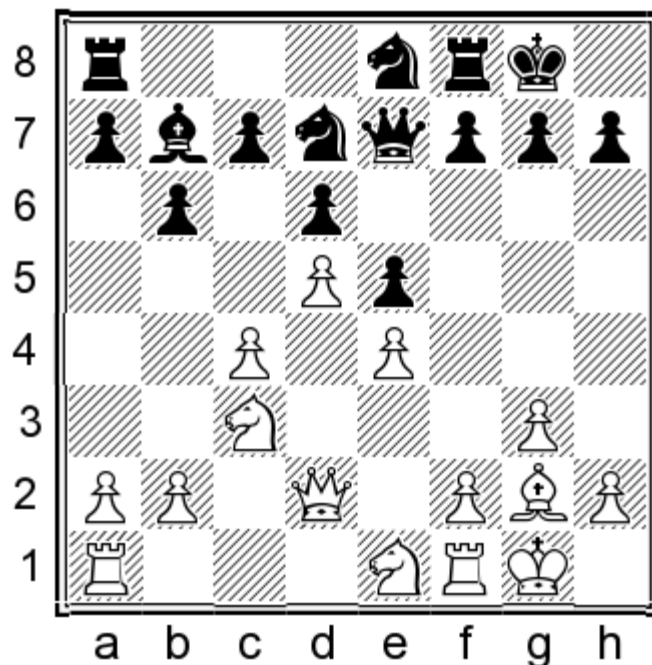
In my opinion this move is a serious inaccuracy.

More common is 9...Ne4 which was even played by Korchnoi back in 1978! In general, this trade is very typical for Black in these structures, as the more pieces will come off, the less significant White's space advantage is. After the game continuation White gets a dominant position in the centre.

10.d5! e5

In case Black intends to be flexible with a move like 10...0-0 White proceeds with 11.Nd4 and the knight is wonderfully placed. If Black plays ...e5 at some point then the knight jumps to f5.

11.e4 0-0 12.Ne1 Ne8



Position after: 12...Ne8

13.Nd3

13.Nc2 with the idea of going to e3 might have been another interesting route for the knight.

During the game Henrik felt quite optimistic about his own chances here. He stated that my bishop wasn't so great, as it was restricted in its movement by the fixed pawns in the centre.

Although I could understand Henrik's reasoning I had to disagree with him in this sense, as in my opinion several other factors are playing a more important role: White has a clear space advantage, which makes it easier for him to shuffle around with his pieces and start exerting pressure either on the kingside and/or queenside.

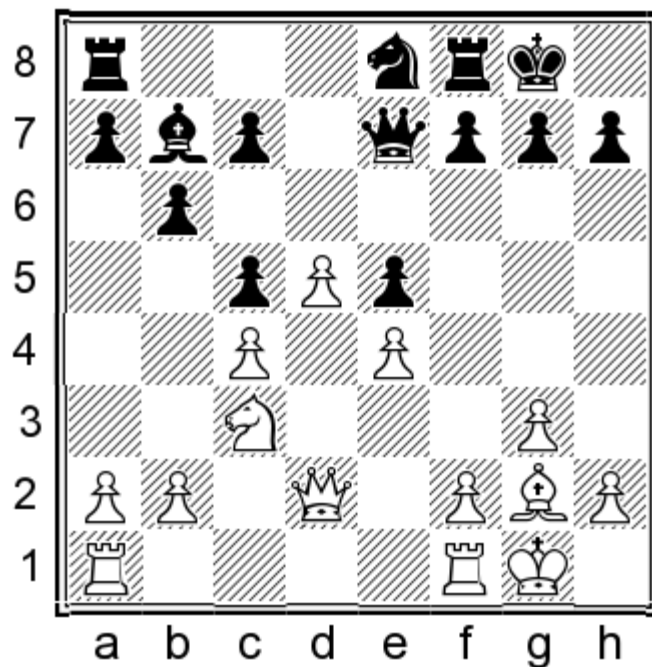
Black's pieces are stuck on the back and aren't doing anything active yet.

How bad is White's bishop if it manages to get an active job elsewhere? And to counter the question; what is the black bishop doing on b7? In the game I succeeded in upgrading my "bad" bishop to the hero of the board!

13...f5?

A) Henrik wasn't really sure which plan to chose. He also considered the prophylactic move 13...a5 preventing White from expanding on the queenside with b2-b4. I think this would have been a reasonable option, even though in the long run the pawn on c7 might become a target for the knight by going to b5, as it can't be chased away any longer. I don't think there is a reason for Black weakening the pawn structure on the queenside though...

B) After studying the position more carefully, I have come to the conclusion that Black's best plan is to play 13...Nc5! and in case of 14.Nxc5 he recaptures with 14...dxc5!

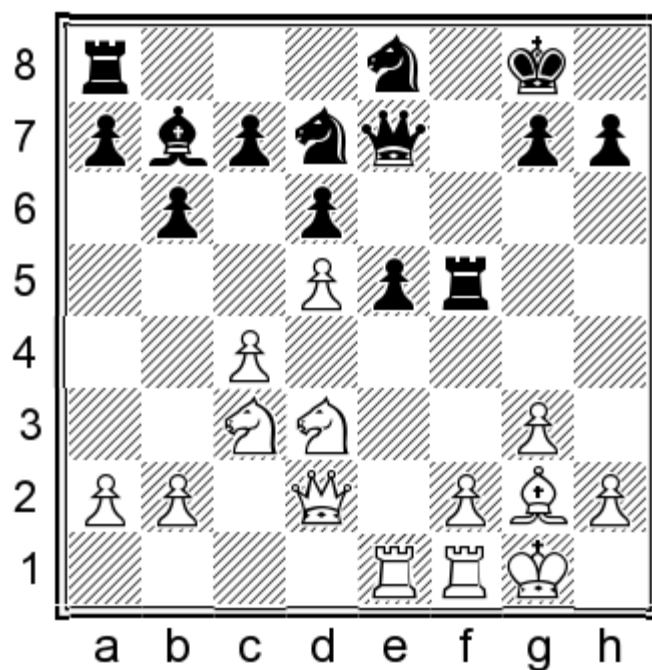


Position after: 14...dxc5!

It's one of those exceptions where its better to capture away from the centre, as Black really needs to bring his pieces back into play. The knight on e8 will get a wonderful square on d6, from where it has a look at the pawns on c4 and e4. Moreover, as you can see, the rooks are finally connected and all the pieces are working harmoniously together. So Black will put the rooks on e8 and f8, and even the bad bishop can be reactivated via c8.

I am not claiming any advantage for Black (I think if someone is better, it should still be White as he can push on both flanks), but he is very solid in any case.

14.exf5 Rxf5 15.Rae1



Position after: 15.Rae1

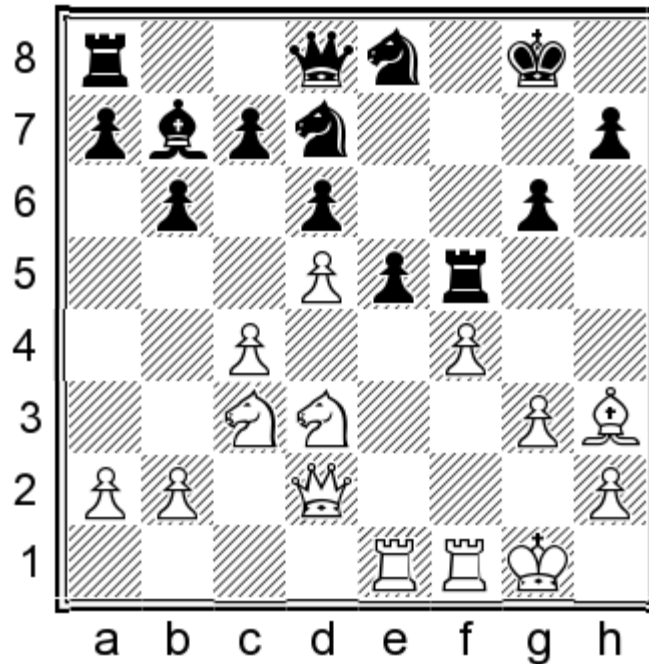
White's pieces are nicely placed in the centre and therefore he is ready for opening the position by undermining the pawn on e5 with the move f2-f4. Sadly, the rook on a8 and bishop on b7 have no time to be reemployed.

It's amazing to see the effects of the misplaced pieces as Black is getting checkmated within 10 moves from now.

15...Qd8 16.f4 g6

After 16...exf4 it was my intention to recapture with 17.Nxf4 and the e6 square looks very tempting for any of my pieces.

17.Bh3!



Position after: 17.Bh3!

Finally I was able to answer Henrik's question as I found a nice way to activate my bishop on the h3-c8 diagonal.

17...Rf8 18.fxe5 Rxf1+ 19.Rxf1 Nxe5 20.Be6+ Kh8

20...Kg7 21.Nxe5 dxe5 22.Rf7+ Kh8 23.Qh6 and checkmate in the next move.

21.Rf8+ Kg7 22.Rg8+ Kf6 23.Qf4+ Ke7 24.Qf8#

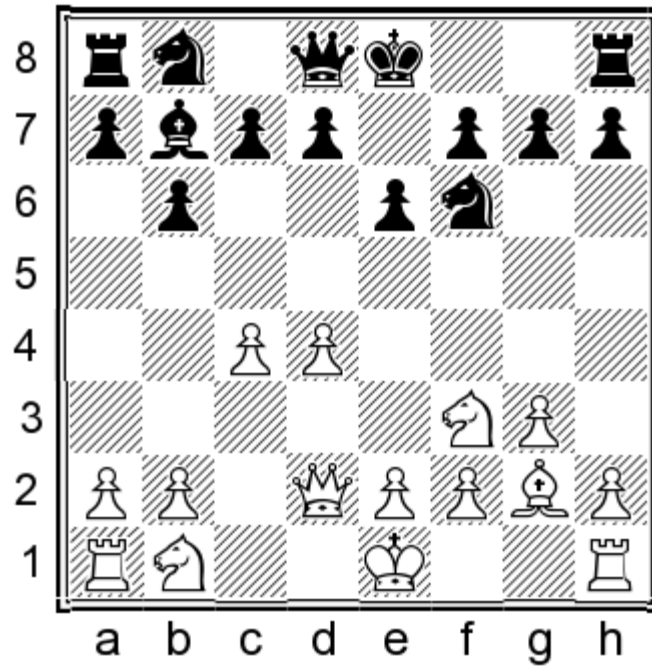
1-0

Ris, Robert (2423)

Lecomte, Robin (2256)

Gouda 2014

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.g3 Bb7 5.Bg2 Bb4+ 6.Bd2 Bxd2+ 7.Qxd2



Position after: 7.Qxd2

7...d6?!

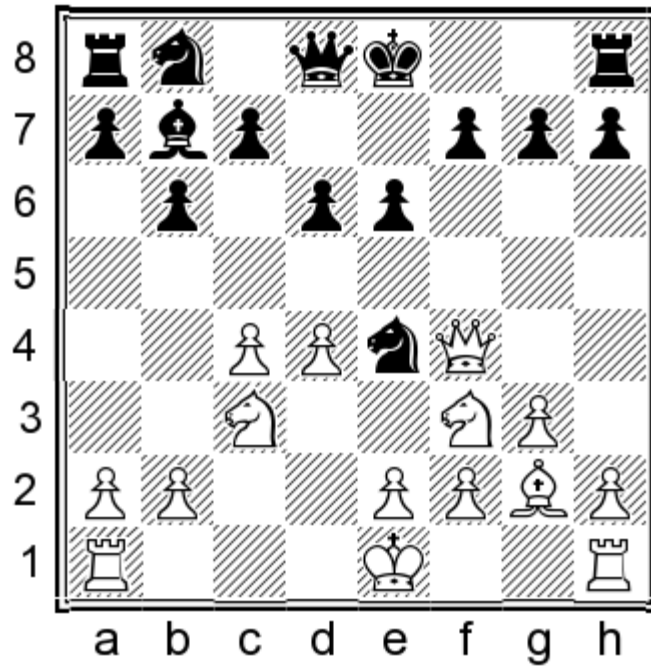
A serious inaccuracy, which allows White to obtain a firm grip in the centre. More common is 7...0-0 intending to meet 8.Nc3 with 8...Ne4.

8.Nc3!

More accurate than the automatic 8.0-0 and in the next note it becomes clear why so. After my move White has the positional threat of playing 9.d5 after which the bishop on b7 will be out of play.

8...0-0

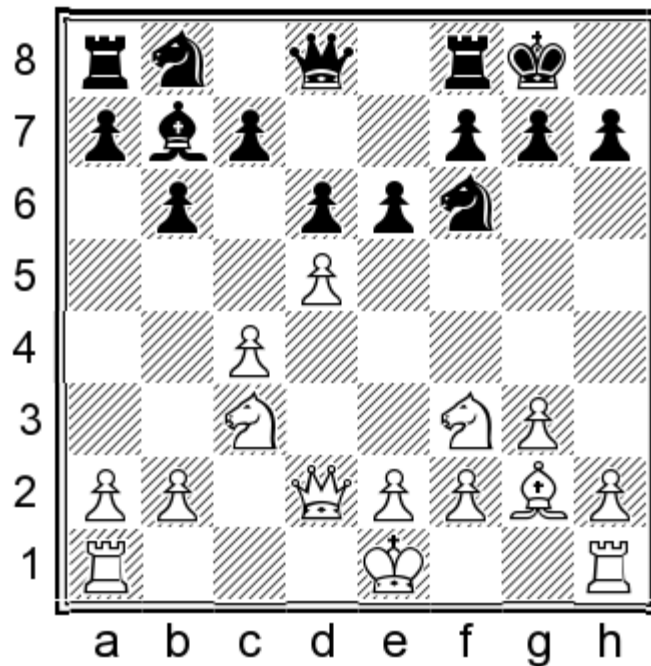
The problem is that Black can't offer the trade of knights in the centre with 8...Ne4 in view of 9.Qf4!



Position after: 9.Qf4!

(9.Nxe4 Bxe4 would be playable for Black.) 9...Nxc3 (9...f5 10.Ng5!) 10.Ng5! and since Black hasn't castled yet, he is in trouble because of the vulnerable f7 square.

9.d5!



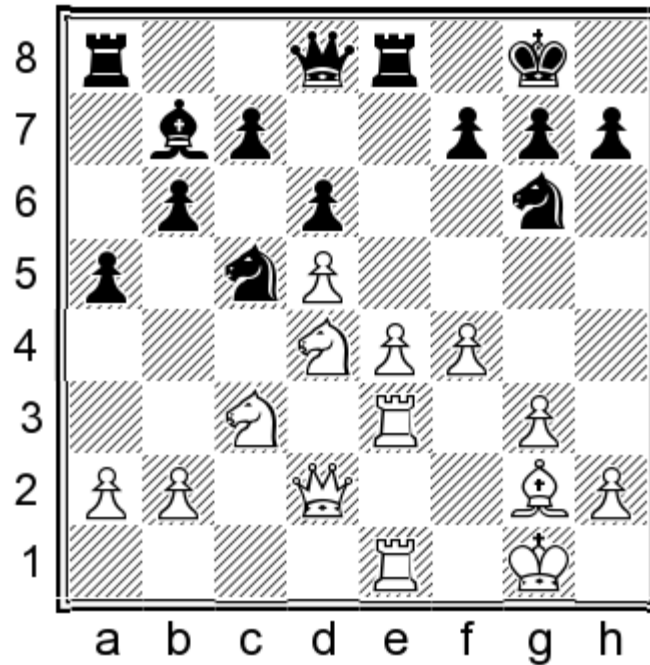
Position after: 9.d5!

After this move I believe White has a clear advantage without any risk.

9...Nbd7 10.0-0 exd5 11.cxd5 a5 12.Rfe1 Re8 13.Nd4 Nc5 14.e4

Black's pieces aren't that badly placed, but the main problem of his position is that it doesn't offer him any prospects of active counterplay. White's plan is rather simple by marching forward with his pawns in the centre.

14...Nfd7 15.f4 Nf8 16.Re3 Ng6 17.Rae1



Position after: 17.Rae1

Obviously White is looking for a central thrust with e4-e5, but bearing in mind that Black doesn't have any active plan or threat, I really enjoyed my next two moves just slightly improving my position.

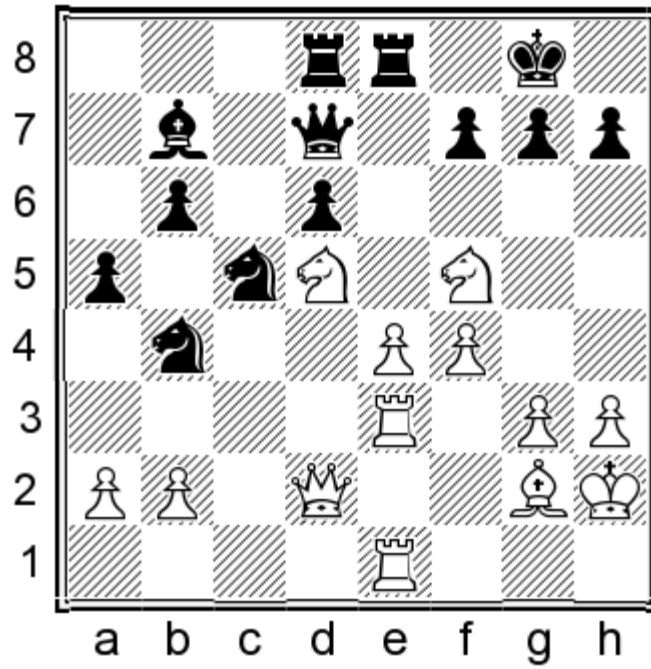
17...Qd7 18.h3 Ne7 19.Kh2 c6

I think this is a serious concession, weakening the pawn structure, but Black's position isn't so much fun to play anyway.

20.dxc6 Nxc6

The other recapture 20...Bxc6 21.Nxc6 Nxc6 22.e5! looks very ugly too and soon Black will definitely collapse.

21.Nf5! Rad8 22.Nd5 Nb4



Position after: 22...Nb4

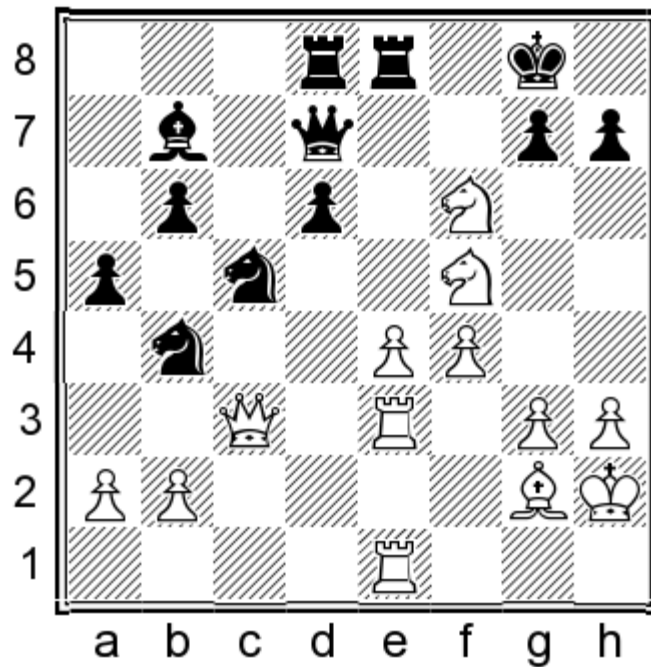
23.Qc3

Grabbing a healthy pawn with 23.Nxb6 can't be bad either, but I was quite obsessed by deciding the game with a devastating attack. So after a few minutes of calculating I went for the powerful piece sacrifice.

23...f6

23...Ne6 24.Nxg7! Nxd5 (24...Nxg7 25.Nf6+ wins the queen.) 25.Nxe8! Nxc3 26.Nf6+ was my intention.

24.Nxf6+!



Position after: 24.Nxf6+!

24...gxf6 25.Qxf6

Threatening checkmate on h6.

25...h5 26.e5!

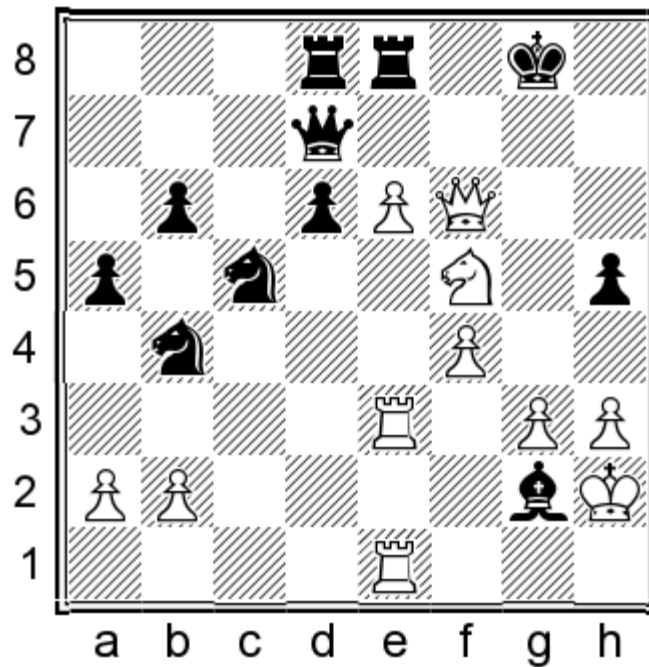
Black's extra piece isn't worth anything and soon my rooks will join the party.

26...Bxg2

A) 26...Rf8 is met by 27.Ne7+ Kh7 28.Qg6+ Kh8 29.Qh6#

B) 26...Re6 27.Qg5+ Kf8 28.exd6 is crushing too.

27.e6!



Position after: 27.e6!

Time is more important than material. I wasn't tempted recapturing the piece with 27.Kxg2? Nc2 and I didn't see anything better but a perpetual.

27...Nxe6

27...Qh7 28.Nh6+ wins the queen.

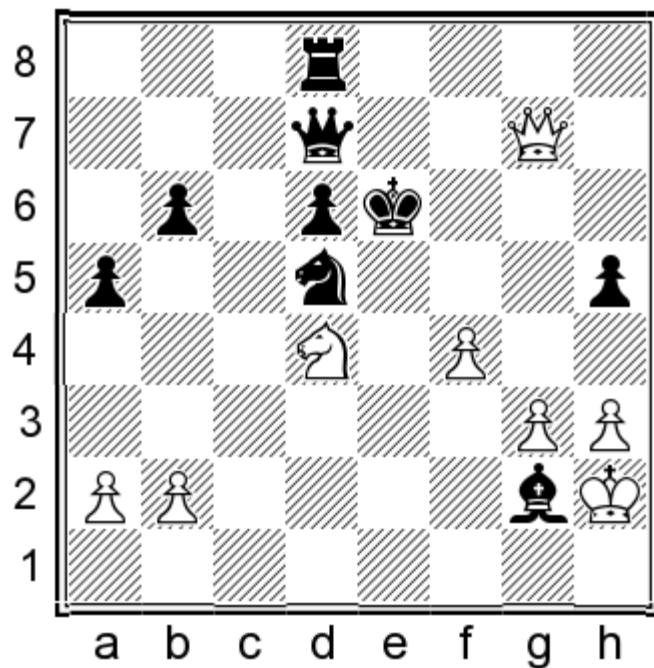
28.Rxe6 Rxe6 29.Rxe6 Nd5 30.Qg6+ Kf8 31.Qh6+ Kf7

31...Kg8 32.Rg6+ Kf7 33.Rg7+ Ke8 34.Qh8#

32.Qg7+ Kxe6 33.Nd4# 1-0

It's always a pleasure conducting a powerful attack in a straightforward fashion leaving the opponent chanceless. And in

addition I quite liked the checkmate pattern with the queen and knight, not something you see that often in practice.



Position after: 33.Nd4#

Exercises Chapter

Exercises

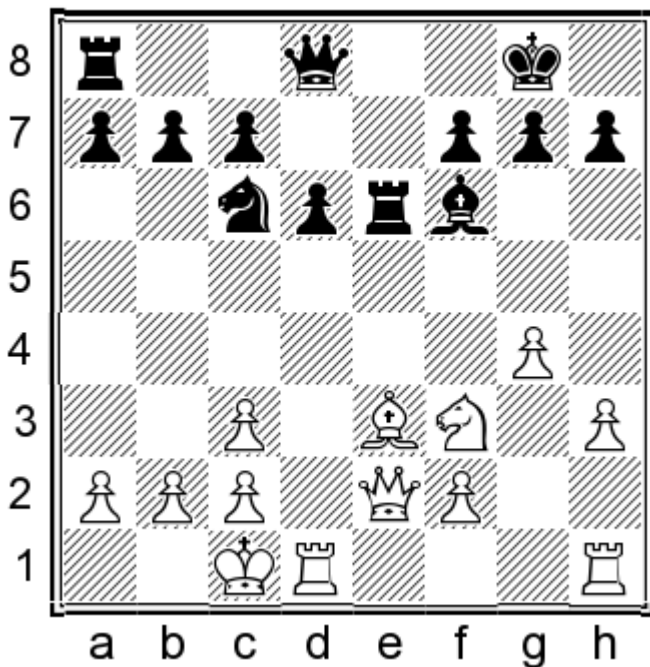
Now you have worked through all the material from chapter 1-9 it's time to test and challenge yourself. The 32 positions have carefully been selected and in my opinion perfectly match the content of this book. Some exercises are relatively easy to solve, others may be really difficult. In any case, please don't feel discouraged if you fail to solve them. The most important thing is to enjoy and learn from it and therefore I have worked out the solutions in depth.

The solutions are given in a separate section at the end of this chapter.

Good luck!

1

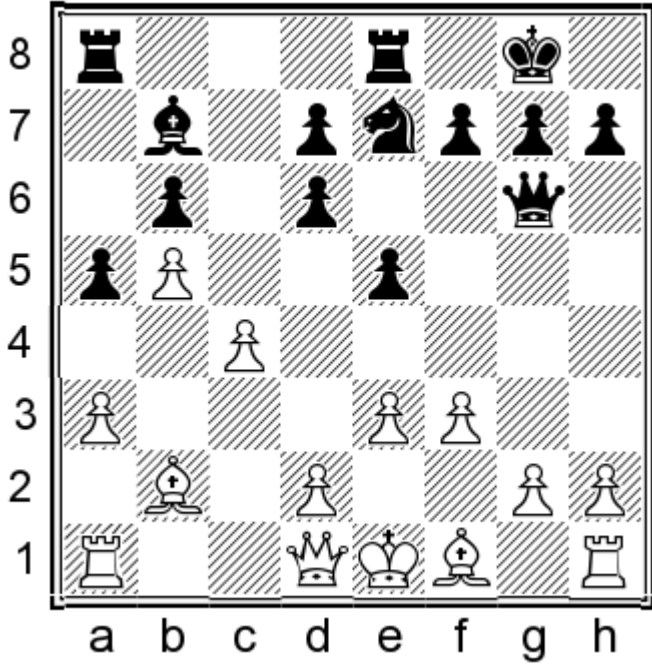
Dubov, D. –
Fridman, D.
FIDE World
Cup, 2017



Black to move

Black decides to stop White's aggressive intentions on the kingside with 13...Bg5. Is this a good idea?

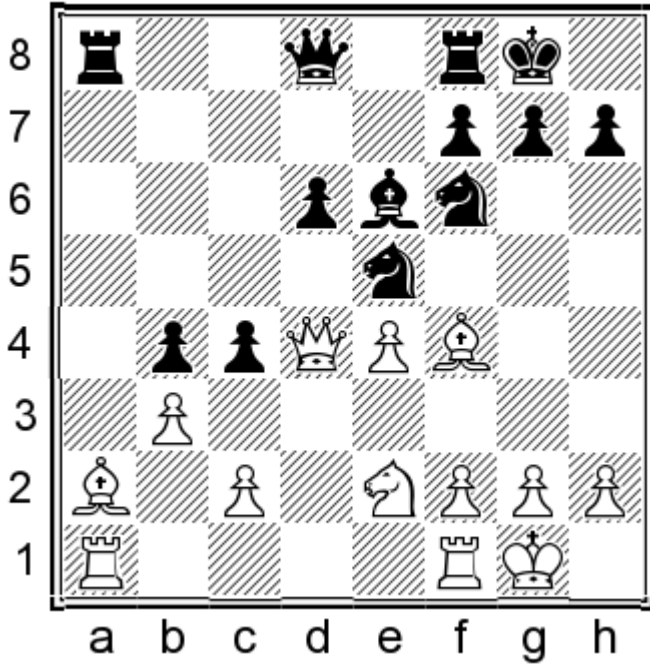
L'Ami, E. –
Neelotpal, D.
chess.com IoM
Masters, 2017



White to move

Black just played 14...Rfe8. How would you proceed here with White?

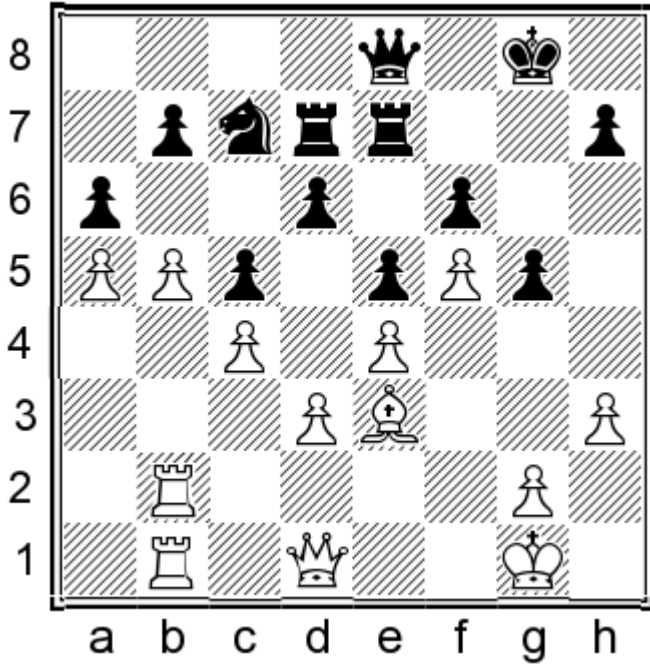
Grandelius, N. – Pragganandhaa, R.
chess.com IoM Masters, 2017



Black to move

The bishop is leaving a strange impression on a2. How would you play with Black?

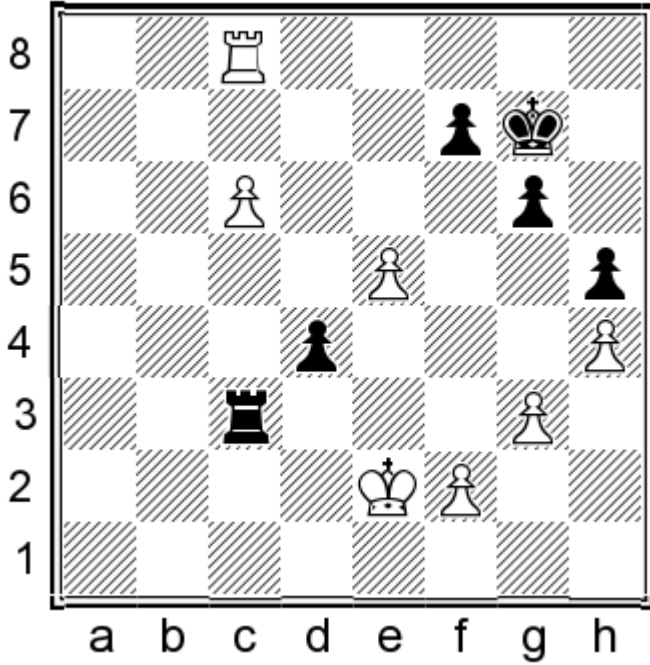
Efimenko, Z. – Sebenik, M.
18th EU-chT (Men), 2011



White to move

White has a pleasant space advantage. How would you continue?

Gelfand, B. – Sunilduth Lina, N. chess.com
IoM Masters, 2017

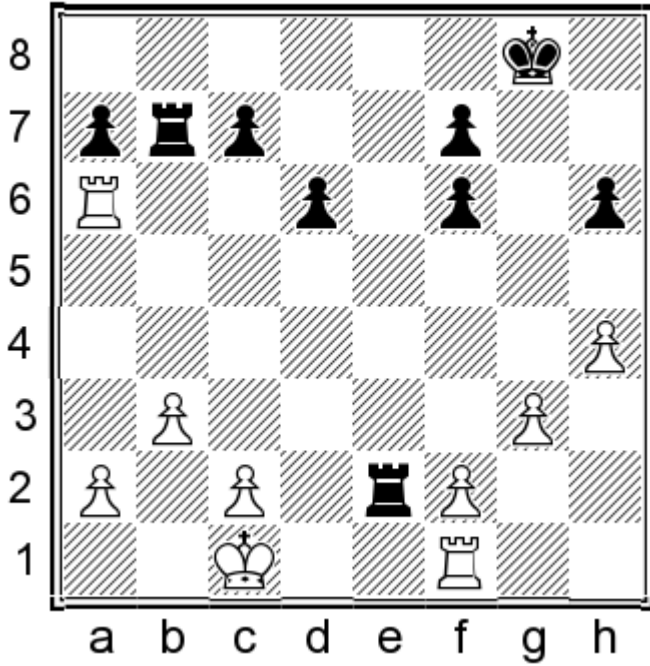


White to move

Gelfand advanced his pawn to the seventh rank. A good decision?

6

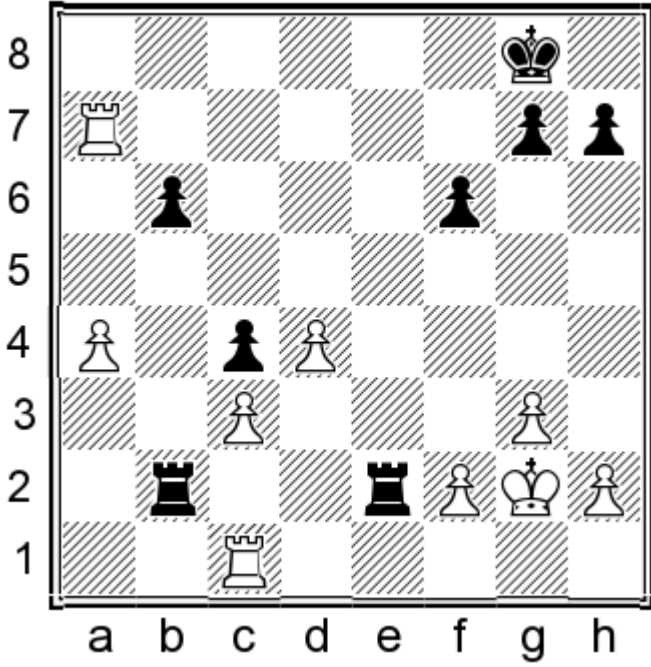
Grischuk, A. – Yu Yangyi
CHN-RUS GM Summit, 2017



Black to move

As White is about to play 26.Kd1 chasing the rook away, Black seems to suffer from an inferior pawn structure in this rook ending. How to continue?

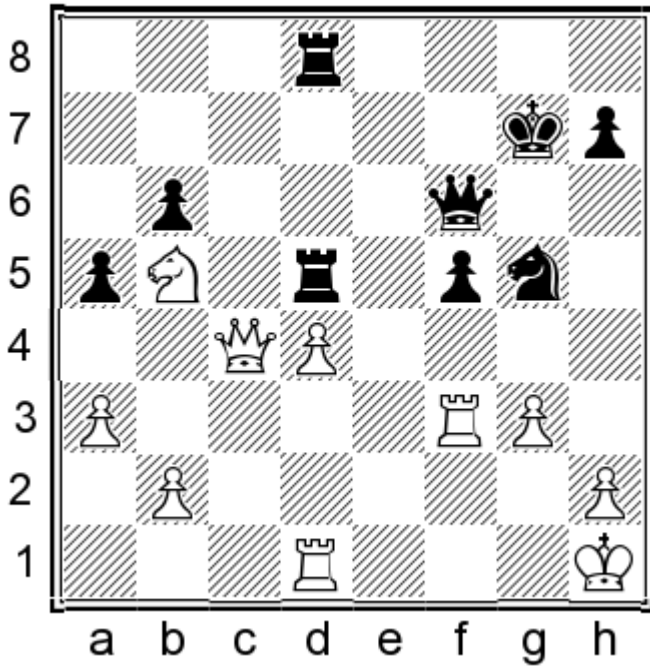
Rapport, R. –
Khmelniker, I.
chess.com IoM Masters,
2017



White to move

How should White deal with the threat on f2?

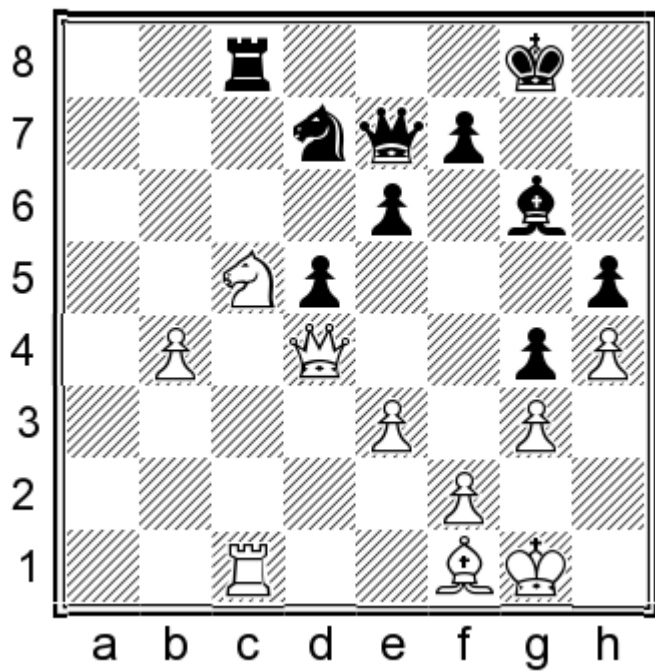
Gelfand, B. – Zatonskih,
A. chess.com IoM
Masters, 2017



White to move

35.Rfd3 or 35.Rf2?

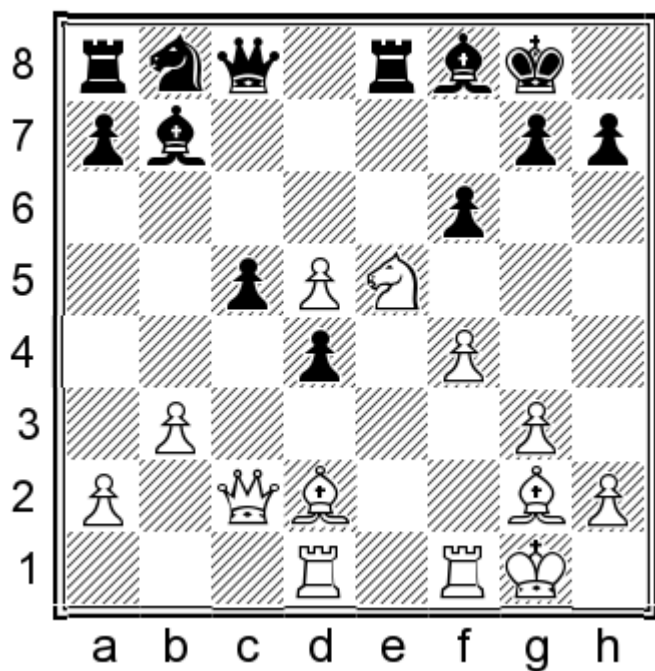
Howell, D. – Timman, J.
chess.com IoM Masters, 2017



White to move

Black's last move was 41...Qe7. This looks very natural, how would you respond with White?

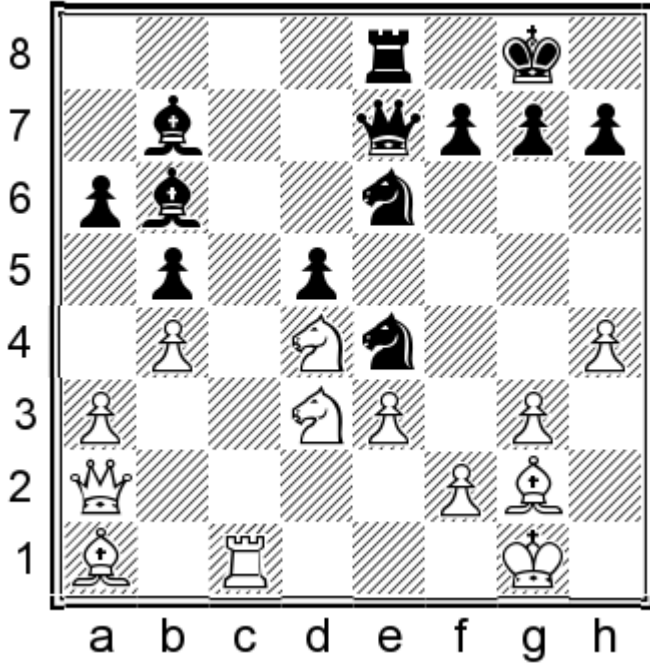
Aronian, L. – Navara, D.
Saint Louis Rapid, 2017



White to move

Black has just played 18...f6. Would you move the knight away or play something else?

Karjakin, S. – Nakamura, H.
Moscow Candidates, 2016

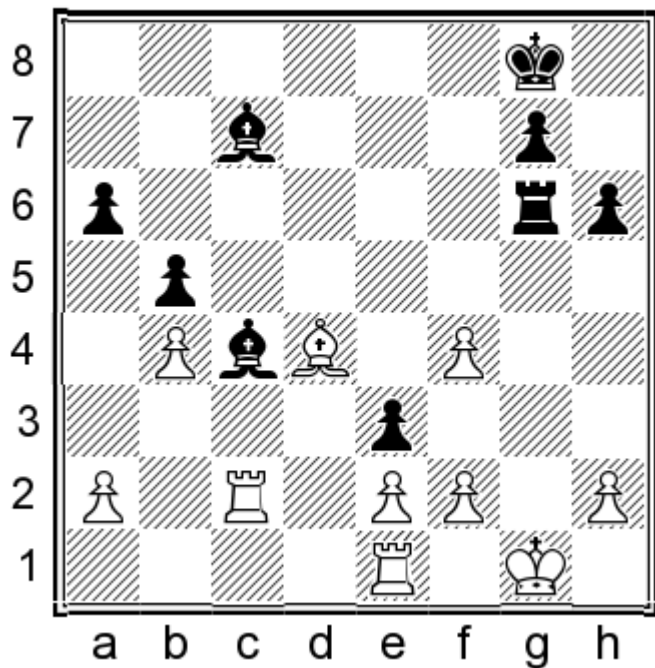


Black to move

How would you evaluate Nakamura's move 29...Nxg3?

12

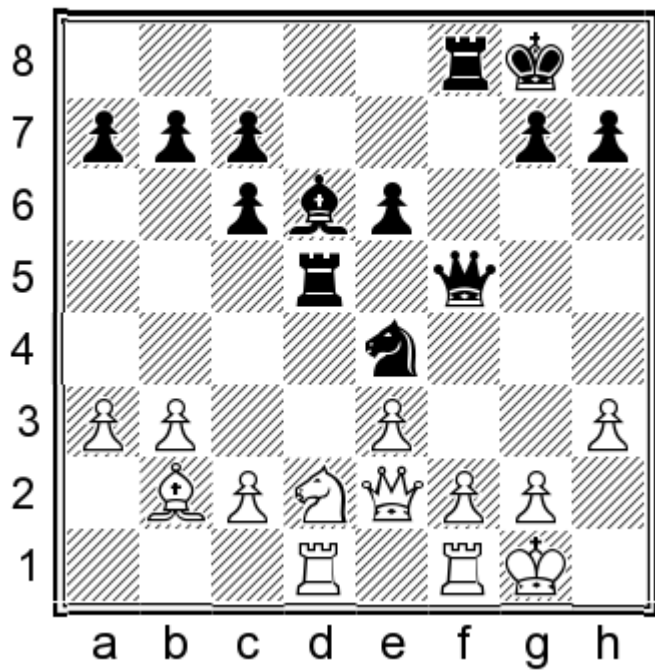
Bluebaum, M. – Bosiocic, M.
21st European Teams, 2017



White to move

What is the best square for your king to go to?

Bromann, T. – Ris, R.
Kopenhagen, 2014

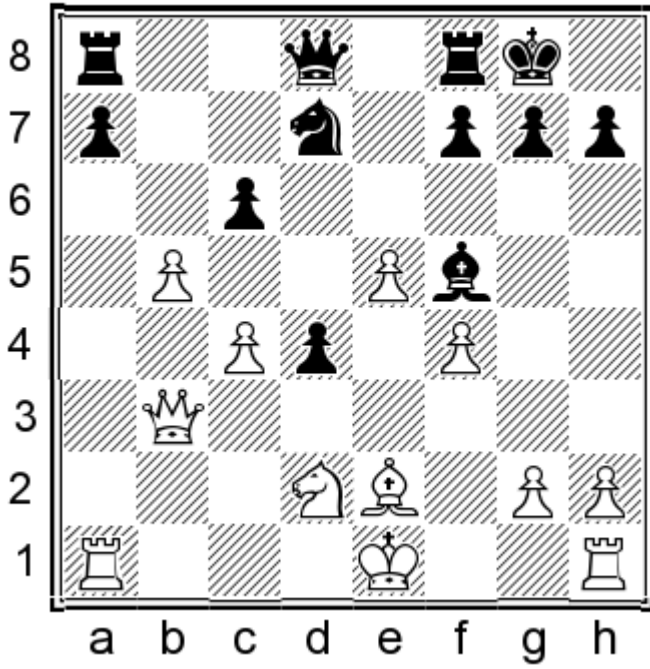


Black to move

Black obtains a crushing attack, by playing...?

14

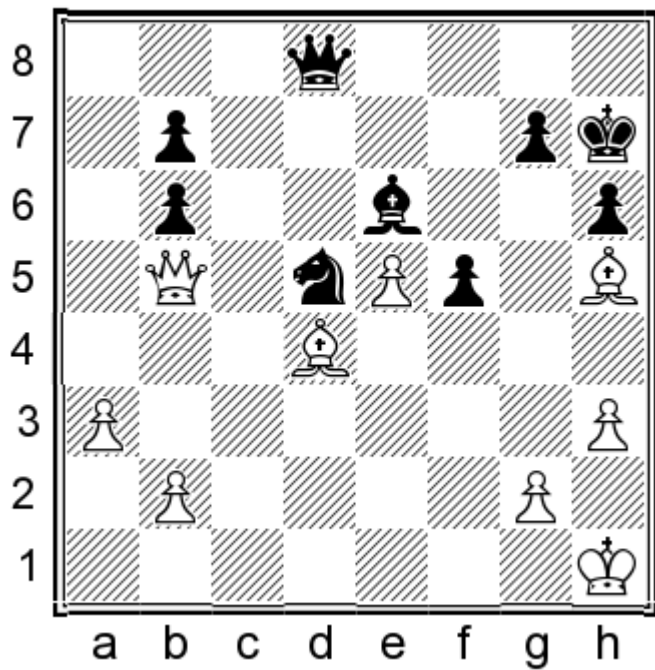
Golod, V. – Ris, R.
Riga, 2014



Black to move

White's last move 15.f4 has been too optimistic. Do you see why?

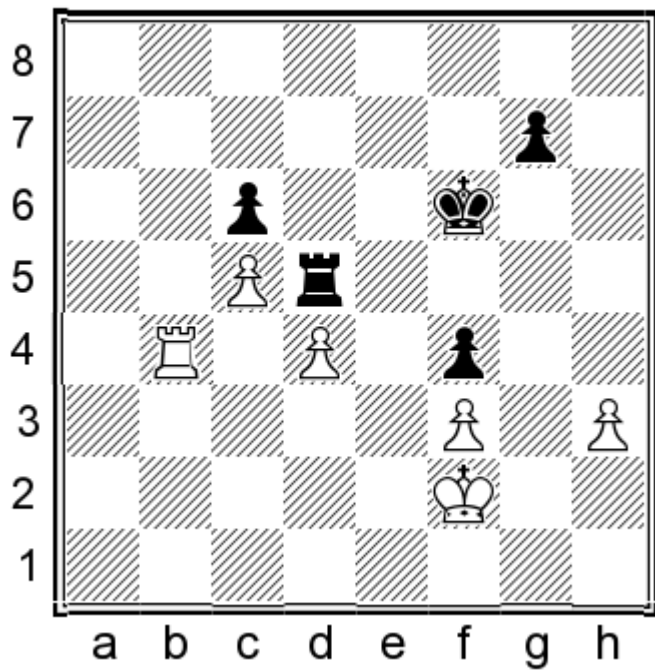
Jonsson, B. – Ris, R.
Reykjavik, 2012



Black to move

White just played 41.Bf3-h5. What's wrong with that?

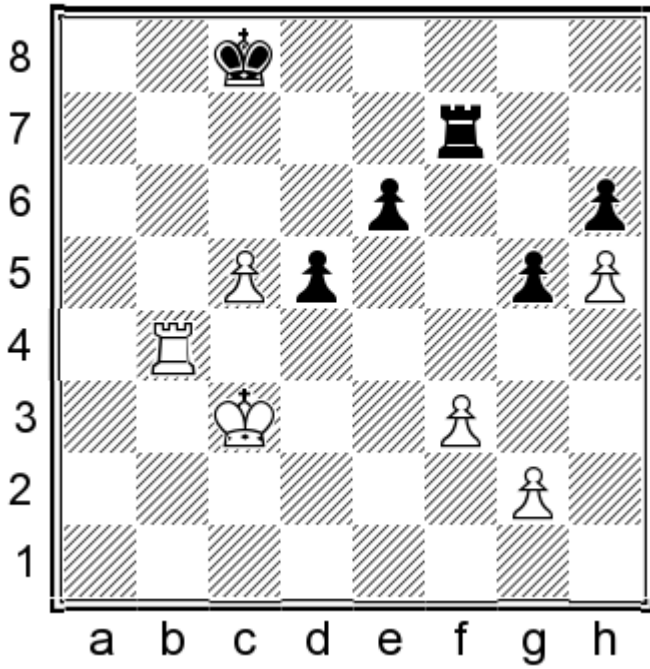
Aronian, L. – Matlakov, M.
FIDE World Cup, 2017



Black to move

Should the black king become active (48...Kg5) or stay in the centre (48...Ke6)?

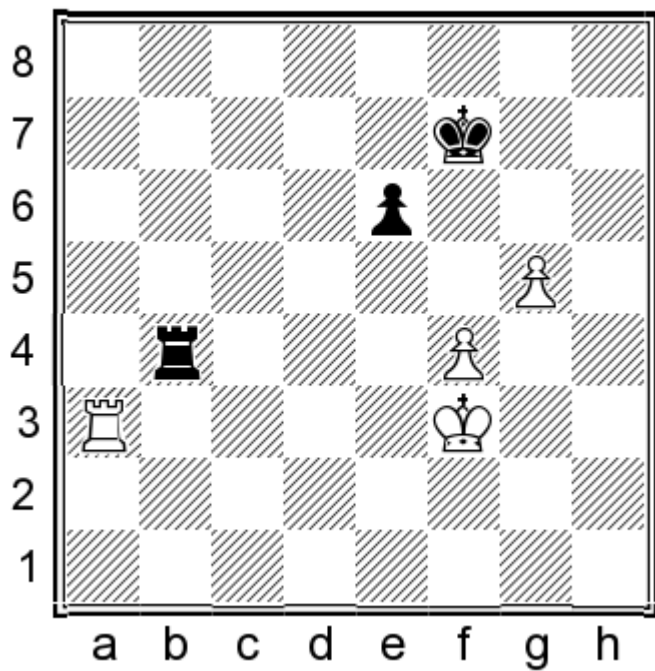
Giri, A. – Aronian, L. FIDE
Candidates, 2016



Black to move

Black is about to suffer an inferior rook ending and therefore offered White to exchange the rooks with 52...Rf4. What do you think?

Nepomniachtchi, I. –
Meier, G. 21st
European Teams,
2017

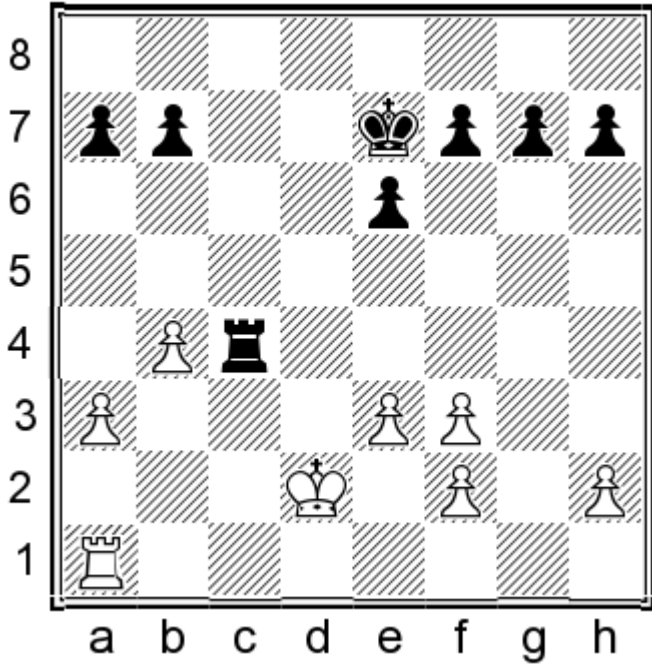


Black to move

79...? Can Black save this endgame?

19

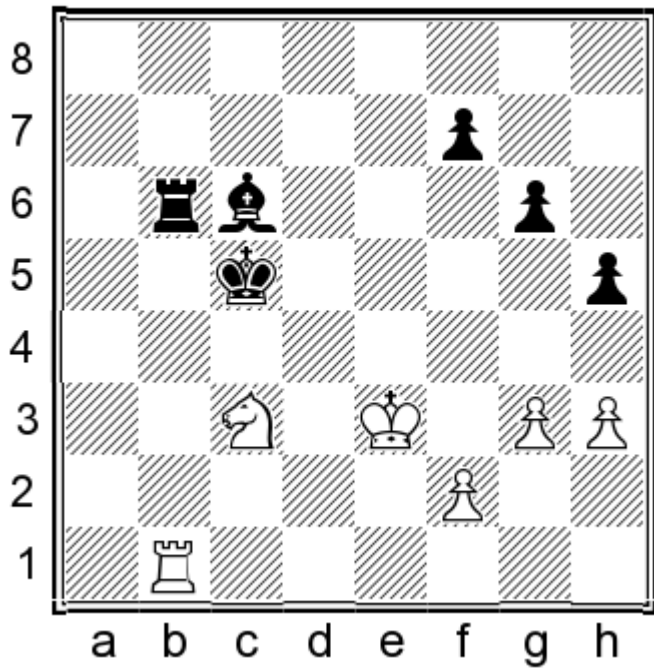
Cohn, E. – Rubinstein, A.
St Petersburg, 1909



White to move

White played here 24.Rc1. How would you evaluate the ensuing pawn ending?

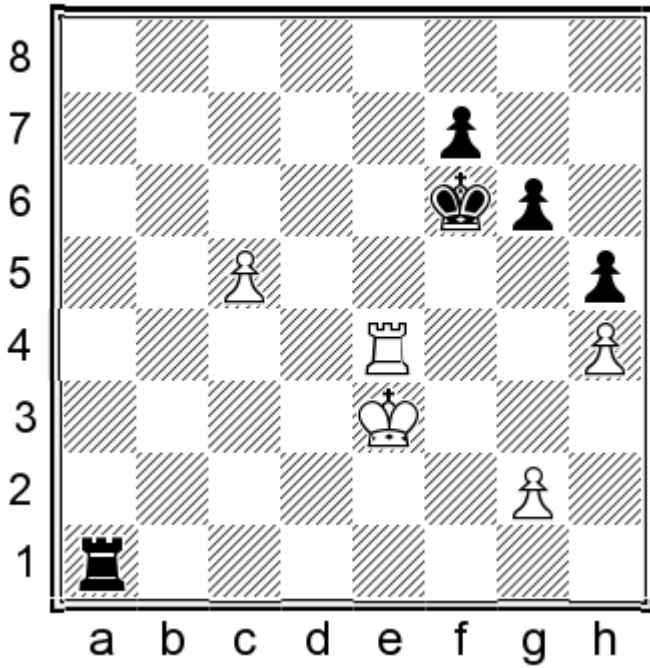
Kazhgaleyev, M. – Ghaem Maghami, E.
17th Asian Cities, 2011



White to move

What is the best way to convert White's advantage?

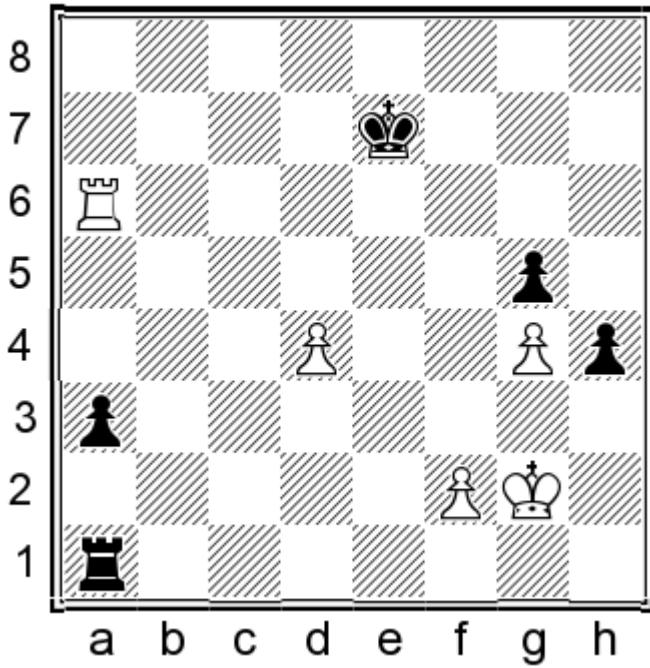
Sokolov, I. – Papaioannou, I.
18th European Teams, 2011



Black to move

What do you think of exchanging the rooks with 48...Re1?

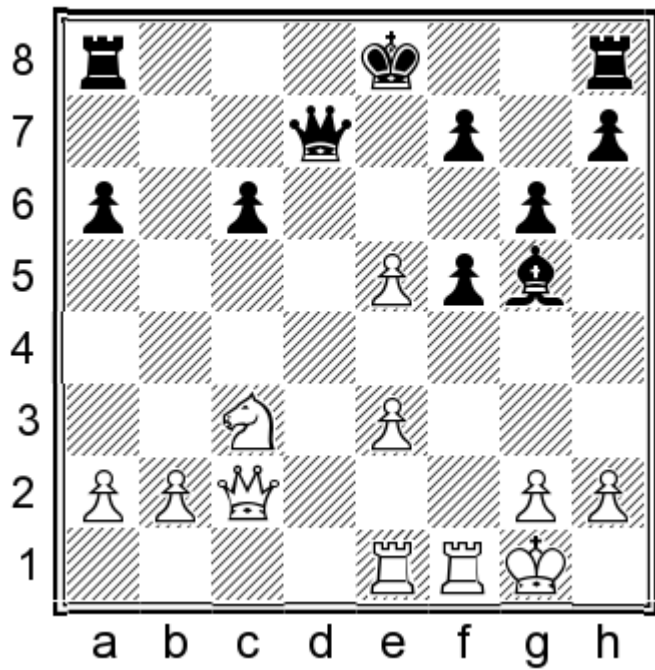
Dvirnyy, D. – Mamedov, R.
21st European Teams, 2017



Black to move

Does Black win after 64...a2?

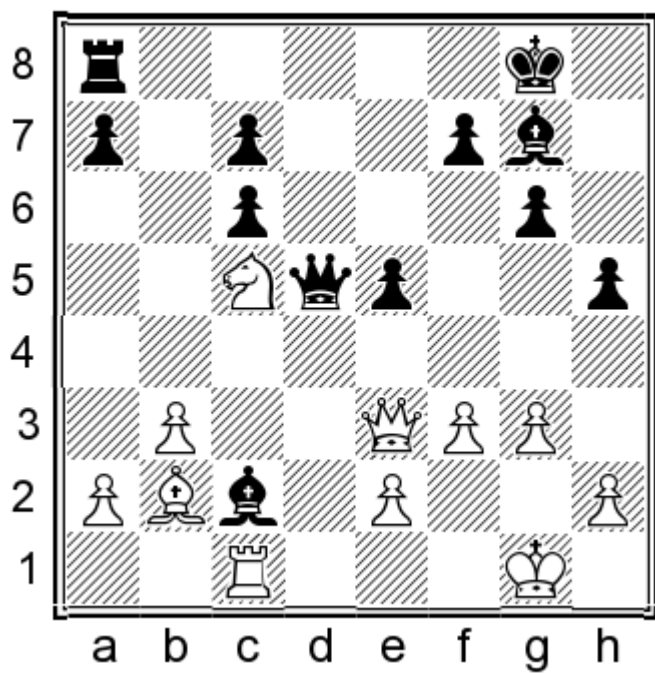
Nepomniachtchi, I. – Laznicka, V.
21st European Teams, 2017



White to move

How does White seize the initiative?

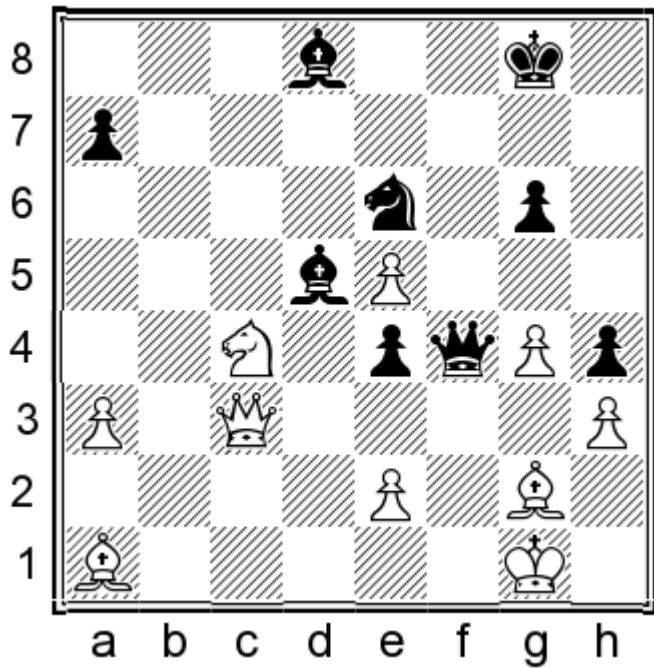
Svane, R. – Smirin, I.
21st European Teams, 2017



White to move

Do you see a tactical idea for White?

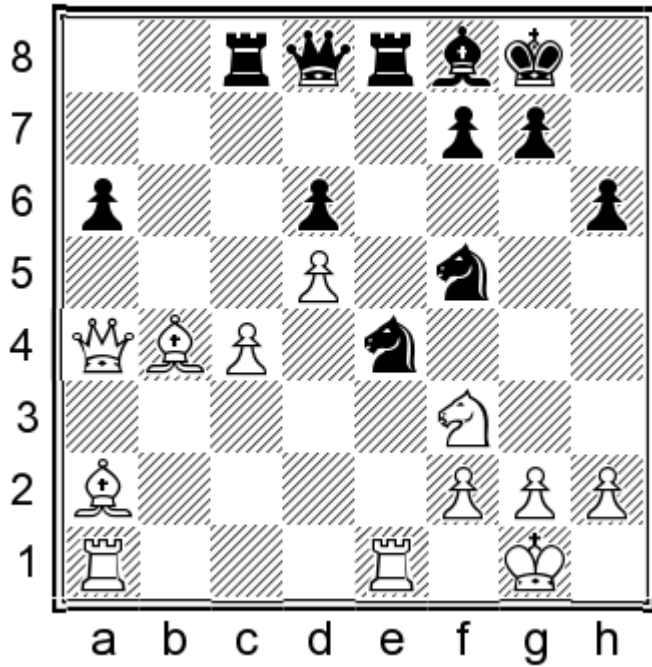
Rodshtein, M. – Fedoseev, V.
FIDE World Cup, 2017



Black to move

How would you exploit the weaknesses on the kingside?

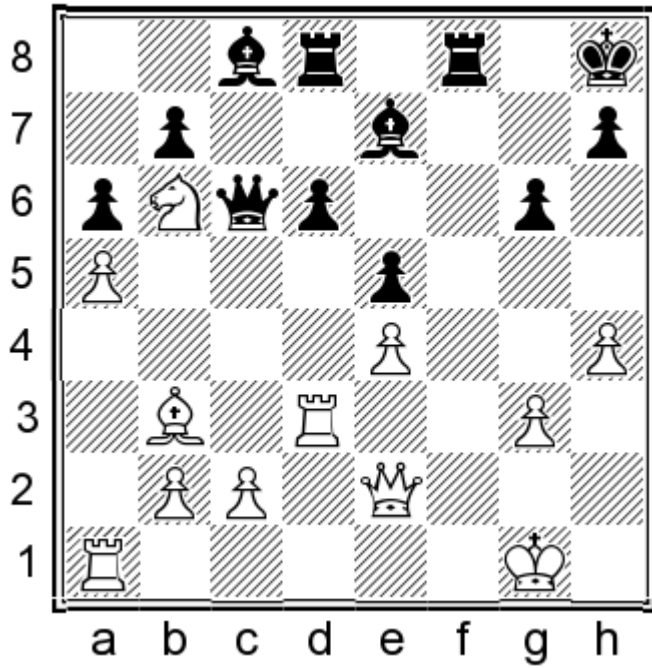
Carlsen, M. – Ding, L. Showdown
G10, 2017



White to move

Carlsen played 25.Qc2 here... Can you improve upon his game?

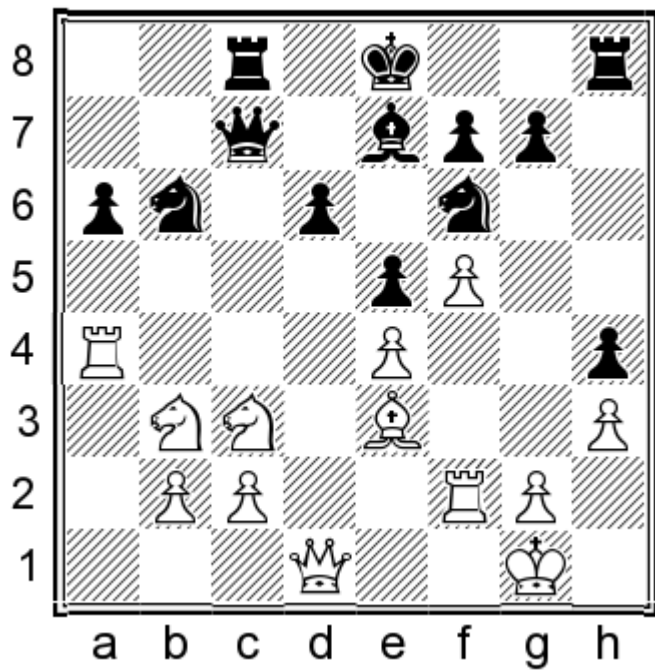
Caruana, F. – Grischuk, A.
Champions Showdown G30, 2017



Black to move

What should a Najdorf player do here with Black?

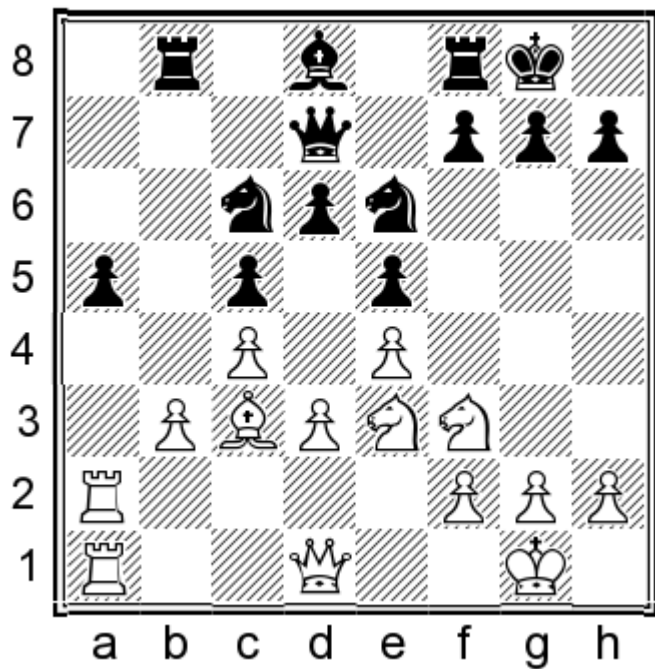
Geller, E. – Najdorf, M. Candidates
Tournament, 1953



White to move

Geller played very well in this phase of the game. How can you exploit the weakness on a6?

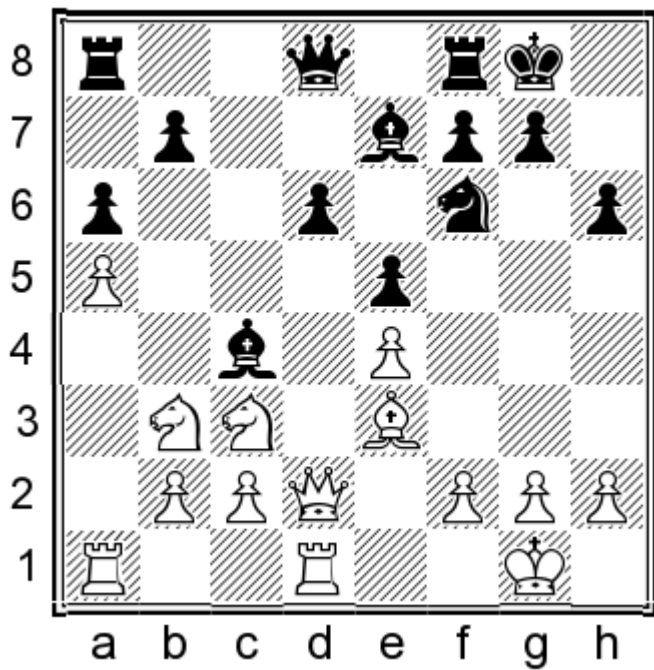
Carlsen, M. – Ding Liren
Champions Showdown G30, 2017



Black to move

Make a plan for Black.

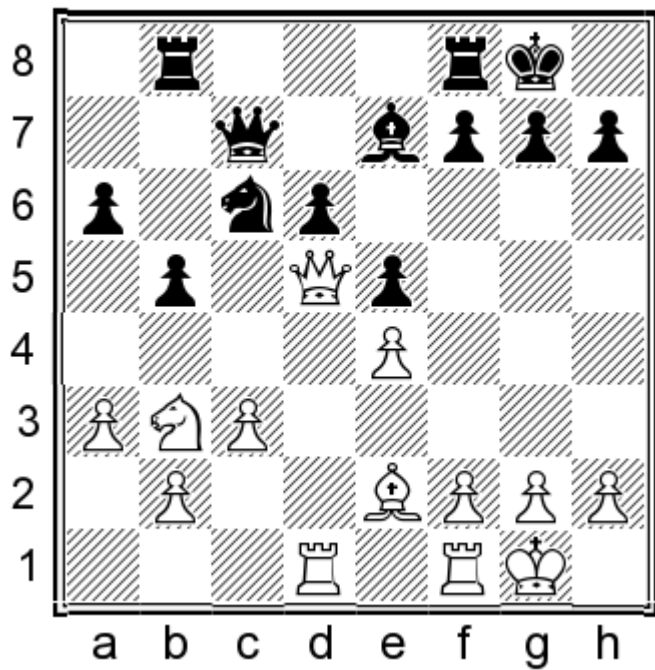
Karpov, A. – Quinteros, M.
Luzern ol (Men), 1982



White to move

Can you make a plan for White?

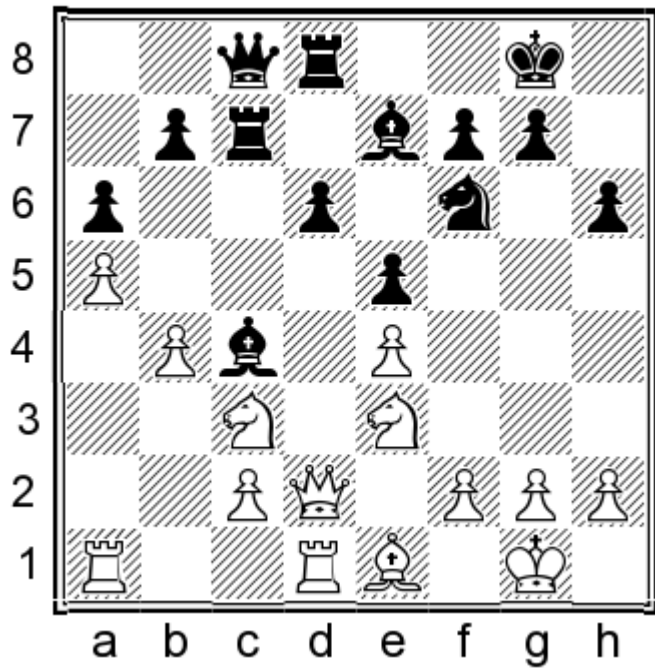
Galkin, A. – Anisimov, P.
ch-RUS Higher League, 2009



White to move

White has managed to gain control over the d5 square. What should be his next plan?

Anand, V. – Kasparov, G.
Saint Louis rapid, 2017



Black to move

It appears White has nice control over the queenside and the centre. Find the right continuation for Black.

SOLUTIONS TO EXCERCISES

1.

Dubov, D. – Fridman, D. FIDE World Cup, 2017

Simplifications are generally good to stop a possible attack, but here it's nicely refuted!

13...♗g5? 14.♘xg5!

14.♗xg5?! ♜xg5+ 15.♘xg5 ♖xe2 favors Black.

14...♜xg5 15.♗xg5 ♖xe2 16.♗e3!

It's this exact move that Fridman must have missed. The rook on e2 has been trapped. White will win an exchange by bringing the king to d1.

16...♗e5 17.b3 h5 18.gxh5 ♘f3 19.♖df1 ♗e8 20.h4 ♘h2!? 21.♖fg1

21.♖xh2? allows 21...♖8xe3!

21...f5 22.♗d1 ♖2xe3 23.fxe3 ♘g4 24.♗d2+–

And White is a healthy exchange up and went on to win easily.

1-0

2

L'Ami, E. – Neelotpal, D.
chess.com IoM Masters, 2017

White will play against the bishop on b7, which is no longer able to join play.

15.e4! f5 16.d3!

Practically White is playing with an extra piece. L'Ami converts his advantage instructively by playing on the other side of the board.

16...♖ac8 17.♖c1 ♜f8 18.♗d2 ♙a8 19.a4 ♗f6 20.g3 fxe4 21.fxe4 ♜f7 22.♙g2 ♜cf8 23.♖c2 ♜g6 24.♗e3 ♗d8 25.♜f1 ♜xf1+ 26.♙xf1 ♗c7 27.♙a3 ♜f6 28.♜f2 ♜xf2 29.♙xf2 ♜f8 30.♗g5 ♙f7 31.♗h5+ g6 32.♗h4 h5 33.g4 hxg4 34.♙e2 ♙b7 35.♙g3 ♙c8 36.♙xg4

And Black had seen enough.

1-0

3

Grandelius, N. – Praggnanandhaa, R. chess.com IoM Masters, 2017

In the game Black went for 18...♗h5, but a more direct attempt to prove the bishop on a2 to be trapped would have been...

18...♗c6!

18...♗h5 19.bxc4? ♗xf4 20.♗xf4 ♗f3+! 21.gxf3 ♖g5+ 22.♗h1 ♗xf4 ♖½-½ (88) Grandelius, N (2653) – Praggnanandhaa, R (2500) Douglas 2017.

18...♗c6! 19.♗xd6

19.♗d1 c3 20.♗xd6 ♗e8 and White is busted.

19...♗xd6 20.♗xd6 ♗fd8 21.e5

21.♗f4 c3 (21...♗xe4!?) 22.f3 ♗a6 looks also quite bad for White, but is perhaps a more stubborn defensive attempt.

21...c3

Despite the extra pawn, White is completely lost as the bishop will never see daylight again.

4

Efimenko, Z. – Sebenik, M.
18th EU-chT (Men), 2011

The following break had to be seen in far advance, actually when White decided to close the position with 33.b6.

49.d4!! exd4

49...cxd4 50.♙d2 intending ♙b4xd6 and White will enter via the queenside.

50.♙f2 1-0

And the bishop performs a pacman-role by taking the pawns on d6, c5 and d4 one after another.

White will play against the bishop on b7, which is no longer able to join play.

15.e4! f5 16.d3!

Practically White is playing with an extra piece. L'Ami converts his advantage instructively by playing on the other side of the board.

16...♞ac8 17.♞c1 ♞f8 18.♞d2 ♙a8 19.a4 ♞f6 20.g3 fxe4 21.fxe4 ♞f7 22.♙g2 ♞cf8 23.♞c2 ♗g6 24.♞e3 ♞d8 25.♞f1 ♞xf1+ 26.♙xf1 ♞c7 27.♙a3 ♞f6 28.♞f2 ♞xf2 29.♗xf2 ♗f8 30.♞g5 ♗f7 31.♞h5+ g6 32.♞h4 h5 33.g4 hxg4 34.♙e2 ♙b7 35.♗g3 ♙c8 36.♙xg4

And Black had seen enough.

1-0

5

Gelfand, B. – Sunilduth Lyna, N.
chess.com IoM Masters, 2017

Gelfand rightly decided to play...

70.c7!

...when Black can only make waiting moves with his king, as the rook needs to stay on c3, keeping an eye on the c-pawn and cutting the king along the 3rd rank.

70...♖h7 71.♔d2 ♕g7 72.f3 ♖h7

The rook can't leave the c-file, e.g. **72...♞xf3 73.♞d8** and the c-pawn promotes.

73.g4 hxg4

73...♕g7 74.gxh5 gxh5 75.f4 followed by f5 and e6.

74.fxg4 ♕g7 75.h5 g5 76.h6+ ♖h7

This position had to be seen in advance. So White has created a passed h-pawn, but that's not enough. With the method of triangulation White is able to bring Black in zugzwang.

76...♖xh6 77.♞h8+ ♕g7 78.c8=♞ and White wins.

77.♕e2! ♞e3+ 78.♔d1 ♞d3+ 79.♕c2 ♞c3+ 80.♔d2

And Black resigned, as we have reached the same position as after **76...♖h7** but now with Black to move. The white king will now go after the pawn on f7, e.g. **80.♕d2 ♞c4 81.♕d3 ♞c3+ 82.♕xd4 ♞c1 83.♕d5 ♞d1+ 84.♕c6 ♞c1+ 85.♕d7 ♞d1+ 86.♕e7** and so on.

1-0

6

Grischuk, A. – Yu Yangyi
CHN-RUS GM Summit, 2017

25...♟f8?

A rule of thumb in rook endgames: play active! Black should have tried 25...♞b6! not fearing the pawn on a7, since after 26.♞xa7 (26.♞xb6 might be a better attempt when White retains the better prospects as well, but in any case Black should have traded off his inactive rook.) 26...♞c6 27.c4 d5! Black obtains excellent counterplay. After the game's continuation the rook on b7 will never be able to become active again.

25...♟f8? 26.♟d1 ♞e5 27.♞e1 ♟e7 28.♟d2 ♟e6 29.♞e3 f5 30.c4 c5?

Another mistake, but Black's position is already difficult to play.

31.♞d3 ♞d7 32.f4! ♞e4 33.♞d5!

Black isn't able to defend the weaknesses on c5, d6 and f5 all at the same time. White nicely converted this into a win.

33...♟e7 34.♞xf5 ♞d4+ 35.♟e2 ♟f8 36.♟f3 ♟g7 37.♟g4 ♞d2 38.♞d5 ♞g2 39.♞d3 ♞e2 40.♟f3 ♞de7 41.h5 ♞h2 42.♟g4 ♞d7 43.♞axd6 ♞xd6 44.♞xd6 ♞xa2 45.f5 f6 46.♞c6 ♞b2 47.♞xc5 ♞xb3 48.♞c7+ ♟f8 49.♞xa7 ♞c3 50.♞c7 ♟e8 51.♟f4 ♟d8 52.♞c6 ♟e7 53.g4 ♞c1 54.♟e3 ♞g1 55.♞e6+ ♟d7 56.♟f3 1-0

7

Rapport, R. – Khmelniker, I. chess.com IoM Masters, 2017

Activity for everything!

32.♔f3!

Excellent play by White. After 32.♞f1?! both king and rook remain passive and Black is doing OK after 32...♞bc2 with sufficient counterplay.

32.♔f3! ♞xf2+ 33.♔e4! ♞xh2 34.♔d5!

What an amazing king march! The king is no longer challenged by the black rooks and will now support the advance of the queenside pawns. Look at the difference in king's activity for both sides! White went on to win in a very convincing way which is worth playing through.

34...♞hg2 35.♞e1 h5 36.♞c3 b5 37.a5 b4 38.a6 bxc3 39.♞xc3 ♞a2 40.♔c6 ♞gd2 41.d5 ♞a5 42.d6 ♞ad5 43.♞d7 ♞a5 44.♔b6 ♞a4 45.♔b5 ♞da2 46.♞a7 ♞a5+ 47.♔b6 ♞d5 48.d7 ♞ad2 49.♞xc4 ♔h7 50.♞b7 ♞d6+ 51.♞c6 ♞xd7 52.♞xd7 ♞xd7 53.a7 ♞d8 54.♔c7 ♞f8 55.♞a6 ♞a8 56.♔b7 ♞xa7+ 57.♞xa7 ♔g6 58.♞a5 1-0

8

Gelfand, B. – Zatonskih, A.
chess.com IoM Masters, 2017

It's often a good idea to keep your pieces protected. In the game Gelfand horribly blundered with

35.♟f2??

Better would have been e.g. **35.♟fd3 ♖e7 36.♞3d2 ♖e4+ 37.♞g2 ♘h3 38.♘c3 ♘f2+ 39.♔g1 ♘h3+** with a repetition of moves.

35.♟f2?? ♞c5!

Taking advantage of the unprotected pieces, the pin along the d-file and the exposed White king.

36.♞e2

36.dxc5 ♞xd1+ 37.♔g2 ♞c6+ and mate.

36...♞c6+ 37.♞g2 ♞xb5

And Black just won a piece and the game.

0-1

9

Howell, D. – Timman, J.
chess.com IoM Masters, 2017

Timman overlooked that White is now able to play

42. ♖xe6!

which wins on the spot. The rook on c1 can't be taken (since the bishop is on f1 this capture doesn't come with check!) in view of mate on g7:

42... ♗xc1

42... fxe6 43. ♗xc8++-

43. ♖g7#

1-0

10

Aronian, L. – Navara, D. Saint Louis Rapid, 2017

White has a huge lead in development, as the majority of Black's pieces are stuck on the back rank. In a struggle for the initiative it therefore could make sense ignoring the threat of your opponent. Aronian went for...

19.♖de1!

...which involves a very strong piece sacrifice.

After something like 19.♗c4? ♜d7! Black will win the pawn on d5 when White's initiative evaporates.

19.♖de1! fxe5

Very principled. Black could also have considered keeping the knight alive on e5. For example 19...♗d7 but then White has the interesting choice between playing for a positional bind with 20.♗c6 or continue the dynamical approach with a more aggressive option like 20.♙e4!?

20.fxe5

The pawns on d5 and e5 are beautifully placed in the centre, taking away a lot of squares from the black pieces. Thanks to the opening of the f-file White is able to use the rook in the attack immediately.

20...♗d7 21.e6 ♗f6 22.♖xf6!

Eliminating a key defender!

22...gxf6 23.♖f5

Beautiful piece configuration by Aronian. Black is practically helpless against the threat of ♖e4-g4/h4 followed by ♗e4 with a devastating attack for White.

23...♗d8

Another illustrative variation goes 23...♗c7 24.♖e4! ♖ad8 25.♖g4+ ♖h8 26.♖h4 (26.♗xf6+? ♗g7-+) 26...♖e7 (26...♗xd5 27.♗xd5 ♖xd5 28.♗xd5 ♗e7 29.♗e4± and White retains a big advantage.) 27.♗xf6+ ♗g7 28.♗f5 ♗e5 29.♗a5!

29...♗xa5 30.♗xe5+ ♖g7 31.e7 ♖e8 32.♖xh7+ ♖xh7 33.♗h5+ ♖g8 34.♗xe8+ ♖h7 35.♗h5+ ♖g8 36.e8=♗#

24.♖e4 ♖e7 25.♖g4+ ♖h8 26.♗e4

26.♗xf6+? ♗g7 is not so clear. By capturing on f6 you are enabling Black to reorganise his defence.

26...♖c8 27.♖h4 ♖g8

27...♖cc7 28.♗xf6+ ♗g7 (28...♖g8 29.♖g4+ ♗g7 30.♖xg7+-) 29.♖xh7+ ♖g8 30.♖xg7+ ♖xg7 31.♗xd8#

28.♖xh7 ♗xd5

A) 28...♗g7 29.♗g6! ♗xd5 30.♖h8+ ♖xh8 31.♗h7#

B) 28...♖g7 29.♗h5+-

29.♗g6+ ♖g7

29...♗g7 30.♖h8+ ♖xh8 31.♗h7#

30.♗h5 ♗xe4 31.♖h8#

A marvellous attacking game by Aronian and it seems that the piece sacrifice initiated with 19.♖de1! was made intuitively without calculating any deep variations. Just make sure ALL your pieces are ready to join the attack!

11

Karjakin, S. – Nakamura, H.
Moscow Candidates, 2016

29... ♖xg3? 30.fxg3!

30. ♗xe6? ♜xe6 31.fxg3 ♜xe3+ and Black wins.

30... ♗xd4 31. ♗xd4!

31.exd4? ♜e3+ favors Black as White doesn't have the same resource as in the game.

31... ♗xd4 32.exd4 ♜e3+

But missed that White has still a very surprising counter idea, by attacking two weak points in Black's position.

33. ♜f2! ♜xd3 34. ♗c7!+-

And thanks to the double attack on b7 and f7 White wins a piece.

1-0

12

Bluebaum, M. – Bosiocic, M. 21st European Teams, 2017

It feels safer to bring the king to the centre, but calculation is required! Bluebaum played...

35.♔f1?

...But he should have opted for 35.♔h1! when Black is unable to create new threats, e.g. 35...♗d5+ (35...exf2 36.♗xf2 ♗d5+ is now met by 37.e4!) 36.f3 and White is in control.

35.♔f1? ♗e6!

An amazing retreat, threatening mate.

36.fxe3

36.♖ec1 ♗h3+ 37.♔e1 ♖g1#

36...♗d8!

This bishop move is even more beautiful! Suddenly the white king has been caught and is now forced to give up material.

37.e4 ♗h3+ 38.♔f2 ♗h4+ 39.♔f3 ♗g2+ 40.♔e3 ♗xe1

And instead of being an exchange up, White was a piece down and eventually lost.

0-1

13

Bromann, T. – Ris, R.
Kopenhagen, 2014

I wasn't really tempted trading off any pieces and instead was looking for dynamical chances. After all, my pieces are more actively placed and in particular the pawn on h3 seemed as a possible target to me. Therefore,

20...♠g5! 21.h4

A) 21.e4 allows 21...♠xh3+! 22.gxh3 (22.♖h1 ♗f4) 22...♗xh3 23.f4 ♕c5+ and Black wins.

B) 21.c4 ♠xh3+ 22.gxh3 ♗g6+ 23.♖h1 ♜h5! and White needs to give up his queen to stop mate.

C) The best option for White here is 21.f4 but then 21...♗xc2 offers the better prospects for Black as well.

21...♗xc2 22.♕a1

22.e4 can be met by 22...♠xe4 23.♗xe4 ♗xb2 24.♗xe6+ ♖h8 and Black is technically winning thanks to the extra pawn and better piece coordination.

22...♠f3+!

A beautiful shot!

23.gxf3

23.♠xf3 ♗xe2 wins the queen. 24.♞d2

23...♗g6+ 24.♖h1 ♜h5 25.♗c4 ♕f4

And mate can't be avoided.

0-1

14

**Golod, V. – Ris, R.
Riga, 2014**

Ignoring the safety of the king (instead of castling kingside) can't go unpunished and Black seizes the initiative with energetic play.

15...d3! 16.♙f3

16.♙xd3? fails to 16...♗c5

16...♞b6!

The point of Black's play: White's king remains stuck in the centre.

17.bxc6 ♞e3+ 18.♔d1 ♗c5 19.♞a3 ♞ab8 20.♞e1 ♞d4 21.♞c1 h5

Obviously my first thought was to play 21...♞b2! but I missed a beautiful win after 22.♞c3 ♞xd2+! 23.♞xd2 (23.♔xd2 ♞f2+ 24.♔d1 ♗a4

followed by 25...♗b2.) 23...♗b3 24.♞c3 d2 25.♞xb3 dxe1=♞+ 26.♔xe1 ♞g1+ 27.♔d2 ♞d8+ 28.♙d5 ♞f2+ 29.♔c3 (29.♔d1 ♙g4+) 29...♞e3+ 30.♔b2 ♞d2+ winning the rook.

22.h3 h4 23.c7 ♞b6 24.♞f1 ♙d7 25.♞c3 ♙a4+ 26.♔c1

26...♞c8!

Simple and strong: picking up the c-pawn.

Black should watch out not to fall for the remaining trick in the position as 26...♗b3+?? is a huge blunder, in view of 27.♞xb3 ♙xb3 28.♞xf8+! and White even wins.

27.♙d1 ♙xd1 28.♔xd1 ♞xc7 29.♞c1 ♗a4 30.♞b3 ♞xb3 31.♗xb3 ♗c3+ 32.♔e1 ♞xc4 33.♗d2 ♞b4 34.♞f2 ♞c5 35.♔f1 ♗e2 0-1

15

Jonsson, B. – Ris, R.
Reykjavik, 2012

I had been under pressure almost the entire game, but after White's last move I spotted an opportunity to profit from White's lack of coordination (unprotected pieces!)

41...♖h4!

A) 41...♗f4? is less convincing, in view of 42.♙xb6 ♖h4 43.♙f3 ♗xh3 44.♖b4! with unclear play.

B) 41...♖g5?! 42.♙f3 doesn't lead anywhere.

41...♖h4! 42.♖e8 ♗f4!

Perhaps my opponent had missed this move, as I am stopping the mating idea on g6, threaten to take the bishop and to take the pawn on h3.

43.♙f3

43.♙f7 ♙xf7 44.♖xf7 ♖e1+ 45.♗h2 ♖e4 and check mate to follow.

43...♗xh3! 44.gxh3

44.♖h5 ♗f2+ 45.♗g1 ♖xd4+ is over too.

44...♖xh3+ 45.♗g1 ♖g3+ 46.♗f1

46.♙g2 ♙d5+

46...♖xf3+ 47.♙f2 ♙c4+ 48.♗g1 ♖g4+ 49.♗h2 ♙f1

0-1

16

Aronian, L. – Matlakov, M.
FIDE World Cup, 2017

Matlakov went for the active...

48...♔g5?

...which is big mistake, as it's too slow.

White is about to centralize his king and take the pawn on c6 when his pawns are too strong. Instead, Black should have stayed in the centre with his king 48...♔e6! 49.♔e2 (49.♞b6 ♞xd4 50.♞xc6+ ♔d5 is a relatively simple draw.) 49...♞h5 and Black is perfectly fine. Remember that in rook endgames the rook should be as active as possible.

48...♔g5? 49.♔e2 ♔h4 50.♔d3 ♔g3 51.♞b6 ♔xf3 52.♞xc6 g5 53.♞g6

And Black resigned, as White's connected passed pawns are much faster.

1-0

17

Giri, A. – Aronian, L. FIDE Candidates, 2016

Well calculated by Aronian, even though the engines initially disagree!

52...**♖f4!**

The pawn ending is drawn. Aronian calculated all the details pretty well.

53.**♗xf4**

White could also keep the rooks on the board with 53.**♖b6** but then after 53...**♕d7** Black has at least managed to activate his rook along the 4th rank.

53...**gxf4** 54.**♕d4** **♕d7** 55.**♕e5** **♕c6** 56.**♕xf4** **♕xc5** 57.**g4**

Threatening g5.

57.**♕e5?** **d4** 58.**♕e4** **♕c4+** and Black even wins.

57...**♕d6!**

The king rushes back to take measures against the g5-break. Aronian knows that g6-h5 versus h6 is a theoretical draw. Therefore all he has to do is exchange his e6- and d5-pawns for the pawn on f3.

58.**♕e3**

58.**g5** **hxg5+** 59.**♕xg5** **♕e7** with a draw as the black king reaches the corner.

58...**e5!** 59.**g5** **♕e7!** 60.**g6** **♕f6** 61.**♕d3** **e4+**!

61...**♕g7** also suffices, but with the game continuation Aronian shows what he is doing.

62.**fxe4** **dxe4+** 63.**♕xe4** **♕g7** 64.**♕f5**

It's a theoretical draw!

64...**♕g8**

64...**♕f8** 65.**♕f6** **♕g8** 66.**g7** **♕h7** 67.**♕f7** stalemate!

65.**♕f6** **♕f8**

A superb game with some very nice resources found by both players. An entire chapter on how to keep pressing your opponent and finding small nuances in simplified positions can be written on this very game.

1/2-1/2

18

Nepomniachtchi, I. – Meier, G.
21st European Teams, 2017

Yes! The rook should be activated so that it can give check and protect the pawn on e6. Meier went wrong with

79...♖c4?

Instead, after 79...♖b1! 80.♖a7+ (80.♔g4 ♖g1+ leads nowhere.) 80...♔g6 81.♖e7 ♖e1 Black is in control.

79...♖c4? 80.♖a7+ ♔f8

80...♔g6 81.♖e7 ♖c6 82.♔g4 followed by 83.♖xe6 and 84.f5.

81.g6!

Now the White king is able to join the attack.

81...♖c1

Or 81...♖c5 82.♖f7+ ♔g8 83.♔g4 ♖a5 84.♖e7 ♖a6 85.♔g5 ♔f8 86.♖b7 ♖c6 87.♔h6 and White wins.

82.♔g4 ♖g1+ 83.♔h5 ♔g8 84.♔h6 ♖h1+ 85.♔g5 ♖f1

85...♖g1+ 86.♔f6 the f-pawn stops checks from behind.

86.♖e7

86.♖e7 and Black resigned, in view of 86...♖e1 87.♔f6 ♔f8 88.g7+ ♔g8 89.♖e8+ ♔h7 90.♖h8#

1-0

19

Cohn, E. – Rubinstein, A.
St Petersburg, 1909

24.♖c1?

White should have kept rooks on the board and play 24.f4! preventing the rook from going to h4, attacking the pawn on h2. The rook ending is clearly better for Black, but White retains good drawing chances. After the game move, White is completely lost.

24.♖c1? ♖xc1 25.♙xc1 ♙f6 26.♙d2 ♙g5 27.♙e2 ♙h4 28.♙f1 ♙h3!

White is just in time to protect the pawn on h2. However the black king is too active and the weaknesses on the kingside (doubled pawns) cause White huge problems. Black can easily strengthen his position:

29.♙g1 e5 30.♙h1 b5 31.♙g1 f5 32.♙h1 g5 33.♙g1 h5 34.♙h1 g4 35.e4

Or 35.fxg4 fxg4 36.♙g1 e4 37.♙h1 h4 38.♙g1 g3 and soon the black king will pick up the pawn on e3.

35...fxe4 36.fxe4 h4 37.♙g1 g3 38.hxg3 hxg3

38...hxg3 and White resigned, e.g. 39.f3 g2 40.f4 exf4 41.e5 ♙g3 42.e6 f3 43.e7 f2#

0-1

20

Kazhgaleyev, M. – Ghaem Maghami, E.
17th Asian Cities, 2011

The remaining 3-3 on one wing endgame looks pretty harmless, even though White's king is closer to the battlefield.

37. ♖e4+

Forcing the exchange of all the remaining pieces.

In case of 37. ♖xb6 ♜xb6 38. ♔d4 ♔c7 39. ♕e5 ♔d7 40. ♖f6 ♕e8 Black is able to defend his only weakness on f7. When White's knight jumps to e.g. e5, Black places his bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal, solving all his problems.

37. ♖e4+! ♜xe4 38. ♖xb6 ♜xb6 39. ♔xe4 ♔c6

Covering the important entry square e5 with 39...f6 isn't enough, in view of 40. ♔d5! when the black king is too far away.

40. ♔e5 ♔d7 41. ♖f6 ♕e8

It looks as though Black has succeeded in getting back in time. However, the difference in activity between the kings is enormous.

42. g4!

A different method goes 42. h4 ♔f8 43. f4 ♔g8 44. f5 gxf5 45. ♔xf5 ♔g7 46. ♔g5 ♔h7 47. ♔xh5 f6 48. ♔g4 (48. g4? ♔g7 and White is forced to exchange pawns, leading to a draw.) 48...♔g6 49. ♔f4 ♔h6 50. ♔f5 ♔g7 51. h5 and White wins.

42...hxg4 43. hxg4 ♔f8 44. f4

No good is 44. g5? ♔g8 45. f4 ♔f8 46. f5 gxf5 47. ♔xf5 ♔g7 and Black holds.

44...♔g8

44...♔e8 45. ♔g7 is a mirror-image win.

45. ♔e7! ♔g7

It's important to understand that in case of 45...f5 you need to keep pawns on the board with 46. g5! (But not 46. gxf5? gxf5 47. ♔f6 ♔f8 48. ♔xf5 ♔f7 and Black has the opposition: draw.) 46...♔g7 47. ♔e6 ♔g8 48. ♔f6 ♔h7 49. ♔f7 and Black has to give up both his pawns.

46. f5 gxf5 47. gxf5 f6

47...♔g8 48. f6! doesn't help either.

48. ♔e6 ♔g8 49. ♔xf6

49. ♔xf6 and Black resigned. Even though he can still take the opposition with 49...♔f8 White always wins with a king on the 6th rank (except for situations with an a- or h-pawn). For completeness: 50. ♔e6 ♔e8 51. f6 ♔f8 52. f7 ♔g7 53. ♔e7 and the pawn promotes.

21

Sokolov, I. – Papaioannou, I. 18th European Teams, 2011

For a long time Black clearly had the upper hand in the double rook ending, but gradually his advantage has vanished. That the black player had lost track is confirmed by the following:

48...♞e1+?

It would have been better to activate the king with 48...♔f5! when a draw is still the most logical outcome.

48...♞e1+? 49.♔d4 ♞xe4+?

Another mistake, after which Black is just lost without any chance.

He should have kept rooks on the board, with e.g. 49...♞d1+ although it remains hard for him to save this ending, as his king is cut off the e-file.

50.♔xe4 ♔e6 51.♔d4 f6

After 51...♔d7 52.♔e5 the white king invades.

52.♔e4!

A) Not 52.c6? ♔d6 when the white king can't get to the kingside, while

B) 52.♔c4 can be met by 52...g5! when Black saves a draw.

52...♔d7

A) 52...f5+ loses to 53.♔f4

B) 52...g5 53.hxg5 fxg5 54.c6 and White takes the kingside pawns.

53.♔d5 g5 54.hxg5

And Black resigned, because after 54.hxg5 fxg5 55.♔e5 the king takes the remaining pawns.

1-0

22

Dvirnyy, D. – Mamedov, R.
21st European Teams, 2017

Yes!

64...a2! 65.d5 ♖d7 66.d6 ♖e6 67.♖h2 h3!

Taking away the g2 square from the white king. White is in zugzwang as the rook can't leave the a-file.

68.♞a7

68.♖xh3 ♞h1+-+

68...♖xd6 69.♞a5 ♖c6 70.♞a7 ♖b5 71.♞a8 ♖c4 72.♞a3 ♖b4 73.♞a8 ♖b3 74.♞b8+ ♖c3 75.♞a8 ♖d3 76.♞a3+ ♖d2 77.f3 ♖e2 78.♞a5 ♖xf3 79.♞a4 ♖e3 80.♞a3+ ♖f4 81.♞a4+ ♖f3 0-1

And Black wins the g-pawn. Only one g- or h-pawn isn't sufficient, but having both pawns easily wins, even without the a-pawn.

23

**Nepomniachtchi, I. – Laznicka, V.
21st European Teams, 2017**

20.g4!

A fantastic idea! White aims to get the e4 square for his knight and open the f-file at the same time to let his pieces join the attack.

20...fxg4?!

It probably would have been better ignoring White's intentions and bring the king into safety with 20...0-0 but then after 21.gxf5 White retains the better prospects as well.

21.♖e4 ♗e7 22.♞d1 ♖c8

22...♗e6 runs into 23.♞d6 ♗xd6 24.♗xc6+ ♕f8 25.♖g5! with a massive attack, as too many things are hanging.

23.e6

Even more crushing is 23.♖c5 0-0 24.♖d7 and now Black has to give the exchange, since after 24...♞d8 25.e6! things are starting to look pretty grim for Black.

23...fxe6?

More stubborn would have been 23...♗xe6 and now after 24.♖d6+ ♗xd6 25.♗xc6+ ♕e7 26.♗b7+ ♗c7 27.♗xc7+ ♕f8 28.♞xf7+ ♗xf7 29.♞f1 ♗xf1+ 30.♕xf1 the ensuing ending of queen vs. two rooks clearly favors White and should offer good winning chances too as the rooks aren't working well together.

24.♗c3 ♞f8 25.♞xf8+ ♗xf8 26.♗h8

1-0

24

Svane, R. – Smirin, I.

21st European Teams, 2017

The black bishop on c2 is in trouble but could at any moment return to f5. White can prevent that by playing...

20. ♖c3!

This move was missed by Black. Of course, the immediate 20. ♜xc2?? fails to 20... ♖d1+ 21. ♔f2 ♜xc2-+

20. ♖c3! ♗d1

Desperately trying to save the bishop, in vain. 20... ♗f5 is met by 21.e4!

21. ♔f2 g5 22. ♖d3 ♗d8 23. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 24. ♗d3 f5 25. ♗xd1 e4 26. ♗xg7 1-0

25

Rodshtein, M. – Fedoseev, V.
FIDE World Cup, 2017

35...e3!

A brilliant idea, intending to take the knight on c4 or enter with the queen on f2. Tempting is 35...♙xc4? but after 36.♚xc4 ♗b6+ 37.♖h1 ♜f2? (37...♖h7!? might still be better for Black, as 38.♚xe6? loses to 38...♚c1+) 38.♚xe6+ ♖h7 39.♚d7+! the queen will come back to d1 when all threats have been parried.

35...e3! 36.♙xd5

36.♖xe3 is met by 36...♗b6! 37.♙xd5 ♙xe3+ and White needs to give his queen in order to stop mate.

36...♚f2+ 37.♖h1 ♚f1+ 38.♖h2 ♙g5!

The point of the previous sequence: the black bishop is joining the attack. The good news for Black is that the pawn on e5 is well blockaded so that White is unable to create mating threats on the long diagonal.

39.♙xe6+ ♖g7 40.♚xe3 ♙xe3 41.♖xe3 ♚xa1 0-1

26

Carlsen, M. – Ding, L. Showdown G10, 2017

The black knights look quite vulnerable, lacking the support of a pawn. Carlsen quickly played...

25. ♖c2?

...But missed Black's reply. Instead he should have opted for 25. ♗b1! when the knights are in trouble. Also after 25... ♖xc4 26. ♗d3 Black is losing control over the position.

25. ♖c2? ♗f6!

An excellent move, which enables Black to stay in the game. The point is that White can't take on e4 as the rook on a1 is en prise now, while if you move the rook, the threat is gone as the queen protects the knight on f5.

1-0

27

Caruana, F. – Grischuk, A.
Champions Showdown G30, 2017

26...h5?

A serious mistake as White obtains a firm grip on the light squares. Correct for a Najdorf pawn structure is 26...d5! which typically activates the dark-squared bishop. After e.g. 27.♙xd5 (27.exd5 ♙c5+ 28.♚g2 ♜e8 the position is very unclear and Black has a lot to play for.) 27...♜c5+ 28.♚g2 ♙g4! 29.♜d2 (29.♜xg4 is met by 29...♜xc2+) 29...♞f6 and Black has a lot of play.

26...h5? 27.♞c3 ♜e8 28.♞c7 d5?

Too late...

29.♜e3 ♞f7 30.♙xd5+-

And this time Black is a pawn down without any compensation and in fact it's White who is completely dominating the centre.

1-0

28

Geller, E. – Najdorf, M. Candidates Tournament, 1953

19. ♖xb6!

Eliminating an important defender of the d5-square is much more important than winning a pawn.

Inferior is 19. ♖xa6?! ♜c4 20. ♖c1 ♖b7 and Black obtains excellent compensation for the pawn. After the game move Black's play on the queenside isn't impressive and in fact, it's White who starts playing on this side of the board. The pawn on a6 is a serious weakness.

19. ♖xb6! ♖xb6 20. ♖e2 ♖a8 21. ♜h2 0-0 22. ♖f1 ♖a7 23. ♖fa1 ♖fa8 24. ♖1a2!

Excellent move. White prepares to bring his knight from b3 to d5.

24... ♖d8 25. ♜a5 ♖c8 26. ♜c4 ♖c6 27. ♜e3 a5 28. ♖c4 ♖a6 29. b3 ♖b6 30. ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 31. ♜ed5 ♜xd5 32. ♜xd5 ♖c5 33. ♖a1 ♖f2 34. ♖xf2 ♖xf2

White has gotten exactly what he had been aiming for: good knight on d5 vs. a bad bishop. Geller converts his advantage instructively.

35. ♖f1 ♖d4 36. c3 ♖c5 37. g4 hxg3+ 38. ♜xg3 ♖b7 39. ♖b1 f6 40. ♜f3 ♜f7 41. ♜e2 ♖b8 42. b4 g6 43. ♜d3 gxf5 44. exf5 axb4 45. cxb4 ♖d4 46. ♖c1 ♜g7 47. ♖c7+ ♜h6 48. ♜e4 ♜g5 49. ♖h7 ♖f2 50. ♖g7+ ♜h4 51. ♜f3 ♖e1 52. ♜g2 ♖f8 53. b5 ♖a5 54. b6 ♖xb6 55. ♜xb6 ♖b8 56. ♖g4+ ♜h5 57. ♜d5 1-0

29

Carlsen, M. – Ding Liren Champions Showdown G30, 2017

White seems to have nice control over the d5-square, he has the better bishop and his rooks are exerting pressure on the a-file. However, Black will now generate counterplay on the other wing.

26...g6! 27.g3 f5

is a standard idea for Black in this kind of structure.

28.exf5 gxf5 29.♗d5 ♖b7⇝

Another advantage of the previous moves is that the 7th rank has been cleared enabling Black to go for a rook lift. Black had a very reasonable game.

½-½

30

**Karpov, A. – Quinteros, M.
Luzern ol (Men), 198**

The play has been concentrated around the d5-square. The knight on b3 isn't doing well and therefore needs to be improved.

15.♖c1! ♜c8 16.♘d3 ♙e6

16...d5 is a move you should always look at, but here it's premature: 17.♗xe5 dxe4 18.♘d7!± and White is better, as the pawn on b7 will become a possible target.

17.♙b6 ♖e8 18.f3 ♘d7 19.♙e3 f5 20.exf5 ♜xf5 21.♗b4

It costs White a few moves to improve his knight, but now is going to do very well by heading for d5.

21...♗f6 22.♗bd5 ♗xd5 23.♗xd5

And White has a very pleasant edge which Karpov went on to convert in very nice style:

23...♙f8 24.b3 ♖f7 25.♗b6 ♜c6 26.c4 ♙e7 27.♖e2 ♙d8 28.♗d5 ♙xd5 29.♜xd5 b5 30.axb6 ♙xb6 31.♔h1 ♙xe3 32.♖xe3 ♖c7 33.♞ad1 ♜f6 34.h3 ♖b6 35.♖d3 ♖b4 36.♔h2 ♖b8 37.♞e1 ♜f8 38.♞e4 ♖c7 39.♞g4 ♜f6 40.b4 ♖b6 41.c5 ♖c7 42.♔h1 a5 43.♞c4 ♖b8 44.cxd6 ♜xd6 45.bxa5 ♖d8 46.♞cc5 1-0

31

Galkin, A. – Anisimov, P.
ch-RUS Higher League, 2009

It would be much nicer if the knight would be on d5, rather than the queen. The knight on b3 isn't well placed and therefore it's a kind of standard plan improving it to the d5 square. Therefore,

17. ♖a1!

is a nice idea, intending to play ♖c2-b4/e3.

17... ♜fd8 18. ♖c2 ♙g5 19. ♖b4

at some point the knights were exchanged which led to a fantastic position for White with opposite-coloured bishop. In Chapter 7 we discussed the rest of this game.

1-0

32

Anand, V. – Kasparov, G.
Saint Louis rapid, 2017

If you don't see Black's next move probably the Najdorf is not an opening for you! By now we should be familiar the thematical move which frees Black's position.

19...d5! 20.♖cxd5

Other captures on d5 allow Black to take on b4.

20...♗xd5 21.exd5

21.♗xd5 ♕xd5 22.exd5 ♜xc2 is nice for Black.

21...♕g5 22.d6

22...♞cd7

A very human decision to block the d-pawn, but probably more accurate would have been 22...♞c6!? 23.d7 ♜c7 and the d-pawn isn't dangerous at all.

23.♞c3 ♕xe3

Resulting into a drawish ending with opposite-coloured bishops. Perhaps Black could still have tried 23...♕e2!? ♜

24.♞xe3 ♞xd6 25.♞xd6 ♞xd6 26.♞xe5 ♞c6 27.♞c5 ♞xc5 28.bxc5 ♞e6 29.♕c3 ♕d5 30.♞e1 ♞xe1+ 31.♕xe1 f6 1/2-1/2