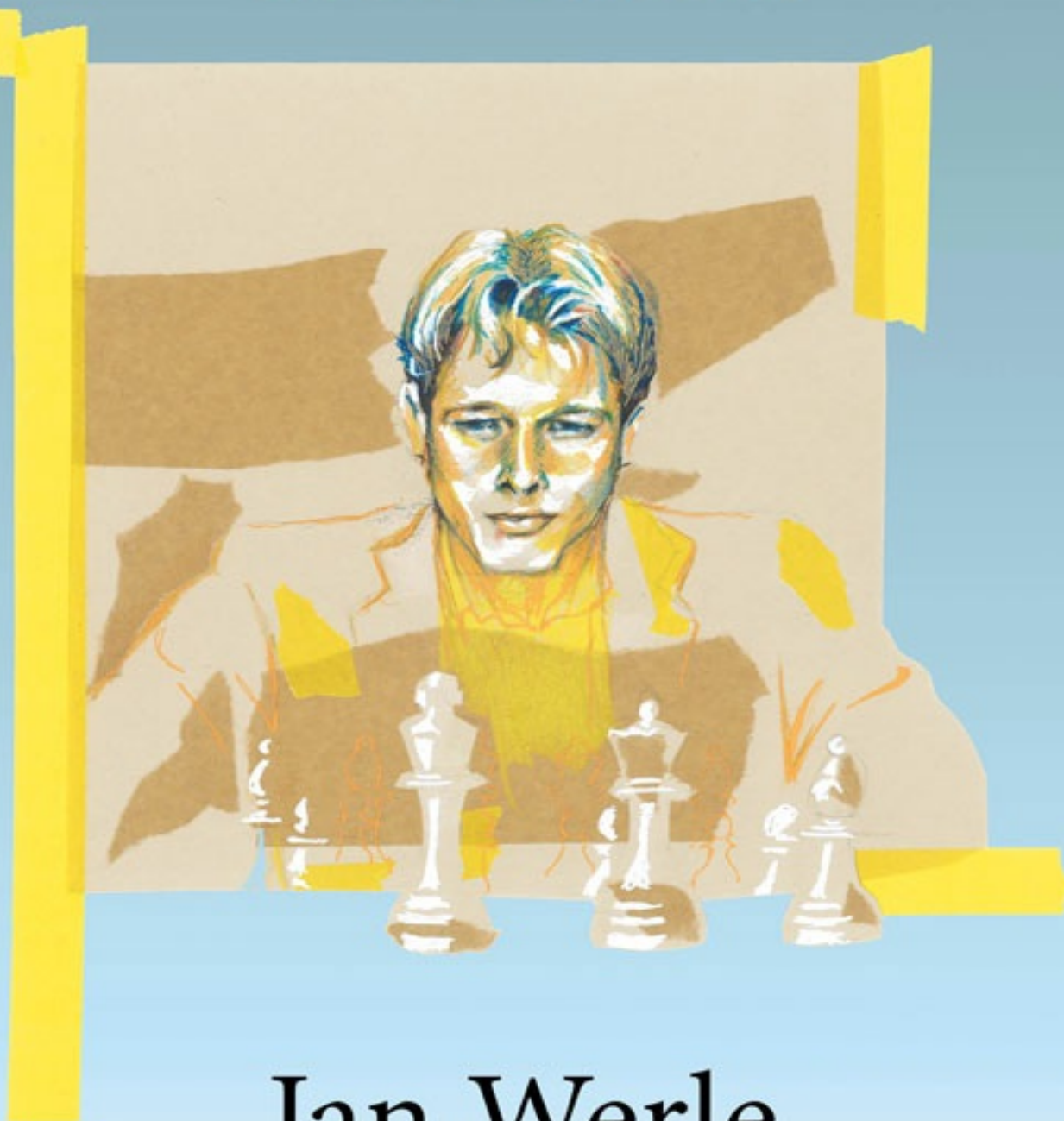


UNBEATABLE!

The Art of Defense



Jan Werle

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Unbeatable!
The Art of Defense

by
Jan Werle

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I dedicate this book to my father Justus,

My most loyal fan,

*Traversing the country together,
from north to south, and from west to east,
alongside high peaks and deep valleys,
the mere experience of walking side by side,
was as challenging as invaluable.*

*Growing older and looking back at the past 30 years,
having become a teacher instead of a world class player,
and concluding that our dreams haven't all come true,
nevertheless shaped an inestimable and even stronger bond.*

Key to Symbols

- ! a good move
- ? a weak move
- !! an excellent move
- ?? a blunder
- ! ? an interesting move
- ? ! a dubious move
- only move
- N novelty
- ⊙ lead in development
- ⊖ zugzwang
- = equality
- ∞ unclear position
- ∞ with compensation for the sacrificed material
- ± White stands slightly better
- ∓ Black stands slightly better
- ± White has a serious advantage
- ∓ Black has a serious advantage
- +− White has a decisive advantage
- −+ Black has a decisive advantage
- with an attack
- ↑ with initiative
- ↔ with counterplay
- Δ with the idea of
- ⊂ better is
- ≤ worse is
- + check
- # mate

Foreword by Loek van Wely

Loek van Wely (photo Frans Peeters)

Groningen 2013, it was a cold and dark winter night. Suddenly Groningen was shaken up by a big bang. Was it an earthquake? No it was Jan (aka 'Japie') who unleashed his novelty in the Grünfeld against me when we were playing in a chesscafe in Groningen at 4 am. Finally he got me. He had desperately been waiting for this moment and ambushed me. I should have known better, but that's Japie, that's my boy. :)

Let me start bluntly, this book is a must read and I don't say this very often (if ever). It also doesn't mean I always agree with the point of views of the writer, in fact it's always good to remain critical but it's very interesting. Chessplayers always think they know better especially when it comes down to psychology, I myself have a reputation to be pretty stubborn, luckily (?) I am now in a phase that I am more objective, more zen and that I don't mind to be found dead with this book in my hands...

This book gives you an insight what your options are how to handle certain situations psychologically, in my opinion much more valuable than to know what your options are in the Poisoned Pawn line of the Najdorf. It will increase your knowledge of the fundamentals of chess (psychology). Just to give you a simple example: *"you can't win a game with 2-0"* (of course you can try to break someone's ego, but that's another thing). How often do I see players, in a winning position, trying to flag their opponent? I hope you are getting my point. That's why I like to go very low on time in a position I am busted anyway (a dead man can eat anything he wants!) and you will be surprised how many will fall for this trick and won't be able to focus anymore on the position on the board...

I have known Japie for quite a long time so I am a bit biased. I always knew him as a quite emotional player, so to read a balanced book from his hands on psychology is quite an eye-opener. Not that I ever will be scared of him, but maybe, maybe in future I show a little bit more of respect to him.

For sure this book will be a very enjoyable read and you will have a few aha-moments. My job is now to get a signed copy, also for me it's never to late to learn...

GM Loek van Wely, eight-time Dutch champion and Japie's favourite nemesis. ;)



Preface

'With blood, sweat and tears', named after the song of a famous Dutch singer, defines the writing process of this book excellently. It seems like I wrote the book in a similar way like playing an erratic, nerve-racking game. Nonetheless, after 3 long years the final result is there, and I feel again like on those enjoyable moments in life graduating, marrying Iozefina or becoming father of my son Max. My wife even proposed to hoist the flag!

Choosing the subject wasn't easy at all, since the topic of defense requires a comprehensive analysis from different angles in order to give the chess player under pressure useful guidelines during a game. Of course, the technical part is a matter of finding challenging, new and interesting positions. I was struggling with describing the emotions that we have during the game, how they influence our decision-making process and what we can do about that. Hence, I tried the best I could to define the issues the defender encounters during a stressful game. Finally I am confidently sharing with you the lessons that I learned from sport psychologists and literature, and my experience as a player over 30 years.

I realize that this book will not cover all open wounds, nevertheless my aim to write a manual about defense which can help us defenders enduring the hardest difficulties in practice, seems to be achieved. Personally speaking this book helped me as a defender to approach a worse position in a much more objective way, optimally use all of my defensive resources available, both psychologically and technically, to set – even under the most dire circumstances – pitfalls, while keeping my nerves under control.

Fortunately I was not alone in the writing process and I am very grateful for all the support I received. In special, I would like to thank Iozefina and my friend Erwin l'Ami, who gave me the essential moral and technical support throughout the writing process. On top of that I would like to thank all of the photographers, and especially Erwin's wife Alina for the beautiful portraits which I could use for my book. Though being one of a kind, I am thankful for my 'nemesis' Loek van Wely for his professional insights in his preface and in chapter 4.

Furthermore I am grateful for all of the proofreaders, and last but not least my publisher and all of the team, amongst others Daniel Fernandez and Mark Haast, who kept faith in me despite the recurrent never-ending writing cycle. Under 'Acknowledgements' I am glad to thank all the other kind people who helped me so much on this burdensome process and challenging subject, and without whom I couldn't finish the book.

Hopefully this first Volume of 'Unbeatable!' will be enjoyable for you dear reader, and simultaneously, serves you well in practice how to stand firm in using your defensive resources as a last resort. But at the same time this is a book with a smile and a tear.

Jan Werle, Woerden – the Netherlands, November 2021

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Passion and the Pain

Under the skin of a chess player

Imagine being an uninitiated spectator at a chess tournament. During any given game, you find it hard to discern what's going on in the mind of either player. Two players sit in deep thought, shuffling their wooden pieces over the 64 squares on the board: calm characters in a pristine white and black landscape. However, you might later find the same two players in the post-mortem room after the game, wildly gesticulating and showing various lines to their opponent to prove their point. A player who lost the game might be wallowing in self-pity or even having an outburst of anger, replete with such self-recriminations as: *"I am so stupid, I could have played (e.g.) my knight to e5 and I wouldn't have been in any trouble."*



The next time you saw a game it would be clear that there is a lot more beneath the surface than mere random shuffling of the pieces. In fact, this unknown world upon which you are intruding is one characterized by mind-numbingly complicated variations, deep strategical thoughts, and of course strongly felt emotions.

Defender under pressure

In this book I try to shed light on how to put up tenacious resistance, as well as why most defenders aren't able to do so. There are so many books written about the attack and the initiative, not to mention opening books. But isn't the hardest discipline in chess the defense of a weak position?

Technically speaking, one of the explanations why defending is such a difficult discipline, is that the attacker has several good moves at his disposal to choose from, whereas the defender is bound to pick one single move which enables him to 'survive'.



World Champion Magnus Carlsen (photo Frans Peeters)

As a result of the technical difficulties, the defender will undoubtedly feel the tension rising in lockstep with the sudden worsening of his position. When one is balancing thus on a tightrope, running the risk of falling, conflicted emotions come naturally to the surface. Underlining the large role of the psychological struggle between two personalities plays in every chess game, the second World Champion (1894-1921) Lasker once said:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“In chess, there are elements of science and art, but both are subordinate to one main thing – the struggle.”

Personality traits and emotions go hand in hand. One player may be more sensitive to a certain

increase in tension (because of his conservative nature) than a different, more adventurous player. My aim in this book is to answer the questions: can rising tension be kept under control by a competitive chessplayer and what relevant techniques and strategies are available to achieve our defensive objectives?

My incentive to write this book

The aspect of psychology in chess has always fascinated me, given my share of failures, disappointments and visits to sport psychologists. There have been many times I've had an opponent in a headlock, only to let him slip away through both psychological and technical mistakes. In wasting these significant advantages and failing to realize the potential in my positions, I've squandered a significant number of half (and full!) points throughout my career.

Of course, the main theme of the book is the art of defense, not how to convert advantages. But the same insights that help a player with an advantage convert it into a tangible, full point can also be applied in reverse to teach us how to stand our ground as defenders.



1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♙d2 a6 8.0-0-0 h6 9.♙f4 ♙d7 10.♘xc6 ♙xc6 11.♙e1 ♙e7 12.h4 ♙a5 13.f3 ♙d8 14.♙c4 b5 15.♙b3 ♙c7 16.g4 a5 17.a3 ♘d7 18.♙e3 ♙b8 19.g5 a4 20.♙a2 b4 21.axb4 ♙xb4 22.g6 ♙b8 23.gxf7+ ♘xf7 24.♙hg1 ♘c5 25.e5 d5 26.♙xd5 ♙xd5 27.♙xd5 a3 28.bxa3 ♙c4 29.♙d2 ♙a8 30.♙d6 ♙xa3+ 31.♙d2 ♙xd6 32.exd6 ♙b2 33.♙e5 ♘b3+ 34.♙d1 ♙a8 35.♙xg7+ ♘f8 36.♙g8+ ♘f7 37.♙xa8 ♙xh4 38.♙a7+ ♙g6 39.♙g7+ 1-0

This is what happened to me during the European Championships Youth in the U16 category in

Lithohoro, Greece. I collapsed during one of my typical moments of weakness. So far my tournament had gone very well and I was playing in round 6 on board 1 against the (current) Polish Grandmaster Jakubowski. Playing in an aggressive style, I obtained a more than promising position in the Richter-Rauzer variation of the Sicilian. My winning attack was about to reach fruition, so my higher-rated opponent felt the urge to make a desperate attempt to muddy the waters with 30.♠d6! In the picture above the engine is showing the superiority of my position; I could have picked any of the ten first suggested lines by the engine and converted my substantial advantage into a win.

A football player missing an open goal.

Incomprehensibly, while under no time pressure at all (but nevertheless in a rising panic), I began seeing ‘ghosts’. As never before, I saw all kinds of non-existent threats crawling up on my king because of what this win would mean to me and my favorable ranking in the standings. In a flash of despair, I took the rook, which eased white’s position considerably after 32.exd6. The square e5 was vacated for the bishop, from where it fulfilled both attacking and defending tasks, gluing his position together,



and helping all his other pieces coordinate. Being fully aware of my big mistake and deteriorating chances, I went into a free fall and made other inconsistent moves, which made my position collapse.

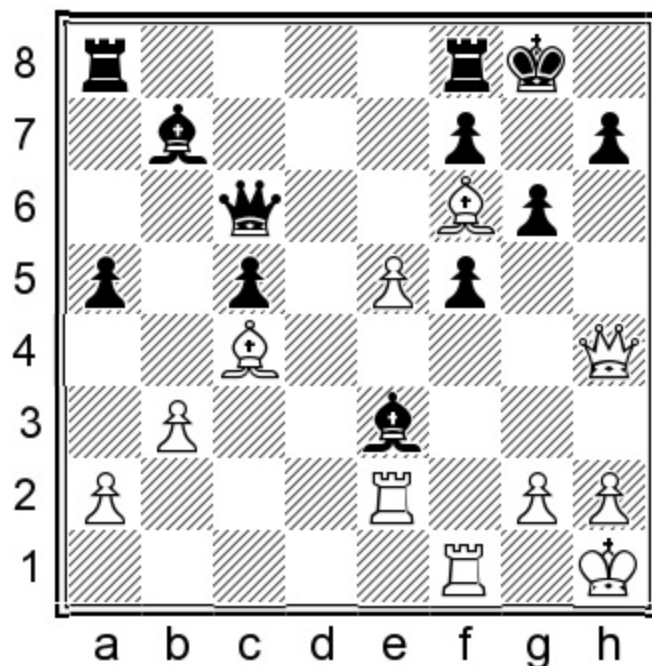
If I had sustained my calmness, I would probably have found the move 32...♞c8 with the threat of ...♞xc3, (♞xc3), ...♘e4+ winning the queen. There was not the urge for any hurry because my opponent didn’t have any threats. Therefore, the idea of bringing the last attacker to the frontlines through the simple and straightforward ♞f8-b8-b2 would have made white’s king’s defenses crumble on the spot.

Due to spoiling promising positions as a result of nerves, my former coach recommended me to visit a sport psychologist. I slowly learned to relax somewhat in the heat of the moment. This helped me a lot, as I managed to keep a cool head in a tense position against Jakovenko during the European Championships U18. It finally resulted in a bronze medal and a breakthrough on the highest scene of international youth chess.

Werle, Jan (2412)

Jakovenko, Dmitrij (2551)

Chalkidiki 2001



Position after: 25...♙e3

Contrary to the previous game against Jakubowski, I knew to stay calm in this situation, and played the quiet move of **26.♖g1!** The game is over now, because **27.♗xe3** is threatened and after **26...♙xg1**, there will follow **27.♕h6** and mate.

1-0

Despite some improvement in my conversion of winning positions, the problem has continued to recur sporadically throughout my career, in tense moments with a lot at stake. Even after consults with the sport psychologist where breathing and relaxation exercises were recommended and practiced, it seemed to me that I would indeed never truly be free of this ‘hamartia’.

One decade later after the onset of psychological problems in my encounters on the international stage, I faced the 2018 World Championship challenger Fabiano Caruana. At the time his rating was ‘only’ 2646, but by finishing outright first in the Wijk aan Zee B-group with a score of 8.5 out of 13 (ahead of strong GM’s such as Motylev, Short, Navara, Vallejo Pons, and Kasimdzhanov) he showed he deserved his a place in the next year’s A-group and was clearly very much in the ascendancy.

For the readers who have never visited Wijk aan Zee, the Challengers play on stage, right next to the elite players of the Masters, and a large audience is attending the games. Performing in front of an audience can have a big influence on cognitive processes and performance⁽¹⁾, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4: Emotions in chess.



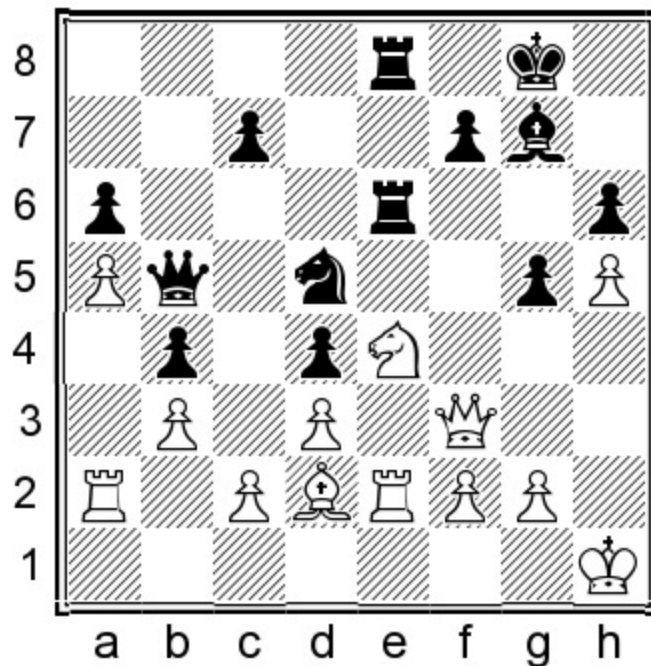
On the right Fabiano Caruana in a game against Magnus Carlsen. (photo Frans Peeters)

Even the collective wisdom and training of the sport psychologists couldn't help me regain a grip on my attention. The large audience and highest stage of the prestigious Wijk aan Zee tournament were not contributing to a calm state of mind. I can recall that my heartbeat increased substantially and I started sweating. Nevertheless, with 36 minutes remaining on the clock for another 8 moves, these factors should have been surmountable, or so one would assume.

Caruana, Fabiano (2646)

Werle, Jan (2607)

Wijk aan Zee 2009



Due to my panic, I switched hastily from line to line in my calculations, not finishing a single line. I couldn't keep the winning line in mind and flitted between lines. Whereas I had discovered the winning line with ...♘c3, ...g4 and ...f5, my mind was derailed and confused. I was trying to look for sidelines instead of trusting 'my' mainline which was winning on the spot. It couldn't be as easy as that, could it? Why would a talented and strong player as Caruana allow such a tactic?

The (seeming) cold-bloodedness of Fabiano Caruana was an ability of which I could merely dream.⁽²⁾

In the post mortem, I told Fabiano that I could have won a piece. I noticed that this came as a surprise to him. When I showed the winning line starting with 32...♘c3, he stayed as cold as ice not moving a furrow. He replied: "So, why didn't you play this?" As I couldn't give a clarifying explanation I left him behind in disbelief; likely he sees me as a madman to this day!

Black-out

It is still questionable how exactly I lost full control and went wrong at this particular moment. As an explanation when asked, I defined it as 'a black-out'. In any case erroneous circumstances suddenly obtained a grasp on me and they didn't let go until the end of the game. In order to comprehend why certain players put up a defense so well, whereas others with the same strength fail miserably, I was highly motivated to investigate this topic comprehensively.



As a result, the idea of writing a book was born. Besides the technical side of defense in chess, I will also be dealing with the psychology behind our game. More specifically, the subjects have been divided into various parts, concerning psychology, strategy and technique.

Chapter Headings

The structure of this book consists of 6 chapters, including this introductory chapter, as will be set

forth below. I tried to cover the defensive approach in chess in all its facets, technically, historically and psychologically.

Chapter 2 (Inaccurate Defense) will provide a brief chronological synopsis, from the middle of the 19th century until the present, of common mistakes in defense – both its passive and active forms. In other words, what are the dangers of a flawed defensive strategy? Back in the old days, the approach and view to chess was more dogmatic than it is today. As we will see, remaining passive in a position which is ‘screaming’ for an aggressive outbreak to liberate the own pieces can lead to a situation in which the defender is being ‘walked over’.

Chapter 3 (The rise of defense in chess history) will illuminate the development of the technique of defense from the romantic era in the early 17th century up to the present day, in which it is defined by the influence of the computer. I’ll cite the views of a lot of leading players of their times (such as Mikhail Botvinnik, Vladimir Kramnik, Garry Kasparov and Viswanathan Anand) concerning their view on this development, and then place them under a modern lens. Likewise with Kotov’s views on chess, based on the precepts of Steinitz and laid out in his influential book ‘Play like a Grandmaster’.

In **Chapter 4 (Emotions in Chess)** I will try to find an answer to what moves chess players during the critical moments of their games. Which factors or stimuli are influencing our emotions? And how are emotions distracting our attention and how can we cope with these problems? Russian Grandmaster and psychologist Nicolai Krogius wrote the influential book *Psychology in Chess* (1976), far ahead of his time, but at present unjustifiably forgotten. According to Krogius, the ones who make the most errors are those who consider chess to be rigid scientific discipline. Concerning the psychological aspect, I have ‘observed’ the world’s best players from different eras and their attitude towards the enormous pressure which they have to cope with. The GM’s Erwin I’Ami and Anish Giri were so kind to share with me their thoughts on this topic.

I also made extensive use of the academic literature on sports psychology, including authors like Lazarus, Parfitt and Jones and psychologist as GM Joris Brenninkmeijer. He shed light on the chapter and provided me with his professional insights and an example from tournament practice.

In **Chapter 5 (Defensive Strategies)** I will give an account of particular defensive strategies which can be applied when one has to defend an inferior position. The opportunity to throw in the towel is for later times. Now, we consider our defensive options: (i) shall we go for drastic measures throwing the cat amongst the pigeons, or (ii) should we sit still and use the waiting strategy, or (iii) ... and (IV) ... well, just read the chapter for all the possible strategies! In the final **Chapter 6 (Barricade your Doors!)** you will find exercises to train your recently acquired defensive decision-making capabilities.

Of course, merely having a solid psychological state of mind during the heat of battle, won’t bring any salvation as long as the chess player is not well equipped in technical domains. Therefore, in **Volume II** we pay attention to all the technical facets of defense, both active and passive. I will present several specific technical disciplines, exemplified with games of (mostly) current elite players, as well as old masters, and introduce you to new defensive concepts.

After reading these books I sincerely hope you will be better equipped for the long and hard journey through the swamps of defense, tackling most of the obstacles on your way. Additionally, I hope you

have enjoyed, as I did, studying the great moves, plans and games of defense and that you came to the same conclusion that I did: apparently ‘passive’ or ‘ugly’ defensive moves can be considered as ‘attractive’. Then, when the chips are down, you will have the ability to keep your head up, even in the most forlorn situations. I wish you an enjoyable read, and clarity of mind during your games as to which of the active or passive strategies are applicable!



(1) Jowett & Lavalley (2007).

(2) At the moment I am writing this book, almost ten years later, Caruana is playing his match against Magnus Carlsen for the World Championships.

Chapter 2

Inaccurate Defense

Section 2.1 – Introduction

Izoria-Werle

Section 2.2 – Too passive!

Steinitz-Anderssen

Lee-Lasker

Averbakh-Smyslov

Botvinnik-Konstantinopolsky

Section 2.3 – Too active!

Polugaevsky-Korchnoi

Rogozenco-Morozevich

Bok-Van Foreest

Section 2.4 – Conclusion

Section 2.1 – Introduction

In this chapter I want to give you an insight into the technical difficulty of maybe the most challenging disciplines in chess: defense. Should you stay low or break free? In chess tournaments it often happens that you need a draw to secure a prize or maybe you might be content with a draw simply because your opponent is higher rated.



The desire to play ‘for’ the draw (because a draw would be practically or competitively useful) often leads to a passive mindset towards the game, which brings with it lowered vigilance and reduced flexibility of thought processes.

When the opponent fails to fall in line with our peaceful intentions, some of you might react by simply digging in further and playing yet more solidly. However, there is some danger in this reactive approach, in which you only try to stop the opponent’s attack (at the cost of your own active ideas.)

Relying on the ability to impale the opponent, should he come too close, on the ramparts of your fortress can turn against you. The opponent will simply continue attacking, the roles of offense and defense becoming entrenched and your counterblows becoming successively less effectual. Your position will become more and more cramped, and what started as a conscious choice of trench warfare will soon become enforced confinement in a dark and increasingly unpleasant prison, with no certainty of ever being able to climb out again.

As Paul Keres asserted in his progressive article ‘The art of the middle game’:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“A cramped position is not in itself a disaster, but if, in addition, one has no prospects of counterplay, then the situation becomes quickly hopeless.”

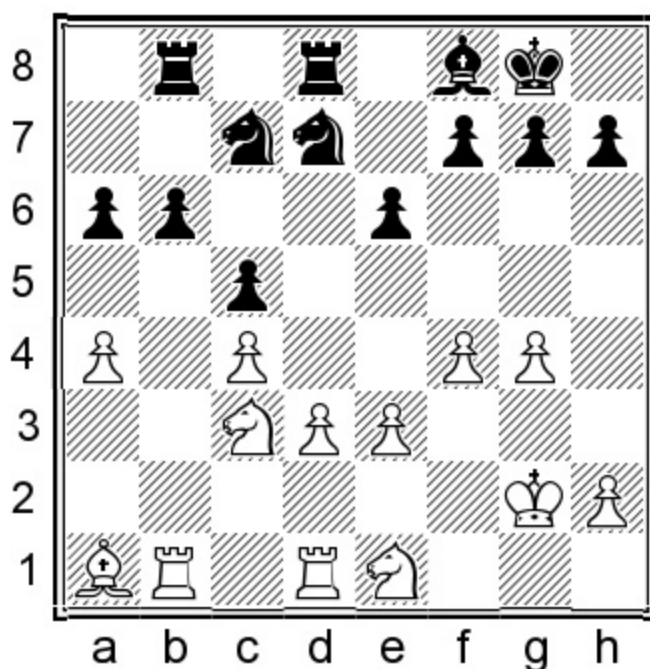
Nobody is keen to recount such experiences from their own career, which is why the following game is still a raw nerve for me and the memory has the ability to wake me up in a cold sweat even years later.⁽¹⁾ It was my loss against Georgian GM Izoria in the U20 World Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2002.

I can still recall the stern reaction of my coach GM Sosonko when we analysed the flawed defensive idea I played there. But it is clear that I made mistakes of a non-technical nature as well: respecting my opponent too much, to the extent that his strong positional style seemed divine and infallible to me.

Izoria, Zviad (2565)

Werle, Jan (2443)

Baku 2002



In this fragment of the game I played the passive move **24...a5** securing the b4-square in perpetuity for the use of my knight (it can attack the d3-pawn from there) and preventing White from playing a5.



Genna Sosonko (left) and Viktor Korchnoi (photo Fred Lucas)

However, Sosonko was not at all impressed by the idea. Raised within the strictures of the Soviet chess school and an advocate of its principles, he agitatedly explained during the post mortem that this move was depriving me of all possible counterplay on the queenside (associated with the pawn thrust ...b6–b5) while White has the initiative on the kingside. Indeed, my position was overrun and I lost in a dishonorable way.

To make it clear how unimpressed he was, we simply didn't analyze the rest of the game. He turned and left the room, even as I tried to object that the remaining part of the game was still worth looking at. But Genna had made up his mind: such a bad move doesn't deserve any further attention, so he wouldn't give it any!

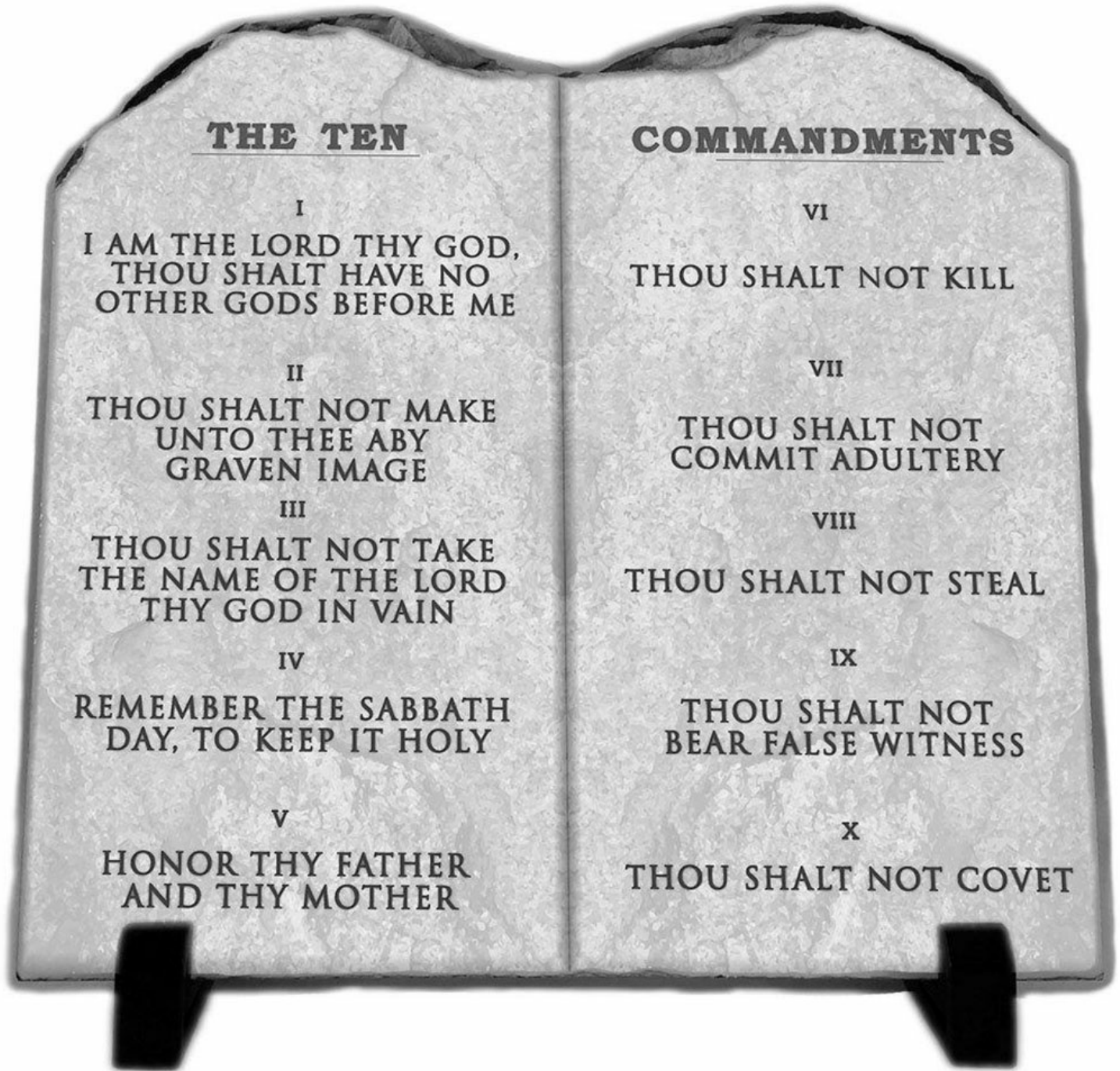
The stern reaction from Sosonko, allegedly inspired by the classic Soviet school approach, worked on me as in each subsequent passive game (yes, even now) this game fragment against Izoria comes vividly to the forefront of my mind. Sosonko's lesson never faded and his firmness etched the following commandment on my mind, which has helped me in many games since:

WARNING

“Thou shalt not make passive moves that result in a position in which all hope is gone.”

Sometimes your opponent has threats that do need meeting. So any kind of coherent defensive technique may well involve blending of active and passive methods.

As these are different extremes, an unskillful mixture of the two will just look haphazard. In such cases it's rarely clear which approach is better: break out by any means necessary, or hold the fort? Every chess player has dealt with this problem, and has in some cases made the wrong decision: either premature desperation or protracted, cheerless defense that could have been avoided.



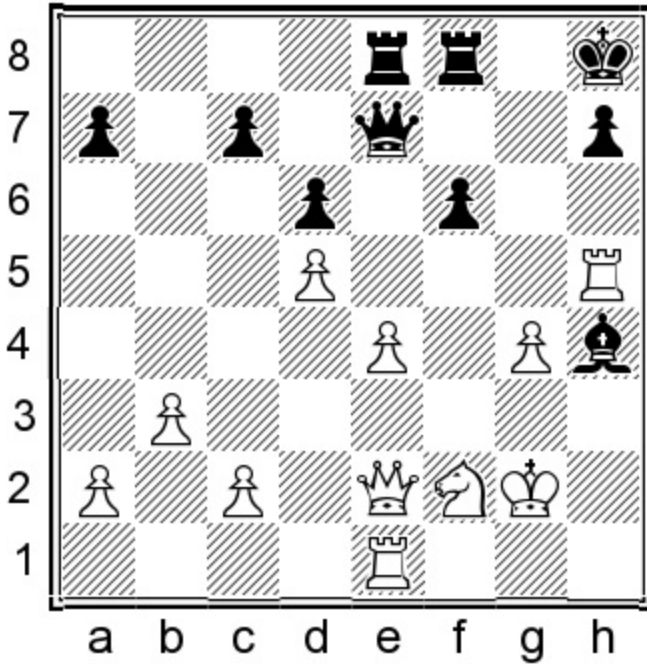
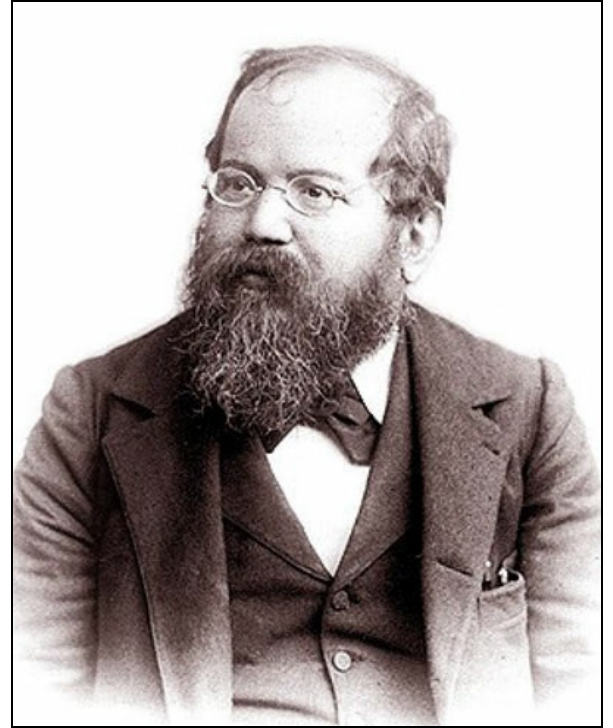
Section 2.2 – Too passive!

Studying the games of the old masters with the computer, I was thrilled by how often a way out for the defender presented itself. Most often, though, it isn't obvious, and in times when players were

unused to ‘computerish’ resources, these last hopes of salvation frequently went unnoticed, even to the best players of the era.⁽²⁾

Steinitz, Wilhelm
Anderssen, Adolf
 London 1866

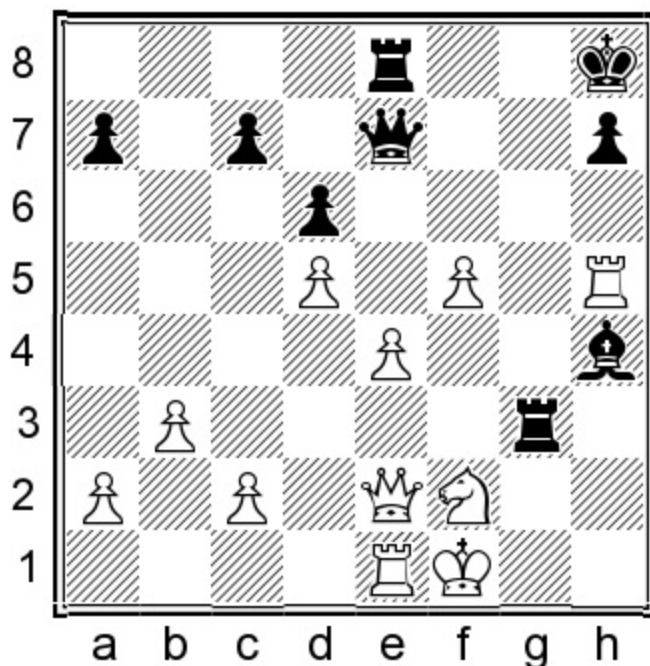
In the present game, Steinitz has a comfortable advantage; but his last move 31.♖h5 permitted Black a sensational save, had he only been alert to the possibility.



31...♗xf2?

Black returns the favour. Despite the fact that Black is two pawns down, by opening up the g-file with 31...f5! he gets sufficient counterplay against White’s King.

After both 32.♖xf5 ♖xf5 33.gxf5 ♖g8+ 34.♔f1 ♖e5! [But not 34...♖g5? when White defends with 35.♖f3.] 35.♖f3 ♖g3 36.♖h5 ♖f4 Black is winning and 32.gxf5 ♖g8+ 33.♔f1 ♖g3 with a dangerous attack.



Analysis after: 33... ♖g3→

Black has very promising play and his attack on the g-file will only get stronger.

31... ♙xf2? 32. ♖xf2 ♖g8 33. ♗f5 ♖g7 34. ♖h6

34. ♔f3! was probably even stronger, for instance 34... ♖eg8 35. ♖eh1 ♖f7 36. ♖h6 ♖gg7 37. ♗e6+—

34... ♖eg8 35. ♖eh1 ♖xg4+ 36. ♔f3 ♖g3+ 37. ♔e2 ♖3g7 38. ♖xf6!

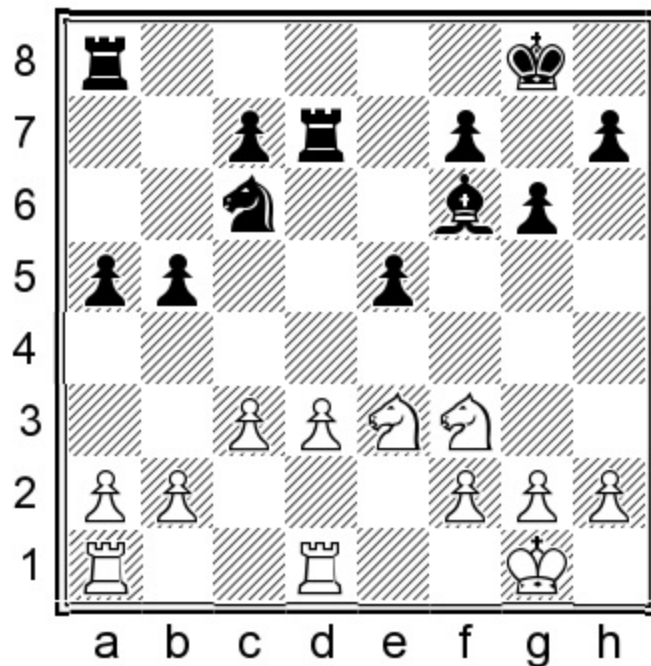
The King can escape to c4 after the upcoming hostile rook checks.

38... ♖g2+ 39. ♔d3 ♖8g3+ 40. ♔c4 ♖e3 41. ♖f8+ ♖g8 42. ♖xg8+ ♔xg8 43. ♖g1+

1-0

It goes without saying that the spectacular pawn sacrifice 31...f5 is not a move which automatically occurs to humans, even modern tournament players. Now we see another example of a latent resource being missed, and in fairness it's not a trivial one either.

Lee, Francis Joseph
Lasker, Emanuel
 New York 1893



Position after: 20. ♖fd1?

20...♜ad8?!

Allowing the liberating move 21.a2-a4! (21.a4!) Instead Black should have tightened the screws by playing himself ...a4 as mentioned above.

21.♘e1? ♙g5?

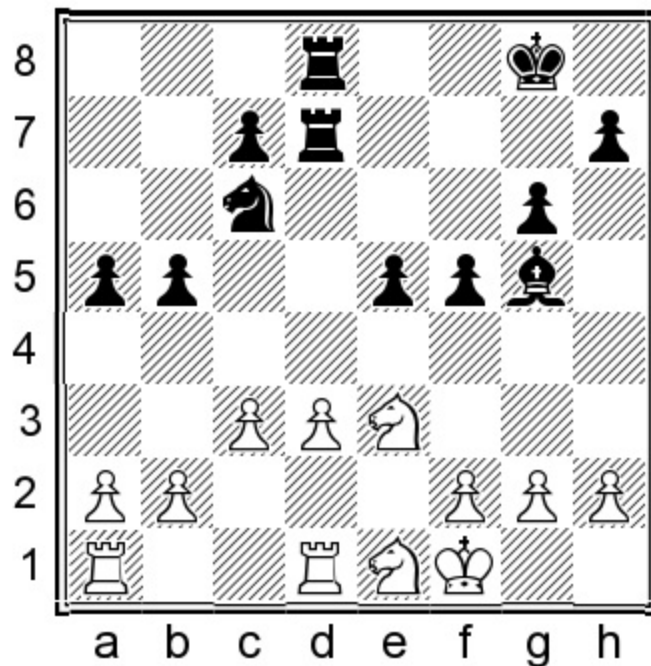
Also in this position, was a5-a4 the right move when Black is much better.

22.♚f1?

22.a4!/? Yet again. 22...b4 23.♚f1 f5 24.♚e2 and White is out of trouble.

22...f5

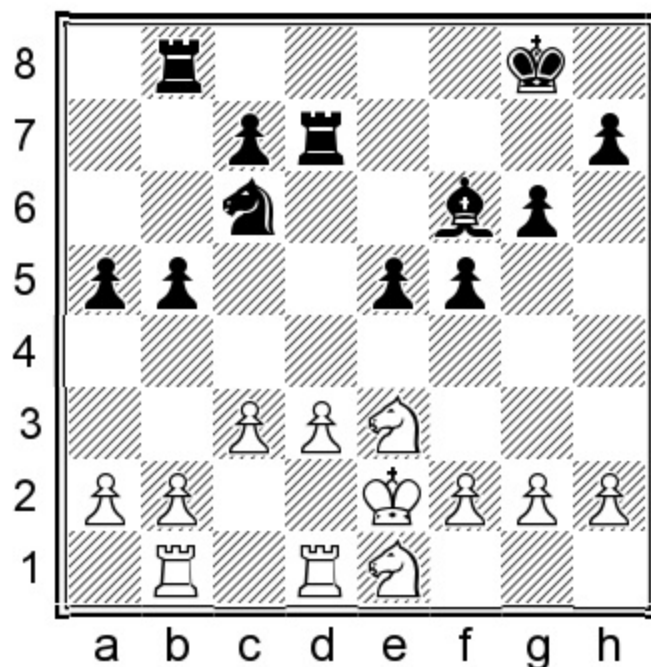
22...a4 History repeats itself: a5-a4 is again the best move.



Position after: 22...f5

White's position has deteriorated at a fast pace. The passive strategy of holding on to the d3-pawn has turned out badly for White. Nevertheless, due to the fact that Lasker never removed the possibility of a2-a4, White is still in the game.

23.♔e2? ♚b8 (Again 23...a4!, with a large advantage.) 24.♞ab1? (24.a4! =) 24...♞f6

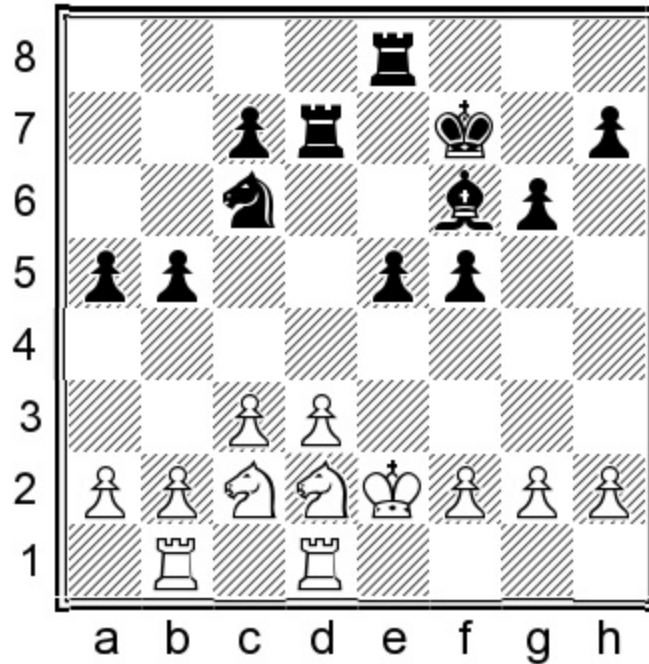


Position after: 24...♞f6

25. ♖3c2?

Such a passive move is predestined to lose the game. Knights need strongholds on the middle of the board. Even with the Rook on b1, engines still want to play a4 for White.

25... ♗f7 26. ♘f3 ♜e8 27. ♘d2

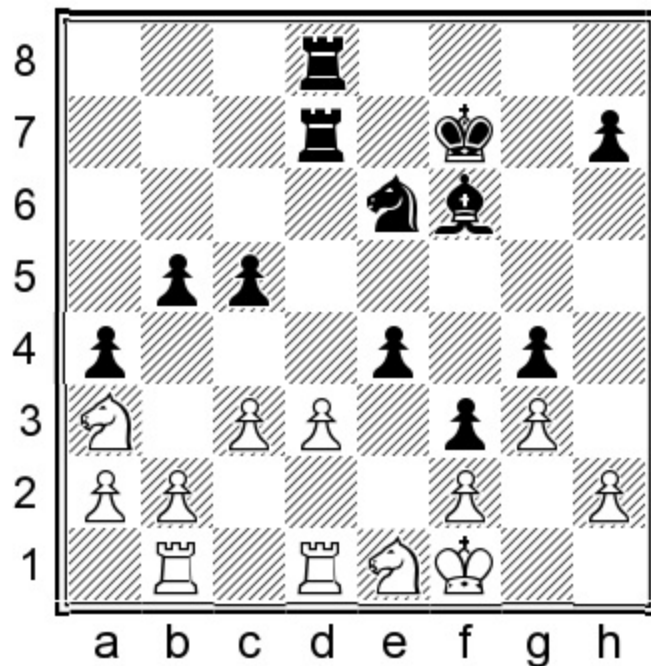


Analysis after: 27. ♘d2

27... ♘d8?!

This small inaccuracy made by Lasker allows one last chance for White to fight back. The best move is absolutely not surprising at all: 27...a4!.

28. ♘b3? (28.a4! bxa4 29. ♘c4 ♘e6 30.g3) 28...a4! (Eureka!) 29. ♘d2 ♘e6 30.g3 ♜ed8 31. ♘f3 g5 32. ♘b4 g4 33. ♘e1 c5 34. ♘bc2 f4 35. ♘a3 f3+ 36. ♗f1 e4



Position after: 36...e4

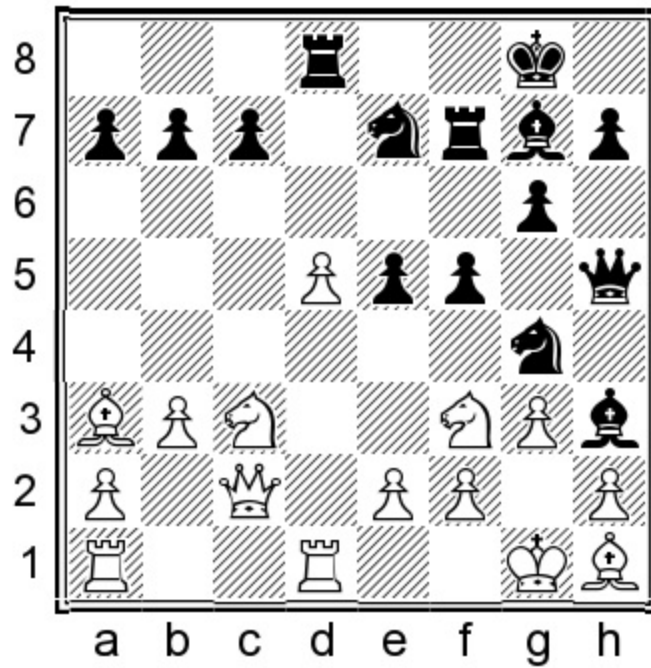
37.♖xb5 exd3 38.♗a3 ♜g5 39.♗c4 ♜e4 40.h4 h5 41.♗b6 ♝b7 42.♗c4 d2 43.♗c2 ♜xc3 44.♞a1 ♜xd1 45.♞xd1 ♞xb2 46.♗2e3 ♞c3 0-1

The renowned endgame expert Averbakh got into the diagram position below and it's clear that his position is a critical one.

His opponent, World Champion Smyslov, has many attacking pieces pointed at the White king, in addition to pawn thrusts like ...e5-e4 to win the h2-pawn, or ...f5-f4 to open the f-file and exchange White's defenders.

But notwithstanding the self-evident nature of these threats and Averbakh's undisputed chess strength, he underestimates the danger and plays a passive reply.

Averbakh, Yuri
Smyslov, Vassily
 Moscow 1939

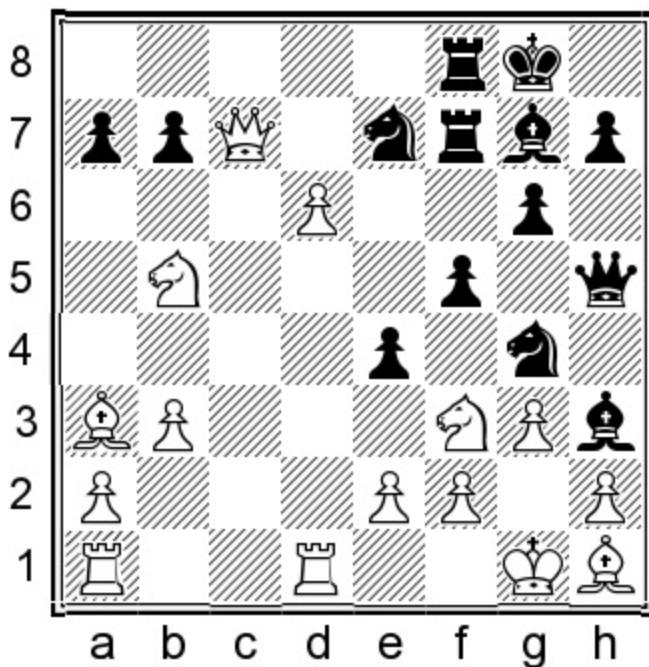
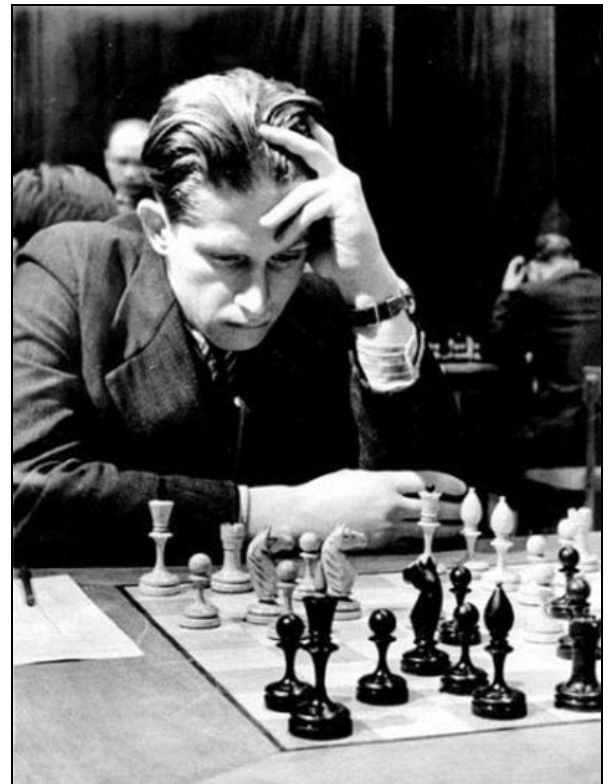


16. ♖ab1?

Yuri Averbakh

Eh?! Does White really have time for such profound prophylaxis? The simple answer is, he doesn't.

Instead, White has to take concrete action: 16. ♘b5! e4 17. ♙xc7 ♜df8 [17... ♘c6!? winning the white queen, but after 18. dxc6 ♜xd1+ 19. ♜xd1 ♜xc7 20. ♘xc7 the position remains unclear.] 18. d6!



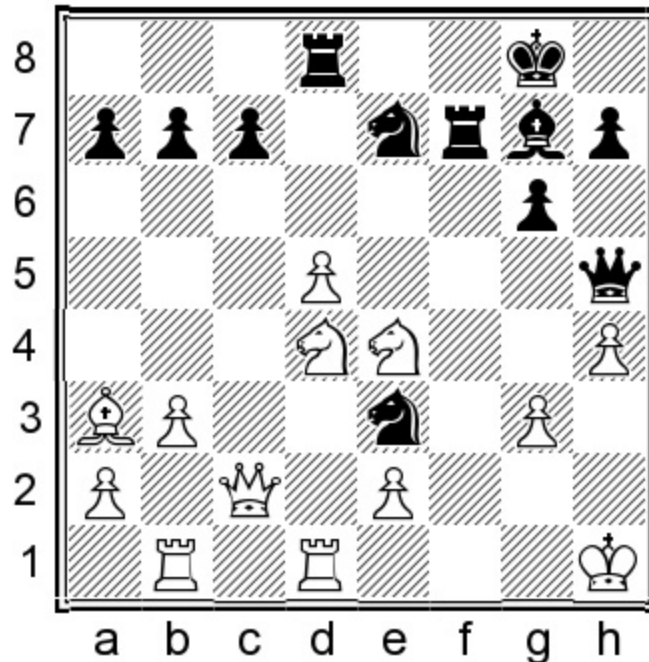
Position after: 17...f4!

Practically speaking, because after the opening of the f-file while White is without any counterplay, Black is winning here.

18. ♖xe4 ♕g2!

The ninth World Champion wipes the floor with his opponent now. White can no longer fill the existing the gaps around his King.

19. h4 ♕xh1 20. ♖xh1 fxg3 21. fxg3 ♘e3



Position after: 21... ♘e3

Black is totally winning.

22. ♖xc7 ♖xd5 23. ♘f3 ♘xd1 24. ♕xe7 ♖e8 0-1

The passive move 16. ♖ab1 indicates a misguided feeling about the direction the game is taking. After it, White almost loses without further resistance. Smyslov, in his notes to the game, comments: “*This move cannot be approved. Now Black’s attack develops swiftly.*” And indeed, this remark is an understatement!

There is an urgency in the position which demands a powerful response from the white player. One wonders what Averbakh missed in the 16. ♘b5 line, was it perhaps the strong defensive 20. h4? Even so, it was possible (even necessary) to seek out the more active continuation in spite of how difficult it is to calculate, as a matter of pure principle.

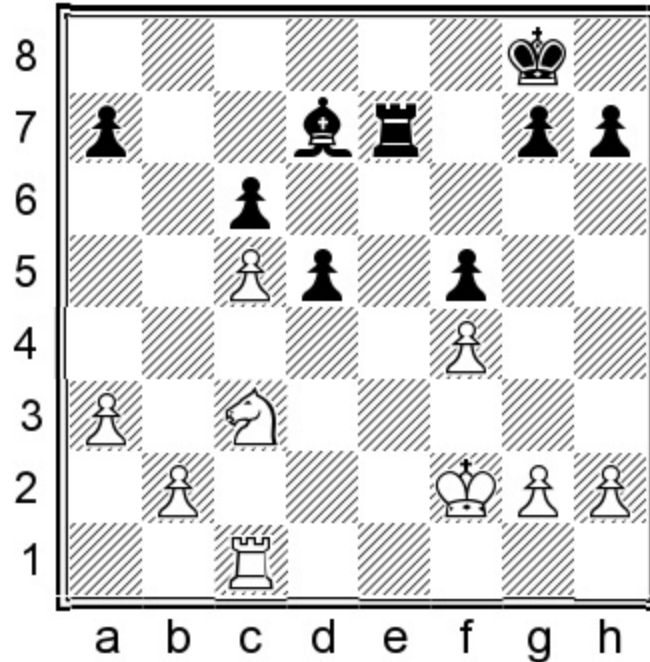
Here is another case where a docile ‘lamb’ is led to the slaughter. Botvinnik intends to acquire full

control over the dark squares d4 and e5. Should he manage to swap rooks and get his knight to the blockading square d4, he will be positionally winning. Black should press the panic button and start immediate action, or else it will be too late.

Botvinnik, Mikhail

Konstantinopolsky, Alexander

Sverdlovsk 1943

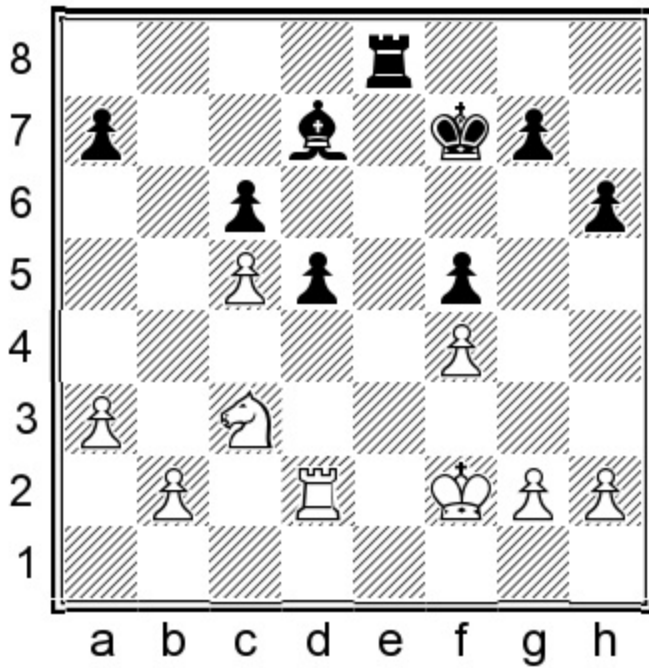


23...d4!

Mikhail Botvinnik

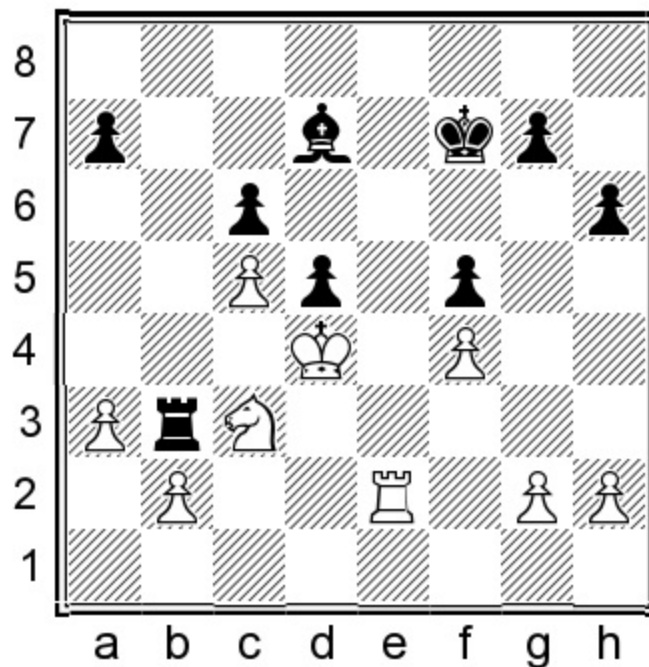
Hopefully the observant reader would join me in shouting ‘*Of course it should be d4!*’, reaching out across time and space to exhort the Black player to avoid compliant moves that will result in his certain death. We are familiar by now with the idea of creating counterplay.

Instead, the submissive course followed in the game gave White the d4-square and soon also the full point: 23...♔f7? 24.♖d1! Stopping d5-d4 for once and for all. 24...♜e8 25.♜d2 h6



Analysis after: 25...h6

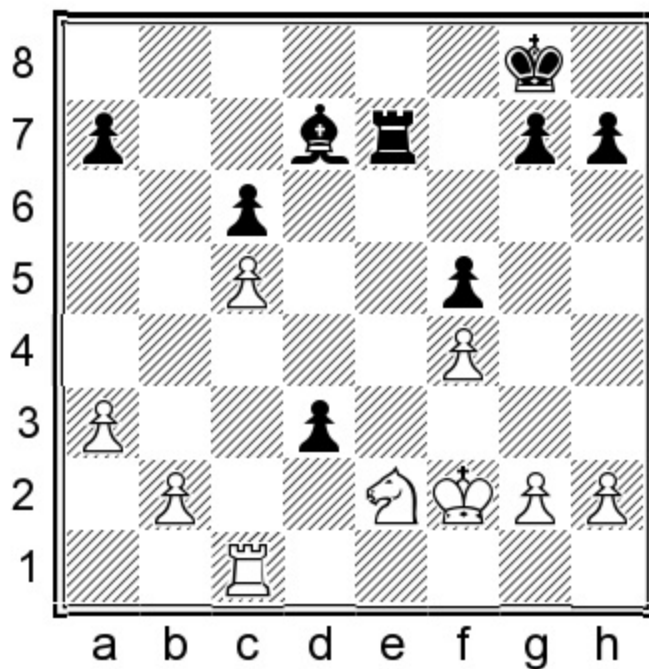
26.♖e2 After the exchange of Rooks, Black is saddled up with chronically weak central squares. 26...♝b8 [26...d4? is no longer leading to the desired counterplay as shown in the analysis after 23...d4. 27.♞xe8 ♜xe8 28.♘e2! d3 29.♘d4 is winning the d3-pawn after ♜f2-e3.] 27.♚e3! White takes full control of the Black central squares. 27...♝b3 28.♚d4!



Analysis after: 28.♚d4!

Botvinnik had no problems converting his big advantage into victory. Botvinnik: *Thus, the central d4 square has been occupied, and Black is obliged merely to observe the development of events - such is the fate of the side with a bad bishop.* (Botvinnik, M. – Konstantinopolsky, A. Sverdlovsk 1943 1-0 (52)).

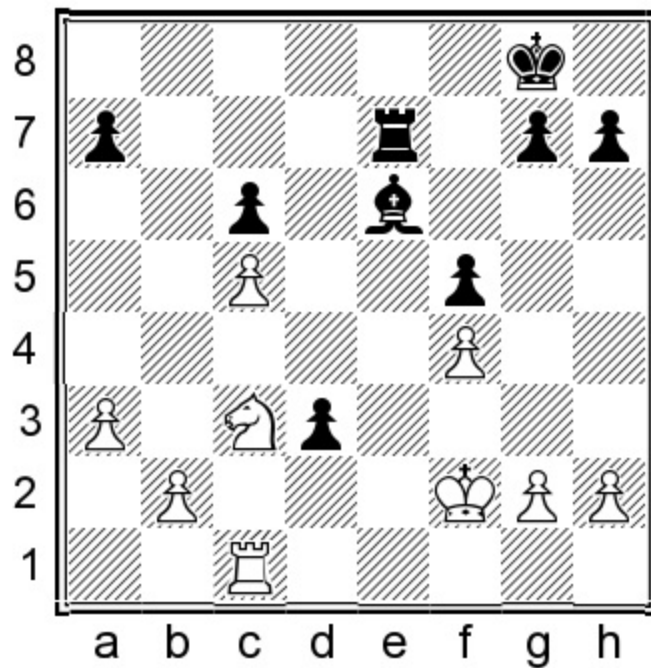
23...d4! 24.♖e2 d3!



Position after: 24...d3!

The d-pawn is an issue of major concern for White.

25.♘c3 ♔e6!



Position after: 25...♙e6

Because of the strong push of the d-pawn, the Black Bishop can be activated via e6 to b3, c4 or d5.

26.♖e1

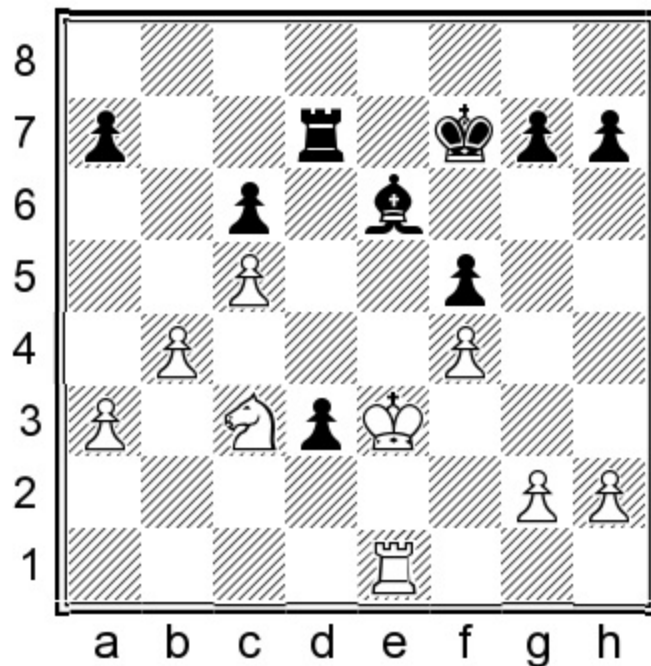
Or 26.♔e3 ♕d5+! 27.♔xd3 ♕xg2 when Black can try to create a passed pawn himself.

Also similar is 26.♖d1 ♕c4!? when White can't surround the d-pawn any longer.

26...♔f7 27.b4 ♖d7

Of course not allowing the exchange of the Rooks.

28.♔e3



Position after: 28. ♔e3

28...g5!!

As White is surrounding the passed pawn on d3, it is essential to maintain counterplay keeping the White pieces busy.

29.g3

29.fxg5? is even (close to) losing, after 29...d2 30.♖d1 f4+!, deflecting the White King from its main task: halting the d-pawn. After 31.♔e2 ♕c4+ and ♕b3. 31.♔xf4 ♕b3 winning the exchange.

29...gxf4+ 30.gxf4 ♕c4!

Black would have defended successfully, as he can generate counterplay along the g-file and after 31.♔d2 there follows ♖d4 (31...♖d4). The critical moment for Black was on the 23rd move, when it was crucial that he sensed the need to become active with d5-d4.

So, in all of the 4 previous mentioned games, the defender didn't act when he should. Just as in my case presumably happened also to the opponents of Lasker, Smyslov and Botvinnik. They didn't sense the urgency to play actively. This led to an easy walkover from the former World Champions.

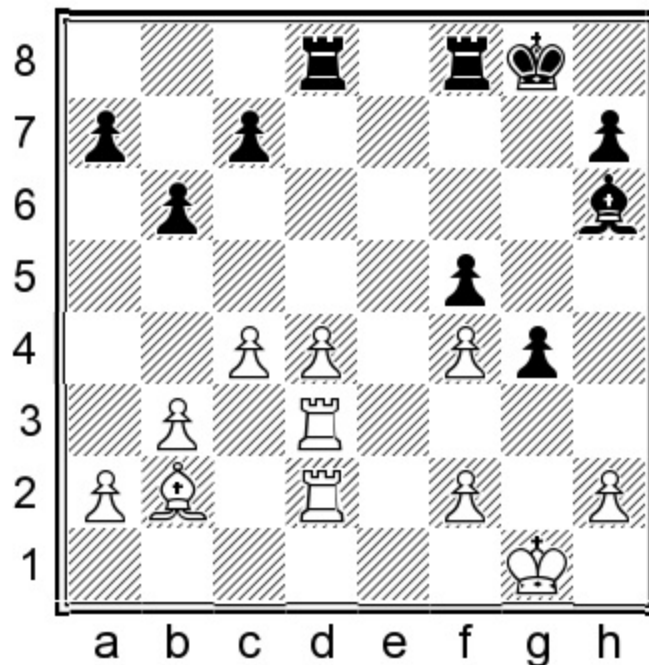
Section 2.3 – Too active!

As can be concluded from the foregoing, overly passive moves can reduce the defender's chances of a good result. On the other hand, neither does reckless activity add value to the defender's position. Trying to lash out with pieces that are still poorly coordinated, as Polugaevsky does below with ♖d2-e2-e6, goes against positional sense and is bound to fail.

Polugaevsky, Lev (2620)

Korchnoi, Viktor (2645)

Evian 1977



29. ♖e2?

Lev Polugaevsky (photo Jos Suttmuller)

The question mark is rather for the wrong plan than move. The Rook goes on a walk to nowhere in particular, whereas defensive measures were being called for.

29. ♕c1! with the idea of trading the black squared Bishops, would immediately equalize, for instance:
29... ♕xf4 30. ♖d1 ♕xc1 31. ♖xc1 with equal chances for both sides.

29. ♖e2? ♕xf4 30. ♖e6?!

Again, White should simplify the position by exchanging the Bishops with 30. ♕b2-c3-d2 (30. ♕c3).

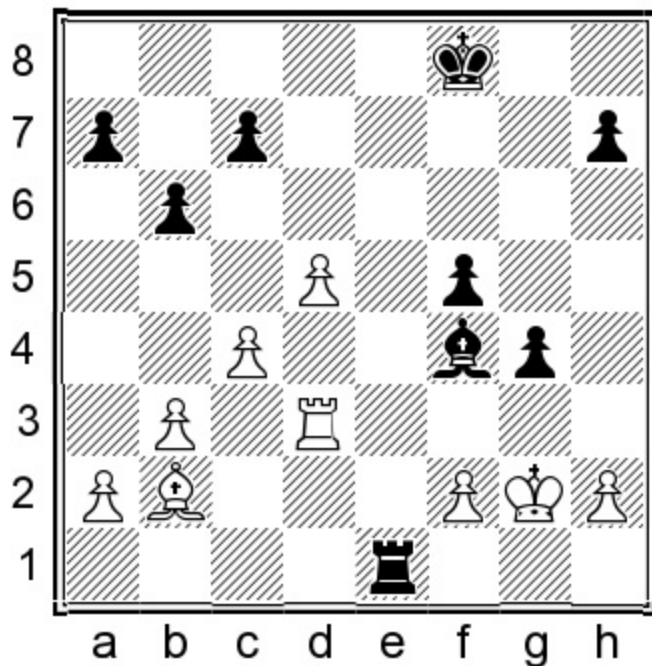
30... ♖fe8

Taking control of the e-file.

31. ♖f6 ♖e1+! 32. ♔g2 ♖f8!

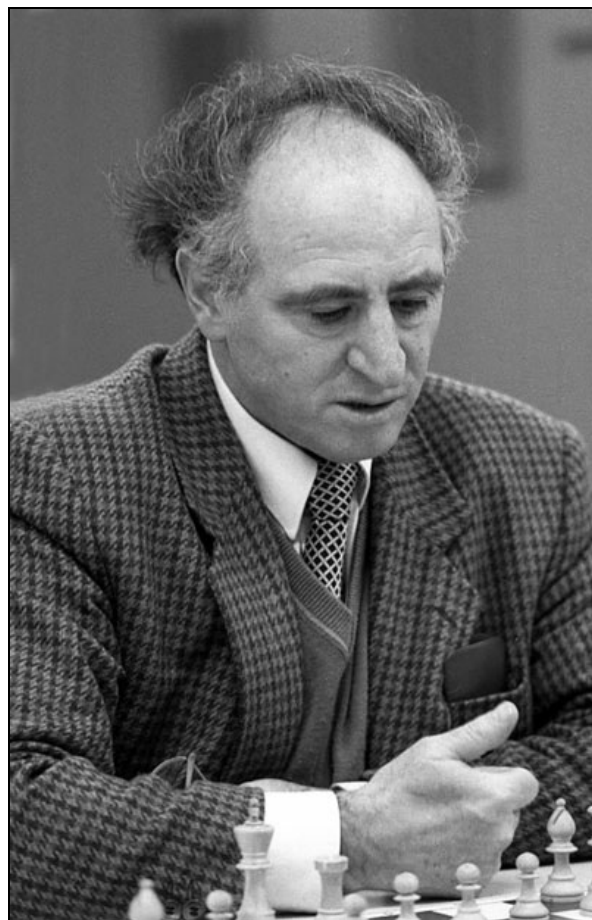
One Rook invaded, the other one is used for defensive purposes.

33. ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 34. d5



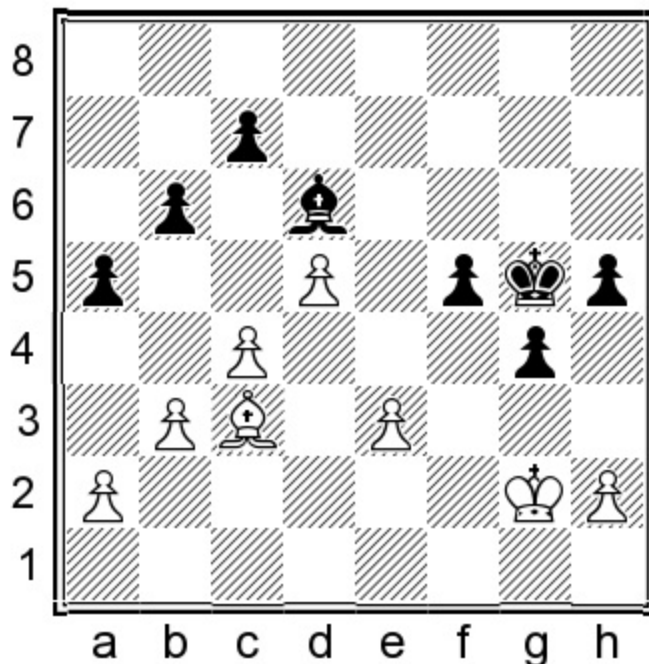
Position after: 34.d5

White can barely move and his queenside pawns are weak, while Black's Rook and Bishop outclass their colleagues.



34...♙d6 35.♙c3

After 35.♞e3 ♞xe3 it is not clear that White has real chances of salvation in the bishop ending either. Black is planning to run his h-pawn and then subsequently create a way for the King toward White's weak queenside pawns. 36.fxe3 ♔f7 37.♙c3 a5 38.♙b2 h5 39.♙c3 ♔g6 40.♙d4 ♔g5 41.♙c3

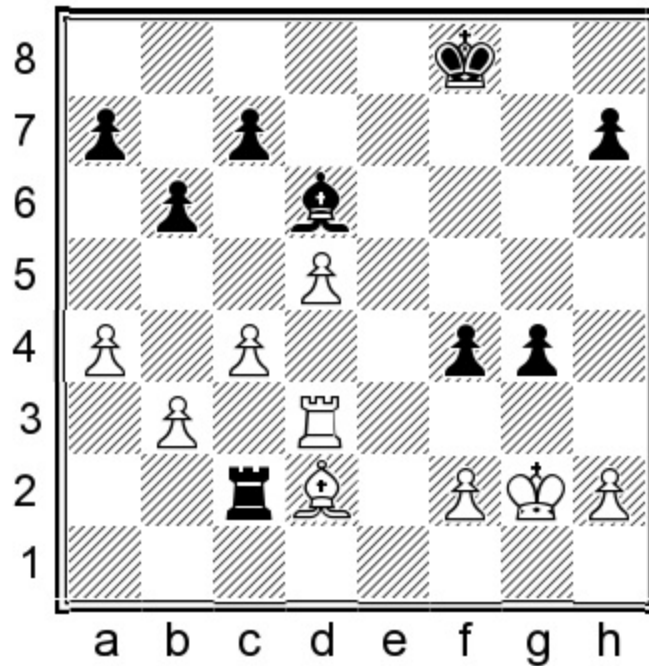


Analysis after: 41. ♖c3

41...f4! 42.exf4+ [42.e4 f3+ 43.♔g1 ♔f4+] 42...♔xf4, when Black is winning as his King reaches out for the queenside pawns.

35...♞c1 36.♙d2 ♞c2 37.a4 f4

One step in the wrong direction will cause you a thousand years of regret. White's queenside pawns are blocked, the difference in activity of the pieces is gigantic, while Black's majority of pawns looks life-threatening. Would Polugaevsky have vainly regretted his passive misstep on the 29th move?

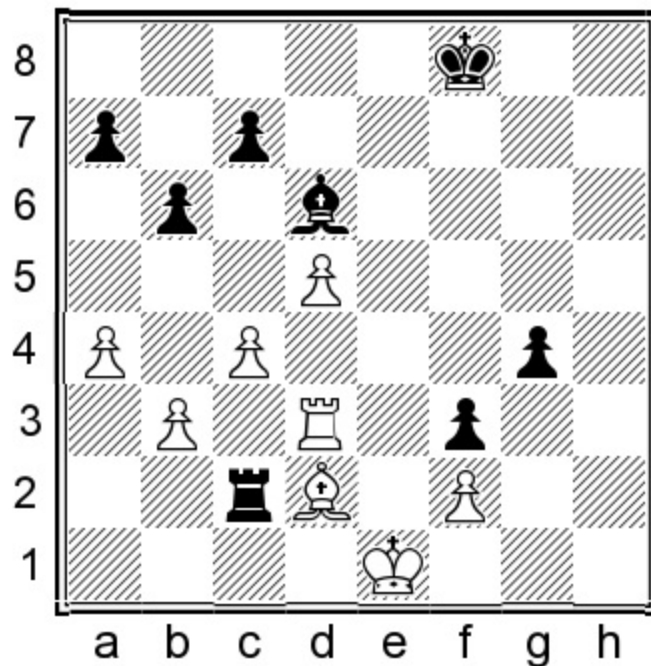


Position after: 37...f4

38.h3

38.f3?? can't be recommended, as after 38...♙b4! White's Bishop is pinned.

38...f3+ 39.♔f1 h5 40.hxg4 hxg4 41.♔e1



Position after: 41. ♔e1

Polugaevsky throws in the towel as he is completely defenseless against the slow King's march ♔g8-f7-g6-f5-e4: a situation which couldn't be more painful to a chess player.

0-1

In the following masterpiece Morozevich shows an immaculate endgame technique by exchanging the queens (allowing a doubled pawn) trying to capitalize on his pawn majority. When the net was closing in for the Romanian grandmaster, he chose an aggressive approach whereas he could have saved the day by the exchange of Bishops.

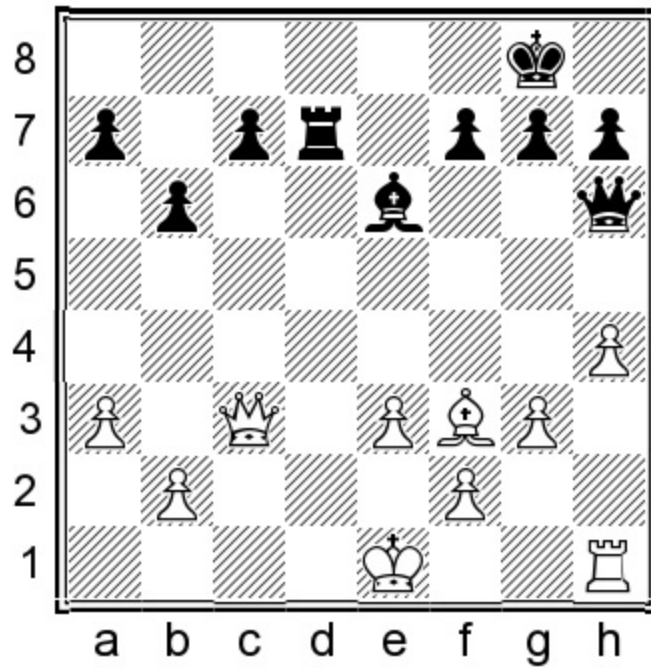


Alexander Morozevich (photo Jos Sutmuller)

Rogozenco, Dorian (2531)

Morozevich, Alexander (2756)

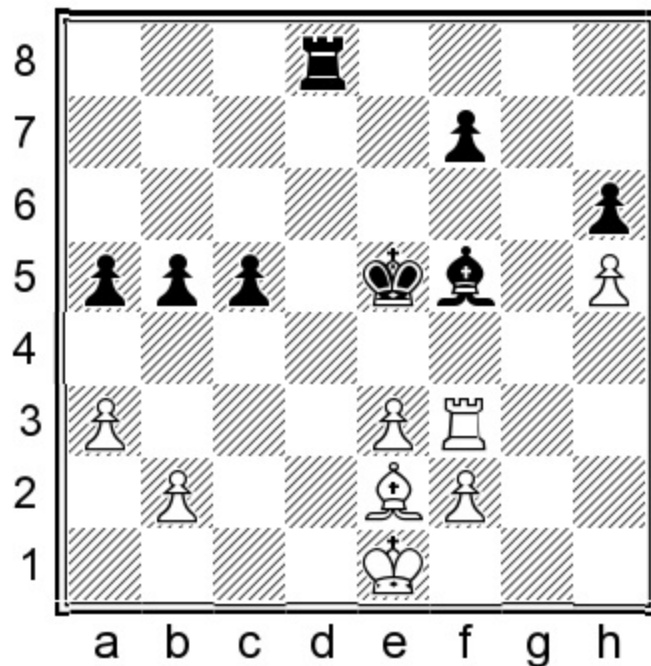
Istanbul 2000



21...♙f6!!

A magnificent move: exchanging Queens being able to push the queenside pawns without hindrance, outweighs the structural issue.

22.♙xf6 gxf6 23.h5 h6 24.♖h4 c5 25.♗e2 ♗b3 26.♖f4 ♔g7 27.g4 ♞d6 28.♞e4 ♕f8 29.♞f4 a5 30.♞e4 ♞d8 31.♞f4 ♕e7 32.♞e4+ ♕d6 33.♗d1 ♗e6 34.♗e2 f5 35.gxf5 ♗xf5 36.♞f4 ♕e5 37.♞f3 b5

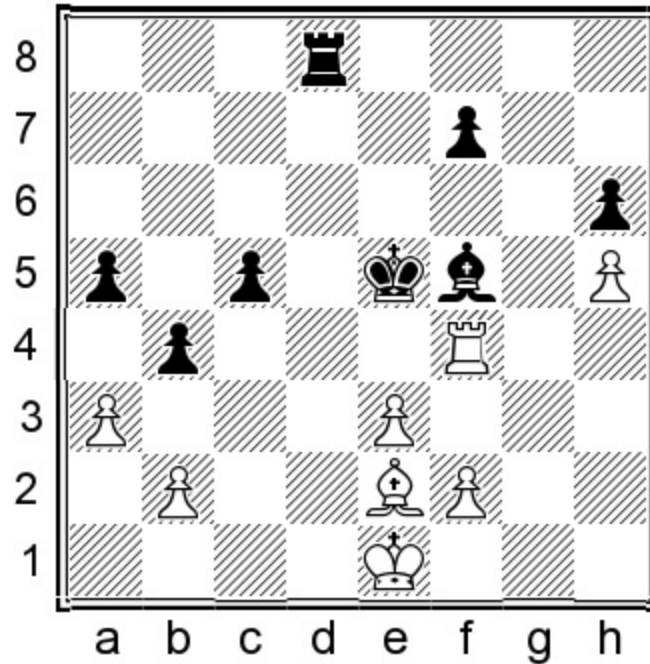


Position after: 37...b5

38.e4?

Rogozenco tries to get his pawn majority rolling as well, as their Black colleagues on the queenside are starting to look terrifying. However, according to Morozevich, “*This move leads to white’s defeat, as the move surrenders the dark squares (f4 and d4)*”. These squares become entrance squares for the black King and involve the beginning of White’s end.

38.♙xb5? is bad due to 38...♗g4 threatening mate on d1, but **38.♞f4!** was the move, as Black has to defend the b5-pawn, after which White will try to simplify the position after the exchange of Bishops by ♙e2-g4. 38...b4



Analysis after: 38...b4

39.♗g4! As shown, exchanging pieces is a proven defending technique. 39...♙xg4 40.♞xg4 when the resulting Rook ending is holdable for White.

38...♙e6!

Morozevich indicates that the rest is clear, as Black’s queenside pawn majority, combined with his better pieces, easily decides the game.

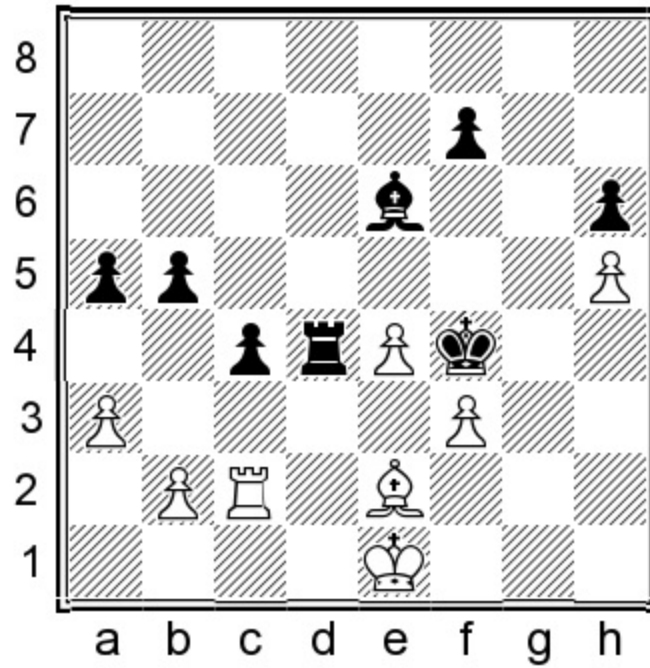
39.♞c3

39.♙xb5 ♗g4! threatening mate on d1. After 40.♞d3 ♞xd3 41.♙xd3 ♙xh5 Black is close to winning due to the strong passed h-pawn.

39...c4

It's harvest time!

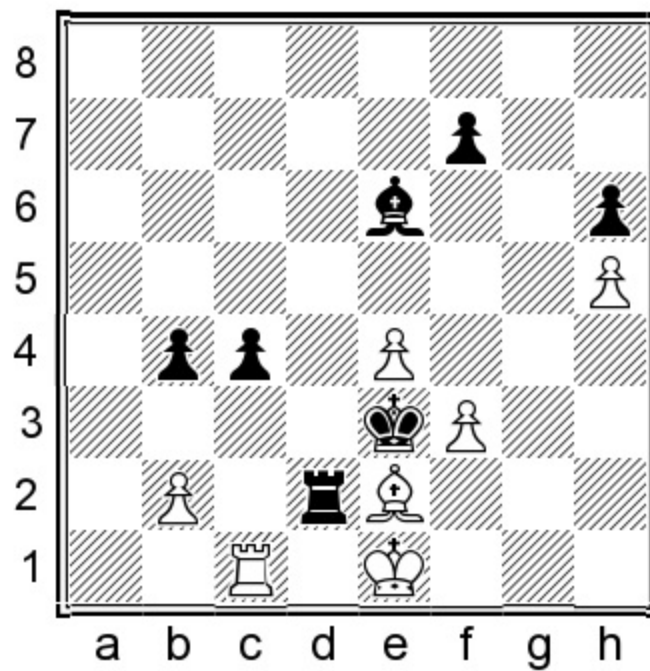
40.f3 ♔f4 41.♞c2 ♞d4!



Position after: 41...♞d4!

Defending c4, in order to make b5-b4 possible.

42.♞d1 b4 43.axb4 axb4 44.♞e2 ♔e3 45.♞c1 ♞d2



Position after: 45...♖d2

The material is still balanced, but that's the only positive thing worth mentioning for White. The Black pieces outweigh the white ones in terms of activity.

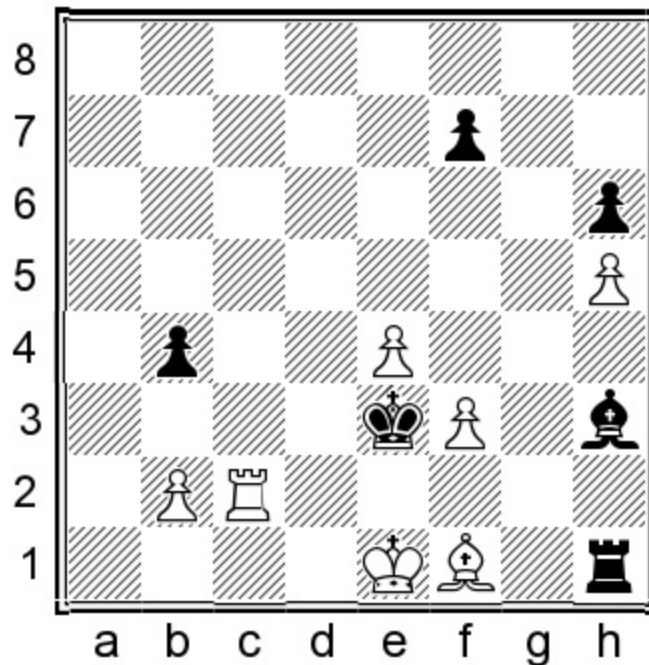
46.♙xc4 ♜h2 47.♙f1 ♜h1

There is no defense against 48...♙c4 or 48...♙h3.

48.♞c2 ♙h3

A sad picture for White, being nailed to the ground. Black's comprehensible but wrong intention of breaking loose comes back to him like a boomerang.

0-1



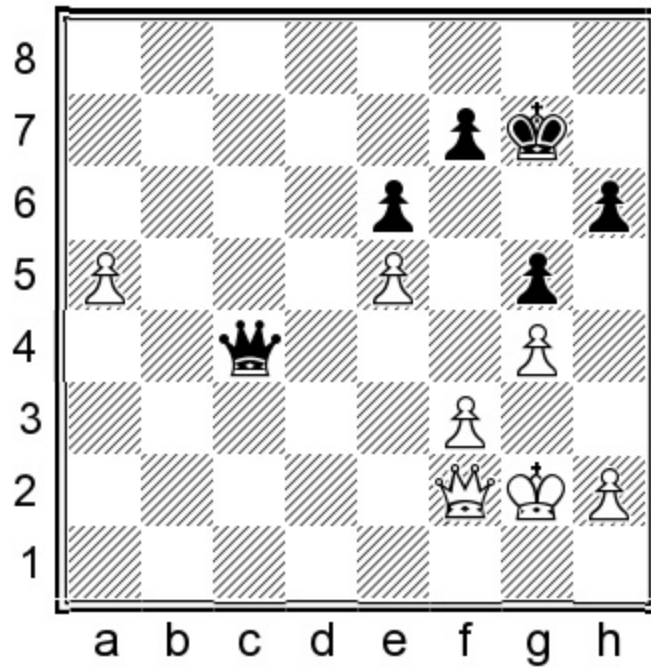
Position after: 48...♙h3

There are positions where it's impossible to improve the existing defensive construction. Let's see the next example where the Dutch champion Lucas Van Foreest has achieved an optimal defensive position. He should now sit and wait and trust the resilience of his position. After all, how is White going to make progress?

Bok, Benjamin (2638)

Van Foreest, Lucas (2522)

Maastricht 2019

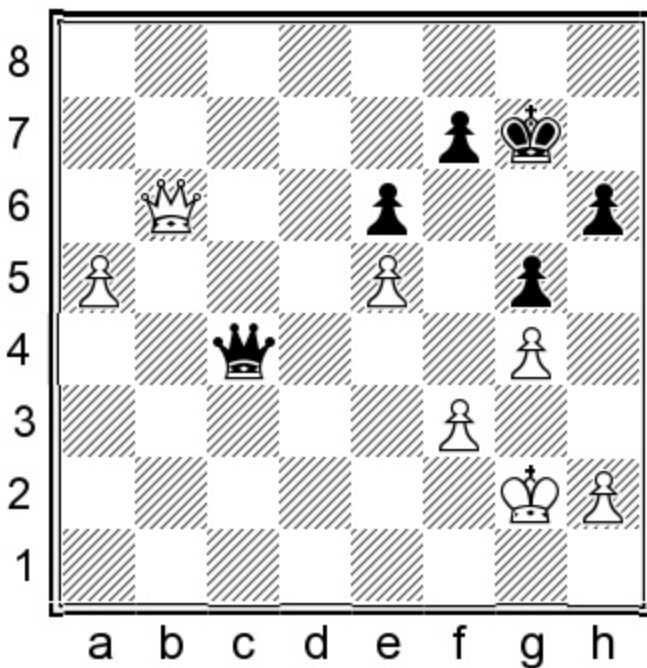


41...h5?

Benjamin Bok (photo Jos Suttmuller)

Like in the previous game (Morozevich – Rogozenco), the defender's will to reverse the course of action is understandable, however, it is merely playing into the hands of his opponent.

41...♔g8! 42.♚b2 ♔g7 43.♚b6



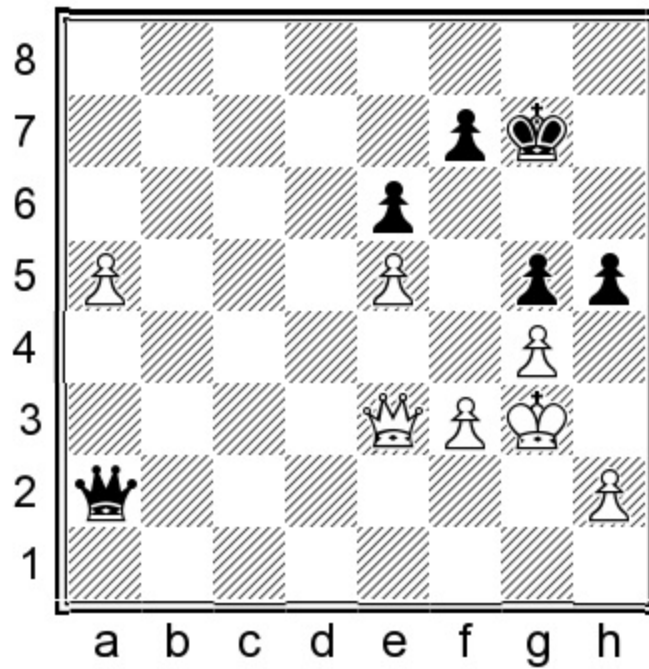
Analysis after: 43.♚b6

was strong, and only now that White's Queen has left her husband's side is it time to strike back. 43...♖e2+ 44.♗f2 [44.♔g3 ♖e1+! keeping an eye on the a5-pawn and the King.] 44...♗c4 reaching the same position as at move 41.

41...h5? 42.♗e3

Creating a second front, by 42.gxh5!, aiming for ♗e2-e4-a8, eventually infiltrating on f8 or h8, was even stronger. 42...♔h6 43.♗e3 ♔xh5 44.♗e4 ♗a2+ 45.♔h3 ♔h6 46.♗a8 Black can't stop both the a-pawn and the Queen from entering.

42...♗a2+ 43.♔g3



Position after: 43.♔g3

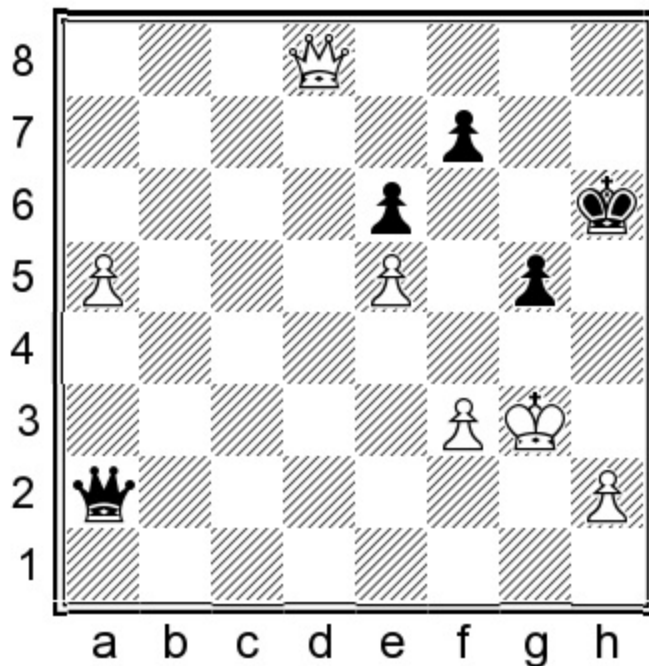
43...♔g6?

The best defense would have been 43...hxg4! 44.♗xg5+ ♔f8 45.♗xg4 ♗xa5 and despite being a pawn down, Black has excellent chances for a draw.

44.gxh5+ ♔xh5 45.♗d3!

White has another trump: the weak black King. According to the principle of two weaknesses, Black collapses as he cannot both defend his King and stop the a-pawn.

45...♔h6 46.♗d8!



Position after: 46. ♔d8!

Black's position collapses: he can't avoid the further loss of material after 47. ♕f6+.

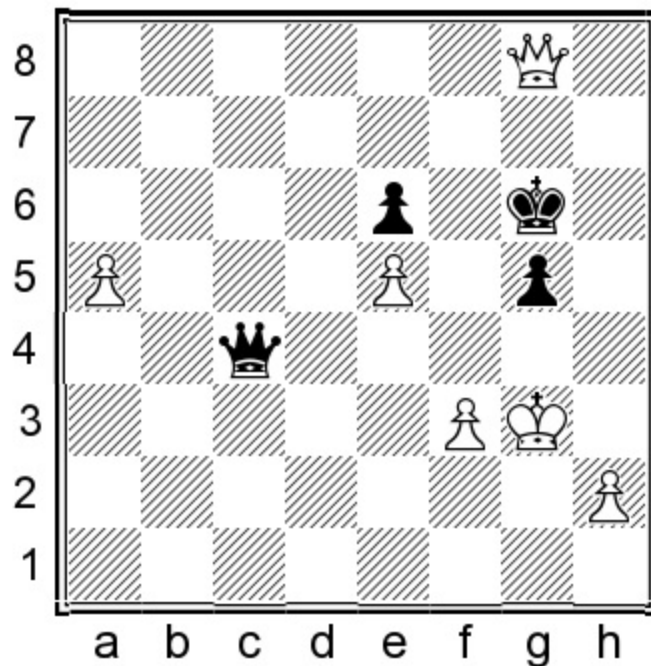
46... ♕c4

Neither 46... ♔h7 rescues Black, since after 47. ♕f8! the kingside pawns are indefensible.

47. ♕f6+ ♔h5 48. ♕xf7+ ♔h6 49. ♕f6+ ♔h5 50. ♕f7+

Likewise the note to the 54th move, 50. ♕g7!, threatening mate on h7, would prove fatal for Black.

50... ♔h6 51. ♕f8+ ♔h5 52. ♕e8+ ♔h6 53. ♕h8+ ♔g6 54. ♕g8+!



Position after: 54. ♖g8+!

54...♔f5

The King is put in harm's way. Albeit, 54...♔h6 would have led to the same consequences. 55. ♖f8+ ♔g6 56. ♖f6+ ♔h5 57. ♖g7 once again threatening mate on h7. 57...♖f4+ 58. ♔g2 ♖d2+ 59. ♔h3 ♖c2 This is the only way to stop the mate. However, given that the Queen gave up on the defense of e6, White is free to pick it up currently. 60. ♖f7+! and taking on e6, is winning for White.

55. ♖h7+!

After the exchange of queens on e4, the passed a-pawn determines the outcome of the game.

1-0

In conclusion, Black prematurely abandoned a defensive position which was completely sound. The opening of the position on the kingside turned against him as he created a second front for White.

Section 2.4 – Conclusion

The allmighty and undefeatable opponent...

In this chapter we have seen several ways of going wrong while defending, and there are no shortage of such examples from all eras of chess. The fundamental question has always been the same: when should the defender act and when should he stay low?

As shown in this chapter's classical games from Lasker, Botvinnik and Smyslov we witnessed the opponents - in their role of defender being hesitant to take the fight to their esteemed world-champion opponents. Without exception, they ended up in passive positions and were steamrolled. As Keres

pointed out, a cramped position is not necessarily fatal for the defender, but there absolutely must be prospects of counterplay.

In the (more) recent games of Morozevich and Bok, we saw that the opponents whom they had forced into the role of defender were by no means new to methods of obtaining counterplay, but rather committed the opposite error to their predecessors: wrongly seeking out active chances when it would have sufficed to hold the position they had, with either checks or piece exchanges to stop the opponent making real progress.

There is a very thin line between successful defense and utter disaster, and to find just where it lies, will occupy us for a great many pages to come.



(1) This should be taken with a pinch of salt.

(2) More details are given in Chapter 3 – The rise of defense in chess history.

Chapter 3

The rise of defense in chess history

Section 3.1 – Introduction

Section 3.2 – The Romantic Period

Section 3.3 – The modern School of Steinitz & Lasker

Section 3.4 – The hypermodern School of Réti

Section 3.5 – The dominance of Botvinnik & Smyslov

Section 3.6 – Viktor the Terrible vs. Tal the Magician

Section 3.7 – A dogmatic approach by Kotov

Section 3.8 – Iron Tigran

Section 3.9 – The eighties and nineties: the K-K era

Section 3.10 – The millennials: era of modern defense

Section 3.11 – Conclusion

Section 3.1 – Introduction

How can we define ‘good defending’ in chess? Which principles contribute to successful defense and where do they originate from? Principles of chess defense should not be treated as if they are unchanging constants or laws of physics. Rather, just like societal norms and the principles of jurisprudence which they engender, the creation of chess rules and styles over time is an emergent property of the time players are living in. That means the beliefs of their generation, the extent to which different styles are successful in that period, and (these days) the technology which is available. Each generation learns from those that have gone before, synthesizing the successful elements of older approaches to chess with new advances in thought and technique.



By analyzing the games of the World Champions and their contemporaries, I will try to develop a theory of how the art of defense has progressed over the years. This chapter is basically a chronological account of that progression, illustrated with (annotated) examples and quotes. We begin with Wilhelm Steinitz, the first player to create some order within the mayhem of the Romantic period, using his defensive ideas and other positional structures and finish in the present era (**Chapter 3.10 – The millennials: era of modern defense**), where the word of the engines is law, bringing about a framework in which increasingly improbable defenses are generated, played and accepted.

Section 3.2 – The Romantic Period

‘Romantic chess’ was the predominant playing style in chess from the 17th until far in the 19th century. This style embodied enterprising, dauntless, but risky and imprecise play with a sole purpose: the enemy’s King. The masters of attack of that time conceived a ‘fertile and sound plan: to get the pieces rapidly into play, to leave the pawns out of consideration and to institute a sudden and vehement attack against the King.’⁽¹⁾ **Gioachino Greco (c. 1600 – 1634)** laid the cornerstone for this

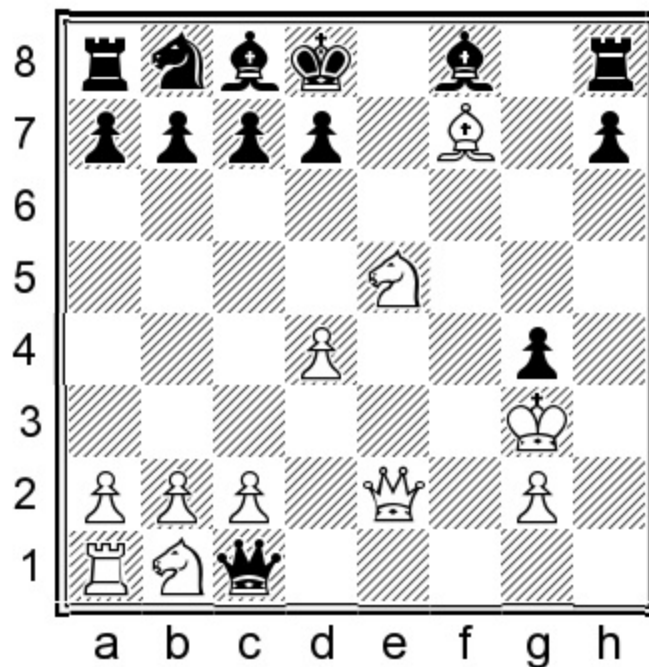
style. He was an Italian chess master and writer in the Renaissance period, and lived in the era between Ruy López de Segura and François Philidor. His games (and constructs) were full of the most enchanting combinations, and he was serving as a role model for the later attacking legends such as, Francois Philidor, Louis De La Bourdonnais, Adolf Anderssen and Paul Morphy. It was rare for Greco's games to last more than around 15 moves, as shown in the next striking example.⁽²⁾

Greco, Gioachino

NN

Europe 1620

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♘f3 g5 4.♙c4 g4 5.♗e5 ♚h4+ 6.♖f1 ♜f6 7.♙xf7+ ♜d8 8.d4 ♜xe4 9.♚e2 ♜g3+ 10.hxg3 ♚xh1+ 11.♖f2 fxg3+ 12.♖xg3 ♚xc1



Position after: 12... ♚xc1

Gioachino Greco

The black player plays a part in the play as a sunbather oblivious to the ominous shelf cloud approaching.

13.♜c6+!!

The discovered attack clears the road for the Queen.

13...♜xc6 14.♚e8#

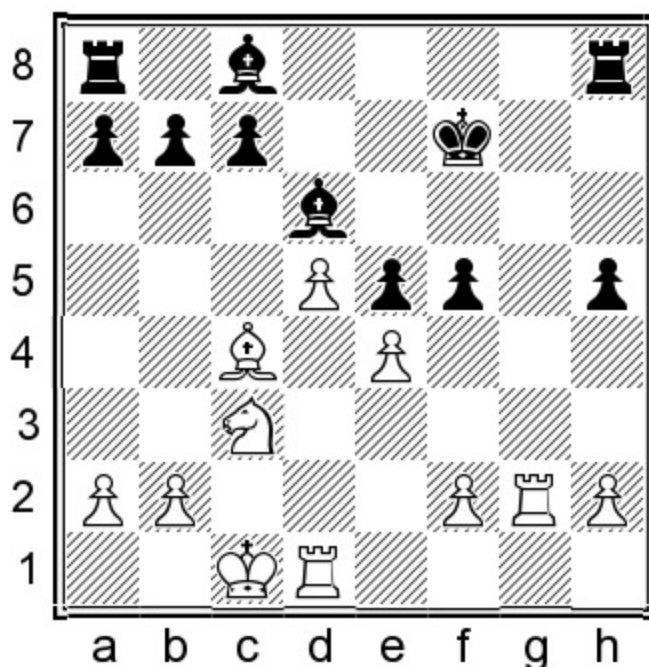
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The masters of attack were displaying the most brilliant and beautiful combinations and were highly appraised by the audience for their strokes of genius. In that time, one tends to think that a combination based on a masterplan didn't find its origin in a cause or a reason⁽³⁾, it could only be invented by the most intellectually gifted chess masters who found these combinations purely due to their brilliancy. According to the second World Champion Emanuel Lasker, **De La Bourdonnais (ed. 1795-1840)** was such an extraordinary genius. De la Bourdonnais (..) 'became the father of the soundest plan known to the history of chess: to combat every developed unit of the enemy in the centre with a force at least equal to it and follow the enemy, after having thrown him back in the centre, with a well-supported advance post in the heart of his position.'⁽⁴⁾



In my view, the next game is exemplary for his attacking style and the fragility of his opponent being overrun. De La Bourdonnais tries to achieve a breakthrough in the centre by force with f2–f4. It appears that this was not the way to get things done and it merely gives the black King an escape route after exf4, followed by ♔f7–f6–e5.

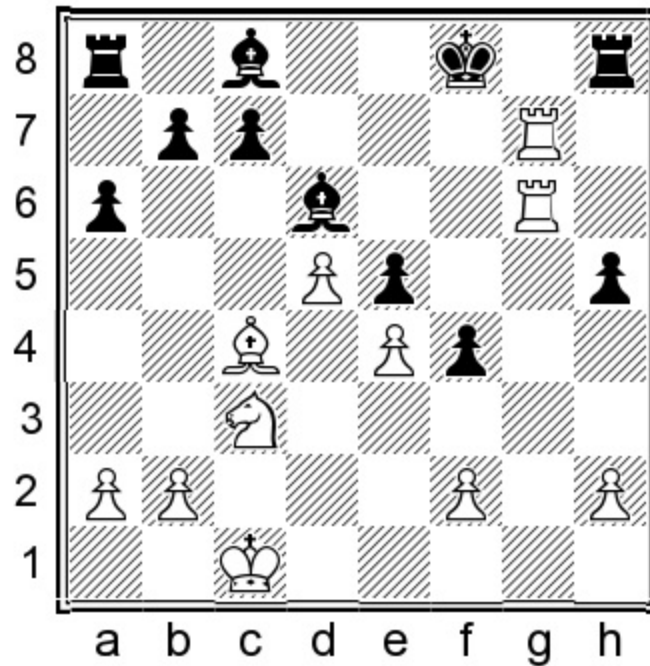
De La Bourdonnais, Louis
McDonnell, Alexander
 London 1834



23.f4

The direct 23.♖dg1! would lead to an advantage for White. Likely De La Bourdonnais couldn't find a

satisfying continuation for White after Black's f5-f4, closing the position thereby leaving his minor pieces immobile. However things turn out differently in his favor: 23...f4 24.♖g7+ ♔f8 25.♞1g6 a6



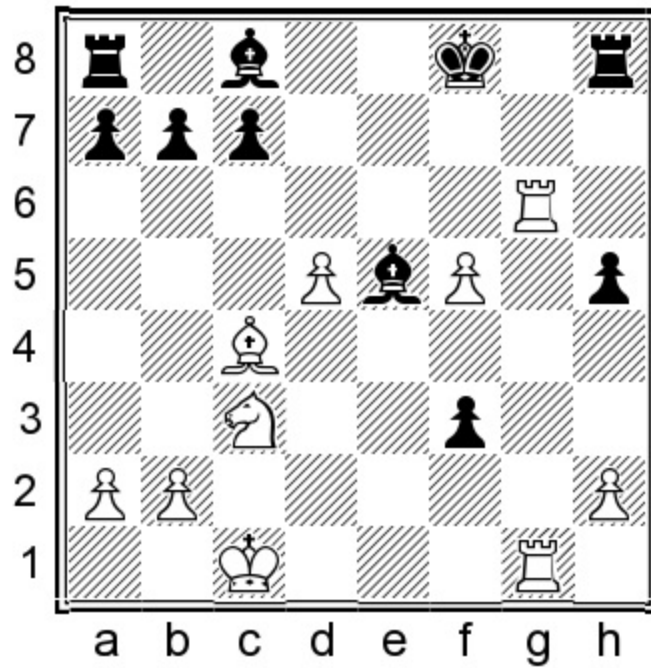
Analysis after: 25...a6

Black has to stop ♖b5. 26.♙f1! At first, White restricts the c8-Bishop before he improves his Knight. 26...♙g4 27.h3 ♙c8 28.♞b1! the Knight is heading to 'the promised land', via the route ♞c3-b1-d2-f3 or c4. Black can't handle another attacking piece.

23.f4 exf4 24.♖dg1 ♔f8?

Instead 24...♔f6!, would be winning for Black. 25.♖g6+ ♔e5 and the King escapes the danger zone.

25.♖g6! f3 26.exf5 ♙e5?



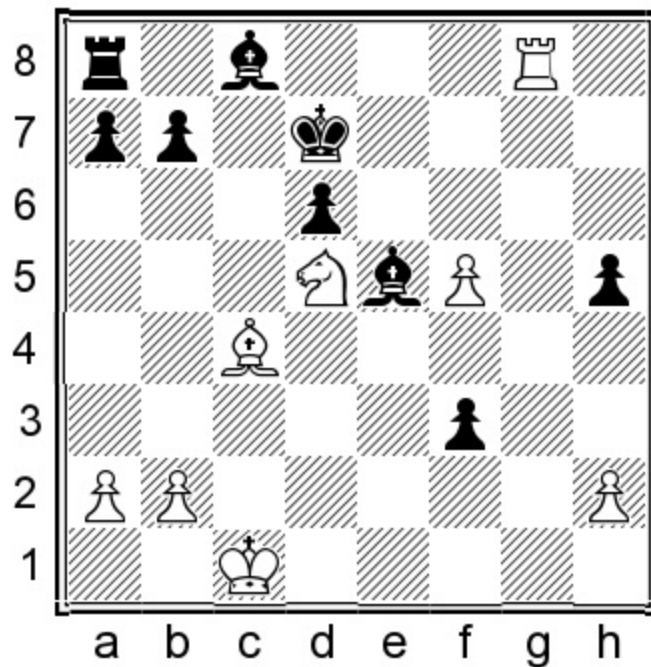
Position after: 26...♔e5?

This move allows White to activate his passive minor pieces.

27.d6!

Black had to do everything what lied within his powers to keep the White minor pieces out of the house. But it's too late now.

27...cxd6 28.♖g8+ ♜xg8 29.♖xg8+ ♔e7 30.♘d5+ ♔d7



Position after: 30... ♔d7

31. ♙b5#

A picturesque mate and a fitting epilogue of an adventurous game. But, naturally, neither without mistakes nor possibilities for the defender to escape his fate.

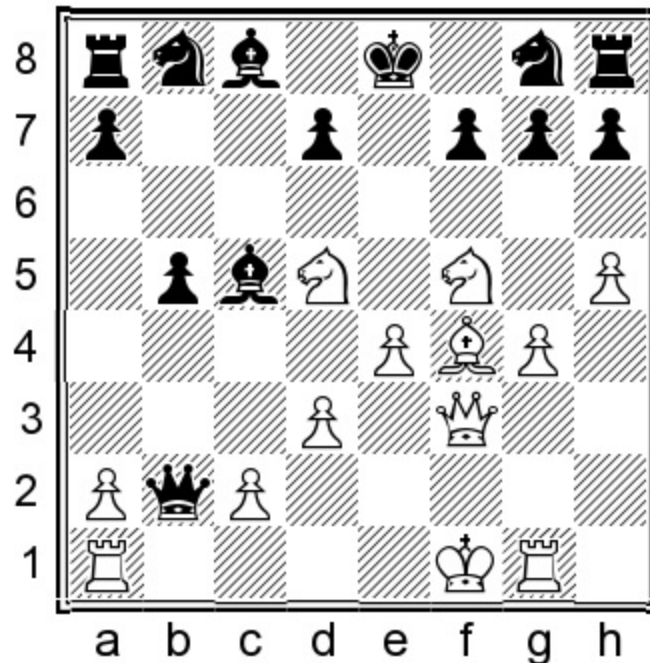
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Lasker wrote about his predecessor: ‘(..) De La Bourdonnais died young in London, and the goddess of chess, Caissa, very much grieved, mourned for him and forgot to inspire the masters with her sunny look. But then – fickle goddess – she gave her love to a young mathematician, the German Anderssen, and inspired him to superb combinations.’ **Adolf Anderssen (1818-1879)** was considered the best player in the world from 1851 to 1858 before he was beaten by Paul Morphy. Anderssen made his staggering progress by analysing the old masters. Above all, the match De la Bourdonnais vs McDonnell caught his attention, which is reflected in his style of play in the by him seldomly played official games.⁽⁵⁾

Anderssen, Adolf

Kieseritzky, Lionel

London 1851 ‘Immortal game’



18. ♙d6!

This stunning move involves a double rook sacrifice! In the romantic period, it was ‘not done’ to decline the sacrifice made by your opponent, and thus, Black accepts the bait of both the rooks submissively.

18...♙xg1?

The positions arising after 18...♙xa1+! are unclear, but only when Black refrains from taking the second Rook. If 19.♕e2, then 19...♙b2! – the black Queen doesn't neglect her defensive tasks. It appears that there is not a forced win in this position. [19...♙xg1? This would have been too eager, as White has a simple mate. 20.♖xg7+ ♕d8 21.♙c7#] 20.♙xc5 ♙xc2+ 21.♕f1 ♙xc5 White has compensation for the material deficit, as the black King remains insecure.

19.e5!

Due to the secluded black Queen, the following mating net on the black King is closing in.

19...♙xa1+ 20.♕e2

Here Black resigned, because 20...♖a6 (this move prevents the mate by ♙c7+) doesn't avert the other mating threat: 21.♖xg7+ ♕d8 22.♙f6+! ♖xf6 23.♙e7, and would have led to the most beautiful mate. White sacrificed almost all of his pieces, but there remain just enough to mate Black!

1-0

This game enchanted the chess world, despite the fact that it comprised numerous technical flaws. Euwe stated: 'An usually elegant finish, almost forcing the incorrectness of the entire combination to be forgotten.' As it appears, defense was a concept which was not really understood at that time. Once an attack was begun, there were few cases of it being stopped or even temporarily delayed, creating a self-perpetuating cycle. since chess fans so rarely saw successful defense, they had little idea how to refute even a patently unsound attack.

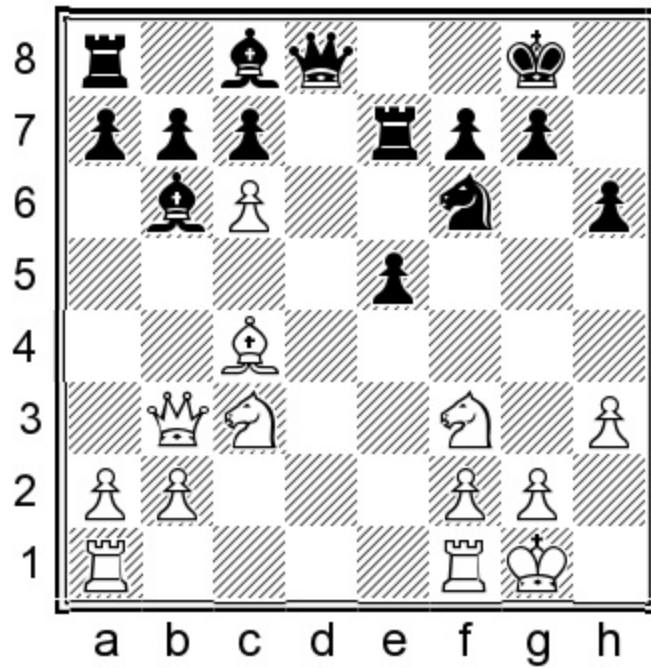
Another leading exponent of the romantic era was **Paul Morphy (1837 – 1884)**, who succeeded De La Bourdonnais and Anderssen. He was considered the world's best player between 1858 and 1860, before he retired from chess, despairing life after the break-out of the Civil War. As written by Lasker, '(..) in Paul Morphy the spirit of De La Bourdonnais had arisen anew, only more vigorous, firmer, prouder.' Anderssen was to comment on his American colleague and successor in the Romantic tradition:

WARNING

“(..) he who plays Morphy must abandon all hope of catching him in a trap, no matter how cunningly laid...”

A more characteristic phrase embodying the spirit of the age doesn't exist. Nonetheless, in the next game we should draw a veil over the defending possibilities...

Morphy, Paul
Morphy, Ernest
New Orleans 1849

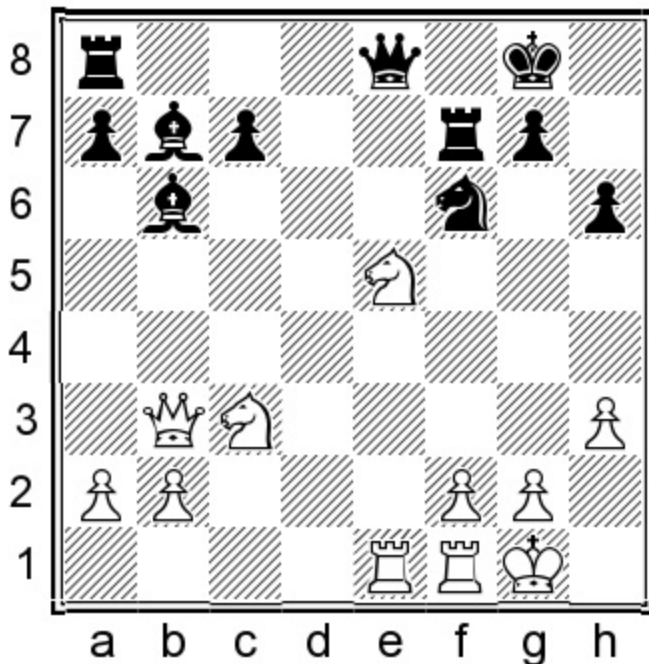
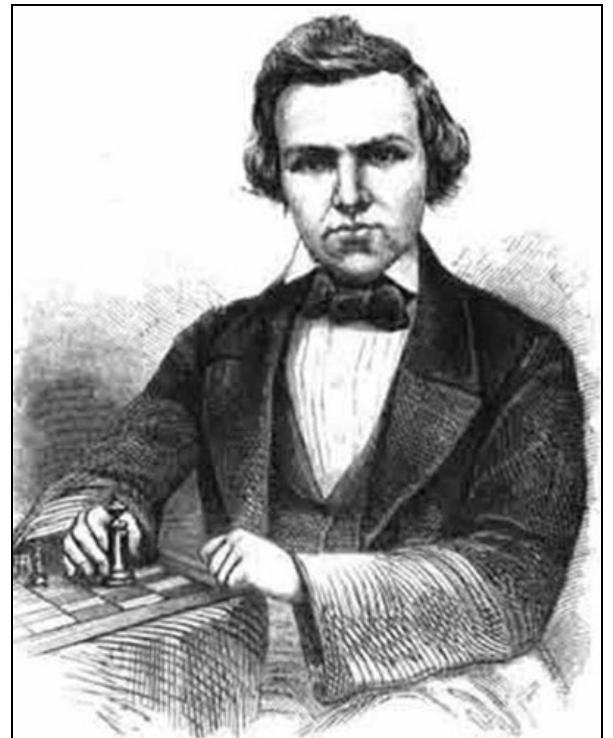


15. ♖xf7+!?

Paul Morphy

Knowing Paul Morphy's reputation, this continuation should not come as a surprise to us. Paul Morphy's idea is not only to pin the opponent's Rook, but use the opened e-file for his Rooks.

15... ♜xf7 16. ♘xe5 ♚e8 17. cxb7 ♙xb7 18. ♜ae1



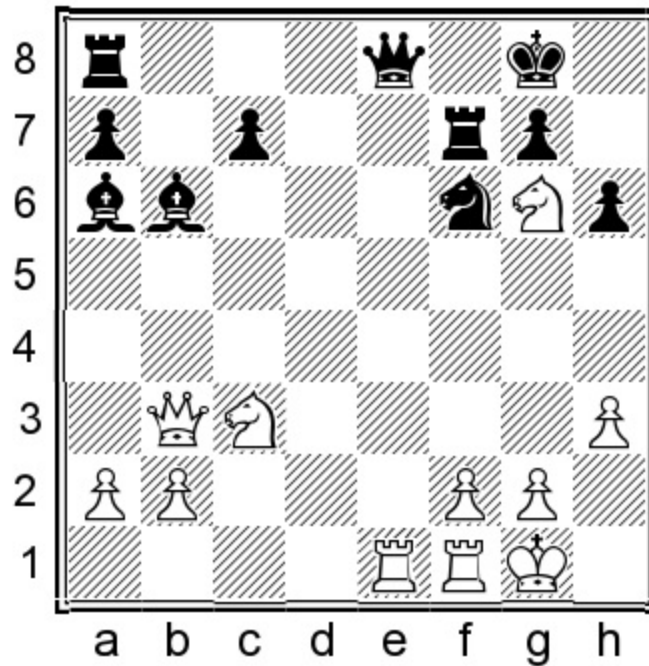
Position after: 18. ♖ae1

Astonishingly, the game lasts only 2 moves more. Does this indicate that White has a truly overwhelming position? Not necessarily; had Black applied a bit of ‘modern’ prophylaxis (i.e. trying to place yourself in your opponent’s position, to figure out what they want) his defense would have been made a lot easier. Here, the question “*Were I White, what would my next move be?*” has a surprisingly trivial answer. After knight moves other than ♖g6, Black can render the pin harmless with ...♔f8. Ergo, White’s main threat by far is ♖g6 followed by ♖e7. Hence, primarily this threat should be neutralized!

18... ♔a6?!

The above train of thought could have led to a defense such as 18... ♖d8! 19. ♖g6 ♖e4! which turns out to be the easiest way to protect against the invasion on e7. After 20. ♖xe4 ♔xe4 Black is simply a piece up and White can’t profit from the pins along the diagonal and file.

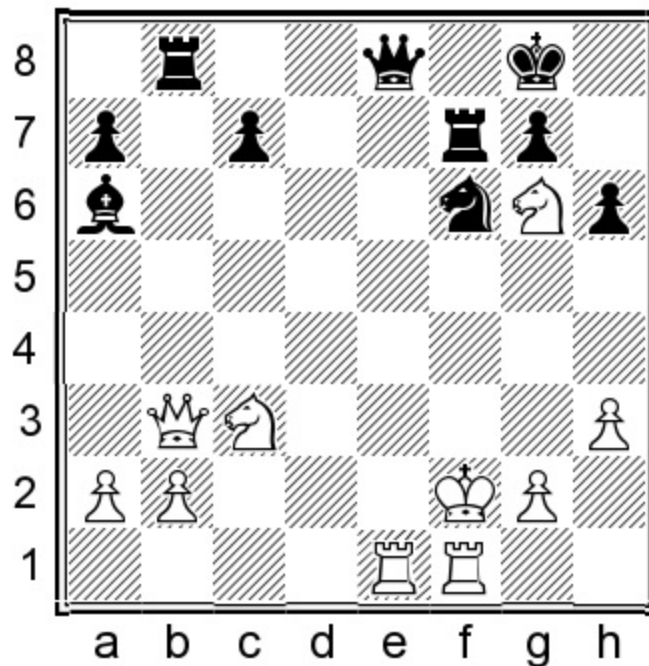
19. ♖g6



Position after: 19. ♖g6

19... ♔d8?

A) 19... ♔xf2+! This counterblow has the defensive aim to expel White’s queen from b3, fighting off the pin. 20. ♔xf2 ♖b8!!



Analysis after: 20...♖b8!!

Should White take on e8, Black now doesn't lose the Queen since the knight recapture comes with check. Additionally it turns out that White has other pieces that remain under attack as the dynamics unfold. 21.♙c2 [21.♖xe8+ ♜xe8+ 22.♔g1 ♖xb3 23.♖xf7 ♔xf7 24.♜e5+ ♔e6 when Black is winning.] 21...♜h5+ Now the pin on the f7-rook is broken and Black gets a winning position after 22.♔g1 ♖xf1+ 23.♖xf1 ♜xf1.

B) Also satisfactory is 19...♙b8!? trading Queens and reducing the attacking pressure. 20.♖e7 ♜xf2+ 21.♖xf2 ♙xb3 22.axb3 with equal play.

20.♖e7

There is nothing anymore that Ernest Morphy can do. The consequences of his half-measures against the pin proved him fatal. Black resigned.

1-0

As Lasker puts it, 'the masters of the attack invented brilliant combinations which began by cramping the king and proceeded to sacrifices', while the masters of defense only played a minor role in the play: 'they invented the systematic exchange of pieces which decreases the vigor of the hostile onslaught.'⁽⁶⁾

And with that I would like to conclude the Romantic era.

Section 3.3 – The modern School of Steinitz & Lasker

After the romantic chess era in which the chess geniuses Adolf Anderssen and Paul Morphy let the

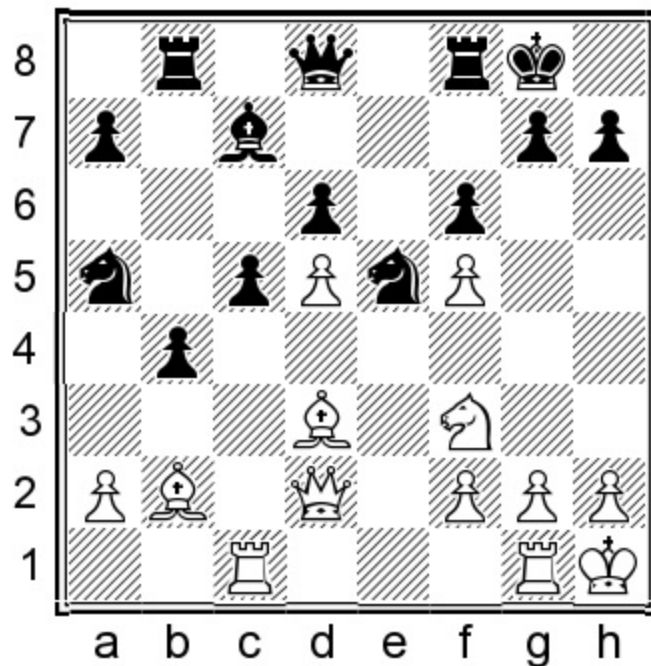
chess world marvel of their spectacular masterpieces, the chess world fell into a deep mourning. Paul Morphy, broken by the US Civil War and tired of life, renounced chess. As there were no geniuses of the same caliber standing up and the evolution of chess was standing still. The great masters from the past were being imitated, but without success. In the period after Morphy the players were playing without a plan. They were missing a role model. It was at that time that a great researcher and the father of modern chess, **Wilhelm Steinitz (1836-1900)**, gave himself over to reflection. He started analyzing his own and Morphy's games, based on which he developed basic principles.



Wilhelm Steinitz

Despite his scientific approach to chess, Steinitz can be defined as an attacking and romantic player, just as Adolf Anderssen and Paul Morphy. His 1866 London match win against Anderssen was achieved using typical 'Romantic' openings such as the King's Gambit (1.e4 e5 2.f4). With the final outcome of 8 vs 6 in the favor of Steinitz and the match devoid of any draws, the audience was the winner. Steinitz, however, was not satisfied with the quality of the games, since a lot of mistakes were made. One of them seen in (Chapter 2, p. 28 Steinitz - Anderssen: 31..f5!), and 5 rounds later another peculiar moment happened.

Anderssen, Adolf
Steinitz, Wilhelm
London 1866



White is a pawn down and there are limited means to make his opponent's life as difficult as possible.

21. ♔xe5!?

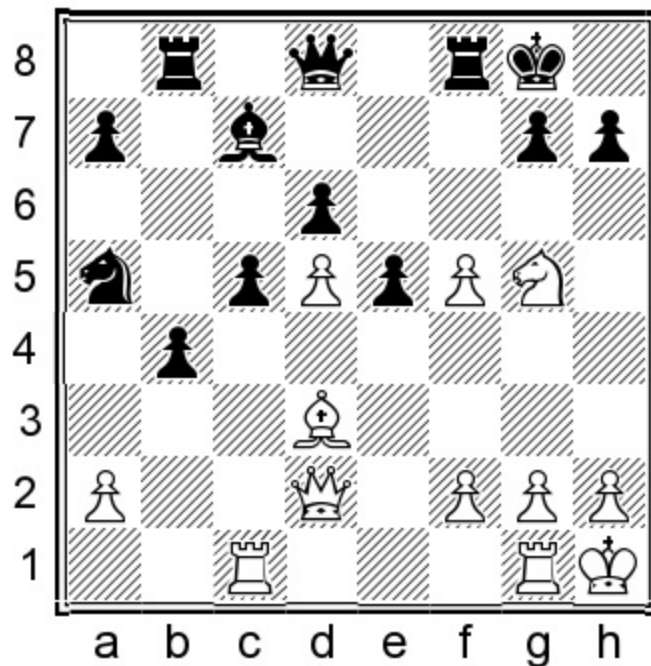
Here, Steinitz made a rigid decision, taking back with the f-pawn, which eventually will prove fatal.

21...fxe5?

Hanging on to the c5-pawn, but forgetting about the 'strong square' (one of the later by Steinitz invented *elements*) on e6.

With the pawn sacrifice 21...dxe5! 22. ♖xc5 ♔d6 Black would have gained the upper hand, as after 23. ♖c2 b3 White's pieces are blocked, and thereby lacking mobility.

22. ♘g5!



Position after: 22. ♖g5!

In a higher sense, Black is already lost here. He simply can't fight the strong Knight on e6.

22... ♔d7 23. ♗e6 ♜fc8 24. g4!

with a total walk-over on the kingside as a consequence. On the 42th move Steinitz resigned.

1-0

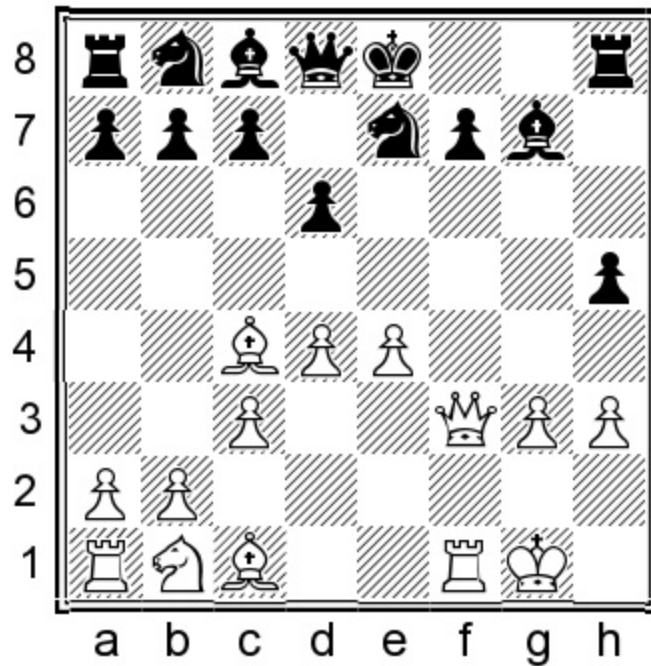
Steinitz couldn't stand the thought that while playing he was floating around without clear guidelines, or in other words, without a clear plan, as he once said to his friend and biographer Bachmann:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“(..) but shouldn't one become critical if one so often has to hear superficial opinions about positions which only can be clarified by a thorough investigation. Shouldn't one worry if one sees how antiquated methods are clung to in a dependent way merely to avoid having one's comfort disturbed.”

After a disappointing tournament in Paris one year later, where Steinitz made many mistakes in defense and finished third, he started asking himself the reason behind his oversights. This tournament was a rude awakening for him, but also the beginning of a new approach. Before diving into his new approach, let's put our finger on one of the disappointing games he played there.

Steinitz, Wilhelm
Kolisch, Ignaz
 Paris 1867



12...♙xh3!

Paving the way for a spectacular King's escape to d7.

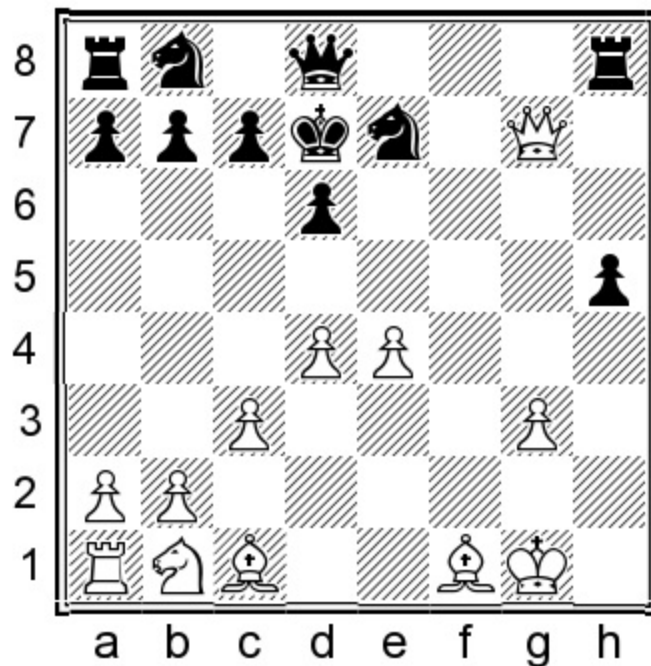
13.♚xf7+ ♔d7!

Here we see another point of 12...♙xh3: White cannot use the e6-square. The cold bloodedness manifested by Steinitz's opponent, was rarely seen these days.

14.♚xg7

The position is very double-edged. which should be in these times beneficial for the attacker. In those times, defense was a discipline still in its infancy.

14...♙xf1! 15.♙xf1



Position after: 15. ♔xf1

White's intentions are clear; he wants to chase the King by 16. ♕h3+.

15... ♚g8!

The Queen move not only serves to trade off Queens, but makes room for the evacuation of the King to d8 as well.

16. ♕h3+ ♖d8

The white Queen can't move, since the g3-pawn is hanging.

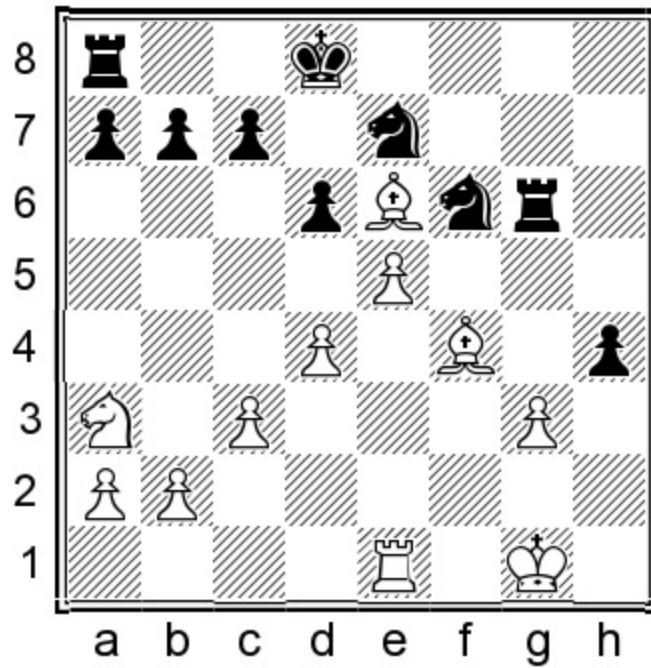
17. ♚xg8+ ♗xg8 18. ♕f4 ♘d7 19. ♘a3 ♙f6 20. ♕e6 ♖g6!

Kolisch doesn't take the strong Bishop on e6 for granted.. and fights it.

21. ♖e1 h4!

A splendid defensive idea, Black is anticipating a central pawn push by White.

22. e5

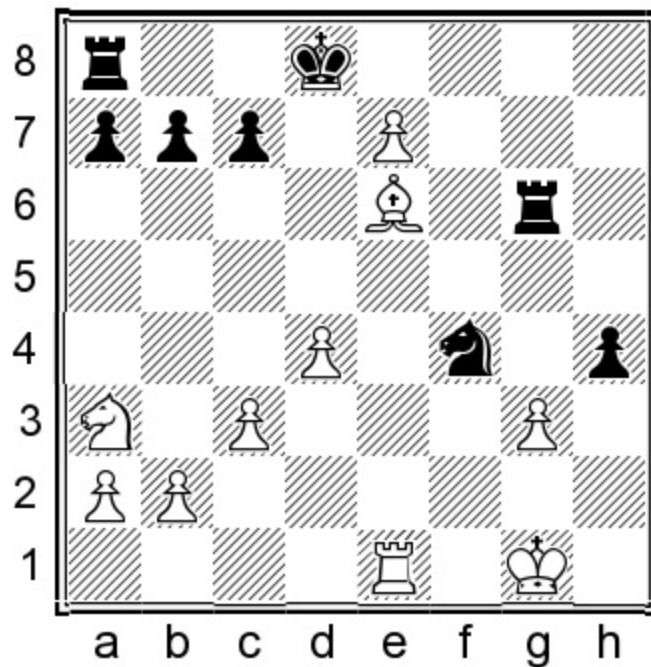


Position after: 22.e5

22...♞h5!

Once more, Steinitz's canny opponent nips the assault in the bud with a firm defensive hand. Both Bishops are hanging now. Note that it is this square that has become available for the Knight, because of Black's previous move.

23.exd6 ♞xf4 24.dxe7+



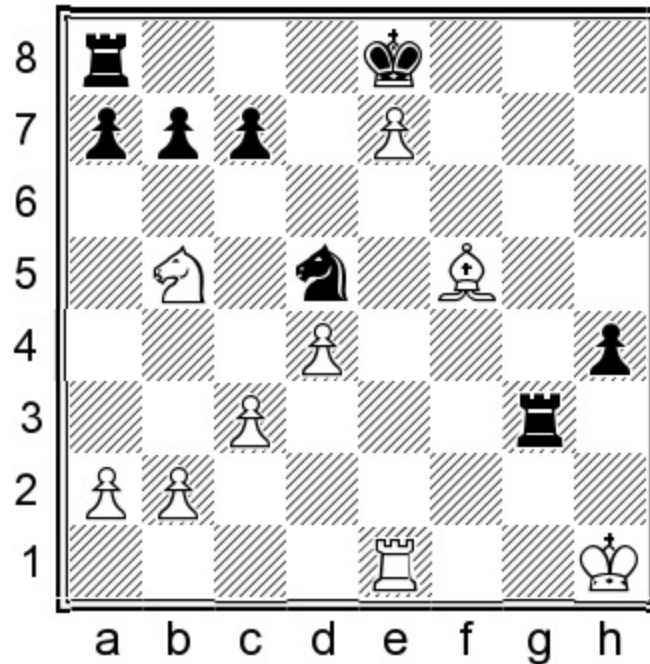
Position after: 24.dxe7+

24...♙e8!

Was this move missed by Steinitz? Even for current top level standards of defense, Black's impressive sequence of moves passes the test of time.

In case of 24...♙xe7, 25.♙f5+ White would have gained the upper hand.

25.♙f5 ♜xg3+ 26.♙h1 ♞d5 27.♞b5



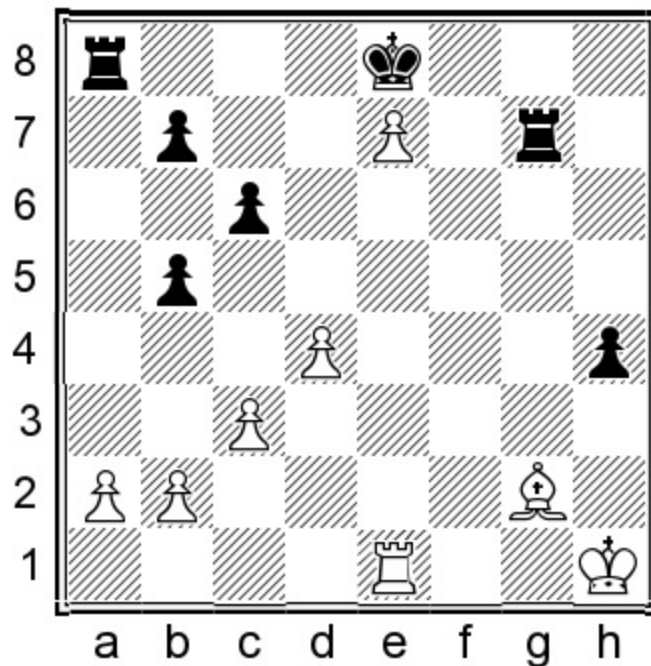
Position after: 27.♞b5

These are the last throes of the game. By any means Steinitz tries to find a way towards the promotion square here, but Kolisch keeps the gates closed.

27...a6! 28.♙e4 axb5 29.♙xd5 c6!

The white Bishop cannot find any adjacent light square to e8. Black guarded all of them.

30.♙g2 ♜g7



Position after: 30... ♖g7

Being an exchange up, Black had no problems converting the ending into a win.

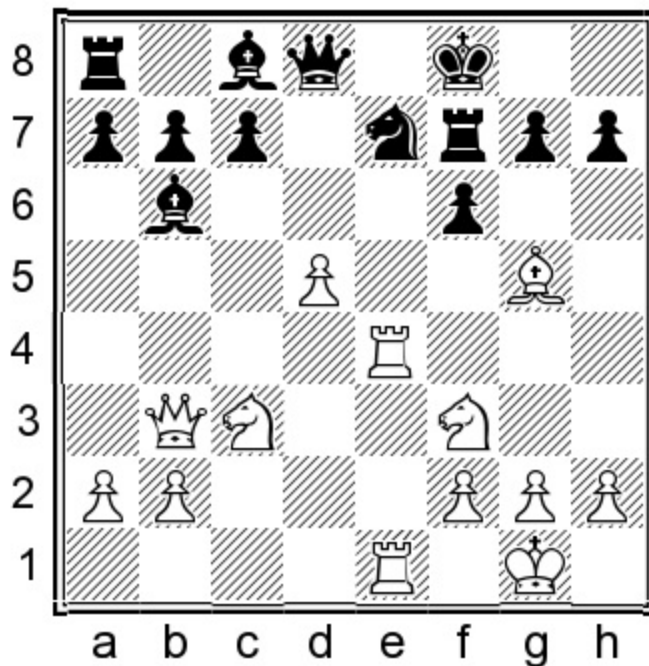
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Steinitz was being outplayed by a pair of subtle and erudite defensive strokes from his opponent. He realized he was on a dead-end street and determined to change his direction. He drew the conclusion that only combinative play would not bring him salvation, and that *'sound defense demands far less expenditure of energy than attack. In general an attack has chances of success only when the opponent's position is already weakened.'* Hence, he adopted a defensive, positional strategy in his best match ever played against Zukertort. Steinitz held the lines throughout the entire match, giving Zukertort not the chance to make use of his genius combinatory insights.

Zukertort, Johannes

Steinitz, Wilhelm

London 1872



The clash of styles becomes manifest in this position. With a firm hand Zukertort is governing his pieces forward to black's King. Steinitz, unimpressed, acts like he has nothing to worry about and that White's attack comes to a standstill after his last move 15...♔f8.

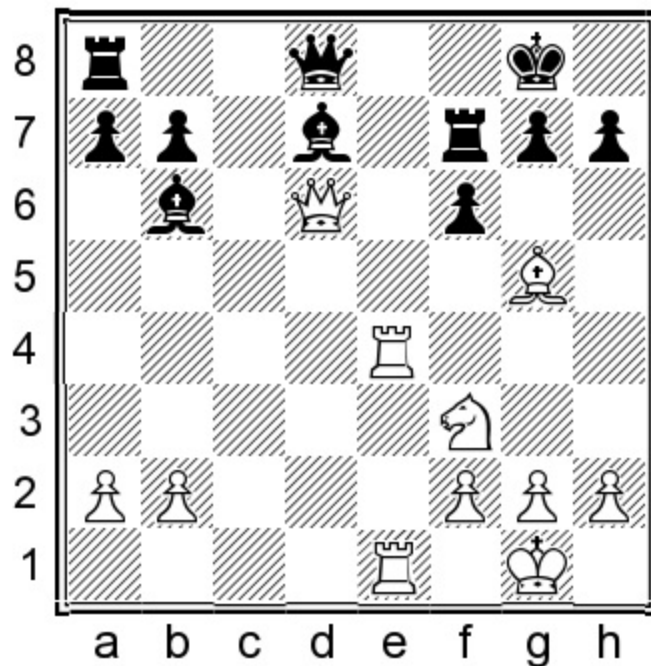
16.d6?!

Assumingly, Zukertort thought that he reached the point of no return and that the only way to success was to play forward. It was simply not his style to retreat. However, the Bishop's exchange by ♗e3 followed by ♘f3–d4–e6 would have led to a large advantage.

16...cxd6 17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.♙xd5 ♗d7!

The only available square for the Bishop, but a good one as it glues the Black's defenses together. Of course, Black didn't accept the Greek gift on g5. The idea behind Zukertort's attacking play is that after 18...fxg5?, White vanquishes Steinitz's defensive set up by 19.♘xg5 and 20.♘h7+.

19.♙xd6+ ♔g8



Position after: 19... ♔g8

Zukertort must have become impatient: all his pieces are on the most active squares.. hence, where is the combination deciding the game?

20. ♘e5?

White may have thought that with the following move he would have been rewarded for his courageous play. But in chess, nothing is what it seems. Especially not with Steinitz behind the defensive pieces.

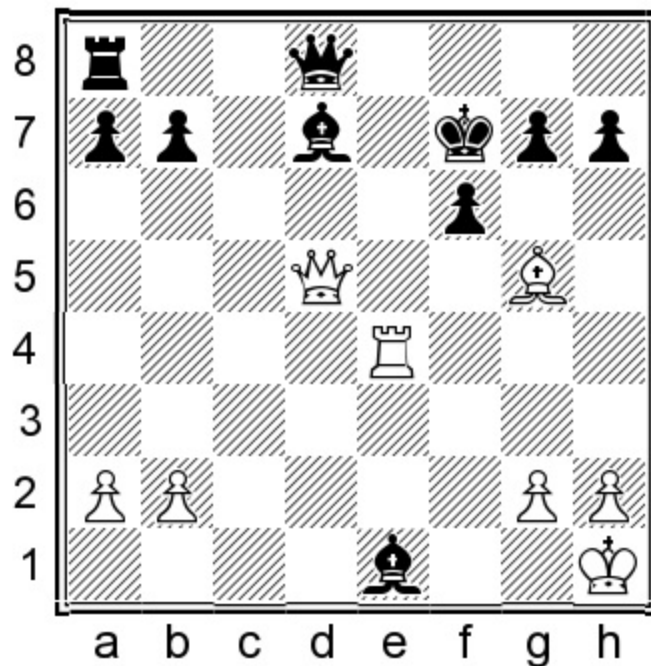
20... ♕xf2+!!

Out of the blue, Steinitz initiates a counterstrike.

21. ♔h1

After 21. ♔xf2 fxe5+ 22. ♔g1 ♖xg5 Black is winning a piece.

21... ♕xe1 22. ♘xf7 ♔xf7 23. ♖d5+



Position after: 23. ♔d5+

23...♔g6!

By using this unorthodox square for the King, Black repels the attack as a whole.

23...♔f8 24.♕f4! threatening mate on d6, when Black is on the brink of defeat.

24.♖xe1 ♕c6!

After the queen's exchange Steinitz had no technical problems turning his pawn up into a win.

0-1

At that time, one was inclined to think that there was no reason for the existence of a plan, apart from the talent, genius, or boldness of a chess master. For the invention of a plan, the position on the board had to disclose a *mark or sign*, which could merely be unraveled and discovered by the keen eye of a chess master.⁽⁷⁾

Contrary to these beliefs, Steinitz thought a plan must have a reason of existence. This assumption made him dedicate his time in developing a – for that time – groundbreaking new theory consisting of principles by which one could make a judgement of positional elements, such as a weak pawn, square, open file or a poor king's position. These principles were designed to be universally applicable. From that time, a new type of playing style began to evolve alongside the romantic, attacking style: the 'positional' or 'strategic' style.

Steinitz went further to categorize these elements c.q. advantages, into permanent and temporary ones. He stated that the task of the positional player is to accumulate slight advantages and convert a temporary advantage into a permanent advantage. In case this conversion is not made the advantage

may be lost or changes hands entirely. For instance, temporary advantages such as piece pressure or advantage in development, ought to be converted into the permanent advantage of e.g. a material advantage or the poor position of the opponent's King. The player who possesses the advantage, had not only the right, but very much the duty to attack. On the other hand, the defending side must be prepared to defend and to grab every small opportunity to disturb the positional balance, even when it costs him something. Steinitz illustrates this in his game against Zukertort, the apprentice of Anderssen and an ardent attacker and the follower of the old romantic school.

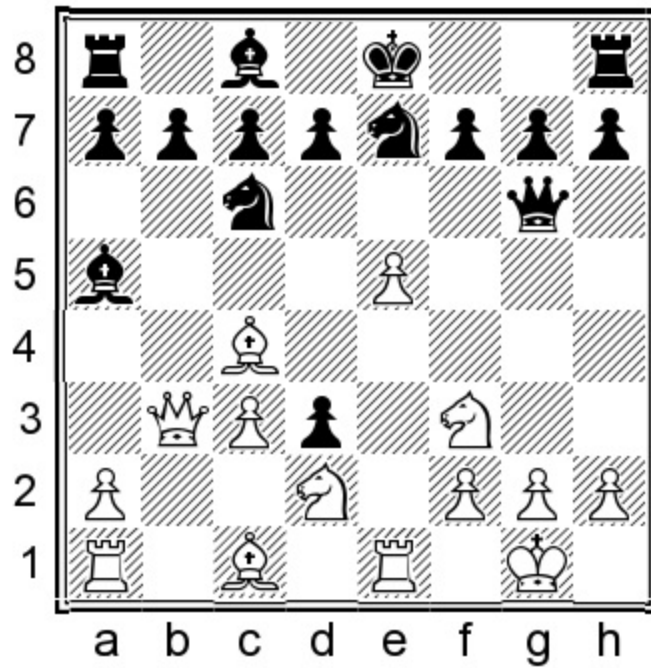


Lasker (right) against Steinitz

Zukertort, Johannes Hermann

Steinitz, Wilhelm

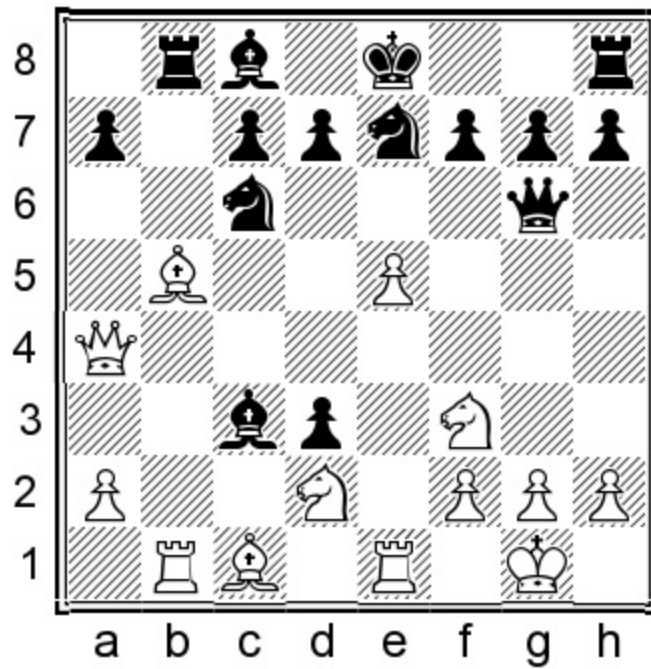
London 1872



11...b5!

Deflecting the most dangerous attacking pieces of the enemy. A proven defensive technique, nowadays also.

12.♙xb5 ♜b8 13.♚a4 ♘xc3 14.♞b1



Position after: 14. ♞b1

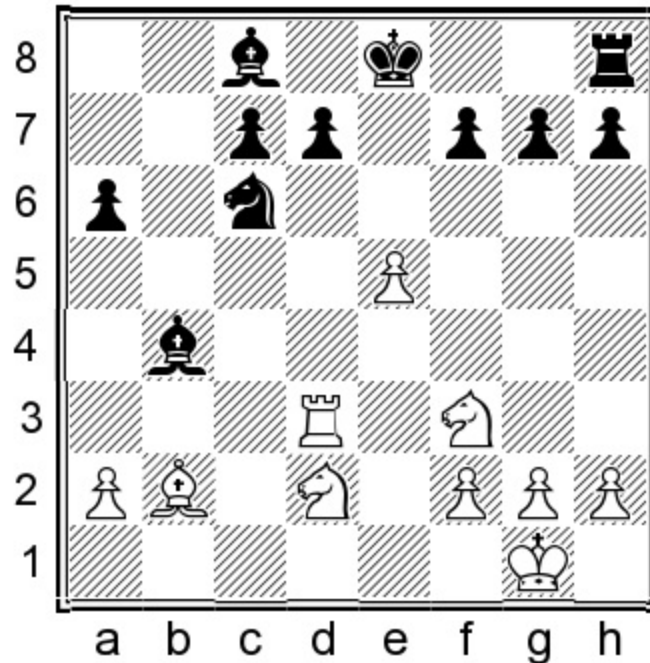
14...a6!

This move reflects a deep understanding of defense. Instead of the ‘sjablone’ castling, Black tries to ease his defensive task by the exchange of pieces.

15. ♖xc6 ♜xc6!

Steinitz’s sharp calculation is deployed for defensive purposes. After the exchange of Queens, the Rook will be protected on b8.

16. ♜xc6 ♘xc6 17. ♝xb8 ♙xb8 18. ♞e3 ♘c6 19. ♞xd3 ♖b4 20. ♖b2

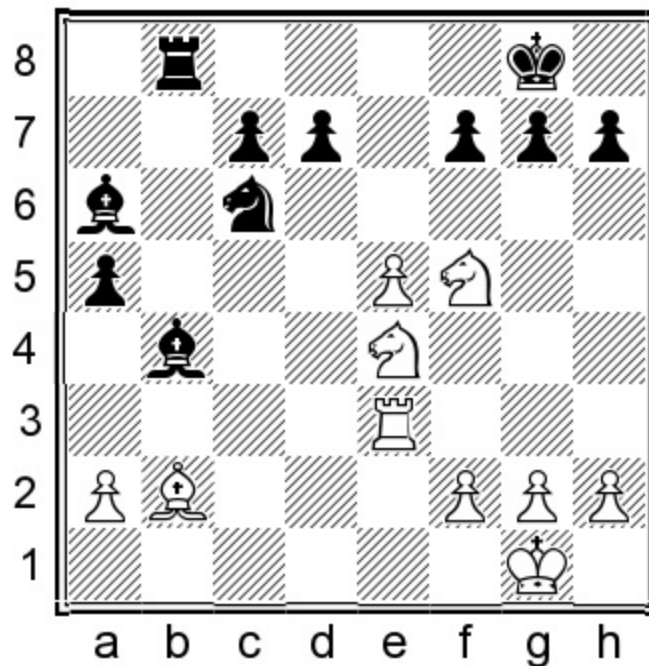


Position after: 20. ♖b2

20...a5!

Steinitz’s permanent advantage of the ‘bishop pair’ is fully exploited. As a result of his last move a6-a5, the c8-Bishop takes part in the game as well.

21. ♘e4 ♖a6 22. ♞e3 0-0 23. ♘h4 ♝b8 24. ♘f5



Position after: 24. ♖f5

Considering White's last moves, Zukertort's attacking aspirations haven't lowered, but Steinitz repels the attack with a final and sobering chord.

24...♙d2! 25.♖b3 ♖xb3 26.axb3

and on the 38th move, the curtains were falling for White.

0-1

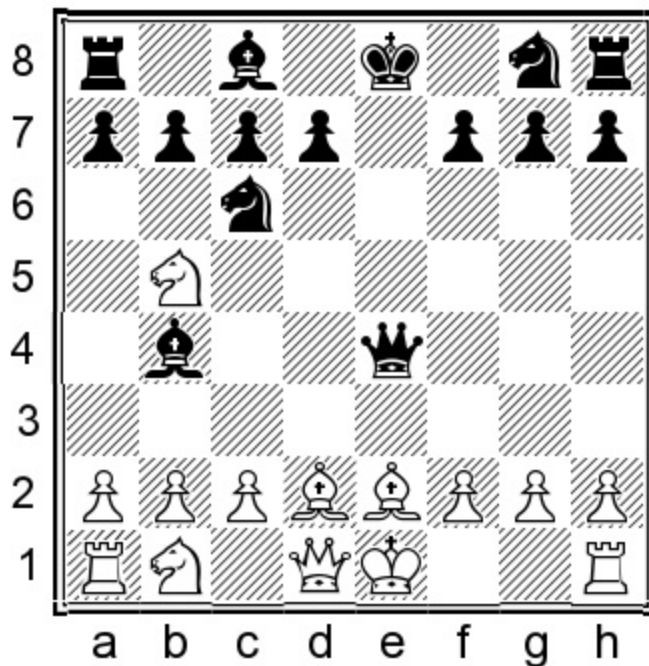
By defining his positional principles of the game, a new era in chess history was born. Steinitz's positional principles, taught every player how to evaluate and subsequently invent a plan for each and every position. In his match against Jonathan Blackburne, over 7 games, he was eager to show the validity of his new chess principles to his opponent and.. the entire chess world! Steinitz succeeded convincingly as he didn't allow a single draw in the whole match. Considering his playing style, he had full confidence in his unweakened pawn chains, even so badly, that he was prepared to play positions with his King in the center. Moreover, his self-proclaimed goal was to refute the gambits, showing his opponents the incorrectness of the pawn sacrifice and the opponent's opening.

Blackburne, Joseph Henry

Steinitz, Wilhelm

London 1876

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♘xd4 ♙h4 5.♘b5 ♙b4+ 6.♙d2 ♚xe4+ 7.♙e2



Position after: 7. Ke2

7... Qd8!

‘The king defends the pawn, taking up a comparatively safe position.’ (Lasker) The theory of the Scotch was still developing in these days, Steinitz had a preference for 4... Qh4. Nowadays, top players stay well clear of this early queen move.

The obvious 7... Qxd2+ 8. Nxd2 Qxg2 is losing material, because of 9. Nxc7+ Qd8 10. Qf3!.

8.0-0 Qxd2 9. Qxd2 a6 10. N1c3 Qe5 11. Na3 b5?

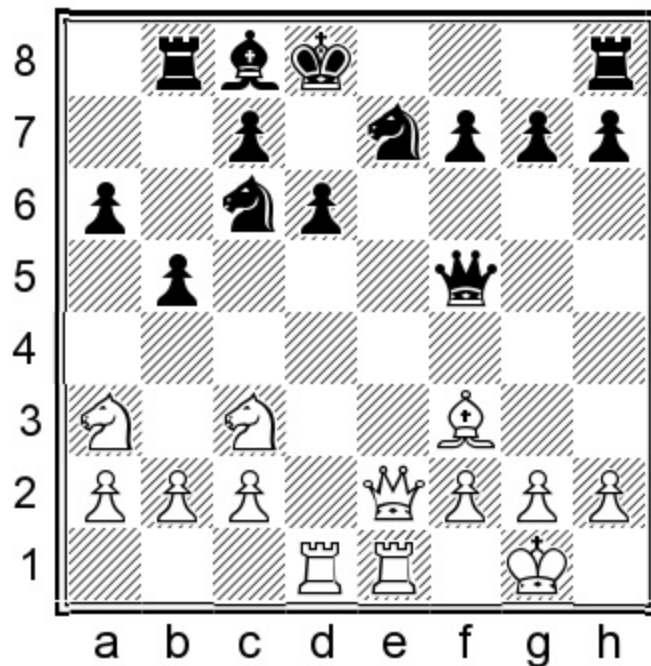
Too optimistic.

To be preferred was 11... h6! with the idea of 12. Bxd1 Qg5! trying to swap the Queens. 13. f4 Qc5+ 14. Qh1 Qf6 following up with d6, is fine for Black.

12. Qf3 Qge7 13. Bxd1 Qf5 14. Bfe1 Bb8 15. Qe2?

Here, Blackburne goes wrong. Winning was 15. Qe4! Qh5 16. Qxc6 Qxc6 17. Qd5 Black can't develop his Bishop, as it would leave d7 unprotected. 17... d6 18. Qc3 is winning, since Black cannot simultaneously protect Qc6 and g7.

15... d6!



Position after: 15...d6!

‘It is interesting in the highest degree to follow how little by little the defending side arranges his pieces for offensive action.’ (Lasker)

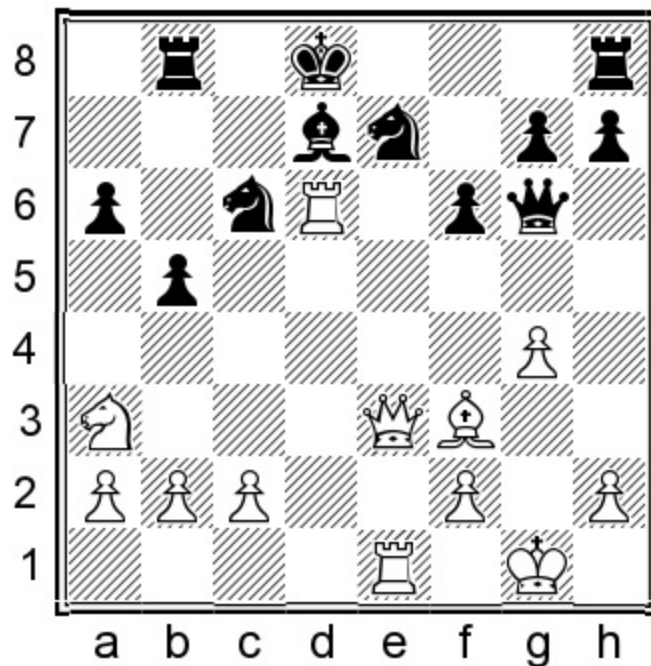
16.♘e4 ♙d7 17.♚e3

Black is out of any trouble, since he can develop his last undeveloped Rook to e8 whereas the center remains closed.

17...f6

Even better was 17...♞e5! 18.♙e2 ♜e8! when Black has a large advantage.

18.g4? ♜g6 19.♘xd6 cxd6 20.♙xd6



Position after: 20. Rxd6

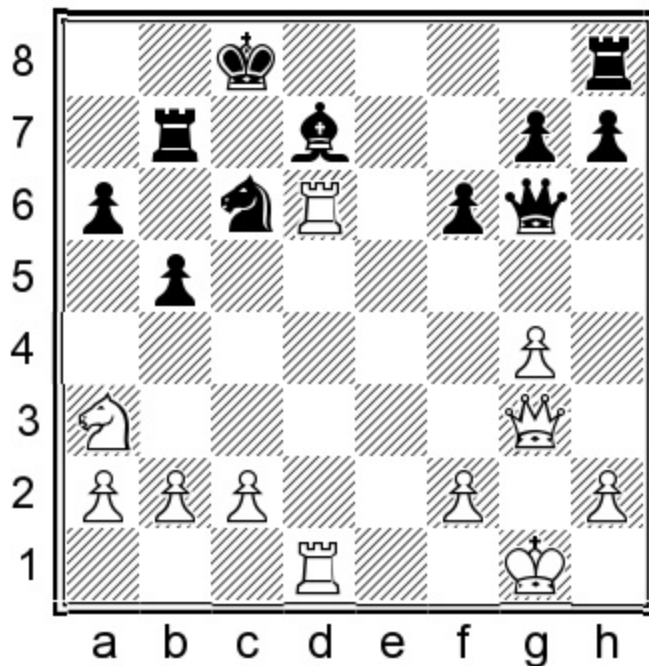
20... Kc7!

Steinitz's defense is tenacious and self-conscious. Fully aware of the capabilities of his defensive resources, he fights his way out of the danger.

21. Qxc6 Nxc6 22. Wg3 Kc8!

The black King doesn't mind taking the route d8-c7-c8, since White swapped his active Bishop.

23. Rcd1 Rb7!



Position after: 23...♖b7!

24.♙g2 ♜b8!

Steinitz is ‘strengthening the weakest point, the Bishop at d7.’ (Lasker)

25.♞1d4 h5!

As White is momentarily out of imposing any threats, it’s time for the counterpunch.

26.♙d5 ♚g5 27.♙xg5 fxg5

The rest is a formality, as Black is a piece up. The game went on until the 51st move, when White resigned.

0-1

Emanuel Lasker

The successful defensive games of Steinitz in the decennium between 1870 and 1880 put an end to the old, romantic era of Morphy, Anderssen and Zukertort. The theories of Steinitz were applied and further developed by the second World Champion **Emanuel Lasker (1868-1941)**. The style of Lasker could be defined as universal, tenacious, and positional, but nevertheless he was also capable of saving the game by making use of tactical resourcefulness. On top of that he was gifted with a fine endgame technique and subtle feel for the psychology of the game.

Lasker, a doctor in philosophy and mathematics, approached chess, just as Steinitz, in a highly scientific way.⁽⁸⁾ He embraced the principles formulated by Steinitz which states that the attack should be directed towards the defender’s weakest spot: ‘the most effective combination as well as

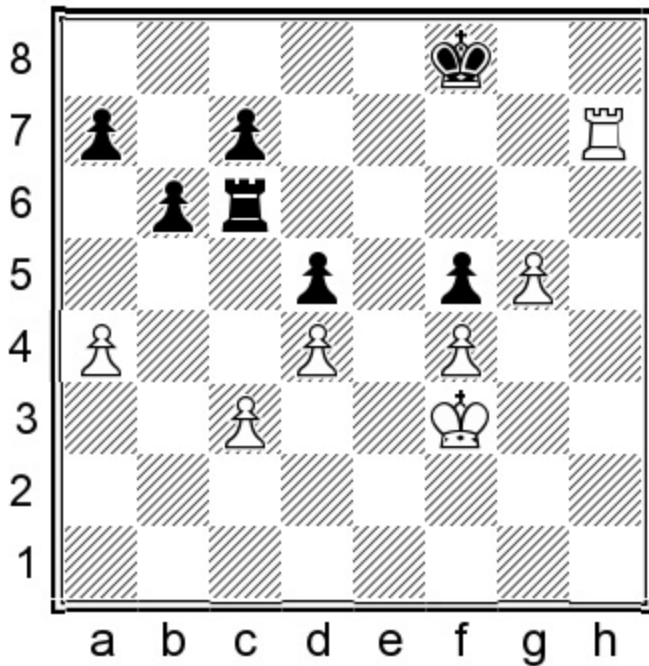
the widest-visions and deepest plan of attack proceed in the direction of the weak points.’⁽⁹⁾

He illustrates this in his book by means of the following game:

Capablanca, Jose Raul

Tartakower, Saviely

New York 1924



Lasker is reasoning that White is better due to the protected passed pawn, the weak c7-pawn and the Rook cutting off the Black King, and for that reason he is the one entitled to attack. Adhering the theoretical approach as advocated by Steinitz, he poses the reader the question: *‘But how to get at them? White finds himself in distress. Never mind, search!’*

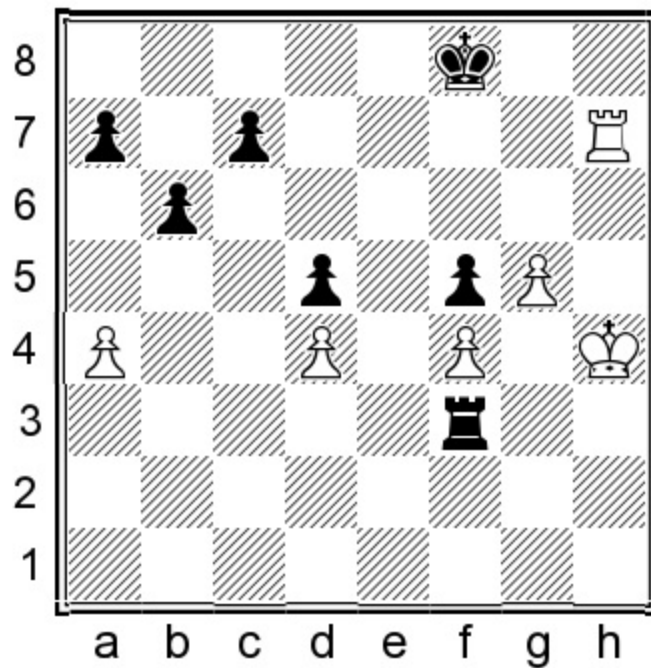
35.♔g3!

The King sets off to the enemy’s weakest links.

35...♞xc3+ 36.♔h4!

It becomes clear that the King is on its way to f6. There isn’t much that Black can do now that his King is cut off along the 7th rank.

36...♞f3



Position after: 36...Rf3

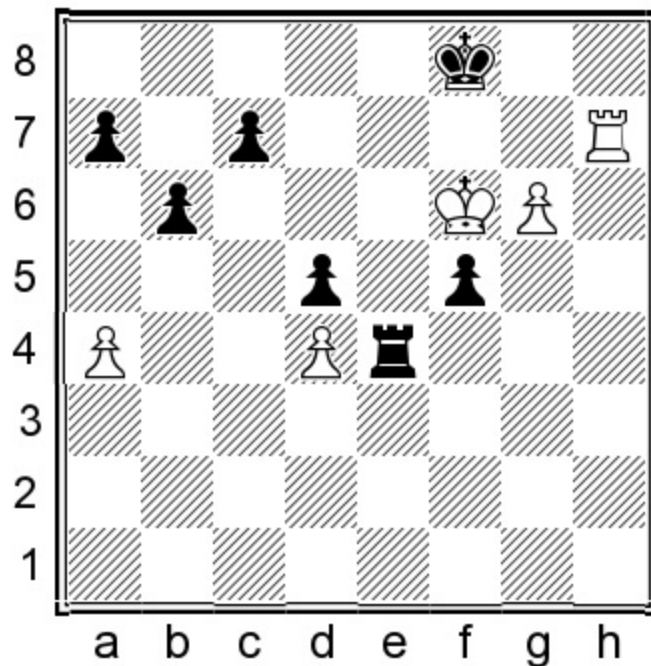
37.g6!

This paves the way for the King's march towards f6.

37...Rxf4+ 38.♔g5

The f5-pawn can be considered a blessing in disguise, giving the white King shelter to any possible checks from the rear.

38...Re4 39.♔f6



Position after: 39. ♔f6

Black is helpless as his weakest spot is left without protection.

39... ♔g8 40. ♖g7+ ♔h8 41. ♖xc7 ♖e8

As Black's Rook is now also condemned to the last rank, there is nothing that stops White from picking up the black pawns.

42. ♔xf5

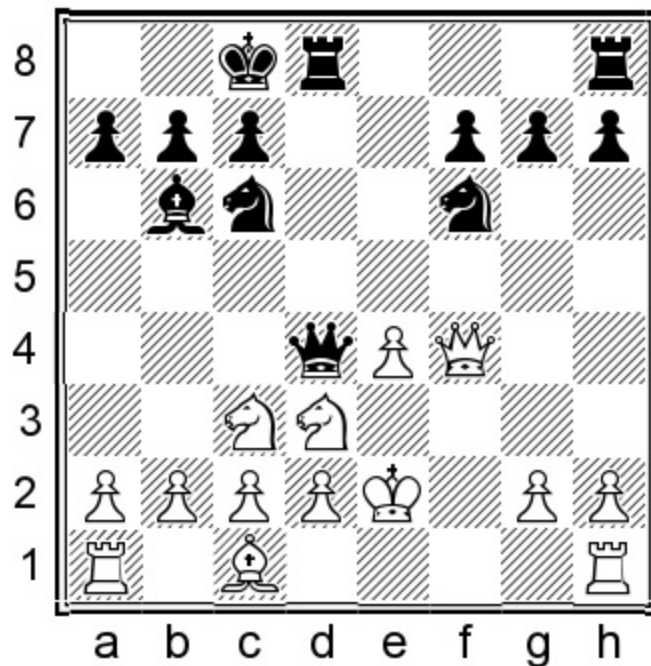
and Tartakower resigned soon after.

1-0

The message which Lasker is sending us here, is that applying the natural and scientific laws of chess will always navigate the attacker to the solution. But what should the defender do? The player having the disadvantage ought to defend while also endeavoring to change the balance by willing to make a concession. But, as Lasker put it, his guiding star must be the *principle of economy*: the defender must make the least concession that suffices. Not an ounce or a dot on an 'i' more.⁽¹⁰⁾

In the next game Steinitz's won a pawn but has to reckon with the underdevelopment of his pieces and the insecure position of the King. While the board is on fire, he finds a way to keep his pawn chain intact while developing his pieces. But is life really so simple?

Steinitz, Wilhelm
Golmayo Zupide, Celso
 Havana 1889



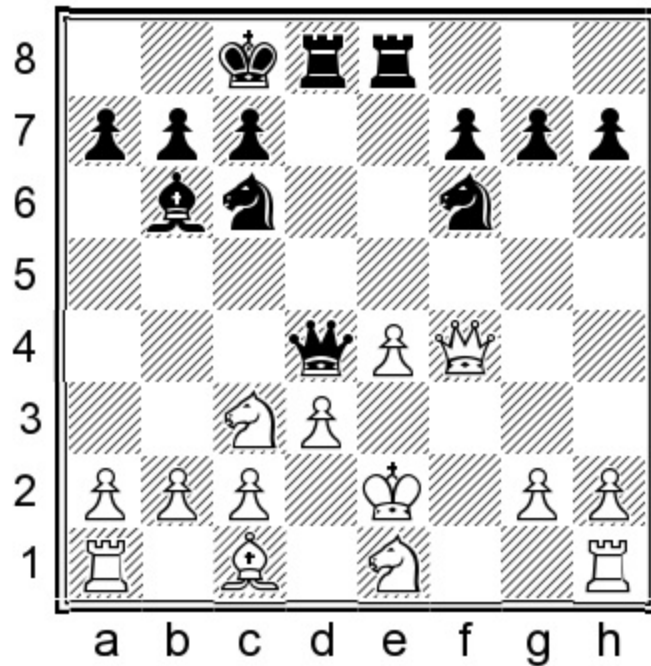
Can we say that even though the White player's strategy, who adhered to the principle of economy, making the least concession that suffices to keep the balance, had its flaws, nevertheless? Is the position of the King too exposed to make any clear dogmatic explanation possible? Or should the position of the King placed forward within the hierarchy of elements? Lasker introduces this diagram to his readers by marking the weakest link: the exposed King. On top of this, he adds that White is a pawn up.

12. ♘e1

Hence, one plus one is two and the text move solves all the problems as he strengthens his worst weaknesses c2 and g2? Moreover, the d-pawn can be moved to d3 after which the pawn chain is set?

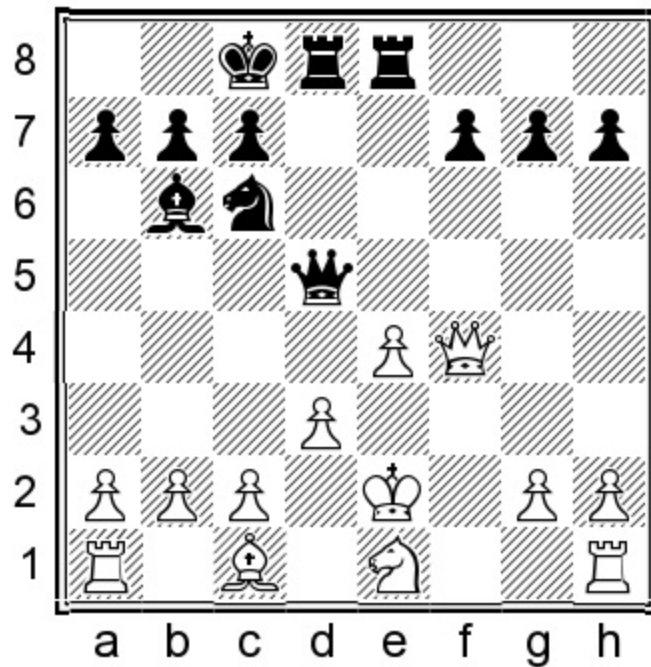
12... ♖b4

No doubt, that after 12... ♜he8! White intended to defend his weakest link in the position: the pawn on e4. 13.d3 and White is secure, isn't he?



Analysis after: 13.d3

13...♞d5! Missed by Lasker. 14.♞xd5 ♞xd5



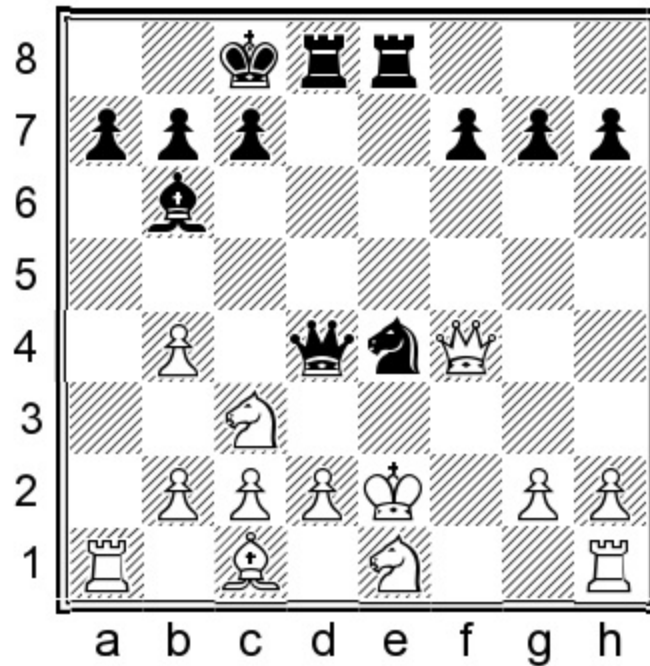
Analysis after: 14...♞xd5

Notwithstanding the nice-looking pawn chain, the theory of the weakest link can't hold up to the crazy tactics coming to White's King. 15.♙e3 [15.♚d1? is losing, after 15...♞xe4!] 15...♞b5 16.b3 Black's only task to conduct is to open the center, finding a way to the King. 16...♙xe3 17.♞xe3 f5 White is helpless, as the center is opened and the King has nowhere to hide.

13.a3 ♖he8?

In addition 13...♗xe4! leads to very unclear play with White's King still in the center. 14.♗xe4 ♗d5 15.♚f5+ ♔b8 16.d3 ♖he8! being a piece down, Black is pulling the strings.

14.axb4 ♗xe4



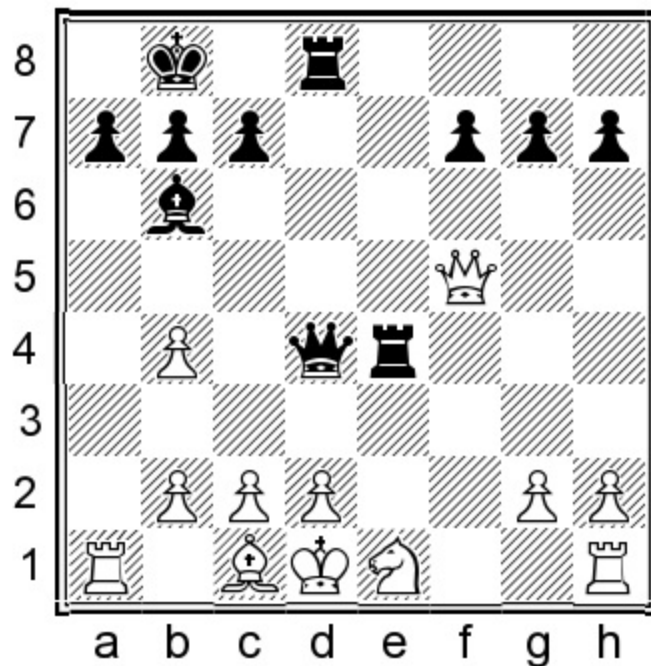
Position after: 14...♗xe4

Lasker asserted that due to the following saving check, Steinitz won the game handsomely.

15.♚f5+!

Instantly sheltering the King, with 15.♔d1, is falling to a discovered check after 15...♗xc3+.

15...♔b8 16.♗xe4 ♖xe4+ 17.♔d1



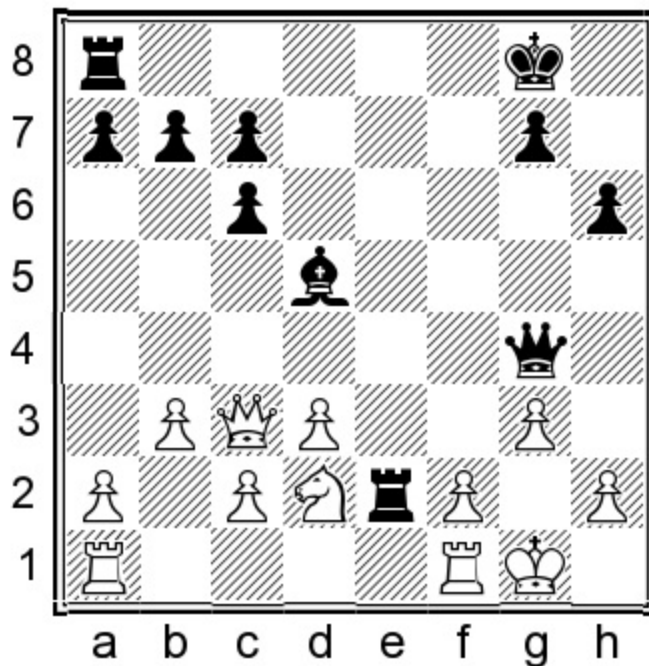
Position after: 17. ♔d1

And indeed, here White successfully defended as his King found a shelter. Black resigned on the 31st move.

1-0

Let's now return to Steinitz's theory of the accumulation and conversion of advantages. Based on this theory, temporary advantages are not lasting and should be converted by the attacker into a permanent advantage. Relating to the defender, an inactive piece could be considered a temporary disadvantage which should be tried to get rid of as quickly as possible before the conversion takes place to a permanent disadvantage. In this respect, the piece could be moved to a better position after which the disadvantage disappears. Lasker reflects this way of defense with the following striking example.

John, Walter
Süchting, Hugo
 Coburg 1904



‘Black’s threat is 1...♖xd2 followed by 2...♔f3. The parry with 2.f3 would be weak because the f-pawn has the function of safeguarding the second rank.

In fact, if 1.f3 ♔h3 would be annihilating.’ (Lasker)

1.♖ae1!

As White utilizes an inactive piece to exchange the intruder on e2, the rook on f1 can be deployed for other defensive purposes, i.e. defending the pawn on f2.

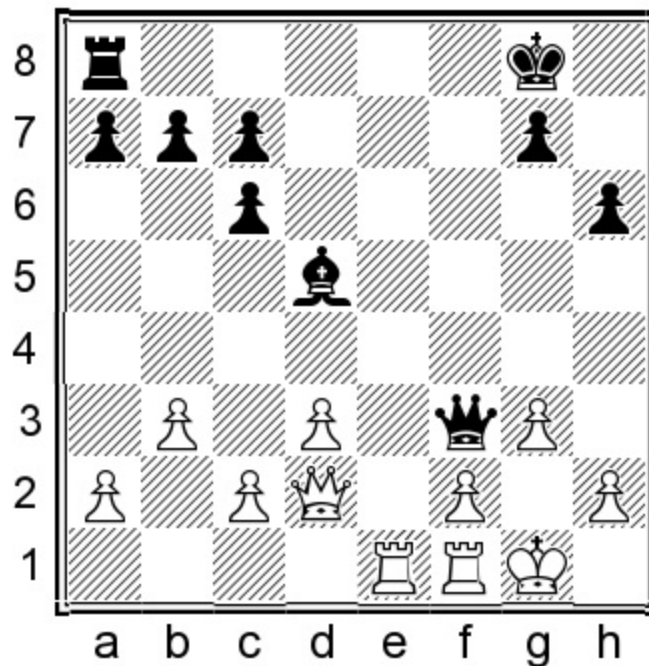
After 1.♘e4? ♔f3! with ♖xe4 to follow, is winning as well.

Using the active Rook for the defense with 1.♖fe1?, is followed by 1...♖f8!, when it becomes clear that White took the wrong rook, now that ♖xf2 is an imminent threat. 2.♖xe2 ♔xe2 3.♖f1 ♔e6! with the idea of ♔h3, when White’s position collapses.

1.♖ae1! ♖xd2

After 1...♖ae8 2.♘e4! White is out of danger by blocking the long diagonal. 2...♔f3 3.♖xe2 ♖xe4 4.dxe4 ♔xc3 5.exd5 with a balanced 2 Rooks vs Queen ending. Neither will 1...♔h3 bring Black victory, as after 2.♘e4! White parries the mating threat on g2.

2.♔xd2 ♔f3



Position after: 2... ♖f3

3. ♖e4!

The interruption of the opponent's forces on the diagonal prevents a mate on g2 or h1.

3... ♙xe4 4. dxe4

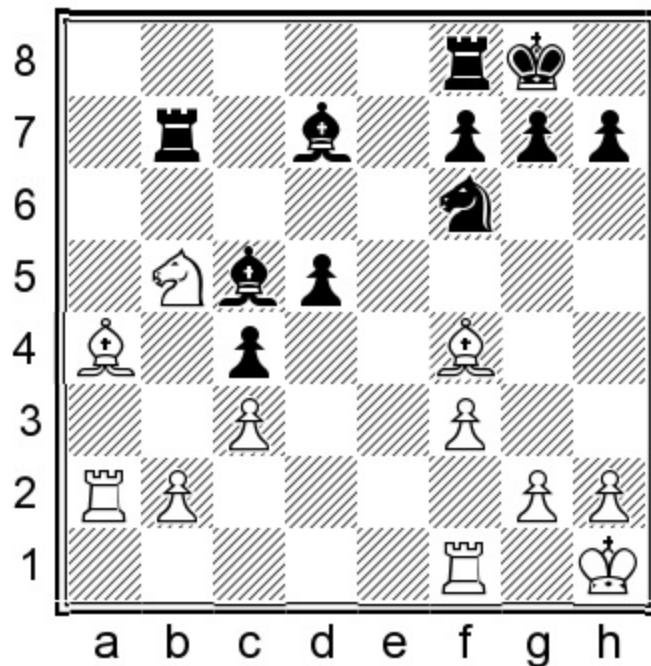
'and the game should be a draw.' In fact, White is enjoying already a stable advantage here as a result of successful defending.

4... ♖xe4 5. ♖e1 ♖f3 6. ♖e7

with a big advantage for White.

Based upon the maxim that the defender should be prepared to make concessions, one should take any necessary measures to find a way out. In the next example there is light at the end of the tunnel, hence, Lasker used extraordinary means to get there.

Lasker, Emanuel
Schlechter, Carl
 Vienna & Berlin 1910



22.♙d6!

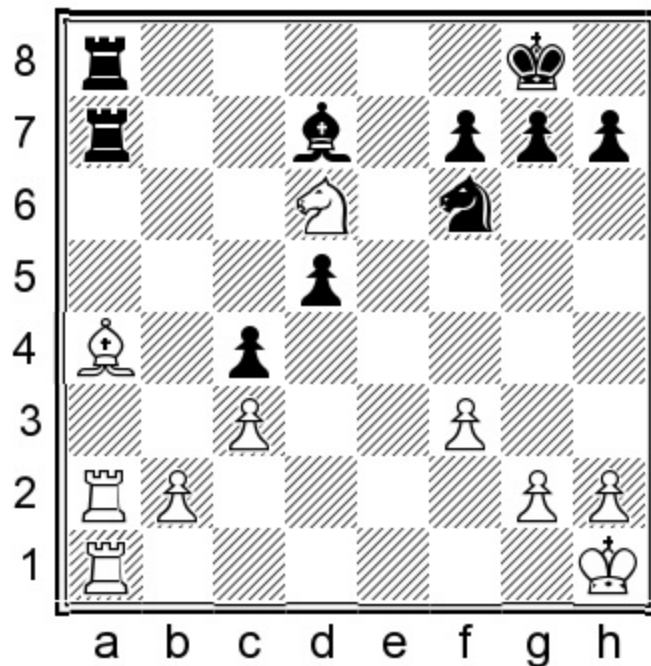
Far ahead of his time, Lasker succeeds in finding the only defense by means of an odd-looking exchange of pieces, all with the purpose to disentangle himself from the pin.

22...♗xd6 23.♘xd6

The Knight seems to be confined in Black's territory.

23...♞b6

Tarrasch buries the hatchet, not going for the most critical line avoiding wild complications. By a tactical trick he can disentangle from the pin. 23...♞a7 24.♞fa1 ♞fa8



Analysis after: 24... ♖fa8

25. ♙b3!! ♜xa2 26. ♜xa2 ♜b8 27. ♙a4! [27. ♙c2? would still be leading to defeat, as the Knight will be trapped by: 27...g6!] 27... ♙xa4 28. ♜xa4 when the rook comes to the aid of the Knight.

24. ♙xd7 ♜xd7 25. ♜f5

White fixed his problems. After a couple of moves the game was drawn.

1/2-1/2

Attack and defense in balanced positions

Notwithstanding Lasker's appraisal for Steinitz's groundbreaking method, he criticizes Steinitz that balanced positions, thus without an attacker and defender, are left out of his consideration. Lasker's comparison of a thunderstorm hovering over the landscape with a balanced position resisting an attack, is – let's put it that way – striking:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

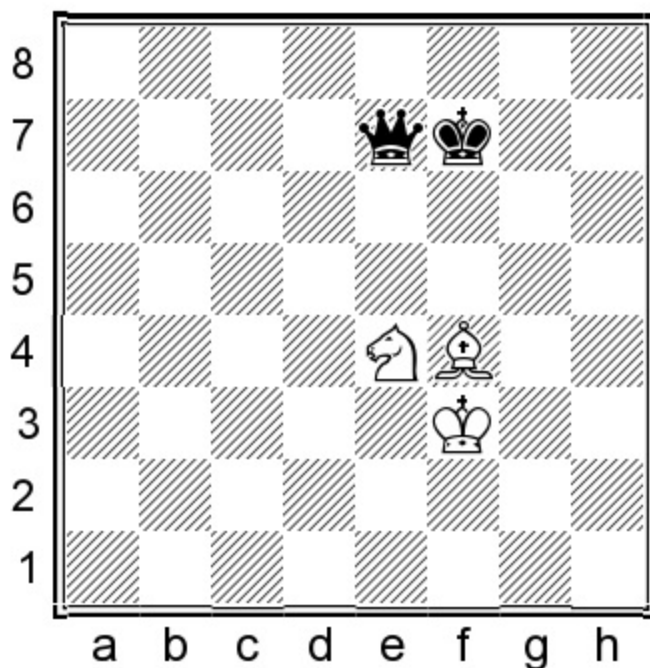
‘An attack in a balanced position bears some likeness to a thunderstorm. The clouds hovering over a peaceful landscape carry here positive, there negative electricity, and suddenly, (..) there are discharges, from cloud to cloud, from cloud to earth. The landscape is frightened, a terrific turmoil is set loose, after a little while the clouds break, the turmoil ceases, the sun shines again, and the landscape laughs merrily like a child.’⁽¹¹⁾

The reason for this omission of Steinitz can be that he hardly ever witnessed any balanced position in the time he lived. In the romantic era it was all about attack or defense. Moreover, according to

Lasker Steinitz's method should be broadened by the concept of the *cooperation of the pieces*, especially in balanced positions. In order to keep the balance, the player should in each and every occasion maintain the cooperation between the pieces. 'The result of cooperation in attacking positions is to strengthen each element of the group, in positions of defense, to protect each other, in positions of balance, to complement each other.'

Example of Cooperation

Lasker



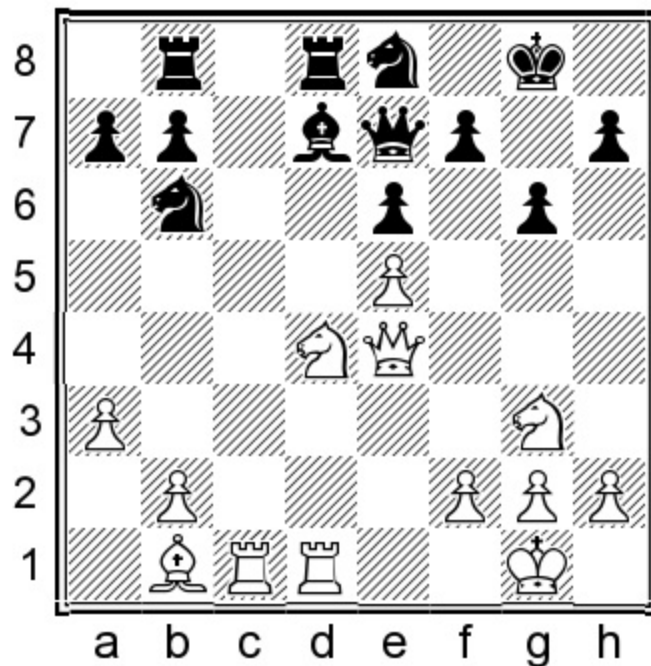
With this example, Lasker illustrates that the minor pieces cover similar surrounding squares, and for that reason they do not complement each other. Instead, after ♞g3 the Knight form together with the Bishop a phalanx on both the white as black squares.

In addition to the principle of cooperation of the pieces, Lasker complements Steinitz's theory with the *principle of proportion*. Like in criminal case law where the punishment of an offender should fit the crime, in chess the plan should correspond with the advantage: how larger the advantage the more ambitious the plan. 'The aim of an attack must be proportionate to the advantage upon which the plan for the attack is based upon.' Likewise, the defender should allocate his concessions wisely. In other words, the attacker should avoid overrating his position whereas the defender ought to counterattack only when it does no irreparable harm to his position.

Euwe, Max

Lasker, Emanuel

Zürich 1934



Lasker is facing a small but annoying positional disadvantage. He has little room to manoeuvre his pieces. 21...♘b6-d5 (21...♘d5) would have solved all his problems, but this move finds its refutation in 22.♙a2.

With modest means, in order to avoid making a concession larger than the position permits, he finds a defensive resource.

21...♙a4!

Provoking the weakening move b2-b3, after which Black takes control over d5.

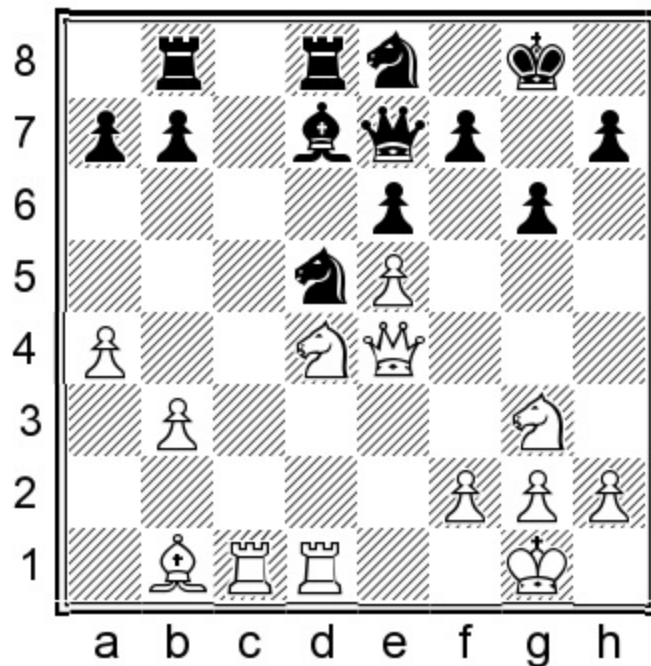
22.b3

In case of 22.♞d3 ♞bc8 23.♞e1 ♞c5! in order to attack the e5-pawn with 24...♘c4.

22...♙d7

The Bishop retreats the very next move! Now that a3 is hanging, maybe even stronger was: 22...♙c6! 23.♘xc6 ♞xd1+ 24.♞xd1 bxc6 25.b4 c5 when Black's pieces become active.

23.a4 ♘d5



Position after: 23... ♖d5

A beautiful concept: the black Knight can't be driven away by ♙b1-a2 anymore now that the pawn has been lured to b3. Even here though, Euwe could still have fought successfully for the advantage with the elegant 24. ♚e1! vacating the e4-square for one of White's pieces. In the game, Euwe starts to drift slowly but surely into an inferior position.

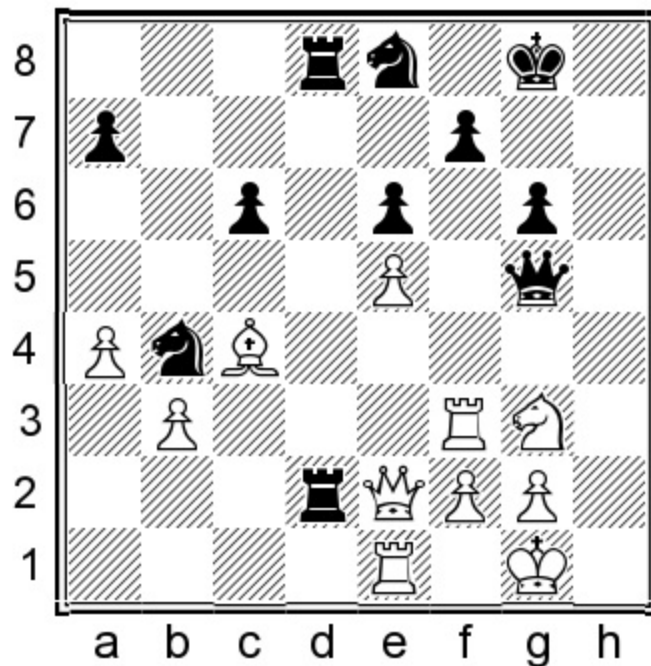
24. ♙d3 ♜bc8 25. ♙c4 ♙c6 26. ♖xc6 bxc6 27. ♞d3 ♘b4 28. ♞f3 ♞c7!

As White is set to launch a kingside attack with h2-h4-h5, Lasker starts his counter operation.

29. h4 ♞cd7 30. h5

The black player seizes the initiative with the following two strong moves.

30... ♚g5! 31. ♞e1 ♞d4! 32. hxg6 hxg6 33. ♚e2 ♞d2



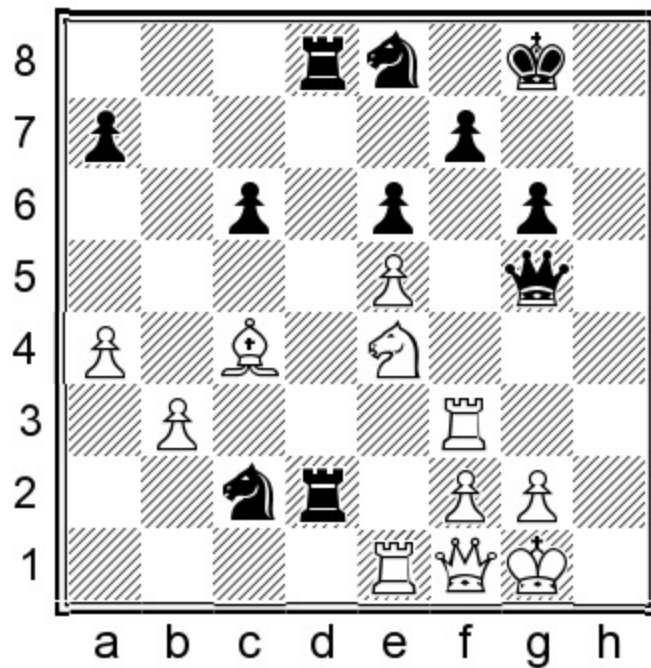
Position after: 33...♖d2

Lasker has taken over the initiative now and Euwe is on the back foot.

34.♜f1?

Better was 34.♜e3!, searching for counterplay. 34...♜xe3 35.fxe3! By thus opening the f-file, Euwe could have created the necessary counterplay. 35...♞d3 36.♙xd3 ♜2xd3 37.♞e4! Despite being a pawn down, White has obtained sufficient counterplay along the f-file. 37...♜xb3 38.♜ef1! ♜b7 39.♞g5♞ White threatens to take on f7, or after ♜dd7 on e6.

34...♞c2 35.♞e4



Position after: 35. ♖e4

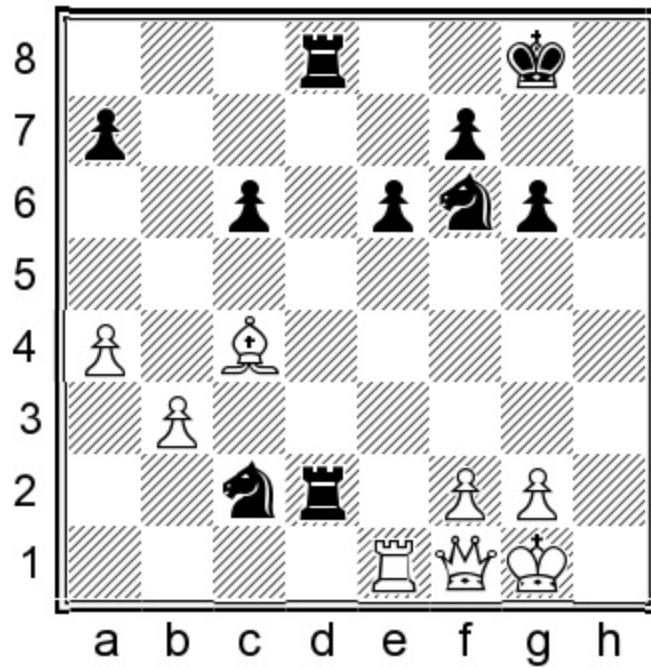
35... ♕xe5!

An exquisite queen sacrifice, after which Black takes full control over the board due to his active pieces.

36. ♘f6+

After 36. ♘d2, Black will just take on e1.

36... ♕xf6 37. ♖xf6 ♘xf6

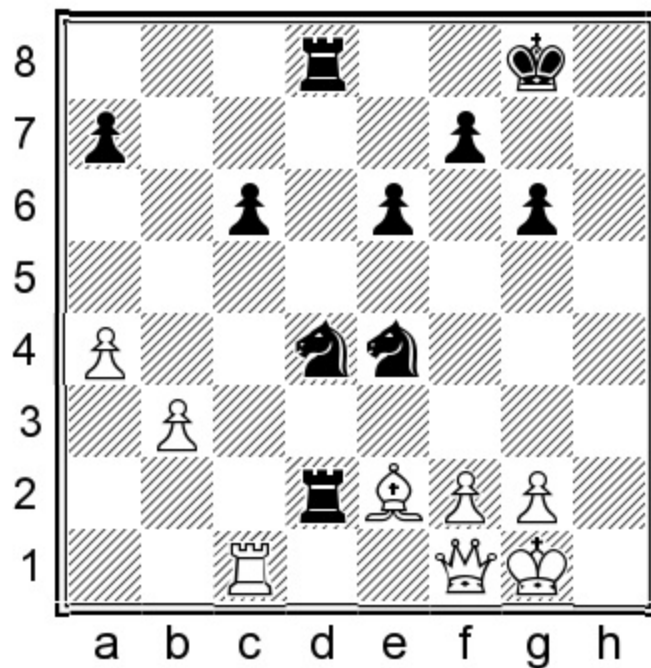


Position after: 37... Nxf6

38. Rc1

Euwe is holding on to his material advantage. Meanwhile, 38. Re2 was the only move to stay in the game. After 38... Rd1 39. Rxc2 Rxf1+ 40. Qxf1 , Black still has plenty of technical difficulties to overcome before he can win.

38... Ne4! 39. Qe2 Nd4



Position after: 39... ♖d4

A picturesque image of the chess landscape after a fierce struggle: the beautiful central Knights cover more squares than Lasker could have expected they would in his wildest dreams.

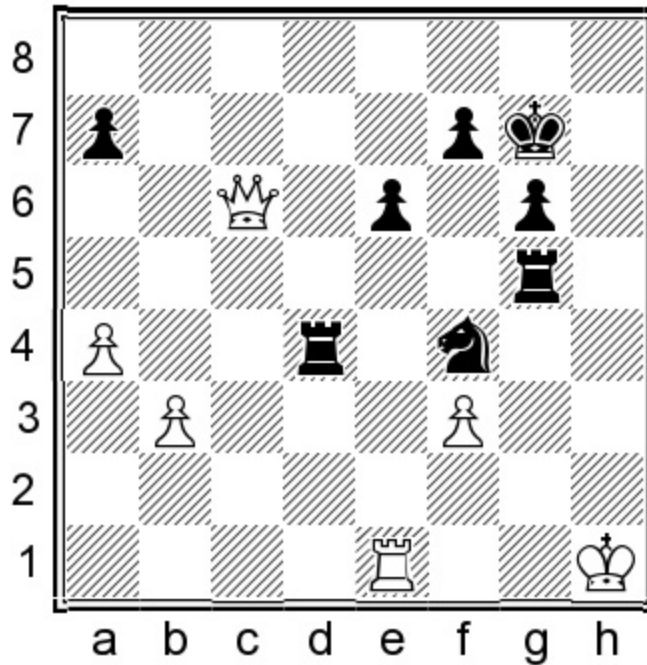
40. ♘f3 ♗xf2 41. ♕c4 ♗d3 42. ♖f1 ♗e5!

Black's dominance in the centre is converted in an attack on the King.

43. ♕b4 ♗exf3+ 44. gxf3 ♗e2+ 45. ♔h2 ♗f4+ 46. ♔h1 ♖2d4 47. ♕e7 ♔g7!

Clearing the path towards the h-file for the Rook.

48. ♕c7 ♖8d5 49. ♖e1 ♖g5 50. ♕xc6



Position after: 50. ♕xc6

Black fully exploited his dominant piece activity, and needs only one final idea to end the game in style.

50... ♖d8!

With a mate on the next move on h8.

0-1

The style of play illustrated by Lasker, is the cautious maneuvering of Lasker, while his pieces operate harmoniously and protect each other and taking up his role as defender he wisely refrains

from any wild and disproportionate counter-offense. The measured outbreak with 21...♙a4 and 22...♙d7 doesn't break the harmony between his pieces, and improves the weakest link in the position: the disadvantage of the lack of space for Black in the center. For Lasker it is of the greatest importance to the positional player that 'he has to prepare for attacks and defenses long before they become actual, and that the defense has to make *no greater concessions than counterattack can regain.*'

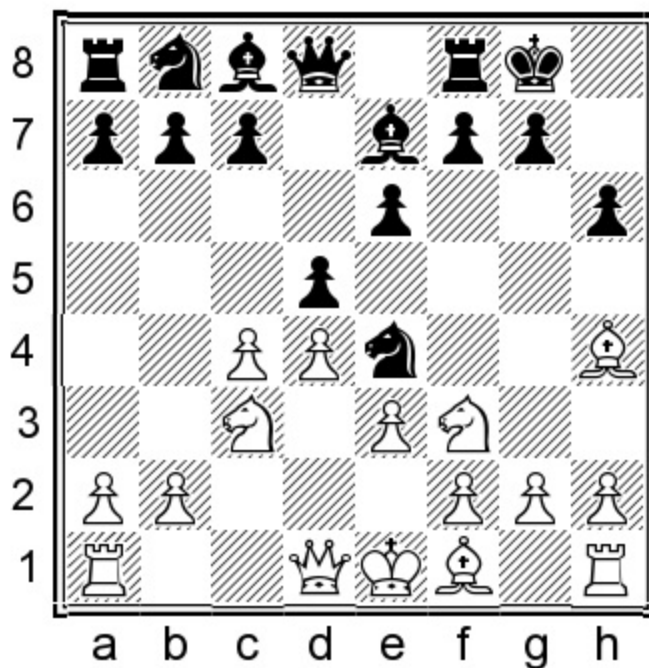
Defensive play in the opening

Lasker preferred cautious and defensive play in the opening with the black pieces, reinforcing his position first. According to the late American Grandmaster Reuben Fine (1914-1993), Lasker was 'a well-rounded chess artist' with a strong need for clarity and order.⁽¹²⁾

Masters usually keep only those openings which fit their temperaments (Fine) and Lasker's defensive and positional touch was seen in the openings he played. The Lasker Defense in the Queen's Gambit Declined is known for its passive nature.

Queen's Gambit Declined

Lasker's Defense

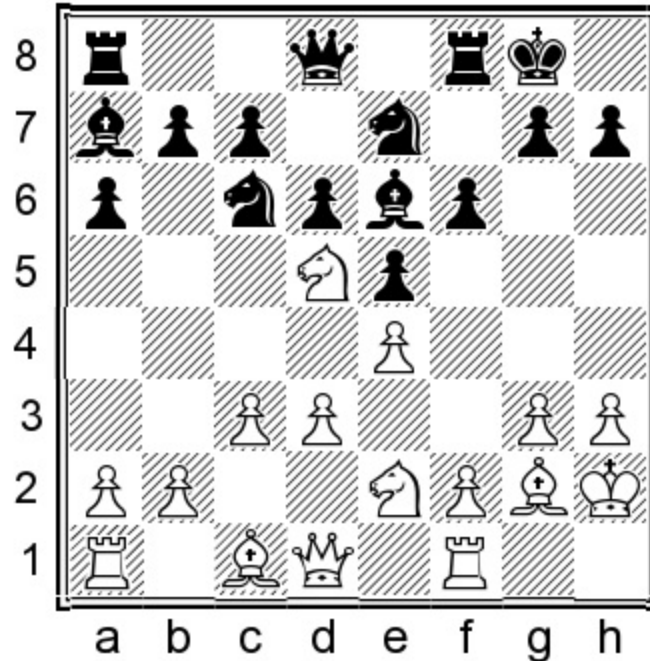


Black aims for a quick exchange of two minor pieces by 7...♞e4, releasing the tension, after which he completes the development of his other two minor pieces on the queenside (e.g. c6, ♞d7, b6 and ♙b7), setting up a phalanx of pawns (a7-b6-c6-d5-e6-f7-g7-h6). His opening play is inspired by and based upon the legacy of the old master Francois Philidor (1726-1795), who proclaimed that the pawn structure is the *soul of chess*, as on the maxim that the line of resistance should be everywhere equally strong. Every pawn move changes the structure and is irreversible, a fact that Lasker was well aware of.

Another example stresses again Lasker's strong need in the opening with Black to defend his weakest

points by setting up a solid pawn chain.

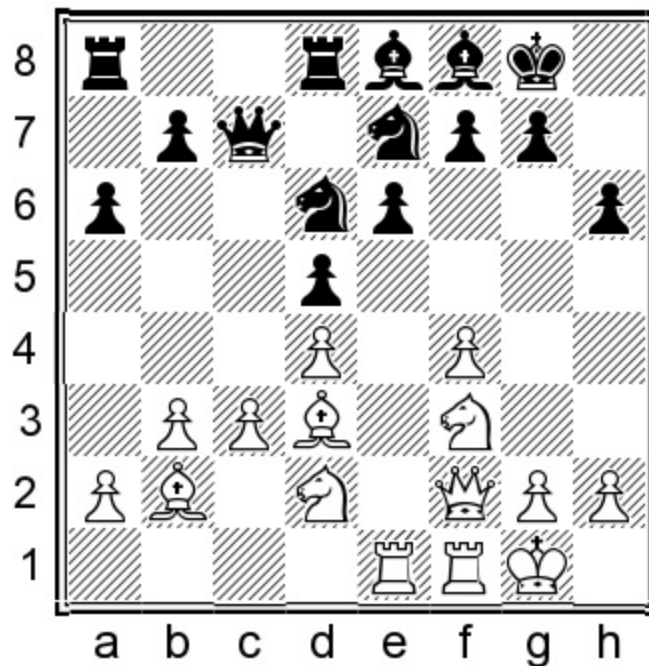
Mieses, Jacques
Lasker, Emanuel
Leipzig 1889



Lasker, fully aware that according to Steinitz' formulation his king position could well be the weak link, has just taken the defensive precaution of playing an early ...f7-f6, thereby pre-empting White's possible idea of f2-f4-f5 (by vacating the f7-square for the bishop's retreat and preventing the pawn pushing on to f6.)

Another distinctive example of Lasker's early style was the following game against Henry Bird.

Bird, Henry
Lasker, Emanuel
Liverpool 1890



The foundation of Lasker’s defensive set up here is again the principle of *prophylaxis*. Lasker positioned his bishops on the flexible squares e8 and f8, defending the squares f7 and g7. His Knights have been centralized and can defend the king’s position at a moment’s notice, among other duties.

From this seemingly passive position the pieces slowly emerged and took on more active roles, while Lasker continued to adhere to the principle that pawn moves can’t be reversed, since they should be used sparingly until it is clear which squares are most important to defend. Bird played here **19.g4**, which was responded with the timid **19...♞ac8**, instead of the stronger **19...♙b5!** **20.♙xb5 axb5!**

In conclusion, the principles of Steinitz, and worked out by Lasker, are (still) relevant at present for the defending side. We learned that the stability of a position can be gauged by its least stable point and that the defender should try to cement the weakest link by making the least concession necessary. As seen in the next chapter, albeit we shouldn’t take the principles too dogmatic, they definitely leave a footprint in the evolution of defense in chess.

Section 3.4 – The hypermodern School of Réti

Richard Réti

Richard Réti (1889-1929) was an Austro-Hungarian grandmaster, composer of endgame studies and chess author.⁽¹³⁾

He advocated a new movement in chess after Lasker’s dogmatic approach: *hypermodernism*. This doctrine had a lot of followers, amongst them Alekhine, Bogoljubow, Breyer, Maroczy and Tartakower. Réti was far ahead of his time in his pragmatic approach and view to chess.

With regard to the principles of Steinitz, Réti expressed the following criticism:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“(.) the universal strategical chess principles are maxims of treatment which may, perhaps,

in the majority of instances find a practical application, yet, in some cases, are better not resorted to.”

Réti doesn't regard the principles as superfluous, but the chess rules must be subjected to careful consideration in each particular instance of intended application. Two games are almost never exactly alike, except of course in the opening phase. He disapproved the dogmatic maxims of Steinitz and Lasker. The application of a rule in chess may well be wrong if applied to an apparently similar position, when there is a more suitable or effective method of play.

One of his companions and chief representatives of the hypermodern school was Hungarian Grandmaster **Gyula Breyer (1893-1921)**. Like Réti, Breyer was a pioneer and destroyer of old principles, effecting reforms with his modern practical approach to the game. For instance, we get insight into his views from his analysis of the following game between Lasker and Capablanca.

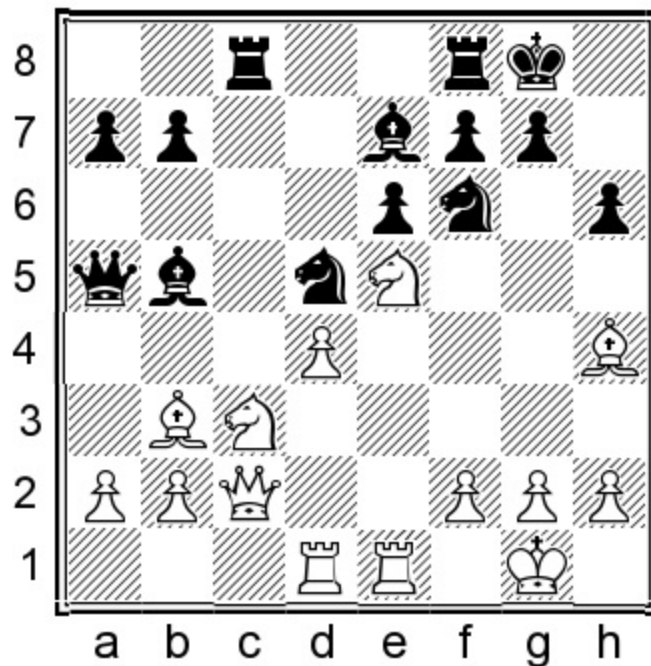
Most masters who were commentating this match had overlooked the promising continuation 17.♗xf6. The reason is to be found in the 'fallacious earlier chess technique', according to Réti. The bishop move both cedes the bishop pair and helps Black in his development. This non-standard move would have almost been impossible to find for Steinitz' disciples, according to Breyer. When I delved deeper into the position with the help of the computer, it appeared that Breyer overlooked two non-obvious defensive moves himself in his analysis.



Gyula Breyer

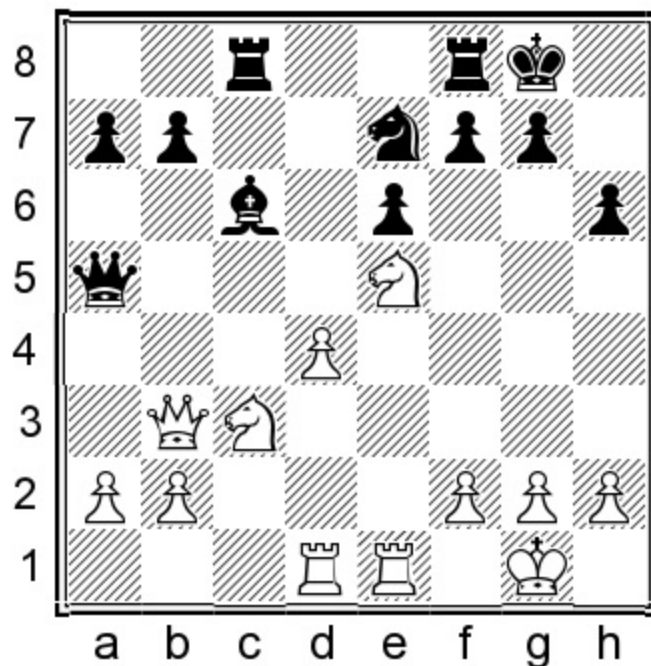


Lasker, Emanuel
Capablanca, Jose Raul
Havana 1921



17. ♖xf6!

This illogical move is almost impossible to find for a chess player who applied the old principles of Steinitz, according to Breyer. White gives up his strong Bishop on h4 for a Knight and gets rid of the tension. As Breyer rightly points out in his analysis, after 17. ♖xf6, White gets the initiative. The text move was 17. ♖xd5?, but then after 17... ♘xd5 18. ♖xe7 ♘xe7 19. ♔b3 ♖c6 Black was simply better.



Analysis after: 19... ♖c6

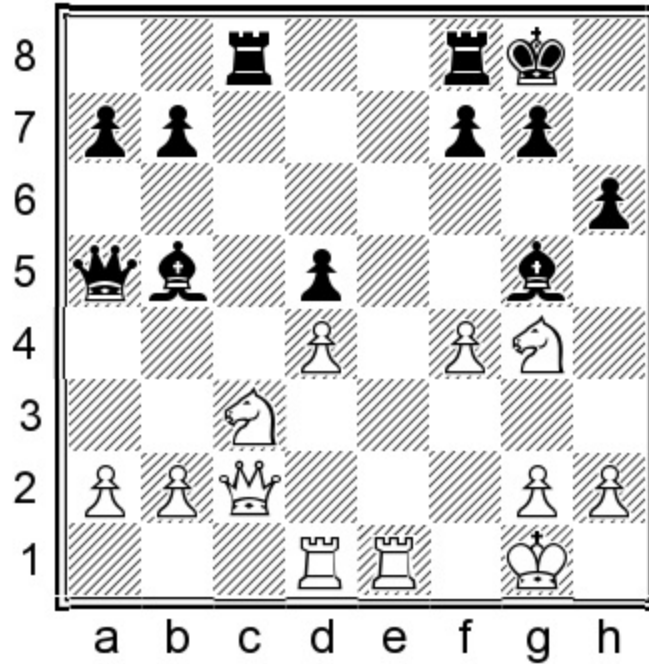
Capablanca finally won the game thanks to his better pawn structure and his fine technique (Lasker -

Capablanca, Havana 1921 0-1).

17.♙xf6! ♗xf6

Lifting the blockade by 17...♗xf6, would prove fatal for Black after 18.♘g6! The Knight can't be taken, due to 19.♙xe6, followed by 20.♙xc8. 18...♖fe8 19.♖xe6!! This is leading to a forced mate. 19...fxe6 20.♙xe6+ ♖h7 21.♗f8+ ♖h8 22.♚h7+!! ♗xh7 23.♘g6#

18.♙xd5 exd5 19.♘g4 ♙g5 20.f4

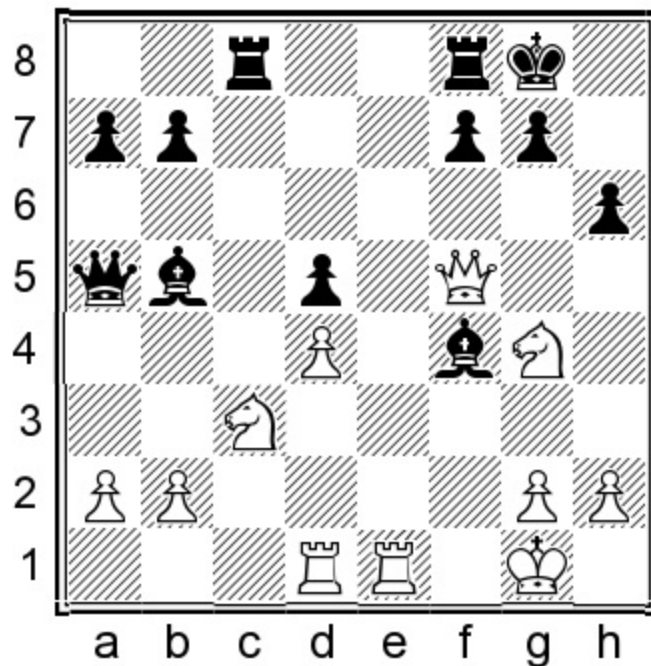


Position after: 20.f4

Breyer was convinced that this move proved fatal for Black, due to the trick of ♙xf4, ♚f5 and ♚xd5. But this judgement turns out to be premature.

20.♚f5 ♖cd8 21.♘xd5 ♚xa2 leads to unclear play.

20...♙xf4 21.♚f5

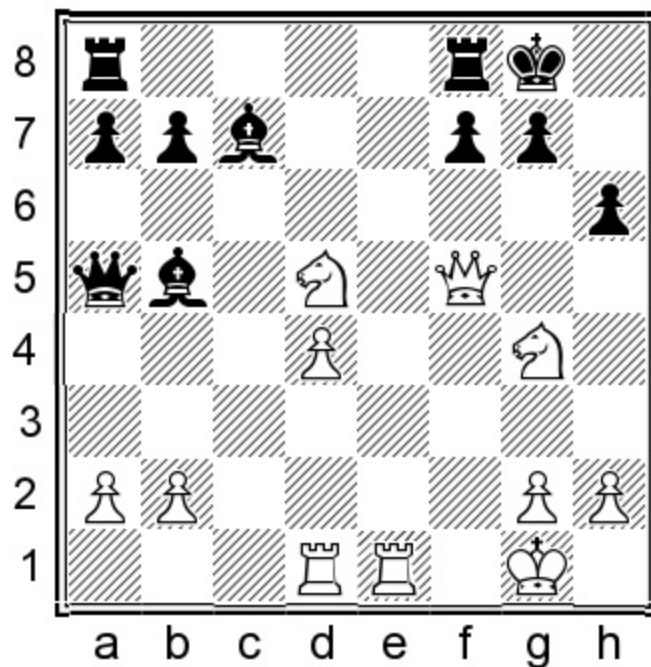


Position after: 21. ♔f5

21... ♖g5!

Breyer (wrongly) assumed that both 21... ♖g5 and 21... ♖c7 were losing.

And indeed, after 21... ♖c7 Black will collapse after 22. ♗xd5 ♖a8

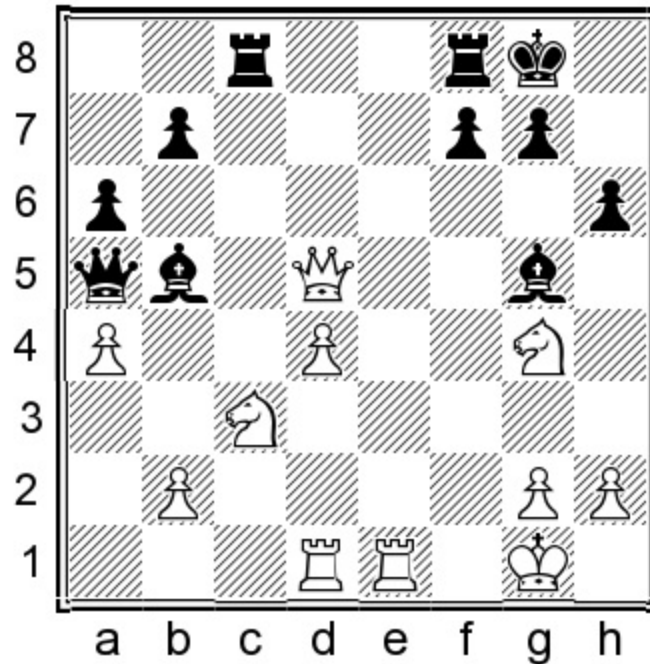


Analysis after: 22... ♖a8

23. ♗xh6+! gxh6 24. ♗f6+ ♔g7 25. ♗h5+ and mate in two. However, with the text move Breyer

would have experienced just what he thought could befall Capablanca: a move which within his mental structures should lead to bad outcomes, but in fact is tactically perfectly sound.

22. ♖xd5 a6 23. a4



Position after: 23.a4

Here Breyer stops his analysis, assuming that White will win a piece. It's remarkable that Breyer, who was so successful in criticizing Steinitz' theory and sharing this seemingly illogical variation starting with 17. ♙xf6, made this assumption. (To be fair, not even every modern annotator checks their sub-lines down to the 6th move.) In some sense, you could say Breyer's pragmatic theory was more successful than he thought, since it provides both the justification and refutation of his line.

23... ♜cd8!

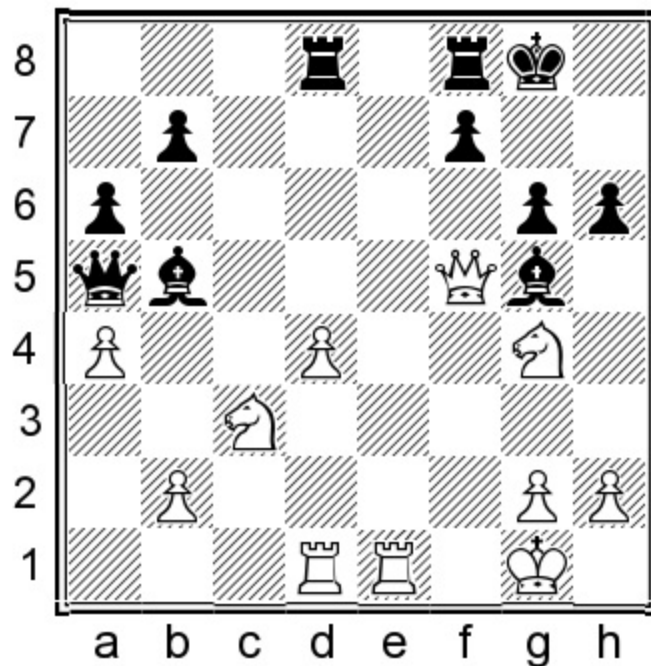
This intermediate rook move chases the Queen from the 5th rank, breaking the pin.

24. ♖f5

Maintaining the pin, otherwise his position could slide due to the strong black Bishop pair.

After 24. ♖e5 ♜fe8! Black also survives.

24...g6!



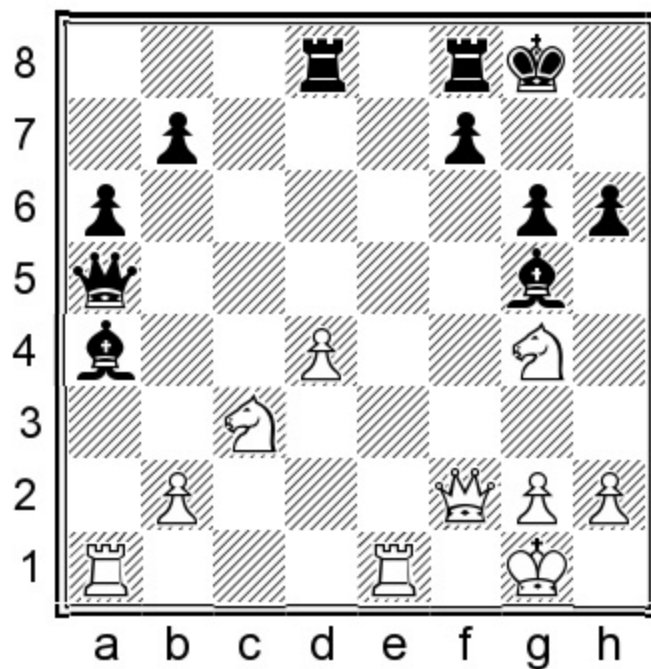
Position after: 24...g6!

Now the Queen has no choice but to say farewell to the 5th rank and hence the pin. Nonetheless, there is still one hope for him to claim an advantage.

25. ♖f2

25. ♖c5 would have led to a move repetition, after 25... ♜c8 26. ♚d5 ♜fd8 27. ♚e5 ♜e8 with equal play.

25... ♙xa4! 26. ♜a1



Position after: 26. ♖a1

White has played all the strongest moves in his pursue for an advantage. The Bishop is pinned, but with a further *unorthodox* move Capablanca would have managed to escape fate!

26... ♖f5!

Black survives, leaving his pinned Bishop ‘en prise’, but assails the Knight on g4.

27. ♖xf5 gxf5 28. ♗xh6+ ♕xh6 29. ♖xa4

when a draw is the most likely outcome concerning this final position of this unravelled analysis of Breyer.

Thus, Breyer’s analysis can be considered as a real improvement on Capablanca’s play. However, modern engines reveal further depth within and beyond his lines. Breyer’s refutation, refuted by modern analysis actually fully in line with hypermodernism’s doctrine: fate strikes unexpectedly and in situations there may exist the most unpredictable escapes! So, dear reader, bear this in mind and avoid drawing *black-and-white situations* pictures of a situation, how hard it even may appear for us, chess players!

Dr. Tartakower reveals with his following definition of the inner strength of the ‘irrational’ approach of the hypermodernism’s doctrine towards Steinitz’ narrow-minded, too dogmatic, maxims:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“They involved not only plans which had never disclosed themselves to us before, schemes which gave to the games an unhealthy stamp: moves which scoffed at any endeavor to obtain freer development of pieces, but alas, finally, methods which seek salvation in their malignant and endless storing up of latent energy, and which in all earnestness were held up to us in the light of science.”⁽¹⁴⁾

Tartakower

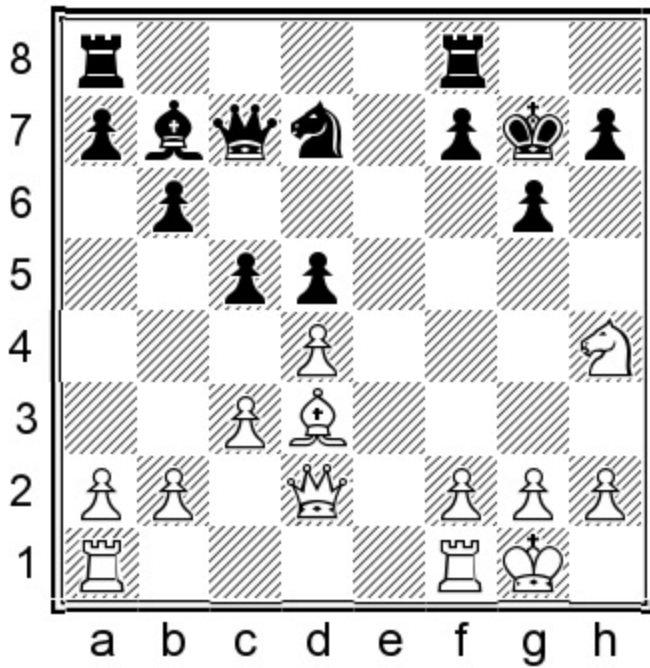
As Tartakower puts it (excessively, with a strong feeling for exaggeration in my opinion), the idols of the old school were smashed by the unprejudiced hypermodern style! Maroczy – another follower of the Hypermodern School – was known as the ‘Master of Defence’ amongst his contemporaries.⁽¹⁵⁾

In the following position, he is faced with the ‘threat’ of ♖g5 and ♗f5+. Therefore, he urgently takes pre-emptive measures by means of f7-f6, preventing ♖d2-g5. Most likely, commentators of the time praised the move as another good example of Maroczy’s anticipating defensive skills, notwithstanding the computer has a different view.

Charousek, Rudolf Rezsó

Maroczy, Geza

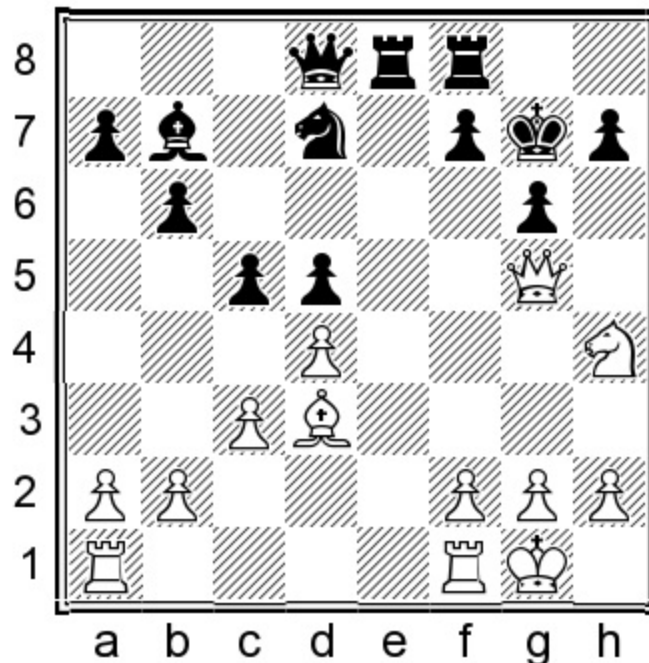
Budapest 1895



16...f6?

For the 19th century such a precautionary measure was already progress: Black takes time out to prevent ♔g5. However, this move implies a weakening of the 7th rank and the king's position.

Therefore, the even calmer and 'sober' computer suggestion of 16...♖ae8! was better, not fearing 17.♚g5, as the threat seems illusory. Black then has the strong 17...♛d8!

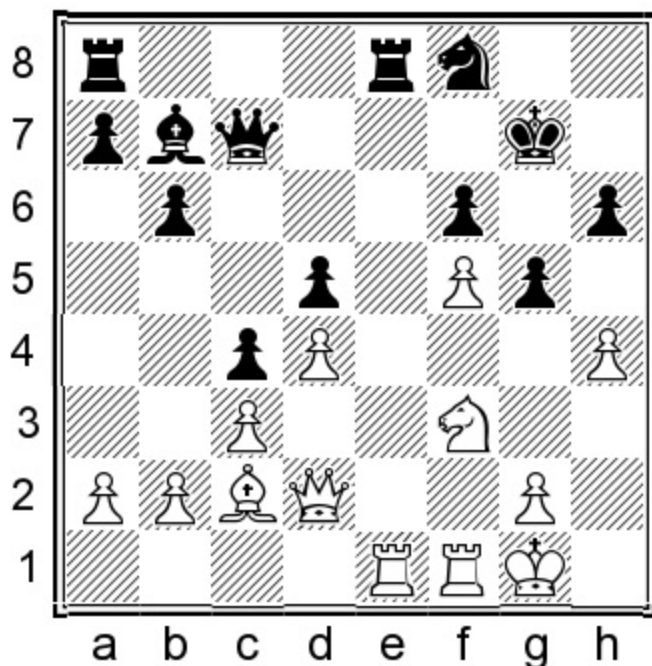


Analysis after: 17...♛d8!

18. ♖f5+ ♔h8! Without making any concessions, Black anticipated on the threats. 19. ♖xd8 ♜xd8 20. ♖d6 ♙c6, solving his problems entirely.

16...f6? 17. ♖ae1 ♜fe8 18.f4 ♖f8 19. ♜e3?

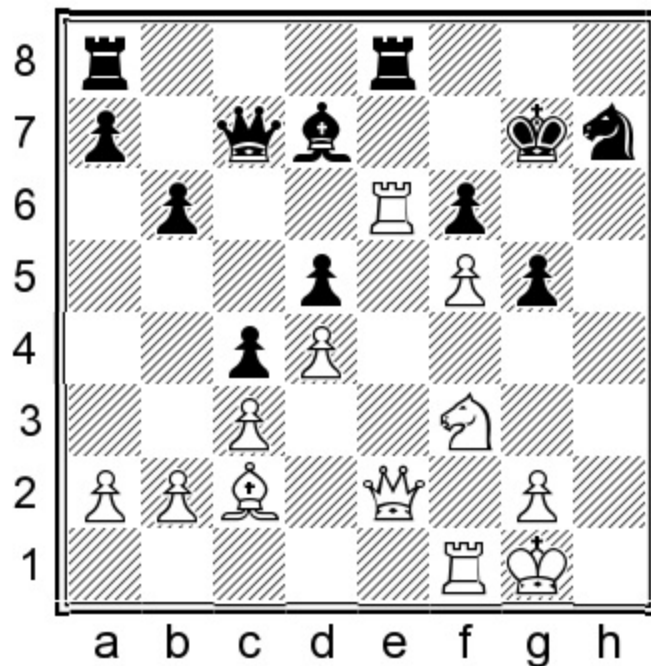
19.f5! Maroczy likely perceived this threat as harmless, because of 19...g5. 20. ♖f3 c4 21. ♙c2 h6 22.h4!



Analysis after: 22.h4!

Black is now on the brink of the abyss. The kingside fortifications erected by Charousek are not as impermeable as presumed. ...hxg5 hxg5 ♖xg5 is the threat, crushing Black's king position, while after 22... ♖h7 23. ♜e6 ♙c6 24. ♖e2 ♙d7 25.hxg5 hxg5 matters are not simple either.





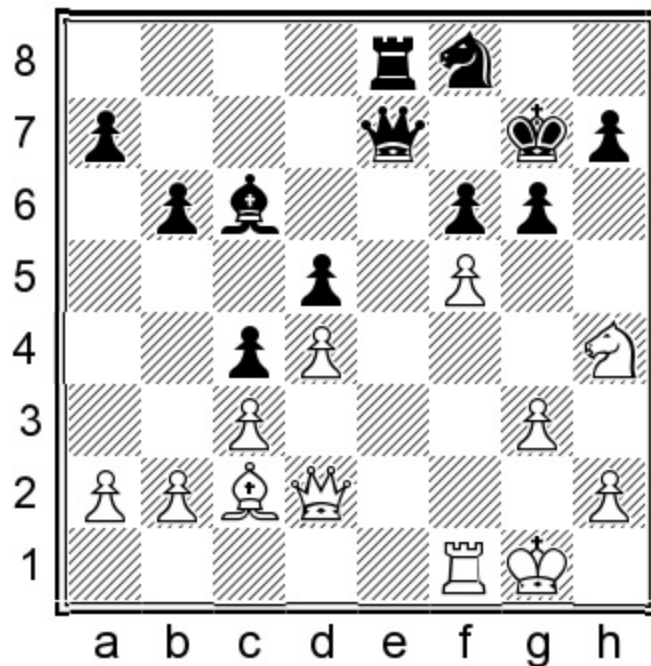
Analysis after: 25...hxg5

White just brings too many pieces in after 26. ♖h2! ♙xe6 27. fxex6 with the idea of ♙e2-♙h5-♙g6+ and/or ♘g4. The defenses crumble against the combined efforts of all four white pieces.

19...c4 20. ♙c2 ♜xe3 21. ♙xe3 ♙c6 22. ♙g3

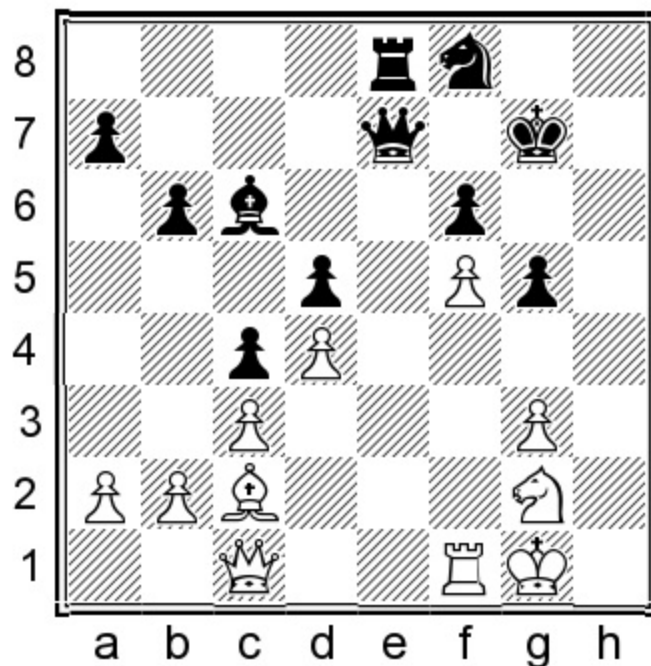
Black has nothing to fear after this move. Nevertheless, White had a chance to expose the weaknesses which had to be created first.

22.g3! with the plan of f5 and ♘g2-e3-g4 is also a very promising continuation for White. 22...♞e8 23. ♙d2 ♙e7 24. f5!



Analysis after: 24.f5!

Again, White's attack is unstoppable. After 24...g5, the white pieces become optimally situated on the weakened g4 and h5 squares. 24...g5 This pawn move gives up on the protection of the squares g4 and h5. [24...♔e3+? is losing due to a knight fork: 25.♕xe3 ♖xe3 26.fxg6 hxg6 27.♙xg6 with 28.♘f5+ to follow.] 25.♘g2 ♕e2 26.♖c1! a subtle move intending ♙c2-d1-h5, taking over the initiative. 26...♕e7 27.h4 h6 28.hxg5 hxg5



Analysis after: 28...hxg5

29.♙d1! Which (normal) human chess player would have pondered such a delicate rerouting of the bishop? 29...♞d8 30.♙h5! ♞e4 31.♖f2 ♙e8 32.♙f3 ♞e7 33.♗e3 followed by ♞h1 and ♗g4, from where the Knight hits both f6 and prepares the invasion on h6. White obtained a much better position.

22...♞e8 23.♗f5+ ♖h8 24.♗e3 f5

The Knight on e3 is misplaced and the position closed. After some shuffling of the pieces the players agreed to a draw.

½-½

Section 3.5 – The dominance of Botvinnik & Smyslov

Mikhail Botvinnik

We shall continue investigating the rise of the level of defense using the evidence we have: games from the best players of their respective eras. In the middle third of the 20th century, the hypermodern school gave way to the dominance of two Soviet players, causing further evolution of defensive techniques.

Mikhail Botvinnik (1911-1995) and Vasily Smyslov (1921-2010) were indisputably dominant in world chess straight after the Second World War, and struck fear into the hearts and minds of their opponents.

Botvinnik, the sixth World Champion, reigned for the years 1948-1957, 1958-1960 and 1961-1963.

He was a child of Communism and his style reflected this; it was positional, cold and merciless, and he left many opponents bereft of both counterplay and hope, tormenting them slowly and bringing home the bacon in the end. His games also included deep opening preparation, and he held the crown 12 whole years.⁽¹⁶⁾

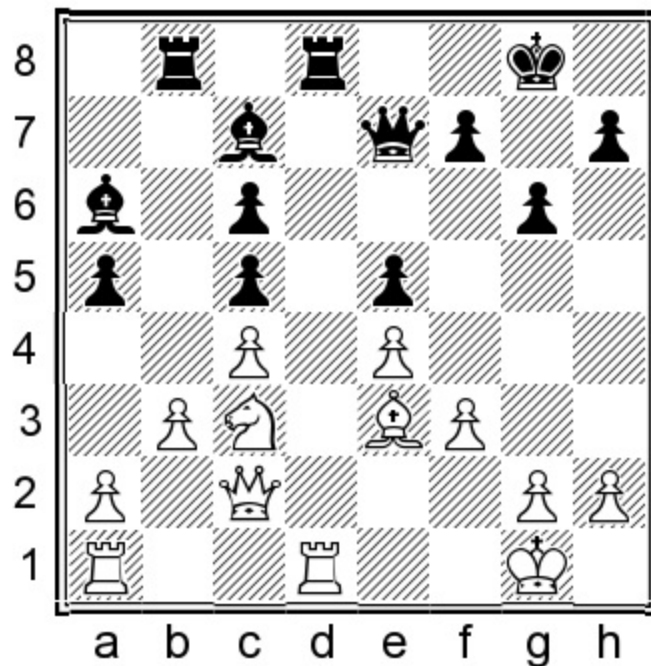
I found it interesting to subject the games of these two greats, especially Botvinnik – sometimes nicknamed ‘the tank’ – to computer analysis. In other words, to figure out what it was that made them seem invincible, and what they have to teach us in the computer era.



Liublinsky, Victor Alexandrovic

Botvinnik, Mikhail

Moscow 1943/44



25...♞d4!?

Botvinnik gives his move an exclamation mark, citing the advantages of the repaired pawn chain and the passed pawn, as the closed nature of the position deprives the white Rooks of any activity. However, in the ensuing lines there occur many concrete ‘computerish’ breaks which give the Rooks a (perhaps better than) level playing field compared to the minor pieces.

26.♘e2

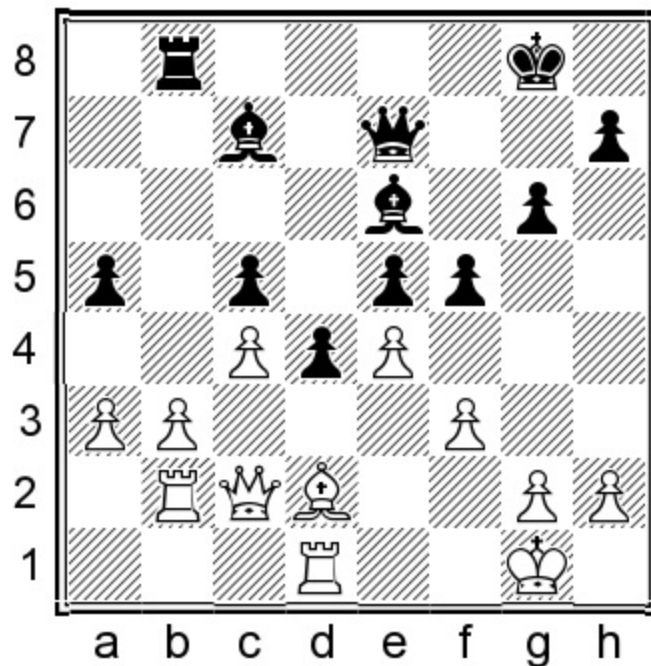
Lyubinsky prefers to take the Rook with his Knight and to retain his Bishop. A questionable decision, since the Knight would have been well placed on the blockading square d3, according to Botvinnik.

After 26...♙c8 27.♙xd4 cxd4 28.♘c1! he would have obtained a large advantage, but for the same reason after keeping the Bishop instead of the Knight on the board. In essence, White has to open the files on the queenside.

26...♙c8 27.♘xd4 cxd4 28.♙f2?

When Botvinnik mentions that his opponent is saddled with a dark squared Bishop (instead of the Knight) and thus completely without counterplay, Botvinnik missed several potential interesting and dynamic ideas to open the queenside files, assuming White was just obliged to await further developments.

White could have refuted this notion by, for example, 28.♙d2! with the idea of b3-b4. 28...c5 29.♞ab1 f5 30.a3 ♙e6 31.♞b2!



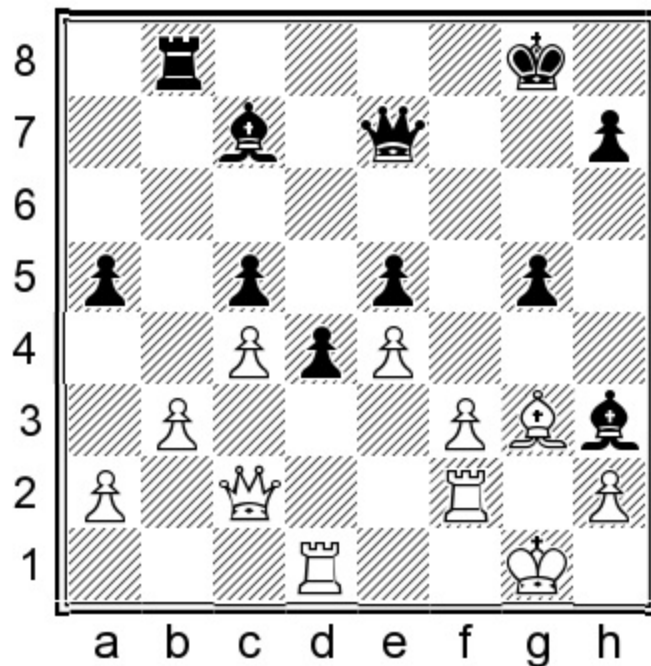
Analysis after: 31. ♖b2!

Now there is no way to stop the b3-b4 pawn break, when the files and ranks are opened and the Rooks become ‘monsters’. 31...f4 32.b4! axb4 33.axb4 cxb4 34.♖db1 when White has a winning advantage.

28...c5 29.♖f1 f5 30.♙g3?

White plays without a plan, which naturally is in Botvinnik’s favor.

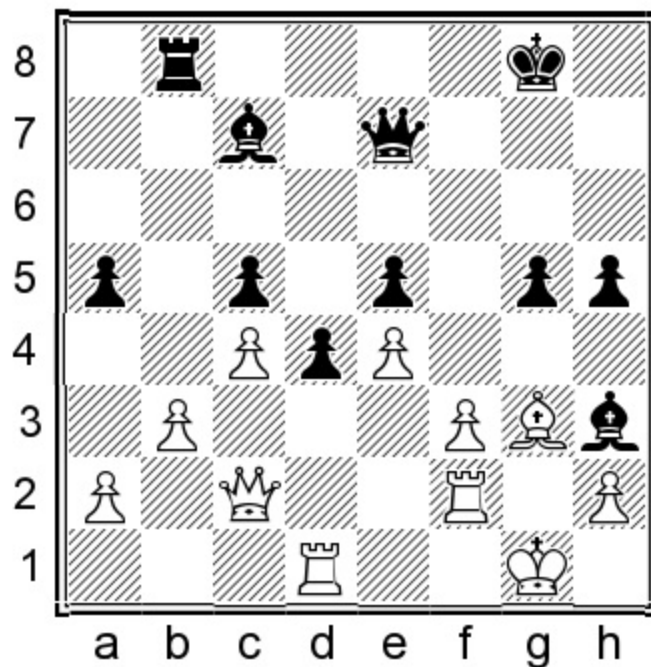
30...♙d7 31.♖ad1 f4 32.♙f2 g5 33.g4 fxg3 34.♙xg3 ♙h3 35.♖f2



Position after: 35. ♖f2

Although Botvinnik's rook sacrifice was necessary in a worse position and even gave him good practical chances, his evaluation of Black being clearly on top is a long way from the truth.

35...h5

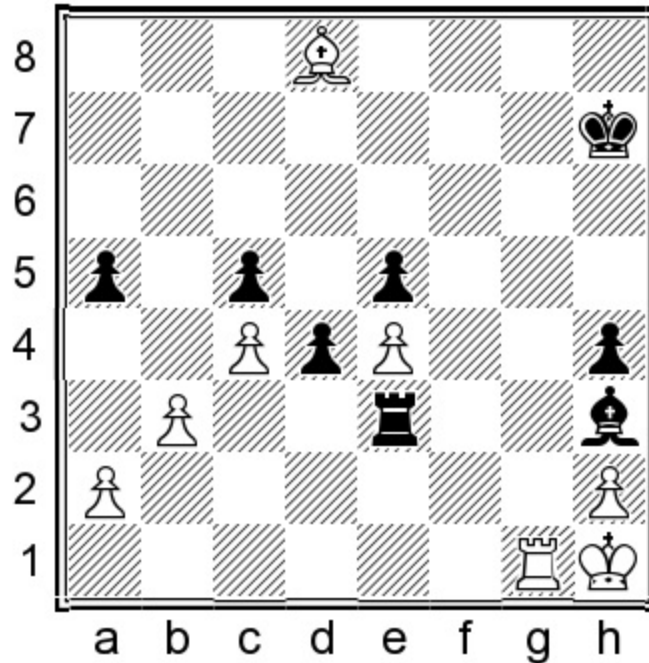


Position after: 35...h5

White's position has deteriorated quickly. Black has a beautiful square for the Bishop on h3, the

white King is weak and the pawn on f3 is a target for the Black pieces. White has not even made an attempt to use his pawn majority on the queenside. The finishing job of the game is as bread and butter to Botvinnik and needs no further comments.

36.♖fd2 h4 37.♙f2 ♜f8 38.♞d3 ♜f4 39.♔h1 ♔h7 40.♞g1 ♙d8 41.♚e2 ♜f7 42.♚d1 ♜h5 43.♙e3 ♜xf3+ 44.♚xf3 ♞xf3 45.♙xg5 ♞xd3 46.♙xd8 ♞e3



Position after: 46...♞e3

Botvinnik knew how to handle White's hesitant play. Nothing is left of his material advantage and promising position.

47.♙b6 (47.♙xa5 ♞xe4+) 47...♞xe4 48.♙xc5 ♞e2 49.♞d1 ♙g4 50.h3 ♙xh3 51.b4 ♙f5 52.♙d6 d3 53.bxa5 h3

0-1

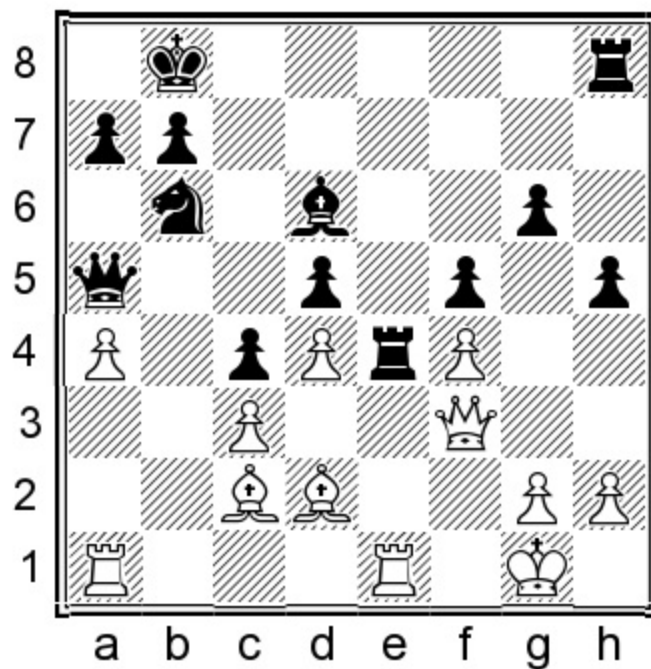
Although Botvinnik's rook sacrifice was necessary in an inferior position, he paints an overly rosy picture of his chances in his annotations to the game. If Lyublinsky had only been aware of the rich chances his position had to offer, he would surely have played more optimistically himself. The computer analysis of this game also reveals that when needs must, there is no more point in making a distinction between orthodox and unorthodox moves.

The heir to the throne got caught up in similar situation but from the other side.



Botvinnik – Smyslov (1957)

Smyslov, Vassily
Makogonov, Vladimir
 Moscow 1944

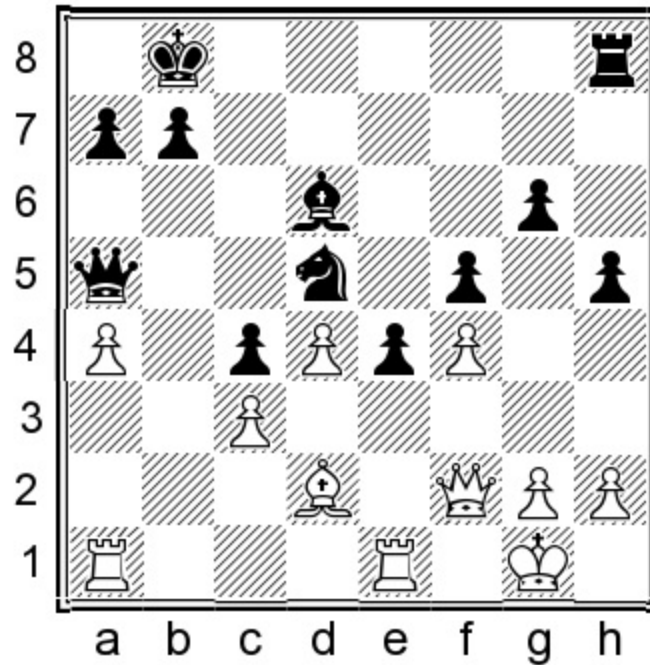


Usually, you'll get an exercise served from the attacking side finding the nice exchange sac after

24...♖e4. As you comprehend, we flip the coin due to the subject of this book about defense.

25.♗g3!

Studying exchange sacrifices from the books, we are used to a one-way street in which the brilliancy of the sac comes to light when it is accepted. For instance, after accepting the sacrifice with 25.♙xe4, the d5-square will be happily occupied by the Knight. 25...dxe4 26.♗f2 ♖d5

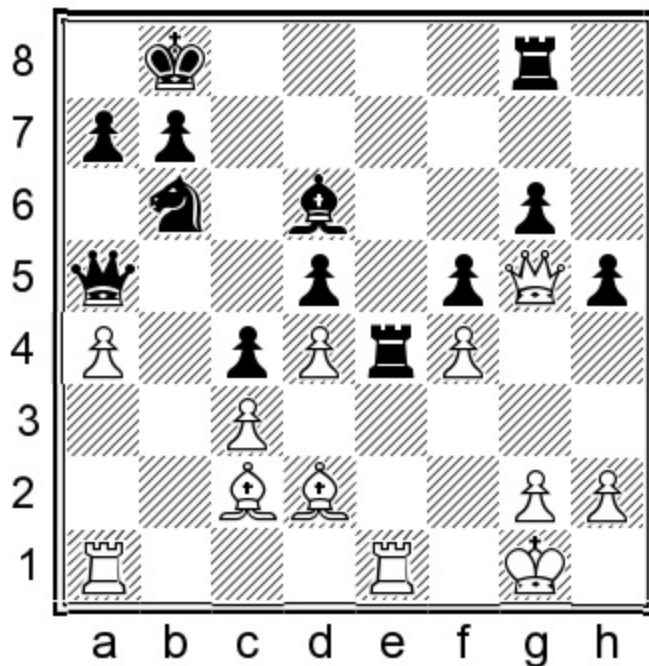


Analysis after: 26...♖d5

Black would have held all the aces. His central knight is more dominant than the Rooks.

White is actually not forced to take the Rook and can try to generate counterplay by activating his Queen.

25.♗g3! ♖g8 26.♗g5!



Position after: 26. ♔g5!

The queen sortie disrupts the coordination between black's pieces, and ♙e4 is still in the air.

26...♙e7

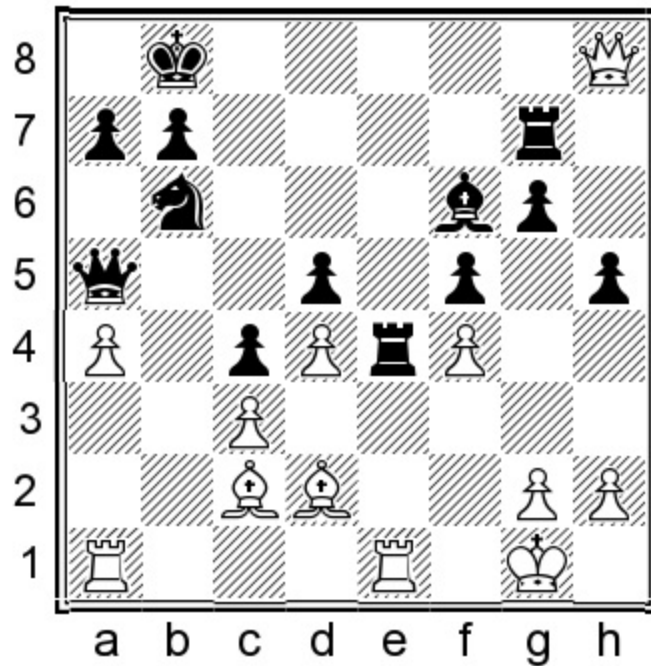
A) 26...♖xd4 27.♙e3 ♗xc3 28.♗f6! ♙c5 29.♗e5+ ♔a8 30.♘h1! when Black is losing material as he can't escape the pins.

B) 26...a6? in order to move the king to the safer place a7, loses after 27.♙xe4! dxe4 28.♖xe4 making use of the pin along the 5th rank.

27.♗h6 ♙f6 28.♗h7!

The queen took a special route via f3-g3-h4-g5-h6 and h7.

28...♖g7 29.♗h8+

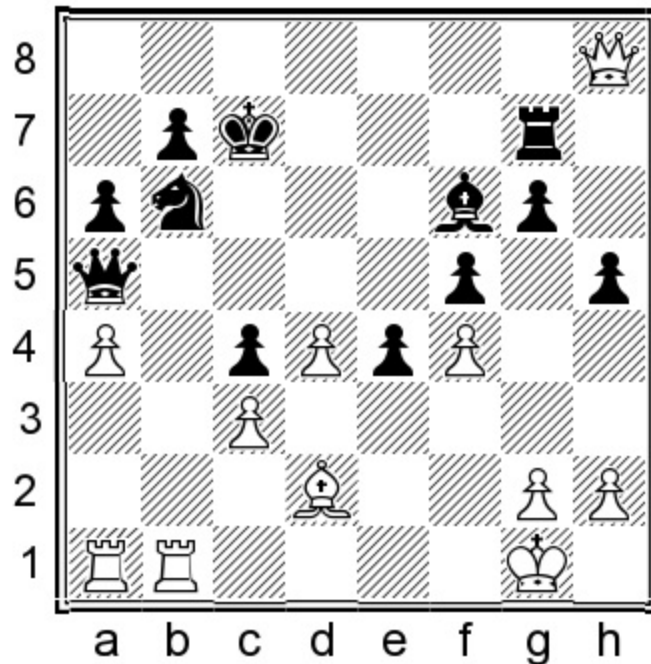


Position after: 29. ♔h8+

Usually, I dissuade my students from such queen manoeuvres in the opening or middlegame. However, here it pays out since the White queen is a pain in the neck for Black, opting for the unappealing 29... ♖c7 or 29... ♘c8.

29... ♘c8

Black had a concession to make: from c8 the knight can't be moved (easily) to d5 anymore. 29... ♖c7?! would neither stop White from taking the Rook. 30. ♕xe4 dxe4 31. ♖eb1 a6



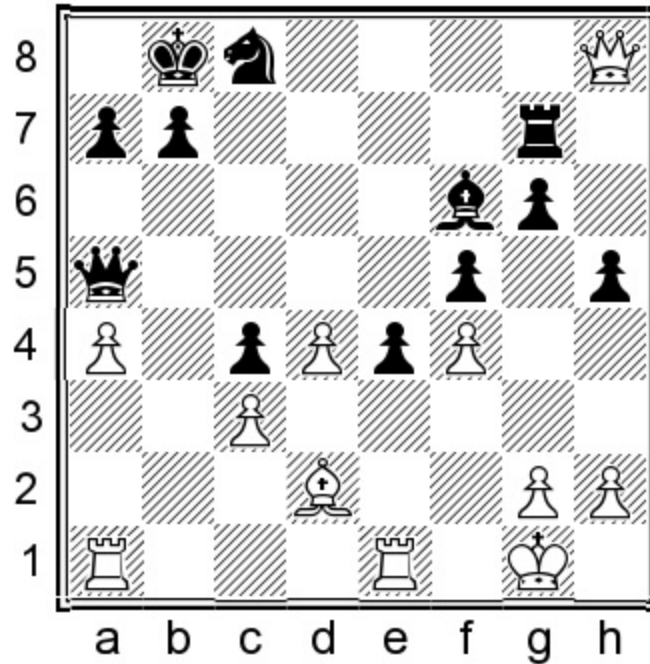
Analysis after: 31...a6

White claims a close to winning advantage after 32.♖a2, planning 33.♖ab2.

30.♙xe4!

Finally, White takes the rook!

30...dxe4



Position after: 30...dxe4

Smyslov would have capitalized his great defensive play with 31.♞eb1 and 32.♙c1, intending ♙a3, giving him a pleasant position. After a fierce struggle with mistakes from both sides, Smyslov finally won.

1-0

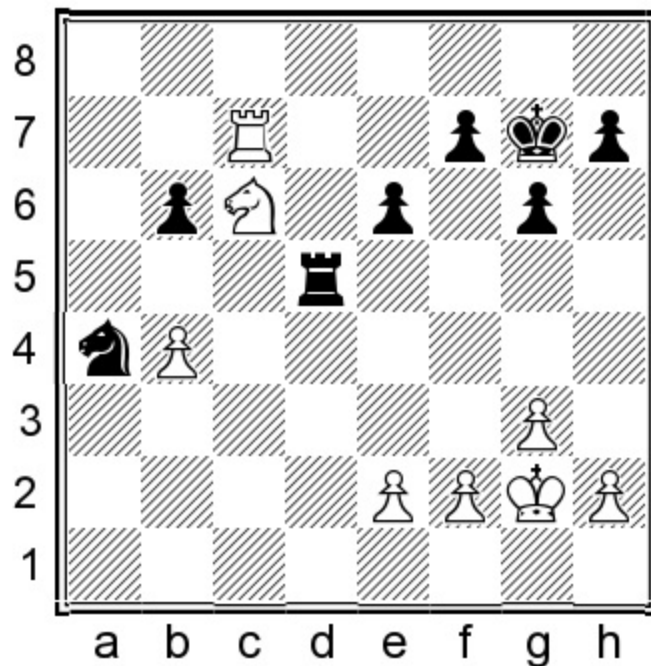
Smyslov ascended to the throne on 1957 and kept it for one year. His style was according to Garry Kasparov “*much lighter and more airy*” compared with Botvinnik’s ‘*tank-like onslaught.*’ He possessed a refined style and great endgame technique.

In the following game against Benko a very Smyslovian, ‘airy’ position appeared on the board. Could we patch Benko’s defenses so that they hold water?

Smyslov, Vassily

Benko, Pal

Monte Carlo 1969



Vassily Smyslov (photo Jos Suttmuller)

In his comments Smyslov gives 25.♘c6 an exclamation mark, explaining: *Threatening 26.e4, driving the opponent's rook from the center. If 25...♖b5 there follows 26.♘d8,*

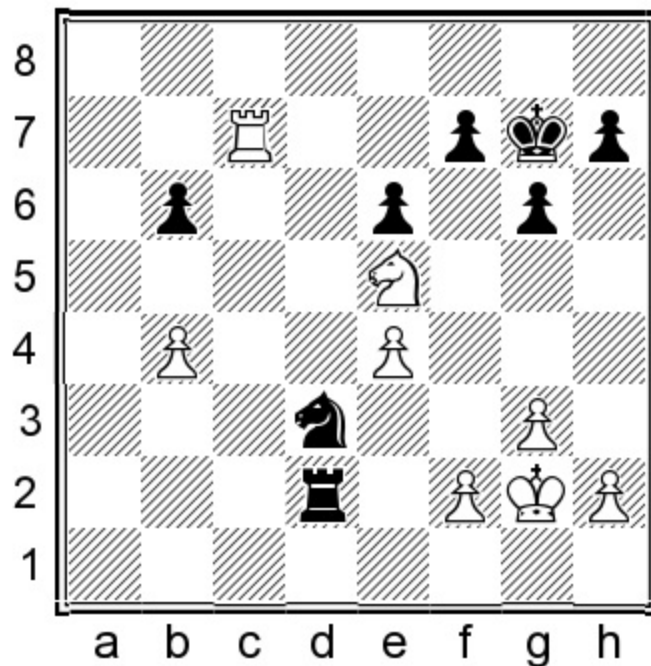
and 25...♘c3 also does not work, in view of 26.♘e7.

However, Smyslov is missing a crucial defensive counteroperation for his opponent.

25...♖d2?

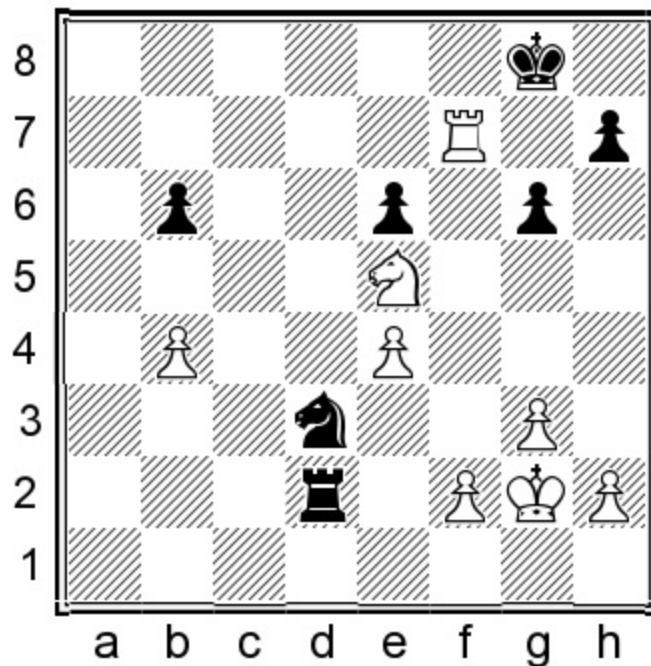
It's only at this moment that Benko lets the game slip. He should have brought the Knight back into the fray with 25...♘b2! In light of the following tactic Benko could have saved the game: 26.e4 ♖d2 27.♘e5 ♘d3!





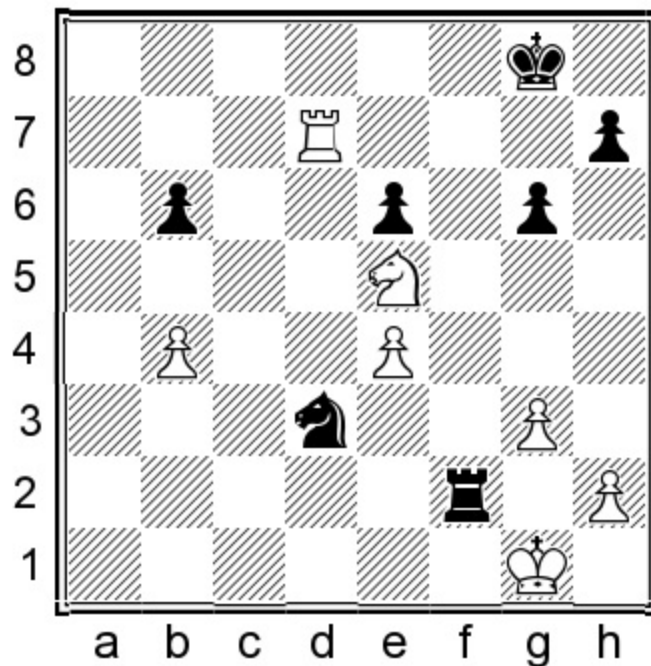
Analysis after: 27...♞d3!

A beautiful defense based on an optically hidden idea. 28.♞xf7+ [28.♞xf7?? ♞xf2+ and the Knight on f7 falls.] 28...♔g8 White's Knight – keeping the Rook on f7 defended – is under fire.



Analysis after: 28...♔g8

A) 29.♞d7? It's funny to see the same motif recur but with reversed colours. This time it's the black Knight who fulfils the role of defending the Rook on f2. 29...♞xf2+ 30.♔g1

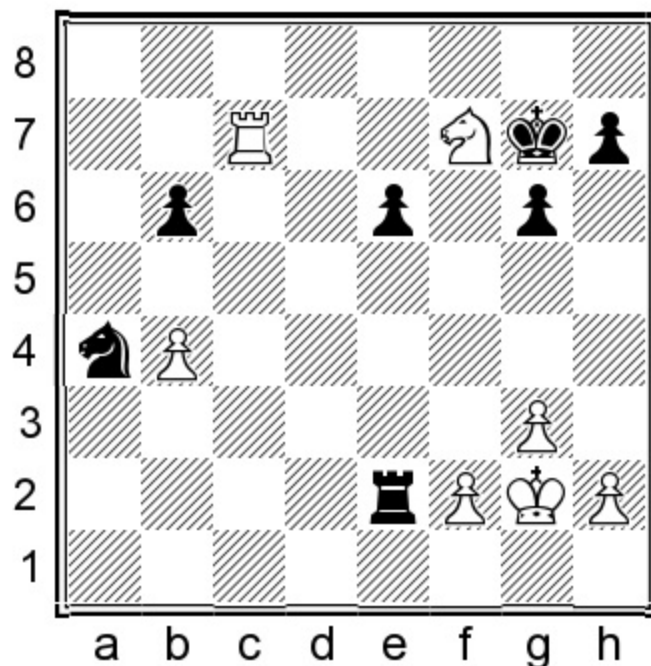


Analysis after: 30. ♔g1

Now the difference is that Black can give up the defense of the Rook. 30... ♖xe5 leaving its own rook unprotected, but assailing the rook on d7. 31. ♖d8+ is not winning for White after ♜f8! (31... ♜f8!), when Black remains a piece up.

B) 29. ♖c4 ♜e2! 30. ♜f3! ♖e1+ 31. ♔f1 ♜xe4 [31... ♖xf3? 32. ♔xe2 ♖xh2 33. f3+- Black's Knight is trapped.] 32. ♜c3 ♖f3 33. ♜xf3 ♜xc4 with a level rook ending.

25... ♜d2? 26. ♖e5 ♜xe2 27. ♖xf7



Position after: 27. ♖xf7

Black's King is seriously in need of the errant knight, which is regrettably stuck on the far edge of the board. Meanwhile White wants to organise a mating net in the next few moves with f2-f4, ♖g5 and ♜f7.

27...h5 28. ♖g5+ ♜f6 29. ♜f1

Setting up a mating net on the next move, after f2-f4. Black is lost.

29...♜xf2+

29...♜b2 30.f4 And mate with ♜c7-f7 is inevitable.

30. ♜xf2 ♜xg5 31. ♜e3 ♜g4 32.b5 ♜h3 33.♜c4 ♜b2 34.♜c2

After 34...♜a4, White will win more material by ♜f4-e5 or g5. So, Black resigned.

1-0

In an equal position, without a worry in sight for Smyslov's opponent, a surprising rapid twist is given to the course of the game. If we looked only at Smyslov's comments to the game, we would conclude that the game was a masterpiece with no room for any improvement for the defender. In only a couple of moves a rook-knight ending results into a landslide victory for Smyslov. How can we give an explanation for this ultimate course of events? How come a strong player as Pal Benko failed to hold the draw in an equal position? Smyslov's credo was:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“I will make 40 good moves and you will do the same and the game will end in a draw.”⁽¹⁷⁾

As a matter of fact, persistent stern defense for 40 moves is a rather non-trivial task. A defender who is under real pressure for a certain amount of time, is more likely to crack at some point. According to Garry Kasparov, Smyslov's victories at the peak of his career were forged *by a lack of a clear defence for his opponents and reveals that nobody was able to withstand Smyslov's superior technique.*

The high pressure which was being exerted on Smyslov's opponents would most likely not catch as many people unawares these days, since (as we see later this chapter) modern elite players have a better sense of danger and ability to evade problems further down the road.

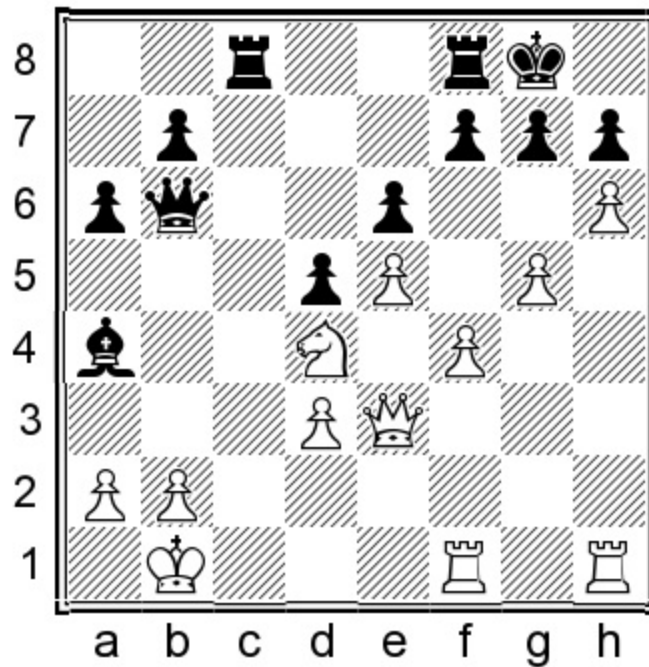
Section 3.6 – Viktor the Terrible vs. Tal the Magician

Korchnoi, maybe the best defender who ever existed, unequivocally played an important role in the development of defensive chess.⁽¹⁸⁾

Viktor Lvovich Korchnoi (1931 – 2016), the strongest challenger to the world title of all times, was a skilful tactician and brilliant in calculating and decision-making, and not in the last place, a subtle psychologist being capable to recognize his opponent's strong and weak points.⁽¹⁹⁾

Often he gives up his own active plans and allows the opponent to carry out his ideas, and if he sees flaws in them, he lands a timely counterblow. His opening knowledge was not always up to par, nevertheless Korchnoi proved unyielding on all fronts. He was unbeatable, like a cat with nine lives.

Tal, Mihail
Kortschnoj, Viktor
 Lugansk 1955



Viktor Korchnoi

Tal was counting on a massive positional plus after g7–g6, due to his superior Knight on d4. However, Korchnoi refused to bury the hatchet. Can you find a backlash for Tal's inaccuracy on the 22nd move (h5-h6)?

22...♖c2!!

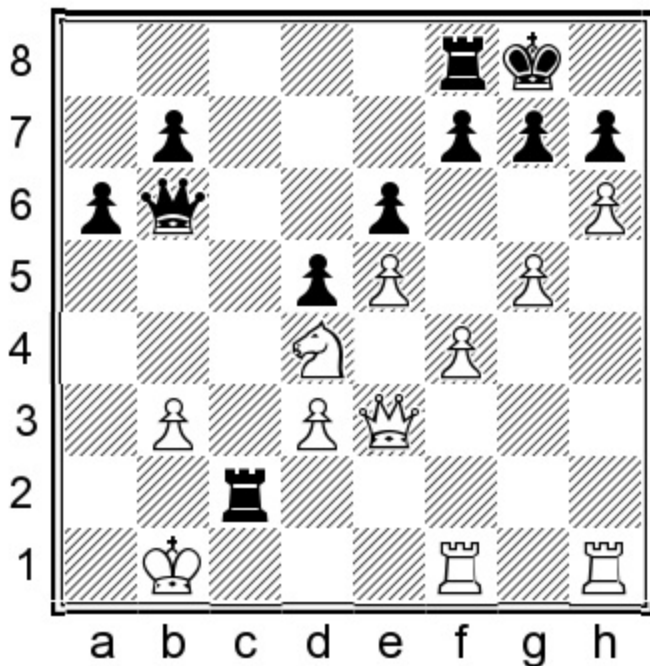
Threatening mate while White loses the Queen after 23.♘xc2 ♕xc2+.

23.b3

The only move.

23...♕xb3 24.axb3

24.hxg7 is bad, on the account of 24...♖a5! 25.gxf8=♖+ ♔xf8 with a mate on a2 and eventually c2.



Position after: 24.axb3

24...♖c3!

With the intention of 25...♖xb3+.

In this position the players agreed on a draw, as a result of the following lines: 25.hxg7 ♖xb3+ 26.♘xb3 ♕xb3+ [26...♕xe3 is bad, 27.gxf8=♕+ as White obtains a ♖♖♘ vs ♕ material advantage.] 27.♔a1 ♕a3+ with a perpetual check.

½-½

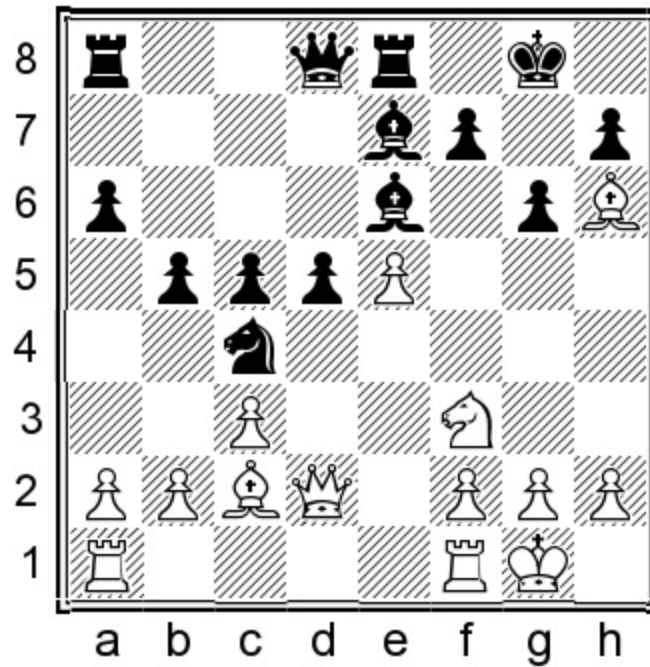
A greater contrast in the playing style between Mikhail Tal, the ‘magician from Riga’, who was the eighth World Champion from 1960 till 1961, and Viktor Korchnoi, is hard to imagine. Until Tal entered the scene, the chess world was raised with the fundamental positional principles and, at first, attributed his spectacular landslide victories to luck because of his risky play, instead of his ‘outstanding talent’ (Euwe). Mikhail Tal, known for his constant readiness to take risks, and his sparkling, swift attacks with unpredictable cascades of sacrifices and wild complications,⁽²⁰⁾ had an enormous influence on the development of chess thinking in the second half of the century. To Tal, ‘every game for him was as inimitable and invaluable as a poem’.⁽²¹⁾

His credo was: *(..) nowadays two players often deliberately deviate from the generally recognized laws, turning into a ‘dense forest’ of unexplored variations, onto a narrow mountain path, where there is room for only one.*⁽²²⁾

In the next game, however, Tal was not rewarded for his daring pawn sacrifice and tumbled off the cliff into the abyss.



Tal, Mihail



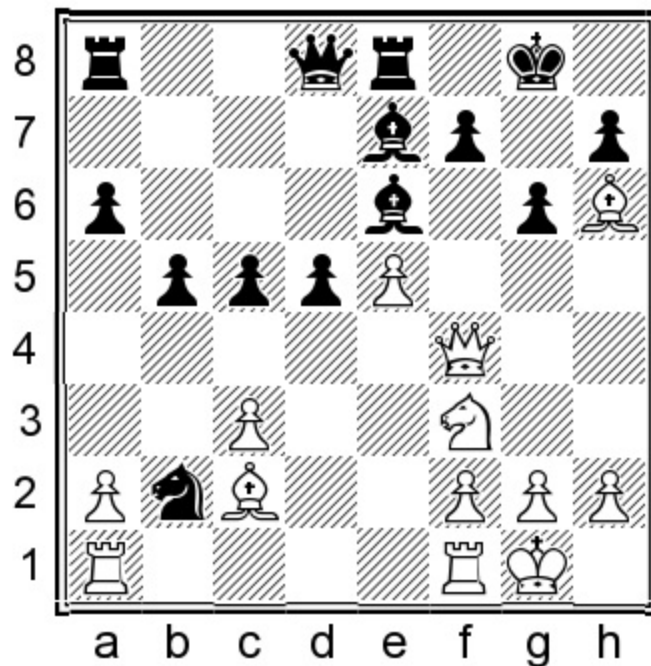
This moment in the game is marking the clash between the different styles of the two giants. Tal is eager to sacrifice a pawn, whereas Korchnoi is waiting for the opportunity to arise to take it.

17. ♖f4!?

Seen before was 17. ♖c1 f5 18. exf6 ♕xf6 when Black was fine in ½–½ (73) Yanofsky, D – Abrahams, G Hastings 1947. The pawn sacrifice after 17. ♖f4 ♘xb2 was part of Tal's preparation.

17. ♖f4!? ♘xb2!

Whereas most of Tal's opponents would think twice to grab so insolently a pawn, giving Tal carte blanche to attack,



Position after: 17... ♖xb2!

Korchnoi thankfully uses the defensive ‘Greed and grit’ strategy (as seen in Chapter 5.7).

18. ♗g5

By the exchange of the Black squared Bishop, Tal strives for free access on the black squares around the King.

Maybe stronger was 18. ♖g5!? d4 19. ♖xe6 fxe6 with compensation for White.

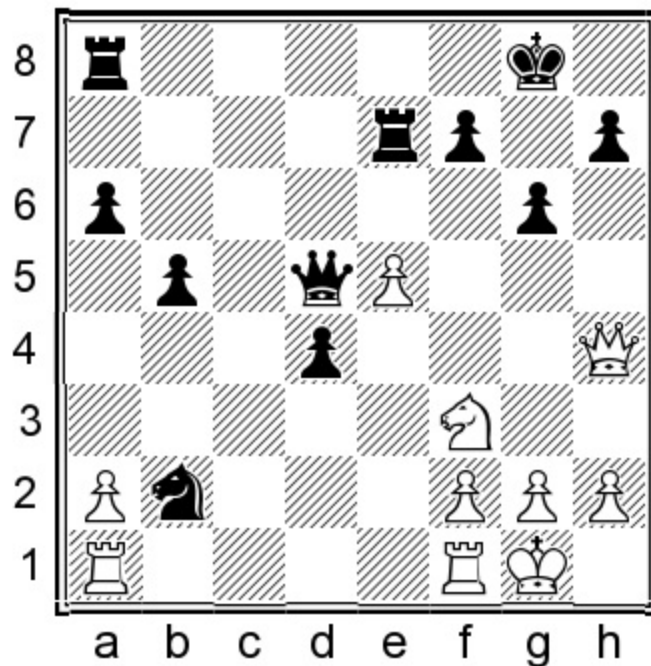
18...d4! 19.cxd4 cxd4

We witness a battle at the cutting edge. Korchnoi immediately throws in his d-pawn to thwart Tal’s attacking aspirations.

20. ♗e4 ♗d5

Maybe even stronger was 20... ♖c8 21. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 22. ♖h6 ♖f8! guarding the King successfully.

21. ♗xd5 ♖xd5 22. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 23. ♖h4



Position after: 23. ♕h4

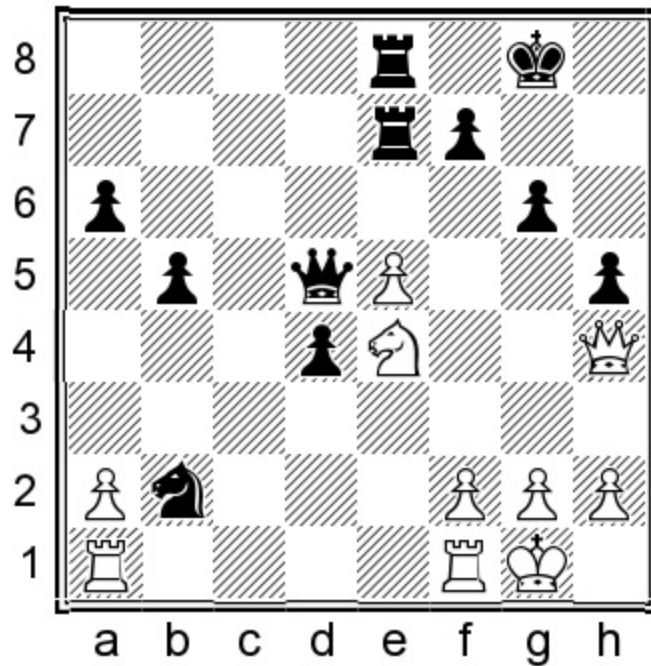
The 8th World Champion must have pinned his hopes on this position. He is attacking the rook on e7 and preparing for 24. ♘g5.

23... ♖ae8!

While Tal is knocking on the door, Korchnoi is aiming to grab the second pawn.

The text move is better than 23... ♖c7 24. ♘g5 h5 25. e6!? endeavouring to find a way to Black's King. 25... fxe6 26. ♖ae1 e5 27. ♘e4 ♕e6 28. f4! when Black has to overcome a dangerous kingside attack.

24. ♘g5 h5 25. ♘e4

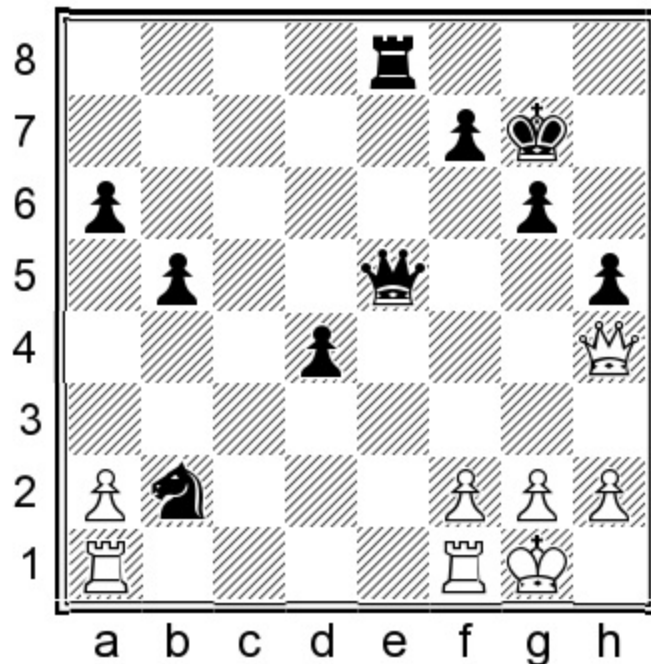


Position after: 25. ♖e4

25... ♔xe5!

And there goes pawn number 2 as Korchnoi's appetite was not yet stilled. The advantage of using 'the greed and grit strategy' of winning a pawn, and subsequently a second one, is that when the going gets tough the extra material can be returned for the purpose of averting the threats. Korchnoi foresaw that he would obtain (more than) enough compensation for the exchange.

26. ♖f6+ ♔g7 27. ♖xe8+ ♜xe8



Position after: 27...♖xe8

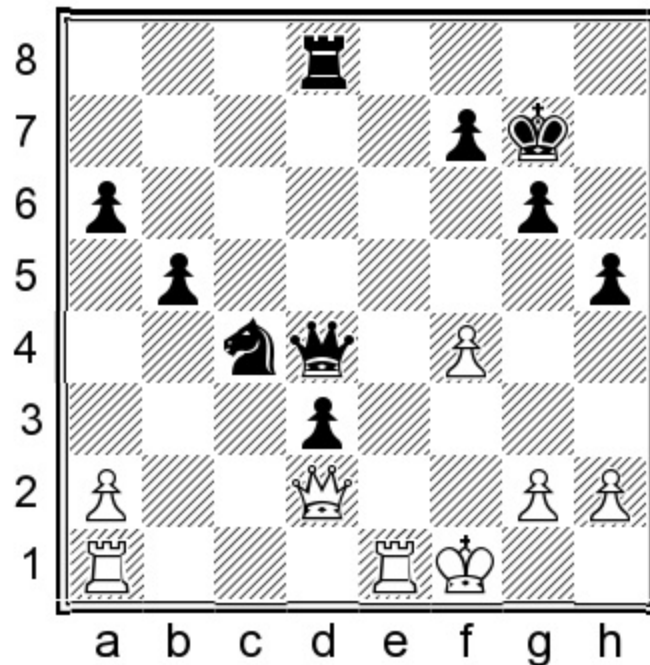
After the dust has settled, Black has a strong Knight and dangerous passed d-pawn, whereas it's hard to find active squares for the white Rooks.

28.f4 ♖f6 29.♖f2

Neither could 29.♖xf6+ be recommended, as White's chances in the ending are clearly worse. 29...♔xf6 30.♖ab1 ♘a4 with the idea of 31.♖bd1? ♘c3! is winning for Black, as the queenside pawns start rolling.

29...d3 30.♖fe1 ♖d8 31.♖d2 ♖d4+ 32.♔f1 ♘c4

The strong Knight together with the strong passed pawn decides the game.



Position after: 32...♘c4

After

33.♖d1 d2

Tal resigned.

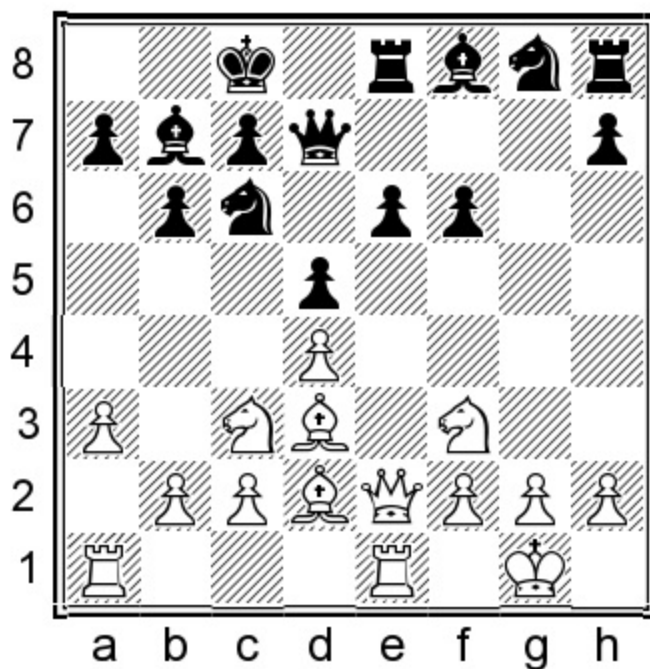
0-1

The young Mikhail Tal had his breakthrough in 1957 beating the world's top players and winning that year's Soviet championship. Because of this result, the FIDE awarded Mikhail Nekhemevich the GM-title even though he did not meet all of the requirements. His tactical genius was aptly described by

Kasparov: *'Tal did not calculate lengthy variations, he simply looked through them!'* This in contradiction to the psychologist Korchnoi, who looked right through his opponent, out calculating the sacrifice thwarting Tal's attacking ideas.⁽²³⁾

About the next game Korchnoi remarks in his biography, that Tal's superficial way of attacking stands out. This is diametrically countering the public's opinion, as Tal just won the Soviet Championships (1957) for which he was highly appraised.⁽²⁴⁾

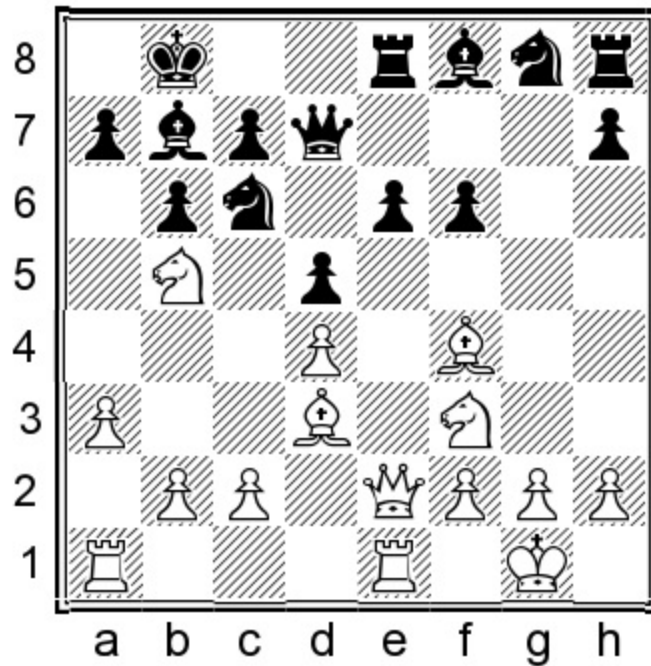
Tal, Mihail
Korchnoi, Viktor
Moscow 1957



13. ♖f5?!

A straightforward attempt to start an assault on the pawn on e6.

However, it would have been better to create a second weakness with 13. ♖f4! ♔b8 14. ♗b5!



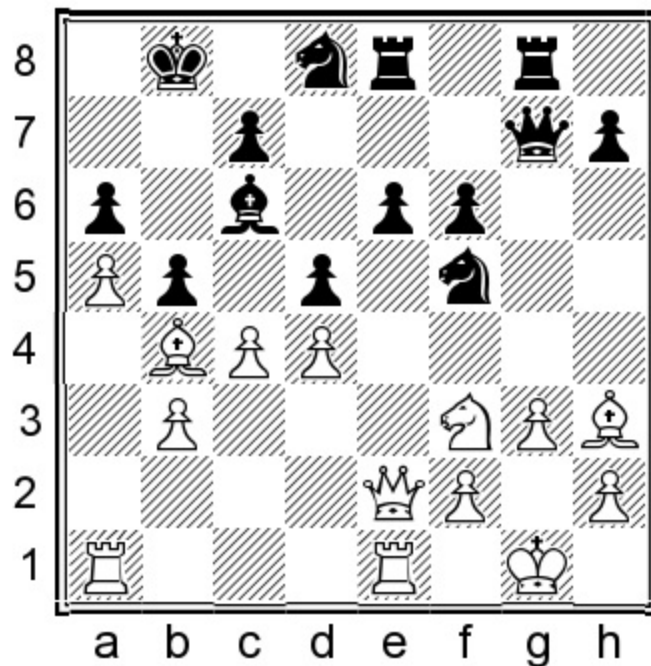
Analysis after: 14. ♖b5!

The pawn on c7 is barely defensible. 14... ♙d6 15. ♘xd6 cxd6 16.c4! when Black can't hold his position together.

13. ♙f5?! ♜d8 14.a4 ♜h6 15. ♙h3 a6 16. ♜a2 ♚b8 17. ♜b4 ♙xb4 18. ♙xb4 ♚g7

Possibly, Korchnoi feared an inferior pawn structure in case of 18... ♜f5!? 19. ♙xf5 exf5, but after 20. ♚d2 ♜e4! he will get sufficient activity in return.

19.a5 b5 20.b3 ♜hg8 21.c4 ♙c6 22.g3 ♜f5



Position after: 22... ♖f5

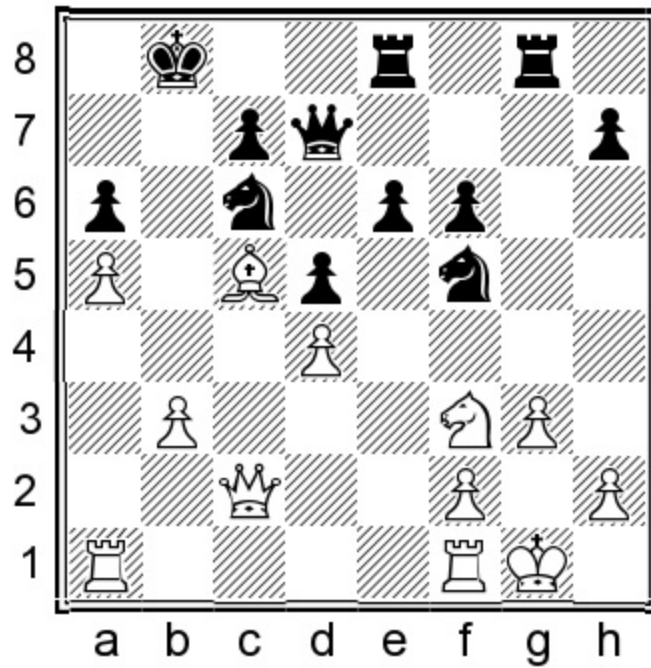
23.cxb5?!

Again Tal uses the direct approach by taking the pawn instead of increasing the tension along the c-file. The more subtle 23.♖ac1 ♕f7 24.♖c3 ♕h5 25.♙g2 ♖g7 26.♖ec1, with ♕c2 to follow, should have been preferred.

23...♙xb5 24.♕c2 ♘c6 25.♙c5 ♕d7 26.♙f1?!

Tal tries to lift the blockade on b5 in order to keep the attack going, but by doing so he is simplifying Korchnoi's defensive task. Probably Korchnoi was expecting the (aforementioned) complications arising after 26.♖xe6 ♕xe6 27.♙xf5 when White will take on h7 getting sufficient compensation for the exchange.

26...♙xf1 27.♖xf1

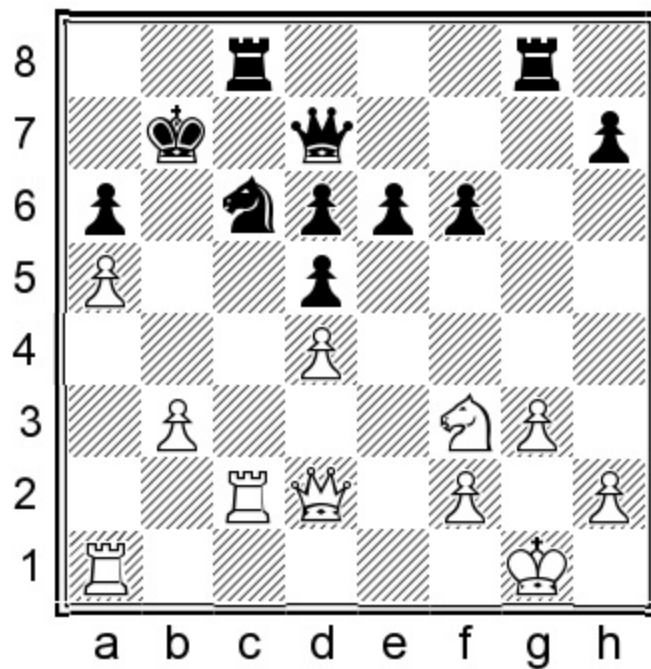


Position after: 27. Rxf1

27... Nd6

Black could have gained the upper hand with 27...e5!

28. Qxd6 cxd6 29. Rfc1 Qb7 30. Qd2 Rc8 31. Rc2



Position after: 31. Rxc2

31...♖a7!

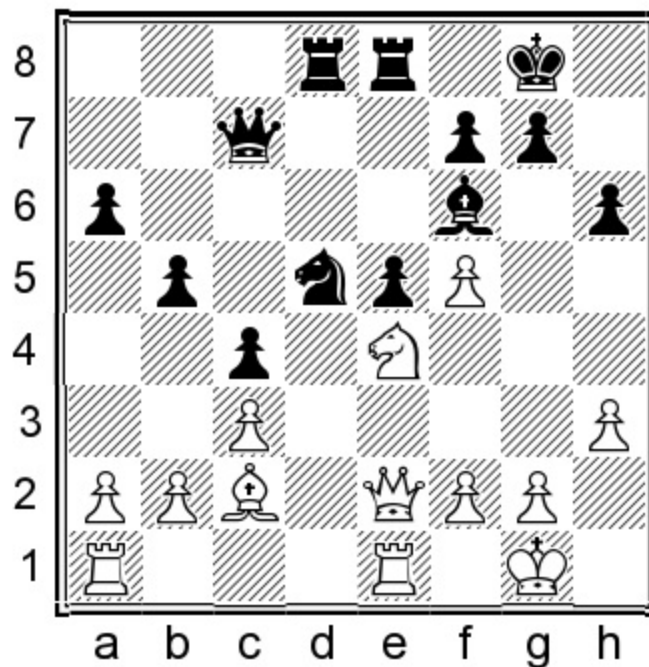
This prevents any breakthroughs by b4-b5, keeping the queenside closed putting the Knight on b5. All in all, Korchnoi managed to save his much worse position. After some shuffling of the pieces, the players agreed to a draw.

½-½

Perhaps it is in the detail that has enabled Korchnoi to discern the incorrectness of many of Tal's attacks. In another of their highly intense struggles, Tal was aiming for wild complications, applying his credo: *(..) nowadays two players often deliberately deviate from the generally recognized laws, turning into a 'dense forest' of unexplored variations, onto a narrow mountain path, where there is room for only one.*⁽²⁵⁾

Tal however, was not rewarded for his daring pawn sacrifice and tumbled off the cliff into the abyss.

Tal, Mihail
Korchnoi, Viktor
Moscow 1968



It seems that White has a small but lasting positional edge. Mikhail Tal could continue with 23.♖ad1 and 24.g3, but instead chose for:

23.b3!?

Tal doesn't let a chance pass by to make the position more complex.

23...♗xc3!?

As expected, Korchnoi accepts the invitation.

24. ♖xf6+ gxf6 25. ♖e3 cxb3!

Korchnoi doesn't let his counterplay slow down by non-existent threats against his King.

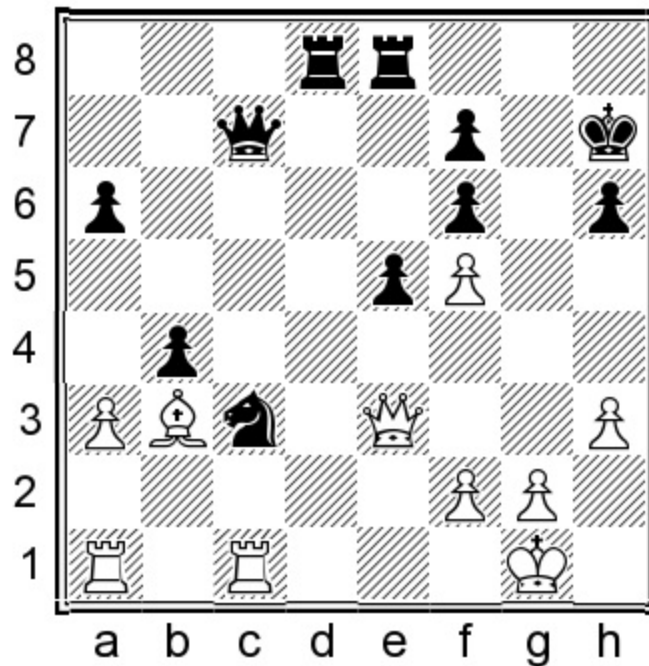
26. ♗xb3

26. ♖xh6 with the idea of ♖e1-e3-g3, looks dangerous. Although after 26...bxc2 27. ♖e3 ♖d1+ 28. ♔h2 e4+! 29. ♖g3+ ♖xg3+! the threats have been parried.

26... ♔h7 27. ♖ec1?

27. ♗xf7! This wins the pawn back and clarifies the position, leaving White with the slightly better odds. But Tal was aiming for a higher degree of complexity and a larger advantage in the ensuing position. 27... ♖xf7 28. ♖xc3±

27...b4! 28.a3



Position after: 28.a3

Tal's attacking aspirations are too ambitious leaving a pawn 'en prise'. Korchnoi is on it like a hawk.

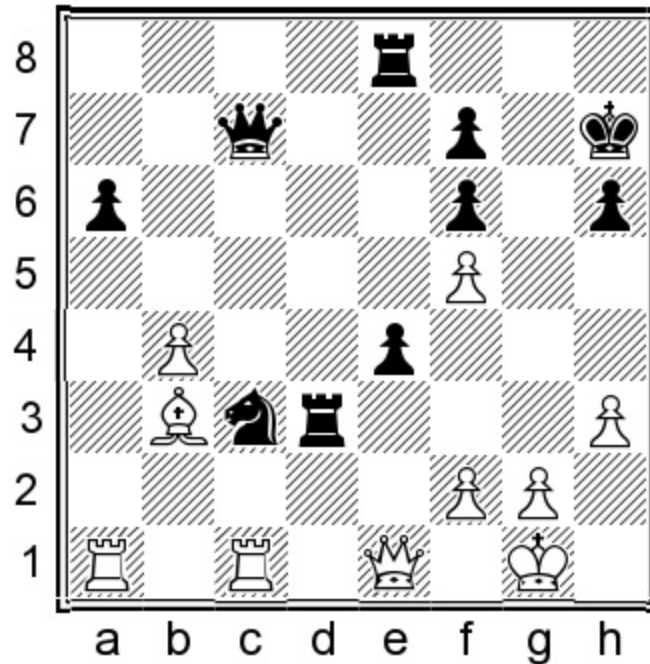
28...e4!

Viktor the Terrible fully takes over the initiative now, by way of ♖d8-d3.

29. axb4 ♖d3!

The Queen is pushed back to the last rank.

30. ♚e1



Position after: 30. ♚e1

30...e3!

One thing leads to another: Korchnoi's initiative is to be transformed into a decisive counterstrike on the enemy's King.

31. ♖c2

31. ♖c2 wouldn't rescue White either, by 31...exf2+ 32. ♚xf2 ♖e3 33. ♖f1 ♚b6 34. ♔h2 ♘e4, winning for Black.

31...♖d2 32.fxe3 ♘e2+ 33.♔h1 ♘g3+ 34.♔g1 ♖e2! 35.♚d1 ♚b7 36.e4 ♖8xe4!

Winning as well, was: 36...♚b6+ 37.♔h2 ♚f2 38.♚g1 ♚f4. Whereas after 36...♖8xe4 37.♔xe4 ♚xe4 there is no defense possible against ♚xg2#.

0-1

It struck me that in the 18 encounters Korchnoi had with the white pieces, the score was only plus one (+ 4, -3, = 11) while in the 30 encounters with the Black pieces, the score was +5 in favor of Korchnoi (+8, -3, =18).⁽²⁶⁾

An explanation for this big plus score with Black is that Korchnoi with his sober, no-nonsense

mentality could perfectly see through Tal and conduct his defensive strategy as Tal would try to set the game up in an attacking fashion with White.

Section 3.7 – A dogmatic approach by Kotov

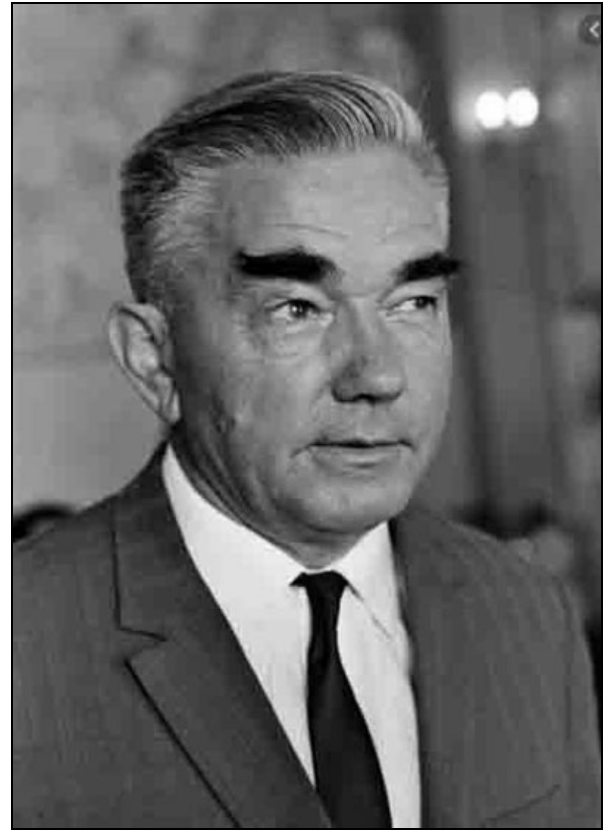
Alexander Kotov

Alexander Alexandrovich Kotov (1913 – 1981) was a Russian Grandmaster and a renowned writer. He left us the legacy of his renown trilogy of books, *Think, Train and Play like a Grandmaster*.

The latter one, published in 1978, was of great(est) influence in the chess study for every tournament player evolution. Kotov discloses brand new guidelines to how a chess player should come to the best move. Based on the maxims of Wilhelm Steinitz the chess player methodically examines and dissects a position, selects the *candidate* moves and categorizes them in an *analysis tree* to get a clear overview.

Ever since the book's publication it has been an influential work; it could, in fact, still serve as a basic text for an aspiring player these days, since it explains the fundamentals of positional chess by showing examples of good principle from the world's best players.⁽²⁷⁾ Since I was a kid my trainer raised me with these positional and classical way of thinking of Kotov. And now, 20 years later, I try to pass this on to my students. Going through the book once again – currently including dog-ears – the next two games came to my attention while I was studying Kotov's classics once more.

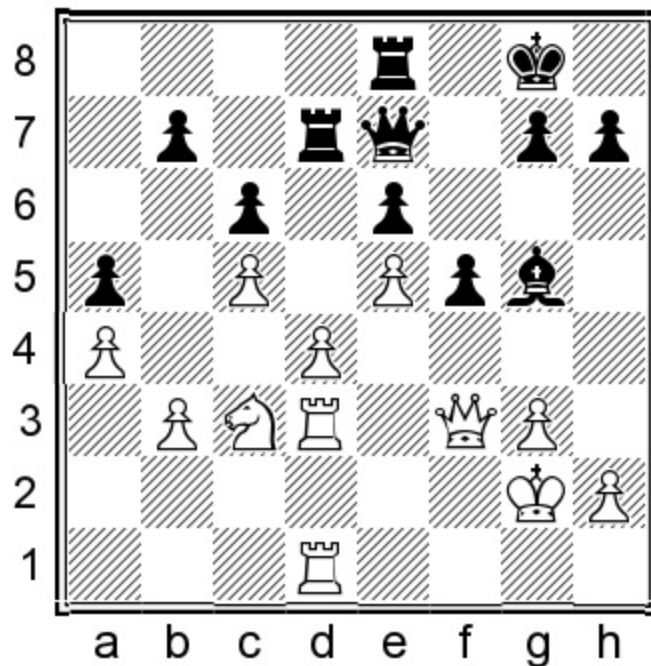
A typical game featured therein is this classic one between Botvinnik and Flohr, an example of the principles that held sway in the pre-computer era. In what follows I have made use of Kotov's annotations, improving them in places where I consider he has not considered the position's dynamic features enough.



Botvinnik, Mikhail

Flohr, Salo

Moscow 1936



Kotov alleges:

“In assessing any position a grandmaster is bound to take account of weak squares (in both camps). Moreover, it is often the case that this feature drives assessments and plans: a number of weak squares, or even a single weak square, can be the pre-eminent feature of the position. A piece that gets established here on this weak point spreads confusion in the defense and decides the issue.”

I agree that this rule should serve every chess player well as a starting point in assessing a position. But it is surprising that the dynamic defensive possibilities of Black are neglected by Kotov, as we will see in the following engine-endorsed analysis.

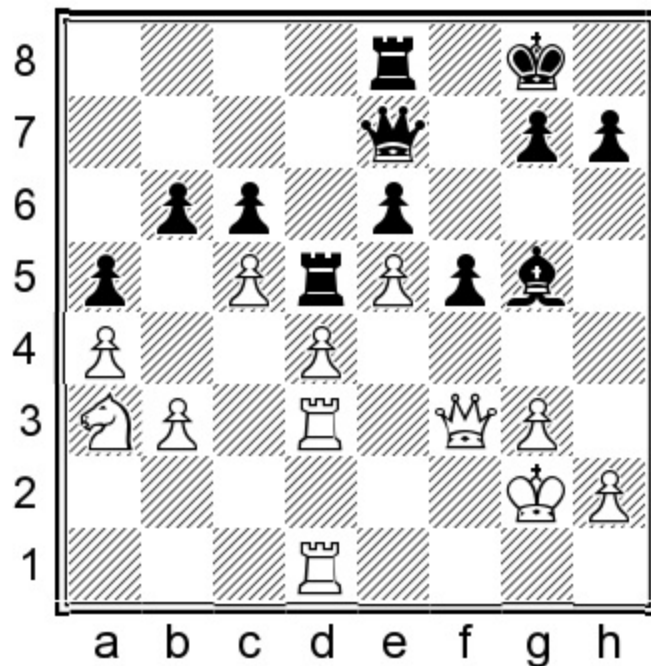
34. ♖b1!?

The Knight begins a long trip (route: ♖c3-b1-a3-c4-d6) to the chief weak square in Black’s camp: d6. But during this time, Black can react by damaging White’s pawn structure.

34... ♜f8?

It is actually due to this passive waiting move that Botvinnik gets to execute his plan.

Instead, it’s essential to defend against this plan with 34... ♞d5! Black couldn’t play b5-b6 immediately, since his c6-pawn would be hanging. But now Black has a reply against further knight moves: 35. ♖a3 b6!



Analysis after: 35...b6!

Black is in time to destroy White's pawn structure and hence make the outpost on d6 less strong. After 36.♖c4 bxc5♜ White has lost a valuable pawn on c5.

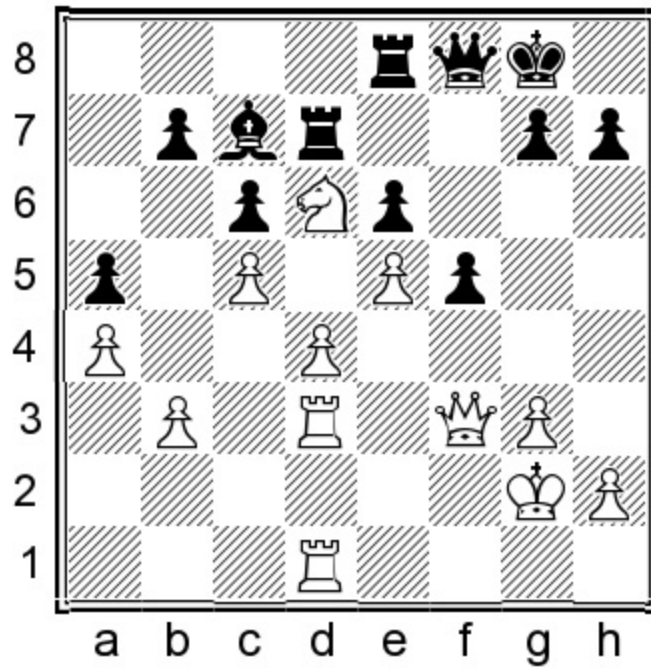
35.♗a3!

Black has missed his chance and now the Knight's manoeuvre is unstoppable.

35...♙d8

35...b6?, trying to fight the knight manoeuvre to d6, doesn't work due to 36.♙xc6.

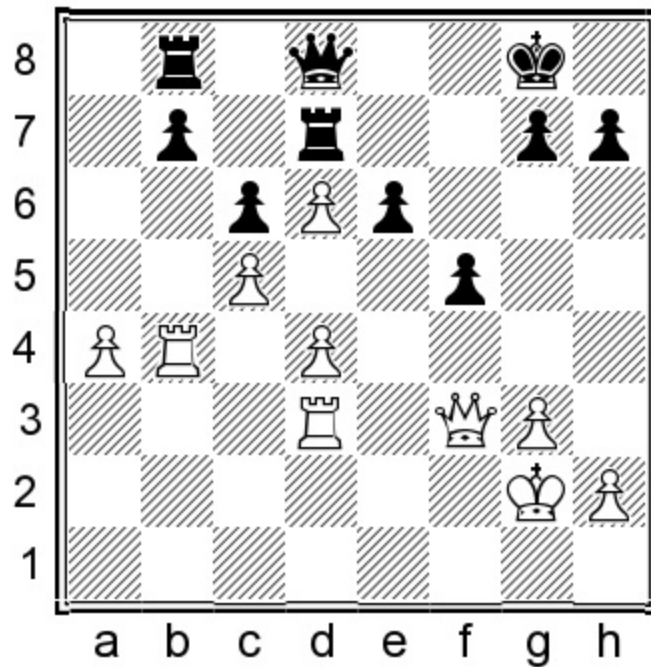
36.♖c4 ♙c7 37.♗d6



Position after: 37. ♖d6

Now, it is impossible to create any counterplay on account of the octopus on d6. The momentum of the game is completely with White.

37... ♜b8 38. ♜b1 ♚d8 39. b4 axb4 40. ♜xb4 ♙xd6 41. exd6



Position after: 41. exd6

One advantage transforms into another. Botvinnik obtains a defended passed pawn.

41...♙a5 42.♞db3 ♞e8 43.♞e2 ♙a8 44.♞e3 ♚f7 45.♞c4 b5 46.♞c2 ♞xd6 47.cxd6 c5+ 48.♚h3 cxb4 49.♞c7+

White is winning, since the d-pawn is unstoppable.

49...♚g8 50.d7 ♞f8 51.♞d6 h6 52.♞xe6+ ♚h7 53.♞e8 b3 54.♞xa8 ♞xa8 55.axb5 ♞d8 56.♞xb3 ♞xd7 57.b6 ♞b7 58.♚g2 ♚g6 59.♚f3 ♚f6 60.♞b5 ♚e6 61.♚e3 ♚d6 62.♚d3 ♚c6 63.♚c4 ♚d6 64.♞d5+ ♚c6 65.♞c5+ ♚d6 66.♚b5

1-0

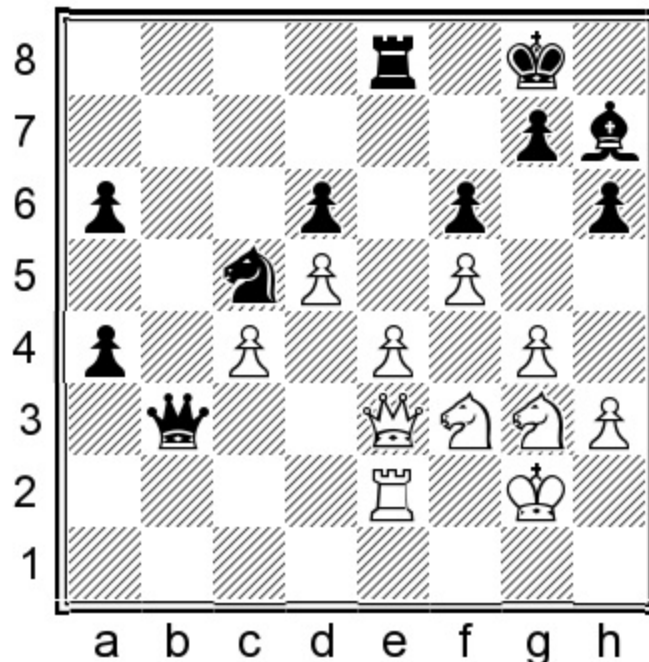
So, Kotov considered the weak square on d6 to be a permanent advantage. However, looking at this position through a modern lens, it's questionable whether the weak square on d6 is a permanent advantage to White, rather than a temporary one. After White set off the knight manoeuvre with ♞c3-b1, Black still had a chance to fight the weak square on d6 by means of ♞d5 and b6.

It is a common lesson from practice that the disadvantage of weak squares, such as d6 above, can be offset by dynamic measures. In the following example from the former Cuban World Champion, Kotov gives an example of how a poorly positioned piece – which is considered as a temporary advantage based on the elements of Steinitz – can be exploited.

Capablanca, Jose Raul

Bogoljubow, Efim

London 1922



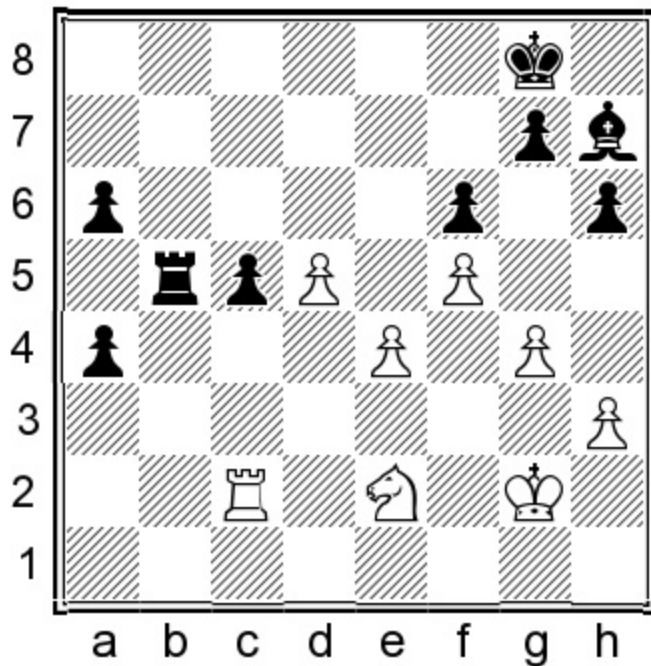
Jose Raul Capablanca

Kotov writes that the position of just one piece affects the course of the whole game. He draws on the notes of Capablanca himself, which suggest that despite all the more active black pieces, «(..) *there is a feature which is very much in White's favour, namely the position of the Bishop at h7. This Bishop*

is not only completely cut off from play, but, even worse, there is simply no way it can ever come into play. Hence White is playing, as it were, with an extra piece." Once more, the computer tells us differently.

36. ♖d4 ♜xc3

36... ♜xc4!? This defence was not mentioned by Kotov, but it is a genuine candidate move. 37. ♗e6 ♞b8 38. ♗xc5 ♜xc5 39. ♜xc5 dxc5 40. ♞c2 ♞b5 41. ♗e2

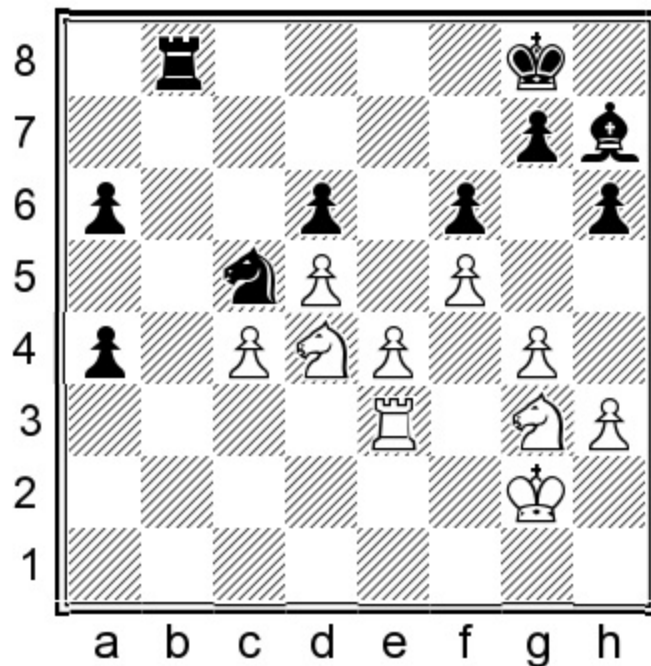


Analysis after: 41. ♗e2

41... ♜f8! It transpires that by means of ♜h7-g8-f7-e8 Black can get his Bishop back into the game: 42. ♗c3 ♞a5 43. ♜f3 ♜g8 44. ♞a2 a3 45. ♜f4 ♜f7 when the position is equal.

37. ♞xc3 ♞b8



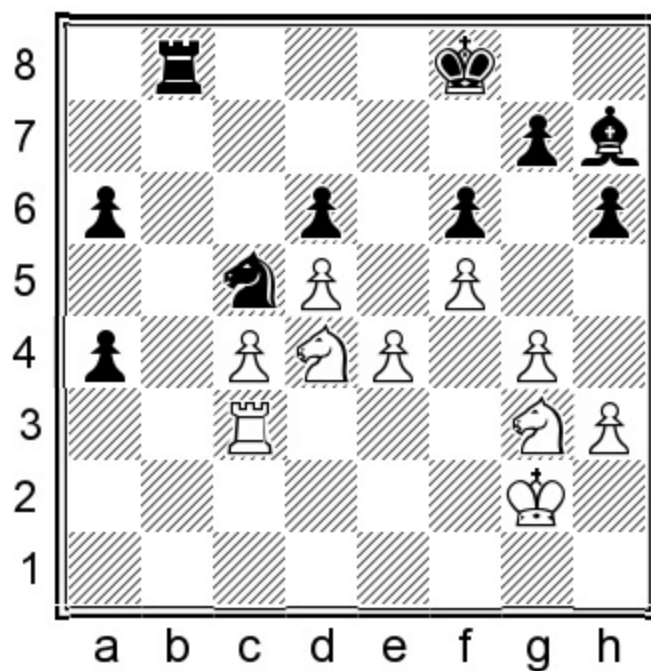


Position after: 37...♖b8

Black's position is not that bad overall. He should only solve the inferior position of his Bishop.

38.♖c3 ♗f7?!

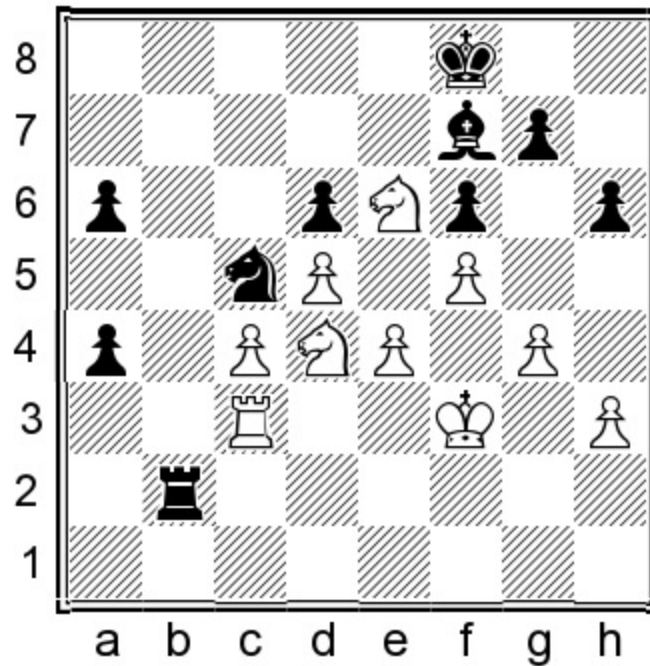
Now 38...♗f8! makes more sense, since it doesn't block the Bishop's only route out.



Analysis after: 38...♗f8

Then 39.♗f3 [39.♗e6+ ♗e7 40.♗f3 ♗d7 41.♗e3 ♖b1 with a dynamically balanced position.]

39...♔g8 40.♖ge2 ♕f7 Black has found a solution for his once lethargic Bishop on h7. 41.♗f4 ♜b2
42.♗fe6+

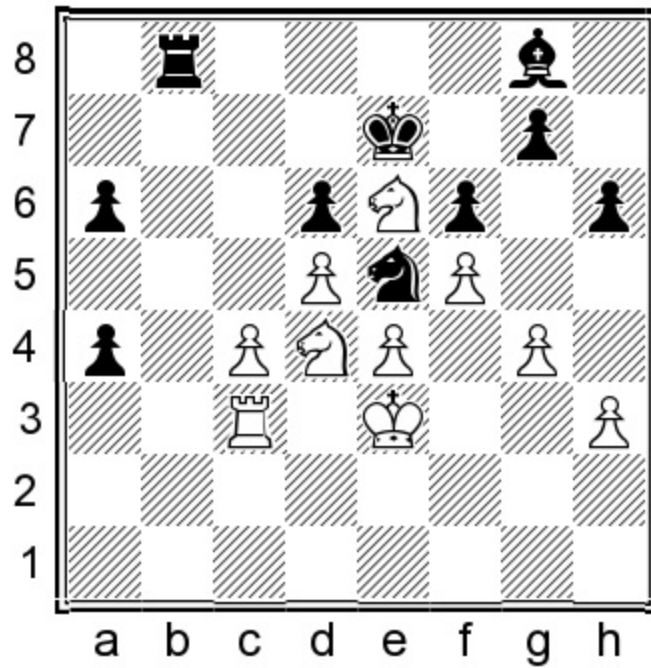


Analysis after: 42.♗fe6+

42...♕xe6! Black even obtains an advantage here, despite the strong passed pawn on e6. 43.dxe6 ♜b3!! after which Black gets the upper hand.

39.♗f3 ♜b2?!

It's time to improve the worst placed piece! 39...♔g8! 40.♗e6 ♗d7 41.♗e2 ♔e7 42.♗d4 ♗e5+
43.♔e3 Black is out of trouble now that the Bishop can hack its way out in time.



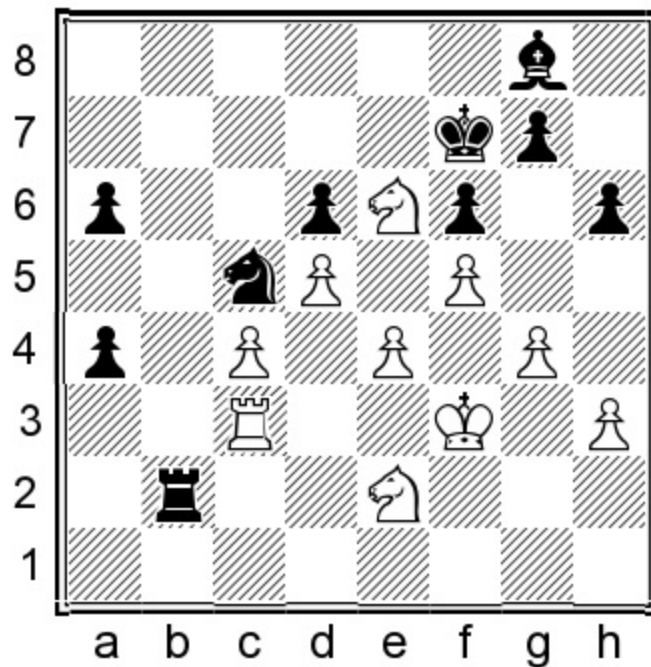
Analysis after: 43. ♔e3

43... ♜f7! Heading towards e8, dodging White's phalanx. For instance, 44. ♘xg7 ♜b1! All of a sudden Black's pieces are thriving.

40. ♘ge2 ♜g8

Better late than never.

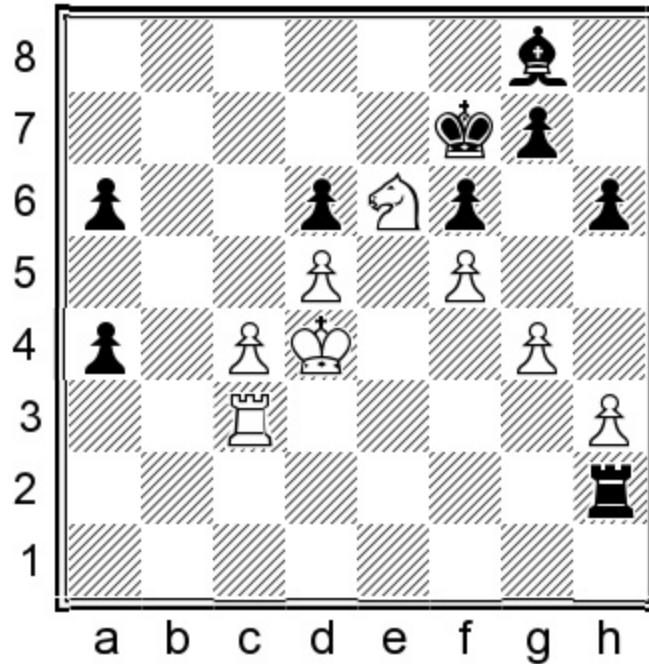
41. ♘e6



Position after: 41. ♖e6

41... ♜b3?

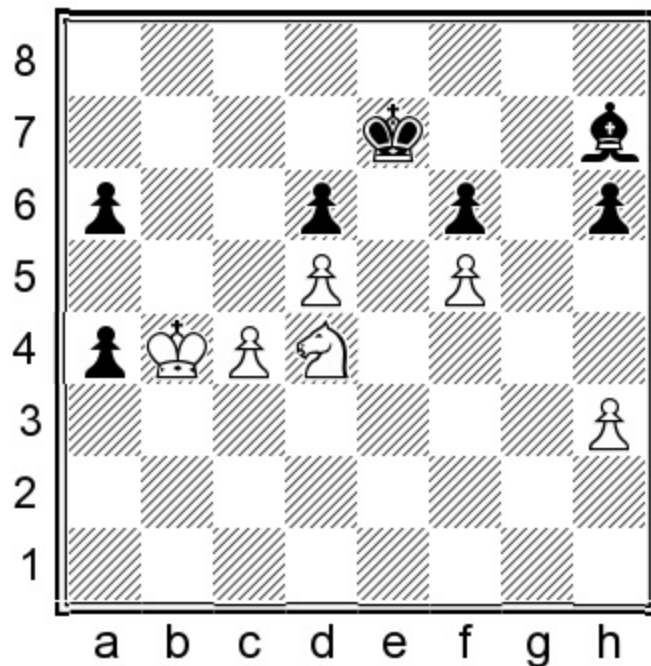
A major mistake after which Black is balancing on the edge of the abyss. Regarding this position Kotov comments: “Exchanging the knights on e6 would leave the bishop no hope of ever getting out of the mousetrap on g8 and h7. Nor is 41... ♜xe4 42. ♔xe4 ♝xe2+ good.” Kotov’s first line is indeed winning for White, but the second one, which forces the exchange of rooks, is not since Black can hold even with a passive Bishop on g8. For example, 43. ♔d3 ♝h2 44. ♔d4



Analysis after: 44. ♔d4

A) 44...h5? Now Kotov proves his point: 45.c5! “A pawn plays through to queen, since support for the advance comes from two extra pieces – the white King and Knight, whose opposite numbers are huddled in the corner.”

B) However, after 44...♝d2+! Bogoljubow would have saved his skin, forcing the trade of rooks by 45.♝d3 ♝xd3+ 46.♔xd3 ♚h7 the Black Bishop returns to its initial place in order to break up White’s pawn chain with g7-g6, and Black holds. 47.♔c3 g6 48.♜d4 gxf5 49.gxf5 ♔e7 50.♔b4 White has managed to keep the Bishop out of play, but his Knight is bound to the defence of f5.



Analysis after: 50. ♖b4

Black forces a shake of hands by 50... ♔d7 51. ♕xa4 ♖c7 52. ♕a5 ♖b7 when the king arrives in time to defend the queenside.

42.c5!

Yes, here the weak bishop on g8 becomes a real problem. But not before Black missed various opportunities to do something against this, such as exchanging the Rooks, attacking White's chain or moving the Bishop out of the corner.

42...dxc5 43. ♗xc5 ♗d2+

After 43... ♗xc5 44. ♖xc5 a3 45. ♖a5 Winning material and stopping the a-pawn – we can't say that the Black bishop on g8 makes his presence felt!

44. ♕f2

44. ♕f4! ♗f1 45. ♗d4 ♖f2+ 46. ♖f3 is already winning for White.

44... ♕e7

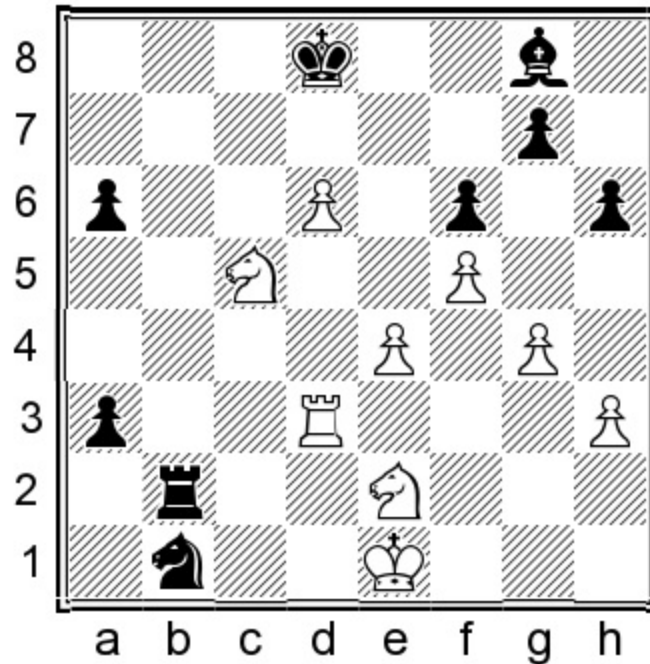
44... ♗b1! was a very good last dynamical attempt for a draw and missed by Kotov; Black intends to move the a-pawn forward.

45. ♕e1 ♗b1 46. ♖d3 a3

Better was 46... ♕d6 47. ♗xa4 ♖b4 48. ♖d4 ♖xd4 49. ♗xd4 ♕f7 50. ♗e6! but Capablanca would still

have had a large advantage.

47.d6+ ♔d8



Position after: 47... ♔d8

48.♘d4!

Heading to c6 or e6. Now it's all over for Black, the d-pawn decides the game.

48...♞b6

48...a2 49.♘c6+ ♔c8 50.d7+ and White's pawn reaches the other side of the board first.

49.♘de6+ ♔xe6 50.fxe6 ♞b8 51.e7+ ♔e8 52.♘xa6

Bogoljubow resigned, as it turns out that even though being first to promote, this will not save him after 52.♘xa6 ♞a8 53.♘c7+ ♔d7 54.♘xa8 a2 55.♘c7 a1=♚ 56.e8=♚#.

1-0

On account of Black's possible freeing ideas of: i) ♔h7-g8-f7-e8, and ii) breaking White's pawn chain by g6 and h5, he could had improved on his play on several occasions, thereby defending his position successfully.

With hindsight, can we say that Kotov's explication of Steinitz's theory was useless since he missed the defensive ideas for Black at the crucial moments? No, Steinitz's theory should serve every player as a basis, but to unveil the intricacies of each position, one ought to take it on its own merits.

Section 3.8 – Iron Tigran

Statue of Tigran Petrosian in Yerevan

Notwithstanding the improvement in defensive techniques set in motion by the immediate post-Botvinnik World Champions Tal (1960-1961), Petrosian (1963-1969), Spassky (1969-1972) and Fischer (1972-1975), we still have not arrived at a truly modern period. But among those champions, the one who deserves special acclaim as a master of defense is Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian. Petrosian was the 9th World Champion and held the crown between 1963-1969, succeeding Botvinnik. The foundation of Petrosian's playing style can be considered as highly positional, aiming for harmonious piece play. Petrosian was averse to real passivity, because he relied on his tactical counter skills to get wins. But he saw no shame in playing in solid fashion. Often, his defensive tactical capabilities remained hidden, and the opponent unaware of what could happen, until the counterpunch was in full swing. When asked, Petrosian commented:

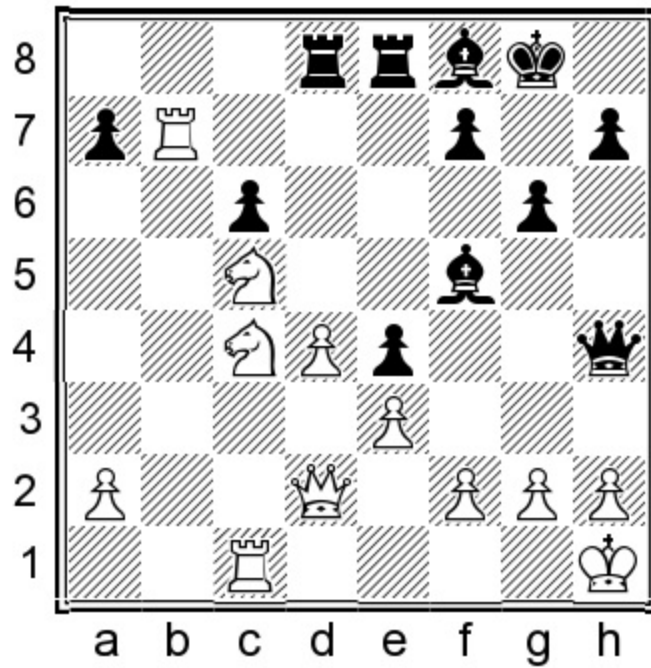


IN THE LIMELIGHT

“Yes, I like defending more than attacking, but who has demonstrated that defence is a less risky or dangerous occupation than attack? And are there so few games that have found their way into the treasury of chess thanks to virtuoso defence?”

In the following game Petrosian backs his words up with deeds. By showing a highly unusual creative defensive idea, he lifts the discipline of defense to a higher level. After grabbing a pawn, Petrosian fights Gligoric's kingside attack tooth and nail by implanting tactical counterthreats along the 5th rank.

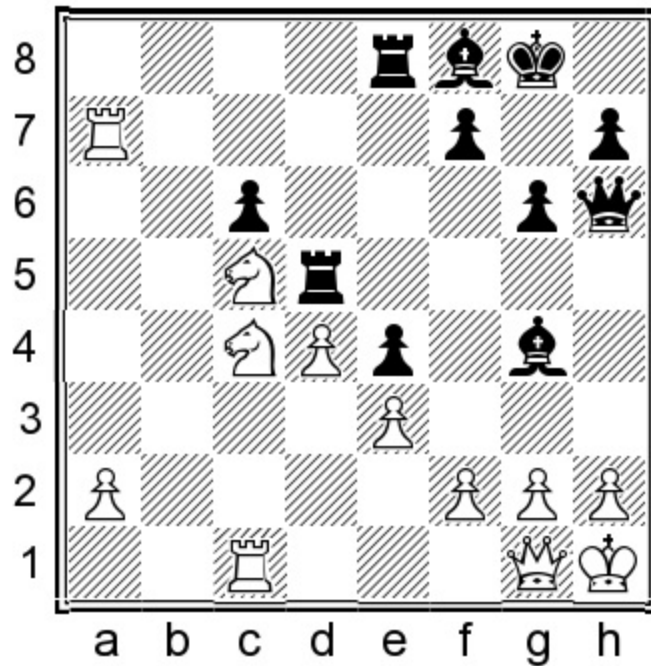
Petrosian, Tigran
Gligoric, Svetozar
Zagreb 1965



27. ♖e1!!

A tremendous defensive plan. Petrosian moves Her Majesty to g1, where she secures her king's wall of pawns.

27... ♜d5 28. ♖xa7 ♞h6 29. ♗g1 ♕g4



Position after: 29... ♕g4

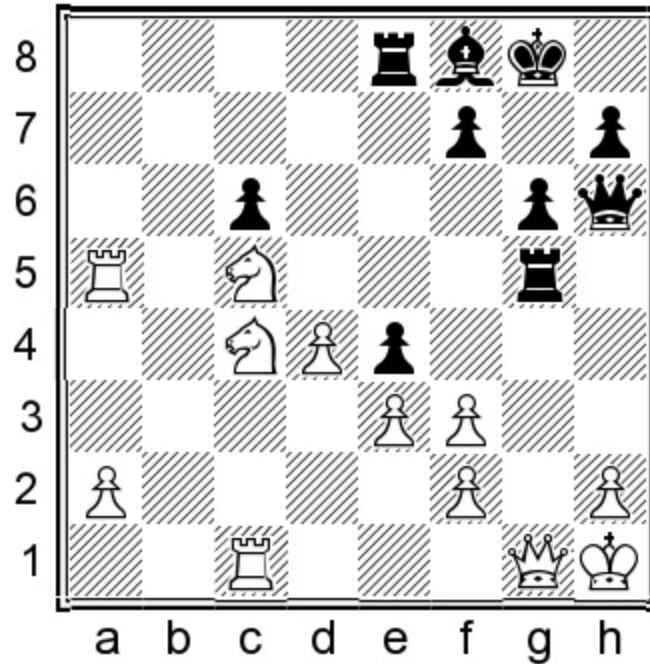
30. ♜a5!?

Petrosian's tactical defensive resourcefulness comes to the fore. He conceals a counter trick, based on which his entire defensive concept holds.

Also possible was 30.♘d2!? trying Black's pieces to the defense of the pawn on e4.

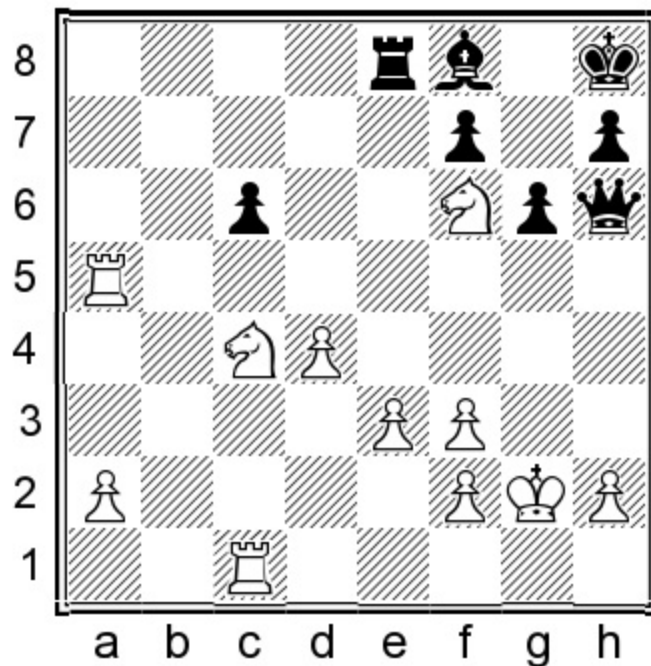
30...♙e2!?

A) 30...♙f3 31.gxf3! Ruthless and cold-blooded. 31...♖g5



Analysis after: 31...♖g5

32.♙f1! ♖h5 33.♙g2! In case of 33...exf3, we can just take back. 34.♙xf3 ♖xh2+ 35.♙g1 when Black's attacking forces run out of fuel. 33...♖g5 34.♘xe4! A magnificent queen sacrifice which was in Petrosian's pipeline all from move 27.♙e1. 34...♖xg2 35.♘f6+ ♙h8 36.♙xg2



Analysis after: 36. ♖xg2

36... ♜e6 37. ♘e4 White couldn't wish for more. His knights are controlling all over the board and the 8th rank as the c-pawn are concrete targets for the rooks.

B) 30... ♜g5 This allows a trick, namely 31. ♘xe4! ♜xe4 32. ♜xg5 ♚xg5 33. f3 White wins a pawn, although Black has serious counterplay on the pawn on e3.

31. ♘b3 ♜b4?

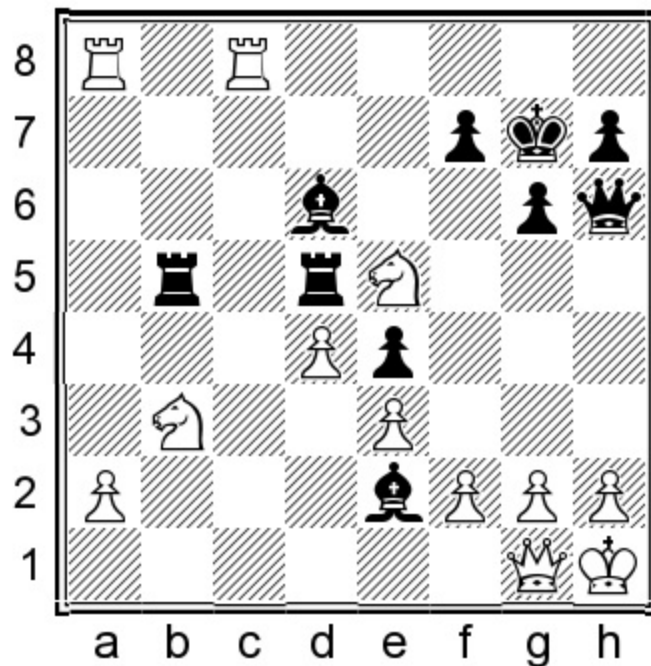
31... ♜xc4! would have been a better try. After 32. ♜xc4 ♜xa5 33. ♘xa5 ♜a8!, Black gets serious counterplay because of his active Rook.

32. ♜a4 ♜b8 33. ♘e5 ♜bb5? 34. ♜xc6

34. ♜xb4 This was one of these rare occasions that Petrosian didn't find this 'petite combinaison'.

34... ♜xb4 35. ♚e1 Striking two undefended pieces, would have meant the end of the game.

34... ♜d6 35. ♜c8+ ♚g7 36. ♜aa8



Position after: 36. ♖aa8

36...♜xe5?!

It is too late for a plot twist for Black. But as well after 36...♜xe5 37. ♖g8+ ♔f6 38.dxe5+ ♜xe5 39. ♖ae8 he would be lost.

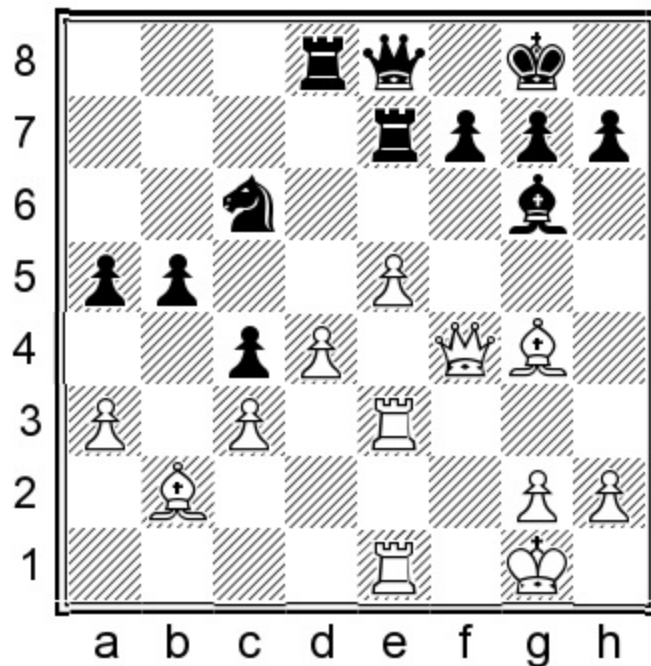
37.dxe5 ♜xe5 38.♞c5 ♜xc5 39.♘xc5 ♚h4 40.♞a4 f5 41.♘e6+ ♔f6 42.f4 ♜b2 43.♘g5 ♜d3 44.♞a7 ♜c4 45.♚d1 1-0

The most famous example of defense and Petrosian can't go unnoticed. Here, Black is about to be overrun in the center, but the 9th World Champion finds a brilliant regrouping of his pieces by way of an exchange sacrifice.

Reshevsky, Samuel Herman

Petrosian, Tigran

Zürich 1953



25...♖e6!

By this great sacrifice, Petrosian sets a blockade on the central square d5. He is losing the exchange, but gaining control over the essential d5-point.

26.a4 ♘e7 27.♙xe6 fxe6 28.♚f1 ♞d5

Petrosian has secured half of a point.

1/2-1/2

Section 3.9 – The eighties and nineties: the K-K era

Comparable to the enduring reigning period of Botvinnik, Kasparov and Karpov had a great influence on the development of defense in chess. Both of them held the World Championship title for (more than) 10 years in between the period of 1975 – 2000. However, their styles different day and night.



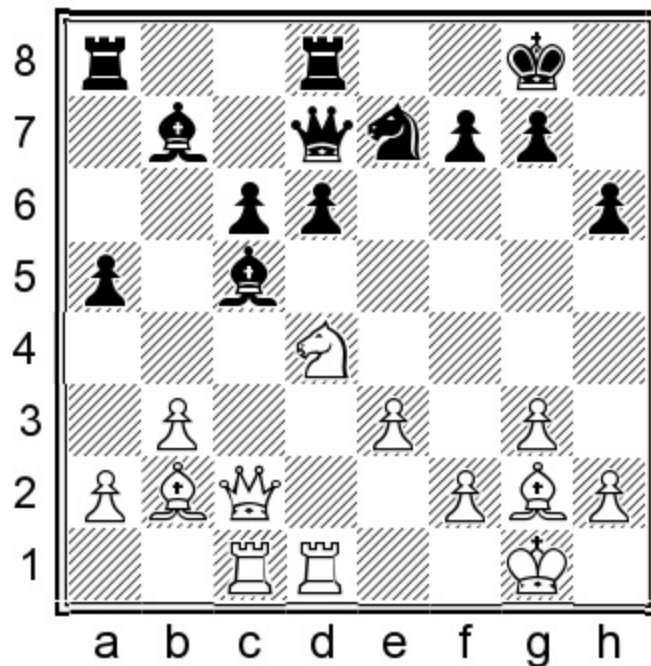
Anatoly Evgenyevich Karpov was the 12th World Champion between 1975-1985. Karpov's style was positional and technical in nature. According to Kasparov, it resembled a hybrid of Lasker's psychological refinement with Capablanca's impeccable machine-like technique, resulting in a 'deep, infiltrating style, subtle positional feeling and extraordinary persistence, practicality and flexibility. (28)

After a year of studying defensive plans and moves for the benefit of this book, I became more and more enraptured by Karpov's well-considered manoeuvres. Karpov was a master in finding subtle defensive moves. It was no coincidence that he rarely lost a game. In the next game against Robert Hübner, Karpov's defense resembles something Petrosian would have done...

Huebner, Robert (2600)

Karpov, Anatoly (2725)

Bad Kissingen 1980



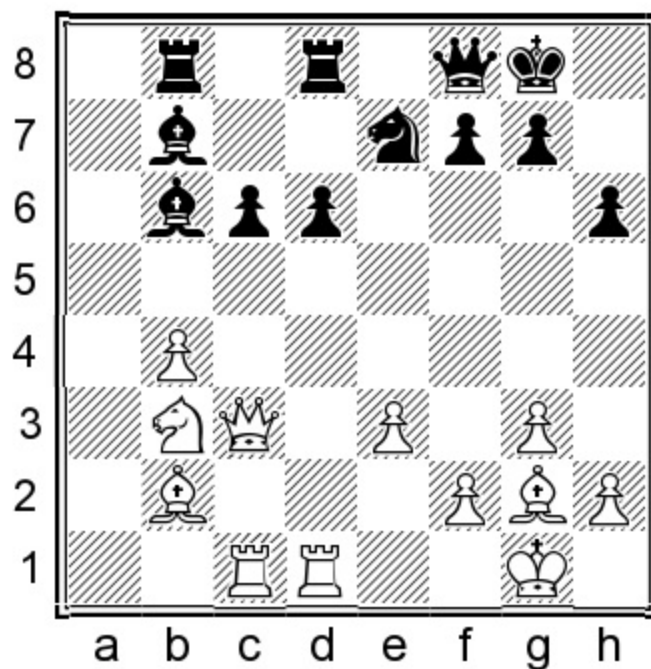
Clearly, Hübner has the better position so far due to Karpov's weak d- and c-pawns.

18...♙e8!

A typical defensive subtle manoeuvre by Karpov; the Queen is heading for f8 to add some necessary protection for when White plays ♖c2-c3, lining his Wueen up with the black King.

19.a3 ♜f8 20.♜c3 ♘b6 21.b4 axb4 22.axb4 ♖ab8 23.♞b3

Since the Knight on d4 has left its post, Black's worst placed piece can be improved.



Position after: 23. ♖b3

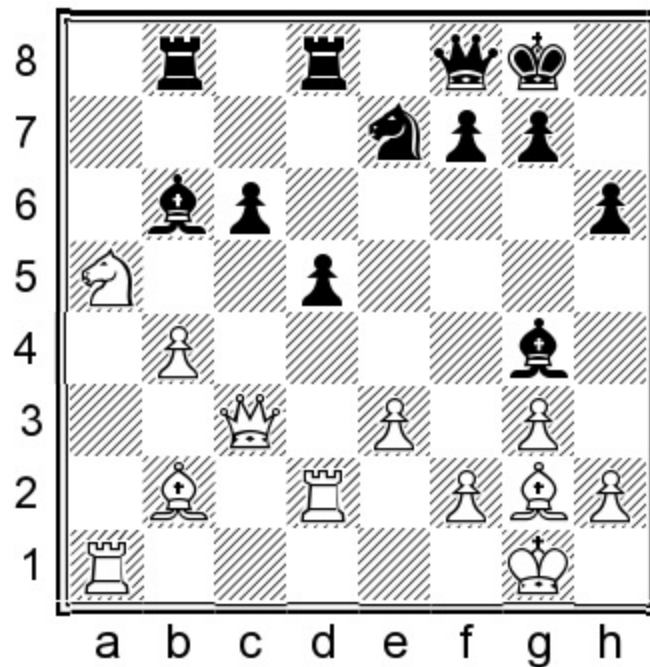
23... ♖a6!

Black's most passive piece is to be improved. 23... ♖c8!? is possible too, followed by ♖e6 or ♖g4.

24. ♖a1 ♖e2 25. ♖d2 ♖g4!

The weakest spots are under protection and Black has solved the issue of the passivity of his pieces. Here Black's position is broadly acceptable.

26. ♖a5 d5



Position after: 26...d5

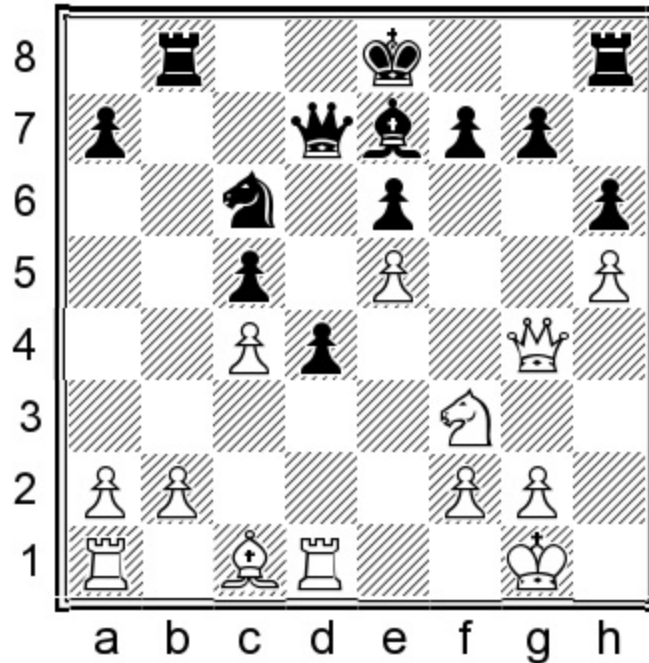
Karpov has disentangled himself from the worst of the positional problems. The players agreed on a draw after 35 moves.

27. ♖b3 ♖c7 28. ♖c5 ♖d6 29. h3 ♖c8 30. ♖ad1 f6 31. e4 ♖h8 32. f4 ♖f7 33. ♖h2 ♖e6 34. ♖d4 ♖xc5 35. ♖xc5 ♖b5

½-½

In the next blitz game, we find another profound defensive idea from Karpov to save his weak g7 pawn.

Arizmendi Martinez, J.L. (2478)
Karpov, Anatoly (2692)



19...♔f8!

Anatoly Karpov (photo Jos Suttmuller)

The best way of defending the g7-pawn: 19...♔f8?! 20.b3 ♖e7 21.♙d2 ♗f5 22.♘h4! ♗xh4 23.♙xh4 ♙e7 24.♙g4 and Black hasn't made any progress since the 19th move.

19...♔f8! 20.b3 a5 21.♙f4 a4

There is a lot to be gained for Black on the queenside, by means of this minority attack. Notwithstanding, he still has to solve his King's and Rook's position on the kingside.

22.♗d2 ♔g8 23.♗e4?!

Giving Black space to execute his maneuver.

23.♙g3! Black doesn't have time now to play: ♔h7, moving the rook from h8, because of an immediate ♙d3+. 23...♔h7 24.♙d3+ g6 25.♗e4 when White is much better.

23...♔h7!

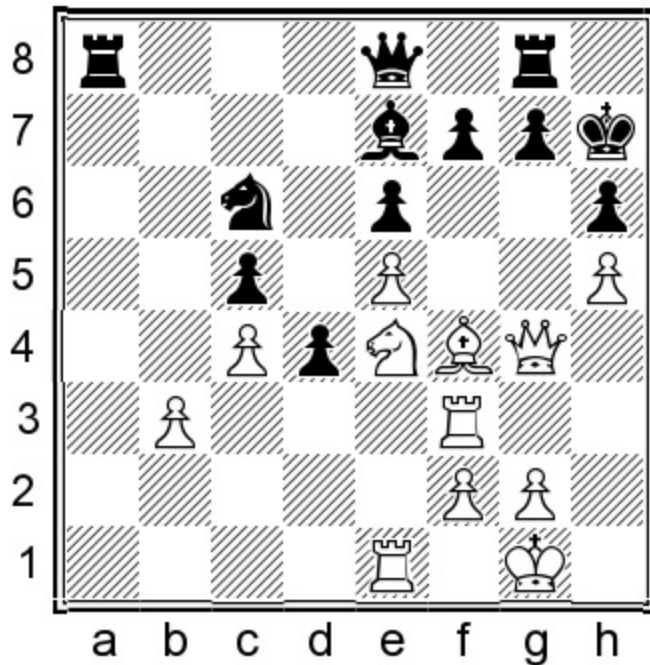
The King is safe on h7, whereas the rook can be moved away from the cage (h8).



24.♖d3 ♜hg8

Naturally, the pawns on g7 and f7 need protection.

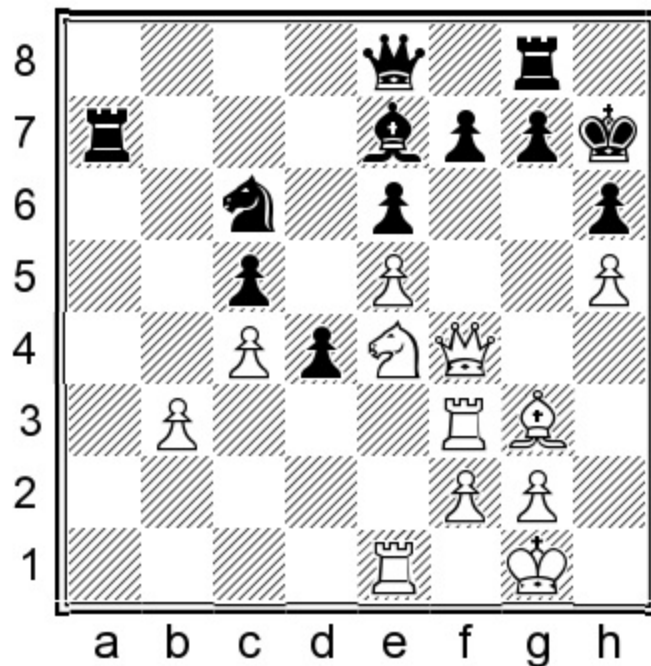
25.♜f3 ♜a8 26.♜e1 axb3 27.axb3 ♚e8!



Position after: 27... ♚e8!

Another fabulous defensive move for a game of blitz! With the following move Karpov defends his pawn on f7.

28.♞g3 ♜a7 29.♚f4



Position after: 29. ♔f4

29... ♖f8!

Passive but effective. There is no way through for the White player.

30. ♗f6+!

This sacrifice secures the draw.

30. ♔h2?! might become risky for White, after 30... f5! Karpov would be the first to aim for counterplay this way. 31. exf6 gxf6 ⇒ White should watch out in order not to be steamrolled.

30... gxf6 31. exf6 ♕d8 32. ♔e4+

The perpetual check is the most White could get out of his position.

32... ♔h8 33. ♖f4

The pawn on h6 can only be defended by the king.

33... ♔h7 34. ♖e4+ ♔h8

There is no way to escape the checks, so the players agreed to a draw.

½-½



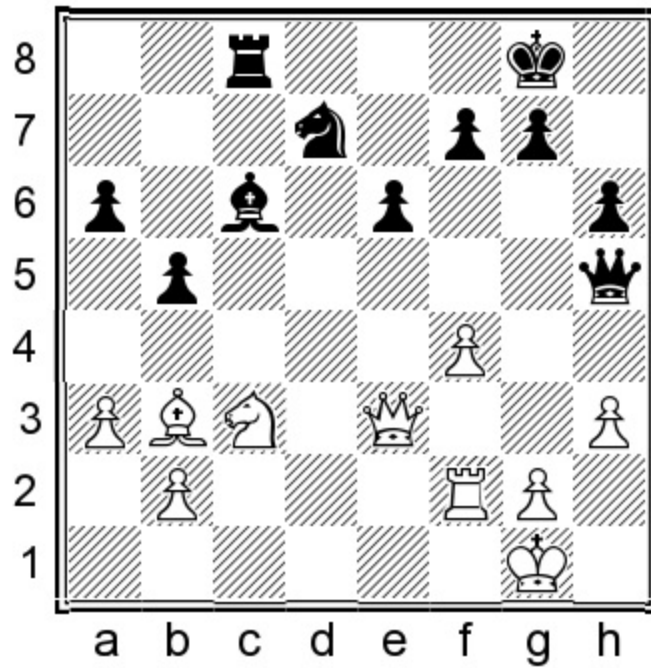
Viswanathan Anand (photo Alina l'Ami)

You just witnessed a technical highlight of one of the best defensive players ever. But even these superior defensive players like Karpov can sometimes fail to take full advantage of their opportunities. **Vishy Anand** wrote in his comments on this game – in Vishy Anand's My Best Games of Chess – that despite White's stern resistance, the win should be a matter of time due to his extra pawn. It's remarkable that both Karpov and Anand missed White's last chance to save the game.

Karpov, Anatoly (2730)

Anand, Viswanathan (2650)

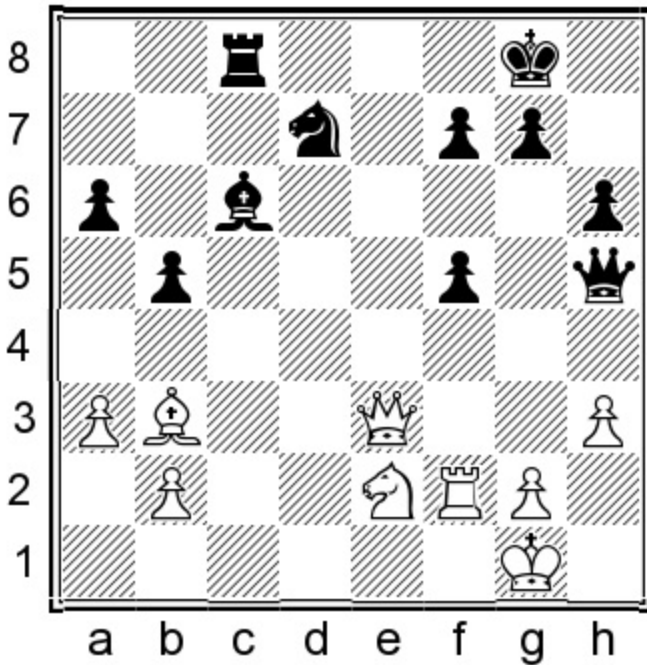
Brussels 1991



45. ♖d2?

Viswanathan Anand (photo Jos Suttmuller)

45.f5! This sacrifice, opening lines, would have given Anand wonderful attacking chances after 45...exf5
46. ♖e2!!



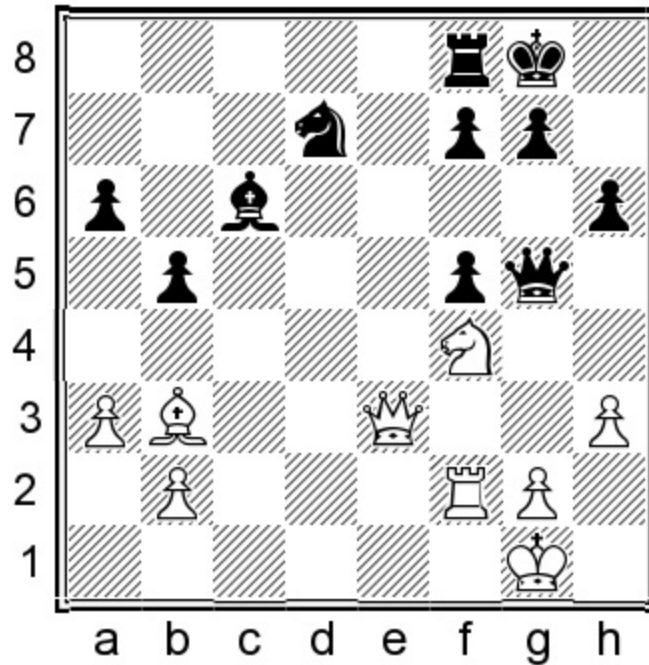
Analysis after: 46. ♖e2!!

Two exclamation marks for the quiet knight move. Despite the material deficit, suggesting that

something fast is in order, White can take this relatively slow route. The knight move conceals great strength and it will be moved to f4 or g3. It's Black who has to pay more heed to his next few moves.

A) 46...♘f6 47.♘f4 ♚g5 48.♙xf7+ ♔h7 [48...♔xf7 49.♚e6+ when the Rook is lost.] 49.♖c2 Due to the strong white pieces, it is Black who should be attentive in order not to totally lose control of the game;

B) 46...♖f8 47.♘f4 ♚g5 Up to this moment, it looked like one-way traffic. Black is just 2 full pawns up?



Analysis after: 47... ♚g5

48.♙xf7+!! Against all odds, White blows up Black's defense. 48...♖xf7 49.♚e8+ ♘f8 [49...♖f8 50.♚e6+ ♔h7 51.♚xc6 ♘b8 Defending a6, but placing the Knight on a passive square. 52.♚d6] 50.♚xc6 and after the exquisite sacrifice on f7, White saved the game due to the weakness on a6.

45.♖d2? ♚c5 46.♚xc5 ♘xc5

The rest of the game was a matter of technique. Anand won the game on the 70th move.

0-1

How can it be that both Anand and Karpov missed this sharp defensive idea of f5, which creates such strong counterplay? In such a bad position, and already a pawn down, Karpov would be desperate for any possible opportunity to create any counterchances. This question kept haunting me, until I got the opportunity to ask Vishy this during a Bundesliga-weekend in Berlin. Anand mentioned that f5 screamed to be played, but that the quiet ♘e2 is much harder to see and that these deeper motifs are what comps train you to see.

Using computers to investigate a position widens our ‘horizons’ and its hypermodern ideas enrich the realm of ideas we might consider. After decades working with engines it is more likely that Anand would have found this idea now.

Kasparov

Garry Kimovitch Kasparov, born on 13 April 1963 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the 13th World Champion from 1985 till 2000, and the leading player until his retirement in 2005. Kasparov is one of the most influential World Champions for his contemporaries, known for his imaginative attacking style. His attacking victories of the 80’s and the 90’s are overwhelmingly powerful and displayed a grandiose, aggressive style.

Whereas Karpov played generally positionally sound positions from the opening, Kasparov’s set-up was much more aggressive. As Kramnik puts it, Kasparov’s play was brilliant and authentic, but a lot of his games owed huge credit to home preparation, the rest of the game being a ‘simple’ matter of delivering precise finishing blows.⁽²⁹⁾

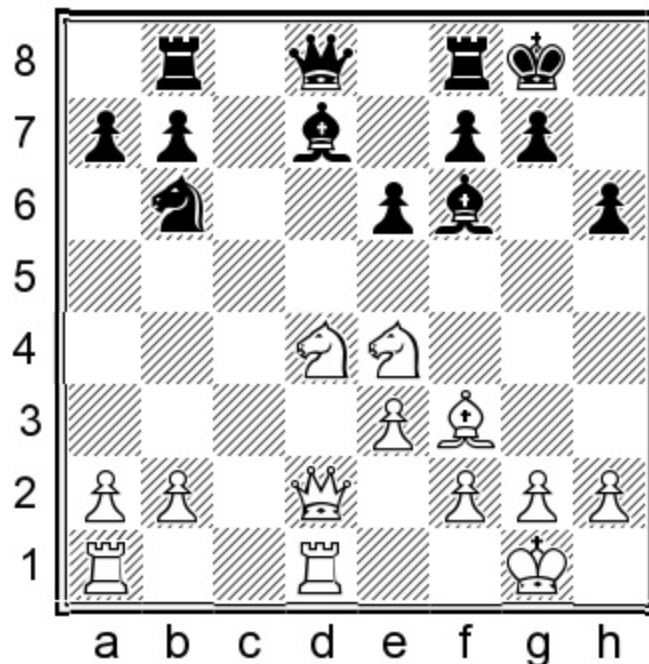
Concerning his legacy to defense, he left the next generation ideas of dynamic and concrete counterplay, as wasn’t seen by any other champion before.⁽³⁰⁾

In the next game, at the second 1985/1986 World Championship Match playing against his eternal rival, Kasparov suffered a tiny but lasting disadvantage. Due to his very accurate calculations, he found the right counterplan deep into an endgame.

Karpov, Anatoly (2720)

Kasparov, Garry (2700)

Moscow 1985



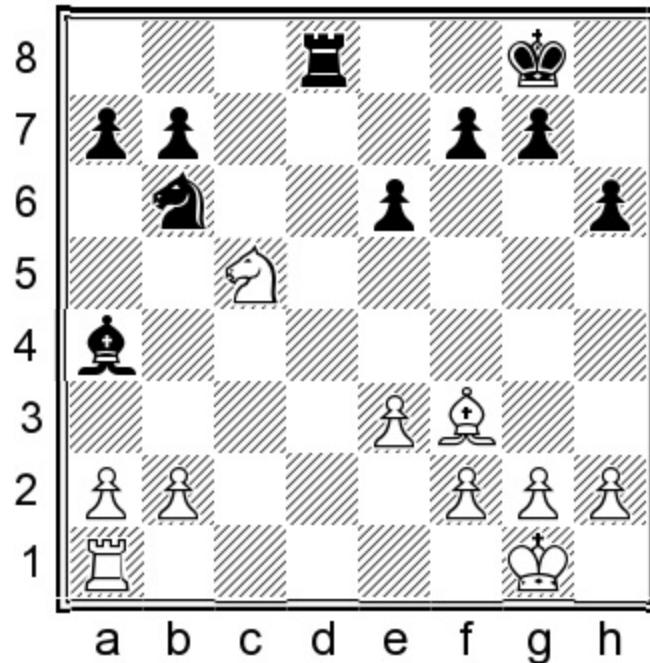
15...♙xd4!

As Kasparov puts it, ♖c4-e5 looks quite good, driving the Bishop away from f3. But instead, he preferred a deeply calculated exchanging operation.

16. ♖xd4 ♗a4!

Kasparov, facing a tiny but lasting disadvantage if he maintains the status quo, sacrifices his pawn on b7 in return for activity.

17. ♖xd8 ♖fxd8 18. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 19. ♖c5



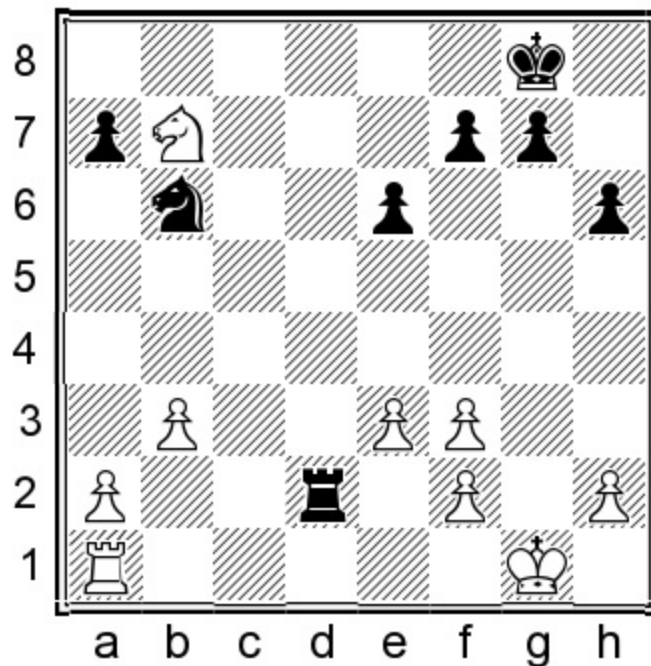
Position after: 19. ♖c5

In the ensuing ending, Kasparov determines to give up a pawn in exchange of an active Rook combined with a Knight.

19... ♖d2! 20. b3

Karpov prefers b3 over b4, in order to keep the pawn, chase the bishop away and – last but not least – to reduce Black’s opportunities to attack the White pawns (by way of ♖c4). Kasparov commented that Karpov’s 20.b3 was dictated by common sense: he was as though saying: ‘(..) for the moment I’m a pawn ahead – let’s see what the opponent will think up...’

20... ♗c6 21. ♖xb7 ♗xf3 22. gxf3



Position after: 22.gxf3

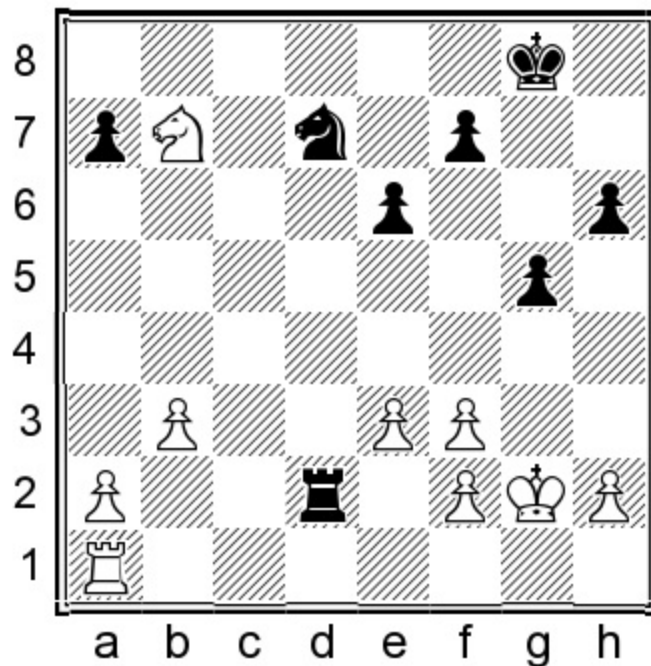
22...♞d7!!

According to Kasparov, the key move upon which his calculations were based and had aimed for on the 15th move, stressing that he doesn't only threaten to invade his knight with ♞d7-e5-d3, but as well prevents the isolated knight on b7 to return.

23.♔g2!

A cunning prophylactical move, as commented by Garry. He gives the variation: 23.♞a5 ♞e5 24.f4 ♞g4 when Black would immediately have regained the pawn. The cunning part in regards to 23.♔g2 that White momentarily keeps the Knight on b7, intending to oppose 23...♞e5 with 24.♞c5.

23...g5!



Position after: 23...g5!

Kasparov initiates an attack on the King, with a Knight and the h-and g-pawns! Furthermore, as his comments are, he fixes Karpov's pawn weaknesses and his Knight acquires the promising route e5-g6-h4. According to the 13th World Champion, his 23...g5 move, is 'Karpov-style' prophylaxis: it is now White who has to disclose his plans.

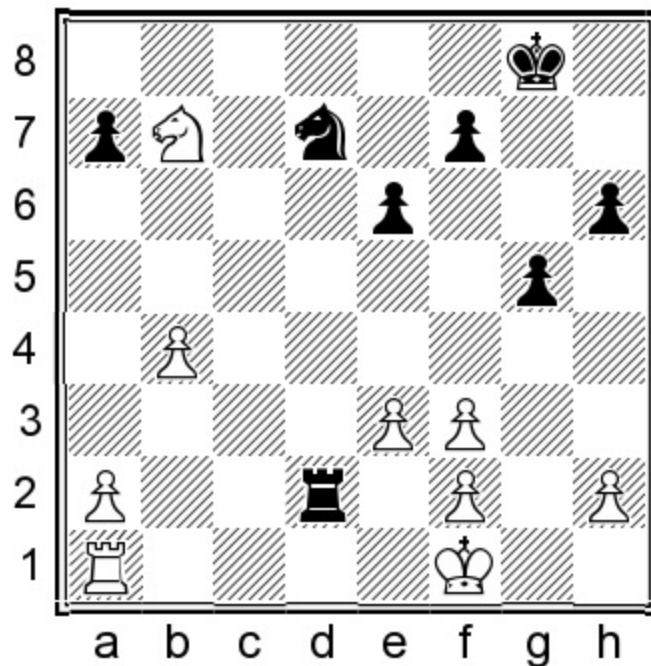
24.b4 ♖b6!

“The situation has changed and the Knight changes course.” On d5 the Knight will attack both the pawns on e3 and b4. 24...♞e5!/? would also have given sufficient counterplay, e.g. 25.♞c5 ♖g6 26.♔g3 ♜h4 27.♞e4 ♞c2 28.a4 ♜f5+ 29.♔h3 ♜h4↗

25.♔f1 ♞d7 26.♔g2

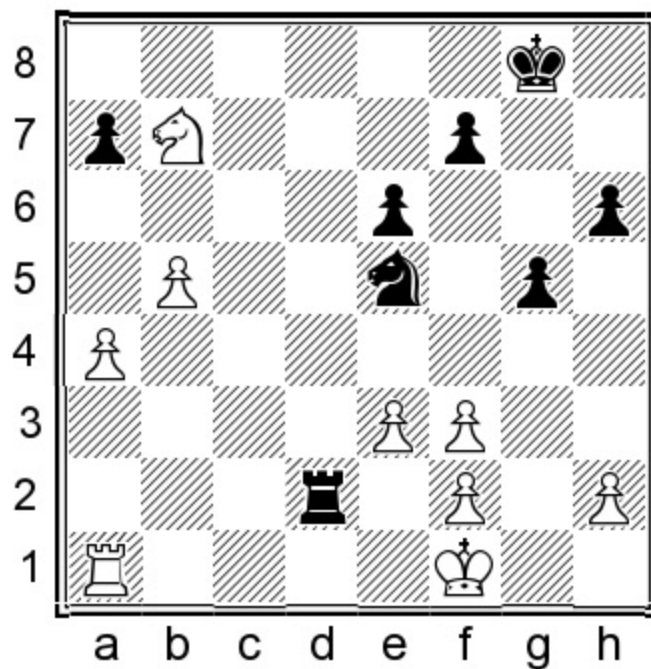
26.a4 ♞e5 27.b5 ♞d3! 28.♞a5 ♞xf2+ 29.♔g1 ♞b2 30.♞c6 h5 with counterplay.

26...♞b6 27.♔f1 ♞d7



Position after: 27...♞d7

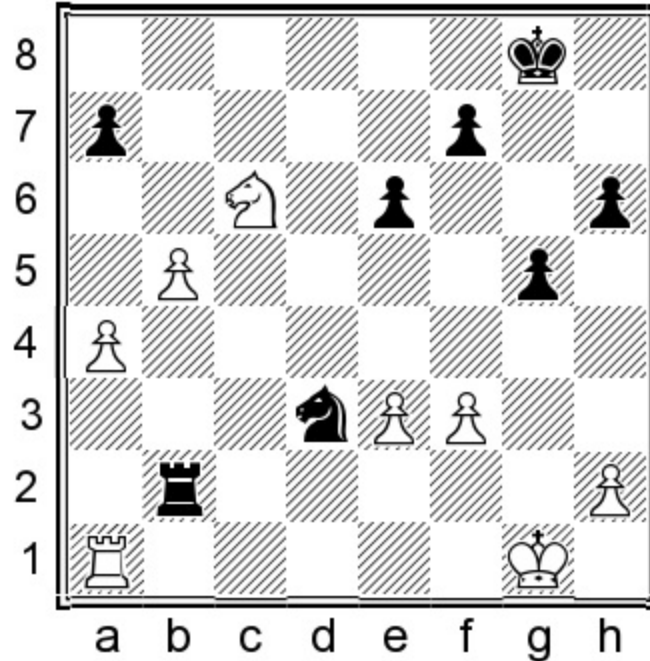
And the players agreed to a draw, considering Black's compensation sufficient. It transpires that this judgement was correct, for instance 28.a4 White starts running with his pawns, as the Knight intrusion is unstoppable. 28...♞e5 29.b5



Analysis after: 29.b5

29...♞d3 On the other side of the fray, Black tries to take a pawn and bring a pawn as close as possible to White's king for promotion or in the creation of mating nets around White's king. 30.♞a5

♖xf2+ 31.♔g1 ♜b2 32.♘c6



Analysis after: 32.♘c6

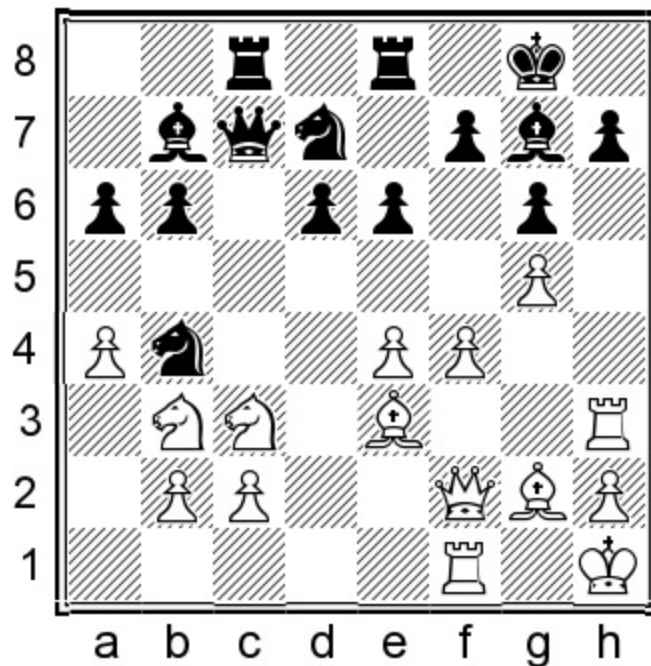
32...h5! Reinforcements are arriving. 33.♘xa7 h4 34.a5 h3 35.b6 Kasparov is in time with his counterplay, and he should as Karpov is knocking on the door on the other side of the fray. 35...♞g2+ 36.♔f1 ♜f2+ would be a perpetual check.

½-½

Within the discipline of defence, Kasparov obviously had mastery of techniques other than purely active counterplay. Later that match 2nd 'KK match', during the 24th and last and decisive game of the second World Championship Match against Karpov, he was facing a difficult position (see below) mainly due to the crushing threat of f4–f5.

Kasparov finds a highly creative prophylactic move to defend his king – one he later defined as the 'most difficult move of the game', after which the flame of White's attack is gradually extinguished. Once again the point was illustrated: defensive skills are as important as attacking skills and they can decide the outcome of the game to the same extent.

Karpov, Anatoly (2720)
Kasparov, Garry (2700)
Moscow 1985



23...♖e7!!

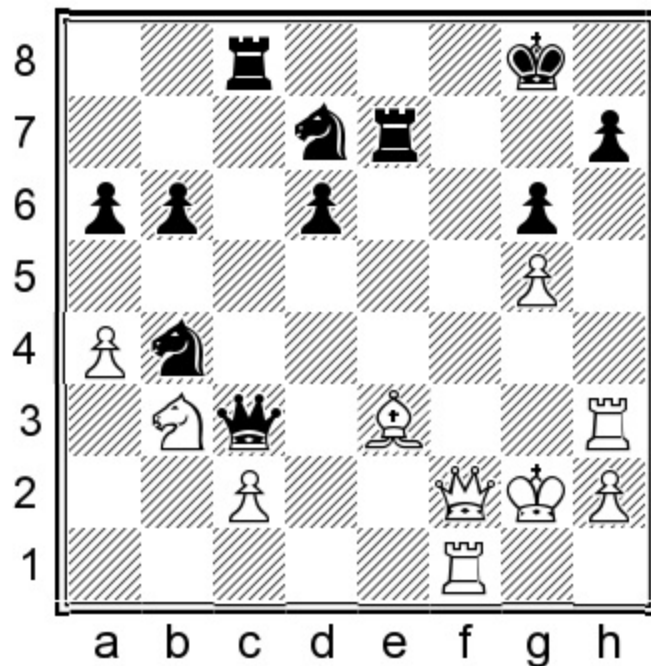
Garry Kasparov (photo Jos Sutmuller)

‘In essence, this is the most difficult move in the game, after which White’s attack begins to peter out.’ (Kasparov) Such a subtle defensive move, defending the weakest link in the position: the f7-point, is marking the turning point in the game.



24.♔g1

In the ensuing lines after 24.f5, it is clear how important it is to have the f7-square covered. 24...exf5 25.exf5 ♗xg2+ 26.♔xg2 ♗xc3 27.bxc3 ♕xc3 28.fxg6 fxg6



Analysis after: 28...fxg6

As it becomes visible, the Rook on e7 holds the black defence together. 29.♔d2 ♚c4! when Black is winning, as his defense refused to crumble.

24...♖ce8!

This defensive set-up is pleasing for the eye. As Kasparov explained the f4-f5 break is hanging ‘like a sword of Damocles’ over the position. After the doubling of the Rooks, Black is fully prepared for this break opening the e-file.

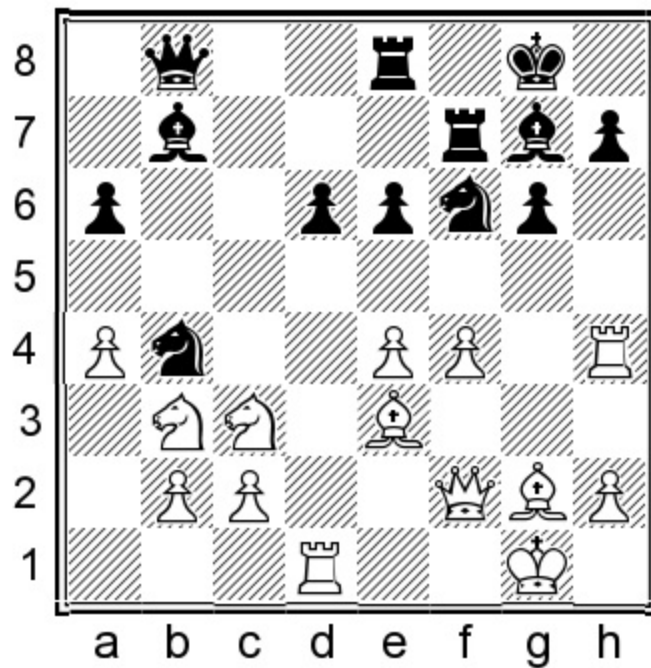
25.♖d1

After 25.♚h4 Black can defend the h7-point by 25...♗f8!

25...f5 26.gxf6 ♘xf6 27.♖g3

Winning a pawn and entering the ending after 27.♔xb6 ♘g4! 28.♔xc7 ♘xf2 29.♕xf2 ♖xc7 30.♖xd6 ♘xc2, Black has sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

27...♖f7 28.♔xb6 ♚b8 29.♔e3 ♘h5 30.♖g4 ♘f6 31.♖h4

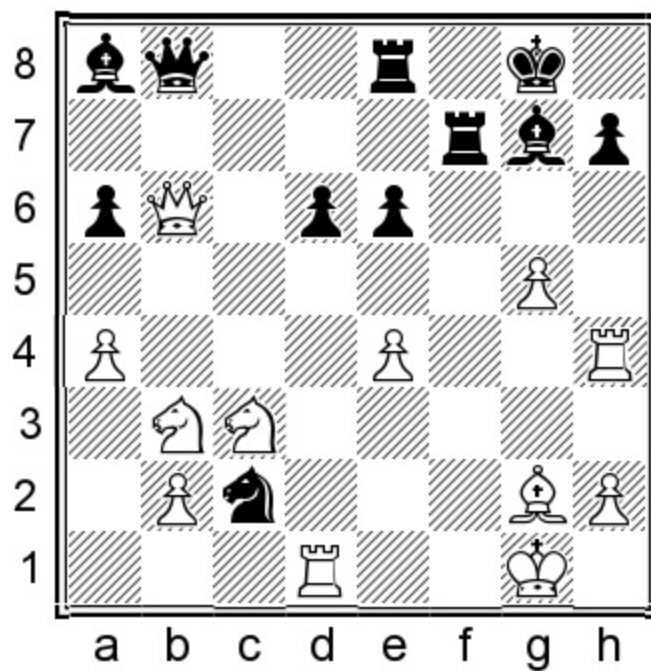


Position after: 31. ♖h4

31...g5!

Kasparov grabs the initiative by the opening of the lines.

32.fxg5 ♘g4 33.♙d2 ♘xe3 34.♙xe3 ♘xc2 35.♙b6 ♚a8!



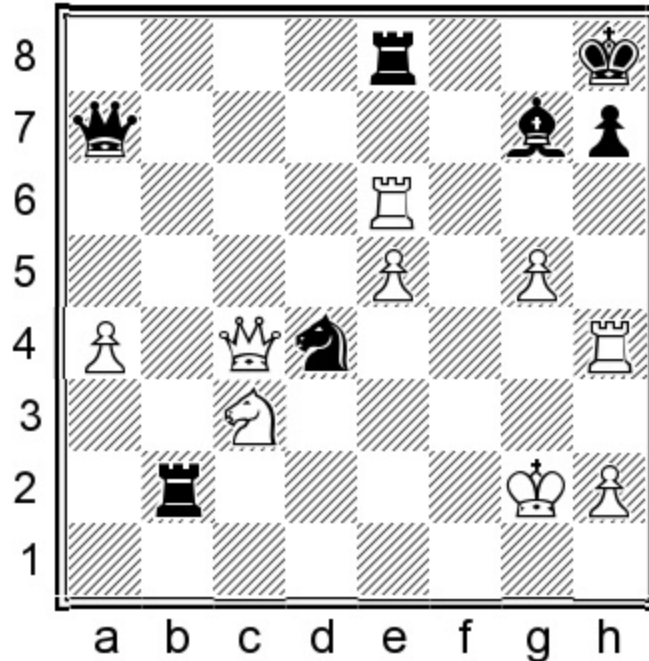
Position after: 35... ♚a8!

Kasparov creates counterplay along the b-file. White's position is alarming, since there's no harmony between his pieces. Now Karpov makes – a rare occasion for the 12th World Champion – a terrible mistake.

36. ♖xd6? ♜b7

One of those seldom mistakes made by Karpov. He is losing the b3-Knight.

37. ♚xa6 ♜xb3 38. ♖xe6 ♜xb2 39. ♚c4 ♔h8 40. e5 ♚a7+ 41. ♔h1 ♚xg2+ 42. ♔xg2 ♜d4+



Position after: 42... ♜d4+

With a major role for the Rooks, this dramatical moment after ♜d4+ seals the game and the entire match. Kasparov writes: ‘What different fates the black rooks have experienced. One, the queen’s rook, made a couple of backward moves, and to the end of the game stood in its place, but the other, the king’s rook, conducted itself heroically and decided the outcome by giving the last check.’ And indeed, we can only affirm the king’s Rook major part in the play. It’s long route via h8-e8-e7-b7-b3-b2 could be explained by defensive (on e7) and attacking (along the b-file) purposes.

0-1

Section 3.10 – The millennials: era of modern defense

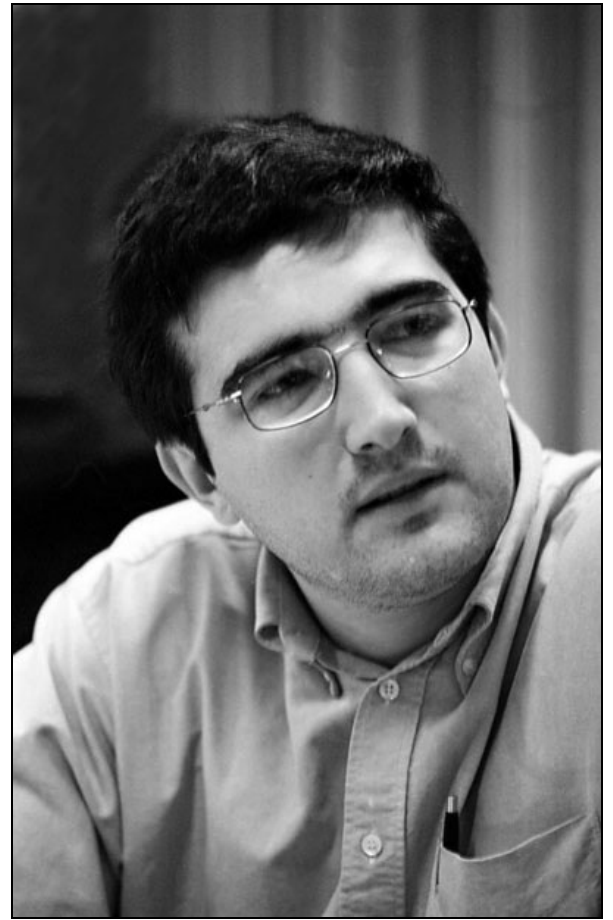
Vladimir Kramnik (photo Jos Sutmuller)

At present, with the help of modern engines we can decidedly say that some of Tal’s sacrifices were simply incorrect. A cure was found for the romantic style of speculative sacrifices: and the cure was called ‘the engine’. After the turn of the millennium, chess as a sport quickly professionalized by the

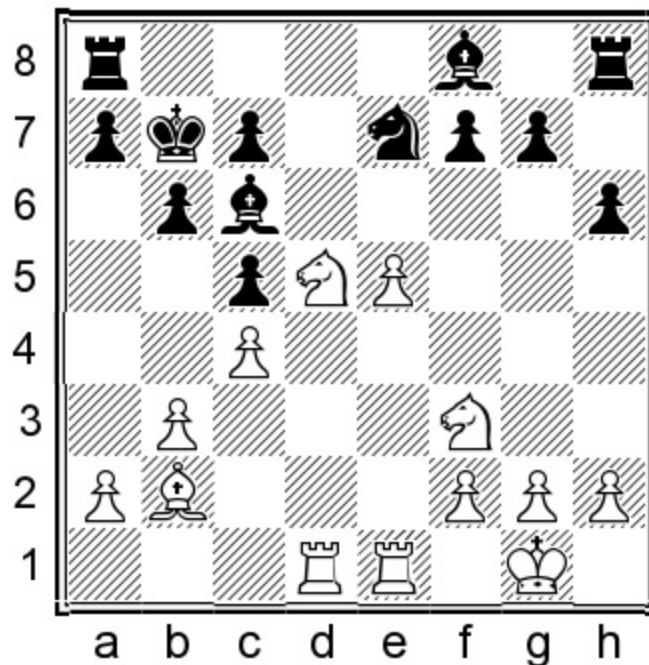
influence of the computer. As a result, leading modern players have a more sober approach to the game. According to Kramnik he accepts the sacrifice, defends and wins. We are under the influence of computers and we are defending with much more precision.⁽³¹⁾

Despite the so dominant reign of the 2 K's where it was unimaginable that there would be any space to improve on their play, in n 2000 between the 8 October 2000 and 4th November 2000 the 'impossible' happened when Kasparov's tenure ended abruptly. In the World Championship match taking place over 15 rounds, Kramnik took on the almighty Kasparov alone... and won, with a score of 8,5 - 6,5. The chess crown was his.

Like Kasparov his claim was founded on a very strong opening repertoire. Kasparov acknowledged that he was caught by surprise as a result of Kramnik's choice of openings. Kramnik chose in several lines defensive set-ups in which the Queens were quickly exchanged. With Black Kramnik had success with the Berlin wall. Kasparov's attacking potential was neutralised and the match was steered in a more favorable technical direction.



Kasparov, Garry (2849)
Kramnik, Vladimir (2770)
 London 2000



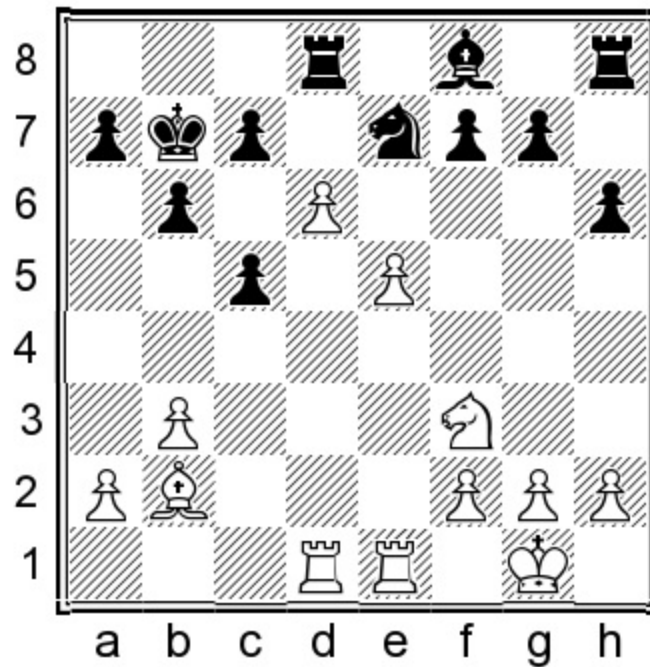
White's initiative seems to be overwhelming. However, Black's position is very compact, not

containing any weaknesses. Kramnik finds a clever mechanical way to improve the position of his Rook on h8.

17...♖g8!!

A multipurpose move, as it defends g7 and prepares, after g7-g5, the rook lift ♖g8-g6 and evt. e6. As we speak, Kramnik, now that g7 is overprotected, threatens to take on d5.

17...♙xd5?! comes too early, as after 18.cxd5 ♖d8 19.d6!? now that we see that the long diagonal a1-h8 will be opened, it becomes clearly visible why the prophylactic text move 17...♖g8 was a move desirable to be implemented by Black.

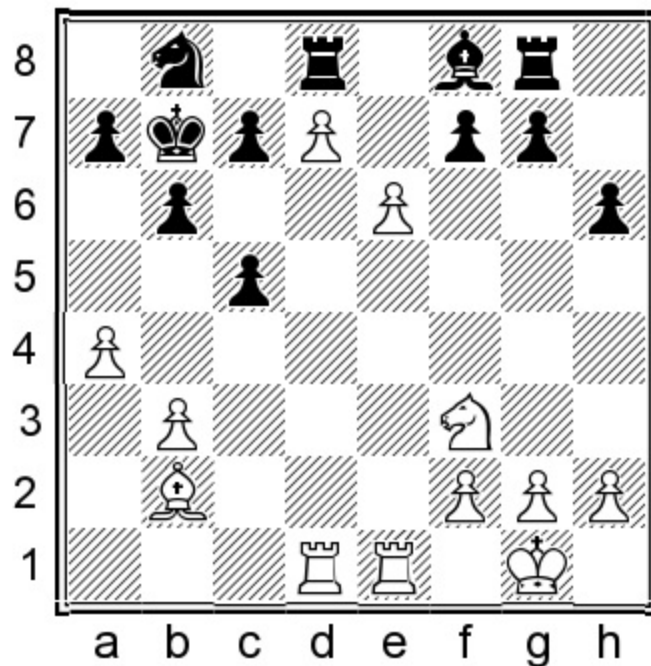


Analysis after: 19.d6!?

19...cxd6 [19...♗c6 20.d7!? ♗b8 21.e6!? fxe6 22.♗e5↑] 20.exd6 ♗c6 21.d7 ♖c7 22.♖e8 the pin on the 8th rank may cause problems hard to overcome for Black.

17...♖g8!! 18.♗f4

18.a4 ♙xd5! 19.cxd5 ♖d8 20.d6 ♗c6 [20...cxd6 21.exd6 ♗c6 22.d7 ♖c7 when Black looks fine.] 21.d7 ♗b8 22.e6



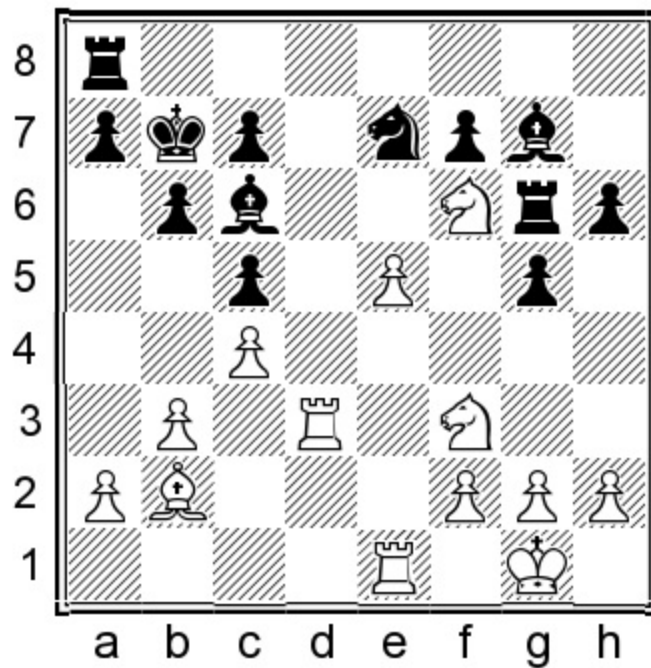
Analysis after: 22.e6

Again, this pawn thrust doesn't sortie the same effect with Black's Rook on g8. 22...fxe6 23.♘e5 with the Rook on g8, ♘e5-f7 is no longer winning material for White. 23...♙d6!, Black is much better as White can't hold on to the d7-pawn.

18...g5 19.♘h5 ♖g6 20.♘f6 ♙g7

A cold blooded continuation. Kramnik intends to eliminate the Knight on f6 in due course.

21.♖d3

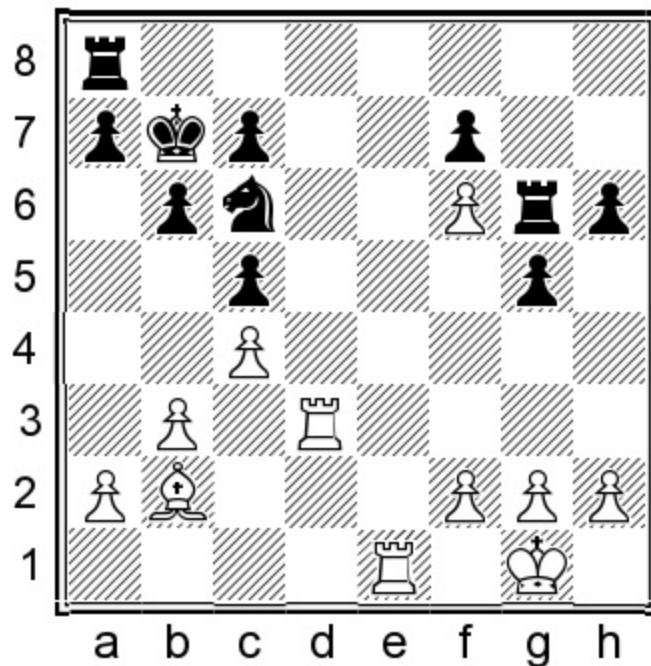


Position after: 21. ♖d3

21... ♙xf3!

Primarily, Kramnik gives up his bishop pair in order to be able to take on f6. In that scenario, the knight leap ♘f3-♘e5 should at all costs be avoided.

22. ♖xf3 ♙xf6 23. exf6 ♘c6 24. ♖d3



Position after: 24. ♖d3

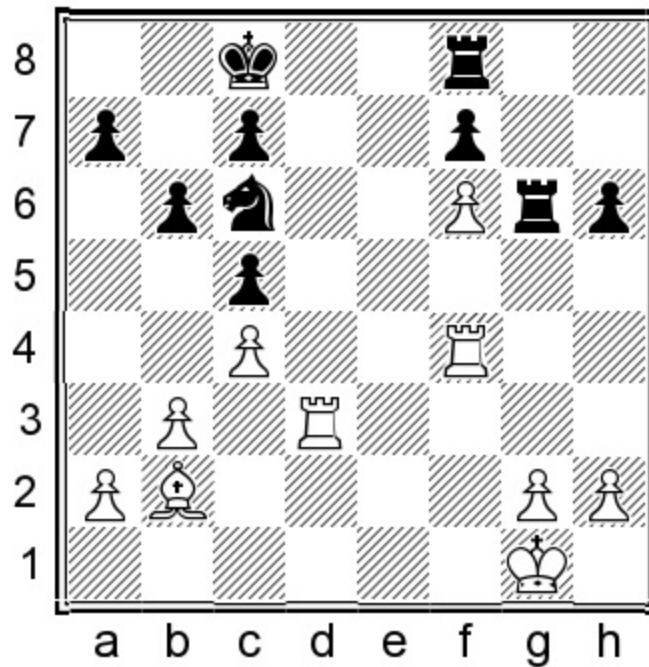
24...♖f8!

Kramnik is preparing for the equalising ♘d4 and ♖xf6. First he has to take preemptive measures to prevent any invasion of the white Rooks on the 7th rank.

24...♘d4? comes too early, on the account of 25.♙xd4 cxd4 26.♖xd4 ♖xf6 27.♖d7.

25.♖e4 ♕c8 26.f4 gxf4 27.♖xf4

Kasparov avoided Kramnik's attempts to let his advantage evaporate after ♘c6-♘d4, but now after ♖xf4 Black takes over the e-file.



Position after: 27. ♖xf4

27...♖e8

Kramnik's tenacious defence left him with equal chances. Although the h6-pawn can become weak, the a5-a4 advance and Black's active pieces, yield him enough counter chances.

28.♙c3 ♖e2 29.♖f2 ♖e4 30.♖h3 a5! 31.♖h5 a4

And Black was fine here, since the weak White queenside pawns can become more and more a concern for Kasparov.

½-½

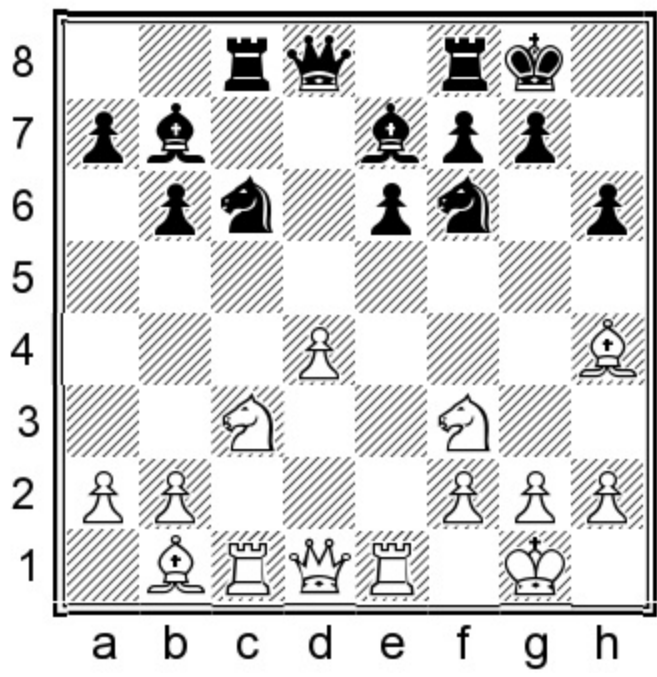
Kramnik was one of the first elite players to consciously reinvent his playing style to reflect modern trends. In an old interview he asserted that amongst most of the contemporary grandmasters his efficient defensive style has a lot of followers:

“ (...) Look at what people are playing these days: Sicilian Sveshnikov, Petroff, the Berlin Defence. Others are playing the openings that were developed by me. I am being copied these days, and so is my defensive playing style. Very few players play like Kasparov in the ‘90s.”

Undeniably, Kramnik’s opening legacy was incalculable. He invented a range of new opening ideas which attracted other advocates among the world elite. The Queen’s Gambit, Semi-Tarrasch, Sveshnikov, Petroff and Berlin Defense were adopted extensively by them, and so was the associated secure and defensive style. This was a logical consequence of Kramnik’s success and the cachet accruing to any line which the diligent and defensively-minded World Champion worked on.

As computers improved in the 2000’s and 2010’s, more players made stable opening repertoires and achieved results with them. To achieve good results against this ever-widening group of players required creating high tension on the board in approximately equal positions.⁽³²⁾ One of the most successful at this was Kramnik’s contemporary and fellow pioneer of modern defense, Peter Leko. In the following game, computer-aided preparation gave rise to a typically futuristic, strong defensive resource. The computer’s defensive style, now adopted also by humans, is not merely materialistic – grabbing a pawn and holding on for dear life – but can also include temporary pawn sacrifices for the initiative...

Sokolov, Ivan (2663)
Leko, Peter (2735)
Wijk aan Zee 2013



15...♘h5!

Peter Leko (photo Jos Sutmuller)

Playing against the isolated d4-pawn, Leko would like to simplify by the exchanges of pieces.

16. ♖c2?!

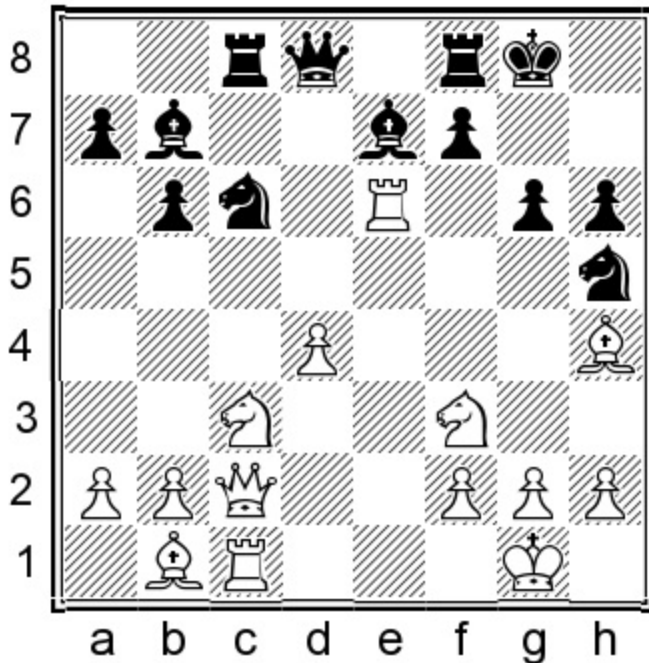
Both sides have to walk a fine line. White because of the long-term danger of his weak isolated pawn, and Black due to White's menacing kingside assault.

Also seen in practice, is 16. ♖g3 ♜xg3 17. hxg3 ♖f6 when after 18. ♘e4?! [18. ♖e4∞] 18... ♖xd4 19. ♖xc6 ♖xf2+! 20. ♘xf2 ♚xd1 21. ♘xd1 ♖xc6 I got the better position in Jepson, C (2413) – Werle, J (2527) Porto Carras 2018, 0-1 (35).

16...g6

Leko stays calm in the face of danger.

17. ♖xe6



Position after: 17. ♖xe6

Peter Leko's preparation had revealed the following move to him, and it must have come as a shock to the white player.

17... ♘f4!

Black defends g6, while also gaining time; the white Rook on e6 has to spend a move to retreat. Black's pieces are perfectly coordinated and ready for the counter-attack.

18. ♖xe7!?

The best practical attempt. A passive retreat would see White jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. 18. ♖xe7? ♜xe7 19. ♖ee1 ♕xf3 20. gxf3 ♚xd4

18... ♜xe7 19. ♚d2 g5!

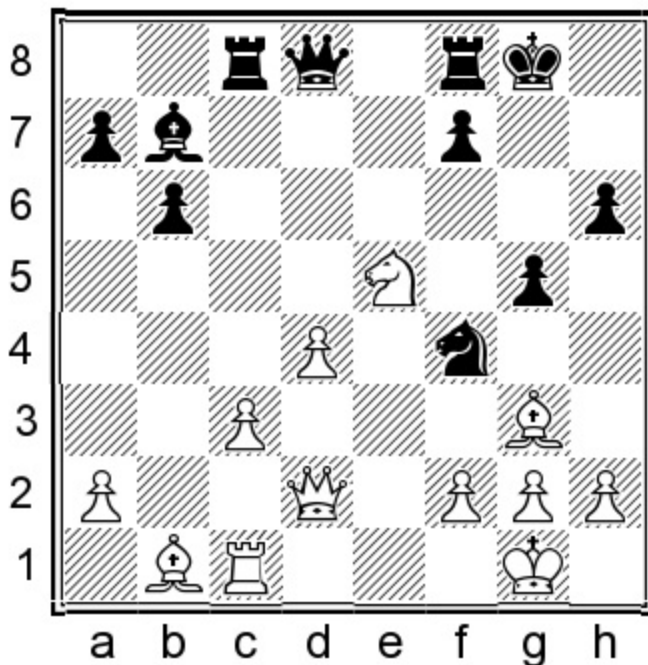
Again, this looks too dangerous to throw your kingside pawns forward like this. But, in fact, with this move, Black obtains a big advantage. The point is that the square on g6 will be available for the e7-knight.

20. ♜e5

20. ♜xg5!? ♜eg6! would leave Leko with a substantial advantage.

20... ♜eg6

Another way of converting the material advantage was: 20... ♜ed5!? 21. ♕g3 ♜xc3 22. bxc3



Analysis after: 22.bxc3

22... ♚xd4!! when after 23. ♚xd4 Black is winning back the queen due to the knight fork on e2.

21. ♜xg6 fxg6

From here on, it's going from bad to worse. Black will take on g2 and takes over the initiative.

22. ♕g3 ♜xg2 23. ♚c2 ♚f6 24. ♕e5 ♚f7 25. a3 ♜h4 26. ♕a2 ♚xa2 and White resigned. 0-1

At present, the most influential defender is undoubtedly Russian Grandmaster Sergey Karjakin. In the World Championship Match the World Champion Magnus Carlsen had to content himself with 10 draws out of 12 classical games and one win apiece. The defenses of Karjakin were almost completely immune to Carlsen's onslaught, and as a result of the match he acquired the nickname *Minister of Defense*.

The exact origin seems to have been a tweet during one of the match games:

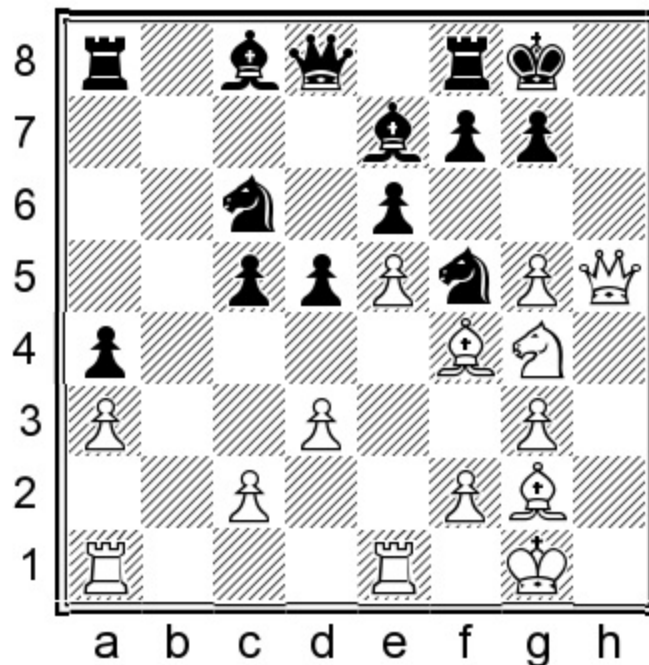
“BREAKING NEWS: Putin just appointed Karjakin Russian Minister of Defence.”⁽³³⁾

And so the chess world can rejoice with a new plague carrier who manages to create beauty from something that was supposed to be ugly. Talking about the non-apparent, hideous defensive moves sorting effect, one might linger that an ape's an ape, a varlet's a varlet, though they be clad in silk or scarlet. The following amazing defensive style displayed by Sergey Karjakin in a game of blitz (!) against Morozevich impressed me the most of all the games I have studied for this book.. and made me believe that illogical and ugly moves can be clad in silk or scarlet!

Morozevich, Alexander (2739)

Karjakin, Sergey (2772)

Moscow 2013



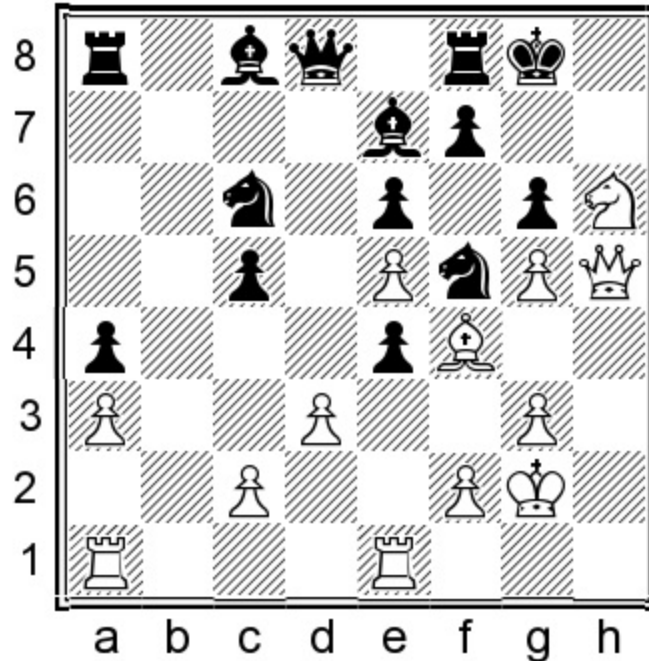
20.♙e4!?

Morozevich vacates the g2-square for his King so that he can then move a Rook to the h-file.

20...dxe4 21.♔g2

21.dxe4!? g6 22.♖h2 ♘cd4 with loads of complications after 23.♔g2∞.

21...g6! 22.♘h6+



Position after: 22.♘h6+

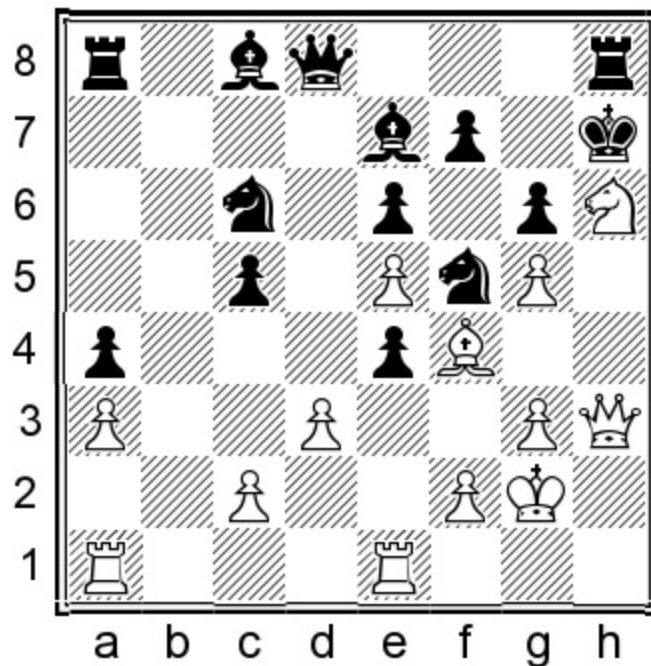
22...♔h7!!

A) The King can, strangely enough, find temporary shelter on the h-file! 22...♘xh6? would lose, as after 23.♙xh6 Black would have been defenseless against the threat of ♖h1;

B) 22...♔g7? 23.♘xf5+ exf5 24.♙h6+ ♔g8 25.♖h1 with a mate on h8 on the next move.

23.♙h3 ♖h8!

The defensive point behind Black's last move. The King makes space for the Rook on the h-file. White's attack on the h-file has been halted.



Position after: 23... ♖h8!

24. ♗xf5+

The discovered check 24. ♗xf7+ looks dangerous, but in reality is harmless. 24... ♔g7 25. ♗xd8 ♘xd8! here the 3 minor pieces overpower the Queen.

24... ♔g8 25. ♗h6+ ♔g7 26. dxe4 ♙xg5

The rest was simple for Karjakin and he finally won the game.

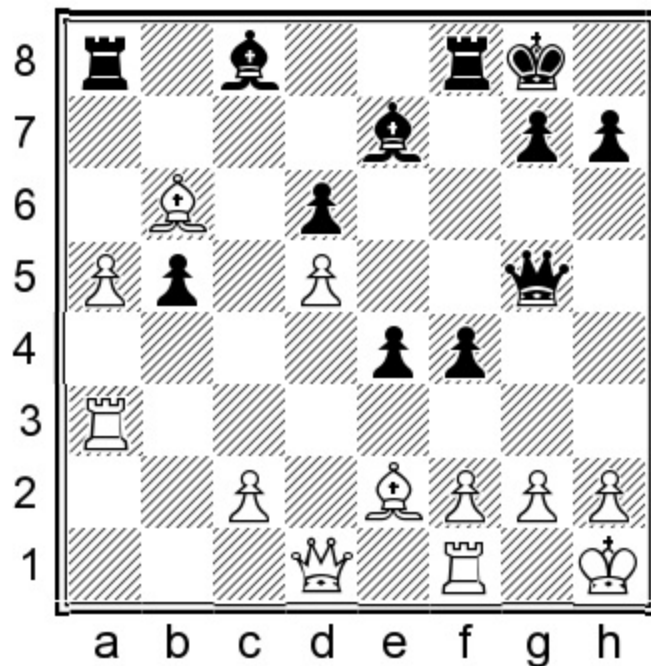
0-1

During the 2018 World Championships Match, where the Norwegian World Champion faced off against his next challenger (the American Grandmaster Fabiano Caruana), a highly peculiar situation arose during the 10th game. Caruana had the option of taking the pawn on b5, which at first sight appears audacious. The journalists following the apparent computer's recommendation, asked why Caruana didn't take on b5 and, secondly, whether he had been too nervous to do so.



Magnus Carlsen (photo Alina l'Ami)

Caruana, Fabiano
Carlsen, Magnus
London 2018



Concerning the first question, after the Bishop moves from the king's defense to grab this pawn, at some point it will have to return, meaning the pawn costs two tempi. Carlsen might use this time to pursue a powerful attack. On the contrary, should Caruana succeed in defending against the attack, this extra pawn would likely grant him the win which might prove decisive in his title quest.

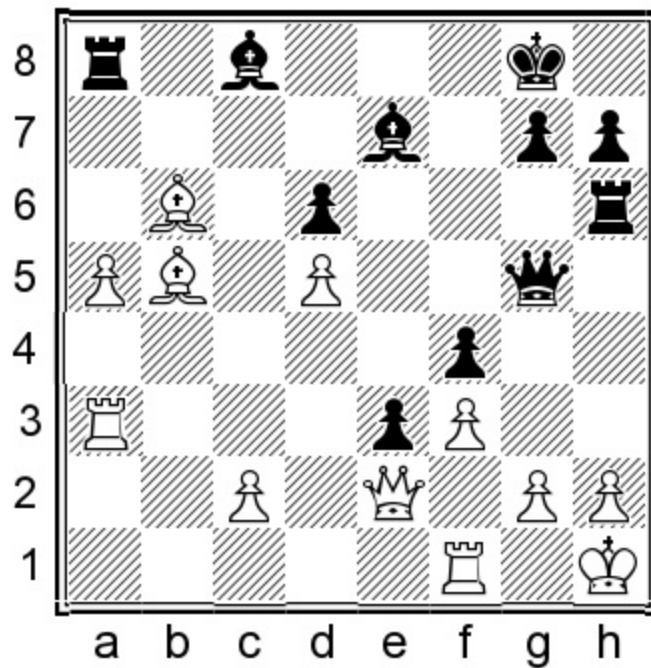
24. ♖xb5

In fact, Caruana and Carlsen disregarded this continuation as being too dangerous for White. Caruana feared ...♖f8-f6, intending to point the Rook to the white King, which appeared like a well-founded argument not to take on b5.

24.g3 was played in the game, after which Carlsen seemed OK: 24...b4 25.♖b3 ♘h3 26.♖g1 f3 27.♙f1 ♙xf1 28.♚xf1 ♚xd5 when Black was fine. Caruana, F (2832) – Carlsen, M (2835) London 2018 ½-½. But let's dig a bit deeper!

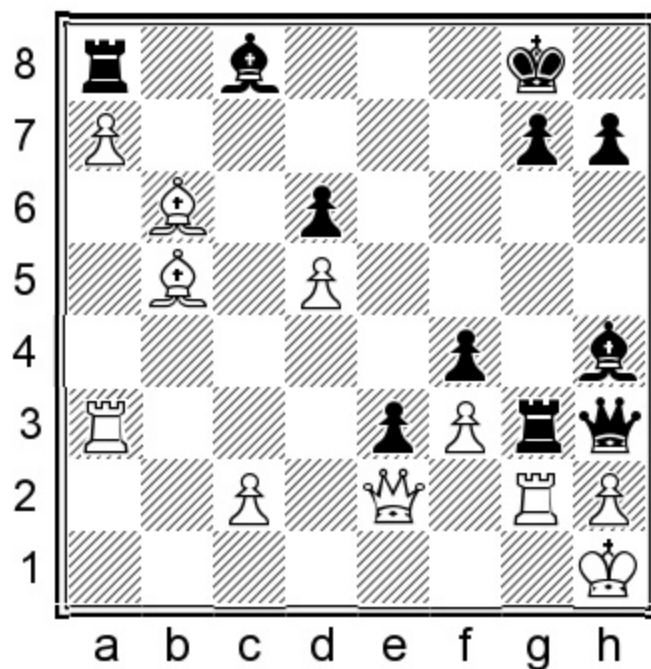
24. ♖xb5 ♖f6 25. ♖e1!

25.f3 was the players' suggestion during the post-mortem. The players rightly commented that anything could possibly happen here, e.g. 25...e3 26.♚e2 ♖h6



Analysis after: 26... ♖h6

27.g3! Clearing the second rank. 27... ♙xg3 28.a6 ♚h3 29.♖g1 ♜h4 30.♖g2 ♜g6 31.a7!! ♖g3!



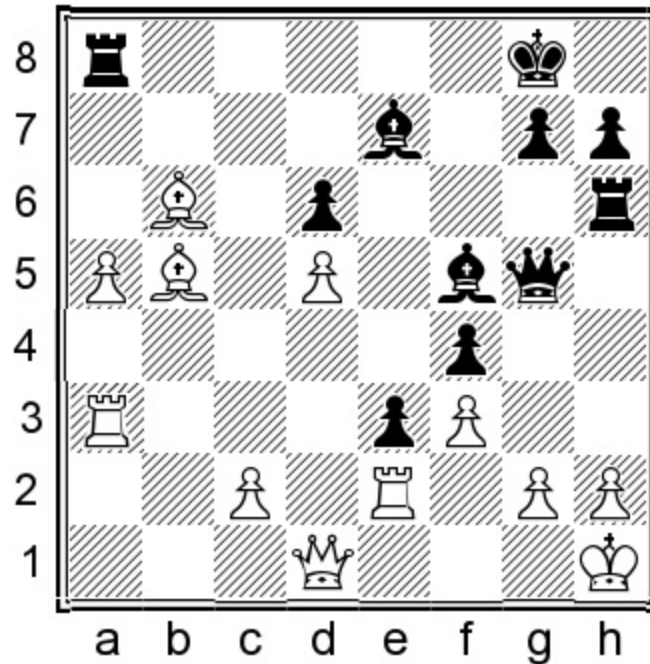
Analysis after: 31... ♖g3!

This goes far beyond human comprehension. The computer evaluates this position (after either ♜c6 or ♖xg3) as equal, i.e. 0.00!

25... ♜f5

25...♖h6 26.♗xe4 ♕h4 27.h3!+- the Rook on a3 makes any bishop sacrifice on h3 impossible.

26.f3 e3 27.♗e2 ♖h6



Analysis after: 27...♖h6

28.♕g1!

We have seen this defensive idea in Petrosian's game against Gligoric. Black's attack has been halted and White will convert his material advantage.

We can conclude from their statements after the game, that the players could not foresee most of the most important defensive (computer) lines after the pawn-thieving on b5. Nonetheless, relying upon their intuition, they rejected the crucial move ♖e1! Both Caruana and Carlsen were not surprised that ♗xb5 was a strong move, and neither did Caruana really regret this 'missed' opportunity. The hazardous and irregular computer lines are often too inconceivable for us to expect to reach clear-cut conclusions over the board.

The final word in this chapter rightfully belongs to Magnus Carlsen. The thus-far-invincible World Champion, who seems to stand head and shoulders above his main rivals, often has a published rating within touching distance of his all-time peak rating of 2882. Asked about the rise of neural network based chess engines which show an enormous amount of fresh and surprising ideas, Magnus gave the following quote:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“It is crystal clear that we have only scratched the surface of what is possible in chess.”⁽³⁴⁾

With which your author couldn't agree more!

Section 3.11 – Conclusion

Richard Réti

Korchnoi asserted once: ‘Defense is my natural element’, but may the innate talent of how to defend a position successfully, be founded on the contributions on defense of our predecessors? In the long history of defense in chess we have witnessed that the first seeds have been sown in the late 19th century. In this chronology we have seen many examples of the most influential players of their era and their everlasting contributions to defense. Trying to explicate how the defensive playing methods progressed over the years, I began with games from the early romantic days when the tendency was to give the opponent free access to one’s king, proceeding right up to the computer-like defense of the modern generation.



The first point is that the old precepts are not obsolete at all. For instance, Steinitz who invented the groundbreaking theory that a successful plan for further operations should be based on the assessment of a position, instead of – what was thought in the romantic era – that the reason is based purely on the genius of a chess master. In line with Steinitz’s theory, Lasker proclaimed that the weakest link in the defender’s position needs to be strengthened (**3.3: The modern School of Steinitz and Lasker**). Or take the principled approach of Botvinnik with his cold, merciless style, Smyslov with his grasp of finesse, (**3.5: The dominance of Botvinnik & Smyslov**) or the lateral defensive approach of Petrosian illustrated by his subtle defensive manoeuvres and exchange sacrifices (**3.8: Iron Tigran**), is still very much alive and inherited by the successors. For example Petrosian’s positionally subtle and extraordinary piece manoeuvres (e.g. 27.♖e1 & 29.♖g1, p. 112) to a passive square near the King, were gracefully adopted by Karpov (e.g. 18...♖e8 & 19...♖f8, p. 116) or Kasparov (23...♖e7, p. 125) in their games (**3.9: The eighties and nineties: the K-K era**). Those methods, plans or ideas stand the test of time and can still be employed by modern players, as indeed they are – in altered form – by the elite of our time.

But one should be careful not to apply the rules blindly. The tradition of questioning begun with Réti’s Hypermodern School in the 1920’s has persisted without a break for the century, and experienced a quantum leap in its evolution when engines accelerated the overall development of the game. So the principles should form only the starting point for the evaluation of a position. Each position requires an evaluation of its own based on pragmatic analysis and individual factors, which frequently include ‘accidental’ resources based on seemingly illogical moves or plans.

A well know quote from Tal defining his intent to turn positions upside down, was: ‘(..), in order to achieve success, you sometimes have to try and demonstrate that two times two is five...’ But Korchnoi unraveled his romantic plans and made the outcome four again. At present, the computer is invaluable in finding such resources, and top players have also mastered the art, for example if you recall the game by Sergey Karjakin (aka: “the Minister of Defence”) against Morozevich. But one also has to take care in trying to emulate the engine’s style of play: positions it can defend through

flawless calculation might be impossible to handle for a human. More than anything, it has become clear that chess is a dynamic and difficult game. Overall though, the trend is that refinement of defensive techniques occurs faster, and defenders nowadays have a lot of ideas at their disposal. The *'perfect'* way of defending, in summary, is a blend of traditional dogmas and ultramodern, concrete computer lines.



McCarthy (the first one to propose the term 'Artificial Intelligence') hosting a chess match in 1966

(1) As stated by the second World Champion. Lasker (2010).

(2) Wikipedia: Greco and Chess history in Europe.

(3) As Steinitz later declared, principles are rooted in life, and thus a plan must have a reason.

(4) Lasker (2010), p. 151.

(5) Lasker (2010), p. 151.

(6) Lasker (2010).

(7) Lasker (2010).

- (8) Kasparov (2003), p. 138.
- (9) Lasker (2010), p. 176.
- (10) Lasker (2010), p. 176.
- (11) Lasker (2010), pp. 179-189.
- (12) Fine (1956), pp. 47-48.
- (13) Wikipedia: Richard Réti.
- (14) Tartakower, The Tree of Chess Knowledge.
- (15) Réti (1923).
- (16) Kasparov (2003) p. 7.
- (17) Kasparov (2006), p. 263.
- (18) Genna Sosonko in his preface on 'Viktor Korchnoi, My Best Games Volume 1'. 2001 Edition Olms.
- (19) Baranov & Mikenas in Kasparov (2006) and Leonard Barden «Viktor Korchnoi obituary». The Guardian, 6 June 2016.
- (20) Kasparov (2003).
- (21) Zubok (2009). p. 179.
- (22) Kasparov (2003).
- (23) Kasparov (2006).
- (24) Kortchnoi (1977), p. 34.
- (25) Kasparov (2006).
- (26) In their first 15 encounters between 1953 and 1968 with Korchnoi behind the black pieces, the score even was (+5, =10) in favor of him.
- (27) For instance, the book gave me a good impression why certain squares are strong and others weak, and why certain pieces should be exchanged.
- (28) Kasparov (2006).
- (29) As Kramnik puts it – see interview at www.ruchess.ru: Vladimir Kramnik, Part II.
- (30) At least, that's your author's humble opinion after studying his games thoroughly.
- (31) www.ruchess.ru: Vladimir Kramnik, Part II.
- (32) www.ruchess.ru: Vladimir Kramnik, Part II.
- (33) A tweet from @Bobby Fiske on 15 November 2016.
- (34) Hans Ree (2019).

Chapter 4

Emotions in Chess

- Section 4.1 – Introduction
- Section 4.2 – Definition, Origin & Influence of Emotions
 - Subsection 4.2.1 – Debilitating emotions
 - Anxiety
 - Anger
 - Relief
 - Pride
 - Subsection 4.2.2 – The perfect state of mind
 - Under-intensity
 - Over-intensity
 - Optimal functioning
 - Subsection 4.2.3 – The origin of emotions
 - How are emotions triggered?
 - Appraisal of emotions
- Section 4.3 – Coping with Emotions
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 - Chess stimuli
 1. Unfamiliar conditions at a competition
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Section 4.1 – Introduction

During live matches in any sport, we hear commentators talking about ‘*focus, focus, focus*’. The best performances by sportspeople are achieved when they have strong focus. The concept has assumed almost mythical importance. But why is it that important, and what exactly is lost if it isn’t there?

Whether we’re talking about tennis players like André Agassi, athletes like Usain Bolt, soccer players like Lionel Messi, or even chess champions like Magnus Carlsen, the strain of competition calls for the combatants to give it their full attention. The latent psychological struggles rarely become visible to observers, but that doesn’t mean they are less important than technical points. One common example of a sportsperson losing the psychological thread of the match is the case of a poor line call in tennis. If a player is convinced the decision was unfair, it stays with them. They become angry and swayed by emotion, and cannot play the next points with a clear mind. For chessplayers, there are off-the-board factors which can influence our brain in a harmful manner. Examples are tiredness and time trouble, which unquestionably limit how well we can concentrate on the position.



Supposedly ‘inexplicable’ blunders can often be explained by irregularities in the player’s mindset that day. A number of factors must combine for one to win any game, but an indispensable one is deep concentration; only thus can we outplan (or outcalculate) an opponent or recall to mind our own relevant past experiences while deciding on a move. And to get this deep concentration we must first master our emotions.

We’ve seen what can happen to tennis players when emotions enter the picture, but how exactly does becoming emotional affect the chess player’s decisions? I aim to explain the connection between attention and some particular emotions in **(4.2.1: Debilitating emotions)** below.

I will try to get to the core of the maladaptive thought patterns that can derail a chess game. Then, based on the Individualized Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) hypothesis, I will illustrate to what degree emotions can be beneficial or harmful for our functioning in **(4.2.2: The Perfect State of Mind)**.

Then **(4.2.3: The Origin of Emotions)** will cover how emotions are triggered using the cognitive motivational – relational theory (CMRT) of Lazarus, a sports psychologist. Lastly, in **(4.3: Coping with Emotions)**, I will provide a tool for getting back on track.

Section 4.2 – Definition, Origin & Influence of Emotions

Subsection 4.2.1 – Debilitating emotions

Emotions and attention

Sportsmen depend to a large degree on emotion in order to keep their attention on the game. That's the case in general, but the interaction between emotion and attention is especially strong in a mental endeavor like chess. Let's note that attention is a broader term than concentration; it encompasses concentration, i.e. on one task, as well as selectivity of perception and, if relevant, the ability to co-ordinate two or more actions at the same time.⁽¹⁾ Since concentration is always focused on a particular task, it automatically excludes every other stimulus in the world, and thoughts about them.

In sports psychology, research has proven that certain emotions, such as nervousness or anxiety, may reduce the cognitive resources available for the task at hand.⁽²⁾

As a result, less relevant information is being processed, affecting performance. When the sportsman's attention is disrupted by diversion to the wrong stimuli, lapses of concentration are caused.

Attention, as we noted, is inextricably linked to emotions. Emotions can be defined as '*an organized psychophysiological reaction to ongoing relationships with the environment, most often, but not always, interpersonal or social*'.⁽³⁾

Emotions comprise three elements: physiological changes, action tendencies and subjective experience.

Firstly, emotions are accompanied by *physiological changes*, such as an increasing heartbeat, blood pressure, and a skin response (going pale). For example, the emotion of anger can lead to an intense impulse to counter-attack in order to get revenge for one's injured self-esteem. Secondly, *the action*



tendency is manifested; fear, for instance, may cause one to run away, whereas sadness may render one motionless.⁽⁴⁾

Each emotion induces a biologically derived action tendency that is almost hard-coded into each person: unlearning the impulsive reaction takes conscious effort.⁽⁵⁾

Lastly, *subjective experience* refers to what the person is consciously experiencing during the occurring emotion.

Within sport and exercise psychology, a range of emotions has been investigated for the extent to which they may influence performance. The emotion of anxiety has induced by far the most interest in the research. It is very relevant in chess as well; others of some interest are anger, pride and relief. I'm going to unpack them one by one so we can understand the subject clearly.



▫ Anxiety

Anxiety is a basic human emotion consisting of apprehension and uncertainty.⁽⁶⁾

It is one of the most widespread and persistent human emotions and emerges when an individual faces a perceived threat to their ego or self-esteem.⁽⁷⁾

This can happen when a sportsman is being evaluated by others, for instance when they have to perform in front of an audience.⁽⁸⁾

Anxiety has standard physiological symptoms (e.g. fast heartbeat, rapid breathing, sweaty palms) and a standard subjective manifestation as *cognitive anxiety*. This means the internalization of and dwelling on negative concerns and self-doubt in relation to performance.⁽⁹⁾ The reason for this

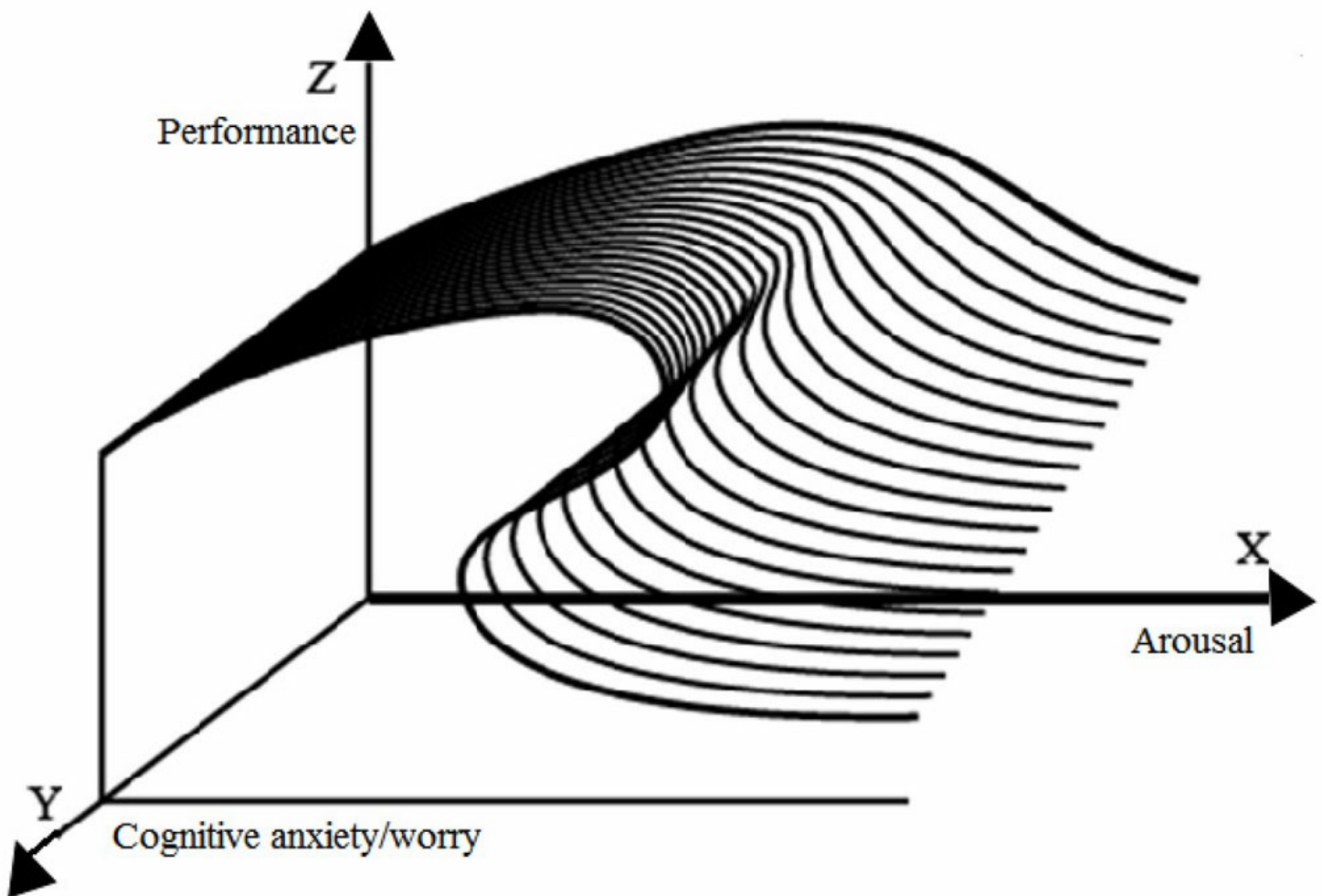
manifestation is usually having unhealthy expectations of oneself.⁽¹⁰⁾

Cognitive anxiety is problematic for – for instance – students’ performance, as the worries and fears involved interfere with memory, concentration and overall ‘processing power’ of the brain.⁽¹¹⁾

This then feeds back into overall anxiety levels, with generally poor end results such as lack of confidence and concentration, shyness and failure in examinations.⁽¹²⁾

The **Catastrophe Model** is applied in sports psychology to explain the interaction of cognitive anxiety and physiological arousal affecting performance.⁽¹³⁾

The figure below shows that cognitive anxiety has a positive relationship with performance when physiological arousal is low. It also shows that in case both cognitive anxiety and physiological arousal level are high, performance will plummet.⁽¹⁵⁾



With the above in mind, we can apply our findings back to the chess board and conclude that our decision-making faculties are not helped by anxiety. It causes hesitation, excessive questioning of your own instincts and indecisiveness.

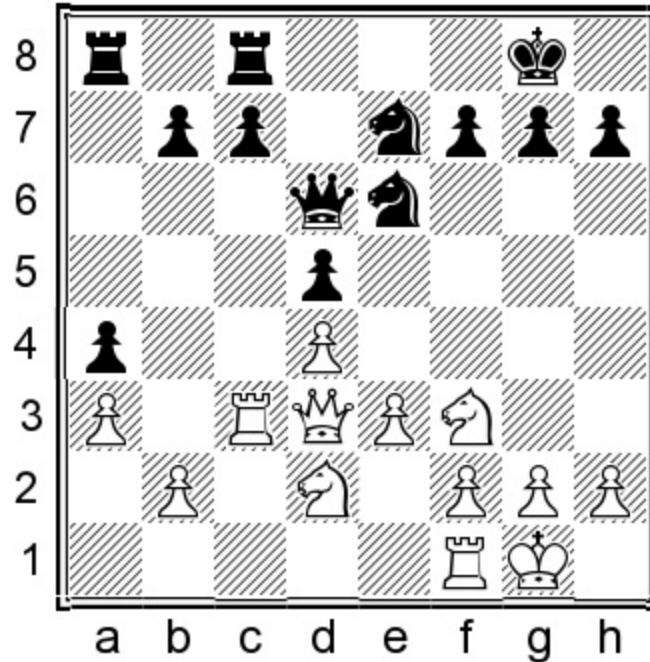
Paul Keres, an Estonian grandmaster and one of the world’s top players between the 1930’s and 1960’s, knows this better than most. His chess skills were undisputed, but it was said that Keres was mentally less tough mentally than his rivals.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the following game in an equal position, Keres' “*indecisive and hesitant way*” (Botvinnik) affected the quality of his moves. The following example illustrates the effect of anxiety on his play.

Botvinnik, Mikhail

Keres, Paul

The Hague & Moscow 1948



16...b5?!

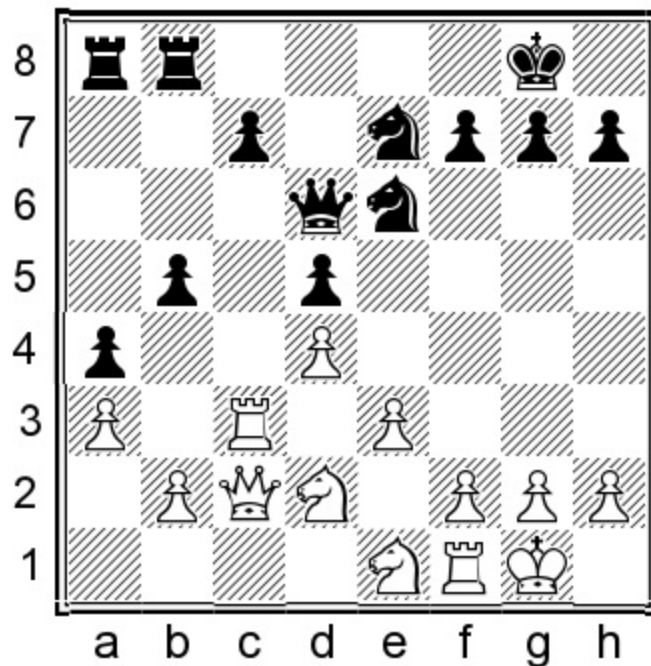
Keres prepared the advance of the backward c7-pawn to c5, by the refined maneuver ♖c6-d8-e6, followed by ♜fc8. He now lost the thread as he deviated from his initial plan (consisting of b6 and c5) with 16...b5?, fearing ghosts. Botvinnik comments: “*A strange decision. When all was ready for the attack indicated in the previous note. Black weakens the squares on the c-file without any justification. After 16...b6 White would have had to reply 17.e4, which would have maintained the tension.*”

And indeed, Black was ready for 16...b6! Botvinnik’s 17.e4 contains other flaws, in terms of allowing a weak, isolated d4-pawn. 17...♞f4! 18.♚e3 dxe4 19.♞xe4 ♚h6! After 20...♞ed5, Black becomes very active and he has the better pawn structure. Not a difficult line to find, and Keres would probably have gone for it if he would have had a clear mind.

16...b5?! 17.♚c2!

Tripling on the c-file and vacating square d3 for the Knight.

17...♜cb8 18.♞e1!



Position after: 18. ♖e1!

The Knight is on its way to d3, c5 or b4, fixing the weaknesses on c6 and c7.

18... ♖c8?!

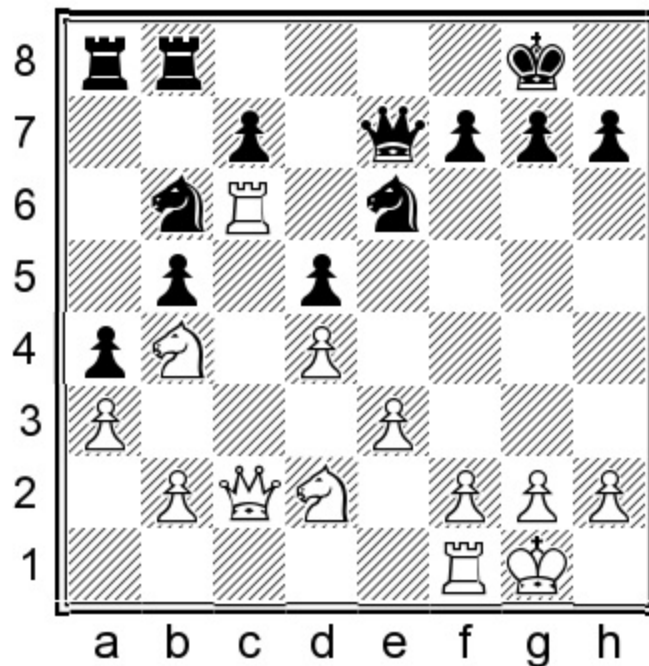
Botvinnik commented: “For the second time Black prepares a more active continuation (18...b4) but then refrains from it. Such indecision is bound to prove costly. In addition he incautiously lifts his control of c6.”

Possible are both 18... ♖b6! with the idea of ♖e7-c6-a5-c4, after which Botvinnik would only be slightly better as Keres would have obtained some counterchances or 18...b4!? In line with Botvinnik’s comment, this move does generate counterplay. 19. axb4 ♖xb4 20. ♖d3 ♖b5, here White would have a small and stable advantage due to the weak c-pawn, but Black has concrete counterplay in terms of his pressure on b2.

19. ♖c6!

Botvinnik gets full control of the square c6, tightening the screws further.

19... ♖e7 20. ♖d3 ♖b6 21. ♖b4!



Position after: 21. ♖b4!

It became clear that things went terribly wrong for Keres. The backward c-pawn and the weak square on c6 secure White's large advantage. Botvinnik went on in a convincing style and won on the 60th move.

Although we can only guess what was going on in Keres' head when he abandoned his main (and strong!) plan of c7-c5, he may well have been affected by the fear of the unknown. Was this anxiety increased by a mixture of Botvinnik's fierce reputation as World Champion and the pre-emptive move 16. ♖c1-c3 aimed against the liberating advance of c7-c5?

□ Anger

Anger can be defined as *'taking offense'* or *'playing the blame game'* when things go wrong. It is a dangerous emotion as it can cause a powerful impulse to counterattack with the aim to either avenge a perceived slight offense or 'cure' one's wounded self-esteem. A sportsman might attribute the blame to another person or entity, or – especially in case they have low self-esteem – to themselves. In both cases, where the blame might well be impairing their performance, self-blame may well be the more harmful of the two. A loss of motivation then follows hand-in-hand with the loss of emotional energy.

In individual sports like tennis, anger is the biggest 'mental disorder'⁽¹⁵⁾ and is often directed, of course, at the opponent. Tennis player John McEnroe was a master in psyching out his opponents, occasionally even before a ball had been struck. The evening before he met the American rising star Brad Gilbert in the San Francisco Championship 1984, he was quoted in the newspaper as saying that “(.) Gilbert doesn't swing a ball hard enough to break an egg.”

On hearing his opponent's remarks, Gilbert became so angry that he couldn't finish his dinner. He was furious with McEnroe because of this provocation and felt the need to prove the contrary. The next day on court, he belted everything as hard as he could, tried to win points immediately when

returning first serves, and tried for aces on his own second serve. Needless to say he lost the match in two straight sets.

The mind game used by McEnroe fulfilled its aim: upsetting the opponent's emotional equilibrium and distracting him from the actual game. Gilbert was not able to control the game and neither could he adapt to circumstances as they actually were.⁽¹⁶⁾ However, anger in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes, anger can help you mobilise energy and release as *constructive power*.⁽¹⁶⁾

According to Gilbert, uncontrolled anger gets you out of balance, but anger for the right reason helps you. It's essential to be prepared in order to anticipate your own anger and then constructively steer the anger in the right direction. *Controlled anger* can be the ideal motivator and a great way to sustain your attention in a competitive environment.

Loek van Wely (photo Alina l'Ami)

Moreover, Gilbert later noted in the specific case of tennis: “*Get angry at yourself when you screw up. Show yourself that you care. Your game will listen. But then move on(...)* You have to forget what just happened.”

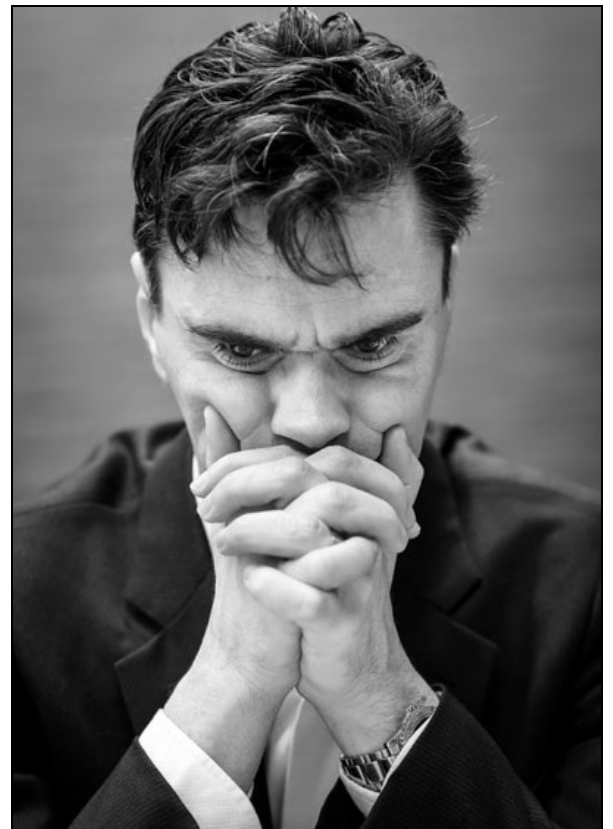
As for anger in chess, I once had an interesting conversation with Dutch top Grandmaster Loek van Wely. Having been outplayed in the opening by Anand, he was furious, blaming himself for forgetting the relevant theory and for his bad play up to that moment.

However, Loek known for his strong mentality and fighting skills, tries to trace the weak spots of the opponent, and is capable of ‘*switching gears*’ (his phrase) when necessary. Many of the top grandmasters tend to play at a rather quick pace to enhance the pressure on their opponent. When you turn the tables by playing even faster than them, they will get their equilibrium.

Confronting Anand with ‘*coffeehouse chess*’ and giving Anand a dose of his own medicine in order to change the course of the game came as a sudden shock to Van Wely's world-class opponent. Normally Loek would be reluctant to do this as this way of playing involves a high degree of risk; but as he was two pawns down there was really nothing else for it.

As he himself said: “*Aggressive play can have an intimidating effect on the opponent. Weak personalities will crack under pressure first, it wouldn't work on me!*”

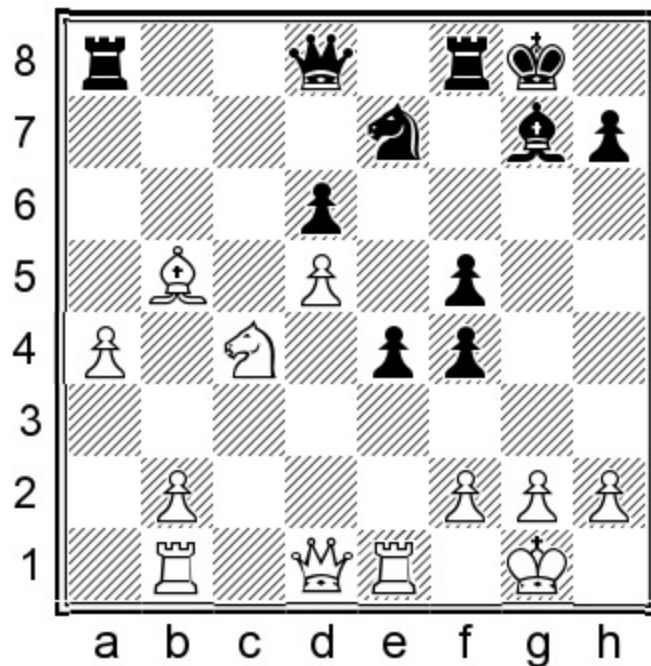
A typical quote for the always outspoken eight time Dutch champion, but there is a lot of truth in it!



Anand, Viswanathan (2786)

Van Wely, Loek (2679)

Wijk aan Zee 2005



20...f3

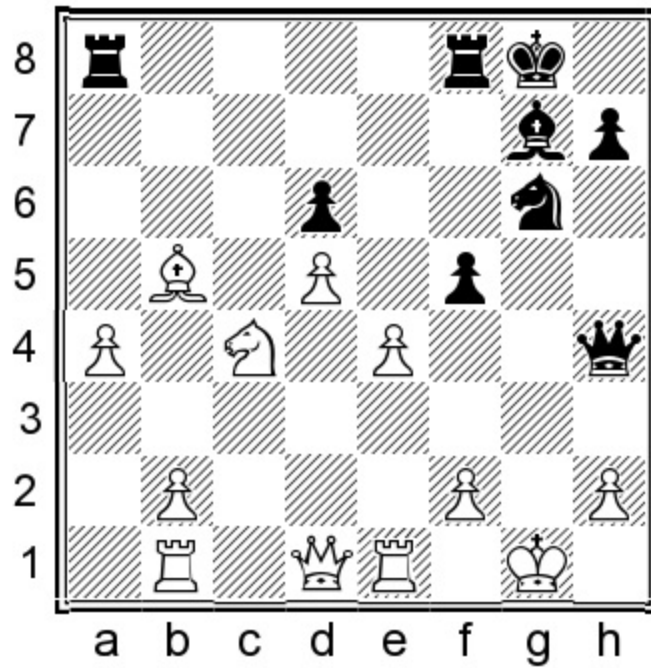
Loek was frustrated with his position, fearing that his attack would be blocked by means of f2-f3. Loek's anger was slightly misguided, since 20...♘g6!? 21.f3 ♘h4, followed by 22...♙f6, offers Black sufficient counterplay for the material deficit.

20...f3 21.gxf3!

Cold-blooded defence by Anand.

21...♘g6 22.fxe4 ♙h4

Black tries to find a direct way to the enemy's King. Nonetheless, Anand could have refuted his opponent's aggression

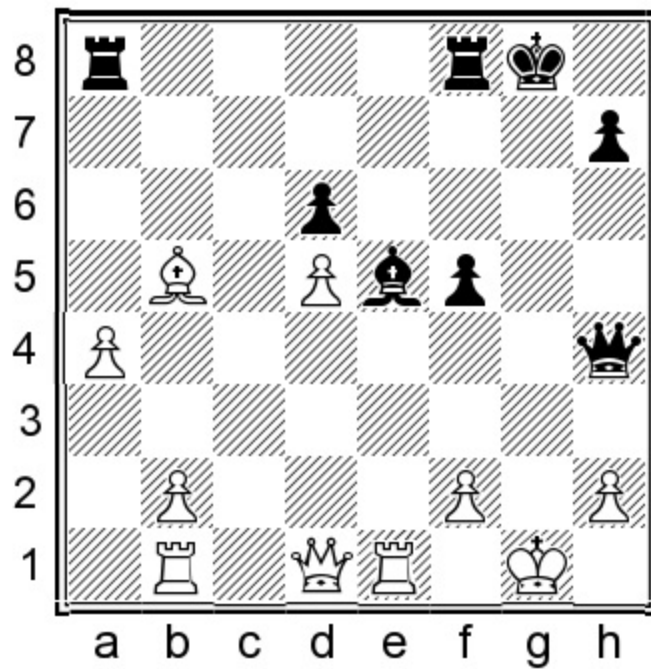


Position after: 22... ♔h4

in two ways and found a safe home for his King.

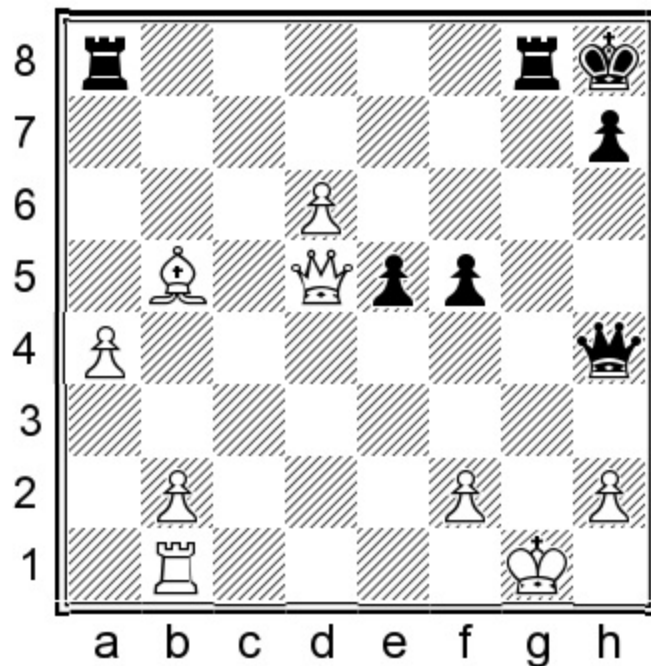
23. ♖f3!

A) 23. e5! ♗xe5 24. ♘xe5 ♙xe5



Analysis after: 24... ♙xe5

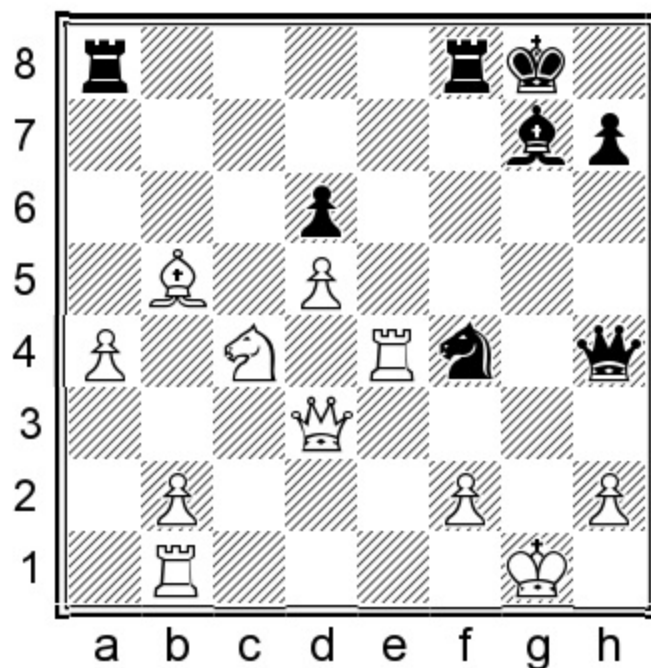
25. ♙xe5! dxe5 26. d6! ♔h8 27. ♗d5 ♜g8+



Analysis after: 27...Rg8+

28.♔f1! The King finds a route for his 'exodus': g1-f1-e2-d3. 28...♙xh2 29.♕e2 ♜h5+ 30.♜f3 and White wins.

B) Another strong continuation would have been 23.♜d3! This continuation was also close to winning. Like the text move, White wants to offer the exchange of Queens on g3. The difference is that after 23...fxe4, he can take back with the Rook on e4 because of the following spectacular King retreat. 23...fxe4 24.♖xe4 ♔f4



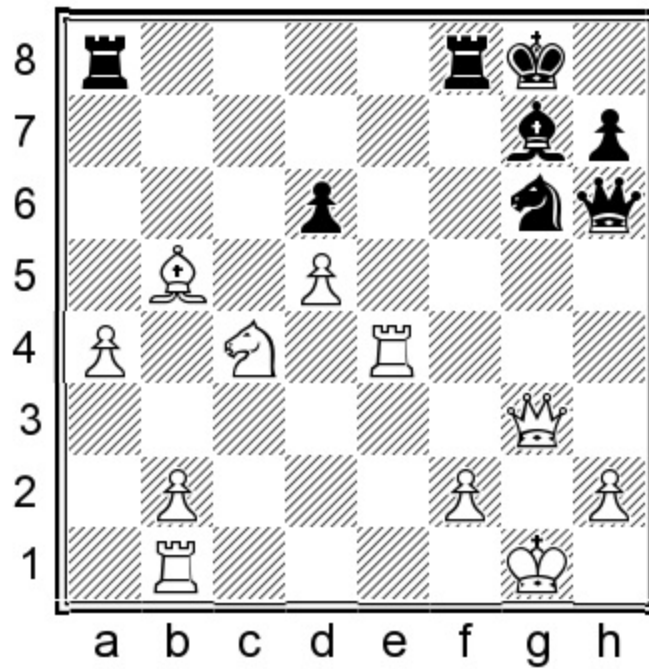
Analysis after: 24...Kf4

25.♔h1!! Quietly tucking away the King. Black's attack comes to an immediate standstill. 25...♕xf2 [25...♘xd3 26.♖xh4 is an easy enough endgame.] 26.♕g3 and with the Queens coming off, Black is helpless.

23...fxe4 24.♕g3 ♖h6!?

Objectively speaking, 24...♖f4 was better: 25.♕xh4 ♘xh4 26.♘d2± Of course, when being material down, exchanging the Queens doesn't increase your attacking chances. Loek proceeds with his 'coffeehouse' chess.

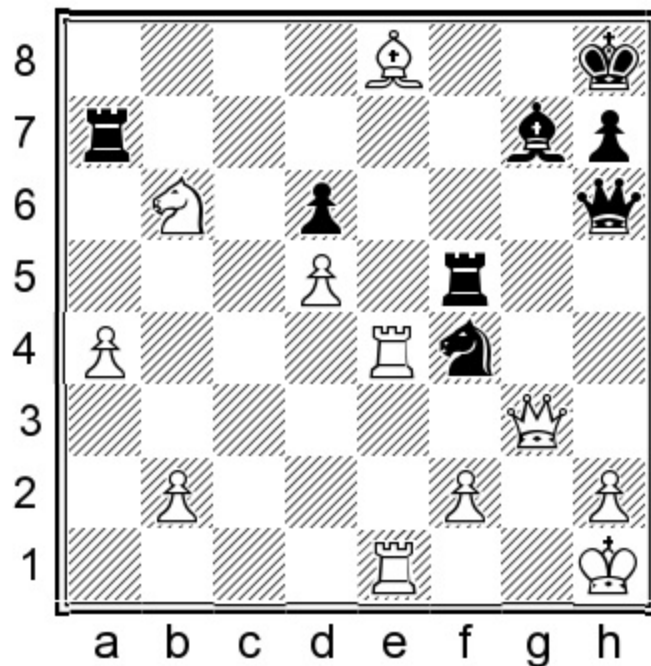
25.♖xe4



Position after: 25.♖xe4

Anand is now three pawns up. However, Van Wely is still in the game on account of his attacking potential.

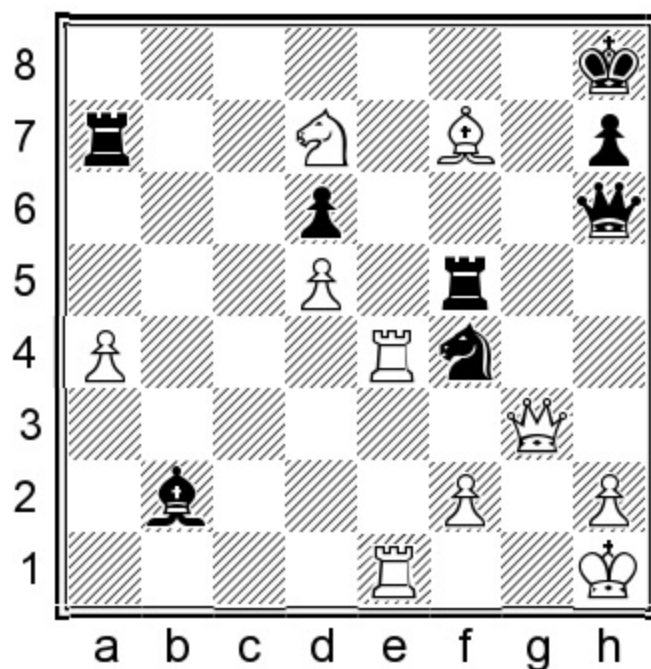
25...♘f4 26.♔h1 ♔h8 27.♖be1 ♖f6 28.♙e8 ♖a7 29.♘b6 ♖f5



Position after: 29...Rf5

30. ♖g4?

A) Anand succumbs under the pressure which has been imposed by his opponent's power play. 30. ♘d7! Depriving Black of using the crucial e5-square for his pieces, meanwhile cutting off the a7-Rook from the fray. 30... ♙xb2? 31. ♙f7!!



Analysis after: 31. ♙f7!!

31...♖xf7 32.♗e8+ with a mate on the back rank.

B) 30.♙d7! ♖e5 31.♚c3!! again, Black would have been 'back-ranked'. 31...♖xe4 32.♚c8+! ♙f8 33.♖xe4+-

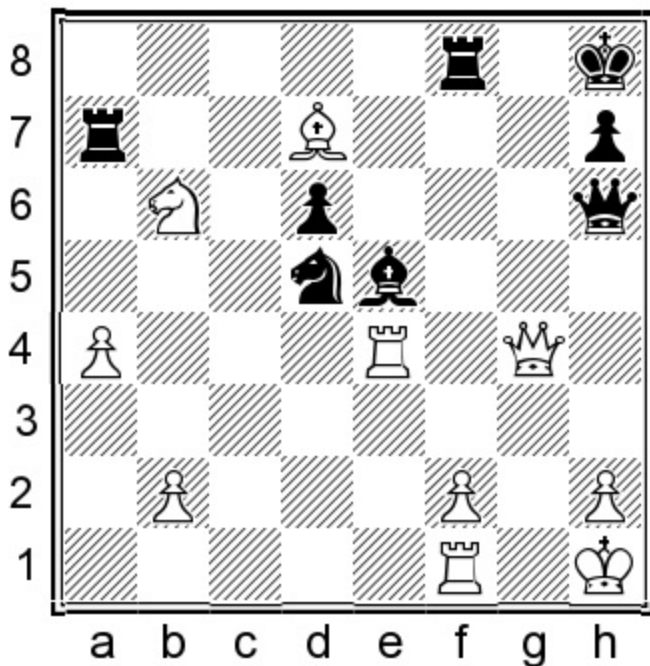
C) 30.♘c4 was also winning.

30...♖f8 31.♖f1

31.♙b5 prevents ♘d3, but not ♘h3 or even better: ♙e5, hinting at potential future mates on h2.

31...♙e5! 32.♖xe5 [32.♘d7? ♘d3+-] 32...dxe5 33.♘d7 ♘h3+-; After 31.♘d7 ♘d3! Black is now winning, as material losses after ♘xf2+ are unavoidable.

31...♙e5 32.♙d7 ♘xd5!



Position after: 32...♘xd5!

33.♖xe5!

Now it's Anand who has to defend accurately. And, one might imagine, he might also have to cope with debilitating emotions (such as anger) because of his spoiled advantage.

33...dxe5 34.♘d5 ♚d6 35.♙e6 ♖e8 36.♖c1 ♚xe6 37.♚xe6 ♖xe6 38.b3 ♖f7 (38...♖g6! 39.♖e1 ♖f7 40.♖e2 ♖d6 41.♘e3 ♖b6+) 39.♔g2 ♖g6+ 40.♔f1 ♖h6 41.♔g2 ♖g6+ 42.♔f1 ♖h6

½-½

Seeing the game above we can draw some comparisons with the provoked fury of Gilbert. Loek's

anger was not guided by an objective analysis of the situation. In actual fact, Black was completely fine on move 20 and it is only *after* 20...f3 that Loek is forced to play in the style he describes above. Normally speaking this would have been punished by Anand, as it was done by McEnroe, but perhaps Van Wely's strong personality made the difference here.

▫ Relief

Relief is the simplest of all emotions to define in layman's terms. It occurs after a period of threat and anxiety. When the possible danger doesn't materialize, we experience relief.⁽¹⁷⁾

Relief can have a desirable effect due to a reduction of the feeling of anxiety and tension, whereafter the sportsman has his mind free to focus on the competitive task. On the other hand, there is also some danger in feeling relief, as it can lead you to become too relaxed and to be less vigilant.⁽¹⁸⁾

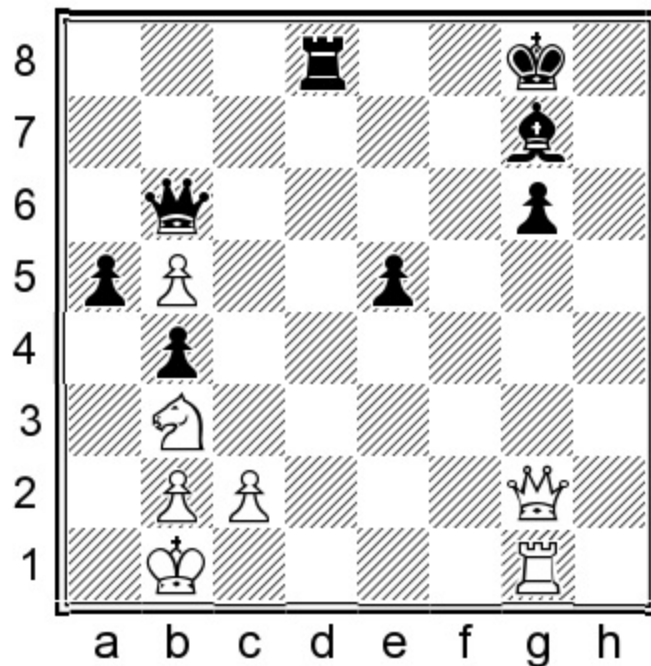
From my personal experience, I was perhaps more focused on the off-board mind games with my main rival Moosa Azadmanesh during the under-14 Dutch Championships. We had already been rivals in age-group tournaments for a while and here were both trying to earn qualification for the European and World Championships. At the time of the next game, played in round 4, Moosa had had a blistering start with 3 out of 3, leaving me half a point behind.

To add to that, Moosa quickly won in this round and I can still remember how he swaggered proudly past my board afterwards. I perceived it as him raising the pressure on me still further; I felt agitated and impatient to catch him, but was facing an opponent who had no intention at all of handing me an easy point. Then one of the most peculiar moments of my whole career occurred. In the diagram below my opponent took the pawn on g6 – a terrible mistake which loses a lot of material. I replied, of course, with ...♗d1+.

Groenhuis, Vincent

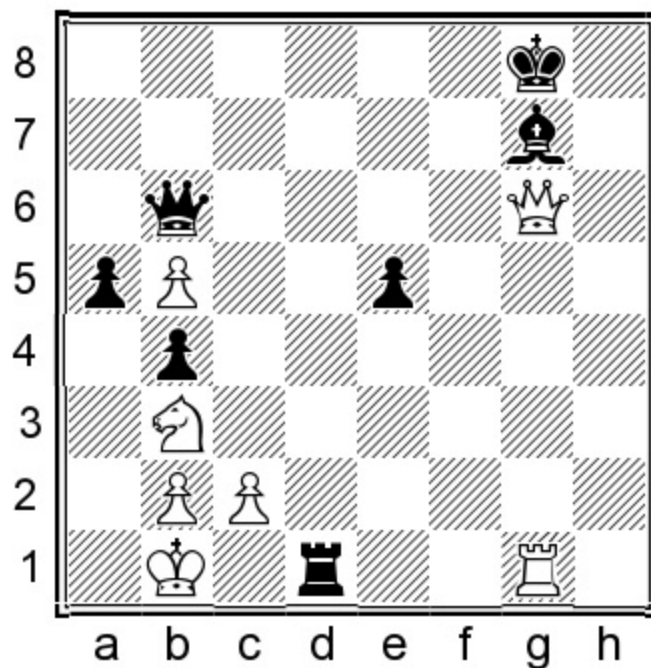
Werle, Jan

Leiden 1997



My difficult Sicilian game with Black was about to be won. It was a load off my mind and I felt relieved, assuming that the game was over. I looked triumphantly through the playing hall in order to catch Moosa's eye. In doing so, however, I lost my concentration, resulting in the next blunder.

39. ♔xg6 ♖d1+



Position after: 39... ♖d1+

40. ♕a2

I didn't pay much attention to the following move assuming that I was always winning, being a Rook

up.

40...♙xg1??

And so I gave up my Queen after 41.♔xb6.

1-0

In practice this mental mistake occurs frequently. Like in this game, a player who suddenly has an equal or better position (after a long defense) is quite likely to lower his guard. It's especially at such moments that one should stay focused without letting relaxation interrupt the thinking process!

▫ **Pride**

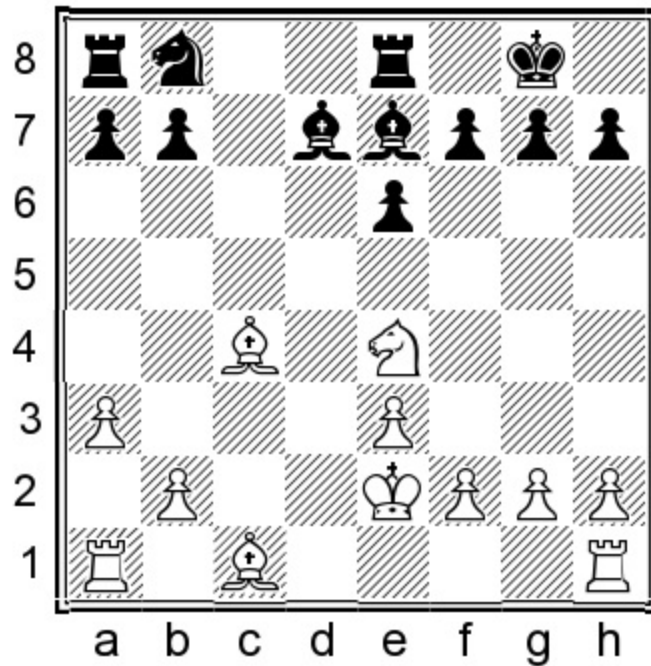
Lazarus defines pride as *'an enhancement of one's ego-identity by taking credit for a valued object or achievement, either one's own or that of someone or group with whom he identifies.'* In life, it leads you to feel deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from your achievements, status, or belongings. In chess, it is the emotion associated with sustaining your self-esteem when your back is against the wall.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a Fall.
- Prov 16:18

Pride can be a motivating factor when you are striving for higher status or rating. But sometimes you can't manage to meet your aspirations, thus converting your originally positive emotion into a negative one like shame or anger, and confounding your train of thought. Pride may result in a behavior pattern where we march confidently to our certain destruction, not so much oblivious to the danger as willfully ignoring it like an ostrich.⁽¹⁹⁾

A rather simple position arose in my game against the English grandmaster Matthew Sadler, during a weekend tournament in the Dutch town of Haarlem. I had White and right from the start of the game, I was eager to cause my strong opponent problems. However, my opening set-up in the Nimzo-Indian didn't have that effect at all.

Werle, Jan (2527)
Sadler, Matthew (2684)
Haarlem 2017

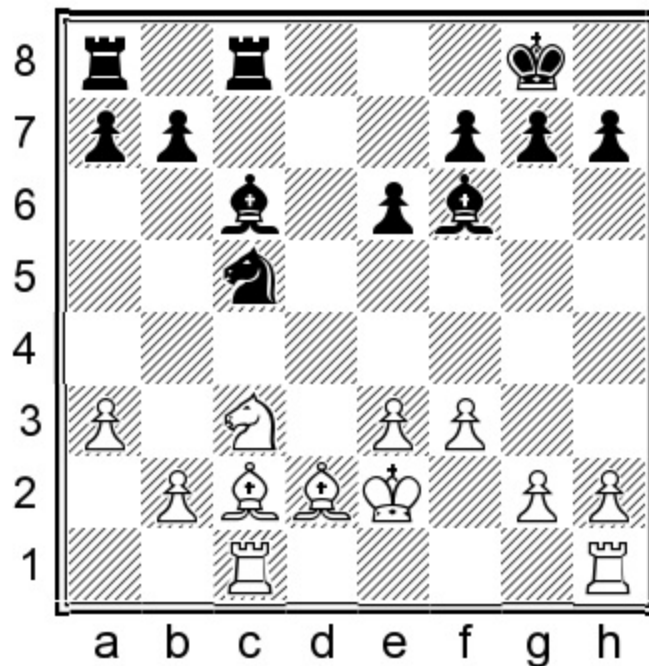


I was aiming for an advantage in this less-than-ideal Nimzo-Indian by proceeding with ♖d1 and ♜d6, and maybe later placing my c1-Bishop on the long diagonal. Black's 14...♙d7 was a rude awakening. 15...♙c6 is on his agenda and I don't have time for either plan. In addition, when my Knight on e4 has to move, Black can take control of the other long diagonal with ...♙e7-f6. By painful experience, I knew that this was the moment to acknowledge the danger and switch into damage limitation mode.

15. ♜c3

15. ♖d1?! ♙c6 16. ♙d3 [16. ♜d6? ♖d8–+] 16... ♜d7 17. f3 ♜e5 18. ♙c2 ♙b5+ could have ended badly for White.

15. ♜c3 ♖c8 16. ♙d3 ♜a6 17. ♙d2 ♜c5 18. ♙c2 ♙c6 19. f3 ♙f6 20. ♖ac1



Position after: 20. ♖ac1

White plays the right Rook to c1. 20. ♖hc1?! a5 21. b4?! axb4 22. axb4 ♖xa1 23. ♖xa1 ♘a6 when White is under heavy pressure.

The position looks very passive, but by coordinated piece play, White can cause Black's small initiative to fade. White is ready for 21. b2-b4.

20...a5 21.b4! White relieves himself from the precarious situation on the queenside. **21...axb4 22.axb4 ♖xc3 23.♖xc3 ♖b5+ 24.♔f2 ♘d3+**

½-½

It was not a great achievement to hold this already close-to-equal position. However, when a player doesn't notice or doesn't want to acknowledge that his position is inferior, it often initiates a slide towards a loss. In case you are aware of the 'pride-factor', you will be better capable of handling such situations.

Subsection 4.2.2 – The perfect state of mind

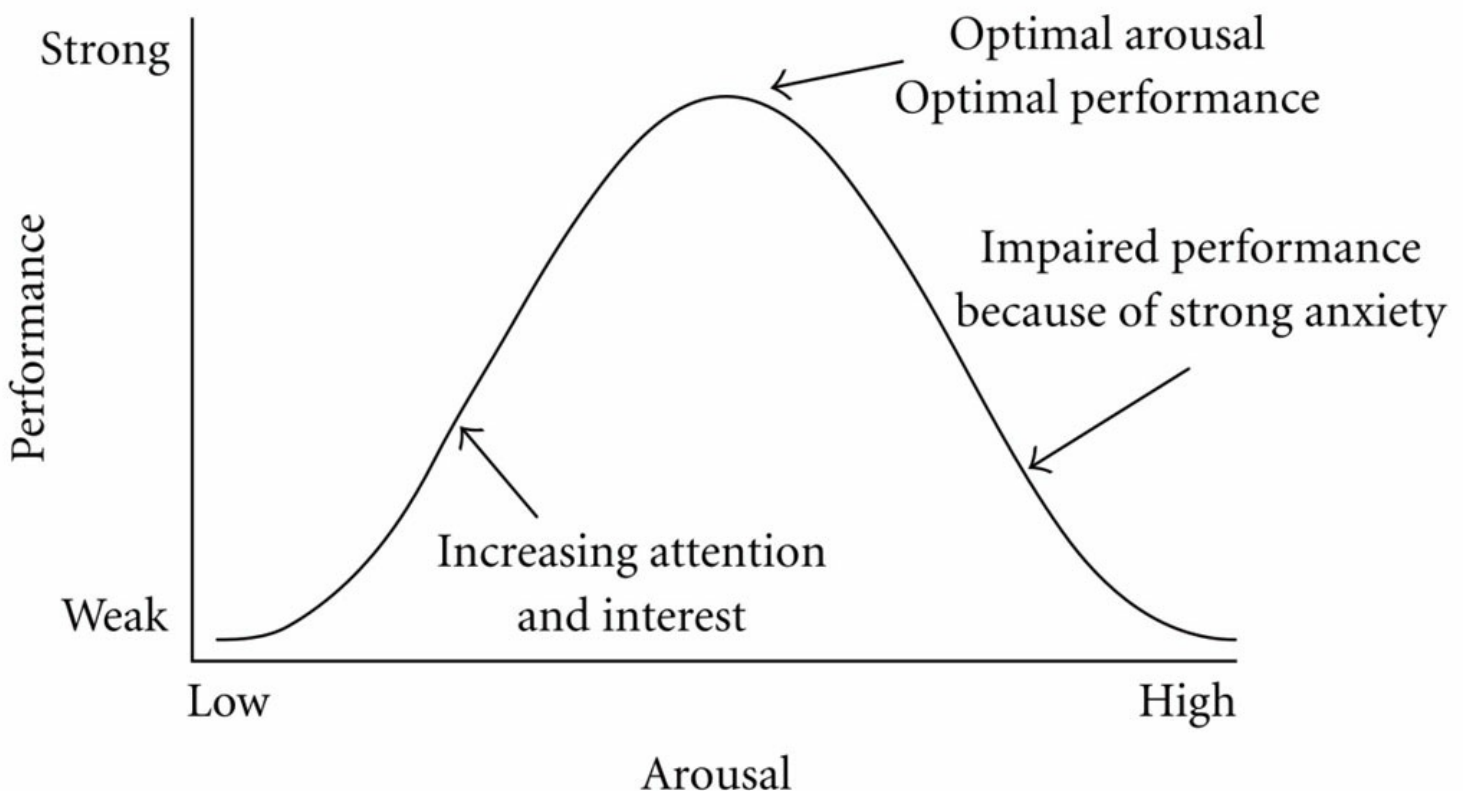
A sportsman develops his own particular feeling for a certain environment based on highly subjective criteria. Emotions are deeply linked with other cognitive, motivational and relational variables. Each single individual emotion is distinctive regarding its antecedents, subjective experience and outcome. The differences between emotions appear to be more important than the similarities, nonetheless some emotional encounters share a common relational meaning, like challenge, threat, harm/loss and what might be done to cope with it.⁽²⁰⁾

We are inclined to differentiate emotions into two categories: positive and negative ones. Emotions

which we in general don't consider to be helpful for our performance, can in certain situations be useful, and vice versa.⁽²¹⁾

For example, stress can often be an emotion with positive consequences such as hope, happiness, pride, love or compassion. A sportsman is dependent on some stress in order to perform his best. This being said, no emotion can be positive for competition if it is felt very intensely.

In the **Individualized Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) model**, the optimal zone of emotion of an athlete, which is required for attaining the ultimate performance, is measured. IZOF was primarily based on the arousal of anxiety on the performance, but is also applicable to other emotional states. While in older explanations emotions were binarized into positive or negative, Hanin suggested that in sports settings it is more useful to distinguish between *helpful* and *unhelpful* ones, according to the needs of each athlete.⁽²²⁾



For example, some athletes may notice that feeling excited is not conducive to performing well; others might feel that anger helps motivate them; and still others perform well only when calm.

The Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning model suggests that each athlete can find out his or her optimal combination of useful emotions and learn how to reach this unique state prior to competitions.⁽²³⁾

One of the features of this model is that an individual athlete may perform better under the influence of a particular emotion, such as anxiety, whereas another athlete does worse under the same circumstances. The model suggests that each athlete should find their own optimal combination of useful emotions and learn to reach them prior to competitions.⁽²⁴⁾

In the following paragraphs we will discuss intense and unhelpful emotions, since unfortunately these are the ones that arise most commonly for chess players defending tough positions. As we will see, over-intensity can deteriorate one's cognitive functioning but can also result in somatic difficulties, such as a higher heart rate. The so-called 'tunnel vision', on the other hand, can be helpful.

▫ Under-intensity

Joris Brenninkmeijer

Despite what I just said, *under-intensity* of emotions can also be an issue impeding optimal performance. It arises in cases where the sportsman is over-confident, being assured of the win. As the sportsman doesn't feel the urge to perform at 100%, he drops his motivation and focus. Physically, that means he no longer has the blood flow, oxygen, or adrenaline necessary for the work he has to do at the board. Complacency may set in as he feels the task is already complete, and this causes a loss of strength, agility,

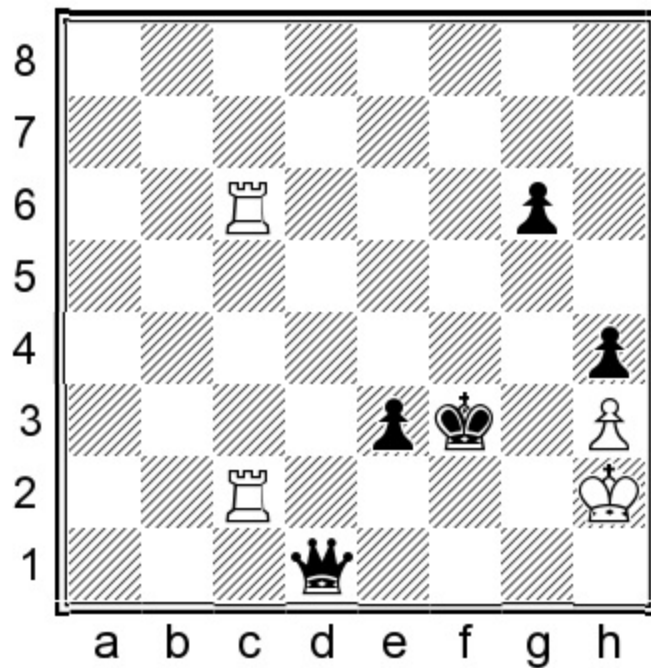


and stamina, meaning that not only does he fail to perform at his best, but he may even 'snatch defeat from the jaws of victory'. A vivid example illustrating how an emotion can change form colour, is the next example from my teammate of Groningen IM Joris Brenninkmeijer. Joris is one of the most talented Dutch chess players the Netherlands has ever produced, beating Vishy Anand and reaching a 2500+ rating in the '90s while maintaining a 'regular' professional career as a psychologist. When I asked him how his play had been affected by emotions, he came up with his game against the Hungarian IM Karolyi. After the game was adjourned with a 2-hour break on the 60th move, he expected no further resistance and so rested on his laurels. Whereas his opponent – being in danger of defeat – used this time to study diligently the specifics of the ending. After the break he conjured a rabbit out of a hat.

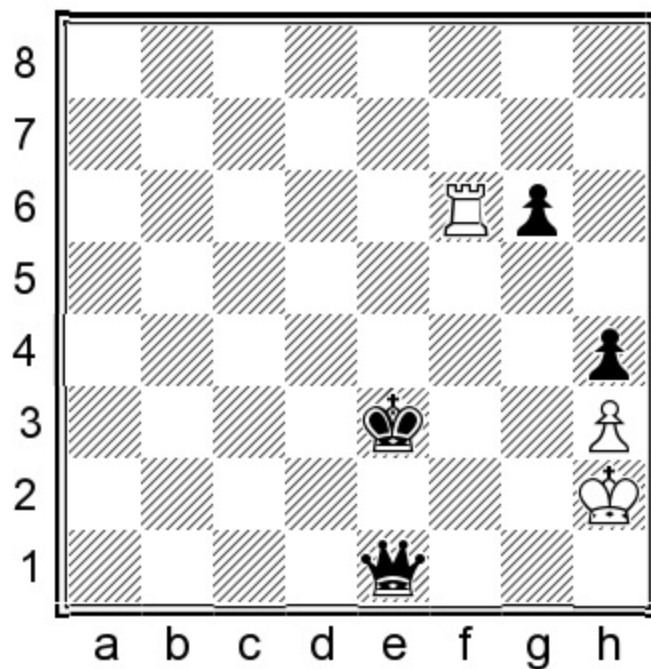
Karolyi, Tibor Jr (2450)

Brenninkmeijer, Joris (2390)

Amsterdam 1988



60...♙xc2+ 61.♖xc2 e2 62.♖c1 ♔f2 63.♖c6 e1=♚ 64.♖f6+ ♔e3

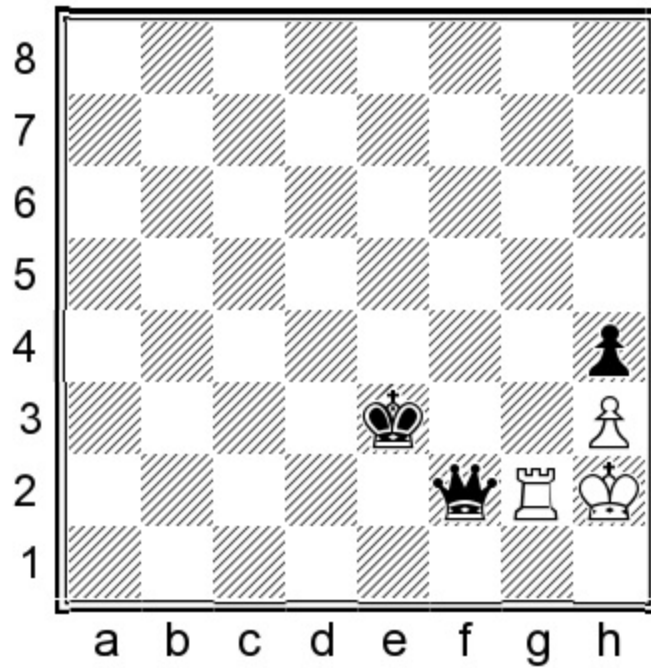


Position after: 64...♔e3

65.♖xg6!

This came as a total surprise to Joris. He had so far only paid attention to the line: 65.♖e6+ ♔f2 66.♖xe1 ♔xe1 when the resulting pawn ending is winning. Now, things are far from easy.

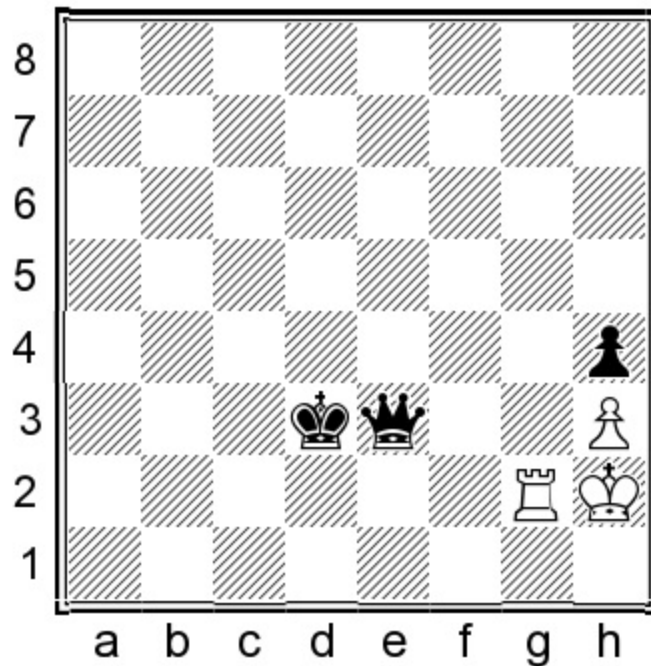
65...♙f2+ 66.♖g2



Position after: 66. ♖g2

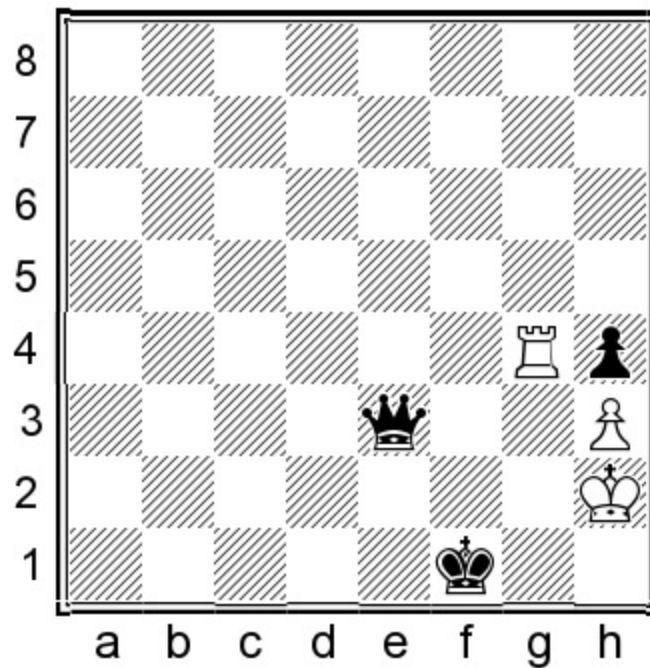
66... ♕f3

It appears that by a delicate and accurate sequence, requiring profound knowledge of the specifics in the ending, calmness and deep focus, Black could have won: 66... ♕f4+! 67. ♔h1 ♔d3 68. ♔g1 ♕c1+ 69. ♔h2 ♕e3



Analysis after: 69... ♕e3

This was the position Joris should have aimed for. After the Rook has moved, the King walk d3-e2-f1 decides the game. 70.♖g8 ♔e2 71.♖g2+ ♔f1 72.♖g4



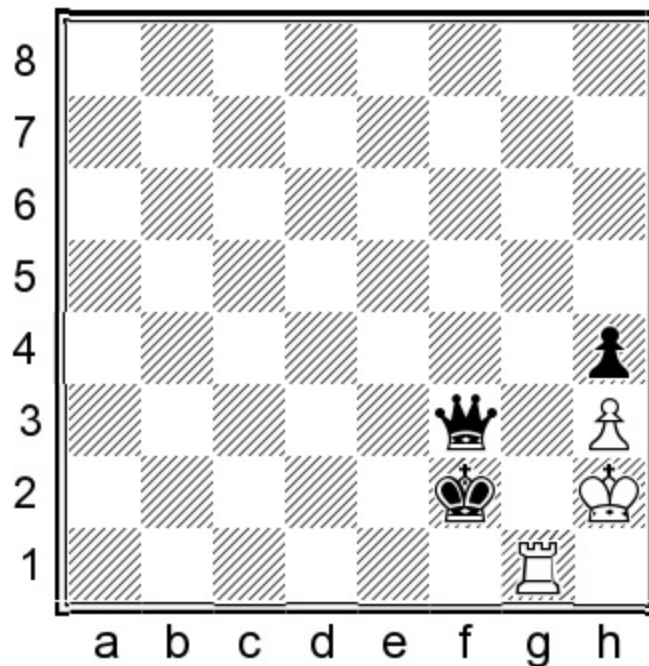
Analysis after: 72.♖g4

Black can now execute a ‘triangle’ manoeuvre with the Queen, in order to force Karolyi into zugzwang. 72...♚e2+ 73.♔h1 ♚f3+ 74.♔h2 ♚e3 Now it’s White’s turn. As a result White has to abandon his fortress, for instance with 75.♖g8. Now Black has 75...♚e5+ 76.♔h1 ♚d5+ winning the Rook and the game.

67.♖g1 ♚f4+

67...♔d3 68.♖g4 ♔e2 69.♖g2+ ♔e3 70.♖g1 ♔d3 71.♖g2 ♚e3 would have brought us to the winning position given in the previous comment.

68.♔h1 ♚f5 69.♔h2 ♔f2 70.♖g2+ ♔f3 71.♖g1 ♚e5+ 72.♔h1 ♚d5 73.♖g2 ♔e3 74.♔h2 ♚d6+ 75.♔h1 ♔f3 76.♖g1 ♚d2 77.♖g4 ♚e3 78.♖g2 ♚c5 79.♔h2 ♔e3 80.♔h1 ♔f4 81.♔h2 ♔f3 82.♔h1 ♚c6 83.♔h2 ♚b6 84.♔h1 ♚d6 85.♖g1 ♔f2 86.♖g2+ ♔e3 87.♖g1 ♚b8 88.♖g2 ♚a7 89.♔h2 ♔f3 90.♔h1 ♚a1+ 91.♖g1 ♚h8 92.♖g2 ♚a8 93.♔h2 ♚c8 94.♖g1 ♚c2+ 95.♔h1 ♚b2 96.♖g4 ♚a2 97.♖g1 ♚d5 98.♖g2 ♔e3 99.♔h2 ♚f3 100.♖g1 ♔f2



Position after: 100...♔f2

101.♖f1+! After **101...♔xf1** it's a stalemate. ½-½

Joris mentioned that emotions got the better of him after the unforeseen 65.♖xg6! Expecting an easy win but being surprised by the concept of the fortress, he became furious with himself for having missed a trick. Subsequently, he didn't manage to calm down, which hindered him in his concentration and stopped him finding the key idea to break the fortress. When asked about his professional psychological insight about how he would act now if facing a similar situation, he replied: *“When you feel that you are losing control because your emotions are taking over, have a cup of tea. Only when you feel at ease, then return to your board and proceed with the game.”* So when you are shocked out of an ‘under-intense’ thought pattern, it's essential to moderate as fast as possible.

▣ Over-intensity

As with under-intensity, with over-intensity the chess player leaves the optimal emotional range for performance. His decision-making may be hampered because of the increased level of anxiety. Possible consequences could be that he spends a lot of time imagining ghosts in the position, or overthinks and examines illogical continuations.

When analyzing Anish Giri's games, I stumbled upon a few examples where he shows a tendency to respond in an emotional and defensive way and is thrown off track. With his indisputable calculation strength, the winning continuation should be – under normal circumstances – easy (or easier) for him to find. Let's look at what happened in his game in the prestigious 2017 edition of the super tournament in Shenzhen.

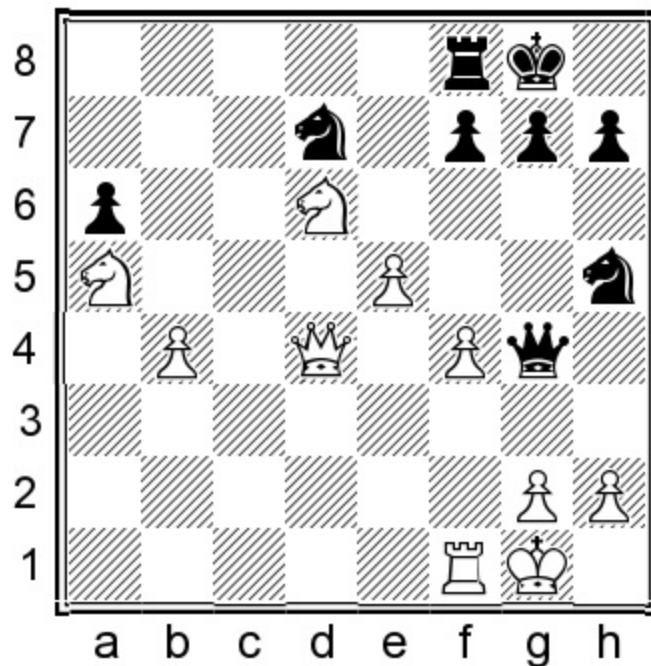
While leading the event Anish faced off against 8-time champion Russian Champion Peter Svidler in

round 5. It was likely this game that stopped him from taking the first place in this super tournament. In a symmetrical structure Giri outplayed Svidler in marvelous positional style. And we pick up the story in a position which is already winning; the point is ripe for harvesting. Svidler now played 34...g5!? which we can see as desperation (or a ‘Hail Mary’ to use the Americanism.) Svidler made this attempt *to turn the tide* (for more on this see Chapter 5: (*Defensive Strategies*)), because with normal or superficial moves he knew he would have been steamrolled by Giri.



Anish Giri (photo Alina l'Ami)

Giri, Anish (2769)
Svidler, Peter (2741)
Shenzhen 2017



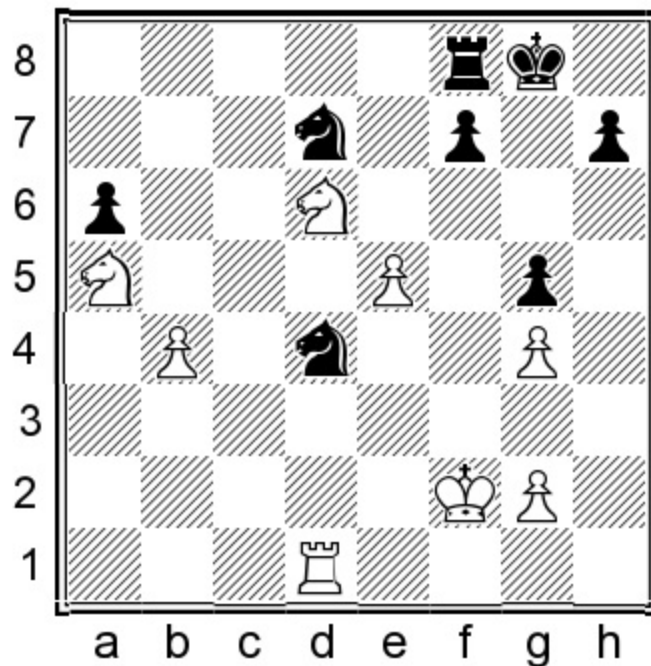
34...g5!? 35.h3

35.♖c6 ♜xf4 36.♗e7+ ♔h8 37.e6+! f6 38.♞xf4 (avoiding nasty checks on e2) 38...gxf4 39.exd7 is totally winning for White. It helps that the pawn is even protected: 39...♙xd7? 40.♗f7+.

35...♜xf4 36.hxg4 ♗e2+ 37.♔f2

37.♔h2! This move was missed by Anish, who is losing track of the game now. 37...♗xd4 38.♞d1 ♗e6 39.♗dc4 ♗b8 40.♞d6±

37...♗xd4 38.♞d1



Position after: 38. ♖d1

38...f6!

A nice save, as after 38... ♗e6 39. ♘dc4 ♗b8 40. ♖d6! Black can barely move.

39.e6

½-½

What went wrong? Did the comfortable feeling of having an extremely pleasant positional edge, which he would slowly but surely convert into a win, suddenly change into a feeling of anxiety? How come such a strong player as Anish made such a mistake? Anish, when we were speaking about this game, told me that I shouldn't underestimate the importance of human error even at the top level! Only the computer it seems, is immune to such factors with its silicon nerves and 3500 level of play.

Previously I had thought that a player of Anish's caliber would surely be able to press a 'reset-button' in such a difficult situation in order to calm down. But he explained to me that chess is an intuitive game in which accidents can happen all the time. We shouldn't expect that we can play like machines so it's better to accept that some things are beyond our control and just let the game run its natural course. Anish Giri consciously plays in a safe and fast fashion, to minimize the chance of really bad outcomes but knowing that the rest is not up to him. He does this because of previous bad experiences; with his current style he almost never loses. And Anish would like to stress that he didn't lose against Svidler here either.

While Anish was explaining to me what had gone wrong in the above example,, he was very clear that the context of the game and tournament should be understood. Both players were in time trouble, playing each move on increment, and thus had little time to think. The prospect of victory

gave Anish an emotional surge, leading to physiological responses and lowered ability to concentrate, a factor which should, at any rate, not be underestimated.

▫ Optimal functioning

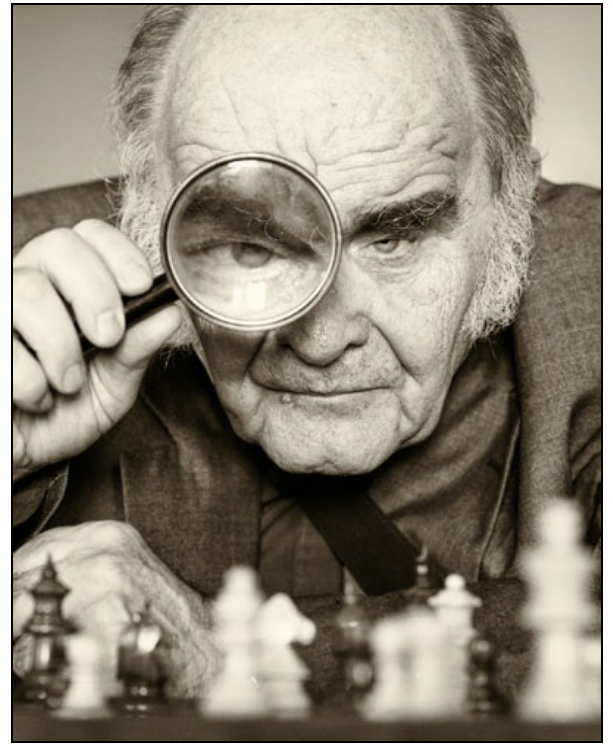
(photo Alina l'Ami)

It should be noted that more successful athletes are more capable of using emotion (such as anxiety) in a positive manner, whereas less experienced athletes may end up panicking as a result of the same emotion.⁽²⁵⁾

Many of the world's elite chess players in chess have the ability to convert their advantage in a convincing way, even while being fully aware of what could happen when they weaken their attention. They constantly remain alert for the possibility of the 'predator' and the 'prey' exchanging places.

A striking example was the Candidates Match for the World Championships between the American and Danish Grandmasters Bobby Fischer and Bent Larsen. This historic match finished in a devastating 6-0 crushing defeat for Larsen. Fischer, having won the match already and with the score at 4-0, had no intention of letting his opponent save face.

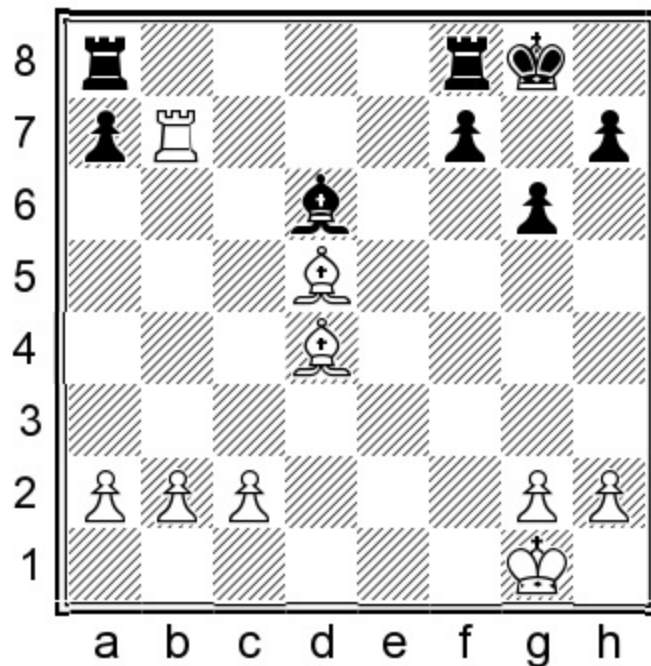
With the utmost precision and vigilance he beat Larsen once again in their 5th encounter. It's remarkable how Fischer kept playing at full strength right until the scoresheets were signed, without seemingly being bothered by emotions.



Fischer, Robert James (2760)

Larsen, Bent (2660)

Denver 1971



23...♖ac8?

23...a5! Keeping the pawn alive.

23...♖ac8? 24.c4 a5 25.♖a7!

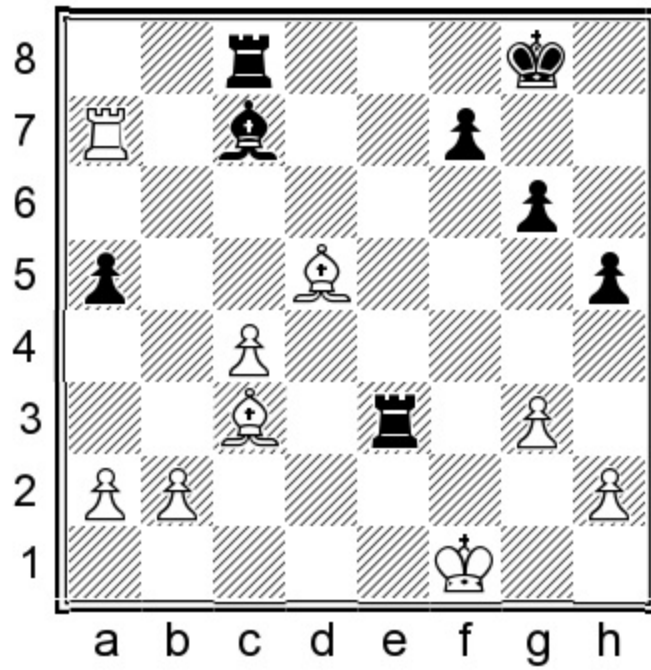
Black's a-pawn is lost.

25...♙c7

On 25...♖ce8 26.♖xa5 ♖e2 27.♙f1 ♖d2 28.♙c3 ♖d1+ 29.♙e2 ♖c1 30.♙d3 wins and 25...♙c5 26.♙xc5 ♖xc5 27.♙f2 with the King quickly approaching d4, the game would be over.

26.g3 ♖fe8 27.♙f1 ♖e7 28.♙f6 ♖e3 29.♙c3 h5

Larsen tries to create some counterplay on the kingside, but in vain. Fischer comes up with an accurate retort.

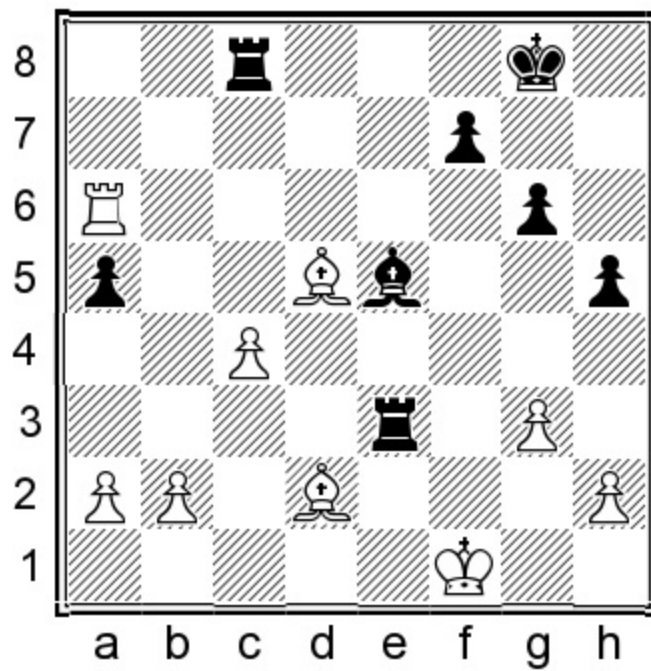


Position after: 29...h5

30. ♖a6!

Simultaneously threatening 31. ♖xg6+ and a nasty pin on Black's Bishop, by 31. ♖c6.

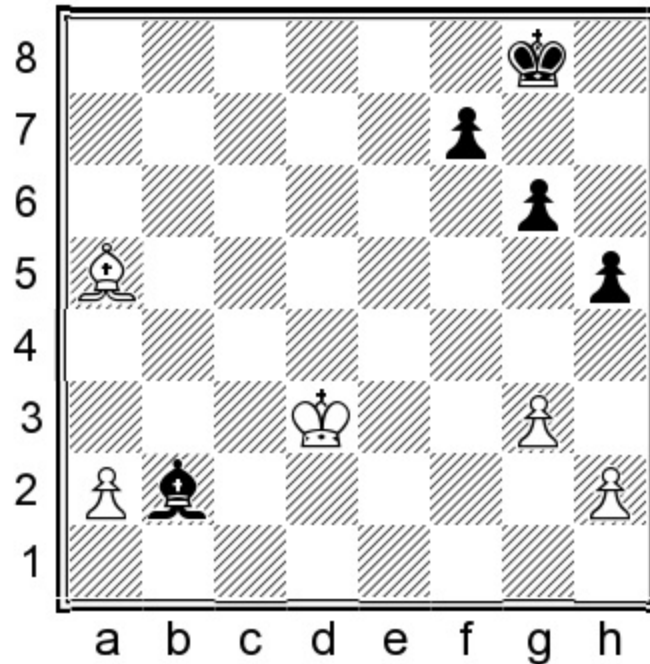
30... ♗e5 31. ♗d2



Position after: 31. ♗d2

The Rook is now trapped in mid-board.

31...♖d3 32.♔e2 ♜d4 33.♙c3 ♜xc4 34.♙xc4 ♜xc4 35.♔d3 ♜c5 36.♜xa5 ♜xa5 37.♙xa5 ♙xb2



Position after: 37...♙xb2

Fischer has capitalized on his advantage with the utmost precision. The distant passed a-pawn decides the game now.

38.a4 ♔f8 39.♙c3 ♙xc3 40.♔xc3 ♔e7 41.♔d4 ♔d6 42.a5 f6 43.a6 ♔c6 44.a7 ♔b7 45.♔d5 h4 46.♔e6

1-0

During the challengers matches for the World Championships. Fischer beat both Larsen and Taimanov both with a catastrophic 6-0 winning streak. In the final qualifiers match he vanquished Petrosian with a 6,5-2,5 score in order to face Spassky in 1972 for the world title. A German chess master asserted that: *“No other master has such a terrific will to win. At the board he radiates danger, and even the strongest opponents tend to freeze, like rabbits, when they smell a panther.”*⁽²⁶⁾



Bobby Fischer makes his way through the crowd in Reykavik 1972.

Subsection 4.2.3 – The origin of emotions

▫ How are emotions triggered?

During my game and post mortem with Fabiano Caruana (see **Chapter 1 – Introduction: The Passion and the Pain**, page 19), I couldn't help myself thinking that Caruana plays with an incredibly calm approach. This is something which he shares with fellow top athlete Roger Federer, who recently revealed that even he, with his decades of experience, had to cope with enormous pressure during the Australian Open in which he won his 20th Grand Slam title. Federer asserted:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“All day I was thinking: How would I feel if I won it, how would I feel if I lost it? I'm so close, yet so far. I think I was going through the whole match like this. I've had these moments in the past, but maybe never as extreme as tonight.”

This quote from a modern day living legend tells us that it is a misconception that with the gaining of experience the nerves get any less intense. Even the most experienced sportsmen respond emotionally to an exciting sporting event or stimulus. Mental strength in sports means performing well even when his emotions are sky-high.⁽²⁷⁾

The stimulus triggering these emotions can be actual or imagined.⁽²⁸⁾

There is a wide range of stimuli which can elicit an emotional reaction in a chess player, including both external stimuli (e.g. a visual stimulus) to internal stimuli (negative self-talk, racing heart).⁽²⁹⁾

After the emotional response to the stimulus comes thinking and cognitive interference, which will be discussed next under ‘Appraisal of emotions’. In **Section 4.3 – Chess stimuli**, we will discuss the most distracting stimuli during a game of chess.

▫ Appraisal of emotions

Sportsmen react differently under stressful conditions. Lazarus’ **Cognitive Motivational–Relational Theory (CMRT)** illuminates the important role of cognitive processes in the generation of emotions, and has often been applied to understand emotions in sports settings.⁽³⁰⁾

According to this theory, emotions are an indirect result of stimuli that an individual ‘appraises’ while in a competitive setting, and the process of their generation spans many internal systems within that person, which we can briefly summarise. The first aspect (‘relational’) is to do with their interaction with the environment, and thus the actual perception of stimuli themselves. The second (‘motivational’) is to do with assessing the status of one’s goals as well as how the developing situation affects that framework. The ‘appraisal’ is made in this phase, and it can be further subdivided as in the following sections. Finally, the ‘cognitive’ aspect of stimulus-processing refers to an entirely conscious thought process, and to the concrete plans of action which are to follow the appraisal one has just made.⁽³¹⁾

Primary Appraisal

Despite the names, the two stages of appraisal (primary and secondary) work in conjunction with each other. The primary appraisal has to do with questions of alignment and goals that arise immediately after a stimulus has been perceived through the senses. These are questions such as: “*How relevant is this situation to my needs?*” or “*what kind of goal is at stake?*” (both of which can be classed under ‘relevance’), or “*is this stimulus threatening for me?*” (which falls under ‘congruence’ in the jargon.) Clearly, the more ‘relevant’ or less ‘congruent’ the stimulus is with your existing state of mind or plans, the more intense the emotion that is caused.

Environment

stimuli (stressors)



person

Primary Appraisal

interpretation of the stressors

positive

dangerous

irrelevant

*challenge,
threat,
harm/loss*

Secondary Appraisal

analysis of the available resources

insufficient
resources

sufficient
resources

Stress

Coping

overcoming of stress

problem-focused

change situation itself

emotion-focused

change relation to the situation

Reappraisal

pacing and learning

Secondary Appraisal

The secondary appraisal concerns the intended reaction to the stimulus. Lazarus defines this stage as: *'cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage demands that are appraised as taxing on or exceeding (...) the resources of that person.'*

When the chess player evaluates his coping mechanisms as adequate for dealing with the threat, then the threat will be seen as less significant. The reaction can depend on who has caused the stimulus; and blame may be given for a harmful event and credit given for a beneficial one. Furthermore, the chess player has to appraise his own ability to deal with the situation, using either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies to handle the experience. Lastly, the appraisal is made of whether the situation is expected to change favourably or not.



As in no other match, the environmental stimuli influenced the 1978 World Championship match between Karpov and Korchnoi. The most distracting stimulus for Korchnoi was undoubtedly the neuro-psychologist **Dr. Zukhar**, seated in the front rows. As part of Karpov's team, he allegedly hypnotized Korchnoi. Korchnoi, who was disturbed by Dr. Zukhar's presence, submitted several protest letters about excessive radiation levels in the playing hall and requested for him to be removed

from the audience or at least be seated at the rear rows.

At the pinnacle of the conflict, Korchnoi declared, “*I will not play if a one-way mirror is not installed*”, to separate him from the spectators and Dr. Zukhar. Let’s now view Dr. Zukhar’s hypnosis through the lens of Lazarus’ CMRT and Korchnoi’s appraising process.

The stimulus was (primarily) appraised as *threatening* for his concentration and quality of moves, which was very relevant for his needs due to the stakes: he could be World Champion. Korchnoi’s secondary’s appraisal was likely that he blamed Karpov’s team, and doubt about his own ability to cope with Dr. Zukhar’s staring (or, according to Korchnoi, hypnosis). Finally it seems he didn’t expect things to improve either, as he continued protesting throughout all of the 32-game match.

Problem- and emotion focused coping

In **Section 4.5 – Cognitive techniques**, I will guide you through the different coping strategies, which fall into two main categories: problem- or emotion- focused coping strategies. The problem-focused way is aimed at resolving the stressful encounter, while the emotion-focused way of coping is more about how the chess player adjusts themselves to the situation, in case the circumstances remain bad or unpredictable. I’d like to give a foretaste here of how to cope with difficult sporting situations, using a game from Aronian when he was under the most intense stress you can imagine: playing Magnus Carlsen.

Presumably, due to Carlsen’s novelty initiating aggressive play against Aronian’s King (as well as his fast and confident execution of the moves) Aronian appraised the stimuli as being quite threatening to him. But Aronian held firm. Instead of throwing in the towel, he kept confidence in his own positional feeling, initiating counterplay by means of ♖c8. His comment after the game was: “*I thought I’ll put the Rook on c8 and things should work out!*”⁽³²⁾

This kind of reaction, expressing a genuine confidence in one’s ability to solve the problems, consistently reduces stress levels.

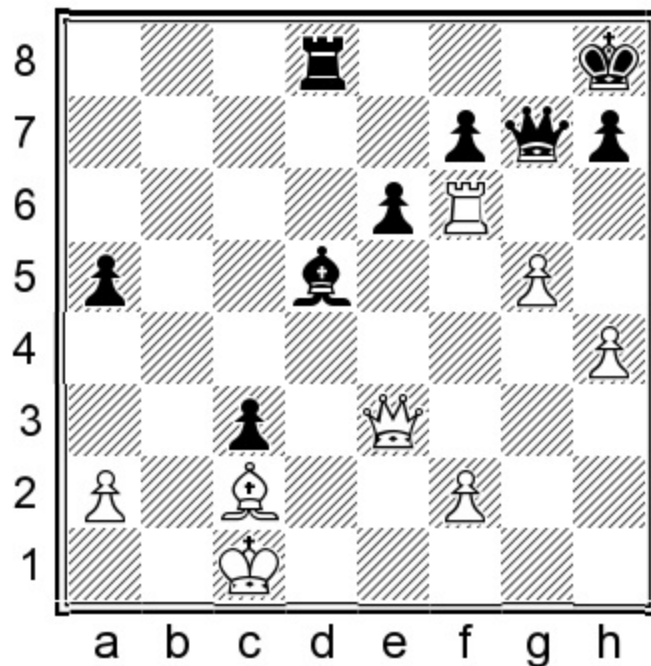


Levon Aronian: superb defending in dire straits. (photo Jos Sutmuller)

Carlsen, Magnus (2875)

Aronian, Levon (2752)

Zagreb 2019



Evidently, Aronian is in trouble. He is completely tied up and his position looks very uncomfortable.

27...♔f8!

Threatening ...♔a3+, and for the sake of the counter, giving up on c3.

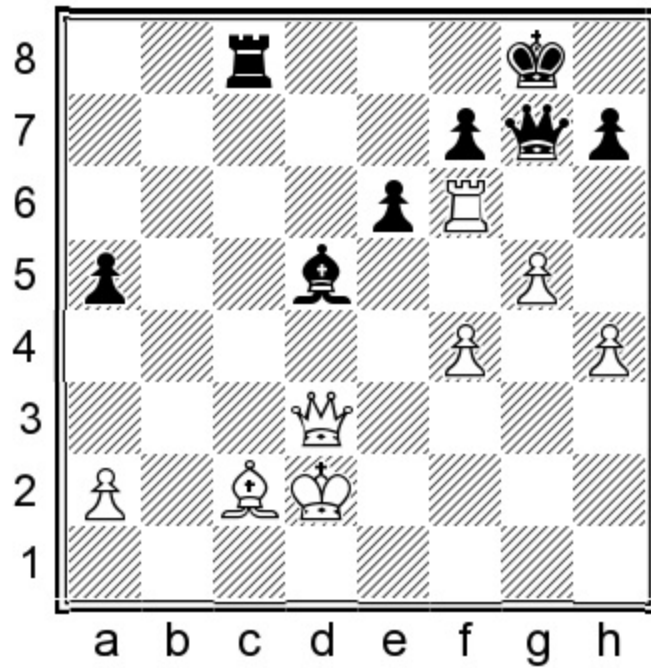
28.♔xc3 ♖c8!

Aronian had to rely on his instinct under these adverse circumstances. Rather than land in a passive position, he takes several moves to put his Rook on a square where it makes a difference.

29.♔d3 ♔g7

Cool-headedly returning to g7 with the Queen so as to create counterplay against White's King, although Aronian's position is still unenviable.

30.f4 ♕g8 31.♕d2



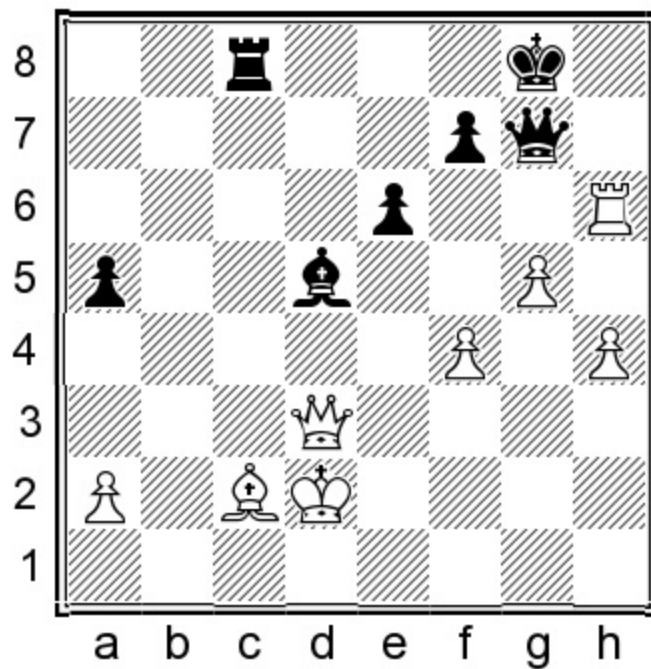
Position after: 31.♔d2

31...h6!!

Aronian prevents Carlsen from playing h4-h5 (and h5-h6). 31...♖d8 32.h5 ♜c8 [32...h6 doesn't work anymore, because of 33.♖xh6 f5?? 34.♖g6+-] 33.h6 ♚h8+- Black would be in a terminal bind here.

32.a3

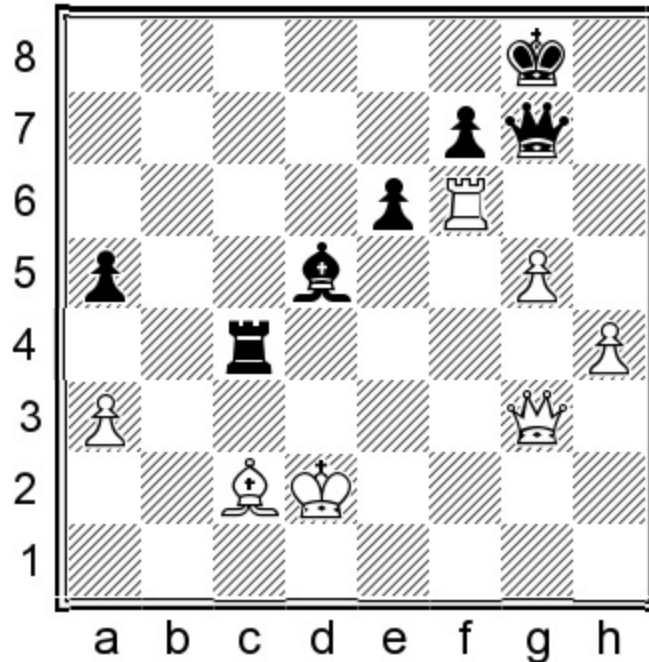
After 32.♖xh6 there is one caveat though,



Analysis after: 32... ♖xh6

Black plays 32...f5!! when suddenly the Rook on h6 is out of bounds and White is even losing here! After Black's f7-f5 White's King is suddenly much weaker than its colleague. 33. ♖f6 ♔a7! and the curtains are falling for White.

32...hxg5 33.fxg5 ♖c4 34. ♔g3



Position after: 34. ♔g3

34... ♗e4!

Solving all of his problems. But not 34... ♖c8?, on account of 35.h5, when all of a sudden White is winning.

35. ♗b3 ♖d4+ 36. ♔e1 ♗f5 37.h5 ♖d3 38. ♗b8+ ♗f8 39. ♗xf8+ ♔xf8 40. ♗c2 ♖h3 41. ♗xf5 ♖xf5 42.h6 ♔g8 43.a4 ♖h4 44. ♖xf5 ♖xa4 45. ♔f2 ♖g4 46. ♔f3 ♖g1 47. ♔f2

1/2-1/2

Section 4.3 – Coping with emotions

Introduction

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, emotions are interdependent and part of changeable processes with respect to time and environment. In sports competition, negative emotions can become troublesome when they intrude in our system and deliver with them a new set of rules and goals, quite separate from our own long-term goals, and demanding re-orientation.

André Agassi (*see picture*), suffering from intense nerves before and during his matches, won the final of the Roland Garros final in 1999 after being 2 to 0 sets down against Medvedev.



Agassi said about this comeback: *“I’m a proven war dog, (..) losing would have been devastating to me. The truth of it is that anything can happen if you keep working, but you also fear the worst. That’s the nature of competition. There’s always battles in your head.”*⁽³³⁾

Agassi stared death in the face, and used it to re-motivate himself and hold his head high. It’s of great importance that a sportsman knows how to cope with his emotions to nevertheless perform at the top of his game. Completely erasing destructive thoughts and/or self-doubt from our minds so that they no longer do any harm to our play is easier said than done. Strong emotions can get out of the boxes where we try to store them, and do untold damage. Much more practical is to *try and cope* with the strong and maladaptive action tendencies that come with them.⁽³⁴⁾

We will deal with the coping process in **4.5: Strategies to enhance emotional control**, by highlighting the emotional controlling strategies. There doesn’t exist a simple antidote in the process of coping against the stimulus or the emotion elicited encounter. A single emotion forms get rid of the tension⁽³⁵⁾

Therefore, we will have a closer look at the most important stimuli (**4.3: Coping with emotions**) evoking emotions, like the tendencies (**4.4: Chess tendencies evoked by emotions**) which come up as a result of these high-intense emotions, in chess.

Chess stimuli

As illustrated before, the only ability of a chess player at the board that really counts, is to be able to concentrate deeply on the task at hand. Attention is a pre-requisite for all the cognitive processes, as it organizes and regulates the course of the thinking process. Unfortunately, several stimuli can induce emotions which may disrupt our concentration. We discussed the environmental stimuli in the previous chapter and got acquainted with an exceptional chess stimulus which disrupted Korchnoi’s concentration. Below, we will have a closer look at more ‘trivial’ several chess stimuli which may appear in every tournament, partially following the schedule as has been set out by the late Grandmaster and psychologist Nikolai Vladimirovich Krogus in his book ‘Chess Psychology’.

1. *Unfamiliar conditions at a competition;*
2. *The stress of the unknown;*
3. *The (in)significance of the result;*
4. *Unpleasant behavior of the opponent;*
5. *An unpleasant opponent*

1. Unfamiliar conditions at a competition

Unfamiliar conditions during a tournament can be quite daunting for a player. The readers amongst us who have visited the Wijk aan Zee tournament in the Netherlands can surely affirm this: a fully packed tournament hall, the sight of the stage, the press etc. It takes time to adjust oneself to these conditions. Krogius gives an example of his own in his book. During his debut at the USSR Championship, held in Riga 1958 and facing world class player Efim Geller in the first round, Krogius was in thrall to the atmosphere: *“Thoughts about extraneous matters and about my surroundings persistently interfered with my reflections on the game and the calculations of variations.”* These environmental stimuli became so dominant that they hampered his concentration and calculation. Krogius sacrificed a pawn and explained that this idea didn’t originate from boldness, but instead from a desire to get rid of the tension.⁽³⁶⁾



A smoky and gloomy Wijk aan Zee. (photo Alina l'Ami)

Facing the world class player Efim Geller, he sacrificed a pawn without much thought.

I experienced a similar issue to Krogius’ in the next game. Playing on a stage together with the world’s best players and in front of a large crowd is by no means easy. In Wijk aan Zee, as we noted, that feeling is heightened. The tension got to me and I played a weird piece sacrifice based on an agitated and nervous feeling I had. To eliminate the tension, I felt a need to play unobjectively and ‘va banque’...

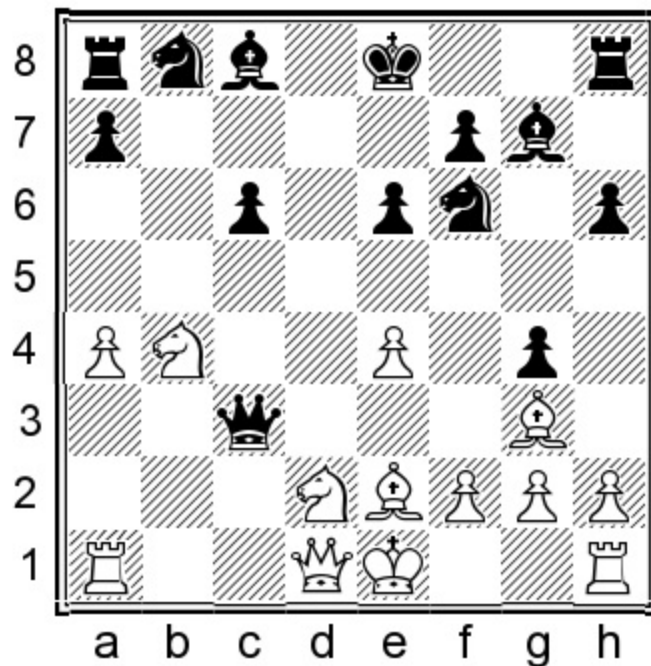


Jan Werle in a game against Erwin l'Ami at the Dutch Championship. (photo Alina l'Ami)

Werle, Jan (2607)

Motylev, Alexander (2676)

Wijk aan Zee 2009



15.0-0?!

Throwing caution to the wind and playing into the hands of the opponent.

The simple 15. ♖a2 just retaining the piece would have been ok. E.g. 15... ♕d4 16. ♖b1 ♘bd7 17. ♖c2 with excellent compensation for the pawn.

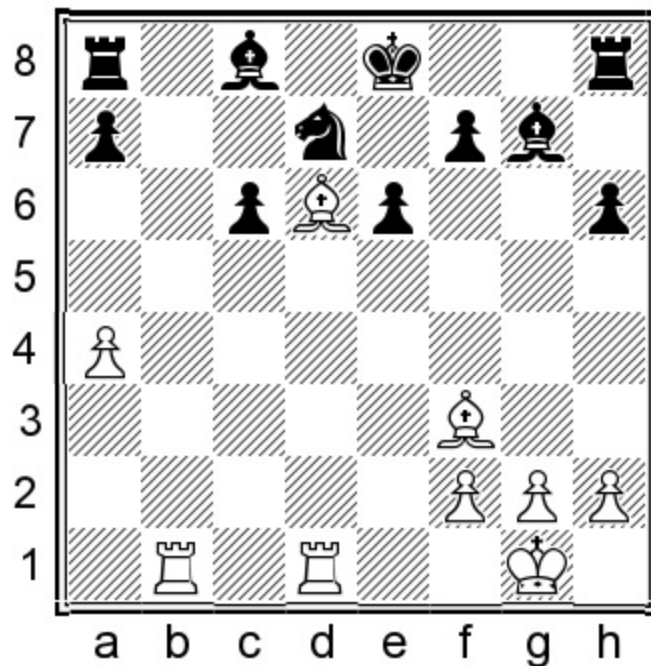
15.0-0?! ♕xb4 16. ♘c4?

16. ♖b1 winning back the piece, was still possible, gaining sufficient compensation: 16... ♕d4 17. ♘xb8 0-0 18. ♘c7 with an equal position.

16... ♘xe4 17. ♖b1 ♕c5 18. ♘d6+ ♘xd6 19. ♘xd6 ♕d4 20. ♘xg4

20. ♘xb8 was still possible, though a tough struggle would lie ahead for White. 20...0-0 21. ♘c7 ♘d7 22. ♘xg4 c5 with a big advantage for Black.

20... ♕xd1 21. ♖fxd1 ♘d7 22. ♘f3



Position after: 22. ♔f3

22...♙e5! 23.♙xc6 ♙xd6 24.♙xa8 ♔e7

And Black was winning; it was now impossible to fool myself; on move 56 I had to resign.

2. The stress of the unknown

Aron Nimzowitsch

One of the most loved and recited chess stories goes that Nimzowitsch's opponent Vidmar absent-mindedly placed a cigar case on the chess table.

Aron Nimzowitsch detested the smoke of cigars and in protest he called for the director. The director rejected this complaint because Nimzowitsch's opponent hadn't lit up the cigar, neither there was any smoke. Nimzowitsch retort was: *"I know, but he threatens to smoke, and you know as well as I that in chess the threat is often stronger than the execution"*.⁽³⁷⁾



In line with this historical quote, uncertain situations on which you can't get a hold, may cause a lot of stress. You might become worried about the many possibilities the opponent may play. When the concerns are mounting, the chess player (wrongly) tends to forget about his own possibilities. The opponent's invisible and not concrete moves and plans coming our way, are considered as increasingly 'unpleasant' and there emerges an increasing desire to neutralize the threat. In this way we try to reduce this feeling on insecurity and to gain back the control over

the game. (Moreover in Section 4.4 – Chess tendencies evoked by emotions).

The following recent game played in the Gibraltar tournament was an ideal illustration for Nimzowitsch's punch line. My opponent got much better out of the opening and gained two pawns. However, I refused to give in to defeat, and stood firm. As a result, the game got a psychological twist. The stakes were high, as the winner of this game would (with a score of 6,5 out 9) get a serious chance in the next and last round to win the tournament and, therewith a substantial prize, which made the game even more emotionally charged. Ultimately, my opponent could no longer be patient and decided to undertake direct action.

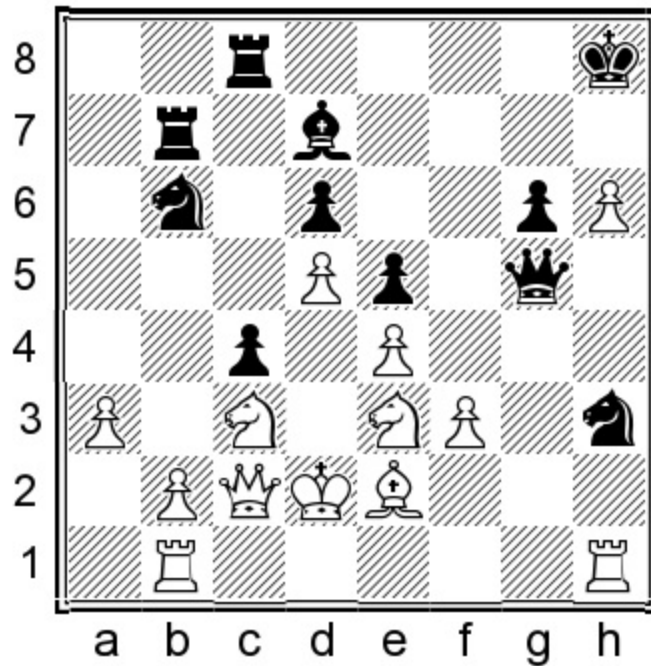


The mountain view of the 'The Rock' of Gibraltar and the playing venue (2020).

Durarbayli, Vasif (2625)

Werle, Jan (2545)

Caleta 2020



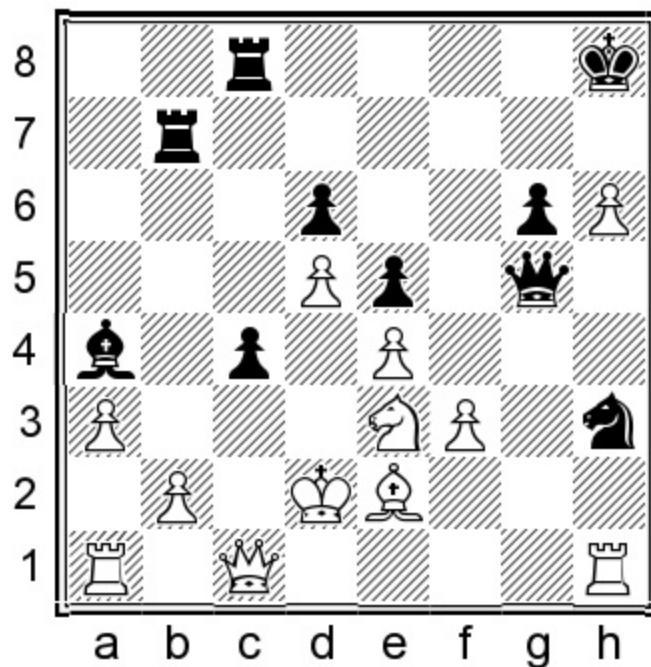
Position after: 32...♖b7!?

33.a4?

At this moment, White wants to cut the knot by pushing his pawn forward, threatening a5 looking for direct measures to make my pieces suffer, realizing a big advantage.

The tension caused by the uncertainty of the further course of the game is enduring and mounting, explaining White's oversight.

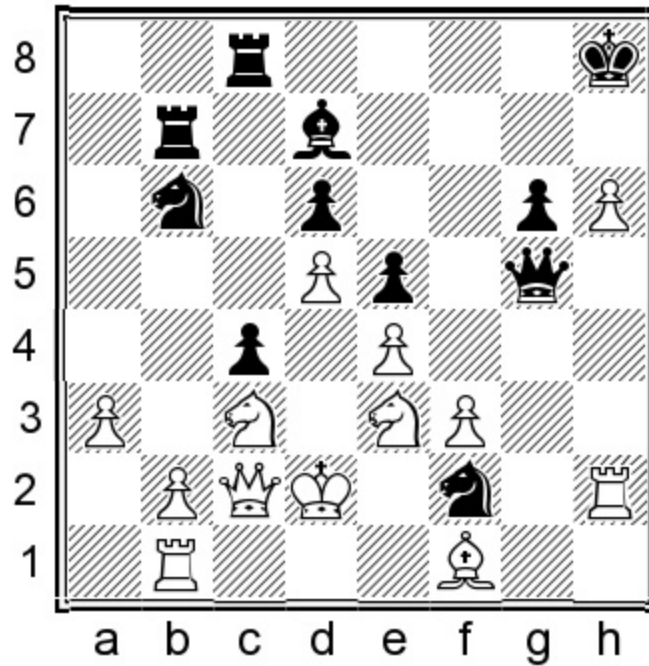
A) 33.♖a1? in order to prepare a3-a4-a5, allows 33...♘a4! 34.♘xa4! ♙xa4 35.♙c1



Analysis after: 35. ♖c1

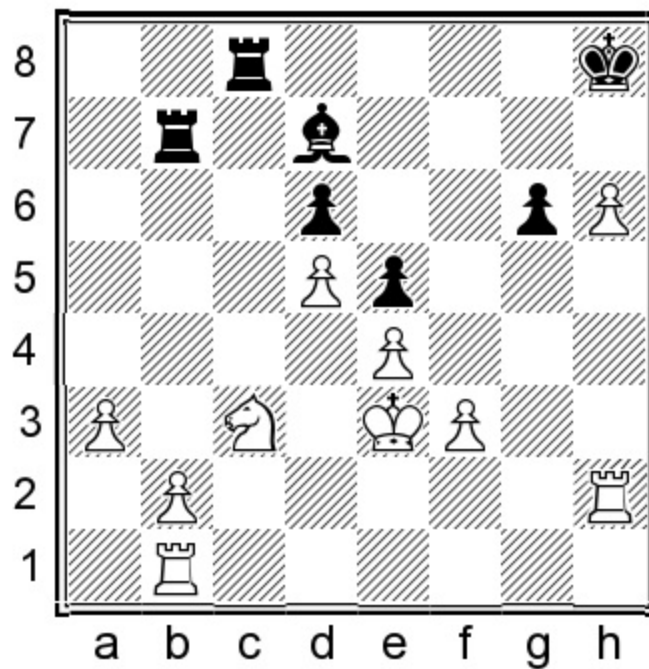
35... ♜b3! gratefully making use of the weakened square b3. [35... ♜xb2+ is winning as well.]

B) 33. ♕f1? ♗f2 34. ♜h2



Analysis after: 34. ♜h2

34... ♗d3! with the idea 35. ♕xd3? cxd3 Black's queenside artillery is activated along the c-file (and b-file). 36. ♖xd3 ♗c4+ 37. ♕e2 ♗xe3 38. ♖xe3 ♖xe3+ 39. ♕xe3



Analysis after: 39. ♖xe3

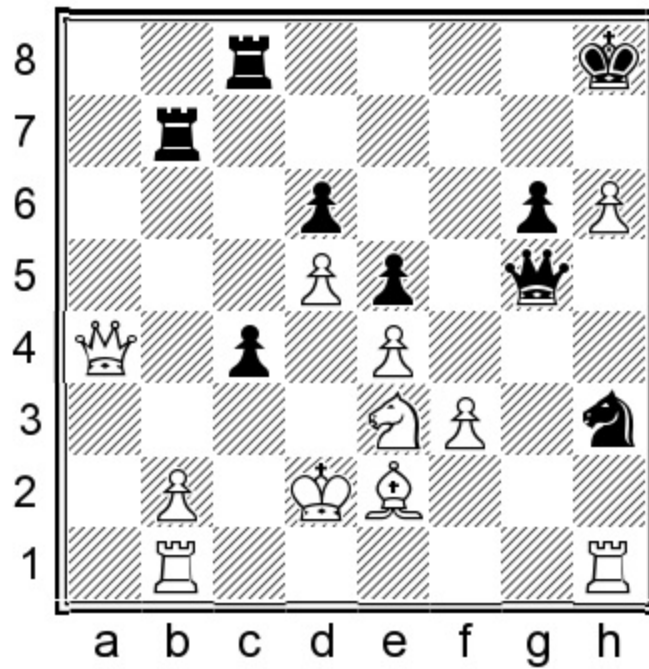
after which Black wins the piece on c3, by 39... ♖xc3+.

C) 33. ♖c1!, with the idea of ♖e1, and evt. ♗d1 to unpin the Knight, would lead to a long and winding struggle.

33... ♗xa4!

This is the introduction to a two piece sacrifice, after the white King will be roaming on the board.

34. ♗xa4 ♗xa4 35. ♖xa4



Position after: 35. ♖xa4

35... ♖xb2+!

But not 35... ♖b3? on the account of 36. ♖a7! threatening ♖g7# and defending the e3-Knight.

36. ♖xb2 c3+ 37. ♖e1?!

37. ♖c2! ♖xe3 38. ♖a2! with unclear play, was difficult to find at the board.

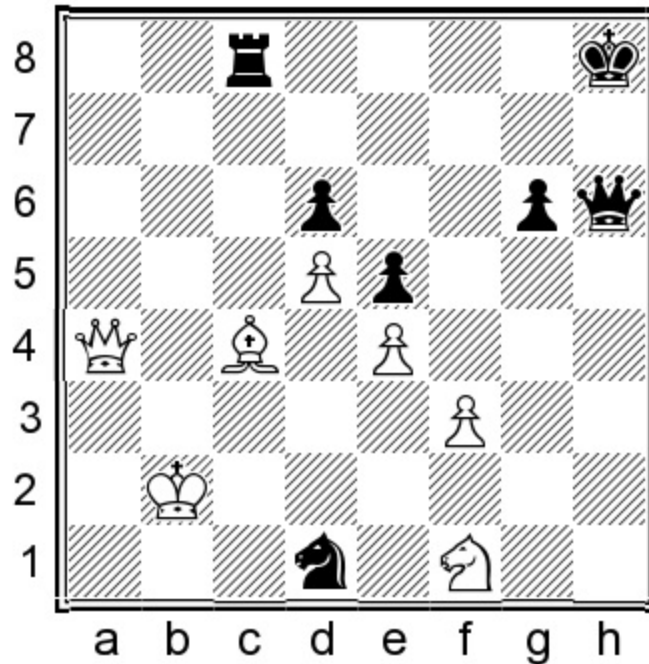
37... ♖h4+

Now it's all over, Black will take the Rook on h1 with the Queen.

38. ♖d1 ♗f2+ 39. ♖c2 cxb2+ 40. ♖xb2 ♖xh1

A check on c1 is threatened, so White doesn't get breathing space for ♖d7 or any counterstrike.

41. ♙c4 ♜xh6 42. ♗f1 ♜d1+



Position after: 42... ♜d1+

White is forced to take on d1, after which the strength of the Rook increases. The resulting ending is winning for Black.

43. ♜xd1 ♜xc4 44. ♖b3 ♜c7 45. ♖b2 ♜f8 46. ♗d2 ♜b8+ 47. ♗b3 ♜b4 48. ♜d2 ♜xd2+ 49. ♗xd2 ♖g7 50. ♖b3 ♖f6 51. ♗c4 ♖e7 52. ♖c3 ♜a7 53. ♖d3 ♜a4 54. ♖c3 ♜a6 55. ♖d3 ♖f6 56. ♖e2 ♖g5 57. ♖e3 ♖h4 58. f4 exf4+ 59. ♖xf4 g5+ 60. ♖f5 g4 61. e5 g3 62. ♗e3 ♖h3 63. e6 ♜a3 64. ♗c4 ♜a8 65. ♗e3 ♜f8+ 66. ♖e4 g2 0-1



On the left ex-World Champion Veselin Topalov. In the middle Jan Werle against Gawain Jones.

3. The (in)significance of the result

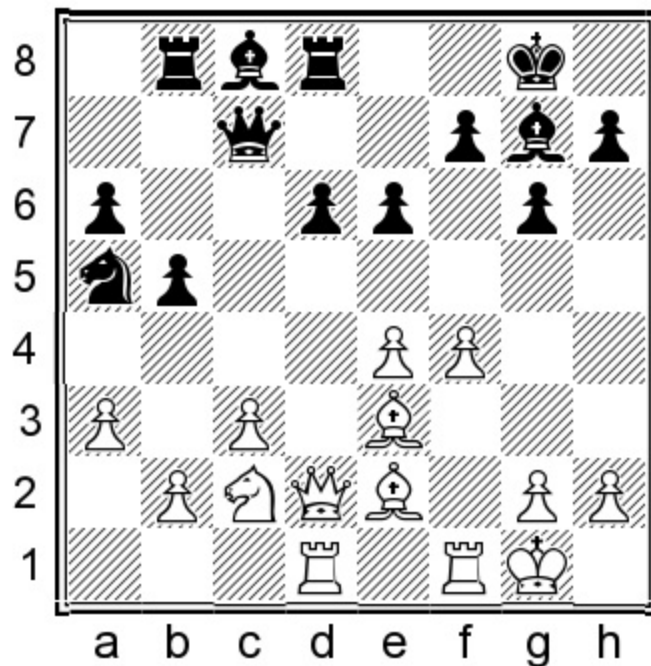
This is one of the main stressors that can get top chess players out of balance. It often happens, especially at the top level, that due to the significance of the result a player makes weird choices when it is both unnecessary and counterproductive to do so. According to Krogius debilitating consequences playing for a win may lead to excessive excitement, which (may) disorganize the activity of their nervous system and disturbs the clarity of thought and concentration.⁽³⁸⁾

On the contrary, an insignificant game or ‘dead rubber’ can also lead players to make out-of-character choices. Larsen, during the 6th and final game of the Candidates Match in 1971, was trailing 5-0. The strong Danish Grandmaster played far below his level.

Larsen, Bent (2660)

Fischer, Robert James (2760)

Denver 1971



17.e5?

Bent Larsen

This move only worsens White's structure. Another possibility 17.f5!? exf5 18.exf5 ♖xf5 19.♗b4 leads to an unclear position.

On 17.♞e1!? follows 17...♗c4 18.♙c1 ♙b7 19.♙f3 and the position is even.

17.e5? ♙f8! 18.b4

Possible are 18.exd6 ♜xd6 or 18.♗b4.

18...♗c6

18...♗c4 was a pitfall, which Fischer had foreseen.

19.♙xc4 ♞xc4 20.♙c5! d5 [20...♙b7 21.♗e3 ♞e4 22.exd6] 21.♙d4±

19.♗d4 dxe5 20.fxe5 ♗xe5 21.♙g5

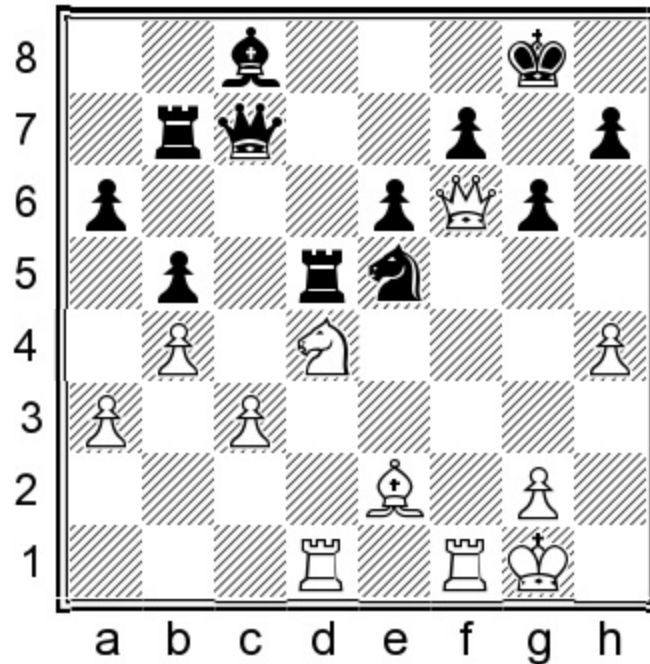
21.♙f4!? ♙g7 22.♞e3 ♙b7 23.♗b3 ♜d5 24.♗c5 White would still be fighting, because of the annoying pin on the e5-Knight. However, Black is clearly on top.

21...♜d5 22.♞f4 ♙g7 23.h4 ♜b7



23...♙xc3 when Black is winning.

24.♙f6 ♘xf6 25.♙xf6



Position after: 25.♙xf6

25...♙xc3?

Fischer is blundering as well. The weird match situation seemingly influenced both of the players. Instead, the solid 25...♙e7 would have granted Black a big advantage.

26.h5

Larsen could have forced a draw with 26.♘xe6! ♘xe6 27.♖xd5 ♘xd5 28.♙d8+ ♔g7 29.♙f6+ with equality.

Possibly Larsen refused to accept losing the match, despite 26...gxh5 27.♔h1 ♘g4 28.♙xg4 hxg4 29.♙h6 ♘d7 30.♖f4 f5 31.♙f6?

31.♙g5+ ♔f7 32.♙h5+ would lead to a perpetual check.

31...♙c8 32.♖ff1 ♖f7 33.♙h6 ♘b7 34.♘xe6 ♙f6 35.♙e3 ♖e7 36.♖de1 ♖d6 37.♙g5+ ♙xg5 38.♘xg5 ♖xe1 39.♖xe1 ♘d5 40.♖e8+ ♔g7

0-1

4. Unpleasant behavior of the opponent

Rubinstein and Fischer asserted that they only played against the opponent's pieces, not the opponent themselves. In current times, this attitude is not adopted a lot as we are aware of the importance of psychology in chess.

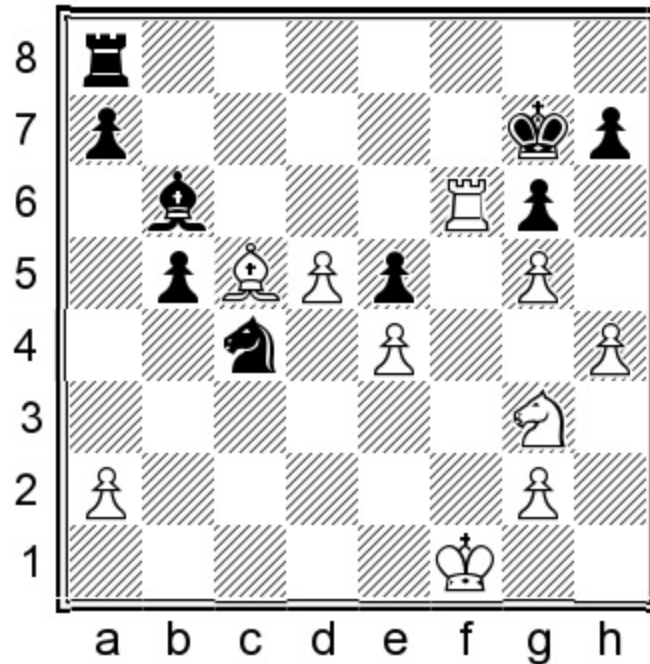
Alexander Alekhine was ahead of his time in this regard (see **Chapter 5.5 – Turning the Tide**) and once said: *“A knowledge of human nature and an understanding of one's psychology are essential to (..) the chess struggle. Before, people fought only the pieces, whereas we fight (..) the opponent, his traits and (..) his vanity.”* Krogius rightly points out that chess is not just a board game but a contest of wills, characters and intellects. The psychological duel during the game can be brought out by posture, gait or other physical conduct and mannerisms.⁽³⁹⁾

We are more persuaded by the moves of an opponent who plays aggressively, looks confident and makes a strong impression. And there are off-board tricks too: in tournament practice I met a lot of professional GM's who use trickery to unbalance the opponent psychologically, such as eating at the board, playing with the pieces, staring straight into the opponent's eyes, pretending to make moves to judge the reaction, or offering draws to make the opponent lose time. Kasparov was a master of psychological tricks such of these. On the rare occasions Karpov blundered in their matches, Kasparov would exacerbate his rival's feeling by making faces of disbelief.



Garry Kasparov in his element against Aronian, while Caruana and Anand are watching. (photo Lennart Ootes)

Karpov, Anatoly (2700)
Kasparov, Garry (2740)
Seville 1987



35. ♖c6?? ♜a5 when Karpov is losing an exchange and later 0-1.

Polish Grandmaster Zbigniew Pakleza (photo from private archive)

Fellow professional chess and poker player, GM Zbigniew Pakleza, told me once that some opponents have a habit of making their moves hesitantly or hovering their hands above the board while looking at him to try and find out his thoughts about that move. He said that he found a successful formula to counteract this behavior: simply walking away from the board while the hand of the opponent is waving above the board. With this he meant to convey the message that he was not impressed about the move, causing the opponent self-doubt. In any case, it is always best to be aware of these tricks and then avoid being psyched out by them!



5. An unpleasant opponent

Some elite grandmasters project an aura of invincibility. This was the case with several World Champions, amongst others Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov, whose opponents always felt they were fighting a losing battle. Naturally, Bobby Fischer was widely praised as a chessplayer, but also feared for his absolute brutality and the difficulty of playing him. As Krogius said: “*There was*

something so devilish about him that beginning from the Candidates' cycle, all of his opponents had to call for match adjournments on medical grounds. Some called this 'Fischer Fear'; others, 'Fischer Fever'."⁽⁴⁰⁾

These days the phenomenon continues unabated. The World Champion Magnus Carlsen has the all-time record rating in classical chess. His main rival Fabiano Caruana during the Grenke Chess Classic in Karlsruhe made no attempt to win, and contented himself with a quick and simple draw. After he was asked why he didn't make any efforts to improve his tournament standing that round, he replied that he thought of playing for the win against Carlsen as *'harakiri'*.⁽⁴¹⁾

Likewise, in their first encounter in the 2011 edition of Wijk aan Zee, a very young Anish Giri beat Carlsen in crushing style. They proceeded to draw many subsequent encounters until the Bilbao Masters 2016, when Magnus broke the spell. Ever since it's been one-way traffic. For example see the score from 2018, which is 6-1 in favor of Carlsen.

In the next game, Carlsen has just played a rare move (6...♘e7 after 7.e5) in the opening, causing Anish to think for 17 and 20 minutes respectively on his next couple of moves. Carlsen knew what he was doing. In the post-mortem he commented that *"sometimes you don't play the position, but your opponent"*.

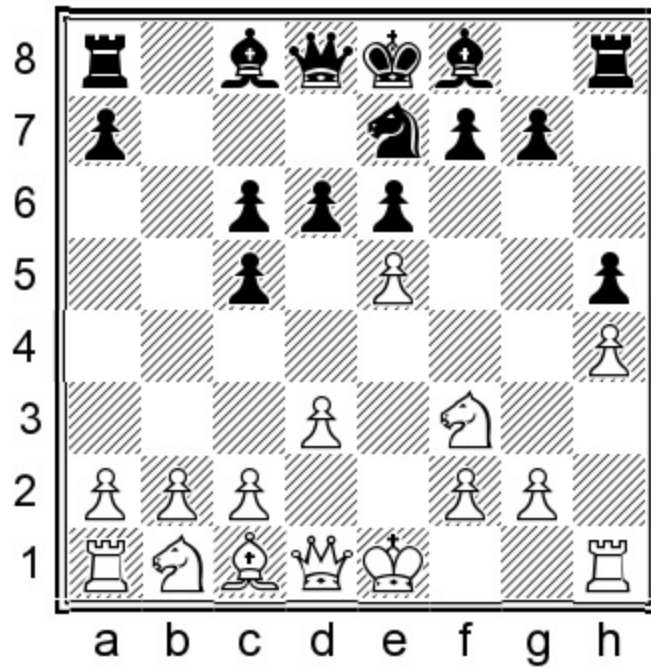


Giri against Carlsen.

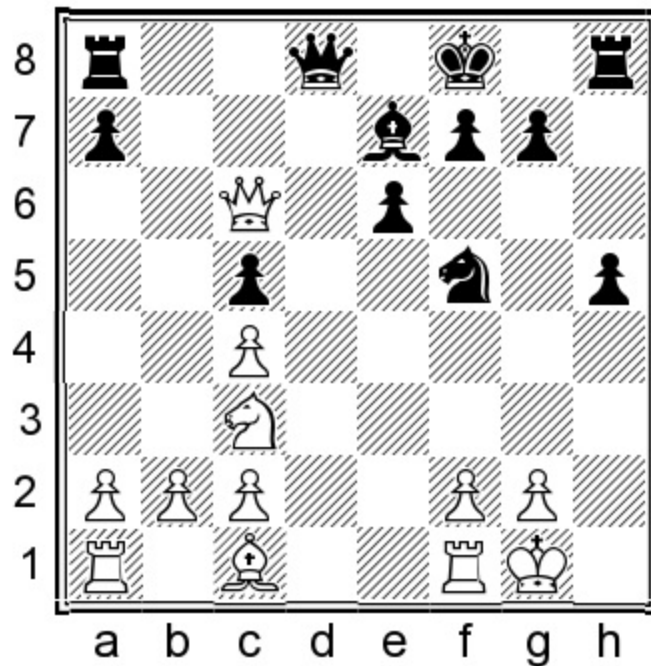
Giri, Anish (2779)

Carlsen, Magnus (2875)

Zagreb 2019



8.exd6 ♖g6 9.♗fd2 ♙xd6 10.♗c4 ♙e7 11.♗c3 ♙a6 12.♚f3 ♙xc4 13.♚xc6+ ♔f8 14.dxc4 ♗xh4
 15.0-0 ♗f5

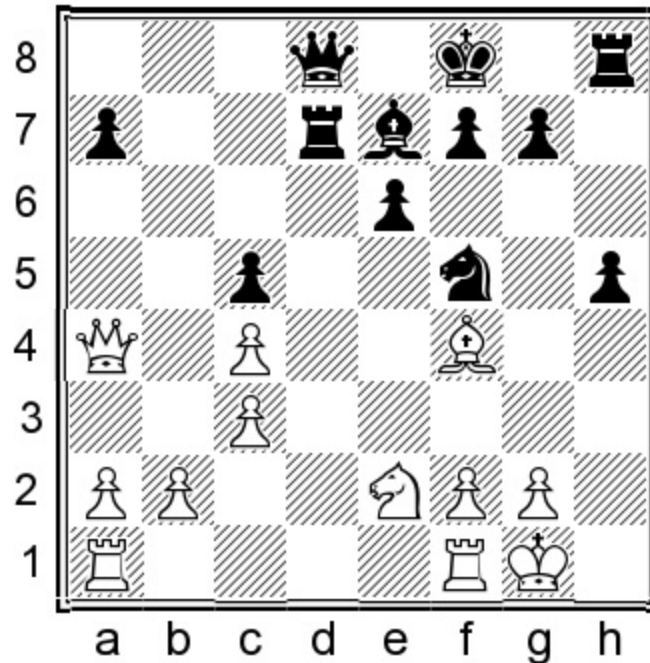


Position after: 15... ♗f5

16.♗e2?

This passive move is the first real mistake of Anish, fearing – as it seems – ghosts. 16.♚e4 h4 17.♙f4!
 ♚c8 [17...h3? 18.g4±] 18.♙ad1 h3 19.g4!↗

16...♖c8 17.♚a4 ♜c7 18.♙f4 ♞d7 19.c3



Position after: 19.c3

19...g5!

As a result of Anish's passive play, he can't make a fist against Black's kingside attack.

20.♞ad1 ♞xd1 21.♞xd1 ♚a8!

The pawns are unstoppable, while White is lacking any sort of counterplay.

22.♙c7 h4 23.f3 h3

An unprecedented short game on top level and the proof that chess and psychology go hand-in-hand.

0-1

Chapter 4.4 – Chess tendencies evoked by emotions

Now we will deal with various action tendencies which are caused by the stimuli just remarked upon. As mentioned before, every emotion entails a biologically implied action tendency or impulse.⁽⁴²⁾

When the going gets tough, we tend to avoid uncertain situations by any means necessary. Facing an uncertain situation, we experience this as 'unpleasant' we may try hard to reduce this feeling on insecurity in numerous different ways, in all cases with the goal of getting a better handle on our situation. A psychological experiment revealed that most people prefer to get an electrical shock instead of *maybe* getting it. As people can't control the situation, they are looking for secondary or

compensatory control mechanisms in order to create a fake/show security.⁽⁴³⁾



Garry Kasparov (photo Lennart Ootes)

As Krogus puts it with respect to chess, rapid changes in a position evoke a heavy sense of responsibility for every projected possibility and may also produce a state of fright and uncertainty concerning the methods of play. When faced with such non-standard problems, our personality comes into play. A conservative, cautious player may show his personality on the board by passive moves while a more adventurous player will chose concrete solutions, trying to deal with the threats immediately. In uncertain times some may cherish hope, while others have given up on hope a long time ago. Some may get the feeling that they are stuck and they can't get out of it, whilst others find it due to the lack of control more easy letting their troubles go.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Krogus mentioned three tendencies which often manifest in time-trouble, namely playing obvious and natural moves, simplifying and over-estimating the merits of the opponent's active possibilities. According to him, these tendencies are caused because the high-speed thinking needed in time-trouble produces an exceptionally tense state. However, in my opinion, these tendencies don't merely show up during time trouble, but arise in general in case of emergency or in any intense situation. Facing a precarious position, our vision begins to narrow and we skip over the strategic checks and

balances usually used in play; our calculations also become more superficial. In anticipation of possible danger, we seek control at all costs.⁽⁴⁵⁾

We can divide these tendencies elicited at the board in 5 categories:

1. The tendency to play obvious, straightforward or natural moves;
2. the tendency to simplify;
3. the tendency of indecisiveness;
4. the tendency of playing too passively, and;
5. the tendency of opting for safety of the King.

1. The tendency to play obvious, straightforward or natural moves

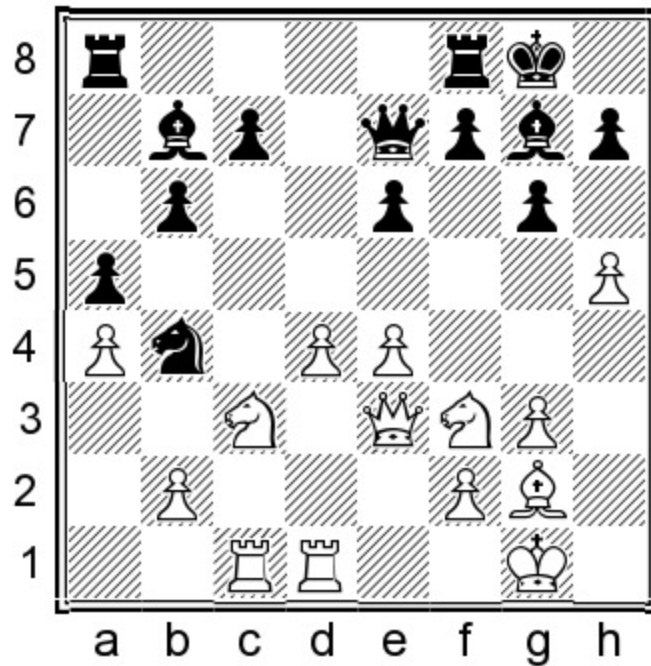
The tendency of playing inflexible moves during a tense situation can reinforce a rigid and negative perspective of the position. The overall uncertain course of the game can lead to the defender trying to fall back on the small subset of considerations which are knowable and secure. The normal process of thinking about the position as a whole, necessary for building decent plans, is thrown out the window.

In the next game I was hoping for, and consequently too focused on, a positive result; this led to inflexible decision-making. It was a crucial match – or at least, I thought so – in the Hoogeveen Open of 2015. As the tournament entered the home straight I was playing on top board against top seed, Indian Grandmaster Gupta. My opponent had managed to get a slight pull and initiative from a Catalan opening. I had my trumps too, though: the two Bishops and a nice square on b4 for my Knight. After some manoeuvring from both sides, we reached a critical position. My opponent decided to go for it with the aggressive **19.h4-h5**, threatening to squeeze me in by means of 20.h5-h6. How should I react?

Gupta, Abhijeet (2629)

Werle, Jan (2524)

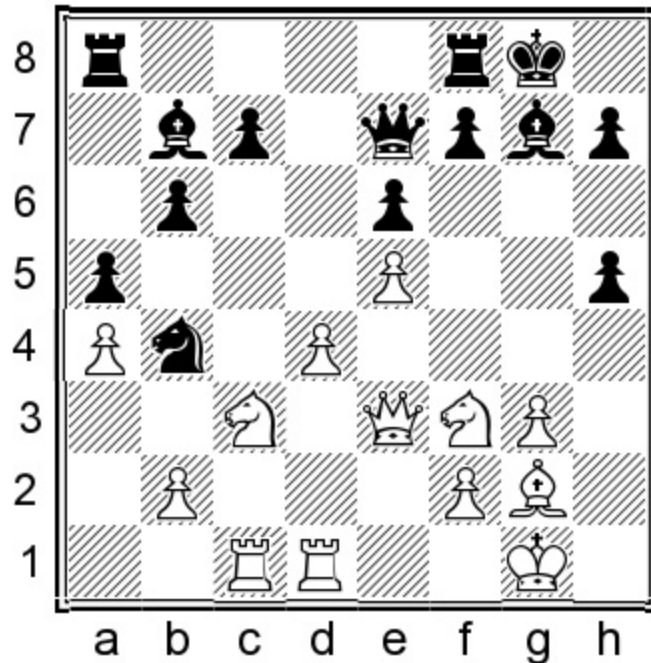
Hoogeveen 2015



19...gxf8?

The non-conventional 19...gxf8! was hard to find for me as it would destroy the pawn structure and the King's defences. Nonetheless this was the way to go for, as the position gets opened which is beneficial for the Bishops. On top of that, Black obtains real counterplay, whereas his position after the text move becomes more and more crippled.

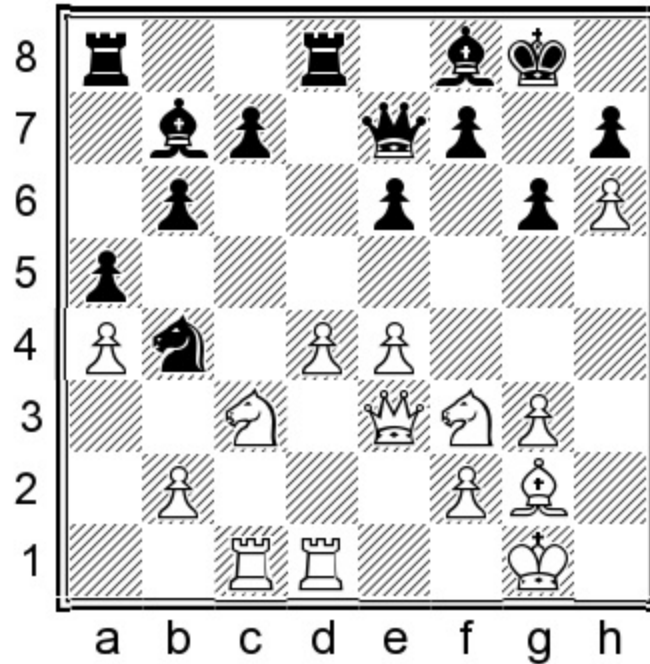
19...gxf8! 20.♘e2 the Knight is heading via f4 to h5. [In case of 20.e5,



Analysis after: 20.e5

Black plays 20...f6!, again undermining the white center, opening the position for the Bishops. For example 21.♘e4 fxe5 22.♗xe5 ♖ae8 23.♙h3 c5! with counterplay.] 20...♖ad8 21.♗f4 ♙h6! pinning the Knight after which it's hard to find an appropriate retort for White.

19...♖fd8? 20.h6 ♙f8



Position after: 20...♙f8

Gupta has boxed me in and thereby obtained a large advantage. He converted his advantage without any difficulties.

21.♗h2! c5 22.♗g4 ♔h8 23.e5 ♙xg2 24.♔xg2 cxd4 25.♖xd4 ♖xd4 26.♗xd4 ♗b7+ 27.♗e4 ♗xe4+ 28.♗xe4

On account of the space advantage, weak back rank and the open c-file, White is close to winning. The tendency of playing obvious or natural moves is partly based on being too attached to old patterns, inapplicable to the present position. The chess player is inclined to mainly look at the first moves that come to mind. Alekhine warned us for this false tendency:

WARNING

“One should never rely on the apparent safety of natural moves.”

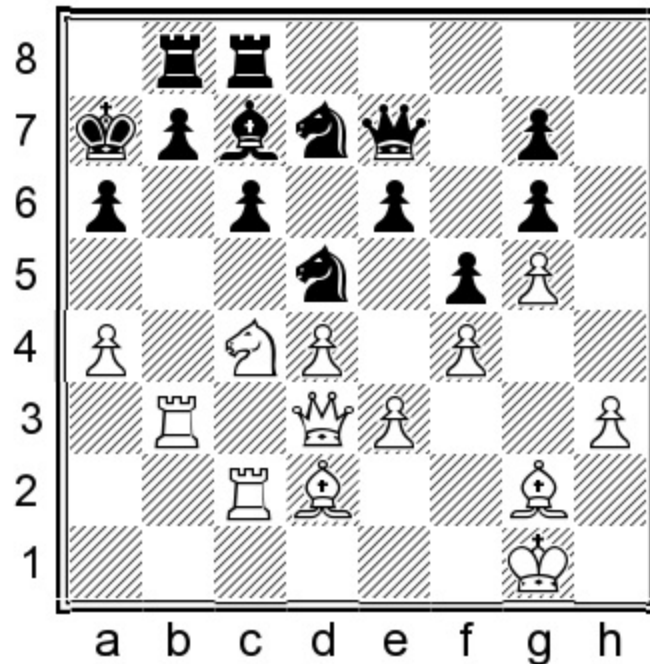
Another cautionary tale was provided fifty years after his remarks. In time-trouble and facing a staggering defensive idea by his opponent, Kasparov was thrown so much off balance that he couldn't come up with a proper reply. Instead, as Kasparov puts it, the general approach of simply building up pressure playing on general grounds hoping that an opportunity for him to play some combination

will present itself, doesn't always prove correct.

Kasparov, Garry (2630)

Petrosian, Tigran (2585)

Tilburg 1981



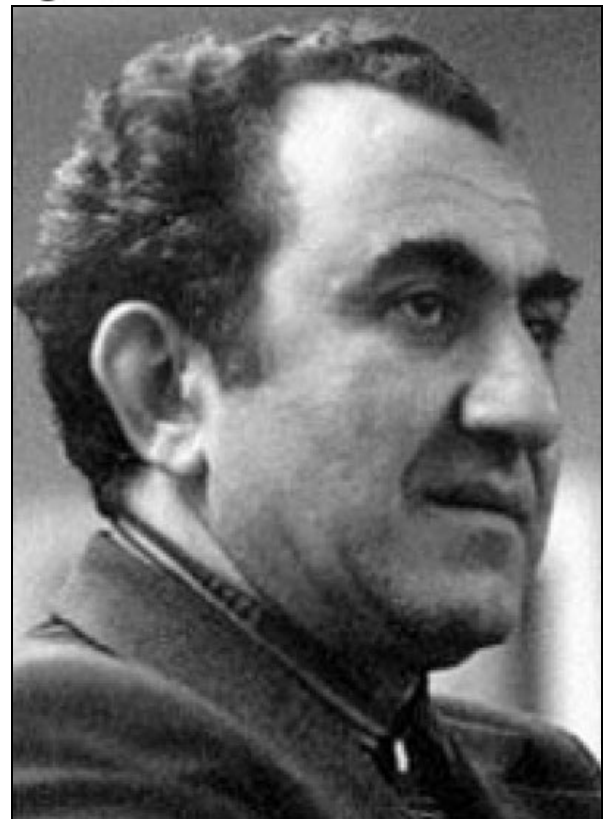
Despite being a pawn up, Petrosian's position is not to be envied. He is under heavy siege on the queenside. Kasparov is ready for the final assault on the enemy King.

30...b5!?

Objectively speaking, this move may not be best, but psychologically it served its purpose as this move by Petrosian left his opponent *nonplussed*. First of all because it looks so strange to move the pawn in front of his King. Second of all, it radically changes the position and White needs to re-assess his approach because of the different pawn structure. Squares like a6, b5 and c6 should be attacked now. Kasparov analysed the game and concluded that he should have played ♖c4-a3-c2-b4 to attack these fortifications.

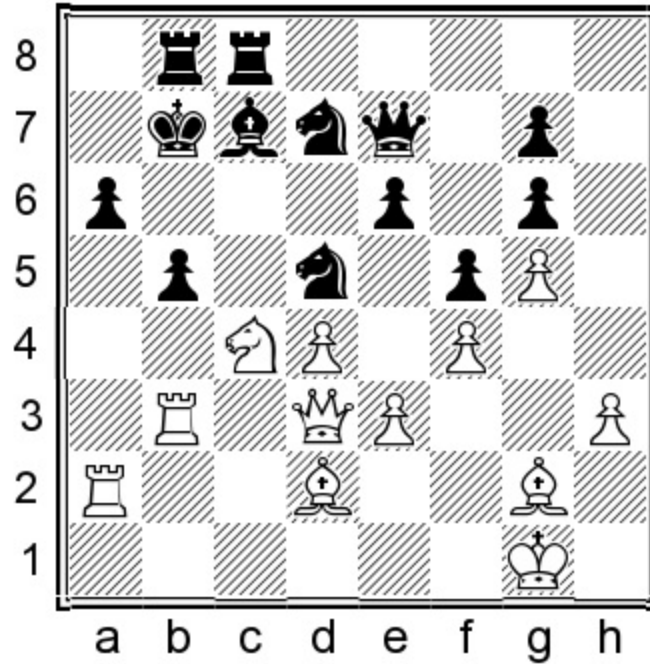
31.axb5 cxb5 32.♖a2

32.♞a3 Regrouping the Knight would maintain all of White's winning chances. 32...♙e8 33.♖a2 ♔b7 34.♞c2→



T. Petrosian

32...♔b7!?



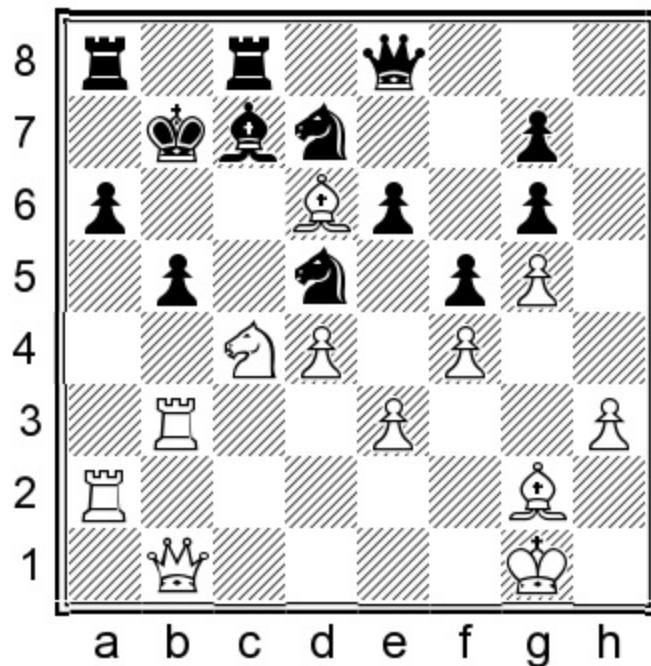
Position after: 32...♔b7!?

This move had its effect once again, as it ‘staggered’ Kasparov even more. He felt that Petrosian should be punished for this move and started looking for immediate wins. As he sensed that a win was not far away, he started growing nervous.

33.♘b4

33.♘a3!? was the right strategy according to Kasparov. In order to attack Black’s stronghold on a6, b5 and d5. 33...♘b6 34.♘c2 ♖a8 35.♘b4 ♚d6 36.♖b1 ♘b8 37.♚b3

33...♚e8! 34.♘d6 ♖a8 35.♚b1



Position after: 35. ♔b1

Kasparov disapproves of this move as he plays on “general grounds, hoping that an opportunity for him to land some combinative blow will present itself.”

35...♕c6!!

Once more with conviction. It is very difficult to play against an opponent who plays shocking moves like this, if they don't lose by force. As Kasparov describes his emotional state: “the psychological effect of the 30...b5!/? thrust and the King march ...♔a7-b7-c6 was so strong, that I was unable to gather my thoughts and I quickly lost.”

36.♖ba3?

And here is the unavoidable mistake of Kasparov, after Petrosian's stern resistance. At most Kasparov could reach an equal position after 36.♕xc7! bxc4 37.♖b7 ♖xc7 38.♖xa6+ ♖xa6 39.♗b5+ ♔d6 40.♗xa6+ ♔e7 41.♕xd5 ♖xb7 42.♕xb7= [42.♗xe6+?? ♔d8 43.♗xe8+ ♔xe8 44.♕xb7 c3 and the c-pawn is unstoppable]

36...bxc4 37.♖xa6+ ♖xa6 38.♖xa6+ ♕b6 39.♕c5 ♖d8 40.♗a1 ♖xc5 41.dxc5 ♔xc5 42.♖a4

0-1

A fresh look at the position gives new insights into its dynamics. Richard Reti (1889-1929) was one of the first to foresee that an overly static approach to chess will cause us to lose the richness and variety of the game. As we saw earlier, he broke with general rules derived from the ‘*Modern School*’, invented by Wilhelm Steinitz. One of Reti's main objections was as follows:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“As (..) no two positions are quite alike, the so called rule, if applied to an apparently similar position, may possibly be wrong, or at least in that particular position there may exist a more suitable or a more effective method of play.”

As each position possesses its own dynamics one should apply a flexible approach, considering your plans with a fresh attitude and, especially, not getting entrenched in one of the ‘shortcut habits’ that follow.

2. The tendency to simplify

The action tendency to simplify positions is aimed at seeking clarity and oversight in positions and is often the result of the emotion of anxiety. It is caused by the thought that we face an uncertain threat which has to be immediately countered. We might be inclined to turn to direct measures in order to solve this real or imagined threat. These measures for the sake of the simplification of the position may comprise the urge to:

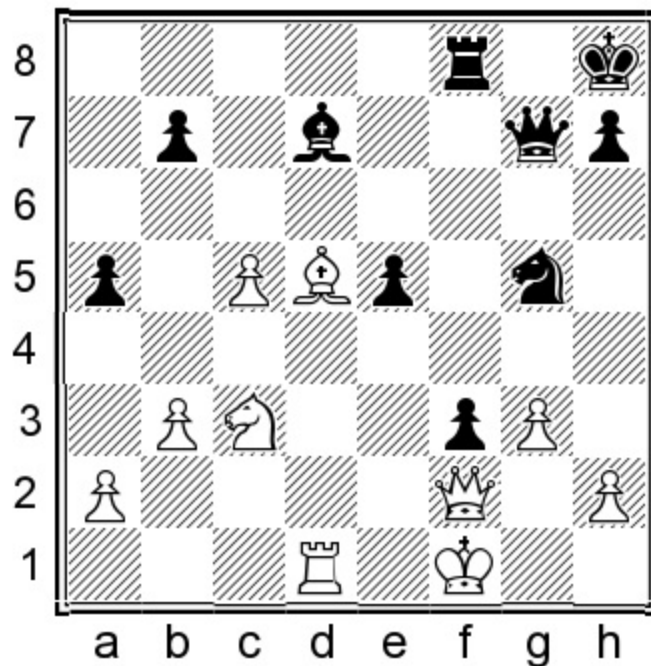
- exchange pieces
- sacrifice or
- play direct moves, i.e. attacking the enemy’s pieces.

In the next example, dark clouds are gathering around White’s King. Being under pressure, the defender wants to clarify the position by a direct approach, but only ends up helping Black in his attack.

Schippers, Maurice (2270)

Kislinsky, Alexey (2425)

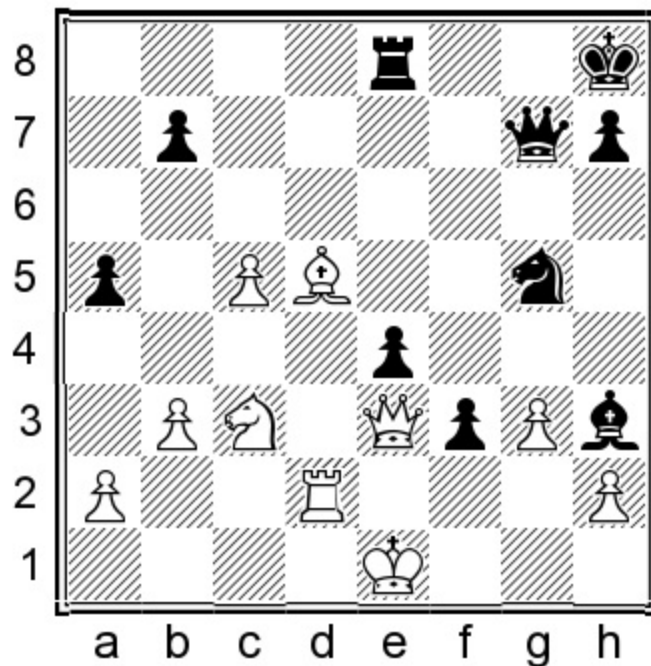
Groningen 2018



35.h4?

The scary pawn on f3, the exposed King and the Knight on g5 were all factors which made White think that he was close to a defeat and that he had to act immediately.

Instead, the calm reply of 35.♞d2!, setting up a blockade defending the squares e3 and f2 was called for. 35...♙h3+ 36.♚e1 e4 37.♞e3 ♜e8



Analysis after: 37...♜e8

38.♚d1! The worst part is over. White has blocked the black pawns and his King eventually escapes

danger on the queenside, or it might be able to stay in the center. E.g. 38...♙g4 39.♔c2 ♖h3 40.♗d1 with an equal position.

35.h4? ♖h3

Black has been gifted a new target to hit: the g3-pawn. The position is untenable for White.

36.♙h2 ♙g4 37.♙d2 ♙h5 38.♙h2

A sad necessity to protect g3.

This poor queen move describes the powerlessness of White's position.

38...♙g4 39.♙e1 f2 40.♙e4 ♙f3 and after a couple of moves White resigned.

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3. The tendency of indecisiveness

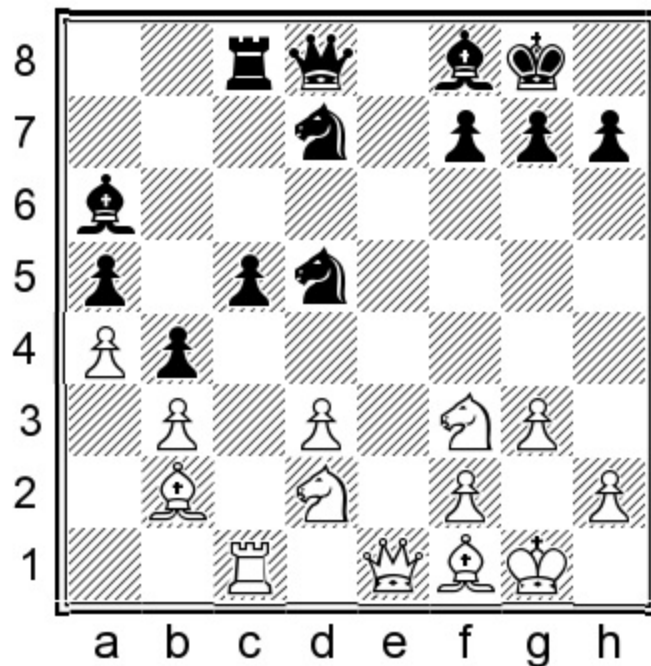
Indecisiveness may be the refuge of the chess player who fears abstract threats. These threats may occur when the anxious defender starts analyzing and visualizing fantasy ideas the opponent may have.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The fact of these ideas being incorrect or non-existent does not help with the anxiety. This reflex also kicks in at some point during the execution of a long-term plan consisting of quite a few moves. In the middle, or just before the final phase of the execution, the player changes his mind and switches to another plan. This switch might be inspired by fear of the coming confrontation and uncertainty over the form it will take, or by the opponent making menacing-looking preparations like in the game we saw between Botvinnik and Keres. My thought wandered from the path in my game against at the Dutch Championship in 2019.

Bok, Benjamin (2645)

Werle, Jan (2555)

Amsterdam 2019

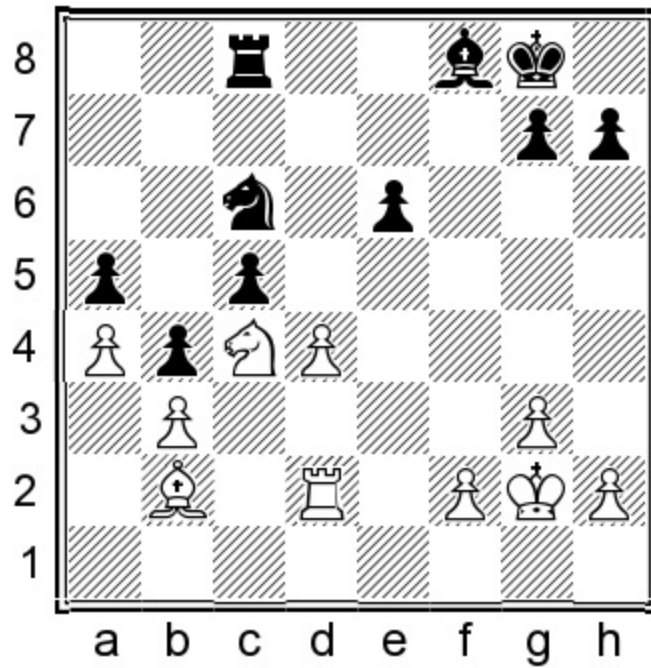


We arrived at the critical moment of the game. The difference in strength in regards to the black squared Bishops is giant. White's b2 Bishop 'shines' over the long diagonal, whereas black's Bishop is doomed to passivity on f8. I spent a lot of time here to look to get rid of my troubles, considering g7-g6 and ♕f8-g7. Nonetheless, g6 looks risky and unnatural as it leaves the long diagonal weakened. Despite this, I should have rejected this undecided, ambiguous attitude, keeping faith in my original idea!

21...♖5b6?

The only move to stay in the game was 21...g6! when after 22.♗e4 ♕g7! I manage to exchange the strong b2-Bishop. 23.♕xg7 ♜xg7 24.♕h3 ♖5b6! Here, the worst part is over for Black.

21...♖5b6? 22.♗c4 ♕b7 23.♕g2 ♕d5 24.♗fd2 ♕xg2 25.♜xg2 ♖b8 26.♞e4 ♗xc4 27.♗xc4 ♗c6 28.♞d1 ♞e8 29.♞d2 ♞e6 30.♞xe6 fxe6 31.d4!



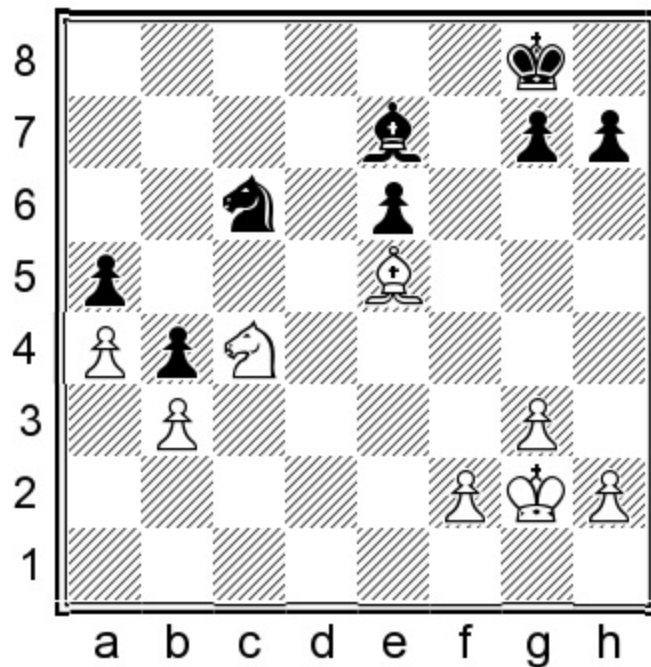
Position after: 31.d4!

My position is hopeless due to the weak pawns and black Bishop on black.

31...♖d8

Black is suffering in this ending, while 31...cxd4 won't help him any further. White is winning after 32.♙xd4 ♖d8 33.♙b6 ♖xd2 34.♘xd2 when the a5 and b4 pawns are lost.

32.dxc5 ♖xd2 33.♘xd2 ♙xc5 34.♘c4 ♙e7 35.♙e5!



Position after: 35. ♖e5!

With the idea of ♖c7 and taking on a5.

35... ♖d8

The exchange of minor pieces by 35... ♖xe5 will not help Black. His weak pawn on a5 is sooner or later lost. For example, 36. ♗xe5 ♖d8 37. ♕f3 ♕f8 38. ♕e4 and like in the game, Black can't hold on to the a5-pawn.

36. ♕f3!

Besides the massive weakness on a5, the King entering the fray is too much to handle for Black.

36... ♗g6 37. ♕e4 ♕f8 38. ♖f4 ♕e8 39. ♗e5 ♗a7 40. ♖e3 ♗c8 41. ♖c5 ♖c7 42. f4 ♕d8 43. ♕d4

1-0

4. The tendency of playing too passively

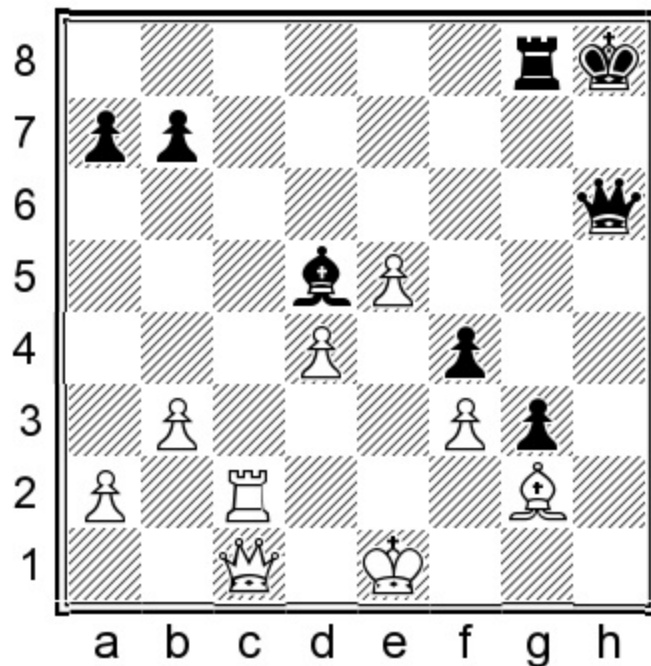
Another tendency of a chess player, is to play in overly passive fashion. The player avoids taking any risks, avoiding any kind of active plans and moves. This impulse possibly unfolds out of urge to stand firm in order not to lose the control of the position. I don't want to proclaim that this approach is always bad, but by playing too passive moves, the opponent is given time to fight his way back in the game. For instance, he can use this time by the activation or regrouping of his bad piece(s).

This tendency is closely related to the tendency of choosing for safety, as above described. Botvinnik and his followers from the Botvinnik school, postponed making any 'life-changing decisions' when they were short on time and just before the time control. By this passive approach, Botvinnik's opponent gets the time to restore the balance.

Yudovich, Mikhail

Botvinnik, Mikhail

Leningrad 1934



37...♗c6?!

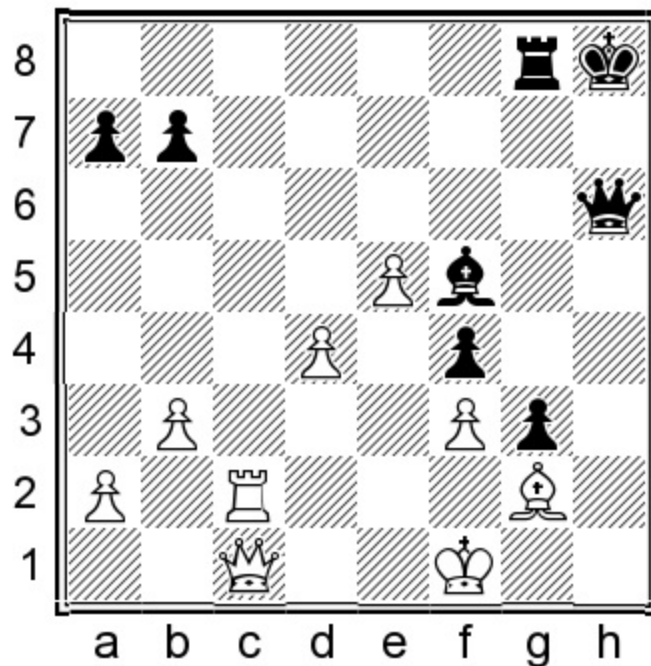
Mikhail Botvinnik

As happened regularly in the games of Botvinnik, in time trouble he opted for the most secure alternative. On c6 the Bishop blocks the white Rook on c2.

However, this secure move could throw away the win. Botvinnik: *“The last move before the time control, and, as often happens, an inaccurate one.”* Botvinnik correctly notes that the Bishop would have been stronger placed on e6, from where it can go to f5 and disrupt White’s coordination.

The Rook on c2 can’t both defend g2 and create counterplay along the c-file, e.g.: 37...♗e6 38.♖f1?! [38.♖c7!? ♗f5!] 38...♗f5





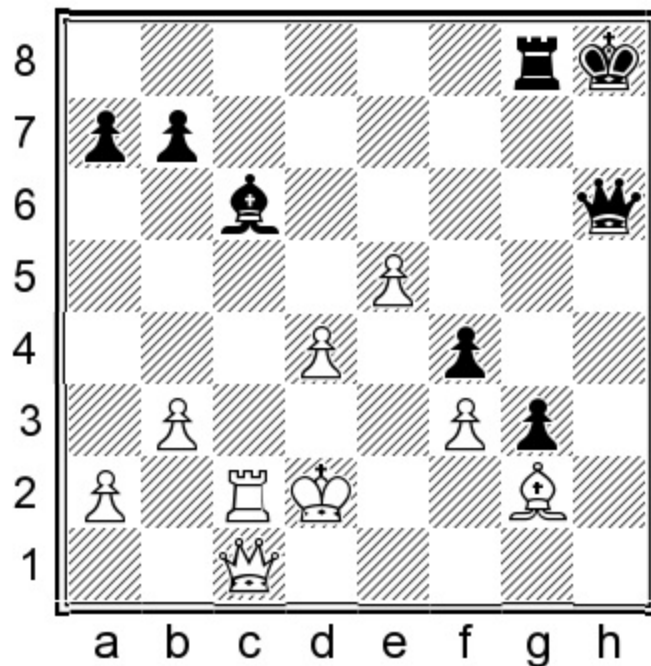
Analysis after: 38...♙f5

The difference in strength of the Bishop's position on f5 (compared to c6) becomes clear. The white Rook on c2 has no appropriate squares to go to. 39.♖d2 [39.♖c7, 39...♚a6+ 40.♔g1 ♚xa2 with ♚f2+, when White is overrun.] 39...♚h2 with ♖g8-c8 and ♙f5-h3 about to follow, is winning for Black as well.

37...♙c6?! 38.a4

Botvinnik: "the danger of 38...♚h2 39.♔f1 ♙b5+ forces White to take control of b5."

However, White could have used the time unwittingly being offered him by Botvinnik after the slow 37...♙c6, to obtain counterplay by means of 38.♔d2!



Analysis after: 38. ♔d2!

In case Black went 38... ♖h2, White could bring his King in safety with 39. ♔c3! and 40. ♔b2, when he is better.

38... ♙d7 39. d5 ♘f5 40. ♖c7 ♗h2 41. ♗b2 ♗g1+

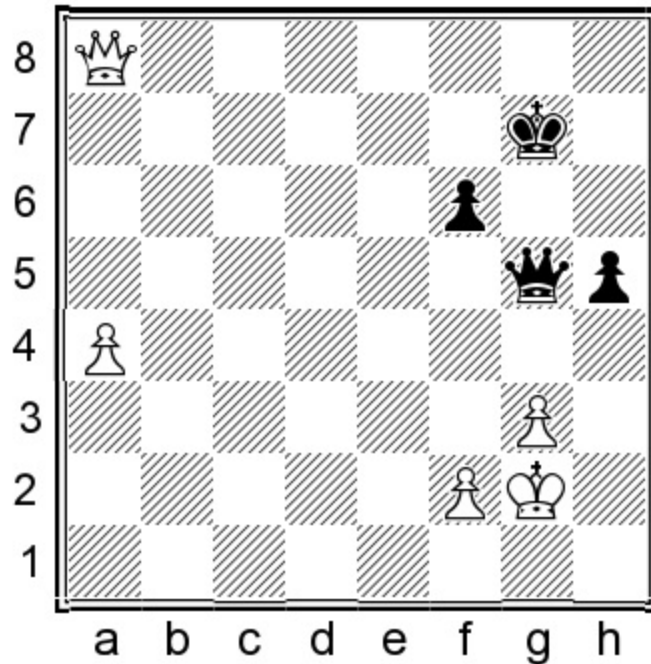
After a couple of moves, Botvinnik won the game.

42. ♙f1 ♗e3+ 43. ♙e2 ♙e6 44. ♗c2 ♖g7 45. dxe6 ♗f2+ 46. ♔d2 ♗d4+ 47. ♔e1 ♖xc7

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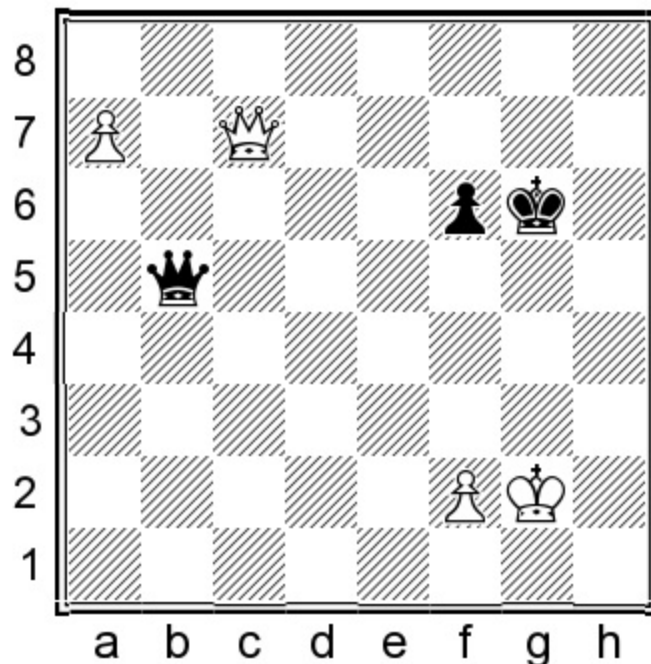
The player who is on top is often inclined to seek total dominance. He thus plays so to allow his opponent the minimum possible number of options. He feels happy as he is calling the shots and steering the game towards his desired outcome. However, this emotion of happiness can quickly evolve into apprehension of losing the control of the game. He may grow increasingly cautious to prevent any kind of counterplay, playing ever more securely resulting in an impulse of over-insurance.

I don't want to proclaim that a cautious and prophylactic approach should be avoided by the player on top. Slowly building up an initiative or leaving the defender without any activity are in themselves good things to aim for, but there is a hidden danger. As a chessboard has 64 squares (yes, indeed!) and the enemy can have up to 16 pieces, it is often practically impossible to stop all the hypothetically possible forms of counterplay. In doing so and of necessity reacting to several phantom threats along the way, you may actually end up limiting the resources left available to you for actually winning the game. This was the story in the next game between Anish Giri and Wesley So.



45. ♔a7+

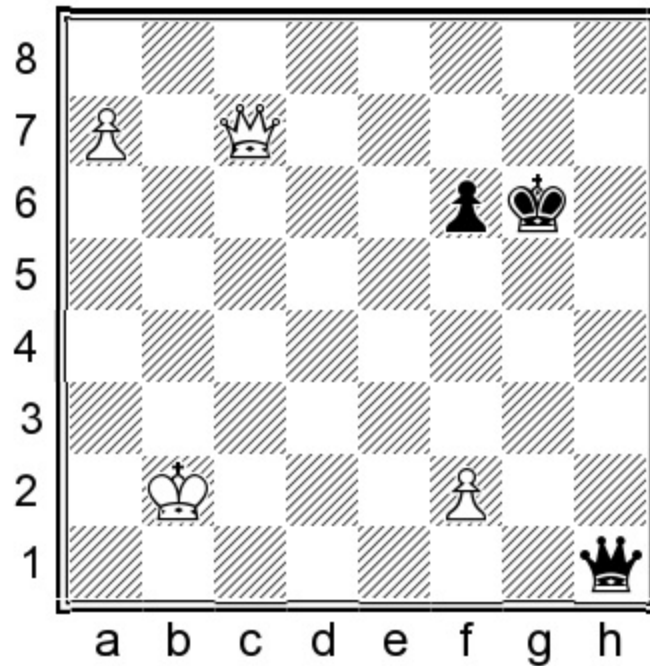
45.a5! White needs a multi-phase plan to win this ending, of which the first stage involves pushing his a-pawn while allowing Black to trade his h-pawn for White's g-pawn. 45...h4 46.a6 hxg3 47. ♔a7+ ♔g6 48. ♔e3! Offers to trade Queens are a recurring feature which White can use to his benefit in this kind of ending. 48... ♔b5 49. ♔xg3+ ♔f7 50. ♔c7+ ♔g6 51.a7



Analysis after: 51.a7

Phase 1 is complete! Now Black must start checking in earnest and see whether White has a haven in mind for his king... 51...♚d5+ 52.♔h2 ♚h5+ 53.♔g3 ♚g5+ 54.♔f3 ♚d5+ 55.♔e3 ♚e6+ 56.♔d2 ♚d5+.

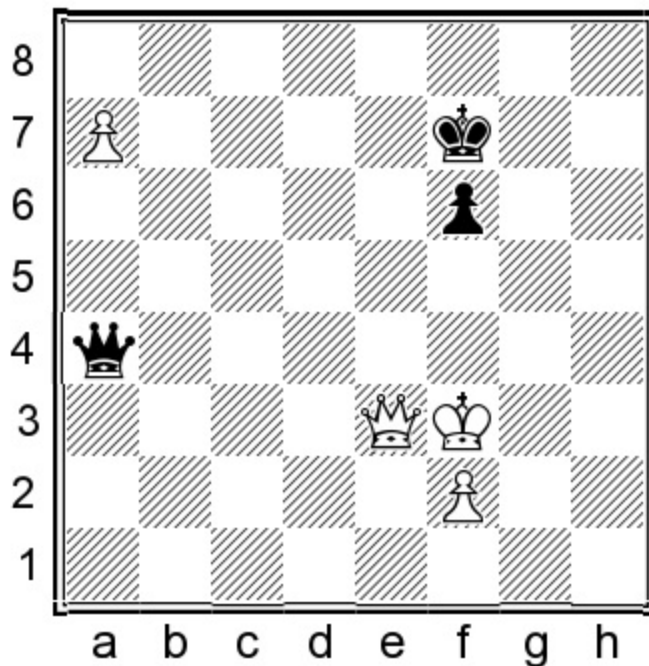
Phase 2 is complete: White's King is almost out of reach of the checks. 57.♔c1! ♚h1+ 58.♔b2



Analysis after: 58.♔b2

Phase 3 will involve repositioning the Queen from c7 while preventing perpetual checks and making Black defend passively against the a-pawn. 58...♚d5 59.♚g3+ ♔f5 60.♚h3+ ♔g6 61.♚e3 Phase 3 of the plan is finished. The white Queen has assumed the perfect post on e3, where she combines the defence of the pawn on a7 with some threats of promotion combinations (for instance starting with ♚e4+.)

In Phase 4, White will return his King to the kingside, where there is some pawn cover from the checks and it helps support ideas like ♚e4+. 61...♚b7+ 62.♔c1 ♚c7+ 63.♔d2 ♚a5+ 64.♔e2 ♚a4 65.♔f3 Done and done! 65...♔f7



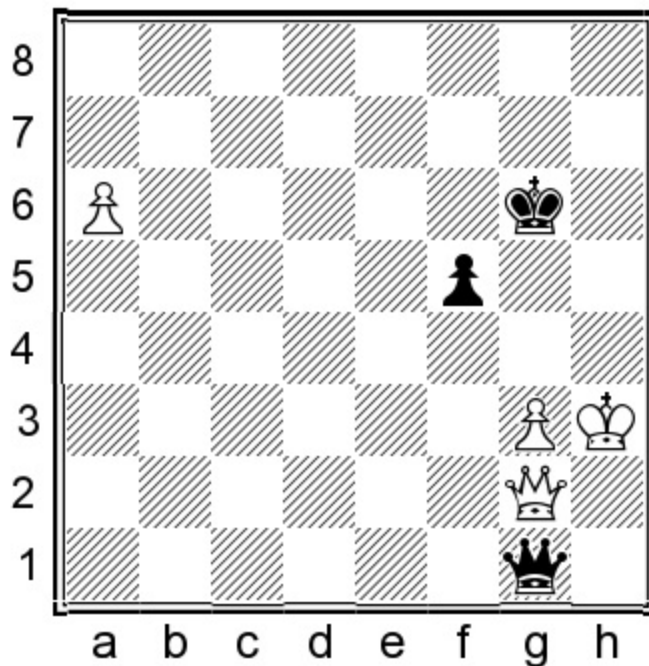
Analysis after: 65...♔f7

66.♞e4! Now for the icing on the cake. The promotion can't be stopped, since White's Queen has full control over the a8-square, and 66...♞xa7 runs into 67.♞h7+ picking up the Queen.

45.♞a7+ ♔g6 46.♞a8 ♞f5 47.♞f3 ♞e5 48.♔h2 ♔f7 49.♞b3+ ♔g7 50.♞b4 ♞c7 51.♞e4 ♞c5 52.♔g2 ♞g5 53.♞e7+ ♔g6 54.♞e8+ ♔g7 55.♞d7+ ♔h6 56.♞d6

56.♞b5! It is by no means too late to initiate the winning plan described in the note to move 45: 56...♞g4 57.a5 h4 58.♞d3 ♞a4 59.a6 hxg3 60.♔xg3 followed by pushing the pawn to a7 and merging with the plan given before.

56...♔g6 57.♞d3+ ♔g7 58.♞e4 ♞c5 59.♞b7+ ♔g6 60.♞b1+ ♔g7 61.♞e4 ♞g5 62.♞e7+ ♔g6 63.♞e8+ ♔g7 64.♞b5 ♞g4 65.♞b7+ ♔g6 66.♞b1+ ♔g7 67.a5 h4 68.♞d3 ♞c8 69.a6 ♞c6+ 70.♔h2 ♞b6 71.♔g2 h3+ 72.♔xh3 ♞xf2 73.♞c4 ♔g6 74.♞f4 ♞g1 75.♞e4+ f5 76.♞g2



Position after: 76. ♖g2

A seemingly impossible turn of events is now on the cards: Wesley So, with his hitherto mathematically lost position, could now have forced a draw.

76... ♖a1

76... ♖b6! 77. ♖a2 ♖g1 78. a7 ♖h1+ 79. ♖h2 ♖a1!= White's King is simply too exposed.

77. ♖c6+ ♔g5 78. ♔g2 ♖a2+ 79. ♔f3 ♖a3+ 80. ♔e2 ♖a2+ 81. ♔d3 ♖b3+?

81... ♖b1+! would have been sufficient for the draw, for instance 82. ♔c4 ♖c2+ 83. ♔b5 ♖b2+ 84. ♔c5 ♖f2+ 85. ♔d6 ♖xg3+ is a draw.

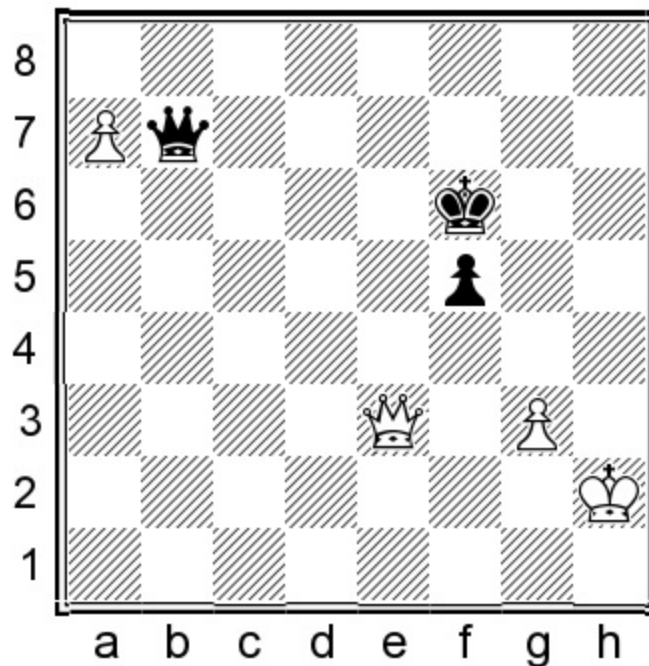
82. ♖c3 ♖d5+ 83. ♖d4 ♖b5+ 84. ♖c4 ♖b1+ 85. ♔d2 ♖b2+ 86. ♔e3 ♖a3+ 87. ♔f2! (White is winning again.) **87... ♖a5**

87... ♖b2+ 88. ♖e2! with the idea of 88... ♖b6+? 89. ♖e3+.

88. ♖f4+ ♔g6 89. ♖d6+ ♔h5 90. ♔e3?

90. ♖d1+! should be winning, for example 90... ♔g5 91. ♖d3 planning ♖e3+ and a7.

90... ♖a4 91. ♔d2 ♖b3? 92. ♖d3 ♖a2+ 93. ♔e3 ♔g5 94. ♔f3 ♖a1 95. ♖d8+ ♔h5 96. ♖e8+ ♔g5 97. ♖e7+ ♔g6 98. ♖e6+ ♔g5 99. ♖e3+ ♔f6 100. a7 ♖f1+ 101. ♖f2 ♖h1+ 102. ♔e2 ♖e4+ 103. ♖e3 ♖c4+ 104. ♔e1 ♖b4+ 105. ♔f1 ♖b1+ 106. ♔g2 ♖b7+ 107. ♔h2!



Position after: 107. ♔h2!

Finally, White has reached the end of Phase 4 as outlined above: his King has returned to the kingside (ending the checks), his pawn is on a7, and he's ready to find a tactical way to force promotion.

107... ♔f7 108. ♕a3 ♖a8 109. ♗b3+ ♔g7 110. ♗b8 ♖f3 111. a8=♕

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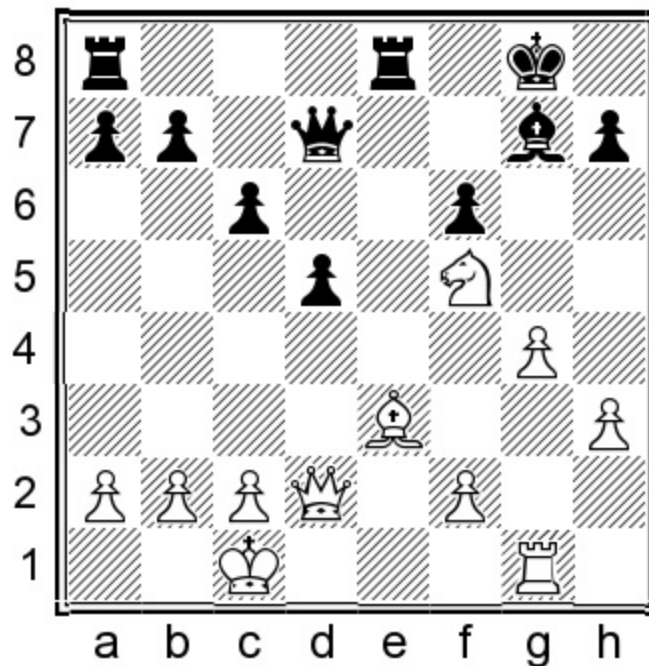
5. The tendency of opting for safety of the King

Like many chess tendencies invoked by emotions, the exaggerated desire to strive for safety of His Majesty arises out of anxiety of the defender. He carries the burden of identifying threats against his King and employing effective strategies to combat the danger. Very often, the threats assume greater proportions in his mind than in reality, leading to excessive defensive measures and the initiative passing to the opponent. As an example we will use my game against Czech GM Hracek.

Hracek, Zbynek (2598)

Werle, Jan (2568)

Bremen 2008

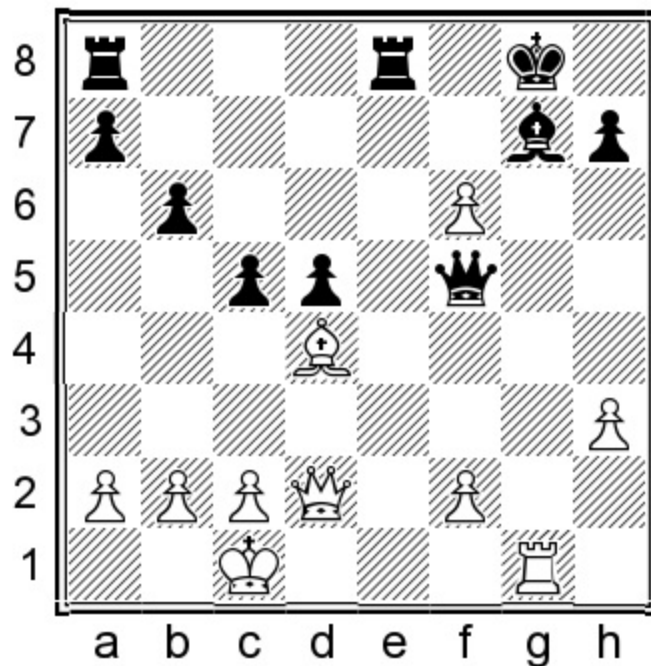


We can see that the white Knight is excellently placed on f5. Add to that the Rook on g1 and my weakened kingside, and you can understand why I was in a state of despair and ended up pressing the button marked **‘EXCHANGE SACRIFICE: EMERGENCY USE ONLY.’** Had I calculated concretely amidst the tension and pressure, I would’ve perceived that there was no need to return the material!

21...♖e5?

21...b6! Cool as a cucumber. Black is going to take control over the important central square d4 after he plays ...c6-c5 next. As a result, White can’t use the long diagonal a1-g8 for the attack on Black’s King and the weak pawn on f6.

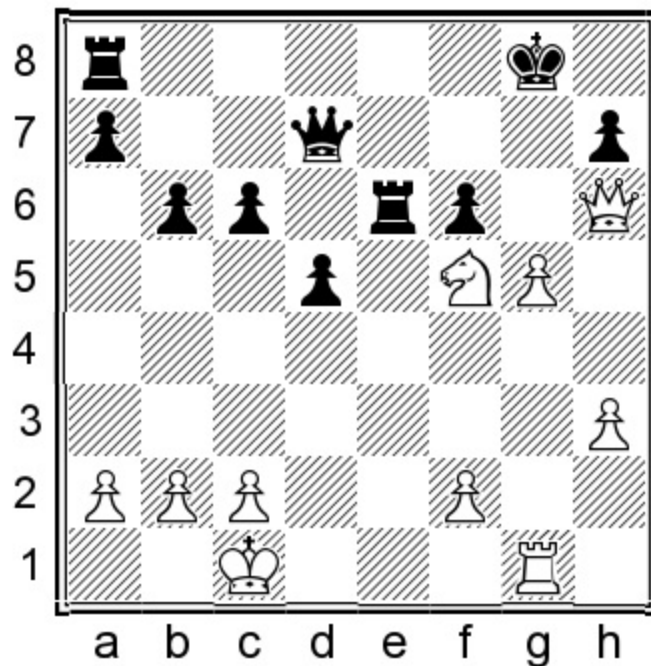
A) After 22.♗d4 Black can accomplish what he has set out to do. 22...c5! Taking control over the crucial d4-square while moving the Bishop from the long diagonal. 23.g5 ♕xf5 24.gxf6



Analysis after: 24.gxf6

24...cxd4! The following move seems dangerous, but, in fact, doesn't have a follow up. 25.♞xg7+ ♔h8 26.♞h6 ♞e1+ when Black comes first.

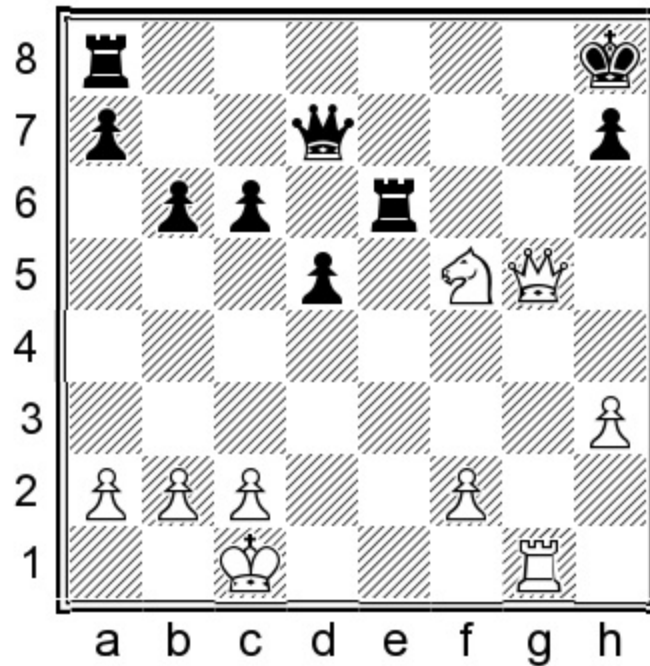
B) 22.♞h6 ♞xh6 23.♞xh6 ♞e6! I stopped my calculations after seeing White's next threatening move. In fact, we need to strike on this moment of truth. 24.g5



Analysis after: 24.g5

24...fxg5! Here Black, however dangerous his position might look, defends all the needed squares

with his Rooks and Queen and wins, e.g. 25. ♖xg5+ ♔h8 Black controls all the important squares of g7, f6 and e5 around the King.



Analysis after: 25... ♔h8

E.g. 26. ♘h6 [Instead, 26. ♘d4 ♖g6!, blocking the g-file and repelling White's attack after 27. ♖e5+ ♖g7!.; Trying to bring the Queen to d4, fails due to 26. ♖h4 c5!.] 26... ♖g6 Here again, White's attack comes to a standstill. 27. ♖e5+ ♖g7 28. ♘f7+ ♔g8 and Black's defensive strategy secures a full point.

21... ♖e5? After 22. ♕d4 ♖xf5 23. gxf5 the game ended in a draw on the 41st move.

½-½

Section 4.5 – Strategies to enhance emotional control

General considerations

From the previous chapters we have learned that a sportsman's emotional state can be counterproductive. Unfortunately though, high tension is part and parcel of high-level sport. For Federer, Ronaldinho or a chess grandmaster, the ability to perform at their best implies ability to cope with emotions as a prerequisite. In chess, this implication is indirect and the intermediate stage is concentration. According to **Vladimir Kramnik**, concentration is paramount:

“It's not even about being nervous or not, it's about ability to concentrate on the game and nothing else, to forget what everyone else is saying or what the tournament situation is.” (47)

Kramnik knew that coping with difficult psychological factors is a key part of the game in modern chess. Therefore, a successful attack should include psychological pressure as well.

“A win comes through taking correct psychological decisions, for example drastic change of the game direction, or going in for unexpected positional complications approaching time trouble.”
(48)

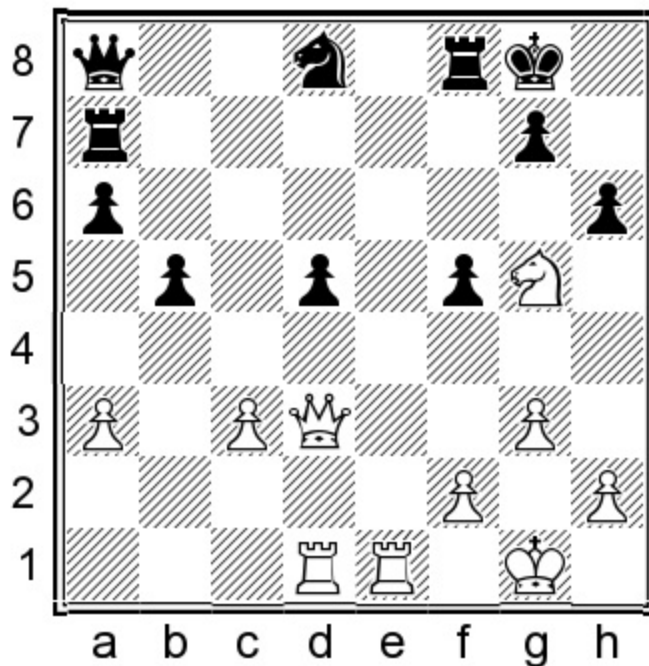
As a result of the huge influence of computers in chess (both preparation and playing styles) it is now necessary to create sharp non-standard positions in order to supply your opponents with the opportunities to make mistakes. (See also **Subchapter 3.8 – The millenniums: era of modern defence**).



Boxing with World Champion Vladimir Kramnik. (photo: Bart Beijer)

In 2008 in Enschede (together with WGM Marie Sebag) I took part in a mini-simul against my idol. As we played in a boxing ring (*see picture*), Kramnik spent a long time searching – in the diagram position – for the best practical and psychological way to knock me out.

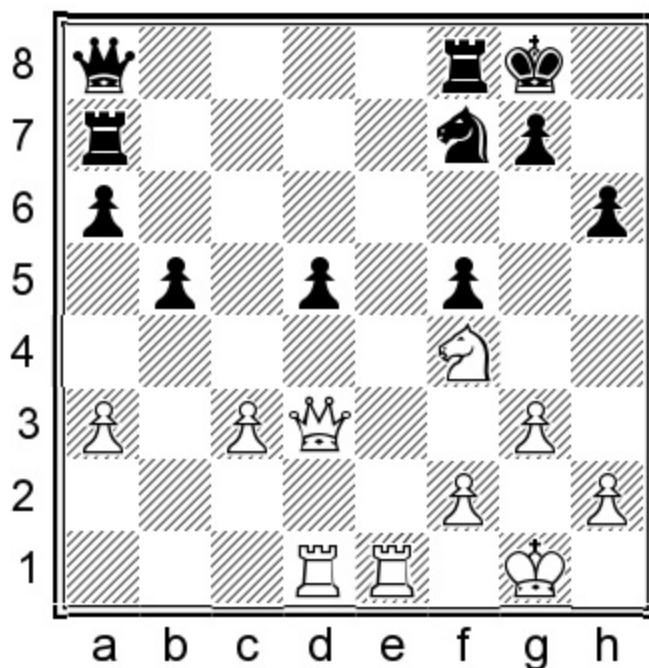
Kramnik, Vladimir (2799)
Werle, Jan (2570)
Enschede 2008



During the post mortem, Kramnik shared some thoughts about how he wanted to increase the initiative in this position. He revealed that he considered both Bf3 and Bh3 . After $26.\text{Bf3}$, and $27.\text{Bd4}$ or even $27.\text{Wxd5}$, the position was – objectively speaking – slightly better for White, but I could have probably held. However, from a practical point of view he had his doubts whether the text move was best, as after $26.\text{Bh3}$ the position would have been complex and I would have had to react with the utmost precision – leading to a higher chance of making a mistake.

26. Bf3

For example, the position arising after $26.\text{Bh3}!?$ Bf7 $27.\text{Bf4}$ looks highly inconvenient for Black.



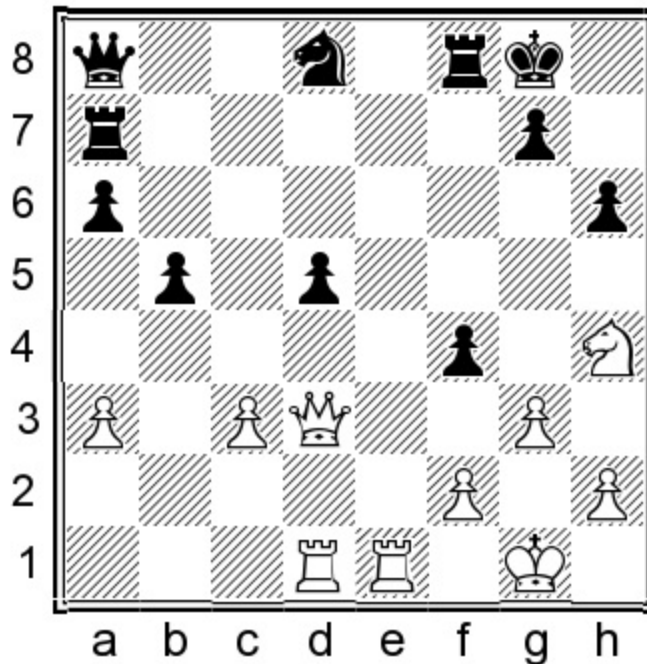
Analysis after: 27. ♖f4

The mobile knight on f4 (reaching h5, g6, e6 and d5) would make that Black is at his wit's end. 27... ♖g5 28.h4 The Knight is wandering around the board. 28... ♖e4 29.f3 ♖f6 [29... ♖xg3? 30.♔g2! when the Knight is trapped.] 30. ♖g6!± followed by 31. ♖xf5, when White maintains pressure on Black's position.

26. ♖f3 f4?!

Giving up the pawn would have kept me in the game. By 26... ♖f7!? I would have resolved my knight's dilemma by neutralizing the opponent's one. 27. ♖xd5 ♖c7 with equality.

27. ♖h4!



Position after: 27. ♖h4!

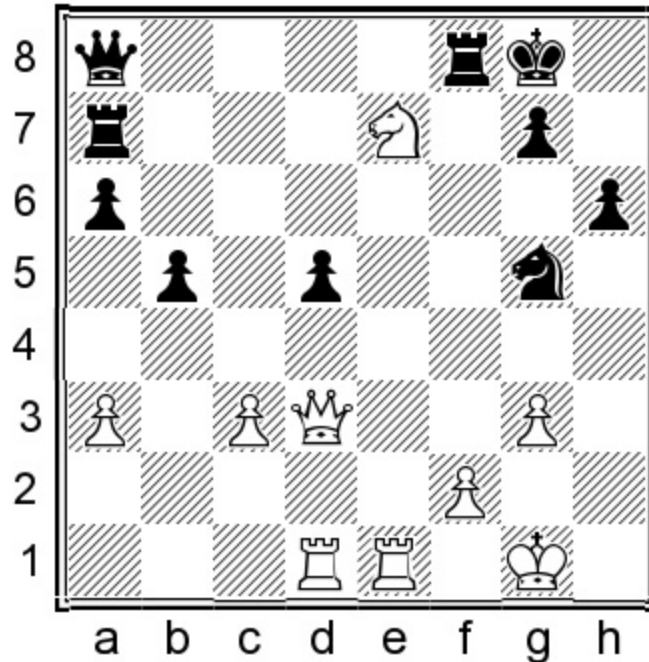
The position Kramnik was aiming for: his Knight invades in Black's position while I am still uncoordinated.

27...fxg3 28.hxg3 ♖f7 29. ♖f5! ♖g5

The Knight is a major threat and the position is hard to defend. However, I could stay in the game by 29... ♔h8! This move is a useful prophylaxis against ♖f5-e7-g6. 30. ♖e7 [30. ♖d4 ♖g5! with counterchances.] 30... ♖e8 31. ♖g6+ ♔g8 32. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 33. ♖xd5 ♖c7 would have cleared the air. Presumably, Kramnik would proceed with the cat-and-mouse game not releasing the tension by means of 30.f4, preventing 30... ♖g5 while having several irons in the fire.

30. ♖e7+!

As it appears, the white Knight is deciding the game.



Position after: 30. ♖e7+!

30... ♜xe7

Material losses can no longer be avoided, e.g. 30... ♔h8 31. ♖g6+! winning the exchange.

31. ♜xe7 ♖f3+ 32. ♔f1 d4 33. ♗g6 ♖h2+ 34. ♔e1!

Running away from the danger zone. Naturally, 34. ♔e2, ♗f3+ (34... ♗f3+) should be avoided.

34... ♖f3+ 35. ♔e2 ♖g1+ 36. ♔f1 ♜xf2+

A desperate attempt as I was already lost here. The King walks in a zigzag pattern out of the checks.

37. ♔xf2 ♖h3+ 38. ♔e1

1-0

From this I learned that the move engines give as best, may not always lead to the best chance of success. Dreev, similarly, asserts in his book that the way to put the defender under maximum pressure is to give him ‘the problem of choice’:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“(..) even if he doesn’t make a mistake, he will probably invest a lot of time, strength and

energy in choosing, which may affect the later course of the game.”⁽⁴⁹⁾

It's during such moments that the defender is really tested and he has to keep his composure. In order to be able to cope with the problems set by an attacker, the defender should be familiar with several cognitive and physical controlling techniques (see **Chapter: 4.2.3 – Physical controlling techniques and Chapter 4.2.3 – Cognitive techniques**).⁽⁵⁰⁾

Physical relaxation techniques

Of course, many physical methods to fight stress and distraction are known. The sport psychologist I visited suggested a well-known technique (which can prove effective to us chess players) in the form of breathing control. Breathing is the most effective technique for reducing over-intensity. Athletes under pressure experience a contraction in their respiratory system, making their oxygen intake insufficient for optimal performance. Breathing is the most appropriate technique for recovery. Through the use of controlled breathing exercises, the blood is enriched and the body's ability to reload energy is repaired. The body's oxygen supply is replenished and the symptoms of over-intensity are reduced. By taking slow, deep breaths, the symptoms of muscle tension, high heart rate and stomach butterflies can be reduced, resulting in a higher confidence and sense of well-being.⁽⁵¹⁾

Cognitive techniques

For a better sport performance, sport psychologists have developed various cognitive strategies to control emotions. Some of them reflect an emotion-focused coping involving the removal of an inappropriate emotion, the generation of an emotion that influences the performance positively.⁽⁵²⁾

The other strategies are based on a problem focused coping, which is aimed at managing the emotions associated with the situation, thereby reducing the stress.⁽⁵³⁾

We will have a close look at the most useful cognitive techniques for us, defenders, comprising of:

- *Imagery;*
- *self-statement modification;*
- *reframing;*
- *storytelling & metaphors, and;*
- *the cognitive paradox.*

▫ Imagery

Imagery can be defined as ‘an experience that mimics real experience, and involves using a combination of different sensory modalities in the absence of actual perception.’ (Cumming & Ramsey 2009) For players and their trainers, this psychological technique has demonstrated its value as it is enhancing the sport performance.

The Brazilian football genius Ronaldhino contriving a trick.

Ronaldinho, the star of FC Barcelona, AC Milan & the national team of Brazil, was one of the most

talented strikers in football and once described how he made use of imagery before the World Cup in 2006:

“When I train, one of the things I concentrate on is creating a mental picture of how to deliver that ball to a team-mate, preferably leaving him alone in front of the rival goalkeeper. So what I do, always before a game, always, every night and every day, is try and think up things, imagine plays, which no one else will have thought of, and to do so always bearing in mind the particular strengths of each team-mate to whom I am passing the ball. When I construct those plays in my mind I take into account whether one team-mate likes to receive the ball at his feet, or ahead of him; if he is good with his head, and how he prefers to head the ball; if he is stronger on his right or his left foot. That is my job; that is what I do. I imagine the game.”⁽⁵⁴⁾



Imagery is not merely about visualization, but it includes in scope other ‘quasi-sensory’ and or ‘quasi-perceptory’ ideas.⁽⁵⁵⁾

There are several types of imagery which have been the focus of many investigations.

At least two of them are directed at normalizing a maladaptive emotional state and are of the most value for us chess players. These are:

- Motivational general-mastery (MG-M);
- Motivational general arousal (MG-A).⁽⁵⁶⁾

Motivation general-mastery imagery means imagery that represents effective coping and mastering challenging situations in sport, such as being mentally tough, confident, and focused during sport competition. It is effective when facing high arousal levels and helps prepare “for the real thing.” By using MG-M imagery, you give yourself a positive interpretation of an upcoming situation. For instance, a golfer who is worried about his performance on an important tournament, can evoke the mental image of scoring a hole-in-one and the crowd going wild.



Motivational general-arousal imagery means focusing on managing feelings, such as anxiety, arousal, relaxation, and stress in sport competition. By MG-A imagery athletes are able to change their response to a particular stimulus and modify undesirable arousal levels. For instance imagine a soccer player having to play ‘into’ a hostile audience and therefore suffering from a destabilizing degree of arousal. He could use the mental imagery of walking out to play, seeing and hearing the crowd, and experiencing an increase in arousal, but then mastering the situation before he faces it by using breathing exercises to bring his heartbeat to a regular level.⁽⁵⁷⁾

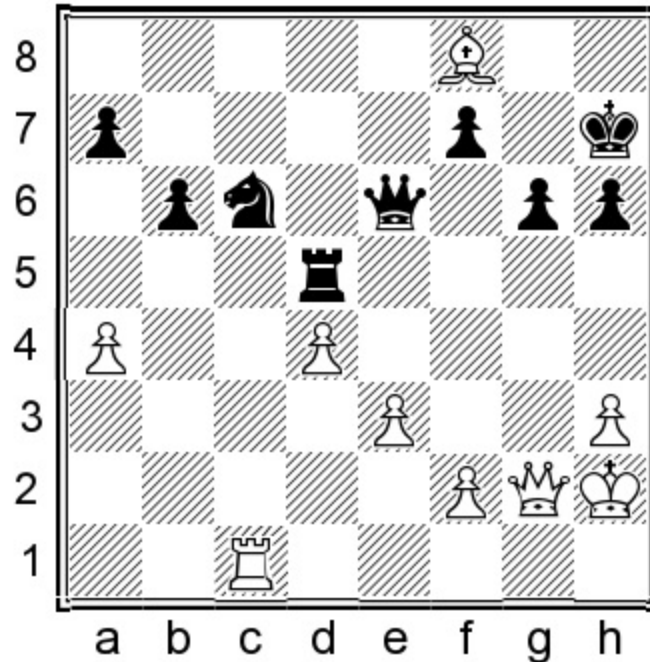
Back to chess. A number of times, round-robin tournaments have a ‘victim’ who just keeps losing and can’t break the streak. A striking example to me was my fellow contestant Indian grandmaster

Sasikiran at the Wijk aan Zee tournament in 2009. He was the top seed (ELO-rating: 2711) but ended up finishing last; by the end of the 3 weeks (!) he surely just wanted it to be over. The tournament had started badly and under those circumstances the setting in a rainy and windy small village in January may also have taken their toll. In general, negative thoughts cause an undesirable spiral and the mental image of another defeat may be self-fulfilling.

Sasikiran, Krishnan (2711)

Efimenko, Zahar (2688)

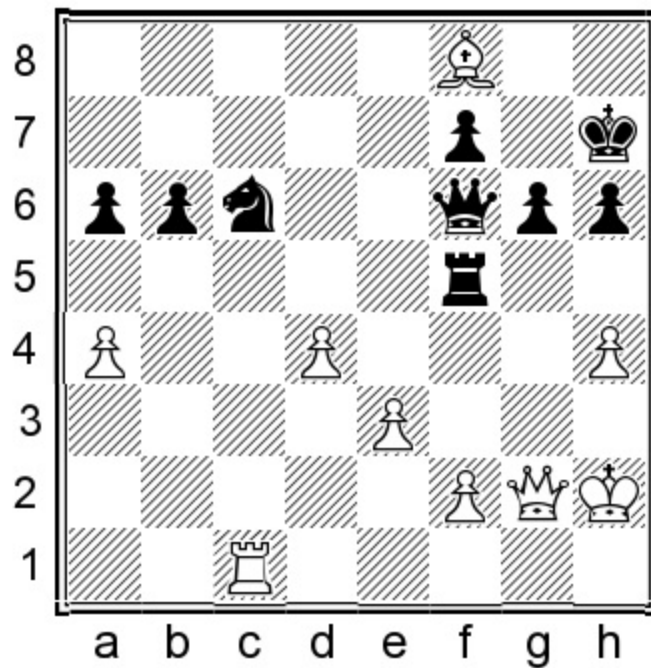
Wijk aan Zee 2009



Sasikiran played **34.h4?**, overreacting to Black's fictional threat of $34... \text{♖g5}$, by taking extreme precautionary measures. As a consequence, the h4 pawn became very weak and the white King was even more exposed. Sasikiran lost soon.

Black wouldn't have been able to cause any harm after a quiet move like $34. \text{♕a3}$. Instead, in order to maintain his composure during this alarming situation, Sasikiran could have visualized a positive image that represented mastering this difficult situation. Of course, the image should be realistic. For the dire straits in which Sasikiran found himself in during the Wijk aan Zee B-group, an encouraging image would have been an invincible sportsman who stands firm during the last rounds. Drawing his way to the end by solid play - imagining yourself being replaced by the supersolid Karpov, who for ages didn't lose a single game. This evoked image worked for me personally, facing similar severe circumstances and wanting to draw my way to the finish line.

34.h4? a6 35. ♖f3 ♜f5 36. ♖g2 ♖f6



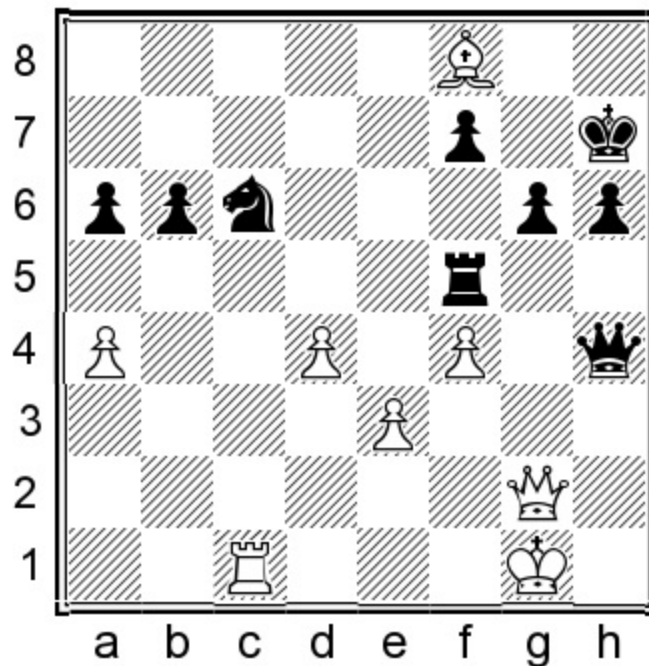
Position after: 36... ♖f6

37. ♔g1?

Once again White is panicking, giving up the h-pawn. With a calm state of mind, Sasikiran would have defended successfully with 37. ♖e4.

37. ♖e4! ♜xf2+ 38. ♔g3 ♜d2 39. ♖f3= when Black is forced to exchange the Queens, now that the Knight is hanging.

37... ♖xh4 38. f4?



Position after: 38.f4?

This is opening all the gates towards the King.

38...♘d8

Or 38...♘xd4! 39.exd4 ♖xf4 with the lethal threat of 40...♖g5.

39.♖c7 ♘e6 40.♖c8 ♘xf8 41.♖xf8 ♖e1+ On the next move is 42...♖h5 decisive. **0-1**

□ Self-statement modification

A concentrated McEnroe 'serve-tossing' the ball with the utmost precision for the perfect placement.

The motivational tool of self-talk is commonly used by a lot of sportsmen and is widely acknowledged in sports psychology.⁽⁵⁸⁾

The use of self-statements, inducing positive emotions such as happiness, can have a positive influence on the sportsman's performance.⁽⁵⁹⁾

In the application of self-statement modification, athletes are using key words. For instance, tennis legend John McEnroe was well-known for his outbursts of anger. In order to maintain the right level of attention during the match, he was writing down tips to himself on cards, taking them with him to the court in his tennis bag.

During the changeover he is looking at these cards. Some of these tips are:

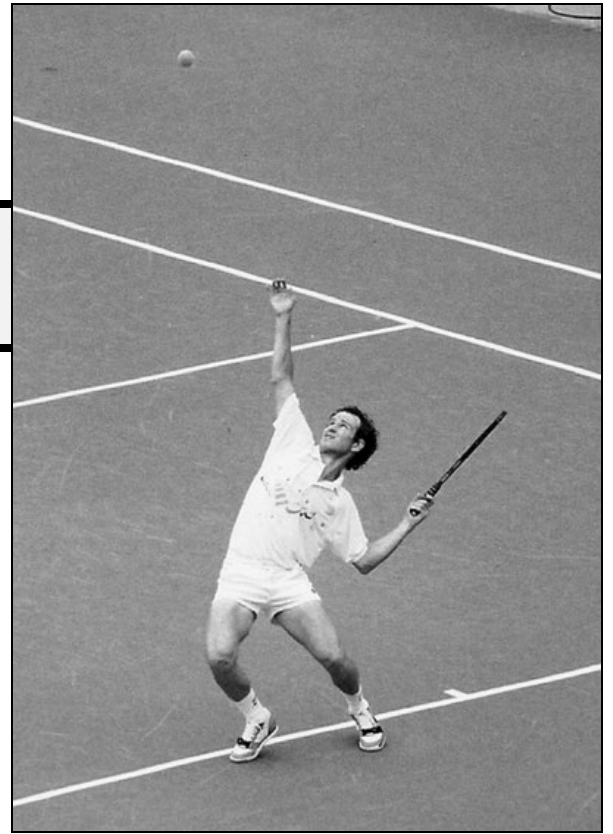
“Keep your head up all through the serve”, and “Don't open up your body too soon on the backhand.”

The key words chosen can involve technical aspects, such as with McEnroe, but also emotions or images. For example, the defender coping with a worse position can say to himself:

“Yes, I admit I have the worse position. But it will be a hard task to get the full point as I am known for my ability to fight back like a cornered animal.”

It is recommended that these phrases are short, vivid and positively phrased with a focus on what to aim for rather than what to avoid.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Helpful to grandmaster Boris Gelfand in his youth, were mentally encouraging orders such as, ‘*come on*’ and ‘*you’ll be fine*’.⁽⁶¹⁾

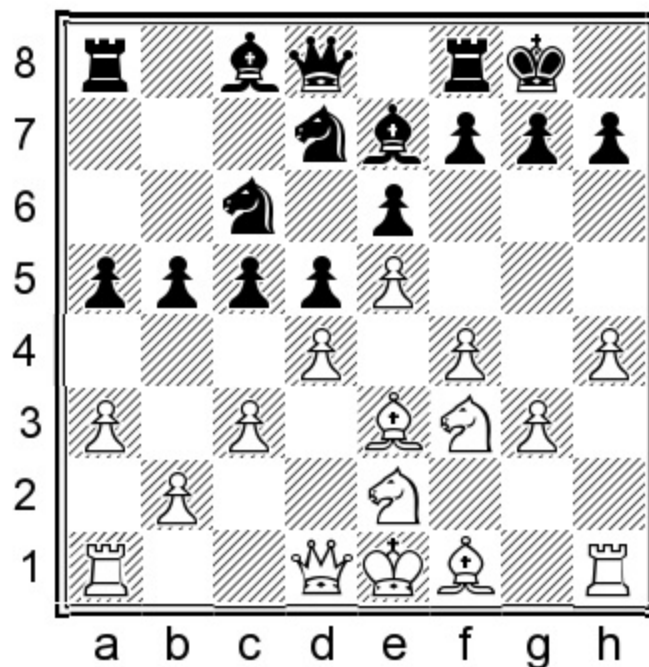
Such phrases helped me to see things into perspective during tense moments during a tournament or game. When I played against the French grandmaster Etienne Bacrot, an interesting psychological moment revolved around the position in the next diagram. Bacrot’s last move **12.h2-h4** is menacing, but he is also burning a fair number of bridges.



Bacrot, Etienne (2677)

Werle, Jan (2528)

Mülheim 2018



My first feeling after he played this move was one of enhanced anxiety. Bacrot wanted to continue 13. ♖c2 and 14. ♗g5, leading to a dangerous attack.

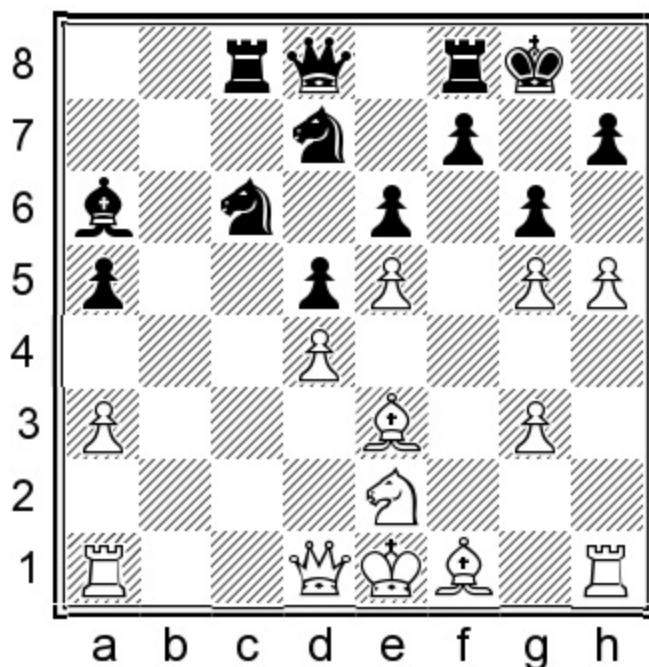
I tried to calm down and applied a self-statement: ‘*So it appears my opponent is going all-in for an*

attack with 13. ♖c2 and 14. ♘g5, threatening mate on h7. Let him come and let it be the critical moment – I'll be ready. Now let me think about my different active and passive ideas.'

My next stage (secondary appraisal, also see Subchapter 4.2.3 – Appraisal of emotions) was to think through the implications of my different answers: 'How can I cope with the threat of ♖c2 and ♘g5? If White manages to make this moves, I will have to take on g5, he will take back with the h-pawn, open the h-file and start giving me mate on h7. A passive approach would be ♜e8 and ♘f8. The danger of this approach lies within its passivity. The idea of f7-f5 has to be thoroughly calculated, but that has the disadvantage that it creates a target for White's pieces: the weak pawn on e6. Of course, the third alternative is the response g7-g6. While I allow a weakening on the kingside, I can develop an initiative using the time I saved by not playing any other defensive moves, such as ♜e8 or ♘f8.'

Subsequently, I started to work out the 3 candidate moves and alternatives by calculating them. The last alternative led to a comfortable position for me:

12...b4!? 13. ♖c2 bxc3 14. bxc3 ♙a6 15. ♘g5 g6 16. h5 ♙xg5 17. fxg5 cxd4 18. cxd4 ♜c8 19. ♚d1



Position after: 19. ♚d1

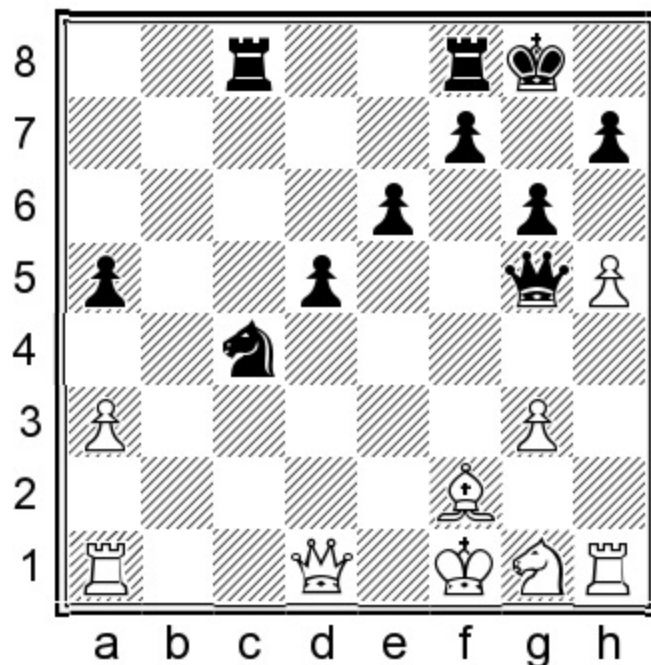
19... ♘dx5!?

I could also have gone for the cold-blooded approach 19... ♚e7, aiming for ♘b6-c4, while the Queen indirectly protects h7, was a sound alternative to Black's wild aggression in the game. For instance, 20. ♙f2 ♘b6 21. ♜h4 ♘c4 when Black is better.

20. dx5 ♘xe5

White is heavily underdeveloped, and the further loss of material seems inevitable.

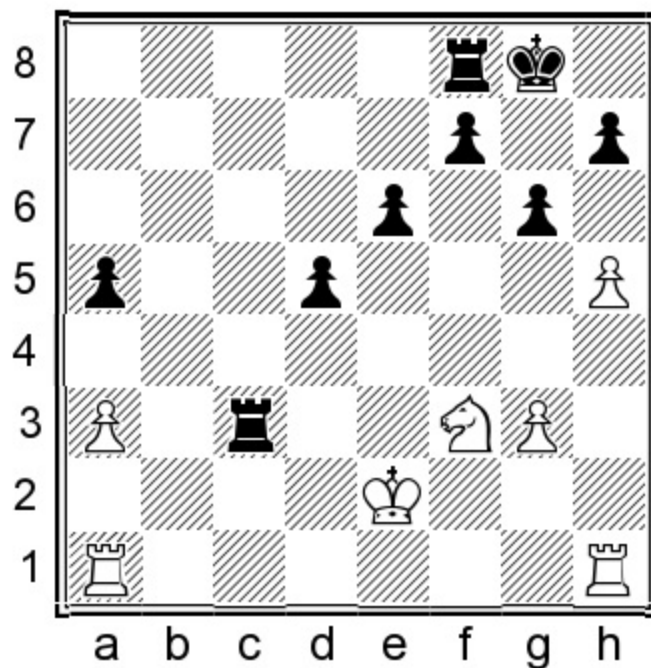
21. ♖g1 ♕xf1 22. ♔xf1 ♘c4 23. ♗f2 ♙xg5



Position after: 23... ♙xg5

That is the third pawn which is confiscated. And the pressure remains, also after the following sequence of exchanges.

24. ♘f3 ♘e3+ 25. ♗xe3 ♙xe3 26. ♙e2 ♙xe2+ 27. ♔xe2 ♖c2+ 28. ♘d2 ♖c3 29. ♘f3

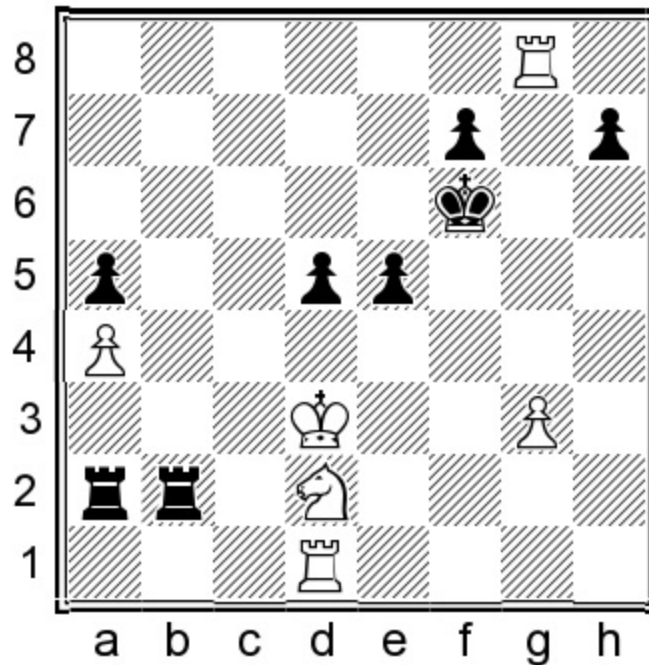


Position after: 29. ♘f3

29...gxh5!

After the text move, White's coordination of pieces is disrupted as the h-rook is having his own adventure. As a consequence, the white Rooks can't stop their hostile colleagues entering on the second rank, after which the black King will be activated and the pawns start rolling.

30.♖xh5 ♜b8 31.♖g5+ ♔f8 32.a4 ♜b2+ 33.♘d2 ♜cc2 34.♞d1 ♜a2 35.♖h5 ♔g7 36.♖g5+ ♔f6 37.♖g8 ♜cb2 38.♔d3 e5!



Position after: 38...e5!

Despite being a piece up, the pawn avalanche can't be stopped anymore by Bacrot.

39.♔c3 ♜c2+ 40.♔d3 e4+ 41.♔e3 ♜a3+ 42.♔f4 e3 43.♘e4+

In case of 43.♘f3 the King is trapped on the middle of the board. 43...e2! 44.♞e1 ♜c4+ with a mate.

43...dxe4 44.♔xe4 e2 45.♞e1

0-1

▫ Reframing

Reframing, in this context, means changing one's perspective towards events. With a new 'frame' it is often possible to discover positives within events previously seen as homogeneously negative, or to place a few negative events into a structure where they represent stepping-stones or anomalies.

For example, consider that a soccer striker in the English Premier League might be going through a

tough time as a result of a goalless drought. Naturally, a striker is judged on the number of goals he scores. After a suggestion from a sports psychologist, the coach asked the striker to observe clips of another striker and list out what that striker was contributing to the game. Although the observed stiker was not scoring, he was of great value to the team. He made many assists (plays which caused team-mates to have scoring chances that they converted), held the ball well to gain time for the attack, and also fulfilled some defensive roles. When the striker being counselled evaluated the overall performance of the other striker, the assessment was positive despite the complete lack of goals. Then his brain was able to reframe his own situation and he realized that his overall performance for the team, in spite of his not scoring goals, was not bad at all.⁽⁶²⁾

In relation to chess, reframing can be useful to see individual results in a different light. Topalov once noted that there are worse things which can happen to mankind than losing a game:

IN THE LIMELIGHT

“Mistakes are normal (...) even if you make a blunder and lose a game, it’s not a tragedy. Real tragedies are not in chess (...) Earthquakes and people dying, but with chess, come on.”⁽⁶³⁾

Veselin Topalov (photo Jos Suttmuller)

As a matter of fact, a lot of sportsmen are using the technique of *zooming out*. This means involves that the field-specific goals and milestones are cast in a new perspective of being, well, not that important. Many sports psychologists try to make their client aware that they are more than solely a sportsman responsible for his sports achievements.

For instance, you might be not merely a sportsman, but as well a loving husband, a father of two children, as a talented mathematician or an efficient constable. Who might say? No less than 20 members of the U.S. Olympic Wrestling Team, when interviewed, said they were treating the 1988 Seoul Olympics ‘*as just another tournament*’. As is understood by every sportloving person around the globe, this major sports event is – as a matter of fact – the highlight of the 4 years towards which the sportsmen put everything aside to be at their best then. According to the psychologist Jones, this form of reframing of the tournament, suggests that the wrestlers were reducing the amount of goal relevance to control their emotional response.⁽⁶⁴⁾



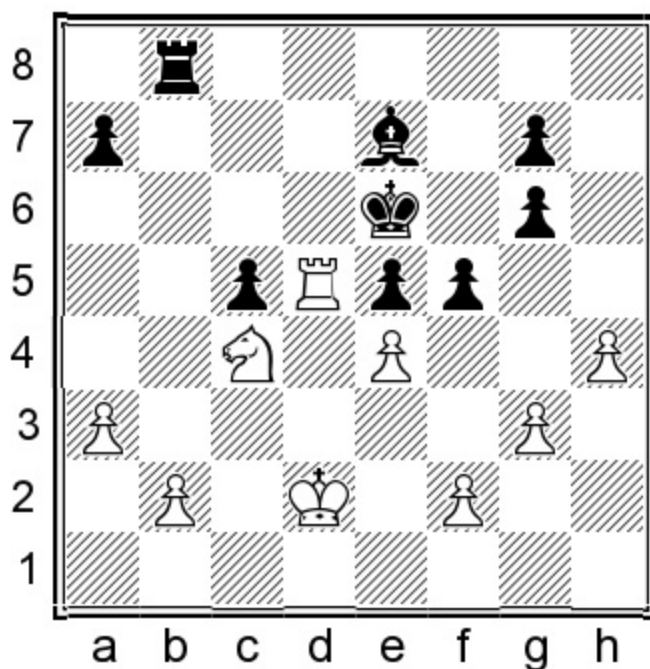
When we as chess players are influenced by the high rating of our opponent, we can also put this rating in perspective. In addition, we can tell ourselves that no chess player finds it easy to defend

under pressure – regardless of their rating, even if it happens to be over 2800! You could also visualize the situation *you* found it very hard to win games with, e.g. with the black pieces or in a close to equal position against a much lower rated opponent. These are the same problems your current opponent may have. A comforting thought for us mortals is that even the current elite players making mistakes and miss things. In the next diagram the following simple trick was missed by both Carlsen and Karjakin.

Carlsen, Magnus (2843)

Karjakin, Sergey (2778)

Bilbao 2012



46...♖xb2+!

46...♖d8 was played by Karjakin, but he managed to hold the draw (½-½ Carlsen – Karjakin, Bilbao 2021).

After the text move, there could have happened:

46...♖xb2+! 47.♘xb2 fxe4!

The Rook suddenly has no safe square to move to and is captured on the middle of the board!

48.♖d3!

With this move Carlsen would have been able to hold the draw.

48...exd3 49.♔xd3 ♔d5 50.f3

and Black can't utilize his extra pawn as a result of the blockade on the light squares e4 and c4. In

that case, a draw would have been the most probable outcome.

▫ Storytelling and metaphors

Involuntarily occurring negative thoughts can increase the tension tremendously. Being paired against a much higher rated opponent may cause feelings of despair and fear. Therefore, a suitable technique is to ‘sidetrack’ these negative thoughts by making them appear stupid. By a metaphor or story, a sportsman can endeavor to enlighten the concepts he cannot hold a grasp on.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Stories and metaphors may reconstruct sportsmen’s negative experiences in the past and encourage them to consider alternative ways of dealing with emotional difficulties.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Stories and metaphors may in sport psychology the metaphor of a traffic light is regularly used. With a junior international soccer team facing a difficult match against a strong opponent in a hostile environment, the green light stood for perfect control, whereas the red light stood for a loss of self-control. Amber was the light which was on, and indicated the moment on which a player could determine whether he’d go green or red. The sportsman realized he had a choice to head towards either the green or the red light. A number of techniques were employed to face the difficult situation in the amber, such as breathing exercises in order to make him calm down to choose the right way to green.



▫ Cognitive Paradox

By way of the technique of cognitive paradox, the sportsman could tell himself in a ridicule way, for instance, how strong and even unbeatable his opponent is. This ‘voice of the irrationality’ in an exaggerated form will cause him to rethink his negativity. For instance, a chess player fearing his higher rated opponent before the match, could ridicule his fear by the thought: *‘You are right, your opponent will not make a single mistake..’*⁽⁶⁷⁾ or: *‘(..) since he is never losing, he will never exhibit, in his entire career, any sign whatsoever of weakness.’*

As a consequence of this absurd thought, our thought processes re-align with reality and are replaced by more positive ones. Again, similar to previous techniques, replacement of maladaptive thoughts may result in more adaptive emotional responses and subsequent behaviors through altering both the primary and secondary appraisal of the stimulus.



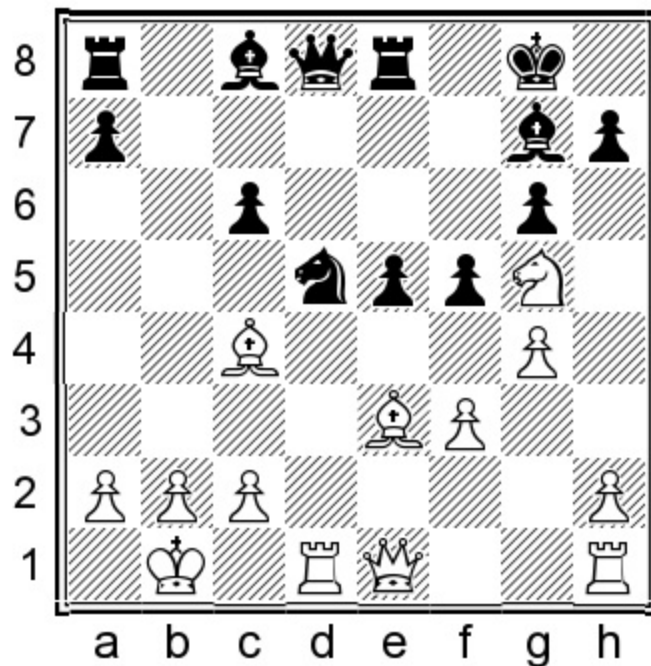
Gawain Jones (photo Alina l'Ami)

Carlsen, Magnus (2834)

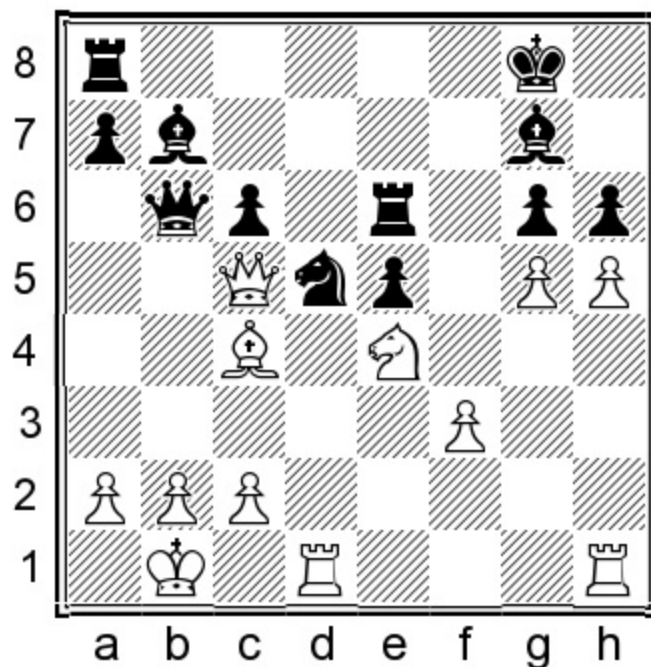
Jones, Gawain (2640)

Wijk aan Zee 2018

Magnus just played 17.g4, which may have sent the English GM into shock. Does the world's best player have a brilliant concept in mind, or is he having a black-out? *'Magnus never makes any mistakes, right?'*



17...f4! Just winning a piece. 18.h4 fxe3 19.♙xe3 h6 20.♙c5 ♖b7 21.♘e4 ♜e6 22.h5 ♚b6 23.g5!



Position after: 23.g5!

Despite being a piece down, Carlsen has developed a dangerous attack on Black's King. Jones could have forced the swap of the Queens with ♙g7-f8, leaving him with a clear advantage.

23...hxg5?!

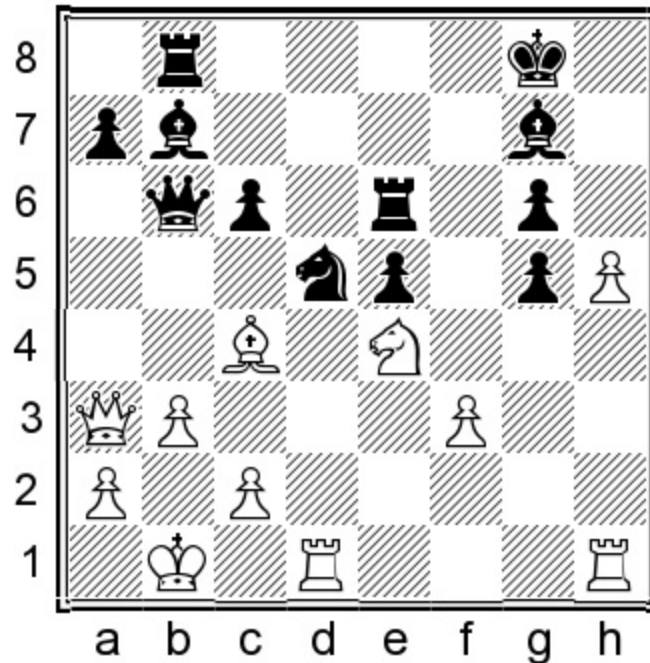
Jones could have forced the swap of the queens with 23...♙f8, leaving him only with a small

advantage after 24. ♖xb6 axb6.

24. ♗a3!

Since Jones refrained from forcing the exchange of queens, Carlsen grabs his chance. With this intermediate move he is avoiding the exchange of queens, eventually generating a dangerous assault on the enemy King. The position has suddenly become very unclear.

24... ♜b8 25. b3!



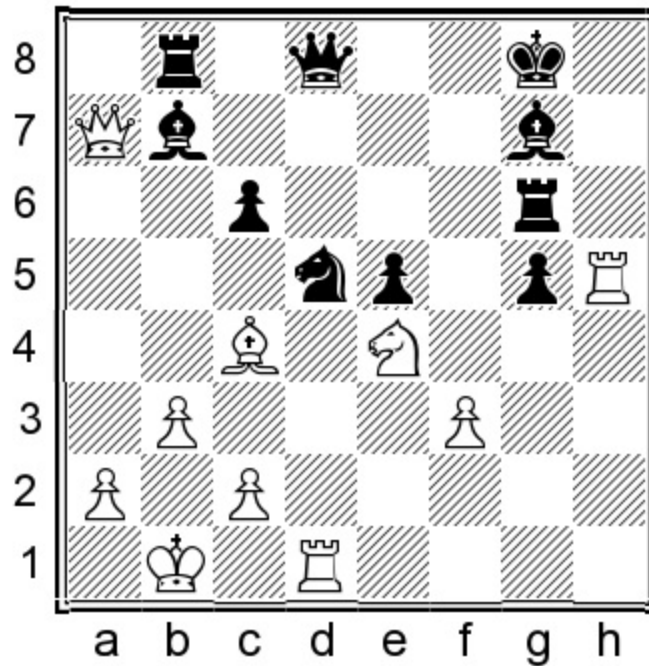
Position after: 25.b3!

Magnus shouldn't worry any longer about any counterattack along the b-file. Moreover, his Queen can be regrouped via c1 for attacking purposes.

25... ♜d8 26. ♜xa7!

Winning a pawn, and more importantly, exerting pressure across the 7th rank.

26... gxf5 27. ♜xf5 ♜g6



Position after: 27... ♖g6

28. ♖xg5!

From the frying pan into the fire.. there goes another pawn.

28... ♖xg5 29. ♘xg5

Obviously, Black can't take back since the Rook would be hanging.

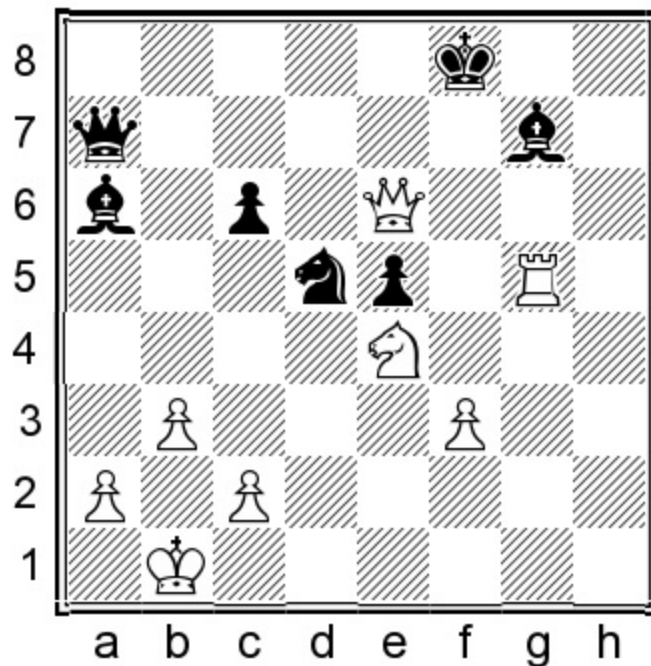
29... ♕c8 30. ♖g1!

The black King is out of cover and the threats are mounting. One of the major threats here is 31. ♘e6.

30... ♖a8 31. ♕b6 ♖a6 32. ♕c5 ♕d7 33. ♘e4 ♔h8 34. ♕f2!

Moving the Queen to the open files on the kingside.

34... ♕e7 35. ♙xa6 ♙xa6 36. ♕h2+ ♔g8 37. ♕h6 ♕a7 38. ♕e6+ ♔f8 39. ♖g5!



Position after: 39. ♖g5!

The net is closing in on Black's King. There isn't any defense against the intruding white pieces.

39...♗e3 40.♕d6+ ♔f7 41.♘c5 ♙c8 42.♖xg7+

and Black resigned as a consequence of 43.♕xe5+ and 44.♕xe3.

1-0

Section 4.6 – Conclusion

Lazarus' Cognitive Motivational–Relational Theory (CMRT) gives us a clear idea of how emotions originate in a sports setting. The extent of the evoked emotions depend on the evaluation by the sportsman of these (environmental) stimuli. The primary appraisal concerns the relevance of a stimulus to a person's well-being in regards to his goals. The secondary appraisal of a sportsman deals with his coping options. The more confidence he has in his own ability to deal with a difficult situation, the less emotions (such as becoming anxious) are elicited.⁽⁶⁸⁾



The Dutch GM's L'Ami and Van Wely. (photo Alina l'Ami)

Emotions such as anxiety can hinder concentration and affect performance. Emotions are not necessarily bad; as shown by the Individualized Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) model, sportsmen are – up to a certain extent – dependent on some emotions to get themselves going. But when the emotion becomes too intense, it lowers their level of play. The stimuli or stressors are both internal and external; in the sports arena there may be several stimuli in the environment that ‘get to’ even experienced sportsmen like Roger Federer or André Agassi, such as the crowd or a ‘problem opponent’.

In chess, these emotions distract us from our main task at hand: fully concentrating on finding the best move. During tense and difficult situations on the board, these emotions can make us fall back on certain tendencies. The tendencies which I notice recurring are: playing obvious, straightforward or natural moves; simplifying the position; opting for safety of the King; and playing too passively. Once we are aware of when our personal emotions might result in these negative tendencies, we can incorporate coping mechanisms for facing similar circumstances. By the use of cognitive methods we can influence the perception of stimuli. For instance, we can calm down by using a positive statement, image or metaphor; reframing of performances; or ridiculing of our destructive thoughts.

- (1) Kremer et al. (2012).
- (2) Moran (1996).
- (3) Lazarus (2000b).
- (4) Valerrand (2000).
- (5) Lazarus (2000b), p. 243.
- (6) Spielberger (1983) and Lazarus (2000b).
- (7) Harris et al. (1998).
- (8) Lazarus (2000b), p. 244.
- (9) Hardy & Fazey (1988).
- (10) Gill et al. (2004).
- (11) Cognitive anxiety is considered to deal with negative concern and self-doubt in relation to performance, whereas, physiological arousal associated with anxiety such as heart beat has been shown to fluctuate continuously during performance: Hardy & Fazey (1988) and Prima Vitasari et al. (2011), pp. 615 – 619.
- (12) Prima Vitasari et al. (2011) pp. 615 – 619.
- (13) Hardy & Fazey (1987).
- (14) Averbakh (2002).
- (15) According to David Gilbert - an American tennis coach and former professional tennis player, achieving a career-high singles ranking of World No. 4 in 1990.
- (16) Lazarus (2000b), p. 229.
- (17) Lazarus (2000b).
- (18) Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and Lazarus (2000b), p. 247.
- (19) www.patheos.com: Top 7 Bible Verses About Stubbornness.
- (20) Lazarus (2000b), pp. 230-233.
- (21) Hardy (1991 & 1996).
- (22) Hanin (2000).
- (23) Hanin (2000).
- (24) www.academy.sportlyzer.com: Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning.
- (25) Fischer et al. (1966) A German chess expert in Life Magazine, p. 8.
- (26) Fischer et al. (1966) A German chess expert in Life Magazine, p. 8.
- (27) www.tennismental skills.com: Roger Federer's Mental Secret.

- (28) Jones (2003).
- (29) Deci (2000).
- (30) Jones (2003).
- (31) Lazarus (1991).
- (32) www.chess24.com.
- (33) www.nytimes.com: Agassi Revival Reaches a Peak In French Open.
- (34) Lazarus (2000b), p. 241.
- (35) Krogus (1976).
- (36) See more concerning this chess stimulus in **Section 4.3 – Coping** with Emotions – simplification.
- (37) Fine (1951), p. 128.
- (38) Krogus (1976), p. 60.
- (39) Krogus (1976), p. 61.
- (40) Pai (2017).
- (41) Ree (2019).
- (42) Lazarus (2000a) p. 243.
- (43) Postmes (2020).
- (44) Tom Postmes.
- (45) So the list of tendencies I use is slightly different to his.
- (46) As was set forth in chapter 4.2.1 ‘Anxiety’.
- (47) Wessler (1986).
- (48) www.ruchess.ru: Vladimir Kramnik, Part II.
- (49) Dreev (2018).
- (50) Wessler (1986).
- (51) Williams & Harris (1998) & Williams (Ed.) (1995).
- (52) Lazarus, (2000a), (2000b) and Golden & Dryden.
- (53) Lazarus (2000a), (2000b) and www.link.springer.com.
- (54) New York Times Sports Magazine, 4 June 2006, Advances in Applied Sport Psychology: A Review – Cumming and Ramsey.
- (55) Richardson (1969).
- (56) Nording & Cumming (2008).

- (57) Martin et al. (1999), Robb (2005) and Jowett & Lavallee (2007).
- (58) Hardy (2006).
- (59) Mellalieu & Hanton (2006) & Jones (2003).
- (60) Jowett et al. (2004).
- (61) Avni (2004), p. 90.
- (62) Beswick (2001).
- (63) Topalov, New in Chess (2005/05).
- (64) Jones (2003) and Lazarus' Cognitive Motivational-Relational Theory.
- (65) Beswick (2001).
- (66) Mojtabai (2000) and Randall, Jennifer & Jennifer (2005).
- (67) Jones (2003).
- (68) Jones (2003).

Chapter 5

Defensive Strategies

- Section 5.1 – Introduction
 - Opposing the wandering Knight
 - The Houdini Act
- Section 5.2 – Prophylaxis
 - A mysterious knight move
 - Braga-Karpov
 - Tal-Korchnoi
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- Section 5.3 – Waiting Strategy
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 - Lasker-Nimzowitsch
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- Section 5.4 – Infinite Resistance
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 - Lautier-Bacrot
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 - Werle-Eichler
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Section 5.1 – Introduction

Defending is maybe the hardest discipline in chess. In order to hold on in bad positions, a defender needs an apt defensive strategy as well as strong calculation. I'll go through a variety of different strategies (some more successful than others) in practical settings. All of these strategies have something in common: you must have confidence in your own abilities, belief that the seemingly impossible might happen, and an awareness of the banana skins upon which your opponent may still slip.

We will start off with **(5.2 Prophylaxis)** and **(5.3 The Waiting Strategy)** and shift our attention from a less passive and reactive strategies to a more proactive approach, culminating in the **(5.5 Turning the Tide)**. Most likely these are not new concepts for you! But something special happens when they are executed by world-class players, such as Emanuel Lasker, Tigran Petrosian and Anatoly Karpov. What exactly makes them such outstanding defenders, able to choose the defensive strategy applicable to each given position?

Among other things, the examples will show you how difficult it is to 'sense the moment' and respond with the right dose of urgency. Then you'll start to figure it out: an all-or-nothing approach might be called for in a hopeless situation, but in other situations it's better to await developments, avoid creating weaknesses and seek a better moment to strike back. Sometimes, your strategy also depends on your opponent's mindset and 'profile'!

Opposing the wandering knight

If we briefly sidetrack and consider that we find ourselves in a difficult situation where we are under a heavy attack, it's important to be aware that the path to victory is a long and winding one, and there's an associated risk involved of 'drifting' and losing the advantage. The phenomenon of 'drifting' reminds me of a stock character from medieval tales and stories: the wandering knight (or knight errant),⁽¹⁾ cut off from his country of origin, finding himself in no man's land and striving for his own chivalrous ideals.



Similarly, a chess player who loses his grip on the progression of the game may, despite having the (much) better position, find it hard to make tough decisions and succumb to anxiety of losing the advantage he has so meticulously built up. His lack of perspective may be exploited by the opponent, and the intellectual purism of his quest may at once become hopelessly diluted by harsh reality; let us remember that the defender is doing everything in his power to disrupt the unfavorable direction in which the game is flowing.

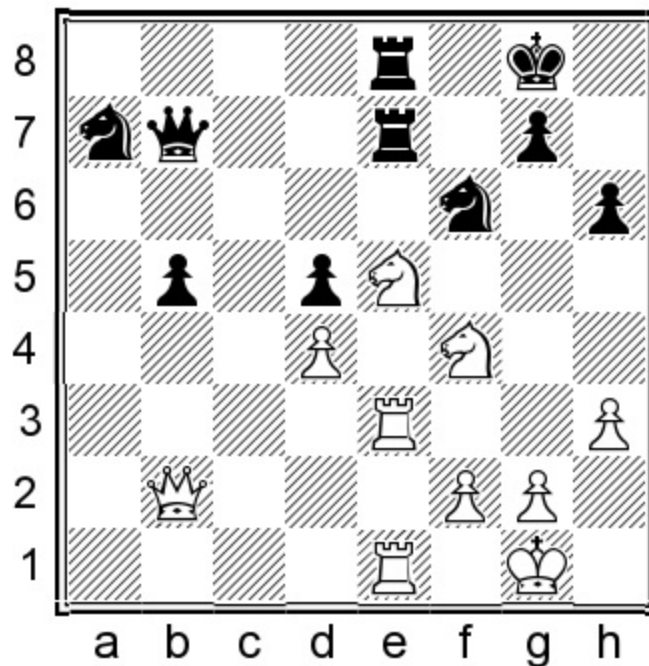
As a matter of fact, converting an advantage is everything but easy. I asked my colleague and friend, grandmaster Erwin L'Ami, what one should do to improve this. His answer was plain and clear: 'it's very hard to train this.' As he is the second of top-flight grandmaster Anish Giri, his authority to speak on this matter is very clear. Giri's own technique is hardly lacking, but against the very best players in the world he does sometimes show a lack of rigour.

In the following game, it becomes clear that even the so-called 'last-ditch' or 'desperate' resources found by an elite player pack a hefty punch. As a very talented tactician, Nakamura is particularly skilled at finding them, and succeeds in leading Giri down a rabbit-hole of his own creation.

Giri, Anish (2793)

Nakamura, Hikaru (2790)

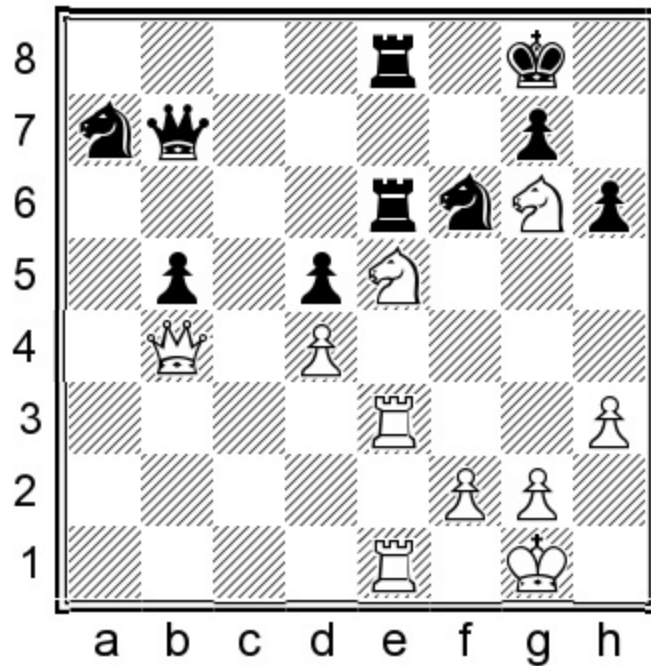
Moscow 2016



43. ♖b3?!

This move has the sole purpose of preventing 43... ♘c6. Anish said to me that his approach in such cases is pragmatic in nature; he plays solidly and quickly, increasing the (time) pressure on the opponent. This technique yields him often success, as the pressure becomes often too much for the opponent. In itself 43. ♖b3 doesn't spoil anything, and it is in fact a good move; however, from the psychological point of view the move is part of a plan not to change the character of the position, missing the opportunity to strike harder.

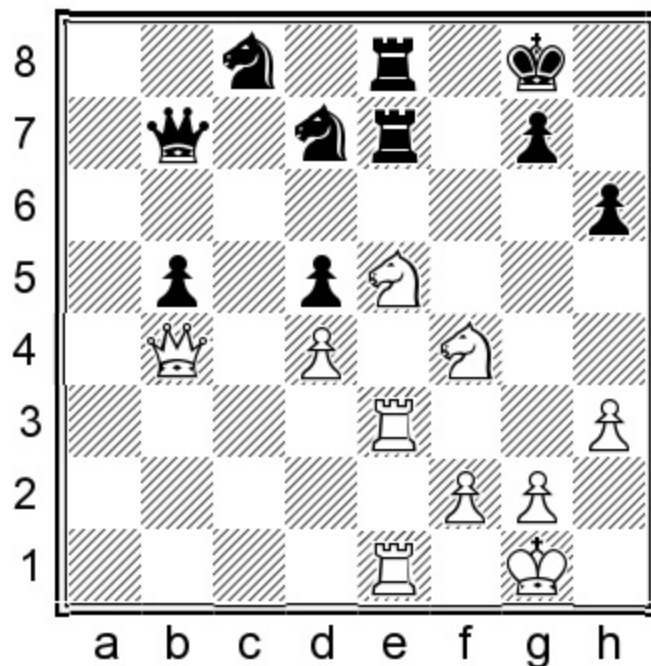
43. ♘fg6! would put the screws to his opponent: 43... ♖e6 [43... ♖c7 leaving the e-file with the Rook allows a discovered attack, after 44. ♘g4! destroying Black's kingside with ♘xf6+.] 44. ♖b4!



Analysis after: 44. ♖b4!

After this move, Black does no longer know which way to turn. For example, after 44... ♔h7 White will play 45. ♘f8+ winning the exchange. And 44... ♘c6 doesn't bring Black salvation either, because of 45. ♘xc6! ♖xc6, when White can win the exchange by a skewer on e7. 46. ♖xe6 ♖xe6 47. ♘e7+ which is easily winning.

43. ♖b3?! ♘c8 44. ♖b4 ♘d7



Position after: 44... ♘d7

45.h4

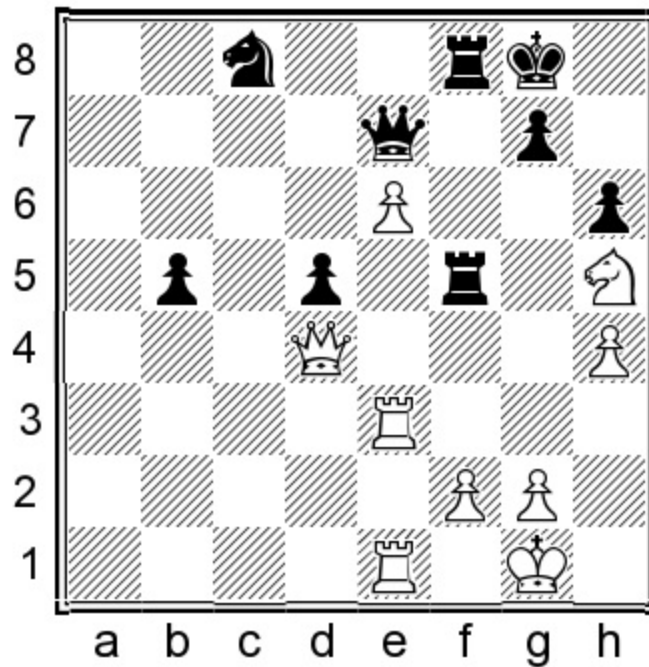
Again, not a bad move at all as Giri is slowly building up the pressure on the kingside without giving anything away. But.. you can't defeat Nakamura with half-measures.

After 45.♘h5! all of Black's hopes are dashed. All White's pieces take part in the attack and White will simply follow up with ♖g3. For instance, 45...♚c7 46.♘xg7! ♜xg7 [46...♔xg7 47.♖g3+ ♔f8 48.♞e3!! Black is defenseless against the threat of ♞ef3+.] 47.♘xd7 ♞xe3 48.♚f8+ ♔h7 49.♘f6+ and with ♞xe3 to follow, when Black will be mated.

45...♘xe5 46.dxe5 ♞f7 47.♘h5 ♚e7 48.♚d4?!

Again, Anish is missing the opportunity to determine the outcome of the game directly, after 48.♚g4! threatening ♘h5-f6+, wins the exchange after 48...♚e6 49.♚g3 ♔h7 Notwithstanding the fact that the g-pawn is no longer pinned, the trick ♘h5-f6+ still decides the game. 50.♘f6+! gxf6 51.exf6 White is winning, as by the opening of the e-file the Rook on e8 will fall.

48...♞ef8 49.e6 ♞f5



Position after: 49...♞f5

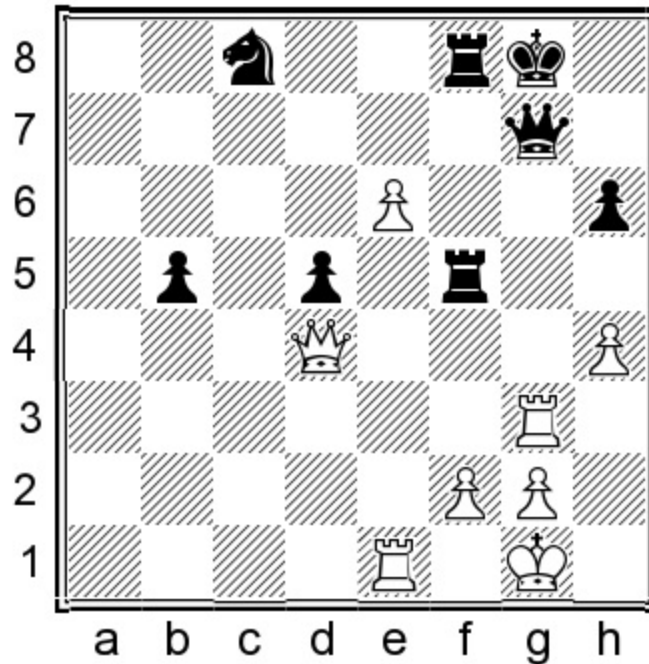
Wavering in his determination, refraining from executing the final blow, it is – by way of saying – inevitable that the opponent will strike back hard. Here, Giri makes a miscalculation, when Nakamura doesn't waste any time to grab his chance.

50.♘xg7?

This mistake from the young star is beyond rationalization. A player of his strength should under

normal circumstances find the continuation: 50.♖e5 b4 51.g3! Preventing ♖xh4, and preparing ♗f4. 51...♖xe5 52.♗xe5 Black is helpless against White picking up his d- and b-pawn.

50...♗xg7 51.♖g3



Position after: 51.♖g3

51...♖g5!

Nakamura's response makes use of the fact that White's Queen is undefended. Black is out of danger and after a couple of moves Giri offered a draw.

52.♖xg5

The only move. 52.♗xg7+ is even losing for White, after 52...♖xg7.

52...hxg5 53.♗xd5

Black can easily defend with ♗e7, stopping the e7 pawn. White has sufficient pawns for the piece to make a draw.

1/2-1/2

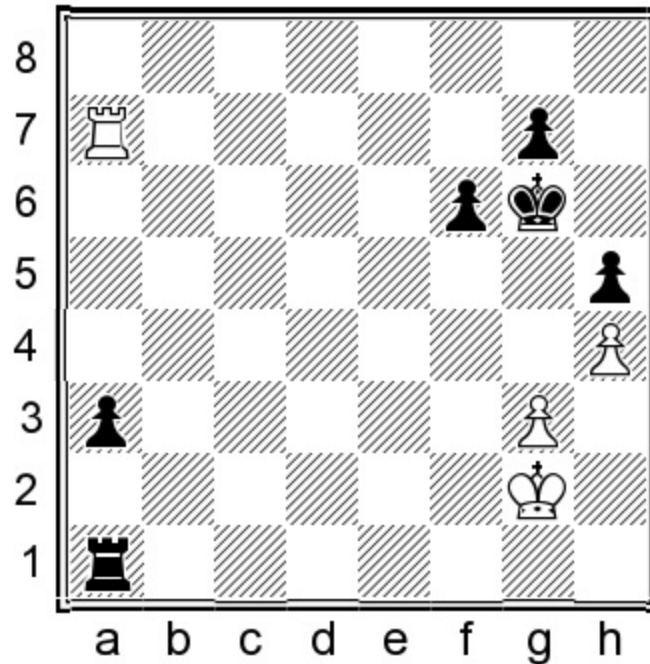
Thus, 'drifting' occurs even at all levels. The defender should always keep his faith that such unforeseen turns of events may arise, however unfavorable the board or tournament situation might be. Just such a twist occurred in one of my own games from the Dutch under-16 Championships. My direct rival – Gabriel Molinari – had won easily in the 8th round, and thus stood 2 points ahead of me

with only one round to go. The only way of becoming champion was to win the following rook endgame, subsequently winning the last ninth round while my opponent had to lose, and in that unlikely event I would get to a playoff match.

Werle, Jan (2223)

Azadmanesh, Moosa (2140)

Leiden 1999

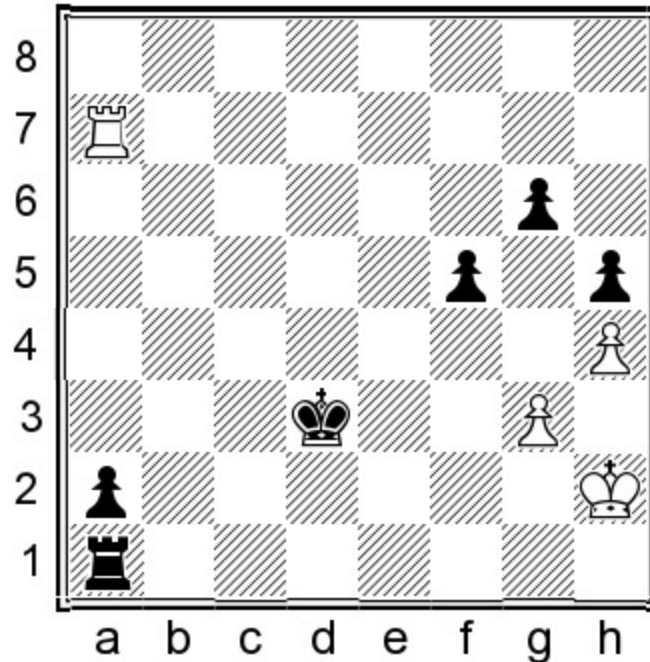


Jan Werle (photo Jos Sutmuller)

So, in the ending in the diagram I'm already 2 pawns down. At first, I felt horrible. How could I be so badly outplayed, in the most important youth tournament of the year (i.e. the national championship)? I didn't think there was any chance of a positive outcome in the final standings of the tournament. When I by chance met the mother of my rival in the corridors of the playing venue, I congratulated her on her son becoming champion. There was no real hope of either a draw or a win for me. Having returned at my board, I pulled myself together and decided that I would make the life of my opponent as hard as possible. From my opponent's body language and conduct it was pretty clear that he had underestimated the technical issues that still stood between him and victory. I knew the ins-and-outs of this position since I had played an identical ending a year earlier, also at the national championships. During a training session my coach, rook-ending specialist IM Cor van Wijgerden, had analyzed that game and ending



thoroughly with my opponent and myself. Therefore I decided to play rapidly; meanwhile my opponent was strolling around and chatting, resulting in a serious, though not crippling, lack of time. We reached the following position.



It was by now clear that my opponent had made some technical mistakes. He can't any longer create a passed pawn and the a-pawn should be on a3.

64...♖e1?

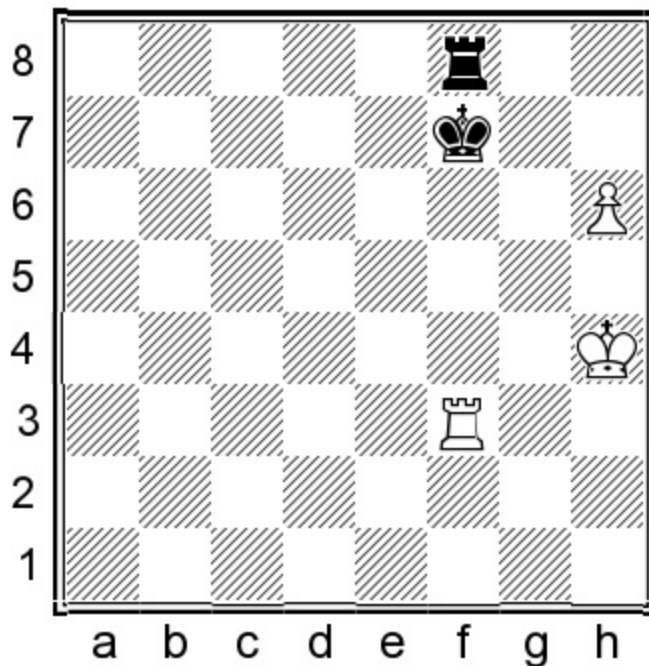
Black hoped for a winning pawn endgame after 65.♗xa2 ♖e2+, but missed the intermediate check.

65.♗a3+ ♔e2 66.♗xa2+

Starting to realize that the win was further away than ever, my opponent went all-in. This was counterproductive and he lost a pawn.

After 16 moves – with plenty of mistakes from both sides – we reached the next position.

(66...♔f3 67.♗a6 ♖e2+ 68.♔h3 ♖e4 69.♗b6 ♔f2 70.♗xg6 ♖g4 71.♗g5 f4 72.gxf4 ♖xf4 73.♗xh5 ♔f3 74.♗g5 ♖f8 75.h5 ♔f4 76.♔h4 ♖b8 77.♗g7 ♔f5 78.♖f7+ ♔e6 79.♖f3 ♔e7 80.h6 ♖f8 81.♗g3 ♔f7 82.♖f3+)



Position after: 82. ♖f3+

My opponent had already moved his King back and forth from f7 to e7 to f7, but here without much thought he determined that the King should rather be in the corner.

82...♔g8?? 83.h7+ and my opponent resigned, because after 83...♔g7 84.♖xf8 ♕xf8, White queens.

1-0

In the last round I won my game, while my rival lost. Thus we finished equal first, and I won the resulting tie-break match. My prospects, which could easily have been pronounced medically dead in the diagram with which I began this story, had been magically resurrected – call it fate or destiny, but these things happen. From this experience I learned to never give up, since opponents can go wrong in *any* position. And up to this very day, I regret prematurely congratulating my rival's mother!

The Houdini Act

In view of the above, resilient and stubborn defense in exceptionally difficult situations does pay dividends in terms of half and full points. It goes without saying that the better side should aim to convert while allowing minimal counterplay (rather than just playing low-effort moves), but despite this, opponents of any level may choke or at least struggle to convert their advantage into a win. Even in really desperate situations, the vagaries of tournament play can lead to miracles. Meanwhile, as the defender, it's obvious that you should strive to prevent the execution of



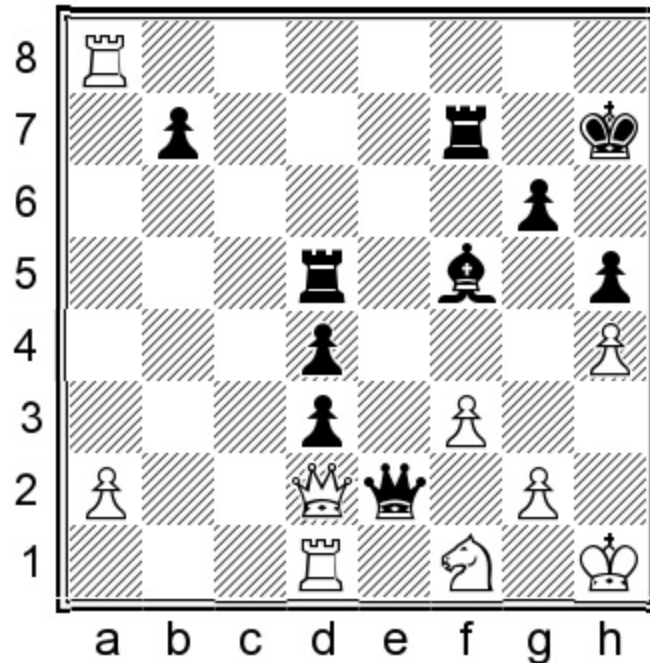
straightforward winning plans at all costs. The problems your opponent needs to solve en route to victory need to be as practically challenging as possible, and in any case not permit of simple forcing solutions. Sometimes, though, fate is on your side and you need only provide a helping hand.

To reiterate, that applies even in cases where the position is so utterly dire that even dreaming of a draw appears ridiculous; as in for instance the following game.

Werle, Jan (2574)

Le, Quang Liem (2694)

Delmenhorst 2011

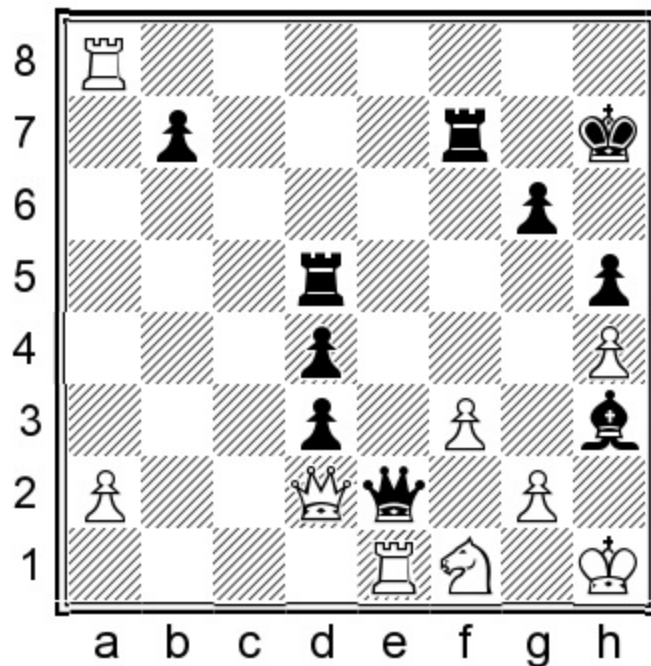


Black is close to winning as his d3-pawn is just too strong. Nevertheless, the game is not yet over. With my last move 40.♔d2 I was hoping to lure my opponent in the most obvious and concrete continuation.

40...♕h3

And so Le Quang Liem went for this obvious line, probably relieved to find an easy win. At least, that's what he thought. Hence, I kept my 'poker face'.

41.♖e1

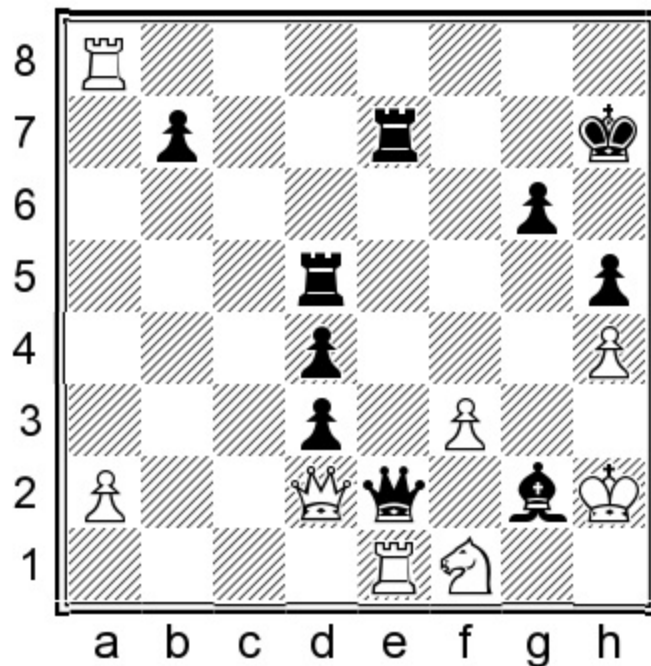


Position after: 41. ♖e1

Here it still appears that White has fallen for a trick, but it is actually Black who may do so. Black could still exchange the Queens and retreat with the Bishop, keeping an advantage. However, this would demand a lot of self-control and awareness from my opponent! Le Quang, Liem: *'My opponent found an interesting defensive idea. Objectively speaking, Black should win, but the very tricky variations require perfect calculation.'*

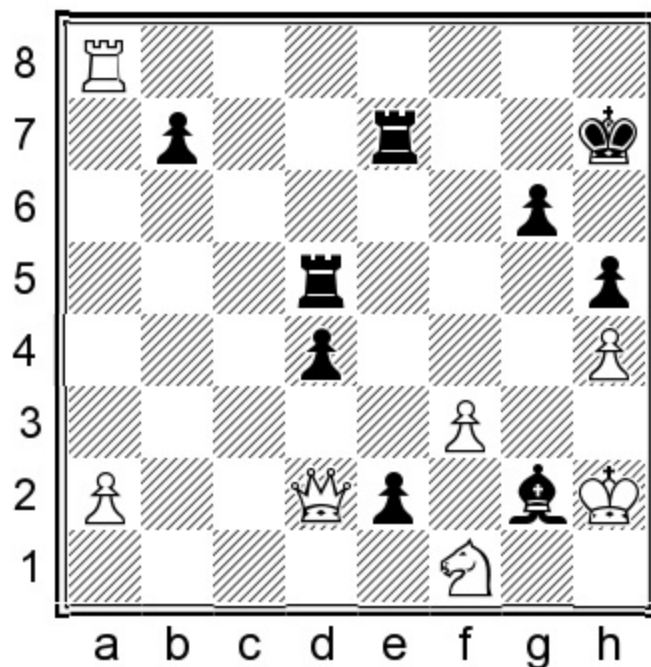
41... ♙xg2+ 42. ♕h2 ♖e7

42... ♙xf3+ 43. ♖xe2 dxe2 44. ♘g3 ♖e5! 45. ♚e1 d3 With d2 coming up, Black is winning. This was not the most obvious continuation, but following up Black's queen sacrifice required courage and deep calculation.



Position after: 42...♖e7

43.♖xe2 dxe2



Position after: 43...dxe2

Here is the position we both were aiming for. But my opponent had stopped calculating at this point, whereas I was still invested in the position, since I had not given up, and while thinking of my 40th move I had been searching desperately for hidden traps. The energy I had put into my calculations was, in the end, not wasted, since I was able to find the following surprise.

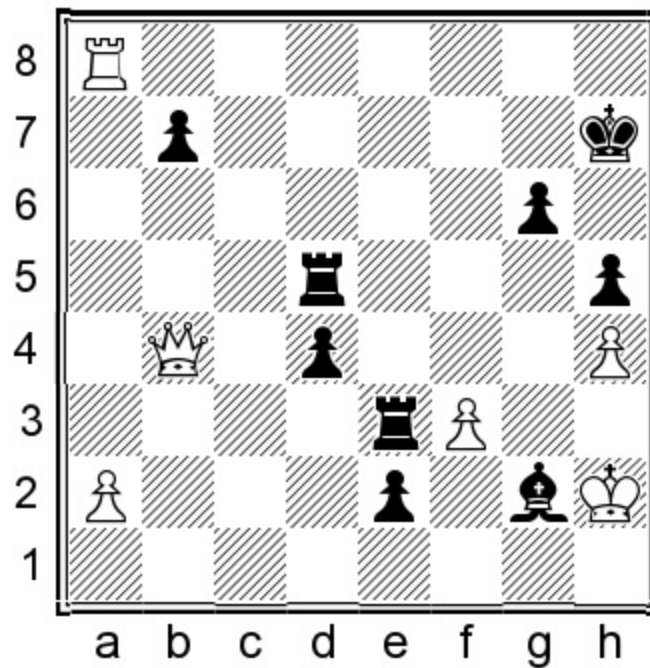
43...♖xe2?? 44.♚f4! , with the idea of ♚f4-f8-h8 mate.

44.♘e3!

This is the point! White lures the Rook from e7 to e3, so that it no longer safeguards its King. After that White can force a perpetual check by means of a rook sacrifice.

44.♚b4? e1=♚-+ The new Queen defends the Rook on e7.

44...♖xe3 45.♚b4



Position after: 45.♚b4

The Queen found a path towards Black's King. The double threat of ♚b4-xb7/f8, and of the perpetual check which actually happened in the game, can't be met satisfactorily.

45...e1=♚ 46.♖h8+!

Missed by Le Quang Liem, White forces a draw by luring the King to h8.

46...♔xh8 47.♚f8+ ♔h7 48.♚f7+

Black must acquiesce to a draw. Or in Le Quang, Liem's words: '*And so my opponent escaped with a perpetual check!*'

½-½

Section 5.2 – Prophylaxis

Another proven defensive strategy is reactive prophylaxis. Prophylaxis is in many occasions a prerequisite for mounting a successful defense, and refers to the defender foreseeing a dangerous plan or move from his opponent and doing something about it one or several moves before it becomes reality. Prophylaxis appears in many forms, but the overarching concept is a general one, and we can meaningfully make general statements about it beyond the obvious ‘think about what your opponent wants’. All the top players have this strategy integrated in their mindset when it comes to defense, especially former World Champion Anatoly Karpov.

A mysterious knight move

Anatoly Karpov (photo Jos Suttmuller)

My personal contact with Karpov’s velvet-touch form of prophylaxis came unexpectedly and suddenly. Right after I lost a game against the strong Russian Grandmaster Alexander Motylev in the 2004 Hoogeveen open tournament, there were many spectators gathered around our post-mortem, some advancing ideas of how I could have defended myself. Yet only he and I moved the pieces, until at some point a third man placed his hand on my knight and retreated it from f6 to e8, to suggest a novel and

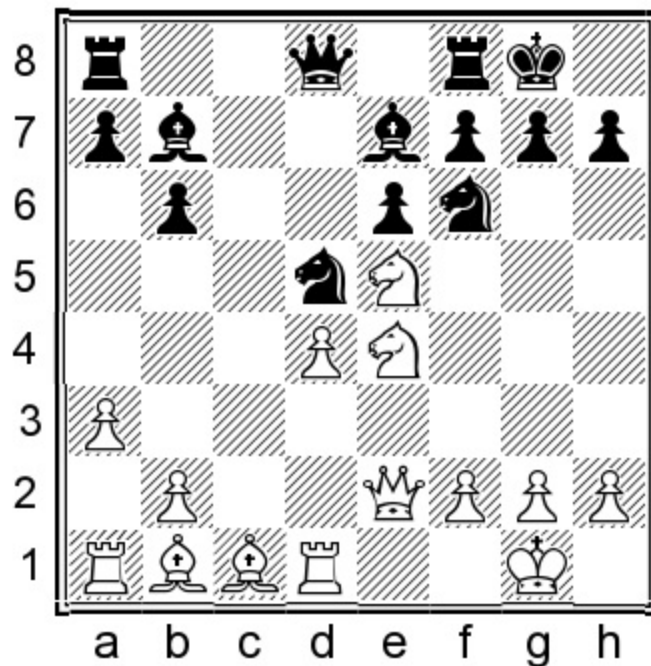


(to me) unnatural-seeming defensive idea. Agitated by the analysis having been thus interrupted, I reversed the move, only to have a pin-drop silence descend upon the room. Clearly, the crowd knew something which I didn’t. Looking behind me with some curiosity as to who the mystery kibitzer was, I discovered to my shame that it was none other than, of course, Anatoly Yevgenyevich Karpov! It goes without saying that we analysed his suggestion and found it to be a profound defensive attempt. In this book there are several defensive (and, above all, prophylactic) Knight retreats from Karpov in different chapters. It was a trademark of his to retreat a Knight in response to a dangerous plan or move from the opponent. In the position below, his opponent Braga intends to increase the pressure on black’s king by playing ♖d1-d3-h3 or ♔e2-d3, and so on. But Karpov was one step ahead of him...

Braga, Fernando Alberto (2375)

Karpov, Anatoly (2720)

Mar del Plata 1982



15...♘e8!?

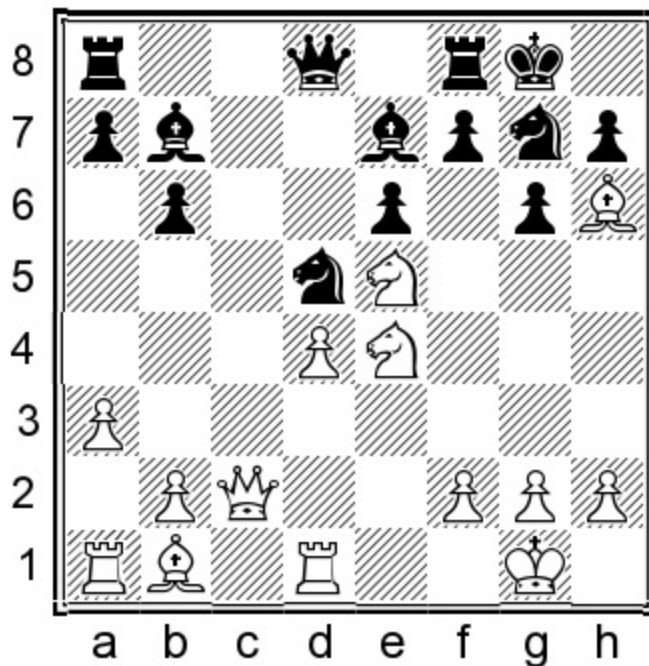
Karpov wants to play g7-g6 in order to render the Bishop on b1 harmless. This strong defensive pawn move will also

create a good defensive square for the Knight on g7. Had Karpov begun with 15...g6, he could have walked into a dangerous assault on the kingside, beginning with 16.♘g5. Playing 16...♘e8 at that point would have been useless because of 17.♘xh7 ♔xh7 18.♚h5+, followed by taking on g6 when the attack crashes through.

15...♘e8!? **16.♚c2**

16.♚d3 wouldn't stop Black from playing 16...g6 17.♗h6 ♘g7 with equality.

16...g6 **17.♗h6 ♘g7**



Position after: 17... Ng7

The Knight on g7 has come to the aid of Black's defense.

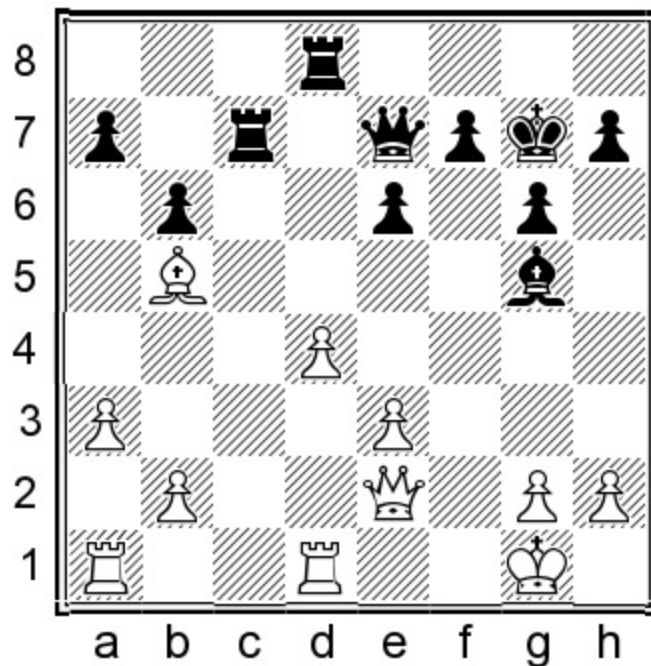
18. Nc6 Bxc6 19. Qxc6 Qc8 20. Qb5 Rd8

Black is already better here, as he has control of the d5-square while White hasn't gotten any attacking play.

21. Ng3 Qb7 22. Qe2 Rh4 23. Re4 Qe7 24. Rxc7

24. Rac1 Rg5 25. Rxc7 Qxc7 26. Rf3 Rac8 27. Rxc8 Rxc8 28. Ne4 Qd8 and Black is better, as White is still stuck with his weak d-pawn.

24... Qxc7 25. Nf1 Rg5 26. Ne3 Nxe3 27. fxe3 Rac8 28. Rd3 Rc7 29. Rb5



Position after: 29. ♖b5

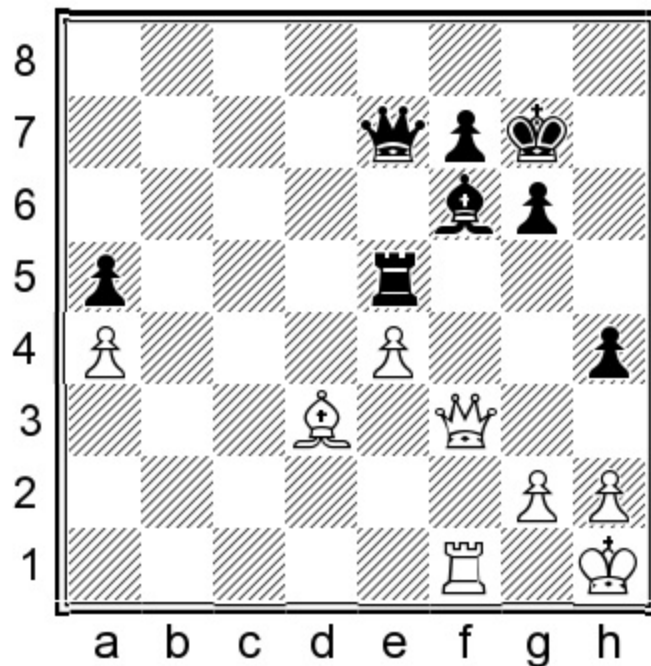
29...e5!

This move leaves White with a weak isolated pawn once again, this time on the e-file. White will have to push e3-e4 in order to keep it, making the dark squares around the pawn (and White's King) weak.

30.dxe5 ♜xd1+ 31.♞xd1 ♜c5 32.e4 ♜xe5 33.♙d3 h5

33...f5 34.♞e1 Karpov is not eager to open the 7th rank, because then his King would experience a cold draught along it.

34.♞f3 h4 35.♞f1 ♙f6 36.b3 b5 37.♚h1 ♜c5 38.♞e2 ♜e5 39.♞f3 a5 40.a4 bxa4 41.bxa4



Position after: 41.bxa4

You might assume that this position still has a large drawing margin, as a result of the opposite-colored Bishops. However, in that case you would be wrong! With the major pieces on the board, opposite-colored Bishops just increase the range of attacking possibilities. Each side's Bishop attacks squares that the other's can't defend and so the attacker is, for practical purposes, almost working with an extra piece. In this case the dark squares around the white King are extremely weak; as befits a World Champion, Karpov is well capable of exploiting this.

41...♖c5!

Activating the Rook to the 3rd or 2nd rank in order to create a devastating attack.

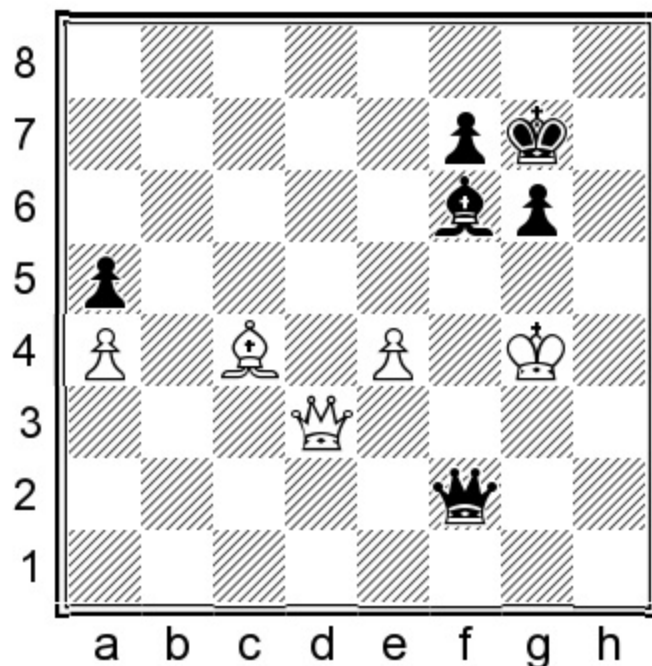
42.♗b5 ♖c3 43.♜f4 h3!

The first blow against the white King.

44.♖f3 hxg2+ 45.♔xg2 ♗e5 46.♜g4 ♖c2+ 47.♖f2 ♖xf2+ 48.♔xf2 ♗xh2 49.♔g2 ♗e5 50.♗c6 ♜c5 51.♗b5 ♗d4 52.♜f4 ♜c2+ 53.♔h3 ♗f6 54.♔g3 ♜b2

With the threat of ♗f6-e5.

55.♔f3 ♗d4 56.♜g3 ♜d2 57.♔g4 ♜d1+ 58.♜f3 ♜g1+ 59.♜g3 ♜h1 60.♜f3 ♜h2 61.♗c4 ♗f6 62.♜d3 ♜g2+ 63.♔f4 ♜f2+ 64.♔g4



Position after: 64. ♔g4

64... ♖e5

Black is building a mating net around White's King.

65. ♘f3 ♙g1+

And White resigned, due to 65... ♙g1+ 66. ♔h4 ♘h2+ 67. ♔g4 [67. ♘h3 ♙f2+ 68. ♔g4 ♙f4#] 67... ♙h5#

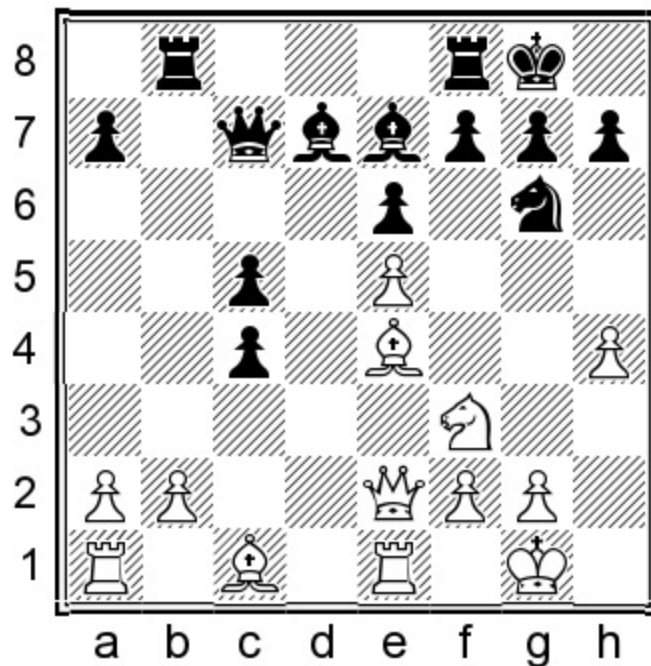
0-1

Korchnoi was one of the few who could handle positions without the initiative well and was a gifted counterattacker. Being the 'Angstgegner' of Mikhail Tal, a thorough-and-thorough attacker, Korchnoi had a huge lifetime plus score against the 8th World Champion (+13-4=27).

Tal, Mihail (2620)

Korchnoi, Viktor (2670)

Moscow 1971



16...♔h8!!

Mikhail Tal (photo Jos Suttmuller)

Fantastic prophylaxis against h4-h5! Black can take now on e5 as the discovered check on h7 is out of the question. Not good was 16...♖fd8?, as after 17.h5 ♘f8 18.h6 g6 19.♙xc4 Black would have been left with weakened black squares around the King and an isolated c-pawn.



16...♔h8!! 17.♙g5

A) 17.h5?! only helps Black after 17...♘xe5 18.h6 f5±;

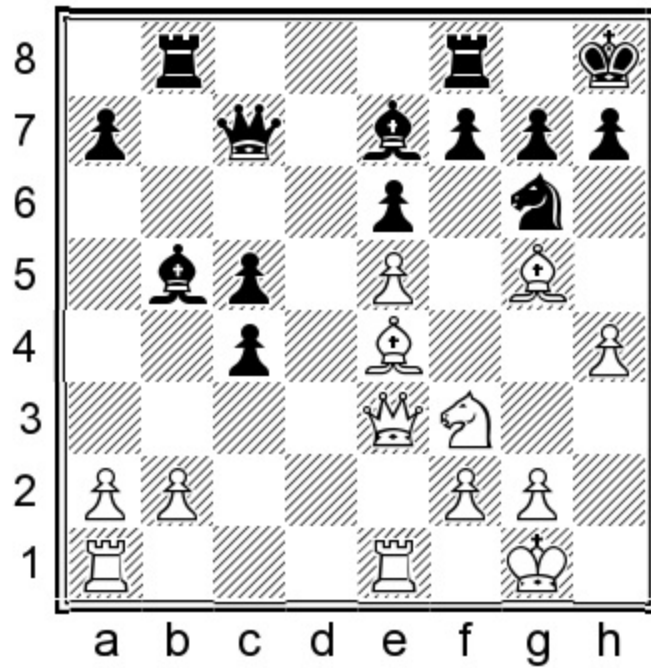
B) 17.♙c2 defending e5 and renewing the threat of h4-h5 is countered by: 17...♙c6! 18.h5 ♙xf3! After this exchange, the Knight on g6 can escape by ♘h4 or ♘xe5. 19.♙xf3 ♘xe5 20.♙g3 ♙d6 when Black is material up.

17...♙b5!

Keeping the pawn on c4 while clearing the 7th rank.

18.♙e3

18.h5 ♘xe5 19.♙xe7 [19.♘xe5? ♙xg5±] 19...♘xf3+ 20.♙xf3 ♙xe7+ when White does not have sufficient compensation for the sacrificed material.

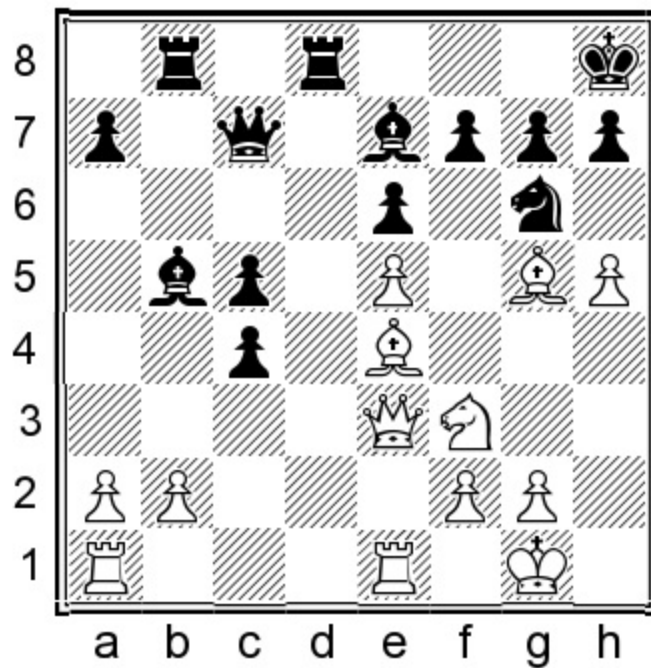


Position after: 18. ♔e3

18...♖fd8!

Primarily making place for the knight retreat to f8 after h5, but also in general terms this is a healthy developing move.

19.h5



Position after: 19.h5

Because of Korchnoi's subtle 18th move, this pawn push doesn't come with as much effect as if the Rook had still been on f8.

19...♙xg5

Black's shouldn't allow the weakening of the dark squares around the King. 19...♞f8? 20.h6! g6 21.♚f4 is too dangerous for Black.

20.♞xg5

20.♚xg5 h6! a subtle intermediate move, not allowing White to play h5-h6. 21.♚g3 ♞e7 when Black has a large advantage due to his extra pawn.

20...♞f8

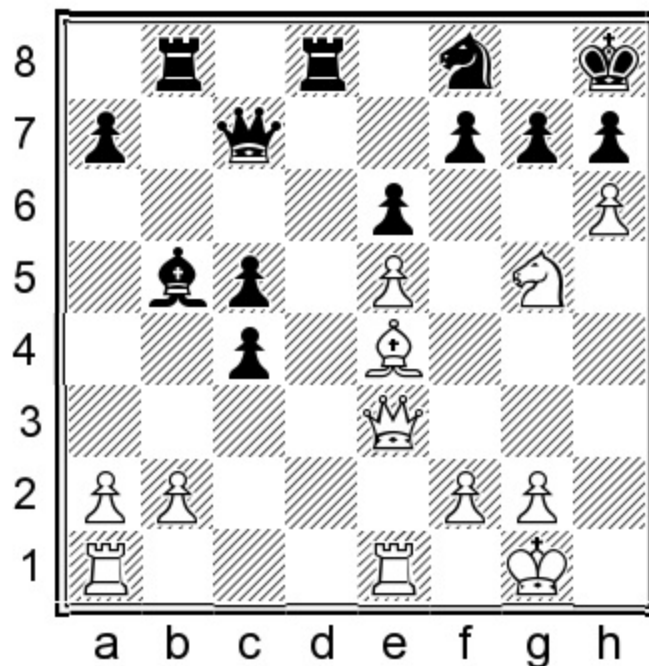
From f8, the Knight defends h7. The Queen on c7 fulfils an important defensive function along the 7th rank.

20...♞xe5 21.♚f4 threatening 22.♚xe5, ♚xe5 and 23.♞xf7+, leads to unclear play.

21.♞ad1

Now that Tal refrains from h5-h6, he is simply worse because Black consolidates his kingside by means of h7-h6.

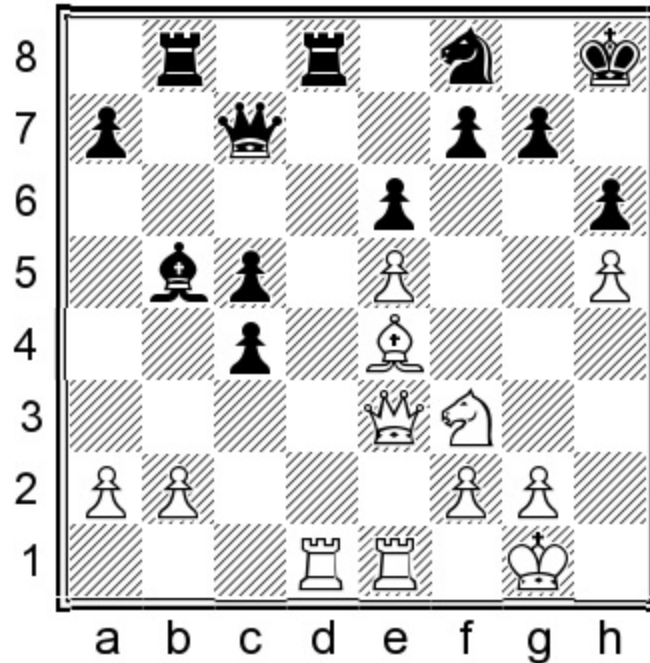
What if White would have played the obvious 21.h6 ?



Analysis after: 21.h6

Black would have responded with 21...f5!! The Queen joins the defense! [21...gxf6 couldn't really be recommended, as after 22.♘xh7 ♘xh7 23.♙xh6 f5 24.exf6 White's attack looks too dangerous] 22.exf6 gxf6 23.♙f3! ♚e7 [23...fxg5 24.♙f6+→] 24.a4?! ♔e8! and after the knight retreat to h3, Black takes over the initiative.

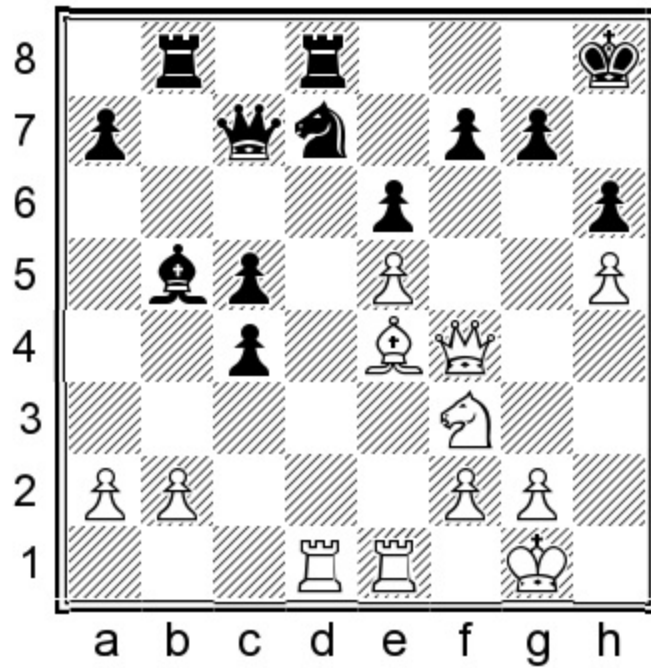
21...h6! 22.♘f3



Position after: 22.♘f3

White has to retreat his attacking troops, and no longer has chances of weakening Black's kingside with h5-h6. Due to the sudden lack of threats against his King, Korchnoi decides to grab the initiative for himself.

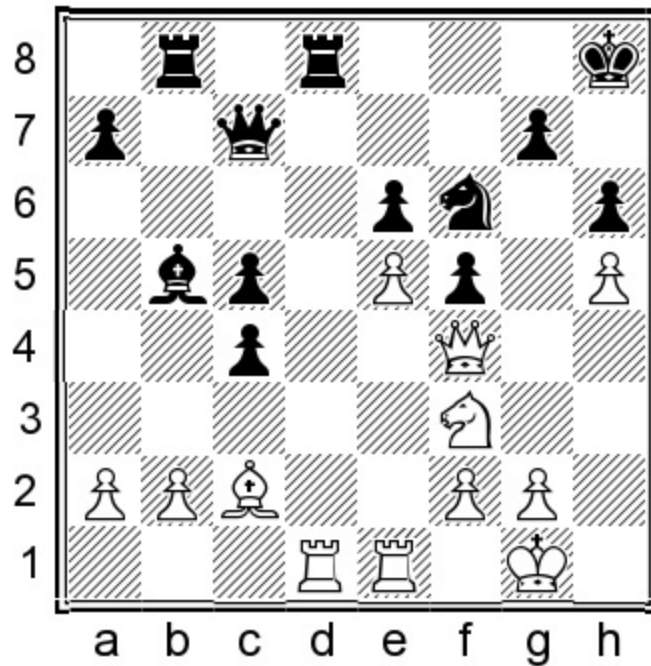
22...♘d7! 23.♙f4



Position after: 23. ♖f4

23. ♕b1, with the idea of setting up a battery on the b1-h7 diagonal with the ♕ & ♖, fails to 23... ♗c6! preventing ♖e4.

23...f5! 24. ♕c2 ♘f6!



Position after: 24... ♘f6!

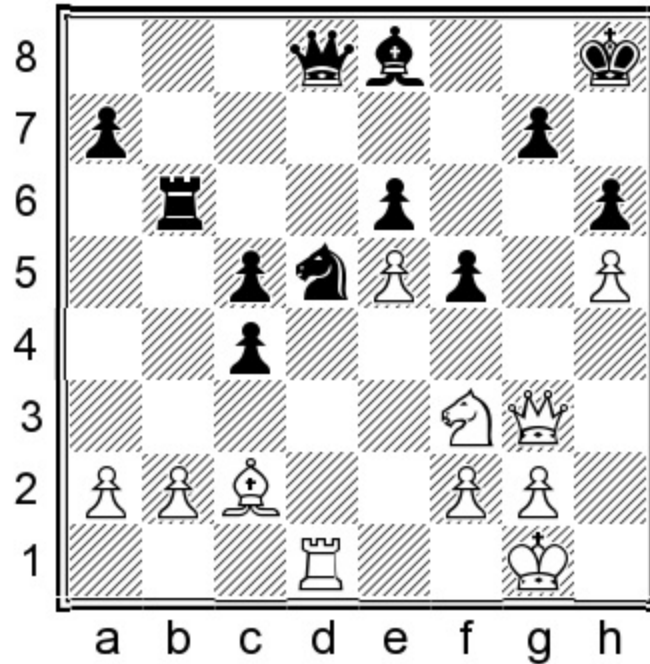
Black makes optimal use of the fact that the Queen is pinned. The Knight moves to d5 while

temporarily preventing g2-g4. The other route 24...♖b6 25.g4!? offers White some attacking chances.

25.♞d6 ♜d5 26.♞g3 ♞b6!

White's best piece on the board is about to be exchanged.

27.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 28.♞d1 ♞e8!

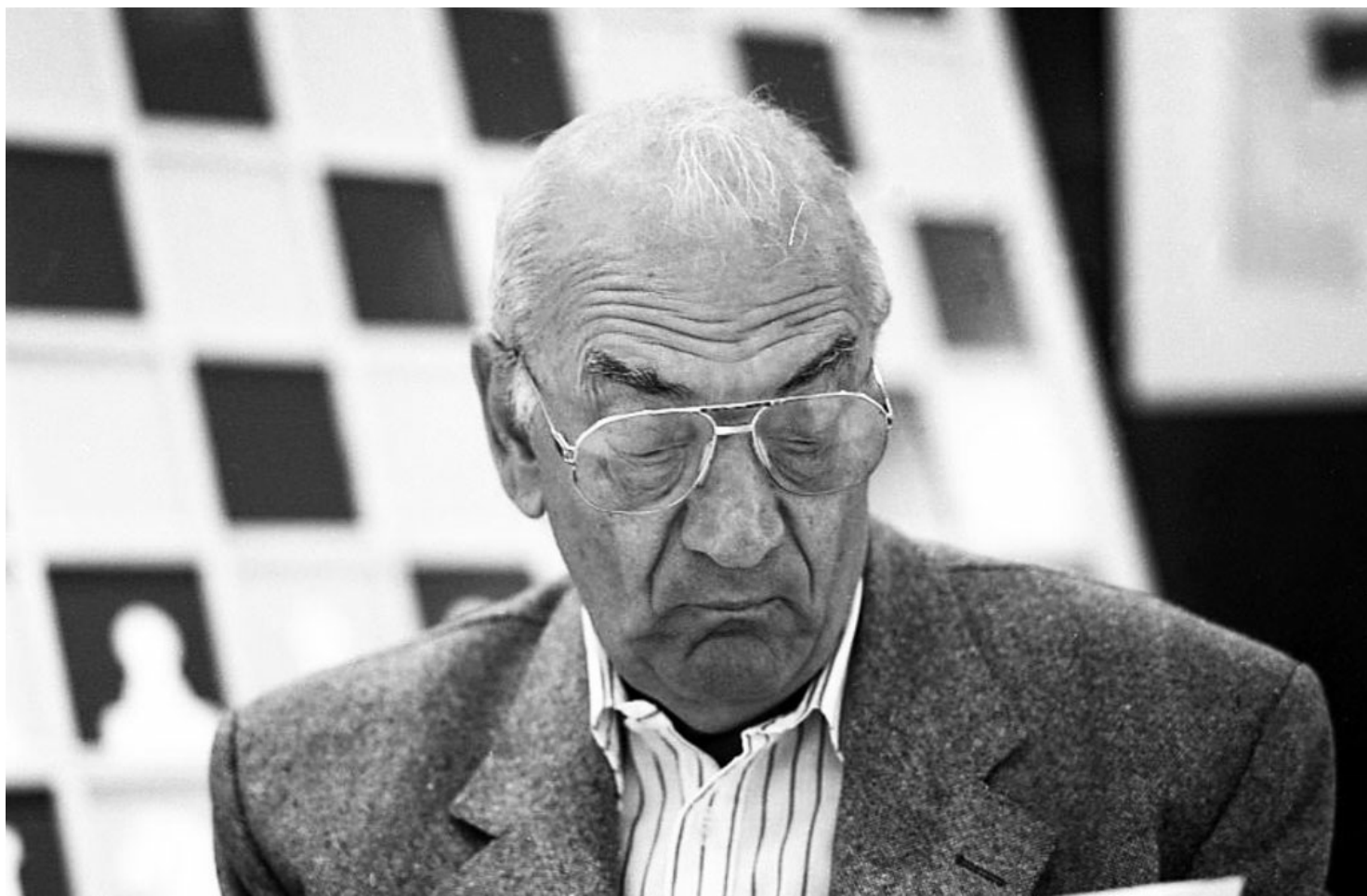


Position after: 28...♞e8!

Now that White's attack has been repelled, the h5-pawn is just a sitting duck, ready to be picked off. We can conclude that Korchnoi's defensive resourcefulness has led to triumph.

29.b3 cxb3 30.♞xb3 ♞xh5 31.♞c1 ♞b4 32.♞c4 ♞xf3 33.♞xf3 ♞g5 34.♞d1 ♞f4 35.♞xd5 ♞d4 36.♞c2 ♞xd5 37.♞e1 ♞xe5 38.♞xe5 ♞xe5 39.♞a4 ♞e1+ 40.♞h2 ♞xf2

0-1



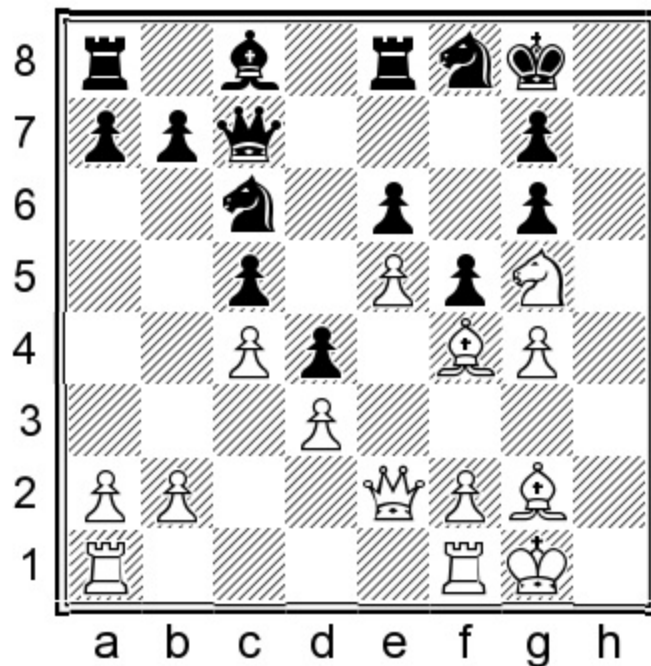
Viktor Korchnoi (photo Jos Sutmuller)

As mentioned before, Karjakin is one of the most skilful defenders of our time. In the next game from the FIDE Candidates he had to face an aggressive assault on his king from Svidler.

Svidler, Peter (2758)

Karjakin, Sergey (2766)

Khanty-Mansiysk 2014



Sergey Karjakin (photo Harry Gielen)

Svidler's last move was 18.g4, opening various lines and diagonals useful for his attack. More specifically, he intends to place his Queen on the h-file via f3. Moreover, after 19.gxf5, gxf5 20.♔d5+ is a direct threat to deal with. Karjakin managed to parry all the threats by means of prophylactic maneuvering.

18...♞d8!

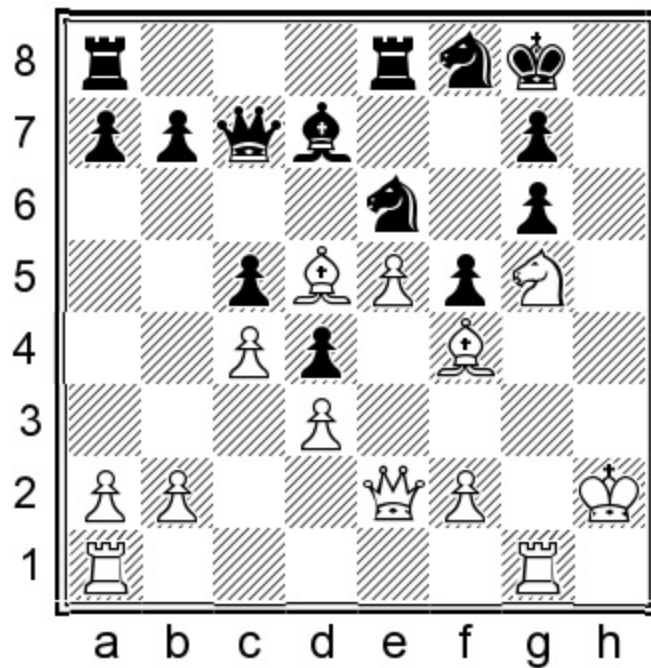
This prophylactic knight move anticipates the aforementioned threat. Karjakin keeps a firm grip on e6 and he wants to exchange the white Knight by playing ♞d8-f7.

19.♖h2 ♔d7 20.gxf5 exf5 21.♔d5+ ♞de6

The Knights keep a firm grip on the blockade square e6 and the surrounding weakened kingside.

22.♞g1





Position after: 22. ♖g1

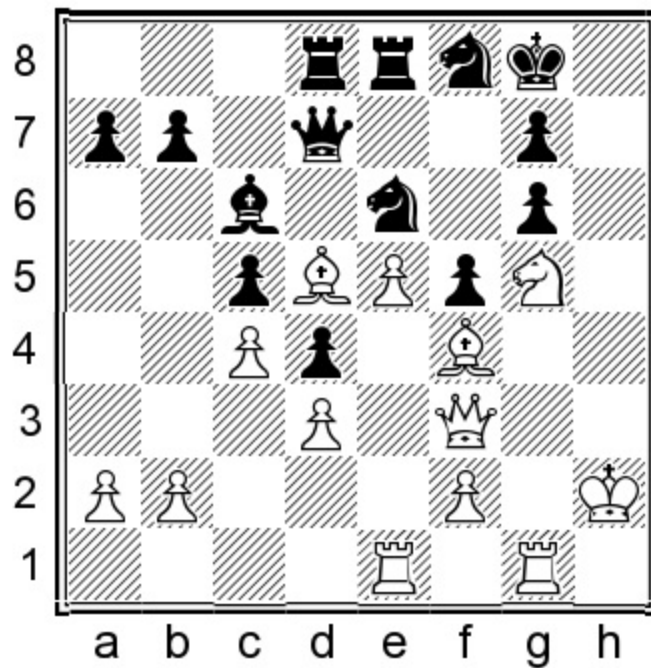
22... ♗c6!

Now White's strong Bishop on d5 has to be neutralised.

23. ♕f3 ♜ad8

23... ♗xd5!? 24. cxd5 ♞xf4 25. d6 ♛c6 26. ♕xf4 ♞e6

24. ♜ae1 ♛d7



Position after: 24... ♔d7

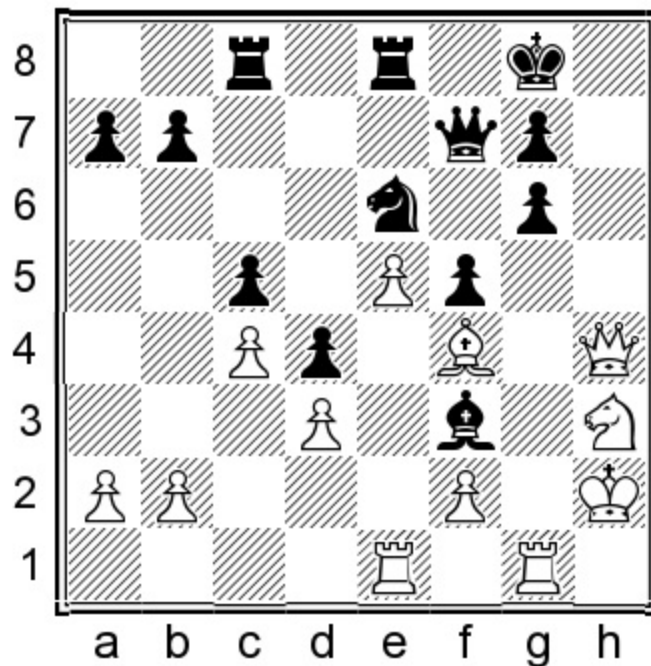
25. ♖xe6+ ♜xe6 26. ♗g3 ♝c8!

A nice prophylactic move: after ♜xg5, ♖xg5, the Rook on d8 is no longer hanging.

27. ♜h3 ♗f7 28. ♗h4

28. ♗xg6 ♗xg6 29. ♝xg6 ♜f7 30. ♝gg1 ♝h8 and Black takes over the attack.

28... ♖f3!



Position after: 28...♔f3!

The Bishop comes to the aid of the defense on the kingside. On top of that it will disturb the coordination of White's pieces after a future ♗g4.

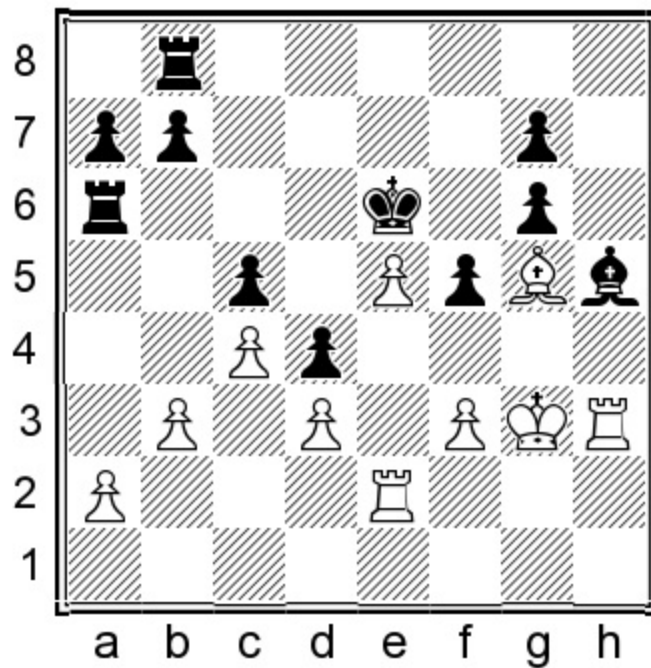
29.♗d2 ♗g4 30.♖g3 ♚e7!

This move isn't just an offer of a queen trade, but it also makes space for the King on f7; after the King goes there Black can swing his Rooks to the open h-file and take over control of the kingside.

31.♚xe7

31.♘g5 ♘xg5 32.♗xg5 ♚d7 33.♗f4 ♔f7! 34.♔g1 ♖h8

31...♖xe7 32.♘g5 ♘xg5 33.♗xg5 ♖e6 34.f3 ♗h5 35.b3 ♔f7 36.♖h3 ♖ce8 37.♗f4 ♖a6 38.♖e2 ♔e6 39.♔g3 ♖b8 40.♗g5?!



Position after: 40. ♔g5?!

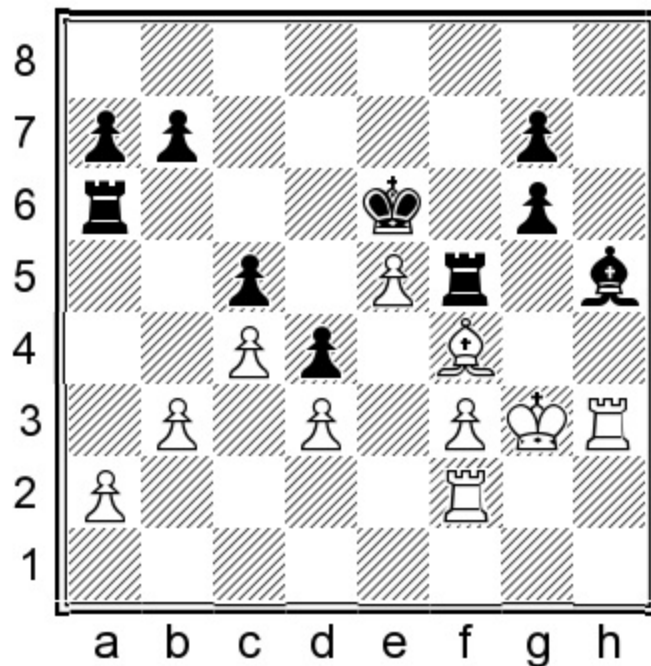
40...f4+!

Karjakin immediately strikes back, exploiting Svidler's inaccurate last move.

41. ♖xf4

41. ♖xf4 ♜f8+ 42. ♔e4 ♜f5 when Black is winning material.

41...♜f8 42. ♜f2 ♜f5!



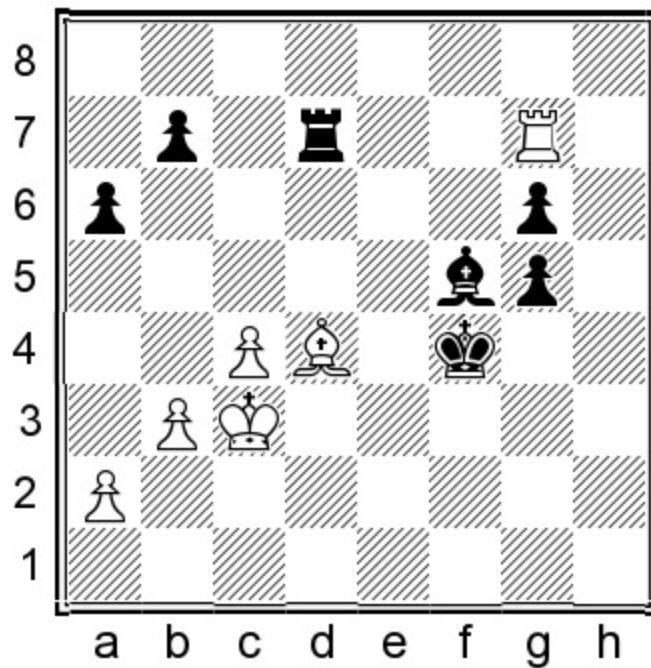
Position after: 42... Bf5!

With the idea of ...g5. White can't hold on to his pawn on e5.

43. ♖c1 ♜xe5 44. ♜h1 ♔f7 45. ♙f4 ♜f5 46. ♙b8 ♜e6! 47. ♜h4

47. ♙xa7? ♜e3 48. ♜hf1 ♜xd3--+

47... ♜e3 48. ♜f4 a6 49. ♙d6 ♜xf4 50. ♔xf4 ♔f6 51. ♙xc5 g5+ 52. ♔g3 ♜xd3 53. ♔g2 ♙e8 54. ♔f1 ♙h5
 55. ♔e2 ♜e3+ 56. ♔d2 ♔e5 57. ♜g2 ♔f4 58. ♙xd4 ♜e7 59. ♜e2 ♜d7 60. ♔c3 ♙xf3 61. ♜e8 ♙e4 62. ♜f8+
 ♙f5 63. ♜g8 g6 64. ♜g7

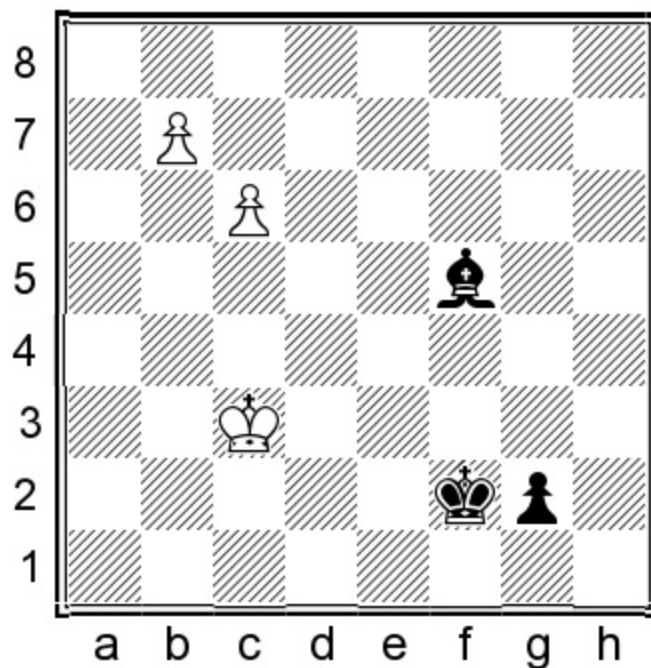


Position after: 64. ♖g7

64... ♜xd4!

The last doubled g-pawn makes it even harder for White to stop the front one.

65. ♔xd4 b6 66. ♔c3 ♔e3 67. ♜b7 g4 68. ♜xb6 g3 69. ♜d6 g2 70. ♜d1 g5 71. b4 ♔f2 72. a4 g1=♚ 73. ♜xg1 ♔xg1 74. b5 axb5 75. axb5 g4 76. c5 g3 77. c6 g2 78. b6 ♔f2 79. b7



Position after: 79.b7

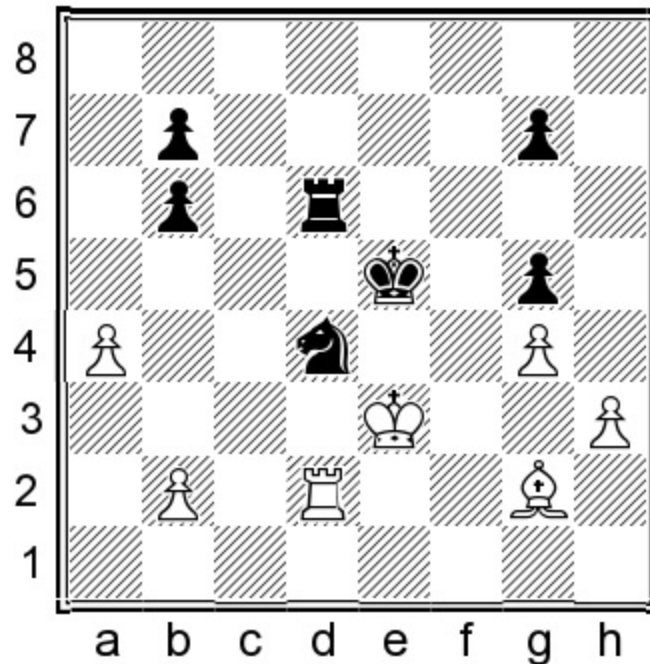
79...g1=♚ 80.b8=♚ ♚c1+ 81.♔d4 ♚e3+ 82.♔c4 ♚e6+ and the white King is forced to the b-file, after which he is X-rayed. 0-1

Section 5.3 – Waiting strategy

With the knowledge that worse or even seemingly hopeless positions are often defended in practice, let's arm ourselves to the teeth, dear readers. As well as the concrete details of each position (which must be calculated), it makes sense to talk about some general strategies applicable to worse positions, with the aim of making the attacker's life as hard as possible. One such strategy is the waiting strategy.

As you might expect, this strategy is applicable in cases where your defensive setup is already optimal and there is no further way to improve the position of your pieces. With the waiting strategy you avoid heading for forced continuations or simplifications (which tend to simplify the opponent's conversion).

Tal, Mikhail
Korchnoi, Viktor
 Moscow 1973



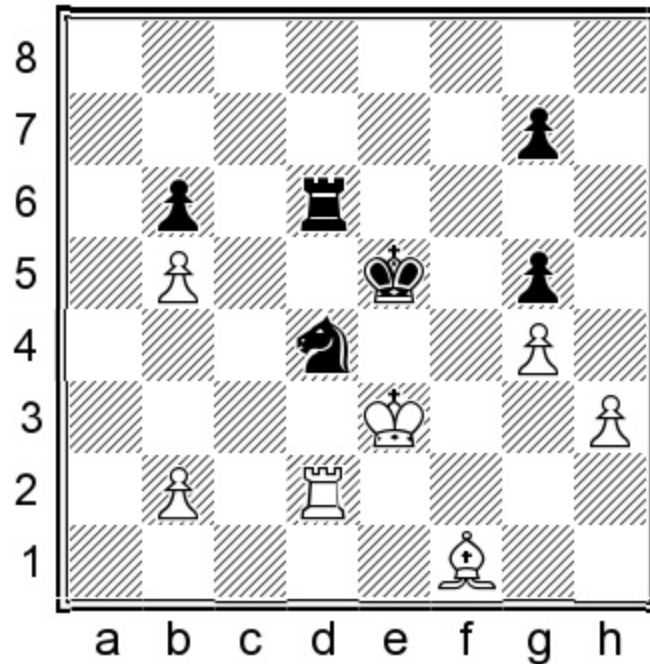
Here is the key moment of the game. After a lot of effort Korchnoi has managed to stabilize the central outpost for his knight on d4, at the same time defusing White's threats on the queenside.

35...b5!

Black had to react by sacrificing a pawn. Korchnoi gives up a pawn under the most favorable conditions, delivering Tal doubled pawns which can now be halted. Giving up the pawn without forcing White's doubling of the b-pawns, can't be recommended: 35...♞d8 is simply bad because of 36.♞xb7 followed up by b4 and a5.

After 35...♖d7? 36.♗xb7! is winning for White.

35...b5! 36.axb5 b6 37.♗f1



Position after: 37.♗f1

Now that the b5-pawn is a weakness requiring protection, White's Bishop has to take on a more passive role.

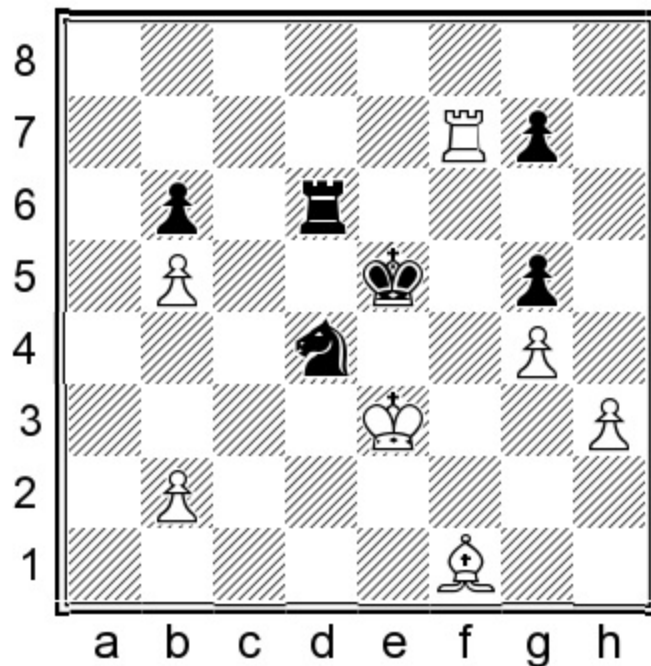
37...♖d8!

Korchnoi has reached the optimal squares for his pieces, and can now just await further developments. In order to create something, Tal has to relieve the Rook of its defensive tasks. Thereafter, Korchnoi will obtain counter chances.

38.♗f2 ♖d6 39.♖d2

White could have played 39.♗f7 here instead of on move 41, of course.

39...♖d8 40.♗f2 ♖d6 41.♗f7



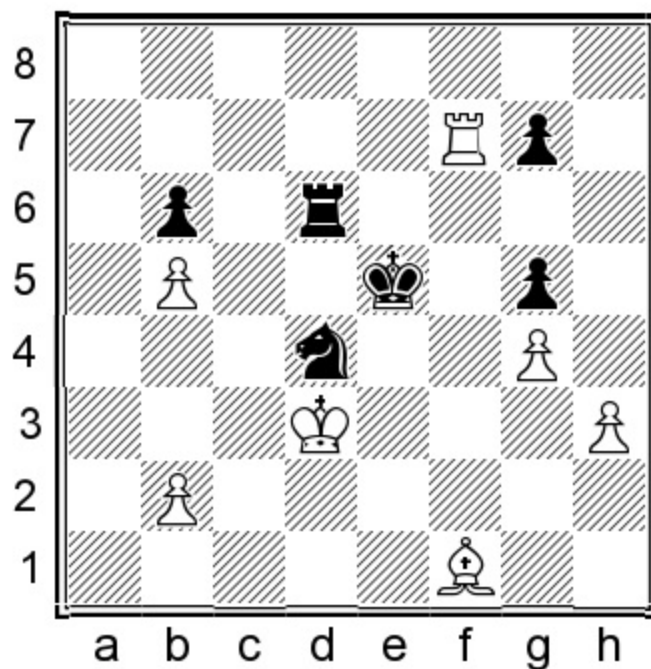
Position after: 41. ♖f7

41... ♜c2+! 42. ♔e2 ♜d4+ 43. ♔e3 ♜c2+ 44. ♔e2 ♜d4+

White has a difficult choice to make regarding how he avoids the unwelcome attentions of the d4-Knight. Should the King go to d3 or to f2?

45. ♔d3

45. ♔f2 ♜f6+ 46. ♖xf6 gxf6 and Black has achieved a fortress.

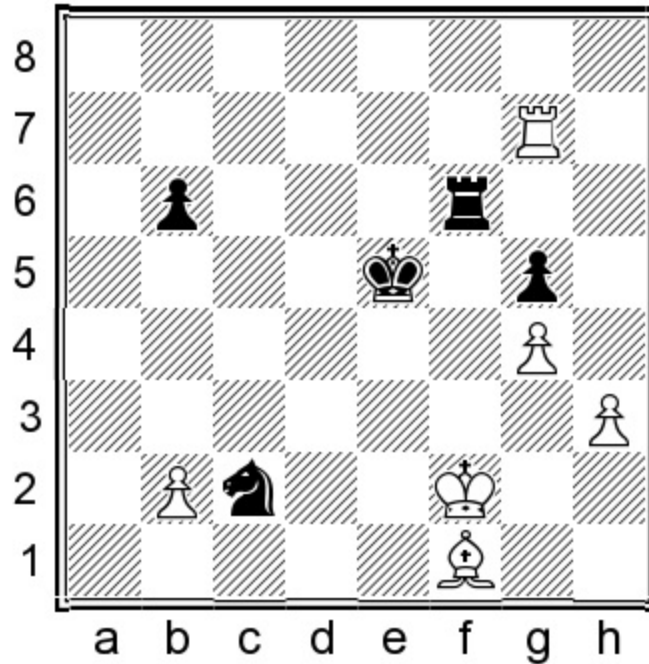


Position after: 45. ♔d3

45... ♖f5+

This move may not be strictly optimal but Black always remained within the drawing margin.

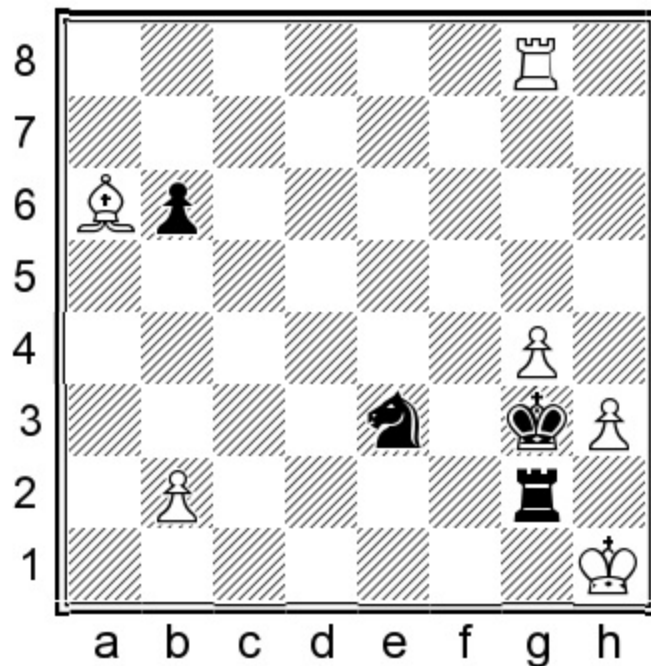
A) 45... ♖xb5+!? 46. ♔e3 ♖d4 47. ♖xg7 ♖c2+! All of a sudden, the King is driven off from the center. The collaboration of the Black pieces in this line fascinates your author. 48. ♔f2 ♖f6+!



Analysis after: 48... ♖f6+!

This is a pivotal point in the analysis of this ending. White is a pawn up, but as the following lines show, Black's activity counterweighs this. 49. ♔g1 [49. ♔e2 ♖d4+ 50. ♔e1 ♖f3+ White finds it very hard to run out of the checks. 51. ♔d1 ♖f4= the active King brings Black sufficient compensation.] 49... ♖f4! The combination of ♖♗&♔, makes that White should be very cautious here in order not to be mated. 50. ♔h2 ♖e3 51. ♖a6 ♔f3

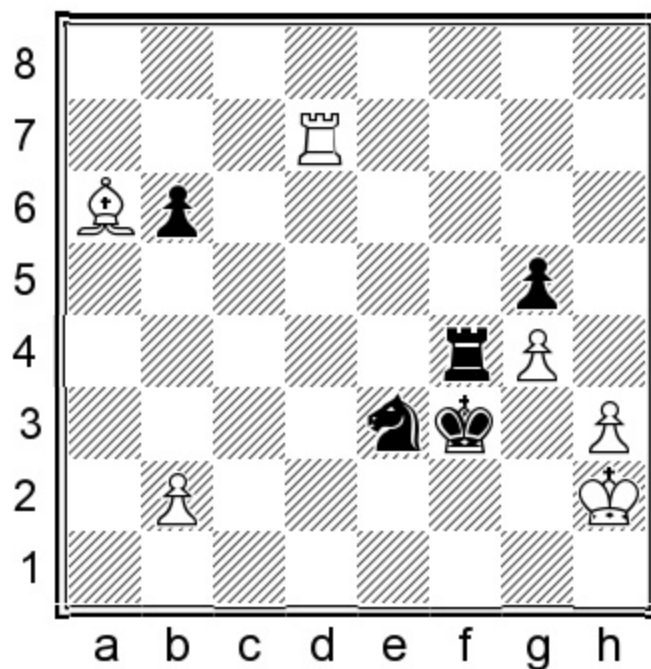
A1) 52. ♖xg5 ♖d6! being two pawns down, but White's Rook is temporarily out of the game and his King is exposed. 53. ♖g8 ♖d2+ 54. ♔g1 ♖g2+ 55. ♔h1 ♔g3!



Analysis after: 55...♔g3!

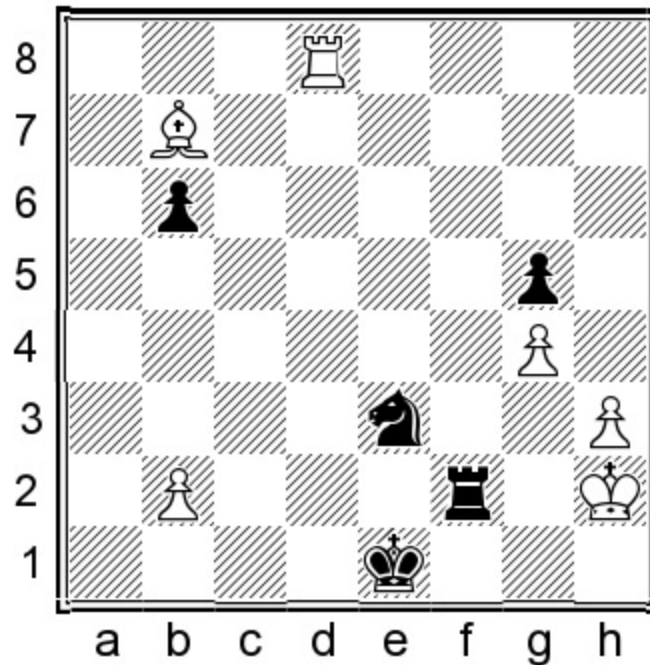
A nice picture, showing that even in the far ending the counterattack can be ultimately rewarded. Therefore, only one inaccurate move of White is required, for example: 56.♖e8 [56.♖f8!! the only defense for White. 56...♘d1 threatening ♘f2+. 57.♖f3+!! ♔xf3 58.♗b7+ winning back the Rook. The ensuing endgame is drawish. 58...♔f4 59.♔xg2 ♘xb2=] 56...♘d1! when there can't be done anything against the mating threat, but giving up the exchange. Black is winning.

A2) 52.♖d7 ♖f4!



Analysis after: 52...♖f4!

Black intends ♖f4-b4xb2+ which will render the White King in danger. All Black's pieces are optimally activated, as a result he equalized despite the material deficit. 53.♙b7+ ♔f2 54.♞d2+ ♔e1 doesn't bring White anything. The most probable outcome would be the repetition of moves after 55.♞d8 ♖f2+



Analysis after: 55... ♖f2+

56.♔g1 [56.♔g3?? is a mate, after 56...♘f1#] 56...♞f1+.

B) 45...♞f6! might also have been playable. 46.♞e7+ ♔d6 47.♞b7 ♔e5 the Black King and Knight maintain their active position.

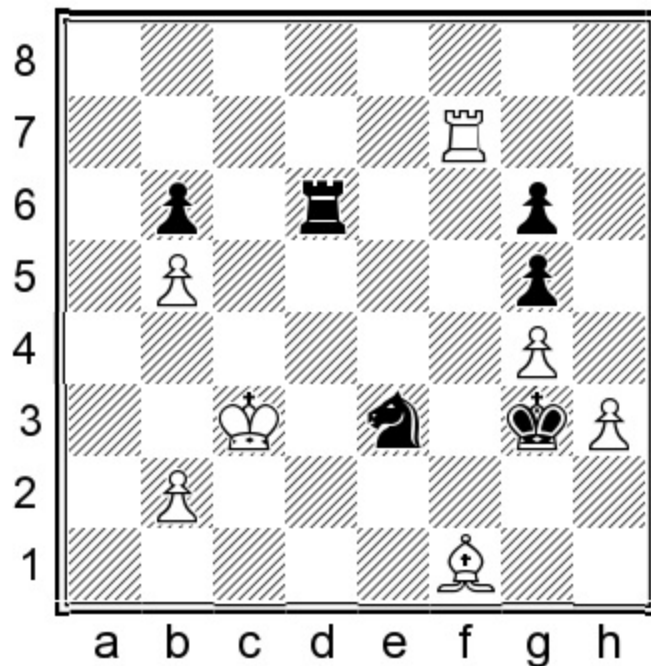
46.♔c3 ♘e3 47.♙c4 g6 48.♞c7 ♘g2 49.♞e7+

After 49.♞c6 just 49...♘f4, hitting h3.

49...♔f4 50.♙f1 ♘e3

For Korchnoi, the activity of his pieces is all that counts. The Knight takes in a perfect position on the middle of the board. As do his other two pieces.

51.♞f7+ ♔g3



Position after: 51...♔g3

White can't claim any advantage, Black's pieces are too active.

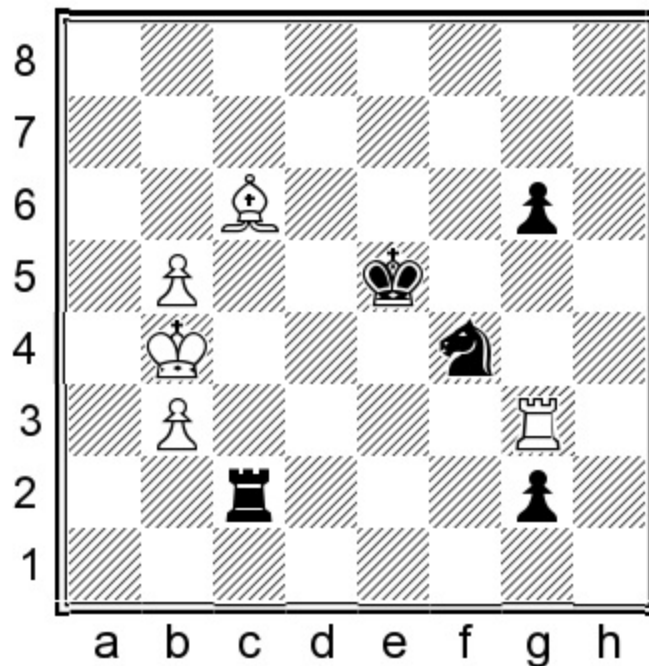
52.♙d3 ♜d5+ 53.♔c4 ♜f4

53...♔xh3! is giving Black even winning chances. For instance, 54.♞f3+ ♔xg4 55.♙e2 ♔h4 Stepping out of any discovered checks. Probably Tal counted on 56.♞d3 But Black keeps his material advantage after 56...♞e6! attacking the Bishop. The rook ending is better for Black.

54.♙e4 ♔xh3 55.♙c6 ♔xg4 56.♞b7

Both sides have their doubled passed pawns on the b- and g-file. The position is balanced.

56...♔f5 57.♞xb6 g4 58.♞a6 g3 59.♞a3 g2 60.♞g3 ♞d2 61.b3 ♞c2+ 62.♔b4 ♔e5



Position after: 62...♔e5

Even in the far ending, Korchnoi pays attention to keep the activity and harmony of his pieces intact.

63.♖g5+

Trying to move the Bishop from the assault of the Rook, in order to push his b-pawn. 63.♙a8 ♔d6
64.b6 ♔d7 The King is in time to stop the b-pawn.

63...♔d6 64.♖g4

Korchnoi's ability to create counterplay is a skill which should be taken by heart by every proficient defender.

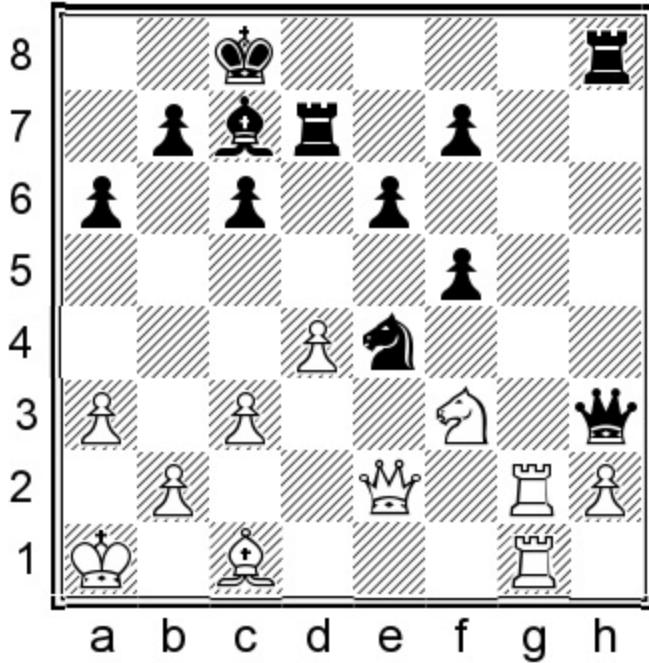
½-½

Emanuel Lasker

The waiting strategy might in some cases help you 'psych out' your opponent; he may feel he is not making progress, upsetting his emotional equilibrium. The previously smooth course of the game may have created unrealistic expectations of how easily he would win, since you have no intention of rolling over and dying.

Instead, you should maintain your composure and avoid making concessions right up until the moment when circumstances are ripe for a counterstrike. Lasker demonstrated exactly this when he found himself in dire straits against Nimzowitsch.

Lasker, Emanuel
Nimzowitsch, Aaron

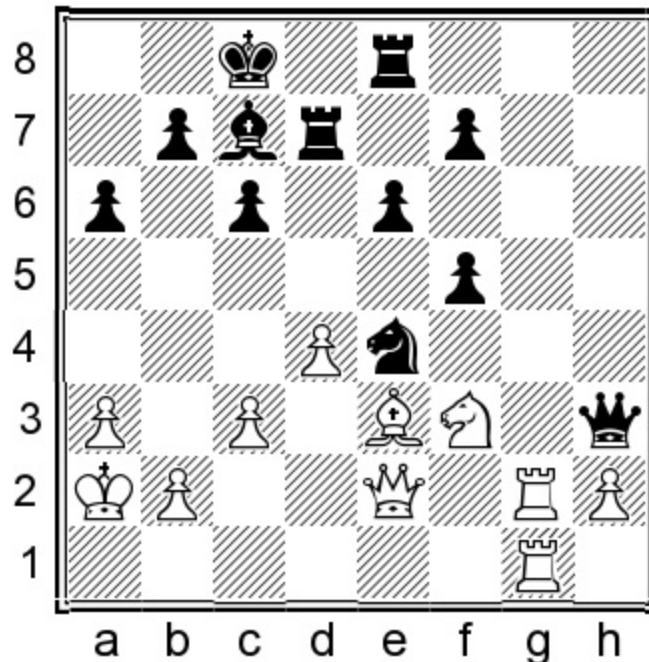


Despite being a pawn down, Lasker has positioned all his pieces perfectly, while his opponent finds it hard to create any play. Thus, Lasker should avoid acting hastily here. Let Nimzowitsch make the first move!

28. ♔e3 ♜hd8 29. ♕a2 ♜h8 30. ♕a1 ♜hd8 31. ♕a2

A genuine psychological encounter is taking place, as both players are sitting on a fence.

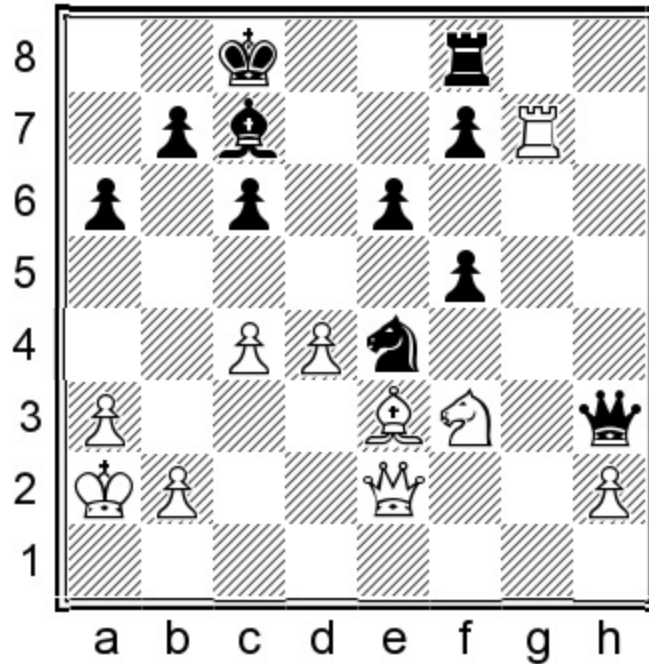
31... ♜e8



Position after: 31...♖e8

Lasker had been waiting for this moment. After Nimzowitsch's last move, the natural plan of pushing his central majority was about to be set in motion and this demanded action from Lasker. The action he chose was to exchange one pair of Rooks, after which Black's King will become more exposed and the pawn advance becomes more difficult to accomplish.

32.♖g8 ♖xg8 33.♖xg8+ ♖d8 34.♖g7 ♖d7 35.♖g8+ ♖d8 36.♖g7 ♖f8 37.c4!?



Position after: 37.c4!?

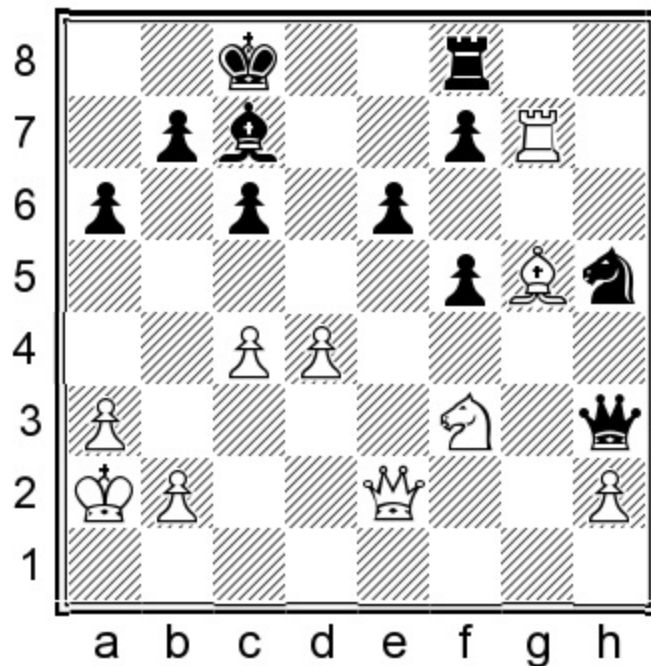
This insidious move makes a possible Queen-manoeuvre ♕e2-d3-b3, hitting Black's King's pawn possible.

37...♟f6

Black is in doubt what to do and refrains from conducting a clear-cut plan.

37...♞h8! is a strong attempt to expel the intruder on g7. 38.♞g2 [After 38.♞g2, Black should have found ♖g8 (38...♖g8) with the plan to exchange the last pair of Rooks. The h-pawn is not as dangerous as it looks at first sight, e.g. 39.h4, ♖g4! (39...♖g4!).] 38...♟f6 39.♖g5 ♟g4 40.♙c1 ♙d8 winning material. However, Lasker's tough and dour defence seems to have upset Nimzowitsch to the extent that the latter lost the thread.

38.♙g5! ♟h5?



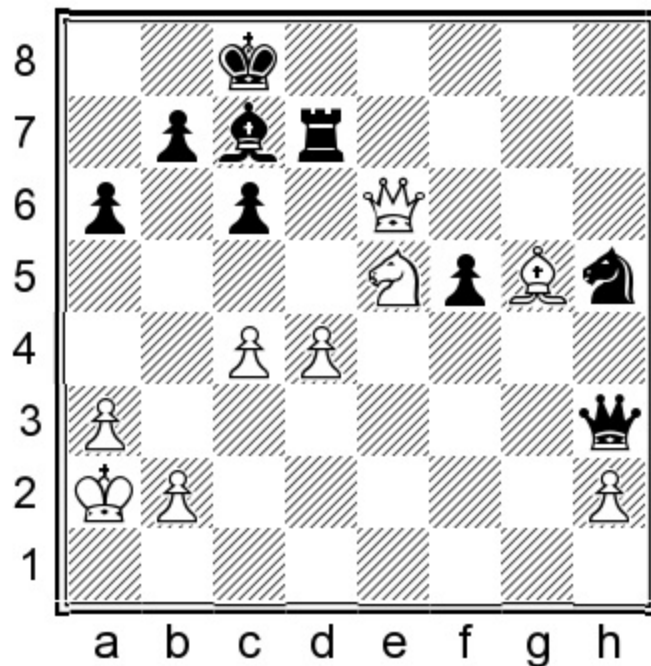
Position after: 38... ♖h5?

“This is what the wily old fox was waiting for!” (Keres) While the inaccurate text move allowed a tactic after which the draw is assured for Lasker, the position was already hard to win for Nimzowitsch. For instance, after 38... ♖e4 White can play 39. ♕e7 ♜e8 40. ♜xf7!? with unclear play.

39. ♜xf7!

A refined sacrifice securing a draw.

39... ♜xf7 40. ♕xe6+ ♜d7 41. ♖e5

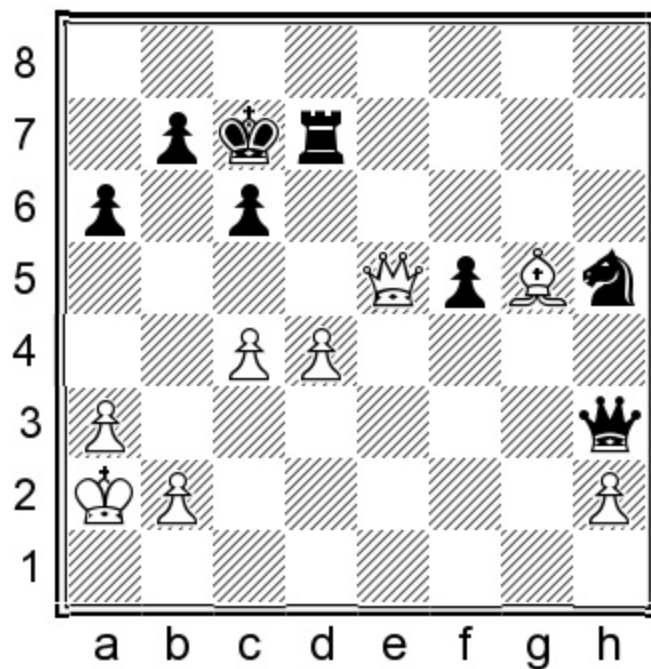


Position after: 41. ♖e5

By the pin Black's Bishop has to give up on the defense of the King.

41... ♗xe5 42. ♕e8+

The players agreed to a draw, as after 42. ♕e8+ ♔c7 43. ♕xe5+



Analysis after: 43. ♕xe5+

43... ♔b6 [43... ♖d6?? is even losing, after 44. c5!] 44. ♕c5+ ♔c7 45. ♕e5+ the Black King can't escape

the checks.

½-½

Nimzowitsch had a large advantage for a long time. He could have made the most of this by following his strategic plan logically. However, this doesn't affect the importance of Lasker's defensive strategy in any kind of way.

As Keres pointed out in his book:

“But one can again and again set the opponent difficult problems and this Lasker really has done with great skill. In actual practice it often occurs that the player with the advantage plunges for inadequate methods if the solution for the problem is made sufficiently difficult for him the whole time.”

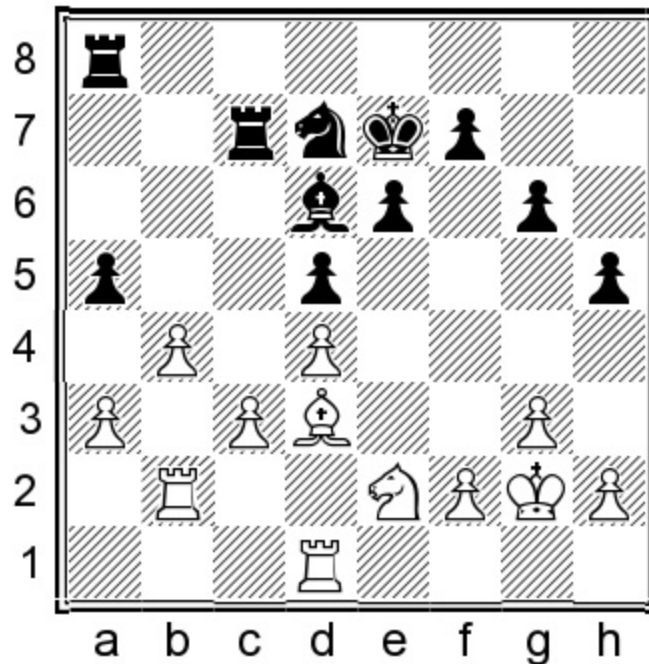


Paul Keres, a chess genius and pioneer of elaborate defensive strategies.

This waiting strategy can prove useful when our opponent has obtained a big advantage but is finding it hard to discover a promising continuation. Small advantages sometimes have a frustrating effect like this; the attacker is thinking bigger and searches prematurely for ambitious tactics and concrete ways to convert. Meanwhile, sometimes as a defender you need to pause for a moment, evaluate all the subtleties and become the immovable object rather than the unstoppable force.

In the next example, Dutch Grandmaster L'Ami waited with his king no fewer than 14 times in a row!

Hambleton, Aman (2484)



30...♔f6!

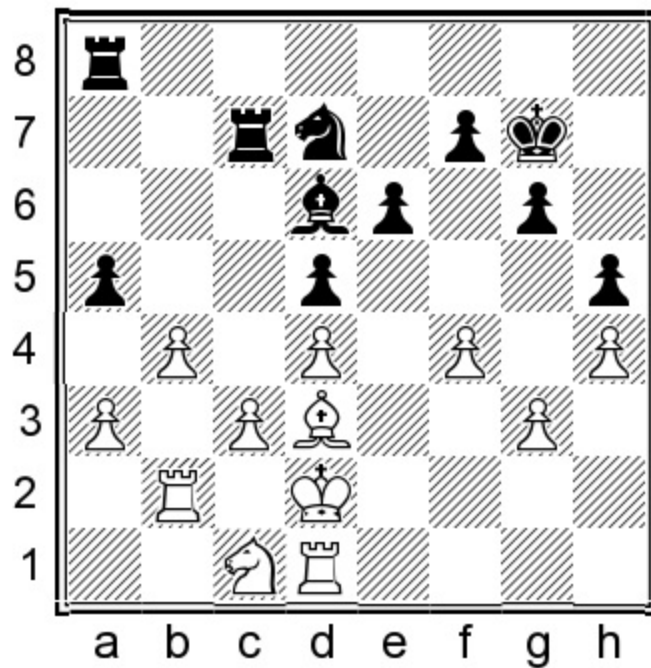
Black await the affairs. Let White undertake action, risking to expose himself!

Regardless of the practical effect and eventual success of Black's waiting strategy, L'Ami considered 30...g5 to be a sound alternative. This move grabs important space on the kingside during the time White must spend preparing on the queenside. 31.♖db1 axb4 32.axb4 ♖ca7 when Black has counterplay along the a-file and the c- and b-pawns are blocked after ♜b6.

30...♔f6! 31.♖db1 ♔e7! 32.♖d1 ♔f6

I will not proceed giving exclamation marks for the remaining 12 waiting moves!

33.♖db1 ♔e7 34.♖b3 ♔f6 35.h4 ♔e7 36.♖3b2 ♔f6 37.♖d1 ♔e7 38.♖e1 ♔f6 39.♖d1 ♔e7 40.♖db1 ♔f6 41.♔f1 ♔e7 42.♖d1 ♔f6 43.♔e1 ♔e7 44.♔d2 ♔f6 45.f4 ♔g7 46.♜c1



Position after: 46. ♖c1

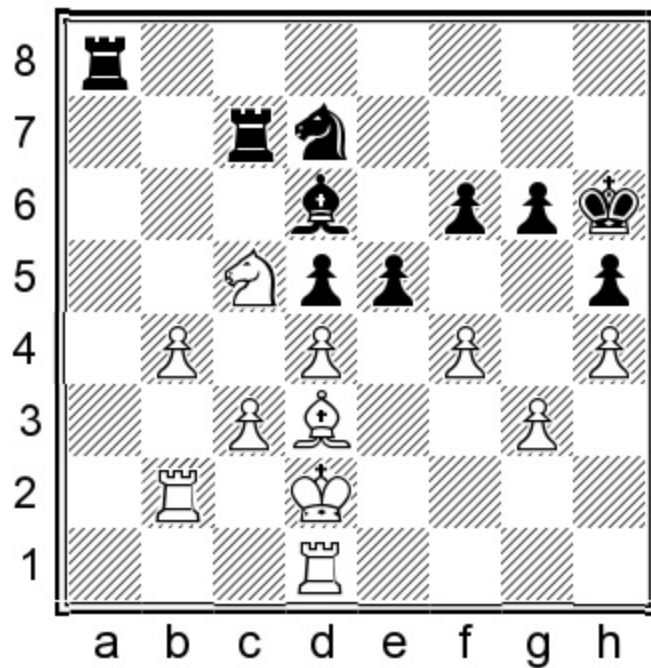
Only this move tells us what White is up to: the Knight will soon be re-routed to b3 and then c5. Therefore Black abandons his waiting strategy and takes up arms.

46... ♜b6 with the idea of ♜a4, attacking c3, would be another worthy option to consider.

46...f6 47. ♖b3 axb4 48. axb4 e5 49. ♖c5

49. fxe5 fxe5 50. dxe5 ♜xe5 provides Black with counterplay. For example, he could follow up with ♜f7 and ♜f2+.

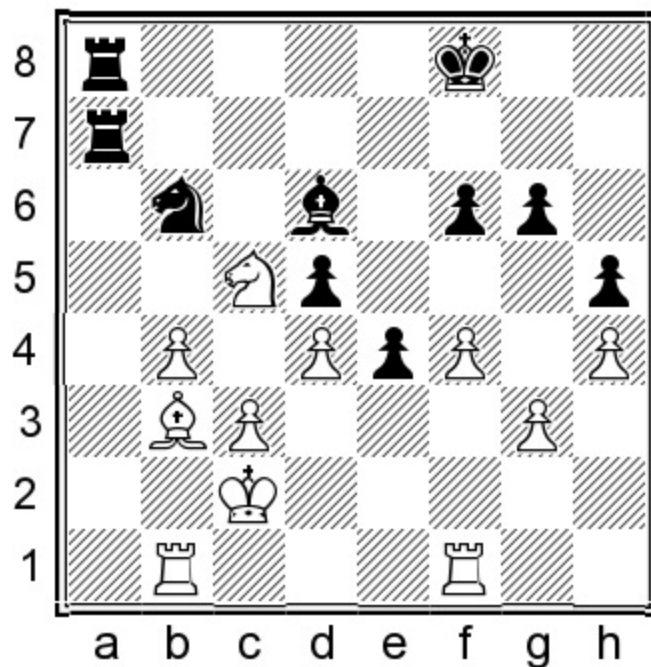
49...♔h6



Position after: 49... ♔h6

L'Ami is stepping out of any possible checks. White finds it hard to take on e5 since then Black's pieces will occupy active positions, with his King still in the center.

50. ♖f1 e4 51. ♙c2 ♘b6 52. ♙b3 ♝ca7 53. ♕c2 ♖g7 54. ♞bb1 ♕f8



Position after: 54... ♕f8

Once more, Black reverts to the waiting strategy. All his pieces are perfectly positioned and he is

challenging his opponent once more to do something active.

55.f5?!

His opponent 'takes the bait'. The King returns to the kingside to cover his pawns. After this move, White's pawn on g3 becomes vulnerable, while Black's King is perfectly capable of defending his own loose kingside pawns.

Despite the material deficit and Black's waiting tactics it is he who calls the shots from this moment on.

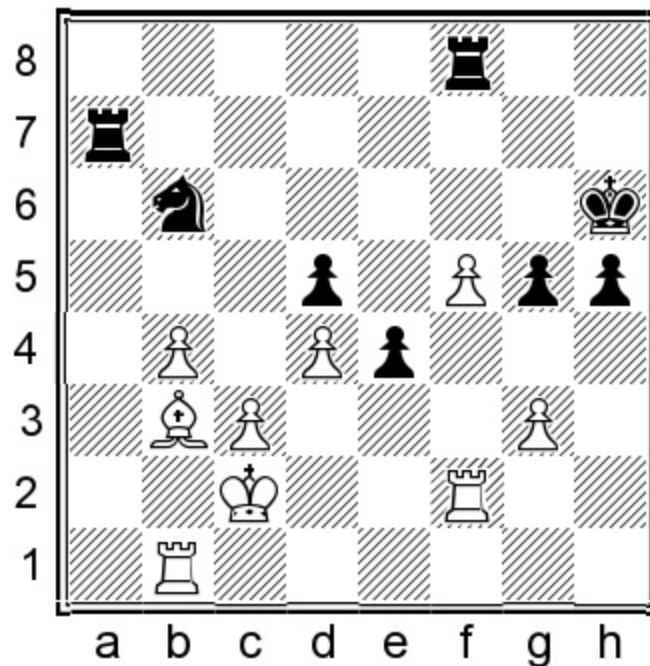
55...♔g7! 56.♘e6+ ♔h6 57.♘f4

57.fxg6 ♔xg6 58.♘f4+ ♙xf4 59.♞xf4 f5! when White will not be able to do something with his extra pawn.

57...♙xf4 58.♞xf4 g5 59.hxg5+ fxg5

59...♔xg5!/? would have provided Black with sufficient compensation for the pawn.

60.♞f2 ♞f8



Position after: 60...♞f8

61.g4!

Hanging on to the f5-pawn.

61...h4!

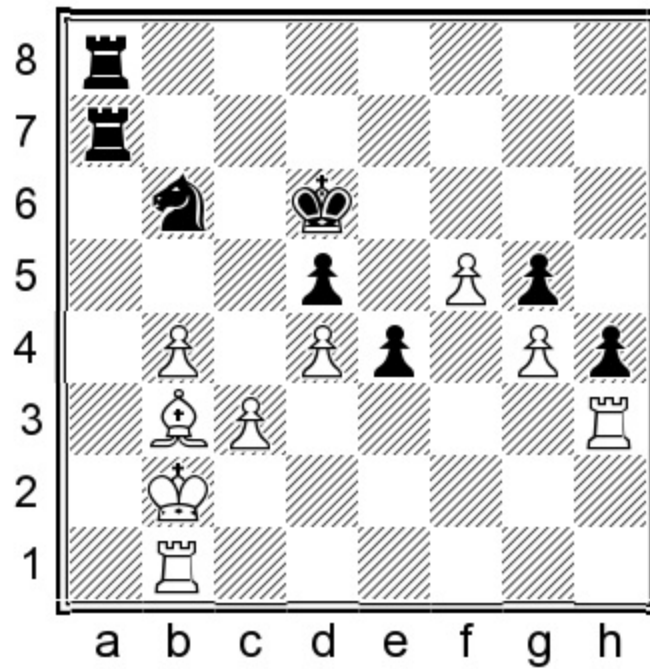
Keeping the h-file closed, creating a passed pawn.

61...hxg4? 62.♖h1+ would give White the so long desired activity along the h-file.

62.♖e2 ♔g7 63.♖e3 ♔f6 64.♔b2 ♖fa8 65.♔c2 ♖h8 66.♖h3 ♔e7

The King is heading for d6, protecting the d5-pawn. Subsequently, the Knight can be transferred to a better position.

67.♔b2 ♖ha8 68.♔c2 ♔d6 69.♔b2

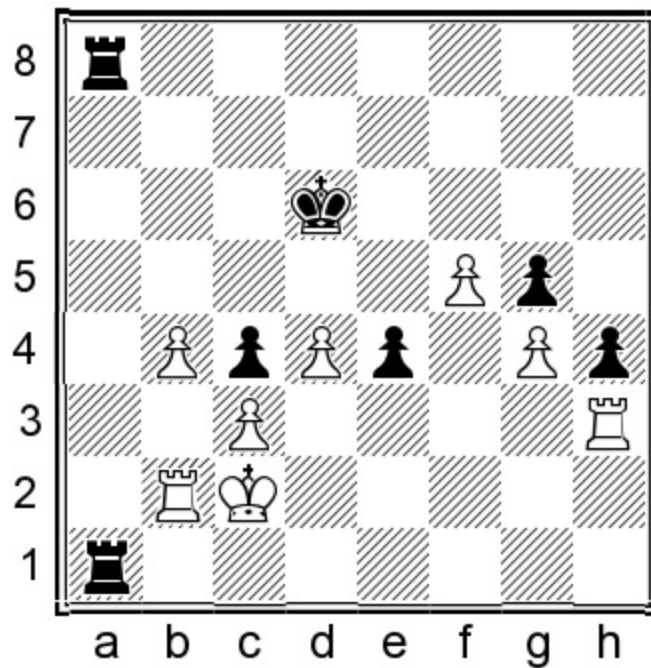


Position after: 69.♔b2

69...♞d7!

L'Ami is moving the knight to its perfect spot: the blockading square on f6 and keeping an eye on g4. However, another – maybe even more concrete continuation would have been: 69...♞c4+! forcing the exchange of the Bishop. 70.♙xc4 dxc4 Now White is helpless against the invasion of the Rooks.

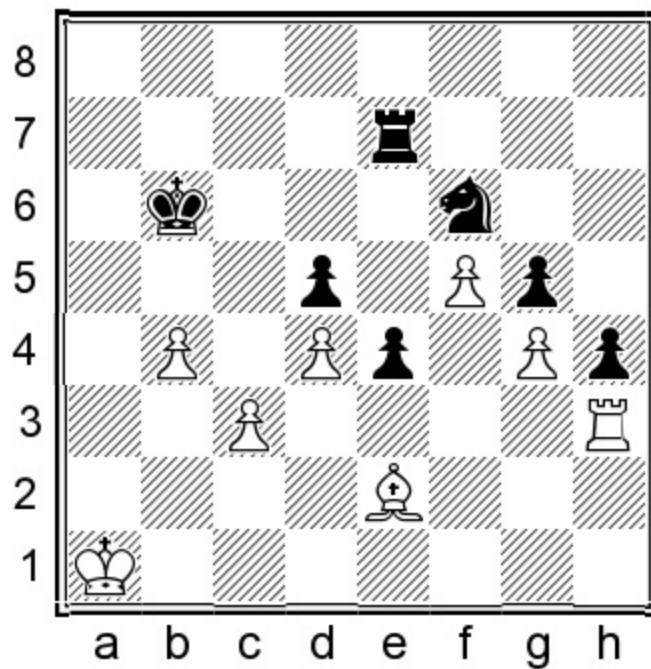
71.♔c2 ♖a2+ 72.♖b2 ♖a1



Analysis after: 72...♖a1

The white Rooks and King are locked up inside their own position. Black is winning after ...♖g1, ...♖aa1 etc.

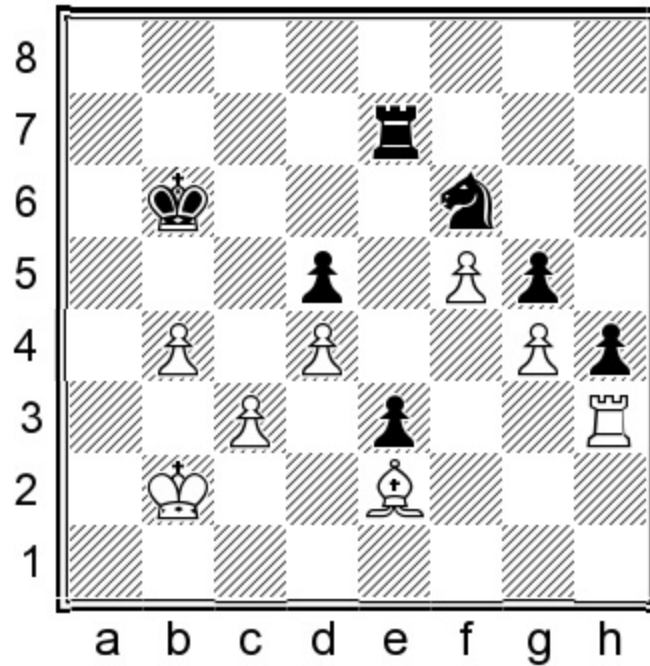
70.♖g1 ♜f6 71.♖e3 ♖h8 72.♖h3 ♔c6 73.♙d1 ♔b6 74.♖e1 ♖e7 75.♙e2 ♖a8 76.♖a1 ♖xa1 77.♔xa1



Position after: 77.♔xa1

With the King in the corner, Black decides that the time is ripe to act.

77...e3! 78.♔b2



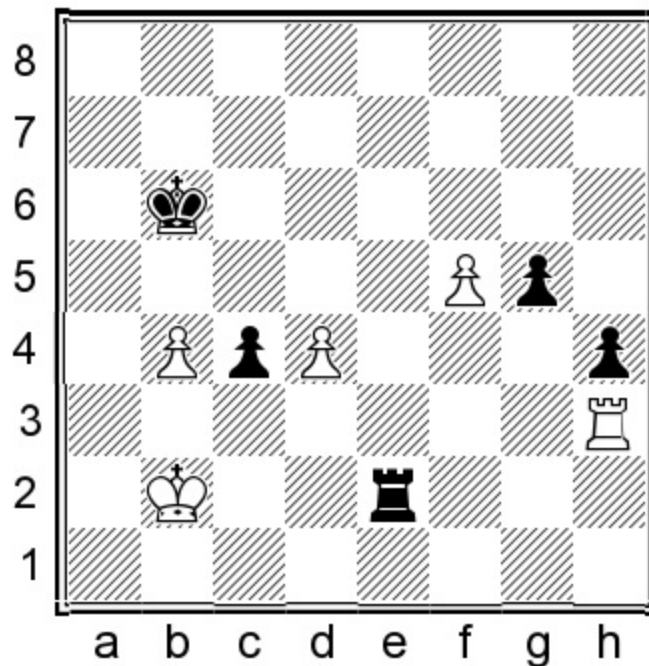
Position after: 78.♔b2

78...♘g4!

The resulting rook endgame appears to be winning for Black.

79.♙xg4?!

However, 79.c4! would have been an amazing save. The point is that after 79...dxc4 80.♙xg4 e2 81.♙xe2 ♖xe2+



Analysis after: 81... Rxe2+

the King has space to become active via c3. 82. Kc3 Rf2 83. Kxc4 Rxf5 when White should be able to make a draw after Kd3 (84. Kd3), bringing the King to the Black pawns.

79...e2 80. Kxe2 Rxe2+ 81. Kb3 Rf2 82. Re3?!

The only chance on a successful defense would again be 82.c4!, activating the King.

82...g4 83. Re6+ Kc7 84. Rg6 g3 85. b5 g2 86. Kb4 h3

The connected pawns are too strong and White comes too late with his counter.

87. b6+ Kd7 88. Kc5 Rb2 89. Rg7+ Ke8

White resigned, as after the next move 90...h2 he cannot stop the promotion of one of the pawns any longer.

0-1

Section 5.4 – Infinite Resistance

The defensive strategy of infinite resistance is closely connected to the waiting strategy. The two are identical in one aspect: the defender puts up tenacious resistance, avoiding possible breakthroughs. But what differentiates them is that here, when the occasion arises, the defender seizes the opportunity for active counterplay. It was initially proposed by Bill Jordan and also advocated by GM Ian Rogers, who are both Australians. The theory states that, [even after the defender reaches a worse position], *“providing he or she continues to try to find the best possible move thereafter, they can put*

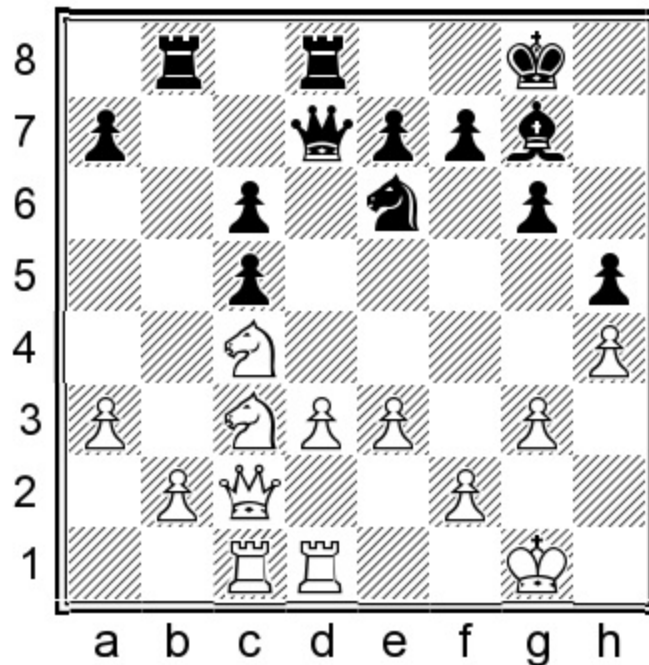
up a virtually infinite resistance and should not lose.”⁽²⁾

We can consider infinite resistance to be the logical sequel to waiting, since few situations call for committing to simply waiting for the remainder of a game. The close relationship between it and the simple waiting strategy is best illustrated by the following game, in which the world’s best defender of this time, Karjakin, shows us the virtue of patience. During a part of this game against Giri he waits over 30 moves, but then when the time comes for action, he is razor-sharp and grabs the chance to improve his position by active means.

Giri, Anish (2752)

Karjakin, Sergey (2771)

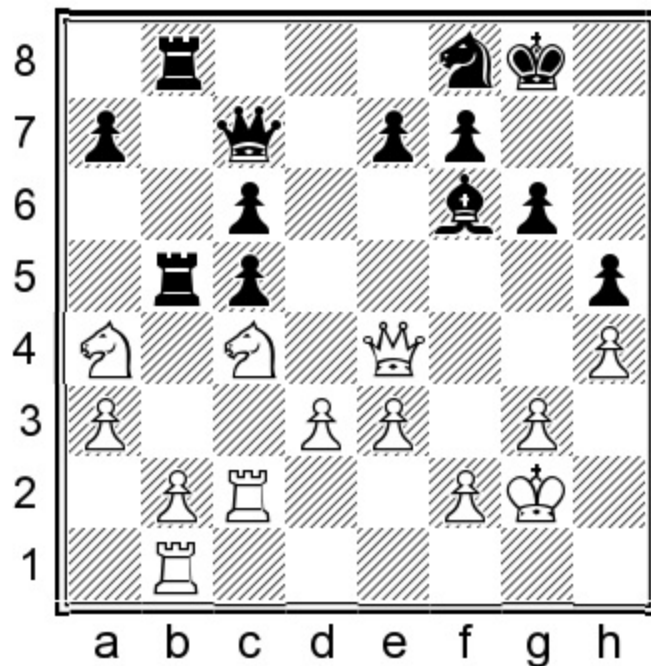
Stavanger 2014



22. ♖e2

White has a small advantage. Nonetheless, Black’s position is solid as it’s hard to make use of the doubled c-pawns, in no small part because of Black’s pressure against the queenside pawns along the b- and d-files.

22... ♜b3 23. ♘a5 ♜b6 24. ♝c2 ♞c7 25. ♘c4 ♜b3 26. ♘d2 ♜b7 27. ♘c4 ♜b3 28. ♝dc1 ♜b7 29. ♝d2 ♜b3
30. ♞d1 ♝db8 31. ♘e4 ♞d8 32. ♘c3 ♞c7 33. ♔g2 ♞d8 34. ♝dc2 ♝3b7 35. ♞e2 ♝d7 36. ♝d2 ♜b3
37. ♞d1 ♝db7 38. ♞f3 ♞d7 39. ♝cc2 ♜b8 40. ♞d1 ♞d8 41. ♔h2 ♘f8 42. ♘e4 ♘e6 43. ♔g1 ♝8b7
44. ♔h2 ♝d7 45. ♘c3 ♝db7 46. ♞f3 ♞c7 47. ♘e2 ♜b8 48. ♞e4 ♝d8 49. ♘c3 ♘f8 50. ♔g2 ♝db8 51. ♘a4
♝3b5 52. ♝d1 ♔f6 53. ♝b1



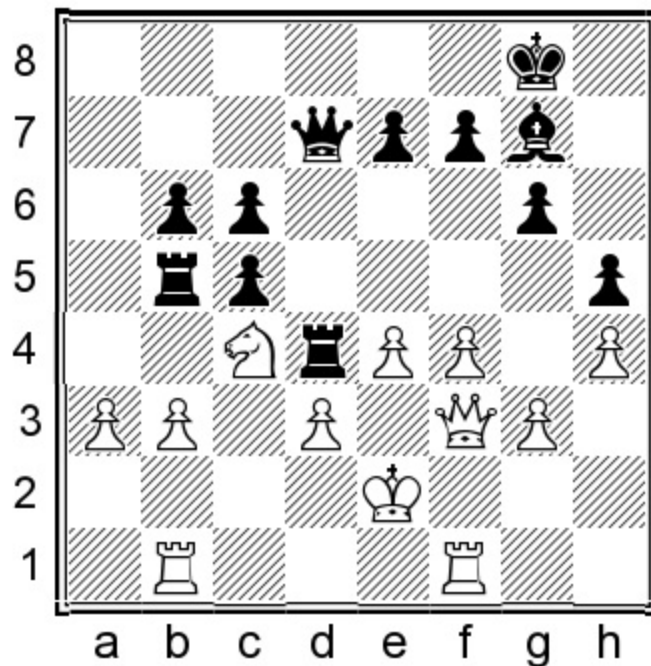
Position after: 53. ♖b1

From the previous diagram 30 moves ago(!), up to this moment, neither side has moved any pawns or made any captures. Karjakin has simply been waiting. Yet, now that the opportunity has arrived, he grabs the chance to improve his position. After the manoeuvre ... ♘d7-b6, he is intending to improve his pawn structure after 55. ♘axb6, axb6.

53... ♘d7 54. ♖h1 ♘b6 55. ♘axb6

After 55. ♘c3, Black could swap the minor pieces and enter with the rook(s) on b2. 55... ♙xc3 56. ♖xc3 ♘xc4 57. ♖xc4 ♖xb2 58. ♖xc5 ♖8b3! A energetic counter offense, activating the second rook, hitting a3 and d3. 59. ♖xc6 ♚b7! ♞ Black's heavy pieces are powerful; Black obtained sufficient counterplay for the pawn.

55... axb6 56. ♖b1 ♚d7 57. b3 ♖d8 58. ♖d2 ♙c3 59. ♖dd1 ♙f6 60. ♔g1 ♚c8 61. ♔f1 ♖d5 62. ♔e2 ♚d7 63. ♚f3 ♚e6 64. ♚g2 ♚g4+ 65. f3 ♚e6 66. f4 ♙g7 67. ♚f3 ♚h3 68. ♖h1 ♚d7 69. e4 ♖d4 70. ♖hd1 ♚h3 71. ♖h1 ♚d7 72. ♖hf1



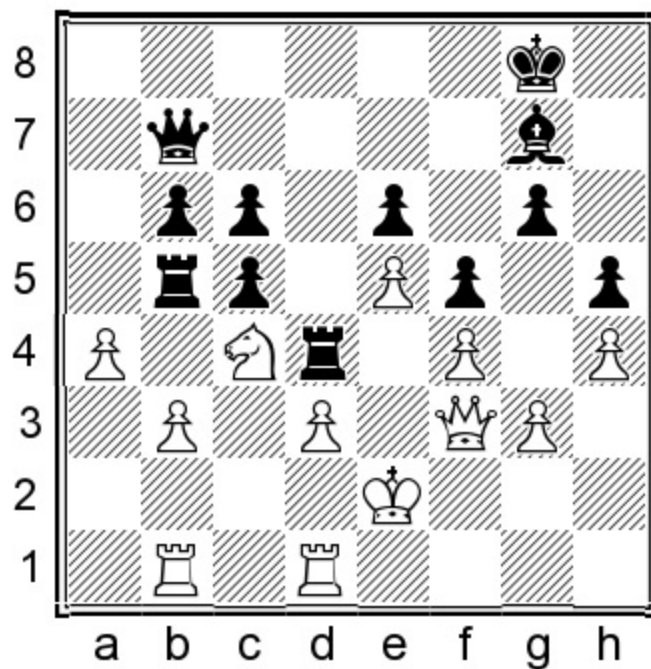
Position after: 72. ♖hf1

White is fully prepared to create a dangerous initiative on the kingside after f4-f5. Karjakin, who has once again been waiting for 17 moves, realizes that this is the moment for action.

72...f5!

On 72...e6 follows 73. ♖g1! with the idea of g4 and on 72...♔h8? 73.f5 with a strong attack.

73.e5 e6 74. ♖fd1 ♕b7 75.a4



Position after: 75.a4

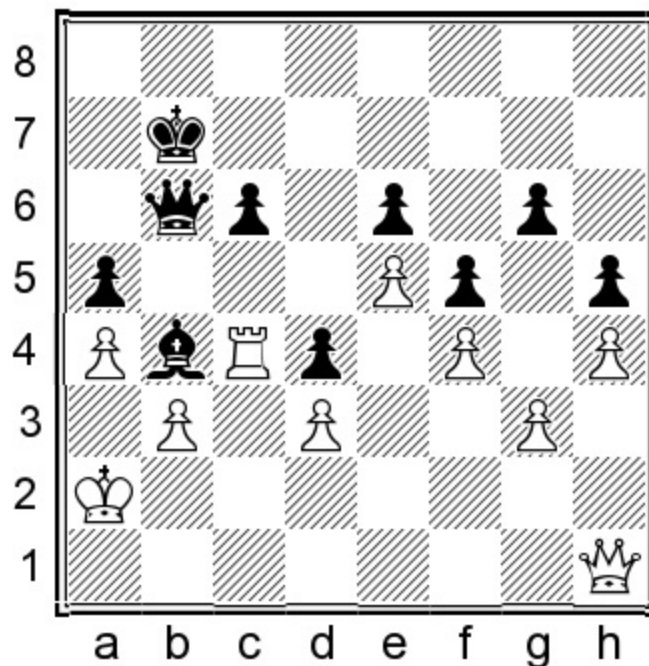
75...♖a5!

Karjakin is as tough as old boots. The exchange sacrifice leads to a closed position, in which Black is able to hold. 75...♖b4 76.a5 b5 77.♗e3 is winning because of ♗c2 on the next move.

76.♗xa5 bxa5 77.♖dc1 ♕f8

After 40 moves of shuffling of the pieces, we reach the following position.

(78.♖c3 ♗f7 79.♖h1 ♗e8 80.♖c4 ♗d7 81.♖e1 ♖b6 82.♖c3 ♕e7 83.♖c1 ♖d5 84.♖c2 ♗c7 85.♖d1 ♖d4 86.♖a2 ♖d5 87.♖dc1 ♗b7 88.♖a3 ♖d8 89.♖d1 ♖d4 90.♖c1 ♖d5 91.♗f2 ♖d8 92.♖c3 ♖b6 93.♗e2 ♗c7 94.♖d2 ♗b7 95.♗d1 ♗c7 96.♗c2 ♕f8 97.♗b1 ♕e7 98.♗a2 ♕f8 99.♖d1 ♕e7 100.♖c1 ♕f8 101.♖d2 ♕e7 102.♖1c3 ♕f8 103.♖f2 ♗b7 104.♖g2 ♕e7 105.♖h1 ♕f8 106.♖f1 ♕e7 107.♖c2 ♕f8 108.♖d2 ♕e7 109.♖f2 ♖d5 110.♖f3 ♖d4 111.♖dc2 ♕f8 112.♖2c3 ♕e7 113.♖h1 ♕f8 114.♖xd4 cxd4 115.♖c4 ♕b4)



Position after: 115...♕b4

Giri decided that he had to find a breakthrough, even while his better self surely knew he was running risks if he sacrificed two pawns.

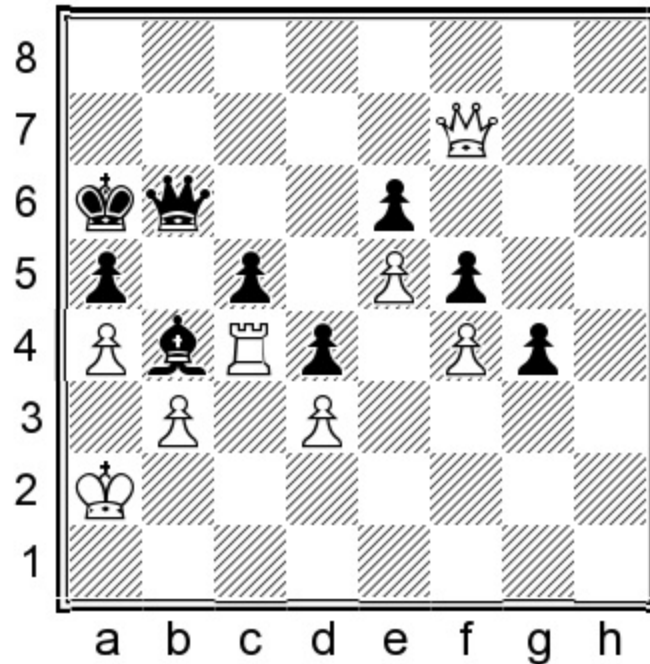
116.g4 hxg4

116...fxg4 117.♖e4! when the pawn on d4 or g6 is falling.

117.h5 gxh5 118.♖xh5 c5

In order to activate the Queen via c6, to g2 or h1.

119. ♚f7+ ♔a6



Position after: 119... ♔a6

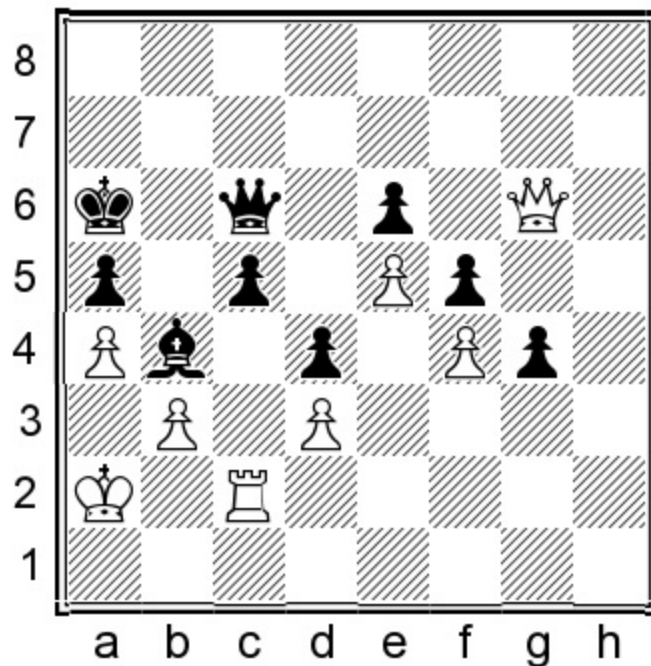
120. ♖c2?

Finally, the winning chance presents itself on the 120th move. An exhausted Anish is missing this sole opportunity in this hard-fought battle. 120. ♚d7! was winning here, since Black is in Zugzwang. For example, 120...g3 the pawn looks dangerous, but won't do White any harm. [120... ♕c3? 121. ♚c8+! after which White can take on c5.] 121. ♖c1! intending ♖c1-♖g1-♖xg3 or to move the Rook towards the King after ♖c1-♖h1-♖h8.

120... ♚c6!

Karjakin had been on the defensive for most of this game's 120 moves(!) but is still on high alert for the very first opportunity of turning things around.

121. ♚g6



Position after: 121. ♖g6

121...c4!!

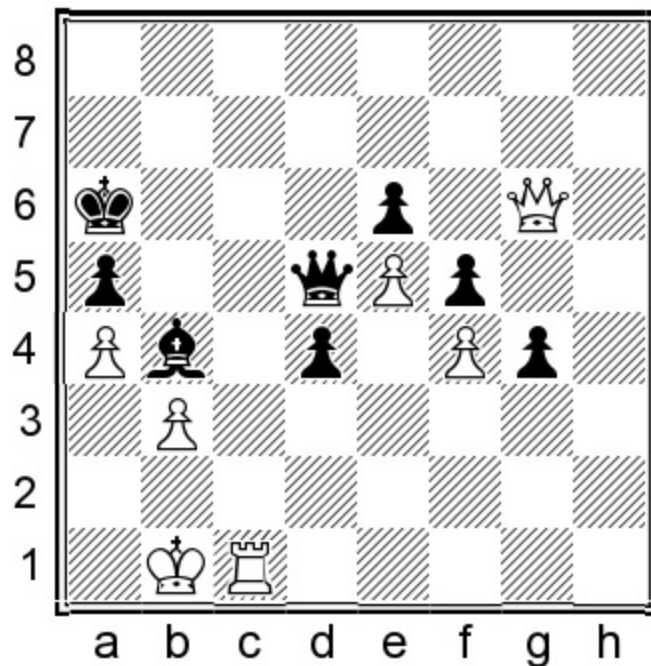
Karjakin's patience has been rewarded: he was looking for an opportunity for 121 moves and here it finally is.

122. ♖xc4

122.bxc4 giving up on the a-pawn, will allow perpetual checks as White's king is too exposed.

122... ♖xa4+ 123. ♔b1 ♖b3+ 124. ♔c1 ♖xd3 125. ♖xe6+ with a perpetual check.

122... ♖g2+ 123. ♔b1 ♖f1+ 124. ♖c1 ♖xd3+ 125. ♔a2 ♖e2+ 126. ♔b1 ♖e4+ 127. ♔a2 ♖g2+ 128. ♔a1 ♖d5 129. ♔a2 ♖g2+ 130. ♔b1 ♖d5



Position after: 130... ♔d5

131. ♖c4??

Deep in the ending, the Dutch star finally goes wrong... Giri should have stayed low with ♔a2, allowing a perpetual check after ... ♗g2+.

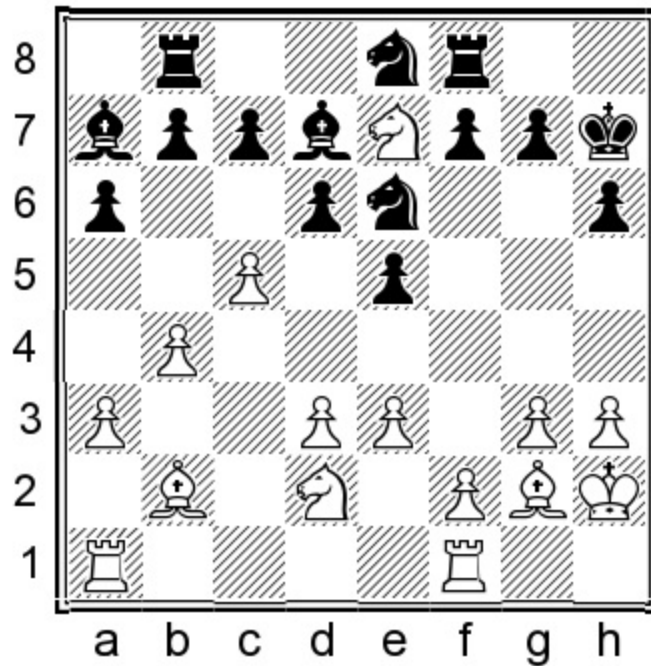
131... ♕c3!

Once more Karjakin doesn't hesitate to grab the offered (extra) half-point. The Rook is shut out of play now, as is the white Queen. A mate is inevitable: 131... ♕c3! 132. ♗e8 ♗h1+ 133. ♔c2 ♗g2+ With a mate on d2 or b2, hence Giri resigned here. Chess can be a cruel game!

0-1

Being mentally resilient and setting up a tenacious defense is not that easy as it initially seems. One has to dare to take extreme decisions. In the following game between Timman and Karpov in their World Championships Match in 1992, the screws have been tightened on Karpov. His prospects are gloomy as he is passive and White has 'free' active play without having to worry about any counter ideas from his opponent. Thus, Anatoly Yegenyevich rolls up his sleeves, and 'says' to Timman: *"You will only go out of this door over my dead body!"*

Timman, Jan (2620)
Karpov, Anatoly (2760)
 Zwolle 1993

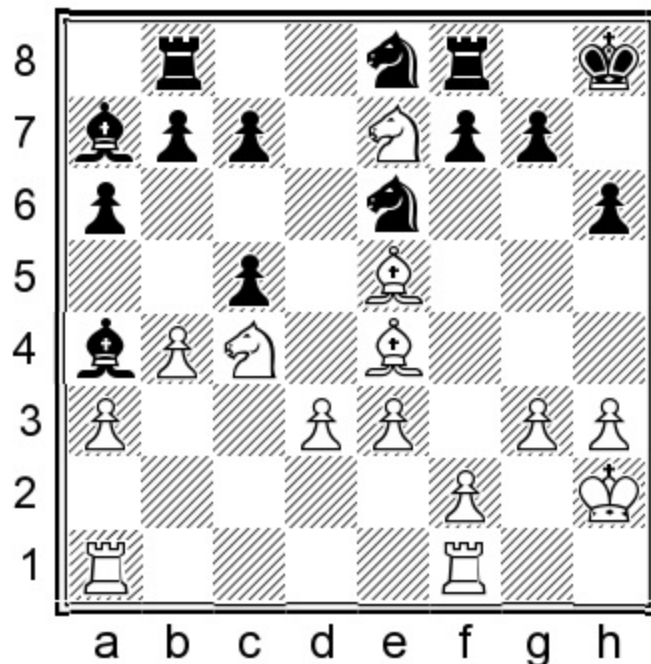


19...dxc5!

An ugly looking move which is quite hard to make; Karpov is ruining his pawn structure! Had Black played with less urgency he would have been overrun by the active white pieces after ♞c4 and evt. c6 .

19... ♙b5 ? 20. ♙e4+ ! gradually Black is forced to pull back. White protects d3, subsequently drives the Bishop off with a4 before he brings in his Knight to c4.

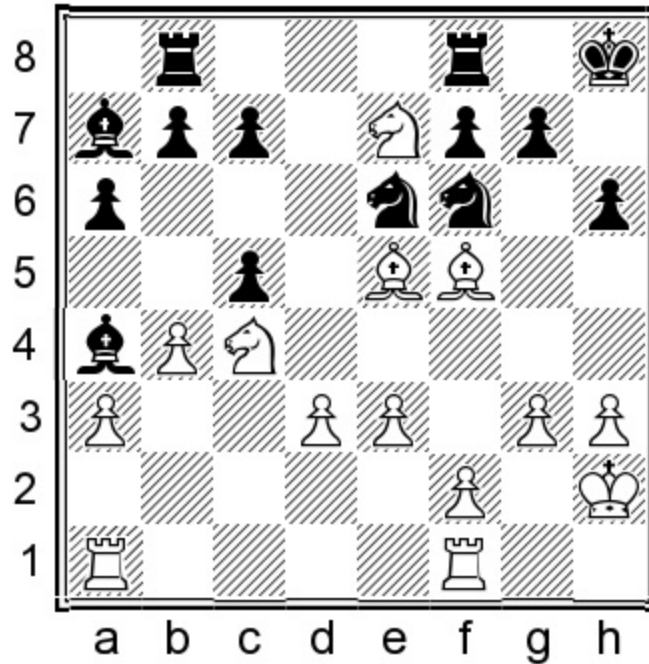
19...dxc5! 20. ♞c4 ♙a4 21. ♙e4+ ♚h8 22. ♙xe5



Position after: 22. ♖xe5

White's positional edge looks overwhelming. All his pieces are perfectly placed in the center. Notwithstanding, Karpov holds on avoiding any material losses.

22... ♜f6 23. ♖f5



Position after: 23. ♖f5

Another difficult decision to make. White threatens to take on e6 and give a check on g6, winning material.

23... ♜fe8!

Asking the intruder to leave the building.

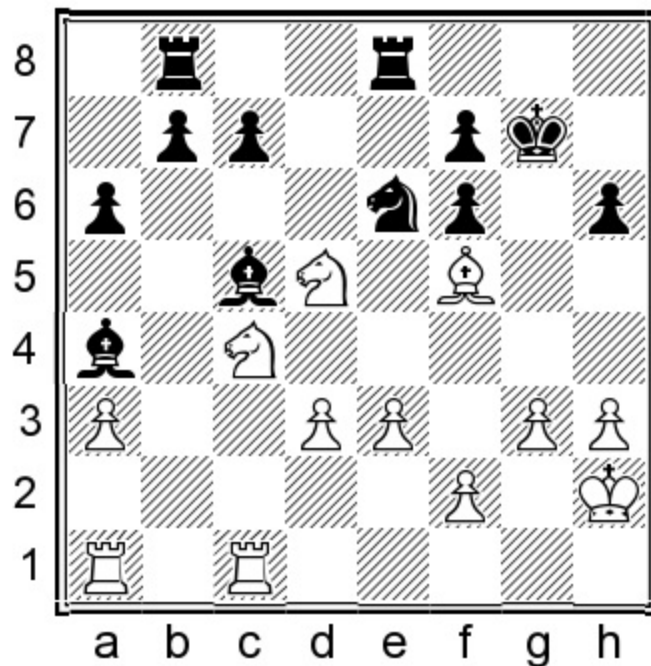
24. ♖xf6 gxf6 25. ♜d5

Hitting f6, but Karpov won't budge.

25... ♜g7!

'Just' defending g7. Karpov has an ugly doubled pawn, but in return he possesses the bishop pair.

26. bxc5 ♖xc5 27. ♜fc1



Position after: 27. ♖fc1

Timman is aiming for a future ♕xe6 and ♜xc7.

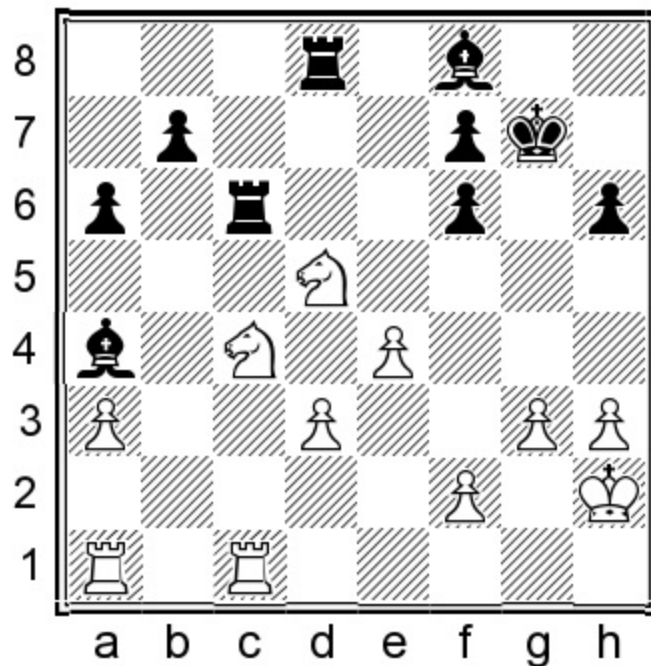
27. ♕xe6? can't be recommended, since after 27...fxe6 28. ♜xc7 ♖e7 White's Knight would be trapped.

27... ♕f8!

Again a tenacious move by Karpov, not giving White the opportunity to get a decisive advantage, after e.g. 27...b6? 28.d4 ♕f8 29. ♕xe6 fxe6 30. ♜xc7 ♖e7 31. ♜xa6 with a big advantage to White.

28. ♜a5

White couldn't really take on e6 and c7, because of 28. ♕xe6 ♖xe6 29. ♜xc7 ♖c6 30. ♜d5 ♖d8 31.e4



Analysis after: 31.e4

31...f5! and Black would definitely still be in the game because of his dangerous bishop pair and queenside pawns.

28...b6 29.♘c6

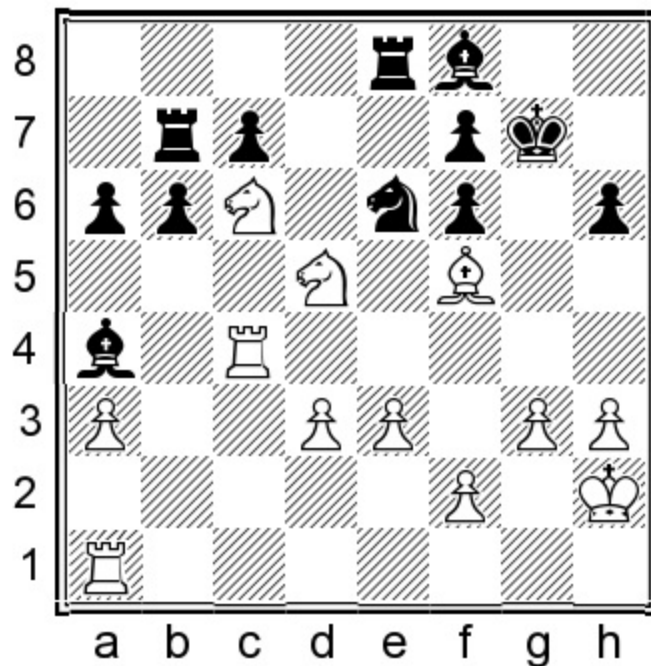
By clever manoeuvring, Timman got a nice position. His Knights are powerful and he owns the better pawn structure. Nevertheless Karpov has trumps of his own: the Bishop pair and the possibility to create a far passed pawn on the queenside.

29...♝b7!

Karpov is not panicking, neither afraid to play an 'ugly' move like ♝b7.

Panicking, giving up on the bishop pair with 29...♙xc6? leads to a much worse position, after 30.♝xc6 when Black's position becomes problematic.

30.♝c4



Position after: 30. ♖c4

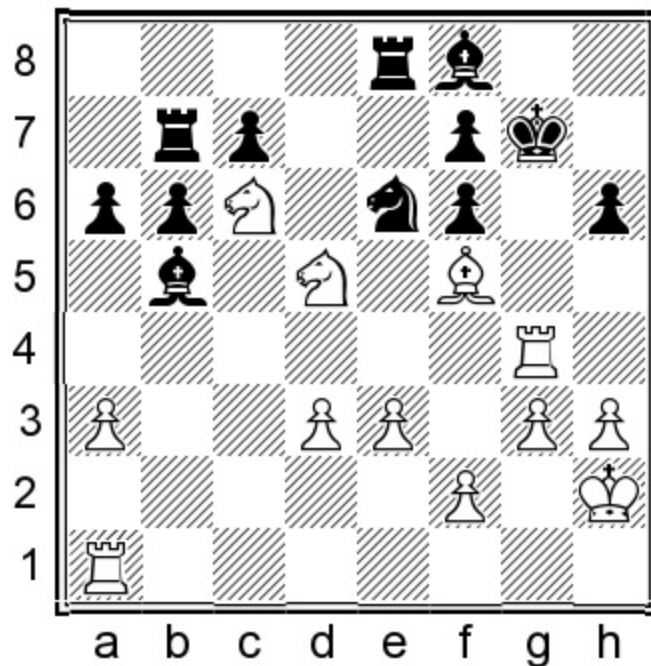
Although the engine slightly favors 30... ♗xc6, Karpov's ... ♗b5 is the much better practical defensive option. Keeping the Bishops on the board is preferable because Karpov wants to set technical problems that do not permit of simple solutions. After the swap on c6, White would get a stable advantage whereas Black doesn't have any hopes for active counterplay.

30... ♗b5!

Karpov stands firm, and once again doesn't give in by taking the Knight.

30... ♗xc6! 31. ♖xc6 This would not have been a picnic for the Black player. He has to deal with 2 weak pawns on c7 and f6. 31... ♗d6 32. d4! When White plays the first fiddle.

31. ♗g4+



Position after: 31. ♖g4+

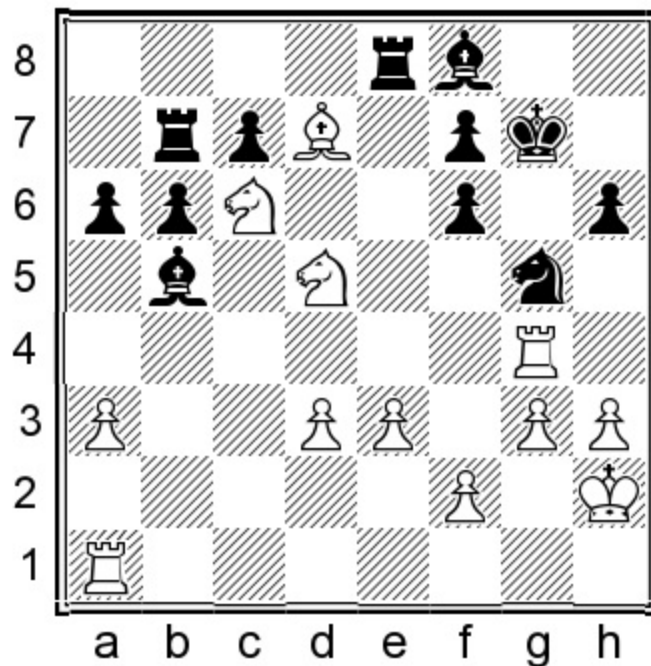
One would say that any hopes on a solution are dashed for Black in this position. But not for Karpov...

31... ♘g5!

Black has to use every resource at his disposal to keep his position together, no matter how ugly the move is. Please note that after 32.h4 White is not winning the Knight, because of the intermediate move 32...h6-h5.

32. ♙d7

If you wonder why the champions in chess are the champions in chess, please be my guest witnessing Karpov's cool reply here.



Position after: 32. ♕d7

32. ♖d4!? was interesting, after which White would have maintained his advantage. However, locking both the rooks up in the corner of the board would surely tempt any chess player!

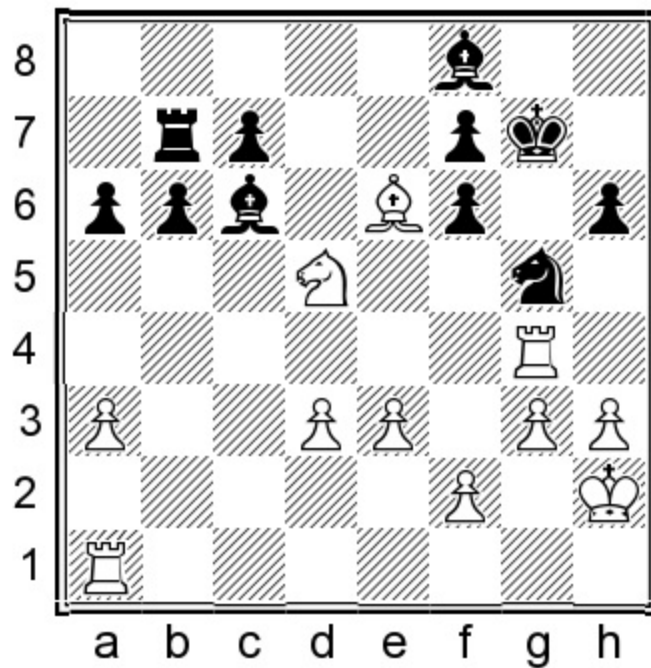
32... ♜e6!!

A magnificent defensive resource from the master himself. Suddenly the tables have turned, since White can't keep defending his 3 minor pieces. This must have come as a surprise to Timman, most likely expecting that he would drive off Black's pieces gradually. After 32... ♜a8?!, which is indeed too passive, White grabs the initiative by 33. ♖f4 intending to force the exchange of Black's Bishop by means of 34.a4!

33. ♕xe6

33. ♜c1 protecting the Knight on c6, is bad due to 33... ♕xa3!

33... ♕xc6



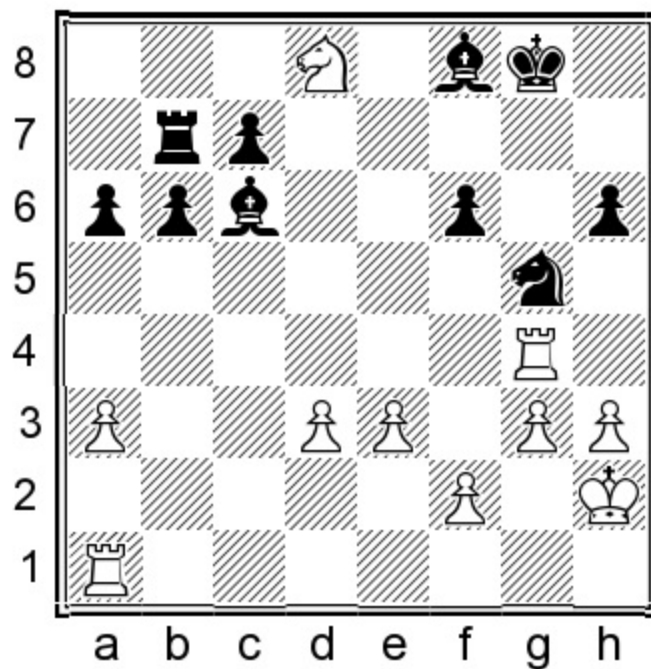
Position after: 33... ♖xc6

Now it's White's turn to stay in the game. Two minor pieces are hanging and the Rook is misplaced.

34. ♘f4!

Timman secures the draw by the Knight manoeuvre ♘d5-f4xe6-d8 ending in a knight fork.

34... ♗xe6 35. ♘xe6+ ♔g8 36. ♘d8



Position after: 36. ♖d8

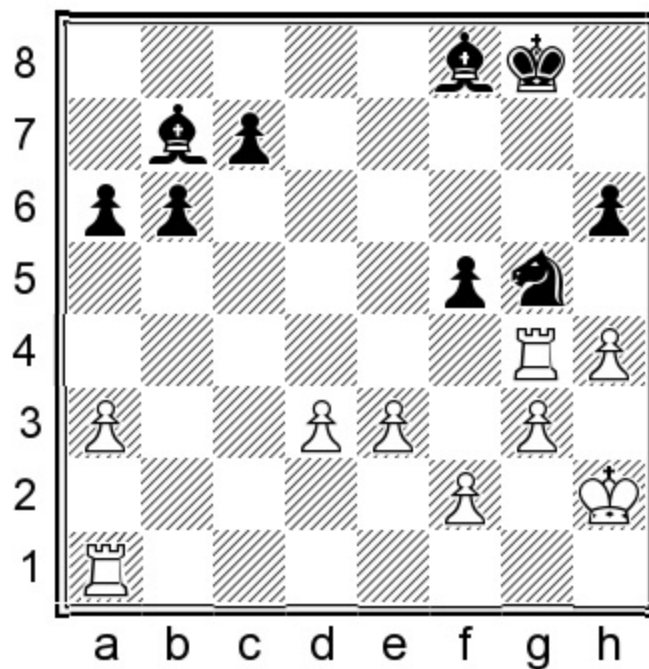
36... ♜f3!

Alas, in White's quest for an advantage after this long and forcing line, the skewer and pin (after h3-h4) don't sort the desired effect for White.

37. ♖xb7 ♜xb7

In this ending White has a Rook and a pawn for two minor pieces.

38. h4 f5!



Position after: 38...f5!

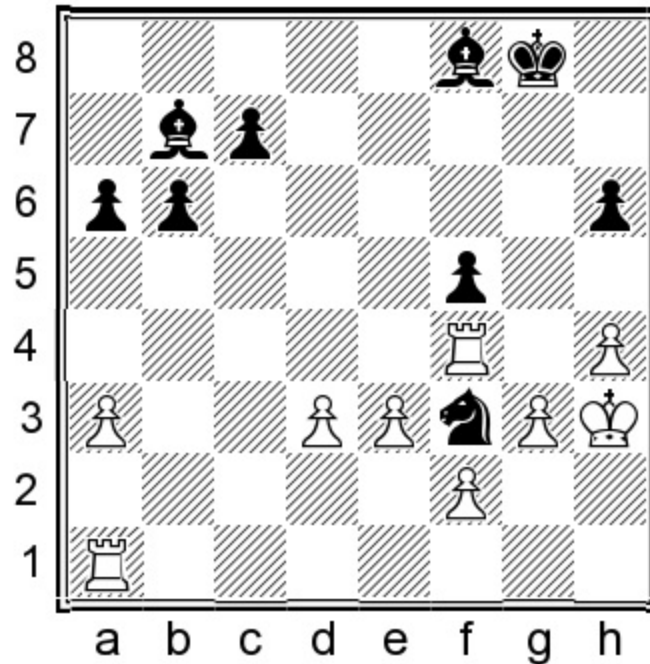
The predator becomes the prey. The Rook on g4 has to retreat, while Black's minor pieces come alive. Hitherto, it was White who was calling the shots. But from here the predator becomes the prey and it is Timman who has to switch into the defensive role. The Rook on g4 has to retreat, and White is not winning the Knight. In the resulting ending, Black's 3 minor pieces weigh up to White's two Rooks, while Black's queenside pawns are a large potential in the ending.

39. ♖f4!

Timman is well-known for his creative and active play. After ♖f4, at first sight an illogical and hazardous position for the Rook, Black can't occupy any longer the perfect square on e6, since the pawn on f5 can be taken then. Moreover, Timman tries to create as soon as possible counterplay for his Rooks.

39.♖c4 ♗e6! White will get in trouble in this ending. Black's knight controls the board on e6, and Black will try to capitalize on his queenside majority of pawns.

39...♗f3+ 40.♔h3



Position after: 40.♔h3

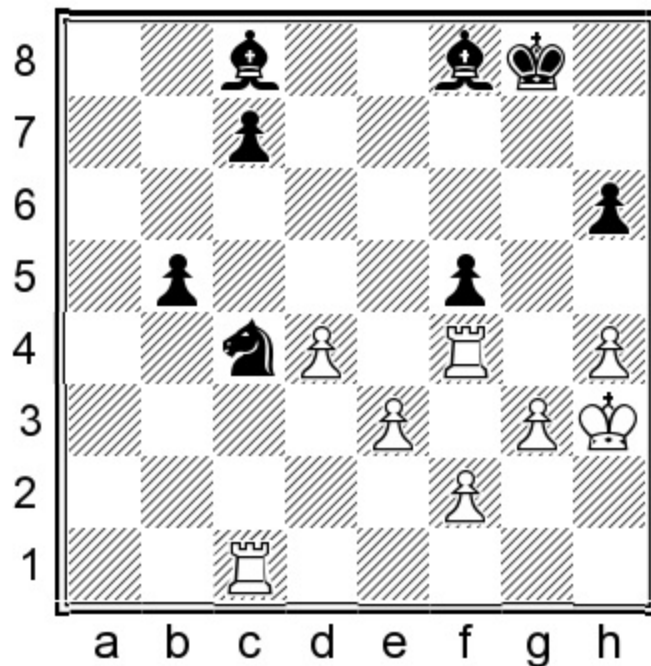
40...♗e5

40...♗d6 wins the exchange, but not the game. For instance, after 41.♖xf5 ♗c8 42.g4! White gets too many pawns.

41.d4 ♗c4 42.a4

42.g4! fxg4+ 43.♔xg4 ♗d6 44.e4! in return for the exchange, White gets two strong central pawns.

42...♗c8 43.♖c1 b5 44.axb5 axb5



Position after: 44...axb5

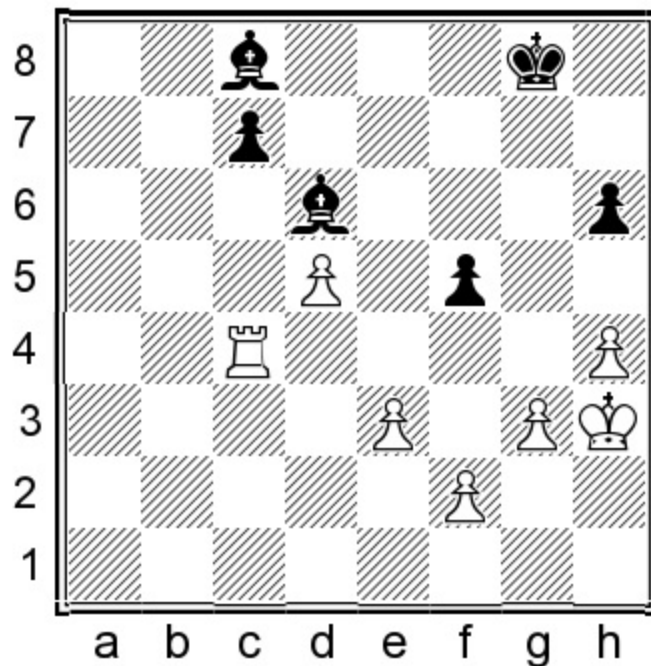
45.d5!

White aims to sacrifice the Rook, after which there is too limited material on the board for any winning attempts on Black's end.

45...♙d6 46.♖fxc4!

46.♖d4? is dangerous, on the account of 46...f4+! threatening 47...fxe3, winning an important pawn. 47.g4 fxe3 48.fxe3 h5! pinning the g4-pawn, obtaining a winning advantage.

46...bxc4 47.♗xc4



Position after: 47. ♖xc4

White can hold the pawns easily together. A draw is the inevitable outcome now.

47... ♔f7 48. ♔g2 ♕e7 49. f3 h5 50. ♔f2 ♖b7 51. ♗d4 ♘c5 52. ♗f4 ♘c8 53. ♗a4 ♘b7 54. ♗f4 ♘c8 55. ♗a4

½-½

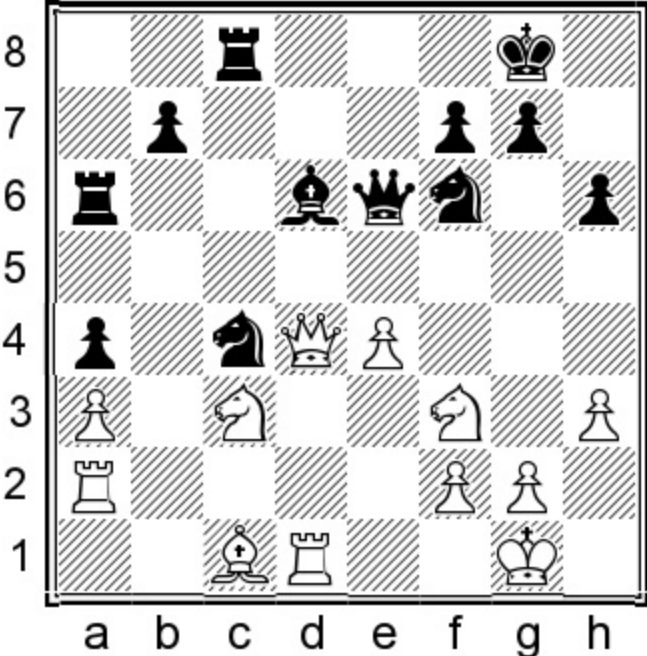
Section 5.5 – Turning the tide

Standing on the brink of a loss, the defender may find it hard to pick a good move, even as the prospects are deteriorating with each move. Meanwhile, the better side can choose from a wide variety of comfortable continuations. Naturally, the side with the better odds doesn't want to change the character of the position. He feels comfortable with the advantage and will endeavor to finish the opponent off by simple means, without changing the character of the position nor taking any significant risks.



On the contrary, the defender is willing to turn the position completely on its head. From the defender's perspective, it may pay off to take a gamble, creating a complicated critical position for the opponent. Due to the change in the position's characteristics, it must be assessed entirely from scratch, a process which costs energy and time for both sides. In addition, from a psychological perspective we can consider this phase separately from what's gone before, which is to the defender's benefit. Such changes of characteristics tend to be irreversible, for instance altered structure, exchange of pieces, a sudden opening of the center or specific tactical complications. This strategy of defense implies taking the risk of reacting too violently, with all your bridges being burnt behind you.

Botvinnik, Mikhail
Reshevsky, Samuel
 The Hague & Moscow 1948



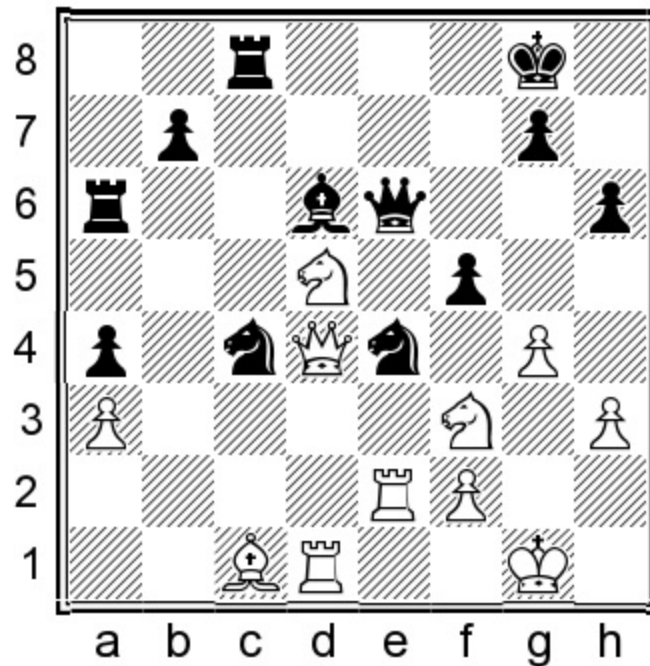
26.♖d5!

At the expense of a pawn, Botvinnik positions his knight on an active square. The more solid 26.♖e2 could, as many other moves, be met by the strong consolidating move 26...♗e5! leaving White without any hope of resistance. For instance, 27.♗e1 ♕c5 28.♖d2 ♖b3 with the threat of ...♗xf2, but White is already short of means by which he might hope to stop it. The text demands Black find something which is, at any rate, different.

26.♖d5! ♗xe4

Black could still play in somewhat solid fashion with 26...♗xd5 27.exd5 ♖f5 when he is not winning material but his pieces work together much better.

27.♖e2 f5 28.g4!



Position after: 28.g4!

Here it is, we have reached the position Botvinnik was aiming for! This unexpected move shakes up the ground and leads to a bizarre twist of events in this game. White's pieces are all active and the pawn on g4 is weakening the position of the Knight on e4, by targeting f5. Suddenly, Reshevsky is bound to the utmost precision and he cannot afford a single mistake.

28...♗c5?!

A) The best move seems to be 28...♗g5!. In normal circumstances Reshevsky should have found this move, but taking into account the time-trouble and recent change in the character of the position, this is not at all an easy move to discover.

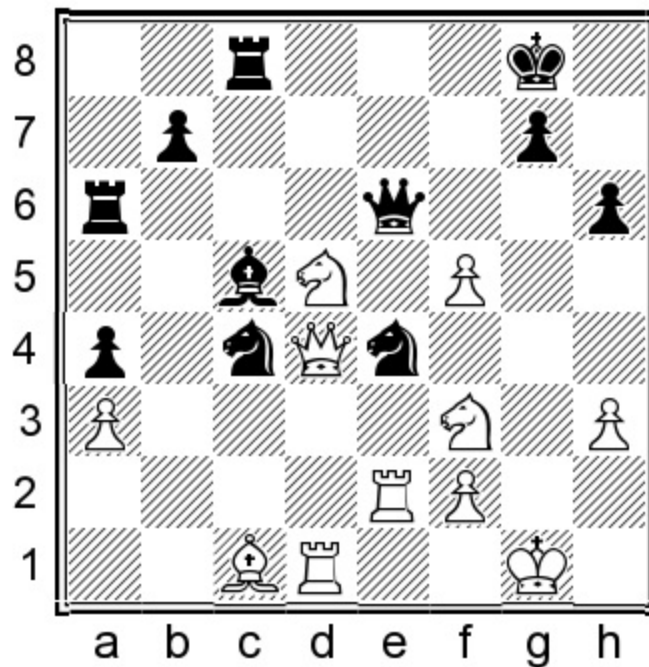
A1) 29. ♖xg5? ♚xe2 is winning for Black.

A2) 29. ♚d3!? preventing the exchange of Queens, but not the simplification of the position after: 29... ♖xf3+ 30. ♚xf3 fxg4! 31. hxg4 when Black resisted White's aggression and maintained a considerable advantage.

A3) 29. ♜xe6 ♖xf3+ 30. ♔g2 ♖xd4 31. ♜xd4 fxg4 32. hxg4 Black survived the attacking wave and kept his advantage, being a pawn up.

B) 28... ♜a5!? with the idea of 29. gxf5 ♚xd5 30. ♚xd5+? missing the Knight fork 30... ♜xd5 31. ♜xd5 ♖c3! when Black is winning.

29.gxf5

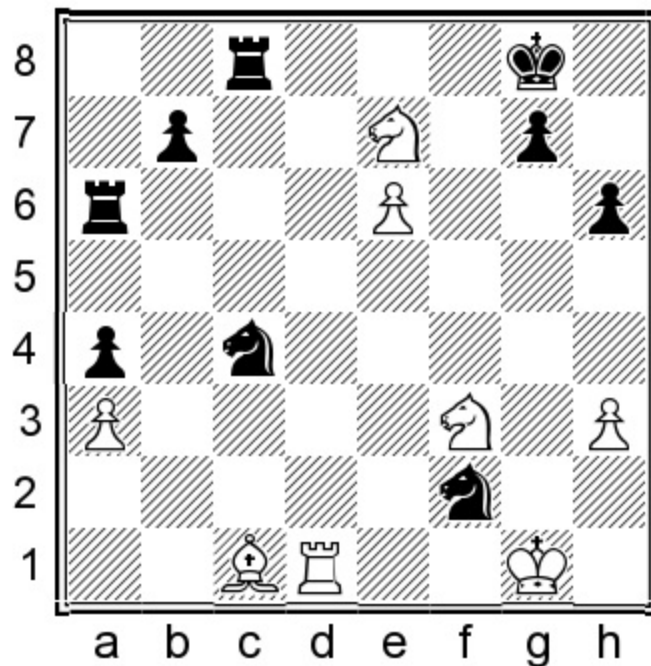


Position after: 29.gxf5

29... ♚xf5??

And here is the mistake. Reshevsky sacrifices a piece, but it isn't clear what he miscalculated or how he thought this attack could succeed.

Better was 29... ♔xd4! leading to large advantage after 30. fxe6 ♔xf2+ 31. ♜xf2 ♖xf2 32. ♖e7+



Analysis after: 32. ♖e7+

when after ... ♔f8 or ... ♔h7, and ... ♖xe6, Black is much better.

30. ♙xe4 ♚xh3 31. ♘h2

With 31. ♘f4 White could also have repelled the attack easily.

31... ♜cc6 32. ♘f4

Preventing Reshevsky's sole threat of ♜g6+. Here Black lost on time in a hopeless position.

1-0

At first sight it is not immediately clear what the link is between this kind of aggressive play, and Botvinnik's trademark positional style. That, in fact, might well explain why he wasn't proud of how he had to handle the previous game, and in fact excluded it from his best games collection. As Tukmakov declares:

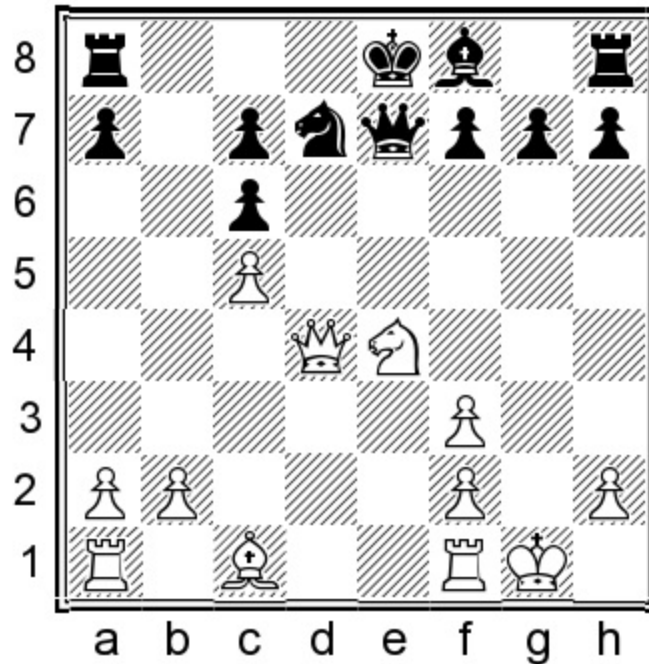
“In his attitude to risk in chess, Alekhine was somewhat ahead of his time. Of course, deliberate risk-taking is also featured in some of the games of other leading players in the world. Even Botvinnik, the very antithesis of his predecessor as World Champion, occasionally would take non-standard and risky decisions, in order to change the course of an unfavorable battle.”⁽³⁾

Based on this quote, it seems that taking non-standard decisions to try to imbalance the opponent is a feature which has to be incorporated in the game plans of all strong players. Let's now see how the pioneer of this fascinating style managed to turn a game upside-down.

In the diagram position Alekhine is behind in development, and his king is much weaker than its

counterpart. Regular play, i.e. moves like ...♔e6 or ...♞e5, will lead Black further down the slippery slope. Alekhine decided that a radical change could be his salvation in this difficult situation.

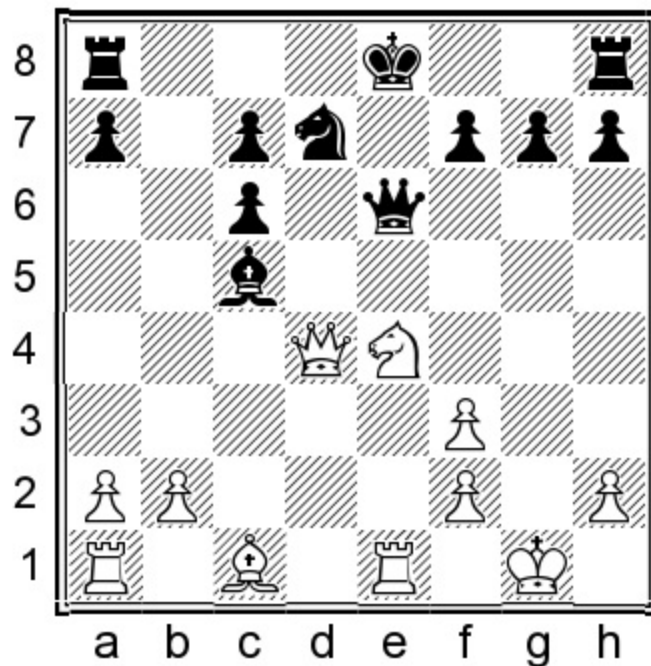
Lasker, Emanuel
Alekhine, Alexander
St Petersburg 1914



13...0-0-0!!

This unexpected, brutal move must have come as a shock to Lasker. White might have expected something like 13...♞e5 instead. White keeps an advantage with 14.♔c3 protecting f3. Black faces real issues completing his development.

Or 13...♔e6 for the sake of bringing the Bishop out. 14.♞e1! ♞xc5



Analysis after: 14...♙xc5

Who tricks who? 15.♚xd7+! Apparently, White tricks Black. Either way, there follows a Knight fork on f6 or c5.

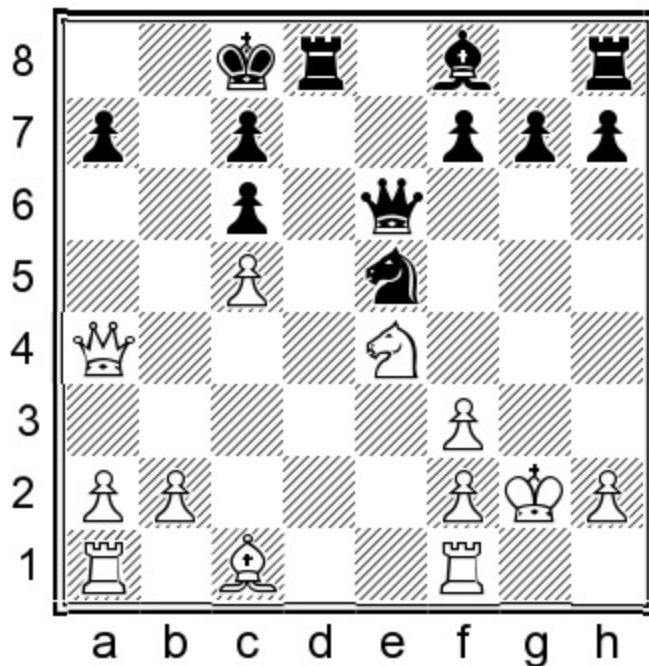
13...0-0-0!! 14.♚a4

As dark clouds gather above black's position, Alekhine finds a creative solution for the problem of his king's position. He could have played 14...♔b8 here to defend the pawn on a7, but then the game wouldn't last for long after White plays simple developing moves: ♙f4, ♖d1-d3-b3/a3.

14...♞e5

This move is not approved by the computers, but nonetheless it achieves its intended effect in the game. The point is that Alekhine places his knight as actively as possible, directed towards the enemy's king.

15.♔g2 ♚e6



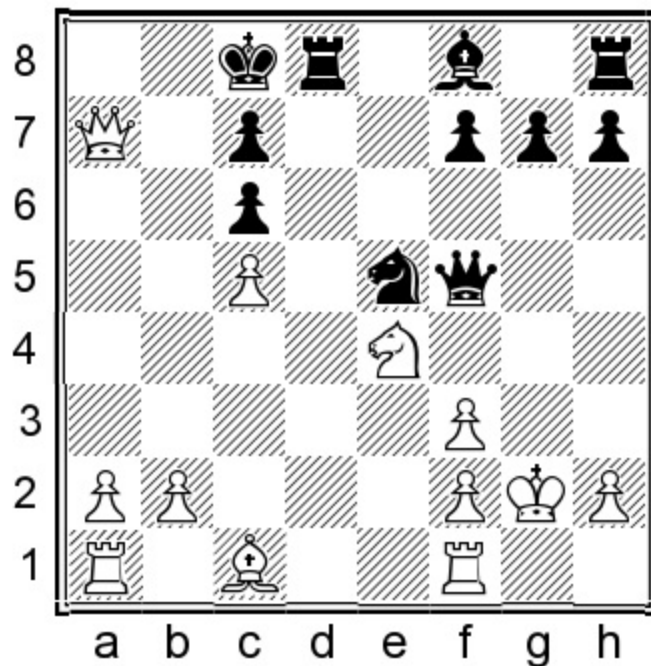
Position after: 15... ♔e6

16. ♖xa7?!

And here is the mistake: White is seduced into taking the pawn. Annotators, starting with the players' contemporary Siegbert Tarrasch, indicated that a much safer move was 16. ♕f4 initiating a strong positional idea. 16... ♖b7 17. ♕xe5 – after taking the strong knight on e5 White will develop a quick attack against black's King with ♖e1 (threatening ♘d6+) - ♗e3-♗b3, meanwhile Black has issues developing his bishop on f8.

16... ♗f5!!

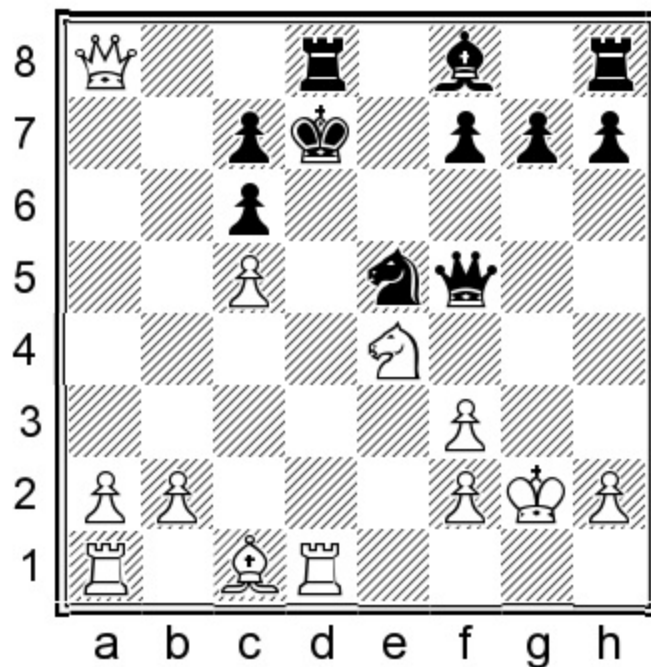
The 'standard' 16... ♗g6+ fails without a fight after 17. ♕g5! White will prevent the King's escape via d7 on the next move. 17... ♗f6 18. ♖ad1 And there is not much to do against the mating threat on a8.



Position after: 16... ♕f5!!

With this beautiful queen move, Alekhine is not only threatening to take on f3, but also at the same time vacating the escape route c8-d7-e6 for his king!

17. ♖a8+ ♔d7 18. ♞d1+



Position after: 18. ♞d1+

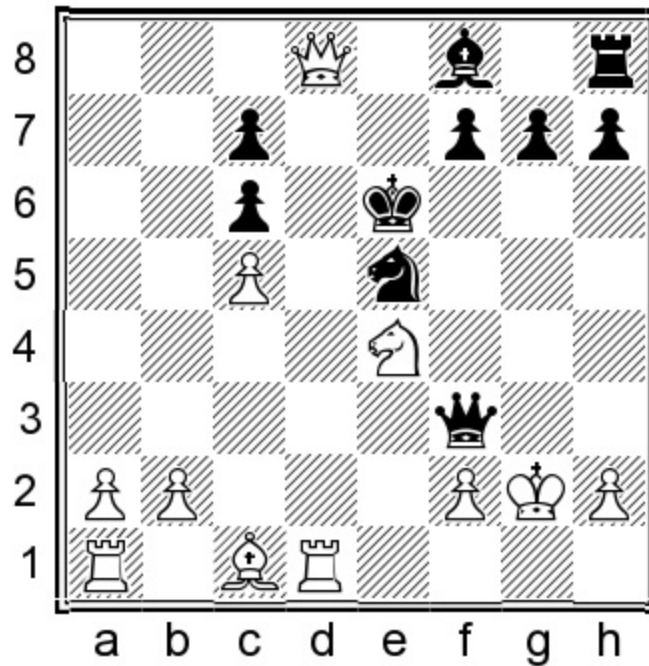
In order to avoid a perpetual check, it was compulsory to defend the f3-pawn with 18. ♖a3 when

Black can go both ...♔c8 or ...♙e7 and ...♔e8. For instance, 18...♔c8 19.♙g5 f6 20.♖ad1! threatening ♖a8, mate. 20...♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♗xf3+! This counterstrike is the only way to fight the threats against his King. 22.♗xf3 ♘xf3 and here, White could take the lead by 23.♙xf6! This is a typical desperado: White takes the Knight under the most favorable circumstances. 23...gxf6 24.♔xf3 f5 25.♘g3 ♙xc5 when White has a small advantage in the ending.

18...♔e6!!

A marvelous king sortie to the middle of the board. Alekhine will hold the draw by perpetual check.

19.♗xd8 ♗xf3+



Position after: 19... ♗xf3+

20.♔g1 ♙e7!

Also possible is 20...♗g4+ 21.♘g3 ♙xc5 22.♗xh8 ♗xd1+ 23.♔g2 ♗f3+ 24.♔h3 ♗g4+ with another perpetual check.

21.♗d4 ♗g4+

21...♖d8?! looks dangerous, but White can play 22.♘d6! cxd6 23.♖e1! pinning the Knight, obtaining a promising position.

22.♔h1

22.♔f1 ♗h3+ 23.♔e2 ♗h5+ is also perpetual: if the king goes to g1, e1 or d2 then there follows

...♗f3+ winning the queen. Black also has ideas of ...♖d8 in case White gets ambitious in some other way.

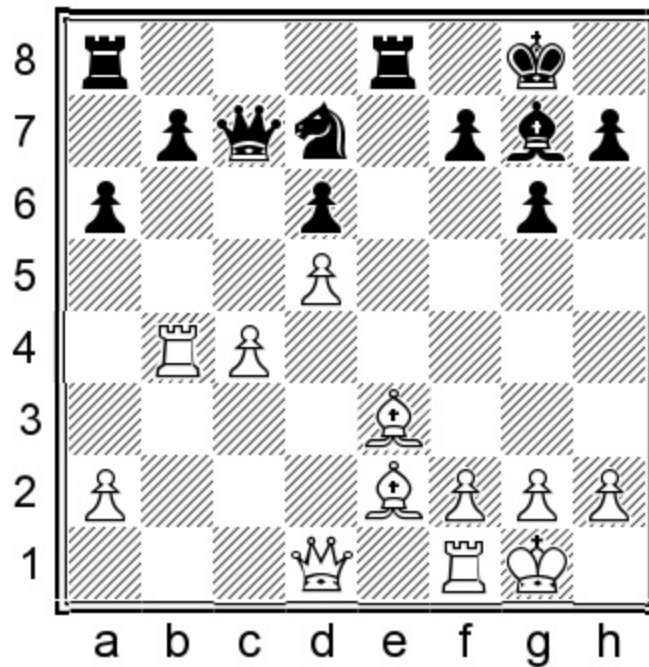
22...♜f3+ 23.♔g1 ♜g4+ 24.♔h1 ♜f3+ ½-½

As we saw in this game, the psychological effect of a sudden change in the flow of the game can shock the erstwhile antagonist into making a mistake. In the following game, when he needed to do something radical, another World Champion applied his own signature remedy – the exchange sacrifice – against Polugaevsky. Polugaevsky, who had expected to build up his pressure slowly on the queenside, couldn't hold his own in the face of the new problems and altered situation.

Polugaevsky, Lev (2625)

Petrosian, Tigran (2605)

Moscow 1983



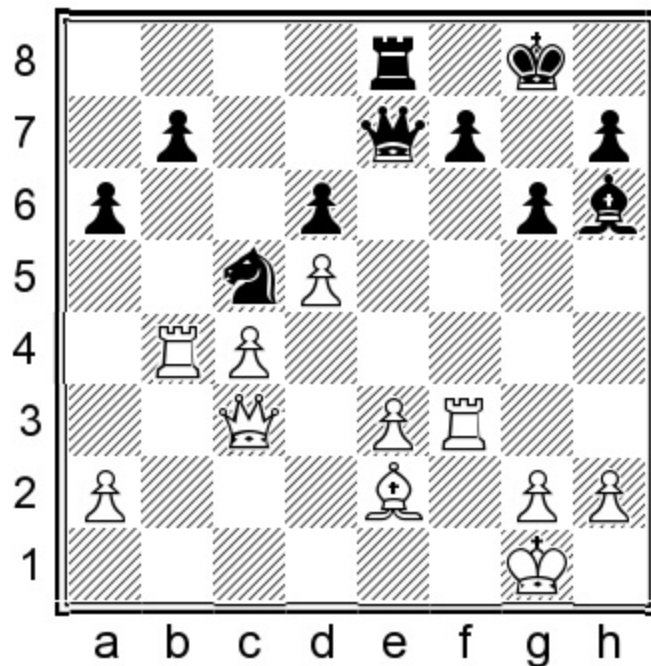
19...♖xe3!

This came as a total surprise to Polugaevsky. After 19...♖ac8 20.♜d2 White will be slightly better as he has a measure of pressure on Black's queen-side.

19...♖xe3! 20.fxe3 ♘c5 21.♜c2 ♖e8 22.♖f3 ♘h6 23.♜c3

After 23.♔h1 ♘xe3 24.♘d3 ♘h6 25.♖b1 Black is fine, but nothing more.

23...♜e7



Position after: 23... ♔e7

24. ♖b6??

And here it is, White's mistake.

Polugaevsky hasn't played at his normal level since the exchange sacrifice. Petrosian's U-turn on the 19th move has paid out!

24... ♞a4

0-1

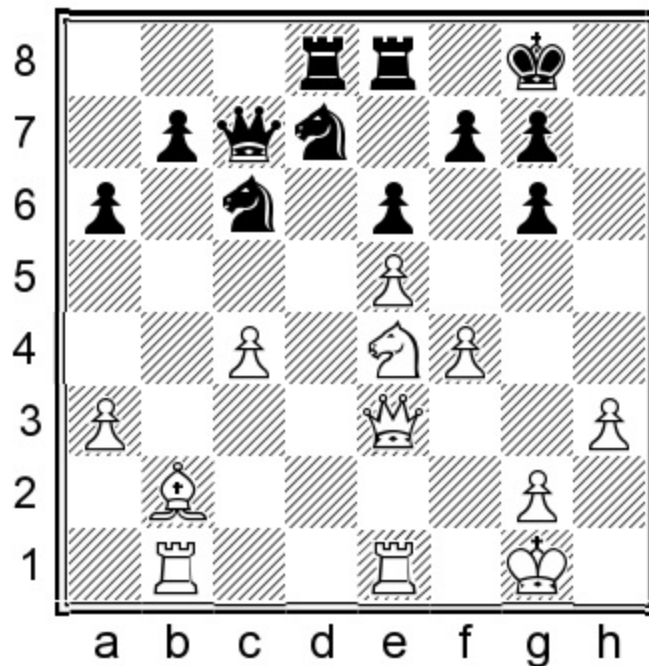
At the top level this fighting approach is applied in practice regularly. Players opt for unconventional ideas and plans, aiming to radically change the course of the game. An opponent having the better position should not escape unchallenged and this means bringing him out of his comfort zone.

In the next battle between two French 'matadors', Bacrot found himself in dire straits but, luckily, retained his mastery of the strategy of turning the tide. As with Polugaevsky's game above, grandmaster Lautier couldn't maintain his composure.

Lautier, Joel (2677)

Bacrot, Etienne (2645)

Aix-les-Bains 2003



Bacrot's position can't be envied here, as the knight leap to d6 will cause chaos and despair on Black's soil. A passive response, such as $\text{d}6\text{-e}7\text{-f}5$ (to cover the square on d6) comes too late, hence Bacrot instead seeks drastic measures to change the course of the game.

22...♞a5!

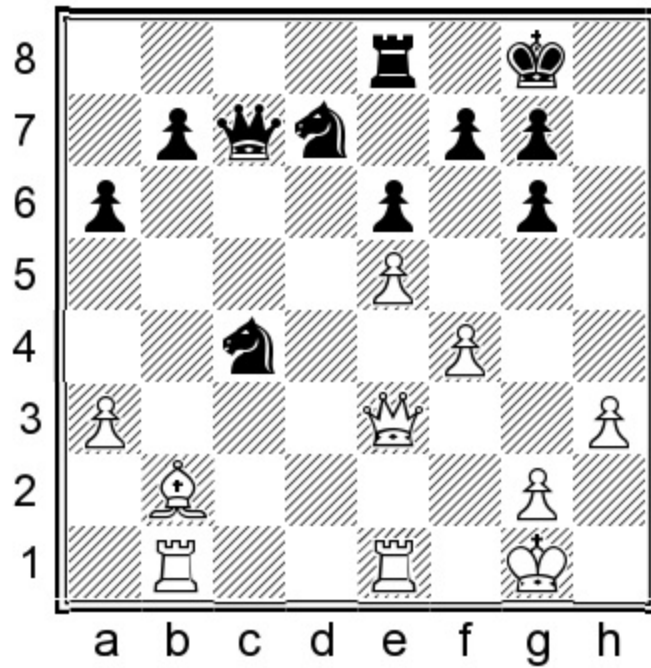
Once again like in the previous game, this move cannot be considered as a good move. The exclamation marks are rather given for the fact that it completely changes the flow of the game; not by coincidence, this takes the same form as in the Petrosian game (an exchange sacrifice).

After the standard continuation 22...♞e7 in order to play ...♞f5, White nevertheless plays 23.♞d6!, when Black's 23...♞f5 doesn't lead to the desired exchange of the Knight on d6, since after 24.♞xe8 ♞xe3 25.♞xc7, White is material up. 23...♞f8 24.♞d4! Entering via b6 on the b-file. 24...♞f5 25.♞b6! ♞xb6 26.♞xb6 ♞xb6+ 27.♞xb6 will give White a very comfortable advantage. The pawn on b7 is doomed and White gets a strong passed pawn on d6 after 27...♞xd6.

22...♞a5! 23.♞d6 ♞xc4

Trying to keep the exchange with 23...♞f8 will only lead to the deterioration of Black's position after: 24.♞ec1 b6 25.♞c3 ♞c6 26.c5 ♞xc5 27.♞b4 ♞a7 28.♞xc5 bxc5.

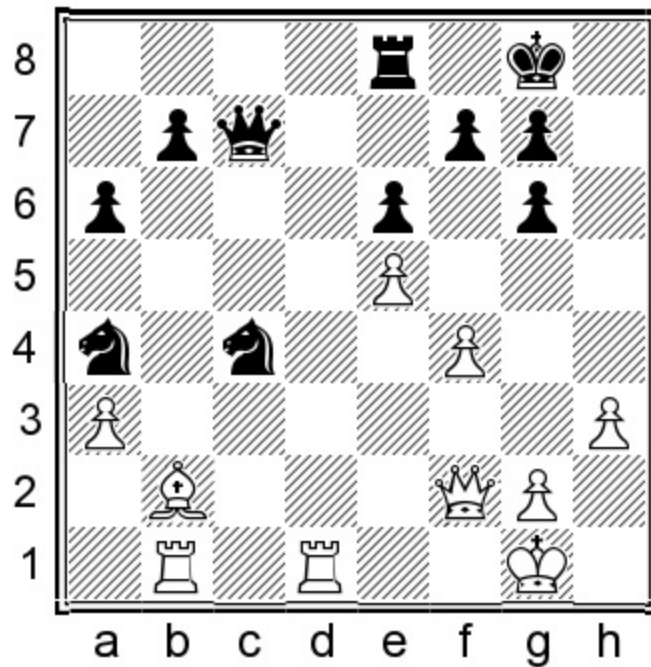
24.♞xe8 ♞xe8



Position after: 24... ♖xe8

After the dust has settled, Black got sufficient compensation for the exchange sacrifice. Black nails the Knight's position further on c4, with ...b7-b5.

25. ♗f2 ♘c5 26. ♖ed1 ♘a4



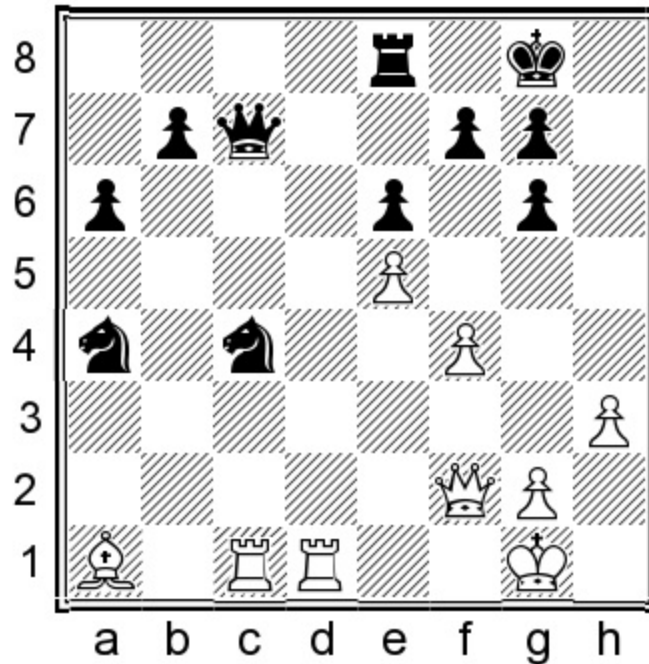
Position after: 26... ♘a4

27. ♔a1?

There was no need to give up the important a-pawn. Lautier is struggling with the aftermath of Bacrot's exchange sacrifice on the 22nd move.

After 27.♔d4 b5 [27...♖xa3?? 28.♖a1+–] 28.♖b3 Lautier would have maintained an advantage, e.g. 28...♗d8 29.♕h2 ♗d5 30.♖bd3 when White will try to intrude on the d-file with his Rooks.

27...♖xa3 28.♖bc1 ♖c4



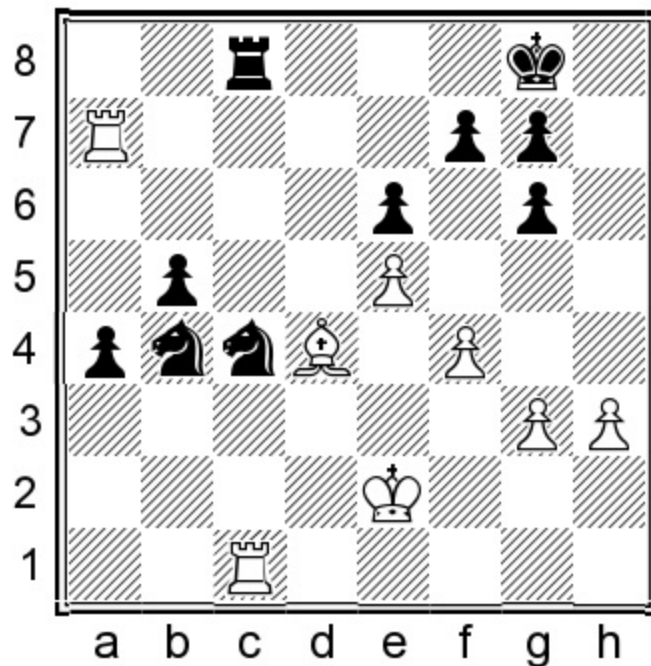
Position after: 28...♖c4

Bacrot's all-or-nothing strategy has brought him right back into contention. In return for the exchange he has two connected passed pawns and some solid squares for the Knights.

29.♖a7?

Lautier is playing on the assumption that he can still fight for an edge. As a result, he takes the risk that his position will go downhill quickly. A more realistic approach could have been 29.♗d6 trying to impede the advance b7-b5, after which a6 is hanging.

29...♖ab6 30.♔d4 ♖d5 31.♔c5 b5 32.♖xc7 ♖xc7 33.♗d7 ♖d5 34.g3 ♗c8 35.♔d4 a5 36.♖a7 a4 37.♕f2 ♖b4 38.♕e2

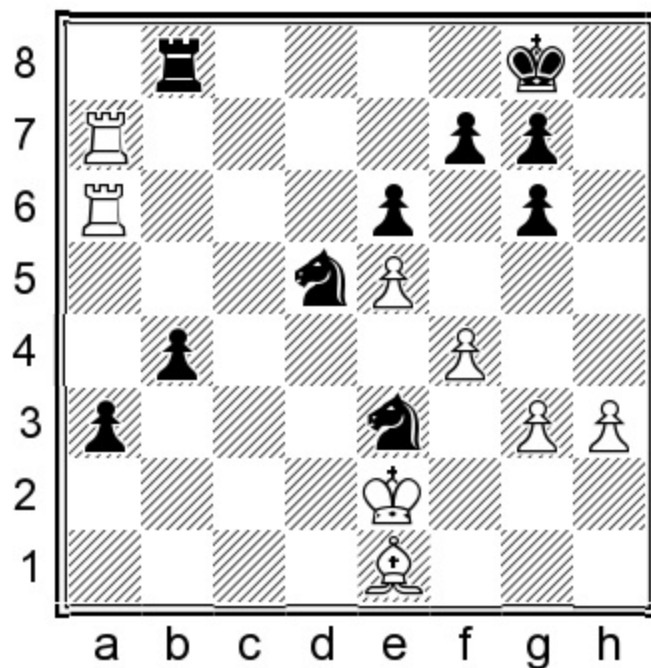


Position after: 38. ♔e2

38... ♖d8

38... ♞c6! regrouping the Knights, would have been a promising continuation 39. ♖d7 a3 40. ♔a1 ♞4a5
 When there is ♞b3 and b5-b4-b3-b2 on the menu.

39. ♔c3 ♞d5 40. ♔a5 ♖b8 41. ♔e1 a3 42. ♖c2 ♞ce3 43. ♖c6 b4 44. ♖ca6



Position after: 44. ♖ca6

44...b3!

Even after the exchange of Rooks, the b-pawn is unstoppable.

45.♖a8 ♜xa8 46.♖xa8+ ♔h7 47.♖xa3 ♘c2!

This move is decisive, as there is no convenient way to halt the pawn. For instance, 47...♘c2 48.♖a8 [48.♖xb3 is losing, due to 48...♘d4+] 48...b2 49.♖b8 ♘cb4! blocking the b-file, after which the promotion on b1 is a fact.

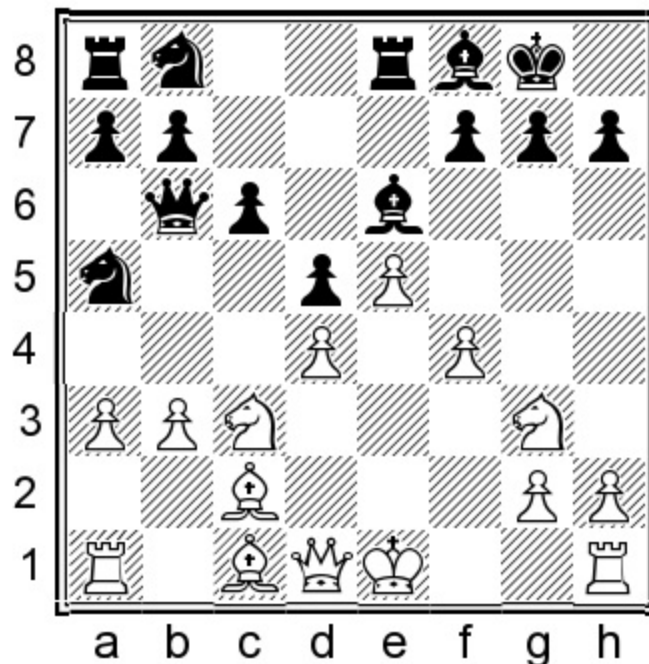
0-1

We usually think of radical changes in the position as necessary. In reality, a relatively quiet move may also have the desired effect, as the Dutch Grandmaster Erwin L'Ami shows in the following game against your author. The key features are that the move be surprising and lead to a different kind of play than what went before.

Werle, Jan (2523)

L'Ami, Erwin (2630)

Bunschoten-Spakenburg 2014



After short castling, the pawn's thrust f4-f5 followed up by a crushing kingside attack, will likely lead to Black's rapid defeat. L'Ami finds a stunning continuation which can't even closely be considered as a good one.

16...f5!

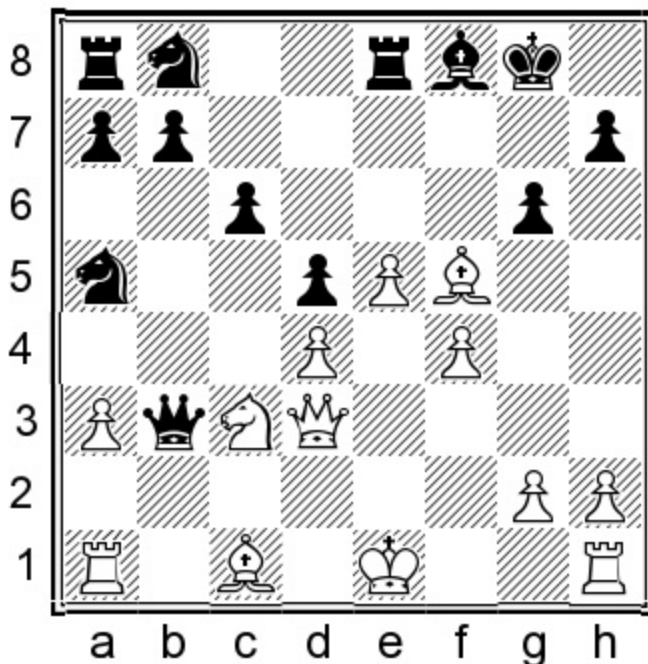
Objectively speaking, this is not the best move at all. But what is objectivity worth, if the black player will – by playing 'regular moves' – barely keep his head above water and struggle miserably for a

draw?

After 16...♘a6? 17.f5 Black would be steamrolled.

16...f5! 17.b4?!

Wavering in my determination. Instead, precise calculation would have led to victory after 17.♘xf5
♙xf5 18.♙xf5 ♖xb3 19.♗d3 g6



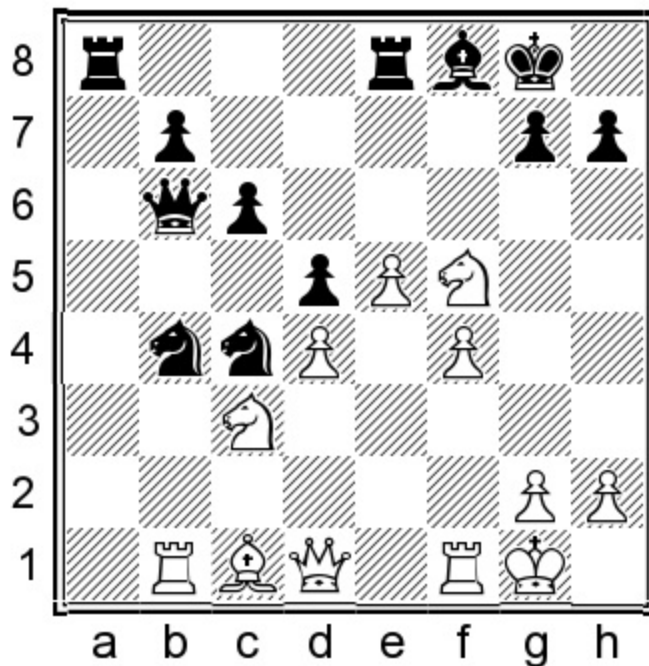
Analysis after: 19...g6

Seeing ghosts, I couldn't visualize the consequences after the not too difficult 20.♙xg6! [Indeed, after 20.♙h3 ♖c4 forcing the exchange of Queens, the worst part for Black is over.] 20...hxg6 21.♗xg6+ ♔h8 Here I stopped calculating the lines, as Black attacks c3 while being a piece up. But after 22.0-0 ♖xc3 23.♗xe8 ♔g8 24.e6! threatening e7, as well as ♗f7+ and ♗xf8+, White is winning.

17...♘c4 18.♙xf5?!

18.♘xf5 was much stronger, as the 'battery' ♙c2-♗d3 will power through Black's defenses and pulverize them. 18...♘d7 19.0-0 a5 20.bxa5 ♖xa5 21.♗d3! Indirectly hitting h7. 21...g6 22.♘h4! when Black is defenseless against ♘xg6.

18...♙xf5 19.♘xf5 a5 20.♖b1 axb4 21.axb4 ♘a6 22.0-0 ♘xb4



Position after: 22... ♖xb4

White still has a promising position, but it has become rather unclear ever since the 16th move. I spent a lot of time and energy because of the ensuing complications and couldn't resist the temptation of accepting the draw offer of my strong opponent! Nevertheless, this result felt like a defeat spoiling my position after my opponent's bluff. After 23. ♖h1 ♔d8 24. ♖xg7! ♕xg7 25. f5 Black would have been helpless against the pawn avalanche.

1/2-1/2

Thus, under some severe circumstances, drastic measures like exchange sacrifices are 'worth a punt'. However, 'the risk-taker' will not always be rewarded for his courage. Before taking such a risk, you, dear reader, ought to make a thorough analysis of the chances of the success of the operation. That means taking into account the chance that the opponent finds the refutation of the risk-fraught undertaking. Depending on the strength of the opponent and the intricacy of the lines which one has to find, one can make an educated guess of how successful your actions might be.

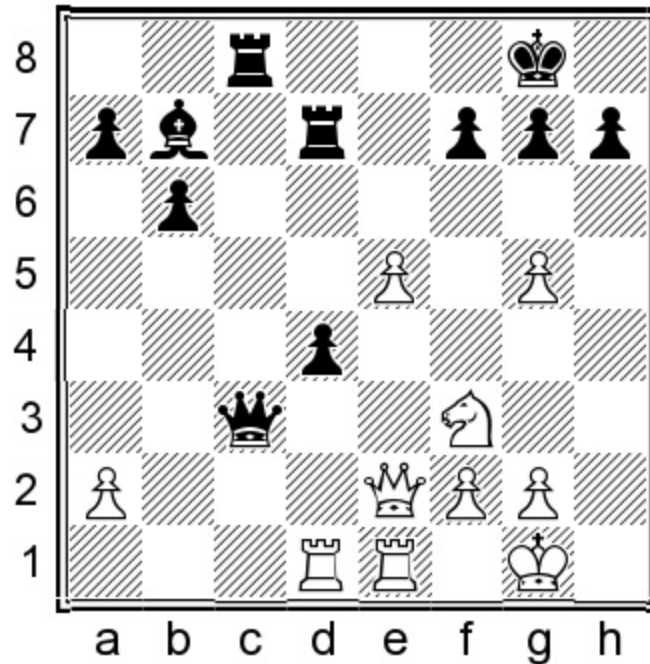
There are two 'off-board' factors which can play a part as well, namely (1) the time on your opponent's clock, and (2) the 'profile' and composure of the opponent. Some players are just very nervous or have a tendency to choose passive continuations when the going gets tough. In case your risky move calls for a robust response, your chances of success are much higher against such an opponent.

Having this approach – as described above – in my toolkit, I choose the all-or-nothing strategy in a fairly recent game in the Bundesliga in order to win against a lower rated opponent. A previous pawn sacrifice in the game had gone totally wrong due to a miscalculation, leading to the following worse position. Since a normal approach would have led to a draw or a loss, I had to find an irregular way out.

Werle, Jan (2526)

Eichler, Christoph (2286)

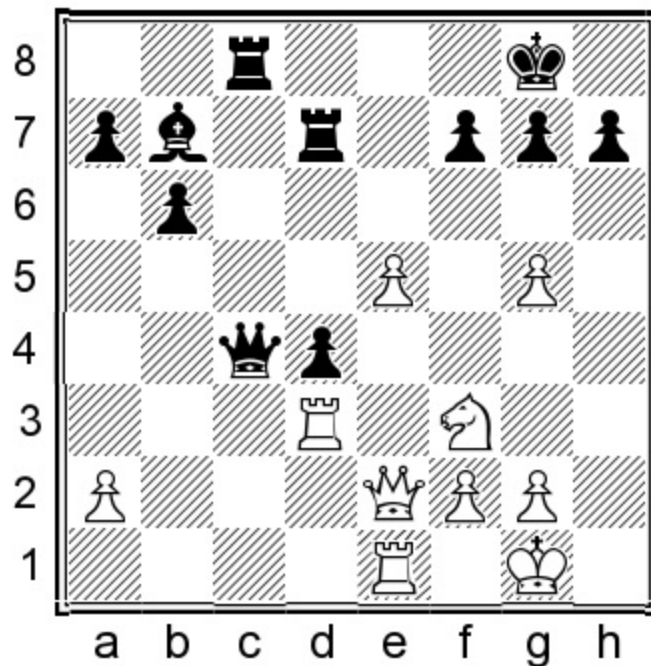
Mülheim 2018



21.♖d3!

Initially, 21.e5-e6 (21.e6) was my intention in this position, but after 21...♕xf3 22.exd7, it now occurred to me that my opponent could take on e2, and I can neither deliver mate on e8 nor queen my pawn. Oops! After missing this, my heart started to pound faster. Calming down, I came to the conclusion that his obvious continuations, such as ...♕xf3, had to be prevented (by ♖d3) and I had to find my way to Black's King immediately, by any means necessary. Meanwhile I made supplication to the goddess Fortuna for the luck I would surely need.

21.♖d3! ♔c4



Position after: 21...♙c4

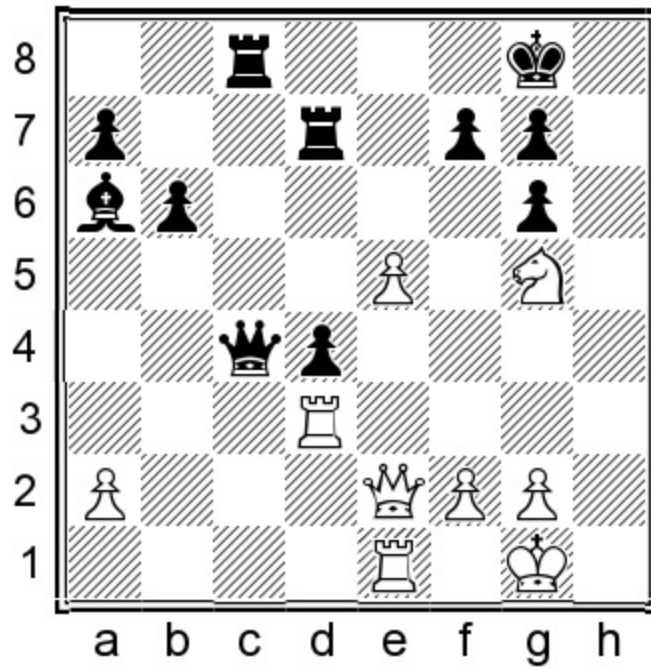
22.g6!

Objectively speaking, this move of mine was not the best one. However, due to the harsh circumstances I was in, it was the best attempt in order to stir things up. After a silent non-aggressive continuation my opponent would have quickly built up his positional advantage. Therefore, the only way to set my opponent real problems was to find a way to his King. Good or bad, this was my only chance of a result!

22...hxg6?!

The more illogical 22...fxg6! would lead to a big advantage for Black as I am now unable to open lines to Black's King. E.g. 23.e6 ♖e7 24.♖xd4 ♙xe2 25.♖xe2 ♖ce8 with a lasting advantage.

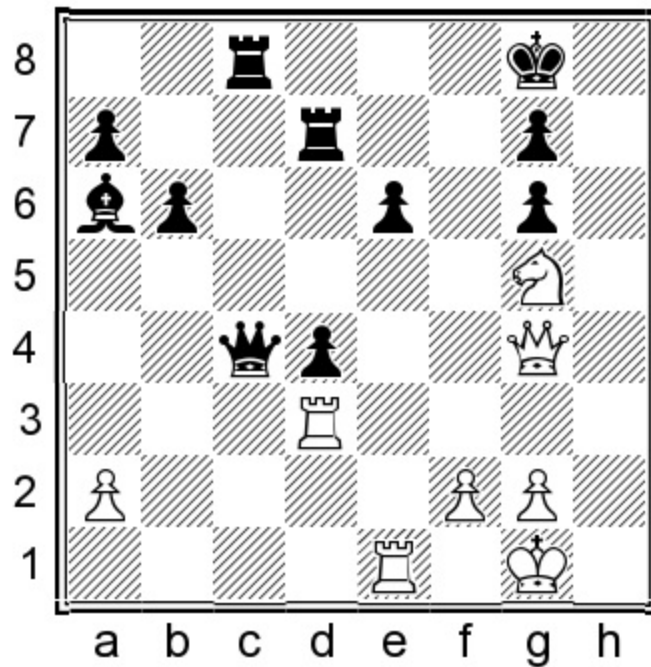
23.♘g5 ♙a6?



Position after: 23...♔a6?

And here is the mistake. This was the natural move I rather wanted my opponent to make. He didn't foresee the dire straits he is getting himself into.

24.e6! fxe6 25.♔g4



Position after: 25.♔g4

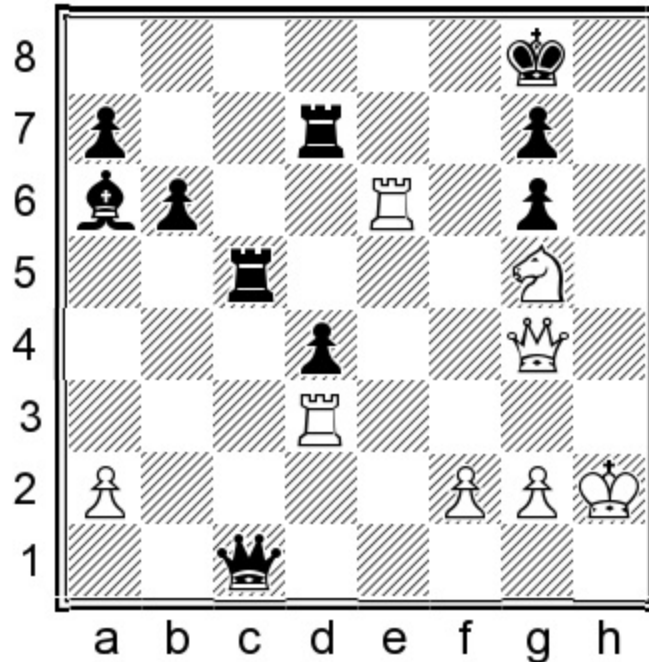
Lady Luck had come through for me and delivered a huge kingside attack. My immediate intention is

now ♖g4-h4-h7+ breaking through the last defenses. From this moment on I could do it alone again.

25...♞c5

25...♞xd3 doesn't help Black, because of 26.♞xe6+ followed by either ♖e8 or ♘h7 and mate.

26.♞xe6 ♖c1+ 27.♔h2



Position after: 27.♔h2

27...♞xg5

Pinning all his hopes on 29...♞h5 after the check on h3, but missing a subtlety. After ♞xg5 (27...♞xg5), I would have won after ♞e8+ (28.♞e8+), ♔f7 (28...♔f7) and ♞e6 (29.♞e6) mate.

28.♞e8+ ♔h7

Black is now helpless against the threats against his King, like ♞e8+.

29.♞h3+ ♞h5 30.♞xh5+ gxh5 31.♞f5+!

This intermediate move leads to an uninterrupted attack on the black King.

31...g6 32.♞xd7+ ♔h6 33.♞h8+ ♔g5 34.♞e7+

1-0

Another example of turning the tide comes to us, courtesy of the ever-dangerous Azeri grandmaster

and tactical maestro Rauf Mamedov. After a bad opening he is about to face the consequences. The pawn on h4 is hanging and White is underdeveloped. White can't save his pawn by moving it to h5, as his dark squares will become very weak.

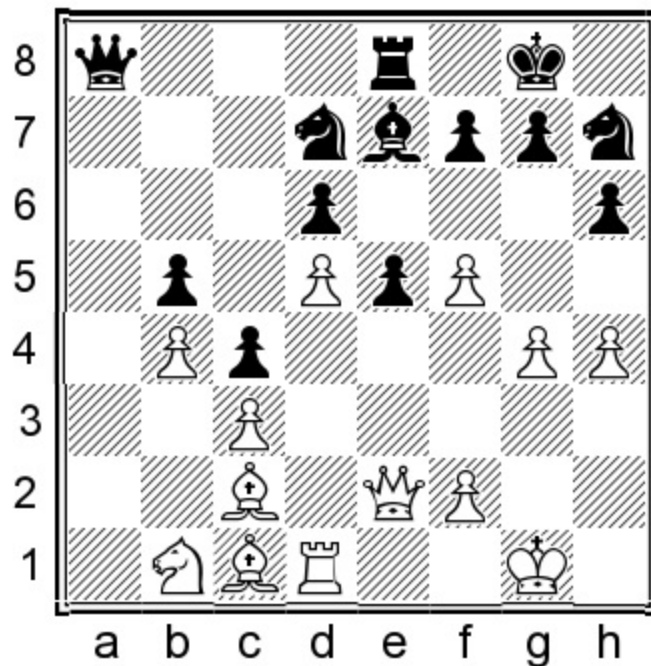


The dangerous Azeri GM Rauf Mamedov is (regularly) a member of the 2700+ Elo-club and frequent applier of the 'Turn-the-tide-strategy'. (photo Frans Peeters)

Mamedov, Rauf (2699)

Brunello, Sabino (2552)

Batumi 2018



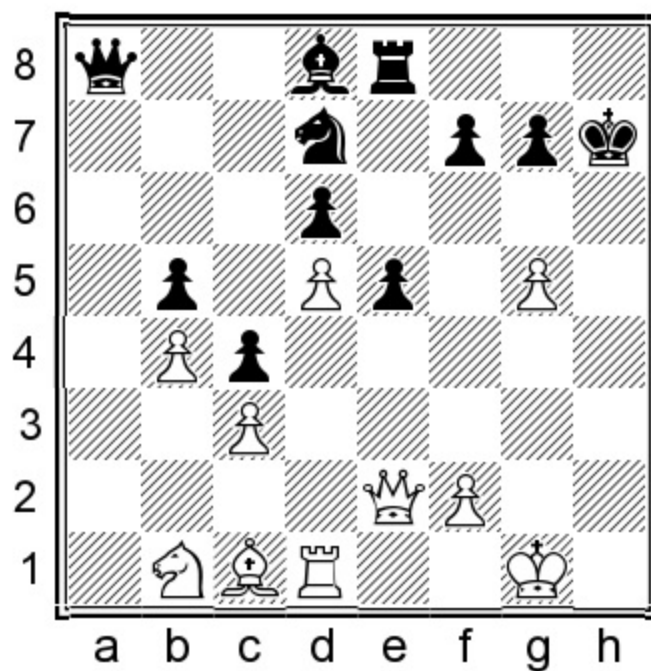
22.f6!

Mamedov pursued a radical change of the course of the game, using a pawn sacrifice for the sake of the initiative. As frequently happens, the initiative prevails above a material advantage!

22.♖d2 ♜xh4 23.♖e4 ♜e7 with a big advantage for Black.

The same goes for 22.h5 because of 22...♜g5!

22.f6! ♜xf6 23.g5 hxg5 24.♜xh7+ ♜xh7 25.hxg5 ♜d8?



Position after: 25...♔d8?

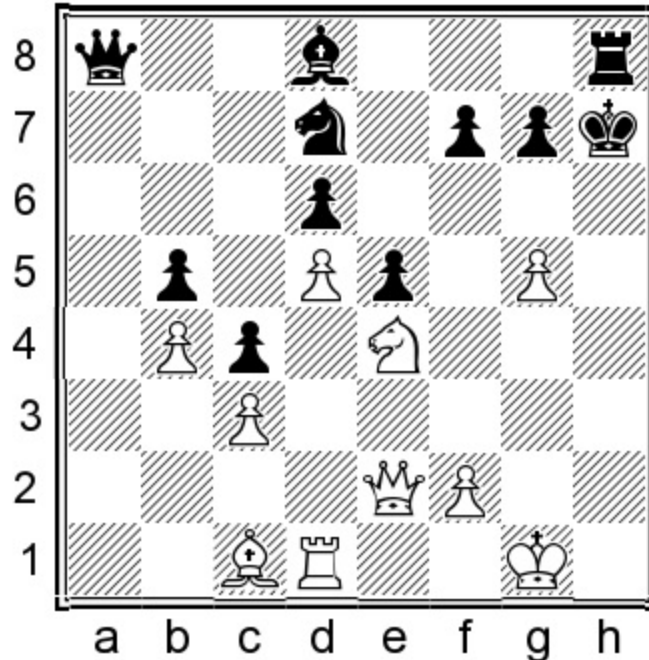
The Italian grandmaster is too optimistic about his position, and forgets about the change of course of the game. Indeed, the Bishop would be very actively placed on b6; however, the issue is that Brunello has no time for this.

It was essential to defend the pawn on d6, whereafter he could have deployed his King, Knight and Rook optimally: 25...♔e7! 26.♘d2 ♖h8 27.♙e4 ♔g8 28.♚g4 ♜f8 and Black is much better, since his Knight and Rook are making good use of the multiple weak spots around White's King.

26.♘d2

Now that the e4-pawn is gone, the Knight is brought to the central square it vacated.

26...♖h8 27.♙e4



Analysis after: 27.♙e4

27...♔e7

Chess can be as erratic as the weather. In a couple of moves the position has changed like the tide - turned from ebb into flood. Mamedov obtained by this turn of events tremendous compensation for the pawn. His Knight occupies an excellent outpost on e4, whereas Black's pieces are passive.

27...♔g8 wouldn't help Black either here, because of 28.♚g4 ♜f8 29.♘xd6! ♜g6 30.♘xf7! and the Knight can't be taken: 30...♔xf7 31.♚e6+ ♔f8 32.♚f5+ ♔g8 33.♚xg6+.

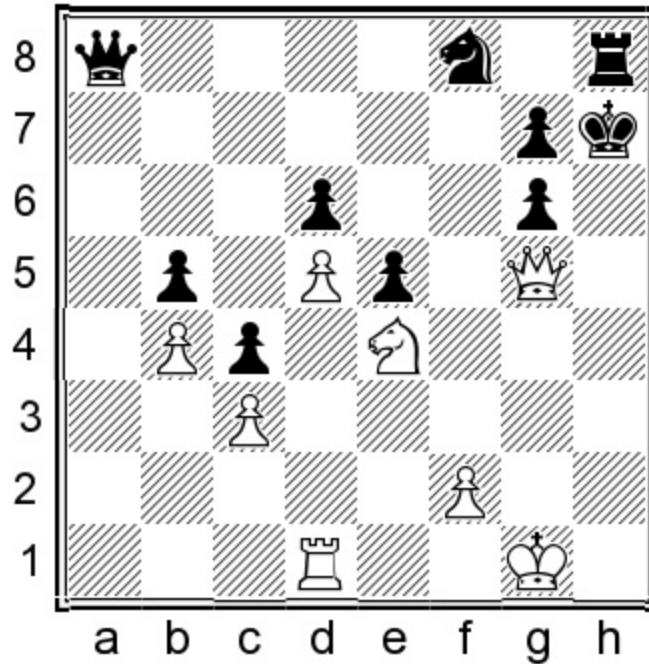
28.g6+!

And another pawn sacrifice for the sake of piece play. The g5-square is now available for the white pieces and the light squares e6, d7 and f7 become weak.

28...fxg6

28...♔xg6?? 29.♚g4+ ♔h7 30.♚xd7

29.♚g4 ♖f8 30.♙g5 ♙xg5 31.♚xg5

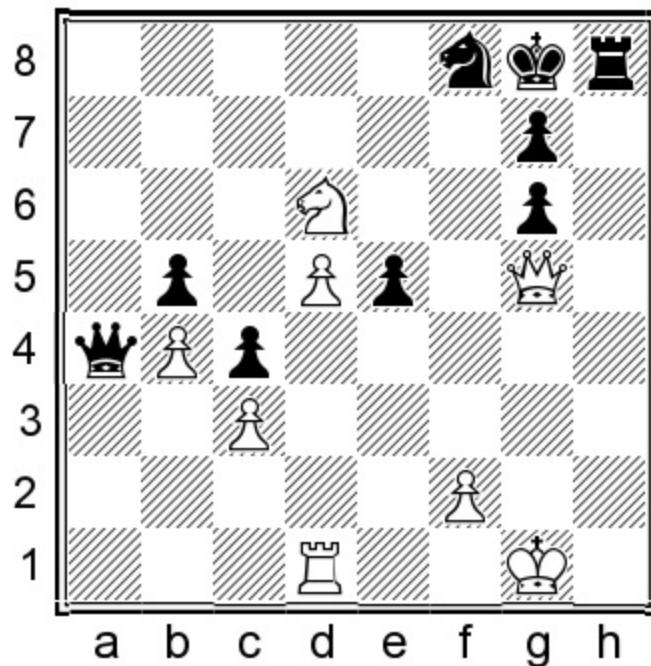


Position after: 31.♚xg5

White has activated all his pieces and obtained sufficient compensation for his material deficit. Now it's Black's turn to defend, as White's initiative is overwhelming and Black's pieces don't coordinate. As we see from the following moves, Black senses the danger and launches his counter-attack, yet it fails due to a complete lack of harmony in his camp.

31...♚c8?

The idea of ...♚a8-c8-h3 does not work yet, and had to be prepared by first activating the Rook on h8: 31...♔g8! 32.♖xd6 ♚a4!



Analysis after: 32... ♕a4!

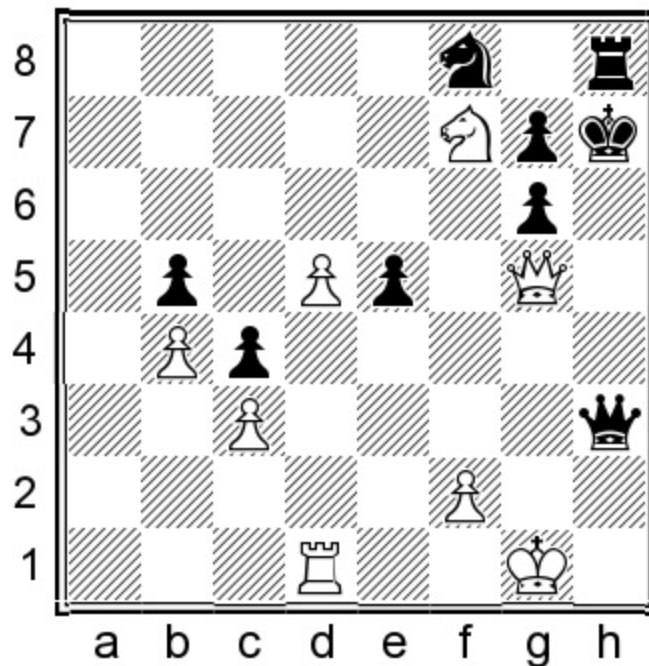
A strange-looking suggestion by the computer, but very effective. Black is attacking the white Rook. When the Rook gives up the defense of the d-pawn when it's moving from the d-file, Black returns to a8 with her majesty, threatening to win the d5-pawn. In case the Queen comes to its defense, Black will bring in the Rook by ♖h8-h3-d3.

A) 33. ♕d2 ♖h3! heading for d3.

B) 33. ♕g4 Black has the opportunity to activate his Rook along the 4th rank with 33... ♖h4! 34. ♕f3 ♖f4! 35. ♕e2 ♗h7! and Black launches a dangerous attack on White's King, during which his last piece (the Knight) comes into play.

C) 33. ♖e1 ♕a8 34. ♕xe5 ♖h5 with equality.

32. ♗xd6 ♕h3 33. ♗f7!



Position after: 33. ♖f7!

White is winning now, since the loss of the exchange is inevitable.

33... ♕f3

33... ♖g8 34. ♖e1 ♘d7 35. ♖e4 and ♖h4 mate about to follow.

34. ♕h4+ ♔g8 35. ♕xh8+ ♔xf7 36. ♖a1 ♘d7 37. ♕h4 ♘f6 38. ♕g5 ♘g4 39. ♖a7+ ♔g8 40. ♕d8+ ♔h7 41. ♕h4+ ♘h6 42. d6 ♕d1+ 43. ♔h2 ♕xd6 44. ♕e7 ♘g4+ 45. ♔g3 ♕f6 46. ♕xf6 ♘xf6 47. ♔f3 g5 48. ♖a5 g4+ 49. ♔g2 ♘e4 50. ♖xb5 ♘xc3 51. ♖c5

1-0

Section 5.6 – The Right timing

In the process of creating and implementing a defensive idea, the element of timing is crucial. At the pivotal point of a game you should be able to act firmly and with conviction, but at other times it's more appropriate to apply waiting tactics and await the moment for a more vigorous counterstrike.

Recognizing the moment at which one must act is a key skill, and with practice you can even plan for it and see it coming.⁽⁴⁾

But how? In order to train this facility, it's important to define a 'critical moment'. In chess books we are told to find the solution based on a prior defined theme. Naturally, this makes our task much easier and doesn't 'trigger' our ability to respond appropriately and in timely fashion when the chips are down in a real game. Unfortunately, exercises and reading form only a small part of this training and you must acquire this situational awareness through painful experience. One of the players in

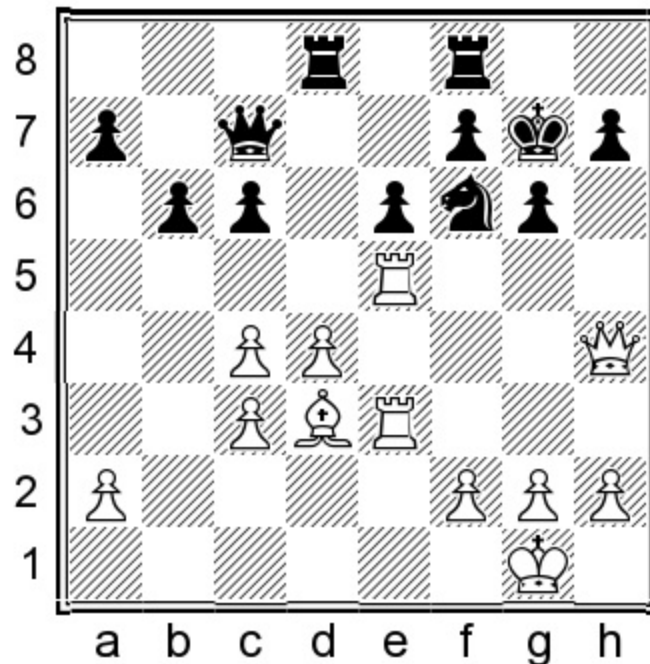
whom this facility was best developed was former World Champion Anatoly Karpov.

After Christiansen's last move 21.♖1e3, a lot of players would have felt intimidated, especially in a rapid game in which there may not be enough time to calculate important lines and see every detail. Therefore, the knee-jerk reaction might be to take immediate defensive action as His Royal Highness' safety is at stake. However, playing a passive defensive move contains the risk of handing over the initiative to the adversary, in every domain of the board.

Christiansen, Larry Mark (2620)

Karpov, Anatoly (2725)

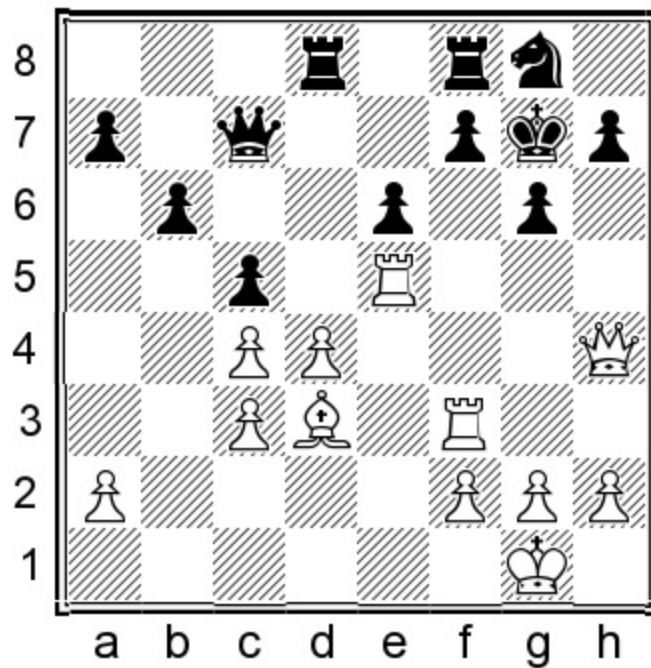
Monte Carlo 1993



The Rook on e3 left the first rank but has not yet been moved to the edge of the board and therefore Karpov comes up first with an aggressive rejoinder in the center. There was no reason for an immediate reaction on the kingside, so Karpov first awaits the opponent's rook lift to f3 or h3. From that point on, Karpov starts defending by pulling his Knight back behind the barricades. As the white Rook is out of play on this square on the edge of the board, his reply in the center gains in strength.

21...c5! 22.♖f3 ♘g8!

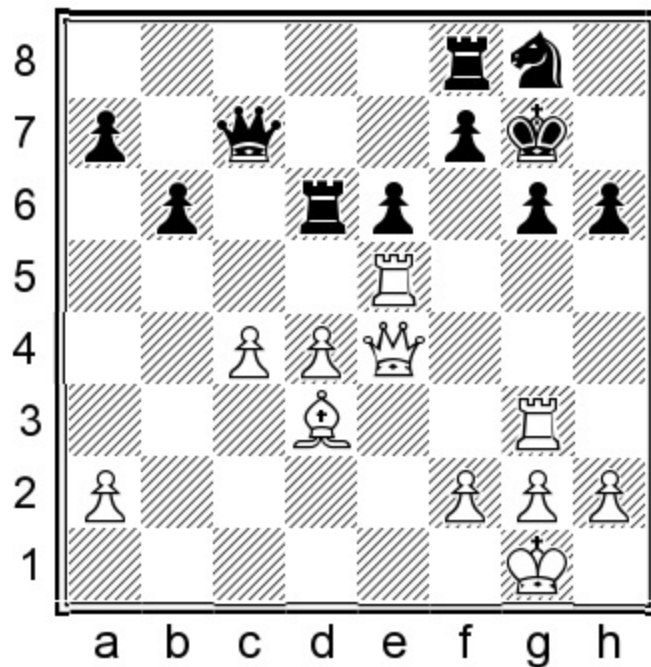
The defensive Knight retreat is Karpov's renowned trademark. But here this retreat is perfectly timed as well, since the white pieces are all occupying highly aggressive positions on the kingside, and perhaps not so well placed to deal with a central counterstrike.



Position after: 22... ♖g8!

23. ♖h3 h6 24. ♖g3 cxd4 25. cxd4 ♖d6 26. ♔e4

Christiansen is planning to blow up Black's defences with h2-h4-h5, but he is too late. The rook sacrifice does not lead to the desired outcome for White either.

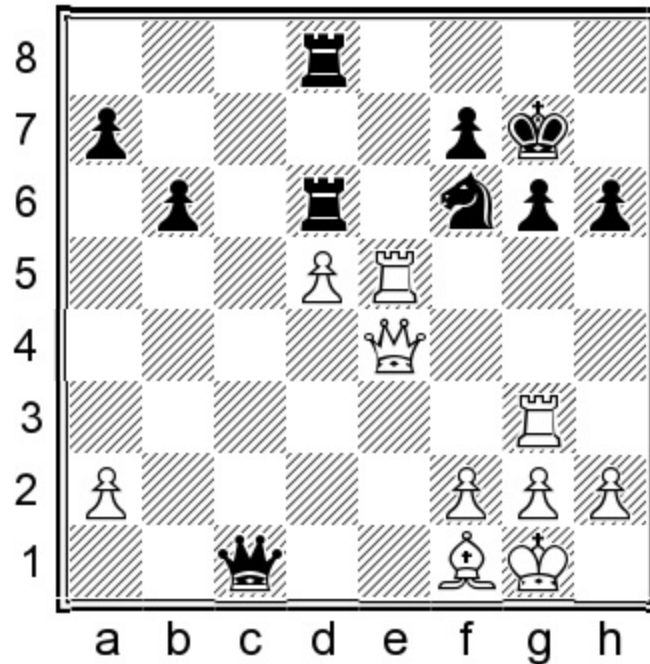


Position after: 26. ♔e4

26... ♖fd8!

Now that d4 is attacked, White has to react, and the center will open in Black's favor.

27.d5 exd5 28.cxd5 ♖c1+ 29.♙f1 ♜f6



Position after: 29... ♜f6

The ruins of White's attack are visible; the white Rooks are totally lacking in coordination and Black is becoming very active. To make matters worse, the pawn on d5 is about to fall:

30.♖c4 ♜xc4 31.♙xc4 ♜c8 32.♙f1 ♜xd5 33.♖xd5

and by now being a pawn up, Karpov was able to win.

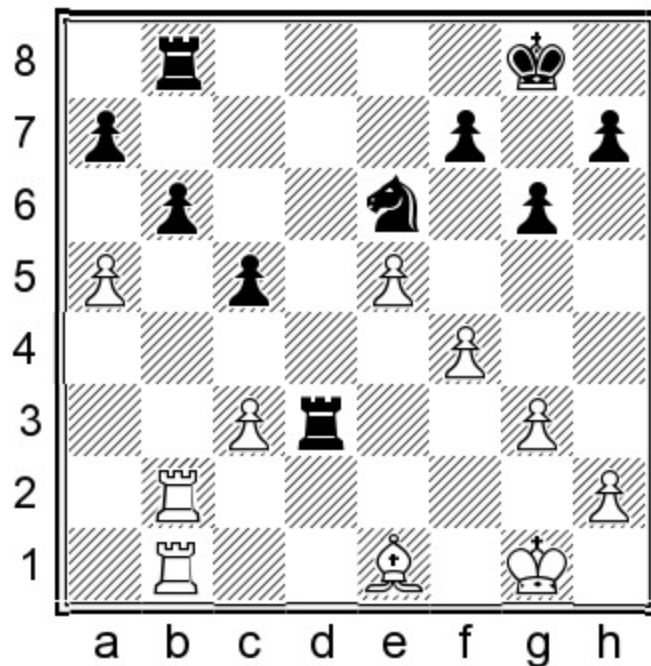
0-1

In the following old game, Rubinstein is on positional grounds enhancing the pressure on Black. Steiner is balancing on the verge of the abyss and Rubinstein is about to win the b6- pawn. The time has arrived for Black to stop waiting, and instead undertake *immediate* counter action!

Rubinstein, Akiba

Steiner, Lajos

Merano 1924

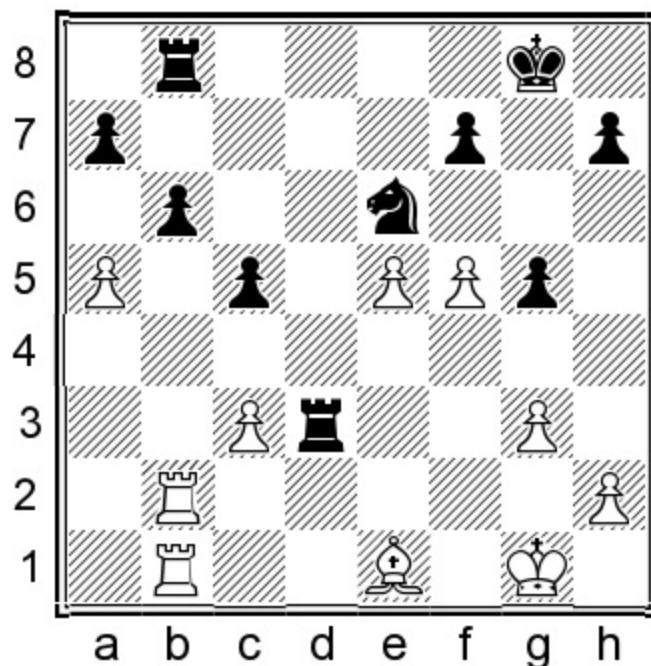


As the white Rooks are momentarily far away from the kingside pawns, Black should not hesitate to attack the kingside pawns. Therefore, 31...g5 was called for.

31...h5?

Steiner is intending to play first h5 and only then g5. The expenditure of one tempo on h7-h5 proves fatal.

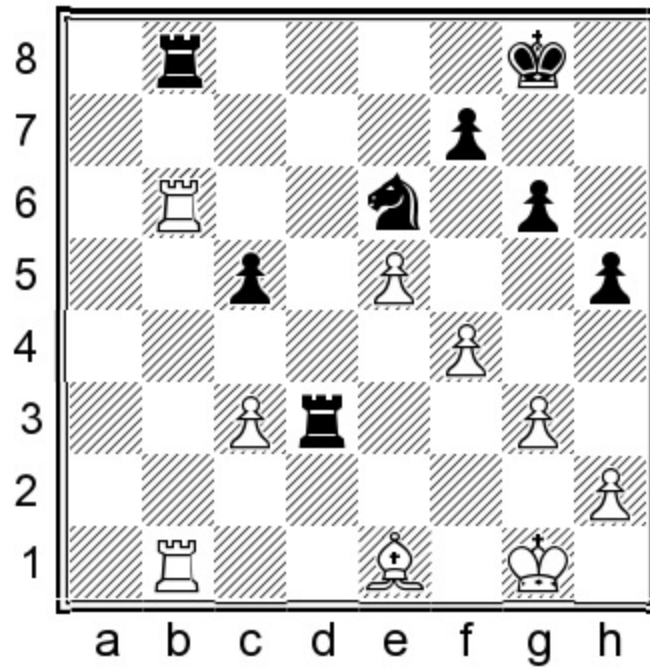
31...g5! 32.f5 [32.fxg5?! gives Black energetic counterplay after 32...♘xg5.]



Analysis after: 32.f5

32...♞f8! One might wonder why the Knight returns to f8 in time of need. The clue lies in the weakened e5-pawn which can be attacked after ♞f8-d7. [32...♞g7!? 33.g4 h5] 33.♞e2 defending the central e5-pawn. 33...♞e8 34.axb6 axb6 35.♞xb6 ♞d7 winning back the pawn.

31...h5? 32.axb6 axb6 33.♞xb6



Position after: 33.♞xb6

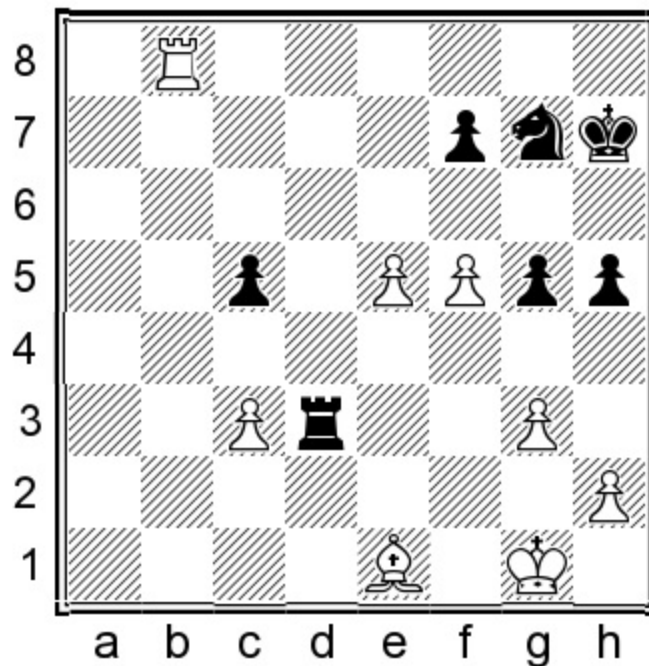
33...♞xb6?!

33...♞bd8! was one last try after which Black could try and hold the resulting ending a pawn down. 34.♔f1 g5 35.fxg5 ♞xg5 36.♞h6 ♞f3 37.♞xh5 ♞xe1 38.♞xe1 ♞xc3.

34.♞xb6 g5

This 'liberating' move is ill-timed and doesn't come to Black's rescue anymore.

35.f5 ♞g7 36.♞b8+ ♔h7



Position after: 36... ♔h7

37.e6!

White's pawn breakthrough is deciding the game. Black's strategy comes one move too late.

37...f6

37...fxe6? 38.f6 ♖f5 39.f7+–

38.♙f2 ♜d5 39.♞c8 ♞xf5 40.e7 ♞e5 41.♙xc5 ♔g6 42.c4 ♔f7 43.♞f8+ ♔g6 44.♙d6

1-0

Section 5.7 – The Tipping Point

We define the tipping point as that delicate moment at which the defender challenges for the initiative. The side which used to possess it must now fight for it in vigorous fashion. Should he fail to do so, or waver slightly in his determination, his control over the position might decrease further, eventually leading to a favorable outcome for the defender instead.

The difference between this and our previous subchapter is that the tipping point is not reached as the result of a 'Hail Mary', rather occurring as the logical culmination of both sides' plans. As we have seen in **(5.3 – Waiting Strategy)**, solid defense can require a lot of patience from the defender. You might be simply marking time until there comes a moment at which you can challenge for the initiative in a logical way.

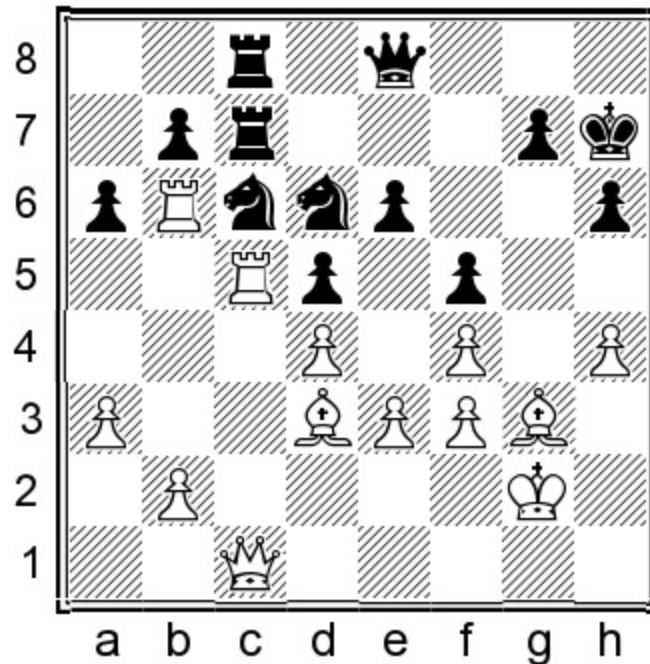
This is what happened in the game below: Alekseev must have started his queenside manoeuvres based on the false premise that he was certain to make progress. An innocent-looking queen move

from Karjakin then changes the picture considerably.

Alekseev, Evgeny (2673)

Karjakin, Sergey (2785)

Moscow 2012



29...♔d8!

All of a sudden, White finds that his Rook on b6 is misplaced. He must deal with some concrete threats based on the c-file, such as 30...♘xd4 or 30...♘a5. By these means Karjakin hopes to exploit the unprotected Rook on b6; there is also a longer-term intention of opening the g-file with ...g7-g5, possibly leading to a dangerous kingside attack.

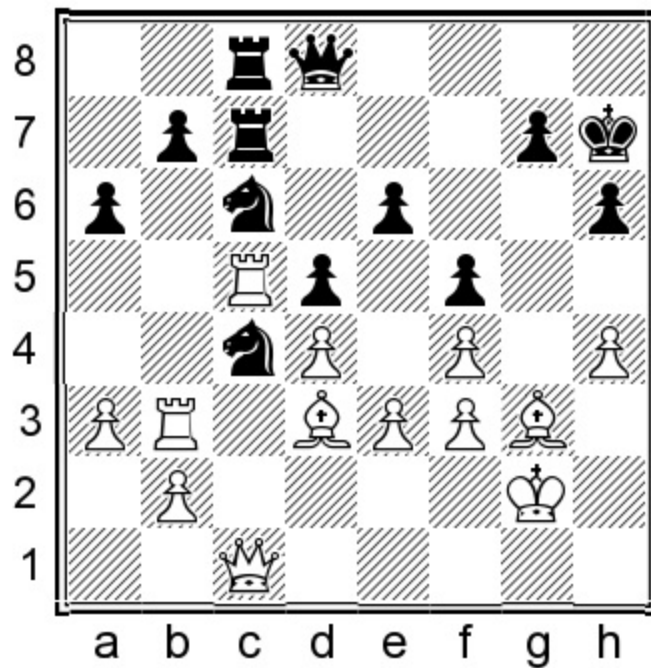
30.♖b3

White has no choice but to admit that his strategy failed and he retreats his rook. This necessity clearly comes to light in the following line:

A) 30.♙xa6? ♘a5 31.♚c3 ♜xc5 32.dxc5 ♚xb6 33.cxb6 ♜xc3 34.bxc3 bxa6–+;

B) Preventing ♘a5 by 30.♙e1? allows 30...g5! 31.fxg5 hxg5 32.hxg5 ♚xg5+ followed by ♜g7, which is winning for Black.

30...♘c4!!

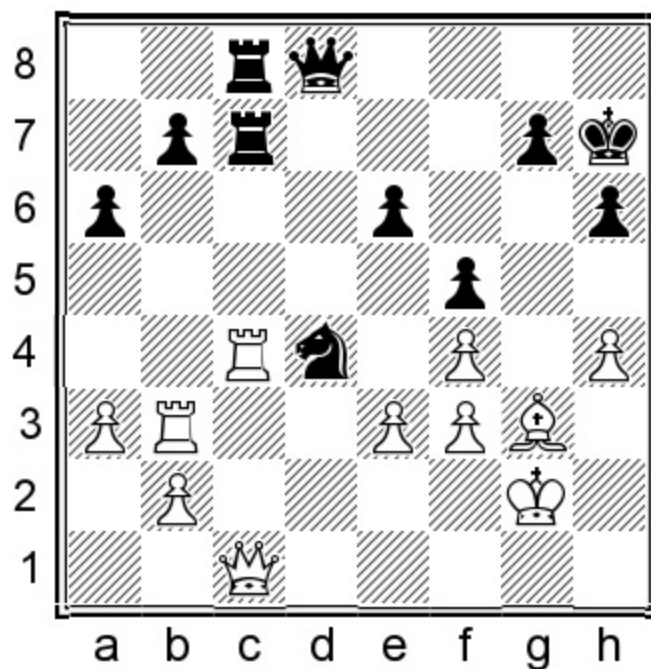


Position after: 30...♞c4!!

A splendid continuation. As always, Karjakin is alert to the moment upon which the course of the game turns.

31.♞c3

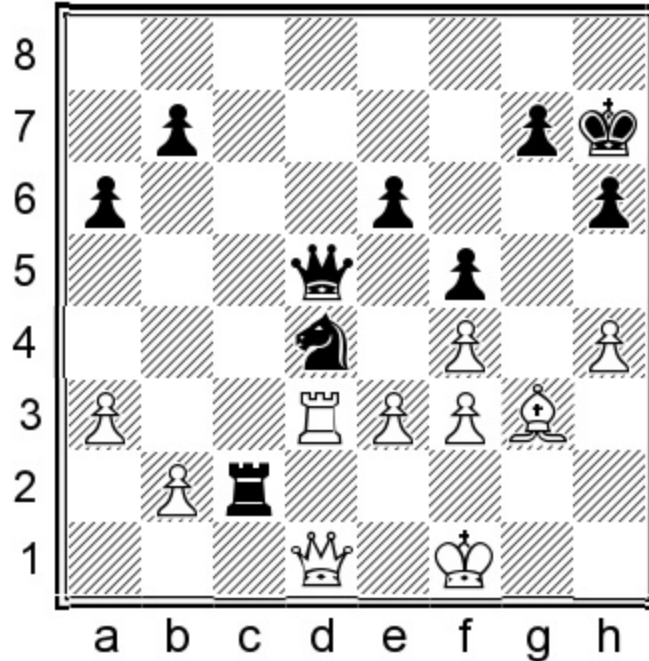
After 31.♞xc4, Karjakin calculated the following line deeply: 31...dxc4 32.♞xc4 [32.♞xc4 ♞a5-+] 32...♞xd4!



Analysis after: 32... ♖xd4!

An unexpected blow! The black Rooks on the c-file get into play with devastating effect.

33. ♖xc7 [33. ♖xd4 ♖xc1 34. ♖xd8 ♖xd8—+] 33... ♖xc7 34. ♔d1 pinning the Knight, but Black is concentrating now on White's weak King. 34... ♖c2+! 35. ♕f1 ♔d5! 36. ♖d3



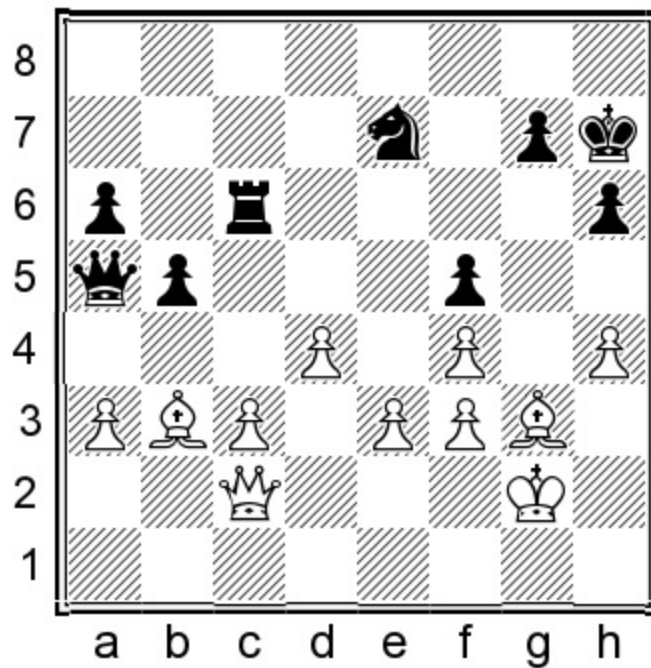
Analysis after: 36. ♖d3

36... ♔c4! White would have been helpless against the threat of ♖c1, thereby ultimately exploiting White's vulnerable king's position on the first rank.

31...b6!?

31... ♖b6 was probably even stronger, because after 32. ♖b3 Black can make use of the same trick 32... ♖a4! 33. ♖c2 ♖xd4! 34. exd4 ♖xc2+ 35. ♕xc2 ♔c7—+

32. ♖5xc4 dxc4 33. ♕xc4 ♖e7 34. ♕xe6 ♖xc3 35. bxc3 ♖c6 36. ♕b3 b5 37. ♔c2 ♔a5

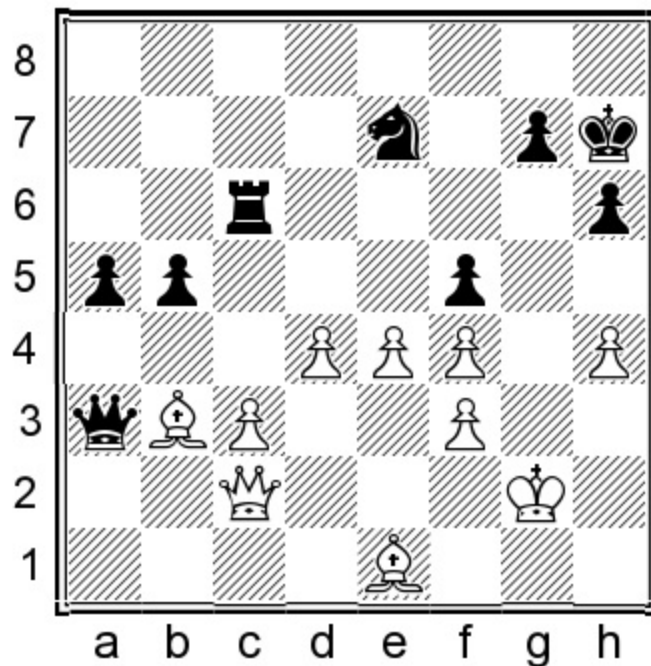


Position after: 37... ♙a5

38. ♜e1

38.d5! ♜xc3 39. ♙d2! would have been a nice save as Black can't avoid material losses due to the pinned Rook. 39...b4 40.axb4 ♙xb4 41. ♜e1 ♙xb3 42. ♙xc3=

38... ♙xa3 39.e4 a5!



Position after: 39...a5!

Karjakin knows not to let go even after the 180-degree turn the game has taken in his favor and proceeds in a determined fashion. Doing so, he doesn't give his opponent time to become dangerous with his pawns in the center.

40.d5

40.e5 a4! 41.♙f7 b4 the marching of central pawns, doesn't save White: 42.d5 b3—+

40...a4 41.♙a2 b4 42.♙b1 b3 43.♚d2 ♖g6+ 44.♗h3 ♚a1 45.♚d3 a3 46.exf5 ♜f6 47.d6 a2

0-1

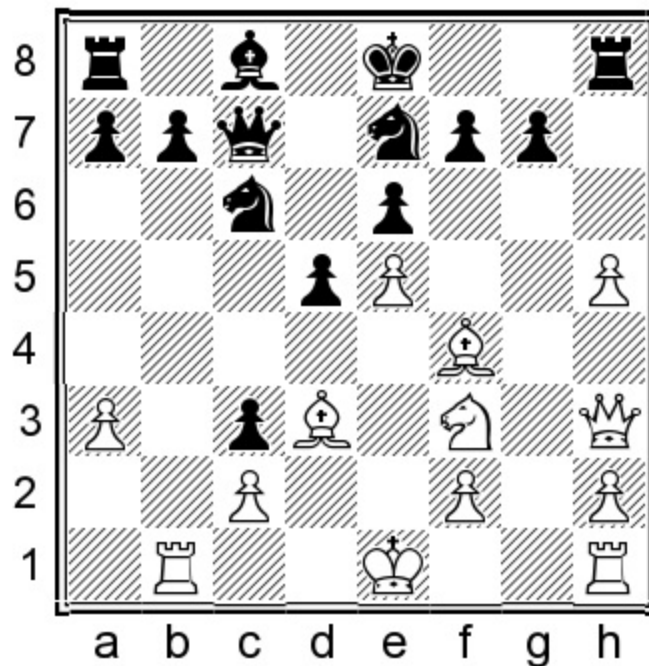
Section 5.8 – Greed and Grit

Many high-level players are comfortable with the idea of snatching material, sometimes in ways that look quite ill-advised, and then hanging onto it for dear life. Most often, in high-level games, the material in question is a single pawn far beyond the enemy lines.

Initially, the pawn-taking operation takes time and the opponent will be able to use the resulting lead in development to launch an attack. If all goes as planned, the pawn-taker will hold firm against the initiative or attack, and the storm will eventually pass. After the slow fading of the opponent's initiative, the defender will endeavor to convert his extra material advantage into victory. Our perennial favorite defender Korchnoi shows us the way against Tal below.

Tal, Mihail
Korchnoi, Viktor
Riga 1958





Korchnoi's hunger hasn't been satisfied yet. He grabs the second pawn in the middle of the board, leaving his Knight – as it at first seems – eternally pinned.

14...♖g6! 15.♙g3! ♖gxe5 16.♖xe5

According to Korchnoi, *“White incorrectly restricts his own possibilities. The critical continuation was to move the king without exchanging knights.”* He should have moved his King out of the check with ♔f1, for the sake of the pin.

16...♖xe5 17.♔f1

17.♔d1? is allowing a Knight fork, after 17...♖xd3! 18.♙xc7? ♖xf2+.

17...♙d7 18.♚h4 f6

It was possible to unpin with 18...♖f3! in order to follow up with e5. With that in mind, maybe White could have started with 18.♙g1 instead.

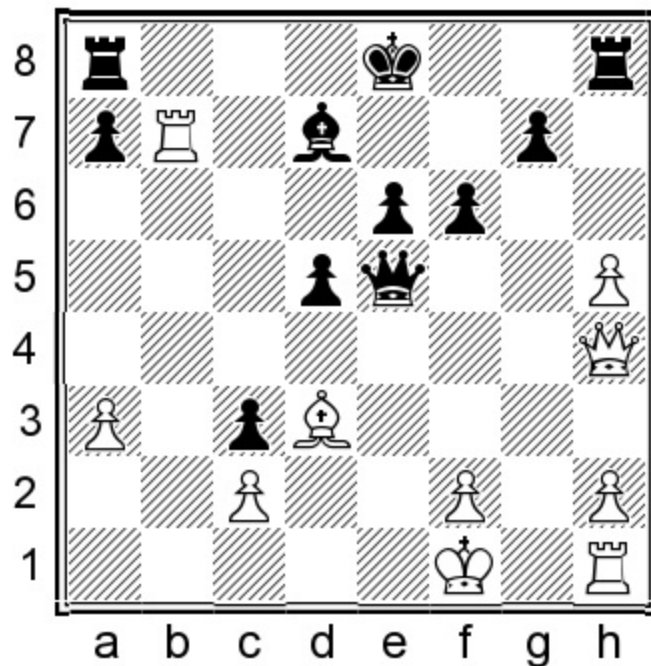
19.♙xe5!

Black is forced to take back with the Queen, allowing ♙xb7.

19...♚xe5

19...fxe5 is dangerous, because of 20.♙g6+ White can consider to take back the pawn on b7, after ...♔f8, ♚b4+ (20...♔f8 21.♚b4+) and ♚xb7.

20.♙xb7



Position after: 20. ♖xb7

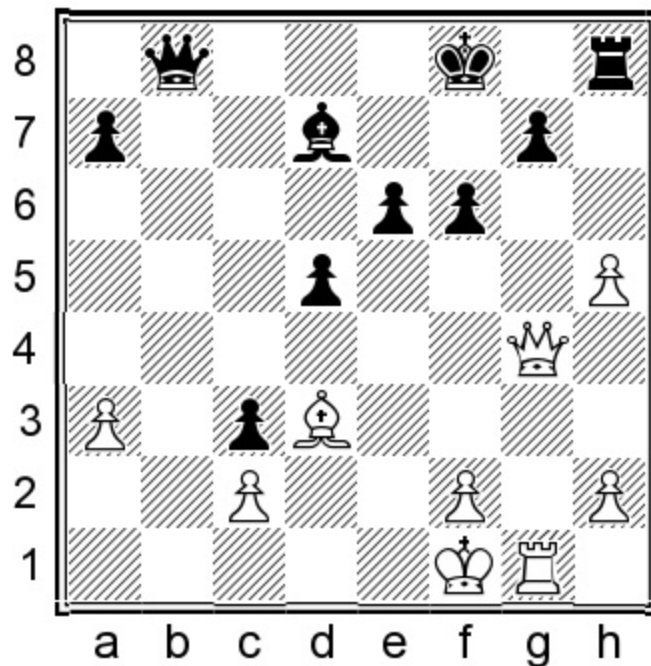
20... ♖b8

Naturally, the most active piece of the attacker should be exchanged!

21. ♖xb8+

With 21. ♖xa7 White would have overplayed his hand, due to 21... ♔d8! Black threatens to take on h5, which he cannot do immediately due to the ♕g6 fork. Now after White defends it with 22. ♕g6, Black keeps an initiative with 22... ♖c6↑.

21... ♗xb8 22. ♖g4 ♔f8 23. ♖g1



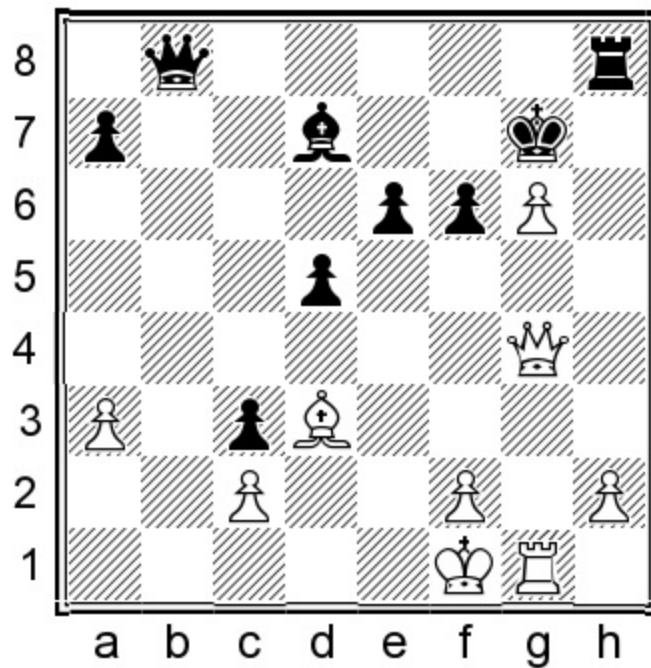
Position after: 23. ♖g1

We reached the climax of the game. Mikhail Tal may well be content with his position so far. The g7-pawn is under siege, and White's attack seems to be successful. When Black defends the pawn with ...♜g8, White strongly follows up with h6 and h7.

23...g5!

An exquisite move from Viktor the Terrible, and proof if any were needed that beauty in chess doesn't come only from attacking moves. Korchnoi: *"The only defense, but a sufficient one. Black returns the last of his extra pawns, but his king finds a safe refuge at g7."*

24.hxg6 ♔g7!



Position after: 24...♔g7!

Setting up a blockade on g7 with the King. The g-file is closed, bringing White's attack to an end.

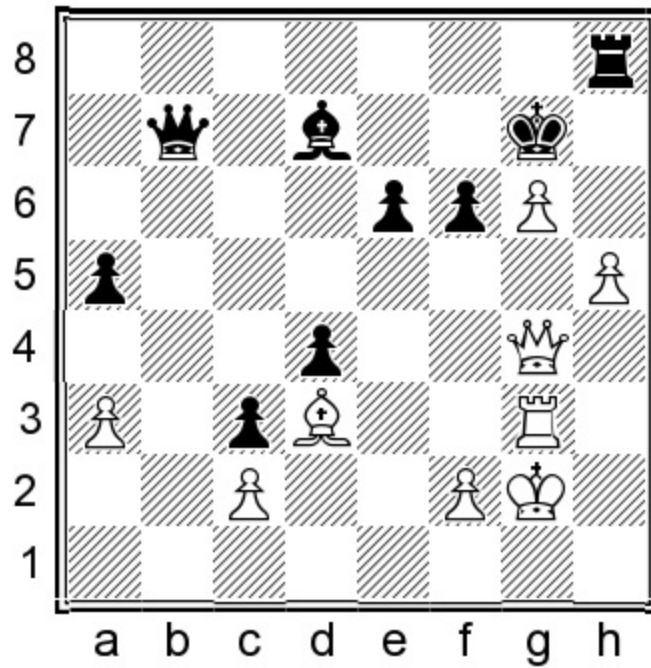
25.h4 a5 26.♖g3 ♚b1+ 27.♔g2

After 27.♔e2 ♜b5! Black develops some strong threats based on pushing the c-pawn.

27...♚b7

Preparing the pawn-push ...d5-d4, harrassing the White King.

28.h5 d4+

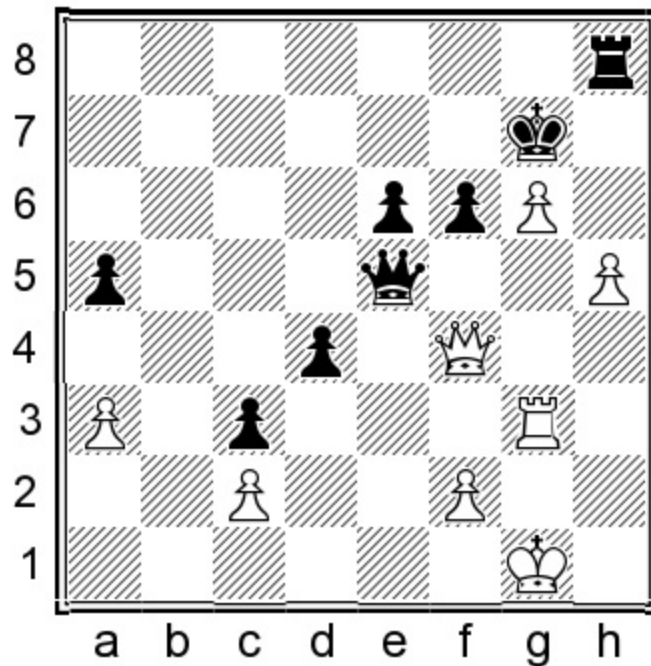


Position after: 28...d4+

29.♔e4

White would think twice to bring the King to the same file as his enemy's rook. 29.♔h2 e5!? leads to active play for Black. For instance, 30.♔f5 ♕xf5 31.♖xf5 ♖c8 when the strong pawn phalanx seems to be an asset in the ending.

29...♕c6 30.♕xc6 ♖xc6+ 31.♔g1 ♖d5 32.♖f4 ♖e5



Position after: 32... ♖e5

So far Korchnoi defended his position with gusto.

33.h6+?

This tactical idea contains a flaw. Because of Black's unsafe King, the position was still balanced had White just kept alive the threat of an invasion along the 7th rank.

33. ♖f3! because of the threat of ♖b7+, Korchnoi is compelled to impede the invasion allowing a repetition of moves. 33... ♖d5 34. ♖f4 ♖e5=

33... ♖xh6 34. ♖xh6+ ♔xh6 35.g7 ♖xg3+!

Missed by Tal. The g-pawn doesn't come to promotion and the resulting pawn ending is winning for Black.

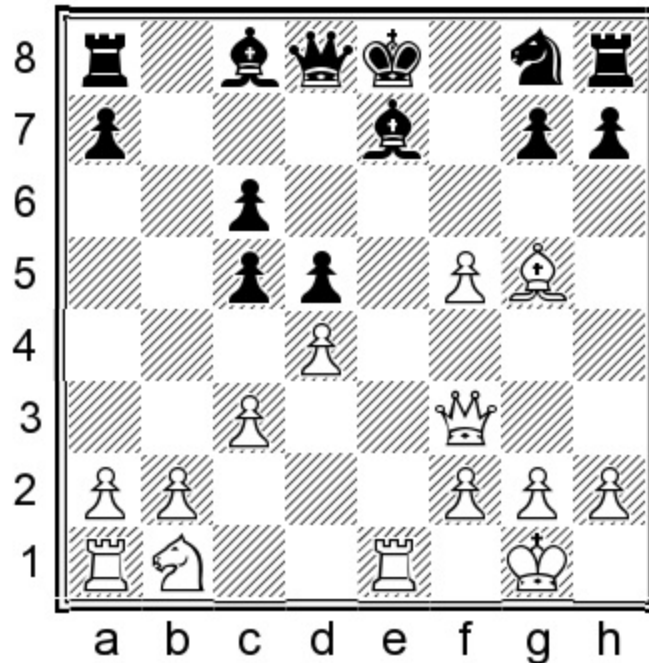
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In situations where material has been sacrificed, one may rightly question who is actually taking more risk: the pawn-taker or the opponent, who is now absolutely obliged to play for and obtain an attack.

Hendriks, Willy (2422)

Smeets, Jan (2620)

Dieren 2012



11... ♔f7!!

The two exclamation marks are not merely given for escaping the e-file pin. Smeets is also parrying

the threat of f5-f6, and recognized that the King is best placed here. Only in response to a subsequent ♖h5+ would Black retreat with the King to f8, arguing that he can then win a tempo with ♜g8-f6. The immediate ...♕e8-f8 was not good (with the Queen on f3), as White would get a chance for a breakthrough by taking on e7 and subsequently f5-f6 with a crushing attack.

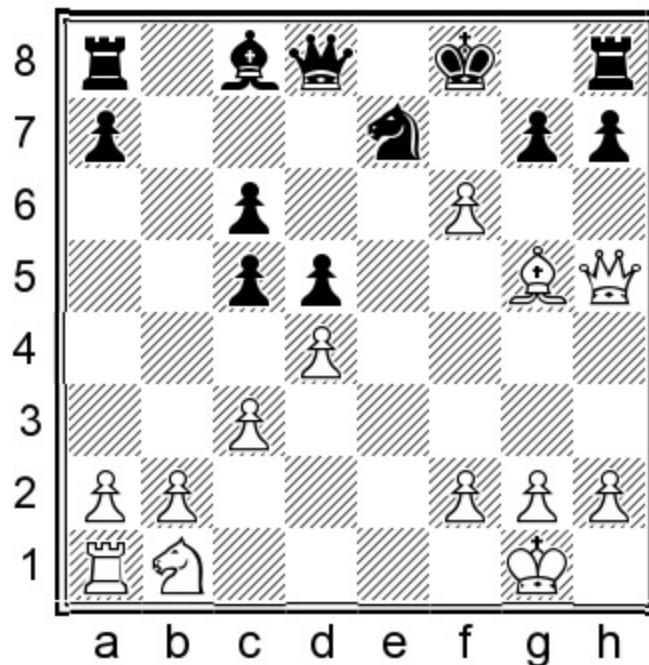
A) 11...♜f6 12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.♚h5+ ♔f8 14.♞d2!? when the Knight hops to h4, threatening ♜g6+ and the doubling of the Rooks on the e-file, will lead to a dangerous assault on Black's King on the middle of the board.

B) 11...cxd4 12.♙xe7 ♜xe7 13.f6 gxf6 14.♚xf6 is dangerous for Black, as the ♚ attacks simultaneously the Rook and the c6-pawn while the black King remains 'stuck' in the center.

C) 11...♕f8 is bad, because of 12.♞xe7! ♜xe7 13.f6 this pawn push is working now, as the King is wrongly placed on f8. 13...gxf6 14.♚xf6+ ♔g8 15.♙h6! White is winning here, since there is no convenient way to defend against the mate.

11...♕f7!! 12.♞xe7+

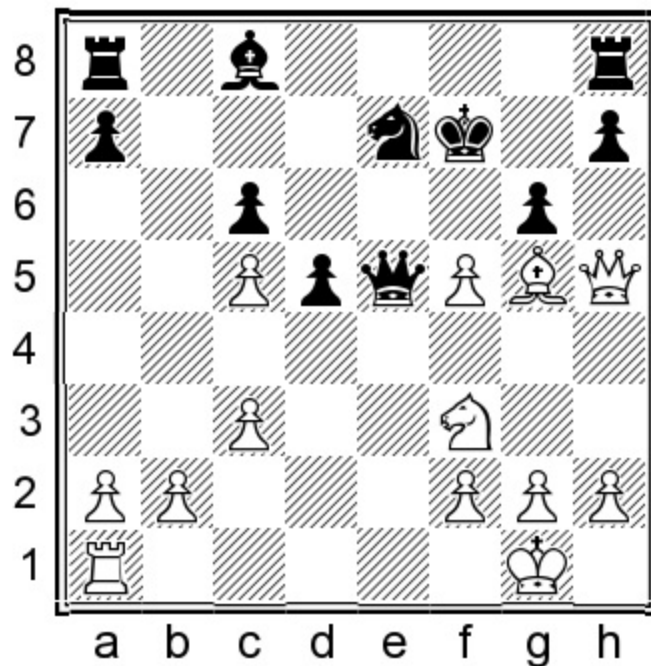
In the following line becomes clear that the crushing line after 11...♕f8? 12.♞xe7! and 13.f6, does no longer work with the Queen lured to h5: 12.♚h5+ ♔f8 13.♞xe7 ♜xe7 14.f6



Analysis after: 14.f6

14...gxf6! White cannot take back with the Queen but the Bishop on f6, which makes a difference between day and night. 15.♙h6+ [15.♙xf6 ♞g8! 16.♚h6+ ♔f7 when Black is winning.] 15...♕g8!, whereafter Black is winning as he will play ...♜g6 on the next move when the King is safe and he is a Rook up.

12...♜xe7 13.♞d2 ♞d6 14.dxc5 ♞e5 15.♚h5+ g6 16.♞f3

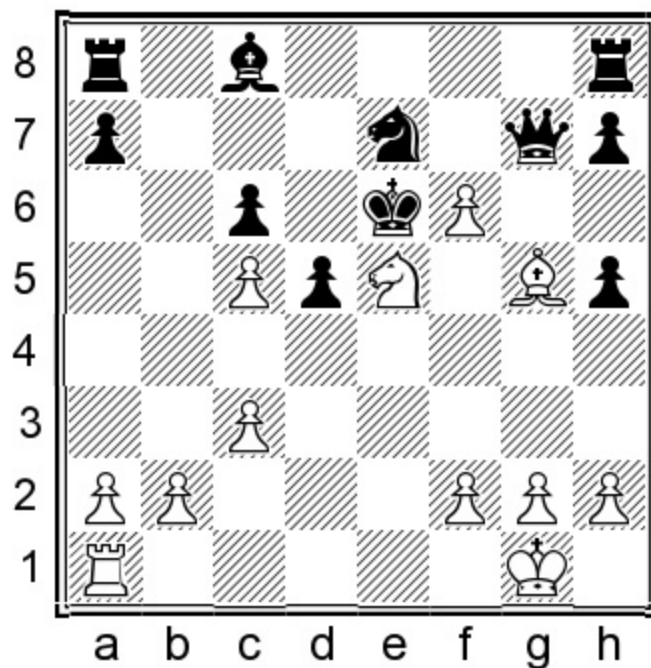


Position after: 16. Nf3

16... Qg7!

Black stands firm while the magnitude of White's attack decreases. Black shouldn't go for the obvious 16... Qxf5 , since then White develops a very dangerous attack after 17. Qh4 Ng8 18. Re1 .

17. f6 gxf5 18. De5+ Qe6!



Position after: 18... Qe6!

Here, the black King might seem to be in danger. But White simply doesn't have enough pieces to attack His Royal Highness. This is a case where the material-grabber will walk away with the full point.

19.fxg7 ♖g8 20.♖e1 ♜f5 21.♞xc6+ ♔f7 22.♙f4

22.♞e5+ is simply bad for White, because of 22...♔xg7.

22...♔xg7 23.f3 ♙d7 24.♞e5 ♙b5

Slowly Black's pieces are improved and White is simply too much material down. The rest is child's play for the twofold Dutch champion.

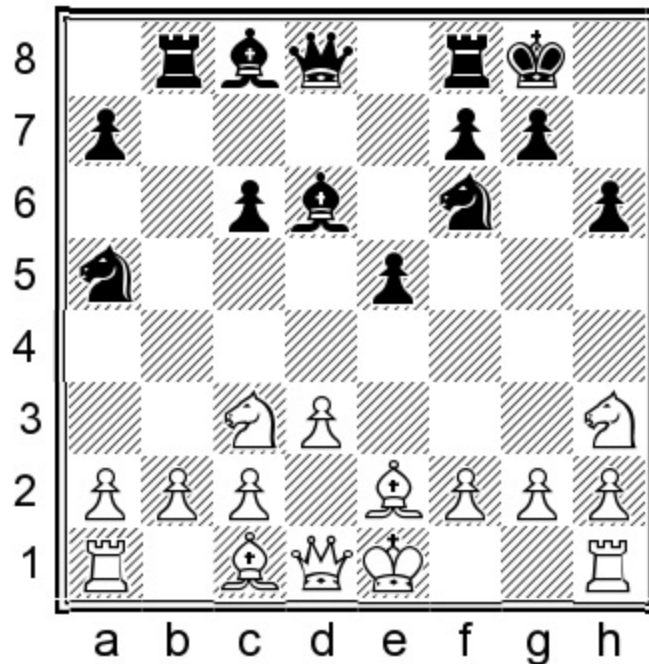
0-1

It may seem almost too simple to be mentioned, but another advantage of winning material is that it can be given back in a favorable way to activate your pieces or start an attack.

Short, Nigel (2660)

Nikolic, Predrag (2600)

Skelleftea 1989



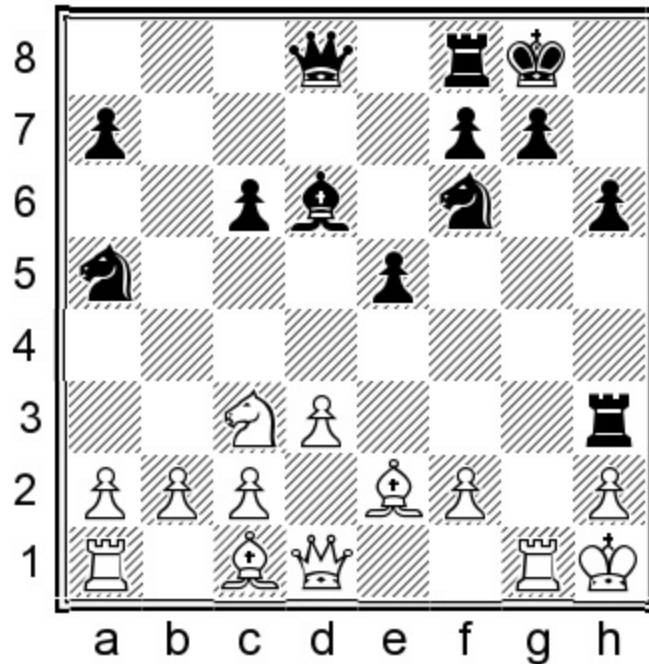
As indeed occurs throughout the Plerio Defense in the Italian Two Knights Opening, White is up a pawn. In this position, Short decided to place his King in the corner before he proceeds with his further operations. Ten years later against Mitkov he applied a different plan, consisting of the long-term regrouping of the Knight by ♞h3-g1-e2-g3, before castling.

12.0-0

12.♙f3 ♖c7 13.♘g1 c5 14.♘ge2 c4 15.♘g3 ♜d8 16.0-0 led to unclear play in: 1-0 (56) Short, N (2675) – Mitkov, N (2509) Batumi 1999.

12.0-0 ♜b4 13.♙h1 ♙xh3 14.gxh3 ♜h4 15.♜g1 ♜xh3

Gaining back the pawn on h3 was a Pyrrhic victory for Black. All the coordination between the black pieces is lost.



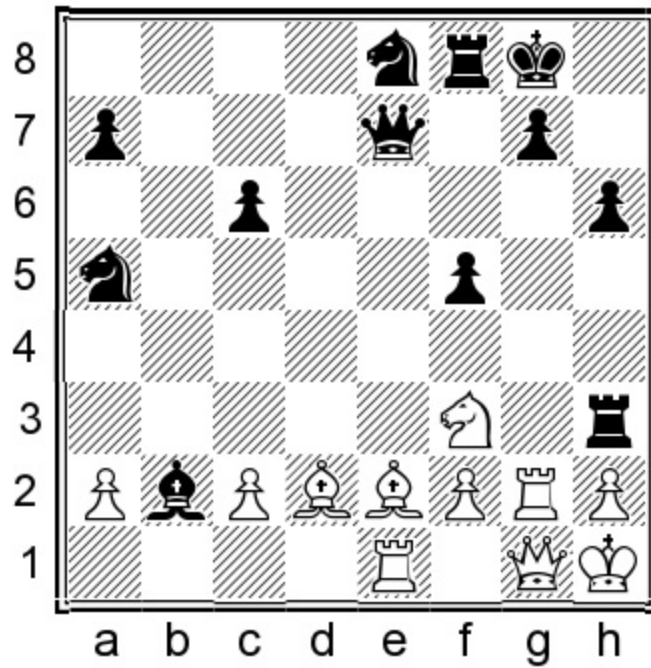
Position after: 15... ♜xh3

One of the most peculiar positions I have ever seen. The strong Bosnian Grandmaster's strategy appears to have been successful. He has regained the pawn and his attack still continues. Nigel Short, however, proves the contrary.

16.♜g3! ♜h4 17.♙g1!

White is taking over on the kingside. All his pieces are perfectly placed, whereas Black's pieces don't coordinate. The Knight on a5 is still hopelessly astray – almost falling off the board.

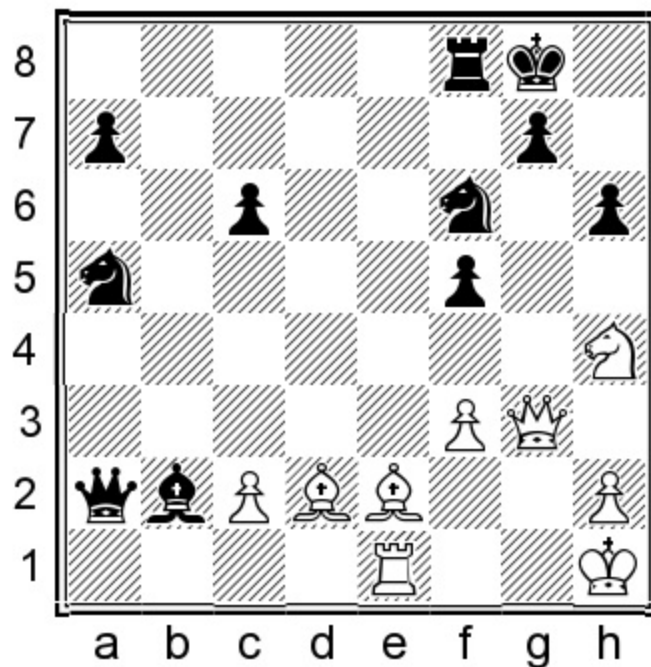
17...♘e8 18.♘e4 ♙c7 19.♘d2 e4 20.dxe4 ♖e7 21.♜g2 f5 22.♘f3 ♜h3 23.e5 ♙xe5 24.♙d2 ♙xb2 25.♜e1



Position after: 25. ♖e1

White sacrificed two of his pawns and even still remains material down here. Nevertheless, all Black's pieces lack direction whereas White's troops are ready for action. Short will target the light squares on the kingside.

25... ♙a3 26. ♖g3 ♖xg3 27. ♙xg3 ♘f6 28. ♘h4 ♙xa2 29. f3!



Position after: 29. f3!

Despite the fact that White is now two pawns down, he is winning here. Black cannot parry all the threats against his King.

29. ♖xf5?? is losing a piece, after 29... ♔d5+.

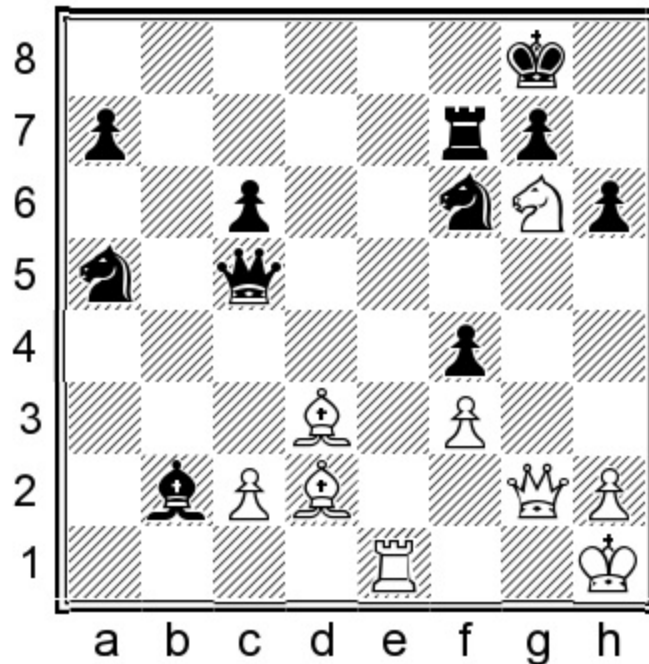
29... ♔d5 30. ♕d3

There is no convenient way to defend f5.

30... f4 31. ♖g2

Black is fighting a losing battle, as the light squares f5 and g6 are just too weak.

31... ♖f7 32. ♗f5 ♕h8 33. ♗e7! ♔c5 34. ♗g6+ ♕g8



Position after: 34... ♕g8

35. ♖h3!

Black is defenseless against ♖c8+ and evt. ♖h8 mate. White's passive strategy consisting of 'greed and grit' grabbing a pawn, paid out in the end, but not in the expected manner. By giving the pawn back, and a little bit more, he was enabled to launch a crushing attack against the enemy King.

1-0



Nigel Short shaking hands with Hou Yifan, Hoogeveen 2016. (photo Harry Gielen)

Section 5.9 – Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed several strategies which could be used in setting up a successful defense. When walking a tight rope, you have to deal with a difficult situation, especially one involving making a decision between several opposing plans of action. We began with quiet strategies such as *the waiting strategy* (**Section 5.3**), applicable to cases where we are quite happy with our position but the time is not ripe for action. Another strategy is grabbing a pawn and then digging in (**Section 5.8**). In the most forlorn circumstances we might consider the all-or-nothing approach, playing a potentially risky, but above all unexpected move in order to turn the tide (**Section 5.5**). With the game rapidly veering off the beaten path, your opponent will have to invest a lot of time and energy to understand what's going on.

In theory this seems very easy (maybe because our examples mostly feature top grandmasters!), but choosing a proper defensive strategy is one of the most difficult disciplines in chess. One has to comprehend when the time to act has arrived, and when one should just be patient and stick to a waiting strategy. Only the best players realize when the moment has arrived upon which one has to act from behind the barricades. Karjakin and Karpov showed us how crucial the timing and patience are (**Sections 5.6 and 5.7**) for a justified counterstrike.

-
- (1) Wikipedia: Knight-errant.
 - (2) Giddins (2017).
 - (3) Tukmakov (2015), p. 21.
 - (4) See also Avni (2004), p. 47.

Chapter 6

Barricade your Doors!

Test your defensive skills

Section 6.1 – Introduction

Section 6.2 – Exercises Chapter 1: The Passion and the Pain

Section 6.3 – Exercises Chapter 2: Inaccurate Defense

Section 6.4 – Exercises Chapter 3: The rise of defense in chess history

Section 6.5 – Exercises Chapter 4: Emotions in Chess

Section 6.6 – Exercises Chapter 5: Defensive Strategies

Section 6.1 – Introduction

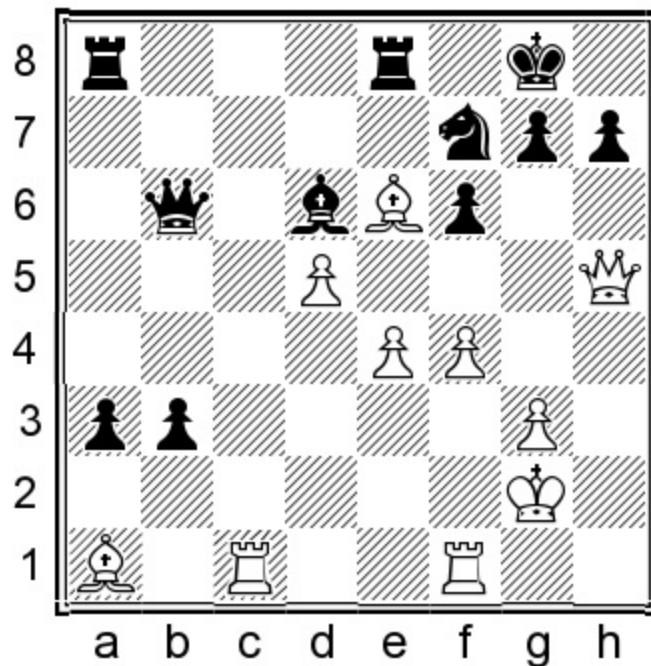
The following diagrams show some of the ‘turning points’ in games from the strongest players of their time. That means moments which could make or break a game, and at which the defender had to make an essential decision leading to irreversible consequences. The problems which you are going to solve are related both to the World Champions and their way of defending and to the notable defensive strategies in general. Each subchapter relates to an earlier chapter in the book, and they are numbered correspondingly. Therefore **Section 6.3** consists of exercises of the discussed World Champions and leading players of their generation. Meanwhile in **Section 6.2** the defender’s play was unfortunately not accurate, and you should endeavor to stand your ground where the great players failed. **Section 6.4** includes exercises about the defender under genuine (psychological) pressure, whilst in **Section 6.5** we defenders should look for the solution based upon the given defensive strategy.

I wish you lots of luck in solving the exercises!

Section 6.2 – Exercises Chapter 1: The Passion and the Pain

1

Sargissian, G. – Werle, J.



■ Finding myself in trouble in the ‘Wimbledon of chess’, I lost my composure. Can you improve on my defensive play?

Show/Hide Solution

1

Sargissian, Gabriel (2658)

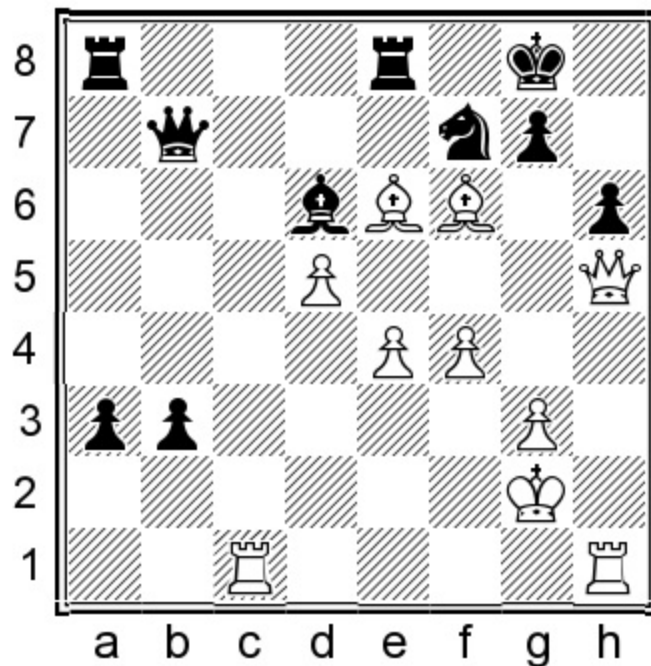
Werle, Jan (2566)

Wijk aan Zee 2007

34...♖f8?

Too hastily played. The problem is that my King is a cornered animal without any hopes left to escape. Instead, I should keep the escape route (...♔g8-f8-e7-d8) open with:

A) 34...♚b7!! a beautiful concept, based on allotting both defensive as counterattacking tasks to the Queen. 35.♖h1 h6 [35...b2 to run away after ♚xh7+, ...♔g8-f8-e7, is also winning for Black.] 36.♗xf6



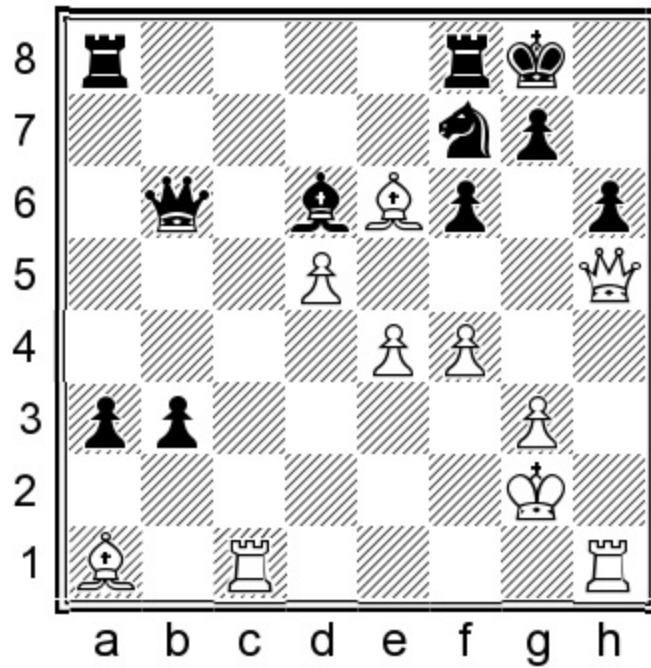
Analysis after: 36. ♕xf6

36... ♖xe6!! The idea behind Black's 34th move comes to light. 37. ♕xg7 ♔xg7 38. dxe6 ♚xe4+ when White's attack comes to an end, simply being too much material down.

B) 34... ♖e7? 35. ♖h1 h6 36. ♕xf6+-

C) 34... ♖a7 is as well successful. The escape route for the King via e7 remains intact. 35. ♖h1 b2 36. ♚xh7+ and the King runs away, by means of 36... ♔f8 White's attack came to a standstill and Black is winning because of his queenside passed pawns.

34... ♖f8? 35. ♖h1 h6

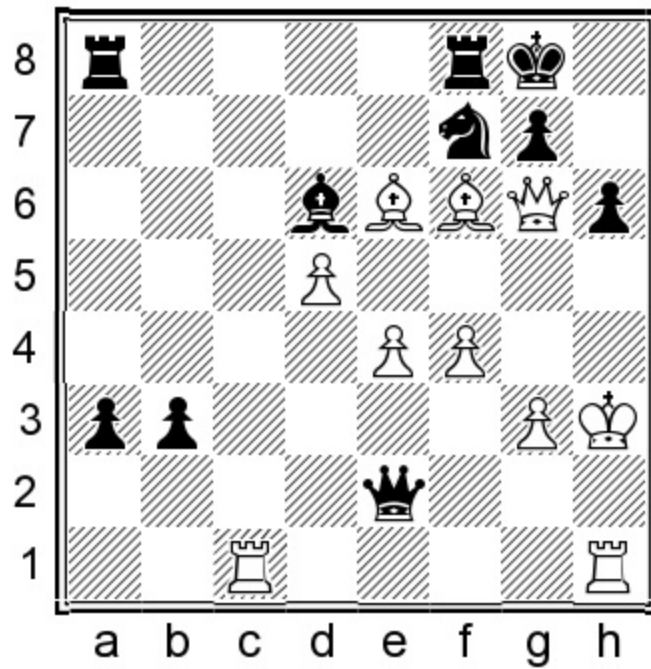


Position after: 35...h6

36. ♖xf6!

Now it is all over as the King is like a rat in a cage.

36... ♚e3 37. ♚g6 ♚e2+ 38. ♔h3



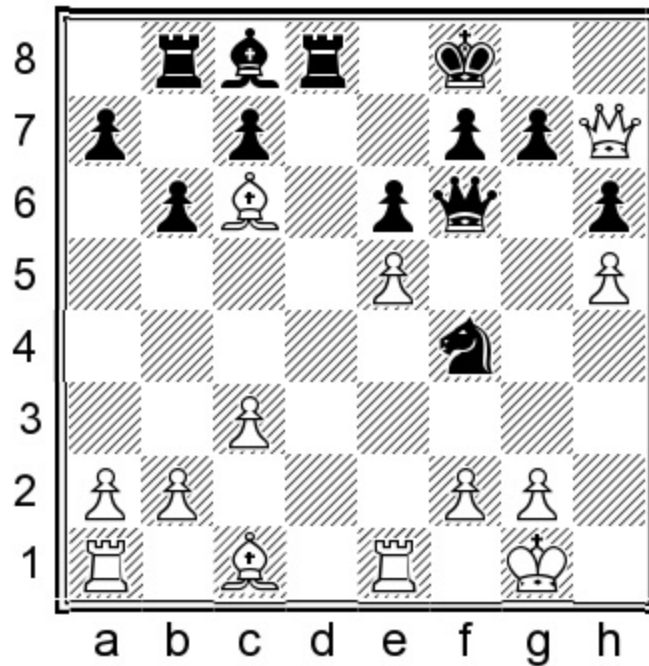
Position after: 38. ♔h3

The King is safe on h3 and Black can't fight the mating threat on g7.

1-0

2

Van der Mark, N. – Westerhof, F.



■ Fill the shoes of Fleur, only 11 years old, playing her former trainer Niels. Under heavy pressure, she finds a way out. Do you see how?

Show/Hide Solution

2

Van der Mark, Niels

Westerhof, Fleur

Doetinchem 2020

19...♖e2+! 20.♔f1

A) 20.♖xe2 ♖d1+ 21.♔h2 ♜h4#!

B) 20.♔h2? ♜h4#!

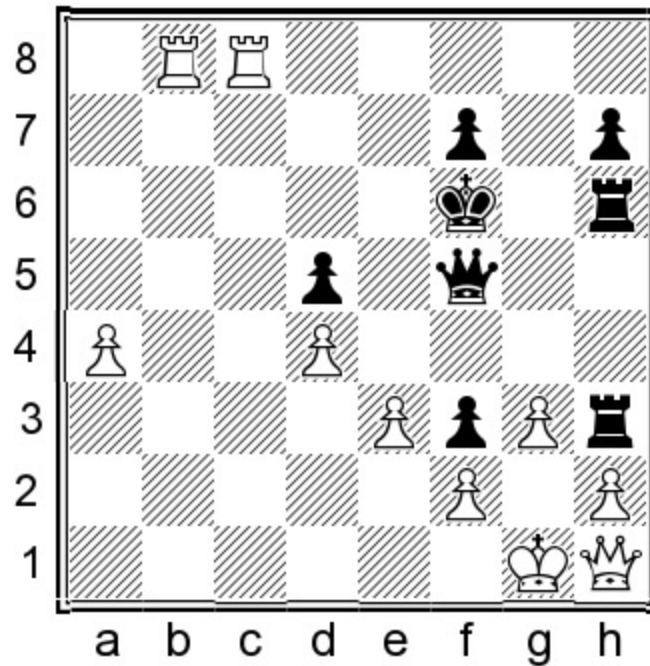
20...♗g3+ 21.♔g1 ♗e2+

And there is no way getting out of the perpetual check.

½-½

3

Ochsner, B. – Bjerre, J.



□ The Queen on h1 is a cornered animal. It seems like she will be eternally trapped there, won't she?

Show/Hide Solution

3

Ochsner, Bjorn Moller (2454)

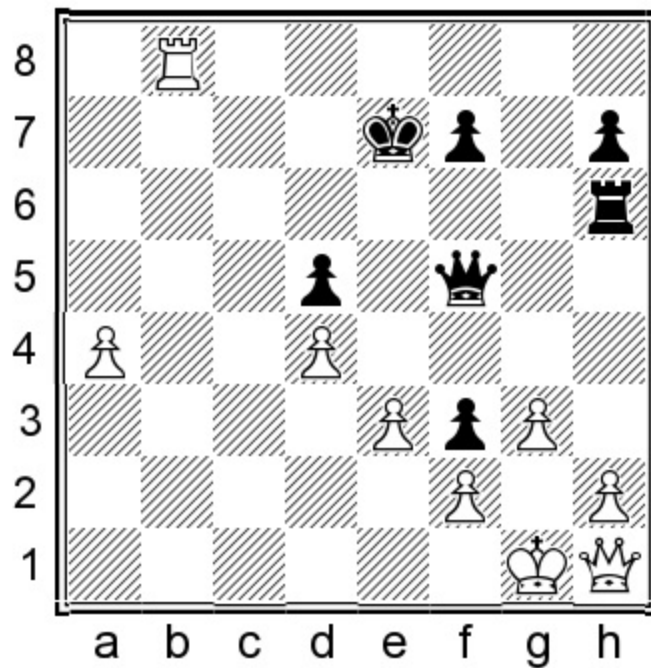
Bjerre, Jonas Buhl (2379)

Svendborg 2018

40.♖c6+!

White is intending to free the Queen with h2-h4. This will become reality when Black is forced to take back the Rook from h3 on h6.

40...♔e7 41.♖xh6 ♖xh6

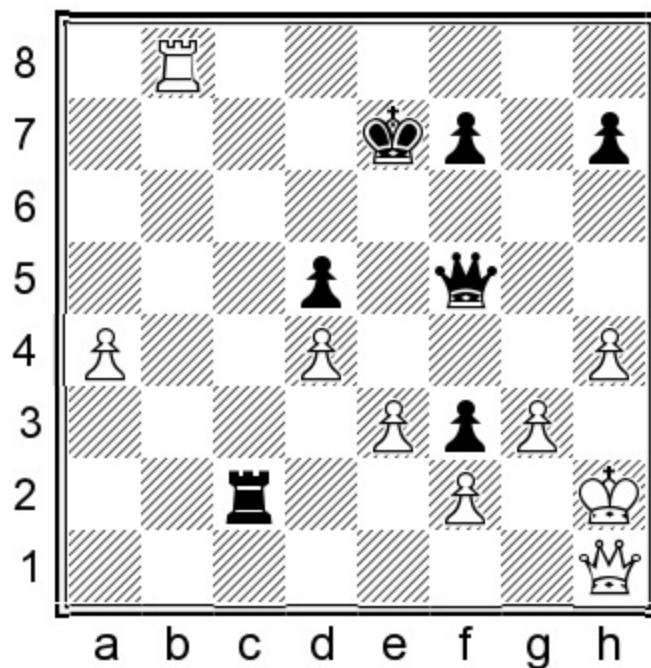


Position after: 41... ♖xh6

42.h4!

The Queen finds her exodus by the push of the h-pawn, after which the King can vacate the first rank by ♔g1-h2.

42... ♜c6 43. ♔h2 ♜c2



Position after: 43... ♜c2

44. ♖f1!

After White's accomplished consolidation, he can start enjoying his material edge.

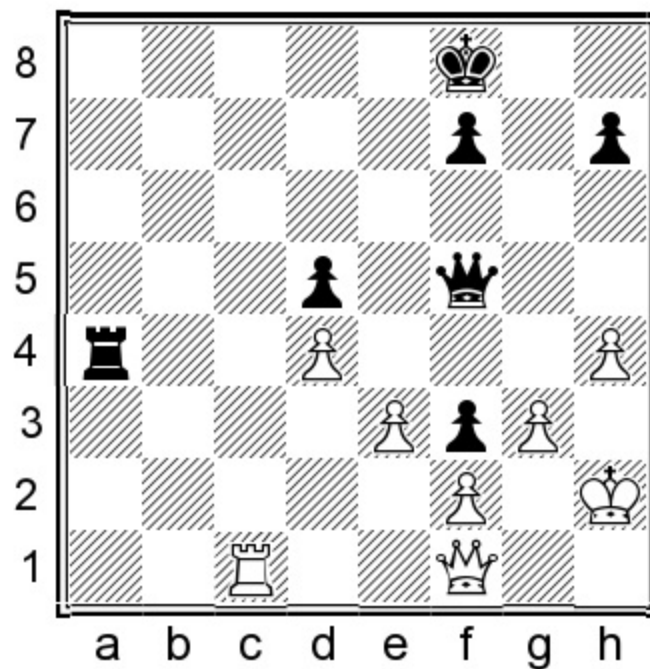
44... ♖d2 45. ♖b7+ ♔f8 46. ♖c7?

46. ♖b1! ♖a2 47. ♖a1 ♖xa1 48. ♕xa1 ♕c2 49. ♔g1 is easily winning for White.

46... ♖a2

46... ♕e6! the only move to stay in the game. Now that White has to neutralize ... ♕xe3 by ♔h2-g1, he does no longer have the option of exchanging the Queens with ♕h3 when the black Rook takes on a4. 47. ♔g1 ♖a2 48. ♖c1 [48. ♕b5 can't be recommended, due to 48... ♖a1+ 49. ♔h2 ♖h1+ 50. ♔xh1 ♕h3+ 51. ♔g1 ♕g2#] 48... ♖xa4

47. ♖c1 ♖xa4

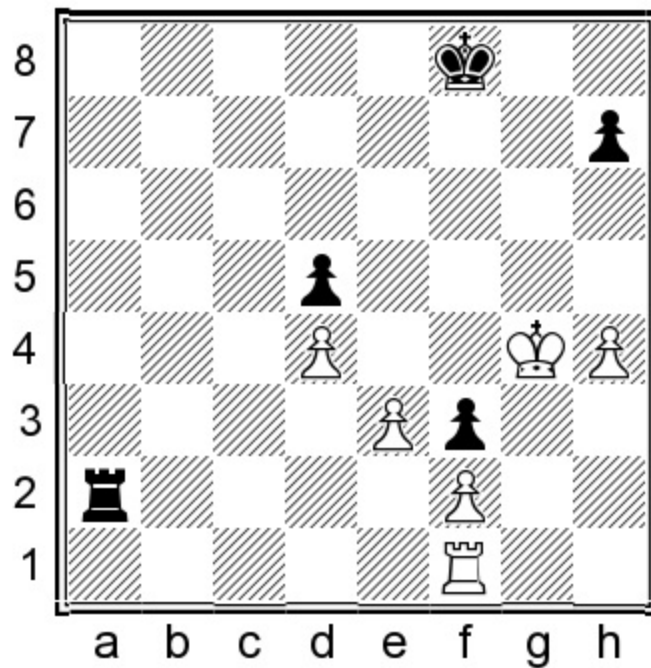


Position after: 47... ♖xa4

White is keen to swap the Queens. In the resulting ending, White is not merely a pawn up, but is intending to conquer the second pawn on f3.

48. ♕h3! ♕e4

48... ♕xh3+ 49. ♔xh3 ♖a2 50. ♖f1 f5 51. g4 fxg4+ 52. ♔xg4 when White will win the f3-pawn.

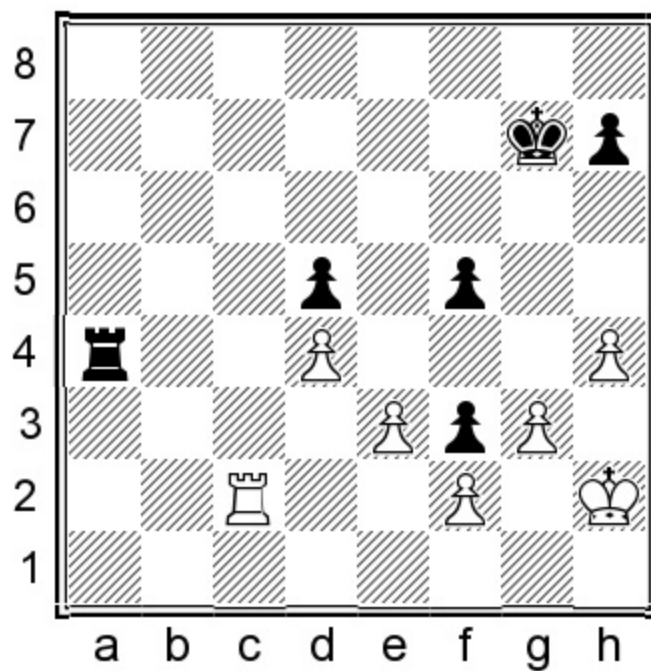


Analysis after: 52. ♔xg4

49. ♖c8+ ♔g7 50. ♖c2!

There is no escape possible for the black Queen.

50... ♖xc2 51. ♖xc2 f5



Position after: 51... f5

52.g4!

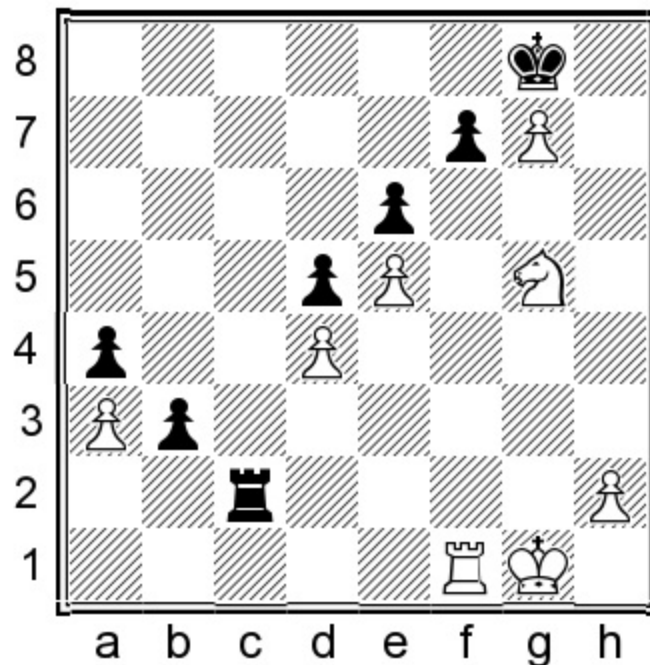
The final chord of the game. The white King enters the fray via g3.

52...fxg4 53.♞c5 ♞a1 54.♞xd5 h6 55.♞b5 ♞f1 56.♔g3 ♞g1+ 57.♔f4 ♞g2 58.h5 ♔h7 59.♞b2 ♔g7
60.♞b7+ ♔f8 61.♞b6 ♔g7 62.♞g6+ ♔h7 63.♞xg4 ♞xf2 64.♞h4 ♞f1 65.♞h3 f2 66.♔f3

1-0

4

Analysis Nevednichy, V. – Werle, J.



□ The b-pawn gives way to despair. Can you find a way to equalize here with White?

Show/Hide Solution

4

Analysis of the game

Nevednichy, Vladislav (2528)

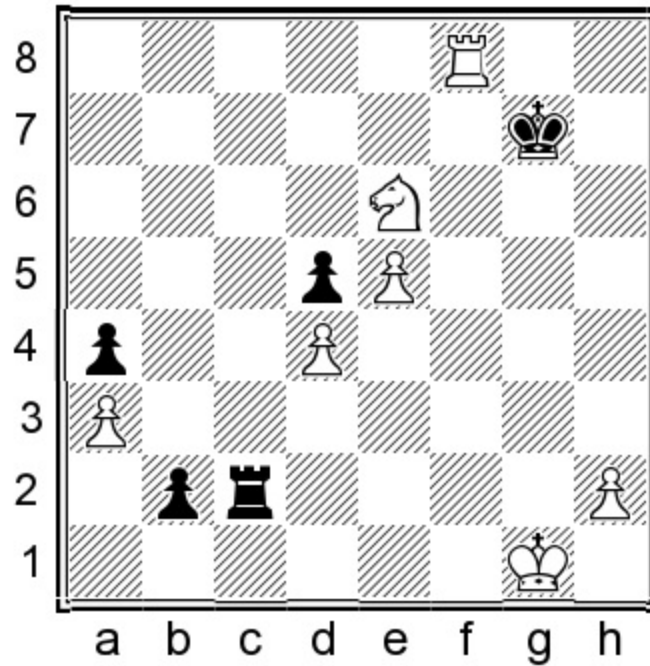
Werle, Jan (2525)

Paleochora 2020

36.♞xf7!

There was no possible way to stop the b-pawn. 36.♖b1 b2 37.♘f3 ♖c1+ winning for Black.

36.♖xf7! b2 37.♖f8+ ♔xg7 38.♘xe6+



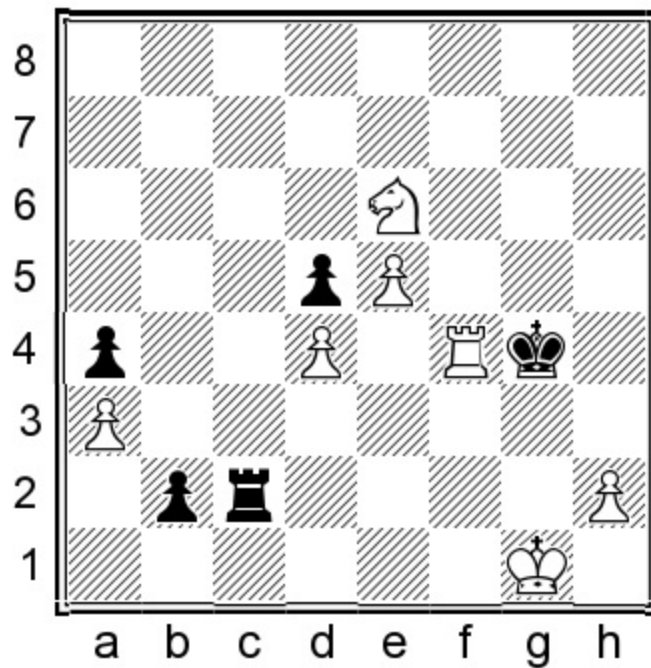
Position after: 38.♘xe6+

Closing in on the King, White is just in time with his checks before Black promotes.

38...♔g6

38...♔h7 doesn't change anything. 39.♖f7+ ♔g8 40.♖f8+ White can't run out of the checks.

39.♖f6+ ♔h5 40.♖f5+ ♔g4 41.♖f4+



Position after: 41. ♖f4+

41... ♔h5

41... ♔h3 can't be recommended for Black, because of 42. ♘g5#.

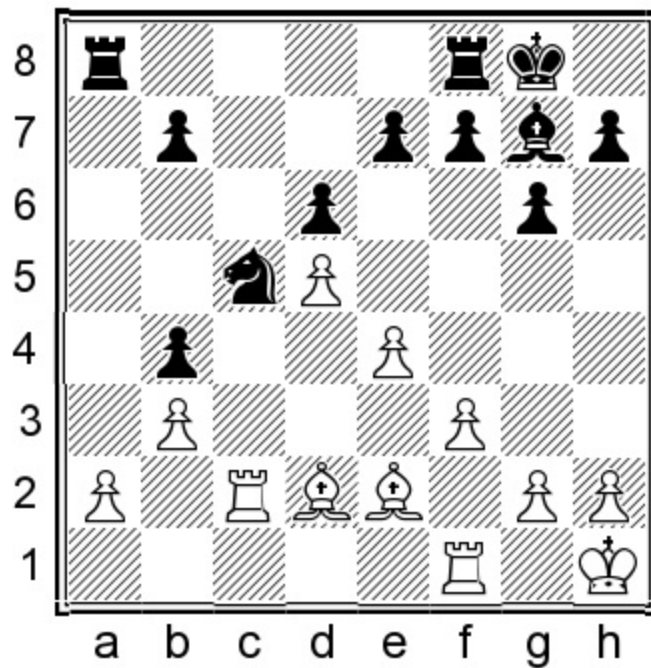
42. ♖f5+

And a draw is the inevitable outcome.

½-½

5

Fischer, R. – Reshevsky, S.



■ Samuel Reshevsky managed to find a defense in this bad position against no one less than Bobby Fischer. Can you find this too?

Show/Hide Solution

5

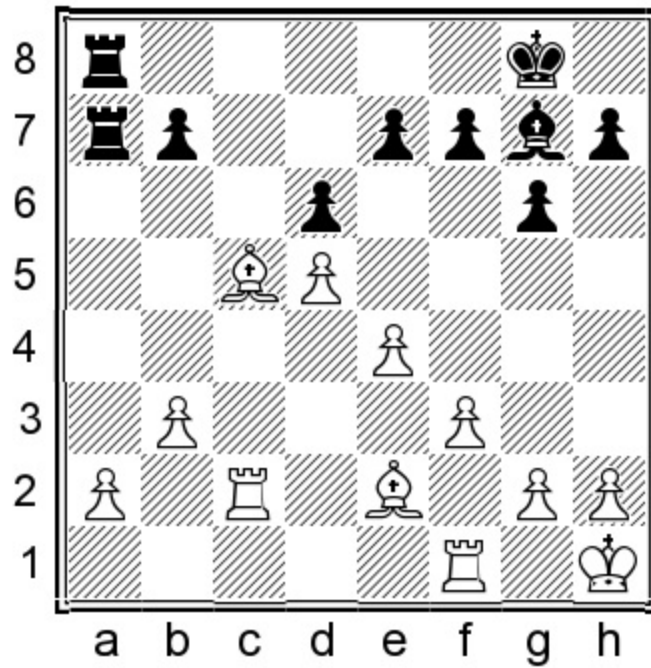
Fischer, Robert James

Reshevsky, Samuel Herman

New York & Los Angeles 1961

21...♙c3!

21...♖a7! instantly targetting the weak pawn on a2, was another possibility. 22.♙xb4 ♜fa8 23.♙xc5



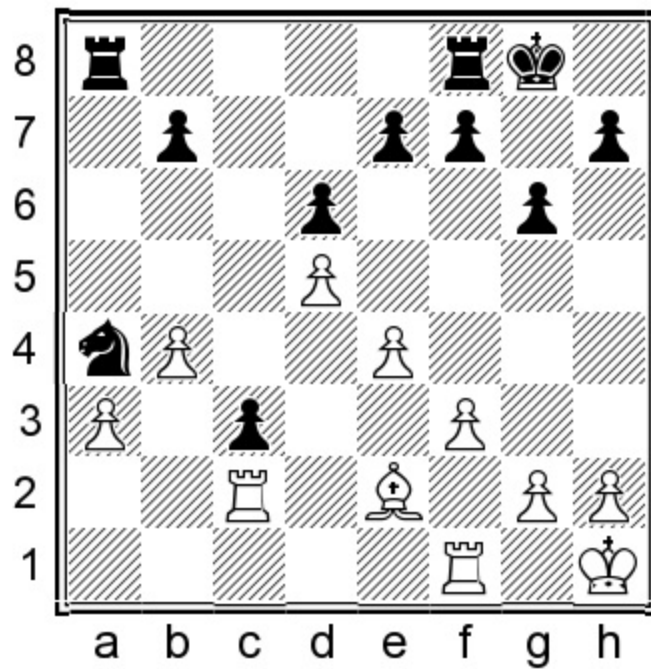
Analysis after: 23. ♖xc5

23... ♜xa2! Both of White's Bishops are hanging, and so the draw has been secured. 24. ♜xa2 ♜xa2=

21... ♖c3! 22. ♖xc3 bxc3 23. b4

23. ♔g1 ♜a3! with the idea of ... ♜fa8.

23... ♘a4 24. a3



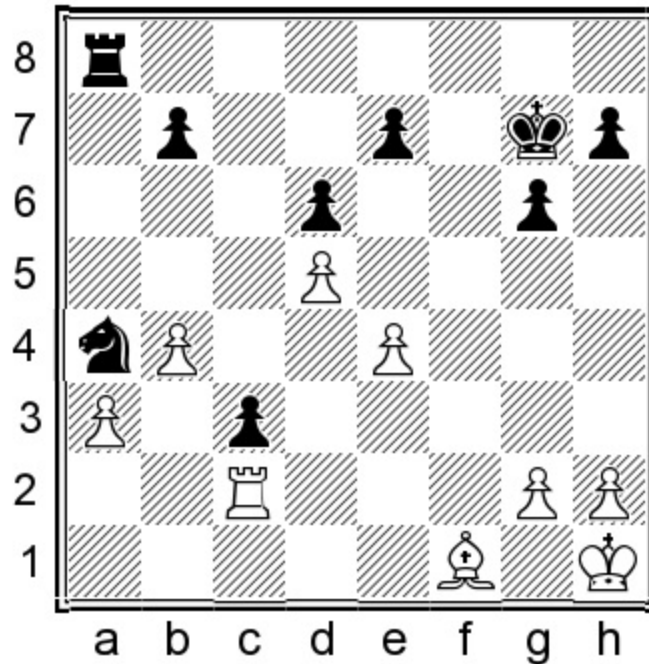
Position after: 24.a3

24...f5!

Black is urged to seek immediate counterplay in the center, otherwise White centralizes his King, surrounding the c-pawn. With this breaking move Reshevsky creates a weak pawn in the center.

24...♖fc8 25.♖fc1 ♖c7 26.♗b5! when the c-pawn is lost.

25.♗b5 fxe4 26.fxe4 ♖xf1+ 27.♗xf1 ♔g7!



Position after: 27...♔g7!

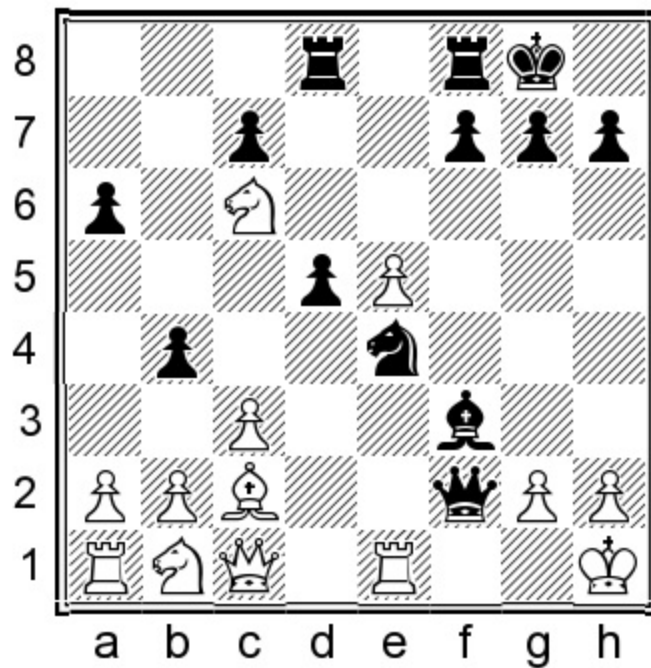
It is White who has to watch his steps from here, as Black's King comes with great force to e5.

28.♗b5 ♔f6!

On its way to e5 and eventually d4.

29.♗xa4 ♖xa4 30.♖xc3 ♔e5 31.♖c7 ♔f6 32.♖c3 ♔e5 33.♔g1 ♔xe4 34.♖c7 ♔xd5 35.♖xe7 b5 36.♖xh7 ♖xa3 37.♖g7 ♖b3 38.♖xg6 ♖xb4 39.♖g5+ ♔e6 40.♔f2 d5

½-½



□ Black is so close and so far away from mating White. Find White's spectacular defense.

Show/Hide Solution

6

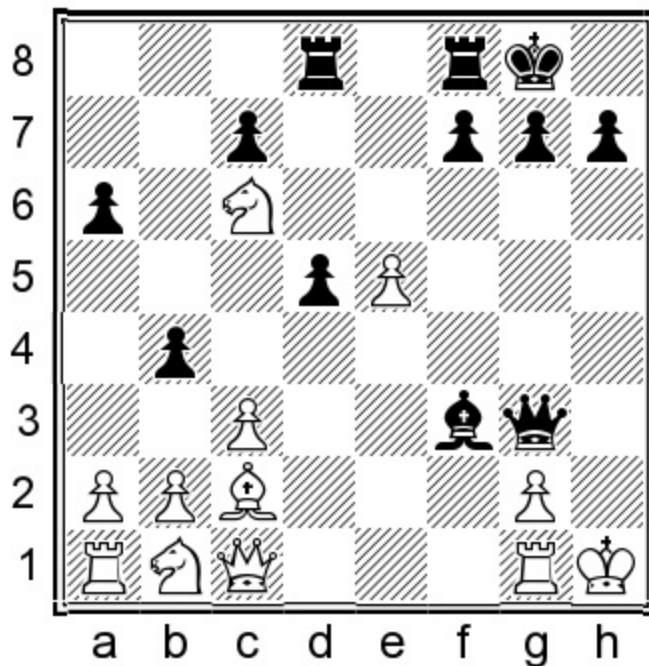
Gelbmann, Norbert (2300)

Gyimesi, Zoltan (2480)

Siofok 1996

18.gxf3?

White misses his chance on everlasting fame with the following magnificent defense: 18.♖g1! ♘g3+
19.hxg3 ♚xg3



Analysis after: 19... ♖xg3

There is only one move which defends against ... ♖h3#. 20. ♖h6!! [20.gxf3?? ♖h3#] 20...gxh6
21.gxf3—+ So close but still so far away from h3.

18.gxf3? ♖xf3+ 19.♔g1 ♖g4+ 20.♔f1 ♖f5+

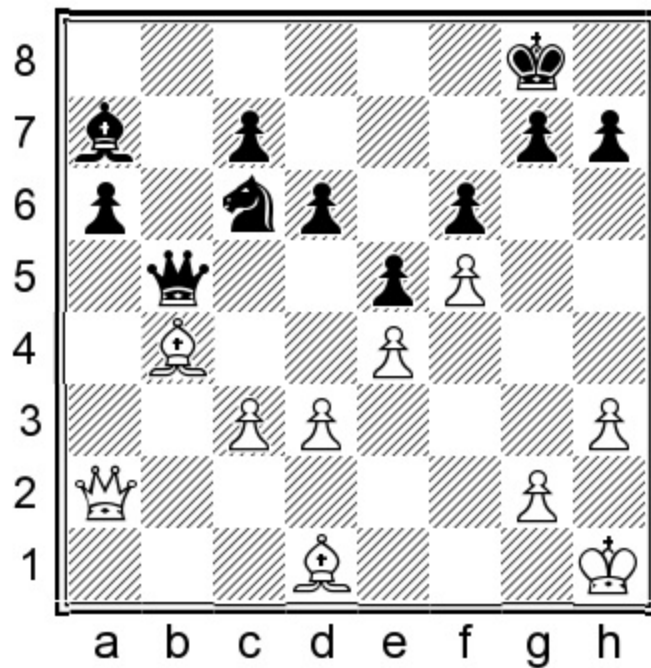
White can't walk out of the checks.

21.♔e2 ♖f2+ 22.♔d1 ♖f3+ 23.♖e2 ♖f1+ 24.♖e1 ♖f3+ 25.♖e2 ♖f1+ 26.♖e1 ½-½

Section 6.3 – Exercises Chapter 2: Inaccurate Defense

7

Steinitz, W. – Robey, J.



■ Steinitz's evil intentions have been revealed after 28. ♖a2+, as the white squares are more vulnerable than well water. How can we defend?

Show/Hide Solution

7

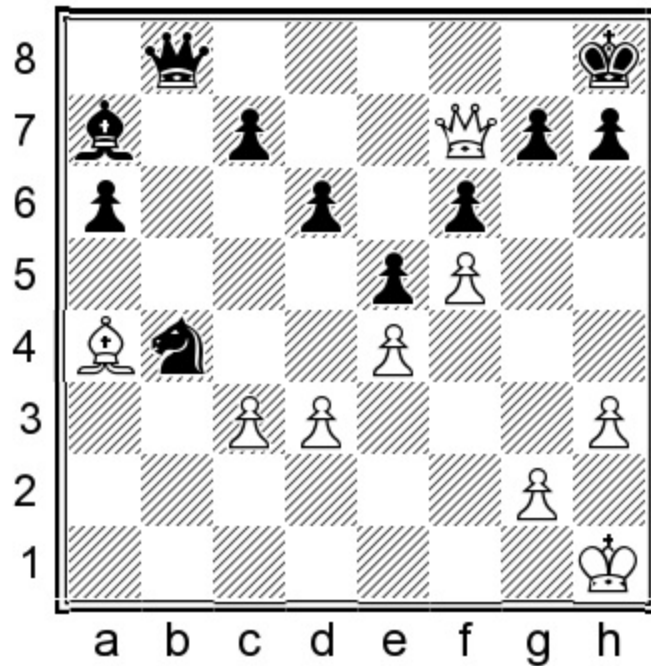
Steinitz, Wilhelm

Robey, James

London 1862

28... ♔f8?!

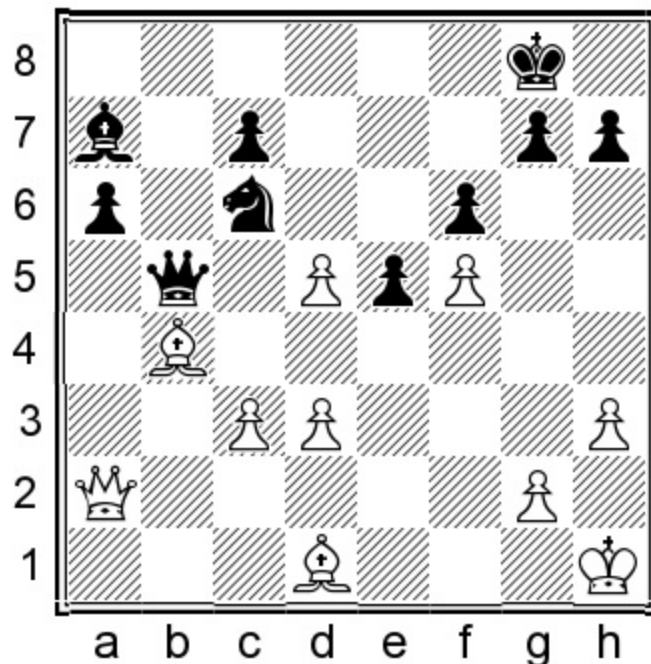
A) Neither good was 28... ♔h8?, as White can enter the castle with 29. ♖f7! ♖b8 30. ♕a4! ♗xb4



Analysis after: 30... Nxb4

31. Qe8!! tightening the net around the enemy King. There is no escape possible. 31... h6 32. Wf8+ Kh7 33. Qg6#

B) The answer is 28...d5! blocking the a2-diagonal not letting the Queen to e6 would save Black's game. This can't be considered a trivial solution or defense, especially not back then. After 29.exd5? [29. Wxd5+ Wxd5 30.exd5 Nxb4=]



Analysis after: 29.exd5?

29...♖xb4! 30.cxb4 ♖b6! it may turn out that Black mates White.

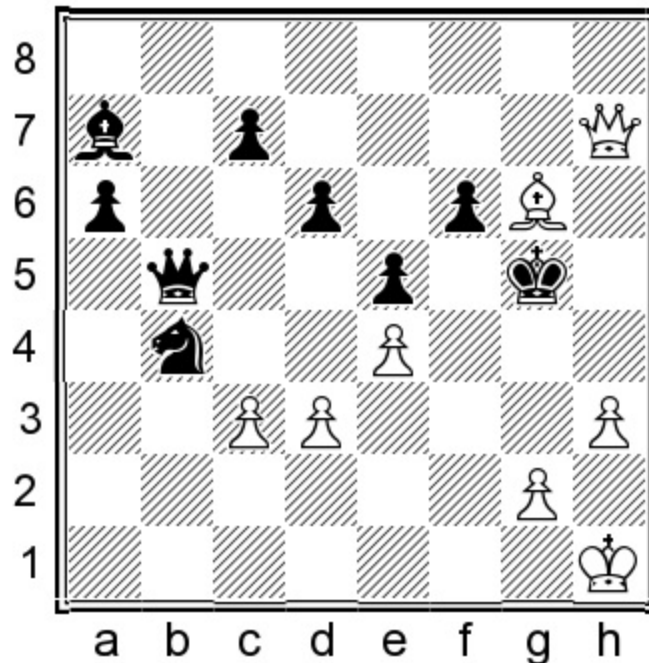
28...♗f8?! 29.♖e6!

29.♔a4? leaves the white King without protection after 29...♕xd3! 30.♔xc6 ♖f1+ 31.♗h2 ♔g1+ 32.♗h1 ♔f2+ 33.♗h2 ♖g1#

29...♗xb4?

29...♗d8 would also leave Black with a difficult game 30.♖c8 ♖b8 31.♖d7 with ♔b3 or ♔h5 to follow.

30.♔h5! g6 31.fxg6 hxg6 32.♔xg6 ♗g7 33.♖f7+ ♗h6 34.♖h7+ ♗g5



Position after: 34... ♗g5

35.g3!

35.♖h5+ would also be winning: 35...♗f4 36.♖f3+ ♗g5 37.♖f5+ ♗h6 38.♖h5+ ♗g7 39.♖h7+ ♗f8 40.♖f7#

35...f5 36.♖g7 ♖d7

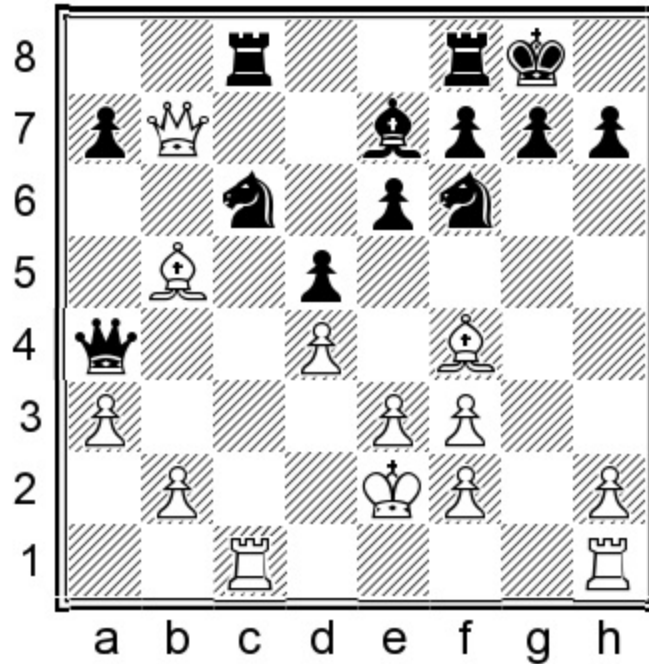
We can't say that the Black player is missing fighting spirit!

37.♔f7#

1-0

8

Botvinnik, M. – Ragozin, V.



■ Botvinnik counted on a quick win due to his extra pawn. However, it was not too late to turn the tide. Which move solves all problems?

Show/Hide Solution

8

Botvinnik, Mikhail
Ragozin, Viacheslav
Moscow 1945

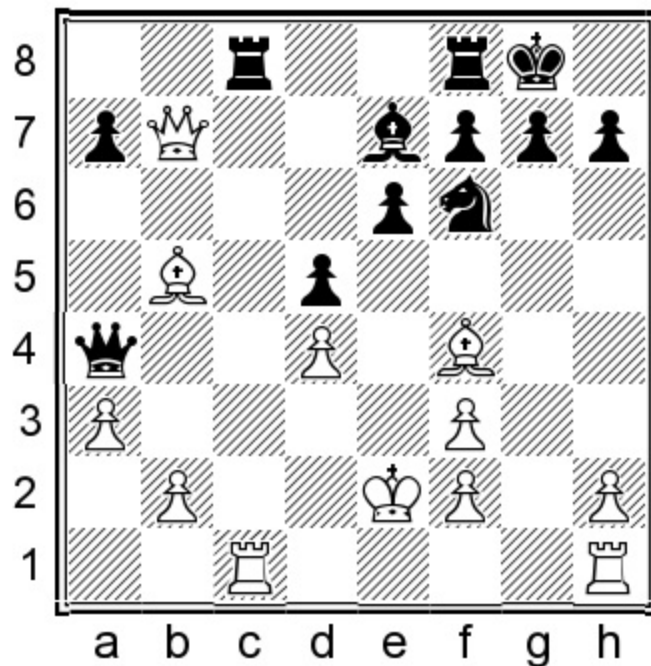
17... ♖xd4+!

The only move. Black gives back the piece, obtaining a serious counterattack on White's King.

A) 17... ♖d8? 18. ♖xc8 ♖xb7 19. ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 20. ♕xa4+-

B) 17... ♗b3? 18. ♕xc6 when Black's counterplay doesn't get off the ground.

17... ♖xd4+! 18. exd4



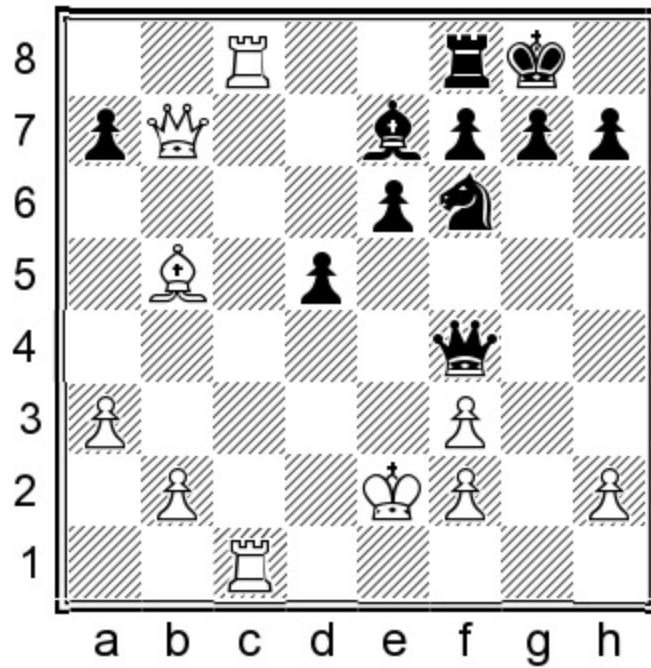
Position after: 18.exd4

18...♙xd4?

But this move can surely be defined as ‘inaccurate’. Ragozin missed the rarely given present, served on a golden platter by the 6th World Champion Mikhail Moiseevich.

18...♖c2+! 19.♖xc2 [19.♔d3 ♜b3#; 19.♙d2 ♖xb2! pinning the Bishop, remaining two pawns up.]
 19...♜xc2+ The Knight sacrifice paid out. White’s King is in danger and Black’s pieces have no trouble finding active spots. 20.♔f1 ♜f5 21.♙g3 ♜xf3 to follow up with ...♞f6-e4, is winning for Black.

19.♖xc8 ♜xf4 20.♖hc1



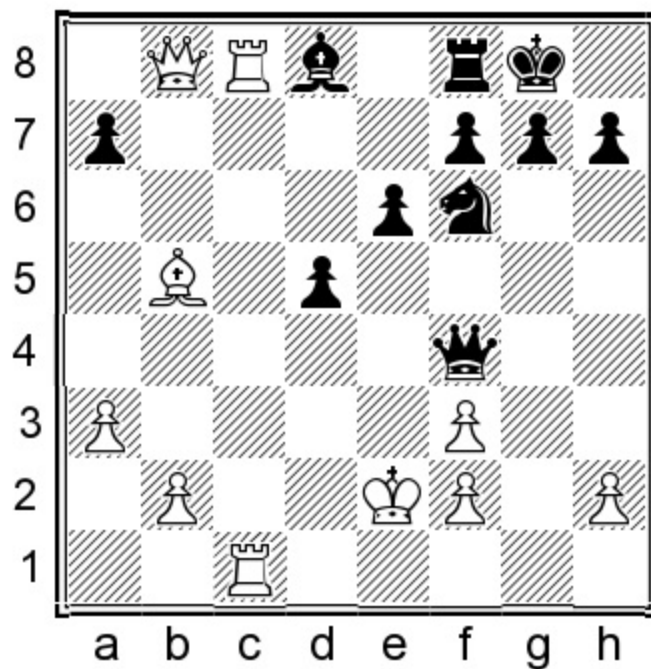
Position after: 20. ♖hc1

And one will not doubt that Botvinnik converted this advantage into something tangible.

20... ♙d8

Also after 20... ♙d6 21. ♖xf8+ ♙xf8 22. ♖c8 it appears that Black can't solve his back rank issues.

21. ♚b8!



Position after: 21. ♖b8!

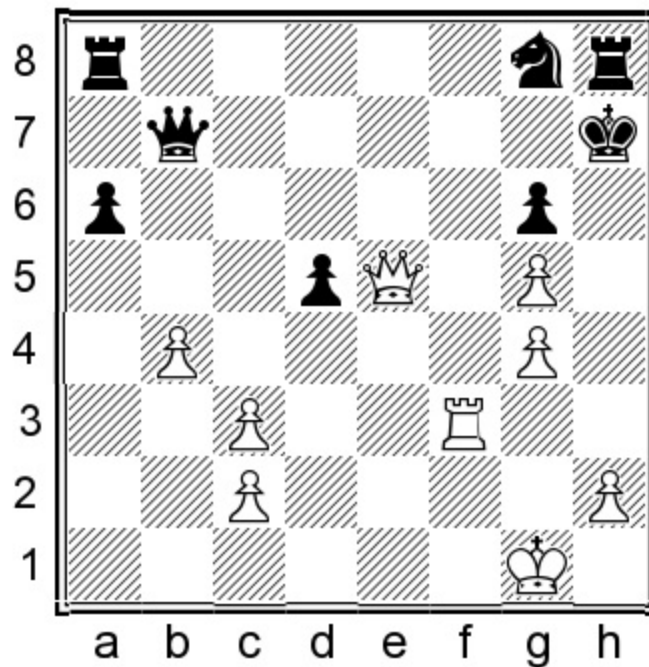
After the exchange of Queens, the ending is easily winning for White.

21... ♜h5 22. ♚xf4 ♜xf4+ 23. ♔f1 ♚b6 24. b4 d4 25. a4 ♜d5 26. ♝xf8+ ♔xf8 27. ♝c8+ ♔e7 28. a5 ♚c7
29. ♚c6 ♜xb4 30. ♝xc7+ ♔d6 31. ♝d7+ ♔xc6 32. ♝xa7 ♔b5 33. ♝xf7 ♔xa5 34. ♝xg7 ♜d5 35. ♔e2
♜f4+ 36. ♔d2 ♔b4 37. ♝xh7 ♔c4 38. h4 ♔d5 39. h5 ♔e5 40. ♝h8

1-0

9

Petrosian, T. – Manoian



■ White is close to mating his opponent. Your task to conduct: keep your head cool and find the defense!

Show/Hide Solution

9

Petrosian, Tigran

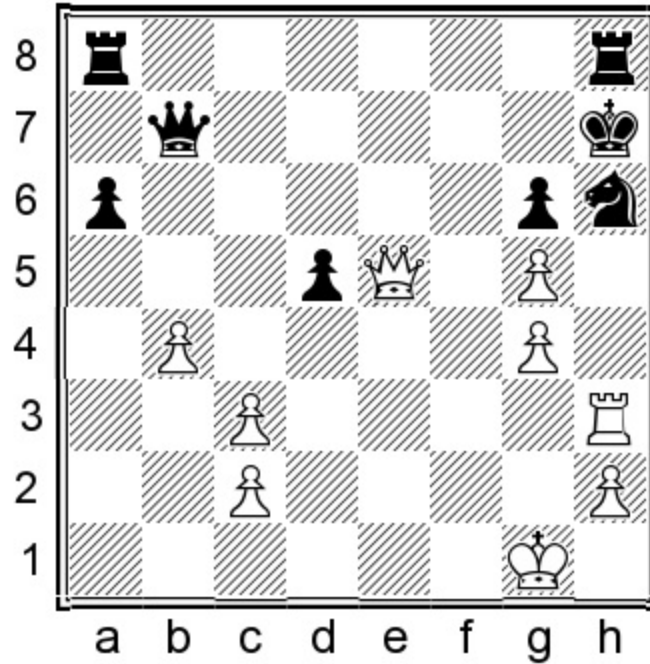
Manoian

Yerevan 1948

31... ♜h6!

The Black player started his operations in good fashion. By moving the Knight, the g8-square becomes an escape square for the King.

32. ♖h3



Position after: 32. ♖h3

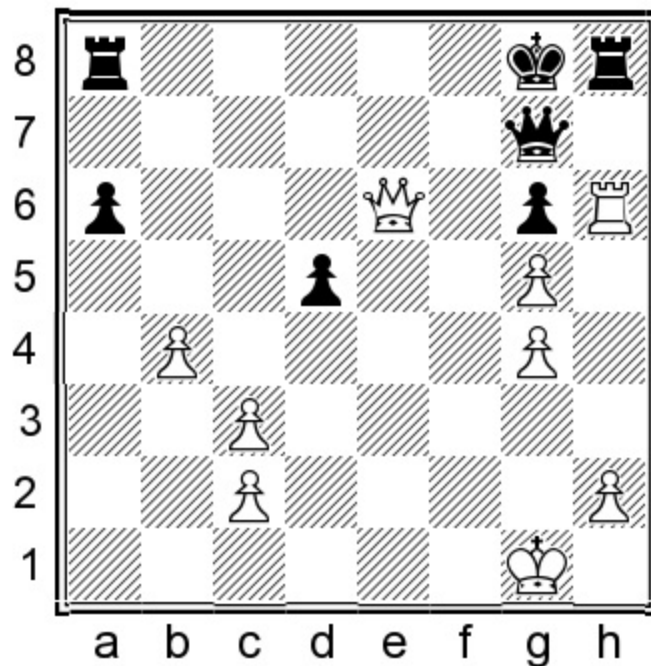
32... ♕g7?

Now it's all over. Instead, there should have been played 32... ♔g8! So near and yet so far. With only one accurate move Black would have defeated Iron Tigran! 33.gxh6 ♔h7! when the King finds a safe haven on h7 now that the h-file is closed.

33. ♖xh6+ ♔g8

33... ♗xh6 34.gxh6 ♔xh6 35. ♗xd5 is winning for White, as there are too many pawns.

34. ♗e6+



Position after: 34. ♕e6+

The Black King on the run has nowhere to hide, meanwhile the Black heavy pieces are prone to be caught.

34... ♖f8 35. ♜xg6

35. ♕d6+ ♔f7 36. ♕xd5+ ♔e7 37. ♕b7+ would be a sound option.

35... ♕e7 36. ♜f6+ ♔e8 37. ♕c6+

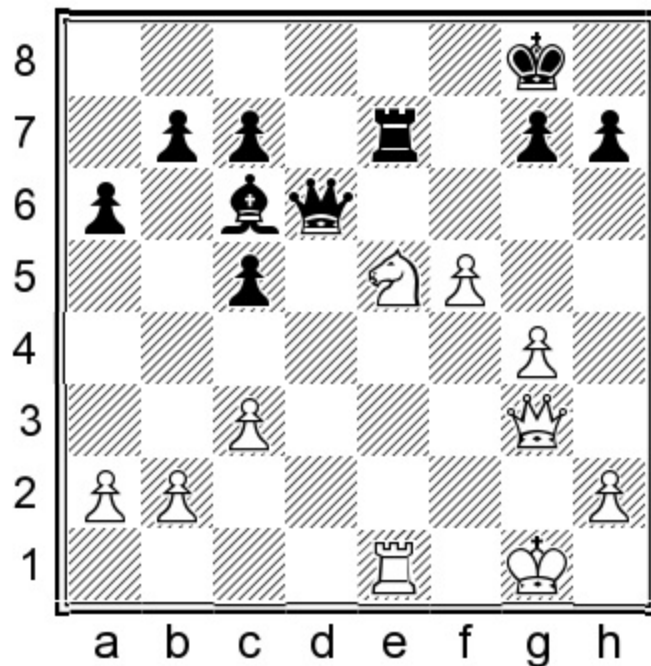
Black is losing the Rook and, thereby, the game.

37... ♔d8 38. ♕xa8+ ♔d7 39. ♕c6+ ♔d8 40. ♜d6+

1-0

10

Fischer, R. – Unzicker, W.



■ The 11th World Champion is pushing his kingside pawns forward. Can you find a strong countermeasure?

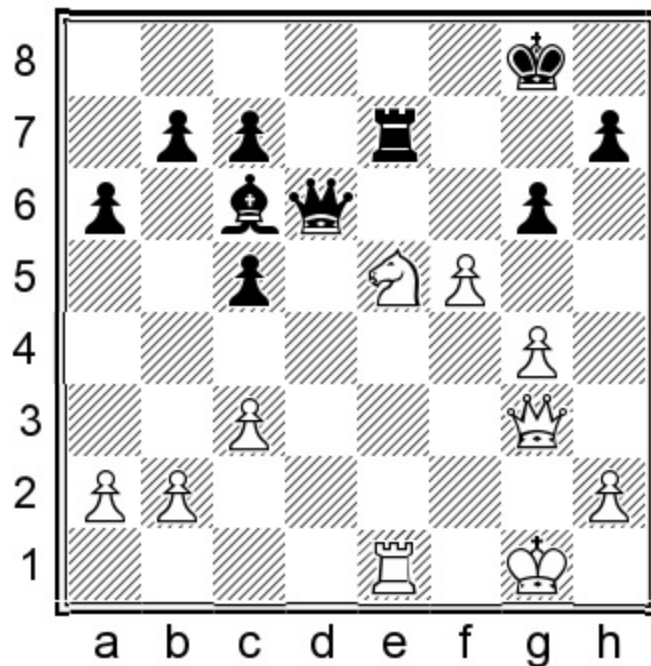
Show/Hide Solution

10
Fischer, Robert James
Unzicker, Wolfgang
 Siegen 1970

26...h6

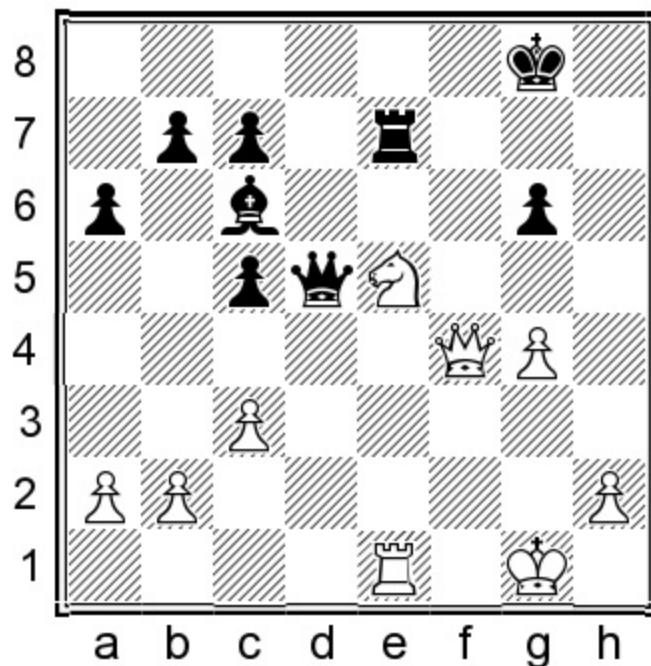
This passive move was happening in the game. Though this move can't be considered as bad or dubious, from a practical point of view Unzicker was bestly advised to undermine White's pawn phalanx g4-f5.

A) 26...g6!



Analysis after: 26...g6!

Yes, active defense it is! Black attempts to open the files creating counterplay against the enemy King. 27.fxg6 [27.♘xc6?? is giving up material, after 27...♙xg3+-+; 27.♚f2 gxf5 28.gxf5+ ♜g7!⇝ is risky for White now that all Black pieces are being pointed at White's King.] 27...hxg6 28.♙f4 ♙d5! ⇝



Analysis after: 28...♙d5!⇝

Black's boldness is rewarded as he obtained serious counterchances against White's King.

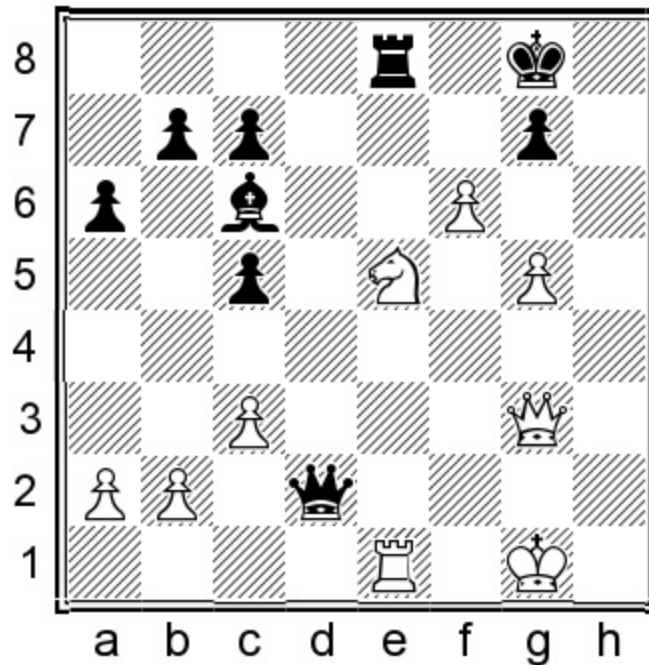
B) 26...h5!? can be considered a sound option for Black in his quest for counterplay. 27.g5 h4! White's Queen is lured forward. 28.♖f4 ♕d5 threatening mate on g2. 29.♞e2 ♞e8! 30.f6 ♜h1+ 31.♔f2 ♜g2+ 32.♔e3 ♜g1+ Black would have been just in time with his counterplay. After ♔d2 he can follow up with ...♞d8+ (33.♔d2 ♞d8+), gaining sufficient counterplay.

26...h6 27.h4 ♕d7?!

Again too passive.

A) 27...♜f6!? the Queen keeps an eye on f5 and h4, halting White's g4-g5.

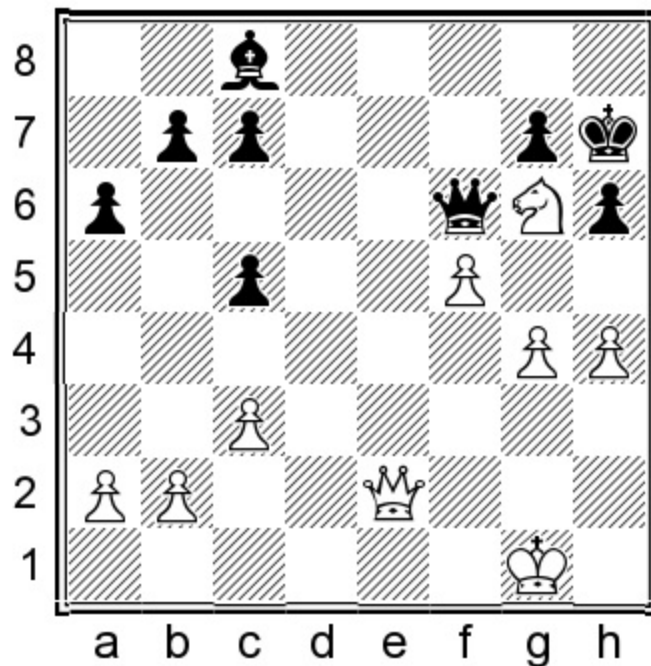
B) 27...♜d2!? 28.g5 hxg5 29.hxg5 ♞e8 30.f6



Analysis after: 30.f6

30...♕d5! parrying the threat of f6-f7+. Surprisingly, Black is fine here.

28.♖f4 ♜f6 29.♞e2 ♕c8 30.♜c4+ ♔h7 31.♘g6 ♞xe2 32.♜xe2



Position after: 32. ♖xe2

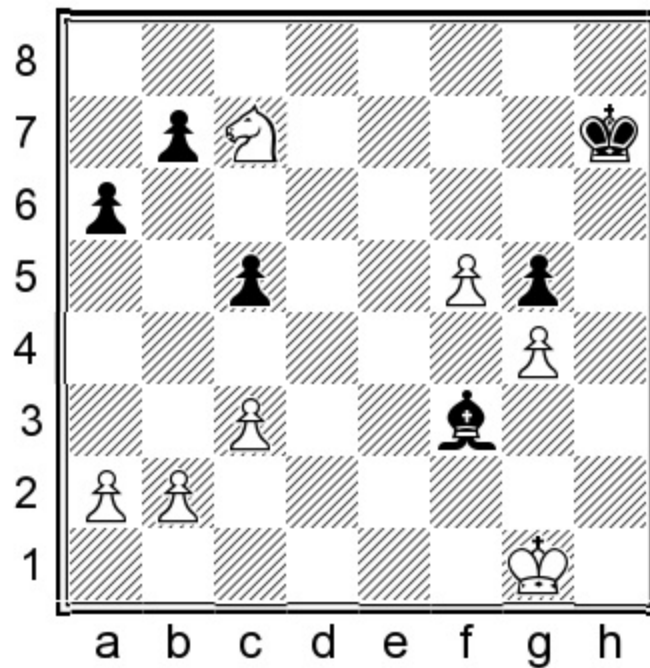
32... ♜d7?

32... ♛d6 wouldn't allow the exchange of Queens due to Black's counterchecks on d1 or g3.

33. ♛e7!

After the exchange of Queens, Black's King will be locked up in the corner of the board. Now it's all over.

33... ♛xe7 34. ♘xe7 g5 35. hxg5 hxg5 36. ♘d5 ♜c6 37. ♘xc7 ♜f3



Position after: 37...♙f3

38.♘e8!

Fischer holds on to his extra pawn, as Unzicker can't take on g4 due to the Knight fork on f6.

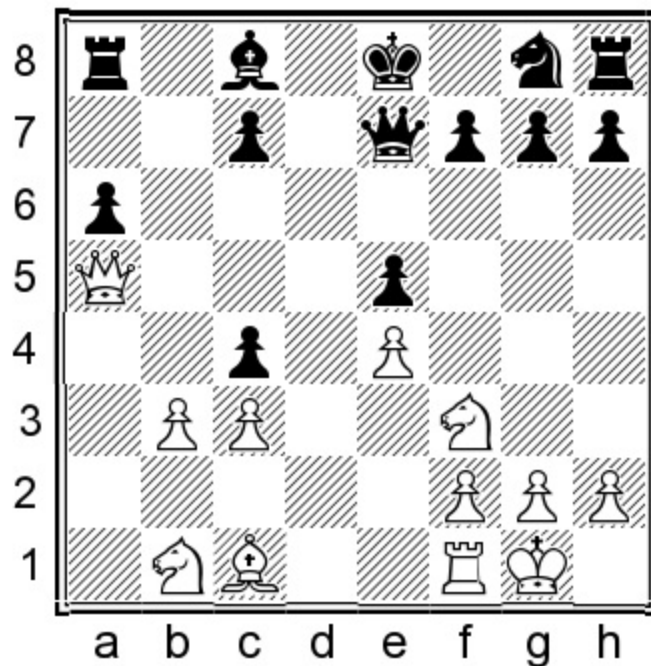
38...♙h6 39.♘f6 ♔g7 40.♙f2 ♙d1 41.♘d7 c4 42.♙g3

1-0

Section 6.4 – Exercises Chapter 3: The rise of defense in chess history

11

Gunsberg, I. – Alekhine, A.



■ Alekhine's King is still in the center, whereas there is no clear way to bring his royal highness in safety. Or is there?

Show/Hide Solution

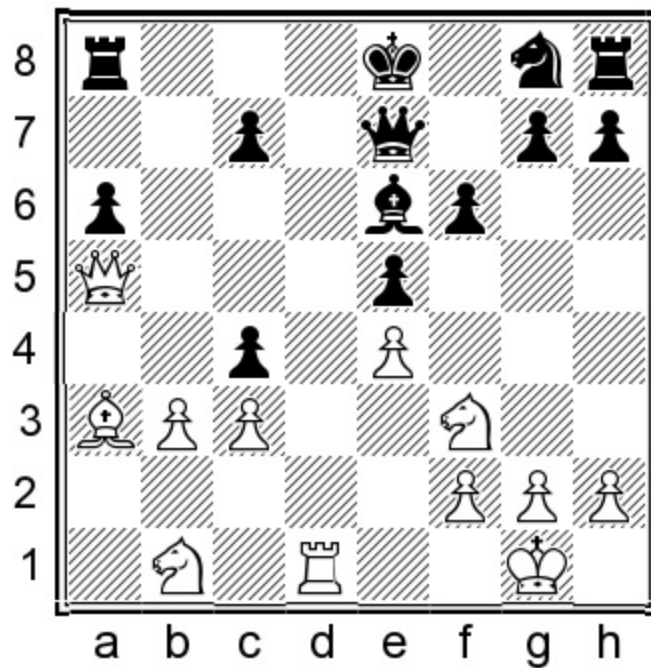
11
Gunsberg, Isidor
Alekhine, Alexander
 St Petersburg 1914

13...f6!

Securing the black squares, but maybe even more important: Alekhine frees the f7-square for his King.

13...♞f6 is dangerous, due to 14.♙a3! c5 15.♙xc5.

13...f6! 14.♞d1 ♕e6 15.♙a3

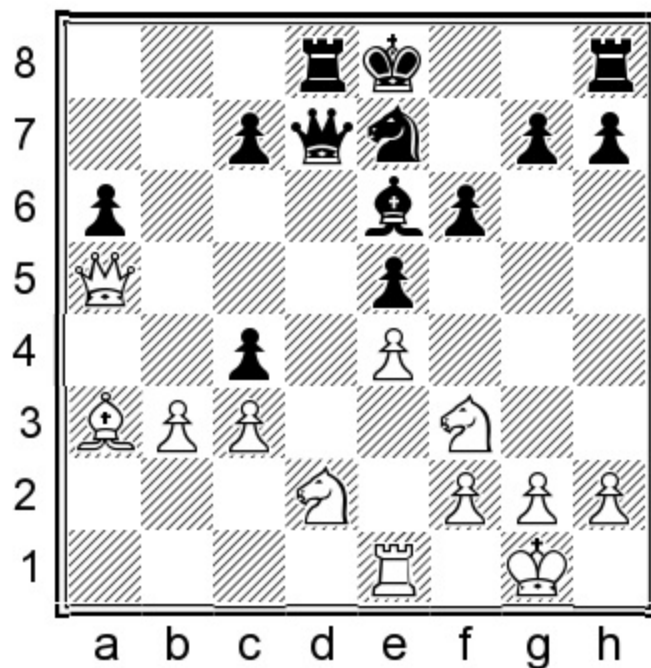


Position after: 15. ♔a3

15... ♖d8!

The last accurate defensive move, which leaves White without any hope on a succesful attack. White cannot take on e7, as ... ♖xd1 leads to mate.

16. ♘bd2 ♚d7 17. ♖e1 ♞e7



Position after: 17... ♞e7

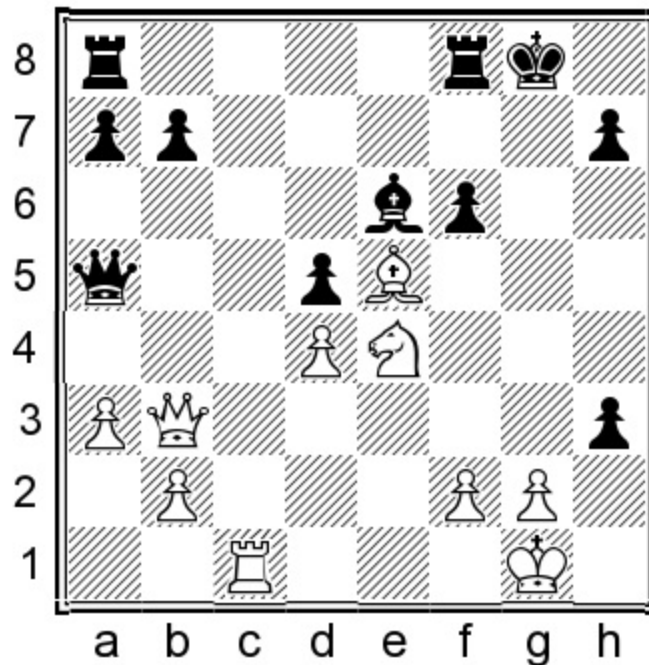
Alexander Alexandrovich secured short castling here and converted his material advantage in the end.

18.♖b4 a5 19.♖c5 cxb3 20.♘f1 ♖d6 21.♖xa5 ♖b6 22.♖a4+ ♔f7 23.♙xe7 ♕xe7 24.♖a3+ c5 25.c4 ♜a8 26.♖c1 b2 27.♖c2 ♜a1 28.♘1d2 ♜xe1+ 29.♘xe1 ♜d8 30.♘d3 ♖d6

0-1

12

Taimanov, M. – Larsen, B.



■ After 22.♘e4, the invasion of ♖&♜ via g3 and c7 strikes fear into the defender's heart. Stay calm and find the best defensive response.

Show/Hide Solution

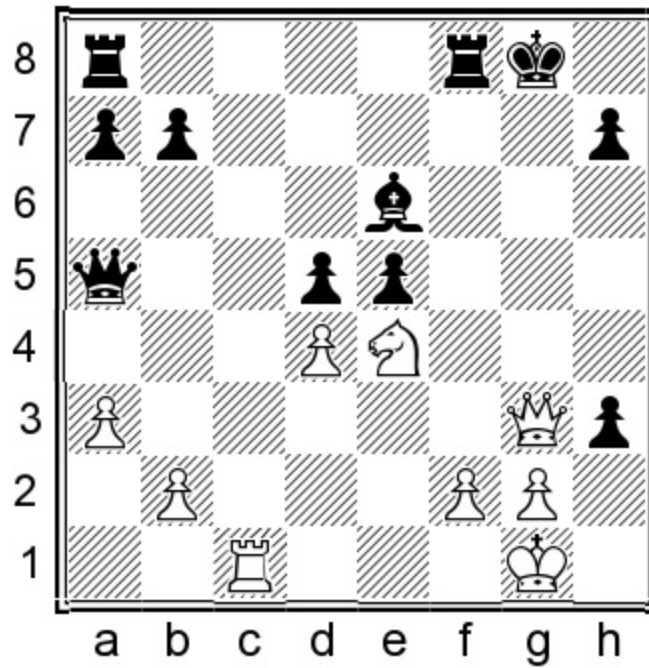
12

Taimanov, Mark

Larsen, Bent

Vinkovci 1970

22...fxe5! 23.♖g3+



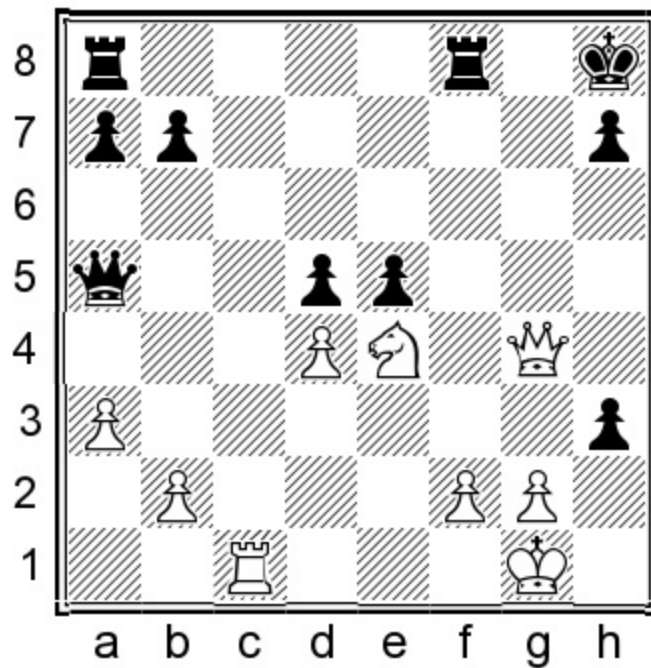
Position after: 23. ♕g3+

23... ♖g4!!

‘Here you are, you can have it.’ The Bishop is placed under direct attack and is left unprotected. The subtle point is that after taking, the Queen can no longer give a check on e5, and as a result the black King can hide in the corner.

It seems that White is winning, since after 23... ♔h8 24. ♕xe5+ ♔g8 25. ♕xe6+ ♔h8 26. ♕e5+ ♔g8 27. ♖c3+-

24. ♕xg4+ ♔h8



Position after: 24... ♔h8

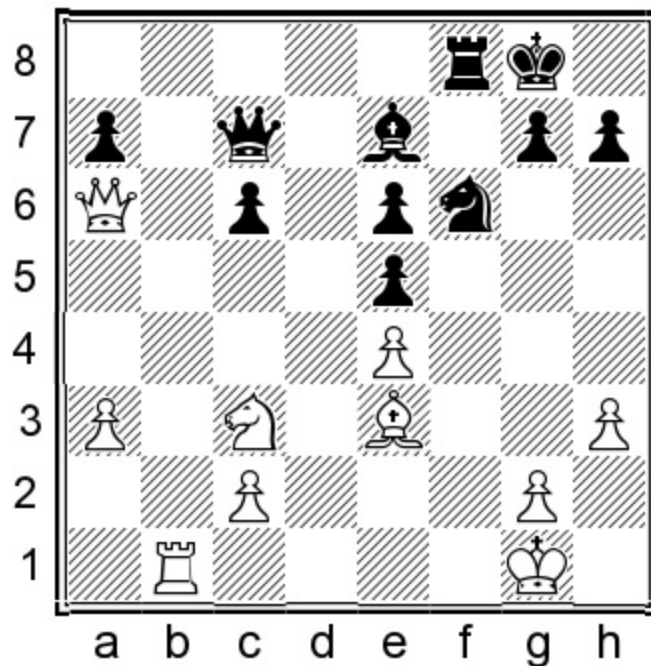
White's attack came to a standstill, and it's time for Black to take over.

25. ♘g5 ♕d2! 26. ♖c7 ♕xf2+ 27. ♔h2 ♕xg2+ 28. ♕xg2 hxg2 29. dxe5 ♖ac8 30. ♖xb7 ♖c2 31. ♘f7+ ♔g7 32. e6 ♔f6 33. e7 g1=♕+ 34. ♔xg1 ♖g8+

0-1

13

Hübner, R. – Petrosian, T.



■ Stand in the shoes of Petrosian and set up an ironclad defense.

Show/Hide Solution

13
Hübner, Robert
Petrosian, Tigran
 Seville 1971

19...♖a8!

Tenacious defending by Tigran Vartanovich, counting on 20.♖b7 ♕c8 when the white Rook is pinned.

19...♖b8 20.♖xb8+ ♕xb8 21.♕xc6 ♔f7 22.♘b5± notwithstanding the engine's evaluation, is this a difficult position to defend for Black.

19...♖a8! 20.a4!

White gradually improves his position by pushing his a-pawn forward.

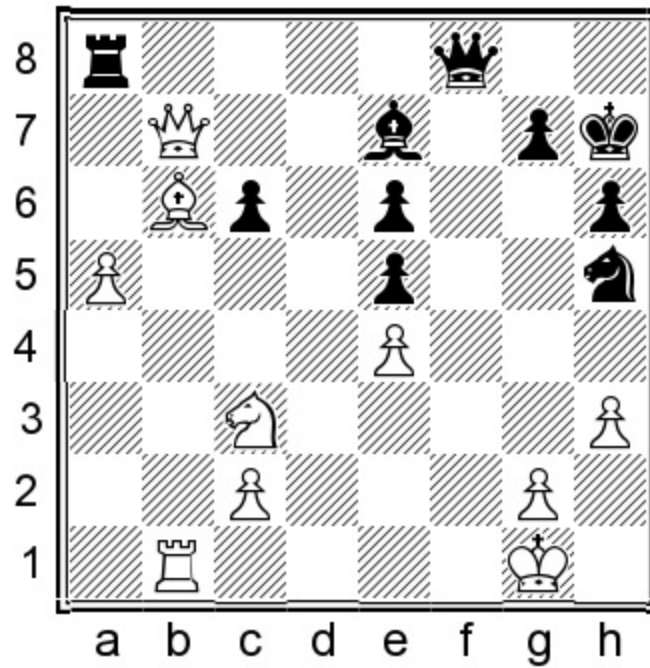
20.♖b7? ♕c8! with the idea of ...♘d7-♘c5 or ...♘e8-♘d6, winning the Rook.

20...h6!!

The 9th World Champion prepares a counteroffense, but first he has to hide his King to a safer ground.

21.a5

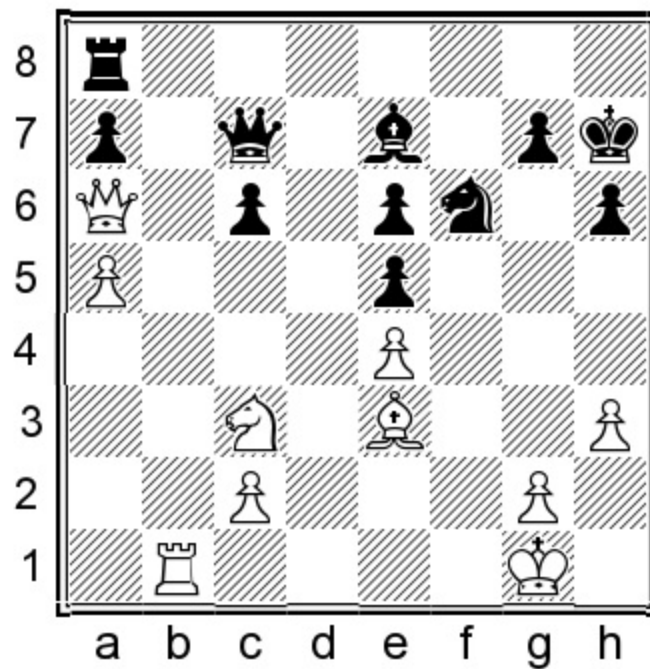
21. ♖b7!? ♜d8 22. ♙xa7 ♔h7! securing the King in order to launch a counterstroke. 23. ♗b6 ♞f8 24. a5 ♘h5↗



Analysis after: 24... ♘h5↗

e.g., 25. a6? ♜b8! 26. ♜c7 ♜xb6! 27. ♜xb6 ♙c5+ leading to a quick mate.

21... ♔h7



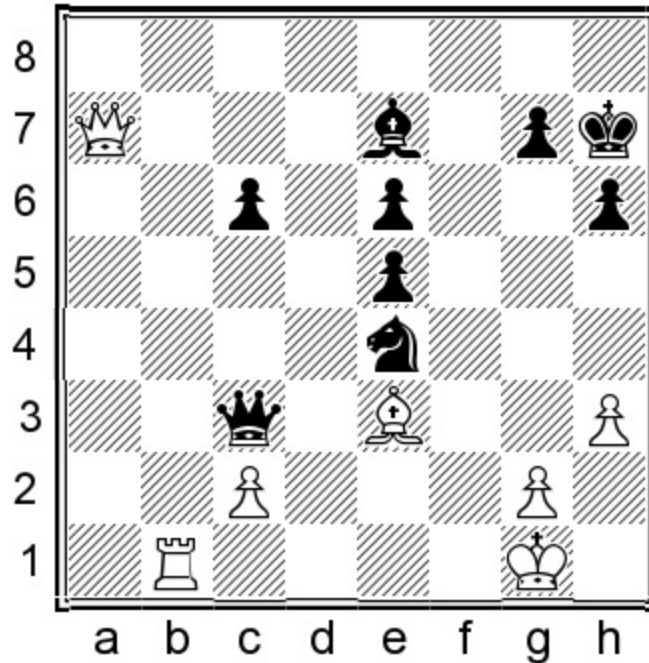
Position after: 21... ♔h7

22. ♖b7 ♗xa5!

Black obtains considerable attacking chances, due to his active Queen and safely hidden King.

22... ♗xb7? 23. ♖xb7 ♕d8 24. a6±

23. ♗xa8 ♗xc3 24. ♗xa7 ♘xe4



Position after: 24... ♘xe4

25. ♖f1

A) 25. ♖b7? ♕f6 26. ♖f7 c5!-+

B) 25. ♗xe7 ♗xe3+=

25... ♕h4

Even stronger was 25... ♘g3! 26. ♖f3 ♘e2+ 27. ♔h2 e4 intending 28... ♕d6+, after which Black is winning.

26. ♖f7 ♕f6

Having the much better odds by the weak white King, Petrosian went on to win.

26... ♗e1+!? 27. ♖f1 ♗e2±

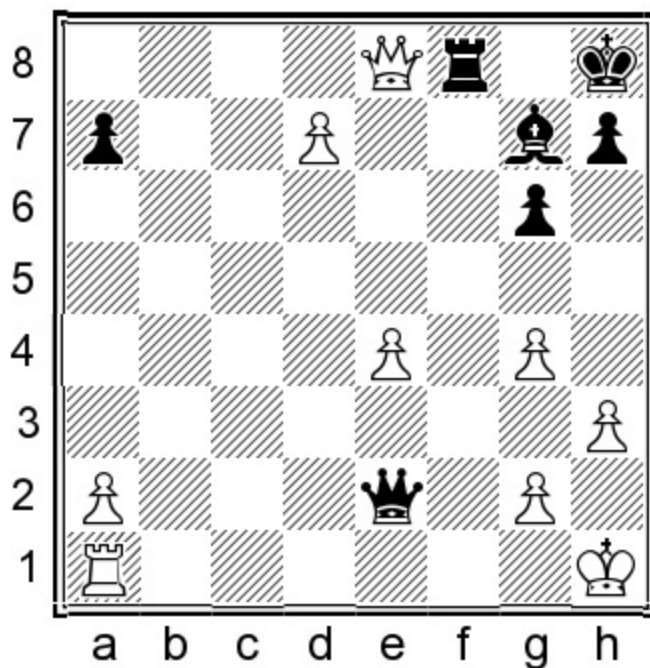
27. ♔h2 ♗xc2 28. ♗d7 ♗b3 29. ♕f2 ♗d5 30. ♗a7 ♗d2 31. ♗e3 ♗c2 32. ♕e1 c5 33. h4 c4 34. ♖c7 ♗d3

35.♔f3 ♖b1 36.♕e3 ♘d6 37.♗d2 ♙f5 38.♞xc4 e4 39.♗c2 ♚xe1 40.♞xe4 ♜e5+

0-1

14

Kramnik, V. – Kasparov, G.



■ White's promotion is imminent. Can you avert the danger?

Show/Hide Solution

14

Kramnik, Vladimir (2751)

Kasparov, Garry (2812)

Linares 1999

30...♗d3!!

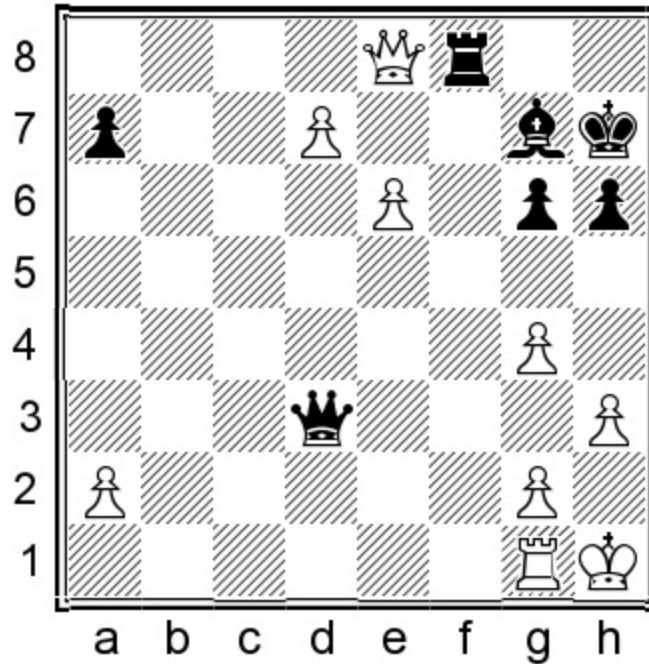
A beautiful defensive concept under construction. Kasparov not merely stops the promotion of the d-pawn, but on top of that he intends ...♞f3 and ...♞xh3 (after unpinning himself by means of ...♔h7).

31.e5

Now White threatens to move his pawn forward. Firstly, Kasparov unpins himself.

31...h6! 32.e6 ♔h7! 33.♖g1

After 33.e7 White even loses: 33...♞f1+ 34.♞xf1 ♚xf1+ 35.♔h2 ♚e5+ leading to a mate.



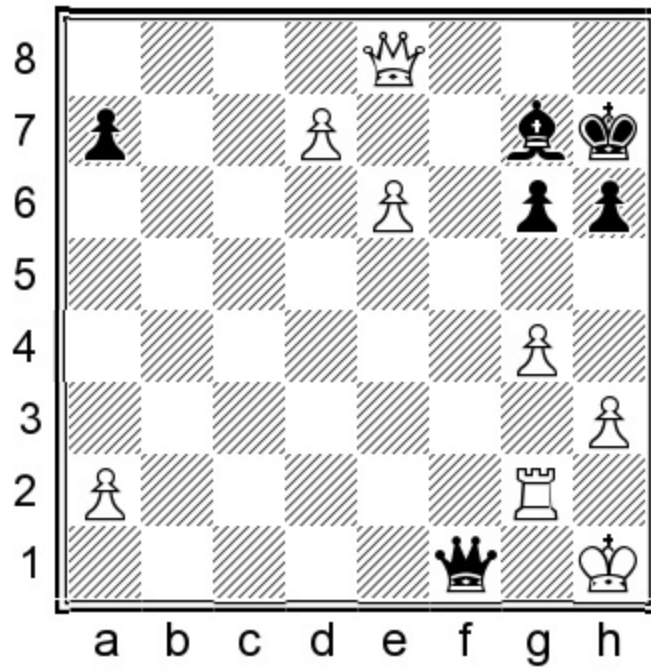
Position after: 33.♖g1

33...♞f3!!

33...♞f1 was as well sufficient for the draw: 34.d8=♚ ♞xg1+ 35.♔xg1 ♚e3+ 36.♔f1 ♚f4+ 37.♔e2 ♚e4+ 38.♔d2 ♚b4+.

34.♚b8

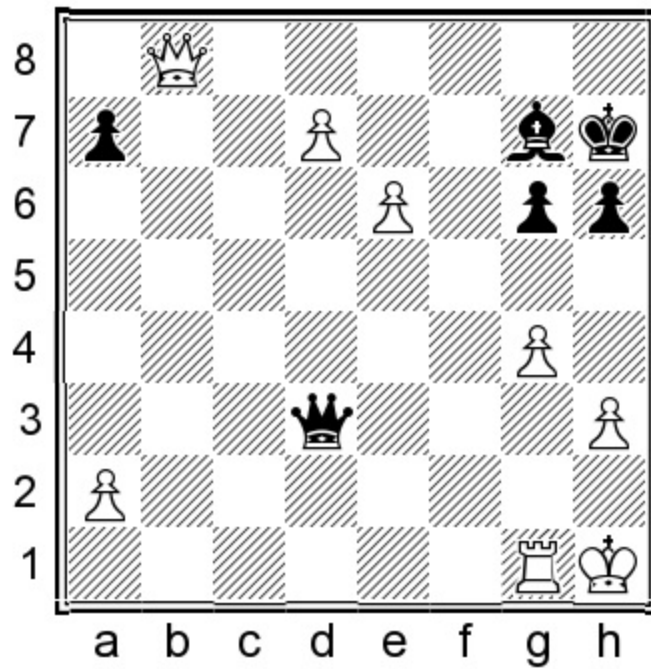
34.gxf3 would expose the white King, after 34...♚xf3+ 35.♞g2 ♚f1+



Analysis after: 35... ♖f1+

36. ♔h2 ♕e5+ 37. ♖g3 ♗f2+ 38. ♔h1 ♗f1+= [38... ♗xg3?? 39. ♗f7+ ♔h8 40. d8=♗#]

34... ♖xh3+! 35. gxh3



Position after: 35. gxh3

35... ♗e4+!

And a perpetual check is unavoidable.

A) 35...♙xh3+?? 36.♚h2 ♜f3+ 37.♚g2+-

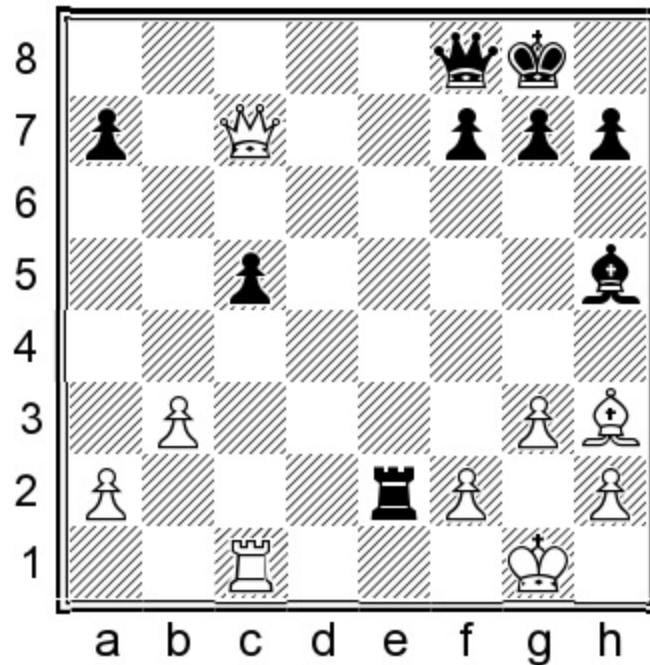
B) 35...♚e4+ 36.♞g2 ♚e1+ 37.♞g1 [37.♜h2? ♚e5+] 37...♚e4+=

½-½

Section 6.5 – Exercises Chapter 4: Emotions in Chess

15

Karthikeyan, P. – Werle, J.



■ After a disappointing sequence of moves, I found myself in a state of anger, rendering any objective analysis impossible. Can you find the draw?

Show/Hide Solution

15

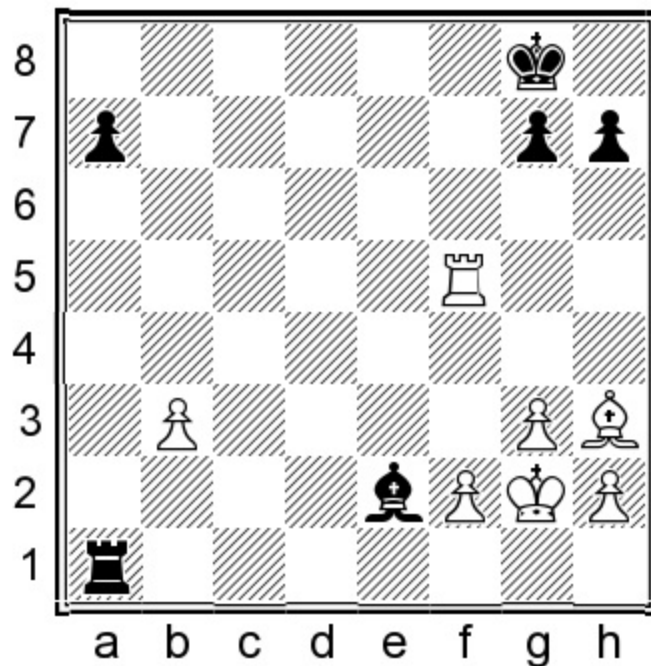
Karthikeyan, Pandian (2474)

Werle, Jan (2560)

Groningen 2016

Should Black take on a2 or play h6?

25...♞xa2!



Analysis after: 29...♙e2!

30.g4 In order to escape the check on f1. 30...♙f1+ [30...♖b1!] 31.♔g3 ♙xh3 32.♔xh3 ♖a3 33.♖b5 a5= The resulting 3 vs 2 Rook ending is equal.

28...♙f3 29.♖c1

29.♙e6+ liquidating into a Rook ending won't salvage White's winning chances. 29...♔f8 30.♖f5+ ♔e7 31.♖xf3 ♔xe6 32.♔g2 a5=

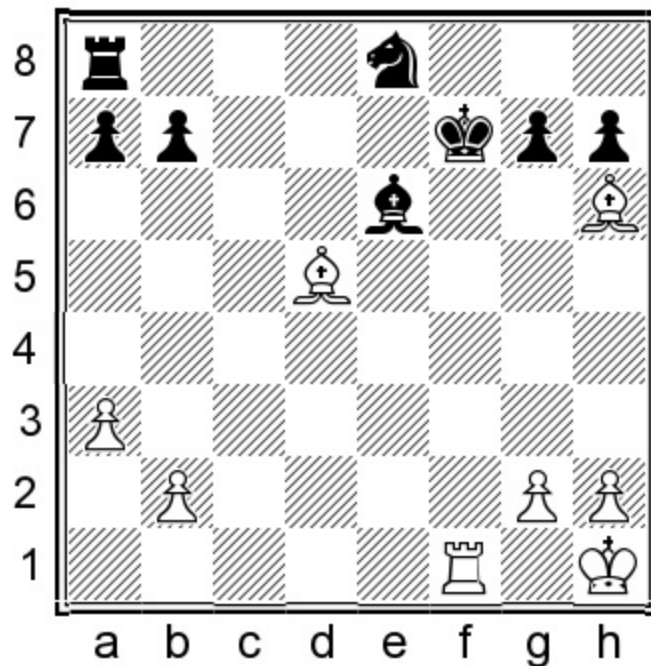
29...g5

Trying to build a net around White's King, meanwhile keeping an eye on b3. Black obtained sufficient compensation for being a pawn down.

1-0

16

Kortschnoj, V. – Huebner, R.



■ In this blitz game, Huebner had to make a difficult choice. The most natural move is 27...♘f6. Would this be your choice as well?

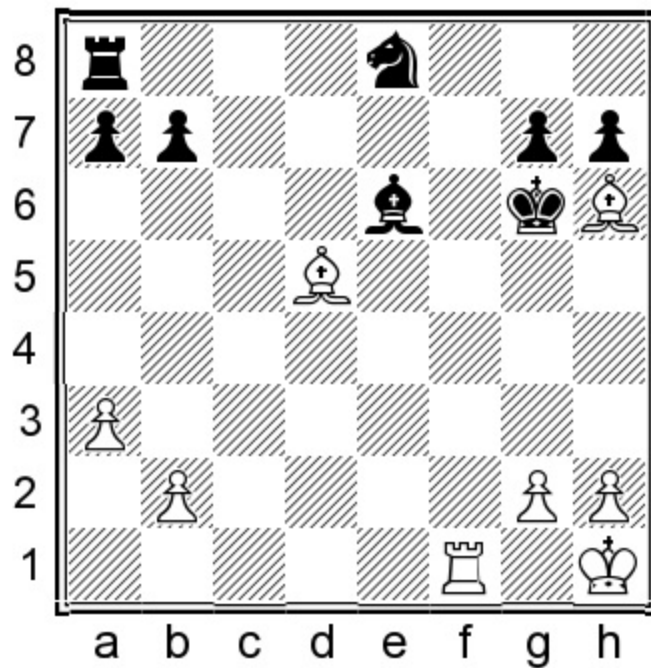
Show/Hide Solution

16
Kortschnoj, Viktor (2625)
Huebner, Robert (2615)
 Brussels 1987

27...♔g6!

27...♘f6? was played by Huebner, and – definitely in a blitz game – this seems the most natural move, after which the King becomes an overworked piece. 28.♙xe6+! ♔xe6 29.♙xg7 when White was a pawn up, obtaining a winning position (though lost in the end).

27...♔g6!



Position after: 27...♔g6!

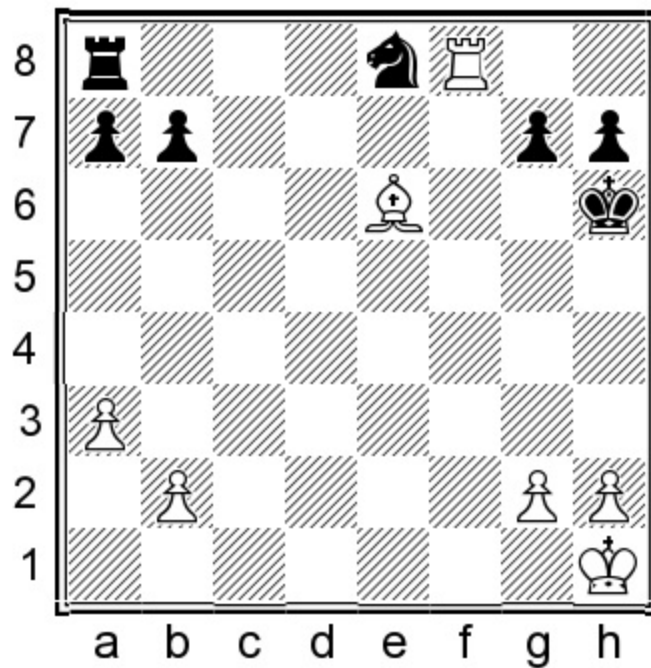
The far from obvious 27...♔g6 is the only move leading to a drawish endgame.

28.♙xe6

28.♙xb7? leaves the two Bishops 'en prise' after 28...♖b8.

28...♕xh6 29.♖f8

Neither 29.♖f7 leads to serious winning chances, after 29...♗d8 30.h4 ♘d6 when the draw is within reach.



Position after: 29. ♖f8

29...♗d8!

All of a sudden, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

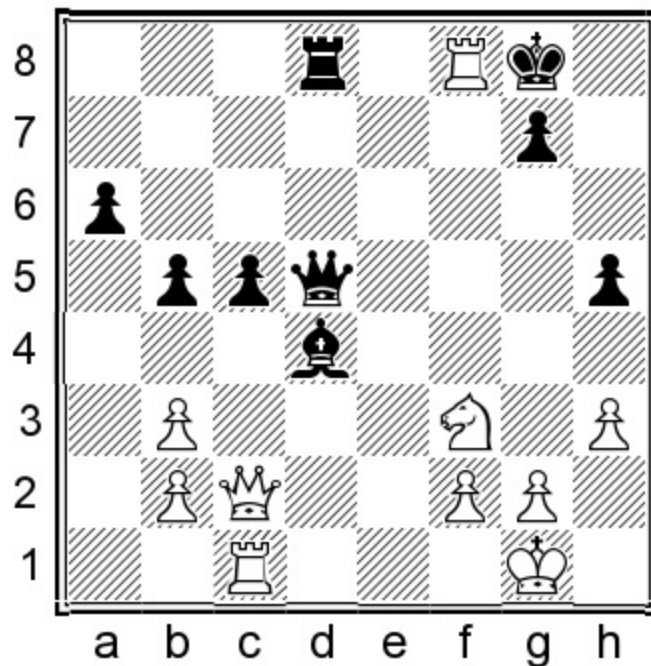
30.h3 ♗d1+ 31.♔h2 ♘d6

With an equal game as Black's pieces take in active positions.

0-1

17

Fischer, R. – Bobotsov, M.



■ A crucial choice has to be made. How do you take back on f8?

Show/Hide Solution

17

Fischer, Robert James

Bobotsov, Milko Georgiev

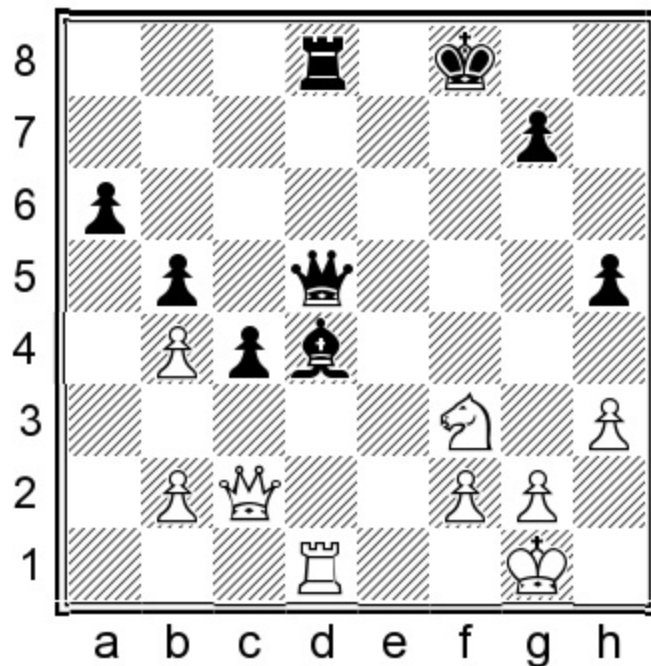
Leipzig 1960

25...♖xf8?

For those who are trying to blend in with the basics of our game... shame on you! The unnatural 25...♔xf8 should have been preferred here because of tactical reasons.

White's pin along the d-file after 25...♔xf8!

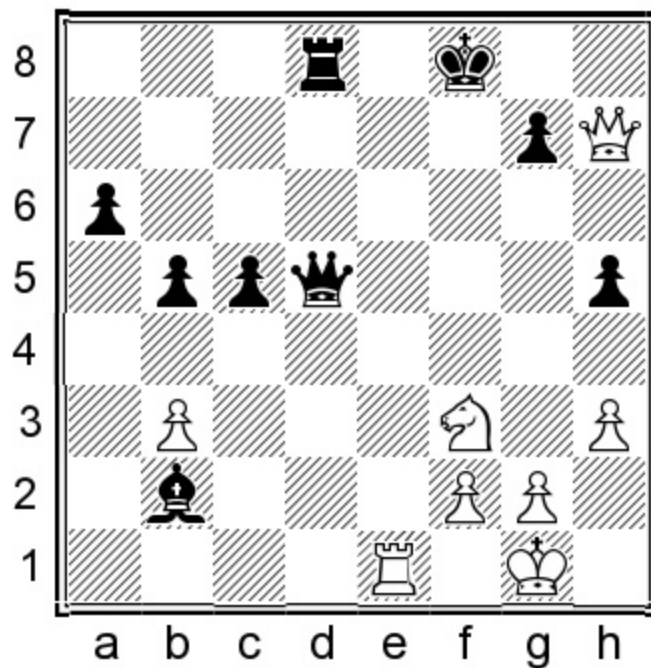
A) 26.b4 doesn't work any longer, due to 26...c4 27.♖d1?



Analysis after: 27.♞d1?

When the discovered attack prevails over the pin, after 27...♞xf2+! 28.♔xf2 ♞xd1-+

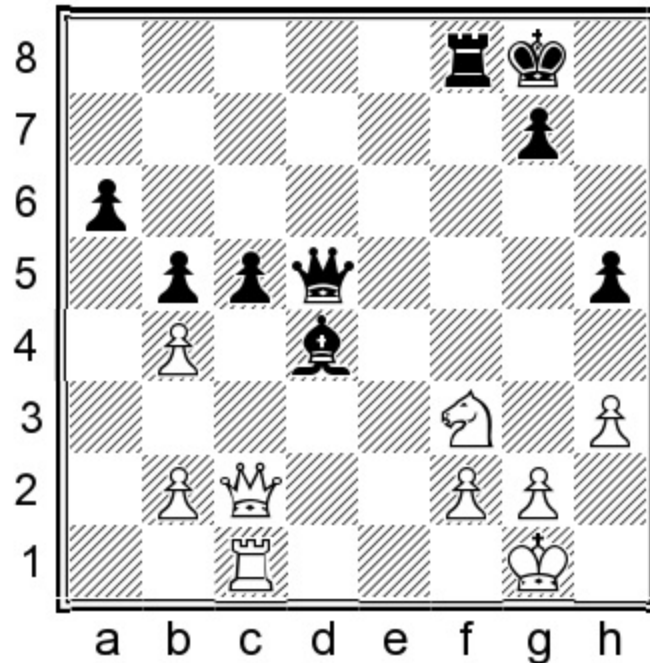
B) Black shouldn't be afraid for: 26.♞h7 ♞xb2 27.♞e1



Analysis after: 27.♞e1

27...♞f6!∞ the Bishop conducts a wonderful defensive task covering all the surrounding weak squares (e7, g7, g5, h4 and e5). A perpetual check by ♞h8 and ♞h5+ is the maximally attainable for White.

25...♖xf8? 26.b4!



Position after: 26.b4!

White is clearly better now, because White pins the Bishop when the c-pawn moves.

26...♖xf3

This doesn't come to Black's rescue. Neither will

A) 26...cxb4? 27.♖d1!+-

B) 26...♖c8? 27.♘xd4 ♕xd4 28.bxc5+- save Black.

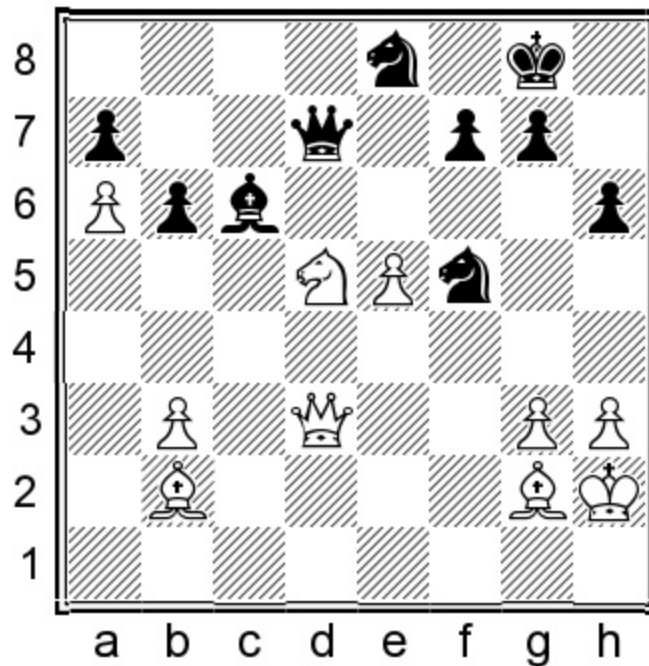
27.gxf3 ♕xf3 28.bxc5 ♕g3+ 29.♔f1 ♕xh3+ 30.♔e1

The King escapes the danger zone. Once the checks have ended, Black is helpless against White's c-pawn.

30...♕h1+ 31.♔e2 ♕c6 32.♕b3+ ♔h8 33.♕f3 ♕e6+ 34.♔f1 ♕h6 35.♕d1

The c-pawn starts rolling, determining the outcome of the game.

1-0



■ Alekseenko was too docile going with the flow of the game. Can you find the way to equalize?

Show/Hide Solution

18

Matlakov, Maxim (2710)

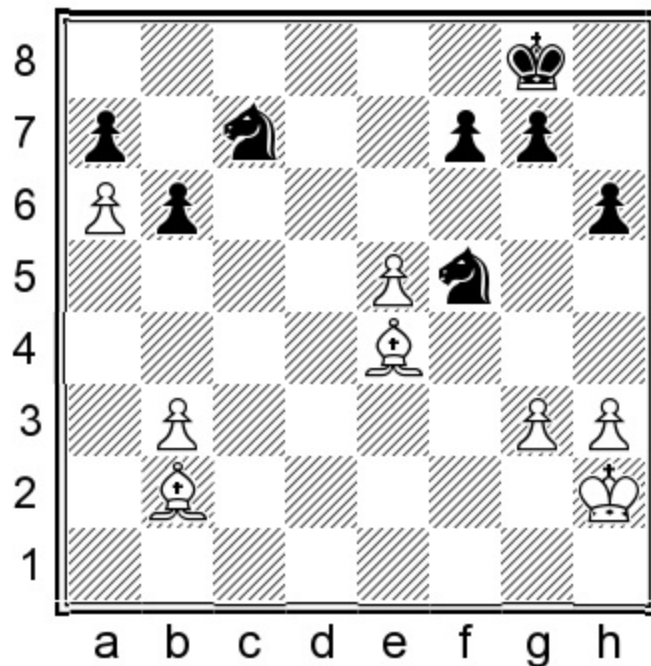
Alekseenko, Kirill (2668)

Izhevsk 2019

38...♘e3!!

Out of nowhere, Black can level the score.

38...♙xd5?! This was the game's move. Alekseenko must have thought that the net was closing in on him, thereby releasing the tension. Entering a 2 Knights vs 2 Bishops ending involves a considerable risk for Black, although even then with accurate play he can maintain the balance. Instead, there was a way out of the misery by means of: 39.♙xd5 ♖xd5 40.♙xd5 ♘c7 41.♙e4

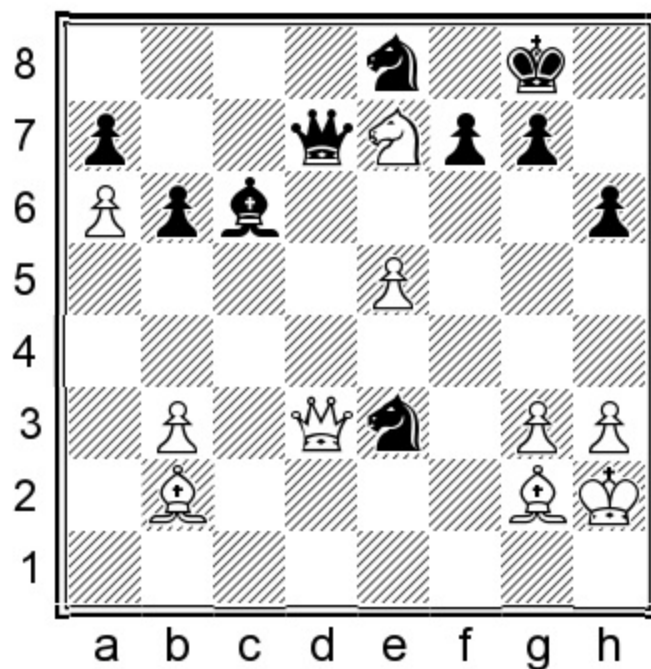


Analysis after: 41. Ke4

41... Ne3? [41... g6! 42. g4 Ng7 with the idea of 43. Qd3 Nge6 when Black can capture the dangerous a6-pawn after b6-b5.] 42. Qd3 Qf8 43. Qa3+ Qe8 44. Qd6 after which White is clearly better as Black is tied down and White can centralize his King.

38... Ne3!! 39. Qxe3

39. Ne7+!?



Analysis after: 39. ♖e7+!?

39... ♔f8! [39... ♚xe7? 40. ♗xc6 when the Knight is trapped.] 40. ♚xe3 ♗xg2=

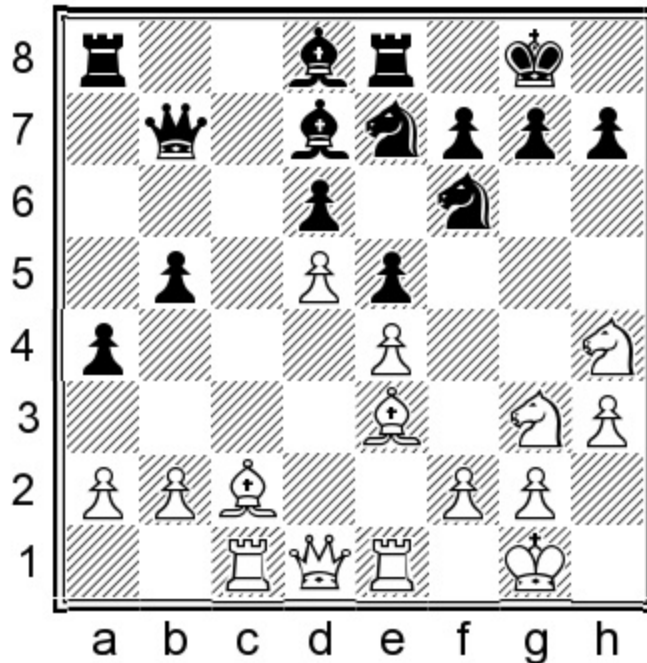
39... ♗xd5 40. ♚d3 ♖c7

When Black is fine as he has main influence in the center.

Section 6.6 – Exercises Chapter 5: Defensive Strategies

19

Howell, D. – Werle, J.



■ Black should refrain from 21... ♖g6 22. ♖hf5, and reckon with 22. ♗g5 and 23. ♗xf6. Can you find a subtle prophylaxis encountering the assault?

Show/Hide Solution

19

Howell, David (2479)

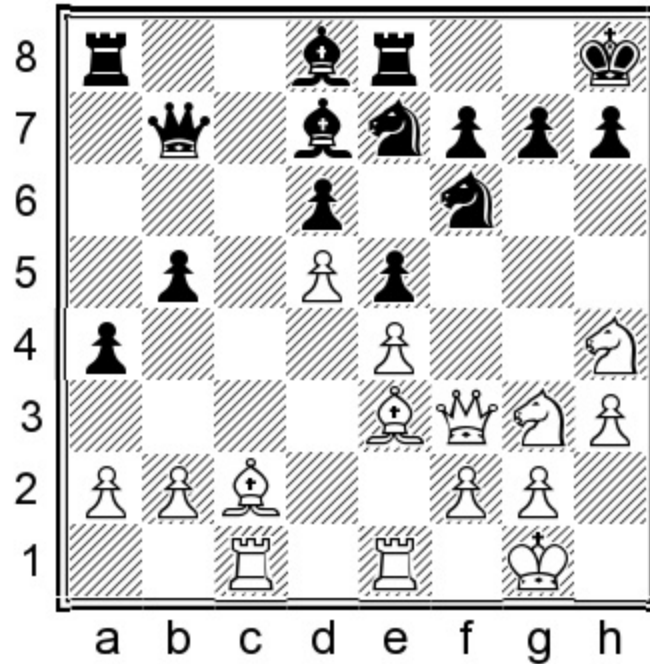
Werle, Jan (2531)

London 2006

21... ♔h8!

Black is clearing the g8 square for (primarily) his f6 Knight after which he fortifies his black squares g7 and f6, and thereby, the King's castle. The threat of ♕g5, attacking the Knight which has no square to retreat to, has been averted.

22. ♖f3



Position after: 22. ♖f3

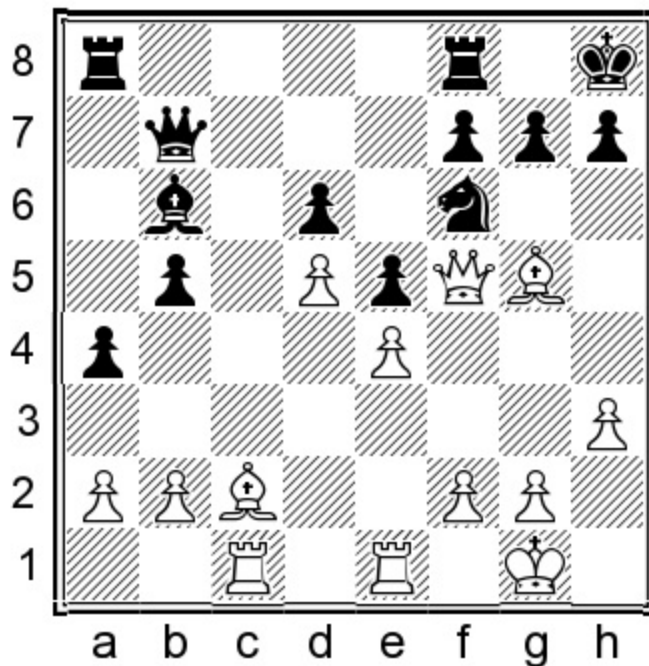
22... ♜f8!

Now the f7 pawn is defended, the possible retreat of ... ♞f6-g8 on ♕g5 is possible. Please note that the Rook is not misplaced on f8 since after ... ♙b6 and ... ♞f6-g8, ...f7-f5 is in the air. With this idea, Black opens the f-file, attacks the pawn on f2, doubles Rooks and creates counterplay.

23. ♞hf5

23. ♙d3 ♙b6 24. ♙g5 ♞fg8

23... ♞xf5 24. ♞xf5 ♙xf5 25. ♖xf5 ♙b6 26. ♙g5



Position after: 26. ♔g5

26... ♖g8!∞

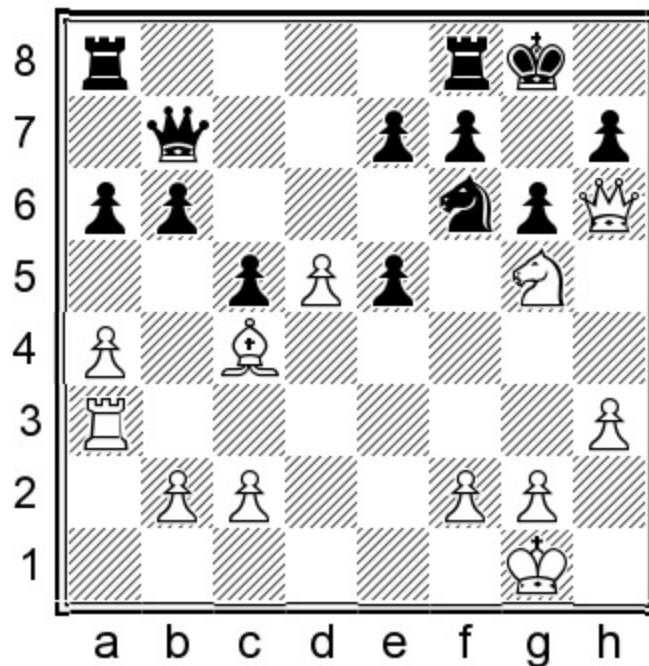
White possesses indeed the Bishop pair, nevertheless there is an equilibrium due to the fine black Bishop on b6 and the possible to be created counterplay on the f-file with ...f7-f5, opening the f-file.

27. ♔d3 ♔c5 28. ♖f3 f6 29. ♔d2 ♖fc8 30. ♖e2 ♖b6 31. ♔f1 b4 32. ♖c4 ♗e7 33. ♖ec1 ♖b7 34. ♖e1 ♖ab8
 35. ♖d1 ♖a7 36. ♔e1 ♖f8 37. ♖f3 ♖f7 38. h4 b3 39. a3 ♖bf8 40. ♔b4 ♔xb4 41. ♖xb4 f5 42. exf5 g6
 43. ♔g1 gxf5 44. ♔b5 ♗g6 45. ♖c3 f4 46. ♖h3 ♖e7 47. ♖bc4 e4 48. ♖e6 ♖xh4 49. ♖c8 ♖xc8 50. ♖xc8+
 ♔g7 51. ♖xe4 ♗e5 52. ♖c3 ♖h5 53. ♔e2 ♖g5 54. ♖h3 h6 55. ♖xa4 f3 56. ♔f1 fxg2 57. ♔xg2 ♗f3+
 58. ♖xf3 ♖xf3 59. ♖d4+ ♖f6 60. ♖d1 ♖g6 61. ♖d4+ ♔h7 62. ♖e4 ♖c1+ 63. ♔h2 ♖xb2 64. ♖e7+ ♖g7

0-1

20

De Waele W. – Maenhout, T.



■ Not beating around the bush, White played 21.♖a3. His devil's intentions are obvious. Can you keep your head cool and find a defense?

Show/Hide Solution

20
De Waele, Warre
Maenhout, Thibaut
Lichess.org 2020

21...e4!

Before Black sets in the counter, he is buying time. The White Rook, on its way to eliminate the defender on f6, has to take a sideroad.

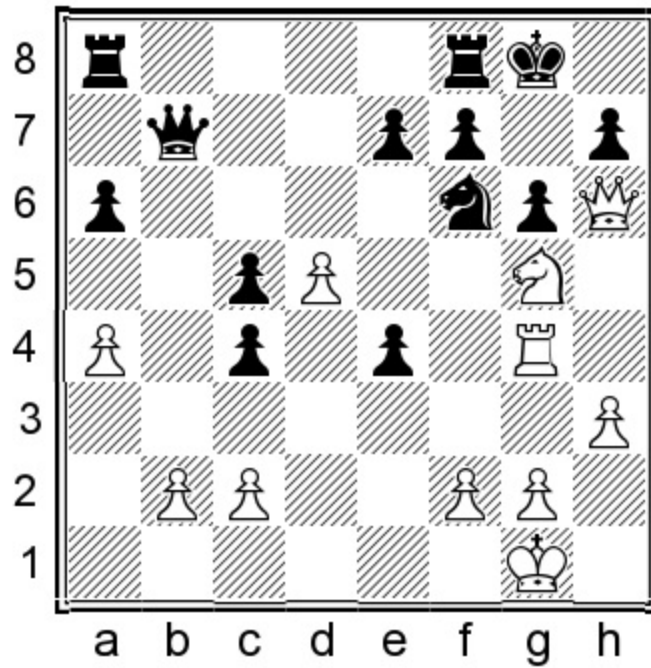
A) 21...b5? 22.♖f3! Δ 22...bxc4 23.♖xf6 exf6 24.♔xh7#

B) 21...♖fd8? 22.d6! e6 23.♖f3+-

21...e4! 22.♖e3

Renewing the threat of eliminating the defender on f6, this time via the route e3xe4-f4xf6.

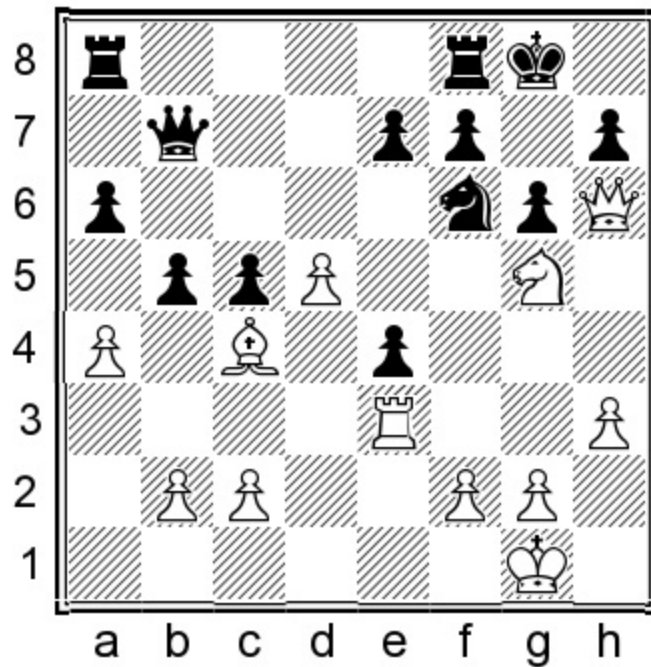
22.♖g3 b5 23.♖g4 bxc4



Analysis after: 23...bxc4

24.♖f4! ♜xf6 is on the agenda again via the route ♜a3-g3-g4-g4-f4. 24...♜fb8 25.♖xf6 exf6 26.♝xh7+ ♔f8 27.d6 ♔e8! when the King escapes.

22...b5!



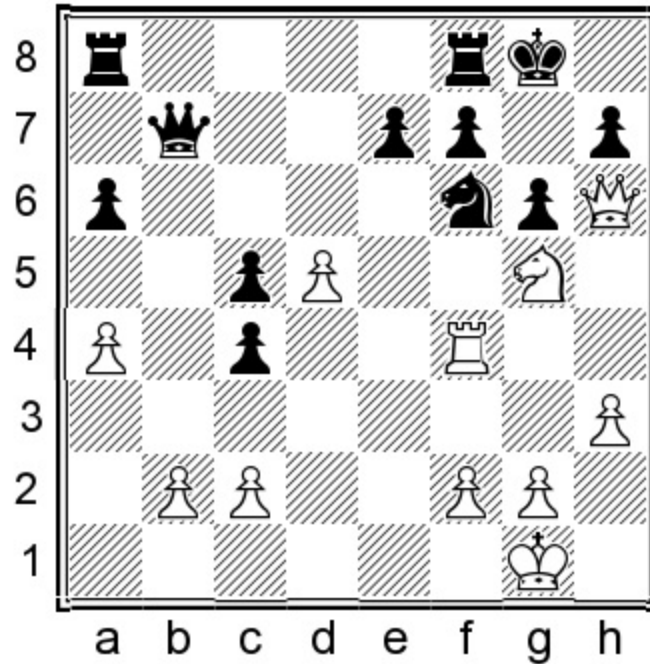
Position after: 22...b5!

The counter comes in time.

23. ♖xe4

23. ♕f1 bxa4 24. ♖xe4 ♜xb2 The Queen joins the defense along the long diagonal. 25. ♖f4 ♜fd8
26. ♖xf6 ♜xf6—+

23...bxc4 24. ♖f4

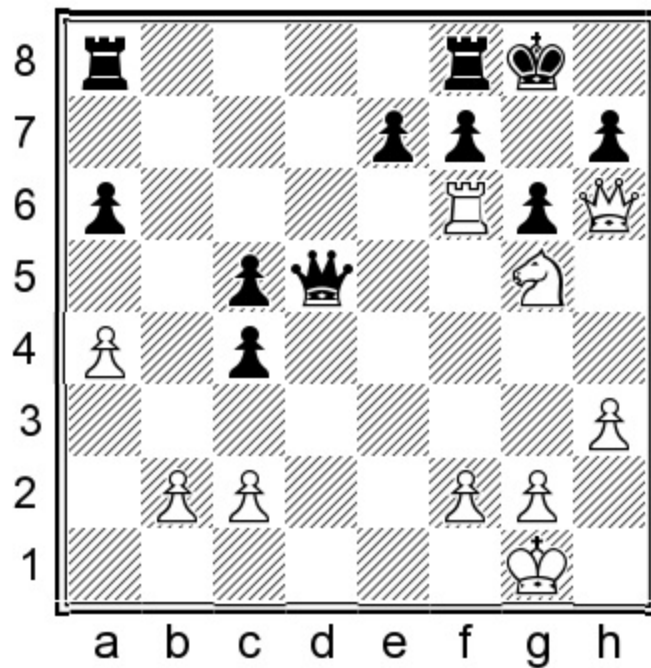


Position after: 24. ♖f4

Black is on several ways in time to defend his position. All due to this important extra tempo he gained on the 21st move.

24. ♖h4 ♜xb2! As well here the attack comes to a standstill now that the Queen defends. 25. ♘h7
♘h5 26. ♘xf8 ♜xf8 27. g4 ♜g7!—+

24...♜xd5 25. ♖xf6



Position after: 25. ♖xf6

25... ♕d1+! 26. ♔h2 ♕h5!

The danger has been averted. Black is winning.

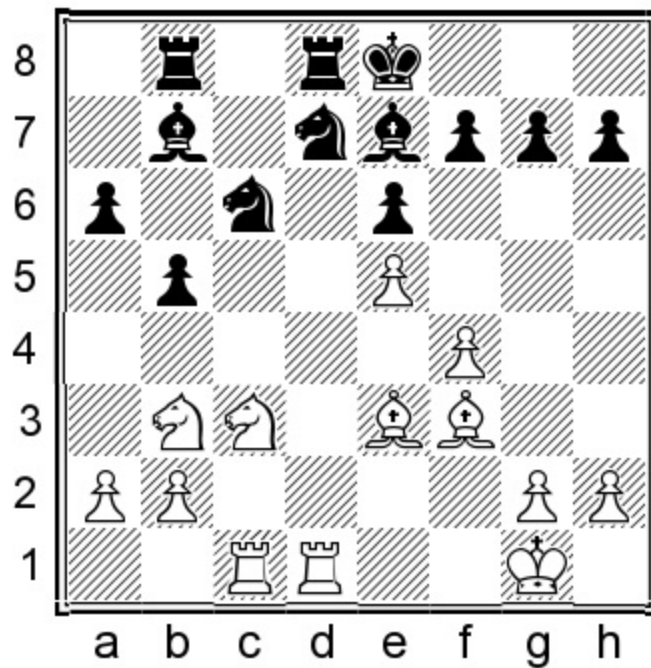
27. ♕xh5 gxh5 28. ♖f4 ♖fd8 29. ♖xc4 ♖d5 30. ♗e4 ♖d4

When White resigned.

0-1

21

Nisipeanu, L. – Vorobiov, E.



■ The black pieces, rooted to the spot, are craving for more space. It is now or never!

Show/Hide Solution

21

Nisipeanu, Liviu Dieter

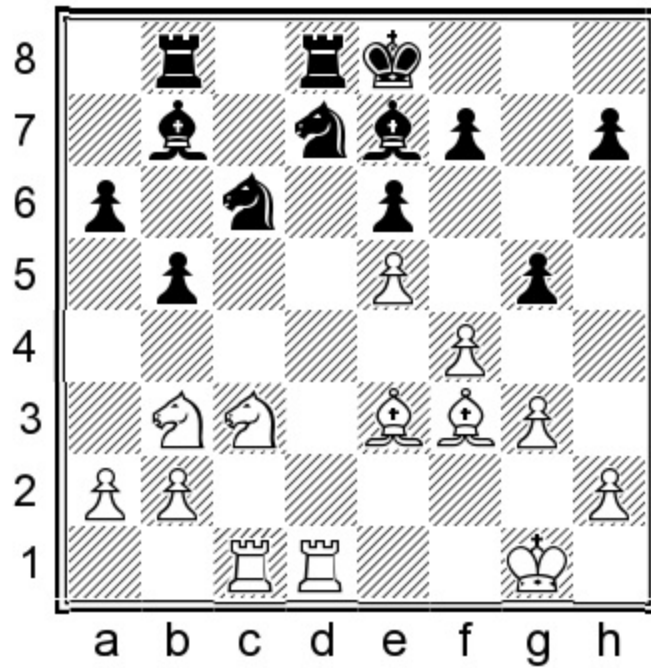
Vorobiov, Evgeny

Bad Wiessee 2016

19...♖dc8?

The odds are stacked against Black, so there is no more time to hide.

19...g5! Serious counterchances are obtained now that White's center falls apart. Especially since 20.g3 is allowing tactics, now that the Bishop on f3 is unprotected:



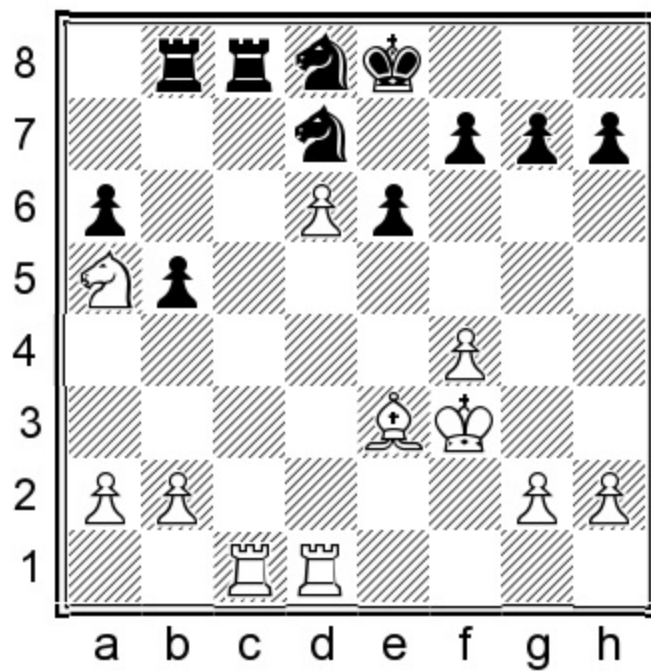
Analysis after: 20.g3

20...♖cxe5! 21.♙xb7 ♘c4! Black is safe since both of White's Bishops are hanging. 22.♙xa6 ♘xe3

19...♗dc8? 20.♘e4!

Gradually, Black is being pushed off the cliff.

20...♘d8 21.♘a5 ♙d5 22.♖f2 ♙b4 23.♘d6+ ♙xd6 24.exd6 ♙xf3 25.♖xf3



Position after: 25. ♖xf3

As the dust has settled, it appears that Black is suffering from his passive play missing his last chance on the 19th move, as he can barely move!

25...f6 26.♖c7 ♗f7 27.♗b7 ♖xc7 28.dxc7 ♖c8 29.♖c1 f5 30.♗d2 ♗f6 31.♗a5 ♗d5 32.♖c6

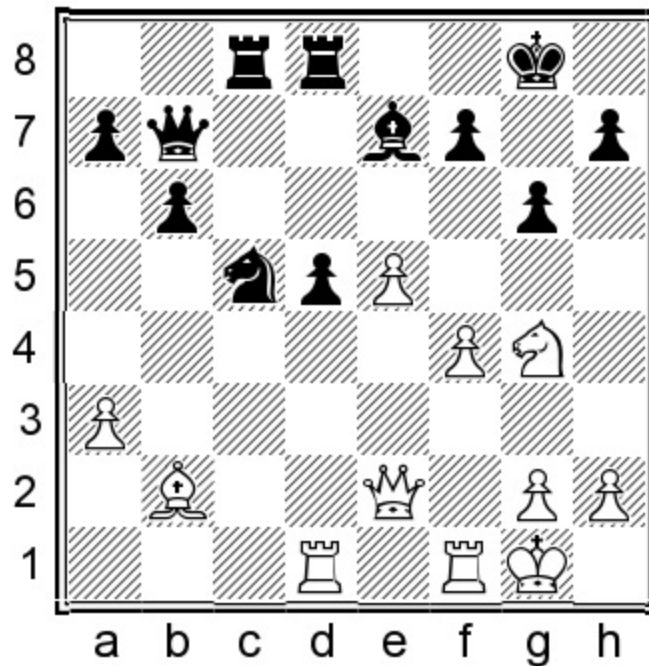
The poor Black player is nailed to the ground.

32...♗e7 33.♗c5 ♗d6 34.b3 ♖a8 35.h4 h5 36.g3 g6 37.a3 ♗f6 38.♗c3 ♗fe8 39.♗a5 ♗f6 40.♗c3 ♗fe8 41.♗e2 a5 42.♗d3 ♗f7 43.♗xa5 ♖xa5 44.♗b7

1-0

22

Training position



■ White possesses the better structure and threatens f4-f5. Can Black pull the emergency brake here?

Show/Hide Solution

22

Training position

24...d4!

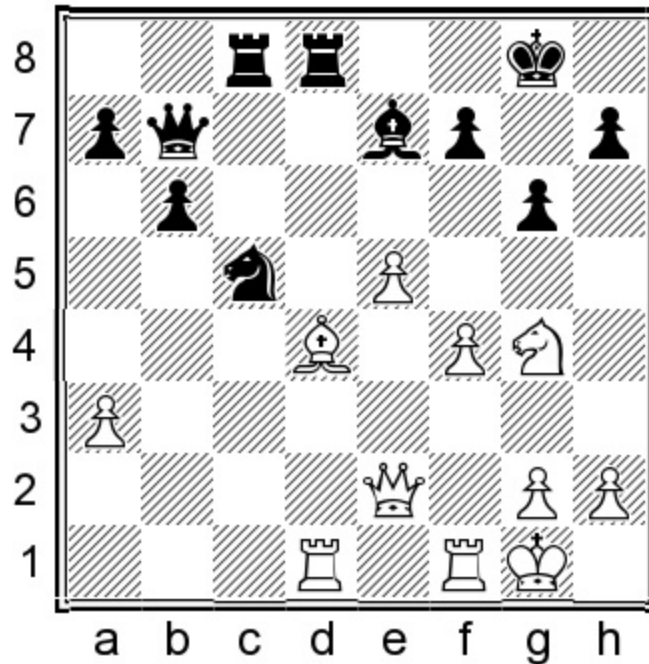
Black's defensive key-idea is to exchange the Queens with ...♙b7-♙e4.

A) 24...♘e4?! 25.f5!→

B) 24...♙a6?! 25.♙f3 Black is defenseless against f5.

24...d4! 25.♙xd4

25.f5 ♙e4!↔



Position after: 25. ♙xd4

25...♙e4!

Just in time! Black's King is no longer in danger after the Queen's exchange.

26.♙xe4

26.♙f2 is even losing, after 26...♘d3! losing the d4-Bishop.

26...♘xe4

Now that the danger has been averted, Black has gained the upperhand.

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