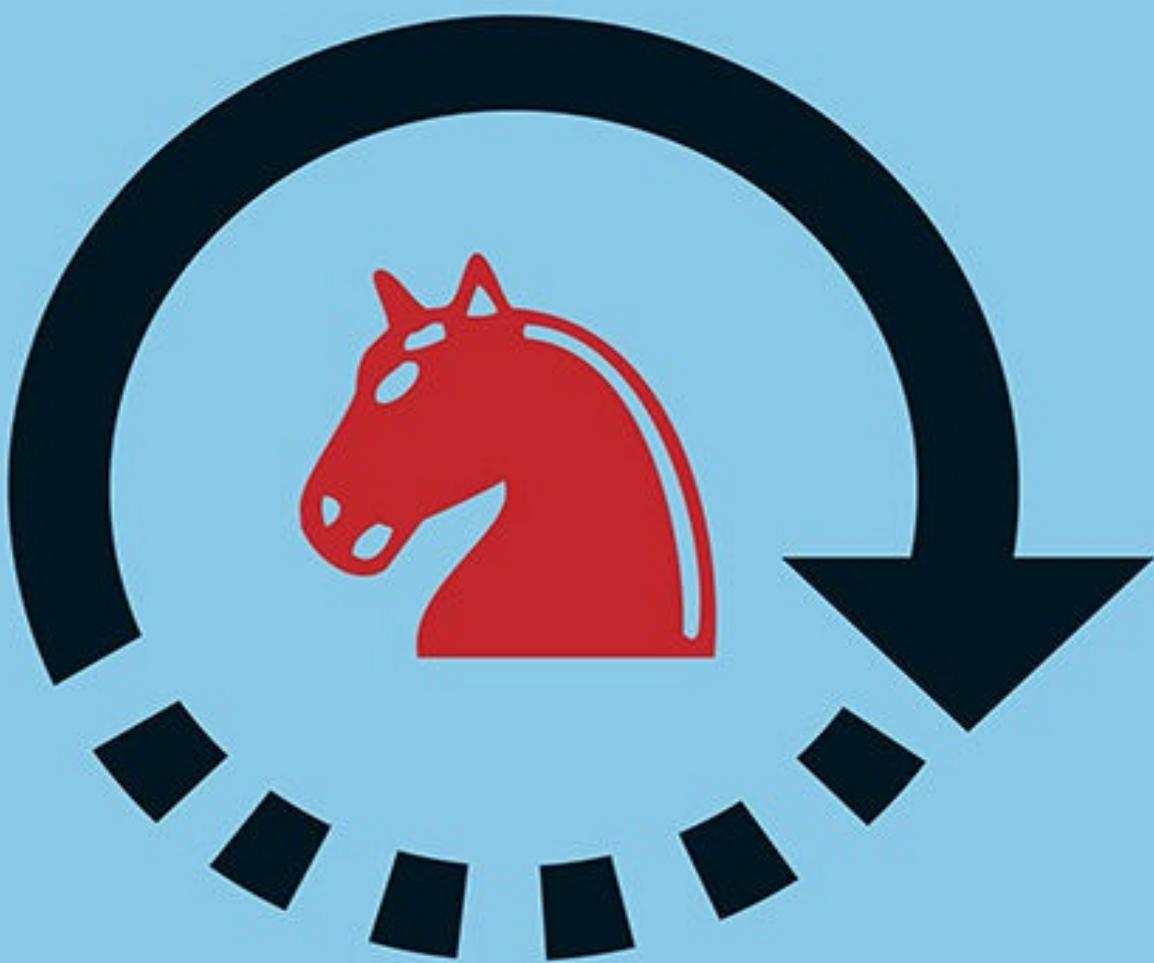


Davorin Kuljasevic

BEYOND MATERIAL

Ignore the Face
Value of Your
Pieces and
Discover the
Importance of
Time, Space and
Psychology in
Chess



NEW IN CHESS

Beyond Material

Davorin Kuljasevic

Beyond Material

Ignore the Face Value of Your Pieces and Discover the Importance of Time,
Space and Psychology in Chess

New In Chess 2019

© 2019 New In Chess

Published by New In Chess, Alkmaar, The Netherlands
www.newinchess.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

Cover design: Ron van Roon

Supervision: Peter Boel

Editing and typesetting: Frank Erwich

Proofreading: Joe Petrolito, Dennis Keetman

Production: Anton Schermer

Have you found any errors in this book?

Please send your remarks to editors@newinchess.com. We will collect all relevant corrections on the Errata page of our website www.newinchess.com and implement them in a possible next edition.

ISBN: 978-90-5691-860-6

Contents

Explanation of symbols

Preface

Chapter 1 – Attachment to material

Chapter 2 – Relative value of material

Test exercises – introduction

Test exercises

Chapter 3 – Time beats material

Test exercises

Chapter 4 – Space beats material

Test exercises

Chapter 5 – Psychology of non-materialism

Test exercises

Chapter 6 – Is it good to be greedy in chess?

Test exercises

Chapter 7 – Solutions

Index of names

Bibliography

Author's biography

Explanation of symbols

The chessboard with its coordinates:



- White to move
- Black to move
- ♔ King
- ♕ Queen
- ♖ Rook
- ♗ Bishop
- ♘ Knight
- ± White stands slightly better
- ∓ Black stands slightly better
- ± White stands better
- ∓ Black stands better
- +- White has a decisive advantage
- + Black has a decisive advantage
- = balanced position
- ! good move

!!	excellent move
?	bad move
??	blunder
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
N	novelty
↑	initiative
→	attack
↖	counterplay
≈	compensation
∞	unclear

Preface

Chess is a game of many laws and, perhaps, just as many exceptions. To help us comprehend such a complex game, we need some fundamental principles to rely on. When it comes to fundamentals, there is nothing more tangible and intuitively valuable than material. We are instinctively attracted to the idea that something can be gained, measured, and traded.

Therefore, we habitually assess our chances in a chess game in terms of material balance on the board, and often form plans and carry out operations with the aim of tipping this balance into our favor. The modern chess lingo even has us evaluating positions in decimal numbers that indicate a material advantage, so it is not uncommon to hear someone complain: ‘Man, I blew a 0.70!’, letting the world know that they misplayed a large positional advantage.

The materialistic value system generally works well in chess. However, it is also sort of like ‘The Matrix’ – obscuring deeper chess truths by its outwardly pleasing design. The motivation for this book was to go beyond material and uncover these truths by exploring the interconnection of material between the other two fundamental principles in chess – space and time, as well as examining our subjective perceptions of material in depth.

Hopefully, after reading this book the reader will have:

- reconsidered the well-known ‘truths’ about the values of the pieces;
- improved his/her understanding of subjective and psychological issues related to material, such as: attachment to material, risk-taking, psychological aspects of sacrifices and many others; and ultimately
- developed a new or improved perspective on chess in which material is seen as equivalent, and not superior to the major chess principles.

To achieve these goals, *Beyond Material* has been divided into six chapters

that deal with the same number of major themes and many other sub-themes within the chapters. All chapters contain instructive examples from contemporary and classical practice alike. Naturally, I have chosen many games of world-class players, but also included a fair number of less known, yet highly illustrative games, as well as some personal examples.

To give you a quick overview of the book: in the first chapter, we discuss the human attachment to material from several angles and lay the foundation for a ‘non-materialistic’ way of thinking that is necessary to fully appreciate the material (no pun intended!) from the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 2, we take a closer look at why traditionally-accepted values of pieces fluctuate in different circumstances and how this can help us evaluate positions more accurately, rather than by using a simple materialistic approach.

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to the exploration of material as it relates to time and space, respectively. It is at this point that we are ‘cracking the Matrix’ by throwing off the shackles of limited materialistic thinking and looking beyond the piece count to understand deeper chess truths about positional play, strategy, initiative, and attack.

It is impossible to get a full picture of this process without taking human psychology into account, so we look at psychological aspects of non-materialism in Chapter 5. By disturbing the material balance, we can often put our opponent under all sorts of psychological pressure, change the trend of the game favorably, and even get a psychological edge in the opening.

In the final chapter, we take a dialectic approach to the topic of greed for material in chess by examining cases when it is beneficial to be greedy and, in contrast, when it is unfavorable. It is meant to be a thought-provoking chapter that may entice you to challenge your own assumptions and habits when it comes to taking and giving material.

To make things more interesting, I have added a test section with 10 positions at the end of each chapter, except for Chapter 1. Thus, there are 50 test positions in total. The goal of these exercises is to help you practice non-materialistic ways of thinking and the evaluation of positions with material

imbalances.

My expectation is that a reader of any level from a decent club player to a grandmaster can have a good reading experience and get something practical out of this book. The concepts presented here are relevant to all chess players, although a reasonable level of chess understanding and experience are required to appreciate them fully.

Writing this book was a great pleasure because the notion of (non-)materialism in chess has interested me for a long time. I have been collecting instructive material and juggling ideas for this book for years, although it wasn't until late 2018, when I was offered to actually write about it by New in Chess, that I approached the subject systematically. I was delighted that I had been allowed to explore this fascinating topic in a great amount of detail, and for this I am also grateful to the editorial staff. As far as I know, the subject of material in chess has not been studied extensively in a single work before, so I hope that this book will be a good reference point for the future.

Coincidentally, while I was putting the final strokes on this work, the intriguing book *Game Changer* by Matthew Sadler and Natasha Regan – a story about the success of the self-taught chess program AlphaZero – came out and received great attention from the chess public. To be honest, I hadn't paid much attention to AlphaZero's games (I know, shame on me) before this book was recommended to me by my publisher Allard Hoogland, even though it had soundly beaten Stockfish, the strongest chess engine at that point.

This was the book that provoked probably the most 'wow's' and 'aha's' of any book that I have read recently, because AlphaZero's playing style and concepts were, firstly, very impressive from a chess player's point of view, but, secondly, also very much in tune with the 'beyond material' approach that I advocate in this book!

For instance, on page 402 of *Game Changer*, in a paragraph titled 'Re-evaluation of compensation and initiative' the authors conclude that '... AlphaZero's games will cause a readjustment in what humans consider to be

acceptable long-term compensation for sacrifices. AlphaZero's approach has shown that many material sacrifices for the initiative can be objectively correct even against most superlative defensive play.'

AlphaZero is also described as: 'not tied to keeping the material balance (page 76)', 'not afraid to sacrifice material... to open lines or diagonals against the opponent's king (page 98)', as well as implementing 'new strategies based around piece mobility (page 402)'. There is even a full chapter (11) in the book that is subtitled *sacrifices for time, space and damage*, which is strikingly similar to the ideas that I talk about in Chapters 3 and 4 in this book.

In a way, the convincing victory of AlphaZero's strategically intuitive and non-materialistic playing style over the machine-like, cold and calculated materialistic approach of Stockfish supports the key concept behind this book. This is not to say that 'materialism' in chess is wrong. It simply points to the fact that we are constantly uncovering new truths about this deep and wonderful game. May this book serve you well in this quest.

Davorin Kuljasevic, Plovdiv. July 2019

CHAPTER 1

Attachment to material

‘You will become a strong player once you learn how to properly sacrifice a pawn.’ These were the words of my first coach, which made a strong impression while I was making early steps in competitive chess.

He had a point; giving up material is not something that comes naturally to most people. After all, we are materialistic beings who are instinctively aware of material balance on the chessboard. But chess is not simply a linear game of addition and subtraction; there are other laws that govern the royal game beyond a mere pawn and piece count.

To understand a chess position properly, we should not just count pieces at their face value, but also take into consideration qualitative factors such as king safety, mobility of the pieces, existence of important outposts and pawn weaknesses, initiative, etc.

I like to think of these ‘non-material’ factors in terms of space and time. Let me clarify.

Space is everything related to the chessboard – squares, files, diagonals, pawn structures, and the space advantage itself. To a large degree, these are the postulates of modern positional understanding set by the first World Champion, Wilhelm Steinitz.

On the other hand, time in chess is a tempo, a threat, the initiative and attack – in other words, time as it relates to chess moves as they unfold, one by one, in a chess game.

So, just as physicists define our universe in terms of matter, space and time, we can try to explain the ‘chess universe’ in similar terms. After all, didn’t Garry Kasparov write a book on how life imitates chess?

Now, it is very common for chess players to subconsciously prefer material at the expense of time and spatial (positional) aspects. However, the

reality of the game is sometimes different, and to become stronger in chess, one needs to learn to look beyond the material count when evaluating a position. Experienced players often do this on a subconscious level, using their knowledge of numerous patterns, rules and exceptions that are formed over the years.

Take, for instance, the following two examples.

Game 1

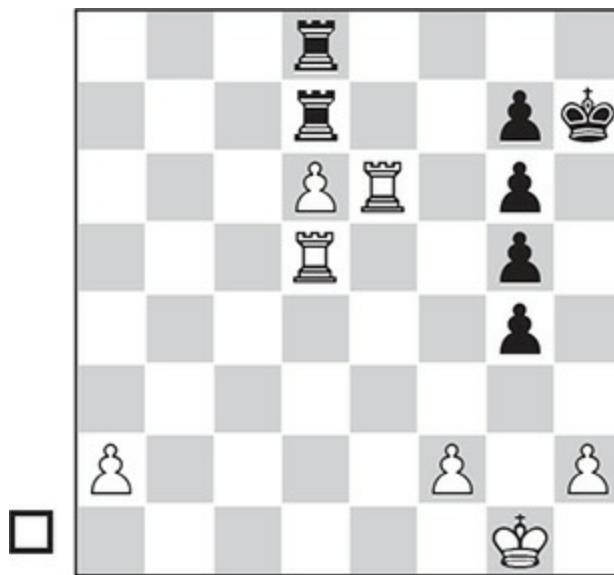
Bela Molnar

2352

Tomas Polak

2503

Pula 2001 (7)



The situation we have on the board is a rare sight; this might be the only game in the history of chess (at least to my knowledge) with quadrupled pawns. Yet, the material is balanced! If we go blindly by the ‘book value’, this position would be mistakenly evaluated as equal. However, if we assess it in qualitative terms, we would realize that White is winning, because he has two passed pawns and more active rooks.

Molnar proceeded accordingly.

34.a4

The materialistic approach 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg5?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ would be wrong, because in the endgame against only one passed pawn, Black has good chances to hold a draw: 36... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 38. a4 g5 39. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ etc.

34... $\mathbb{Q}a8?!$

This loses easily. More stubborn was 34... $\mathbb{Q}g8$, threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}g8-f7$. However, in that case White can actually start picking up pawns on the g-file, one by one: 35. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}dxg5$ etc.

35. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}dd8$ 36. a5 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 37. d7 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}aa8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}aa8$

Black resigned.

Game 2

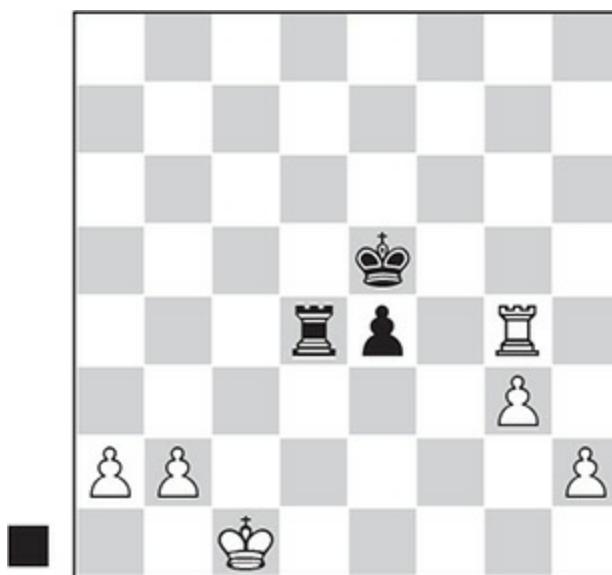
Alexandra Kosteniuk

2510

Hou Yifan

2557

Nalchik Wch 2008 (6)



White is up three pawns in the rook endgame, which is almost always a decisive advantage at this stage of the game. However, after

48... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$

it soon becomes clear that it is not Black, but White, who is trying to achieve a draw! The only black pawn is advanced further than any white pawn, while the white pieces are placed very passively, so it becomes a challenge to block it. Kosteniuk played

49. ♜g5+

49.a4?? is obviously too slow and is already losing after 49...e3 50. ♜g7 ♛f6 51. ♜g4 e2 52. ♜e4 ♜d1+.

49... ♛f6 50. ♜c5 e3 51. ♜c2

White has managed to stop the pawn for a moment, but Black can reinforce the threat with

51... ♛f5 52.a4 ♛e4

and here White had to force a draw by giving side-checks:

53. ♜c4+

Again, trying to capitalize on the material advantage with 53.a5 has a boomerang effect after 53... ♛f3 54.a6 e2–+.

53... ♛d3 54. ♜c3+ ♛e4 55. ♜c4+ ♛d3 56. ♜c3+ ♛e4 57. ♜c4+ ♛d3 ½-½

Hopefully, these striking examples illustrate well how important it is to identify non-material factors that are essential for the position in question. This is a skill that takes time and nurture to develop. Not surprisingly, beginners tend to rely primarily on a material count when they assess their chances. If you think about it, most of their operations in a game are materialistic in nature: threats, attacks, checks, and captures. They need time to develop an appreciation for the non-material aspects of chess.

A funny situation happened a few years ago with one of my young beginner students in a youth tournament. After he won his opponent's queen, I expected that the game would be over fairly quickly, especially since his opponent, playing White, had only a couple of pieces left. However, instead of going for a simple mating attack at several points, he proceeded to 'clean up the board' by capturing all the remaining white pieces.

Meanwhile, I took a walk around the playing hall to check the other games in progress. Immersed in an interesting position in another game, I had barely noticed a hand rising in the air on the other side of the room. My young student's game had just finished. As I walked up to his table, the first thing I

saw was a guilty grin on his face. Instantly, I knew what that was about, and I looked at the final position on the board just to confirm my suspicion. Sure enough, the white king was stalemated in the middle of the board, which was full of black pieces. It was surrounded by no less than four black queens!

Chess peculiarities

Besides the innate human attachment to material, this incident also hints at two peculiar aspects of chess that sometimes override the significance of material:

- 1) the specific role of the king in chess; and
- 2) pawn promotions.

In *Strategy and Tactics in Chess* by Georgy Lisitsyn, one of the first chess books I read in my childhood, the role of these two peculiarities was methodically explained. According to Lisitsyn, ‘... king’s role and pawn promotion complicate, widen and enrich possibilities in chess’. Let us look at several interesting examples that I have encountered over the years to prove his point.

Game 3

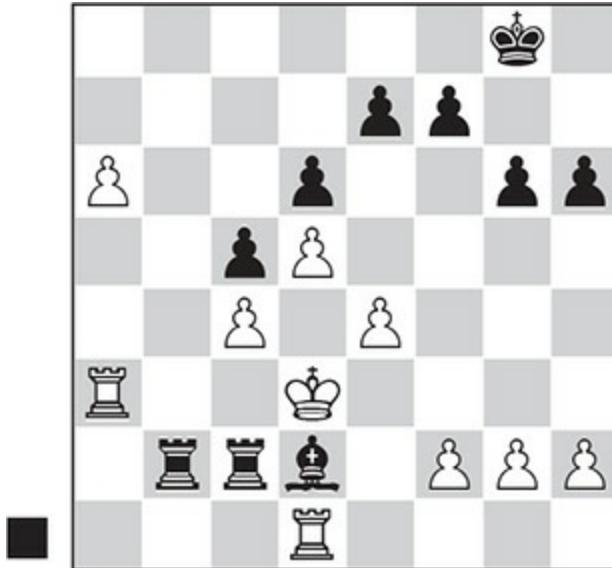
Shen Yang

2464

Melissa Castrillon Gomez

2248

Batumi ol W 2018 (2)



Black has a material advantage that is equivalent to two pawns and also a time advantage (it is her move). But, speaking of chess peculiarities, White is threatening to obtain a decisive material advantage by promoting her a-pawn in the next two moves. It would seem like Black has no choice but to surrender her material advantage, to eliminate the dangerous passed pawn. After only about half a minute spent on the move, this is exactly what WIM Castrillon did: 29... $\mathbb{Q}a2?$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}a1 \mathbb{Q}c3+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xc3 \mathbb{Q}xa1$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xd2 \mathbb{Q}xa6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, and a draw was agreed.

However, she failed to appreciate the second chess peculiarity: the king's role. In this position, the white king is placed very awkwardly on d3. It is protected for now, but it only takes some imagination to visualize the creation of a mating net around it. Black can do it with the spectacular

29... $\mathbb{Q}f4!!$

This is a bit stronger than 29... $\mathbb{Q}g5$, with the same idea, as it avoids e4-e5 in some variations.

30.a7 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 31.a8 $\mathbb{Q}+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$



From the material point of view, the situation has changed 180 degrees; now, White is the one with a material advantage and an extra move. Yet, her king is in a mating net and there is not much she can do about it with her three major pieces! Black is threatening a simple checkmate after 32... $\mathbb{Q}be2$ and 33... $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$. Let us see which options White has:

- A) 32. $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (preparing to defend the third rank with 33. $\mathbb{Q}h3$) 32... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}bf2$, and on top of everything, White's queen is also being trapped!;
- B) 32. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}fc2+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ (a quiet move that closes the mating net) 34. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$, with 36... $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$ to follow;
- C) 32. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}be2$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (33. $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ f6 does not change anything) 33... $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ (in case of 36. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, the geometry works perfectly for Black: 36... $\mathbb{Q}d2+!$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5+$, followed by 38... $\mathbb{Q}xe1$) 36... $\mathbb{Q}d2!-+$.



analysis diagram

A beautiful final position of the combination. Despite being significantly down on material, Black is completely winning because of the miserable positions of all White's pieces, in particular her king.

Game 4

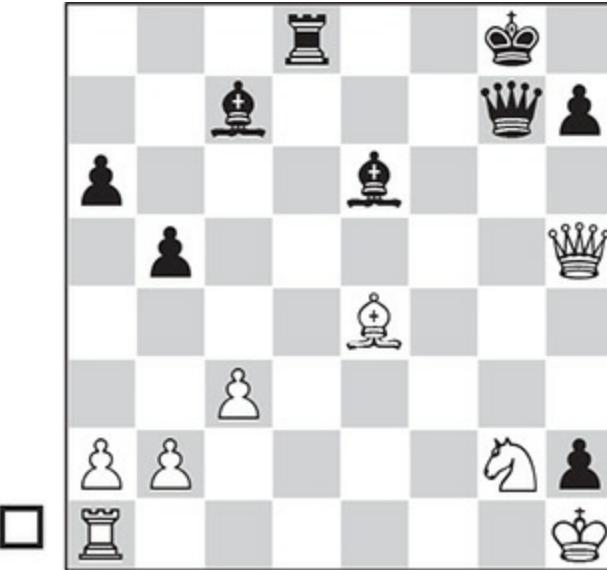
Yuri Solodovnichenko

2436

Valerij Filippov

2605

Pocztowy 1999 (4)



Things look pretty shaky for the white player here. Black is up a pawn and his position is clearly preferable from a positional point of view as well (bishop pair on an open board and a safer king). At this point, White came up with an absolutely brilliant idea to save his skin.

31. ♜e1!!

The double exclamation marks are not so much due to the strength of the move itself, but for the idea behind it.

31... ♛xa2

Sometimes a rook's pawn is a poisoned one (think Spassky-Fischer, Game 1 of their 1972 World Championship match), but there seems to be nothing wrong with taking it for free in this instance.

32.b3!?

While giving up the a2-pawn might be justified by the centralization of the rook, this one looks like pure madness. Why in the world is White giving up his queenside pawns like this?

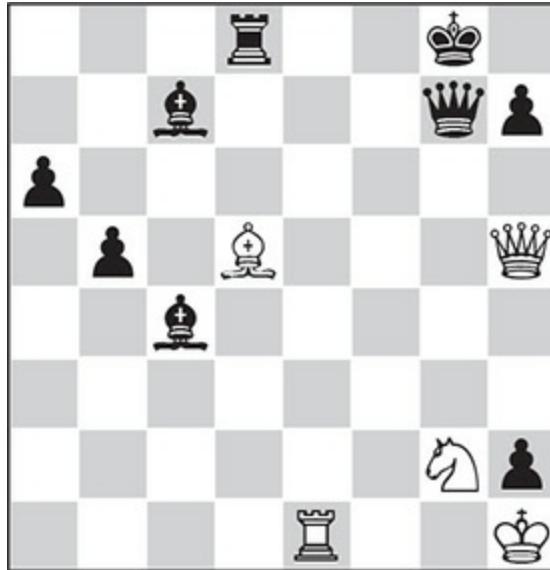
32... ♛xb3 33.c4!

Is White just throwing the game away or what?

33... ♛xc4?

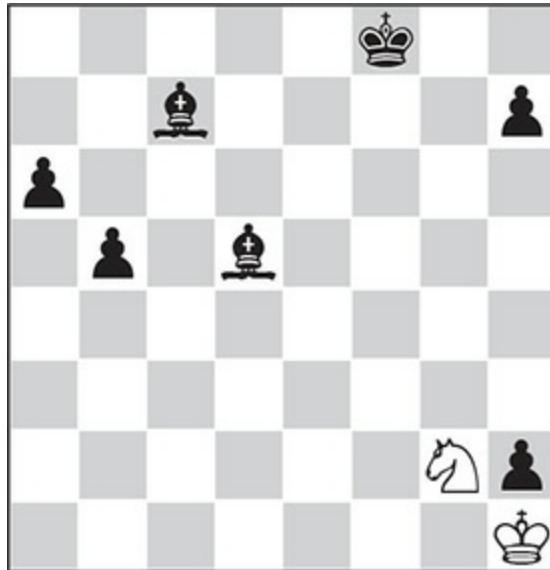
This is obviously what Black thought as well. He is now four pawns up and has the same positional advantages as in the initial position. According to all known laws, Black should be completely winning now, but...

34. ♜d5+!!



Ladies and gentlemen, your highness – check! There is nothing more forcing in chess than attacking the opponent's king and Solodovnichenko uses it to the full extent now.

34... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8=$



And what do we have? A stalemate – the point of White's beautiful combination envisioned on move 31! He sacrificed everything he had to remain only with his king and knight. But, thanks to the peculiar role of the king in chess, none of Black's accumulated material and positional advantages matter anymore – the game is a draw!

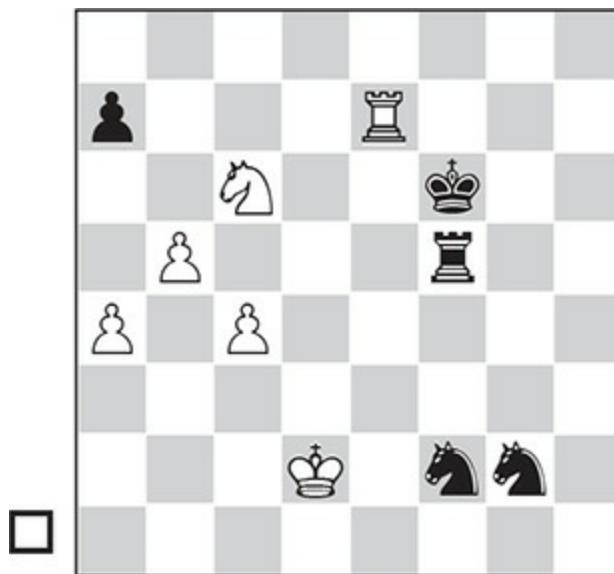
It needs to be noted that 33... ♕f8! would have avoided the game combination and given Black excellent winning chances.

Game 5

Eduard Gufeld

Vasily Smyslov

Soviet Union 1975



Here, we have a nice classical example of the power of a pawn promotion. White is down a piece for two pawns, although he can immediately win a third one to establish the notorious material balance. How many people would not resist the call of the sirens and just grab the a7-pawn here? However, grandmaster Gufeld understood that there is something more important at work in this endgame than just material.

44.a5!

This strong move simultaneously prepares a pawn promotion with b5-b6-b7, etc. and keeps Black's knights away from the queenside. On the other hand, 44. ♕xa7? would allow Black to get his off-sided knights back into the game with tempo: 44... ♔e4+ 45. ♔d3 ♔c5+ 46. ♔d4 ♔f4, most likely with a peaceful outcome.

44... ♔f4

Smyslov attacks the pawn and prepares ... ♔f2-e4+. 44... ♔f4 is too slow,

due to 45.b6 axb6 46.axb6 ♜h5 47.b7 ♜h8 48.♖h7+–.

45.c5! ♜e4+



46.♜xe4!!

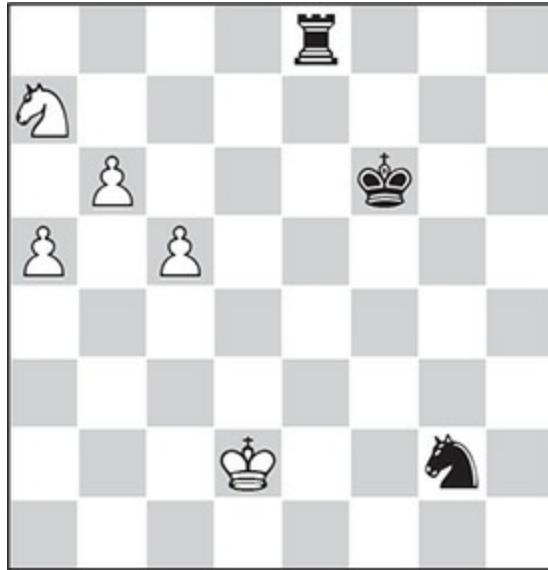
A wonderful idea. White is down a rook, but has calculated that he will not need it – the pawns can find a way to the promised land on their own (admittedly, with a little help from their friend, the knight).

46...♜xe4 47.b6 ♜e8

Other continuations don't save Black either:

- A) 47...axb6 48.cxb6! (recapturing away from the black pieces) 48...♜e8 49.a6 ♜e3 50.♕d3 ♜d5 51.b7 ♜e6 52.a7, and the pawns are unstoppable;
- B) 47...a6 48.b7 ♜e8 49.♗a7! (threatening an interference with 50.♗c8) 49...♜b8 50.c6+–, followed by 51.c7.

48.♗xa7



Black has the move and it seems like he just might catch the pawns, either with his king or the knight, but, in fact, he is not in time.

48...♞e3

The king is one move too slow in the following variations:

- A) 48...♚e6 49.b7 ♚d7 50.a6 ♚c7 51.♞b5+! ♚c6 52.♞d6 ♜d8 53.a7 ♜xd6+ 54.cxd6 ♜xb7 55.d7+–;
- B) A particularly beautiful variation arises after 48...♞f4 49.b7 ♜e2+ 50.♚d1 ♜b2 51.a6 ♜e6 52.c6 ♜c7.



analysis diagram

White's pawns seem to be finally blocked, but he wins with the study-like
53. $\mathbb{Q}b5!!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ (53... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}c1!+-$) 54.c7 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 55.b8 \mathbb{Q} $\mathbb{Q}xb5$
56. $\mathbb{Q}h8+!$, and the rook on b2 falls to the skewer.

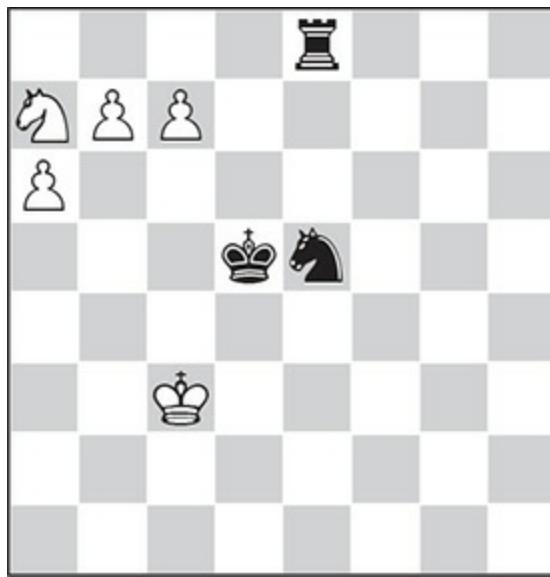
49.a6 $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Black has managed to bring his knight back to the defense; however, the pawns are just unstoppable.

51.b7 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 52.c6 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

In case of 52... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, the a-pawn decides: 53. $\mathbb{Q}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 54.a7+-.

53.c7



A nice finish to a well-played and instructive endgame! **1-0**

God save the queen

A small digression, but still on the topic of the value of material – don't we all have a special connection with the most powerful piece on the board – the queen? For example, I know some, even fairly strong, players who tend to avoid a queen trade to their own detriment, just to keep the dream of a mating attack alive. However, nothing is absolute in chess, and neither is the queen's power over the other pieces. The next example should clarify this point.

Game 6

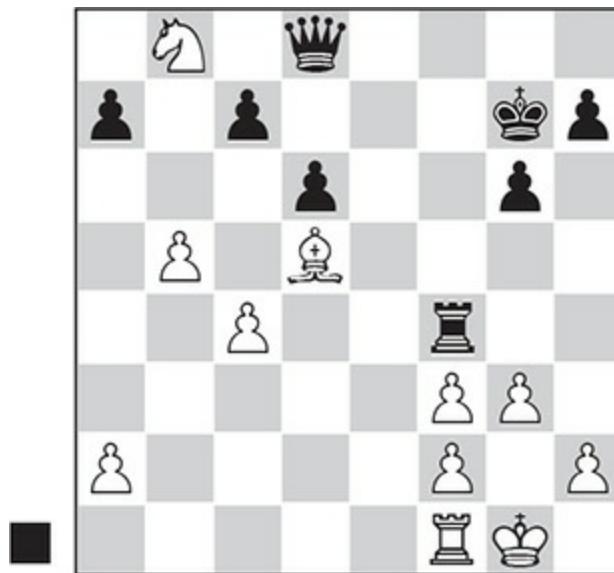
Diego Flores

2567

Alan Pichot

2504

Montevideo Ach 2015 (8)



After some complications, an unusual position was reached in the encounter between two Argentinian grandmasters. From a material standpoint, Black should be happy – he has a queen for two pieces and some pawns. It is also his move, so he can decide how to proceed. He made an apparently logical, but wrong decision:

30... ♕f8?

This is too passive and materialistic. Black overestimated the power of his queen and underestimated the power of his opponent's centralized minor pieces, which is very easy to do. However, it was essential to eliminate one of them while it was still possible, with either

A) 30... ♜xb8 31.gxf4 ♜f8=; or, even better

B) 30... ♜f5 31.♘c6 ♜f6=, when the active 32.♘e1? does not work, due to 32... ♜xd5! 33.cxd5 ♜xf3#.

31.♘c6 ♜f6



32. ♜e1!

Instead of chasing material gains, White increases the power of his pieces. In case of the tempting 32. ♜xa7?! ♛c3 33.a4 ♜xf3! 34.a5! ♜f8 35.a6 ♜e8 36. ♜c6 ♛d2 37.a7 ♛a2, we reach an unusual positional draw.

32... ♜b2 33. ♜e7+ ♛h8 34.a4!

Flores continues with a non-materialistic approach. The greedy 34. ♜xc7? would allow his opponent to obtain counterplay with 34... ♜e8, and suddenly White would need to think about his king's safety.

34... ♜a1+ 35. ♛g2 ♜xa4 36. ♜d4!



A very instructive position. Despite a clear material advantage, Black's position is lost. He cannot deal with the extremely potent white pieces. The threat is ♜d4-e6-g5 and ♕xh7 checkmate!

36...h6 37.♗e6 ♕f6

37...♕f5 was a bit more stubborn – Black should have eliminated the powerful bishop, but even after 38.♗xc7 ♕e5 39.♗d7 ♔a5 40.♗e6 ♕xd5 41.cxd5 ♗xb5 42.♗xd6, White should win, thanks to his strong d-pawn.

38.♗xc7 ♔a5 39.h4 ♗b6 40.♗e4!



The final re-arrangement of the minor pieces.

40...♖d4 41.♗d5

Black's rook has been completely dominated.

41...♕f5 42.♗xf5 gxf5 43.♗c7 ♕a1 44.h5 ♖d4 45.♗e7 ♖d3 46.♗xa7 1-0

White's minor pieces and rook worked in unison and outplayed the nominally much more powerful combination of queen and rook. We cannot say that the black queen was a bad piece – it had plenty of operating space. It was simply ineffective compared to the white pieces.

Loss aversion

I have already explained how young and inexperienced players tend to seek immediate gratification by means of winning material. It is simply human nature to be attached to material gains and avoid material losses.

Psychologists have found that the pain of losing is about twice as powerful as the pleasure of gaining. It is, therefore, not surprising that chess players tend to subconsciously protect their material and avoid giving it away. As the expression ‘losses loom larger than gains’, coined by the Nobel-winning psychologists Kahneman and Tversky, suggests, the avoidance of pain associated with material losses is often stronger than the willingness to take risks to achieve gains. This phenomenon, known as ‘loss aversion’, can be seen in the next example:

Game 7

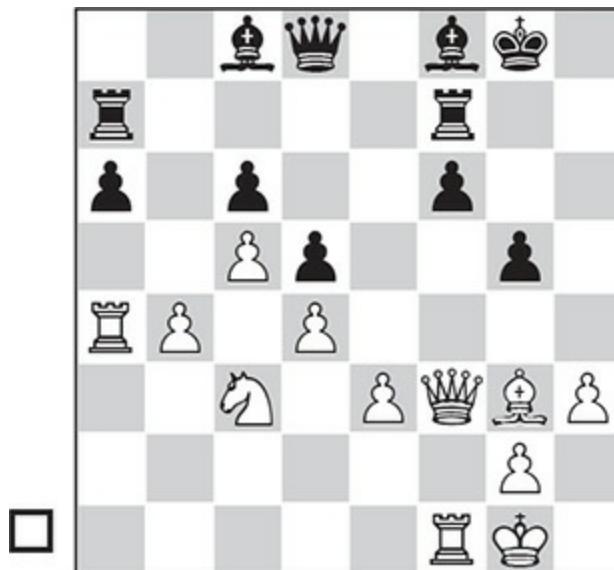
Eivind Olav Risting

2317

Milan Pacher

2467

Pardubice 2018 (3)



White should not be afraid to give up his extra pawn to activate his pieces:

25.e4!

In the game, White played it safe: 25. \mathbb{Q} fa1?! \mathbb{Q} ae7 26. \mathbb{Q} d1 (even here, giving up material would have been more promising: 26. \mathbb{Q} xa6! \mathbb{Q} xa6 27. \mathbb{Q} xa6 \mathbb{Q} e8 28. \mathbb{Q} f2±, and there would be nothing in the way of b4-b5, destroying Black's pawn center) 26... \mathbb{Q} e8 27. \mathbb{Q} 4a3, but he did not make

any progress with such play.



analysis diagram

Black could have created counterplay with a hidden resource: 27... \mathbb{Q} h6!, preparing active play on the kingside with 28...g4!, 29... \mathbb{K} e4, etc.

25...dxe4 26. \mathbb{Q} xe4 \mathbb{Q} xd4+ 27. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{Q} e5 28. \mathbb{Q} d6! \mathbb{Q} xd6 29.cxd6↑



In positions with opposite-colored bishops and major pieces, the initiative of the attacking side is magnified by the fact that the defender cannot defend the

squares of the opposite color. This position is a good example, as Black struggles to defend his dark squares:

29... ♜a8 30. ♜a5! ♞xd6 31. ♜c5 ♞d5 32. ♜c3! ♞e6 33. ♜d4+–

And Black's position falls apart.

One of my favorite chess authors, Russian grandmaster Alexander Kotov, identified two additional types of attachment to material: ‘conditioned reflexes’ and ‘dizziness due to success’. If you are not familiar with these ideas, I strongly recommend you get a copy of Kotov’s famous work *Think like a Grandmaster*, where they are described in detail.

Here, I would like to explore these topics a bit further by providing several illustrative examples from contemporary grandmaster practice. Hopefully, they will help you to become aware of your own tendencies in these areas as well.

‘Conditioned reflexes’

Game 8

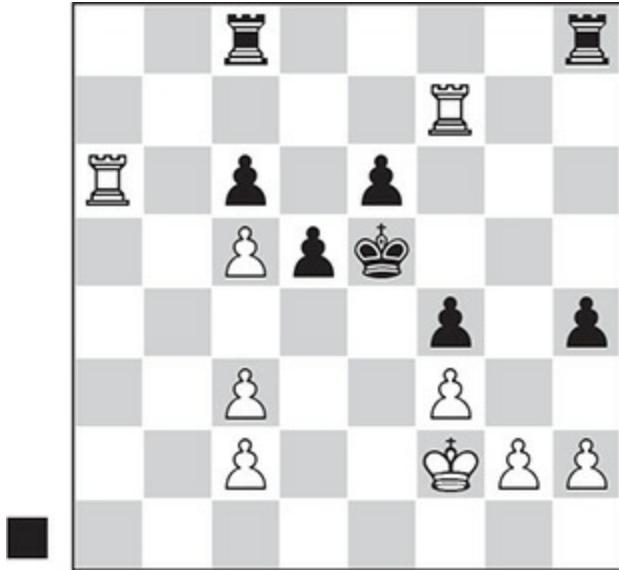
Ivan Saric

2661

Marc Narciso Dublan

2532

Spain tt 2015 (3)



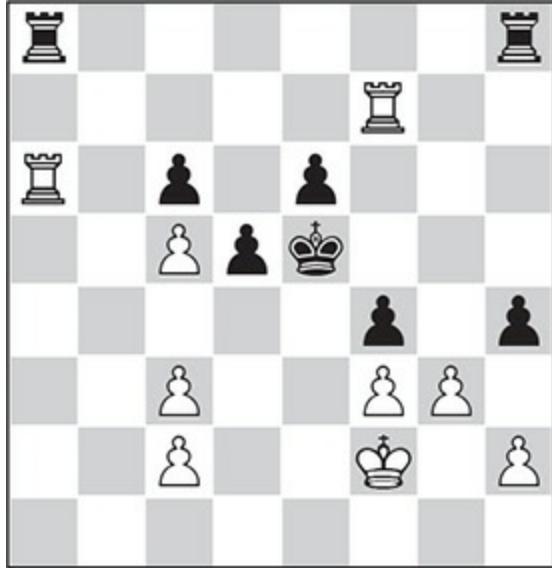
We have a sharp double-rook endgame in which White's chances are better, due to his more active rooks and the exposed position of Black's king in the center of the board, which is reminiscent of Game 3, Shen Yang-Castrillon Gomez. White also has what the late Croatian GM Krunoslav Hulak liked to call 'half a pawn more' – referring to doubled (here tripled) c-pawns that may prove useless in the endgame.

32... ♜a8?

Grandmaster Narciso Dublan played the most active move, preparing to answer 33. ♜xc6 with 33... ♜a2, with serious counterplay. Instead, 32... ♜cf8! would have secured Black's king, and after 33. ♜xf8 ♜xf8 34. ♜xc6, Black still obtains enough activity with 34... ♜a8=.

33. ♜xa8?

Saric spent a minute and a half on this move. Since he played his next move almost 'a tempo', it is safe to conclude that he spotted the idea of checkmating the black king with g2-g3 and f3-f4 before making his 33rd move. A 'conditioned reflex' forced his hand to trade the rooks first and play g2-g3 later because the rook on a6 was hanging. However, checkmate is 'older', as they say, so White could have ignored the threat to the rook and played 33.g3!! immediately!



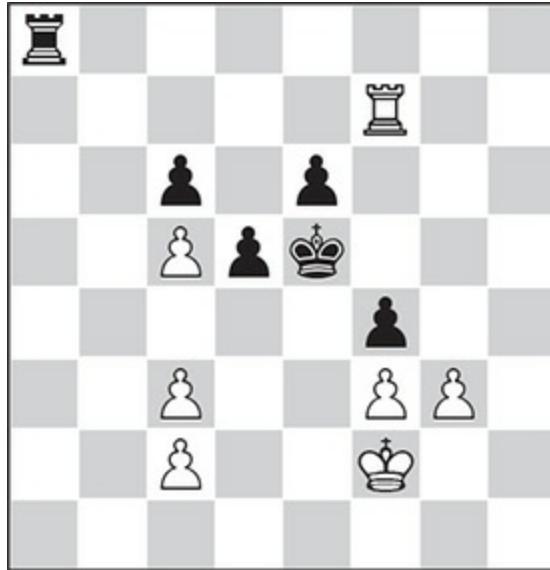
analysis diagram

Now, Black needs to play only moves to escape the mating net: 33...hxg3+ 34.hxg3 fxg3+ 35.♔e3! (the key – White’s king takes the e4-square under control and threatens checkmate again – this time with 36.f4) 35...d4+ 36.cxd4+ ♔d5 37.♔d3 e5. After sacrificing a pawn to clear the d5-square, Black is now forced to clear the e6-square to save his king. White concludes his combination with several beautiful intermediate moves: 38.♕f5! (creating the fourth mating threat in a row!) 38...♗ae8 39.♗a8! g2 40.♗xe8 ♗xe8 41.♗g5 g1 ♔ 42.c4+! ♔e6 43.♗xg1, and the endgame with two extra pawns is easily winning.

33...♗xa8 34.g3

This is too late now.

34...hxg3+ 35.hxg3



35...d4?

Panic or time trouble might have contributed to this inadequate reaction. Clearly, the only move to stay in the game was 35... \mathbb{R} a4. It is also enough to hold a draw after 36.gxf4+ \mathbb{R} xf4 37. \mathbb{R} xf4 \mathbb{Q} xf4 or 36.g4 \mathbb{R} a2 37.g5 \mathbb{R} xc2+ 38. \mathbb{Q} g1 \mathbb{R} xc3.

36.cxd4+

Good enough to secure the full point, although even more convincing was 36.gxf4+ \mathbb{Q} d5 37. \mathbb{R} d7+ \mathbb{R} xc5 38.cxd4+ \mathbb{Q} c4 39. \mathbb{R} d6, with an easy win.

36... \mathbb{Q} xd4 37. \mathbb{R} xf4+ \mathbb{R} xc5 38. \mathbb{R} e4 \mathbb{Q} d6 39.f4 \mathbb{R} a2 40. \mathbb{R} d4+ \mathbb{Q} c5 41. \mathbb{R} d2 \mathbb{Q} c4 42.g4 c5 43.g5 \mathbb{R} c3 44. \mathbb{R} e2 c4 45.g6 \mathbb{R} a7 46. \mathbb{Q} e3

Black resigned.

Game 9

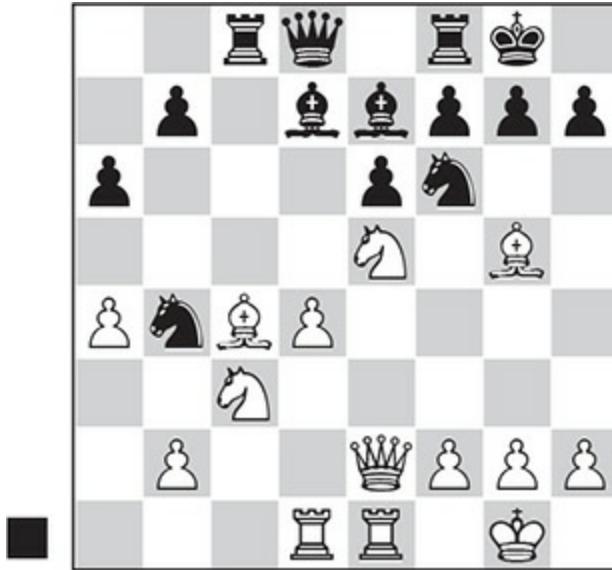
Joel Lautier

2658

Victor Bologan

2681

France tt 2001 (1)



We have a fairly typical IQP position on the board, played out between two world-class grandmasters. Black's position is solid, but he needs to maintain control of the d5-square and keep White's attacking attempts at bay.

15...♝e8

A good move. Bologan realizes that, at the moment, he cannot bring his bishop to c6 as he would like to, so he over-protects the f7-pawn first. The point is that the natural 15...♝c6? allows a typical sacrifice on f7: 16.♞xf7! ♜xf7 17.♝xe6 ♜e8 18.♝xe7 ♜xe7 19.♜xe7 ♜xc4 20.♝xf6±.

16.♝b3 ♜fd5 17.♝d2 ♜c6

Bologan takes the first opportunity to play ...♝d7-c6 after all. However, it was better to continue with 17...♝g5, following the well-known recommendation to trade pieces in IQP positions. After 18.♝xg5 ♜xg5 19.♞xd5 ♜xd5 20.♝xd5 exd5 21.b3 a5, the position would be equal.

18.♞g4!

A good attacking move, which not only threatens ♜d2-h6, but also prevents Black from simplifying the position with the above-mentioned ...♝e7-g5.

18...♝f6?



There is no doubt that by playing like this, Bologan expected Lautier to retreat with his queen. This is the ‘conditioned reflex’ – the strongest piece is under attack, so it has to be preserved.

Instead, 18... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ was called for, when the position would remain complex. White’s answer must have been a cold shower...

19. $\mathbb{N}xf7!$

A counter-attack! To add to his misery, Black forgot about the sacrifice that he had prevented just a few moves ago. This is another typical ‘conditioned reflex’.

19... $\mathbb{N}xf7$

19... $\mathbb{N}xg4?$ 20. $\mathbb{N}xd8$ $\mathbb{N}cx d8$ 21. $\mathbb{N}xe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 22. $\mathbb{N}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{N}xd5+$ $\mathbb{N}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{N}xh4$ $\mathbb{N}xf2$ 25. $\mathbb{N}f1$ should be winning for White.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

I vaguely remember seeing a similar position in one of Botvinnik’s games. Black is pinned all over and he cannot avoid material losses.

20... $\mathbb{N}bd5$

Alternatives do not save Black:

A) 20... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 21. $\mathbb{N}xe7+-;$

B) 20... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 21. $\mathbb{N}xd5$ $\mathbb{N}bx d5$ 22. $\mathbb{N}e5!$ $\mathbb{N}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{N}xd5$ $\mathbb{N}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{N}xd5$ $\mathbb{N}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{N}xd5+-.$

21. $\mathbb{N}e5!$



After this strong move, the blockade on d5 falls apart.

21... ♜d7 22. ♖xd5 ♜xe6 23. ♖xd8+ ♜xd8 24. ♜xe6 ♖xd4 25. ♜g5 ♖xd1+
26. ♖xd1 ♛f8 27. ♜xf7 ♛xf7±

As a result of the combination, White won a clear pawn and eventually converted his material advantage in the endgame.

Game 10

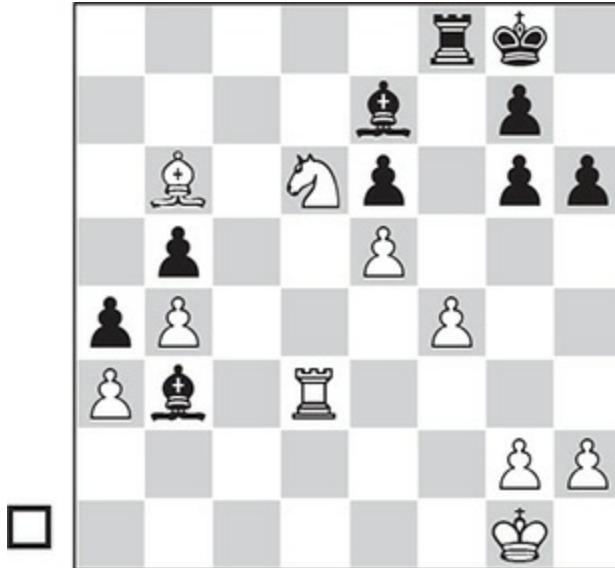
Davorin Kuljasevic

2550

Axel Rombaldoni

2513

Castelfranco Veneto 2014 (5)



White is better in this endgame. Black's last move was ... \mathbb{Q} d8-f8, attacking the f4-pawn. How would you respond?

36. \mathbb{Q} e3?!

As they say, a knee-jerk reaction. It is so natural to protect the pawn and discourage the ...g6-g5 break in one move. However, due to this materialistic reflex, I missed a stronger move. White could have ignored the threat to the f4-pawn and played to his strengths with 36. \mathbb{R} c3!, and if 36... \mathbb{Q} xf4?!, 37. \mathbb{R} c7.



analysis diagram

Now White's activity becomes very problematic for Black: 37... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (37... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ clogs the f8-square, and after 38. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$, Black's rook lacks good squares: 38... $\mathbb{R}h4$ 39. $\mathbb{R}c8$ $\mathbb{R}h5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{R}g5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xb5+-$) 38. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 39. $\mathbb{R}c1$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$, and White wins the pawn back with interest. It would be very difficult to stop the b-pawn after $\mathbb{Q}b5-d6$, $b4-b5-b6$, etc.

36...g5?!

Now that the bishop does not control d8-square any more, Black could have continued with 36... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 37. $exd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 38. $\mathbb{R}d2$ $\mathbb{R}d8$, and a draw would be pretty much inevitable.

37.fxg5 hxg5 38. $\mathbb{R}d4$ $\mathbb{R}b8\pm$

The rest of the game (which ended in a draw) is not particularly relevant to our topic, although I will include it in my 'Worst oversights in time trouble' collection, if I ever make one.

Game 11

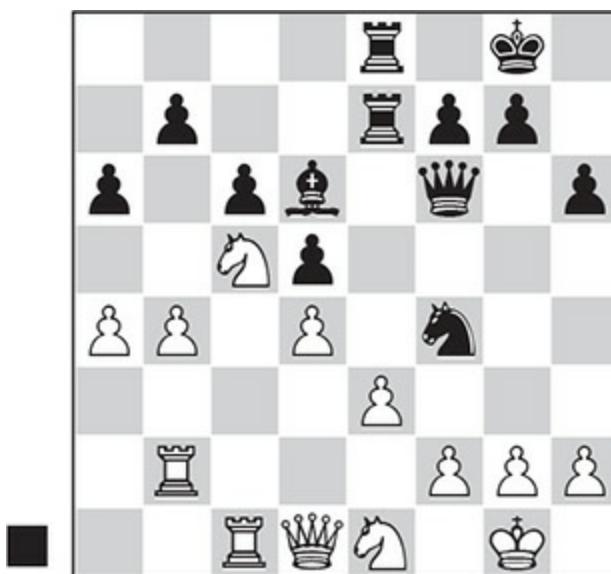
Baadur Jobava

2678

Alberto David

2597

Milan 2011 (9)



A double-edged situation has arisen in the normally calm Carlsbad pawn

structure. White has an excellent outpost on c5 and is ready to open the queenside with b4-b5 at the right moment. On the other hand, Black has concentrated his pieces in the center, eyeing the residence of the white king. Grandmaster David sharpens the situation even more:

22...a5!?

22... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, for instance, would have kept the tension in the position.

23.bxa5

White cannot win the piece with 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ axb4 24.exf4??, because of 24...

$\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$



analysis diagram

25... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!!$, and White's position collapses.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$



This was the point of Black's pawn sacrifice on move 22. He evacuates his knight from f4 with tempo and if White retreats his rook from c5, 25... \mathbb{Q} xd4 follows and Black is fine.

However, notice how I said 'if' and not 'when' White retreats his rook. Somehow, our brain is quick to assume that a more valuable piece should automatically move when attacked, and I suppose that GM David also considered the rook retreat as the main line in his calculation. However, Jobava's non-materialistic reply

25. \mathbb{Q} d3!

proves once again how conditioned reflexes can fool us. On the other hand, 25. \mathbb{Q} c1 \mathbb{Q} xd4! 26. \mathbb{Q} cb1 \mathbb{Q} e6 27. \mathbb{Q} xb7 \mathbb{Q} xb7 28. \mathbb{Q} xb7 \mathbb{Q} c5 would have given Black sufficient activity to hold the balance.

25... \mathbb{Q} xc5

It was still possible to decline the exchange sacrifice with 25... \mathbb{Q} a8 26. \mathbb{Q} c1 \mathbb{Q} xa5 27. \mathbb{Q} cb1 \mathbb{Q} a7 28. \mathbb{Q} b6±, although this would likely lead to long-term positional suffering.

26. \mathbb{Q} xc5



For a pawn and the exchange, White got a permanent outpost on c5 for his knight and the open b-file to pressure the backward b7-pawn. This is a typical case of a positional exchange sacrifice that we will explore in more depth in Chapter 4.

26... ♜g5!

In a practical sense, the best continuation. Black needs to obtain counterplay by attacking the white king. ...f7-f5-f4 is the threat. 26... ♜a8 would have led to a very passive endgame after 27. ♜xb7 ♜a7 28. ♜b1! ♜g6 29. ♜xg6 fxg6 30. ♜c5 ♜xa5 31. ♜b8+ ♜f7 32.h4±, where Black would have had to defend for a long time.

27.g3 h5

A natural continuation – the g3-pawn has to be weakened.

28. ♜xb7 h4 29. ♜c5 hxg3 30.hxg3



30... ♜xe3!?

Destroying the king's pawn shield with this rook sacrifice is the best practical chance. Otherwise, White would be in time to secure his king, and Black would run out of active possibilities. David shows that he understands the principles of non-materialism, just like Jobava. Such games are always interesting.

31.fxe3 ♜xe3?

Objectively speaking, stronger was 31... ♜xg3+ 32. ♜g2 ♜xe3+ 33. ♛h1 ♜h3+ 34. ♜h2 ♜c3 35. ♜d3 ♜xd4±.

32. ♜b8+ ♛h7

And here Jobava had a direct win:

33. ♛h1!!

Truth be told, this is a very difficult idea to find even with plenty of time on the clock. Instead, 33. ♜c2+?! f5 34. ♜h2+ ♛g6 was played in the game, and Black had a chance to save himself, which he missed, and lost the game.

33... ♜xg3 34. ♜c2+ f5 35. ♜h2+ ♛g6 36. ♜b1+–

The point. Black cannot avoid the trade of rooks on the g-file, when his attack vanishes, and White remains with an extra piece and an outside passed pawn.

Besides automatically responding to a threat to a stronger piece, another materialistic conditioned reflex is to capture 'free' material. I am sure that readers can relate to situations from their own practice when they grabbed

material without much thinking, only to later realize that there had been a better alternative. I would like to show two examples where a player (myself included) acted on basic instincts and took a hanging pawn, instead of considering other candidate moves.

Game 12

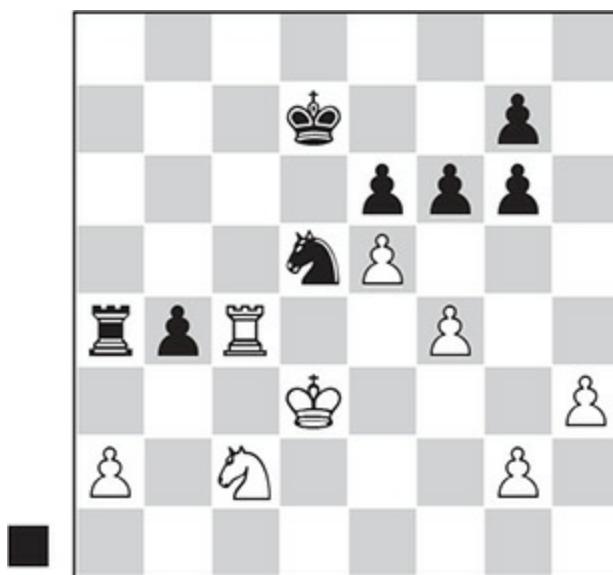
Michele Godena

2488

Davorin Kuljasevic

2549

Balatonszarszo 2017 (6)



After a couple of hours of squeezing water from a stone against a very solid opponent, I finally got an opportunity to win a pawn and, naturally, I did not pass on it.

42... ♜xa2?

However, as it often happens in rook endgames, an advantage of one pawn may not be enough to win the game. I failed to consider a very strong alternative: 42...g5!. The point is that the a2-pawn is not going to run away, and Black can strengthen his position with this move first. None of White's replies guarantee him an easy life in the endgame:

A) 43.g3 ♜xa2 44.♘xb4 ♜a3+ 45.♕d4 ♜e3!±;

- B) 43. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $gxf4$ 44. $exf6$ $gxf6$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$
 48. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5\#$;
- C) 43. $fxg5$ $fxe5!$.



analysis diagram

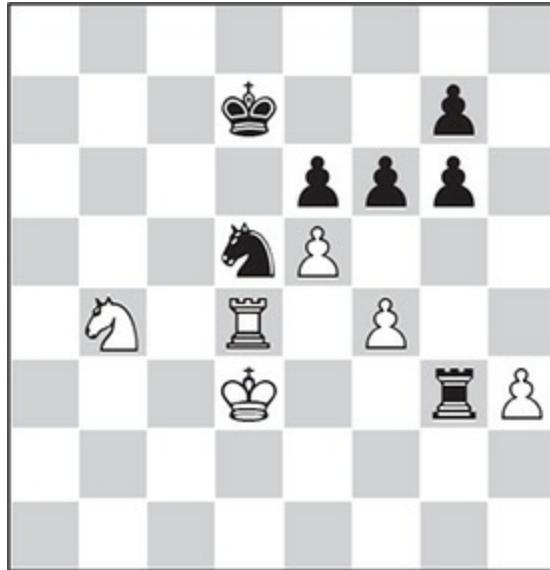
This is the right capture. White will not be able to protect his kingside pawns in a good way after this. For example: 44. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2\#$. This version of the endgame with an extra pawn gives Black greater winning chances, because White cannot force a liquidation into a basic rook endgame, as he did in the game.

Of course, these are not the easiest of variations to find, but they do exist, and it is therefore necessary to override the initial urge to take material and force oneself to think more broadly.

43. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

This forces favorable simplifications.

44... $\mathbb{Q}g3+$



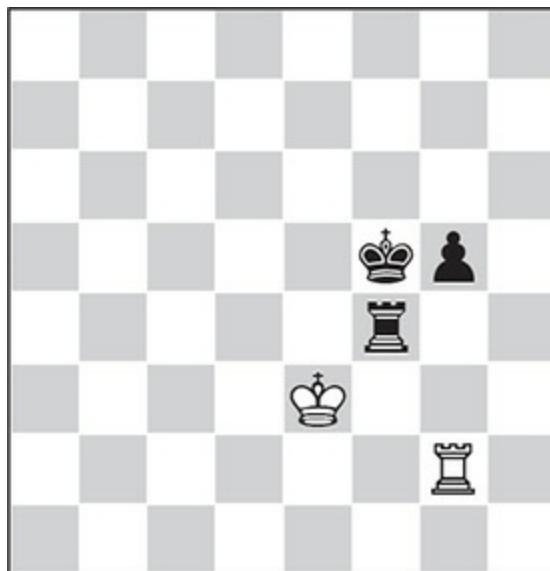
45. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

The only good retreat, but sufficient to hold the draw.

A) 45. $\mathbb{Q}e2?$ $f \times e5$ 46. $f \times e5$ $\mathbb{R}e3+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}xe5-$ +

B) 45. $\mathbb{Q}c2?$ $\mathbb{R}c3+$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}c5$, with good winning chances for Black.

45... $\mathbb{R}xh3$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $exd5$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{R}f3$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{R}xf4$ 51. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}f1$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}f4$
56. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $g5$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



We have reached a theoretically drawn position.

57... $\mathbb{R}f1$

The key defensive idea for the weaker side after 57...g4 is 58. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}xf2=$, so Black cannot make progress.

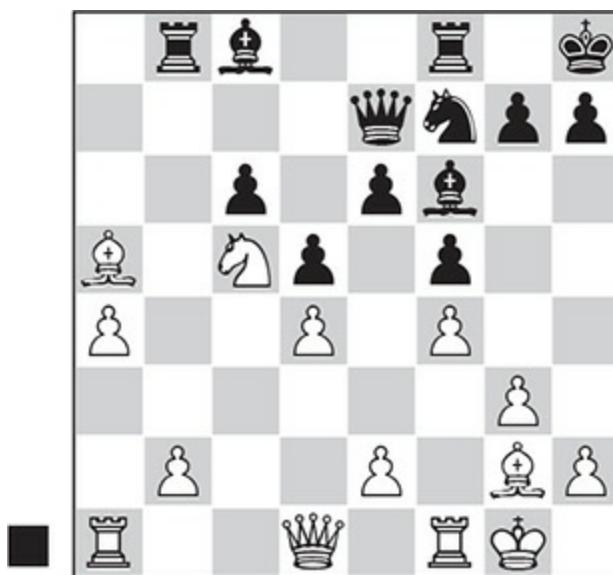
58. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ g4 ½-½

Game 13

Vladimir Makogonov

Viacheslav Ragozin

Sverdlovsk 1943 (5)



It is Black to move, and he can recoup the pawn at once. If he doesn't, White is threatening to put his bishop on c3, push his queenside pawns forward and have all the reasons to consider his position winning. Ragozin indeed took the pawn: 21... $\mathbb{Q}xb2?!$, but this gave Makogonov enough time to consolidate his positional grip with 22. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23.e3 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c2\pm$, and he won the game in the end.

However, in the starting position, Black had a more dynamic and much more unpleasant option at his disposal.

21...e5!

Undermining the c5-knight and increasing the operational scope of his passive pieces.

22. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Obviously, the tactics work in Black's favor after 22.fxe5?! $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23.dxe5

\mathbb{Q} xc5+.

22...exf4!

Another non-materialistic solution. It is tempting to win the b2-pawn again with 22...exd4 23. \mathbb{Q} xd4 \mathbb{Q} xb2 but, just as in the game, this gives White an opportunity to consolidate his domination on the dark-squares with 24.e3!±. **23.gxf4 g5!**



This opens the side of the board where Black is by no means inferior to White. White's plans to push the a-pawn have to be put on hold, as he needs to retreat his knight to protect the kingside.

24. \mathbb{N} d3

After something like

24...gxf4 25. \mathbb{N} xf4 \mathbb{Q} d6 26. \mathbb{Q} h1 \mathbb{Q} a6±

Black may even have an easier game, despite the material disadvantage.

'Dizziness due to success'

Another typical way that chess players display attachment to material is complacency when they have achieved a material advantage. This is what Kotov calls 'dizziness due to success'. We feel better when we win material, especially if we also think that we are about to win the game. Surely, a cocktail of endorphins and other happy chemicals in our brain makes us more complacent because we have already received a material reward.

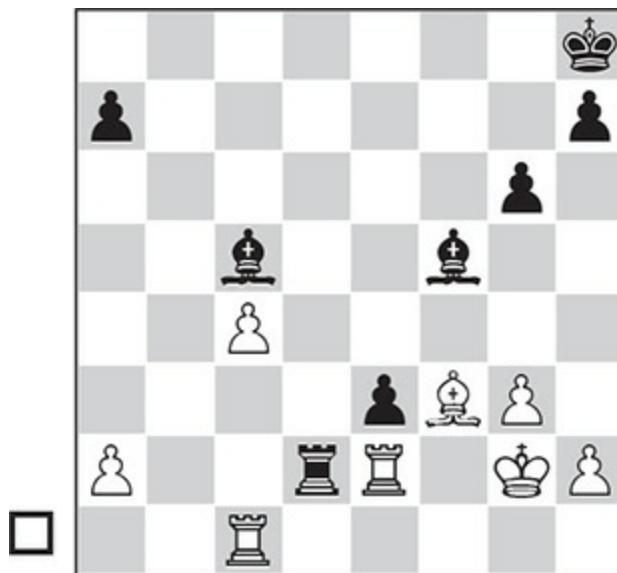
This psychological state can be very dangerous if you have an opponent across the table who is still ready to fight tooth and nail to turn the game around. If you become oblivious to dangers that are hidden in a position, things may turn south in an instant. Chess is an unforgiving game! The next classical game is a perfect example of that:

Game 14

Mikhail Botvinnik

Tigran Petrosian

Soviet Union tt 1966 (3)



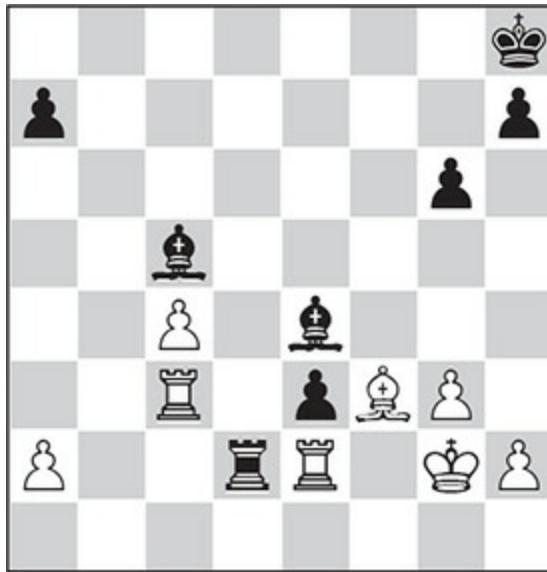
This game between two great World Champions was played three years after their World Championship match, which Petrosian won. Here, Petrosian was down an exchange with little hope of saving the game. This was the critical moment when Botvinnik had to find a way to convert his material advantage.

34. ♜c3??

Here is what Botvinnik wrote about this move: ‘I decided to prevent the intrusion of the black bishop on the d3-square in the safest possible way, but at the same time I carelessly weakened the first rank.’ The key word here is ‘careless’ – I am sure Botvinnik would have been more alert to his opponent’s counter-chances if the material advantage had not been on his side.

White could hardly win with 34. $\mathbb{R}xd2$ $exd2$ 35. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$, given Black's enormous activity. However, the winning move, suggested by Petrosian after the game, was 34. $\mathbb{R}ce1!$. Now, the intended 34... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ does not work for Black, because of 35. $\mathbb{R}xd2$ $exd2$ 36. $\mathbb{R}e8+$, and White's rook is set loose: 36... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 37. $\mathbb{R}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 38. $\mathbb{R}xd2+-$.

34... $\mathbb{Q}e4!$



Botvinnik missed this nice tactic and, realizing he loses a lot of material, resigned in this position. The possible variations are:

- A) 35. $\mathbb{R}xd2$ $exd2+-$;
- B) 35. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{R}xe2+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{R}xa2+-$;
- C) 35. $\mathbb{R}cxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 36. $\mathbb{R}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+!$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{R}xd2+-$.

He concluded: 'I was afraid that I might blunder something, and I found a way, nevertheless!' An interesting thought. It tells us that Botvinnik blundered despite being aware of the potential tactical dangers in the position. What could be the reason behind this?

Firstly, at the age of 55, he was not as tactically sharp as he was in his youth. Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that Botvinnik had a material advantage for several moves before the blunder happened. It is entirely possible that on a subconscious level, he felt he 'deserved' to win the game because of his previous success and let his guard down, allowing the fatal

blunder.

Game 15

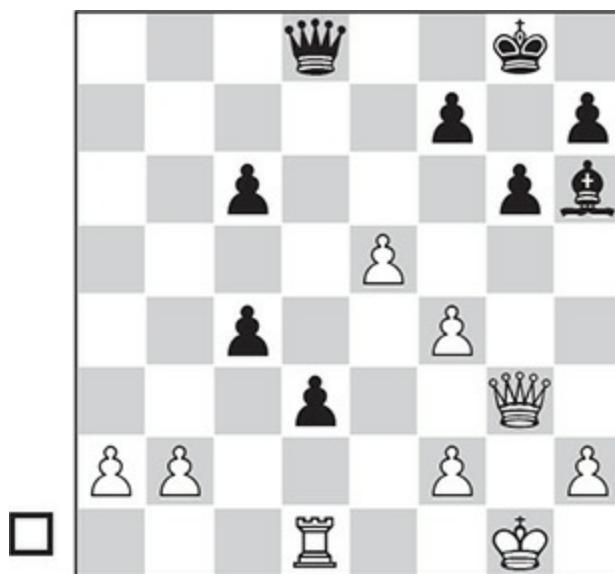
Davorin Kuljasevic

2550

Moheb Ameir

2275

Tunis 2014 (1)



While I cannot tell for sure whether Botvinnik experienced dizziness due to success in the previous game, I am certain that I did in this one. White is up a full exchange and he just needs to neutralize Black's passed pawn to claim the full point. With this goal in mind, very confidently, I played **32.b3?**,

expecting the game to be over within a few moves.

By the way, the most convincing way to convert the advantage was 32.a4!

♘d4 33.♘e3 ♘xb2 34.e6+–.

32...cxb3?

My opponent was in serious time trouble and probably just could not evaluate the consequences of 32...♕xf4! 33.♕xf4 c3.



analysis diagram

In rook endgames, two connected passed pawns advanced to the third rank are stronger than a rook. Here, White can block them with 34. $\mathbb{R}c1\ c2$ 35. $\mathbb{R}f1$, but the ensuing position is, surprisingly, drawn with best play due to the exposed white king: 35... $\mathbb{R}d5$ 36. $f3$ $\mathbb{R}xe5$ 37. $\mathbb{R}d2$ $c5$ 38. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{R}d5$!, with an unusual case of a positional draw. White cannot make progress with the extra rook.

33. $\mathbb{R}xd3$

Now it is just over.

33... $\mathbb{R}a5$ 34. $axb3$ $\mathbb{R}e1+$ 35. $\mathbb{R}g2$ $\mathbb{R}e4+$ 36. $\mathbb{R}f3$ 1-0

In conclusion, the mistake of allowing Black to obtain serious counterplay in a lost position with a piece sacrifice on f4 was caused by what Kotov calls a ‘dulled sense of danger’ that often goes hand in hand with complacency in positions with a nearly decisive material advantage. Pay attention to your own psychological state in such situations, and if you tend to get too relaxed or excited, make sure to fix it. If you don’t, make no mistake, blunders are just around the corner, waiting to be made!

Sacrifice as an ‘exchange of currency’

Let us come back to our discussion about material, space (positional aspects)

and time in chess. When we sacrifice material, aren't we just exchanging one kind of 'chess currency' for another? For instance, in the previous example, Black sacrificed his bishop for a pawn and in return, he obtained a strong positional asset – two connected passed pawns on the third rank. In game 10, Kuljasevic-Rombaldoni, 36. $\mathbb{N}c3!$ is a strong move because it exchanges material for time (White wins several important tempi by attacking black pieces) and positional assets (seventh rank, improved piece coordination). Mikhail Tal's famous sacrifices could be viewed as an exchange of material for a time advantage (initiative, attack), and so on. Examples are infinite. Let us see what chess legends have to say about this idea.

Game 16

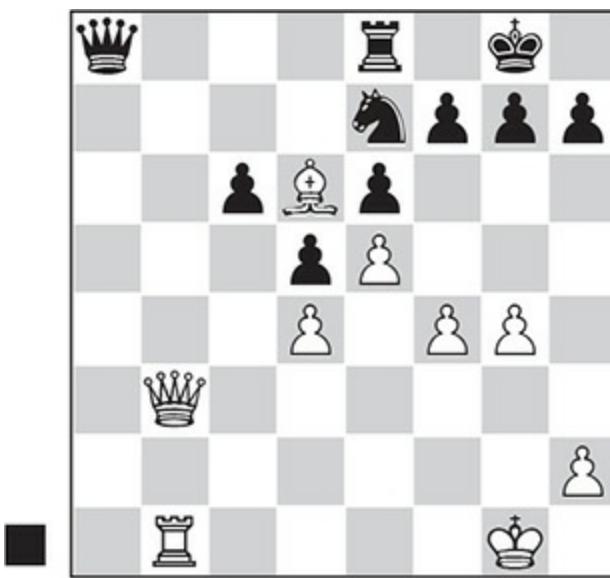
Mikhail Golubev

2520

Viktor Kortchnoi

2635

Münster 1996 (4)



Black is up a pawn, but White clearly has compensation in view of the space advantage. Kortchnoi played

22...h5!

I find his comment to this move very insightful: 'This is why an extra pawn is

important: so that we can sacrifice it in order to obtain an outpost for the piece.' He is basically talking about the exchange of chess currencies: material into positional.

23.h3

White prefers to maintain his pawn structure and declines the sacrifice. 23.gxh5?? would be a positional mistake that is equivalent to blundering a piece, due to 23... ♕f5–+.

If White wanted to take the pawn, he could do it with 23. Qxe7 Qxe7 24. gxh5 $\text{e8}\text{F}$. Still, this endgame with equal material is preferable for Black, due to a better pawn structure and the exposed White king. In this case, too, we can see how a material advantage is exchanged for a positional one.

23... a6

Black has better chances. However, the rest of the game is not particularly interesting for our topic.

24. $\kappa c2$ $\kappa g6$ 25. $\kappa f1$ $h \times g4$ 26. $h \times g4$ $\kappa a8$ 27. $f5$ $\kappa f8$ 28. $\kappa f2?$ $e \times f5!$ 29. $g \times f5$ $\kappa d3!$

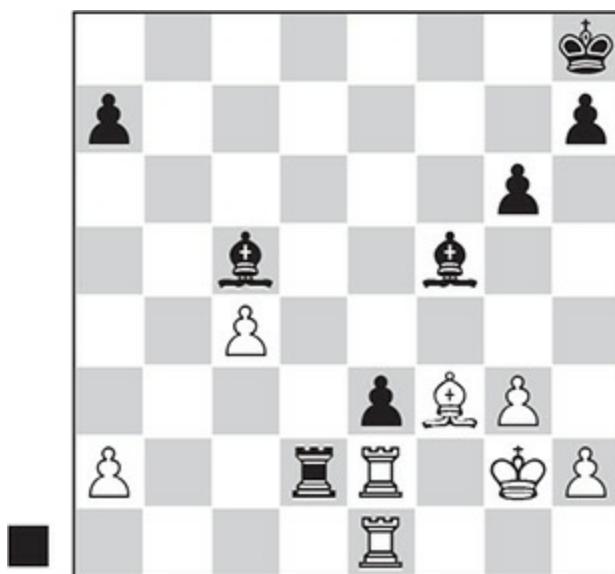
And Black had a winning position: **0-1 (40)**.

Game 17

Mikhail Botvinnik

Tigran Petrosian

Soviet Union tt 1966 (3) (analysis)



This is a familiar position from the section ‘Dizziness due to success’. After 34. $\mathbb{Q}ce1!$, Botvinnik analyzes several responses for Black, one among them being

34... $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Here he suggests that the best way for White to convert the advantage is

35. $\mathbb{Q}xe3!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$,

claiming that ‘White would have a winning endgame with an extra pawn, completely in accordance with Capablanca’s recommendation’. He refers to Capablanca’s rule of thumb that in situations when you have an extra exchange, the best way to convert the advantage is to give it up for a pawn in return.

So, both great World Champions agree on the non-materialistic approach when a bit of material is sacrificed to obtain another type of advantage. In this example, with the exchange sacrifice on e3, White not only eliminates the opponent’s annoying advanced pawn, but also unblocks his own passed pawn. In material terms, his advantage has decreased, but in positional terms, it has increased.

In conclusion, if you perceive material as just one kind of ‘currency’ that can be exchanged for positional and/or time resources, you have made an important step toward non-materialistic thinking. Of course, you still need to respect material, but it becomes easier for you to sacrifice it (and anticipate your opponent’s sacrifices) when you acknowledge positional and time ‘currencies’ in chess as equally important as material. We will study them in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Risk and reward

From the analysis of my own games and conversations with other chess players, I have noticed another big reason, besides attachment to material, why sacrificing material is often a difficult decision. Sometimes we see a promising idea that involves a sacrifice, but we are not sure whether we should proceed with it. We think that it might be too risky to part with our material for possibly strong compensation, but uncertain consequences.

This is nothing unusual. Kahneman and Tversky, the same psychologists who

studied the ‘loss aversion’ concept, have also observed that ‘people feel greater regret for bad outcomes that result from new actions taken than for bad consequences that are the consequence of inaction’. This phenomenon, called ‘regret avoidance’ can partly explain a chess player’s reluctance to sacrifice material and tendency to keep the status quo, material-wise.

A lot depends on one’s temperament and attitude toward risk, too. On one side of the risk spectrum are the ‘optimists’. These are the players who are ‘easy on the trigger’ and confident in their ability to handle whatever happens on the other side of the sacrifice (think Mikhail Tal).

On the other end, there are the ‘pessimists’, those who have never given up a square, let alone a pawn, in their life. This is an exaggeration, of course, but there are indeed very risk-averse players out there (think Ulf Andersson).

And then, there is everything in between the two extremes.

These temperaments are defined not so much by an objective assessment of risk, but rather its perception. When it comes to material sacrifices, pessimists tend to overestimate the risk for themselves and underestimate it for their opponent.

In contrast, optimists usually don’t see too much risk for themselves, but are very alert to all the ways their opponent can go wrong.

At the end of the day, regardless of what kind of risk temperament you may have or how much you suffer from regret avoidance, objectivity that comes with the accumulated knowledge and skill is the key. The more you know about sacrificing material, the better you will handle such situations when you need to make a critical decision.

Furthermore, the ability to take calculated risks is one of the most difficult practical skills in chess. For this, precise calculation and experience in positions with a non-standard material balance are necessary. I think that people generally don’t study such positions enough, so they often get confused over the board in double-edged situations that require a lot of ‘risky’, concrete decisions involving material sacrifices. As you go through this book, you will find a great number of such positions, so I suggest you study them carefully if you want to improve this part of your game.

Conclusion

- While the nominal values of pieces are a useful starting point in positional assessment, there are many non-material, qualitative factors that are just as important as material. We can view these factors in terms of space (positional aspects of chess) and time (tempo, initiative, attack).
- Humans are naturally attached to material. Most of the time, this is a useful instinct, but sometimes it can be harmful for chess players. Conditioned reflexes, dizziness due to success, overestimation of the queen's power, loss aversion, and regret avoidance are all symptoms of attachment to material that can result in oversights, missed opportunities and outright blunders.
- There are two peculiar aspects of chess that complicate and enrich the game: the role of the king and pawn promotion. A strong player will recognize situations when they become critically important and, if necessary, override his materialistic instincts to evaluate the position accurately.
- Material sacrifices can be viewed as an exchange of one type of ‘chess currency’ for another. Depending on the correctness and strength of the sacrifice, in return we get more or less positional or time resources. If you perceive material as just one kind of currency that can be exchanged on equal terms for the other two, you have made an important step toward non-materialistic thinking.
- Material sacrifices are often perceived as more or less risky. Optimists tend to underestimate the risk of a sacrifice, while pessimists tend to overestimate it. Regardless of your own risk temperament, to get the best practical results it is important to learn how to take calculated risks. Studying positions with imbalanced material is essential to achieve that skill.

CHAPTER 2

Relative value of material

As beginners, we were taught that the approximate values of pieces are one point for a pawn, three pawns for the knight and bishop each, five pawns for the rook and nine pawns for the queen. Most chess players routinely go by this valuation. They estimate the benefits of piece trades in these terms, and over time it becomes ingrained in their chess DNA, so to speak. Having such a static valuation method is necessary because we need a starting point.

However, things are never that simple in practice.

You have surely had situations when you disagree with another person about the evaluation of a certain position. He believes that his exchange sacrifice promises a strong initiative against your exposed king and shaky pawn structure. You, on the other hand, don't think much of his empty threats and are sure that you will convert the extra material in the long run. You analyze the position for quite some time, trying to prove each other wrong. Unable to come to a clear conclusion about the objective evaluation of the position, you eventually decide to turn the almighty engine on, hoping that it will side with you. Alas, the screen shows the notorious 0.00!

How is it possible for individual evaluations of the same position to differ so much?

As we concluded in the introduction, chess players differ in their attitude toward risk, attachment to material gains, understanding of non-materialism and other subjective factors. In addition to that, the evaluation of positions with imbalanced material is difficult, because there are no clear-cut formulas that determine the exact impact of non-material factors on the value of material. We cannot say, for example, that a long-term initiative is worth one pawn or that the harmony of your pieces is worth two pawns in every single instance. These non-material assessments depend on the context, your skill, your opponent, and many other factors. It is a complex process and, I would

dare to say, an art in itself.

The purpose of this chapter is to help you with this process by exploring typical situations in which your pieces or your opponent's pieces become more or less valuable than they normally are. I believe that if we get a better idea about how to assess the value of pieces in unbalanced positions, it becomes easier to make non-materialistic decisions and anticipate such events in a game.

Which factors cause the value of pieces to fluctuate? I would like to enumerate them here for easy reference:

- piece positioning and centralization;
- piece mobility;
- development;
- coordination with other pieces;
- local significance;
- harmony (global significance).

This may not be a definitive list, but these are the most important factors. We shall look at concrete examples from which it will become clear how one or more of these factors influence players' perceptions about the value of material and, consequently, their decisions in critical moments of the game.

I have divided the chapter into five sections corresponding to the prevailing theme in the illustrative games. In some games, you might notice elements of several themes. For example, a piece on the rim often implies a lack of coordination with other pieces. A superior harmony of your pieces can be a result of the opponent's lag in development, and so on. Such overlaps are natural and when they happen, I will try to point them out.

Obviously, the underlying theme in all the examples is non-materialism. In many situations, it is necessary to sacrifice material to get the most value from your pieces or to diminish the value of your opponent's pieces.

Misplaced piece(s)

Some events and situations stay carved in your memory for life as vividly as

if they happened just yesterday. One such situation happened during my junior days. My club colleague lost an important game in a team competition, so our coach was visibly upset by the result. I joined their game analysis, also curious as to what had gone wrong in the game. I remember that it was a Closed Sicilian type of position where Black had planted his knight on the strong d4-square. White, naturally, played $\mathbb{N}c3-d1$ to kick out the knight with c2-c3 and my friend continued according to the script with ... $\mathbb{N}a8-b8$, preparing the typical pawn storm with ...b7-b5-b4 etc. Our coach made White's next move c2-c3 on the board, looked at the score-sheet in utter disbelief and asked my friend: 'You played ... $\mathbb{N}b5??$ '. The young fellow tried to explain why he chose the b5-square for the knight instead of simply trading knights on f3 or retreating to a more natural square like c6, but he was interrupted by the coach: 'No, no... do you know what it is like to put your knight on b5 in this position? It is like...', and then he searched for an object nearest to the chessboard – it happened to be an apple – replaced the knight with an apple and concluded: '... your knight is as useful on b5 as this apple.' I think that we both got the point.

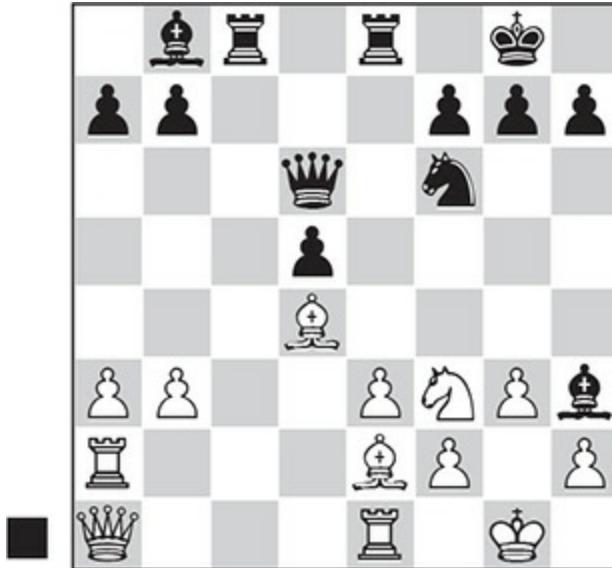
Misplaced pieces can have a strong impact on the game, sometimes even a decisive one. It takes skill and a great amount of knowledge to be able to put your pieces on the right squares throughout the game. In the heat of the battle, even strong players sometimes forget how misplacing their pieces can have undesired consequences. It may seem like it is only temporary, but sometimes one does not get another chance to improve the misplaced piece and restore harmony. A quick action by the opponent can throw your army into disarray.

Game 18

Vladimir Simagin

Boris Spassky

Moscow ch-URS 1955 (11)



At an earlier stage of the game, grandmaster Simagin had used Réti's plan: $\text{N}a1-a2$, $\text{N}d1-a1$, in an original way. Thanks to this maneuver, White's control over the important a1-h8 diagonal is indisputable. However, this plan also has a downside that Spassky underlines with his next vigorous move.

18... ♜e4!

Two of the strongest white pieces (queen and rook) are decentralized and somewhat awkwardly placed. Because of this, Black energetically tries to open up a battlefield on the other side of the board. He is not afraid to give up a pawn for that purpose.

19. ♜xg7

Simagin plays the principled move, even though it contains a fair amount of risk for him. Much safer, but also insufficient for an advantage, was 19. ♜d2 $\text{N}g6$ 20. ♜xe4 $\text{dx}e4=$.

19... ♜g6

This is the point – Black prepares a sacrifice on g3 with a tempo.

20. ♜e5

In the post-mortem, Simagin admitted that his initial intention had been to allow the sacrifice on g3: 20. ♜d4 ♜xg3 21. fxg3 ♜xg3 22. ♜f1!? ♜xf1+ 23. ♛h1, when it seems that White wins material because Black's knight has no good squares to escape. However, he realized too late that Black counters with 23... ♜c2!, threatening checkmate on g2. After 24. ♜xc2 ♛xc2 25. ♛b2 ♛xb2 26. ♛xb2 ♜xe3, Black is winning.

20... ♜xe5 21. ♜xe5 ♚f5



Black has obtained a serious initiative for the sacrificed pawn. White has to play precisely now to find the right, but narrow path out of trouble. As it usually happens, it is not easy to re-adjust to a new situation once your original plan did not work out, and here Simagin falters.

22.f4?

With this move, White keeps the material advantage, but irreparably weakens his king's position. It was necessary to switch on the ‘non-materialism mode’ and play 22. ♜d3! ♜c3 23. ♜f4 ♜xa2 24. ♜xa2. For the sacrificed exchange, White gets a pawn, a strong knight outpost, a better pawn structure and a safer king; in other words – full compensation. After the game move, his pieces lose coordination and his position falls apart quickly.

22...f6 23. ♜f3 ♜c3 24. ♜h4 ♜e6 25. ♜h5

This was White’s idea – he protects e3, opens the second rank for his rook and attacks his opponent’s rook at the same time. However, it runs into a nice refutation.

25... ♜xa2 26. ♜xe8



26... ♕c1!

Thanks to this tactical shot, Black wins on the spot.

27. ♔xc1

The point is that after 27. ♔xc1 ♕xe3+ 28. ♔h1 ♕xc1 none of the misplaced white pieces can help king's defense.

27... ♕xc1 28. ♔b5 a6 0-1

Game 19

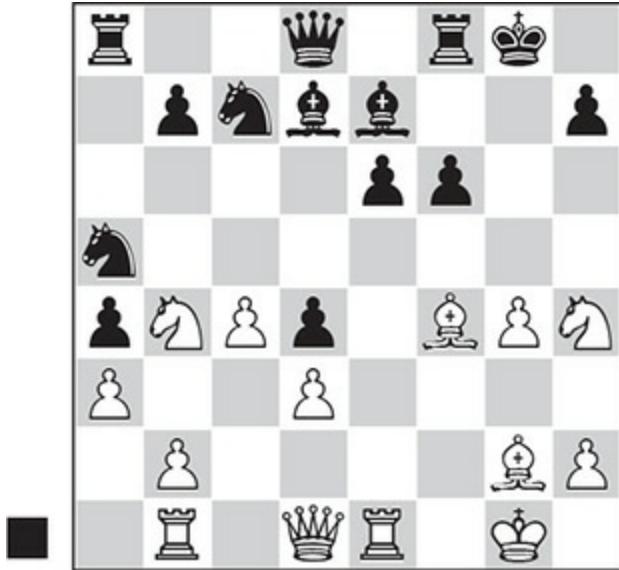
Vasili Ivanchuk

2703

Evgeny Alekseev

2714

Jermuk 2009 (4)



In a Reversed Benoni middlegame, Black is facing some difficulties. His king is not safe, and his knights are misplaced.

20...♞a6?

The exchange of knights would be a relief for Black. However, Black's knights are even more misplaced now. A brilliant player like Ivanchuk does not miss the opportunity to punish such a mistake in style.

21.♝d5!!

When non-materialism becomes your second nature, such moves are easy to spot and playing them becomes a matter of principle. White gets a strong attack for the sacrificed piece, because both black knights are far away from the kingside and cannot participate in the king's defense.

21...exd5 22.♝xd5+ ♕g7

In case of 22...♚h8, White obtains a winning attack with 23.♝f3, threatening 24.♝g6+. Black's defenses are insufficient:

A) 23...♝e8 24.♝f5 ♜c5 25.♝h6+–;

B) 23...♝e8 24.♝e2! ♜c6 25.♝be1 ♜c5 26.♝xe7! ♜xe7 27.♝d6+–.



23. $\mathbb{Q}h1?$!

This is not the most forceful move and it gives Black just enough time to consolidate his defense. Time is an essential element in chess and a single tempo can make a world of difference. We will talk more about that in the next chapter.

It was stronger and more natural to bring the queen into the attack with 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$. If Black tries to get his knight back into the game with 23... $\mathbb{N}c6$, then 24. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{R}f7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ gives White a winning attack, as the reader can ascertain on his own.

23... $\mathbb{N}e8?$

Over-protecting the e7-bishop can be useful in some variations, but this move does not contribute to the defense of the weak black king in any way. He had to use this opportunity to re-centralize one of his knights and therefore 23... $\mathbb{N}c6!$ was the right move. Now after:

- A) 24. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{R}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8!$; or
- B) 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$, Black would be just in time to patch up some holes around his king with his previously misplaced knight.

24.g5!



It is completely natural to open more files and diagonals on the kingside, especially after Black has wasted time moving his rook from f8 to e8. Now $\mathbb{R}d1-h5$ cannot be stopped and Black will be helpless against White's attack. His three pieces on the other side of the board will remain mere spectators until the end of the game.

24... ♜h8

24...fxg5 25. $\mathbb{N}h5$ gxf4 leads to a mating attack for White: 26. $\mathbb{R}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 27. $\mathbb{N}g6+$ etc.

25. ♔h5 ♕g8 26. ♖xg8 ♔xg8 27.g6 ♗c6+ 28. ♖e4!? $\mathbb{N}xe4+$ 29.dxe4 hxg6
30. $\mathbb{N}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 31. $\mathbb{N}h5+$

Black resigned in view of 31... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{R}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{N}h6\#$.

Game 20

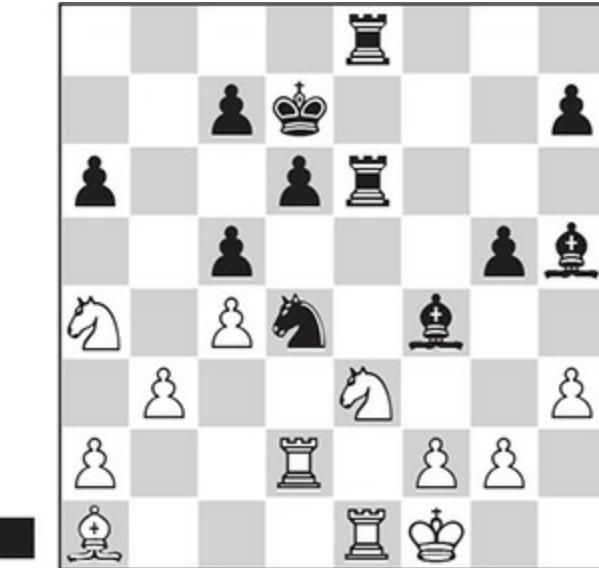
Mateusz Bartel

2608

Davorin Kuljasevic

2546

Biel 2017 (7)



If we apply our discussion about the relative value of material to this position, then Black is obviously ahead. The difference between the activity of the two sides in this endgame is palpable. White's last move was 35. $\mathbb{R}a4$, attacking the knight on d4. I responded with 35... $\mathbb{N}xe3?$ and a draw offer, which was accepted. This was obviously a poor decision on my part for more than one reason. Immediately after the game, my opponent pointed out a strong move:

35... $\mathbb{N}xe3!$,

which absolutely had not crossed my mind. The conditioned reflex to protect the rook had blocked my imagination! However, this exchange sacrifice poses some serious problems for White. The point is that Black opens up the game in the center exactly when both White's knight and bishop are misplaced on the edge of the board. This is the same concept that Ivanchuk used against Alekseev, only in a different setting. White faces a difficult choice now.

36. $\mathbb{N}xe3$

is the best. White lands himself in trouble if he takes with the pawn: 36. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{N}xe3!$ 37. $\mathbb{N}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$. Black's pieces are running rampant in the center of the board, and White should therefore probably return the exchange with 38. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (in case of 38. $\mathbb{N}b2$,



analysis diagram

White's pieces look ridiculous after 38... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$, as pointed out by Bartel; 39. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$ does not work, due to 39... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4-$) 38... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xd2\#$, and hope for the best in the pawn-down, opposite-colored bishops endgame.

36... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

And to save the game, White would have to find a non-materialistic solution:

37. $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ $cxd4$ 38. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

39. $\mathbb{Q}b2?!$ looks just awful for White.



analysis diagram

His pieces are completely misplaced. 39... \mathbb{Q} e6 \mp .

39... \mathbb{Q} g6 40. \mathbb{Q} e2! \mathbb{Q} xd3+ 41. \mathbb{Q} xd3

Despite the extra pawn, Black will most likely not be able to break the fortress that White can set up:

41... \mathbb{Q} e6 42. \mathbb{Q} e4 c6 43. \mathbb{Q} b2 a5 44. \mathbb{Q} d3 h5 45.g4=

It should be noted that the more positional alternative 35... \mathbb{Q} f8!? also keeps Black's edge after 36. \mathbb{Q} g1 \mathbb{Q} e4 37.b4 (or 37. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} ee8 38. \mathbb{Q} a4 \mathbb{Q} e6 \mp) 37... \mathbb{Q} c6 38. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} ee8 39.bxc5 dxc5 40. \mathbb{Q} cd5 (the move that bothered me during the game) 40... \mathbb{Q} f5!.

In the next game, we will see how the current World Champion, Magnus Carlsen, skilfully takes advantage of misplaced white pieces to score a victory in an equal endgame.

Game 21

Wei Yi

2696

Magnus Carlsen

2855

Bilbao 2016 (2)



White is about to regain the sacrificed exchange, with an approximately equal endgame. From several possible continuations, Carlsen chooses the strongest one in a practical sense.

29... ♜d8!

The alternatives:

A) 29... ♜xa2+ 30. ♜b2 ♜b4 31. ♜xc7 ♜xc7 32. ♜f6 ♜f8 33. ♜g5=; and

B) 29...a5 30. ♜xc7 ♜xc7 31. ♜f6= would likely lead to a quick draw.

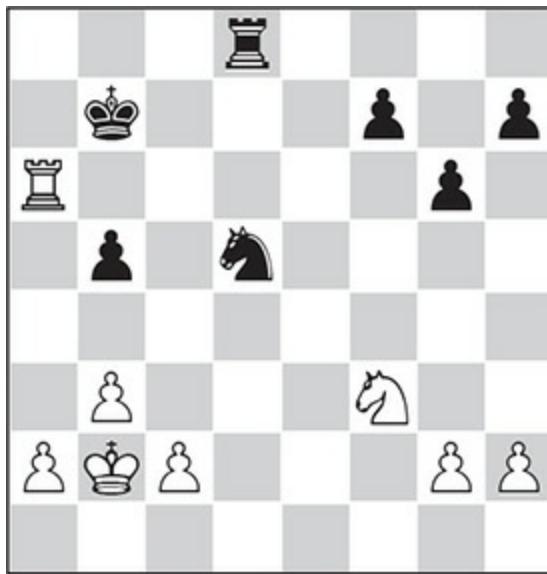
30. ♜b2

30. ♜xc7? ♜xc7 31. ♜xa6 ♜d1+ 32. ♜b2 b4!—+ is an important point.

30... ♜d5

Very importantly, ♜b6-f6 is not possible any more.

31. ♜xc7 ♜xc7 32. ♜xa6 ♜b7!



Carlsen sacrifices a pawn to centralize his pieces and force the decentralization of White's rook. Non-materialism at work!

33. ♜a3

This is an awkward square for the rook. The other option was 33. ♜a5 ♜b6 34.b4 ♜xb4 35. ♜a3=, when the third rank would be open for the rook. Truth be told, this would be a small achievement for Black as he would disconnect White's queenside pawns. Still, a draw would be the most likely outcome, of course.

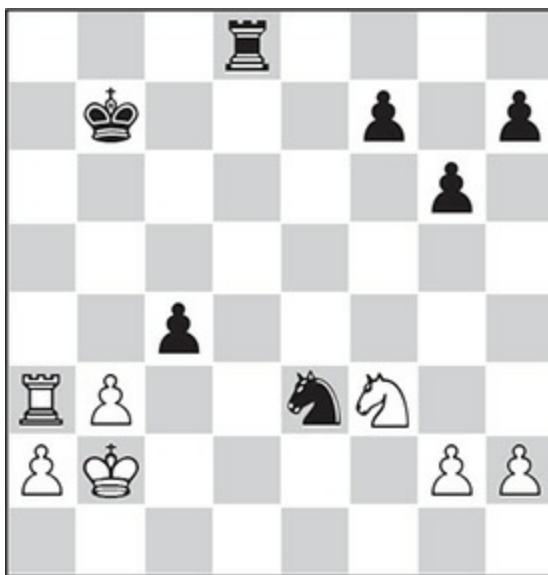
33... ♜ e3!

Carlsen wastes no time and makes threats while White's pieces are uncoordinated.

34.c4!

The best reaction. White cannot play 34.g3 due to 34... ♜ d1+ 35. ♛ c1 ♜ c3!, and he loses tactically because of the misplaced rook on a3! 36. ♜ d2 ♜ xd2! 37. ♛ xd2 ♜ b1+ 38. ♛ c1 ♜ xa3 39. ♛ b2 b4–+.

34... bxc4



35. ♜ e5?

Carlsen is extremely strong when it comes to posing practical difficulties to his opponents, even (or I should say, especially) in simple positions. Among many possibilities, Wei Yi chooses the wrong one. White should not have wasted time bringing his rook back into the game, so 35.b4 was the right solution: 35... ♜ xg2 36. ♜ c3 f5 37. ♜ xc4, and White's chances are no worse than Black's in this sharp endgame.

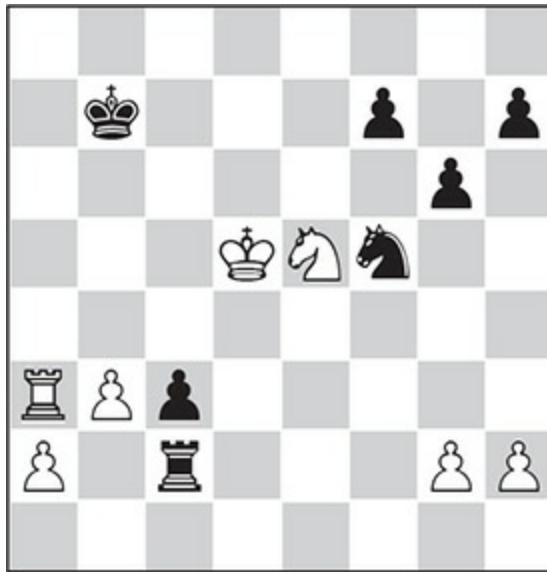
35... ♜ d2+

Now Black's rook becomes very active on the second rank.

36. ♛ c3 ♜ c2+ 37. ♛ d4

I wonder if Wei Yi initially intended to play 37. ♛ b4 ♜ d5+ 38. ♛ c5 and missed 38...c3!, when the knight cannot be taken: 39. ♛ xd5 ♜ d2+ 40. ♛ e4 c2 41. ♜ d3 ♜ xd3–+.

37... ♜ f5+ 38. ♛ d5 c3



The consequences of White's mistake on move 35 become obvious now. Stopping the dangerous passed c-pawn becomes a real challenge with the misplaced rook on a3.

39. ♛ c5!?

In a difficult position, Wei Yi does not lose his spirit. With this move, he sets up a lethal trap for Black.

39... ♜ d6!

Carlsen is up to the defensive task. 39... ♜ d2? 40. ♜ c6 allows serious counterplay against the black king. If 40... c2?, White checkmates after 41. ♜ a7+ ♜ c8 42. ♜ b6 c1 ♔ 43. ♜ c7#.

40. ♜ c6

As before, 40. ♜ xd6? loses to 40... ♜ d2+ 41. ♜ e7 c2.

40... ♜ e4+ 41. ♜ b5 ♔ c7!

The point. Black's king escapes the mating net and he should be winning now.

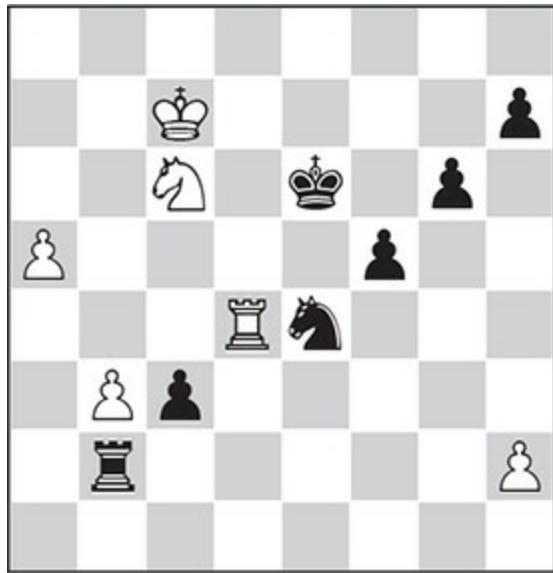
42. ♜ a7+ ♜ d6 43. ♜ a4 f5 44. ♜ b6 ♜ xg2 45. ♜ d4+ ♜ e6 46. a4 ♜ a2?

An unnecessary waste of time. The immediate 46... ♜ b2 was much better.

47. a5 ♜ b2 48. ♜ c7?

Wei Yi fishes for tactics again, but he misses his opponent's counter-blow. After 48.b4! ♜ d6 (or 48... c2 49. ♜ c4) 49. ♜ d3 c2 50. ♜ c3, the game would

have been far from decided.



48... ♜c5!

Carlsen finds the winning tactical sequence. White's idea was 48... ♜xb3??

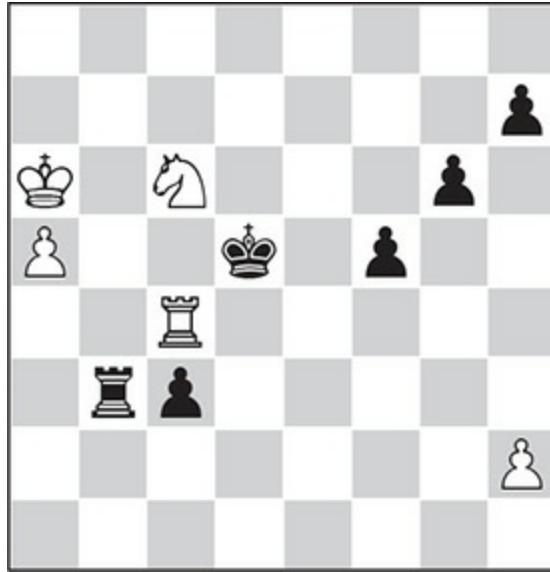
49. ♜xe4+! fxe4 50. ♜d4+ ♛d5 51. ♜xb3 ♜c4 52. ♜c1 and 48...c2

49. ♜c4=.

49. ♜c4

It is too late for 49.b4 now, since after 49...c2 50. ♜c4 ♜a6+ 51. ♛d8 (51. ♛b6 ♜xb4!–+) 51... ♛d5 52. ♜c3 f4!, the other passed pawn decides the issue after 53.b5 f3! 54.bxa6 f2 55.a7 f1♛.

49... ♜a6+ 50. ♛b6 ♜xb3+ 51. ♛xa6 ♛d5!–+



This is the point of Black's combination. White's rook can no longer remain behind the passed pawn. Carlsen's magic hands in tactical exchanges in small areas of the chessboard sometimes remind me of Lionel Messi's genius solutions in tight spaces on the football field.

52. $\mathbb{R}b4$ c2 53. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 54. $\mathbb{R}xb3$ c1 \mathbb{Q} 55. $\mathbb{R}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}b8$ f4 0-1

Game 22

Hrant Melkumyan

2583

Wesley So

2656

Moscow 2010 (5)



Speaking of misplaced pieces, in this position there are quite a few, especially if you look on Black's side of the board. With his last move, the Armenian grandmaster playing White offered an exchange of the dark-squared bishops. However, he probably underestimated the following non-materialistic solution by young Wesley.

22... ♜xe1!

A simple exchange of bishops with 22... ♜xe1 23. ♜axe1 ♜xe1 24. ♜xe1 would have been completely fine for White. Black cannot win the f4-pawn with 24... ♜xf4?, because the only misplaced white piece would join the game with decisive effect: 25. ♜c8! ♜c7 26. ♜e7+ ♜h8 27. ♜f1 ♜xd4 28. ♜xf7+-.

23. ♜hxe1 ♜xf4

By sacrificing the exchange, Black achieved domination on the dark squares. His only problem is that besides the queen and bishop, all his remaining pieces are placed poorly. This becomes even more obvious after White's next move:

24. ♜e8

It seems like White has enough counterplay to neutralize Black's attack. But Wesley has seen further.

24... ♜g3+ 25. ♛h1 ♜xh3+ 26. ♜h2 ♜f3+ 27. ♛g1 ♜xg4+ 28. ♛h1 ♜f3+ 29. ♛g1 ♜g4+ 30. ♛h1



Black's useful checks have run out, while White also threatens to win the b8-knight. But that does not mean that Black does not have more aces up his sleeve.

30... ♜e7!

Wesley So mobilizes his passive rook at the right moment. There is no need to lament about the knight on b8 – Black can conduct the kingside attack without it. The alternatives are much less impressive:

- A) 30... ♜xd4? 31. ♜xf8!+ ♛xf8 32. ♜xb8 ♛e7 33. ♜xa7++–;
- B) 30... ♜bd7 31. ♜f1∞; and
- C) 30... ♜f3+ 31. ♛g1=.

31. ♜xb8

31. ♜xe7 ♛xe7 32. ♜xb8 ♜f3+ 33. ♛h2 ♜xd3–+.

31... ♜f3+ 32. ♛g1 ♜g4+ 33. ♛h1



After some checks to gain precious time on the clock, Wesley So plays a quiet, yet extremely powerful move that dispels White's hopes of creating counterplay:

33...f5!!

How often do you see such quiet prophylactic moves (the idea is to clear the f7-square for the king) when one is down a rook? The problem for White is that he has two misplaced pieces on the queenside and thus he can do nothing to repair the situation around his king, even with an extra move.

We can understand why So moved the f-pawn forward from this variation:

33...♝g3?? 34.♜xf8+ ♛xf8 35.♝h8#.

34.♜g1

34...♝g3 was a deadly threat, but this is also not the solution to White's problems. 34.♝f1 is met with 34...♝g3, and now 35.♜xf8+ does not work as it did on the previous move: 35...♛xf8 36.♝h8+ ♛f7-+.

34...♞f3+

Now ♛h1-g1 is no longer an option, so White has to move his queen from h2.

35.♝g2 ♞xd3

Black has regained the sacrificed material and his position is completely winning.

36.♞h2 ♜e2 37.♜xf8+ ♛xf8 38.♞d7+ ♛e8 39.♞b8+ ♛d8! 0-1

So avoided the last trap: 39...♛xd7?? 40.♞d6+ ♛e8 41.♞xg6+=.

Uncoordinated pieces

In the examples from the previous section, we have seen how one or two misplaced pieces can be problematic. However, if most of your pieces do not communicate with each other, then you might have an even bigger problem on your hands. One of the classic examples of the lack of piece coordination is the following K-K game.

Game 23

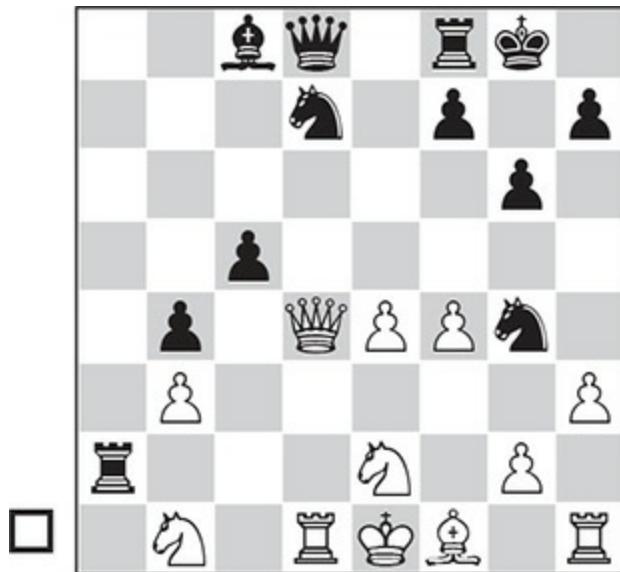
Anatoly Karpov

2725

Garry Kasparov

2805

Linares 1993 (10)



The opening has obviously gone wrong for Karpov and his position is not enviable. However, his next move

19. $\mathbb{Q}g1?$!

is not a pretty sight. Vishy Anand, who tried to defend White's position in the analysis, summed up his sentiments in one sentence: 'I rest my case!'

19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ was, at least, more aesthetically pleasing than the text. However, Black has a nice forced win: 19... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}de5!$ 21. $fxe5$ (21. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 22. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{Q}a1-$) 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$

\mathbb{Q} xd3 24. \mathbb{Q} c1 \mathbb{Q} xb1 25. \mathbb{Q} xa2 \mathbb{Q} xa2 26. \mathbb{Q} c4 \mathbb{Q} d4 27. \mathbb{Q} f1 \mathbb{Q} b1.

19... \mathbb{Q} gf6 20.e5 \mathbb{Q} e4 21.h4?

It is very difficult for White to complete his development. With his last move, Karpov may have planned to activate his rook via h3 and prevent the \mathbb{Q} h4 check. However, this move somehow leaves a bad aftertaste. It is better to ‘admit the mistake’ and re-centralize the queen with 21. \mathbb{Q} e3, when Garry Kasparov gives the following line: 21... \mathbb{Q} b7 22. \mathbb{Q} d2 \mathbb{Q} xd2 23. \mathbb{Q} xd2 \mathbb{Q} xd2 24. \mathbb{Q} xd2 \mathbb{Q} b6 25. \mathbb{Q} xd8 \mathbb{Q} xd8 26. \mathbb{Q} c1 \mathbb{Q} d5+. White, at least, has a fighting chance here, compared to the game.

21...c4!

Kasparov is as energetic as ever. If White takes the c-pawn, 22... \mathbb{Q} a5 will follow, with a decisive attack. It is clear, then, that Black is completely winning, even though material is nominally equal. However, Karpov’s answer, and the position that arises, will be remembered in chess history as one of the most peculiar instances of poor piece coordination.

22. \mathbb{Q} c1



White’s pieces look as if they were taken from a starting position of Fischer Random Chess.

22...c3!

Flashy, although not the only way to finish the game.

23. \mathbb{Q} xa2 c2 24. \mathbb{Q} d4 cxd1 $\mathbb{Q}+$ 25. \mathbb{Q} xd1



25... ♜dc5!

Kasparov trades the only active white piece. White's problems will not be alleviated even after the queen trade.

26. ♛xd8 ♜xd8+ 27. ♛c2 ♜f2 0-1

Karpov lost on time. I would like to show two nice forced lines:

28. ♜g1 ♜f5+ 29. ♛b2 (29. ♛c1 ♜d1+ 30. ♛b2 ♜xb1#) 29... ♜d1+
30. ♛a1 ♜xb3#.



analysis diagram

A cute final picture that should serve as a warning as to what might happen if you don't develop and coordinate your forces. It is always less painful to learn from the mistakes of others!

Strong players can intuitively sense when their opponent's pieces fall 'out of sync'. For example, several pieces end up in unusual positions or become loose and exposed to tactical shots. In such cases, it is important to act energetically to exploit the disorganization in your opponent's camp, even if it implies material sacrifices. Otherwise he might get off the hook. The following two games are good examples of this strategy.

Game 24

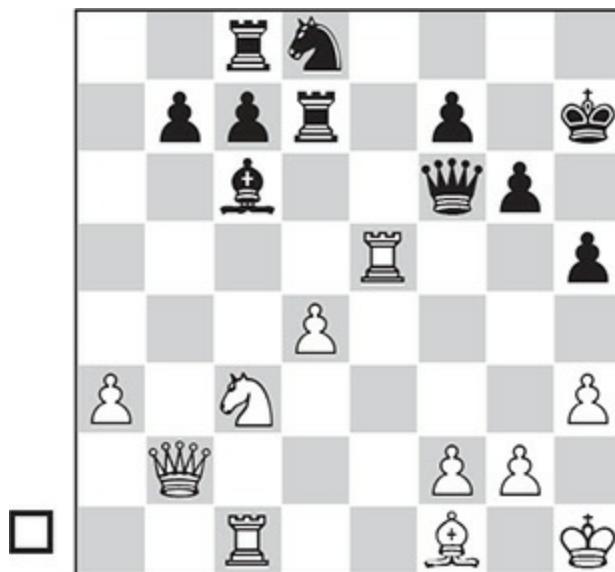
Dmitry Jakovenko

2736

Aimen Rizouk

2500

Khanty-Mansiysk 2009 (1.1)



White holds the initiative in this position, but he needs to play precisely if he wants to keep it. On one hand, Black would like to restore his piece coordination with ... N^d 8-e6 and ... R^c 8-d8. On the other, the d4-pawn is hanging. At first glance, White does not have a move that deals with both threats. So, which one should he prevent? Jakovenko provides the answer.

38. ♜ ce1!

It is much more important for White not to allow Black to reconnect his pieces with 38... ♜ e6 (now this runs into 39. d5), than to try to defend the d4-pawn.

38... ♜ xd4?

Black is not ready to enter a tactical exchange with such poor piece coordination. He had to play 38... ♛ g7, although after 39. ♜ d2 ♜ a8 40. a4! ♜ xa4 41. ♜ d5, White's initiative is very strong, nevertheless.



39. ♜ d5!

A strong tactical resource that may have gone unnoticed by Black. His position collapses now.

39... ♜ h4

The tactical point is 39... ♜ xd5 40. ♜ xh5+ ♛ g7 41. ♜ h7+!, and White wins the queen. Just a few moves before, the queens were firmly separated by three pieces on the a1-h8 diagonal, so Black may not have suspected that he could lose his queen in such a way.

40. ♜ e4!

Another strong tactical shot. Black is helpless against White's threats because his pieces are scattered around the board with no purpose.

40... ♜ xe4 41. ♜ xe4+– ♛ g5 42. ♜ e5 ♜ h4 43. ♜ e4 ♛ g5 44. ♜ f6+ ♛ h6 45. ♜ e8 f6 46. ♜ b4 ♛ e6 47. ♜ xe6 ♜ xe8 48. ♜ xe8 ♜ xe8 49. ♜ f8+ ♛ h7 50. ♜ xe8 ♛ c5

51. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 1-0

Game 25

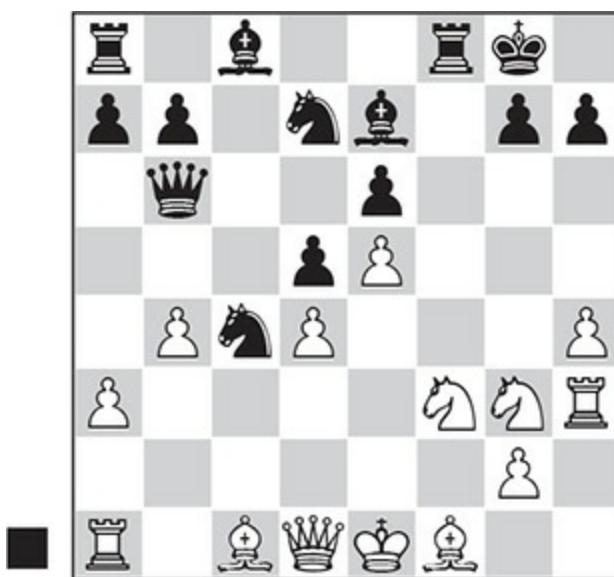
Jorge Sammour Hasbun

2460

Davorin Kuljasevic

2464

USA tt final ICC 2007 (1)



This position arose from the French Defense. Sensing a lack of coordination among White's pieces, I decided that it was the right time to open the center.
15... $\mathbb{Q}dxe5!$

Black could also have included 15...a5 first, but this thematic sacrifice just begs to be played either way.

16. $dxe5 \mathbb{Q}xe5$

The rook on h3 and the knight on g3 are completely misplaced now (this might have not been the case if the position had remained closed), and White will struggle to coordinate them with the rest of his undeveloped forces.

17. $\mathbb{R}a2!?$

White protects the vulnerable f2-square in an interesting way, activating his idle rook.

17. $\mathbb{R}b2$ runs into 17... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (18. $gxf3?$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}d3+$

20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6-$) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf1+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ \mp .

17... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 18. $gxf3$ e5†

Black activates the ‘French bishop’ and forms a strong pawn center. His advantage grows move by move.

19. $\mathbb{Q}hh2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ag2$



As one of my club colleagues would say, White’s kingside looks like ‘a furniture store’ – a lot of pieces sitting in a small area without having much space to move around. Black, on the other hand, has a very harmonious piece set-up.

20... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ a5!

The principled move, not fearing any ghosts. Black needs to open up the queenside to get to White’s king.

22. $bxa5$

White’s attack after 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $axb4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ does not bring success: 23... $g6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $bxa3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8-$.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6?$!

Missing a nice forced win. Black had to think non-materialistically and sacrifice the pride of his position, the pawn center, to attack the king: 23... $e4!$ 24. $fxe4$ $dxe4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}af5!$.



analysis diagram

To be honest, I had missed this idea. White cannot defend the f1-bishop in a good way due to his poor piece coordination: 26. $\mathbb{R}h1$ (26. $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$

27. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2+$) 26... $\mathbb{Q}xh4+!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$.

24. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7??$

A very sloppy move. 24... $g6$, followed by 25... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, would have kept the lion's share of Black's advantage. 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ does not work due to 25... $hxg6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}b4+-$.



25. ♜g5!

After this, White is the one attacking!

25...d4

25...e4 does not work as intended because of 26. ♔d4 ♜xh2 27. ♜xg7, and Black's king gets mated.

26. ♜hg2 ♜f8 27. ♔e4!

Not only g7, but now also h7 is a target. My pieces have lost their coordination, while White's pieces are suddenly firing on all cylinders – what a turnaround.

27... ♜d5 28. ♔xe5!



My opponent saw this nice winning tactic before he played 27. ♔e4, with little time on the clock, too. Well done.

28... ♜e7 29. ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 30. ♜xg7+ ♛f8

30... ♜xg7 31. ♔e8# is the point.

31. ♜xe7 ♛xe7 32. ♜xe7+ ♛xe7 33. f4+–

After the dust has settled, White has obtained a winning endgame. This was a painful loss.

**33... ♛e6 34. ♜g3 ♛d6 35. ♜d3 h6 36. ♜d2 ♜a8 37. ♜e2 ♜g8 38. ♜xd4 ♜g4
39. ♜f2 ♛e7 40. ♜e4 b5 41. ♛e3 ♜c4 42. ♜d4 ♜g8 43. ♜f5+ ♛d7 44. ♜xh6 ♜e8
45. ♜g4 ♛d6**

Black resigned.

Limited mobility and lag in development

In certain positions, the value of the pieces declines because they simply cannot move. The primary reason for this is usually a lag in development, although it can also be the result of your opponent's superior piece placement that does not allow you to put your pieces on their optimal squares. Let us look at several instructive examples where strong players sacrificed material to exploit the poor mobility of their opponent's pieces.

Game 26

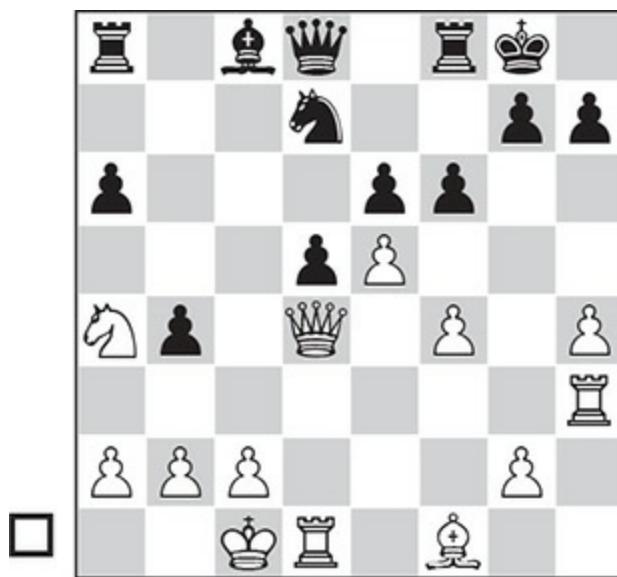
Garry Kasparov

2805

Nigel Short

2655

Amsterdam 1994 (2)



Nigel Short challenged White's central control with a sharp sequence of pawn breaks. Kasparov's reaction is principled:

16. ♜xb4!

Black lags in development, so White should try to exploit that. Trading into the endgame with 16.exf6 ♜xf6 17. ♜xf6 ♜xf6, while looking optically better for White, is too modest. Black would be happy with such a turn of events.

16...fxe5 17.♕d6!

Kasparov was a master at holding the initiative – this game is an excellent example. He avoids the trade on e5 (17.fxe5 ♜xe5 18.♖e3±) with a specific idea in mind.

17...♝f6 18.f5!!



This pawn sacrifice is the real point behind White's previous play.

18...♚h6+

18...♝xf5? loses material by force: 19.♖f3 ♚g4 20.♖xf8+ ♜xf8

21.♝b6+–.

19.♛b1 ♕xf5?!

Black takes a pawn, but his development will suffer greatly. White's queen on d6 completely paralyzes his pieces. His last chance to stay in the game is 19...♝f6!. We have seen a similar defensive idea in the game Ivanchuk-Alekseev. Black obtains better piece coordination by centralizing his passive knight: 20.♜xe5 ♜e4 21.♝d4±.

20.♖f3!

A strong idea. After the rook exchange, White's bishop gets the h3-square to attack the weak e6-pawn.

20...♖xf3 21.gxf3 ♚f6 22.♝h3 ♚f7

Short is preparing to trade the powerful white queen with ...♝f6-e7. He cannot untangle with 22...♝f8 because of 23.♝b6 ♜xf3 24.♖f1+–.

23.c4!



Another pawn sacrifice to keep Black's pieces in lockdown.

23...dxc4?!

It seems like Short was intent on taking everything that his opponent offered him in this game. But this just makes it easier for White to develop his initiative.

23... \mathbb{N} e7 would not work as intended, due to 24. \mathbb{N} c6 \mathbb{Q} b8 25.cxd5 and Black's position falls apart. However, keeping the position at least somewhat closed with 23...d4 deserved attention.

24. \mathbb{N} c3!

The maneuver of the knight to e4 decides the game in White's favor.

24... \mathbb{N} e7 25. \mathbb{N} c6 \mathbb{Q} b8 26. \mathbb{N} e4

Black does not have a good defense against the multiple threats (\mathbb{N} e4-g5/d6).

26... \mathbb{N} b6

Grandmaster Ftacnik showed a nice winning line for White after 26... \mathbb{N} f8:

27. \mathbb{N} d6+ \mathbb{Q} g8 28. \mathbb{N} xc8 \mathbb{N} b4 29. \mathbb{N} xe6+! \mathbb{N} xe6 (29... \mathbb{Q} h8 30. \mathbb{N} xe5+-)

30. \mathbb{N} xe6+ \mathbb{Q} f8 31. \mathbb{N} d8#.

27. \mathbb{N} g5+ \mathbb{Q} g8 28. \mathbb{N} e4! g6 29. \mathbb{N} xe5

Virtually all of White's moves come with tempo.

29... \mathbb{N} b7 30. \mathbb{N} d6! c3 31. \mathbb{N} xe6+ \mathbb{N} xe6 32. \mathbb{N} xe6 1-0

Game 27

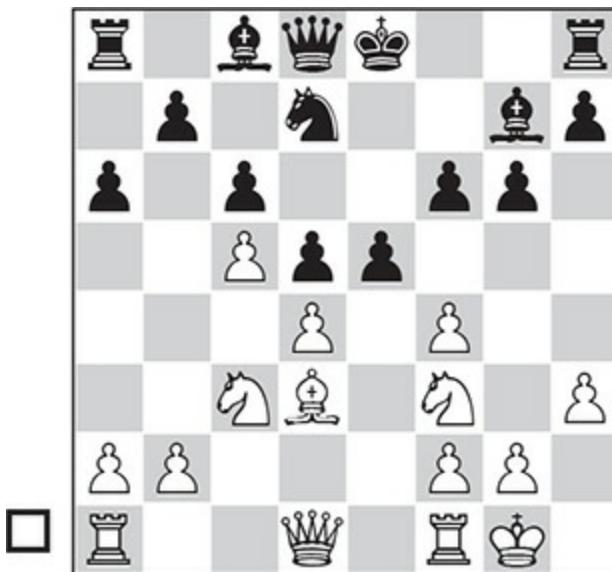
Boris Gelfand

2681

Sergei Movsesian

2666

Polanica Zdroj 2000 (5)



A sharp situation has arisen in the center after 11...e5. Black would like to open his dark-squared bishop and undermine the c5-pawn. However, he is one move too early with this pawn break – this would have worked much better if he had already castled. Like Kasparov in the previous game, Gelfand realizes that his opponent is not ready for the opening of the position and plays the most ambitious move:

12.f5!

This implies a piece sacrifice. Instead, 12.fxe5?! fxe5 13.♗xe5 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 0-0 15.f4 ♜a5 would have fulfilled all Black's dreams.

12...e4?

Black takes the bait, not realizing that his position will soon become very difficult. It was necessary to accept a worse, but playable position after 12...g5 13.♗e1 0-0 14.b4±. By the way, here 14...e4 would be met by 15.♕xe4! dxe4 16.♗b3+ ♛h8 17.♗xe4±, just like in the game.

13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♗xe4±

For the sacrificed piece, White obtains tremendous positional pressure.

14...0-0

As strange as it might sound, Black's best move is probably a counter-sacrifice: 14... \mathbb{Q} b6!? 15.cxb6 \mathbb{Q} xf5 16. \mathbb{Q} e1 0-0 17. \mathbb{Q} b3+ \mathbb{Q} f7, when he would be down a pawn in a bad, but still playable position. Compared to the game, his pieces would at least have had some operating space.

15. \mathbb{Q} b3+ \mathbb{Q} h8 16. \mathbb{Q} d6



An impressive position. Almost none of Black's pieces can move.

16... \mathbb{Q} h6 17. \mathbb{Q} fe1!

Of course, Gelfand does not go for the low-hanging fruit, but rather patiently strengthens his position. 17. \mathbb{Q} f7+? \mathbb{Q} xf7 18. \mathbb{Q} xf7 would restore the material balance, but also give Black much-needed breathing room after 18... \mathbb{Q} g8.

17... \mathbb{Q} g7

In case of 17...b6 18.fxg6 hxg6, White has an elegant win with 19. \mathbb{Q} f7!.

18. \mathbb{Q} e4 \mathbb{Q} xc5

Movsesian has had enough of passivity, so he returns material to get some space for his other pieces. But this comes a few moves too late.

19.dxc5 gxf5 20. \mathbb{Q} e8?!

Not the most convincing way to convert the advantage, though it should be enough.

20... \mathbb{Q} xe8?!

A more stubborn defense was 20... $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ (a move that is easy to miss) 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$.
21. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 22. $g3+-$ $a5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $a4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 1-0

Game 28

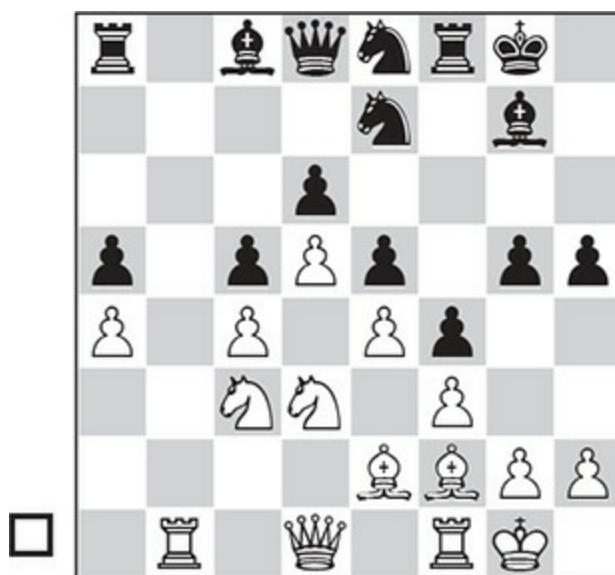
Viktor Kortchnoi

2605

Friso Nijboer

2505

Netherlands tt 1992/93 (9)



I like reading Kortchnoi's annotations. They are full of candid and insightful comments, like the following one: 'I would like to draw readers' attention to the fact that 11 of 17 moves of Black so far have been pawn moves. He engaged all eight of his pawns! The game has not even begun, and he has already burned all of his bridges.'

In other words, Kortchnoi believes that Black has seriously neglected his piece development. His next move should already not come as a surprise to us, then.

18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$

The purpose of this long-term piece sacrifice is to open up the position for

White's pieces, using the strong connected passed pawns in the center to limit the mobility of Black's pieces even more.

18...dxc5 19.♕xc5 ♜g6?!

Kortchnoi correctly points out that Black's last move was a mistake and that he should have covered the b6-square by playing 19...♜f6. After 20.♗b3 ♜f8 21.♗f2 g4 22.c5, White would have a great position, but, according to Kortchnoi, Black would have a fighting chance.

20.♗b6!

It would be completely wrong to win material at the expense of White's long-term plan: 20.♗xf8? ♜xf8+, and the central pawns are blocked.

20...♝f6 21.c5 g4 22.d6!

Mission accomplished. There is nothing wrong with 22.fxg4 hxg4 23.♗xg4, but Kortchnoi prefers to strangle his opponent.



22...gxh3?!

Kortchnoi believed that the best practical try for Black would have been the rook sacrifice: 22...♜d7?! 23.♝d5+ ♛h7 24.♝xa8 ♛h4, threatening ...g4-g3.

However, White wins very nicely with 25.♗d8! ♜f6 26.♗xf6 ♜xf6 27.♖b2! g3 28.h3 ♜xh3 29.gxh3 ♛xh3 30.♗a6! ♛h4 31.♗c8.

23.gxf3

23.♗xf3 was equally good. Kortchnoi remarks: 'However, I thought that

Black's position is so bad that I can even let him fulfill his threats!'

23... ♜h3 24. ♛h1! ♜xf1 25. ♜xf1



This was Kortchnoi's non-materialistic idea. He gave up a rook for Black's most dangerous attacking piece, effectively running his attack into a dead end. Once again, we can see that the value of pieces is relative. Black's pieces, especially his rooks, are immobile, while White has all the fun with his wonderfully coordinated pieces and the central pawn duo.

25... ♜e6 26.d7 ♜f6

26... ♜f6 was a bit better according to Kortchnoi, although after 27. ♛d5 ♜xd5 (27... ♜g7 28. ♜c4) 28. ♜xd5 ♜d8 29.dxe8 ♛ ♜xe8 30. ♜xd8 ♜exd8 31.c6, Black suffers further material losses after c6-c7 and ♜f1-h3.

27.d8 ♛ ♜fxd8 28. ♜xd8 ♜d7 29. ♜g5



White's position is completely winning in a positional sense, even if Black wins back the c-pawn.

29... ♜c8

29... ♜xc5 30. ♜d5 ♜a7 31. ♜b6 ♜f7 32. ♜c4+–.

30. ♜d5 ♜gf8

Nothing saves Black: 30... ♜xc5 31. ♜h3 ♜xd5 32.exd5+– or 30... ♜xd5 31.exd5 ♜xc5 32. ♜e4+–.

31. ♜e7! ♜xc5 32. ♜h3 ♜xd5 33. ♜xd5 1-0

So far, we have mostly analyzed the relative value of pieces from the opponent's perspective. It is time to focus on the other side of the board and look at the situations where the value of our pieces increases as a result of either their superiority on a certain part of the board or their overall harmony.

Preponderance of pieces in local operations

Sometimes it is enough to have an advantage on just a small part of the chessboard, perhaps a quadrant, to win the game. You might remember how Carlsen skillfully coordinated his pieces on a small area of the board to win an equal endgame against Wei Yi. Let us see how he does something similar in the middlegame against another strong player.

Game 29

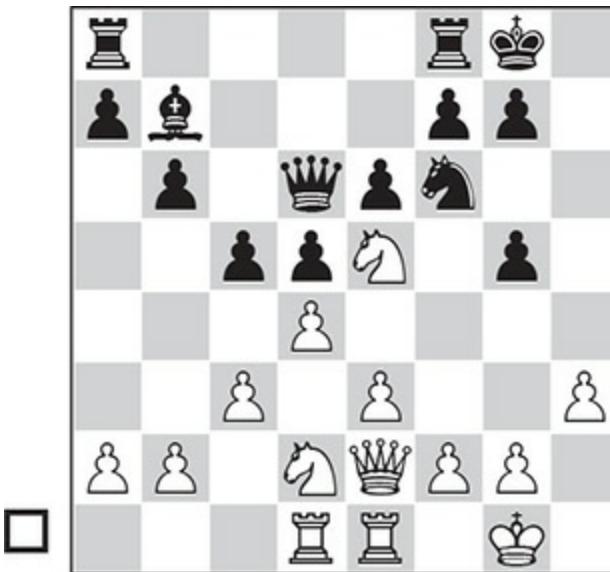
Magnus Carlsen

2844

Evgeny Tomashevsky

2728

Wijk aan Zee 2016 (6)



One can immediately recognize that this position arose from the fashionable London System. One of the main strategic ideas behind the modest, but solid pawn center arising from this opening is to attack on the kingside with ♜f3-e5, f2-f4, etc. Therefore, Carlsen's next move is not a surprise:

16.f4 gxf4 17.♘f1!

However, this quiet attacking move is anything but obvious. Carlsen had realized that, besides the f6-knight, all the other black pieces are disconnected from the kingside, so he swiftly concentrates his forces on this side of the board. The straightforward 17.exf4?! would allow Black to obtain counterplay via 17...cxd4 18.cxd4 ♜ac8.

17...♝d7

Very much a human reaction. Taking the second pawn with 17...fxe3 would take a lot of courage in view of 18.♘xf6!.



analysis diagram

Black would lose after 18...gxf6? 19.♘g4+ ♕h7 20.♖f1!, and despite having a choice of capturing either one of White's knights, Black cannot prevent checkmate. White simply has too many pieces on the kingside. The only move for Black is 18...exd2!. Still, I cannot think of many things that would be less pleasant during a game than staring at the powerful knight on e5 and rook and f6, without having any concrete defensive ideas. White would have several promising attacking possibilities. Probably the simplest one is 19.♖xd2 (also strong is Peter Heine Nielsen's recommendation: 19.♖f4!? f6 20.♘g6 →) 19...♕d8 (19...gxf6? 20.♘g4+ ♕h8 21.♖d3+–) 20.♖f4, with an attack. Therefore, Tomashevsky's decision not to take on e3 is fully understandable.

18.♕h5!

Carlsen continues with his strategy of piling up the heavy artillery on the kingside.

18...♗f6

Pretty much the only move. 18...♝xe5? 19.dxe5 g6 20.♘g5 ♕d8 21.♘xf4 → looks terrible for Black on the dark squares.

19.♕h4 ♕d8?!

Again, the most human decision – Black brings his queen back from d6, where it did nothing, to a better defensive square. At the same time, he will

also try to extinguish White's attack with a queen trade. However, 19... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ g5 21. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ f6 was objectively the best defense.

How obvious is that, though? Besides, White keeps his attack going with 22. $\mathbb{Q}df3$.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$



20... $\mathbb{Q}e4?$

Probably due to the intense pressure that he has been facing on the kingside, Tomashevsky was too eager to trade queens and forgot to swap the c-pawn first. Now he lands into a hopeless endgame by force. 20...cxd4 21.exd4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ was playable. White keeps a strong initiative, nevertheless, with 22. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ f5 23. $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h5$, in a position that looks like a Stonewall gone bad for Black.

21. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ dx $e4$ 23. dx $c5$!



This capture is the key. White takes control of the d-file and the seventh rank.

23...bxc5

To add to his misery, Black cannot even fight for the d-file with 23... \mathbb{R} ad8 24. \mathbb{R} xd8 \mathbb{R} xd8 because of a typical tactic: 25. \mathbb{N} h8+! \mathbb{Q} xh8 26. \mathbb{B} xf7+ \mathbb{Q} g8 27. \mathbb{B} xd8+-.

24. \mathbb{R} d7 \mathbb{B} ab8 25.b3

This endgame is extremely unpleasant for Black. White's pieces dominate completely.

25...a5

Black cannot expel the knight from e5 with 25...f6 due to 26. \mathbb{B} g6 and 27. \mathbb{N} h8#.

26. \mathbb{R} c7

It is cash-out time.

26...a4 27.bxa4 \mathbb{B} a8 28.a5 \mathbb{R} b7 29. \mathbb{R} xc5 \mathbb{R} a7 30. \mathbb{B} c4 1-0

Tomashevsky had had enough – further resistance, although possible, would be futile against the best endgame player of our time.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (popularly known as ‘MVL’) is another contemporary player with a great sense for non-materialism. I would like to show two instructive examples from his practice where he sacrificed material to obtain superior coordination of his pieces in one part of the board.

Game 30

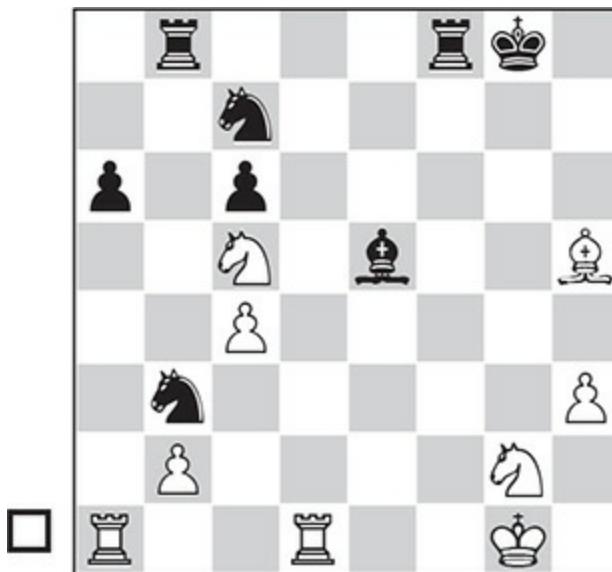
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2793

Alexandra Goryachkina

2493

Gibraltar 2018 (3)



We have a pretty lively endgame on the board. There are only a few pawns left, so Black is looking forward to exchanging some pieces to increase her drawing chances. However, the French grandmaster avoids simplifications and goes for a more ambitious continuation:

32. ♔d7

32. ♔xb3 ♕xb3 33. ♕a5 ♔f6± would be fine for Black.

32... ♔xa1 33. ♔xe5!

White needs to play this move if he wants to preserve his winning chances, but, as we will shortly see, he is not planning to retrieve material with

34. ♔d7. He has a more vigorous idea in mind, instead.

33. ♔xf8?! ♔xf8 34. ♕xa1 ♕xb2= would have been a way to sign the scoresheets quickly.

33... ♔c2?!

Black misses White's strong response, probably counting only on 34. ♔d7. Better was 33... ♔b3, when I believe that Vachier-Lagrave would have

continued in a non-materialistic spirit with 34. $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ (on the contrary, 34. $\mathbb{Q}d7?!$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}bc5$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ leads to an endgame with an extra pawn for White, but also with good drawing chances for Black, due to the reduced material).



analysis diagram

It is all about piece coordination! 34... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$. Again, the strongest continuation is not the one that immediately wins material, but rather one that maximizes the potential of White's pieces (once again, going for material is not the best: 35. $\mathbb{Q}f7+?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}bd4\pm$): 35... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g4$, and White keeps a dangerous initiative in the endgame due to his superior piece coordination on a small area of the board.



34. ♔g6!

Similar to the variation above, winning the material with 34. ♔d7?! is beside the point: 34... ♔e6 35. ♔xf8 ♔xf8±.

34... ♕xb2 35. ♔d7!

Everything comes with tempo. White threatens checkmate in two and to win the c7-knight. Black is in dire straits.

35... ♕c8

This allows a pretty finish. 35... ♔e6 is even worse: 36. ♔h7+ ♔h8
37. ♔g6#.

36. ♔f4!



The concentration of White's pieces around the black king is impressive. In contrast, Black's pieces are misplaced and disconnected from each other. And the king cannot defend itself alone...

36... ♜ b1+ 37. ♛ f2 ♜ b2 38. ♜ h7+ ♜ f8 39. ♜ fg6+ ♜ e8 40. ♜ e7+ ♜ d8 41. ♜ xc6#
1-0

Game 31

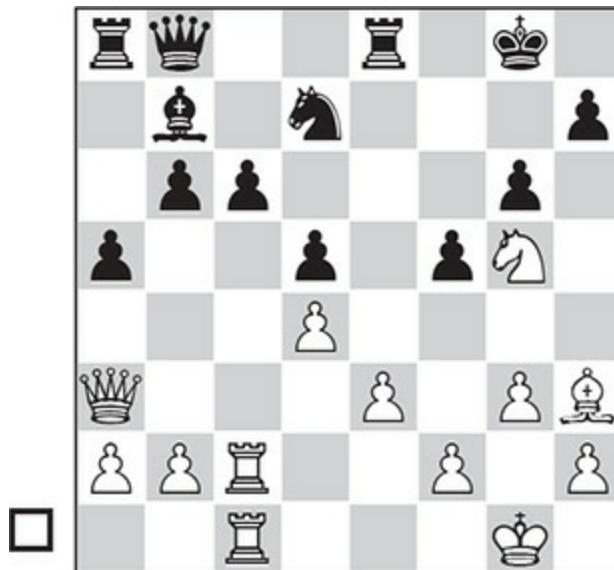
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2722

Cristhian Cruz

2529

Spain tt 2013 (7)



White has achieved a positional advantage out of the opening. Although Black has many weaknesses, it is not so easy to break his position with 'normal' moves. White could, of course, maneuver a bit to create new weaknesses, open a new battlefield, or make some useful piece trades. However, Vachier-Lagrave comes up with a different, more enterprising solution.

20. ♜ xc6!?

A more positional continuation would have been, for instance, 20. ♜ g2 ♜ d8 21. ♜ h3 ♜ c8 22. ♜ f4, with a clear advantage for White, as well.

20... ♜xc6 21. ♕xc6

The point of this positional sacrifice is to destroy the pawn chain c6/d5 and open up the position, so that he could more easily attack the weakened position of Black's king.

21... ♙d8

This and the next few moves are, more or less, forced.

22. ♔e6 ♜f6 23. ♜d6 ♔f8 24. ♔f4 ♜xd6 25. ♜xd6 ♜ab8 26. ♜xd5

White has won the d5-pawn, as expected, restoring the nominal material balance. His chances in the endgame are better thanks to his superior piece placement and the long-term potential of his connected central pawns.

26... ♜ec8?!

Black ambitiously looks for counterplay along the c-file but neglects his other pieces. It was better to re-centralize with 26... ♔e6 27. ♜d3 ♜ed8±.

27.g4!



An excellent reaction by MVL. The f5-pawn limits White's pieces, so it makes a lot of sense to get rid of it.

27... ♜c1+

27...fxg4 28. ♜xg4± would be good news for White's bishop and bad news for Black's knight.

28. ♜g2 g5

A risky continuation. Black clears the g6-square for his knight, but also

weakens his pawn structure and his king.

29.♘d3!

The correct knight jump, but White also had to calculate the follow-up.

29.♘h5?! allows sudden counterplay: 29...♝g6 30.gxf5? ♘h4+ 31.♔g3 ♗g1+-.

29...♝d1



30.♘f3!

This strong move is the point of White's play. The knight on d3 is indirectly protected and his piece coordination is perfect. Black remains with huge kingside weaknesses. 30.♘e5 looks reasonable, but after 30...f4!∞, the bishop on h3 is not a happy camper.

30...♝d2?!

Somewhat better was 30...♝g1, not letting White activate his bishop.

31.gxf5 h5 32.♝f1

The bishop is back in the game and White should be technically winning now.

32...♞c8 33.♘e5!?

Vachier-Lagrave goes about the conversion phase in an aesthetic, if slightly inaccurate way. A more straightforward way to do it was 33.e4 g4+ 34.♔e3+- . The knight on d3 holds everything together and White can just roll his passed pawn trio down the board.

33... ♜cc2 34. ♛e4 ♜xf2 35. ♜c4



Black obtains some play with his rooks on the second rank, but just by glancing at the cluster of white pieces in the center, you have to appreciate MVL's sense for piece coordination!

35... ♜g7 36. ♜d6 g4 37. ♜xb6 ♜xb2 38. ♜c6

Black's main problem is that he is virtually down a piece because his knight has no good squares. This is a theme that we saw in earlier sections of this chapter.

38... ♜xh2?!

With this move, Black clears the path for his kingside pawns, but, at the same time, allows White to happily push his passed pawn forward. The most stubborn defense was 38... ♜b8, but you will rarely see young and ambitious players make such 'passive' moves!

39.f6+ ♔h6 40. ♜c8



White is winning now. His pieces are too well-centralized for Black to have sufficient counterplay with his g-pawn.

40... ♜h7 41. ♜h8 ♜hf2 42. ♜g8 ♜xf6 43. ♜xh7+ ♛g5 44. ♜f7 ♜h6 45. ♜g7+ ♛f6

45... ♛h4 46.d5 ♛g3 47. ♜g6!+-.

46. ♜g8 ♜b7?

Loses on the spot, but Cruz has been fighting an uphill battle for quite some time anyway. 46... ♛e7 prolonged the game a bit.

47. ♜xh5! 1-0

Superior harmony of pieces

One of the most pleasing things in a chess game is when your pieces achieve harmony and it seems like you control the whole board. In such cases, the value of your army is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. All your pieces are united together as one force and it is almost impossible for your opponent to stop them, even if he has a nominal material advantage. Beautiful combinations in chess are often just a natural conclusion to a harmonious placement of pieces.

Naturally, the stronger your opponent, the more difficult it is to achieve such harmony, because he will usually do everything to throw a spanner in the works. You need to show resourcefulness and, quite often, a non-materialistic approach to achieve the desired goal. Some factors that increase the harmony

of your pieces to keep in mind are ‘geometric’ connection between the pieces, strong outposts for knights and bishops, clear targets in the opponent’s position, and, last but not least – a safe king.

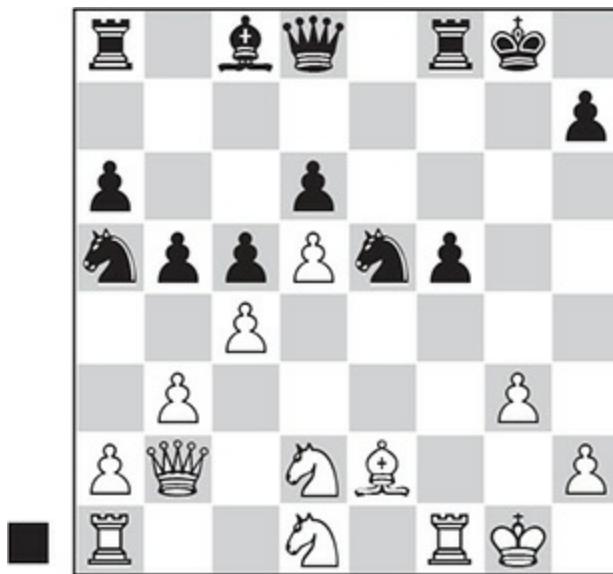
Tigran Petrosian, the 9th World Champion, was famous for the ability to arrange his pieces harmoniously and conduct the battle in a similar fashion. I would recommend that players who often find their pieces scattered around the board and are susceptible to tactical shots study Petrosian’s games. Here is one classic example.

Game 32

Tigran Petrosian

Boris Spassky

Moscow Wch m 1966 (10)



This is the well-known 10th game from the 1966 World Championship match. Spassky was down a point and looked for a way to even the score with black. His opening choice (the King’s Indian), as well as his next move, are in accordance with the strategy to imbalance the game against an extremely solid opponent (we will talk more about psychology of non-materialism in Chapter 5).

19...f4?!

Objectively speaking, though, such aggression is premature (we have seen

this in the ‘Limited mobility and lag in development’ section). Black should have developed his queenside pieces before trying to complicate the game. Understandably, he felt that this was the right moment to do it because White’s piece coordination is not ideal either.

However, a soberer continuation was 19... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



analysis diagram

and, while it is true that ...f5-f4 is no longer possible, Black is quite solid. The poorly placed knight on a5 can eventually be re-routed via b7-d8-f7.

20.gxf4?!

Mikhail Tal believed that Petrosian played this weaker move on purpose, considering Spassky’s aggressive mood, to lure him into the risky game continuation. It is not too difficult to see that 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 21. gxf4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}df2\pm$ was simpler and stronger, and if any king is weak – it is the black king.

20... $\mathbb{Q}h3?$

This is the continuation that Spassky has been lured into. The alternative 20... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$ was probably not enough for Spassky – he looked for something sharper.

21. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$



This strong exchange sacrifice is the idea that Petrosian had prepared in advance. From the strategic point of view, this game bears a striking resemblance to Kortchnoi-Nijboer. There, too, the King's Indian Defense was played, Black over-extended with his pawns on the kingside, and White sacrificed the exchange on f1 for Black's light-squared bishop!

21...♝xf1?!

Realizing that the alternative leads to a position with only two possible results (Black winning not being one of them), Spassky makes another risky decision. After 21...♜xf4 22.♜xf4 ♛g5+ 23.♜g4! ♛xg4 24.♛xg4 ♜xg4 25.♜xg4 ♛xg4+ 26.♚h1 ♜d4 27.♜g1+ ♚h8 28.♜xd4+ cxd4 29.♝e4, White is in the driver's seat in the endgame.

22.♜xf1

The crucial problem for Black is that his strong centralized knight has to leave its post and open up the a1-h8 diagonal for White's queen, leaving his king defenseless in the way of the hurricane. Black's problems are exacerbated by the misplaced knight on a5 as well. As Mikhail Tal noted: 'While the absence of the a5-knight has not been felt in the attack, it will be sorely missed in defense.'

22...♝g6 23.♛g4!

This is the best way to continue the attack. 23.♛g4?! runs into 23...h5!⇒.

23...♜xf4?

This allows White to strike at Black's king with full force. Black had to

neutralize the pressure on the a1-h8 diagonal with 23... $\mathbb{Q}f6$. After 24. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 26. f5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4$, White would have a superior endgame, which was obviously not something Spassky was up for in this game.



24. $\mathbb{Q}xf4!$

The second exchange sacrifice in the game allows Petrosian to achieve perfect piece harmony in the attack.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

Spassky has been avoiding slightly worse endgames along the way, so he is at least consistent in keeping the position complex, hoping for some ‘unforced error’ by Petrosian. But it was not to be – Petrosian conducts the rest of the game with authority.

26. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$

White’s domination begins.

26... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}g5+$

White also wins by force after 27... $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$.

28. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}aa7$

This allows a pretty final combination.

29. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$



30. ♜h8+! 1-0

Deserving the applause of the spectators in the playing hall. When your piece coordination is picture-perfect, as it was for Petrosian in this game, nice tactics based on geometric motifs are not a coincidence, but inevitability!

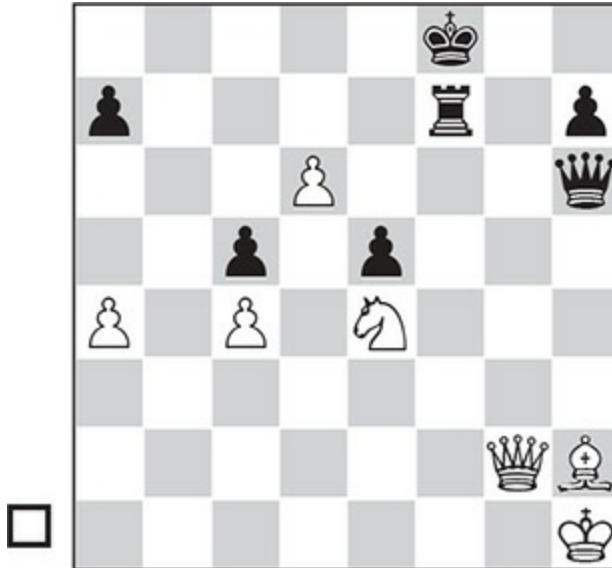
Interestingly enough, this was not Petrosian's first time to finish a game with this combination!

Game 33

Tigran Petrosian

Vladimir Simagin

Moscow playoff m 1956 (5)



He won the title of Moscow 1956 champion with the same final combination:

43. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$!

The ‘sleeping’ bishop is an integral part of the combination. It would have been premature to play 45. $\mathbb{Q}h8+?$ immediately, due to 45... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+=.$

45... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$



46. $\mathbb{Q}h8+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ 1-0

The next game serves as a good exercise in non-materialistic thinking. If you

already have not done it so far, you may want to cover the text below the diagram and try to solve it as an exercise, like those in the test section of the book.

Game 34

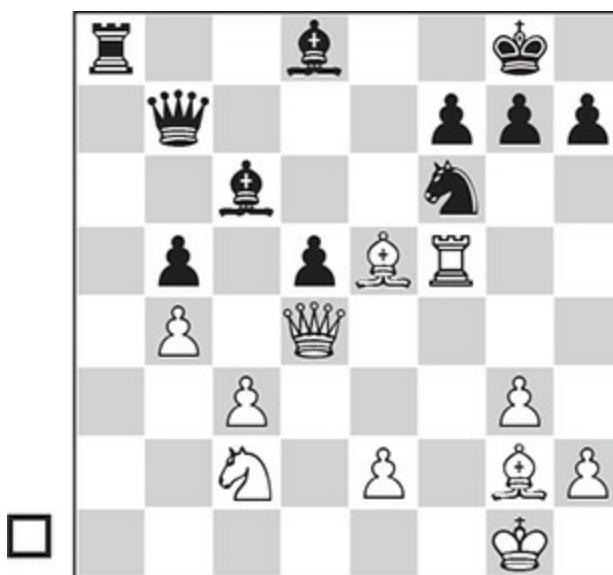
Vladimir Malakhov

2670

Alexander Moiseenko

2665

Russia 2005



White has more active pieces in this static pawn structure, but he has not yet achieved an ideal piece set-up that would allow him to put definite pressure on Black's position. Furthermore, Black is threatening to pin the queen with 21... $\mathbb{Q}b6$, and the first order of business is to find the best way to deal with this threat. Some of the 'conditioned reflexes' are to remove the queen or the king from the diagonal, or to cover the diagonal with 21.e3. However, I hope that you also included non-materialistic ideas in your candidate-moves list.

Malakhov's solution was

21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6!!$

This unexpected sacrifice is the only way to maintain White's positional pressure. Other, 'normal' moves either disturb White's piece coordination or

help Black to improve his own:

- A) 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $f6=;$
- B) 21. $e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $h6=;$
- C) 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}a2\leftarrow.$

21... $\mathbb{Q}b6?!$

Black had a choice between two material-winning options. Out of respect for the queen's power, he chose this one. I imagine that, if given the same choice, most people would do the same. Capturing the opponent's queen is something that does not happen every day, and it somehow feels good even if it leads to a suspicious position.

However, Black would have had better defensive chances if he had played 21... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ instead. Now, naturally, White sacrifices the exchange with 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\uparrow$,



analysis diagram

achieving excellent control over the dark squares. Black has a passive position with a terrible light-squared bishop, multiple pawn weaknesses and an exposed king. Nonetheless, White is not without weaknesses either and he does not have enough pieces to conduct a direct attack on Black's king. So, objectively speaking, White position is much easier to play, but Black should hold with precise defense: 23... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ (23... $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$)

24. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}b6+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f4\pm$.
22. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4\pm$



White has just two pieces and a pawn for the queen, but just look at the harmony of his pieces. Combined (especially once the knight gets to e3), they exert enormous concentrated pressure on Black's position. Meanwhile, Black's only active piece, the rook, can do very little on its own. Let us see how the game continued to get a better idea of what I am talking about here.

23...h6

Stops 24. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$, but creates an easy target for White. The alternatives are not much better, though:

A) 23... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a1+$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 26. $h4!+-$; or

B) 23... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$, and if 25... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$, White obtains a winning attack with 26. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f8!$.

24. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $f6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2?$

In principle, Black should sacrifice his rook for the powerful bishop, but he should have taken the e2-pawn first: 26... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}a8!$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$, and here Black's defensive chances are better because White's king is more exposed to the queen's checks than in the game.

None of this is simple and straightforward to understand in an actual game, of course.

27. ♜ f5 ♕ xd4 28. ♜ xd4+–

Now White is technically winning. Black has no counterplay whatsoever.

28... ♔ e7 29. ♜ f2 ♜ b7 30. ♜ h3!

The last white piece enters the game.

30... ♔ c7 31. ♜ e6+ ♔ f8

Here, Malakhov found a nice tactical way to finish the game:

32. ♜ g6! ♔ h7

32... ♔ xc3 33. ♜ f5!+–, with checkmate to follow.

33. ♜ g8+ ♔ e7 34. ♜ g7+! ♜ xg7 35. ♜ f5+ ♔ xe6 36. ♜ xg7+ ♔ e5 37. ♜ e3 ♜ c8

38. ♜ h5 d4+ 39. cxd4+ ♔ d5 40. ♜ xf6+ ♔ c4 41. d5 1-0

Conclusion

- Individual assessments of materially imbalanced positions can differ sharply, due to both subjective and objective differences between the way chess players perceive non-material factors.
- Some of the most important factors that influence the fluctuations in the value of pieces throughout the game are piece positioning and centralization, piece mobility, development, coordination with other pieces, and local significance and harmony.
- To influence some of these factors to your benefit, it may be necessary to sacrifice material.
- It is a mistake to think that misplacing a piece is temporary and can be fixed soon. Sometimes your opponent does not give you that chance!
- When you notice a misplaced piece or a lack of coordination among your opponent's pieces, it is principled to look for a quick and direct way to take advantage of that, even if it implies sacrifices.
- It is usually not a good idea to begin active operations if you are not sufficiently developed and mobilized, and your opponent is.
- When your pieces are in harmony, their total value is greater than the sum of their parts.
- Combinations are usually just a natural extension of a harmonious piece placement.
- Some factors that increase the harmony of your pieces are ‘geometric’

connection between the pieces, strong outposts for knights and bishops, clear targets in the opponent's position and king safety.

Test exercises – introduction

In the ‘Test exercises’ sections, you will get a chance to test your skills in finding non-materialistic solutions in critical moments of the game. Most exercises will be related to the material discussed in the preceding chapter, which should be helpful when you attempt to solve them. Exercises are approximately ordered by ascending level of difficulty, so you can expect the first few to be easier than the last few.

The goal of the majority of exercises is not only to find the ‘right’ solution, as in typical tactical puzzles, but also to exercise your evaluation skills in positions with material imbalances. Therefore, I strongly recommend that you do not content yourself only with finding the correct sacrificial idea (which can, at times, be a fairly obvious two-three move sequence) and attaching a casual ‘with compensation’ evaluation to it.

To get the most out of these exercises, I rather encourage you to explore your ideas in depth, try to anticipate the opponent’s defenses, calculate your follow-up, and try to come up with a more accurate evaluation of the arising positions. This may be difficult at times, but solving progressively more challenging exercises should actually be the way to improve, shouldn’t it?

There will be five such sections after every chapter in the book, starting from Chapter 2. Each section will contain 10 test exercises. You may find them more or less challenging, depending on your level, but overall, I would say that they are on the difficult side. I strongly believe that reading the material from the corresponding chapters will help you to solve them successfully.

At the end of the book, you will find the solutions to the exercises. I have tried to make them as instructive as possible by providing verbal explanations where necessary. In some cases, I have also included longer variations or game fragments as a part of the solution. These are for illustrative purposes

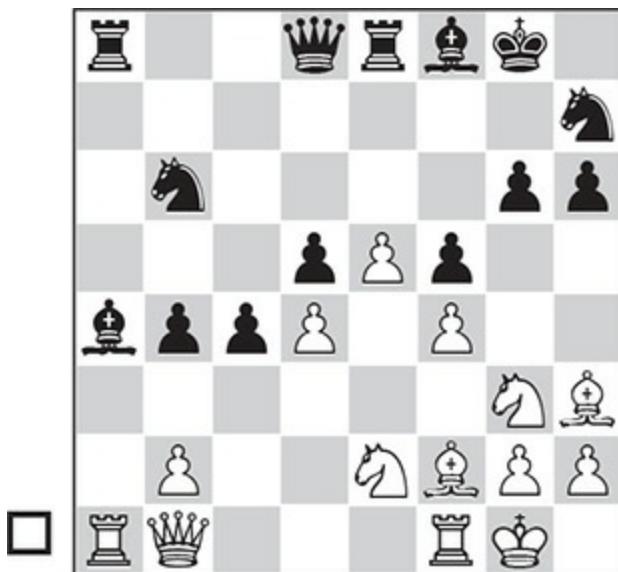
and do not imply that you haven't solved the exercise if your solution is only 4 moves deep and the one in the book has 12 moves. As long as you have found the correct idea and did not miss an important resource for yourself or your opponent, you can consider your solution to be correct.

Good luck solving!

CHAPTER 2

Test exercises

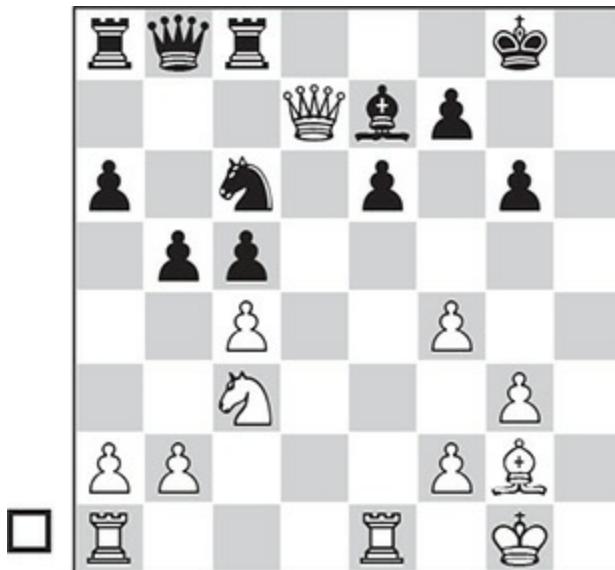
Exercise 1



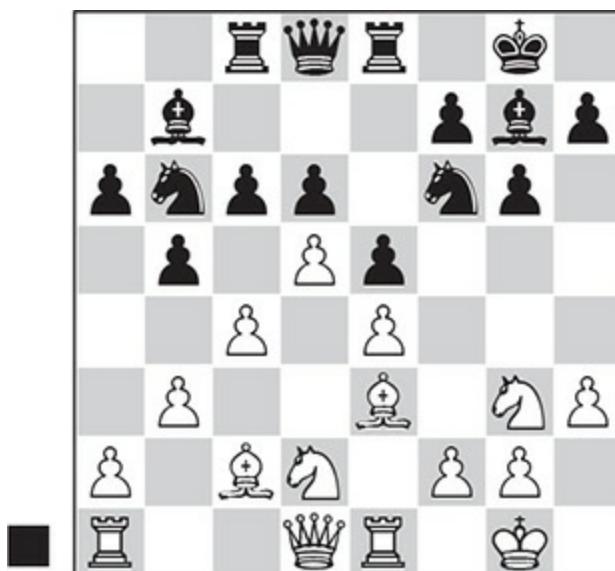
Exercise 2



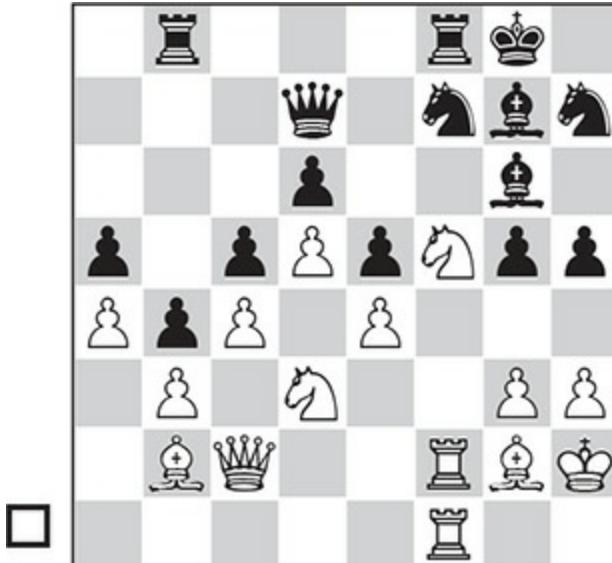
Exercise 3



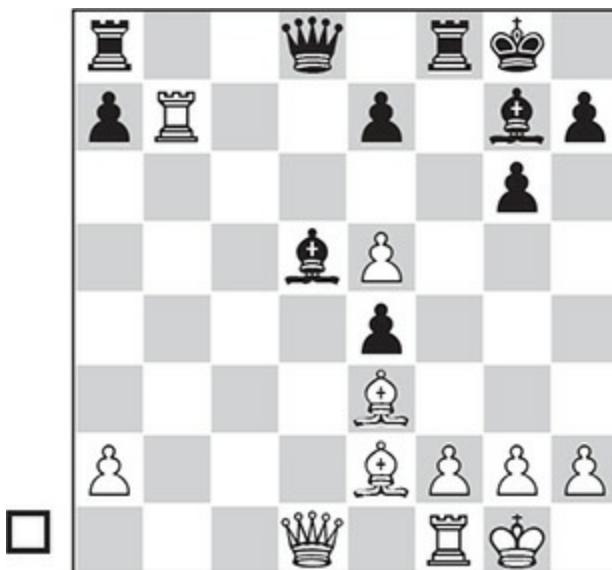
Exercise 4



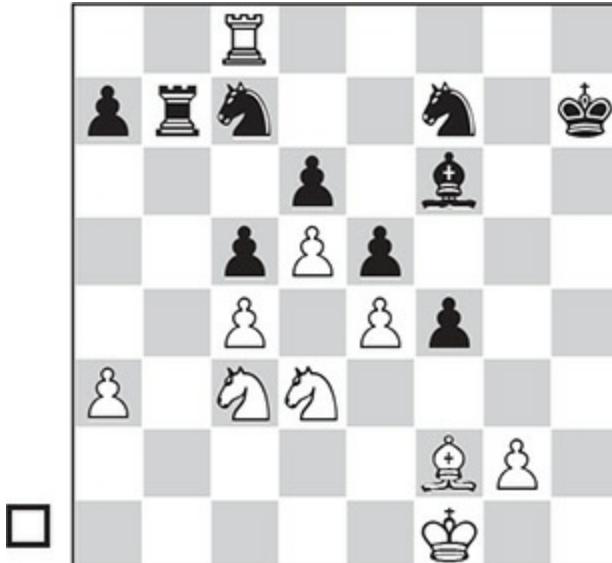
Exercise 5



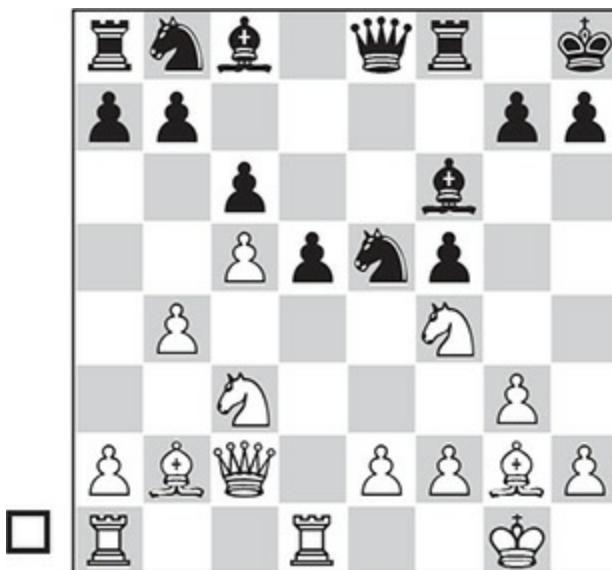
Exercise 6



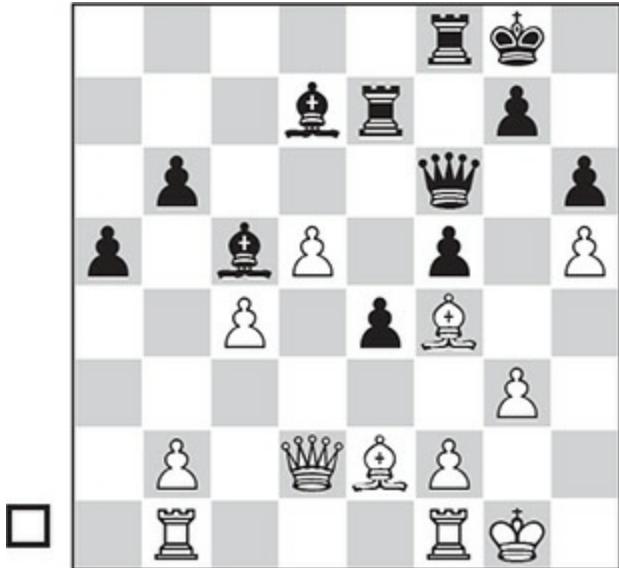
Exercise 7



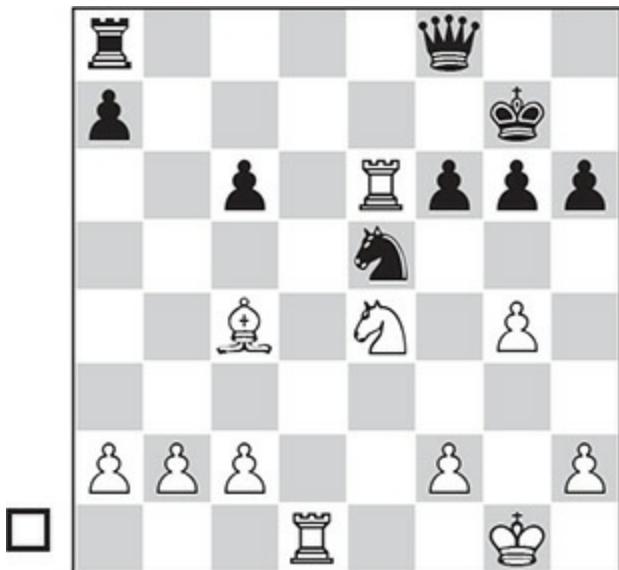
Exercise 8



Exercise 9



Exercise 10



CHAPTER 3

Time beats material

When we talk about time in chess, we can mean two things. The first one is, of course, your available thinking time, measured by the chess clock. The second one is time in terms of chess moves.

While the subject of managing thinking time is an interesting one, that is not the topic of this chapter or this book. Here, we are interested in managing time by making the most efficient moves; moves that do not give our opponent enough time to carry out his ideas and that allow us to direct the game in a desired way. To clarify the meaning of time in a chess game, let us take a close look at the following position.

Game 35

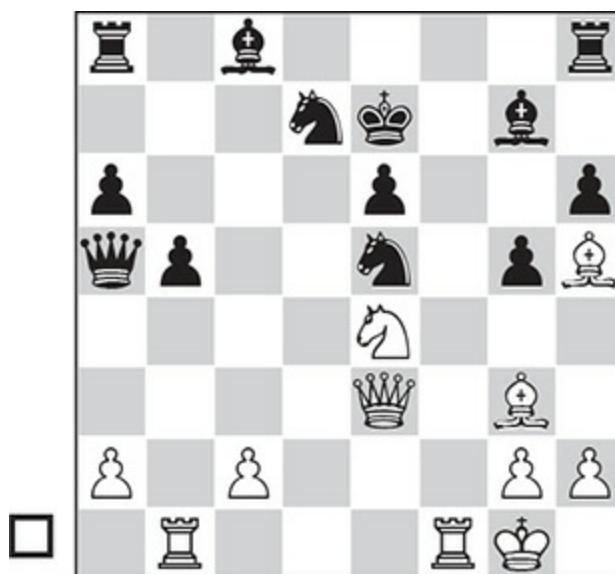
Dante Beukes

2155

Gerrard Mphungu

2091

Batumi ol 2018 (10)



This position arose from the sharp ‘Poisoned Pawn’ Variation of the Najdorf Sicilian. Earlier, White correctly sacrificed a piece to drag Black’s king out in the open. In addition to having to defend his exposed king, Black also lags in development (remember Chapter 2!), which makes his defense that much more difficult.

However, let us talk about the concept of time now. Time is measured in moves. If Black were given an extra move here, his position would be simply winning. He would either extinguish White’s attack by trading queens with ... ♕a5-b6, complete his development with ... ♜c8-b7, or protect his king with ... ♜h8-f8. This means that White has to act quickly and decisively to keep and, eventually, materialize his strong initiative. With this in mind, let us see how White continued.

21. ♔h1?

This move clearly does not respond to the needs of the position. White is supposed to aggressively attack his opponent’s king, not defend his own! Why did White play this inadequate move? It is simple. Black’s last move was 20...b5 (threatening 21... ♕b6) and White acted on a conditioned reflex to preserve his strongest attacking piece from exchange. However, at the same time he failed to realize that playing a slow move like 21. ♔h1 is equivalent to giving your opponent a free move.

In sharp, tactical positions, the first thing one must calculate are checks and captures. These are the most forcing moves and, from the time point of view, the most important ones. Here, White had a simple way to obtain an advantage with checks and captures:

A) 21. ♜xe5!? ♜xe5 22. ♜c5+ ♔d8 23. ♜d6+ ♜d7 (23... ♜d7 is too passive and loses after 24. ♜bd1 ♔c7 25. ♜xe6) 24. ♜c5. In this forced variation, only this move is not a capture or a check, yet it is just as forcing as it contains several material-winning threats. So, Black’s next move is forced, too: 24... ♜c8, and now 25. ♜xd7 ♜xd7 26. ♜c6+ ♜b8 27. ♜xd7±. White gets his piece back by simple means, keeping very good attacking chances as Black’s pieces remain uncoordinated;

B) However, an even stronger attacking move exists in this position: 21. ♜bd1!. From the previous chapter, you might remember the strategy of

maximizing the value of your pieces by concentrating them in an important area of the board. Here, too, White brings another heavy weapon to the attack. With the d- and f-files under control, Black's king is stuck on e7. Black can try different defenses, but none of them work:

B1) An attempt to trade the queens with 21... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ ends ingloriously for Black after 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$;

B2) 21... $\mathbb{Q}b7$



analysis diagram

is nicely met by a thematic double rook sacrifice: 22. $\mathbb{Q}f7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ and, despite a huge material advantage, Black king is defenseless: 24... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (24... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb7\#\#$) 25. $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d7\#$;

B3) Black cannot escape with his king via 21... $\mathbb{Q}d8$, because of 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ and, once again, 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ is the move that destroys Black's position: 23... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe5\#\#$;

B4) 21... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ is the relatively best defense, but it is still refuted by 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ (22... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf8\#\#$) 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$, and now White has to find a quiet move: 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$



analysis diagram

with the deadly threat of 25. ♜c5. Black has a tempo and an extra rook to defend, but he cannot resist White's powerful piece attack: 24... ♛f5 (24... ♛b7 25. ♜c5+–) 25. ♜c5 ♛xc5 (25... ♛xc5 26. ♜xe6!, with checkmate) 26. ♜xc5+ ♛c7 27. ♜d6+ ♛b7 28. ♜f3+–.

21... ♛b6

White lost a crucial tempo in the attack and, naturally, Black uses this tempo for the defense.

22. ♜a3+ ♛d8

Black's king will feel much safer on the queenside than on e7.

23. ♜d6??

A tactical oversight. White should have maximized his piece coordination, again with 23. ♜bd1, and after 23... ♛b7 24. ♜f6 ♛xf6 25. ♜xf6, he would have enough initiative to keep the balance.

23...b4! 24. ♜f7+ ♛xf7 25. ♜xb4 ♜f8!



Excellent defense by Black. White's attack grinds to a halt.

26. ♜xb6 ♕xa3 27. ♜xf7 e5—+

And Black was up a full piece, which he somehow failed to convert to a full point: ½-½ (45).

White's opening approach was very direct and time-oriented: quick development, two pawn sacrifices to obtain the initiative and a piece sacrifice to expose Black's king. All of this implies that once the opening has finished, White was obliged to conduct the attack in the 'fast and furious' mode. In such double-edged positions, the pace of events on the board accelerates and the importance of time increases immensely. However, with the time-wasting 21. ♛h1?, White squandered his most valuable resource and Black got away, keeping his extra material.

In this game, we saw how precious a single move can be. To be more exact, the smallest unit of time in chess is called a 'tempo'. It is not the full chess move (as in both white and black moves), but rather half a move.

The fight in the opening phase often revolves exactly around this extra tempo, or, what is commonly known as 'the first-move advantage'. White moves first, so he has an advantage of half a move over Black. In principle, he should try to create a positional or material advantage using this slight edge in time. Black, on the other hand, should try to neutralize White's advantage in time with precise replies and gradually equalize. Recently, with

the emergence of super-strong chess engines and the increase in computing power, it has become much easier for Black to achieve this. Of course, what I am talking about here is the classical, principled approach to openings. There are other opening philosophies for both White and Black that do not view time as such an important factor.

Let us briefly return to our discussion about a beginner's understanding of material and non-material aspects of chess. I have noticed that, to a large degree, beginners don't fully understand the concept of time in chess. They will often mishandle their initiative by being too late with the strongest move. When confronted about it, you can often hear them say: 'But coach, I played it on the next move!', not really appreciating the importance of that one-move difference in chess.

The thing about a time advantage compared to material and positional advantages is that it is the most fragile type of advantage. If mishandled, it can evaporate in one move. Material and positional advantages are more stable and durable and, as such, instinctively preferred by most players. However, an advantage in time, also known as the 'initiative', can be the most powerful of all types of advantages. In this chapter, we will see examples of how strong players use this advantage to its maximum effect, sometimes creating masterpieces that have been forever stored as a part of chess history. It is well worth studying such games to develop your own skill in this important area.

Initiative

I decided to divide the material in this chapter into two parts: initiative and attack. Since these two terms are closely related, I think that some clarification is in order. Firstly, the similarities are obvious: both initiative and attack are based on one player having an advantage in time to impose his threats and ideas on his opponent. Secondly, the key difference between initiative and attack is in the goals one tries to achieve. When you attack, your primary goal is to checkmate the opponent's king, while material or positional gains are secondary. When you have the initiative, the main goal is to dictate the tempo of the game and force the opponent into doing something

he normally would not do. Having the initiative does not necessarily mean attacking the king; it can take the form of an opening initiative, a positional initiative, an initiative in the endgame, and so on. Of course, your initiative will not last forever, so you are eventually expecting something in return; be it an extra pawn, a positional achievement, or the possibility of a mating attack.

I believe that the following two games are proper examples of what initiative is and, just as importantly, how to handle it successfully.

Game 36

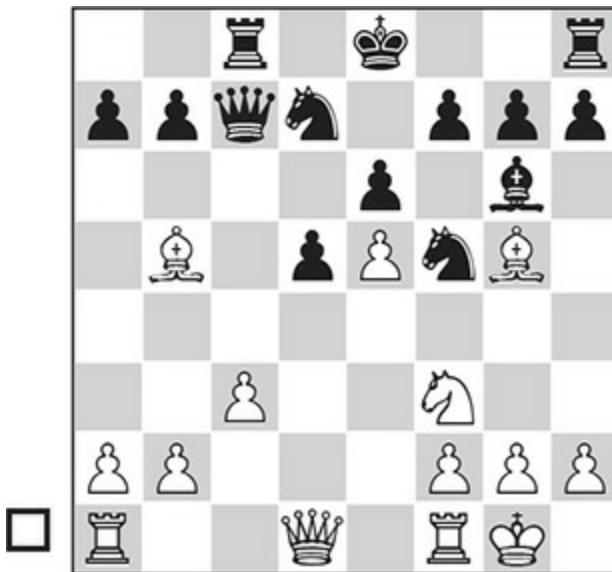
Judit Polgar

2686

Viorel Iordachescu

2626

Aix-les-Bains Ech 2011 (10)



The game began as the Caro-Kann Defense and has developed quietly so far. White's bishops are placed very actively, while Black boasts a rock-solid pawn structure. If he got one move to castle, he would equalize the game. Ah, but that one tempo will change the course of the game completely! In the hands of a strong attacking player, as Judit Polgar was, a time advantage is a

very strong weapon.

15.c4!

Opening the position is the best way to use her development advantage.

Something positional such as 15.♘d4?! a6 16.♘xf5 ♗xf5= poses Black no problems at all.

15...a6

Of course, Black should not open the d-file: 15...dxc4?? 16.♖c1+–.

The exchange on d7 looks forced now, but Judit finds a better way to fight for the initiative:

16.cxd5!!

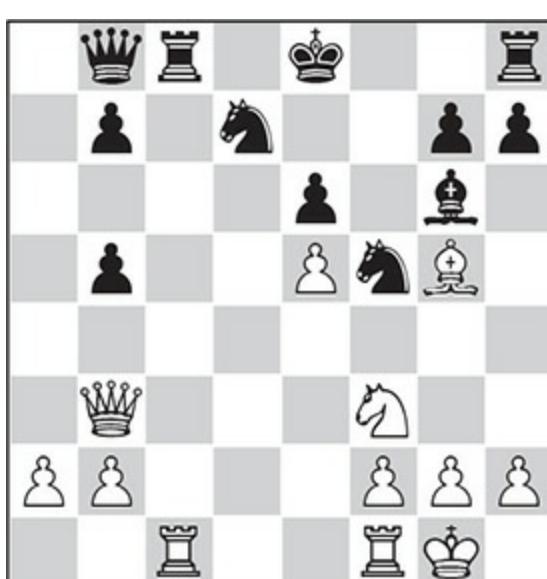
Here is what she said about her decision: ‘I was very much in the mood for sacrificing. I had won my previous 3 games. I had the self-confidence to do so. After calculating many lines, I decided to go for the complications.’

As we can see, the psychological momentum was also on her side. We will talk about psychological aspects of non-materialism in more detail in Chapter 5. White’s initiative after 16.♗xd7+ would be short-lived: 16...♚xd7 17.cxd5 exd5 18.♗b3 0-0 19.♖ad1 ♕c5=.

16...axb5 17.♖c1

Now comes a series of ‘tempo moves’; in other words, threats that force the game in the direction White prefers. Such moves are the basic fuel for the initiative.

17...♗b8 18.dxe6 fxe6 19.♗b3



For the sacrificed piece, White has obtained a dangerous initiative against the uncastled king and uncoordinated black pieces. According to Judit, Black had a difficult choice between five defensive options in this critical position. The difficulty from White's perspective is that she had to calculate many of these variations before playing her 16th move. This takes not only a sharp attacking instinct, but also a strong visualization ability – a high level of chess mastery, indeed.

19... ♜f8? '

'... in a practical game with lots of tension, one of the most difficult things is to decide what is the best defense out of the many possibilities.' (Polgar)
This move looks safe, but it makes the already poor coordination of Black's pieces even worse. In addition, it does nothing to challenge White's initiative. The first thing that White had to check was whether Black could castle:

A) 19...0-0? – it is important that this does not work, since 20. ♜xe6+ ♜f7 21. ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 22. ♜c1 ♜b8 23. ♜b3!+–, followed by e5-e6 wins material;

B) 19... ♜f7 is another passive defense, allowing White to expand her initiative with 20. ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 21. ♜c1 ♜b8 22.g4, and here Black would be forced to part with his material advantage after 22...0-0 (since 22... ♜e7? 23. ♜b4 ♜d5 runs into 24. ♜d6!±



analysis diagram

and White dominates. Her bishop on g5 does a fantastic job in many of these lines, which becomes particularly obvious in the event of 24... $\mathbb{B}xd6??$

25. $\mathbb{R}c8\#$) 23. $\mathbb{B}xb5!$ (an important intermezzo) 23... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 24. $gxf5$ $\mathbb{R}xf5$

25. $\mathbb{B}b3\pm$, with an extra pawn for White;

According to Judit, Black had two defensive options to stay in the game:

C) 19... $\mathbb{R}c4!?$ (giving up a pawn to trade a strong white rook with a tempo; this is far from an obvious choice) 20. $\mathbb{R}xc4$ (20. $\mathbb{B}xb5$ does not do the trick. Black is fine after 20... $\mathbb{R}xc1$ 21. $\mathbb{R}xc1$ $h6!$ 22. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{B}c7=$) 20... $bxcc4$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 22. $g4$ 0-0!. White is somehow down a tempo compared to the 19... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ line, which makes the position balanced after 23. $gxf5$ $\mathbb{B}xe5=$; and

D) 19... $\mathbb{Q}f7$, which she considered to be Black's best answer. It has the advantage of connecting Black's rooks, so it indeed looks like the most natural move in the position. 20. $\mathbb{B}xb5$ $\mathbb{R}c6!.$ Again, not an easy move to foresee. Remember Kortchnoi's maxim: extra pawns are there to be given up for something else – in this case, to slow down the opponent's initiative. After 21. $\mathbb{R}xc6$ $bxcc6$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xc6$ $\mathbb{B}xe5$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xe5+$ $\mathbb{B}xe5$, Black manages to trade off several white attacking pieces and his king looks pretty safe. So it makes sense for White to force a draw with 24. $g4$ $\mathbb{B}d4$ 25. $\mathbb{B}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{B}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$.

20. $\mathbb{B}xb5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{R}xc8$ $\mathbb{B}xc8$ 22. $\mathbb{R}c1$ $\mathbb{B}b8$

Black would not find safety in the endgame either: 22... $\mathbb{B}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xd7+$ $\mathbb{B}xd7$ 24. $\mathbb{R}c7!$, and the d7-knight falls due to 24... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{R}c8++-$.

23. $g4$

White's initiative grows move by move.

23... $\mathbb{Q}h6$

In case of the other knight retreat 23... $\mathbb{B}e7$, White continues 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 25. $\mathbb{B}b6!$, threatening the deadly 26. $\mathbb{R}c7+$. If 25... $\mathbb{B}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{B}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27. $\mathbb{B}d4!$, Black falls under a strong attack.

24. $\mathbb{B}b4!$

Polgar finds a nice way to maximize the attacking potential of her pieces.

$\mathbb{B}b4-e7+$ followed by $\mathbb{R}c1-c7$ is a deadly threat.

24... $\mathbb{Q}g8$



Just a simple glance at the position is enough to conclude that White has managed to capitalize on her piece sacrifice on move 16. Black is completely tied down on the kingside and White has a choice of promising ways to prolong the initiative.

25. ♔xh6!?

Judit wanted to get her queen to e7, even at the cost of trading her strong dark-squared bishop. 25. ♕e7? immediately would have been a hasty decision because of 25... ♜f7!.

I should add that White had a strong alternative in 25. ♖d4!?, intending to meet 25... ♜f7 with 26. ♖c6!, and it is either the queen or the smothered mate on e7!

25...gxh6 26. ♕e7 ♕e8

There was no other way to defend against 27. ♖c7.

27. ♗xb7 ♗a4 28. b4 ♗e8 29. ♕e7!

Reintroducing the threat of ♖c1-c7. Because of Black's last move, the defense with ... ♗a4-e8 is not possible.

29... ♕d7

If Black stops 30. ♖c7 with 29... ♗c6, White wins beautifully like this:

30. ♖d4 ♗d5 31. ♗b5!! ♗xb5 32. ♖c8, and checkmate cannot be stopped.

30. ♖c7!



A nice transformation of advantages. Polgar's initiative will not abate in the endgame! Her connected passed pawns are worth at least a piece, while Black plays virtually without the rook.

30... ♕xe7 31. ♖xe7 ♜c6 32. ♘d4 ♜d5 33. b5 ♜g6 34. ♖c7 ♜xe5 35. f4!?

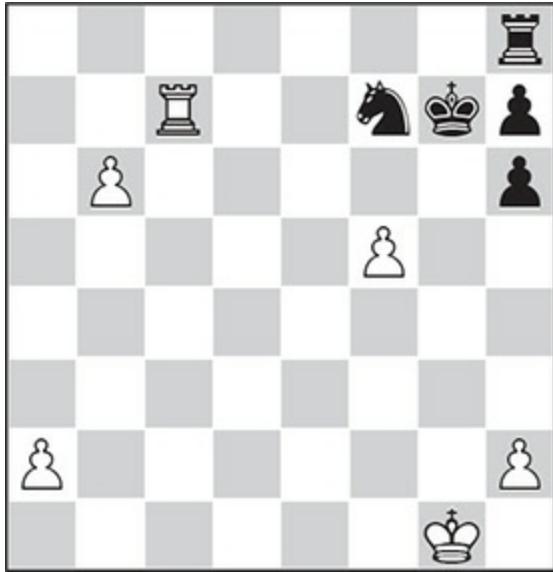
Polgar's comment here is insightful: '35.b6 was winning and I know that most of the people would find it more practical, but I wanted to keep my initiative.'

Indeed, a more 'technical' way to win was 35.b6 ♘f7 36. ♖c8+ (36.b7? ♛g7 ♜g7) 36... ♜g7 37. ♜xe6+! (the key) 37... ♜f6 38. ♖xh8 ♜xh8 39. ♘d8 ♜f7 40.b7 ♜xb7 41. ♜xb7.

35... ♘f7 36. f5!

This was Judit's point.

36... exf5 37. ♜xf5 ♜e6 38. b6 ♜xf5 39. gx f5 ♛g7



Black rook is finally free, but it is too late for that. White's queenside pawns cannot be stopped.

40.b7 ♜b8 41.a4 ♜f6 42.a5 ♜d6 43.a6

And White obtained a winning position. Her initiative lasted for just over 25 moves!

43... ♜xf5 44.a7 ♜g8+ 45. ♜f2 ♜xb7 46. ♜xb7 ♜a8 47. ♜e3

The rook endgame is technically winning for White, which can be seen from the way Judit converted it.

**47... ♜e5 48. ♜xh7 ♜c8 49. ♜d3 ♜d5 50. ♜xh6 ♜c5 51. ♜a6 ♜a8 52.h4 ♜b5
53. ♜a1 ♜b6 54. ♜c4**

Black resigned.

Karpov's name does not come up often in discussions about the initiative and attack because most of his memorable games were positional masterpieces. However, the following game proves that the 12th World Champion was also very strong in handling the initiative in sharp positions.

Game 37

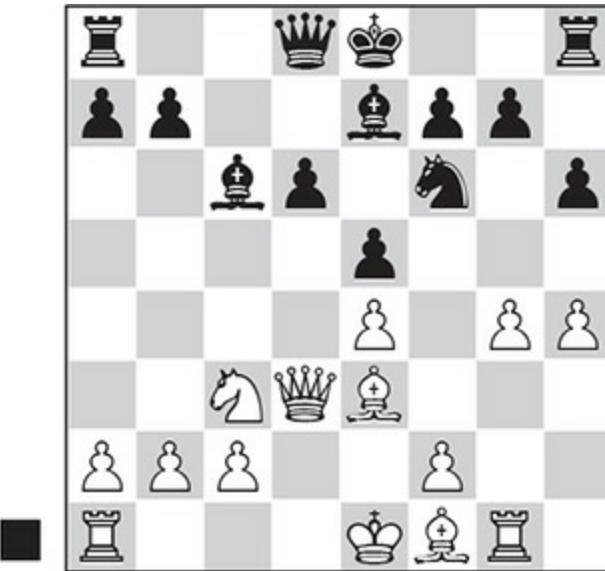
Anatoly Karpov

2710

Gyula Sax

2560

Linares 1983 (3)



The opening stage of the Keres Attack in the Sicilian Defense has reached its culmination. Black needs to make an important decision as to how to deal with White's thematic g4-g5 push. The Hungarian grandmaster Sax, true to his style, comes up with a tactical solution:

13... ♜a5?!

Attacking the e4-pawn and forcing White's next move. However, the more modest 13... ♜h7 would have been better. White can sacrifice a pawn for an initiative with 14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 ♜xg5 16.0-0-0, although Black seems to be solid enough here.

14.0-0-0 ♜xe4!? 15. ♜xe4 d5



This piece sacrifice was Black's idea on move 13. It has several benefits:

- 1) trying to take over the initiative by pushing White's pieces back;
- 2) taking the a2-pawn;
- 3) erasing the positional weaknesses on the d-file;
- 4) avoiding the unpleasant g4-g5 attack.

Karpov recognized the problem: 'How should White answer the opponent's sudden initiative?'

16. ♜b3!

Sometimes asking yourself the right question is half the solution. Karpov realizes that the materialistic approach would give Black exactly what he wants, and he sacrifices the piece back, intending to obtain the initiative himself! By keeping the material advantage with 16. ♜g3, White would allow Black to develop a strong initiative with 16...d4 17. ♜d2 ♜xa2 18.c4 ♜a4.

16...dxe4

Unlike Karpov, Sax has no choice but to accept the sacrifice.

17. ♜c4 ♜f8

This was Karpov's idea. After this forced move, Black's pieces become uncoordinated. Just as in Judit Polgar's game, it was important to make sure that Black cannot play 17...0-0, this time due to 18.g5 hxg5 19. ♜xg5 ♜xg5+ 20.hxg5 g6 21. ♜h6!, followed by ♜h1 with a winning attack.



With Black's king stuck in the center, how should White develop his initiative? Karpov goes for the sharpest continuation.

18. ♜d5!

Another non-materialistic decision. This time Karpov sacrifices a rook for Black's most important defensive piece – the light-squared bishop. No less importantly, he keeps his initiative burning by creating new threats. Another serious option was 18.g5!? hxg5 19.hxg5↑, with definite pressure on Black's position.

18... ♛xd5 19. ♜xd5

This bishop dominates on the light squares.

19... ♜d8

Karpov was not sure if this was the best defense for Black. He thought that Black might have had to neutralize the initiative with the queen trade: 19... ♕b4 20. ♜xb7 ♕xb3 21.axb3 ♜b8. However, in the variation 22. ♜c6+! ♜d8 23. ♜xa7 ♜b4, he missed a strong resource: 24.c4! ♜xb3 25. ♔c2 ♜b4 26.b3 ♔c7 27. ♜xe4±, and Black's rook gets trapped on b4!

20. ♜c4!

Prophylactic thinking was one of Karpov's trademark skills. He realized what Black's main defensive idea was and he made sure to prevent it. Material gains can wait – keeping the initiative is what matters.

20. ♜xb7?! is met by 20... ♜c5 21. ♜c6+ ♔e7 22. ♜b7+ ♔e6, and Black's king feels surprisingly safe on this square. White's initiative is enough just

for a perpetual check: 23. $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7=$.



20... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$

Black found a creative defense against the 21. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ threat. A much less obvious one was 20... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$, preparing ... $\mathbb{Q}a5-c7$. Black is quite stable on the dark squares. White still keeps some initiative after 22.g5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

21.c3 b5!

This intermezzo was the point.

22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

A wonderful understanding of non-materialism shines through Karpov's moves. Taking the free pawn with 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ seems like an automatic move (remember the 'conditioned reflexes'!), yet after 23... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, Black's rook would obtain the open b-file for counterplay.



23... ♜e7?

Just as in the previous game, the defender cannot sustain the continuous pressure and, in the critical moment, Sax does not find a defense that would keep the opponent's initiative in check.

A) Firstly, we have to take a look at the tactical possibility 23... ♜xc3+?!, which is refuted by 24. ♛b1! ♜xb2+ 25. ♛xb2 ♜a3+ 26. ♛xa3 ♜xd5 27. ♜xa7+-, and White should not have problems winning the two bishops vs rook endgame;

B) The right defense was 23... ♜c7. After 24.g5!, White holds the initiative on the whole board. Black remains in the game only with great precision: 24... ♜e7! (24...a6 25.gxh6 gxh6 26. ♜xe4++; 24...b4 25.c4↑) 25.gxh6 gxh6 26. ♜xh6 ♜g8↔, with drawing chances in the long run.

24. ♜c5!

Now White does not mind the exchange of dark-squared bishops. Once the e5-pawn falls, Black's king will become very exposed.

24... ♜xc5

Karpov suspected that, when playing 23... ♜e7, his opponent had missed that after 24... ♜c7, White has 25. ♜xe5+ ♜d7 26. ♜xd6 ♜xd6 27. ♜d1+-.

In addition, Black cannot defend the e5-pawn with 24...f6 because of 25. ♜c4!+-.

25. ♜xe5+ ♜d7 26. ♜xc5 ♜c7 27. ♜f5+



White has won some material back, but, most importantly, his initiative continues. He may not have a direct mating attack yet, but it is very unpleasant for Black to find the most precise defensive moves in such a position. At this point, he has another difficult choice to make.

27... ♜e7

The other option was 27... ♜c6 28. ♜xb5+ ♜d6 29. ♜b4+! ♜c5 30. ♜xe4 ♜c7 31. ♜f3 and here, to stay in the game, Black needs to find the only move: 31... ♜d7!, clearing the d8-square for his king. In the stressful conditions of a tournament game, this is a tall order.

28. ♜xe4+ ♜d7 29. ♜f5+ ♜e7 30. ♜e1!

Here is what Karpov said about this critical position: ‘After a long think, I managed to find the best way to keep the initiative in the likely event of Black’s king hiding on d8.’

The more ‘materialistic’ alternative 30. ♜xb5!? ♜d6 31. ♜e5+ ♜d8 32. ♜xg7± was good, too. In return for some attacking tempi, White would have gained a material advantage. Karpov’s non-materialistic approach was more principled, though; one should keep the momentum of the attack if possible.



30... ♜d6

It seems like Black's king has no choice but to hide on d8. However, a less obvious possibility existed: 30... ♜h8! 31. ♜xb5+ ♛f8±, tucking the king away on f8. Black's piece coordination is still very poor, but at least his king is fairly safe behind the pawn shield.

31. ♜c4+!

An important inclusion. 31. ♜xb5+?! would have allowed Black to defend with 31... ♜e6.

31... ♛d8 32. ♜xb5

White regains the nominal material balance, which is bad news for Black in this position, primarily because he has no more material to throw at White in his attempts to defend the poor king.

32...a6 33. ♜a4 g6 34. ♜f3 ♛c8?

Black tries to get his king to safety on b8, but White has that one pesky extra tempo that ruins his plans. Apparently, the only move that would keep the game going was 34... ♛c5, although I fail to see what Black's next move is. White can surely strengthen his position in some way, so there should be no doubt about the final outcome of the game.



35. ♜e7!!

As I noted in the previous chapter: when your pieces are in harmony and your opponent's pieces are not, tactical shots are inevitable.

35... ♜d1+

The point is 35... ♜xe7 36. ♜a8+ ♔c7 37. ♜a7+, and White wins the queen due to 37... ♔d8 38. ♜b8#.

36. ♔xd1 ♜xe7

After this move, White wins with a nice mating attack. In case of 36... ♜d8+, the simplest is 37. ♜d7!, with a completely winning queen endgame.

37. ♜a8+ ♔c7 38. ♜a7+ ♔d6 39. ♜b6+

Black resigned in view of 39... ♔e5 40. ♜d4+ ♔e6 41. ♜b3#. A splendid effort by Anatoly Karpov!

One thing that you might have noticed from these two games is that, from an analytical point of view, Black was not losing in either one. At several points in the game, the black players could have defended successfully, slowly extinguishing White's initiative (usually by returning some material).

However, defending against a strong initiative is obviously a difficult task, even for the strongest players in the world. The psychological pressure of defending makes it even more unpleasant, because your opponent basically tries to impose his will on you. The material balance often becomes less important in such cases. It takes a strong character and a lot of experience to

be able to defend such positions successfully.

Lessons on initiative

Sooner or later, every chess player comes in touch with chess classics. From some of them we learn how to put our pieces on good squares, from others how to attack, and so on. My first encounter with the games of Alexander Alekhine was an inspiring experience. I may have been 8 or 9 years old when I won a book with a collection of 100 best games by Alekhine in a weekend tournament. The kind of chess that Alekhine played (at least in that non-representative sample) was miraculous. A methodical initiative build-up, powerful attacking moves, sacrifices and mating finales – Alekhine instantly became my hero!

Here is one game that left a strong impression on me back in the day. It was far from a perfect game and these days I would not even put it in Alekhine's top 200 games, but somehow it was carved into my memory and shaped my early understanding of the initiative.

Game 38

Boris Verlinsky

Alexander Alekhine

St Petersburg 1909 (8)

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d4 exd4 6.♕xd4 ♕xd4 7.♘xd4 c5
8.♘e2 ♗d7 9.b3**



White repeats the move that Lasker used successfully against Tarrasch in their 1908 World Championship match. However, the 17-year-old Alekhine had studied that game more diligently and had an improvement prepared:

9...c4!?

An ambitious long-term positional pawn sacrifice. In return, Black gets more operating space for his bishops and pawn targets on the queenside. Alekhine strives for the initiative from the very beginning of the game. 9... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ was played in Lasker-Tarrasch, Düsseldorf & Munich Wch m/1 1908, 1-0 (55).

10.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}a4?$

At the early stage of his career, Alekhine was still rough around the edges. It is typical for a youthful spirit to initiate concrete play as soon as possible. However, this action is premature since he has not castled yet. 10...0-0-0 \mathbb{Q} should have been played first.

11.c3?

White shows too much materialism. If he had recognized that Black lags in development, he would have played 11. $\mathbb{Q}bc3!$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ (11... $\mathbb{Q}xc2??$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2+$) 12.0-0! (trading material for time) 12... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$, and it is White who has a strong initiative, not Black!

11...0-0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c2!?$

Another ambitious bishop move. Alekhine exploits the weak light squares in the opponent's camp, especially the central d3-square. However, it was more flexible to mobilize the rest of his forces: 12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c5$, with a

strong positional initiative.

13.f3 ♕c5

The second bishop gets into action, exploiting the weaknesses created by the previous move.

14.a4

Not a bad move. White prepares 15.♗a3 or 15.♗d4. The tactical point is that 14.♗d4 would have been met by 14...♝xd4! 15.cxd4 ♕xd4 16.♝b1 ♕xb1 17.♝xb1 ♜e7+.

14...♝f6 15.♗a3?!

15.♗d4 was a better try for White. Black would have kept the pressure with 15...♝d3=.

15...♝e3!



This is the image I remembered from the old book. The two black bishops completely paralyze White's forces.

16.♝f1

16.♗d4 ♜d3↑ looks nice for Black.

16...♜a7 17.a5?

White shows too much materialism again. As they say, 'he waters the flowers, while his house is on fire'. He should have used this tempo more wisely. The most obvious choice is 17.♗d4. Here, Black would have a wide choice:

A) Besides the straightforward 17... \mathbb{Q} xd4 18.cxd4 \mathbb{Q} xd4 19. \mathbb{B} e3 \mathbb{Q} b3 20. \mathbb{Q} c5 \mathbb{Q} d3 21. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{Q} hd8 22. \mathbb{Q} b4±, he also has two interesting sacrifices at his disposal:

B) Firstly, he could try to keep the initiative with 17... \mathbb{Q} xe4!? 18.fxe4 \mathbb{Q} xe4. White would have to find only moves to avoid material losses: 19. \mathbb{Q} g3 (19. \mathbb{Q} b2 \mathbb{Q} he8 20.0-0-0 c5+) 19... \mathbb{Q} xc3 20. \mathbb{Q} de2! \mathbb{Q} xa4∞, with an interesting endgame;

C) Secondly, there is 17... \mathbb{Q} xd4 18.cxd4 \mathbb{Q} xd4 19. \mathbb{Q} c1 \mathbb{Q} xa4, where Black would have some positional compensation, but hardly anything more;

D) 17... \mathbb{Q} xa4? fails to 18. \mathbb{Q} e7!+-.

17... \mathbb{Q} d3

The d3-square is White's Achilles heel.

18.c5?

Trying to shut off Black's bishop to prepare \mathbb{Q} e1-f2 and \mathbb{Q} f1-e3, but Alekhine refutes this idea beautifully. 18. \mathbb{Q} b2 was the last opportunity to stay in the game.

18... \mathbb{Q} hd8 19. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{Q} d7 20. \mathbb{Q} e3



20... \mathbb{Q} xc5!

A nice little combination that allows Black to protect his c2-bishop indirectly. Black's pieces are in full harmony.

21. \mathbb{Q} d4

Taking the piece with 21... \mathbb{Q} xc2? ends in checkmate after 21... \mathbb{Q} xe4++ 22. \mathbb{Q} e1 \mathbb{Q} d1+! 23. \mathbb{Q} xd1 \mathbb{Q} f2+ 24. \mathbb{Q} f1 \mathbb{Q} xd1+ 25. \mathbb{Q} e1 \mathbb{Q} xe1#.

Such mating finales are common in Alekhine's games, especially against weaker opponents.

21... \mathbb{Q} b3 22. \mathbb{Q} e2

Not the best defense, but White's position was already beyond saving. At this point, Black has a variety of tactical ways to obtain a decisive material advantage. For instance, 22. \mathbb{Q} hb1 is refuted by 22... \mathbb{Q} a4! 23. \mathbb{Q} xb3 \mathbb{Q} xd4-+.

22... \mathbb{Q} xc3 23. \mathbb{Q} b2 \mathbb{Q} xe3+!

This temporary exchange sacrifice puts an end to this game.

24. \mathbb{Q} xe3 \mathbb{Q} e6 25. \mathbb{Q} a3 \mathbb{Q} xd4 26. \mathbb{Q} f4 \mathbb{Q} c5 27. \mathbb{Q} ha1 \mathbb{Q} e2+ 28. \mathbb{Q} g4 \mathbb{Q} e6+ 0-1

Another one of my childhood heroes was Garry Kasparov. Looking at his attacking games was like going through a tactical maze of variations where he would always find a way out and emerge on top. Compared to Alekhine, his attacking concepts and combinations were more complex, which is understandable considering the difference in their opponents' level of defense. When given a chance, Kasparov would sweep his opponents off the board with relentless initiative and powerful attacks. Here is one of my favorite examples.

Game 39

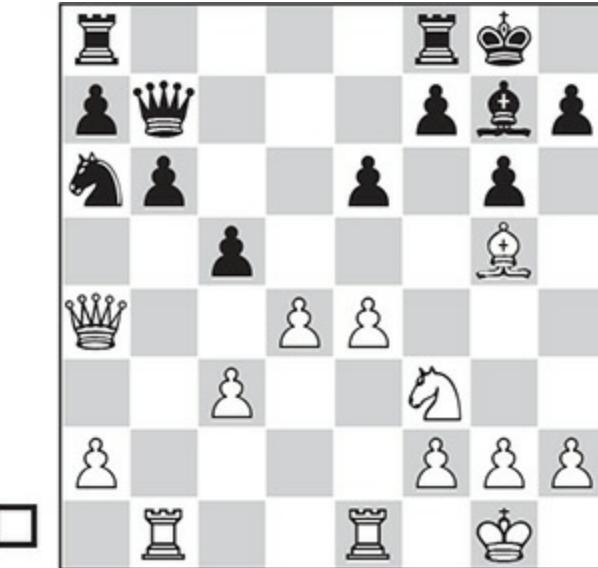
Garry Kasparov

2595

Joszef Pribyl

2390

Skara Ech tt 1980 (5)



Here is another game by a 17-year-old future World Champion. We have a typical Grünfeld Defense middlegame on the board. Take a few minutes to think about how White should proceed from this position. There are several possible courses of action, such as putting one of the rooks on d1, or playing h2-h4 in connection with e4-e5 and trying to attack on the kingside. Of course, White's main idea in such positions is to use his pawn advantage in the center and create a passed d-pawn. However, the c3-pawn would be hanging then. Kasparov, as you might have guessed, goes for the most principled and sharpest continuation:

16.d5! ♜xc3 17. ♜ed1 exd5 18.exd5

White's pawn sacrifice brings him an instant initiative because Black has two misplaced pieces ($\text{Rc}3$ and $\text{Ra}6$), so it will take him at least two moves to regroup. Meanwhile, White can focus on his most valuable asset, the d-pawn, not fearing any pawn advances by Black.

18... ♜g7

A human move, although probably not the best. Black should rather have relocated his knight. And while 18... $\text{N}b4?$ is bad in view of 19.a3 $\text{N}xd5$ 20. $\text{N}c4+-$, 18... $\text{N}c7!?$ was very much playable. After 19. $\text{N}e7 \text{N}fe8$ 20. $\text{N}d7$, it is important that Black has 20... $\text{N}eb8!$ 21.d6 $\text{N}e6\infty$, with a complex struggle ahead.

19.d6 f6

This was Black's idea when he retreated the bishop to g7. He prevents 20. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and makes 20... $\mathbb{B}ad8$ possible. However, Kasparov did not plan to retreat in this game.



20.d7!!

An extremely powerful piece sacrifice. This move not only threatens a pawn promotion in certain lines, but it also cuts off Black's queen from the kingside, where Kasparov plans to conduct an attack.

20. $\mathbb{Q}f4?$ would be too meek. 20... $\mathbb{B}ad8\infty$ would follow, with a solid enough position for Black. If 21.d7?, then 21... $\mathbb{B}f7!-+$.

20...fxg5

Kasparov analyzed 5 moves for Black here, but the only other serious alternative was 20... $\mathbb{B}ad8$ 21. $\mathbb{B}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$, when White keeps the initiative with another piece sacrifice: 22. $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ $fxe5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$. Black has stopped the d-pawn, but now White opens up a new front: 25. $\mathbb{B}b3!$ →, when the scattered black pieces cannot help their king. For example: 25... $e4$ (or 25... $\mathbb{B}c7$ 26. $\mathbb{B}f7!-+$) 26. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 27. $\mathbb{B}xg6$ $h6$ 28. $g4!$, and White wins.

21. $\mathbb{B}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

The only defense. 22... $\mathbb{Q}d4?$ loses to 23. $\mathbb{B}xd4!$ $cxd4$ 24. $\mathbb{B}xd4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

23. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{B}c7!$

Black defends well. Other moves lose quickly. Kasparov analyzes:

A) 23... ♜ b4 24. ♜ f4!



analysis diagram

and White wins thanks to some nice geometry: 24... ♜ c6 25. ♜ xf8 ♜ xf8 26.d8! ♜ xd8 27. ♜ xd8;

B) 23... ♜ c6 24. ♜ xf8 ♜ xf8 25. ♜ xa6 ♜ d4, when he correctly points out that White can simply take the pawn: 26. ♜ xa7!+–, not fearing 26... ♜ xf2 because of 27.d8!+ ♜ f8+ 28. ♜ xd4!.

24. ♜ xf8 ♜ xf8 25. ♜ d6!

Initiative above material! The greedy 25. ♜ xc5? would backfire after 25... ♜ xg2+! 26. ♜ xg2 bxc5 27. ♜ b7 ♜ d8=, and Black survives.

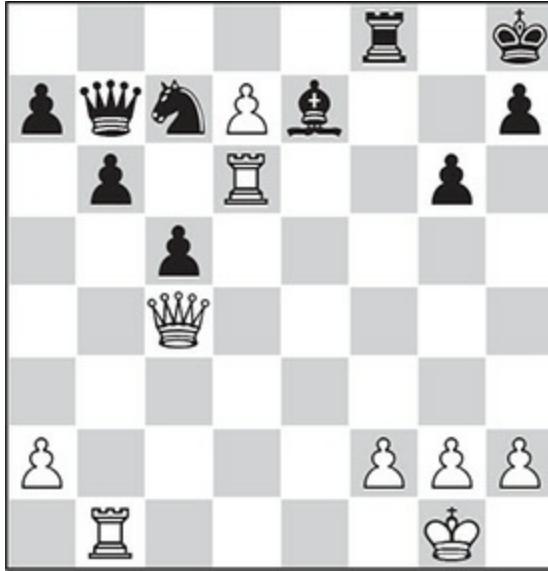
25... ♜ e7

Again, Black finds the relatively best way to offer resistance.

A) The d-pawn could have been blocked with 25... ♜ d8, but then, as we have seen in one of the variations above, White can use the misplacement of Black's pieces to attack on the kingside: 26. ♜ b3! ♜ a6 27. ♜ c3+ ♜ g8, and now White has a strong idea, suggested by the 13th World Champion: 28. ♜ c2!+–, threatening to sacrifice the rook on g6. For all intents and purposes, White is winning here;

B) Too passive is 25... ♜ b8 26. ♜ bd1 ♜ d8, as 27. ♜ c6! ties down Black's

pieces. Kasparov even claims that after 27... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28.h4 Black is in zugzwang! 28... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 29. $\mathbb{N}xd4$ cxd4 30. $\mathbb{R}xd4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31. $\mathbb{R}c4++-$.



26.d8 \mathbb{Q} !!

Black does not get time to take a breather – for the last 10 moves, every move by White has come with either a threat or a sacrifice.

26... $\mathbb{N}xd8$

In case of 26... $\mathbb{N}xd8$ 27. $\mathbb{N}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$, Kasparov's point was 28. $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ $\mathbb{N}d5$ 29. $\mathbb{N}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 30. $\mathbb{N}d1$, with a winning rook vs bishop or knight endgame.

27. $\mathbb{N}c3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28. $\mathbb{N}d7$

The prized pawn is sacrificed to make room for the rook on the 7th rank.

Kasparov's handling of initiative is superb.

28... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29. $\mathbb{N}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{N}f4!$

This is the final point of Kasparov's combination on move 26. Due to a double threat (31. $\mathbb{N}h6$ with checkmate and 31. $\mathbb{N}xc7$), White wins material.

30... $\mathbb{N}a6?$

Black has been defending very well up to this point, but the long defense takes its toll on him. He blunders into a simple mating threat.

After 30... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 31. $\mathbb{N}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 32. $\mathbb{N}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 33. $\mathbb{N}f1$ a6 (33...a5 34.a4!) 34. $\mathbb{N}c6!$ b5 (34... $\mathbb{N}f6$ 35. $\mathbb{N}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 36. $\mathbb{N}e1!+-$) 35. $\mathbb{N}xa6$ b4, he could still put up resistance, although I am inclined to believe the endgame is winning for White.

31. ♜ h6!

Apparently, Black missed this move. The checkmate on h7 cannot be prevented, so he resigned.

One fascinating thing about Kasparov is the extreme precision of his calculation in tactical positions. If you subject his annotations from *Chess Informant* in the 1980s and 1990s to the scrutiny of present-day chess engines, you will find very few mistakes in his analysis of forced variations. This is not the case with Alekhine's annotations, which may be flawed or overly biased in places. It seems like Kasparov combined his exceptional tactical ability with objectivity attained through his analytical work in Botvinnik's school.

But Kasparov was not the last player I systematically learned from about the initiative and attack. Around the time when I was already a decent master-level player, my coach introduced me to the games of a player whose name I had never heard of before and had trouble pronouncing. His games too were like nothing I had seen before. It was the great Rashid Nezhmetdinov.

'The greatest master of the initiative'

This is the honor that Lev Polugaevsky, the famous Soviet grandmaster, gave the Tatar master. When you see the following game, you will understand why.

Game 40

Lev Polugaevsky

Rashid Nezhmetdinov

Sochi 1958

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 d6 3. ♜c3 e5 4.e4 exd4 5. ♜xd4 ♜c6 6. ♜d2 g6 7.b3 ♜g7 8. ♜b2 0-0 9. ♜d3 ♜g4!?

Showing aggressive intentions early on.

10. ♜ge2?!

10. ♜f3 would have been better.

10... ♜h4 11. ♜g3 ♜ge5 12.0-0 f5 13.f3?

Too passive. 13.exf5 gxf5 14.♘ge2 f4 15.f3∞ would give White something to play for.

13...♝h6 14.♝d1 f4 15.♝ge2 g5

Polugaevsky falls under a strong attack now.

16.♞d5 g4 17.g3

Forced, in view of 17.♘xc7? g3 18.h3 ♜xh3+.

17...fxg3 18.hxg3 ♜h3 19.f4 ♜e6!

This is the first special move of the game. The pawn on c7 is poisoned now, as well as the e5-knight. At the same time, Black prepares to exchange the powerful d5-knight, which holds the key to the critical f4-square.

19...♞f3+?? would actually be a huge mistake because after 20.♚f2 ♜h2+ 21.♚e3+, White's king is safe, while Black's queen is not!



20.♝c2

If White goes for material with 20.♘xc7 (20.fxe5? ♜xd5+), Black demolishes his position with 20...♜xf4! 21.♞xf4 (or 21.gxf4 g3+; 21.♞xf4 ♜xg3+ 22.♚h1 ♜f6+, with a mating attack) 21...♜xf4 22.♞xe6 ♜f3! 23.♝c2 ♜f7+, followed by ...♝e5-f3+, etc.

20...♜f7 21.♚f2 ♜h2+ 22.♚e3 ♜xd5 23.cxd5 ♜b4

The complications have reached the boiling point. Polugaevsky has defended stubbornly and decides that his moment has come:

24.♞h1?

Playing this, he probably planned to win material and hide his king on the queenside. In hindsight, it was necessary to play 24.a3 ♕xc2+ 25.♔xc2 ♔h3 26.♕xe5 dxe5 27.♔d3, when Black would still have a strong attack, but White would at least have a fighting chance.



24... ♕xf4!!

This is arguably one of the most spectacular moves in chess history.

25.♕xh2

There was not much choice, as 25.gxf4 ♕xf4+! 26.♕xf4 ♕xc2+ forces White to give up his queen to save the king after 27.♔xc2 ♕xc2+.

25... ♕f3+ 26.♔d4

Black is down a full queen, but, in return, he has White's king trapped in the center of the board. Among the many tempting ways to continue the attack, Nezhmetdinov chooses the quietest one.



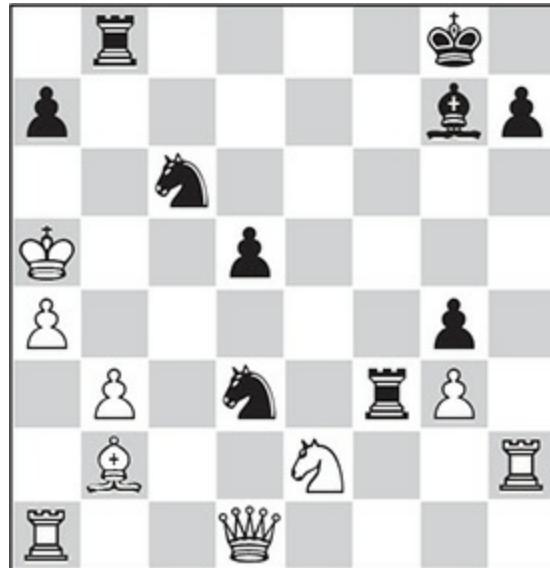
26...♝g7!!

Playing such a calm move after an impressive queen sacrifice is a sign of great feeling for the attack. White's extra defensive move is useless as his king is immobile and Black's threats are too many. Polugaevsky tried to secure his king's access to the c4- and c3-squares with

27.a4 c5+ 28.dxc6 bxc6 29.♝d3,

but this just allowed a beautiful finale:

29...♞exd3+ 30.♛c4 d5+ 31.exd5 cxd5+ 32.♛b5 ♜b8+ 33.♛a5 ♜c6+!



and White resigned one move before checkmate.

Nezhmetdinov was an extremely gifted player with a natural feel for the initiative and attack. Once he got into his zone, he would create wonderful original combinations. When Mikhail Tal, possibly the greatest attacking player ever, was asked what the happiest day of his life was, he said: ‘When I lost to Nezhmetdinov!'

As a small contribution to this great player, I would like to share one of his, perhaps, less known attacking games with limited annotations, so that you can enjoy it yourself.

Game 41

Rashid Nezhmetdinov

Yuri Kotkov

Krasnodar 1957

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.♕e1 ♘d6 6.♘xe5 ♗e7 7.♗d3!?

7.♗f1 is more common.

7...0-0 8.♘c3 ♘xe5 9.♘xe5 ♗f6



10.♕e3!?

10.♕e1 is more standard. On both moves 7 and 10, Nezhmetdinov chose aggressive alternatives to more commonly-played positional moves.

10...g6 11.♘f3 ♗g7 12.b3!?

Another unusual developing move, but completely logical in this position.

12...♗e8 13.♗a3 d6 14.♖ae1↑



Nezhmetdinov has mobilized all his forces, so Black has to play carefully to neutralize the initiative.

14...♘f6 15.h3 ♘d7?!

This knight has almost made a full circle and the great attacker will punish it. Black should have developed his last minor piece: 15...♖b8 16.♗c4 ♘d7, with a passive, but solid position.

16.♗d5! f5?

In an attempt to defend the f6-square, Black weakens his kingside irreparably. His original intention was probably 16...♗e5, but this runs into 17.♖xe5! dxе5 (if 17...♗xe5, then 18.♖xe5 dxе5 19.♗e7+–) 18.♗e7 ♘d7 19.♗f6+ ♘xf6 20.♗xf6, and Black would not survive the attack on the dark squares.

Among many promising ways to start the attack, Nezhmetdinov chooses the most direct and impressive one:



17. $\mathbb{Q}xc7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

19... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ would run into 20. $\mathbb{Q}1xe5!$, winning.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b2!$

Just as in his game against Polugaevsky, a quiet backward bishop move prepares the decisive attack.

21... $\mathbb{Q}g7$

21... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ is refuted nicely by 22. $\mathbb{Q}e8!!$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+-$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}c4!!$

Nezhmetdinov shows another glimpse of his tactical genius. The bishops terrorize Black's king.

22... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

22... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+-$.

23. $\mathbb{Q}xf6?!$

The only flaw in an otherwise spotless performance.

Instead, 23. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ was winning, as analyzed in the 22... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ variation.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8?$

This allows a nice mating tactic. 24... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ would still have allowed Black to put up some resistance.



25. ♕e8+! 1-0

I have noticed that the newer generations of players are generally not so well acquainted with the heritage of the older generations. This is a shame, because in almost every branch of human activity, ‘we stand on the shoulders of giants’.

I believe that a careful study of selected games of great players of the past can bring only benefits to those who do it. Studying some of the aforementioned classics is a good and fun way to learn about the initiative and attack.

When ‘the dull player’ attacks

Several years ago, in one open tournament, while waiting for the closing ceremony, I looked at some chess books on a bookstand. The owner of the bookstand, a well-known grandmaster from my region, came up to me and, in his typical tongue-in-cheek style, proposed to sell me at a discount ‘a great book to spice up my dull chess style’. Taking no offense, I looked at the book, although I do not recall whether I bought it or not.

Anyhow, most chess players who know me would indeed characterize me as a primarily solid positional player. Be that as it may, on occasion I can show a more aggressive, initiative-minded side.

Game 42

Ivan Ivanisevic

2623

Davorin Kuljasevic

2546

Biel 2017 (4)



My opponent is well-known for his enterprising, tactical style of play, so I was expecting a sharp game. In this unusual Sicilian Dragon type of position, I realized that Black can play for the initiative with the following pawn sacrifice:

12...a4!

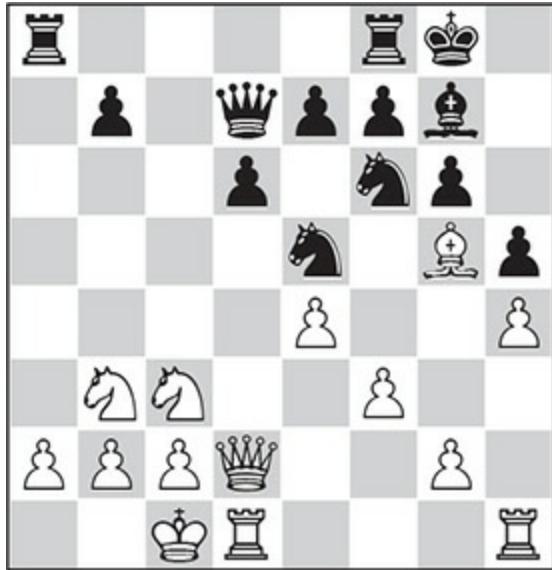
Before I went for this, I could not accurately assess how much compensation Black gets for the pawn, but it seemed like it should be enough. I also relied on a positive experience from a game I played many years ago against American grandmaster (then IM) Mackenzie Molner, where I sacrificed the a-pawn in the French Defense in a similar manner.

In case of the immediate 12... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, White can play 13.a4! $\mathbb{R}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$

13. $\mathbb{Q}xa4?$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}fxd7!$ is a much worse version for White.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$



In fact, the semi-open a- and c-files, as well as the possibility of getting the knight to c4, give Black a serious initiative.

15. ♕b1?!

A natural-looking move, but it seems that both of us might have underestimated the strength of Black's initiative.

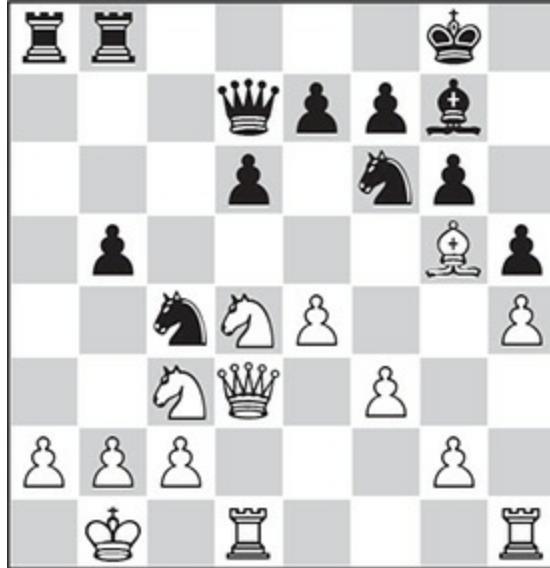
A) White cannot simplify the position with 15. ♘xf6 ♗xf6 16. ♖d5 ♕xa2 17. ♖xf6+ exf6 18. ♘xd6, because of Black's strong attacking resource 18... ♜a4! 19. ♖d4 ♜c4=+;

B) Perhaps he should have already thought about trading queens: 15. ♜e2 ♜fc8 16. ♜b5, although even then, Black can continue playing for the attack with 16... ♜c7! (instead of the materialistic 16... ♜xb5?! 17. ♖xb5 ♕xa2 18. ♖a3=) 17. ♖d4 ♜c4.

15... ♜c4 16. ♜d3 b5 17. ♜d4?!

A risky move, as the knight was a good king protector on b3. I think that White may have miscalculated something when playing this move. During the game, I was mostly concerned about 17.e5, which is, indeed, White's last chance to obtain some counterplay. After 17... ♜h7! 18. ♗e3 ♗xe5 19. ♗d4 ♜fb8, Black gets his sacrificed pawn back, with a better position.

17... ♜fb8



White sank into thought at this point, probably realizing that the b5-pawn cannot be taken.

18.a3

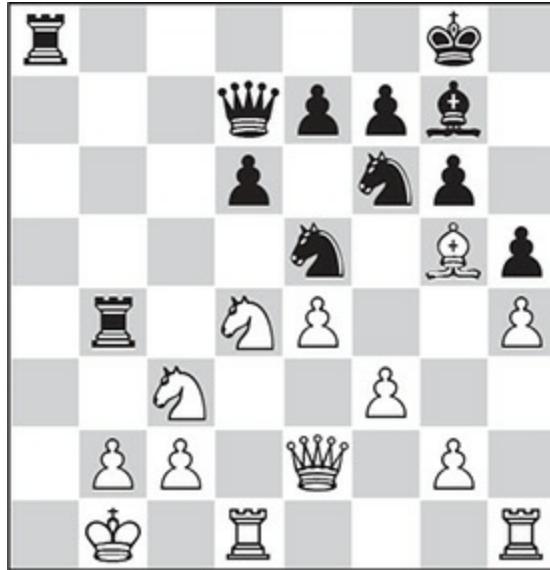
This move allows Black to open up the a- and b- files for attack. But it is already difficult to suggest something reliable for White:

A) If he takes the pawn with 18.♘dxb5, Black wins with 18...♞xb2! 19.♛xb2 ♞xe4 20.fxe4 ♜xb5+! (I think that my opponent may have originally missed this move) 21.♚c1 (21.♛xb5 ♜xb5+ 22.♚c1 ♜xc3+) 21...♝b2+ 22.♛d2 ♜a3;

B) Capturing with the other knight, 18.♞cxb5, is also risky. Black breaks through with multiple sacrifices: 18...d5! 19.exd5 ♜xb2! 20.♛xb2 ♜xd5 21.c4 e5!, and White's position falls apart;

C) The defensive move 18.♞c1 solves the problems related to the b2-weakness that we just saw, but after 18...♝e5 19.♝e2 b4 20.♞cb5 ♜b7, he will find it difficult to defend the a2-weakness.

18...♝e5 19.♝e2 b4 20.axb4 ♜xb4



Now Black's attack develops on its own and it becomes clear that White is in big trouble.

21. ♜b3 ♜c4 22. ♜d4 ♜c6

Preparing ... ♜c6-a6-a1 with checkmate!

23. ♜hd1 ♜a6 24. ♜xc4

Giving up material to stop the attack is the only sensible solution.

A) Black's main threat can be seen in the following variation: 24. ♜xf6



analysis diagram

24... ♕a1+! 25. ♔xa1 ♜xb2+ 26. ♔c1 ♜xa1+ 27. ♔b1 ♜axb1#;

B) If White defends the b2-square with 24. ♔c1, he clogs the escape route for the king, allowing another beautiful mating finale: 24... ♕a1+!! 25. ♔xa1 ♜a3+ 26. ♔a2 ♜b5+! 27. ♔b1 ♜xc3#;

C) During the game, I regarded 24. ♔c1 as the only move; however, 24... ♜d7! 25. ♜xe7 ♜c5 breaks White's defense all the same.

24... ♜xc4 25. ♜d4 ♜xd4 26. ♜xa6 ♜xa6 27. ♜xd4

White has traded off many pieces, but he cannot realistically hope to save this endgame after the following tactic.

27... ♜xe4! 28. ♜xe4 ♜xd4 29. ♜xe7 d5 30. ♜c5 ♜b6!—+ 31.c3

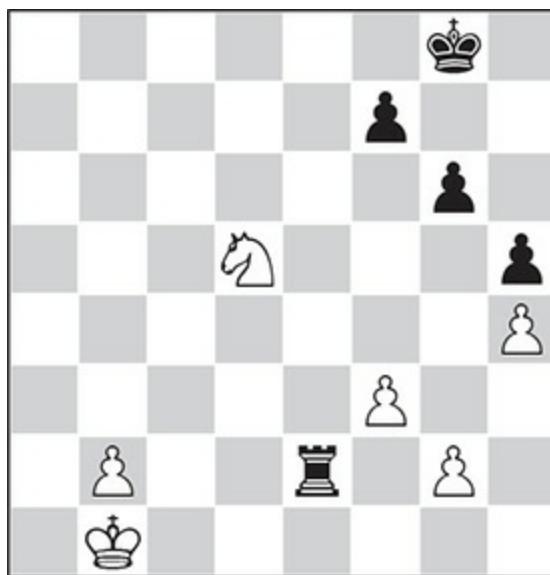
All endgames are lost for White, and so is this one.

A) 31. ♜d3 ♜e6 32. ♜g5 ♜e2 33. c3 f6 34. ♜f4 ♜e5—+;

B) 31. ♜b3 ♜f6—+;

C) 31. b3 f6—+.

31... ♜xc3 32. ♜a4 ♜b7 33. ♜xc3 ♜xe7 34. ♜xd5 ♜e2



And, despite a few hiccups, I eventually managed to convert the advantage.

35. ♜f4 ♜d2 36. ♜c1 ♜d4 37. g3 ♜f8 38. ♜g2 ♜e7 39. ♜c2 ♜d6 40. b3 ♜c5
41. ♜e3 ♜b4 42. ♜c4 ♜d7 43. ♜d2 ♜d5 44. ♜e4 ♜f5 45. f4 ♜d5 46. ♜g5 ♜d7
47. ♜f3 ♜c7+ 48. ♜d2 ♜xb3 49. f5 ♜c3 50. ♜e2 gxf5 51. ♜d4+ ♜c4 52. ♜xf5
爵d5 53. ♜f2 爵e5 54. ♜g7 爵e4 55. ♜g2 ♜c2+ 56. ♜h3 ♜f3 57. ♜f5 ♜g2
58. ♜d4+ 爵f2 0-1

Game 43

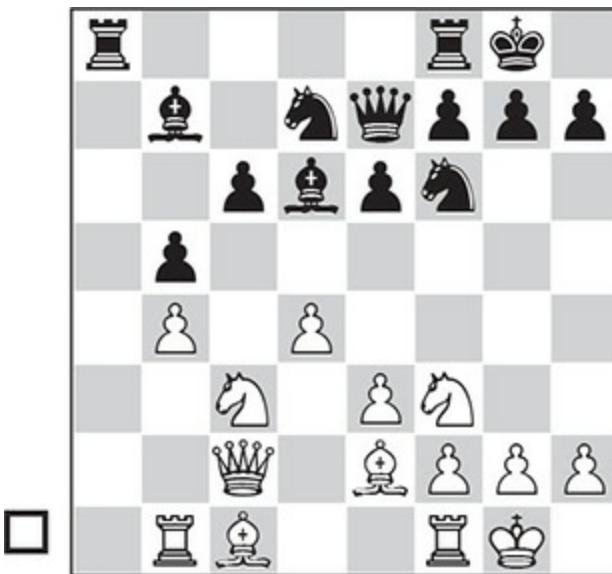
Davorin Kuljasevic

2546

Anthony Bellaiche

2463

Biel 2017 (5)



While preparing the material for this section, I realized that the two selected examples of my finest initiative-based play were, in fact, two back-to-back games from the same tournament. Talk about psychological momentum! For this game, I had prepared an interesting new idea:

15.e4!N

This involves the sacrifice of the b4-pawn for a serious initiative. Before, people would defend the pawn with 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$.

15...e5

Taking the pawn immediately with 15... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ gives White too much initiative: 16.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, and now the simplest is 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ exd5 18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ f6 19.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ (all tempo moves) 20... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (20...h6 21. $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e5+-$) 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e5\pm$.

16.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

This sharp move is the point. White is ready to give up his queenside, just to keep making strong threats and dictate the tempo of the game.

17... ♜xb4

My opponent spent a lot of time deciding between this principled move and the safer alternative 17... ♜c7. Black would be solid in that position, but if he does not get to break with ...c6-c5, his position is just worse in the long run. For example: 18. ♛d1 ♛fd8 19.f3 ♜b6 20. ♜e3 g6 21. ♛h1±.

18. ♜f5 ♜c5 19. ♛b3!



This was still part of my home preparation. I like this defensive, yet also potentially attacking, rook lift. 20. ♜e3 is the threat, when Black's bishop would fall.

19... ♛fe8!

Again, the best defense – clearing the f8-square for the queen.

20. ♜b2 ♜a5

After another long think, Black goes for the safer variation.

The critical variation, which I had focused on in the game preparation, is 20... ♜xc3 21. ♛xc3 ♜f8, but this looks scary from the human point of view. White obtains a strong initiative with 22. ♛g3 ♜g6 23. ♜h6! gxh6 24. ♜xf6 ♜e6 25. ♜b2 ♜xe4 26. ♛h3 f6 27. ♜d3. The exposed position of Black's king makes White's position much easier to play, but Black is not without defensive resources.

21. ♜e3 ♜f8



22. ♜xb5!

I was out of my preparation at this point, although I already got the gist of the position – White should keep up the initiative. The position becomes tactically messy, but White is the one calling the shots, which suited me perfectly.

22... cxb5

Initially, I was more troubled by 22... ♜xe4!?, when I had missed something in my calculations after 23. ♜bd6! ♜xd6 24. ♜c5 ♜dc4 25. ♜d4, and here after 25... ♜ed8 (25... ♜ad8 is objectively better, but Black will have a difficult time defending the endgame without an exchange after 26. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 27. ♜xf8 ♜c8 28. ♜d6!±) 26. ♜xf8 ♜xd4 27. ♜xd4 ♜d2 28. ♜xb7 ♜xf1, I had missed that White has 29. ♜d6!+–, so I thought that the position was unclear.

23. ♜xb5±

Due to the triple threat (24. ♜c5, 24. ♜xb7, and 24. ♜xe5), White wins back material by force.

23... ♜xe4

An important test of White's concept was the variation 23... ♜a6 24. ♜c5 ♜xb5 25. ♜xf8 ♜xe2, when he has 26. ♜xg7! ♜xf1 27. ♜xf6+–.

24. ♜xb7↑



Despite the simple symmetrical pawn structure, Black has serious problems in equalizing, because of the misplaced position of several pieces and a general lack of coordination. On the other hand, White's pieces could not be placed any better and exert strong pressure.

24... ♜c3 25. ♜d4

White starts posing concrete threats. His ♜b7, ♜d4 and ♜f5 are all ready to deliver a decisive blow to Black's position.

25... ♜ac8

25... ♜xe2+ 26. ♜xe2 ♜c6 loses easily to 27. ♜h6+! ♛h8 28. ♜c4! ♜xd4 29. ♜xf7+ ♛g8 30. ♜xd4. During the game, I was mostly worried about Black trading the strong rook with 25... ♜ab8, but it turns out White's initiative does not lose in strength after 26. ♜a6! ♜xb7 27. ♜xb7.

26. ♜a6!

A very strong move. The bishop moves away from 'contact' on e2 and prepares the 27. ♜e7+ fork that wins material. Black cannot cover all his weaknesses with such poor piece coordination. In case of 26. ♜b5 ♜e6±, Black still holds.



26... ♜c6

The alternatives were:

- A) 26...g6 27.♗e7+ ♜xe7 28.♗xe7 ♛xe7 29.♕xc8 ♗d3 30.♗b8! ♗e2+ 31.♔h1 ♜c7 32.♗a8 ♗xd4 33.♗a6+ ♔g7 34.♗xd3+–;
- B) 26...♜a8 27.♗b5 ♜eb8!?, with a beautiful variation: 28.♕xc3 ♜xb7 29.♕xe5 ♜c5 30.♜c1 ♜xb5, and now White wins with a brilliant tactical shot: 31.♗b8!!.. There is something about this b8-square...;
- C) 26...♝c4, which would have been the best defense. White wins a pawn after 27.♕xc4 ♜xc4 28.♗xg7 ♜c5 29.♕xc3 ♜xf5, but Black might hope to defend this position in the long run due to the reduced material. However, instead of trading the bishops, White could also keep things complex with the unpleasant 30.♗h8!±.

27.♗b5 ♜c4



28. ♔a1!?

There were many strong and tempting moves at this point, but I liked this one the most.

28... ♕xb5

Or 28... ♕e2+ 29. ♔h1 ♕xd4 30. ♔xd4+-.

29. ♕xb5 ♔d2?

In time trouble, Black finally commits the losing mistake. As we have seen in previous examples, defending accurately against constant pressure for several hours is a very difficult task. The only way to try to resist was 29...f6 30. ♕xa5 (I was a bit disappointed to find out that 30. ♕b7 does not work, due to 30... ♕c7! 31. ♕xc7 ♔xc7 32. ♕a2 ♔f7±) 30... ♕xa5 31. ♕xa5, and despite having a serious material advantage, White would still have to overcome some obstacles to win the game.

30. ♕xg7 ♔a3 31. ♔d4!

Black had missed this strong centralizing move. His king will not have a good defense now.

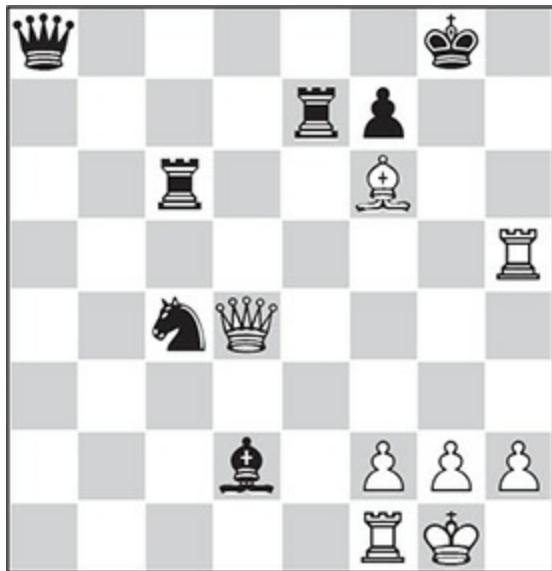
31... ♔a8

Another nice line is 31... ♕d6 32. ♕b8! ♕xb8 33. ♕e7#.

32. ♔f6

Preparing the mating attack with ♔d4-g4.

32...h5 33. ♕e7+ ♕xe7 34. ♕xh5!



And White checkmates: **1-0**.

Initiative in simple positions

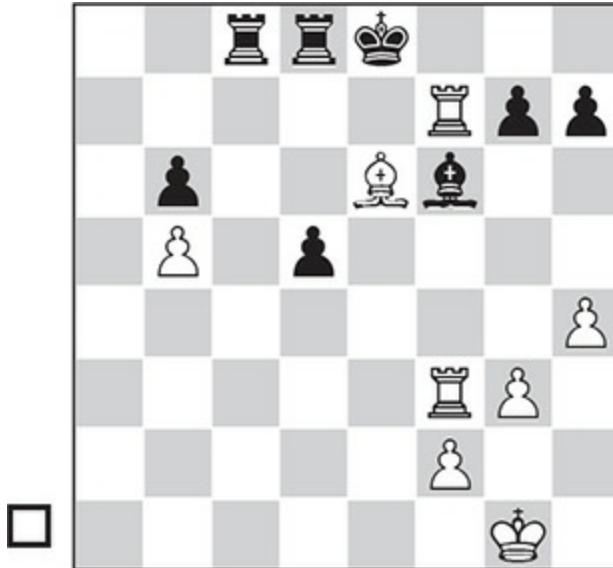
So far, we have mostly seen examples of the initiative in complex middlegames. To round off, I would like to show how one can play for the initiative even in ‘simple’ positions. Normally, in such positions primarily some sort of technical skill is required, and we do not usually associate them with sharp tempo play. However, chess is a game rich with possibilities, so it is also possible to play for the initiative in positions with limited material.

Game 44

Vasily Smyslov

David Bronstein

Amsterdam/Leeuwarden ct 1956 (16) (analysis)



In this materially balanced endgame, White has a clear positional advantage because of his much more actively-placed pieces. Smyslov decided to capitalize on this advantage in a ‘technical’ way – by winning Black’s b-pawn and using his strong endgame technique to gradually convert it. However, there was a stronger option – he could have played for initiative with

40. ♜e3!

With this move, White highlights the exposed position of Black’s king. The presence of opposite-colored bishops makes Black’s defense more difficult, because he has no pieces to effectively cover his light squares.

Interestingly, this strong move was not covered in Smyslov’s annotations! In time-trouble, Smyslov opted for 40. ♜b7, and after 40... ♜c1+?! (Black could have put up a stubborn defense by trading a pair of rooks: 40... ♜c3 41. ♜xc3 ♜xc3 42. ♜xb6 and setting up a dark-square blockade with 42... ♜d4 43. ♜b7 ♜d6, with a full fight ahead) 41. ♜g2 ♜d6 42. ♜f5 g6? 43. ♜d3 ♜e7 44. ♜e3 ♜d7 45. ♜xb6, he patiently converted his advantage: 45...d4 46. ♜f3 ♜d6 47. ♜a6 ♜e7 48. ♜a8 ♜c5 49. ♜h8 ♜d6 50. ♜c8 ♜d5 51. h5 ♜c3 52. hxg6 hxg6 53. ♜c6 ♜b7 54. ♜xg6 ♜xd3 55. ♜xd3 ♜c4 56. ♜d1 d3 57. ♜c1+ 1-0.

40... ♜c1+

Nothing is changed by 40... ♜c3 41. ♜e2; in fact, Black’s pawn is one square

further away than in the main line, which is obviously in White's favor.

41. ♕g2 d4 42. ♖e4 ♖d6

42... ♖b8 is worse because of 43. ♔d5+ ♕d8 44. ♔c6 with checkmate on e8.

43. ♖a7!

The key attacking move. It was very tempting to win material with 43. ♔d5+ ♕d8 44. ♔c6 ♖cxc6 45. bxc6 ♖xc6, but it turns out that it is not so simple to convert the advantage in this endgame. For instance: 46. g4!? d3 47. g5 ♔c3! (an interesting variation arises in case of 47... d2 48. gxf6 d1 ♕: 49. ♖f8+! ♕c7 50. ♖e7+ ♕d7 (50... ♕d6 51. ♖d8++–) 51. ♖a8!+–) 48. ♖a4 ♕e8 49. ♖b7 ♖c8 50. ♖e4+ ♕f8 51. ♖xb6 d2±.



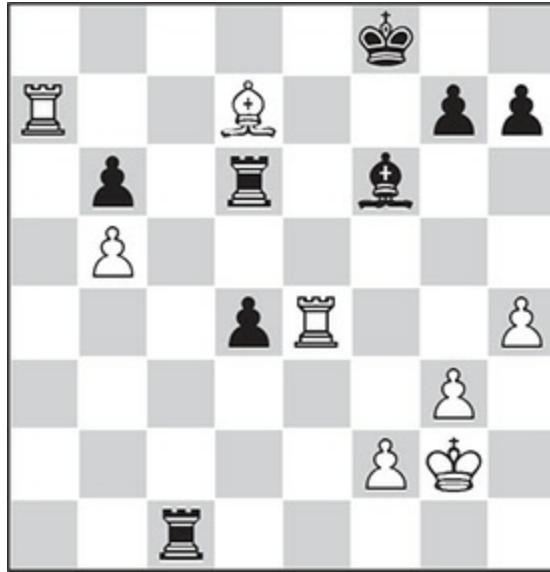
43... ♕d8 44. ♖a8+! ♕e7

Black's king has to get back into the line of fire, because the escape via 44... ♕c7 does not work due to the skewer 45. ♖c8++–.

45. ♔f5+ ♕f7 46. ♖a7+!

It is essential to force Black's king back to the eighth rank, where it is the most vulnerable. Notice how White has combined various attacking ideas with limited material, while Black's pieces are standing around without any particular use. When this happens, you know that you have a very strong initiative.

46... ♕f8 47. ♔d7!



Sometimes, the initiative culminates with a quiet move. White threatens to close down on Black's king with 48. \mathbb{R} a8+ \mathbb{K} f7 49. \mathbb{Q} e8+! \mathbb{K} f8 50. \mathbb{Q} g6, with checkmate. Black is forced to give up the exchange to prevent the immediate disaster.

47... \mathbb{R} xd7

Not even the escape via g7 would save Black: 47...g6 48. \mathbb{R} e8+ \mathbb{K} g7 49. \mathbb{Q} e6+ \mathbb{K} h6, because of 50. \mathbb{Q} g8! with checkmate. Also, 47... \mathbb{R} e7 is just a temporary defense. After 48. \mathbb{Q} c6!, the bishop cannot be defended.

48. \mathbb{R} xd7

And White obtains a winning endgame. His plan is to re-route the rook to the a-file via e2-a2 and centralize his king (\mathbb{K} g2-f3-e4). The other rook stands perfectly on d7.

As I mentioned earlier, the initiative can take on different forms. The common denominator for all types of initiative is that you force your opponent to make difficult choices in critical moments. This can be done at any stage of the game, and strong players find ways to pose problems to their opponents even in very simple positions. Magnus Carlsen is a perfect example of that.

In the following game, we can see how the strongest Chinese player, Ding Liren, wins a seemingly completely drawn rook endgame by creating difficult practical problems that his strong opponent did not manage to solve.

Game 45

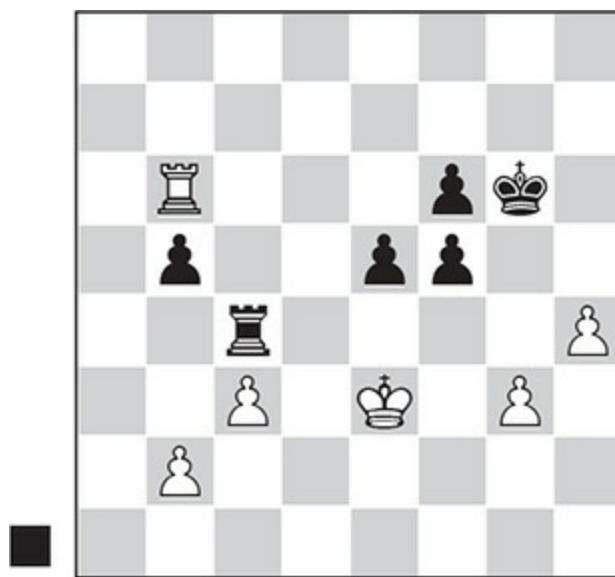
Ni Hua

2696

Ding Liren

2781

Shenzhen rapid 2015 (4)



In this 4 vs 4 rook endgame, a draw seems like the most likely result. White has just attacked the weak b-pawn. Black can, of course, protect it with 45... $\mathbb{R}c5$, but Ding Liren found a more active, non-materialistic, idea:
45... $\mathbb{R}g4!!$

In case of 45... $\mathbb{R}c5$ 46. $\mathbb{R}b8=$, it would be difficult to make progress for either side.

46. $\mathbb{K}f2$

This was the first important decision for White. The alternative was 46. $\mathbb{K}f3$ $e4+$ 47. $\mathbb{K}f2$ $f4$ 48. $gxf4$ $\mathbb{R}xf4+$ and here, again, White has to make a responsible decision:

A) If he goes with his king to g3, he allows Black to put his rook behind the passed pawn: 49... $\mathbb{R}f5$ 50. $\mathbb{K}g4$ $\mathbb{R}e5$. Even though White should be able to hold a draw in this position, Black's initiative is clearly unpleasant;

B) On the other hand, if he blocks the e-pawn with 49. $\mathbb{K}e3$, he loses the h-pawn to 49... $\mathbb{R}xh4$. Then, after 50. $\mathbb{R}xb5$ $f5$, we get a pawn race in which

White would need to find very precise moves to save the game.

46...f4 47.gxf4 ♖xf4+ 48.♔g3 ♔f5!



The point of Ding Liren's combination. He sacrifices a pawn to cut off White's king from his passed e-pawn. At the same time, White's rook will also be somewhat misplaced on b5. I find this endgame concept very reminiscent of the sixth game of Anand-Carlsen match in 2013.

49.♖xb5 ♖g4+

With this 'informative' check, Ding gives his opponent another tricky puzzle to solve – where to go with the king?

50.♔h3?!

Ni Hua chooses a much riskier, materialistic continuation, hoping that he will be able to distract Black with his h-pawn. This may be possible, but only with very precise play.

It was more practical to give up the h-pawn: 50.♔f3 ♖xh4, but even then, White would have to find only moves to keep drawing chances: 51.♔g3 ♖h1



analysis diagram

and now only 52. $\mathbb{R}g2!$ saves him (52.c4? loses after 52... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 53.c5 f5 54.c6 f4+ 55. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{L}h2+$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{L}c2$). 52... $\mathbb{L}d1$ (52... $\mathbb{L}c1$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f3!=$) 53. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{L}d3+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (with this move, White wins the crucial tempo) 54... $\mathbb{L}h3$ 55.c4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 56.c5 $\mathbb{L}h2+$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 58.b4 e4 59. $\mathbb{L}b6=$, and White is just in time with his counterplay.

50... $\mathbb{L}g1$

Now White's king is cut off on the h-file, which makes his position critical.

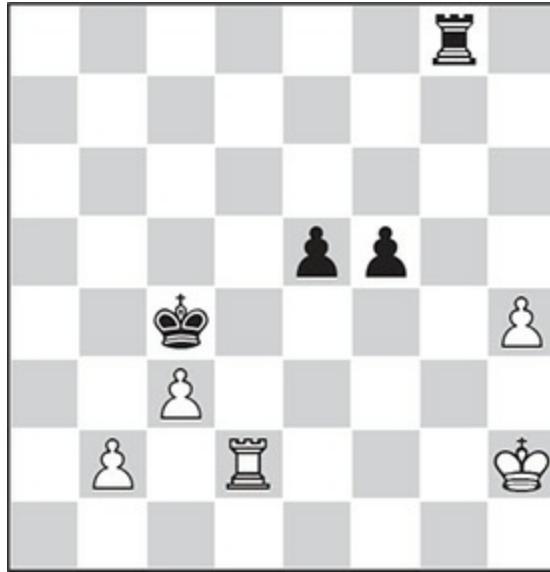
51. $\mathbb{L}d5$

Bringing the rook back into the game is a good idea.

51... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}h2?$

White wastes a valuable tempo at the critical moment. The logical continuation was 52. $\mathbb{L}d2!$ and, as far as I can tell, White holds with precise play. Black can try several ideas:

A) 52...f5 53. $\mathbb{L}f2+$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$ $\mathbb{L}g8$ 55. $\mathbb{L}e2+$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 56. $\mathbb{L}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$



analysis diagram

and here we can see White's key defensive idea: 57. $\mathbb{R}g2!$ $\mathbb{R}h8$ 58. $\mathbb{R}g5!$ $\mathbb{R}xh4+$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{R}f4$ 60. $b4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 61. $b5=;$

B) 52... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 53. $\mathbb{R}d3+!$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 54. $\mathbb{R}g3$ $\mathbb{R}h1+$ 55. $\mathbb{R}g2$ $\mathbb{R}xh4$ 56. $b4$ $f5$ 57. $c4$ $f4$ 58. $\mathbb{R}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 59. $b5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 60. $\mathbb{R}b1$ $e4$ 61. $b6$ $f3+$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{R}h8$ 63. $b7$ $\mathbb{R}b8$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}f2=;$

C) 52... $e4$ 53. $\mathbb{R}f2+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 54. $\mathbb{R}g2!$ (once again, this is the key defensive idea for White after 52. $\mathbb{R}d2$) 54... $\mathbb{R}h1+$ 55. $\mathbb{R}h2$ $\mathbb{R}xh2+$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $e3$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 58. $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 59. $h6=.$



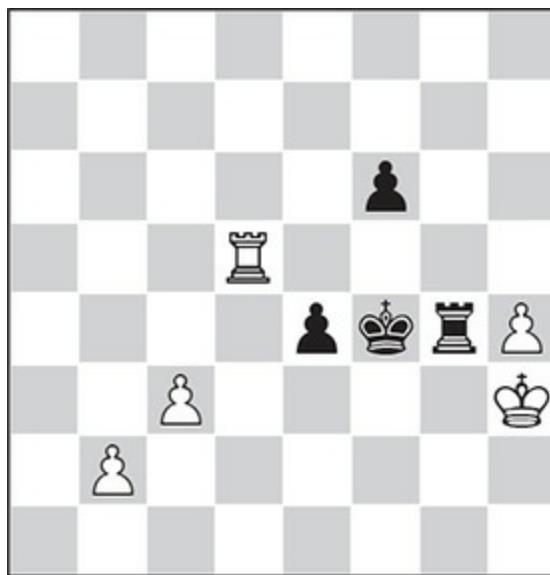
52... ♜g4?!

After such a nice display of non-materialism in the endgame, Ding Liren shows that he is only human, after all. There was no need to go after this pawn. He should have focused on the promotion of the e-pawn with 52... ♜g8! and nothing could stop him. For example: 53. ♜d1 (53.b4 e4 54.b5 e3-+) 53...e4 54. ♜f1+ ♚e5 55. ♜g1 ♜h8 56. ♜g3 f5, and Black's pawns are unstoppable.

53. ♜h3?

White has been consistently holding on to this pawn throughout the endgame. But if he had valued time more than material, he would have played 53.b4! ♜xh4+ 54. ♜g2 ♜g4+ 55. ♜f1, which would be a huge improvement, because his king would return to the center and his queenside pawns would be in motion. This would have given him a chance to save the game, although he would have needed to play very precisely as Black would still have the initiative.

53... ♜g1 54. ♜h2 ♜g4 55. ♜h3 e4!—+



Ding Liren finally realizes that pushing the e-pawn is the right way to proceed. Since this was a rapid game, some mutual mistakes were inevitable in time trouble, but at the end of the day Ding Liren was rewarded with the full point for his proactive play in the endgame (**0-1, 74**).

Attack

In chess, as in any conflict, success lies in the attack. – Max Euwe

Indeed, attack is the most decisive operation in chess. We can talk about maneuvering skill and endgame technique all day, but we should not forget that the goal of the game is to checkmate the opponent's king. In the introduction, we talked about the special role of the king in a chess game. All chess players should, therefore, try to perfect their attacking skills. This is a multi-layered skill that comprises of the abilities to:

- create conditions for attack;
- recognize the proper moment for attack;
- anticipate the opponent's defenses;
- assess which targets around the king are the most vulnerable;
- know whether to attack with pawns or pieces;
- envision matting patterns;
- carry out the decisive combination in the mating attack;
- ... and many more...

Countless attacking manuals have been written for this purpose. Some focus on the games of great attacking players, such as Morphy, Tal or Shirov. Others cover specific types of attacks, such as the attack on the uncastled king, attacks that arise from specific openings, etc.

My primary source for learning about attack used to be *The Art of Attack* by Vladimir Vukovic. It is a relatively old book, but what I liked about it was that it approached the subject very methodically, almost scientifically. The author made sure to cover the topic of attack based on a wide variety of criteria, such as: king's position, critical squares around the king, pawn attacks, piece attacks, file attacks, diagonal attacks, fianchetto attacks, mating patterns and more. He also explained the conditions for attack and stages of attack.

In this book, our goal is different; we will analyze the attack from the perspective of non-materialism. For that purpose, I have selected eight

instructive games featuring some of the best attacking players in chess history. Of course, as we analyze these games, I will make sure to draw your attention to the finer points of their attacks, such as those I listed above.

Mating attack

In reality, most attacks do not finish with a checkmate. The opponent either defends successfully, sometimes even launches a counter-attack, or he gives up some material to protect his king. As practical players, we are okay with winning material or obtaining a big positional advantage as a ‘side-effect’ of a mating attack. In many cases, this just means that the game is prolonged until the second, final mating attack in the endgame.

There are, however, also those attacks that are destined to end with a checkmate. Naturally, such games are the most exciting and memorable among thousands of good games, because of their rarity and aesthetic value. But if you think about it, the aesthetic value is not only in the final position; it is also in the sacrificial build-up of the mating combination. To checkmate against worthy opposition, we often need to give up much of our material to gain the time necessary to create and close the mating net. In other words, without non-materialism, such attractive games would hardly exist.

In this section, we will look at several such games, starting with my all-time favorite.

Game 46

Vasili Ivanchuk

2735

Artur Jussupow

2625

Brussels ct m rapid 1991 (1)



A very sharp middlegame has arisen in the 1991 Candidates matches game between Vasily Ivanchuk and Artur Jussupow. White tries to attack Black's central pawns, while Black has been preparing to attack on the kingside. Notice how the far advanced black e-pawn cuts White's army into two parts. This pawn will play a very important role in Black's attack until the very end of the game...

Black threw the first punch with 18...g5!. Ivanchuk responds in kind:

19.♗e5!?

White is using the long-range power of his bishops to create serious counterplay in the center. The sharp fight continued logically:

19...gxf4 20.♗xc6 ♗g5 21.♗xd6 ♗g6 22.♗d5

Both sides have clustered their pieces in small areas of the board, as we discussed in Chapter 2: Preponderance of pieces in local operations.

However, Black is one move ahead with his kingside attack.

22...♘h5 23.h4



The critical position has been reached. How should Black continue his attack? Jussupow decides not to waste any time and goes for the most forcing option.

23... ♜xh4!?

This is a risky piece sacrifice, but at this point Jussupow already saw the contours of the mating attack!

'Calmer' options were:

- A) 23...fxg3 24.♕xg3 ♜xh4, when White obtains timely counterplay with 25.♘b5!, threatening 26.♘de7+; and
- B) 23...♞f2 24.♞xf4 ♜xf4 25.♞xf4, when Black does not have a violent attack as in the game, but can keep the initiative, nevertheless, by trading an important defender of White's king with 25...♝e4!±.

24.gxh4

Ivanchuk accepts the sacrifice, although this was not the only move.

- A) The intermediate 24.♞xf4?? does not work, due to 24...♞f3+! 25.exf3 ♜h2+ 26.♔f1 e2+ (Black opens the e-file and White's position falls apart) 27.♔e1 exd1♚+ 28.♚xd1 ♜g1+-+;
- B) However, this defensive idea could work in the event of an intermediate check: 24.♞ce7+!? ♜h8 25.♞xf4 ♜f3+ 26.exf3 ♜h2+ 27.♔f1.



analysis diagram

With the knight on e7, things are different. 27...e2+ is not possible. Nevertheless, Black can continue the attack with another sacrifice: 27... \mathbb{Q} xe7!! 28.fxg4 (the point is the deflection of the bishop away from h2-b8 diagonal: 28. \mathbb{Q} xe7 \mathbb{B} xg3!–+) 28...e2+ 29. \mathbb{Q} xe2 \mathbb{Q} xe2 30. \mathbb{B} f3. It seems that White has consolidated his defense, but looks are deceiving in this case: 30... \mathbb{Q} xg4!! (a full-rook sacrifice!) 31. \mathbb{B} xa8+ \mathbb{Q} h7, and despite the extra rook, White cannot do anything to parry Black's ... \mathbb{Q} e2xg2 threat. 32. \mathbb{Q} f4 \mathbb{Q} xg2 33. \mathbb{Q} xg2 \mathbb{Q} h3 34. \mathbb{Q} xh3 \mathbb{Q} xh3+ 35. \mathbb{Q} e2, with a likely perpetual check.

24... \mathbb{Q} xh4?

Jussupow continues according to the plan, but this combination, unfortunately, has a flaw. Instead 24... \mathbb{Q} e4! would've been objectively best. After 25. \mathbb{Q} ce7+ \mathbb{Q} h8 26. \mathbb{Q} xe4 \mathbb{Q} xh4, White has no choice but to play 27. \mathbb{Q} g2 \mathbb{Q} f2+ 28. \mathbb{Q} h1 \mathbb{Q} h4+ 29. \mathbb{Q} g1, with a three-fold repetition. But that would have been much less fun.



25.♘de7+?

The position has become very messy. It has to be noted that this game was played with a shorter time control (60 minutes per game), so one cannot blame Ivanchuk for not finding the refutation of Black's attack, nor Jussupow for missing the most precise way to attack.

The other check 25.♗ce7+! would have turned the tables: 25...♔h8 26.♘xf5 ♔h2+ 27.♔f1. If you compare this position to a similar one from the game after 25.♘de7+, you will see that the only difference is that there, the knight is placed on c6 and here, on d5. This is the difference between winning and losing! From the d5-square, the knight hits both the f4- and e3-pawns, which allows him to eliminate the danger to his king just in time. For starters, 28.♗xf4 is a threat, so the only way for Black to keep up the attack is to block the key diagonal by sacrificing another piece: 27...♝e5! and now:
 A) 28.♝xe5+?!. White still needs the dark-squared bishop in defense, so this would be a mistake. After 28...♝xe5! 29.dxe5 ♕g8,



analysis diagram

for the first time in the analysis, we can see what Jussupow's brilliant mating idea was. The threat is 30... $\mathbb{N}h1+!!$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xh1 \mathbb{N}h2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{R}g1$ checkmate! White has a brilliant defense in turn: 30. $\mathbb{N}g7!!$ (interference!) 30... $\mathbb{R}xg7$ 31. $\mathbb{B}b8+$ $\mathbb{K}h7$ 32. $\mathbb{N}f6+$ $\mathbb{N}xf6$ 33. $\mathbb{B}b1+!$ $\mathbb{R}g6$ 34. $\mathbb{N}xg6+$ $fxg6$ 35. $exf6 \mathbb{N}g3$ 36. $\mathbb{K}g1=$, and he survives;

B) 28. $dxe5$! $\mathbb{R}g8$. Black is threatening the afore-mentioned checkmate, but here comes the fascinating defense: 29. $\mathbb{N}dxe3!$ $fxe3$ 30. $e6!$. The bishop is discovered with a tempo, taking the h2-square under control! Black cannot execute the idea for which he sacrificed three minor pieces, so his position is lost.

25... $\mathbb{N}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{N}xf5 \mathbb{N}h2+$ 27. $\mathbb{K}f1$

The knight is ineffective on the c6-square in comparison to the 25. $\mathbb{N}ce7+$ variation. The f4-pawn is not hanging, so Black continues his attack without obstacles:

27... $\mathbb{R}e6$

This looks like the most natural way to bring one of the rooks to the g-file. Both ... $\mathbb{R}e6-g6$ and ... $\mathbb{R}a8-g8$ are possible now. However, there was an even stronger alternative: 27... $\mathbb{N}f6!$, opening up the g-file, but, more importantly, including his bishop in the attack via h4! Now, none of White's defenses work:

- A) 28. ♜ce7 ♕g8! 29. ♜xg8 ♕xg8–+;
- B) 28. ♜e5 ♕xe5! 29. dxe5 ♕g8 30. exf6 ♔h1+ 31. ♜xh1 ♜h2+ 32. ♜e1 ♕g1#;
- C) White's best defense against 27... ♕e6, 28. ♜d3 also does not work due to 28... ♔h4!!..



analysis diagram

Black introduces another mating threat: 29... ♔f2, 30... ♔g1#! White is in big trouble:

- C1) 29. ♜e5 ♔f2!–+;
- C2) 29. ♜xh4 ♔xh4 30. ♔g1 ♕g8–+;
- C3) The sacrifice 29. ♜xe3 is now met by 29... ♔f2! 30. ♜xe8+ ♕xe8 31.e3 ♔g1+ 32. ♔e2 ♔xg2 → and, despite having managed to escape the mating net on the kingside, White's king will not feel too safe in the center either.



28. ♕b7?

Even such a brilliant player like Ivanchuk could not cope with the complexity of the position. This move looks reasonable as it appears to win a tempo to bring the queen to the h1-a8 diagonal, protecting the g2-bishop if necessary. However, a defense, although a very difficult one, existed. White had to think non-materialistically: 28. ♕d3!!.. This prepares a sacrifice on e3, which eliminates Black's main mating threat. 28... ♕g8 29. ♕xe3! (29. ♜xe3? is the wrong way to go about it: 29... ♜xe3+ 30. ♕xe3 ♜xd4!–+) 29... ♜xe3+ 30. ♜xe3 ♜f6 (30... ♜xd4? does not work now, because the knight protects the g2-bishop from e3. 31. ♜xd4 ♜xe3 32. ♜b7!+–), and now another defensive sacrifice: 31. ♜g4! ♜xg4 allows White to bring his queen to the defense across the third rank with 32. ♜h3!=. This leads to mass exchanges and, most probably, a drawn outcome.

28... ♕g6!!



This move has some similarities with the ... $\mathbb{Q}xf4!!$ sacrifice in Polugaevsky-Nezhmetdinov. With complete disregard for material, Jussupow goes directly after White's king.

Truth be told, even the simple 28... $\mathbb{Q}g8!?$ would have given Black a decisive attack. In that case, White could at least escape the mating net with 29. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, but there should still be no doubt about the outcome of the game after 32... $\mathbb{Q}xc4!.$

29. $\mathbb{Q}xa8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$

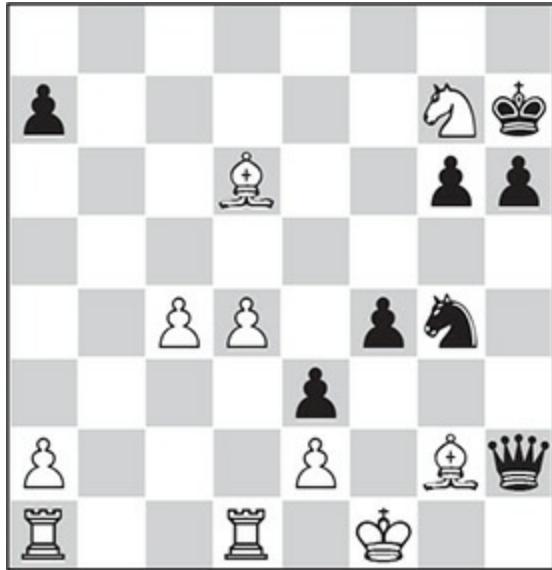
White is up a rook and two pieces, but dark clouds have gathered around his king...

30. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$

Ivanchuk had no choice but to sacrifice his queen to eliminate the mating threat. 30. $\mathbb{Q}ce7?$ would have allowed Black to fulfill his original idea: 30... $\mathbb{Q}h1+!!$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g1\#.$

30... $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}ce7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $f \times g6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$

White has given up some of his material advantage to eliminate most of Black's attacking pieces. His king is still very vulnerable, but there does not seem to be a forced checkmate; if 33... $\mathbb{Q}g3$, he goes 34. $\mathbb{Q}g1$. But even with such limited material, Jussupow creates 'something out of nothing':



33... ♜ f2!!

It is not about the attack on the rook, but 34... ♜ h3! with checkmates on g1 or f2!

34. ♜ xf4

The only move. 34. ♜ e6 ♜ h3! 35. ♜ xh3 (35. ♜ xf4 ♜ g1#) 35... ♜ f2#.

34... ♜ xf4 35. ♜ e6

The king is not in time to escape: 35. ♔ e1 ♜ g3#.

35... ♜ h2



Returning to the ‘crime scene’ and renewing the ... ♜ f2-h3 threat.

36. ♕db1 ♜h3! 37. ♕b7+ ♔h8 38. ♕b8+

Ivanchuk offers one more sacrifice to stop the bleeding...

38... ♗xb8 39. ♜xh3 ♗g3!



... but to no avail. White's king cannot be helped any more – Black checkmates only with his queen and the proud e3-pawn that has weathered all the middlegame storms. Truly, an attacking masterpiece! White resigned.

The following two ‘king-walk’ brilliancies by Chinese players could be considered modern-day versions of Polugaevsky-Nezhmetdinov.

Game 47

Jinshi Bai

2585

Ding Liren

2759

China tt 2017 (18)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♜b4 4.♘f3 0-0 5.♗g5 c5 6.e3 cxd4 7.♗xd4 ♜c6
8.♗d3 h6 9.♗h4 d5 10.♗d1 g5 11.♗g3 ♜e4 12.♗d2 ♜c5 13.♗c2



Both players have played the opening ambitiously so far. White gave up several opening tempi to put strong pressure on Black's center and force the weakening ...g7-g5 move. Black, on the other hand, has wasted no time in the opening, developed his pieces quickly, and his next sharp move is the logical continuation of his opening strategy:

13...d4! 14.♗f3

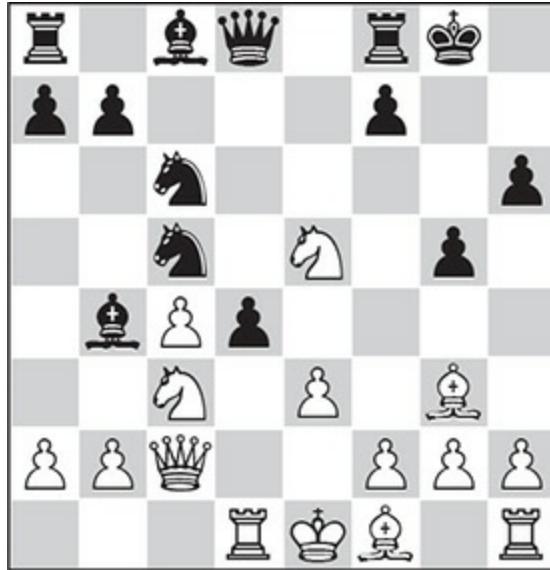
White relied on this move to indirectly defend the c3-knight and attack the d4-pawn at the same time.

14...e5

This pawn sacrifice was a part of Black's idea that started on move 13. It opens up another two of his pieces: the light-squared bishop and the king's rook.

15.♗xe5

In case of the other capture 15.♕xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5, Black obtains enough compensation for two pawns after 16...♔f6 17.exd4 ♔f5 18.♔d2 ♕ad8 by virtue of a tremendous development advantage.



15...dxc3!?

The c3-knight is not immune after all! With this queen sacrifice, Black obtains the initiative and forces White to choose his next moves carefully. Black had other interesting options, as well, such as 15... \mathbb{Q} a5 16. \mathbb{Q} xc6 bxc6 17. \mathbb{Q} xd4 \mathbb{Q} xa2 \mathbb{Q} and 15... \mathbb{Q} e8 16. \mathbb{Q} xc6 bxc6 17. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{Q} f6 18. \mathbb{Q} xd4 \mathbb{Q} f5 19. \mathbb{Q} d1 \mathbb{Q} e4 \mathbb{Q} , but the game move is the most time-efficient.

16. \mathbb{Q} xd8 cxb2+



17. \mathbb{Q} e2??

White decides to keep his material advantage, but at what price? His own

king will hinder the development of the other pieces. Instead, White should have retreated the rook with 17. $\mathbb{R}d2$, which leads into a pretty much forced sequence: 17... $\mathbb{R}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 20. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{R}xd2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{R}d8+$, when the material balance would be mostly restored. Black would have full compensation for the pawn in the endgame thanks to his more active pieces.

17... $\mathbb{R}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$

I wonder if White just missed this move when he played 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$. I cannot imagine that he willingly entered the variation where his king ends up on f3.

19. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

For a queen and a pawn, Black has a rook and a knight. But the quality of Black's pieces, as we discussed in Chapter 2, is more significant than White's material advantage. This evaluation is magnified by the poor position of White's king. Ding Liren finds a brilliant way to take advantage of these factors:



20... $\mathbb{R}d4!!$

A stunner! The rook cannot be taken and checkmate on g4 is threatened. Black begins knitting the mating net around White's king.

21. $h3$

White could have tried to alleviate his problems by giving back his queen with 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 22. $exd4$ $\mathbb{R}xd4+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. However, after 23... $\mathbb{Q}f5+$

24. ♔e4 ♕e6, he is completely lost despite material equality. The difference in harmony between his and Black's pieces is appalling.

21...h5 22.♕h2

White clears the g3-square for his king. Once more, an attempt to return material with 22.e4 ♕xe4 23.♘xe4 ♕xe4 24.♔xe4 fails. Black can, actually, continue attacking: 24...f5+ 25.♔d3 f4 26.♗xc6 bxc6 27.♕h2 ♕f5+, and White's king is in the mating net again. His position is a sad sight.

22...g4+ 23.♕g3 ♕d2!

The coordination of Black's pieces is impressive. Now the white queen has to leave the b1-h7 diagonal, and the e4-square becomes available for Black's knight.

24.♗b3 ♕e4+



25.♔h4

White's king will not have much wiggle room on the edge of the board, but this was forced. The problem is that the road to the middle of the board after 25.♔f4 is congested. Black delivers a nice checkmate after 25...♗xf2+!

26.♕xe4 ♕f5+ 27.♔d5 ♕e6+ 28.♔e4 f5+ 29.♔d3 ♕d2#.

25...♕e7+ 26.♔xh5

White's king is all but trapped. However, Black needs to bring more attackers to close the mating net. When I looked at this fascinating game for the first time, I thought that the simple 26...♗xf2 should do the trick (and it does),

but Ding's quiet move is just astounding.



26... ♕g7!!

It would seem like in most of the attacks we have seen so far, there is always one quiet, but extremely powerful move that brings a new momentum to the attack. Ding Liren patiently prepares checkmate on the h-file. There is not too much White can do in the meantime.

As a side note, 26... ♕xf2!?, with the idea 27. ♖d3 ♕f5+! 28. ♔xg4 ♖f6+ 29. ♔g3 ♖h5+ 30. ♔g4 ♕f4+! 31. ♔xh5 ♕h4#, also works for Black. White could play something else on move 27, but his position is lost anyway.

27. ♖f4

Only like this can White prolong the battle. The idea behind Ding's 26th move can be seen in the variation 27. ♖xc6 ♖f5! 28. ♖xe7 ♕h8#.

27... ♕f5 28. ♖h6+ ♔h7

White defended against the direct attack on the h-file, but his king is not any safer.

29. ♖xb7

Other possibilities are even worse:

- A) 29. ♖xc6 ♖g6+! 30. ♔xg4 f5+ 31. ♔f4 ♖d6+ 32. ♖e5 ♕xf2#;
- B) 29. ♖xf7 ♖g6+ 30. ♔xg4 ♖xf7-+;
- C) 29. ♖xg4 ♖g6#.

29... ♕xf2!

This is the most precise way to continue the attack. White has to defend against 30... ♕g3 checkmate.

30. ♔g5

Now White's king has an escape square on h4. But not for long...

30. ♔f4 does not help because of 30... ♕xf4! 31. exf4 ♕g3#.

30... ♕h8!



With this move, Ding Liren closes the mating net on White's king. White can only choose from a variety of checkmates.

31. ♕xf7

Black gets to use his king to checkmate in the variation 31. ♕xc6 (31. ♔xe7 ♕g7#!) 31... ♕g8+! 32. ♔h6 ♕xh6+ 33. ♔xh6 ♕xg5+ 34. ♔h5 f6!

35. ♕xg4 ♕g3#.

31... ♕g6+ 32. ♔xg4 ♕e5+!

This knight sacrifice (to deflect the knight from f7) is the final nail in White's king's coffin.

If it is exceptionally beautiful, some players graciously allow their opponent to carry out their checkmating attack until the end, but it was not the case in this game – White resigned here.

The final position is worth a diagram: 33. ♔h4 ♕g8+! (but not 33... ♕g7+?? 34. ♕xh8+-) 34. ♔xh8 ♕xg5#.



analysis diagram

If you look at the final checkmate positions from the games Jinshi Bai-Ding Liren or Polugaevsky-Nezhmetdinov once again, you might get an impression that they were taken from of a random bughouse game. I have always liked bughouse chess, by the way. It has different names and slightly different rules from country to country, but it is a fun chess activity all around the world. Why do I suddenly bring up bughouse, when we are talking about serious things here? Well, I believe that despite its recreational nature, bughouse can be a very useful tool for the development of combinatorics, attacking skill and non-materialistic thinking. In this type of chess, it is only the king that matters and other pieces are just passengers that jump from one board to another, so one can learn about the relative value of pieces in attack and defense in a fun, socializing way.

Game 48

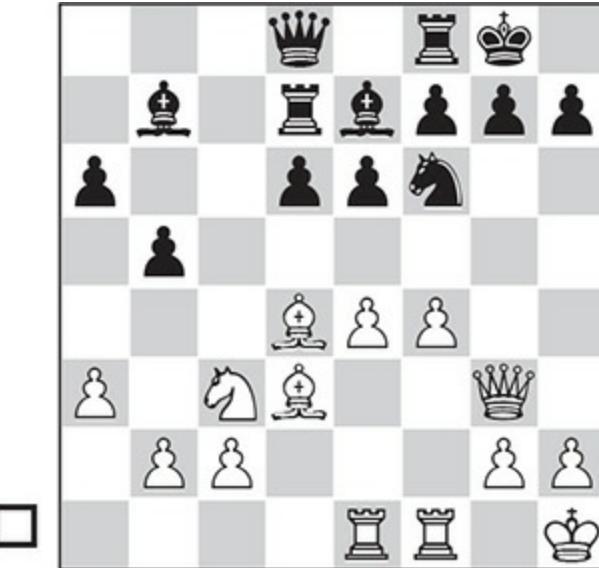
Wei Yi

2724

Lazaro Bruzon

2669

Danzhou 2015 (2)



The Scheveningen Sicilian is a complex opening. Black accepts a slightly passive, but solid position in the hope of creating a counter-attack in the center or on the queenside. As long as his pieces remain flexible, he should be able to deal with White's e4-e5 and f4-f5 breaks. That being said, I am not sure if the set-up with ... $\mathbb{R}d7$ and ... $\mathbb{N}d8$ that grandmaster Bruzon used in this game is ideal; Black's rook is placed a bit awkwardly on d7. The young Chinese targets the h7-square:

17. $\mathbb{N}h3$ g6?!

This is a standard way of dealing with the threat along the b1-h7 diagonal, but it does not work well in this position.

On the other hand, 17...h6 is also far from ideal, as the h6-pawn is often a big liability for Black in the Sicilian.

Perhaps, the passive but non-weakening 17... $\mathbb{R}e8$ was the best practical solution. White would have a large choice of plans, for instance the attacking 18. $\mathbb{N}e3!?$, but, as I said, Black probably made a strategic mistake somewhere earlier in the game.

18. $f5! \uparrow$

This standard Sicilian break against the e6- and g6-pawns ensures that White will open up the f-file on his own terms.

18... $e5$ 19. $\mathbb{N}e3$

Black cannot achieve counterplay in the center with the ...d6-d5 break, so his

position is strategically very suspicious. His next move was not forced, although it is difficult to suggest anything constructive. 20. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ is coming anyway, followed by the opening of the f-file at the right moment.

19... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

19...d5? just does not work tactically: 20.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22.f6! $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+-$) 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 24.f6! $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f3+-$.

20.fxg6 hxg6 21. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$



At the time this game was played, this strong move was a novelty. Before that, two 2200-2400 players had played 21. $\mathbb{Q}b6?$ (a misplaced tactical shot) and 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3?!$ (a sensible, but slow attacking move). Compared to these players, Wei Yi understood the importance of time and initiative better, as he charged forward without hesitation. Black's 19th move gave him a clear target – the f7-pawn, so the idea behind 21. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is to open up the f-file and the b1-h7 diagonal for the attack.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ would have been more solid, although White would have a free hand on the kingside after 22.exd5 \pm . For example: 22... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$, and he could already start a menacing pawn attack with 24.g4! $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25.h4.



22. ♜xf7!!

This remarkable rook sacrifice is the real point behind 21. ♔d5. There is no time to waste when you want to expose the opponent's king!

22... ♛xf7

Black could have tried to keep the extra piece and played 22... ♜f6, but the problem is that White continues the attack with 23. ♔e6! ♛h8 (or 23... ♜f8 24. ♜e7+!+) 24. ♜g5+-.

23. ♔h7+ ♛e6

Black's king has to run to the center. Other moves lose quickly: 23... ♛f6 24.exd5! (prepares the mating net) 24...e4 25. ♜f1+ ♛e5 26. ♜xg6! exd3 27. ♜e6#; 23... ♛f8 24. ♜h6#.

24.exd5+ ♛xd5

The alternative 24... ♜xd5 was not too appealing because Black's king remains very exposed on the kingside. It is not difficult to see that White has a decisive attack after 25. ♜xg6! (but not 25. ♜xg6+? ♛f6 26. ♜f5+ ♛e7, and Black's king hides away) 25... ♜xg2+. Only this desperate move averts the checkmate, but after 26. ♜xg2 d5 27. ♜f7+ ♛d6 28. ♜xe8, White is a clear piece up.

25. ♜e4+!

I am sure that this obligatory piece sacrifice was still a part of Wei Yi's calculations before 21. ♔d5. Black's king should not be allowed to escape to the queenside. In case of any other move such as 25.c4+, the king escapes via

25... ♜c6–+.

25... ♜xe4



Up to this point, everything has been virtually forced. Wei Yi has sacrificed a rook and a piece to drag Black's king all the way to e4. He surely had this position in his calculations before 21. ♜d5, but how far he calculated after that, we cannot know. I imagine that he had some concrete ideas on how to close the escape routes for Black's king and keep it exposed in the center. A part of his decision to sacrifice must have been intuitive as well, because it just feels like White's attack is very promising.

26. ♜f7!

A logical move – threatening checkmate in one (27. ♜f3#) and taking away squares from Black's king. Black's hand is forced.

26... ♜f6 27. ♜d2+ ♜d4 28. ♜e3+ ♜e4

Wei Yi has ascertained that he has at least a draw, but is there a way to continue the king hunt?



29. ♔b3!!

Yes, there is! White can afford to play such quiet moves (as compared to more forcing checks or captures) because Black's piece coordination is so poor that none of his pieces can come to his king's aid. On the other hand, giving a check with 29. ♔xg6+?? would have been wrong because of 29... ♕d5 30. ♔d3+ ♕e6--.

29... ♕f5 30. ♔f1+ ♕g4

All this was forced and now White has several promising ideas to target Black's king. Wei Yi is on top of the task once more, as he finds the only move that wins:

31. ♔d3!

This threatens both 32. ♔xg6 and 32. ♔e2+. It was still possible to go wrong:

A) 31. ♔d2? ♕h5! 32. ♔h3+ ♕h4--+, and g2-g4 checkmate is illegal!;

B) 31.c4, preparing 32. ♔d1, runs into an unexpected defense: 31...

♕xg2+! 32. ♔xg2 ♕a8+ 33. ♔g1 ♕e4! 34. ♔d1+ ♕h4, and there is no checkmate.

31... ♕xg2+

Black is giving up some of his extra material to finally bring his queen into the game. The alternatives don't work either:

A) 31... ♕h5 32. ♔d1+ ♕h4



analysis diagram

and now 33. $\mathbb{Q}f3!!$ closes the mating net: 33... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ e4 35. $\mathbb{Q}h3\#$;

B) 31... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 33. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$ (this is a well-known theme – a quiet king move prepares the final attack) 34... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$, and to avoid checkmate, Black has to give up his queen: 35... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $gxf5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+-$.

32. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$



Curiously, Black is threatening a checkmate in one himself, but his last wish

will not be fulfilled. Wei Yi puts an end to his suffering with another quiet move:

36. ♜e1!

Bruzon resigned in view of 36... ♜a7+ (36... ♜f4 37. ♜d3+ ♛g4 38. ♜xg6+ ♜g5 39. h3+ ♛xh3 40. ♜f5#; 36... ♜f8 37. ♜xf8 ♜xf8 38. ♜g2#) 37. ♛h1 ♜b7+ 38. ♜f3+ ♛g4



analysis diagram

39. ♜g2+! (this move that breaks the pin is the key!) 39... ♜h5 40. ♜h3+ ♜h4 41. ♜xh4#.

How easy is it to play a perfect attacking game like this one? Maybe the next game will give you an answer to this question.

Game 49

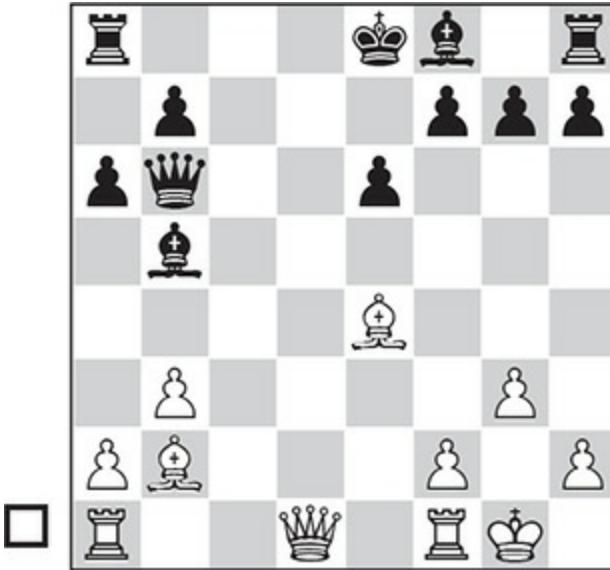
Davorin Kuljasevic

2578

Ante Brkic

2575

Croatia tt 2013 (4)



I have played countless games with Ante Brkic since we were cadets and they have usually been interesting, fighting games. This one was not an exception. In the opening, I have sacrificed a pawn for the initiative and Brkic did not react in the best way, so we got to this position.

Black just attacked White's rook on f1, planning to complete his development with 18... ♜c5. However, White does not have to comply:

18. ♜f3!

In this kind of position, White should use the momentum gained in the opening to make sure that Black's king remains in the center, even if it requires some temporary sacrifices.

18. ♜e1?! would have granted Black an important tempo to complete his development: 18... ♜c5 19. ♜c2 0-0! 20. ♜xh7+ ♛h8. White would get the material back, but very little interest in return.

18...f5?

I did not expect such a radical reaction. If Black takes the rook – 18... ♜xf1, then 19. ♜xb7! forces him to go for a clearly inferior endgame after 19... ♜e2 20. ♜c6+! (20. ♜c6+? does not work due to 20... ♛e7! 21. ♜a3+ ♛d8↖ and White's pieces are overloaded) 20... ♜xc6 21. ♜xc6+ ♛d8 22. ♜xa8±. I thought that Black had to play 18... ♜c5 19. ♜xg7 ♜g8 20. ♜f6 ♜xf1 21. ♜xf1 when White has a strong initiative for the sacrificed exchange. The bishop on e4 is a monster.

19. ♜xf5!

Of course! Black's king is exposed on e8 and White is already in attacking mode, ready to sacrifice material for attacking tempi.

In case of 19. ♜xb7, Black had prepared 19... ♛a7 when the bishop cannot get back to e4. After 20. ♜c8 ♜xf1∞ things looked quite messy.

19...0-0-0

Played quickly. My opponent was obviously anxious to get his king out of harm's way. Accepting the sacrifice would lead to a strong attack for White:

A) 19...exf5 20. ♜fe1+ ♛e7 21. ♜xf5; or

B) 19... ♜xf1 20. ♜h5+ ♛e7 21. ♜e1.

I do not remember the exact variations I calculated, but I remember that White's attack should have been nearly decisive.



This was an interesting psychological moment. I realized that White is much better on positional grounds and that if I simply retreat the bishop, I would have a superior position. However, I also saw an interesting attacking possibility and the more I calculated the lines, the less I wanted to switch back from attacking to technical mode. In the end, after a half-an-hour rumination, I decided to follow my instinct and played

20. ♜e5?!

The point of the move is to take away the b8-square from Black's king, so that White can continue attacking along the open files. In hindsight, I should

have hit the brakes and settled on a much more practical (and objectively better) solution: 20. $\mathbb{Q}fc1+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$. In fact, Black cannot develop without giving up one more pawn, which means that White is pretty much technically winning.

20...exf5 21. $\mathbb{Q}ac1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

I also calculated 21... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22. b4 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 25. $bxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e6+-$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$

All of this was a part of my calculations before move 20. White has a strong attack for the sacrificed piece. Brkic's response was also my main line, but he actually had a better move.

23... $\mathbb{Q}d8?$!

We both underestimated 23... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$. Here I thought that if I just move my queen somewhere, like 25. $\mathbb{Q}g5$, and play $\mathbb{Q}e5-d4$ on the next move, I would get back the piece with an extra pawn, while still attacking. However, it turns out that Black has more than one good defensive resource, one of them being 25... $\mathbb{Q}c6!!$ 26. b4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\leftrightarrow$.



24. $\mathbb{Q}f6+!$

I was happy to see this attacking resource in advance. I had a feeling that the attack had a good chance of succeeding if I could make such moves work.

24... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$

Brkic was surely not eager to get into a position where he loses his whole kingside, but this loses by force. 24...gxf6 was the best, when 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 26. $\mathbb{N}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xh8\pm$, followed by 28. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$, should give White very good winning chances.

25. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+?!$

A conditioned reflex. I was already in time trouble by this point, so this ‘forced’ exchange was a welcome 30-second bonus to my dwindling time on the clock. However, if I had seen the quiet move 25. $\mathbb{Q}e6!!$



analysis diagram

the game would have been over right there and then. 26. $\mathbb{N}xd7+$ is the devastating threat. Black is pinned left and right, and he cannot defend all his weaknesses. Possible variations are:

- A) 25... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 26. $\mathbb{N}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 27. $\mathbb{N}d1$; and
- B) 25... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 26. $\mathbb{N}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 27. $\mathbb{N}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{N}xf6$, and Black succumbs to the attack in both cases.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$



After spending all my remaining 5 minutes, I failed to find a forced win and decided to force the three-fold repetition with

30. ♔e5+? ½-½

Immediately after the game, my opponent asked me why I had not played 30. ♕e1+ ♔e7 31. ♕xe7+ ♔xe7 32. ♕e1+ ♔d7 33. ♕g4+!. This is the move that I had missed in my hectic, last-minute calculations. (I only looked at 33. ♕f5+?, but since this lets Black's king off the hook after 33... ♔c7 34. ♕e5+ ♔c8 35. ♕xg7 ♕d8+, I made a rational decision and called it a day) The point is that White keeps contact with the g7-pawn.



analysis diagram

Black's most stubborn defense is 33... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (33... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ loses quickly to 34. $\mathbb{L}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$) 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{L}e8$ 35. $\mathbb{L}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (35... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is refuted by a small tactic: 36. $\mathbb{L}xd5+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$, and White would have two extra pawns in the endgame), and now the only winning move is the anything but obvious 36. $\mathbb{L}d7!!$.



analysis diagram

A beautiful idea: 36... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xb6+-$. I would be very curious to know how many players would be able to calculate this winning variation from move 29 with 5 minutes on the clock.

I hope that my account of this imperfect attack has helped you realize how difficult it is to play a great attacking game. Admittedly, attacking is not my strong suit and there are players who are stronger in this area of the game and who would probably have done better in this game in my place. But another point that I would like to make is that there are many outside factors that affect one's performance during a game, such as:

- time pressure;

- sporting form;
- mood;
- level of concentration;
- psychological pressure;
- conditioned reflexes.

If you fall under the influence of at least one of these, a potential ‘Mona Lisa’ of attacks can turn into your 5-year-old nephew’s first painting. Therefore, players who have been able to create beautiful attacking games in the limiting conditions of a tournament game deserve all the credit and glory that goes with it.

Wrecking the kingside

In most of the examples we have seen so far, the prerequisites for the attack were already there. In some cases, it was the exposed king; in others, a strong open file for the attack, or an advantage in the number of attacking pieces over the defending pieces. However, in most cases our opponent will make sure to secure his king and avoid creating targets to attack. In such situations, one needs to display ‘a very particular set of skills’ to disturb the balance and generate conditions for an attack out of thin air. This requires a good feeling for the initiative, great imagination and, of course, non-materialistic thinking. It is rarely possible to break a solid defensive set-up without taking a calculated risk and sacrificing material.

Mikhail Tal, the 8th World Champion, was also the absolute champion in this category. I suggest that we start exploring this topic by looking at one of his great attacking games.

Game 50

Mikhail Tal

Vasily Smyslov

Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade ct 1959 (8)

1.e4 c6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 e5 4.♗gf3

The opening began quietly, but Smyslov's next move is an inaccuracy.

4...♞d7?!

4...♝d6 was a better way to develop.

5.d4!



Tal sensed that this was the right moment to open the center, disregarding the ‘don’t play with the same piece twice in the opening’ rule. Chess is a game of many exceptions.

5...dxe4

A more solid alternative was 5...exd4, when White can force a good version of the middlegame with an isolated queen’s pawn: 6.exd5 cxd5 7.♗xd4±.

6.♘xe4 exd4 7.♗xd4

With the exchanges in the center, Smyslov preserves the symmetry of the pawn structure. At the same time, he helps White centralize two pieces, so we can say that White already holds a slight initiative. We can also see how the knight on d7 is a hindrance for Black – it shuts down his queen and bishop.

7...♗gf6 8.♗g5 ♜e7



9.0-0-0

Tal wants to mobilize his forces as quickly as possible. However, he could also have transformed his opening advantage into a long-term positional one with 9. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$. The bishop pair gives White a stable advantage in an open position with symmetrical pawns on both flanks. For example: 10... $\mathbb{B}a5+$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{B}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$.

9...0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$

Smyslov seeks counterplay with this queen sortie. Again, a more solid alternative existed: 10... $\mathbb{B}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $h6\infty$.

11. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

Tal develops another piece, but there is more than meets the eye to this move. In fact, already at this point, Tal was prepared to sacrifice this bishop to keep the initiative.

This is how ‘the magician from Riga’ explained his decision: ‘If White defends the pawn with 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ then Black has 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4\leftarrow$. That was when I realized: the only way to keep and develop the initiative is with a piece sacrifice.’

We can see from this remark that Tal valued time in chess highly.



11...b5

A logical move, since 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ loses a piece to 12...c5. The position has become very sharp.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

Not a simple move (12. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ was a more obvious possibility to keep the initiative). Tal's point was that $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ idea gains in strength if the g5-square is available for the knight. Of course, this move comes with a tempo – White needs such moves to keep up his initiative.

12... $\mathbb{R}a6$

Once again, Smyslov chooses the sharpest move, both keeping contact with the a-pawn and keeping the ...c6-c5 threat in reserve. He had two alternatives:

A) In case of 12... $\mathbb{R}c7$, Tal remarks: 'I would probably not have refrained from my old hobby: proving that a rook is stronger than two pieces.'

13. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{R}xf7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{R}xf7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{R}g8$ 16. $\mathbb{R}he1\uparrow$;

B) Probably the best option was 12... $\mathbb{R}a4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{R}axc8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, and now 14... $\mathbb{R}a6!$ (Tal only considered the endgame after 14... $\mathbb{R}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$, which looks a bit more pleasant for White) 15. $\mathbb{R}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\leftarrow$, and after the trade on b3, Black's chances should not be worse.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Looks ugly, but the bishop has to stay on this diagonal. The more natural move 13... $\mathbb{Q}c5?$ would have been met with 14. $\mathbb{R}h4$ $bxc4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \rightarrow$, and

here Tal enumerates four threats: 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$, 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$, 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ and 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$, against which Black has no good defense. For example: 15... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h6!!$ $gxh6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh6\#$.



14. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

Tal noticed that Black's last two moves were not ideal from the perspective of piece coordination. To take advantage of this, he launched a kingside attack without hesitation. Of course, the opportunity to attack rarely comes for free; he had to sacrifice his c4-bishop to win an important attacking tempo.

14... $bxc4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Tal's first target in Black's solid kingside set-up is the g7-pawn. Several defenses are possible now. Smyslov chooses the most active one.

15... $\mathbb{Q}h5!?$

Giving back the piece to slow down White's attack and create counterplay of his own. Alternatives were:

A) 15... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$. White continues with 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}df6$ (Tal gives a nice variation: 17... $\mathbb{Q}ef6?$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$) 18. $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa5\pm$, with a dominant endgame;

B) A very risky defense is 15... $g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, and Black looks terrible on the dark squares. In response to 17... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$, Tal intended to

play

B1) 18. ♕he1!?



analysis diagram

with a strong long-term attack in return for the sacrificed piece. He concludes: ‘All these variations prove that the piece sacrifice was intuitive and that it was practically impossible to calculate everything over the board.’ I have to point out an interesting attacking option examined by Tal:

B2) 18. ♕h4!? ♜a1+ 19. ♜d2. Here, Black has an absolutely astonishing defense: 19... ♜a5!! (Tal analyzed only 19... ♜a6 20. ♜f5+ ♛h8 21. ♜e2! ♜e8+ 22. ♜f1!, which is just hopeless for Black now that White’s king is safe),



analysis diagram

and somehow all the tactics work for Black! 20. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3!!$ (incredible!) 22. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5\infty$.

16. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$

Black's idea was to deflect White queen from the g7-square, as in the variation 16. $\mathbb{Q}xh5?$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6-$ +, and it is Black, not White, who attacks!

16... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$

Tal thought that this ambitious move was a decisive mistake, but it is not. However, alternatives were probably safer:

A) 17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ (Tal's initial intention was 18. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5?$, threatening checkmate on h7. He awards this move a !!, missing the following defense: 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb2+!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $gxh6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5!$, and Black is up a piece) 18... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}7g5$ $h6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$, with a slight advantage in the endgame due to a superior pawn structure;

B) 17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d6$, which gives White a strong initiative, but the position remains unclear after 19... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$.

18. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6??$

Actually, only this blunder cost Smyslov the game. To his defense, Tal's queen sacrifice is not the most obvious move...

The only move was 18... ♕f6 19. ♜g5 (Tal thought that White wins after 19. ♜xf7+ ♔g8 20. ♜3g5, but once again, he missed a clever sequence that defends the h7-square: 20... ♜a1+ 21. ♜d2 ♜xc3+ 22.bxc3 ♜f6!, and Black even takes over) 19... ♜xg5+ 20. ♜xg5 f6 21. ♜f4, when White keeps the initiative, but there is no direct attack on the king.



19. ♜xf7!

Tal is modest about this beautiful move: 'Not so much to please the crowd, as to speed up the attack.'

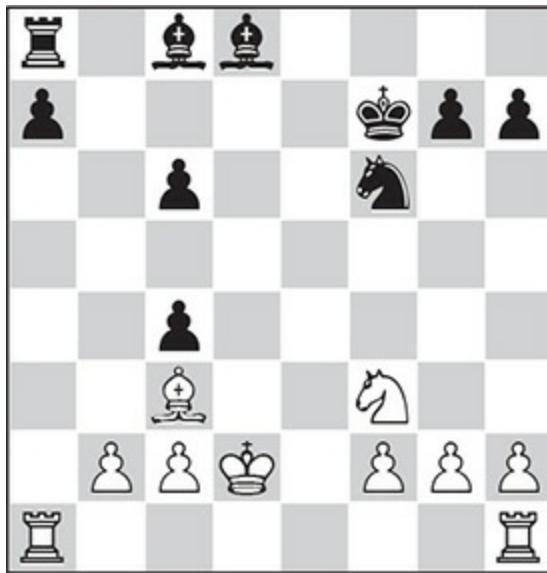
19... ♜a1+

Black is forced to give this check, but after the king moves, his queen will be hanging, too. In case of 19... ♜xf7 20. ♜xd8+ ♔g8, White has a choice of smothered checkmates: 21. ♜xf7# and 21. ♜xg8#.

20. ♜d2 ♜xf7

Nothing is changed by 20... ♜e4+ 21. ♜e2 ♜xc3+ 22.bxc3+- ♜a3 23. ♜g8+! ♜xg8 24. ♜f7#.

21. ♜xf7+ ♔g8 22. ♜xa1 ♔xf7+-



As the result of the attack, White obtains a decisive material advantage in the endgame.

23. ♜e5+ ♛e6 24. ♜xc6 ♜e4+ 25. ♛e3 ♜b6+ 26. ♜d4 1-0

As Tal himself admitted, he made a risky, mostly intuitive, sacrifice because it was impossible to calculate the consequences of the combination up to a clear conclusion. But as long as he had the initiative in his hands, Tal felt that he should have good practical chances.

We also saw how Smyslov defended well up to a certain point, but then committed a one-move blunder that cost him the game. This scenario happens quite often. Simply put, it is easier to attack than defend, and this is true not just in chess. Thus, the risk of an attacking sacrifice is not one-sided; we should keep in mind that there is also a significant amount of risk for our opponent in the defense. Let us look at one high-level example that proves this point.

Game 51

Levon Aronian

2780

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

2820

Batumi ol 2018 (5)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♗xe4 6.d4 ♗e7!?

Mamedyarov employs a rare sideline of the Open Ruy Lopez. I have used it once against GM Ilya Smirin and I think that it can work well as a one-time surprise weapon, although probably not more than that. The main line is 6...b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6, with a lot of opening theory to follow.

7.♗e1 b5 8.♗xe4

The principled move. Alternatives are 8.♗b3 and 8.d5.

8...d5 9.♗xe5 ♗xe5 10.♗xe5 bxa4 11.♔e1 f6 12.♗e3 c5 13.♗d1 0-0 14.♗c3



Everything has been pretty much forced up to this point. White has a superior pawn structure, so Black should come up with some active ideas to compensate for it. I am not sure where Mamedyarov's home preparation ended, but his next move may be a small inaccuracy.

14...♗b8

Black would get pretty decent play after 14...a3!? 15.b3 cxd4 16.♕xd4 ♗b7, followed by ...♗a8-c8, etc.

15.b3 cxd4 16.♕xd4 ♗d6!?

Knowing Mamedyarov's active playing style, we cannot condemn him for giving up a pawn (in fact, two pawns) for uncertain compensation. Black gets a slight initiative, but objectively speaking, he should not have enough compensation with White's best play. Let us see now how one of the strongest players in the world copes with his defensive tasks.

The alternative is 16...axb3 17.axb3 ♕b7 18.♕a3 ♕xa3 19.♖xa3±, when Black keeps material equality, but also remains in a very passive position. I do not see Mamedyarov entering this kind of position with black unless held at gunpoint.



17.♘xd5+ ♔h8 18.♖d3 ♘e8!

Black's sacrifice is tactically based on this cunning move. He escapes the pin and prepares the activation of his queen via the g6-square. In connection with ...♕c8-b7, this should give him enough ammunition to keep the initiative for at least the next couple of moves.

19.♕b2 ♕e5 20.♘xa4



White is up two pawns now, so Black needs to avoid exchanges and drum up some threats on the kingside.

20... ♜b5!?

Mamedyarov is planning to use the rook in the attack along the fifth rank.

21. ♔f3

This move allows Black to develop the bishop to the long diagonal with a tempo, so 21. ♔c4!? deserved serious attention. After 21... ♜e6 (21... ♜b7 does not make sense now, because White exchanges the bishops: 22. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 23. ♜f1, and I do not see compensation for Black) 22. ♜h4 ♜c7±, Black keeps some compensation due to better coordination of his pieces, but this is not enough for two sacrificed pawns.

21... ♜b7 22. ♜e3

In case of 22. ♜d1?! ♜b8!,



analysis diagram

Black would get a perfect attacking set-up with ‘machine-guns’ on b8 and b7 and ‘heavy artillery’ (queen, rook) ready to target g2 and h2.

22... ♜e4!

The idea of this important intermezzo is to chase away White’s rook from the third rank, where it could have been useful in defense.

23. ♖d2

As a result of the double pawn sacrifice, Black has maximized the potential of his pieces with tempo play. The question is, what does he do next?

23... ♜xg2!

Mamedyarov wants to keep up the momentum of attack, which is only possible with sacrifices at this point, similar to Tal’s game. It is a risky decision, but with a potential to pay off handsomely if White goes wrong.

The alternative 23... ♜g6 is met by 24.f3 ♜xc2 25. ♖c1±, and Black’s attack would have reached a dead end. For a player with Aronian’s technical skill, winning this position with white would probably be just a matter of time.

Mamedyarov’s sacrifice changes the nature of game completely. It becomes double-edged, requiring a lot of precise, concrete decisions.



24. ♕xg2

This was actually the first crossroad for Aronian. He was not forced to capture the bishop, since the alternative 24.f4 was also a serious option. However, I suppose that he refrained from it because of another piece sacrifice: 24... ♜b7! (White should not mind the exchanges after 24... ♜xb2?! 25. ♕xe8 ♜xe8 26. ♜xb2±, when he would have excellent winning chances in the endgame) 25.fxe5 ♜c6.



analysis diagram

Black's attack looks very scary. The engine finds the only moves for White to avoid checkmate: 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ g5 27. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$, and even claims that White is winning after 31.c4!, but this would be beyond human comprehension in a tournament game.

24... $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

White's king cannot hide in the corner with 25. $\mathbb{Q}h1?$, because of the classical double-bishop sacrifice 25... $\mathbb{Q}xh2!$ and to stop the checkmate, White would have to play 26. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5\#$, when Black wins back the piece with interest.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xh2$



This was the moment of truth for Aronian. He has several reasonable defenses against Black's threat 26... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ and 27... $\mathbb{Q}g1\#$. He chooses, probably, the most natural one.

26. $\mathbb{R}e1?$

This seems like the most efficient way to prevent the afore-mentioned threat. White centralizes his passive rook on the important e-file. However, this move is a mistake for concrete reasons. Positional considerations can often be misleading in positions that require concrete calculation of variations, such as this one.

A) The right continuation was 26. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4!!$



analysis diagram

and somehow this feeble-looking defense works out for White. One possible variation is 27... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ (28... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$) 29. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 30. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 35. $c3+-$,



analysis diagram

and White somehow miraculously escapes all these checks and attacks. But, once again, understanding that this is the right way for White to proceed

is just beyond human experience and one should not blame anyone, even the world's leading players, for not finding these moves;

B) Another reasonable defense was 26.f3, taking the g1-square under control and clearing the second rank. After 26... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$, the position remains unclear. 26... $\mathbb{B}e8?$ does not work now because of 27. $\mathbb{B}e1!+-$.

26... $\mathbb{B}g5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e2??$

Even such strong players sometimes have blackouts. Aronian missed a simple counter-tactic on the next move. Black's threats could, once again, be parried with the knight maneuver toward the center: 27. $\mathbb{N}c3!\infty$. The position is full of possibilities, which I suggest the reader explore in depth at his/her leisure. It is just important to determine that Black does not win the queen with 27... $\mathbb{B}g1+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, and now:

A) 28... $\mathbb{B}xe1+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{B}xe4+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f1$, and the endgame is roughly equal; or

B) 28... $\mathbb{B}e8$ 29. $\mathbb{B}xg1!$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ (once again, this is the key defensive motif) 30...h5 31. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h3\pm$. White defends and even plays for more because Black's bishop is semi-trapped on g1.

27... $\mathbb{B}e8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d1$



28... $\mathbb{B}g1!$

This is the move that Aronian had most likely missed – a sort of cross-pin. Otherwise, White would be just winning.

29. ♜e5

This is the only move that averts immediate resignation. 29. ♜xe8+ ♕xe8

30. ♛xg1 ♜xg1 or 29. ♛xg1 ♜xg1+ lose easily.

29... ♜xe5

Black's position is completely winning on positional grounds now.

Mamedyarov confidently converted.

**30. ♛de2 h5 31. ♜d3 ♜g2 32. ♜b6 ♛xe1+ 33. ♛xe1 ♜xf2 34. ♜d5 ♛d8 35.c4
♜xa2 36. ♜f3 g6 37. ♛e3 ♜g7 38. ♜h3 ♜f2 39. ♛d3 ♜g1+ 40. ♜c2 ♜h2+
41. ♜xh2 ♜xh2 42. ♛h3 ♜e5 43. ♛d3 a5 44. ♛e4 ♜f7 45. ♛f3 ♛h8 46. ♛g2 g5
47. ♜e3 ♜e6 48. ♛f1 f5 0-1**

In this game, we got a confirmation of the point previously made: it is easier to attack than to defend. Finding brilliant defensive concepts, such as those that Aronian missed in this game, is much more difficult than finding similarly strong attacking ideas.

Part of the reason is that most people are much better trained in attack than in defense, while the other part is that defense is psychologically much more unpleasant, even if you know that your position should objectively be fine. This is a very important notion to keep in mind when we get into such positions with either color.

While we are with Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, one of the strongest attacking players of our time, let us look at another bright example of how he creates an attack seemingly out of nothing.

Game 52

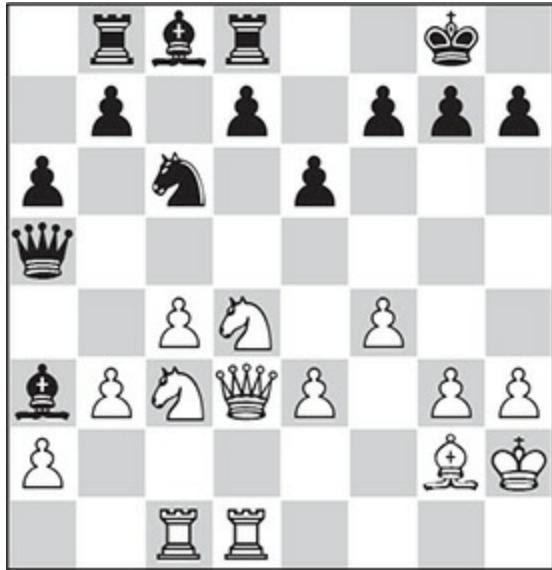
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

2748

Aleksandr Lenderman

2626

Doha 2015 (3)



In a Nimzo-Indian gone Catalan middlegame, Black has been doing well to contain White's spatial advantage. His position is very solid and instead of continuing to maneuver with 22. $\mathbb{R}b1$, Mamedyarov decides to change the nature of the position sharply with

22... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

Some commentators have given this move a '!?' mark, others '?!' or even worse. It depends on how you look at it: if you will look from a human point of view, then this move is a springboard to a very imaginative attacking idea and may deserve more than just an 'interesting move' mark. On the other hand, if we look at it completely objectively, it contains a serious tactical oversight that immediately gives Black an almost winning position. So, by the highest standards, it is not only a 'dubious' move, but probably just a bad move. I will therefore refrain from giving it any evaluations and let the reader judge on his/her own.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xc1$

Both players missed a difficult refutation of White's idea. In case of 22... $dxc6$, they thought that White was just winning a pawn with 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{R}xd3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$. It looks like Black should trade the rooks and suffer in the endgame, but, in fact, he wins with 24... $\mathbb{R}d7!!$.



analysis diagram

Armchair experts with their engines on will immediately jump at the opportunity to criticize the players for missing such a ‘simple’ win, but, as I explained a bit earlier, a lot of external factors and human limitations influence our thinking during the game. We cannot blame either player for missing this counter-intuitive move in the heat of the battle – people are not machines! Objectively speaking, though, this move would probably have sealed White’s fate, because he could not save his a5-knight:

- A) 25. $\mathbb{N}xd7 \mathbb{Q}xd7$ 26. $\mathbb{N}d1 \mathbb{Q}e8!$, and there is no good defense against 27... $\mathbb{Q}b4$;
- B) 25. $\mathbb{N}b1 \mathbb{Q}b4-$ +
- C) 25. $c5 \mathbb{Q}xc1$ 26. $\mathbb{N}xc1$ is relatively the best, but Black would have a nearly winning advantage, nevertheless.

23. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

The point of the exchange sacrifice was to attack the h7-pawn with tempo. Black has a tough choice now: where to remove the bishop?

23... $\mathbb{Q}b2?!$

The difficulty of Black’s decision was that it was not so easy to predict on which diagonal the bishop would be more useful.

It turns out that it was better to play 23... $\mathbb{Q}a3$, so that Black can hide his king on f8 after 24. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+ \mathbb{K}f8$.

Now White does not have the queen check on d6, as he would have in the game position. White would still keep the initiative here, although it would not lead to a dangerous attack, as it did in the game.



24. ♜xe6!!

A Tal-like sacrifice! After sacrificing an exchange, White gives up more material, just to expose Black's king. Even though there is no forced win in sight, Black will have some serious defensive tasks to solve. We can only guess whether Mamedyarov had foreseen this idea before he played 22. ♜xc6, but when it comes to such an imaginative player, my guess would be that he did. If you have ever seen how quickly he spots tactical ideas in 30 seconds handicap blitz games, you will know what I am talking about.

24...fxe6 25. ♜xh7+ ♔h8

This was the second difficult decision for Lenderman. It is not easy to understand where Black's king is safer. In hindsight, it may have been better to bring the king closer to the center.

Without the bishop on a3, 25... ♛f8? makes no sense due to 26. ♜d6+ ♛f7 27. ♜e4!, and White obtains a winning attack: 27... ♜f6 28. ♜g5+ ♜xg5 29. fxg5.

However, 25... ♛f7 was a serious alternative.



analysis diagram

White is down a rook, but he can continue his attack:

- A) 26. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $d5!$ (it feels like Black should be fine after this move)
27. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ and here, White would have to find an incredible move:



analysis diagram

29. $\mathbb{Q}g8!!$, which forces a draw after 29... $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 30. $cxd5$. Despite the extra rook, piece and move, Black cannot avoid a perpetual check! 30... $exd5$

31. $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$; or
 B) 26. $\mathbb{Q}g6+!?$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, with attacking ideas similar to the game.



26. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$

Mamedyarov brings a very important piece into the attack, threatening $\mathbb{Q}e4-g5-f7\#$ or $\mathbb{Q}d3-g6-h5$ with checkmate. Despite the extra rook, Black is scrambling to put his defense together as all his pieces are on the queenside. This was the critical moment: among many possible defenses, only one move can save him.

26... $\mathbb{Q}f8?$

Lenderman decides to cover the f7-square first, but this is not the right defense. Let us see which possibilities he had:

A) Bringing the queen to the kingside with 26... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ is also insufficient, because of 27. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h7++-$;

B) The other way to include the queen in defense is 26... $d5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$, but Black is not in time as White has 28. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ with checkmate on the next move. By the way, here we see why 26... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ was not such a good move – it takes away the escape square for his king;

C) There is also an idea to clear the g7-square for the king: 26... $g6$. However, even that does not alleviate Black's defense. White's attack proves to be too strong after 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e2!!$ (all one can say about this

move is – wow...) 28... $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 29. $\mathbb{B}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30.g4 → ,



analysis diagram

and White has a completely winning position despite being down a rook! Black's pieces are out of the game and White has several ways to build up his attack, such as $\mathbb{Q}d1-d6$, $f4-f5+$ or $\mathbb{Q}e4-g5$, $\mathbb{B}b2-c2+$, etc. If this position is not a proof of how important it is to think non-materialistically in chess, then I don't know what is;

D) The only move that could save Black was 26... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$.



analysis diagram

White has several ways to continue the attack, but none of them promise more than a draw by perpetual:

D1) 27. \mathbb{Q} xf6 gxf6 28. \mathbb{Q} g6.

This position looks scary for Black and maybe Lenderman thought that White has a winning attack here, but, in fact, he could defend with 28... \mathbb{Q} f8!. There are other defensive possibilities, but all of them fail for one reason or another. It is difficult to see in advance that only this move saves Black: 29. \mathbb{Q} h6 (29. \mathbb{Q} g8 is met by 29... \mathbb{Q} f5!–+) 29... \mathbb{Q} f7!. This is the point behind Black's previous move. He defends the critical h7-square and leaves White without attacking resources after 30. \mathbb{Q} g6+ \mathbb{Q} g8 31. \mathbb{Q} xf7+ \mathbb{Q} xf7 32. \mathbb{Q} h7+, with perpetual check;

D2) White has another way toward the f7-square: 27. \mathbb{Q} d6, and now the key defense is 27... \mathbb{Q} xa2+! 28. \mathbb{Q} g1 \mathbb{Q} f8, and the problem for White in this line, unlike in most of the other lines, is that Black's queen takes away the e2-square for the transfer of White's queen to h5. This slows down White's attack significantly. After 29. \mathbb{Q} g6 (29. \mathbb{Q} g6 is met by 29... \mathbb{Q} e2!–+) 29... \mathbb{Q} e7, Black would have good chances for a successful defense.

27. \mathbb{Q} g6!

White can proceed with his attack slowly, since Black's pieces are so uncoordinated that it is difficult to see how he can prevent the three-move threat: \mathbb{Q} e4-g5/ \mathbb{Q} d3-e2-h5+ with checkmate.

27... \mathbb{Q} g8 28. \mathbb{Q} e2



28...♝f6

Black cannot even save his skin with sacrifices any more: 28...♝f6
29.♛xf6+ ♚xf6 30.b4!. This pawn sacrifice is crucial, as it deflects Black's queen from the fifth rank. After 30...♝xb4 31.♚h5, Black's king is in a mating net. For example: 31...♝b2+ 32.♚g1 d5 33.cxd5 exd5 34.♚xd5+ ♚h8,



analysis diagram

and White concludes his mating attack with 35.♚d8+! ♚xd8 36.♛xd8#.

29.c5

Now ♜e2-h5 is impossible to stop and Black can already resign. However, it seems that Lenderman falls into the category of chivalrous chess players who allow their opponent to carry out the attack until checkmate.

29...♝c3 30.♛h5 ♕f5 31.♝xf5

31.♛h7+ ♛f8 32.♝h8+ ♛e7 33.♛e8# was a quicker checkmate, but it does not really matter.

**31...exf5 32.♛e8+ ♛h7 33.♝g5+ ♛h6 34.♞d6+ ♚f6 35.♝h8+ ♛g6 36.♛h7#
1-0**

As you analyze this and other attacking games, it is useful to ask yourself how the attacker used the specific attacking abilities that I have enumerated in the introduction to this section. For example:

- 1) How did Mamedyarov recognize when it was time to attack?
- 2) Which critical squares around the king did he target?
- 3) Which were the key defensive ideas that he had to anticipate?
- 4) How did he coordinate his forces in the attack?
- 5) Which mating patterns had he foreseen?

Just thinking about these issues helps one improve his understanding of attacking process. Attacks may seem more random than positional play, but I believe that chess is a deeply logical game in which certain ‘natural laws’ govern even the outwardly chaotic and volatile positions.

Finally, let us see a game of another bright attacking player of our era – Levon Aronian. This game is not as spectacular as those we have seen before, but it illustrates well how to spot the right moment to attack. Besides, I had to do justice to Aronian – I could not complete this chapter showing only a game that he lost!

Game 53

Levon Aronian

2799

David Navara

2737

St Louis rapid 2017 (1)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♜a6 5.b3 ♜b4+ 6.♗d2 ♜e7 7.♘c3 0-0 8.♗g2
 d5 9.cxd5 exd5 10.0-0 ♜e8 11.♘e5 ♜b7 12.♖c2 c5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♗ad1
 ♔c8 15.e4 ♜f8 16.f4 d4 17.♘d5 ♜xd5 18.exd5



Both players have played a model game in the 4.g3-Queen's Indian so far. Here Navara makes a seemingly logical decision.

18...f6?!

He surely spotted that after the opening of the b1-h7 diagonal for the queen on the previous move, Aronian was getting ready to sacrifice his knight on f7. What can be a more natural way to defend against a dangerous threat than to expel that piece from the dominant central position with a tempo?

However, since Black is lagging in development, it was more urgent to play 18... ♞d7. Navara was probably concerned about the pin: 19. ♜h3 (19. ♜c6 is just for show – the knight is unstable on c6 after 19... ♞f6+, threatening 20... ♞xd5). White seems to just win material here, but things are not so simple after 19... ♛e7!. The thing with such moves (just like 24... ♛d7!! in Mamedyarov-Lenderman) is that they are inconspicuous – they just don't seem like they could be the best move in the position.

Yet, this exchange sacrifice would have given Navara much better chances than the materialistic continuation in the game. White should not accept the

sacrifice immediately, but rather continue with 20. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (if 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd7?$ $\mathbb{R}xd7+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$, White would get slaughtered on the light squares) when, besides retreating to e8, Black can try to obtain the initiative himself with a stunning rook sacrifice: 20... $\mathbb{R}e6!!$.



analysis diagram

The whole idea is to clear out the h1-a8 diagonal, which was weakened after 19. $\mathbb{Q}h3$. But it can be done only with a non-materialistic approach! After 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ (Black would obtain a strong attack in case of 21. $dxe6?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 22. $exf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$) 21... $fxe6$, the position is very complicated, but Black has good compensation, considering White's weakness on the light squares.

I would imagine that most people would instinctively retreat their knight to c4 or d3 in a rapid game. Aronian, on the other hand, sensed that Black's last move seriously weakened his king's position and, realizing that Black is not sufficiently developed, started the attack with



19. ♜ de1!!

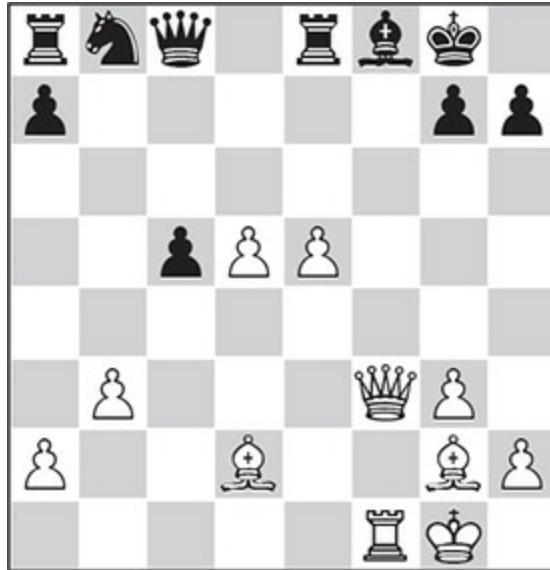
A brilliant intuitive piece sacrifice, which is even more impressive for a rapid game.

19...fxe5

Navara takes material, although 19... ♜d7!? was also an option. White can ignore this and continue the attack with 20. ♜e4! (or just play for a positional advantage with 20. ♜c6±, since Black cannot move his knight to f6 anymore) 20...fxe5 21. ♜xh7+ ♛h8 22.fxe5, and, similar to the game, White would have a strong attack for the sacrificed piece. Black would probably have to give back some material: 22... ♜xd5 23. ♜g6 ♜xe5 24. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 25. ♜h5 ♜g4 26. ♜xe5 ♛xh7 27. ♜xd5 ♜e8, with a worse, but playable position.

20.fxe5 ♜d7

This was surely also the first move of Aronian's calculation when he entered this variation. However, Black had another possibility: 20...d3!? 21. ♜xd3 ♜a6 22. ♜f3 ♜xf1 23. ♜xf1.



analysis diagram

We can see from this position that 19...Bd1!! was largely an intuitive sacrifice. It was impossible to calculate all the details of the combination until the end, but Aronian's intuition told him that even in this position where he is down a rook, his strong central pawns supported by other pieces, just have to prevail against a more numerous, but severely underdeveloped black army. For instance: 23...c4!? 24.d6 Qd7 25.e6!, and White crashes through.

21.e6 ♜f6



22. ♜xf6!

This exchange sacrifice and the next move were surely foreseen by Aronian three moves ago, on move 19. If White did not have these moves, his piece sacrifice would have been refuted.

22...gx~~f~~f6 23. ♜f5!

This was the point of Aronian's combination. He sacrificed a lot of material to gain attacking momentum and now he is ready to send all his pieces against Black's king. The critical squares are h7 and f6. Black has such poor development and piece coordination that his extra rook is practically meaningless in defense. Importantly, White's central pawns serve as a barrier between the white and black pieces, allowing Aronian to develop his attack undisturbed.

23... ♜d8?

Navara covers the f6 weakness, but this move loses quite easily. Better defenses were:

A) 23... ♜c7 24. ♜e4 ♜ad8 25. ♜g4+ ♛h8 26. ♜h4 ♜xd5 27. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 28. ♜xd5 ♜e7 29. ♜f5±; or

B) 23... ♜e7 24. d6 ♜xg2 25. dx~~e~~x~~e~~7 ♜xe7 26. ♜xg2±, in both cases giving back the extra rook to fend off a direct attack on the king. The arising type of position with the strong e6-pawn should be winning for White, but Black can still put up some resistance.



24. ♕e4

Aronian engages the heavy artillery first.

24... ♜e7 25. ♜g4+ ♔h8

25... ♜g7 leads to a forced checkmate on h7 after 26. ♜e4.

26. ♜e4

Now the light-squared bishop joins the attack, too, and Black is busted.

26... ♜c8 27. ♜h4 ♔g8

Navara probably realized that he cannot defend the h7-pawn with 27... ♜cc7, due to 28. ♜xf6+ ♔g8 29. ♜g4+ ♜g7 30. ♜xg7+!, and the queen on d8 is not protected: 30... ♜xg7 31. ♜xd8#.

28. ♜xh7 ♜xd5 29. ♜g6+ ♜g7 30. ♜h5!



The final touch. Black's king is caught in a mating net.

30... ♜xe4 31. ♜h8# 1-0

In a complex middlegame, with limited time on the clock, Aronian still managed to find a narrow and difficult path toward a winning attack. This ability is not an accident – it comes from many hours of analysis and practice of such positions, more than anything else.

Conclusion

- Time is a very important factor in chess: an advantage in time (initiative)

allows us to execute our ideas and force the opponent to make moves he normally would not want to make.

- The smallest unit of time in chess is called a ‘tempo’ (half a move).
- To gain an advantage in time, we often have to give up material.
- The importance of time increases immensely in positions with concrete play, such as tactical complications and simple endgames.
- Compared to material and positional advantages, time is the most fragile kind of advantage; however, it can also be the most powerful, if used skilfully.
- When one has the initiative, the primary goal is to dictate the tempo of the game and force the opponent into doing something he normally would not do; it does not necessarily mean attacking the king, but we expect something in return.
- When attacking, the primary goal is to checkmate the opponent’s king, while material or positional gains are secondary.
- Taking a calculated risk when making an intuitive sacrifice is often worth it, because defending against a strong initiative, even when up on material, is a difficult task for the opponent for both practical and psychological reasons.
- One of the main points of having the initiative is that it poses difficult practical problems for our opponent to solve.
- One of the best defensive strategies when the opponent has sacrificed material for the initiative or attack is to sacrifice the material back, to neutralize his threats and reduce his advantage in time.
- Some of the best players to study when it comes to initiative and attack are Alexander Alekhine, Garry Kasparov and Rashid Nezhmetdinov.
- Mastery in attack comprises of many skills, such as recognizing the conditions for attack, creating conditions for attack, knowing typical attacking patterns, anticipating the opponent’s best defenses, envisioning and carrying out mating combinations, and, of course, non-materialism!
- Playing a perfect attacking game is difficult and requires, besides strong attacking skills, a good sporting form, proper mood, good nerves and

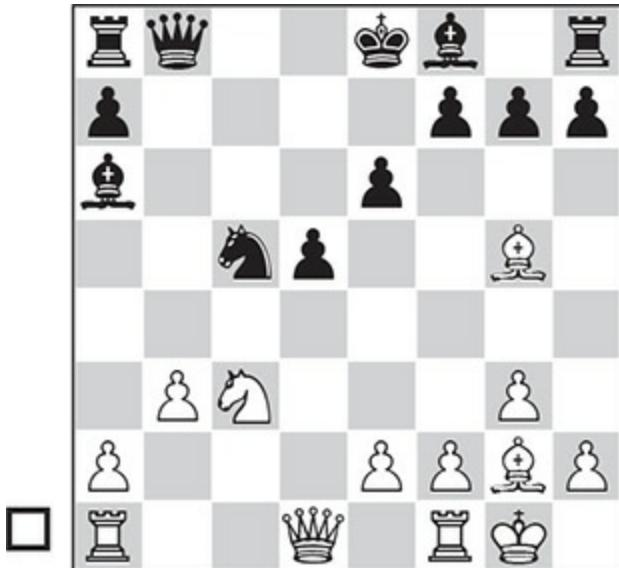
immunity to outside pressure.

- Finding brilliant defensive concepts is much more difficult than finding similarly strong attacking ideas.

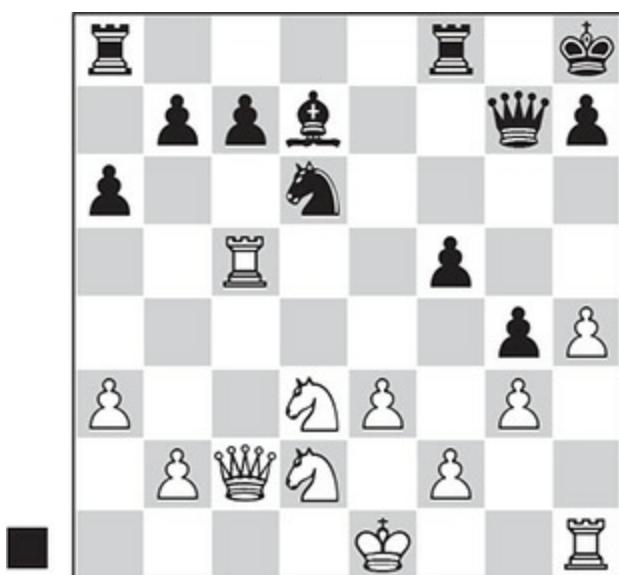
CHAPTER 3

Test exercises

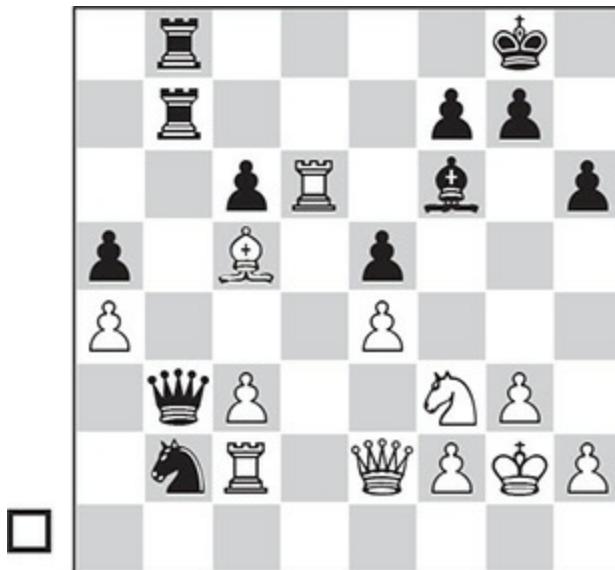
Exercise 11



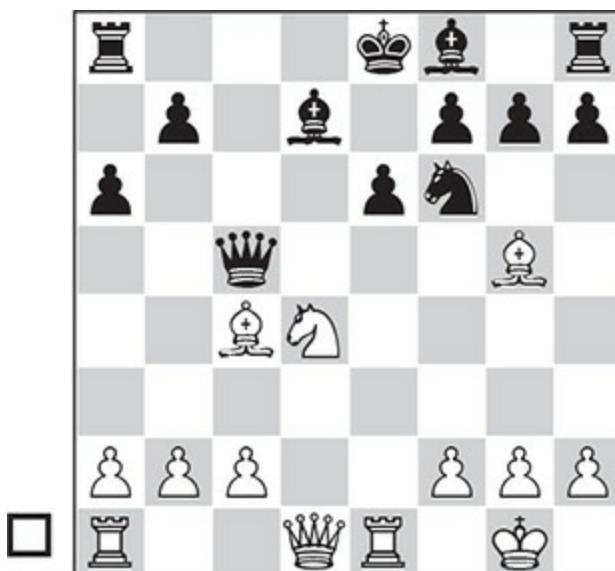
Exercise 12



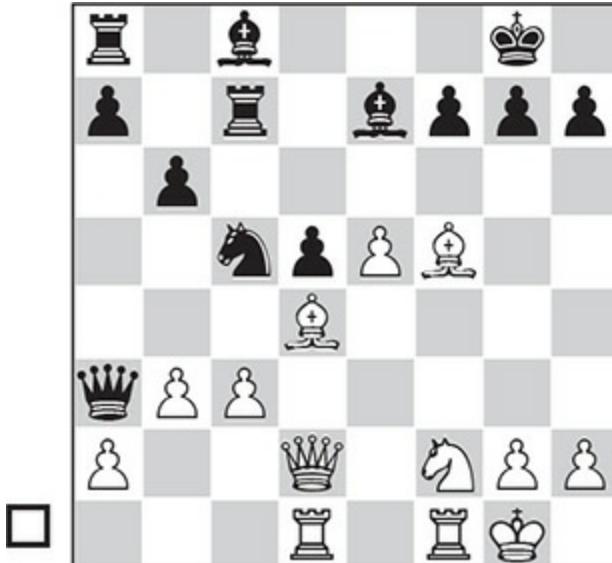
Exercise 13



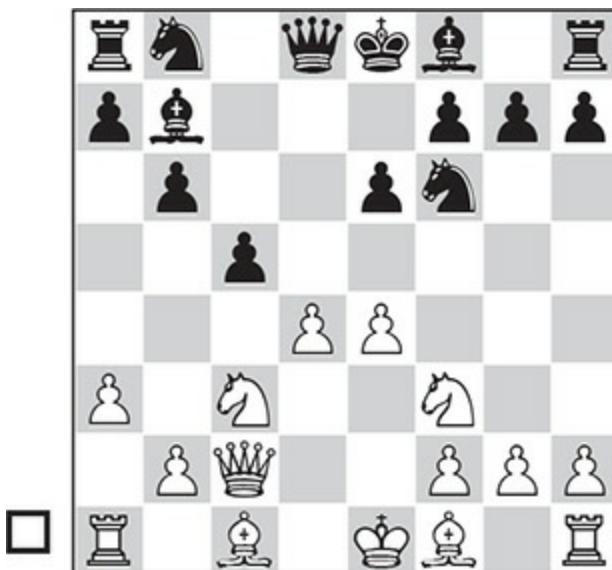
Exercise 14



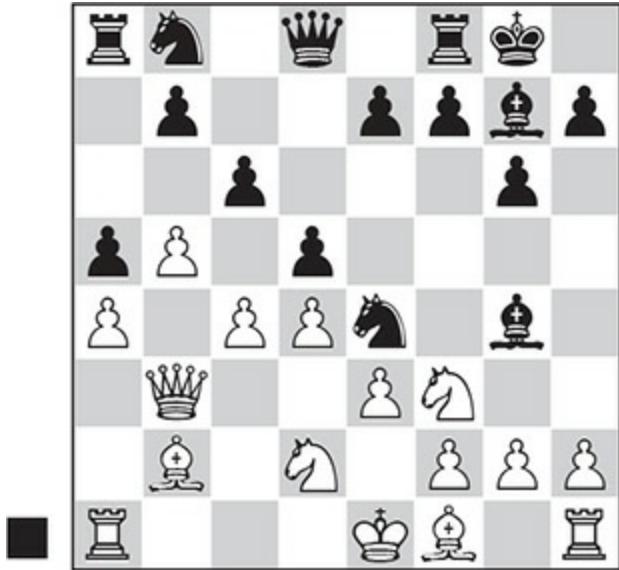
Exercise 15



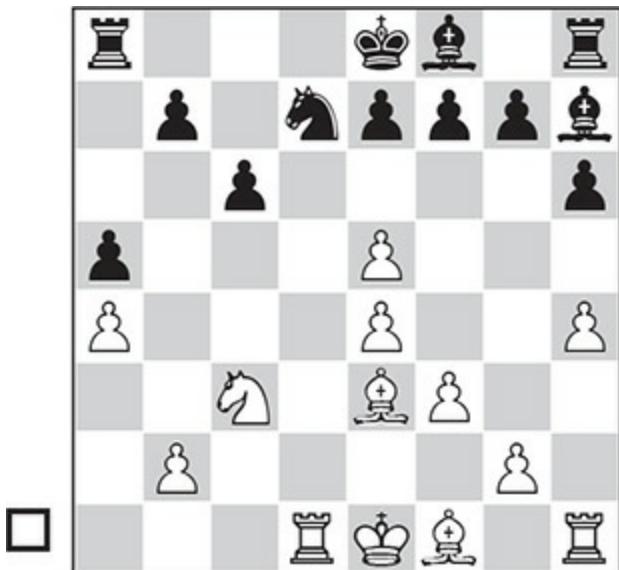
Exercise 16



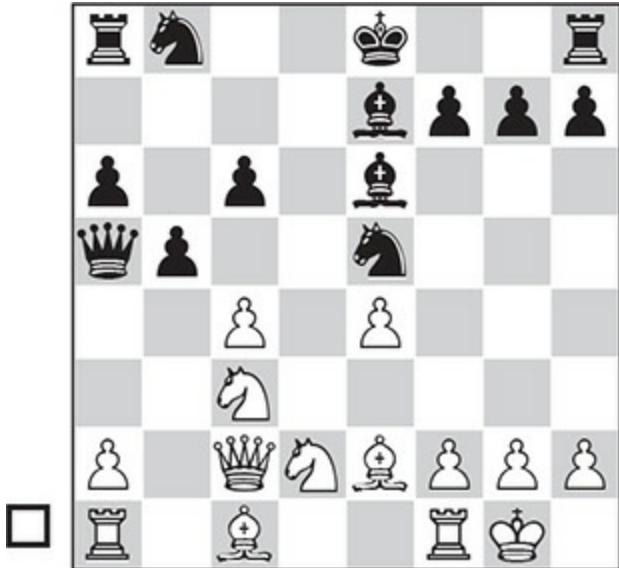
Exercise 17



Exercise 18

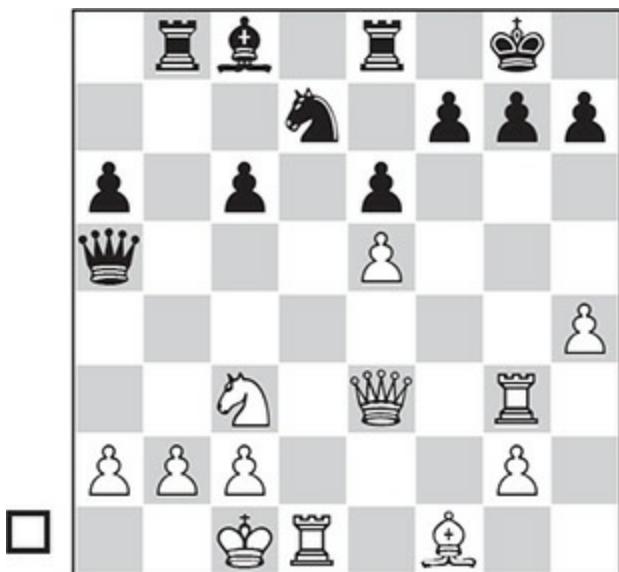


Exercise 19



□

Exercise 20



□

CHAPTER 4

Space beats material

In our discussion of material and non-material aspects of chess, the idea of ‘space’ refers to positional factors that exist independently from material and time, two concepts that we covered in the previous chapters.

In the romantic days of chess, in the mid-19th century, people did not pay too much attention to the positional minutiae of the game. As the main purpose of the game was to checkmate the opponent from move one, time was valued more highly than anything else, even material. However, in the era of King’s and Evans Gambits, one man understood that chess is governed by deeper chess laws than all-out mating attacks.

In the period from 1873-1882, the first World Champion, Wilhelm Steinitz, developed a theoretical basis for what we commonly accept today as the ‘positional principles of chess’. Here is what he wrote about his discovery:

‘Some of the games which I saw Paulsen play during the London Congress of 1862 gave a still stronger start to the modification of my own opinions, which have since developed, and I began to recognize that Chess genius is not confined to the more or less deep and brilliant finishing strokes after the original balance of power and position has been overthrown, but that it also requires the exercise of still more extraordinary powers, though perhaps of a different kind to maintain that balance or respectively to disturb it at the proper time in one’s own favor.’

Steinitz stressed the importance of previously neglected positional elements, such as pawn structure, piece outposts, control over files, ranks and diagonals, space advantage, piece position and more, as building blocks of a more methodical game-plan, which was based on the accumulation of small advantages and their patient conversion, in contrast to the aggressive tactical hit-and-miss approach that was prevalent at that time.

The world's leading players were very skeptical about the relevance of these ideas at first, but as Steinitz successfully defended them in practice, the chess world embraced them, and upcoming generations further developed the paradigm in which positional factors play just as important a role as time and material factors in chess.

In this chapter, we will focus on situations where material can be sacrificed to obtain one or more of these positional advantages. Sometimes, this leads to a positional compensation, and in better cases to positional domination. I suggest that we begin with a nice model game that illustrates many positional ideas in a non-materialistic fashion.

Game 54

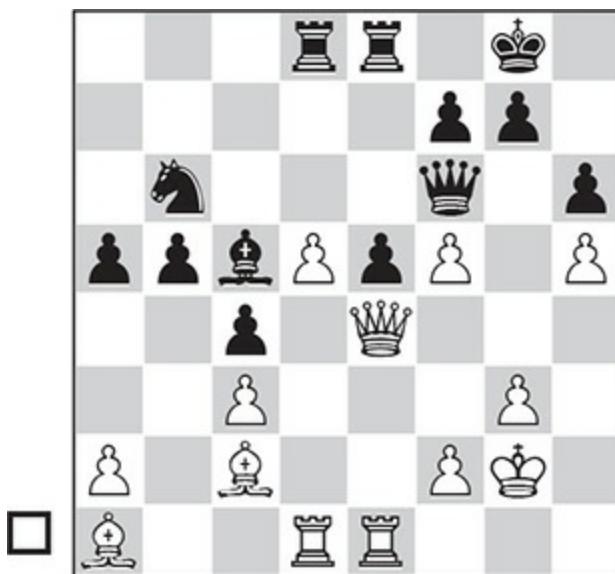
Anton Shomoey

2570

Denis Khismatullin

2664

Moscow 2012 (1)



We have a complex middlegame on the board. Both players' pawn structures are unusual and need to be treated with caution. However, we should give an edge to Black simply because his minor pieces are much better placed than White's bishops. The closed nature of the position is more in Black's favor,

so Shomoev's next move, if somewhat dubious, is not surprising.

30.a4

White would like to open up some files and diagonals on the queenside at the cost of a pawn. The problem is that 30. $\mathbb{N}b1$ is well met by 30... $\mathbb{N}c8!$, and the pawn on b5 is indirectly defended, while the knight goes to the perfect blocking d6-square anyway.

30... $\mathbb{N}c8!?$

A very creative positional solution by GM Khismatullin. Instead of taking the pawn, he sacrifices one to get his knight to the ideal d6-square. At the same time, he makes sure that White does not get any open spaces for queenside counterplay.

There was nothing wrong with taking the pawn with 30...bxa4. White would probably have continued with 31. $\mathbb{N}b1$, and now the knight would have to remain on b6 to guard the a4- and c4-pawns, which was obviously not a part of Black's strategy. After 31...a3 32. $\mathbb{N}b5$, White would indeed obtain some counterplay for the pawn, although the advantage would still be on the black side.

31.axb5 $\mathbb{N}d6$

Such a powerful blocking knight on d6 is often worth a pawn.

32. $\mathbb{N}g4$



32... $\mathbb{N}e7?$

An almost imperceptible mistake, but objectively speaking, quite a serious one. In hindsight, it was better to sacrifice the second pawn at once with 32... e4!. Black needs to open up files and diagonals for his major pieces. After 33. ♜xe4 a4 34. ♜b1 a3, he would get more than full compensation for the two pawns, due to the superior position of his pieces.

33. ♜b2?

White misses a great opportunity to turn the game around. He had an incredibly strong positional resource: 33. ♜e4!!.



analysis diagram

White prepares to capture the key c4-pawn, which would free up his pieces. The difficulty of finding such a move is that it requires non-standard and non-materialistic thinking. If you think about it in purely positional terms, then giving up a pretty useless rook for a strong blockading knight and an important pawn is a very good deal for White. Black cannot preserve the c4-pawn in any way:

- A) 33... ♜c8 34. ♜xc4 ♜xc4 35. ♜xc4±;
- B) 33... ♜xe4 34. ♜xe4 ♜b6 35. ♜xc4, and White is just positionally better because Black's pieces are suddenly lacking maneuvering space. He will remove the queen from c4 and push the c-pawn forward, creating a fearsome pawn mass in the center, supported by the two bishops.

33...e4!

Now Khismatullin does not miss his chance to open up the center.

34.♘e2?!

Shomoev decides not to take the pawn, but doubles up on it first. Indeed, 34.♗xe4? would have been wrong, since Black can set up a strong pin along the e-file: 34...♞de8 35.f3 ♗xf5†. However, once again the non-materialistic approach would have worked the best: 34.♘xe4! ♗xe4 35.♗xe4∞, when the exchange sacrifice would bring White some of the benefits described in the 33.♘e4 variation.

34...♞de8 35.♞de1



It seems like White has consolidated somewhat, but Black has an unpleasant surprise in store:

35...e3! 36.fxe3 ♗e4!

A beautiful positional concept. It turns out that Khismatullin has not pushed the e-pawn with the intention to recoup it, but rather to unblock the e4-square for his knight and simultaneously completely block all White's pieces. How often do you see such a positional domination where one side is up two clear pawns, but his pieces can barely move?

The materialistic approach 36...♞xe3? would have allowed White to free up his game with several exchanges: 37.♞xe3 ♞xe3 38.♞xe3 ♗xe3 39.♘f3 ♗c5 40.♘c1 ♗xb5 41.♘e4. Black would have returned the sacrificed

material, but the position would become approximately equal.

37. $\mathbb{Q}f1?$

This is a tactical mistake, although not an obvious one. However, White already needed good advice.

A) The exchange on e4, 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$, would not alleviate his positional problems after 37... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$;

B) Maybe it was worth giving up a pawn with 37.b6!? as a distraction and also to activate his pieces a bit, although after 37... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8\#$, Black would have remained in the driver's seat.



37... $\mathbb{Q}xg3!$

Steinitz would be proud. Black crowns his accumulated positional achievements with a well-timed tactical shot. This piece sacrifice exposes White's king, which, as it will transpire shortly, does not have enough defenders around it.

38. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$

The other capture, 38. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$, is refuted by 38... $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e1!$, and Black wins a lot of material due to White's terrible piece placement: 41. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+-$.

38... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5!$



This quiet move is the key to Black's combination. Black sets up two batteries: ♔e5/♕e3 and ♔e5/♕d6. Despite the extra piece, White cannot organize a successful defense against Black's multiple threats.

41. ♕d1

41. ♕f2 is met by 41... ♔xd5+ 42. ♕f3 ♕e1+.

41... ♕d6! 42. ♕f4 ♕g3+

Not the only way to win, but the x-ray motif adds to the beauty of the attack.

43. ♔xg3 ♕e3+ 44. ♕g4

44. ♕f3 ♕xf4+ 45. ♕g4 ♕d2+.

44... ♕xf4 45. ♕xf4 ♕g1+

And White resigned as he loses a lot of material. A brilliant achievement by GM Khismatullin!

I hope that this example made an impression on you and gave you something to think about in terms of exchanging material for positional factors.

In the further course of this chapter, I will focus on the examination of typical positional factors in separate sections for instructive purposes. Naturally, there will always be some overlaps (for example, a poor pawn structure may come with several other positional weaknesses, such as strong outposts for the opponent, exposed king, etc.), so just like in Chapter 2, I will make sure to mention these overlapping themes when necessary. Also, similar to Chapter 2, this chapter will be divided into smaller sections revolving around

the predominant positional theme. We start with...

Outposts

According to the dictionary, an outpost is ‘a small military camp or position at some distance from the main army, used especially as a guard against surprise attack’. Many chess terms come from military nomenclature and this should not be a surprise, given the origins and history of the royal game. Chess players’ understanding of outposts differs somewhat from the general definition above, but nevertheless we are aware of its importance in chess as one of the most distinguished positional elements. Controlling an outpost gives you the ability to survey and exert influence over a certain area of the board. Especially coveted are dominant outposts on one of the four central squares. They give you an opportunity to squeeze the life out of the opponent’s position by preventing his active play in the center and, sometimes, even on the wings.

There is no doubt that the knight is a perfect piece to plant on an outpost because of its ‘octopus-like’ sphere of influence. Bishops are also strong candidates to keep an outpost, while major pieces are usually not ideal for static placement on an outpost and can be put to better use in more active operations.

Considering the importance of outposts, it is not uncommon to sacrifice material to obtain control over them. I would like to show several examples where a positional exchange sacrifice allowed White to take full control over a central outpost, ensuring positional domination. We start with a game of one of the greatest players of all time.

Game 55

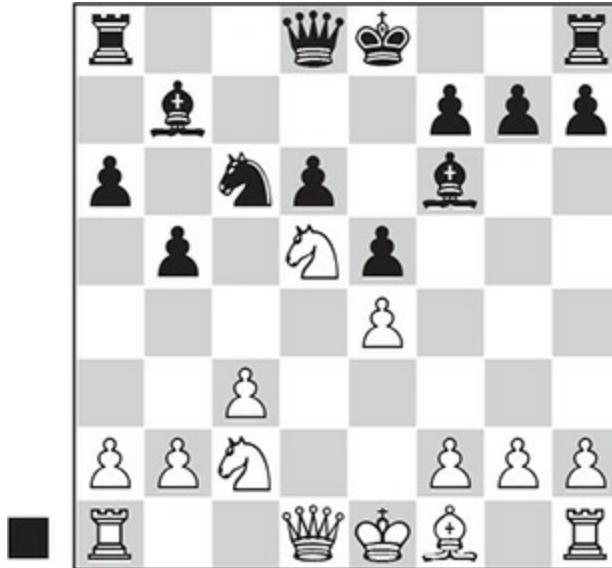
Garry Kasparov

2805

Alexei Shirov

2740

Horgen 1994 (9)



This game was played in the early days of the Sveshnikov Sicilian, when both White and Black were largely on uncharted territory, coming up with new plans and ideas in practically every game. One of the main strategic themes in this opening is the control over the d5-outpost. Black has many ways to approach this issue. The knight maneuver that Shirov employed in this game was an invention of strong Polish GM Krasenkow.

13... ♟b8

The idea is to re-route the knight to the d7-square in the spirit of Najdorf Sicilian. From there, it can challenge White's outpost on d5 via b6 or attack the e4-pawn via c5.

Black could also challenge the knight immediately with 13... ♟e7, allowing the weakening of his pawn structure after 14. ♜xf6+ gxf6 or playing 13... ♛g5 and putting his bishop pair to work.

14.a4

By breaking up Black's pawn chain on the queenside, White gets some additional squares for his pieces on that flank, the most important one being c4.

14...bxa4 15. ♜xa4 ♟d7 16. ♜b4!?

This move contains a wonderful positional idea, which Shirov falls for.

16... ♟c5?!

Black completes his knight's maneuver, but underestimates White's next move. In hindsight it seems better to prevent White's idea with 16... ♜b8.

The exchange sacrifice 17. $\mathbb{N}xb7$ $\mathbb{N}xb7$ 18.b4 would not work well after 18...a5 \mathbb{N} , and Black's pieces would be placed much better than in the game. White should rather resort to simple development with 17. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a5 18. $\mathbb{N}b5$ 0-0 19.0-0, which would lead to a complex middlegame in which Black would have ways of compensating for White's strong central outpost.



17. $\mathbb{N}xb7!$

Shirov underestimated the long-term positional consequences of this exchange sacrifice. By eliminating the light-squared bishop, Kasparov strengthens his control over the d5-outpost and the other light squares.

17... $\mathbb{B}xb7$ 18. b4!

This move is an integral part of White's positional idea. The knight on b7 is severely limited and cannot influence the game in almost any way. So, the overlapping positional theme here is poor piece mobility, something we have covered in detail in Chapter 2.

18... $\mathbb{N}g5$ 19. $\mathbb{N}a3!$

With his previous move, Black had threatened to exchange the knight, should it have gone to e3, but Kasparov finds an alternative way to bring his other knight to a strong outpost on c4.

19...0-0 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a5 21. $\mathbb{N}d3$ axb4 22. cxb4



Black's position is unenviable – his knight on b7 is still stuck and it is hard to find good squares for his pieces with White's knights controlling so much ground. He has managed to open up the a-file for counterplay, but this came at the price of letting White have the potentially dangerous passed pawn on the b-file. It is also difficult to make the ...f7-f5 break work without the light-squared bishop. Shirov embarks on a plan to re-activate his knight:

22... ♟b8

He clears the d8-square for the knight's maneuver toward c6 or e6. It may have been more circumspect to play 22... ♛h8 23.0-0 g6, preparing counterplay with ...f7-f5.

23.h4!

Kasparov uses the absence of Black's queen from d8 to push back Black's bishop to a more passive position.

23... ♜h6?!

23... ♜d8 looks passive and interferes with the knight's planned route, but it may have been a more solid choice as it stops ♞c4-b6. After 24.g3 ♜c7 25.0-0 ♜d8, White could show his trump card: 26.b5! ♜e6 27.b6 ♜d8 28.♘b1, and here Black's knight would have been reactivated at the expense of his bishop.

24.♘cb6

The d7-square has become vulnerable after 22... ♟b8, so the knights are very happy to start jumping around. The inclusion of 23.h4 ♜h6 also made a

check on e7 possible, which may be relevant in some lines.

24... ♜a2



Shirov relied on this move for counterplay.

25.0-0!

As Aron Nimzowitsch remarked, ‘The threat is stronger than the execution!’.

25.♘d7?! would be premature, due to 25...♝d2+ 26.♚f1 ♜a7, and Black obtains counterplay against the uncastled king. For example: 27.♝b1 ♜b2 28.♞e7+ ♔h8 29.♞xf8 ♜xb4 30.♝c2 d5! 31.♞xd5 ♜xf8=.

25... ♜d2

Shirov continues to play actively, but it will not be enough. He could have defended against the ♜b6-d7 threat with 25...♝e8, although his position still looks awful after 26.♝c4 ♜d2 27.♝h5±, and White’s positional domination is complete.

26.♝f3 ♜a7 27.♞d7



We have reached the critical moment. White threatens to win back material, retaining all his positional advantages. Among many possibilities, Shirov fails to find the one that would give him the best chances for survival and gives back the exchange:

27... ♜d8?

27... ♜a8! was the only move, when White would have had to find

28. ♜b6! (alternatives fail to impress) 28... ♜a3! 29. ♜xa8 ♜xd3 30. ♜e2 ♜xd5, and the very strong tactical sequence 31. ♜b6! ♜d3 32. ♜g4! ♜c3 33. ♜d7 g5 34. ♜xb7 finally gives White a big advantage. This would have definitely put Kasparov under a much greater test than the game continuation.

28. ♜xf8 ♛xf8



Just one look at this position is enough to give the final verdict – Black is strategically lost. White still has his strong outpost on d5 and an outside passed pawn, while Black's pieces are decentralized and uncoordinated. Kasparov's execution was quick and merciless:

29.b5! ♕a3 30.♘f5!

Threatening the deadly 31.♔d7.

30... ♕e8 31.♗c4 ♖c2 32.♗xh7! ♖xc4 33.♗g8+ ♕d7 34.♗b6+ ♕e7 35.♗xc4 ♖c5 36.♖a1! ♖d4 37.♖a3 ♗c1 38.♗e3! 1-0

A nice final touch. Kasparov showed a tactical masterclass in the last phase of the game, but it was the positional exchange sacrifice in the opening that gave wind to his sails. The focal point of his positional pressure was the untouchable knight on the d5-outpost that severely limited Black's active options.

The next two ‘twin’ games are very curious. In the summer of 2013, I played one of the best tournaments of my career in the beautiful Croatian coastal city of Split. En route to a 8 out of 9 points victory, I played against international master Djurovic in round 5. The key idea of that game was a positional exchange sacrifice that allowed my knight to assume a commanding outpost on e5.

Unbeknownst to me, less than a month after that game, Spanish grandmaster Korneev used a strikingly similar idea in his game against IM Recuero

Guerra. I only discovered that game years later by accident, when I studied one line of the Petroff Defense. What I found particularly peculiar about these games is not only that we used the same positional idea in completely different positions, but also that we both converted our positional advantage in virtually the same way!

Game 56

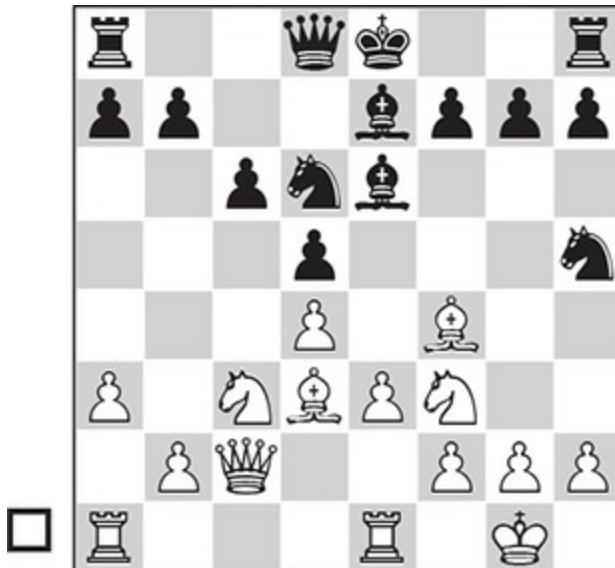
Davorin Kuljasevic

2577

Goran Djurovic

2394

Split 2013 (5)



Black's treatment of the opening was original, to put it mildly. He spent several tempi too many on knight moves and now he is lagging in development. For starters, he cannot castle on the next move because the h7-pawn is unprotected. This gave me an idea to take immediate action with **14.♘a4!?**

when Black also needs to take care of the ♘a4-c5 threat. Of course, it was also possible to preserve the dark-squared bishop with 14.♗e5 h6 15.h3, but I figured that White does not need to waste time on that, since taking on f4 seemed too risky for Black.

14...♝xf4?!

The opening of the e-file looks very suspicious with the king still on e8. Black probably thought he could get away with it. It would have been more circumspect to play 14...h6 15.♝c5 ♛c8, when Black's position is worse, but still solid.

15.♗xf4 g6



This was his idea. If he gets to castle and exchange the light-squared bishops via f5, his position would not be worse at all. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, one tempo can make a substantial difference to the assessment of the position and here White can use it to take the initiative:

16.♝xe6!

I remember that I played this move very quickly, within 2-3 minutes. It just felt right intuitively. Prior to this tournament, I had read an excellent book on tactics by Lev Psakhis and solved many chess problems and studies, so I just could not resist the temptation to create something nice in a game when given a chance. Fortunately, my intuition did not fail me – this positional exchange sacrifice is indeed the best move in the position.

16.♝c5 would have been much less effective. After 16...♛c8 17.♝e2 ♛f8, Black could regroup with ...♚g7 and ...♝f6, with only a slightly worse position.

16...fxe6 17.♝c5

White has dangerous threats against Black's king – both the e6- and g6-pawns are under attack. Therefore Black's answer is pretty much forced.

17... ♜e4

This enables Black to trade off the dangerous c5-knight. 17... ♜f7 defends against 18. ♜xg6, but after 18. ♜xe6 ♜d6 19. ♜e1 ♜d8 20.f5!, White would have a crushing attack.

18. ♜xe4 ♜xc5 19. ♜xg6+!

This intermezzo is the key to White's combination. It helps him establish approximate material equality, while his positional advantage remains.

19...hxg6 20. ♜xg6+ ♛d7 21. ♜e5+ ♛c7 22.dxc5±



White's knight holds a strong outpost on e5 and is not worse than any of Black's rooks. On the contrary, there are no open files for Black's major pieces to operate on, so White can proceed in a positional manner from here, improving his position slowly. One of my schemes was to put pawns on g3 and h4, reroute the knight to g5 via f3 and double up on the weak e6-pawn. There are several other promising plans for White, of course.

22... ♛e7 23.g3 ♜af8

One of Black's problems is that White's positional advantage persists in the endgame. In case of 23... ♜ag8 24. ♜f7 ♜xf7 25. ♜xf7 ♜h7 26. ♜g5, White might have an even easier technical job, since it becomes easier to push pawns in front of his king in the endgame.

24. ♕e1 ♕hg8 25. ♜h6 ♕f6 26. ♜h4 ♕g7 27. ♔f3 b6?!

Black's wish to open up a file for his rooks is understandable, but this move gives White welcome targets around Black's king. It may have been more prudent to wait with something like 27... ♛c8. White could then try to open up the queenside front himself with 28.b4.

28. ♔g5

The beauty of this position is that the knight has more than one outpost at his disposal: the g5- and d4-squares can be used to a strong effect as well.

28... ♜d7 29. ♜g4!

White can win several tempi to recentralize his queen now.

29... ♕e8 30. ♜e2 ♕g6?

This is the losing mistake. Black had to prevent the intrusion of White's queen with 30... ♛b7. White would continue 31.b4 and, sooner or later, a new weakness would be created in Black's position. It seems that White is just strategically winning, anyway. The knight completely dominates.

31. ♔a6+–

Now Black's queenside falls apart.

31... bxc5 32. ♜xa7+ ♛c8 33. ♜a8+ ♛c7 34. ♜a5+ ♛c8 35. ♜a8+ ♛c7 36. ♜a5+ ♛c8 37. ♔f3 ♕g7 38. ♜xc5



The rest needs no commentary. White already has a material advantage and the game can be won in many different ways.

38... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 40. $b4$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 42. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $dxc4$
44. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $e5$ 46. $f5$ 1-0

Game 57

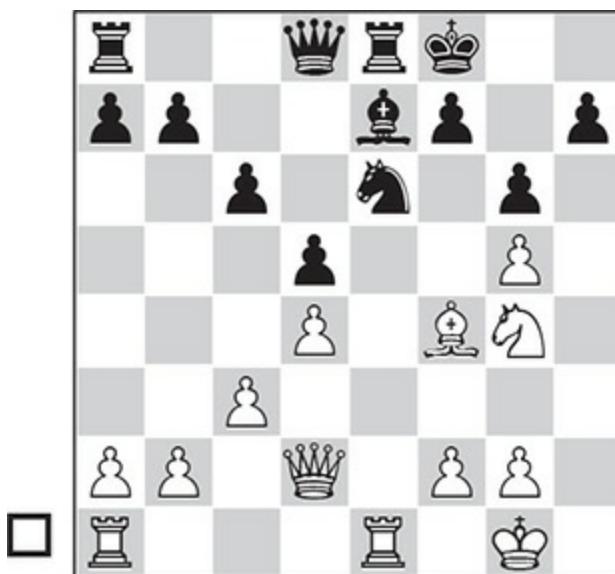
Oleg Korneev

2625

David Recuero Guerra

2454

Linares ch-ESP 2013 (8)



With the previous game in mind, it should not be difficult to guess GM Korneev's next move.

24. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$

This exchange sacrifice not only secures a strong outpost on e5, but also exposes Black's king on the f-file. Of course, White's idea is a long-term one – there are no forced winning variations, but his positional domination will persist no matter what Black does.

24... $fxe6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Korneev focuses on the attack on the f-file, where his rook would assume the f6-outpost, while the knight would be planted on e5.

There was an alternative, less intuitive way to arrange the pieces for the attack with 26. $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$. The rook remains on e5, while the

knight goes to f6, with the main target being the h7-pawn.

26... ♕xf4 27. ♖f3 ♔e7 28. ♖xf4 ♖f8 29. ♖f6!



White makes full use of his outposts. The rook cannot be taken, so it puts a lot of pressure on Black's position.

29... ♕d6

It would be a mistake to trade rooks, since after 29... ♖xf6? 30.gxf6+, the combination of ♕d2-h6, ♕g4-e5 and f6-f7 is deadly for Black.

30. ♕e5?!

This natural move is inaccurate since it allows the capture on f6. He could have continued the positional pressure with 30. ♕e3±. There is no need to rush with ♕g4-e5.

30... ♕e8?

Black misses pretty much his last chance to make this a game. 30... ♖xf6! looks extremely risky, but after the forced 31.gxf6+ ♔xf6 32. ♕f4+ ♔g7 33. ♕f7+ ♔h8 34. ♕xb7, if Black finds 34... ♕b8! 35. ♕xc6 ♕e8, he defends against the direct threats and reduces White's positional advantage to a minimum.

31. ♕f4 ♕e7 32. ♕g4 ♕d7 33. ♕e5+ ♔e8 34. ♕g4?!

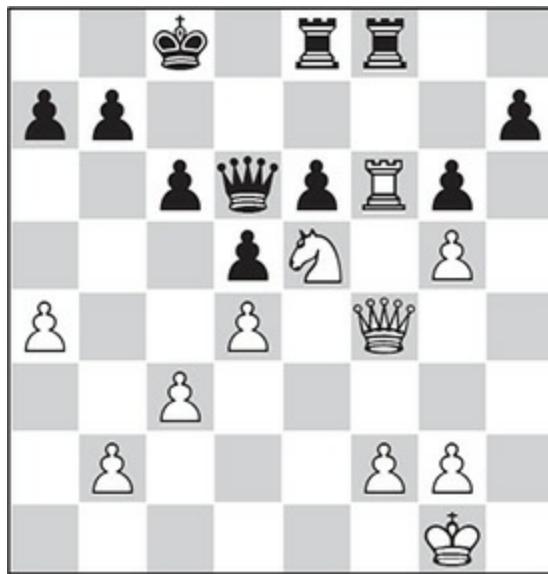
White struggles to find the winning plan here. This move is a tad inaccurate because it lets Black's king escape to the queenside. Instead, he could have immediately proceeded with queenside expansion with 34.b4 ♖c8 35.a4, and

Black's king would remain stuck in the center, while White could slowly improve his position. If he succeeds in creating another weakness in addition to the e6- and h7-pawns, Black would be helpless.

34... ♕d7 35. ♜e3 ♖ae8 36. ♜e5+ ♔c8 37. ♜f4 ♖d6

Black's king is safer on c8 than it was on e8, but White is still in control. Korneev finally embarks on the right course:

38.a4!



The full control of outposts in the center gives White the option to play freely on the flanks. White sets his queenside pawns in motion, planning to poke holes in the king's pawn shield.

38...a6

Allowing a4-a5-a6 looks equally unpleasant: 38... ♖g8 39.a5 ♖gf8 40.a6.

39.a5

Now the b6-square has been weakened.

39... ♕e7 40.b3!

Planning to push c3-c4-c5, when another outpost on d6 would appear!

40... ♖d6 41. ♔h2 ♖d8 42.g3 ♖de8 43. ♔g1 ♖e7?!

43... ♖g8 would have been more stubborn, keeping the queen on d6.



44.c4

After some maneuvering to gain time and see what Black is up to, White finally proceeds with his main idea.

44...dxc4

The opening of the position is clearly in White's favor. However, even the passive defense 44... \mathbb{Q} d6 45.c5 \mathbb{Q} e7 would have failed after 46. \mathbb{Q} f7!+– followed by \mathbb{Q} d6+.

45. \mathbb{Q} xc4!

Now we can see how important it was to provoke ...a7-a6. 46. \mathbb{Q} b6+ is a deadly threat. Black is lost.

45...e5 46.dxe5 \mathbb{Q} b8 47.e6+ \mathbb{Q} c7 48. \mathbb{Q} xf8 1-0

Dark/light squares complex

Another positional factor that can play an important role in a game is the control over the dark or light squares complex. We have seen something similar in the previous section; Kasparov controlled not only the d5-outpost, but also the neighboring light squares c4, b5 and f5. In the ‘twin games’, the e5-outpost was obviously White’s focal point, but the white players also used auxiliary dark-squared outposts, such as f6, g5 and d6. Simply put, the control over a complex of squares of the same color facilitates the coordination of our pieces. It is good to have comfortable squares for your pieces that are in the vicinity of each other, because it allows you to

concentrate them in one part of the board and work toward a common goal. In addition, it is often more difficult for the opponent to organize active play when you control a squares complex because squares of one color are already taken!

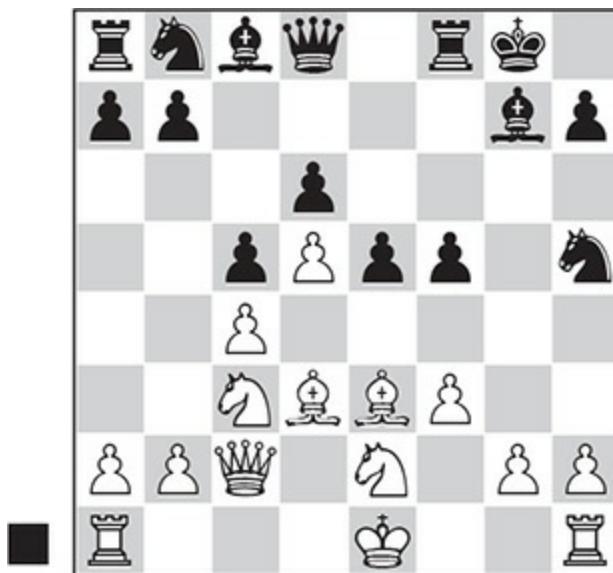
The next game is a classic example of this principle.

Game 58

Alexander Kotov

Svetozar Gligoric

Zurich ct 1953 (25)



In this King's Indian structure, both sides have their trumps. White has more space in the center and a strong battery along the b1-h7 diagonal. He plans to open it eventually by attacking the f5-pawn with a timely g2-g4 break. Black, on the other hand, boasts strong central control and hopes to open up the long diagonal for his dark-squared bishop. Gligoric strikes first.

11...e4!

Black could not afford to play slowly, for example: 11... \mathbb{Q} f6?! 12.0-0-0-0 \mathbb{Q} a6 13.a3 \mathbb{Q} c7, because White would open up the position with 14.g4! → and take control of the light squares complex.

12.fxe4 f4 13. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{Q} d7



With the pawn sacrifice, Black has not only cleared the diagonal for his bishop and created an outpost on e5, but he has also blocked White's queen-bishop battery and taken away the e4-square from his pieces. Now he aims to plant his knight on the e5-square, which would be a terrible predicament for White's pieces. Kotov finds a good solution to it.

14.♘g1!

The knight is rerouted to f3, preparing to be traded for the powerful e5-knight.

In principle, White would like to break free with 14.e5. However, he is not sufficiently developed, and after 14...♗xe5 15.♗xh7+ ♛h8†, his position would become very dangerous, not to mention that Black could probably just win the c4-pawn by force.

14...♗g5 15.♗f1 ♘e5 16.♘f3 ♗e7

Black will trade the knights on his own terms. It would have made much less sense to trade with 16...♘xf3+?! 17.gxf3, because it would have given White the open g-file for counterplay.

17.♘xe5 ♗xe5 18.0-0-0



Black controls most of the dark-squares on the a1-h8 diagonal, which is magnified by the fact that White's king is on a potentially vulnerable c1-square. Gligoric finds another potential dark-squared target – the e3-square.

18... ♜f6 19.h3

This was forced (otherwise ... ♜f6- g4-e3 is coming), but now the g3-square is also weak, which is definitely a plus for Black. Now he switches to the queenside attack:

19... ♜d7 20. ♜d3 a6

...b7-b5 is in the air and if Black opens up the b- or a-file, White's king would fall under a heavy attack. Kotov shows defensive prowess, once again finding a difficult backward knight move.



21.♘b1!

The knight is rerouted to the d2-square, from where it not only covers the c4-square in case of ...b7-b5 and ...bxc4, but also threatens to expel Black's queen from its dominant position on e5 with ♘d2-f3.

21...f3!?

A beautiful positional, if not completely accurate, idea. Gligoric sacrifices a second pawn in the same vein as the first one. He blocks an important light square (f3) for the opponent's pieces and unblocks a neighboring dark square for his pieces.

Objectively speaking, though, Black had stronger continuations:

A) 21...b5 22.♘d2 ♙e8! (preparing the ...♘f6-d7-e5 maneuver) 23.♘f3 ♖h5, with good compensation for the pawn; or, at the very least

B) 21...♘h5 22.♘d2 ♙a4!, forcing a draw by repetition after 23.b3 ♗a1+ 24.♗b1 ♗c3+ 25.♗c2 ♗a1+.

22.gxf3 ♘h5 23.♘d2?!

Kotov's move seems logical, especially since the f3-pawn was hanging. However, the non-materialistic 23.♘e1! would have enabled him to challenge Black's dark squares domination. After 23...♖xf3 24.♕c3 ♖f4+ 25.♘d2 ♙xc3 26.♗xc3 ♖g3, he could sacrifice back the second pawn: 27.e5! dxе5 28.♖hf1±, and now White would have the upper hand, as his pieces would finally get open files and diagonals to operate freely.

23...♗f4



White's hesitant last move allowed Black to achieve this picture-perfect control of the dark squares. In fact, his extra pawns are more of an obstacle than a strength, and he would be better off if at least one of them was not there, so that his pieces could get some breathing space. A remarkable positional concept, indeed.

24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ b5 25. $\mathbb{h}4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{R}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\mathbb{R}ab8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ b4 29. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g3?$!

This allows a nice tactic. It was better to play 30. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{R}g8$ 31. $\mathbb{R}xg8+$ $\mathbb{R}xg8$ 32. $\mathbb{R}d2$, over-protecting the b2-square, when Black would have positional compensation due to his control of the dark squares, but not more than that.

30... $\mathbb{R}g8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{R}xg3!$ 32. $\mathbb{R}xg3$ $\mathbb{N}e2$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{R}xg3$

Thanks to this small combination, Black manages to trade off his knight for White's dark-squared bishop, which helps him to increase his control over the dark squares. White is clearly on the defensive now, but he resisted stubbornly in the remainder of the game and Black did not manage to break his position, despite the obvious positional advantage.

34. $\mathbb{B}c1$ a5 35. $\mathbb{B}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 36. $\mathbb{h}5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}g8$ 38. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ a4 40. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ a3 41. $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$



In the final position, Black has absolute domination on the dark squares, but White holds a fortress where his knight covers most of the important dark squares, so a draw is a fair outcome for this strategically very interesting game.

We have already seen several nice games by Maxime Vachier-Lagrave in this book, so it is no secret that he has a very subtle feeling for sacrificing material to obtain non-material advantages. In the next two games, he makes a positional pawn sacrifice to obtain long-term control over the dark squares. This positional method should be in the toolbox of every Sicilian and King's Indian player.

Game 59

Fabiano Caruana

2820

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2757

Wijk aan Zee 2015 (13)

1.e4 c5 2. \mathbb{Q} f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. \mathbb{Q} xd4 \mathbb{Q} f6 5. \mathbb{Q} c3 a6 6.h3

This has been one of the most popular approaches against the Najdorf in recent years.

6...e5 7. \mathbb{Q} de2 h5 8.g3 \mathbb{Q} e6

MVL's favorite set-up. He prefers to develop the bishop to e6 and strengthen his control over the key d5-square, over the other plan: 8...b5 9. $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{B}bd7$ 10. $\mathbb{B}ec3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$, which used to be Boris Gelfand's pet line.



9. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{B}bd7$ 10.a4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$

Before castling, Black mobilizes his queenside pieces, since the heart of the strategic battle in the opening is taking place on the d- and c-files.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

White could also have secured the c4-square first with 12.b3. This prevents the plan Black used in the game, but also loosens the c3-knight a bit. Black could then change plans and focus on creating dark-square control on the kingside with 12...h4 13.g4 0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$, when g5 and f4 look like very comfortable potential outposts for Black's pieces. It may even be worth sacrificing the d6-pawn if this enables Black to trade the dark-squared bishops in this kind of position.

12... $\mathbb{Q}b6!?$

This move was played with a concrete idea that MVL had prepared at home.

13.b3



13...d5!

The point! Black sacrifices the back-ward d-pawn to free up his pieces.

14.♘xb6

White has to accept the sacrifice since 14.a5 would be met by 14...d4.

14...♗xb6 15.♘xd5

It makes more sense to trade a pair of knights, so that White can connect his pawns with c2-c4, compared to 15.exd5 ♗f5 16.a5 ♗c7 17.♗d2 0-0, and White will face strong positional pressure along the semi-open c-file and two diagonals, while his knights lack any outposts.

15...♘xd5 16.exd5 ♗d7



MVL's evaluation of the position after the pawn sacrifice is quite insightful: 'I have no clue whether White is better, but he is struggling to move his queenside pawns because of the fantastic job the ♕e7 is doing. Meanwhile on the kingside, my pawn majority can start rolling. Still, I need to be careful not to allow White to create a blockade, and especially the battle for the e4-square will be crucial as White's knight can get there quite quickly.'

17.c4 ♜d6!?

It may not be immediately obvious why Black would need to play like this. MVL wants to make sure that White does not play d5-d6, which would clear the long diagonal for his bishop, the d-file for his pieces and the d5-outpost for the knight.

Even if this is not the strongest move, it is an excellent example of prophylactic thinking! He admitted that 17...♝c5 was part of his home preparation, but he did not like to give White the option of playing 18.d6!?, which gives him the above-mentioned active possibilities.

18.a5?!

Caruana obviously wants to make sure that Black does not block the queenside with ...a6-a5, but this misses the point. White should have started the fight for the center immediately with 18.♘c3 f5 19.♖e1 h4 20.g4. MVL planned to continue 20...g6 21.♗e2 ♜f6 followed by ...e5-e4, which seems to give Black good chances. If we take the analysis a few moves further: 22.♕ac1 ♜f7 23.♗e3 e4, White could make 24.c5! work tactically: 24...♗xc5 25.♕xe4 ♗xe3 26.♕d6+ ♔g7 27.fxe3 ♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♜e5, and Black will retain an active position with good counterplay even in the pawn-down endgame.

18...f5

Now Black is one move faster in the fight for the key squares on the kingside.

19.♘d3 h4 20.g4 0-0!?

The Frenchman prefers to mobilize his pieces as quickly as possible, rather than going for the low-hanging fruit: 20...fxg4 21.♘c3 0-0 22.♔h1, when White's knight gets an outpost on e4.



I like what he says about this decision: ‘... giving up most of my initiative for one lame pawn is not in my habits.’ Talk about non-materialism!

21. ♜c3?

Caruana probably miscalculated something, because this move allows the dangerous ...e5-e4 push that opens up the h2-b8 diagonal. It was necessary to eliminate this threat by exchanging on f5 with 21.gxf5 ♜xf5 22. ♜e3 ♜g6. This gives Black a lot of initiative with ...♜e7-c5 to follow as well, but it seems that White can hold with 23. ♜h1 ♜c5 24. ♜d2! ♜d3 25. ♜ad1 ♜c2 26. ♜c1 ♜d3=, which is also given by MVL in his notes.

21...e4 22. ♜e3 ♜d8!

This is probably what Caruana missed. There is no good way to defend against the queen-bishop battery on the h2-b8 diagonal now. Black’s control over the dark squares finally bears fruit!

By the way, the other way to set up the battery with 22...♜e5? does not work because of 23.f4!.

23. ♜xe4

Caruana decides that giving up a piece for 3 pawns is the most practical way to defend against the attack. His other options look really unattractive:

A) 23.f4 exf3 24. ♜xf3 ♜c7 25.g5 ♜fe8! 26. ♜f2 ♜h2+ 27. ♜f1 ♜d6!
with ...♜c5 next, wins the queen; or

B) 23.gxf5 ♜c7 24. ♜fe1 ♜h2+ 25. ♜f1 ♜f4 26. ♜xe4 ♜xf5 27. ♜f3

\mathbb{Q} g3!–+.

23...fxe4 24. \mathbb{Q} xe4 \mathbb{Q} f4 25. \mathbb{Q} xf4 \mathbb{R} xf4 26.f3 \mathbb{Q} e7



White will try to set up some sort of a fortress with his pawn mass, but Black should be able to break it eventually.

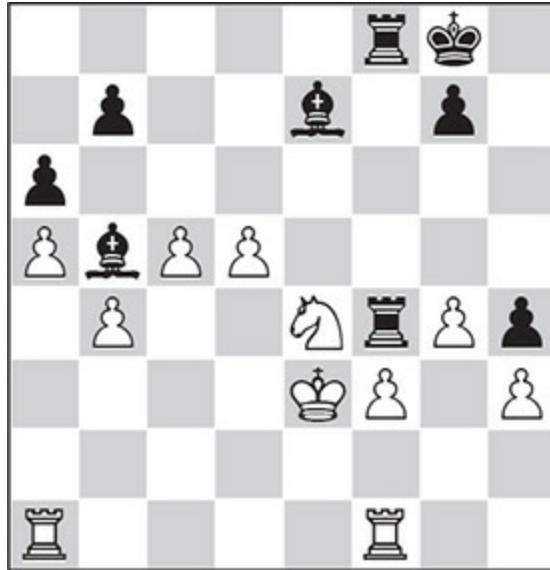
Here is how MVL approached the position: ‘I am aiming for the ideal set-up ... \mathbb{Q} e7-b4, ... \mathbb{R} cf8 followed by ... \mathbb{Q} d7-e8-g6 and White will have too many weaknesses. White bringing his king to the center is thus no surprise although it accelerates his fate.’

27. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{R} cf8 28. \mathbb{Q} e3 \mathbb{Q} e8 29.c5

This move prevents Black from putting his bishop on b4, but it also surrenders a new outpost for the other bishop.

29... \mathbb{Q} b5 30.b4!

A cool defensive idea. White is ready to play this endgame a rook down, but Vachier-Lagrave shows once again that material possessions do not interest him:



30... ♜xe4+!

Attacking the king is more important than material! As he puts it: ‘Black’s remaining pieces will work together in perfect harmony.’

Actually, after 30... ♜xf1? 31. ♜xf1, it seems that White might indeed have a fortress, no matter what Magnus Carlsen thinks about them!

31. ♛xe4 ♜e8

White’s king is completely exposed now. The end is near.

32. ♜f4

The king can escape the mating net only at the cost of huge material losses:

32. ♜e3 ♜xc5+ 33. ♜d2 ♜xb4+ 34. ♜c2 ♜xf1 35. ♜xf1 ♜xa5–+, while

32. ♜d4 ♜f6# is a pretty and rare mating pattern.

32...g5+ 33. ♜f5 ♜f7!

Such quiet king moves that close the mating net are well-known. 34... ♜d3# is threatened.

34. ♜fe1 ♜d3+ 35. ♜e4

35. ♜e5 ♜xc5# would be another nice mating pattern in the center of the board.

35... ♜f6



And White resigned because the only move that prevents 36... $\mathbb{Q}e5\#$, 36.f4, is met by 36... $\mathbb{Q}xe4\#$. A beautiful finale of a world-class performance by MVL!

Game 60

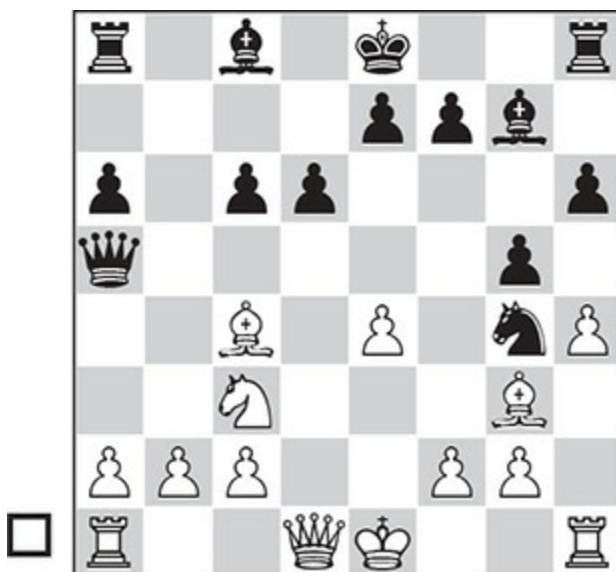
Francisco Vallejo Pons

2684

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2765

Reykjavik Ech 2015 (5)



Here we have another sharp Sicilian. Initiative is what matters here the most, so Vallejo plays

15. ♖f3,

which had been played before by the likes of Ivanchuk and Ponomariov. The f7-pawn is under attack and the instinctive reaction of anyone who has ever suffered the Scholar's Mate would be to protect the pawn. However, Vachier-Lagrange thinks outside of the box and plays a new move:

15... ♗e5!?

Previously, both 15... ♕f8 and 15... ♗e6 have been tried.

16. ♗xe5 ♜xe5 17. ♗xf7+ ♔d8



For the sacrificed pawn, Black gets excellent control over the dark squares. He can organize active play via the open b- and f-files, while his king will be completely safe on d8 or c7. In the meantime, White does not have similar prospects for his pieces.

18. hxg5 ♜b8!

Vachier-Lagrange wants to keep the momentum of his initiative on the dark squares, although there was nothing wrong with taking on g5 either.

19. ♗b3

This is the most human move, although White had more adventurous possibilities at his disposal:

A) Both 19.g6!? ♜xb2 20. ♗e2 ♜b4 21.0-0 ♗xe4 22. ♗xe4 ♜xe4

23. ♕ae1∞; and

B) 19.gxh6!? ♕xb2 20.hxg7 ♕xh1+ 21. ♔d2 ♕d4+ 22. ♕d3 ♕xf2+
23. ♖e2 ♕xf7 24. ♖g3 ♕xa1 25.g8♕ + ♕xg8 26. ♕xg8+ ♔c7 would lead to complications where some sort of a dynamic balance would probably exist.

19... ♕f8 20. ♖e3 ♕xg5

A very important decision. Black prefers to trade the queens, even though, superficially, this reduces his potential to make use of his domination on the dark squares. The thing is that after 20...hxg5 21.0-0-0, Black's queen-bishop battery looks very nice on the surface, but it is not clear how he can make use of it.

21. ♕xg5 hxg5 22.f3

I think that White should have played 22. ♖d1 a5 23.c3, limiting the influence of Black's dark-squared bishop and rerouting his knight to greener pastures. The c3-square is really not appropriate for it in this constellation.

22...g4 23. ♔e2 a5!



White can feel the pressure from both sides of the board. With his last two moves, Black has increased the scope of his dormant light-squared bishop. Now we are already talking about the bishop pair advantage, which is another important positional factor worth sacrificing material for.

24. ♖a4?!

As they say, 'a knight on the rim is dim', and this will not be an exception to

the rule! Vallejo probably thought he had no choice but to protect his king with c2-c4, so he played 24. $\mathbb{Q}a4$; however, he could have kept the balance with the non-materialistic approach: 24. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!$ c5 25. $\mathbb{Q}h7$, not fearing 25... $\mathbb{Q}a6+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$, because White can solve his woes on the dark squares with the exchange sacrifice 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ cxd4+ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd4=$.

24... $\mathbb{Q}a6+$ 25.c4 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ gxf3+ 27.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}d4$



MVL installs his bishop firmly on the central outpost, completing his domination on the dark squares. This endgame looks like no fun for White with his knight and bishop in such miserable positions. Despite the relatively reduced material and an extra pawn, it is clear that he is in for an unpleasant passive defense.

28. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ c5 29. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

A very strong move, in my view. The bishop looks excellent on a6, but Black has achieved the maximum with this piece set-up, so it is time for a new scheme. Now he plans to attack the a4-knight with 31... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, followed by 32...a4. White's answer looks pretty much forced.

31. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

and now

31... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

is the point of the Frenchman's bishop maneuver. White cannot block the bishop with 32. $\mathbb{Q}d5$, so the c4-pawn is doomed.

32. ♔d3?

Vallejo cracks under the pressure. This move loses outright.

It was necessary to accept the loss of the c4-pawn and play a pass move like 32. ♕d1, when Black may improve his position a bit before he takes the pawn with, for example, 32... ♛e5 33. ♕f2 ♕g3↑, and while White would be suffering, he could still nurture some hopes of survival.

Unfortunately, 32. ♔d5? does not work due to 32... ♛xd5 33. cxd5 a4 34. ♕d1 ♜xb2+ 35. ♜c2 a3! and, as is well known with opposite-colored bishops, the side that attacks has a big (here decisive) advantage.

32... ♜g3!



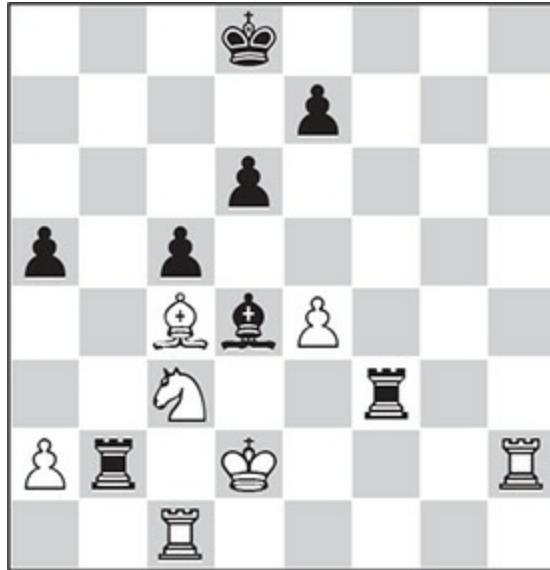
The principle of two weaknesses at work. White cannot defend all of his weak pawns, and his position collapses.

33. ♔e2

33. ♜f1 fails to 33... ♛h3—+.

33... ♛xc4+ 34. ♔d2

When playing 32. ♔d3, did White miss that after 34. ♛xc4 Black does not have to take the bishop, but rather plays 34... ♜xb2+! 35. ♔e1 ♜xh2—+ ?
34... ♜xf3 35. ♛xc4 ♜xb2+



And White resigned since he loses both his pieces with check after 36. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{R}xc3+$.

I have heard somewhere that attacks on dark squares are stronger than attacks on light squares. While I cannot support this claim by facts or statistics, empirically it does seem that more games are decided thanks to superior dark-square control, rather than on light squares. I would be curious to know what other experienced players have to say on this topic.

Still, there are many nice examples of successful strategies on the light squares complex and one of the benchmarks for every educated chess player should be the following classic.

Game 61

Samuel Reshevsky

Tigran Petrosian

Zurich ct 1953 (2)



Nimzo-Indian structures like this one have been known to be dangerous for Black ever since the famous game Botvinnik-Capablanca from the 1938 AVRO tournament. Black expands on the queenside, but White's pawn center is potentially more dangerous. If White can push e5-e6 in this position, he would unleash the power of his major pieces and Black could land into trouble before too long. Petrosian understood that and prepared the following defense.

25... ♜e6!

The exchange sacrifice was Petrosian's trademark strategic weapon. We have already seen how he used it to obtain superior piece coordination against Spassky; in this case, it is motivated by purely positional considerations. Black wants to block the e6-square and take full control over the other light squares, such as d5 and d3, when White takes the rook on e6 with his light-squared bishop. These days, such positional exchange sacrifices are used routinely by chess players of various categories, but it is good to know important precedents, if anything, to impress someone with your chess knowledge!

The materialistic approach 25... ♜a7 26.e6 f6 looks very risky. Black would be fine if he could put his knight on d5 on the next move, but we have already explained the importance of time in chess. White has a very strong idea that keeps the initiative: 27.a4!. The idea is to undermine the important

c4-pawn, as well as to open the a3-f8 diagonal for the idle dark-squared bishop.

26.a4

Reshevsky uses exactly the same idea that we have just discussed. He is hoping that Black replies with a b-pawn move, when the c4-pawn becomes undefended. An alternative (and probably better) option was 26. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{N}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ (waiting with this capture until Black plays ... $\mathbb{N}e7$ takes away Black's option of taking back on e6 with the queen) 27...fxe6 28. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ (if White tries to attack with the h-pawn – 28.h4, Black can assume a different piece set-up: 28... $\mathbb{Q}d3!$? 29. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5\mathbb{Q}$) 28... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$, and Black has obvious positional compensation due to his control over the light squares, no matter how optimistic your engine might be about White's chances in this position.

26... $\mathbb{N}e7$!

The knight hurries to the strong central outpost. 26...b4? or 26...bxa4 would miss the point. After 27.d5! $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 29. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$, the position would open up and Black's compensation would be only minimal.

27. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 28. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

Reshevsky makes sure to maintain contact with the key c4-pawn.

28... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f3$



Petrosian has achieved his desired set-up, with full control over the light

squares. However, White is threatening to undermine it by removing the protection of the c4-pawn and attacking via the f-file after Bb2-a3 , etc. Petrosian has an elegant solution to this.

29... d3!

This move is not too difficult to make, but Black needed to make sure that he would still have positional compensation in a position where he is down a pawn.

30. ♜xd3 cxd3 31. ♛xd3 b4

Petrosian creates a passed pawn on the b-file, ensuring counterplay in the arising endgames. A sharper option was 31...bxa4!? 32.c4 ♔b4, where Black would be doing well if he could make sure to contain White's connected pawns. Most probably, he would, but Petrosian's solid choice is good enough and also more instructive from a positional point of view.

32.cxb4

Reshevsky goes for the riskless continuation.

A much more double-edged approach was 32.c4, when Black would lose his central outpost, but after 32... ♔b6, his a-pawn would be very weak, so Black would definitely get good counterplay with his connected queenside pawns.

White would have to stir up complications with 33.d5! exd5 34.c5 ♗xa4

35. ♔d4, with all three results possible.

32...axb4



Petrosian was confident that his passed b-pawn, supported by the knight on the d5-outpost, would give him sufficient counterplay against White's a-pawn.

There was also nothing wrong with 32... \mathbb{Q} xb4 33. \mathbb{Q} b3 \mathbb{Q} b8 either, with full positional compensation for the pawn.

33.a5 \mathbb{Q} a8 34. \mathbb{Q} a1 \mathbb{Q} c6 35. \mathbb{Q} c1 \mathbb{Q} c7 36.a6 \mathbb{Q} b6

Neither side can make meaningful progress, so the game is soon drawn:

37. \mathbb{Q} d2 b3 38. \mathbb{Q} c4 h6 39.h3 b2 40. \mathbb{Q} b1 \mathbb{Q} h8 41. \mathbb{Q} e1 ½-½

I was quite impressed with the following game, in which young grandmaster Vidit uses a 'Petrosianesque' exchange sacrifice, not only to obtain positional compensation, but rather to take the positional initiative thanks to his control over the light squares.

Game 62

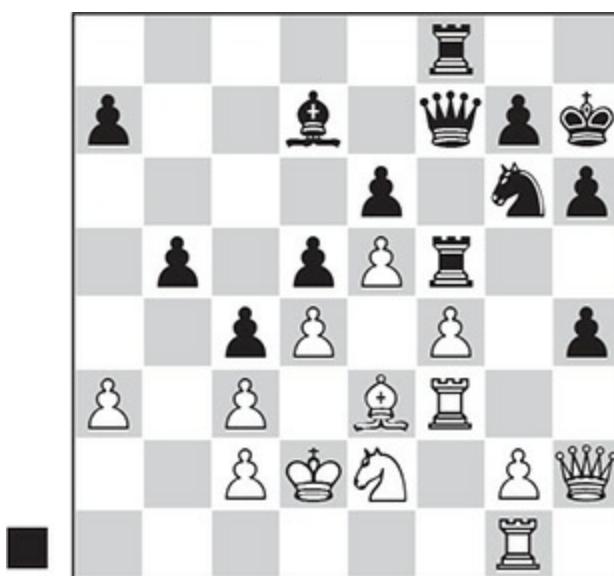
Alexander Areshchenko

2701

Santosh Gujrathi Vidit

2602

Martuni 2014 (4)



The contours of the Winawer Variation of the French Defense are on the

board. This popular opening system often leads to complex strategic battles in the middlegame, where long pawn chains indicate battles for key squares. In this position, White threatens to play g2-g4, which would trap the rook on f5 and open up the g- and h-files for White to attack.

Like Petrosian in the previous game, Vidit understands that keeping the blockade on f5 is more important than material and he plays
27... ♕g8!

Black could have kept the extra pawn with 27... ♔e7 28.g4 ♕f7, but this would be a rather passive way of handling the position. Vidit's solution is much more spirited.

28.g4 hxg3 29.♗xg3 ♔e7

This is the point. Black dares White to take the exchange. He would have two semi-open files for an attack, but the knight on the powerful f5-outpost would hold both targets for attack (h6 and g7) firmly under control and keep White's dark-squared bishop locked inside its pawn chain.

30.♔c1 ♔e8!



This was actually the point behind 27... ♕g8. Black quickly reroutes his bishop to a much more useful diagonal, thus increasing his control over the light squares complex.

31.♔b2

The king defends both weak pawns (c3 and a3), but, as we shall see a bit

later, it is not entirely safe on the queenside either.

31...a5 32.Qd2 Qf8 33.Qxf5

White decides to take the material after all. It is not like he will have much choice once Black gets his bishop to g6.

33...Qxf5



Black finally obtains the position he wanted, with full control over the light squares complex. White's attack on the kingside is non-existent, so he can only sit and wait. Meanwhile, Black has ways to improve his position and eventually break on either side of the board.

34.Qe1 Qg6 35.Qd2 Qf7!

An excellent way to regroup the pieces. Black prepares the following scheme: ...Qh7-h8 and ...Qg6-h7, fully securing the king, and then ...Rg8-b8 and put the queen somewhere useful, followed by the ...b5-b4 break at the right moment.

Another tempting idea is to secure the e4-outpost for the bishop with 35...Qe7, but this would run into 36.Qh4, when the knight would just have to return to f5.

36.Rh3

Areshchenko could not prevent the afore-mentioned regrouping with 36.Qg2, since this would allow Black to strike immediately: 36...b4! 37.axb4 axb4 38.cxb4 Qxd4, with a powerful attack.

36... ♕h8

The king will be safe on h8, as will the bishop on h7. From this safe oasis, it can target one of White's weak spots, the c2-pawn.

37. ♘h4

I suppose that the purpose of this clumsy-looking move is to prevent a possible regrouping with ... ♕f5-e7-c6 and ... ♘g6-f5. However, this bishop might be missed in the defense of the critical c3- and d4-pawns, so maybe it was worth considering leaving it on e1 or f2.

37... ♘h7 38. ♙a2 ♖b8 39. ♖b1



Areshchenko understands that waiting tactics are in order and he sets up his rooks on the b-file and the third rank to meet Black's ...b5-b4 break in the most effective way. I like Vidit's following queen maneuver that allows him to win an important tempo for attack.

39... ♕h5!? 40. ♘h2 ♕e8!

This is the point. The a4-square is the only undefended spot in White's position and the queen will use the e8-square as the springboard to get there. Vidit's maneuvering on the light squares in this game is impressive.

41. ♘d2 b4!



This is one of the most difficult types of decisions one has to make in a game. You have a positional advantage and you can either continue maneuvering to create new weaknesses in the opponent's position, or you can immediately make a concrete decision when the character of the position changes sharply and you have to switch from maneuvering to direct, calculation-based play. Usually, if you have put your pieces on the best squares, it is time to strike while the iron is hot, and this is exactly what Vidit does in this critical moment.

42.cxb4 ♕a4 43.b5?

Areshchenko succumbs to the pressure very quickly.

He had at least two better defenses. Let's have a look:

A) 43.bxa5 ♜xb1 44.♕xb1 ♔xd4 45.♔a2 ♔xc2 seems just bad for White at first sight,



analysis diagram

however he has unexpectedly strong counterplay with 46. $\mathbb{Q}f6!!$ and, somehow, the variations seem to work out for White – he manages to survive by a hair's breadth:

A1) 46...gxf6 47.exf6 d4 48.f7 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}b7+=;$

A2) 46...d4 47. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 48.f5 c3 49. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ dxc3 50. $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}f6+=;$

A3) 46... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ gxf6 50. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 51.a6 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 52.exf6, with a very unclear endgame.

B) Of course, 46. $\mathbb{Q}f6!!$ is very difficult to see in advance, but White could have put up more resistance even with a simpler move like 43. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, when Black gets a slightly better endgame after 43...axb4 44. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2+$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$, but White would still be in the game.



43... ♜xh4!

Before the position opened up, Black would have never made this exchange, but now it allows him to win the key pawn on c2.

44. ♕xh4 ♜xc2

Black is simply positionally winning now. Vidit's conversion was spotless.

45. ♘b2 ♜b3+ 46. ♔b1 ♜xb5

Threatening 47...c3, followed by 48...♝f1.

47.f5

This allows the decisive combination. However, even after 47. ♜c3, Black would have a fairly easy job of converting. For example: 47...♝e8 and White is just defenseless on the light squares.

47...c3! 48. ♜xc3

The desperation trick 48. ♘xh6+ is refuted by 48...♚g8!.

48... ♚f1+ 49. ♜c1

And the final move of the game is the icing on the cake:

49... ♜c2+!

White resigned in view of 50. ♜xc2 ♘c8+, winning the queen.

Pawn structure

The pawn structure is often the backbone of strategic operations, so every experienced chess player understands the importance of sporting a healthy pawn structure. Going to battle with a bad pawn structure is like building a

house with shaky foundations. Consequently, compromising the opponent's pawn structure can be a strong strategy in and of itself, and worth sacrificing material for. Take the following small positional combination as an example.

Game 63

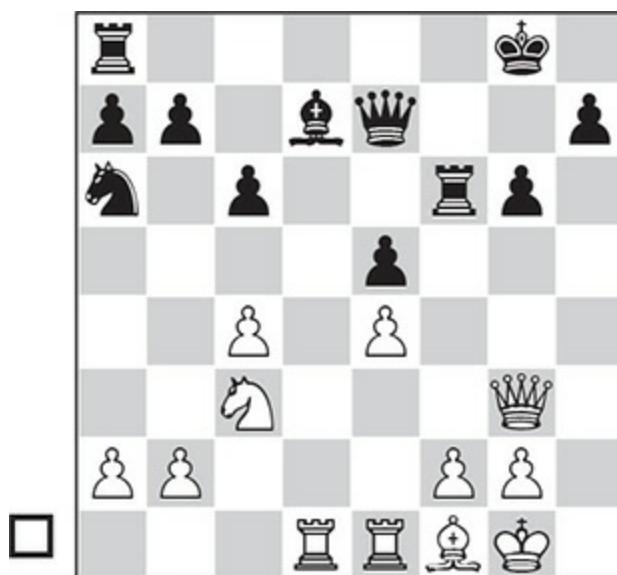
Davorin Kuljasevic

2501

Alojzije Jankovic

2532

Croatia tt 2008 (2)



The position looks roughly balanced. Academically speaking, White has a slightly better pawn structure (two own, versus three black pawn islands). However, his minor pieces seem to be lacking in active prospects and it is not difficult to imagine how Black can target the d4-outpost with the knight maneuver ... $\text{N}a6-c7-e6-d4$ in the near future. However, White solves these positional issues with a nice positional pawn sacrifice:

20.c5!

I believe that in Russian chess literature, this positional device is called 'attacking the strongest point', meaning that the c5-square has been defended twice by Black's pieces, but White attacks it nevertheless. Such moves are very easy to miss due to conditioned materialistic reflexes. Now, this move is

clearly positionally desirable, since it opens up the light-squared bishop and tries to establish a foothold on d6. The key is to understand what happens when Black captures the pawn.

20...♝xc5

In case of the more cautious 20...♝c7 21.♝c4+ ♕h8 22.b4 ♕af8 23.♝d2, White has an obvious positional edge.

21.b4

This positional combination is based on two tactical details. The first one is that 20...♝xc5 (and later 24...♝xb4) is not possible due to the hanging bishop on d7. The second one is that Black cannot play 21...♝e6 now since the e5-pawn would lose protection. Thus, the knight has to retreat to the edge of the board.

21...♞a6



22.♝c4+!?

The point of this intermediate check is to drive Black's king to a dark square, so that the e5-pawn will sometimes be hanging with check. I am not sure if this is objectively necessary, but it felt like a good idea in the game.

22...♚g7 23.♝xa6 ♜xa6 24.♞a4



This is the position I was going for when I sacrificed the pawn. Black has a terrible pawn structure and White will plant his knight on the nice c5-outpost. I think that it is safe to say that White has obtained a small but clear positional advantage as a result of the combination.

24...♞e8?!

This is a bit too passive. It was worth considering 24...a5!?, to get rid of one of the doubled a-pawns and open some files.

25.♘c3 ♜f7 26.♘c5

In addition to having a superior pawn structure and a strong outpost for his knight, White has also established domination over the dark-square complex. We can see how positional factors are often interconnected. In the remainder of the game, White converts his positional advantage by pressing against the weak black pawns.

26...♜d8 27.♞d3 ♜fd6 28.f4!



It seems that including the ♜c4 check was useful after all!

28... ♜xa2 29. ♜a1 ♜f7 30. ♜xd6 ♜xd6 31.fxe5

The weak black pawns start falling, one by one...

31... ♜d4+ 32. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 33. ♜xa6 ♜xb4 34. ♜xa7 ♜g8 35. ♜a8+ ♜g7 36.e6 ♜xe6 37. ♜xe6+ ♜f6 38. ♜c5 ♜c4 39. ♜d7+ ♜e6 40. ♜f8+ ♜e7 41. ♜xh7 ♜xe4 42. ♜e8+!

The simplest.

42... ♜xe8 43. ♜f6+ ♜e7 44. ♜xe4 ♜e6 45. ♜f2 ♜d5 46. ♜e3 c5 47. ♜d3 c4+ 48. ♜e3 ♜e5 49. ♜c3 g5 50.g4 1-0

After this fairly simple introductory example, let us look at a more complex one, in which ex-World Champion Vishy Anand uses a nice intuitive exchange sacrifice to compromise his opponent's pawn structure, and take advantage of it in the long run.

Game 64

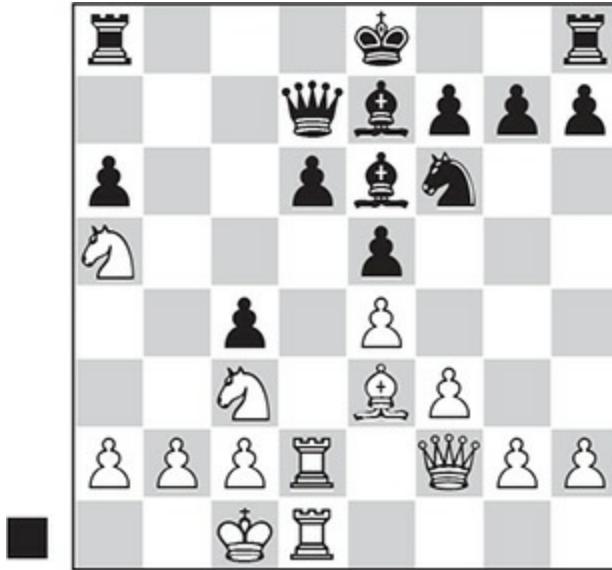
Viswanathan Anand

2792

Boris Gelfand

2723

Wijk aan Zee 2006 (13)



White has a nice prophylactic piece set-up on the queenside. His knights control many important squares, making it very difficult for Black to organize his typical queenside play. Black's only hope of changing that is to attack the a5-knight. However, 15... ♔c7 would run into 16. ♔b6, so Gelfand prepares it with

15... ♕b8?!

Anand will quickly expose the downside of this move. It was necessary to complete development first with 15...0-0, when the game can continue 16. ♔c5 ♔c7 17. ♔b6 ♔d7 18.g3 ♕ab8 19.f4 g6, with mutual chances. Although quite impressive, White's queenside piece bind is also high-maintenance.

16. ♔c5!

With this sharp move, Anand attacks Black's weakest point (the d6-pawn) and introduces a brilliant positional sacrifice. Gelfand was probably more eager to see 16. ♔a7, when he would surely have sacrificed the exchange himself with 16...0-0! 17. ♔xb8 ♕xb8. This would have offered him full compensation, considering the misplaced knight on a5.

16... ♔c7



Two white pieces are hanging, but Anand has foreseen that he can solve this problem with the following combination.

17. ♜xd6! ♕xa5

Black would lose by force in case of 17... ♜xd6 18. ♜xd6 ♕b6 19. ♕xb6 ♜xb6 20. ♜c7.

18. ♜xe6!

This sacrifice is tactically possible only because Black delayed castling on move 15.

18...fxe6 19. ♜xe7 ♜b7

The bishop is untouchable in view of 19... ♛xe7 20. ♜a7+ ♛f8
21. ♜xb8++–.

20. ♜d6



The dust has settled, and it is time to take stock. For the sacrificed exchange, White has gotten a pawn, a powerful bishop on d6, a superior pawn structure and a much safer king. Black's pawn structure has been compromised to the degree that it gives White prospects for long-term positional pressure, even in the endgame. The e5-pawn is particularly problematic for Black.

20... ♜d7

Unfortunately for Black, he cannot castle artificially with 20... ♔f7, because White would get an instant attack on the f-file after 21.f4!.

21. ♕h4 ♜d8

Gelfand obviously did not rate his chances in the middlegame too highly, so he tried to trade the queens.

However, it was worth considering retreating the knight with 21... ♟f6, when White could still win the e5-pawn with 22. ♕g3, but Black would connect his forces after 22... ♔f7 23. ♜xe5 ♜d8, with a manageable position.

22. ♜h5+

Anand prefers to keep the queens on the board, which is understandable in a position where you need just one extra move to checkmate the opponent's king. That being said, there was also nothing wrong with the 'technical' approach: 22. ♜xd8+ ♔xd8 23. ♜xe5±. The endgame would be quite difficult for Black because of his multiple pawn weaknesses.

22...g6 23. ♜h6?!

Anand's move looks reasonable; however, a more energetic alternative

existed: 23. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$, and now: 24.f4!! (very reminiscent of 18.f5!! in Kasparov-Short in Chapter 2), opens up files to attack Black's king. After 24... $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ (24... exf4 25.e5! $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ is just losing for Black) 25. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$, another strong move 26. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ ties down Black's pieces completely. White just needs to get his rook to the f-file to obtain a winning position: 26... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27.g3! $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$, and Black's pawns fall like ripe apples.

23... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 25.h4



25...g5!?

In the given circumstances, Gelfand's decision seems like a sober solution. He is giving up a pawn to reach a worse, but holdable endgame where he, at least, has some maneuvering latitude. Otherwise, in case of 25... $\mathbb{Q}g7$, White can avoid the queen trade with 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. The middlegame after something like 26... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 27.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28.g5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ does not look terribly appealing for Black. His pieces are completely stuck.

26.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 27.gxh6 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}a3\pm$



As mentioned earlier, Black's structural problems persist into the endgame, which proves the depth of Anand's positional sacrifice on move 16.

30... ♜f6

Gelfand rearranges his king and rook to attack both the h6- and f3-pawns. However, it was a good time to consider rerouting the knight from d7 to a more active square: 30... ♜b8!? 31. ♜c3 ♜c6, with a more active position than in the game.

31. ♜h3 ♛g6 32. ♜d2 ♜f7 33. ♜e3 ♜f6 34. ♜c3 ♜d7 35. ♜h1 ♜c6 36. ♜a4 ♜b7 37. ♜c3 ♜b8

After some maneuvering, both sides have improved their pieces. White clearly has the initiative, because Black's rooks are quite useless in such a blocked position, while he can maneuver with his knight to target numerous weaknesses in Black's camp. Thus,

38. ♜d1!?

prepares ♜e3-e2, ♜d1-e3 or ♜d1-f2, g4-g5, ♜f2-g4, which makes Gelfand's defense quite unpleasant.

38... ♜g8

He decides to trade the e5-pawn for the one on h6. It is unclear whether a more passive defense like 38... ♜b5 would have given him better chances. For example, after 39. ♜f2 ♜b7 40. ♜g1 ♜d7 41.g5±, followed by ♜f2-g4, White keeps the positional pressure.

39. ♜h5 ♜xh6 40. ♜xe5



40... ♜f7?!

I think that it made sense for Black to trade one of his passive rooks while he had the chance with 40... ♜b5!?. The endgame after 41. ♜xb5 axb5 42. ♜c3 ♜b6 43. ♜c5 ♜b7 44.e5! is difficult for him, but not hopeless. For example, 44... ♜f7 45.f4 b4 46. ♜e2 b3 would allow Black's rook to see some daylight.

41. ♜h5 ♜b5 42. ♜h1!±

White avoids the rook trade and remains fully in control.

42...e5

This is most probably a necessary evil. It creates new weaknesses, but allowing White to push f3-f4, e4-e5, etc., would have been even worse.

43. ♜c3 ♜b7 44. ♜d5

Now, the knight has a dominant central outpost, making it even more difficult for Black's rooks to become useful.

44... ♜e6 45. ♜b4!

Anand improves his bishop, as well.

45... ♛g7 46. ♜h2 ♜g5 47. ♜c3 ♛g8 48. ♜f2 ♜f7 49. ♜f1 ♜e8



Gelfand finally seems to have found a target for his rooks. 50... $\mathbb{R}ef8$ is threatened. However, Anand finds a tactical way to protect the backward f-pawn.

50. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{R}ef8$

A static alternative, such as 50... $\mathbb{R}e6$, would allow White to cover the f-file with 51. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ $\mathbb{R}c7$ 52. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{R}f7$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f5$, with a technically winning endgame.

51. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

This is the only way to recoup the pawn. Other moves lose tactically: 51... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{R}xf6$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ and 51... $\mathbb{R}xf3$ 52. $\mathbb{R}xf3$ $\mathbb{R}xf3$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f4$.

52. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 53. $f4$ $\mathbb{R}e8$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$



Gelfand has defended creatively so far and has managed to trade a pair of his weak e-pawns for other white pawns. However, Anand has kept the positional pressure even deep into the endgame by smoothly transforming his positional advantages. At this point, his superior piece centralization gives him an obvious positional advantage over the nominally more valuable black pieces (as discussed in Chapter 2).

54... ♔d7 55. ♕e1 ♔e6?!

This hesitant move is not necessary. Instead, Black should have exchanged on e5 immediately: 55... ♔xe5 56.fxe5, when he could obtain counterplay with the active move 56... ♕f2!, keeping drawing chances.

56. ♕e2!



Anand recognizes where the biggest threat is coming from and he pre-empts Black's counterplay along the second rank.

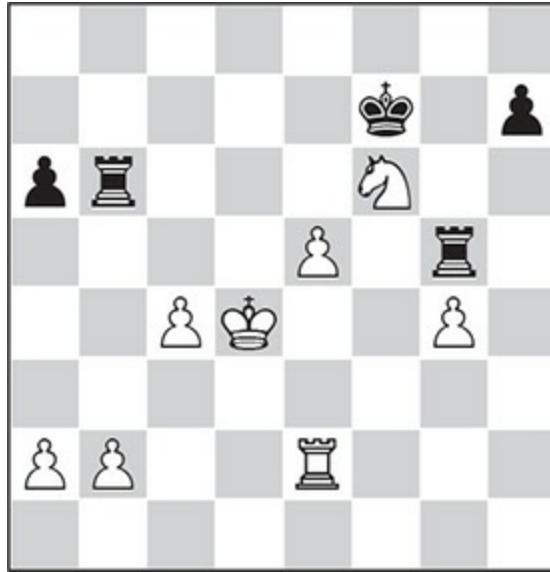
56... ♜xe5 57.fxe5 ♜g7 58.♘f6+ ♛f7 59.♕xc4

The weak c4-pawn could not be defended any more. White already has a material advantage, so Black's only hope for a draw is to activate his rooks and slow down the expansion of White's pawns.

59... ♜g5?

Gelfand falters after a long and difficult defense. This is just too passive – the rook has little to do on g5. His last chance was 59... ♜b6 60.b3 ♛e6 61.♕d4 ♜b8 62.c4 ♜d8+, when White would still have to work for the full point since Black would remain active.

60.♕d4 ♜b6 61.c4



White is winning now thanks to his queenside pawn majority. The conversion part took a long time, mostly due to Gelfand's stubborn defense, but there was never any doubt that White was in the driver's seat due to Black's shattered pawn structure.

61... ♕e6 62.b3 ♕b8 63. ♕e4 h6 64. ♔d5 ♕bg8 65. ♔f4+ ♕e7 66.e6!
Black resigned.

Exposed king

In the previous chapter, we have seen many examples of attacks on the king, so there is no need to give further explanations about the importance of keeping one's king safe. Even if the king is not being attacked directly, its weakness can be weighing you down and limit your active options. Usually, this happens when the king does not have a sufficient pawn shield and has to be defended by pieces.

Sometimes, an exposed king can be the key positional factor in the position, just like in the next top-level game.

Game 65

Magnus Carlsen

2876

Levon Aronian

2780

Stavanger 2015 (8)



Carlsen had won a pawn earlier, but Black has some compensation due to his active pieces. How should White proceed? Carlsen came up with an intriguing idea:

29.e6!?

He is giving back the extra pawn to split Black's kingside structure and open up Black's king a bit. It is possible to put pressure on the isolated e-pawn or use the e5-outpost for his knight later. Basically, he has traded his material advantage for several positional plusses that might prove more useful than the extra pawn in the long run.

He had other options, too, one of them being 29. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$, which prepares the e5-e6 push. However, Black would have a strong reply: 29... $\mathbb{N}b5!$, clearing the d5-square for his knight. Now, in case of 30.e6, Black responds with 30... $\mathbb{N}d5$ 31. $\mathbb{N}c4!?$ (31.exf7+ leads only to a draw after 31... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 32. $\mathbb{N}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 33. $\mathbb{N}c4$ $\mathbb{R}b4$ 34. $\mathbb{N}a2$ $\mathbb{R}xb2$ 35. $\mathbb{N}c4$ $\mathbb{R}b4$) 31... $\mathbb{N}xe3$ 32.exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{N}xe3$ $\mathbb{R}c5\infty$, when his king would be exposed, but White may not have enough firepower for the final blow.

29...fxe6 30. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{R}8d6$

It was also possible to protect the pawn by keeping the eighth rank secure with 30... $\mathbb{R}e8$. However, this looks quite passive and White could simply continue with 31. $\mathbb{N}e5$, keeping the slight positional edge. At some point,

Black's king could be attacked with moves like ♕e3-g3, ♔b3-f3, etc.

31. ♕c1



Well-spotted! The eighth rank is undefended, so why not attack the king with ♕c1-c8?

31... ♔d3?

Aronian's sense of danger fails him. This move is very ambitious and typical of his style of play, but the problem is that his king is more exposed than White's, so Carlsen's attack comes one move before his.

It was much safer to prevent White's threat with 31... ♕c6, which would most likely lead to a very slightly better endgame for White, in which Carlsen would try to squeeze his opponent.

32. ♕c8+ ♔h7 33. ♔a4!



A very annoying move. White is threatening both 34. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ and 34. $\mathbb{Q}e8$.

33... $\mathbb{N}xb2?$

Aronian continues his counterplay against White's king, without any concern for his own. Objectively speaking, it was necessary to prevent White's threats by retreating the knight with 33... $\mathbb{N}b4$, when after 34. $\mathbb{Q}e8 \mathbb{R}d1+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{R}d8$ 36. $\mathbb{R}xd8 \mathbb{R}xd8$, Black fends off the direct attack. However, after 37. $\mathbb{Q}h5$, White's queen would complete a nice tour-of-the-board to get a first-row seat for the kingside attack. This would still be a very unpleasant position for Black, although he is not losing as in the game.

34. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{R}f5$

Aronian's risky approach is based on the counter-attack on the f2-pawn. White's king is also somewhat exposed, which can be seen from the variation 35. $\mathbb{R}xd3?$ $\mathbb{Q}b1+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{R}xd3$, when Black wins material. However, Carlsen has prepared a cool defense against Black's threats.



35. ♔h2!

This quiet move elegantly eliminates Black's threats. It reminds me very much of the spectacular ♔f1-g1-h2 maneuver featured in the next game (Khismatullin-Eljanov).

Obviously, 35. ♕h4?? fails to 35... ♕xf2+ 36. ♔h2 ♕f4+ 37. ♕xf4 ♕xf4+.

35... ♕f4

Black cannot take on f2 either way, so this is the only move that keeps him in the game. 35... ♕xf2 is now simply met by 36. ♕xd3+, while 35... ♕xf2 runs into 36. ♕a8!, and Black's king falls under an irresistible attack. For example: 36... ♕f6 37. ♕h8+ ♔g6 38. ♕e8+ ♕f7 39. ♕h4+ ♔g5 40. ♕a4!, and Black will have to give up a lot of material to save his king.

36. ♕c2?

On the surface, this looks like a safe way to neutralize Black's threats and win the rook with either g2-g4 or ♕f3-h4 on the next move. However, Carlsen missed that his king can also be attacked on the diagonal, not just on the second rank!

White could win by force with the more straightforward 36. ♕h4 ♕xf2. This gives Black some counterplay, but it is not enough as White wins with 37. ♕xf5 fxe4 39. ♕xf2 ♕d3 40. ♕f7.



36... ♕a1?

Aronian might have been in time trouble at this point, because he misses not only a fairly simple win for White after this move, but also a tactical solution that would have solved his problems with the pinned rook: 36... ♕b8!!, creating a geometry with White's king along the h2-b8 diagonal.

The point is that after 37.g4 (37. ♔h4 would be met by 37... ♕d4! 38. ♕c8 (38. ♕xd4? ♕e2+--+) 38... ♕xc8 39. ♕xd4 ♕f6#), Black would have a stunning tactical retort: 37... ♕g6! 38.gxf5 exf5!, and White is even losing because his queen cannot find a safe square against the discovered check with the rook. A brilliant tactical concept, which I am sure that a player of Aronian's caliber would have been able to find with enough time on the clock.

37.g4 ♕f1



Aronian based his counterplay on this move, but it is simply refuted with
38. ♜e1!+–

All the critical squares around the king are protected after this strong defensive move, and Black loses his rook without compensation.

38. ♜e1 did have several ugly cousins:

- A) 38. ♜h4? loses to 38... ♕d1, followed by 39... ♜g1#;
- B) 38. ♜g1? is met by 38... ♕d4!+; while
- C) 38. ♜d2? ♜xf2+ 39. ♛h1 is refuted similarly by 39... ♕d4!+.

38... ♜h5 39. gx f5 exf5 40. ♜c4 1-0

The following game, which was referenced in Carlsen-Aronian above, contains one of the most spectacular king maneuvers in recent years (and the competition has been quite fierce!).

Game 66

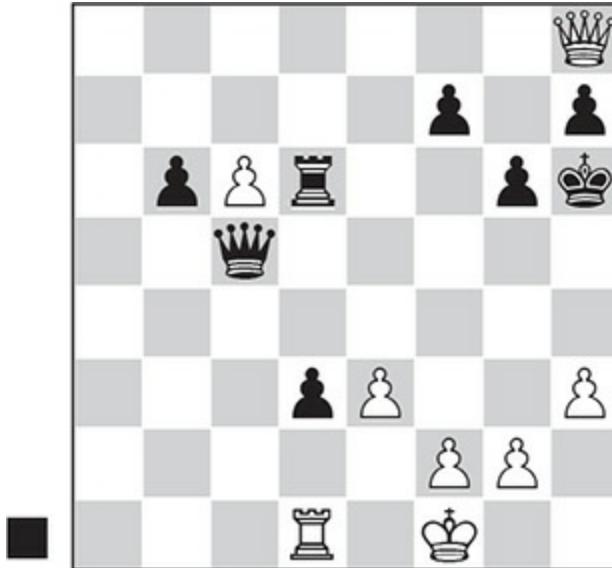
Denis Khismatullin

2653

Pavel Eljanov

2727

Jerusalem Ech 2015 (10)



In this sharp position, it is not clear whose king is more vulnerable. It is never pleasant to have your king out on the sixth or the fifth rank, but White's king also does not look too comfortable on the first rank, especially after Eljanov's next move.

42... ♜c2?

I am sure that this would be the instinctive reaction of most players in this position. What can be more natural than attacking a hanging rook while threatening checkmate in one? Yet, this move is a mistake!

Black had a much safer option in 42... ♜xc6, getting rid of White's passed pawn and taking the f8-square under control. After 43. ♜xd3, Black has many ways to keep his king safe, the simplest one being 43... ♜c8 44. ♜f6 ♜c4 45. ♜e2 ♜c6=. But, what is the fun in that?

43. ♜f8+ ♛g5

The king is very exposed on g5, but as long as White does not have a direct mating attack, it seems like Black's counterplay should be good enough to keep the balance. However, Khismatullin finds a brilliant defensive/attacking resource.



44. ♔g1!!

Usually, when people take my rook with check, I lose the game.

However, Khismatullin's idea is much deeper: by giving up the rook, he gains enough time to tuck away his king on the safe h2-square and claim that he can organize a mating attack with his queen and pawns only. In fact, the king on h2 is placed there for attacking purposes as well, since it controls the g3-square, which becomes important in variations where he pushes f2-f4 and Black's king goes to h4.

It is likely that Black considered only 44.f4+ ♔h4 45. ♕xd6 ♔xd1+ 46. ♔f2 ♕e2+, with a perpetual check.

44... ♕xd1+?

When you say A, shouldn't you also say B? Not every time. Black had an only defense, which is brilliant in its own right: 44... ♕d5!!.

The point is twofold: firstly, to keep the queen on c2, so that both the rook on d1 and the c-pawn would remain under control and, secondly, to bring the rook into the defense via the fifth rank. Truth be told, this is a very difficult concept to realize over the board, especially after such a shocking move like 44. ♔g1. Now, in case of 45. ♔h2 (Black also survives somehow after 45. ♕xf7 ♕xd1+ 46. ♔h2 ♕f5! 47. ♕xh7 d2 48.f4+ ♔f6=) 45... ♕f6!, Black's king escapes the mating net, although its adventures could continue after 46.e4 ♕c5 47.e5+!? ♕xe5 48. ♕e1+ ♕d4, with completely unclear

consequences.

45. ♔ h2



The c-pawn is an additional distraction for Black as he is trying to defend his king, and the fact that his queen is ‘off-side’ on d1 does not help at all. The poor king is pretty much on its own.

45... ♕ xc6

The funny thing about 45...d2 is that White can ignore the hanging rook and the d2-pawn and play for checkmate nevertheless: 46. ♔ xf7, and now Black could do the ‘phoenix’ motif with 46... ♕ h1+ 47. ♔ xh1 d1 ♕ + 48. ♔ h2, but even his newly-born queen would be helpless against the mating threats after 48... ♕ f6 49.f4+ ♕ f5 50. ♕ e7 ♕ e6 51.e4+, and White wins.

46. ♔ e7+

The problem for Black’s king in many arising variations is that it cannot go to f5 because of g2-g4+, which wins the queen.

46... ♕ h6

46...f6 does not work either. White closes down the mating net with 47.f4+ ♕ h6 48. ♕ f8+ ♕ h5 49. ♕ g7! h6 50.g4++–.

47. ♕ f8+ ♕ g5 48. ♕ xf7!



Such quiet moves that close the mating net are possible only when your own king is safe. White is threatening to checkmate with 49. $\mathbb{R}f4+$, 50. $g4+$, etc.

48... $\mathbb{N}f6$

Giving up material is a desperate measure in this case, but there was nothing better left to do. It was not possible to escape with 48... $\mathbb{N}h6$, because of 49. $\mathbb{R}f8+$ $\mathbb{N}h5$ 50. $g4++-$.

49. $f4+$ $\mathbb{N}h6$

49... $\mathbb{N}f5$ 50. $\mathbb{N}d5\#$.

50. $\mathbb{N}xf6$ $\mathbb{N}e2$ 51. $\mathbb{N}f8+$ $\mathbb{N}h5$ 52. $\mathbb{N}g7!$

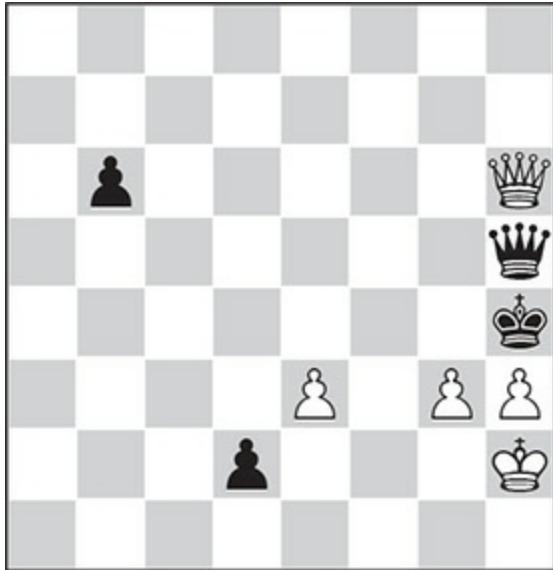
The board is shrinking for Black's king – soon enough he will have no more hiding places left.

52... $h6$ 53. $\mathbb{N}e5+$ $\mathbb{N}h4$ 54. $\mathbb{N}f6+$ $\mathbb{N}h5$ 55. $f5!$

The simplest way to get to the king.

55... $gxf5$ 56. $\mathbb{N}xf5+$ $\mathbb{N}h4$ 57. $\mathbb{N}g6$

And Eljanov resigned in view of 57... $d2$ 58. $\mathbb{N}xh6+$ $\mathbb{N}h5$ 59. $g3\#$. This checkmate deserves a diagram!



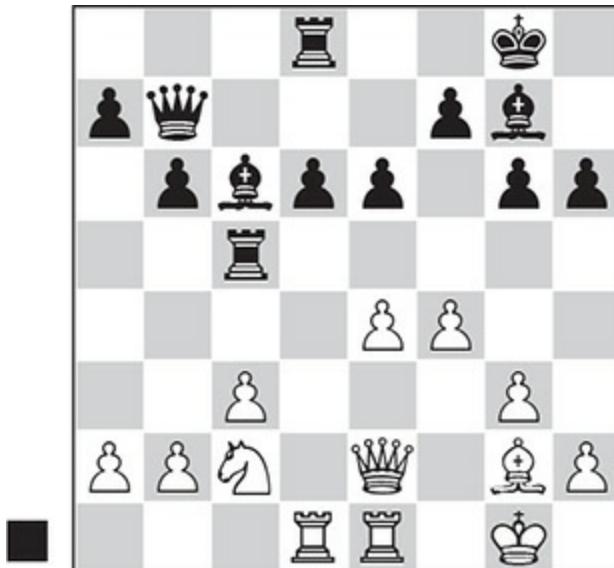
analysis diagram

Bishop pair

The bishop pair advantage is one of the more debatable positional factors. The general agreement is that a strong outpost or a good pawn structure are almost always positionally desirable and that an exposed king is not. However, the relevance of the bishop pair varies from position to position. In open positions, having a pair of bishops promises a big, sometimes even decisive, advantage. In semi-open and closed positions, though, it may not be a relevant positional factor. After all, certain openings, like the Rossolimo Sicilian or the Nimzo-Indian Defense, are based on the strategy of giving up the bishop pair early on to obtain other positional/time advantages. All this being said, every chess player should respect the bishop pair as a very potent positional feature, because most positions in chess tend to open up at some point, when the bishop pair can become a real strength. For our discussion of positional factors, the important question is: would it be worth sacrificing material to obtain the bishop pair? I think that there are many cases where the answer to this question would be affirmative. Let us take one classical game as an example.

Game 67

Octavio Troianescu
Tigran Petrosian
Bucharest 1953 (10)



At this stage of the game, Black already has the bishop pair. However, in this semi-open position, the power of two bishops cannot be fully used. We can say that the bishop pair has a chance of becoming an important positional factor in the future, but at this point it is still just a possibility, rather than reality. It is instructive to see how Petrosian gradually increases the power of his bishops (with some help from his opponent).

22...b5

A logical move. Black prepares the ...b5-b4 break and vacates the b6-square for his queen.

23.♗d2

In case of 23.♗d4, he should preserve his bishop from the exchange with 23...♝d7, and if 24.e5 ♛b6 25.exd6, 25...b4!† opens up the position for Black's bishops.

23...♝c4!

Petrosian was a great ‘psychologist’ over the board (more on that in the next chapter). With this slightly provocative move, he is not only putting extra pressure on the e4-pawn, but also setting up a positional trap for his opponent.

24.a3 a5 25.♕e3?!

Petrosian's weaker opponent does not resist the temptation to attack the rook, but that is exactly what Petrosian was waiting for!

White could have kept the 'status quo' with something like 25.♔e3, forcing Black to find other ways to improve his position.

25... ♜xe4!

I guess that in 1953, Petrosian's opponents were still not fully aware of his trademark exchange sacrifices.

26.♕xe4 ♜xe4



For the sacrificed exchange, Petrosian obtains an absolute monster of a bishop on e4, which can be supported with both the d- and f-pawns. If he can activate his dark-squared colleague as well, White's king will fall under heavy fire along the diagonals.

27.♗c2 d5 28.♗d4?!

White is not showing too much caution in this game. This allows Black to conveniently open up the position for his bishops. It made more sense to sit tight for a while, for example with 28.♖ed1.

28...b4! 29.cxb4 axb4 30.a4

Maybe White should have tried his luck with 30.axb4!?, hoping for 30... ♜xb4 31.♗c6 ♜b6+ 32.♔f2 ♜xc6 33.♕xe4 ♜xb2 34.♕ee2, when he would have, at least, got rid of Black's powerful light-squared bishop.

However, Black does not have to go for the forced variation, and can keep the tension with 30... $\mathbb{N}b6!?$.

30... $\mathbb{N}a7?!$

This is probably not the most accurate way to attack the a-pawn. 30... $\mathbb{N}a8$ was better.

31. $\mathbb{N}f2 \mathbb{N}c8$

Petrosian side-steps Troianescu's trick. 31... $\mathbb{N}xa4?$ fails tactically to 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $fxe6$ 33. $\mathbb{N}xe4! \pm$.

32.b3?

This move is not only positionally bad, it is also too slow. White is too materialistic, trying to keep his outside passed pawn. However, he irreparably weakens the c3-square, which Petrosian will skilfully use to his advantage. Instead, 32. $\mathbb{N}b3!$ was the right move, that would highlight the downside of 30... $\mathbb{N}a7$. After 32... $\mathbb{N}xa4$ 33. $\mathbb{N}c5$, White manages to trade his knight for Black's strongest piece, with only a slightly worse position after 33... $\mathbb{N}c6$ 34. $\mathbb{N}xe4$ $dxe4$.

32... $\mathbb{N}f8!$

Excellent regrouping. The dark-squared bishop will find much better use on the g1-a7 diagonal. White already begins feeling the power of the bishop pair.

33. $\mathbb{N}b5 \mathbb{N}a6$ 34. $\mathbb{N}e2 \mathbb{N}b6+$ 35. $\mathbb{N}f1$



A sad necessity. But how can Black take advantage of the king's exposed position on f1? Petrosian has the answer:

35... ♜c3!

The second exchange sacrifice in the game! Black threatens 36... ♜f3+ with a deadly attack, so White has no choice but to accept it.

36. ♜xc3?!

However, there was a better way to do it. He should have shown a little non-materialism in this game, for once.

The right continuation is 36.a5! ♜xa5 37. ♜xc3 bxc3 38. ♜d4. The point of the pawn sacrifice is to secure the d4-square for the rook, so that he can sacrifice it for the e4-bishop. It should have become clear by this point that White cannot tolerate this bishop and that his main positional goal should be to exchange it at a convenient opportunity. For example, after 38... ♜c5 39. ♜xe4! dxе4 40. ♜xe4 ♜a2 41. ♜e2 ♜xb3 42. ♜d3+, White could try to set up a blockade on the light squares in the endgame.

36...bxc3 37. ♜c2

A nice variation arises after 37. ♜d3 ♜xb3 38. ♜e3 f5! (the rook sacrifice on e4 has been effectively prevented with this move) 39. ♜b5 ♜xb5+ 40.axb5 d4, and White is getting steam-rolled.

37... ♜xb3 38. ♜ec1 ♜b4



The two bishops and the two passed pawns in the center completely dominate

the two passive rooks.

39.g4 ♕xc2

Petrosian decides to cash out his positional chips into some good-old material. There is nothing wrong with this approach since he already has two strong passed pawns in the center, although it was also possible to keep the bishop pair and continue improving the position in other ways.

40.♖xc2

If 40.♕xc2, 40...♕c4+ 41.♔g2 ♕xf4 wins the f4-pawn.

40...♕xa4 41.f5 exf5 42.gxf5 g5 43.h4 ♕c5!



A strong move that gives Black's queen access to the kingside.

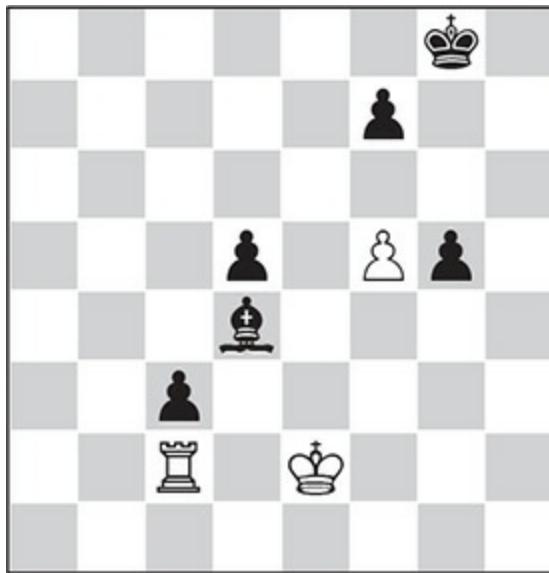
44.hxg5

The tactical point is that the pawn cannot be taken with 44.♖xc3? in view of 44...♕a1+ 45.♔e1 ♕xe1+ 46.♕xe1 ♕b4+.

44...♕f4+ 45.♔e1 ♕g3+ 46.♔d1 ♕g1+

Petrosian figured that the simplest way to convert the advantage is to trade the queens and win the bishop vs rook endgame with three extra pawns.

47.♕e1 ♕xe1+ 48.♕xe1 hxg5 49.♔e2 ♕d4!



Three passed pawns for the exchange in the endgame were enough to comfortably convert this nice game into a full point:

50. ♜ a2 ♛ g7 51. ♜ d3 ♟ e5! 52. ♜ a5 ♛ f6 53. ♜ xd5 ♛ xf5 54. ♜ e3 f6 55. ♜ c5 ♛ g4 56. ♜ c4+ ♛ g3 57. ♜ e4 g4 0-1

Controlling space

A space advantage is one of the most easily recognizable positional factors. The strategic fight in a chess game often revolves around controlling more space. Whether it is a struggle for an important file, a dangerous diagonal or a complex of squares on a certain part of the board, the main benefit of controlling more territory than your opponent is having more maneuvering freedom for your pieces.

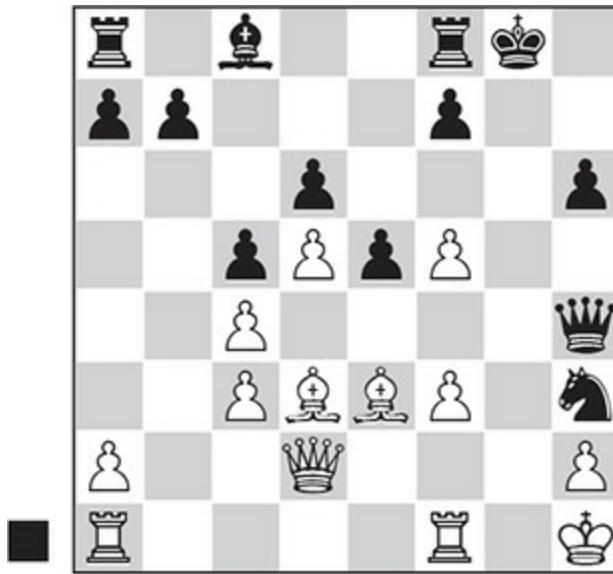
Non-materialism can play an important role in this fight. As we explained in detail in Chapter 2, the values of pieces fluctuate depending on their positions and relation to other pieces on the chessboard, so it is important to keep an open mind to the possibilities of sacrificing material to control important spaces on the chessboard.

Game 68

Amin Tabatabaei

2448

Hou Yifan



A complex Nimzo-Indian middlegame is on the board. Both sides have their positional plusses and minuses in a sharp position, so a tense battle is ahead. Hou Yifan recognizes that the g-file is of paramount importance right now and plays

22... ♜h8,

not only evacuating the king from it, but also preparing to bring the rook to the g-file. Protecting the h-pawn with 22... ♟f4? would have been a big mistake as it would surrender the file to White. After 23. ♜g1+ ♛h8 24. ♜g4 ♜h3 25. ♜g3 ♜h4 26. ♜ag1, White obtains a winning attack on the g-file. For example: 26... ♜d7 27. ♜xf4 exf4 28. ♜g7 ♜g8 29. ♜g2.

23. ♜xh6?

Her young opponent missed this positional point and went for the material. Instead, 23. ♜g1! would have been correct. Such moves are often overlooked because we instinctively value the rook higher than a knight. However, in this position, Black's knight is no worse than the rook on a1 (which is basically the exchange that we are making).

23... ♜xg1 24. ♜xg1, and now White has the initiative on the kingside. Black should trade the rooks with 24... ♜g8 (24... ♜d7? is too slow, because of 25. ♜g4 ♜h5 26. ♜f2! ♜g8 27. ♜h4, trapping the queen), and after

25. $\mathbb{Q}xg8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xh6\mathbb{Q}$, White continues to put pressure on the kingside, even with the somewhat limited material.

23... $\mathbb{R}g8$

Now Black has the g-file firmly under her control. The lost h6-pawn is largely irrelevant.

24. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 25.f4?!

White feels the lack of operating space for his pieces, so he looks for a way to open up some files and diagonals with this move. Hou Yifan's response is very instructive.



25...e4!

An excellent positional decision. Instead of opening them, Hou Yifan shuts down the f-file and the c1-h6 diagonal. At the same time, she opens a new file for her own rook – all this at the cost of only one pawn!

It would not have made sense to allow the activation of White's pieces with 25...exf4? 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf4\pm$.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{R}ae8$

Black's rooks control both open files, while all of White's pieces are suffering from a lack of space. He would surely like to have his extra f-pawns disappear, just to unclog his pieces. But, as Peter Svidler said, 'chess does not work that way'.

27. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

A nice tactic. Hou Yifan uses tactical motifs on the g-file to win the f5-pawn.

28. ♜d1

The only move, since 28. ♜ae1? is refuted by 28... ♜xe3! 29. ♜xe3 (29. ♔xe3 ♜g2#) 29... ♜g1+ 30. ♜xg1 ♜xg1#.

28... ♜xf5



The point of taking the f-pawn is not so much to win material, but to free up her light-squared bishop, which was trapped by that pawn.

29. ♜f3 ♕h7 30. ♜ae1 ♜g7?

Just when she was about to succeed with her excellent positional play, Hou Yifan makes a serious tactical error that does not go unnoticed by her opponent. Instead, just activating the bishop first with 30... ♜f5! would have given Black a fantastic position. She would control all the important files, diagonals and outposts.



31.f5!

Tabatabaei does not miss the chance to provide some breathing space for his pieces. It is interesting that virtually all the key positional moves in this game have come with a sacrifice!

31... ♜xf5

This is the only way to capture the pawn. By putting the rook on g7, Hou Yifan disconnected her rooks, and now 31... ♜xf5?? would have run into a discovered attack: 32. ♜d4! ♕xe1 33. ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 34. ♕xe1+-.

32. ♜g2 ♜h7 33. ♜h6∞

This is a whole different story now – White’s rooks and bishops control just as much space as Black’s pieces, so the game is unclear again. The remainder of the game is not too important for our purposes. Tabatabaei made an ‘unforced error’ after a few moves and Hou Yifan won in the endgame.

Game 69

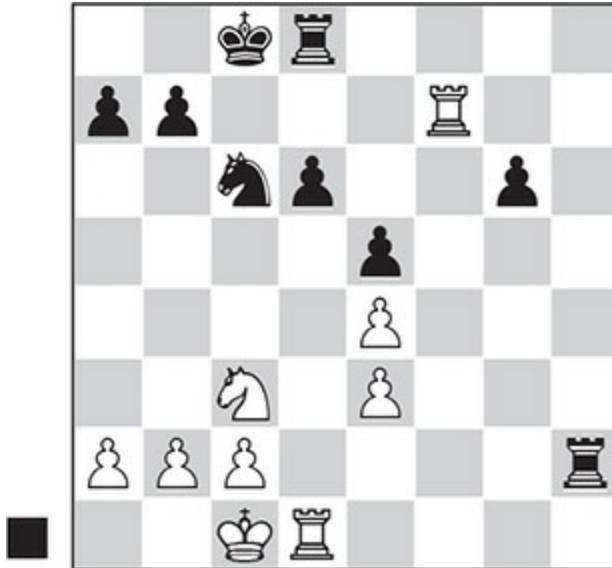
Teimour Radjabov

2738

Peter Svidler

2727

Baku playoff rapid 2015 (1)



This endgame looks quite unpleasant for Black. White's rooks are more active, and he has some nasty threats with his knight (Nc3-b5xd6 or just Nc3-d5 , with positional domination). How can Black solve his problems? In the previous game, I paraphrased Peter Svidler's famous line about how chess does not work. Let us see now, for a change, how chess does work!

20...Nb4!

This is the best solution. The alternatives would not solve Black's problems:

A) $20\dots a6$ would prevent $21.\text{Nb5}$, but not $21.\text{Nd5}$, when White would control much more ground, despite the same material balance: $21\dots g5$ ($21\dots Ng8$ would not work because of $22.\text{Nb6+ Nb8} 23.\text{Nd6+-}$) $22.\text{Ng7\pm}$, and the g-pawn isn't going anywhere. In case of $22\dots g2$ $23.\text{f1!}$, the other rook joins the party on the seventh rank, and it is game over for Black;

B) Trying to trade the strong rook with $20\dots Nd7$ would yield only partial success, because after $21.\text{f8+ Nd8} 22.\text{xd8+ Nxd8} 23.\text{xd6 g5} 24.\text{d5\pm}$, White would be up a full pawn.

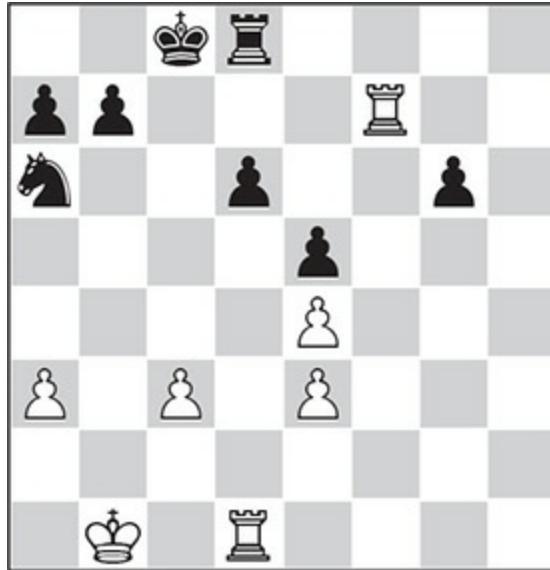
21.a3 Nxc2+

$21\dots Nxc2$ looks good at first, until you see that the knight gets trapped after $22.\text{d2! Nxd2} 23.\text{xd2 Na1} 24.\text{b4!}$.

22.Nb1 Nxc3

This exchange sacrifice was forced. But what did Black give up material for?

23.bxc3 N a6!



This is the answer! The knight will go to the ‘untouchable’ outpost on c5, where it will control a lot of ground and set up a sort of fortress. An excellent solution by Svidler; otherwise, Black would suffer in the endgame in one way or another.

24. ♜g1 ♛c5 25. ♛c2 ♜d7

Trading the powerful white rook is the second part of the puzzle. White’s space advantage has been neutralized.

26. ♜xd7 ♛xd7 27. ♜g4 ♛c6 28. c4 g5 29. ♜xg5 ♛xe4

The exchange of Black’s g- for White’s e-pawn has been inevitable.

30. ♜g8 a5!



Svidler sets up an impregnable fortress on the queenside. The structure of Black's pawns after the upcoming ...b7-b6 and ... \mathbb{N} e4-c5 indeed looks like some kind of medieval fort in which the powerful knight on c5 safeguards its king on c6.

31. \mathbb{R} c8+ \mathbb{Q} d7 32. \mathbb{R} a8 b6 33. \mathbb{Q} d3 \mathbb{N} c5+ 34. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{N} e4 35. \mathbb{R} g8 \mathbb{Q} c6 36. \mathbb{R} g4 \mathbb{N} c5=

The endgame is drawn with best play. White's only winning attempt is to bring his king around to c8, but when he does that, Black will move his king forward and create counterplay against the undefended White's pawns and liquidate into a drawn rook vs knight endgame. This is exactly what happened in the game and after 40-something more moves the draw was agreed.

I once saw a version of chess on a 6x6 board (36 squares). I was surprised to realize how strong a piece the knight is in that game. In the final position of the previous game, it seems like the board has shrunk to similar proportions, since there are no pawns left on the kingside. The brilliance of Svidler's defensive concept is exactly in this 'shrinking' of the chessboard, in which the short-legged knight controls just as much relevant space as the long-range rook.

As we discussed earlier, the human instinct to take material is very strong, because it is a more tangible kind of advantage than time or a positional advantage. I would like to show you several situations in which young players hurried to win material at the expense of a stable space advantage, not realizing that it was a wrong positional decision.

Game 70

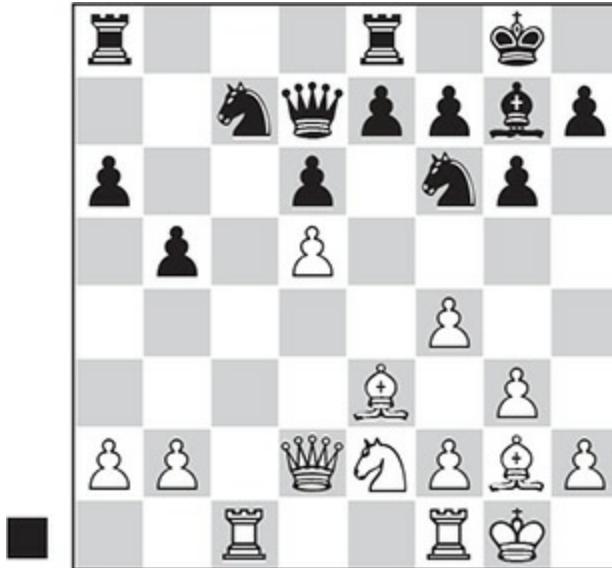
Eivind Olav Risting

2298

Milanko Bilic

1967

Riga Ech U18 2018 (1)



White has a huge space advantage and an easy plan to improve his position by planting his rook on c6, doubling on the c-file and attacking the queenside pawns. It is also difficult to ignore the terribly placed ♜c7, which is why Black played

18...b4!?

This pawn sacrifice is absolutely necessary to gain some space.

19.♗b6

The move itself is not bad, but it was played with the idea to swap the bishop for c7-knight and win the b4-pawn. This materialistic idea gives up a solid chunk of White's positional advantage. There was no need to go chasing after material, since he could simply continue expanding his space advantage with 19.♖c6 a5 20.♗b6± and if 20...♝b5, 21.a4! is a strong idea for White. 21...bxa3 22.bxa3 a4 (the pawn could not be taken on the account of 23.♘d3, trapping the knight) 23.♘d3 ♜a7 24.♖c4±,



analysis diagram

continuing the positional domination and not allowing Black any counterplay.

19... ♜ec8 20. ♔xc7?!

By trading his most active minor piece for Black's worst placed one, White transforms his big positional advantage into a material one. However, if we have learned anything so far, it is that the advantage of one pawn is not decisive if your opponent gets active counterplay of some sort.

Again, I believe that it was better to preserve the positional advantages with 20. ♜c4 a5 21. ♜fc1 ♜a6 22. ♜d4 ♜xc4 23. ♜xc4, when Black would continue suffering in a passive position.

20... ♜xc7 21. ♜xb4 ♜b7?!

Black gets some breathing space for his pieces, but this continuation is inaccurate. Instead, 21...a5 would have given Black counterplay on the queenside after 22. ♜d2 ♜xc1 23. ♜xc1 ♜b5 24. ♜d4 ♜b4.



analysis diagram

Black has come a long way since the initial position where his pieces were cluttered on the seventh rank. It would not be so simple to convert the extra pawn for White here; for example: 25. \mathbb{Q} c2 \mathbb{N} xd2 26. \mathbb{Q} xd2 a4 27. \mathbb{Q} c6 \mathbb{Q} f8 28. \mathbb{Q} d4 \mathbb{Q} d7 29. \mathbb{Q} b4 \mathbb{Q} c5±, and Black is active enough.

22. \mathbb{Q} d2 \mathbb{Q} a4 23.b3 \mathbb{Q} a3?!

After this, and a few other ‘empty moves’ by Black, White converted his material advantage without much trouble. 23... \mathbb{Q} b4 was the last chance to get some counterplay.

24. \mathbb{Q} c4 \mathbb{Q} d7 25. \mathbb{Q} fc1 \mathbb{Q} b2?

25...a5 was better, still.

26. \mathbb{Q} 1c2 \mathbb{Q} b6 27. \mathbb{Q} c6 \mathbb{Q} f6 28.f5 \mathbb{Q} g7?

It is unclear why Black never tried to obtain counterplay with 28...a5.

29.fxg6 hxg6 30.h4 \mathbb{Q} d7 31. \mathbb{Q} 6c4 \mathbb{Q} c5 32.h5 \mathbb{Q} b5 33.hxg6 fxg6 34. \mathbb{Q} f4 \mathbb{Q} g5

35. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{Q} a7 36. \mathbb{Q} e6+ \mathbb{Q} xe6 37. \mathbb{Q} xe6 \mathbb{Q} a5 38. \mathbb{Q} c8 \mathbb{Q} h6 39. \mathbb{Q} h8+ \mathbb{Q} g7

40. \mathbb{Q} g8+ 1-0

Interestingly, in the next example, White also hurried to win the b4-pawn, instead of holding on to his positional advantages.

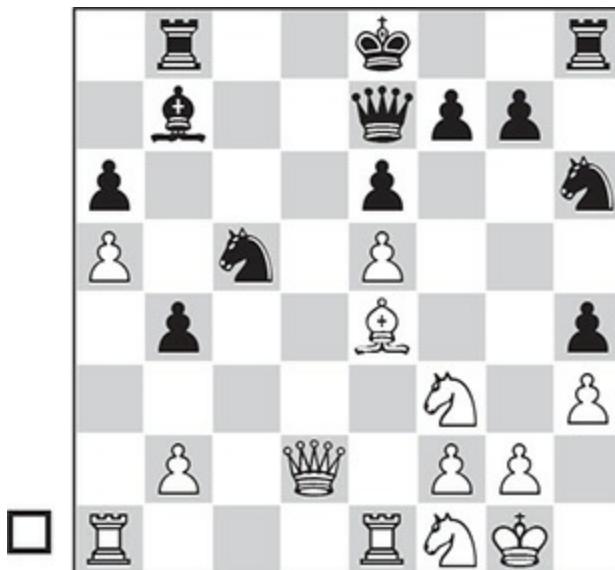
Game 71

Dante Beukes

Clarence Campbell

1633

Namibia tt 2018 (15)



White has achieved a significant positional advantage out of the opening – better development, the better pawn structure and more space control. This is probably why the young player with the white pieces felt that it was time to reap the material rewards.

22. ♜xb4?!

However, this allows Black to improve his position and obtain some counterplay. Instead, the non-materialistic 22. ♜xb7 ♕xb7 (22... ♜xb7 is worse. White also dominates after 23. ♜g5 0-0 24. ♜ad1 and if 24... ♜f5, 25. ♜e3! ♜xe3 26. ♜xe3 gives him a strategically winning position) 23. ♜e3 0-0 24. ♜ad1



analysis diagram

would have kept White fully in control of the position. Black's pawns are so weak that they would eventually fall anyway. What is more important is that White would not have given his opponent an opportunity to activate his forces, as he did in the game.

22... ♜xe4 23. ♜xe4 ♛xb4?

Black misses his first chance. He had a perfect opportunity to make sense of his knight with 23... ♜f5, simultaneously defending his queen and preparing kingside castling. His bishop could also become an important factor.

Suddenly, White's positional advantage would not be so impressive, and he would have to play precisely to make something out of his extra pawn.

24. ♜xb4 ♜f5 25. ♜c1?

White misses a forced way to exploit the pin on the bishop. 25. ♜a3! was the right move: 25... ♛d7 26. ♜ab3 ♛c7 27. ♜g5+–.

25... ♛d7 26. ♜d4?



White is oblivious to his opponent's resources...

26...♝e7?

... but Black misses his chance. 26...♝xg2! would have punished White's impetuous play: 27.♜xb8 ♜xb8 28.♞xf5 ♜xf1=, and White would have regretted not trading this bishop on move 22.

27.♝b3!

Now Black will not get another chance to save the game.

27...♝c6 28.♝c5+ ♔c7 29.♝xb7 ♜xb7 30.♜bc4 1-0

Game 72

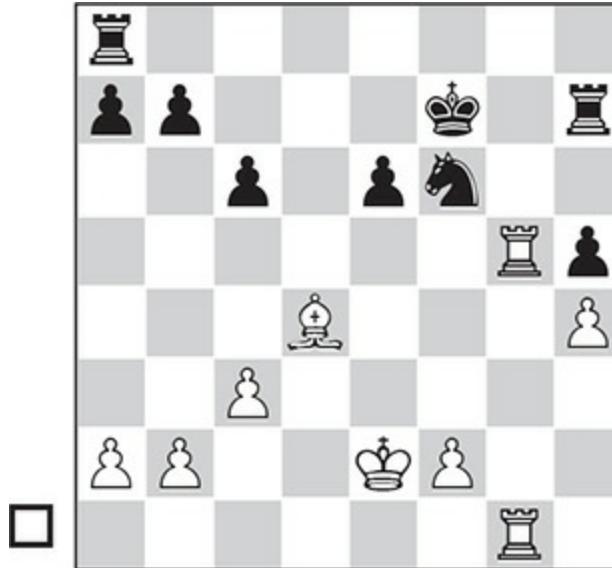
Eivind Olav Risting

2305

Marius Gramb

2073

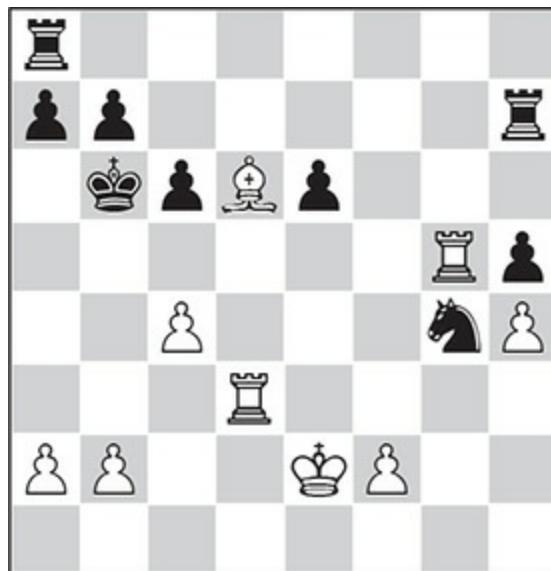
Sunny Beach 2018 (9)



White has a really nice space advantage in the endgame. All his pieces are placed perfectly, and Black is under serious pressure. White just needs to find a target, a weakness to exploit. In the game, he chose the wrong one.

25. ♜a5?

White's idea is to win either the a7- or h5-pawn, but this allows Black to consolidate. The right target was the black king: 25. ♜1g3!. After this move, Black would not have a good defense against ♜g3-f3. For example: 25... ♛g4 26. ♜f3+ ♛e7 27. ♜c5+ ♛d7 28. ♜d3+ ♛c7 29. ♜d6+ ♛b6 30. c4



analysis diagram

and this would have been much better than trying to convert a pawn-up endgame where Black has active possibilities.

25...a6

A better way to prove the futility of White's pawn grabbing was 25... $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xa7$ $\mathbb{R}xa7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{B}f4+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{B}g6$, which forces White to passively defend the h4-pawn. For example: 29. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{R}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 31. $a3$ $\mathbb{R}a4$, with active counterplay for the pawn.

26. $\mathbb{B}gg5?$

Continuing on the wrong, materialistic, path. Tigran Petrosian was famous for saying that a chess player should always be willing to admit his mistake, and thus 26. $\mathbb{B}ag5!$ would still have been the best move here.

But even if White was not so inclined, he could have played 26. $\mathbb{R}g3$, continuing to patiently improve his position.

26... $\mathbb{R}d8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 28. $\mathbb{R}xh5$



White has won a pawn, but at the same time, he has relinquished all of his space advantage. His powerful bishop is gone, and his rooks are misplaced on the edges.

28... $\mathbb{R}dh8?$

Black does not seize the moment. He had one last chance to activate his rooks: 28... $\mathbb{R}hd7$ 29. $\mathbb{R}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 30. $\mathbb{R}xe6$ $\mathbb{R}d2+$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}xb2$, and this would have given him the possibility of defending actively in a pawn-down

rook endgame.

29. ♜xh7 ♜xh7 30. ♜a4

White should be technically winning now. He eventually converted the advantage after some ups and downs: **1-0 (60)**.

Someone might say that I've been nitpicking in these last three examples, since in all of them the white players eventually won their games despite the positional inaccuracies I pointed out. And they may be right; it all depends on your point of view. The way I look at it is that such mistakes might go unnoticed against lower-rated opponents (as was invariably the case here), but would surely be punished by stronger players. It is important for young players to learn even from the small mistakes in the games that they won, because it teaches them to be diligent and attentive to detail on every single move, which is the pre-requisite for playing chess on a high level.

Positional compensation

In most examples in this chapter, one side sacrificed material to obtain a positional advantage of some sort. In some, such as Reshevsky-Petrosian or Radjabov-Svidler, the purpose of the sacrifice was to achieve positional compensation rather than a positional advantage. In such cases, the value of the sacrificed material is roughly equivalent to the positional value one gets in return, and neither side can claim a significant advantage. Sacrifices of this sort can help us to solve various positional problems, as we will see from the next several examples.

Game 73

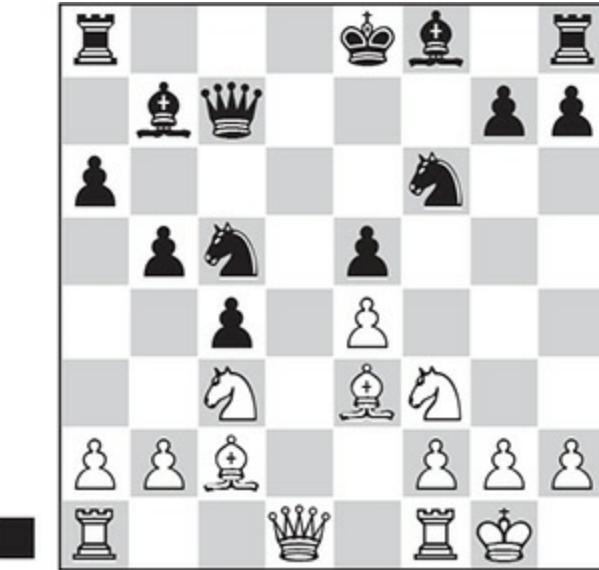
Rustam Kasimdzhanov

2678

Garry Kasparov

2804

Linares 2005 (9)



Some 15-20 years ago, this opening position from the Meran Variation of the Semi-Slav Defense was the subject of theoretical discussion. If Black can complete his development, his position will be more than fine, but in practice, this has not been easy to accomplish. White was often able to obtain the initiative in one way or another, and Black could never fully solve his opening problems. However, Kasparov demonstrated an elegant solution in Linares 2005, his last tournament in classical chess...

16... ♕e7

Just planning to castle on the next move. Black should not be greedy for central pawns in such a position, as evidenced by the following game: 16... ♘cxe4?! 17. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 18. ♖e1 ♔d6 19. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 20. ♘g5 ♔d3 21. ♜f3 0-0-0 22. ♜a8+ ♔d7 23. ♜xa6 ♖b8 24. ♘f7, and Black had to defend for no less than 100 moves to claim a draw in Gelfand-Bareev, Novgorod 1997.

Another popular move was 16... ♖d8, but after 17. ♜e2 ♕e7, White obtains a pretty serious initiative with 18.a4! ♘cxe4 19. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 20. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 21. axb5 axb5 22. ♖a7 ♔d6 23. ♘d4!, as in Alterman-Gabriel, Bad Homburg 1997 (1-0, 42).

17. ♘g5

This is the most principled reply, aiming to prevent Black from castling due to the ♘e3xc5 and ♘g5-e6 threat. However, Kasparov realized that this

threat is not as strong as it seems...

17...0-0!

At the time, this was a novelty. Reportedly, Kasparov found this move two years earlier, in 2003, with the help of an engine and, after detailed analysis, concluded that Black obtains good positional compensation for the exchange. Before that, 17... $\mathbb{B}c6$ and 17... $h6$ were tried, but White obtained the initiative in both cases.

18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19. $\mathbb{B}e6$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$



Compared to the previous variations, Black is down on material, but the advantage here is that he is fully developed, and his pieces are placed harmoniously. His positional compensation is based primarily on the strong dark-squared bishop, but he has several other plusses as well, such as counterplay on the f-file, a pawn majority on the queenside and some potential outposts. Rustam Kasimdzhanov, at the time the reigning FIDE World Champion, makes a mistake on the very next move.

21. $\mathbb{Q}d5?$!

This drops the f2-pawn and there was no need for that. The position would remain roughly balanced after 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, when Kasparov intended to continue with 21... $\mathbb{B}e6\mathbb{Q}$, preparing ... $\mathbb{B}f6-g4$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}c5-d4$, with counterplay.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+!$

A nice tactical shot.

23. ♔h1

23. ♕xf2? loses to 23... ♗g4 24. ♗xg4 ♕xf2+ 25. ♔h1 ♕f1+ 26. ♕xf1 ♕xf1#.



23...e4

Kasparov decides to fortify his bishop on f2 with the e-pawn, keeping it close to White's king. A more positionally-inclined player would probably play 23... ♗d4!? 24. ♕b1 ♗d6!, engulfing the d5-pawn.

24. ♗e2?

This is quite passive and allows Black to take over the initiative. White should have looked for activity with 24.d6 e3 25.a4!, when the position remains dynamically balanced, since winning the d6-pawn with 25... ♕d8?! would be very risky for Black due to 26.axb5 axb5 27. ♗f3! ♕xd6 28. ♕a8+ ♔f7 29. ♕fa1, and White is the one attacking.

24...e3 25. ♕fd1?

Another strangely passive move. Black can easily block the d-pawn now. It was about time to activate the light-squared bishop with 25. ♗f5.

25... ♗d6



Simple and strong. From d6, the queen also sets her sights on White's king, which is not good news when you are playing against Kasparov.

26.a4 g6!

A strong move that prepares ... \mathbb{Q} f6-h5-g3, with mating threats. Kasparov is in his element now.

27.axb5 axb5 28.g3

In case of 28. \mathbb{Q} d4, Black would have a beautiful win: 28... \mathbb{Q} e5 29. \mathbb{Q} ad1 \mathbb{Q} g3!! (a devastating move. Every single one of Black's pieces joins the attack, including the e-pawn) 30.hxg3 \mathbb{Q} h5 31. \mathbb{Q} g1 \mathbb{Q} xg3 32. \mathbb{Q} g4 e2! 33. \mathbb{Q} e6+ \mathbb{Q} xe6 34.dxe6 \mathbb{Q} f1+-+.

28... \mathbb{Q} h5 29. \mathbb{Q} g4



29...♝xg3!

A thematic sacrifice that destroys the king's pawn shield.

30.hxg3

The queen trade 30.♛e6+ ♛xe6 31.dxe6 does not promise better times. 31...♜h4!—+ blocks the opponent's and supports his own e-pawn at the same time.

In case of 30.♜g1, the most convincing winning variation is 30...♝f2!
31.♛xh5 ♜xg1 32.♜xg1 ♜f1! 33.♝g4 ♜f2! 34.♜g2 e2.

30...♝xg3+ 31.♛g2

31.♛g1 also loses after 31...e2! 32.♜e1 ♜c5+ 33.♛g2 ♜f2+ 34.♛h3 ♜h5.

31...♜f2+ 32.♛h3 ♜f5!



This is the quiet point of Kasparov's combination. The checkmate threat on h2 decides the outcome of the game.

33. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ h5 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}hg1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xg1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

White resigned.

Game 74

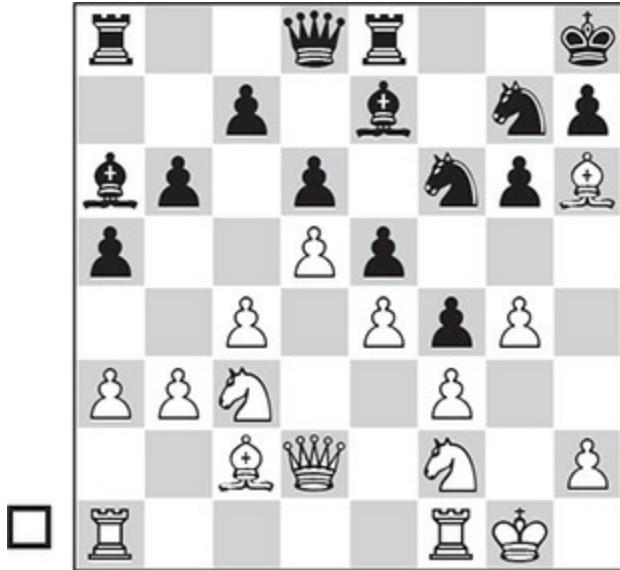
Maxim Rodshtein

2609

Laurent Fressinet

2670

Rijeka Ech 2010 (11)



In blocked positions of the King's Indian variety, it is often about who is faster: White on the queenside or Black on the kingside. In this instance, White's typical play with b3-b4 and c4-c5 has been slowed down by Black's bishops. Meanwhile, Black has a simple plan: ... \mathbb{Q} f6-g8, force the trade on g7 and push ...h7-h5, with good attacking prospects. Maxim Rodshtein, one of the leading Israeli grandmasters, found an inspired solution to this issue: **22.b4!**

This pawn sacrifice gives White timely counterplay on the queenside. Instead, the straightforward 22. \mathbb{Q} d3 would have been too slow. After 22... \mathbb{Q} g8 23. \mathbb{Q} xg7+ \mathbb{Q} xg7 24.b4 \mathbb{Q} c8!, White would have difficulties in obtaining active play on the queenside, while Black would have a simple attacking scheme on the other flank. For example: 25. \mathbb{Q} c2 \mathbb{Q} h4 26. \mathbb{Q} a4 \mathbb{Q} f8 27. \mathbb{Q} c6 \mathbb{Q} b8 28. \mathbb{Q} d3 h5, and White is already in trouble.

22... \mathbb{Q} xc4

It would not make much sense for Black to ignore the pawn sacrifice, since after 22... \mathbb{Q} g8 23. \mathbb{Q} xg7+ \mathbb{Q} xg7 24. \mathbb{Q} a4 \mathbb{Q} f8 25. \mathbb{Q} c6 \mathbb{Q} b8 26. \mathbb{Q} b5, White would force the opening of a file on the queenside either way.

23. \mathbb{Q} d3 \mathbb{Q} xd3 24. \mathbb{Q} xd3



The pawn sacrifice has helped White achieve long-term positional compensation thanks to his control over the light squares complex on the queenside and a potential to use the c-file to attack the backward c-pawn. I really like this idea!

24... ♜d7 25. ♜fc1 ♜ec8 26. ♜xg7+ ♛xg7 27.a4

White prepares to invade the b5-square with his knight, followed by ♜c1-c6, etc. Black should start his kingside counterplay at once.

27...h5 28.g5

28.h3 would be the wrong way to defend, because Black could open up a file for attack: 28...hxg4 29.hxg4 ♜h8 30. ♜f2 ♜h7!, followed by ...♜h7-g5, with dangerous threats to White's king.

28... ♜h7 29.h4 ♜h3 30. ♜f2 axb4 31. ♜b5!?



We have reached the critical point of the game. Black is nominally up two pawns, but White controls much more space and threatens to win the key c7-pawn. His pawn sacrifice on move 22 has definitely been justified because he has obtained excellent play on the queenside.

Fressinet realizes this and gives the game a new direction with his own strong sacrifice:

31... ♜xg5! 32.hxg5 ♜xg5∞

This counter-sacrifice exposes White's king, forcing him to combine his queenside play with defense very carefully. The next phase of the game is quite sharp, and both players navigate the complications fairly well, considering that they were probably in time trouble, as well.

33. ♜e1 b3 34. ♜a3 ♔h6 35. ♜g2 ♜d7 36. ♜c6 ♜a5 37. ♜d3?!

An imperceptible mistake. It was safer to continue 37. ♜xb3 ♜xa4 38. ♜c2! ♜a2 39. ♜bc3∞, when White keeps the dynamic balance.

37... ♜ca8!



Fressinet finds a strong resource to obtain counterplay on the other side of the board!

38. ♜ xb3

I wonder if he had prepared to meet 38. ♜ xc7 with a dazzling queen sacrifice: 38... ♕ xb5!! 39. axb5 ♜ xa3.

Black is down a rook for a queen, but he has an overwhelming attack, as can be seen from the following beautiful variations:

A) 40. ♜ c1 b2! 41. ♜ xb2 ♜ xf3 42. ♛ h1 ♜ g3 43. ♜ c2 ♜ h3+ 44. ♛ g1 ♜ aa3–+; and

B) 40. ♜ b2 ♜ a1+ 41. ♛ h2 ♜ b1 42. ♜ c3 ♜ aa1 43. ♜ xb3 h4!–+, and White has no defense against ...h4-h3 !

38... ♜ xa4 39. ♜ xc7 ♜ a1+ 40. ♛ h2 ♜ d8 41. ♜ c1

There was no other way to stop the rook from coming to a2.

41... ♜ c8

Not a bad move, but Black could use the disorganization in White's camp with 41... ♜ 8a3!!, which is far from an easy move to find. Now, White's only move is 42. ♜ cc3 (the exchange of rooks with 42. ♜ xa3 ♜ xa3 43. ♜ xa3 ♜ xc7 would lead to a lost position for White, simply because his knights are an easy target for Black's queen. For example: 44. ♜ e2 ♜ c5 45. ♜ b1 ♜ c2–+) 42... ♜ xb3 43. ♜ xb3 ♜ d1! 44. ♜ c2

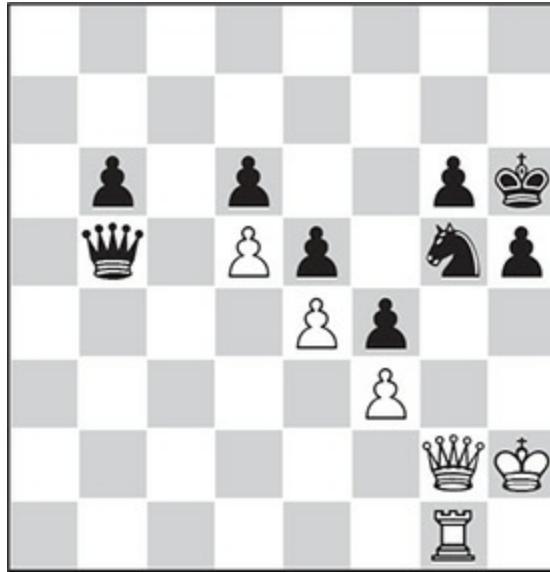


analysis diagram

and now, I was dumbfounded when I saw that Black wins by force with 44... $\mathbb{Q}h3!!$. What a move! White's king cannot escape the mating net. 45. $\mathbb{R}xd1$ (Black gives an even more spectacular checkmate in the event of 45. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+!$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#$) 45... $\mathbb{Q}h4$. All of White's pieces are just spectators... 46. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2-$.
42. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1??$

What a turnaround! In a tense position, Fressinet suddenly blunders. 44... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ would keep the game complicated.

45. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}g1$



He probably missed this move, after which he loses the knight. The rest was fairly simple for White.

46... ♜xf3+ 47. ♜xf3 g5 48. ♜h3 ♜e2+ 49. ♜g2 ♜xg2+ 50. ♜xg2 g4 51. ♜b2 ♜g5 52. ♜xb6 f3 53. ♜xd6 h4 54. ♜d8 g3+ 55. ♜h3 1-0

It seems like Maxim Rodshtein has a knack for positional sacrifices. His next game features a fine exchange sacrifice for long-term positional compensation.

Game 75

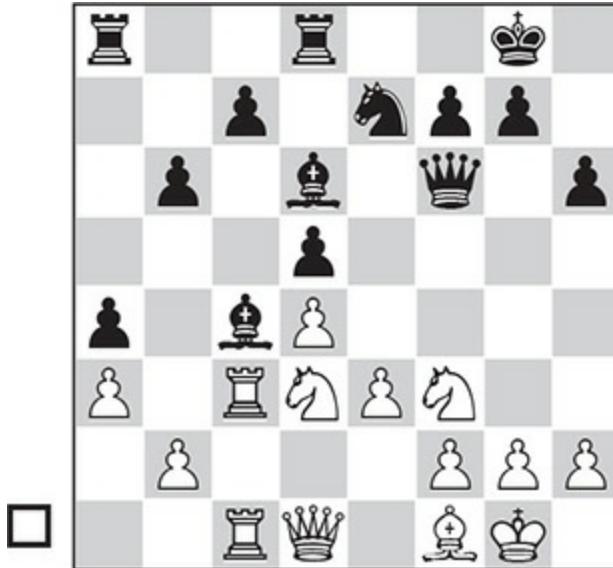
Maxim Rodshtein

2680

Tal Baron

2502

Israel tt 2015 (7)



Black threatens to establish a stronghold on c4 with ...b6-b5, which would give him an extremely solid position. Rodshtein prevents this with
21. ♜ xc4!.

This exchange sacrifice does not promise White an advantage but gives him a more active position than the alternatives.

21. ♜ d2 would have been met by 21...b5=, while 21. ♜ fe5 would have been even worse due to 21... ♜ xe5! 22. ♜ xe5 ♜ xf1 23. ♜ xf1 c5=.

21...dxc4 22. ♜ xc4 b5

Black did not want to give up his a-pawn, but this creates a hole on c5. The non-materialistic 22...c5!? would have given Black a livelier game for the pawn: 23.dxc5 ♜ xc5 24. ♜ xa4 ♜ xa4 25. ♜ xa4=.

23. ♜ c1∞



For the exchange, White has obtained compensation in the form of excellent central control and the possibility to advance his pawn center. This kind of position gives more weight to minor pieces, since the rooks' mobility is quite limited, which is another positional factor that favors White.

23... ♜e6 24.g3 ♜ac8 25.♘e2

White is ready to push his pawns.

25... ♗d5?

An inadequate reaction. There is nothing in the way of White's pawns now. The position would have remained dynamically balanced after 25...c6 26.e4 f5! 27.e5 ♜b8 28.♘f4 ♜f7∞.

26.e4 ♜e8 27.♘fe5 ♗f6



28. ♕c6?

Rodshtein has built a great position, but, unfortunately, he misses a direct win. White had a really cool tactical shot: 28. ♔h3! ♕xh3 29. ♔f4, trapping the queen in an original way.

28... ♕a2!

Strangely enough, the exposed queen finds safety on this square! Black is back in the game.

29. ♔h3?!

A superfluous move. If 29. ♔c1, Black has the annoying response 29... ♕a1!; however, 29.f4 would have kept some edge.

29... ♕cd8 30. ♔g2?

This ‘safe’ move turns out to be a serious tactical mistake. But Black misses it, too...

30... ♕b1?

The queen on e2 is undefended and, thus 30...b4! 31.axb4 a3† would have turned the game around.

31. ♕c1 ♕a2

The rest of the game was marred by strange tactical mistakes that can only be explained by severe mutual time trouble. It is a shame that White spoiled his excellent positional play with a poor tactical follow-up, but the game is, nevertheless, instructive from the positional point of view.

32. ♔f3?! ♔h7?!

32...c5! 33. \mathbb{Q} c6 c4∞.

33. \mathbb{Q} d7?

33. \mathbb{Q} f5∞.

33... \mathbb{Q} g5??

As Tartakower used to say, ‘the winner is the one who makes the next-to-last mistake’.

Black would have had the upper hand if he had played 33... \mathbb{Q} xd7 34. \mathbb{Q} xd7 \mathbb{Q} g5†.



34. \mathbb{Q} xe8! \mathbb{Q} xe8

Baron probably missed that 34... \mathbb{Q} xf3 is met by 35. \mathbb{Q} xf7+ \mathbb{Q} xf7 36. \mathbb{Q} xf7 \mathbb{Q} xf7 37. \mathbb{Q} xf3+–.

35. \mathbb{Q} f5 f6 36. h4 \mathbb{Q} e6 37. \mathbb{Q} c6 \mathbb{Q} b3 38. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} d1 39. e5 1-0

Finally, let us see how positional compensation can be achieved in the endgame.

Game 76

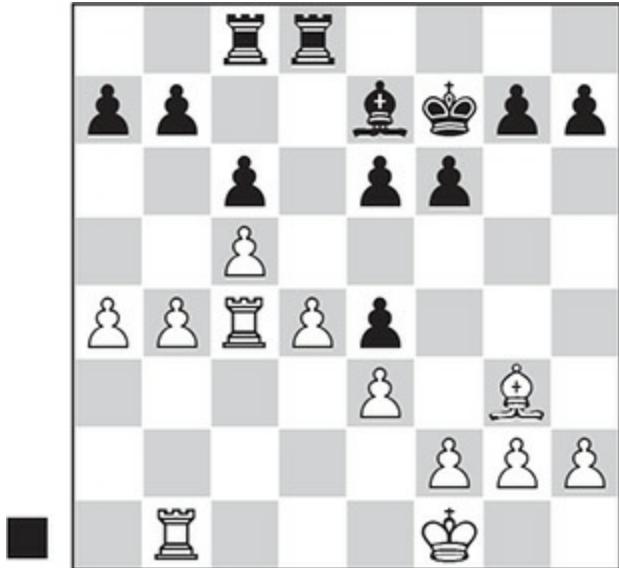
Pavel Eljanov

2718

Dmitry Andreikin

2718

Havana 2015 (3)



Black has a solid, but very passive position. If he just sits there, White has a plan to push b4-b5 and create a weakness on c6. In that case, Black could not oppose White on the b-file because of the bishop on g3. It would, therefore, not hurt him to get some activity. Andreikin's solution is to the point:

24...e5!

Passive defense with 24...a6 25.b5 axb5 26.axb5 $\mathbb{R}d7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 28. $\mathbb{R}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ looks somewhat unpleasant for Black.

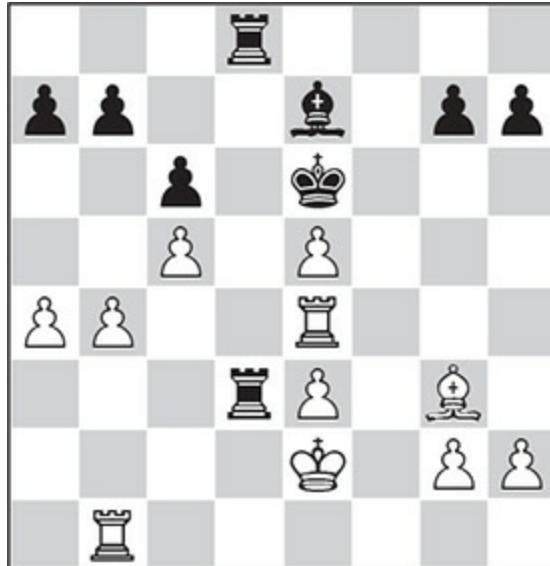
25.dxe5 f5

Thanks to the pawn sacrifice, White's dark-squared bishop is temporarily out of the game, while Black gets an open file for his rooks and the e6-square for the king.

26. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 27.f3 $\mathbb{R}d3!?$

Andreikin does not stop there but sacrifices the second pawn to achieve maximum activity. There was probably nothing wrong with 27...exf3+ 28.gxf3 $\mathbb{R}d5$, though.

28.fxe4 fxe4 29. $\mathbb{R}xe4$ $\mathbb{R}cd8\mathbb{Q}$



An interesting position. Black's light-square blockade seems impenetrable.

30.b5!?

Eljanov said that he just wanted to force matters since he did not believe that he could break the blockade. A more patient approach was 30. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 31. $a5$ $h5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $a6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\mathbb{Q}$, but White would have to dig very deep into a bag of tricks to win this position.

30... ♕ d2+ 31. ♔ f3 g5!

A good follow-up. Andreikin follows the active policy to a tee.

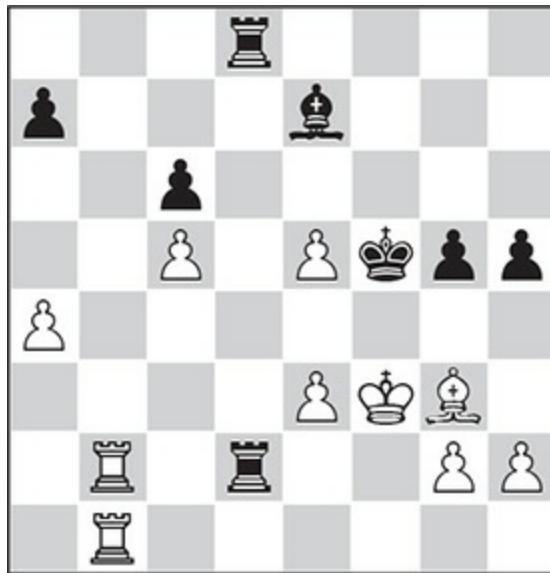
32.bxc6 bxc6



33. ♜ eb4

Eljanov clears the e4-square for his king. In his game notes, he also mentions the following entertaining variation: 33. ♜ b7 ♜ f8+ 34. ♛ g4 h5+! 35. ♛ xh5 ♛ f5 36. ♛ h6 ♜ h8+ 37. ♛ g7 ♜ dd8 38. ♜ xe7 ♜ dg8+ 39. ♛ f7 ♜ f8+, with a perpetual check.

33...h5 34. ♜ 4b2 ♛ f5!?



Who would have thought some 10 moves ago that Black could threaten a checkmate in one?

35.e4+ ♛ e6 36. ♜ xd2 ♜ xd2

Black's activity is sufficient for a draw despite the two-pawn deficit.

37. ♜ b7 g4+ 38. ♛ e3 ♜ xg2 39. ♜ c7 h4 40. ♜ f4 ♛ xc5+ 41. ♛ d3 ♜ f2! 42. ♜ xc6+ ♛ d7 43. ♜ f6 ♜ f3+ 44. ♛ c4 ♛ g1



45. ♜f7+

45. ♜d6+ is also insufficient for White, due to 45... ♛c7 46. ♜g5 ♜xh2
47. ♜d8+ ♛b7 48. ♜xh4 ♜xe5 49. ♜g6 ♜a3=.

45... ♛e6 46. ♜f6+ ♛d7

Draw agreed.

Conclusion

- Space in chess refers to positional factors – those that exist independently of material and time.
- Some of the most relevant positional factors are outposts, open files and diagonals, dark/light squares complex, pawn structure, space advantage and king safety.
- There are many situations in which it is beneficial to sacrifice material to obtain one or more of these positional advantages.
- Unlike sacrifices for the initiative or attack, positional sacrifices often imply a more patient approach where we are reaping positional benefits gradually, rather than immediately.
- Outposts in the center are particularly important because they allow us to control the most territory.
- The knight is the perfect piece to keep an outpost because of its ‘octopus-like’ sphere of influence; bishops are also well-suited for outposts, while

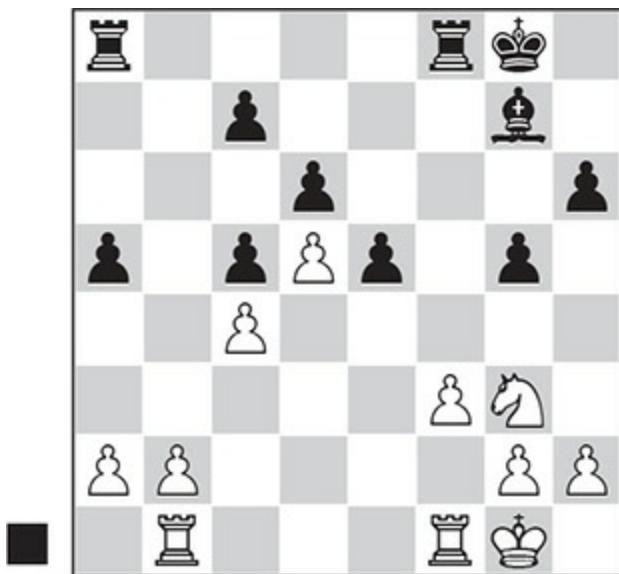
major pieces are usually not – they can be used better in more active operations.

- Control over a complex of squares of the same color facilitates the coordination of our pieces and allows us to work toward a common goal by concentrating them on one part of the board.
- An exposed king can be a serious positional weakness that can weigh you down and limit your active options, even if your opponent has no direct attack.
- The bishop pair is a relative positional factor (it is much more significant in open positions than in semi-open or closed positions), but every chess player should respect it as a very potent positional weapon, because most positions in chess tend to open up at some point.
- The strategic fight in a chess game often revolves around controlling more space; whether it is a fight for an important file, a dangerous diagonal or a complex of squares on a certain part of the board.
- One of the common ‘conditioned reflexes’ is to take material at the expense of a positional advantage. It is important to recognize situations in which preserving positional advantages would promise even greater long-term benefits than taking material now.
- When the value of the sacrificed material is roughly equivalent to the positional value one gets in return and neither side can claim a significant advantage, we have positional compensation.

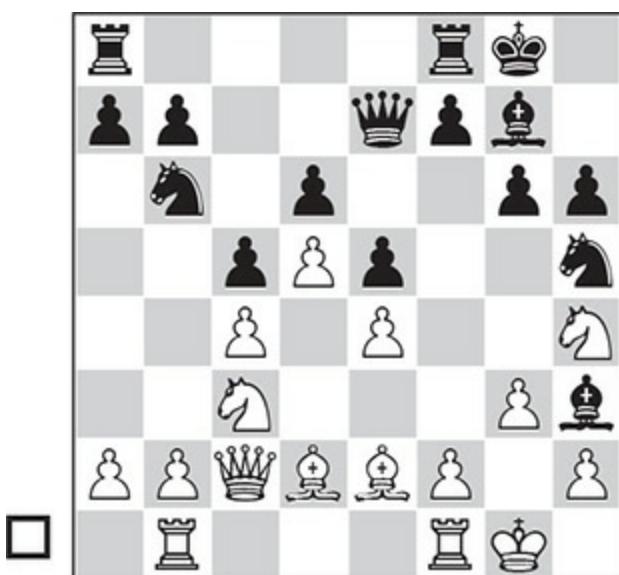
CHAPTER 4

Test exercises

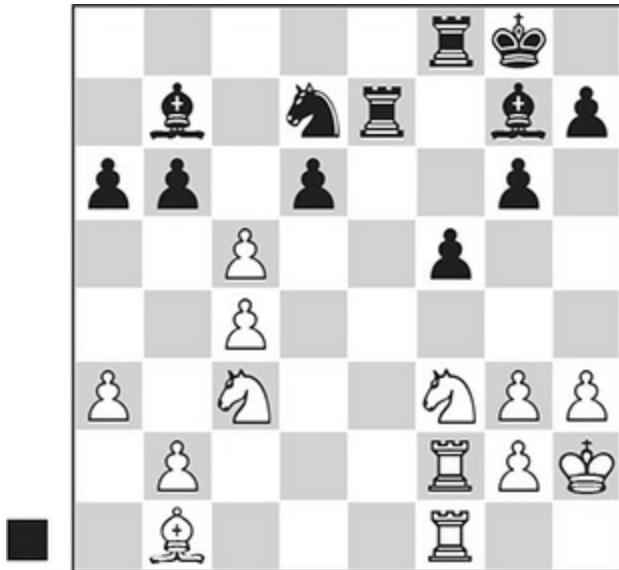
Exercise 21



Exercise 22

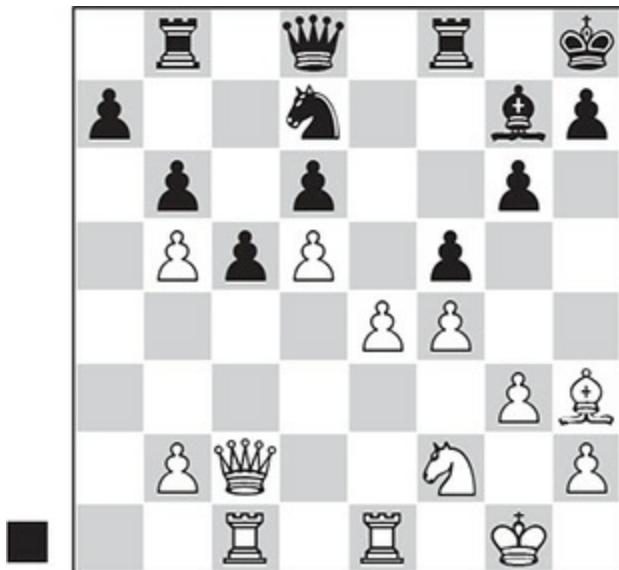


Exercise 23

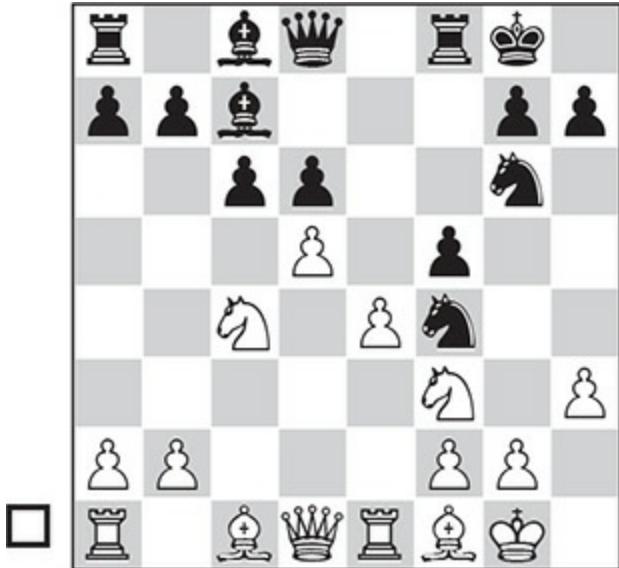


What is the best way to take back on c5?

Exercise 24



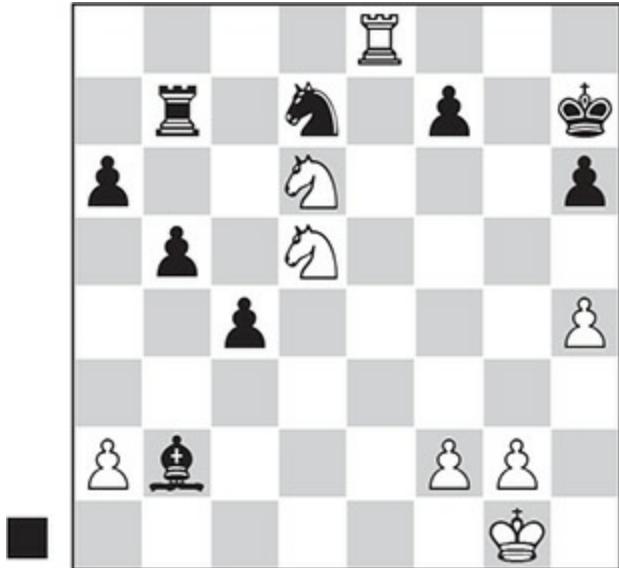
Exercise 25



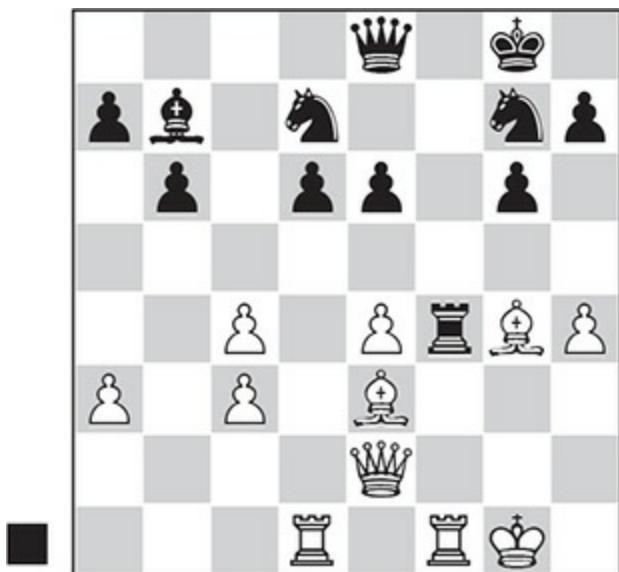
Exercise 26



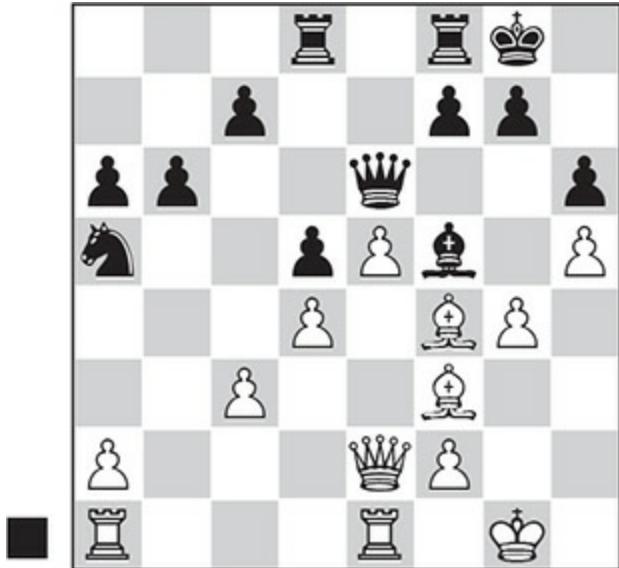
Exercise 27



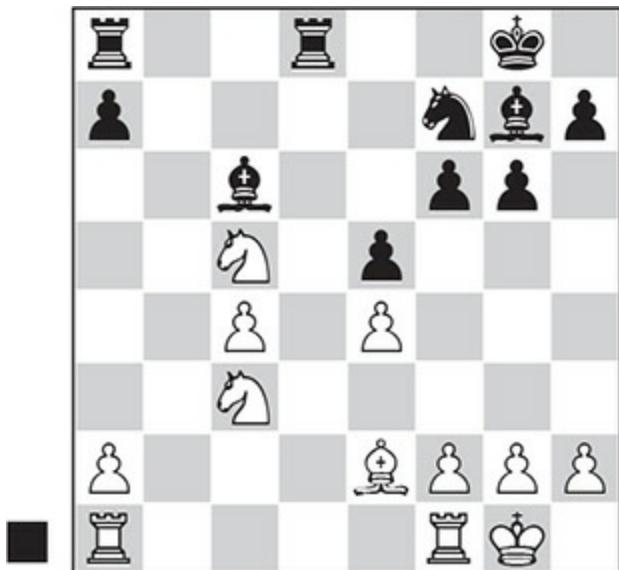
Exercise 28



Exercise 29



Exercise 30



CHAPTER 5

Psychology of non-materialism

Robert James Fischer was famous for saying: ‘I do not believe in psychology, I believe in good moves.’

In an ideal world, we would all be immune to pressure, oblivious to our opponent’s confident body language, infinitely patient and never get excited or nervous. However, we are all human and these psychological pitfalls are not only inevitable, but also give chess a distinctive charm as our imperfections make the game unpredictable and exciting.

For example, it is well-known that the endgame where one side has a rook and a bishop and the other only a rook, is a theoretical draw. If we were computers, we could agree to a draw right after the last pawn disappears from the board, because with best (or mostly just ‘good’) moves there is no way for the stronger side to win. Yet, this particular endgame has a rich history of missed opportunities, panicky decisions in time scrambles, wrong 50-move draw claims and many more strange mistakes. Just take the following game as an example.

Game 77

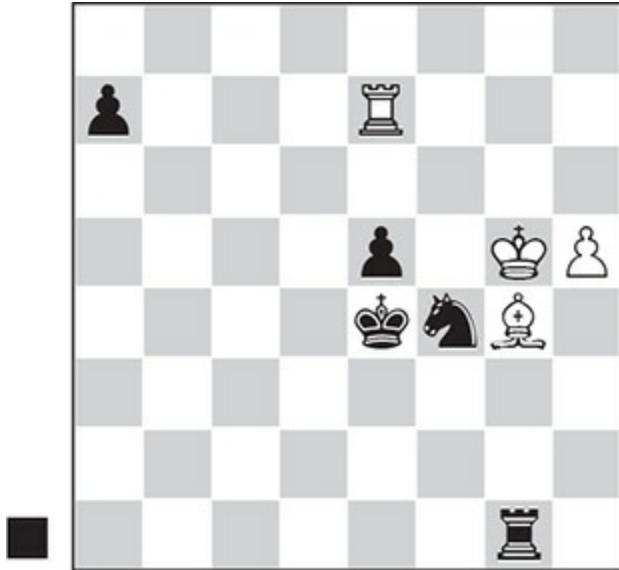
Maxime Lagarde

2616

N Krishna Teja

2340

Sitges 2018 (5)



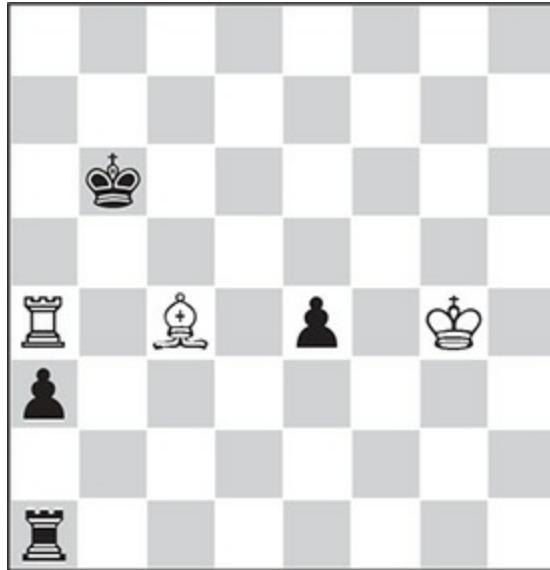
In a very drawish endgame, Black makes a somewhat nervous decision.

52... ♜xh5?!

While this still keeps the game well within the drawing margin, it unnecessarily prolongs Black's defense for another 50+ moves. He had a fairly straightforward way to draw with 52... ♜d5 53. ♜xa7 ♜e3 54. ♜a4+ ♛d3 55.h6 ♜xg4 56. ♜f1 57.h7 ♜f8 58. ♛h6 ♜h8 59. ♜g8 ♜xh7+ 60. ♛xh7 e4.

However, if for some reason he was not in the position to calculate this line, the simple 52... ♜h3+ 53. ♛h4 ♜f2= should have been preferred. I really don't see how Black can lose this. The h-pawn is not such a great danger that one would have to sacrifice the knight for it immediately. But, as they say, 'fear makes the wolf look bigger'.

53. ♛xh5 a5 54. ♜a7 ♜a1 55. ♜d7 ♛d4 56. ♜c6 ♛c5 57. ♜e8 ♛b6 58. ♜e7 a4 59. ♜e6+ ♛c7 60. ♜a6 a3 61. ♜f7 e4 62. ♛g4 ♛b7 63. ♜a4 ♛b6 64. ♜c4



64... ♜c5?

Krishna probably missed White's strong response. He had a cool way to hold a draw without having to enter the rook and bishop vs rook endgame. 64...

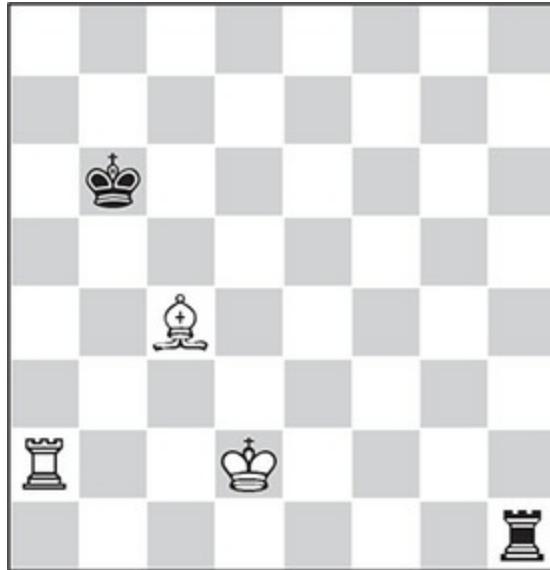
♜c1! was an excellent way to activate the rook. After something like 65.♝e6 (another point of Black's last move can be seen in the variation 65.♛f4 ♜xc4! 66.♜xc4 ♛b5 67.♜c8 ♛b4, with a drawn rook vs pawn endgame) 65...e3 66.♝f3 ♜c3!=, Black sets up a fortress of sorts where both his pawns and the rook are untouchable. The reader can ascertain this on his/her own.

65.♝a6!

A strong move. It is important to keep the squares on the f1-a6 diagonal under control. It seems that Black cannot prevent White from eventually capturing both his pawns now.

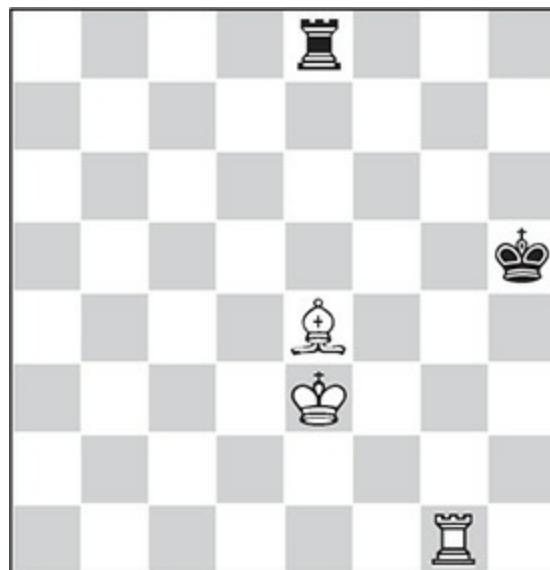
65...a2 66.♛f4 e3 67.♝e2 ♛b6 68.♝xe3 ♛c5 69.♛d2 ♛b6 70.♝c4 ♜h1

71.♜xa2



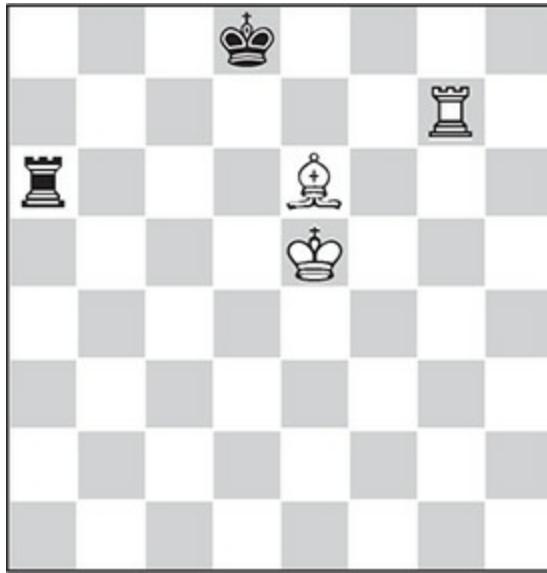
And we are in the rook and bishop vs rook endgame, which means at least another 50 moves of torture or riskless joy, depending which side of the board you are sitting on. At this point of the game, fatigue and thoughts about missed opportunities usually kick in, while the ticking seconds on the clock do not present relief; on the contrary.

71... ♜c5 72. ♜e2 ♜h3 73. ♜a5+ ♛d4 74. ♜a4+ ♛e5 75. ♜d3 ♜g3 76. ♜e2 ♜h3
77. ♜e4 ♜g3 78. ♜f3 ♜g1 79. ♜e3 ♜g5 80. ♜a6 ♛f5 81. ♜d4 ♜g8 82. ♜e4+
♛f4 83. ♜f6+ ♛g5 84. ♜f5+ ♛g4 85. ♜e3 ♜e8 86. ♜f6 ♜e5 87. ♜g6+ ♛g5
88. ♜e6 ♜a5 89. ♜d3 ♜c5 90. ♜h6 ♜e5+ 91. ♜e4 ♜e8 92. ♜g6+ ♛h5 93. ♜g1

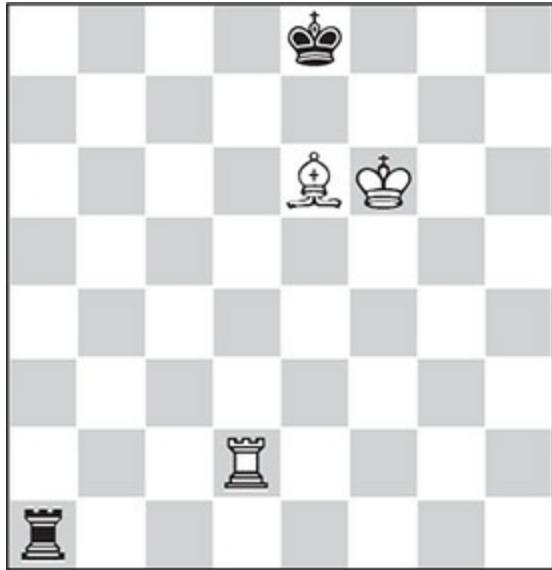


Lagarde has managed to push Krishna's king back to the edge of the board after 22 moves. He needs to hope that his opponent makes a mistake in setting up the proper defense within the next 28 moves.

93... ♜f8 94. ♛d4 ♜h4 95. ♛e5 ♜f2 96. ♜f5 ♜f3 97. ♜g2 ♜g3 98. ♜h2+ ♜g5
99. ♜h8 ♜e3+ 100. ♜e4 ♜g3 101. ♜f8 ♛g4 102. ♜f7 ♛g5 103. ♜f3 ♛g6
104. ♜f4 ♛g7 105. ♜e4 ♜a3 106. ♜g4+ ♛f8 107. ♜d5 ♜a6 108. ♜e6 ♛e7
109. ♜g7+ ♛d8



Nothing special has happened in the meantime. White just translated the attack from the g-file to the seventh rank. It seems hardly possible that he can win the game, because Black must have realized that move 121 is his promised land (i.e. the first opportunity to claim a draw by the 50-move rule).
110. ♜d7+ ♛e8 111. ♜f6 ♜a1 112. ♜d2



112... ♜f1+??

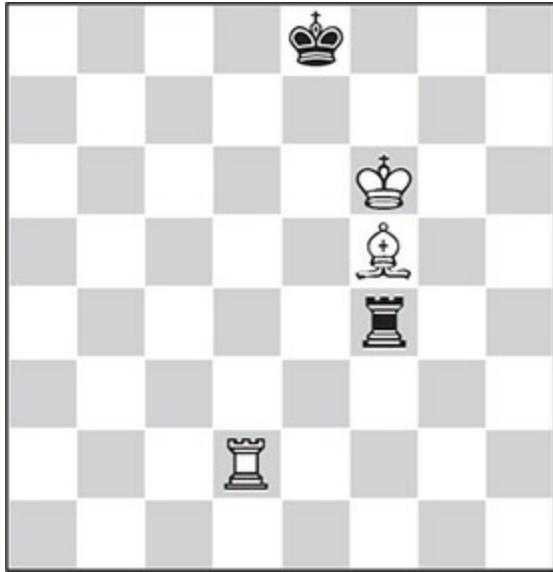
A shocking mistake! Black runs into a mating net. Instead, just keeping the rook on the sixth rank with 112... ♜a6, and if 113. ♜c2, 113... ♜d6, would have secured a draw.

113. ♜f5

Now White is winning even without Philidor's obscure maneuvers. Simply put, both Black's rook and his king are in the worst possible positions to defend against checkmate on the eighth rank.

113... ♜f4

What else? The rook cannot be moved from the f-file with 113... ♜e1 because of a quick checkmate: 114. ♜g6+ ♛f8 115. ♜d8+ ♛e8 116. ♜xe8#. On the other hand, 113... ♜f3 (it is well-known that the third rank is the worst place for the rook in these positions) allows a direct checkmate after 114. ♜c2. With the rook on f4, Black would at least have ... ♜f4-d4 in this position.



114. ♜d1??

Unbelievable! White does not seem to realize that he can force the basic checkmate after 114. ♜e2+ ♛d8 (114... ♛f8 115. ♜c2+-) 115. ♜c2 or, just as good, 114. ♜h2.

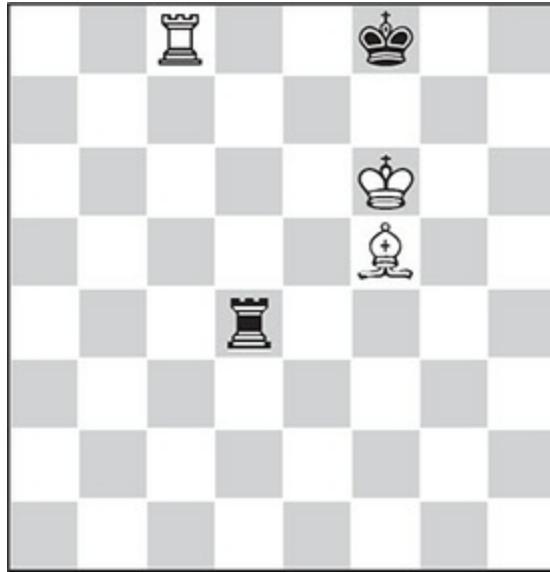
114... ♜f2 115. ♜d3? ♜f1 116. ♜d4?

The tragicomedy of errors continues. Actually, Black has no choice, as his position is lost either way. But White keeps on missing the obvious for a few more moves, wasting precious time to deliver checkmate...

116... ♜f2 117. ♜d5? ♜f1 118. ♜d2? ♜f4 119. ♜e2+

Finally, Lagarde gets on the right track. Black's king is in a mating net.

119... ♛f8 120. ♜c2 ♜d4 121. ♜c8+



And just one move before getting checkmated, Krishna stopped the clock and claimed a draw due to the 50-move rule with the move 121... ♕d8.
Absolutely incredible! ½-½

Now, imagine these two players analyzing that same endgame without pressure at home. Surely, their level of play would have been much higher. The end of this game was full of mistakes mostly due to fatigue and pressure, physical and psychological alike.

Therefore, we should take Fischer's words with a grain of salt. Yes, one should always strive to make the right move, but one should also understand that psychology will play a big role in the nature and quality of decisions in the heat of tournament battle.

This is obviously the topic of this chapter, in which I will try to explain the connection between psychology and non-materialism.

Psychological pressure

The famous 20th century grandmaster Savielly Tartakower was known for his witty aphorisms. One of them was: 'I never defeated a healthy opponent'. I think that most people take this literally, in the sense that people often attribute their losses to bad health or some other external factor. However, considering Tartakower's reported quick-wittedness, I have a feeling that

there might be a deeper meaning to his maxim. Since chess is a mental rather than a physical endeavor, one way to interpret the aphorism is that we cannot defeat an opponent who does not make mental mistakes. This would actually fit well with Tartakower's other aphorisms about human fallibility, such as the previously mentioned: 'The winner of the game is the player who makes the next-to-last mistake'; as well as 'Chess is a struggle against one's own errors'; and 'The blunders are all there on the board, waiting to be made.' Indeed, if you think about it, how many games have you won in which your opponent did not make at least one serious mistake? Probably not too many. However, the thing about our opponent's mistakes, as welcome as they are, is that they often come unexpectedly and it seems like you have no direct control over them. And, while it is true that we cannot make decisions for our opponent, we may still have certain (sometimes serious) psychological impact on them. Here are some of the ways in which we can 'tamper' with our opponent's psychological well-being during a game:

- force the opponent into a position he is not familiar with;
- force the opponent into a type of position he is uncomfortable playing;
- change the trend or nature of the position sharply;
- get into a position where finding the best move is not obvious and simple;
- put pressure on the opponent by playing for the initiative, regardless of material or positional disadvantages.

I do not advise using 'mind tricks', such as staring down your opponent, projecting the confidence of a World Champion (when you are not), playing quickly and slamming the clock, and so on. These are counter-productive in the long run and pretty lame at that, if you ask me. What I am suggesting here is that there are perfectly legitimate and effective psychological strategies which can cause your opponent to feel uncomfortable or indecisive and preferably induce him into making a mistake. Non-materialism can serve this purpose very well. Let us see how this works in grandmaster practice.

Game 78

Paul Keres

Boris Spassky

Riga ct m 1965 (10)

Matches are the highest form of competition in chess. Two players try to best each other in a series of direct encounters, which, besides the necessary elements of general chess skill and concrete preparation, have a strong psychological weight. The game that we are about to see was the 10th and last game of the 1965 Candidates quarterfinal match between Paul Keres and Boris Spassky. Keres trailed by one point and needed to win on demand to tie the match. Spassky would qualify for the next stage with a draw.

1.d4

Grandmaster Igor Bondarevsky, Spassky's coach at the time, explained the players' strategies and psychological approaches: 'In a must-win situation, Keres opens the game with the queen's pawn. Why did he do that? Perhaps it is because he realized that so far in the match, he achieved a meager 1 point out of 4 games in open positions, as opposed to 3 points out of 5 games in closed positions (with both colors). In addition, Spassky had worse positions out of the opening in games 6 and 8, when the first moves were 1.c4 and 1.d4, respectively.'

1... ♕f6 2.c4 g6!?



'A surprise! Soon after the opening, many strong grandmasters in the press-

center had approved of Spassky's strategy to give his opponent a chance for an open fight. Very often, refraining from the common strategy to "play for a draw" in such competitive situations is psychologically justified. Of course, being a full point ahead brings about a temptation to play solidly. However, a lifetime of experience has shown that such an approach often leads to... a loss. In a situation where one player fights with his full capacities and the other one is "sleeping", besides certain chess drawbacks, negative psychological repercussions inevitably appear. This can be dangerous for the defender in a tense, decisive battle' – Bondarevsky.

I should just add that Magnus Carlsen used the same double-edged approach at the end of the 2013 World Championship match with Vishy Anand. Vishy needed a win in the ninth game of the match, but Carlsen did not shy away from the battle with the black pieces and was rewarded for it.

3.♘c3 ♜g7 4.e4 d6 5.f4

A natural choice in a must-win situation.

5...c5 6.d5 0-0 7.♘f3 e6 8.♗e2 exd5 9.cxd5 b5!?



Not a move you would expect from someone who would secure victory in the match with a draw. Spassky was obviously fully psychologically prepared for a double-edged fight.

10.e5 dxе5 11.fxе5 ♜g4 12.♗f4

Another interesting option was 12.♗g5!? ♜b6 13.0-0∞.

12... ♜d7 13.e6

Keres starts the complications...

13...fxe6

... and Spassky goes for the sharpest continuation. 13... ♜de5 would have led to a relatively more balanced game after 14. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 15. ♜xb5 fxe6 16.0-0.

14.dxe6 ♜xf4!



Spassky increases the tension, even though he had a ‘safe’ alternative at his disposal. 14... ♜b6 forces the queen exchange, sharply reducing White’s chances to complicate the game. However, even in the endgame after 15. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 16. ♜xb5 ♜xe6 17.h3, White would retain a slight plus and this was not in Spassky’s pre-game plans.

15. ♜d5

This was the point of the piece sacrifice. White centralizes his queen with strong threats.

15... ♛h8!

Another inspired decision! Spassky is ready to sacrifice material to fight for the initiative in the game that he does not even have to win.

It was still possible to keep material equality by giving back the piece: 15... ♜b7 16. ♜xb7 ♜b6∞, when the position would remain complicated, as White would try to attack on the light, and Black on the dark squares.

16. ♜xa8 ♕b6



Spassky puts his experienced opponent under the first serious test in the game. On one hand, he can take on a7, allowing Black to eliminate the annoying e6-pawn. The benefit for White would be that he could castle, getting a ‘normal’ position with an extra exchange on his account. On the other, he could pin down Black’s pieces with 17. ♜b8, but this would allow Black to play 17... ♜e3!, with a total mess of a position. Keres goes for the ‘safer’ choice.

17. ♜xa7

This is how Bondarevsky explains Keres’ first critical decision of the game: ‘One should not underestimate the age difference between the opponents. It is understandable for a 20-year younger opponent (Spassky) to actively seek complications and for his more experienced opponent to gravitate toward a position with a safe king and extra material. If the roles were reversed, the Estonian grandmaster would have surely burned his bridges and played 17. ♜b8. Perhaps, his decision was influenced by a certain psychological advantage that Spassky has achieved by bravely engaging in the decisive battle.’

A very insightful observation! In case of 17. ♜b8 ♜e3! 18. ♜d1!∞, the position becomes extremely sharp. One of many possible continuations is 18... ♜e7 19. ♜d2 ♜xg2+ 20. ♛f2 b4, when nothing would still be decided.

17... ♜xe6 18.0-0 ♜e3



White has completed his development, but after Spassky's new burst of activity, he is facing another critical decision: to keep the material advantage or not? Once again, Keres, who was probably not expecting that he would be the one making difficult decisions in this game, makes a wrong choice.

19. ♜f2?

This move surrenders the initiative to Black. White keeps the material advantage, but his pieces become uncoordinated. His queen is already disconnected from the rest of the army, so disconnecting his other two major pieces spells disaster. Of course, all of this is difficult to understand in a situation where you are under all sorts of pressure. As Tartakower said, the mistakes are all here, waiting to be made. The alternatives were:

A) 19. ♜ad1 ♜xd1 20. ♜xd1, which looks very good for White at first, but the problem is that Black can answer with 20... ♜d4+!, and after 21. ♛h1 (or 21. ♜xd4 ♜xd4=) 21...b4 22. ♜b5 ♜d5!, the game is likely to peter out to a draw and this surely was not an option for Keres. For example:

23. ♜bx d4 cxd4 24. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 25. ♜xd4 ♜xg2+ 26. ♛xg2 ♜xd4=;

B) 19. ♜xb5!, which was the only real option to continue the fight. After 19... ♜xf1 20. ♜xf1 ♜f7, Black would have had strong compensation for the pawn, but the battle would continue.

19...b4

This simple move gives Spassky plenty of initiative.

20.♘b5

Keres plays the most active move, which creates an even greater disconnect between his pieces. However, his position would not be much better after 20.♘a4 ♜xa4 21.♗xa4 ♜xb2+, nor after 20.♘d1 ♜c2! 21.♕c1 ♜d4+, when Black would completely dominate, despite being down on material.



20... ♜f7 21.♗a5 ♜b8!

Spassky is not interested in material gains (21...♜xb2 would also have promised him an advantage) – he goes for a direct attack, instead. The h2-pawn is the target.



22. ♕e1 ♔d5

There was also nothing wrong with 22... ♔g4 23. ♕f1 ♔d5! 24. ♕fe2 ♕f8, and Black continues the attack with full force.

23. ♕f1

23. ♔d3 would not change much after 23... ♔g4 24. ♕fe2 ♕f8 → .

23... ♕xf1!?

Instead of the expected 23... ♔g4, Spassky changes course and finds a way to benefit from the exchange of White's light-squared bishop.

24. ♕fxf1 ♕c4 25. ♜a6 ♕f6

The point is that Keres' queen is tied to the defense of his misplaced knight, which gives Spassky many useful attacking tempi.

26. ♜a4 ♕xb2 27. ♜c2?

27. ♜a5 was the only move to stay in the game, even though it is clear that after 27... ♔d3 28. ♕e3 c4 29. ♜c7 ♔g8, Black is the one having all the fun.



Keres succumbs to the pressure. This move just loses a piece without any compensation. Bondarevsky notes that he was also in time trouble at this point of the game, which was entering the fifth hour of play (they played with longer time controls back in 1965).

27... ♜xb5

Black is now up on material, so the rest is just agony for White.

28. ♜e7

28. ♜xb2 is met by 28... ♜xf3+.

28... ♜d3 29. ♜e2 c4 30. ♜e8+ ♜f8 31. ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 32. ♜g5 ♜c5+ 33. ♜h1 ♜d7

34. ♜d2 ♜e7 35. ♜f3 ♜e3 0-1

Keres's time ran out in a completely lost position.

Undoubtedly, Spassky played an inspired and virtually flawless game. As we learned from the insights of his coach, Igor Bondarevsky, this was largely due to his correct psychological approach that allowed him to put pressure on his opponent. He managed to stir the game into a complicated, materially-imbalanced affair, in which Keres was forced to make one difficult decision after another. In the critical moment, when psychological, positional and time pressures, as well as fatigue and the age disadvantage combine, even a world-class grandmaster like Keres can blunder a piece in one move. This is the power of psychology in chess.

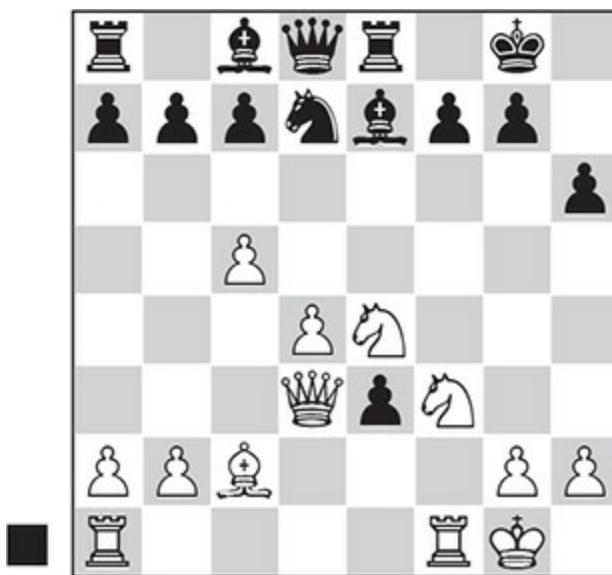
Let us stay with Boris Spassky, who used to be a great player and, in my opinion, one of the underestimated World Champions. His next game, against another one of the world's leading grandmasters at the time, gives us another instructive example of psychological warfare in the game.

Game 79

Boris Spassky

David Bronstein

Leningrad ch-URS 1960 (16)



An astute reader will immediately recognize that this position originated from the King's Gambit, Spassky's old love. In the pre-computer era, this opening was a fertile ground for players with a strong tactical imagination. In this game, Spassky obtained strong attacking prospects out of the opening. If you are sitting across the board, the ♔d3/♔c2 battery looks very unpleasant, so it is not a surprise that Bronstein tried to distract the queen with **14...e2?**.

In hindsight, it was safer to protect the h7-square with 14...♘f8, when Spassky planned to continue 15.♘e5 (however, 15.♗ae1 is more precise) 15...♗e6 (Black has a paradoxical defense, though: 15...♗f6! 16.♗xf6+ gxf6, and White would have to retreat) 16.♗ae1 with a strong attack.

15.♘d6!

A fascinating sacrifice. Spassky gives us plenty of insight into the makings of his decision: ‘When I played this move, I knew that it was not the best, analytically speaking. The natural response 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ would keep all positional advantages. So, what allured me to 15. $\mathbb{N}d6$? Firstly, this move, regardless of its objective value, appeals to me conceptually: White completely ignores Black’s threat to win the useless rook on a1. Secondly, White immediately uses the poor positioning of Black’s pieces to strike on the kingside. Thirdly, the psychological element: Black’s best response involves his king running toward the center. However, I thought that this continuation was not in Bronstein’s style because he is generally reluctant to travel with his king, so I sensed that he might try to defend differently. Fourthly, the competitive element: For the next 26 moves, Black had only 20 minutes left before the time control. In addition, one should not underestimate the unpleasant psychological impact of such moves.’



15... $\mathbb{N}f8?!$

As Spassky had expected, Bronstein was not feeling adventurous and he preferred to guard his king.

However, objectively the best was 15... $\mathbb{N}xd6!?$, which would have led to the forced line 16. $\mathbb{N}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 17. $cxd6$ $exf1\mathbb{N}+$ 18. $\mathbb{N}xf1$ $cxd6$ 19. $\mathbb{N}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{N}e1+$ $\mathbb{N}e5$ 21. $\mathbb{N}xg7\mathbb{N}$. White will win the knight on e5 and continue

attacking the unwillingly centralized black king.

Still, Black has reasonable defensive resources and after something like 21...

$\text{N}g8$ 22. $\text{N}xh6$ $\text{N}b6!$ 23. $\text{N}h1$ $\text{Q}e6$ 24. $dxe5$ $d5$, White's attack may eventually not be enough for more than a perpetual check.

16. $\text{N}xf7!$

Crashing through on the kingside.

16...exf1 $\text{N}+$ 17. $\text{N}xf1$ $\text{Q}f5$

This is the most stubborn defense, but it will not change the outcome of the game.

A) The aesthetic point of Spassky's sacrifice was that taking the knight with 17... $\text{N}xf7$ allows a nice mating finale: 18. $\text{N}e5+$ $\text{Q}g8$



analysis diagram

19. $\text{N}h7+$! $\text{N}xh7$ 20. $\text{Q}b3+$ $\text{Q}h8$ 21. $\text{N}g6\#;$

B) Black also loses in case of 17... $\text{N}d5$ 18. $\text{N}b3$:

B1) 18... $\text{N}h5$ 19. $\text{N}xh6+$ $\text{Q}h8$ 20. $\text{N}f7+$ $\text{Q}g8$ 21. $\text{N}d8+$ $\text{Q}h8$ 22. $\text{N}e5!$ $\text{R}xd8$ 23. $\text{N}f7+$ $\text{Q}g8$ 24. $\text{N}xd8+$ $\text{Q}h8$ 25. $\text{N}xf8+$ $\text{Q}xf8$ 26. $\text{N}f7+$ $\text{Q}g8$ 27. $\text{N}e5+$ $\text{Q}h8$ 28. $\text{N}c4$; or

B2) 18... $\text{N}xf7$ 19. $\text{Q}xf7+$ $\text{Q}xf7$ 20. $\text{N}c4+$ $\text{Q}g6$ 21. $\text{N}g8!+-$, with the deadly threats of 22. $\text{N}e5+$ and 22. $\text{N}h4+$, as pointed out by Spassky.

18. $\text{N}xf5$ $\text{Q}d7$ 19. $\text{N}f4$ $\text{Q}f6$ 20. $\text{N}3e5$



Returning some material gave Black a few tempi to consolidate, but his king is still irreparably weak. Spassky continues the attack with the same decisive force.

20... ♜e7

20... ♜xe5 21. ♜xe5 ♕xe5 22.dxe5 would eliminate the powerful knight, but with an extra pawn and long-term attacking prospects, White is winning one way or the other.

21. ♜b3 ♜xe5 22. ♜xe5+ ♔h7 23. ♜e4+

Black resigned in view of 23... ♔h8 24. ♕xf8+ followed by 25. ♜g6+ and checkmate.

Spassky's 15. ♜d6! shows his appreciation of time in chess and his understanding of the relative value of the pieces. At the same time, it was primarily a psychological decision, aimed at unsettling Bronstein and getting him out of his comfort zone. Not surprisingly, the World Championship Challenger from 1951 erred on the very next move.

I have already mentioned the importance of learning from the older generations of chess players. Our level of understanding today would not be the same without their legacy. These days, many strong players understand the importance of putting psychological pressure on their opponent from the

start of the game, in much the same way as Spassky understood it more than half a century ago. Take, for example, two leading players of the young generation.

Game 80

Jan-Krzysztof Duda

2706

Pavel Eljanov

2720

Germany Bundesliga 2017/18 (1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.♗b3 0-0 7.h3 a6 8.♗bd2



This move is usually played with the intention of postponing kingside castling and completing the thematic ♘d2-f1-g3 maneuver quickly, or preparing a kingside attack with g2-g4, as in this game.

8...♝e6 9.♝c2 d5 10.♝e2 h6 11.g4!?

Duda aims for the initiative from the very beginning. Needless to say, this approach contains some risk, as well. 11.0-0= would have been safer, but also much less ambitious.

11...♞h7 12.♕g1

White does not mind Black closing the center with ...d5-d4, but it was worth considering starting with 12.exd5 ♗xd5 13.♗e4 first, and only then to

prepare the attack with $\mathbb{N} h1-g1$, $g4-g5$ etc. That way, White would have more pieces that could join the kingside attack.

12...d4

Black obtains space advantage with this move and potential for counter-play with ...dxc3, ...b7-b5-b4, etc.

13.♘b3

This is a prelude to an interesting piece sacrifice. White's attack would probably not get too far in the case of 13.h4 $\mathbb{N} d7$ 14.g5 $h5\#$.

13...♝e7



14.♞xe5!?

A very bold sacrifice by the young Polish grandmaster. For the piece, he gets excellent central control, but apparently nothing else in return besides a vague prospect of a kingside attack. Black has virtually no weaknesses and is better developed. Yet, there might have been a psychological factor to this sacrifice, because the quality of Eljanov's play from this point on deteriorates significantly.

14...♝xe5 15.♞xd4 c5 16.♞f5

The knight is very strong on f5 and Duda probably assessed that this would give him sufficient compensation for the sacrificed piece.

16...♚h8?!

The first suspicious decision by the Ukrainian grandmaster. There was no

need for this move at all.

Instead, Black should have tried to establish a blockade on the dark squares with 16... $\mathbb{Q}h4$. Now, ... $\mathbb{Q}e5-g6$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}h4-g5$ is a positional threat, so White should continue with 17. $\mathbb{Q}f1$, which is a small achievement for Black. After 17... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$, a maneuvering battle would ensue, where neither side can really open the position easily. White would have some compensation, but Black is completely fine, and I would lean towards the side with an extra piece in the long run.

17.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6?$!

And another one...

Black would have still kept an edge if he had taken White's right to castle with 17... $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6\#$.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

White is ready to castle queenside now and start the pawn storm against Black's king.

18... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ b6 21.h4 f6 22.f5 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 23.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g3$



We have reached the critical moment. Eljanov has made a couple of inaccuracies, allowing Duda to develop fully and obtain good attacking prospects on the kingside. It is imperative for Black to find active counterplay now; otherwise his extra piece will become completely meaningless.

24... $\mathbb{Q}fd8?$!

A bit slow. Black should have punched first with 24... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 25.g5 (25.b3 is met by 25...c4!, followed by 26... $\mathbb{Q}a3+$, and Black is the one attacking) 25...fxg5 26.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ hxg5 28. $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 30.b3 c4!, with huge complications.

25.g5 fxg5?

This, however, is a blunder. Black had the last opportunity to get active play with 25... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 26.gxh6 gxh6 27. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$, with a dynamic position. A possible variation is 28. $\mathbb{Q}dg1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30.b3 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5\infty$.

26.hxg5 hxg5

Eljanov probably expected White to attack on the h-file, when he could defend along the sixth rank with ... $\mathbb{Q}c8-c6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}d8-d6$. However, he was in for an unpleasant surprise:



27. $\mathbb{Q}xg5!$

This move destroys Black's defense. White has two wide open files for the attack now.

27... $\mathbb{Q}f7$

A tactical problem is that 27... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ loses to 28. $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 32.d4! cxd4 33. $\mathbb{Q}b3$.

28. $\mathbb{Q}g3?$

This gives Black one last chance to stay in the game. The simple 28. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

would have given White an easy attack, since Black could not play 28... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ due to 29. $\mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{Q}f7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+-$.



28... $\mathbb{Q}c6?$

This was not Eljanov's game. He could have forced a trade of both White's rooks with 28... $\mathbb{Q}xd3+!$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ (the problem for White is that after 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd3 \mathbb{Q}xa2!$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xg7 \mathbb{Q}a1+$, he cannot escape the perpetual check after 31. $\mathbb{Q}c2 \mathbb{Q}a4+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c1 \mathbb{Q}a1+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c2)$ 29... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd3 \mathbb{Q}xg5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg5 \mathbb{Q}h5$, and while White's position is still more promising, Black would have survived the worst.

29. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

The rest is easy for White.

29... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $c4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xc4 \mathbb{Q}e5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{Q}d6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d5 \mathbb{Q}xd5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Black resigned.

How did such a strong player as Pavel Eljanov lose an objectively better position so easily? It is possible that he was not in his best form, in which case Duda deserves praise for recognizing it and giving him a challenge in the form of a materially-imbalanced position and unusual problems to solve over the board. It is also possible that Duda had been aware of some of Eljanov's general shortcomings and aimed for his 'Achilles heel'.

The next example is very similar in that respect – a young grandmaster ambitiously sacrifices a piece against his experienced opponent, manages to confuse him, and brings home the bacon.

Game 81

Vladislav Artemiev

2671

Alexander Motylev

2658

Chita ch-RUS 2015 (3)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.♗xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♗d6 6.♘f3 ♗f6 7.0-0

This leads to a middlegame with an IQP. A more popular attempt to get an edge in this line of the QGA is to give a check: 7.♗e2+!? ♗e7 8.♗xe7+ ♗xe7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘c3, with a slight initiative in the endgame.
7...0-0 8.h3 ♗c6 9.♘c3



9...♗f5?!

Motylev is known as an excellent theoretician, so it is surprising that he played a sub-standard continuation on move 9 in a relatively well-known position. Normally, both 8.h3 and 9...h6 are semi-automatic moves in these positions, since the pin on the knight is quite annoying. Black is usually fine in these positions if he gets to develop the bishop on f5. White can prevent it

with 10. $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but the position after 10... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ has proved to be solid enough for Black in practice, despite some structural weaknesses.

10. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $h6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $g5$

This weakening of the kingside is necessary, since 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is strongly met by 12. $d5!$, and Black's pieces are being pushed back. After 12... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, White holds a significant edge.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xg5!?$

The '!?' is not for the objective, but rather for the psychological value of the move. White keeps the pin along the h4-d8 diagonal at the nominal cost of one pawn. However, this puts some positional and psychological pressure on Black, as he has to think of creative ways to neutralize White's initiative.

A simpler and objectively better move is 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, when White enjoys a pleasant edge in the endgame after 12... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ (opening the f-file by 12... $\mathbb{Q}xg3?!$ 13. $fxg3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ would allow White to expand his initiative with 14. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h2\pm$ Liiva-Hübner, Puhajarve rapid 2013) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}axd1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $f4$ 1-0 (56) Graf-Ortmann, Deizisau 2009.



12... $h6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$

The 2014 European Champion finds the best answer, but it took him 23 minutes. It was necessary to prevent White from playing $\mathbb{Q}f1-e1$, which can

be seen in the variation 13... ♜e7 14. ♕e1 ♛g7 15. ♖d2 ♕h8 16. d5 ♗xd5



analysis diagram

and now 17. ♕xe7! ♗dxe7 18. ♖d5 gives White a powerful attack for the sacrificed rook, with moves like ♗g5-f6+, ♖d2-c3+ and ♕a1-e1 coming up.



14. ♖d2?

Faced with his opponent's strongest defense, Artemiev also sinks into thought for more than 20 minutes but fails to come up with the right follow-

up.

It seems more principled to target the weakened f7-square with 14. $\mathbb{N}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 16. $\mathbb{N}h5$, although after 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ both

A) 17. $d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18. $dxe6$ $fxe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$; and

B) 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ would most likely end in a draw by perpetual check.

Objectively speaking, this is probably the most that White can get from his piece sacrifice.

In case of a slower move, such as 14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$, we can see how important 13... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ was to prepare 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, since now 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ can be met with 15... $\mathbb{Q}h7!$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ \mp

Artemiev probably sacrificed this pawn to mobilize all his pieces and go for broke. Still, with the knight on d4, Black should simply be better.

15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $c5$ 16. $b4$ $b6$

The last two black moves seem forced, but, strangely enough, they took Motylev more than 15 minutes. Was it because of the psychological pressure?

17. $bxc5$ $bxcc5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$

It is important for Black that he can refute 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ with 18... $\mathbb{Q}e4!$, which leads to a nearly winning endgame after 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ \mp .

18... $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$



Motylev trades a pair of rooks and just has to play 19... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ now, which would slowly extinguish White's initiative.

However, he had been spending a lot of time on each of his moves since Artemiev's sacrifice and was surely under time pressure at this point. This, and general fatigue due to jet lag at the start of the tournament, as reported by Motylev himself, contributed to his next move.

19... $\mathbb{Q}e6??$

A blunder that loses the game. After 19... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6\#$, White would not have sufficient compensation for the sacrificed material.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $f xe6$ 21. $\mathbb{N}xd4!$

Now Black's defense collapses.

21... $\mathbb{Q}h2+$

In case of 21... $cxd4$, White wins with 22. $\mathbb{N}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{N}d5$ $\mathbb{N}xd5$ (or 23... $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{N}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf6++-$) 24. $\mathbb{N}xd8$ $\mathbb{N}xd8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{N}xd4$, and the endgame with rook and two minor pieces versus queen and pawns is hopeless for Black.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{N}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{N}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24. $\mathbb{N}e2!$

And the knight joins the attack as well, so Black resigned.

Of course, Artemiev did not have to sacrifice the piece and, analytically speaking, it was a worse choice than the alternative. However, some things in chess cannot be fully explained rationally. If someone feels like sacrificing on

that particular day and follows up energetically regardless of the objective evaluation of the position, then more power to him. There is, of course, always a risk that his opponent will find the best defensive moves and refute the sacrifice, but who says that the risk for the opponent to make a mistake under pressure is not greater?

Playing against the opponent

In most of the previous examples, we have seen how strong players have used their understanding of their opponent's preferences and drawbacks to take calculated risks in their decisions. For any competitive chess player, it is important to gather as much information about their opponent before the game. For example:

- Which kinds of positions does he like and which ones doesn't he feel comfortable in?
- Does he solve problems primarily using concrete calculation or intuition?
- How does he tolerate ambiguity and tension?
- How does he fare in positions with material imbalances?
- Does he rely on deep theoretical preparation or does he like to improvise over the board?
- How does he handle time pressure?
- Is he in a good competitive form or not?

All this information can be extracted from the opponent's key games. It might take you one or two hours to create a basic psychological profile of your opponent, depending on your experience with this procedure. This may be helpful in deciding on a course of action that may be the most unpleasant for him, both as a pre-game strategy and for critical over-the-board decisions. In this section, we will look at a few more examples of this practical approach.

Nezhmetdinov and Tal played their four official games in the period from 1957 to 1961, when Tal took the world by storm. He won the super-strong Soviet championship back-to-back in 1957 and 1958, the Interzonal

tournament in 1958, the Candidates tournament in 1959, and became the World Champion in 1960 by beating Mikhail Botvinnik.

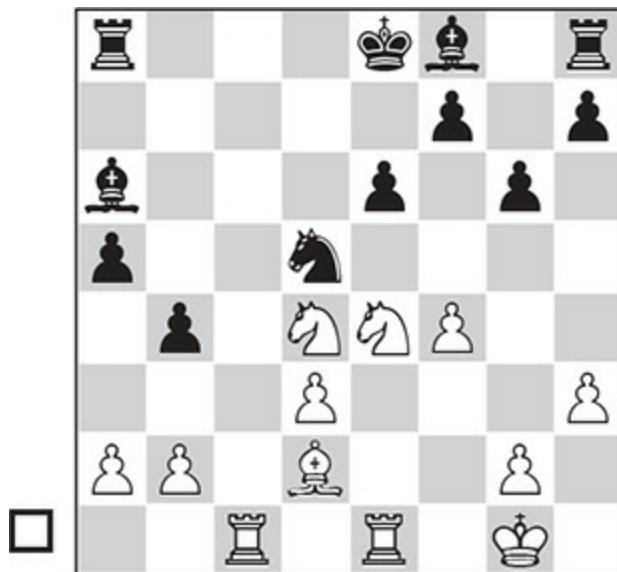
Yet, his score against Nezhmetdinov in that period was only one win and three losses! Admittedly, he had the black pieces in all these encounters, but the way he lost these games was impressive, nevertheless. We already devoted one section to ‘the greatest master of initiative’ in Chapter 3. In the next game, we will see how Nezhmetdinov became a greater Tal than Tal himself!

Game 82

Rashid Nezhmetdinov

Mikhail Tal

Moscow 1959 (7)



Black is doing well. He has a strong centralized knight and a bishop pair that covers many important squares. If he could get time to castle, his chances in the endgame would be better due to the isolated d-pawn. It seems like White cannot do much in this endgame, but Nezhmetdinov finds a way.

19.f5!?

A very direct move. Objectively speaking, this is a bluff, but if we have learned anything from the games in this chapter, it is that the psychological value of a move can sometimes (more than) compensate for its lack of

objective value. Nezhmetdinov obviously wanted to use his development advantage at any cost, but he probably also wanted to put Tal under pressure for two reasons.

The first one is that he had beaten him once before and bad memories do not help when you have to defend. Secondly, as a markedly attacking and initiative-minded player, Tal was not used to defending, especially not in his younger days.

Nezhmetdinov was obviously not interested in playing out a ‘boring’ endgame that would ensue after 19. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 0-0 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3=$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Tal plays it safe. He had already lost a game where Nezhmetdinov had attacked him before, so his caution is understandable. He was probably expecting to castle once his opponent moved the knight from d4, when his bishop pair would become very powerful. But it was not to be...

There was absolutely nothing wrong with taking the pawn: 19... $gxf5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$, and after 21. $\mathbb{Q}ed6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, Black would connect his rooks with excellent winning chances in the long run. But Tal was too focused on getting his king to safety against a dangerous opponent.

20.f6!



Nezhmetdinov’s feeling for the dynamic potential of his pieces is impressive.

This brave pawn sacrifices itself so that the rest of his army can break in and create chaos in Black's position. No less importantly, Black gets no time to castle.

20... ♜xf6

The other capture 20... ♜xf6 would be met by 21. ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 22. ♜xe6! ♜xe6 23. ♜xe6+ ♚f7 24. ♜cc6, and White gets back the piece, with a better position.

21. ♜d6+ ♚e7 22. ♜xf7!

Nezhmetdinov is giving Tal a taste of his own medicine! This piece sacrifice is not fully correct, but it will pose Black difficult practical problems to solve because of his poor development and piece coordination.

22... ♜xf7 23. ♜c7+ ♚g8 24. ♜xe6 ♜e8 25. ♜d7



This is the critical moment for Black. He is up a piece, but his rook on h8 is completely out of play and White's activity is quite serious. A calm head and concrete calculation are necessary in such situations. However, for reasons that we can only guess at, Tal makes a terrible blunder:

25... ♜f6??

This allows Nezhmetdinov to demonstrate his combinative genius. Black had several reasonable alternatives instead:

A) 25... ♜xb2? would run into 26. ♜f1 ♜g7 27. ♜c7!, when White wins back the piece;

B) 25... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 26. $\mathbb{R}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ would give him at least a draw, since White does not accomplish anything with 27. $\mathbb{R}xa8$ (27. $\mathbb{R}d7=$) 27... $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h6$, due to 29... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ 30. $\mathbb{R}f1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 31.g4 $\mathbb{R}d8$ 32.gxf5 $\mathbb{R}xd3$ 33.fxg6+ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$, and only Black can be better here;

C) However, a move with the h-pawn: 25...h5! (or 25...h6) would address his greatest problem – the immobile rook on h8. Now, 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 27. $\mathbb{R}ee7$ would be met with 27... $\mathbb{R}h7!$, when Black would be threatening to trade a pair of rooks with 28... $\mathbb{R}e8$, etc.

While this seems not too difficult in analysis, in a real game, it is far from obvious; otherwise Tal would have found it. My guess is that Tal did not like the look of the two white rooks on the seventh rank, so he played 25... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ to take the e7- and d8-squares under control. However, he failed to consider the following move.

26. $\mathbb{R}f1!$

Brilliant! Black has no good defense against the mating threats, and he has to give up a piece.

26... $\mathbb{Q}g7$

The point is that after 26... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, White has a study-like double-rook sacrifice:



analysis diagram

27. $\mathbb{Q}xf6!$ with two possible mating finales: 27... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g7\#$ and 27... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f8\#!$

27. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

White is technically winning, and the rest needs no comments.

28... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $h5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}hf8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 1-0

Nezhmetdinov's sacrificial attack was indeed Tal-like – it had elements of bluff and created psychological pressure, which Tal did not handle well. Would the same kind of sacrifice work against Kortchnoi, Petrosian or any other strong tactician who was used to defending? Probably not. The different profiles of opponents require different psychological approaches.

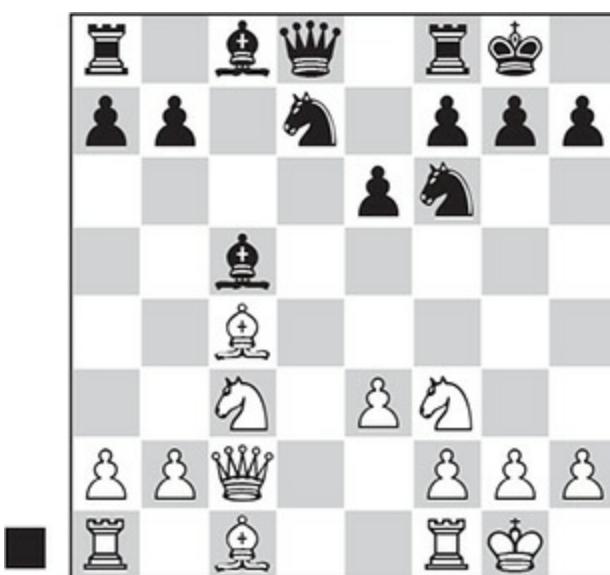
In the next game, we will see how one of Alexander Alekhine's famous combinations originated as an attempt to get a solid opponent out of his comfort zone.

Game 83

Alexander Alekhine

Karoly Sterk

Budapest 1921 (4)



Alekhine has not handled the opening with white in the most efficient way and Black got enough development tempi to comfortably equalize with **12...b6**.

Solving the problem of the queen's bishop is a common headache for Black in many openings, but here he does not have such issues. In fact, it is White who has to think about how to develop his own bishop, and Alekhine decides to take some risk:

13.e4!?

While simultaneously opening the c1-g5 diagonal for the bishop and threatening e4-e5 in some lines, this active move also gives Black some targets. Playing for the initiative when Black has already equalized is risky, but Alekhine understood that he would probably not get anywhere with quiet developing moves like 13.b3 or 13.♘d1. His opponent drew with the likes of Bogoljubow, Sämisch and Tartakower in this tournament, so he could surely handle a balanced position well. I believe that this is what motivated Alekhine to imbalance the game as soon as possible and check how his opponent would handle direct, move for move, battle; even if it contained some risk for him.

13...♝b7 14.♝g5

The direct attempt 14.e5 is well met by 14...♞g4 15.♞g5 g6 16.♞xe6 ♞h4!.

14...♞c8

14...♞c7 or 14...♝b8, to take control over the dark squares, was more in the spirit of the position. However, the game move is also not bad; White feels some pressure on the c-file.

15.♞e2 ♜b4!

Sterk's approach is correct. White has problems defending his weaknesses.

16.♞d3

16.e5?! would not work well here, too, due to 16...♜xc3 17.bxc3 ♜e4†.

16...♜xc3 17.♞fc1!

This move implies a pawn sacrifice, but it fits well into Alekhine's strategy to imbalance the position and play for the initiative at any cost.

It is understandable that he did not want to play a position with a backward c-pawn after 17.bxc3 h6! 18.♞xf6 (or 18.♞h4 ♜h5 19.♞e3 e5†) 18...♜xf6

19.e5 ♕d7??



17... ♕xe4??

So far, Black could make moves based on general principles. However, at this moment he had the first concrete decision of the game and he did not cope with the task. Alekhine's strategy to create tension in the position turned out to be successful.

Out of several reasonable alternatives, the best one was 17... ♕c5 18. ♕xc3 ♕xe4, when White would have had to work hard to prove his compensation for the pawn. Keeping the tension with 19. ♕c4?? would probably be the best, since 19. ♕xf6 ♕xd3 20. ♕e3 gxf6 21.b4 ♕g6??, as suggested by Alekhine, would actually not offer White any compensation.

18. ♕xe4 ♕xe4 19. ♕xe4 ♕c5



This was Black's idea, but once the queen moves away, three black pieces on the c-file are simply unsustainable.

20. ♔e2?!

A strange decision. 20. ♔b1 wins a piece on the spot after 20... ♕a5 21. b4+–.

20... ♕a5 21. ♕ab1 ♔a6 22. ♕c4!

Despite the inaccuracy on move 20, White still has an advantage thanks to the poor placement of Black's pieces. Alekhine's last move is a prelude to one of his famous combinations.

22... ♔a4?

A naive move. White was threatening to win the piece with 23.b4, so Black prepares the counter-attack 23... ♕c3!.

However, it is easy to see through this simple tactical plot and this proves how Alekhine correctly assessed his opponent's inferior understanding of dynamics. The obvious downside of this move is that Black places four (!) out of his five pieces on the edge of the board. Alekhine uses this to his advantage with an elegant combination.

The relatively best defense was 22...h6. Alekhine would undoubtedly have gone for the piece sacrifice: 23. ♕xh6! gxh6 24. ♕e5, which gives White a strong attack. For example:

A) 24...f5 25. ♕d7! ♕xd7 26. ♕g4+ fxg4 27. ♕xa6 ♕b4 28. ♕b5±;

B) 24... ♔h7 25. ♕h5 ♕d2 26. ♕d4!±, and White gets his piece back,

since 26... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ loses to 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+-$.



A well-known diagram from many tactical manuals.

23. $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ $\mathbb{R}fc8$

23... $\mathbb{R}ac8$ would allow the ‘windmill checkmate’ after 24. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{B}xe2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g6\#$, while in case of 23... $h5$, Alekhine offers a nice mating variation: 24. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ $\mathbb{B}xe2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$, followed by the unstoppable $\mathbb{Q}g7-h7-h8\#$.

24. $\mathbb{Q}e5!$

The point. White leaves his rook hanging to attack Black’s king. Black has no defense.

24... $\mathbb{R}c5$

Other moves would not have saved Black either:

A) 24... $\mathbb{R}xc4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $g6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa4+-$;

B) 24... $\mathbb{R}xc4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf7++-$;

C) 24... $gxf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g8\#$.

25. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $g6$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{R}ac8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 1-0

Playing against young players

I remember that the first tournament in which all my nine opponents were younger than me was in 2010. I was 23 then! These days, chess tournaments

across the world are full of young, ambitious players who are eager to earn rating points and international titles. When you sign up for an open tournament, there is a pretty big chance that you will play at least one young and underrated player you have never heard of, but who will give you a tough fight. Therefore, knowing how to approach these games is very important. Most young players have their typical strengths and weaknesses. Here is my attempt to classify them, based mostly on personal experience:

Young players' typical strengths

- forced variations in the opening;
- tactical awareness;
- calculation of straightforward variations;
- an 'easy hand' (i.e. not overthinking decisions);
- ambition and determination;
- a 'nothing to lose' attitude.

Young players' typical weaknesses

- a narrow opening repertoire
- positional intuition
- understanding of positional nuances;
- maneuvering and unforced play;
- basic endgames knowledge;
- endgame technique;
- the opponent's resources;
- hasty decisions.

These are, of course, not displayed by all young players in all games, but they are a good reference point when you face a player in his/her formative years. You may notice that their typical strengths revolve around

- 1) being concrete (as in concrete opening preparation, concrete calculation, concrete problem-solving, etc); and
- 2) optimism. This can be a lethal combination in certain positions and not

such a good one in other types of positions.

On the other hand, their typical weaknesses revolve around:

- 1) lack of experience; and
- 2) lack of patience.

Knowing all of this is nice, but how can one use this knowledge?

Many experienced players go to extremes by trying to dull things down from the very beginning of the game. They use their erudition to achieve positions that lack in tactical potential, trying to force their young opponent to make primarily positional decisions. This approach generally works fine, although it has some limitations. Firstly, by avoiding concrete play at any cost, you limit yourself as well. Secondly, tactically-strong young players will eventually find tactical opportunities in any kind of position.

I believe that a flexible approach is better. One should not mind getting into sharp tactical positions or topical opening variations against young players if one believes that one can outplay them in such positions.

For example, when faced with a decision between: a) a positionally-risky, but ‘calculatable’ line and b) a probably positionally sound, but intuitive line, young players will usually go for the first one since it plays to their strengths (calculation rather than intuitive evaluation).

If I see that there is such an opportunity, I will check the first, concrete line carefully. If it turns out that this line has a drawback for my opponent (it often does), I will play the move that gives him the afore-mentioned choice and he will usually take the bait. Similarly, if I see that my opponent plays a sharp opening line where I can make an improvement or surprise him, I will not shy away from it.

Below, I will show two examples of a successful psychological approach against young and promising players from my own practice. The key decisions in these games were based on non-materialism, with the intention of getting my opponents out of their comfort zone and playing against what I perceived as their weaknesses.

Game 84

Davorin Kuljasevic

2555

Darwin Yang

2402

Lubbock 2010 (6)

My opponent in this game was a 14-year old promising player from the USA. We had played several games before this encounter, so I had some idea about what to expect. I knew that he had a good knowledge of theoretical variations in the Semi-Slav Defense, so I chose a less theoretical opening, which should have come as a surprise to him, since I do not usually play this way.

1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. g3 d5 3. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ c6 4. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 5. c4



The Réti Opening is quite a good option if you know that your opponent plays 1...d5 and you just want to get a reasonable game without much opening theory.

5...e6 6.cxd5 exd5 7.d3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

A more popular approach is 8. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, dragging Black's queen to b6: 8... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, followed by e2-e4.

8...0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ d4

A principled move that prevents 10.e4.



10.♘e4!?

Other knight moves were possible, too, but this continuation seemed to offer more complicated play. I was trying to exploit my opponent's lack of experience with non-standard pawn structures. Black already has an important strategic decision to make regarding the exchange on e4.

10...♞a6

10...♞xe4 would probably be premature, since White obtains an initiative in the center simply with 11.dxe4 ♜e6 12.♖d1 c5 13.b4 b6 14.e3.

11.a3 ♜e8

Yang probably prepared the exchange on e4 with this move. However, it was better to anticipate b2-b4 with 11...♜c8 12.b4 c5=, and Black would be completely fine.

12.b4 ♜xe4

A concrete decision – not unexpected for a young player. 12...♜c8 was probably better anyway, preparing 13...c5.

13.dxe4 ♜g6 14.♝b2

Black had prepared a small tactical trap in case White gets greedy for the bishop pair advantage: 14.♝e5? ♜f6 15.♝xg6 d3!.

14...♜f6



The e4-pawn is hanging, and White has to move his knight to protect it. The obvious move is 15. $\mathbb{N}d2$, continuing the positional fight. However, I came up with an interesting idea to open up the position by sacrificing a pawn.

15. $\mathbb{N}xd4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16. $\mathbb{R}ad1$

Now, everything is pretty much forced.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 17. $\mathbb{R}xf2$ $\mathbb{N}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{N}c3$ $f6$ 19. $e5!$

This pawn advance, in connection with the following one, is the key positional idea that I had to find in advance; otherwise 15. $\mathbb{N}xd4$ would not make that much sense.

19... $fxe5$ 20. $b5!$ $cxb5$ 21. $\mathbb{N}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 22. $\mathbb{N}xb5$



This is the position I was aiming for. The point, which I thought my young opponent might not fully appreciate, is that White's bishops are very strong not only in the short run, but also in the long run. I could imagine many endgames in which they would promise White an advantage against the knight and bishop pair. However, Black's position is also unpleasant in the middlegame, since his piece coordination is not so good and he has several weaknesses, such as the d7-square and the b7- and e5-pawns. I would probably play the same sequence against anyone, but I thought that it might be particularly tricky for a less experienced opponent because Black's defensive task is not straightforward.

22... ♜c7

Black uses a tactical detail: ♜b2 would be undefended in case of 23. ♜xb7 ♜ab8. It would not be so good to play 22... ♜ab8 due to a small tactic: 23. ♜xe5! ♜xe5 24. ♜f8+ ♜xf8 25. ♜xe5+-.

23. ♜a4

Another option was to force the endgame with 23. ♜d7 ♜ab8 24. ♜xe7 ♜xe7, and while White has full compensation and probably some more, I thought that there was no need to simplify my opponent's defensive task.

23...b5

The first sign of youthful impatience. Although the move itself is not so bad, it does create some new weaknesses.

It was somewhat better to defend more 'statically' with either 23...a5 24. ♜d7 ♜c5 25. ♜d1 h6± or 'non-materialistically' with 23... ♜ed8!?

24. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 25. ♜xa7± h6 26. ♜xb7 ♜c5!±.

24. ♜a5 e4?

This, however, is a serious positional mistake. While trying to keep a material advantage, Black grants White's dark-squared bishop a wide-open long diagonal to aim at his king. This is a huge long-term positional concession, as every Nimzo-Indian player knows. A player with a better-developed positional intuition would not play this move, but this is easily forgivable in the case of a young player, because perfecting positional play takes more time than is the case for tactical play.

He should have given up the extra pawn to centralize his pieces: 24... ♜ad8

25. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 26. $\mathbb{B}xa7$ h6, where White keeps some pressure due to his bishop pair advantage.



25. $\mathbb{B}h3!$

White finds new employment for his bishop. 26. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is too strong a threat, so Black has to play

25... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$

after all.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 27. $\mathbb{B}xa7\pm$

White establishes material equality, and with the open dark-squared bishop, his positional advantage is quite serious.

27...e3

A natural move, although not without positional risks. 27...h5, giving some air to the king, would have been more patient.

28. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!?$

Once again, Black tries to solve his problems in a concrete manner. During the game, I thought that this was the losing move, but it turns out to be quite decent.

28... $\mathbb{Q}d2??$ loses to 29. $\mathbb{B}xc7$, while 28... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ leads to a very unpleasant endgame for Black after 29. $\mathbb{B}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$.



29. $\mathbb{R}c1$

This leads to an endgame in which I intuitively felt that White should be winning. However, things are not so simple.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 30. $\mathbb{B}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$

If Black tries to win the queen with the typical deflection 30... $\mathbb{R}d1+$ 31. $\mathbb{R}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$, White has a nice refutation with 32. $\mathbb{R}d7!$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e6\#$.

31. $\mathbb{R}xc7$ $\mathbb{R}d1+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$



White has achieved complete domination on the long diagonal. Black's king

is indefinitely trapped in the corner and it looks like a discovered check at the right moment should decide the game. This indeed happened in the game, after a time-trouble mistake by Yang.

34... ♜d2??

However, after the right move 34... ♜b1!, Black's rook would have been shielded from a discovered attack by his b-pawn, and 35. ♟d4 h6± would have led to a pawn-up opposite-colored bishops endgame where White would still have had to work for the full point.

35. ♟c3!

The key intermediate move. Black's rook will not find a safe haven now.

35... ♜d3

35... ♜c2 36. ♟e5 ♜c5 37. ♜g5++– is similar.

36. ♟e5

And Black resigned due to the threats 37. ♜g5# and 37. ♜d7+.

Game 85

Dominik Horvath

2331

Davorin Kuljasevic

2555

Austria Bundesliga 2017/18 (4)



White's last move, 15.e4, created tension in the center. Black has many ways to resolve it and I took my time trying to find a good response, because I felt this was a critical moment. What caught my attention was that by playing this way, White has weakened his control over the g1-a7 diagonal. If Black could open it and give a check on c5, White's king would be forced to the h-file, where it would be exposed to mating threats. Since Black cannot play 15...c5 immediately due to 16.♗xd5, I came up with another idea:

15...♝f6

The alternatives lead to a roughly balanced game:

A) 15...dxe4 16.♝xe4 ♜c7 17.♝g5 ♜f6 18.♝ae1 ♜d6 and if 19.♝g4, then 19...g6;

B) 15...♝xe5 16.dxe5 (16.fxe5 dxe4 17.♝xe4 c5↔) 16...♝c5 17.♝e3 dxe4 18.♝xe4 ♜xe4 19.♝xe4 ♜ad8 20.♝ad1.

16.♗xd5 c5!?

I had sacrificed the d5-pawn so that I could play this move and open the diagonal for my bishop. The idea was to inject some dynamism into the position and create practical problems for my opponent to solve.

Both 16...♝xd5 17.♝xd5 cxd5 18.♝b3 and 16...cxsd5 17.♝ae1 look too static and give White an easy game.



17.♔h1?!

White was probably surprised with the previous move and he did not react

appropriately. As I explained earlier, White's king in the corner is exactly what Black wants.

A) It was better to continue 17. \mathbb{B} ae1, when Black has compensation with the direct 17...cxd4 (or by keeping the tension with 17... \mathbb{B} c7!?) 18. \mathbb{B} g4 (18. \mathbb{B} g6? does not work because of 18... \mathbb{B} c7 19. \mathbb{B} xf8 dxc3+) 18... \mathbb{B} d8 19. \mathbb{B} xf6+ \mathbb{B} xf6 20. \mathbb{B} e4 \mathbb{B} f5 21. \mathbb{B} xd4 \mathbb{B} b8!, and the bishop gets to the key diagonal, after all;

B) Another good possibility is 17. \mathbb{B} fe1, clearing the f1-square for the king, if needed. Black can continue with 17...cxd4 18. \mathbb{B} g4 \mathbb{B} d8 19. \mathbb{B} xf6+ \mathbb{B} xf6 20. \mathbb{B} e4 \mathbb{B} g6. Now 21.f5 is not possible, so Black keeps compensation similar to variation A): 21. \mathbb{B} xd4 \mathbb{B} b8.

17...cxd4 18. \mathbb{B} xd4 \mathbb{B} c5

Black has a very pleasant position once he gets his bishop on this diagonal. White's extra pawn is not so important because the key positional factor is the exposed white king.

19. \mathbb{B} d3 \mathbb{B} ad8 20. \mathbb{B} ad1?

The young Austrian misses the point of my previous move. He should have given up the d5-pawn to neutralize the threats to his king with 20. \mathbb{B} ae1 \mathbb{B} xd5! 21. \mathbb{B} g6! (21. \mathbb{B} xd5 \mathbb{B} d6 22. \mathbb{B} f3 \mathbb{B} xd5 23. \mathbb{B} xd5 \mathbb{B} xd5 is similar) 21... \mathbb{B} d6 22. \mathbb{B} xd5 hxg6 23. \mathbb{B} xd6 \mathbb{B} xd6, with maybe only a slight advantage for Black in the endgame.



20... ♜d6!

This is it! White either missed or underestimated this rook lift, but Black is in full attacking mode now. He just needs to clear the sixth rank to get his rook to h6.

21. ♞f3

This is the most stubborn defense, allowing White to cover his king with the knight.

A) White may have originally missed that 21. ♞c4 is insufficient because of 21... ♜g4! 22. ♜xd6 ♛xd6+;

B) 21. ♞f5 also fails to save him, on account of 21... ♜xd5 22. ♞h5 ♜xf4 23. ♜xf4 ♜h6+;

C) 21. ♞a4 does not change anything after 21... ♜a7.

21... ♜g4

21... ♜h5?! is the wrong way to attack due to 22. ♜g5! ♜h6 23. ♜h3.

22. ♜e4

The other possible defense: 22. ♜g5 ♜h6+ 23. ♜h3 does not work, because of 23... ♜e3 24. ♜de1 ♜d7! 25. ♜xe3 ♜xh3+ 26. gxh3 ♜xh3+ 27. ♜g1 ♜xg3+ 28. ♜h1 ♜xe3+.

22... ♜h6+ 23. ♜h4 ♜e3!

Only like this can Black keep his attack going. 23... ♜e3?! (threatening 24... ♜xh4) does not lead anywhere after 24. ♜f3.

24. ♜xc5

24.d6 is also refuted nicely by 24... ♜xh4+ 25. ♜g1 (25.gxh4 ♜xh4+ 26. ♜g1 ♜g4+--), and now after 25... ♜xe4! 26. ♜xe4 ♜xd1+, Black picks up all White's major pieces with tempo.

24... ♜xf1 25.d6!



This is a strong intermezzo. However, it did not take me by surprise. I expected that my talented 14-year old opponent would be tactically resourceful, so I made sure to check this move before playing 23... N e3.
25... N x d 6!

This is also the strongest response. Another possibility that would give Black an edge is 25... N x g 3+!? 26. N x g 3 N x h 4+ 27. N g1 N e2 28. N e1 N b5+.

26. N x d 6

It is important that another white intermezzo 26. N f5 is refuted by 26... N x g 3+! 27. N x g 3 N x d 1+ 28. N h2 N f6+.

26... N x g 3+ 27. N g1 N x h 4



As a result of the complications, after best play by both sides, Black is up a pawn and White still remains with a weak king. Due to White's activity, Black is not winning yet, but he is very close to it.

28.♘e1 h5 29.♗xb7

I did not mind losing this pawn because it allows me to finally activate my rook.

29...♝h1+ 30.♚f2 ♝h4 31.♚g1 ♕c8

Black has a very strong initiative now.

32.♕d2 ♞h1+ 33.♚f2 ♞h4 34.♚g1 ♞f6?

This move lets the lion's share of the advantage slip. I did not see a way forward on the kingside, but in fact, the following queen maneuver is very strong: 34...♞h1+ 35.♚f2 ♞h2!—+, and there seems to be no good defense against ...h5-h4-h3, etc.

35.b4 h4 36.♗c5 ♕d8 37.♗e3 ♕b2



38.♗xa6?

When under pressure, people often act on their instincts. White was in serious time pressure here and his materialistic instincts came to the fore. You may remember a discussion on young players' attachment to material gains from the previous chapter. I believe this is also what guided Horvath to take the pawn on a6. Obviously, he saw that Black would bring his rook to the second rank, but since he could not calculate that it is losing, he just took the pawn.

If his positional instincts were better-developed, he would have quickly grasped that the decentralization of the knight was not worth a pawn, and that defending with one piece less on the kingside is a dangerous business. Instead, the knight's centralization 38. \mathbb{N} e4! \mp would have given him reasonable hopes to survive.

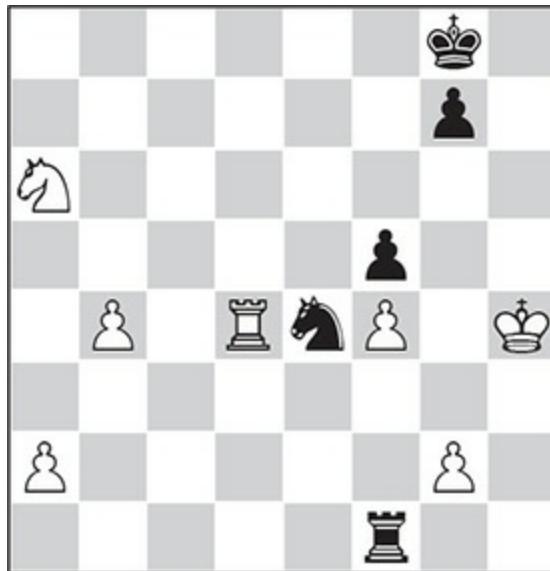
38... \mathbb{N} d2 39. \mathbb{N} f3 \mathbb{N} d4+ 40. \mathbb{N} h2 \mathbb{N} f2!

There were probably other good ways to continue the attack, but this move leads to a nice win by force.

41. \mathbb{N} d1

41. \mathbb{N} e8+ \mathbb{K} h7 42. \mathbb{N} a8 is insufficient because of 42... \mathbb{N} xf4 43. \mathbb{N} h8+ \mathbb{K} g6 44. \mathbb{N} c6+ f6 45. \mathbb{N} e8+ \mathbb{K} g5+-.

41... \mathbb{N} xf3 42. \mathbb{N} xd4 \mathbb{N} f1 43. \mathbb{N} h3 f5 44. \mathbb{N} xh4 \mathbb{N} e4!+-



This was the point of the combination started on move 40. White's king is caught in a mating net even with queens off the board, while his knight is just a bystander.

45. \mathbb{N} d3

45. \mathbb{N} h5 is met by 45... \mathbb{N} h7+-, while 45. \mathbb{N} xe4 fxe4 gives Black a decisive passed pawn after 46. \mathbb{N} c5 e3 47. \mathbb{N} d3 e2.

45... \mathbb{N} xf4+ 46. \mathbb{N} h5

In case of 46. \mathbb{N} h3, the knight's geometry works perfectly for Black after 46... \mathbb{N} f2+ 47. \mathbb{N} g3 \mathbb{N} xd3+-.

46... ♜g4

This closes the mating net and White resigned due to the inevitable ... ♔e4-f6#.

Changing the trend

I believe that grandmaster Jonathan Rowson was the first author to seriously elaborate on the concept of ‘trend’ in chess. Not recognizing the trends in the game is one of ‘seven chess sins’ in his well-known book with the same title. If you are not familiar with the concept, ‘trend’ is just a word for the direction in which the game is moving.

For example, you have a big advantage and are in the process of methodically converting it. Your opponent has been passive for most of the game. The trend has been going your way. However, you commit an inaccuracy and suddenly your opponent obtains serious counterplay. The trend has changed and if you do not adjust to the new situation quickly, you might lose the ground from under your feet before you know it.

The adjustment you have to make when the trend changes is primarily a psychological one. This is often easier said than done, especially in positions where the trend changes sharply or after a long period of ‘status quo’. A trend change usually involves a new and different set of problems to solve and, consequently, requires a fresh attitude.

A good chess psychologist will not only react to a new trend; he will try to change it himself if he finds it appropriate. This may be a good strategy when the trend in the game is going your opponent’s way and you want to stop it or reverse it. Another example: the trend in the position is drawish and your opponent has easy moves to keep the balance. It may not be a bad idea to imbalance the position in some way that creates tension and changes the trend from one to three possible results. Many times, such an unexpected turn of events throws the opponent off balance and he commits a mistake.

One of the best methods of changing the trend is to disturb the material balance on the board. A well-evaluated sacrifice that changes the trend can help you reap psychological dividends, since the opponent may not feel too comfortable in the new situation, even after he wins the material. Viktor

Kortchnoi was a master at this. Let us see two games in which he successfully used this strategy against grandmasters.

Game 86

Viktor Kortchnoi

2640

Jozsef Pinter

2570

Beer-Sheva 1988



White stands optically better due to his space advantage. However, Black is quite solid; his pawns on the sixth rank make it difficult for White to open the position for his bishop pair. In addition, the d4-pawn can become a target in such positions if Black manages to get his bishop to f6. Pinter's next move prepares a maneuver that makes this possible.

25...♞g4!

The knight is headed to the f5-square (via h6) with a tempo, while also vacating the f6-square for the ...♝f8-e7-f6 maneuver. Kortchnoi's impression was that this plan could shift the trend in Black's favor and that White would be the one trying to equalize the game. This made him look for an alternative approach that would interfere with Black's scheme. His next move must have come as a surprise to Pinter.

26. $\mathbb{R}xe6!$?

This rook sacrifice completely changes the nature of the position. Here is how Kortchnoi explains it: ‘In a practical game against a human (not a computer, I emphasize) and with limited time to think, an element of a surprise can play a very important role. Of course, one has to weigh the risks of such sacrifices on a case-to-case basis.’

Black would have achieved his strategic goals with relative ease in case of the simpler 26. $\mathbb{R}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 27. $\mathbb{R}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6=$ or 26. $\mathbb{R}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5=$ 28. $h5?!$ $gxh5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{R}cd8\#$.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h3$

With three black pieces on this diagonal and other weaknesses on the light squares, it is clear that White will have the initiative in the arising positions. How strong is it? Considering that White has sacrificed a full rook, Black should be able to keep the balance by giving some material back. This, however, does not mean that his defensive task is easy by any means. Kortchnoi has managed to shift the trend in White’s favor – he is the one who has an easier game now.



27... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Kortchnoi considered this move a losing one, but this is not quite so.

A) An interesting alternative is 27... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$, but it fails to 29. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 31. $g4!$ (the key! Black’s queen is all but

trapped) 31... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ (31... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g2+-$, followed by 33. $\mathbb{R}h1$) 32. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$, and now White does not mind the queen exchange as he wins material after 33. $\mathbb{Q}xh5+$ $gxh5$ 34. $gxf6+-$;

B) The best defense is 27... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$, and now:

B1) 28... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ looks reasonable, but it runs into a spectacular refutation:



analysis diagram

29. $h5!!$. A very difficult move, but with a beautiful point: (Kortchnoi analyzed only 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$, which gives Black just enough time to eliminate the dangerous bishop: 29... $\mathbb{R}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}xe6$ 31. $\mathbb{R}xe6=$) 29... $gxh5$ 30. $\mathbb{R}e5!$. This is the point. The rook joins the attack on the just-opened fifth rank. 30... $\mathbb{R}e7$ 31. $\mathbb{R}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



analysis diagram

and now White has another brutal attacking resource: 32. $\mathbb{R}xf6!!$ $gxf6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ 34. $d5+-$. Black is up a full rook and a piece, yet he is helpless against the attack. One possible variation is 34... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $fxe5$ 36. $c5!$. With this quiet move that takes the d6-square under control, White closes the mating net: 36... $cxsd5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ $\mathbb{K}e7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{K}d8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f8\#$. Chess is indeed a beautiful game!

B2) 28... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $d5$ $cxsd5$ 31. $cxsd5$ $\mathbb{Q}ee7$, and Black defends stubbornly. His best defensive strategy is to surround his king with pieces and offer some material back to trade off the opponent's strong attacking pieces.

28. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$



Coming back to our previous discussion on the relative value of pieces, this bishop is probably worth more than a rook.

28... ♜f7?

This move works much better with the knight on h6. The problem with this set-up is that after d4-d5, the f6-knight is getting hit by White's bishop. Defending such positions is taxing on the mind and the psyche, and it often happens that strong players miss fairly simple tactical details, such as this one.

Instead, Black should have moved the king:

A) While 28... ♛h7 loses to 29.h5! ♜xh5 30. ♜e5! (we have seen the same 5th-rank-attack motif in another line) 30... ♜f6 31. ♜g5;

B) Black defends with 28... ♛h8 29. ♜xg6, and now 29... ♜d8!! (Kortchnoi analyzed only 29... ♜e7 30.d5 cxd5 31. ♜xf6 ♜xe6 32. ♜xe6 gxf6 33. ♜xf6+–).



analysis diagram

A very difficult defensive move. Black prepares ... $\mathbb{Q}d8-e8$, which saves him from the $\mathbb{Q}e1-e5-h5\#$ threat. White can continue the attack with 30.d5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f5$, when Black faces difficulties, but his material advantage gives him some hope of survival.

29. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$

Black has no good defense against the 30.d5, 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ threat. Pinter went down quickly:

29... $\mathbb{Q}b8?!$

The most resistant would have been 29... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30.d5 cxd5 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$, but Black's position still remains difficult after 33.h5! d4 34.h6! $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ (34... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 35.h7+ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xg7++-$) 35. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ gxh6 37. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$, with a winning endgame (Kortchnoi).



30. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3?!$ 31. d5



White's attack develops with ease and Black is completely lost, despite the extra rook. The white bishops are just too strong.

31... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

31... $\mathbb{Q}b2$ is met by 32. d6+–, while in case of 31... $\mathbb{Q}e8$, among several winning continuations, the most beautiful one is Alexander Khalifman's suggestion: 32. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 34. c5 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 36. cxd6! $\mathbb{Q}xc1+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}bb7$



analysis diagram

38. \mathbb{N} x f 7+!! \mathbb{Q} x f 7 39. d7.

Brilliant!

32. \mathbb{Q} e5 cxd5 33. \mathbb{Q} x c 7 \mathbb{Q} x c 7 34. h5 1-0

Game 87

Hannes Stefansson

2569

Viktor Kortchnoi

2642

Reykjavik 2003 (8)



In many branches of the Nimzo-Indian Defense, a complex strategic fight takes place. What is more important: White's long-term bishop pair and space advantage or Black's development advantage and the flexibility of his knights in the middlegame?

In this instance, Kortchnoi was not happy with Black's prospects: 'Already at this moment I disliked the black position. In order not to get totally outplayed I have conceived now a pawn sacrifice.'

I should add that Kortchnoi was probably too pessimistic about Black's chances of equalizing; he had several promising continuations where his chances would not be worse.

10...a5!?

Another reasonable possibility is 10...b6 11.♘e2 ♗b7 12.0-0 ♔e8, preparing the equalizing ...♗f6-e4 or ...♗b7-e4.

11.b3 ♘c5 12.♗c2 ♔d6?!

Kortchnoi follows up with his original idea, although this shows a lack of flexibility.

He had a stronger alternative with a similar idea: 12...h6 13.♕h4 a4, and here White would probably have to part with his bishop pair: 14.♕xf6 (because 14.b4 runs into: 14...♗fe4! 15.♕xd8 ♘xc3 16.♕xc7 ♘b3!+, with a cool rook-trap) 14...♕xf6 15.b4 ♘b3, and Black obtains good counterplay, similar to the game, but with several extra tempi.

13.f3±

After taking the e4-square under control, White can claim an edge in such positions. The trend has been going his way so far.

13... ♕e8 14. ♔e2 ♖c6

Kortchnoi prepares the ...a5-a4, ...♖c5-b3 idea with this move.

15.0-0 a4!? **16.b4 ♖b3**



Kortchnoi admitted: ‘I had not considered this sacrifice to be sufficient to equalize the chances. My aim was to divert White from developing his strategic initiative.’

This is the first critical moment of the game. White has achieved a solid positional advantage, as he has neutralized Black’s slight development advantage and taken control of important central squares. His opponent has offered him a pawn for dubious compensation. Should he accept it and try to convert it later or stick to his positional supremacy?

This is one of the most difficult decisions in chess. It takes a lot of experience to recognize in which situations material is more important than a positional advantage, and vice versa. Clearly, psychology plays a big part as well. I would like to suggest that Stefansson made a wrong practical decision when he took the pawn, because this changed the trend from ‘White trying to slowly positionally outplay Black’ to ‘White trying to convert the extra pawn when Black has some counterplay’.

17.♘xb3?!

17.♗ad1 keeps White's positional advantage without giving Black unnecessary counterplay. He can basically ignore the b3-knight.

17...axb3 18.♘xf6 gxf6!?

Kortchnoi continues with non-standard solutions. 18...♘xf6 was objectively better, but in a practical sense, he wants to imbalance the position as much as possible so that his opponent does not have an easy task converting the extra pawn.

19.b5?!

Stefansson did not want to allow Black to push ...b7-b5 himself. However, this gives Black's queen a nice outpost on c5.

If he had taken the pawn immediately with 19.♘xb3 ♕e6 20.♗fc1, Black could have played 20...b5. White could then return the pawn: 21.♘g3!

♘xc4 22.♗c3±, transforming his material advantage into a positional one – Black has serious kingside weaknesses due to 18...gxf6.

19...♕c5 20.♘xb3 ♕e6 21.♗fc1 ♗ed8



Black has obtained some compensation for the pawn as his pieces are placed actively. But his most important achievement is that White cannot make decisions based on general positional guidelines any more, but rather he has to solve concrete, move by move, tasks. This kind of position is suited better for Kortchnoi, a stronger tactician than Stefansson. This will become evident

in the next phase of the game.

22. ♜g3?!

Stefansson does not continue in the best way. 22.a4, preparing a queen trade via a3, or simply a4-a5-a6, is the most natural move. Kortchnoi planned to answer with 22...c6! and if 23. ♜a3?!, then 23... ♜xa3 24. ♜xa3 ♜a5!↑, and White's advantage would disappear as his queenside pawns would become difficult to defend. However, 23. ♜c3 keeps White's edge.

22...f5 23. ♜h1 ♜d6 24.h3?!

White's last two moves were way too passive. He is lacking a good plan and his position is becoming stagnant. The trend is shifting...

Once again, 24.a4 was more to the point. His only advantage in the position is the extra a-pawn, so why not make something of it?

24... ♜ad8

Black controls the only open file, which gives him the initiative, despite being down a pawn.

25. ♜c3 ♜6d7 26. ♜f1 ♜d2 27. ♜fc1 ♛e7!

After taking control of the second rank, Kortchnoi finds a target on the kingside: the queen is headed toward h4, when sacrifices on g2 and h3 are in the air.

28. ♜f1 ♜2d7 29. ♜c2 ♛h4 30. ♜e2 ♛h8!?



It turns out that 18...gxf6 was not in vain. Black's rooks can be redeployed

on the g-file.

31. ♕c2?!

Stefansson just did not want to push 31.a4 in this game for some reason.

31... ♕d6 32. ♕c3 ♕6d7 33.c5

Finally showing some signs of life on the queenside, but Kortchnoi has a ready response.

33...c6! 34.bxc6 bxc6 35. ♕c2 ♙a4

This move shows that Kortchnoi is in control of the game. From the moment he sacrificed the pawn, he has played with much more vigor than his 40-year-younger opponent.

36. ♙f2 f6!



A nice idea. Black prepares to double the rooks on the g-file. Such changes are always unpleasant for the defender because, just when he got used to a certain position, he has to solve new practical problems. The g2-pawn has to be protected now.

37. ♕c3 ♕g7 38.e4!?

With this counter-sacrifice, Stefansson is trying to set up a dark-square blockade with his knight on e3. Not a bad positional idea at all...

38...fxe4 39.f4 ♙d4 40. ♜e3 ♕dg8 41.f5?

... however, it is his tactics that fail him. Instead, 41. ♜h4 exf4 42. ♜xf4 leads to a position with mutual chances.



41... ♜xg2!

Kortchnoi did not miss such opportunities.

42. ♔h4

42. ♜xg2 is also bad for White: 42... ♜xg2 43. ♜xg2 ♔d2+ 44. ♔h1 ♜f7+-.

42... ♔d2 43. ♜xf6+ ♜8g7 44. ♜xe5

White defends against the mate on h2, but Kortchnoi saw one move further:

44... ♜2g3!

And White's king is in a mating net, so he resigned.

The reigning World Champion, Magnus Carlsen, is a master at controlling trends in a chess game, even with shorter time controls. His ability to recognize the critical moments in a game and when it is appropriate to change the 'rhythm' of the battle is second to none. He does not shy away from sacrificing material if this helps him to create a new set of practical problems for his opponent, as we can see in the following game.

Game 88

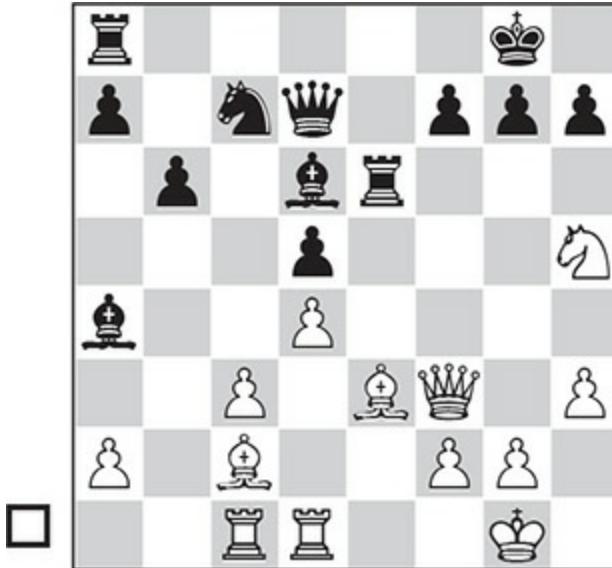
Magnus Carlsen

2832

Sergey Karjakin

2781

Stavanger 2017 (8)



The 2017 edition of the Norway Chess tournament has been one of Carlsen's worst tournaments in recent years. At the time this game was played, he was at the bottom of the table with a -2 score. This was probably the reason why he tried to win this game at any cost. Karjakin played his usual safe and sound chess with the black pieces, so Carlsen tried to imbalance the position earlier with a bxc3 exchange. However, an inaccuracy on the previous move allowed Karjakin to force a trade of the important light-squared bishop with 22... ♜a4. This exchange would greatly diminish White's attacking prospects, simplifying into a completely equal position with few chances to disturb the balance. This is why Carlsen decided to change the trend:
23.c4!?

This pawn sacrifice contains a considerable amount of risk, but Carlsen was willing to take it, considering his tournament position and the current trend, which was going Karjakin's way.

In case of 23. ♜xa4 ♜xa4 24. ♜f4 ♜xf4 25. ♜xf4 ♜f6= or 23. ♜b3 ♜ae8=, Black would face no problems whatsoever.

23...dxc4 24.d5

Carlsen is playing for the initiative. He wins a tempo and prepares ♜e3-d4, with attack on g7.



24... ♜g6!

The best continuation. Black could also extinguish White's initiative with a counter-sacrifice: 24... ♜xe3!? 25.fxe3 ♜xc2 26. ♜xc2 b5, when he would definitely have compensation for the exchange. However, Karjakin surely wanted to play in a principled way, trying to refute Carlsen's audacious pawn sacrifice.

Anyway, this would lead to imbalanced play, which is something that Carlsen was trying to provoke in the first place.

25. ♜d4

Carlsen continues with a direct attack. Taking the rook with 25. ♜xg6 does not work due to 25...fxg6! 26. ♜g3 ♜xd1 27. ♜xd1 ♜f7#.

A subtler and possibly more promising continuation was 25. ♜xa4!? ♜xa4 26. ♜f4 ♜f6 27. ♜g4!#, threatening to win material with 28. ♜d4.

25... ♜xc2?!

Understandably, Karjakin is eager to trade off the ♜c2, but with White's rook still on d1, it was possible to play 25... ♜e8!, and Black is very solid. Carlsen would probably just have had to go down the rabbit hole: 26. ♜xa4 ♜xa4 27. ♜e1 ♜xa2 28. ♜g3!, preparing ♜g3-f5 and h3-h4-h5. Whether this would have been enough for the two sacrificed pawns is anyone's guess.

26. ♜xc2 ♜a4 27. ♜cc1?

This slow move gives Karjakin a much-needed break. It was essential to keep up the threats with 27. ♜dc1, and if Black defends his property with 27...b5,

Carlsen would have time to create a mess with 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg7!$ $\mathbb{N}xg7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g4+\mathbb{Q}$, just like in the game.

27... $\mathbb{Q}xa2?$

Grandmaster Yermolinsky, who annotated this game, made a well-taken point here: ‘I love the concrete approach to positions, but every once in a while, we should think like Petrosian.’ However, it is not surprising that Karjakin lost his sense of danger in this position. He was low on time in a complicated position, and in such situations, we usually become tacticians rather than strategists.

The Petrosian-like prophylaxis 27... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ would have secured him against the sacrifice on g7. After 28. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$, we transpose into the note to 25... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$.



28. $\mathbb{Q}xg7!$

Karjakin underestimated the strength of this move, both in objective and in practical terms. It is never easy playing with an exposed king in time trouble, because you never know which of your opponent’s threats are real and which are imaginary.

28... $\mathbb{N}xg7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

The king would not be safer in the corner. After 30... $\mathbb{Q}h8$, White could continue playing for the initiative with 31. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e1\infty$ or simply force a move repetition with 31. $\mathbb{Q}d4+=$.

31. ♔ h4!?



Not the only good move, but perhaps the most annoying one for Black. Carlsen uses one of the best psychological strategies in his opponent's time pressure: avoid forced lines and give him a choice of several apparently equally good moves, instead.

31... ♕ b2

It was far from trivial to understand whether the game move or 31... ♕ e8 was better with little time on the clock. After 32. ♔ xh7 ♕ b2 33. ♜ xc4 ♕ g7†, the position looks quite similar to the game, but Black has an extra tempo here.

32. ♜ xc4?

A barely noticeable mistake, but quite a serious one. It was better to drive Black's king to the center with 32. ♔ h6+ ♕ e7 33. ♜ xc4, and if it decides to travel some more: 33... ♕ d7!? 34. ♜ dc1 ♕ xd5 35. ♔ xh7, all three results would be possible.

32... ♕ e8?

Karjakin missed a golden chance to secure his king. 32... ♕ g7!† would have delivered a serious blow to White's attacking aspirations. After 33... ♕ h8, the king would be safe in the corner and the trend would shift in the other direction...

33. ♜ e1 ♕ f6

A safe move. 33... ♕ g7 is much less effective now: 34. ♜ g4+ ♕ h8 35. ♔ h6=

However, Black had a very concrete defense: 33... ♔d2 34. ♕ce4 h5! 35. ♕xh5 ♘f6 36. ♕h8+ ♗g8†. Of course, no one could be expected to see this with their seconds ticking.

34. ♕xh7 ♗g7 35. ♕c2



Carlsen is definitely having the better end of this double-edged affair. His strategy worked – Karjakin already has made some mistakes and was surely not feeling as comfortable in this position as he did in the balanced middlegame before 23.c4!?

35... ♗f6 36. ♕g4 ♖c5 37. ♕e2 ♗h6 38.g3!

Carlsen finds new motifs to put pressure on his opponent. Now ♕g4-h4-h8 looks dangerous, so Karjakin enlists the help of his knight in the defense.

38... ♘f6 39. ♕h4 ♗g7 40. ♕g2 ♗g5?!

The notorious 40th move... you don't want to make responsible decisions on your last move before the time control. This is probably why Karjakin did not play the critical 40... ♘xd5!. It looks risky, but actually White does not have anything concrete. For example:

- A) 41. ♕h7 ♗f6! (but not 41... ♘f4+? 42. ♕h2 ♗f6 43. ♕e4!+–) 42. ♕h5 ♘e7†;
- B) 41. ♕g4 ♗h6∞;
- C) 41. ♕f5 ♕d8 42. ♕e6 ♘e7 43. ♕f3 ♘g6 44. ♕he4, with a full fight

ahead.



41. ♔c3!

This is Carlsen's strongest move of the game. Such quiet moves are often easy to miss, even with more time on the clock. The queen is powerful on the a1-h8 diagonal, putting pressure on the ♟f6 and threatening 42. ♜e5. At the same time, the d5-pawn is hanging, but Black cannot take it for tactical reasons.

Carlsen finally takes a serious initiative with this move and Black has to play very carefully to keep the balance. However, Karjakin does not adjust to the new trend and makes a losing mistake on the very next move.

41... ♕d6?

It is clear that Karjakin was psychologically affected by the sudden turn of events by the fact that he made this mistake after a 25-minute think.

Another one of a human's psychological limitations is the reluctance to 'admit the mistake'. Computers do not have this problem. Taking a step back to reset a plan or idea just goes against our natural desire to improve the position with every move. However, there are positions where you have to swallow your pride and just do it.

A) Therefore, Karjakin's best answer here was 41... ♕g7!, admitting that he has just wasted two tempi. Nevertheless, this would take care of White's threats ♜h4-h8+ and ♜e2-e5 and the position would remain unclear. White

could try to put pressure with 42.d6!? $\mathbb{Q}d8$ (42... $\mathbb{Q}xd6?$ loses to 43. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d6+)$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d4\uparrow$, but Black should have sufficient defensive resources like ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-e8$;

B) It is also important to understand why it is risky to take the d5-pawn. 41... $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ gives White a strong attack after 42. $\mathbb{Q}h2$:

B1) 42... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}h8!$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xg8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}g2+-$;

B2) 42... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ (44... $\mathbb{Q}g7?$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$ $bxc5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}h4+-$) 45. $\mathbb{Q}eh5$, and Black's position is highly unpleasant.

42. $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$



The winning rook lift.

43... $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Karjakin missed something tactical when he played 41... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. Maybe it was the fact that 43... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ is strongly met by 44. $\mathbb{Q}f3+-$, when Black has no good defense against the discovered attack.

44. $\mathbb{Q}xg8+$!

This move forced immediate resignation due to 44... $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ (44... $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g4+-$) 45. $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ (the most merciless; 45. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ also wins) 45... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 47. $d6!$, with a mating finale.

Let us see a couple more examples of how an abrupt trend change can throw off the opponent.

Game 89

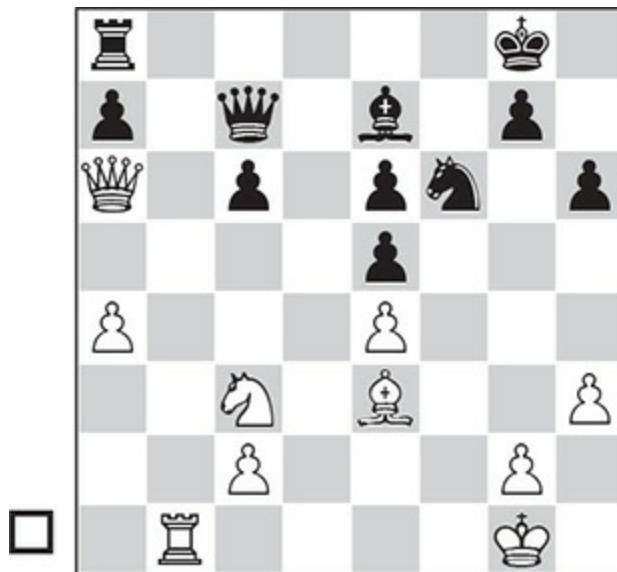
Robert Hübner

2590

Tigran Petrosian

2640

Seville ct m 1971 (7)



Despite the extra pawn for Black, I think that most people would prefer to play this position with white. His pieces are far more active, and he has a clear plan on the queenside: invade the seventh rank and win the a7-pawn. Hübner tried to finesse his way with

21.a5.

His idea is to improve on 21. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ by getting his a-pawn further down the board. However, this gives Petrosian a target for counter-attack.

Petrosian was concerned about the immediate 21. $\mathbb{Q}b7$, when he correctly assessed the endgame after 21... $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 22. $\mathbb{R}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{R}xa7$ $\mathbb{R}xa7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ as more promising for White, regardless of the small material deficit, due to the outside passed pawn. However, the pawn sacrifice 21... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 22. $\mathbb{R}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ would have given

him good counter-chances in the middlegame, as sorties like ... \mathbb{Q} f6-h5 and ... \mathbb{Q} e7-h4 would be enough to make White's king feel uncomfortable.

It is worth noting that White cannot play 21. \mathbb{Q} b7?? because 21... \mathbb{Q} c8+ traps both his major pieces.

21... \mathbb{Q} h7!

There is more than meets the eye to this quiet prophylactic move. Petrosian understood that he would mostly suffer in the endgame after 21... \mathbb{Q} f8 22. \mathbb{Q} b7 \mathbb{Q} xb7 23. \mathbb{Q} xb7 a6 24. \mathbb{Q} f2±, so he decided to reverse the trend with a sacrifice.

22. \mathbb{Q} b7



This is the critical moment. The queen trade promises White a risk-free advantage. However, Petrosian anticipated this unfavorable scenario and found a way to change the trend.

22... \mathbb{Q} xa5

In case of 22... \mathbb{Q} xb7 23. \mathbb{Q} xb7 \mathbb{Q} d8 24.a6 \mathbb{Q} a5 25. \mathbb{Q} a4 \mathbb{Q} xe4 26. \mathbb{Q} xa7±, Black's prospects in the endgame would be quite grim, indeed.

23. \mathbb{Q} xa8 \mathbb{Q} xc3

Surely, Petrosian's experience of recognizing appropriate situations to change the trend came in handy at this point. As Mikhail Tal suggested:

'Interestingly enough, Petrosian had a similar situation in his 1966 World Championship match against Spassky. Just like in his match against Hübner,

the first 6 games ended in a draw, and in the seventh game Petrosian took over the initiative with an exchange sacrifice and won.'

24. ♜xa7



Igor Zaitsev reported that Hübner offered a draw here, but Petrosian declined. Even though the position is objectively equal, he believed that he did not risk anything and that he could play for more.

24... ♜xe4

White has to be careful now. The knight is a tricky piece, and a centralized knight even more so.

25. ♜f1?

The change of scenery has affected Hübner's play. Suddenly, he has to evaluate concrete variations and here he makes a big mistake.

Instead, 25. ♜xe7 ♜xe3+ 26. ♜h1! would have likely led to a draw by force (26. ♜h2? loses to 26... ♜g3+ 27. ♜g1 ♜d2), since after 26... ♜g3+ 27. ♜h2 ♜f4 28. ♜xe6!, Black's discovered checks are enough just for a draw.

However, to play this way, White would have had to overcome a psychological barrier. Just a few moves ago, he was slowly squeezing his opponent on the queenside and now he has to give him free access to his king to achieve a draw. In that sense, Hübner's decision to bring the rook closer to his king is understandable. But it contains a tactical flaw.

25. ♜h2 also looks quite scary after 25... ♜h4, but White holds with 26. ♜b6

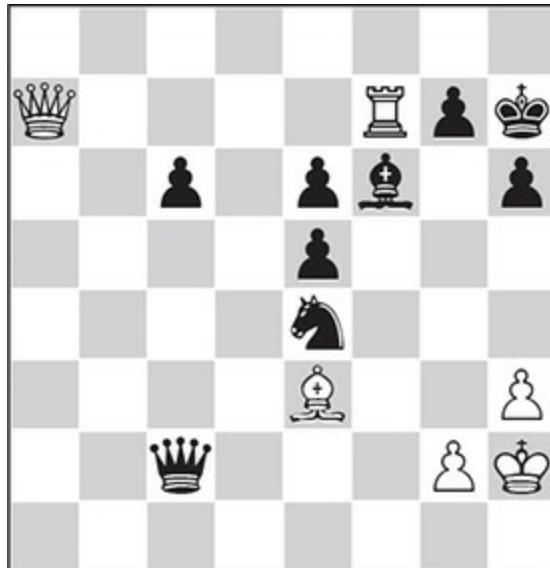
\mathbb{Q} g3+ 27. \mathbb{Q} h1 \mathbb{Q} xc2 28. \mathbb{Q} b3=.



25... \mathbb{Q} h4?!

White would be in trouble after the direct 25... \mathbb{Q} g3! \mp , because 26. \mathbb{Q} f7 does not work due to 26... \mathbb{Q} e1+ 27. \mathbb{Q} h2 \mathbb{Q} f5 28. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{Q} d2 29. g4 \mathbb{Q} g6!, and the rook is trapped!

26. \mathbb{Q} f7 \mathbb{Q} f6 27. \mathbb{Q} h2 \mathbb{Q} xc2



The trend has clearly shifted in the favor of the Armenian grandmaster. While the position remains objectively balanced, he has easier play, since his pieces

coordinate better and his king looks safer. In addition, time trouble was approaching...

28. ♕d7 ♘b3 29. ♔f2 ♘d5 30. ♘a7 ♘d2 31. ♘e3 ♘c2 32. ♔e1 c5

After a maneuvering sequence, Petrosian comes up with a concrete idea first. With his last move, he prepares 33... ♗g5, since White's queen cannot go to a7 anymore. Hübner decides to prevent it with

33.h4?!

but this creates new weaknesses on the kingside. The only way to keep the balance was 33. ♖d7! and if 33... ♗g5, then 34. ♖d3 ♗f4+ 35. ♖g1=.

33...c4?!

The position is complicated, and it is not easy to find the best moves even for the more active side. Petrosian could have taken advantage of the previous move with 33... ♘d6! 34. ♖c7 ♘f5 35. ♘xc5 ♘e2 36. ♖f2 ♘e4!, and the h-pawn falls, with a difficult position for White.

34. ♖c7 ♘d3 35. ♖f3 ♘b1?!



Petrosian initiates a tactical combat, changing the trend at the most delicate moment.

36. ♘e3?!

Hübner is not up to par.

The critical continuation was 36. ♖xc4 ♘d6 37. ♖c6!, leading to a direct fight in which White's chances are not worse, as can be seen from the

variations below.

- A) 37...e4 38.♘h5 ♘f5 39.♗xe6 ♘b8+ 40.♔h1 ♘f4 41.♗e2 ♘e5 42.g3 ♘xg3! 43.♘xg3 ♘xg3+ 44.♔g2 ♘xe2 45.♗xe5 g5=;
- B) 37...♗xe1 38.♗xd6 ♘xh4+ (38...e4 39.♗xe6!=) 39.♗h3=;
- C) 37...♘f5 38.♗f2 e4 39.♗f4 e3 40.♗xe3 ♘xh4 41.♗f2 ♘f1 42.♗c2=.

However, in severe time trouble, such decisions are made primarily based on intuition because it is not possible to calculate all the relevant lines.

Understandably, Hübner preferred to play it safe, hoping to weather the time trouble unscathed. **36...♘d6!**

Petrosian finds an excellent regrouping: ...♘d6-f5, ...e5-e4 and ...♘f6-e5, creating dangerous threats to White's king. This attacking scheme comes at the perfect moment, just when Hübner was lowest on time (there was obviously no increment back in 1971).

37.♗d2 ♘f5 38.♗xc4 e4



The game has reached the critical moment, just two moves before the time control.

39.♗c2??

A blunder, similar to the one Keres committed against Spassky. There are many defensive possibilities here, such as:

- A) 39.♗e2 ♘e5+ 40.g3 ♘d4! 41.♗b4 ♘f3+-+; and

B) 39. ♜b4 ♛e5+ 40. ♔g1 ♜d3 41. ♜xe4 ♛e3!±;
C) but only 39. ♜b4! does the job. White keeps his head above water after
39... ♛e5+ 40. ♔h3 ♜a1 41. ♜xe4 ♜a3+ 42. g3 ♛xg3 43. ♜c3 ♜a8
44. ♜d3 ♛xe1 45. ♜xe1=.

Of course, this is a very difficult defensive sequence, which just shows how much pressure White was facing due to Petrosian's imaginative play in the final stage of the game.

39... ♜xe1

This is a full piece. White resigned on the next move:

40. ♜xe4 ♛e5+ 0-1

The psychological effect of this dramatic game, in which Petrosian skillfully shifted the trends in his favor, was such that Hübner withdrew from the match, even though there were 3 more games left. The official reason was that he could not come to an agreement with the organizers about improving the playing conditions. However, there is no doubt that the first decided game in a tense and hard-fought match had a strong impact on his decision as well.

Psychology in opening preparation

There is no need to explain the ever-increasing importance of opening preparation in modern chess. Ever since computers have become sufficiently strong to refute well-known opening variations and revive forgotten ones, we have become dependent on them in our work on openings. However, the 'space-bar' approach does not work anymore; if you want to get an edge in the opening, following the first line of the engine will not cut it – you need to come up with some creative ideas of your own every once in a while.

In the final section of this chapter, I would like to show two games of Veselin Topalov from the early computer era. Surely, most strong players had access to deep-computing power even then, but few of them were as dangerous in the opening as the Bulgarian ace was in the period around 2005 to 2008, which, interestingly enough, coincided with the retirement of one great World Champion and the rise to the top of another one...

In those days, Topalov's main edge over his top-level opponents in the

opening stage was his ability to put strong pressure on them with well-prepared new ideas, often sacrifices. Clearly, a lot of credit for this should go to his seconds who went the extra mile to find and scrutinize ideas that may not have been the first choice of the engine but were the most unpleasant from a psychological point of view. The combination of Topalov's excellent form in those years and his dangerous opening preparation made him the most fearsome player in the eyes of his opponents and the most exciting one in the eyes of the chess public.

Later, such an approach to openings was adopted by many strong players; Levon Aronian is just one who comes to mind; but I feel that (and this may be completely subjective) Topalov was the forerunner of this trend in opening preparation.

I would like to present two most impressive games of Topalov from this period, in which he used strong opening novelties that enabled him to put maximum pressure on his rivals. The arising positions would invariably play to Topalov's general strengths: dynamics and attack. This proves that his and his team's approach to openings was well-thought out.

Game 90

Veselin Topalov

2778

Viswanathan Anand

2785

Sofia 2005 (6)

**1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♜a6 5.b3 ♜b4+ 6.♗d2 ♜e7 7.♘c3 c6 8.e4 d5
9.♘c2 dxе4 10.♘xe4 ♜b7**



White has tried many moves in this topical position: 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, 11.c5, etc. Topalov had used 11. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ earlier that year to beat Peter Leko, so Anand surely had prepared an improvement for Black there. However, Topalov and his team did not sit on their laurels; they looked for an improvement for White earlier on, producing the following novelty.

11. $\mathbb{B}eg5!?$

A very bold move and certainly not the one that jumps at you when you turn on the engine. From the standpoint of classical opening principles, it looks suspicious. Instead of continuing to develop, White plays with an already developed piece for the third time already, decentralizes it and allows Black to open the dangerous long diagonal (so, don't do this at home unless you have a super-strong engine!).

However, this move has a very concrete idea – to put pressure on the f7-square, Black's softest spot in many openings. It is almost a bughouse-inspired idea, if you are a fan of the game. A few years later, Topalov used a very similar motif in the well-known game against Vladimir Kramnik from the Wijk aan Zee tournament.

11...c5

Anand plays the most principled move.

Black could eliminate the sacrifice on f7 by castling: 11...0-0. The position becomes very sharp after 12.0-0-0 h6 13.h4! (another point behind 11. $\mathbb{B}eg5$)

13...c5 14.d5 exd5 15.cxd5 c4! 16.bxc4 ♜a6, but this is probably something that Topalov had worked out in his home analysis.

On the other hand, the immediate 11...h6?! seems suspicious, as after 12. ♜xf7 ♛xf7 13. ♜e5+ ♛g8 14. ♜h3!, Black has to play very passively to hold the e6-weakness: 14...♜c8 15.0-0, and White has ample compensation for his piece due to his superior development.

12.d5

This is a thematic pawn sacrifice in many lines of the QID.

12...exd5 13.cxd5 h6

Once again, Anand plays the critical move, inviting the sacrifice on f7.

Taking the pawn with 13...♜xd5?! was not worth it, as after 14.0-0-0, White creates dangerous threats with 15. ♜c3. For example, 14...h6 15. ♜c3! hxg5 16. ♜xf6 ♜xf6 17. ♜c4 ♜xf3 18. ♜he1+ ♛e7 19. ♜f5! gives White a brutal attack.

14. ♜xf7!

This is the point of no return, but it is nice to see such sacrifices in top-level games anyway.

14...♛xf7 15.0-0-0



White has good compensation for the sacrificed piece, but its consequences are still quite vague. Yes, Black has an exposed king and lags behind in development, but he also has a lot of defensive options.

However, the main practical problem for the defending side in such positions is that the position is new to you, while your opponent has analyzed it at home, and you don't know at which point you will stop playing against the engine and start playing against a human.

15... ♕d6

The most reasonable continuation, stopping 16. ♔e5 and blocking the d-pawn.

A) Of course, taking the pawn is much too risky: 15... ♕xd5? 16. ♔e5+ ♜g8 17. ♔c3+–; while

B) 15... ♛g8?! is also not ideal as the king blocks its own rook. After 16. ♔c3 ♔a6, we can see why it was important to block the d-pawn: 17.d6! ♔xf3 18. ♔c4+ ♛f8 19. ♔g6 ♔h5 20. ♔xf6! ♔xg6 21. dx e7+ ♔xe7 22. ♔xe7+ ♛xe7 23. ♔he1+ ♛f8 24. ♔xa6, with a big advantage in the endgame;

C) Black had another interesting idea: 15... ♔bd7!?, also stopping 16. ♔e5+, but with a twist: 16. ♔h4 c4!. This is it! Black seeks counterplay via the c-file, which is why it was necessary to free the c8-rook first. 17. bxc4 ♔a3+ 18. ♛b1 ♔e8 19. ♔g6+ ♛f8 20. ♔f5 ♔e7, with a messy position in which the white king would also not feel too safe.

16. ♔h4

Topalov might have still been in his opening preparation, but this position is easier to play for White, nevertheless. White's initiative has a natural flow, while Black needs to find some really difficult defensive moves, such as the next one.

16... ♔c8!

Backward moves are often the most difficult to make, but in this position, it is essential to prevent the knight from coming to f5 after 17. ♔g6+, as in the following variation: 16... ♔e8 17. ♔g6+ ♛g8 (or 17... ♛f8 18. ♔xh6! gxh6 19. ♔f5+–) 18. ♔f5 ♛c7 19. ♔c3 ♔f8 20. ♔d3+–, with a crushing attack for White.



17. ♜e1!

The key move of the game, in my opinion. Topalov prepares to lift his rook to e6, from where it puts enormous pressure on Black's pieces. Anand's defensive task is becoming more and more demanding.

17... ♛a6

Anand rightfully prefers queenside development over artificial castling: 17... ♜e8 18. ♜g6+ ♛g8. The problem for Black here is that after 19. ♜c4, his king is not much safer on g8 than f7, while his queenside remains undeveloped.

18. ♜e6

This is the most aesthetic and psychologically unpleasant way to continue the attack, although White had a few other options, such as:

A) 18. ♜c3!? ♜c7 19. ♜c4↑, and if 19...b5, 20. ♜e6! is extremely strong; and

B) 18. ♜g6+!? ♛g8 19. ♜f4, preparing to remove the blockade from d6.

18... ♜b4

This was a very important psychological moment for Anand. He could prolong the passive defense or look for counterplay on the queenside. He decides on the latter, even though he also had sufficient resources for the former: 18... ♜c7!?

A) 19. ♜g6+ ♛g8 20. ♜f5 ♜f8 21. ♜c4



analysis diagram

21...b5!. This is the key defensive idea in many variations with the knight on c7. White can continue 22.♘e7+!? ♜xe7 23.♖xe7 ♛xe7! 24.d6+ bxc4 25.dxe7 ♜e6, and while the position remains highly imbalanced, Black should be satisfied having traded off a lot of the opponent's attacking pieces;

B) Another important possibility is 19.♕c4, when Black is solid enough after 19...♔g8! 20.♕c3 (or 20.♖xd6 ♔xd6 21.♕f4 ♔d7 22.d6+ ♘cd5 23.♖e1 b5!?) 20...♘fe8!∞.

Of course, it is not easy to force yourself to play this way. White is attacking and you need to defend passively in a position where one mistake can lead to immediate disaster. That being said, such the approach can work if you are focused, patient, and feel that you have enough defensive resources. At a certain point, the attacker will run out of bullets.

19.♕xb4 cxb4 20.♕c4



20...b5?

After a long string of accurate defensive moves, Anand makes a mistake. His idea to divert the light-squared bishop and open the c-file is natural, but the timing is wrong.

It was much better to secure the king first with 20... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ and go for ...b6-b5 on the next move. Anand may have been concerned about 21. $\mathbb{N}f5$, and rightfully so, because it looks like White is just crushing. However, Black has an unexpected defense: 21...b5!! (21... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ leads to a disaster on the light squares, with a nice forced variation: 22.dxe6 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{R}d7!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h4!+-$. Black is in complete stalemate and can do nothing about 26. $\mathbb{Q}g6!$) 22. $\mathbb{R}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$. Three white pieces are hanging and he has no way to preserve his coordination. After 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 24. $\mathbb{R}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$, Black has survived the worst and can force a draw with 25... $\mathbb{Q}a1+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+!$.

21. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7?$

This strange move shows that Anand has lost his way in this difficult position. White can win in many ways now. 21... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ had to be played, sooner or later. Black's position would be cheerless after 22. $\mathbb{Q}c4\pm$, but he could still try to put up a fight.

22. $\mathbb{Q}g6+-$

This is the simplest.

22... $\mathbb{R}xd5$



23. ♜xe7+?

Topalov makes a mistake in calculation, just when he is about to win the game. 23. ♜e5! followed by ♜b5-c4, etc. would have forced Black's resignation within the next few moves.

23... ♜xe7 24. ♜c4+ ♛f6 25. ♜xh8 ♜d4!

This is probably the move that Topalov had missed. Black forces an endgame where he is down a pawn but can still put up some resistance. He probably expected Anand to take the piece: 25... ♜xh8, when White gets a winning attack with 26. ♜d1 ♜f5 27. ♜e4.

26. ♜d1 ♜a1+ 27. ♛d2 ♜d4+ 28. ♛e1 ♜e5+ 29. ♛e2

The queen trade is inevitable, after all. Of course, not 29. ♛f1? ♜h3+ 30. ♛g1 ♜xh8--.

29... ♜xe2+ 30. ♛xe2



White is technically winning in the endgame, nevertheless. It took a bit more time to win this game than necessary due to the mistake on move 23, but Topalov had no problem converting it into a full point: 1-0 (52).

We saw how Anand could have defended successfully in several different ways throughout the game, but eventually succumbed to the pressure. The greatest value of such opening sacrifices is in their practicality, rather than their theoretical importance. A lot of times, they are designed for just one important game in which the elements of surprise and psychological pressure encumber the defender's task to find the right way. After the game, theoretical analysts and the players themselves will go back to their opening labs and discover improvements that could be used next time in that same variation. In today's information era, this process can take anywhere from a few minutes to several hours. This is how quickly the theoretical value of a carefully prepared novelty, sometimes patiently stored for multiple years like a fine wine, expires.

Game 91

Veselin Topalov

2801

Levon Aronian

2752

Wijk aan Zee 2006 (10)

1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♜a6 5.b3 ♜b4+ 6.♗d2 ♜e7 7.♗g2 c6 8.♗c3 d5 9.♗e5 ♜fd7 10.♗xd7 ♜xd7 11.♗d2 0-0 12.0-0 ♜f6 13.e4 b5



The Queen's Indian Defense was much more popular at the top level in the 1990s and early 2000s than it is today. I believe that one of the big reasons for this is that alternative defenses, such as the Ragozin, the Vienna Defense and the Semi-Tarrasch, were not investigated well enough then to entice strong players to employ them, so they naturally gravitated toward the sturdy and time-tested QID. However, these days the engines have shown us reliable ways to reach equality by force with black in many of these previously unpopular openings, which can explain the increase in their popularity at the expense of the QID.

14.exd5 exd5 15.♗e1 ♜b8 16.c5 ♜c8 17.♘f3 ♜e4



This used to be one of the most topical positions in this variation back in the day. The world's top players like Karpov and Kramnik had been unsuccessful in proving White's advantage. However, Topalov came up with not only a new move, but a completely different approach to the position. Instead of trying to squeeze an edge based on a better pawn structure, he set the board on fire:

18. ♜xe4!

This exchange sacrifice completely changes the nature of the fight. Suddenly, it becomes concrete, dynamic and imbalanced. Even though it is not among the top 3 'comp' choices, Topalov's team had prepared it already in 2005 for the FIDE World Championship tournament in San Luis. A good thing about strong opening novelties is that they can be stored for later use, as in this case.

In this position, Kramnik tried to get a positional edge with 18. ♜e5, but Peter Leko's defense proved to be too solid in their 2004 encounter: 18... ♜xc3 19. ♜d3 ♜c7 20. ♜xc3 ♜e8 21. a4 b4 22. ♜f3 ♜f8 23. ♜e3 f6=. Other possibilities are 18. ♜b2 and 18. ♜c1 ♜f6 19. ♜d2, but Topalov's move is the most interesting, at the very least.

18...dxe4 19. ♜e5

Ever since White fixed the pawn structure with c4-c5, Black's c6-pawn has been a positional weakness for him. However, it was difficult to get to this

pawn with a closed center. The exchange sacrifice has enabled Topalov to target it more easily with his light-squared bishop. Black should, therefore, not allow him to take on e4. His next move, while risky-looking, is critical.

19... ♔d5!

Something passive like 19... ♔c7?! would let White achieve complete domination in the center with 20. ♕xe4 ♔b7 21. ♕f3.

20. ♔e1!

The queen is placed better on e1 than c2 for tactical reasons in the variation 20...f5.

20... ♔f5

20...f5?! weakens the kingside too much and White just needs to open the position with 21.f3. The same move would not work in case of 20. ♔c2, because of 20... ♕xc5! 21.dxc5 ♔xc5 22. ♔h1 b4, and Black wins material.

21.g4!

Another strong non-computer move that takes care of Black's counterplay connected with ...f7-f6. Topalov's preparation has obviously been very deep and designed to create the most practical problems for his opponents.

The first suggestion of the engine is 21.f3, but after 21...e3! 22. ♕xe3 (22.g4 is now met with the counter-attack 22...f6!⇒) 22...f6⇒, Black is doing fine.

21... ♕g6 22.f3



Now 22...e3 is simply met by 23. ♕xe3, when 23...f6 would not work due to

24. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ and 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$. This is the critical moment for Aronian because he has a wide choice of possibilities. Once again, he chooses the most principled-looking one.

22...b4

This move is riskier than the alternatives, as we will see, but is still very much playable.

However, from a pure theoretical standpoint, Black's best option is to secure the c-pawn:

A) 22... $\mathbb{Q}bc8!$ and after the more or less forced sequence 23. $fxe4 \mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $fxg6$ 26. $e5 \mathbb{Q}h4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}e7=$, Black would be fine. If Aronian had played this way and drawn the game with ease, we may not have even been talking about the brilliance of Topalov's sacrifice, but humans are not computers and mistakes are inevitable, especially in such complex positions;

B) Another feasible option for Black is a counter-sacrifice to free up his play: 22... $\mathbb{Q}xc5!?$ 23. $dxc5 \mathbb{Q}xc5+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1 b4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b2 exf3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf3 \mathbb{Q}fe8$, when I would still take White due to an extra piece on the board, despite the engine's 0.00 evaluation.

23. $fxe4 \mathbb{Q}e6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b2 \mathbb{Q}f6$

The strong knight has to be eliminated and this is the right way. 24... $f6!?$ would have unnecessarily weakened the light squares. White could take advantage of that with 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g3 f5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f1!↑$.

25. $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$

At this point, it is difficult to guess how deep Topalov was in his preparation. This move surely looks as the simplest and strongest continuation, although the alternative 25. $d5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g3↑$ does not look too shabby, either.



25... ♜xc6 26.e5 ♜a6 27.♗fe8?!

Black wants and should try to invade the second rank with ... ♜e8-e2, but this natural move is just a slight inaccuracy.

As is well-known, one of the most difficult strategic questions in a game is how to arrange the rooks on the back rank. Here, it was better to play the less intuitive 27... ♜be8!, based on an obscure tactical point. After 28.♘f1 he can play 28... ♜d3 and White cannot answer with 29.♘f4, as he could in case of 27... ♜fe8 because the b8-rook would be under attack! Now, with the rook on f8, Black wins with 29... ♜e2!.

It should also be noted that 27... ♜xf6? allows White to mobilize his connected pawns with 28.♘f2!±, followed by d4-d5, etc.

28.♘f1!

This looks even stronger than 28.♘g3.

28... ♜e2!

Aronian is up to the task. 28... ♜d3?! would run into 29.♘f4±, when 29... ♜e2 would not be possible, as explained above.



29. ♔f2!!

In a later game, White chose the inferior continuation 29. ♔xe2?! ♕xe2, and with the rook on the second rank, Black had good counterplay in the endgame: 30. ♔c1 ♔e4 31. ♔f1 ♕c2 32. ♔f4 ♕d8† 0-1 (81) Banikas-A.Sokolov, Greece tt 2006.

The text is an extremely powerful quiet move that leaves a problem-like impression: the queen has triangulated from e1-f1-f2 in the last three moves. It is all based on a concrete approach to finding the best move in each consecutive position. Strangely enough, Black's position becomes very difficult now, even though he did not make any serious mistakes so far.

29... ♔xg4 30.h3

This is the point. White gets the h2-square for his king and fights against the ... ♕e8-e2 threat.

30... ♔g5

Aronian gives up on the 31... ♕e2 threat and focuses on trading the bishops with 31... ♔e4. 30... ♔h5 would be met well with 31. ♕e1±.

31. ♔c1!

A very strong move. Not only does it prevent 31... ♔e4, but the bishop will be a menace on the h2-b8 diagonal.

31... ♔h5

Black should try to avoid the endgame at any cost. 31... ♔xf6 32. ♔xf6 gxf6 33. ♔f2 looks depressing for him.

32. ♜f4 ♕bd8

Unfortunately for Black, 32... ♕e2 does not work because after 33. ♜f1, both black rooks are hanging (the other one after 34. ♜f3).

33.c6

The pawns are now in motion, which is not a good development for Black.

33... ♜e4 34.c7 ♕c8 35. ♜e1!

When it rains, it pours. White can finally activate his worst-placed piece with a strong effect. Black's defenses can't hold any more.

35... ♜g6

The problem for Aronian is that 35... ♜xg2 has a direct refutation:

36. ♕xe8+ ♕xe8 37. ♜xg2! ♜d1+ 38. ♛h2 g6, and now the key is the centralizing move 39. ♜e4! ♕c8 40.d5+-, followed by 41.d6, etc.



36. ♕xe4!

Most people do not sacrifice an exchange on e4 in their whole life; Topalov does it twice in the same game!

36... ♕xe4 37.d5

We have a throwback to Troianescu-Petrosian from the previous chapter where two bishops and connected pawns completely outplay the rooks. The rest is agony for Aronian.

37... ♕ce8 38.d6 ♕e1+ 39. ♛h2 ♜f5 40. ♜g3 g6 41. ♜g5 ♜xg5 42. ♜xg5 ♕d1 43. ♜c6 ♕e2+ 44. ♛g3

Black resigned.

What can one say about this game? Aronian made virtually no mistakes, maybe one or two inaccuracies, and he was still beaten convincingly.

Topalov's home preparation was simply brilliant, as well as his resolute and precise play afterwards.

Many players followed in his footsteps and began paying attention to the psychological aspects of opening preparation: looking for continuations that would be the most unpleasant for the opponent, those where he could fall for a tactical trap, or where he could spend a lot of thinking time trying to 'refute' the novelty or just find the best strategic direction. Such a creative approach is not only practically useful, it also enriches and deepens our understanding of chess.

Conclusion

- Psychology plays a big role in the nature and quality of decisions that we make over the board.
- It is possible to exert psychological pressure on your opponent with appropriate strategies, such as:
 - forcing him into a position he is not familiar with;
 - forcing him into a type of position he is uncomfortable playing;
 - changing the trend or nature of the position sharply;
 - getting into a position where finding the best move is not obvious or simple;
 - putting pressure on him by playing for the initiative, regardless of material or positional disadvantages.
- Sacrificing is one of the best ways to cause your opponent to feel uncomfortable, confused or indecisive, and preferably induce him into making a mistake.
- One of the features of modern chess is that many strong players understand the importance of putting psychological pressure on their opponent from the very start of the game.

- In the critical moment, when psychological pressure, positional pressure, time pressure, fatigue and other factors compound, even a world-class grandmaster can blunder.
- For any competitive chess player, it is important to gather as much information about his opponent before the game to help him to decide on the course of action that may be the most unpleasant for the opponent, both as a pre-game strategy and critical over-the-board decisions.
- To get relevant information about the opponent, one should investigate the opponent's key games and get answers to the following questions:
 - Which kinds of positions does he like and which ones doesn't he feel comfortable in?
 - Does he solve problems primarily using concrete calculation or intuition?
 - How does he tolerate ambiguity and tension?
 - How does he fare in positions with material imbalances?
 - Does he rely on deep theoretical preparation or does he like to improvise over the board?
 - How does he handle time pressure?
 - Is he in a good competitive form or not?
- The different profiles of opponents require different psychological approaches.
- Young players are becoming an increasingly prominent group in tournaments, so it is important to be psychologically prepared and create appropriate strategies for games against them.
- Most young players have their typical strengths and weaknesses. Their typical strengths revolve around 1) being concrete and 2) an optimistic outlook.
- Young players' typical weaknesses revolve around: 1) lack of experience and 2) lack of patience.
- The adjustment you have to make when the trend changes is primarily a psychological one.
- A good chess psychologist will not only react to a new trend; he will try to

change it himself, if he finds it appropriate. This may be a good strategy when the trend in the game is going your opponent's way and you want to stop it or reverse it.

- One of the best methods of changing the trend is disturbing the material balance on the board.
- Many times, an unexpected turn of events throws the opponent off balance and forces him to commit a mistake.
- In modern chess, the psychological aspects of opening preparation have become extremely important.
- A creative approach, where one looks for new opening ideas (often sacrifices) that would be the most unpleasant for the opponent from a psychological point of view, can help you reap great dividends from your opening preparation.
- In the modern era, the greatest value of opening surprises is in their practicality, rather than their theoretical importance.

CHAPTER 5

Test exercises

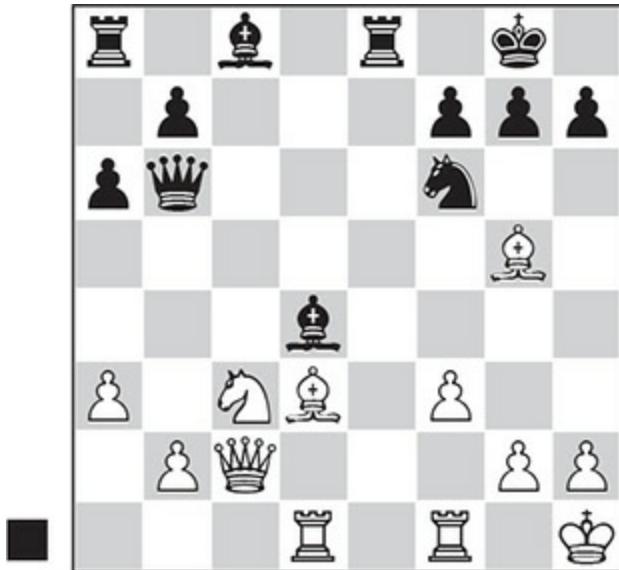
Exercise 31



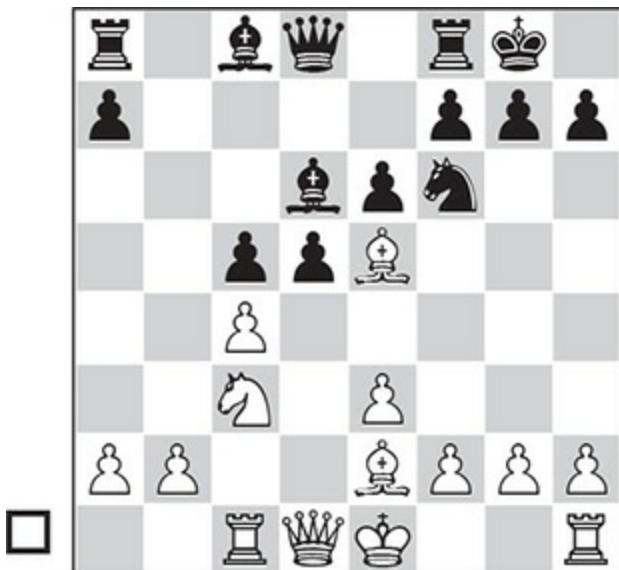
Exercise 32



Exercise 33

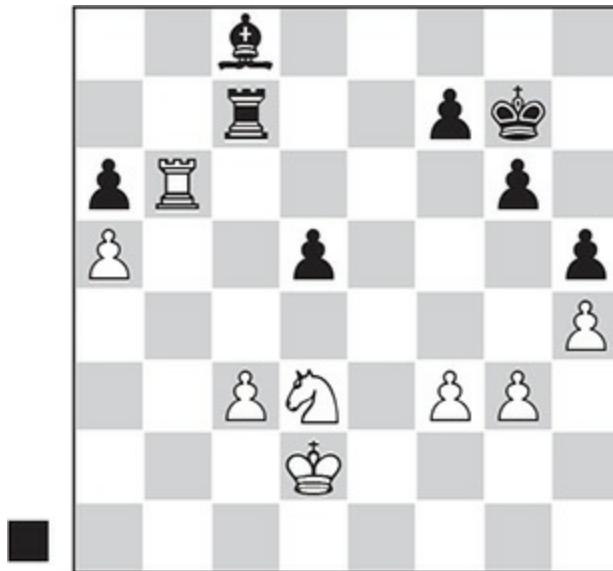


Exercise 34

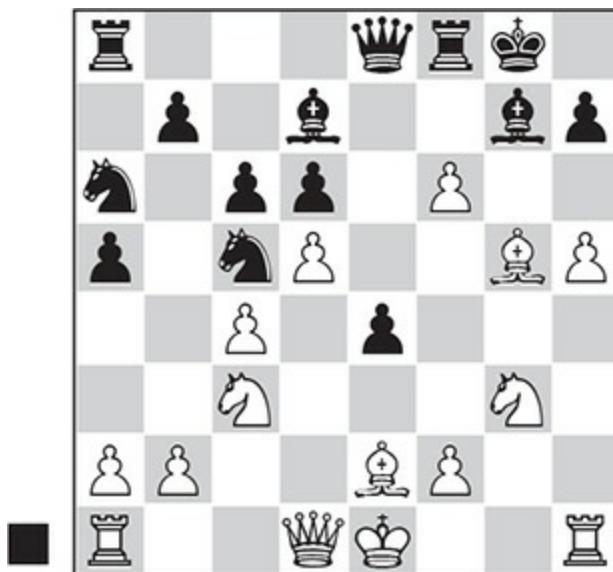


Would you take on d6 or on f6?

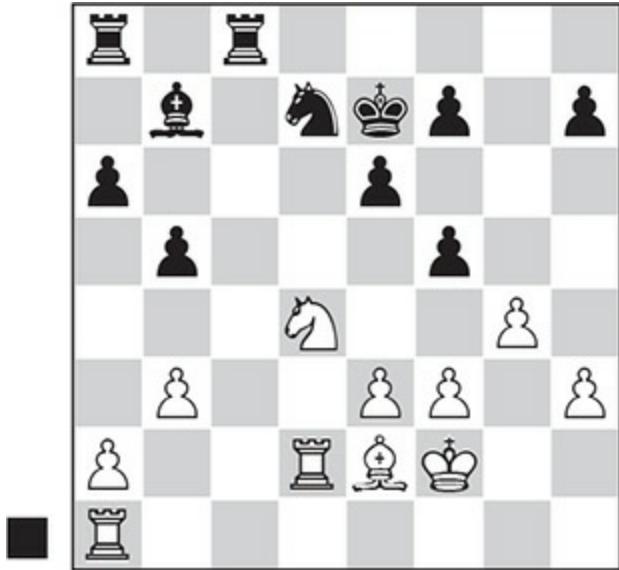
Exercise 35



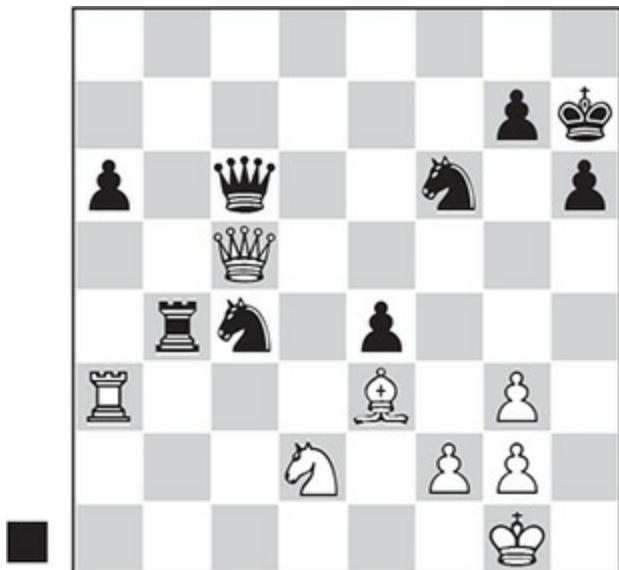
Exercise 36



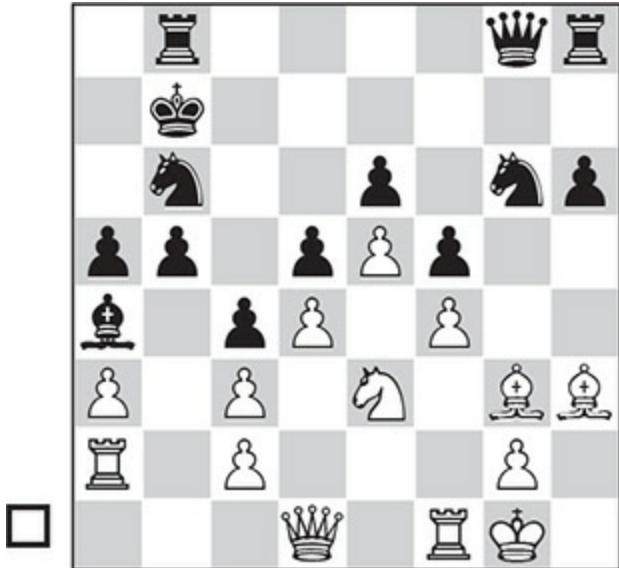
Exercise 37



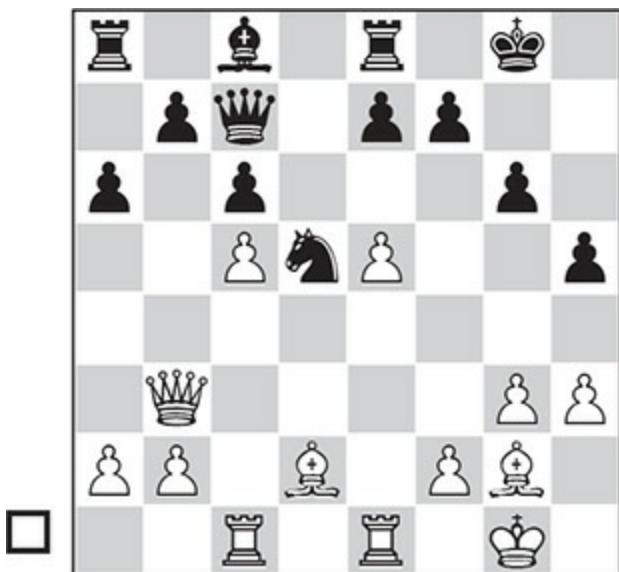
Exercise 38



Exercise 39



Exercise 40



CHAPTER 6

Is it good to be greedy in chess?

‘Greed, for lack of a better word, is good.’ Those who have seen the 1987 movie *Wall Street* will surely remember this controversial statement by Michael Douglas, playing the role of the slick financier Gordon Gekko. The point he wanted to get across in his captivating speech was that greed is the primary force that has propelled humanity to progress and evolve.

Is it good to be greedy in chess? It is difficult to give a categorical answer to this question.

On one hand, without a desire to get what you want (material, positional or other types of advantages) you can hardly win a game of chess. On the other hand, you have to consider various limitations (positional, your own, or imposed by the opponent) and sometimes you need to restrain your ambition. The balancing act between the two is far from easy. The goal of this chapter is to analyze this subject from several different angles.

To take or not to take?

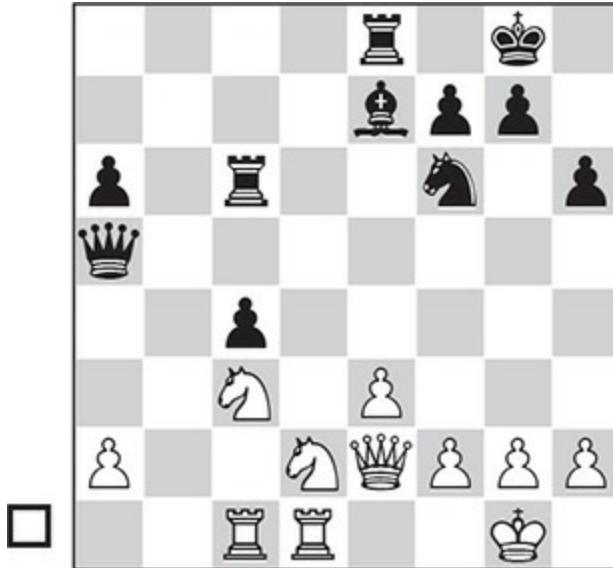
Sometimes, your opponent leaves material ‘en prise’ for whatever reason. You are tempted to take it, but the voice of reason tells you to think twice before doing it. What if the opponent has set up a trap for you? What if he gets unexpected counterplay? People usually do not give material for nothing in return. In such cases, you should weigh your options carefully, because the wrong decision can often prove to be regrettable.

Game 92

Laszlo Szabo

Tigran Petrosian

Zurich ct 1953 (9)



This position is strikingly similar to the famous Bernstein-Capablanca game from 1914. Bernstein lost that game due to an elementary back-rank tactic after he took the poisoned c-pawn. Szabo probably knew his classics, but he made the same risky decision, nevertheless.

25.♘xc4?!

In this instance, White is not losing by force after taking the pawn, but the pin along the c-file will be very inconvenient for him.

White's position would remain slightly worse, but not easy to break if he had refrained from taking the pawn: 25.♖c2 ♖ec8 26.♘f3 ♗b4 27.♖dc1 – very similar to Capablanca's game.

25...♚c7



Black prepares to triple on the c-file and for this reason alone, it was much more practical to decline the pawn offer. However, there is no way back any more, so White should try to make the most out of this dubious position.

Szabo's continuation is the best.

26. ♜a4

The knight has to move, and the other two options were inferior:

A) 26. ♜b1 ♜c8 27. ♜bd2 looks fairly safe, but the problem is that after 27...a5!, which prepares 28... ♜b4, White's knights get stuck and Black wins material; and

B) 26. ♜d5 ♜xd5 27. ♜xd5 ♜c8 28. ♜d4 ♜f6 29. ♜e4 ♜c5, when the knight is under a perpetual pin and this should be winning for Black eventually.

26... ♜c8 27. ♜d4

Still not a decisive mistake, but White is walking a tight rope here. His pieces are in complete disarray. He should have realized that his best chance was to give up some material and play a slightly worse endgame after 27. ♜ab6! ♜xb6 28. ♜xb6 ♜xc1 29. ♜xc8 ♜xc8=.

27... ♜e8!



A purposeful move – Petrosian wastes no time. Not only does he prepare to transfer the knight to d6, but he also clears the f6-square to attack the awkwardly-placed white rook on d4.

28.e4?

This is entirely inadequate – Szabo probably panicked here.

A) 28. ♜ab2 would also not help, because of 28... ♜f6+, when we see another important point of 27... ♜e8: the rook on d4 is pinned because of the b2-knight;

B) White should have taken advantage of the only drawback of Petrosian's last move, which weakened the d7-square, and play 28. ♜d1!, when after 28... ♜d6 (just not 28... ♜f6? 29. ♜d7) 29. ♜ab6 ♜xb6 30. ♜xb6 ♜xc1 31. ♜xc8 ♜xc8=,



analysis diagram

an endgame similar to the one after 27. $\mathbb{Q}ab6$ would arise.

28... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29. $e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

This is such a simple tactic that it does not even require an exclamation mark. It is difficult to understand what White missed when playing 28. $e4$. Black is winning in many ways now.

30. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$

30... $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ was winning too, but this is the most elegant solution.

31. $\mathbb{Q}ab6$

In case of 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, Black wins with 31... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (33. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4-$), and now 33... $\mathbb{Q}xa4!$, a deflection ‘a la Capablanca’, decides the outcome.

31... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$



Ironically, the knight is lost exactly on the same square on which it accepted the ‘Greek gift’ on move 25.

33. $\mathbb{R}e7$ $\mathbb{R}xc4!$ 34. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{N}c6$ 35. $h3$ $\mathbb{R}c1$ 36. $\mathbb{R}xc1$ $\mathbb{N}xc1+$ 37. $\mathbb{R}h2$ $\mathbb{N}c4$ 38. $\mathbb{N}f3$ $\mathbb{N}xa2$ 39. $\mathbb{R}a7$ 0-1

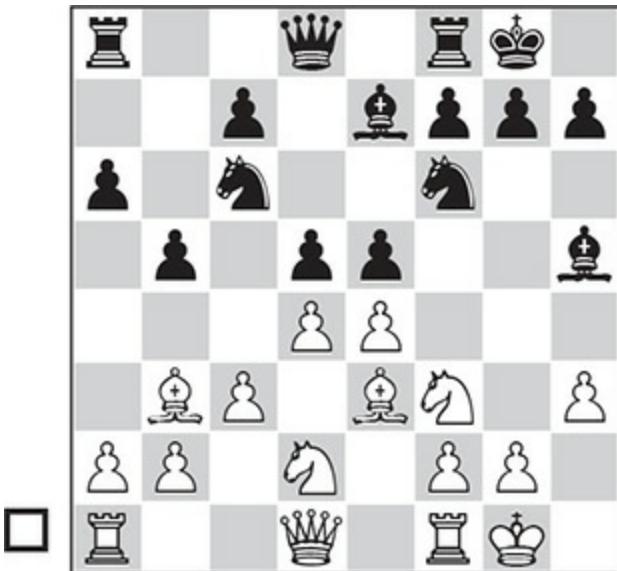
Let us see an example where a very strong player showed a rare moment of greediness, which immediately backfired on him.

Game 93

Efim Geller

Boris Spassky

Moscow zt 1964 (10)



Spassky has maximized the tension in the center by playing ...d6-d5. After a long think, Geller contrives a forced sequence of moves with the aim of winning Black's central pawn.

12.g4 g6 13.dxe5?!

Instead of trying to win the pawn, he would have done better if he had just played for a positional advantage with 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♗xd8 ♖fxd8 17.♗fd1±. In a fairly symmetrical pawn structure, the difference between the activity of the white and black bishops is huge.

13... ♘xe4 14.♗b1?!



This was Geller's original idea. The d5-pawn cannot be defended. Sometimes, when we see that we can win free material like that, we get satisfied on a subconscious level and we do not calculate further with the same level of commitment. This does not happen too often to players of Geller's strength and experience, but it probably did in this case. However, Spassky did not mind sacrificing the pawn, as we will see.

14... ♜c8!

This strong move prepares ... ♜f8-d8, while also hinting at White's weakened kingside. Only now did Geller realize the flaw in his plan. There is no good way to capture the hanging pawn because Black obtains a dangerous initiative in return.

Probably frustrated with the outcome of the battle for the center, Geller tries to change the nature of the position:

15. ♜d4

Let us see what happens if White takes the pawn.

A) In case of 15. ♜xd5, Black has the nasty pin 15... ♜d8 and if White tries to obtain compensation with 16. ♜xc6 (16. ♜d4 is not much better as after 16... ♜xd4 17. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 18.cxd4 c5 19. ♜c3 ♜b7, White's kingside looks like a Swiss cheese) 16... ♜xd1 17. ♜xd1, Black attacks anyway with 17...h5!;

B) On the other hand, 15. ♜xd5 is met by 15... ♜a5 when White's queen is misplaced, giving Black several tempi to obtain a strong initiative: 16. ♜d1 ♜d8 17. ♜e2 ♜xb3 18.axb3 h5!.

15... ♜xe5 16.f4

This threatens to win the piece with f4-f5, but Spassky had a ready response:



16...c5!

This counter-attack was Spassky's point behind capturing on e5. Geller has virtually no choice now but to accept the exchanges in the center that favor his opponent.

17.fxe5

Every knight retreat has some drawback.

- A) 17.♘f3 is bad because Black gets a winning attack with 17...♗xg4 18.hxg4 ♗xg4+;
- B) 17.♘e2 has the same problem – 17...♗xg4; while
- C) 17.♘c2 allows 17...c4–+.

17...cxd4 18.cxd4 ♗d7±



After the dust has settled, Black can claim an advantage, mainly because of White's shaky kingside. In the next stage of the game, he correctly proceeds to open up the center, magnifying White's weaknesses.

19.♗d2 f6! 20.♕c1 ♔h8 21.♗f4?

Geller commits a serious mistake under pressure. By bringing his bishop to the h2-b8 diagonal, he tries to create counterplay with ♕c1-c7. However, Spassky saw further...

Instead, he should have traded Black's strongest pieces at once: 21.♗xe4 ♗xe4 22.♕c2 ♜.

21...fxe5 22.♗xe5 ♔g5!

A brilliant reply. Spassky ignores Geller's active idea and just goes for the white king.

23.♕c7



23... ♕xc7!

The queen will not be needed in the attack.

24. ♜xc7 ♜e3+ 25. ♛g2 ♜xd2 26. ♜xf8+ ♜xf8

Black has four pieces around the poor white king and is ready to play ...

♜g6-e4+ on the next move. Geller's response is pretty much forced.

27. ♜xd5 ♜f2+ 28. ♛g3

28. ♛h1 avoids the mating finale, but Black would be a full piece up after 28... ♜f1+ 29. ♜xf1 ♜xf1+-.

28... ♜f1+ 29. ♛h4 h6



White's king is in a mating net. 30... $\mathbb{Q}g5\#$ is threatened.

30. $\mathbb{Q}d8 \mathbb{Q}f8!$

And White has no good defense against the bishop check from the other side, so he resigned. A beautiful game.

Geller was punished for trying to win a central pawn at any cost, while in the first game Szabo lost because he was greedily holding onto his extra pawn. In the next game, the opposite happened. Artur Jussupow's lack of greed in the critical position is what cost him an important win in the 1989 Candidates semifinal match against Anatoly Karpov.

Game 94

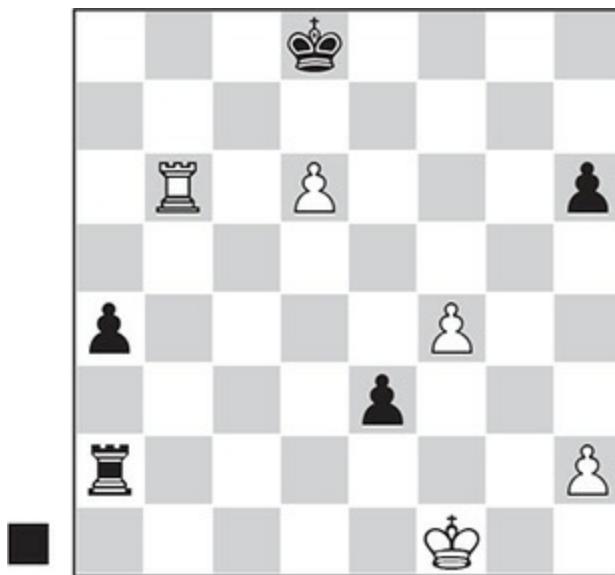
Anatoly Karpov

2755

Artur Jussupow

2610

London ct m 1989 (5)

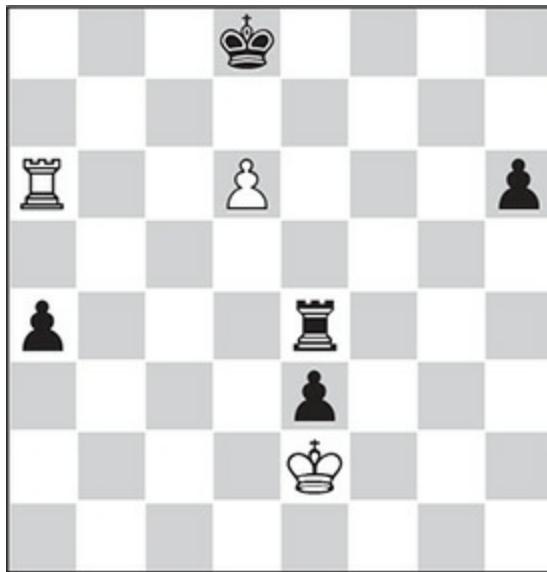


Jussupow banked on being faster with his passed pawns and played

38...a3?

However, as his former coach, the late, great Mark Dvoretsky pointed out: 'In this ending 'materialism' is appropriate – Black wins easily by eliminating

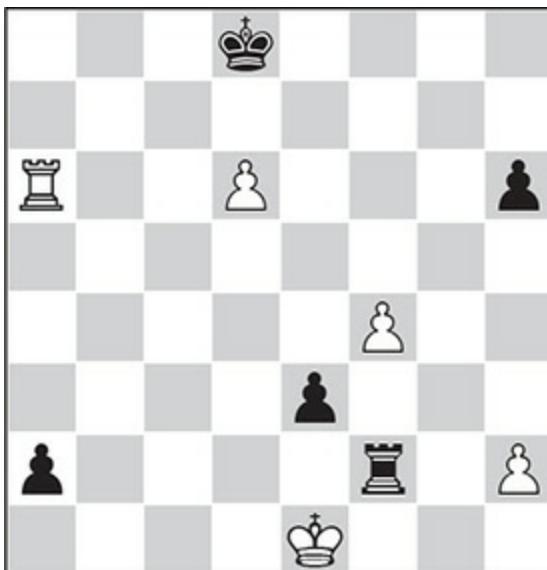
the enemy pawns.' 38... $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 39. $\mathbb{R}a6$ (or 39.f5 $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5-$ +) 39... $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$,



analysis diagram

and the rook assumes a perfect position on e4, protecting both the a- and e-pawns. It is untouchable because if 42. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, 42...e2 promotes on the next move. One possible variation is 42. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ h5 44. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$, with a technical win for Black.

39. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ a2

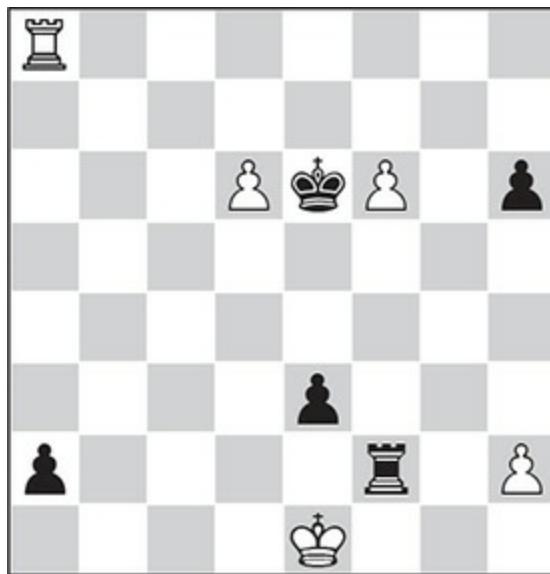


Things look grim for White. Black just needs to stretch his rook along the second rank and he wins White's rook by promoting the a-pawn. However, Caïssa was on Karpov's side in this game, as he finds an unlikely saving resource.

41.f5! ♜d7

The point is that the planned 41... ♜xh2 does not work due to 42.f6 ♜h1+ 43.♔e2 a1♚ 44.♜xa1 ♜xa1 45.f7, and Black is even losing!

42.f6 ♚e6 43.♜a8!



The only move, but enough to achieve a draw. Now White's passed pawns are just as dangerous as the black ones, so Jussupow has to eliminate them.

43... ♜xd6 44.f7 ♜xf7 45.♜xa2

But, due to simplifications, this leads to a drawn rook endgame despite the extra pawn for Black.

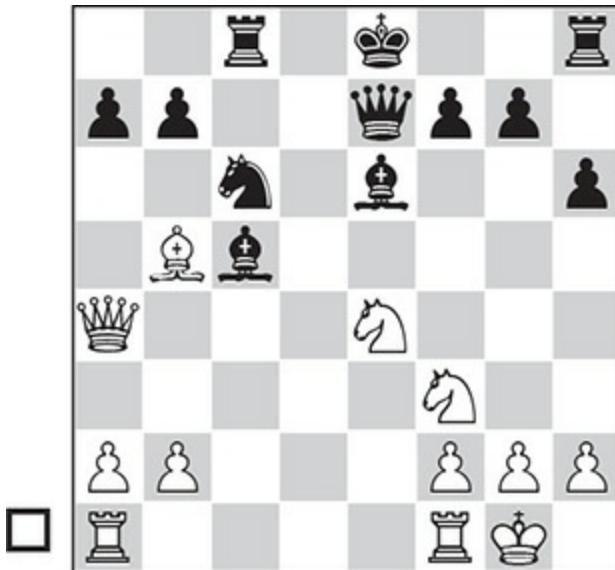
45... ♜e5 46.♜a6

And the draw was agreed.

Here is another example that shows in which kind of situation one should not pass up on opportunity to take material.

Game 95

Davorin Kuljasevic



Krejci had made a mistake in the opening and ended up in this unenviable position. White has many promising continuations, and I took my time to figure out which one would give me the greatest advantage. Part of the problem was that some of them promised a material advantage (an extra pawn) and others a stable positional advantage. This was not a simple choice, but with the clock ticking, a decision had to be made and, in the end, I went for

16. ♜ xc5?

My intention with this move was to ruin Black's pawn structure and play for a long-term positional advantage. But when I thought about it after the game, the best I could eventually get from this positional advantage was an extra pawn in the endgame, which is what I could have got right away! So, my decision to forego taking the pawn immediately did not make sense.

There are two ways to win a pawn:

A) 16. ♜ ac1 ♜ b6 17. ♜ xc6+ bxc6 18. ♜ e5 0-0 19. ♜ xc6 ♔ c7±, but I thought that this was not so simple because the presence of many pieces on the board gives Black more options to obtain compensation somehow. Nevertheless, a pawn is a pawn and White does not risk anything by taking it,

so this was still a better choice than 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$;

B) However, the second option was even simpler: 16. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ and White gets a pawn-up rook endgame by force: 16...0-0 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathfrak{Q}c7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathfrak{Q}xc6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6\pm$.



analysis diagram

Clearly, White does not risk anything by playing like this and Black is facing a difficult defense in the rook endgame. Due to the simplifications, maybe his draw-to-loss ratio is 50:50, but White should not mind such a scenario, in principle.

For some reason, I thought that this was too little and decided to ‘play for more’ in a positional manner. In hindsight, I think that it was the wrong decision.

16... $\mathfrak{Q}xc5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $\mathfrak{Q}b6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

Another one of my overly sophisticated ideas was 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ bxc6 19. $\mathfrak{Q}a3$ c5 20. $\mathfrak{Q}a4+$, forcing Black’s king to walk, but then I realized that this is nothing special, since Black can continue 20... $\mathfrak{Q}f8$ 21. b3 g6, and White’s edge is only minimal.

18...0-0 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 21. b3 \pm



So, this is the position that I was aiming for. White has a big positional advantage, obviously. But, as I said earlier, if Black defends well and, say, manages to grease the queen trade with the e6-pawn as collateral, we will still reach a pawn-up double rook endgame, which I could have gotten in the first place by playing 16. $\mathbb{Q}e5$.

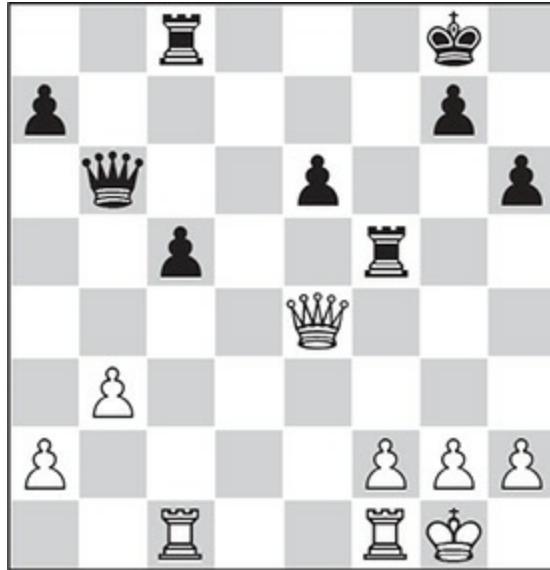
21... $\mathbb{R}f5?!$

This is slightly inaccurate. It was more important to fight for the d-file with 21...c5 22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{R}fd8\pm$ or even 22... $\mathbb{R}cd8!?$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{R}d2\leftarrow$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}e4?!$

This square should be reserved for the rook, while the queen is placed best on c4, from where it exerts pressure on both the isolated black pawns. Thus, it was better to continue 22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{R}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{R}fe1$ c5 24. $\mathbb{R}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25. $\mathbb{R}ce1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 26. g3, with definite positional pressure. As in the Carlsen-Aronian game, where Carlsen sacrificed a pawn to achieve a similar pawn structure on the kingside, White might combine an attack on the weak pawns with threats to the slightly exposed black king.

22...c5



The rest of the game is not particularly interesting for our topic. After a few more uninspired decisions, I let my advantage slip and could only wonder what would have happened if I had taken the free pawn when I had a chance.

23. ♜c4?!

23. ♜ce1 ♜c6 24. ♜d1!±.

23... ♜d8 24. ♜e3 ♜d4 25. ♜e1 ♜fd5 26. ♜c2 e5 27. ♜ce2 a5 28. h3 a4 29. bxa4 c4 30. ♜c3?!

30. ♜g3±.

30... ♜c7 31. ♜c2 ♜a5 32. ♜xa5 ♜xa5 33. ♜b1 ♜xa4 34. ♜b5 ♜d1+ 35. ♛h2 ♜a1 36. ♜xe5 ♜1xa2 37. ♜xa2 ♜xa2 38. ♜c5 ♜xf2 ½-½

Clearly, this was a case of ‘overthinking’ a simple choice between an immediate material and a long-term positional advantage. As a rule of thumb, if you can win material without your opponent getting any significant compensation for it, you should be greedy and forget about the sophisticated positional gains. Very often, you will trade them for a material advantage later, anyway.

Learning the hard way

How do you feel about taking a ‘poisoned’ pawn? Some people would immediately decline the very thought of doing it; others might have some reservations but would check for its correctness; while there are also those for

whom taking the pawn would be the first choice if it gives them chances to play for a win. As we discussed in the first chapter, a lot depends on an individual's level of risk tolerance. Personal experience also plays a very important role in this type of decision, as you will see in the next examples.

Game 96

Benjamin Finegold

2513

Davorin Kuljasevic

2547

Lubbock 2009 (3)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.a4 e6 6.♗g5 ♘bd7 7.e3 ♗a5 8.cxd5!?

This was a new move to me, even though it had been played by strong players before. I had been familiar only with 8.♗d2 ♘b4 9.♗c2.

8...♘xd5

I figured that this was a principled continuation because this is what people do in a similar position in the Cambridge Springs Variation (without the moves ...a7-a6 and a2-a4). 8...exd5 would have been more solid and perhaps justified, due to White's early weakening of the b4-square.

My opponent's next move caught me by surprise.



9.e4!

An ambitious pawn sacrifice which, as I learned later, has been played before on American soil by grandmasters Ehlvest and Yermolinsky, which is how Finegold might have picked up this idea.

9... ♕xc3 10.bxc3 ♔xc3+?!

I was not really in the habit of taking such pawns before developing first, but I had no choice in this position. However, between the text move and 10...

♘f6, the latter is clearly better, because it forces White to play 11.♕d3, when 11...♔xc3+ cannot be met by 12.♕d2 and after 12.♔e2 the queen can return home: 12...♗a5 13.♕d2 ♗d8, with a passive, but solid enough position. White cannot develop a serious initiative since his king is uncastled.

11.♕d2 ♗b2 12.♖b1 ♗a3

I did not think that there was a big difference between this and 10...♘f6, because my queen can always return to d6. However, after my opponent's next move

13.a5!



I came to realize that even if I castle and retreat the queen, I would not be able to obtain active play at all. Disillusioned with such a bleak outlook, I came up with a 'brilliant' active idea:

13...c5??

This cuts off the queen's access to the d6-square. However, I was certain that my queen could only be harassed to the point of a three-fold repetition (♖b1-

a1-b1).

Even though White has strong pressure for the pawn after 13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{B}d6$ 15.0-0 0-0 16.e5 $\mathbb{B}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ it was still necessary to continue like this.

14. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{B}b2$

And then came...

15. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$



Black cannot prevent 16. $\mathbb{Q}a2$, trapping the queen. You know that feeling of horror and embarrassment when you realize that you have just made a spectacularly stupid mistake and you will lose the game. I sat there for a few more minutes in that state, trying to figure out what had gone wrong, before I extended my hand in resignation. On the bright side, this loss was not in vain as it helped Ben Finegold get his deserved last GM norm in this tournament.

One would think that such a painful loss would have taught me something about wandering with my queen in enemy territory, but only two years later, this happened:

Game 97

Zdenko Kozul

Davorin Kuljasevic

2560

Rijeka 2011 (7)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3 b6 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♘xd5 ♗xd5 9.♗e2!?



In this game, too, I was out of book early. In fact, this was a strong novelty by Kozul at that time, very much according to the principles of modern opening preparation that were discussed in the previous chapter. More popular continuations are 9.♗d3, 9.a3 and 9.♗xc7.

After a 40-minute think, I produced the ‘principled’ reply

9...♗b4+?!

There were many options for Black, but I tried to figure out which one would ‘punish’ White for playing a non-theoretical move. I was naive to think like this, because 9.♗e2 is a natural developing move that might even be the best move in the position upon further inspection. The point is that from e2, the bishop can easily be transferred to f3, threatening all sorts of nasty stuff, like in the variations:

- A) 9...c5 10.♗e5 cxd4 11.0-0!+–, with the inevitable 12.♗f3; or
- B) 9...♗d6 10.♗d2! ♗xf4 11.♗f3+–;
- C) Among other alternatives, I was not particularly inspired by the safe,

but somewhat passive 9... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$;

D) So probably the best choice was to play 9... $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11.0-0 c5, with good chances of equalizing.

10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Somehow, I did not think that Kozul would play like this. I can take the ‘poisoned’ pawn in two ways now. My idea was that in case of 10. $\mathbb{Q}f1$, Black can use the position of White’s king on f1 to prevent $\mathbb{Q}e2-f3$ with 10... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6=$.



10... $\mathbb{Q}xg2??$

After some calculation, I decided that this was safe. I will take the pawn and suffer a bit, but it cannot be that bad because his king is also in the center, I thought.

The right version of the ‘poisoned pawn variation’ is 10... $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ (now, there is no 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$) 12.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, with obvious compensation and some initiative for White, but nothing too alarming.

11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$



This had all been foreseen. I give a check, he moves, I play ...c7-c6 and escape with my queen to h4 on the next move. But Kozul's reply left me bewildered.

13.♔c3!

I had calculated only 13.♔c1, not really giving much thought to where the king would go. It seemed more natural for it to retreat than to move forward, but as it will transpire shortly, this counter-intuitive king move is winning and 13.♔c1 is not.

13...c6 14.h4! 1-0



My queen gets trapped in the same way as against Finegold (15. $\mathbb{Q}h2$), only on the other flank. With this, I also managed to beat my previous record of losing in 15 moves. This one lasted only 14 moves and remains my personal best to this day. The only more bizarre thing than the way I lost this game is that I am probably the only chess player in history who has managed to win an international tournament in which he lost a game in 14 moves!

On a more serious note, it is important to point out that 14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ would not have won in the same way because after 14...c6 15.h4, Black could save his queen with 15... $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$. This is why the king went to c3 – to keep his a1-rook open.

However, it seems like I may have learned my lesson the hard way, after all.

Game 98

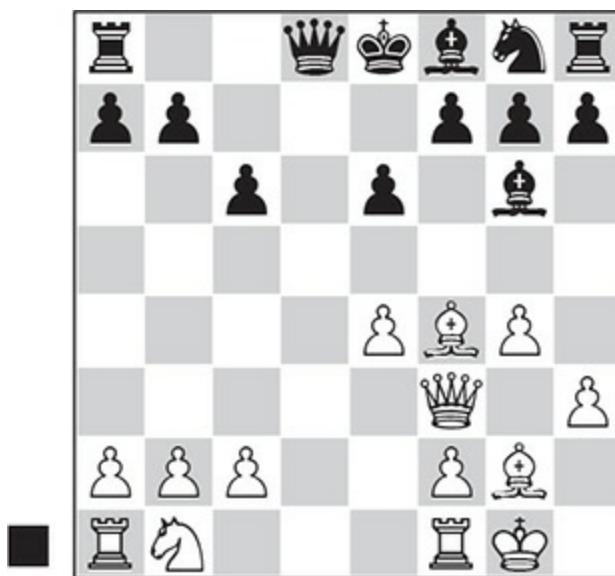
Pavel Eljanov

2706

Davorin Kuljasevic

2545

Biel 2018 (4)



After mixing up the move order in the opening, I ended up in a similarly uncheerful position as in the previous two games – out of book early and

having to solve some serious opening problems with black. However, this time I quickly rejected the idea to play too actively with my queen.

11... \mathbb{Q} c5

This is the best continuation, preparing to bring the queen to e7 and play ...e6-e5. I briefly considered 11... \mathbb{Q} f6 12. \mathbb{Q} d1 \mathbb{Q} b6,



analysis diagram

which wins the b2-pawn, but it took me less than a minute or two to dismiss it on general grounds. My previous negative experiences surely played a big part in that on a subconscious level. Indeed, after 13. \mathbb{Q} d2 \mathbb{Q} xb2? 14. \mathbb{Q} ab1 \mathbb{Q} xc2 15. \mathbb{Q} dc1 \mathbb{Q} xa2 16. \mathbb{Q} xb7, Black's material gains would be meaningless because White's attack is too strong.

12. \mathbb{Q} d1

A bit inaccurate.

White could have exerted more serious pressure with either 12. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} f6 13.h4! h5 14.g5 \mathbb{Q} d7 15. \mathbb{Q} a4 \mathbb{Q} e7 16. \mathbb{Q} ad1 0-0 17. \mathbb{Q} d2↑ or 12. \mathbb{Q} d2 \mathbb{Q} f6 13. \mathbb{Q} ad1 \mathbb{Q} e7 14. \mathbb{Q} c3!↑.

12... \mathbb{Q} e7

And Black eventually managed to get a reasonable position out of the opening.

One closing thought about the topic of poisoned pawns. It might be only my impression, but it seems that the new generations of players are ‘greedier’ for them. Probably due to their extensive work with strong engines, they have a more concrete approach and a good understanding of when they can take what’s offered and when not. Take the next game, for example.

Game 99

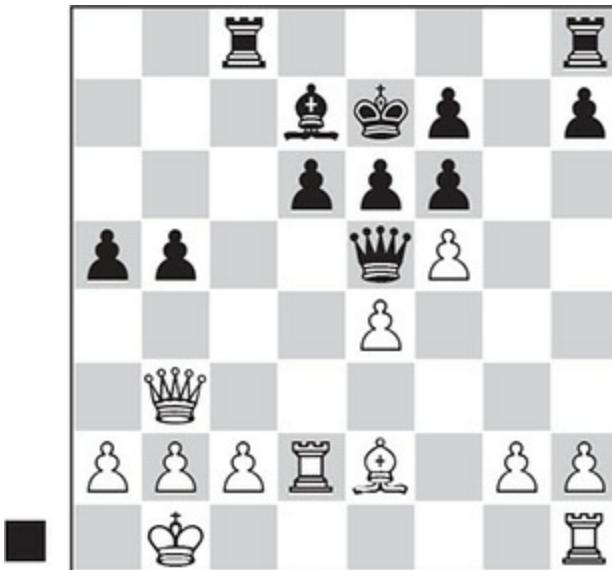
David Ledger

2168

Kirill Alekseenko

2639

Porto Carras tt 2018 (1)



White's last move was 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, offering the ‘poisoned’ e4-pawn to be taken. As this was one of the many games that I followed in the live transmission of the event, I kept coming to it every 5-10 minutes to check on the progress. However, the position had been fixed for a while, and it seemed that Black was deliberately taking a lot of time on his decision, which was interesting because he had played the previous moves fairly quickly. I tried to understand what he was thinking about and then it dawned on me that he actually considered taking the pawn on e4.

Now, I am not a big Sicilian expert, but I know that in many branches of this

opening, Black should be very careful not to allow the opening of the e-file while his king is still on it. The knight sacrifices on d5 and f5 for this purpose are well-known, while particularly in the variation in question (the Rauzer Attack), White sometimes even plays e4-e5 (when Black can take the pawn in three ways), just to open up the files and diagonals for the attack.

Nevertheless, after almost a half-an-hour contemplation, the young Russian played

21... ♜xe4!?

A brave and concrete decision. Where many people would decline the pawn offer as a matter of principle, Alekseenko saw an opportunity to tip the balance in his favor.

A more positional alternative was 21...b4 22. ♖hd1 ♖c6, when Black should be slightly better. He could continue putting pressure with ... ♖hc8, ... ♖c6-b6 and ...a5-a4, but it might also be possible that this is not too much if White plays carefully, and that Alekseenko looked for something more promising.

22.fxe6 fxe6 23. ♜g3

Black definitely did not miss this double threat when he took the e4-pawn.

After

23...d5



he was ready to get his king to d6 in case of a check on g7. This is the critical

position for White, because the initiative is in his hands and 24. $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ is not the only move in the position. After thinking for five minutes, he still went for the obvious

24. $\mathbb{Q}g7+?!$,

trying to restore the material balance by taking on f6 next. However, I am afraid that this is exactly the position that Black wanted to achieve when he took the e4-pawn, as we shall see shortly.

It was better not to be greedy and just continue playing for the initiative with 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$.



analysis diagram

White has three open files for his major pieces and Black has to watch out for $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ sacrifices. In addition, after 24... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ (in case of 24... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, 25. $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ works better for White, since 25... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ gives him an opportunity to expose Black's king with a sacrifice on d5) 25. $\mathbb{Q}f2$, he seizes a dark-squared diagonal (g1-a7) for queenside intrusion. After 25... $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e1$,



analysis diagram

he can continue by lifting one of his rooks and attacking via the third or fourth rank, or just pushing his kingside pawns.

In short, Black would be up a pawn, but would definitely have to defend. This is the risk he was taking when he took on e4, but since White did not react in the best way, it paid off.

24... ♜d6



25. ♔xf6?

White gets his sacrificed pawn back, but by doing so, he transfers the initiative back into Black's hands. It was still not too late to play for the initiative with 25. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 26. $\mathbb{N}hd1\mathbb{Q}$.

25... $\mathbb{N}hf8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g7$

In case of 26. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ or any other queen move, Black forces the favorable queen trade with 26... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ $\mathbb{N}xf4\#$.

26... $\mathbb{N}g8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{N}cf8$

Everything comes with tempo now.

28. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $b4$

Black controls the whole board and White's queen cannot hide. He is forced to trade it:

29. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $h5\#$



As a result, Black gets a dominant position in the endgame. His king is now perfectly centralized, while the removal of the white e-pawn has opened up a corridor for his own e-pawn. You guessed it, Black eventually won simply by pushing it down the board.

If we come back to Black's decision to take the central pawn and analyze it in retrospect, we could argue that it was probably the best practical decision. He calculated a long line in which he saw that he would be clearly better if his opponent chose a natural, but wrong continuation. He took some risk by

giving his opponent the initiative, but he probably thought he could handle it. On the other hand, not taking the pawn would have meant he would have to maneuver positionally for some time and might not get another chance to win material. It was a high risk-high reward decision, and in the end it paid off. I have seen this kind of approach work out well in many contemporary games.

Subconscious greed

There are situations in which greed manifests itself as a non-willingness to give up material or loss aversion, as we discussed in the first chapter. This is a very subtle type of attachment to material that is hard-wired into our chess code. The thing is that in most variations that we calculate, our first candidate moves are usually ‘clean’ moves, i.e. those that do not imply material sacrifices. However, sometimes sacrificial ideas sneak into the positions under consideration, but we miss them because, subconsciously, we hold on to our material, whether it is by trying to preserve a material advantage or to keep the material balance.

I hope that the next several examples illustrate this phenomenon well enough.

Game 100

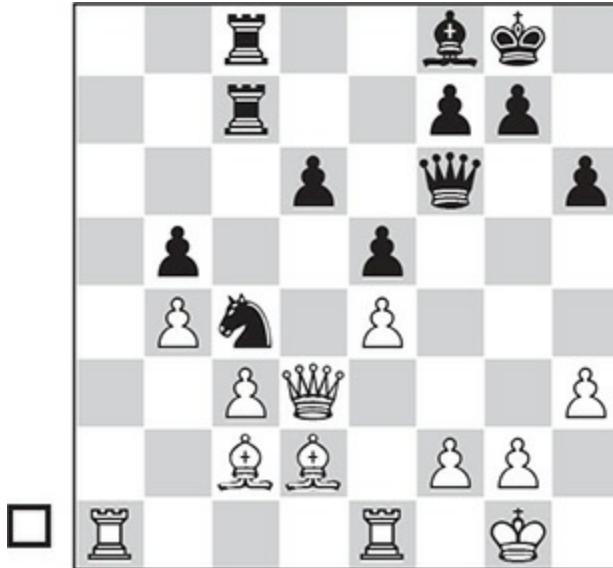
Michael Adams

2742

Maxim Matlakov

2689

Skopje tt 2015 (7)



White is slightly better due to a superior pawn structure and control over the a-file. Another positional disadvantage for Black is the passivity of his dark-squared bishop. That being said, Black is very solid, and the strong c4-knight compensates for a lot of other positional issues. Adams continued

27. ♜b3?!,

threatening to swap off the strong knight, while also inviting his opponent to capture the c3-pawn.

However, it is more methodical to continue 27. ♜c1±, avoiding the piece trade. White could slowly build up his position with maneuvers like ♜c2-b3, ♜e1-e2-a2, etc. Black would have very few active possibilities.

27... ♜xd2?!

What can be more natural than taking a free pawn? However, it seems that both players missed a strong intermediate move: 27...d5!.



analysis diagram

This counter-sacrifice opens up the dark-squared bishop, solving all Black's problems. Such moves can easily go under the radar if you look at the position superficially, because on a subconscious level, one would rather take a pawn than give one up.

Now it is rather White who has to be careful and simplify the position with 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (since 28. $exd5 \mathbb{Q}xd2$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd2 \mathbb{R}xc3\#$ would lead to a situation where the roles of the two bishops would be reversed: White's bishop would be passive and Black's active), and Black would have a pleasant choice between 28... $dxc4=$ and 28... $bxc4!?$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e2 d4\leftarrow$.

28. $\mathbb{Q}xd2 \mathbb{R}xc3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e3!?$

I presume that this was Adams' idea when he played 27. $\mathbb{Q}b3$. The point of the pawn sacrifice was that the a2-g8 diagonal has been cleared for his bishop, so that it can attack the weak f7-pawn. He could also have played 29. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ or 29. $\mathbb{B}d5$, but with his last move he made sure to bring one of his rooks to the f-file quickly ($\mathbb{R}e3-f3$ in case of the retreat of Black's rook or $\mathbb{R}a1-f1$ in case of the exchange).

29... $\mathbb{R}xe3$ 30. $fxe3$



Even though the position might seem drawish at first sight, White holds an unpleasant initiative against the weaknesses on b5 and f7. In addition, Black's extra pawn on d6 is not only useless – it obstructs his pieces, the bishop in particular. But such positions are nothing new and both players were surely familiar with them from the Sveshnikov and Zaitsev variations of the Sicilian and Ruy Lopez, respectively. This makes it all the more surprising that a strong player like Matlakov made the following error.

30... ♜c7?

It was essential to play 30...d5!. This is one of those rare situations where not having a pawn on the board is better than having it. Black would bring his bishop to life and get counterplay against the b4-pawn.

What held Matlakov back from sacrificing the pawn, only he knows. Since he missed a similar idea on move 27, it is possible that ‘subconscious greed’ prevented him from considering this move in the first place. After

- A) 31. ♜f1 ♜d6 32. ♜f2 ♜c7 33. ♜xd5 ♜xb4 34. ♜xf7+ ♔h8; or
- B) 31. ♜xd5 ♜d6 32. ♜f1 ♜xb4 33. ♜xf7+ ♔h8, a draw would be a very likely outcome.

31. ♜d5!

Adams makes sure that Black never gets another opportunity to push the d-pawn. While attacking the weak black pawns, he will be virtually up a piece, since Black's dark-squared bishop is completely out of the game. Due to

White's weakened kingside, Matlakov tries to create counterplay:

31...g6 32.♘d3 ♘g5 33.♖f1!

The rook will be placed perfectly on f3 for both defensive and attacking purposes.

33...h5?!

This is a bit slow. I do not see any harm in preventing 34.♖f3 by playing 33...♗g3, with reasonable counterplay.

34.♖f3



Everything is defended now, and Black loses the b5-pawn. In his search for counterplay, Matlakov makes a miscalculation.

34...♗h4?

The idea is to counter-attack with ...♗h4-e1 and ...♖c7-c1, while also threatening to pick up the b4-pawn. However, this runs into a nice, and far from obvious, refutation.

Black would still have had good chances to hold if he had played 34...♔h7! instead. After 35.♗xb5 ♖c2 36.♗f1 f6 37.b5 ♖b2 38.♗h2 h4 39.♖xf6 ♕e7, he would have had sufficient activity.

35.♔h2!

Matlakov probably realized now that there is a tactical flaw in his plan with 35...♗e1. The game move

35...♗h6

does not save him, either.

The intended 35... $\mathbb{B}e1$ was refuted by 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 37. $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{R}c1$ 38. $\mathbb{B}e6!$ $\mathbb{B}h1+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}e1+$ 40. $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{B}xe3+$, and now 41. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$ decides the game in White's favor, since the rook cannot be taken due to 42. $\mathbb{B}xg6(+)$ and 43. $\mathbb{B}g8\#$.

36. $\mathbb{B}xb5$



Everything has worked out perfectly for Adams. Not only did he capture the key pawn – he also created the winning $\mathbb{B}b5-e8+$ threat. Black's bishop did not get another chance to get back into the game after he missed the key ... $d6-d5!$ motif twice.

36... $\mathbb{B}h7$

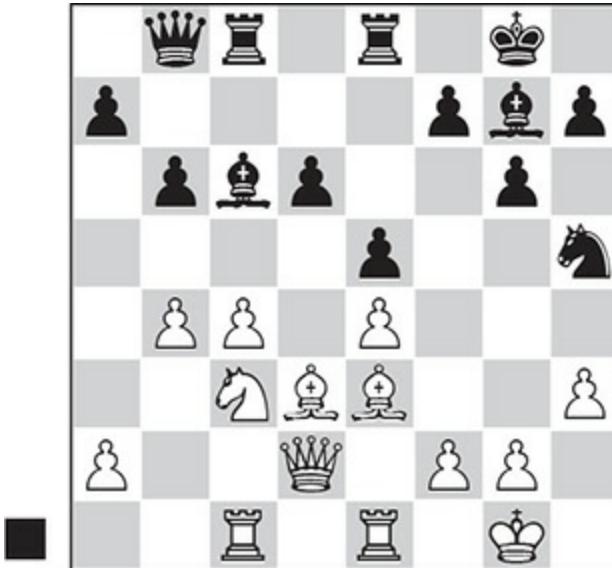
The counterplay with 36... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ also does not work due to 37. $\mathbb{B}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 38. $\mathbb{R}xf7+$ $\mathbb{R}xf7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 40. $\mathbb{B}f8+$, and White wins the queen or gives checkmate: 40... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (40... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 43. $\mathbb{B}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 44. $\mathbb{B}xg6\#$) 41. $\mathbb{B}e7++-$.

37. $\mathbb{B}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{R}e7$ 39. $\mathbb{B}d8$

Black resigned.

Game 101

Davorin Kuljasevic



Black did not treat the Maroczy pawn structure well earlier and ended up in this inferior position as a result. However, his saving grace, in a positional sense, is his control over the d4-square. This is why he should have thought about transferring his knight towards it as soon as possible.

20...♞d7?!

This is the wrong plan. The right move was 20...♞f4!, rerouting the knight toward the d4-square. It implies a pawn sacrifice, but after 21.♝xf4 exf4 22.♚xf4 ♜e5∞



analysis diagram

Black's worst piece suddenly becomes very active. Moreover, White's extra pawn would not be of much use in a position with opposite-colored bishops, so there would be little point in playing $\mathbb{B}c3-d5$. In short, Black would have had adequate compensation for the pawn.

I think that White should rather decline the sacrifice and try to increase the positional pressure with 21. $\mathbb{B}d5$ or 21.a4. Nevertheless, after 21... $\mathbb{B}e6\pm$, Black would obtain some counterplay by getting his knight to d4.

Once again, it is difficult to know what prevented Black from sacrificing the pawn. Perhaps the same subconscious reflex to protect material that we have seen in Matlakov's game was at work here.

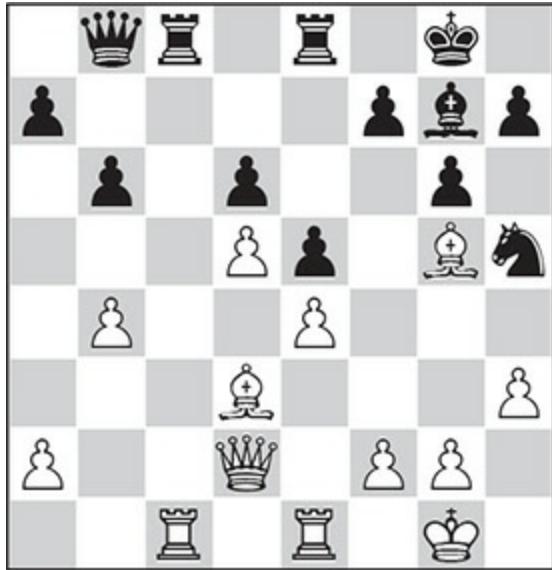
21. $\mathbb{B}d5 \mathbb{B}e6?!$

Another positional mistake. Black should have tried to swap the knight on d5 with 21... $\mathbb{B}f6$, not the bishop.

22. $\mathbb{B}g5!\pm$

Now the knight will not get another chance to retreat to f6. White also threatens the annoying 23. $\mathbb{B}e2$.

22... $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 23.cxd5



As a result of the previous inaccuracies, Black was forced to get into this lousy position. White completely dominates on the light squares and can prepare an invasion on the c-file using the c6-outpost.

23...♞f4

It is too late for this move now. White can just ignore the knight on f4 and play on the c-file.

24.♜a6

Black is strategically lost, and the remainder of the game is not that interesting (**1-0, 50**).

Game 102

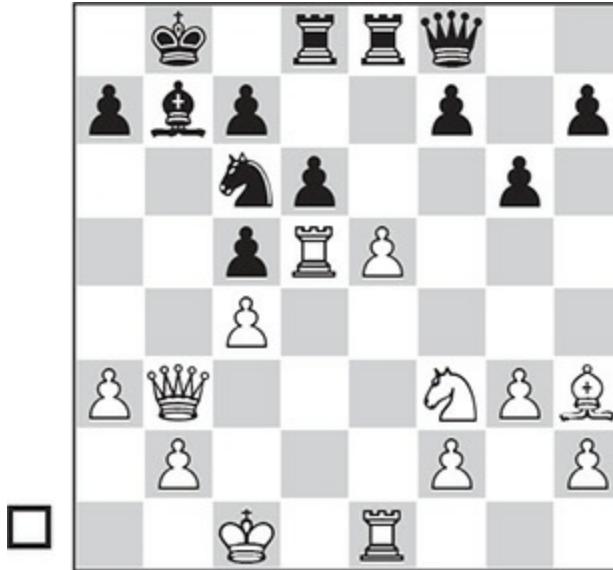
Yuri Kryvoruchko

2682

Zoltan Almasi

2688

Varadero 2016 (8)



This position arose from one of the sharpest variations of the Scotch Game, where White builds a strong pawn center and Black tries to undermine it. In a tense middlegame, Ukrainian grandmaster Kryvoruchko finds a deep tactical resource:

22. ♜g2!

Black has to be careful now because of the potential mating threats along the h1-a8 diagonal. Almasi decides to close the diagonal for good and take some material in the process, with

22... ♛a5?!

This is a very risky approach as Black will be missing his light-squared bishop in the defense. However, he did not have a simple choice. For example, 22...f6 may look like a good way to undermine the central pawn, but it allows a beautiful combination: 23. ♜d4!!.



analysis diagram

An amazing position. The g2-bishop pierces through the other pieces on the diagonal, determined to destroy its colleague on b7.

A) 23... \mathbb{B} xd4 loses to 24. \mathbb{B} xd4; while
 B) 23...cx \mathbb{B} d4 allows 24. \mathbb{B} b5+–;
 C) 23... \mathbb{B} a5 is the only move, but this runs into another spectacular tactical shot: 24. \mathbb{B} c6+!. Absolutely brilliant! Black cannot escape his fate after 24... \mathbb{B} xc6 25. \mathbb{B} xc5 \mathbb{K} c8 26. \mathbb{B} xc6!. Of course, White will not trade his prized bishop. 27. \mathbb{B} xc7+, followed by checkmate on b7, is threatened, so the only move is 26... \mathbb{B} e7, when 27.e6! puts the last nail in Black's coffin. Considering the tactical potential of White's construction on the long diagonal, the most prudent choice was 22... \mathbb{B} a8! which eliminates these threats. Granted, White could still keep a slight edge after 23.exd6 cx \mathbb{B} d6 24. \mathbb{B} d3, but this was the safest choice, by far.

23. \mathbb{B} a4 \mathbb{B} xd5 24.cxd5 \mathbb{B} b7

Almasi probably did not consider this position to be too dangerous for him, because most of White's pieces are far away from his king. However, Kryvoruchko found another quiet, but powerful way to jump-start the attack: **25. \mathbb{B} f1!**

Every time this bishop moves, it moves one square at a time, but it does so with a very strong effect. The h1-a8 diagonal has been closed, but a new one,

f1-a6, has opened up and the bishop quietly shifts over there. Black has a much bigger problem on his hands now, as the fianchettoed knight in place of the bishop is a really poor defender. Serious defensive measures are called for. Perhaps Almasi had only calculated the straightforward attacking attempt 25. $\mathbb{N}e3$, when he would have had more than a sufficient defense with 25...dxe5 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (or 26. $\mathbb{R}b3 \mathbb{R}d6!$) 26... $\mathbb{R}xe5!$ 27. $\mathbb{R}xe5 \mathbb{B}h6+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{B}xh2\#$.



25...dxe5?

In the critical moment, Almasi does not show a willingness to sacrifice material to relieve his defense. The only way to keep fighting was to trade his idle rook for one of White's attacking pieces: 25... $\mathbb{R}xe5!$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xe5$ (White would not get too far with 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dxe5 27. $\mathbb{R}xe5 \mathbb{B}d6\pm$ either) 26...dxe5 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$,



analysis diagram

and now only 27... $\mathbb{R}d6!$ keeps him in the game: 28. $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $\mathbb{R}xc6$ 29. $dxc6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8\pm$, with a tenable position.

26. $\mathbb{Q}b5$

White is closing in on the black king. Almasi's defensive task is already very difficult, but now he misses the last opportunity to prevent White's mating threats by giving up some of his extra material.

26...e4?

This shows complete disregard for White's threats on the queenside.

From the following two variations, it becomes clear that Black has made a mistake by not trading the e8-rook on the previous move:

A) 26... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{R}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{R}e3+-$. This winning rook-lift would not have been possible in case of the exchange of rooks on e5;

B) At the same time, 26... $\mathbb{R}xd5$ is not possible, now due to the hanging rook on e8: 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+-$;

C) Black's only defense is 26...c4, making space for the saving queen maneuver ... $\mathbb{Q}f8-c5-b6$. Unfortunately for Black, this would hardly change the outcome of the game, since after 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$, White wins the e5-pawn on account of 28...f6 29. $\mathbb{Q}d4!+-$.



27. ♜c6!

Superb! All of White's last six moves (excluding the forced ones, 23. ♔a4 and 24.cxd5) were made by the bishop! Kryvoruchko ignores the threats to his knight and rook and just goes for the throat.

Black was probably only counting on White responding to his threat with 27. ♜d2, when 27...c4! would gain in strength. In case of 28. ♜c6 ♔c5 29. ♜xe8 ♜xf2, Black would even get some counterplay.

27... ♔a8

This equals resignation, but the alternative is to let White demonstrate the main point of his combination after 27...exf3 28. ♔b3! ♜xe1+ 29. ♔c2 ♜e2+ 30. ♔b1 ♜e1+ 31. ♔a2.



analysis diagram

White has sacrificed all of his other pieces to give checkmate with his only two remaining pieces, just like in the game Ivanchuk-Jussupow. I find such combinations particularly aesthetically pleasing.

28. ♜e3

This rook lift is the quickest way to the final destination.

28...exf3 29. ♔b5 ♜b8 30. ♜xe8

Black resigned.

Sometimes it is difficult to defend when your opponent has a brilliant attacking day. Nevertheless, one should always be ready to give up some of his extra material to eliminate attacking pieces of the opponent, and contain the opponent's threats. Whether Almasi's reluctance to do that was caused by loss aversion or some other reasons, the fact of the matter is that he did not do it and that he had to pay the price in the end. One should keep an open mind when it comes to material sacrifices in all sorts of positions, even in those where they usually do not occur.

Too much of a good thing

So far, we have seen positions in which it was not good to be greedy and those in which it was necessary.

However, we have not talked about the other extreme yet: a type of situation

in which a player becomes overly ‘generous’ and goes overboard with material sacrifices. In other words, when one overestimates the return he will get for the sacrificed material. This is not to be confused with incorrect sacrifices. It is not correctness, but the faulty intention behind the sacrifice that I have in mind. When one sacrifices with overly optimistic expectations, things may not always work out as planned.

There are several possible explanations for such sacrifices:

- 1) overestimating your own and/or underestimating opponent’s resources;
- 2) trying to win the game too hard;
- 3) sacrificing for the sake of sacrificing;
- 4) losing a sense of danger;
- 5) ‘false activity’.

I will try to illustrate this interesting phenomenon through several examples.

Game 103

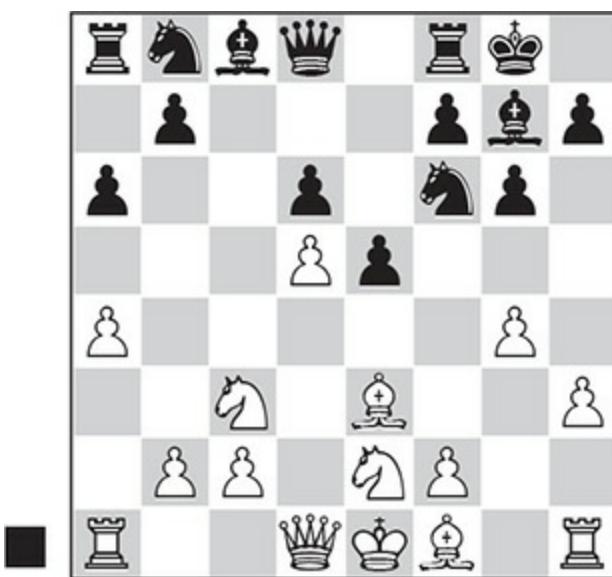
Arkadij Naiditsch

2706

Magnus Carlsen

2865

Baden-Baden 2015 (3)



An original and double-edged position arose very early from the Pirc Defense. White's plan is to complete his development with $\mathbb{Q}e2-g3$ and $\mathbb{Q}f1-g2$ and put pressure on the kingside. Black's options are a bit more limited due to a lack of space, although he should be able to get enough counterplay with some combination of ... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ /... $\mathbb{Q}d8-a5$, and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-e8$ /... $f7-f5$. The position definitely leaves a lot of room for creativity, but Carlsen may have gotten creative too soon:

10... $\mathbb{Q}xg4?$!

Such sacrifices can be promising in various King's Indian set-ups. However, it just seems too rushed here as White has not castled yet, so Black does not have any real targets on the kingside. It is a speculative sacrifice at best, something you might play in a blitz or rapid game, but when the World Champion does it in one of the strongest classical tournaments in the world, it shows he has a lot of courage. However, the further course of the game proves that he overestimated his chances.

A soberer alternative is 10... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8\infty$, preparing 13... $f5$, with a normal position.

11.hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$



12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Naiditsch plays the most natural move. Interestingly, White could basically refute the piece sacrifice by concrete means: 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$. This preserves the

bishop from exchange and prepares to expel the knight with f2-f3, ♕e2-g3 or ♔f1-h3, with a strategically winning position. The critical response 12... ♖b6 would be met by a strong counter-sacrifice: 13. ♕e4 f5 14.a5 ♖a7 15. ♕g3 h5 16. ♖e2! fxe4 17. ♕xe4+–.



analysis diagram

Black's position has clearly gone awry. After ♔f1-h3 and f2-f3, White obtains a decisive attack on the light squares.

Still, this is a very difficult variation to find over the board and one cannot criticize Naiditsch for playing 12. ♖d2, nor Carlsen for missing it when he sacrificed a piece. It just proves that the sacrifice is close to being incorrect by objective standards.

12... ♖d7 13. ♕e4!?

White had a wide choice of options here. Naiditsch decides to play in the most active possible manner.

13... f5 14. ♔g5!

Clearly, White's idea was not to snatch the pawn with 14. ♕xd6? because 14... f4 traps the bishop.

14... ♖b6 15. ♔h3!



A strong, non-materialistic idea. All of this was planned by Naiditsch before he went 13. $\mathbb{Q}e4$. White does not mind giving up a pawn for full development and a chance to eliminate the strongest black piece.

15... $\mathbb{Q}df6$

Black could win a pawn with either 15... $fxe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ or 15... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 16. 0-0!, but in both cases his initiative would quickly expire, and he would be saddled with multiple weaknesses.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$!

Naiditsch wants to prevent ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-e4$, but there was a better way to deal with this threat. It was possible to preserve the b-pawn by playing 17. $b3$, since 17... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ can be parried elegantly with 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3! \pm$, and White would be in control.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xb2!$

Of course, Black should try to open the position in any possible way because White's king still looks a bit exposed on e1.

18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$



The situation has become very sharp. It seems that Naiditsch was playing for the initiative just as much as Carlsen. However, his king is still exposed, and Black has a chance to create serious counterplay along the b-file.

19... ♜f7?!

Carlsen loses the momentum with this defensive move. 19... ♜ab8! was the obvious choice, but it might be possible that Carlsen did not play it because White could at least force a draw with 20. ♜xg7+ (instead, 20. ♜xb8 ♜xb8 21. ♜g2 e4 22.0-0 ♜g4 would offer him nice compensation for the piece, justifying his previous play) 20... ♛xg7, and now:

- A) In case of 21. ♜h6+ ♛f7 22. ♜xf8 ♛xf8, Black would have enough compensation, due to his counterplay on the b-file;
- B) 21. ♜xf5!? gxf5 22. ♜xf6+



analysis diagram

B1) Now 22... $\mathbb{R}xf6?$ loses to 23. $\mathbb{N}g5+$ $\mathbb{R}g6$ 24. $\mathbb{N}e7+$ $\mathbb{R}g8$ 25. $\mathbb{N}xh7+$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{K}e2!$;

B2) The only move is 22... $\mathbb{R}xf6!$ 23. $\mathbb{R}xh7$, when White still has dangerous threats, but Black can survive after 23... $f4$ 24. $\mathbb{N}d3$ $\mathbb{R}c1+$ 25. $\mathbb{N}e2$ $\mathbb{R}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xf7+$ $\mathbb{K}xf7$ 27. $\mathbb{N}f5+$, and White should hold a perpetual check. Very often, higher-rated players will avoid continuations that give their opponent an attacking position with ‘a draw in the pocket’ and I suspect that this was the case with Carlsen in this instance.

20. $\mathbb{R}b3$ $\mathbb{N}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{N}e3!$



Naiditsch correctly tries to trade queens, because his king would feel safer and it would be easier to attack Black's weaknesses in the endgame.

21... ♔c7 22. ♕b6 e4 23. ♔c6!?

This is prophylaxis against 23... ♕xb6 24. ♖xb6 ♔d7, when Black gets some counterplay. Objectively speaking, there might have been better ways to deal with it, but I see nothing wrong with Naiditsch's practical approach.

A) One good prophylactic possibility was 23.a5, discouraging the exchange on b6. In case of 23... ♕g4, White would have 24. ♕xc7 ♖xc7 25. ♖xe4!;

B) Another one was 23. ♔d2!?[±], overprotecting the knight;

C) Less accurate was 23.0-0?! ♕xb6 24. ♖xb6 ♔d7 25. ♖b3 ♕e5, which would give Black some positional compensation in the endgame.

23... ♖c8 24.0-0



Naiditsch does not mind giving up a pawn to trade the queens because his position will still be better in the endgame. Sometimes, even if you see an objectively stronger continuation that still gives your opponent some counter-chances in the middlegame, trading the queens is the most practical strategy, especially if you are low on time.

24... ♜xc6 25. dxcc6 ♕xc6



26. ♜fb1!

Naiditsch's spirited play leaves a strong impression. He was not thrown off balance by Magnus's piece sacrifice, continuously seeking active play of his

own. Now all his pieces become active; even the passive light-squared bishop can join the game via f1. Black has difficulties organizing active play with his rooks, due to the ♜g5xf6, ♛c3-d5 sequence. At this point, it is crystal-clear that the piece sacrifice on g4 did not work out and he needs to fight for a draw.

26...h6 27.♗xf6 ♜xf6



28.♘xe4!

Everything works out for White – even his misplaced bishop gets a chance to join the game. It is no wonder that Naiditsch tied for first place with Carlsen in this super-strong tournament with such strong play.

28...♝e5

28...fxe4 leads to a lost exchange-down endgame after 29.♝e6 ♕f8

30.♞xf7 ♛xf7 31.♝b6! ♛xc2 32.♝xd6, and the a-pawn is lost.

29.♞d2 ♛xc2 30.♝f3

An important positional achievement of the 28.♘xe4 combination is that White has disconnected Black's central pawns. Black's defense is very difficult with the isolated a- and d-pawns. Carlsen fought tooth and nail to save it, but Naiditsch converted nevertheless on move 61.

Game 104

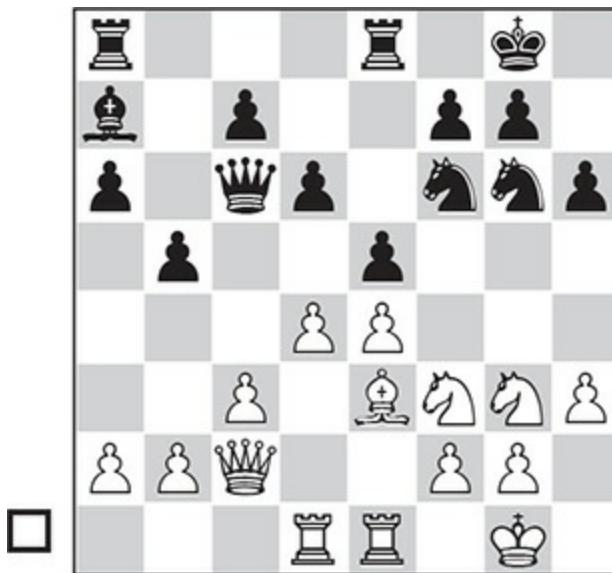
Adhiban Baskaran

2624

Davorin Kuljasevic

2564

Turkey tt 2014 (5)



Well-supported pawns on e4 and d4 usually mean that White has obtained a slight advantage in the Italian Game, and this position is not an exception. In a slightly cramped situation, I tried to put some pressure on White's pawn center with my pieces. Adhiban responded with

18. ♜c1!?,

which simultaneously targets the h6-pawn and keeps the queen protected, so that White can take back with the c-pawn in case of the exchange on d4.

He had several other possibilities to keep an edge:

A) 18.d5 ♜b7 19. ♜f5 ♜xe3 20. ♜xe3±; and

B) 18. ♜f5!±, which is a much better version of what he tried to do in the game. Black should probably play something prophylactic like 18... ♜h7 now, since any opening of the center would be clearly to White's advantage: 18...exd4? (or 18... ♜xe4? 19. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 20.dxe5!±, and the e4-knight is hanging), and now 19. ♜xh6! gxh6 20. ♜d2



analysis diagram

leaves Black with no good defense against the kingside attack. For example:
20... ♜e7 21. ♜3h4 ♜xf5 22. ♜xf5 ♜e6 23. ♜xh6 ♜e8 24. ♜xe6 fxe6
25. ♜e7++-

18...exd4

I figured that it was obligatory to open the center now since White's pieces have started to show some appetite for the pawns around my king.



One of the recaptures on d4 seems forced, but Adhiban unleashed:

19. ♔xh6?!

This sacrificial idea, as we have seen in the variation 18. ♕f5 cxd4 19. ♔xh6!, can be very dangerous, but Black has strong central counterplay in this particular position. I think that Adhiban either underestimated Black's defensive resources or overestimated his attacking resources when he went for this attacking continuation. Maybe both. It was a morning game, after all. In case of the pawn recapture 19.cxd4, Black gets a reasonable position after the exchange of queens: 19... ♕xc1 20. ♕xc1 ♔b6=, with pressure on the central pawns. However, White keeps some positional edge with 19. ♕xd4 ♕d7 (or 19... ♕xd4 20.cxd4! ♕xc1 21. ♕xc1±) 20.f3.

19... ♕xe4 20. ♕xe4?

Continuing on the wrong path, but Adhiban strikes me as the kind of player who would rather die honorably in a fight where he has small chances to prevail, than to suffer for a long time in a worse position after 20. ♕xe4 ♕xe4 21.cxd4 ♕xe1+ 22. ♕xe1 ♕d5 23. ♕g5 ♔b6=.

20... ♕xe4 21. ♕h5



This was his idea. If White gets a free move, he will destroy Black's kingside with ♔h6xg7, followed by ♕c1-h6, etc. Also, the bishop cannot be taken because there is no defense against the checkmate on g7. I understood that the situation was serious, but I also trusted that I had good defensive resources.

As I calculated my next move, something bizarre happened – the lights in the playing hall went out! There was a big ‘ooohhh’ of surprise, followed by murmur and laughter in the dark, especially from the younger participants. As the arbiters found something to light the players’ way out of the dark playing hall and into the bright corridor, you could see many of them still thinking about their interrupted games. The break until they fixed the issue with the lights lasted no more than 5-10 minutes, which was just enough time for me to grasp the contours of the winning continuation. Who would have thought that power outages could actually be useful?!

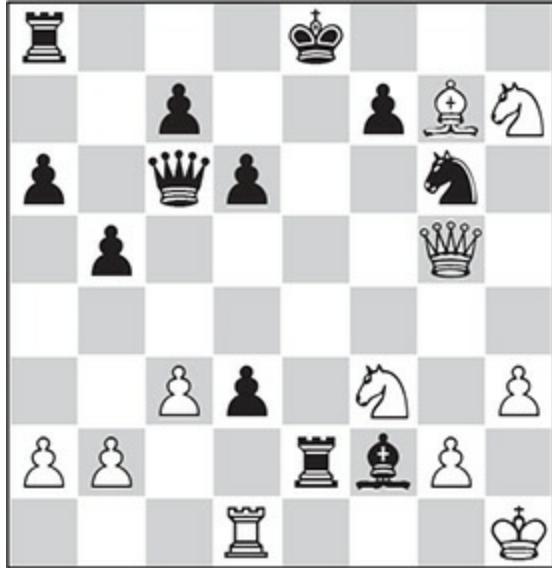
21...d3!?

Several roads led to Rome, but only one move can be played. The move I chose is not the best, but it is good enough. It is important to open the diagonal for the a7-bishop and target the f2-pawn. Perhaps Adhiban underestimated this counter-attacking idea.

The most accurate move was 21... ♔d5!, attacking the knight on h5, so that 22. ♕xg7 is not possible. After 22. ♕xg7, again 22...d3 followed by ... ♕e4-e2 decides the issue.

22. ♕xg7

Going for the checkmate. Unfortunately for White, he is one move too slow. A better attempt to complicate matters was 22. ♔g5!?, when Black would be winning with the same idea – by targeting the f2-pawn: 22... ♕e2! 23. ♕f6+ (23. ♕xg7 is too slow, once again. After 23... ♔c5, White has to trade the queens, because in case of 24. ♕h6 ♕xf2+ 25. ♔h1 ♕xg2#, Black gets to the king first) 23... ♕f8 24. ♕h7+ ♔e8 25. ♕xg7 ♕xf2+ 26. ♔h1,



analysis diagram

and this, at least, looks somewhat threatening for Black. However, Black can play the same way as in the game: 26... $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4!-$ +, with an attack of his own!



22... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+!$

This is the key. Black is winning now.

23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

23. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ allows 23... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5-+$.

23... ♜e3

This covers the diagonal for White's queen and his attack comes to a stop.

24. ♜b1 ♛f4 25. ♛xf4 ♕xf4 26. ♕f1 ♔xg7 27. ♜xd3 ♕e8 28. ♜d1 ♕e6 0-1

I have noticed an interesting propensity of certain players to sacrifice material indiscriminately to get a vague sense of activity. For instance, as a predominantly 1.d4 player, I have often faced the King's Indian Defense in games against lower-rated opponents. Their strategic understanding of this opening is usually fairly simple: place your pieces as actively as possible and attack the king or set up some tactical traps. Of course, the King's Indian Defense is an opening that requires not only a good tactical eye, but also careful strategic handling.

What often happens is that players with black disregard deeper strategic ideas in an attempt to play as actively as possible, many a time sacrificing material for that purpose. This is what I call 'false activity'. It has happened so many times in the past that I think that I have already almost developed a sixth sense for when it is going to happen. Take, for instance, the following example.

Game 105

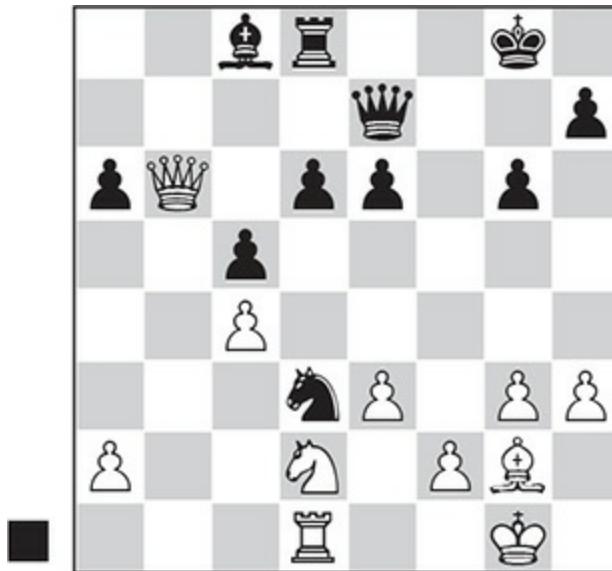
Davorin Kuljasevic

2550

Mihail Grigoriadis

2200

Thessaloniki 2018 (6)



In my preparation for the game and during the game itself, I had noticed that my opponent was a one-sided player in a sense that he played strictly tactically. He seemed to be very creative in finding ways to enliven his pieces and start tactical sequences, not shying away from sacrificing material. However, he sometimes did this at the expense of broader, strategic goals. With this in mind, I had set up a small psychological trap for him with my previous move, which was 26. $\mathbb{R}d1$.

26...d5?

Based on the profile explained above, I had a strong feeling that he would go for this ‘false activity’. He has been in a passive position for most of the game, and now he finally gets a chance to make a statement in the center and activate his passive bishop and rook. This implies a pawn sacrifice, which he had surely prepared and assessed as ‘giving compensation’ because his pieces suddenly become very active.

There are two problems with this move, though. Firstly, it lacks a strategic focus – it is purely a tactical device. Now, if it works tactically, who cares about strategy. But what if it does not work tactically? Then Black’s position falls apart.

And here we come to the second problem with false activity – in such cases, the validity of the sacrifice is determined very superficially – mostly by scanning the active potential of the pieces and calculating a few variations

that confirm it. It is a bit of wishful thinking, because one does not analyze what could go wrong with it as deeply as one should. As I have seen this pattern many times in my practice, I was able to anticipate it and find the antidote in advance.

It was necessary to keep defending passively with 26... \mathbb{Q} e5 and ... \mathbb{Q} e5-f7, although White keeps a clear positional advantage after something like 27. \mathbb{Q} b2+, as Black has a shaky pawn structure and an exposed king.

27. \mathbb{Q} b3 \mathbb{Q} e5

Played quickly, which confirmed my prediction that Black had planned the pawn sacrifice. 27...dxc4 keeps the material balance, but Black's pawn structure after 28. \mathbb{Q} xc4 would be awful, and this is pretty much winning after 28... \mathbb{Q} b4 29. \mathbb{Q} xd8+ \mathbb{Q} xd8 30.a3 \mathbb{Q} d5 31. \mathbb{Q} b8.

28.cxd5 exd5 29. \mathbb{Q} xd5+ \mathbb{Q} f8



This is the position that Black had been going for, but so had I! His pieces are seemingly active, and he threatens to win back the pawn on h3. I believe that his assessment was based on White defending the pawn on the next move, when he indeed gets some counterplay. However, I realized in advance that I would not have to waste time protecting that pawn, and that I would have a big advantage by playing for positional domination:

30.e4!

It is important not to be materialistic. This move solidifies the powerful

bishop on d5, and White can proceed increasing the pressure from there. White had many ways to defend the h3-pawn, but all of them had some positional or tactical drawback, besides wasting time, of course:

- A) 30. \mathbb{Q} h2 \mathbb{Q} d7;
- B) 30. \mathbb{Q} g2 c4;
- C) 30. g4 h5;
- D) 30. h4 \mathbb{Q} g4.

30... \mathbb{Q} xh3 31. \mathbb{Q} c3



As a result of playing for false activity, Black ends up in an even worse position than the one he started from. The potential energy of White's pieces is about to transform into something much more concrete; f2-f4 is a strong threat and after that, all the other pieces will start moving in.

31... \mathbb{Q} g4 32. \mathbb{Q} c1

Reminding Black that he has some pawn weaknesses as ‘side-effects’ of his false activity.

32... \mathbb{Q} c8 33. f3 \mathbb{Q} h3 34. \mathbb{Q} c4

Due to the mating threat on h8, Black cannot trade the knight, so he has to retreat.

34... \mathbb{Q} f7 35. \mathbb{Q} b1!



And as the last white piece joins the attack, Black cannot defend his position any further.

35... ♕g5

One last attempt at activity...

36.f4 ♔h5 37.♕xf7 ♔xf7 38.♖b7+ ♔e6 39.f5+

This covers the fifth rank, so Black cannot defend against ♖c3-e5# and he resigned.

Sometimes sacrificing seems so ‘right’ that one cannot resist the temptation to do it. If the sacrifice is not backed by some concrete aim or is done for purely hedonistic reasons, then it may be uncalled for. Again, I am primarily talking about the intention behind the sacrifice, not its correctness. To paraphrase the controversial ‘l’art pour l’art’ philosophy (or ‘art for art’s sake’ in English), in such cases one sacrifices for the sake of sacrificing.

I do not say that such sacrifices are necessarily bad. Chess is, after all, a game with a distinctive aesthetic element, and it is always nice to see a sacrifice in a game in which most moves are plain, just like it is nice to see an attractive dribble in a football game that mostly consists of short passes. However, we should not get too carried away with sacrificing, thinking that all that glitters is gold. Chess is predominantly a utilitarian, competitive game, in which every move should be played with a certain tactical or strategic aim in mind.

I would like to show you two examples in which I sacrificed material primarily for ‘aesthetic’, rather than pragmatic reasons, and I was duly rewarded with a 0 in the tournament cross-table for such a sloppy approach.

Game 106

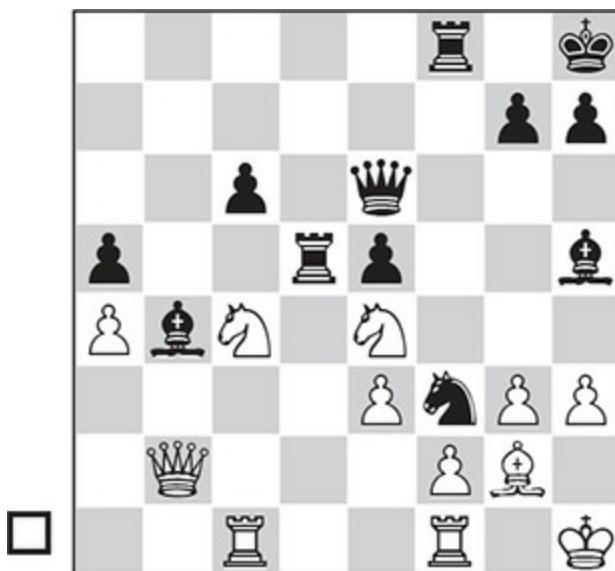
Tomi Nybäck

2551

Davorin Kuljasevic

2408

Warsaw Ech 2005 (5)



Black completely dominates in this position, mainly thanks to the powerful knight on f3. White really has no constructive plan, so he resorts to the one-move threat

30.♘b6,

which actually worked:

30...♙f5?

Instead of simply retreating my rook and continuing to increase my advantage methodically, I came up with this über-creative idea to sacrifice the exchange so that I can obtain a passed pawn on the d-file. Not only is this exchange sacrifice barely correct, it is also totally impractical because:

- A) White was desperately looking to change the character of the position

anyway; and

B) time trouble was looming.

Instead of playing a safe position with a clear plus, I chose a sharp one with uncertain compensation. Just a terrible decision, although a part of it could be attributed to my inexperience. Such an idea would barely cross my mind these days.

31.♘xd5 cxd5 32.♗c3 d4

This was the idea – the pawn gets to d2 by force.

33.exd4 exd4 34.♗e2



If I remember correctly, we were both in severe time trouble somewhere around this move. Now the comedy of errors begins.

34...♕e5?

I was not in the mood for simple decisions that day. After the logical 34...d3 35.♘f4 d2, Black would have obtained sufficient compensation for the exchange. However, what is the point in that, when Black could have enjoyed a risk-free positional advantage without having to sacrifice material?

35.♘g1?

As I said, we were both very short on time and this explains why Nybäck returned the favor. Instead, 35.♘f4! was pretty much winning, since the intended 35...♖xf4 36.gxf4 ♕xf4, threatening checkmate, does not work due to 37.♖c8+ ♔f8 38.♖b8!+-.



35... ♜e1!

This move is very unpleasant for White. It cuts off his kingside pieces and threatens all sorts of nasty stuff.

36.g4?

Too materialistic. White should have eliminated the tricky knight first:

36. ♛fxe1 ♜xe1, and only then played 37.g4 ♜c3 38. ♜e2, with approximate equality.

36... ♜d3 37. ♜c2!?

White's idea is to prevent 37... ♜xc1 and continue playing for complications. The alternative was to accept a slightly worse endgame after 37. ♜e2 ♜xe2 38. ♜xe2 ♜xc1 39. ♜xd4 ♜xg4 40.hxg4 ♜d3=.

37... ♜g6!

Not falling for the trick. Now both ... ♜d3xf2+ and ... ♜d3xc1 are threatened. It would have been wrong to take the rook with 37... ♜xc1? because after 38.gxh5, the knight is trapped on c1!

38.f4! ♜xf4 39. ♜f2

Nybäck has been resourceful in this tactical skirmish. He has managed to preserve his material advantage, but the problem is that his position is bad. However, my problem was that there were still two moves to make until the time control.



39... ♜e6?

I read an article by grandmaster Max Dlugy in which he said that when players are down to their last seconds, a state of mind called ‘zombie mode’ kicks in. In that state, whether you are a complete beginner or Magnus Carlsen, something changes in your brain and you start playing senseless moves that you normally would not even think about. I believe that the last two moves that I made in this game could be attributed to this condition.

Why not simply 39...d3–+ ?

40. ♜e2 ♜d6??

Yes, the infamous 40th move...

Black would still have been fine after 40... ♜xe2 41. ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 42. ♜xe2 d3=.

... And just as I thought that I had survived the time trouble and that I could play on with a decent position, my opponent assured me that this would not happen:

41. ♜c6 1-0

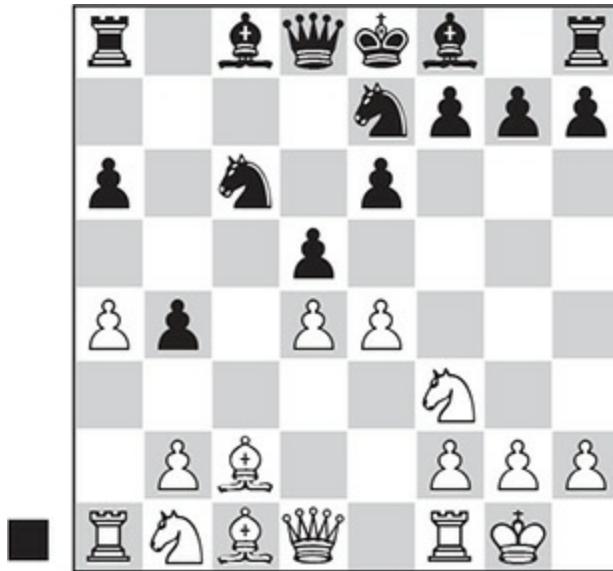
Game 107

Gergely Antal

2511

Davorin Kuljasevic

2552



Black is doing okay. His only problem is how to complete his kingside development, due to the funny position of the knight on e7. The usual suspects in such positions are 10... \mathbb{N} g6 and 10...dxe4, followed by 11... \mathbb{N} d5, 12... \mathbb{N} e7, etc. The first option can be easily dismissed, as White can either block or open up the center and the knight will not feel comfortable on g6. So, it seems natural to take on e4 and get the knight to d5, using the fact that White cannot press it with \mathbb{N} b1-c3. However, instead of playing straightforwardly, I found a more creative solution once again.

10...b3!?

This prepares a pawn sacrifice with the aim of eliminating the strong light-squared bishop. Nonetheless, it was much more practical to play 10...dxe4 11. \mathbb{N} xe4 \mathbb{N} d5, when Black gets a reasonable position after, for example, 12. \mathbb{N} bd2 \mathbb{N} e7 13. \mathbb{N} b3 \mathbb{N} b7 (13... \mathbb{N} a7!?, preparing ... \mathbb{N} a7-c7, is also worthy of consideration) 14. \mathbb{N} c5 \mathbb{N} xc5 15.dxc5 \mathbb{N} f6. White could still hope for a small edge here, although the arising positions would be closer to equality more than anything else.

11. \mathbb{N} d3 \mathbb{N} b4 12. \mathbb{N} xb3 \mathbb{N} xd3 13. \mathbb{N} xd3 dxe4 14. \mathbb{N} xe4



This is the position I had been aiming for. Truth be told, the pawn sacrifice is not incorrect. Black gets some compensation for the pawn, due to his control of the light squares and White's backward and isolated pawns.

Correctness is not the issue here, though, but the way I arrived at the decision. Instead of weighing seriously between 10...dxe4 and 10...b3 – as soon as I saw that I could get some compensation with the pawn sacrifice – I just focused on the latter and virtually forgot about the other, simpler, possibility. I just got too carried away with an opportunity to sacrifice a pawn for compensation.

In addition, even though the two moves are roughly equal in strength, the one where I sacrifice a pawn is more committal as I have to prove compensation, so the importance of every move increases. In case of the simpler 10...dxe4, on the other hand, Black just develops with normal moves and shifts the burden of proof on his opponent.

14... ♕d5

The other option is 14... ♔d5 15. ♔c3 ♔b7, but I did not like it because White gets a nice attacking set-up with 16. ♔e5 ♔d6 17. ♔g4 0-0 18. ♔h6. Antal decides to play an endgame with an extra pawn. However, I am not sure if this was the best decision.

15. ♔c3

The alternative is to keep the queens on the board: 15. ♔e2 ♔b7, and play for

the initiative with 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1\pm$, since Black is not fully developed yet.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$



Black has decent compensation for the pawn in the endgame, but nothing more than that. I was too optimistic in my assessment of the compensation, thinking that the control of the light squares gave me an easy game, when in fact White controls the dark-squares complex very well himself and can use the c5- and e5-squares as outposts for his knights.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

The more active 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$? might have been more to the point.

17... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0 20. $\mathbb{Q}e5$



Not much has happened over the last few moves. Both sides have quietly completed their development. Black still has sufficient positional compensation, but, as I mentioned earlier, he has to thread carefully because one small mistake can tip the balance in White's favor.

White, on the other hand, does not run any risks in such a position. At this point, I made a really poor strategic decision.

20...♝xe4?

This bishop was the key to Black's compensation. I cannot recall exactly, but I think that my idea was to stop ♜e4-c5 ideas with this exchange, thinking that I would be in time to reroute my knight from f5 to d5. However, this is not possible.

20...♝fc8 would have kept the compensation.

21.♝xe4± ♜ac8

Preventing ♜e5-c4, as the variation 21...♝d6 (preparing the...♞f5-e7-d5 maneuver) 22.♞c4 messes with Black's plans: 22...♝c7 23.♝b4! ♜fd8 24.♝c5±.

22.g4!

A strong idea that I had under-estimated. The knight is forced to a less favorable square and will not reach d5 in this game.

22...♞d6 23.♝e2 ♜fd8?

I completely missed my opponent's obvious reply.

Good or bad, it was necessary to simplify the position with 23...♞c4 and in

case of 24.d5, Black has decent chances to hold a pawn-down rook endgame after 24... \mathbb{Q} x e5 25. \mathbb{Q} x e5 exd5 26. \mathbb{Q} x g7 \mathbb{Q} x g7 27. \mathbb{Q} x e7 \mathbb{Q} c4 28.h3 \mathbb{Q} b8 etc.



24. \mathbb{Q} a5!

White is in the driver's seat now.

24... \mathbb{Q} e8 25. \mathbb{Q} d1 \mathbb{Q} f6 26.b3±



The game lasted for another 50 moves and it was a torture throughout. In hindsight, I regretted the decision to sacrifice the pawn for vague

compensation, because my opponent was running absolutely no risks and in case I messed up, he would have a free extra pawn. This is what happened in the game in a nutshell.

You may have noticed that I have included many more personal examples in this chapter, compared to the previous ones. The reason for this is that it is obviously much easier to explain your own feelings and tendencies when it comes to such a subject, than those of other players. I am aware that I cannot compare to the great players whose games we have studied so far, but I hope that the reader has found these examples insightful, nevertheless.

Conclusion

- Being greedy is not necessarily good or bad in chess. Depending on the situation, one should balance a desire to get material, positional or other types of advantages, on one hand, with an awareness of various limitations (positional, your own, imposed by the opponent, etc.) on the other.
- If your opponent leaves material ‘en prise’, always think twice before taking it. He might have set up a cunning trap for you or prepared unexpected counterplay. However, don’t trust the opponent unconditionally. If you have checked the variations carefully and do not see compensation for him, feel free to be greedy!
- Taking a poisoned pawn is often a difficult decision. It depends on an individual’s risk tolerance and personal experience. A concrete approach that is based primarily on calculation is very common for the new generations of chess players who work with chess engines a lot. It is a high risk-high reward approach.
- Sometimes we miss good sacrificial opportunities because we subconsciously hold on to our material, whether it is by trying to preserve a material advantage or by keeping the material balance. In addition, as the first candidate moves in our calculation are usually ‘clean’ moves, i.e. those that do not imply material sacrifices, it is easy to miss sacrificial ideas that sneak into the positions under consideration.
- One should keep an open mind for material sacrifices in all sorts of

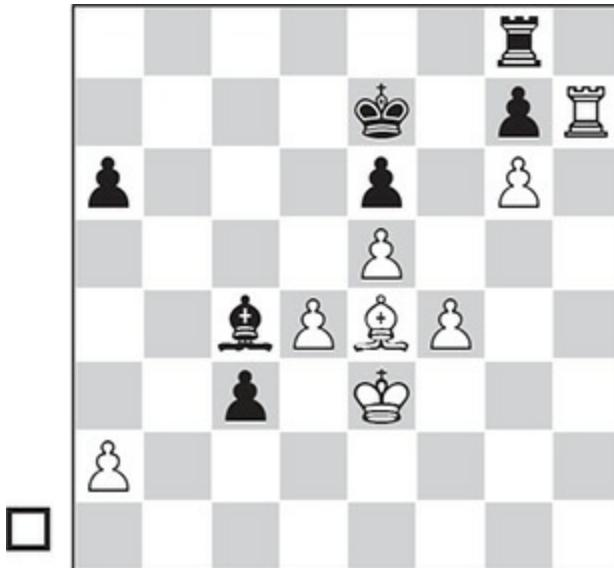
positions, even in those where they usually do not occur.

- Sometimes chess players become too ‘generous’ and sacrifice material over-zealously, hoping to get more return for the sacrificed material than objectively possible. There are several explanations for this phenomenon: overestimating one’s own and/or underestimating the opponent’s resources, trying to win the game too hard, sacrificing for the sake of sacrificing, losing a sense of danger and ‘false activity’.
- Sometimes the correctness of the sacrifice is not the issue, but the intention behind it is. If the sacrifice is correct but is not backed by some concrete tactical or strategic aim, then it may be uncalled for.

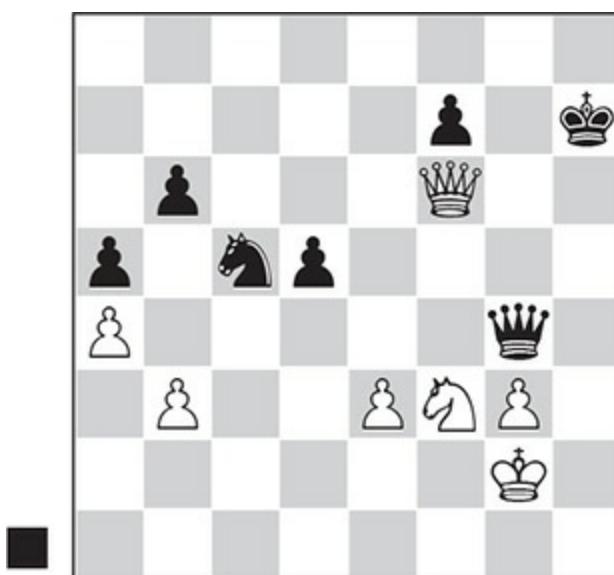
CHAPTER 6

Test exercises

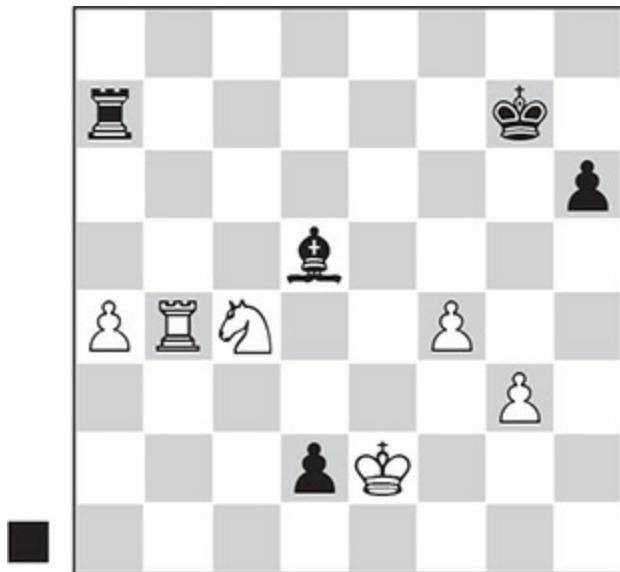
Exercise 41



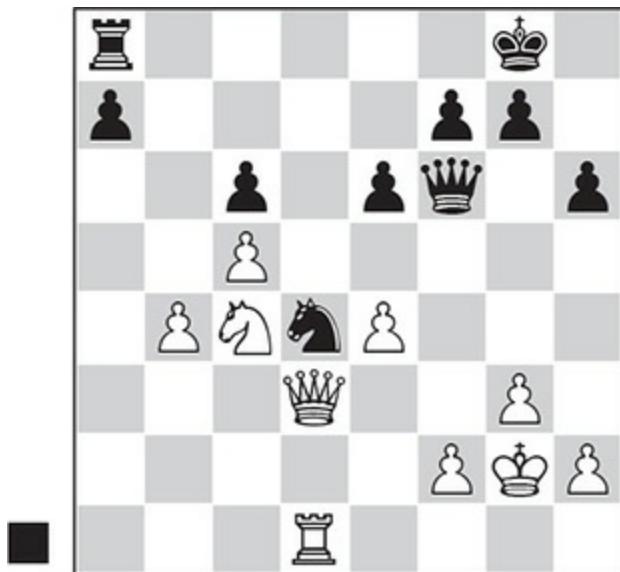
Exercise 42



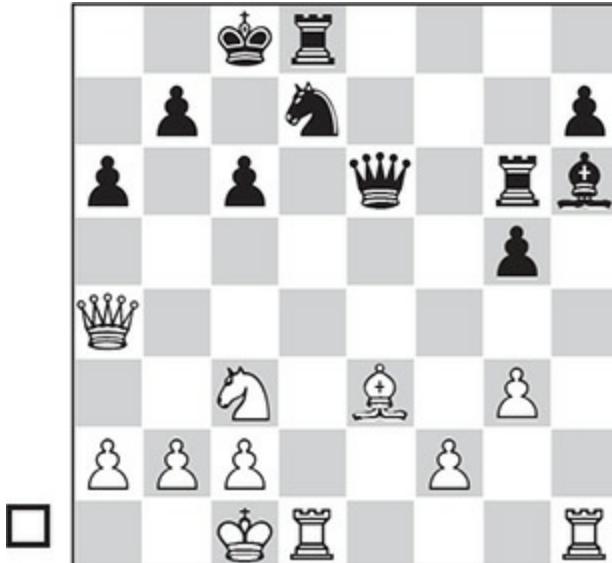
Exercise 43



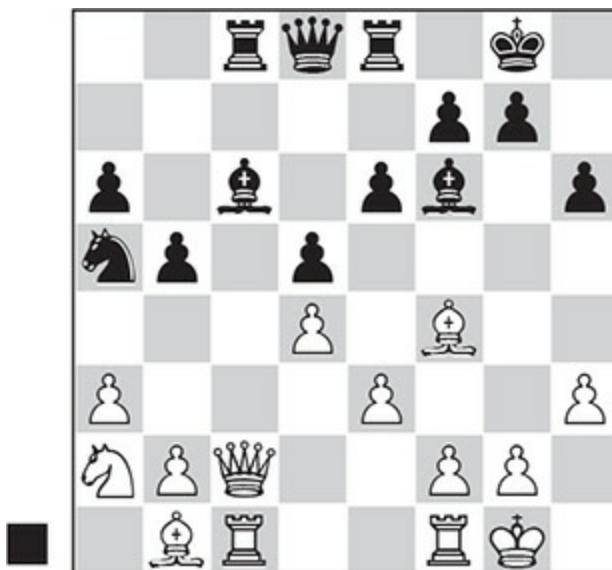
Exercise 44



Exercise 45



Exercise 46

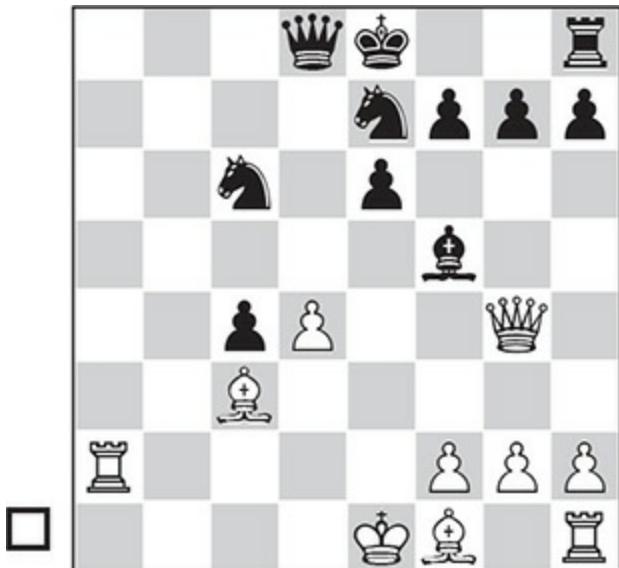


Exercise 47



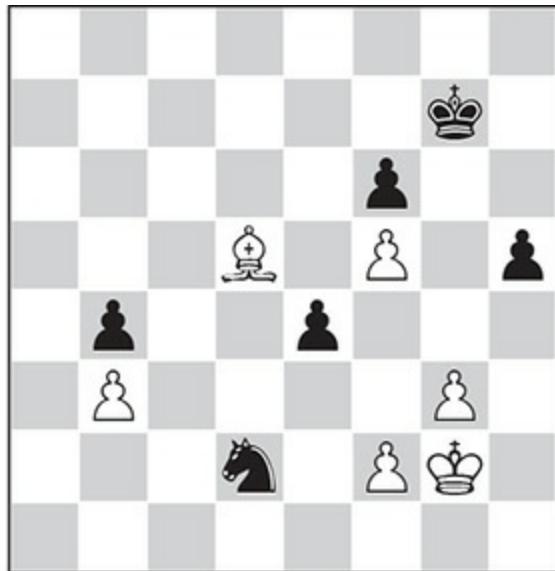
Would you play 14. ♔d1 or 14. ♔e1 ?

Exercise 48



Would you play 17. ♔xg7 or 17. ♔f3 ?

Exercise 49



□

Exercise 50



□

CHAPTER 7

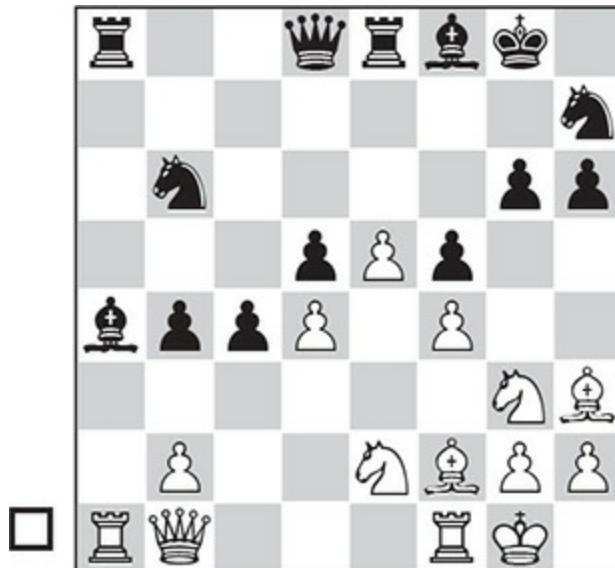
Solutions

Exercise 1

Mikhail Botvinnik

Bent Larsen

Noordwijk 1965 (1)



White should not waste any time with the thematic piece sacrifice:

26. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ $gxf5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

28. $\mathbb{Q}g6!?$, preparing f4-f5, was also strong.

28... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}a7\pm$



And White controls the whole board.

Exercise 2

Joel Lautier

2625

Veselin Topalov

2700

Elista ol 1998 (6)



19... ♜xe3!

Topalov obtains a strong attack on the dark squares with a thematic exchange sacrifice.

20.fxe3 ♜e7 21. ♜a2 ♜xc1?!

Even stronger was 21... ♜e8! → .

22. ♜xc1 ♜xa4 23. ♜xa4 ♜xe3+ 24. ♛h1 ♜e4?

Missing the opponent's resource. Instead, the simple 24... ♜xd4 25.b5 ♜c5† leads to complete domination on the dark squares and a difficult position for White.

25. ♜f5?

Lautier misses his chance: 25. ♜e8+ ♜f8 26. ♜e6! fxe6 27.dxe6 ♜f2+

28. ♛h2±.

25... ♜f2+ 26. ♛h2 ♜e5+ 27. ♜g3 ♜e4 28. ♜b3 ♜f2 29. ♜d3 h5—+

Exercise 3

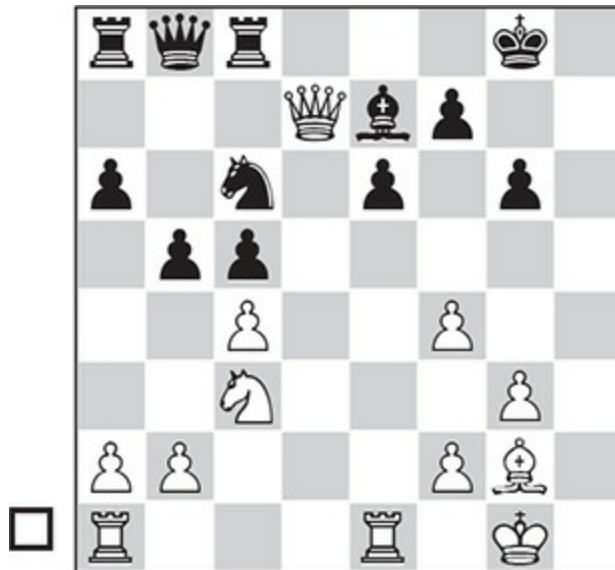
Anatoly Karpov

2740

Veselin Topalov

2640

Linares 1994 (4)



20. ♜xe6!

This exchange sacrifice destroys Black's pawn shield, giving White a decisive positional advantage. 20. ♜xc6?! ♜a7=.

20... ♜a7 21. ♜xg6+! fxg6 22. ♜e6+ ♛g7 23. ♜xc6 ♜d8 24.cxb5 ♜f6 25. ♜e4
♝d4 26.bxa6+–

Exercise 4

Luke McShane

2671

Michael Adams

2744

London blitz 2016 (3)



Black can change the closed character of the position sharply with a piece sacrifice:

19...cxd5

The positional continuation 19... ♜fd7 leaves Black a bit cramped after
20. ♜c1 ♜c7 21. ♜d3 ♜c5 22. ♜e2±.

20.cxd5 ♜bx d5! 21.exd5 ♜xd5 22. ♜f3?

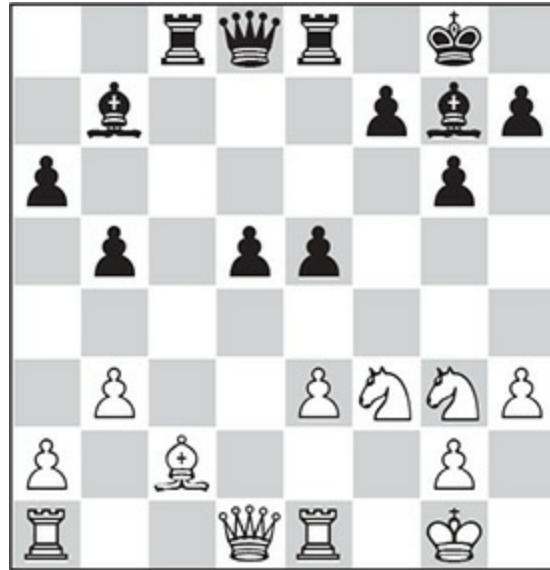
Somewhat better for White is 22. ♜df1 ♜xe3 23.fxe3 e4 24. ♜c1 b4∞.

22... ♜xe3 23.fxe3

23. ♜xe3 d5±.

23...d5

23... ♜xf3!? 24.gxf3 e4±.



24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e4 25. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 26. exd4 $\mathbb{Q}c7!$ \mp

Black has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed piece, in the view of the strong pawn center supported by the powerful bishops.

Exercise 5

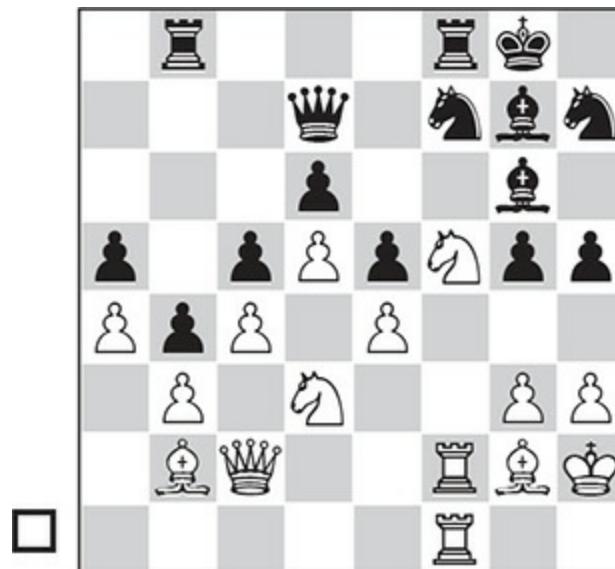
Davorin Kuljasevic

2538

Ashot Parvanyan

2379

Karlsruhe 2018 (8)



White has an excellent opportunity to break the position open:

31. ♜xg7

Instead, the game saw 31. ♜e2? ♛be8 32. ♜c1 ♛h6 33. g4 h4±, when White's space advantage was not enough to win the game.

**31... ♛xg7 32. ♜xf7+! ♜xf7 33. ♜xe5 dxe5 34. ♜xe5+ ♛h6 35. ♜xb8 ♛xb8
36. e5 ♛g6 37. ♜d2±**



White's connected central pawns are worth more than a piece.

Exercise 6

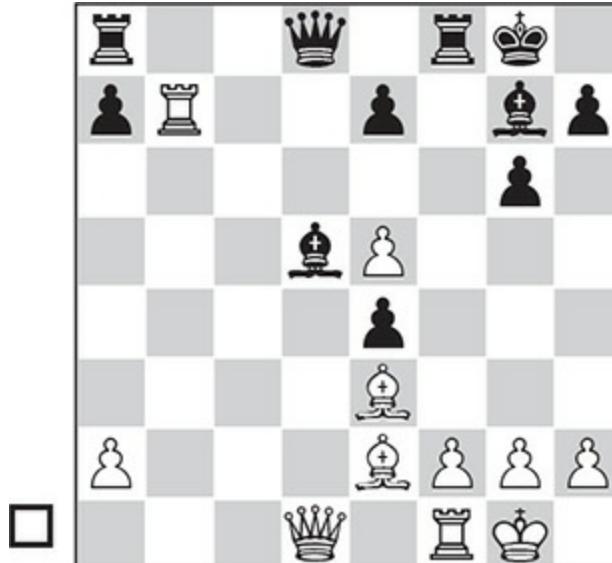
Davorin Kuljasevic

2574

Martin Neubauer

2415

Croatia tt 2012 (8)



18. ♜xe7!

Other moves are too meek: 18. ♜xa7 ♜xa7 19. ♜xa7 ♜xa2= or 18. ♜b5 e6=.

18... ♕xe7 19. ♔xd5+ ♕h8 20.e6 ♜fe8 21. ♜c4 ♜ac8 22. ♜b3±



As a result of the exchange sacrifice, White obtains a strong protected passed pawn and complete domination on the light squares.

Exercise 7

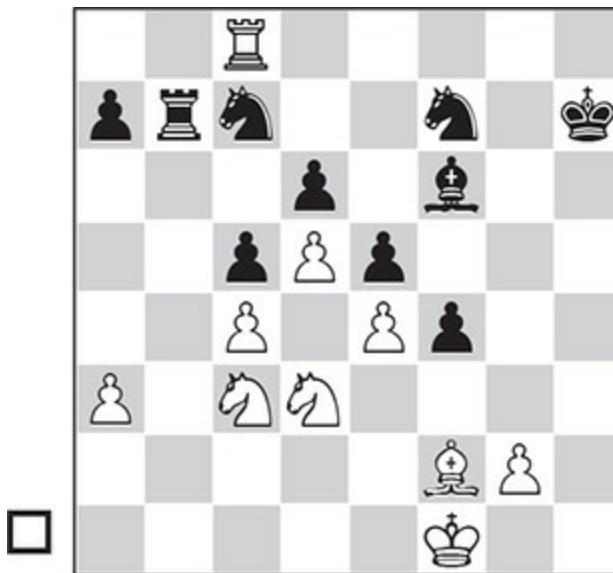
Vladimir Kramnik

2788

Loek van Wely

2641

Wijk aan Zee 2010 (6)



White has a long-term positional advantage thanks to the weak d6-pawn, but Kramnik finds a concrete way to break Black's position with a piece sacrifice:

40. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$ $dxc5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 43. $c5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

All of this has been forced and now Kramnik could seal the deal by simply pushing his passed pawns:

45. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$

Instead, in the game 45. $\mathbb{Q}d3?$ was played, and Black obtained some counterplay with 45... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$.

45... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 46. $c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 47. $d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}7xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}c4+-$

Exercise 8

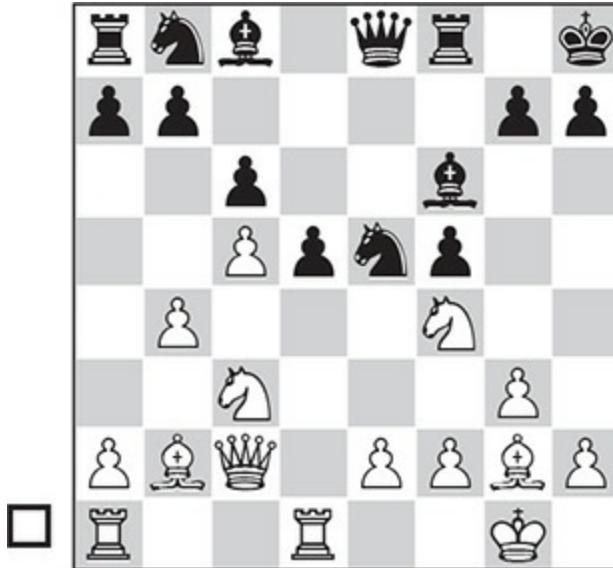
David Anton Guijarro

2653

Yago de Moura Santiago

2476

Dubai 2018 (6)



Anton Guijarro maximizes the potential of White's pieces with a strong positional sacrifice:

15. ♜cxd5! cxd5 16. ♜xd5 ♜a6 17. ♜xf6 gxf6 18. ♜c3 ♜c7 19. a4 ♜b8 20. ♜d6 ±



Black's position is in a shambles, despite the extra material.

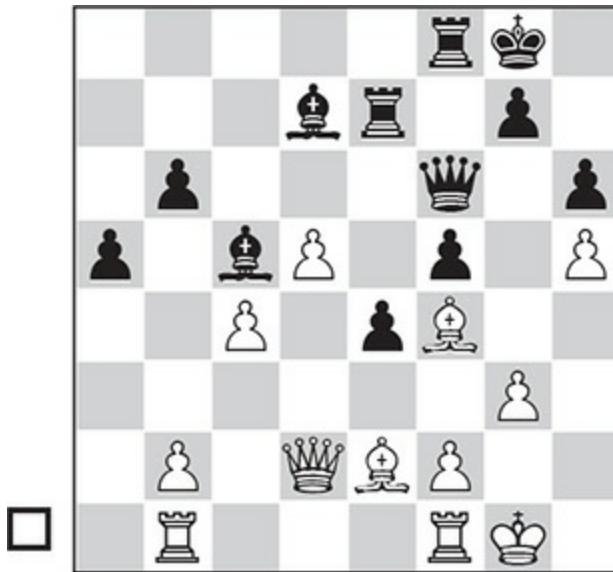
Exercise 9

Alexander Areshchenko

Alexander Motylev

2595

Dubai 2005 (9)



This is a difficult positional puzzle that requires prophylactic thinking. It is important to understand that Black is threatening to open the position with ...e4-e3 and that his dark-squared bishop is very strong. How to solve these positional problems? GM Areshchenko found a strong non-materialistic solution:

24.b4!

White should pay attention to the opponent's resources in case of the 'natural' 24.♗e3? f4!, when Black obtains an edge in all variations: 25.♗xc5 (25.♗xf4 ♜h3 26.d6 (26.♗fd1 ♗xf2+ 27.♗xf2 e3+ 28.♗xe3 ♜xe3 29.♔xe3 ♜e8+-+) 26...♜d7 27.♗d5+ ♜ff7=) 25...bxc5 26.♗xf4 ♗xf4 27.gxf4 ♜xf4=. Another reasonable way to prevent Black's threats exists: 24.♔g2?! ♜fe8 (24...e3 25.fxe3 ♜fe8 26.♗f3=) 25.♗e3=. Now ...f5-f4 is not an issue any more and White is fine.

24...axb4 25.♗xb4



White is willingly offering his rook in return for the powerful dark-squared bishop.

25...e3!?

25... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ would have given him sufficient compensation, as he would control a complex of dark squares and could tie Black's pieces down to the defense of the backward b-pawn. In case of 25... $\mathbb{R}fe8$, White's plan was to prevent ...e4-e3 with another exchange sacrifice: 26. $\mathbb{R}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 27. $\mathbb{R}e3!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe3\mathbb{Q}$.

26.fxe3 $\mathbb{R}xe3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

28. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4=$.

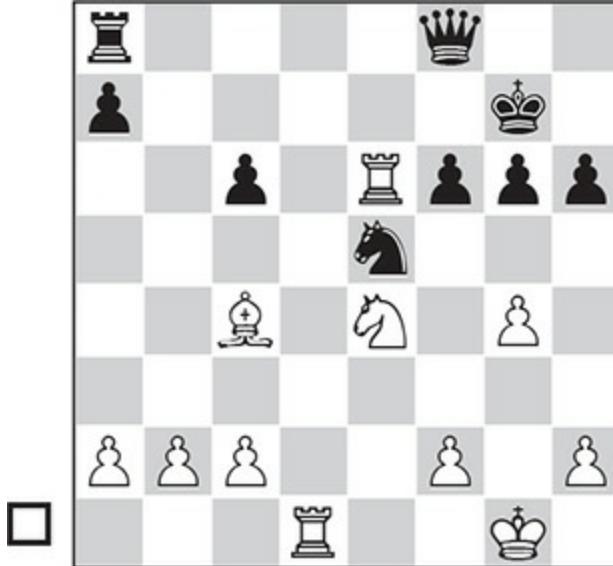
28... $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Exercise 10

Vlastimil Jansa

Nona Gaprindashvili

Gothenburg 1967/68 (1)



White needs to clear the seventh rank for the attack:

27. ♜xe5!

The greedy 27. ♜xf6?! lets all the advantage slip after 27... ♜d8 28. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 29. ♜xe5 (29. ♜e8+? ♛f8 30. ♜xe5 ♜d4#) 29... ♜xf6=.

27...fxe5

This is the main line of this long and complex combination. Gaprindashvili defended with 27... ♜d8 in the game, but this should have lost by force after 28. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 29. ♜c5! (instead, Jansa allowed a perpetual check by playing 29. ♜e6? ♜d1+ 30. ♛g2 ♜xg4+ 31. ♛f1 ♜d1+) 29... ♜d1+ 30. ♜f1 ♜xg4+ 31. ♜g3.

28. ♜d7+ ♛h8 29. ♜d6!

Despite the limited material, White's attack is extremely strong. 29. ♜f7 is not accurate due to 29... ♜g8! (29... ♜e8 30.g5!+-) and if 30. ♜f6?, 30... ♜xf7 31. ♜xf7 ♛g7#.

29...g5!

This is the most testing defense. 29... ♜f4 30. ♜f7+ ♜g7 is refuted by 31. ♜g5+! ♛f8 (31... ♛f6 32. ♜h7#; 31... ♛h8 32. ♜h7#) 32. ♜e6+ ♛e8 33. ♜xf4 ♛xd7 34. ♜xg6+-.



30.h4!!

You get full credit for this puzzle only if you saw this powerful move before sacrificing on e5. White's attack runs into a dead end in case of 30. $\mathbb{Q}f7+?!$

$\mathbb{Q}g7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ (or 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8=$) 31... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8=$, since 34. $\mathbb{Q}d3+?$ does not work due to 34...e4+.

30...gxh4

In other variations, White uses the fact that the knight on g5 is defended by the h-pawn. 30... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d6++-$; 30... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f7++-$.

31. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 33.f4!

This is the quiet point of 30.h4!!. Black's king is in a mating net.

33... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$

33... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ leads to a won pawn endgame for White after 34. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 36. $fxe5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 37. $b4+-$.

34. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$



35. ♕h7!+–

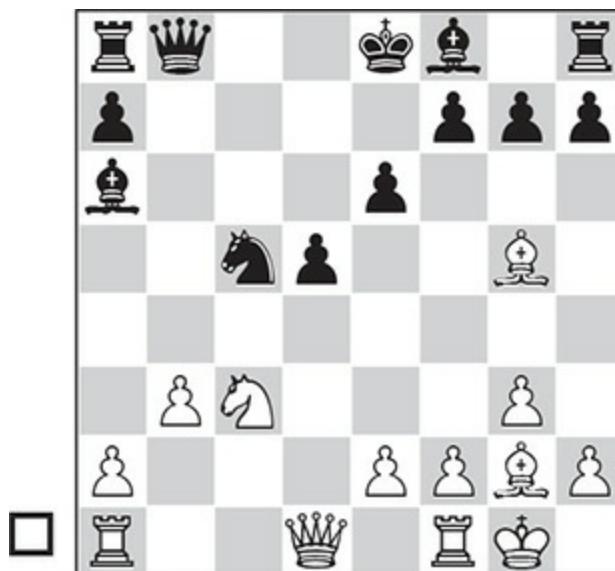
If you calculated this far from the starting position, you have some serious potential in chess!

35... ♔e3 36. ♡d7+ ♔g6 37. ♡xf8+ ♔f6 38. ♕f7#

This is one of the most beautiful combinations from a real game that I have ever seen.

Exercise 11

Analysis

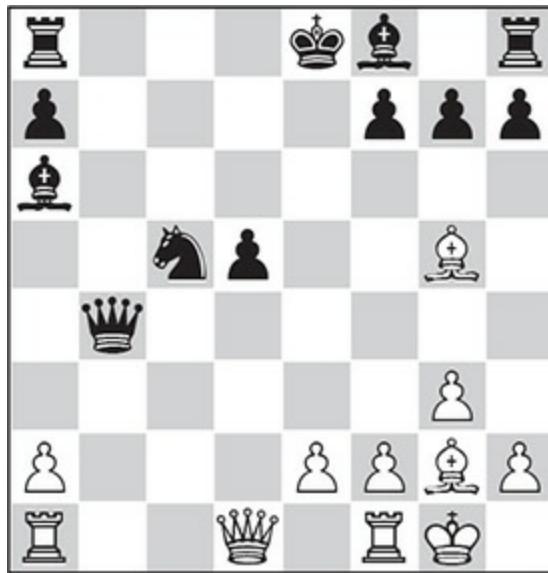


White has a serious development advantage, but it might expire if he does not act quickly.

14.b4!

Another move order that works is 14. \mathbb{Q} xd5 exd5 15. b4!+– (but not 15. \mathbb{Q} xd5? \mathbb{Q} b7+–).

14... \mathbb{Q} xb4 15. \mathbb{Q} xd5 exd5



16. \mathbb{Q} xd5!+–

And White is completely winning. Also possible, but more complicated, was 16. \mathbb{Q} xd5 \mathbb{Q} c8 17. \mathbb{Q} ad1 f6 18. \mathbb{Q} xf6! gxf6 19. \mathbb{Q} h5+ \mathbb{Q} e7 20. \mathbb{Q} d5!+–.

16... \mathbb{Q} c8

16... \mathbb{Q} b7 17. \mathbb{Q} b1+–.

17. \mathbb{Q} c6+! \mathbb{Q} xc6 18. \mathbb{Q} d8#

Exercise 12

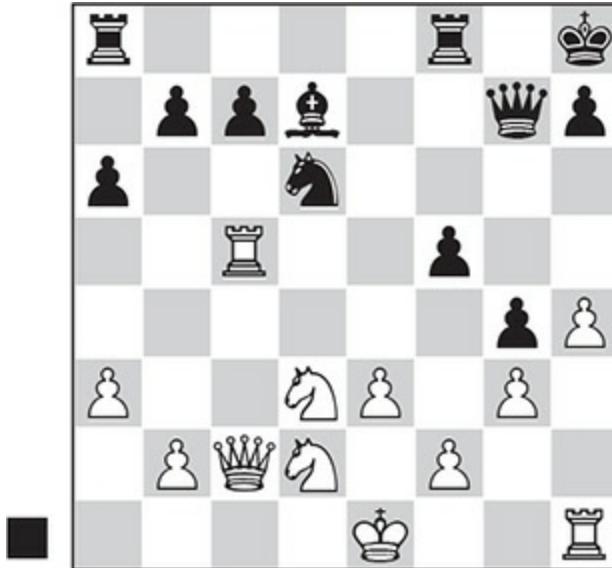
Santosh Vedit Gujrathi

2643

David Anton Guijarro

2626

Lake Sevan 2015 (9)



If he gets to castle, White will have a stable positional advantage. This is why Black needs to use his advantage in time and keep White busy by creating threats.

21...b6!

21... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22.0 0 $\mathbb{R}ad8$ 23. $\mathbb{R}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 24. $\mathbb{R}xc6!$ $bxc6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $fxe4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 27. $b4\pm$ or 21... $c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}ae8$ 23.0 0 \pm would both be very pleasant for White.

22. $\mathbb{R}xc7$

For the sacrificed pawn, Black gains time to harass White's pieces.

22... $\mathbb{Q}b5$

Another way to do that was 22... $\mathbb{R}ac8$ 23.0 0 $\mathbb{Q}a4!\infty$.

23. $\mathbb{R}b7$ $\mathbb{R}ac8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

And now the most precise way to keep the initiative was

24... $\mathbb{R}fd8!$.

In the game, Anton Guijarro's attempt 24... $\mathbb{Q}d6?!$ was met by the precise 25. $\mathbb{R}a7!\pm$.

25.0 0 $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

26. $\mathbb{R}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3-$.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

With mutual chances.

Exercise 13

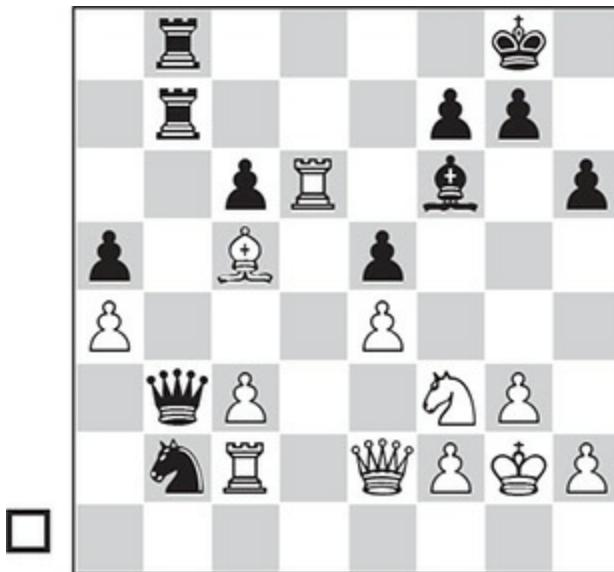
Nenad Fercic

2446

Davorin Kuljasevic

2538

Pozega ch-CRO 2018 (5)



31. ♜xf6!

Natural and strong. The real question is how does White follow it up?

31. ♜xc6?! ♛xa4 32. ♜e3±.

31...gxsf6 32. ♜h4 ♛h7 33. ♜xb2!

This second exchange sacrifice is even more spectacular. In the game, White played the tempting, but inaccurate sequence 33. ♜f5 ♜g8 34. ♜h5?

(34. ♜d2 → was better) 34... ♜g6, and even blundered in time trouble:

35. ♜e2?? (35. ♜d2 ♛xa4=) 35... ♜d3 36. ♜e3 ♜f4+ 37. ♜xf4 exf4 38. ♜f3 ♛d1! and White resigned.

33... ♜xb2 34. ♜h5 ♛c2 35. ♜f5 ♛xe4+ 36. ♜h3 ♛h8!



A strong defensive move, but, as it turns out, not enough to save the game.
White has a devastating tactical resource.

37. ♜e7!! ♛g8

37... ♜xe7 leads to a nice checkmate after 38. ♔xh6+ ♛g8 39. ♜xe7#.

38. ♜xf6 ♜h7 39. ♜d6+-

Black's rooks are completely dominated by White's minor pieces.

Exercise 14

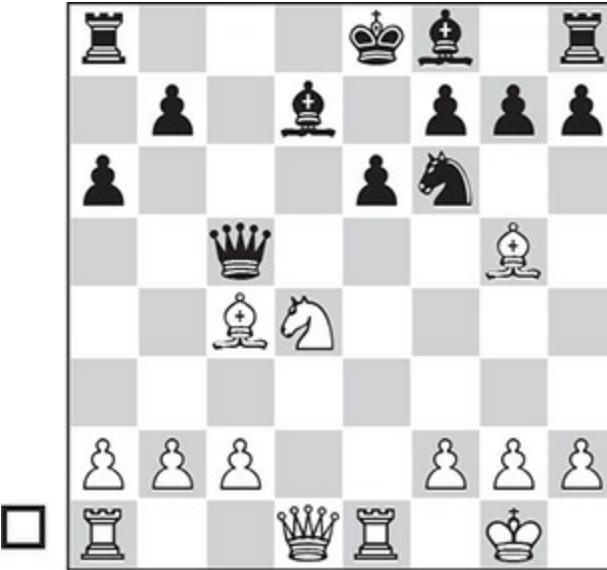
Michael Adams

2734

Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu

2693

Sofia 2007 (3)



Black played one move too many with his queen and Adams exploits his lead in development with a thematic piece sacrifice:

13. ♜xe6! fxe6 14. ♜xf6 gxf6 15. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 16. ♜xe6+ ♜e7

Another important variation is 16... ♛f7 17. ♜d7+ ♜e7 18. ♜ae1 ♜he8 19. b4! ♜xb4 20. ♜e4 ♜d6 21. ♜f5 ♜h8 22. ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 23. ♜d5+ ♛f8 24. ♜xe7 ♛xe7 25. ♜xb7+--.

17.b4!

This is the key intermediate move that forces Black's queen off the best defensive square c5. 17. ♜g4?! is not so strong after ♜d8 18. ♜g7 ♜f8 19. ♜ae1 ♜d7=.

17... ♜c3

17... ♜xb4 18. ♜b1 ♜c4 19. ♜d6+--.

18. ♜e3! ♜c7 19. ♜h5+ ♛f8 20. ♜ae1 ♜e8 21. ♜h6+ ♛f7 22.c3!



When one can make such slow position-improving moves, it means that the opponent is facing a very tough defensive task. White's attack is not immediately decisive, but his opponent is nearly in zugzwang. Nisipeanu did not last much longer.

22... ♜hg8 23. ♜xh7+ ♜g7 24. ♜h5+ ♜f8 25.g3 ♜d7 26. ♜e6 ♜g5 27. ♜h8+ ♜f7 28. ♜h7+ ♜g7 29. ♜h5+ ♜f8 30.c4 1--0

Exercise 15

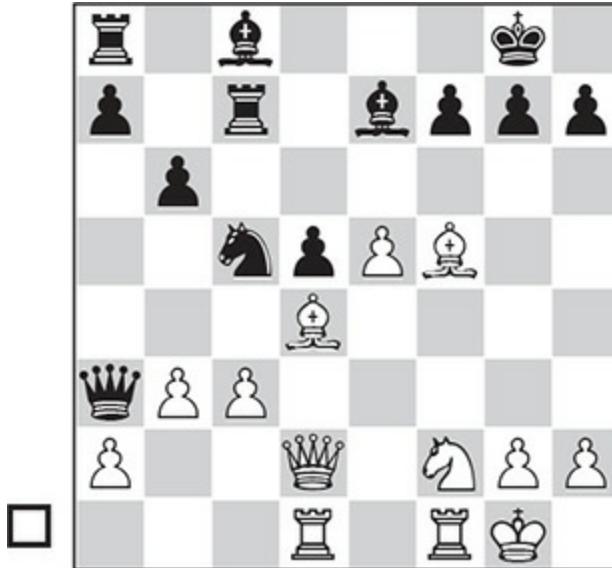
Adhiban Baskaran

2669

Matthias Blübaum

2590

Doha 2015 (9)



Black's queen is cut off from the kingside and his piece coordination is temporarily poor. Thus, it is the right time to open attacking avenues with a pawn sacrifice:

21.e6!!

In the game, 21. $\mathbb{Q}g4?$! followed, when Black was slightly worse, but solid enough after establishing a blockade on e6: 21... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}df1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

In case of 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$, White obtains a very strong kingside attack with 22. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g4$. For example: 23... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3+-$. Opening the f-file with 21... $fxe6$? is just bad due to 22. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b1+-$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

22... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ may have been more stubborn, but White wins material with 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b7\pm$.

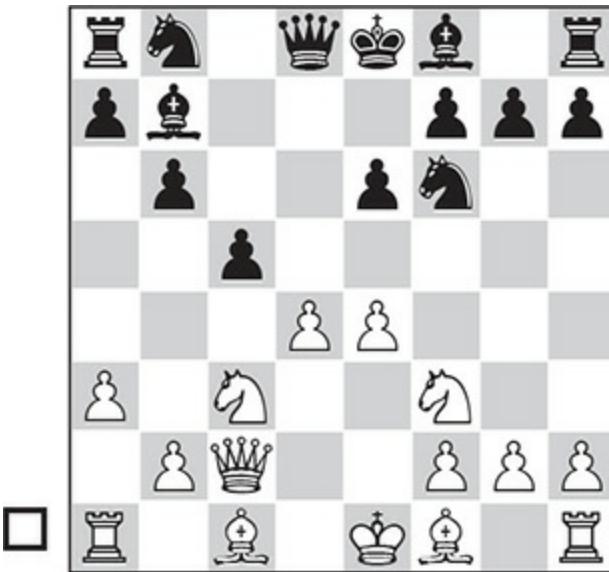
23. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ f6 24. $\mathbb{Q}de1$

With a decisive kingside attack in which most of Black's pieces will be mere spectators.

Exercise 16

Vasily Papin

Maksim Vavulin



White can best use his lead in development with a pawn sacrifice:

9.d5!

9. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$, was played in the game and is also very reasonable. White prepares to take the initiative with 10.0-0-0: 9... $\mathbb{Q}bd7?!$ (9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ was better) 10.0 0 0 $cxd4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ (even stronger was 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ and if 11... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, then 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 13. $e5+ -$) 11... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}db5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$, with a strong initiative.

9. $dxc5?!$ is inadequate, as it facilitates Black's development after 9... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 11. 0 0 0 =.

9...exd5 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$

10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4+ -$.

11.e5 $\mathbb{Q}g8$



Black seriously lags in development and White has several ways to exploit it.

12. ♕e2!

12.e6!? is quite tempting, although White's advantage is not too big if Black plays the best: 12...fxe6 13. ♔e5 ♔gf6 14. ♔g5 ♕c7 15. ♔xf6 gxf6 16. ♔xd7 0 0 0! 17. ♔xf8 ♕hxf8 18.0 0±.

12... ♕e7 13. ♔f4 a6 14.0 0!

Development above all!

14...axb5 15. ♔xb5 ♕d8 16. ♔d6

With a miserable position for Black, although the extra piece still gives him some hope of surviving the upcoming attack.

Exercise 17

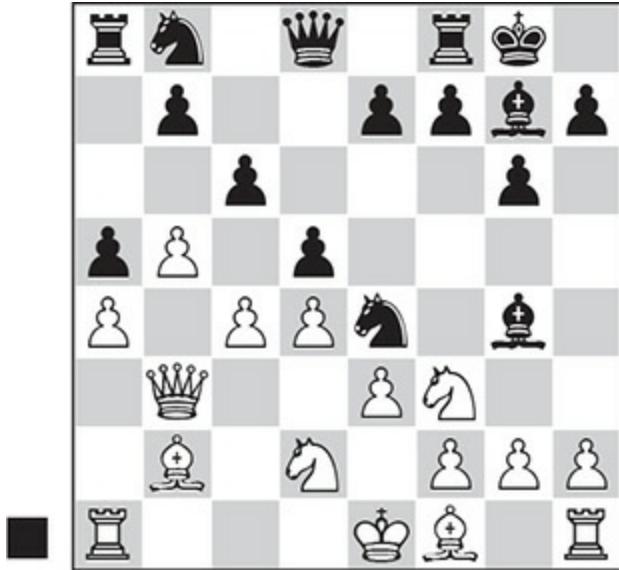
Denis Khismatullin

2642

Daniil Dubov

2654

Chita ch-RUS 2015 (7)



Dubov solves his development problems elegantly – by sacrificing the central pawn:

10... ♜d7!

In case of 10...dxc4 11. ♜xc4 ♜d6 12.0 0 ♜xc4 13. ♜xc4 cxb5 14. ♜xb5±, Black would pay a price for releasing the central tension as White would have a superior pawn structure. Black has two additional ways to sacrifice a pawn to complete his development: 10... ♜xd2 11. ♜xd2 e5 12.dxe5 ♜d7 13.f4± and 10...c5!? 11.cxd5 ♜xf3 12. ♜xf3 cxd4 13. ♜xd4 ♜d7∞.

11.cxd5 cxd5 12. ♜xd5 ♜xd2 13. ♜xd2 e5!

This is the right follow-up. Black strikes in the center while White has not castled yet.

14. ♜e2!

14.dxe5?! ♜xe5 15. ♜xd8 ♜fxd8↑; 14. ♜xb7 exd4–+.

14... ♜e6

14... ♜xe2? 15. ♜xe2 exd4 16. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 17. ♜xd4±.

15. ♜e4

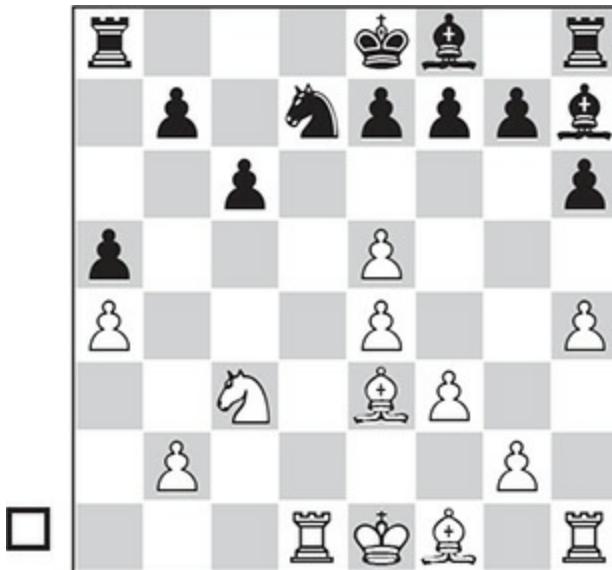
15. ♜xb7? exd4 16.exd4 ♜c5! 17. ♜f3 ♜xd4±.

15... ♜e8

Black obtains nice compensation for the sacrificed pawn, since his opponent is still struggling to complete his own development. He could also force a move repetition with 15... ♜f5 16. ♜d5 ♜e6.

Exercise 18

Analysis



15.e6!

This is a fairly thematic pawn sacrifice in the Slav and Caro-Kann Defenses. It slows down Black's development and automatically gives White positional compensation. However, finding his next move is actually the point of this exercise. White can also start with 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5!?$, which would lead to a transposition to the main line after 15... $cxb5$ 16.e6! $fxe6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$.

15.f4?! misses the opportunity to take the initiative. Black completes his development smoothly after 15...e6=.

15... $fxe6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$

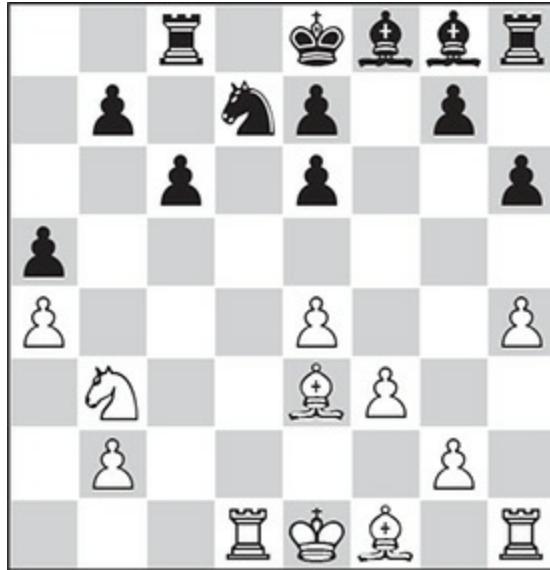
This piece sacrifice gives White a huge initiative. Black's bishops and his king's rook are trapped on the kingside and cannot participate in the game.

16... $\mathbb{R}c8$

16... $cxb5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 0 0 0 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{R}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 20.b4!!.. This is the most convincing way of continuing the initiative. White is preparing to create a passed pawn on the queenside while Black's pieces are still stuck on the other side of the board: 20... $axb4$ 21.a5 b3 22. $\mathbb{R}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ 24.a6 b2 25. $\mathbb{R}b1+-$;

16...0 0 0 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4+-$.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b3\pm$



White starts to target Black's weaknesses on the queenside.

18... ♜a8

Now White has another powerful pawn sacrifice

19.e5!

This allows him to penetrate the queenside.

19... ♗xe5 20. ♗c5 b6 21. ♗a6! ♔f7 22. ♗xb6+–

Exercise 19

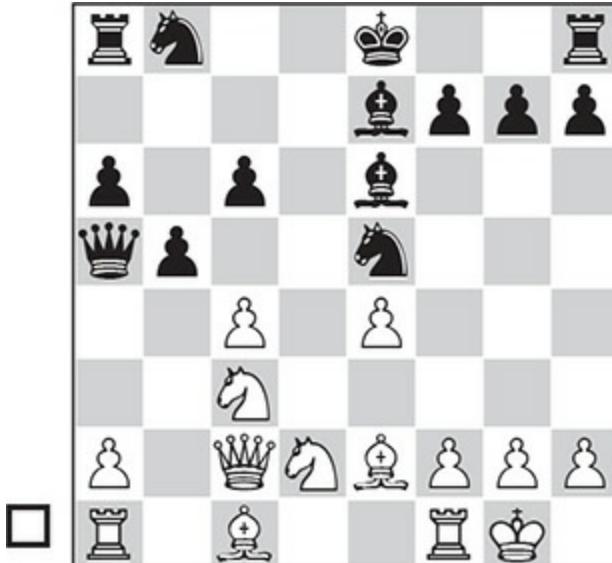
Daniil Dubov

2683

Sergey Volkov

2645

St Petersburg ch-RUS 2017 (1)



White's position is preferable and he has several promising continuations.
However, Dubov's enterprising piece sacrifice

13.♘d5!?

leaves the best impression.

- A) 13.f4 ♘xc4 14.♘xc4 ♗xc4 15.♗xc4 bxc4 16.♘a4±;
- B) 13.♘b3 ♗c7 14.cxb5 cxb5 15.♘d4 ♗bd7 16.♗b2±.

13...cxd5 14.cxd5 ♗d7 15.♗b2



For the sacrificed piece, he has obtained the initiative in the center and hampered Black's queenside development.

15...f6 16.f4 ♜c4

In the event of 16...♝b6+ 17.♚h1 ♜g4, White could sacrifice an extra exchange:



analysis diagram

18.e5!, literally steamrolling Black in the center after 18...♞f2+ 19.♜xf2 ♜xf2 20.♝e4 ♜h4 21.d6! ♜d8 22.e6! ♜xe6 23.♝c5+-.

17.♝xc4 bxc4



18.♚h1?!

White still keeps strong pressure after this cautious move, although Black is allowed to castle. However, the pawn sacrifice 18.e5! would have given him a strong attack on the uncastled black king after 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h5+!$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}fe1+-$.

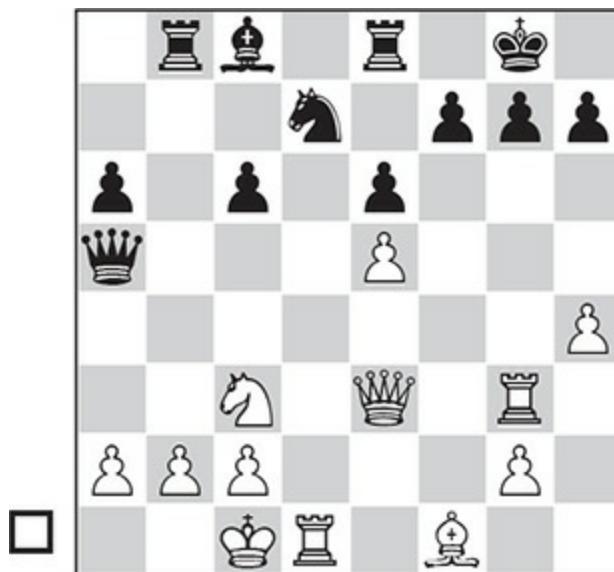
18... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a5 21.e5 0 0 22.e6↑

Exercise 20

Paul Keres

Laszlo Szabo

Budapest tt 1955 (3)



The knight on d7 puts pressure on the e5-pawn and can participate in the defense of his monarch via the f8-square. Keres decides to eliminate it:

18. $\mathbb{Q}xd7?$

There is nothing wrong with 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1\pm$, when White keeps all the advantages of his position. The game move is more in the spirit of the position, though.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

White has strong threats on the kingside and Black has only one move to hold the position. However, Szabo fails to find it.

19...h6?

Black is also losing after 19...g6 20.h5 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ and 19... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}xb2+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ g6 22.h5+-)

21. ♜d1 g6 22.h5 ♜h2 23. ♜f4 ♜xh5 24. ♜h3.

The only move was 19... ♜b4! 20. ♜g5 g6 21.b3± (21.h5 ♜d8!=; 21. ♜e4?? ♜xe4 22. ♜xe4 ♜e1#).

20. ♜f4 ♛f8



21. ♜xg7!

This rook sacrifice is the point of White's play. Black's king is defenseless now.

21... ♛xg7 22. ♜f6+ ♛f8

22... ♛g8 23. ♜xh6 f5 24.exf6+-.

23. ♜g6!

And Black resigned due to the inevitable checkmate.

Exercise 21

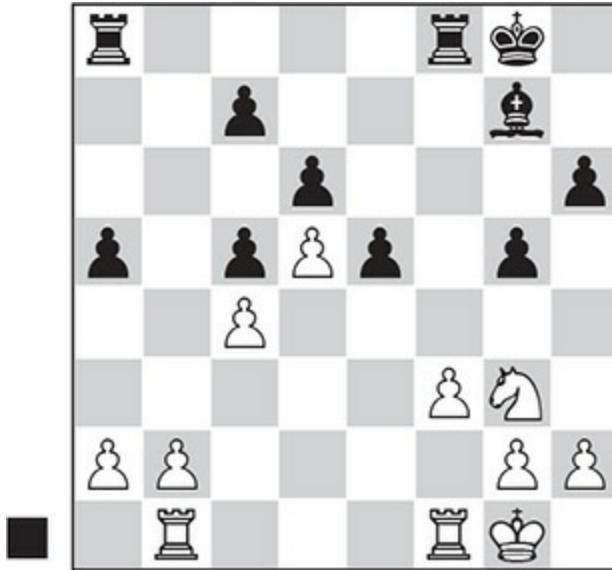
Wang Yue

2739

Teimour Radjabov

2761

Wijk aan Zee 2009 (11)



26...e4!

It is well worth sacrificing a pawn to open the powerful dark-squared bishop. In case of 26... $\mathbb{R}fb8$ 27. $\mathbb{B}e4$ $\mathbb{R}b4$ 28. $\mathbb{R}fc1$ $a4$ 29. $\mathbb{R}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f2=$, the bishop would be trapped behind its pawns.

27. $\mathbb{B}xe4$

27. $f xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{R}xf1+$ 29. $\mathbb{B}xf1$ $\mathbb{R}f8\#$.

27... $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $a4$ 29. $h4$

According to Radjabov, the best defense was 29. $\mathbb{R}fc1$ $\mathbb{R}fb8$ 30. $\mathbb{B}c3$ $\mathbb{R}b4$ 31. $b3 axb3$ 32. $axb3$ $\mathbb{R}a3$ 33. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{R}axb3$ 34. $\mathbb{R}xb3$ $\mathbb{R}xb3$ 35. $\mathbb{B}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36. $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5\#$.

29... $gxh4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{R}fb8$ 31. $b3 axb3$ 32. $axb3$ $\mathbb{R}a2$ 33. $\mathbb{R}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7\#$

And Black successfully exploited the two weaknesses in White's camp (b3 and g2).

Exercise 22

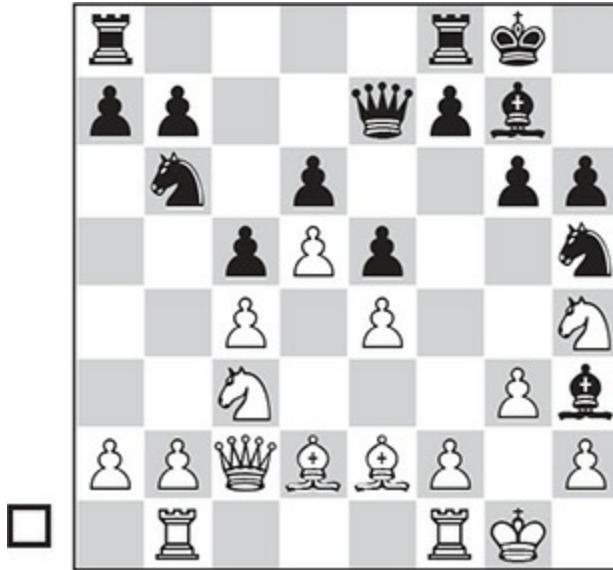
Loek van Wely

2632

Zdenko Kozul

2617

Reykjavik Ech tt 2015 (2)



White can use the opportunity to create an outpost on f5 with an implicit exchange sacrifice:

16. ♕xh5!

16. ♔g2 would lead to a typical maneuvering battle, while 16. ♕fe1?! would be wrong on account of 16... ♔f4!.

16...gxh5 17.b3 ♔c8

Taking the exchange with 17... ♔xf1 would be a positional disaster for Black, as there would be no way to defend the f5-square any more. The game could continue 18. ♕xf1 ♔c8 19. ♔d1 ♔f6 20. ♔xh5 ♔e7 21. ♔d1!+–, followed by the knight transfer to e3 and f5, with a subsequent kingside attack.

18. ♔d1 ♔d7 19. ♔e3 ♔e7 20. ♔ef5 ♔xf5 21. ♔xf5 ♔h7 22.f4! f6 23. ♔f2±

Exercise 23

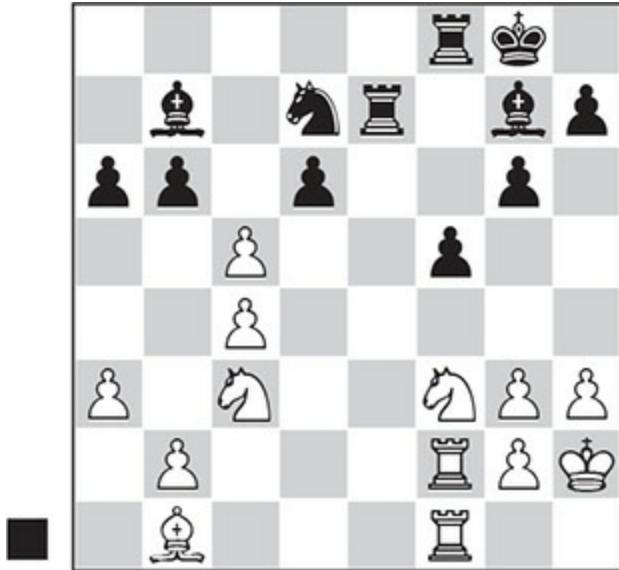
Boris Spassky

2640

Anatoly Karpov

2705

Montreal 1979 (13)



In the contest of the three recaptures, first place goes to
22...bxc5!

This is the best way to deal with 23.Qd5, which Karpov recognized as White's main defense in a difficult position. The downside of this capture is that it leaves a backward pawn on d6, which makes this a counter-intuitive decision. However, Karpov was ready to sacrifice this pawn to obtain other positional advantages, as we shall see. In case of 22...dxc5, Black can continue with 23.Qd1 Qxc3 24.bxc3 Kg7 25.Qfd2 and if 25...Qf6, 26.Qb2 with some pressure against the b6-pawn. After 22...Qxc5 23.Qd5 Qxd5 24.cxd5+, Karpov was not sure about Black's winning chances here.

23.Qd1

23.Qd5 Qxd5 24.cxd5 Qb8+ shows why it was important for Karpov to open the b-file.

23...Qxc3 24.bxc3 Qf6 25.Qfd2 Qe3

25...Qe5!? was quite strong, too.

26.Qg1

In case of 26.Qxd6 Qxd6 27.Qxd6 Qxf3! 28.gxf3 Qe5, we can see the complete domination of the rook and knight vs rook and bishop.

26...Qf7 27.Qxd6 Qxd6 28.Qxd6 Ke7 29.Qd3 Qe1+



And for the sacrificed pawn, Karpov obtains domination in the endgame based on the superior position of his pieces.

Exercise 24

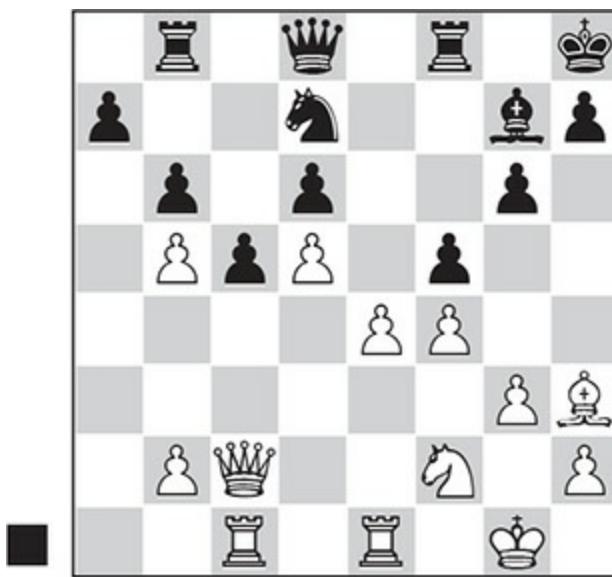
Magnus Carlsen

2856

Emilio Cordova

2638

Baku ol 2016 (8)



It looks like the position is about to open up favorably for White, but the Peruvian grandmaster Cordova found a strong non-materialistic resource.

23...g5!

23...fxe4?! 24. \mathbb{Q} xe4±; 23... \mathbb{Q} f6?! 24.exf5 gxf5 25.b3±; and 23... \mathbb{Q} d4 24. \mathbb{Q} g2 \mathbb{Q} xf2 25. \mathbb{Q} xf2 fxe4 26. \mathbb{Q} xe4 \mathbb{Q} f6 27. \mathbb{Q} e6± are all in White's favor.

24.fxg5

The point is that if White takes material with 24. \mathbb{Q} xf5 gxf4 25.gxf4, Black achieves serious counterplay on the kingside: 25... \mathbb{Q} h4! 26. \mathbb{Q} xd7 (or 26. \mathbb{Q} d3?! \mathbb{Q} d4+ 27. \mathbb{Q} h1 \mathbb{Q} f6±) 26... \mathbb{Q} d4 27. \mathbb{Q} f5 \mathbb{Q} xf5! 28.exf5 \mathbb{Q} xf2+ 29. \mathbb{Q} xf2 \mathbb{Q} g8+ 30. \mathbb{Q} f1 \mathbb{Q} h3+ 31. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{Q} g2=.

24...f4!

This is a strong follow-up that ensures Black's domination on the dark squares.

25. \mathbb{Q} f5 fxg3



26. \mathbb{Q} h3!

Carlsen creates a barrier on the kingside with a counter-sacrifice.

26.hxg3 \mathbb{Q} xg5 27. \mathbb{Q} g2 \mathbb{Q} e5±.

26...gxh2+ 27. \mathbb{Q} h1! \mathbb{Q} e5 28. \mathbb{Q} e2

With a complex struggle in which the World Champion eventually prevailed.

Exercise 25

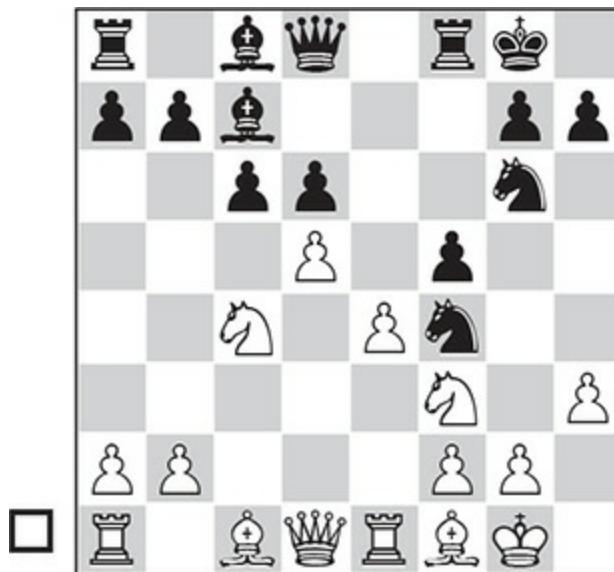
Veselin Topalov

2816

Hikaru Nakamura

2814

St Louis 2015 (2)



A critical moment arose very early in the game after Nakamura's ambitious 15...f5. Topalov did not want to relinquish the initiative to his opponent and sacrificed the pawn instead:

16.e5!

16.exf5?! ♕xf5 17.dxc6 bxc6 looks really nice for Black.

16...♘xd5

16...cx d5 17.♘xd6 ♕xd6 18.exd6 ♔xd6 19.b3± is an even worse version for Black.

17.exd6 ♕xd6 18.♘xd6 ♔xd6 19.b3!



For the sacrificed pawn, White obtains a strong positional pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal, which is surprisingly difficult to deal with.

19... ♕d7 20. ♔b2 ♕fe8 21. ♔d4 ♕f6 22. ♔d2! ♕d6 23. ♔c4 h6 24. ♔d4 ♕f6
25. ♔xf6 gxf6 26. ♔xf6±

Exercise 26

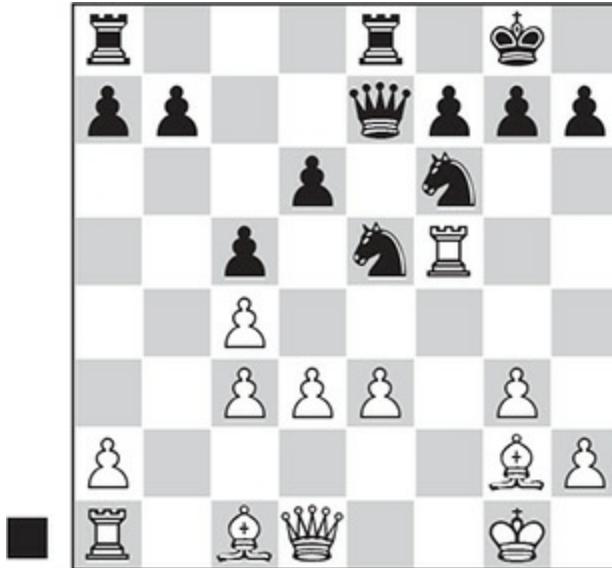
Denis Khismatullin

2642

Evgeny Tomashevsky

2747

Chita ch-RUS 2015 (2)



15...d5!

15... \mathbb{Q} ad8 16.e4±.

16.cxd5

16. \mathbb{Q} xd5 \mathbb{Q} xd5 17.cxd5 c4 18.d4 \mathbb{Q} d3 is very similar.

16...c4 17.d4 \mathbb{Q} d3

Khismatullin was intimidated by the possibility of the other knight jumping to e4, so he incorrectly sacrificed the exchange.

18. \mathbb{Q} xf6?

Black's position looks excellent in case of 18. \mathbb{Q} d2 \mathbb{Q} e4 19. \mathbb{Q} xe4 \mathbb{Q} xe4 20. \mathbb{Q} f3 \mathbb{Q} xf3 21. \mathbb{Q} xf3 \mathbb{Q} ad8, but objectively it would be around equal.

18... \mathbb{Q} xf6 19. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{Q} xc1 20. \mathbb{Q} xc1 \mathbb{Q} g5

20... \mathbb{Q} ad8† was even stronger.

21. \mathbb{Q} e1 \mathbb{Q} ad8 22.e4 \mathbb{Q} xd5 23.e5 \mathbb{Q} d7 24. \mathbb{Q} xc4 g6†

Exercise 27

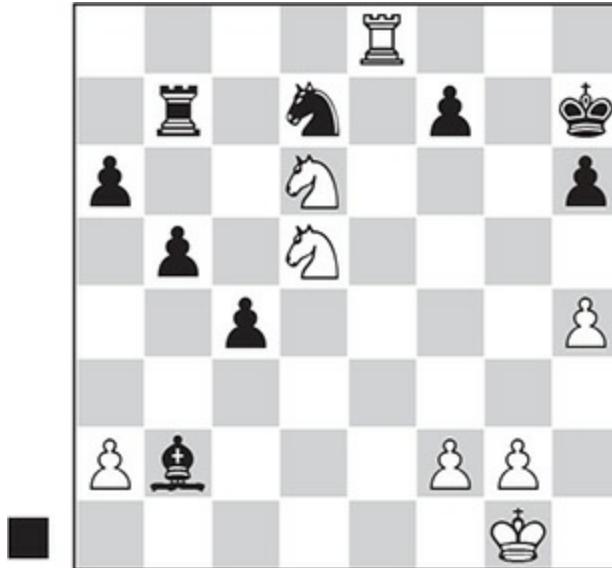
Nicholas Pert

2501

Alexey Dreev

2704

Gibraltar 2005 (3)



Black's strongest assets in this endgame are his queenside pawns. The only way to use them is with an exchange sacrifice:

32... ♜b6!

Other moves, like 32... ♜b8 or 32... ♜a7, allow counterplay with 33. ♜e7 ♜e5 34.f4 ♜g4 35. ♜xf7+ ♜h8 36. ♜c7=.

33. ♜xb7 ♜xd5 34. ♜c8 ♜b4!



Black is threatening to take White's last pawn on the queenside. Pert decides to look for salvation in a minor piece endgame:

35.a4?!

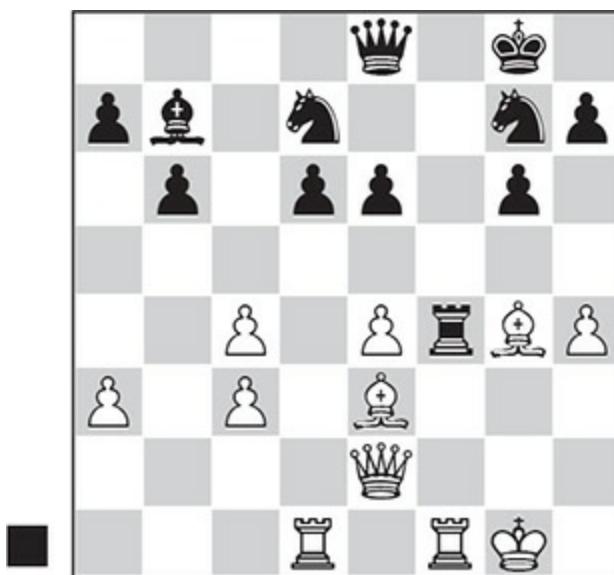
However, a draw could have been achieved with another sacrifice: 35. ♜ a5 ♜ xa2 36. ♜ xc4! bxc4 37. ♜ xc4 ♜ c3 38. ♜ c5.

35...bxa4 36. ♜ xc4 a3 37. ♜ xb4 a2 38. ♜ a4 a1† + 39. ♜ xa1 ♜ xa1†

And in the end, Black won this endgame.

Exercise 28

Analysis



Black is down an exchange and White seems to be in control. Yet, Black has a way to set up a sort of a fortress with a second exchange sacrifice:

28... ♜ xe4!

28... ♜ xf1+ 29. ♜ xf1 ♜ e5 (29... ♜ xe4?! 30. ♜ d4±) 30. ♜ f4±.

29. ♜ f3 ♜ xe3!

This is the right way. 29... ♜ c5 does not do the trick, due to 30. ♜ xd6! ♜ f5 31. ♜ xe4 ♜ xe4 32. ♜ d3! ♜ eg3 33. ♜ d1+-.

30. ♜ xe3 ♜ f5 31. ♜ f4 ♜ xf3 32. ♜ xf3 ♜ e5 33. ♜ f2 ♜ c6±



Like in the game Radjabov-Svidler, the board has ‘shrunk’ and Black’s knights are no worse than White’s rooks.

Exercise 29

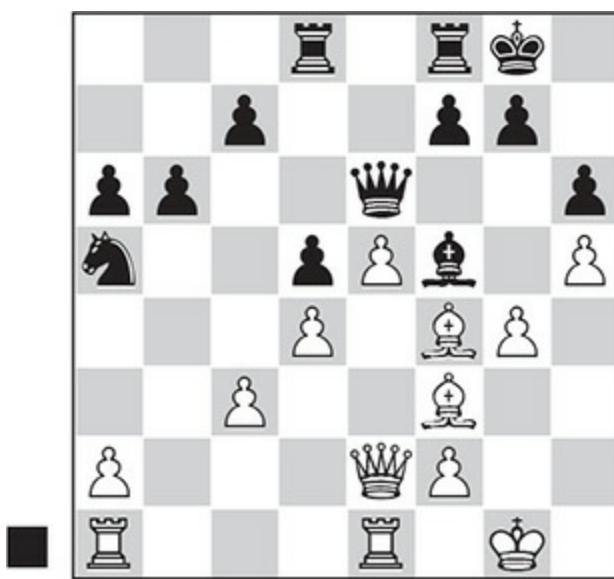
Vladimir Kramnik

2787

Hou Yifan

2680

Wijk aan Zee 2018 (3)



Hou Yifan found a non-materialistic way to get out of a difficult situation:

23... ♜e4!

The passive 23... ♜h7 lets White push his kingside pawn majority uninhibited with 24. ♜g2 c5 25. ♜g3±, followed by f2-f4, etc.

24. ♜xe4 dxe4 25. ♜g3

The e4-pawn is lost, but Hou Yifan prepares another pawn sacrifice to maximize the potential of her pieces.

25... c5 26. dxс5

26. ♜xe4 cxd4 27. cxd4 ♜c6 28. ♜ad1 ♜b4 gives Black positional compensation ‘a la Petrosian’.

26... ♜c4!±

26... bxc5 27. ♜xe4±.



The point. Black threatens ... ♜c4-d2-f3 and obtains sufficient compensation for the pawn.

27. ♜xe4

27. cxb6?! ♜d2↑; 27. ♜ad1 bxc5 28. ♜xe4 ♜d2 29. ♜e2 ♜d5!=.

27... ♜d2 28. ♜f4 bxc5 29. ♜e3 ♜c4 30. ♜e4 ♜d2 31. ♜e3 ♜c4 32. ♜e4 ♜d2 ½-

½

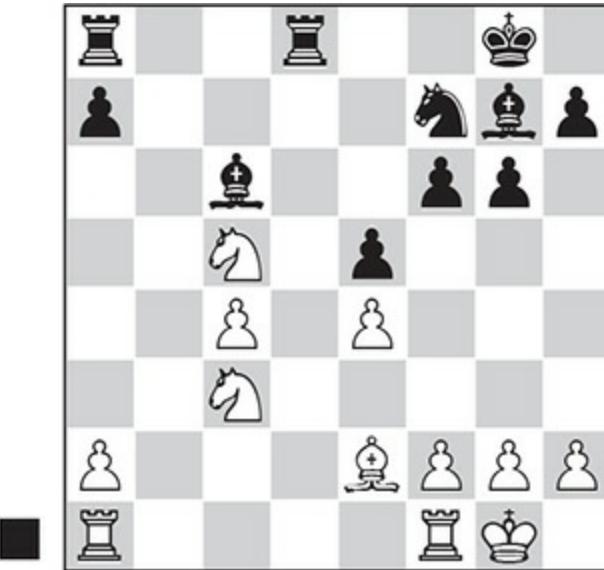
Exercise 30

Davorin Kuljasevic

Zdenko Kozul

2600

Croatia tt 2018 (7)



Being already down a pawn, Black found a way to take a positional initiative with another pawn sacrifice:

21... ♜g5!!

All other moves lead to an advantage for White: 21... ♜f8 22. ♜e6 ♛d2 23. ♛fd1 ♛c2 24. ♛xf8 ♛xc3 25. ♛d7±; 21... ♛d2 22. ♜b3 ♛c2 23. ♛fc1 ♜xe4 24.c5!±; 21... ♛ab8 22. ♜d5±.

22.h4

22. ♜d5 ♜f8! 23. ♜b3 ♜xe4 24. ♜f3 ♜xd5 25.cxd5 ♜c3=; 22.f3 ♜f8 23. ♜d3 ♜e6=.

22... ♜f8!

The point.

23.hxg5 ♜xc5 24.gxf6 ♛d2=



The two extra pawns do not really matter. Black has full control over the dark squares complex and a strong presence on the second rank. White has to play carefully to hold this endgame.

Exercise 31

Wesley So

2778

Sergey Fedorchuk

2657

France tt 2015 (10)



White has a wide choice in this position. It would seem like he should play with his queen, but the best move is, in fact, the one that leaves it hanging, at least for one move:

21. ♕d4!!

In the game, Wesley So acted on a conditioned reflex and retreated the queen with 21. ♕d2?. However, after 21... ♕f7 22. gxf6 gxf6 23. ♕d4 ♕e5 24. ♕xg4 ♕xg4 25. ♕d4 ♔f7 26. ♕e6, Black launched an unexpectedly strong kingside attack: 26... ♜dg8! 27. ♜xc7 ♕e5 28. cxd6 ♕c8! 29. d7 ♜f3+ 30. ♔f1 ♜d3+ 31. ♜e2 ♜h1+!. Other possibilities are: 21. ♕xg4 ♕xg4 22. ♕d4 ♕f7 23. ♕e6 ♜d7± and 21. ♕d4 ♕ef5!±, while another queen sacrifice exists, as well: 21. gxf6!? ♕xf4 22. fxe7+ (22. fxg7+ ♔xg7 23. ♕e2+ ♔f6!–+) 22... ♔f7 23. exd8 ♜ xd8 24. ♕e4! ♔g8 25. ♕eg5∞. **21... ♜xf4 22. ♕e6+ ♔f7 23. ♜xf4 ♜hg8△**
23...fxg5 24. ♜xe7+ ♔xe7 25. ♜xg6++–.
24. ♜e6 ♜c8△+–



Black keeps the material balance, but his position looks terrible from a positional point of view.

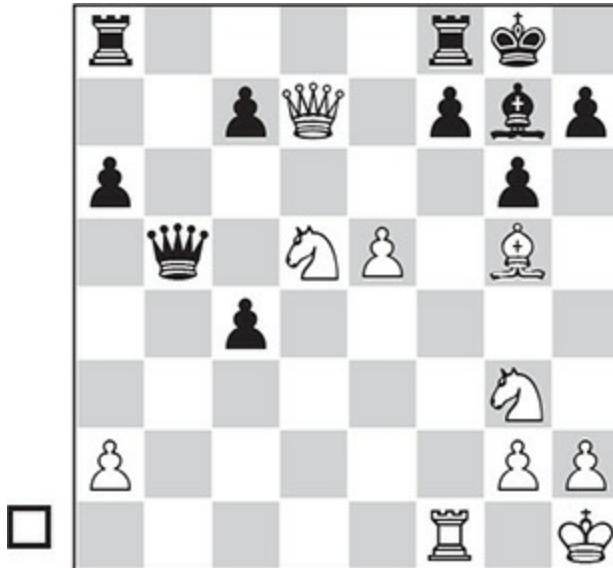
Exercise 32

Maxim Matlakov

Gadir Guseinov

2634

Baku playoff rapid 2015 (1)



Like in the previous game, the white player missed a strong possibility, thinking that the hanging queen should be protected:

22. ♜e4!

is the winning move, but in the game Matlakov played 22.e6?, which ended badly for him after 22...fxe6 23. ♜xe6+ ♛h8 24. ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 25.h4 c3 26. ♜e4 c2 27. ♜h2 c6, and White resigned.

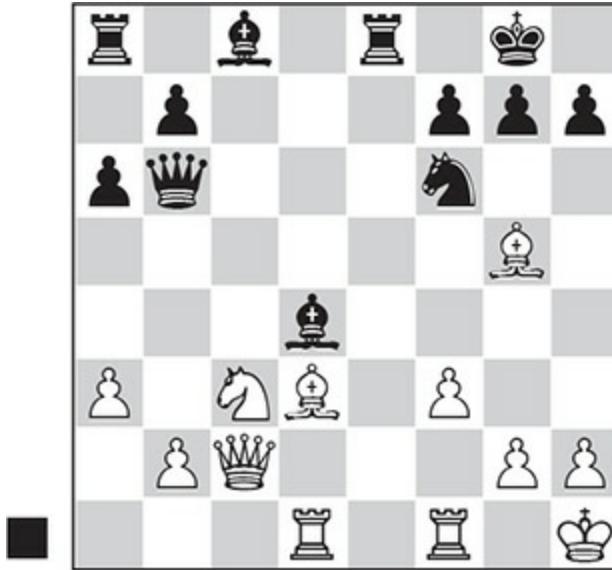
22... ♜xd7 23. ♜ef6+ ♜xf6 24. ♜xf6+ ♛g7 25. ♜xd7 ♜fe8 26. ♜c1+–

Exercise 33

Aman Hambleton

Davorin Kuljasevic

Biel rapid 2017



How to solve the development problems and the threats of $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ and $\mathbb{N}c3-d5-c7$? Black has an elegant way of doing that:

21... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

Sacrificing the h7-pawn, which is not too important in the big picture.

A) 21... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ preserves the material balance, but leads to a position in which Black would suffer in the long run, due to White's bishop pair advantage or the inferior pawn structure: 22. $\mathbb{N}xc3$ $h6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ (23. $\mathbb{Q}h4\pm$) 23... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 25. $g4\pm$;

B) 21... $h6?$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{N}d5$ $\mathbb{N}xb2$ 24. $\mathbb{N}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 25. $\mathbb{N}c7+-$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{K}h8$

Black gains momentum by threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}e6-b3$. He has full compensation, as evidenced by the continuation

24. $\mathbb{N}b1$ $\mathbb{R}ac8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{R}xe6$ 27. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{R}xc3=$.

Exercise 34

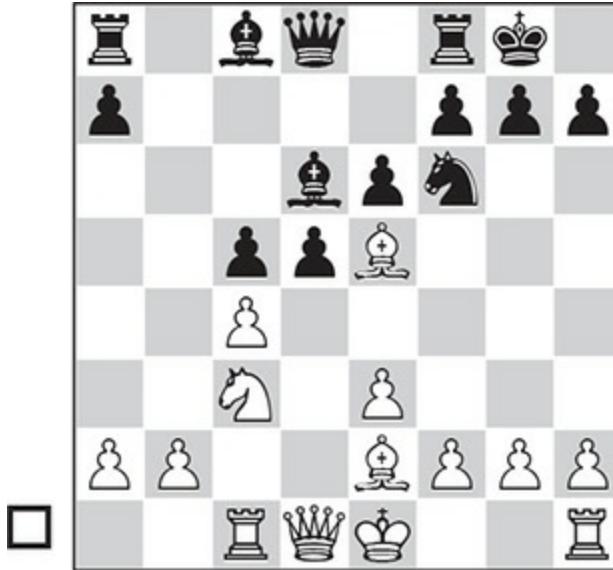
Davorin Kuljasevic

2578

Bahruz Rzayev

2411

Legnica Ech 2013 (5)



It is tempting to win the central pawn with

12. ♜xf6.

However, White could also play for a small positional edge with 12. ♜xd6 ♜xd6 13.cxd5 exd5 14. ♜a4.

12... ♜xf6 13.cxd5 exd5 14. ♜xd5 ♜b8 15. ♜d1



This is the critical position when trying to assess Black's compensation.

Among several attractive options, the best one is

15... ♜e5!

A) 15... ♜e7 16. ♜d2 ♜d8 17. ♜d5 ♜xd5 18. ♜xd5 ♜xb2 19. ♜a8!±;

B) 15... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ does not quite work, due to 17.g3! (17. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8\mathbb{Q}$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g1\pm$) 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 24.f3+–.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6\mathbb{Q}$

With a very active position where Black should be able to eventually return the sacrificed material. Which continuation is better, 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ or 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$? Analytically speaking, there is not much difference between them – White's advantage is symbolic with Black's best play in both cases. Which continuation White will choose is a matter of his psychological preferences and risk-reward attitude.

Exercise 35

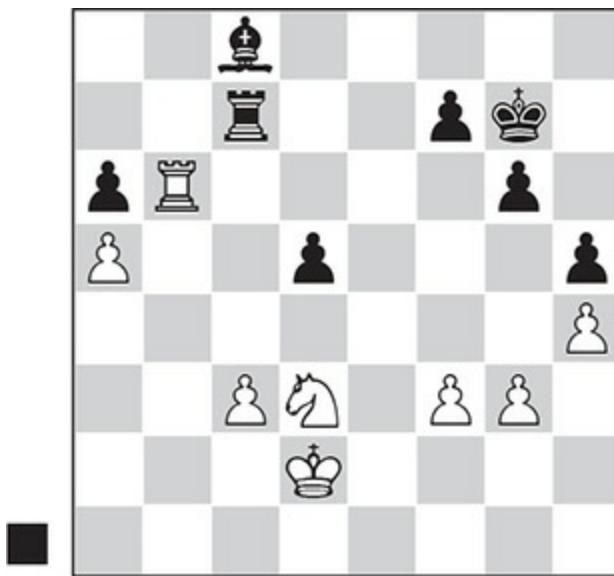
Alexey Sarana

2573

Vadim Zviagintsev

2633

Yaroslavl 2018 (7)



Activity is important in endgames, not only for objective, but also for psychological reasons. In this position, the experienced grandmaster

Zviagintsev sacrifices a pawn to activate his passive pieces, obtaining excellent drawing chances:

41... ♜c4!

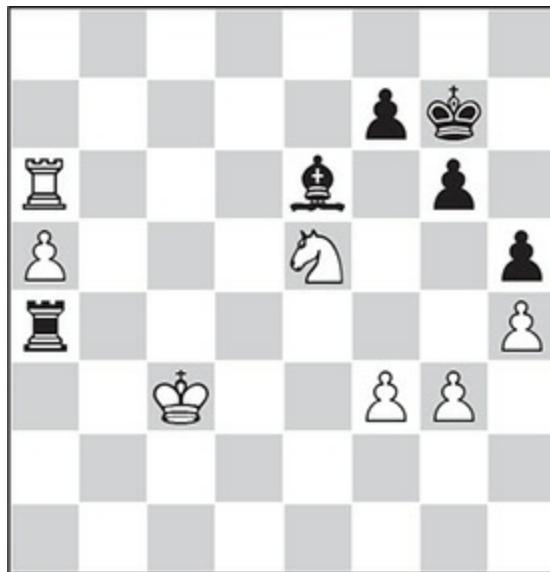
Passive moves like 41... ♜f8? 42. ♜e5 ♜e7 43. ♜d3 ♜b7 44. ♜d4+– and 41... ♜d7? 42. ♜b4 d4 43. c4 ♜c7 44. ♜c6+– would make White's job much easier.

42. ♜e5

42. ♜b4 d4 43. cxd4 ♜xd4+ 44. ♜c3 ♜d1 45. ♜xa6 ♜a1=; 42. ♜b8 ♜f5

43. ♜b4 ♜c5 44. ♜xa6 ♜xa5=; 42. ♜b4 ♜c7 43. ♜e5 ♜c5=.

42... ♜a4 43. ♜c6 ♜e6 44. ♜xa6 d4! 45. cxd4 ♜xd4+ 46. ♜c3 ♜a4∞



We have a 180 degrees turnaround in terms of piece activity compared to the initial position. True, Black is down a pawn, but his pieces have been revived and this kind of position is much easier to play than the one a few moves ago. In the remainder of the game, he managed to activate his king as well, securing a comfortable draw:

47. ♜d3 ♜d5 48. ♜a7 ♜f6! 49. ♜d7+ ♜f5 50. ♜b6 ♜a3+ 51. ♜c2 ♜e6 52. a6 ♜e5 53. ♜a8 ♜d4 54. a7 ♜e3=

Exercise 36

Davorin Kuljasevic

Luka Matanovic

2211

Croatia tt 2017 (1)



Black's best practical chance in this position is the exchange sacrifice
17... ♜xf6!.

The alternatives make White's task much simpler in a practical game:

- A) 17... ♜xf6 leads to a difficult endgame for Black by force: 18. ♜xf6 ♜xf6 19. ♜d4 ♜e5 20. ♜xe5 dxe5 21. ♜gxe4 ♜xe4 22. ♜xe4 ♜f4 23. f3±;
- B) 17... ♜d3+? was played in the game, but it contains a tactical flaw:
18. ♛f1 ♜ac5 19. ♜xd3! (19. fxg7? ♜xf2+ 20. ♛g1 ♜e5+-; 19. ♜gxe4 ♜xe4 20. ♜xd3 ♜xg5 21. fxg7 ♜f6±) 19... ♜xd3 20. ♜cxe4+-.

18. ♜xf6 ♜xf6



Black's pieces are active and White's king is unsafe, which makes the position still somewhat messy. The following variations prove that it is not easy for White to convert his material advantage and that he has to play carefully over the next few moves.

19. ♜g4!

This is the best move, but it depends on a hidden tactical detail. The computer-assisted 19.dxc6!? ♜xc6 20. ♜xd6 ♜e5 21. ♜h6± would be a difficult decision over the board from a human perspective.

White can even get into trouble in case of inaccurate continuations: 19.0 0?! ♜h8 20. ♜e1?! e3↑ or 19. ♜d2?! ♜b4 20.0 0 ♜e7↖.

19... ♛h8

19... ♜d3+ 20. ♜f1 ♜xb2



analysis diagram

21. ♜cxe4!. When playing 19. ♜g4, White had to find this idea, which is not so easy and proves the practical value of Black's exchange sacrifice.

20. ♛f1 e3 21. ♜xd7 ♛xd7 22. ♜f3 ♛e5 23. ♜xe3 ♜b4±

Exercise 37

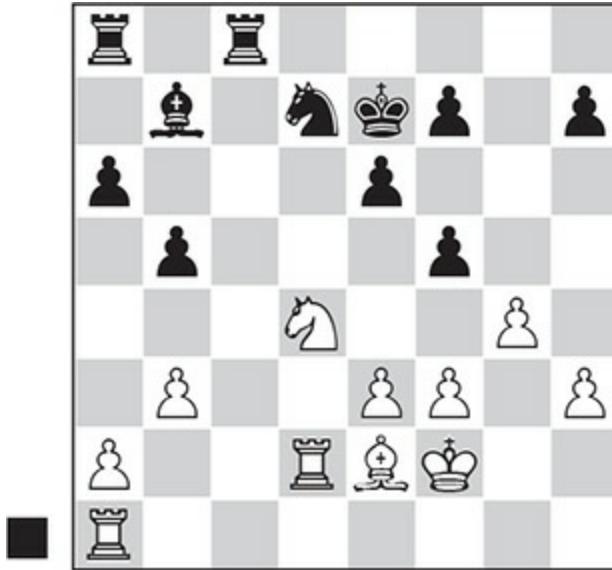
Nikita Vitiugov

2730

Santosh Vidit Gujrathi

2630

Tsaghkadzor Wch tt 2015 (6)



In this innocent-looking position, Black has to be careful not to end up in an inferior endgame by exchanging on g4. Grandmaster Vidit found a more active alternative:

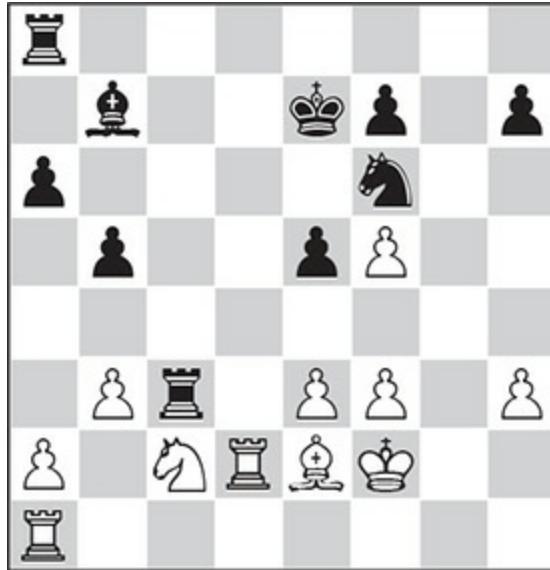
23...♝f6!?

Sacrificing the f5-pawn. Black could have kept the material balance with 23...fxg4 but after 24.hxg4↑, the h-file opens up and the h-pawn becomes an easy target. However, an even stronger way to accomplish this goal was 23...♞c3! 24.gxf5 e5, when White's best reply is to return the extra pawn: 25.f6+! ♞xf6 (25...♞xf6 26.♞f5!) 26.♞f5+ ♜e6 27.♞g3, with just a slight edge for White.

24.gxf5?!

Vitiugov follows the conditioned reflex to take free material. However, a stronger possibility was 24.a4! b4 25.a5, ignoring the f5-pawn for the time being and isolating the b4-pawn. The game could continue 25...♞c3 26.♞a4 ♔d5 27.gxf5 e5 28.♞c2 ♞xb3 29.♞c4 ♞b2 30.♞xd5 ♞xd5 31.♞xb4 ♔b3 32.♞e2!±.

24...e5! 25.♞c2 ♞c3=



Black has achieved a lot of activity for the sacrificed pawn and Vidit had no problems holding this position.

26. ♜b4 e4! 27. ♜c2 ♜xc2 28. ♜xc2 exf3 29. ♜xf3 ♜e4+ 30. ♛e2 ♜g3+ 31. ♛f2 ♜e4+ 32. ♛e2 ♜g3+ 33. ♛f2

Draw agreed.

Exercise 38

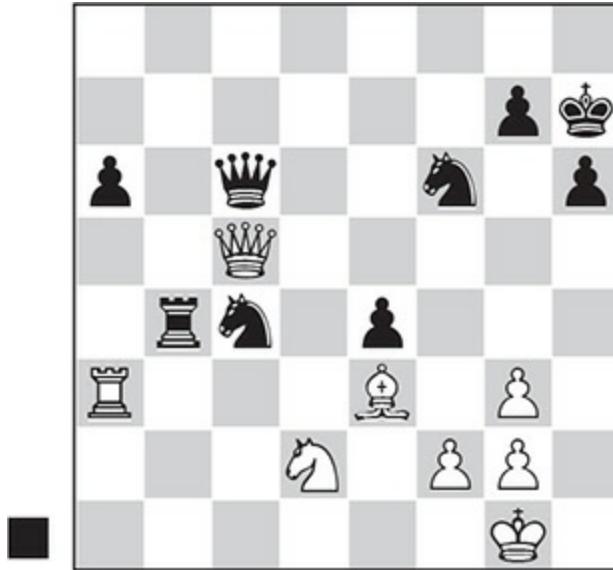
Branko Vujakovic

2353

Davorin Kuljasevic

2543

Croatia tt 2014 (3)



44... ♕xd2!!

The queen does not have to be protected! The game saw 44... ♔xc5?!

45. ♔xc5 ♕xa3 46. ♔xb4??.

45. ♔xc6 ♕b1+ 46. ♔h2 ♕g4+

46... ♕f1+? 47. ♔h3 ♕xe3 48.g4 ♕h1+ 49. ♔g3 ♕f1+ 50. ♔f4+-.

47. ♔h3



47... ♕e5!+-

This is the point. White cannot defend the queen and the mating square h1. The knight on d2 does a perfect job of defending all the key squares, so

White does not have any counterattacks.

47...h5? 48. h4+–.

Exercise 39

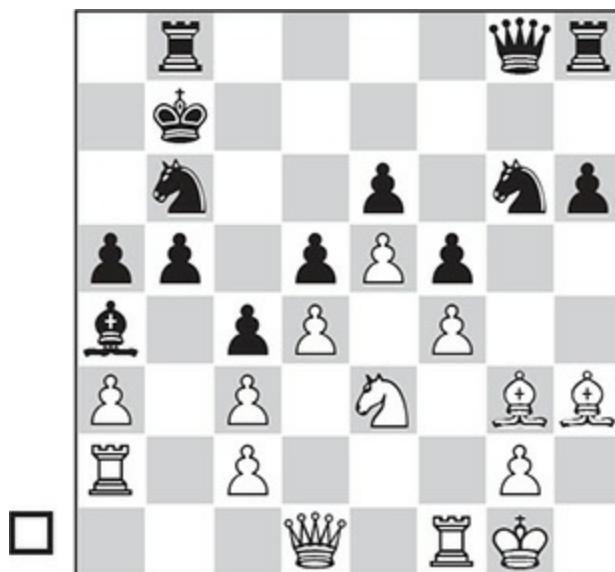
Ernesto Inarkiev

2669

Nikita Vitiugov

2638

Moscow 2009 (2)



Over the last few moves, Black has done a lot to improve his position, while White's maneuvering play has been stagnant. The trend was clearly going Black's way, so Inarkiev decided to change it with an enterprising piece sacrifice:

31. xf5!

31. h5? xe5+–; after 31. h2 h5, Black has a positional initiative.

31...exf5 32. xf5

For the sacrificed piece, White gets two connected passed pawns and active pieces. The position becomes very volatile and any mistake from either side can tilt the scales.

32... a6 33. f3?!

A bit more accurate was 33. h2 h5 34. e3∞.

33...h5

Another interesting possibility was 33... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$? 34. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 35.f5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3\infty$.

34. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h4 35. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ h3 36.g4 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7!$ 38.f5 $\mathbb{Q}g2!$

With a very imbalanced position.

Exercise 40

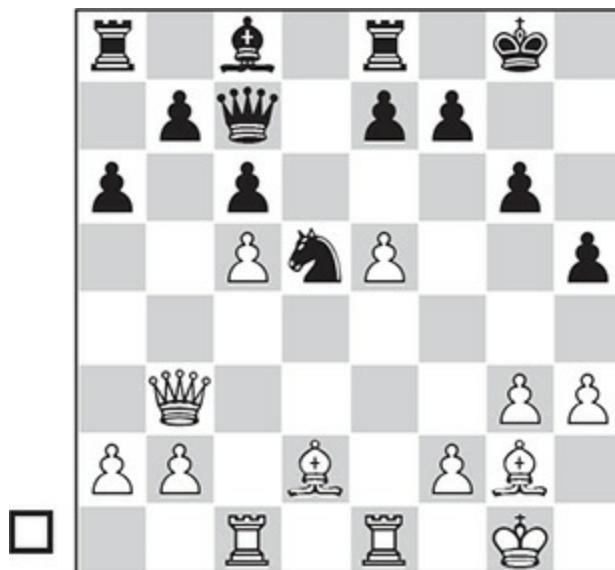
Veselin Topalov

2804

Gata Kamsky

2671

Sofia 2006 (5)



White can hold a stable positional advantage even with simple moves, but Topalov decided to play in the psychologically most challenging way:

26.e6!

26. $\mathbb{Q}cd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a4\pm$.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 28. $\mathbb{Q}e1$



As a result of the exchange and pawn sacrifice, White gets ample attacking possibilities against the shattered black kingside. The defender's task is very difficult in such positions, which was proved by the way the game progressed from this point.

28... ♕d7

It was better to return some material to include the queen in the defense via the seventh rank: 28...e5!? 29.♕c3 e6 30.♕xe5 ♔f7, although White keeps a strong initiative even then with 31.♕e4.

29.♕d3 ♔h7?!

29... ♔f7 was a better defense, but not the first move that comes to one's mind.

30.♖e5! ♕f6 31.♘e3 ♕g7 32.♘e4! ♔f7

32... ♕xe4 33.♖xe4 ♕h8 34.♕c3+--.

33.♕c2±

All of White's pieces have joined the attack and Topalov eventually broke through Black's defenses.

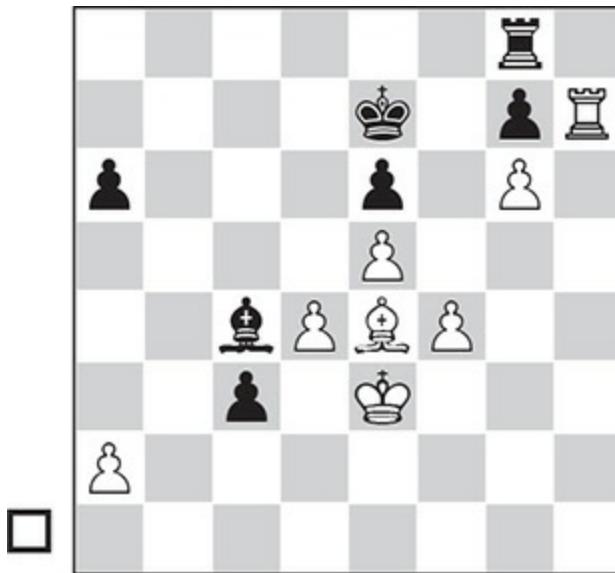
Exercise 41

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

2809

Vladimir Kramnik

2800



White has a big advantage in this endgame and there is probably more than one way to win. However, the most decisive continuation is

46.d5!,

sacrificing a pawn to create a connected pawn duo on the e- and f-files. In the game, Mamedyarov took the slower route to victory: 46.a3 a5 47.♘c2 ♕d7 48.d5 ♘xd5 49.♕d4 ♘a2 50.♖xc3 ♔c6 51.♗h2 ♔c5 52.♗d2 ♗h8 53.♗d7 ♗h3+ 54.♔b2 ♘d5 55.♗xg7 ♕d4 56.♗h7 ♗g3 57.♗h5 ♗g2 58.♗g5 ♗f2 59.g7 ♘e4 60.g8♘ ♗xc2+ 61.♔b3 ♗c3+ 62.♔a4 ♗c5 63.♗g2 ♘f3 64.♗d8+, and Black resigned.

46...exd5

46...♘xd5 47.♘xd5 exd5 48.f5 d4+ 49.♔d3 ♕e8 50.♗h4+–.

47.♘c2 ♘xa2

47...♔e6 48.♔d4 ♗f8 49.f5+ ♗xf5 50.♘xf5+ ♔xf5 51.♗h2 ♕xg6 52.♔xc3+–.

48.f5+–

And Black has no defense against f5-f6, etc.

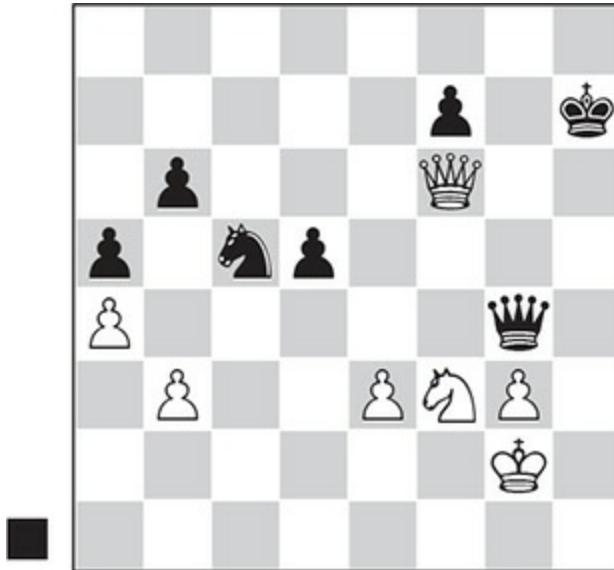
Exercise 42

Levon Aronian

Fabiano Caruana

2805

Stavanger 2015 (5)

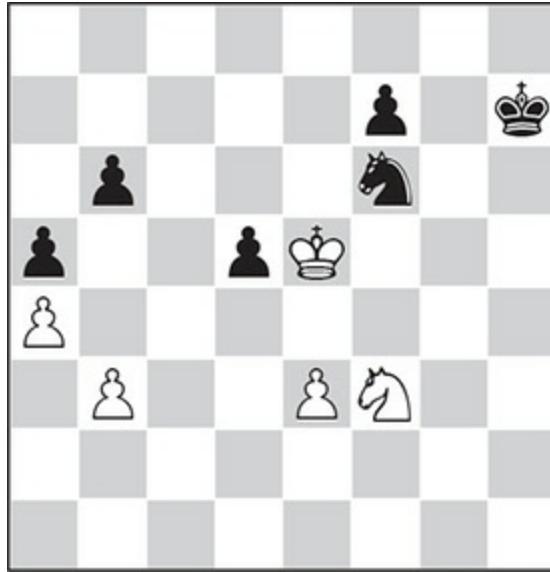


Caruana got greedy and took the pawn:

39... ♜xg3+?

However, this was the wrong decision because White's pieces will be far too active in the resulting ending. The right move was 39... ♜g6, when Black has enough counterplay against the weak b3-pawn: 40. ♜h4+ ♜g8 (40... ♜g7 41. ♜d4+ ♜f6 42. ♜xd5 ♜b2+ 43. ♜h3 ♜xb3=) 41. ♜d8+ ♜g7 42. ♜xd5 ♜c2+ 43. ♜d2 ♜xb3=.

40. ♜xg3 ♜e4+ 41. ♜f4 ♜xf6 42. ♜e5



The difference between the activity of the two kings is striking. White is winning in this endgame despite being down a pawn!

42... ♕g6

42... ♝g4+ 43. ♔xd5 ♝xe3+ 44. ♔c6 ♕g6 45. ♔xb6 ♔f5 46. ♔xa5+–.

43. ♝d4 ♕g5 44. ♔d6 ♝g4 45. ♝c2!+–

Exercise 43

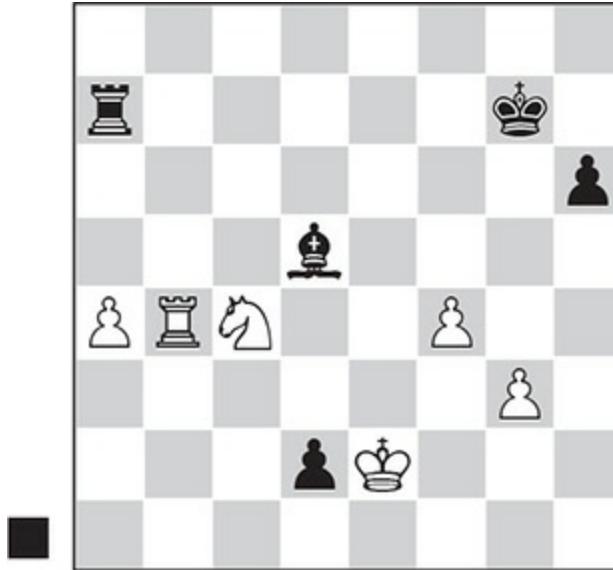
Antoaneta Stefanova

2490

Anna Muzychuk

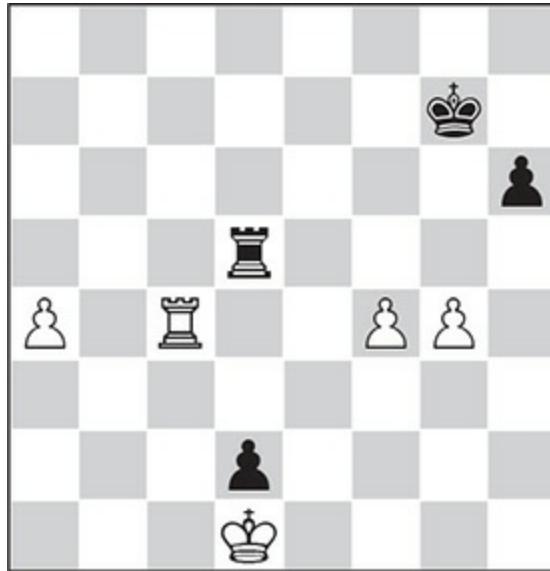
2564

Khanty-Mansiysk Wch W 2018 (3)



In a difficult situation, Black held on to her passed pawn, but she should have given it up for activity with
43...Qc6!.

After 43...Qxc4+? 44.Rxc4 Rd7 45.Qd1, White blocked the d-pawn and the rook endgame was simply winning: 45...Rd3 46.g4 Rd5

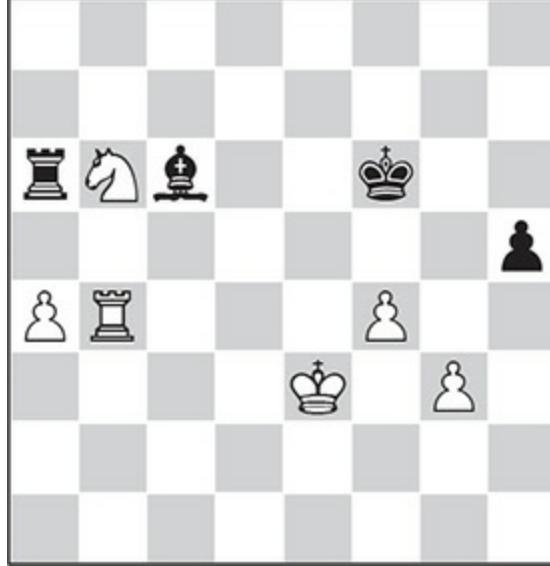


analysis diagram

47.Rc3! Rd4 48.Ra3 and Black resigned.
44.Rb6

44.a5 would have led to a theoretically drawn rook endgame after 44... $\mathbb{Q}d5$
45. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ h5 46. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5=.$

44... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ h5 46. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6\infty$



Even with two extra pawns for White, this endgame is very likely drawn. It is difficult to make progress on the queenside without allowing Black serious counterplay against the g3-pawn. For example:

47. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f3\infty$

Exercise 44

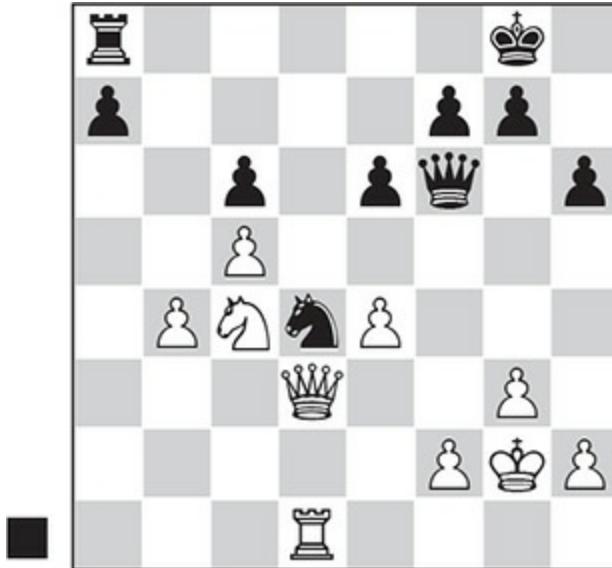
Davorin Kuljasevic

2577

Marko Tratar

2503

Trieste 2013 (5)



Black is in a difficult situation, but he can hope to survive if he sacrifices a pawn:

29...e5

In the game, Tratar continued passively and lost without a fight after 29...
29...e5? 30.e5 **e7** 31.**d7** **f8??** (the endgame after 31...**xd7** 32.**xd7** is quite hopeless, too) 32.**xc6**.

30.f4

Black would welcome the mass exchanges in the center: 30.**xe5?!** **xe5** 31.**xd4** **xd4** 32.**xd4** **a5!±**.

30...e6 31.xe5



And now

31...a5!

allows him to liquidate the pawn structure on the queenside, keeping his practical drawing chances alive.

Exercise 45

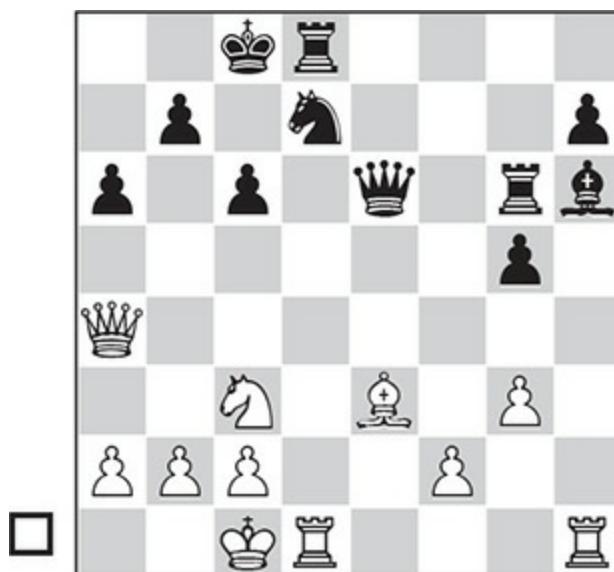
Viktor Kortchnoi

2625

Mikhail Gurevich

2645

Rotterdam 1990



22. ♜xh6?!

As Kortchnoi said: ‘One does not win brilliancy prizes with such moves.’ He saw the right move 22. ♜e4!, which creates multiple threats against the uncoordinated black army, but he miscalculated something: 22... ♜f6 (22... ♜e5 23.f3 ♜g7 24. ♜b3 h6 25. ♜d4 ♜d5 26.c4+–) 23. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 24. ♜d1+ ♜d5 (24... ♜c8 25. ♜d6+ ♜b8 26. ♜d4+–; 24... ♜e7 25. ♜b4+–) 25. ♜c5 ♜e7 26.c4 g4 27. ♜xh6 ♜xh6 (27... ♜xc5 28. ♜e3+–) 28. ♜a5+–.

22... ♜xh6 23. ♜xg5 ♜e8 24. ♜xh6 ♜xh6+ 25. ♜b1 ♜e6±

The ‘side-effect’ of the combination that netted him a pawn is that Black has

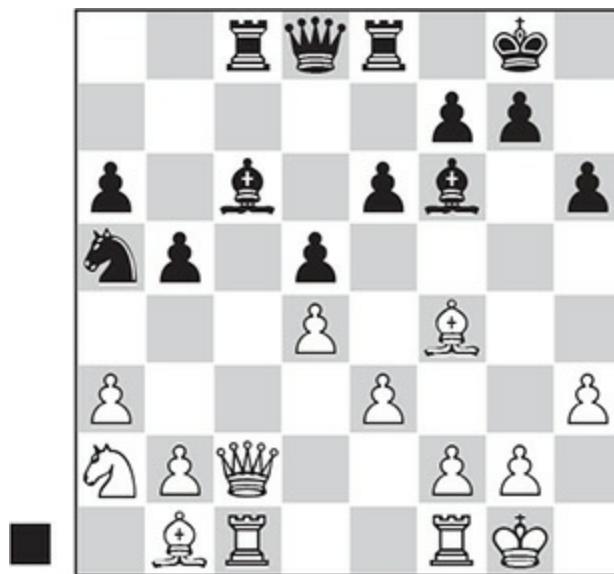
restored the coordination of his pieces and White's winning task is far from trivial.

Exercise 46

Forest Chen

Sydney Kong

Tennessee 2018



The battery on the b1-h7 diagonal looks menacing, but Black cannot play ... g7-g6, due to the hanging h6-pawn. Or can he?

18...g6!

Non-materialism!

- A) The game saw 18... $\mathbb{Q}d7?$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3+-;$
- B) 18... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\pm$.

If White takes the pawn with

19. $\mathbb{Q}xh6?!$

(19. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4\leftrightarrow$), Black continues

19...e5 \leftrightarrow



and suddenly all White's minor pieces look completely misplaced.

Exercise 47

Davorin Kuljasevic

2298

Mladen Palac

2572

Zadar 2001 (3)



14. ♔d1?

This leads to a worse endgame by force! White should have accepted the position where he was down an exchange: 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (now 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf1?$ does not work, in view of 15. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 16. $fxg7$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg2+-$) 15. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$



analysis diagram

and here White has full compensation. In the following game, he was even better after 16... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d5\pm$ Cosma-Gormally, Cappelle-la-Grande 2002.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xf1!$

I did not think that Black can play this way because he is ‘losing material’. But I underestimated the positional factors in the arising endgame:

15. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 16. $fxg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8!$

The move I had missed.

18. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$



19... ♕d2!

This is the point – White's minor pieces cannot coordinate well in the endgame, so his 'material advantage' is completely irrelevant.

20.♘c4 ♕c2 21.a4 f5

21...b6!?

22.♔f3 ♔xg7#

Exercise 48

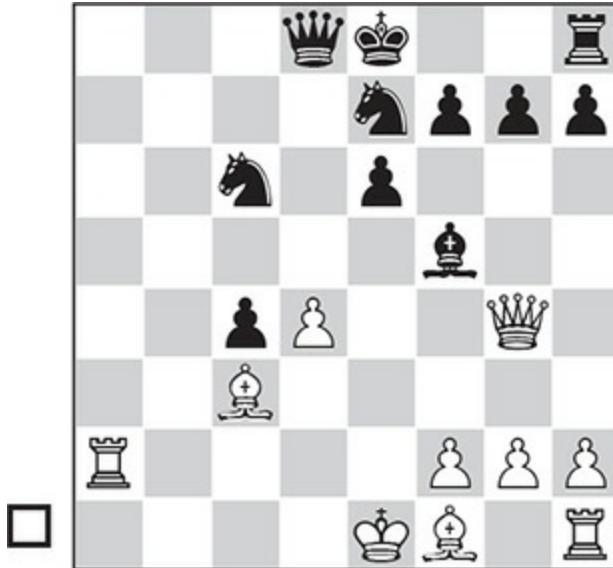
Davorin Kuljasevic

2555

Nenad Sulava

2453

Zagreb 2017 (5)



The right continuation is

17. ♔f3.

In the game, I took the ‘poisoned pawn’ with 17. ♔xg7?!, but this turned out to be the wrong decision as it allows Black to ride a wave of activity: 17... ♕g8 18. ♔h6 ♘d5 19. ♘d2 ♕b8! 20. ♘a1 ♕b3 21. ♘c1 ♘d7, and the full control over the light squares promises Black sufficient compensation.

17...0 0

17... ♘d5 18. ♕xc4+–.

18. ♕xc4 ♘xd4 19. ♔g3 ♕b1!

The only move that prevents White from castling; 19... ♕g6 20.0 0±.

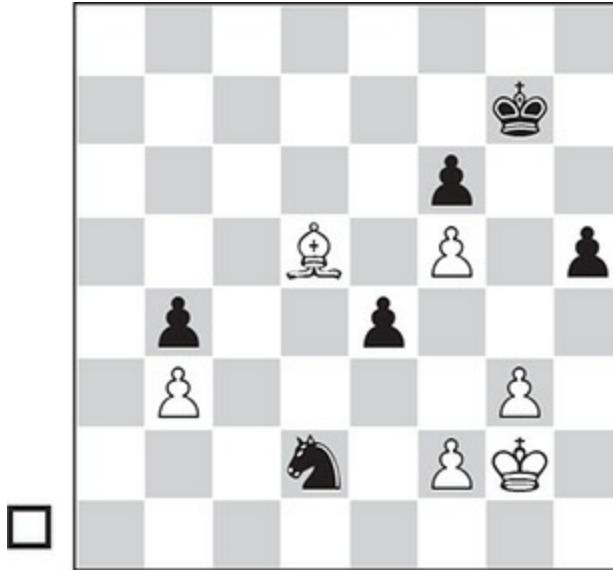
20. ♘d2 ♘ef5 21. ♔e5 ♘c2+ 22. ♔d1 ♕a8! 23. ♘xc2 ♕xg2 24. ♘f1 ♕xc2+
25. ♕xc2±

Exercise 49

Akiba Rubinstein

Alexander Alekhine

London 1922 (12)

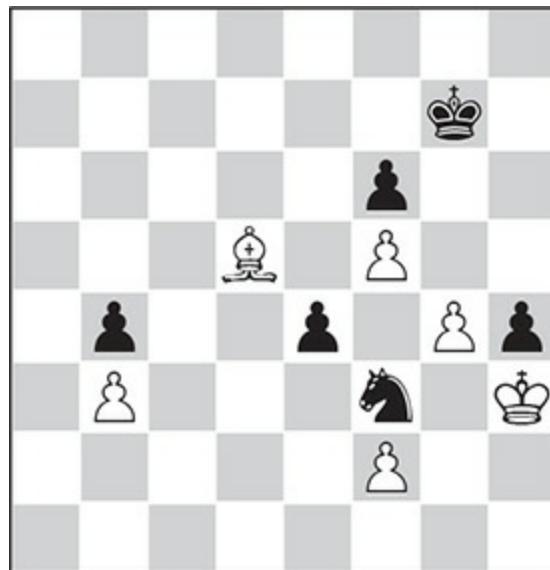


White's king is cut off, but he has a way to activate it and achieve a draw with a series of pawn sacrifices:

50.g4!

This is the first one. 50.f4? was Rubinstein's choice in the game, but after 50...e3!, his king remained cut off on the kingside and Alekhine won the endgame convincingly after 51.♕g1 ♕f8 52.♕g2 ♕e7 53.♗g8 ♕d6 54.♗f7 ♕c5 55.♗xh5 ♗xb3 56.♗f3 ♕d4 57.♗f7 ♕d3! 58.♗xb3 ♕d2 59.♗c4 b3 60.♗xb3 e2 0-1.

50...h4 51.♔h3 ♗f3



52.g5!

The second one...

52...fxg5 53.♘xe4 ♜d4

... and the third one:

54.f4! gxf4 55.♕xh4 ♔f6 56.♕g4 ♔e5 57.♗d3 ♜xb3 58.f6 ♔xf6 59.♔xf4=

Exercise 50

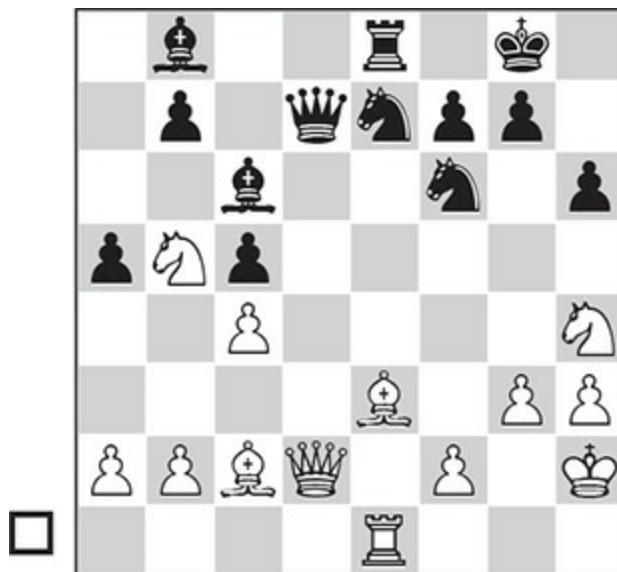
Etienne Bacrot

2718

Ding Liren

2738

Liaocheng rapid 2018 (5)



White can take two pawns in this position. However, both of them are poisoned. In the game, Bacrot took the one on h6:

27.♗xh6?,

but this backfired quickly. Taking the pawn on the other flank with 27.♗xa5?! is suspicious, at the least, due to 27...g5! 28.♗g2 ♜g6, and suddenly Black has some dangerous threats on the kingside. Continuing on the greedy path with 29.♗xc5?! allows Black to launch a powerful attack with 29...♜xe1 30.♗xe1 ♜f4! 31.gxf4 ♜xf4+ 32.♔g1 ♜xh3. White should probably just agree to an equal endgame after 27.♗xd7 ♜xd7. **27...gxh6 28.♗xh6 ♜g6 29.♗f5**



29... ♜ h5!

Bacrot may have underestimated this strong move. Black defends against the checkmate and launches an attack of his own.

30. ♛ xe8+?

It was better to play 30. ♛ d1 ♜ e6 31. ♜ xh5, but after 31... ♜ e2! 32. ♜ xe2 ♜ xe2, Black has a powerful presence on the second rank in the endgame.
33. ♜ d8+ ♜ h7 34. ♜ xb8 ♜ xf2+ 35. ♜ g1 ♜ g2+ 36. ♜ f1 ♜ xc2#.

30... ♜ xe8 31. ♜ xh5 ♜ e1

Suddenly, White's king is the one being checkmated!

32. ♜ h6+ ♔ f8 33. ♜ xc5+ ♔ e7 0-1

Index of names (numbers refer to pages)

A

Adams 276-278, 302, 308
Adhiban 287-289, 308
Alekhine 81-83, 86, 134, 221-223, 329-330
Alekseenko 273-274
Alekseev 38, 40, 50
Almasi 280-283
Alterman 188
Ameir 30
Anand 45, 98, 166-170, 206, 248-252
Andersson 33
Andreikin 195
Antal 295-296
Anton Guijarro 304, 307
Areshchenko 161-163, 304
Aronian 121, 123-125, 130-133, 171-173, 247, 252, 254-256, 268, 325
Artemiev 215-217

B

Bacrot 330
Banikas 255
Bareev 188
Baron 193-194
Bartel 40
Bellaiche 92
Bernstein 261
Beukes 69, 185
Bilic 183
Blübaum 308
Bogoljubow 221
Bologan 22-23
Bondarevsky 205, 207, 209

Botvinnik 23, 29-30, 32, 86, 159, 218, 301

Brkic 113, 115

Bronstein 96, 210-212

Bruzon 110

C

Campbell 185

Capablanca 32, 159, 261-263

Carlsen 41-43, 54-55, 97-98, 155, 171-173, 206, 239-242, 268, 283-287, 294, 314-315

Caruana 152, 154, 325

Castrillon Gomez 14, 21

Chen 328

Cordova 314-315

Cosma 328

Cruz 58

D

David 24-26

Ding Liren 97-100, 106-109, 330

Djurovic 145

Dlugy 294

Dreev 316

Dubov 310-311

Duda 212-215

Dvoretsky 266

E

Ehlvest 269

Eljanov 172, 174, 176, 195-196, 212-215, 272

Euwe 100

F

Fedorchuk 318

Fercec 307

Filippov 15

Finegold 269-270, 272

Fischer 15, 201, 204

Flores 18-19

Fressinet 190-192

Ftacnik 51

G

Gabriel 188

Gaprindashvili 305

Gelfand 51-52, 152, 166-170, 188

Geller 263-265

Gligoric 149-151

Godena 26

Golubev 31

Gormally 328

Goryachkina 56

Graf 216

Gramb 186

Grigoriadis 290

Gufeld 16

Gurevich 327

Guseinov 319

H

Hambleton 319

Horvath 228, 231

Hou Yifan 12, 180-182, 317

Hübner 216, 243-247

Hulak 21

I

Inarkiev 324

Iordachescu 73

Ivanchuk 38-40, 50, 101-105, 156, 282

Ivanisevic 90

J

Jakovenko 47

Jankovic 164

Jansa 305

Jinshi Bai 106, 109

Jobava 24-26
Jussupow 101-103, 105, 265-267, 282

K

Kahneman 19, 33
Kamsky 324
Karjakin 239-243
Karpov 45-46, 76-80, 253, 266, 302, 314
Kasimdzhanov 188-189
Kasparov 11, 45-46, 50-51, 83-86, 134, 141-144, 149, 168, 188-190
Keres 205-210, 246, 312
Khalifman 235
Khismatullin 138-140, 172, 174, 310, 316
Kong 328

K

Korneev 145, 147-148
Kortchnoi 31, 52-54, 61, 74, 221, 232-239, 327
Kosteniuk 12
Kotkov 88
Kotov 20, 28, 149-151
Kozul 271-272, 313, 318
Kramnik 248, 253, 303, 317, 325
Krasenkow 142
Krejci 267
Krishna Teja 201
Kryvoruchko 280-282
Kuljasevic 23, 26, 30-31, 40, 48, 90, 92, 113, 145, 164, 225, 228, 267, 269, 271-272, 279, 287, 290, 293, 295, 302-303, 307, 318-321, 323, 327-329

L

Lagarde 201-202, 204
Larsen 301
Lasker 81
Lautier 22-23, 301
Ledger 273
Leko 248, 253

Lenderman 126-131

Liiva 216

Lisitsyn 13

M

Makogonov 28

Malakhov 63, 65

Mamedyarov 121-123, 125-128, 130-131, 325

Matanovic 321

Matlakov 276-279, 319

McShane 302

Melkumyan 43

Messi 43

Moiseenko 63

Molnar 12

Molner 90

Morphy 100

Motylev 215, 217, 304

Movsesian 51-52

Mphungu 69

Muzychuk 326

N

Naiditsch 283-287

Najdorf 142

Nakamura 315

Narciso Dublan 21

Navara 130-133

Neubauer 303

Nezhmetdinov 86-89, 105-106, 109, 134, 218-221

Ni Hua 97-98

Nijboer 52, 61

Nimzowitsch 143

Nisipeanu 308

Nybäck 293-294

O

Omar 279

Ortmann 216

P

Pacher 20

Palac 328

Papin 309

Parvanyan 302

Paulsen 137

Pert 316

Petrosian 29, 32, 60-63, 159-161, 176-179, 187, 221, 240, 243-247, 256, 261-262, 317

Pichot 18

Pinter 232-233, 235

Polak 12

Polgar 73-75, 77

Polugaevsky 86-87, 89, 105-106, 109

Ponomariov 156

Pribyl 83

Psakhis 146

R

Radjabov 182, 187, 313, 317

Ragozin 28

Recuero Guerra 145, 147

Reshevsky 159-160, 187

Réti 37

Risting 20, 183, 186

Rizouk 47

Rodshtein 190, 193-194

Rombaldoni 23, 31

Rowson 232

Rubinstein 329

Rzayev 320

S

Sämisch 221

Sammour Hasbun 48

Santiago 304
Sarana 321
Saric 21
Sax 76-78
Shen Yang 14, 21
Shirov 100, 141-144
Shomoev 138-139
Short 50-51, 168
Simagin 37-38, 63
Smirin 121
Smyslov 16, 96, 117-121
So 43-45, 318
Sokolov 255
Solodovnichenko 15-16
Spassky 15, 37, 60-62, 159, 205-212, 244, 246, 263-265, 314
Stefanova 326
Stefansson 236-238
Steinitz 11, 137, 140
Sterk 221
Sulava 329
Sveshnikov 277
Svidler 181-183, 187, 317
Szabo 261-262, 265, 312

T

Tabatabaei 180-182
Tal 31, 33, 61-62, 88, 100, 117-121, 127, 218-221, 244
Tarrasch 81
Tartakower 204, 221
Tomashevsky 54-56, 316
Topalov 247-254, 256, 301-302, 315, 324-325
Tratar 327
Troianescu 176, 178, 256
Tversky 19, 33

V

Vachier-Lagrave 56-59, 152, 155-156

Vallejo Pons 156
Van Wely 303, 313
Vavulin 309
Verlinsky 81
Vidit 161-164, 307, 322-323
Vitiugov 322-324
Volkov 311
Vujakovic 323
Vukovic 100

W

Wang Yue 313
Wei Yi 41-43, 54, 110-113

Y

Yang 225
Yermolinsky 240, 269

Z

Zaitsev 244, 277
Zviagintsev 321

Bibliography

- Game Changer: AlphaZero's Groundbreaking Chess Strategies and the Promise of AI*, Matthew Sadler & Natasha Regan, New in Chess, 2019.
- Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk*, D.Kahneman & A.Tversky, (1979), *Econometrica*, 47, 263-291;
- The psychology of preference*, D.Kahneman & A.Tversky, (1982), *Scientific American*, 246, 160-173;
- Botvinnik's Best Games ('Analiticheskie i kriticheskie raboty') Volume III: 1957-1970*, Mikhail Botvinnik, Moravian Chess 2001;
- My Best Games, 1952-2000 (Vol. 1: Games with white)*, Victor Kortchnoi, Olms 2001;
- My Best Games, Vol. 2: Games with black*, Victor Kortchnoi, Olms 2001;
- World Championship: Petrosian vs. Spassky, 1966*, Mikhail Tal; *Chess Digest Magazine* 1973;
- Perfect Your Chess*, Andrei Volokitin and Vladimir Grabinsky, Gambit Publications 2014;
- Anatoly Karpov: My 300 Best Games*, Anatoly Karpov, Russian Chess House 1997;
- William Steinitz: A Biography of the Bohemian Caesar*, K.Landsberg, McFarland & Co 1993;
- English Oxford Dictionary*:
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/outpost>;
- Life & Games of Mikhail Tal*, Mikhail Tal, Everyman Chess 1997;
- Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953*, David Bronstein, Dover Publications 1979;
- Recognizing Your Opponent's Resources: Developing Preventive Thinking*, Mark Dvoretsky, Russell Enterprises, Inc 2015.

Author's biography



- Born in Zagreb, Croatia; living in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, with wife Iva and daughter Lili;
- Grandmaster since 2010, highest rating: 2591 in Sept. 2013;
- Professional chess player, coach and author;
- Holding MS in Finance degree from Texas Tech University;
- Former editor-in-chief of *Sahovski glasnik* (Croatian chess magazine);
Former host of *Sahovski komentar* (Croatian chess TV broadcast);
- 4th place at World Youth U-16 in Crete, 2002;
- Winner of a dozen international tournaments and numerous team championships, including the Croatian Championship and Cup, US Chess League and Mitropa Cup.