

Colin Crouch

# Fighting Chess

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**Colin Crouch**

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First published in 2012 by Gloucester Publishers Limited, Northburgh House,  
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 85744 993 8

Distributed in North America by The Globe Pequot Press, P.O Box 480,  
246 Goose Lane, Guilford, CT 06437-0480.

All other sales enquiries should be directed to Everyman Chess, Northburgh House,  
10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT  
tel: 020 7253 7887 fax: 020 7490 3708  
email: [info@everymchess.com](mailto:info@everymchess.com); website: [www.everymchess.com](http://www.everymchess.com)

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*To Audrey Eileen Crouch, my mother, born December 1927, died July 2011.  
With many memories.*

**Everyman Chess Series**

Chief advisor: Byron Jacobs

Commissioning editor: John Emms

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Typeset and edited by First Rank Publishing, Brighton.

Cover design by Horatio Monteverde.

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## Also by the Author:

*Rate Your Endgame*

*Chess Secrets: Great Attackers*

*Modern Chess: Move by Move*

*Why We Lose at Chess*

*Analyse Your Chess*



# Contents

Preface	7
Introduction	9
<b>1 Vladimir Kramnik-Levon Aronian, Zurich, April 2012</b>	<b>13</b>
Game One: Kramnik-Aronian	13
Game Two: Aronian-Kramnik	27
Game Three: Kramnik-Aronian	34
Game Four: Aronian-Kramnik	47
Game Five: Kramnik-Aronian	56
Game Six: Aronian-Kramnik	67
<b>2 World Championship, Anand-Gelfand, Moscow, May 2012</b>	<b>87</b>
Game One: Anand-Gelfand	88
Game Two: Gelfand-Anand	96
Game Three: Anand-Gelfand	104
Game Four: Gelfand-Anand	122
Game Five: Anand-Gelfand	130
Game Six: Gelfand-Anand	138
Game Seven: Gelfand-Anand	147
Game Eight: Anand-Gelfand	157
Game Nine: Gelfand-Anand	165
Game Ten: Anand-Gelfand	180
Game Eleven: Gelfand-Anand	187
Game Twelve: Anand-Gelfand	195
The Sequel: Tie-Break Games	206

<b>3</b>	<b>Seventh Tal Memorial, Moscow, June 2012</b>	<b>215</b>
	Round One: Carlsen-Kramnik	219
	Round One: Radjabov-Tomashevsky	239
	Round One: Morozevich-Caruana	247
	Round Five: Radjabov-Carlsen	261
	Round Six: Morozevich-Nakamura	275
	Round Eight: Caruana-Kramnik	284
	Final Notes	293
	Index of Openings	295
	Index of Games	296

# Preface

Many books get written as a result of illness, of being stuck in bed. This is another of these examples. In the spring of 2012, I found myself with swollen legs and could barely walk. I could climb upstairs only with hands and feet, and it seems that my hands were taking too much of the strain, trying to pull myself up the stairs, or out of the bath, or into bed. So my arms became damaged as well.

When I felt myself strong enough to get up and sit in front of the computer, I wanted to play through some really top-level games of chess. The timing was fortunate for me. I noticed that there was a friendly match between Aronian and Kramnik coming up soon, and then the World Championship between Anand and Gelfand, just a month later. Although I was starting to walk again a little, I was still in and out of hospital. To play through world-class games was a lifeline to me to the outside world.

I blogged each of the games of the two matches, without any real thought about publishing in book format. I soon appreciated that, with a little extra effort, fully revising all my earlier notes and adding further games, this might be of unusual chess interest – not necessarily because of the strengths and weaknesses of my own writing, but because I had stumbled on unusually good timing.

This became fully clear after these two matches, and then the next really big tournament, the Tal Memorial. Remember that at the start of the 1960s, Tal beat Botvinnik to become world champion at the age of 23, a then unprecedented display of chess youth and vigour. Tal's health deteriorated very early on and, while he remained a strong and dangerous grandmaster through to the end of his life, he was never the dominant force his admirers had hoped for.

Given this context, the Tal Memorial of Moscow 2012 was a strong reflection of what he had himself achieved just over fifty years earlier. This time, though, there were three grandmasters, all in their early twenties or teens, aspiring to show that they too could soon become world champions. After a tense battle, Carlsen (21), Radjabov (25) and Caruana (19) came out first, second and third, against opposition of vastly over 2700 strength.

This must surely herald the switch of the generations. Anand will of course aim to remain World Champion for as long as possible, but eventually younger players will take

## *Fighting Chess: Move by Move*

over. Could this be Carlsen, with his admirable ability to avoid defeat? Or Caruana, a few years younger? Or Giri, who is even younger? Or one of a small number of other players?

Colin Crouch,  
Harrow,  
November 2012.

# Introduction

This book is based on the idea that every move is important, any mistake by either player is significant, and any mistake by the opponent should be pounced upon. The theme in this book is based on what can loosely be described as “positional chess”, on giving nothing away to the opponent, and on being alert to opportunity given by the opponent.

I am fascinated that the strongest players avoid losses to a remarkable extent, even when play appears sharp and double-edged. How, I wondered, do these top grandmasters keep their balance? The statistics are awe-inspiring. In six games against Kramnik, Aronian lost only once. In six games against Aronian, Kramnik lost only once. In twelve games against Anand, Gelfand lost only once. In twelve games against Gelfand, Anand lost only once. Four losses out of 36. Few club players, playing against opponents of their own strength, could achieve such a low percentage of losses. What is the secret of the top players?

Personally, in my own games, I find I have wins and losses, very rarely draws, and even more rarely do I achieve solidly played draws. I would love to know how to turn these losses into draws, except I suspect that the answer is relatively simple. I am usually good enough to find wins against players up to about IM strength, but quite often, in declining health, I get tired, and cannot think clearly enough, and so I lose.

I was also startled, when going through recent games, that players somewhat younger than me (I am in my mid fifties) can occasionally lose their sharpness, and sometimes make uninspired mistakes. Just before the World Championship, Anand handled the opening dreadfully against Tiviakov, in the German Bundesliga, and was straightforwardly ground down in a Sicilian, where Anand played ...e7-e5, and lost control of the d5-square and the files and diagonals nearby. Kramnik, too, in his first game against Aronian, played almost unrecognisably. Could they, on bad days, play almost as badly as me?

One bad loss happens, but it is important, if at all possible, not to start a string of bad losses. It is a question of match survival. In the two matches being examined, all four players lost a game, but they did not lose any further games. The problem is, if anything, more the opposite, an excess of “animal spirits”, a belief that if you have won one game, you can play whatever you like, and you are immune to mistakes. Both Aronian and Gelfand suffered from this.

I felt slightly disappointed with the World Championship match, not because it was “boring”, but rather because there seem to have been several opportunities for both sides

to try for an edge in many lines. Too often, the initiative tended to fizzle out much too quickly. If your position is clearly level throughout, then you have every right to offer or accept a fairly quick draw. If, on the other hand, one of the players had even the slightest of edges, that player should try to make the opponent suffer. A win plus four draws is better than five draws.

If the reader feels slightly disconcerted that there is such a switch between the first person and the third person, the second person – you – can have your point of view in the analysis. Imagine that I am sitting in my room, with the computer, trying to make sense of what is going on in a series of difficult positions, while being aware that the two players involved are vastly stronger than me. I know, however, that they occasionally make mistakes, as they do occasionally lose games. I am trying to assess, perhaps with the help of the computer, what is going on in a string of moves; to decide whether the player is seeing things more clearly than me, and finds a much better move than I was thinking of; or whether the player has made a mistake in a critical position, which I noticed; or whether, if the player and I chose different moves, both moves might be equally valid.

Watching live chess games is one of the best ways of sharpening a player's thinking. There is an immediacy which cannot be achieved just by going through games which have already been played, recorded and analysed. For a writer, maybe it is a useful prod for the reader to invite him, or her, to be asked what the player should be thinking, in a new position, in a book. Hence plenty of questions and answers.

After the live game, I try to analyse further, and I have been blogging it up. All the games in the Aronian-Kramnik match and the Anand-Gelfand match are written up in my blog, *shakthinking*, usually a day or two after the game. I thought about deleting my comments in these games, before publication, but I decided against it. The *shakthinking* notes were merely an earlier draft, with, I have to admit, many typos (it's difficult with only half of one eye working), and if I am able to find mistakes in my earlier annotations, then of course I can try to correct these mistakes for a later draft. It might still be useful for some readers to compare before and after notes.

Which leaves this to the more detailed questions of the reader. I am asking you, in effect, the same questions as I asked myself in playing through the games live. If I felt that a player has pushed a pawn too early, for example, I want to re-analyse the position. If I find that the player's move was, after all, correct, that is fine, and I have learned something. If I find that the player has got it wrong, and I cannot see any way to disprove the argument I have made, then this is also knowledge. What I am asking you, the reader, is to go through the same exercises yourself.

Many of the exercises are open-ended. Remember that most of the games in this book end up in draws, and so there is no clear-cut winning line, or winning plan, that needs to be found. Instead, we are dealing far more with positional uncertainty. If there are apparently four reasonable moves in a given position (and the reader can check out these moves on the computer), which of these is the safe equalizing line? Or on a different set of four possible moves, one might give a fractional edge; another might be about equal; another

might end up, after some tactics, with a repetition; while another, apparently equally promising, might end up with a slight disadvantage.

These exercises are based mainly on positional chess, on giving nothing away to the opponent. More specifically, they are based on fighting positional chess, on recognizing that your opponent will want to give nothing away, while you yourself do not want to give anything away. There is no assumption, in fighting positional chess, that everything will end up with a quick handshake after around a dozen moves; nor even in a quick win after a blunder by the opponent. No, these games are played out to the end, and well contested.



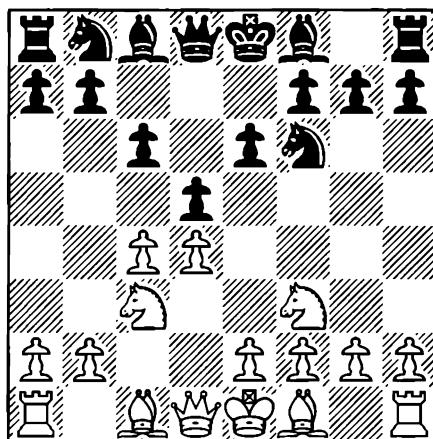
# Chapter One

## Kramnik-Aronian, Zurich 2012

### Game One: Aronian-Kramnik

21st April 2012  
V.Kramnik-L.Aronian  
Zurich 2012 (Game 1)  
*Semi-Slav Defence*

1  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  d5 2 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  3 c4 c6 4  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  e6



The ultra-solid Semi-Slav Defence, which players have increasingly relied on for Black, when they want to make sure they have no realistic chances of losing.

### 5 ♜g5

Keeping to the main line. 5 e3 is the chief alternative.

**Question:** For those who are addicts to deep theory, or to gambit chess, or who quite simply want to know what is happening in the Botvinnik Variation.

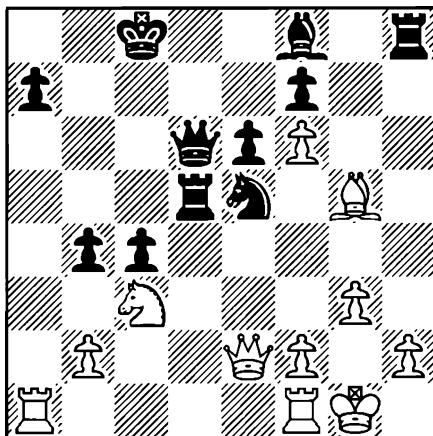
What is happening at high levels in these with 5...dxc4 - ?

### 5...h6

Aronian is happy to play in “normal” Queen’s Gambit chess.

He could have chosen the sharp gambit line with 5...dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♜h4 g5 9 ♜xg5 hxg5 10 ♜xg5 ♜bd7 – wild stuff, with plenty of opportunities for Black to play for a win, but recent top-level games suggest that in the main line White, first, has the option to take an easy perpetual, and second, that White might well be better in complicated play.

The hammered-out main line would be 11 exf6 ♜b7 12 g3 c5 13 d5 ♜b6 14 ♜g2 0-0-0 15 0-0 b4 16 ♜a4 ♜a6 17 a3 ♜xd5 18 ♜xd5 ♜e5 19 axb4 ♜xd5 20 ♜e2 cxb4 21 ♜c3 ♜d6.



As I said, wild stuff – but as so often, sharp and accurate play may end up in a quick perpetual check. For example, 22 ♜xa7 bxc3 23 ♜a8+ (or 23 ♜fa1 ♜b4 24 ♜a8+ ♜b7, again with a perpetual, M.Vachier Lagrave-Y.Solodovnichenko, French League 2011) 23... ♜d7 24 ♜a7+, soon drawn by perpetual, S.Ganguly-A.Shirov, Spanish League 2011. This was of course known before.

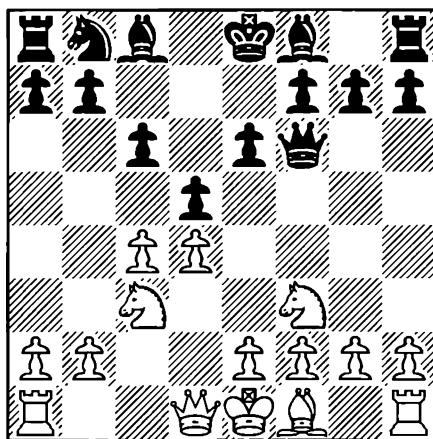
White could also try for more, with 22 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 23 f3 ♜c5+ 24 ♜e3 ♜d3 25 ♜xc5 ♜xc5+ 26 ♜h1. A recent game, A.Grischuk-A.Shirov, European Team Championship, Porto Carras 2011, continued 26... ♜d4 27 ♜a5 ♜d8 28 ♜fa1 ♜d7 29 h4, and it was not all that surprising that both players were able to promote a passed pawn, ending up with another perpetual check a few moves later.

If, in critical lines in the opening, the end result is a known draw some 25 moves deep, it is often best, to try to keep the game open, to play something less highly theoretical. Aronian chose 5...h6, and it worked out well for him.

#### 6 ♜xf6

White could still continue with gambit play after 6 ♜h4 dxc4 7 g4 g5 8 ♜g3 b5, although perhaps slightly less convincingly so. Certainly, many players as Black have swallowed the pawn. Alternatively, Black could continue to decline the gambit with, for example, 6...♝bd7.

#### 6...♝xf6



#### 7 e3

The simplest, and therefore perhaps the best, chance to aim for a slight edge. 7 e4 dxe4 8 ♜xe4 ♜b4+ 9 ♜e2 ♜f4 10 ♜d3 0-0 11 g3 ♜c7 12 ♜g2 is equal.

#### 7...♝d7 8 ♜d3

Many choices – and, indeed, in game five Kramnik tried 8 ♜e2. White is not too concerned about giving away a tempo with ♜d3, ...d5xc4; ♜xc4, as this exchanges off Black's d-pawn for White's less centralized c-pawn.

#### 8...dxc4

Black's position is not so cramped as to need to hold on to the d5-pawn indefinitely. He will want to open up the centre and create lines for his bishop pair with ...c6-c5, or more likely, ...e6-e5.

#### 9 ♜xc4 g6

Aronian turns the game into, in effect, a Grünfeld, the bishop putting pressure on White's d4-pawn, with the help of a later ...e6-e5 or ...c6-c5. Instead:

a) 9...g5 is aggressive, but probably not so good, as he is loosening pawns in front of the king (assuming kingside castling). White would just castle, 10 0-0, and see what Black does next.

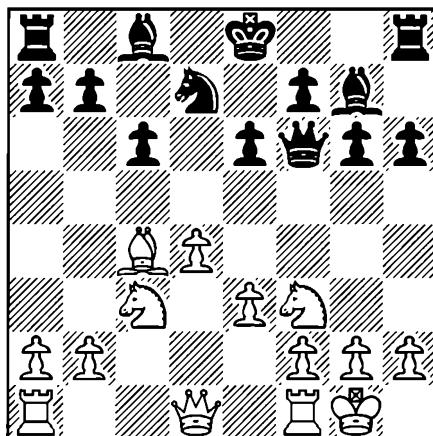
b) 9...e5?! would have been tactically inaccurate, in view of 10 dxe5 ♜xe5 11 ♜xe5 ♜xe5

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

12  $\mathbb{W}b3$ , and suddenly Black has problems with his f7-square.

Black is behind in development, and he needs to be careful not to open up his position too quickly. Therefore, slower ways are required, quiet development, before then opening up the pawn structure.

**10 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}g7$**



**Question:** What do you think should White play next?

**11  $\mathbb{R}e1$**

Ideally, every move in a game of chess should have its justification, and every quiet move should prove, a few moves later, to be part of a greater plan. It is not really that clear why White's rook should be on e1. He already has enough defensive ballast to cover any pawn advance with e3-e4-e5, so the rook on the e-file does not seem to be genuinely necessary.

The immediate 11 e4 is safe enough, in that his pawn moves to a comfortable square, and he gains some space in the centre. Then perhaps 11...e5 (to prevent White from playing e4-e5 himself) 12 d5 0-0, when White can transpose into the game with 13  $\mathbb{R}e1$ , but surely he can do something more constructive? Inevitably, we would not be thinking of a big advantage for White, but keeping a slight edge would be satisfactory. Possibly 13  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  (into safety) 13... $\mathbb{R}d8$  14  $\mathbb{W}b3$ ! and he can still try for a slight edge. The obvious 14... $\mathbb{N}c5$  is not as big a gain of tempo as it looks, since the knight would be on a better defensive post at b6, covering the d5-square, rather than at c6. Perhaps a slight edge for White after 15  $\mathbb{N}c2$ .

**11...0-0**

It has to be played sooner or later, and this seems to be a good time.

**12 e4**

White has played a mixture of  $\mathbb{R}e1$  and e3-e4. Just one of these would have been bet-

ter, it seems. Here 12  $\mathbb{W}c2$  forces Black to show how he can find complete equality. Black may have the bishop pair, but he is slightly behind in development.

**12...e5**

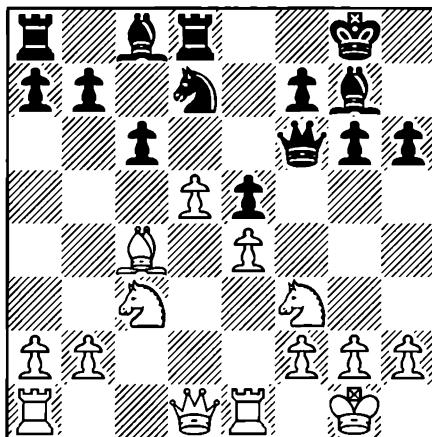
At last, there is a genuine pawn.

**13 d5**

The only sensible move. After 13  $dxe5?$   $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  Black is already better, with his bishop pair starting to take control.

**13... $\mathbb{E}d8$**

14... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  also makes good sense, but Aronian wants to keep his options open.



**14  $\mathbb{E}e3$**

**Question:** What is White's idea with this move?

When I saw this on the computer, my instincts were that it surely cannot be good. The rook is soon on an uncomfortable square and does nothing effective. If  $\mathbb{E}d3$  soon, then ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ , and the rook must move again. White is not yet worse even then, but if he makes another couple of slightly inaccurate moves, then quite certainly, as in the game, he will genuinely be in trouble.

Instead, one might expect White to play 14  $dxc6$   $bxcc6$  15  $\mathbb{W}c2$ . This would be an ultra-technical way of handling the position, relying not so much on White creating active play for his pieces, but rather to mess up Black's queenside pawns slightly.

But what about Kramnik's own rook move? It seems to be the old story of trying to trick the opponent with a "Theoretical Novelty", using a sharp move which the opponent will not have seen before, hoping that he will not be able to find a good reply. Most of the attempted big theoretical novelties in the two 2012 matches end up going badly wrong. It is better to find good and accurate moves.

**14...b5**

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Aronian looked at the sharpest reply and decided that the position was safe, and potentially good.

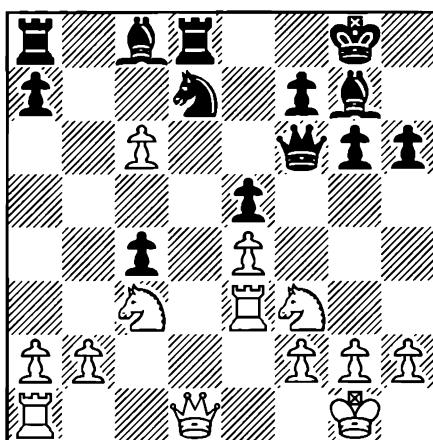
### 15 dxc6

In my blog, written just after the game had finished, and without time to examine the comments made by others, I noted that this was “another odd move, showing that Kramnik has perhaps lost his sureness of positional touch. Would he really have played like this a decade ago?”

What in fact happened was that Kramnik had followed a somewhat doubtful new line, thinking that it was good, and missed the big tactical improvement for Black, which Aronian found easily enough over the board. See the comments to Black’s 16th.

He needed to keep his bishop. Having two knights versus two bishops is likely to put himself under pressure. 15 ♘b3, or maybe 15 ♘d3, would still be about equal.

### 15...bxc4



**Question:** Which is better? 16 ♘d5 or 16 cxd7 - ?

There is no trick question here, no deeply hidden third option. I would suggest, however, that the reader spend some time trying to think about which of these moves is better, before playing through the rest of the game. Try to answer this with the minimum of hindsight. Imagine what you would do over the board.

### 16 ♘d5

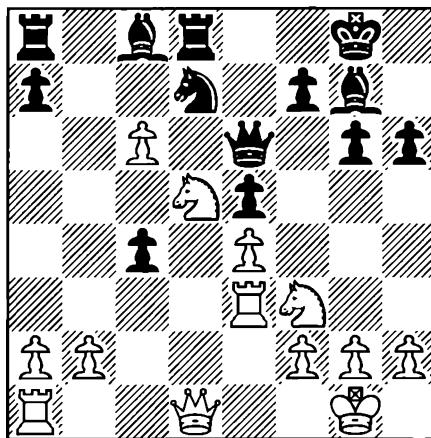
This was the move that Kramnik played.

### 16...♝e6!

And this was Aronian’s reply.

A recent game, in which Kramnik was following, went 16...♝d6 17 cxd7 ♘xd7 18 ♘d2 ♘b5 19 ♜c2 ♜ab8 20 ♜c3 with advantage to White, and later a win in V.Gunina-A.Muzychuk, European Women’s Championship, Gaziantep 2012. This may look impressive

and an unusual rook zigzag, but Kramnik trusted Gunina rather more than he actually should.

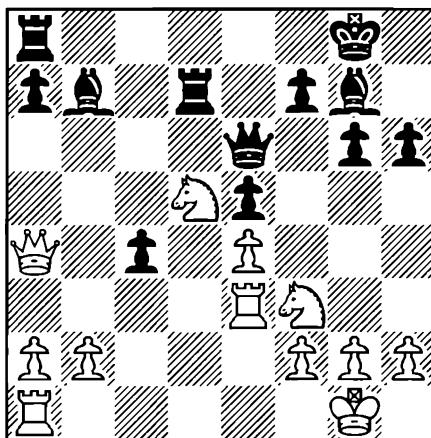


Should we therefore claim that Aronian's win was the result of a massive new theoretical innovation? Not really. Innovation or no innovation, the only way that a player can lose a game of chess is by making a mistake, and it is the fault of the loser, not the winner, who made the mistake. All Aronian had to do was to find a few good moves. At various points of the game, he had used an hour less on the clock than his opponent.

**17 cxd7**

17  $\mathbb{Q}c7?$   $\mathbb{W}xc6$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xa8$   $\mathbb{W}xa8$  would have been pointless. Black therefore had no need to cover the c7-square. Black's 16... $\mathbb{W}d6?$  in the earlier game was a significant loss of time. This was Muzychuk's mistake. And Kramnik's attempt at a novelty had backfired. By now Kramnik was in danger of being seriously worse, and spent a lot of time thinking.

**17...Rxd7 18 Wa4 Ab7**



## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

We see now the basic problem. The advanced knight on d5 is a weakness, rather than a strength. Kramnik should not have played 16  $\mathbb{Q}d5$ .

It is a sophisticated example of the beginners' error, moving the knight to the other side of the board, without being part of a genuine attack, and without having ensured that the knight is safe, not just on the next move, but also on later moves. Sometimes what happens is that the knight has to retreat, with loss of tempi.

**19  $\mathbb{W}xc4$**

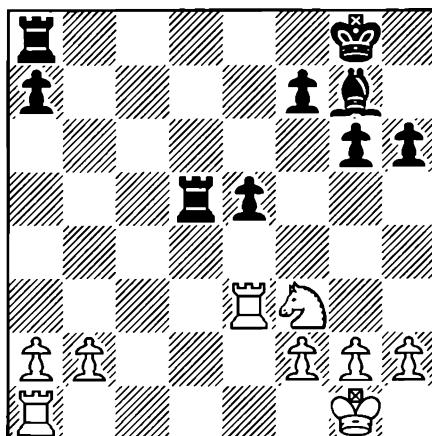
This allows favourable simplification for Black, now that the d5-square folds. Few players would have had the cold discipline to admit that the earlier knight move was wrong, and then simply retreat it with here 19  $\mathbb{Q}c3!?$ . White is still worse, even so. Black could try something like 19... $\mathbb{E}ad8$  20  $\mathbb{E}c1 \mathbb{Q}h7$ , keeping open the later kingside attack with ..f7-f5.

Of the world championship greats, perhaps Emanuel Lasker over a century ago, and quite probably Karpov, would have considered such a retreat under pressure, and maybe also Spassky or Petrosian. It would, of course, be extremely difficult to second-guess what others might have played in such a position, and given the history of the previous part of the game – but one thing that is totally clear is that Kramnik did not play 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$  himself.

**19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$**

The start of a chopping of pieces and pawns on d5. No general comment is required, move-by-move, except to note that it is important, even if elementary, to count up the number of attackers and the number of defenders to ensure who is winning the battle.

**20  $exd5 \mathbb{W}xd5$  21  $\mathbb{W}xd5 \mathbb{E}xd5$**



**22  $\mathbb{E}ae1$**

Now White is attacking the pawn on e5, but it is simple enough to bring a defender into play.

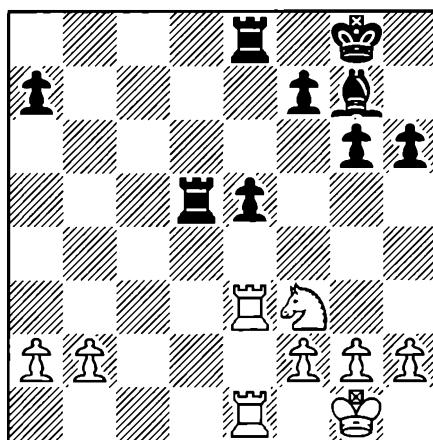
**22... $\mathbb{E}e8$**

Aronian aims for the most direct plan, a pawn roller with ..f7-f5 and ..e5-e4, supported by the rook, and opening up the long diagonal for the bishop. Even so, the plan is not quite

as straightforward as it looks, and there are more indirect ways of trying to achieve the same goal.

22 ...f6!?, the quiet way of protecting the pawn, is to be considered. Black then has the choice, with the rook, of moving to b8, or c8, or d8, as well as e8. Black's initiative that way is not based solely on the kingside. Also, his king will be more active on f7, rather than on g8, or even (as in the game) on h7. Black does not have to worry about the "bad bishop", since the bishop can re-emerge with ... $\mathbb{B}f8$ . It is a different way of handling the position, and probably not inferior.

White is uncomfortable – perhaps not yet losing, but he would have to play with extreme accuracy and hope that his opponent does not have the same level of accuracy. The main problem is that Black is threatening to roll over the centre with ...f7-f5 and ...e5-e4, opening up new possibilities for the bishop and the two rooks. White's two queenside pawns are then seriously open to attack.

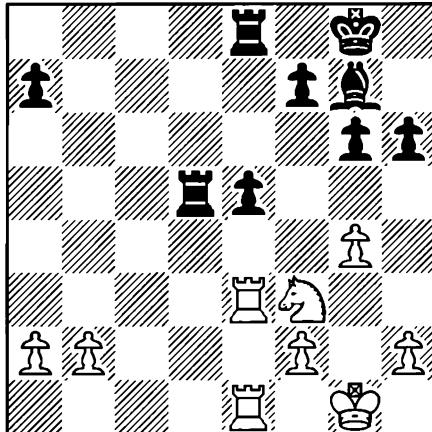


**Question:** What should White do here?

### 23 g4!

When in trouble, a top grandmaster will generally find excellent defensive moves. This pawn push looks extravagant at first, but Kramnik is fully aware he must not allow the rolling of the pawns.

23  $\mathbb{Q}h4$  is the main alternative, if White is not content with passive defence. Then after 23... $\mathbb{B}h7$  24 f4  $\mathbb{B}b8$  25 fxg5 (25 b3 exf4 26  $\mathbb{B}xe7$  g5 is good for Black) 25... $\mathbb{B}xb2$ , White's kingside pawns appear to be more united (g2 and h2) than in the main line (f2 and h2). What Kramnik has to consider, though, is that if the f-pawn has not been exchanged off, there is no defence on the second rank, should the black rooks be doubled on that rank. The f2-pawn is needed, to protect the g2- and h2-squares.



**Question:** What is the most accurate way for Black to maintain a slight edge?

### 23... $\mathbb{Q}h7$

Aronian played this quickly. The computer consensus was that 23...f5 24  $\mathbb{Q}h4$  fxg4 25  $\mathbb{Q}xg6$  would have been better, but this is not fully clear. The knight looks exposed, but if Black were to try to trap the horse with 25... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ , it turns out that his e-pawn is pinned after 26  $\mathbb{Q}f4$ . It is still uncomfortable, but it is not so clear that Black has a definite win.

If, for the moment, we forget about the computer and its analysis, the question is, what is best in purely positional terms? Computers are not always so good in assessing this.

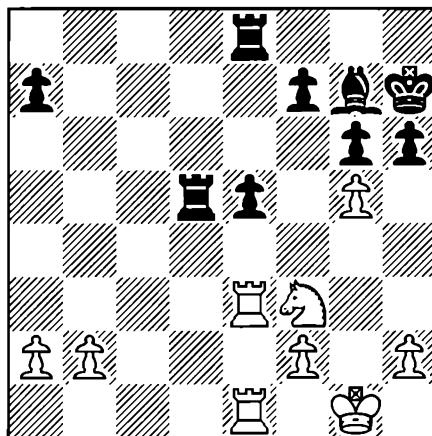
It is time to remember the old idea of prophylactic chess, as discussed almost a century ago (time flies!) by Nimzowitsch. When dressed up in modern terms, the idea is not that of direct defence, of covering any immediate attacks by the opponent. Rather, the idea is to prevent the opponent from making a good move, and to prevent any counterplay by the opponent, so that the player himself will remain at least comfortably equal, and, if all goes well, keep a slight advantage.

Black is clearly not scared of White being able to play for an edge with g4-g5. Therefore, any attempt by Black to prevent g4-g5 cannot be regarded as defensive. Rather, Black is aiming for a prophylactic move, to prevent White from equalizing.

This suggests 23...f6!?, just waiting, and preventing his opponent from doing anything more than waiting himself. Clearly, Black can try ...f6-f5 later in many lines, but there is no need to hurry. Black has the additional option of re-developing with ... $\mathbb{Q}f8$  and ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ , as well as the more obvious ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ .

For instance, if 24  $\mathbb{Q}h4$ , then 24... $\mathbb{Q}f7$  25 f4  $\mathbb{B}b8!$  (more ambitious than 25... $\mathbb{Q}d4$  26  $\mathbb{Q}e4$ ) 26 fxg5  $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  27  $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  fxg5 28 b3  $\mathbb{Q}b4$  with a clear plus, due to the passed pawn, and the bishop being far more active than the opposing knight. Even here, it would be far too early to claim a decisive advantage, but it would take highly accurate play for White to defend.

**24 g5!**



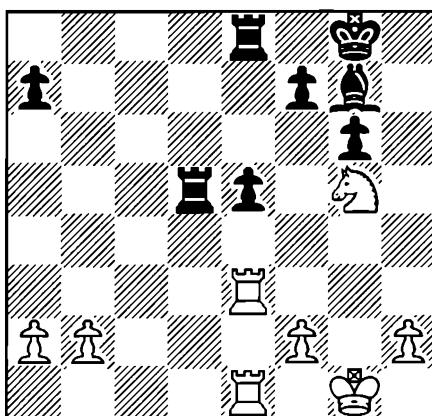
This gives White excellent chances of equalizing. It looks ugly, leaving himself with two isolated pawns against Black's three united pawns (after the next move from either side), but it is not so clear, in dynamic terms, that Black can create a serious kingside advantage, and meanwhile White has the extra pawn on the queenside as a counterbalance.

**24...hxg5**

If it were not for the *en passant* rule, Black would have a probably winning advantage. As it is, 24...f5 25 gxf6 (e.p.) 25...fxg6 26 b4 is only equal.

**25 ♜xg5+ ♚g8**

Kramnik has made good defence so far, but he still has to play accurately and carefully.



**Question:** Another difficult decision, this time for White. Kramnik played 26 f4, opening up the centre. Is this brilliant? Or awful? In either case, why?

**26 f4?**

This is the losing move, and a strange one, in that Kramnik was being careful a few moves earlier to avoid opening up the second rank with f2-f4.

Instead, White needs to ask Black how to proceed. 26 b4 seems the most constructive of the quiet moves, maybe even adding an escape route for the knight via e4 and c5, if required. Also, in comparison with ideas involving b2-b3, White still has counterplay with  $\mathbb{K}a3$ . White is not yet equal, but neither is he clearly losing.

**26... $\mathbb{R}b8$**

An easy way of breaking the pin.

**27 fxe5**

There is not much else, but now it is difficult to defend either of his kingside pawns, being an extra file apart.

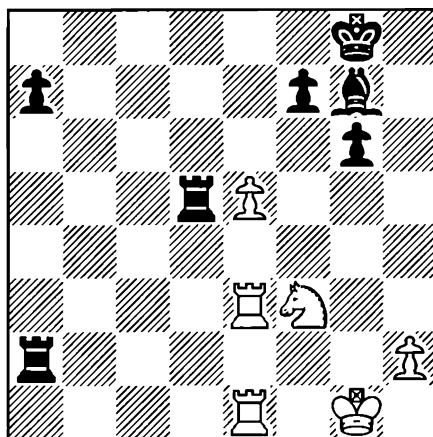
**27... $\mathbb{R}xb2$**

With Black's rook on the seventh, and a possible doubling of rooks on that rank, and renewed chances of bringing the bishop into play (... $\mathbb{B}f8$ , or ... $\mathbb{B}h6$ , or pressure on the e5-pawn), White is in trouble, with his king exposed, and all his pawns being under attack. Kramnik's f2-f4 idea was disastrous.

**28  $\mathbb{Q}f3$**

He could have tried 28 a4, intending 28... $\mathbb{R}dd2$  29  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  and there is no obvious immediate win. White is still in trouble, even so.

**28... $\mathbb{R}xa2$**



Black is now a pawn up, furthermore an outside passed pawn up. There is no realistic possibility of White ever winning the a-pawn, or even trying to sacrifice the knight for it (after full pawn exchanges on the kingside). All that White can hope for is to open up the centre, and push Black's king around by checks, hoping that, with two rooks and knight on the board, something might happen.

**29 e6**

So he tries it, but Aronian is careful with his tactics.

**29...fxe6**

Obviously, he cannot allow White's advanced pawn to survive.

**30 ♜xe6**

Some modest counterplay? Perhaps, but Black's bishop covers any potential mating threats.

**30...♝f5**

Whereas White's knight is exposed to attack.

**31 ♟h4 ♜f4 32 ♜e4 ♜f6 33 ♜g4 ♚f7**

The rest of the game looks fast-moving, with lots of checks, and Black's king being forced to run. The point is, though, that the king is genuinely able to run, with the help of the other pieces covering several dangerous squares. Before long, White's knight is unable to join in the attack, as Black's king is far too far away. White's king, of course, can do nothing.

It looked complicated in the time scramble, but Black was always in control.

**34 ♜c1**

Staying active for as long as he can.

**34...♝h6**

Black's bishop joins in. Two rooks plus bishop, against an exposed king on the edge of the board, add to mating threats.

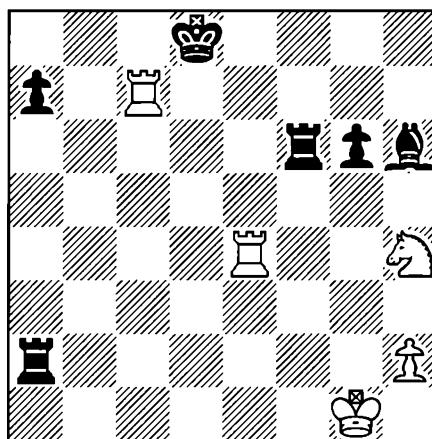
**35 ♜c7+ ♚e8**

35...♚e6? 36 ♜c6+ makes life far more difficult.

**36 ♜e4+**

More checks. 36 ♜xg6? ♚e3+ is an instant collapse.

**36...♚d8**



**Question:** Is Aronian bringing his king too far into the open?

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Everything is fine, White runs out of checks, and Black has a breathing space to coordinate his pieces.

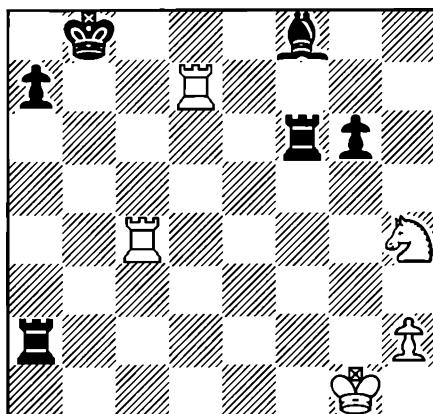
**37...♝h7**

Attacking the bishop, but it can run to better squares.

**37...♞f8**

Aronian is being careful not to allow White's knight into play, though there are plenty of winning choices here. For instance, 37...♝d6 38 ♜f3 is no doubt good for a win, but then Black will need to think about the endgame. Easier to win in a queenless middlegame.

**38 ♜d4+ ♚c8 39 ♜c4+ ♚b8 40 ♜d7**

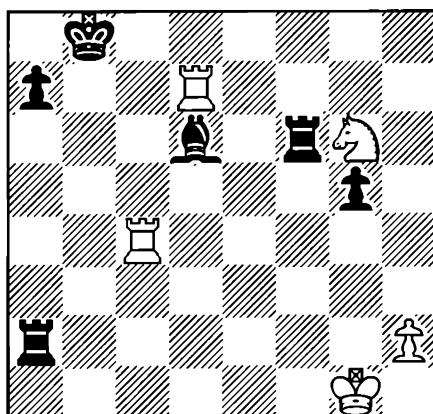


No more checks to force the king to escape, and indeed the next threat with ♜d8+ is lifeless. Black has time to find the winning punch.

**40...g6 41 ♜g6**

Or 41 ♜g2 ♜a1+, winning the knight.

**41...♞d6 0-1**



It's over. Black is still attacking the knight, obviously, while ... $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$  mating is an even stronger threat.

This is what I wrote in my day-after blog:

"Just on the basis of this game, Kramnik appears to have lost much of his positional grip, as indeed in Anand's loss a week earlier (*Black against Tiviakov in the Bundesliga*). In neither case was the issue one of missing tactics in wild and sharp combinations, as one might suspect when the brain is not quite as quick as in the early twenties. It seems more serious than this. Positional play ought, in theory, still be close to the player's peak until quite a late stage, but there are clearly lapses being made, even at the highest level."

As I write this, it is now a couple of hours before the second game. Maybe first-round nerves could be a problem. Can Kramnik fight back? Or, at the very least, can he avoid losing further ground?"

Now I am writing at the end of July, a couple of days after Morozhevich (age 35), suddenly had to drop out, for health reasons, at Biel. At the time of the match against Aronian, Kramnik was 36, and there were clear weaknesses in his play in the first round – although, as a top professional, he did not lose any more games. At the Tal Memorial, however, just a couple of months later, he lost twice in a row, after grinding out a very long endgame against Tomashevsky, inevitably under great time pressure (and Tomashevsky should have held the draw). At the World Championship in May, few would dare to say that Anand (42) or Gelfand (43) were starting to make more mistakes, even if some people posited the catch-all argument, unfairly, that play was getting "boring".

Clearly, age is a factor. You cannot be as energetic after 35 than beforehand. For myself, I now have the perfect excuse for never becoming a grandmaster. I did not make a systematic attempt to become an IM until I was 34. Too late.

But what about the younger players? Aronian, at the time of his match against Kramnik was 29, and the second-highest rated player in the world. He would need to do something quickly, not least because Carlsen is several years younger, and there are already other extremely dangerous younger players too.

## Game Two: Aronian-Kramnik

It was something of a relief that, in the end, this game ended up as a steady draw. First, we would like to think that, when two of the strongest players of the world play each other, their current level of technique should be close to flawless. Second, Kramnik was having a bad off-day in game one, and it would be upsetting if one of the world greats were at the start of a string of decline.

No long comments on this game. The point of interest at the time, when watching the game live on the computer, was to see how much Aronian could squeeze out of almost nothing. The point of interest afterwards is in seeing how Kramnik could hold, with relative ease, an uncomfortable early endgame. Most of us would have found it troublesome.

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

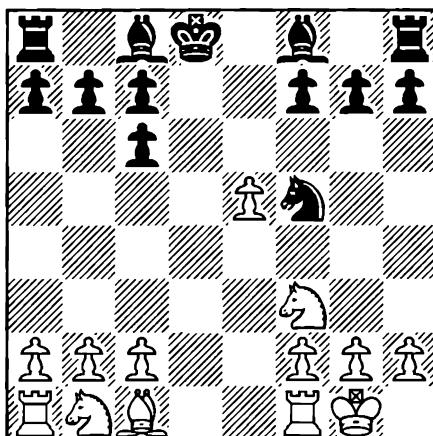
It is easy enough for the reader to skip through such games. “It’s only a draw. I want to learn how to win games.” Very few players, even at a high level, are comfortable just making absolutely sure that they can hold a position, with draw after draw after draw. If the position is level, they want to try to win, and if they are not quite level, they feel uncomfortable, and are often not very good in finding safe ways of holding the balance under slight pressure.

It is therefore a good idea for the reader to take note of how Kramnik was able to hold a slightly uncomfortable semi-endgame with reasonable ease. Aronian was certainly trying to press for the win but in the end he was unable to break though.

Another interesting point is that, after his disastrous first-round loss, Kramnik did not attempt any extreme counterplay. The last thing he would have wanted to do would be to lose his first two games. He was content to hold the position as Black, and wait to see what happens in later rounds.

22nd April 2012  
L.Aronian-V.Kramnik  
Zurich 2012 (Game 2)  
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  3  $\mathbb{Q}b5$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  4 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  5 d4  $\mathbb{Q}d6$  6  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $dxc6$  7  $dxe5$   $\mathbb{Q}f5$  8  $\mathbb{W}xd8+$   $\mathbb{Q}xd8$



Kramnik’s famous “Berlin Wall”. When he had to play a long match against Kasparov in 2000, his main concern was to cut out any possibility of a loss as Black against his formidable opponent. It worked – two wins with White, and a string of draws, and Kasparov was unexpectedly the first player since 1921 not to win a game in a world championship match.

There are some obvious weaknesses in Black’s position. He has, for example, the dou-

bled c-pawns. However, it is highly unlikely that White can set up an attack against the c-pawns. The problem is more that White has the extra pawn on the kingside, so the big danger is that these pawns might become active. Black has to be fully aware of this problem. Another obvious point is that his king is stuck in the centre – dangerous, but with care Black can overcome this. Here, the doubled c-pawns are useful in covering squares on the d-file.

The Berlin Defence is a difficult line for White to try to handle. Indeed, it is difficult for both players to handle, usually involving heavy manoeuvring, without any clear tactical opportunities.

### **9 ♜c3**

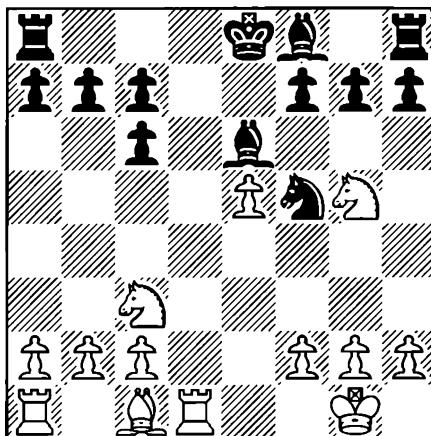
The main choice here. 9 ♜d1+ ♕e8 is natural for White, but Black often wants to play ...♕e8 anyway, and maybe White will have better things to do than move the rook.

### **9...♕e6**

It would be slightly unfair to ask the reader what Black should play next, since there are several possibilities which Black has tried in top grandmaster games. 9...♗e8 is the most popular, while 9...h6 or 9...♝d7 are also fully playable.

Not 9...♝e7?! though, as this makes it easy for White to eliminate the bishop pair with 10 ♜g5, when Black's pawn structure suddenly loses its flexibility.

### **10 ♜d1+ ♕e8 11 ♜g5**



**Question:** What should Black do here? He does not really want to give away his bishop pair, but there is no obvious good move for the bishop.

### **11...♝c8!**

This simple bishop retreat looks the most secure. Black has lost two tempi, true, but White's knight is not on such a good square, and a return to f3 will involve the return of the two tempi. 12 ♞f3 ♕e6 13 ♜g5 is a plausible sequence, and of course a quick draw.

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

There are lines in the Berlin where Black could allow the capture on e6, creating an isolated pawn there – but the pawn is not easily attacked on e6, since White's own pawn on e5 blocks any attacking lines on the e-file. Probably this is a little too early to try, as Black has made a slight concession.

Instead, 11... $\mathbb{B}c4?$ ! is just about possible, but not very good, as Black will need a few extra moves to bring the bishop onto secure squares; while 11... $\mathbb{B}d7?$  is tactically bad, in view of 12  $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ .

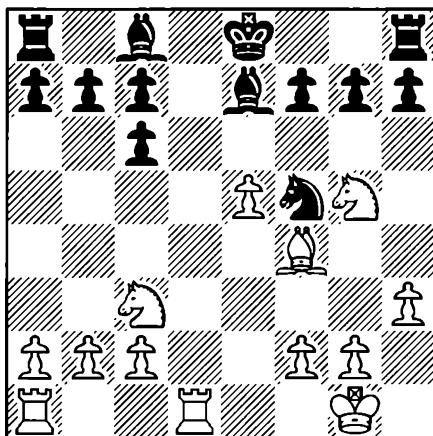
### 12 h3

Hoping to keep his kingside pawn majority mobile.

12  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  a5 13 a4 b6 14 b3 c5 is steady and equal, subsequently drawn in V.Topalov-V.Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 2012. The next few moves were 15  $\mathbb{B}b2$   $\mathbb{B}e7$  16  $\mathbb{Q}e4$   $\mathbb{B}e6$  17  $\mathbb{Q}f4$  h5, and some moves later White exchanged on e6 without gaining much. He has given away tempi with  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ -e2-f4xe6 and, as a result, Black's defence is solid.

### 12... $\mathbb{B}e7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}f4?$

New? Unusual? An innovation? Certainly Kramnik thought for a long time on the next couple of moves.



**Question:** What are the main choices for Black? Is one better than the others?

### 13... $\mathbb{Q}h4$

Yet more manoeuvring with the minor pieces. Kramnik intends to hit the e5-pawn with ... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ .

13...h6 is also good, intending 14  $\mathbb{Q}ge4$   $\mathbb{B}e6$  or 14  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{B}e6$ , with equality in either case, and he has regained his tempi with the bishop.

Since I have asked my question, I suppose I should give an answer. My own view is to prefer 13...h6, rather than the extra knight manoeuvring, which a potential loss of tempo. See the next comment.

**14 e6**

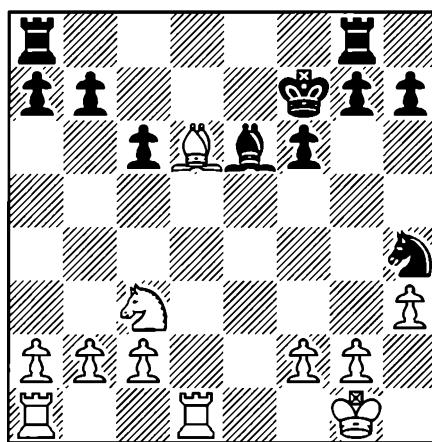
With open play and hopes of a microscopic edge. The problem is that the edge is far too small after reasonable defence by the opponent. 14  $\mathbb{Q}ge4$   $\mathbb{Q}g6$  14  $\mathbb{A}h2$  keeps the tension for longer.

**14...f6**

Kramnik decides that he can hold with reasonable care.

14...fxe6 is a more tactical attempt. After 15  $\mathbb{Q}ge4$  e5 16  $\mathbb{A}xe5$   $\mathbb{A}xh3$  17  $\mathbb{A}g3$   $\mathbb{A}g4$  18 f3  $\mathbb{A}e6$  19  $\mathbb{A}xc7$   $\mathbb{Q}f5$ , play is equal.

**15  $\mathbb{Q}f7$   $\mathbb{A}g8$  16  $\mathbb{A}xe6$  17  $\mathbb{Q}d6+$   $\mathbb{A}xd6$  18  $\mathbb{A}xd6$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$**



**Question:** Isn't this a good time to offer a draw?

Play looks level and, in his earlier calculations, Kramnik would clearly have assumed that he had equalized. Indeed, a few moves later, he offered a draw, leaving Aronian slightly irritated. It is still up to Black to prove that he is fully equal.

There are still some weaknesses in Black's queenside pawn structure. Black has not been able to keep his pawn on c7, and so he can no longer guard the d6-square. True, White's bishop on d6 does not attack anything, even though it is well advanced. If, however, he can find a way to bring his knight on d6, that will be more serious. Meanwhile, Black has to decide what to do with his other queen side pawns. White will probably want to play  $\mathbb{A}c5$  at some stage, forcing Black to push either his a-pawn or his b-pawn (with ...b7-b6), to allow him to move his rook. Extra pawn pushes, to cover existing weaknesses, can soon end up with other weaknesses.

I was interested to see how Kramnik was going to handle the position. There is no reason to believe that White has any big advantage, but how was Black going to hold the balance?

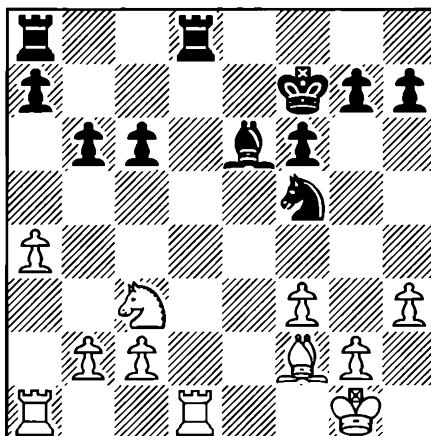
**19 f3**

Not so much to allow the king to develop to f2, but rather, as we shall soon see, to give his bishop a retreat square.

**19...♝f5 20 ♜c5 b6**

The ...b7-b6 push is needed, Kramnik decides.

**21 ♜f2 ♞gd8 22 a4**



**Question:** What should Black do next, to defend his position?

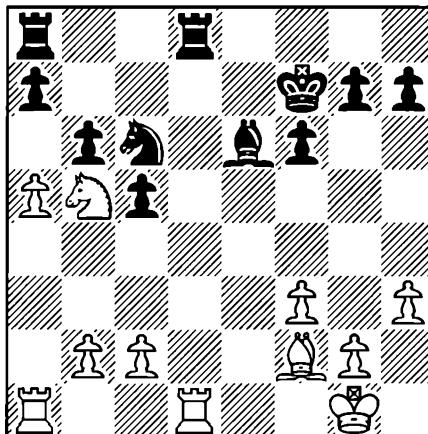
General ideas and a specific move here, please.

**22...♝e7!**

Black could just about drift around with perhaps 22...h5, but it is starting to be risky. The computer suggests that White has only a slight edge, but if White plays with clear and confident moves, it could easily end up with Black's position deteriorating. Black, too, needs to play with confidence.

Black's plan is not the obvious ...♝d5, to try to exchange knights and end up with the drawish opposite-coloured bishops. It is in any case difficult to arrange this. What he is trying to do is defend with ...c6-c5 and ...♝c6. This creates extra weaknesses, particularly on the light squares, with possibilities for White of trying ♜b5 and ♜d6. It is uncomfortable, but it has to be done. Kramnik's defence is the traditional one: that for each attacker, there needs to be a defender in play. More specifically, a knight on c6 is an excellent defender, giving counterplay as well as passive defence. White cannot quite break through, and Black, with care, holds the draw.

**23 a5 c5 24 ♜b5 ♜c6**



Everything is covered, if only just. Black has defended it extremely economically.

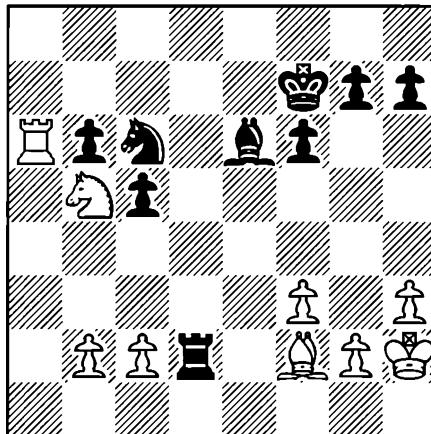
**25  $\mathbb{Q}xd8$**

The knight-versus-bishop exchange with 25  $\mathbb{Q}c7$  does not achieve much. Play is level after 25... $\mathbb{R}xd1+$  26  $\mathbb{R}xd1$   $\mathbb{B}c8$  27  $a \times b6$   $a \times b6$  28  $\mathbb{Q}xe6$   $\mathbb{Q}xe6$  29  $\mathbb{R}e1+$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$ .

**25... $\mathbb{R}xd8$  26  $a \times b6$   $a \times b6$  27  $\mathbb{R}a6$**

White has no time to prepare his pieces, before the attack with the rook. If 27  $\mathbb{A}e3?$ ! then 27... $\mathbb{Q}b4$  and Black already has the initiative.

**27... $\mathbb{R}d1+$  28  $\mathbb{Q}h2$   $\mathbb{R}d2$**

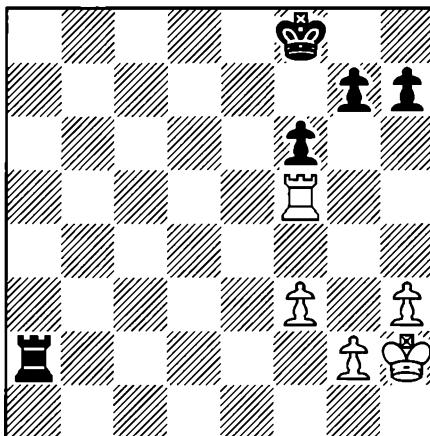


A lot of pieces and pawns soon drop off on either side. Indeed, the reader might well be puzzled why the players did not agree a draw a few moves earlier. At the time, I speculated that perhaps they wanted to avoid having to play an exhibition rapid game if they had agreed an early draw. One very serious game in a day is enough.

I did not know that Kramnik had offered a draw slightly prematurely. Aronian wanted

to play it out to its completion, to show that he was the one who had the right to offer the draw.

29  $\mathbb{E}xb6$   $\mathbb{E}xc2$  30  $\mathfrak{Q}d6+$   $\mathfrak{Q}e7$  31  $\mathfrak{Q}e4$   $\mathfrak{Q}d4$  32  $\mathbb{E}b7+$   $\mathfrak{Q}f8$  33  $\mathbb{E}c7$   $\mathbb{E}xb2$  34  $\mathbb{E}xc5$   $\mathfrak{Q}f5$  35  $\mathfrak{Q}g3$   
 $\mathbb{E}xf2$  36  $\mathfrak{Q}xf5$   $\mathfrak{Q}xf5$  37  $\mathbb{E}xf5$   $\mathbb{E}a2$  ½-½



Kramnik, like Anand a week earlier (in the Bundesliga), was careful to make as certain as at all possible not to lose two consecutive games.

### **Game Three: Kramnik-Aronian**

This is the strangest of all the nineteen games covered in the two main matches. It was strange at the time, and looks dodgy now. There was no need for Aronian to have sacrificed his queen, for lesser pieces. He was already a point up against Kramnik, and if he was a strong enough player to hold out for a few draws, in a six-game match, he would win against one of the most solid match players in history. Once, Kramnik beat Kasparov in a World Championship match, with just two wins and a whole string of draws. Aronian had the perfect opportunity to emulate Kramnik's play a dozen years earlier.

If you go on the basis that if you are a point ahead in a match, the classic response is to play steadily, and remain a point ahead. This was an exhibition match, not part of the world championship, and both players wanted to play interesting games, yet did not want to give away their main opening secrets. This backfired, with first Kramnik, and then Aronian, finding interesting but bad novelties.

After this game, points were level. It is hard to gain an impression as to who has the psychological edge. The easy answer is that, quite probably, the match will end up level. It is indeed a possibility that both players will want to settle down and play three solid and unexciting draws. Against that, it has to be remembered that, if the players finish with any quick draws, the match conditions will require them to play a rapidplay finish, after the main game, to please the spectators. It is arguably less exhausting for the players to play a full-length game. If the games are long and intense, it is more than likely that there will be

an odd number of wins, rather than an even number, in which case one of the players will win.

But perhaps we are going ahead of the story. I am writing just before the fourth game, and speculating about the finish, when I should be writing up the third game.

24th April 2012  
**V.Kramnik-L.Aronian**  
 Zurich 2012 (Game 3)  
*Four Knights Game*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜c3**

This is one way of avoiding the Marshall Gambit: 3...♝b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 ♜e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♜b3 0-0 8 c3 d5!?, the main line of which is 9 exd5 ♜xd5 10 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 11 ♜xe5 c6, although Marshall himself played 11...♜f6 against Capablanca.

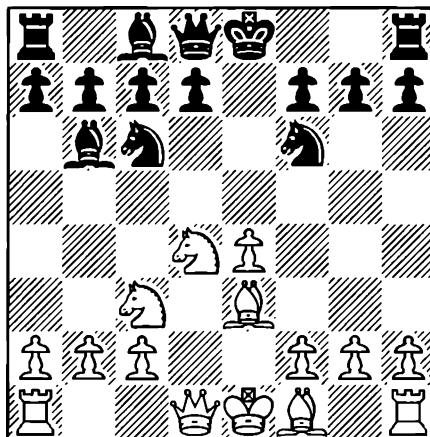
Note the way in which Marshall tried to gain a tempo, in playing ...d7-d5 in one turn, instead of ...d7-d6, quietly defending his pawn structure. Sometimes in the mainline Ruy, Black will push the pawn again, with ...d6-d5, after long preparation. Other times, Black merely tries to defend the pawn centre on d6 and e5.

In this game, in the Four Knights, Aronian is clearly inspired by Marshall's concept, playing a sharp ...d7-d5. There is nothing wrong with this, so long as he gives nothing away to his opponent.

**3...♜f6 4 d4 exd4 5 ♜xd4 ♜c5**

Unusual, but there are some well-known drawing lines with 5...♝b4 6 ♜xc6 bxc6 7 ♜d3 d5. It is too early to agree a quick draw and have a rapidplay game.

**6 ♜e3 ♜b6**

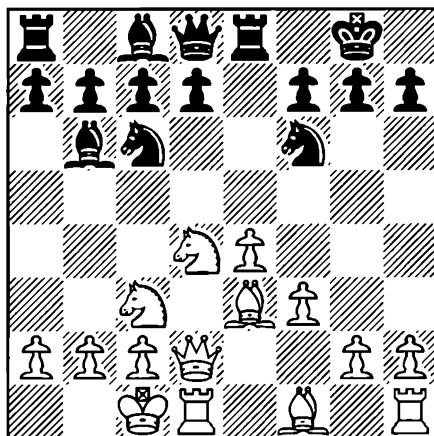


**7 ♜d2**

**Question:** Kramnik clearly wants to develop his pieces quickly, to try to keep an initiative, before Black can complete his development. Does 7  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$  look like a good idea? Is it better? Worse? Or different?

It is difficult to see how White can achieve much, in terms of an edge, by exchanging knights with 7  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $bxc6$ . The computer suggests that White might still have a slight plus after 8 e5  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  9 exf6. Play on for an extra move, though, and after 9... $\mathbb{Q}h6!$  Black is comfortably equal. His king might be slightly misplaced (after 10  $\mathbb{W}e2+$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$ ), but this is not a serious problem, as Black's other pieces will soon be able to find comfortable squares. He is helped in this by making good use of the bishop pair, versus bishop and knight, where the knight is not on a particularly good square. Black's pawn structure is slightly unusual, but none of his pawns is actually weak and, again, if he keeps his pieces active, he should be fine.

7...0-0 8 0-0-0  $\mathbb{B}e8$  9 f3

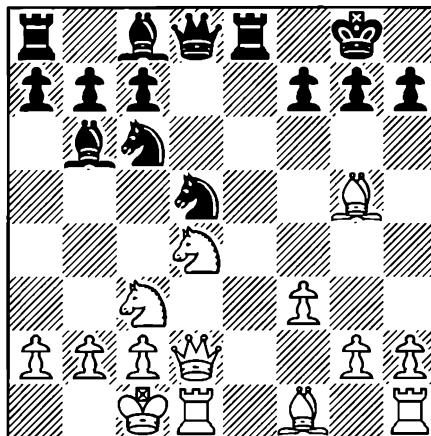


9...d5

A highly direct double pawn push, in the style of Frank Marshall, close to a century ago, and of course Levon Aronian. Black plays ...d7-d5 in just one go, the possible disadvantage being that Black has not yet developed his pieces – necessarily so, in that he has not yet had the chance to move his queenside bishop. When play suddenly opens up, before all the main pieces have been developed, tactics can quite often arise. White has not yet fully developed his own pieces either, his light-squared bishop remains unmoved, and his dark-squared bishop being open to attack.

There are other ideas, such as 9...d6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ , perhaps more in the style of Steinitz, rather than Marshall.

10 exd5  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  11  $\mathbb{Q}g5$



**Question:** Tactics time! Is there a safe way for Black of remaining at least equal? And what are your impressions about Aronian's queen sacrifice, with 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$  12  $\mathbb{Q}xd8 \mathbb{Q}xd1$  - ? Indeed, would you even have considered this yourself?

### 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ ?

This is one of the several examples in these two matches in which big innovations turn out to be big mistakes. Kramnik (game one) and Aronian (here) got caught by aiming to hit the opponent with tactics, only to find that their own position has crashed. Later, both Anand and Gelfand got caught themselves. It is not enough for something to be interesting and innovative. Against strong opposition, it also has to be good and accurate. Many games in the 2012 matches failed this test.

Kramnik was clearly under pressure. This is what happens in gambit chess. The opponent sacrifices, usually at some stage in the opening, gaining some sharp attacking ideas, and with the hope that the defender will not be able to find fully accurate defensive moves. Unfortunately for Aronian, Kramnik is a strong enough player to calculate vast numbers of lines in great depth, and he found the best lines, and won.

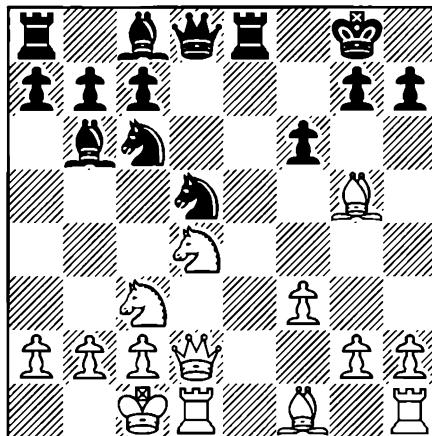
Was Aronian in a bad position already? Or did he have a safe alternative?

The most straightforward attempt is 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  12  $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{W}xd2+$  13  $\mathbb{B}xd2 bxc6$  14  $\mathbb{Q}c4$ . Black's pieces are fine, but his fractured pawn structure will be of concern, through to the endgame. An irritating edge for White.

Another possibility is to concede the bishop pair with 11... $\mathbb{Q}de7$  12  $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{W}xd2+$  13  $\mathbb{Q}xd2 \mathbb{Q}xc6$  14  $\mathbb{Q}d5 \mathbb{Q}e6$  15  $\mathbb{Q}xb6 axb6$  16  $a3 \mathbb{Q}f5$ , but it would be difficult for Black to demonstrate full equality. 12  $\mathbb{Q}b3$  also keeps Black under some pressure: remember that his pieces are not yet fully developed.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ , this time only a temporary queen sacrifice, is not fully acceptable either: after 12  $\mathbb{Q}xd8 \mathbb{Q}e3$  13  $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}xd2+$  14  $\mathbb{B}xd2$ , Black will soon drop a pawn on c7.

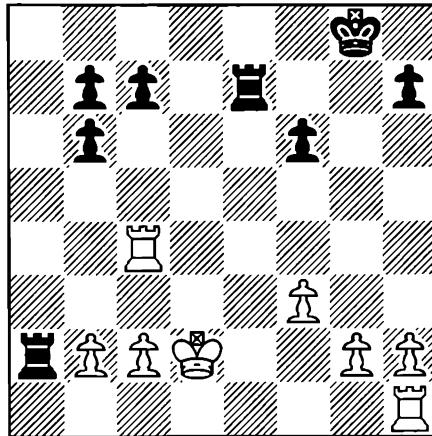
The best equalizing opportunity is 11...f6!.



Did the reader reach this far? We are only one move after the last test position, but several other ideas needed to be considered, and usually to be rejected.

Attack is met by Black with counter-attack, with minimal loss of tempo. No unnecessary retreat, but no wild sacrifices either. Now:

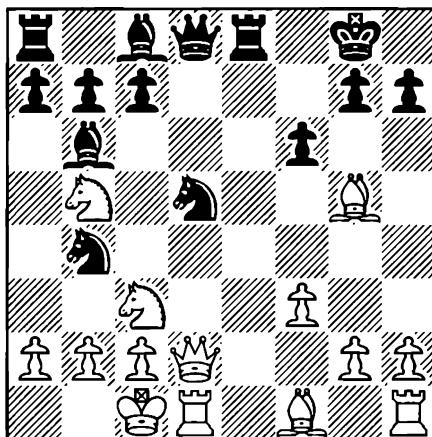
a) 12  $\mathbb{Q}c4$  looks sharp, but after a few tactics, play fizzles out to a drawn double-rook endgame: 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  13  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{Q}e6$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xf6$   $gxf6$  15  $\mathbb{Q}xb6$   $axb6$  16  $\mathbb{W}xd4$   $\mathbb{W}xd4$  17  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{Q}xc4$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$   $\mathbb{Q}xa2$  19  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$ .



Perhaps this is too far for most of us to calculate in our heads, but the sequence of tactical play is logical enough, without any big surprises.

b) 12  $\mathbb{Q}db5$  looks interesting, one of the main points being that after 12... $\mathbb{Q}e3?$  13  $\mathbb{W}xd8$   $\mathbb{Q}xd8$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$  15  $\mathbb{Q}b1$ , the knights for once out-perform the bishop pair. Black has not yet found time to develop his queenside pieces.

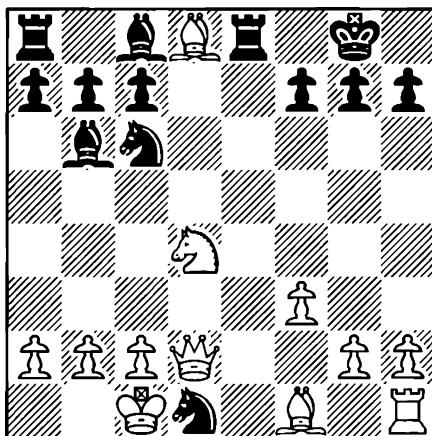
Still, Black seems to equalize comfortably with 12... $\mathbb{Q}cb4!$ .



Black quickly plays ...c7-c6 and White, sooner or later, has to give away a tempo with the dark-squared bishop.

The pyrotechnics by Aronian therefore seem unnecessary, and worse, bad. Aronian would seem to have had the possibility of equalizing by normal means.

**12  $\mathbb{Q}xd8 \mathbb{Q}xd1$**



**Question:** How should Kramnik handle Aronian's piece sacrifice?

**13  $\mathbb{Q}xc7!$**

Kramnik is attempting to make the absolute maximum out of his position, perhaps allowing concessions and various tactical opportunities, but also trying to ensure that he has queen and pawn versus assorted pieces, rather than playing with just queen versus other

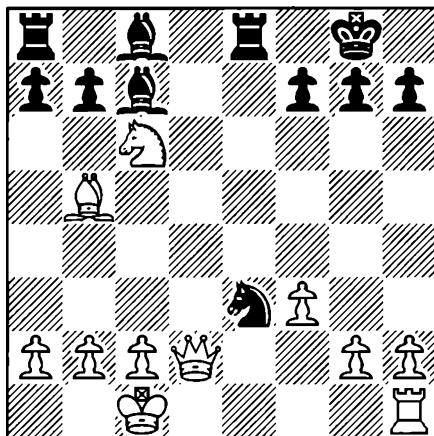
## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

pieces. A humble pawn, if working with other pawns, often tips the balance.

White can also try 13  $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ ?  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  14  $\mathbb{W}xd1$ , when Black has rook and bishop for the queen. Possibly White can claim a slight edge, or possibly Black can say that he is fully equal. It would be unrealistic, though, to suggest that Black is better.

That being so, whether or not Kramnik's 13  $\mathbb{Q}xc7$  can be regarded as a refutation or just a good move, Aronian's queen sacrifice seems suspect.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xc7$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{Q}e3$  15  $\mathbb{Q}b5$



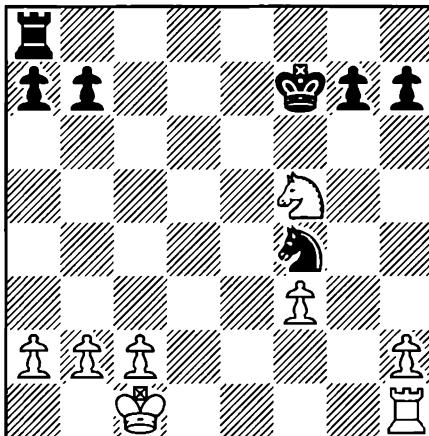
Very sharp. Kramnik would have seen this before his 13th. Of course, the real tactics arise in the next few moves. Kramnik, despite his lapse in round one, is still clearly playing confident chess, believing that, as one of the world's all-time greats, he will have the analytical strength and resourcefulness to combat any hand-to-hand battles by his opponent. It is a close call, but it seems that Kramnik has handled it extremely well.

15... $bxc6$

**Question:** Tactics corner. Aronian grabs the knight, but allows his rook to drop. Could he have done better by bringing one of his bishops into play?

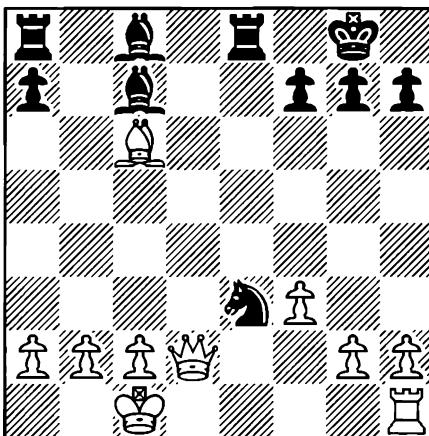
The obvious 15... $\mathbb{Q}f4?$  does nothing for Black after 16  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  17  $g3$   $\mathbb{Q}h6$  18  $f4$ , since if 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ , then 19  $\mathbb{W}d8+$  and mate next move.

Instead, 15... $\mathbb{Q}f5$  is interesting, with a few tactics after 16  $\mathbb{Q}d4$   $\mathbb{Q}f4$  17  $\mathbb{Q}xe8$   $\mathbb{Q}xg2$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xf7$  19  $\mathbb{W}xf4$   $\mathbb{Q}xf4$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ .



The trouble is that, with the help of the bishop desperado sacrifices on c7 and f7, White is a pawn up, and should eventually win. This is an example of why it is still important to count the number of pawns, even when the other pieces on both sides are being hacked around.

**16 ♘xc6**



**Question:** More tactics to consider, every move. The computer likes 16...♗f4 here. What is likely to happen next?

There is another chance to set up some tactics with 16...♗f4, but yet again, with best play, White ends up a pawn up in the endgame.

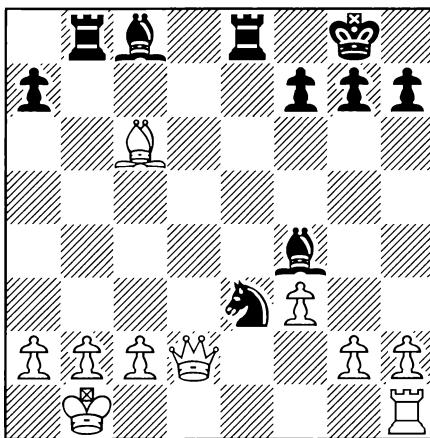
One can reasonably assume that Kramnik, some moves in advance, will have noted that he can play 17 ♖d4, and that, at the very worst, he can end up with equality with a perpet-

## *Fighting Chess: Move by Move*

ual check. This would happen after 17... $\mathbb{Q}f1+$  18  $\mathbb{Q}d1$  (not 18  $\mathbb{Q}xf4?? \mathbb{Q}e1$  mate) 18... $\mathbb{Q}e3+$  19  $\mathbb{Q}c1$ , etc. This is a useful back-stop when trying to analyse during a game. Realizing that he is at least equal, Kramnik does not have to worry that he might be losing. He can play the sharp line with confidence.

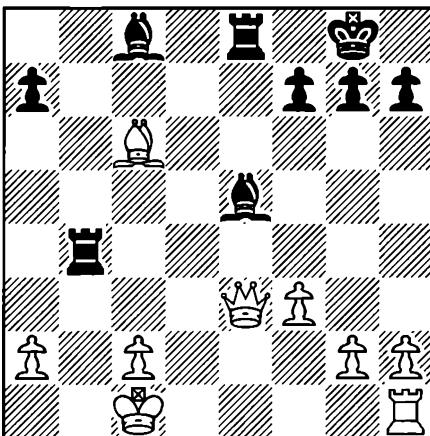
But can White improve on this?

Time to try 17  $\mathbb{Q}$ b1!  $\mathbb{K}$ b8.



Then  $\mathbb{Q}xe8 \mathbb{Q}xb2+$  leads to complicated equality after  $\mathbb{Q}a1$  or  $\mathbb{Q}c1$ . Or at least the computer suggests that it is equal.

White can, however, play for much more with 18  $\mathbb{W}d4!$   $\mathbb{Q}e5$  19  $\mathbb{W}xe3$   $\mathbb{B}xb2+$  20  $\mathbb{Q}c1$   $\mathbb{B}b4$ .



It would be difficult for most of us to keep track of what is going on in such a position, several moves in advance. The basic point, though, is that with forced simplification White will remain a pawn ahead, after 21  $\mathbb{Q}xe8$   $\mathbb{Q}f4$  22  $\mathbb{E}e1$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ + 23  $\mathbb{E}xe3$ .

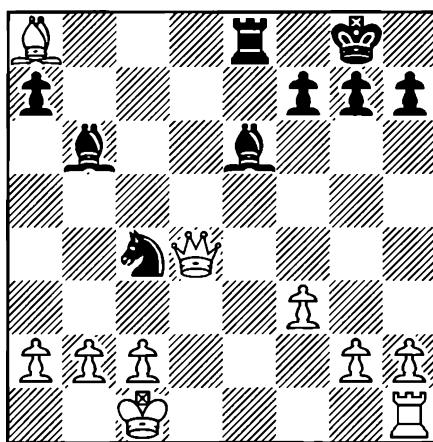
It seems almost unfair that, yet again, after so many wild tactics on either side, the final result is a pawn up for White in a joyless endgame for Black. But if a player is better at the start of a string of tactics, it is logical enough that, with good play by either side, he should remain better at the end of the tactics.

**16...♝c4 17 ♜d4**

Other queen moves look good too. The tension has gone, and Kramnik is on the way to a win.

**17...♜e6 18 ♜xa8 ♜b6**

Aronian sets an extremely deep trap, avoiding the more obvious 18...♜xa8.



**19 ♜d3**

**Question:** Just about any safe queen move is good, but which is the most accurate? Can he force his opponent to resign by around move 30?

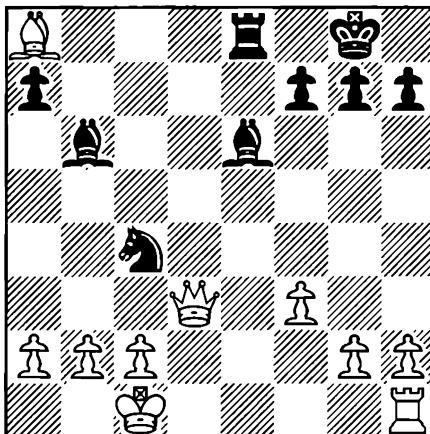
I leave this as something of a trick question. The position is not as clear as I thought. The obvious reply, protecting the queen with 19 ♜e4, at first seems to keep a decisive material advantage, but if we dig closer, Black's mighty minor pieces give him enough for a perpetual. After 19...♜e3+ 20 ♜d1 ♜b2+! 21 ♜e2 ♜b6, there is an unusually convoluted repetition on 22 ♜d2 ♜c4+ 23 ♜c1 ♜e3+ 24 ♜d1 ♜b2+ 25 ♜e2 ♜b6, and the roundabout continues.

The last try for White would be 25 ♜e1 (or, earlier, 21 ♜e1), but again there is another repetition after 25...♜d7 26 ♜b7 ♜b6+ 27 ♜d2 ♜e3+ 28 ♜e1 ♜b6+. Plenty of checks and repetitions, but not quite enough for Black to checkmate. And of course White does not have quite enough for the win.

This would be an extraordinarily difficult position to try to analyse over the board. Quite possibly Kramnik's instinct would have made him decide that the minor pieces are far too difficult to handle in open play. It seems that Kramnik played the best move here,

ignoring his bishop, and keeping his queen and rook developed and centralized.

19  $\mathbb{W}h4 \mathbb{B}xa8$  20  $\mathbb{Q}b1$  is another good try for the win, with a different defensive approach. Instead of keeping his queen and rook active, White's approach would be to keep his king and queen as safe as possible.



**Question:** The final tactical exercise. What happens if Black tries 19... $\mathbb{B}d8$  - ?

#### **19... $\mathbb{B}xa8$**

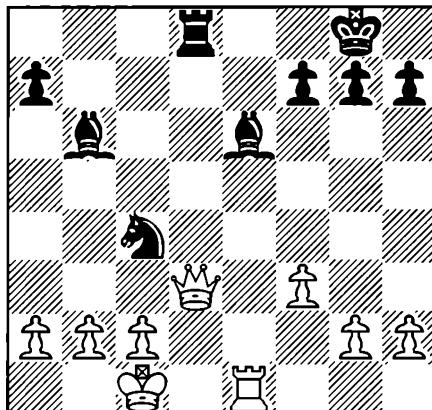
Maybe Kramnik was hoping for 19... $\mathbb{B}d8$ . Then White has the visually attractive 20  $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ ?  $\mathbb{B}xd5$  21  $\mathbb{W}xc4 \mathbb{B}d1+$  22  $\mathbb{B}xd1 \mathbb{Q}xc4$  23  $b3$  and there has been simplification, and the rook and two pawns, well coordinated, should eventually force a win.

The commentators at the time, looking at their computers, noticed that after wild play with 20  $\mathbb{W}e2 \mathbb{Q}e3+$  21  $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{Q}a3+$  22  $\mathbb{Q}a1 \mathbb{Q}c4$  23  $\mathbb{B}d1 \mathbb{B}xa8$  24  $\mathbb{B}d3$ , White is still winning.

Maybe so, but would Kramnik, still slightly out of form, have tried such an obscure line? Sometimes it is best to keep things simple.

Anyway, White has two good replies.

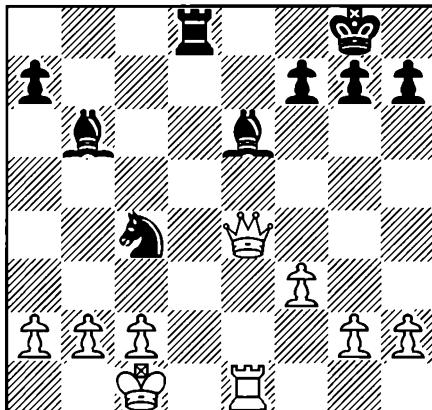
#### **20 $\mathbb{B}e1 \mathbb{B}d8$**



**Question:** Should White try to speed things up, with 21  $\mathbb{Q}xe6$  - ? Then 21... $\mathbb{B}xd3$  22  $\mathbb{Q}e8$  is mate.

This would indeed speed up the finish, but the wrong player wins. After 21  $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ ?  $\mathbb{fxe}6$  22  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$   $\mathbb{B}e3+$  23  $\mathbb{Q}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}d1$  it is Black who gives checkmate. Beware of back-rank howlers!

**21  $\mathbb{Q}e4$**



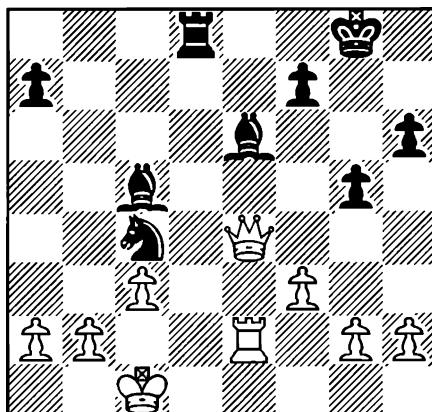
While writing my blog, I noted that “there is not all that much that needs to be said. The battle between queen versus bishop and two knights is potentially interesting, but White has two extra pawns, and once these pawns start to advance, Black’s minor pieces start to be repulsed.” I was getting tired!

Clearly White was winning, and clearly there was a big time scramble, with Kramnik in particular having much to think about. Somehow, Kramnik lost track with his position, and there were still a few fighting chances for Aronian.

**21...g5**

At the time this appeared to be slightly desperate, creating pawn weaknesses. I had expected 21...h6. Still, White is winning anyway.

**22 c3 ♜c5 23 ♜e2 h6**



**24 g3**

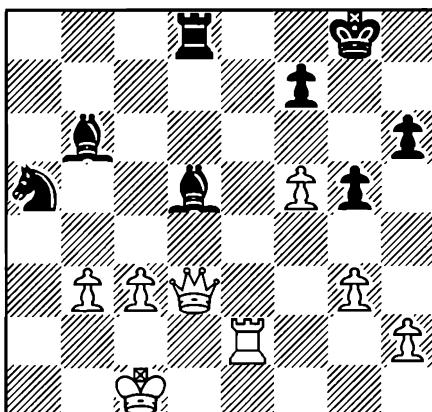
Perhaps Kramnik is concentrating a little too much on the square-by-square approach.

24 b3 seems more dynamic, forcing Black to retreat his pieces:

a) 24...♜a3+ 25 ♛c2 ♜f5 26 ♜xf5 ♜d2+ 27 ♜xd2 ♜e3+ 28 ♛d3 ♜xf5 29 ♛e4, and after the flurry of tactics, White has a simple win in the endgame.

b) 24...♜d6 25 ♜c6 ♜c8 26 ♜a6 and Black has to disorganize his pieces. No crashing through, but it is progress.

**24...a5 25 f4 a4 26 f5 ♜d5 27 ♜d3 ♜b6 28 b3 axb3 29 axb3 ♜a5**



**30 ♜e8+!**

Kramnik was never completely out of control, even during his time scramble. In other

words, he is winning! That is all that really matters.

Kramnik's exchange sacrifice looks strange at first, giving away his material advantage. He is about to have queen and two pawns, versus rook, bishop and knight. However, there are two points greatly in favour of White: firstly, it is difficult for Black to cover the two connected passed pawns; and secondly, Black's knight is completely out on the edge.

There may be other ways of forcing through a win, and therefore it would be unfair for the reader to ask what White should have done next. The simple point, though, is that after his exchange sacrifice, Kramnik was able to win without difficulties.

**30... $\mathbb{E}xe8$  31  $\mathbb{W}xd5$   $\mathbb{E}d8$  32  $\mathbb{W}b5$   $\mathbb{E}d6$  33  $\mathbb{B}c2$   $\mathbb{B}g7$  34  $b4$   $\mathbb{B}b7$  35  $c4$   $\mathbb{E}f6$  36  $g4$   $\mathbb{B}d8$  37  $c5$   $\mathbb{B}c7$  38  $\mathbb{W}d7$   $\mathbb{B}c6$  39  $b5$   $\mathbb{B}a7$  40  $\mathbb{W}xc7$   $\mathbb{B}xb5$  41  $\mathbb{W}e5$   $\mathbb{B}a7$  42  $\mathbb{B}d3$  1-0**

Probably both players could have handled this slightly better during the time shortage, but there is no doubt that Kramnik was better throughout.

## Game Four: Aronian-Kramnik

Not much to think about, one might assume. Play was level and accurate, and the players agreed a draw at move 25. It happens. One cannot force an opponent to make a mistake, and if no mistakes by either side are made, the logical result is a draw. Like it or not, that is chess.

If anything, what is surprising is that only half of top level games end up in draws. Between both players rated over 2700, the approximate draw percentage is around 60%, with a very small plus score for White. This is based on results (from the beginning of April 2011 to the end of March 2012) in 301 games, as recorded by Live Chess Ratings, 2700. So most games at the highest level are indeed draws, but not as many as some might suspect. Even 2700+ players do not play perfect chess.

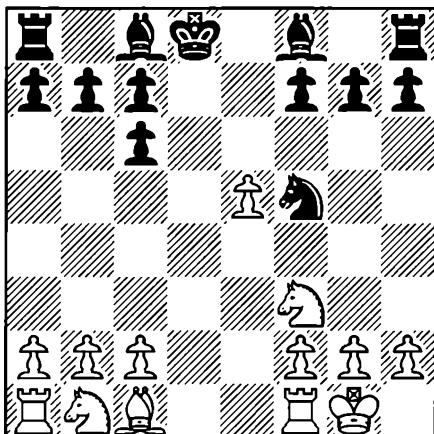
What probably happened was that Kramnik in game one, and Aronian in game three, have been jolted by their recognition of fallibility in chess, and both players felt they needed to settle down. No speculative chess, just solid chess. A similar dynamic can be seen in the World Championship match, a month later.

The tell-tale sign is not so much that they played quiet and accurate moves. Again, accuracy is not a problem. Rather, it is that sometimes players are a little too eager to rush to safety, or, as here, they are happy to agree a relatively quick draw, when there was still interesting play in the position.

There is only one question to be asked of the readers in this game, but it is quite a big question. What might have happened if the game were to be continued?

25th April 2012  
**L.Aronian-V.Kramnik**  
 Zurich 2012 (Game 4)  
*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4 e5 2  $\mathbb{B}f3$   $\mathbb{B}c6$  3  $\mathbb{B}b5$   $\mathbb{B}f6$  4 0-0  $\mathbb{B}xe4$  5 d4  $\mathbb{B}d6$  6  $\mathbb{B}xc6$   $\mathbb{B}xc6$  7 dxe5  $\mathbb{B}f5$  8  $\mathbb{W}xd8+$   $\mathbb{B}xd8$**



Another Berlin Defence and another draw in the main line.

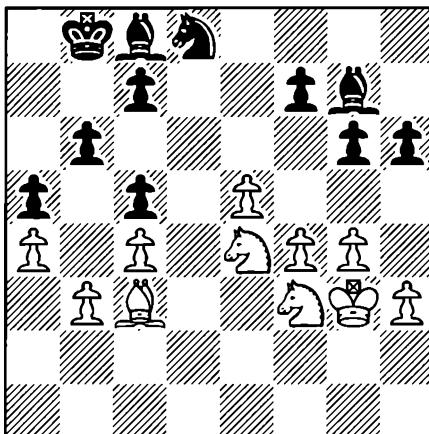
It is, however, a myth to suggest that the line is notoriously drawish, queens off, a bit of sensible manoeuvring, and a draw agreed. The database I mentioned (2700+ players against other 2700+ players, early 2011 to 2012) give the score as +5 =5 -2 (from White's point of view) out of 12 games. The draw proportion is therefore lower than the average (about 40%, as opposed to about 60%). Players with Black cannot rely on an easy half-point. They still have to work for it.

The importance of Kramnik's ability to halve out every time against Kasparov, in the famed 2000 match, was that Kramnik had exceptionally deep knowledge of the strategies of this line as Black. Possibly, who knows, Kasparov did not have equally deep knowledge as White. So Kramnik was better prepared.

### 9 h3

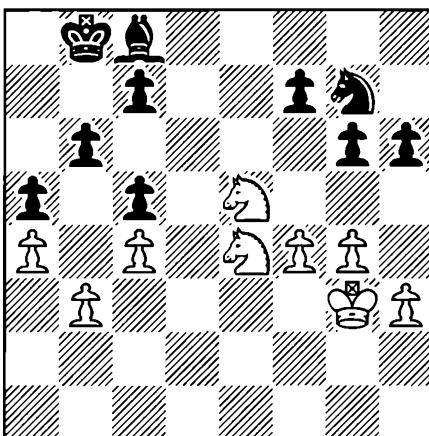
Varying from the 9  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  of game two.

Kramnik has had a recent loss in this line against Karjakin. Bearing in mind the previous comments, the young grandmaster managed to do something that Kasparov failed to achieve. Karjakin was, on this occasion, able to set up a mobile kingside pawn majority, after 9  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  10 h3 b6 11 a4 a5 12 g4  $\mathbb{Q}e7$  13  $\mathbb{Q}g5$   $\mathbb{Q}e8$  14 f4 h6 15  $\mathbb{Q}f3$ . Quite how mobile the pawns were is open to question after 15...g6 (S.Karjakin-V.Kramnik, Russian Championship, Moscow 2011). But zoom forwards some moves, and we reach a complicated minor piece endgame.



*White to play*

Rooks have just been exchanged on d8, and one can easily gain the impression that we are about to head for a quick draw. However, Karjakin has a sacrificial breakthrough in his mind, and he plays 30 e6! ♜xe6 (30...♜xc3?? 31 e7, queening) 31 ♜xg7 ♜xe7 32 ♜e5.



White's knights are dominant; while one of the main problems for Black in the Berlin Defence is that it can be extremely difficult to create a passed pawn from the crippled queenside majority. White's kingside is far more mobile and, indeed, he was able to create a decisive passed pawn, after 32...f5 33 ♜f6 g5 34 ♜c6+ ♜b7 35 ♜d8+ ♜g8 36 ♜c6+ (a harmless repetition, to help reach the time control) 36...♜b7 37 ♜d8+ ♜b8, and now 38 fxg5 hxg5 39 ♜h7, regaining the material at last, and then creating a passed pawn, and ultimately winning.

With modern technology, it is easy enough to find the whole game on the Internet, and

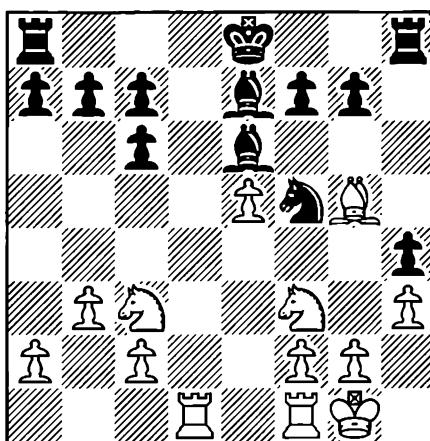
so there is no need to repeat all the moves. The reader might also note a win for Black in D.Navarra-S.Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

Clearly Karjakin has excellent understanding of the Berlin. He is, at the time of writing, one of the five players aged 25 and below in the top ten world list. Carlsen, Radjabov and Caruana get a full mention, in the later part of this book, being the three leaders in the recent Tal Memorial; of the other two Nakamura was not quite at his best in that tournament, whereas Karjakin did not play at all. So it is a good opportunity to pay my respects to him here.

**9...♝e8 10 ♜c3 h5 11 ♜g5 ♜e6 12 b3 ♜e7 13 ♜ad1**

For 13 ♜fd1? see the next note.

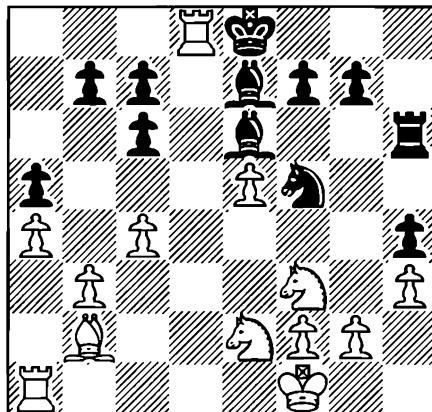
**13...h4**



This move is part of Kramnik's defensive repertoire. The main problem in Black's set-up is not so much any weakness of the queenside doubled pawns (it would be extremely difficult for White to attack them), but rather, that Black has fewer pawns on the kingside. The ...h5-h4 plan is designed to prevent White from setting up a kingside pawn roller.

The danger then, from Black's point of view, is that his h-pawn can be difficult to defend. If, however, he can cover his h-pawn effectively, without his pieces being excessively tied down to defence, he should be equal.

There is another Karjakin game that can be mentioned here. In V.Ivanchuk-S.Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2012, White had the other rook on d1. From the stem line in the opening, play went 9 ♜c3 ♜e8 10 h3 h5 11 ♜d1 ♜e7 12 ♜g5 ♜e6 13 b3 h4 (reaching the same position as in the game, but with 13 ♜fd1 rather than 13 ♜ad1) 14 ♜f1 (slightly more attractive for White? – perhaps, but it was still only a draw) 14...a5 15 a4 ♜h5 16 ♜c1 ♜b4 17 ♜e2 ♜d5 18 ♜e1 ♜d8 19 ♜b2 ♜h6 20 c4 ♜e6 21 ♜f3 ♜e7 22 ♜xd8+ ½-½.



The computer seems to think that White is slightly better here. What do you think? I leave this as an unanswered question.

Back to the Aronian-Kramnik game.

**14  $\mathbb{E}fe1$**

Apparently a minor innovation, but it is unlikely to have any drastic impact, one way or the other.

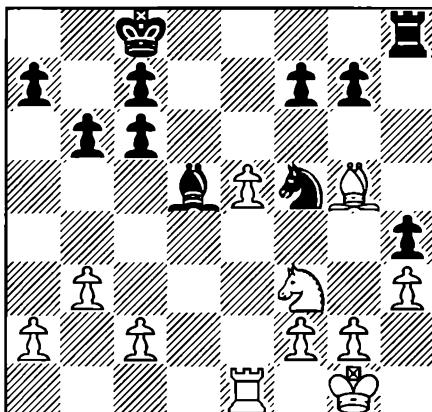
**14... $\mathbb{E}d8$  15  $\mathbb{E}xd8+$   $\mathbb{Q}xd8$**

With reference to Ivanchuk-Karjakin in the earlier note, it is clear that in such lines Kramnik prefers to move his king to the queenside, rather than the kingside, where it is possibly still slightly exposed.

**16  $\mathbb{Q}e4$  b6 17  $\mathbb{Q}f4$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  18  $\mathbb{Q}eg5$**

This eliminates Black's bishop pair. It is far too early for White to claim any sort of advantage.

**18... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$  19  $\mathbb{Q}xg5$   $\mathbb{Q}d5$**



White's knight on f3 is now pushed away from any attack square.

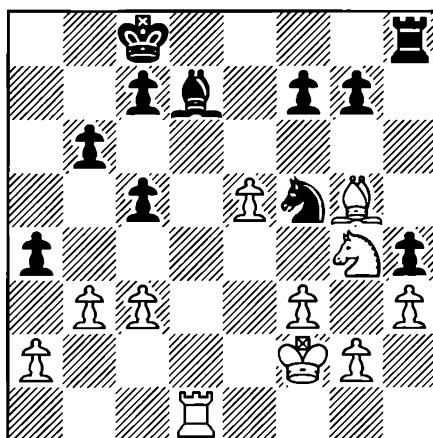
**20 ♘h2 c5 21 ♖d1**

This helps explain why White moved the knight to h2, rather than to d2. He wants to put pressure on the bishop.

**21...♘c6 22 c3**

To prevent ...♗d4.

**22...a5 23 ♗g4 ♖d7 24 f3 a4 25 ♖f2 ½-½**



The end of the game? Or should it have been only the beginning? This is the sort of position where players of equal strength would be happy to take an early half-point, but where the stronger player, whether as White or as Black, would want to try to grind it out indefinitely. Or perhaps, with two players of equal strength, one of the players will want to grind it out anyway. The position is equal, but it is not a clear draw. One of the players might well make a minor inaccuracy, maybe pushing a pawn carelessly, or maybe moving a piece from a better square to a worse square. Then the opponent would have legitimate ways of trying to play for a win.

The exercise I am setting asks you to make good use of your computer and its chess engine.

## Exercise

Try to play out this position, with the help of the computer. In most positions, unless we are in the middle of an exchange or some kind of tactic, there will be something like three to five choices on each turn. You will not be able to analyse everything, and neither can I. What I am suggesting is that you carry on trying out apparently good moves, and keep trying variations until there is a completely drawn position, or alternatively, where one of the players suddenly has a slight edge.

The idea of the exercise is to give the reader a better grasp of holding the balance in a level position. It is so easy to make a slight stumble. The hope is that your opponent will

slip up before you do. You will almost certainly find that, even with the help of computer suggestions, it will be difficult, unexpectedly so, to keep to complete equality throughout.

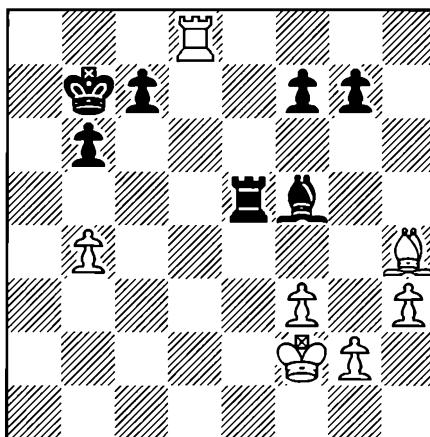
According to my own computer, the main choices here are:

- $25 \dots \mathbb{E}e8;$
- $25 \dots \mathbb{E}h5;$
- $25 \dots axb3 26 axb3$ , and either  $26 \dots \mathbb{E}e6$ , or one of the rook moves already suggested;
- $25 \dots c4.$

Now it is up to you.

### Some suggested answers

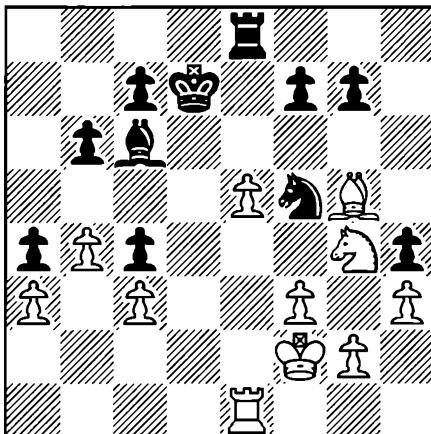
If Black is determined to head for a drawn position, with as little fuss as possible, the simplest line here is to offer quick simplification with  $25 \dots axb3 26 axb3 \mathbb{E}e6 27 b4$  ( $27 c4$  allows Black to think about playing his knight to d4)  $27 \dots cxb4 28 cxb4 \mathbb{E}e8$ . As White, I would perhaps be slightly worried about allowing Black the possibility of creating a passed pawn on the queenside, and certainly it would seem sensible to simply further, with a knight exchange, with  $29 \mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}xe3 30 \mathbb{Q}xe3 \mathbb{Q}f5 31 \mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{Q}xe5 32 \mathbb{Q}d8+ \mathbb{Q}b7 33 \mathbb{Q}xh4$ .



Determined players might well squeeze it out for a few more moves, but it is difficult to see how, even if one of the players could create a passed pawn (...c7-c5 for Black), he would have much chance of creating a strong one.

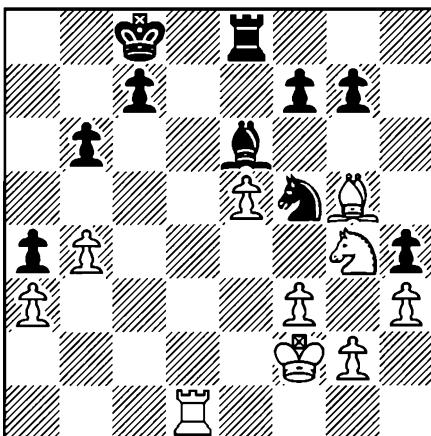
In fairness, this might be the sort of thing that both players would have been thinking about, when agreeing a draw. After all, Kramnik's original intention with  $24 \dots a4$  would have been to create the possibility of quick simplification on the queenside.

Suppose, though, Black were to try to tweak it out for more than a slight edge, albeit while allowing an extra degree of risk. Again, trying out equalizing moves with the computer, play could continue with  $25 \dots c4 26 b4 \mathbb{E}e8$ . This looks good if Black's rook can somehow reach White's side of the board, but how can it get there? White has everything covered on the d-file. Try  $27 a3 \mathbb{Q}c6 28 \mathbb{E}e1 \mathbb{Q}d7$ , all apparently computer-safe moves.



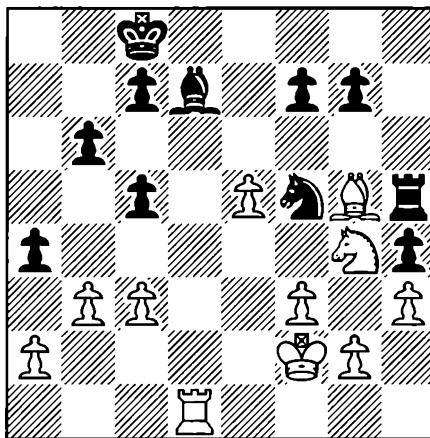
But White suddenly has a tactic: 29 e6+ ♜xe6 30 ♔e5+ ♜c8 (not 30...♜e8?? 31 ♔xc6 and Black's rook is pinned) 31 ♔xf7 ♜xe1 32 ♔xe1 and Black is definitely under pressure.

Going back, 25...♜e8 seems safe enough, waiting to see what he wants to do with his queenside pawns. Then perhaps 26 b4 (again, there are other moves) 26...cxb4 27 cxb4 ♜e6 28 a3.



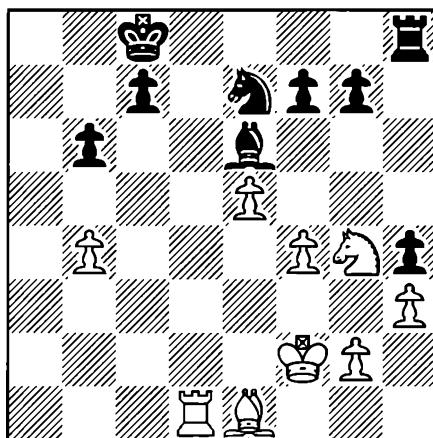
Such positions, characteristic of the Berlin, can be positionally disorientating if your instincts are for trying to make progress. Looking at the pieces, any king move will end up on a slightly worse square. Shifting the knights on either side, or White's bishop, would release the pressure on the opponent. Black would also like to keep his rook lined up against the e5-pawn. So what is left, if there is no constructive pawn move? White's rook is mobile, but cannot attack anything. Black's bishop is mobile, but can do nothing more than prod the rook. A possible line might be 28...♝b3 29 ♜d3 ♜c4 30 ♜d2 ♜b5, and then a rook move, and then a bishop move, and so on.

Finally, and the reason why I feel slightly surprised by the early draw agreement, Black can prod the bishop with 25... $\mathbb{B}h5!$ ?



If White's bishop moves, then Black's other pieces can start to move. This is the way in which Black is starting to explore for a win. For instance:

- a) 26  $\mathbb{B}f4$  will leave White a little uncomfortable after 26...axb3 27 axb3  $\mathbb{B}e6$ .
- b) 26  $\mathbb{B}d2$ , covering both the c3- and b4-squares, might be a better defensive plan. Black still seems to keep the initiative after 26...axb3 27 axb3  $\mathbb{B}e6$  28 b4 cxb4 29 cxb4  $\mathbb{Q}e7$  30 f4 (Black threatened ... $\mathbb{B}xg4$ , winning the e5-pawn) 30... $\mathbb{B}h8$ , but it still fizzles out to equality after the unexpected 31  $\mathbb{B}e1!$ .



White may have what is theoretically the bad bishop, but it still creates pressure on the h4-pawn, preventing Black from gaining full control with his rook and knight. If Black is now content with equality, he could worry the rook with 31.. $\mathbb{B}b3$ , and there is little opportunity for White to improve his pieces.

Perhaps Aronian has everything covered, but it would have been interesting to see what would have happened, if Kramnik had declined the draw offer.

## Game Five: Kramnik-Aronian

The fifth game ended up in a steady and unexciting draw, but of course there is nothing wrong with “steady and unexciting” draws. What this means, in top-level play, is that neither player has made a mistake, surely no bad thing in a game of chess. Aronian, in game five, was content to give nothing away as Black. Looking backwards, he would not want to have tried overexcited chess, as in game three. Looking forwards, his best chance of winning the six-round match is to put some pressure on his opponent as White.

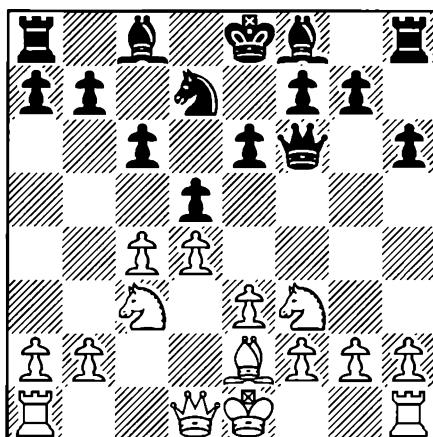
There was perhaps the slightest of suggestions that, at one stage, Aronian could have taken the initiative with Black. Whether or not this was anything significant, the chance was missed, and play soon ended up with another draw.

27th April 2012  
V.Kramnik-L.Aronian  
Zurich 2012 (Game 5)  
*Semi-Slav Defence*

**1  $\mathbb{Q}f3$**

Back to normal resumption. Kramnik, after his game one loss, switched his openings around in game three, with 1 e4, and won in a Four Knights. It would be naïve to suppose that Aronian would have tried the queen sacrifice again. He would undoubtedly have varied at some stage.

**1...d5 2 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  3 c4 c6 4  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  e6 5  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  h6 6  $\mathbb{Q}xf6$   $\mathbb{Q}xf6$  7 e3  $\mathbb{Q}d7$  8  $\mathbb{Q}e2$**



Kramnik avoids 8  $\mathbb{Q}d3$  this time. The virtue of playing the opening quietly, with  $\mathbb{Q}e2$ ,

rather than the apparently more aggressive  $\mathbb{Q}d3$ , is that the d4-square is ultra-safe, with the queen providing an extra guard on d1 or, perhaps later, one of the rooks reaching d1.

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

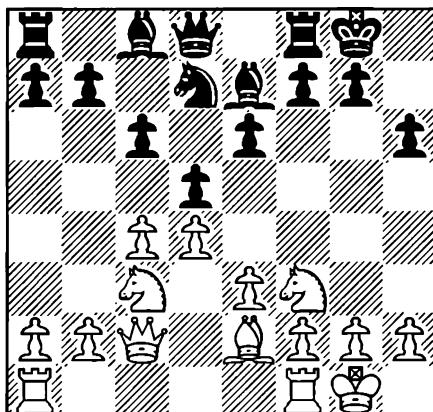
**Question:** Why this queen retreat? Is there nothing else?

Black's idea is not as strange as it looks. He is happy that he has induced his opponent to concede the bishop pair, with the veiled threat of the Botvinnik Variation (see notes to game one). Once he has done that, what can he do next? The danger is that the queen and the dark-squared bishop are in the way of each other. If, for example, Black were to play ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ , the queen does not have many squares; while if instead ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ , there is the danger of a pawn prod with e3-e4-e5. The argument is that Black has made a gain with the bishop pair, but that he will need at some stage to give up a tempo or so with the queen.

There are, of course, credible alternatives: 8...dxc4 9  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$  g6 transposes into game one. A computer search suggests that, as well as 8...dxc4, Black can try 8... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ , or even 8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$  (though he will then have to take care of the queen).

Perhaps unexpectedly, 8... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ ? is another possibility, prodding the c-pawn. This gives away a couple of tempi after 9 c5  $\mathbb{Q}d7$ , but it is no great loss, seeing that White's c-pawn no longer adds pressure to the centre, whereas Aronian's own move lost a tempo anyway. Black can think, in some variations, of opening up the centre with ...e6-e5. This line looks fully playable for Black.

9 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}e7$  10  $\mathbb{Q}c2$  0-0



11 a3

**Question:** The computer suggests that there are more than twenty reasonable moves for White, each of which gives equality, and very little more. Why did Kramnik choose this particular one?

If no move is likely to give any sort of clear advantage, then in practical terms it is often a good idea to play a quiet waiting move. This can often imply an insignificant-looking pawn move, slightly improving the pawn structure, while waiting to see exactly what the opponent is planning to do. Here, the pawn is just slightly better on a3 than on a2, allowing White to try b2-b4 in some lines, or maybe merely preventing ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ , or maybe creating a hole for the bishop, after Black exchanges with ...d5xc4;  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ , and then a retreat to  $\mathbb{Q}a2$ . Who knows? It is no bad thing to open up possibilities for later, given the opportunity for a quiet move.

The obvious alternatives are the various rook moves, though it is difficult to predict which rook is best, and where it should move to. Of the top ten moves suggested by the computer, two each are given as either of the rooks moving to c1, d1, and e1, while 11  $\mathbb{Q}ab1$  is the seventh. Time perhaps to wait? White would not want to lose a tempo, if he finds he has not placed the rook the most effectively.

The immediate 11 e4 dx $e$ 4 12  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $\mathbb{Q}c7$  opens up play, but then Black is equal. It is often better to maintain the tension. So we return to think about the best rook move.

11  $\mathbb{Q}ad1$  looks in many ways the most natural move, but what then happens after 11...b6 - ? 12 e4 is still too early for an edge, so what else can he try? Attention may focus on 12 cxd5 cxd5, but then we have the problem that the rook is not on the best square. It would be better on c1 instead.

By a circuitous path, 11  $\mathbb{Q}fd1$  may well be regarded as most accurate, and if 11...b6, White still has several reasonable choices, maybe 12  $\mathbb{Q}ac1$  or 12 cxd5, or possibly 12 e4 or 12  $\mathbb{Q}b3$ . Clearly this cannot possibly be calculated trying to analyse move-by-move. What is important is positional judgment, and being able to anticipate what to do after the opponent's ideas. What, for example, would White do if Black were to try ...b6 - ?

### 11...b6

He has to do something with the "bad bishop", often the biggest positional problem in the Queen's Gambit.

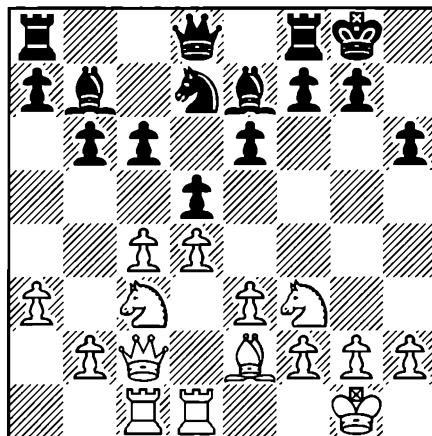
### 12 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$

Note that if White had played 11  $\mathbb{Q}fd1$  instead, and if Black were still to try 11...b6, then White might find something more constructive to do than 12 a3.

### 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$

Kramnik decides what to do with his rooks, but perhaps very slightly too late. It needs to be emphasized of course that he has not done anything seriously wrong, and that he is not worse, but he has lost some of his opening initiative.

Aronian still has to play carefully to try to prove he has complete equality. His next move is startling.



**13...WB8**

**Question:** Why another queen move? He has already taken on f6, retreated on d8, and now another queen move, which attacks nothing, and defends not very much.

The first point to note is that the strongest grandmasters, while undoubtedly making mistakes on occasion, also have the uncanny ability to keep the position in balance, avoiding losing, when under pressure. It looks very much the case that White is better here, but in a few moves, Aronian escapes with easy equality. How does this happen?

In terms of chess thinking, the central point, which makes stronger players better than weaker players, is the question of defensive tactics. We all learn about attacking tactics, I attack his king, he tries to defend, I think about a sacrifice, analyse it, decide that it works, and so play the sacrifice. Or alternatively, if the sacrifice does not work, then play it positionally, and aim for the next breakthrough.

Defensive tactics are more difficult to grasp, but essentially the idea is that I want to defend the position quickly and securely, but I need to calculate. My pieces are not at the best squares at the moment, but my idea is that in a couple of moves, I will start to be on good squares. So I need to ensure that, in the meantime, my opponent cannot create an advantage. He plays this, then I defend, then he plays this, then I defend. Is my position awful? Or is it equal? It requires a lot of thought.

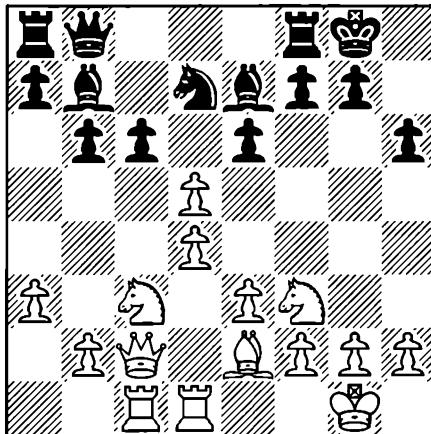
The queen is out of the way on b8, and White cannot attack it. The basic defensive plan is to keep the queen on the queenside, and bring both rooks to the queenside as well. Black could consider 13...Bc8, when he is not seriously worse, but then he still has to decide what to do with the rest of the queenside. Another option perhaps is 13...a6, followed by ...b7-b5.

In the end, what Black is aiming for is complete equality, not trying to defend a slightly worse position.

**14 cxd5**

Now that Black has given away a tempo, it is time for White to end the quiet manoeuvring. If his pieces are already on good squares, the only way to make progress is with the pawns.

14 e4 dxe4 is equal, like a safe Caro-Kann, so instead he exchanges pawns on d5, to see how Black recaptures. White is hoping for a modest advantage after either recapture.



**Question:** Which way should Black recapture?

An easy question to answer for players who use the Queen's Gambit for Black and various other lines, such as the Queen's Indian – and also, of course, for players with White who start with 1 d4.

Black has the worse pawn structure after 14...exd5 and will usually need to work hard to try to equalize. The main problem is the “minority attack” – two queenside pawns attacking three – White setting up the attack with ideas of b2-b4, quite possibly  $\mathbb{W}b3$ , then a2-a4, and at some stage b4-b5, trying to put Black's c6-pawn in great discomfort. If, in such an attack, Black were to exchange with ...c6xb5, he ends up with an isolated pawn on d5, which is very weak. There are ways to counteract such an attack, but Black has to be careful as to which methods he will need to try to defend. If in doubt, avoid.

Therefore:

**14...cxsd5**

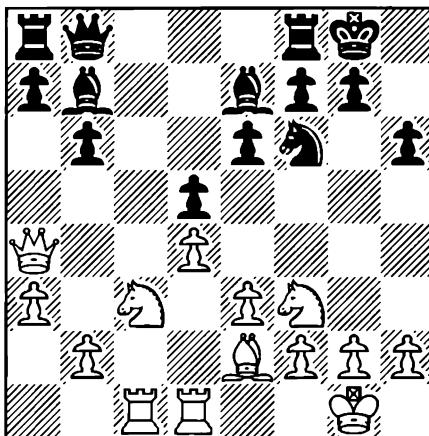
The pawn structure is now symmetrical, but White is slightly ahead in development. Aronian needed to be fully satisfied that his pieces are active enough to hold the balance.

Watching this online, I felt confident that Kramnik should be able to squeeze out an edge, but it seems that Aronian has defended with great accuracy.

**15  $\mathbb{W}a4 \mathfrak{Q}f6$**

A critical position, and potentially the difference between a slight advantage for White or mere equality. Has White got any genuine edge though? Understandably, Kramnik

thought for a long time here.



**16 ♜a6**

**Question:** Was this the best? Does this give White any advantage?  
If not, does he have an improvement instead?

The game move allows Black to exchange his supposedly bad light-squared bishop. The point is that if Black managed to play ...a7-a6 and ...b6-b5, he would have a standard symmetrical Slav position, where it is difficult for White to claim any sort of edge. Black will eventually try to open up lines with ...b5-b4.

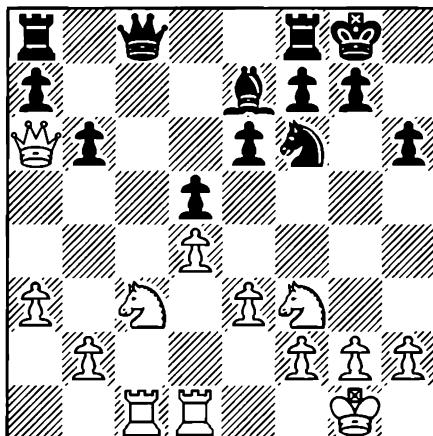
There is also the tactical problem that if White were to try to exchange off his f3-knight for one of Black's minor pieces, White's queen could get stuck on the wrong side of the tracks after a later ...a7-a6 and ...b6-b5. For example, Black is better in lines such as 16 ♔e5 a6 17 ♔c6? ♕xc6 18 ♕xc6 b5 – or, in this line, 17 ♔d7? ♔xd7 18 ♕xd7 ♕d6 19 h3 b5, and White is forced to retreat far too quickly.

Instead, Fritz (an old version) suggests doubling rooks with 16 ♜c2 a6 17 ♜dc1, but this seems cosmetic. After 18...b5, Black is equal.

Houdini suggests 16 ♕b3, aiming to prevent Black's plan of ...a7-a6 and ...b6-b5. Certainly this looks better than equality, but only very slightly so after 16...♜c8. Maybe White can try stonewalling with 17 ♔e5 followed by f2-f4, aiming for an edge in the middlegame, rather than in the endgame, but then he has to think about how to cover the hole on e4.

Kramnik decided to keep things simple. It is already starting to look drawish, provided Black finds a few accurate moves.

**16...♜xa6 17 ♕xa6 ♜c8**

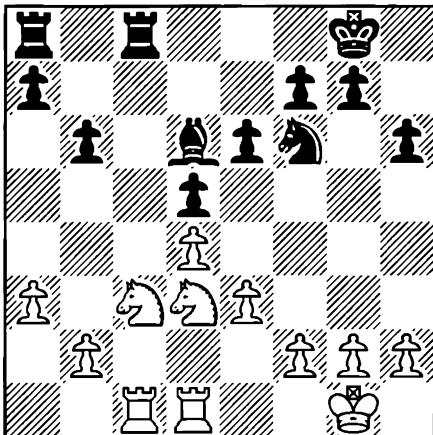


18 ♕xc8

**Question:** Should White have retreated, rather than exchange queens?

It does not make all that much difference, in that Black is equal either way. If the queen retreats, Black plays 18... ♕b7 with equality. Aronian has demonstrated excellent defensive play.

19... ♕fxc8 19 ♖e5 ♗d6 20 ♗d3



**Question:** Hasn't Black even got a slight edge now? His bishop covers both sides of the board, while White's knights do not attack much.

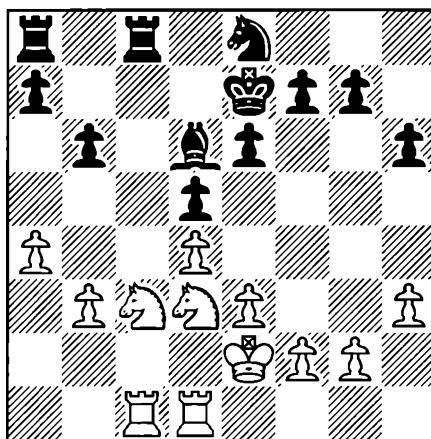
It is difficult to imagine that this position is anything other than level. If Black had a

knight, rather than a bishop, on d6, it would be time to agree a draw. With the bishop there, he will have good chances of exchanging one of the knights – if, for example, White were to try  $\mathbb{Q}e5$ . Alternatively, as in the game, the bishop might give an occasional prod against one of the pawns, but even this does not amount to much. Bishops are at their best in open play. With closed or half-closed positions, the bishop is no more effective than the knight.

**20... $\mathbb{Q}e8$  21  $\mathbb{Q}f1$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  22  $\mathbb{Q}e2$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  23 h3  $\mathbb{Q}c4$**

After a few moves of consolidation by both sides, Black's rook advance is so annoying that White is induced to push a pawn. He is about to weaken his pawn structure, though not seriously so.

**24 b3  $\mathbb{Q}cc8$  25 a4**



**Question:** Testing the computers. Of the two chess engines I was using, one said that that Black was better, while the other implied that the position was so dead equal they might just as well offer a draw.

Which assessment do you think is more accurate?

**25... $\mathbb{Q}a3$**

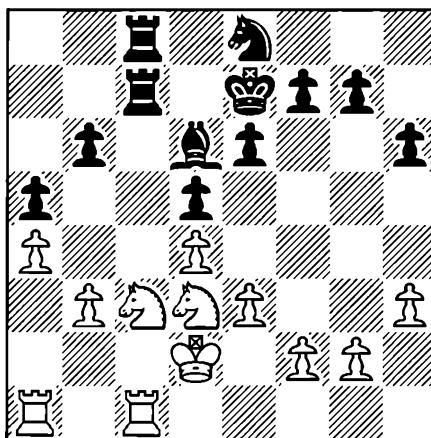
"Sometimes the battle of the chess engines can be more interesting than the game itself, from certain points of view. Both computer engines suggest that 25...a6 might have been slightly better. *Houdini* gives this as 0.00 dead equal, while *Fritz* (and I have to emphasize that this was an old version) gives this as a slight edge for Black. *Houdini* suggests the sensible consolidation in the centre with 26  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  27 f3, followed by  $\mathbb{Q}e2$ . It is difficult to imagine any sort of breakthrough by Black. *Fritz* gives instead 26  $\mathbb{Q}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  27  $\mathbb{Q}d2$ , and perhaps it is understandable why Black is given a slight edge."

These were the notes I made at the time. *Fritz* seems to overestimate (or perhaps, used to overestimate) the relative strength of the bishop over knight. Computer assessments are

useful and are the start of any modern analysis, but they cannot be relied in 100%.

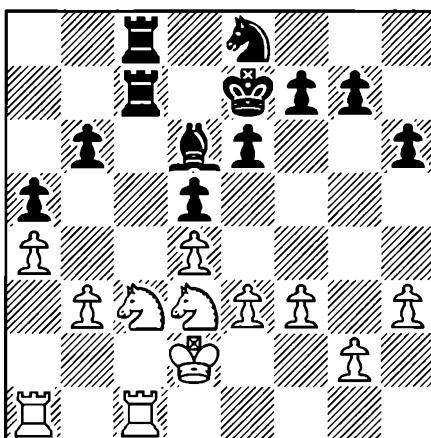
The position is equal.

26  $\mathbb{E}c2$   $\mathbb{E}c7$  27  $\mathbb{E}a1$   $\mathbb{A}d6$  28  $\mathbb{G}d2$  a5 29  $\mathbb{E}cc1$   $\mathbb{E}ac8$



30 f3

If White wanted to finish the game with a draw as quickly as possible, the simplest way is 30  $\mathbb{Q}b5$   $\mathbb{E}xc1$  31  $\mathbb{E}xc1$   $\mathbb{E}xc1$  32  $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ . The computer that preferred the bishop suggested Black could try to carry on with 32... $\mathbb{A}h2??$  – a reminder of Fischer's grotesque blunder in the first game against Spassky in 1972. Black is, of course, in great trouble after 33 g3 and the king moving to the kingside, remembering also to play h3-h4 if Black tries to push with ...h6-h5.



30...f5

Just as we are about to reach the long-discarded statutory 30-move requirement before the draw (which seems to have re-emerged at the recent Dubai International), something

happens, and play opens.

**Question (and another computer-generated comment):**

Was 30...h5 even better? Can Black claim a slight edge?

I have to admit that I ignored this suggestion in my initial draft, but, writing this for a book, it is time to draw up some loose ends.

30...h5 is tempting, until one recognizes that 31 g4 h4 32 e4 dxe4 33 fxe4 quite possibly favours White. He has three pawn islands, as opposed to two, which is commonly regarded as a slight weakness; but each of these pawn pairs is strong and compact and, most importantly, Black's bishop does nothing effective, while White's two knights work well together, both with each other and with the pawns. It is a case of complementarity, rather than of duplication.

In the game, Aronian made sure that his opponent was not allowed to set up a pawn centre with d4 and e4.

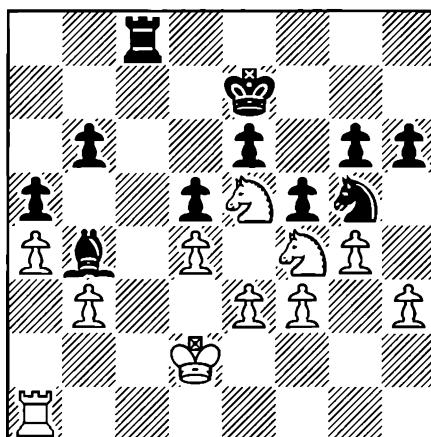
**31 g4**

Opening some space on the kingside...

**31...g6 32 ♜e2 ♞xc1 33 ♞exc1 ♜f6 34 ♜e2 ♜h7**

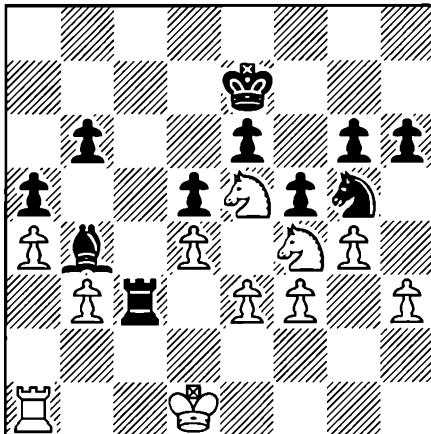
...while Black tries to attack White's more advanced pawns. The play gets tense, but it is still close to level.

**35 ♜e5 ♜g5 36 ♜f4 ♜b4+**



Suddenly, without an error on either side, both kings are under attack, and each player has several weak pawns, both for himself and for his opponent, to think about. However, there are not enough pieces to give checkmate, while the pawns on either side are so weak that, with general hacking, neither player will find a clear pawn advantage. Therefore, after a few accurate moves, a draw.

**37 ♜d1 ♞c3**

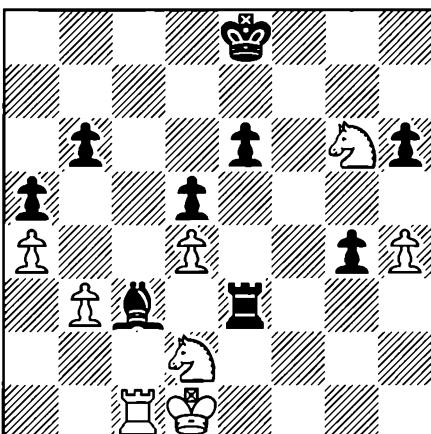


**Question:** We are uncomfortably close to the time control, and play has become suddenly less than sedate. The choice here is in challenging the rook on the c-file with 38  $\mathbb{R}c1$ , or setting up a pawn attack on the kingside with 38 h4. Which is better?

### 38 $\mathbb{R}c1$

Safe.

38 h4? is a punt too far. Never mind that Black can head for a draw with 38... $\mathbb{R}xe3$ ?! 39  $\mathbb{Q}fxg6+$   $\mathbb{Q}e8$  40  $\mathbb{R}c1$   $\mathbb{R}e1+$  41  $\mathbb{Q}c2$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$ , when the tactics soon subside. Worse still, the knight sacrifice 38... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ ! 39  $\mathbb{Q}xf3$   $\mathbb{R}xe3$  40  $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$   $\mathbb{Q}e8$  41  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $fxg4$  42  $\mathbb{R}c1$   $\mathbb{Q}c3$  puts White under great pressure.



Without any pawns supporting them, the knights themselves are powerless, less effec-

tive than Black's single bishop. Then, of course, there is the passed g-pawn.

Gambling during a time scramble is dangerous. The usual rule when short of time is: don't give anything away. Let your opponent make the mistakes.

### **38... $\mathbb{E}xe3$**

Allowing the exchange of rooks with, for example, 38... $\mathbb{E}xc1+?$  39  $\mathbb{Q}xc1$   $f\rightarrow g4$  40  $f\rightarrow g4$  leaves White much better. Apart from questions about the minor pieces on each side, White is going to win the g6-pawn.

### **39 $\mathbb{E}c7+$**

Blink, and White has the control of the c-file, a reversal of earlier events. Black has enough pieces on good squares to prevent any thoughts of checkmate with rook and two kings, but he cannot bring the king into complete safety either. A perpetual soon emerges.

**39... $\mathbb{Q}d8$  40  $\mathbb{E}g7$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  41  $\mathbb{E}g8+$   $\mathbb{Q}b7$  42  $\mathbb{E}g7+$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  43  $\mathbb{E}g8+$   $\mathbb{Q}b7$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$**

This was in some ways the most difficult game to try to understand, not despite it being "only a draw", but rather, precisely because it *was* a draw and not a win by either of the players. After all, in the days of the 19th century, it was expected that the natural result of a game of chess is a win for one of the players. It often takes great skill and sophistication for both players to end up with a draw when play has been sharp.

In the first and third games, it was not too difficult, even in live play, to sense that one of the players was starting to go wrong, and it was no great surprise that the player eventually lost. Sometimes, though, the position became complicated; neither player ever had any clear chances of forcing a win, but because the position was complicated, there might well have been various minor errors on either side, perhaps swinging from a slight edge for White, through to a slight edge for Black, and perhaps eventually ending up with a difficult draw.

But can the writer and analyst be certain that he has identified correctly what is going on? There is always the fear of ascribing a move as a mistake, when it is in fact a good move; and there is the other fear of failing to identify a mistake. It is much easier when a player has lost. In that case, logically, one of the players must have made a mistake at some stage, and so you give a question mark; at the worst, all that will happen is that you give the question mark to the wrong move. Whereas with a draw, it is difficult to decide whether, in a complicated position, there should perhaps be many "?"s in the text; or whether one should take the lazy approach, and decide that the players were both extremely strong grandmasters, and why, therefore, should we question their moves?

It took me more than a day to write up the notes to this game.

## **Game Six: Aronian-Kramnik**

The play gets more interesting as the match goes on. We would have liked the match to continue further, to game eight or beyond. The players have warmed up to the task, but they are also well aware that if their play starts to get more fanciful, as in games one and three, the opponent will find refutations.

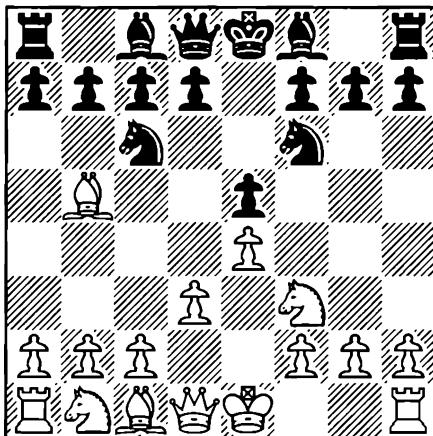
Technically, what is most striking about this game is that, although the play gets

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

strange and complicated, and both players are fighting hard for tactical blows, it seems the game did not stray far from equality, except for a brief phase just before the time control. Most players would have got well beyond their depth, whether as White or as Black, and therefore a loss is likely. Yet both Kramnik and Aronian kept their balance, not through quiet “positional” chess, but fighting the position through, move by move.

28th April 2012  
L.Aronian-V.Kramnik  
Zurich 2012 (Game 6)  
*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 ♜f6 4 d3**



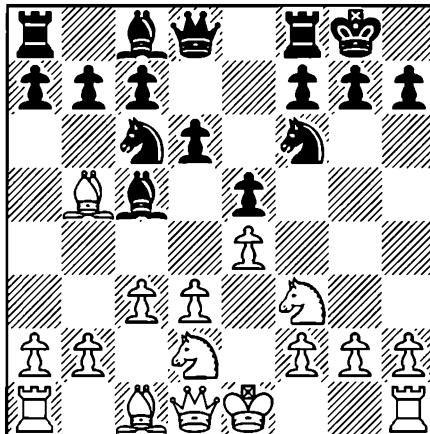
Aronian has failed to break down Kramnik's favourite Berlin Defence in the main line, and looks for alternatives. It may well be that in the years to come, 4 d3 will be seen as the main line. White accepts that he cannot break through with d2-d4 in one go, but he still has the advantage of the first move, and Black has to demonstrate that he can equalize.

**4...♝c5 5 ♜bd2**

Heading further away from the main lines. This quite often happens in grandmaster chess these days. There is not all that much point if both players play “book” chess, knowing that the opponent is fully conversant in the main lines and will have analysed them. All that will happen is a draw. If one of the players is interested in playing for a win, he will need to try something slightly off-book. This usually means something slightly quieter, as the “interesting” lines will have been analysed in great depth many years ago.

Here 5 c3 is the most popular continuation in this second-string attempt by White to keep an edge in the Berlin. Then 5...d6?! is mistimed due to 6 d4.

**5...d6 6 c3 0-0**



7 0-0

**Question:** This looks natural, but hasn't White missed a good opportunity for an edge? A knowledge of late 19th century chess would have helped.

As Steinitz recognized over a century ago, the manoeuvre with 7  $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ ?, followed by either  $\mathbb{Q}e3$  or  $\mathbb{Q}g3$ , can be highly effective. In such a knight manoeuvre, if White has already castled he will have to use an extra tempo with  $\mathbb{E}e1$  to vacate the f1-square.

Also, again remembering some old Steinitz lines, if White is planning to set up an attack on the kingside, it might often be a good idea to delay castling kingside, and instead to castle queenside, so that the king is not getting in the way of the attack.

When you have the opportunity, play through some of Steinitz' wins as White against Chigorin in the 1892 World Championship match. Agreed, Chigorin did not defend with great accuracy, and one can assume that Kramnik would have handled the defence far more accurately. In other words, this is not going to be a re-run of Steinitz-Chigorin.

After 7  $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ ?  $\mathbb{A}d7$  or 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ , a logical continuation for White might be 8  $\mathbb{Q}g3$ , with no big attack, but challenging his opponent to try to equalize.

Shipov, admittedly having to write at speed (this was live commentary), gave 7... $\mathbb{Q}g4$  as a "refutation", although perhaps this was slightly garbled in the translation from Russian to English. At the very least, 8  $\mathbb{Q}e3$  is equal. Moreover, White also has 8 d4 exd4 9 cxd4. Then the "fried liver" sacrifice with 9... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  10  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{Q}xf2$  (if 10... $\mathbb{W}f6$ , then simply 11  $\mathbb{A}e3$ ) 11  $\mathbb{Q}xf2$   $\mathbb{W}f6+$  12  $\mathbb{Q}e3$  does not work, since Black has already sacrificed two pieces rather than one. As a result, 12... $\mathbb{A}xd4+$  13  $\mathbb{W}xd4$   $\mathbb{W}g5+$  and 14... $\mathbb{W}xb5$  will still leave White a piece ahead.

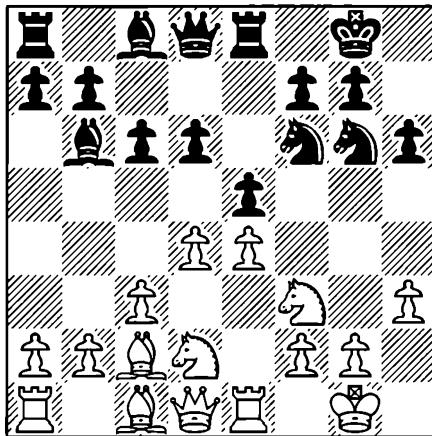
7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black is probably equal now.

8 h3

**8 d4 exd4 9 cxd4 ♜b6** does not give White any advantage.

**8...♜g6 9 ♜e1 c6 10 ♜a4 ♜e8 11 d4 ♜b6 12 ♜c2 h6**

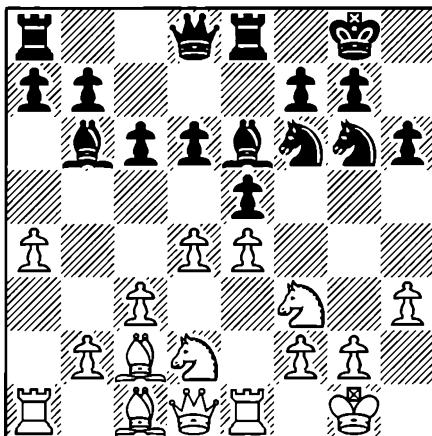


Black's position looks safe enough. A critical point is that the bishop is on the right side of the d6-pawn. If the bishop were on e7, White would perhaps still have a slight edge.

**13 a4**

A slightly strange move, one might think, in that if White is going to play a2-a4 in the Ruy Lopez, it is generally in the context of prodding the b5-pawn. Still, it gains some space on the queenside, which might be useful later. White is waiting to see what Black does next, and only then will he decide what to do with his minor pieces. Most particularly, what is Black going to do with his bishops? If he tries 13...♝c7, for example, he releases the pressure on the d4-pawn.

**13...♝e6**



Kramnik tries the other bishop move, preventing ♜c4, but there is still another knight

manoeuvre to reach for better squares.

#### **14 $\mathbb{Q}f1$**

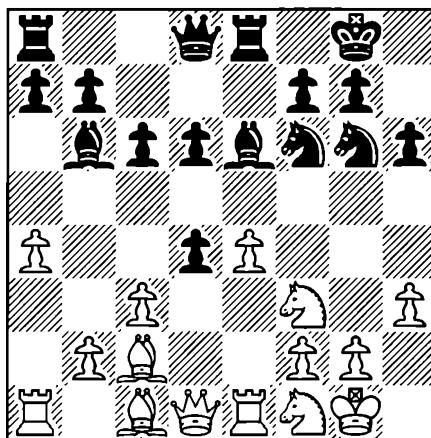
Either to e3 or to g3.

#### **14...exd4**

Neither player will want to open up the pawn centre, unless necessary, or unless it starts to take the initiative. However, Kramnik was alert to the possibility that the exchange here could be well timed.

Previously, 14... $\mathbb{W}c7$  was seen in E.Alekseev-R.Jumabayev, Moscow 2012. Then after 15  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{R}ad8$  16  $\mathbb{A}e3$ , Black could still keep the centre closed with reasonable equalizing chances. Instead, he tried 16...d5?, allowing 17  $\mathbb{Q}xe5$   $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  18  $\mathbb{A}f4$ , and White was substantially better.

Kramnik showed a much clearer understanding of timing, and it was soon Aronian who was under pressure. If Black wants to try to open the centre, often the correct choice is to do it promptly or not at all. A half-way approach, of playing a couple of moves quietly and then opening the centre, can often be a mistake.



#### **15 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$**

**Question:** In most such central structures, White would usually recapture with the pawn, keeping the d4- and e4-pawns working together. Why does he avoid playing 15 cxd4 here?

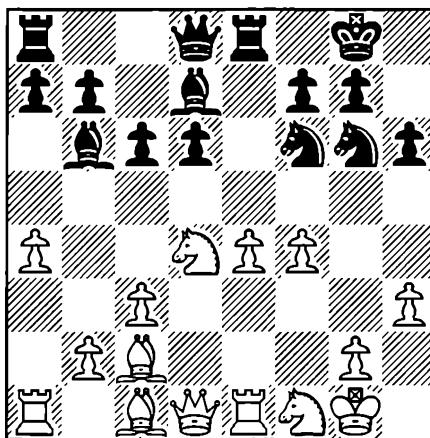
Because 15 cxd4? d5! leaves White's centre under attack. If he tries to win a pawn with 16 e5  $\mathbb{Q}e4$  17  $\mathbb{A}e4$  dxe4 18  $\mathbb{R}xe4$ , Black has 18... $\mathbb{A}d5$  and (once the rook has moved) ... $\mathbb{A}xf3$ , regaining the pawn on d4, while still attacking the e5-pawn. Black is better in all lines.

#### **15... $\mathbb{A}d7$**

A loss of tempo, maybe, but Kramnik is happy that he has forced White to recapture on

d4 with the knight, rather than with the pawn. Black can now try to create pressure on the e4-pawn.

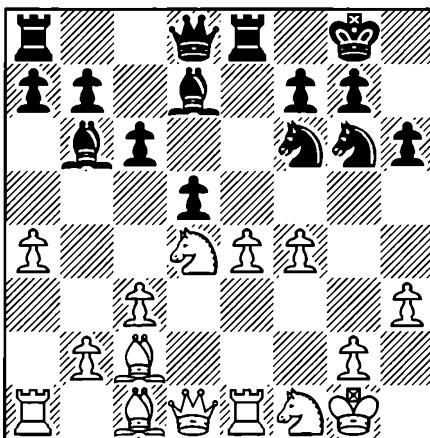
**16 f4**



This looks ugly, with the knight being pinned, and both his e- and f-pawns being under some pressure. The point is that he wants to allow his pawn to advance to e5, if Black were to try ...d6-d5. This is not really an attacking plan for White. It is more a case of setting up counterplay, if Black attacks the centre. White cannot be too wild, as his king can easily be exposed.

The more straightforwardly defensive option is 16 ♔g3, and if 16...d5 then 17 exd5 ♕xe1+ 18 ♕xe1 ♔xd5, about equal. Instead, Black could maintain the tension, maybe 16...♛c7 17 ♔e3 ♛ad8, again about equal.

**16...d5**



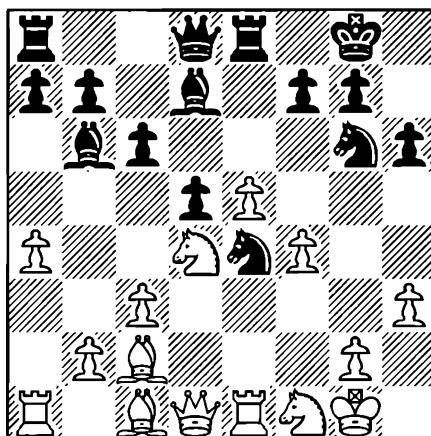
Again, there are plenty of choices for Black, and plenty of ways of keeping tense equal-

ity. When the game is close to equal, there are often several acceptable or good moves. If the position is balanced, it will remain close to that balance, as long as no mistakes are being made. Quite often, there is a much narrower range of possibilities when the position is not equal. Indeed, if a position is worse, the defender may have to play extremely accurately. Any slight mistake, and the position can easily deteriorate to a quick loss. From the other side, if a player is better, sometimes it is easy to maintain that advantage, whereas at other times a player with a slight edge can easily drift to equality, without the most precise play.

So it is extremely difficult to try to annotate an equal position, with equality kept over several moves. At various stages of the World Championship a month later, the grandmaster commentary team had to admit they found it difficult to predict what was going on. If there is genuinely no clearly best move, all the player can do is to pick one, decide for various reasons that he is happier with such-and-such a move, and play it. Don't be daft and spend half an hour thinking about a level position.

Now for a piece of statistics. The computer engine I have been using indicates that, before Black's 16th, there are well over twenty different moves that leave the position essentially equal or, at most, very slightly better for Black. This is a large number, especially given that we are in a tense early middlegame, with no pieces and only one pawn each having been exchanged. The move that Kramnik played was given as the only chance of gaining a slight edge, but even then the game seems more likely to remain as tense and equal.

**17 e5 ♖e4**



**18 ♗xe4**

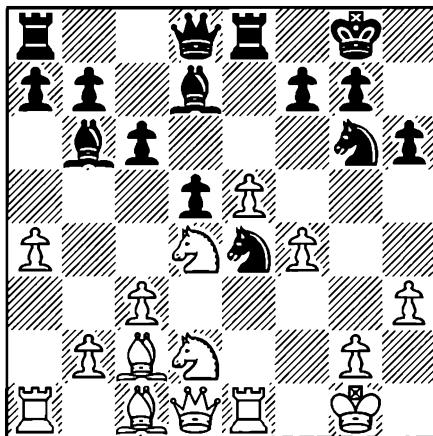
Natural and direct. Even here, there appear to be three possibilities for White, with (subject to later analysis) approximate equality.

The simplest approach, developing the queen and bringing it active, is 18 ♕h5. Black can then offer a queen exchange with 18... ♜h4 19 ♕xh4 ♖xh4 20 ♗e3 – level, unless the reader can suggest otherwise.

18 ♜d2 is another option, apparently giving Black slightly the better of things, but it may well be that this, after analysis, could end up with clear equality.

Unfortunately, I do not know how much time Aronian spent on this position, and what lines he analysed. So...

**Question:** An analysis position.



You are welcome to use the computer to help analyse this position. Indeed, given the context of the earlier argument, this is positively recommended. The challenge is whether you can find a clear equalizing line after both 18...♝h4 and 18...♞f5.

a) 18...♝h4 leads to much chopping in the centre after 19 ♜xe4 dxe4 20 ♜xe4 ♚f5 (making use of the pin on the knight) 21 ♜e2 ♜xf4 22 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 23 ♜xf5 ♜xf5. Plenty of moves to calculate, but no sacrifices. The analysis engine I am using gives Black an edge, presumably in view of the isolated e-pawn. Play on a few moves, though, and after 24 a5 (forcing Black to exchange the bishop) 24...♞c5 (or 24...♜xd4+ 25 ♜xd4) 25 b4 ♜xd4+ 26 ♜xd4, any hope of an edge has reduced almost to vanishing point. Black might continue with 26...♜ed8 27 ♜c4 ♜d3 28 ♜xd3 ♜xd3, but White can hold this after 29 e6 fxe6 30 ♜xe6 ♜xc3 31 ♜e7, even if temporarily a pawn down.

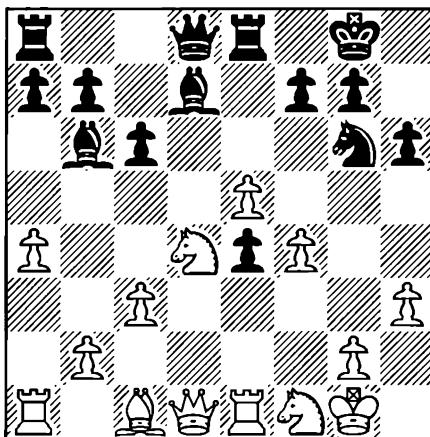
b) 18...♞f5 19 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 20 ♜xe4 dxe4 leaves Black's advanced e-pawn in danger, but there are potentially two pins on the white knight, so 21 ♜xe4?? at once loses to 21...c5.

Instead, 21 ♜h2 is possible, most likely equal. Alternatively, White could play more tactically, with 21 a5!? ♜xa5 22 ♜xe4 c5 23 ♜a4 cxd4 24 ♜xa5, which is lively but most likely heading for a draw again.

Playing through these lines makes one appreciate that Aronian's 13 a4 was a wise idea, and that the later a4-a5 becomes unexpectedly useful many moves later. The pawn push was certainly not a waste of tempo.

Back to the main line.

**18...dxe4**

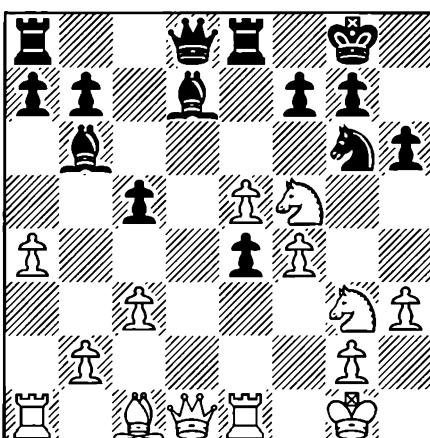


We have just seen something like this, in the line with 18  $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{B}f5$  and then a double-exchange on e4. The difference here is that White's knight on f1 and Black's bishop on d7 are still on the board. This could well make a radical difference to the outcome of the next few moves – or not. Possibly the strategies could be roughly the same.

**19 a5!?**

In my blog, I noted that this was “an extremely difficult position to assess. Translation: I do not know what is going on, and I don’t know whether Aronian’s move was brilliant, okay, or not all that good. At the very least, it would take me several attempts to make an initial assessment at home, and maybe across several days, and even then I would not feel any degree of certainty about all this.” And much text to follow, I conceded that his position may well have been fully playable, but I could not understand why he chose it.

So let us try to understand why Aronian might have rejected 19  $\mathbb{Q}g3$  c5 20  $\mathbb{Q}dfs$ .

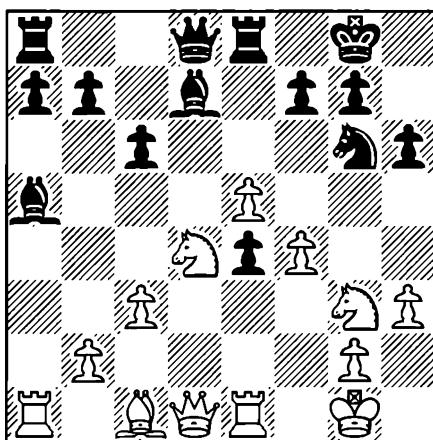


Here White has kept the a-pawn, but has granted his opponent the long diagonal from a7 to g1. Perhaps in the end Aronian simply wanted to avoid any checks along that diagonal, such as 20...c4+ 21 ♖h2 ♜f2, threatening the rook, with a substantial gain of tempo if White moves it away. Then 22 ♗d6 (not 22 ♜e2?? ♜xf5! 23 ♜xd8 ♜xg3+, winning a piece) 22...♜xe1 23 ♜xe1 is playable for White despite the lost exchange, given his strong and active d6-pawn and the chance of chopping a few black pawns, but it does not seem to be advantageous. Most lines seem to end up in equality; e.g. 23...♜e7 24 ♜xe4 ♜c7 25 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 26 ♗xc4.

Maybe it is as simple as that. Given two complicated lines, with many variations and sub-variations, he would rather give away a pawn than the exchange.

19... ♜xa5 20 ♜g3

20  $\mathbb{B}xe4$ ?! recovers the pawn immediately, but after 20...c5 Black will be able to make good use of his bishop pair, against White's rather exposed king.



**Question:** Time to ask the readers... What should Black do next?

20... b6

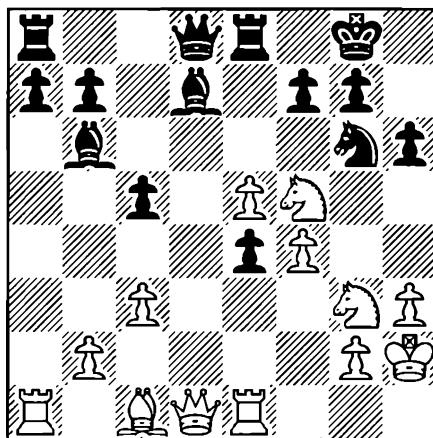
A difficult decision, but it seems that Kramnik played the best and most accurate move.

It is tempting to prod the knight first with 20...c5 21  $\mathbb{Q}df5$  (21  $\mathbb{Q}b3?$  favours Black, since White's knights lack coordination) 21... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$  (21... $\mathbb{Q}c7$  22  $\mathbb{W}g4$  puts pressure on Black's kingside) 22  $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ , but White ends up better in the queenless late middlegame after 22... $\mathbb{W}xd1$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ , as 23... $\mathbb{Q}ed8$  24  $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$   $\mathbb{Q}xd8$  25  $\mathbb{Q}xa5$   $\mathbb{Q}d1+$  26  $\mathbb{Q}f2$   $\mathbb{Q}xc1$  allows White to coordinate his kingside with 27  $g3!$ , so this is not a safe line for Black. Instead, 23... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  24  $\mathbb{Q}d6$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  25  $\mathbb{Q}e4$  f6 is a possibility, though Black will have to work hard for a draw.

The essential difference between this variation and the game is that, in the latter, Kramnik has added ... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ , and White has added  $\mathbb{Q}h2$ . In view of the fact that the bishop on a5 was under pressure, perhaps purely in positional terms 20... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  was the best.

I was wondering whether Kramnik's move was a mistake, but it seems in fact that he played accurately and well, forcing Aronian now to find good moves to try to hold the position. This is the wonderful thing about this game. So often it seems to swerve from advantage to Aronian, then back to Kramnik, then back to Aronian again – but looking it more closely, the game was never (apart from a blip in time trouble) anything other than equal.

**21 ♜h2 c5 22 ♜df5**

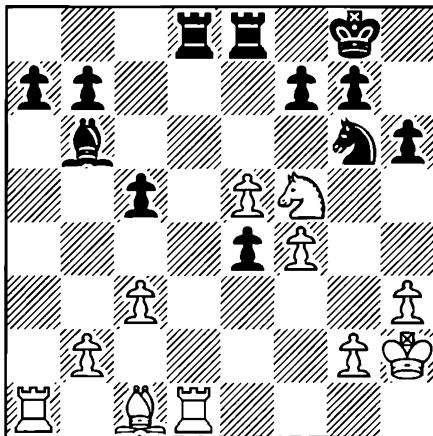


The simple question is: what has Aronian gained for his a-pawn? Possibly not quite enough. Or maybe he was okay.

**22...♜xf5**

White is obviously better if he can win the e-pawn without trouble, so Black's exchange is necessary.

**23 ♜xf5 ♛xd1 24 ♜xd1 ♜ad8**



Black has three choices here – and remember that Aronian has already sacrificed a

pawn, so he cannot afford to play lazy moves.

**Question:** The choices are to complete development with 25  $\mathbb{B}e3$ ; to block the d-file and create a strong knight with 25  $\mathbb{Q}d6$ ; or to try to recover the pawn quickly with 25  $\mathbb{K}e1$ . Which seems best?

Complicated – not in the sense that there are any great tactics, but rather that there are some obvious positional strengths and weaknesses for both sides, while it is far from clear that either player can force a clear edge.

Black has an extra pawn, and if he keeps the pawn, he has excellent chances of winning. He also has control, though not total control, of the d-file. Another point in Black's favour is that White's bishop has not yet had a chance to enter the game.

The first impression might be that Black should be winning. And yet, if we examine the four minor pieces as a whole, rather than focusing on White's c1-bishop, it becomes clear that of the four pieces, only one, White's knight on f5, is a dangerous attacker. He can try to win a pawn, either with  $\mathbb{Q}g3$  and  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ , or by forking two pawns with  $\mathbb{Q}d6$ . If the e4-pawn goes, the presumed advantage would swing to White. The final picture would be that White would have an excellent kingside pawn structure, while Black would have problems covering the a7- and c5-pawns.

Aronian played:

**25  $\mathbb{K}e3$**

This is a combative move, ignoring Black's initiatives on the d-file, and quite simply developing his own pieces.

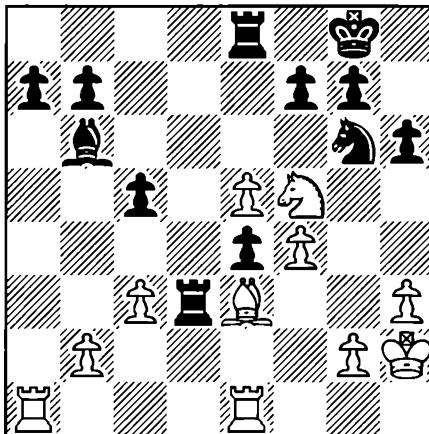
White could plug the d-file with 25  $\mathbb{Q}d6$ , but the knight is then pinned. A likely result would be a draw after, for example, 25...f6 26  $\mathbb{K}e3$   $\mathbb{K}e7$  27  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $\mathbb{K}xd1+$  28  $\mathbb{K}xd1$   $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  29  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$   $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  30  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$   $\mathbb{Q}c4$  31 b3 with a dull endgame. 25  $\mathbb{K}e1$   $\mathbb{K}d3$  26  $\mathbb{Q}d6$   $\mathbb{K}e7$  also seems to lead to equality, with a possible repetition after 27  $\mathbb{Q}c8$   $\mathbb{K}e8$  28  $\mathbb{Q}d6$ . Clearly this is a summary of several different possibilities, but the overall reading of these lines should end up in equality.

What happens with the bishop move? It is difficult to assess. We can only really answer this a few moves later.

**25... $\mathbb{K}d3$**

Black can try to ram some pawns through by 25...c4 26  $\mathbb{K}xb6$  axb6 27  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{K}d3+$  28  $\mathbb{K}xd3$ , but after either pawn capture, White can hold the balance with 29  $\mathbb{Q}d6$ .

**26  $\mathbb{K}e1$**



**Question:** What happens next? Or alternatively, what *should* be happening next? (I am aware that I have not yet fully answered the previous question. Maybe it is time to answer both.)

### 26...f6!

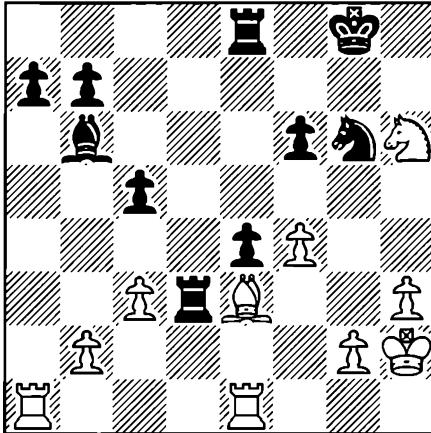
Kramnik did not want to give the e-pawn away without a struggle after, for example, 26... $\mathbb{E}e8$  27  $\mathbb{Q}d6$   $\mathbb{B}d7$  28  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ . Instead, his attack on the e5-pawn opens up lines for him. Amazingly, the position is still about level, although Black probably has the slightly easier play.

That being so, it seems that 25  $\mathbb{E}e1$ , 25  $\mathbb{Q}d6$  or 25  $\mathbb{A}e3$  are all good and reasonable moves. Perhaps that is not all that surprising. Chess writers, myself included, tend to like finding the best move, or even the winning move, after an opponent has made a serious mistake. But what happens if there is no serious mistake? It is quite possible that several moves might be equally valid.

### 27 exf6

27  $\mathbb{Q}d6$   $\mathbb{E}f8$  28  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $fxe5$  29  $fxe5$   $\mathbb{B}d5$  favours Black.

### 27...gxf6 28 $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$



**Question:** Which of the four legal king moves is best? Are they all about equal? Or does one king move give Black an edge?

**28...♔f8?!**

It is difficult to decide which of the three reasonable king moves is best. (28...♔g7? 29 ♔f5+ is an obvious loss of time.) But the move chosen by Kramnik is doubtful, and Aronian momentarily has the initiative. The main problem is not so much of disengaging the joust between king and knight, but rather that the king is now on the same diagonal leading to c5 (i.e. ♜xc5 would now be check), so Black's bishop on b6 is unable to free itself.

28...♔h7 29 ♔g4 ♔g7 is perhaps the most natural plan, but not necessarily the best. 30 ♔f2 ♜d5 31 g4 is not quite equal for Black, and he would need to play carefully.

However, there is no need to try to dislodge the knight. White would want to move it anyway. Therefore, 28...♔h8! 29 ♜a4 (by analogy to the main line) 29...♜c7 30 g3 a5, and Black is comfortably equal, as 31 ♜xc5 is met by 31...♝xf4!, still equal.

**30 ♔f2 ♜d5 31 g4**

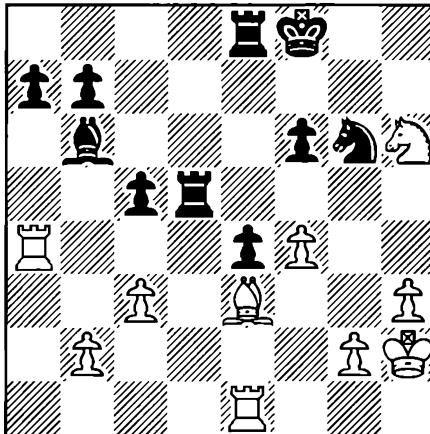
"Comfortably equal" would tend to imply that the comfortable player will find it easier to avoid making mistakes, as opposed to the uncomfortable player, who might need to play highly accurate chess, to avoid making mistakes. This can be of considerable importance as we start to reach the time control.

**29 ♜a4**

Mainly aimed at preventing Black from playing ...♝e7 and ...♜d5.

**29...♜d5**

To make it more difficult for the white knight to return.



**Question:** This seems to be the one golden opportunity for either of the players to create a serious edge; i.e. after Black's inaccurate king move. What should White do here?

### 30 c4?!

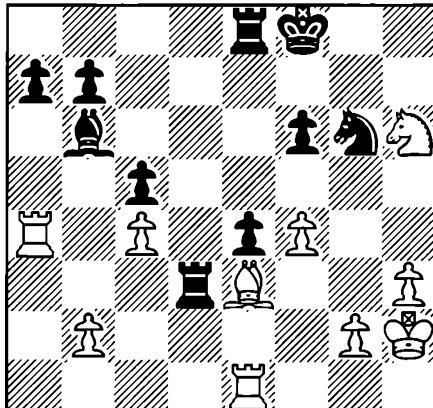
The problem with this as a winning attempt is that, with the pawn on c4, White's rook on a4 no longer puts pressure on Black's pawn on e4. Instead:

- a) 30 g4, with a general kingside pawn advance, looks tempting, but after 30... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ ! (aiming for f3) 31  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  32  $\mathbb{Q}xh4$   $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ , play is close to equal.
- b) 30 f5! gives White an advantage, if not yet a decisive one.
- b1) 30... $\mathbb{Q}e7$  or 30... $\mathbb{Q}e5$  simply allows White to take a pawn with 31  $\mathbb{R}xe4$ .
- b2) 30... $\mathbb{Q}h4$  will get the knight trapped after 31 c4  $\mathbb{R}d7$  32  $\mathbb{Q}g3$ . Black can save the piece with 31... $\mathbb{Q}c7+$  32  $\mathbb{Q}g1$   $\mathbb{R}e7$ , but then White wins the a-pawn with 33  $\mathbb{R}xa7$ .
- b3) 30... $\mathbb{Q}h8$  is not as awful as it looks, and there appear to be no immediate win. Nevertheless, Black has undoubtedly retreated, and there are various good lines for White, starting with 31  $\mathbb{Q}f4$  (the rooks attack the e4-pawn) or 31 g4.
- b4) Finally, Black can insert 30... $\mathbb{Q}c7+$  31  $\mathbb{Q}g1$ . The problem in that case is that he has no time to extricate the knight, while also saving the a7-pawn. If 31... $\mathbb{Q}g3$ , then 32  $\mathbb{R}f1$ , and the problem remains. Or if 31... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ , although Black is not yet ready to resign, White has a clear advantage, probably decisive, after capturing on either a7 or e4.

A near-miss for Kramnik.

### 30... $\mathbb{R}d3$

Keeping control of the d-file, and therefore highly natural. It now starts to look promising for Black, but maybe it is still about equal.



**31 b4?**

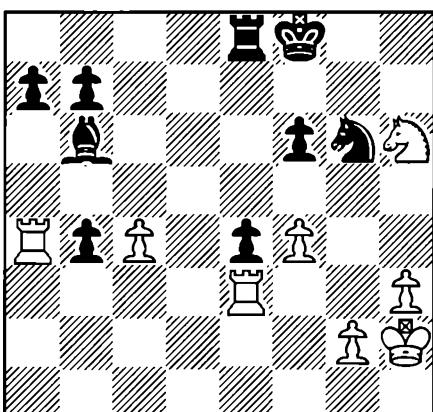
With breathtaking ability to create wild and dangerous positions, Aronian makes his final attempt to win the match.

Or so it seemed at the time. As the reports emerged, it became clear that Aronian had completely missed the exchange sacrifice, and had to improvise wildly to keep the position alive.

Perhaps that figures. This game has been so tense that it would not be difficult to anticipate the players running short of time. That being so, mistakes creep in. Kramnik's 28... $\mathbb{Q}f8$  and Aronian's 30 c4 were clear misjudgments, which could easily have altered the result of the game. Aronian's 31 b4 was more serious, as it could easily have lost by force against best play. Having said that, the winning line for Black is extremely difficult to envisage, especially in time trouble.

31  $\mathbb{Q}f5$  would have been a safe and steady move.

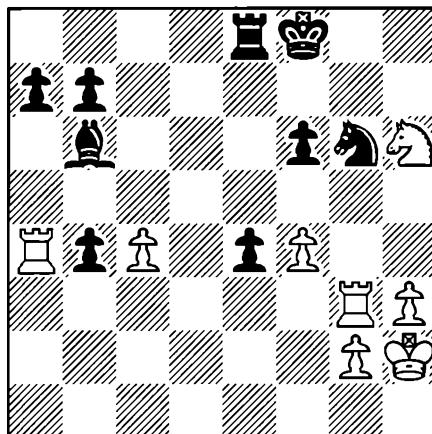
31... $\mathbb{Q}xe3!$  32  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  cxb4



Black now has three passed pawns, one of them looking highly dangerous and well protected. White's pieces, at the moment, are badly coordinated.

**33...Bg3**

The only sensible move. He has to attack the king, before Black can queen a pawn.



**Question:** What next for Black?

**33...e3?**

This is the sort of move that any reasonably strong player would be able to play and calculate extremely quickly. There is a simple enough variation to see, and if in the end Black cannot find anything when he is about to queen, and if as a result it will end up as a draw, then so be it. You cannot win a game out of nothing.

It would take a stronger player to wind his way through the best line – except that there is no player who could dare to suggest that they would do better than either Kramnik or Aronian. Maybe there will at some stage be a player of 2900+ strength, not helped by rating inflation (after the 2012 Olympiad, there are now fifty players over 2700). But it would be a difficult ask...

Here 33...Be7!! is an exceptionally difficult move to find, not least because Black's three kingside pawns are apparently thoroughly immobile. The only thing that favours Black is that his two passed pawns, helped by the bishop, are highly dangerous, whereas White's two rooks and the knight are not well-placed for defence.

Perhaps the most difficult point in terms of thought processes is that, when trying to attack, it takes a leap of faith (as Shipov noted) to make a quiet retreat, rather than strong forward move.

The natural reply is 34 Bxb4, but a second retreat, 34...Bc7, creates the lethal threat of ...Bxf4, pins and skewers working together. I have to admit that I signed off in my analysis when I noted 35 Bg4. Shipov's prod soon showed how Black can still win. He plays 35...f5.

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Then 36  $\mathbb{B}h4$  protects the f4-pawn but is otherwise hopelessly out of position. Then 36...e3 does win for Black after, for example 37  $\mathbb{B}b1$  e2 38  $\mathbb{B}e1$   $\mathbb{Q}g6$  or 37  $\mathbb{B}xb7$  e2 38  $\mathbb{B}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}g6$ .

36  $\mathbb{B}xb7$  is more lively, and indeed the computer temporarily gives White as better. Play the line through though, and Black is winning after 36...fxg4 37  $\mathbb{B}xc7$  e3. The main tactical point is that after 38  $\mathbb{Q}g1$  e2 39  $\mathbb{B}f2$  e1 $\mathbb{Q}+$  40  $\mathbb{Q}xe1$   $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ , Black wins the rook.

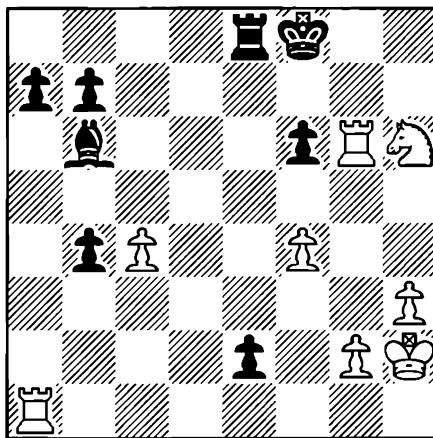
White could try 38  $\mathbb{B}xa7$  e2 39  $\mathbb{B}a1$ , but after 39... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  40  $\mathbb{B}e1$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$ , Black will win the rook for the passed pawn. Rook and knight versus knight and four passed pawns is not as exciting as it might sound. White's pawns will gradually drop off.

Going back, White could have tried 34  $\mathbb{Q}g4$ , but now it is a quick positional grind for Black, with the help of the two advanced pawns: 34... $\mathbb{Q}f5$  35  $\mathbb{Q}xf6$   $\mathbb{Q}xg3$  36  $\mathbb{Q}xg3$   $\mathbb{B}e7$  37  $\mathbb{Q}d5$   $\mathbb{Q}g7+$  38  $\mathbb{Q}h2$  e3, and soon. The b-pawn soon makes its presence felt; e.g. 39  $\mathbb{Q}xb6$  b3! 40  $\mathbb{Q}g1$  b2 41  $\mathbb{B}b4$  e2 42  $\mathbb{Q}f2$   $\mathbb{Q}xg2+!$  43  $\mathbb{Q}e1$   $\mathbb{Q}g1+$  44  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$  axb6 and wins.

All, of course, computer-inspired analysis. Which leads to the question of how human players over the board would be able to find such lines. Difficult.

**34  $\mathbb{B}xg6$  e2 35  $\mathbb{B}a1$**

Just in time.



**Question:** Now what is the best move for Black?

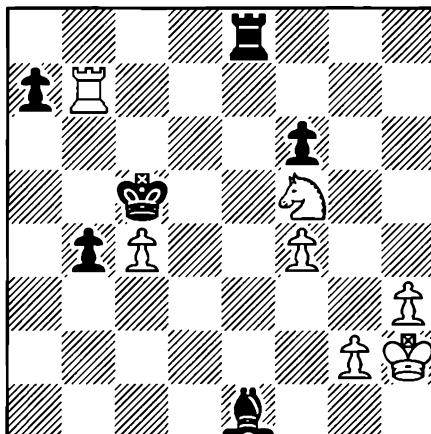
**35... $\mathbb{Q}f2$**

I hope everyone avoided 35...e1 $\mathbb{Q}+$ ? 36  $\mathbb{B}g8+$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  37  $\mathbb{B}xe1+$  and the queen disappears. Black needs to bring in the bishop first.

**36  $\mathbb{B}g8+$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  37  $\mathbb{B}g7+$   $\mathbb{Q}d6$**

And 37... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ ? 38  $\mathbb{B}f7$  mate would be just as bad.

**38  $\mathbb{B}xb7$  e1 $\mathbb{Q}$  39  $\mathbb{B}xe1$   $\mathbb{Q}xe1$  40  $\mathbb{Q}f5+$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$**



The last difficult position – and just after the time control, which in theory means that both players have time to think, although what quite often happens is that both players continue to rush on with their earlier analysis without re-checking it.

**Question:** White soon forced a draw with 41  $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ .  
Can he try for more with 41  $\mathbb{Q}xa7$  - ?

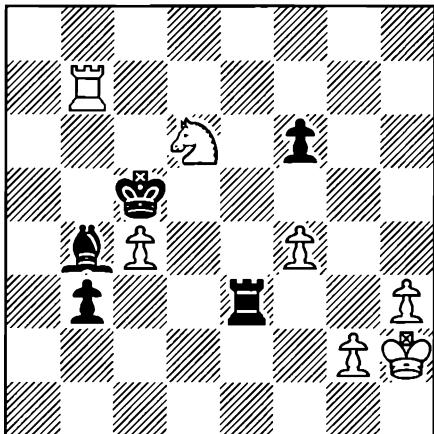
#### 41 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$

Given the tension in the position and the dangers of a second pawn promotion, it is understandable that, by this stage, Aronian will be happy with a draw.

Instead, the computer suggests 41  $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ , just grabbing a pawn while seemingly ignoring the other passed pawn. It is doubtful whether a human player would even consider it. Only the most ambitious and fearless would do so.

Play on a few moves and we soon see why humans are cautious. It is a question of survival.

41...b3 42  $\mathbb{Q}b7$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$  43  $\mathbb{Q}d6$  might be good enough as a winning try for White – if, and only if, the opponent is not strong enough to find the correct replies. Black plays 43... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ !



Then 44  $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ ?  $\mathbb{Q}xd6$  45  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$  is badly mistimed as the b-pawn is still defended. White has to wait for ...b3-b2 first.

Therefore White decides to advance his own pawns: 44 g4, when 44...b2? 45  $\mathbb{Q}b5+$   $\mathbb{Q}xd6$  46  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$  wins the black pawn on the seventh for nothing, while after 44... $\mathbb{Q}xd6?$  45  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$  48  $\mathbb{Q}b7$ , with g4-g5 to follow, White is a tempo up in the pawn race.

Instead, 44... $\mathbb{Q}a3!$  puts White under pressure. Then 45  $\mathbb{Q}b5$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$  46  $\mathbb{Q}d6$   $\mathbb{Q}a3$  47  $\mathbb{Q}b5$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$  would be an unexpected repetition of position, but White is in trouble after 45... $\mathbb{Q}c1$  46  $\mathbb{Q}c7+$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$  47  $\mathbb{Q}b7$  b2 (avoiding another repetition) 48  $\mathbb{Q}d6+$   $\mathbb{Q}a4$ .

Pawn snatches so often do not work, and Aronian is correct in aiming for a safe draw.  
41... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  42  $\mathbb{Q}d4+$   $\mathbb{Q}c7$  43  $\mathbb{Q}c5+$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

This was the most difficult game of the match to analyse, and therefore the most interesting. Shall we add that this was also the best game?

It was not quite perfect chess. There were a couple of identifiable inaccuracies, and indeed a complete tactical oversight by Aronian, which gave Kramnik an extremely difficult winning opportunity – but it was the sort of difficult position that a player would need to think about for half an hour, rather than quickly playing a move in the time scramble.

It was lively chess, as in the whole match. The next match, between Anand and Gelfand, was inevitably going to be a much tenser encounter, this being for the World Championship itself.

## **Chapter Two**

# **Anand-Gelfand, World Championship, Moscow 2012**

Many chess players had greatly looked forward to the friendly match between Kramnik and Aronian, and were almost disappointed at the thought of a match between Anand and Gelfand. This was by no means a reflection of the players being in any sense "weak". It has to be remembered that the quality of chess has improved vastly in the last fifty years, and also in the last ten years, or even the last five years. Gelfand in 2012 was a stronger player, if not necessarily overwhelmingly so, than the combatants Spassky and Petrosian in the 1960s.

What is happening is that, although Anand was able to beat Kramnik and Topalov in official world championship matches, and has therefore been a fully worthy world champion, younger players have, if anything, reached an even higher level. Currently Carlsen and Aronian have reached #1 and #2, and it looks likely that this will remain so, at least until even younger players, or at least players of the same sort of age as Carlsen, are able to improve and try to take over the top two slot. It is with this background that the match between Aronian, the second highest rated player in the world, and Kramnik, not too long ago a World Champion, was of particular interest. A match between two players, both in their mid forties, is, unfairly or not, of lesser interest than a match between two players in their late twenties or mid thirties.

Having said that, it was an immense achievement by Gelfand to qualify to play in the World Championships. He had to go through a marathon knock-out of 128 players, the Chess World Cup, in Khanty-Mansiysk at the end of 2011. After some strong preliminaries, he had to beat Jakovenko, Karjakin and Ponomariov, all redoubtable strong grandmasters whose ratings at the time were, respectively, 2736, 2723 and 2739. (In the July 2012 list, Karjakin is up to 2784.)

Tough enough, but these were still only the preliminaries. He still had to beat Medvedyarov, Kamsky and Grischuk, in May 2011. This was clearly no soft opposition. Gelfand fully deserved his shot at the title. If anyone wants to argue that Gelfand was a soft option for the world championship, well, try it yourself!

Having said that, Gelfand was slightly fortunate in his timing. At the start of the World Cup, he was the highest rated player in the tournament, at 2758, and thus the “favourite”, but only by the smallest of margins. There are currently, in July 2012, ten players higher rated than this, not including Gelfand, now at 2738. Two of the top ten players (Anand and Ivanchuk) are around the same sort of age as Gelfand, one is less than ten years younger (Kramnik), while the rest are significantly younger, and therefore have time to improve.

It was therefore a remarkable achievement for Gelfand to qualify for a World Championship match, but realistically, unless he were actually to beat Anand, this was likely to be his last shot at the title.

## **Game One: Anand-Gelfand**

A relatively quick draw, in 24 moves, but this was not quite as solid as it might appear. Wasn’t Gelfand better? One soon gained the impression that Gelfand was aiming solely at holding the draw, especially with the black pieces, and not quite believing that he was capable of beating Anand. The impression strengthened as the match continued.

Here it is useful to remember past encounters by the two players, both recent, and going back over twenty years. Out of 35 full-length games, White has won ten times, but Black has won only once. Both players have found it extremely difficult to win as Black, but every so often they have a reasonable number of wins by White. Anand as White has scored five wins, ten draws and no losses. Gelfand as White lost once against Anand, but for the remainder has achieved five wins and fourteen draws.

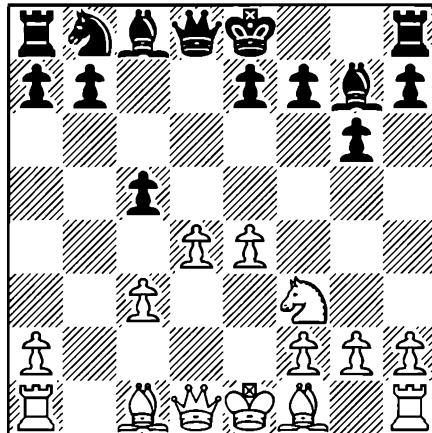
The players are therefore about level in playing strength, just one extra win for Anand over 35 games. Any lopsidedness is in the White-Black question. What we were later going to see was that Anand was just going to concentrate on trying to draw every game as Black, aiming for quick draws if at all possible. He was reasonably confident that, over a large number of games, he could achieve a plus score with White, and therefore an excellent chance to keep the World Championship.

Gelfand, as Black, played a far more open strategy. He did not concentrate on ultra-symmetrical pawn structures, but instead played “normal” chess, as in game one, albeit while still trying to concentrate on solidity.

There was an odd resemblance between this game and the first game of the Kramnik-Aronian match. Kramnik as White wanted to show he could dominate the match, and made full use of a very recent theoretical novelty, in which he hoped that his opponent could not find the best moves. This, however, was only tested in one game, and the new line, under top-level examination, proved not to be good. So, too, in the Anand-Gelfand match. The main difference was that Aronian kept his nerve and held out for the win (although Kramnik played several inaccuracies later on), whereas Gelfand was only looking for the draw.

11th May 2012  
V.Anand-B.Gelfand  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 1)  
Grünfeld Defence

1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 g6 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  d5 4  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  5 cxd5  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  6 e4  $\mathbb{Q}xc3$  7 bxc3 c5



All standard so far for the Grünfeld Defence. Play in the centre usually opens up quickly, sometimes with gambit attacks, as here. There is major tension on the d4-pawn.

8  $\mathbb{Q}b5+$

Known, if usually regarded as of no great importance. Anand wants to innovate, but unless his analysis is watertight, some unpleasant surprises can happen.

Instead, 8  $\mathbb{Q}e3$   $\mathbb{Q}a5$  9  $\mathbb{Q}d2$  has had some good results recently. The idea is 9...cxd4 10  $\mathbb{Q}c4$ , and if 10... $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$  (10... $\mathbb{Q}c7$  is safer), then 11  $\mathbb{Q}d2$  and the queen is trapped.

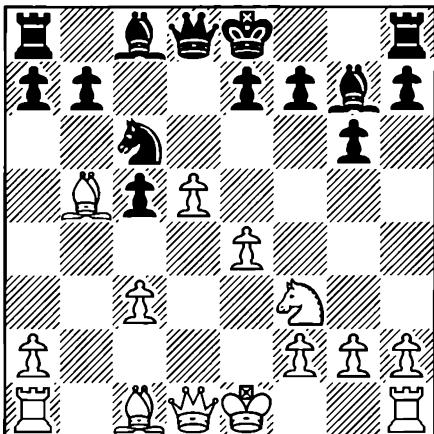
Just to show that occasionally it can be Aronian's opponents who sacrifice the queen, a game continued 10...dxe3?! 11  $\mathbb{Q}xa5$   $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$  12  $\mathbb{Q}e2$   $\mathbb{Q}xa5$  13  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  0-0, L.Aronian-E.Sutovsky, World Team Championship, Ningbo 2011. It just didn't work. Aronian later won.

8... $\mathbb{Q}c6$

No need to worry about the pin.

9 d5?!

He tries it anyway.



**Question:** Why do you think that strong players do not trust this move?

White is not going to win the knight for nothing. Black will break the pin with 9...a6, and if 10  $\mathbb{Q}a4$ , then 10...b5. To take the knight, White would have to give away the light-squared bishop, which is a big concession. In open pawn structures, with the chance of roaming on open diagonals, the bishop pair is useful, more so than bishop and knight. Players quite simply would not trust this as White. Black's pawn structure is not sufficiently wrecked to have any sort of decisive disadvantage. After all, Black's kingside pawns are strong and secure. 9 0-0 is a more common response.

I noted at the time that: "It is difficult to imagine that this pawn push by Anand would have been intended as his main line of attack in this match. (...) Anand is presumably trying to test his opponent in an unfamiliar line, with tactics that Gelfand will need to think about." It seems risky, unless his analysis is solid.

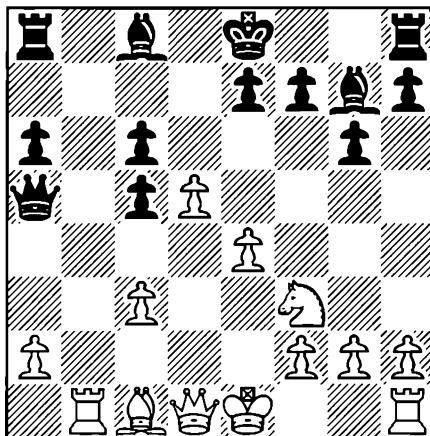
**9... $\mathbb{W}a5$**

The players needed also to consider 9...a6 10  $\mathbb{Q}a4$  b5 11 dxc6 bxa4, with probable equality, but with a difficult pawn structure for either side. Maybe Gelfand was suspicious about this, or maybe he quite simply felt that his own move was better.

The computer suggests that, after either move, White is not worse but even has a slight edge. A small edge, plus a theoretical innovation, sounds good at the start of a match.

Perhaps we should briefly add that 9... $\mathbb{Q}xc3+?$  10  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}xa1$  11  $\mathbb{W}xa1$  ends up winning material for White.

**10  $\mathbb{E}b1$  a6 11  $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$  bxc6**



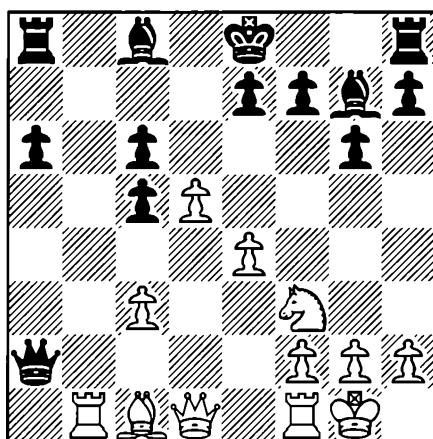
**Question:** What should White do next? The main choice is 12 dxc6 or 12 0-0.

### 12 0-0?!

Haven't we all, with a sense of relief, castled quickly when it seems the right time to do so, in a wild open central position? Often it is correct and appropriate, but if there is a better move, he should play it. If necessary, White can castle later.

The computer suggests that 12 dxc6  $\mathbb{W}xa2$  13  $\mathbb{W}b3$   $\mathbb{W}xb3$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xb3$  is best, and the only equalizing try for White – there is no chance of an initiative (and where did that supposed edge go to?) – but even here, one would instinctively prefer Black, with his outside passed pawn and his bishop pair.

12...  $\mathbb{W}xa2$



And indeed, why not? What is happening here, as in the first Kramnik-Aronian game, is

that the player with White has gone all-out with a wild idea, hoping to be 1-0 up and home and dry, but has gone too wild, and without having analysed in depth in advance.

Black is now a pawn up, with an outside passed pawn and no obvious way for White to defend against it. The black king is still in the centre, but there is no obvious way for White to attack or aim for checkmate either. Black also has a good bishop pair, while White's bishop and knight look ineffective. Ideally, White would have liked to have had a light-squared bishop, to hassle the queen, but of course Anand had exchanged that bishop many moves ago.

The two main points of interest for the rest of the game was how Anand was apparently able to hold the draw with great comfort, and, conversely, the question of whether Gelfand should or could have tried for more.

### 13 $\mathbb{E}b2 \mathbb{W}a5!!$

A highly practical response, keeping the queen out of trouble.

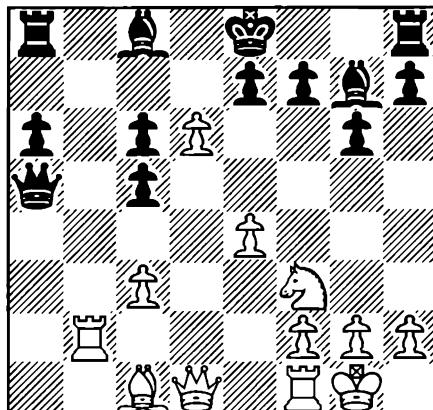
Some twitter feed suggested that Anand might have forgotten his analysis here, and that he could have tried something more effective. More likely, he soon recognizes that he has already gone wrong, and that his optimistic d4-d5 push was not as good as he thought. He now has an uphill struggle.

If Gelfand were to try the much sharper 13... $\mathbb{W}c4$ , trying to win all the pawns available, Anand would presumably have found interesting ideas in this line.

### 14 d6

White is not aiming at a mating attack. All he is doing is try to defend actively, making it difficult for Black to castle safely.

He might have considered 14 dx $c$ 6 instead, but after 14...0-0 Black would be clearly better.



**Question:** Black is a pawn up, with excellent chances of aiming for more than a draw. Can you find a good line for Black?

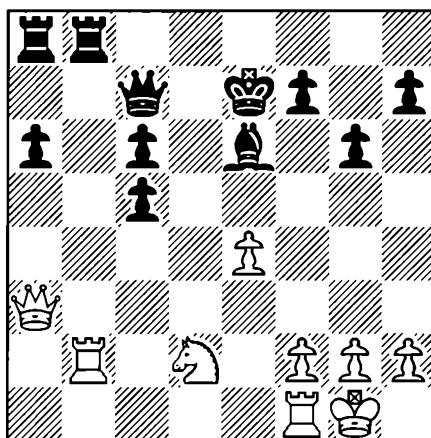
**14...♝a7?!**

The first sign in this match of Gelfand playing far too defensively. The problem is that, in his numerous earlier games against Anand, Gelfand achieved a serious minus score as Black, so it is unlikely that he would feel totally confident in playing open chess. His match strategy must therefore have been to cut down any unnecessary losses, be happy with a string of draws, and wait for the chance of an occasional win in the next dozen games.

Understandable enough – but in playing so cautiously here, he seems to have missed a great opportunity of applying serious pressure as Black, as early as in game one. If your opponent has played inaccurately, you must punish him, even if he is a 2800+ World Champion.

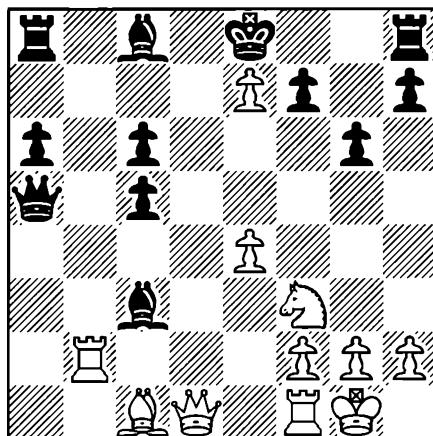
The simple pawn snatch, 14...♞xc3!, seems to give Black a big advantage:

- a) 15 ♜c2 ♜e6 and Black is happy.
- b) 15 ♜d2 ♜xd2 16 ♜xd2 ♜e6 17 dxe7 ♜c7 18 ♜a4 ♜xe7 19 ♜a3 ♜hb8 (there are other good moves) and Black has the initiative, as well as the extra pawn, in a simplified position.



It is difficult to see how Anand could survive here or on previous moves. Definitely a missed opportunity for Gelfand. He got too tied up in trying to ensure the draw, perhaps forgetting that it was possible to try to win.

- c) Instead, Shipov suggests 15 dxe7!, regarding this as, in effect, winning for White.



Then 15....♝xb2? 16 ♜xb2 gives Black far too many weaknesses on the dark squares, while 15...♛xe7? 16 ♜g5+f6 17 e5!! ends up as a win after 17...fxg5 18 ♜d6+.

Sergey Shipov must be among the best of instant commentators, without the luxury of writing notes some months later. Nevertheless, it seems that he is overpressing when trying to suggest that Anand has been able to keep a good position. The problem of setting up a pawn exchange on e7 is that Black no longer covers the f7-square. Therefore, 15...♝c7! (not given by Shipov) seems very good for Black. He does not have to try ...♛xe7; his queen and bishops can snuggle up with ...♝e6 and ...♝f6 (or alternatively 16 ♜g5 f6); and he has covered the weakness on d8 for the time being. He can later expand his defences and counterplay by finding a way to take the e7-pawn eventually.

**15 ♜g5 exd6**

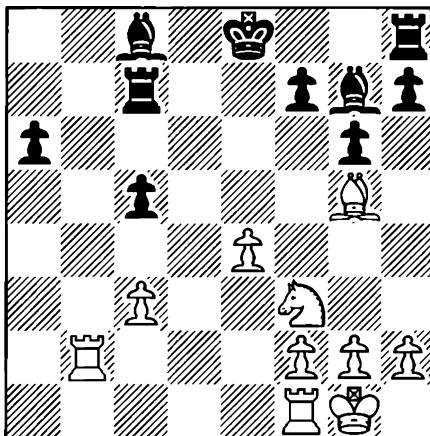
Again aiming for simplicity. The computer suggests 15...f6, with a slight edge for Black, but most of the earlier advantage has gone.

**16 ♜xd6 ♜d7 17 ♜xc6 ♜c7**

An excellent way of achieving a draw against Anand, except that here it is a draw lost, rather than a draw gained.

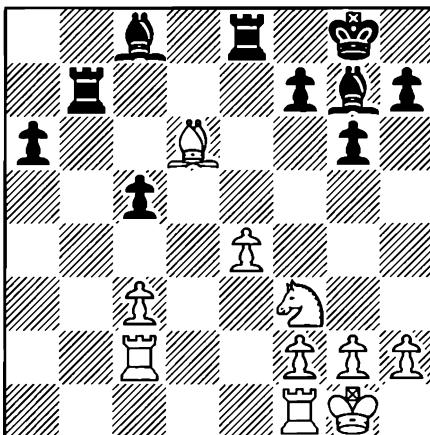
**18 ♜xc7 ♜xc7**

When I saw this, after a stroll in the garden, I had fully expected that there would be a long slow grind, with a serious attempt by Gelfand to win as Black. I certainly had not expected a draw, just half a dozen moves later.



Anand still needed to find good defensive ideas, but he did what was needed.

**19 ♜f4 ♜b7 20 ♜c2 0-0 21 ♜d6 ♜e8**



**Question:** What is the best way for White of handling the defence?

Remember that Black has the bishop pair and an outside passed pawn,  
so White still needs to be careful.

**22 ♞d2!**

A good defensive move. The one way in which the usually less impressive knight can outweigh the bishop (even as a half of the bishop pair) is that the knight can change the colour of its effective squares (and also attack squares of the opponent's colour). The knight is now covering c4 and e4, and if it can reach either of these squares, there is always the possibility of a knight fork on d6, perhaps aiming to eliminate the bishop pair. The

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

more I look at this, the more I appreciate that Anand is just about holding the line – a good result from an uninspiring position.

22  $\hat{A}xc5?$ ! is more natural, but after 22... $\hat{B}xe4$  23  $\hat{A}d4 f6$  (to keep the bishop pair), White would need to work extremely hard to hold the position. Black's outside passed a-pawn, with the help of the bishop pair, is far more dangerous than the inside passed c-pawn.

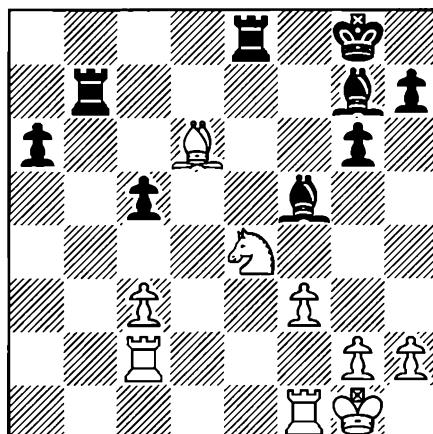
**22...f5**

At the time, this looked a little like oversimplification of the pawn structure, and one felt that Black should still be able to create an edge. It seems not. Certainly Gelfand was unable to find anything significant.

White is able to hold after, for example, 22...c4 23 e5  $\hat{A}f5$  24  $\hat{B}cc1$   $\hat{A}d3$  25  $\hat{E}fe1$   $\hat{B}b6$  26  $\hat{A}f3$ . Note how the knight defends both the pawn on e5, and also the rook on e1 (so that there is no longer an effective threat of ... $\hat{B}xd6$ ).

22... $\hat{A}f8$  is a possibility, but after 23  $\hat{A}xf8$   $\hat{A}xf8$  24  $\hat{B}a1$ , the black a-pawn is under control, and White can consolidate with f2-f3 and  $\hat{A}f2$ . Any edge for Black, as suggested by the computer, is purely minimal and is likely to fade to nothing after a few good moves by White. There are other possibilities, but nothing special.

**23 f3 fxe4 24  $\hat{A}xe4 \hat{A}f5$  ½-½**



The knight is now on an excellent central square, an ideal defender. True, Black can exchange it off for his bishop, but once the bishop pair has gone, the outside passed a-pawn has little support, and cannot realistically aim for power.

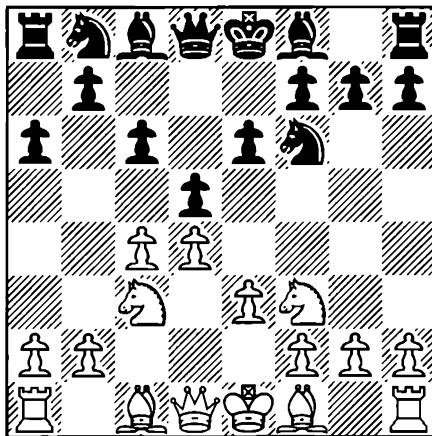
Therefore, a draw was agreed. 25  $\hat{B}a2$   $\hat{A}xe4$  26  $fxe4$   $\hat{A}xc3$  27  $\hat{A}xc5$  is quite simply level.

## Game Two: Gelfand-Anand

Not quite as solid a game as it looks. Gelfand again had the opportunity to put Anand under pressure, but he allowed unnecessary simplification, both in the middlegame and in the early part of the endgame.

12th May 2012  
**B.Gelfand-V.Anand**  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 2)  
Semi-Slav with 5...a6

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♜c3 a6



**Question:** Why the early ...a7-a6 in the Slav? This seems to happen so many times these days, especially at the top level, but shouldn't Black be developing instead?

With over forty players reaching 2700+, there is little margin for error at the highest levels, and players with Black do not want, if possible, to give White even the slightest edge. Here Black is concentrating on setting up a pawn barricade, waiting to see what White is going to do next.

If 6 ♜d3, the simplest line is to exchange with 6...dxc4 7 ♜xc4 b5, then the bishop retreats, and Black can choose between either 8...♜bd7, transposing to one of the lines of the Meran (5...♜bd7), or playing more flexibly with 8...c5, a Queen's Gambit Accepted, with the choice of moving the knight either to c6 or d7.

As in many lines of the Semi-Slav, if White is not going to move his bishop, it is not so clear what he is going to do next. He can enter the Exchange Slav, with 7 cxd5 cxd5, but ...a7-a6 is useful in many lines. It is by no means a wasted move.

The one practical problem for Black is that it is often very difficult to play for a win against an opponent of slightly lower strength. This does not apply so much against an opponent of equivalent strength, and it is unlikely that Anand as Black would be too worried about setting up a quick drawing line against Gelfand. Against a mere IM, the problem would need some thought.

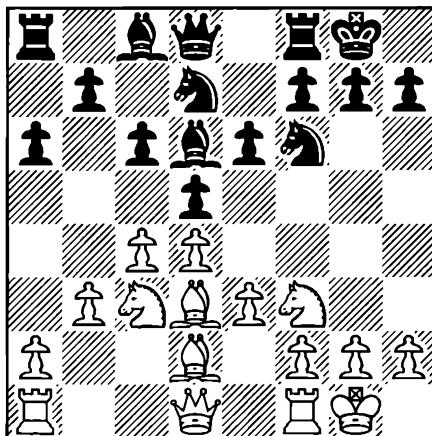
## 6 b3

The most popular choice at top grandmaster level. Whether White is better, is open to question.

## 6... $\mathbb{B}b4$

So that White cannot continue the fianchetto, 7  $\mathbb{B}b2$  losing a pawn after 7... $\mathbb{Q}e4$  8  $\mathbb{W}c2$   $\mathbb{W}a5$  9  $\mathbb{B}c1$   $\mathbb{W}xa2$ .

7  $\mathbb{B}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}bd7$  8  $\mathbb{B}d3$  0-0 9 0-0  $\mathbb{B}d6$



The bishop, having prompted its counterpart to a slightly uncomfortable square on d2, is content to centralize, with an insignificant loss of tempo. Black is close to complete equality.

## 10 $\mathbb{B}c1$

In recent years, White has generally preferred 10  $\mathbb{B}e1$ . It is not totally clear what Anand would have played in reply. He could simply have tried 10...e5 as in the game; while there have been a few lines starting with 10...h6 11 e4 dx $c$ 4 12 bxc4 e5, and if 13 d5  $\mathbb{Q}c5$ , which is perhaps more interesting than the game, but this would probably have been not what he would have wanted.

In my blog notes, just after the game, I noted that “10  $\mathbb{W}c2$  looks a possibility, if one is thinking only about ...e6-e5 by Black; for example 10...e5 11 cxd5 cxd5 12 e4 dx $e$ 4 13  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  14  $\mathbb{B}xe4$  h6, and White is slightly quicker in developing his pieces. There is, however, a possible change of direction with 10...b5!?, and if the c-file is opened up, the queen is not so comfortable on c2.”

Gelfand tried the queen move in game four.

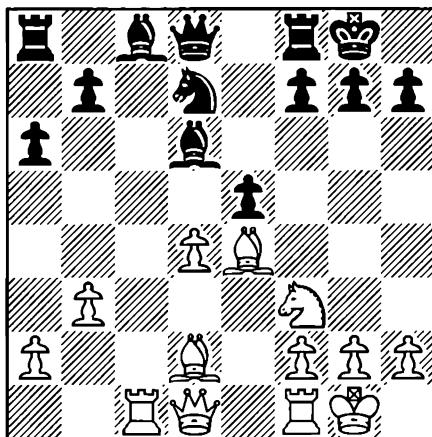
## 10...e5

Indeed, 10...b5 is to be considered here too.

## 11 cxd5 cxd5 12 e4

12 dx $e$ 5  $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  does not give White much. It would be a different story if his bishop were on b2. As it is, on d2 the bishop gets in the way of other pieces.

**12...dxe4 13 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 14 ♜xe4**



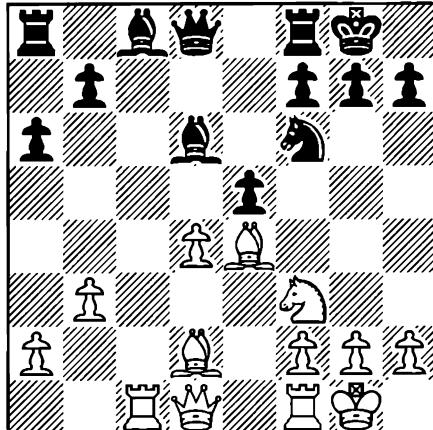
**Question:** Is Black genuinely equal?

One suspects not. The pawn structure is close to symmetrical, and would have been even more so before the exchanges on e5. Clearly neither player has the better pawns. In terms of pieces, though, White is a long way ahead in development. Black has not even had the opportunity of moving his bishop on c8. It would require him to play a couple of extra good moves (a bishop move, then ...♝c8) to eliminate the backlog in development. White, in the meantime, can think about going on to the next stage of activating his pieces: a good middlegame.

It seems strange that Anand would be interested in playing such a line. Maybe it is a question of chess psychology. Over the years, he might well have noticed that Gelfand was slightly uncomfortable in trying for an edge in open and symmetrical pawn structures, and that he has allowed the opponents to equalize without creating pressure. One would expect this position to lead to a 50-move grind, with Black having to work hard to keep the position alive, rather than a quick 25-move draw.

**14...♝f6**

If 14...exd4, then 15 ♜g5 is irritating; for example, 15...♝f6 16 ♜c4, followed by ♜xd4, and it is going to be a struggle for Black to develop all his pieces.

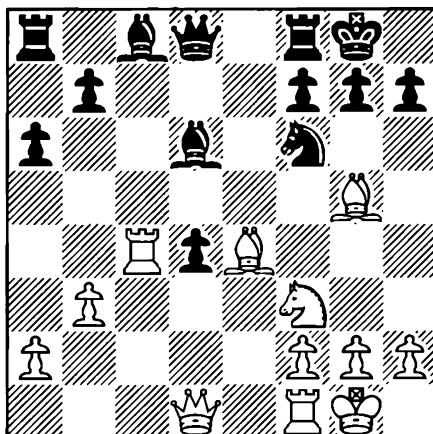


**Question:** The choice here is between an endgame (with 15  $\text{dxe5}$ ) or a middlegame (with 15  $\text{Ag5}$ ). Which gives White the better chances of an edge?

Either is possible. The problem was that Gelfand decided upon a quiet and modest edge in the endgame – and then, a few moves later, went for an even quieter and modest edge. He soon found that the position was only equal.

### 15 $\text{dxe5}$

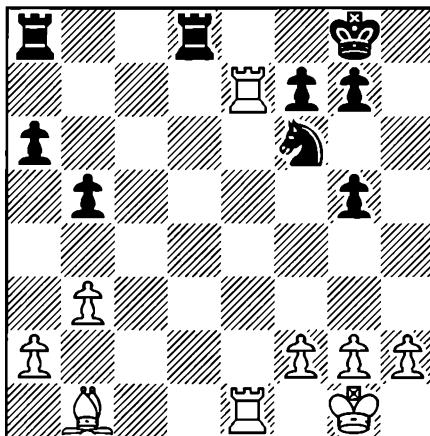
Gelfand thought for a long time here. If he were to be given a second chance, and And does not modify his opening, Gelfand would presumably be more than happy to try 15  $\text{Ag5! exd4 16 Ac4}$  – if, and this is always a big if, he could find a clear edge. (Note that this position could also have arisen via 14... $\text{exd4 15 Ag5}$  above.)



The natural continuation is 16... $\text{Ae7 17 Axg5 Bb6 18 Ab1}$ , but then Black is at least a

tempo down, and White can use this tempo to set up dangerous threats with  $\mathbb{W}d3$ , and a hit on h7, as later occurred in G.Sargissian-E.Hossain, Istanbul Olympiad 2012.

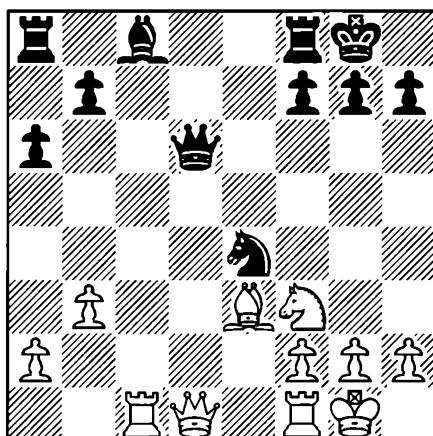
Instead, an earlier encounter continued (via 14... $\text{exd}4$  15  $\mathbb{A}g5$  etc) with 16... $\text{h}6$  17  $\mathbb{B}xd4$   $\text{hxg}5$  18  $\mathbb{B}xd6$   $\mathbb{W}e7$  19  $\mathbb{A}b1$   $\mathbb{A}g4$  20  $\mathbb{B}e1$   $\mathbb{A}xf3$  21  $\mathbb{B}xe7$   $\mathbb{A}xd1$  22  $\mathbb{B}xd1$   $\mathbb{B}fd8$  23  $\mathbb{B}de1$  b5, A.Goganov-S.Rublevsky, Taganrog 2011.



It looks like White has a reasonably clear, albeit small, edge – although the game ended up with a straightforward draw, when White soon allowed a minor piece exchange (after 24  $\text{h}3$   $\text{g}6$  25  $\mathbb{A}e4$ , when the half points were inevitable).

So perhaps Anand has not quite found a tight defensive structure, despite earlier impressions, and Gelfand can play with confidence to aim for a plus score in this opening (*These comments were, of course, made just after the game*). No clear win for either side, naturally, but Black has to work to hold.

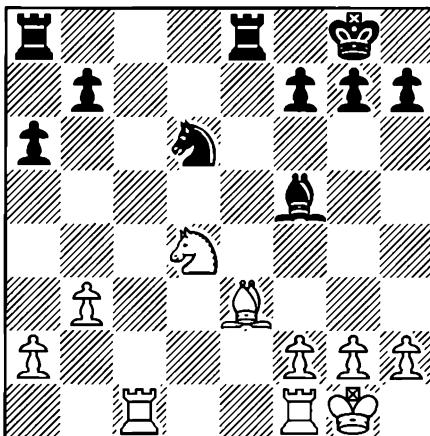
**15... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  16  $\text{exd}6$   $\mathbb{W}xd6$  17  $\mathbb{A}e3$**



Even here, Anand is not yet fully out of trouble, and presumably Gelfand had decided that this was a good prospect for an edge.

**17...♝f5 18 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 19 ♜d4 ♜fe8**

Anand is not too concerned about allowing his bishop to be exchanged for a knight. A more significant point is working out what to do with his rooks, and 19...♜g6! allows Black to see what White's pieces do, once the bishop is safe. Shipov gives 20 ♜c7 ♜ac8 21 ♜fc1, and now Black can defend in comfort with 21...f6!, followed by an exchange of rooks and ...♜f7.



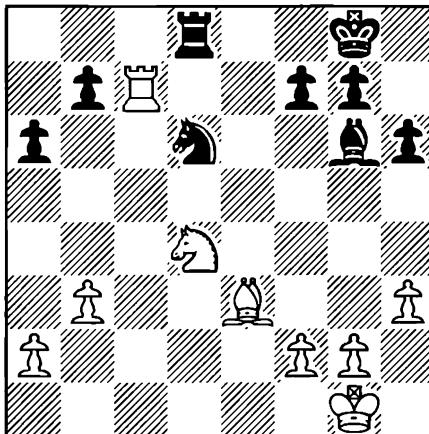
**Question:** Should White squeeze a bishop versus knight edge after 20 ♜xf5 ♜xf5, or should he keep his pieces in play and try for gradual improvements?

**20 ♜xf5?!**

Again, excessive simplification by Gelfand – one gets the feeling that he is willing to take as many draws as he can against Anand, which is not perhaps the best way to try to win a match. (Again, comments made just after the game)

Away from the psychology of chess, White's knight is the best minor piece on the board, as long as it is actively guarded by the bishop. Black's minor pieces are still slightly insecure, as a result of a slight slowness in earlier development. There is absolutely no need for White to exchange either of his pieces. It is up to Black to try to work out how to offer an exchange himself, without a loss of tempo and perhaps the danger of the loss of a pawn.

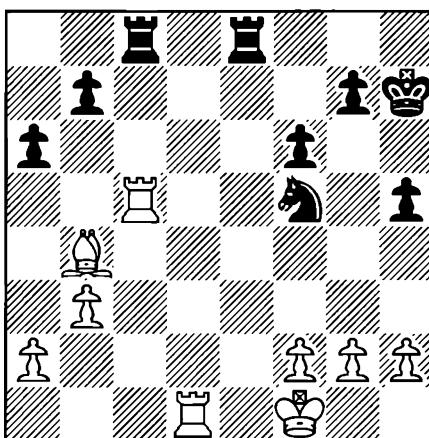
White can improve with 20 ♜c7! ♜g6 21 ♜fc1 ♜ac8 (compare this with 19...♜g6! above) 22 h3 h6 23 ♜f4 ♜xc7 24 ♜xc7 ♜d8 25 ♜e3.



One can imagine that Carlsen or a younger Kramnik would have great zeal in trying to grind such a position out for a win.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$  21  $\mathbb{Q}c5$  h5 22  $\mathbb{R}fd1$   $\mathbb{Q}ac8$  23  $\mathbb{Q}f1$  f6 24  $\mathbb{Q}b4$   $\mathbb{Q}h7$  25  $\mathbb{Q}c5$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Draw agreed. A tame finish.



**Question:** Could White still have tried for more?

After all, the bishop should count for something.

Anand has secured his defences well. After 25... $\mathbb{R}xc5$  26  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$   $\mathbb{R}e6$ , followed by ...b7-b6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ , White will be unable to find anything to attack.

First impressions after the first two matches? Anand is clearly not yet playing at his best, and he also had a bad weekend in the recent Bundesliga. The chances are that he will

improve. If so, this could be slightly worrying from Gelfand's point of view. If he cannot create trouble when he has had the better positions – in both games – what will happen if he starts to be under pressure?

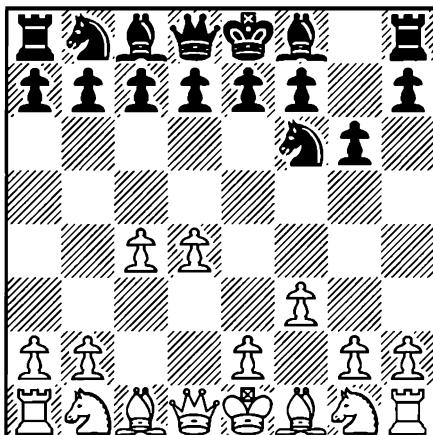
## Game Three: Anand-Gelfand

There is no great need to write in detail about the opening, or to spend days analysing this line of the Grünfeld. It is enough to say that Anand was familiar with the 3 f3 line, and that it is not too difficult to find a recent game where Anand experimented with this (see the note to Black's eighth move below). If I had noticed this, then Gelfand will have noticed it too, much earlier than me. He had prepared this line, innovating at move 16.

One suspects that there were various possible alternatives between moves 8 and 15, and that quite possibly there could have been some sort of improvement for White. Again, this is beyond the scope of this book. The point is that Anand had played what seemed at the time to be the best line for White, and that Gelfand had found a big improvement for Black. Certainly it was not a winning improvement, but he forced Anand out of the comfort zone.

14th May 2012  
V.Anand-B.Gelfand  
*World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 3)*  
*Grünfeld Defence*

1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 g6 3 f3



The start of a new thread of analysis, avoiding the main line Grünfeld with 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  d5 – and for good reason, as it could easily have ended up in disaster for Anand in game one.

This move is likely to end up in either a Grünfeld, albeit without ever reaching any of

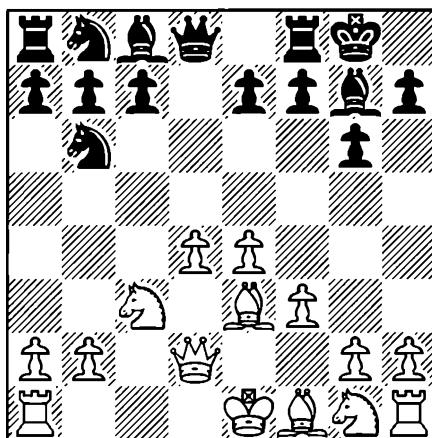
the main lines, or a King's Indian Sämisch, although even here, as Anand was able to show later on (see game eight), we do not necessarily reach the Sämisch either.

A lot is relatively unexplored, but sharp – an ideal line for White when trying to plug away for a plus score in a match.

**3...d5 4 cxd5 ♜xd5 5 e4 ♜b6**

The point is that Black never had the opportunity of exchanging on c3.

**6 ♜c3 ♜g7 7 ♜e3 0-0 8 ♜d2**



**Question:** For those who want to catch up on their opening theory, what does Black usually play here? If you do not already know, try to think about it.

**8...e5**

This is, of course, preparation by Gelfand.

In a game played several months earlier, White won quickly after 8...♜c6 9 0-0-0 ♜d6 10 ♜b1 ♜d8 11 ♜b5 ♜d7 12 d5 ♜e5 13 ♜c2 c6?? 14 ♜xa7, already with a winning position, V.Anand-S.Mamedyarov, Ajaccio (rapid) 2011. Not a game to be looked at in depth, except to note that Anand had experimented with this variation. Naturally, Mamedyarov would not have played so badly at a normal time limit.

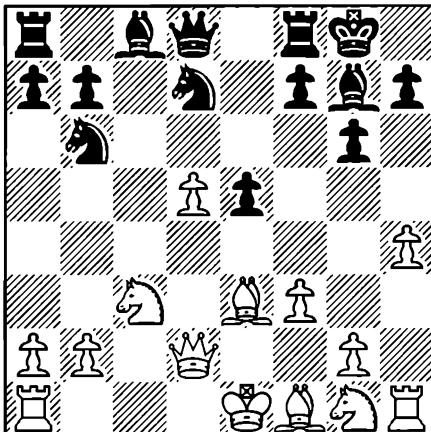
A more representative continuation would have been 12...a6 13 dxc6 ♜xd2 14 ♜xd2 ♜xd2 15 ♜xd2 axb5 16 cxb7 ♜xb7 17 ♜xb5 f5 18 exf5, as in N.Vitiugov-A.Giri, Reggio Emilia 2011/12. The computer likes this for White, but Black has active play for his pawn, and later made a draw.

There are also some lines in which White has played an early f3-f4. No deep theory here. Try it out yourself, if you are interested.

**9 d5 c6**

Presumably 9...f5 is reasonable enough, but Gelfand continues with his prepared line.

**10 h4 cxd5 11 exd5 ♜8d7**

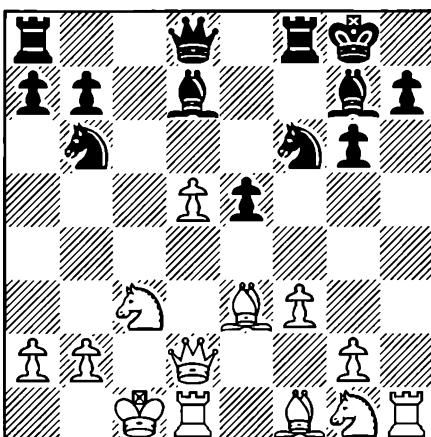


This looks strange for Black, until one appreciates that a later ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  will create great pressure on White's d-pawn. The pawn structure has become thoroughly asymmetrical, with White trying to keep the advanced pawn, and also trying to open up the h-file with h4-h5, while Black will try to do something with his potentially mobile e- and f-pawns...

**12 h5  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  13 hxg6 fxg6**

...or, if the f-pawn gets exchanged, he will try to do something with his half-open f-file.

**14 0-0-0  $\mathbb{Q}d7$**



It looks like wild attacks against kings on opposite wings.

**15  $\mathbb{Q}b1$**

Except that Anand is carefully bringing his king into safety, with this move and the next. He is aiming for a longer-term initiative, making use of the advanced passed pawn, rather than aiming for quick mate.

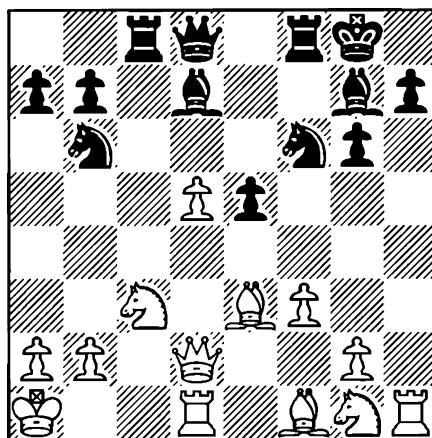
**Question:** How would Black handle the position if White were to attack with 15 ♜h6 - ?

It is not as if Black is going to get choked on the g7-square, so he has some freedom, and some counterplay, with 15...♜xh6 16 ♛xh6 ♜c8.

If White tries to escape with the king now – a couple of moves too late – Black is very comfortable after 17 ♔b1?! ♜f5+ 18 ♔a1 ♜f7, and if 19 g4?!, then simply 19...♜xg4 20 fxg4 ♜xg4, followed by ...♝f2, gives him the advantage. 17 d6?! ♜a4 18 ♜ge2 ♛b6 also allows Black to take over the attack.

Possibly 17 ♜d3, when 17...♜a4 18 ♜d2 (18 ♜xg6 ♛d7 allows Black more initiative than the pawn is worth for White) 18...♜c7 appears equal, but if the computer is allowed to run for a few seconds, White is given an edge after 19 ♔b1!, followed shortly by ♜ge2. A different setting, but again ♔b1 is the critical idea.

15...♜c8 16 ♔a1



**Question:** Now what? Isn't Black just significantly worse?

16...e4!

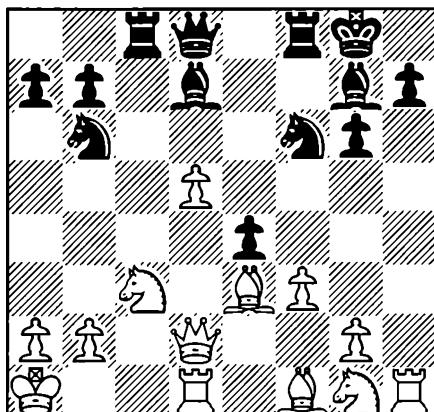
This was a prepared variation. The big advantage of a prepared line is that the opponent, if he has not also seen it, will find it far more difficult to find good moves with speed. That, at least, is the theory. Innovations can be good, bad or indifferent, and here Gelfand has to show that his move is at least playable.

Black has sacrificed the pawn to open up the long diagonal for the bishop on g7. Without the pawn sacrifice, the bishop is merely bad. Without the pawn, Black can attack the squares around White's king.

Even so, this must be regarded as a shock move, an attempt to confuse his opponent.

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

The move itself was probably the best, but can we guarantee that Black's previous moves were positionally the most accurate? It would seem, for example, that 15  $\mathbb{A}h6$  would have given White a slight edge. If the opening were to be repeated in another game, there would be an opportunity for White to look for an improvement.



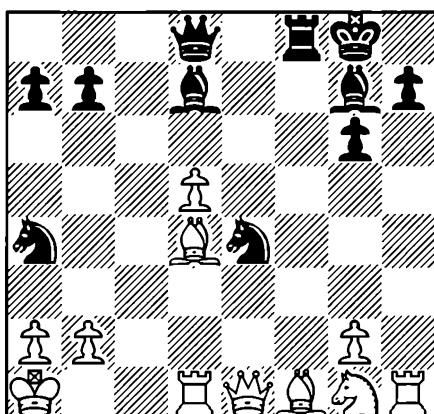
**Question:** What should White do next? The computer suggests half a dozen promising moves, and if even one of these is good, Black could face problems.

### 17 $\mathbb{A}d4!!$

A good and safe move, with a slight edge, but by no means a winning line. It is good enough, and that is all that is important. Anand challenges the long diagonal.

Were there any other possibilities? What about other lines, maybe more ambitious?

a) 17  $f \times e4?$  would have been bad, as after 17... $\mathbb{E}xc3$  18  $\mathbb{W}xc3$   $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  Black is at least more than equal. After 19  $\mathbb{W}e1$ , there would be some pleasing knight forks: 19... $\mathbb{Q}a4$  20  $\mathbb{A}d4$



20... $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ , intending 21  $\mathbb{Q}xf2?$   $\mathbb{Q}xb2+$  22  $\mathbb{Q}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}xf2$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xf2$   $\mathbb{Q}c3+$  24  $\mathbb{Q}xb2$   $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$  followed by 25... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ .

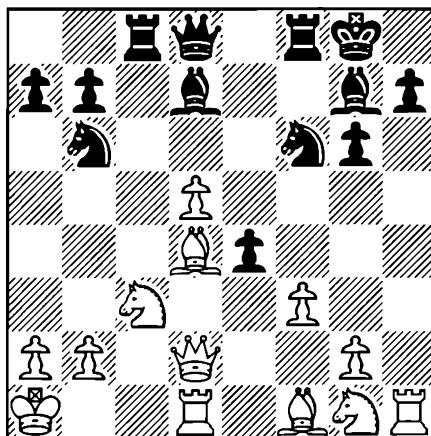
21  $\mathbb{Q}c4$  is more solid, but even here there are some enjoyable tactics (and a player will never become good at the game, if they cannot take pleasure out of tactics): 21... $\mathbb{Q}xh1$  22 d6+  $\mathbb{Q}h8$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xg7$  24  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}xb2$  25  $\mathbb{Q}xb2$   $\mathbb{Q}f6+$  26  $\mathbb{Q}e5$   $\mathbb{Q}g3$ , and the two queens are mutually pinned against the kings, which gives Black the chance to escape with the knight.

Of course, Anand stayed clear of such lines.

b) 17  $\mathbb{Q}h6$  is by now a defensive move, rather than an attack against the king, but perhaps White still keeps a slight edge after, for example, 17... $\mathbb{Q}xh6$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xh6$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$  19  $\mathbb{Q}ge2$  (19 d6  $\mathbb{Q}a4$  is about equal) 19... $\mathbb{Q}e8$  20  $\mathbb{Q}d4$  e3 21 g3.

c) 17  $\mathbb{Q}g5$ , pinning the knight, also looks good for a slight edge after 17...exf3 18 gxf3.

If there are three good bishop moves by White, and if, furthermore, White could have deviated a couple of moves earlier with a probable slight advantage, the overall conclusion must be that Gelfand was playing this variation for shock value, rather than trying to suggest that he has found a serious way to equalize.

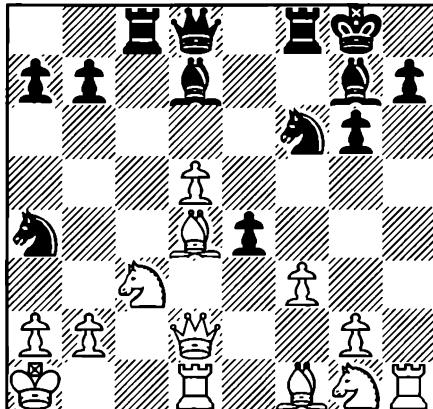


17... $\mathbb{Q}a4$

**Question:** Is this move good?

In my day-after blog, I noted that “I suspect that, had this been a player other than a candidate for the World Championship, I would have regarded this as something of a wild hack. Black is doing nothing in the centre, and his attack against the queen is almost non-existent. 17...exf3 would have been quieter, with a slight edge for White after either 18  $\mathbb{Q}xf3$   $\mathbb{Q}g4$  or 18 gxf3  $\mathbb{Q}f5$ .“

A bit harsh? In fairness, I noted the practical point that, strangely enough, “before long, Gelfand is on top, and Anand is under pressure.” Maybe the psychology is good, but the move itself is not good.



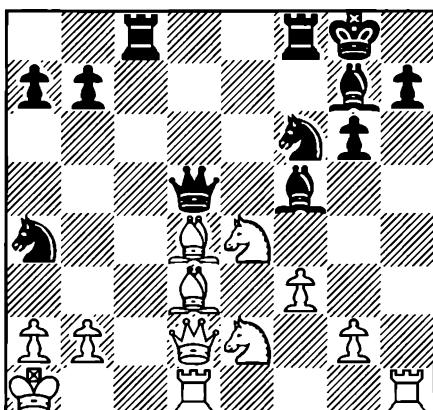
**Question:** Inevitable question: if Black's last move should be branded as an error, what is the best reply for White?

**18 ♜ge2**

Another difficult choice, one of many for both sides. Here 18 ♜xe4! is promising, and if 18...♝f5, there are presumably several quiet moves that keep a slight edge for White.

The computer recommendation, 19 ♜b4, is not quite so clear-cut after 19...♜xe4 20 ♜xe4 ♜c7 21 ♜e2 ♜c2 22 ♜d2 ♜xe4 23 ♜xc2 ♜xc2 with equality. Is there anything more?

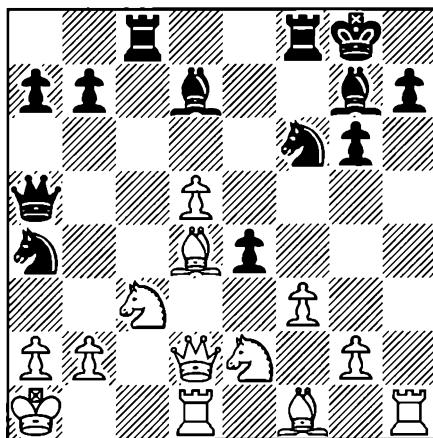
Try to think back to the mid-19th century, and the fascination by Morphy with the great 1834 Labourdonnais-McDonnell matches. Morphy recognized that, in the heat of tactical battle, his two predecessors sometimes got too interested in tactics, and often forgot about development. Apply the Morphy idea to the current position, and we can try 19 ♜d3!? ♜xd5 20 ♜e2.



Suddenly White's pieces are fully developed and centralized, attacking on the kingside (where Black's king is open) and developing on the queenside. Black's f6-knight is pinned, a serious problem, since if 20... $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$  21  $fxe4$   $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  22  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $\mathbb{W}xe4$  then 23  $\mathbb{Q}xg7$   $\mathbb{Q}xg7$  24  $\mathbb{W}h6+$  with a quick win. Alternatively, 20... $\mathbb{Q}e6$  21  $b3$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$  22  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$   $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  23  $\mathbb{W}b2$  keeps White in control, making full use of the long diagonal, and not allowing Black to take advantage. Anand would clearly have been much better, with best play.

**18... $\mathbb{W}a5$**

Consistent with his sideways plan. 18... $exf3$  19  $gxf3$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$  20  $\mathbb{Q}f4$  is more natural, but White keeps a slight edge, offering perhaps a bishop exchange with  $\mathbb{Q}h3$ .



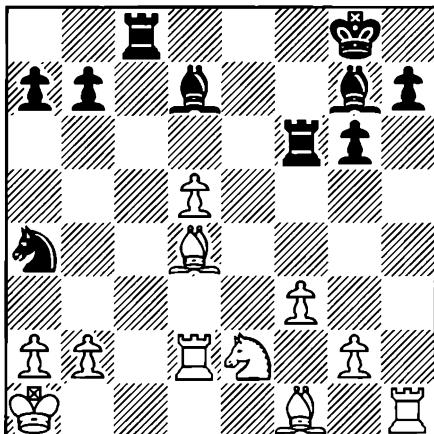
**19  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$**

White is happy to simplify.

**Question:** Is there anything wrong with 19  $fxe4$  - ?

I have to admit that I missed the idea in my blog scan, but both players would have calculated it. After 19  $fxe4$   $\mathbb{Q}xc3$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xc3$   $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  21  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $\mathbb{W}xd2$  22  $\mathbb{Q}xd2$   $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ , Black is slightly better, as we approach the endgame with bishops of opposite colour.

**19... $\mathbb{W}xd2$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$   $\mathbb{Q}xf6$  21  $\mathbb{Q}xd2$**



**Question:** There has been some simplification over the last few moves, but what should Black do next?

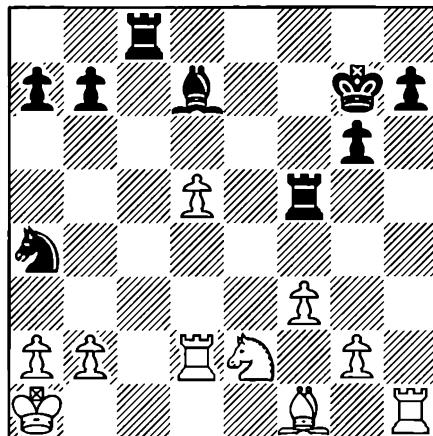
### **21...♝f5?**

Too provocative. With complete accuracy now on both sides, it would seem that White should be able to win, therefore a full question mark, "?", rather than a half question mark, "?!". Even so, the rest of the game is difficult and complicated for both sides.

Here 21...♜d6 blockades the d-pawn and Black can soon win it back, helped by White's lack of kingside development: 22 ♕xg7 ♔xg7 23 ♜h4 ♛b6 24 ♜hd4 (24 ♛c3 is only a draw, as after 24...♜xd5, the knight is pinned) 24...♜b5 25 g3 ♜cd8, and Black finally recovers the pawn with a level endgame.

Shipov suggests instead 23 b3 ♛b6 24 ♛f4 ♜c1+ 25 ♛b2 ♜e1. Equal? Unclear? Fractional edge to White? The most important point is that it is not a clear win for White, which is useful if Black is trying to defend a difficult position.

### **22 ♕xg7 ♔xg7**

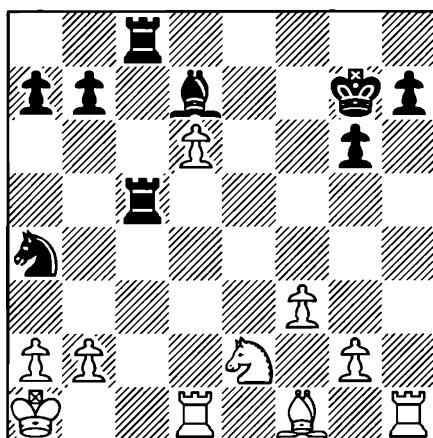


**Question:** "Passed pawns must be pushed". So what should White do here?

**23 d6?!**

Too hasty. White opens up space, allowing Black's rooks to double on the c-file, which allows him to create counterplay. Quite probably White should be winning eventually, but there is extremely difficult play on both sides and, in time trouble, Anand was eventually unable to find the win.

White should have waited before pushing. 23  $\mathbb{Q}h4!$  improves; e.g. 23... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  24  $\mathbb{Q}hd4$   $\mathbb{Q}b5$  25 b3, and it is not so clear what Black can do. He is, after all, a passed pawn down.  
**23... $\mathbb{Q}fc5$  24  $\mathbb{Q}d1$**



An extremely difficult position to analyse, whether over the board or at home. The question and answer can be given in two parts.

**Question:** First, is 24... $\mathbb{B}c2$  satisfactory? If so, then find the main lines. If not, what else can Black try, to make life more difficult for his opponent?

#### 24...a5

Very puzzling, and I have to admit that, in my analysis, I got on completely the wrong track, thinking that in one apparently critical line after 24... $\mathbb{B}c2$ , Black can escape with a draw with a few tactics. There was, however, a second critical line in which White has a win.

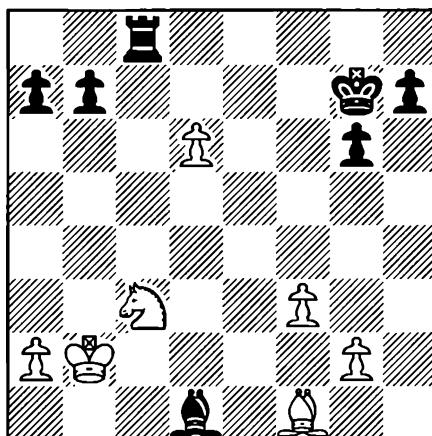
If 24... $\mathbb{B}c2$ , quite clearly the most natural move, does not work, what else can Black try? Gelfand uses an old technique, that if you cannot do anything constructive with the pieces, all that remains is to make progress with your pawns. Here ...a7-a5 is a desirable move to flick in. Therefore 24...a5, and the pawn push makes its presence felt in later play.

However, this would probably have been Gelfand's second choice, if there were problems with the immediate 24... $\mathbb{B}c2$ . Let's see.

a) 25  $\mathbb{B}h4$  looks promising and is certainly something worth analysing. Then Black could transpose to the main line in the game with 25...a5, but he could also try captures on b2.

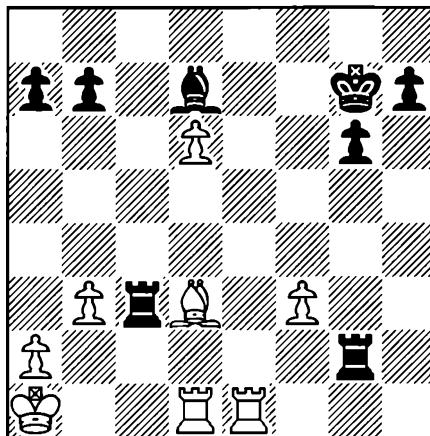
a1) 25... $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$  26  $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{Q}a4$  is unsatisfactory, as the tactics do not work after 27  $\mathbb{B}xb7$   $\mathbb{Q}xe2$  28  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$   $\mathbb{B}c1+$  29  $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{B}xb1+$  30  $\mathbb{Q}xb1 \mathbb{Q}c2 \mathbb{Q}xe2$  32  $\mathbb{B}e4$ , since if 32... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ , then 33  $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}g3$  (33... $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$  34 d7 promotes) 34  $\mathbb{B}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  35  $\mathbb{B}xh7 \mathbb{Q}e8$  36  $\mathbb{B}xa7$  and White has far too many pawns to give Black any chance of a realistic defence with bishop and knight versus rook. Sharp tactics, but White is still keeping the crucial passed pawn.

a2) Black can improve with 25... $\mathbb{B}xb2!?$  26  $\mathbb{B}xa4 \mathbb{Q}xa4$  27  $\mathbb{Q}xb2 \mathbb{Q}xd1$  28  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ .



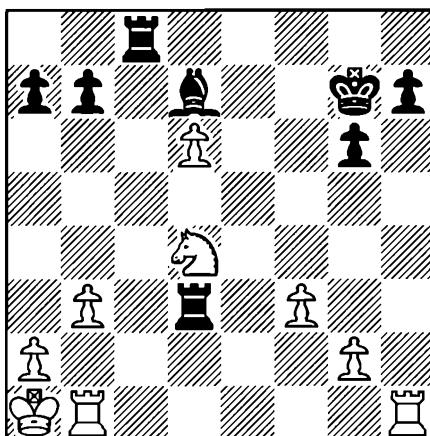
The critical position. The bishop is trapped(!), but Black can pick up the passed pawn by 28... $\mathbb{B}c6$  29  $\mathbb{Q}xd1$   $\mathbb{B}xd6$  with a probable draw, even if White keeps a slight pull. It is difficult to see how White can create another effective passed pawn, so long as Black keeps his structure tight, not advancing to the centre of the board. This, however, is just one line of thought.

b) The more prosaic 25 b3 gives White a comfortable edge – indeed a decisive edge – after 25.. $\mathbb{Q}c3$  26  $\mathbb{Q}xc3$   $\mathbb{B}xg2$  27  $\mathbb{Q}d3!$   $\mathbb{B}xg2$  28  $\mathbb{Q}he1$ .



Suddenly White's undeveloped kingside pieces jump into activity, the bishop covering the c2-square against the black rooks doubling in the second rank, while his own rook is able to eliminate any defences against the passed d-pawn; e.g. 28... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  29  $\mathbb{B}e7$   $\mathbb{Q}f5$  30  $\mathbb{B}xh7$   $\mathbb{Q}xd3$  31 d7, queening.

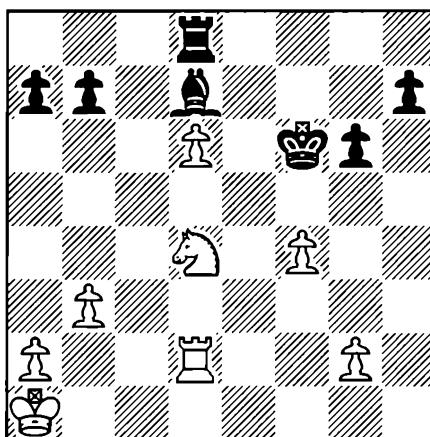
Still, this is not yet the whole story. Gelfand must surely have considered the strange but resourceful 25... $\mathbb{Q}b2$ . This can confidently be said, since Gelfand soon made the same move himself. Play then continues with 26  $\mathbb{B}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}d3$  27  $\mathbb{Q}d4$   $\mathbb{B}d2$  28  $\mathbb{Q}xd3$   $\mathbb{B}xd3$ .



This is much as in the game, except there White had added  $\mathbb{B}h4$  and Black ...a7-a5. Which insertions or omissions would be the more significant?

Gelfand presumably decided that he preferred his opponent's rook to be off the back rank. After all, in the diagram position above, White has 29  $\mathbb{B}bd1$   $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$  30  $\mathbb{B}xd1$ , and if

30... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  then 31  $f4$   $\mathbb{E}d8$  32  $\mathbb{E}d2$  (to avoid tempo hits with ... $\mathbb{A}g4$ ).



Now how would you enjoy handling the king and pawn ending? Remember we are already almost ten moves deep into the analysis, and Gelfand would have had to consider several other variations, including the ones already given. It was no wonder that Gelfand looked tense during the match.

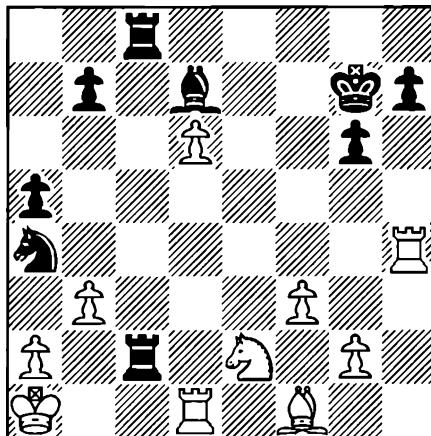
Here it seems that 32... $\mathbb{A}c6$ ! 33  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $bxcc6$  34  $\mathbb{Q}b2$   $\mathbb{Q}e6$  35  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{E}xd6$  36  $\mathbb{E}xd6+$   $\mathbb{Q}xd6$  37  $\mathbb{Q}b4$  holds the balance after 37... $h5$  38  $\mathbb{Q}a5$   $\mathbb{Q}c7$ . Indeed, the only danger is of White overpressing, bringing the king to a6 and pushing the b-pawn, since if then b4-b5??, Black suddenly wins by ...c6-c5.

There are other lines which could be unearthed, but I would prefer the book to be ready for publication in 2012 rather than 2013. Provisionally though, it would appear that 24... $\mathbb{E}c2$ ! was more accurate, and certainly at least in practical terms. It is difficult to find a quick refutation to this move.

**25  $\mathbb{E}h4$**

White can't do anything with the knight or bishop, so it has to be a rook that is needed to activate his pieces.

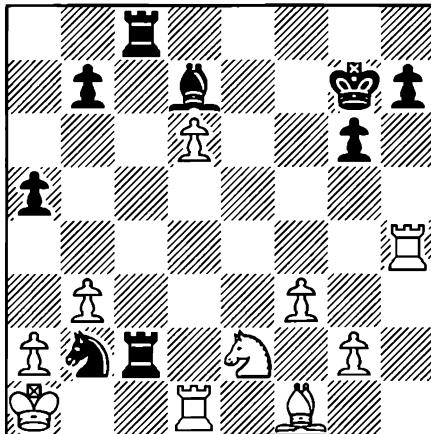
**25... $\mathbb{E}c2$  26  $b3$**



26...Nb2

With great astonishment to the spectators – although Gelfand must have thought about this while considering his 24th. The problem is not so much that the knight is in the lion's teeth, but rather that Gelfand has slightly mistimed it.

Black could try to burrow down with 26...Nc5 27 Rb1 Ne6, but would he be happy to do so, a pawn down?



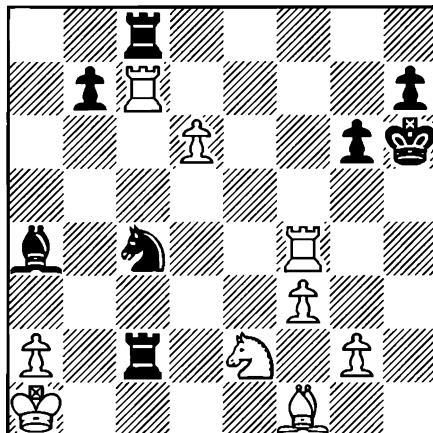
**Question:** Which is better: to attack the knight with 27 Rb1 and later to force simplification? Or to try to put the knight into a cage with 27 Rdd4 - ? Other moves may also be considered.

27 Rb1!

A good and straightforward move, and indeed the best move, aiming for favourable

simplification and an excellent chance of forcing a win. Unfortunately, albeit understandably, Anand was getting short of time.

27  $\mathbb{H}dd4$  is also good, but is more complicated after, for example, 27...a4 28 bxa4  $\mathbb{Q}c4$   
29  $\mathbb{H}he4$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  30  $\mathbb{H}f4+$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  31  $\mathbb{H}de4$   $\mathbb{Q}xa4$  32  $\mathbb{H}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}h6$  33  $\mathbb{H}c7$



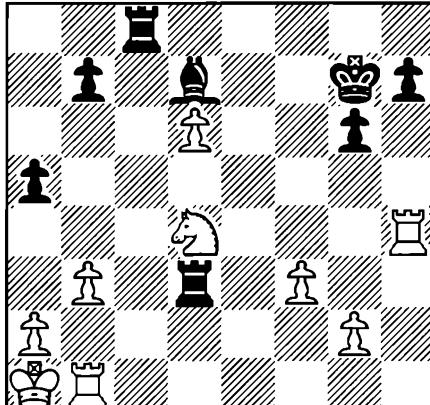
and now a final swing with 33... $\mathbb{Q}b3$  34  $\mathbb{H}fxc4$   $\mathbb{H}xc4$  35 axb3  $\mathbb{H}4xc7$  36 dxc7  $\mathbb{H}xc7$  37  $\mathbb{Q}b2$ , and this time the pawns are equal in number, so the bishop and knight should eventually outplay the rook. Perhaps not something to be tried during a time scramble though. Best to play simpler lines.

The computer suggests that 27  $\mathbb{H}d5$  might also give an edge, but it is not clear that this is as effective as 27  $\mathbb{H}dd4$ .

**27... $\mathbb{Q}d3$  28  $\mathbb{Q}d4$   $\mathbb{H}d2$  29  $\mathbb{Q}xd3$**

The bishop does not budge for the first 28 moves, but then gets exchanged for the far-advanced knight, which has moved six times. This must surely suggest some gain of tempo by White.

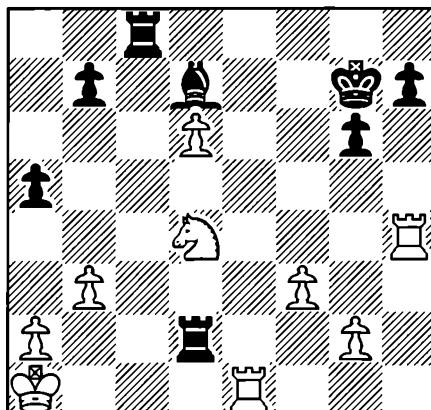
**29... $\mathbb{H}xd3$**



30  $\mathbb{R}e1$

And now it is White, not Black, who is seriously attacking the king. The exchange of tempi – looking back at 24...a5 25  $\mathbb{R}h4$  – has allowed White to provide extra defence on d4, and so activate his other rook.

30... $\mathbb{R}d2$



**Question:** Assess the position. Who is better, and by how much? What is White's best? Do this exercise quickly. Remember, both the players were short of time.

I, too, did not have time to assess the position in "live chess". You concentrate on following the main part of the game, then there is the time scramble; you do not look at the time scramble carefully before the annotations of the main part of the game get started.

I wrote some total nonsense, noting that "play is starting to fizzle out to a draw. White is a strong passed pawn ahead, but his weakness is that he permanently has to be careful

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

about checkmate, on the back rank, or doubled rooks on the seventh. White has no chance to coordinate his pieces for any sort of attack."

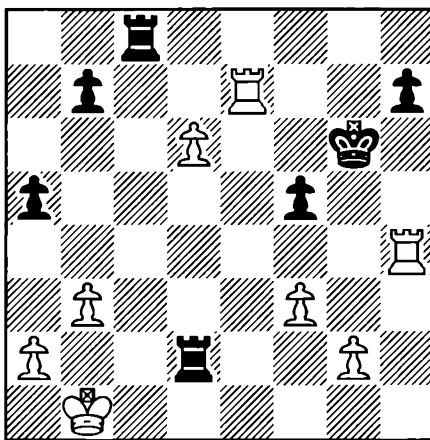
Well, perhaps 60% total nonsense, and a few reasonable comments.

In fact, Anand has shown excellent composure when Gelfand's attempted attack was raging. His next move should also have been winning a move further on: 31  $\mathbb{E}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  32  $\mathbb{Q}b1$ . Of course he must not allow checkmate with ... $\mathbb{E}c1$ .

**31  $\mathbb{Q}b1!$   $\mathbb{Q}f5+$  32  $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$   $gxf5$  33  $\mathbb{E}e7+$**

It is understandable that, with two pairs of rooks trying to give checks, and nothing else attacking the king, the easy interpretation would be this was going to end up in some sort of perpetual. Quite probably both players would have had similar thoughts in their mind.

**33... $\mathbb{Q}g6$**



**Question:** Find the win!

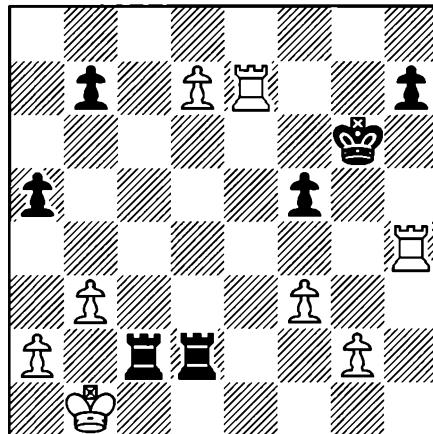
**34  $\mathbb{E}c7?$**

This only ends up as a draw.

Opportunity in chess often happens only fleetingly. A couple of hours of intense concentration and one player has a winning position but is short of time, having perhaps less than a minute to make a move – concentration lapses, and suddenly the win has blown into sand. Any serious chess player will know the feeling.

This time, passed pawns should definitely have been pushed. Here 34  $d7!$  is enough to tip the game in White's favour. It is not so much that the new queen itself is winning. It is more that the mere threat of promotion forces Black to allow the disruption of his own forces. This would be seen most clearly in 34... $\mathbb{E}d8$  35  $\mathbb{E}hxh7$   $f4$  36  $\mathbb{Q}c1$   $\mathbb{E}d6$  37  $a4$ , and White will have plenty of leisure to bring his king forward, with an eventual win.

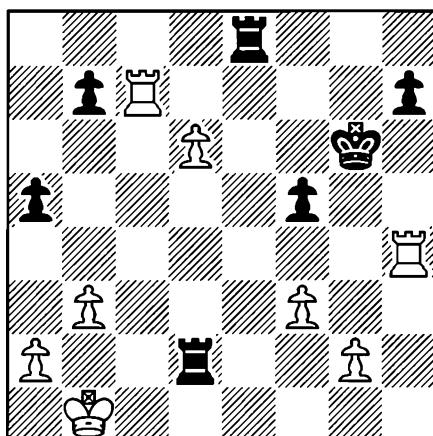
What about immediate counterplay by Black? The immediate impression is that 34... $\mathbb{E}cc2$  forces a perpetual.



Then White has the tricky 35  $\mathbb{R}c4!!$  and there is no perpetual, since after 35... $\mathbb{R}b2+$  36  $\mathbb{Q}c1$ , the rook covers the checking square on c2 – very easy to miss – while 35... $\mathbb{R}xc4$  36  $\mathbb{B}xc4$  is an eventual win for White. He is a pawn up and has plenty of opportunity to exchange his passed pawn for one of his opponent's pawns, maybe with a well-timed d8 $\mathbb{Q}$  and  $\mathbb{R}xb7$ . White can advance his king, with  $\mathbb{Q}c2$ ,  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ , etc, before setting up the winning exchange.

Another attempt for a perpetual is 34... $\mathbb{R}d1+$  35  $\mathbb{Q}b2$   $\mathbb{R}d2+$ , but this time the king runs forward with 36  $\mathbb{Q}a3$   $\mathbb{R}cc2$  37  $\mathbb{Q}a4$  and escapes into active play.

So everything fits, but how many players could be able to analyse this in ten seconds?  
34... $\mathbb{R}e8$



Black is now instantly equal. The main defensive threat is 35... $\mathbb{R}e1+$  36  $\mathbb{Q}c1$   $\mathbb{R}ee2$ .  
35  $\mathbb{R}h1$   $\mathbb{R}ee2$  36 d7  $\mathbb{R}b2+$  37  $\mathbb{Q}c1$   $\mathbb{R}xa2$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Very tough, but to win World Championships you are expected to overcome extreme

difficulties. Anand should really have won this game, but Gelfand certainly had his winning chances in game one, and to a lesser extent in game two, so the “luckometer” was therefore about level. None of the three draws was faultless, when examined closely and with the help of the computer, but very few players would have gone unscathed, whether as White or as Black, in the third game.

We are still a long way off from the ideal of perfect chess, and perhaps this is no bad thing. Chess players have something to aspire to.

## **Game Four: Gelfand-Anand**

As in game two, Anand gradually equalized with a symmetrical pawn structure and made a steady draw (even if one feels that Gelfand might again have placed his opponent under greater pressure). This sort of thing happens, and indeed it ought to happen a lot of the time, at anything beyond intermediate level. Most of the time, though, it doesn’t happen. Players quite simply make mistakes, or try to overpress their position, or start to crumble under pressure, against accurate and/or inspired play by the opponent.

It is easy to skip through “dull and boring” games, but in terms of technique, if both players have played well, a reader who wants to improve will learn lessons. Below grandmaster level, there will almost always be mistakes made, and making mistakes is frustrating. What do grandmasters do to avoid making mistakes? Or is it that they make mistakes anyway, but their mistakes are smaller and less significant than those of the rest of us?

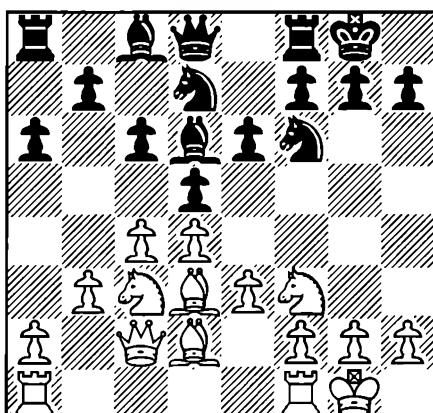
15th May 2012

**B.Gelfand-V.Anand**

*World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 4)*

*Semi-Slav with 5...a6*

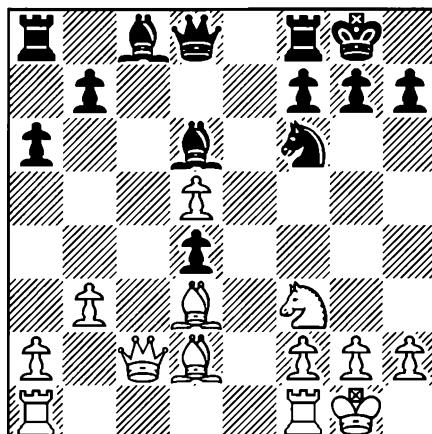
**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♜f3 a6 6 b3 ♜b4 7 ♜d2 ♜bd7 8 ♜d3 0-0 9 0-0 ♜d6 10 ♜c2**



**10...e5**

I had suggested, when blogging on game two, that Black could have tried 10...b5. However, Anand stuck to his main idea. It is not so clear that Black was fully able to equalize here, but Gelfand seemed to trust his opponent's judgment.

**11 cxd5 cxd5 12 e4 exd4 13 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 14 exd5 ♜f6**



**Question:** Isn't White clearly better?

Yes! White is not yet winning, but Black has to work hard to try to equalize. White is ahead in development, if only slightly. He has brought his bishop from c1 to d2, and his queen from d1 to c2, while Black's corresponding pieces remain unmoved. Black has no chances of playing for a win, barring a clear error by White, and therefore such an opening would be inappropriate if Black is, for example, aiming for a win in a weekender, or trying to gain a few rating points.

This is matchplay, however, and in theory the aim is to give absolutely nothing away with the black pieces, and try for a slight edge by White. To this end +1 =11 -0 would be a good score, a World Championship score; whereas +5 =2 -5 would not be so good.

Anand wants his six safe draws as Black, and somehow to find a win for White. Meanwhile, Gelfand as White has to pin his hopes on seizing on microscopic edges, and – very difficult – taking full advantage of them.

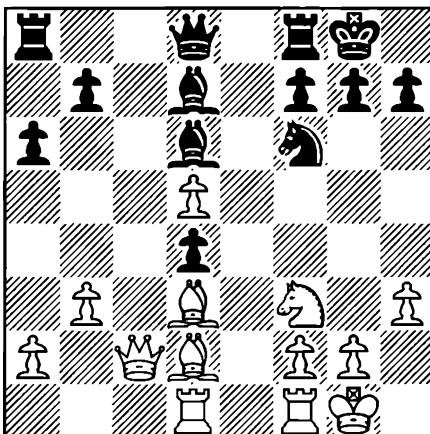
In games two and four, Anand drew both times, but not quite convincingly. If Gelfand were to play with extreme accuracy, he would have had the chance to press hard for a win in either of these games.

**15 h3**

To eliminate any possible activity with ...♜g4. The naive 12 ♜xd4?! ♜e5 13 ♜c3 ♜xd5 gives Black a slight edge.

**15...♜d7 16 ♜ad1**

With the rook off the long diagonal,  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  is now a threat. Black has no time to try ... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  himself.



**16...Re8**

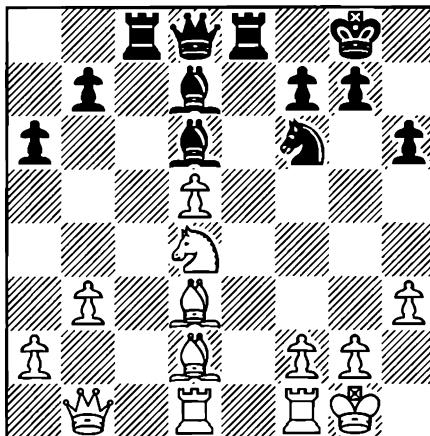
Anand concedes that he is losing a pawn – not really what he would have been hoping for in playing ultra-solid chess. His main hopes are that he will be able to keep his pieces solid and that, eventually, he will regain White's own isolated d-pawn. Nevertheless, it will take a lot of time before Black can take the pawn safely.

**Question:** Can Black think about regaining the pawn immediately with 16...Rc8 17 Bb1 h6 18 Qxd4 Qxd5 - ?

Black is too far behind in development to allow this to work, even if the opposing pieces and pawns are close to symmetrical. Sometimes the “advantage of the first move” counts for nothing, but at other times the extra move can be vicious. Here 19 Ae4 gets the attack in first, and if 19...Ae5 20 Qxd5 Qxd4, White has a decisive advantage after either 21 Axh6 or 21 Axh6.

Black would have tried to defend with 19...Ac6 or 19...Ae6, but in each case his pawn structure would be seriously disrupted after White takes it with the knight.

**17 Qxd4 Rc8 18 Bb1 h6**



**Question:** Impressive symmetry, but what is White going to do next? The likelihood is that White's extra pawn will drop at some stage, so it is important that Black is forced to make concessions before recovering it.

### 19 $\mathbb{Q}f5$

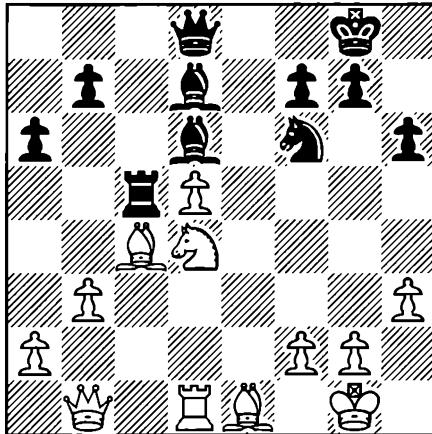
White intends to gain the advantage of the bishop pair before Black can regain the pawn. Plausible, but it does not give White a workable edge.

Instead, 19  $\mathbb{Q}fe1!$  keeps play more complicated and seems to be a genuine improvement. Either Black can exchange the rooks himself, when White has the chance to coordinate his pieces, or he can allow White to exchange rooks himself, after which Black's own pieces will be slightly disorganized.

If, for example, 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$   $\mathbb{Q}xe8$  21  $\mathbb{Q}h7+$   $\mathbb{Q}h8$  22  $\mathbb{Q}e4$ , Black is under great pressure on the h1-a8 long diagonal and on the d-file. White's gain of tempo converts to a clear edge. It is nothing yet decisive, but after 22... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $bxc6$  24  $\mathbb{Q}c2$ , White has weakened Black's queenside pawns and gained the bishop pair.

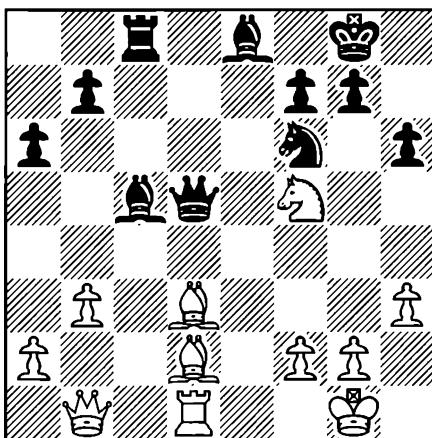
Alternatively, Black can exchange with 19... $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ , when White has opened up some space for the rook on the d-file. For instance, 20... $\mathbb{Q}d5$  21  $\mathbb{Q}f5$ , and White is ahead of the game.

Instead, 20... $\mathbb{Q}c5$  attempts to reach something close to the line in the game, but then 21  $\mathbb{Q}c4$  is promising.



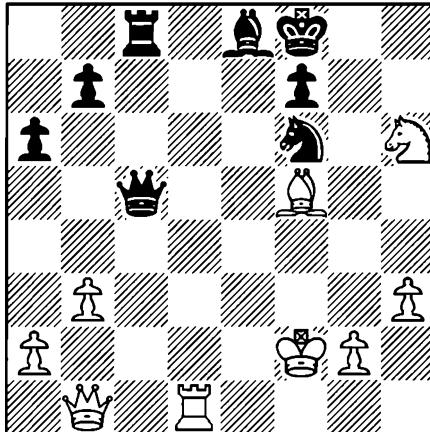
If 21...b5 22  $\mathbb{A}b4!$   $\mathbb{B}xc4$  23  $\mathbb{A}xc5$   $\mathbb{A}xc5$  24 bxc4, and White has rook and two pawns for the two bishops, a slight material edge for White. Furthermore, the two pawns are strong, connected and passed, while Black's two bishops do not coordinate well. White has a clear edge here.

We must remember, however, that the defender is also allowed to play well. 19... $\mathbb{A}c5$  seems the toughest defence, one point being that after 20  $\mathbb{A}xe8+$   $\mathbb{A}xe8$  21  $\mathbb{Q}f5$ , Black can try to equalize with 21... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ .

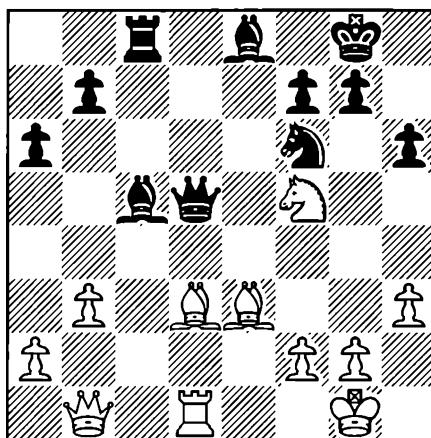


All of a sudden, tactics emerge from even the quietest and most symmetrical openings. It is clear that White is not worse, since his position is still better developed. The only question is whether he can keep the edge.

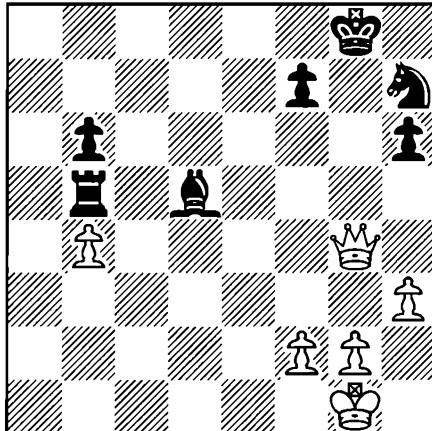
Of course, there is a third possibility, that he can overpress and end up worse, maybe through bad tactics. The computer at first recommends 22  $\mathbb{A}xh6?$  gxh6 23  $\mathbb{Q}xh6$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  24  $\mathbb{A}f5$ , but then notices that Black has far more effective play with 24... $\mathbb{A}xf2+!$  25  $\mathbb{Q}xf2$   $\mathbb{W}c5+$ .



This is not the sort of position White would be aiming for in a quiet positional game. Indeed, his king is so badly exposed that he is actually losing.  
Rewind, and 22  $\mathbb{Q}e3!$  is best, with a good positional edge.



This time the tactics would favour White, Black's queen standing awkwardly on the open d-file. For instance, after 22... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$   $\mathbb{g}xh6$  24  $\mathbb{Q}h7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xh7$  25  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  26  $\mathbb{W}c2$  a5 27 a3  $\mathbb{Q}c6$  28  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  b6 29  $\mathbb{W}d1$   $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  30 b4 axb4 31 axb4  $\mathbb{Q}b5$  32  $\mathbb{W}g4+$ , followed by  $\mathbb{W}d7$ , White is winning material.



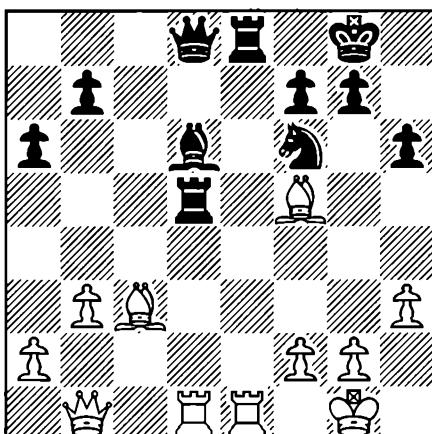
Players could not be expected to see all this as far back as move 19. What is needed is for the player to have good tactical instincts, a sense that if one side has the more mobile pieces in an open position, something is quite likely to work in his favour after the jousting of attack and defence. It is a matter of positional play, as well as of tactics. If a player has the more active pieces, the tactics will often emerge, even if he has not seen everything in advance.

And we have not yet found a convincing way for Black to equalize. A missed opportunity for Gelfand, it seems.

**19... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xf5$   $\mathbb{R}c5$  21  $\mathbb{R}fe1$   $\mathbb{R}xd5$**

The pawn has now been safely recovered. All that White has in his favour, in terms of aiming for an advantage, is the bishop pair. It is not enough, if there are no opposing weaknesses to attack.

**22  $\mathbb{R}c3$**

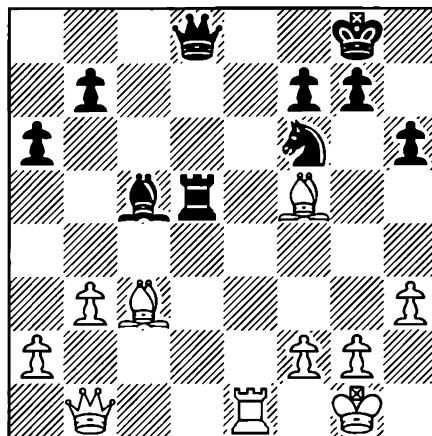


**Question:** How should Black equalize, with the greatest speed and comfort?

**22...♝xe1+?!**

22...♝e5 is, quite simply, level. He will have neutralized White's dark-squared bishop, so there is now nothing to attack with.

**23 ♞xe1 ♜c5**



**Question:** White to play. What should he do now?

**24 ♜c2?**

Very strange. We can attribute this to the extreme tension of playing in a match for the World Championship.

This quiet move is essentially a non-move, whereas the simple 24 ♜xf6! gxf6 (not 24...♜xf6?? 25 ♜e8+ ♜f8 36 ♜h7+ and mates) 25 ♜e4 would give White a clear edge again, since the black kingside is now wrecked. It is unlikely that Black is as yet losing, but he would have to defend extremely accurately for perhaps forty more moves to prove that he is holding, and so will be under great pressure.

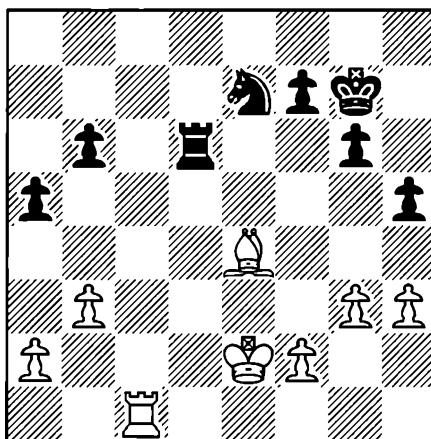
**24...♝d4 25 ♜xd4 ♜xd4**

Now we have only a microscopic edge for White, and Anand is soon able to halve out.  
**26 ♜c8 g6 27 ♜g4 h5 28 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 29 ♜f3 b6 30 ♜c1 ♜d6 31 ♜f1 a5 32 ♜e2 ♜d5 33 g3 ♜e7 34 ♜e4 ♜g7 ½-½ (see diagram overleaf)**

Even here, the position is not yet dead. There are still opportunities for White to play on with 35 f4, and perhaps a later push with g3-g4. Probably in the end it would not amount to anything more than a draw, but Gelfand could continue to nag his opponent.

Note carefully that it was Anand, as Black, who offered the draw, and Gelfand that accepted. This adds to the impression that, in the games so far, Gelfand was not confident in

playing for wins against Anand, and that he was playing for safety, making draws as often as he could. Anand would clearly have sensed the vibes, and was happy to offer an early draw on any reasonable occasion.



## **Game Five: Anand-Gelfand**

Both players seem to have settled down, no longer wanting to play extravagant chess (Anand in game one, Gelfand in game three), and attempting to make sure that they make no unnecessary mistakes.

After this game, there have been five draws in a row and, as the match goes on, one can expect that play will become even more cautious. Eventually, it is likely to be a battle of attrition, maybe with one of the players getting tired, losing control a little, and losing a game. Or perhaps it will end up in a rapidplay finish after twelve draws.

If we are indeed looking for a match of drawish chess, who is more likely to be favourite, if the balance were to tip? If anything, Gelfand, regarded as the underdog, might be regarded as slight favourite.

(Written in the day-after blog, with a few typos corrected. Of course, there were several more draws to follow, but unexpected results also crept in.)

17th May 2012

V.Anand-B.Gelfand

*World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 5)*  
*Sicilian Defence*

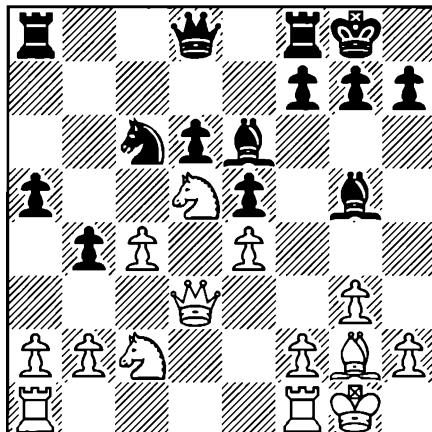
1 e4

## A change of opening.

1...c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4

Anand wanted to try out a main line Open Sicilian. If he is unable to find an edge, then there is still time to opt for something new.

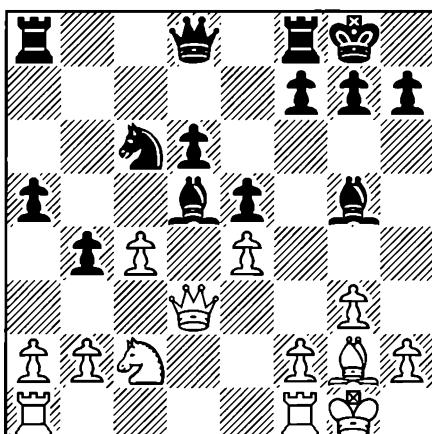
3...cxd4 4  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  5  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  e5 6  $\mathbb{Q}db5$  d6 7  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  a6 8  $\mathbb{Q}a3$  b5 9  $\mathbb{Q}d5$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  10  $\mathbb{Q}xf6$   $\mathbb{Q}xf6$  11 c4 b4 12  $\mathbb{Q}c2$  0-0 13 g3 a5 14  $\mathbb{Q}g2$   $\mathbb{Q}g5$  15 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}e6$  16  $\mathbb{W}d3$



All mainstream. The only real comment to be made so far is that the fianchetto system with g2-g3 and  $\mathbb{Q}g2$ , in addition to c2-c4 rather than c2-c3, makes it difficult for Black to aim for sharp kingside pawn play – in that, if he were to play ...f7-f5, White would have an instant open long diagonal after e4xf5.

**16...Qxd5**

Gelfand, too, is looking for steady chess and, with the black pieces, the prospect of a draw. There are reasonable ways to keep the tension, a recent game continuing 16... $\mathbb{W}b8$  17 f4  $\mathbb{Q}d8$ , J.Borisek-A.Moiseenko, European Team Championship, Porto Carras 2011. Black eventually won, but the mistakes came much later on.

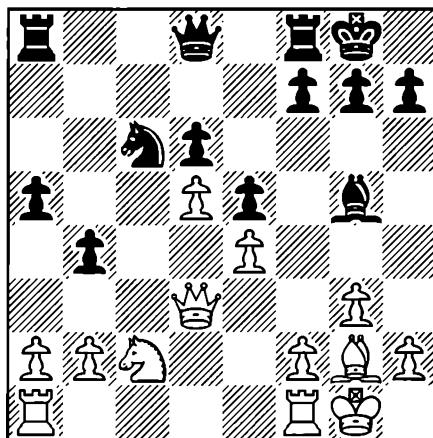


**Question:** How should White recapture? I leave this as an open-ended question, in that all three recaptures have been played in high-level chess. Don't rely on the databases. Just think about this position yourself, and what you would play next in a game.

Each of the three recaptures on d5 would allow White to claim that he can still play for an edge. There is no obvious answer, but players of different temperament or, more importantly here, the same player in a different tournament or match situation, would handle the position differently. If, for example, a player is absolutely desperate for a win, and a draw is simply not good enough, he would keep the position asymmetrical, probably with 17 exd5. The second choice perhaps would be 17  $\mathbb{W}xd5$ . If White wants to make absolutely certain that he has no danger of losing, then a highly symmetrical position, allowing no obvious weaknesses for either side, is good enough.

### 17 cxd5

And here, as in the second and fourth games (albeit as Black), Anand aims for symmetry. I am not sure whether it is better, or worse, than the other recaptures, but 17 exd5 might well create more danger for both sides.

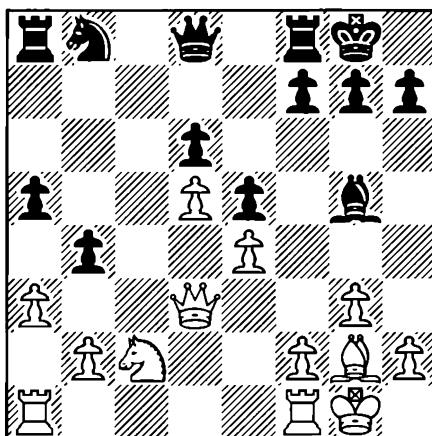


**Question:** Where should the knight go?

### 17... $\mathfrak{N}b8$ ??!

Here 17... $\mathfrak{N}e7$  looks genuinely equal, whereas Black's attempt to play more sophisticated chess ends up in unexpectedly creating a weakness. Black's idea is to manoeuvre his knight to c5, a good square, and just about impossible if the knight is on e7. The trouble is that, in a couple of lines, the knight on b8 turns out to be in the way of the major pieces, and White could have kept a slight edge with alert play. See the next comment.

18 a3



**Question:** Should Black defend with 18... $\mathbb{Q}a6$  or exchange with 18... $bxa3$  - ?

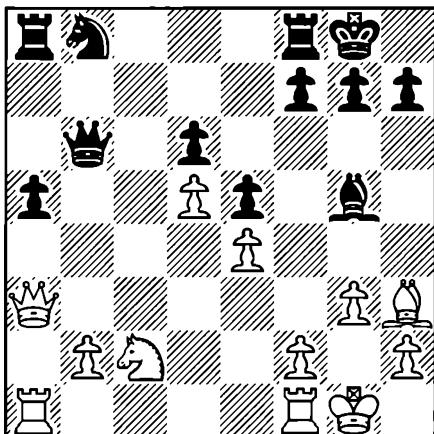
18... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 

Black has the awkward problem of deciding which of two reasonable-looking lines to choose, in each of which the opponent has a slight pressure. Perhaps Black's position is not particularly bad, but it takes some care to find a way to equalize after, arguably, a slightly inaccurate previous move.

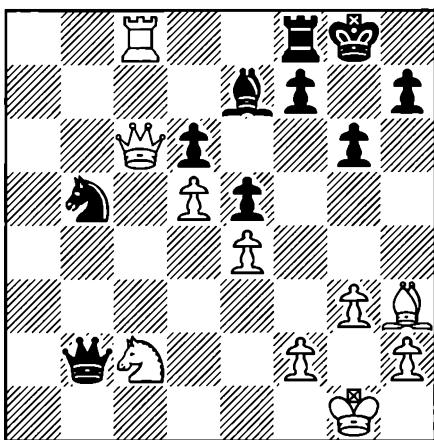
What it boils down to is whether Black, after the exchange of the queenside pawn, is going to be safer with the remaining pawn on a5 or on b4. Normally a pawn on a5 would be safer than on b4, because if Black's b-file is fully open, he can create counterplay against White's b2-pawn; whereas if Black has a b4-pawn instead, the problem is that his pawn can then be more easily pressured than the white one on b2.

Black does not fully equalize with the line he chose, and White could later have tried to improve. So the question is whether Black can equalize with 18... $bxa3$ , or at least has less of a disadvantage. This is always difficult, when trying to evaluate two positions a few moves later, in which there are no obvious tactics emerging. It will be a matter of what is going to happen, not two or three moves along the line, but in later manoeuvring. And yes, this is more about what is likely to happen during the endgame, rather than in the middlegame. This is not surprising, since it is the sort of middlegame which forces players to think about future endgames.

As far as moves are concerned, if Black tries 18... $bxa3$ , the most threatening recapture is 19  $\mathbb{W}xa3$ , keeping tabs on both the a5- and d6-pawns, and so preventing Black from redeveloping with ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$  or ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ . If 19... $\mathbb{W}b6$ , then 20  $\mathbb{Q}h3$  keeps the knight under partial control.

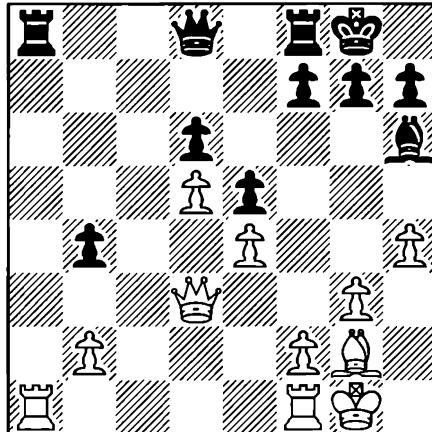


It is tempting to say that, visually, White has an edge, but perhaps it will fizzle to equality after accurate play; e.g. 20... $\mathbb{Q}a6$  21  $\mathbb{W}xa5$   $\mathbb{W}xb2$  22  $\mathbb{W}a4$   $\mathbb{Q}c7$  23  $\mathbb{W}c6$   $\mathbb{E}xa1$  24  $\mathbb{E}xa1$   $\mathbb{Q}b5$  25  $\mathbb{E}a8$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  26  $\mathbb{E}c8$   $g6$ .



Black is equal, as the pawn weakness on d6 is now no more significant than White's pawn weakness on e4.

It would take good defensive nerves for Black to try such a line, but it is an improvement from the one he actually played, in which White could have kept an edge.  
**19 axb4**  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$  **20**  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$   $axb4$  **21**  $h4$   $\mathbb{Q}h6$



**Question:** What should White play here, if he wants to keep a slight edge?

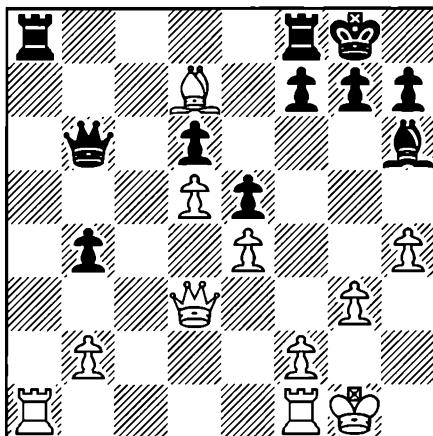
**22 ♜h3?!**

A missed opportunity. Anand finds a way to manoeuvre his bishop to c6, entrenched on the opponent's side of the board, but so what? The bishop is attacking only thin air, unable to put pressure on any pawn, and Black may later put counter-pressure on the e4-pawn. Play soon tends to equality.

Instead, 22 ♜c4! is uncomfortable for Black, the pawn on b4 being genuinely weak. For instance, 22...♜b6 23 ♜c6 attacks the pawn that the bishop can no longer defend, or 22...♝b8 23 ♜a7, in either case with pressure. Black's bishop ought, in theory, to be able to give solid cover to the b4-pawn, but it cannot reach the queenside.

It is possible that Black would find it prudent, in some lines, to abandon the pawn, hoping that White cannot find a win with only an isolated extra pawn, and with bishops of opposite colour. However, Black would still need to work extremely hard, and there would be reasonable chances for White to have tried for a win.

**22...♜b6 23 ♜d7**



**Question:** Which is the best square for Black's b-pawn? On b4 or on b3?

#### 23...b3

When I blogged, I was critical of this pawn move, as it seems much easier for White to attack a pawn on b3, rather than on b4. Black could easily have kept the position safe with, for example, 23... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ .

I now acknowledge that 23...b3 does not give anything away to White. Unless Black is careless, any win of the pawn on b3 will soon result in Black winning the pawn back, once the b-file has been opened.

Gelfand was thinking about the tactics, and what happens if White tries to win the b-pawn. The alternative view was one of purely positional thinking: that if the pawn is safe, Black's position cannot be broken down.

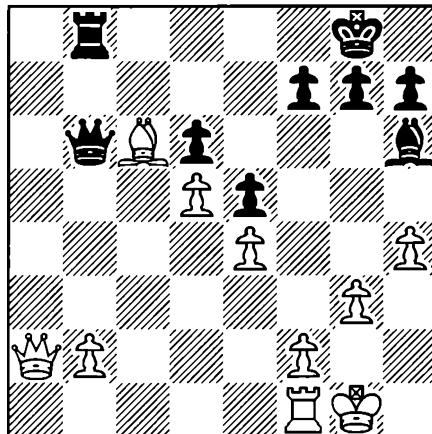
#### 24 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

24  $\mathbb{Q}a4$  will eventually enable White to swallow the b3-pawn, but Black seems safe enough after, for example, 24... $\mathbb{R}fc8$  25  $\mathbb{Q}xb3$   $\mathbb{R}ab8$  26  $\mathbb{Q}a4$   $\mathbb{W}xb2$ , while 26  $\mathbb{R}a3$   $\mathbb{Q}c1$  is no help for White.

#### 24... $\mathbb{R}a2$

Consistent. Gelfand's aim is to open the b-file for his major pieces.

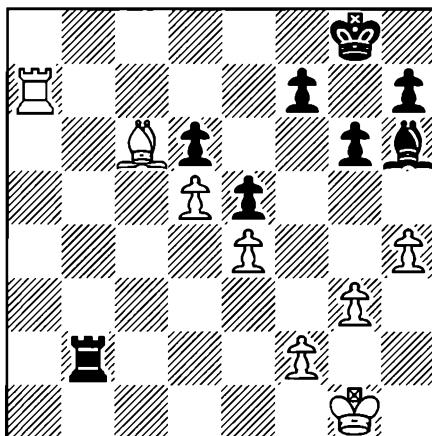
25  $\mathbb{R}xa2$   $\mathbb{B}xa2$  26  $\mathbb{W}a3$   $\mathbb{R}b8$  27  $\mathbb{W}xa2$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$



**Question:** Draw agreed, but could Anand as White have tried a little harder?

It is often difficult for the spectator to assess whether a draw is legitimate or premature. One reason for this is that the players are vastly more knowledgeable, and if they agree a draw, this generally means that they have analysed a few moves deep, seen what is likely to happen if play continues, and quite simply offered and accepted the draw.

Sometimes there can be premature draw agreements, true, but what about here? Anand could have carried on, but would it have led to much? After 27... $\mathbb{W}xb2$  28  $\mathbb{W}xb2$   $\mathbb{B}xb2$  29  $\mathbb{E}a1$  g6 30  $\mathbb{E}a7$ , White has pressure on the f7-pawn.



It looks difficult until one recognizes that, at long last, Black has time to get his own bishop active: 30... $\mathbb{A}d2!$  comfortably holds the balance.

If White tries the natural 31  $\mathbb{A}e8?!$ , Black takes the initiative with 31... $\mathbb{A}e1$ , as 32  $\mathbb{B}xf7?$

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

$\mathbb{B}b8$  33  $\mathbb{E}e7$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  even wins a piece. But 32  $\mathbb{A}xf7+$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  33  $\mathbb{B}d7$   $\mathbb{A}xf2+$  34  $\mathbb{Q}g2$   $\mathbb{A}c5+$  35  $\mathbb{Q}h3$   $\mathbb{B}f2$  36  $\mathbb{A}e6$  h5 ends up in a draw.

Another try for White would have been 30  $\mathbb{A}a8+$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  (30... $\mathbb{A}f8$  is slightly passive) 31  $\mathbb{A}a7$ , as in the previous diagram position, but with the king being on g7, rather than on g8. However, 31... $\mathbb{A}d2$  still holds, since 32  $\mathbb{A}e8$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$  33  $\mathbb{A}xf7$   $\mathbb{A}e1$  just transposes to the earlier line.

The draw is therefore justifiable, even if the spectators would have learned a little more had it been played out.

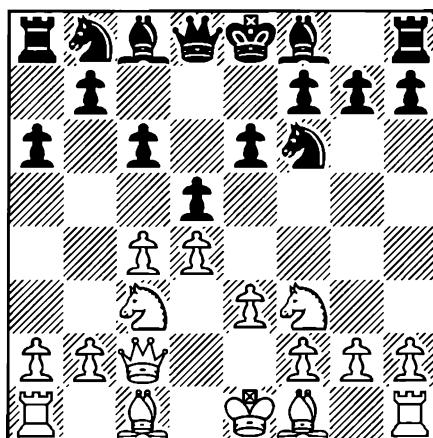
## Game Six: Gelfand-Anand

You've guessed it, another draw, another endgame, again not reaching the second time control. What is disappointing for the viewers is not so much the succession of draws, but rather that neither player at any stage seemed prepared to grind out for a win. There appear to have been several minor inaccuracies by both sides in previous rounds, but neither player seemed prepared to take on the initiative. We would have preferred to see long endgame struggles, to move 60 and beyond, but the players were happy enough to level out, just wanting to reach the next round with as little stress as possible.

Anything new in game six?

18th May 2012  
**B.Gelfand-V.Anand**  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 6)  
Semi-Slav with 5...a6

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  4 e3 e6 5  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  a6 6  $\mathbb{W}c2$



Something new, at least for this match. It is not so clear that Black is genuinely fully

equal after 6 b3, as in games two and four, but Gelfand was unable to achieve more than a draw over the board. Time to check out new ideas.

6...c5

**Question:** Why this second move with the c-pawn?

Isn't it simply just a waste of a tempo?

Such a move must be made carefully, for a less experienced player. Unless the timing is correct, it can easily be a bad waste of time. Here White has weakened his d4-pawn slightly by moving his queen off the d-file, so Black wants to counter-attack with ...c6-c5 and ...Qc6, as soon as possible. There may also be occasional hits on the queen with ...Qb4.

Then there is the battle with the pawn centre. If White were now to play 7 Qd3 or 7 Qe2, Black instantly regains the tempo by 7...dxc4 8 Qxc4 with quick equality. Or he can try, more ambitiously, 7...Qc6. White has not gained anything.

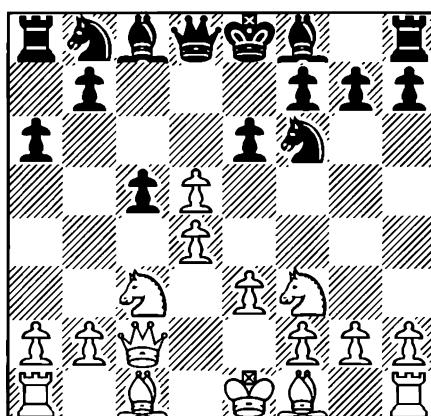
If White were to exchange with 7 dxc5 instead, Black again regains his tempo with 7...Qxc5, since he has not spent time on playing ...Qe7 or ...Qd6 before the recapture.

7 Qd2 is too much of a quiet developing move to be dangerous. If we remember the second and fourth games, Black positively encouraged Qd2 by playing ...Qb4, even though the black bishop would soon retreat.

This second push with the c-pawn is the most direct way for Black to equalize. After 6...Qbd7 or 6...Qd6 he would have to work harder.

**7 cxd5**

So White makes his other central pawn exchange.



**7...exd5**

**Question:** Why does Black allow himself to get stuck with an isolated d-pawn?

Surely he would want to keep his pawn structure fluid, with 7...Qxd5 or 7...cxd4 - ?

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

The question is one of tempo. Black has already used up an extra pawn move, with ...c7-c6 and then ...c6-c5, and while ...a7-a6 is often a good and useful move, it does not help develop his pieces. At the moment, White has three pieces in play, Black only one. It would be unwise to open up the centre too quickly, and therefore he wants to keep a pawn on d5.

a) 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  8  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{W}xd5$  leaves White several possibilities to keep an edge. One idea is 9 b4 c4 10  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$   $\mathbb{Q}xb4+$  11  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$  12  $\mathbb{W}xd2$ , and Black will take several moves to finish his development. Not 12... $\mathbb{W}xc4?$  13  $\mathbb{Q}c1$ , skewering the queen.

b) 7...cxd4 8  $\mathbb{Q}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  9  $\mathbb{W}xd4$  is also troublesome.

When playing as Black, it is sometimes necessary to make slight concessions with the pawn structure, to give breathing space for the pieces.

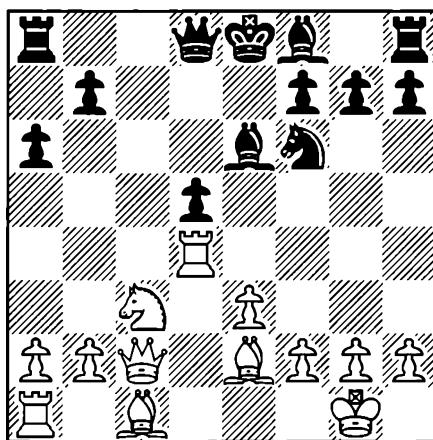
**8  $\mathbb{Q}e2$**

It is too early to initiate the exchange on c5. After all, Black can do nothing constructive with his c-pawn. 8...c4? 9 e4 swallows another tempo, and Black's pawns become weaker, rather than stronger.

**8... $\mathbb{Q}e6$**

The sort of breathing space that is needed after Black has played ...e6xd5.

**9 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}c6$  10  $\mathbb{Q}d1$  cxd4 11  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  12  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$**



**Question:** Any particular reason why 12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$  or 12... $\mathbb{Q}d6$  would be preferable to the other?

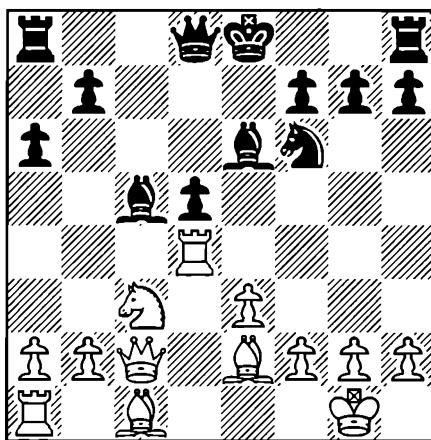
**12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$**

Anand would have needed to calculate carefully over the next few moves, and indeed he was content to sacrifice the d-pawn later on, just to ensure that all his pieces became active, and more so than his opponent's.

A completely positional defensive response would be something like 12... $\mathbb{Q}d6$  13  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  0-0 14 h3  $\mathbb{W}d7$ , followed by bringing the rooks into the centre. The only problem is that if

Black decides that, at some stage, he needs to push the rook away from d4, with ... $\mathbb{R}c5$ , or ... $\mathbb{R}e5$ , he would probably have lost a tempo. The counter-argument might be that the rook will have to move away anyway for reasons of safety. For instance, if White were eventually to play  $\mathbb{A}d2$  while it is still on d4, the rook would be short of escape squares; while if White were to try, probably unwisely, b2-b3, there would be uncomfortable attacks and pins with ... $\mathbb{A}e5$ , and along the c-file.

My own personal preference would be 12... $\mathbb{A}d6$ , but I am not suggesting that Anand's move here was wrong. In most interesting and tense positions, there will be more than one reasonable choice.



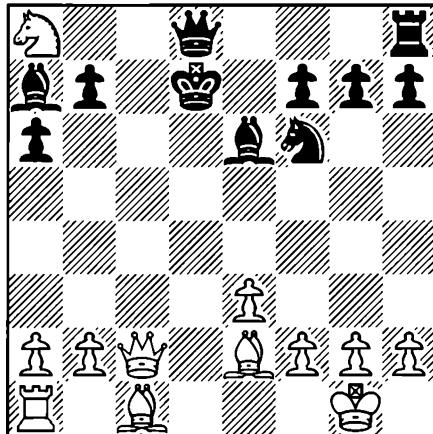
**Question:** And the question I did not ask before.

What are the tactics like after 13  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  - ?

### 13 $\mathbb{Q}d1$

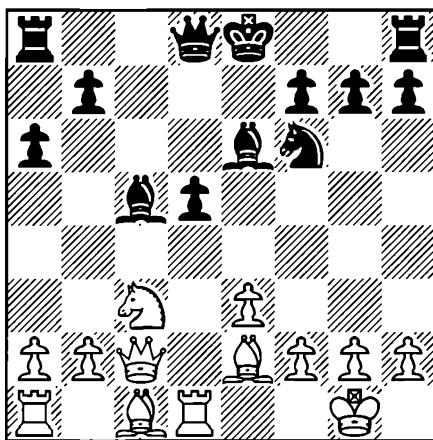
Gelfand ignores the invitation. The tactics end up only level, and Gelfand still hopes for a win by positional methods.

The sharp line is 13  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{R}xd4$  14  $\mathbb{Q}c7+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  15  $\mathbb{Q}xa8$  (15  $\mathbb{Q}xe6$   $fxe6$  16  $exd4$  gives White reasonable compensation for the exchange, but no more than that) 15... $\mathbb{A}a7$ .



The knight is trapped, and there is no clear way of bringing it back into play. This is dangerous enough to reject the whole line. In fact, and surprisingly, White can force a repetition with 16  $\mathbb{W}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  17  $\mathbb{W}f4!$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  (or 17... $\mathbb{A}b8$  18  $\mathbb{W}b4!$   $\mathbb{A}d6$  19  $\mathbb{W}b6$   $\mathbb{Q}b8$  20  $\mathbb{W}xd8+$   $\mathbb{B}xd8$  21  $\mathbb{Q}a4$  and the knight escapes with equality) 18  $\mathbb{W}a4+$ , a good line, but not what Gelfand would have wanted.

Instead, he develops, waiting to see what Anand does next. There is indeed a choice coming up.



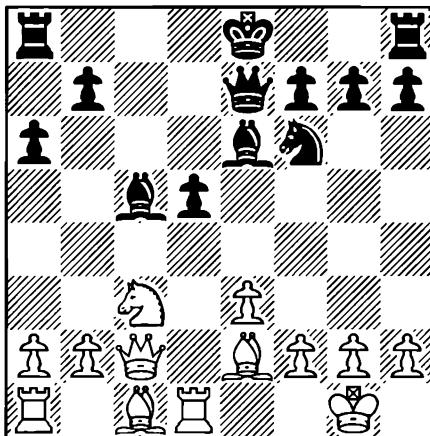
**Question:** A queen move now, but which is better, 13... $\mathbb{W}e7$  or 13... $\mathbb{W}d6$  - ?

**13... $\mathbb{W}e7$**

An extremely difficult position to try to evaluate. Anand is a vastly experienced grandmaster, and World Champion, with great tenacity in defence. He decides that this move,

protecting the c5-bishop but abandoning control of the d5-pawn, is sufficient to hold the game. He loses a pawn, but his pieces are so much better developed, he would argue that White has no realistic chances of playing for a win. We will try to assess this point of view later.

Here 13... $\mathbb{W}d6$  looks slightly uncomfortable, so maybe instincts should prevail. After 14  $\mathbb{W}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  15  $\mathbb{W}b3$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  16  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}d8$  14  $\mathbb{Q}d2$ , White is starting to create the standard pressure against the isolated d-pawn.



**Question:** White is about to win the d-pawn, but where does he want his queen? On c2 or b3? The choice is either 14  $\mathbb{W}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  15  $\mathbb{W}b3$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  16  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  0-0, or, as in the game, 14  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  0-0, in either case followed by captures on d5.

#### 14 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Keeping a minimal edge for White.

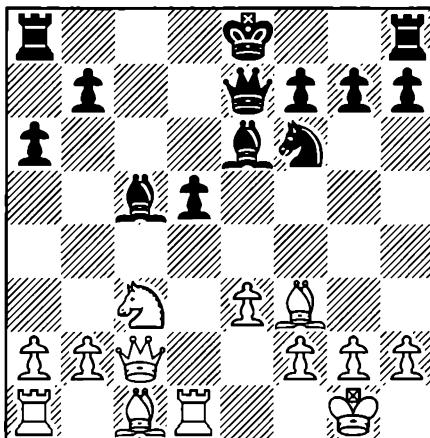
At first, it might appear that the suggested alternative, 14  $\mathbb{W}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  15  $\mathbb{W}b3$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  16  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  0-0 17  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ , is a considerable improvement for White, as Black no longer has the same pressure on c2 (after ... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ ) as in the game.

However, Black can improve with 14... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ ? The king is slightly awkwardly placed, but not weak, and Black can perhaps get his kingside moving with ...h7-h5. Meanwhile, much of the pressure on d5 has been lost. After 15  $\mathbb{Q}f3$ , White has a slight edge, but probably no more (see the comments in the game after 14  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}d8$  15  $\mathbb{W}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$ ).

A more ambitious line, perhaps, would be 15  $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ ?, completing his development, and ignoring the isolated d-pawn for the time being. Black's main problem is how to complete his own development, while avoiding the bishop being in the way of the rook pair. If 15...g6, there is an unexpected plan of attack with 16  $\mathbb{Q}b1!$ ? (a computer suggestion) 16... $\mathbb{Q}e4$  (making it more difficult for White to control the long diagonal with  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ ) 17  $\mathbb{Q}e1$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  18  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  b5 19  $\mathbb{W}c2$  b4 (again keeping White off the long diagonal) 20 a3 a5 21  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

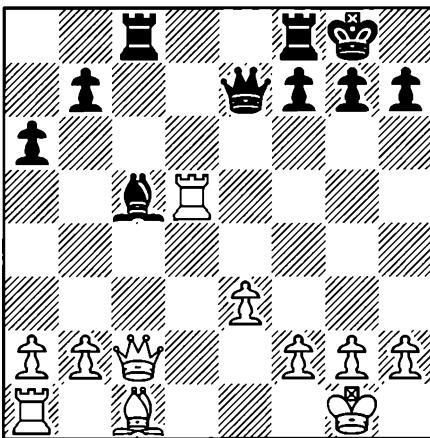
dxe4 22  $\mathbb{W}xe4$ , and White has finally won the pawn, even if his queenside pieces have been temporarily undeveloped.



**14...0-0**

This was the last chance to abandon the pawn sacrifice. 14... $\mathbb{B}d8$  15  $\mathbb{W}a4+$   $\mathbb{Q}f8$ , as in the previous note, could now be met by 16 b3, and if 16... $\mathbb{B}b4$ , then 17  $\mathbb{Q}b1!$  with an edge. The tactical point is that 17... $\mathbb{A}d7$  is answered by 18  $\mathbb{W}xb4!$   $\mathbb{W}xb4$  19  $\mathbb{A}a3$ , with favourable simplification for White.

**15  $\mathbb{A}xd5$   $\mathbb{A}xd5$  16  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  17  $\mathbb{B}xd5$   $\mathbb{B}ac8$**



**Question:** What should White do next? Can he keep the extra pawn successfully?

**18  $\mathbb{A}d2$**

White has a microscopic edge. This move is only good if White is unable to keep an edge

by trying to hold the pawn. Gelfand could not see anything for him by passively defending. That being the case, this was a good attempt to keep a slight edge. Anand had played the defence impressively. Few would have had the confidence to defend such a position a pawn down.

The main problem for White is in bringing the bishop into play, and then the rook. Gelfand achieves this immediately, at the cost of giving back his extra pawn.

Instead, 18  $\mathbb{W}e2$  is natural, but after 18... $\mathbb{W}e4$ , Black's pieces are strong. For instance, 19  $\mathbb{B}d3 \mathbb{W}xd3$  20  $\mathbb{B}xd3 \mathbb{B}fd8$  21  $\mathbb{B}xd8+$   $\mathbb{W}xd8$  22  $\mathbb{Q}f1 \mathbb{B}d1+$  and it is clear that White is not winning. He has still not developed his rook and bishop.

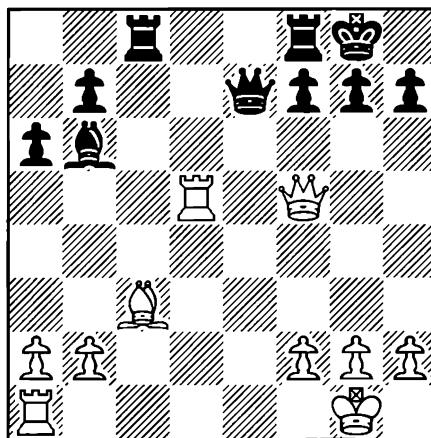
White wants to keep the e4-square covered, so possibly 18  $\mathbb{W}f5$  g6 19  $\mathbb{W}f3 \mathbb{B}fd8$  20  $\mathbb{B}xd8+$   $\mathbb{B}xd8$  21 g3, which is still difficult for Black to play. The best response seems to be 21... $\mathbb{Q}d6$  22 b3  $\mathbb{Q}e5$  23  $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{W}d7$  24  $\mathbb{W}e4$  and now 24... $\mathbb{W}c6!$  25  $\mathbb{W}xc6 \mathbb{B}d1+$  26  $\mathbb{Q}g2 bxc6$ , when a familiar positional draw results.

Naturally, it is easy enough to generate other lines, but the likelihood is that they will all end up in a draw, with accurate play.

**18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  19  $\mathbb{Q}c3$**

19  $\mathbb{W}d3$  is a simple draw offer. White still wants to try for more.

**19... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  20  $\mathbb{W}f5$**



And indeed it is easy to see why Gelfand wants to carry on. He has chances, maybe small but not negligible, to play for a win, whereas Black has no chance of more than a draw.

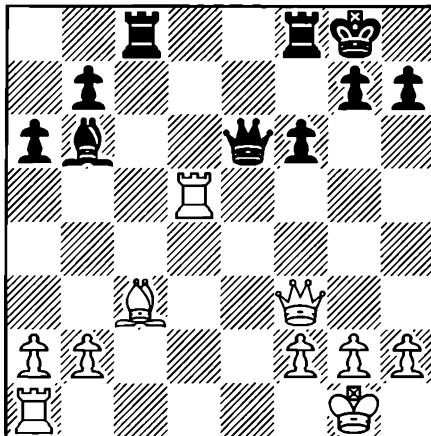
**Question:** What's the best way for Black to steady the boat?

**20... $\mathbb{W}e6?$**

A slightly strange move, pushing White's queen to a safer square. Anand seems to be concentrating a little *too* much on defence, and less on finding the best squares for the pieces.

Here 20... $\mathbb{B}c5$  is equal. If rooks start to be exchanged, Black's defence becomes much easier. Indeed, 21  $\mathbb{B}xc5 \mathbb{W}xc5$  would be a good time to agree a draw; while 21  $\mathbb{W}g4 f5 22 \mathbb{W}d4 \mathbb{B}xd5 23 \mathbb{W}xd5+ \mathbb{W}f7$  is also safe for Black. After 24  $\mathbb{B}d1 \mathbb{W}xd5 25 \mathbb{B}xd5 \mathbb{B}d8$ , the bishop ending would be drawn.

**21  $\mathbb{W}f3 f6$**



**Question:** White has just been handed a slight positional edge.  
What is the best way of keeping up the pressure?

**22 h4**

A strange move, a defensive move, pretending to be the start of an attack. What is important is not a pawn push to h5 or even h6, but rather trying to put pieces on dominating squares. To keep any sort of edge, White needs to try to control the centre, not make a random pawn push on the kingside. The centre is open and he has good pieces there.

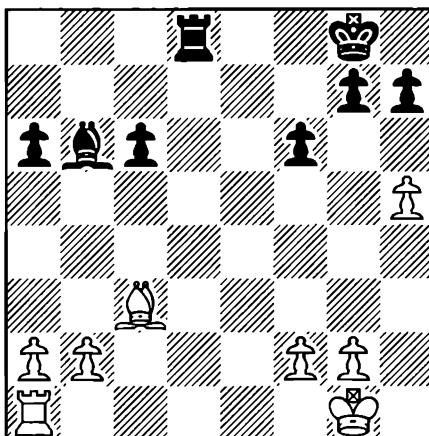
Having said that, it is not so obvious that White is going to be better anyway. Possibly 22  $\mathbb{B}e1 \mathbb{W}f7 22 \mathbb{W}f5$ , to try to irritate Black again. He should not create extra weaknesses for his pawns.

**22... $\mathbb{W}c6$**

22... $\mathbb{B}fe8$  looks simple and equal.

**23 h5**

Perhaps the problem is the second pawn move, rather than the first. 23  $\mathbb{B}ad1$  at least avoids creating a pawn weakness on h5, but play should still end up equal after 23... $\mathbb{B}cd8$ .  
23... $\mathbb{B}fd8 24 \mathbb{B}xd8+ \mathbb{B}xd8 25 \mathbb{W}xc6 bxc6$



If White still had a pawn on h3, rather than on h5, he might probe for Black's queenside pawn weaknesses. As it is, White has to be careful to protect his own kingside pawns.

**26  $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{Q}f7$  27  $g4 \mathbb{Q}d4$  28  $\mathbb{B}c1 \mathbb{Q}xc3$  29  $\mathbb{Q}xc3 \mathbb{Q}d4 \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$**

After 30  $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{Q}xg4+$  31  $\mathbb{Q}f1 a5$  32  $\mathbb{B}c5 a4$  33  $\mathbb{B}b5$ , White can cover his pawns. So draw agreed.

This was the most interesting of the “quiet draws” so far. Anand’s pawn sacrifice in the late opening seemed to hold, both in play and in analysis, though the position was tense.

Readers will notice a pattern in the first six draws. Play was sharp early on, in games one and three, when both players were happy to take the occasional calculated risk; but later on, they both wanted to play quiet and technical chess.

Of the “quiet draws”, several were perhaps not quite as accurate as they looked. Games two and four should have kept a slight edge for White (Gelfand), his pieces being slightly but significantly better developed; whereas in game five, Anand (as White) could have created more pressure on one of the pawns. Small edges, and not necessarily enough to make a significant advantage, but even finding just one chance of a genuine advantage would alter the balance of the match.

People were starting to speculate as to what would happen if all twelve games were drawn, and the match end up in a rapidplay finish, and who was going to be the more successful in that aspect of chess. Going through the statistics, Anand had a reasonably significant edge at the faster time limits, but of course one slip could easily change the balance. And so, in the end, it happened. However, there were some massive surprises before the players could think about the rapidplay.

## Game Seven: Gelfand-Anand

After six draws, Gelfand, the supposed underdog, takes the first win, and convincingly so. There were no sharp tactics, and no delicate endgame squeeze, but instead a middlegame

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

positional grind in which Anand, for once, did not handle his knights effectively, while Gelfand's knights, with the help of queen and rook dominating the c-file, broke through with great force.

It is technically relatively easy to write up a game in which one player won and the other lost. You need to find the losing move, the move which put the other player on the slide. Therefore, after six draws, it is almost a relief not having to try to analyse the many ups and downs of a drawn game, in the full understanding that most such possible inaccuracies did not make the difference to the result of the game. There is often quite a large margin of safety in a drawn game, whereas in a decisive one there is a far more distinct boundary between being safe and either losing or being on the way down.

Organizational point: Yes, Gelfand is playing White two games in a row. This is easily explained. The routine in the match was game-game-rest-game-game-rest, and so on. Halfway through the match, the players flipped, so that now Gelfand has the first White in the next sequence of two game pairs.

20th May 2012

B.Gelfand-V.Anand

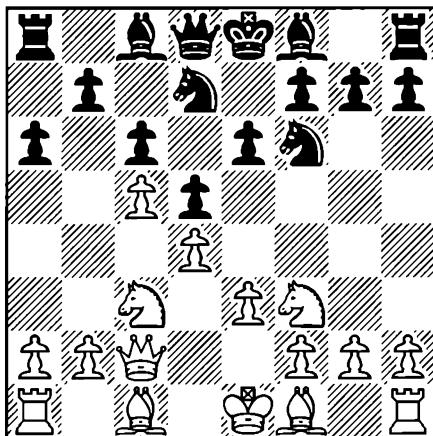
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 7)

Semi-Slav with 5...a6

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♜f3 a6 6 c5**

At least it is asymmetrical, perhaps no bad thing psychologically if Anand, as Black, is fully geared towards highly symmetrical pawn structures, as part of his defensive plans. Here the asymmetry lies only on the a- b- and c-files. The rest, from files d to h, is symmetrical.

6... ♜bd7 7 ♜c2



7...b6

**Question:** Is this a good move?

The computer suggests that the position is equal after the 7...b6 pawn exchange, and yet it is difficult to be convinced that Black is fully equal. His pieces are very slightly misplaced, and in the play which follows, Black is unhappy having the knight on b6, rather than on c6 (after he has played ...c6-c5). Black remained under pressure throughout the game.

There were, of course, good alternatives for Black, mainly based on the idea of ...e6-e5 and then setting up a wide broad pawn front, as opposed to the narrow front on the a- to c-files.

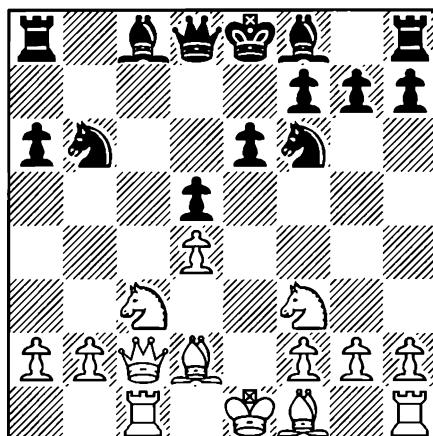
For instance, 7...e5 is a far more direct response to White's flank pawn push. Black does not even have to bother preparing with 7... $\mathbb{W}c7$ , as 7...e5 8 dx $e$ 5  $\mathbb{Q}g4$  is lively, but probably about equal.

In the context of the match, Anand quite simply did not want to play anything lively as Black. He just wanted to cut down anything unpredictable. This, it seems, was his basic error in thinking.

**8 cx $b$ 6  $\mathbb{Q}xb$ 6**

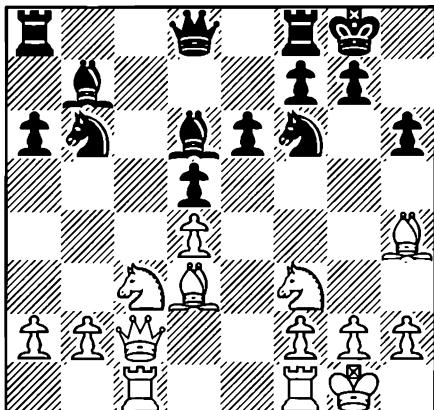
After 8... $\mathbb{W}xb$ 6 9  $\mathbb{Q}a$ 4, followed by  $\mathbb{Q}d$ 2, White is probing the black queenside.

**9  $\mathbb{Q}d$ 2 c5 10  $\mathbb{E}c$ 1 cxd4 11 exd4**



White is ahead in development, and it is still unclear as to what Black should do with his b6-knight. It is already an opening success for Gelfand. Note that there is nothing wrong with White's isolated d-pawn: it helps create knight outposts on c5 or e5.

**11... $\mathbb{Q}d$ 6 12  $\mathbb{Q}d$ 3 0-0 13  $\mathbb{Q}g$ 5 h6 14  $\mathbb{Q}h$ 4  $\mathbb{Q}b$ 7 15 0-0**

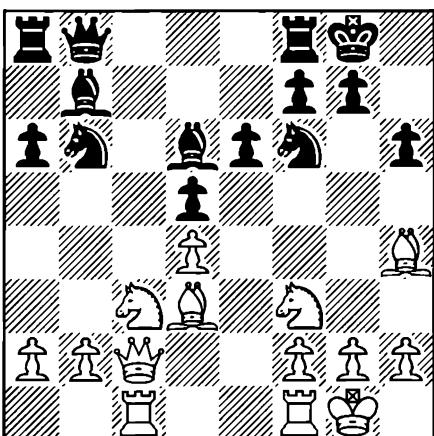


**15...WB8**

Anand, too, knows about any unusual thought processes by his opponent. His f6-knight is pinned and, if given the chance by White, most players would feel confident about doubling the f-pawns, unless there is a definite improvement in playing differently. We have already seen, in game four, how Gelfand rejected doubling up Anand's f-pawns on move 24, and how Anand was able to equalize comfortably, rather than being slightly inferior.

Here Anand could have tried 15...Qbd7, and only later breaking the pin with a queen move. It is possible that White has nothing better to do than to play 16 Qg3 anyway, in which case Anand's queen shuffle would have been unnecessary.

Instead, Anand allowed his opponent to create the doubled pawns.



**16 Qg3**

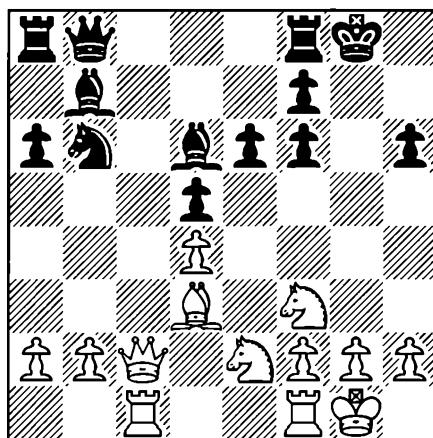
**Question:** How much would White achieve by doubling the black pawns here?

The quiet bishop retreat was greeted with some surprise by the commentators. Gelfand has certainly found a consistent plan: forcing the exchange of the dark-squared bishops so as to take full advantage of the e5- and c5-squares for his pieces. This keeps a slight edge for a while, but with careful play Black can reach close to equality. If Black can defend his sore squares, it is not so clear what White can do after that.

Structural pawn weaknesses, such as broken pawns, can create long-term problems, right up to the endgame even if the remaining pieces are relatively active. With pieces, the more active player always has to be aware that if the defender can gradually activate his forces, and if his pawns are as good as his opponents', then he should gradually equalize the game. There are plenty of examples in this book, notably in some of the earlier games by Black by Anand.

This leaves the question of how seriously damaged the pawns are after 16  $\mathbb{A}xf6$   $gxf6$  17  $\mathbb{Q}e2$ . If you have not tried it out on the computer, then do so. Just go through a few sample moves, suggested by the computer, and see what happens a few moves down the line.

Ready?



The problem you might well find for Black is not so much the weakness of the doubled f-pawns, but rather the isolated pawns, on a6 and h6, on both sides of the board. For example, after 17... $\mathbb{B}c8$  18  $\mathbb{W}d2$ , the white queen is excellently placed, with ideas of  $\mathbb{W}a5$ , as well as keeping the h6-pawn under threat. Black may try to simplify with 18... $\mathbb{B}xc1$  19  $\mathbb{B}xc1$   $\mathbb{W}f8$  20  $\mathbb{Q}g3$ , but then he has pawn weaknesses on both sides of the board, and his pieces are equally stretched to cover both sides. If Black were to try to keep his pieces active with 20... $\mathbb{B}c8$  21  $\mathbb{B}xc8$   $\mathbb{A}xc8$  22  $\mathbb{W}a5$ , the pawns are in danger of collapsing.

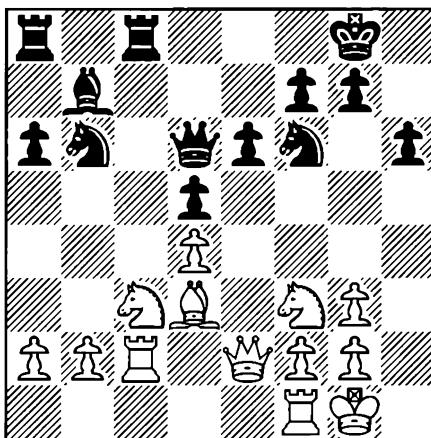
It is difficult to see any obvious way for Black to achieve equality. White just seems substantially better. The line that Gelfand actually played does not seem so impressive, and it would seem that Anand needed to make further slight errors before he was worse, then losing.

**16...Bc8 17 We2 Axg3 18 hxg3**

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

The main point of Gelfand's plan of attack would appear to be that, by exchanging the dark-squared bishops, he now has the opportunity to take control of the e5-square for the knight, and later, the c5-square for the other knight. The only problem is that, in his attempt to dominate on the dark squares, his d4-pawn, a dark-squared pawn, is slightly weak. Black should be able to hold the position.

18... $\mathbb{W}d6$  19  $\mathbb{E}c2$



19... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$

The computer suggests that there are more than a dozen moves that give Black clear equality. There are no tactics on view. In other words, this is a positional battle.

**Question:** Is Anand's move bad, in that he is allowing White to play  $\mathbb{Q}a4$  - ?  
Or alternatively, is he okay and just equal anyway?

At first glance, Anand's move looks a little too passive to be good. "Passivity" implies quietly trying to defend a slightly worse position – but if his position is level, then he has defended successfully, rather than defended passively. The critical position is not now but a couple of moves further on. Black was holding the balance, but he made a mistake later.

A more combative approach might be 19... $\mathbb{Q}c4$  (starting to put pressure on White's pawns) 20  $\mathbb{E}fc1$   $\mathbb{W}b4$ . Again, the computer suggests that there are about a dozen moves which are equal here. Clearly, no annotator could be expected to go through them all and summarize conclusions. There is so much more to try to work out in run-of-the-mill positional battles than in wild tactics. In positional chess, the difficult point is sieving through many ordinary-looking moves, trying to see if just one of these might give a slight edge (or equality, or good defensive chances, or whatever). Whereas with tactics, there are fewer moves which need to be considered – a check or a capture, say – but each choice of move, whether by the player or the defender, will have radically different outcomes.

One possible drawn outcome would be 21  $\mathbb{Q}d1$  (to put pressure on the c4-knight)

21... $\mathbb{W}b6$ , when there is an immediate repetition with 22  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ . Black has also positioned his pieces in such a way that White cannot profitably win a pawn by a capture on c4. If White were to take there, then Black can open up the long diagonal, with ...d5xc4, or possibly first ... $\mathbb{B}xd4$ , after which Black is ready, among other things, to take on f3 and win the d-pawn.

And what about the other dozen drawish moves for Black? I leave this to you to try to see if you can find something. My own positional instincts are that Black cannot possibly be better, after reasonable play by both sides. There is no sense in attempting to win the position by force.

The quickest draw, at first illogical but in fact reasonable enough, would be 19... $\mathbb{Q}g4$  20  $\mathbb{Q}g5$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  21  $\mathbb{Q}f3$ , again with s repetition. The knight on g4 is useful, providing a different way of covering any thoughts of  $\mathbb{Q}e5$ .

Perhaps White could try 20  $\mathbb{B}fc1$  instead, but then 20...a5, for example, is still about equal.

#### 20 $\mathbb{B}fc1$

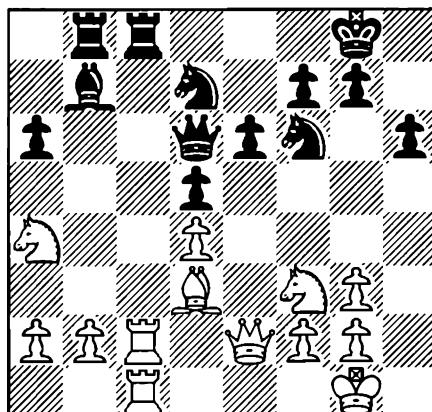
According to the computer, there are now two choices for White which keep him fully equal: the text move and 20 a3.

#### 20... $\mathbb{B}ab8$

Whereas here there are three fully reasonable choices for Black that aim for equality. These are the text move, 20... $\mathbb{B}c7$ , and 20... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ . Other moves, the computer seems to suggest, might give White the very slightest of edges.

#### 21 $\mathbb{Q}a4$

And now half a dozen reasonable moves by White, with complete equality. The move that Gelfand chose was, in fact, well out of the top dozen, but once the move gets played, the computer sees outcomes, and agrees that it is equal.



**Question:** What should Black play here? The main choice, according to the computer, is between 21... $\mathbb{Q}e4$  and 21... $\mathbb{B}xc2$ .

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Actually, we can add to a third reasonable choice for Black: 21...a5!?. If White responds with 22  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ , attempting to exploit the weakness on b5, then perhaps 22... $\mathbb{W}b4$  or 22... $\mathbb{W}b6$  and Black is fully in play.

Instead, Anand tried:

**21... $\mathbb{Q}e4?$**

This seems too quick a jump from defence (on the queenside) to attack (in the centre), especially as Black is not really attacking anything. He needs to watch what is happening with White's queenside pressure.

21... $\mathbb{B}xc2!$  is not a surrender of the c-file, but rather is the start of counterplay along that file. For example:

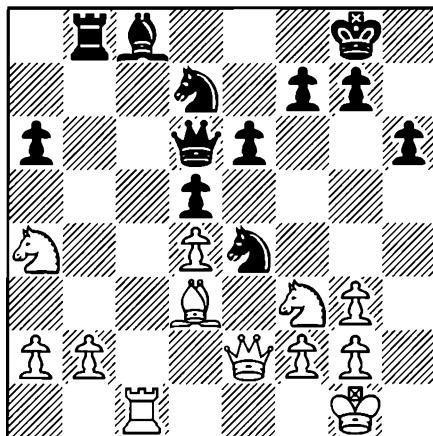
a) 22  $\mathbb{B}xc2$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  23  $\mathbb{Q}c5?$  (23  $\mathbb{Q}c3$  is safer, with a possible offer of repetition with 23... $\mathbb{B}b7$  24  $\mathbb{Q}a4$ ) 23... $\mathbb{B}b5!$ , and now his bishop is no longer "bad", but is able to force an exchange with the previously good bishop. White will have to watch out for his isolated d-pawn.

b) 22  $\mathbb{W}xc2$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  23  $\mathbb{Q}c5$  looks impressive on the queenside, but White's centre is going to be badly eroded after 23...e5!. On 24 dx5, Black can even try for an advantage with 24... $\mathbb{W}b6!?$ .

With best play, 21... $\mathbb{B}xc2$  would have been equal. So the game was not the totally one-sided win by Gelfand, as it might at first appear.

**22  $\mathbb{B}xc8+$   $\mathbb{Q}xc8$**

Black has given up control of the file, as 22... $\mathbb{B}xc8?$  23  $\mathbb{B}xc8+$   $\mathbb{Q}xc8$  24  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  dx5 25  $\mathbb{W}xe4$  wins a pawn.



**Question:** What should White do next?

**23  $\mathbb{W}c2!?$**

Both players are becoming extremely nervous mid-match, and it shows in their choice

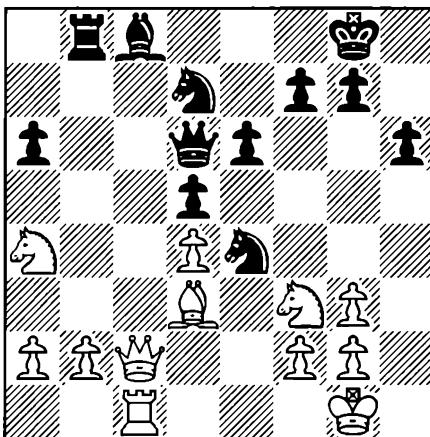
of moves. Gelfand is aiming for total security on the c-file, neglecting other avenues of attack. It is time to concentrate on the dark-squared diagonals, rather than the files.

a) 23 a3?!  $\mathbb{Q}df6$  24 b4  $\mathbb{A}d7$  is too slow, using up too many pawn moves. After 25  $\mathbb{Q}c5$   $\mathbb{A}b5!$  (pinning White's bishop), Black is more than equal.

b) 23  $\mathbb{W}e3$   $\mathbb{W}b4$  might perhaps give White a slight edge, but he can also cover the b4-square with his queen...

c) 23  $\mathbb{W}e1!$  is the best way to create pressure. White keeps an edge, with ideas perhaps of  $\mathbb{W}a5$ . After 23... $\mathbb{Q}df6$  26  $\mathbb{Q}e5$ , White has more pressure on the dark squares; or 23... $\mathbb{A}b7$  24 b4  $\mathbb{A}c6$  25  $\mathbb{Q}c5$   $\mathbb{A}b5$ , and this time the d3-bishop is no longer pinned so White can play 26  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $dxe4$  27  $\mathbb{A}xe4$ .

Whatever happens, Black is under pressure. He lost his positional balance on move 21.



**Question:** What should Black do next?

**23...g5?**

Certainly not this. Again, this is an extremely nervous response, attacking with a pawn, hoping he can achieve something, while ignoring the main threats along the c-file.

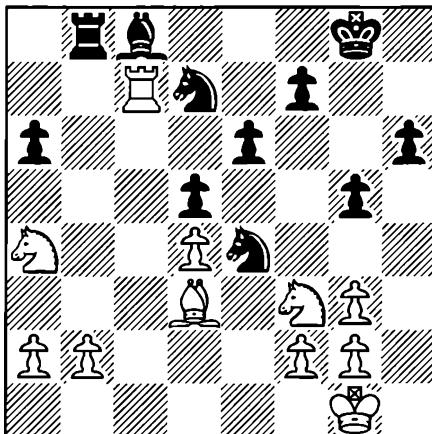
Black does not even have all his pieces in play, so 23... $\mathbb{A}b7!$  has priority and just about holds the balance. The immediate defensive tactic is that 24  $\mathbb{W}c7??$  runs into 24... $\mathbb{B}c8$ , and White loses material. Instead, 24  $\mathbb{Q}c5$   $\mathbb{B}c8$  25 b4 is still tense, but one possibility for Black is 25... $\mathbb{W}b6$  26 a3  $\mathbb{Q}df6$ , when he is starting to show some good defensive coordination.

**24  $\mathbb{W}c7$**

Of course. Now White is significantly better.

**24... $\mathbb{W}xc7$  25  $\mathbb{B}xc7$**

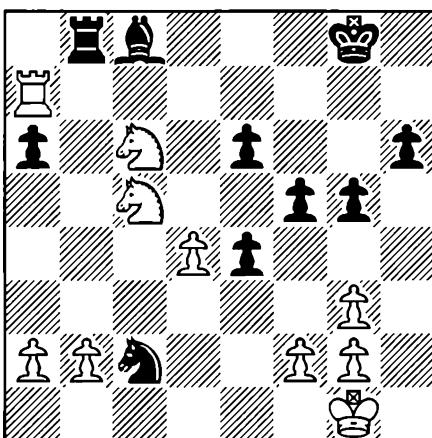
Positionally winning. Just take a look on the rook on the seventh, and Black's bad bishop, which in the end gets lost. It took a dozen or so moves to mop up, Gelfand finding ways to manoeuvre his knights to excellent outpost squares.



**25...f6**

This may well be regarded as another weak move, but in reality the position cannot be held anyway.

**26 ♜xe4 dxe4 27 ♜d2 f5 28 ♜c4 ♜f6 29 ♜c5 ♜d5 30 ♜a7 ♜b4 31 ♜e5 ♜c2 32 ♜c6**



There is probably not much that needs to be said about the last few moves. Just note the way in which Gelfand takes over squares, move by move, with his opponent unable to muster any real opposition.

**32...♜xb2 33 ♜c7 ♜b1+ 34 ♜h2 e3 35 ♜xc8+ ♜h7 36 ♜c7+ ♜h8 37 ♜e5 e2 38 ♜xe6 1-0**

This was not quite as smooth as it looked, but Gelfand's win was thoroughly deserved. He had slightly the better of the play in many of the earlier drawn games, but he was held back by Anand's accuracy in slightly inferior positions – and also, one suspects, through Gelfand's own lack of confidence in trying to grind out fractionally superior positions.

This time, Anand's defences failed. In all the seven games up to now, Anand was better in only one.

Anand needed to up his game, even when he was still drawing. Sooner or later, Gelfand would be able to take advantage of the various minor errors. Remember, Anand lost, not because he made a single mistake, but rather because he went wrong twice. The first time, Gelfand threw away his advantage by concentrating only on the c-file, rather than taking note of the whole queenside.

After this first win, I felt at the time that we were seeing a new World Champion, in the name of Boris Gelfand, and that he would be expected to halve out to five more draws. I noted that "realistically, it is unlikely that Anand will be able to bounce back. Even so, it takes only one piece of inspired play, and, it must not be forgotten, a mistake by the opponent to allow things to level. At the time of writing, it is just under an hour before the next game will start. Has Anand composed himself to play for a win?"

## **Game Eight: Anand-Gelfand**

Chess never ceases to surprise. Just as Boris Gelfand was, it seemed, about to become World Champion, he managed to self-destruct in only 17 moves. It was not a case of great brilliance on Anand's part. He merely did what needed to be done.

The win itself was relatively easy. The difficult part was the chess-thinking early on, the way in which Anand, presumably with the help of seconds before the match, was able to find ways to induce his opponent to make mistakes.

Anand's opening was certainly very well thought out, and it would have been difficult for Gelfand to handle Black's position, even in normal circumstances. The likelihood was that he was so focused on concentrating on five more solid games, draw-draw-draw-draw-draw, that he found it difficult to handle a sharp position as Black, in full knowledge that his opponent would have prepared the opening thoroughly. He did not want to bear the tension of being Black in a long and difficult game, where he was unable to equalize quickly, and so he improvised, disastrously.

There were some apparent similarities to the earlier match between Kramnik and Aronian – to the extent that Kramnik lost a game badly, but two games later, Aronian's play fell apart, in what was basically an unsound queen sacrifice. Look closely, though, and Aronian and Gelfand collapsed in opposite directions. The match between Aronian and Kramnik was a friendly match, without the extreme tension of a World Championship, and Aronian was prepared to show to his opponent, and to the world, that he could play chess stylishly, a win followed by another brilliant win. His hopes crashed. Kramnik did not have to do anything particularly remarkable out of the opening, but defend coolly and accurately after Aronian's queen sacrifice.

In contrast, it was Anand's original and strong handling of the opening which plunged Gelfand into a tail-spin. Gelfand was not really aiming for creative ideas of his own. He was merely improvising, and without a script it did not work for him.

21st May 2012  
V.Anand-B.Gelfand  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 8)  
*Benoni Defence*

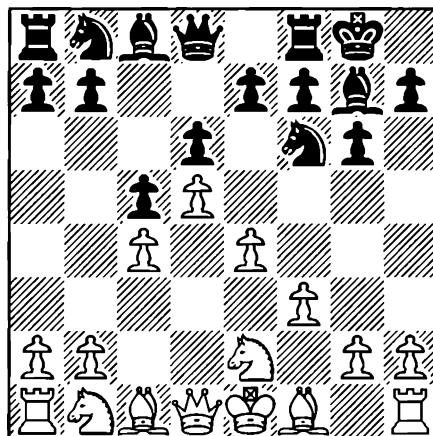
**1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 g6**

Would it have been a good or a bad idea for Gelfand to revert to the Slav and Semi-Slav set-ups? He played such lines a year ago, but suffered a couple of reverses against Carlsen, which Anand would have been aware of, and studied.

**3 f3 c5**

I suspect that this was only the third line of defence in Gelfand's opening preparation, behind the Semi-Grünfeld (3...d5), and the King's Indian (3... $\mathbb{Q}g7$  or 3...d6). Risky, given that he only needed three more draws as Black to win the title.

**4 d5 d6 5 e4  $\mathbb{Q}g7$  6  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  0-0**



**Question:** Can you find a new way for White to make life difficult for Black?

Compare and contrast with the Sämisch King's Indian: 1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 g6 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  4 e4 d6 5 f3, and in particular the line 5...0-0 6  $\mathbb{Q}ge2$  c5 7 d5.

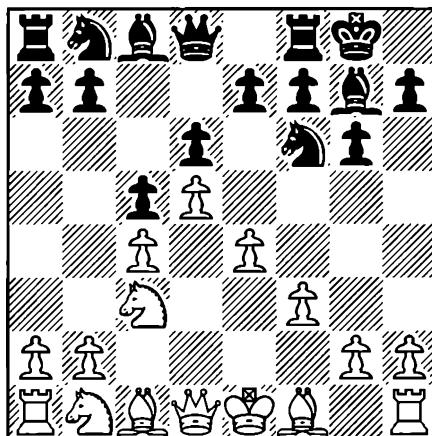
**7  $\mathbb{Q}ec3!$**

A full exclamation mark, since it was this move which ultimately won the game. White's main problem after an early f2-f3, in analogous lines of the Sämisch or the Benoni, is working out what to do with his knight on g1, for which there is no easy route to a good square. Sometimes in the Benoni, White is able to develop with  $\mathbb{Q}h3$  and  $\mathbb{Q}f2$ , once Black has already played ... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ . If, however, White has already moved the knight to e2, and the other knight is on c3, he has to spend time manoeuvring behind the lines with, for exam-

ple, ♜e3, followed by ♜c1, and perhaps ♜d3, to enable the minor pieces to begin working together.

Anand shows a simpler and more effective way to develop his knights, playing ♜ge2 and then ♜ec3, after which the other knight can decide where to go, probably to d2, perhaps occasionally to a3. It all seems marvellously effective.

There are many lines against the Benoni in which White develops his knights with ♜c3, ♜f3 and ♜fd2. Anand shows a way in which he achieves this, and with the addition of an early f2-f3 pawn push, to secure his pawns on the light squares.



**Question:** What should Black do next?

The simple answer is, "I don't know" – and of course this is a perfectly reasonable answer, for the writer as well as for the reader.

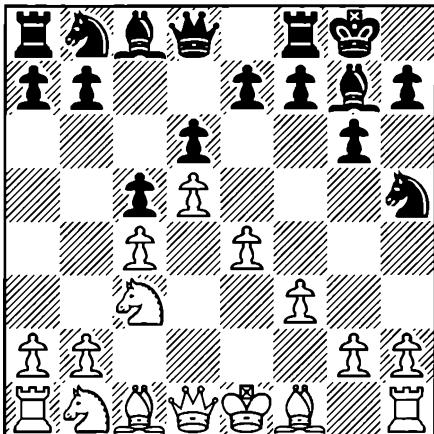
Picture, though, how difficult the position for Gelfand would be at the board, after only seven moves. The natural continuations here would perhaps be 7...e6 or 7...♜a6, but he must surely have sensed that Black is reaching a slightly inferior position in one of the main lines. He would have been happier to go through all this while preparing at home, rather than having to sort it all out over the board. In addition, he would have found it difficult, having been geared up to play ultra-solid chess, to find a sharp innovation.

Should he accept a slight disadvantage? Or should he improvise? He improvised – unsuccessfully.

Should he have avoided any lines involving King's Indian or Benoni set-ups? Perhaps that needs to be left as an open question.

**7...♜h5?!**

It just cannot be good, but perhaps it is not quite as bad as it looks. "Knights on the edges get stuck in the hedges" and all that.



**Question:** What should White do next? A kingside pawn rush, or develop his pieces?

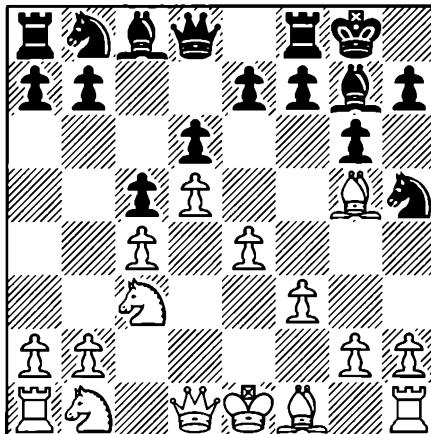
This position is already extremely tense, with both players by now being out of the book.

My own personal reaction in such a position would be to charge the pawns forward, gaining tempi after  $8 \text{ g4 } \mathbb{Q}f6 9 \text{ h4 } h5 10 \mathbb{Q}g1$ , with wild and complicated play to follow. White still has the likelihood of a slight edge. If anything starts to go wrong, however, Black would presumably find ways to create dangerous counterplay. One technical problem for White is that, because of his earlier knight manoeuvring, he cannot create a quick attack on Black's kingside pawns with  $\mathbb{Q}f4$  or  $\mathbb{Q}g3$ . In the end, this is probably how both Gelfand and Anand would have assessed the position. There is not much point in trying to gain a couple of tempi with a pawn rush when, a few moves later, he will probably have to use up a couple of tempi with the knight to cover his own weaknesses in front of the king.

Anand is in a difficult match position in that, despite being a point down, he cannot go all-out for an attack, since a second loss would have ended his chances of remaining World Champion. He therefore plays it cautiously, aiming for quiet development. Who knows – if his opponent makes one slightly strange move to break the positional balance, he might well play another strange move, this time overpressing.

**8  $\mathbb{Q}g5$**

$8 \mathbb{Q}g5$  is also good, when  $8 \dots f5$  transposes to  $8 \mathbb{Q}g5 f6 9 \mathbb{Q}e3 f5$  below.



**Question:** What should Black do next?

**8...♝f6?**

Sometimes a top grandmaster can, through over-sophistication, look like a lower division club player. It is not so clear that Black has done anything seriously wrong so far, but this move tips the balance too far.

Instead, 8...♝f6 is a natural way of starting counterplay. For example, 9 ♜e3 f5 10 exf5 ♜xf5 11 g4 ♜xb1 12 ♜xb1 ♛f4 13 ♜e4 ♜e5 is about equal. 9 ♜h4 is slightly more difficult for Black to achieve ...f7-f5 (there is pressure on the e7-pawn), but 9...♛d7 looks complicated and, again, about equal.

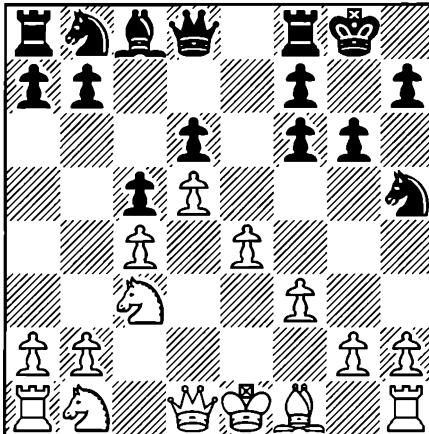
**9 ♜xf6**

Gelfand was tacitly making a draw offer with 9 ♜h6 ♜g7 10 ♜g5. Anand would never have accepted it.

**9...exf6**

This is part of Gelfand's "cunning plan". He wants to exchange his front f-pawn for one of the white pawns, while keeping the second f-pawn in place. Unfortunately, he is seriously behind in development. For example, Black would need at least four extra moves to bring the rook from a8 to e8, and even then it is not clear where the bishop, and even more so the knight on b8, will find good squares. White, too, has only one knight developed, but his other pieces are more balanced, and can get into play quickly as required.

White is better – but it is hard to imagine that the game is already more than half way through.

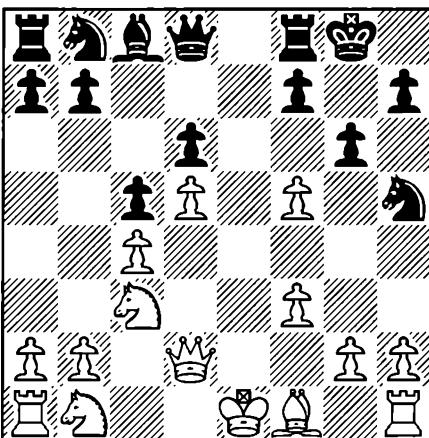


**10  $\mathbb{W}d2$**

Covering the c1-h6 diagonal is a good consistent plan. He also makes an escape square (d1) for the king, in case Black plays a later ... $\mathbb{W}h4+$ . Anand was thinking quite a few moves ahead.

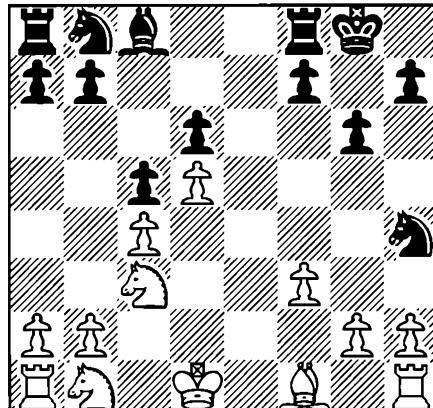
10 g4  $\mathbb{Q}g7$  11 h4  $\mathbb{Q}d7$  is no doubt also playable, with an edge for White, but Anand wants to keep his pieces, rather than his pawns, moving.

**10...f5 11 exf5**



Gelfand now had a long think, recognizing that queen, rook and knight are not enough to attack the enemy king, if White has active defensive pieces. Black's other pieces are well out of play.

The most obvious line is 11... $\mathbb{W}h4+$  12  $\mathbb{Q}d1$   $\mathbb{Q}g3$  13  $\mathbb{W}f2$   $\mathbb{Q}xf5$  14  $\mathbb{W}xh4$   $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ .

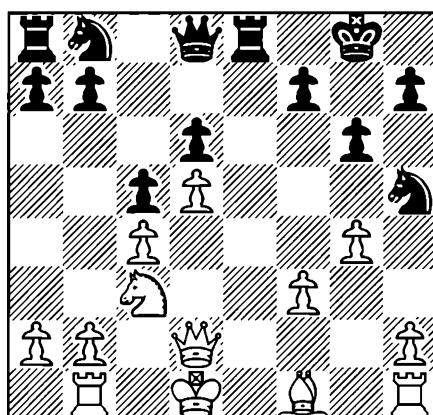


Pawns are level, neither king is under threat, and both sets of pieces are equally developed, in terms of getting off the back rank. There is, however, a horse kick at the end with 15  $\mathbb{Q}b5$ , winning a valuable central pawn.

Instead, 11...  $\mathbb{E}e8+$  12  $\mathbb{Q}d1$   $\mathbb{A}xf5$  13 g4 transposes into the main line, which we shall consider later. It is just about playable, in the sense that it is not immediately losing, but still unattractive.

Probably the best attempt to hold the position together is 11...  $\mathbb{W}e7+$  12  $\mathbb{Q}d1$   $\mathbb{A}xf5$ . Then White could try to avoid simplification with 13  $\mathbb{Q}a3?$ , or he could continue the thematic line with 13 g4  $\mathbb{A}xb1$  14  $\mathbb{E}xb1$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$ .

**11...  $\mathbb{A}xf5$  12 g4  $\mathbb{E}e8+$  13  $\mathbb{Q}d1$   $\mathbb{A}xb1$  14  $\mathbb{E}xb1$**



**Question:** Does Black have to retreat his knight with highly uncomfortable play, or he can consider attacking with 14...  $\mathbb{W}f6$  - ?  
What happens next? Clear analysis is required.

**14... $\mathbb{W}f6?$**

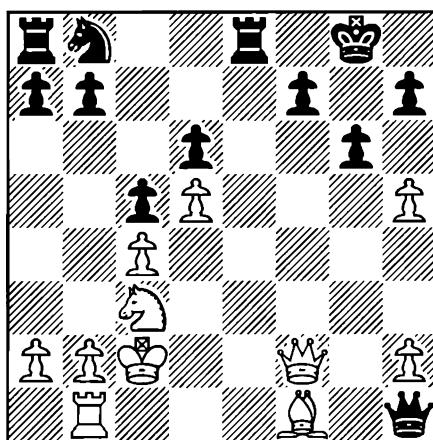
He loses in three moves!

Black could, of course, retreat his knight, but then his position, though not losing immediately, is very uncomfortable. It seems that on a bad day, overexcited by his previous success, Gelfand quite simply missed that Anand's 17th move was going to trap his queen.

**15 gxh5!**

15  $\mathbb{Q}c2$   $\mathbb{Q}f4$  16  $\mathbb{Q}e4$  leaves White better, but it is not so clear-cut. Black can, for instance, offer the exchange with 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ .

**15... $\mathbb{W}xf3+$  16  $\mathbb{Q}c2$   $\mathbb{W}xh1$  17  $\mathbb{W}f2!$  1-0**



The queen has been well and truly tagged. Gelfand presumably decided that it was hardly worth bothering trying to play on, with 17... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  18 dx $c$ 6 (but not 18  $\mathbb{Q}h3??$   $\mathbb{Q}d4+$  and the queen escapes to f3) 18... $\mathbb{W}xc6$ , as White can carry on with the presumed winning attack with 19  $\mathbb{Q}g2$   $\mathbb{W}d7$  20  $\mathbb{Q}d5$   $\mathbb{W}a4+$  21 b3  $\mathbb{W}xa2+$  22  $\mathbb{Q}b2$   $\mathbb{W}a1$ . The queen is however on a different corner, and this time it can be fully reactivated, if given the time, with ... $\mathbb{W}e1$ . White must still be winning, but it would still need care. Perhaps the most convincing line would be 23  $\mathbb{Q}f6+$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  24 h6+  $\mathbb{Q}xh6$  25  $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ , aiming for a big check with the queen on f7 if Black's king is forced to retreat. The most direct reply would be 25... $\mathbb{W}e1$ , but then 26  $\mathbb{Q}g8+$   $\mathbb{Q}h5$  27  $\mathbb{Q}f3+$   $\mathbb{Q}g5$  28  $\mathbb{W}g2+$   $\mathbb{Q}f4$  29  $\mathbb{Q}b1$ . White's checks have given himself the opportunity to bring the rook into play, and in view of mating threats with  $\mathbb{Q}f1$ , he would be winning.

So yes, Gelfand could have played on, but it was well within Anand's ability to find the winning lines. It would presumably have been too much to endure by Gelfand, with both the queen being stuck in the corners, and the king being hunted in the open. He resigned quickly.

## Game Nine: Gelfand-Anand

After six draws, the two wins – one for either side – might be expected to liven things up. Both players would be fully aware that they are each fallible. They have each lost a game, so they would be concerned not to lose another one. Equally, their opponent would each have dented armour, so it is possible for either to play for a win. Add to this the fact that there were now only four more games of long-play for one of them to find a win somewhere, and play started to get more interesting. Sooner or later, one of the players will want to avoid halving out every game, and the onus would seem to be on Gelfand to try to gain a result, before the rapidplay finishes. At long-play, the two combatants are very evenly matched, but with quick time limits Anand has achieved a big plus score.

It was not to be expected that Gelfand's play would collapse after his disastrous loss. If anything, I felt at the start of the day's game that Gelfand was still the favourite, if only slightly. He seemed, overall, to have marginally the better of the six draws.

Of course, with only four games left, any result, even a draw, will affect the odds each time. And in any critical game, individual moves can affect the whole result of the match. Anand was greatly under pressure in game nine, eventually scraping a draw. All credit to him for seeing, well in advance, that this endgame was tenable. Gelfand tried hard to set up the endgame, with reasonable chances of success, but he could not find a way to grind down Anand's defences. An excellent defensive result by Anand, it seems.

Perhaps the most critical position of the whole match was when Gelfand had to consider what to play at move 19. The problem was whether to go for a tactical solution, winning a queen against various other pieces, or whether he should have played it positionally. Winning the queen looked good at the time, but Gelfand would have had a clear edge with the positional solution. This does not necessarily mean that Anand was in any sense losing. It is more a case that he would have to defend rigorously against everything Gelfand could throw against him. In the game itself, Anand needed only one basic defensive idea – a fortress position – and he defended it excellently and drew. Would he have defended it so confidently against other options, with no simplification of the position?

Then, when we go back to an earlier stage, wasn't Anand playing slightly too extravagantly, giving away two bishops for two knights? Couldn't he have equalized instead, or at least reached a manageable inferiority?

This was the most interesting game so far – not because it was in any sense perfect chess, but rather because it was a tense and interesting battle, with several critical turning points to discuss. It was also the first serious endgame battle.

23rd May 2012  
B.Gelfand-V.Anand  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 9)  
Nimzo-Indian Defence

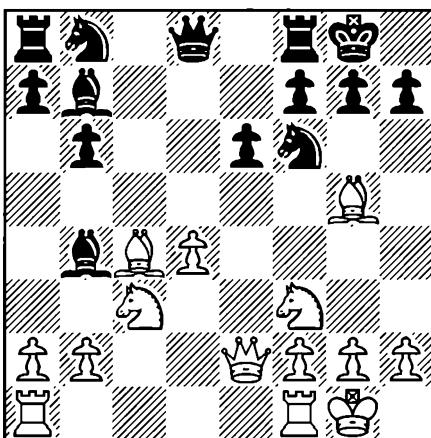
1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 e6

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Sooner or later, it was inevitable that Anand would drop the Semi-Slav with ...a7-a6. It seemed okay to try it out in games two and four, with comfortable draws in the end, but even in these Gelfand was slightly better in the opening. The longer the match continued, the more likely it was that, were Anand to continue to play ultra-symmetrically, Gelfand would find some sort of weakness. So it proved in game seven.

The problem was not so much the opening itself, but rather the mentality for Black that "my position is ultra-solid and symmetrical, therefore I cannot be worse". Tempo does matter.

3 ♘c3 ♘b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♘d3 d5 6 ♘f3 c5 7 0-0 dxc4 8 ♘xc4 cxd4 9 exd4 b6 10 ♘g5 ♘b7 11 ♘e2

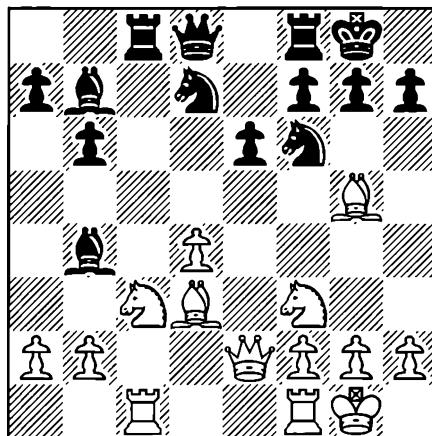


Nothing new. This was a favourite of Karpov's as Black. White has more space in the centre, but still has the isolated d-pawn.

11... ♘bd7

A recent top grandmaster game went 11... ♘xc3 12 bxc3 ♘bd7 13 ♘d3 ♘c7 14 c4 h6 15 ♘d2 ♘g4 16 ♘e4 ♘xe4 17 ♘xe4 ♘gf6 18 ♘e2 ♘c6 19 a4 ♘ac8 20 ♘fc1 ♘e4 21 ♘e3 with a slight edge to White, later a draw, in H.Nakamura-A.Giri. Dortmund 2011. We will discuss this below, after various transpositional possibilities.

12 ♘ac1 ♘c8 13 ♘d3



**Question:** How should Black handle the position?

**13...♝xc3**

If you are prepared to play the Nimzo as Black, you need to be ready to give up the bishop pair, as here.

The pin on the h4-d8 diagonal for Black is uncomfortable, but if he were to try to defend with 13...♝e7, he would be a tempo down when compared with the Queen's Gambit Declined, where Black breaks the pin in one go.

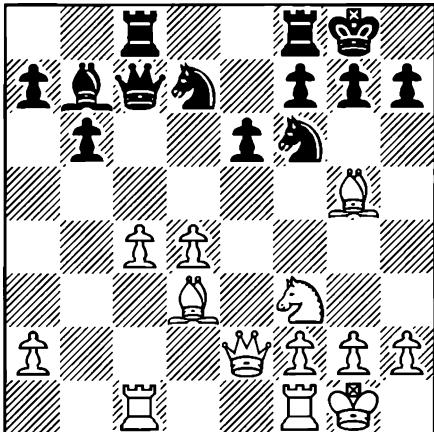
Black could insert 13...h6 14 ♘h4, but then if 14...♝xc3 15 bxc3 ♛c7, White has a better square for the bishop with ♘g3. It is better to allow it to stay on g5.

It is difficult to find any other genuinely constructive moves here. A more positive point of view is that, by exchanging off White's knight on c3, Black has less serious opposition on the long diagonal, and so his bishop remains strong. It would, for example, now be more difficult for White to aim for d4-d5.

**14 bxc3 ♛c7**

And now there is a genuinely constructive reason why Black wants to force the white pawn to the c-file. The queen is safe here, and can keep some pressure on White's central pawns.

**15 c4**



**Question:** What should Black do next?

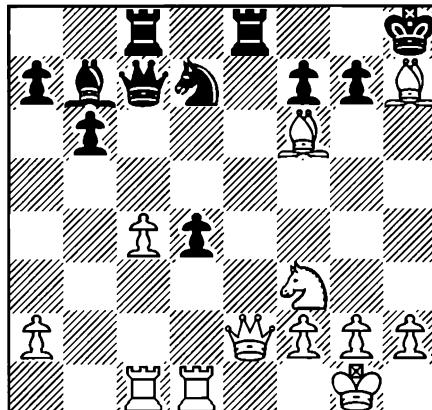
**15...♝xf3?!**

A strange move – and indeed Anand admitted this as so at his press conference. Allowing two knights against two bishops usually gives an advantage to the player with the bishops, all other things being equal. The only genuine disadvantages is where are blocked pawn structures (not here), or if the player with the knights is ahead in development (not here), or if the player with the knights has the opportunity of exchanging one of the bishops, leading to single bishop versus knight. To justify the bishop exchange, Anand needs to make a serious prod to the d4-pawn by ...e6-e5, with ideas, once the pawn structure has been clarified, of playing ...♝c5. Anand only half-achieves this at best, and Gelfand remains with the advantage.

So what improvements could have been made?

15...♝fe8!? seems a far more natural way of achieving the same idea of an early ...e6-e5, perhaps after an exchange on f3. If 16 ♘xf6 (intending 16...♝xf6 17 ♐e5), Black exchanges the bishop with 16...♝xf3! 17 ♞xf3 ♘xf6 and is comfortable. One bishop versus one knight tends to be less threatening than two bishops versus two knights.

There are other possibilities, of course, with tactics following logical play on both sides after 16 ♘fd1 e5?! (he could also try 16...h6) 17 ♘xf6 exd4 18 ♘xh7+ ♔h8.



The tactics soon fade to approximate equality after 19 ♕e7 ♔f6 20 ♜e1 ♖xf3 21 ♖xf3 ♖xe7 22 ♜xe7 ♖xe7 23 ♘d3 ♜e8.

Also, since we have referred to the Nakamura-Giri game, 15...h6 16 ♘d2 (16 ♘h4 ♖f4 favours Black slightly) 16...♗g4 17 ♕e4 ♖xe4 18 ♖xe4 ♔gf6 gives White only a modest edge. Note that Nakamura-Giri omitted ♜ac1 and ...♜ac8. Would these extra rook moves make any difference? This is something the readers can explore.

So 15...♜fe8! looks the best, giving away as little as possible to the opponent, provided he can make his way through the initial tactical battle.

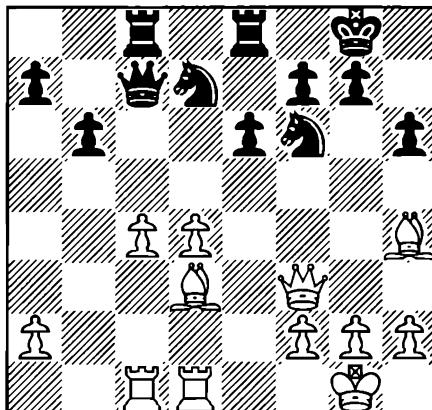
#### **16 ♖xf3 ♜fe8**

As we've just noted, this should probably have been played a move earlier; and 16...e5? 17 d5 does not work. If given the chance, the two bishops will dominate the knights after ♘f5.

#### **17 ♜fd1 h6**

17...e5?! 18 ♘f5 again gives White the more active position.

#### **18 ♘h4**



**Question:** Black is worse and, in order to survive, he has to admit this. What is the best way to try to hold the balance?

**18...♝d6!**

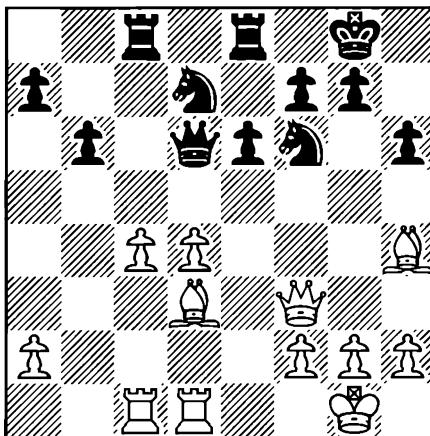
A brave decision. All he can do is to place one of his pieces on a good active square, and hope that White has no tactical refutation. 19 c5 is dangerous, but if Anand has calculated that he is only slightly worse after the tactics, then he must try this.

Passive play will end up with a grinding disadvantage, and should be avoided. The likelihood is that his opponent will eventually find a win. White is happy after, for example, 18...♝cd8 19 ♜g3 ♜c8, or again 18...e5 19 ♜f5.

Trying to simplify with 18...♝c6 19 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 does not work either. White has the bishop pair against the two knights, and also has the more active pawns. Add this up, and 20 c5 is strong. 20...bxc5 is met by 21 ♜xf6, and White is almost certainly winning the end-game after 21...gxf6 22 ♜b5 ♜c7 23 dxc5.

It is easy to generate some implausible alternatives – the computer suggests that 18...♝h8 might be one of these. All one can say is that if 18...♝h8 is the best move, White is clearly better. Whereas if Black can find a sensible idea, with chances of setting up some counterplay (pressure on d4, say), he should try it.

Time now for Gelfand to make a difficult decision.



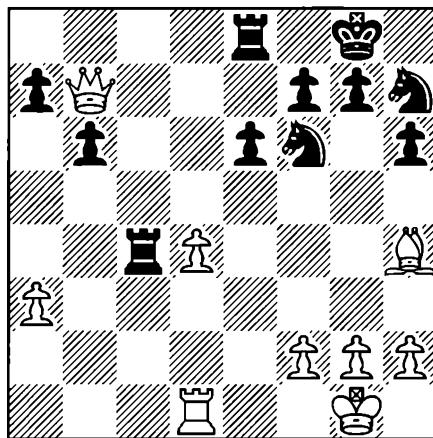
**Question:** White has the quick pawn break 19 c5 bxc5 20 dxc5, with the threat of ♜h7+. The question is whether this is the best line. If it can be shown that Black can hold afterwards, could White find something better here?

**19 c5?!**

Tempting, but it forces play far too much for such a minimal advantage. Given the op-

portunity, White should squeeze hard with the bishop pair, and get the opponent to make concessions before any sort of tactics or simplification.

My first impression, in my day-after blog, was that 19  $\mathbb{A}c2!$ ? looked good, setting up the cross-eyed bishops with  $\mathbb{A}a4$ . However, Black can play 19... $\mathbb{W}b4!$ , when he is still in the game, as after 20 a3, he could sacrifice his queen with 20... $\mathbb{W}xc4!$  21  $\mathbb{A}h7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xh7$  22  $\mathbb{B}xc4$  23  $\mathbb{W}b7$   $\mathbb{Q}df6$ .



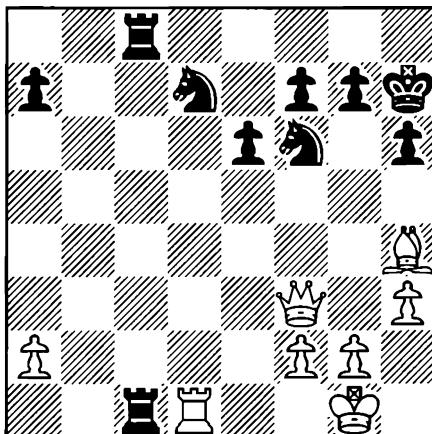
Whether or not White exchanges on f6, Black is still going to defend actively with ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ , and although White has a slight material plus (queen versus rook and knight), it is difficult to see how he can ever create a passed pawn. Defensive queen sacrifices are very much in the air in this type of position. 20  $\mathbb{A}g3$  can also be met, with reasonable safety, by 20... $\mathbb{W}xc4$ .

Time, perhaps, to take a different viewpoint. White has his bishop pair. He should aim to keep his pawns well defended, when he would have chances of a clear edge if Black cannot do anything immediately active. Therefore, 19  $\mathbb{A}e2!$  – quiet and unglamorous, but Black is going to find it hard to equalize. If 19...e5, for example, only then 20 c5, with a large advantage to White.

### **19... $\mathbb{B}xc5$ 20 $\mathbb{D}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$**

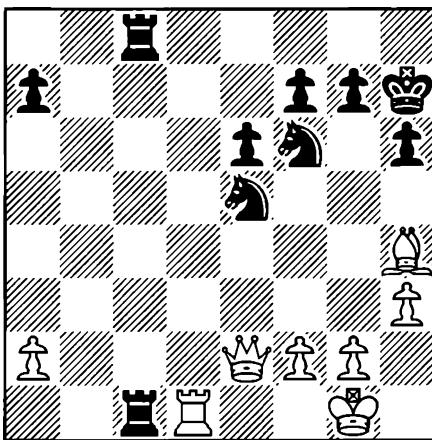
Better to sacrifice the queen for assorted pieces, than to allow his opponent a big passed pawn.

**21  $\mathbb{A}h7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xh7$  22  $\mathbb{B}xd6$   $\mathbb{B}xc1+$  23  $\mathbb{B}d1$   $\mathbb{B}ec8$  24 h3**



The general view at the time was that White must surely have close to a winning advantage. After some further simplification (a rook exchange), it is difficult to see how to defend the a7-pawn, and then how to stop White from pushing his own a-pawn. No doubt Gelfand would have been confident about his prospects here, but Anand is a superb defender in difficult positions. He starts his defensive manoeuvres by a direct attack on the queen, gaining a tempo with the knight – but isn't he merely weakening his pieces and pawns?

24... $\mathbb{Q}e5$  25  $\mathbb{W}e2$



**Question:** What should Black do next?

25... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$

Smart defence under pressure. Anand is not too worried about having his pawns doubled, so long as his king remains close by. It is much more important that, if one of the

knights is exchanged, the other knight is safe. His main defensive plan is that if he can move his other knight to d5, the rook can return to the second rank and, with the knight being on such a good square, he will not be zugzwanged. The rook can alternate between c7 and e7.

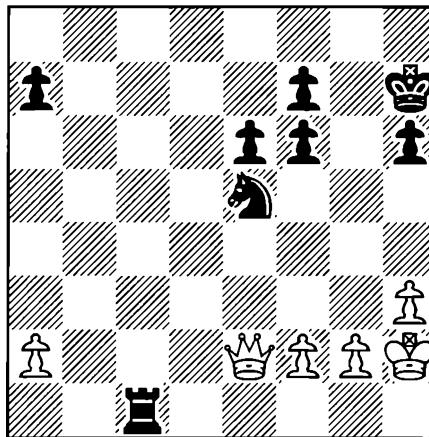
Anand made a difficult endgame defence look relatively simple. Remember, Gelfand probably felt that he had excellent winning chances, otherwise he would not have entered the tactical simplification at move 19.

25... $\mathbb{Q}d5$  might seem more active, but there are too many pieces getting in the way of each other, and with not enough safe outposts, supported by pawns. For instance, after 26  $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{B}xd1$  27  $\mathbb{W}xd1$ , it is not clear how Black can keep everything covered.

Even so, Black might still have chances to hold with 27... $\mathbb{Q}c4?$ , and if 28  $\mathbb{W}a4 a5$ . Or maybe not. With so many of Black's pieces and pawns being required for mutual protection, there is always the possibility of a mixture of zugzwang and White gradually improving his pieces.

**26  $\mathbb{Q}xf6$**

The only sensible move. After 26  $\mathbb{Q}g3?$   $\mathbb{B}8c2$  27  $\mathbb{W}f1 \mathbb{B}xd1$  28  $\mathbb{W}xd1 \mathbb{B}xa2$ , Black is ahead. 26... $\mathbb{g}xf6$  27  $\mathbb{B}xc1 \mathbb{B}xc1+$  28  $\mathbb{Q}h2$



**28... $\mathbb{B}c7$**

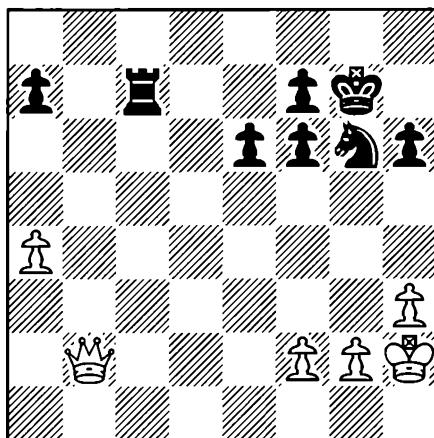
A natural defensive square for the rook, but Anand later finds it difficult to complete his plans of ... $\mathbb{Q}e7-d5$  and ... $f7-f5$ . He is fractionally short of making everything safe, which of course makes the endgame all the more fascinating.

Alternatively, if 28... $f5$  29  $\mathbb{W}b2 \mathbb{B}c7$ , then 30  $\mathbb{W}b8$  makes things awkward, since 30... $\mathbb{B}e7$  (or 30... $\mathbb{B}d7$  31  $\mathbb{W}c8 \mathbb{B}e7$ ) blocks the knight's desired path to d5. With accurate play by White, it can be difficult for Black to coordinate his pieces.

**29  $\mathbb{W}b2$**

A good square for the queen, eyeing the f6-pawn, while also covering the b-file and helping White to push the a-pawn without any significant interruption.

29... $\mathbb{Q}g7$  30 a4



**Question:** A thought experiment. Imagine that for the rest of the game, both players play the very best moves. Is White going to win? Or is Black going to draw?

No hedging bets allowed, like saying that “White is slightly better”. For this experiment, you have to decide whether White ought to be winning, or whether the final result, a draw, would have been a correct answer.

It seems finely balanced. When playing through the game live on the computer, I, like many others, believed that White should win. I was mightily impressed that Anand was able to hold out for a draw. Six weeks later, going through the game again, I started to believe that perhaps, with extremely accurate pawn pushes on the queenside, White could yet break through. but after trying to analyse several such pawn pushes, I have been unable to find a convincing win, so maybe the position was only a draw.

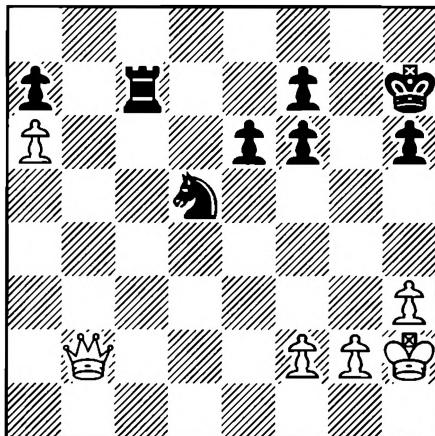
It's difficult. If you think Black has no problems and that it is only a draw, then either you have the very clear instincts of Anand, or maybe you just do not see what the problem is. There are, of course, intermediate points of view.

Sorry to give such an indeterminate answer. The point of the question is to ask the readers to think about what Anand and Gelfand would have been thinking about themselves.

30... $\mathbb{N}e7$

Bringing the knight to d5 as planned.

31 a5  $\mathbb{Q}d5$  32 a6  $\mathbb{Q}h7$



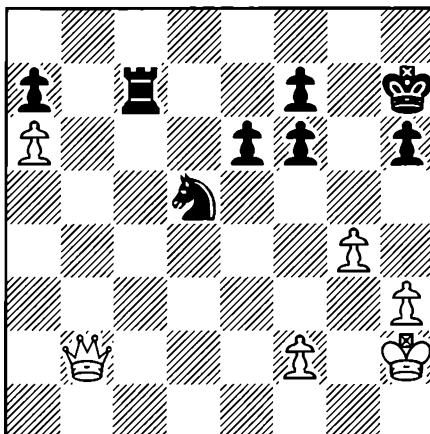
**Question:** How should White handle the next part of the game?

### 33 ♕d4?!

In some ways, this is the easiest part of the game, but in other ways it is the most difficult. The point is that the players were getting close to the time control, so neither player can be expected to have to think long and hard about the next few moves. Better just to reach move 40. Therefore, if you have a stable position, it can be simple enough to play some nondescript moves quickly. This is well understood.

There is no obvious reason why the queen should be better on d4 than on b2, and certainly no obvious justification to use up a tempo with this move. White could instead have done something else. There is a natural reluctance to make a critical pawn move just before the time control, since pawns cannot retreat, and squares nearby get weakened. Here, though, it turns out to be important for Black that he is able to play ...f6-f5, and therefore, it might be quite a useful idea for White to prevent that advance, by playing 33 g4! himself.

A flick through the blogs and websites suggest that most commentators ignored this point. Sergei Shipov, among the most informative of the instant commentators, noted that 33 g4 was “the harshest” test of Anand’s defensive plan. Others merely mentioned that Anand seemed to look more relaxed after playing ...f6-f5.

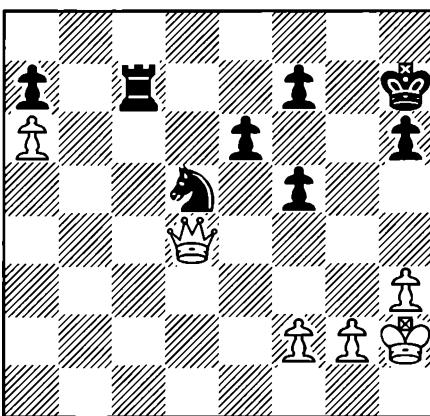


White's basic plan, possibly after a few intermediate moves with the king and queen, would be to force something through with f2-f4-f5, Black now being unable to play ...f6-f5 himself. It looks good, and even if White cannot find a quick pawn push, Black still has to be careful about attacks on the h6-pawn with ♜d2, and, in some lines, ♖g3-h4-h5.

This leaves Black playing natural quiet moves, while White has the chance to coordinate his queen, his pawns, and, not to be forgotten, the king. Play might continue 33...♜g6 34 ♜b8 ♜g7 35 ♜g3 ♜c3+ (Black can only wait) 36 f3 ♜c7 37 f4. Since Black has to protect the a7-pawn on a7, and the rook needs to be guarded by the knight, he has no real mobility, so White has time to centralize his king with, for example, 37...♜c3+ 38 ♜f2 ♜c2+ 39 ♜e1 ♜c7 40 ♜d2, etc, and then perhaps finding the right time to advance with f4-f5.

It is progress, and genuine progress, but it has yet to be proven that White can force a win against the very best play by Black. A challenge for the reader?

**33...f5**



Anand has finally achieved his defensive set-up, although naturally he still has to play accurately.

**34 f4**

This leaves the pawn structure slightly rigid. Gelfand, still close to the time control, might well have felt that 34 g4 makes it too easy for Black to exchange off his front doubled pawn, and decided it was not going to be his best option.

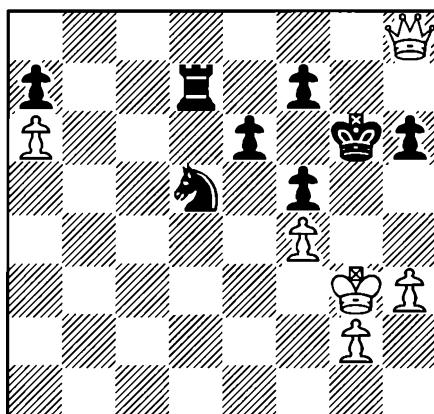
Possibly 34 f3!?, a waiting move, deferring his options until after the time control. He still has the choice between playing g2-g4 and f3-f4. He can also move his king around, just to see what gives.

Pressure, but no obvious winning attempt.

**34...♝d7 35 ♜g3**

He still has no desire to exchange pawns with 35 g4.

**35...♚g6 36 ♜h8**



Progress? Or a positional trap? Black was ready to play ...♝f6 anyway, followed by ...♞e4. So he is close to holding the draw.

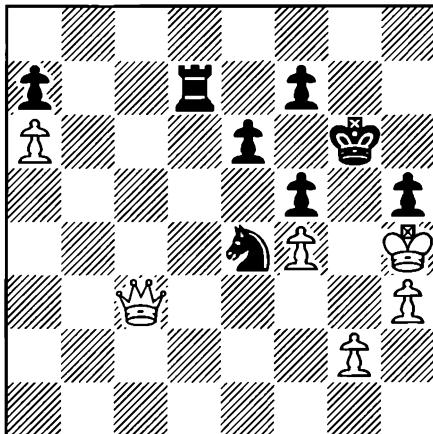
**36...♝f6 37 ♜b8**

And now the queen runs to the queenside.

**37...h5**

To create an extra escape square for the king (on h6).

**38 ♜h4 ♚h6 39 ♜b2 ♚g6 40 ♜c3 ♞e4**

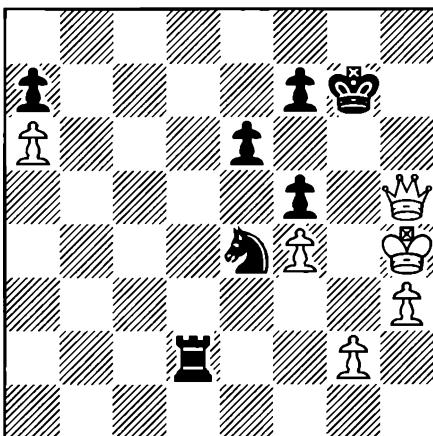


**Question:** The time control has just been reached.  
But isn't White just about to win the pawn on h5?

**41 ♜c8**

Gelfand avoids a nasty little trap: 41 ♜f3?! ♜d2!, when all of a sudden Black's pieces are aggressive, rather than defensive:

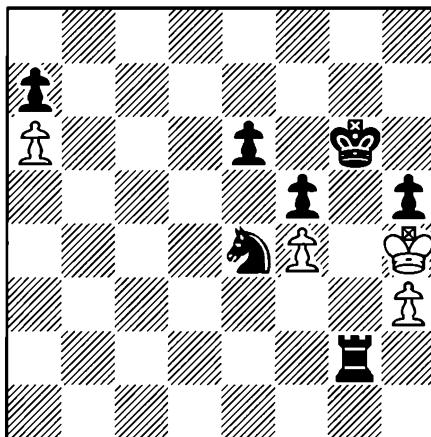
After 42 ♜xh5+? ♔g7, White has "won" one battle, in that he has gained the pawn, but his king and queen are absurdly placed, and he will have to lose material. Black will play ...♜d8 and ...♜h8(+).



The self-burial by 42 g3? ♜h2 43 ♜xh5+ ♔g7 44 g4 ♜f2 is even stranger.

If zugzwang does not save the game, then there is a close relative, stalemate, which will give the draw: 42 ♜b3 (worse is 42 ♜e3?! ♜f2) 42...♜xg2 (42...♜f2? 43 ♜b8 leaves White

better) 43  $\mathbb{W}xe6+$   $fxe6$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ .

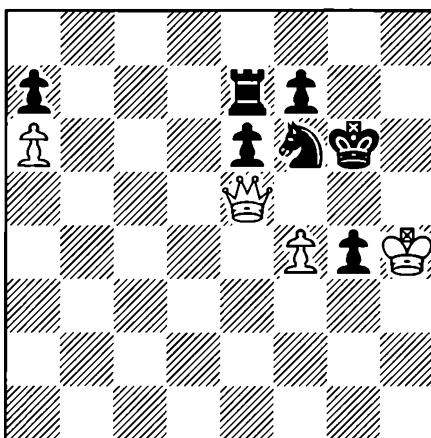


How many of these lines did you visualize?

41... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  42  $\mathbb{W}b8$   $\mathbb{R}e7$

The entertainment has gone, and we are now looking at a draw.

43  $g4$   $hxg4$  44  $h \times g4$   $fxg4$  45  $\mathbb{W}e5$



Gelfand's last attempt to enliven the position, but now Anand shows a new fortress.

45... $\mathbb{Q}g8$  46  $\mathbb{W}g5+$   $\mathbb{Q}h7$  47  $\mathbb{W}xg4$   $f6$  48  $\mathbb{W}g2$   $\mathbb{Q}h8$  49  $\mathbb{W}e4$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$   $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Not a faultless draw, but Anand defended well in an awkward endgame.

## Game Ten: Anand-Gelfand

Even though this ended up in another draw, not reaching the time limit, one gains the impression of a sense of urgency, of forcing the opponent (for both sides) to have to think about every move.

24th May 2012

V.Anand-B.Gelfand

World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 10)

*Sicilian Defence*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5**

Evidently, Anand has decided that Gelfand was sufficiently well booked up not to try another Open Sicilian.

**3...e6**

Or 3...d6. Or, the most common, 3...g6. It's a matter of choice.

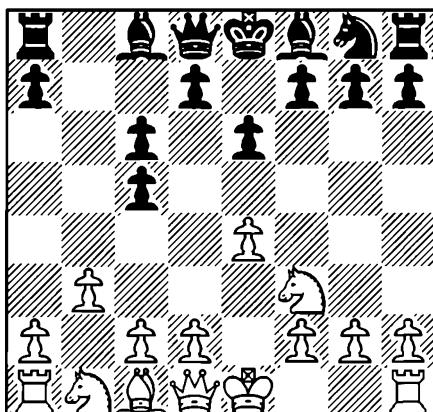
3...a6?!, on the other hand, would be a sign of inexperience. As we soon see in the game, White is more than happy to exchange bishop for knight and double the black pawns. The forward c-pawn is then a weakness, rather than a strength, and gets in the way of the dark-squared bishop.

**4 ♜xc6**

And indeed this is the standard response for White here nowadays, not bothering to wait for Black to play ...a7-a6. If White were to delay this exchange, Black has the chance to play ...♝ge7, avoiding the pawn doubling, after which it is not so clear what White is going to do with his bishop on b5.

**4...bxc6 5 b3**

Playable, but hardly mainstream. As the game soon shows, Gelfand had anticipated the possibility of this opening by Anand.



It is rather like a Nimzo-Indian with colours reversed. The difference is that if Black were to play ...d7-d5, White would in effect be a couple of tempi up, in that he already has the advantage of the first move, and in that, when compared with White's e2-e4 in one move, Black has to play ...e7-e6 and ...e6-e5 to put pressure on the e-file.

Therefore Black does not usually play ...d7-d5, so perhaps it is really a "Nimzo-English" with colours reversed.

### 5...e5!?

With a sense of paradox – one would assume that 5...d6 6 ♜b2 e5 is a simpler way of proceeding. There are, of course, other choices for Black.

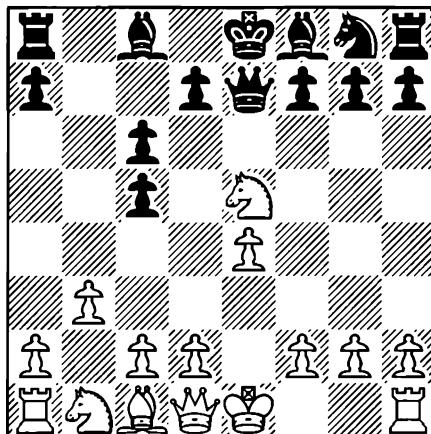
At the Tal Memorial, later in the month, the players were naturally interested in the openings of the World Championship, and Radjabov faced this system three times as Black. Each time, he played the older, more established set-up with 5...d6, and White tried 6 e5. He beat McShane, and drew with Caruana and Grischuk.

Innovations are not necessarily improvements. They are often slightly offbeat ideas, just to try something new, to get the opponent thinking. The problem with Gelfand's move is that he clearly loses a tempo. Then again, is this so much of a problem, if he has prevented White from playing e4-e5 - ?

### 6 ♜xe5

He takes the bait, justifiably so.

### 6...♝e7



**Question:** What next for White?

### 7 ♜b2!?

Anand later changed his mind about this position and tried something else: 7 d4 d6 8 ♜xc6 ♜xe4+ 9 ♜e2 ♜xe2+ 10 ♜xe2 ♜b7 11 ♜a5 ♜xg2 12 ♜g1 ♜h3 13 ♜c3, Anand-Gelfand, World Championship, second tie-break game 2012. Perhaps White was still

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

slightly better anyway. The queens have been exchanged, and White is ahead in development. Both players have slightly broken pawn structures (for White, pawns on f2 and h2; for Black, pawns on a7 and c5), but Black's c-pawn is further advanced and therefore more open to attack, and also cuts down the mobility of his dark-squared bishop. Black's bishop pair was therefore unable to threaten White. Anand later won, after 77 moves of a rapid-play, though the traffic was not totally one-sided.

The computer also gives 7  $\mathbb{Q}d3$   $\mathbb{W}xe4+$  8  $\mathbb{W}e2$   $\mathbb{W}xe2+$  9  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$  with, it is suggested, a slight edge to White. Possibly so. It is not clear how Black can fully equalize. White's bishop on b2 is going to be more effective than either of Black's bishops.

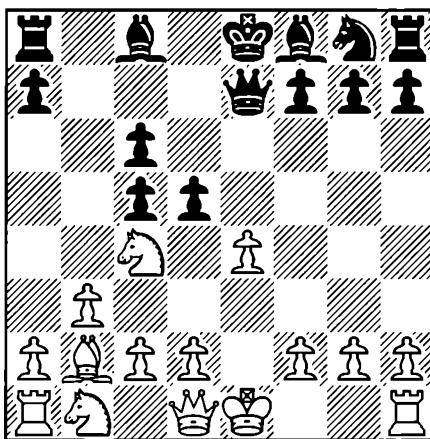
Since White has three reasonable choices for a slight edge, Black's innovation seems to be ultimately unconvincing.

7...d6 8  $\mathbb{Q}c4$

Not 8  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $\mathbb{W}c7$  and the knight is trapped. White can win a third pawn in return with 9  $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ , but this hardly seems good.

8...d5

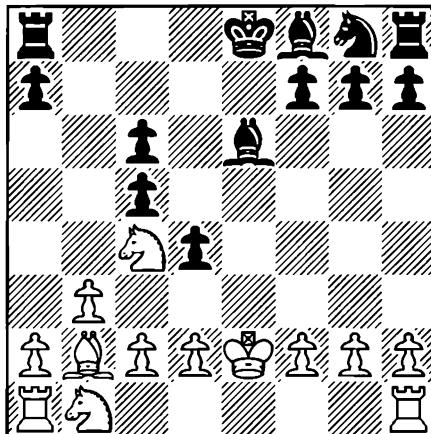
8... $\mathbb{W}xe4$  9  $\mathbb{Q}e3$  leaves White well ahead in development. He can castle quickly, and put pressure on the e-file.



9  $\mathbb{Q}e3$  d4 10  $\mathbb{Q}c4$   $\mathbb{W}xe4+$  11  $\mathbb{W}e2$   $\mathbb{W}xe2+$  12  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$

My own assessment, at home, was that White was doing very well, with a standard Nimzo blockade against the doubled pawns, and also keeping ahead in development. Unlike the previous game, the bishop pair does nothing. I was surprised on seeing a few tweets that Black was supposed to be doing well. Was I looking at another game?

12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$



**Question:** What should White play here?

**13 d3?**

A pawn move is not in itself a developing move, and any unnecessary pawn push creates weaknesses.

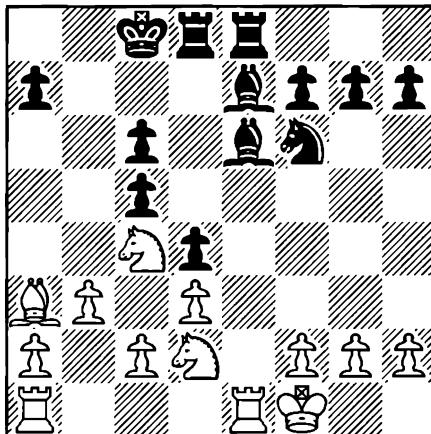
White can develop far more efficiently with 13  $\mathbb{Q}ba3!$ , followed perhaps by  $\mathbb{R}he1$ ,  $\mathbb{Q}f1$  and, if given the chance,  $\mathbb{Q}e5$ , allowing the other knight to move to the centre with  $\mathbb{Q}ac4$ . White has a clear edge.

It is also possible that he can develop with the other rook instead, with  $\mathbb{R}ae1$ , and  $\mathbb{Q}d1$ . The important point is to develop quickly, rather quicker than his opponent can do, and then concentrate on manoeuvring against Black's pawns. It is going to be difficult for Black to get all his minor pieces working well together.

**13... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  14  $\mathbb{Q}bd2$**

The problem now is that each of White's pieces is blocking the others. Play is only level.

**14...0-0-0 15  $\mathbb{R}he1$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  16  $\mathbb{Q}f1$   $\mathbb{R}he8$  17  $\mathbb{Q}a3$**



Not really the greatest of diagonals, but what else is there to be done?

**17...Qd5**

A reminder for White that he no longer has any protection for the c3-square.

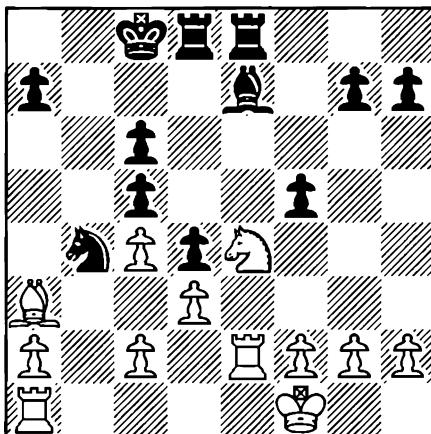
**18 Qe4 Qb4**

Indeed, just for the moment, it is White, not Black, who faces difficulties on the queen-side. Anand will be fully aware of this, and he quickly neutralizes the difficulties.

**19 Re2 Qxc4**

Gelfand wants to remove the strong c4-outpost for his less than impressive bishop.

**20 bxc4 f5**



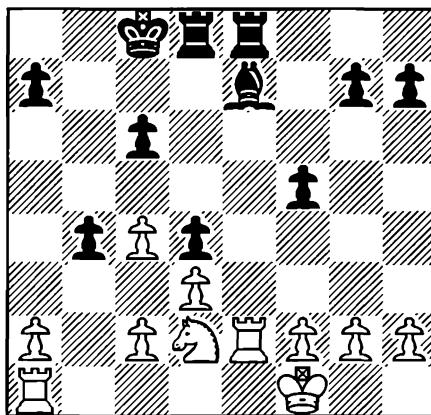
**21 Qxb4**

**Question:** But should White have exchanged Black's knight just here?

Black's knight is no longer threatening, now that he cannot move it to d5. Unless White allows Black to take one of the pawns, the only way back to active play would be via a6. For instance, 21  $\mathbb{Q}g3$  g6 22  $\mathbb{A}c1 \mathbb{B}d7!$ ? (to make good use of the b-file for the rook) 23 a3  $\mathbb{Q}a6$  is tense, but equal.

Both lines look reasonable, but Anand's move cuts down any complicated lines. It seems he was already thinking about a draw.

**21...cx b4 22 Qd2**

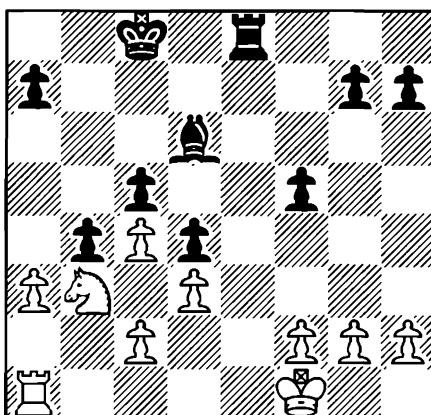


Amazingly, it is White who now has the doubled c-pawns, and this makes it difficult to take advantage of Black's slightly ragged pawn structure.

**22...Qd6**

The computer suggests 22...Qf6 as with a slight edge for Black, though it is difficult to believe this. 23 a3 bxa3 24 Bxa3 looks fine for White, whereas Black's bishop is not on a good post to nurture his queenside dark squares.

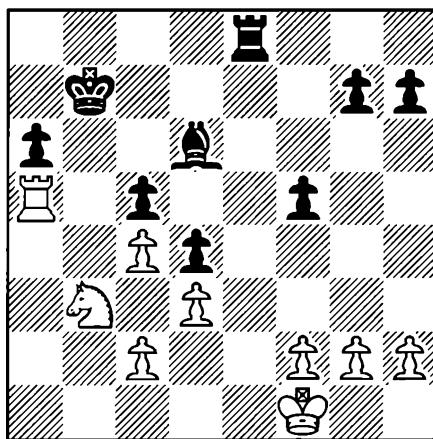
**23 Bxe8 Bxe8 24 Ab3 c5 25 a3 ½-½**



**Question:** A draw was agreed here. Could one of the players have continued to try for an edge?

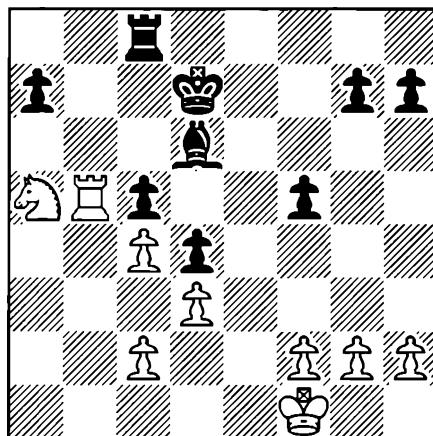
The draw agreement seems slightly premature. Black definitely has a slight edge after 25...bxa3 26  $\mathbb{E}xa3$   $\mathbb{Q}b7$ , in view of his outside passed pawn. White cannot, despite initial appearances, force a perpetual or set up a simple rook exchange; while Black, for as long as he can keep the a-pawn safe and slightly threatening, can force his opponent to have to defend accurately. White has an extra pawn elsewhere on the board, in compensation for Black's passed pawn, but clearly the backward doubled c-pawn is in no sense dangerous.

27  $\mathbb{E}a5$   $\mathbb{E}c8$ ?! 28  $\mathbb{E}b5+$  looks like a stock equalizing plan for White, and no doubt both players would have noted this. But the computer notes that 27...a6!! is good for Black.



The point is that after 28  $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$   $\mathbb{Q}b6$  29  $\mathbb{Q}b3$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$  30  $\mathbb{E}a1$  (remember, Black is threatening mate on e1) 30... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ , now that Black has opened up lines for his diagonal, his a-pawn is rather dangerous. For instance, 31  $\mathbb{E}d1$  a5 32  $\mathbb{Q}c1$  a4 33  $\mathbb{Q}a2$  (not 33  $\mathbb{Q}e2??$   $\mathbb{E}xe2$ , and Black promotes on a1) 33... $\mathbb{Q}a5$  is unpleasant for White.

He could instead retreat with 27  $\mathbb{E}a1$  a6 (still a useful move) 28  $\mathbb{E}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}c7$  and then, for example, 29  $\mathbb{E}a1$   $\mathbb{E}a8$  30  $\mathbb{Q}e2$   $\mathbb{Q}b6$  31  $\mathbb{E}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  32  $\mathbb{Q}a5+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  (see following diagram), but now Black has untangled his pieces, and White will have to work out how to defend against the a-pawn for the next thirty moves.



As in some of the earlier games, Gelfand should really have tried for more in this ending. Perhaps he did not quite believe that he could beat Anand in technical endgames.

Anyway, another draw, and we are getting ever closer to the maelstrom of rapidplay and blitz to decide the World Championship.

## Game Eleven: Gelfand-Anand

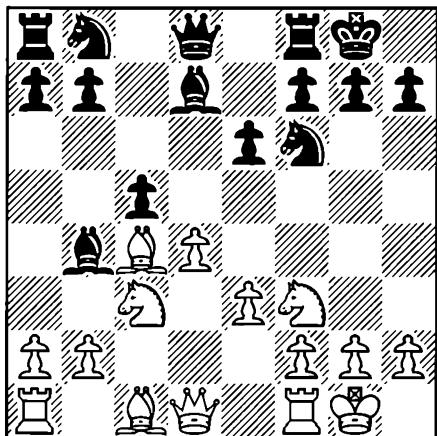
26th May 2012  
**B.Gelfand-V.Anand**  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 11)  
*Nimzo-Indian Defence*

**1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 e6 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}b4$**

Again avoiding the Slav.

**4 e3 0-0 5  $\mathbb{Q}d3$  d5 6  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  c5 7 0-0 dx $c$ 4 8  $\mathbb{Q}xc4 \mathbb{Q}d7$**

Not new, but almost forgotten. Gelfand thought for more than half an hour in response to Anand's modest developing move, apparently introduced by Bronstein. The main development plan is ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ .



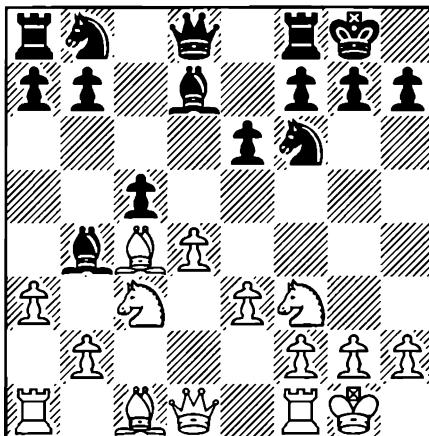
**Question:** Can you find a clear edge for White? Or is Black's opening fully playable?

### 9 a3

This was the one chance for Gelfand to take the initiative. If Anand's move was genuinely doubtful, and if there were a few ways to gain an edge, then Gelfand would have found one of them. If the position after Anand's move was genuinely equal, then it would have been hardly surprising that Gelfand could not find anything.

- a) 9 a3, as played in the game, is the computer's main suggestion for a slight edge.
- b) 9  $\mathbb{W}b3$  is the computer's second selection, but then 9... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  forces White to scurry away to avoid ... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ . White cannot realistically be better here.
- c) 9  $\mathbb{Q}e5$  is potentially interesting, but it needs to be remembered that the "threat" of gaining the bishop pair is not of great significance. White uses up three moves with the knight to capture on d7, while Black has made only one move with the bishop. The tempo count suggests that Black should be equal after either 9... $\mathbb{Q}c6$  or 9... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ .

It seems that Gelfand is still on the right tracks.



**Question:** Three reasonable choices here, the third being 9...cxd4.

Which is best? Or which has the most surprise value in a level position?  
Or are they all about equal? Find a move, and hope that it is not a mistake.

#### 9....Ba5

Apparently, this was a surprise to many of the top grandmasters commentating in Moscow. Later moves were not predicted by the grandmasters either. This does not necessarily mean that the moves were particularly odd or unusual. It just reflects the point that if a position is close to equal, then quite often there are several ways to retain near-equality in several different lines. We can be grateful for that. If there was only one reasonable move in any position, chess would have been played out to its death by the time of Capablanca.

The basic point about Anand's bishop retreat is that he has decided – in advance of course – only to exchange his bishop for knight if White has already captured with d4xc5. Anand would prefer, if possible, not to allow his opponent to have a solid pawn structure of c3/d4/e3, etc. It is much less solid if the pawns are on c3, c5, e3, etc.

Instead:

a) 9...Bxc3 10 bxc3 is a minor concession, though the main play has yet to come. One problem in this line is that, once the b-pawn has switched files to c3, White can add some pressure with Bb1. Black no longer has the simple equalizing option (as in two rounds earlier) of exchanging the c5-pawn on d4, followed by ...b7-b6 and ...Bb7, so his position is potentially slightly uncomfortable. Anand was looking for more direct ways to equalize.

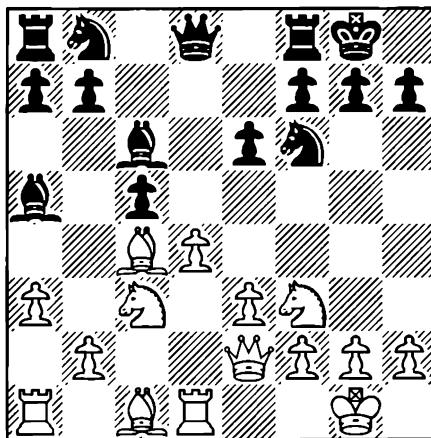
b) 9...cxd4 10 exd4 is a standard IQP (isolated queen's pawn) variation, in which it is not so clear that he really wants the bishop on d7. Again, he would have been happier with ...b7-b6, ...Bb7, ...Qbd7, etc. Black still has to prove that he can equalize.

Possibly Anand's move is indeed the best among equals.

**10 ♜e2**

10 dxc5 ♜xc3 11 bxc3 ♜a5 is level.

**10...♝c6 11 ♞d1**



**Question:** Black to play. What next?

**11...♝xc3?!**

A puzzling move, indeed the most puzzling move of a short but difficult game. Black has already retreated with ...♜a5, declining to capture on c3, but now, a couple of moves later, he plays ...♝xc3 with loss of tempo. Neither player has altered the pawn structure in the meantime, whereas White has played a couple of developing moves which, one would think, would mean that Black does not have the luxury of giving away a tempo.

So why did Anand try this? Or, more specifically, why now? The point here is that while White has made a couple of developing moves, Black has done the same. He has manoeuvred his bishop to c6, and is ready to play ...♝bd7. Once he is ready to achieve this, it is a good idea to eliminate White's c3-knight, to avoid, for example, a d4-d5 prod by a white pawn. Also, as we shall see later, Black can offer a favourable bishop exchange with ...♝d5, once the knight on c3 has gone.

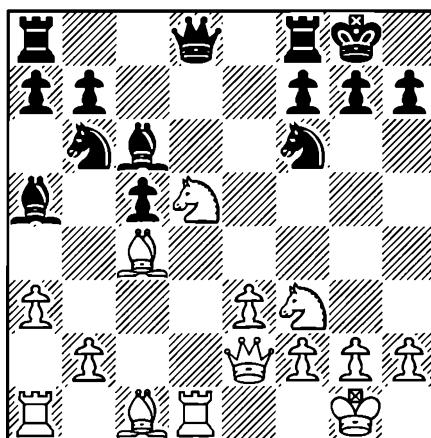
It works, in that Anand soon equalized. There is the question, though, of whether Gelfand could have reacted more alertly, with the possibility of a slight edge.

Anand's play is arguably the most difficult to appreciate, at World Championship level, since the days of Petrosian in the 1960s. It is not so difficult to appreciate the games of Fischer or Kasparov, even if admirers know that they would be unable to play as well. Karпов, too, gives nothing away, and takes whatever is given. If the opponent makes a slight error, he will lose. Playing through the games in this match, Anand's most obvious similarities are with Petrosian and the deep and intricate manoeuvring, which looks puzzling, but in which everything works out well in the end. We have already seen, several times in this

match, how Anand has given away bishop for knight, when most players would prefer the bishop. This was a Petrosian speciality as well.

The difference between Petrosian and Anand, and why Anand became a much stronger player, was that, behind his defensive technique, Anand was far more willing to attack when given the chance – and, above all, he was able to analyse his openings in great depth at home with, of course, the help of the computer, whereas Petrosian tended to be lazy in this aspect of the game. Occasionally, Anand, like Petrosian, can go spectacularly wrong in misjudging the pace of play in a position. But not here.

Returning to the game, there is still the puzzle as to why Anand did not try 11... $\mathbb{Q}bd7!$ ? After all, 12 dxc5  $\mathbb{A}xc3$  13 bxc3 could have arisen in the main line, supposing White had played d4xc5 a couple of moves later. Alternatively, 12 d5 is natural, when 12...exd5 (not 12... $\mathbb{A}xc3??$  13 dxc6, winning a piece) 13  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{Q}b6$  leads to sharp play, although after any tactics, Black remains equal.



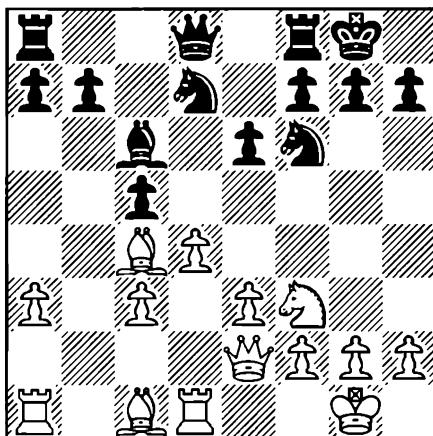
Well, at least that is what I said several weeks ago. On checking through various references, I notice that Shipov gives this variation as really strong for White after 14  $\mathbb{Q}xb6$  (Shipov describes as “weak” the continuation of R.Knaak-A.Yusupov, Hamburg 1991: 14  $\mathbb{Q}f4$   $\mathbb{W}c7$  15  $\mathbb{A}a2$   $\mathbb{A}e8$  16  $\mathbb{A}d2$   $\mathbb{A}xd2$  17  $\mathbb{A}xd2$   $\mathbb{Q}e4$  18  $\mathbb{A}c2$   $\mathbb{W}e7$ , which is equal) 14... $\mathbb{W}xb6$  15 b4 cxb4 16  $\mathbb{Q}e5$  “and so on”. However, it is hard to see why White’s position could be regarded as in any sense advantageous. Black has his extra pawn, and potentially two outside passed pawns; he is better developed, and his king is safe enough. All that can be said for White is that he has a pair of bishops after, say, 16... $\mathbb{W}c7$  17  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $\mathbb{W}xc6$ . The best I can reasonably suggest is that White should be able to equalize with 18  $\mathbb{A}d2$ . So I stick to my earlier assessment, while noting that White has a possible improvement at move 12 (see below).

Instant commentaries are often extremely useful, especially because the commentator, like Shipov, is not merely churning forth the output of computer chess engines. The trouble is that, as in chess over the board, mistakes and misjudgments slip in.

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

We return to a previous comment of mine, in which I suggest that White has a different way to try to show an edge. One suspects that Anand would have been more worried about 12  $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$ . If Black takes the knight, then after 12... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  (there are various alternatives, probably each with a slight edge to White) 13  $dxe5$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  14  $\mathbb{Q}b5$ , White is starting to create pressure on the d-file.

**12  $bxc3$   $\mathbb{Q}bd7$**



**Question:** What is White's last chance to squeeze out a slight edge?

**13  $\mathbb{Q}d3$**

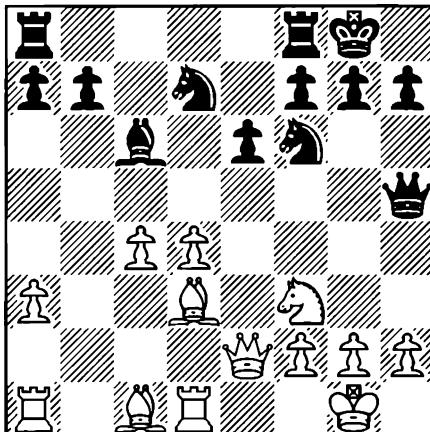
This makes it much easier for Black to exchange bishops, a few moves later, with ... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ , neutralizing the bishop pair. After the move played, everything soon ends up in equality.

Instead, 13  $\mathbb{Q}b2$   $\mathbb{W}c7$  14  $\mathbb{Q}a2$ , or perhaps 13  $\mathbb{Q}a2$  first, was the last chance before the rapidplay for Gelfand to try for a plus score with the white pieces. After that, it is Anand who has the advantage of White in game twelve. Black still has to prove he can equalize.

**13... $\mathbb{W}a5$  14  $c4$**

14  $\mathbb{Q}b2$   $cxd4$  15  $cxd4$   $\mathbb{Q}e4$  is equal.

**14... $cxd4$  15  $exd4$   $\mathbb{W}h5$**



**16 ♜f4**

An unexpectedly provocative move, inviting Anand to break open White's pawn structure with 16...♝xf3 17 gxf3.

**Question:** Should Anand have tried this?

Probably not. Anand was happy to halve out with his next move, safely.

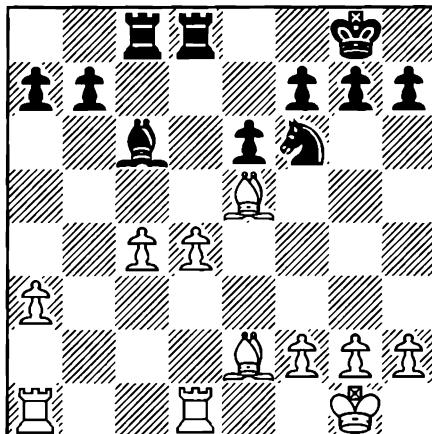
Yes, he could give his opponent doubled and isolated f-pawns, but White then has two bishops versus two knights, and while it is easy enough to see ways in which White can improve his position, it is difficult to see anything constructive for Black.

Besides, Anand had just encountered a gruelling defence with two knights versus two bishops, as Black in game nine. He would not want to go through all that again. Quite possibly Gelfand would have reasoned that Anand was unlikely to speculate, at this stage of the match.

**16...♝ac8 17 ♞e5**

He cannot keep the knight on f3 indefinitely.

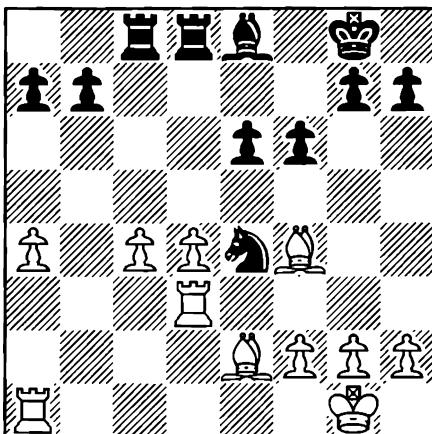
**17...♛xe2 18 ♜xe2 ♞xe5 19 ♜xe5 ♜fd8**



**Question:** Does White still have chances of playing for a slight edge with his bishop pair?

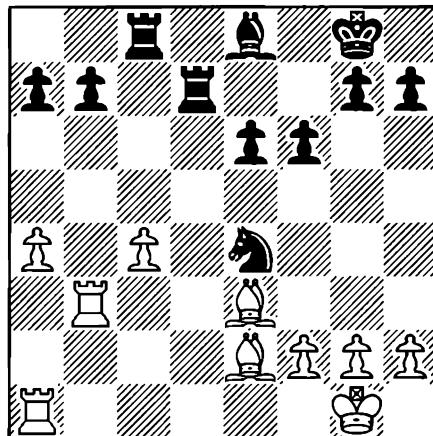
The problem is that White's queenside pawns have been weakened, making it extremely difficult for him to open the position in his favour. Meanwhile Black can try to manoeuvre his pieces to attack the hanging pawns. White turned out to be happy with a draw.

**20 a4 ♜e4 21 ♜d3 f6 22 ♜f4 ♜e8**



Indeed, momentarily it looks as if Black is already better, but Gelfand has his defences sorted out, and there was soon a handshake.

**23 ♜b3 ♜xd4 24 ♜e3 ♜d7 ½-½**



Draw agreed, perhaps slightly prematurely from the point of view of the spectators, as there is still play on the board – but if both players play accurately, the result would eventually be a draw. White of course plays 25  $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ , when a possible continuation might be 25... $\mathbb{Q}g6$  26  $\mathbb{Q}e3$   $\mathbb{Q}d6$  27 c5  $\mathbb{Q}f5$  28  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  29 fxe3  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  30  $\mathbb{Q}xb7$   $\mathbb{Q}a5$ , and the draw comes even closer.

## Game Twelve: Anand-Gelfand

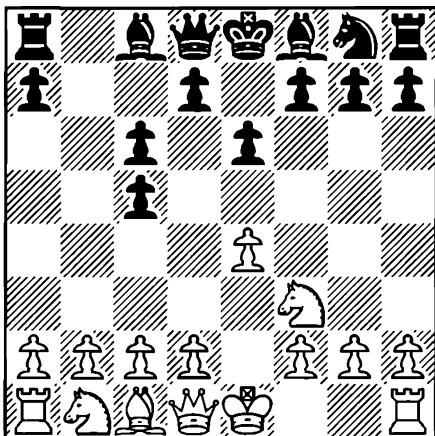
Was this going to be a tame draw in the final round, a time to relax before the stress of the rapidplay? There seems little sense in going all out for a win, taking risks, on the last day of the slow-play. Better to wait for the opponent to make mistakes in a quicker time limit.

It turned out that the game was indeed a draw, and in 22 moves, but there was no lack of creative spirit. There was enough interest in the first 21 moves to fascinate anyone.

After much of the tentative chess of the first half of the match, and the serious mistakes in games seven and eight, both players seemed to settle down to play exceptionally high-level, creative chess. One senses that, had the match had been played over 16 games, or even the traditional 24 games, there would have been far more outstanding chess to follow.

28th May 2012  
V.Anand-B.Gelfand  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 12)  
*Sicilian Defence*

1 e4 c5 2  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  3  $\mathbb{Q}b5$  e6 4  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$  bxc6



**5 d3**

**Question:** What do you think about this move? Remember that Anand had played 5 b3 a couple of rounds earlier.

The d2-d3 push seems rather tame here, especially given that Anand soon played b2-b3 and  $\mathbb{B}b2$  anyway. The suspicion is that he simply did not want to allow Gelfand the same variation as in game ten (5 b3 e5 6  $\mathbb{Q}xe5$   $\mathbb{W}e7$ , etc), even though White could still have kept, it seems, a slight edge at move 13. And what were the seconds there to do? Three days before the next game was surely enough time to examine the opening and test it out, with a few grandmasters and a computer. The move I suggested in the notes (13  $\mathbb{Q}ba3$ ) seems logical enough, avoiding the extra pawn move (d2-d3), while still completing his development. The computer suggests that it is good.

Quite possibly Anand, having been unable to demonstrate an edge over the board, wanted to disregard the whole line with 5 b3 for this game. If he can find something promising with 5 d3, then play it! Objectively, though, it is unlikely that 5 d3 is quite as accurate as 5 b3, and in the second rapidplay game, Anand returned to 5 b3, making a different attempt at an improvement.

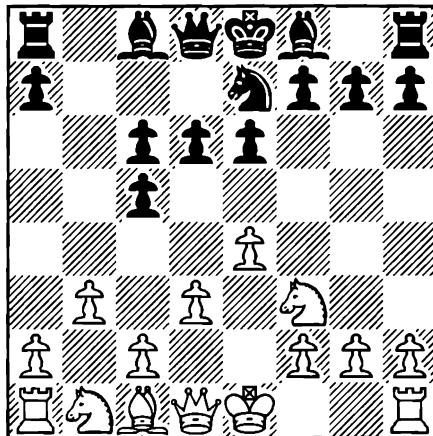
5 0-0 is also to be considered, a straightforward developing move, waiting to see whether Black aims for ...d7-d6 or, less likely, ...d7-d5.

**5... $\mathbb{Q}e7$  6 b3**

Again, if this is still Anand's plan, there was no great reason to insert 5 d3. Was this a sign that, these days, Anand has tended to play overcautiously, as some commentators have suggested?

**6...d6**

Thus, no 6...d5.

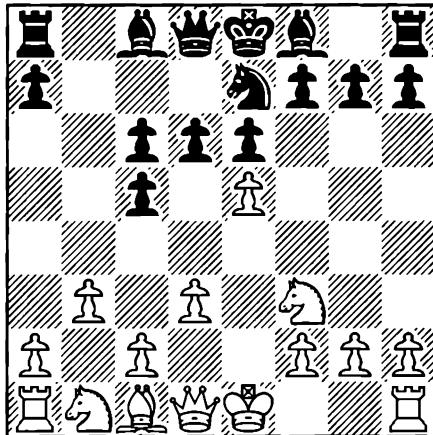


**Question:** What should White play next?

**7 e5**

Really, there is not much choice to be made here. If Black is allowed to play ...e6-e5, he would have a solid and compact pawn centre, and a useful bishop pair, for when it starts to open up.

Play starts to become intricate and complicated.



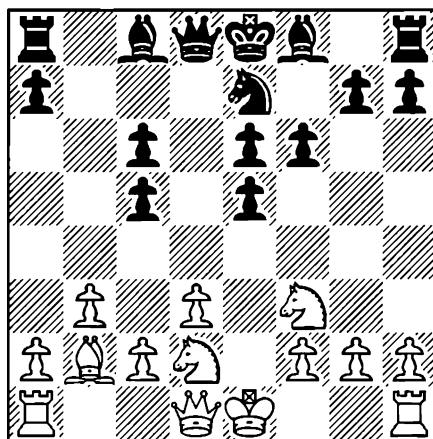
**7...d5**

**Question:** Should Black have taken the pawn immediately?

There is no obvious reason why the pawn cannot be snatched with 7...dxe5. White could

not try 8  $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ , as after 8...  $\mathbb{W}d4$  9  $\mathbb{Q}c4$   $\mathbb{W}xa1$  10  $\mathbb{B}b2$   $\mathbb{W}xa2$  11  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{W}a6$  12  $\mathbb{Q}d6+$   $\mathbb{Q}d7$  13  $\mathbb{Q}xf7$   $\mathbb{B}g8$ , he has started to run out of ideas for his rook sacrifice.

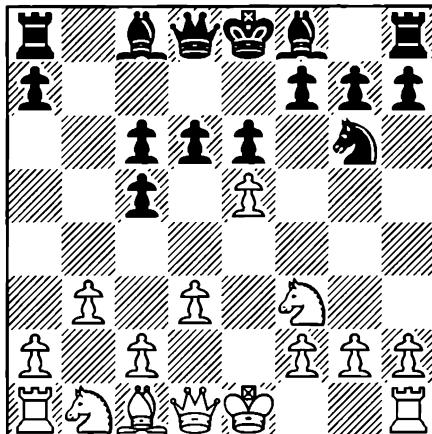
This leaves something like 8  $\mathbb{B}b2$  f6 9  $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ , making it a positional gambit.



It is not absolutely certain that White has complete compensation for his pawn, but it is not clear either that Black is definitely better. Indeed, White has his own positional pluses. Probably the position is equal, or close to equal, though it can be difficult to assess what is going on when there is a material imbalance.

The danger is, for Black, that he might feel obliged to show that he can do something positive with his extra pawn. He has three main weaknesses in this rather strange position. Obviously the c-pawns are doubled and isolated, and the squares in front of the pawns create good outposts for White. The other two weaknesses are the two bishops. The one on f8 has no real destination, blocked by the doubled pawns on c5 and on e5. The c8-bishop is equally obstructed, by the other doubled pawns on e6 and c6. Black needs to think about how to bring his bishops into play.

It is possible that this might have been a slightly better way of playing this for Black, in view of later comments. Such assessments can at best be tentative in such a difficult position. The move Gelfand played was not bad either.



**Question:** White to play. What next?

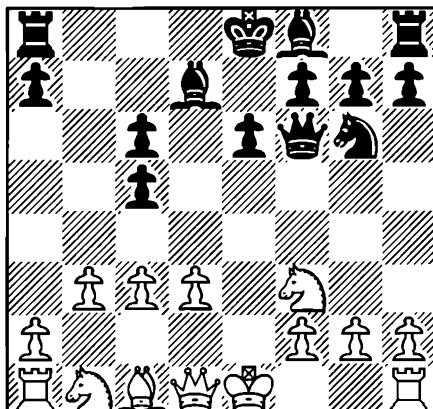
### 8 h4?!

By now Gelfand and Anand will have been well-tuned into each other's thought processes, if not so much in the first eight games, then certainly in the later rounds. One senses that, on the last move, Gelfand had instinctively decided that Anand would want to continue the pawn sacrifice for as long as possible, and try to squeeze some sort of initiative out of it.

Anand's push of the h-pawn was slightly strange, the only realistic explanation being to try to force Black into taking the gambit. The advanced h-pawn did not add to the ideas and strategies used later on. The possibility of a further h4-h6-h6, for example, was unlikely ever to be played.

There is a much simpler way of handling the position for White, avoiding having to gambit a pawn, and almost certainly giving him a slight edge. All he has to do is to play 8 exd6. If then 8...Rxd6 9 Qbd2, White's two knights, plus the bishop, are far better coordinated than the opposing minor pieces.

Black can try 8...Rf6, gaining a tempo by the attack on the rook. Then 9 c3 Rxd6 is about equal, but 9 d7+! Rxd7 10 c3 gives White a slight edge, and often this is all that is really needed out of the opening.

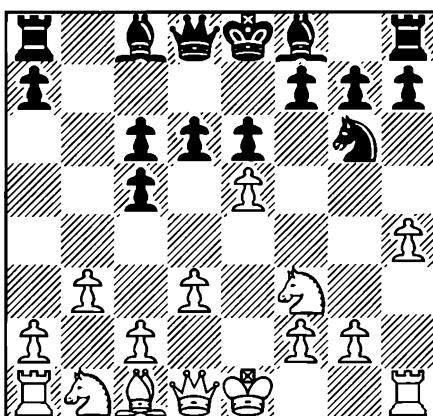


Black's bishop on d7 is on a bad square, and this makes all the difference between a slight advantage for White and mere equality. It will take time for Black to put pressure on d3 with the rook, and to attack that square with the bishop, as ... $\mathbb{R}c8$  and ... $\mathbb{R}a6$  would cost two tempi.

10... $\mathbb{Q}f4$  11  $\mathbb{Q}xf4$   $\mathbb{W}xf4$  12  $\mathbb{W}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}d6$  13  $\mathbb{W}xf4$   $\mathbb{Q}xf4$  14  $\mathbb{Q}bd2$  gives the sort of position where two knights can occasionally outplay the two bishops. White will soon be able to play  $\mathbb{Q}c4$ , a good square which cannot be attacked by pawns, or perhaps  $\mathbb{Q}e4$ . The two knights can work together.

If instead 10... $\mathbb{W}f5$ , the simplest option would be 11  $\mathbb{W}e2$ , followed by offering the exchange of queens with  $\mathbb{W}e4$ . Again, Black's queenside pawns are damaged, and he does not even have an extra pawn to compensate.

Black can also try opening up for the light-squared bishop with 10...e5, but after 11  $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ , it is not so clear that any of the bishop moves are that effective. Meanwhile, the other bishop is caged in again by the pawns on c5 and e5. White keeps a slight edge.



**Question:** Black could again take on e5, and this is playable. But is there a quick and simple way to simplify the position, to ensure that Black cannot lose?

**8...Qxe5**

The most obvious reply, but there are still, as the computer suggests, several different possibilities of keeping the position equal, while lively and interesting.

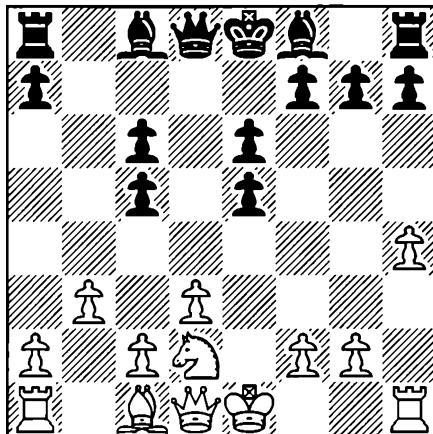
Assume, though, that Black does not want to keep the tension alive. He is not interested in provoking his opponent into overpressing. All he wants is to take the half-point away as quickly and as conveniently as possible. A draw with Black against strong opposition is usually a good result.

The simplest way would appear to be 8...c4!?, a return pawn offer, which immediately mobilizes his dark-squared bishop. If 9 bxc4 then 9...Qxe5 and Black is comfortable, since 10 Qxe5?! is answered by 10...Ra5+ 11 c3 (not 11 Qd2?? Rxe5+, winning the rook) 11...Rxe5+ with the advantage. Black also has at least equality after 9 dxc4 Qxe5.

If instead 9 exd6 cxd3 10 Qxd3 Qxd6, Black has some slight difficulties with his queen-side pawn structure, but there is adequate compensation with his more active minor pieces, and his bishop pair.

It is difficult to imagine that White could be enthusiastic about trying to win in such positions. (Again, what has he achieved with his h2-h4 push?) Job done for Black.

**9 Qxe5 dxe5 10 Qd2**



**Question:** Effectively the same question as before. What is the best way to handle the position here, to try to eliminate any danger of a loss?

**Warning:** This was perhaps the most difficult move so far in the whole of the match, and Gelfand thought for an hour in making his decision. It is a baffling position, and if a

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

player of Gelfand's strength cannot find a good position quickly, then few others could have done better. Indeed, one would suspect, 99% of chess players would not have considered the move that Gelfand played, and of the 1%, most players would have rejected it quite quickly.

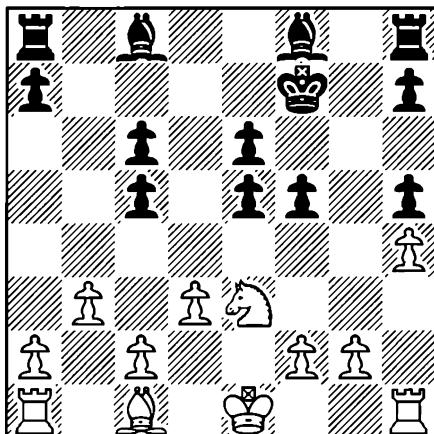
**10...c4?**

An astonishing move, which got the audience buzzing. Black gives away the extra pawn, just to activate his dark-squared bishop, and then, before long, gives away a second pawn too.

Gelfand's move is not perhaps all that great a surprise if we take into account the possibility of ...c5-c4 two moves earlier. Quite possibly he had thought about that, but decided it was unnecessary. A little further on, there is an extra degree of urgency. Black has to decide quickly how to get his bishops into active play. Two moves ago, this would have been a straightforward equalizing idea, whereas now it makes the whole game noteworthy.

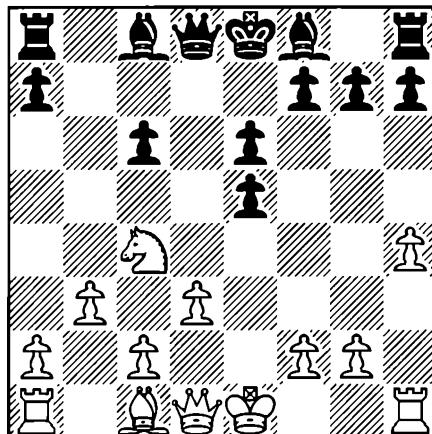
The problem is that quieter lines, such as 10... $\mathbb{A}d6$  11  $\mathbb{A}b2$  f6 12  $\mathbb{W}h5+$  g6 13  $\mathbb{W}f3$   $\mathbb{A}b7$  14  $\mathbb{W}g4$ , or 10... $\mathbb{W}d5$  11  $\mathbb{Q}e4$   $\mathbb{A}e7$  (now if 11...c4, 12 bxc4 gives White a slight edge) 12  $\mathbb{W}g4$  g6 13  $\mathbb{W}g3$ , still make life uncomfortable for Black, and therefore there is still a danger of a loss in the longer run.

Suppose, on the other hand, that Black tries to keep the extra pawn, being prepared to combat any tactics – for instance, if it was essential for him to play for a win, rather than to secure a draw – there is still a possible choice. He could try 10... $\mathbb{W}d5$  11  $\mathbb{Q}e4$  f5!? 12  $\mathbb{W}h5+$  g6 13  $\mathbb{Q}f6+$   $\mathbb{W}f7$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  gxh5 15  $\mathbb{Q}e3$ .



Black now has three sets of doubled pawns! It is unlikely that White will be able to regain a pawn quickly, but Black will have to work hard to keep them all together. Maybe 15... $\mathbb{A}a6$  16  $\mathbb{A}b2$   $\mathbb{A}g7$  17 0-0-0  $\mathbb{B}hg8$  18 g3, tense but perhaps level. Not quite enough, if the first objective is to make sure he cannot be worse, in the heat of the match battle.

**11  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$**



**11...♝a6**

**Question:** Could Black have protected the front e-pawn with 11...f6 - ? He can be content with having opened up lines for his dark-squared bishop, and material is level.

This would not be advisable. 11...f6 12 ♜h5+ g6 13 ♜f3 leaves too many pawn weaknesses, especially on c6 and f6.

**12 ♜f3**

Of course not 12 ♜xe5?? ♜a5+.

**12...♝d5**

The next stage of Gelfand's defensive idea.

**13 ♜xd5**

**Question:** This queen exchange is obvious, natural, and wins a pawn. Anand played it very quickly. But were there any other interesting moves he could have tried?

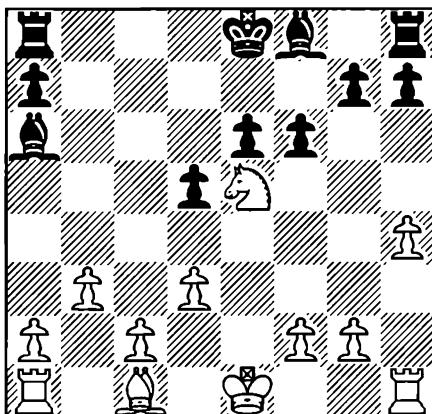
Shipov suggested that 13 ♜g3! was the last attempt by Anand to try for a win. Pawns are level, but Gelfand still has structural problems, which are not yet fully resolved. Black also has trouble with his dark squares, and it is difficult to bring his dark-squared bishop into play.

The computer suggests 13...f6 14 0-0 as level, but White can be happy with this. Black's sacrifice of the c5-pawn gives a bit more freedom to his pieces, but White's game still looks better.

Another option is for Black to exchange his front e-pawn with 13...e4, but this opens up the long diagonal, and after 14 0-0 exd3 15 cxd3 ♜d8 16 ♜d1, followed soon by ♜b2, Black still has to work out how to develop his kingside.

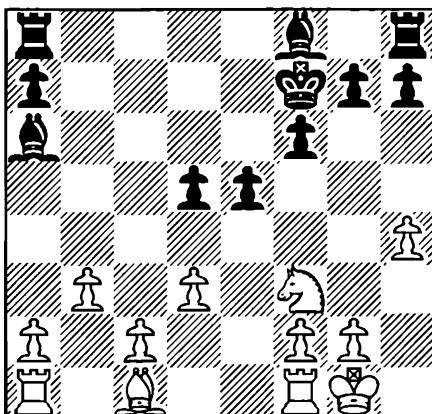
This would have been the last serious attempt by Anand to try to win the slow-play match, before the tensions and dubious excitements of the rapidplay.

**13...cxd5 14 ♔xe5 f6**



Gelfand has sacrificed his second pawn, ensuring that the five remaining pawns are healthy and secure, with prospects of activity, revitalized by his free-ranging bishops.

15 ♔f3 e5 16 0-0 ♕f7



**Question:** Superb though Gelfand's defensive plans might be, it is always best in chess to remain a little sceptical. Is Black really totally level here?

17 c4

This simplifies the structure a little too soon if White is aiming to gain anything out of the extra pawn. It was not long before the players agreed a draw. Quite possibly, with it being the final game of the main match, both players would have been extremely tense,

and each would have felt a sense of relief at not losing. Six all would be a highly respectable score for either player, equal first in the slow-play; whereas 5½-6½ would have been a real downer for the loser. They then had to start thinking about the rapidplay.

Objectively, Anand is still slightly better here. The important point is not to allow his pawn structure to be weakened, if at all possible. 17 ♘b2 would at least have forced Black to show how to defend a slightly worse position:

a) 17...e4 18 ♖d4 exd3 19 cxd3 ♘xd3 20 ♕fd1, and while Black now has level material, he will still be under pressure with his isolated d-pawn. It is impossible for two bishops to focus on the same square, whereas bishop and knight can sometimes work well together.

b) 17...d4 allows White to open up a good square for the knight with 18 ♖d2, and ♖c4 before too long.

c) 17...♘b4, to block out the knight from reaching d2, would perhaps be one good method of defence, and then after 18 c3, a quick retreat with 18...♘d6. White's pawn structure will again have been slightly weakened, and this gives the opportunity for Black to defend.

The draw is not wholly trivial for Black, although Gelfand would surely have found a good way of holding the game. The chances for White to try for an edge with 17 ♘b2 seem less than those after 13 ♗g3 earlier.

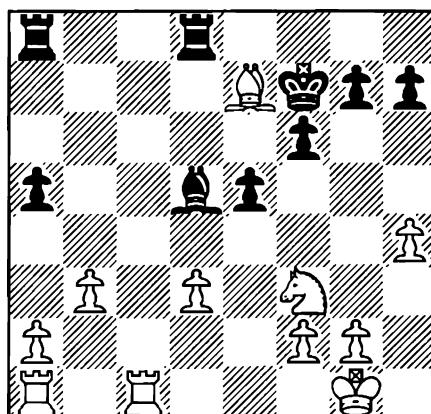
**17...♗e7 18 ♗e3 ♘b7 19 cxd5**

If 19 ♕fc1, all Black needs to do to defend is to centralize his pieces, and not worry about pushing his pawns – therefore 19...♗hd8.

**19...♘xd5 20 ♕fc1 a5**

In order to try and break down the outside 2-1 queenside white pawns.

**21 ♘c5 ♕hd8 22 ♗xe7 ½-½**

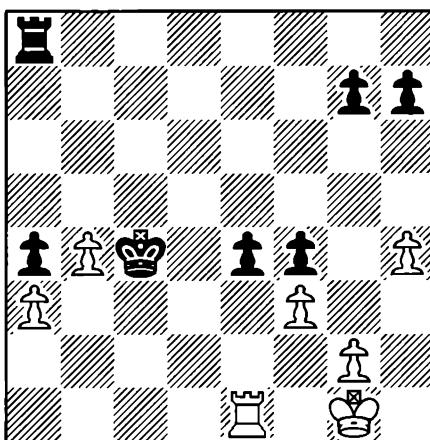


**Question:** Many commentators suggested that the agreed draw seemed a little premature. What do you think?

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

The draw offer by White was perfectly reasonable. White has the extra pawn, but Black has the more active pieces, and White's pawns have various weaknesses, so it is difficult to see how he could set up a viable passed pawn.

After 22... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$  23  $\mathbb{B}c7+$ , both 23... $\mathbb{B}d7$  and 23... $\mathbb{Q}f8$  seem acceptable. The simpler line would be 23... $\mathbb{B}d7$  24  $\mathbb{B}xd7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xd7$  25  $\mathbb{Q}d2$  a4, when there is not much to be done for White. Indeed, if he tries too hard, he has to be careful not to fall for any traps. For example, 26  $\mathbb{Q}c4$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  27 b4  $\mathbb{Q}b5$  28 a3  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$  29  $dxc4+$   $\mathbb{Q}xc4$  30  $\mathbb{B}d1$  e4 31  $\mathbb{B}e1$  f5 32 f3 f4!?



It is now White who has to play for the draw: 33  $fxe4!$  (not 33  $\mathbb{B}xe4+?$   $\mathbb{Q}b3$  and White is in trouble) 33... $\mathbb{Q}b3$  34 b5  $\mathbb{Q}xa3$  35  $\mathbb{B}b1$  with a repetition after 35... $\mathbb{Q}a2$  36  $\mathbb{B}b4$   $\mathbb{Q}a3$  37  $\mathbb{B}b1$ .

But who needs all this extra excitement at this stage of the match? Easier just to take the safe and quick draw.

In my blog, I suggested this was “the best chess of the match so far”. Now I am not so sure. Technically, Gelfand should have played ...c5-c4 a couple of moves earlier, for example, while Anand had possible improvements at several points in the game. It was undoubtedly difficult and interesting, though, with much chess paradox squeezed into twenty moves.

## The Sequel: Tie-Break Games

Anand won the rapidplay playoff, retaining the World Championship. He scored one win and three draws, out of the four extra games. I have played through the games, but I do not intend to annotate them fully. There was, of course, much entertainment, as is bound to happen with two world-class players, each aiming for a win. Equally, the players cannot be expected to play completely accurate chess, when the clock is so dominant. So there are mistakes, so what?

It is sad that we have resorted to rapid games to decide the World Championship. What

happens in the end is that strength and stamina will decide, rather than chess understanding. The game that Gelfand lost was from a drawn endgame, with only one pawn on the board and an equal number of pieces. Gelfand did not have any second time control and, having to play ten seconds a move indefinitely, he slipped in an error or two. Not really a good way for a world championship to finish.

For completeness, we give fragments of each of the games.

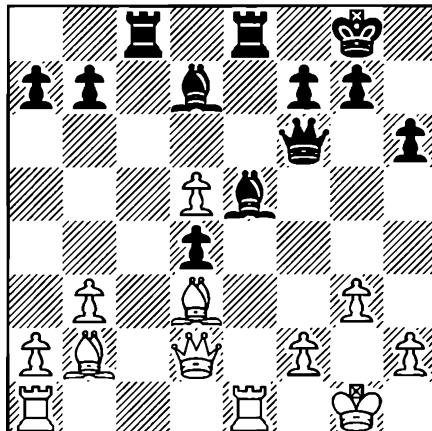
30th May 2012  
B.Gelfand-V.Anand  
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 1)  
*Semi-Slav Defence*

This looked impressive when played through quickly. Sharp and open tactics ending up, after sacrifices on either side, in a drawn rook and pawn endgame. Sometimes, though, the draw may be the result of mistakes by both sides, and all the more so in a rapidplay game.

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 e3 e5 5 ♜f3 ♜bd7 6 ♜c2 ♜d6 7 ♜d3 0-0 8 0-0 e5**

Anand believes in his plan. 8...dxc4 9 ♜xc4 b5 is a more common reaction.

**9 cxd5 cxd5 10 e4 exd4 11 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 12 exd5 h6 13 b3 ♜e5 14 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 15 ♜e1 ♜e8 16 ♜b2 ♜d7 17 ♜d2 ♜f6 18 g3 ♜ac8**



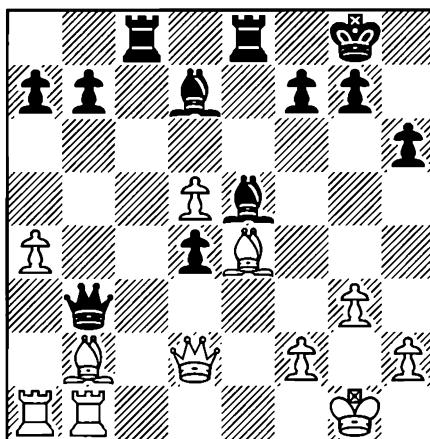
**19 a4?!**

A strange move, which merely, and unnecessarily, ends up weakening his pawn structure. The simplest way for White to try for an edge might well be the ultra-symmetrical 19 ♜e4, arguing that his bishop on b2 is superior to Black's bishop on d7.

**19...♜f3**

Straight away, Anand pounces on Gelfand's weaknesses at b3 and f3. Black is now better.

20 ♜e4 ♛xb3 21 ♜eb1



Exactly the sort of position where Anand would have benefited from having twenty minutes to think.

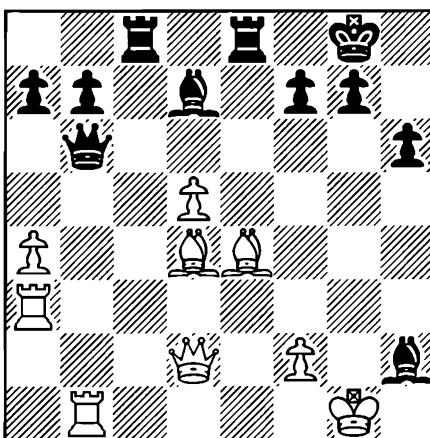
21...♜xg3?!

This looks good, and the crowds enjoyed it, but the game soon ended up in a draw.

Instead, the computer suggests 21...♝c4!, quietly consolidating, and it is difficult to see how White can improve his pieces. If 22 ♜xd4??, then of course 22...♝xd4.

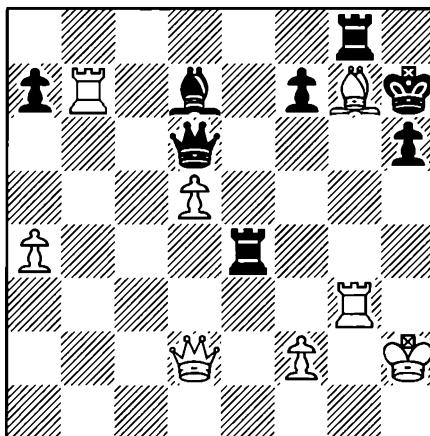
It is easier to think through tactics quickly than to try to assess a position.

22 ♜a3 ♛b6 23 ♜xd4 ♜xh2+



Ofcourse Anand had seen this in advance.

24 ♜xh2 ♛d6+ 25 ♜g3 ♜xe4 26 ♜xg7 ♜h7 27 ♜xb7 ♜g8



And we can assume that both players will have seen their way through the tactics.

**28 ♜xh6+**

The only problem, from Anand's point of view, is that Gelfand was able to find the drawing line. It is extremely difficult for a player who has calculated a variation, over the board, very close to its end, and seeing that it is not winning, then to change tack at the beginning and start again (i.e. 21...♜c4 instead of 21...♝xg3). It is close to impossible to do this in a rapidplay.

**28...♝xh6+ 29 ♜xh6 ♜xg3 30 ♜xg3 ♜c8 31 ♜c7 ♜xh6 32 ♜xc8 ♜xa4 ½-½**

A sharp draw, although there were undoubtedly mistakes.

30th May 2012  
**V.Anand-B.Gelfand**

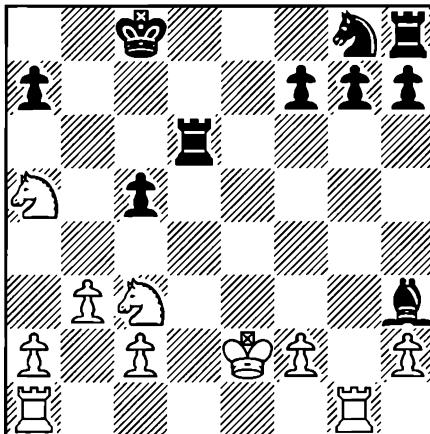
World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 2)  
*Sicilian Defence*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 e6 4 ♜xc6 bxc6 5 b3 e5 6 ♜xe5 ♜e7 7 d4**

Deviating from game ten, in which Anand played 7 ♜b2!?

**7...d6 8 ♜xc6 ♜xe4+ 9 ♜e2 ♜xe2+ 10 ♜xe2 ♜b7 11 ♜a5 ♜xg2 12 ♜g1 ♜h3 13 dxc5 dxc5**

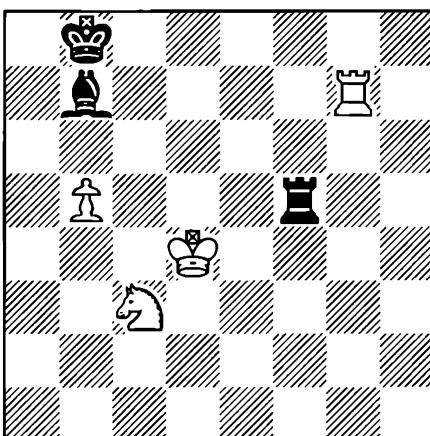
**14 ♜c3 0-0-0 15 ♜f4 ♜d6 16 ♜xd6 ♜xd6**



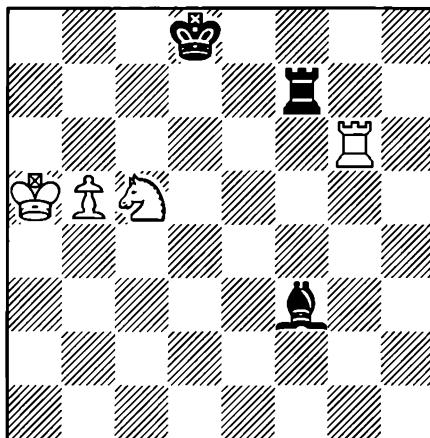
Here it seems that Anand could have achieved a clear advantage with 17  $\mathbb{R}xg7$ , leaving Black with four isolated pawns.

The game move, 17  $\mathbb{R}g5$ , was also possible, but leaves White only a slight edge. Maybe Anand was distracted by the thought of attacking the black king, but, if so, he was unable to demonstrate checkmate.

Nevertheless, Gelfand was getting short of time – a move every ten seconds indefinitely – and although he reached what presumably have been a straightforward draw, with rook and bishop versus rook, knight and pawn, he managed to lose the game. It is much easier in defending, when you have plenty of time on the clock, than when you have to play almost instantly, while still trying to calculate whether you have allowed a potentially good move by the opponent, and see what your own move would be in reply. Just going through the mechanics takes up time.



This is the position after Black's 64th.



And this is the position after White's 71st. It is easy to see that White has made progress, but it is not so clear that he should have any winning chances. Even so, Gelfand somehow lost, after allowing Anand to exchange minor pieces into a winning rook ending. So, a game down over the match.

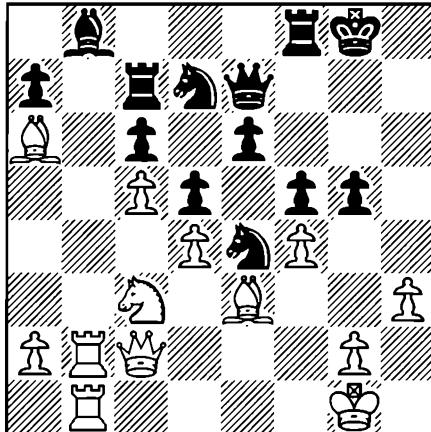
The question for the reader is to try to find a reliable way of holding the position, whether after move 64 (you are aiming for a rock-solid blockade), or after move 71. Use the computer to help you analyse.

30th May 2012  
**B.Gelfand-V.Anand**

World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 3)  
*Slav Defence*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3  $\mathbb{Q}$ f3  $\mathbb{Q}$ f6 4 e3  $\mathbb{Q}$ f5 5  $\mathbb{Q}$ c3 e6 6  $\mathbb{Q}$ h4  $\mathbb{Q}$ g6 7  $\mathbb{Q}$ xg6 hxg6 8  $\mathbb{Q}$ d3  $\mathbb{Q}$ bd7 9 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}$ d6 10 h3 0-0 11  $\mathbb{Q}$ c2  $\mathbb{Q}$ e7 12  $\mathbb{Q}$ d1  $\mathbb{Q}$ ac8 13 c5  $\mathbb{Q}$ b8 14 f4  $\mathbb{Q}$ e8 15 b4 g5 16  $\mathbb{Q}$ b1 f5 17 b5 gxf4 18 exf4  $\mathbb{Q}$ ef6 19 bxc6 bxc6 20  $\mathbb{Q}$ a6  $\mathbb{Q}$ c7 21  $\mathbb{Q}$ e3  $\mathbb{Q}$ e4 22  $\mathbb{Q}$ b2 g5 23  $\mathbb{Q}$ db1

Anand is in massive trouble here. All he can do, in practical terms, is force Gelfand to have to calculate not just one line, but several different lines. With any luck, the opponent will miss something.



Anand opened play up with...

**23...gxf4!?** **24 ♖xf4 e5**

Two good captures on the e-file, but which is the better? In fact it doesn't really matter, but it is time spent on the clock for Gelfand to analyse.

**25 ♖xe5**

25 ♖xe4 also wins: 25...exf4 26 ♖d6 and Black is squashed on the queenside; or 25...fxe4 26 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 27 dxе5 and the bishop on b8 is lost.

**25...♘xe5**

Somewhere in all the hacking of pieces on both sides, Gelfand missed 26 ♖xe4. Then 26...fxe4 27 dxе5 is the same as before, and again Black's bishop drops; while if he moves the knight away, White has 27 ♖d6.

Gelfand instead played...

**26 ♕xb8?**

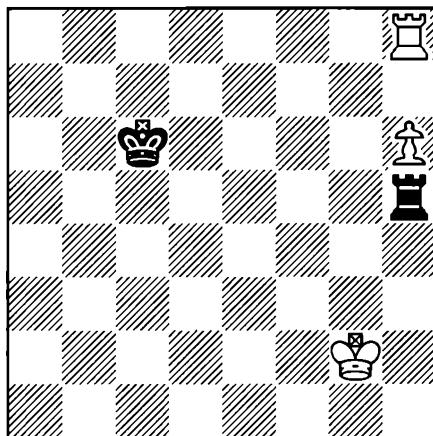
...which is strange, as the bishop is dead wood. Taking the live knight would have been far more sensible, but of course mistakes occur in rapidplay. Anand was now able to play...

**26...♗g6**

...when he had survived for the time being.

Then many, many more moves were made, just seconds per move, far quicker than one would expect to ask grandmasters to play. After many mistakes, Gelfand emerged with a winning rook endgame, two pawns up, and sacrificed one to promote the other.

So, the final chance for Gelfand to win, and he blew it...



*White to play*

Gelfand gave away a totally unnecessary tempo with 61  $\mathbb{R}h7?$   $\mathbb{B}d7$  62  $\mathbb{B}g3$   $\mathbb{B}e6$  63  $\mathbb{B}g4$ , when he had to admit that he was no longer winning, and so offered the draw. 61  $h7?$   $\mathbb{B}b7$  is also a well-known draw. All White can do is move the king, and all that Black needs to do is to keep the rook safe on the h-file, or, if necessary, check on the g-file should the white king reach g6 or beyond.

So can you find the win from the diagram? Remember, Gelfand could still have levelled the whole match.

30th May 2012

**V.Anand-B.Gelfand**

World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 4)

The final game ended up in a level rook and opposite-coloured bishop ending – no big mistakes, just a steady draw, and Anand retains his title.

There is a temptation to analyse this game, as an illustration that it is still just about possible for the top grandmasters to conduct a good rapidplay game, since most of us are not capable of playing with such accuracy in rapid finishes. On the whole, though, it seems better to concentrate on the Tal Memorial.

The many blunders in the other tie-break games are, of course, painful to watch, and it is much more interesting to analyse slow play. All the same, it is a valuable exercise to see how the strongest players can make ghastly mistakes when they are forced to play quickly. It is an exercise in chess psychology. Are the mistakes they make at speed of the same type as lower-level players with more time on the clock?

## **Afterthought**

A couple of days after these notes were written, the British Championship had just been completed – except there was the little matter of sorting out first place, with Gawain Jones and Stephen Gordon tied on 9/11. Gawain won the play-off – but only after managing, in one of the games, to lose the queen for not enough pieces, and then Stephen, when running very short of time, made mistakes and lost.

The point is not so much that one player beat the other. Chess is, after all, a competitive game. Rather, the quality of play has undoubtedly deteriorated through having to negotiate very fast time limits. It would surely be preferable, for the author and for the general chess public, to see chess being played at the highest possible level.

# Chapter Three

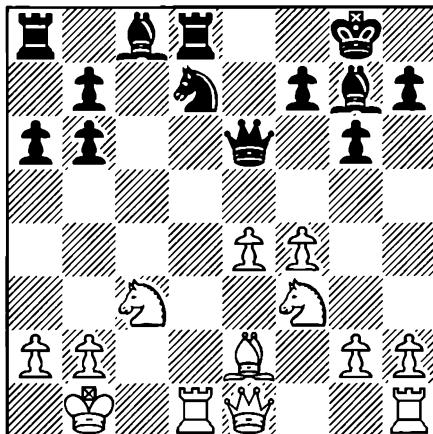
## Seventh Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012

Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>1 Carlsen</b>	*	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	5½
<b>2 Caruana</b>	½	*	½	0	0	1	½	½	1	1	5
<b>3 Radjabov</b>	0	½	*	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	5
<b>4 Morozевич</b>	½	1	½	*	1	½	1	0	0	0	4½
<b>5 Aronian</b>	½	1	½	0	*	½	½	1	0	½	4½
<b>6 Kramnik</b>	½	0	½	½	½	*	1	½	0	1	4½
<b>7 Grischuk</b>	½	½	½	0	½	0	*	1	1	½	4½
<b>8 Nakamura</b>	½	½	½	1	0	½	0	*	½	½	4
<b>9 McShane</b>	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	½	*	½	4
<b>10 Tomashevsky</b>	½	0	0	1	½	0	½	½	½	*	3½

Sometimes, for no obvious reason, a tournament can fizzle out to dullness. This was certainly not the case with the Tal Memorial. The draws were well fought, with no formal 20-minute handshakes. No player was out of their depth, and no player was able to run away from the opposition. Play was so tight towards the end that it was unclear who would actually win the event.

Caruana, the youngest player, was leading with 5/8, but lost badly against Aronian in the final round. The critical position was at move 19.



L.Aronian-F.Caruana (round nine)

*Black to play*

Caruana could have snatched a couple of pawns with 19... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$  20  $\mathbb{W}xc3$   $\mathbb{W}xe4+$  21  $\mathbb{Q}d3$   $\mathbb{W}xf4$ , but then he has exchanged off his fianchetto bishop, and his king looks open to attack. Nevertheless, it looks well worth trying, and seems much better than the tame 19... $\mathbb{W}e8$  20  $\mathbb{W}h4$   $\mathbb{Q}f6$  21  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  with pressure for White.

Try to analyse the position yourself, and remember the tension of the tournament situation. Would you have taken the two pawns? Would it all have been safe? Would it have been safe against a renowned attacking player such as Aronian? Could Caruana have won the tournament? Or was he still under pressure?

Carlsen never dominated this tournament, but his convincing win against McShane in the final round was enough to come sole first, with two wins and seven draws. Conversely, McShane, had he beaten Carlsen, could have ended up equal first, instead of second from bottom. However, he was able to win against Aronian, Kramnik and Morozevich, which is still extremely impressive.

The other three games in the final round were all drawn. I leave it to the reader to decide whether Kramnik could or should have achieved more against Morozevich, or whether Grischuk could have done so against Tomashevsky. The chess engine suggests so, but often this is merely the starting point of analysis, rather than the conclusion.

## The latest strongest grandmasters

Sometimes the headline stories are more thought-provoking than the actual games, at least at one level of thinking. And sometimes the picture is as interesting as the chess itself, again at one level of analysis.

A photograph of the prize-giving shows images of Radjabov, Carlsen and Caruana, all of undergraduate age, dressed in suits. One recognizes that, at this extremely prestigious

event, the three youngest players are on top – and that these, perhaps with a few others of the strongest young grandmasters (Karjakin was not playing, and Giri will have his chance in the future) will soon start to dominate the chess world. It is fully appropriate that the tournament was the Tal Memorial, in recognition that Tal himself had an immense impact at the start of the 1960s, when he beat Botvinnik to become world champion at the age of 23. Now it seems that there are at least three other players who could have a similar impact, compared with just one – Tal – or perhaps Fischer a few years later.

Chess is on the move, and this Tal Memorial in 2012 suggests that we are at the beginning of the most exciting period of chess since the original impact of Kasparov in the early 1980s, and his development and consolidation thereafter. For the first time since Kasparov's retirement, we have the sense that not just one player, Magnus Carlsen, but a select few others too will in time be as strong as Kasparov.

This must surely be well worth celebrating. In the third part of this book, I wanted to go through some of the strengths, and possible slight weaknesses, of these three young super-super-grandmasters, with a win and a loss by each of them. Of course, Carlsen did not lose a game at all, so instead we include a tense draw by him.

There is an element of double-counting, in that Carlsen had a win against Radjabov, and therefore Radjabov had a loss against Carlsen – so an extra game has been included, a win by Nakamura, who is of a similar sort of strength. This win was against Morozevich, who had himself looked, in the early stages, to be threatening to run away with the tournament – until his loss to Nakamura prefaced two more, against Tomashevsky and McShane.

Naturally, we should not get carried away with the idea that the younger players were necessarily the greatest geniuses. What was happening during the Tal Memorial was that Kramnik, the oldest player in the event, and Morozevich, not necessarily in the most robust of health, got tired, and made various mistakes. Youth in chess is of enormous significance. Young players do not get tired so easily – though of course, without excellent chess understanding, even the most athletic of chess players will not reach the top.

Where does this leave Aronian, the world's second highest rated chess player? He is seven years younger than Kramnik, but is significantly older than the three leading players in Moscow. A clue can be taken from the cross-table: Aronian lost twice at the Tal Memorial, and also lost a game against Kramnik at Zurich. Three losses in fifteen games, an average of one defeat in five of his games. This compares with Carlsen's recent record of an average of one defeat in over twenty games. It is difficult, therefore, to see how Aronian will ever be able to beat Carlsen in a world championship match, unless he can cut down sharply on his losses.

## **Round One: Carlsen-Kramnik**

Magnus Carlsen has a remarkable ability to avoid defeat, which has allowed him to become the top-ranking player in world chess, a head of Aronian, and further ahead of all other players, including Anand, the world champion. Carlsen must be regarded as the fa-

## *Fighting Chess: Move by Move*

vourite in the next cycle of the world championship. In matches, avoiding defeats is more important than in tournaments. Carlsen has the ability to win just one game in a match, and presumably more than that, while not losing any.

Carlsen just does not lose games. He is therefore able to increase his rating, despite having already reached 2800, by the apparently simple (but not really so simple) method of playing solidly and avoiding trouble, while still finding wins against the top players.

As an indication, look at his tournament results over the past year and a half, after he had already reached 2815. Then:

**Medias** (June 2011): Carlsen (2815) +3 =7; wins against Nakamura, Nisipeanu and Ivanchuk.

**Biel** (July 2011): Carlsen (2821) +5 =4 -1; wins against Pelletier (twice), Shirov (twice) and Caruana (once); two draws against Morozevich; and, most impressively, a win and a draw by Vachier Lagrave.

**Sao Paulo/Bilbao** (September/October 2011): Carlsen (2823) +3 =6 -1; wins against Ivanchuk (twice); win and a loss against Vallejo Pons.

**Moscow** (November 2011): Carlsen (2826) +2 =7; wins against Gelfand and Nakamura.

**London** (December 2011): Carlsen (2826) +3 =5, wins against Howell, Nakamura and Adams.

**Wijk aan Zee** (January 2012): Carlsen (2835) +4 =8 -1, wins against Gashimov, Aronian, Gelfand and Topalov; loss to Karjakin.

**Moscow** (June 2012; our featured tournament): Carlsen (2835) +2 =7; wins against Radjabov and McShane.

**Biel** (July/August 2012): Carlsen (2837) +4 =6; wins against Wang Hao (twice) and Bologan (twice).

And, most recently, **Sao Paulo/Bilbao** (September/October 2012): Carlsen (2843) +4 =5 -1; wins against Vallejo Pons (twice) and Anand; win and a loss against Caruana.

Only four losses against ninety grandmaster opponents, all at world-class strength or very close to it. There was a time when Capablanca was regarded as almost unbeatable, having lost only 35 games in his career, at about 6%. This seems tiny in comparison. Many of Capablanca's opponents were relatively weak, whereas Carlsen's opponents were all strong modern grandmasters, only rarely dropping below 2600, and mostly at 2700+ level. To lose only one in ten games would be quite an achievement, as in the matches by Aronian and Kramnik, or Anand and Gelfand. But to lose on average only once in over twenty games, that is mind-blowing accuracy. In terms of world championship chess, who would be able to find a single win, plus a string of draws, in a ten-game match against anyone else?

Predictions often have the ability of going vastly astray, but one can feel reasonably confident that Carlsen will beat Anand in the next world championship. It would be unwise to think too many years ahead. After all, even younger players, rapidly advancing through the 2700s, will themselves have the valuable opportunity of learning from Carlsen, and trying to

improve on him. Caruana and Giri are the obvious possibilities. They both have the talent to become world champions, but can they play with extreme and consistent accuracy, move by move, week by week, month by month? And there will be even younger players advancing through the ranks. It will be interesting to see how it all works out.

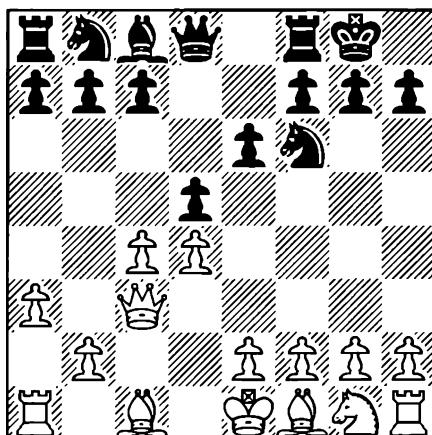
But now it is time to focus on the early summer (in the northern hemisphere) of 2012. Specifically, the Tal Memorial of June 2012, a ten-player all-play-all with no back-runners, every player having the confidence and the chess ability to exploit any tiny mistake by the opponent. Only Carlsen in this event managed to remain unbeaten. No player scored less than 3½/9. There were no “weakies” here.

Carlsen's chess was not quite as self-assured as it might appear. He was a little rusty through not having played in the previous five months, and some of his opening play was too leisurely – impressive if the opponent responds too quietly, but downright dangerous if the opponent takes the initiative and sacrifices.

In the following game Carlsen got his king stuck in the centre. Many felt that he was soon in extreme danger. Others, including myself, thought that, while he was extremely close to the edge, Carlsen just about kept things safe with gritty defensive play. There is often, in really sharp positions, only the smallest of difference between a tense draw and catastrophe.

8th June 2012  
**M.Carlsen-V.Kramnik**  
Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012  
*Nimzo-Indian Defence*

**1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 e6 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$  4  $\mathbb{W}c2$  0-0 5 a3  $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$  6  $\mathbb{W}xc3$  d5**



All this seems very solid for Black, with not many wins for White at the higher levels.

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

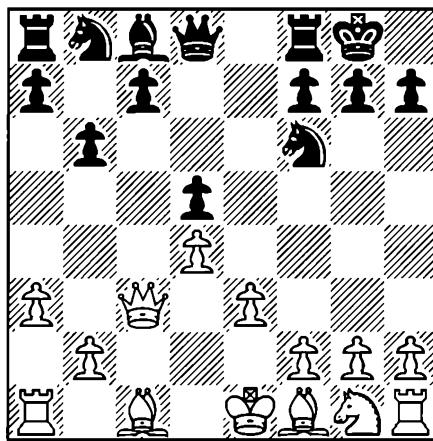
White has the bishop pair, but he is in danger of running behind in development, after having spent time on  $\mathbb{W}c2$ , a2-a3,  $\mathbb{W}xc3$ , and almost certainly another queen move later.

**7 e3**

Varying from the more popular 7  $\mathbb{Q}f3$ , followed perhaps 7...dxc4 8  $\mathbb{W}xc4$  b6 9  $\mathbb{Q}g5$   $\mathbb{A}a6$  10  $\mathbb{W}a4$  c5 11 dxc5 bxc5. The computer suggests this is slightly better for White, but it usually ends up in a draw – as, for example, in M.Carlsen-V.Kramnik, Dortmund 2009. Carlsen and Kramnik are, of course, fully entitled to have their own points of view.

7  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  is also played.

**7...b6 8 cxd5 exd5**



**Question:** What is the most accurate move for White?

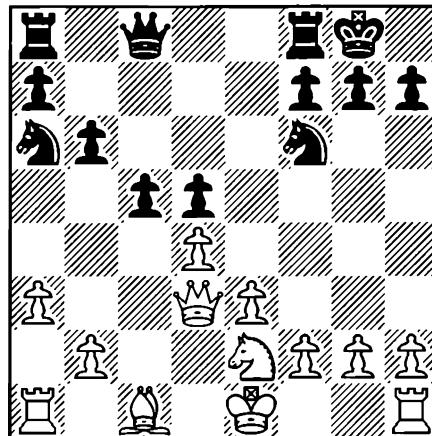
**9  $\mathbb{Q}d3$ ??**

As mentioned above, Carlsen was rusty. His move allows Black to equalize with comfort. White would do better to delay developing his bishop until it becomes clear what Black is going to do with his own bishop. 9  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}f5$  also looks comfortable for Black.

Instead, 9  $\mathbb{W}c2$ ! places the queen on a more flexible diagonal, so that if 9... $\mathbb{Q}a6$  10  $\mathbb{Q}xa6$   $\mathbb{Q}xa6$  11 b4, he can set up the standard queenside minority attack. Or if 9... $\mathbb{W}e7$ , then maybe 10 b4 again. Black still has to show that he can equalize.

**9... $\mathbb{Q}a6$  10  $\mathbb{Q}xa6$   $\mathbb{Q}xa6$  11  $\mathbb{W}d3$   $\mathbb{W}c8$  12  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  c5**

Black is ahead in development, in the sense that he has already castled and all his minor pieces are off the back rank. He now has to be careful not to slow down. If, for example, he becomes too concerned about the isolation of his knight on a6, and starts to think about quiet manoeuvring such as ...c7-c6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ , he will lose the impetus in his position. Like it or not, he has to be prepared to play ...c7-c5, continuing to open up lines for his pieces, even if it allows his pawns to be weakened.

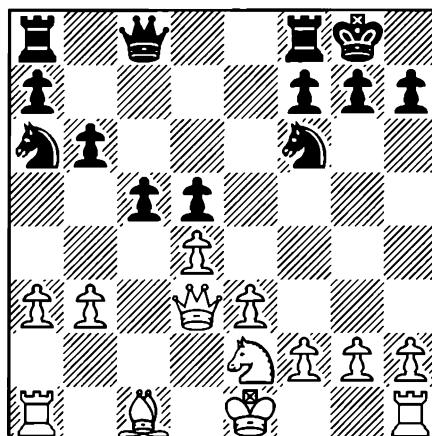


**Question:** What should White do in reply?

### 13 b3

Black is going to be very comfortable if he is given the chance of playing ...c5-c4. Therefore Carlsen prevents that move.

The main alternative would be to exchange pawns with 13 dxc5, which may be the more accurate move – although it is unlikely, given White's slowness in development, that he can claim any edge. Then 13...bxc5 looks tense, but equal, while 13...dxc5 14 Wd1 is similar the main line (after 15 Wd1 in the game). The difference here is that White's b-pawn is still on b2. Life is much easier with the pawn on this square. If, for example, 14...Wa6, White can simply play 15 O-O, as there is no threat of ...Qxb3.

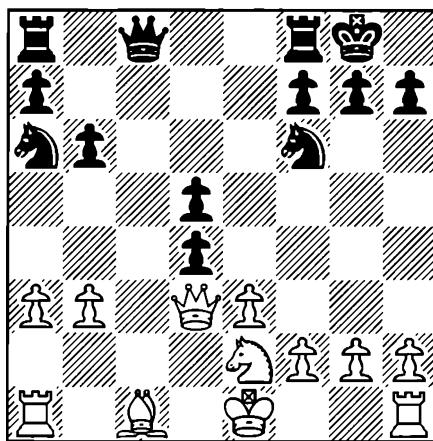


### 13...cxd4

**Question:** Could, or should, he have created a passed pawn, with 13...c4 - ?

Any real weakness in White's play is through the slowness of his development, not his pawn structure, which is strong. Black needs to concentrate on generating as much activity for his pieces as possible.

The passed pawn after 13...c4 14 bxc4 is not particularly strong, either with the queen exchange (14... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$  15  $\mathbb{Q}xc4 dxc4$ ) or without (14...dxc4). Remember that White, too, will have a passed pawn, and a fully centralized and protected one.



**Question:** Which way should White recapture?

**14  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$**

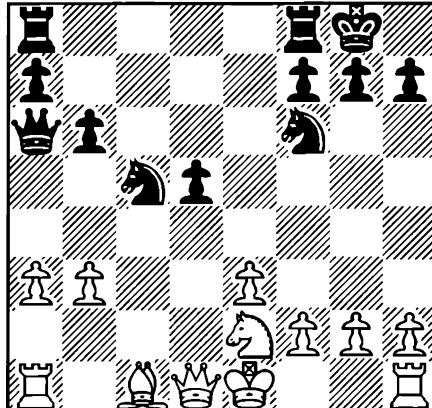
He would like to create pressure on the d-file and, ideally, on the long a1-h8 diagonal. The naive 14  $\mathbb{Q}xd4?!$  would obstruct both lines, giving Black the advantage after 14... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ , especially since 15  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  runs into 15... $\mathbb{Q}xb3!$  16  $\mathbb{Q}xb3 \mathbb{Q}c3+$ , winning a pawn.

The queen recapture keeps play far more open for White. The knight would not have been on a good square anyway. Better to leave it on e2 and reserve options.

The computer suggests 14 exd4 as offering White a slight edge, but it is difficult to see why this should be so. It seems equal after 14... $\mathbb{Q}e8$  15 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}c7$ . If anything, with the symmetrical pawn structure, but with a pawn blockage on d4, Black's knights are more flexible than White's bishop and knight. The line is playable, but certainly not inspiring for White.

**14... $\mathbb{Q}c5$  15  $\mathbb{Q}d1 \mathbb{Q}a6$**

Suddenly one senses a buzz on the internet. Isn't Black doing extremely well? Isn't he just winning? There were plenty who suggested that he was. Even when the game ended as a draw, many still suggested that somehow Kramnik had missed a win. It is of course not quite so simple.

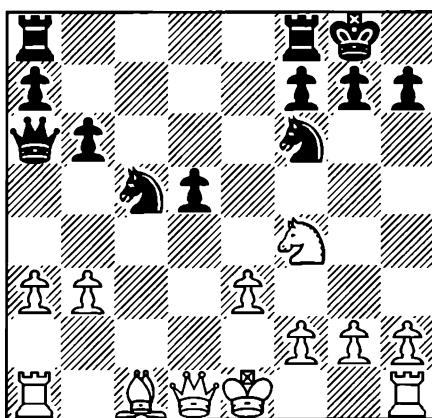


**Question:** So what should Carlsen do next?

#### 16 $\mathbb{Q}f4?$

Over-sharp. By covering the d3-square Carlsen aims to give away nothing to his opponent. If Black attacks, then by all means White will fight back. If Black does nothing (which is unlikely) White will start to attack himself with b3-b4, aiming to capitalize on his superior pawn structure once his pieces are in safety.

After having gone through the Anand-Gelfand match, one feels that Gelfand in particular would quickly have given away a pawn, so that the rest of White's position remains absolutely secure, with not even the slightest chance of attack by the opponent. This would occur after 16 0-0!  $\mathbb{Q}xb3$  17  $\mathbb{W}xb3$   $\mathbb{W}xe2$  18  $\mathbb{B}b2$   $\mathbb{W}c4$  19  $\mathbb{W}d1$ , when Black's extra pawn is isolated and needs protection, while White's dark-squared bishop has easily the better minor piece.



**Question:** What are the drawing lines after each of 16...g5, 16...d4, and 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$  - ? Or is it possible that one of these may end up with an advantage?

Sometimes when play is wild and tactical, if one of the players in a sharp position goes wrong, he can go decisively wrong, without any obvious later error.

**16...d4!**

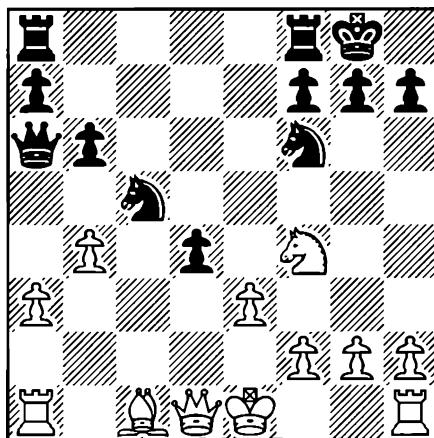
Kramnik's instincts are to go for the win, and rightly so.

The simplest solution, though certainly not a winning try, is 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$  17  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  (17  $\mathbb{Q}xe6$   $fxe6$  or 17  $\mathbb{Q}d3$   $\mathbb{Q}xd3$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xd3$  d4 offer White nothing either) 17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$  (he does not want to allow White to escape with easy castling) 18  $\mathbb{Q}f4$   $\mathbb{Q}e6$  with a draw by repetition.

A more complicated drawing line follows after 16...g5 17  $\mathbb{Q}b2!$  gxf4 (or 17... $\mathbb{Q}fe4$  18 h4!, since 18...gxf4?? now loses to 19  $\mathbb{Q}g4+$  and mates) 18  $\mathbb{Q}xf6$   $\mathbb{Q}d3+$  19  $\mathbb{Q}f1$  (not 19  $\mathbb{Q}d2??$   $\mathbb{Q}xf2$  with decisive threats, including ... $\mathbb{Q}e4+$  and ... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ ) 19... $\mathbb{Q}c1+$  20  $\mathbb{Q}e1$  (and not 20  $\mathbb{Q}g1??$   $\mathbb{Q}e2+$  21  $\mathbb{Q}f1$   $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ , winning the queen) 20... $\mathbb{Q}d3+$  21  $\mathbb{Q}f1$ . Many would regard this as un thematic, as it is Black who is scraping for the draw, rather than forcing White to chase the half-point. All the same, it is still a draw.

Instead, Kramnik went all-out for attack – the correct decision – but he missed something on the next move.

**17 b4**



**The Tal Memorial 2012 Quiz Question:** Find the win for Black – possibly.

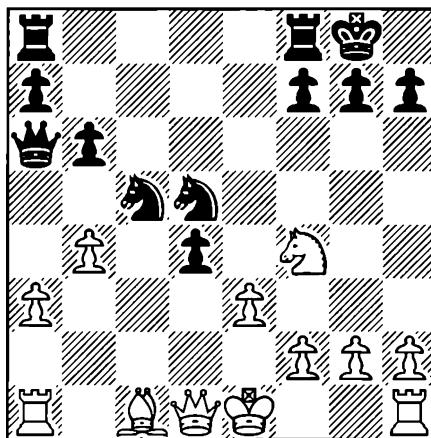
**17...dxe3?!**

Tal would have enjoyed this. Both Kramnik and Carlsen missed the tactic, but one can feel reasonably sure that Tal would have seen the idea instantly.

If one piece is under attack, then do not despair, try sacrificing the other! The point is

that the opponent can only take one piece at a time. For instance, if the opponent takes the attacker's first piece (here, the knight on c5), the second piece might achieve its objective with gain of tempo. Or if the second piece is taken, a defender might be deflected so that it can no longer cover a critical square.

This would happen after 17... $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ .



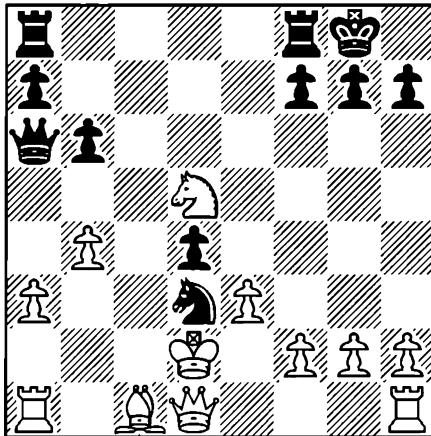
Tal magic! One knight is attacked, but the other knight becomes the attacker.

Of course, even Tal's magic cannot force a win from a level position, and to win a game would be possible only if the opponent makes at least one mistake. Also, controversially, Tal was not all that concerned even as to whether his magic might leave himself in a worse position; all that he was concerned with was to induce the opponent to make the occasional, and fatal, mistake.

The knight sacrifice here is sound, so Black will not end up in a worse position, whereas even the tiniest mistake by White will end up with a speedy loss; but it seems, after much analysis, and quite a few prods by my editor, that White can just about hold the draw. The game ended up with a draw anyway, but Carlsen was not forced to have to find the very best moves. It is a shame that Kramnik, a great World Champion, did not play like Tal here, another great World Champion. What a great finish it would have been!

Analysing the moves themselves, 18  $bxc5?$  is the less complicated line but is not good. After 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ , Black barges through with his other knight. White has to capture – there is nothing else – but after 19  $exf4 \mathbb{Q}fe8+ 20 \mathbb{Q}d2 bxc5$ , it is not difficult to see that his king is in trouble, with his pieces undeveloped. If 21  $\mathbb{Q}b2$ , then 21... $\mathbb{R}ab8 22 \mathbb{R}b1$  (or 22  $\mathbb{Q}c1 \mathbb{Q}e2$ ) 22... $\mathbb{W}c4$  (threatening 23... $\mathbb{R}xb2+$  24  $\mathbb{R}xb2 \mathbb{W}c3$  mate) 23  $\mathbb{W}f3 \mathbb{W}a2 24 \mathbb{Q}c1 c4$  wins easily.

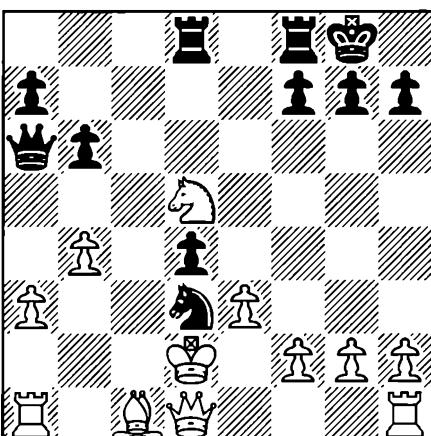
The other capture, 18  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ , followed by 18... $\mathbb{Q}d3+$  19  $\mathbb{Q}d2$ , is critical.



No player could hope to analyse in depth all the main lines over the board; even at home, with the help of several evenings and the use of the computer, this is very difficult. My own instincts were to try 19... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$  first, putting immense pressure on the d-file, but quite possibly this is not quite enough, the likely result after accurate play being a draw. There are several endgames which need to be considered, mainly with asymmetrical piece play. 19... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$  is an attempted refinement, less natural, but it frees the f8-square for the king should White try  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ . Finally, on a different strand of thought, Black can consider 19...dxe3+ 20 fxe3  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ , which we can regard as unclear, for the moment.

Flesh and blood humans cannot process all lines simultaneously, and my first choice was to see whether Black can claim a clear edge after 19... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ . Maybe we can look to see whether it is possible to find a big advantage with the exchange on e3, but then, after this quick scan, it is back to what seems to be the critical line.

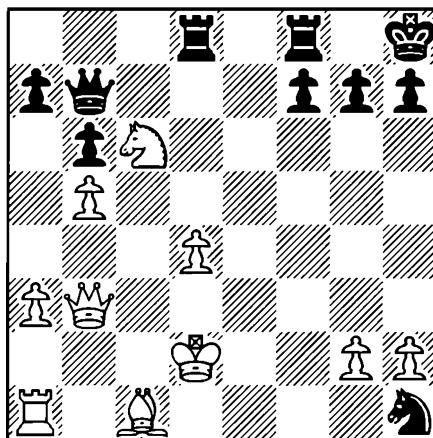
Trying 19... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$  first:



This is very sharp – but with White being underdeveloped and his king out in the open, and Black having open lines against the king, it would hardly be surprising if White were in trouble. There seems to be just one way to try to hold the position: 20 e4!

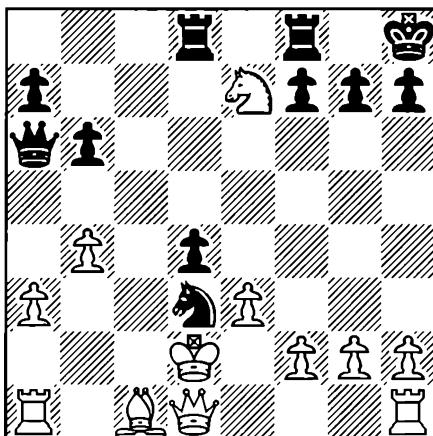
Before examining 20 e4 more closely, there are other moves which need to be considered:

- a) 20  $\mathbb{W}b3 \mathcal{Q}xf2$  21  $\mathcal{Q}e7+$   $\mathcal{Q}h8$  22 b5  $\mathbb{W}b7$  23  $\mathcal{Q}c6 \mathcal{Q}xh1$  24 exd4



This is given as the first choice in the computer analysis. White's king is somewhat safer and his pieces are going to good squares (after  $\mathbb{A}b2$ ); unfortunately he is now down in material. To get his pieces working, he has to let the rook drop. Black is close to winning.

- b) 20  $\mathcal{Q}e7+$   $\mathcal{Q}h8$  is the next line up.



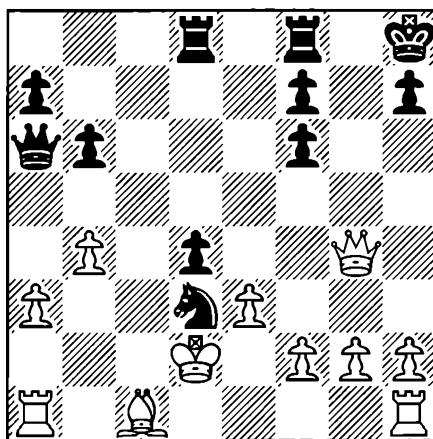
White has saved his knight with tempo, but what is he going to do next? Black is about to set up a decisive attack against the king. For example, 21  $\mathbb{W}f3$  dx $e$ 3+ 22  $\mathcal{Q}c3$  (if 22  $\mathcal{Q}xe3$ , then, among others, 22... $\mathcal{Q}xc1$ ) 22... $\mathbb{R}c8+$  23  $\mathcal{Q}xc8$   $\mathbb{R}xc8+$  24  $\mathcal{Q}d4$   $\mathbb{W}c4+$  25  $\mathcal{Q}e3$   $\mathbb{R}e8+$  26

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

$\text{Qd2 Qd8}$  27  $\text{Qe3 Qe1}$  28  $\text{Rxe1 Rd3+}$  29  $\text{Qe2 Rd4+}$  30  $\text{Qe3 Rd3}$  mate is a good old-fashioned king hunt.

White has to play 21  $\text{e4! Qxf2}$  22  $\text{W e2 Wxe2+}$  23  $\text{Qxe2 Qxh1}$  24  $\text{Qd2}$ , which transposes to critical 20  $\text{e4}$  variation below. Instead, 22  $\text{Wf1 Qxe4+}$  is hardly worth analysing in greater depth. Black is obviously winning. White's pieces are undeveloped or completely out of place, while Black has two extra pawns for the piece and everything helps set up a attack.

c) 20  $\text{Qf6+ gxf6}$  21  $\text{Wg4+ Qh8}$  is good, if it works. If it does not work, he has merely returned the piece for nothing.



Unfortunately for White, it does not work. Black is threatening a killer check with ... $\text{d4xe3}$ , so 22  $\text{e4 Qe5}$  23  $\text{Wh3}$  (White must cover d3) 23... $\text{Wc4}$  24  $\text{f4}$ , but then the pawn crashes through with 24... $\text{d3}$  25  $\text{fxe5 Wc2+}$  26  $\text{Qe3 d2}$  and Black wins.

We are starting to reach the minor variations. Briefly:

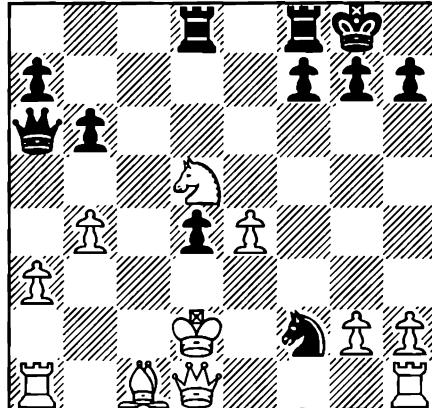
d) 20  $\text{Wf3 dxе3+}$  21  $\text{fxe3 Qe5}$  22  $\text{We4 Wb5}$  recovers the knight, with a clear positional win.

e) 20  $\text{We2 dxе3+}$  and White's position collapses.

f) 20  $\text{Wf1 dxе3+}$  21  $\text{Qxe3 Qxb4+}$  22  $\text{Qe1}$  (22  $\text{Qc3 Rd3+}$  soon wins for Black) 22... $\text{Qd3+}$  23  $\text{Qd1 Qxf2+}$  24  $\text{Qe1 Qd3+}$  25  $\text{Qd2}$ , and after the knight has eaten a couple of pawns, Black quite simply adds another rook to the attack with 25... $\text{Rfe8}$ .

Now for the main line:

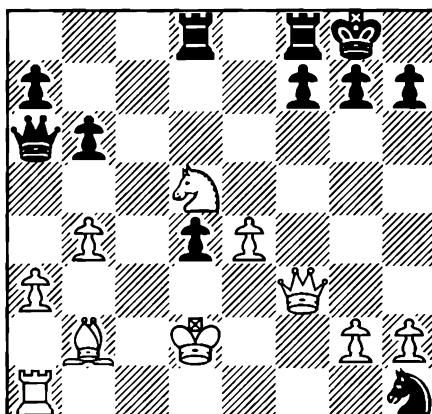
g) 20  $\text{e4! Qxf2}$



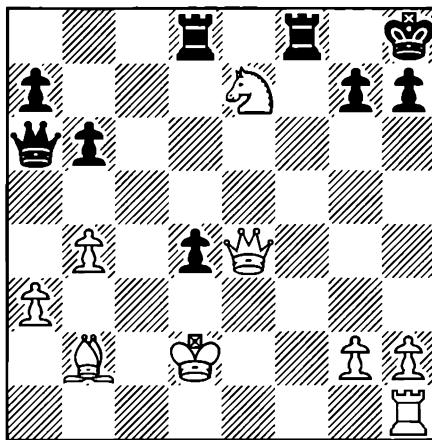
**Question:** Where should the white queen go?

Very difficult – a quiz within a quiz. The basic choice is between 21  $\mathbb{W}f3$  and 21  $\mathbb{W}e2$ . As a practical player, whether with Black or with White, I would want to concentrate my attention on the sharp tactical lines with 21  $\mathbb{W}f3$ , not least because White is attempting to refute Black's play, and an attempted refutation forces the players to think much harder than an attempt to hold the game. It is, of course, quite possible that the quieter option is more effective than the aggressive one. My editor suggests that the quieter attempt is in fact better.

g1) I give the analysis unchanged on the line with 21  $\mathbb{W}f3$ , except that this move no longer gets an exclamation mark. After 21... $\mathbb{Q}xh1$  22  $\mathbb{R}b2$ , White, by sacrificing the rook, has given himself time to get his pieces developed and active, and his king seems safer. He is currently material down, but Black's knight is in danger of dropping, after which White will be material ahead.



The computer gives this as equal, but dig a little further and Black can set up a second run of the attack with 22...f5! 23  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}h8$  24  $\mathbb{B}xh1$   $fxe4$  25  $\mathbb{W}xe4$ .

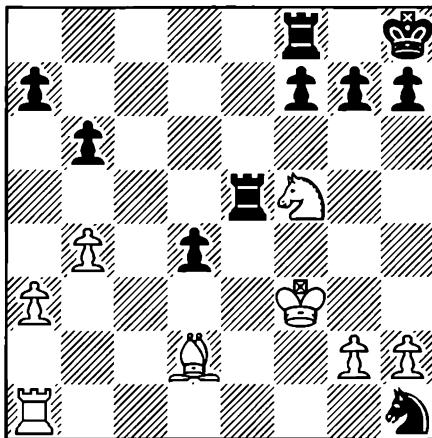


It is clear that White's king is no longer so safe, and he has problems getting the bishop and knight working together.

Here the obvious 25... $\mathbb{B}f2$ ?! 26  $\mathbb{Q}e1$   $\mathbb{B}xb2$  ends up in a quick draw after 27  $\mathbb{Q}g6+$   $hxg6$  28  $\mathbb{W}h4+$   $\mathbb{Q}g8$  29  $\mathbb{W}xd8+$ . But Black has an impressive queen zigzag with 25... $\mathbb{W}c4$ ! (now White's bishop is out of play) 26  $\mathbb{W}h4$   $\mathbb{W}f7$ ! 27  $\mathbb{B}e1$  (after 27  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{W}a2+$  White's king is far too exposed) 27... $\mathbb{W}f2$ + 28  $\mathbb{W}xf2$   $\mathbb{B}xf2$ + 29  $\mathbb{B}e2$   $\mathbb{B}xe2+$  30  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$   $\mathbb{B}e8$  and White loses a piece before he can properly reach the endgame.

So is Black genuinely winning? Let's have another try:

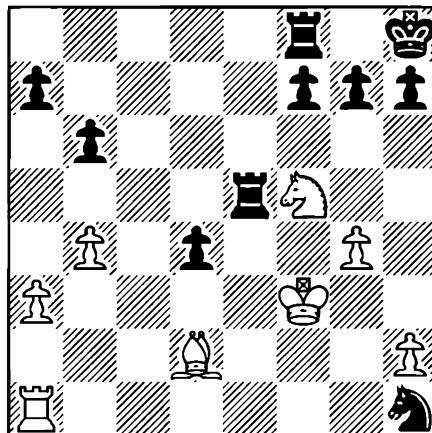
g2) 21  $\mathbb{W}e2$  forces a queen exchange much earlier, with 21... $\mathbb{W}xe2+$  22  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$   $\mathbb{B}xh1$  23  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}h8$  24  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{B}de8$  25  $\mathbb{Q}f5$   $\mathbb{B}xe4+$  26  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{B}e5$



I spent much time analysing this position at home, concentrating on 27  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{B}d5$ , and

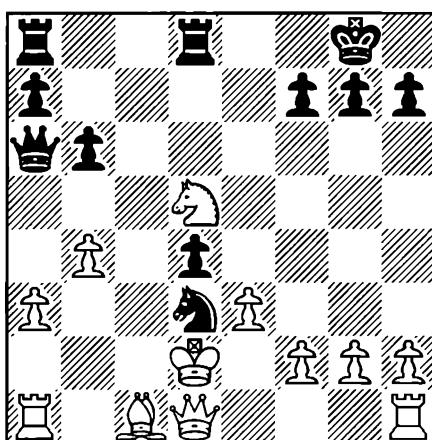
now either 28 ♜e3 or 28 ♜c3, trying to see what happens if Black wins the two minor pieces for the rook while White wins the h1-knight or, alternatively, if after 28 ♜c3 he inserts 28...♜c8.

This is an interesting exercise, but White can improve with 27 g4!



The computer, or at least the one I am using, seems to think that Black has a straightforward clear advantage, but in fact it is far from clear-cut. If 27...h5, White simply blocks with 28 h3, and any exchange of pawns on g4 favours White since the h-file has been opened. If Black tries an early ...g7-g6 instead, the dark-squared long diagonal could become seriously weakened; for instance, 27...g6 28 ♛xd4 ♜d5 29 ♜xh1 ♜xd4?? loses to 30 ♜c3. Quieter moves seem to give no inroads to White's defences.

So time to consider something else, and 19...♝fd8!?



This is not something a player would think of spontaneously, since it seems far more natural to bring the rooks to the d- and e-files. We have already seen, however, that if the

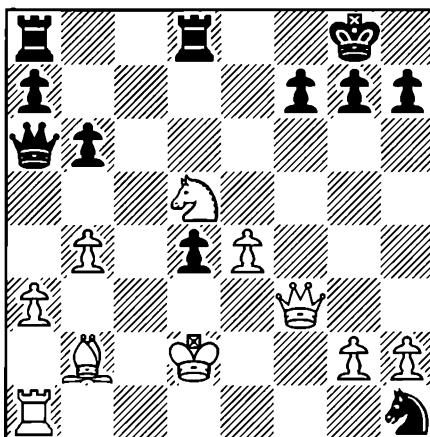
## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

other rook moves from a8 to d8, White keeps the possibility of  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ , after which Black has to move the king to h8. Black is trying to gain a tempo by playing 19... $\mathbb{R}fd8$ .

It is easy enough to demonstrate that 20  $\mathbb{Q}c7?$  is senseless after 20... $dxe3+$  21  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$   $\mathbb{W}c4$ , when Black is winning. So the knight fork is nothing to be scared of, even if it would be more “natural”, in one’s head, to eliminate such danger.

The problem here is not the elementary tactic, but rather that the kingside has been weakened by moving this rook to the centre. In all but one reply, 19... $\mathbb{R}fd8$  is at least as good as, or even better than, moving the a8-rook. It is not worth repeating all the above analysis we have just done with 19... $\mathbb{R}ad8$ .

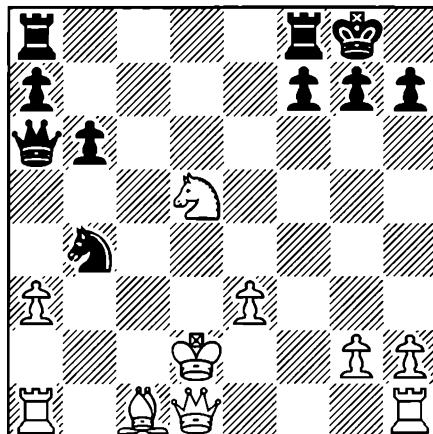
The best reply for White after 19... $\mathbb{R}fd8$  is 20 e4  $\mathbb{Q}f2$  21  $\mathbb{W}f3!$  (much more dangerous for Black this time) 21... $\mathbb{Q}xh1$  22  $\mathbb{A}b2$ .



Black no longer has the saving move 22...f5, as his rook on f8 has already gone. He could perhaps try 22... $\mathbb{W}c4$ , but after 23  $\mathbb{R}c1$   $\mathbb{W}a2$  24  $\mathbb{R}c2$   $\mathbb{W}b1$  25  $\mathbb{A}xd4$ , Black’s pieces are comically decentralized, and he has no protection from the white queen on the kingside, with 25...f6 merely inviting 26  $\mathbb{R}c7$ . Maybe Black would want to try sacrificing the exchange on d5, but it is unlikely that his position will hold.

Therefore 19... $\mathbb{R}fd8?$  does not work – White has an almost certain win. 19... $\mathbb{R}ad8!?$  gives Black at least a draw, but it seems likely that, if White plays with great accuracy, Black does not have more than that. So, equal, so far.

The analysis is not yet complete though. There is a third option: 19... $dxe3+!?$  20  $fxe3$   $\mathbb{Q}xb4!$

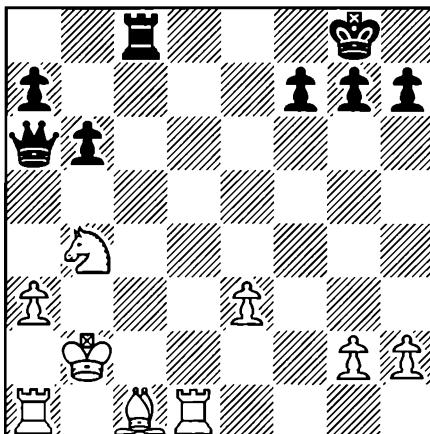


This is a computer suggestion, and it almost instantly was advocated on the Internet. My own instinct was that it looked slightly speculative, and I felt that I wanted to bring a rook into play as quickly as possible, so I did not try to analyse this in depth. It would, I am sure, be a good practical try. After all, even a Tal would not be able to analyse it in complete depth over the board, and with a time limit. Nevertheless, with the luxury of home analysis, there is the obligation to tie up the loose ends, and this is a big loose end. Could it be that Kramnik had missed a win against Carlsen? Or is it, after all, only a draw?

There is also another time limit question to be considered. Neither I, nor my publisher, would want the analysis to drag on through 2013, so on occasion “probably” might be a legitimate answer.

In response, 21 axb4  $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ , sacrificing the exchange, is reasonable, but White is still under considerable pressure. His king is still exposed, and his kingside pawn structure is damaged, so that Black has good outlets with the queen, for example ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$  and ... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ , or on the seventh rank via ... $\mathbb{Q}a2$ . Black can also create difficulties on the d-file, and he now has the option of setting up a passed pawn with ...a7-a5. This is something that might be considered for White, but only in desperation.

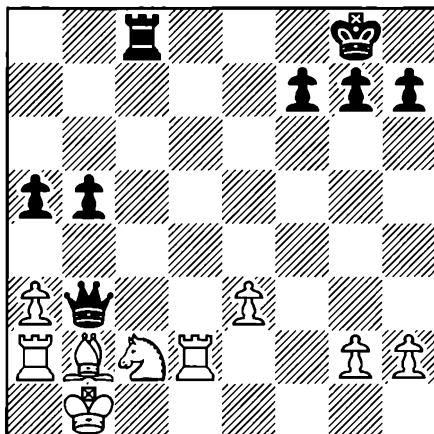
A better defensive try would be to give up the queen with 21  $\mathbb{Q}xb4$   $\mathbb{R}fd8+$  22  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{R}ac8+$  23  $\mathbb{Q}b2$   $\mathbb{R}xd1$  24  $\mathbb{R}xd1$ .



White is slightly ahead in material (R+B+N vs. Q+P), but his pieces are badly coordinated, and Black can start to prod away with his queenside pawns by ...a7-a5. The only realistic chance for White to defend is to try to set up a passive barricade with the pieces and avoid losing any kingside pawns.

Black now tries 24... $\mathbb{W}e2+$  25  $\mathbb{B}d2$   $\mathbb{W}b5$ . On 26  $\mathbb{B}d5$ , he could offer a repetition with 26... $\mathbb{W}e2+?!$ , but he should not be happy with this. Instead, 26... $\mathbb{W}f1$  aims to gain a free move after 27  $\mathbb{B}d2$ . White could try 27  $\mathbb{B}d2$ , sacrificing the g-pawn to develop his pieces, but after 27... $\mathbb{W}xg2$  Black is much better.

A more interesting attempt is 26  $\mathbb{B}a2!$  a5 27  $\mathbb{Q}c2$   $\mathbb{W}c4+$  28  $\mathbb{B}b1$ . At last, White's king has found his way into the castle. What is unusual is that it is White's rooks and minor pieces which guard the castle, rather than the pawns. We can complete the defensive line with 28... $\mathbb{W}b3+$  29  $\mathbb{B}b2$  b5 30  $\mathbb{B}a2$ .



Now it is up to you, reader, to find a win or a clear advantage for Black. White's pieces

are stuck – the only possible try, at the moment, is to wiggle his rook between a1 and a2, and perhaps a pawn push with h2-h3, but these pawn pushes cannot last indefinitely. My positional sense is that Black is clearly better, and that if he can find a good way to advance his own pawns, he should be winning. Still, I could be wrong. One point to be noted is that if Black pushes his pawns too hastily, with ...f7-f5 and ...g7-g5, White can try to spring back with ♖d4 (aiming for ♖f5), and if ...♝xe3 then ♜e2.

**Question:** Can you find a winning plan for Black? (open ended question)

This whole game is extremely complicated. It is pure tactical chess, except that after all the tactics, the players need to think about the positional stuff, once things have simplified. After 19...♜ad8, for example, the players will need to think about possible rook and pawn endings, or rook versus minor piece endings, perhaps with an extra rook on each side; or possibly, after 19...dxe3+ 20 exd3 ♖xb4, some complicated zugzwanging attempts in the late middlegame.

“Tactical chess” does not always mean someone making a sacrifice with a forced checkmate to follow a few moves later. All that is mostly textbook stuff – even if, in a game not long afterwards, both Carlsen and Aronian (who should have won) missed such a combination, involving a rook and queen sacrifice and leading to checkmate.

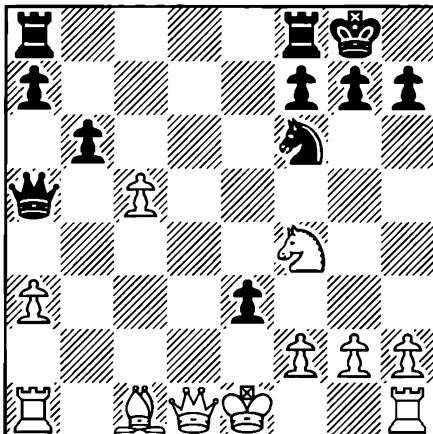
Tactical chess, at a more sophisticated level, is a battle between two players, with neither player ever being sure of what is going on, but having to calculate move by move – and keep finding the best moves, often the most imaginative moves, while trying to avoid serious tactical or positional blunders.

The “Tal magic”, as commemorated in the Tal Memorial, may or may not force the win in the end, but Kramnik could have pressed hard, and it would have been extremely interesting to see how Carlsen, the strongest and most solid player of his time, would have handled this.

Tal himself was not all that concerned whether all his games were analytically sound. He wanted, given the opportunity, to play scarily wild chess, to see how his opponent would react. Often it was just a bonus if his position, when he initiated the tactics, was positionally and/or analytically better. He just wanted to outplay his opponents.

In most aspects of chess at the highest level, play has improved considerably since Tal’s day. It is not so clear, though, that there has been much of an improvement in totally wild tactical chess. In this particular game, both Kramnik and Carlsen appear to have fallen short of what Tal at his best was available to achieve. It is also far from clear whether the top modern players could have reached the strength of Kasparov either, when play got wild.

Back to the game itself, and a comparatively disappointing quick draw by repetition.  
**18 bxc5 ♜a5+**

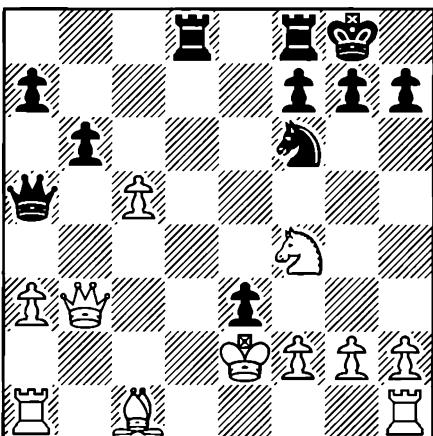


19 ♘f1

**Question:** Could Carlsen have tried for an edge himself with 19 ♕e2 - ?

The computer suggests that White is winning, but how much do you believe in computer assessments? Have a long hard think.

Remember, too, that this is only analysis. For Carlsen and Kramnik, this was “real life” and neither player would want to jeopardize their game. Carlsen had good instincts here in aiming for a clear draw. 19 ♕e2 ♖ad8 20 ♜b3 (to offer a queen exchange with ♜b4) would have been far more speculative.



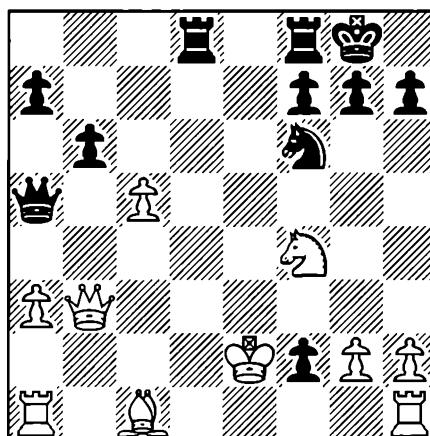
Then any good tactician would immediately consider 20...♜d2+ 21 ♔xe3, when White’s king is fully exposed to the attacks of queen, two rooks and a knight. The trouble is that, given the chance, White can reach relative safety with 22 ♘f3. For instance, 21...♜e8+ 22

$\mathbb{f}3 \mathbb{W}xc5!$  23  $\mathbb{A}xd2 \mathbb{W}c6+$  24  $\mathbb{Q}d5!$  (the only move) 24... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  25  $\mathbb{Q}g3$  (or 25  $\mathbb{E}ae1 \mathbb{Q}c3+$  etc) 25... $\mathbb{W}g6+$  26  $\mathbb{Q}h3 \mathbb{W}h5+$  is only a draw.

To go for checkmate, Black would need to sacrifice further with 21... $\mathbb{W}xc5+$  22  $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ , but then Black, a rook and a bishop down, finds that he is running out of attacking chances. Neither 22... $\mathbb{W}xf2+$  23  $\mathbb{Q}d1 \mathbb{E}d8+$  24  $\mathbb{Q}d3$ , nor 22... $\mathbb{Q}e4+$  23  $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{W}xf2+$  24  $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}xh1$  25  $\mathbb{Q}e3$  will save the game. A nice try, but it has to be rejected.

Black needs to attack positionally, rather than by direct tactics. He needs to recognize, in his analysis, that he has good compensation for his bishop, with more active pieces, a vulnerable white king, and of course a pawn count in his favour. In such positions, the defender, with the extra piece, will often find it difficult to retain equality, and even more difficult to find an advantage.

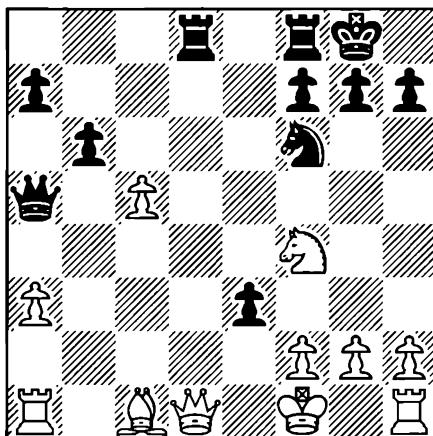
So, quite simply, 20... $\mathbb{W}xf2!$  and see what White does next.



A quick scan through the computer might suggest a possible draw after 21  $\mathbb{Q}e3$   $\mathbb{B}xc5$  22  $\mathbb{E}hd1$   $\mathbb{E}xd1$  23  $\mathbb{E}xd1$   $\mathbb{E}e8$  24  $h3$  (to prevent ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ ) 24... $g5$  25  $\mathbb{Q}d5$   $\mathbb{Q}xd5$  26  $\mathbb{W}xd5$   $\mathbb{E}xe3+$  27  $\mathbb{W}xf2$   $\mathbb{E}e8$  28  $\mathbb{W}xg5+$  with a perpetual, but Black can improve on this with 22... $\mathbb{E}fe8!$  23  $\mathbb{E}xd8$  (or 23  $h3$   $c4!$  24  $\mathbb{W}xc4$   $\mathbb{W}e5$ ) 23... $\mathbb{W}xd8!$  24  $\mathbb{E}d1$   $\mathbb{W}e7$  25  $h3$   $g5$  and wins.

There are, of course, many possible subvariations which might be considered, but none that appear to be a clear improvement for White. In which case taking a draw for White by Carlsen seems a fair enough result. He did not, it seems, have an advantage after 19  $\mathbb{Q}e2$ , but would quite possibly have lost.

**19...Ead8**



**Question:** Where should the queen go?

**20...Qc2!**

After a lot of thought, 20...Qf3?? Qc3 would be disastrous; while 20...Qe2?!, covering any threats on the a6-f1 diagonal, is risky after 20...exf2, as Black is setting up threats on the e-file instead. The best that could be said for White is that if he plays extremely well, he might have chances to hold the position, which is hardly enticing. For example, 21 Qxf2 Qfe8 22 Qc2 g5! (far more accurate than 22...Qe4+?! 23 Qf3) 23 Qh3 g4 or 23...Qd5 and Black is attacking.

**20...Qb5+**

There is nothing better.

**21.Qe1**

It has to be the king move. 21...Qe2?? Qd1 mate, or 21...Qe2?? Qc4 22 Qxc4 Qd1 mate, would have been catastrophic.

**21...Ra5+ 22.Qf1 Qb5+ 23.Qe1**

Again the only move. 23...Qg1?? Qxc5 wins for Black.

**23...Ra5+ ½-½**

A remarkable game, and it might have been even more remarkable if Kramnik had found 17...Qd5!.

As an indication of the overall evenness of the leading grandmasters in this tournament, had Kramnik beaten Carlsen in the first round, and all other games remained the same, there would have been a tie for first between Carlsen, Caruana, Radjabov and Kramnik. Or perhaps if Radjabov had not lost concentration against Carlsen, or if Caruana had made more steadily against Morozevich, or if Morozevich had avoided three losses in a row...

There are so many ifs and buts in chess. Few players can ever fully achieve the ideal of never having a losing position, and never giving away a clear advantage. Not even, it seems, Carlsen. Or at least, not yet.

## Round One: Radjabov-Tomashevsky

A second game from round one, and a strange and memorable finish. Tomashevsky gets highly centralized with his pieces – his queen and two knights – but they unexpectedly become over-centralized, ending up zugzwanging themselves. The two knights look good, but if they stand a knight's move apart, they are potentially vulnerable, each having to defend the other. In this game, the forward knight was both under pressure and pinned against the queen, which was also tied to its defence, rendering all three centralized pieces immobile. Remarkable stuff, but surely Tomashevsky could have seen all this much earlier?

In truth, this was not one of Radjabov's greatest wins technically, since he allowed Black to equalize far too easily in the opening, and so had to rely on a big misjudgment by his opponent late on. However, when Tomashevsky went wrong, Radjabov pounced for a win with remarkable speed.

8th June 2012

T.Radjabov-E.Tomashevsky

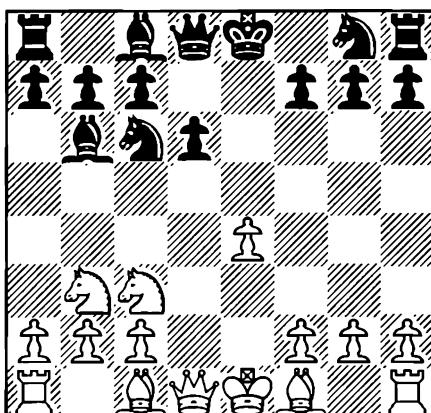
Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012

*Scotch Game*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♜xd4**

The Scotch Opening, which has had a revival recently. The point is not so much that White is genuinely much better. It is more a case that the main lines of the Ruy Lopez do not appear these days to give all that much either.

**4...♜c5 5 ♜b3 ♜b6 6 ♜c3 d6**



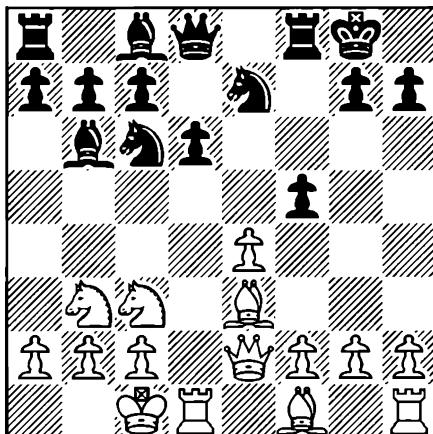
7  $\mathbb{W}e2$

**Question:** Why this particular move? You are not being asked whether this is better, or otherwise, than a few alternatives. The question is rather, what White is aiming for, and what chance he has of trying for an opening edge.

Over the last few moves, White's pieces have been increasingly directed to queenside play, and the natural continuation of the plan, arguably, is to get all his queenside pieces developed, and then to castle long. The problem is what to do with his dark-squared bishop. The natural square is e3, but 7  $\mathbb{A}e3?$   $\mathbb{A}xe3$  8 fxe3 leaves White's pawns unnecessarily doubled and isolated. Therefore White needs to find a good safe square for his queen, to cover the e3-square, and the logical solution is on e2. The other bishop is blocked, but that can be sorted out later. The queenside has priority.

It has to be admitted that Radjabov has not achieved much from his opening, and that other lines should be considered. 7  $\mathbb{A}b5$ , in Ruy style, is possible, but again it does not seem to achieve much after 7... $\mathbb{W}h4$ . Alternatively, 7  $\mathbb{Q}d5$  is certainly playable, gaining the bishop pair after  $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ , but remember that White has invested a lot of moves with his knight, just to take the bishop. Play is probably about equal.

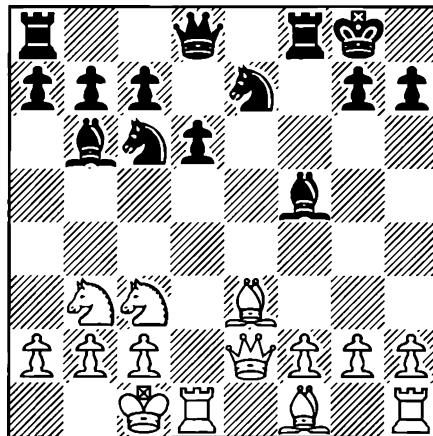
7... $\mathbb{Q}ge7$  8  $\mathbb{A}e3$  0-0 9 0-0-0 f5



Positionally, the simplest way to equalize. He removes the central white pawn with a swipe on the edges, Black's pieces are as mobile as White's, and neither side has any significant pawn weaknesses.

10 exf5  $\mathbb{A}xf5$

10... $\mathbb{A}xf5$  seems slightly more direct. Equal.



**Question:** Any chance of a microscopic edge?

11 h3

This looks reasonable, with the idea of g2-g4 and ♘g2. After Tomashevsky's reply, Radjabov thinks again, and decides not to continue with this plan.

Instead, 11 g3, followed by ♘g2, might still give chances of an edge. Or on second thoughts, probably not. Black is equal, and whatever White tries, he is not going to achieve anything, if Black continues to play accurately.

11... $\hat{Q}$ d7

Prophylactic chess. White has used up a move trying to make g2-g4 more effective, so Black can use one up in return, and preferably a more constructive move, to make White's h2-h3 ineffective.

11... $\mathbb{Q}g6$  is possible, when his position is still playable, but it only makes total sense if White has played, or is fully committed to, g2-g4.

12 d2

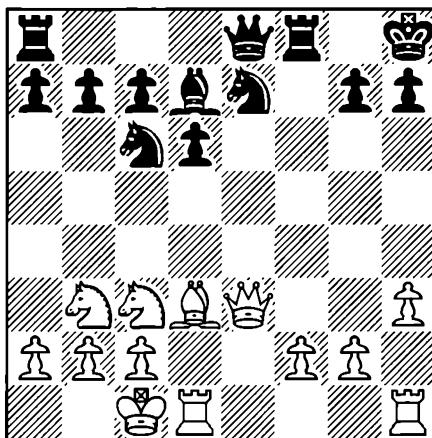
Radjabov decides that 12 g4 ♘g6 is not quite satisfactory, as White would have weakened his dark squares, on f4 and e5.

12... ♜xe3

Tomashevsky is happy enough to gain an almost insignificant tempo. Possibly 12... $\mathbb{A}e6$ , now that White no longer has the queen on the e-file, might have been very slightly better. Or possibly not.

It is almost inevitable that there will be much shuffling of pieces, when there is no clear weakness on either side, and both sets of pieces are in play, but are not dominant. Either there will be a steady draw at some stage, or one of the players will slightly loosen their grip, allowing the opponent an edge.

13 ♜xe3 ♛h8 14 ♔d3 ♜e8



**15 f4**

**Question:** What do you think of this move?

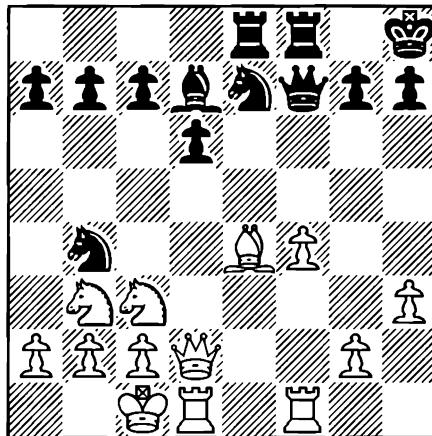
White has to be careful here, in that he is slightly weakening his pawn structure. His f4-pawn could end up under attack, and it no longer protects the e3-square, which could be significant if Black were to play ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$  and put pressure on the e-file. Having said that, if he takes reasonable precautions, his position will be playable, and he has gained some squares in the centre while preventing Black from playing ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ . Also, he might get his other kingside pawns moving.

If White wanted to play something boringly equal, he could try 15  $\mathbb{Q}he1$   $\mathbb{W}f7$  16 f3  $\mathbb{Q}ae8$  17  $\mathbb{Q}e4$   $\mathbb{Q}e6$  18  $\mathbb{Q}b1$ , and it is difficult for either side to make progress. Radjabov wants to try something, and one cannot dispute the fact that he was successful in winning the game, though Black's mistakes came later.

**15... $\mathbb{W}f7$  16  $\mathbb{Q}hf1$   $\mathbb{Q}ae8$  17  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}b4$**

Indeed, Black is starting to look slightly better.

**18  $\mathbb{Q}e4$**

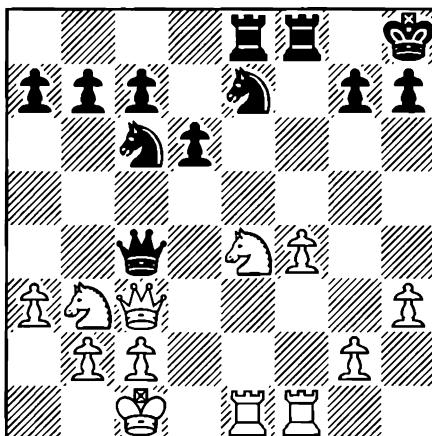


**Question:** To play for an edge? Or to keep steady equality? And which move should he try?

#### 18... $\mathbb{R}c6$

This simplifies and still keeps the position steady. He might have played for a slight edge, without simplification, by 18... $\mathbb{Q}ec6$ ! (threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}a2+$ ), and if 19  $\mathbb{Q}b1$  then 19... $\mathbb{Q}e6$  with comfort. White could throw in 19  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ , but then Black's pieces are again clearly the more coordinated. In hindsight, White's 14 f4 seems premature.

19  $\mathbb{Q}de1$   $\mathbb{Q}xe4$  20  $\mathbb{Q}xe4$   $\mathbb{W}c4$  21 a3  $\mathbb{Q}bc6$  22  $\mathbb{W}c3$



**Question:** What next for Black?

**22... $\mathbb{Q}d5?$ !**

It is hard to believe that Black was soon going to be in zugzwang in an open position. Tomashevsky quite simply lost his sense of danger. However, there is always a potential risk if the queen is stuck in the centre without a clear means of escape.

The simplest equalizing option would be to exchange queens with 22... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ .

If he wants to keep queens on the board, with the aim of maintaining the initiative, that is fine, as long as he keeps the queen safe, and with good escape routes. For instance, 22... $\mathbb{Q}b5$  is comfortable for Black.

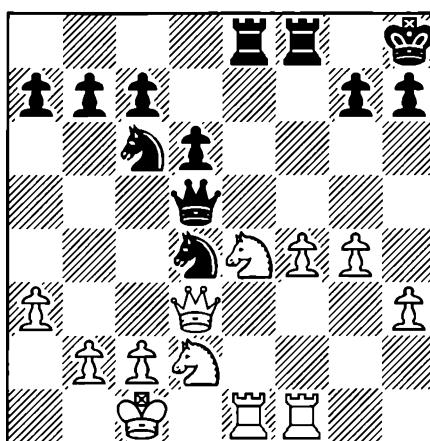
**23  $\mathbb{Q}bd2$**

The position seems much too quiet to set up a trap!

**23... $\mathbb{Q}f5$  24  $g4$   $\mathbb{Q}fd4$**

Black seems to be thinking that he is taking the initiative.

**25  $\mathbb{Q}d3$**



**Question:** What now?

**25... $b5?$ !**

Closer to zugzwang. Black's knight on d4 is pinned, while the other knight and the queen are finding it difficult to escape. After this, Black's battle is for survival. It is no longer realistic for him to try to do anything more.

Where is the queen going to go, first of all? An initial try might be 25... $\mathbb{Q}a2!?$ , but then 26  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  is troublesome. Black can try 26... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ , but it is not all that clear why Black should want to lure the knight to g5. White's knight is, after all, still on a good attacking square.

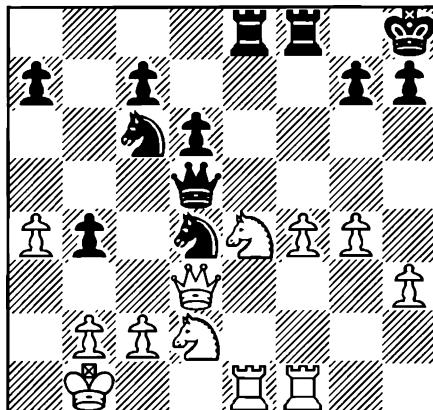
The next train of thought is to try 25... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$  at once. This is far from obvious, but it works. The queen is away from attack, and the king is also safe from the attacks on h7. Meanwhile, the rooks and knights can gradually get coordinated. Black is not yet fully safe, but he has made progress.

**26 ♔b1**

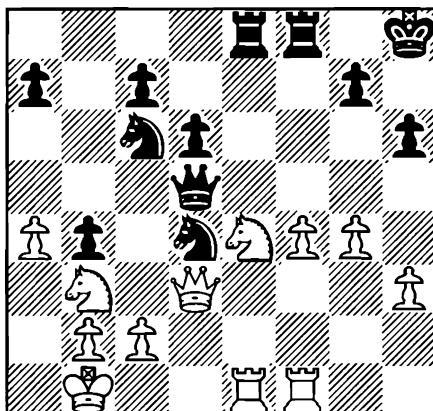
A step closer to zugzwang. The king blocks any escape square at a2. Also, do not forget, the knight on d4 is pinned, making c2-c3 is a winning threat, as Black no longer has ...♘b3+.

**26...b4**

He has prevented c2-c3, but there are still a few other problems.

**27 a4****27...h6?**

Even here, Black can still play 27...♕g8. In comparison with the line a couple of moves earlier, he has weakened his queenside with ...b7-b5-b4, but this is not necessarily fatal.

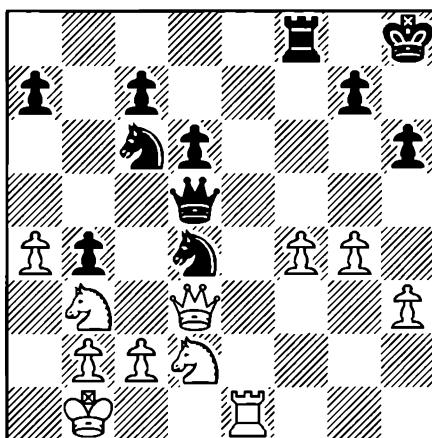
**28 ♘b3**

**Question:** Black is by now already on the slide, but he has one last chance. Can he find a tactic which avoids immediate collapse?

**28... $\mathbb{E}e7$ ?**

28... $\mathbb{E}e7$  offers more resistance, since if then 29  $\mathbb{Q}ed2$ , Black can hit back with 29... $\mathbb{E}xf4$ . However, 29  $\mathbb{E}e3$   $\mathbb{E}fe8$  30  $\mathbb{E}fe1$  a5 31 h4 is a straightforward positional win. Black's queen cannot move, and neither can his knights. His rooks are stuck between three squares on the e-file, and his king and pawns can do nothing active. All White has to do to win is to roll the kingside pawns carefully.

**29  $\mathbb{Q}ed2$   $\mathbb{E}xe1+$  30  $\mathbb{E}xe1$**



Zugzwang – where the zugzwanged pieces have, at first sight, taken over all the main central squares. Perhaps someone would object that this is not really a true zugzwang, as Black can still wriggle around with his king and rook, and White's win will be through a direct attack with his pieces and kingside pawns. Black does not therefore have to give away material, and White still has to find a definite win (though that should not be too difficult).

Maybe so, but what would be the correct technical term? The basic point is that, for a while, Black's queen and two knights have been immobile, as a result of the partial zugzwang of three important pieces.

**30...g5 31 f5 1-0**

White will win with  $\mathbb{E}e4$ , when Black's knight will drop.

## Round One: Morozevich-Caruana

Alexander Morozevich is commonly regarded as one of the most talented of the very top grandmasters, and yet he has never been consistently able to maintain a rating over 2800. Somehow he manages to fall just short. For instance, he was leading, a point clear, after five rounds of the Tal Memorial, but then his play deteriorated dramatically and he only managed a single draw in the remaining four games. Not long afterwards, his health suffered a collapse, hopefully minor, at the Biel tournament, and he had to retire early on, allowing another grandmaster (Bologan) to take part in the remaining rounds. Chess is,

among other things, a sport, and his physical strength seems not be at the required level for him to reach the very top.

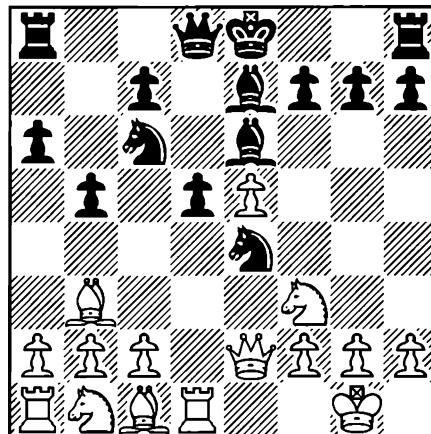
Caruana was, at the time of this game, still a teenager, albeit an exceptionally talented one. In his game against Morozevich, he went badly wrong in the opening. A couple of years of further experience would no doubt have papered up many of his gaps, when encountering very old openings. Here Morozevich surprised his opponent. Caruana was still able to play imaginatively, with a pawn sacrifice on the a-file, just to keep his position alive, and allow his pieces to take part in the game. He managed to reach the time control with reasonable chances, but then missed a sacrificial pawn break which could easily have held the draw.

8th June 2012  
**A.Morozevich-F.Caruana**  
Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012  
*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 ♜xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♜b3 d5 8 dxе5 ♜e6 9 ♜e2**

Morozevich plays an old-fashioned line and soon reaps the dividends.

**9....♜e7 10 ♜d1**



**Question:** What should Black play here? Don't bother about trying to look up the theory. It is more a case of using one's positional common sense.

**10...♞a5?!**

This is the wrong knight to remove the bishop, and Black now has little chance to try to equalize.

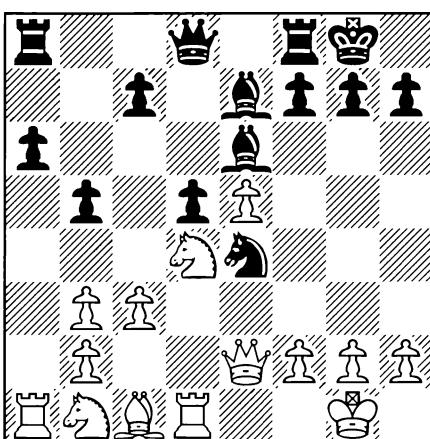
## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ , again followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ , is much safer. Then once the exchange has been made, the remaining knight is on c6, rather than on e4. On the latter square the knight is vulnerable, and can easily be pushed away with gain of tempo. The knight on c6 would at least be safe.

10...0-0 is also possible, but then White has 11 c4 bxc4 12  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ , with the superior pawn structure.

As mentioned above, Caruana was still a teenager at the time of the tournament, and inevitably there will be occasional gaps in his knowledge and understanding, which older players will be able to take advantage of. As he progresses through his twenties, he should become an even stronger player.

**11 c3  $\mathbb{Q}xb3$  12 axb3 0-0 13  $\mathbb{Q}d4$**

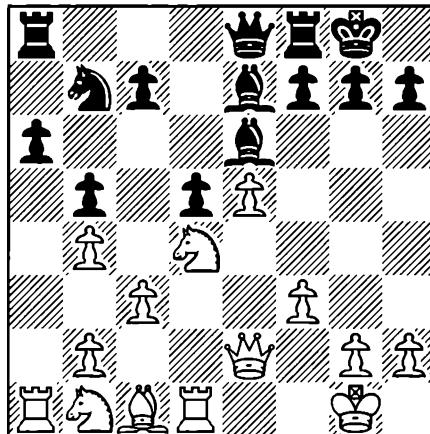


Problems are starting to emerge for Black. If he had a knight on c6, rather than on e4, he could quickly have exchanged on d4; whereas with the knight on e4, he now has to deal with attacks by f2-f3.

**13... $\mathbb{W}e8$**

Here, for example, he would quickly get his knight trapped after 13...c5 14  $\mathbb{Q}c6$   $\mathbb{W}c7$  15  $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$   $\mathbb{W}xe7$  16 f3  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  17 h4.

**14 f3  $\mathbb{Q}c5$  15 b4  $\mathbb{Q}b7$**



Not really the square that Caruana would have wanted for the knight, but he was soon able to fight back.

**Question:** What is the best way for White to handle the position?

**16 ♜e3?!**

One senses that, over the next few moves, neither player seemed totally confident in handling the manoeuvring battle.

Morozevich was clearly itching to get his minor pieces away from their starting squares, but in doing this so quickly, he is not bringing them to better squares. He starts off with a long manoeuvring plan – ♜e3, ♜a3, ♜ac2, f3-f4, ♜f2, and ♜e3 – and while all this looks extremely steady and solid, it is quite slow and gives Black chances to equalize. The critical point is that e3 is not really such a good square for the bishop. So if he cannot move the bishop to a good post in one go, perhaps he should delay moving it just yet.

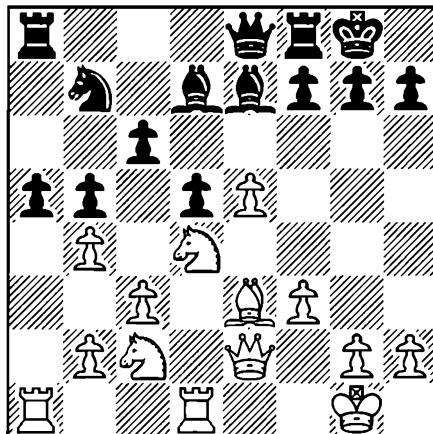
Instead, 16 ♜e1, or possibly 16 ♜f2, looks more effective. The idea is ♜g3, when the bishop can move either to h6 or to ♜g5. The exchange of dark-squared bishops would tend to favour White, leaving him with two good knights versus knight and a rather ineffective bishop. Meanwhile, there is no hurry to develop the b1-knight so quickly. A few moves later, he can perhaps move it to d2. A likely steady edge for White.

**16...♝d7 17 ♜a3**

I approved of this at the time, but again it all seems so slow. White is still structurally slightly better, but only slightly so.

**17...c6 18 ♜ac2 a5**

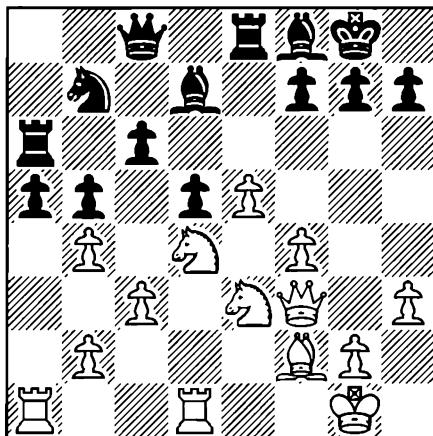
Black is now close to equal. The key point is that if White is forced to exchange pawns with b4xa5, Black can make use of the knight, pawn, or maybe the bishop on the c5-square. Caruana has by now recovered his disadvantage.



**19 f4 ♕c8**

The simplest way of achieving equality is 19...axb4. Caruana prefers to maintain the tension, and this first queen move is fully acceptable – but his later queen moves, just to keep it going, seem far too indulgent.

**20 h3 ♜e8 21 ♜f2 ♜f8 22 ♜f3 ♜a6 23 ♜e3**



**Question:** The computer suggests 23...a4 as equal.  
Is there anything wrong with that?

**23...♜a8**

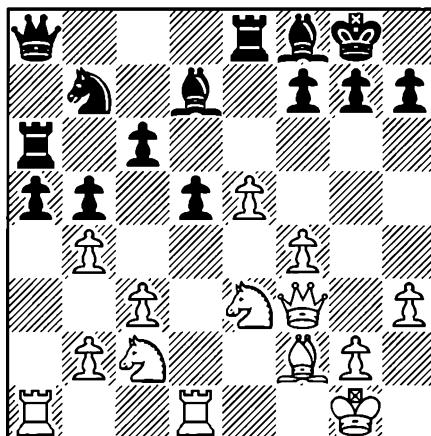
The problem is that White has so much power in the centre, Black cannot afford to take any pressure off the pawns. He needs somehow to make his presence felt against the b4-pawn, so that White is forced to exchange, and then, just possibly, he can create counter-

play with ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$  and ... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ .

If he were to try 23...a4?!, it would be easy enough to find many small steps to advantage for White, and much more difficult for Black to improve his position. A line might continue 24  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  25  $\mathbb{Q}f1$   $\mathbb{Q}d8$  26 f5  $\mathbb{Q}g5$  28  $\mathbb{Q}dc2$ , followed by  $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ , and Black is slowly being ground down.

Caruana has either to find something more imaginative, or perhaps something simpler. For instance, 23... $\mathbb{W}c7$  looks equal.

**24  $\mathbb{Q}dc2$**



**Question:** What should Black play here?

This is very much an open question. Quite often, if the play is level and there are no immediate tactics on either side, what is important is to give nothing away to the opponent. Eventually, either one player will make a concession, or perhaps the position will remain deadlocked indefinitely, until perhaps the players start to get bored and agree a draw.

The tension between White's pawn on b4 and Black's pawn on a5 is still critical. 24...axb4? would be a big mistake, in view of 25  $\mathbb{Q}xa6$   $\mathbb{W}xa6$  26  $\mathbb{Q}a1$   $\mathbb{W}b6$  27  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ . However, Black can try 24...a4 this time, now that the white knight is not on d4. White would have conceded a couple of tempi if he were to return with 25  $\mathbb{Q}d4$ , and Black could consider 25... $\mathbb{Q}d8$  to bring his own knight back into play. It is only equal now.

Of quieter moves, it is probably better for Black to keep his bishops on their own squares. Any advance will risk leaving the bishop on a more exposed square. Perhaps the simplest, if he is happy to take a quick draw is 24... $\mathbb{W}c8$ , inviting his opponent to offer a repetition with 25  $\mathbb{Q}d4$   $\mathbb{W}a8$ .

**24... $\mathbb{W}d8?$**

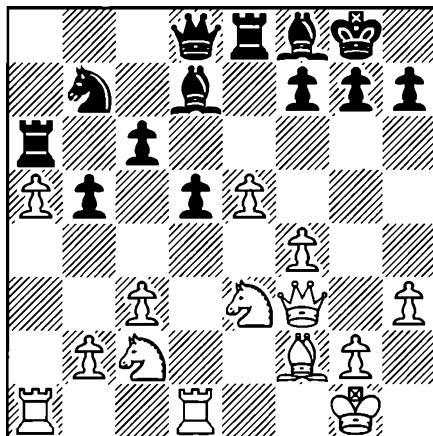
Instead, Caruana tries to squeeze a tiny tempo, preferring the queen on d8, rather than

## *Fighting Chess: Move by Move*

c8. This appears to be an oversight. Black needs to keep the queen covering the rook on a6, whether from a8 or c8.

25 bx a5

White finds a good time to break the tension on the b4- and a5-pawns. After all, Black cannot play 25... $\mathbb{Q}x\text{a}5?$  because of 26 b4 and the knight is pinned.



## **Question: What next for Black?**

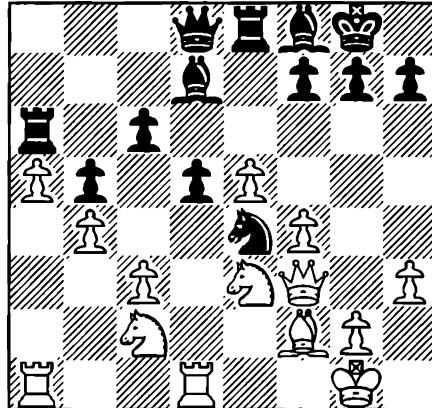
25... c5!?

Caruana immediately recognizes that he has made a mistake, and settles for gambit play, rather than fear losing in a “the rest is a matter of technique” grind.

The obvious 25... $\mathbb{B}xa5$  26  $b4$   $\mathbb{B}xa1$  27  $\mathbb{B}xa1$  is uncomfortable. What, for example, is he going to do with the knight on b7? The implied answer would be something like 27... $\mathbb{W}c7$  28  $\mathfrak{Q}d4$   $\mathfrak{Q}d8$ . Other players as Black might prefer to try handling the defence here.

26 b4 ♟e4

Whereas now Black has genuine counterplay. True, White is a passed pawn up – an outside protected passed pawn, often extremely useful in the late middlegame or endgame – but it does not make much of an immediate impact in the earlier part of the middlegame, if the defender has genuinely active pieces. Indeed, the attacker has suddenly become the defender.

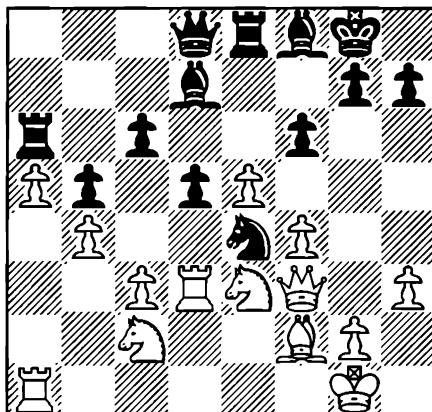


**Question:** What should White play next?

**27 ♕d3?!**

White is still better, but the rook move is ungainly. 27 ♔f1 is much more convincing, covering the c3-pawn, while opening up lines for both the queen (a more economical way of protecting the pawn since, unlike the rook, the queen can quickly move again) or the bishop. If 27...f6, for example, then 28 ♔d4 and White should be able to keep a very clear edge.

**27...f6**

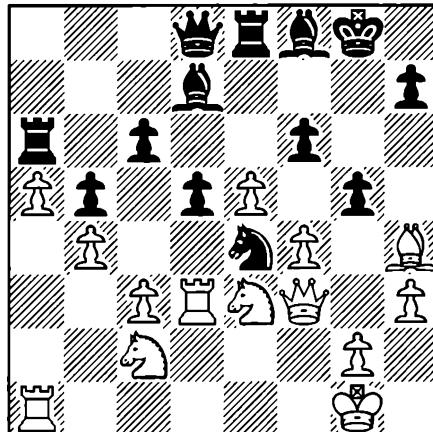


**Question:** What should White do next? It would appear that Morozevich missed a tactic when calculating his next move. For advanced players, what is the problem in one of the lines with 28 exf6 or 28 ♔h4 - ?

**28 ♜h4?!**

28 exf6 ♜xf5 29 ♜g4 is simple enough, and keeps the advantage without unnecessary tactics.

**28...g5!**



**29 fxg5**

Quite possibly Morozevich only now started to appreciate that 29 ♜xd5 cxd5 30 ♜xd5 gxh4 31 ♜xe4 ♜a8! is, at best, only equal. There are many sacrifices, pins and pin avoidance which need to be considered, and even an excellent tactician will occasionally allow something to slip through the net.

**29...fxg5 30 ♜g3**

Similarly, 30 ♜xd5 cxd5 31 ♜xd5 might look dangerous, but it is White who is in danger after 31...gxh4 32 ♜xe4 ♜a8.

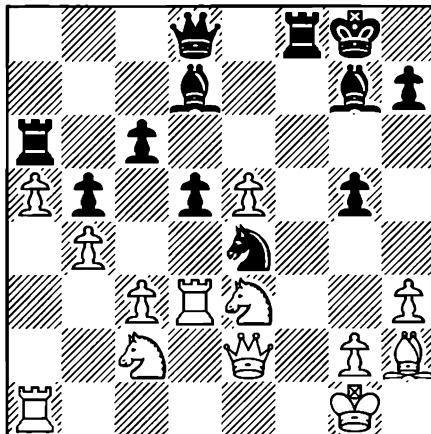
**30...♜g7**

And so Caruana has taken over the initiative, although he is still a pawn down. There will be a tense battle before the next time control.

**31 ♜h2 ♜f8**

It is no longer the case that Black has made a speculative pawn sacrifice under pressure. Now it can be stated that he has genuine compensation for the pawn. Caruana has kept the game alive, but he still needs to play accurately.

**32 ♜e2**



**Question:** What should Black play next?

**32...Rf2?!**

Even as late as after move 30, it is a good idea to complete your development, rather than trying to start an attack against the king with insufficient pieces. Black's rook did not stay long on f2.

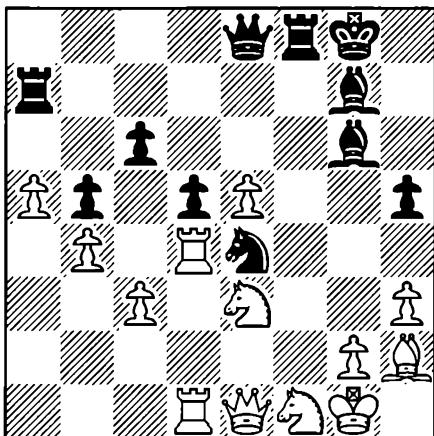
Here 32...Re7 33.Rf1 Ra8 allows Black to recover the pawn on e5. White is still slightly better, but Black is not losing. A defender cannot always achieve everything.

**33.Qe1 g4 34.Bd4 Rf8**

Whoops! White was threatening Rx e4, and 34...g3 is met simply by 35.Qxg3.

The players were clearly in time pressure over the next few moves, so it is to be expected that minor errors might have occurred, but nothing disastrous. Caruana concentrated on keeping his bishop pair, rather than trying to win back the e5-pawn. No detailed comments, until we reach the last move before the time control.

**35.Rad1 Re8 36.Qxg4 Qf5 37.Qce3 Qg6 38.Qf1 h5 39.Qge3 Ra7**



**Question:** One left minute on the clock, before the extra time is allotted next move. What would you play here?

**40 ♜g3?!**

White has a sudden urge to simplify, but unnecessarily gives away the exchange.

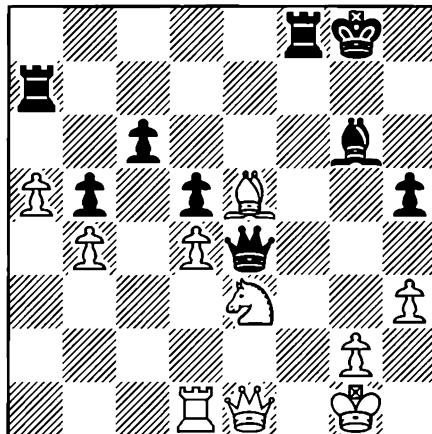
It is difficult to formulate a good plan quickly from several possibilities, and I have to admit that, going through the lines suggested by the computer, I used up far more than the allowed minute. Black still has the dangerous possibility of ...♜af7, so White needs to be careful.

A different method of simplification, again with an exchange sacrifice, would be 40 c4!? bxc4 41 ♜xc4 dxc4 42 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 43 ♜xe4, and with two extra pawns for the exchange, the superior pawn structure, and a strong centralized queen, White is better. Whether that advantage is enough to win against best play is uncertain. In practical terms, though, White has given himself a comfortable working edge.

**40...♜xe5**

It is unlikely that Morozhevich would have missed this, which means that the exchange sacrifice would have been intentional. The problem is that, unlike the 40 c4 variation, he has not broken up Black's queenside pawn structure.

**41 ♜xe4 ♜xd4 42 cxd4 ♜xe4 43 ♜e5**



**Question:** After a flurry of tactics, it is time to take one's breath. Who is better? Or is it equal? And what is the most sensible continuation for Black?

#### 43... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ !?

This is just about playable, as long as he handles the next few moves with complete accuracy, and does not try for a win. He has wasted a tempo, though, since the king is no better on h7 than on g8.

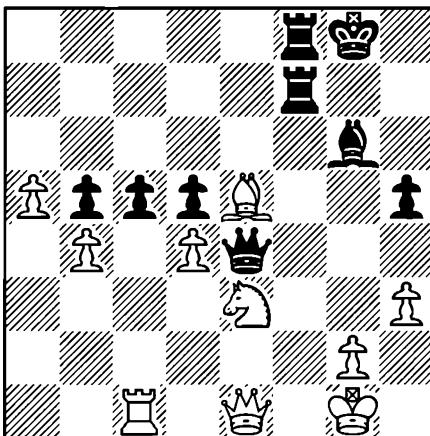
Instead, 43... $\mathbb{Q}af7$  is far more natural and should give at least a draw. Whether there is anything more than that is open to question.

White can try 44  $\mathbb{Q}c1$ , as in the game, when 44... $\mathbb{Q}h7$  just transposes. If that is Black's best, it does not really matter which move order he plays it in.

44... $\mathbb{Q}f2$  is more direct, but not necessarily better. White has 45 a6, which is a dangerous distraction. For instance, 45... $\mathbb{Q}b2$  46 a7  $\mathbb{Q}a8$  47  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{Q}xa7$  48  $\mathbb{Q}xb2$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$  49  $\mathbb{Q}h2$  leaves queen, rook and opposite-coloured bishop on each side, but Black is going to be uncomfortable, with an open king and an inferior pawn structure.

However, there is still a good move for Black, and respect if you saw it!

He can play 44...c5!! – a superb pawn break.

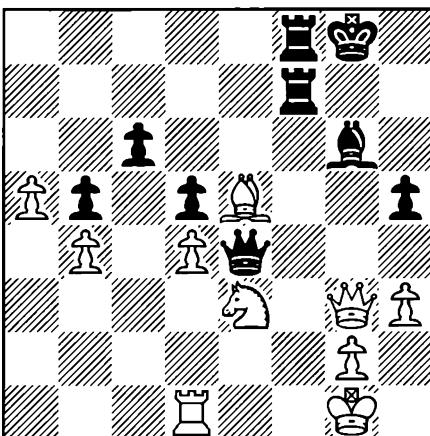


Then 45  $\mathbb{Q}xc5?$  loses immediately to 45... $\mathbb{Q}f1+$  46  $\mathbb{Q}xf1$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ , while after 45  $bxc5$  b4 White is also in trouble as, totally unexpectedly, Black now has the more dangerous queen-side passed pawn.

If White can keep his balance, he should be able to find 45  $\mathbb{Q}g3!$  with a likely draw. The most direct line would be 45... $cxd4$  46  $\mathbb{Q}xd5$   $\mathbb{Q}f2$  47  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$  (47  $\mathbb{Q}c6$   $\mathbb{Q}xg2+!$  48  $\mathbb{Q}xg2$   $\mathbb{Q}e1+$  leads to perpetual check) 47... $\mathbb{Q}h7$  48  $\mathbb{Q}xg6$   $\mathbb{Q}xg6$  49  $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$   $\mathbb{Q}xg6$  50  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  and a draw is on the way.

In chess, straightforward attacking play can end up in very difficult tactics, but there is often more than one good possibility in a critical position. On move 44, positional play would also have held the game.

Try 44  $\mathbb{Q}g3$ .

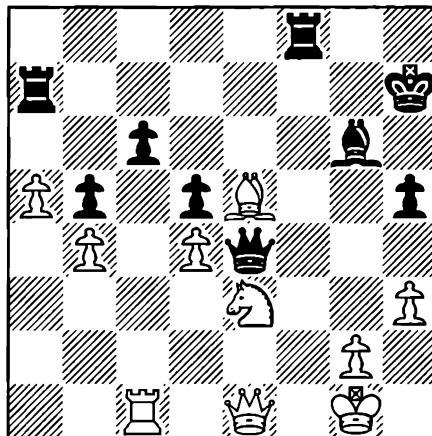


Then there is an entertaining snakes-and-ladders draw by repetition after 44... $\mathbb{Q}h7$  (not 44... $\mathbb{Q}f3?$  45  $gxf3$   $\mathbb{Q}xf3$  because of 46  $\mathbb{Q}g5!$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$  47  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$   $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  48  $\mathbb{Q}a1$  and White wins)

45  $\mathbb{W}g5 \mathbb{B}f2$  46  $\mathbb{W}e7+$   $\mathbb{B}8f7$  47  $\mathbb{W}d8 \mathbb{B}f8$  48  $\mathbb{W}e7+$  etc; while if Black tries for more with 47... $\mathbb{B}h6?$ , then 48  $\mathbb{K}e1 \mathbb{B}f1+$  49  $\mathbb{B}xf1 \mathbb{W}xe3+$  50  $\mathbb{B}h2 \mathbb{B}xf1$  51  $\mathbb{W}h8+$   $\mathbb{B}g5$  52  $\mathbb{W}d8+$  is another draw.

A draw seems to be a fair result.

**44  $\mathbb{B}c1$**



**Question:** An essential point of technique: How does the defender halve out when he is slightly worse but wants to avoid losing?  
In other words, what should Black do here?

**44... $\mathbb{B}af7$ ?**

This is the second attempt by Caruana to start an attack with ... $\mathbb{B}f2$  (see move 32), and again it fails.

He could have tried an even older idea (from move 22 and beyond) – blockading the white a-pawn with 44... $\mathbb{B}a6$ . He cannot then win, but he should be safe from losing.

It is, of course, frustrating not to be trying for a win when the exchange up, but the passed a-pawn, plus the weakness of Black's various queenside pawns suggest that he should be cautious. As the further play shows, White can defend against anything Black attempts on the kingside.

**45  $\mathbb{B}h2 \mathbb{B}f2$**

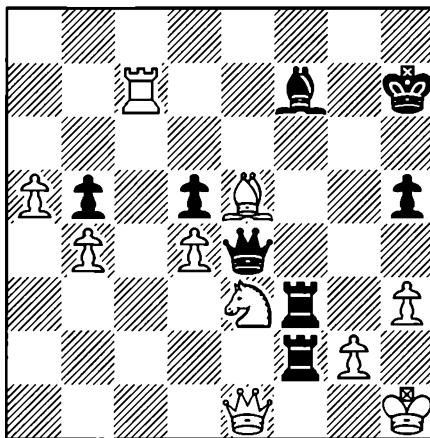
Caruana's plan, but it is not a good one. His attack on the kingside does not work, and he has no defence on the queenside. The computer suggests the passive 45... $\mathbb{B}c8$ , but now White is better after 46  $\mathbb{W}g3$ , with the possible idea of  $\mathbb{W}g5$ . Tempi matter, and Black should have set up his queenside defences a move earlier.

**46  $\mathbb{B}xc6$**

Simple enough. Of the three rooks on the board, it is the sole white rook which is the most dangerous.

46... $\mathbb{E}8f3$  47  $\mathbb{E}c7+$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$  48  $\mathbb{Q}h1$

With a clear defensive win. The direct 48 a6 is also decisive.

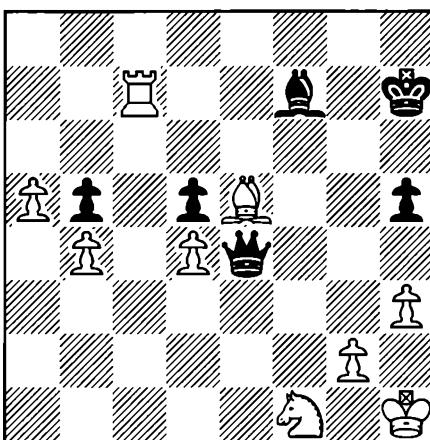


Black is overcommitted.

48... $\mathbb{E}f1+$

Nothing else is any better. 48... $\mathbb{W}xe3$  49  $\mathbb{E}xf7+$  wins a piece; while after 48... $\mathbb{E}xh3+$  49  $\mathbb{Q}g1$ , both black rooks are en prise and one will fall.

49  $\mathbb{W}xf1$   $\mathbb{E}xf1+$  50  $\mathbb{Q}xf1$



Black will be unable to attack with only his queen. Sooner or later, White's pieces will work together and the a-pawn will finish the game off.

51... $\mathbb{Q}g6$  51  $\mathbb{E}c6+$   $\mathbb{Q}h7$  52  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{W}b1+$  53  $\mathbb{Q}h2$   $\mathbf{h}4$  54  $\mathbb{Q}e2$   $\mathbb{W}xb4$  55  $\mathbb{E}c7$   $\mathbb{Q}g8$  56 a6 1-0

Few people would want to claim that this game was in any sense perfect, as there were identifiable mistakes on both sides, but it was quite imaginative and entertaining. As for Ca-

ruana, he was still a teenager at the time of the Tal Memorial, albeit with a rating of 2770. So we can say with confidence that, if he can eliminate a few weaknesses in his game, he should comfortably reach 2800 before too long, and stay at that level for many years.

## Round Five: Radjabov-Carlsen

Radjabov has developed into an extremely solid player, if not with quite the same aura of invincibility as Carlsen. He has lost seven games over the same recent period (including three times to Ivanchuk), rather than just four at the highest level. It is enough to note that Radjabov only lost once at the Tal Memorial, and that against Carlsen, while Carlsen went unbeaten. In this extremely tough event, every other player lost at least twice.

If Radjabov can consolidate his defensive play just a little more, it would be a tense and difficult match if both Radjabov and Carlsen were ever to play for the world championship. Just one win by either player could easily be enough, with the loser quite possibly given no possibility to recover.

So what happened in their game at the Tal Memorial? In previous recent encounters, both players had ended up with steady draws, but somehow this time Carlsen was able to find a very small edge as Black, and squeezed, and continued to squeeze, until Radjabov finally lost his guard and the game. Had Radjabov drawn, it would probably have been he, not Carlsen, who would have won the tournament.

Carlsen has gained the reputation of being the best positional grinder in history, exceeding even the exploits of Kramnik in his younger years. Radjabov, on this evidence, is not quite at the same level, but the gap is small.

13th June 2012  
**T.Radjabov-M.Carlsen**  
 Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012  
*Scotch Game*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 d4**

Looking at Radjabov's two games in this book, the impression might easily be that he opens with 1 e4 all the time, and then, if the opponent replies 1...e5, the Scotch, which he had also played against Tomashevsky in round one. Not so. He plays 1 d4 and 1 e4 with equal regularity, and nowadays very often 1 ♜f3 as well. It is noticeable that he does not make quite as much of an impact as Carlsen with the white pieces, with fewer wins and very many draws. This is perhaps something he will need to think about if he aims for the very top.

**3...exd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜c5 5 ♜xc6**

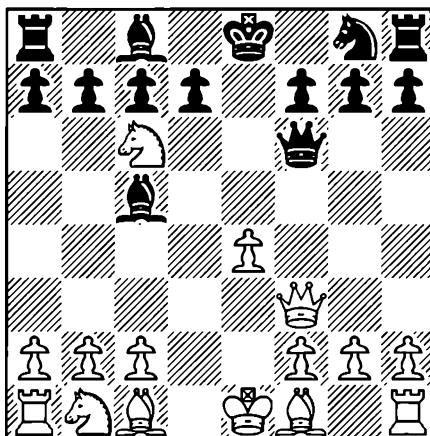
Radjabov had clearly decided that 5 ♜b3, with which he won against Tomashevsky, was not that impressive after all, and so he tries a different line.

**5...♝f6**

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

If this were a beginners' book, I would add a diagram here, and ask what would happen if White were to try to keep the knight with 6  $\mathbb{Q}a5$ .

6  $\mathbb{W}f3$



**Question:** The more interesting questions start here, a move later.

First, what happens if Black plays 6... $\mathbb{W}xf3$  7  $gxf3$   $dxc6$ , going tit-for-tat with the doubled pawns? Second, if Black does not exchange on f3, which is the best of the three recaptures on c6?

6... $bxc6$

According to the computer I am using (and of course there are more recent models), Carlsen's move was, if anything, slightly the weakest of the four captures. Top grandmasters think otherwise. Usually it is best to be guided by the grandmasters, who are likely to have far better assessments than computers of long-term positional consequences of minor differences in pawn structure.

Carlsen has recaptured with the pawn towards the centre, with excellent defensive coverage of the central squares. White has the pawn on e4, but there is not much hope of him trying to dominate in the centre. It is far too early to say that Black can possibly be better, but at least he is solid, and he can hope to improve on that if his opponent gives anything away.

6... $dxc6$  is a familiar pawn structure from the Berlin Defence to the Ruy Lopez, popularized by Kramnik and others. The small but significant difference is that in that, in the Scotch, White captures on c6 with the knight, rather than the bishop. Therefore, he gets to keep his light-squared bishop. White can try 7  $\mathbb{W}g3$  0-0 8  $\mathbb{A}d3$ , followed by quick castling, with the reasonable chance of a slight edge.

6... $\mathbb{W}xc6$  could be interesting, avoiding doubled pawns altogether. However, this leaves the queen in a slightly strange position, and moving it again will be with loss of tempo.

Black still has to prove that he is fully equal after 7  $\mathbb{Q}c3$ .

Finally, there is 6... $\mathbb{W}xf3$  7  $gxf3$   $dxc6$  (with queens off the board, he can be happier with the centre open). The problem here is that White can cause trouble on the g-file after 8  $\mathbb{B}g1$ , with a slight but clear edge.

Carlsen's choice, 6... $bxc6$ , seems the safest.

7  $\mathbb{W}g3$

7  $\mathbb{Q}d2$  has also been tried. It is nothing spectacular.

7... $d6$  8  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{W}g6$

Clearly Carlsen considers that he is happy enough with his pawn structure, especially if the queens are off the board – he remains slightly nervous with them still on the board.

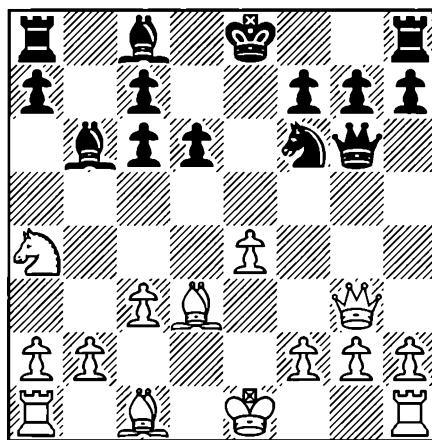
9  $\mathbb{A}d3$

Or 9  $\mathbb{A}d2$   $\mathbb{W}xg3$  10  $hxg3$   $\mathbb{Q}e7$  11  $f3$   $\mathbb{Q}g6$ , about equal, and agreed drawn after 116 moves in Wang Hao-E.Tomashevsky, Russian Team Championship 2012. Be warned. In such a line, players will try to grind each other down for many, many moves.

9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  10  $\mathbb{Q}a4$

Radjabov gains the bishop pair and has claims for a slight edge, but he would need to play extremely accurately to try and prove it.

10... $\mathbb{A}d4$  11  $c3$   $\mathbb{A}b6$



**Question:** How best to try to keep a slight edge?

12 0-0?!

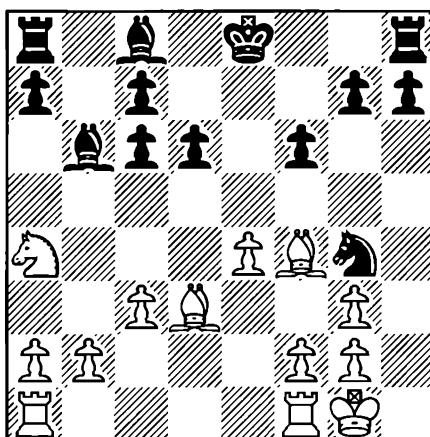
Too routine – only castle if you cannot find anything else to do. Carlsen was able to equalize immediately by exchanging queens, followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ . The problem is not so much that the doubled pawns are themselves weak, but rather that the pawn on g3 is obstructing an retreat square for the bishop (after  $\mathbb{A}f4$ ) and that, in addition, White cannot push away a knight on g4 with h2-h3. Such things can make a difference between a small

edge and mere equality.

Given this, 12  $\mathbb{W}xg6?$   $hxg6$  13  $\mathbb{B}f4$  would have been a more appropriate way to complete his development, and then perhaps 13... $\mathbb{Q}d7$  14  $\mathbb{B}c2$   $\mathbb{Q}e5$  15  $b3$ , still with a slight edge. 12  $\mathbb{B}f4?$  is also promising, again with a slight edge.

White has various chances to throw in an exchange on b6, gaining the bishop pair. There is no hurry. The bishop will not run away. It is usually preferable not to simplify when you are slightly better. Keep the tension going instead.

**12... $\mathbb{W}xg3$  13  $hxg3$   $\mathbb{Q}g4$  14  $\mathbb{B}f4$  f6**

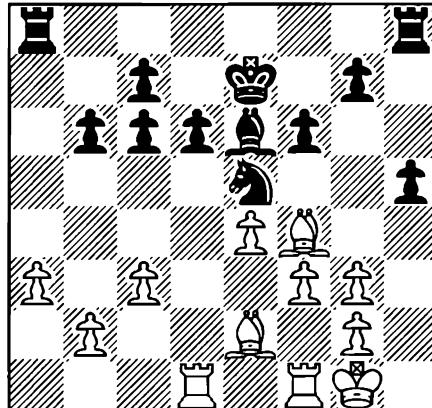


Just solidly equal, and an excellent chance for Carlsen to demonstrate his outstanding grinding skills.

The problem which makes it very difficult for Radjabov to improve his position is that his kingside pawn structure is immobile. If he still had a pawn on h2, rather than on g3, he could keep his pawns moving with h2-h3, retreat the bishop from f4, and then arrange things so that he can eventually play f2-f4.

Instead, all that White can do is tuck around, hoping his position is not going to deteriorate.

**15  $\mathbb{R}ad1$  h5 16  $\mathbb{B}e2$   $\mathbb{B}e6$  17  $\mathbb{Q}xb6$   $axb6$  18 a3  $\mathbb{B}e7$  19 f3  $\mathbb{Q}e5$**

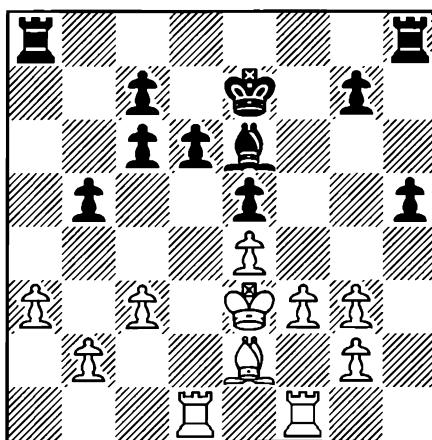


Black is already slightly better, and White will need to defend carefully. Black's bishop and knight work well together and slightly outperform White's bishop pair. If, for example, White gets frustrated with the knight remaining on e5 and decides to take it off, Black would remain with the slightly better bishop.

The pawn structures also need to be considered. Black has a queenside pawn majority which is mobile. White's kingside pawn majority is static. The only pawn move on that side of the board is an f3-f4 push (after the bishop has moved out of the way), but this would create a weakness on g4.

White cannot hope for an advantage. Black is able to try.

**20 ♕f2 b5 21 ♘xe5 fxе5 22 ♖e3**



**22...h4**

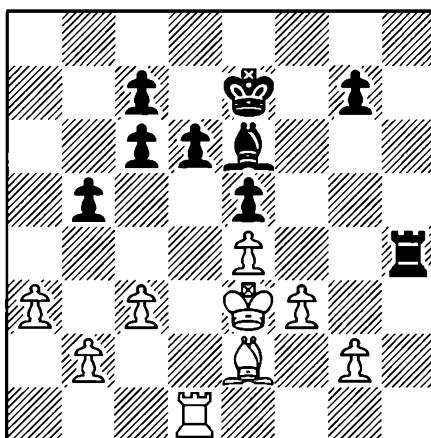
**Question:** Should Black really allow his opponent to eliminate his doubled g-pawns?

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

It is a question of priorities. White is now ready to push his pawns forward with f3-f4 and possibly f4-f5, so Black decides to press against the g3-pawn immediately. Matters have changed in the last few moves in that White has exchanged the black knight, so there is no longer the possibility of parking the knight on g4.

Black has to be content with opening up the h-file for his rook.

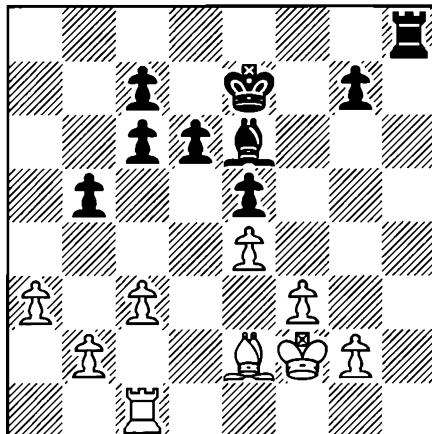
**23 gxh4 ♜xh4 24 ♜h1 ♜ah8 25 ♜xh4 ♜xh4**



Now there is a long stretch of manoeuvring by Black, taking play until at least the first time control. He wants to keep his rook on the open h-file for as long as possible. White has a 3-2 pawn majority on the kingside, but if he cannot find a way to make progress on that side of the board, Black will start to take the initiative on the queenside. One problem for White is that, if Black's rook can stay on the h-file, the desirable g2-g3 would simply allow Black to keep control on the seventh rank with ...♜h2.

Nevertheless, one would expect that the result should be a draw. In the game, Carlsen was able to bring his king to the queenside, to give extra protection for his pawns to advance. Even so, it is unclear whether he can break through on that side of the board.

**26 ♜c1 ♜h2 27 ♔f2 ♜h8**



**Question:** Find a good way for White to consolidate for a safe draw. Black's edge is still not nearly enough to win, and perhaps with a few sturdy defensive moves White will be close to equality.

#### 28 ♕e3

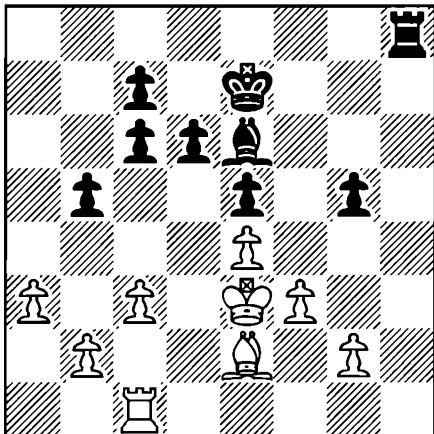
White could certainly consider 28 ♕g1, followed by g2-g3 and ♕g2, when he has prevented any incursions on the h-file. The end result should be a steady draw. Should we criticize Radjabov for not heading for safety, in view of the fact that eventually he lost the game? This must be very much an open question. Radjabov's mistake came later, when he was only under mild pressure. It is possible that he was thinking about whether Carlsen himself might be under slight pressure. After all, there were a few small pawn weaknesses in Black's position.

Radjabov might have been considering 28 c4!?, ♖xc4 29 ♖xc4 bxc4 30 ♖xc4, when it is Black who needs to think about how to secure the draw, since White now has an outside passed a-pawn, and Black's pawn structure seems less effective than before. Radjabov was already geared up to play c3-c4, with his ♜c1. Was he still aiming to squeeze out a slight edge?

Perhaps this is the key to what was happening. It seems that Radjabov did not want to agree a draw just yet, but he needed to be careful not to overpress. It is easy to create a narrative which suggests that Carlsen was playing absolutely superbly, and that he was able to create an advantage, and later a win, out of thin air. In a competitive game of chess, there is always another story about what was going on. Radjabov, too, hoped for a slight edge, and wanted to keep his opponent under slight pressure. Somewhere along the line, he misplayed it.

#### 28...g5

To prevent f3-f4.



**29 ♜d3?!**

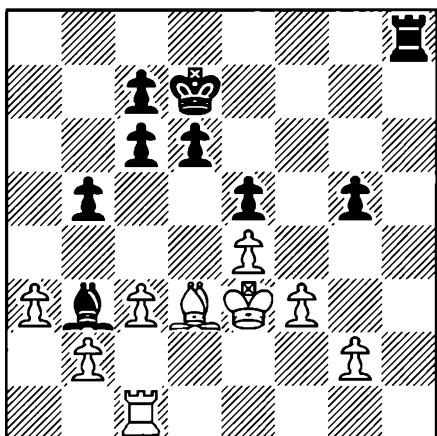
One senses that Radjabov was starting to drift slightly. There are ten moves or so before the time control at move 40, and the natural reaction in such a position is just to keep things alive by shuffling the pieces around, and only then try to think about creating a slight edge. The danger here is that if one player keeps shifting pieces aimlessly, while the opponent is able to find something constructive to do, the player with the greater sense of purpose will gradually take over the initiative.

29 c4 still leaves White at least equal.

**29...♝d7**

Now Black is making some progress, in the sense that his king covers the c6-pawn, and so White cannot gain a tempo with c3-c4 and a double exchange, since the pawn is no longer threatened. Even so, the difference is tiny, and 30 c4 is still equal.

**30 ♞a1 ♜b3 31 ♞c1**



**31...♔c8**

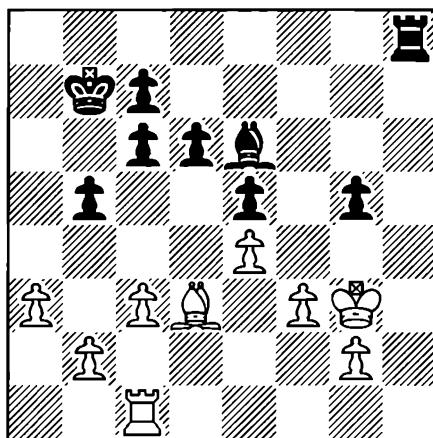
It seems that Radjabov is not going to bother playing c3-c4 after all, in which case Carlsen still has a glimmer of hope in bringing his king over to the queenside, specifically to b6, enabling him to play ...c6-c5, after which a new phase of the endgame will commence.

**32 ♔f2**

Radjabov seems to believe that the simplest way of holding the position is to move backwards and forwards, and of course sideways, with his pieces.

There is still time to play 32 c4. Not much has changed structurally in the last few moves. Pawns and bishops get exchanged, and the kings are slightly differently placed, but with no major improvements on either side. All that Radjabov needs to do is play c3-c4 before it is too late.

**32...♗b7 33 ♔g3 ♕e6**

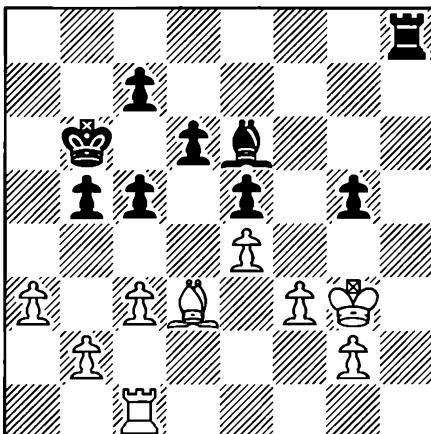


**34 ♜a1?!**

The procrastination has gone on too long, and for the first time it is possible to claim that Carlsen has a clear edge, and that he is not just waiting for his opponent to make mistakes.

Even now, 34 c4 looks fine, when one could argue that Radjabov's manoeuvre with ♔e3-f2-g3 would have been the correct approach, keeping an eye on the g5-pawn. If 34...♗b6, then 35 b4 blocks off the a5- and c5-squares, and the position remains level.

**34...♗b6 35 ♜c1 c5**



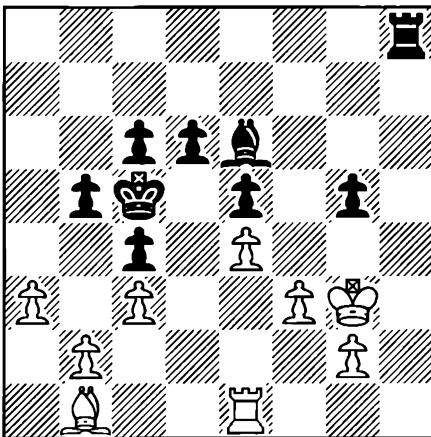
**36  $\mathbb{R}a1?$**

Even here, when Black is finally starting to make progress with his pawns, White continues his rook shuffle. 36 c4, optional for a long time, is now essential. If 36...b4, then 37  $\mathbb{R}a1$  defends.

**36...c4**

Even if this is not yet winning, Radjabov will need to rethink his play – not easy when he is only four moves from the time control.

**37  $\mathbb{Q}c2 \mathbb{Q}c5$  38  $\mathbb{R}e1$  c6 39  $\mathbb{Q}b1$**



**Question:** What is Black's plan here?

First, it is important to recognize that Carlsen is indeed searching for a genuine plan, in contrast to Radjabov's evident belief that once a position is solid, that position will remain

solid whatever happens (within reason). The position is still blocked at the moment, but Black can, with a few extra moves, unblock it in the centre.

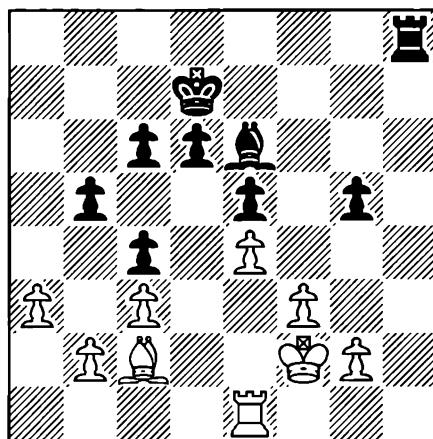
**39... $\mathbb{Q}b6!$**

Having manoeuvring his king to the queenside to help advance the doubled c-pawns, Carlsen then sets up a return journey, to e7 and then to f6, so that he can advance the pawn to d5.

**40. $\mathbb{Q}c2\mathbb{Q}c7$**

The time control.

**41. $\mathbb{Q}f2\mathbb{Q}d7$**



**Question:** What next?

**42 a4?**

Badly mistimed, and in effect the losing move. Radjabov wakes to the thought, just after the time control, that he will need to make a pawn push at some stage, before Carlsen can get his central pawns going, but he should have waited a move.

Instead, 42. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$  still holds the balance. For instance, 42...g4 43.f4 and White is comfortable. Or if 42... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ , continuing his march towards the kingside, then the c6-pawn is no longer protected and 43.a4! would have been well timed. After 43...bx a4 44. $\mathbb{Q}xa4\mathbb{R}xb8$  (44...c5 45. $\mathbb{Q}a1\mathbb{R}a8$  46. $\mathbb{Q}a3$  offers Black nothing) 45. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\mathbb{R}xb2$  46. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ , White, for the first time, takes control of the h-file with his rook, and 46... $\mathbb{R}c2$  47. $\mathbb{Q}h7+\mathbb{Q}f6$  48. $\mathbb{Q}h6+\mathbb{Q}f7$  49. $\mathbb{Q}d5\mathbb{Q}xd5$  50.exd5 leads to equality.

The inserted king moves,  $\mathbb{Q}g3$  and ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ , make an enormous difference to the final outcome. On e7, the black king no longer protects the pawn on c6; while with the white king on g3, there is no longer a check after ... $\mathbb{R}xb2$ . King positioning is important in the endgame.

Carlsen has shown greater positional stamina in this game. He has noted many minor

inaccuracies by his opponent, mostly in the delaying of c3-c4, and decided it was very much worthwhile to continue playing in the hope of a more significant inaccuracy, on which he will be able to pounce. Many players would have taken, or offered, a draw some twenty moves earlier, but when Carlsen is given even the slightest chance of playing for an edge, and possibly later a win, he will take it.

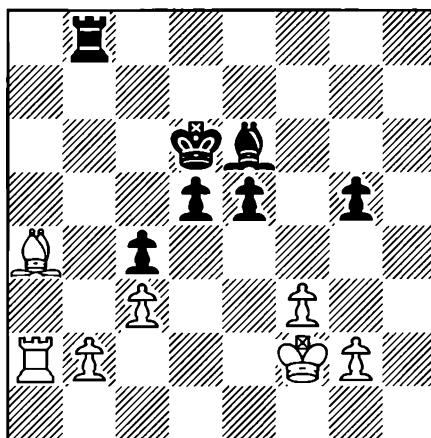
**42...bx a4 43 ♜a1**

43 ♜xa4 ♜b8 44 ♜b1 ♜c7, followed by ...d6-d5, leaves Black with a clear advantage.

**43...♜b8 44 ♜a2 d5 45 exd5**

He could perhaps try 45 ♜xa4 immediately, but Black is still considerably better after 45...d4. If White, at some stage, tries to cover the advanced d-pawn with his king, Black can switch the attack to the h-file with his rook.

**45...cx d5 46 ♜xa4+ ♜d6**

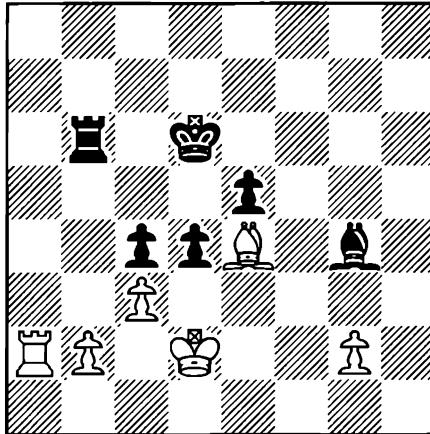


A transformation! Black's pawns are now extremely mobile, and he has excellent squares for his pieces; whereas White's pieces are scattered and do nothing active, the only role for the rook being to protect the b2-pawn.

**47 ♜c2**

On 47 ♜e3, Black has 47...♜f5, threatening ...♜b1.

**47...d4 48 ♜e4 ♜b6 49 ♜e2 g4 50 fxg4 ♜xg4+ 51 ♜d2**



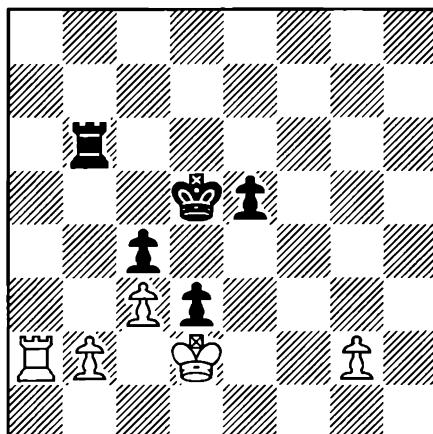
**Question:** Black has made the first part of the breakthrough, but what is he going to do next?

### 51...♝e6

White's bishop is the only piece, other than the king, to cover Black's passed d-pawn and potential passed e-pawn. It is therefore a good idea to try and exchange the bishops with ...♝d5. White can resist, but it will still probably end up with the same rook and pawn ending as in the game.

Not yet 51...d3?, as the passed pawns get quickly blockaded. After 52 ♜e3 ♜e6, White can free his queenside pawns with 53 b4 – though Black would still have an edge, his position being so strong.

**52 ♜c2 ♜d5 53 ♜xd5 d3+ 54 ♜d2 ♜xd5**



Even now, one might easily gain the impression that, with rook and three versus rook and three, the game might easily be drawn, with White's king blockading the passed pawns. The key here is that Black can attack the opposing king, with the rook on the g-file and good support from his own king and all the pawns. Once the white king is pushed off the blockading squares e3 and d2, the rest is easy.

**55 ♜e3 ♜g6 56 ♜a5+**

56 ♜f3 e4+ 57 ♜f4 (or 57 ♜e3 ♜g3+ 58 ♜f2 e3! 59 ♜xg3 d2 etc) 57...♜f6+ 58 ♜e3 ♜f1 soon wins for Black.

**56...♝e6 57 ♜e4 ♜g4+ 58 ♜f3 ♜f4+ 59 ♜e3 ♜f1 0-1**

White cannot do anything against the threat of ...♜e1+, followed by ...♜e2.

## Round Six: Morozevich-Nakamura

What went right for Morozevich in this tournament and what went wrong? He started off superbly with wins against Caruana, Grischuk and Aronian, and draws against Carlsen and Radjabov. Then, suddenly, he had three consecutive losses against Nakamura, Tomashevsky and McShane – and, finally, another draw against Kramnik, who was also having a rough time. Morozevich's depth of imagination requires great respect, but there is also a reputation that his play can fade quite sharply, through tiredness, or perhaps severe self-doubt, once he starts to lose games.

It was a bad summer for Morozevich, with three losses in a row in Moscow, and then being too exhausted to carry on playing at Biel. Sadly, it is unlikely that he will ever become world champion. His play is often original and extremely good, but sometimes his play can be "original" in the bad sense. This next game was the first of his three losses. Meanwhile, Nakamura was having a quiet tournament, unable to keep up with his contemporaries, Carlsen, Caruana and Radjabov. If Nakamura is able to achieve a couple of really good tournaments, he will quickly edge up towards 2800 as well.

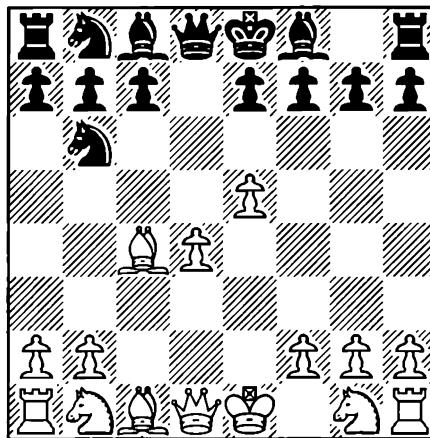
It is easy to be slightly frivolous about their game below, noting that, between move six (when he had to retreat his bishop) and move thirty-four (when he had shot his bolt and was already losing), White did not make a single retreat – an unusual record. Lovers of chess trivia will no doubt be interested in searching out even longer sequences without any retreats. Quite probably this has already been done.

Behind the trivia, there is the implication that Morozevich is a player who concentrates on attack, attack, and more attack, and that he is an extremely dangerous when attacking. Before this game, he had just beaten Aronian, and he was also close to beating Carlsen, appropriately with two rooks on the seventh, but he could not clinch the win.

Morozevich has never consistently reached 2800 – although, had he managed three draws instead of three losses in rounds six to eight, he would have been up to 2795. Was he starting to get tired at this tournament? Or were his opponents able to find systematic weaknesses?

14th June 2012  
**A.Morozevich-H.Nakamura**  
Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012  
*Queen's Gambit Accepted*

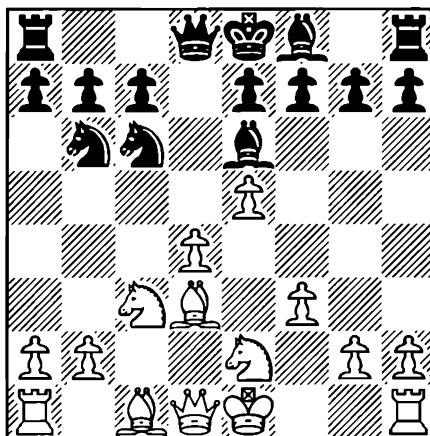
**1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 ♜f6 4 e5 ♜d5 5 ♜xc4 ♜b6**



**6 ♜d3**

A necessary retreat. The position is now tense, but about level. White has more space in the centre, but his d- and e-pawns are loose. Black has less space, but he is able to manoeuvre effectively within that space.

**6...♜c6 7 ♜e2 ♜g4 8 f3 ♜e6 9 ♜bc3**



**9...♝d7**

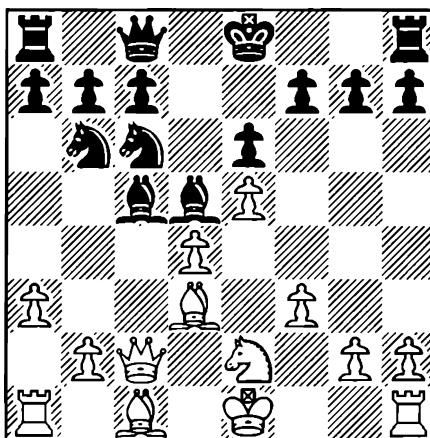
## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Nakamura runs a tight ship. In an earlier game, A.Morozevich-Ar.Timofeev, Russian Championship, Moscow 2011, Black tried a more open defence with 9... $\mathbb{Q}c4$  10  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$   $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ , when Morozevich choked up Black's kingside with 11 e6 fxe6 12 0-0. For trivia followers, the next retreat by White was at move 24, after 12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  13  $\mathbb{Q}e4$  g6 14  $\mathbb{Q}c5$   $\mathbb{W}d6$  15  $\mathbb{Q}xb7$   $\mathbb{W}d5$  16  $\mathbb{Q}e3$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  17  $\mathbb{Q}f4$   $\mathbb{W}f5$  18  $\mathbb{Q}c1$   $\mathbb{Q}xd4$  19  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$  20  $\mathbb{W}xd4$  e5 21  $\mathbb{W}b4$   $\mathbb{W}xf4$  22  $\mathbb{W}b5+$  c6 23  $\mathbb{W}xc6+$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$ , and now 24  $\mathbb{Q}c5$ . White was already close to winning, but the knight cannot be expected to move forward from b7.

**10  $\mathbb{Q}e4$   $\mathbb{Q}d5$  11  $\mathbb{Q}c5$   $\mathbb{W}c8$  12 a3 e6 13  $\mathbb{W}c2$**

All roughly equal so far.

**13... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$**

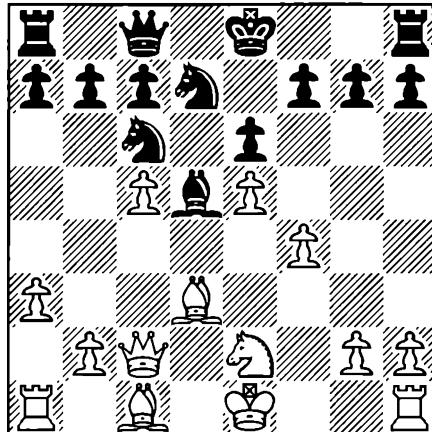


**Question:** How should White recapture?

**14 dx $\mathbb{Q}$ c5?!**

This leaves both the e5- and c5-pawns unnecessarily exposed. 14  $\mathbb{W}xc5$  is still about equal.

**14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$  15 f4**

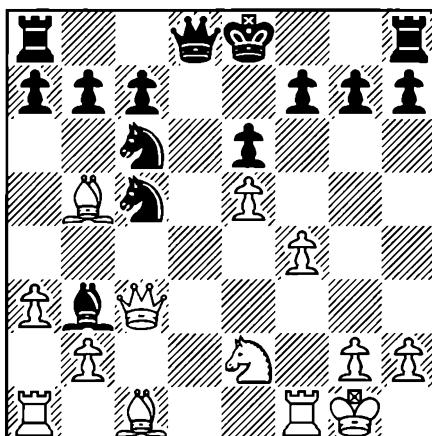


**Question:** How can Black take over the initiative? Look for a tactical attempt to exploit the weak c5-pawn. The second, more difficult, question is whether Black has a genuine advantage.

### 15... $\mathbb{A}xg2$

This is certainly playable and should have been equal, but Morozевич later treated it as a gambit and ended up losing.

The computer suggests that 15... $\mathbb{W}d8!$ ? is a considerable improvement, with a clear advantage for Black, the main line being 16 0-0  $\mathbb{A}b3$  (a sudden tactical resource) 17  $\mathbb{W}c3$  (best; after 17  $\mathbb{W}xb3?$   $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  and 18... $\mathbb{W}xd3$ , Black wins a pawn safely) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  18  $\mathbb{A}b5$ .



Although Black is again a pawn up, he has too many pieces under pressure to be completely happy (and yes, this is a human response, not a computer response). The position is

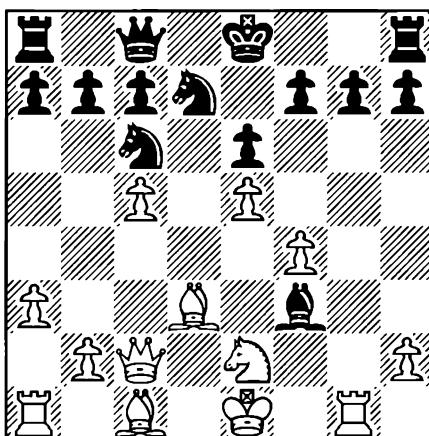
## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

extremely complicated, Black's minor pieces are hanging, so why should he try to calculate much further?

Play on a move or so and we reach 18... $\mathbb{W}d5$  19  $\mathbb{Q}d4$   $\mathbb{A}a4!$  20  $\mathbb{A}xc6+$  (or 20  $\mathbb{A}e3$   $\mathbb{A}xb5$  21  $\mathbb{Q}xb5$   $\mathbb{A}a6$ ) 20... $bxc6$ , when Black seems to keep an edge – but how many chess players would be confident to calculate all this in advance?

Nakamura seems to have missed a very difficult line, though Morozevich's game was not easy anyway.

**16  $\mathbb{B}g1$   $\mathbb{A}f3$**



**Question:** What next for White?

**17  $\mathbb{A}e3?$**

Unnecessarily allowing Black an extra tempo, which should have won the game for him relatively comfortably.

White should have preferred 17  $\mathbb{W}xg7$ , and if 17... $\mathbb{W}d8$ , then maybe 18  $\mathbb{Q}g1!$ ?  $\mathbb{A}h5$  19  $\mathbb{A}xh7$  (19  $\mathbb{A}xh7$   $\mathbb{Q}d4$  is possible for White, but he will need to be careful with the queen) 19... $\mathbb{A}xh7$  20  $\mathbb{A}xh7$   $\mathbb{Q}d4$  21  $\mathbb{W}c3$  (again, he needs to handle the queen safely with the king being exposed) 21... $\mathbb{W}h4+$  22  $\mathbb{W}g3$   $\mathbb{W}xg3+$  23  $\mathbb{h}xg3$ . The position is tense, but about equal.

White could instead try to complete his development (finally!) with 18  $\mathbb{A}e3$ , but after 18... $\mathbb{W}h4+$  19  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{W}h6$  20  $\mathbb{A}g5$  0-0-0, Black, with his own pieces now developed, looks to have slightly the more flexible position.

In a complicated early middlegame, where various pieces have not yet been brought into play, it is often a difficult judgment as to what priority should be given between development, or taking a pawn, or bringing the already developed pieces into more active play. Here, taking the pawn should have been preferred. It is not just the number of pawns that needs to be considered; it is also that White, by taking on g7, would have damaged Black's kingside structure.

**17...g6**

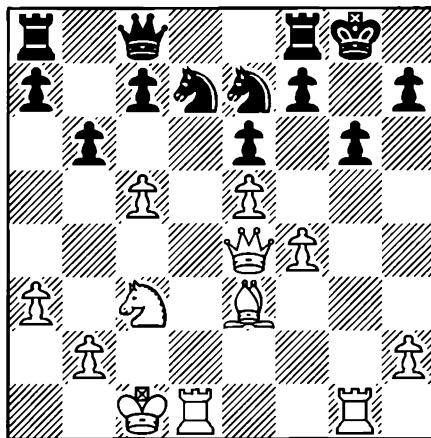
Whereas now, White must struggle.

**18 0-0-0 ♜e7 19 ♜e4 ♜xe4 20 ♜xe4 b6**

Or perhaps 20...d5.

**21 ♜c3**

Preventing the opposing knight from reaching d5.

**21...0-0**

**Question:** It's starting to look desperate for White. He is a pawn down, and Black is nearly ready to play ...♝f5, after which there is no hope of an attack against the king. What can White do next?

**22 c6! ♜b8 23 f5!**

Magnificent gambit play. White is already a pawn down, but he is ready to sacrifice two more, not so much to provide clear compensation, just to open up lines to attack the king. Win or lose, Morozevich showed resourcefulness. Without these pawn sacrifices, he would quickly have gone under.

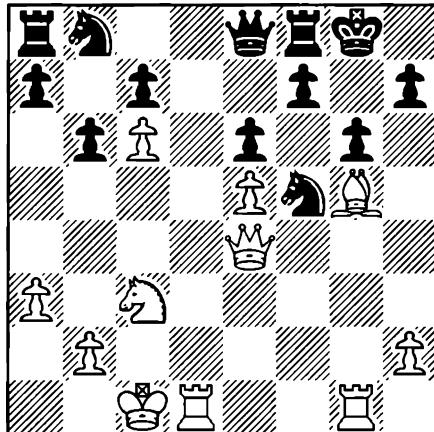
Despite the end result, affected by time trouble, Morozevich had given himself good chances to hold the game.

**23...♝xf5 24 ♜g5**

And the bishop is now in full play. If it reaches f6, Black will have to be worried about mating attacks on g7, or along the h-pawn.

**24...♛e8**

Black needs to bring his queenside pieces into play.

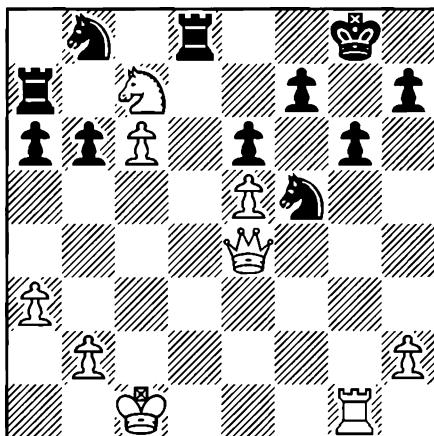


**Question:** What now? There is an obvious move, but how far can you calculate it?

**25 ♜f4?**

Amazingly, Morozевич did not try it. Here 25 ♜d8 forces Black to give up the queen, since 25...♜xc6?? 26 ♜xb8! ♜xe4 27 ♜xf8+, followed by ♜xe4, wins a piece.

Therefore he has to play 25...♜xd8 26 ♜xd8 ♜xd8. Black is slightly ahead in material (having rook, knight and two pawns for the queen), but his pieces are undeveloped. We play on with 27 ♜b5 (this has to be done quickly) 27...a6 28 ♜c7 ♜a7



29 ♜a8! (the various computers suggest this move) and, after 29...♜xc6, White makes his first retreat since move six by 30 ♜xb6, with a likely draw after 30...♜c7 31 ♜b1. This would have been a far tidier finish.

In the game itself, it is perhaps kindest not to try to analyse every move in depth, as

both players were clearly short of time. The main creative part of the game has been and gone. Now all White can do is try to find decent moves to reach the fortieth.

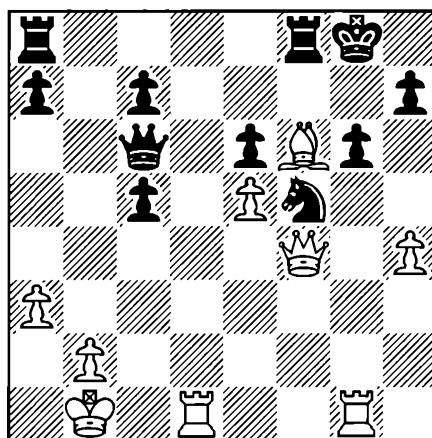
**25...f6**

It is understandable that Nakamura did not want to risk 25... $\mathbb{W}xc6$  in time trouble. White might, for example, try 26  $\mathbb{Q}b1$  followed by  $\mathbb{Q}e4$ ; or there might be other possibilities. We'll leave it at that. Any slight mishap could easily end up with a quick defeat, not something he would have liked.

**26  $\mathbb{A}xf6 \mathbb{W}xc6$**

Black has jettisoned his f-pawn in order to create more space for his pieces.

**27  $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{Q}d7$  28  $\mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}c5$  29  $\mathbb{Q}xc5 bxc5$  30 h4**



**Question:** Quick assessment, as Black is in time trouble. What would you do if you had to make a move in a minute?

**30... $\mathbb{R}f7?!$**

A loss of tempo. This rook move is unnecessary for his defence.

The computer suggests 30...c4, though after 31  $\mathbb{R}c1$ , it is difficult to believe that Black has any significant edge.

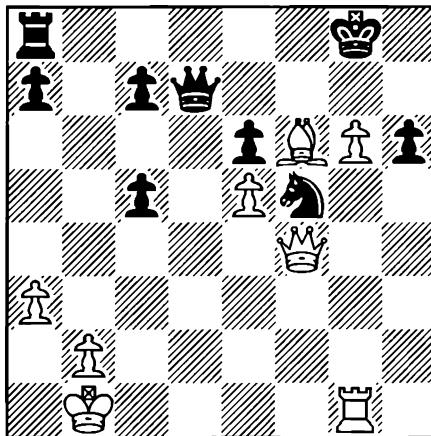
The correct continuation, it seems, is 30... $\mathbb{R}ab8$ , and if 31 h5, only then 31...c4, and Black is still genuinely better. For example, after 32 hxg6 h6 33 g7  $\mathbb{R}fc8$  34  $\mathbb{R}c1$  c3 35  $\mathbb{R}c2 \mathbb{R}b3$ , he will double up on the b-file. Black continues his attack until the very last moment, playing a defensive move only when absolutely necessary. The general ratio is something like three attacking moves to one defensive move, when there are attacks against kings on opposite flanks. This is only an approximation, of course, but it is a reminder that it is best not to be over-defensive in an advantageous but sharp position.

Maybe a quick-thinking reader would be able to envisage this in a minute. For the rest of us, the important point is that Black, by pressing through with his attack immediately,

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

has gained crucial time.

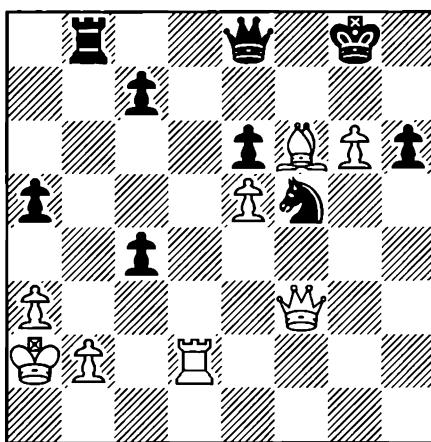
**31 h5 ♜d7 32 hxg6 h6 33 ♜xd7 ♜xd7**



**34 ♜f3**

After all the strange vicissitudes, the game is now level again. Unfortunately, in time trouble it did not remain equal.

**34...♜b8 35 ♜d1 ♜e8 36 ♜d2 c4 37 ♜a2 a5**



**Question:** What should White play here? Again, make your decision quickly.

**38 ♜d1??**

According to Morozевич, just about any reasonable move would have been fine, other than the one actually played. He missed his opponent's pawn hack.

**38...c3! 39 bxc3 ♜e3**

Suddenly, all his pieces are after the white king. In contrast, White's advanced g-pawn merely blocks any attack against the black king.

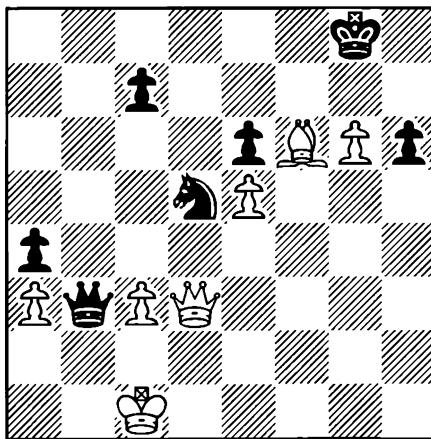
40 ♕e2 ♔d5 41 ♕d3

If 41  $\mathbb{W}c4$ , Black has an instant win with 41...  $\mathbb{W}a4$  42  $\mathbb{W}xa4$   $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$  43  $\mathbb{Q}a1$   $\mathbb{B}b1$  mate.

41..a4

Followed, if allowed, by ...b3.

42 ♜b2 ♜xb2+ 43 ♔xb2 ♕b8+ 44 ♔c1 ♕b3



White's bishop is useless.

45 ♜a6 ♜xc3+ 46 ♔d1 ♕e3+ 47 ♔e2 ♜c4+ 0-1

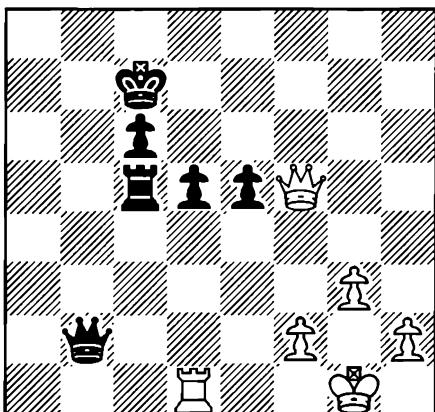
## A strange game.

## **Round Eight: Caruana-Kramnik**

In truth, this was hardly a great game by Kramnik. Once a player, even a great player, has started to hit the mid thirties, tiredness will occasionally set in, and more frequent mistakes will occur. Kramnik had, in the previous two rounds, played two very long and tiring games, the latter being a loss (see below). Resilience can start to decrease, even if only slowly, and there will be dangers of further losses.

Of course, only a really strong player would be able to exploit such minor weaknesses, and Caruana is indeed such a strong player. He had, at the time of this game, slightly more than a decade before needing to worry about similar signs of decline. His current problem, as exemplified in his game against Morozevich, is that he can still make mistakes through inexperience. His peak will come some time, perhaps, in his late twenties.

As for the long games by Kramnik: it took him 36 moves to win Tomashevsky's a-pawn, to reach an endgame with rook, knight and four kingside pawns, versus rook, knight and three kingside pawns. This was going to be a long struggle, and Tomashevsky lasted out until move 83. Then against McShane, just after the time control, the players reached an intense queen and rook ending with three pawns on each side, two of them passed.



L. McShane-V. Kramnik (round seven)

Black to play

Kramnik was probably better in the earlier stages. After all, it is easy enough to imagine how dangerous his central passed pawns could have become, if given the opportunity. However, it is now White who has the initiative. His outside passed h-pawn, almost of minor significance during the middlegame, is now an enormous threat. All White has to do is advance his h-pawn safely and it is difficult for Black to defend that part of the board. Kramnik tried 44...e4? here, after which McShane's outside passed pawn proved decisive, and Kramnik resigned on move 94.

The task for the students, making full use of their analysis engines, is to find a better attempt to defend the position after 44... $\mathbb{E}c1$  45  $\mathbb{E}xc1$   $\mathbb{W}xc1+$  46  $\mathbb{Q}g2$ . It is not easy, even though the computer engine gives the position as stone-cold drawn in three different lines. Good luck if you can find something secure.

Given a free hand, I feel sure that I would have given this game in detail in this book. My intention, however, was to look only at Carlsen, Caruana and Radjabov. Only one game not featuring one of the three target players has been annotated, that being Nakamura-Morozevich in round six. This leaves twenty more games, including twelve with a decisive result, for readers to investigate on their own.

Meanwhile, returning to the current game, remember that Caruana beat Kramnik – a truly impressive result.

17th June 2012

F.Caruana-V.Kramnik

Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012

Scotch Game

1 e4 e5 2  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{Q}c6$  3 d4 exd4 4  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

Yet another Scotch. In this book, we have already seen Scotch – and Scotch Four Knights – games by Kramnik (successfully) and Radjabov (both successfully and unsuccessfully).

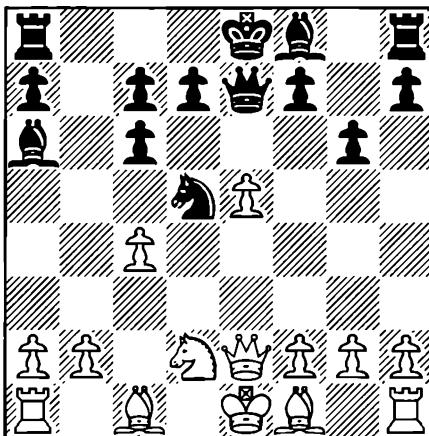
Now Caruana beats Kramnik. Could this be the start of a new fashion? Or is it all a one-off?

Probably this was just a brief flurry – and it is incidental that these games have been picked up for detailed analysis in this selection. In fact, most of the 1 e4 e5 clashes at the Tal Memorial were in the Ruy Lopez (which was seen eight times). It is difficult to imagine that there will be another sudden surge of interest in the Scotch as a result of these few games.

4... $\mathbb{Q}f6$  5  $\mathbb{Q}xc6$   $bxc6$  6 e5  $\mathbb{W}e7$  7  $\mathbb{W}e2$   $\mathbb{Q}d5$  8 c4  $\mathbb{Q}a6$

8... $\mathbb{Q}b6$  is the other main line.

9  $\mathbb{Q}d2$  g6



**Question:** One for students of chess psychology. Would you be happy with a quick draw by repetition here? Would it make a difference if you felt that your opponent would try and avoid it? Finally, what is the move we are being asked to think about?

10  $\mathbb{Q}f3$

The line in question is 10  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{W}b4+$  11  $\mathbb{Q}d2$   $\mathbb{W}e7$ . Caruana would, I presume, have been happy with a quick draw as Black against a recent World Champion. Naturally, I am unable to get inside the head of a leading grandmaster, or his opponent, but there seems to be a reasonable narrative in the next few moves – in that Caruana makes an implicit offer of a draw, and Kramnik decides he has to try something else, which turns out to have been either not so good, or at least a more difficult route to equality. This seems to make the most sense of the way Kramnik managed to find himself a pawn down while still in the opening.

Or it could just have been a bluff by Caruana. Maybe he was dangling the prospect of an early draw by repetition, intending to play a new move next time round, rather than repeat the position again. If nothing else, it would be a good opportunity to see what

## Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Kramnik is thinking, and then decide what to do later.

There are other lines, notably 10 b3 ♜g7 11 ♜b2, with either equality or a minimal edge for White.

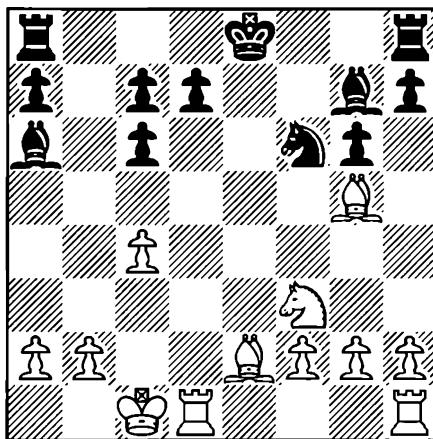
**10...♜g7**

As we have just seen, 10...♝b4+ 11 ♜d2 ♝e7 12 ♜f3 would repeat the position. Of course this is not a forced line for either side, but the various alternatives – for example, 11 ♜d1 ♛a4+ 12 ♛c2 – should still end up equal.

**11 ♜g5 f6**

11...♝b4+ 12 ♛d2 would now give White a slight edge.

**12 exf6 ♛xe2+ 13 ♜xe2 ♜xf6 14 0-0-0**



**Question:** What next for Black?

This, surprisingly, is the critical position in the whole game. Given that Kramnik soon lost a pawn, there was clearly something wrong with his handling of the opening.

**14...0-0-0**

Black's two main problems are, first, what to do with his king, and second what to do with a couple of small pawn weaknesses (a7 and d7). Kramnik castled quickly on the queenside, but left his a7-pawn dangerously weak. Possibly he underestimated this. Instead:

a) 14...0-0? would lose the other pawn after 15 ♜xf6, followed by ♛xd7. There is no reasonable compensation to be seen.

b) 14...♝b8 merely delays the problem. To counter the possible threats to b2, the most efficient solution seems to be 15 ♜e3, followed by ♜d4. If Black were to try 15...♜g4 16 ♜d4 ♛xd4 17 ♛xd4 ♜xf2??, the knight soon gets captured after 18 ♜f1.

c) 14...♞e4 looks effective (maybe Kramnik had intended this?), but after 15 ♜he1! ♜xg5 15 ♜xg5, Black's king is uncomfortably open. If 16...0-0 17 ♛xd7 ♜xf2, White has a hidden

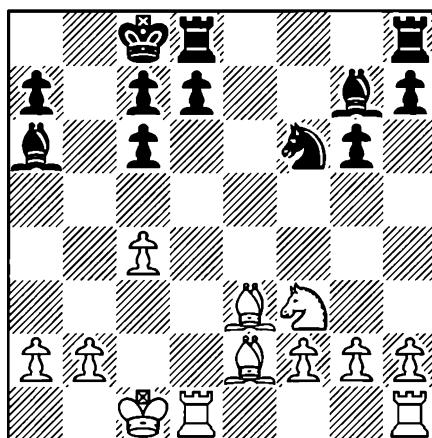
tactic in 18  $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$   $\mathbb{Q}xg7$  19  $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ , followed by a fork with 20  $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ .

Despite initial impressions, this is not quite winning, since Black has 19... $\mathbb{Q}g8$  (avoiding a later check on the f-file) 20  $\mathbb{Q}xc7$   $\mathbb{Q}xe2$  21  $\mathbb{Q}xe2$   $\mathbb{Q}xc4$  22  $\mathbb{Q}c2$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  23  $\mathbb{Q}xc4$   $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ . How should one judge this rook and pawn endgame? Black's pawn structure is slightly damaged, with isolated a- and c-pawns. This of itself, and with all other things being equal, guarantees White a slight edge with accurate play. White has at least a draw, though it is far too early to say that he has serious winning chances. On the other hand, it is uncomfortable for Black and, given the chance, he would prefer to find complete equality instead.

d) There is one fully sound move: 14...d6!. Black's pawn structure has now been straightened up and, if necessary, he can cut out any threats to the a7-pawn with ...c6-c5. More significantly, he can castle safely on the kingside. Play is equal – if 15  $\mathbb{Q}d4$ , then simply 15...0-0, and if 16  $\mathbb{Q}xc6?$ , then 16... $\mathbb{Q}e4$  with advantage to Black.

**15  $\mathbb{Q}e3$**

Now White has a solid positional edge.

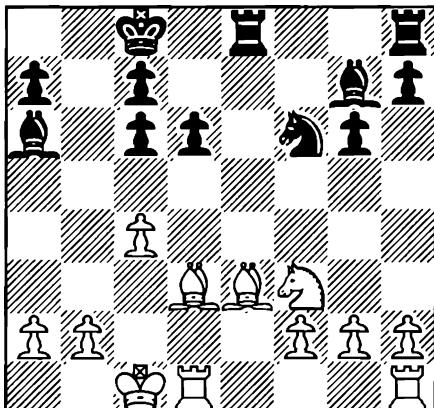


**15... $\mathbb{Q}de8$**

**Question:** Any improvements? In particular, could he have tried to defend the pawn with 15... $\mathbb{Q}b8$  - ?

The a7-pawn is not directly attacked after the move played, but each time Black leaves it undefended, he remains under pressure. A quiet defensive plan with 15... $\mathbb{Q}b8$  17  $\mathbb{Q}he1$   $\mathbb{Q}b7$  is certainly possible, but there is no clear and simple equality. The problem is that, while Black would like to play both ...d7-d6 and ...c6-c5, how is he going to achieve this? If he plays ...c6-c5 first, his pawn will be taken. If he plays ...d7-d6 first, White will start an attack with  $\mathbb{Q}d4$ . It is already difficult for him.

**16  $\mathbb{Q}d3$  d6**



**Question:** Kramnik has achieved his first objective, managing to play ...d7-d6 safely while keeping the knight away from the centre. What is Caruana going to do next?

### 17 c5

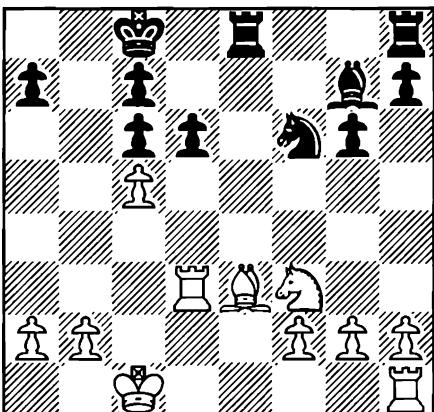
Now 17 ♜d4 achieves nothing for White after 17...c5, and if 18 ♜c6, then simply 18...♚b7.

17 ♜xa7?! c5 is just about playable if White continues with 18 b4, but few would consider this as an attempt for an advantage.

White could try something quiet such as 17 h3 (to prevent ...♝g4) 17...c5, but his edge is going to be very slight.

Better to open up the queenside, so that all of Black's pawns are weakened. Or at least, that is how the argument goes.

**17...♜xd3 18 ♜xd3**



**Question:** How should Black continue the defence?

Perhaps Black's position is not as bad as it looks, but he still has to defend imaginatively and find the correct reply.

**18...d5?!**

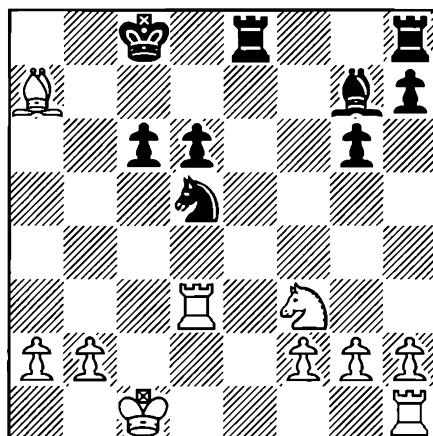
Kramnik gives away his worst pawn in order to find good squares for his pieces. All the same, a pawn is a pawn, and nowhere did Kramnik find a way to recover it. White's passed a-pawn remained to the end.

Instead, 18...d5 19 Qd4 Qd7 20 f3 is just about playable for Black, though it looks uncomfortable. Once any immediate tactics have been resolved (e.g. after 20...Bxe3 21 Bxe3 Qh6), Black still has to work out what to do with the a-pawn, and the two doubled c-pawns. There will be no quick win for White, but he will be able to grind for a long time.

The best reply seems to be 18...dxc5! 19 Bxc5 Be2. It goes against the grain to allow tripled isolated pawns, and an extra isolated pawn nearby, but for the first time Black has good squares for his pieces and is in no great trouble. For example, 20 Qxa7 c5! 21 Qxc5 (21 Bb3 Qd7 or 21 Bhd1 Bxf2 22 Qe5 Bf4! 23 Bb3 Bb4) 21...Be4 22 b4 Qxb4 23 cxb4 Bxa2 is equal.

In this line 20 Be1! seems more testing, with Black's queenside pawns being troublesome to defend. There is no obvious win for White, but equally there is no obvious way for Black to find a clear draw. Perhaps something like 20...Qh6+ 21 Qb1 Be8, and it would have been interesting to see what would happen next. This must still be better than being a pawn down.

**19 cxd6 cxd6 20 Qxa7**



**Question:** Black to play. What next? How can he set up a new line of barricades?

**20...♝c7?!**

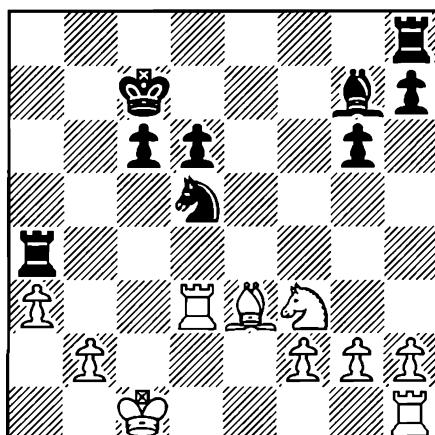
It seems Kramnik is not quite as good as he used to be in defending difficult endgames. This showed, for example, in his first match game against Aronian – though of course everything is relative and he is still an immensely strong player, battling to stay at 2800 level.

Black certainly needed to work extremely hard on this position, whereas Kramnik merely played passively, attacking White's passed pawn, and not doing all that much else.

Instead, 20...♜e2 leads to a quick hacking of material with 21 ♜d4 ♜xd4 22 ♜xd4 ♜xf2 23 ♜xc6 ♜f4 24 ♜xd6 ♜c7 25 ♜hd1 ♜xg2, but after 26 h4 it is difficult to get back the extra pawn quickly. If he can only achieve this slowly (the direct 26...♜h2 27 ♜a7 ♜xh4 28 ♜d7+ sees Black's king suddenly in trouble: 28...♚b6 29 ♜1d6+ or 28...♚b8 29 ♜c6+ ♜c8 30 ♜a7), White will have two dangerous, outside, connected passed pawns.

Black's best plan might be to complete his development with 20...♜hf8, making sure that all his pieces are centralized and on good squares, without worrying about attacking a pawn on the edge. One of the points is that he is creating pressure on the f-file, which makes it difficult for White to improve his minor pieces. For example, 21 ♜e1 ♜xe1+ 22 ♜xe1 ♜b7 23 ♜e3 ♜xe3 24 fxe3 ♜f2 and Black is reasonably safe. Perhaps 21 ♜e3 ♜e4, when play continues, and White is only slightly better.

**21 ♜e3 ♜a8 22 a3 ♜a4**



It is not so clear that his rook is any better on a4 than on e8, and of course he has spent two tempi getting it there.

**23 ♜e1 ♜f8**

To provoke the knight move, and therefore not a waste of time. 23...♞xe3 24 fxe3 ♜e8 still sets up a tough defence, but White should probably win eventually.

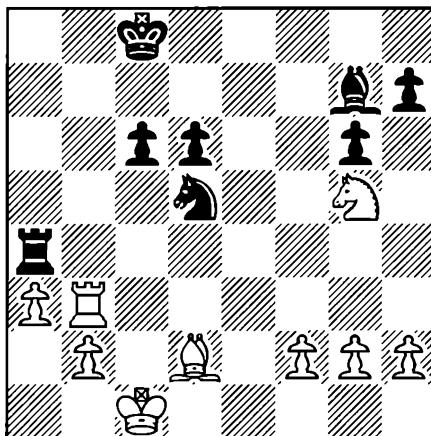
**24 ♜g5 ♜e8 25 ♜b6+ ♜d7 26 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 27 ♜e3**

The old story: the more pieces get exchanged, the more an extra pawn increases in value. The bishop is on the same square as six moves ago, but White is happier now a pair of rooks has gone.

**27... $\mathbb{Q}d7$**

Again, 27... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  28  $\mathbb{B}xe3+$  is to be considered. At the moment, the knight looks stronger than the bishop, but if the bishop is given the opportunity to move to a safe square, the balance will change.

**28  $\mathbb{B}b3$   $\mathbb{Q}c8$  29  $\mathbb{A}d2$**



The bishop is now safe. The general idea for White is to find better squares for his other pieces and to cut down the opponent's options. Still, progress is not going to be quick.

**29...h5 30  $\mathbb{Q}f7$   $\mathbb{Q}c7$  31  $\mathbb{B}g3$**

White has prodded the kingside pawns successfully and forced Black to retreat one of his pieces.

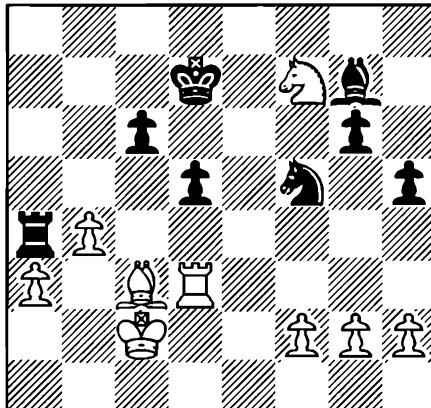
**31... $\mathbb{Q}e7$  32 b4**

Now that his pieces are safe, it is time to start pushing the pawns.

**32... $\mathbb{Q}d7$  33  $\mathbb{B}d3$  d5 34  $\mathbb{Q}c2$**

And the king is on hand to offer support, push away the opposing pieces, and eventually enable his own pawns to advance. This is classic technique in the endgame.

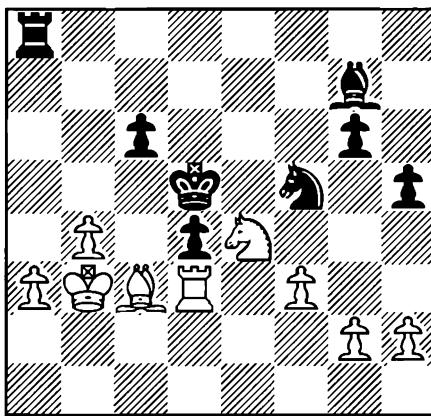
**34... $\mathbb{Q}f5$  35  $\mathbb{A}c3$**



**35...d4**

35... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$  36  $\mathbb{Q}xg7$   $\mathbb{Q}xd3$  37  $\mathbb{Q}xd3$   $\mathbb{Q}xg7$  38  $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ , followed by  $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ , gives White enough kingside pawns to ensure that he will win the knight endgame.

**36  $\mathbb{Q}b3$   $\mathbb{Q}a8$  37  $\mathbb{Q}g5$   $\mathbb{Q}d6$  38 f3  $\mathbb{Q}d5$  39  $\mathbb{Q}e4$**



**39... $\mathbb{Q}e3??$**

A time-trouble blunder. After 39... $\mathbb{Q}f8$  40  $\mathbb{Q}d2$  c5 41  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$   $\mathbb{Q}xc5$  42 bxc5  $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ , it would still require a lot of hard work for White to force victory. The next stage might be 43  $\mathbb{Q}b4+$   $\mathbb{Q}d5$  44 a4, advancing the pawn. In itself this is not enough to win; White will have to find some way to make use of the extra pawn on the kingside, with g2-g4 at some stage.

**40  $\mathbb{Q}xe3$  1-0**

After 40...fxe3 41  $\mathbb{Q}xg7$  White has two pieces and a pawn for the rook, and the e-pawn will soon drop off too, so Black resigned.

For a teenager, indeed for anyone, to beat Kramnik is quite an achievement.

# Final Notes

There are, of course, no final notes in chess. It is all part of a long historical process, which carries on from the past and through the future. Older players will gradually see their strengths decreasing, and younger players will improve, sometimes very quickly. Since 2005, it has to be acknowledged that there has been no improvement at the very top, in that the number one spot has been vacant since Kasparov retired, with no player as yet being of the same strength. There has been a vast increase of new 2700+ grandmasters, who are all intensely strong, but not quite as strong as Kasparov.

What we have seen in the last few years, however, is that some of these players are starting to go beyond Anand and Kramnik, and have genuine aspirations to reach the level of Kasparov, or even beyond. For instance, Carlsen, at 21, is just a couple of good wins from reaching Kasparov's peak rating (2851 in July 1999, aged 36).

There are statistical questions as to whether the FIDE rating system has an inflationary tendency, and whether ratings in 2012 are fully equivalent to ratings in 1999. Carlsen, on his own website <[www.magnuscarlsenchess.com/](http://www.magnuscarlsenchess.com/)>, suggested that Kasparov's rating of 2851 was actually equivalent to a 2886 rating in November 2010. Furthermore, according to Carlsen's recalculations, Kasparov's rating of 2675 in July 1982, at the age of 19, would have been 2811 in modern terms. There are many ifs and buts about all this, and no doubt different statisticians would have different points of view, but Carlsen's argument makes sense. He certainly does not claim that, in his early twenties, he is already the best chess player ever. He knows he still needs to prove himself.

Carlsen also notes that he reached 2800 in November 2009, at the age of 18 years and 11 months, slightly faster than Kasparov. There is just one other player who is currently achieving a similar speed of improvement. That is Anish Giri, aged 18 years and 3 months at the time of writing, with a rating of 2730, and an increase on average of two rating points per game. Even Caruana's development looks very slightly slower.

Time to have a closer look at the most recent ratings, up to the beginning of the 2012 Olympiad. According to the international ratings (updated daily at <[www.2700chess.com](http://www.2700chess.com)>) just before the Istanbul Olympiad, there are currently eight players rated over 2770. These can be divided into three age groups (actual ages given in brackets):

**25 and under:** Carlsen (21) 2843, Radjabov (25) 2785, Nakamura (24) 2783, Karjakin (22) 2778, Caruana (20) 2770

**26 to 30:** Aronian (29) 2816

**31 and over:** Kramnik (37) 2797, Anand (42) 2780

Then three more players, aged 25 or under, with ratings of 2730 or more (so within reasonable striking distance of 2750): Wang Hao (23) 2742, Giri (18) 2730, Tomashevsky (25) 2730.

There are other young players who might be capable of reaching this higher level, but at the moment we have eight players (of age 25 or below) who can be regarded as excellent candidates for the world championship (remember that Carlsen is not World Champion yet). This is a definite generation gap. Only Aronian, at 29, straddles between the younger age group and the old guard of Kramnik and Anand.

It has been a splendid opportunity to be able to write about the major shift of the chess generations in mid-2012. Before long, Carlsen will almost certainly become the strongest ever player in chess, ahead of Kasparov. There will be others, too, who will overtake Kasparov – and there are at least two obvious possibilities in the above list. This does not mean that these players will become more of a “genius” than Kasparov, nor even that Kasparov is necessarily a greater genius than Fischer. Every generation has the opportunity to learn from its predecessors, and every player can also learn from their contemporaries. Even more important perhaps, when considering the massive step-change in playing strength in this short period of time, is the increased sophistication of computer technology.

Chess is becoming even more interesting than a few years ago.

# Index of Openings

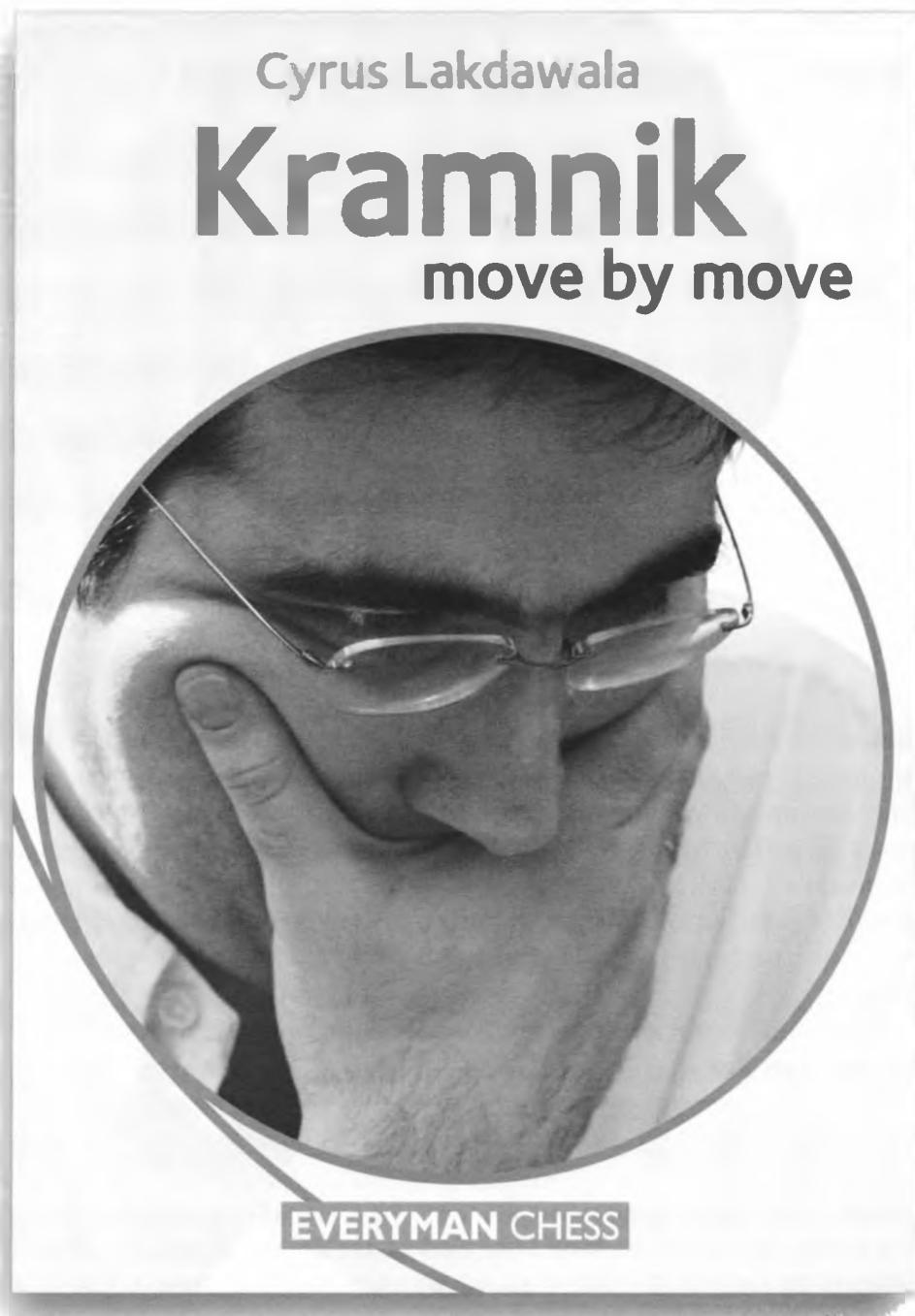
(figures refer to page numbers)

Benoni Defence	158
Four Knights Game	35
Grünfeld Defence	89, 104
Nimzo-Indian Defence	165, 187, 219
Queen's Gambit Accepted	275
Ruy Lopez	28, 47, 68, 247
Scotch Game	239, 261, 284
Semi-Slav Defence	13, 56, 207
Semi-Slav with 5...a6	97, 122, 138, 148
Sicilian Defence	130, 189, 195, 209
Slav Defence	211

# Index of Games

Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 1).....	88
Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 3).....	104
Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 5).....	130
Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 8).....	157
Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 10) .....	180
Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 12) .....	195
Anand.V-Gelfand.B, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 2) .....	209
Aronian.L-Kramnik.V, Zurich 2012 (Game 2).....	27
Aronian.L-Kramnik.V, Zurich 2012 (Game 4).....	47
Aronian.L-Kramnik.V, Zurich 2012 (Game 6).....	67
Carlsen.M-Kramnik.V, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012 .....	219
Caruana.F-Kramnik.V, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012 .....	284
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 2).....	96
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 4).....	122
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 6).....	138
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 7).....	147
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 9).....	165
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Game 11) .....	187
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 1).....	207
Gelfand.B-Anand.V, World Championship, Moscow 2012 (Tie-break game 3).....	211
Kramnik.V-Aronian.L, Zurich 2012 (Game 1).....	13
Kramnik.V-Aronian.L, Zurich 2012 (Game 3).....	34
Kramnik.V-Aronian.L, Zurich 2012 (Game 5).....	56
Morozevich.A-Caruana.F, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012 .....	247
Morozevich.A-Nakamura.H, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012 .....	275
Radjabov.T-Carlsen.M, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012 .....	261
Radjabov.T-Tomashevsky.E, Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012 .....	239

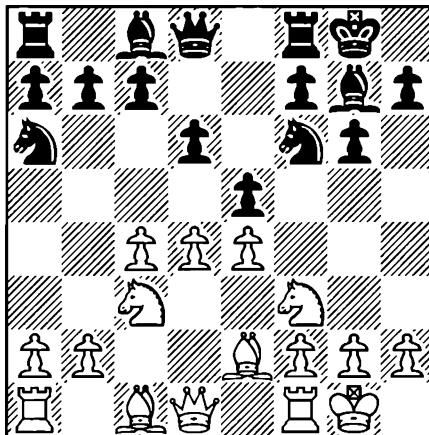
The following are some sample pages  
from another great **move by move** book:



ISBN: 9781857449914 – 416 pages

Game 28  
V.Kramnik-V.Topalov  
Nice (rapid) 2008  
King's Indian Defence

1 d4  $\mathbb{Q}f6$  2 c4 g6 3  $\mathbb{Q}c3$   $\mathbb{Q}g7$  4 e4 d6 5  $\mathbb{Q}f3$  0-0 6  $\mathbb{Q}e2$  e5 7 0-0  $\mathbb{Q}a6$



**Question:** Doesn't this decentralizing move violate principle?

**Answer:** Yes, but the move is an exception to the normal rule since the post is only temporary. Black's knight has access to all sorts of good squares, such as c5, or even b4 and c7, depending on how White sets up. The idea is to avoid the theoretical monolith stemming from 7... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ , from which my database announces nearly 34,000 games. I remember being surprised by 7... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ , by a master way back in the 1980's. I thought his move was outrageous and expected to crush him. Unfortunately, I underestimated his opening and went on to lose in confused fashion. So I learned then not to underrate the move.

8  $\mathbb{Q}e3$

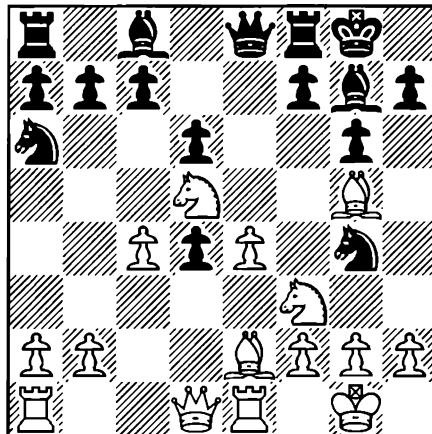
White's best shot at an edge is to retain the central pawn tension for as long as possible.  
8... $\mathbb{Q}g4$  9  $\mathbb{Q}g5$   $\mathbb{W}e8$

**Question:** An unnatural move?

**Answer:** This bizarre move is now quite normal in the position. Instead, 9...f6 10  $\mathbb{Q}c1$  (10  $\mathbb{Q}h4$  is also played here) 10... $\mathbb{Q}h8$  11 h3  $\mathbb{Q}h6$  12 dx5 fx5 13  $\mathbb{Q}e3$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$  14  $\mathbb{W}d2$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$  was A.Karpov-G.Kasparov, World Championship (7th matchgame), New York 1990, when I prefer White slightly after 15 b4  $\mathbb{Q}e6$  16  $\mathbb{E}fd1$ .

**10  $\mathbb{Q}e1$  exd4 11  $\mathbb{Q}d5$**

V.Anand-J.Polgar, Leon (human+computer rapid) 2000, saw 11  $\mathbb{Q}xd4$   $\mathbb{W}e5$  12  $\mathbb{Q}f3$   $\mathbb{W}c5$  13  $\mathbb{Q}h4$   $\mathbb{Q}e5$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xe5$  dx $e5$  15  $\mathbb{B}c1$   $\mathbb{Q}e6$  16  $\mathbb{Q}d5$  f6 17 a3 c6 18 b4  $\mathbb{W}d4$  19  $\mathbb{W}xd4$  exd4 20  $\mathbb{Q}f4$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$  21  $\mathbb{Q}g3$   $\mathbb{B}fe8$  22  $\mathbb{Q}f1$   $\mathbb{B}ac8$  23  $\mathbb{Q}d3$  and again I prefer White, who managed to blockade Black's passed d-pawn.



**11...d3**

It would be a short game if Black played 11... $\mathbb{W}xe4??$  12  $\mathbb{Q}d3$ .

**12  $\mathbb{Q}xd3$  c6**

**Question:** Why can't Black take on b2?

**Answer:** He doesn't have the time. His dark squares grow grievously weak after 12... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ ?

13 e5!.

**13  $\mathbb{Q}e7+$   $\mathbb{Q}h8$  14  $\mathbb{Q}xc8$**

White picks up the bishop pair.

**14... $\mathbb{B}xc8$  15  $\mathbb{Q}f1$   $\mathbb{Q}c5$**

**Question:** Can he grab b2 now?

**Answer:** He can, but Kramnik would undoubtedly give up the exchange for a huge initiative once again with 15... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$  16  $\mathbb{B}b1$   $\mathbb{Q}c3$  17  $\mathbb{B}xb7!$   $\mathbb{Q}xe1$  18  $\mathbb{Q}xe1!$ .

**16  $\mathbb{W}xd6!$   $\mathbb{Q}xe4$**

Double attack: Black simultaneously attacks f2 and White's queen. The over-exuberant e4-knight rushes out into the street and looks for someone – anyone – to high five. But he may be celebrating prematurely, since he is pinned.

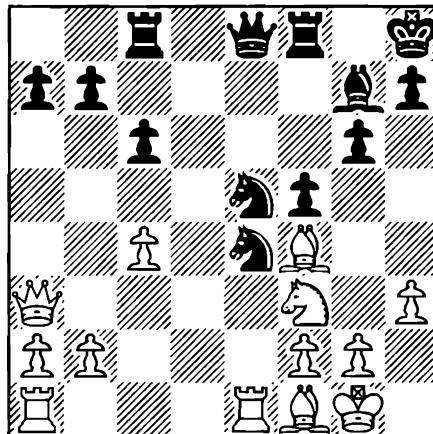
**17  $\mathbb{W}a3$  f5**

## Kramnik: Move by Move

**Question:** Isn't f2 hanging?

**Answer:** It is defended tactically. Black drops a piece after 17... $\mathbb{Q}xf2?$  18 h3! (eliminating the knight's exit route) 18... $\mathbb{W}d7$  19  $\mathbb{Q}h4$   $\mathbb{Q}xh3+$  20  $gxh3$  and Black doesn't get enough for the piece.

**18 h3  $\mathbb{Q}e5$  19  $\mathbb{Q}f4!$**



**Question:** Whose position do you prefer?

**Answer:** White stands better for the following reasons:

1. Bishop pair in an open position.
2. The pinned e4-knight gums up the works, like the slow moving supermarket cashier trainee who takes forever with each customer before you in line.
3. a7 is hanging.
4. Black's dream of kingside or central counterplay is an arid desert where life of any sort never takes root.

**19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$**

Black loses the initiative after this unforced retreat, but good alternatives are hard to find:

- a) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+??$  drops a piece to 20  $gxf3$ .
- b) 19...b5 20 cxb5 cxb5 21  $\mathbb{W}xa7$   $\mathbb{Q}c4$  22 a4 bxa4 23  $\mathbb{W}xa4$   $\mathbb{Q}xb2$  24 , when White has the initiative and Black's offside knight on b2 is in some danger as well.
- c) 19...a6 20  $\mathbb{Q}ad1$   $\mathbb{Q}f7$  (what else?) 21  $\mathbb{W}b4$  b5 22  $\mathbb{W}a3$  and Black remains under strategic pressure.

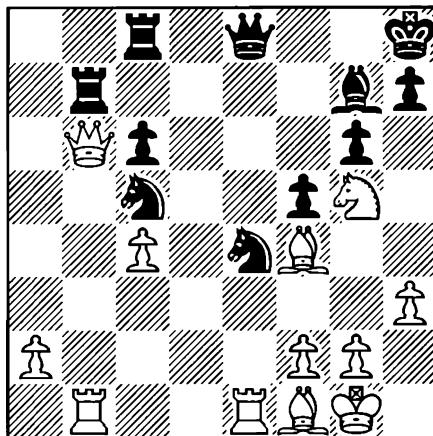
**20  $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ ?**

20  $\mathbb{Q}ad1$  keeps Black twisting in the breeze.

**20...♝xb2?!**

He decides to ski the slopes, ignoring the prominent avalanche warning sign up ahead. After this move Topa submits to endless defensive drudgery without complaint. He should go for 20...♝a8! 21 ♜xb7 (21 ♜e3 ♜xb2 also looks okay for Black) 21...♜dc5 22 ♜b4 ♜a4! 23 ♜b6 ♜a6 24 ♜c7 ♜e6 25 ♜b7 ♜c5! with a draw by repetition.

**21 ♜ab1 ♜g7 22 ♜xb7 ♜dc5 23 ♜b6 ♜f7 24 ♜g5! ♜b7**



Farmer Topa plucks the withered turnip from his dying field and thinks: "will this drought ever end?" We are at a crossroads: should White sac his queen here by taking on b7? We can decline – reasoning that, just because a novelist writes a revolver into the hands of a character, it need never be fired). Or we can take a chance and sac – thinking that we carry regret for actions not taken when we should have, if only we had the courage.

**Exercise (critical decision):** Would you sac or not?

**Answer:** The queen sac is completely sound.

**25 ♜xb7!**

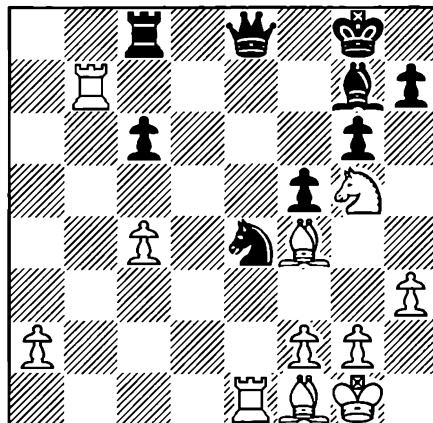
GM Baburin writes: "One should not call this a sacrifice, as for a queen White will have a rook, bishop and pawn." And a strong initiative, I might add.

**25...♝xb7 26 ♜xb7 ♜g8?**

26...c5 was called for.

Black's defenders are pilings on an old dock, worn away by the ocean's pounding and by time. There lies a path where White's piece activity grows exponentially.

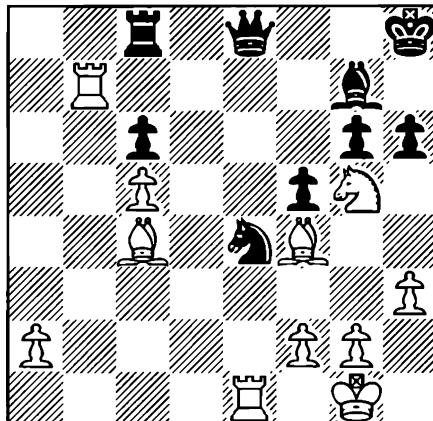
## Kramnik: Move by Move



**Exercise (planning):** Find one powerful move and you open the spigot, as White's pieces pour out against Black's king.

**Answer:** Clearance – free the light-squared bishop of his constraints by clearing c4. Black's position collapses quickly with the addition of the new attacker, as Kramnik's vacuum irretrievably sucks all life energy out of Black's game.

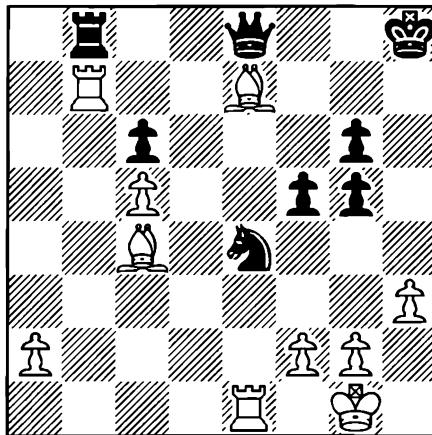
**27 c5! h6 28 ♜c4+ ♜h8**



**Exercise (combination alert):** Sometimes you simply get an intuition that the disparate elements in one side's position are subtly out of whack. White has a mind-bending shot – a shot we all dream about. Do you see it?

**Answer:** Overload. Neither Black's queen nor bishop can touch White's intruder.

29 ♜e5!! hxg5 30 ♜xg7+ ♚h7 31 ♜f8+! ♚h8 32 ♜e7! ♜b8



**Exercise (combination alert):** The black king's corpse, icy to the touch, is ready for the forensic examination to determine cause of death.

**Answer:** Removal of defender: White clears f6 for his bishop to deliver checkmate.

33 ♜xe4! 1-0

*Game 29*  
**A.Morozevich-V.Kramnik**  
 Tal Memorial, Moscow 2009  
*Nimzo-Indian Defence*

**1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♜b4**

A bold choice, since Morozevich boasts a nearly 70% score with the Capablanca line of the Nimzo-Indian.

**4 ♜c2 0-0 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 ♜xc3 d5**

A painter needs more than just one colour to work the canvas. 6...d5 is a no-nonsense move; Black stakes a claim in the centre. In the previous chapter we looked at 6...b6 (see Game 16).

*"It is always a treat to read a book by Colin Crouch."*

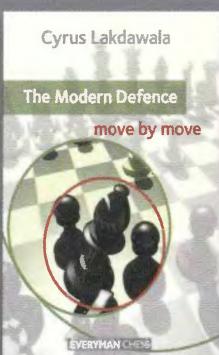
Grandmaster Lubomir Kavalek on Chess Secrets: Great Attackers

# Fighting Chess move by move

What separates the best chess players from the rest? What gives them the edge over their rivals? Chess legend Vladimir Kramnik believes it's their fighting skills and the ability to continuously find ways to keep a game alive. Colin Crouch agrees, and is fascinated that the world's strongest players seem almost unbeatable, even when games appear sharp and double-edged. In this book Crouch examines the tremendous fighting qualities of today's top grandmasters. Analysing key games from 2012, Crouch demonstrates how they give nothing away to opponents but are always alert to punish any slight errors, and crucially, how we can apply these lessons to help us in our own games.

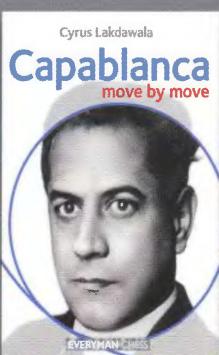
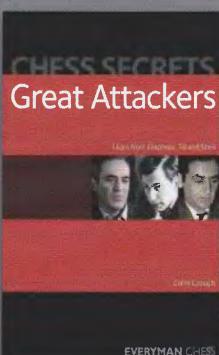
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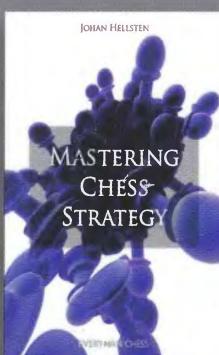


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