

Secrets of Positional Chess

How to exploit strengths and weaknesses on the chessboard

Dražen Marović



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GAMBIT

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Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!?	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
Cht	team championship
Wch	world championship
Wcht	world team championship
Ech	European championship
Echt	European team championship
ECC	European Clubs Cup
Ct	candidates event
IZ	interzonal event
Z	zonal event
OL	olympiad
jr	junior event
wom	women's event
mem	memorial event
rpd	rapidplay game
tt	team tournament
corr.	correspondence game
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(n)	<i>n</i> th match game
(D)	see next diagram

Introduction

This book is about chess space and chess pieces, and their strength and weakness; an unpretentious book on a simple subject – so simple that it is widely considered one of those themes which are absorbed just by time and playing experience. When a friend of mine learnt the topic I was writing about, his immediate reaction was: “Why are you writing about that? Everybody knows what a weak square or a weak piece is.” My experience in teaching chess, however, is utterly different. I learnt that on lower levels of chess knowledge most players know the difference only theoretically, but few make a clear distinction in practice. Their games swarm with most vulgar errors, because in their chess apprenticeship they paid little attention to the subject. Naturally, as we go higher in the chess hierarchy players are more and more aware of the subject and its importance. However, no matter how modest the theme appeared to be, we shall see from the long list of illustrious losers in the book that no player is immune from all kind of erroneous judgements. Sometimes a weakness is accepted light-heartedly in the hope that it can be compensated for, or the opponent outwitted, but once committed, weaknesses stay in the position and eventually may cost us dearly. More often, however, it is not apparent what is weak and what is strong and even a highly trained chess mind does not discern it; after all, the fundamental difficulty of the game of chess lies in that. The purpose of this book is to turn the reader’s awareness to the topic and its significance, and so help him to make clearer distinctions in the constant changing of values that constitutes a game of chess.

A long series of revealing games and positions, played by strong professional players and distinguished by their clarity of thought, await the reader. It is the clarity of thought I valued most in choosing the material for the book. It is not by chance, therefore, that you will find mostly games by famous players. In comparison to the messy games of lesser players, I find theirs are marked by clear thoughts and come straight to the point. To learn from their exceptional experience, it is enough to be concentrated and stay attentive.

1 Weak and Strong Squares

The subject of our attention in this chapter is a plain theme, but one of the fundamental issues of the general theory of chess: weak and strong squares.

When playing chess, we err and each error we commit remains engraved in the position in the form of weaknesses, which are often enduring and sometimes are felt until the end of the game. The most common weaknesses are weak squares. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I would like to remind you that ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ are two terms for the same characteristic, depending on which side of the board we are looking at it. Like ebb and flow, strength and weakness transform constantly one into the other.

For a long time now chess masters have been aware of the relative strength and weakness of chess squares, although they differed in the adopted definitions. Two and a half centuries ago Philidor wrote: “A square is weak if it is not controlled or cannot be controlled by a pawn of our own”. When it became apparent that squares could be controlled by pieces as well, later experience broadened the definition. Further on towards the middle of the 20th century we started to look at the weak square more flexibly. Every weak square is a static feature. Its weakness is not functional in itself, but it depends on both sides’ actions on the board. As long as an active plan is being carried out, all the static weaknesses, weak squares included, are irrelevant, unless they are themselves targets. In our time the chess master has acquired a new awareness of the complex, dialectic relationship between dynamic forces and static elements. Today we would say pragmatically that only those squares which can be exploited are weak.

We shall discuss the origin and the consequences of weak and strong squares with illustrative games and positions. Sometimes we shall need more or less complete games in order to trace the appearance of potential weaknesses

and their gradual fall into decay, but sometimes critical positions will suffice. Our purpose is simple and practical: to recognize their causes and watch the process from the moment of their appearance to the final, usually damaging, effects. We shall, therefore, pass quickly to the critical situations, stopping only to point out the causes of the arising problems, and concentrate on the crucial course of the struggle and our theme. We shall take our first lessons from a great master of positional play, Vasily Smyslov.

Smyslov – Rudakovsky

USSR Ch (Moscow) 1945

Sicilian Defence

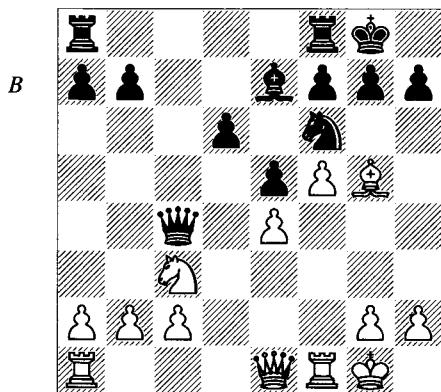
1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3
d6 6 ♜e2 ♜e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♜e3 ♜c6 9 f4 ♜c7
10 ♜e1 ♜xd4 11 ♜xd4 e5 12 ♜e3 ♜e6?

12...exf4 followed by 13...♜e6 is more consistent with the previous move, 11...e5.

13 f5 ♜c4??

13...♜d7 14 g4 ♜c6 15 ♜f3 d5 16 exd5 e4, seeking counterplay, is perhaps not fully adequate, but is certainly more enterprising.

14 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 15 ♜g5 (D)



Black’s difficulties begin here. Once the f6-knight is eliminated, White’s knight will reign

supreme on the strong central d5-square. Its position will be unassailable. Black is unable to control d5 with either his pawns or his pieces. The cost of his superficial play is a lasting weakness.

15... $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Dominance over a strong square implies a strong piece on it. The central position only increases the knight's superiority. Its centralization is possible because 17... $\mathbb{W}xc2$ would fail to 18 $\mathbb{K}f2$, when Black cannot prevent $\mathbb{Q}c7$, which costs him an exchange.

17... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 c3 b5 19 b3 $\mathbb{W}c5+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{K}c8$

21 $\mathbb{K}f3$

The commanding presence of the centralized knight makes it clear where White's chances lie: Black's kingside is obviously exposed.

21... $\mathbb{Q}h8$

21...f6 would prevent the following stroke, but in the long run would not help much.

22 f6!

This opens up Black's king at a moment when his lack of coordination makes any meaningful resistance futile.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23 $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 25 $\mathbb{W}g3$

White threatens 26 $\mathbb{W}xh7+$ followed by mate.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}cg8$ 27 $\mathbb{K}d1$ d5 28

$\mathbb{K}xg7$ 1-0

Impressive in its simplicity, this victory was built on the basis of a single strong square. Its first fruit was the centralized knight, which helped to transform White's spatial preponderance into the final assault.

Smyslov – Denker

USSR-USA (Moscow) 1946

Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 g3 g6 4 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5 d3 e6

6 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4?$!

This is inferior to the natural 6...d6. We shall soon see the consequences.

7 $\mathbb{Q}ce2$

White frees his c-pawn to advance, after which Black's usual superiority on d4 has gone.

7...d6

7... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 9 $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (or 9... $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$, etc.) wins a pawn, but dangerously slows down Black's development.

8 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

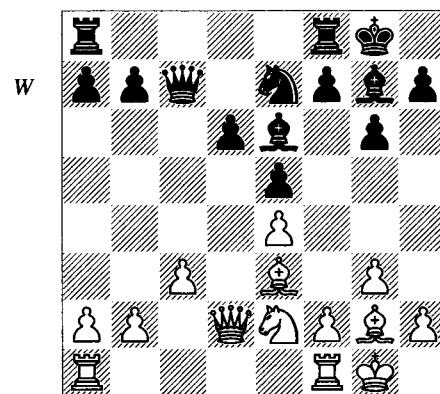
Retreating the knight to c6 does not help White's development as 8... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ would do, but leads to exchanges on d4 which are favourable to White.

9 d4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5?!

This move ends up creating a hole on d5. Of course, Black hopes to control it with his pieces, but 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ was at least less committal.

12 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0 14 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (D)

15...d5 is not available because of 16 $\mathbb{Q}c5$, and so Black must live with his backward pawn.



For the time being Black can console himself that the potentially weak d5-square is well protected by his minor pieces. However, it is precisely around this square that the battle will be waged.

16 $\mathbb{Q}fc1$!

By carrying out the c4 advance, White intends to strengthen his grip on the centre: the d6-pawn will be fixed in its backward position, while the temporarily passive knight at e2 will be given a major role.

16...f5

Black's problem is that he cannot thwart the obvious. 16...b5 is answered by 17 a4, when 17... $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ a5 19 $\mathbb{Q}ca1$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ (otherwise 20 b4) 20 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ a4 fails to 21 $\mathbb{Q}c1$, while 17...a6 18 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ also leads to difficulties for Black.

17 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}c3!$

The knight moves in at once to take control of the central squares. The move is based on some tactical points.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f5$

In case of 18... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ Smyslov had in mind 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d5 20 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ d4 21 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xe3$

$\mathbb{W}d6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7?$ (23... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is a tougher defence) 24 $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 25 $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 28 $\mathbb{E}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 29 $\mathbb{E}d1$, when the pin is decisive.

19 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

Owing to White's strong pressure on the central squares, the seemingly natural continuation 19... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ fails to 20 c5! d5 21 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 22 f4, when Black's pawn-centre falls apart.

20 $\mathbb{W}xe3$ h6?! 21 $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$

21... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ would be disagreeably pinned by 22 $\mathbb{E}ac1$ (with the point 22...d5 23 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$), while 21... $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}b4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ is also disadvantageous for Black.

22 $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 23 b3 b6 24 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

Black accepts his fate. 24... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ looks better. As a matter of fact, if Black had opted for ... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ at move 20, he would have had better chances to resist.

25 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

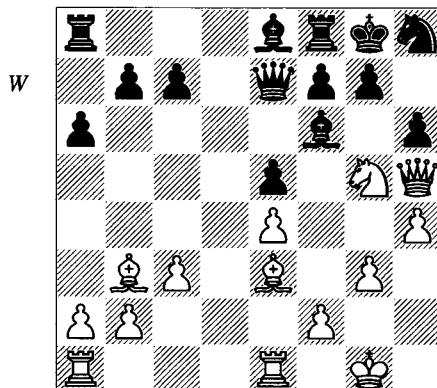
Clearing the way for the superior knight. The fight for the strong square d5, started by 16 $\mathbb{E}fc1$, has been successful.

25... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 27 $\mathbb{E}d3$

The usual procedure against a backward pawn: the pressure on it is increased.

27... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 28 $\mathbb{E}cd1$ $\mathbb{E}f7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30 $\mathbb{E}d5$

...and the backward pawn was lost. The rest is self-evident. We have again seen how a weak (or strong) square arises, how a strong piece finds a dominant post on it, and the stifling effect it has on the enemy's defensive options. Some more illustrative examples will reinforce our understanding.



Smyslov – Liublinsky
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1949

The position on the board speaks volumes about the outcome of the opening: Black's pieces cramped around the king show that he made some strategic misjudgements. However, Liublinsky's position has no weak spots and White must seek a way to exploit his spatial advantage and better coordination.

21 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

At the moment Black is cramped on his back ranks, while White has no concrete threats. By provoking 21...c6, he wants to create a new weakness at b6 and at the same time to block any exit for the light-squared bishop. One may ask what he can do with the hole on b6. Well, for the time being nothing, but a nice place has been prepared for the e3-bishop in the future.

21...c6

Black could stall by 21... $\mathbb{E}b8$, but then 22 b4 provokes other unpleasant decisions.

22 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23 $\mathbb{E}ad1$

The rooks are hurrying to the open file: White's to capture it, Black's to oppose them.

23... $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 24 $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25 $\mathbb{E}ed1$ $\mathbb{E}xd2$ 26 $\mathbb{E}xd2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

Finally Black threatens to play 27... $hxg5$ and it seems that White must retreat his knight, lessening the pressure. However, White has some further trumps to play...

27 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 28 $\mathbb{E}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xf7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

When he played 21 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, White could not foresee this concrete sacrifice, but principled play often yields such fruit.

30... $\mathbb{W}d7$

30... $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 31 $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32 $\mathbb{W}g8+$ leads to mate.

31 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{W}xd8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 1-0

It's worth noting how the d5-square grew weak and how the centralized strong piece on it caused another weak square on b6. The link between the two is neither rare nor accidental.

Hübner – Gligorić

Skopje OL 1972

Grünfeld Defence

1 g3 g6 2 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 3 d4 d5 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0-0 6 c4 c6 7 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$??

Stronger is 8... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 9 f3 (or 9 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ c5) 9... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$.

9 ♜c3 ♜c6??

9...♜fd7 is better. For instance: 10 ♜xd5 ♜xe5 11 dxe5 ♜xe5 12 ♜h6 ♜e8 13 ♜b3 ♜c6 14 ♜fd1 ♜b8.

10 ♜xc6 bxc6 11 ♜a4

As a result of the exchange on c6, a weak square appeared in Black's camp on c5, which White hurries to place under control. Black probably relied on a quick ...c5, but the course of the game does not corroborate his assessment.

11...♜d7 12 b3 ♜a5

12...c5 13 ♜b2 still leaves the burden of proof on Black.

13 ♜b2 ♜ac8 14 ♜c1

The pressure exerted on c5 keeps the c6-pawn in its backward position.

14...♝f5

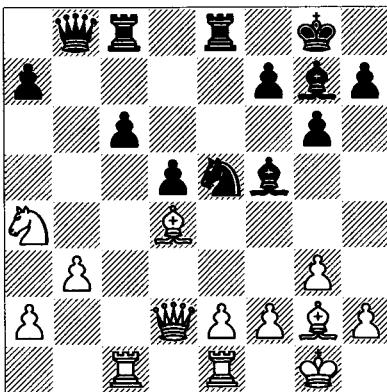
14...c5 would lose a pawn to 15 ♜c3 followed by 16 dxc5.

15 ♜e1 ♜fe8 16 ♜c3 ♜b5 17 ♜d2 ♜b8

Having failed to carry out ...c5, Black prepares ...e5.

18 ♜b2 e5 19 dxe5 ♜xe5 20 ♜d4 (D)

B



White's effort remains concentrated on the hole at c5.

20...♝f8 21 ♜c5

Exchanging the pieces that cover a weak square is a standard method of play in spite of its simplifying effect.

21...♜d7 22 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 23 ♜c5 ♜e5

23...♜e6 loses to 24 ♜d7, while 23...♜d7 24 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 25 ♜c5 (or 25 e4) is advantageous for White.

24 e4 dxe4 25 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 26 ♜xe4 ♜d5 27

♜e3 ♜xe4 28 ♜xe4 ♜e5 29 ♜c5

Note two things. On the tactical level, White manages to activate his rook and move it to a5 owing to the fact that the black queen cannot leave the long dark-squared diagonal (29...♜e7 fails to 30 ♜d4 ♜e6 31 ♜e5). On the strategic level, Black's pawn-structure has changed but remained inferior. His two backward pawns on the queenside cannot be defended.

29...♜g7 30 ♜a5 ♜d8 31 ♜xa7

White has achieved a material advantage.

When a weak square becomes an enduring liability, it often influences the course of events decisively. The pawn unit of the type c6-d5, which Nimzowitsch called an isolated pawn-couple, as a rule runs the risk of being lastingly blockaded or transformed into another inferior formation.

Gligorić – Ståhlberg

Split/Belgrade (3) 1949

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜d2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♜gf3 ♜c6 6 ♜b5 a6?

Today, chess masters are more sensitive to the problems arising in the initial stage of the game and do not dare to lose a tempo so light-heartedly.

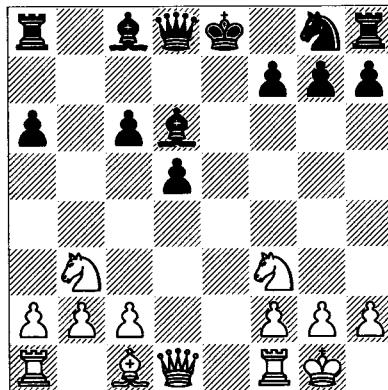
7 ♜xc6+ bxc6 8 0-0 ♜d6

8...cxd4 9 ♜e1+ ♜e7 10 ♜b3 ♜f6 11 ♜e5 leads to difficulties for Black. The same can be said of 8...♜e6 9 c4 dxc4 10 ♜a4.

9 dxc5 ♜xc5 10 ♜b3 ♜d6 (D)

In case of 10...♜b6 there is 11 ♜e3 ♜xe3 12 ♜e1.

W



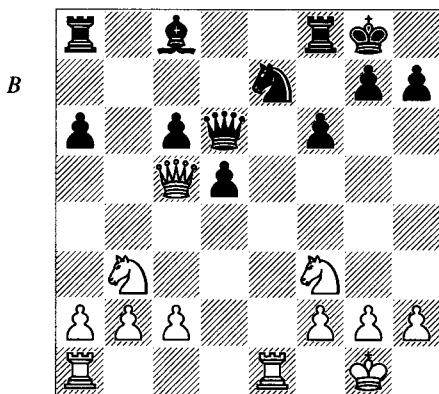
11 ♜d4

Early in the game White manages to fix a weakness – the c5-square. Black does not have the standard isolated d-pawn, but his pawn unit is blockaded.

11...f6 12 ♜f4

We have encountered this method before: a weakness becomes more keenly felt when the pieces that defend it are exchanged off.

12...♝e7 13 ♜fe1 0-0 14 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 15 ♜c5! (D)



The fewer pieces on the board, the more White's preponderance on the dark squares is emphasized.

15...♜xc5 16 ♜xc5 ♜a7 17 b4

The next natural stage is to fix the weaknesses. The immediate 17 ♜d4 would be met by 17...♝f5 (18 ♜xc6 ♜c7).

17...♝f5

17...a5 is preferable, although 18 c3 keeps an advantage.

18 ♜b3 ♜c7 19 c3 ♜f7 20 ♜fd4 ♜d6 21 ♜c5 ♜e8 22 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 23 f3

Having restricted the backward pawns on a6 and c6, White proceeds to improve the position of all his pieces, in the meantime limiting his adversary's options.

23...♝f7 24 ♜f2 g5 25 a4

By advancing the pawn to a5, White will fix the a6-pawn, tying a piece to its defence.

25...h5 26 a5 ♜c4 27 ♜e1 ♜e5 28 g3 ♜e7 29 ♜e2 ♜c7 30 f4 gxf4 31 gxf4 ♜g6 32 ♜g3 ♜e7 33 ♜e1 ♜a7 34 ♜f2 ♜a8

Black can only wait, but 34...♜c7 appears better.

35 ♜a4 ♜h3 36 ♜e3 ♜d7 37 ♜b6 ♜a7 38 ♜e1 ♜f5 39 ♜xf5 ♜xf5 40 ♜a4

From c5 the knight will keep an eye on a6, reducing Black's counterplay to the minimum.

40...♜d3 41 ♜c5 ♜b5 42 f5

By establishing a strong square on e6, White further squeezes his opponent.

42...♜a8

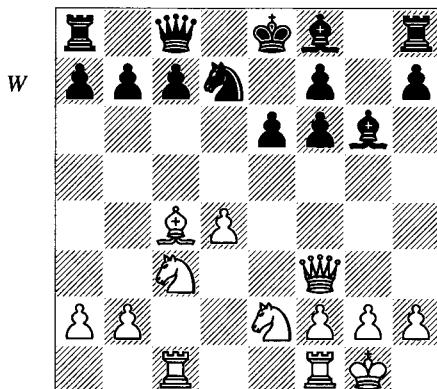
In case of 42...♜e7, 43 ♜e6 is available.

43 ♜b7!

There is no way for Black to activate his pieces. Meanwhile, ♜d6+ and ♜e6 will open the way for the white king, which will penetrate via e3-d4-c5 unopposed.

From the moment when a weak square is provoked until the final stage, when the fruits of its consequences can be reaped, is a long way, requiring concentration and discipline. But if these requirements are met, such lasting static weaknesses quite often prove fatal.

It may look curious, but considering the typical pawn-formations it seems to me logical that weaknesses often appear on the fifth rank. Another square on the fifth rank which I find affected often by the same disease is the f5-square...



Fischer – Addison
Palma de Mallorca IZ 1970

After grabbing a pawn in the opening, Black has fallen behind in development and here, at the transition into the middlegame, he starts to feel uncomfortable: his king is still in the centre, and most of his pieces on the back rank. He has no coordination and no counterplay. The only question is how White shall make a breach in his pawn-structure.

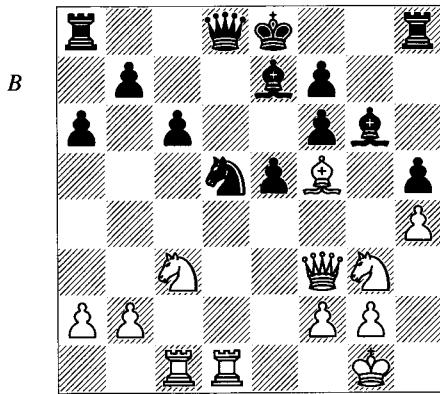
12 d5! e5 13 ♜b5 ♜e7 14 ♜g3

A crevice has been found in the pawn-wall. The f5-square has been weakened and White's forces move in at once to dominate it.

14...a6 15 ♜d3

Black has landed into a cramped position where he cannot castle and can gain no counterplay.

15...♝d8 16 h4 h5 17 ♜f5 ♜b6 18 ♜ce4! ♜xd5 19 ♜fd1 c6 20 ♜c3 (D)



After White's temporary pawn sacrifice the position has opened up, and the better placed pieces prevail.

20...♝b6 21 ♜xd5! cxd5 22 ♜xd5 ♜xb2

22...♝d8 loses to 23 ♜c7+ ♜f8 24 ♜xg6.

23 ♜b1 ♜xa2 24 ♜xb7 1-0

Slow development resulted in a cramping weakness at f5 and badly placed pieces. The punishment was severe.

However, although it is the most common case, weak squares are not necessarily holes in the pawn-formation or weaknesses in front of backward or isolated pawns.

Alekhine – Flohr

Bled 1931

Queen's Gambit Accepted

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♜xc4 c5
6 0-0 ♜c6 7 ♜e2 a6 8 ♜d1 b5 9 dxc5 ♜c7 10
♗d3 ♜xc5 11 a4 b4?! 12 ♜bd2 0-0**

Having missed the stronger 10...♝a5 and then 11...bxa4, Flohr surrendered the squares b3 and c4 to White. When a year later in his match against Euwe he tried to improve his play by 12...♝a5, he was again worse after 13 b3 ♜d5 14 ♜b2 ♜c3 15 ♜xc3 bxc3 16 ♜e4.

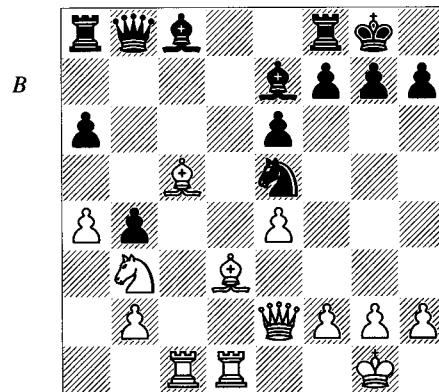
13 ♜b3 ♜e7 14 e4 ♜d7

In order to prevent 15 e5 Black could respond 14...e5, but then 15 ♜e3 followed by 16 ♜ac1 captures the file advantageously, very much like in the game.

15 ♜e3 ♜de5?!

This exchange makes the black queenside more vulnerable. 15...♝b7 looks stronger to me.

16 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 17 ♜ac1 ♜b8 18 ♜c5! (D)



Black has fallen into a passive position, but in order to penetrate his territory, energetic measures are required. The exchange of a set of bishops should make it easier. Do not fail to notice how weaknesses multiply gradually: Black first ceded b3 and c4 to his opponent, and now he has to surrender c5 to White's knight.

18...♝xc5 19 ♜xc5 ♜b6 20 ♜h5!

Unexpected and powerful.

20...♜d7

In case of 20...♜xd3 21 ♜xd3 the rook is lifted into the attack on the third rank. On 20...f6 21 ♜f1 ♜d8 Alekhine demonstrated 22 ♜d4!, vacating d1 for the queen, which returns to capture the file.

21 ♜e2

White provokes the exchange of knights, which will ease the penetration by his rooks down the c-file. Thus the weakness of certain squares is transformed into a weakness of the whole file.

21...g6 22 ♜g5 ♜xc5 23 ♜xc5 a5

Otherwise White would play a5 himself.

24 h4

It is time to combine actions on both wings.

24...♝a6 25 ♜f3 f6

This weakens the seventh rank, but the threat of 26 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ was a sufficient reason for it.

26 $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$

Obviously played in order to prevent the penetration by the rook to d7. Unfortunately, when it seemed to Black that he had gradually overcome his difficulties, there came a sudden collapse:

27 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 28 e5

White aims to deny Black's queen the d6-square.

28...f5

28...fxe5 29 h5 leaves Black's position in ruins.

29 $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ 1-0

The exchange of queens will bring a powerful knight to c5, after which Black's normal development will remain difficult.

18... $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}dd1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22 f4 $\mathbb{Q}5c6$

If 22... $\mathbb{Q}5g6$, then 23 g3.

23 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ h6 25 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}cd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ b4

When lacking good moves, one often has to turn to inferior ones.

28 $\mathbb{Q}3a4$ a5 29 e5 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black has finally managed to fianchetto his light-squared bishop, but to no avail...

30... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}ab6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 1-0

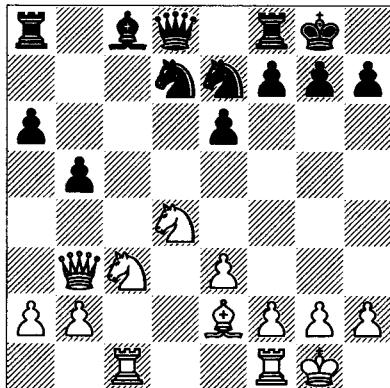
We find the c5-square vulnerable in many lines of the Queen's Gambit, including the QGA and the Orthodox.

Réti – Grau

London OL 1927

Queen's Gambit

B



Reshevsky – H. Steiner
USA Ch (New York) 1942

White has just played 13 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ -b3!, making it clear that Black has some problems. The planned 13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ does not work due to 14 a4, 13... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is just a blank shot after 14 $\mathbb{Q}b4$, while White intends 14 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$, increasing the pressure on the open files.

13... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b3$

Although Black did not commit any grave mistakes, we witness that his ambitious plan of expansion on the queenside left some weaknesses on the dark squares – a5, c5 and d6.

16... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$

17... $\mathbb{Q}5c6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ leads to more or less the same invasion of the dark squares as in the game.

18 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

1 c4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 d4 d5 4 cxd5 cxd4 5 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ a6 8 g3

Nearing the end of the opening phase, White is better developed and intends to make use of it by preventing Black's normal development.

8...e5??

8... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ e6 is preferable.

9 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$??

At first glance Black's last two moves seem natural, but they left the squares c5 and d5 weakened. Here Black should have tried 9... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, planning to oppose the g2-bishop. This would have kept the position more closed and less easily penetrated.

10 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 0-0 13 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$

After 13... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$, 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ demonstrates Black's difficulties: 15... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d5$. Taking with the pawn delays, but does not solve the problem.

14 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

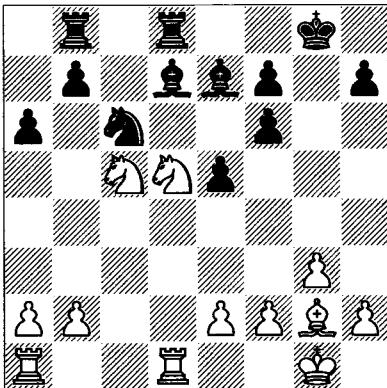
If 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, there is again 15 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d5$. Taking with the pawn delays, but does not solve the problem.

15 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ (D)

The threats are obvious, but cannot be parried. Having invaded the squares on the fifth rank, White wins material by force.

16... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

B

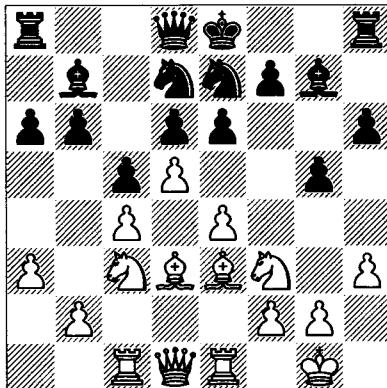


After 16... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ or 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$, the b7-pawn falls.

17 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 1-0

The defence collapses at d7. A couple of weak squares on the fifth rank were enough to bring about such an early collapse.

B



Baburin – Miles
British League (4NCL) 2000/1

White has just relinquished the central tension by 13 d5. This closes in Black's queen's bishop, but gives up an important central square to Black's pieces – a bad assessment and a bad bargain. Black's reaction is predictable...

13... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2??!$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 15 $\mathbb{W}d2$ 0-0 16 $\mathbb{H}cd1$ $\mathbb{Q}de5$

Responding in a most natural way to White's unnatural play, Black obliges his opponent to accept a powerful dark-squared bishop on the dominant central square.

17 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Another tempo is thrown away repenting for the 14th move.

18... $\mathbb{W}f6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}a4??$

Gripped by the throat in the centre, White takes the opportunity to get some active play, but the knight's mission turns to be hazardous. Instead, he should be patient and wait.

19... $\mathbb{H}ab8!$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{H}b3$

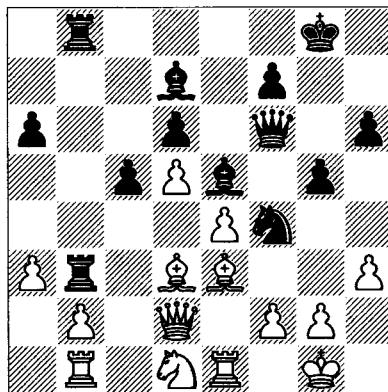
White's pawn-grab has had a high price. Black's pressure in the centre and the kingside spreads to the queenside: b2 comes under fire on both the b-file and the long diagonal.

23 $\mathbb{H}b1$ $\mathbb{H}fb8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

If 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, then 25... $\mathbb{H}xd3$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$.

25... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ (D)

W



Obvious but strong. Using his strong squares, Black forces an exchange that will leave the white king's position even weaker.

26 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

26 $\mathbb{Q}c2?$ would fail to 26... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3+$, but the capture on f4 opens the g-file, rendering the white king even more vulnerable.

26... $\mathbb{gxf4}$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}c2??$

27 f3 takes better care of the king, but ominous threats loom on the g-file anyway.

27... $\mathbb{H}xh3!$ 28 $\mathbb{g}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

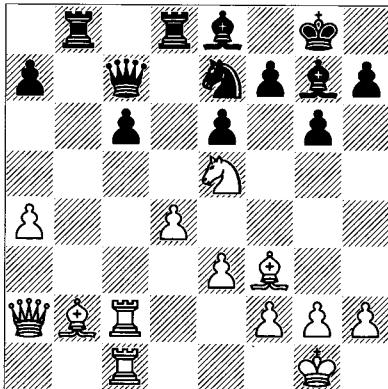
The white king is defenceless.

29 f3 $\mathbb{H}g8+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ 0-1

The weakness of the e5-square led to strong positional pressure and was transformed into other disadvantages leading to the final catastrophe.

However, we could say in general that the nearer to the king they are, the more treacherous weak squares get.

B



Rubinstein – Spielmann
Semmering 1926

Passive opening play has led Spielmann into this unenviable situation, where Black lacks counterplay. He must now make a difficult decision.

24...♝xe5

Taken in the midst of the middlegame complications, this was certainly not an easy decision. Black's kingside is obviously weakened by the disappearance of the dark-squared bishop, but the alternative – giving up the c6-pawn – was certainly unappealing. The upshot is that Black has a complex of dark squares that he cannot defend. At the moment there is no imminent danger as the long dark-square diagonal remains blocked by the e5-pawn. The question is whether White can find a way to make use of the weak complex around the black king.

25 dxе5 ♜d5 26 ♜xd5!

This exchange increases the strength of the dark-squared bishop. White, therefore, does not hesitate to enter a position with bishops of different colour. When there are enduring weaknesses, like the dark squares around the black king in our game, opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker, precisely because the bishop cannot be opposed on its diagonals.

26...♜xd5 27 ♜d4 ♜a5 28 h3 ♜a6

To make 29...♜b4 possible.

29 ♜c4 h5?!

There is no doubt that Black lacks any meaningful counterplay. In such a situation players often worsen their position with superficial moves. The text-move further weakens the complex around the black king.

30 ♜a3

The queen leaves the light squares for the dark squares, on which Black is vulnerable. White threatens 31 ♜e7.

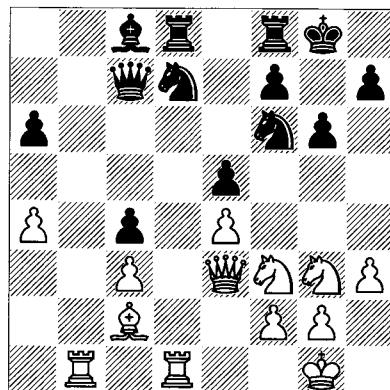
30...♜b7 31 e4 ♜d8 32 ♜c3 ♜bd7 33 ♜e3 ♜h7 34 ♜c5

35 ♜f8 is threatened and all of a sudden there is no defence.

34...♜d1+ 35 ♜h2 ♜xc1 36 ♜f8 1-0

The critical squares around the king have been weakened to the point where mate cannot be parried. Whenever the appearance of a weak square can be used against the opponent's king by tactical means, it forebodes the worst. The next case will remind you very much of Spielmann's plight...

W



Keres – Gligorić
Zurich 1959

Several positional considerations operate in White's favour in this middlegame position. First we notice that White's major pieces are active and well-placed, especially his rooks on the open files. Then our attention is attracted by the c4-pawn, which looks somewhat shaky, the potentially strong light d5-square and, looking further, by the weakened complex of dark squares around the black king. The position of the queen and the knights suggests at once that there is something about the complex which could be exploited. Keres chooses the right path at once:

27 ♜g5!

It's as if all the weaknesses in the black camp have been put under a magnifying glass. The pressure exerted on the e5-pawn and the

f6-knight ties down the d7-knight in its passive posture. At the same time, using the pin, the capture of the open central file has been prepared and $\mathbb{Q}f5$ made possible. A powerful move indeed!

27... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

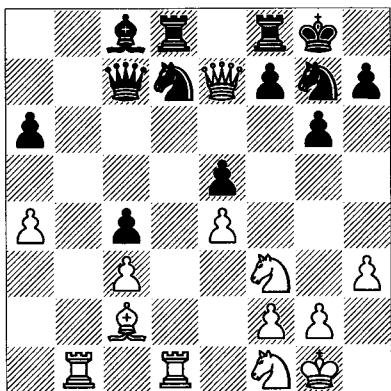
How to get rid of the grip otherwise? The idea is to repel the queen by 28...f6 and activate the knight via g7 and e6. Unfortunately, the manoeuvre opens new crevices.

28 $\mathbb{W}e7 \mathbb{Q}g7$

In case of 28...f6 there is 29 $\mathbb{B}b4$ and the c4-pawn is losing the ground from under its feet.

29 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ (D)

B



The circumstances change and the knight seeks a better position. It moves towards d5 or g4.

29... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}f4$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ f6

31... $\mathbb{B}fe8$ 32 $\mathbb{W}d6 \mathbb{W}xd6$ 33 $\mathbb{B}xd6$ promises only difficulties for Black, but the text-move weakens the king's position perilously; the weakness of the dark squares is now transformed into a weakness of the seventh rank.

32 $\mathbb{Q}g4 \mathbb{Q}d3$

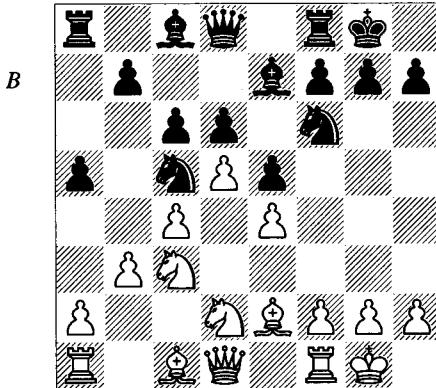
It was too late to expel the queen. 32... $\mathbb{B}de8$ loses to 33 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$. We have reached a virtual zugzwang.

33 $\mathbb{B}xd3!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 34 $\mathbb{B}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{B}xf6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{B}xf2+$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}g1 \mathbb{B}f1+$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 1-0

Weaknesses in space often endanger the king's position, but it takes a trained eye to note it and exploit it. Paul Keres was blessed with a hawk's eye.

Looking from the other side of the board, we come across strong squares, which are not just a fruit of miscalculation. They make part of the

overall strategic plan and we could speak of them as of strategically strong squares. Their importance often grows in the middlegame, when minor pieces, which tend to occupy them, acquire exceptional importance in various activities granted by their favourable position on the board. In order to neutralize them a watchful eye is needed from the very beginning. The following selected examples warn that late reactions won't do.



Petrosian – Larsen
Beverwijk 1960

Speaking generally, the blocked centre reduces the sharpness of the struggle, but the resulting positions require no less positional sensitivity. One would expect 10... $\mathbb{Q}e8$, opening up the possibility of ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$, planning ...f5 or the more devious ... $\mathbb{Q}c7$. However, in positions of this type Bent Larsen used to get impatient and would often seek a straightforward path where the position offered none.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xd5??$

This exchange entails the obvious consequence that the light squares c4 and b5 are ceded to White's minor pieces.

11 $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{B}d7$ 12 a4!

Of course, White will not allow 12...a4. By blocking the advance, White places b5 under firm control, and he will be able to use this square to penetrate Black's camp.

12... $\mathbb{W}b6??$

On b6 the queen will be only a temporary nuisance for White, and otherwise is simply misplaced. 12... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is again correct, planning 13 $\mathbb{Q}g4 \mathbb{Q}g5$ or 13 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ f5.

13 ♜a3 ♜fc8 14 ♜b1 ♜a7 15 ♜c1 ♜c7

Doubling rooks on the c-file looks rather clumsy.

16 ♜b5!

We have seen this method before: White exchanges off the enemy pieces that defend a weak square. When the light-squared bishops are gone, b5 will belong completely to the c3-knight.

16...♝g4 17 ♜e1 ♜a6

The intended 17...♜ac8 fails to produce any positive effect: after 18 h3 ♜h5 19 ♜e3 ♜b8 20 ♜c4 White would achieve his aim.

18 h3 ♜h5 19 ♜xa6

Having forced the bishop to h5, where it is out of play, this is a simple tactical solution.

19...♝xa6

Given that 19...bx6 loses a pawn to 20 ♜c4 ♜d4 21 ♜xa5 (then 21...♜xe4 would lose to 22 ♜c6), Black must retake with his queen, whereupon the queenside lies open to penetration by the white cavalry.

20 ♜c4

White threatens 21 ♜b5 followed by 22 ♜e3 with full dominance. Pushed back into a passive position, Larsen decides on a desperate measure...

20...♜xc4 21 bxc4 ♜xc4 22 f3

Planning ♜d1 plus ♜b5.

22...♜d4+ 23 ♔h1 ♜e8 24 ♜e2 ♜g5 25 ♜fd1 ♜b6 26 ♜b1 ♜c7 27 ♜b5 ♜d7 28 ♜c1 ♜d8 29 ♜e3 ♜g6 30 g4

The boa-constrictor style: when he caught his opponents in a passive, disadvantageous position, Petrosian throttled them. By doubling rooks on the open file, he quickly crushed any resistance.

Stein – Ljubojević

Vrnjačka Banja 1971

Schmid Benoni

1 d4 c5 2 d5 ♜f6 3 ♜c3 d6 4 e4 g6 5 ♜f3 ♜g7 6 ♜e2 0-0 7 0-0 ♜a6 8 ♜f4 ♜c7 9 a4 ♜g4 10 ♜e1 a6?!

10...♜xf3 11 ♜xf3 ♜d7 is more natural.

11 ♜d2 ♜xe2 12 ♜xe2 ♜e8

Here Black could try 12...b6 13 ♜c4 ♜b8 (if 13...b5, then 14 ♜a5) 14 e5, but that could hardly satisfy Ljubojević's temperament or the objective needs of the position. The lack of

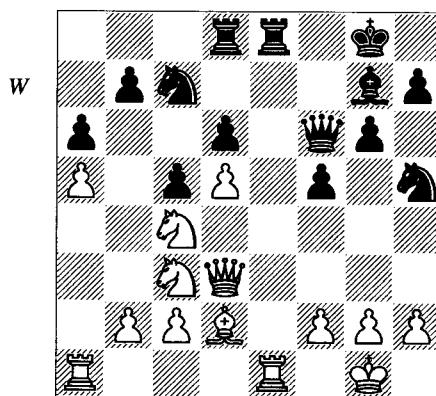
consistency (or a dose of optimism inappropriate in the circumstances) has but one consequence: to the weakness of c4 has been added the weak b6-square.

13 a5 e6 14 ♜d3

The hasty 14 ♜c4 would be answered by 14...♜fxd5.

14...exd5 15 exd5 ♜h5 16 ♜e3 f5 17 ♜c4 ♜f6 18 ♜d2 ♜ad8 (D)

18...♜xe1+ 19 ♜xe1 ♜e8 apparently eases the defence, but here appearances deceive: Black's pawn-structure remains immobile and potentially exposed to pressure in all types of end-games.



19 ♜a4 ♜xe1+ 20 ♜xe1 ♜f7 21 ♜ab6 h6??

Played in order to prepare 22...♜f6, but the lost tempo turns out to be valuable: White gets the time to strike first. Having decided to exert pressure on the d5-pawn, Black should play the consistent 21...♜f6.

22 b4! cxb4 23 ♜xb4 ♜f8 24 ♜e3

When the fianchettoed dark-squared bishop is forced to leave the long diagonal and defend the d6-pawn in Benoni structures, it is generally a sign of a serious positional deterioration. The c2-pawn is set free to advance, firmly securing the d5-pawn and denying the b5-square to the c7-knight.

24...♜f6 25 c4 ♜e8 26 ♜c2 ♜xe1+ 27 ♜xe1 ♜e8 28 ♔f1 ♜e4?!

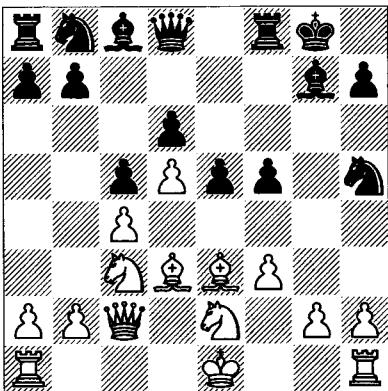
As I pointed out above, all sorts of endgames favour White, so by exchanging queens Black is meeting his opponent's desires.

29 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 30 ♜d3 ♔f7 31 ♜c8!

The crucial idea, which Black probably overlooked. His king will remain cut off on the

kingside. Cramped on his back ranks, he will not be able to put up any resistance. In retrospect, the wagon started to go downhill the very moment White established his knight on the strategic c4-square.

Looking from the other side of the board, Black's potentially strong squares in the King's Indian are d4 and e5. It is not by chance they both happen to be on the diagonal of the dark-squared fianchettoed bishop...



Kotov – Gligorić
Zurich Ct 1953

We are hardly out of the opening and a superficial glance at the board might suggest that Black has serious difficulties to overcome. It is not clear how he can develop his queenside while his opponent is ready to castle queenside and g4 hangs in the air. However, Gligorić's answer makes Kotov's whole plan look highly dubious...

11...e4! 12 fxe4 f4 13 ♜f2 ♜d7

These three energetic moves have changed the scene substantially. Quickly, and at a small price, Black has achieved what he can normally only dream of: the diagonal of his g7-bishop has been menacingly opened, his queen's knight has obtained a magnificent central position, while White's bishops have been hemmed in. White could open the light-squared diagonal by the counter-sacrifice 14 e5, but after 14...♜xe5 15 ♜xh7+ ♜h8 16 ♜e4 (16 ♜d3 f3) 16...♝xc4 17 0-0-0 b5 he would be in trouble.

14 ♜g1

Forced into a passive role, White understands he must take measures against the dominant

e5-knight. This knight manoeuvre puts up the most tenacious resistance.

14...♛g5 15 ♜f1 ♜e5 16 ♜f3 ♛e7 17 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 18 0-0-0 ♜f6 19 h3 ♜d7

It is quite obvious that with his queen and bishop lined up on the long diagonal, Black will strive to open the b-file, after which the point b2 would fall under fire from two directions. Would Black do better to speed up the breakthrough by 19...a6? It is difficult to say. Perhaps it is more a question of personal feeling and style than pure calculation. Gligorić liked to do things solidly.

20 ♜d3 a6 21 ♜b1!

The second knight is bound for f3. It is quite clear to White that he could not survive the queenside attack in the present situation. Something must be done against the centralized queen and the diagonal in general. Besides, at d2 the knight would be ideally posted against ...b5.

21...f3!

Before White can carry out his plan, Black strikes again. Another pawn and another blockade!

22 gxf3 ♜h5 23 ♜d2 ♜f4 24 ♜b1 b5

A rare scene: all the black pieces are on their best squares. However, it is not easy to open the position of the white king. Especially the knight is excellently posted against breakthrough on the queenside.

25 h4 ♜h8

Black removes the king before 26 ♜g1 threatens 27 ♜g5 and possibly even an exchange sacrifice. If Gligorić did not like 25...b4 because of 26 ♜g1, he could have considered 25...♜h6; although it looks somewhat bizarre, it came into consideration.

26 ♜g1 ♜f6 27 ♜b3 ♜ab8??

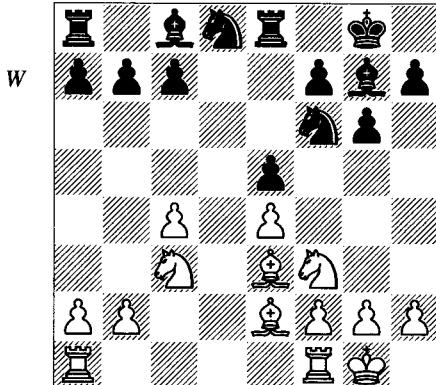
Indecision. This time 27...b4 was necessary.

28 ♜e1 b4 29 ♜b1 ♜a8 30 ♜g3

Not 30 ♜c1 due to 30...♜a4. White is after the blockading knight.

30...♜g8 31 ♜h2 ♜xg3 32 ♜xg3 ♜e2 33 ♜xe2 ♜xg3 34 ♜c1

Finally the knight is bound for its ideal post – d3, whence it defends the vulnerable b2-pawn and controls the crucial squares e5 and f4. The blockade has been lifted due to Black's indecision, and the positional balance has been re-established. After a few more moves a draw was agreed.



Larsen – Fischer
Monte Carlo 1967

Early exchanges caused lasting damage to White's pawn-structure; the hole on d4 will be felt for a long time. However, White hoped for compensation in the activity of his pieces.

11 ♜b5

If White seizes more space by 11 c5, then the natural 11...♝g4 gives Black counterplay. Therefore, White opts to create tactical threats.

11...♝e6 12 ♜g5 ♜e7

12...♜xg5 13 ♜xg5 ♜e7 is not as good, due to 14 ♜fd1 ♜e6 15 f4 h6 16 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 17 f5, as in Rossetto-Quinteros, Buenos Aires 1968.

13 ♜fd1

Black's previous move works because after 13 ♜xa7 ♜f4 14 ♜xf4 exf4 15 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 16 f3 ♜d7 17 ♜ab1 ♜a8 the better coordinated black pieces create pressure.

13...b6

13...h6 is possible, but Black keeps in mind the motif of the weakened back rank.

14 c5

Resourceful and typical of Bent Larsen: he is looking for a tactical solution. 14 a4 c6 15 ♜xe6 ♜xe6 16 ♜c3 seems too slow. The simple 16...♜b7 followed by 17...♜f8 keeps in check any possible pressure on the queenside.

14...♜xc5 15 ♜d8+ ♜f8 16 ♜xa7 ♜xa7 17

♜xc8 ♜g7

17...♜e8 is viable, but 18 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 19 ♜f3 f6 20 ♜c4+ ♜g7 21 ♜d2 did not suit Fischer's mood.

18 f3 ♜e8 19 a3

19 ♜xc5 bxc5 20 ♜b8 was proposed as an improvement, but the continuation 20...f6 21

♜h3 ♜d6 satisfies Black (22 a3 ♜f7 23 ♜c1 is met by 23...♜h6).

21...♜d6 20 ♜d8 h6 21 ♜h3 ♜e6 22 ♜b8 ♜e8 23 ♜xe8 ♜xe8

Parrying the threats, Black has managed to turn events in his favour. For the first time in the game we notice that after the imminent ...♜c5 Black will command the d4-square and install a strong piece on it. His game is comfortable.

24 ♜b5

A sheer loss of time: the e8-knight is just forced to a better position. Fortunately for White, his position can take it.

24...♜d6 25 ♜f1 ♜b7 26 ♜f2 ♜c5 27 ♜xc5 ♜bxc5 28 ♜d1 h5

Before hopping into d4 it is necessary to prevent ♜g4.

29 ♜d5

Given that Black does not have to respond 29...f6, weakening the seventh rank, 29 ♜d3 is better.

29...♜f6 30 h4 ♜e7 31 ♜c4

31 ♜xe5 does not work due to 31...c6, when the rook is trapped.

31...f6 32 ♜d2 ♜d4

Centralizing the knight is a small strategic victory in itself. From now on Black's pawns will be able to advance supported by that mighty knight.

33 ♜f1 f5

The pressure exerted on e4 is an additional sign that events are turning imperceptibly in Black's favour.

34 b4?!

This burdens White's position with a new weakness on the a-file. Besides, Black can hit back with a tactical blow...

34...b5!

Black narrows White's options while advancing his pawns and fixing the a3-pawn.

35 ♜g8

35 ♜e2 loses to 35...♜cb3, while 35 bxc5 bxc4 hardly comes into consideration.

35...fxe4

Precise. Black avoids 35...♜d7 36 exf5 gxf5 37 f4.

36 fxe4

Black's previous move was possible owing to 36 bxc5 e3 37 ♜d3 (or 37 ♜xd4 exd4 38 ♜d3 ♜xa3) 37...exf2 38 ♜xf2 c6.

36...♜d7 37 ♜d3 ♜a6

If 37... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ at once, then 38 $\mathbb{E}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 39 $\mathbb{E}c6$. Black would rather activate his own rook via c6.

38 $\mathbb{E}c3$ c5! 39 g4?

In time-trouble, White commits a blunder, seeing only that after 39 bxc5 b4, 40 axb4? loses to 40... $\mathbb{E}a1+$. However, 40 $\mathbb{E}c1$ is essential, when 40...bxa3 can be met by 41 $\mathbb{Q}a2$. 40... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, however, is more demanding.

39...c4

From now on the passed c-pawn will be a constant menace. White's difficulties with the light-squared bishop just exacerbate his problems.

40 gxh5 gxh5 41 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 42 $\mathbb{E}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 43 exd5 $\mathbb{E}f6$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 45 $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$

...and the game is coming to its natural end.

The struggle centred around the hole on d4. When the knight captured the stronghold, the balance of power started to change.

The above examples demonstrate in what measure the appearance of some typically strong squares can influence the course of the struggle in the King's Indian Defence and Benoni. We come across such strategic posts in other openings as well. In the French they often occur at d4 and e5.

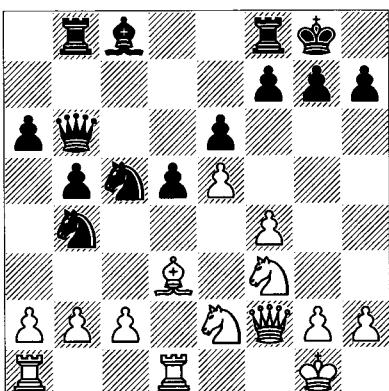
Anand – Bareev

Dortmund 1992

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 e5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 5 f4 c5 6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 8 $\mathbb{W}d2$ b5 9 dx5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 11 $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}b8$?! 13 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 14 $\mathbb{E}fd1$ 0-0?! 15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$! (D)

B



It is not our intention to discuss the details of the opening struggle. I would just like to point out the obvious consequence – White's strong d4-square. The queen's knight moves at once to occupy it, accumulating power in the centre and looking forward to the breakthrough f5. If we seek the causes which led to the present situation on the board, we shall find them in the nonchalant underrating of the centralized knight and the prospects it offers. Expanding on the queenside by ...a6 and ...b5 was somewhat slow and the exchange of the dark-squared bishops made White's task somewhat easier (7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ would have taken better care of the vital d4-square). However, Bareev's real difficulties derive from his lack of consistency. Having decided to seize space on the queenside, he should have carried the idea on by 12...b4 13 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5. Or, once he had spent a tempo on 12... $\mathbb{E}b8$, then instead of castling, he should have continued 14... $\mathbb{Q}a4$.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}bx3$

$\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ already was in the air, but the exchange at d3, which only strengthens White's pawn-formation, can hardly be looked upon as a justification of the earlier 13... $\mathbb{Q}b4$.

17 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$

Stronger is 17...b4 (on 17...a5 apart from 18 b3, limiting Black's counterplay, Black must consider 18 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ as well). White's next move ought to have been prevented.

18 b4!

With the pawn at d3 White can afford this move, which apparently weakens the c3-square. By fixing the queenside pawn-formation, he accentuates the favourable relation between the centralized knight and the passive d7-bishop. Besides, from now on Black will have to fear the enemy knight on c5 or even penetration by the white king on the dark squares in a more distant endgame.

18...a5 19 a3 $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 20 $\mathbb{E}dc1$ axb4 21 axb4 $\mathbb{E}xc1+$ 22 $\mathbb{E}xc1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$

The c3-square could not be exploited, and Black has engineered some exchanges. However, the simplification does not change the nature of the position, in which the errant a4-knight and the passive light-squared bishop are no match for White's powerful knight-pair.

23 $\mathbb{Q}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26 g4

White's play on the kingside, supported by the knights, comes as a natural fruit of his spatial advantage. Black's problem lies in the fact that he has no serious counterplay and must wait passively.

26...♔e8 27 ♔e3

The king is in the way on e3, but fortunately the position allows later corrections.

27...f6 28 h4 ♜b8

In order to prevent 29 f5.

29 ♜c1 ♜f8 30 ♔e2

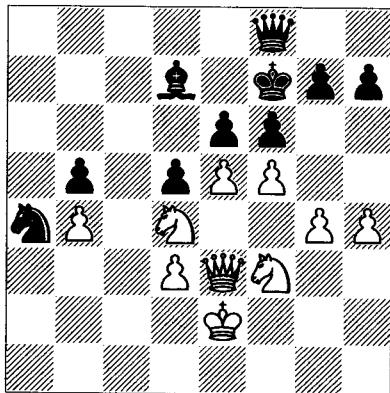
The king continues to roam. It would stand best on f2.

30...♞f7 31 ♜e3

After some hesitation about where to put his king, White is finally ready to play f5. It comes at an unfavourable moment for Black, when his knight is still out of play.

31...♜f8 32 f5 (D)

B



32...♜e8

32...♜e7 would delay the advance 33 g5 because then 33...exf5 34 gxf6 gxf6 35 ♜h6 ♜g8 works fine. If White's king were on f2 at this point, then 33 exf6 gxf6 34 ♜h6 ♜g8 35 g5 would be quite unpleasant for Black.

33 g5!

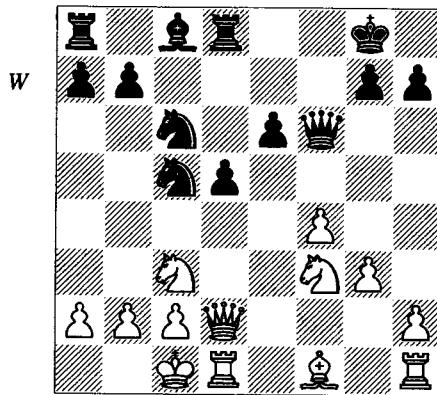
This is made possible by the queen's entry point on h6, and the pawn avalanche falls upon Black with full force.

33...exf5 34 gxf6 gxf6 35 ♜h6 fxe5 36 ♜xh7+ ♜f6 37 ♜h6+ ♜f7 38 ♜g5+ ♜e7 39 ♜g7+ ♜d8 40 ♜f7+ ♜c7 41 ♜xe5

The endgame is hopeless for Black.

Looking back at the game we recognize again the clear positional pattern: first a strong central square, then a strong centralized piece on it,

which, after exchanges in the middlegame, supports a pawn advance across the whole kingside. In the end the superior centralized force breaks any resistance; a neat process.



Wedberg – Gleizerov

Stockholm 2001/2

Black has emerged from the opening with a sensitive pawn-structure broken into three islands, of which the central one is potentially weak. For the time being Black's influence exerted on the critical squares d4 and e5 is strong enough and it cannot be jeopardized by 14 ♜b5 due to 14...♝e4 – an important detail in the struggle for the control of the vital central square e5.

14 ♜e1 ♜d7?!

As we shall see, Black should have played the more patient 14...a6.

15 ♜e3 b6 16 ♜b5

At the cost of a tempo with his queen manoeuvre, White has seized the critical moment when ...d4 was not possible any more to deploy the bishop to b5. By eliminating the c6-knight he will increase his control over the central dark squares.

16...♝ac8

The exchange brought about by 16...♝e7 17 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 does not alleviate things. After 18 ♜d4 followed by 19 ♜he1 the pressure exerted on the central pawn unit remains substantial.

17 ♜he1 ♜e8 18 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 19 ♜d4 ♜cd6

20 g4!

Having taken full control of d4 and e5, it is essential to limit the activity of the light-squared

bishop. White has prevented 20... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ thanks to the threat of 21 $\mathbb{Q}cb5$ and at the same time he has taken active steps on the kingside.

20...a6 21 $\mathbb{W}e5 \mathbb{Q}f7$

21... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $gxf6$ 23 f5 does not appeal to Black, and so he takes a passive stance.

22 f5

This is consistent with the earlier 20 g4. White's domination of e5 has made it possible for him to prepare this advance, which increases the activity of the knight-pair and leaves Black with a weak isolated d5-pawn.

22...exf5

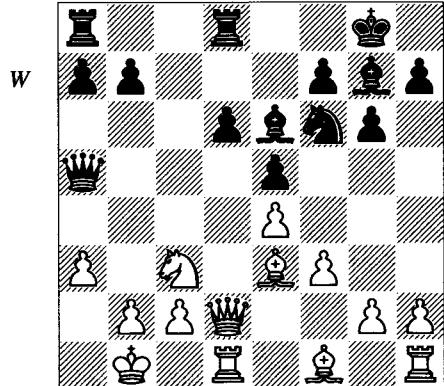
Note that after 22... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xe5$, 23... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ e5 does not work properly because of 25 $\mathbb{Q}e6$, but 23...g6 comes into consideration.

23 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}g5+$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 25 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}xe1$

26 $\mathbb{W}xe1$

Black has serious problems. White has managed to transform his strength on the strategic square e5 into new advantages. This is a typical problem for Black in the French.

In the Sicilian Defence, however, his critical square is d5.



**Boleslavsky – Lisitsyn
USSR Ch (Leningrad) 1956**

Having created a potential weakness on d5, Black has covered it with his pieces, but his last move, 13... $\mathbb{W}fd8$, leads to difficulties. We shall see why.

14 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}a4?$

Had Black played 13... $\mathbb{W}ad8$, then he would have been able to respond to 14 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ with 14... $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 15 $\mathbb{W}xd2$ d5. In the game he could also achieve the desired ...d5 after 14... $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 15

$\mathbb{W}xd2$ d5, but this time 16 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ is advantageous for White. He waits, therefore, expecting 15 $\mathbb{W}b4$, when 15... $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 16 $axb4$ d5 frees his game.

But Boleslavsky had a much deeper plan in mind:

15 c4!?

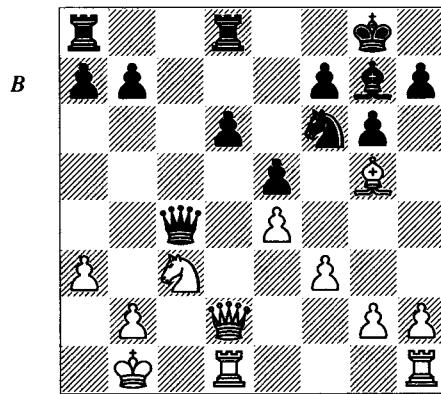
This move has a fine and instructive idea revolving around the central square d5. If White is allowed to play 16 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}d5$, his king will be perfectly safe and he will have excellent chances of a kingside attack.

It should be noted that 15 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (threatening $\mathbb{Q}b5$) wins material, but 15... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ d5 does not look wholly clear.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$

Capturing the pawn is the critical test of White's idea. What does he get for it?

16 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}b3$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (D)



Here is the answer: the f6-knight will be eliminated and the white knight will govern the board from an unassailable position at d5. A mighty piece on a strong strategic square!

18... $\mathbb{W}e6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}h4$

Facing a kingside pawn-storm, Black keeps his queen in the endangered sector, hoping to frustrate the pawn avalanche. But a glance at the board says everything: for a magnificent knight Black has got only a useless surplus of the d6-pawn.

21 $\mathbb{W}e2$

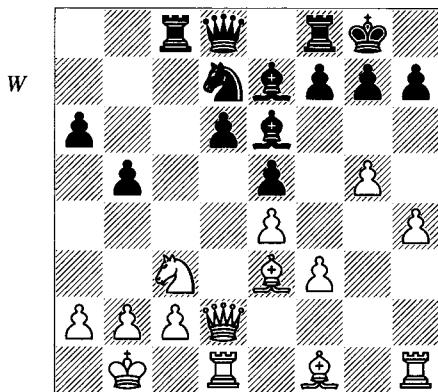
After the superficial 21 g3 $\mathbb{W}h3$ the pawn-storm would stall. As long as White avoids that, his advance will proceed inexorably. As is often the case, by trying to get off the hook, Black just speeds his downfall.

21...♞f8?!

21...f5 was imperative.

22 ♜f1! ♜ac8 23 g3 ♜g5 24 h4 ♜h6 25 g4
g5 26 hxg5 ♜xg5 27 ♜h5 ♜g6 28 g5 h6 29
♜xh6 ♜xg5 30 ♜h5 1-0

Victory grew out of a single strong square.



Fischer – Bolbochan
Stockholm IZ 1962

17 ♜h3!

In the Najdorf, the d5-square is often weakened early in the opening, but it is usually well covered by Black's minor pieces. However, Bolbochan's play in our game lacked the necessary precision. His knight spent at least a tempo hopping around in vain and castling kingside added some difficulties to Black's burden. With the text-move, White begins the fight for domination of d5. Now 17...♝b6 comes too late to cover the weakened square due to 18 ♜xb6 ♜xb6 19 ♜d5 ♜d8 20 h5, when White is quicker.

**17...♞xh3 18 ♜xh3 ♜b6 19 ♜xb6 ♜xb6 20
♜d5 ♜d8**

The central square has been conquered under the most favourable conditions. The strong knight will help the pawn-storm which is already under way...

21 f4 exf4 22 ♜xf4 ♜d7 23 ♜f5! ♜cd8

Given that 23...♜b7 fails to 24 ♜f6+, Black has little choice.

24 ♜a3

White's large space advantage gives him wide possibilities. The rook manoeuvre on the third rank is designed to force Black's pieces

into passive locations and thus facilitate the final assault.

24...♜a7 25 ♜c3 g6

25...♜d7 would lose to 26 ♜f6+ ♜xf6 27 gxf6 g6 28 ♜g5 ♜h8 29 ♜h6 ♜g8 30 ♜c8 (Fischer).

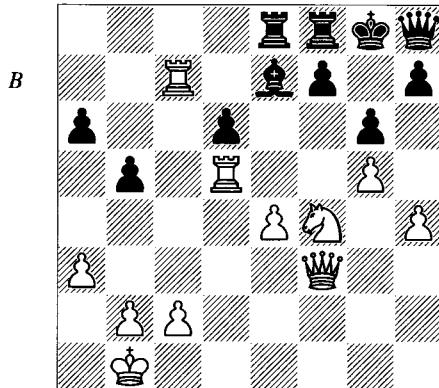
26 ♜g4 ♜d7 27 ♜f3 ♜e6 28 ♜c7 ♜de8

Again there is no choice: 28...♜d7 obviously loses to 29 ♜f4, while 28...♜fe8 29 ♜f1 targets the vulnerable f7-pawn.

29 ♜f4 ♜e5 30 ♜d5

Another typical procedure: when you command a strong square, various pieces can make use of it. Here the purpose is to squeeze Black further and deprive him of active posts.

30...♜h8 31 a3 (D)



Having packed Bolbochan's queen into the far corner, White decided he could afford this quiet move. The first rank is secured now, and White also sets a little trap.

31...h6

Fischer demonstrated 31...f6 32 ♜b3 ♜f7 33 ♜xd6 fxe5 34 hxe5 ♜e5 35 ♜f6 ♜f8 36 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 37 ♜c8+ ♜f8 38 ♜e6, winning.

32 gxh6 ♜xh6

If 32...♞xh4 then 33 ♜xg6! fxg6 34 ♜b3 ♜f7 35 ♜f5 (Fischer).

33 h5 ♜g5

Of course, 33...g5 creates another hole for the knight.

34 hxg6!

A fine solution, just at the moment when it seemed that Black found some fresh air.

34...fxg6

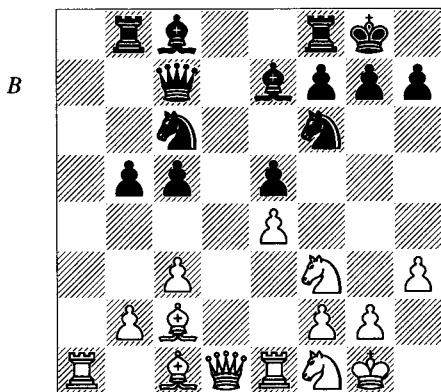
34...♞xf4 loses to 35 gxf7+ ♜xf7 36 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 37 ♜h5 and the black king is naked.

35 ♜b3 ♜xf4

No better is 35...♝h8 36 ♜xg6+ ♜xg6 37 ♜xg5, etc.

36 ♜e5+ ♜f8 37 ♜xe8+ 1-0

One weakened square inspired a crystal-clear plan which enhanced White's control over it and turned his spatial preponderance into an exquisite assault! d5 is a sensitive square in many lines of the Sicilian, and even the slightest negligence is enough to make it a crucial strong square for White. In the Chigorin Variation of the Ruy Lopez we have a less common but similar situation...



Boleslavsky – Goldenov
Ukrainian Ch (Dnepropetrovsk) 1939

16...♜d8?!

Time and experience have taught Black that safeguarding the potentially vulnerable d5-square by 16...♜e6 is more precise.

17 ♜e2 h6

This game left another little lesson to posterity: with two sensitive light squares on the fifth rank, this apparently logical move represents a weakening of the king's position.

18 ♜e3 ♜e6 19 g4 g6

Black cannot allow ♜f5, but now the harm done by 17...h6 becomes apparent.

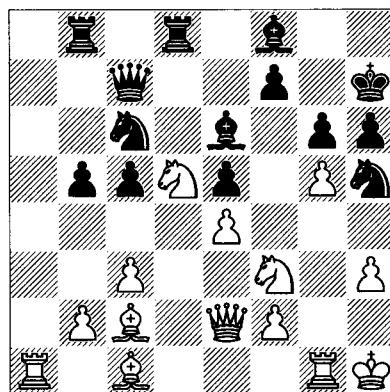
20 ♜h1 ♜h7?!

20...♜f8 21 ♜g1 ♜h8 is better. We shall see that on h7 the king is more exposed.

21 ♜g1 ♜f8 22 g5!

Given that the g5-pawn cannot be captured without grave consequences for the whole black pawn-structure, the purpose of this unexpected thrust is to eliminate a guardian of the d5-square.

22...♜h5 23 ♜d5! (D)



Although apparently defended by superior force, this square very often proves vulnerable in this typical Lopez structure.

23...♜xd5

After 23...♜xd5 Boleslavsky had in mind 24 exd5 ♜xd5 25 gxh6 ♜f4 (25...♜xh6 loses to 26 ♜g5+ ♜g7 27 ♜xh5) 26 ♜e4 (we see now why h7 was the wrong place for the king). Golde-nov, therefore, decided that his best chance was an exchange sacrifice. Unfortunately, it was not enough.

24 exd5 ♜xd5 25 ♜e4 ♜d7 26 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 27 gxh6 ♜xh6 28 ♜xh6 ♜xh6 29 ♜ad1 ♜e6 30 ♜g5 ♜f5 31 ♜d6 ♜e7

Or 31...♜f4 (31...♜c8 loses to 32 ♜xf7+ ♜xf7 33 ♜gxg6+, etc.) 32 ♜g4.

32 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 33 ♜xf7+ ♜g7 34 ♜xe5 1-0

Boleslavsky's play reminds us also that another sensitive square in the Ruy Lopez is f5 – the theme of our next game...

Stein – J. Rodriguez
Havana OL 1966
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 ♜e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♜b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 d4 ♜g4 10 d5 ♜a5 11 ♜c2 c6 12 h3 ♜h5?!

Each generation seems to believe they invented chess. However, those who learn from old games often find 'the novelties' played decades ago. Yates-Rubinstein, Hastings 1922 continued 12...♜xf3 13 ♜xf3 cxd5 14 exd5 ♜c4 with fine play for Black. The retreat plays into White's hands.

13 dxc6 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}ac8?$

In view of what is coming there is no time to lose. 15... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ was essential in order to enable the freeing ...d5 at once.

16 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}h4$

The results are in front of us: a strong knight established on the strong f5-square and a bishop without prospects.

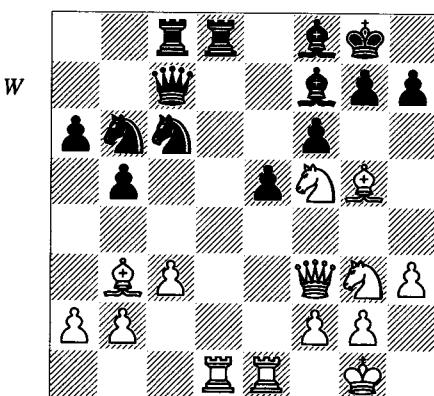
17... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}hf5$ d5 19 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black has achieved the desired ...d5, but too late and to no effect. He remains suffocated by the powerful f5-knight.

20... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

As unpleasant as it is obvious. White provokes the advance 21...f6, which weakens the a2-g8 diagonal with all the consequences this implies.

21...f6 22 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (D)



24 $\mathbb{Q}h6+$!

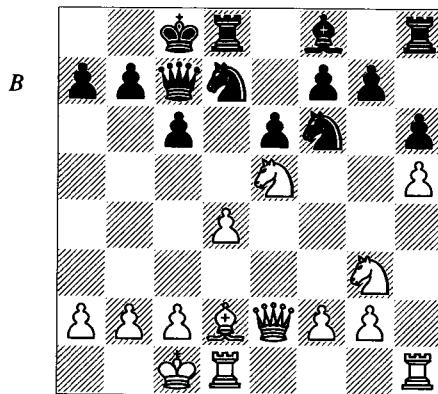
When the knight lands on a square like f5, tactical chances are likely to appear. All of a sudden the black king's position is ripped apart and it is exposed to a strong attack.

24...gxh6 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 26 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

In case of 26... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 28 axb3 White keeps overwhelming compensation owing to the exposed black king.

27 $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{W}xd8$ 29 axb3 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 1-0

In the Ruy Lopez, as in other openings we have examined, the critical squares happen to be on the fifth rank. The Caro-Kann does not differ in that respect: White's traditionally strong square is e5.



**Spassky – Pomar
Palma de Mallorca 1968**

Pomar's careless move-order led to a position in which White was able to occupy the dominant central square with his king's knight.

14... $\mathbb{Q}b6$

Given that 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15 dxе5 would offer the g3-knight an ideal place in the centre and make it possible for White to claim a marked spatial advantage by advancing his kingside pawns, Black is forced into this passive move.

15 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ axb6 17 c4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f3!$

This series of piece exchanges just confirms White's preponderance on e5. He cannot exploit it at once, but the time will come to do so. For the time being, the freeing advances ...c5 and ...e5 are impeded, which preserves White a spatial advantage.

20... $\mathbb{W}he8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b1$

Necessary to counter the threatened ...e5.

21... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}he1$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 23 g3 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 24 a3 $\mathbb{W}f5??$

It takes great patience to defend a passive position such as this. Black lacks it. Damaging his own pawn-structure can hardly improve his chances, but Black was relying on simplification to save his skin.

25 $\mathbb{W}xf5$ exf5 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}h4$

It's finally time for White to play f4 and strengthen his claim on e5.

31... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 32 a4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black's fundamental problem lies in the fact that the pawn ending is lost for him: after

32... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 33 $gxh4$ g6 34 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ Black is nearing zugzwang.

33 f4 g5

More restraint would be helpful here. This advance just weakens Black's pawn-structure.

34 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ f6?

Again an impatient reaction, but this time with far-reaching consequences. Satisfied that he can finally control the important central square, Black weakens the f5-pawn. The waiting 35... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ was his best option.

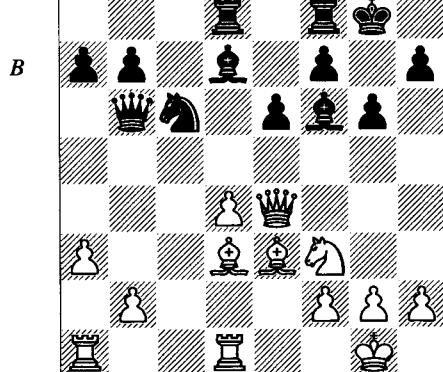
36 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}c2$

The knight is bound for e3 and White's advantage takes concrete shape.

38... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b5 40 axb5 cxb5 41 b3 bxc4 42 bxc4

...and the fall of the f5-pawn was inevitable.

It is rarer and more difficult to achieve strategically strong posts as Black. We studied above some cases in the King's Indian Defence. Another typical case can be found in the positions of the Queen's Gambit Accepted, Caro-Kann, or various other variations of the Queen's Gambit, when White's isolated d-pawn is blockaded and the square in front of it is under Black's full control. To one of these standard cases we devote the next game...



Kamsky – Karpov
Elista FIDE Wch (4) 1996

17... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$

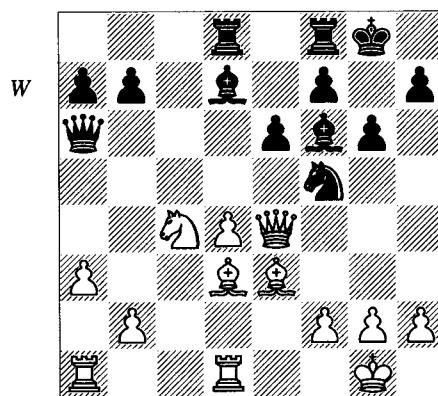
Karpov's purposeful play has culminated in this simple, but strong and consistent move, which, by firmly blockading the d4-pawn, announces that the d5-square is under full control.

18 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Black is ready to meet 18 d5 with 18... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$.
18... $\mathbb{Q}f5$

The d5-square belongs to Black, but given that the pawn cannot move forward (e.g., 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd7?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 20 d5? $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 21 dxe6? $\mathbb{Q}xd1$, etc.), exerting pressure on the d4-pawn is more logical than sitting safely on d5 and doing nothing.

19 $\mathbb{Q}c4?!$ $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ (D)



A fine place for the queen: obviously 20 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ would now be met by 20... $\mathbb{Q}b5$, which means that White's 19th move was a blank shot: it only endangered the d4-pawn. Besides, it leads to the following move, which further weakens White's pawn-structure.

20 a4

20 b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ costs White the d4-pawn and 20 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is met by 20... $\mathbb{Q}b5$. The text-move, on the other hand, creates another weakness – at b4.

20... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

The strong square has been put to good use, at the same time giving the queen enough breathing space.

22 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

22 b3 is better.

22... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

Not due to a whim of the moment, but fear of ...g5. In surrendering the light squares to the powerful d5-bishop, White acknowledges that his queen is in a tight spot. For instance: 23 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ g5 24 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 25 fxe3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 26 a5 $\mathbb{Q}b4$, etc.

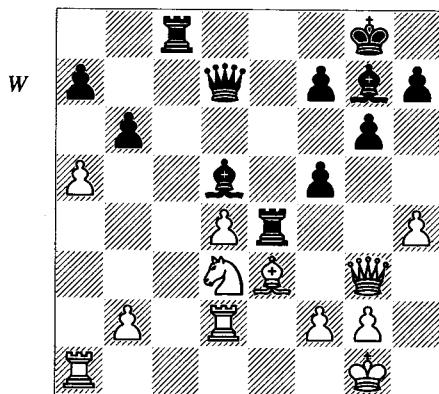
23...exf5 24 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 25 h4 $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

27 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}f4$ at once changes little. 27 h5 is better.

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

27... $\mathbb{W}d8$ is more logical.

28 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $b6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 30 $a5$ $\mathbb{M}e4$ (D)



Reminding White that the d4-pawn is not the only vulnerable point in his position.

31 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $b5$ 32 $\mathbb{M}dd1$

Eliminating the d5-bishop is not helpful in a position so widely open to penetration by Black. Note that the queen on d5 would favour Black even more. Opposing on the open file seems essential.

32... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 33 $\mathbb{M}ac1$ $h6$ 34 $\mathbb{M}c3$ $b4$ 35 $\mathbb{M}c2$ $\mathbb{M}c6$
36 $\mathbb{M}dc1$

36 d5 is worse due to the simple 36... $\mathbb{M}c8$.

36... $\mathbb{M}b5$ 37 $\mathbb{M}xc6$ $\mathbb{M}xc6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 39
 $\mathbb{M}c4$?

Karpov was of the opinion that White must resort to 39 d5.

39... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}e6$

40... $\mathbb{M}g4$ would fail to 41 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{M}xg3$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$
 $\mathbb{M}xg2+$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}h1$, but 40... $\mathbb{M}d5$ looks even stronger.

41 d5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 42 $\mathbb{M}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

...and White was lost.

2 Strength and Weakness on Files and Diagonals

Weak squares remind me of rotten apples in my cellar. In the autumn I collect apples from my orchard and put them in wooden boxes. Unless I separate the apples with straw, a single rotten apple in the box will lead to all the apples in the box eventually rotting. Weak squares multiply like rotten apples. From a single weakness the whole file on which it lies gets rotten, unless we prevent or take attentive care of the initial weakness.

Steinitz – Sellman

Baltimore 1885

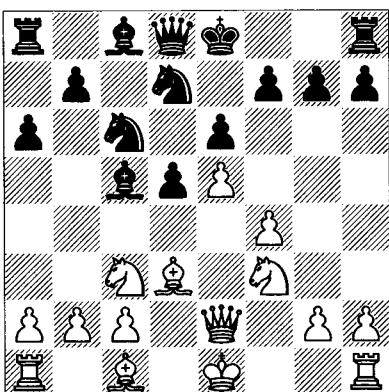
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 e5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 5 f4 c5 6 $dxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

Black can play 6... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ before capturing on c5. Then 7 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ suits Black perfectly but after 7 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 8 b4 d4 Nunn draws attention to 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ d3 10 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 11 c3!. After the text-move, 7 $\mathbb{W}g4$ is a dangerous option.

7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ a6 8 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 $\mathbb{W}e2$ (D)

B



9... $\mathbb{Q}b4?$

Black believes that as long as the d3-bishop is alive, his king would be too exposed on the

kingside. At the same time, he underestimates some positional factors. This move relinquishes his grip on d4, White's potentially powerful stronghold. For the same reason the often-recommended 9... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ fails due to 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e3$, when White will control d4 to his advantage in spite of further exchanges (11... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 13 $\mathbb{W}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ followed by 15 $\mathbb{Q}d4$). 9... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b5, with counterplay, looks better.

10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b5 11 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3+$ 12 cxd3

Correctly assessing that the open file can be exploited.

12... $\mathbb{W}b6?!$

In view of what follows, Black should have played 12...b4.

13 b4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14 a3 f5?!

Black has been concerned with the safety of his king and does not notice that the danger comes quietly from the other side, on the open file. 14...f6 is better.

15 $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d4$

The strong d4-square has received the usual guest – a strong minor piece. Additionally, the strong squares a5 and c5 have been added to the collection. The latter is especially important. We also note the useful work of the modest d3-pawn, preventing the blockade by ... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ -c4.

17... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18 0-0 h5

Or 18... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 19 g4.

19 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Follow the route of the knight: b1-d2-b3 and to a5 or c5.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ g6 21 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}2b3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 25 $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 26 $\mathbb{W}c2$

White invades the open file and the defence is helpless.

This illustrative victory was built entirely on the strong squares which affected the whole open file. Sometimes even smaller weaknesses

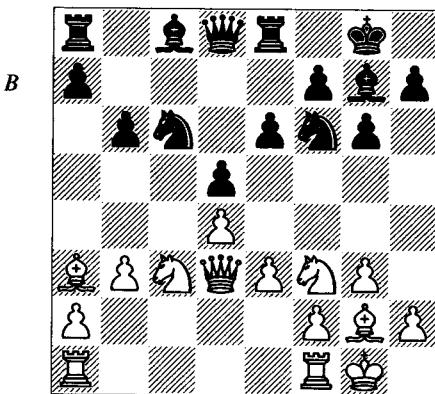
lead to great worries and affect the whole files in the same disastrous manner...

Ivanchuk – Leko

Istanbul OL 2000

Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 g3 c6 4 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ d5 5 cxd5 cxd5
6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7 0-0 0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 9 b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10 e3
b6 11 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12 $\mathbb{W}d3$ (D)



12...a5??

Apparently there is nothing wrong with this ‘natural’ move, preparing 13... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ and ...b5-b4. However, the move weakens the b5-square and Ivanchuk’s logical plan is completely based on that single weakness.

13 $\mathbb{W}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 14 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$

14...b5 obviously does not work due to 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$.

15 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

Now it is too late for ...b5, since this square is controlled by White’s minor pieces.

15... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

15... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 16 $\mathbb{W}xf1$ compromises Black’s light squares even more.

16 $\mathbb{Q}a4$

When the b5-square was weakened, the b6-pawn was weakened too. As usual, sickness spreads.

16... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Now the a6-square has become vulnerable and needs protection.

19... $\mathbb{Q}b8$

19... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ would be met by 20 $\mathbb{Q}a6$.

20 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c1$

Making use of the growing weakness of the black queenside, White is quicker in capturing the file.

21... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

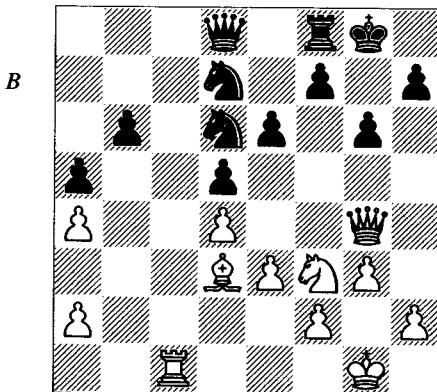
In case of 22... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, which, by the way, leaves a better impression, White had in mind to switch his attention temporarily to the kingside with 23 h4.

23 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$

This looks somewhat nervous, but the slow 24... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 25 h4 f6 26 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ does not bring relief: then 27 $\mathbb{W}f4$ followed by 28 g4 keeps the pressure on.

25 bxa4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (D)

Ivanchuk recommends 26 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}a7$! $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d1$! holding the open file for himself with advantage.



26... $\mathbb{W}b8$??

26... $\mathbb{W}e7$ is stronger: 27 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ (Ivanchuk). If White fights for the c-file by 27 $\mathbb{W}f4$, when opposing the rook does not work after 27... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}c7$, Black would resort to 27... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ with 28 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ in mind. 28 e4 dx4 also gives White little.

At first glance the text-move is also a good solution. However, in constantly worrying about the c-file, Black forgets the weakness of his king...

27 $\mathbb{W}h4!$

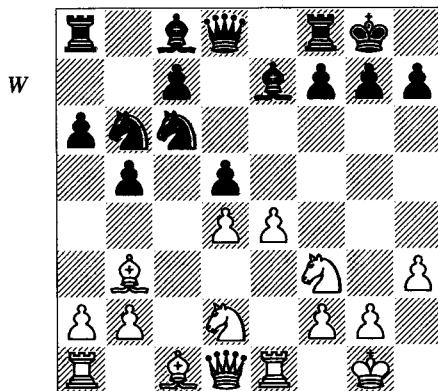
The planned 27... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ would now fail to 28 $\mathbb{Q}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}e7$, keeping Black on the defensive.

27... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ f6 29 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 30 h4

The cumbersome position of Black’s knights affords White sufficient time to build up an attack.

30... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{M}d8$ 32 $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33 $\mathbb{W}xb8$
 $\mathbb{A}xb8$ 34 $g5$

Black managed to prevent the penetration of his second rank, but he will lose the vital e5-square and will not be able to stop the f3-knight penetrating. The weakness of the b5-square grew into the weakness of the c-file. The subsequent kingside attack made its defence increasingly difficult.



Fischer – Reshevsky
Santa Monica 1966

The last move was 12...d6-d5, an expected move; after all this is one of the reasons why the king's knight moved over to the queenside. However, note in passing that advancing the pawn has created a potentially weak square at c5.

13 $\mathbb{A}c2$ $\mathbb{A}e3$

It is important to control the b1-h7 diagonal. Black takes steps to oppose the c2-bishop by ... $\mathbb{W}d7$ and eventually ... $\mathbb{A}f5$. After 13... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 14 $\mathbb{A}b1$ $dxe4$ 15 $\mathbb{A}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ Black has a strong blockade, but 16 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ emphasizes his lasting weakness on c5.

14 e5

Experience teaches us that before deciding on such a step White should control the queen-side by 14 a3 $\mathbb{W}d7$ 15 b3.

14... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{A}f5?$

In chess one should beware of so-called obvious moves. Opposing the c2-bishop seems the most natural thing in this position. However, exactly owing to this reaction White is able to achieve a firm grip on the situation.

15... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ is necessary, and we shall soon see why.

16 $\mathbb{A}g5!$

White prepares to exchange off the dark-squared bishops and at the same time vacates the c1-square for his rook. Both these points are bad news for the vulnerable c5-square, which from now on becomes the sick point in Black's body.

16... $\mathbb{M}fe8$

Note that 16... $\mathbb{A}xg5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $h6$ would be met by 18 e6. 16... $\mathbb{A}b4$ 17 $\mathbb{M}e2$ $\mathbb{M}fe8$ is somewhat better.

17 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{M}xe7$ 18 $\mathbb{M}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$

18... $\mathbb{M}xc2$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ would not please Black either.

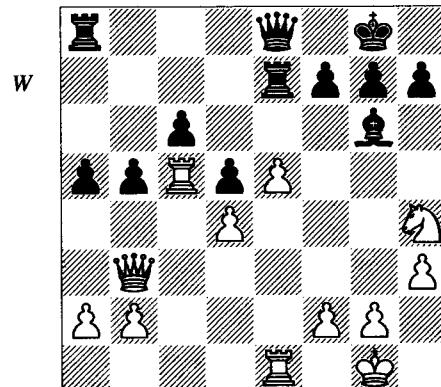
19 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{M}xc2$

Positional capitulation, but 19... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 20 $\mathbb{A}xf5$ 21 a3 is also difficult for Black.

20 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xb4$ a5 22 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{A}g6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h4$

What was a defensible weakness, has in time grown into a defenceless hole. White can also consider playing on the kingside.

23... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 25 $\mathbb{M}xc5$ c6 (D)



26 $\mathbb{M}ec1$

A straightforward method: White concentrates his forces on the weakness.

26... $\mathbb{M}e6$ 27 f4 f5 28 a4

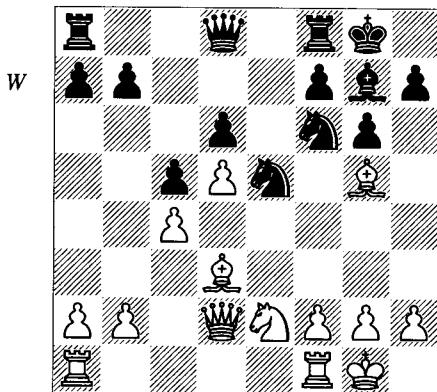
Having pushed the bishop into passivity, it is time to undermine the pawn-formation.

28... $\mathbb{W}xa4$

If 28...b4, then 29 $\mathbb{W}c2$.

29 $\mathbb{W}xa4$ $\mathbb{M}b8$ 30 $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$
32 $\mathbb{M}xc6$

White wins material.



Szabo – Fischer
Leipzig OL 1960

Fischer's 12... $\mathbb{Q}d7-e5$ was a natural answer to the threatened advance of the f-pawn; it was essential to eliminate the light-squared d3-bishop in order to meet the coming attack successfully. At the same time, the knight move was rather provocative. The impulsive player that he was, Szabo reacts to provocation impatiently...

13 f4?

'Active' moves are often deceptive. In advancing his f-pawn, White weakens not only the e3- and e4-squares, but also a whole diagonal. The modest 13 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ is appropriate.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ h6

Preparing ...g5 in reply to the expected f5.

15 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 16 $\mathbb{M}ae1$

16 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 17 h3 (otherwise Black continues with ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ is also advantageous for Black.

16... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

17 b3 is unpleasantly answered by 17... $\mathbb{Q}e4$. White begins to feel the consequences of his careless decision on move 13.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18 f5 g5 19 b3 $\mathbb{W}a5!$

White's attack on the kingside has become grounded. The bishop is superior to the knight. Besides, some tactical possibilities lie in the position...

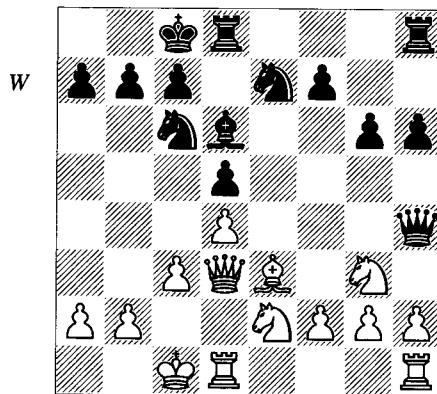
20 $\mathbb{M}c1$

20 a4 is met by 20... $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{E}e3$ followed by 22... $\mathbb{M}ae8$ and complete paralysis. However, 20 $\mathbb{W}b1$ is better.

20... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 21 $\mathbb{M}c2$ $\mathbb{E}e3$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ a5 24 h4 a4 0-1

The process from the moment the e-file was compromised to the punishment was short.

When analysing this encounter, I remembered an older game with the same message...



Winter – Alekhine
Nottingham 1936

This position, from an Exchange French, gives White no reasons to hope for an advantage. On the contrary, as early as move 13 Black has good reasons to be satisfied. His active queen, well-coordinated pieces and mobile kingside pawns tip the scales in his favour. It is time for White to exercise some caution, but Winter did not feel that way. His next move demonstrates that he nurtured optimistic views.

14 f4?

The advance of the f-pawn may look at first glance a logical, active plan. On deeper inspection, however, we find out that the pawn will not be able to reach f5 and that it represents the beginning of positional deterioration.

14... $\mathbb{W}g4$

To clear a path for the h-pawn and to control the f5-square.

15 h3 $\mathbb{W}d7$ 16 $\mathbb{M}hf1$ h5! 17 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ h4 18 $\mathbb{Q}3e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ f6

What a change in the position: with this move, Black covers the vital squares e5 and g5, while his knight controls the kingside from its dominant position at f5, and the open e-file is fully at the disposal of Black's major pieces.

20 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{M}de8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}e6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{M}he8$ 23 $\mathbb{M}de1$ $\mathbb{M}8e7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 25 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5!$

Having increased his pressure on the e-file to the maximum, Black switches in search of

the lateral weaknesses. On 26 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ he plans 26... $\mathbb{E}xe2$ 27 $\mathbb{E}xe2$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 29 $\mathbb{E}f3$ (if 29 $\mathbb{W}xa7$, then 29... $\mathbb{E}xd2+$, etc.) 29... $\mathbb{W}e4$. At the same time 26... $\mathbb{W}a4+$ is threatened.

26 b3 $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

What White had tried to prevent still works.

27 $\mathbb{Q}c1$

27 $bxc4$ $\mathbb{W}a4+$ leads to mate.

27... $\mathbb{Q}ce3+$ 28 $\mathbb{E}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{E}xe3$

30 $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}b5$

White must give up material to protect the d3-square; the positional advantage is transformed into material.

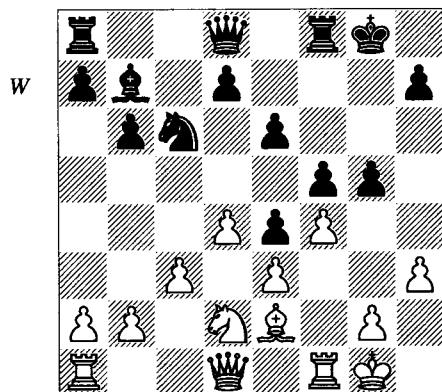
It turned out that the ill-advised 14 f4 weakened the whole file and led to great difficulties.

Rubinstein – Alekhine

Dresden 1926

London System

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b6 4 h3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ cxd6 7 e3 0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ d5 9 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10 c3 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dxe4 12 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f5 13 f4 g5 (D)



To White's passive approach Black reacted energetically by the non-routine 5... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, after which he seized first a spatial advantage by 10... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ and then the initiative. The threat of ... $\mathbb{W}g5$ provoked 13 f4 and we start to feel the g3-square as a potential weakness.

14 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ d5 15 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17 a4?

White's position is already suspicious and, to put it mildly, the text-move looks nonchalant. To prevent what he soon faces in the game White had but one choice – 17 g3.

17... $\mathbb{E}g8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

This exchange comes at the proper moment and obliges White to take with the rook (on 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ there is 20... $\mathbb{E}xg2$), after which the e5-pawn becomes shaky, the g3-square a sore point in the pawn-structure, while the whole g-file is affected by its lasting weakness.

19 $\mathbb{E}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g3$

A subtle dance of the queen and rooks begins on the g-file. The hole g3 will be used until the very end to create threats against the endangered white king.

21 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}g7$ 22 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6!$

Obvious and good. By eliminating the defender of the g2-pawn, Black further weakens the white king's position.

23 $\mathbb{E}f2$ $\mathbb{W}g3!$

While keeping an eye on e5, Black has managed to oust White's king's rook from its relatively active post.

24 $\mathbb{E}c2$

24 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ would not do due to 24... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{W}h2$ 26 $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}af8$, when 27...f4 cannot be parried.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 25 $\mathbb{E}xf1$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$

The threat of 26... $\mathbb{E}c4$ earns time to transfer the rook via Black's second rank, increasing the pressure on the g-file to the maximum.

26 b3 $\mathbb{E}c7$ 27 $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{E}cg7$ 28 $\mathbb{E}f4$

White has finally freed his queen.

28... $\mathbb{E}g6!$

However, a new menace looms from the h6-square.

29 $\mathbb{W}b4$

Of course, after 29 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{E}h6$, 30 $\mathbb{W}e1$ defends the king, but then 30... $\mathbb{W}g7$ dooms e5-pawn. 30 c4 is no better due to 30...d4.

29... $\mathbb{E}h6$ 30 $\mathbb{h}4$

There is nothing better to parry the mate threat.

30... $\mathbb{W}g7??$

The winning 30... $\mathbb{E}xh4+$ 31 $\mathbb{E}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}xh4+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ f4 does not satisfy Alekhine's aesthetic sense. However, sometimes in search of the beautiful we become impractical.

31 c4

If 31 $\mathbb{W}d6$ (or 31 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{E}g6$ 32 $\mathbb{E}ff2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$, etc.), then 31... $\mathbb{E}g6$ 32 $\mathbb{E}ff2$ f4 33 exf4 e3 and the defence of the second rank collapses.

31... $\mathbb{E}g6$ 32 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}g3??$ 33 $\mathbb{W}e1??$

Annotators have echoed Alekhine's assessment that 33 $\mathbb{Q}g1?$ is met by 33...d4 34 exd4 e3 35 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{H}h3$ followed by 36... $\mathbb{W}g3$, but White can instead play 33 cxd5! $\mathbb{H}h3+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}g3$ 35 $\mathbb{H}ef2$, when there is no mate in view – a flaw at the end of Alekhine's brilliancy.

33... $\mathbb{H}xg2$ 0-1

When following the early h3 the later f4 was provoked, g3 was surrendered to Black's major pieces. The whole g-file suffered and soon became the route of Black's invasion. Together with other games in this section, it is a fine lesson on the correlation between weak squares and the files on which they lie.

We could say in general that seizing an open file brings an advantage. The fact itself implies that some erroneous step by the opponent has brought it about; no positional balance can be upset, unless a mistake tips the scales to the other side. Trying to classify the types of errors which cause the process in a very large number of games, I came to distinguish two major groups of cases. In one, an open file is simply relinquished to the enemy by an obvious mistake; in most of these cases it happens either due to some mistaken strategic assessment in the opening or to what we could call an unforced error in the middlegame. In the other groups of cases, the open file is not a gift. It is contested for a prolonged period and gained by eventually outplaying the opponent and quite commonly owing to strong measures, including material sacrifices. I have selected a number of illustrative examples throwing light on both of them.

Capablanca – Vidmar

London 1922

Queen's Gambit

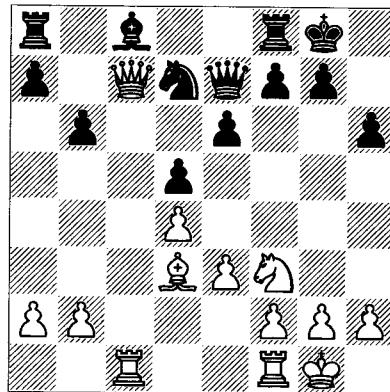
1 d4 d5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 c4 e6 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 6 e3 0-0 7 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ c6 8 $\mathbb{W}c2$ dxc4 9 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 11 0-0 b6?

The fianchetto of the light-squared bishop is a common idea in this line, but normally only after an exchange on c3. Was it simply a moment of carelessness from Vidmar? Whatever the case, the consequences will be obvious in just a couple of moves...

12 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ cxd5 13 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ h6 14 $\mathbb{W}c7!$ (D)

Black's error on move 11 surrendered the open c-file to White, and he jumped at the

B



chance to seize it. The paralysis we witness is a just penalty for the error. White threatens to win in short order by 15 $\mathbb{Q}b5$.

14... $\mathbb{W}b4$ 15 a3 $\mathbb{W}a4$

15... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xa3$ would just help White to carry out the intended 17 $\mathbb{Q}b5$. Then 17... $\mathbb{W}e7$ (if 17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, 18 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ traps the queen) 18 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ costs Black material.

16 h3

This quiet move confirms that a sort of zugzwang has arisen!

16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

17... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ loses to 18 b3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}c6$; the alternative 17... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}e7$ f6 19 b3 $\mathbb{W}xb3$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ is equally horrible.

18 $\mathbb{Q}c2$

This wins material. 18 b3 also wins, since 18... $\mathbb{W}xb3$ can be met by 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}c2$.

18... $\mathbb{W}b5$ 19 a4

...and White wins. Conceding the c-file was costly indeed!

However, the problems are usually more sophisticated, and the effects of an erroneous strategic decision in the opening take longer to appear.

Portisch – Tal

Oberhausen Echt 1961
French Defence

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 e5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 5 f4 c5 6 c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}df3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 8 g3 cxd4 9 cxd4 f6?

Without entering into the niceties of this opening variation, let us simply say that the decision to open the f-file is a far-reaching one, whose effects it is far from easy to foresee.

Portisch will help us to understand its negative sides.

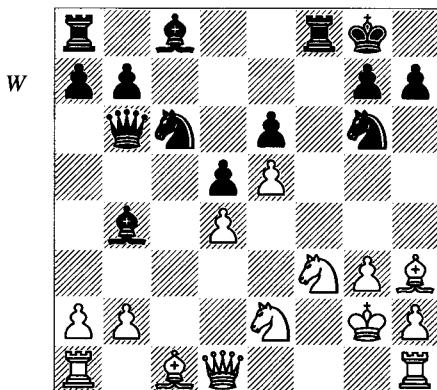
10 ♜h3!

The kingside is White's proper theatre of action. The text-move makes it possible to evacuate the king to the quiet refuge of g2, while the pressure on e6 frustrates the normal coordination of the black minor pieces.

10...♝b4+

Note that 10...f5 would do little to prevent White's kingside strategy: after 11 g4 Black's problems would just increase.

11 ♘f1 fxe5 12 fxe5 ♘f8 13 ♘e2 ♘g6 14 ♘g2 0-0 (D)



15 ♜g4!

The situation on the kingside had seemed stabilized, but now comes this powerful move, denying Black the peaceful period he needed to finish his development and seek counterplay. The h2-pawn is set free and its advance will significantly influence the course of events.

15...♝d7 16 h4 ♘a5

While White's straightforward plan on the kingside proceeds like clockwork, Black is forced into complex manoeuvres to put up any realistic resistance. The dark-squared bishop is bound for d8, to cover the sensitive dark squares on the kingside.

17 ♘b1 ♘b5 18 h5 ♘ge7 19 h6 g6 20 ♜g5

The threats on the open f-file start to take shape. Creating strong squares on f4, f6 and g5 exposes the black king to attack.

20...♞f5 21 ♜xf5 ♘xf5

In principle Black would prefer to close the file by capturing with one of the pawns, but in our position it would only enable the white

knight to exert stronger pressure on the king's position from their unassailable bases on f4 and g5.

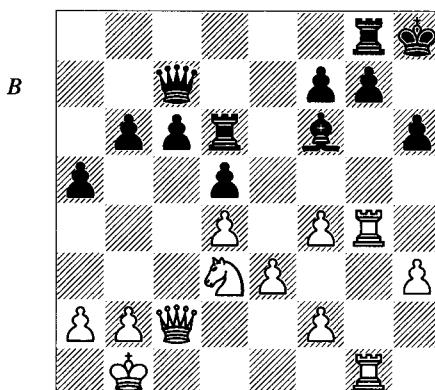
22 g4 ♘xf3

This could be regarded as a desperate attempt to avoid suffocation on the kingside. It is quite obvious no serious compensation can come out of it. Indeed, after...

23 ♘xf3 ♘b6 24 ♘g3 ♘f8 25 ♘d2 ♘c7 26 ♘f4 ♘e8 27 ♘hf1 ♘b6 28 ♘f2 ♘b4 29 ♘bf1 ♘d3 30 ♘f3 ♘xb2 31 ♘xd3 ♘b5 32 ♘g5

...the end was coming down the f-file.

The difficulties which persisted all through the game were caused by a strategic error in the opening. Black opened the f-file looking for counterplay, but in the end it turned against him. However, as we go deeper into the middlegame, the loss of a file can more often be ascribed to what I call unforced errors; the tennis term seems to me most appropriate. Sometimes they are one-move or two-move blunders which for obvious reasons are not of great interest to us, but numerous illustrative examples in grandmaster practice demonstrate mistaken assessments. In this respect I find the following games highly instructive:



P. Johner – Rubinstein
Teplitz Schönau 1922

Having moved his knight to d3, White felt safe and comfortable in this middlegame position and he must have been surprised when Black struck with...

23...c5!

It is quite clear that he is after open files on the queenside and the open dark-squared diagonal

for his bishop. However, White succumbs to his desire and grabs the pawn:

24 dxc5?

If White had penetrated a little deeper into the position, he would have kept it closed and continued 24 $\mathbb{Q}e5$. In that case the pawn avalanche after 24...c4 can be stopped at once by 25 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ (if 25...b5 26 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ then 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$) 26 $\mathbb{W}b5$, while the better 24... $\mathbb{B}b8$ can be met by 25 $\mathbb{W}b3$, but the more aggressive 25 $\mathbb{W}f5$ also comes into consideration (if 25...c4, for example, then 26 $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 27 $\mathbb{W}xf7$).

24...bxc5 25 $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}c6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}a3$

Gobbling the d5-pawn is also costly: 26 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 27 $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{W}b7!$ threatens 28... $\mathbb{B}xd3$ as well as 28... $\mathbb{E}c1+$.

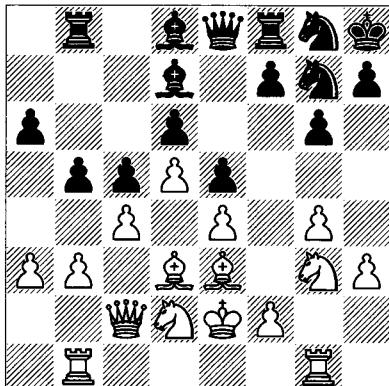
26... $\mathbb{E}c8!$

White has gained just one worthless pawn and in return has surrendered the file and the diagonal. A catastrophic evaluation to be kept in mind!

27 $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2!$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{E}c3$ 29 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{E}c2+$ 0-1

The punishment was appropriate.

B



Polugaevsky – Stein
USSR Ch (Tallinn) 1965

We can immediately see that White has been carrying out a very ambitious plan: he has played on both wings, keeping his king in the centre. However, Black has posted his pieces excellently and the next move throws more light on the position:

20... $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

The fight revolves around the freeing ...f5 and consequently about the f-file, which Black tries to open. In order to do that, the g3-knight must be eliminated.

21 $\mathbb{B}bf1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 23 $\mathbb{F}xg3$ $\mathbb{B}xc4?$

At the moment when we expect 23...f5, Stein decides first to open the b-file. The course of the game proves him wrong, especially given that there was no hurry to make this exchange in any case.

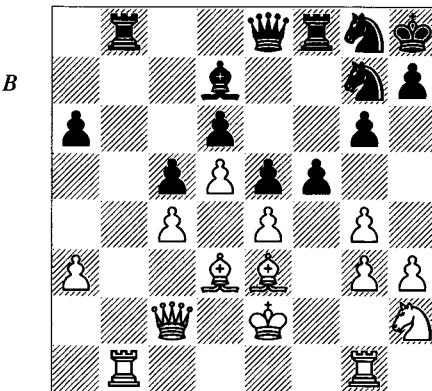
24 $\mathbb{B}xc4$ $f5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

When exchanging on c4, Stein probably considered only further exchanges on f5, when the position opens favourably for him and the b8-rook acquires greater importance. But Polugaevsky knows better: he blocks the kingside and waits.

25... $\mathbb{W}e8$

In order to prepare 26... $\mathbb{Q}f6$; otherwise there is no counterplay on the kingside.

26 $\mathbb{B}b1$ (D)



Just a step before Black forces events, White switches his attention to the other wing and seeks counterplay on the file mistakenly opened by Black a couple of moves earlier.

26... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27 $\mathbb{E}xb8$ $\mathbb{W}xb8$ 28 $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}b2$

Without the open b-file, White would be condemned to passive defence. Now the penetration by his major pieces bears strongly on the position.

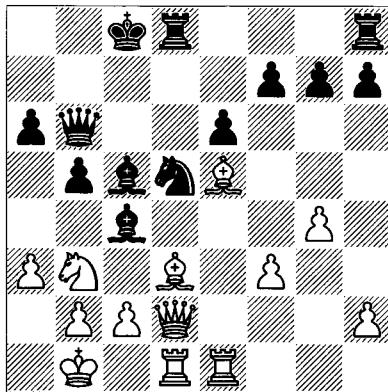
29... $\mathbb{F}xg4??$

29... $\mathbb{F}xe4$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $h5$ offers stronger resistance. This way the f5-square remains under White's control and the kingside stays blocked.

30 $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}gh5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 32 $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{E}f6$

Now the straightforward 33 $\mathbb{W}b8$ would have left Black in a difficult endgame. Opening the b-file severely rebounded on Black. In general we could say that opening a file and controlling it are sensitive and often crucial moments in the game.

B



Adams – Topalov
New Delhi FIDE 2000

In this tense middlegame position Topalov continued:

20... $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 21 $\mathbb{M}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3?$!!

This exchange is premature and in a couple of moves leads to the deterioration of the black position. 21... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is correct.

22 cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 23 $\mathbb{M}c2+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 24 d4

The greedy 24 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{M}hg8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ f6 26 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ e5 does not pay – the white bishop gets shut out from the play. The text-move, on the contrary, cuts the black bishop off from the defence of the obviously weakened queenside and establishes a foothold on the open c-file; the c5-square will obviously play an important role in the course of the struggle.

24...f6 25 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 26 $\mathbb{M}fe1$ g6

But not 26...g5 27 $\mathbb{M}e4$. Black must have ...f5 at his disposal.

27 $\mathbb{M}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 28 $\mathbb{M}e2$

Increasing the pressure on the backward e6-pawn is one scenario, but switching to the open file is constantly on White's mind.

28... $\mathbb{M}he8$

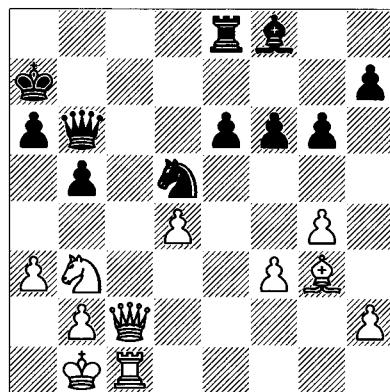
If Black tries to simplify by 28... $\mathbb{Q}f4$, then 29 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 30 $\mathbb{M}e4$ e5 31 d5 bodes ill for Black.

29 $\mathbb{M}c2$ $\mathbb{M}c8$ 30 $\mathbb{M}e1$ $\mathbb{M}xc2$ 31 $\mathbb{M}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8?!$

Black is eager to control the hole on c5, but by doing so he surrenders the file to his opponent's major pieces. 31...f5 is stronger; although it gives the e5-square to the g3-bishop, it seeks counterplay instead of passively waiting.

32 $\mathbb{M}c1$ (D)

B



32... $\mathbb{Q}d6$

Annotating the game in *Informator*, Adams supplies this move with a question-mark and suggests that 32... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ was the proper way to handle the situation, giving the line 33 $\mathbb{M}c6$ $\mathbb{M}d8$ 34 $\mathbb{M}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$. However, White can play 33 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{M}b7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}a5$, penetrating into Black's camp or reaching an advantageous endgame after 34... $\mathbb{M}xc7$ 35 $\mathbb{M}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 36 $\mathbb{M}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 37 $\mathbb{M}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 38 b4.

33 $\mathbb{M}c6$ $\mathbb{M}d8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{M}xd6$ 35 $\mathbb{M}e8$ $\mathbb{M}d8$ 36 $\mathbb{M}xd8$ $\mathbb{M}xd8$ 37 $\mathbb{M}c6$

At the end of the process White commands the file. The obvious threat of $\mathbb{Q}c5$ does not leave Black any choice.

37... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{M}xd4$

Or 38...a5 39 $\mathbb{M}a6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 41 $\mathbb{M}xe6$ with a clear advantage for White.

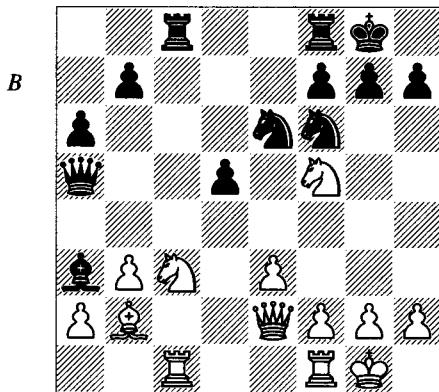
39 $\mathbb{M}xa6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 41 $\mathbb{M}xe6$ $\mathbb{M}f4$

42 $\mathbb{M}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 43 $\mathbb{M}xb5$ $\mathbb{M}xf3$ 44 $\mathbb{M}c5$

White is winning. Black had problems inherited from the opening, but his hesitation in recognizing the importance of the nascent open c-file aggravated them and led to a painful defeat.

Mastering open files obviously bears fruit. It is not surprising that players are often ready to pay a price in material to open and command

the files recognized as important at some point of the struggle. A pawn sacrifice is a common method to gain the desired files – a huge number of practical examples involve pawn sacrifices.



Larsen – Wade
Teesside 1972

It is not difficult to discern that Black has difficulties to cope with. His isolated pawn is a lasting worry and the white knight on f5 quite a nuisance – that is what we conclude at a glance. Then we notice also that the open c-file is in question and that it has to do with the f5-knight and geometrical relations between the black king and the c8-rook. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to get rid of the f5-knight. For instance, in response to 16...g6 White strikes by 17 ♜xd5. 16...b5 comes into consideration though. However, Black had ambitions on the c-file...

16...♜c7?? 17 ♜a4 ♜xb2 18 ♜xb2

It becomes apparent that the attempt to double rooks on the c-file has failed, because now 18...♜fc8 does not work due to 19 ♜e7+.

18...b5 19 ♜c5! ♜b6

19...♜xc5 will come to the same thing.

20 b4 ♜xc5 21 ♜xc5!

21 bxc5 ♜e6 (not 21...♜xc5 22 ♜d4) 22 ♜d4 ♜c8 is less convincing than the pawn sacrifice; White is after the open file...

21...♜xc5 22 bxc5

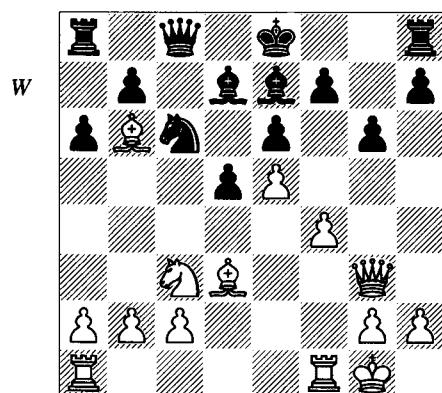
What was hidden becomes apparent: by sacrificing a pawn, White is seeking to control the open file and the initiative that will arise from it.

22...♜e6

After 22...♜xc5 23 ♜c1 ♜a7 (or 23...♜b6 24 ♜c6 ♜a5 25 h3) 24 ♜c6 ♜e8 25 ♜a3 there would be no defence against 26 ♜e7+. Therefore Black had to admit reluctantly that the passed c-pawn gives White a large advantage.

23 ♜d4 ♜e5 24 ♜a3 ♜g4 25 ♜f3 ♜c7 26 ♜c1 a5 27 ♜d3

There is no doubting White's superiority.



Lutikov – Sakharov
USSR Ch (Alma-Ata) 1968/9

Black was cautious not to castle into White's attack on the kingside, but his hesitant opening play is reflected in the general passivity of his position and the hole on b6, whence the powerful dark-squared bishop cramps him. However, at first glance the situation does not look critical: the kingside seems secure and ...♝d8 would deal with the b6-bishop on the next step. But it is White's turn to move, and he shatters this illusion...

16 f5!

This looks like an offer Black can't refuse; 17 fxg6 hxg6 18 ♜xg6 is threatened.

16...gxg5??

Black presumably dismissed 16...♝b4! due to 17 fxg6, when 17...hxg6 fails to 18 ♜xf7. However, the intermediary 17...♝c5+ 18 ♜xc5 ♜xc5+ 19 ♜h1 hxg6 gives the black king more breathing space; 20 ♜xf7 does not work any more (due to 20...♜xd3 when Black is ready for 21 ♜xg6? ♜xe5) and White must be satisfied by the positional advantage after 20 a3 ♜xd3 21 cxd3. Black was either unaware of his difficulties or he missed the freeing 17...♝c5+.

17 ♜g7 ♜f8 18 ♜xf5!

The second blow is possible because now 18...exf5 would be met by 19 ♜xd5 ♜d8 20 ♜c5.

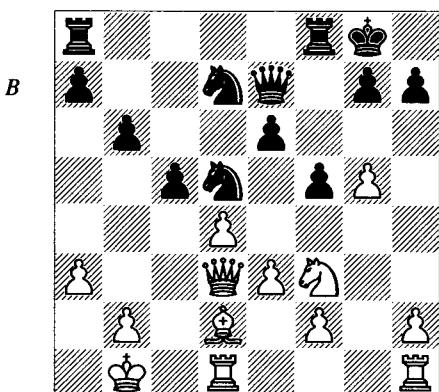
18...d4 19 ♜xh7!

The hidden sacrificial idea is being revealed now: by sacrificing a piece White has opened the vital f-file, on which the final stroke is conceived.

19...dxc3 20 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 21 ♜g6 ♜xe5 22 ♜xe5

Black is lost.

In the end the returns were rich. As a matter of fact, when a file is opened as a route of attack on the enemy king, the results usually exceed the invested material by far. Some examples from the champion's practice are impressively instructive:



Gelfand – Kramnik
Berlin ECC 1996

Having secured a peaceful refuge for his king and a dominant central position for one of his knights, Black all of a sudden starts a dangerous attack on the queenside with a pawn sacrifice...

18...b5!

This is one of those offerings we are reluctant to take, but we feel we must accept because if Black were allowed to continue with 19...c4, it would be one-way traffic.

19 ♜xb5

19 dxc5 ♜xc5 only makes things worse for White, and the alternative 19 e4 c4 20 ♜e2 fxe4 21 ♜xe4 ♜f7 cannot be recommended to White either.

19...♜ab8 20 ♜a5

Had White prevented Black's next move by 20 ♜a4, apart from the doubling of rooks, 20...c4 would come into consideration.

20...♝b3

The pressure on the semi-open file is a nice reward for the sacrificed pawn.

21 ♜a2??

Who would think that in a couple of moves the king will be exposed on a2 and he would feel better on a1? Chess owes much of its fascination to its complexity and the fact that no matter how strong players may be, they often cannot foresee the coming events.

21...♜fb8 22 ♜b1 e5!

White in all probability missed this startling move. The e6-square is vacated for the queen and the white king starts to feel uncomfortable. Normal solutions are beyond reach.

23 ♜hc1

Kramnik demonstrated 23 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 24 dxe5 ♜xe5 25 ♜c3 ♜xc3+ 26 bxc3 ♜e4!, when there is no good reply.

23...♛e6 24 ♜a1 exd4 25 ♜xc5 ♜xc5 26 ♜xc5 ♜c3!

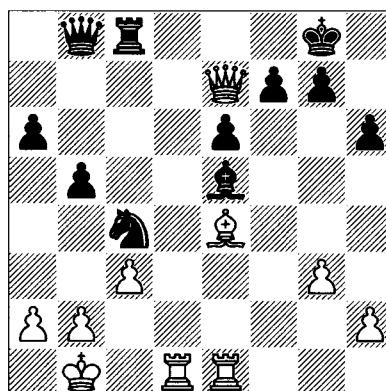
The mating threat based on ...♜xb2 cannot be parried.

27 ♜xd4

27 ♜xc3 leads to the same end as the game continuation: 27...dxc3 28 ♜d4 cxb2+ 29 ♜a2 ♜xa3++ 30 ♜xa3 ♜a6+, mating.

27...♜xb2 28 ♜xb2 ♜a2+ 0-1

It was also on the b-file that decisive events took place in the following game:



Shirov – Kramnik
Linares 1996

White threatens $\mathbb{B}d7$, which would push Black hopelessly onto the defensive. However, Black is to move and he strikes first:

26...b4!

The motif repeats: the pawn sacrifice opens the road towards the white king and seizes the initiative.

27 $\mathbb{W}xb4 \mathbb{W}c7$

The quiet point: 28... $\mathbb{B}b8$ hangs over White's head and there is little he can do about it.

28 $\mathbb{W}b7$

28 b3? loses to 28... $\mathbb{Q}a3+$, so there remains only the text-move.

28... $\mathbb{Q}a3+$!

Another fine point: now 29 $\mathbb{Q}a1 \mathbb{Q}c2+$ leads to a repetition.

29 $\mathbb{Q}c1 \mathbb{Q}f4+! 30 gxf4 \mathbb{W}xf4+ 31 \mathbb{B}d2 \mathbb{B}d8$

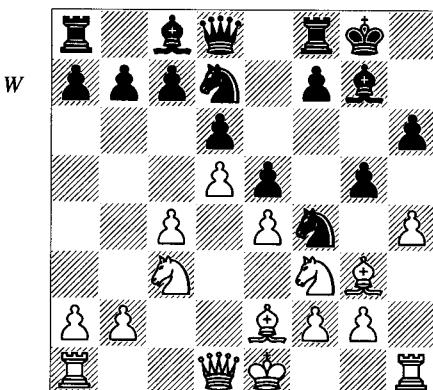
32 $\mathbb{B}d1$

32 $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ does not succeed due to 32... $\mathbb{Q}h8$
33 $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}c4$.

32... $\mathbb{B}xd2 33 \mathbb{B}xd2$ ½-½

This game and the last are both characterized by the dramatic change of situation after the pawn sacrifice and the seizure of the file.

So on different occasions different files become the route of violent penetration into the enemy position. However, the most attractive files to attackers are those which lead straight towards the enemy king and among them, by the nature of its typical position on the board, are the g- and h-files. A couple of games will remind the reader of their importance and the frequency they are exposed to forced breakthroughs in many different types of positions.



Bukić – Brinck-Claussen
Krakow tt 1964

Black has just played 11... $\mathbb{Q}h5-f4$. Instead of blocking the kingside with 11...g4, Black thought that he could create active counterplay by attacking the g2-pawn. What he underrated was the fact that White opens the h-file. At the moment it does not look dangerous for Black, but things are often different from what we see.

12 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 13 $\mathbb{W}c7$!

Bukić found this idea when analysing earlier games in which 13 $\mathbb{Q}f1 f5$ gave Black good counterplay. White is now better prepared to meet 13...f5, when 14 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xf4 \mathbb{Q}xf5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ keeps the advantage. Also, 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xe2$ f5 15 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}xf5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}de4$ secures White comfortable control of the centre.

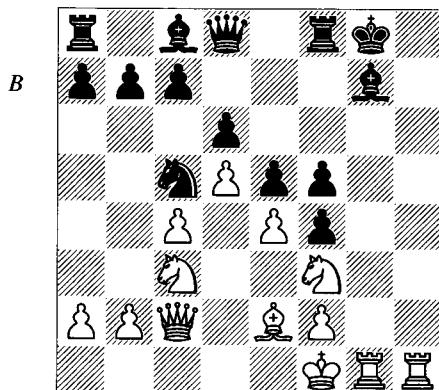
13... $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

A good move, though 14 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ attracted more attention later.

14... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}g2$

Bukić had been aiming for this position. Both critical files on the kingside lie open to his rooks.

16...f5 17 $\mathbb{Q}ag1 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ (D)



18... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

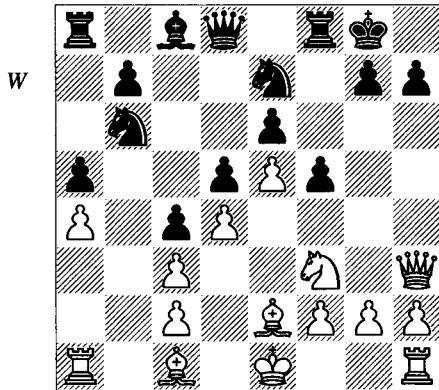
It's strange how some positions and situations remain fixed in our mind decades after. I still vividly remember Bukić demonstrating to us after the game that he intended to punish 18...fxe4 with 19 b4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23 $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ $\mathbb{W}xg7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$.

19 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

White threatens the obvious 21 $\mathbb{W}xe4$, which unfortunately cannot be prevented by 20... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ due to 21 $\mathbb{Q}e6 \mathbb{Q}xe6$ 22 dx6 $\mathbb{W}f6$ 23 $\mathbb{B}h5$. In spite of his pawn-mass and bishop-pair, Black

is defenceless in front of the tremendous pressure on the open files.

20...f3 21 ♜xf3 ♜f5 22 ♜e6 ♜xe6 23 ♜xe4
 ♜g5 24 dx6 c6 25 ♜h7+ ♜f8 26 ♜d3 e4 27
 ♜xe4 ♜e5 28 f4 d5 29 cxd5 cxd5 30 ♜b4+
 1-0



Sax – Dolmatov
Clermont-Ferrand 1989

By playing ...c4 and ...f5 Black has seemingly secured his king's position. What's more, he can lay siege to the a4-pawn, an immobile target. However, this type of French is not as impervious as it often looks. Sax's very next move calls in question its apparent solidity...

13 ♜g1!

This move greatly enlivens the play. Responding to the inevitable loss of the a4-pawn, White intends 14 g4, opening a file for attacking purposes.

13...♜e8?!

13...♜g6 (with the point 14 g4 f4) does not succeed in keeping the position closed due to 14 ♜g5 h6 15 ♜f3, when the weakening move ...h6 will justify White's intended g4-g5 advance. However, 13...♜d7 is more natural.

14 g4 ♜xa4?!

This move is over-optimistic, considering the quickly-growing pressure on the kingside. This time 14...♜d7 was essential.

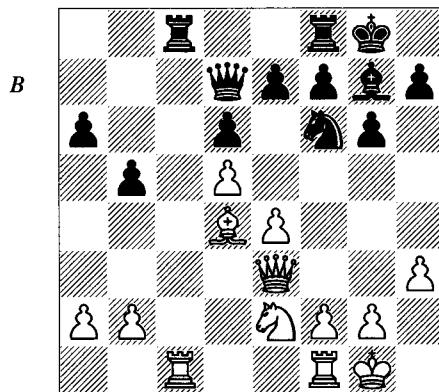
15 gx5 ♜xf5

If 15...♜xf5, there is 16 ♜h4! ♜f8 17 ♜h6 ♜f7 18 ♜h5 g6 19 ♜xg6.

16 ♜g5 h6 17 ♜h5 ♜c6 18 ♜g6 ♜e7 19 ♜h7

Black's defence is falling apart – so devastating can be the consequences of a single file opened for an attack at a proper moment!

Weaknesses in the neighbourhood of the king cause equally acute headaches. Very common and characteristic are the weak squares which appear on the vital diagonals leading towards the enemy king. When the key defender, usually the fianchettoed bishop, is removed, the whole complex around the king becomes vulnerable. This situation often arises due to excessive greed for material.



J. Polgar – Tiviakov
Ohrid Ech 2001

This is a typical early middlegame situation, where chances are assessed and plans made. White has not achieved a great deal in the opening – some spatial advantage and a potentially useful c6-square. It is far from easy to prepare the central thrust e5 since the d5-pawn would then come under attack. An objective evaluation would suggest that Black should exchange rooks and concentrate on keeping the game level. However, he feels somewhat cramped and decides to expand his breathing space, assessing that at the same time he would seize the initiative.

18...e6 19 dx6 ♜xe6 20 f3 ♜xc1 21 ♜xc1
 ♜xa2?

Having weakened the d5-square and rendered the d6-pawn backward, Black goes a step further – in order to grab a pawn he surrenders the open file (on the previous move, 20...♜xa2 was not good due to 21 ♜a1). It was the moment

to stop and reassess the idea. Perhaps then he would have played 21... $\mathbb{Q}c8$.

22 $\mathbb{Q}c6 \mathbb{Q}d8$

22... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is strongly met by 23 $\mathbb{W}c3 \mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xd4$, when the f8-rook remains walled in and the black queenside pawns can hardly move, while the deadly manoeuvre $\mathbb{Q}f4-d5$ hangs over Black's head.

23 $\mathbb{W}c3 \mathbb{Q}e8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xg7 \mathbb{Q}xg7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f4!$

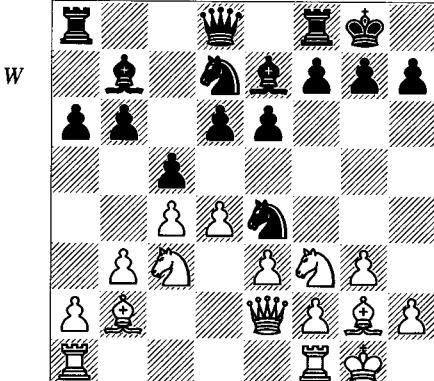
Unfortunately, the tactical solution gives less: after 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd6 \mathbb{Q}xd6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27 $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 28 $\mathbb{W}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}d5 \mathbb{W}c5+$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{W}d6$ 32 $\mathbb{W}d4$ a5, 33 e5 can be met by 33... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$, while 33 g4 h6 34 h4 g5 35 f4 exposes the white king to 35... $\mathbb{W}c6$.

However, after the text-move we get a clear view of how Black's position has degenerated step by step. The cost of his meagre gain was two critical weaknesses – d5 and f6, connected in our thoughts by the deadly knight manoeuvre in progress.

25... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

A temporary solution, but keeping f6 under control by 25... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is obviously as hopeless.

26 $\mathbb{W}f6 \mathbb{Q}e8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ a5 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd6 \mathbb{W}c4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d7 \mathbb{W}c5+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 1-0



Smyslov – Kasparov
Moscow tt 1981

12 $\mathbb{Q}fd1 \mathbb{W}b8$

This move immediately raises a question: is it an error that drops an exchange or a deliberate sacrifice? Let us see:

13 $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e5 \mathbb{Q}xg2$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf8 \mathbb{Q}f1$

The immediate 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ would be met by 17 d5. In giving up the exchange, Black decided that dominating the a8-h1 diagonal would bring enough compensation.

17 $\mathbb{W}d3 \mathbb{Q}xf8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Now 18 d5 is met by 18... $\mathbb{exd}5$ 19 $\mathbb{cxd}5$ f5, when Black keeps his grip on the complex of light squares around the white king.

18... $\mathbb{f}5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e1$

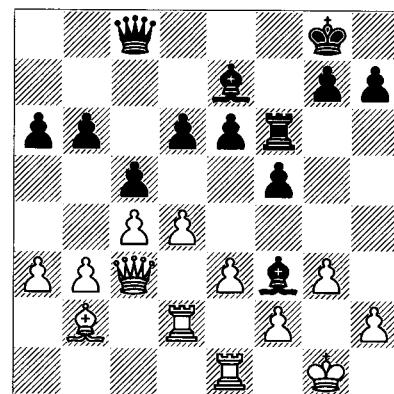
An exchange is not worth much in this position and if at this point White intended to go for e4 and simplifications, he was right.

19... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 20 $\mathbb{W}c3$

An interesting psychological moment: White still speculates with his exchange instead of keeping the balance by 20 e4 $\mathbb{fxe}4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ e5 22 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e4 23 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e7$, etc. Did Smyslov miss this line or did the material advantage have a bearing on his decision?

20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21 a3? (D)

White's house is obviously on fire and this does not help to extinguish the flames. White should have repented and played 21 $\mathbb{W}d3$.



21... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$

The queen moves to h5 with mating threats.

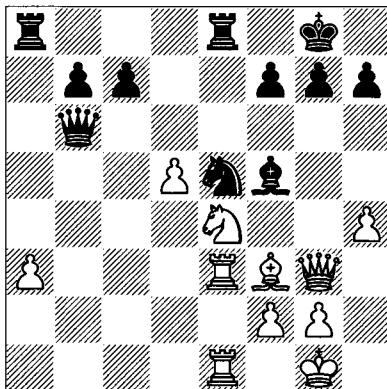
22 $\mathbb{dx}c5 \mathbb{Q}h5$ 23 h4

Otherwise obviously 23... $\mathbb{W}xh2+$.

23... $\mathbb{W}g4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{bx}c5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{Q}g6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 27 $\mathbb{W}a5$ h6 0-1

More often than not, weaknesses are not presented to us and we have to provoke them in order to make use of them afterwards. I find the following game to be a highly instructive example:

W



Portisch – Hamann
Halle Z 1963

Black has just played 28... $\mathbb{Q}g6-e5$, which seemed a good answer to his problems. The threatened simplification via minor-piece exchanges would satisfy Black completely. But it was White to move:

29 $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

While avoiding exchanges and preventing ...f6, White increases the pressure on e5 and provokes Black to weaken the position of his king – White threatens 30 $\mathbb{Q}g5$.

29...g6

The obvious 29... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ hxg6 31 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is not safe at all for Black.

30 $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

White forces the black queen off the sixth rank and is ready to make use of the newly weakened f6-square.

31... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 33 $\mathbb{B}f1$ $\mathbb{B}e7$ 34 $\mathbb{B}f4$

Having created a breach in the defensive formation, White occupies the weakened diagonal.

34... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 35 $\mathbb{B}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$

36... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 37 $\mathbb{B}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{B}d6$ 39 $\mathbb{B}b2$ does not bring Black relief.

37 $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

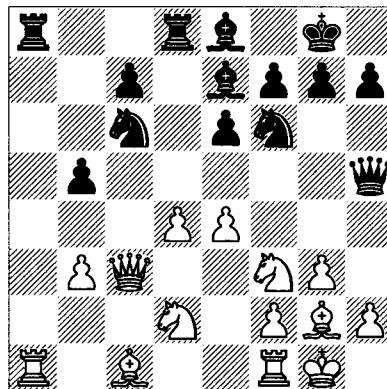
The f6-knight must be supported.

37... $\mathbb{B}d6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $b6$ 39 $f4$ 1-0

Black overstepped the time-limit.

A common case, however, is the weakness on the diagonal which remains in the position as a reminder of some strategic errors committed in the earlier course of the struggle. It is worthwhile watching the process of deterioration in the ensuing illustrative games.

W



Kramnik – Piket
Dortmund 1995

Black had ventured into an inferior line of the Catalan Opening, and here his queen is misplaced and isolated on h5. The further course of the struggle accentuates the problem.

16 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{B}a2$ 18 $\mathbb{W}c1$

White prevents ... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ and is ready to force the rook back.

18... $\mathbb{W}h6$ 19 $h3$ $g6$

Black admits that his queen manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{W}d5-h5$ made no sense, but in order to bring it into play again he must play this move, which is the first sign of weakness on the long dark-square diagonal.

20 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7??$

The exchange of a set of knights will increase the danger on the diagonal.

23 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{B}a6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}a8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6??$

Black has managed to activate the queen at a worrying cost of time, but his pieces lack co-ordination and remain posted passively. The ‘active’ text-move can hardly improve the situation.

27 $\mathbb{W}d1$

Sensing the weakness of Black’s king, White prepares a breakthrough in the centre.

27... $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $b4$

To counter the opening of the a1-h8 diagonal, Black is ready to close it by 29... $\mathbb{Q}c3$. The weakness of his king has become the main issue.

29 $d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 31 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $h5$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

Otherwise a pawn is lost.

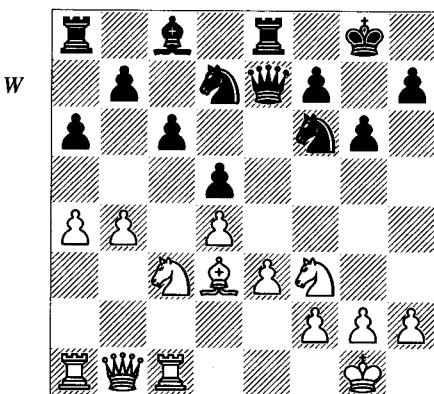
33 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $exd5$ 34 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{E}a2$ 35 $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$

The blockade has been broken. Given that 35... $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 36 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ or 35... $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 36 $\mathbb{E}xe2$ $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 37 $\mathbb{E}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 39 $\mathbb{W}e7$ loses material, Black contrives to preserve the balance, but now the dark-squared bishop, dominating the weak route towards the black king, survives.

36 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 37 $\mathbb{E}e3$ $d4$ 38 $\mathbb{W}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 39 $\mathbb{E}d3$
 $\mathbb{W}a6$

Here White could finish off his opponent by 40 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$, threatening 41 $\mathbb{Q}h6$, but 40 $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e2$ 41 $\mathbb{E}f1$ $d3$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ also led to victory in the game.

From the imperceptible weakening caused by 19... $g6$ to the mating attack is a long road of instructive omissions and errors. We shall pass the same road in another game of the new world champion.



Kramnik – Timman
Belgrade 1995

Here Black has not handled a line of the Exchange Queen's Gambit in an exemplary way. He was confronted by the minority attack in a passive position. His previous move, 14... $g6$, reflects the lack of a good defensive plan. 14... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ is better, but at the moment who would think of the dark squares around the king as potential weaknesses?

15 $\mathbb{W}b2$ $a5$ 16 $bxa5$

16 $b5$ is well met by 16... $c5$.

16... $\mathbb{E}xa5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4?$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 19 $g3$
 $\mathbb{H}a7$ 20 $e4!$

Now we notice for the first time in the game that 14... $g6$ weakened the black king's defences.

This central break activates White's pieces and suddenly throws strong light on the weakness.

20... $dxe4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 22 $\mathbb{E}e1$ $b6$

Played in order to prevent 23 $\mathbb{Q}bc5$.

23 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}gf6$
26 $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

Black has managed to parry the obvious threat, but new difficulties await him...

28 $d5!$

The position of the queen on the diagonal and the inevitable 29 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ suggest at first glance that the black king is in danger; the complex of dark squares around the king has become weak.

28... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}d8$

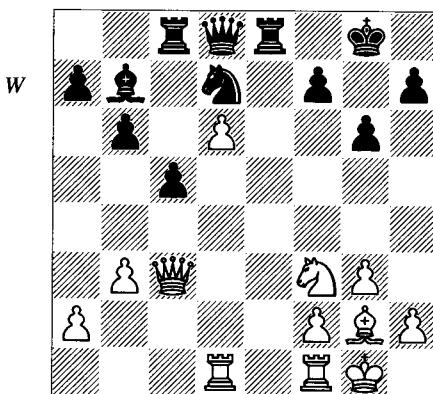
Black loses material no matter what he does. For instance, 29... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ (in order to avoid the crushing 30 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$) 30 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$, etc.

30 $\mathbb{E}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}b4$

30... $\mathbb{W}g7$ fails to 31 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}bd7$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$
 $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 33 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$.

31 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$
34 $\mathbb{E}e4$ 1-0

We continue with the same subject, the same weak complex. Only the players are different...



Portisch – Matanović
Adelaide 1971

Black has just played 20... $g6$. One should be cautious about playing moves of this kind. It is true that the weakened dark squares cannot be exploited right now, but it can prove difficult in the long run. 20... $b5$ came into consideration.

21 $h4$

This is a natural reaction: either we can imagine the pawn marching on to h6 or in case it is

stopped by 21...h5 we witness a further weakening of the king's position.

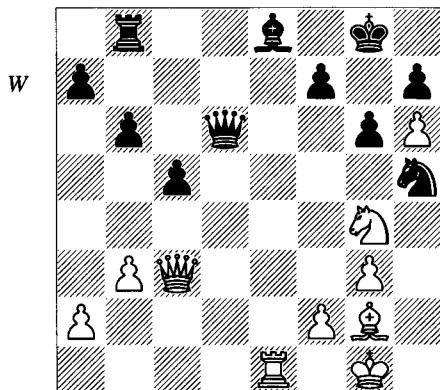
21...♝b8 22 h5 ♜c6 23 ♜fe1 ♜xe1+ 24 ♜xe1 ♜f6 25 h6!

Now we see more clearly the tragic dimensions of the then seemingly innocuous 20...g6. If White were to move, he would continue 26 ♜e5 ♜xg2 27 ♜d7. If Black avoids the threat by 25...♜xf3, then 26 d7! ♛f8 (otherwise 27 ♜e8+) 27 ♜xf3 leads to zugzwang. Therefore, there is no choice:

25...♛xd6 26 ♜e5 ♜e8

Black must protect the vital d7-square, because 26...♜xg2 27 ♜d7 ♜xd7 28 ♜xf6 ♜d4 loses to 29 ♜e5. But now the threat comes from the other side...

27 ♜g4 ♜h5 (D)



28 ♜d5!

The bishop is taboo due to the simple 29 ♜f6+. It comes in preparation of ♜e5, preventing the otherwise possible ...♝d4 as well as preventing the defensive ...f6 at some point.

28...♜d7 29 ♜e5 ♜xg4 30 ♜xh5 ♛f8 31 ♜e5!

Black gets rid of the nuisance at h6, but his opponent now switches his attack towards f7.

31...♝xh6 32 ♜e7 ♛f8 33 ♜c4 ♛g5?

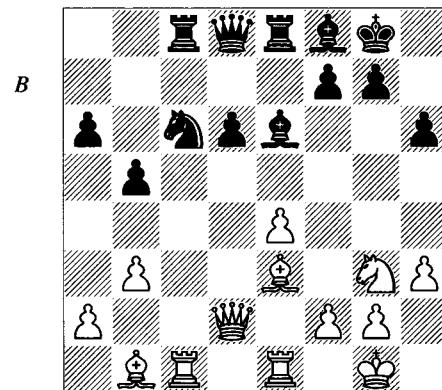
Stronger resistance is offered by 33...♝e6 34 ♜xe6 fx6 35 ♛xe6+ ♛h8, when 36 ♜e5+ ♛g8 37 ♜xa7 g5 38 ♜e7 ♛f6 39 ♜e3 keeps Black in a delicate situation – his king cannot find peace.

34 ♜xf7+ ♛g7 35 ♜xa7 ♛h6?

35...♝d2 36 ♜xg6+ ♜d7 is a better defence.

36 ♜g8 ♜xg8 37 ♜xg8 ♜c1+ 38 ♜h2 ♛f3

39 ♜f8+ 1-0



Smirin – Grishchuk

New York 2000

Black is ready to advance his backward d-pawn and it seems that all the usual opening difficulties are behind him.

23...d5 24 exd5 ♜xd5 25 ♜c2 g6 26 ♜cd1 ♜e7

Grishchuk responds to being attacked by counter-attacking. It sounds good, but we must not overlook a detail that changed the position: 25...g6 weakened the f6-square.

27 ♜b2 ♛g7 28 ♜d4 ♜xd4 29 ♜xd4 ♜c5

Feeling the weakness, which the exchange of bishops spread to the whole diagonal, Black reserves the possibility of returning to the a1-h8 diagonal and opposing the white queen – he intends to meet 30 ♜e4 with 30...♛e5.

30 ♜dd1! ♜ed8?

Black chooses to ignore the obvious threat – 31 ♜e4. Although it does not contain imminent danger for Black, it creates conditions for decisive action. Such a hole in the defensive wall should never be underrated. 30...♜d5 is necessary, although 31 b4 (31 ♜c1 would be met by 31...♝b4) 31...♝c6 32 ♜e4 ♜xe4 33 ♜xe4 leads towards a better endgame.

31 ♜e4 ♜xd1 32 ♜xd1 ♜c7

It becomes apparent what Grishchuk had in mind: after 33 ♜f6+ ♛f8 White has no immediate follow-up, and so 34...♜c3 will deal with any danger on the diagonal for sure. What he forgot was that it will be difficult to live under the constant menace.

33 h4!

White threatens h5, opening the king's door wider, and so provoking a new weakness on g5.

33...h5

33... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, with the idea of opposing on the diagonal by 34... $\mathbb{W}e5$, can be dealt with by 34 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ or 34 $\mathbb{Q}e1$.

34 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

34... $\mathbb{H}d8$ 35 $\mathbb{M}e1$ just worsens Black's case.

35 $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 36 $\mathbb{W}xa6$

In the end the weakness on f6 had its price – not less than a healthy pawn!

36... $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 37 $\mathbb{M}xb1$ $\mathbb{H}d8$

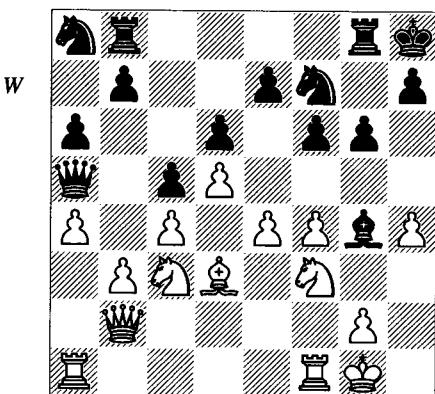
37...b4 38 $\mathbb{M}e1$ $\mathbb{H}d8$ 39 $\mathbb{W}b5$ also favours White.

38 $\mathbb{M}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b4 40 $\mathbb{H}d1$

Black pays a great price to block the queen-side pawns: the pin on the d-file is paralysing. White threatens 41 $\mathbb{M}xd5$.

40... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 41 $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 42 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{H}d7$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{H}d8$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 1-0

In all of the above examples, Black weakened a square on the long dark-squared diagonal. In the course of the game, due to some additional errors, the little weakness passed to the whole diagonal and slowly grew into a fatal illness. Many a time, however, the attacker, having achieved a spatial advantage and pressure on the diagonal, must force open his road by more violent means. We come across similar circumstances on various diagonals, but by far the most numerous are the cases involving the a1-h8 and b1-h7 diagonals. No wonder, because in general it is White who attacks and the black king is so often just there, hiding at the end of those diagonals.



Kramnik – Lanka
Manila OL 1992

Black has just played 22... $\mathbb{Q}d7-g4$ in the hope of impeding White's central breakthrough. If he manages to do so, then he would stabilize the position, while the pressure deriving from the white queen and Black's obvious lack of active play will not be felt so critically. But White decides to force his way through...

23 e5! $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}g4$

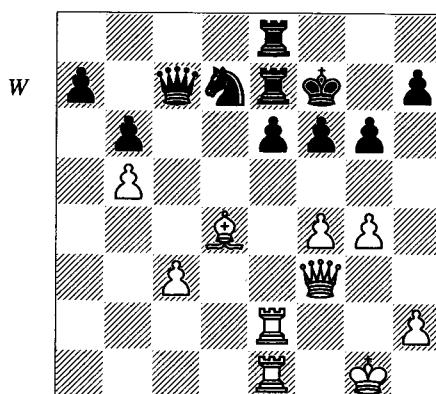
24... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ looks like a better choice for the bishop than the undefended post at g4, but 25 $\mathbf{fxe}7 \mathbb{H}g7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xd6!$ hits him hard all the same.

25 $\mathbf{fxe}7 \mathbb{H}g7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$

On 27... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ Kramnik gives 28 $\mathbb{M}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 30 f5 gxf5 31 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 32 $\mathbb{M}xe5$ dx5 33 $\mathbb{Q}e6$. The passed pawn supported by active pieces is more than enough compensation for the material.

28 $\mathbb{M}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Now 29 g4 (as well as the move played by Kramnik – 29 $\mathbb{Q}d7$, followed by 30 f5), will soon crush resistance.



Alekhine – Bogoljubow
Nottingham 1936

Black is a pawn up and ready to free his game with ...e5. However, the strong centralized bishop and potentially exposed black king gave White an extraordinary idea:

35 g5 fxg5

This move was much criticized by numerous annotators, but in fact it is necessary and good. I find the suggested 35...f5 too passive and dubious since White can advance his h-pawn.

36 f5!

The purpose of 35 g5 was to increase the range of the bishop. However, capturing on g5 looked perfectly good for Black: after 36 fxe5+ ♕g8 Black would close the diagonal. Judging from Bogoljubow's reaction, this mysterious blow slipped Black's attention.

36...♗f4? (D)

Or:

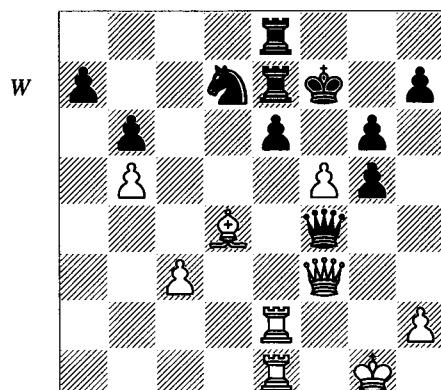
- a) 36...exf5 fails to 37 ♘d5+ ♔f8 38 ♖g7+.
- b) 36...gxf5 loses to 37 ♘h5+ ♔f8 38 ♘h6+, etc.

c) 36...e5 was given as best by Alekhine in his book on the Nottingham tournament. 37 ♘d5+ and now:

c1) 37...♔f8 38 ♘c6 and then:
 c11) Black can try 38...♘d8 39 fxe5 hxg6 (bad is 39...exd4? 40 gxh7 ♗g7 41 h8♘+ ♘xh8 42 ♘h6+ ♗g8 43 ♘xg5+ and now 43...♔h8 44 ♘h6+ or 43...♔f8 44 ♘f1+ ♘f7 45 ♘h6+, etc.), although 40 ♘xg6 ♘f7 (if 40...♗g7 then 41 ♘h5 ♗g8 42 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 43 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 44 ♘xe5) 41 ♘f1! is difficult to meet.

c12) 38...♗c8?! is possible.
 c13) 38...♘xc6! 39 bxc6 ♘b8 (39...exd4? 40 ♘xe7 ♘xe7 41 ♘xe7 ♘xe7 42 c7 and White wins – this was given by Alekhine) looks OK; e.g., 40 f6 ♘e6 41 c7 ♘a6 (but not 41...♗c6? 42 ♘xe5).

c2) Another viable way for Black to handle the position is 37...♔g7 38 ♘c6 ♘d8, when the g6-pawn is protected and 39 f6+ ♘xf6 40 ♘xe5 can be met by 40...♘xe5 41 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 42 ♘xe5 ♘d1+.

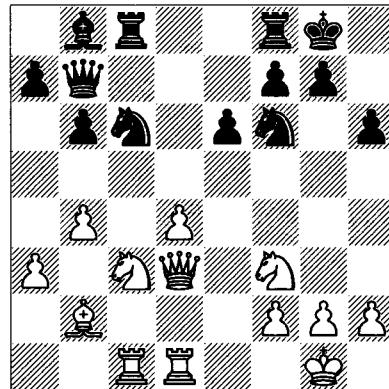


37 fxe6+ ♘xe6 38 ♘d5 ♘f6 39 ♘xf6

In addition to the diagonal, now the f-file is open and the position of the black king is definitely endangered.

39...♗g4+ 40 ♘g2 ♘f5 41 ♘e5

It's as simple as that: Black is a whole piece down and his king's position is not any better; resignation is near.



Portisch – Browne

Amsterdam 1971

In the opening phase, Black failed to blockade the isolated pawn and Portisch now seized his chance...

20 d5! exd5 21 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 22 ♘xd5

The result of the breakthrough is obvious: the b2-bishop has been unleashed and the black king feels its gaze fully. At the same time, Black's task is made difficult by the pin, the passive b8-bishop and his badly coordinated defensive force.

22...♗d8

After 22...♘fd8 23 ♘e4 it remains a big question how Black can disentangle his pieces without some sort of damage.

23 ♘xc8 ♘xc8 24 ♘e5 ♘c2?

24...♗e6 is also inadequate, since 25 ♘xe6 ♘xe6 26 ♘c6 denies Black any counterplay. The same is true for 24...♗b7 25 ♘xb7 ♘xb7 26 ♘c6. Therefore 24...♔xe5 is essential. It is still a good bishop vs bad knight endgame, but the worst is behind Black.

25 ♘d7 ♘e8 26 ♘xg7! ♘xg7 27 ♘d4+

There is no refuge for the king. Black underrated the explosive power on the long diagonal.

27...♔e5

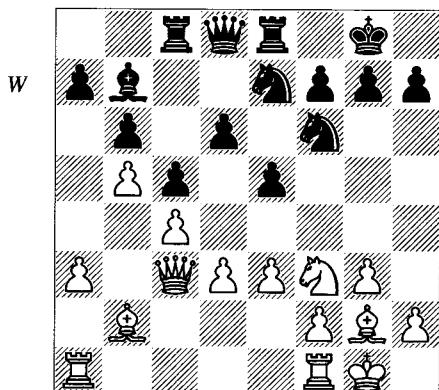
If 27...f6 then 28 ♘xf6.

28 ♘xe5 ♘e6 29 ♘a1

Stronger than 29 $\mathbb{W}g4+$. The threat is still there, on the diagonal.

29... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 30 $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 31 $\mathbb{M}e1$ $\mathbb{M}g8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3+$ 33 $gxh3$ $h5$ 34 $\mathbb{W}f6$

Black has no defence.



Kramnik – Ehlvest
Vienna 1996

White has a comfortable position with good prospects. One idea is to block the centre and play on the wings, carrying out f4 and opening the a-file, but it is a long process and White was looking for something quicker. The queen and bishop are menacingly lined up on the long diagonal, but the e5-pawn is in the way. However, the b7-bishop is undefended which makes a tactical solution possible:

15 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}g4$

The pawn has been snatched away and seemingly all goes smoothly. Now the attempt to catch White by surprise with 16... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $f5$ fails to 18 $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19 $g4!$ $fxg4$ 20 $f3$ (Kramnik) and the black fortress has been shattered. But Ehlvest finds a much stronger answer...

16... $\mathbb{Q}ed5!$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $gxf6$ 18 $cxd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$

After 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $c4$ (otherwise White plays 20 $\mathbb{W}c4$) 20 $\mathbb{W}d4$ (or 20 $dxc4$ $\mathbb{M}e4$ 21 $\mathbb{W}d3$) 20... $cxd3$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ Black's chances are unsatisfactory.

With the text-move, he offers White 19 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$, which is hardly possible to win. But having shattered the black bastion, White is in no hurry.

19 $\mathbb{M}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6??!$

19... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ would just invite the reply 20 $\mathbb{W}c4$, but 19... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ looks more natural; then 20 $\mathbb{W}c4$ could be met by 20... $d5$ 21 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $d4$. White would continue 20 $f4$ and having prevented ... $\mathbb{Q}f3$, he would be ready to grab the f6-pawn under improved circumstances. However, with the queens off, Black's chances would have improved as well in comparison with the course of the game.

20 $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7??!$

It isn't wise to put the king on the endangered diagonal, but Black has already decided to hold on to material equality, whatever happens.

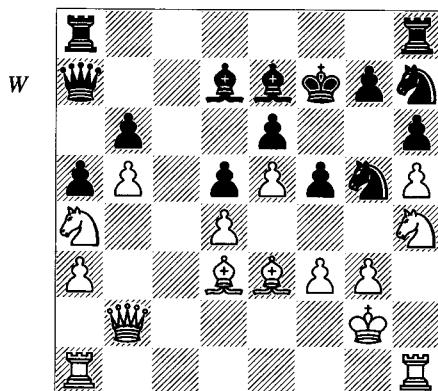
21 $f5$ $\mathbb{M}e8$ 22 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23 $e4$ $h6$ 24 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $d5$ 25 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 26 $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Now Black has to take care of $h6$ too ($\mathbb{Q}c1$ is an idea).

27 $exd5$

Simple and strong. Black cannot make use of the a8-h1 diagonal and, what is more, he must yield the open file either by 27... $\mathbb{M}xe1+$ 28 $\mathbb{M}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}h8$, when 30 $\mathbb{M}e7$ $c4$ (otherwise 31 $\mathbb{Q}b2$) 31 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ decides, or by 27... $\mathbb{W}h8$ (or 27... $\mathbb{M}g8$), when 28 $d6!$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 29 $\mathbb{M}e6$ wins.

27... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 28 $\mathbb{M}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 1-0



Alekhine – Capablanca
Arnhem AVRO 1938

25 $g4!$

This time the pressure on the b1-h7 diagonal is strengthened by the fact that Black's pawn-structure on the kingside has been compromised by the hole on g6, which weakens the whole diagonal.

25...fxg4 26 ♜g6+ ♜g8

On f8 the king is obviously more exposed to $\mathbb{H}af1$.

27 f4 ♜f3?

Black was eager to eliminate the h4-knight. On f3, however, instead of the expected respite through exchanges, the knight will be trapped. 27... $\mathbb{N}f7$ was essential.

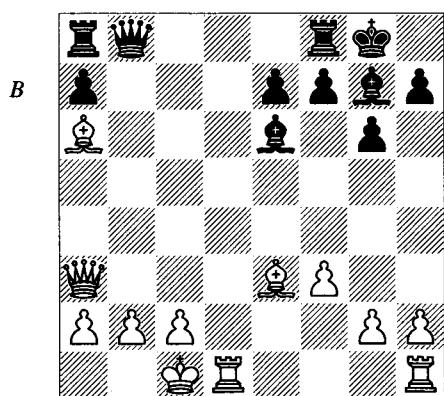
28 ♜xh7+

The g6-square is needed for the knight, after which the siege is laid to the f3-knight.

28...♜xh7 29 ♜g6 ♜d8 30 ♜ac1 ♜e8 31 ♜g3

There is no defence against 32 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$. Again, the threats develop quickly along the b1-h7 diagonal.

However, although for obvious reasons much more rarely, open diagonals sometimes work against White. Our next example is such a case.



Adams – Fedorov
Wijk aan Zee 2001

We recognize at once that this is a position arising from the Dragon. White has grabbed a pawn and now hopes to limit his opponent's counterplay: the a6-bishop controls the important square c8, while the dark-squared bishop is ready to oppose its fianchettoed counterpart by $\mathbb{Q}d4$. The struggle is entering the critical phase, when a crucial question must be answered: can Black use the open diagonals towards the white king to create meaningful threats?

16...♛e5

Now 17 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ could be met by 17... $\mathbb{W}g5+$ and the queen's rook can be activated too.

17 g3 ♜ad8

18 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ must be prevented and the pressure exerted on the dark-squared diagonal maintained.

18 ♜f4 ♜f6 19 ♜he1 ♜f5

The light-squared bishop adds to the pressure by targeting the c2-pawn. At the same time, the queen gains more room along the rank.

20 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 21 c3?

For a moment 21 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ seemed to me an easy solution to the problem, and although this is not quite so, it is certainly an improvement. 21... $\mathbb{B}c8$ (21... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ is less appealing) 22 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ and now:

a) 22... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ gives White the upper hand after 23... $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ or 23... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 24 $\mathbb{B}c3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xe7$.

b) 22... $\mathbb{W}g5+$ is better, when 23 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ repeats, while 23 f4 $\mathbb{W}h5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ (not 24 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$) 24... $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}xh2$ 26 $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 27 $\mathbb{B}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}g1+$ 28 $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ is satisfactory for Black.

Unfortunately, White follows his ambitions and by weakening the b1-h7 diagonal, he endangers the king on the second rank as well.

21...♛b6

Now 22... $\mathbb{W}f2$ is threatened.

22 ♜e3 ♜h6!

The a1-h8 diagonal was denied to the g7-bishop by 21 c3, but he finds a job on another line.

23 f4

23 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ loses to 23... $\mathbb{W}f2$.

23...♝c6

A new threat on each move: 24... $\mathbb{W}e4$ is threatened.

24 ♜d2

The alternative is 24 g4 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xe7$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 26 $\mathbb{B}b7$ $\mathbb{W}f6$.

24...♝d5

There is no peace for White any more.

25 ♜e2 e5! 26 ♜a4

26 $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\mathbb{W}h1+$ leaves White without a good continuation.

26...exf4 27 gxf4

If 27 $\mathbb{B}e8+$ then 27... $\mathbb{B}xe8$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}xa2$.

27...♞xf4!

A sign that the game is approaching its end (28 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}xa2$).

28 ♜e8+ ♜g7 29 ♜xf4 ♜xe8 30 ♜c4 ♜h1+

31 ♜f1 ♜g8 0-1

3 Weakness of the First and Second Ranks

In game after game we have seen the same lesson: weak squares are a sort of sick tissue in the position, brought about by faulty judgement. Their malady spreads around to other neighbouring squares and pawns, weakening them. As we have seen, sometimes the whole file or the whole diagonal on which a weak square lies suffers. As a rule, such files and diagonals are routes for the enemy forces. Bishops thrive on weakened diagonals and rooks prosper on such files. Unfortunately, the process of deterioration does not stop there. As the rook penetrates down the file, its influence spreads horizontally. Especially when it reaches the seventh rank, its strength reverberates along the rank: in the middlegame all sort of tactical possibilities crop up; in the endgame the pawns, which usually survive there until late on, become shaky and easily fall. Even more ill-omened is the penetration to the back rank, because the king dwells on it and its security is imperilled.

The mere appearance of the rook on the seventh rank in middlegame positions often entails very serious danger. In these situations just a small imprecision may lead to catastrophe. Who does not remember the end of the following short but memorable game (*see following diagram?*)

Seeking complications, Geller has just played the sharp 14... $\mathbb{W}d8-a5$.

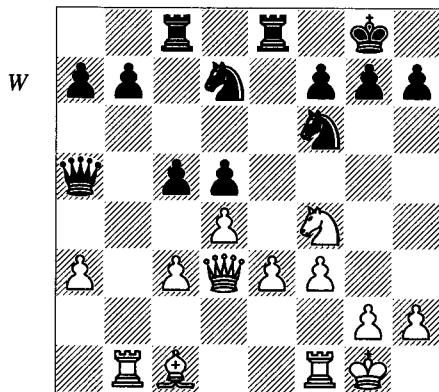
Black left the b7-pawn *en prise*, having concluded that after 15 $\mathbb{E}xb7 \mathbb{Q}b6$ the rook is trapped. However, White took the risk...

15 $\mathbb{E}xb7!$

The rook is in peril, but at the same time it brings hidden threats.

15... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16 $g4$

Trapping the rook is not that easy. 16...c4 17 $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ fails to 18 $\mathbb{E}xb6$ followed by 19 g5. Seeing what $\mathbb{W}f5$ implies, Kholmov proposed 16...g6. After 17 g5 c4 18 $\mathbb{W}c2 \mathbb{Q}fd7$ the rook is



Bronstein – Geller
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1961

still safe (19... $\mathbb{W}a6$ is not threatened due to 20 $\mathbb{E}xd7$ and 21 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$) and White has time for 19 h4, with the point 19... $\mathbb{E}ed8$ 20 h5 $\mathbb{W}a6$ (or: 20... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21 $\mathbb{W}h2$; 20... $\mathbb{E}c6$ 21 $\mathbb{h}xg6$ $\mathbb{f}xg6$ 22 e4) 21 $\mathbb{E}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 22 $\mathbb{h}xg6$ $\mathbb{f}xg6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$. There is also 19 a4 $\mathbb{E}ed8$ 20 $\mathbb{A}a3$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ 21 $\mathbb{E}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$, when White can choose between the quiet 22 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ and the sharp 22 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 23 $\mathbb{A}f6$.

However, Black decided to prevent g5 by more forceful means...

16...h6?

This move temporarily prevents g5, but just weakens the black king's position and provokes the unpleasant game continuation...

17 h4 cxd4

Trapping the rook is infeasible, and Black seeks counterplay on the open c-file.

18 g5 dxe3

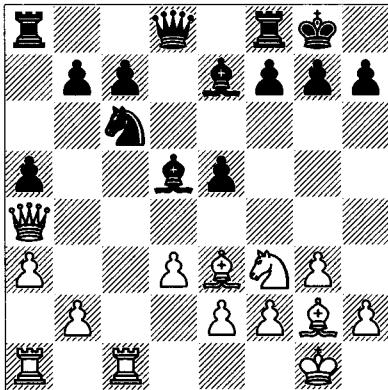
On 18... $\mathbb{E}xc3$ White continues 19 $\mathbb{W}f5$, but at first glance the text-move keeps the fight in suspense. However, Bronstein's rejoinder shatters all illusions...

19 $\mathbb{g}xf6$ $\mathbb{E}xc3$ 20 $\mathbb{W}g6!$ 1-0

The *quietus*!

At the time this miniature adorned many magazines and books, but its brilliant final stroke is such a striking example of the rook on the seventh rank and the danger it implies that I simply had to use it. The game which follows will remind you by its motif of the same illusions Geller nurtured when he sacrificed the b7-pawn.

B



Botvinnik – Portisch
Monte Carlo 1968

The early phase of the game favoured White. We reach such an assessment rather easily: a comparison of the two pawn-structures simply tells all. Against the restricted, but firm and healthy white formation stands the black pawn line, weakened by ...a5 and susceptible to pressure on the c-file. To make things worse, Black continues with a slow and routine manoeuvre...

13... $\mathbb{E}e8$ 14 $\mathbb{H}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8?$!

While the pressure on the c-file grows due to White doubling rooks, Black loses time. Immediate steps should have been taken to lessen the pressure by 13... $\mathbb{A}d6$ or 14... $\mathbb{A}d6$.

15 $\mathbb{H}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8?$

15... $e4$, which judging from the previous moves was on Black's mind, now proves inadequate. After 16 $dxe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ (16... $\mathbb{A}xe4$ is bad due to 17 $\mathbb{W}b5$) 17 $\mathbb{H}d2$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 18 $\mathbb{H}c4$ the light-squared bishop must leave its central post and Black's queenside remains very much exposed. 15... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ or even the belated 15... $\mathbb{A}d6$ is better, but like Geller in the above game Portisch leaves a pawn *en prise*, believing he would trap the rook.

16 $\mathbb{H}xc7!$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17 $\mathbb{H}1xc6!$ $bxc6$ 18 $\mathbb{H}xf7!$

An unexpected blow: now 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ would lose to 19 $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$. Thus White keeps his precious rook on the seventh rank and his attacking chances in a position of approximate material equality.

18... $h6$ 19 $\mathbb{H}b7$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 20 $\mathbb{W}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

20... $\mathbb{W}e6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ costs Black another pawn, leading to a hopeless endgame for him.

21 $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

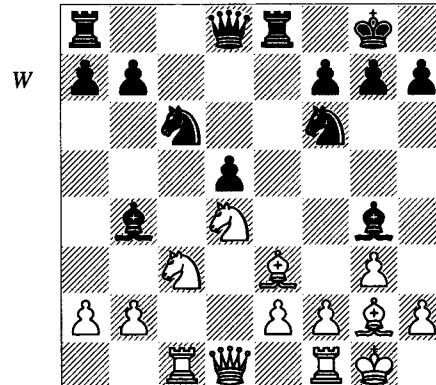
The holes around the king make some small tactical niceties possible.

21... $\mathbb{W}xb7$

21... $\mathbb{W}e6$ would only avoid the ensuing sudden collapse.

22 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$ $g6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ 1-0

A debacle for Black, but two years earlier Portisch was on the winning side of an equally brilliant attack based on a rook on the seventh rank:



Portisch – Donner
Santa Monica 1966

Reaching the critical moment of the transition into the middlegame, when the activity of the black pieces apparently matches the weakness of the isolated pawn, Portisch takes a courageous decision:

12 $\mathbb{W}b3?$

White sacrifices a pawn and Black can hardly refuse the offer...

12... $\mathbb{A}xc3$ 13 $\mathbb{H}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$

After 14... $\mathbb{W}xe2$ 15 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{H}b8$ 16 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $gxf6$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xa7$ $\mathbb{H}bx b2$ (or 17... $\mathbb{H}exb2$ 18 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{H}8b4$ 19 $\mathbb{H}c4$) 18 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19 $a4$ $\mathbb{H}ed2$ 20 $\mathbb{W}h4$ the position of the black king is insecure; e.g.

20...d4 21 $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22 $\mathbb{B}f4$. However, taking with the bishop looks perfectly safe.

15 $\mathbb{B}fc1$

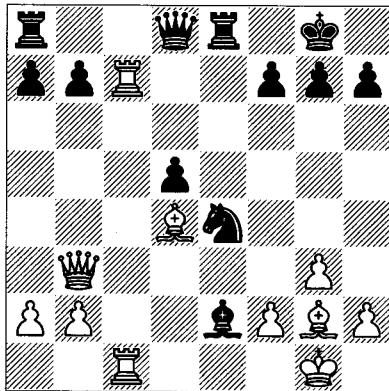
The fog has cleared and we understand fully the purpose behind the pawn sacrifice. White commands the open c-file and threatens to penetrate to the seventh rank to regain his investment with some interest.

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

After 15... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ Black can protect the vulnerable rank in the event of 16 $\mathbb{B}c7$ $\mathbb{B}e7$, but after the intended 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ the f7-point remains threatened and vulnerable.

16 $\mathbb{B}c7$ (D)

B



16... $\mathbb{Q}a6?$

The critical line is 16... $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18 $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 20 $\mathbb{B}7xc4$, when White is relying on the weakness of the d5-pawn.

17 $\mathbb{B}f3$

White has a spatial advantage while Black's defensive force obviously lacks coordination. This enables White to strike from the other side – the f7-pawn has remained sensitive.

17... $\mathbb{Q}g5$

The coordinated pressure exerted by the centralized bishop and the rook on the seventh rank is tremendous and can hardly be parried successfully. 17... $\mathbb{B}f8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}f5$ or 17... $f6$ 18 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $g6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{B}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{B}xc7$ 21 $\mathbb{B}xc7$ leads to disaster for Black, but the logical 17... $\mathbb{B}e7$ appears inadequate as well. Apart from the quiet 18 $\mathbb{B}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $f5$ 20 $\mathbb{W}f5$, which wins back the material while keeping all the advantages of the position, Portisch had in mind something more dramatic: 18 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $f5$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xg7+$

$\mathbb{B}xg7$ 20 $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{B}cc7$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 22 $\mathbb{B}cf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23 $h4$, threatening $\mathbb{Q}f3-h5$.

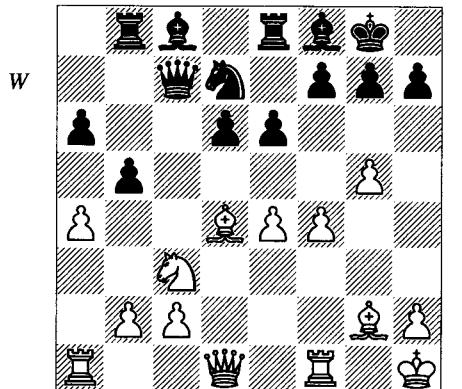
18 $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$

Played to protect the d5-pawn. The main point of the combination remained hidden until Portisch demonstrated 18... $\mathbb{W}xc7$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xg5!$ $f6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (or 20... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21 $\mathbb{B}xc7$ $\mathbb{B}e1+22$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+24$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$, etc.) 21 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (22 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+!$ mates). The text-move is just a one-move remedy.

19 $\mathbb{B}xb7$ 1-0

19... $f6$ 20 $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ and 19... $g6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}e5$ $f6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $fxg5$ 23 $\mathbb{B}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ are bad enough.

Extra caution is necessary whenever an enemy rook reaches our second rank, but chess is made of illusions and mirages and no matter how rich our experience, from time to time we fall into the same pitfall.



Ivanchuk – Topalov

Novgorod 1996

Black has just thrown caution to the wind by playing 16... $b7-b5$, seeking queenside counterplay but at the cost of surrendering the a-file to White.

17 $axb5$ $axb5$ 18 $\mathbb{B}a7$ $\mathbb{W}d8$

18... $\mathbb{W}c6$ exposes Black to 19 $f5$, after which 19... $b4$ fails to 20 $fxe6$ $fxe6$ 21 $e5$ $d5$ 22 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $exd5$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xd5+$, etc.

19 $b4!$

Black's expansion on the queenside has been stopped and the knight has retained its important position, bearing down on the centre.

19... $e5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $exf4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 23 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6?$

Black fails to perceive the need for 23... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (or the same idea a move earlier). The power of the white rooks is concentrated on f7, but set on expelling the rook from the seventh rank, Black overlooks the hidden point and White now lands a weighty blow.

24 g6!!

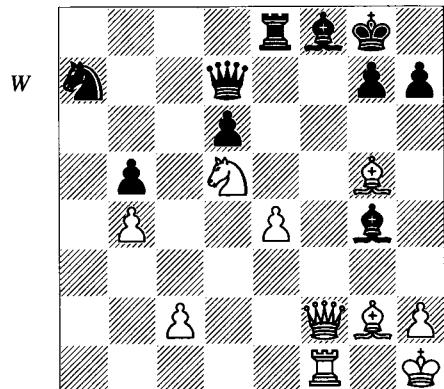
The idea is to vacate the g5-square, so that now 24...hxg6 could be punished by 25 $\mathbb{R}xf7$ and 24...fxg6 by 25 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 27 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 28 $\mathbb{W}h4$ with a crushing attack. Caught in a predicament, Black decides to eliminate the ominous rook on the seventh rank, but his problems persist.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 25 $\mathbb{G}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 27 $\mathbb{F}xe8\mathbb{W}$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$

On 27... $\mathbb{W}xe8$ Ivanchuk demonstrated 28 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (or 28...gx6 29 $\mathbb{R}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30 e5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d5$) 29 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{W}xg4$ 30 $\mathbb{W}f2$ and now it is the eighth rank in question; a common occurrence – as soon as the seventh rank becomes weak, the back rank is in trouble as well.

28 $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ (D)

28... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ loses to 29 $\mathbb{W}xf8+$ $\mathbb{R}xf8$ 30 $\mathbb{R}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f6$.



29 e5!

White threatens 30 $\mathbb{Q}c7$, when the g2-bishop would join the final attack.

29...h6

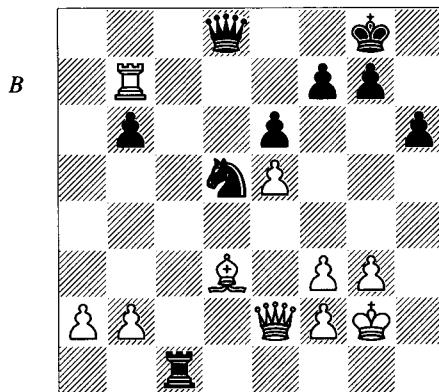
29... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ helps little in view of 30 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 31 e6.

30 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ 1-0

34... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ loses to 35 $\mathbb{W}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 36 $\mathbb{W}g6$.

f7 is the most common target whenever a rook breaks in to the seventh rank. The reason

is equally common: the king usually castles kingside.



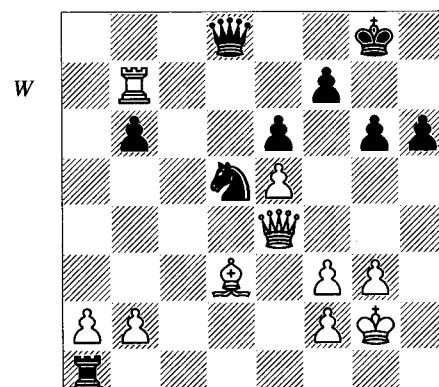
Karpov – Geller
Moscow 1981

Karpov's last move was 29 $\mathbb{Q}a6-d3$, which both prevented 29... $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 30 $\mathbb{G}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}h4$, and threatened 31 $\mathbb{W}e4$, a threat which Geller unjustly underrates.

29... $\mathbb{E}a1?$

Preparing 30...g6, but Black should play the immediate 29...g6, parrying 30 $\mathbb{W}d2$ by 30... $\mathbb{E}c7$ 31 $\mathbb{R}xc7$ $\mathbb{W}xc7$, entering an endgame a pawn down. With the text-move, he misses the unusual tactical power of the rook on the seventh rank.

30 $\mathbb{W}e4$ g6 (D)



31 $\mathbb{R}xf7?$

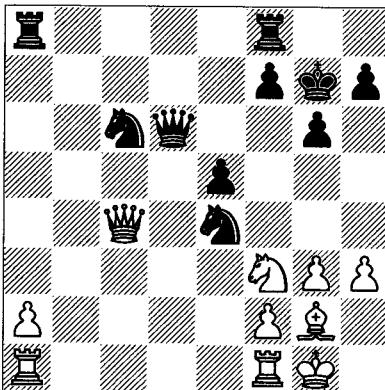
It was probably the reduced number of pieces that deceived Black.

31... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 32 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33 $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ 1-0

33... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$, 33... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ and 33... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}h7+\mathbb{Q}f7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ all lead to defeat.

As a rule, Black's defence is even more compromised when the middlegame complications find the seventh rank open:

B



Portisch – Kozma
Reykjavik tt 1957

Black has a problem: 23... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24 $\mathbb{R}fd1$ costs him a pawn, so in order to avoid this loss he must open the seventh rank.

23... $f5$ 24 $\mathbb{R}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 25 $\mathbb{R}d7+\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26 $\mathbb{R}c1$ $\mathbb{R}ac8$

26... $\mathbb{R}fc8$ 27 $\mathbb{R}d5$ cannot be recommended to Black.

27 $\mathbb{W}a6$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 28 $\mathbb{W}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29 $\mathbb{R}c7$

Black has parried the immediate threats, but the open rank is a permanent disadvantage, which the exchange of pieces makes more obvious.

29... $\mathbb{R}xc7$ 30 $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$

Not, of course, 30... $\mathbb{R}c8$ due to 31 $\mathbb{Q}g5$, but the counter-threats created by the text-move apparently match the shortcomings of the black pawn-structure. However, his king's position remains highly sensitive.

31 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ $\mathbb{W}xa2$

If 31... $\mathbb{W}e8$, then 32 $\mathbb{R}b1$ and the inevitable 33 $\mathbb{R}b7$ accentuates Black's weakness.

32 $\mathbb{W}e7$ $\mathbb{W}g8$ 33 $\mathbb{R}c7$ $h6$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

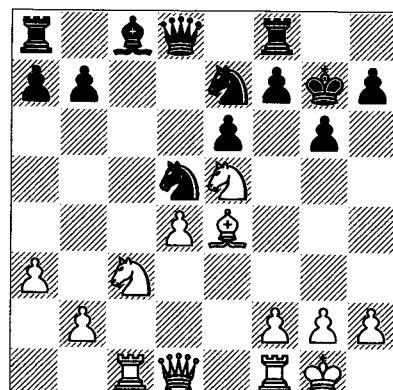
When the king is exposed, tactics work: 34... $hxg5$ loses to 35 $\mathbb{R}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 36 $\mathbb{W}c5$ and the queen is lost.

35 $\mathbb{R}xc6$ $hxg5$ 36 $\mathbb{R}xf6$

...and the struggle was decided.

The finishing touch emphasizes again the consequences caused by the open seventh rank. However, occupying the seventh rank does not always entail tactical solutions. Just by being there, rooks squeeze the opponent and reduce his options, causing another sort of problems.

B



Smyslov – Ribli
London Ct (7) 1983

White has just played 15 $\mathbb{R}a1-c1$, keeping the tension and waiting to see how Black intends to finish his development.

15... $b6$

15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16 $\mathbb{R}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $exd5$ 18 $\mathbb{W}b3$ would give Black an unpleasant endgame.

16 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 18 $\mathbb{R}c7$

Both players have got what they wanted: Black – the strong d5-square and the long diagonal; White – the open file and the seventh rank. The rook is there to stay: an attempt to expel it from c7 by 18... $\mathbb{W}d6$ would be met by 19 $\mathbb{R}xf7+$ $\mathbb{R}xf7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$, etc.

18... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{R}ad8$

Otherwise $\mathbb{R}d7$.

20 $\mathbb{R}d1$ $a5$ 21 $h4!$

It turns out that the pressure exerted on the diagonal matters little, but the pressure on the seventh rank is already becoming annoying. White threatens 22 $h5$, loosening Black's king's position.

21... $\mathbb{R}c8$ 22 $\mathbb{R}d7$ $\mathbb{W}e4$ 23 $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Better is 23... $h6$ 24 $\mathbb{W}g3$ (after 24 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 26 $\mathbb{R}xb7$ $\mathbb{R}c6$ Black has some drawing chances) 24... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 25 $\mathbb{R}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (25... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ is weaker owing to 26 $f3$ and now

26... $\mathbb{W}c2$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ or 26... $\mathbb{W}f5$ 27 $\mathbb{E}e1$; note also that Black cannot get rid of the a7-rook by opposing it – 25... $\mathbb{B}a8$ 26 $\mathbb{B}c7$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ loses to 27 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$.

24 f3

Obvious but powerful: based on 24... $\mathbb{W}c2$ 25 $\mathbb{B}c1$ and 24... $\mathbb{W}e2$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g4$, the pawn move annuls the pressure on the light-squared diagonal and creates the conditions for a favourable endgame.

24... $\mathbb{W}f5$ 25 $\mathbb{B}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}a4??!$

Stronger is 25... $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 26 $hxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$, even if it costs the b6-pawn.

26 $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{B}c2$

Black has finally penetrated the seventh rank too, but at the cost of deteriorated coordination of his pieces, and with less effect. The position of the white king is much healthier. If Black had foreseen the threat carried out on move 29, he might have chosen 26... $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but then the pin by 27 $\mathbb{B}c1$ is most unpleasant.

27 b4 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 28 bxa5 bxa5 29 $\mathbb{E}e4!!$

Grabbing the pawn would allow Black to activate his king's rook. White wants more. Aware of the fact that the exchange of queens leads into a superior endgame, he brings the other rook into action as well.

29...h6 30 $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{B}b2$ 31 $\mathbb{B}g4$

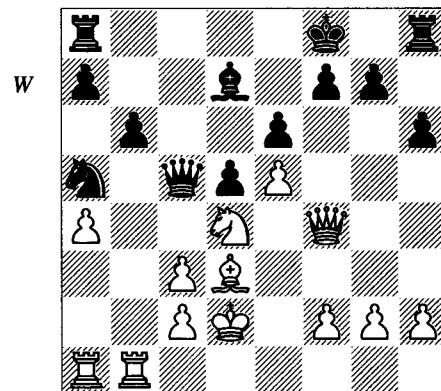
Sitting on a7, the rook provokes a further weakening of the already loose pawn-structure – the g6-pawn hangs. 31 $\mathbb{B}f4$ is also good, though after 31... $\mathbb{W}c2$, White should play 32 $\mathbb{B}g4$ g5 33 $\mathbb{Q}xf7!$, rather than 32 $\mathbb{B}axf7+?$ $\mathbb{B}xf7$ 33 $\mathbb{B}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$.

31...g5 32 hxg5 h5 33 $\mathbb{B}g3$ h4 34 $\mathbb{B}g4$ h3 35 g6 h2+ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{B}h8+$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}xg2+$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{W}c2+$ 39 $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{B}h2+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}f1+$ 42 $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{W}h1+$ 1-0

Black runs out of checks after 43 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}e1+$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{W}h1$ 45 $\mathbb{B}g3$ and if 45... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 46 $\mathbb{B}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}h2$ 48 $\mathbb{B}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ then 49 $\mathbb{Q}d7$, etc.

From the last two games we draw a simple lesson: when there are no tactical blows, the least that a rook on the seventh rank can offer in the middlegame is to limit the opponent's possibilities and stifle his counterplay. In comparison, the prospects of those who are handicapped by the penetration by the opponent's rook to the seventh rank in the endgame are even gloomier. The road is long, but when we fall into such

positions, we usually find it difficult to extricate ourselves from the predicament.



Leko – Hübner

Dortmund 2000

This complex position arose from the French Defence. Apart from the passive rook on h8, everything at first glance looks satisfactory for Black. The a4-pawn is blockaded, ... $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ is always at hand, and ... $\mathbb{B}c8$ is threatened. However, the next move forces a reassessment.

17 $\mathbb{Q}a6!!$

It was important to deny the a8-rook access to c8. At the same time we note in passing that now 17... $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ would not bother White. 18 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ (or 18... $\mathbb{B}xc4$) 19 a5 leads to an advantageous position in which the white knight is superior to the black bishop.

17... $\mathbb{Q}c8??!$

Black is eager to get rid of the nuisance on a6, but White will not surrender the c4-square to the a5-knight. This move ends up worsening the position of the bishop.

18 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

18...a6 would just weaken the b6-pawn, while 18... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ obviously does not work due to 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$. 18... $\mathbb{Q}g8$, though, came into consideration.

19 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{B}b8??!$

Black wants to retain material equality. The exchange of bishops by 20... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ would improve his chances in the endgame in spite of the inevitable loss of a pawn.

21 a5 $\mathbb{W}g5??!$

21... $\mathbb{W}c5$ would be answered by 22 $\mathbb{W}b4$ and 21... $\mathbb{W}c7$ by 22 $\mathbb{W}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 23 $\mathbb{W}d6$. In all these

continuations Black's basic problem remains his bishop. After the exchange of queens its inferiority will be greater. Therefore 21... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ was imperative. Black probably overrated the opening of the h-file.

22 $\mathbb{W}xg5$ hxg5 23 axb6 axb6

23... $\mathbb{R}xb6$ 24 $\mathbb{R}xb6$ axb6 25 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ is not very encouraging for Black.

24 $\mathbb{Q}a7!$

It's the little details that distinguish the play of strong grandmasters. Now 24... $\mathbb{R}xh2$ does not work due to 25 $\mathbb{R}ba1$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26 $\mathbb{R}c7$.

24...f6 25 c4!

Another fine point: White is seeking another open file.

25... $\mathbb{R}h4$

25...dxc4 26 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ would make possible the winning 27 $\mathbb{R}d1$. In the case of 25...fxe5 White replies 26 c5 b5 27 $\mathbb{R}c7$.

26 exd5 $\mathbb{R}d4+$

After 26...exd5 27 $\mathbb{R}e1$ Black has run out of good moves.

27 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

27 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ fxe5 28 $\mathbb{R}ba1$ also wins.

27...fxe5 28 $\mathbb{R}b4$ exd5 29 $\mathbb{R}xd4$ exd4+ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 32 $\mathbb{R}a8$

...and White entered a won bishop endgame.

a8-knight into play by 28... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ would be punished at once by 29 $b5$, when the rook penetrates the defenceless seventh rank. Black's forces are scattered across the board, lacking coordination. He must exercise great caution to hold on.

28...f6 29 $\mathbb{Q}b1!$

The b-pawn will create the natural breakthrough on the c-file and the knight moves to a3 to make it possible at the proper moment.

29... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

Although apparently closed, the position provides routes by which White can penetrate. After 30... $\mathbb{R}c8$ Black would be ready to oppose the white rooks on the critical file, but then the a3-knight would enter via c4. The text-move threatens 31...b5; the immediate 30...b5 would be met by 31 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 32 $\mathbb{R}a3$ and the knight would move to c5, finding new targets.

31 b5!

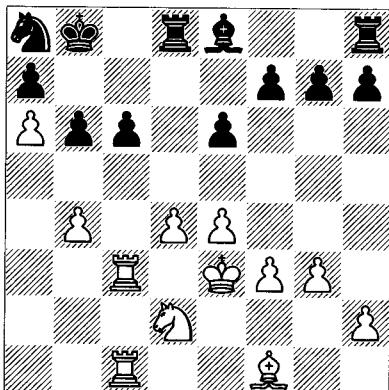
It's now or maybe never.

31... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$

It is strange that numerous annotators, including Botvinnik himself, do not even mention 32 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$! $cx b5$ 33 $\mathbb{R}c7$. After 33... $\mathbb{R}c8$ 34 $\mathbb{R}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 35 $\mathbb{R}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 36 $\mathbb{R}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 37 $\mathbb{R}f7$ Black is in trouble.

32... $\mathbb{R}xb5$ 33 $\mathbb{R}c7$ (D)

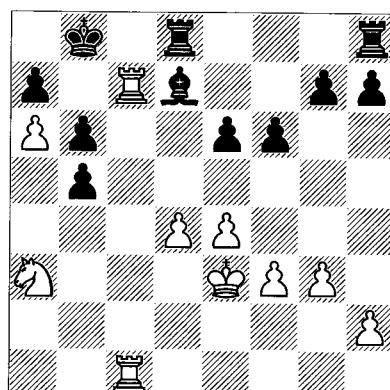
B



**Botvinnik – Vidmar
Groningen 1946**

This endgame with rooks and minor pieces is clearly better for White, due to his spatial advantage and the pressure exerted on the semi-open c-file, on which Black is especially sensitive. So for instance the attempt to bring the

B



The critical position. The rook has reached the desired destination. White threatens to double rooks, and 'obvious' moves like 33...b4 or 33... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ won't do; the former because of 34 $\mathbb{R}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 35 $\mathbb{R}cc7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 36 $\mathbb{R}xa7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 37 $\mathbb{R}b5$ followed by mate; the latter because of 34 $\mathbb{R}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 35 $\mathbb{R}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 36 $\mathbb{R}xb5$ with a won endgame. 33... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ apparently does not work

either due to 34 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (or 36... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}7c6$) 37 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ (or 37... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}1c6$) 38 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 39 d5 exd5 40 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ b5 41 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}c3$.

33... $\mathbb{Q}c8$??

We owe to Botvinnik the variation that offered Black some hope – 33... $\mathbb{Q}c8$! 34 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$!! 35 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, cutting the white king off from the passed b-pawn. However, even here Black is not safe. For instance: 39 d5 (39 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ also attracts attention) 39...exd5 40 exd5 b5 41 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ b4 42 d6 b3 43 d7 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ (or 43... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}d2$) 44 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ (or 44...b2 45 d8 \mathbb{Q} $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}b4$) 45 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ (45...b2 would fail to 46 d8 \mathbb{Q} + 46 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, etc. Vidmar relied on the fact that the c1-rook will not be defended, but it proved a miscalculation....

34 $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}hc8$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ h6 38 $\mathbb{Q}xa7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 42 g4 e5 43 d5 $\mathbb{Q}1c5$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}xb8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ 48 a7+ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e8$

...and White reached a winning position by capturing the f6-pawn.

17...exd5 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ is shattering.

18 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

The breakthrough results in the occupation of the seventh rank, with the usual results.

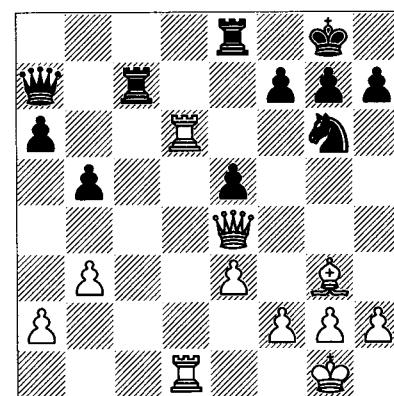
20... $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}a6$

The c6-pawn is besieged and doomed.

21...e5 22 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

White's passed pawn represents a clear advantage. Having occupied the seventh rank, all was decided there.

However, on many occasions the weakness of the seventh rank also pervades the back rank.



Rubinstein – Maroczy
Gothenburg 1920

In order to protect the seventh rank Maroczy has just played 28... $\mathbb{Q}c8-c7$, but direct threats are not the only measures at White's disposal.

29 h4!

The pawn advance cannot be stopped. It leads inevitably to the deterioration of the presently unstable coordination of the black pieces.

29...f6 30 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 31 h5

31 $\mathbb{Q}d8$! wins more quickly.

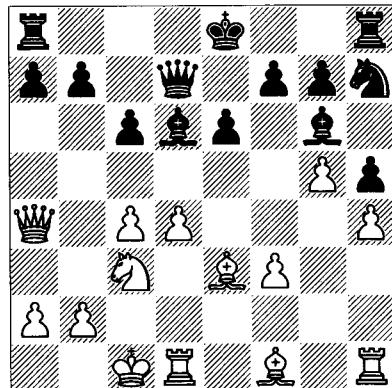
31... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 32 h6 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Now the back rank is vulnerable, and the f6-pawn shaky.

33... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 1-0

35... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ loses to 36 $\mathbb{Q}e7$. Against White's coordinated attack, the defence of the sensitive ranks was an impossible task.

The seventh rank exposed to raids by the opponent's rooks forebodes troubles, but the

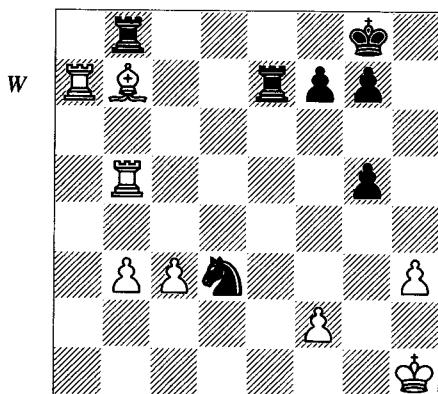


Keres – Euwe
Nordwijk 1938

Two details strike the eye in this game of the young Keres. His wedge on g5 has spoilt the normal coordination of the black pieces and Black is still behind in development. Keres finds an original way to exploit these factors:

16 c5! $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17 d5! 0-0

exposed back rank spells shocking disasters. If left undefended just for a second, it may lead to sudden collapse.



Topalov – Morozevich
Cannes 2002

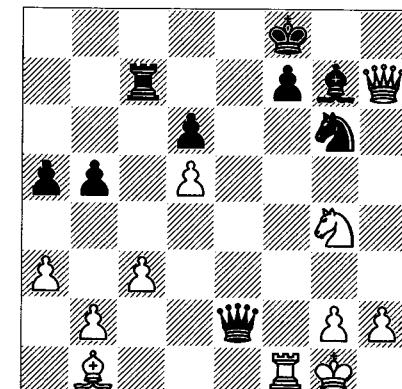
Topalov's next move put the eighth rank under a magnifying glass:

33 $\mathbb{A}e4!$ 1-0

All the white pieces are *en prise*, but none can be taken due to mate or heavy material loss.

1... $\mathbb{A}xc3!$ 2 $\mathbb{W}f1 \mathbb{A}c8!$ 3 $\mathbb{A}xd4 \mathbb{Q}xd4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}h1$
1-0

The first rank became White's own trap. Left vulnerable for an instant, it caused his sudden death; an unpleasant experience shared by many...



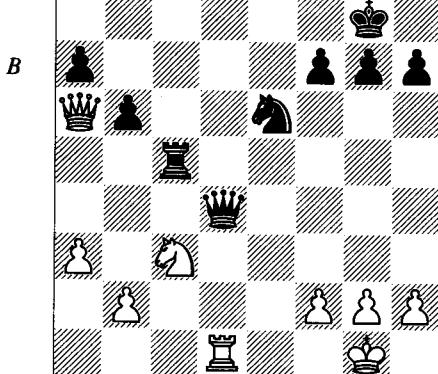
Singh – Harikrishna
Calcutta 2001

Black is in some trouble, but manages to trick his opponent...

36... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ 37 $\mathbb{A}xf4??$

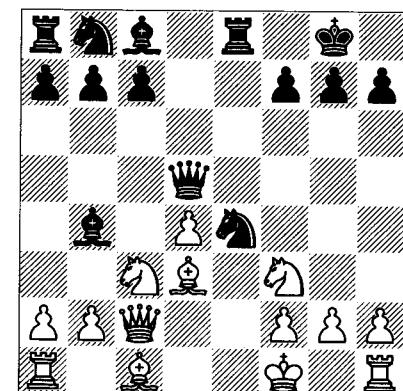
37 $\mathbb{Q}f2$? is no good due to 37... $\mathbb{W}xb2$, but 37 $\mathbb{W}e4!$ keeps an advantage.

37... $\mathbb{Q}d4+!$ 0-1



E. Poliak – Levin
Kiev 1949

White has just attacked the queen and it seems that he will win the a7-pawn. He saw 1... $\mathbb{A}xc3$, based on the weakness of his back rank, but seeing the cure in 2 $\mathbb{W}f1$, decided to use the 'apparent' weakness as a trap. However, what seemed false turned out to be real.



Janowski – Marshall
Biarritz (3) 1912

White has lost the right to castle, but when playing 11 $\mathbb{Q}b1-c3$ he hoped for the best. His

surprise at the continuation was all the more unpleasant...

11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12 $bxc3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3!$

The first shock: the back rank is weak.

13 $cxb4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

The weakness is still there, while the intended 14 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ fails to 14... $\mathbb{Q}h3!$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$.

14 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4!$

A new blow, again based on the king's vulnerability.

15 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16 $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$

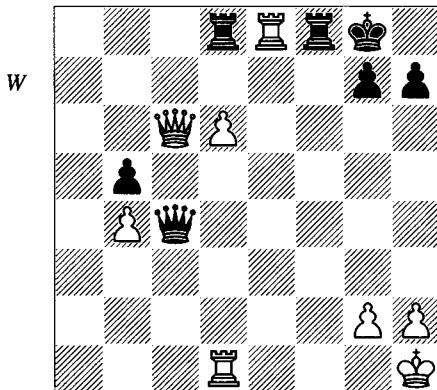
White has grabbed a piece, but he has no solution for the king's weakness.

20 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}8e3$

Simpler is 20... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

21 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 0-1

We find similar examples in extraordinary abundance, characterized by a mating attack or a huge material loss. Very often the weakness is exploited with the help of a passed pawn or the paralysing effect of a pin, which are cases I find very common in master practice. I shall limit my choice to just a few examples.



Najdorf – Ju. Bolbochan
Buenos Aires 1948

Possessing a strong advanced passed pawn, Najdorf exploits Black's vulnerable back rank in a neat manner.

35 $\mathbb{Q}xd8!$

This is possible because after 35... $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 37 d7 nothing can stop the pawn.

35... $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

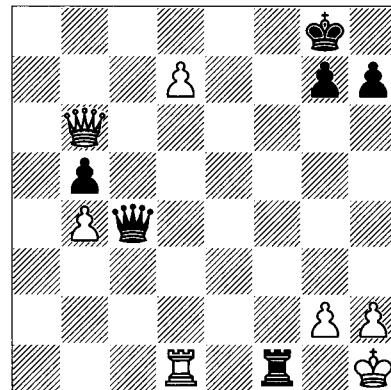
By 36... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ Black defends his weakness, but only temporarily. Then 37 d7 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$

$\mathbb{Q}h8$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ finds a new weak spot on e8. After 39...h6 (or 39...g6 40 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}e7$) 40 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 41 h3 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ there is no response.

37 d7!

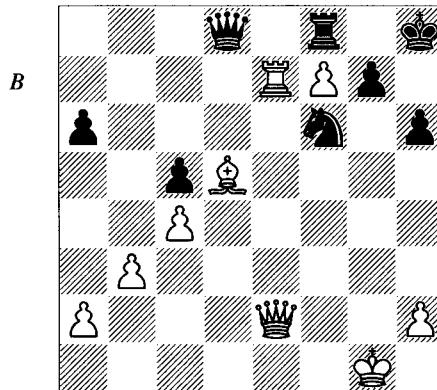
Ignoring the apparent weakness of his own back rank, White insists on his plan – and rightly so.

37... $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ (D)



38 $\mathbb{Q}g1!!$ 1-0

After 38... $\mathbb{Q}xg1+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ it is all over.



Sutovsky – Movsesian
Ohrid Ech 2001

White has just played 48 $\mathbb{Q}e5-e7$ preparing the pragmatic $\mathbb{Q}e5-c7$. Black now made White's job nice and easy:

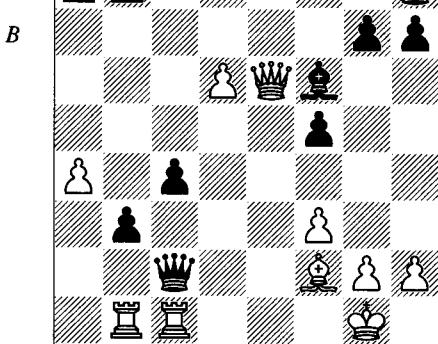
48... $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$

After 49... $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ (insufficient) is 50... $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 53

$\mathbb{W}e4$ g5 54 $\mathbb{B}xe6$, etc.) 51 $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g5+$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ there are no more checks.

50 $\mathbb{B}xf8+$ $\mathbb{W}xf8$ 51 $\mathbb{W}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 52 b4!

Now the passed pawn cannot be stopped due to the paralysis on the eighth rank: 52... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 53 $\mathbb{W}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 54 bxc5 or 52...cxb4 53 c5 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 54 $\mathbb{W}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 55 c6, etc.



Hort – Keres
Oberhausen Echt 1961

Basing his decision on the weakness of the first rank and the strength of his advancing passed pawns, Keres continued:

35... $\mathbb{W}xc1+$!

When Keres played this sacrifice in time-trouble, Hort, who was just in the process of getting up and then, seeing this move, tried to change direction downwards, fell from his chair to the floor. Malicious tongues immediately construed a story that Keres's move was so strong that it knocked poor Vlastimil to the ground.

36 $\mathbb{B}xc1$ b2 37 $\mathbb{B}b1$ c3 38 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{B}xa4$ 39 d7

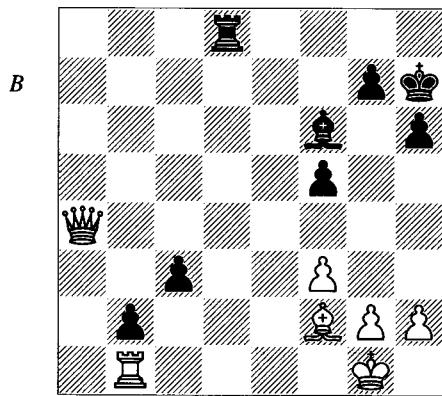
White's last hope was Black's temporary weakness on the back rank. The threat could be parried simply by 39... $\mathbb{B}g8$, after which 40... $\mathbb{B}a1$ would decide. But, short of time, Keres misses that elegant defence and things get complicated again...

39...h6? 40 $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 41 d8 $\mathbb{W}?$

By now the players had passed the time-control and White sealed his move – apparently winning easily, but in effect losing a position where he could still hold a draw. Correct is 41 $\mathbb{W}xb8!$ c2 (not 41... $\mathbb{B}a1$?, when 42 $\mathbb{B}e1!$ wins)

42 $\mathbb{W}xb2!$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$ 43 $\mathbb{B}f1$ $\mathbb{B}a8$ 44 $\mathbb{B}b6$. But capturing the a4-rook seemed much more important.

41... $\mathbb{B}xd8$ 42 $\mathbb{W}xa4$ (D)



42... $\mathbb{B}d2!!$

This fascinating position kept many of us busy until the early hours, although our team was not involved and the result did not affect us. White is a whole queen up, but cannot parry the numerous threats because he is weak on the back rank.

43 $\mathbb{B}xb2??$

As Keres pointed out, he expected the more tenacious 43 $\mathbb{W}b5$ c2 44 $\mathbb{W}f1$! (in case of 44 $\mathbb{W}xf5+$ there is 44...g6 45 $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{B}xc2$ 46 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!$) 44... $\mathbb{B}d5!$ (but not 44...cxb1 \mathbb{W} 45 $\mathbb{W}xb1$ $\mathbb{B}d6$ 46 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{B}a6$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ g6 48 $\mathbb{W}c2!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 50 $\mathbb{W}b1!$) 45 $\mathbb{A}e3$ (or 45 g3 cxb1 \mathbb{W} 46 $\mathbb{W}xb1$ g6! 47 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$, after which the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{A}5-a1$ wins; no better is 45 g4 $\mathbb{A}5!$ 46 $\mathbb{B}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 47 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{B}a1$ 48 $\mathbb{W}xal$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ f4xg4 50 fxg4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and 51... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ wins) 45...cxb1 \mathbb{W} 46 $\mathbb{W}xb1$ $\mathbb{A}5$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ 48 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{A}1$ 49 $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ and there is no perpetual check.

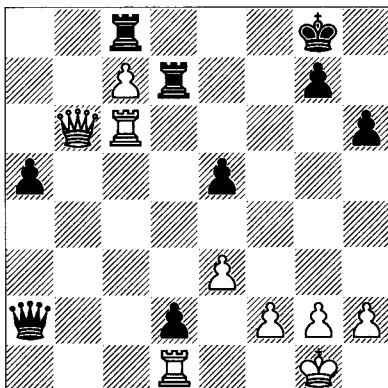
43... $\mathbb{C}xb2$ 44 $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 45 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{B}b8!$

Constantly playing on the weakness of the first rank, Black is careful not to afford his opponent a second of relief.

46 $\mathbb{W}b1$ g6 47 g4 $\mathbb{B}a8$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{B}a1$ 49 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{B}1$ 50 $\mathbb{W}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{B}f1+$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ f4+ 53 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}c1+0-1$

The lesson is straightforward: see that your back rank is secure. Viktor Korchnoi carefully followed this advice when he reached this position in one of his candidates matches...

W



Korchnoi – Spassky
Belgrade Ct (7) 1977

Everything looked clear at this point. One would expect 30 $\mathbb{W}b7 \mathbb{E}xc7$ (or 30... $\mathbb{E}dxc7$ 31 $\mathbb{E}xc7$) 31 $\mathbb{E}xc7$, when the only reasonable attempt, 31... $\mathbb{W}a4$, fails to 32 $\mathbb{E}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 33 $\mathbb{W}b1+$. Yet the mere fact that White's back rank is a potential problem puts a strong player on the alert immediately. After considering his options, Korchnoi surprised the audience and played an unassuming quiet move.

30 h3!

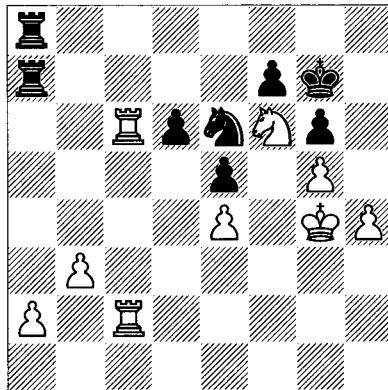
White saw the pitfall if he ignored the vulnerability of his back rank. Having examined 30 $\mathbb{W}b7?$, he noticed the devilish reply 30... $\mathbb{W}a4!!$, when 31 $\mathbb{E}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32 $\mathbb{W}g8+?$ $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 33 $c8\mathbb{W}+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ is winning for Black: 34 $\mathbb{E}xd2$ loses to 34... $\mathbb{W}d1+$, 34 $\mathbb{E}f1$ to 34... $d1\mathbb{W}$ and 34 $\mathbb{E}c2$ to 34... $\mathbb{W}a1!$. The escape square on h2 parries Black's threats and keeps White's own threats very much alive.

30... $\mathbb{W}a4$ 31 $\mathbb{E}xd2$! $\mathbb{E}xd2$ 32 $\mathbb{W}b7 \mathbb{E}dd8$ 33 $cx d8\mathbb{W}+$ $\mathbb{E}xd8$ 34 $\mathbb{E}c7$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $e4$ 36 $\mathbb{W}xe4$

White has a winning advantage.

In our next example Black started to think about his first rank too late.

W



Ye Jiangchuan – Wang Zili
Beijing 2000

What worries Black in this position is not so much his material inferiority as the weakness of his back rank and the miserable position of his king. White's next move emphasizes its rueful state at once:

68 $\mathbb{E}c8!$

By giving up a pawn, White takes control of the eighth rank.

68... $\mathbb{E}xa2$ 69 $\mathbb{E}e8!$

The hidden idea: now 69... $\mathbb{E}xe8$ loses the exchange, while 69... $\mathbb{E}xc2$ loses the rank. At the same time 70 $\mathbb{E}cc8$ threatens to close the case.

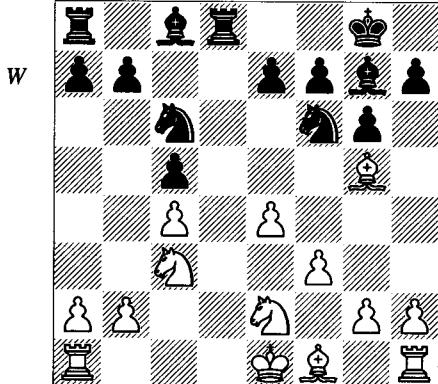
69... $\mathbb{E}a1$ 70 $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 71 $\mathbb{E}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 72 $\mathbb{E}b8$ $\mathbb{E}c3$ 73 $b4$ $\mathbb{E}c4$ 74 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 1-0

When the pawn reaches b7, $\mathbb{E}xf8$ will win.

Paralysed on the back rank, Black can only watch. The rook on the seventh is always menacing. On the eighth, if it does not win outright, it ties our hands and turns the struggle into slow, hopeless death.

4 Outposts

Having examined a large number of examples from grandmaster practice, we have sharpened our awareness of the close links between a weakness in space and the strength of pieces. Their interrelationship is constant, but constantly changeable. The static weakness of a square depends on the dynamic force of pieces which target it and make use of it. Their mutual dependence (fulfilment) reaches its peak when a strong piece occupies a strong square, a hole on an open file. Aron Nimzowitsch called this an outpost. Most commonly it is a minor piece (but it can also be a rook) on a central square. By its very position, such a piece is a major factor in the struggle ahead. It cramps the opponent, limits his activity to defence and at the same time, as a rule, it supports action on either of the wings. Besides, by opening and closing the file at will, it acts as a key to the file. Whatever happens on it, depends on the outpost.



Stoltz – Gligorić
Saltsjöbaden IZ 1952

Blocking the centre is in general a more reasonable option for White in the Sämisch King's Indian than exchanging on c5. This exchange leaves a hole in the pawn-structure, which represents a permanent weakness. Such a hole can be allowed only if a very concrete variation

compensates for it. Gligorić will help us to understand fully why is that so.

10 ♕d1 ♔d7!

White was obviously hoping for further exchanges, but Black will have none of it! As a rule, with a hole in the enemy pawn-formation to exploit, one does not exchange rooks! One needs them in the process of realization.

11 ♖d5 h6

White is the first to establish an outpost on the central file, but it is of a temporary nature. There is a basic difference between these two pawn-formations. White's formation has been damaged irreparably by the hole on d4, whereas Black can control d5 with ...e6, and the text-move prepares this very move. For the moment Black is not concerned by 12 ♖xf6+, since after 12...exf6 he will later play ...f5.

12 ♔e3 b6 13 ♔ec3 ♔e8!

This knight has a role to play and the inevitable advance ...e6 becomes more difficult to meet.

14 ♔c1 e6 15 ♔e3 ♔c7

The d4 weakness is there and cannot be rectified. It takes time to be ready to make use of it. 15...♔d4 would be premature due to 16 ♔e2. Black intends to occupy d4 with a piece at the proper moment, when his piece will be a sort of key to the open file, closing and opening it at will.

16 ♖d3 ♔a6

We begin to see Black's plans. After the further ...♔ab4 he would be ready to play ...♔d4 followed by ...♔bc6. If White prevents the idea by a3, then a weakness appears at b3, which can be exploited by a centralized d4-knight.

17 f4

White seeks active counterplay in the intended 18 e5, securing e4 for his knight; an idea Black cannot allow.

17...f5 18 exf5

In case of 18 e5 the e4-square is under control and 18...g5 is advantageous for Black.

18...exf5 19 ♖cd5 ♔ab4

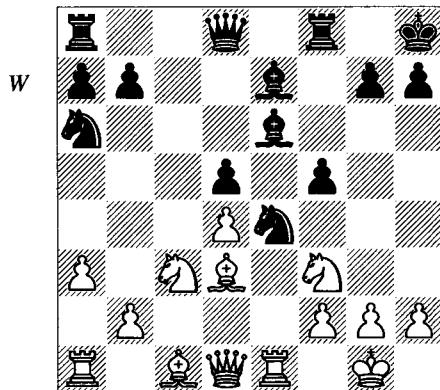
The struggle for the outpost continues. White is again quicker to establish it, but again temporarily. Black opposes it and the knight at d5 will be eliminated.

20 ♜b1 ♜d4 21 a3 ♜xd5 22 cxd5

After 22 ♜xd5 there is 22...♜a5 23 ♜a2 ♜a4 and another weakness – at b3 – becomes visible. Unfortunately, taking with the pawn has a price: the pawn is doomed.

22...♝e7 23 ♜a2 ♜g7 24 ♜c2 ♜f6 25 ♜f2 ♜a4 26 b3 ♜e8 27 ♜he1 ♜f7 28 b4 ♜xd5 29 bx5 bxc5 30 ♜d3? ♜xf4 0-1

In this example the winning strategy centred around the d4-square. Gligorić's remarkable play, imbued by deep positional understanding and most instructive details, remains a classical example on the theme of the outpost.



Khalifman – Timman
Hoogeveen 2000

There is a detail in the above position which reminds us of the previous example. Here it is Black who first established an outpost on an open central file, but the pawn-structure forebodes that his life on e4 will not be long: as soon as the inevitable f3 comes, it will have to depart. The strong e5-square, on the contrary, beckons to the f3-knight. Another detail also speaks in White's favour: while the e1-rook is well-placed on the open file, the black bishops stand in the way.

17 ♜f4

The bishop is here to clear the way for the f3-knight. Learn from that little practical wisdom: the point is not just to occupy a hole, but

to make use of it. Like Gligorić, Khalifman is patient. 17 ♜e5 could be met by 17...♜f6 18 f3 ♜b6.

17...♜c8

The aggressive 17...g5 would lose its apparent menace after 18 ♜e5+ ♜g8 19 ♜b3 ♜d7 20 ♜e2 g4 21 ♜e1.

18 ♜b3 ♜f6 19 ♜e5

The b7-pawn is defended indirectly (19 ♜xb7 ♜ac5), but seizing the potential weakness on e5 is much more important anyway. At the same time the manoeuvre ♜e2-f4 may become attractive.

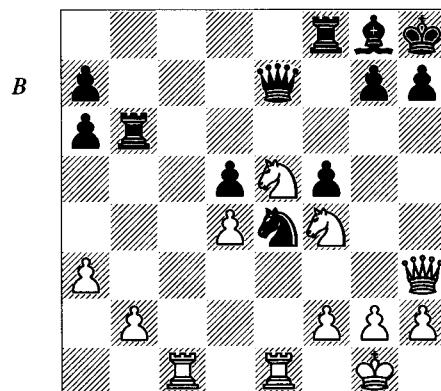
19...♛e7 20 ♜ac1 ♜g8

After 20...♝b8, intending to increase the pressure on the e5-bishop, White should react at once by 21 ♜xf6, either clearing the way for the f3-knight or in case of 21...gxsf6, 22 ♜e2.

21 ♜xa6

The further course of the game justifies White's decision, but 21 ♜xf6 was again consistent; all the more so because after 21...gxsf6 apart from the mentioned knight manoeuvre there is the most disagreeable 22 ♜b5.

21...bxax6 22 ♜e2 ♜xe5 23 ♜xe5 ♜b8 24 ♜h3! ♜b6 25 ♜f4 (D)



Relying on a plain, clear plan, White has made as much as he can out of his position. His dominant knight is to stay on e5, while in view of f3 Black is about to lose his outpost.

25...♝f7?

Inadequate. 25...♛g5 26 ♜e3 ♜d8 is the only way to put up resistance, but the structural weaknesses cannot be erased. Besides, if for no other reason, Black would lose the game because of his impotent bishop.

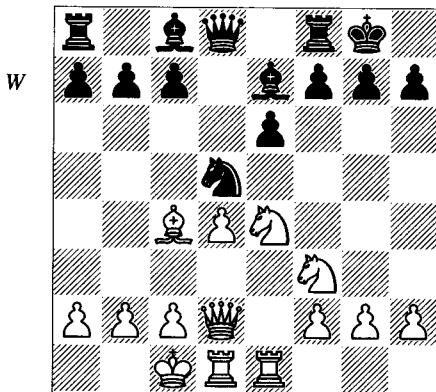
26 f3 g5

Just a desperate attempt at the moment when the fight for the central outpost has been lost.

27 fxe4 gxf4 28 exf5 ♕g5 29 ♜c8

Now there is no longer any doubt.

The struggle for the outpost determined the course of the game. And, as you already certainly noticed, it is commonly a story about knights.



Shirov – Bareev
New Delhi FIDE 2000

At the critical moment of transition into the middlegame Black has just played the dubious 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6-d5$. Play continued:

12 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ f5

Has White overlooked the threat coming from the g5-square?

13 $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$

Necessary, but strong.

13...exd5

In case of 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14 c4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ the knights are superior to the bishop-pair. Besides, the black pawn-formation has been permanently weakened by 12...f5, while Black's development difficulties persist. On the other hand, 13...fxe4 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ loses to 17 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ followed by mate) 17 fxe3 favours White, whose centralized minor pieces dominate the board.

14 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

So we reach a position characterized by the powerful outpost on e5, which can be further strengthened by $\mathbb{Q}cd3$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}g5$

This will speed up White's oncoming advance on the kingside, but after 14... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}cd3$ White has alternative plans in which the f4-square can be reserved for the knight.

15 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16 h3

The closed nature of the position suggests a kingside attack. White's strong outpost and spatial preponderance support the advance. White is going to seize the initiative.

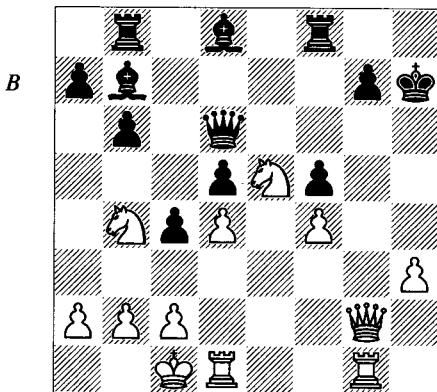
16... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}cd3$ b6 18 g4 c5 19 g5 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}g2!$

From g2 the queen supports the further advance, but at the same time keeps an eye on the potential counterplay; for the time being 20...c4 is ruled out by 21 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$.

20... $\mathbb{Q}b8?$!

One would rather see 20... $\mathbb{Q}a6$.

21 g6 c4 22 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23 gxh7+ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ (D)



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

24... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26 c3 is even less appealing.

25 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

If the threat of $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is parried by 25... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, then 26 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}dg1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ decides.

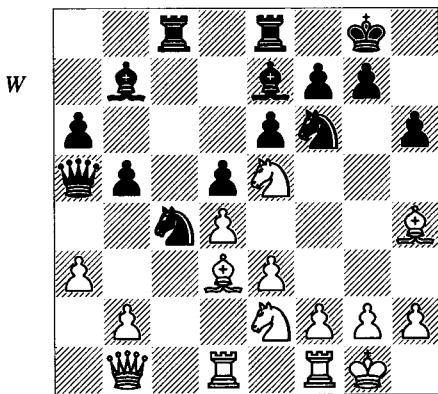
26 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

26 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}dg1$ is also possible. For instance: 27...a5 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 31 dx e5 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}h6+$, etc.

26... $\mathbb{Q}bd8?!$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 1-0

Had Black played 26... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$, he would have avoided this last crushing move and could have continued to resist.

A more complex struggle developed in the following game...



Alekhine – Capablanca
Buenos Aires Wch (12) 1927

It is on the c-file that the important events started to develop. Black was quicker and managed to establish a strong outpost on c4. He now threatens 18... $\mathbb{Q}d2$. White could retreat the knight to f3, but retreating was not to Alekhine's liking. Besides, he saw an intricate possibility to move his knight to c5, closing the c-file...

18 $\mathbb{Q}xf6?$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

18...gxf6 is not available due to 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ opening a path for the queen with deadly effect.

19 $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{W}b6?$

The decisive loss of time and initiative. Black fails to notice the hidden 21... $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$ 22 b4 (22 dx5 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}xa3$ is fine for Black) 22... $\mathbb{Q}xa3!$, when neither 23 bxa5 $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 24 dx5 $\mathbb{Q}a3$, 23 $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 24 bxc5 $\mathbb{W}xc5$ nor 23 $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xa4$ bxa4 25 bxc5 g6 can satisfy White.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7?!$

In spite of Black's failure to punish his opponent by a tactical stroke, Black has kept the better chances. His strong outpost is still there. Behind it the rooks will be able to double and control the file. But first of all the position of the knight must be secured. Black is impatient to win the file and enters the typical process prematurely. Correct was 23... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ in order to be able to meet 24 $\mathbb{W}a2$ by 24... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and prevent the vital 25 b3. That done, Black could follow

the old positional wisdom of doubling his rooks behind the outpost.

24 $\mathbb{W}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}ec8$ 25 b3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$

Otherwise 27 $\mathbb{W}a5$.

27 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}b1$

White has reacted excellently to exploit Black's error on move 23 by chasing the knight and closing all the routes via which Black might penetrate. The next step is to exchange a pair of rooks (exchanging both pairs would reduce winning chances) and now he vacates d3 for his knight, which is bound for c5. The time has come to establish a white outpost on the c-file!

29... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$

A new attempt at penetration on the c-file would fail again: after 30... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 32 $\mathbb{W}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ Black is kept at bay. However, 30... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ is better.

31 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{g}6$

The threat was 32 $\mathbb{W}g4$. The penetration by 31... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ would be kept in check by 32 $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d3$.

32 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 33 $\mathbb{b}4$

By playing impressively simple but consistent chess, White has created the conditions for the desired outpost on the open file.

33... $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Black has been set on penetrating via the open file from the beginning and has become addicted to the idea. 33... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ is more logical.

34 $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{W}c7?$

There was nothing better than retreating the rook to c7.

35 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 36 dxc5 $\mathbb{W}e5$

Probably played in the belief that 37... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ will solve the difficulties caused by the pin. Unfortunately, Black simply overlooked the following simple but crushing move...

37 $\mathbb{f}4$

If the white rook were on e1, then 37... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ would even win. But it isn't, and the c3-rook is lost in a couple of moves; e.g., 37... $\mathbb{W}f6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dxe4 39 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ threatening 40 $\mathbb{Q}c2$.

Portisch – Schmidt

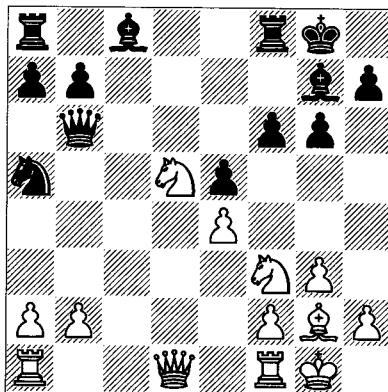
Bath Echt 1973

Grünfeld Defence

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 g3 0-0 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ d5 6 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 9 e3 e5 10

d5 ♜a5 11 e4 c6 12 ♜g5 f6. 13 ♜e3 cxd5 14 ♜xb6! ♜xb6 15 ♜xd5 (D)

B



Many players distrust this line from Black's viewpoint. Instead of 10...♜a5 they prefer to play 10...♝e7, while some of them avoid the dilemma by a different move-order. In Izeta-Illés, Spanish Ch 1998, Black postponed castling, playing ...cxd5 before White was able to eliminate the b6-knight. In our game White has succeeded in establishing a strong knight on the open d-file. Moreover, it has landed there gaining a tempo (obviously, 15...♝xb2 would lose to 16 ♜c7).

15...♝d8 16 ♜c1

From now on the fight will revolve around the d5-knight. White will try to keep it there and profit from its presence. Black, on the contrary, seeks to get rid of it. Another idea is 16 h3 followed by ♜a4 and ♜fd1 and doubling rooks on the d-file. When annotating the game Stoltz-Gligorić (see page 60), I pointed out the method which recommends preserving rooks from exchanges in order to double them behind the outpost.

16...♜c6 17 ♜b3 ♜f7 18 ♜fd1 ♜e6 19 ♜a4 ♜d7 20 h4

The struggle ahead is about the outpost on the open file. Black has concentrated his force to exert pressure on the powerful knight, but the fact that Black cannot take it with impunity due to the pin on the a2-g8 diagonal allows this important step.

20...♝f8?

Or:

a) 20...♜xd5 21 exd5 ♜e7 fails to 22 ♜h3 f5 23 ♜g5.

b) 20...♝e7, proposed by some Hungarian annotators, is at least consistent with the plan followed up until now, but it threatens nothing; apart from 21 ♜e3 White can proceed 21 h5 ♜xd5 22 exd5 ♜xd5 (or 22...♜xd5 23 ♜xe5 fxe5 24 ♜xd5+ ♜h8 25 ♜xb7) 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 ♜g5.

c) However, hesitant moves just give White enough time to strengthen the position of the vital outpost and we could agree with Schmidt that 20...♜h8 was much better than the pointless text-move.

d) I would add that 20...g5 was also an option to consider.

21 ♜h2! ♜g7 22 ♜h3

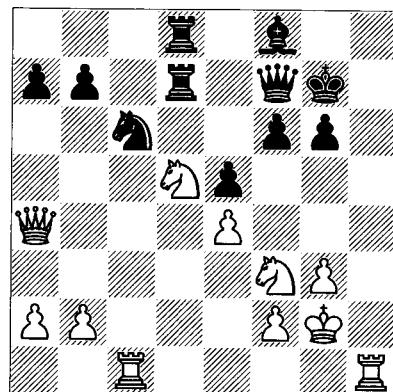
This is a logical consequence to the idea started with 20 h4. Eliminating the light-squared bishop lessens the pressure on the d5-knight.

22...♜xh3 23 ♜xh3 ♜e8 24 ♜g2 ♜ad8 25 h5

Having made possible the exchange of the light-squared bishops, the h-pawn is set on another equally important mission – to provoke new weaknesses around the king.

25...♜f7 26 hxg6 hxg6 27 ♜h1 (D)

B



From now on Black must consider the doubling of rooks on the h-file.

27...♝g8 28 ♜c4

Again 28...♝e7 is prevented.

28...♝g7 29 b4 ♜e7

Finally Black has achieved his desire to get rid of the cramping outpost, but the positional damage has already been done and the logical moves which follow emphasize it fully...

30 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 31 ♜ed7 32 ♜c2 a6 33 ♜h4!

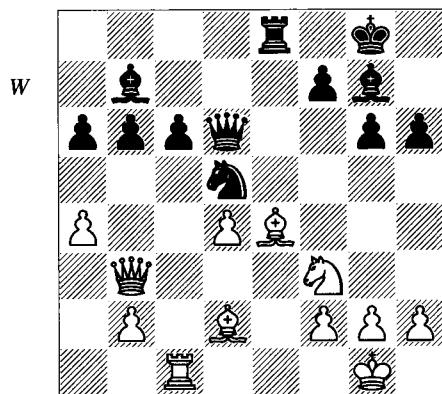
The weakened g6-pawn becomes the target. Now 34 $\mathbb{W}g4$ will ask some highly unpleasant questions. Black, therefore, decides to enter the endgame.

33... $\mathbb{H}d4$ 34 $\mathbb{W}g4$ f5 35 $\mathbb{W}xg6$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ fxe4

Even worse is 36... $\mathbb{H}xe4$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$, threatening 39 $\mathbb{Q}c7$.

37 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{H}d7$ 39 $\mathbb{H}e1$

White wins material.



Reshevsky – Flohr
Amsterdam AVRO 1938

After White's 23 $\mathbb{Q}d3-e4$ Flohr has just inadvertently played 23... $\mathbb{H}c8-e8$. What follows is highly instructive:

24 $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

The idea of establishing an outpost against a seemingly superior defence is remarkable, although it is quite clear that 25... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 26 $dxe5$ leaves Black without a good reply.

25... $\mathbb{H}c8$ 26 $\mathbb{H}e1$ $\mathbb{H}e8$ 27 h3 $\mathbb{H}e6$ 28 f4

The outpost has been stabilized and it represents the crucial element of White's advantage.

28... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 29 $\mathbb{H}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}b4$

Just at the moment when Black was ready to play ...f6, there is this unpleasant attack...

30... $\mathbb{W}h4$ 31 $\mathbb{H}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Thanks to White's previous move, 31...f6 is ruled out due to 32 $\mathbb{Q}e1$.

32 fxe5!

If Flohr had been relying on White having to play 32 $dxe5$, he was wrong. At once it is clear that destroying the outpost was very costly.

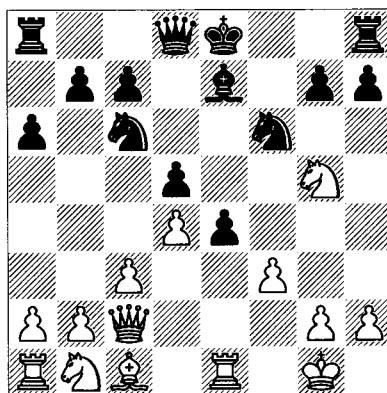
32...f5

Black is forced in a direction he didn't want to go, since after 32... $\mathbb{W}xd4+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34 $\mathbb{H}c7$ there is no reply.

33 $\mathbb{H}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{H}c6$ 35 $\mathbb{H}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}h1$

...and no good defensive moves were available to Black.

In the examples we have examined it has mostly been the knight which occupied the outpost, but the role is not confined to the knight. Although rarer, we find the bishop in its place and sometimes even the rook.



Leko – Yusupov
Vienna 1996

Black has fallen into difficulties quite early on in a dubious variation of the Ruy Lopez. He has little choice about his next few moves:

13...h6 14 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 0-0 15 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

Black's position suffers from lasting weaknesses. From just a glance we start enumerating – g6, e6, e5.

16... $\mathbb{W}d7$

Closing the position with 16... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ fails to 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 18 $\mathbb{W}b3$, while 16... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ invites 17 $\mathbb{Q}xh6!$ $\mathbb{Q}gh6$ 18 $\mathbb{W}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ (or 19... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}fg5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 21 $\mathbb{H}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}el$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$, Chaplinsky-Dimitriev, USSR 1972) 20 $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

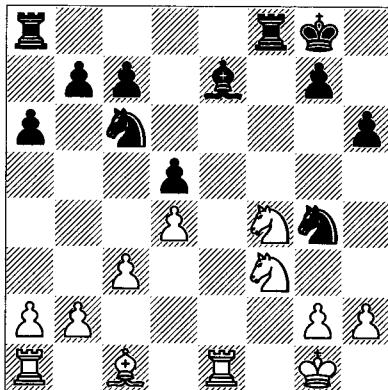
17 $\mathbb{W}g6!$

The queen's incursion forces the exchange. Black's f6-knight, as a consequence, will be further from its strategic square e4.

17... $\mathbb{W}g4$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (D)

White's minor pieces now invade the important strong squares.

B



19... $\mathbb{R}fd8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{R}d7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}c8$

21... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $cxd6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ is also difficult for Black.

22 $\mathbb{R}e2$ $b6$!?

There are more important tasks than covering the c5-square. 22... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is necessary.

23 $\mathbb{R}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

By skilfully exploiting Black's positional weaknesses, White finally succeeds in occupying the strong outpost.

24... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g3$

In expectation of 26... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, this quiet move makes possible 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ (or 27... $gxf6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 29 $g4$) 28 $\mathbb{R}xe7$ in reply.

26... $\mathbb{R}g8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}g2$

If 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ then 27... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$.

27... $g5$

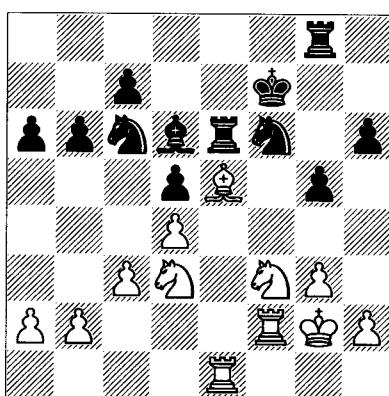
The more we wriggle in passive positions, the deeper we sink.

28 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$!?

28... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is stronger. Now the weakness of the f-file proves intolerable.

29 $\mathbb{R}f2$! $\mathbb{R}e6$ (D)

W



In case of 29... $\mathbb{R}g6$ there is 30 $h4$ $g4$ 31 $h5$. 30 $\mathbb{c}4$!

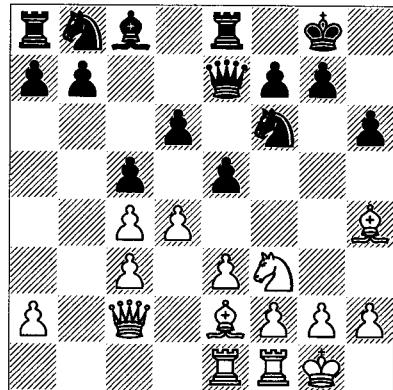
The final thrust rips the position open.

30... $dxc4$ 31 $d5$

Black no longer has any good answers.

A fine game, but we shall learn more from Mikhail Botvinnik...

B



Botvinnik – Chekhov
USSR Ch (Leningrad) 1938

What have the opening moves brought? An experienced eye would conclude that the white pawn-structure is superior despite the apparent damage in the form of the doubled c-pawns; the c3-pawn is a worthy member of the central pawn-mass. On the contrary, the black formation may contain a weakness on d5, although at the moment it is irrelevant. The most visible element of the existing tension is the pin on the h4-d8 diagonal. White's previous move, 12 $\mathbb{R}ae1$!, has something to do with that pin. By defending the bishop, White prepares to play $\mathbb{Q}d2$, which would free the f-pawn to advance, with very unpleasant consequences for Black.

12... $\mathbb{Q}g4$

Played for the same reason – to prevent the intended $\mathbb{Q}d2$.

13 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$! $\mathbb{R}xf6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$?

Psychologically it is difficult to go back, but here 14... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ was a wiser decision. Botvinnik considered 14... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$, which I find adequate, because White's pieces lose their harmony and strength of purpose. After giving up his light-squared bishop, Chekhov becomes sorely weak on the light squares.

**15 ♜xf3 ♛e6 16 dxc5 dxc5 17 ♞d1 ♜ad8
18 ♞d5**

So the complications end and White establishes a strong outpost on d5. This time it is a rook, a rare case among outposts. Following its nature, the rook is not there to stay in the manner bishops and knights are. It is there to win the file and penetrate further down it.

18...b6?

It is true that 18...♜xd5 would fail to 19 cxd5 ♜e7 20 ♜a4 and 21 d6, but 18...♛e7 19 ♜fd1 g6 would do the job better. 20 g4 keeps the f7-pawn in check, but it is a different story compared to the game.

19 ♜fd1 ♛a5 20 h3

Such quiet moves often emphasize strength and confidence. Black is definitely losing the fight for the open file.

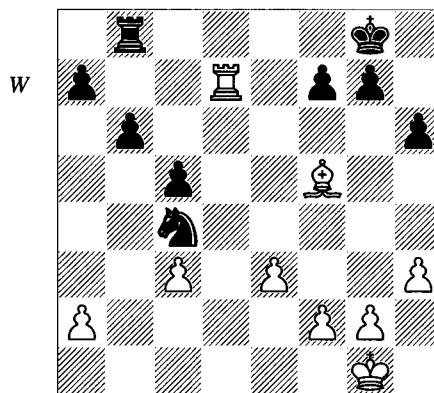
20...♜xd5 21 ♜xd5 ♛e7 22 ♜g4 ♛b7 23 ♜f5!

With the queen defended and ...g6 prevented, the rook is finally ready to penetrate further. Its role on the outpost was temporary.

23...♛b8 24 ♜d7 ♜d8

Otherwise 25 ♜h7+.

25 ♛xe5 ♛xc4 26 ♛xb8 ♜xb8 (D)



27 ♜e4!

It is the bishop's turn to take its place on d5. Centralized and targeting the f7-pawn, it will literally paralyse Black.

27...♝a3 28 ♜d5 ♜f8 29 e4 a5 30 c4 b5 31 cxb5 ♜xb5 32 e5 a4 33 f4 ♜d4 34 ♜f2

...and the pawn avalanche supported by the active king and two pieces will shortly wipe out any meaningful resistance.

5 Static Weakness and Attack

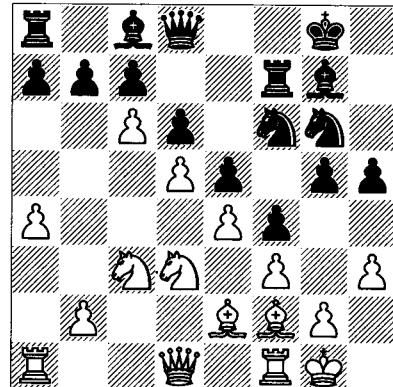
As I stressed earlier, a weak square is a static weakness: its state is relevant only when and if it can be exploited by the enemy pieces. This logical reasoning led to the reassessment of disadvantages and dangers caused by such spatial weaknesses in the process of the dynamic struggle. While an attack is taking place on the other side of the board, far away from the dubious square, its potential weakness as a rule does not influence the fight. It is the property of attacks and counterattacks to impose imperatives, which govern the board at that specific moment. While in progress, an attack, which in general implies some forceful events, suspends all the static qualities in the position, apart from those which the attack targets. If, for instance, Black attacks on the kingside, the outcome of the struggle will be decided by the strength of that very attack. As long as it lasts, any potential static weaknesses become irrelevant. However, we should not forget that such a state of affairs on the board is temporary. As soon as an attack loses its impetus, the static weaknesses start to come to the fore. It often happens that the moment an attack fails, the position burdened with static weaknesses simply collapses. That's why annotators so often speak of players burning their bridges. The following games demonstrate the relation between static weakness and dynamic force. Weaknesses are left behind, sometimes even material offered and hopes placed on an attack. As long as it lasts, one is safe... (see following diagram)

In order to prevent the prepared breakthrough on the kingside, White has just played 17 c6, which seems rather unpleasant. White threatens 18 ♜b5 a6 (or 18...b6 19 a5) 19 ♜a7 and when the light-squared bishop is eliminated, White's king will find peace.

17...a5!

"Do not move pawns on the wing where your opponent is attacking!" – says a sacred maxim of positional play, but great players have the ability to find exceptions to such rules. The

B



Korchnoi – Kasparov
Amsterdam 1991

text-move weakens Black's queenside, but Kasparov must have good reasons to do it.

18 cxb7 ♜xb7 19 b4 ♜c8!

It is the kingside counterplay that matters! Black obviously considers it vital for his survival and sacrifices a pawn.

20 bxa5 ♜h6! 21 ♜b4?

Kasparov proposed 21 a6! in order to divert Black's attention. But White is enchanted by the weakness at c6 and spends two tempi to get there: if he survives the attack, then his position will be won. Unfortunately, the crucial things start to happen on the other side of the board.

21...g4 22 ♜c6

Chasing the queen where it is bound for.

22...♛f8 23 fxg4 hxg4 24 hxg4 ♜g5 25 ♜f3 ♜h6 26 ♜e1 ♜h4

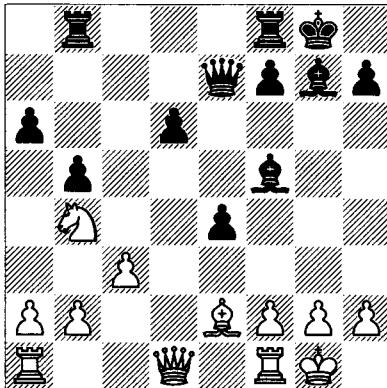
The flight from the endangered zone, prepared by 26 ♜e1, will not work any more. To 27 ♜f1 Black responds 27...♜xf3 28 gx f3 ♜xg4! 29 fxg4 ♜h3+ 30 ♛e2 ♜xc3 31 ♜d3 f3+ 32 ♜xf3 ♜c2+ 33 ♜f1 ♜xg4 (Kasparov).

27 ♜xh4 ♜xh4

White has been outplayed.

The queenside weaknesses remained irrelevant: the successful attack suspended and in the end simply annulled them.

B



Adams – Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 2001

We are out of the opening. A glance at the position suggests that Black has gone too far in search of active play: his d-pawn is backward and the square in front of it has been surrendered to the b4-knight; besides, his queenside pawns are in danger. However, this quick first glance proves to be deceptive...

18...Bg5?

Leaving two pawns *en prise*, Kramnik rightly seeks compensation in a kingside counterattack. The threat of 19...Nh3 takes care of the a6-pawn, while 19 Bxd6?! Bbd8 would just further activate Black's pieces.

19 Nh1

The alternative was 19 f4 exf3 20 Bxf3.

19...Be5 20 a4?

In view of the growing pressure on the kingside this must be too optimistic, which could also be said of 20 Qxa6, when 20...Bb6 21 Qb4 d5 opens the sixth rank to move the rook into an attacking position on the other side of the board. Sensing the peril, White should continue 20 Qc6 and eliminate the e5-bishop.

20...a5 21 Qc6 bxa4!

A nicely conceived idea. By sacrificing an exchange, Black gets rid of his positional weaknesses. Now 22 Qxb8 Bxb8 23 Bxa4 (if 23 Bc2 then 23...e3) 23...Bxb2 24 Bxa4 Bd2 could hardly satisfy White, while the exchange 22 Qxe5 dx5 comes in the worsened circumstances.

22 f4

White finally feels that the situation is getting out of hand and reacts properly.

22...exf3

22...Qxf4 obviously loses to 23 g3.

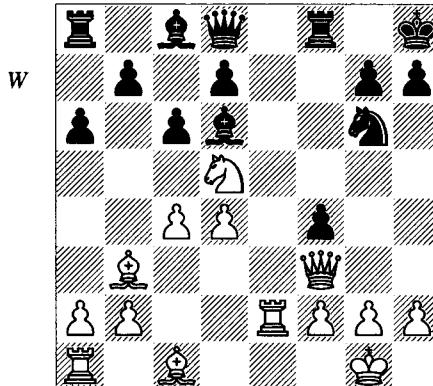
23 Bxf3 Be4 24 Qxb8?

This time White goes too far. It was high time to eliminate the e5-bishop, although Black would still be comfortable in that case.

24...Bxb8 25 Bxa4

Black could now have reaped the fruits of his excellent play by 25...Qxf3 26 gxf3 Wh6 27 Wg1+ Qf8 with a clear advantage in spite of the relatively reduced material. Notice also that, as it happens many times, the existence of opposite-coloured bishops enhances Black's prospects.

By relying on his counterattack, Black was able to cover his positional weaknesses.



Vygodchikov – Alekhine
corr. 1908-9

Black's previous move, 15...c6, weakened the enticing b6-square and White was certain he could take advantage of it:

16 c5?! Bb8! 17 Qb6

Instead of retreating the knight to c3, White is seduced by the hole on b6 and the prospect of winning material. Black, on the contrary, preserves his dark-squared bishop and puts his hope in the counterattack.

17...d5! 18 Qxa8? Qh4

White's greed is quickly shown to be misplaced. His king is under attack.

19 Bc3

19 Wh5 would not give White any respite due to 19...g6, when 20 Wh6 Qf5 21 Wh3 Qg3 traps the queen.

19...f3 20 ♖e5

White gives up a part of his booty in order to close the dark-squared diagonal and lessen the pressure.

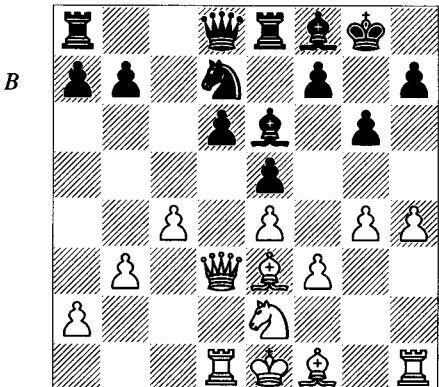
20...♕xe5 21 dxe5 ♔xg2 22 ♕d4 ♕d7 23 e6 ♕xe6 24 ♕d2 ♕g6

White is a whole piece up, but this piece is out of play and his king is in peril. However, some care is necessary: for instance, after 24...♔h3 25 ♕c3 ♕g8 26 ♕e5 ♔f4 27 ♕g5 ♕g4? (27...h6 wins) 28 ♕xg7+ White saves his skin by perpetual check.

The text-move both defends the vulnerable g7-pawn and creates threats: on 25 ♔f1 there is 25...♕f5, and 25 ♔h1 is met by 25...♔e1. To avoid the worst White will have to give up more material.

25 ♕c2 ♕xc2 26 ♔h1 ♕g6 27 ♕g1 ♕h3 28 ♕b6 ♔f4! 29 ♕xg6 ♕g2+ 30 ♕xg2 fxg2+

Black is winning. The hole created on b6, although entailing a huge material loss, was vastly compensated for by Alekhine's counter-attack. In general we could say that tactical blows are common means by which apparently secure, strong squares are called into question so often.



Neergaard – Simagin
corr. 1964

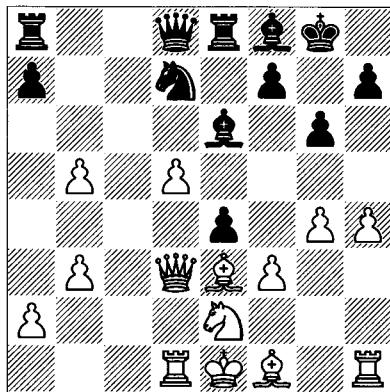
If we take a quick look at this position, we shall probably neither be convinced by White's chances on the kingside nor be overjoyed by the position of his king, but if there is anything we could be sure of, then it is his apparently complete control of the d5-square. However,

Simagin's very next move suggests we were wrong...

16...b5!

Now White cannot allow 17...bxc4 18 bxc4, when the concentrated black fire finds a sore place to hit. But 17 cxb5 still seems OK...

17 cxb5 d5! 18 exd5 e4! (D)



Making use of his better development, Black opens the position for a strong attack.

19 ♕xe4

19 fxe4 ♔e5 20 ♕b1 ♕xg4 is not appealing to White, so he has little choice.

19...♕xg4 20 ♕f4

20 ♕xg4 ♕xe3 21 ♔f2 ♕c5 is even more alarming.

20...♕h5 21 ♔f2 ♔e5 22 ♕g2 ♕d6

As the perfectly positioned black pieces grow in strength, White's queen is forced out of play.

23 ♕a4 ♕c8 24 ♕d2 ♕f6 25 ♕g5? ♕f5 26 ♕f4 ♕xf3!

...and White was knocked out (27 ♕xf3 loses to 27...♕c5+ 28 ♕g2 ♕xf3, etc.) The d5-square was not under such tight surveillance after all! Black's play cast a different light on it.

Shirov – Kramnik

Wijk aan Zee 2001

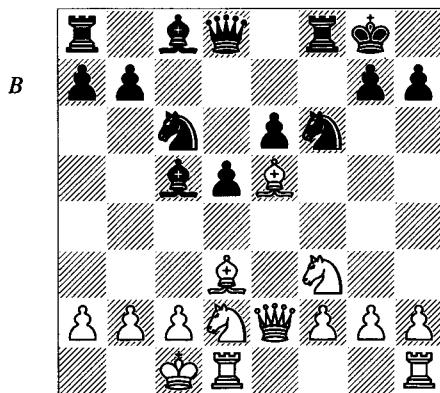
Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 dxc5 e6 5 ♕f4 ♕xc5 6 ♕d3 ♕c6 7 ♕f3 f6!? 8 ♕bd2 fxe5 9 ♕xe5

A somewhat unusual opening has led to a position where it looks as if White has succeeded in controlling the important central square e5. He would have certainly preferred to achieve this by 9 ♕xe5, but 9...♕f6 ruled it out.

9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0-0 11 0-0-0? (D)

One would expect 11 0-0, but if that had been White's intention, he could have done so on his 8th move. The text-move suggests that he cherished hopes of dominating the central dark squares. However, remembering some old games of the same pawn-structure and character which Aron Nimzowitsch left to posterity, we start noticing some essential differences. The awkward position of the e5-bishop strikes the eye at once.

**11...a5! 12 $\mathbb{Q}b3$?! $\mathbb{Q}d6$**

The pressure exerted on e5 suddenly grows at the moment when the hoped-for 13 $\mathbb{Q}bd4$ fails to 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$. 13 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ does not make 14 $\mathbb{Q}bd4$ more palatable due to 14... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ (or 16 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$) 16...e5. White lacks a critical tempo to carry out what he strove to do.

13 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ a4 15 $\mathbb{Q}c1$

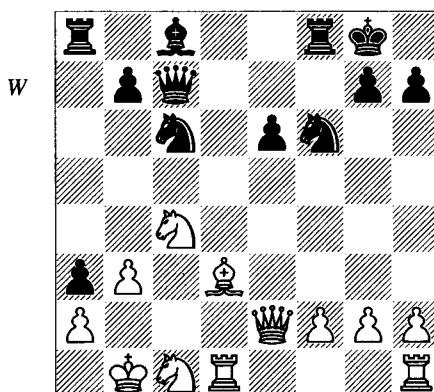
15 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a3 fatally weakens the white king's position: then 16 b3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 18 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ creates a threat that cannot be met.

15...a3 16 b3 $\mathbb{W}a5$

The false feeling of strength on the e5-square led White into wrong conclusions and now he suffers irreparable damage to his own pawn-structure.

17 c4

Reducing material by 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 18 c4 does not change much after 18...dxc4 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$.

17...dxc4 18 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (D)**19 $\mathbb{Q}he1$??**

Kramnik considered 19 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ to be somewhat better. Now the king's knight joins the attack decisively.

19... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}cb4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Black threatened ...b5.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ b5 23 $\mathbb{W}d4$

If 23 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ then 23... $\mathbb{Q}b7$.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ bxc4 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 26 bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$

Black has achieved a winning position. It all started with a temporary, apparent weakness on e5, which remained out of White's reach due to an energetic counterattack.

Evaluating the strength and weakness of chess space, we must stay aware that there are things real and things apparent, chess realities and chess appearances. The ability to distinguish between them is vital.

The long list of games and positions we have analysed will hopefully help the reader to see the danger more clearly. A healthy dose of caution will avoid light-hearted decisions which lead to the weakness of space. Never forget that a game of chess is a process of metamorphoses, that the weakness of space is just the first negative stage which gets transformed by time into other forms of weaknesses, notably into the weakness of chess material. That is the topic of Part 2 of this book.

6 The King

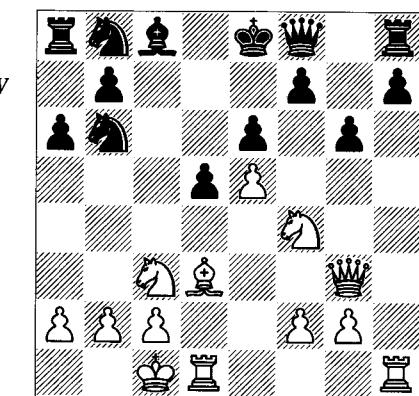
The game of chess is primarily about the king. It is the most precious piece on the board, unique in its functions – the only one which cannot be exchanged or sacrificed and the most vulnerable one. Therefore, while attacking the enemy king, we take all precautions to protect our own. In the old games on the chess-board, those slow oriental games in which time meant little, the king's predecessors, called *radja* and *shah*, lived a relatively peaceful life. But the very day an unknown Italian inventor changed the rules of play, turning the Arabic *alfil* into the long-ranged bishop and the lame *mantrin* into a mighty, dynamic queen, the king was imperilled. The Renaissance player felt the change and came to the conclusion that the king needed more protection. The solution was found in a simultaneous double move of the king and one of the rooks, which was called castling. By fleeing from the centre, the king sought a secure refuge on the wing, and for a good reason. Although sometimes it feels safe in the centre behind the mass of central pawns, its initial position is not in general the happiest of places for the king. The growing pressure of the enemy pieces often turns into a vicious attack. As a rule, this generally happens when one side oversteps the limits of caution and neglects harmonious development in the pursuit of material gain or an unfounded initiative. The counterattack then hits like a boomerang and the king, stranded in the centre, becomes a sensitive target. Such early surprises are avoided by castling, although even on the wing, peace and security are never guaranteed. Any weakening of the defensive position around the king may bring disaster, which constantly lurks on open diagonals, open files, in the form of pawn assaults, etc.

So long as there are many pieces on the board, the king remains in danger. His fears subside gradually through the exchange of pieces, and especially when the queens are off the board. Then the king comes out of its hide-out and joins the fight. With the danger lessened by the

reduction of material, all of a sudden the king may turn into a strong piece. On rare occasions it can perform stunning tasks in the middle-game, on the board full of pieces, but as a rule it is in the endgame that we witness its extraordinary metamorphosis from weakness into strength. It steps out of its refuge on the wing, walks straight into the centre and often determines the course of events. In the ensuing illustrative examples we shall watch both faces of its dual nature.

Endangered Species

We start with the king's weakness, which is, due to its nature, its most common state. In the opening and early middlegame, before the king has reached safety by castling, we are conscious of its vulnerability. There are many possible causes of the king's exposure, but running after material gain and getting behind in development are the two most widespread and mostly fatal causes. Repeated in literally thousands of games, they remind us of the nature of the game of chess and the weakness of human character.



Bogoljubow – Spielmann Stockholm 1919

Black has defended his weak spots and kept the extra pawn, but at the cost of development and coordination of his pieces. White's enormous lead in development must manifest itself and be transformed into something palpable. In such positions one must look for hidden solutions. Bogoljubow finds the key, reaching the apparently paradoxical conclusion that d5 is the weak spot in the chain of Black's defence...

15 ♜e4!

White threatens 16 ♜xd5 exd5 17 ♜fxd5 ♜xd5 18 ♜xd5 with a mating attack, which forces the rejoinder...

15...dxe4 16 ♜xe4 ♜8d7 17 ♜c3!

A beautiful quiet move: the queen is bound for c7, which would paralyse Black utterly. Before playing it, Bogoljubow must have examined 17 ♜h4, but 17...♜e7 18 ♜d6+ ♜f8 19 ♜h6+ ♜g8 20 ♜h5 ♜f8 parries the direct threats.

17...♜e7

On 17...♝d8 there is 18 ♜f6 h5 19 ♜a5.

18 ♜f6+ ♜xf6 19 exf6 ♜f8 20 ♜c7 ♜d7 21 ♜d5

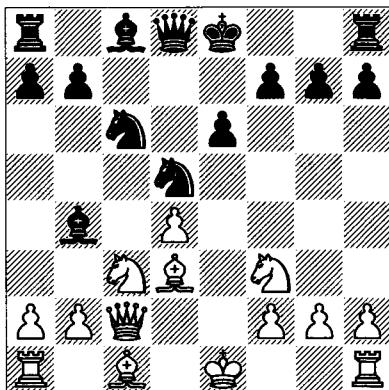
Facing 22 ♜b6 Black must take, opening the e-file for the final blow...

21...exd5 22 ♜he1+ ♜e5 23 ♜xe5+ ♜e6 24 ♜b1 ♜d8 25 ♜xd5

Although propped up by two pieces, d5 remains weak...

25...♜xd5 26 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 27 ♜c8# (1-0)

B



Najdorf – Portisch
Varna OL 1962

As soon as the initial moves had been played, Portisch took the risky decision to exploit the

pin on the a5-e1 diagonal and win a pawn. He continued:

9...♜xc3? 10 bxc3 ♜xd4 11 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 12 ♜b5+

The first sign that the gobbled pawn was not free: Black loses the right to castle.

12...♛e7 13 0-0!

What Black lost White can afford. At the cost of another pawn, White achieves a sharp lead in development.

13...♜xc3

Attempts to refuse the offer do not work: 13...♜e5 14 cxb4 ♜xb5 15 a4 ♜c6 16 ♜e2 f6 17 ♜a3 is a difficult path too, while 13...♜c5 14 ♜a4 ♜xc3 (or 14...♜xc3 15 ♜d2 ♜d4 16 ♜b3) 15 ♜g5+! f6 16 ♜d2 ♜xd2 17 ♜c7+ ♜d7 18 ♜ad1 ♜ac8 19 ♜g3 leads to catastrophe.

14 ♜e2

The a1-rook is taboo, while the threats are as effective as they are simple (15 ♜g5+ and 16 ♜ac1).

14...♜d6 15 ♜b2 ♜a5 16 ♜fd1

There is no more peace for the king stuck in the centre. White threatens 17 ♜xd6.

16...♜d8 17 ♜h5 f6

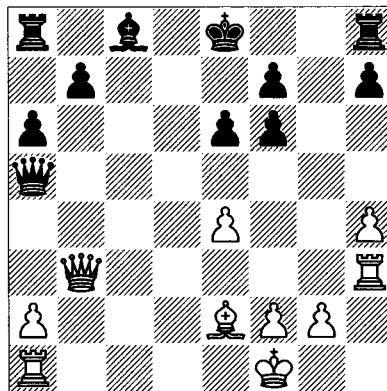
This is essential to protect against ♜g5+, but it further weakens the king's position.

18 ♜xh7

It is possible to leave the b5-bishop *en prise* due to 18...♜xb5 19 ♜xg7+ ♜e8 20 ♜xf6.

18...♝f7 19 ♜e2 ♜g5 20 ♜c1! ♜xh2+ 21 ♜xh2 ♜e5+ 22 f4 1-0

B



Kramnik – Kaidanov
Groningen PCA 1993

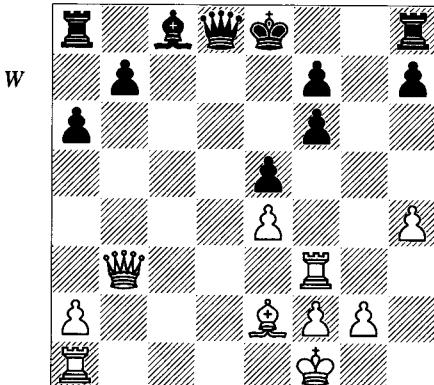
In the Vienna Variation of the Queen's Gambit Black grabbed a pawn, entering this by no means easy position. He cannot castle (17...0-0 18 $\mathbb{W}e3$), and he cannot develop his bishop, and his rooks are uncoordinated. Moreover, the f6-pawn will be exposed to $\mathbb{W}b2$ or $\mathbb{B}f3$. It is not surprising that considering the threats Black continues...

17...e5?!

This pawn move deals with potential threats to f6 on the diagonal and solves the development of the hemmed-in bishop, but at the same time increases the scope of the white bishop and creates new vulnerable squares. 17... $\mathbb{B}b8$ looks rather slow; for instance, 18 $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19 $\mathbb{B}hc3$ 0-0 (or 19... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{B}c5$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 21 $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 22 $\mathbb{B}1c4$) 20 $\mathbb{B}c5$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 21 $\mathbb{W}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 22 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 23 $\mathbb{B}h5$ intending $\mathbb{B}d1$. In my opinion 17... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is a better try.

18 $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ (D)

Abandoning the pawn by 18... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 0-0 and going from a material advantage to a material disadvantage is psychologically rather difficult, while 18... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ would now come in worsened circumstances. Kramnik proposed 19 $\mathbb{B}c1$ intending to double rooks, but then Black resists by 19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20 $\mathbb{B}fc3$ (or 20 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}hb8$) 20... $\mathbb{B}hc8$. 19 a4, shielding the a3-square, seems to me more unpleasant for Black.



19 $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

It is not difficult to conclude that developing the bishop costs more than at move 18 (19... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 0-0 21 $\mathbb{B}d1$). Preparing it with 19... $b5$ opens new possibilities; Kramnik gives a nice little line: 20 $\mathbb{B}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21 $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xa3$ 23 $\mathbb{B}xa6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24 $\mathbb{B}fxa3$, when

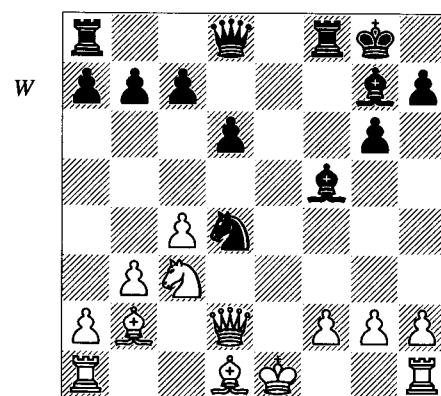
the passed pawn should decide. 19...0-0 20 $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}h6$ is equally difficult for Black. However, waiting cannot improve things.

20 $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{W}d8?!$

Possibly Black was hoping for 21 $\mathbb{B}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 22 $\mathbb{B}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$. However, he should have continued 20... $\mathbb{W}e6$ 21 $\mathbb{B}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 22 $\mathbb{B}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$, fighting on.

21 $\mathbb{B}c7$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 22 $\mathbb{B}e7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xf6+$

Black is lost.



**Alatortsev – Boleslavsky
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1950**

Alatortsev, like Spielmann above, has lost a couple of tempi in the opening. To make things worse, instead of castling he now continued in an optimistic vein (one of the fundamental psychological errors we often come across):

15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

White hopes to simplify into a pleasant end-game. However, events now developed in another direction, not to his liking...

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe2?!$

To 16 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ Boleslavsky planned to reply 16... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$, catching the king on e1 in an embarrassing situation. 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{W}f6!$ (if 17... $\mathbb{W}g5$, then 18 $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xf8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}e3$) 18 0-0 loses to 18... $\mathbb{W}g5$ 19 f3 $\mathbb{Q}h3+$, but stronger is 17 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}e7+$ (not 17... $\mathbb{B}e8+$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 19 0-0) 18 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ (18 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 19 $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}f6$ is advantageous for Black) 18... $\mathbb{B}ae8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g3$ (not 19 $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 20 $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xe5+$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$).

16... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}g5!$

White does not get to castle yet!

18 g3 $\mathbb{B}ae8$

So at the end of the early complications, against the coordinated black pieces stands White still deliberating about how to finish his development.

19 0-0 ♜h3 20 f4

To parry the worst, White is compelled to expose his king even more. 20 ♜fc1 would be punished by 20...♜xf2 21 ♛xf2 ♜e3+ 22 ♛e1 ♜g4, etc.

20...♜xf1!

White counted only on 20...♜c5+ 21 ♜f2, missing this tremendous response based on a queen sacrifice.

21 fxg5 ♜xe2 22 ♜c3

After 22 ♜d4 ♜h3 (on 22...♜g2 there is 23 ♛e1 ♜h3 24 ♜d5+) 23 ♜h4 ♜g2 24 ♜e1 ♜xe1+ 25 ♛g2 ♜e2+ 26 ♜h3 ♜f5 27 ♜d4 b6 Black's two rooks will overpower the white queen.

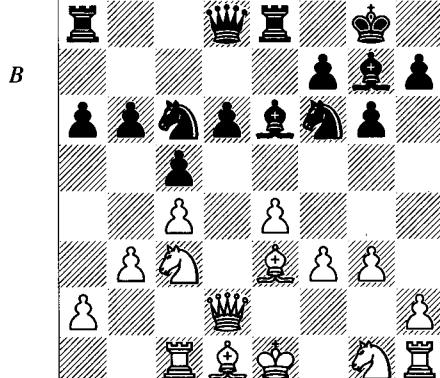
22...♜g2 23 ♜d3

Or 23 ♜e1 ♜h3.

23...♜f3 24 ♜f1

24 ♜f1 ♜xh2 does not alleviate White's problems.

24...♜g2+ 25 ♛h1 ♜c6 26 ♜xf8+ ♛xf8 27 ♜f1+ ♜f2+ 0-1



Eliskases – Stein

Mar del Plata 1966

This unusual position was reached from the King's Indian Defence. It is a closed position and White hoped to overcome his development difficulties by ♜ge2 and ♜f4. However, it was not to be...

15...♜d4!

By sacrificing a pawn, Black prevents 16 ♜ge2 and seeks the initiative while the white king is still in the centre.

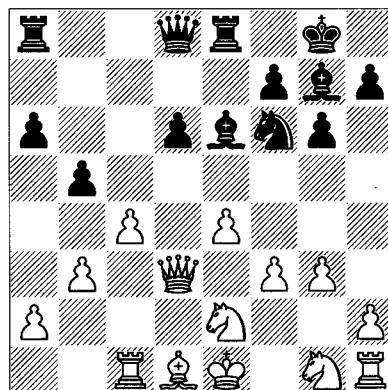
16 ♜xd4 cxd4 17 ♜ce2 d3!

Forcing the queen to d3 makes possible a further opening of the position.

18 ♜xd3

White has no choice but to acquiesce: on 18 ♜f4 there is not only 18...♜h6 19 ♜xd3 ♜f5, but also 18...d5; for instance, 19 cxd5 ♜xd5 20 ♜xd5 (20 ♜xd3 ♜xe4) 20...♜xd5 when the irksome d3-pawn survives, or 19 ♜xe6 ♜xe6 20 ♜xd3 dxe4 21 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8.

18...b5 (D)



19 ♜f4?

White must finish his development by urgently vacating the e2-square for the king's knight, but it's not the same wherever the e2-knight moves. 19 ♜c3 bxc4 20 bxc4 ♜c8 exerts strong pressure, denying White the necessary respite. However, 19 ♜d4 makes the difference, because it eyes the f5-square, which the course of the game proves critical. 19...bxc4 20 bxc4 and then:

a) 20...d5 is quite good.

b) 20...♜f5 21 ♜ge2 and now:

b1) 21...♜xe4 fails to 22 ♜xf5 ♜a5+ 23 ♜f1 ♜xf5 24 g4.

b2) 21...♜xe4 is parried by 22 ♜xf5 ♜a5+ 23 ♜f1 ♜xf5 24 ♜f4 (not 24 ♛g2 due to 24...♜xg3) with level play.

b3) 21...♜h6 keeps the initiative.

19...♜f5!

It is clear at once that the e4-pawn cannot be protected and Stein's finely conceived attack breaks through.

20 $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

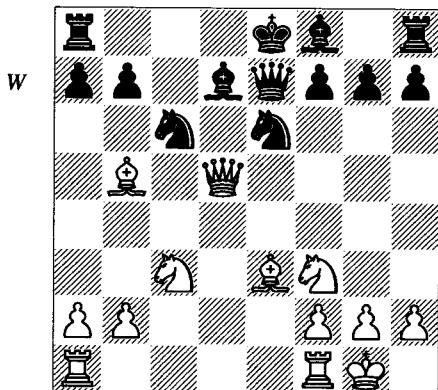
Another subtle tactical point: after 21 fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ the menace comes on the open file, and also from a5.

21 $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

22 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}b6+$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ explains this desperate attempt.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

White has no hope of surviving.



Portisch – Bronstein
Monte Carlo 1969

Black has fallen well behind in development in the opening. He is now on the ropes, covering his king with all the pieces at his disposal, but Portisch's next move shows that it must remain in the centre for a while longer.

12 $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Or:

a) 12...0-0-0 is now out of question due to 13 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$.

b) 12... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, on which Black was counting when he put his knight on e6, allows White to keep the advantage by 13 $\mathbb{W}xd7+$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 16 $\mathbb{R}fd1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ a6 18 $\mathbb{Q}b6$, etc.

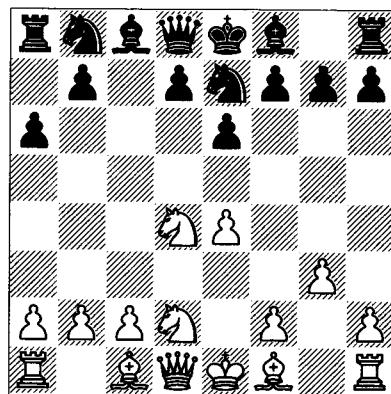
13 $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ a6 15 $\mathbb{R}ad1!$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b6$

White's overwhelming lead in development is transformed into an irresistible attack.

16... $\mathbb{R}xd1$ 17 $\mathbb{R}xd1$ f6 18 $\mathbb{W}f5$ g6 19 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20 $\mathbb{W}d5$ 1-0

In the examples we have just examined, the king was stuck in the centre, generally as a result of poor development. The outcome was

typically that the active side prevailed by the sheer force of its active units. However, many a time it is not the slow process of falling behind in development that ends fatally, but the weakness of space around the king or simply unforced errors. We shall devote some pages to illustrate typical cases that occur frequently.



Savon – Krogius
USSR tt 1964

For some reason, Black assessed that g3 was a provocation he could punish. He continued accordingly:

6...e5 7 $\mathbb{Q}4b3$ d5?

The course of the game teaches us that the modest 7...d6 was necessary.

8 exd5 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

The rook sacrifice is justified by the dubious position of the black king, but the idea is based on the additional motif of the weak b6-square. After 9... $\mathbb{W}xd1+$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ there is no way to protect it.

9... $\mathbb{W}xh1$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8??$

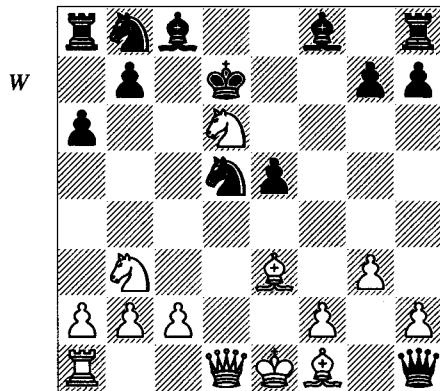
Stronger is 13... $\mathbb{W}d5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ (White should avoid 14 $\mathbb{Q}h3+?!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$) 14... $\mathbb{W}xd1+$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}bc6$, although after 18 $\mathbb{Q}f7+!$ (otherwise ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$) the h8-knight cannot be trapped cheaply.

14 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3!$

After some hesitation White decides to rely on his superior development and the lasting exposure of the black king in the centre. 15... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ obviously loses to 16 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ and 15... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ to 16 $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17 $\mathbb{W}h5$, so Black is compelled to close the open file.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d5?$! (D)

There is more uncertainty about 15... $\mathbb{W}d5$ 16 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (but not 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17 $\mathbb{W}b4+$ and Black loses his queen), when White must make a difficult decision. On the one hand there are hidden paths to examine, like 17 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ (or: 18... $g6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}f6$; 18... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}b6+$) 19 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}xd1+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d3$. On the other hand, there is the apparently simpler 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$, but we are again at an intricate crossroads – 18 $\mathbb{Q}c4$, 18 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ or 18 $\mathbb{Q}h3$. One is attracted by the last because it narrows Black's options to 18... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, when 19 $c4$ attracts, but fails to 19... $\mathbb{W}h1+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}e4$, but 19 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ (19... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}b6+$) 20 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ keeps the attack strong. The sore point of the text-move lies in the fact that the queen remains out of play at the moment when White is getting ready to castle and engage all his pieces in the attack.



16 $\mathbb{W}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 18 $fxe3$

Being a rook up means little when all the pieces are immobile and lack any coordination.

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

On 18... $\mathbb{W}f3$ White would continue 19 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}h1+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xh2+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g2$.

19 0-0-0 $\mathbb{W}c6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}a5!$

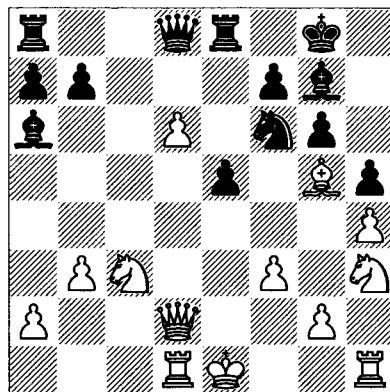
In such situations there is always some tactical solution at hand: the c4-square is vital for the final assault.

21... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ $e4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xb8$ $\mathbb{W}xe3+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}b1$

Black has no useful moves at his disposal.

Positions characterized by a king stranded in the centre are by their nature sensitive, and

numerous unforced errors reveal the psychological implications of the struggle.



Kramnik – Shirov

Cazorla (9) 1998

This was the crucial game of the match and we can assume the tensions were high. The far-advanced passed pawn, supported by major pieces and the pin of the f6-knight, is very near to breaking the defence. However, at the critical moment of the middlegame crisis, instead of the natural 19 $d7$, squeezing Black to the maximum, White played...

19 $\mathbb{Q}d5?$

...and was struck by the powerful...

19... $e4!$

There was only one negative detail in White's formation – his king on e1, unable to castle and now under sudden, sharp attack.

20 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$

In his calculations White returned to the missed opportunity, but now 20 $d7$ $exf3+$ 21 $dxe8\mathbb{W}+$ $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (or 22 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$) 22... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (24 $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ loses to 25... $\mathbb{W}c2!$) 24... $fxg2$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ would expose the white king to the mighty bishop-pair. 20 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $exf3$ or 20 $f4$ $e3$ does not help either.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 21 $d7$ $\mathbb{W}b6!$

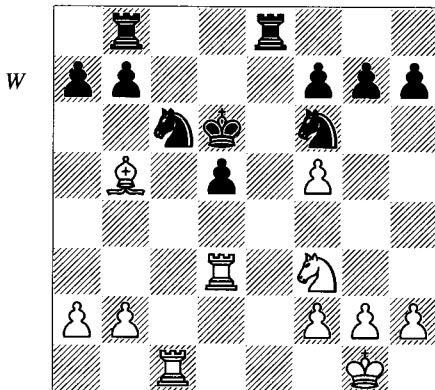
Shirov in his element! The escape route via f2 is cut off and the king is obliged to bear the brunt of the attack.

22 $dxe8\mathbb{W}+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

23 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ cannot help because of 23... $\mathbb{Q}xh4+$ and 23 $f4$ $e3$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ leads to a quick mate.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $axb6$
26 fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

...and the ending promised White no more than drudgery. Kramnik resigned at move 48.



Portisch – Keres
Wijk aan Zee 1969

Standing in the defence of the vital points d5 and c6, the black king does a good job, but using the pressure on the files and the pin, White can disturb its presence on the central position. To do so Portisch played...

22 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Feeling that the point c6 will be in danger, Black moved to strengthen it...

22... $\mathbb{Q}bc8?$

There was something wrong in Keres's calculation when he underrated the coming attack from c4. We shall see from the course of the struggle that fleeing from the pin and $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ by 22... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ was essential.

23 $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

On 23... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ there is 24 $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 26 fxe3 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27 b3 and if 23... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, then 24 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ shifting the pressure to d5. Black thought he could get away with the aggressive text-move.

24 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

24... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ costs Black a pawn, while the text-move does not appeal either.

25 $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}cd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Giving up the central pawn by 26... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ comes into consideration, but then White does not have to take it at once and may choose to continue like in the game.

27 g4

By driving away the knight, the key support for the isolated pawn will be removed.

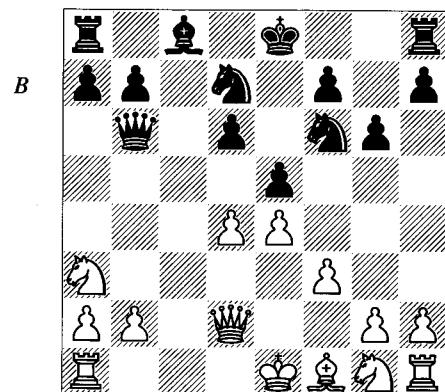
27...h6 28 h4 $\mathbb{Q}c6?$

Black fails to notice that his queen's rook will find itself in a tight place. 28...a5 is better.

29 b4 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 30 g5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $b6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 34 a4

...and White won material.

Usually when both kings are stuck in the centre, the tactical fight becomes complex and uncertainties are heightened. It is generally the side that finds a refuge for its king that prevails.



Kotov – Boleslavsky
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1945

Feeling that he is behind with development, Kotov has just played 12 $\mathbb{Q}b1-a3$ expecting to recuperate the lost time by 13 $\mathbb{Q}c4$. Black's response was natural and firm:

12...d5!

Black opens the game and denies the knight the c4-square. His assessment that his king is better off will prove right.

13 dx5?!

This wins a pawn, but frees the black pieces. Considering the state of the white kingside, wiser was 13 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ (but not 14 $\mathbb{Q}dx5$ due to 14... $\mathbb{Q}e3$) 14... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $exd4$ 16 0-0-0 0-0-17 $\mathbb{Q}7f6$ with chances to equalize, even though the pressure along the c-file may cause White some unpleasant moments.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Just by comparing the situation of the two kings, we understand the essentials. Now it's

too late for 16 0-0-0 due to 16... $\hat{Q}f5$, but king-side castling is also unavailable for a while.

16 $\hat{Q}e2$ a6 17 $\hat{Q}c4$ $\hat{E}e8$ 18 $\hat{Q}d1??$

The rejoinder will make it all too clear why 18 $\hat{Q}f1$ was essential.

18... $\hat{Q}h3!$ 19 $\hat{Q}f1$

After 19 $f4$ $\hat{Q}xg2$ 20 $fxe5$ $\hat{E}xe5$ the rook has no place to go.

19... $\hat{Q}xf3$

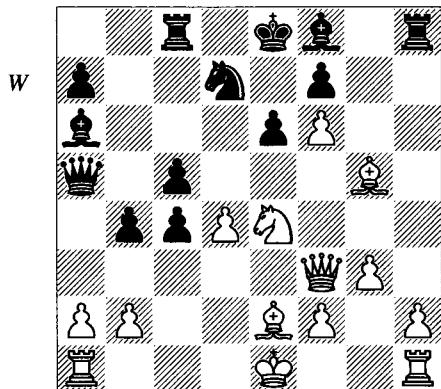
Starting the usual fireworks.

20 $\hat{W}f4$

20 $\hat{W}c3$ $\hat{E}e3$ 21 $\hat{Q}d3$ $\hat{E}c8$ 22 $\hat{Q}c4$ $\hat{E}xc4$ 23 $\hat{W}xc4$ $\hat{Q}g4$ 24 $\hat{Q}d4$ $\hat{E}e1+$ 25 $\hat{E}xe1$ $\hat{Q}d2+$, etc., was given by Boleslavsky.

20... $\hat{Q}g4$ 21 $\hat{W}xf3$ $\hat{Q}e3+$ 22 $\hat{Q}e1$ $\hat{Q}xg2$ 23 $\hat{W}f2$ $\hat{Q}xh1$

...and the rest, as they say, was a matter of inertia.



Kramnik – Ehlvest
Riga Tal mem 1995

Here Ehlvest had deviated from the standard lines of the Botvinnik Semi-Slav, by seeking counterplay with ... $\hat{E}c8$. It may have been his *faux pas*. Whatever the case, both players still have their kings in their initial positions, but a detail in their situations differs: Black has given up any hope of castling, whereas White has preserved it. The ensuing energetic pawn breakthrough in the centre has a lot to do with these facts...

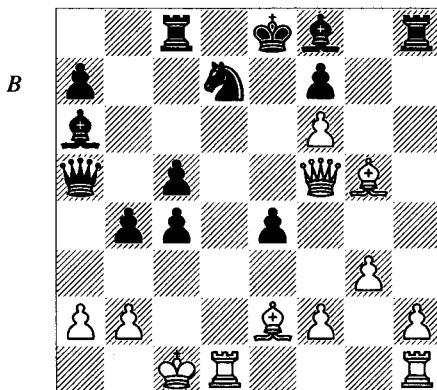
16 d5! $\hat{E}xd5$ 17 $\hat{W}f5!$

Beautifully played: a pawn has been invested to open the h3-c8 diagonal and now a whole knight is offered to open the d-file.

17... $\hat{d}xe4$

17... $\hat{Q}b7$ would prove meaningless after the natural 18 0-0, while 17... $c3$, consistent with Ehlvest's play up until now, gives up the d5-pawn for feeble threats; for example, 18 $\hat{W}xd5$ $cx b2$ 19 $\hat{Q}d1$ $b3+$ 20 $\hat{Q}d2$ or 18 $\hat{Q}g4$ $\hat{Q}b5$ 19 $\hat{W}xd5$ $cx b2$ 20 $\hat{Q}d1$.

18 0-0-0 (D)



Castling long rightly accentuates the importance of time in a position that is cracking open.

18... $\hat{E}c7$ 19 $\hat{Q}g4$

The purpose of this clever move is to force Black to play 19... $\hat{Q}b5$, after which he won't be able to oppose the queen's inroad by $\hat{W}xe4+$ and $\hat{W}a8$ later on. For the time being it is important that 19... $\hat{W}xa2$ 20 $\hat{W}xd7$ guarantees Black no more than a couple of useless checks; the king hides at f4.

19... $\hat{Q}b5$ 20 $\hat{W}xe4+$ $\hat{Q}d8$ 21 $\hat{Q}xd7!$

Clear-cut! Not one second is left to Black to think of counterplay!

21... $\hat{Q}xd7$

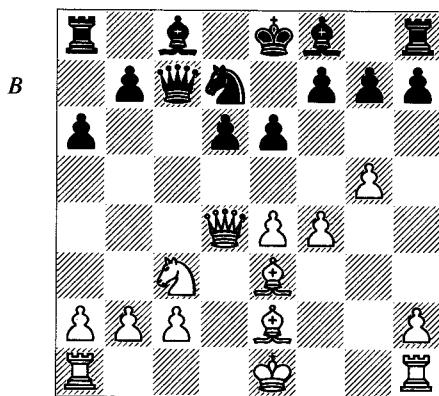
Or 21... $\hat{E}xd7$ 22 $\hat{Q}f4$.

22 $\hat{W}he1$

Black's situation is beyond hope.

In all the above cases one detail is common: due to slow development, the king of the losing side was stuck in the centre and could not be evacuated before the storm struck. This experience has been shared by literally thousands of chess-players in thousands of games. Although, of course, we can uncover numerous examples to the contrary, nonetheless the exceptions just strengthen the widespread feeling that keeping the king in the centre for too long sooner or later becomes risky. A vast range of motifs,

used effectively against defenders, warn against it. That same sense of acute danger has led to a widely accepted opinion that it pays to force the enemy king to stay in the centre, whether by cutting off the path of castling, or by tactical tricks or even at a huge material cost. The idea has been constantly nurtured by striking examples from master competitions.



Keres – Bogoljubow

Salzburg 1943

The early exchange of knights on d4 did not do service to Black: positioned on the central d4-square, the white queen prevents the normal development of the black kingside. At the same time, by postponing castling himself, White has kept Black's routine queenside expansion with ...b5 in check due to the potential reply a4. This explains Black's modest continuation:

11...b6

Black hopes that this fianchetto, apart from the natural development, will make it possible to castle queenside.

12 f5

This typical Sicilian pawn advance is timely: White threatens 13 fxe6 fxe6 14 ♘h5+ and if Black closes the position by 12...e5, then the purpose of the f-pawn has been realized in the form of the strong strategic square d5.

12...♘e5 13 fxe6 fxe6 14 a4

White not only fixes the weak b6-pawn, but threatens to grab it, which Black parries with a counter-threat to the g5-pawn.

14...♗e7 15 h4 ♖c5

This is a rather strange way of defending the b6-pawn, but on the one hand 15...♖b8 16 ♘f1

keeps the black king in the centre indefinitely, and on the other hand in playing the text-move Bogoljubow may have had in mind an active role for his queen.

16 ♖d2 ♖c7

Unfortunately, 16...♗b4, with which Black must have flirted, proves to be just a blank shot after the simple 17 0-0 ♘b7 18 ♘a3. So the queen has been driven from the centre, and lost time.

17 ♘f1 ♘b7 18 ♘d4!

Just at the moment when Black was ready to castle, White finds a means to keep it in the centre.

18...♗f8

18...0-0-0 loses a pawn to 19 ♗e3.

19 0-0-0 ♘xf1 20 ♘xf1 ♘d8

An ugly move, but 20...♘c4 is met by 21 ♘f4, when 21...0-0-0 is still forbidden due to 22 ♖g4, winning a pawn.

21 ♘f4

Having held the opponent's king in its initial position by a series of subtle moves, Keres moves in for the kill.

21...♘g6

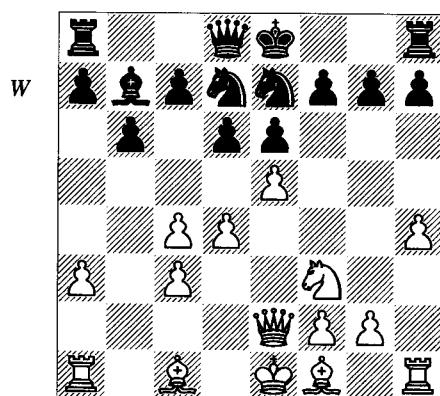
There is nothing else. 21...♗e7 loses to 22 ♘b5! axb5 23 ♘xe5, etc.

22 ♖g4 ♗e7

To Bogoljubow's 22...♔d7 Keres planned 23 ♘d5! ♖c6 24 ♖xe6+ ♔xe6 25 ♘g4#.

23 ♖h5

The quiet, final stab. The rest of the game is of little interest.



Stein – Smyslov
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1972

Black has reacted to White's advance on the kingside by exerting pressure on the e5-pawn, but ignoring the obvious threat and although poorly developed, Stein does not give up...

11 h5!

The point of the pawn advance is not limited to gaining space. It has very much to do with the black king on e8, which now loses hope of finding a peaceful refuge on the kingside. 11...0-0 12 h6 creates holes around the king, while 11...h6 exposes a target for later attack. Still, weighing up the arguments for and against, 11...h6 was the move to play.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xf3??$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ dxe5 13 h6!

White's aim has been realized: the play is sharpened and the black king is caught in a vulnerable place. It is true that the white king is also still in its initial position, but it is quite secure on e1.

13...gxh6 14 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ exd4 15 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{W}g8$ 16 $\mathbb{W}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ c5 18 g4 cxd4 19 gxf5 e5

Black has managed to get rid of the dark-squared bishop, but the powerful white queen and h7-rook continue to create threats, giving Black no time to improve the position of the miserable rook on a8, which fetters Black's defence. The tactical attempt 19... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 20 $\mathbb{W}e4$ dxc3 would be parried by 21 $\mathbb{R}a2$ (but as Stein pointed out, not 21 $\mathbb{R}d1$ because of 21...c2); 19...exf5 fails to 20 0-0-0 and 19... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ to 20 fxe6 fxe6 21 $\mathbb{R}h6$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ 22 cxd4.

20 $\mathbb{W}d5$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ 21 cxd4 $\mathbb{R}c8$ 22 $\mathbb{R}d1$

To 22 c5, as recommended by Suetin, Black responds not 22...exd4 due to 23 $\mathbb{R}a2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 24 $\mathbb{R}b5$, but 22...bxc5.

22... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}g8$

20 $\mathbb{W}d5$ and 23 $\mathbb{Q}g2$, which both activated white pieces, secured a cosy place for the king on f1. Black's problem has remained his exposed king and by vacating the f8-square he responds in the same manner to remedy its precarious situation.

24 $\mathbb{W}b7!$

Another strong reply, playing again on the same theme of the endangered king. The position opens forcefully in White's favour.

24... $\mathbb{R}xc4$

24...exd4+ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{R}c5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is little help.

25 dxe5

25 $\mathbb{W}a8+$! $\mathbb{W}d8$ 26 $\mathbb{W}d5$ wins quickly.

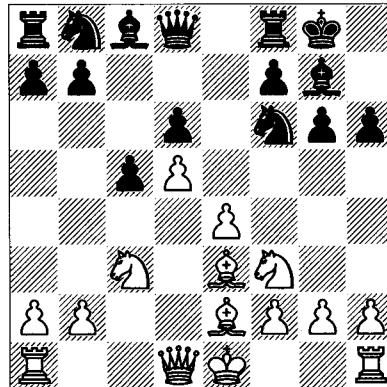
25... $\mathbb{W}xe5+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}b5$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}c6$

Bad, but there is nothing better. 27... $\mathbb{R}cg4$ loses to 28 $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 29 $\mathbb{R}xd7+$, etc., while 27... $\mathbb{R}xg2+$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xg2$ is hopeless for Black.

28 $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{R}xc6$ 29 $\mathbb{R}h8!$

The final blow! The end is inevitable.

B



Donner – Portisch

Lugano OL 1968

White has reached a position with a Benoni pawn-structure via a dubious move-order, and with an unfavourable detail – the white king has stayed in the centre longer than it should. Black's reaction was not long in coming...

10...b5!

This pawn advance keeps the king in the centre, and provokes forcing play. 11 e5, which is often useful in similar positions, fails here because of 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$.

11 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c3??$

Better, although by no means easy, is 13 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 15 $\mathbb{R}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 14 bxc3 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 15 $\mathbb{W}b3$

In view of the king's precarious condition on e1, 15 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ hardly comes into consideration; 15... $\mathbb{W}e8+$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ (or even 16...f5) looks most unpleasant. In such situations one does not grab pawns, and Donner tries to lessen the pressure by exchanging queens.

15... $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ 16 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

17 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f5 19 g3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ remains unpleasant for White.

17... $\mathbb{Q}d3!$

Notwithstanding the exchange of queens, compelling the king to stay in the centre remains a fruitful policy: the white rooks are

uncoordinated, and the d5-pawn is cut off and weak. It pays to sacrifice a pawn in these circumstances.

18 ♜xh6 ♜e8+ 19 ♜d1

19 ♜e3 ♜d7 20 0-0-0 ♜b6 21 c4 ♜a4 is not appealing either.

19... ♜d7 20 ♜c1 ♜b6 21 ♜e1

The planned 21 c4 is met by 21... ♜a4 22 ♜e3 f5 23 g3 g5, so White goes for the reduction of material, the usual saving procedure in many cases.

21... ♜xe1+ 22 ♜xe1 ♜e8+ 23 ♜e3

No place to hide: on 23 ♜d1 there is again 23... ♜a4 24 ♜e3 f5 25 g3 g5 26 ♜b3 f4 27 gx4 gx4 28 ♜xf4 ♜b2+ 29 ♜d2 ♜e2# and the unfortunate king is caught in the mating-net.

23... f5 24 ♜f3 f4 25 ♜d2 c4 26 ♜xb6 ♜e2+ 27 ♜d1 axb6 28 ♜b1 ♜xf2 29 ♜xb6 ♜xg2 30 ♜e1

30 ♜e1 loses to 30... f3. Cut off on the back rank, the white king stays exposed until the bitter end.

30... ♜e2+ 31 ♜d1 ♜xa2 32 ♜e1 ♜e2+ 33 ♜d1 ♜f2 34 ♜g5 f3 35 h4 ♜g2 36 ♜b8+ ♜g7 37 ♜b7+ ♜f8 0-1

Ever since 10... b5, the white king has had no peace. In similar circumstances many players in many games shared Donner's experience about the annoying ...b5. A more recent game struck my attention...

Gelfand – Anand

Linares 1993

Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 c5 4 d5 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 b5!?

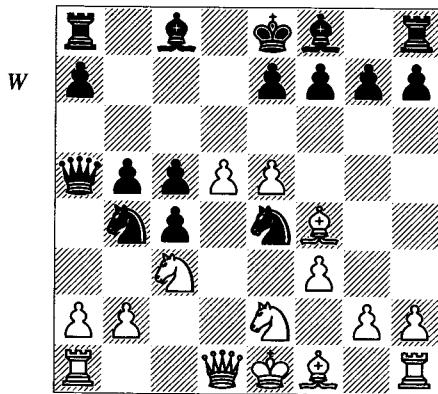
This time the challenge comes even earlier. The motif is the same: the e4-pawn.

6 ♜f4 ♜a5 7 e5??

In that same tournament, another interesting game was played in the same variation. Shirov-Kramnik, Linares 1993 continued 7 ♜d2 b4 8 e5 bxc3 (after 8... ♜g4, 9 e6 ♜f6 10 ♜xc4 fxe6 11 dx6 was a correct sacrifice for superior development in Van Wely-Azmaiparashvili, Istanbul OL 2000) 9 ♜xc3 ♜a6 10 exf6 exf6 11 b3 ♜e7 12 ♜xc4 ♜d6 13 ♜e2 0-0 14 0-0 f5 15 ♜e1 ♜d7 with an advantage for White.

7... ♜e4 8 ♜e2 ♜a6 9 f3 ♜b4! (D)

A whole piece for the right to check and force the king to stay in the middle of the board!



The threat can hardly be avoided. For instance: 10 ♜c1 g5 11 ♜e3 ♜xc3 12 bxc3 ♜a6, followed by 13... ♜g7 is fine for Black.

10 fxe4 ♜d3+ 11 ♜d2 g6

Not a difficult decision to take; 11... ♜xb2? loses to 12 ♜b1 and after 11... ♜f2? 12 ♜e1 ♜xh1 the knight is trapped, while the tension and initiative have disappeared. Considering the potentially weak e5-pawn as well as the urgent need to complete development, the fianchetto is logical and consistent.

12 b3?

Anand gives 12 ♜e3 as the right thing to do. He is right, but after 12... ♜g7 Black would get his adequate share of play; for example, 13 ♜g3 ♜xf4 14 ♜xf4 ♜xe5+.

12... ♜g7 13 bxc4 ♜xf4 14 ♜xf4 ♜xe5 15 ♜e2 b4 16 ♜a4+ ♜xa4 17 ♜xa4 ♜xal 18 ♜xc5 0-0 19 ♜d3 a5 20 g3 ♜g7 21 ♜g2 ♜a6

White has no compensation for the exchange and the powerful bishop-pair.

In the diagram on the following page, only 12 moves have been played, but it takes no great expert to conclude that White is facing difficulties. His queen is exposed to 13... ♜e6, when both the b5-knight and the c3-pawn are threatened. It would be easy to find a solution, if it were not for the unfortunate king on e1, stuck in the centre at a moment of early crisis.

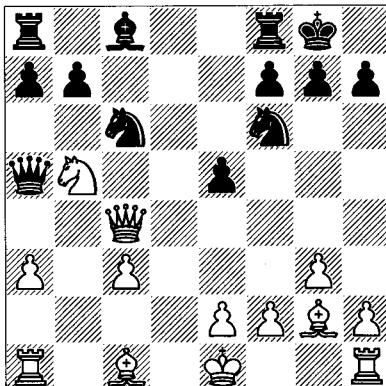
13 ♜d6 ♜e6 14 ♜d3

14 ♜xb7 ♜xc4 15 ♜xa5 ♜xa5 16 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 would be advantageous for Black, hence White must comply.

14... e4!

An important moment: by sacrificing a pawn Black lessens the pressure exerted on the h1-a8

W



Topalov – Ivanchuk
Linares 1999

diagonal and the b7-pawn in particular, but, more importantly, the white king is not given a single moment to catch its breath and run out of danger.

15 ♜xe4

Again White must comply and take the offer: 15 ♜e3 ♜g4 is highly unpleasant, while 15 ♜d2 ♜ad8 pins the knight (after 16 ♜xb7, 16...♜a4 reveals the weakness of the first rank).

15...♜xe4 16 ♜xe4 ♜ad8 17 ♜c2

17 ♜f3 ♜e5 and 17 ♜e3 ♜fe8 demonstrate there is no good alternative.

17...♜d4 18 ♜b2 ♜xe2!

There is no peace for the king. At the cost of a whole knight it is held a hostage of the growing attack.

19 ♜xe2

Unfortunately for White, 19 ♜b4 is answered by 19...♜xc3! 20 ♜f3 ♜e5+ 21 ♜e3 ♜d5 22 ♜xd5 ♜xd5.

19...♜fe8

After this potential pin it is clear that White will have to give back more than he took.

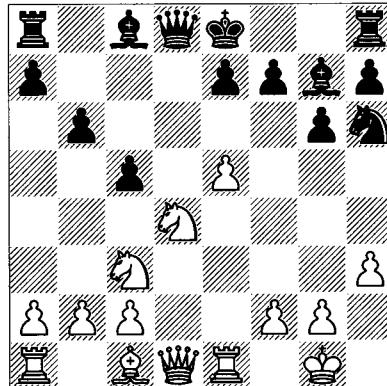
20 ♜b4

There is no way out of the predicament unscarred: 20 ♜e3 ♜c4+ 21 ♜f3 ♜xe4; 20 ♜e1 ♜h5+; or 20 f3 f5 21 ♜f2 fxé4 22 f4 ♜h5 and the punishment comes on the light squares.

20...♜h5+ 21 f3 f5 22 g4 ♜h3 23 gxé5 ♜xf5 24 ♜c4+ ♜h8 25 ♜e1 ♜xe4+ 0-1

Ivanchuk's knight sacrifice on e2 awakens some old memories. In another brilliant game a knight was sacrificed on e7 with the same purpose ...

W



Kholmov – Keres
USSR Ch (Tbilisi) 1959

Black has apparently solved his opening problems, since 12 ♜db5 ♜xd1 13 ♜xd1 0-0 gives him comfortable play. But there was more to this position than Black expected...

12 ♜c6!

At first glance it looks like White is falling into a trap, but we soon learn that this time 12...♜xd1 does not help. After 13 ♜xd1 ♜d7 (13...♝b7 does not change things for the better) 14 ♜d5 there is no good reply. 12...♜c7 proves to be just an inferior version of the game continuation after 13 ♜xe7. Then 13...♜xe7 14 ♜d5 ♜d8 15 ♜f6+ ♜e7 16 ♜f3 ♜e6 17 ♜g5 is too bad for Black to consider.

12...♜d7 13 ♜xe7?

With the queen on d7, Black can recapture with the king, as he did in the game, or he can first play 13...♜xd1 14 ♜xd1 and only then 14...♜xe7. In both cases the result is the same: his king will stay in the centre under attack. 15 ♜g5+ ♜e6 16 ♜d6+ ♜xe5 (or 16...♝f5 17 f4) 17 ♜ad1 ♜b7 18 f4+ ♜f5 19 ♜e2 wins.

13...♜xe7 14 ♜xh6 ♜xh6 15 ♜f3 ♜g7

Black has parried the first wave of attack (16 ♜xa8? would lose to 16...♝b7 17 ♜xa7 ♜c6, etc.), but the king, stuck in the centre, remains vulnerable.

16 ♜d5+ ♜d8

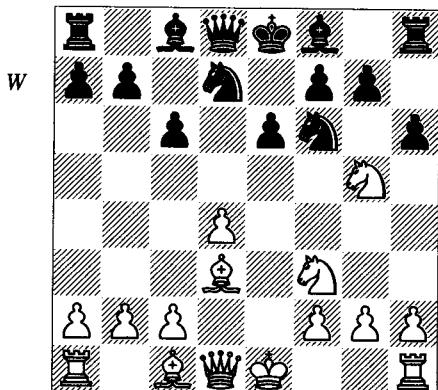
16...♜e8 loses to 17 ♜f6+ ♜xf6 18 exf6+ etc., and 16...♝f8 to 17 e6 ♜b7 18 e7+ ♜e8 19 ♜f6!. The text-move loses the queen.

17 ♜ad1 ♜b7 18 ♜b3 ♜c6 19 ♜xb6 axb6 20 ♜xf7

...and Black was knocked out.

Leko – Bakhtadze
Las Palmas U-16 tt 1995
 Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♜d7 5 ♜g5 ♜gf6 6 ♜d3 e6 7 ♜f3 h6? (D)



Today we know better and Black avoids this highly provocative and dubious move. We shall know the reason why very soon.

8 ♜xe6! ♜e7

At the time, this was considered an improvement over 8...fxe6. As a matter of fact, it is a worse version of the variation played in Wolff-Granda, New York 1992, which continued 9 ♜g6+ ♛e7 10 0-0 ♜c7 11 ♜e1?! ♜d8 12 c4 ♜b4 13 ♜e2 ♜f8 with a degree of counterplay. Black can only dream of in our game; of course, 11 ♜e1 is out of place.

9 0-0 fxe6 10 ♜g6+ ♜d8

So we see our theme – the black king has been kept in the centre by means of a piece sacrifice.

11 c4

This position occurred in Deep Blue-Kasparov, New York (6) 1997. I could not understand Kasparov's reasons for entering this disastrous line, as it is utterly in contrast with his chess postulates and quite in harmony with the abilities of the machine. Deep Blue played 11 ♜f4, another strong developing move. On f4, the bishop limits the movement of the black king and the dark-squared bishop, which tends to move to d6. After 11...b5?! (again too optimistic) 12 a4 ♜b7 13 ♜e1 ♜d5 14 ♜g3 ♛c8 15 axb5 cxb5 16 ♜d3 ♜c6 17 ♜f5 Black was outplayed. 11...♜d5 is somewhat better, which

explains Leko's choice; he intends to keep his opponent cramped on his first two ranks.

11...♜d6

Black could accelerate the intended manoeuvre by 11...♜b4 12 ♜e2 ♜d6, but then his queen strays away. Leko notes he intended to continue 13 ♜e5, but 13 ♜d2 is certainly quite unpleasant too.

12 ♜e2 ♜c7 13 ♜d1 ♜d6 14 ♜e5!

White is using his overwhelming spatial advantage to keep his opponent subjugated.

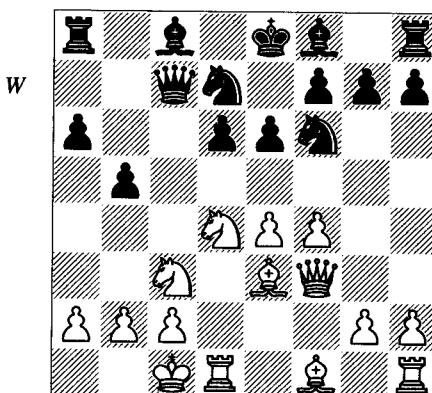
14...♜f8 15 ♜f4

This is in complete harmony with 13 ♜d1 and 14 ♜e5. While Black cannot finish his development and obtain any level of coordination, White moves all his pieces into active positions.

15...♜xe5?

At first glance, opening the d-file does not seem so tragic, but in connection with the displacement of the f6-knight it is decisive. 15...b6 is essential.

16 dxe5 ♜g8 17 ♜g3 ♜b6 18 ♜g4 c5 19 ♜d6 ♜xb2 20 ♜ad1 ♛c7 21 ♜xe6 ♜df6 22 ♜d7! 1-0



Nei – Darga
Beverwijk 1964

Striking in the centre by 10 e5 does not appear to bring an advantage; after the expected 10...♜b7 the pawn will be lost. But in those days much more was needed to deter Iivo Nei ...

10 e5! ♜b7 11 ♜h3 dxe5 12 ♜xe6

The point of the central thrust: opening the position for a sharp attack at the cost of a piece

may bring success against an exposed king. Hidden traps are waiting for both players, but as a rule the attacker is in a psychologically advantageous situation.

12...fxe6 13 ♜xe6+ ♜e7 14 ♜xb5!

The defence is strong, and only exceptional measures can break through.

14...axb5

14...0-0-0 15 ♜xe7 or 14...♜d8 15 ♜b6 is not very appealing and the play proceeds along the forced line planned by White.

15 ♜xb5 ♜c6 16 ♜d6+ ♜d8 17 fxe5 ♜c7?!

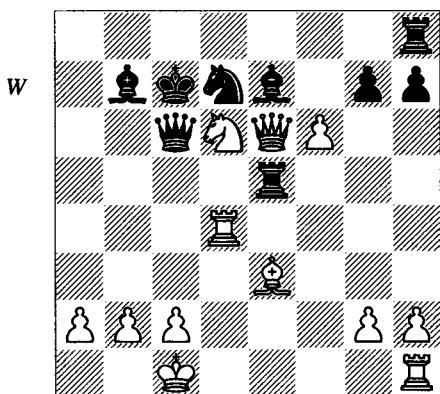
Exploiting the pin on the sixth rank, Black could choose 17...♝e4 and meet 18 ♜f7+ with 18...♝e8, limiting White to perpetual check, or play for more with 18...♝c7. The text-move coordinates the rooks, but on c7 the king will not find peace...

18 ♜d4 ♜a5?

The dark side of similar positions lies in the notorious fact that in a labyrinth of possibilities it is very easy to slip. Black takes precautions against 19 ♜c4, but that is not the only threat hanging over his head. He should have entered the endgame by 18...♜xd6 19 ♜xd6 ♜e4 20 exf6 ♜xe6 21 ♜xe6 gxsf6, which is inferior for him, but it can be held.

19 exf6 ♜e5 (D)

19...♜xd6 20 fxg7 is less appealing. Anyway, Black based his hopes on the text-move.



20 ♜b5+!

It was impossible to foresee the course of the attack at the moment when White sought complications with 10 e5. The trouble is that moves like this, pulled out of the attacker's hat, make the life of the defender difficult.

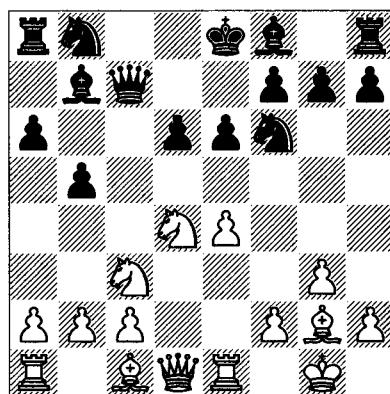
20...♜xb5

20...♜xb5 loses to 21 ♜f4+ ♜b6 22 ♜xe7, etc.

21 ♜xd7+ ♜xd7 22 ♜xe5+ ♜d6 23 ♜c3+ ♜c6 24 ♜a5+ ♜c8 25 fxg7 ♜g8 26 ♜d4

White has more than enough compensation for the bishop in the form of numerous pawns and the lasting weakness of the black king.

26...♜f4+ 27 ♜b1 ♜d7 28 ♜c5+ ♜c6 29 ♜f8+ 1-0



Stein – Furman
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1969

This early opening position at first glance does not announce the turbulent complications which ensue, but if we look more attentively we cannot miss the imbalance in Black's development; he has expanded on the queenside at the expense of the kingside and Stein's sharp tactical blow finds his king more vulnerable to attack than it appears.

10 a4 b4 11 ♜d5!

It is interesting that Shabalov-Benjamin, Las Vegas 1993 repeated the same theme via a slightly different move-order. 10 ♜g5 ♜bd7 11 a4 b4 12 ♜d5 would transpose into that game, which continued 12...exd5 13 exd5+ ♜e5 14 f4 ♜xd5 15 ♜f5 with a strong attack. The d5-square turns out to be vulnerable in numerous variations of the Sicilian even when under pawn surveillance. The piece sacrifice is based on the sensitive situation of the black king and the lack of coordination caused by it.

11...exd5 12 exd5+ ♜d8 13 ♜g5 ♜bd7 14 ♜e2

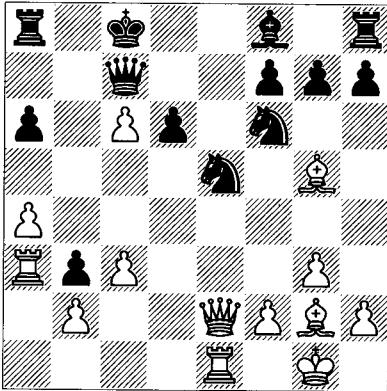
14 $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 15 dxc6 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ gxf6 17 $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xb4$ is quite unpleasant for Black, but the pressure exerted on the open file by the text-move also accentuates Black's passivity, while keeping several options about how to proceed further.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c8$

14... $\mathbb{W}c5$ would lose to 15 $\mathbb{Q}c6+$, but the clever text-move attempts to entice White into 15 $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, when Furman had in mind 16...gxf6! (16... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xf7$ is insupportable) 17 $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$, beating back the attack. White, however, is in no hurry. Having gripped his opponent by the throat, he calmly tries to bring his queen's rook into action.

15 c3! b3 16 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 17 dxc6 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ (D)

B



White is a whole piece down, but all his force has been introduced into battle.

18... $\mathbb{d}5$

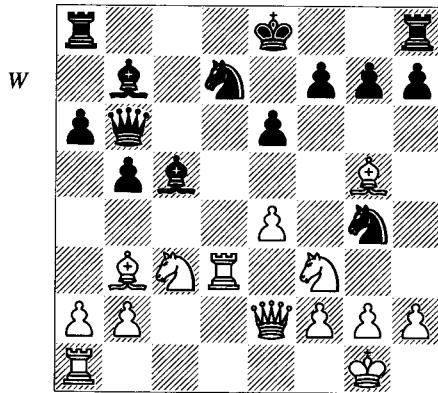
18... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19 $\mathbb{W}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ loses to 20 $\mathbb{W}f3!$ (but not 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}e8$, as demonstrated by Stein), but by attacking the a3-rook Black succeeds in bringing his reserves into play.

19 $\mathbb{W}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 21 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}g4+$

White forces a favourable endgame, in which he can continue to exploit Black's exposed king.

22... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xd7+$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 30 $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{W}xd1$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

We can finally say that White's strong initiative has been transformed into a decisive material advantage.



Petrosian – Bertok

Stockholm IZ 1962

It is easy to be deceived by positions like this. Black threatens to capture the f2-pawn, and apparently stands well. 15 $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}ge5$ would confirm our first impression. But there is more to it than that...

15 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

Sometimes attack is the best defence. All of a sudden the roles have changed: the queen is attacked and the d5-knight is taboo.

15... $\mathbb{W}a5?$

15... $\mathbb{exd}5$ 16 $\mathbb{exd}5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 17 d6 opens the diagonal for the b3-bishop with crushing effect. However, 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16 $\mathbb{exd}5$ e5 came into consideration to diminish the pressure.

16 $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

Having disrupted the coordination of the defensive forces, the knight continues to harass Black: $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ is threatened.

17... $\mathbb{Q}ge5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$

Black still can't castle: 19...0-0 is susceptible to 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{fxe}6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 22 $\mathbb{W}g4$, when the numerous threats cannot be parried.

20 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

21...0-0? would be punished by 22 $\mathbb{Q}f6+!$ $\mathbb{gxf}6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, forcing a quick mate. The king will have to remain in his uncomfortable initial position.

22 $\mathbb{Q}hd3$

With castling denied to Black, White's rook switches back to the open file in full control of the board.

22... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23 e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

A simple procedure: considering the hopeless case of the g8-rook, the more of the active

black pieces are exchanged, the more difficult it will be for Black to defend.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 25 $\mathbb{R}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}de1$!

From the tactical stroke on move 15 onwards, Petrosian's play has been characterized by impressive clarity. The e4-knight is the last barrier on his road and he is taking steps to push it out from its commanding central position.

27...f5

27... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ would allow 28 $\mathbb{W}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 29 $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 30 $\mathbb{R}c3$, etc.

28 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{G}xf6$ 29 $\mathbb{W}h3$

Precisely calculated: there is no way to endanger the g2-pawn without leaving e6 too exposed.

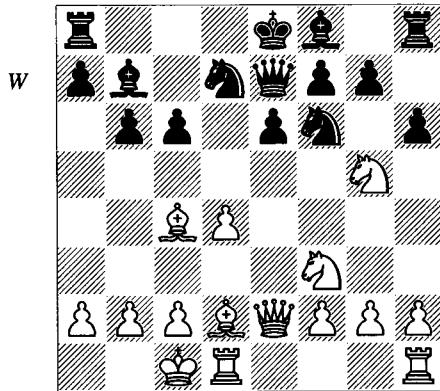
29...f5

29... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ fails to 30 $\mathbb{R}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31 $\mathbb{R}xf6+$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 32 $\mathbb{W}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 33 $\mathbb{R}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$, etc.

30 f3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 31 $\mathbb{W}xf5$

Black has been outplayed.

However, attacking the opponent's king in the centre is not always a one-way street. The play is full of submerged possibilities and often takes sharp turns with unclear consequences.



Stein – Flohr
Ukrainian Ch (Kiev) 1957

This is again a familiar type of situation. Flohr's king is still in the centre, but he is ready to castle queenside as soon as the g5-knight retreats. However, although 11 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ looks logical and good, counting with the temporarily vulnerable king and awkward position of the queen, Stein had another idea...

11 $\mathbb{Q}b4!$

The exclamation mark for the stunning idea and sheer courage to enter the ensuing conundrum. It is true, the first step was not so difficult, because 11... $\mathbb{W}xb4$ obviously loses to 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$.

11...c5 12 dxc5 bxc5 13 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Can it be that simple? 14... $\mathbb{h}xg5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 16 $\mathbb{R}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}c6!!$) 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 19 $\mathbb{R}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{R}hf8$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xg5$ favours White. But Salo Flohr was up to the challenge.

14... $\mathbb{Q}fd7!!$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}gxf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}g5+$ 17 f4 $\mathbb{W}xf4+$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$

The black king is still in danger, most of the black pieces are out of play, checks from b5 and h5 seem devastating, but by some miraculous power the position holds on by a thread.

19 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ g6 20 $\mathbb{Q}b5+?$

After long thought, Stein gives up what seems so obvious: 20 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$, and after 20... $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}g3$ it is all over. But Flohr had yet another trump up his sleeve. In the post-mortem analysis he demonstrated 20... $\mathbb{W}g5!!$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$, when 22 $\mathbb{Q}xh8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ leaves the game far from over. However, 22 $\mathbb{Q}e5++$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 23 $\mathbb{R}hf1+$ is more dangerous for Black: 23... $\mathbb{Q}f5?$ fails to 24 $\mathbb{W}f3$, so 23... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24 $\mathbb{W}h3$ is critical.

20... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}xc5+$

22 $\mathbb{W}xg6$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ forces the exchange of queens, giving Black a respite to create counterplay.

22... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ 26 h3

On 26 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$ 27 $\mathbb{R}d3$ Black is set free by 27... $\mathbb{R}h7$ 28 $\mathbb{R}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e8$.

26... $\mathbb{W}g5$ 27 $\mathbb{W}xe6+$

Winning a third pawn for the piece is a good consolation, but not the most important in our position. As long as the black pieces are awkwardly positioned around the king and the king's rook remains out of play, White is superior, but as soon as Black manages to activate the h8-rook, the balance will tip in his favour. We already feel that his pressure on the dark squares may become irresistible.

27... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 28 $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{R}b8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{R}b6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}c4?$

Contrary to what I pointed out in the previous note, instead of keeping the black army subdued and inactive, White commits a grave

error which sets free the dormant black potential. 30 $\mathbb{W}xa7?$ is equally dubious because of the reply 30... $\mathbb{W}f6$. That detail itself demonstrates that 30 $\mathbb{M}hf1$ is essential. White was probably afraid of 30... $\mathbb{A}xa2+$, whereupon 31 $\mathbb{Q}xa2?$ loses to 31... $\mathbb{A}e6$, but 31 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ is best, when Black must try 31... $\mathbb{A}e6$, since 31... $\mathbb{A}a5?$ allows 32 $\mathbb{A}h7+$, mating.

30... $\mathbb{M}h7!$

Obviously but strong. Now we can say that White is a piece down without compensation.

31 $\mathbb{M}hf1 \mathbb{M}f6$ 32 $\mathbb{M}xf6 \mathbb{W}xf6$ 33 $\mathbb{M}f1?? \mathbb{W}xf1+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xf1 \mathbb{A}xa2+ 0-1$

Having resisted doggedly with a series of cunning moves, Black in the end prevailed. Such a turnaround is a notorious psychological effect attackers should always heed. In general, however, the king caught by a sudden attack in its initial position is a very sensitive target. The king should generally seek a refuge by castling and in the early phases of the game it mostly lives in hiding, although, as our next games testify, not always.

Active King in the Opening and Middlegame

The king's status changes fundamentally in the endgame, but as early as the opening and more often in the middlegame, we sometimes encounter unusual cases in which an intrepid king joins his troops in battle. Some of these examples are so fascinating and revealing I thought it useful to devote some time to this rare aspect of the king's personality.

Steinitz – L. Paulsen

Baden-Baden 1870

Vienna Opening

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 f4 exf4 4 d4?! $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

In his younger days Steinitz was a sharp player, often playing on the edge of reality. His extraordinary game against Paulsen has been remembered for this unusual idea, the like of which would certainly raise eyebrows in our time. Disregarding normal, easy development, the white king steps forward and enters the

early skirmish. We shall see soon that the whole idea is not just a whimsical reaction, but based on the exposed position of the black queen on h4. We assess it rightly as dubious, but considering the time and the unique quality of the idea, it should certainly deserve a better mark than today's realistic assessment supplies it with.

5...d6 6 $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}g4$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 0-0-0

I recall that in the traditional match USSR-Yugoslavia, played in 1963, Averbakh and Trifunović reached this same position. In those days beating Trifunović, the incomparable king of draws, was a rare feat. For some reason many players believed they could beat him only in sharp, unusual variations, which, as a matter of fact, was just water to Trifunović's mill. Averbakh showed poor judgement, too. At this point Trifunović replied 7...f5! 8 $\mathbb{W}d2 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 9 exf5 0-0-0 and seized the initiative.

8 $\mathbb{Q}e3!$

White gets out of the awkward situation and will gain time by attacking the black queen.

8... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{W}a5?!$

At this point I recall another important game for this line, Barle-Portisch, Portorož/Ljubljana Vidmar mem 1975. A couple of years earlier, the very talented Slovenian master Janez Barle was my club-mate and when preparing him for various junior championships I became accustomed to analysing all his games; this particular one sticks in memory. Not so brilliant as his countryman Janez Planinc, but of the same fearless, razor-sharp style, on that occasion Barle committed the same error as Averbakh in his game versus Trifunović; in those days I would not have recommended to play against the Hungarian chess professor like this. Portisch responded more energetically: 9...g5! 10 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11 h3 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ with fine counterplay.

10 a3

The queen remains in a tight spot, an important detail that pushes Black in an undesired direction...

10... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$!

Why with the king? Well, in case of 11...g5 there is now 12 b4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ with a large advantage, while 11 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ g5 12 $\mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{Q}g7$ makes a difference.

11... $\mathbb{W}h5+$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ 13 b4

The pawn advance will push back the c6-knight and lessen Black's influence in the centre, but its real purpose is to open a new front on the queenside.

13...g5

13...g6 looks less obliging.

14 ♜g3 ♛h6 15 b5 ♜ce7 16 ♜f1

The perilous opening stage is over. The king has deserved some peace and the last move creates the conditions to castle 'by hand'. White is vastly superior.

16...♜f6 17 ♔f2 ♜g6 18 ♔g1 ♛g7 19 ♛d2

h6 20 a4 ♜g8

Preparing 21...♜f4, but White is already poised to strike and he does it first...

21 b6! axb6 22 ♜xf6! ♛xf6 23 ♜g4+ ♔b8

24 ♜d5 ♛g7 25 a5

The exchange sacrifice released a powerful attack. The black pieces cut off on the other wing cannot help the king.

25...f5

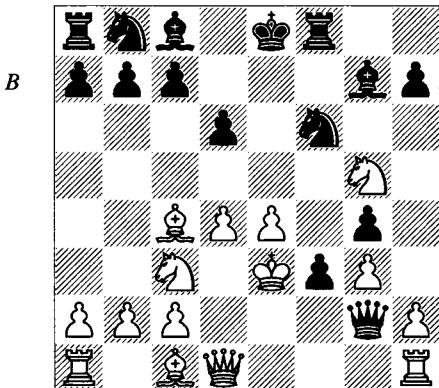
25...b5 loses to 26 a6 b6 27 a7+ ♔b7 28

♜xc7 ♔xc7 29 ♛c3+ ♔b7 30 ♜c8+, mating.

26 axb6 cxb6 27 ♜xb6 ♜e7 28 exf5 ♛f7 29

f6 ♜c6 30 c4

...and White soon won. But it was a perilous journey through a dubious opening phase the like of which we encounter in many a gambit labyrinth of those pioneer days. The next diagram finds the white king in the thick of a sharp opening battle.



Michelet – Kieseritzky

Paris 1845

Glancing at the diagram, we feel that an uncertain future awaits the white king, although it

is protected well at the moment. V. Vuković noticed also that the g5-knight happened to be in a tight spot and recommended 13...♜c6 14 a3, continuing 14...♝e7 with 15...h6 in mind, but in that case the weakness of the d4-pawn looks vulnerable to the sacrificial stroke 14...♜xd4 15 ♜xd4 ♛f2+ 16 ♜d3 ♜d7. Anyway, Kieseritzky assessed the position better than his critics, although he took a much criticized path...

13...♜h6! 14 ♜d3 ♜c6 15 a3

16 ♜g1 is threatened.

15...♝xg5 16 ♜xg5 ♜xe4!

The quieter 16...♜d7 is possible, but the unexpected knight sacrifice is consistent with Kieseritzky's previous decision and fighting mood. Besides, based on the pin and the enduring awkward position of the white king, it is a promising sacrifice.

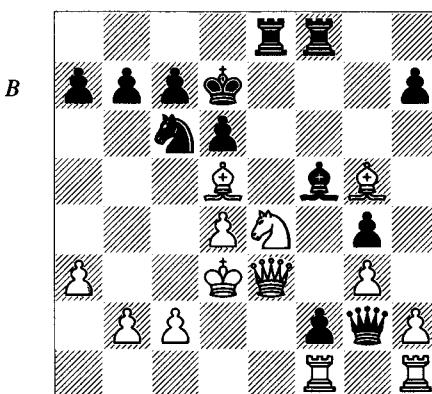
17 ♛e1

Eliminating the queen by 17 ♜xe4 ♜f5 18 ♛f1 would not bring relief after 18...♜d7.

17...♜f5 18 ♜xe4 f2 19 ♛e2

The alternative is 19 ♛e2.

19...♜d7 20 ♜d5 ♛ae8 21 ♜af1 (D)



An exclamation mark was given to this move, but it just set a trap that Black fell for.

21...♝xe4+?

In the tense, complex position Black miscalculates, trying to cash in his pressure at once. Winning the queen was appealing, but not good. 21...♜e7 22 ♜xe7 ♛xe7 looks attractive, but 23 ♛f4! prevents the intended 23...c6 and threatens 24 ♛xf5+ ♜xf5 25 ♜f6+, etc. 23...♝e8 24 ♜xb7 is not a solution to the mutual pins, but 23...♝h3 and even 23...♝f3+ are satisfactory. However, 21...♜g6! 22 ♜f4 ♜e7 wins. If the

queen were on e2, then this idea would not work because the g4-pawn would hang, but in that case 21... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22 $\mathbb{A}xe7$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}b5+$ (or 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$, etc.) 24... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xb7?$ $\mathbb{B}xd4+$, etc., would be decisive.

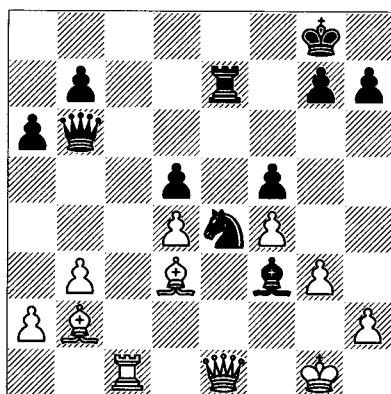
22 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{B}f3$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xf3!$ $gxf3$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$

While winning the rook back, White simultaneously traps the queen, which will wait for the end of the game on g2. The rest is simple.

24... $\mathbb{W}e6$ 25 d5 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ h5 27 $dxe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ h4 29 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $hxg3$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 1-0

This was a happy end for the white king, but after some lucky turnabouts. Anyway, an active king in the opening is a rare thing by all standards. Less so in the middlegame, where there are relevant examples from further back than Steinitz's age.

B



Horwitz – Staunton
London (20) 1846

This was the position reached after 27 $\mathbb{B}a1-c1$. That White is experiencing difficulties is not difficult to assess. Owing to the closed position, his bishop-pair is inferior to Black's bishop and knight, and his king is potentially vulnerable, which makes the exchange at e4 unappealing. However, it remains to be seen how Black can realize his advantage. Staunton's answer announces the things to come...

27... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$

With the rook defended, the strong e4-knight can open the file at will. Besides, after this preparatory move other active moves can be expected on the kingside.

28 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ g5 29 $\mathbb{F}xg5$

29 $\mathbb{W}e3$ g4 is also difficult for White in the long run.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 30 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Played consistently: the king takes an active role in the kingside action.

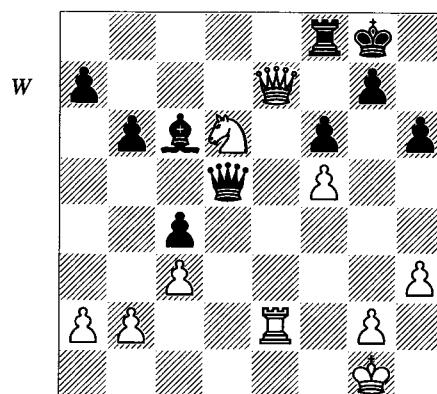
31 $\mathbb{H}c8??$

When the house is on fire, one does not engage one's pieces elsewhere. 31 h4 is a better chance.

31... $\mathbb{W}e6$ 32 $\mathbb{H}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 33 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}e1$ 35 $\mathbb{H}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 0-1

36... $\mathbb{H}e2+$ leads to mate. Considering the time, a remarkable idea!

Modern chess has remained frugal with positions featuring an active king in the middlegame. It's probably the reason why such cases stick so firmly in the memory.



Teichmann – Allies
Glasgow 1902

Paralysed by the harmonious activity of the white queen and the d6-knight, Black can do nothing but wait. On the other hand, both these pieces have no reasonable move and the e2-rook cannot leave the second rank because of the mate threat against g2. A balance of impotence, said a friend of mine, when I showed him this position. The 'Allies' probably shared this opinion and did not worry when White continued...

28 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

If White can wait, we can also wait, they reasoned, not noticing it was a beginning of a fine idea...

28... $\mathbb{B}b5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $a5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}h4$

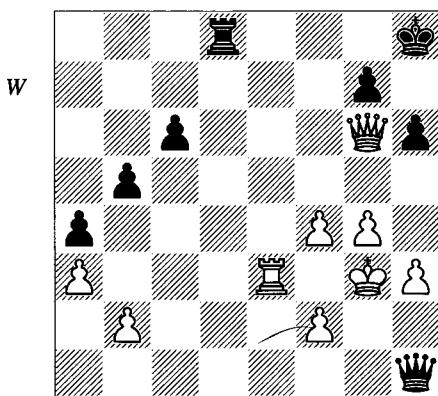
At last the Allies discovered they would be mated in 3! In order to stop 31 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ they did the only thing they could...

30...g6 31 $\mathbb{E}e3!$

Making sure that 31...g5+ fails to 32 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ and 31...gx f 5 to 32 $\mathbb{E}g3+$, etc.

31... $\mathbb{W}xg2$ 32 $\mathbb{E}g3$ $\mathbb{W}f2$ 33 fx g 6 $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 34 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 1-0

I found the motif repeated some decades later:



Kholmov – Mikenas
Vilnius 1953

Considering the fact that the white king is apparently exposed to checks, an extra pawn does not seem a decisive advantage. But Kholmov assigns his king a special task...

40 $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ $\mathbb{W}g2$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

Unexpectedly, the ‘exposed’ king joins the final attack. Its intentions are revealed after 41... $\mathbb{W}xf2$, when 42 $\mathbb{E}e8+$ $\mathbb{E}xe8$ 43 $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 44 $\mathbb{W}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ creates unsolvable difficulties.

41... $\mathbb{E}f8$ 42 $\mathbb{W}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

If Black had hoped he could protect the g6-square by 42... $\mathbb{E}f6$, then he now realized that 43 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ gx f 6 44 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ refutes it.

43 $\mathbb{Q}g6$

The infiltration has been carried out as intended.

43... $\mathbb{W}d5$

43... $\mathbb{E}f6+$ again fails after 44 $\mathbb{W}xf6$, while 43... $\mathbb{W}xf2$ is refuted by 44 $\mathbb{W}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 45 $\mathbb{W}f7$. Now Black has no choice but to simplify into a bad endgame.

44 $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ $\mathbb{C}xd5$ 45 g5

Decisive.

45...hx g 5

45... $\mathbb{E}xf4$ loses to 46 $\mathbb{E}e8+$ with a won pawn ending.

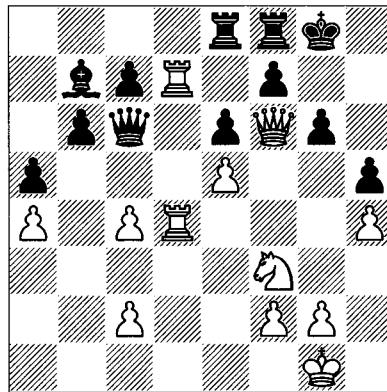
46 $\mathbb{F}xg5$ d4

In case of 46... $\mathbb{E}xf2$ 47 $\mathbb{E}e8+$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 48 $\mathbb{E}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ d4 50 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ White is quicker.

47 $\mathbb{E}e7$ $\mathbb{H}d8$ 48 $\mathbb{E}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 49 $\mathbb{H}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 50 $\mathbb{H}e7$ d3 51 $\mathbb{E}e1$

...and White soon won.

Here is a further example from more recent times...



Short – Timman
Tilburg 1991

The players are apparently in the same situation of ‘mutual impotence’, only Short does not agree.

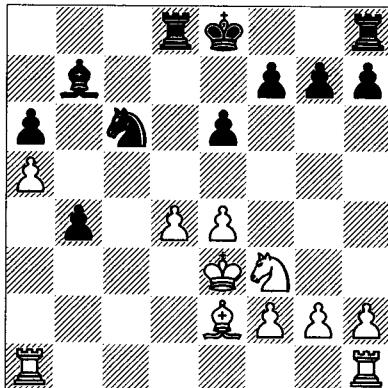
31 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

I wonder whether at this moment it dawned on Black that this king is bound for h6 and that he was in mortal danger or if he only discovered the truth later on. The game continued:

31... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}ce8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 1-0

The only consolation Black could find was in the fact that after the essential 31... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ there is 32 $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ hx g 4 (or 32... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 33 gx h 5 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$) 33 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ g3+ (alternatively, 33... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 34 f3 gx f 3 35 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$) 34 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$ (Speelman’s move, threatening to continue 36 h5) 35... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$.

B



Portisch – Pinter
Hungarian Ch (Budapest) 1984

Expecting Black routinely to castle, we might prematurely come to the conclusion that the white king, having stayed in the centre, represents an advantageous element of the position. But Black's actual choice is far from routine...

18...f5! 19 exf5 exf5 20 ♜c4 ♜e7!

Having abandoned the possibility of castling, Black moves his king to f6 and all of a sudden the position has been turned topsy-turvy: the black king gets a safe place, while its white counterpart stays in the open.

21 d5 ♜f6!

The idea hinged on this hidden move (obviously 21...♜b8 22 ♜d4 would be counterproductive; 18...f5 would boomerang on Black). Black threatens 22...♜he8+, and White has no time to oppose the black rook by 22 ♜he1 because of 22...♜e7, when the d5-pawn falls. There is no way back.

22 dxc6 ♜he8+ 23 ♜f4 ♜e4+

This is the moment when Black could stumble by choosing the 'easy win' by 23...g5+, when after 24 ♜xg5 ♜d4+ 25 ♜g3 ♜g4+ 26 ♜h3 ♜xc6 27 ♜f3 ♜xc4 the passed pawn supported by the superior bishop should win. However, Pinter points out that the surprising 24 ♜g3! enables White to survive the immediate onslaught, and gives 24...f4+ 25 ♜h3 ♜c8+ (or 25...♜xc6 26 ♜he1 h5 27 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 28 ♜e1 with an advantage for White) 26 g4 h5 27 ♜g2 hxg4 28 ♜e1 ♜d2 29 ♜a2.

24 ♜g3 ♜c8

24...♜xc6 fails to 25 ♜xa6.

25 ♜ac1 ♜g4+ 26 ♜h3 f4 27 ♜e5?

This looks perfectly adequate to save the king from its predicament; for example, 27...h5 28 ♜d7+ or 27...♜xe5 28 ♜he1+ ♜f6 29 ♜e6, etc. Pinter, however, noticing its drawbacks, proposed a more ingenious way out of trouble. He suggested 27 ♜xa6 ♜g3++ (27...♜e6?! 28 ♜c4! or 27...♜f5?! 28 ♜c5 does not help Black) 28 ♜h4 and Black has nothing better than perpetual check. 27 c7!? is an interesting alternative.

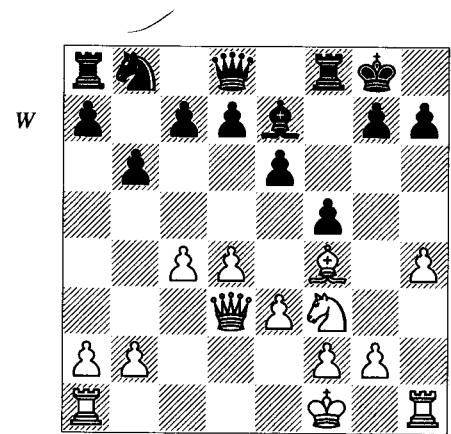
27...♜g5!

Taking away the king's route of escape, thus closing the net.

28 ♜f7+

28 ♜f3+ puts up less resistance.

28...♜h5 29 ♜e2 ♜d3+ 30 g3 f3 31 ♜c5+ ♜g5+ 32 g4+ ♜xg4+ 33 ♜g3 fxe2+ 0-1



Spassky – Polugaevsky
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1961

It was in this apparently quiet position that the white king started its exciting trip, but White could hardly imagine how far it would go.

13 ♜e2!

This was a natural decision and a logical move: the king is well protected in the centre, while the queen's rook can be switched to the other side of the board and g4 pawn advance carried out.

13...d6 14 g4!

By opening the g-file, White seizes the initiative. He does not worry about 14...fxg4 owing to 15 ♜g5 ♜xg5 16 hxg5 g6 17 ♜e4. The weight of the battle is transferred to the king-side, where all the white force is engaged.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{M}ag1$ $f\mathbb{x}g4$ 16 $\mathbb{M}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17
 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

To deny Black the h5-square.

17... $\mathbb{M}d7$ 18 $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19 $\mathbb{M}g2$ b5

Black offers a pawn sacrifice in order to turn White's attention in another direction and open the position for counterplay against the white king.

20 c5

20 cxb5 $\mathbb{M}b8$ 21 a4 c6 would certainly please Black, but White does not comply, and stays focused on the black king.

20...dxc5?!

20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is better. In grabbing the pawn, Black surrenders the e5-square to White's minor pieces, which greatly facilitates his attack.

21 h6 $\mathbb{M}f5$

Black had no choice: 21...g6 loses to 22 $\mathbb{M}xg6+$ $hxg6$ 23 $\mathbb{M}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{M}d5$ 25 $\mathbb{M}g1$, while 21...c4 is punished by 22 $\mathbb{M}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 23 $hxg7+$, etc.

22 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ c4 23 $\mathbb{M}e4$ $\mathbb{M}d5$ 24 $\mathbb{M}g4$ c3 25 b3 b4

Unfortunately, Black cannot stabilize the situation by 25...g6 due to 26 e4 and hopes to be able to harass the white king from b5.

26 e4 $\mathbb{M}b5+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{M}f7$ 28 $hxg7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29
 $\mathbb{M}xf6$

29 $\mathbb{M}xe6$ $\mathbb{M}d7$ would ease the pressure.

29... $\mathbb{M}xf6$ 30 $\mathbb{M}xh7$ $\mathbb{M}xf3+$

On the verge of disaster Polugaevsky seeks his last chance: exposing the white king to checks.

31 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

31 $\mathbb{M}xf3$ obviously does not work because of 31... $\mathbb{Q}g5+$. So the king sets off on an unusual journey.

31... $\mathbb{M}d3+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ (D)

34 $\mathbb{Q}h5?$

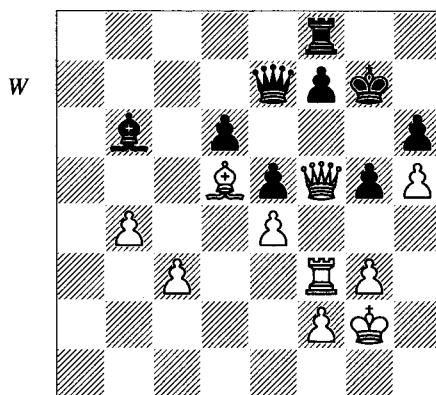
Nearing the end of his extraordinary mission, the king stumbles. 34 $\mathbb{Q}h5+?$ is insufficient because of 34... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ 35 $\mathbb{M}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36 $\mathbb{M}xa8$ $\mathbb{M}d2+$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{M}d1+$, etc. White forgets that the black queen can go back the same way it came to d3. The text-move was probably a time-trouble error, because it is easy to see that 34 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{M}xd4+$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ wins.

34... $\mathbb{M}b5+$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h4?$

There was still time to save the game. 35 e5 $\mathbb{M}e8+$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ (37... $\mathbb{M}f7?$ loses to 38 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$) 38 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{M}f7$ 39 $\mathbb{M}h3$ $\mathbb{M}f4+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{M}c1+$ is a draw. But the damnation of weak moves, as Tarrasch said, is that they lead to other weak moves. Shaken by his blunder, White overlooks another tactical point...

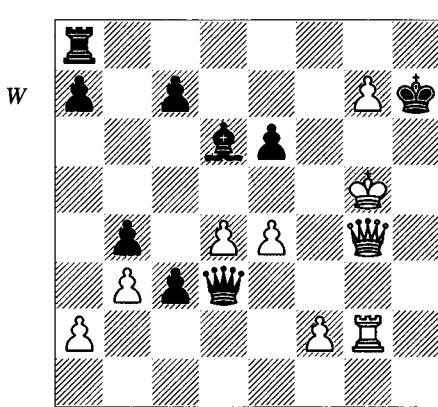
35... $\mathbb{M}e7+$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{M}g5!$ 37 $\mathbb{M}xg5$ $\mathbb{M}xg5$ 38
 $\mathbb{M}xg5$ $\mathbb{M}d8$

The scene has changed drastically: blessed by his protected passed pawn on c3, Black has a superior endgame.



Psakhis – Hebden
Chicago 1983

Several elements add up to an obvious advantage for White. Apart from his material advantage, we notice at once a clear spatial advantage, his superior bishop, and the passivity of the black pieces tied to the defence of the f7-pawn. However, in spite of all these comforts it remains unclear how to win the position. If any of the queenside pawns advances, the dark-squared bishop becomes more active; if the advance is prepared by moving the major pieces



to the other side of the board, then the pressure on f7 is abandoned and Black can use his own major pieces actively. But a remarkable idea occurred to Psakhis...

43 ♜f1 ♜a7 44 ♜e2 ♜b6 45 ♜d3 ♜a7 46 ♜c4 ♜c7+ 47 ♜b3 ♜e7 48 g4!

The timing of the operation is important. Having transferred the king to the queenside in the first phase, White cedes the move to his opponent to decoy the bishop to b6 (the only move at Black's disposal), which facilitates the second phase.

48...♜b6 49 ♜c4 ♜a7

Note that 49...♜d8 loses to 50 ♜xf7+ ♜xf7 51 ♜xf7+ ♜xf7 52 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 53 ♜d5 ♜e7 54 ♜c6, when by winning the bishop for the passed b-pawn, White will create a won pawn endgame. This variation reveals Psakhis's idea. His chances are based on the weak black bishop.

50 ♜b5

Intending 51 ♜a6.

50...♝e8+

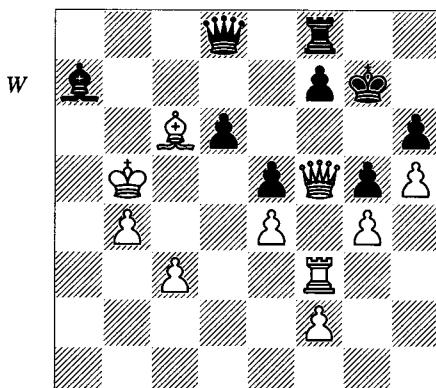
50...♝b8+ allows 51 ♜a6 followed by ♜xf7+ and a quick win.

51 ♜c6

Now 51 ♜a6? is ruled out due to 51...♝a4+ 52 ♜b7 ♜b8+ 53 ♜c7 ♜b6+ and mate in two.

51...♝d8 (D)

51...♝e7 52 ♜d7 ♜xd7 53 ♜xd7 is hopeless for Black.

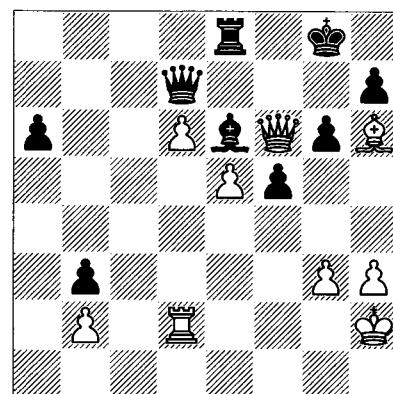


52 ♜c4 ♜e7 53 ♜d7 ♜e6+ 54 ♜xe6 ♜xe6 55 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 56 ♜b5 ♜e7 57 ♜a6 ♜xf2 58 ♜c4 ♜d8 59 ♜b7 ♜e1 60 ♜b5 ♜f2 61 ♜b6 ♜d4 62 ♜a4 d5

It is not possible to save the d-pawn since 62...♜c5 loses to 63 ♜b5 ♜e3 64 ♜c6, etc.

63 cxd5 exd5 64 exd5 e4 65 ♜c6 ♜c8 66 d6 e3 67 ♜b5 ♜f6 68 ♜a6+ ♜b8 69 ♜d7 1-0

The realization was relatively easy, but it took a flash of imagination to see the winning procedure.



Korchnoi – Tal

USSR Ch (Erevan) 1962

The end of a great battle seemed at hand at this point. The black king is stalemated and all White has to do is move his rook to the open file. However, it turned out he cannot do so, because his own king is also endangered. The game continued:

39 ♜d1 ♜a7 40 ♜d2 ♜d7 41 ♜d1 ♜a7 42 ♜d4 ♜d7

It was the end of the session and Korchnoi played a couple of moves to pass the time-control. When it seemed he had reached an impasse, he had a subtle idea:

43 g4! a5 44 ♜g3

Seeking security against harassment by the black queen, the king is bound for g5, a most unusual hiding place.

44...♜b8

If 44...a4, then 45 ♜b4.

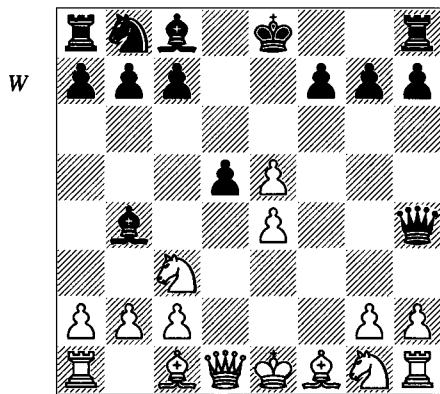
45 ♜h4 ♜f7 46 ♜g5 fxg4 47 hxg4 ♜d7 48 ♜c4 a4 49 ♜c7 a3 50 ♜xd7!

Just in time!

50...♜xd7 51 e6 ♜a7 52 ♜e5 axb2 53 e7 ♜f7 54 d7 1-0

Two motifs are intertwined here: the king seeks a safe haven, but at the same time it participates in the assault on the enemy king. The search for a safe place occurs commonly in the

middlegame, usually preceding a final attack. However, finding a secure refuge for the king is not always a peaceful walk to the other wing. I still recall a wild game, in which Chigorin's king was chased from e1 to d5 and finally found refuge on a1! As a young player I analysed it with International Master V. Vuković, who was preparing a new edition of his book.



Chigorin – Caro
Vienna 1898

The king's ordeal began here, after Caro sacrificed a knight to force it into the open.

7 ♕e2 ♜xc3 8 bxc3 ♜g4+ 9 ♜f3 dxе4 10 ♜d4 ♜h5! 11 ♜e3 ♜xf3

The clever 10...♜h5 leads to a draw by perpetual check after 12 gxе3 ♜e1+ 13 ♜f4 ♜h4+, but Chigorin was on a war-path and would have none of it.

12 ♜b5+ c6 13 gxе3 ♜h6+

Black chooses to avoid the endgame that is possible after 13...cbx5 14 ♜xe4. As a matter of fact, 14...♜xe4+ 15 ♜xe4 ♜d7 16 ♜e3 0-0 17 ♜d4 (if 17 ♜ab1, then 17...♜xe5) 17...♜ac8 is perfectly safe for Black.

14 ♜xe4

14 ♜e2 is tricky, but insufficient owing to 14...♜h3 (not 14...exf3+? 15 ♜f2 ♜h3 16 ♜f1) 15 ♜d1 exf3+ (but not 15...♜xf3+? due to 16 ♜e1, when White wins).

14...♜g6+ 15 ♜e3 cbx5 16 ♜a3 ♜c6 17 ♜d5

Both players are unable to castle and the fight remains tense. The white rooks are more active, but his king is more exposed.

17...♜xc2 18 ♜ac1 ♜f5 19 ♜he1

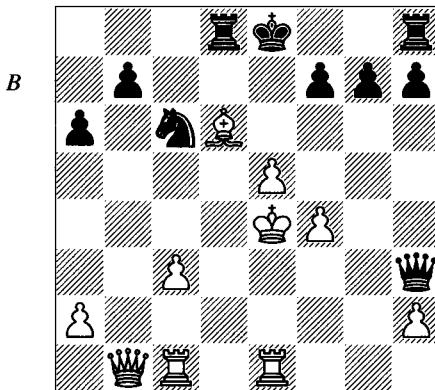
19 ♜d6 would allow 19...0-0-0, but the text-move could be met by the drawish 19...b4. However, both players believe they can get the upper hand.

19...♜d8 20 ♜xb5?!

20 ♜d6 is more logical, with the idea of parrying 20...f6 by 21 ♜b1 and 20...♜d7 21 ♜b1 f6? by 22 exf6 ♜xd6 23 fxg7.

I do not like the text-move because Black could continue 20...g5, getting rid of all his worries.

20...a6 21 ♜b1! ♜g5+ 22 f4 ♜g2 23 ♜d6 ♜h3+ 24 ♜e4 (D)



24...f5+ 25 ♜d5

The tournament bulletin, which Vuković possessed, noted that at the moment this strange position arose on the board, some spectators who had arrived late for the playing session asked the arbiter to intervene because "White put the king instead of the queen and the queen instead of the king". We were luckier knowing which is which, but it did not help us much in the difficult analysis. Dissatisfied with the ensuing series of pointless checks which just forced the exiled king closer to safety on the queenside, we spent quite a lot of time checking 25...♜c8. The purpose of this move is to cut off the king's route back. 26 ♜xb7 was quickly refuted by 26...♜g2+ 27 ♜c5 ♜e7+, etc., but for a long time we could not find an effective reply to 26 ♜c4. In the end we came to the conclusion that the waiting 26...g6! was the best try, liberating the queen from the defence of the f5-pawn. Black would keep his chances.

25...♜g2+? 26 ♜c4 b5+ 27 ♜d3 ♜f3+ 28 ♜c2 ♜f2+ 29 ♜b3 ♜c8

On the shrewd 29... $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, hoping for 31 $\mathbb{Q}xa5?$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$, White would continue 31 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$ $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (Chigorin).

30 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}a1$

The strange journey, started at move 7, is finally at an end. The king is secure and White can show more interest in the problems of the enemy king.

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

If Black hoped to stabilize his defence by 33... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and 34... $\mathbb{Q}c4$, then it was just a vain desire. Vuković proposed 32... $\mathbb{Q}f3$, leaving the c4-square for the knight.

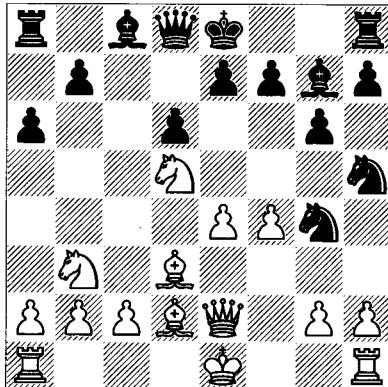
33 e6 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

33... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ loses to 36 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ followed by 37 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$, etc.

34 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ h5? 35 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$!? 36 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 1-0

You might be tempted to think that such games only happened in the 19th century, but this is not so.

B



Topalov – Kramnik
Belgrade 1995

To forecast the further course of the game, we should pay attention to the essential details. Black could directly prevent the threatened 17 $\mathbb{Q}a5$, but that would mean admitting that his idea of disrupting White's kingside with his knights has failed, and would bring his counterplay to an end. Such a pessimistic approach can lead to no good and Kramnik was right to go in for unforeseeable complications.

16...e6! 17 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 18 g3 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$

19 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ exd5 21 exd5+ (21 $\mathbb{Q}af1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ does not worry Black) 21... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

satisfies Black; for example, 22 $\mathbb{Q}af1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ axb5 24 $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$, etc.

19... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

The king is bound for the unknown: White is ready to take risks too.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$

Kramnik must have been surprised by his opponent's decision; in his commentary I find: "A strange solution. It was time to force a draw: 23 $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d2."$

23... $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6+$

Both players are seeking a win; White because he is a piece up, Black because the white king is in the open.

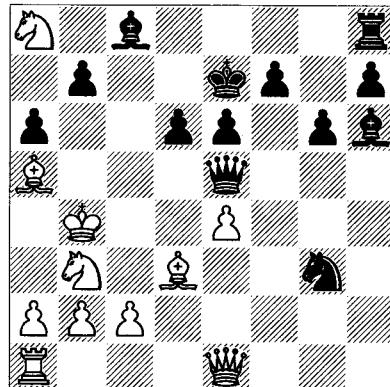
28 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5+$

Black has enough pawns to consider the exchange of queens, but the text-move is quite consistent with the course of the game so far.

29 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (D)

30 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ allows 30... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xg3?$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+$. The text-move controls the d2-square.

B



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

Now 30... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ would be too slow: 31 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ (31... $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ loses to 32 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$, etc.) 32 $\mathbb{Q}b6$.

31 $\mathbb{Q}b6?$

Kramnik warns against playing 31 $\mathbb{Q}b6?$, when 31... $\mathbb{Q}xb2!$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ (or 32 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$) 32... $\mathbb{Q}c3+!!$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}d2!!$ cannot be parried.

Feeling the constant menace to which the king at b4 is exposed, I was attracted by 31 $\mathbb{Q}b1$

with the idea of retreating the king to a3 and activating the dark-squared bishop. For example, 31... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (31...d5 is not available because of 32 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ – the reason why the knight stayed a little longer on a8) 32 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ (32 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ is not dangerous for Black) 32... $\mathbb{B}xa8$ (or 32... $\mathbb{W}f4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}b6$) 33 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$, but after 34...a5 it turns out that the white king continues to be in peril.

31...d5!

The only move, but a strong one, exposing the roaming king to checks on the f8-a3 diagonal.

32 $\mathbb{Q}a4$

In the belief that he can save the king from such a delicate situation, Topalov plunges into abyss...

After 32 exd5 Black clearly has at least perpetual check – 32... $\mathbb{W}d6+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$, but looking deeper we find that he can win by 34 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 35 a4 $\mathbb{Q}e5!$.

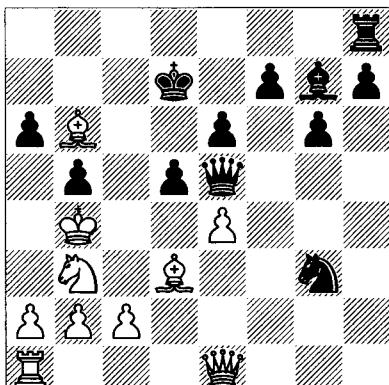
32... $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ b5+ 34 $\mathbb{Q}b4$

In case of 34 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}xb2+$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ the blow comes from f8; again owing to 31...d5.

34... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (D)

The king desperately needs some shelter. 35 $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ does not help.

B



35... $\mathbb{W}xb2?$

In the complex struggle the players are losing the plot. Here Black strays from the right path and loses the lion's share of his advantage. In his notes Kramnik gives 35... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!!$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 37 $\mathbb{B}b1$ (or 37 c4 bxc4! 38 $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}c8+$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}a3$, etc.) 37... $\mathbb{B}c8!!$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 39 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ a5+. The siege was closing on the white king, but Kramnik only noticed the difference made

by the moves 35... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ in analysis after the game. The exchange on e4 provides a precious tempo needed to introduce the rook into the attack.

After the text-move, on the contrary, the queen is astray for just a moment, but it is enough for White to catch his breath...

36 exd5 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 37 $\mathbb{d}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$

37...fxe6 is worse due to 38 $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ axb5 39 $\mathbb{B}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 40 $\mathbb{W}xg3$.

38 $\mathbb{Q}c5?$

The final illusion. When he suddenly had good drawing chances, White collapses.

38... $\mathbb{Q}c3+$! 39 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ a5+ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 0-1

White drops a whole queen. The post-mortem analysis revealed that 38 $\mathbb{Q}xb5+!$ axb5 39 exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 40 $\mathbb{W}xg3$ would have preserved some chances. In a long analysis Kramnik gives 40... $\mathbb{W}c3+!$ 41 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ h5! 44 $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ (the h-pawn is a real threat and must be stopped) 44...h4 (or 44... $\mathbb{B}xc2$ 45 a4 $\mathbb{B}b2$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ h4 47 a5 h3 48 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ h2 49 $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{B}xh2$ 50 a6) 45 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ g5 46 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$, when White has chances to save the game.

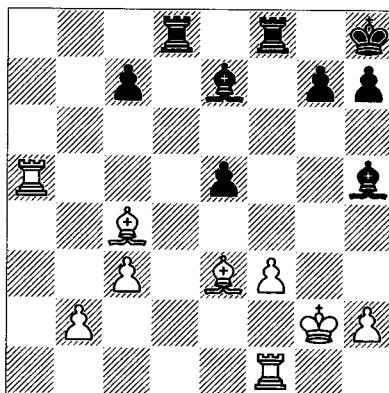
Anyway, we have watched a heroic king indeed! Unfortunately, in the complex surroundings of the middlegame such heroes are not common. Once upon a time it was a challenge and an honour to act like Steinitz and Chigorin in the above games. Besides, in epochs in which so little was known and so much terrain still awaited exploration, the risks were not so high. Today it would hardly pay to take so much risk on a regular basis. Modern chess competitions are not so much about honour and principles, but more about money prizes and ratings, so the main effort is invested into the king's protection and security.

The King in the Endgame

It is only after the middlegame complexities dissolve that the king generally springs into action. Positions get simpler, tensions subside, and the whole environment becomes less unfriendly for the king. Simplified endgame positions are governed by some new rules which favour the king. It becomes equal to other pieces – sometimes strong, sometimes feeble,

depending on how active it is. How active depends in its turn on other circumstances, but the process of centralization, characteristic of the endgame, is quite often crucial. A series of relevant examples will help us to get fully acquainted with its importance.

B



Alekhine – Teichmann
Berlin 1921

It is quite obvious that in this endgame with rooks and bishops Black has some difficulties. If White could transfer his light-squared bishop to e4, his queenside pawn-majority would become for all practical purposes a pawn surplus. Conscious of the threat, Teichmann, an excellent tactician, finds a continuation that seems to solve all his problems...

22... $\mathbb{R}d1$

After this there is no way to defend the f3-pawn, and simplification into a drawish endgame. Capturing the e5-pawn yields little: 23 $\mathbb{R}xe5 \mathbb{R}xf1$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xf1 \mathbb{R}xf3+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{R}d6$ and Black is apparently out of danger. But Alekhine finds a brilliant move...

23 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

Ignoring the offer of the e5-pawn, White himself sacrifices a pawn. He understands that his chances lie with his pawn-majority and a new and important element arising in the position – his centralized king.

23... $\mathbb{R}xf1$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xf1 \mathbb{Q}xf3$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf3 \mathbb{R}xf3+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{R}f8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d3$

The queenside majority is an important asset, but what makes the crucial difference is the position of the two kings – White's in the centre, active, while Black's in the far corner, out of

play. A pawn plus in such a position is worthless and probably the best thing Black can do is to give it back by 27...e4+, in order to activate his bishop.

27... $\mathbb{Q}g8??$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{R}b8$ 29 $b4 \mathbb{Q}f7$ 30 $b5 \mathbb{Q}e6$ 31 $c4 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 32 $\mathbb{R}a7$

Four tempi were invested into bringing the king to d7, but in the meantime White has advanced his majority and the rook on the seventh rank makes sure that the black king continues to feel miserable.

32... $\mathbb{R}d6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

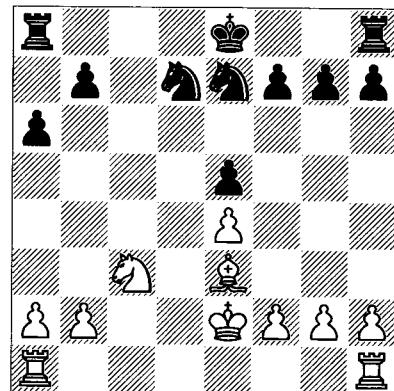
The pawns are now ready to advance further and nothing can parry their deadly menace.

33... $e4$ 34 $b6 \mathbb{R}f8$

Or 34... $\mathbb{R}xh2$ 35 $c5 \mathbb{Q}c8$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $cx b6$ 37 $\mathbb{R}xg7$, etc.

35 $c5 \mathbb{R}f5+$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 1-0

B



Rubinstein – Mieses
St Petersburg 1909

Immediately after the opening, there was a series of exchanges, and White's 15 $\mathbb{Q}e1-e2$ reflects clearly his intentions: the first rank is vacated for the rooks to move freely to the open files, while the king remains in the centre, nearer to the action. The black king is obviously less fortunate and cannot find a similarly cosy square.

15... $\mathbb{R}c8$

Reluctant to castle either kingside, where the king would be far away from the battle, or queenside, where it would be more exposed, Black tries to improve the position of his d7-knight, which has no solid foothold.

16 $\mathbb{E}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$

Surprisingly White goes for simplifications, but decides rightly that 17 $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ makes it harder to penetrate Black's camp.

17... $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 18 $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6?!$

This is apparently a simple, appealing solution, closing the c-file and potentially the d-file as well. However, 18... $\mathbb{E}c7$, preparing 19...0-0, is more persistent, although 19 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (bad is 19... $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 20 $\mathbb{E}xc1$, when Black loses material) 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ keeps the initiative; for instance, 20... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ or 20...0-0 21 $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

19 $\mathbb{E}d5$

By abandoning the symmetry of the pawn-structure, White manages to keep the tension and the initiative.

19... $\mathbb{E}xd5$

Black could avoid the immediate exchange by 19... $\mathbb{E}c4$, but then 20 b3 $\mathbb{E}d4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f6 (22 $\mathbb{E}xe5+$ was threatened) 22 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is favourable for White.

20 $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22 f4

An important detail in winning a new open file.

22...f6 23 $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $\mathbb{E}xe5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25 $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 26 $\mathbb{E}f7$

The superior position of the centralized white king has been rewarded: White can choose between a material or a positional advantage.

26... $\mathbb{E}c4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}b4$ 28 $\mathbb{E}xg7$

The alternative is 28 b3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$, winning material, but Rubinstein prefers the concentrated effort of his centralized pieces.

28... $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 29 $\mathbb{E}xh7$ $\mathbb{E}xg2$ 30 $\mathbb{E}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

The king must retreat. 30... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ opens the road to the passed pawn and 32 a4+ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 33 d6 wins.

31 $\mathbb{E}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 32 $\mathbb{E}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$

By sacrificing a pawn, White seeks the optimal cooperation of his pieces, united in support of the passed pawn.

33... $\mathbb{E}xa2$ 34 $\mathbb{E}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 35 d6 $\mathbb{Q}b5$

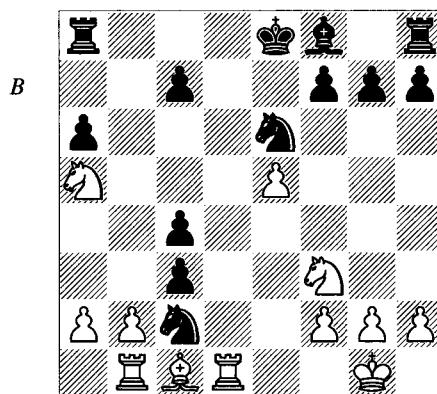
Necessary in order to prevent mate following 36 $\mathbb{Q}f6$, but now the white king steps forward decisively.

36 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 37 $\mathbb{E}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{E}b5+$ 39 $\mathbb{E}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Black did his best to prevent the king's penetration, but could not avoid this knight and pawn endgame, in which the superior white pawns are supported by a powerful centralized king.

40... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ a5 42 $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 1-0

White won thanks to the remarkable cooperation of the small but centralized force. Reaching the centre more quickly than the opponent's king often proves decisive and needs to be a part of player's calculations at the transition into the endgame.



Sax – Tal

Tallinn 1979

In the complications arising in a variation of the Open Ruy Lopez Black won a pawn, but White was confident of his lead in development. And indeed, the position looks harmless: White will get back the pawn and the game will become level. But Tal finds a way to make things uncertain...

20... $\mathbb{E}b8!$

The beginning of a long, tortuous, well-calculated line leading straight into a very simple endgame.

21 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}a3!$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}e1$

23 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is insufficient due to 23...c2 24 $\mathbb{E}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 26 $\mathbb{E}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$, but Sax discovers a nice tactical solution to maintain material equality.

23... $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$ $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 25 $\mathbb{E}xb8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{E}b2$ 28 $\mathbb{E}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$

This is the position Black was aiming for when he played 20... $\mathbb{E}b8$. We now see the reason for all these exchanges: Black possesses a passed pawn and his king quickly reaches the centre.

29... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 30 $\mathbb{g}3$

If 30 $\mathbb{Q}f1$, Black replies 30... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$.

30... $c5$ 31 $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

At the proper moment. White must avoid exchanging, since it leads to a lost pawn endgame, but he will not be able to avoid the penetration by the black king.

32 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 35 $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$

The black knight is temporarily out of play, but the centralized king, supporting the passed pawn, tips the scales in Black's favour.

37 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $g6$

Not, of course, 37... $c4$ because of the reply 38 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$.

38 $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

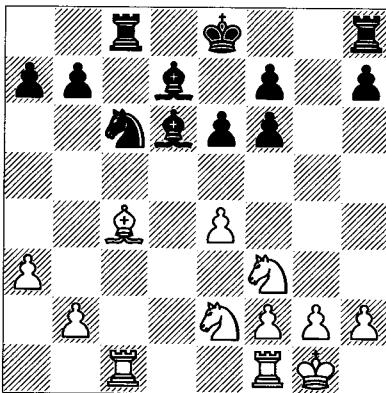
Again 38... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is bad due to 39 $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ $gxf5$ 40 $h4$ $c4$ 41 $h5$, when White will create a passed pawn.

39 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $c4$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $c3$

White cannot hold the passed pawn and at the same time prevent the fall of his kingside pawns. The game flows to its inevitable end.

41 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $a5$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $a4$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 48 $e6$ $fxe6$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $a3$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0-1

B



Chekhov – Em. Lasker
Moscow 1935

Black has kept his king in the centre and manages to capitalize on this seemingly unimportant detail.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b5$

White protects his queenside pawns by a clever rejoinder, but only temporarily...

16... $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 18 $\mathbb{E}xc1$ $\mathbb{E}c8!$

Played with elementary simplicity: only now it is obvious what the grand old man is aiming at. The exchange of rooks will accentuate the strength of his bishop and the superiority of his king.

19 $\mathbb{E}xc8$

Note that White cannot avoid the exchange by 19 $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ because of 20... $\mathbb{Q}d8$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 20 $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $b5!$

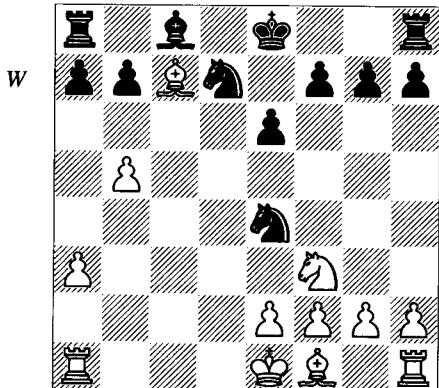
21... $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 22 $a4$ would help White to slip out of his predicament, but the text-move will simplify into a simpler endgame emphasizing the privileged position of the black king.

22 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 23 $a4$ $bxa4$ 24 $bxa4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

26 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ would be met by 26... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 27 $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $a5$, winning the pawn endgame.

26... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $a5$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $e5$

Black is winning.



Alekhine – Fine
Kemer 1937

In the early phase White achieved what we call the advantage of the bishop-pair, but Black is ready to annul that potential advantage by ... $\mathbb{Q}b6-d5$. The ensuing moves are based on that idea.

16 $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

The e4-knight limits White's freedom and must be expelled from the centre.

16... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17 f3 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}ef6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$

Another subtle move: gradually White will deny all the central squares to the black knights and push them back.

19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20 e4 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Feeling secure in the centre, now that the queens are off, the king cooperates with the other pieces to limit the opponent's options.

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

After 21...b6 White planned 22 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 23 axb4 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ with a superior pawn-structure.

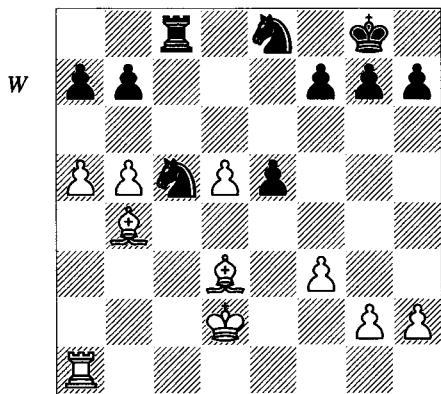
22 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 23 a4 $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e5?!

This move weakens both critical light squares (d5 and f5). Temporarily they are under surveillance, but what is temporarily acceptable often fails in the long run. In principle, any opening of the position works in favour of the bishop-pair.

25 $\mathbb{Q}hc1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28 a5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Tied to the defence of the e5-pawn, Black has slowly been pushed back and now the d5-square has been invaded. This provokes the exchange, which in turn gives White a passed pawn.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 30 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (D)



31 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

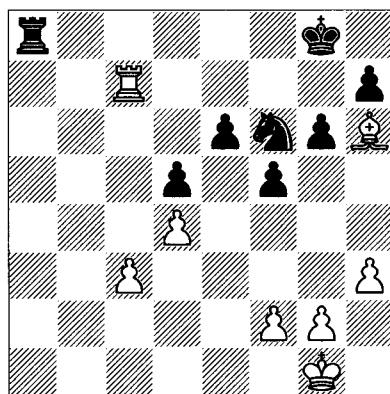
The cautious 31 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ would allow 31... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, but the text-move is more difficult to meet. Now 31... $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ would lose to 34 d6. More and more the king's influence weighs on the position. For all practical purposes the white king is an extra piece and it does not surprise us that its presence in the centre becomes fatal for Black.

31... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ b6 33 axb6 axb6 34 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ bxc5 35 b6 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$

36... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ followed by 38 b7 would not have made any difference.

37 $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ 1-0

Staying in the centre is disadvantageous in the opening, but in the endgame, as we see, it often proves rewarding. Various positional elements tend to accentuate the power of the more active king: sometimes it is the pawn-structure which tells, sometimes the mobility of the minor pieces, sometimes the spatial advantage, etc.



Tarrasch – Réti

Vienna 1922

What made the difference in this old game is obvious at first sight: the black king is boxed into its corner, which implies a severe limit on the manoeuvrability of its pieces. Meanwhile, the white king is free and mobile.

31 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 33 f3!

By controlling the e4-square, White restricts his opponent's options and widens his own; g4 may come into consideration; for example, 33... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 36 g4 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ and the knight is trapped.

33... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

Grabbing the pawn at the cost of letting the black king out of its prison would be foolish indeed. On the other hand, the rook and the bishop can't achieve anything more without the king's help. The long march begins...

34... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

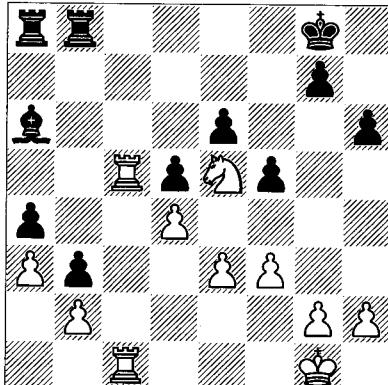
White has won a tempo to prevent consolidation by ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$, and so the plan can be carried on...

36... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 39
 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 1-0

41 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}g#$ cannot be prevented.

It is curious that that same year another game was played, and remembered for the same motif...

W



Alekhine – Yates
London 1922

As above, Black is reduced to waiting. Commanding the open file, on which his rooks cannot be opposed because the ensuing knight vs bishop endgame would be completely lost for Black, White uses his king to crush resistance.

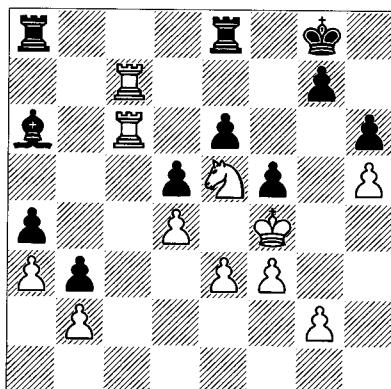
24 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 25 h4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fb8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}c7$
 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}ce5$

By threatening to double rooks on the seventh rank, White forces the bishop to retreat.

28... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}5c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31 h5
(D)

The strangling process is slow but relentless.

B



Solmundarsson – Smyslov
Reykjavik 1974

White has just played 18 e3-e4 and the pressure on g7 and f5 apparently forms adequate compensation for the sacrificed pawn. Unfortunately, there is a hole in that plan...

18...g6!

This beautiful exchange sacrifice refutes Solmundarsson's play in the opening. In giving up material, Black obviously counts on the overwhelming power of his two bishops, especially the dark-squared one.

19 $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$
22 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ f4 23 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

23 h4 is somewhat better.

23... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

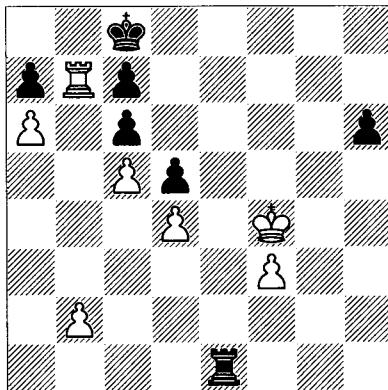
The beginning of the long march. The king is bound for the other side of the board. Full domination and the closed position make the march safe, but nonetheless memorable. This phase of the game, extremely simple and instructive, requires no comment. Just sit and watch Smyslov playing!

25 $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ g5 28
 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e5 31 $\mathbb{Q}g2$
 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 32 h3 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5 34 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 35
 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ h6 37 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$
39 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ a4 42 $\mathbb{Q}c2$
 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 46

b3 b5 47 bxa4 bxa4 48 ♖d3 h5 49 ♔b1 ♕f2
50 ♕xf2+ ♕xf2 51 ♖h2 ♔g3 0-1

The king's mobility is a crucial element in assessing its strength. It is always its fundamental value, but nowhere so much as in the rook endgame.

B



Alekhine – Spielmann
New York 1927

An extremely interesting rook endgame arose after just 20 moves. 20 moves further into the game, victory seems close for White. He threatens ♖xa7 and his passed pawn on the f-file is quite an asset. However, Black possesses a distant passed pawn, and did not intend to surrender the a7-pawn for nothing...

40...♖d1 41 ♔e5 ♕e1+ 42 ♕f5 ♖d1 43 ♖xa7
♖xd4 44 ♖a8+ ♔d7 45 f4 ♖a4 46 a7!

A seemingly unusual step. In rook endgames one endeavours to activate the rook as much as possible. Here, on the contrary, White himself, disregarding an essential maxim of rook endgames, imprisons his rook on a8! But we soon find a good reason for Alekhine's decision: by paralysing his own rook, White also glues the black rook to the a-file, which from now on it will not be able to leave. And why should that be good? Well, because the movement of the white king cannot be limited by the rook any more.

46...h5

Black possesses two passed pawns and the first question to harass the mind of an analyst is very pertinent: what is the use of the king's mobility if it has to control two widely separated passed pawns? And leaning on that the second,

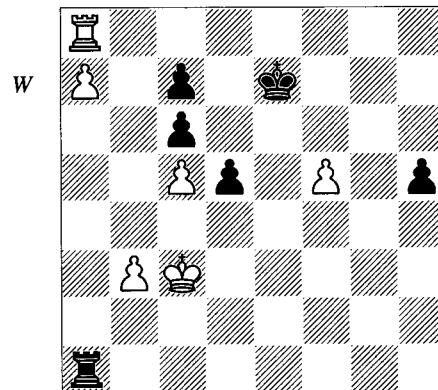
practical question: what can White do against 46...d4 47 ♔e4 h5; he cannot hold both pawns without losing his precious a7-pawn? Well, he can, because the f-pawn wakes up and 48 b3 ♖a1 49 f5 threatens 50 f6 winning at once. After the forced 49...♔e7 50 ♕xd4 h4 51 ♔e5 ♖e1+ (51...h3 loses to 52 ♖h8) 52 ♕f4 ♖a1 53 ♔g5 h3 54 ♖h8 Black is lost.

The text-move does not endanger the d-pawn and only in case of 47 ♔g5 would the d5-pawn advance.

47 b3 ♖a1 48 ♔e5 ♖e1+ 49 ♕d4 ♖d1+

47 b3 released the white king, but, exposed to checks, it does not seem to be able to make any progress. However, its retreat is just temporary.

50 ♕c3 ♖a1 51 f5 ♔e7 (D)



52 ♕d4

Obviously the further advance of the passed pawn had to be stopped, but now the king goes back. While the black king cannot leave the second rank, its white counterpart is mobile and goes in the opposite direction.

52...h4

Quick, but not enough.

53 ♕e5 ♖e1+ 54 ♕f4 ♖a1 55 ♔g5 ♖g1+

The king finally gets the distant pawn, because 55...h3 loses to 56 ♖h8 ♖xa7 57 ♖xh3 ♖a1 58 f6+, etc.

**56 ♖xh4 ♖a1 57 ♔g5 ♖g1+ 58 ♕f4 ♖a1 59
♕e5 ♖e1+ 60 ♕d4 ♖a1 61 ♔c3**

Having eliminated Black's h-pawn, the king goes back to reduce the mobility of the enemy rook.

**61...♖a3 62 ♕b2 ♖a6 63 b4 ♔f7 64 ♕b3
♖a1 65 f6!**

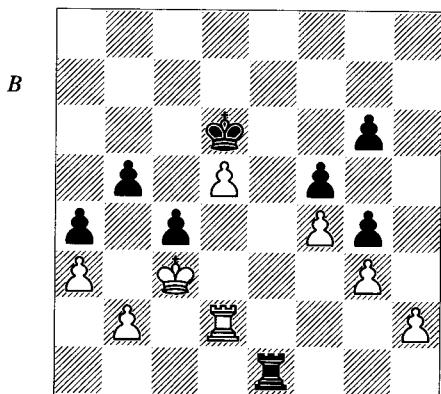
This will paralyse the king and force the black rook back to a6. It is the moment to break through and reap the reward.

65...♜a6 66 b5 cxb5 67 ♜b4 1-0

67...c6 loses to 68 ♜h8 and 67...♜a1 to 68 ♜xb5, etc.

This is what we call an active, mobile king. A superb endgame, with a fantastic king in the main role!

To this brief survey of the king's positive characteristics in the endgame we shall add one more aspect – the king as a blockader. In this important role we find the king at the end of the fight, in simple endgames. Especially typical and relevant are rook endgames in which the king blockades a passed pawn.



Ghitescu – Pfleger
Bamberg 1971

Material may be balanced, but positional factors are not. The black king blockades the passed d-pawn. The pawn is temporarily defended but stuck and in need of constant support, which makes the white rook immobile. The black rook, on the contrary, enjoys full freedom. What follows is a one-piece show...

1...♜e3+ 2 ♛c2

2 ♛d4 ♜b3 leads to zugzwang, while 2 ♛b4 ♜b3+ 3 ♛a5 ♜d3 is hardly better.

2...♜b3

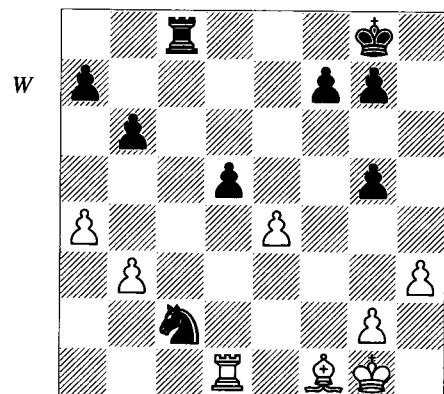
2...♜e7 3 ♛c3 ♛c5 4 d6 ♜d7 is also possible.

3 ♜d1 ♜f3 4 ♜d2 ♜e3

We are back in the same position, but now it is White to move and he must step back.

5 ♛c1 c3 6 bxc3 ♜xc3+ 7 ♛b2 ♜c5

White is lost. It's true that the rook put on the show, but without the blockader on d6 it could not have been staged. The strength of such a blockader in a rook endgame is so overwhelming that the very threat of a blockade can decisively influence the course of the struggle...



Gipslis – Korchnoi
USSR Ch (Riga) 1970

A series of exchanges led to this simple position in which White has the option of recapturing the pawn either with his rook or with the pawn. White, erroneously, instead of 30 ♜xd5 ♜e3 31 ♜d3 with level play, took with the pawn. The consequences became clear in just a couple of moves...

30 exd5? ♜e3 31 ♜d3 ♜xf1 32 ♜xf1 ♜f8!

I have given this move an exclamation mark to emphasize the strength of the king, ready to blockade and eventually capture the d-pawn.

33 d6

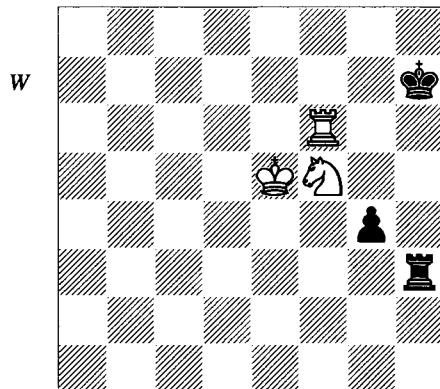
To other moves Black would reply ...♛e7-d6 with obvious consequences: the d5-pawn would become shaky, the white rook completely tied to its defence, while the black rook would remain free to act. There could only be one outcome – the demise of the passed pawn. By advancing the pawn further into enemy territory, White prevents the blockade but further exposes the pawn – in a couple of moves it will be surrounded and lost.

33...♜d8 34 a5 f6 35 ♜e2 ♜f7 36 ♜c3 ♜e6 37 axb6 axb6 38 ♜c7 ♜d7 39 ♜c6 ♜xd6 40 ♜c7 g6

Black has excellent prospects of winning the game.

We shall see that in the middlegame as well as in various types of endgame, the minor pieces, especially the knight, are ideal blockaders. In the rook endgame, however, it is undoubtedly the king. It blockades the passed pawn, it paralyses the enemy rook and at the same time it sets free its own rook. Winning the pawn is, as a rule, just a matter of time.

In the above examples we have seen the king in its best attire. It was active, centralized, commanded a spatial advantage and finally it was a deadly blockader. However, in as many endgame cases we find the king in inferior situations. Some of these are characteristic and worth our attention. I find that the most widespread case of an inferior king in endgame play has to do with space. Often we see a king in the corner or on the edge of the board, fighting an unequal battle against a superior enemy king which commands more space.



Akopian – Khenkin
Las Vegas 1994

In some other position the black king would survive, but not in this corner. Akopian makes sure it cannot escape and that the rook cannot help it...

1 $\mathbb{K}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

1... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ is impossible as 2 $\mathbb{R}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ leads to mate. The same happens after 1... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{R}a3$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 5 $\mathbb{R}g7\#$.

2 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{R}a3$ 3 $\mathbb{R}d7!$

The white king needs the cover while plotting the mating-net and the rook on d7 will take care of both.

3... $\mathbb{R}a6+$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

The passed pawn can't help, because it is too slow; 4... $\mathbb{g}3$ loses to 5 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 6 $\mathbb{R}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 7 $\mathbb{R}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}h7\#$, mating.

5 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 6 $\mathbb{R}f7+$

White misses the simple 6 $\mathbb{Q}h7$, but fortunately he can repeat the position...

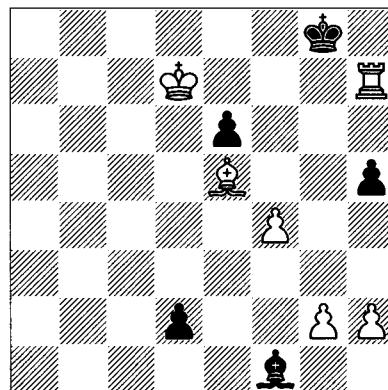
6... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 7 $\mathbb{R}f6$ $g3$

7... $\mathbb{R}a7$ (7... $\mathbb{R}a8$ would transpose into the above note) 8 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}h6$; $g3$ 11 $\mathbb{R}f7$ $\mathbb{R}a6+$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$, etc.

8 $\mathbb{R}e6$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 9 $\mathbb{R}e7$ $g2$ 10 $\mathbb{R}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}h7$

1-0

A drastic case of a king caught in the corner.



Benjamin – Friedman
Saint Martin 1993

The black pawn is about to queen, but White keeps the enemy king in the corner and plots to mate it before the queen can react.

50 $\mathbb{R}h6$

The threatened 51 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ gains a precious tempo: the d2-pawn cannot advance.

50... $\mathbb{Q}f7$

The alternative is to block the h-file by 50... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$, but 52 $\mathbb{R}f6$ renews the threat and after 52... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 53 $f5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 54 $\mathbb{R}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 55 $\mathbb{R}d8$ the pawn is caught in time.

51 $\mathbb{R}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

Or 51... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 52 $\mathbb{R}xe6+$, etc.

52 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

By threatening 53 $\mathbb{R}h6$, White gains another valuable tempo, removing the king from the d-file and potential check.

52... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 53 $\mathbb{R}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Or 53... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 54 $\mathbb{R}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}f8$, etc.

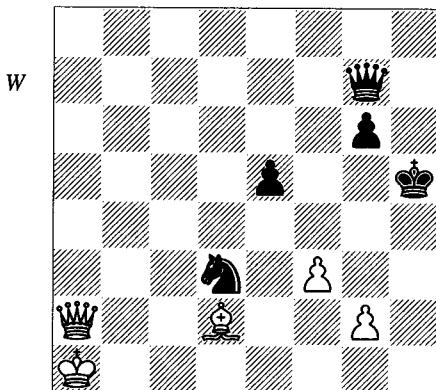
54 f5+

This will block the king's exit and definitely catch it in a trap.

54...exf5

Or 54... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 55 $\mathbb{E}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 56 $\mathbb{E}f7+$ followed by 57 $\mathbb{E}xf1$, etc.

55 $\mathbb{E}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 56 $\mathbb{E}d6$ 1-0



Botvinnik
Shakhmatny Listok, 1925

This study features the same motif – the perilous state of the king on the edge of the board.

1 $\mathbb{Q}4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}h6!$

This move has two ideas – decoying the queen to h6 and vacating the d2-square.

2... $\mathbb{W}xh6$ 3 $\mathbb{W}h2+$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 4 $\mathbb{W}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 5 $\mathbb{W}d8\#$

The roads of escape have been blocked.

The following examples, taken from recent tournament practice, are no less illuminating.

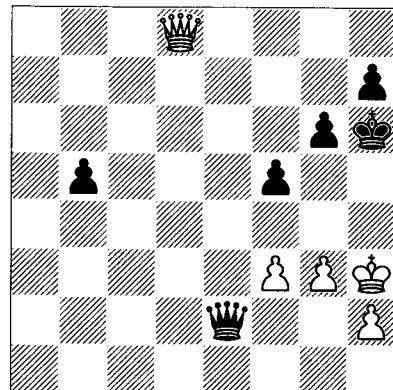
In the following diagram, Black is a pawn up, and can now gobble another pawn, but the constant threat of perpetual check or stalemate forbids the pawn advance as well as capturing the f3-pawn. It seems there is no way to move the passed pawn forward and at the same time protect the king from checks. What does help, however, is the precarious situation of the white king on h3.

55...b4!

Not, of course, 55... $\mathbb{W}xf3?$ due to 56 $\mathbb{W}g5+!$. But by giving up the pawn, Black surprisingly creates the conditions for an attack on the white king in spite of the reduced material.

56 $\mathbb{W}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 57 $\mathbb{W}d4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 58 $\mathbb{W}xb4?!$

B



Afek – Ashley
Budapest 1997

58 $\mathbb{W}d7+$ is better. Greed in chess usually has its price.

58...g5!

The point of the sacrifice: Black threatens mate in one!

59 $\mathbb{W}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 60 $\mathbb{W}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$

Obviously not 60... $\mathbb{W}xf3?$ 61 $\mathbb{W}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 62 $\mathbb{W}h6+$ with stalemate.

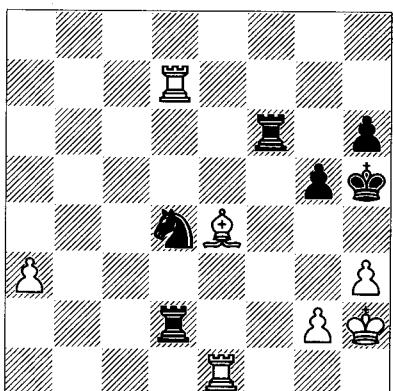
61 $\mathbb{W}h1$

Or 61 $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$.

61... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 62 $\mathbb{g}4+$ $\mathbb{fxg}4+$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3+$ 64 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{gxf}3$ 65 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 66 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$

...and the pawn endgame was lost for White.

B



Van Wely – C. Lutz
Leon Echt 2001

Somewhat earlier in the game Black trapped his own king in a dangerous position on the

edge of the board by playing ...g5. The pin on the d-file made things worse. It is true that Black can get rid of the pin by 41...Qb3?, but 42 Rxd2 Qxd2 43 Qd3 simplifies into an end-game with a winning passed pawn. The attempt to eliminate the a3-pawn by 41...Ra6? does not work either, since 42 Rf1 Rxa3 43 Rf6 threatens the inevitable 44 Rxh6+ followed by mate.

41...g4?

This move appears to give the king more breathing space, but in fact worsens its position. 41...Rh4! is correct; for example, 42 a4 g4 43 hxg4 Qf3+ 44 Qxf3 Rxd7 45 Re5 Rxf3 46 gxf3 Rd2+ 47 g1 g3 with a draw.

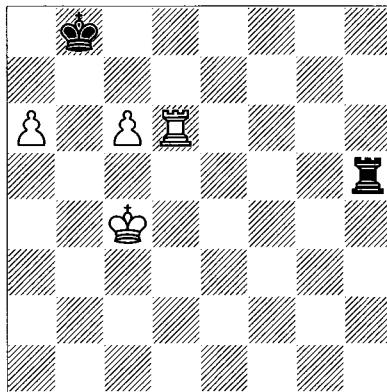
42 Qg3! Qe2+

42...gxh3 is inadequate due to 43 Rd5+ Qf5+ 44 Rxf5+ Rxf5 45 Qxf5 hxg2 46 Rh2, when the a3-pawn survives and wins.

43 Rxe2 Rxd7 44 Rc2 1-0

Being on the edge is always a precarious situation for the king, but especially when fighting enemy passed pawns; then falling into an abyss is so much easier.

B



Kaminski – Ehlvest
Polanica Zdroj 1997

Although the white king is cut off along the fifth rank, confronting two passed pawns is a difficult task, because they are so near to promotion. Ehlvest continued:

68...Qc7? 69 a7 Ra5

69...Rh8 70 Qc5 is obviously insufficient, but controlling the passed pawn from behind looks good. Unfortunately, when the passed pawns get to the seventh rank and sense the

proximity of promotion, they become wild and harnessing them often proves impossible.

70 Rd5!

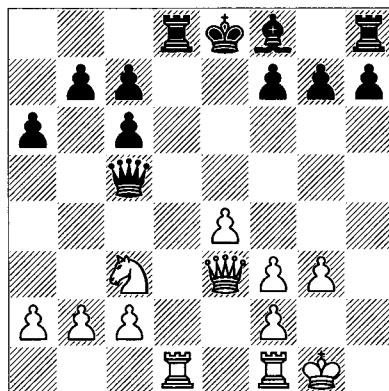
The subtle point is that the a7-pawn is taboo (70...Rxa7 loses to 71 Rd7+ Kb6 72 Rxa7 Qxa7 73 Qc5 and Black does not get the opposition), which helps the white rook to become active.

70...Ra1 71 Qb5 Rb1+ 72 a6 Rb6+ 73 Ra5 Rb2 74 Rd4 1-0

Going back to the initial position, we discover that 68...Ra5! improves Black's chances fundamentally. Although 69 Qb4 Ra1 70 Qb5 causes some difficulties, 70...Rb1+ 71 Qc5 Rc1+ (71...Ra7? is premature due to 72 Rd7+ Ra6 73 Rb8, etc.) 72 Qd5 Ra7 73 Rd7+ (or 73 Qe6 Qxa6 74 Qd7 Rh1 75 Rb2 Qb6 76 Rb2+ Ra7) 73...Qxa6 74 Qd6 Rh1 (but not 74...Rb6? 75 Rb7+ Ra6 76 Rb8, when White wins) 75 Qc7 Rh8 holds on.

In all these cases the unfavourable position of the king and the lack of space have a critical bearing on the development of the struggle. Another critical case for an inferior king in the endgame is its isolation. We say that the king is cut off, meaning that it is cut off from other pieces, that it has lost coordination with them, that it is cut off from events on the board, or been prevented from participating in them. The term is mostly used in reference to rook endgames and therefore our examples are selected from that endgame segment.

B



Dvoretsky – Smyslov
Odessa 1974

Emerging from the opening, White relied on his kingside pawn-majority in the approaching

endgame, but to exploit such an advantage it usually takes more than good play. And oddly enough, Smyslov provides a helping hand...

14... $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 15 $\mathbb{M}xd8+$ $\mathbb{W}xd8$ 16 $\mathbb{M}d1+$ $\mathbb{W}e8?$

We shall see that the black king on the wrong side of the board will make a huge difference in the course of the endgame. The black pawn-minority simply needs its king's support.

17 $fxe3$ g6?

This move accentuates the error at move 16, because it facilitates the creation of a white passed pawn on the kingside. After 17... $\mathbb{B}b4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e2$, 18... $\mathbb{M}d8$ leaves Black's lot as miserable as in the game, but 18... $\mathbb{M}e8$ slows down the pawn advance.

18 e5!

Obvious, but powerful.

18... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19 f4 f6 20 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 21 e4

When the pawn endgame is lost, then the higher types of endgame are usually lost as well. In our game there is no doubt about it.

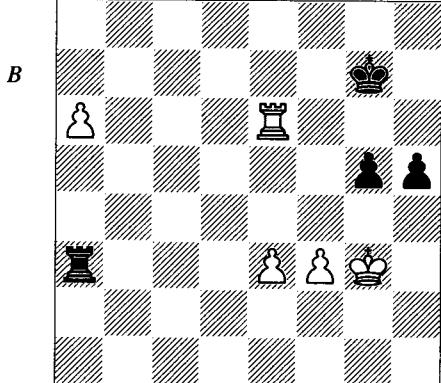
21...h5 22 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

Dvoretsky suggests 22...h4!?, but then 23 e5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24 $\mathbb{M}h1$ g5 (or 24...hxg3 25 $\mathbb{M}xh8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e4$) 25 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is decisive.

23 bxc3 b5 24 e5 a5 25 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ b4 26 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{M}e8$

27 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{M}e6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 1-0

Cut off from the kingside, the black king could only watch the events.



Akopian – Polovodin
St Petersburg 1994

This position is a very illustrative case of how the king can be cut off by an active rook and of the typical mirages characterizing similar

endgames. Here the black king is cut off from its pawns, but temporarily without consequences – apparently White has no means to make use of it. On the contrary, it seems that by playing 43... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ it is Black who can make use of the overburdened white rook, which is defending two pawns. However, by choosing that 'decisive' move Black falls into a trap: after 44 $\mathbb{M}h6$ it turns out that the e3-pawn is taboo, because 44... $\mathbb{M}xe3$ 45 $\mathbb{M}h8$ $\mathbb{M}a3$ 46 a7 is winning for White, while 44... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 45 $\mathbb{M}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ represents a bad bargain. There is only 44...g4 45 fxg4 hxg4 46 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 47 $\mathbb{M}b6$ $\mathbb{M}xe3$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ and the white king crosses to the other side of the board more quickly. So, feeling secure and being on the move, Polovodin played...

43... $\mathbb{M}a4?$

What is wrong about this natural move? Its shortcoming lies in the fact that it does not exert pressure on the e3-pawn any longer, which means that the white rook gains more freedom. Akopian immediately exploits this...

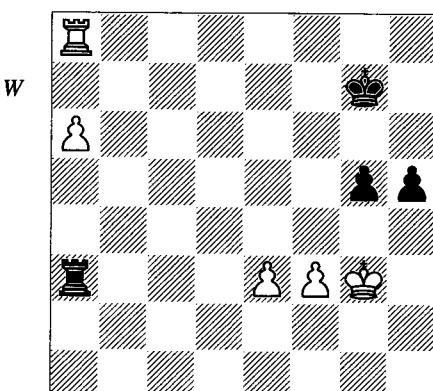
44 $\mathbb{M}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 45 $\mathbb{M}a7$ $\mathbb{M}a3$

Given that 46 e4 would be met by 46...g4, one may wonder what the idea was behind the manoeuvre $\mathbb{M}e7-a7$, which puts the rook in a passive position in front of its own pawn. Well, we shall soon learn.

46 $\mathbb{M}a8$

A subtle detail: White is not compelled to play the weakening 46 e4, because as long as the black king is on the sixth rank, the e3-pawn is still taboo (46... $\mathbb{M}xe3$ would obviously lose to 47 a7, etc.).

46... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (D)



47 a7

Played consistently: the e3-pawn is defended indirectly.

47...♔h7

The king is imprisoned in its corner and can only move from g7 to h7 and back. It can never cross the f-file because of ♜h8. We can say that now it is cut off more effectively than in the initial position. Note that 47...g4 would be answered by 48 f4 (certainly not 48 fxg4?, when 48...♜xe3+ 49 ♔f4 ♜a3 leads to a theoretical draw) 48...♜xe3+ 49 ♔f2 ♜a3 50 f5 h4 51 f6+ and the white pawns are quicker. The same winning procedure also appears after the text-move:

48 e4 g4 49 e5

...and White's advancing e-pawn cannot be stopped.

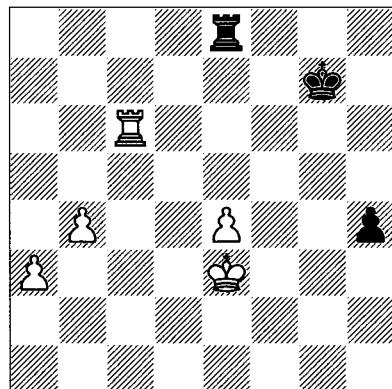
However, studying attentively the diagram position we notice that apart from 43...♔f7, 43...♜a4 and the pawn moves, which all lose, there is one more move at Black's disposal and it turns out to be the saving move – 43...♔h7!. In this manner the white rook is immobilized and the ball thrown back into White's court. On 44 f4 (the only way to make progress) Black replies 44...h4+! 45 ♔g4 gxf4 46 ♔xf4 h3 47 ♔g3 ♔g7 48 ♔xh3 ♔f7 49 ♜h6 ♔g7 50 ♜b6 ♜xe3+ 51 ♔g4 ♜e5!, efficiently cutting off the king and making it possible to move his own king to the queenside and draw. Note that here 51...♔f7? loses to 52 ♔f5 ♔e7 53 a7 ♜a3 54 ♜h6 ♔d7 55 ♜h8.

It seems that theoretically everybody understands the advantages and shortcomings of having the king cut off in a rook endgame, but in practice, games are swarming with grievous errors. We shall add one more instructive example.

In the following diagram, Black is no less than two pawns down and his king is cut off, so his passed pawn represents his last and only hope. Chernin, of course, understands this fully, and continues...

53...h3 54 ♔f3 ♜a8 55 ♜c3 ♔f6 56 ♔g3 ♔e5 57 ♔xh3 ♔xe4 58 ♔g3 ♔d4 59 ♜f3 ♔c4 60 ♔f2 ♔b5 61 ♔e2 ♔a4

B



Serper – Chernin
Groningen PCA 1993

The position has changed substantially. Black is still two pawns down, but his king has found a cosy place between the white pawns. It cannot win one of them, but paralyses the white rook by the need to defend them.

62 ♔d2 ♜d8+?

Unfortunately, as soon as Black achieved his ideal position, he drops his concentration and makes a fatal error.

63 ♔c3!

This is what Black probably missed. The king crosses the critical line owing to the fact that 63...♔xa3 loses at once to 64 ♜f5, when the black king will be cut out of play and the passed pawn will advance freely. Therefore, correct is 62...♜h8, when 63 ♔c3 does not work due to 63...♔xa3, while 63 ♜c3 ♜h2+ 64 ♔d3 ♜h4 prevents any progress. The white king is cut off on the rank and cannot penetrate enemy territory.

63...♜c8+ 64 ♔b2 ♜h8

White threatened 65 ♜f5 ♜a8 66 ♔c3, etc.

65 ♜f6

65 ♜f5 leads nowhere due to 65...♜h5.

65...♜h2+ 66 ♔c3 ♜h3+ 67 ♔c4 ♜h4+ 68 ♔c5 ♜h5+ 69 ♔b6 ♔xa3 70 b5

...and White wins.

We shall return to this important subject when we examine the properties of the rook.

7 The Queen

When discussing the king I mentioned how the Renaissance reform, introduced at the end of the 15th century, changed the nature of the Arabic *shatranj* and transformed the slow oriental game into a modern dynamic one, in fine harmony with the taste and convictions of the time. We owe its new dynamic nature mostly to the queen.

Moving on files and diagonals as far as open space allows, swinging in just a move from one side of the board to the other, its power and speed of movement came to the fore and fascinated the Renaissance player. In order to make full use of its new-born force, the Italian chess school focused on positions with an open centre and attacking potential, an environment in which the queen's qualities could be exploited fully. In that respect nothing has changed up until our day: the queen remains the piece of action and attack, enjoying its extraordinary dynamic character in all the phases of the game. It enters the scene depending on the character of the position: the more open the position, the sooner it is in action; in closed, blocked positions it remains dormant for a longer time. We feel its strength first and foremost in its mobility, capability of sudden transfers across the whole board or in pressure exerted on the diagonals and files leading to the enemy king. In the endgame the queen's power, reflected in its omnipresence and many functions, is not diminished. Whether supporting passed pawns or keeping an eye on the opponent's king, the queen dominates the board until the very end.

We are warned about queen's remarkable traits from the early days of our chess apprenticeship, and rigidly keep in mind its nominal value, but in time we learn that material is just one of the factors involved in the chess struggle, and not the most important one. In the games of chess masters we come across queen sacrifices executed for various purposes. At first we are impressed mostly by pseudo-sacrifices, which yield palpable, quick results, but

sooner or later we learn to admire the deep positional sacrifices whose outcome remains hidden for a long time. We should always keep in mind that the real value of the queen lies partly in the fact that it can be sacrificed for lesser pieces if the position requires it.

It is an irony of the game that the queen's value and importance imply at the same time its vulnerability. Precisely because it is so valuable, the queen, for instance, is a bad blockader, its role in defence is limited, and its early exposure perilous. If a queen ventures into the centre prematurely, the opponent's minor pieces can develop with tempi, and there are often tactical possibilities against an exposed king. At worst we find the queen shut out of play following a greedy pursuit of material gain. More often than not, the hunter becomes the prey in such instances, or else the queen becomes an impotent spectator.

The inherent value of the queen is normally somewhere between these extremes. The games and positions I have selected will bring these simple truths closer to the reader.

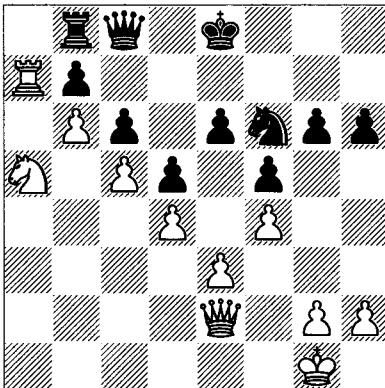
Basic Traits; The Queen's Strength

At first sight the blocked position in the diagram on the following page perhaps does not strike us as promising: the vulnerable spot in Black's defensive line, the b7-pawn, is well protected and White's dominance of the only open file does not seem to promise any breakthrough. However, if we look a little deeper we recognize some essential imbalances: White has a spatial advantage and his queen is mobile. Can he squeeze anything out of this?

28 ♕a2!

By threatening to play 29 ♜xb7 ♜xb7 30 ♜xb7 ♜xb7 31 ♜a7, White forces the knight into a defensive posture.

W



Petrov – Grau
Buenos Aires OL 1939

28... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29 $\mathbb{W}f2!$

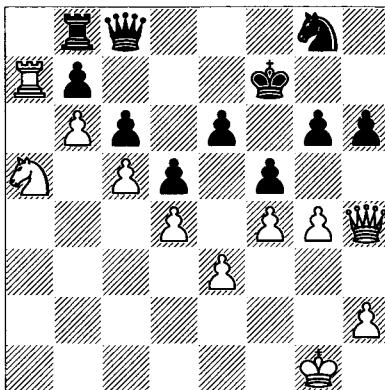
He now swings his queen over to the other wing to exploit Black's somewhat loose pawn-structure.

29... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

29... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30 $\mathbb{W}h4$ h5 seems to close the door on the inquisitive white queen, but then 31 $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 32 $\mathbb{W}h6$ gives Black the move at an unavoidable moment: 32... $\mathbb{W}d7$ loses to 33 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 35 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 36 $\mathbb{W}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}xe8$, etc.

30 $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31 g4 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ (D)

W



32 g5!! h5 33 $\mathbb{W}f2$

Now we see the point of the pawn advance: the f6-square has been denied to the black knight and it cannot reach the crucial defensive position on d7 in order to prevent the sacrificial breakthrough on the queenside.

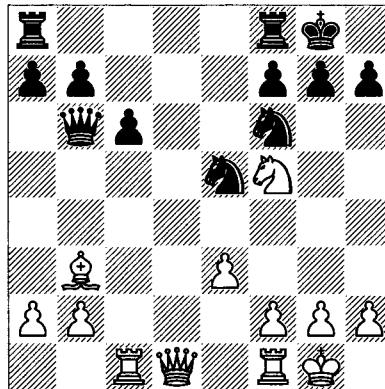
33... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 34 $\mathbb{W}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

34... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ does not help due to 35 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 36 $\mathbb{W}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 37 $\mathbb{W}xa7+$ followed by 38 b7, when the pawn promotes.

35 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 37 $\mathbb{W}a7$ 1-0

Victory was achieved by a memorable queen manoeuvre: it swung from one side of the board to the other in a most impressive demonstration of its mobility! That same quality continues to be the centre of our interest in the following instructive examples.

W



Alekhine – Em. Lasker
Zurich 1934

Lasker's imprecise play, especially his previous move, 17... $\mathbb{W}d8-b6?$, opened the way for the following bolt from the blue which features the white queen in the main role:

18 $\mathbb{W}d6!$ $\mathbb{Q}ed7$

Objectively speaking, 18... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $gxh6$ 20 $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ is a better way to beat off the imminent threats, but the cost is high: Black's pawn-structure is irreparably damaged.

19 $\mathbb{W}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 20 $\mathbb{W}g3!$ g6 21 $\mathbb{W}g5!$

Three quick, energetic queen moves have brought Black to his knees. White threatens to finish off any resistance with 22 $\mathbb{Q}d6$.

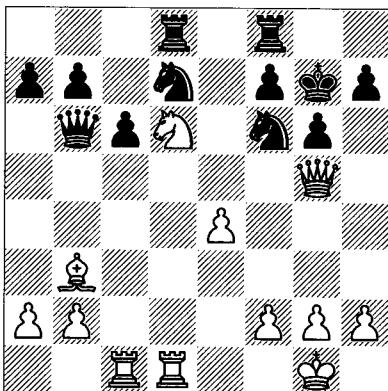
21... $\mathbb{Q}h8??$

21... $\mathbb{W}b5$ is objectively more tenacious, but 22 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $cxb5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ keeps an enduring advantage in the form of the kingside pawn-majority and superior bishop.

22 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23 e4 (D)

The strong knight on d6 paralyses the defensive forces while the advance of the e-pawn will definitely shatter their coordination.

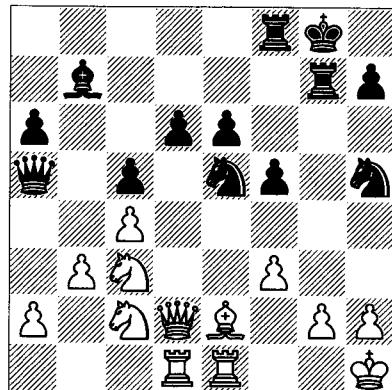
B

23... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 24 $\mathbb{M}d3$ f6

Kotov demonstrated 24...h6 25 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$
26 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ f6 27 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$.
25 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xg6!$ 1-0

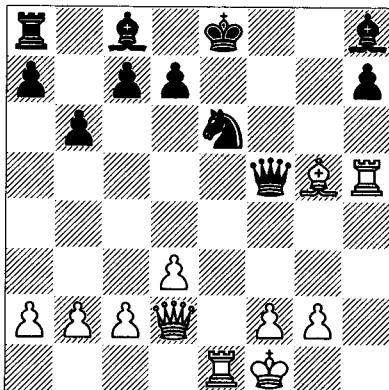
Or 20... $\mathbb{W}f5$ 21 $\mathbb{M}e3$, etc.21 $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 22 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ 1-0

B



Ustinov – Stein
Moscow tt 1965

W



Bogoljubow – Rubinstein
Stockholm/Gothenburg (9) 1920

Black has just captured a knight on h8, preserving approximate material equality, but his worries do not stop there. His pieces visibly lack coordination and his king is still unable to castle. As long as it is on e8, it is vulnerable. However, only a quick attack by White can exploit its present state and Bogoljubow finds the way...

17 $\mathbb{W}b4!$ c5 18 $\mathbb{W}h4$

Two energetic queen moves have changed the scene completely. The sword hangs over the black king and there is little Black can do about it.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 20 $\mathbb{M}h6$ $\mathbb{W}xh6$

At first glance the game appears tense and unclear, but the mobile black queen will change the picture in just two moves!

27... $\mathbb{W}d8!$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}g5$

The mobility of the queen works miracles. Black's pressure on the kingside has become irresistible.

29 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

29 $\mathbb{M}g1$ loses to 29... $\mathbb{Q}g3+$, while 29 $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ changes nothing.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ 30 $\mathbb{M}xe6$ $\mathbb{M}d7!$ 31 $\mathbb{W}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$
32 $\mathbb{hxg3}$ $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ (0-1)

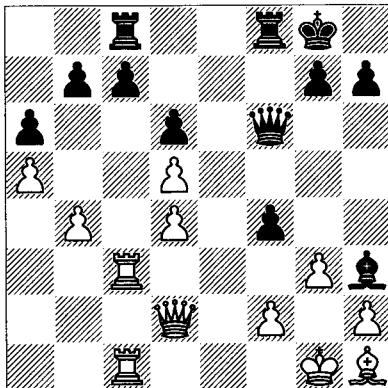
It is in the attack on the opponent's king that the queen's best qualities come to the fore. Such sudden queen transfers, mostly to the g- and h-file, represent the deadliest weapon of attack.

Looking at the diagram on the following page, while Black was developing his initiative on the kingside, White concentrated his pressure on the backward c7-pawn. By threatening $\mathbb{W}xf4$ he seems to have got the upper hand, but Portisch produces a beautiful queen move...

25... $\mathbb{W}g5!$

It is amazing that by stepping into a pin, the queen acquires extraordinary attacking power. At the same time 26 $\mathbb{M}xc7$ has been prevented due to 26... $\mathbb{fxg3}$. Instead, White is compelled to abandon his plans on the c-file and take care of the vulnerable f2-square.

B



Rogoff – Portisch
Biel IZ 1976

26 $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}f7!$

This quiet move vacates f8 for the queen's rook to increase the pressure exerted on the f-file and prevents 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ thanks to 27... $\mathbb{R}cf8$.

27 $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{R}cf8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}g6$

Black steps out of the pin, using the weakness of White's back rank to provide a tactical defence of the f4-pawn.

29 $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{R}f6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}c3 h5$

White's defence hinges on g3 and this pawn advance is intended to increase the pressure on it.

31 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

31 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ does not work because of 31...h4 32 $\mathbb{Q}ee7$ fxg3 33 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 35 hxg3 hxg3 36 f3 g2, when Black wins.

31...fxg3!

This must have come as a surprise to White.

32 $\mathbb{Q}xg3 h4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 0-1

While analysing Portisch's victory, I recalled an older game featuring a similar motif...

In the following diagram, Black's pieces have taken up ideal attacking positions, but the defence does not seem to have any weak spots. By joining the fight, the black queen will change things at a stroke!

28... $\mathbb{Q}h5$

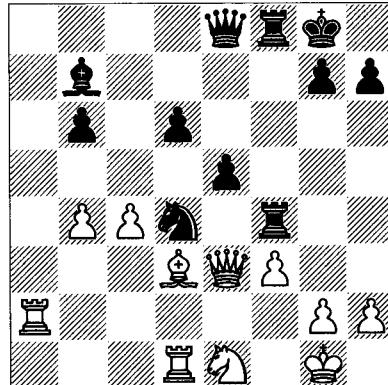
Black threatens 29...e4 30 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ (or 30 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exf3) 30... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 31 fxе4 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}c1$.

29 $\mathbb{Q}f1 \mathbb{Q}g5!$

This time Black threatens 30... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ and the king's position is destabilized.

30 $\mathbb{Q}f2 h6!$

B

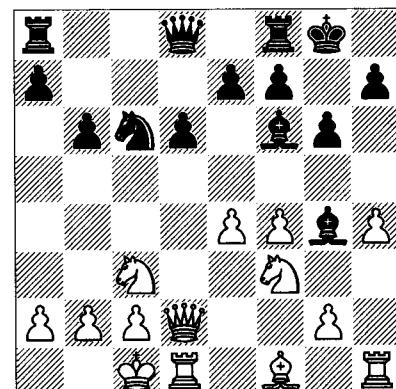


Stahlberg – Alekhine
Hamburg 1930

Having defended the queen, Black renews the threat of 31... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$. Stahlberg missed the point and played 31 $\mathbb{Q}h1$, succumbing at once. If he had continued 31 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, then 31... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1+35$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1+36$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $hxg5$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}f7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}e6$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}e4 b5!$ would win for Black, as given by Alekhine.

Again the decisive threat came from g5, but it is the h-file and the h4-square and h5 in particular where tactical blows usually happen.

W



J. Polgar – Smirin
Istanbul OL 2000

The prospects of the white queen penetrating into the black camp look remote here, but Polgar manages to make headway in a *blitzkrieg*...

12 $h5 \mathbb{Q}xh5?!$

This move just helps White. Instead of keeping the light-squared bishop with the logical 12...gxh5, Black instinctively preserved the dark-squared bishop, but we shall see that it can be put to little use.

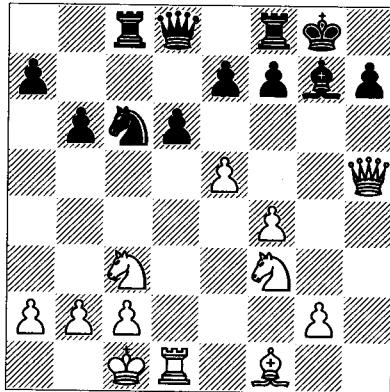
13 ♜xh5 gxh5 14 ♜d5 ♜c8

Polgar suggested 14...♝xc3 15 bxc3 ♜c8 16 ♜xh5 ♜e6 17 ♜b5 ♜a5 as an improvement, but this is not easy for Black either; for example, 18 ♜h1 (18 f5 ♜f6 slows White down) 18...♜g6 19 ♜h4 ♜fc8 (or: 19...f6 20 ♜d7; 19...♜h8 20 ♜d7 e6 21 f5) 20 ♜h3 ♜f8 21 ♜g3 ♜f6 22 ♜g5.

15 ♜xh5

The queen has been transferred to an attacking position in just a few moves.

15...♜g7 16 e5 (D)



B

16...♜e8

On 16...h6 Black must have feared 17 ♜h4, but 17 ♜d3 is also powerful.

17 ♜h3!

The immediate 17 ♜d3 would be parried by 17...f5. This quiet retreat is much more difficult to meet. Now White threatens 18 ♜g5 h6 19 ♜f5 with mate, while 17...f5 would expose Black to 18 ♜c4+.

17...h6 18 ♜d3 ♜b4

18...e6 does not work because of 19 ♜e4 dx5 20 ♜f6+.

19 ♜e4

This piece must be preserved.

19...e6 20 f5! ♜xc3

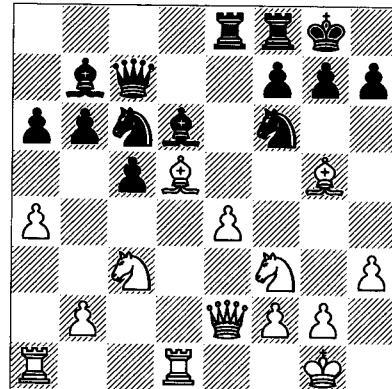
Playing 20...f6 would prevent the crushing game continuation, but against 21 exd6 would not help.

21 f6 ♜b5

If 21...♜a4 then 22 bxc3 ♜xa2+ 23 ♜b2 ♜xc3 24 ♜d4, etc.

22 ♜g3 1-0

Black cannot avoid being mated within a few moves.



B

Portisch – Radulov

Nice OL 1974

In this tense position Black came to the conclusion that he could exploit the pin on the e-file and initiated complications:

**15...♜d4 16 ♜xd4 ♜xd5 17 ♜xd5 ♜xd5
18 ♜f5**

Portisch turns his eye towards the black king.

18...♜xe4 19 ♜h5!?

19 ♜d2 achieves nothing due to the intermediate 19...♜h2+. The text-move, amassing forces on the fifth rank, creates strong threats.

19...♜fe8

Radulov finds a solution which is surprisingly resilient. Otherwise: 19...♜e5 20 ♜f6; 19...g6 20 ♜f6; or 19...f6 20 ♜xd5 ♜h2+ 21 ♜h1 fxg5 22 g3, etc.

20 ♜xg7!?

The hardly-veiled threat has been realized. The knight is obviously taboo.

20...♜e8 21 f4! ♜xf4 22 ♜e8 ♜c6!

This suffices; after 22...♜xe8? 23 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 24 ♜xd5 there is no compensation for the exchange.

23 ♜xd6!?

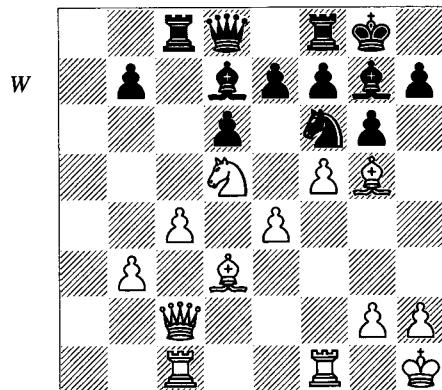
23 ♜h6 ♜f8! leads to an ending that should be drawn despite White's extra exchange.

23...f6?

Later analysis showed that 23...h6! is fully satisfactory for Black.

24 $\mathbb{Q}e1!$ 1-0

Queen sallies are not always so quick to harm the opponent's defence. Sometimes it takes time and support, often from a rook-lift to the h-file.



Portisch – Reshevsky
Petropolis IZ 1973

A strong centre and spatial advantage as a rule guarantee freedom of movement. In our position it is easy to foresee which piece is likely to move.

20 $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h4$

The natural queen manoeuvre, which transfers the queen into an attacking position, announces clearly what follows – a rook-lift on the third rank and a further increase of the kingside pressure.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

To protect against $\mathbb{Q}f3-h3$, the f8-square must be evacuated for the f6-knight.

23 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}cf1$

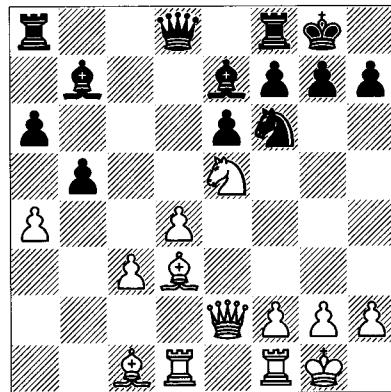
A fine detail. Willy-nilly, Black must close the f-file, which leads to an unfavourable defensive set-up.

24... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xg6!$ $\mathbb{Q}hxg6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xf6!$ 1-0

28... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ leads to mate.

The power exerted by an active queen on the files leading to the enemy king is often irresistible, especially if helped by a rook. Its strength on the diagonals targeting the opponent's king's position is no less potent. A very common plan of kingside attack involves lining

up a queen and a bishop along a sensitive diagonal.



Em. Lasker – Reshevsky
Nottingham 1936

White has just played 16 a2-a4. With this pawn sacrifice, White's idea is to solve the problem of his backward c-pawn, by advancing it to c4 and thus controlling the important central d5-square. There is only one flaw in his reasoning: Black does not have to accept the sacrifice.

16... $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

A strong line-up of bishop and queen appears on the long diagonal. This will influence the course of events until the end of the game.

17 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Note that 17 f3 or 17 f4 would be met by 17...b4.

17... $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}b2??$

18 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ leads White into an inferior position, burdened with an isolated pawn, but in my opinion with better practical chances to hold on.

18... $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}c1??$

19 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ is certainly worse than it was a move earlier, but is still better than the line chosen by White.

19... $\mathbb{Q}g5$

The main purpose behind 18... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ was this tactical blow, intended to heighten the pressure along the diagonal to the maximum.

20 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$

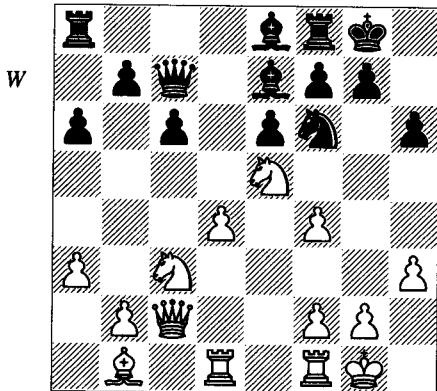
Alas 21 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ is no better: 21... $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ is untenable for White.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 22 $gxf3$ $\mathbb{W}g5+ 0-1$

23 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ obviously loses to 23... $\mathbb{W}g4$.

The tremendous pressure of the queen and bishop line-up proved in the end crushing.

The end: 26... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 27 $\mathbb{B}xd7+$, etc. The static weaknesses created thanks to White's queen and bishop line-up led to a fatal deterioration in Black's position.



Kramnik – Lputian
Debrecen Echt 1992

There are some important details to note in this middlegame position. Black's unprotected queen and the vulnerable h7-square enable White to make a central thrust that at first glance seems infeasible:

17 d5!

The f6-knight is tied to the defence of h7, 17...exd5 loses to 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ and 17...cxsd5 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ fails to 22 a4. The d5-square, an apparently impregnable post, turns out to be vulnerable because tactical circumstances make it so. The key element is the dreadful pressure from the white queen and bishop lined up against the black king. The play continued:

17... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$

Although attacked four times, the d5-pawn remains taboo!

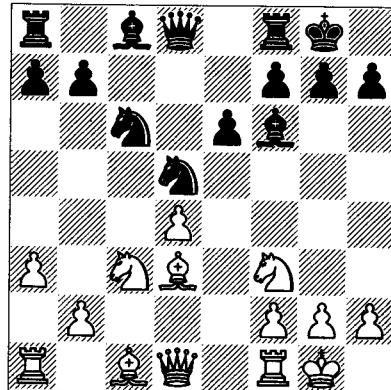
18... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 19 dx6 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ fxe6 21 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ g6 22 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

The weakness of the d5-square has been transformed into the weakness of the isolated e6-pawn.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

The pawn is finally doomed; 24... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ does not work because of the pin, while 24... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ fails to 25 $\mathbb{W}d6$.

25 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 1-0



Smyslov – Ribli
London Ct (5) 1983

This position arose from a Semi-Tarrasch. In comparison with a common move-order in the Caro-Kann, White has earned a tempo – a3, which enables him to place the queen on c2 and use the line-up to weaken the black king's position.

11 $\mathbb{W}c2$ h6

On 11...g6 12 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ White would protect the d4-pawn with the natural 13 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$. The text-move obliges White to develop less harmoniously, but opens the sensitive b1-h7 diagonal for good.

12 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

This simple move serves several purposes: the d4-pawn is protected (13... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ would fail due to 15 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ b5 17 $\mathbb{Q}xh6!$ gxh6 18 $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d2$), additional pressure is exerted on the d5-knight and White makes $\mathbb{Q}e4$ possible – the line-up on the b1-h7 diagonal is more threatening when the queen is in front of the bishop.

13... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e2!$

The isolated pawn needs more protection before the intended manoeuvre is carried out; namely, 14 $\mathbb{Q}e4?$ would be met by 14... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$. However, retreating to e2 is not just a temporary necessity, but a part of a larger plan, which makes the idea valuable: the

queen's knight moves to the other wing to join the kingside attack.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}ce7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4?$

The course of the game disapproves of this seemingly useful, but actually superficial move, which loses time to force the rook to a better position. 16... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ would keep the game level.

17 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18 $\mathbb{M}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}g3$

The knight continues its journey started at move 14. When it reaches its destination, h5, we can expect all sort of trouble to befall the black king.

20... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}de7$

If Black had some hidden thought about trapping the queen by 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ he had to give it up due to 23 $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $exf5$ 25 e6. Unfortunately, although there are many defenders around the king, White identifies a weak spot in its vicinity – the f7 point.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xh6!$

The penetration by the queen made the king's position insecure and now this stroke blows it fully open.

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

22... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ fails to 23 $\mathbb{M}xe5!$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25 $\mathbb{M}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ with an irresistible attack, while 22... $\mathbb{M}xd4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ would not fare any better.

23 $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

The knight arrives at its destination at the critical moment: if the g7-pawn falls, then the whole defensive line falls apart.

23... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$

A cunning defence: by giving back the material, Black manages to protect g7.

24 $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 26 d5!

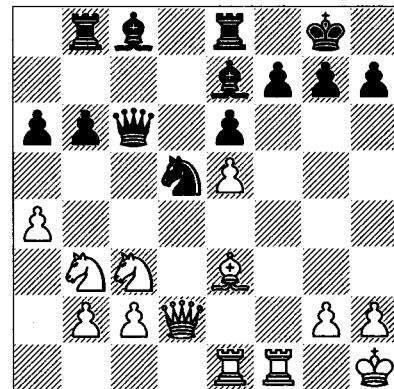
Now we can appreciate the magnitude of the error committed at move 16. The rook being on e1, 26... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ can be punished by 27 $\mathbb{W}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28 $\mathbb{M}xe6+$ $fxe6$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}h7\#$. Note also that 26... $gxf6$ loses to 27 $dxe6$.

26... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 27 $\mathbb{W}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28 $\mathbb{M}xe6+!$ $fxe6$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30 d6+

The final detail – the last blow comes from the d5-square.

30... $\mathbb{M}xd6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$

By now it is clear that White will prevail. White's queen and bishop line-up led to a strong attack.



Ivanchuk – Anand
Shenyang 2000

White's central thrust e5 has opened the f-file, which he thought would work to his advantage. Play continued:

19 $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{M}f8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

White expected 20... $..exd5$, when 21 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 22 $\mathbb{W}g3$ creates tactical threats at the cost of a temporary pawn sacrifice. After 22... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 23 $\mathbb{M}xf7$ $\mathbb{M}xf7$ 24 e6 $\mathbb{M}f8$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xb8$ White recaptures the pawn under favourable circumstances in which his passed e-pawn becomes an asset. This line can be avoided only at the cost of the b6-pawn and that is exactly what Anand opts for.

20... $\mathbb{W}xd5!$

The reasoning behind the move is straightforward and clear: the strength of the centralized queen lined up with a bishop on the long diagonal should provide good compensation for the pawn.

21 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

Threatening ... $\mathbb{W}xg2+$.

22 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

This move is apparently quite a good remedy against the bishop-pair: the exchange on c5 favours White. But the exchange is not the only option and had White foreseen the course of events, he would have probably preferred 22 $\mathbb{M}g1$.

22... $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

The pressure exerted on g2 affords Black active counterplay.

23 $\mathbb{W}e2$

23 $\mathbb{W}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ appears advantageous for White based on 24... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d6$

$\mathbb{B}c8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}c5$, but Anand noticed a hidden tactical trick – 24... $\mathbb{B}c8!!$ 25 $\mathbb{B}xe1 \mathbb{B}xc2$; 25 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (threatening 26... $\mathbb{Q}e3$); 25 $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}b4$; or 25 $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}h4$.

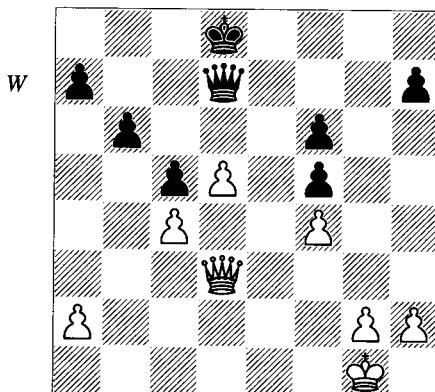
23... $\mathbb{B}fc8$

This looks bad because of 24 $\mathbb{Q}d6$, but there is a little trap: 24... $\mathbb{W}xg2+ 25 \mathbb{W}xg2 \mathbb{Q}xg2+ 26 \mathbb{W}xg2 \mathbb{B}xc2+$ and Black wins.

24 $\mathbb{W}d1 \mathbb{W}e4 25 \mathbb{W}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe4$

The enduring pressure against g2 proved valuable: it steered the fight into an endgame in which the black bishops are superior to the feebly coordinated white minor pieces. Now 26 $\mathbb{Q}d6 \mathbb{Q}xc2$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xb8 \mathbb{Q}xd1$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd1 \mathbb{Q}xb8$ simplified into an endgame that is advantageous for Black.

As positions simplify into an endgame, the queen's influence on the course of the struggle does not diminish. Its mobility remains a crucial factor.



S. Ivanov – Yandemirov
St Petersburg 1993

White's healthier pawn-structure and better-protected king are important elements of his superiority, but it is the mobile queen which will deserve all the praise at the end of the struggle.

27 h3 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{Q}d6$ 29 a4 $\mathbb{W}c8$

Obviously, after 29... $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 30 $\mathbb{W}xf5$ the c4-pawn is taboo because of 31 $\mathbb{W}e6+$, etc., while the f6-pawn cannot be defended.

30 $\mathbb{W}g3!$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 31 a5

There are two open files, but they are both controlled well and in order to penetrate the enemy position the white queen must open one

more road. Having constrained the black queen to f8, it is the proper moment to do it; after 31... $\mathbb{B}xa5$ 32 $\mathbb{W}e1 \mathbb{W}e7$ 33 $\mathbb{W}xa5 \mathbb{W}c7$ 34 $\mathbb{W}a6+ \mathbb{W}b6$ 35 $\mathbb{W}c8$ the queen achieves the desired aim.

31... $\mathbb{W}f7$

31...b5 is more tenacious. The queen should stay on the back rank.

32 axb6 axb6 33 $\mathbb{W}b3 \mathbb{W}b7$

Or 33... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 34 $\mathbb{W}a4$.

34 $\mathbb{W}b1$

Black cannot defend two weak points simultaneously and his position deteriorates quickly.

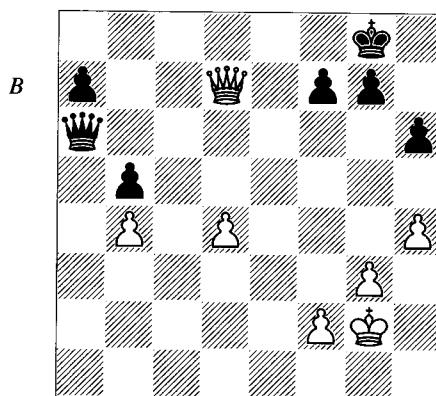
34...b5 35 $\mathbb{W}xf5 bxc4$ 36 $\mathbb{W}e6+ \mathbb{Q}c7$ 37 d6+ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Or 37... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 38 d7+ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 39 $\mathbb{W}e7$.

38 $\mathbb{W}xf6+ \mathbb{Q}d7$ 39 $\mathbb{W}e7+ \mathbb{Q}c6$ 40 $\mathbb{W}e4+ \mathbb{Q}b6$

41 $\mathbb{W}e8$ 1-0

Tied down by the pawn weaknesses, the black queen could not match the mobility of the enemy queen and that was decisive. Mobility is also as a rule paramount in endgames with passed pawns.



Kramnik – Adams
Wijk aan Zee 2000

Black's chances to stop the passed d-pawn depend on the level of activity his queen can achieve. Unfortunately, it's a difficult task, given that the white king is better shielded than the black one. His poor queenside pawn-structure makes it even more difficult: 41... $\mathbb{W}e6$, for instance, loses to 42 $\mathbb{W}xe6 fxe6$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, when 43...a5 does not work because the king is in the square.

41... $\mathbb{W}g6$

The best try. At least the a7-pawn is safe, because 42 $\mathbb{W}xa7$ $\mathbb{W}e4+$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}e1$ gives Black real hope.

42 $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 43 d5 a5

In view of 43... $\mathbb{W}d3$ 44 $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{W}e4+$ 45 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 46 $\mathbb{W}d3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 47 d6, etc., the b-pawn is the last hope. 43...a6 44 $\mathbb{W}e5$ followed by d6 and $\mathbb{W}c5$ is hopeless for Black.

44 bxa5 b4 45 d6!

This fine little detail emphasizes the mobility of the white queen.

45...b3

In case of 45... $\mathbb{W}xd6$, White masters the critical light-squared diagonal by 46 $\mathbb{W}e4+$ and 47 $\mathbb{W}b7$ and the pawn promotes.

46 d7 $\mathbb{W}c6+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f3$ 48 $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{W}d3$

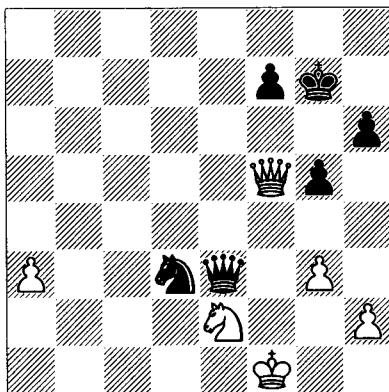
Or 48... $\mathbb{W}d5$ 49 $\mathbb{W}b1+$ f5 50 $\mathbb{W}xb3$, etc.

49 a6! 1-0

After 49... $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 50 $\mathbb{W}b1+$ f5 51 $\mathbb{W}xb3$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 52 $\mathbb{W}a2$ Black will soon be at a loss for useful moves.

Note also that reduced material does not diminish the danger of attacks when there are queens on the board.

B



Tal – Keres

Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade Ct 1959

In spite of the small number of pieces on the board, the white king is exposed to constant harassment from the strong black queen.

43... $\mathbb{W}d2!$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}d4$

The queen and the knight complement each other well, and White must be careful not to step into a fork or discovered check. For instance: 44 $\mathbb{W}e4$ loses to 44... $\mathbb{W}e1+$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}f1+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$. In case of

44 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d1+$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}c2+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}b1+$ the discovered check will decide.

44... $\mathbb{W}e1+$

44... $\mathbb{W}d1+$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xd4+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{W}g1+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xh2+$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ leaves Black a pawn up, but he will not be able to protect the king from checks and stop the passed a-pawn at the same time.

45 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}e3$ 46 $\mathbb{W}d5$

46 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ blocks the king which again runs into a fork after 46... $\mathbb{W}e2+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$. If the knight moves further from the king, other tactical possibilities spring up. So after 46 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}e2+$, 47 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ is met by 47... $\mathbb{Q}f4+$, while 47 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ runs into mate or loss of material after 47... $\mathbb{Q}e5$. 46 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}d2+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}c1+$ 48 $\mathbb{W}f1$ loses to 48... $\mathbb{W}c5+$.

46... $\mathbb{W}f2+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}f1+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$

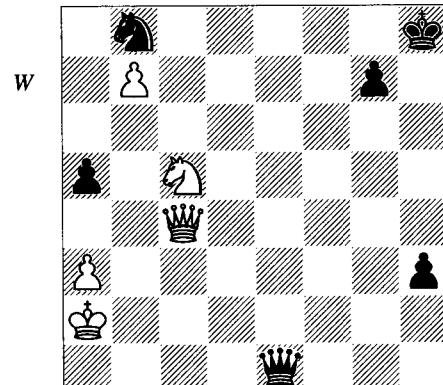
When facing Tal one had to be extremely cautious until the very end. The apparently winning 48... $\mathbb{h}5+?$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}f6+?$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ actually loses to 51 $\mathbb{W}d6!$.

49 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{W}d3+$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{W}xa3+$

52 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{W}e7+$

Having exiled the white king to the other side of the board and won a pawn, the queen and the knight have done the lion's share of the task. The rest was a simpler technical job.

Cooperation between queen and knight is especially effective. Sometimes it rises to striking levels.



Capablanca – Janowski

San Sebastian 1911

The white passed pawn has reached the seventh rank, but it is blockaded, while the black

h-pawn threatens to promote in two. Besides, the white king is in the open and the first impression favours Black, but the game takes an unexpected turn...

58 ♜e4!

A formidable move! While the black queen is cut off on the first rank and the apparently vulnerable white king protected, the white queen is set free and the black king endangered. Simultaneously, the advance 58...h2 has been prevented by 59 ♜c8+ ♜h7 60 ♜h3+ ♜g8 (60...g6 61 ♜e6+ costs Black his queen) 61 ♜e6+ ♜f8 (or 61...♜h8 62 ♜e8+ ♜h7 63 ♜g5+) 62 ♜d6+, etc.

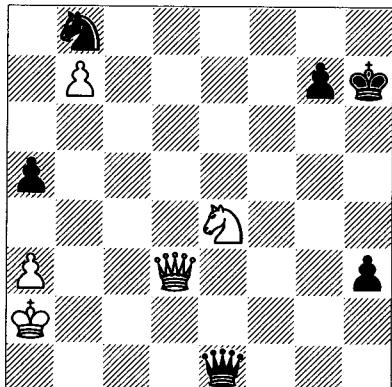
58...♜h7?

58...♜h1? might appear better, but fails to 59 ♜c8+ ♜h7 60 ♜f5+ ♜h8 (60...g6 loses to 61 ♜f7+ ♜h6 62 ♜f8+) 61 ♜h5+ ♜g8 62 ♜e8+ ♜h7 63 ♜g5+ ♜h6 64 ♜f7+ ♜h7 65 ♜h8+ ♜g6 66 ♜e5+ ♜f5 67 ♜xb8.

However, 58...♜h4 was necessary in order to reactivate the queen. After 59 ♜c8+ ♜h7 60 ♜f5+ ♜h6 61 ♜d6 g6 62 ♜f8+ ♜h7 63 ♜xb8 ♜f2+ 64 ♜b3 ♜b6+ Black can hope for perpetual check.

59 ♜d3! (D)

B



Playing on the weakness of the black king, Capablanca continues to restrict his opponent's options and create new threats, including a forced mate starting with 60 ♜g5++ ♜h6 61 ♜f7+.

59...g6

Or:

a) 59...h2 fails to parry the threat: 60 ♜g5++ ♜h6 61 ♜f7+ ♜h5 62 ♜f5+ ♜h4 63 ♜f4+ ♜h3 64 ♜g5+ ♜g2 65 ♜f3+ ♜g1 66 ♜h3#.

b) 59...♜h4 fails to 60 ♜g5+ ♜h6 61 ♜f7+ ♜h5 62 ♜f5+ g5 63 ♜e5, etc.

c) 59...♜g8 is insufficient due to 60 ♜d5+ ♜h7 61 ♜h5+ ♜g8 62 ♜e8+ ♜h7 63 ♜g5+.

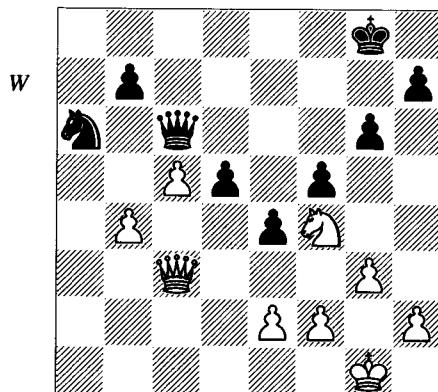
60 ♜xh3+ ♜g7 61 ♜f3!

The king is kept in the mating-net: White threatens 62 ♜f6+ ♜h7 63 ♜g5+ ♜h6 64 ♜f7+.

61...♛c1

61...♜h4 doesn't work due to 62 ♜c3+ ♜h7 63 ♜c7+ ♜h6 64 ♜xb8, and nor does 61...♜d7 because of 62 ♜d3 ♜b8 63 ♜d4+ ♜h7 64 ♜g5+ ♜h6 65 ♜f7+ ♜h5 66 ♜h8+ ♜g4 67 ♜e5+ ♜f5 68 ♜xb8, when there is no perpetual check.

62 ♜f6+ ♜h7 63 ♜f7+ ♜h6 64 ♜f8+ ♜h5 65 ♜h8+ ♜g4 66 ♜c8+ 1-0



Portisch – Uhlmann
Stockholm IZ 1962

Two details make White's position advantageous: his queenside pawn-majority and his well-protected king. Exploiting the pawn-majority is not so easy, but attacking the exposed black king is quite realistic...

30 ♜e5!

Leaving a pawn *en prise*, White launches an irresistible attack with just two pieces.

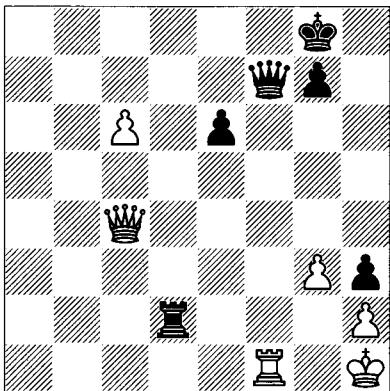
30...♝xb4

30...♝c7, placing the critical e6-square under surveillance, looks somewhat better, but then 31 h4 ♜d7 32 ♜d6 ♜f7 33 ♜d8+ wins material.

31 ♜e6 ♜d7 32 ♜f6

Black has no reasonable reply.

B



Perez – Ordóñez
Venezuela 1997

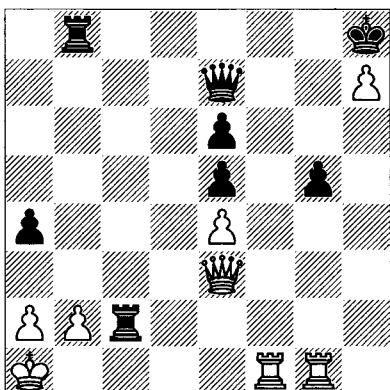
Black is seemingly in difficulties, because the queen is under attack, the c-pawn is a major threat, and 1... $\mathbb{R}d1$ would be met by 2 $\mathbb{Q}g1$. But despite appearances it is White whose exposed king is under attack. Black won after...

1... $\mathbb{R}d1$! 2 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}a7+$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}a2!$ 0-1

White's position proved untenable because his queen was simultaneously burdened with too many tasks.

With major pieces on the board it is sometimes not at all easy to distinguish which of the two kings stands worse. Recently I came across a most curious position.

W



Leko – Khalifman
New Delhi FIDE 2000

At first glance both kings are out of immediate danger: the white king can be protected simply by 44 $\mathbb{R}b1$, while the black king is hiding

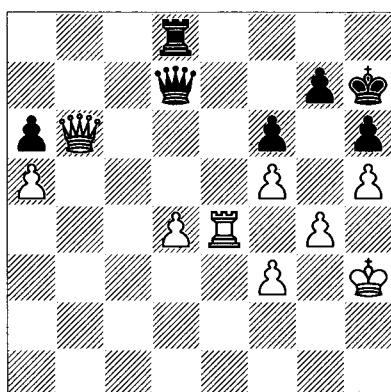
behind his opponent's h-pawn. Forcing the black king out into the open by 44 $\mathbb{R}xg5$ $\mathbb{R}xb2$ 45 $\mathbb{R}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ does not seem to promise anything because the doubled rooks can protect the king on the second rank. With probably such thoughts on his mind, White continued:

44 $\mathbb{R}b1?$ a3 45 $\mathbb{W}xa3$ $\mathbb{W}xa3$ 46 $\mathbb{R}xa3$ $\mathbb{R}xb1+$ 47 $\mathbb{R}xb1$ $\mathbb{R}c4$ 48 $\mathbb{R}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 49 $\mathbb{R}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{R}d4$ 52 $\mathbb{R}g2$ $\mathbb{R}xe4$ 53 a4 $\mathbb{R}d4$ 54 a5 e4 55 a3 e5 56 a4 e3 57 $\mathbb{R}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 58 $\mathbb{R}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 59 $\mathbb{R}h3$ e4 60 $\mathbb{R}h8$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 61 $\mathbb{R}e8$ e3 62 $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{R}d5+$ 64 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{R}d4$ ½-½

However, in spite of appearances, analysis demonstrates that 44 $\mathbb{R}xg5!$ $\mathbb{R}xb2$ 45 $\mathbb{R}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ would not have been in vain, but one crucial move had to be found – 46 $\mathbb{R}b8!!$. The point is that in case of 46... $\mathbb{R}xb8$ the protection from checks on the second rank is not there any more and 47 $\mathbb{W}h3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 48 $\mathbb{R}g1+$ $\mathbb{W}g7$ 49 $\mathbb{W}xe6+$, etc., wins, while in case of 46... $\mathbb{R}xa2+$ 47 $\mathbb{R}b1$ the white king is shielded on the b-file and 47... $\mathbb{R}h2$ fails to protect the black king due to 48 $\mathbb{R}f3!$. The black king was naked, but Leko, possibly because of time-trouble, did not see it.

It is not just victories, but also miraculous rescues that we owe to the queen and its mobility.

B



Gelfand – Kramnik
Sanghi Nagar FIDE Ct (4) 1994

Kramnik had been defending a difficult major-piece endgame a pawn down for a long time. When he lost the second pawn and entered this position, his prospects looked dismal. The a6-pawn is hanging, his pieces are passive,

and his back rank is sensitive. But at the critical moment Black came up with...

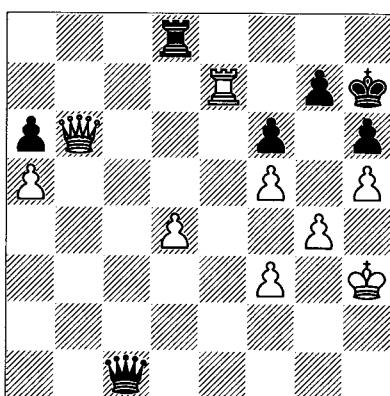
66... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

For a moment the a6-pawn is protected, but the purpose of the text-move obviously goes beyond that. Black is trying to activate his pieces before it is too late. To do that he pays a price in ceding the seventh rank to the white rook.

67 $\mathbb{R}e7$

After the game Gelfand was under the impression that he missed the win here, hidden in the continuation 67 d5. The point is in decoying the rook to d5, while the black queen is denied its sally to c1 because the d8-rook hangs. After 67... $\mathbb{R}xd5$, 68 $\mathbb{R}e7$ threatens 69 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, while 68... $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 69 $\mathbb{R}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 70 $\mathbb{R}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 71 $\mathbb{R}xd5$ leads to defeat (the white king will hide from checks by crossing the fifth rank via c5). However, Kramnik improved on this, giving 67... $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ 68 $\mathbb{R}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ as correct.

67... $\mathbb{Q}c1!$ (D)



There is an essential difference in comparison with the above note. 68 $\mathbb{R}xd8$ does not work because the black king will be stalemated and the intermediary 68 $\mathbb{R}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ does not help White either, since 69 $\mathbb{R}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 70 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ 71 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ 72 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ leads to perpetual check. But Gelfand also had a trump-card...

68 d5

The purpose of the move is in the control of the g1-square – the black queen is allowed only one check. At the same time 68... $\mathbb{R}xd5$ is denied to Black because it transposes to a line given in the note to White's 67th move, where 69 $\mathbb{R}xg7+$ wins. But Kramnik does not give up...

68... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 69 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ 70 $\mathbb{R}xa6$

This does look final – White can interpose if Black checks on the second rank and seemingly nothing can stop his passed pawns. However, the passed pawns are not that quick and the initiative has passed to Black.

70... $\mathbb{R}c3$ 71 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$

The situation has been turned upside-down: now it is White who is vulnerable on his first two ranks.

72 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{R}d1$ 73 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{R}xd5$ 74 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{R}d3$ 75 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{R}xf3$ ½-½

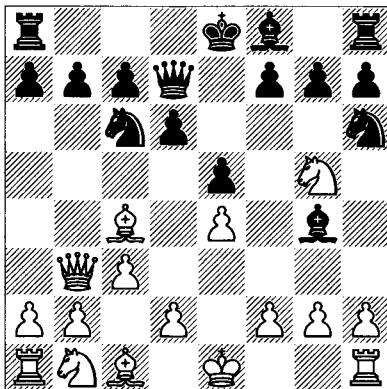
Basic Traits; The Queen's Weakness

When attacking the enemy king or saving its own, the queen is a powerful piece. The long list of situations we have passed through portrayed it in its best attire. In each of those cases it lived up to its reputation, and was worth at least its nominal value.

However, nominal values in chess are at best some sort of statistics, helping chess teachers to present a complex game in a simplified manner, a sort of crutch helping chess pupils to start walking through the jungle of rules and maxims. However, the longer we walk, the more conscious we get of the great illusion we call nominal values. In the end we know that there is not one single value in chess which is constant. We learn that values depend on the circumstances, that they change with circumstances, that they represent temporary standards in the constantly changing world on the chess-board. Chess truth is relative and that quality permeates every single detail of the game, but perhaps none so completely and visibly as the value of the pieces. When we become aware of this, we start distinguishing situations in which the queen is powerful from those in which it is feeble. We shall devote the following pages to the latter and look for causes which explain how and why it happened that the mighty piece lost its strength. As always, we shall rely on practical experience and wisdom.

In the position of the diagram on the following page, White, who had targeted the points b7 and f7, came to the conclusion that the time was

W



de Rozynski – Alekhine
Paris 1913

ripe for a tactical display. He therefore continued:

7 ♕xf7+? ♔xf7 8 ♔xf7 ♕xf7 9 ♕xb7

White has given up considerable material, but he is getting it back and everything looked properly done: the young Russian master will be taught a good lesson!

9...♔d7 10 ♕xa8 ♕c4!

What a sudden change of fortune: the aggressive white queen is out of play, while the black queen threatens mate in one!

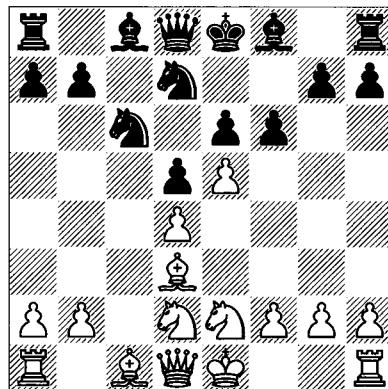
11 f3 ♕xf3! 12 gxf3 ♔d4! 13 d3?

The chance was still there to save the game by returning the gobbled material by 13 cxd4 ♕xc1+ 14 ♔e2 ♕xh1 15 d5, but optimism did not leave de Rozynski.

13...♕xd3 14 cxd4 ♕e7 15 ♕xh8 ♕h4# (0-1)

So what happened in this game and why was White mated in 15 moves? The answer has to do with White's development in the first place, the role of his queen and the unrealistic goals he set himself. He developed two pieces to support the queen's action, then gave up both of them to win material. Greed was stronger than common sense. The result was that his queen strayed into the corner of the board while his remaining pieces were standing in their initial positions. When Black struck back, there was nobody to defend the king. We shall see that this same scenario is repeated in thousands of tournament games and that literally no player has been spared the humiliation of such defeats. Let us draw some lesson from the illuminating examples which follow:

W



Barle – Portisch
Portorož Vidmar mem 1973

Black has attacked White's e5-pawn at the proper moment and White now has nothing better than 9 exf6 with approximately level play, but that did not attract the young Slovenian master. He was ambitious to obtain more from this tense position.

9 ♔f4

Now 10 ♕h5+ looks like a most unpleasant threat, and if Black chooses to defend the e6-pawn by 9...♔e7, then 10 ♔f3 fxe5 11 dxe5 ♕dxe5 12 ♔xe5 ♕xe5 13 ♕h5+ ♔f7 14 0-0 offers compensation.

9...♔xd4 10 ♕h5+ ♔e7 11 ♔g6+??

11 exf6+ is better; e.g., 11...♔xf6 12 ♔g6+ hxg6 13 ♕xh8 e5 14 ♔f3 ♔xf3+ 15 gxf3 ♔f7 16 ♕h4 and White's queen escaped in Timman-Morozevich, Wijk aan Zee 2000.

11...hxg6 12 exf6+ ♔xf6!

A move earlier this was not possible due to ♕h4+, but here it makes an essential difference. The knight stays on d7 intending to enter the fight via c5.

13 ♕xh8 ♔f7

Another subtle detail: the queen is denied the h4-square. It can return to life only by 14 ♕h3, but it is understandably unappealing to put the queen on a square where it is liable to come under attack from the c8-bishop. Unfortunately, it seems to be White's best chance.

14 0-0?! ♔c5 15 ♔b1 e5

The queen's retreat has been cut off and it is stranded out of play until the end of the game.

**16 ♔b3 ♕xb3 17 axb3 ♔e6 18 ♕h7 ♕f6
19 h4 ♔e2+ 20 ♔h1 e4**

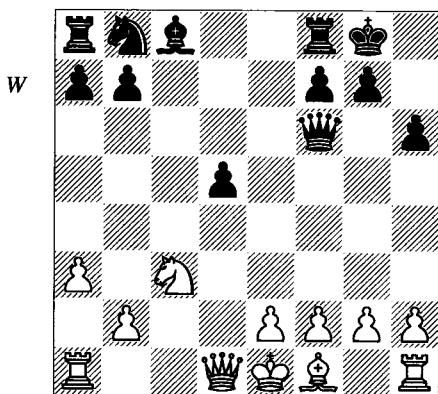
The attempt to free the queen by advancing the h-pawn has failed: while blocking the b1-bishop, Black at the same time creates the conditions to line up his forces on the b8-h2 diagonal.

21 ♜g5 ♛e5 22 ♜e1 ♜d6 23 f4

23 g3 would lose to 23...♝xg3+ 24 fxg3 ♜xg3 25 ♜e2 ♜g4.

23...exf3 24 ♜xg6+ ♔f8 0-1

The queen was liberated too late.



Vaganian – Planinc
Hastings 1974/5

White has a choice: to hurry up with his lagging development or to grab the defenceless d5-pawn. He opted for the latter.

12 ♜xd5?!

It was certainly clear to Vaganian that this was a risky decision, but he hoped he could get away with it. When weighing up the risk, he must have concluded that his opponent's counterplay was not so quick and forceful and that he would be able to finish his development.

12...♜d8 13 ♛f3 ♜b6!

In Kapengut-Kaminsky, USSR 1974, Black continued 13...♛g6 14 ♜d1 ♜xd1+ 15 ♜xd1 ♜c6 16 e3 ♜e6 17 ♜e2 ♜d8 18 0-0 ♜d2 and the advantage he achieved in spite of this somewhat slow reaction speaks enough of the difficulties White is facing. Planinc finds a more energetic response.

14 ♜d1

This seems to be White's best option: he exchanges his idle queen's rook and simultaneously defends the b2-pawn.

14...♜xd1+ 15 ♜xd1 ♜c6 16 ♛e3?!

16 e3 ♜e6 17 ♜e2 ♜d8, as in Uhlmann-Barcza, Havana 1963, is not easy for White either, but roaming with the queen and further neglecting the essential necessities of the position is tempting fate.

16...♝d4 17 ♛e8+ ♔h7 18 e3

So this was Vaganian's idea when he invaded the back rank: to thwart Black's development and finally improve his own. But it was not to be...

18...♜c2+ 19 ♜d2 ♜f5! 20 ♛xa8 ♜d6+ 21 ♜c1 ♜a1!

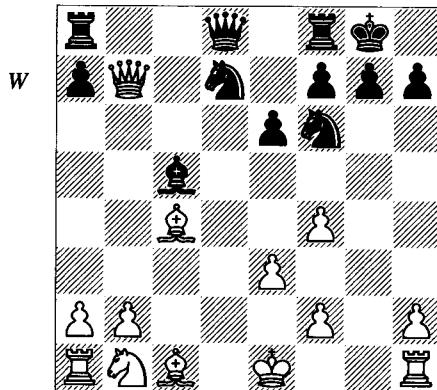
All forced and clear, but a couple of moves earlier one could easily have missed it. Not Planinc!

22 ♜xb7?

22 ♜c4 is a better defence, but Black's attack is still too strong.

22...♜c7+! 0-1

The knight and the bishop complement one another beautifully in the same story we are getting used to. The white queen wandered around and finally lost its way on a8, while Black was weaving his mating-net around the white king.



Foguelman – Bronstein
Amsterdam IZ 1964

This position arose from a variation of the Queen's Gambit Accepted that was popular at the time. White has won a pawn at the cost of development, but nothing looks wrong with his position at this point.

11 0-0

Spassky-Gurgenidze, USSR 1963 featured the more cautious 11 ♕g2 ♜c8 12 b3, whereupon 12...♝b6 gave Black enough compensation for the pawn. Castling looks more natural, but Bronstein immediately saw its shortcomings:

11...♝d5!

If White expected 11...♝b8 and planned 12 ♜f3 to strengthen his loose king's position, then he was wrong: the queen's path has been blocked.

12 ♜d1?

Removing the blockade by 12 ♜xd5 could hardly satisfy White since after 12...♝b8 13 ♜a6 exd5 the threat of 14...d4 as well as a quick rook-lift along the sixth rank gives Black fine counterplay.

It was time to understand the seriousness of the situation and sound retreat – 12 ♜b3 was necessary. Instead, White neglects his king's position (f2 becomes vulnerable) and an avalanche falls upon his head...

12...♝b8 13 ♜c6 ♛h4

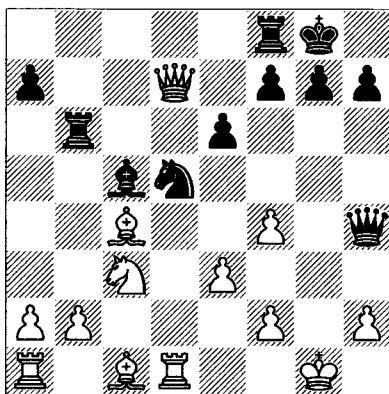
Black moves his queen into an attacking position, and does not have to worry about his knight – 14...♝g4+ protects all.

14 ♜c3 ♜b6!

14...♜xc3 would be met by 15 ♜xd7, when all the critical light squares are under surveillance.

15 ♛xd7 (D)

B



15...♝xf4!

This explains the previous sacrifice: the white queen is cut off from its king and stranded on d7 at a crucial moment.

16 ♜e2

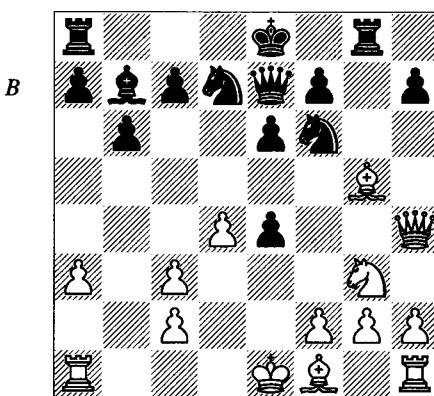
16 exf4 ♛xf2+ 17 ♔h1 ♛f3# is the consequence of White weakening the f2-pawn by playing 12 ♜d1.

16...♝h3+ 17 ♜g2 ♛xf2 18 ♜d4

Or 18 ♜f1 ♛g4 19 h3 ♜e5.

18...♝g4 19 ♜f4 ♛xh2+ 20 ♔f1 ♛xe3 21 ♜d5 ♛xf4 0-1

A shocking punishment!



Fischer – V. Kovačević

Rovinj/Zagreb 1970

If there was one opening in which Fischer did not feel at home it was the French. For the strong Croatian tournament he had prepared a somewhat bizarre line, which worked well against Uhlmann, but it gave Kovačević good reason to prepare for it. He played an exemplary continuation studied and recommended by V. Vuković in the 1930s. His next subtle move showed that he had examined the line thoroughly...

12...h6!

White based his strategy on the pressure along the h4-d8 diagonal. Now this mean move questions it all: if the bishop retreats, there is no more pressure on the diagonal; if he captures the pawn by 13 ♜xh6 (13 ♛xh6? loses to 13...♝g4 14 ♜xe7 ♛xh6 15 ♜h4 ♜g4), then 13...♜g4 14 ♛h3 0-0-0 15 ♜e2 ♜gg8 puts in question White's strategy on the kingside, especially the queen's role.

13 ♜d2??!

We shall learn from the course of the game that 13 ♜c1 was better, in order to leave d2 vacant for the retreating queen.

13...0-0-0 14 ♜e2 ♜f8

The white queen is getting more and more cramped.

15 0-0 ♜g6 16 ♜xh6

16 ♜h3 ♜d5 17 ♜xh6 ♜h4 is also difficult for White.

16...♜h8 17 ♜g5 ♜dg8 18 f3 e3!

18...♜h4 is bad after 19 fxe4! and the queen sacrifice upturns the situation on the board. This very position reminds me of a curious event which happened while Fischer was contemplating his 18th move. It was a free day and it was the only game played that day. The hall was half-empty, but in the end of the hall some Soviet grandmasters were watching the game with interest, Petrosian and his wife among them. When Kovačević left the podium and walked towards the toilet, Petrosian's wife approached him and warned to take care of the queen sacrifice. He did not understand what she was talking about, but coming back to the board and seeing 18 f3 on the demonstration board, the point dawned upon him. It was the first part of the tournament and the Soviets still hoped to overtake the peerless American grandmaster; if necessary, by any means they could. Surpassing Fischer was an illusion in those days!

19 ♜xe3

If 19 ♜xe3, then 19...♜d5 20 ♜g5 f6; we now see why the bishop should have retreated to c1.

19...♜f8 20 ♜b5 ♜d5 21 ♜f2

There are no longer any good moves: 21 ♜d2 is met by 21...a6 22 ♜d3 ♜h4, etc.

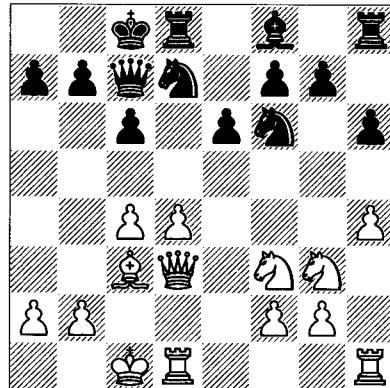
21...a6 22 ♜d3 ♜xh2 23 ♜h1 ♜h4 24 ♜xh2 ♜xh2 25 ♜f1 ♜xg2+ 26 ♜e1 ♜h4+ 27 ♜d2 ♜g6 28 ♜e1 ♜gf4 29 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 30 ♜e3 ♜f2! 0-1

In 1959 Fischer used to resign with tears in his eyes. This time he did it graciously, as the champion who happens to suffer a minor, utterly unimportant set-back.

In the following diagram, the opening has resulted in a spatial advantage for White that is typical of the Caro-Kann. However, it is a small advantage, all the more so because it could be further limited by forced simplifications after 13...♜d6 14 ♜e4 ♜f4+ 15 ♜b1 ♜e5. However, Black decided to exploit the pin on the d-file to the full.

13...♜f4+?! 14 ♜b1 ♜c5? 15 ♜c2 ♜ce4

B



Fischer – Steinmayer
USA Ch (New York) 1963/4

It seemed a perfect route to good play, but it contained a hole.

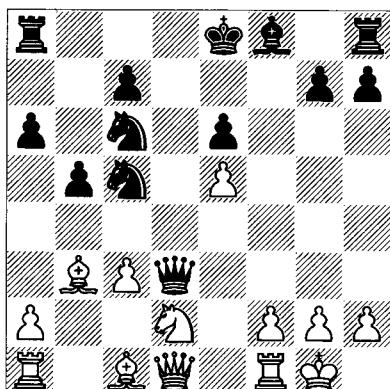
16 ♜e5!

A bolt from the blue! It's not only the f7-pawn that is in question, but also the queen cut off behind the enemy lines. No matter how it wriggles, there is no salvation. 16...♜xg3 17 fxg3 ♜xg3 18 ♜d3 ♜f4 19 ♜f3 or 16...♜xc3+ 17 bxc3 ♜g4 18 ♜h5 costs Black the exchange. There was only the third road to try...

16...♜xf2 17 ♜df1 1-0

After 17...♜xg3 18 ♜xf2 White threatens ♜f3 as well as ♜xf7.

W



Kasparov – Anand
New York Wch (10) 1995

This was a well-known position at the time, in which the queen's inroad to d3 was considered

the final solution to the difficulties Black had been facing in this line of the Open Spanish. However, this game reminded us that final solutions in chess are not so common.

14 ♜c2! ♜xc3 15 ♜b3!!

Avoiding the exchange of his light-squared bishop, White offers a sacrifice of a whole rook. If Anand could have fathomed what stood behind this home-made trap, he would have modestly continued 15...♜d8 16 ♜d2 ♜xd2 and concentrated on saving his skin. During the game the lure of material got the better of him.

15...♜xb3?? 16 ♜xb3 ♜d4

It is now too late to play 16...♜d8 17 ♜h5+ g6 18 ♜g4 ♜xe5 19 ♜b2 ♜d4 20 ♜ae1 ♜f5, which fails to 21 ♜xd4! ♜xd4 22 ♜xd4. After 16...♜xa1 17 ♜h5+, a vehement attack brings Black to his knees while his queen is out of play: 17...♚d7 18 ♜xe6+ ♜xe6 19 ♜g4+! ♜f7 20 ♜f3+ ♜e6 21 ♜xc6+ ♜d6 22 exd6 ♜e5 23 ♜d2! ♜xd6 24 ♜e1+ ♜f7 25 ♜f3+ ♜g6 26 ♜g4+! ♜f7 27 ♜c3; 17...g6 18 ♜f3 ♜d8 19 ♜f6! ♜g8 (or 19...♜d4 20 ♜xh8 ♜h4 21 ♜c2!) 20 ♜xe6 ♜g7 21 ♜a3 and a rational response is lacking.

With the text-move, Black postpones the capture on a1, defends the e6-pawn and he apparently can still eliminate the murderous bishop on b3 – it gives the impression of being a saving solution. However...

17 ♜g4!! ♜xa1 18 ♜xe6

Reluctantly, Anand's queen finally ends up where it was decoyed from the beginning. Although a whole rook down, White's initiative goes on undiminished.

18...♜d8

On 18...♜e7 19 ♜g5 h5 there is 20 ♜e4, while 18...♜c3 can offer only a miserable life after 19 ♜d7+ ♜f7 20 e6+ ♜g8 21 ♜e3 c5 22 ♜h5 g6 23 ♜d5.

19 ♜h6!

A new bolt from the blue: if the g7-pawn is eliminated, the king will be stripped of any defence against ♜h5+.

19...♜c3

Giving up the queen by 19...♜xf1+ is to no avail; 20 ♜xf1 g6 21 ♜e3 ♜c5 22 ♜b3! ends badly for Black.

20 ♜xg7 ♜d3 21 ♜xh8 ♜g6

21...♜e2+ 22 ♜h1 does not help. The queen has finally returned to defend the king, but in

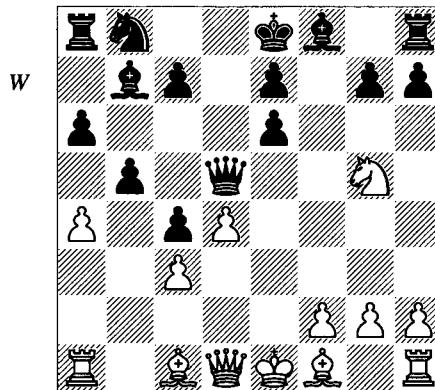
dire circumstances from which there is no salvation.

22 ♜f6 ♜e7 23 ♜xe7 ♜xg4 24 ♜xg4 ♜xe7 25 ♜c1

This useful move slows down the pawn advance decisively.

25...c6 26 f4 a5 27 ♜f2 a4 28 ♜e3 b4 29 ♜d1 a3 30 g4

Now there is no question about White's overwhelming superiority. (I have based these annotations largely on the analysis published by Kasparov.)



Knaak – Bönsch

E. German Ch (Dresden) 1970

Black's kingside pawn-structure has been shattered and he is under constant pressure on the queenside, which makes his further development difficult. But is that worth two pawns?

11 ♜e2!

Well, Knaak believes that his position is worth even three pawns! In order to accentuate his development advantage he invites the black queen to capture on g2. And as a matter of fact, in view of the threatened 12 ♜f3, there is little Black could do instead.

11...♜xg2

11...♜d7 12 ♜f3 is advantageous for White.

12 ♜f1 ♜d5

The alternative is 12...♜xh2, but 13 ♜xe6 ♜d6 14 d5 is highly unpleasant.

13 axb5!

Polugaevsky-Szabo, Budapest 1965 featured 13 ♜f4 b4, when Black was at least rid of the constant threat to open the a-file.

13...axb5

13... $\mathbb{W}xh2$ is strongly met by 14 $\mathbb{Q}g4$, when in Doroshkevich-Astashin, USSR 1967, 14...h5 15 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 16 $\mathbb{W}f3!$ threatened not only 17 $\mathbb{W}xa8$ but also to trap the queen by 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$.

14 $\mathbb{W}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ e5

Not an easy decision, since all the options are treacherous: on 15... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ there is 16 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ threatening to trap the queen by 17 $\mathbb{Q}h3$, while 15... $\mathbb{W}xh2$ again fails, this time to 16 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$. So if the e6-pawn is doomed, then let it fall for some good purpose – at least the f4-square is denied to the c1-bishop. Of course, after the text-move the black king's position is more open and sensitive.

16 $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Several annotators pointed out 16 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ as stronger. The idea is to win a tempo after 16... $\mathbb{W}d5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e6$; 16... $\mathbb{W}xh2$ does not work due to 17 $\mathbb{W}h5+$, when 17...g6 loses to 18 $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ and the black queen is caught. On 16... $\mathbb{W}c6$, 17 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is again unpleasant: it prevents 17...h6 and threatens 18 d5. After 17...exd4 18 $\mathbb{W}xd4$, 18... $\mathbb{W}d6$ fails to 19 $\mathbb{W}a7$ and 18... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ to 19 $\mathbb{Q}e2$.

16... $\mathbb{Q}d5$

16... $\mathbb{W}xh2$ does not work again, this time due to 17 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 dx $e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (if 18... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ then 19 $\mathbb{Q}f4$) 19 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$, trapping the queen once more. In case of 16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ there is 17 dx $e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (or 17... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}f4$) 18 $\mathbb{W}d4$ and thanks to the miserable position of the black king, 18... $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ is to no avail – $\mathbb{Q}a1$ will decide.

17 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xh2$ 18 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g4!$ e6 20 $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$

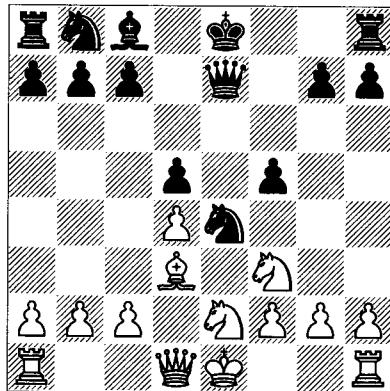
Threatening 22 $\mathbb{Q}f4$, so White can afford to ignore the rook. Now it's either the queen or even worse.

21...h5 22 $\mathbb{W}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xb5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 26 $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

...and the end was near.

White entered the position of the following diagram disregarding the check from b4: he was ready to pay a price for the strong lead in development he would get in compensation. Black, on the contrary, was lured by the smell of material. We can see the outcome in the subsequent course of the game.

B



Karpov – Enevoldsen

Skopje OL 1972

9... $\mathbb{W}b4+$ 10 c3 $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 11 0-0 0-0

Capturing on c3 obviously did not come into consideration. Black was satisfied with a surplus of one pawn, believing that the blocked centre would limit White's counterplay. Well, he was wrong!

12 c4!

This move undermines the blockade and opens the first crevice.

12...dxc4

After this exchange, the black king will feel less secure, but 12...c6 13 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (13...g5 fails to 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 16 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}c7$) 14 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ keeps the pressure on; 14... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ is met by 15 cx $d5$ cx $d5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 18 $\mathbb{W}b3$.

13 $\mathbb{Q}xc4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b1$

It is useful to keep an eye on b7, but the real reason behind the move is that it opens up possibility of a rook-lift on the third rank.

14... $\mathbb{W}a3$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

White threatens 16 $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ with a sudden demise for Black, which provokes a further opening of the king's position.

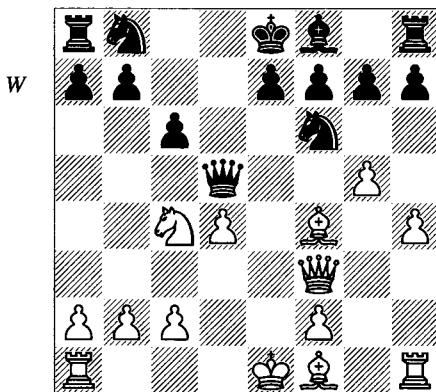
15...g6 16 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

The queen has returned to defend the king, but the four tempi invested into grabbing the b2-pawn and the journey back cannot be recaptured. White's pieces invade the board with lightning speed.

17... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

18... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ was essential to prevent the worst. Of course, after 19 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ the position remains difficult for Black.

After the text-move (18... $\mathbb{Q}c6?$), Karpov played 19 $\mathbb{Q}fxg6$ $hxg6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ with an advantage, but in the analysis after the game he found the crushing 19 $\mathbb{M}xh7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}fxg6$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{W}xf8$ (or 21... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 24 $dxe5$, etc.) 22 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ $\mathbb{W}h6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}g8+$, etc. That would indeed have been the deserved punishment for Black's greed!



Shamkovich – Zakharov
Moscow Ch 1962

Black has just countered White's 14 $g5$ with 14... $\mathbb{W}d7-d5$, which appeared to equalize. However, White's reply demonstrated that it was not that simple.

15 $\mathbb{W}b3!$

We immediately see that 15... $\mathbb{W}xh1$ does not work due to 16 $\mathbb{W}xb7$, but we need to check what happens after 15... $b5$.

15... $b5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

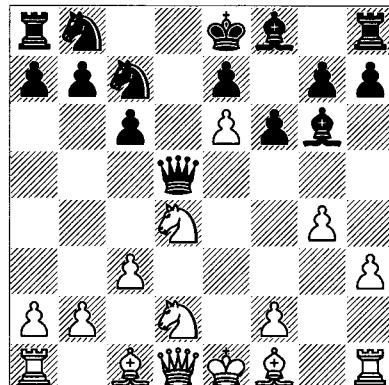
Again 16... $\mathbb{W}xh1$ fails, this time to 17 $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 $gxf6$ $gxf6$ 19 0-0-0, when there is no decent answer. The endgame with rooks and minor pieces was not a happy solution either, but nevertheless, looking back, it was Black's best option.

16... $e6??$ 17 $gxf6!$ $\mathbb{W}xh1$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

The rook was a decoy and now the trap closes around the black queen. It will take just a few moves to catch it.

18... $gxf6$ 19 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 23 $c3$ $\mathbb{M}d8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 1-0

Motifs repeat and remind us of similar situations and ideas...



Stein – Birbrager
USSR Cht (Moscow) 1966

Guess what Stein played and how Birbrager replied!

12 $\mathbb{W}b3!$ $\mathbb{W}xh1?$

It seems that in chess, like in life, one has to suffer to learn. However, had Birbrager analysed the previous game, he would have probably exchanged the queens and at least avoided the ensuing humiliation.

13 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}2f3!$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

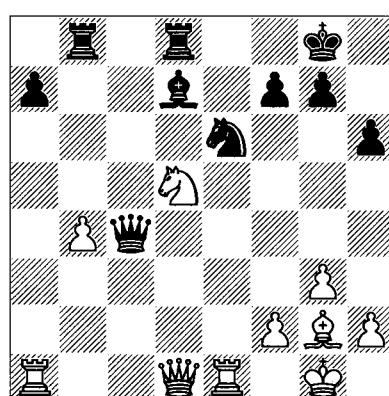
While Black is collecting material, White is planning to mate him.

15... $\mathbb{W}xf1+$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

On 17... $\mathbb{Q}ba6$ Stein had in mind a simple but beautiful move – 18 $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ followed by 19 $\mathbb{M}d1$.

18 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19 $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}fg5+$ 1-0

This was bad enough, but quite often the queen pays for its optimistic sallies dearly.



Stein – Tarve
Pärnu 1971

Although in the middle of the board, upon closer examination Black's queen is in a tight spot. Stein comes to the same conclusion and the hunt begins:

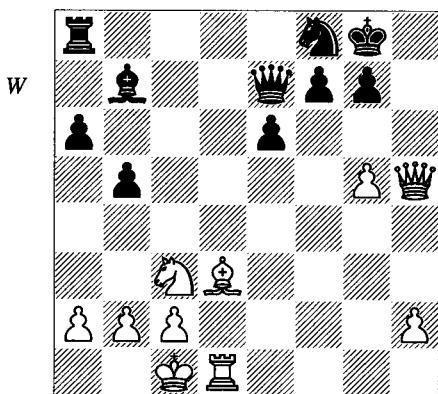
25 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ $\mathbb{W}b5$ 26 $\mathbb{R}a5$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 28 $\mathbb{R}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Or 28... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 29 $\mathbb{W}d2$.

29 $\mathbb{R}c1$

While hunting the queen, White sights the enemy king.

29... $g5$ 30 $\mathbb{R}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 31 $\mathbb{R}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 32 $\mathbb{R}xg5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33 $\mathbb{R}h8+$ 1-0



Ivanchuk – Kramnik
Linares 1997

Assessing this position, we could say that White to move can formulate an active strategic plan easily: a kingside attack springs from the position naturally. How to do it is another matter.

26 $h4!$

Black's reply to this move explains why I have doubts about it. Given that the rook-lift on the third rank seems slow and 26 $g6$ is premature, there is no point keeping the queen on $h5$. 26 $\mathbb{W}g4$ followed by the advance of the h -pawn was indicated.

26... $\mathbb{W}b4!$

This sudden thrust by the black queen thwarts what looked like being a smooth procedure. For the moment White's attack has been blocked. What's more, Black threatens 27... $\mathbb{W}f4+$ followed by 28... $\mathbb{Q}f3$, unexpectedly trapping the white queen.

27 $\mathbb{R}f1??!$

To remedy the new situation, Kramnik proposed 27 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 28 $\mathbb{W}g4$, rightly criticizing Ivanchuk's continuation.

27... $\mathbb{g}6!$ 28 $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{W}g4$

At the end of the operation the black queen has enhanced its activity to the detriment of the excluded white queen.

29 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 30 $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$

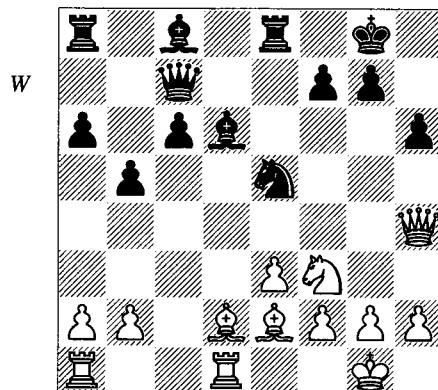
This defends the queen (White was threatening $hxg6$) and simultaneously forces the white rook to abandon the f -file.

31 $\mathbb{R}d1$ $b4$ 32 $\mathbb{R}d3$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 34 $\mathbb{R}d2$ $\mathbb{W}f4$

This nasty little pin takes full advantage of the queen's absence. Black threatens 35... $\mathbb{R}d8$.

35 $hxg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 36 $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$

The white queen has been finally extricated from its predicament, but at a material cost that guarantees Black victory.



Kramnik – Piket
Wijk aan Zee 1998

In order to free his game, Black had carried out an ... $e5$ advance, but this was not enough to overcome his difficulties.

17 $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 18 $\mathbb{R}ac1$

In two strong moves White forces the queen to retreat passively and then exerts powerful pressure on the backward $c6$ -pawn. What appeared a level position has turned into quite a headache for Black.

18... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Black decides to develop naturally because continuing passively with 18... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ invites 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20 $\mathbb{R}d7$.

19 ♜xe5 ♛xe5 20 ♜xc6 ♛xb2

20...♛xa2 does not work due to 21 f4 ♜f6 22 ♜xf6 gxf6 23 ♜c3, but capturing on b2 leads to other problems.

21 ♜c7! ♜b7 22 ♜f3 ♜ac8 23 ♜b4!

All of a sudden the black queen has been cornered.

23...♜e5

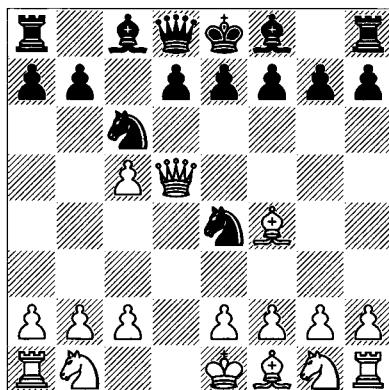
The move is forced upon Black, as 23...♜xc7 loses to 24 ♜xe6 and 23...♜f6 24 ♜a5 is also hopeless for him.

24 ♜cc1 ♜xc7 25 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 26 ♜a5 ♜c2

27 ♜xa6 ♜b8 28 ♜e4!

A subtle little detail: now 28...♜xa2 would fail to 29 ♜xb5. Having won the queen, White needed only to attend to the usual technical details.

We have now seen the story several times: if the almighty queen strays out of play (due to greed or miscalculations of some kind), is excluded from play or is even trapped, it loses its strength and becomes a shadowy piece on the margin of events. But that is not the only scenario in which the queen's nominal value suffers. The queen's early exposure leads to the same characteristic fall.



Tolush – Boleslavsky

USSR Ch (Moscow) 1945

Tolush has just moved his queen into the centre, expecting 5...♜f6 6 ♜c4 or 5...♜a5+ 6 c3, and planning to keep his booty. But it was not to be.

5...f5!

The knight does not retreat, but stays in the centre and the white queen will be exposed to

unforeseen harassment. White has no easy way out. 6 ♜f3 e6 7 ♜d1 ♜xc5, which is objectively best, helps Black develop and plays into his hands, while forcing things by 6 f3 e6 7 ♜d1 runs into 7...e5! 8 ♜e3 (or 8 fxe4 exf4 9 exf5 ♜h4+) 8...♜h4+ 9 g3 ♜xg3 10 ♜f2 ♜b4+, switching to attack from the other side. So White was persuaded to enter complications.

6 ♜xf5 d5 7 ♜h5+ g6 8 ♜h4 ♜d4!

Threatening 9...♜xc2+, and at the same time Black besieges the queen.

9 ♜e5

9 ♜a3 ♜f5 10 ♜h3 ♜fg3 would be very ugly for White.

9...♜xc2+ 10 ♜d1 ♜xa1 11 ♜xh8 ♜a5

In contrast to the isolated white queen, the black queen moves into the attack.

12 ♜c3 ♜xc3+ 13 ♜xc3 ♜xa2 14 e3 ♜b1+ 15 ♜e2 ♜d4!

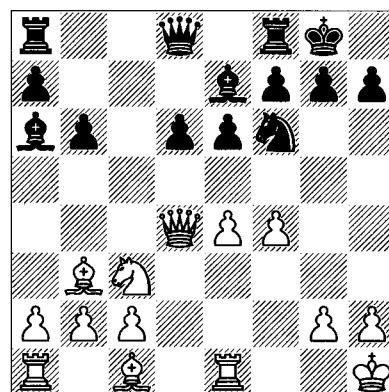
By persecuting the queen, Black forced the white king into the open. In whichever manner White takes, there is 16...♞d7.

16 ♜xd4 ♜d7 17 ♜b4 0-0-0 18 f4

Black was threatening 18...♜d1+ 19 ♜xd1 ♜g4++ and mate next move.

18...♜c2 19 ♜a5 ♜c1

White is lost.



Khliavinsh – Boleslavsky

Minsk Z 1957

Playing against the Sozin, Boleslavsky applied an original idea in the opening and then noticed that he could turn the exposed position of the white queen in the centre of the board to his advantage.

12...d5! 13 exd5 ♜g4 14 ♜e4 ♜c5!

Behind an exposed queen there is usually a vulnerable king. In two moves Black transfers his pieces into attacking positions.

15 ♜d2

Obviously 15 ♜xc5 loses to 15...♛h4, while 15 ♜d1 ♛h4 16 h3 does not change events due to 16...exd5 17 ♜xd5 ♜ae8.

15...♛h4 16 g3

On 16 h3 there is 16...exd5 17 ♜xd5 ♜ad8; the pressure grows, while the white queenside is in a deep sleep.

16...♛h5 17 ♜xc5 bxc5 18 ♛g2

The long diagonal must stay closed. 18 dxe6 loses to 18...♜ad8, while 18 c4 does not work either because of 18...exd5 19 cxd5 ♜fe8.

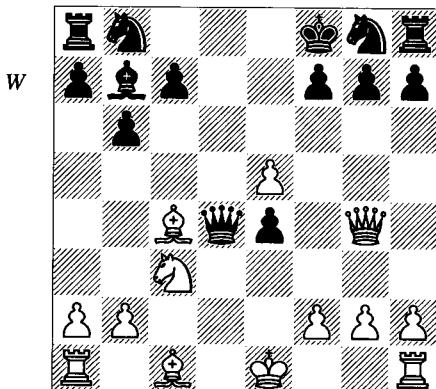
18...♝b7

Black has strong pressure on the vulnerable white king.

19 h3

On 19 c4, the move 19...♜ac8, recommended by Suetin, is too slow in view of 20 h3 exd5 21 ♜g1, but 19...exd5 20 cxd5 ♜ad8 21 ♜d1 ♜fe8 is effective.

Now (after 19 h3), 19...c4 20 ♜xc4 exd5 21 ♜f1 led to unclear play in the game, but Black has a simpler option in 19...exd5 20 ♜g1 ♜fe8.



Pillsbury – Swiderski
Hannover 1902

To compensate for his loss of castling rights, Black went after material, counting on 11 ♜b3 ♛xe5. But Pillsbury had a better look at the position and came up with...

11 ♜d5!

We notice quickly that 11...♜xd5 fails to 12 ♜c8+ ♛e7 13 ♜g5+ f6 14 ♜d1 and the game takes an unfavourable turn for Black.

11...c6 12 ♜xe4 ♛xe5 13 ♜f4 ♜f6 14 ♛h4 ♛e7 15 0-0-0

The queen remains under attack, while now 15...♜xe4 would not work due to 16 ♜d8+.

15...♜e8 16 ♛g3 ♜a6 17 ♜he1 ♜d8

This works well enough if White plays 18 ♜xc6, when 18...♜xd1+ follows, but instead the persecution of the queen continues...

18 ♜d5 ♜c5 19 ♜xe8+

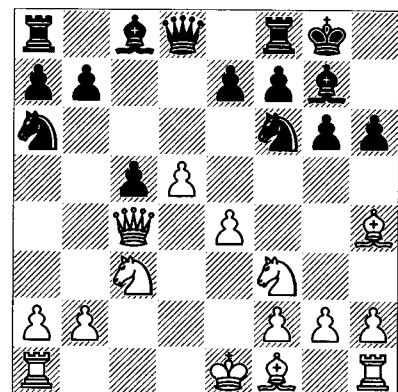
19 ♜xf7 ♜xd1+ 20 ♜xd1 also wins.

19...♜xe8 20 ♛xg7 cxd5

20...♜f8 does not work because of 21 ♜e1+ ♜d7 22 ♛g4+ f5 23 ♛g7+ ♜c8 24 ♜e6+.

21 ♛xh8+ ♜d7 22 ♛xh7 ♜c8 23 ♛xf7 d4 24 ♛e6+ ♜d7 25 ♛g8+ ♜d8 26 ♛g4+ ♜d7 27 ♜e3

The fight is over.



Panchenko – Sideif-Zade
Tashkent 1980

In this line of the Grünfeld Defence, which was later thoroughly explored in the matches for the crown between Kasparov and Karpov, the idea of developing the queen's bishop to g5 was one of the first to be abandoned. The dark-squared bishop is misplaced on h4 and White's queenside, lacking its support, becomes vulnerable.

10...b5!

The positions of the white king, still in the centre, and the white queen, exposed on c4, provoke this natural tactical reaction. The position

opens up and the black pieces enter the battle while gaining tempi.

11 ♜xb5

11 ♜xb5 ♜b8 12 ♜e2 fails to the crushing 12...♜xb2! 13 ♜xb2 ♜xe4 14 ♜c1 ♜a5, so White has no real alternative.

11...♛a5+ 12 ♜d2

Again White has no choice – 12 ♜c3 would be punished by 12...♜xe4, while 12 ♜c3 ♜b4 13 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 14 e5 ♜g7 15 ♜a3 ♜g4 reveals too many weak spots.

12...♜b8

12...♜xe4 is the first thing that comes to mind, unleashing the full power of the bishop-pair. It took good nerves and shrewdness to weather the attack in Dzhindzhikhashvili-Gurgenidze, USSR 1966, which continued 13 ♜xe4 ♜xb2 (13...♜f5 also deserves attention) 14 ♜b1 (14 ♜d1!?) 14...♜xa1 15 ♜xa1 ♜b4 16 ♜c3 ♜d7 17 ♜xe7 ♜xb5 18 ♜e4, when 18...♜d3+ 19 ♜xd3 ♜xc3+ 20 ♜xc3 ♜xd3 21 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 22 ♜d2 ♜c4 simplified to equality. However, doubts remain; for example, why not 18...f5 19 ♜xf8 (or: 19 ♜xb5 fxe4; 19 ♜xc5 ♜fe8) 19...♜xf8 20 ♜f6+ ♜xf6 21 ♜xb5 ♜b6 instead? However, on the whole I consider the text-move natural and good.

13 ♜d1

Annotators in unison give 13 ♜g3 as an important improvement, leading to unclear play. However, 13...♜d7 14 ♜xb8 ♜xb8 15 ♜c3 ♜xb2 16 ♜b1 ♜xd2 (I should point out that there is also 16...♜b5!) 17 ♜xd2 ♜xe4+ 18 ♜xe4 ♜xc3+ 19 ♜d1 given in ECO as advantageous for White on the basis of 19...♜a4+?? 20 ♜e2, is wrong in view of 19...♛xa2, with complete annihilation.

13...♜b4 14 a3

To 14 ♜b3 Black responds 14...♜c2++ 15 ♜e2 ♜xb5.

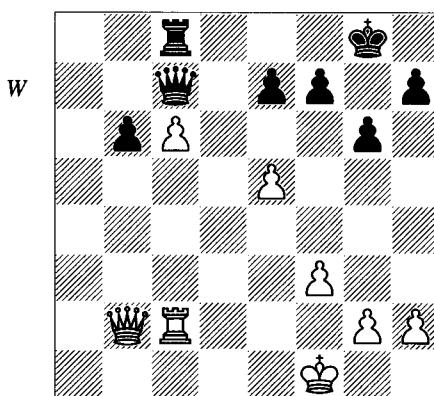
14...♜xb5 15 f3

15 ♜xb5 loses the queen to 15...♜c2+ and 15 axb4 ♜xb4 finds a new target in the e4-pawn. By reinforcing e4, White avoids the worst, but just temporarily...

15...♜b6 16 axb4 ♜xb4 17 ♜c2 ♜xd5! 18 ♜f2 ♜xb2 19 ♜xc5 ♜xc5 20 ♜xc5 ♜c2 21 ♜xa7 ♜c3 0-1

The vehement attack which struck White was constantly revolving around the unfortunate position of the white queen on c4.

Premature development in the opening and irrational play after material gain, as a rule, harm the queen's potential in these phases of the game which are so critical for formulating harmonious strategic plans. Apart from that, at any stage, but especially in the endgame, there is an occurrence harmful to the queen's efficiency: the queen is a bad blockader. That is a natural consequence of its extraordinary value, which suffers under circumstances when its mobility and activity are affected by its passive task.



Smyslov – Olafsson

Reykjavik 1974

Olafsson had survived a middlegame where he was under pressure for a long time, but could not avoid this endgame, in which the mobile white queen is vastly superior to the black queen, which has been obliged to adopt the passive position of a blockader.

36 ♜b5 ♜a8

As long as the queen is on c7, ♜d5 can be met by ...♜d8. If Black tries to activate the queen by 36...♛a7, then 37 ♜d5 is most unpleasant (not to mention 37 e6).

37 ♜c1 ♜g7

If 37...♜a5, then 38 ♜d3 forces the rook back.

38 f4 h5 39 h3 h4?

An instructive error: when the major pieces are limited to passive defence in the endgame, the pawn-structure must remain as compact as possible; any loose pawn will prove a weakness sooner or later.

40 ♜b2

To defend the h4-pawn, Black must relinquish control over d6, which will exacerbate the difficulties of the defence.

40...e6 41 ♜f2 ♜h8 42 ♜g1

Now that Black's major pieces are stretched between defence on two wings, this quiet move accentuates the state of zugzwang: Black is forced to accept new weaknesses.

42...b5 43 ♜c5 ♜b8 44 ♜h2 ♜a5

Finally the blockade is untenable. 44...b4 loses to 45 ♜d6. On the waiting 44...♜g8 White continues 45 ♜d1 ♜c8 46 ♜d7 ♜xc6 47 ♜d8+, etc.

45 ♜d1 ♜a4

After the alternative 45...♜c8 46 ♜e7 ♜c3 47 c7! neither 47...♜xc7 48 ♜f6+ nor 47...♜xc7 48 ♜d7 works.

46 c7 ♜xf4+ 47 ♜g1 ♜c8 48 ♜d8 1-0

48...♜xc7 49 ♜f8+ leads to mate.

25...gxsf4

25...♜g6 loses to 26 d7 ♜d8 27 ♜d6 ♜f7 28 fxg5 ♜f8 and now either the simple 29 ♜d1 or 29 g6+ hxg6 30 ♜g5 ♜xg5 31 d8+ ♜e8 32 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 33 ♜xe6+.

26 d7 ♜d8 27 ♜xf4 h6

The threatened 28 ♜g5 must be prevented. 27...♜f8 loses to 28 ♜h5+ ♜g8 29 ♜g5+, etc.

28 ♜g3 ♜f8 29 ♜h5+ ♜g7 30 ♜e8 ♜e7

The blockade has been established, but at the price of almost total paralysis. It is up to the white bishop to exploit it.

31 ♜e1 a5

Otherwise 32 ♜b4.

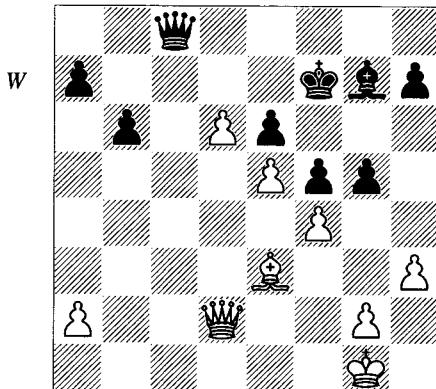
32 ♜f2 ♜h4

If 32...b5, then White replies 33 ♜h1 b4 34 ♜b6.

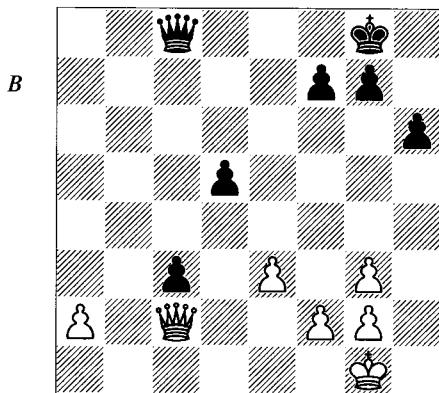
33 g3 ♜g5 34 ♜xe6 ♜c1+

Or obviously 34...♜xg3 35 ♜f6+.

35 ♜g2 ♜c2 36 gxh4 ♜e4+ 1-0



Lin Ta – Thorsteins
Thessaloniki OL 1988



Rajković – S. Nikolić
Yugoslav Ch (Čateške Toplice) 1968

A glance at the above position shows us that White's protected passed d-pawn is his main hope in the struggle ahead. At the moment it cannot advance and technical difficulties must be overcome first. Exchanging queens by 25 ♜c1 ♜xc1+ 26 ♜xc1 would be inadequate in spite of the far-advanced d-pawn – the white king cannot infiltrate the blocked position.

25 ♜d1!

The check from h5 will deter the attempt to blockade the pawn with the king, or at least draw the black king further away from the passed pawn.

Both players have a passed pawn, but the black one has advanced much further. The white queen blockades this pawn, and that task traps the queen in its total immobility. The black queen, while also partially limited in its movements by the need to protect the c3-pawn, is much freer, which makes a crucial difference.

38...♜c4

While preventing 39 ♜f1, Black threatens to set free the passed pawn by ...♜b4-b2, and this provokes White's next move.

39 a3 ♜c5 40 ♜c1

White cannot contemplate 40 a4 $\mathbb{W}b4$, so his queen's position deteriorates further.

40...c2 41 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 42 a4

The pawn must hurry. On 42 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ Black responds 42... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ getting into the square and if the a-pawn advances, the king will catch it and capture it.

42...d4! 43 exd4 $\mathbb{W}c4+$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$

Black has attained two important objectives: White's dangerous passed pawn has left the board and the queen cannot move from c1.

45 d5

On 45 $\mathbb{W}b2$ there is 45... $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}a1!$ 47 $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c4+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c3+$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ and having forced the white king and queen into zugzwang, the black king will join the queen to win.

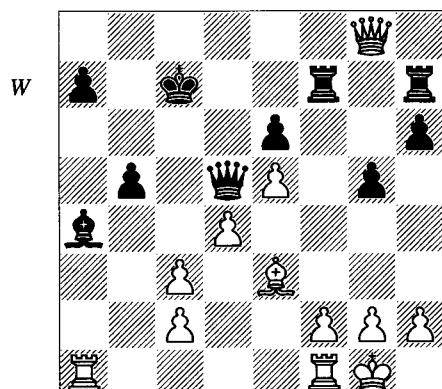
45... $\mathbb{W}e4+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Or 46 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}d3+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 48 d6 $\mathbb{Q}e8$, etc.

46... $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}c5+$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}xf2$

Black is winning.

In the endgame the queen is obviously devalued if it must act as a blockader, but fulfilling the same task in the middlegame is not much better.



Unzicker – Wade
Buenos Aires 1960

Black is obviously in trouble, but for the time being his king is protected by the enemy pawns, which are blockaded by the black queen. It is amazing what a quick remedy Unzicker finds against the blockader:

34 c4! $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 35 d5! $\mathbb{W}xd5$

If 35... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ then 36 $\mathbb{W}a8$.

36 c4!

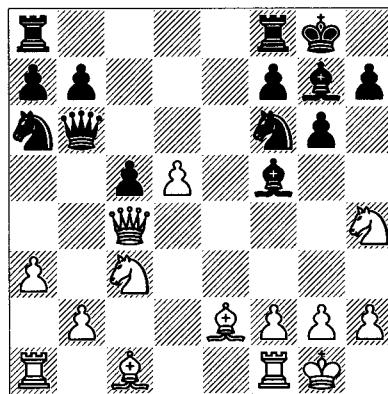
This third pawn is taboo.

36... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 37 $\mathbb{W}g6$

The blockade has been broken and the black king is at the mercy of the enemy pieces.

37... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 38 $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 39 $\mathbb{W}d6+$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xa7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 41 $\mathbb{W}xb5$

...and only the usual inertia kept the game going.



Kotov – Lilienthal
Budapest Ct 1950

White has just played the optimistic 13 $\mathbb{Q}f3-h4$. This can be met with the natural 13... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, retreating the bishop to a place with a nice view at both wings and using it as a perfect blockader of the white passed pawn. However, Black thought he could use the bishop in a more active manner and he played instead...

13... $\mathbb{Q}c2??$

He was probably hoping for 14 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, but this was wishful thinking.

14 $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 15 $\mathbb{W}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$

The strong bishop was exchanged mistakenly, then a pair of knights and as a result the well-supported passed pawn had to be blockaded by the queen; an unfortunate choice.

18 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Confronted by the imminent $\mathbb{Q}f4$, Black places the e5-square under surveillance, while obviously considering 19...b5.

19 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

19... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ seems better.

20 d6!

The further it advances, the more unpleasant it becomes. The black queen's retreat invited this advance, which keeps the queen as a hostage in its cumbersome position of a blockader.

20...b5 21 ♕d5 ♜ac8 22 ♔e3

This is a useful developing move: it prevents 22...♝b8 as well as 22...c4 (23 ♔xa7).

22...♜c6??!

Again played optimistically. As the following continuation shows, 22...h6 was necessary.

23 ♔g5! ♜cc8 24 ♔e7 h6

Otherwise 25 ♐g5, but this weakens the point g6 and the knight for the second time in the game moves to h4, though this time with good reason.

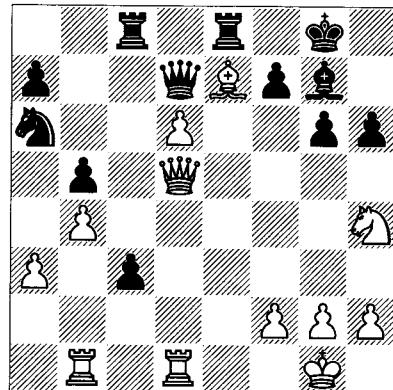
25 ♐h4 c4

Threatening 26...♜c5 – this is the only way to save the g6-pawn.

26 b4 c3 (D)

If 26...cxb3, then 27 ♐xg6.

W



27 ♜bc1 c2 28 ♜d2 ♜xe7

Finally the price had to be paid to set the queen free from d7.

29 dxe7 ♜xe7 30 ♐xg6 ♜f6 31 ♜f5!

Black's chances to save the game are dwindling rapidly.

8 The Rook

Moving along the ranks and down the files, the rook has kept its basic properties from the ancient games on the chess-board. In the Indian *chaturanga* it was called *ratha*. Symbolizing the Earth, it moved in straight lines, forming by its movement a square, the picture of the Earth as the Indian philosophers imagined it.

The rook is naturally attracted by open files. It is only down open files that the rook can attain its full potential: either on a central file left open in the opening or after supporting a pawn advance on the wing, which often results in an open file. It is down the file that positional pressure can be exerted, attacks built up, penetration to the seventh rank carried out, enemy rooks opposed, or the rook can be lifted along a rank to the sector where it is most needed. In the endgame the rook is put to best use supporting passed pawns or cutting off the enemy king.

Generally speaking, the rook's tasks depend on the state of the centre. In open positions it is quickly brought to the central files as soon as the king is taken care of. When the centre is closed, its duty is on the wing, in support of the advancing pawns. But the aim is the same – to open a file; because it is from an open file that the rook derives its strength.

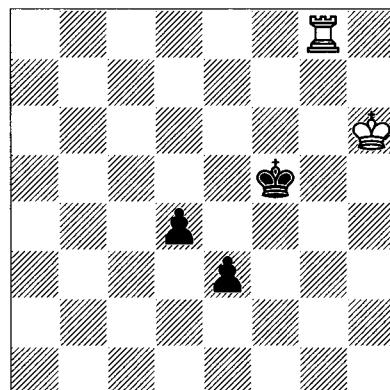
In contrast to what we emphasized above, the rook's weakness is caused by closed files and lack of mobility. The rook can also suffer due to lack of coordination, often when the king has stayed longer in the centre than it should and impedes the rooks along the first rank. We also find cases where an attack fails, and a rook is left in dubious circumstances.

One thing, however, we should never forget: the rook is the keeper of the basic ranks; in the middlegame it's the back rank, in the endgame the menace concerns mostly the second rank. At all times we should stay aware of their constant potential weakness and constant danger hanging over them.

These are the basic themes we shall examine in our analysis.

Basic Traits; Advantages and Drawbacks

We shall start by emphasizing some fundamental traits which make the rook an exceptionally valuable piece: its range and speed and, depending on these qualities, the high degree of coordination two rooks can achieve. Although limited to the straight rails of files and ranks, the rook moves quickly from one wing to the other, changing its target in a single move: it attacks or controls from afar. That quality especially comes to the fore in basic endgames, such as when the rook faces a seemingly impossible task of controlling the advanced enemy pawns.



Dgebuadze – Fominykh
Erevan 1997

The black pawns are so near their promotion squares that White's task looks hopeless. 1...e2 or 1...d3 would make the mission of the rook impossible. However, there is a solution!

1 ♕h5! e2 2 ♜f8+ ♔e4 3 ♜g4 ♔e3 4 ♜e8+ ♔f2

4...♔d2 5 ♔f3 makes it easy for White: 5...d3 6 ♜f2 stops the pawns. However, the text-move looks convincing: 5 ♔f4 d3 and Black wins.

5 $\mathbb{E}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$

After 5... $\mathbb{Q}g1$ White plays 6 $\mathbb{E}e8$ d3 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 8 $\mathbb{E}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 9 $\mathbb{E}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 10 $\mathbb{E}h8$ and there is no way for Black to make progress. The text-move, on the contrary, keeping the white king at bay, seems decisive, but the rook steps in and settles the issue:

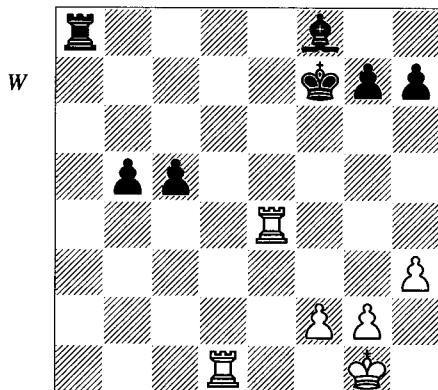
6 $\mathbb{E}e8$ d3 7 $\mathbb{E}e3!$

The pawn advance has been blocked and the game was agreed draw after one further move...

7... $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 8 $\mathbb{E}f3+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

With a little help from the king, the rook was able to keep the passed pawns under control.

The impression we gain from this example is definitely of a dynamic, potent piece, reaching quickly and reaching far.



Fischer – Spassky
Reykjavik Wch (10) 1972

Masterfully created pressure on f7 led to this tense position in which White has won an exchange, but Black has kept counterchances in the form of two dangerous passed pawns. White's immediate task is to control their advance and then, when opportunity presents itself, advance his own pawn-majority on the kingside.

34 $\mathbb{E}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 35 $\mathbb{E}b7$

The rook on the seventh rank is ideally posted to keep the black pawns under surveillance. At the same time it denies Black the natural ... $\mathbb{E}b8$ and preserves its active role on the ranks.

35... $\mathbb{E}a1+$

Opinions were divided on this move. Bent Larsen strongly supported the view that Black

should keep the rook behind his pawns and recommended 35...b4. Then:

a) R.Byrne pointed out that after the intended continuation 36 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 37 $\mathbb{E}c4$ (threatening $\mathbb{E}xb4$) 37... $\mathbb{E}d8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 39 $\mathbb{E}b5!$ the critical squares d5 and c6 are not accessible to the black king due to the pins. That is true, but after 39...g5 White would not be able to achieve the harmonious advance that we witness in the game.

b) 36 $\mathbb{E}b6+$ is a much more effective reply. 36... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ hardly comes into consideration because of 37 f3 (but not 37 $\mathbb{E}be6$ at once due to 37... $\mathbb{E}a1+$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ 39 g3 b3), threatening 38 h4 h5 39 $\mathbb{E}be6$ with a mating-net. 36... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ is met by the natural 37 f4 with a clear advantage.

Therefore, Spassky's answer was his best chance, enabling him to activate his pieces with checks.

36 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ 37 g3 b4 38 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ h5?!

Or:

a) 38... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ just provokes the intended 39 f4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 40 g4, when 40... $\mathbb{E}a2+$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ hardly disturbs White. The queenside pawns remain neutralized, while Black must worry constantly about $\mathbb{E}be7$, $\mathbb{E}ee7$, h4 or the centralization of the white king.

b) However, in a slightly different version, after 38... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ Black manages to activate the bishop via e5 whatever White plays; for instance, 39 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 40 g4+ (40 $\mathbb{E}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$) 40... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 41 $\mathbb{E}xg7$ $\mathbb{E}a3+$; 39 $\mathbb{E}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 40 $\mathbb{E}h5+$ (or 40 $\mathbb{E}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 41 $\mathbb{E}h4$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ threatening 42... $\mathbb{E}xd4$) 40...g5; or 39 $\mathbb{E}e8$ c4 40 $\mathbb{E}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 41 $\mathbb{E}d7$ $\mathbb{E}a6$ 42 $\mathbb{E}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 43 $\mathbb{E}xd6$ $\mathbb{E}xd6$ 44 $\mathbb{E}xd6$ c3 45 $\mathbb{E}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

39 $\mathbb{E}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7?$

This retreat fails to oppose the powerful pawn advance on the kingside, and this allows White to seize the initiative. Essential was 40...g5 41 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$, although 42 $\mathbb{E}b5$ creates further difficulties.

41 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 42 f4 g6 43 g4 $\mathbb{E}xg4$ 44 $\mathbb{E}xg4$

Now that is set in motion, the pawn advance has substantially changed the situation. While the black force is immobile, White can further squeeze his opponent by 45 g5, which provokes the reply...

44...g5 45 f5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Otherwise 46 $\mathbb{E}e6$.

46 $\mathbb{R}b5!$

This unpleasant pin has been coming up in various lines in this ending. It either wins a pawn or the white rooks invade the vital ranks.

46... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

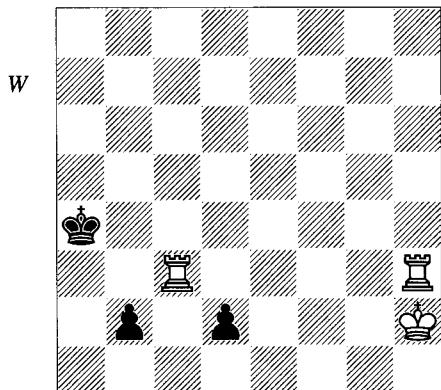
46... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (or 46... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 47 $\mathbb{R}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}d3$)

47 $\mathbb{R}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 48 $\mathbb{R}ee7$ looks rather depressing for Black.

47 $\mathbb{R}exb4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 48 $\mathbb{R}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

...and the little detail will make the win rather simple.

Acting in pairs, rooks acquire exceptional strength, owing to their primary qualities but to a high degree of coordination as well. The following study, which I saw years ago in an old edition of the Soviet magazine *Shakhmaty*, will confirm the impression.



Olmutsky

Sotsialistichna Kharkivshina, 1963

An exposed king against two rooks! However, Black's two pawns are ready to promote, and this complicates what otherwise would be a simple task.

1 $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 2 $\mathbb{R}ab3+$

The first sign that the king is in trouble in spite of appearances. 2... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ would fail to 3 $\mathbb{R}bg3$ and no matter which pawn promotes, the rooks will force mate.

2... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 3 $\mathbb{R}hc3+$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 4 $\mathbb{R}d3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 5 $\mathbb{R}bc3+$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$

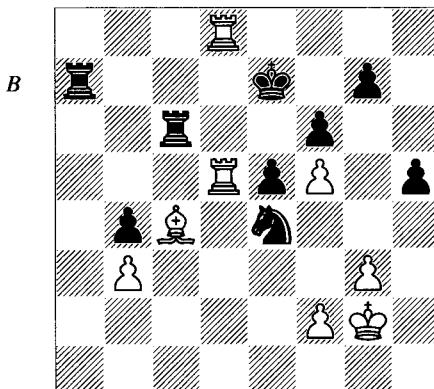
5... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ loses to 6 $\mathbb{R}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 7 $\mathbb{R}c7$, etc.

6 $\mathbb{R}c7!$

Why the exclamation mark? Because 6 $\mathbb{R}c8?$, for instance, lets victory slip away: 6... $b1\mathbb{Q}$ 7 $\mathbb{R}d7$ $\mathbb{W}e4$ and there is no mate.

6... $b1\mathbb{Q}$ 7 $\mathbb{R}d8!$ $\mathbb{W}e4$ 8 $\mathbb{R}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 9 $\mathbb{R}a7+$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 10 $\mathbb{R}xa4+$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 11 $\mathbb{R}d8$

White wins. Subtle coordination has done it! But such an exceptional degree of coordination does not adorn only studies.



Rubinstein – Alekhine

London 1922

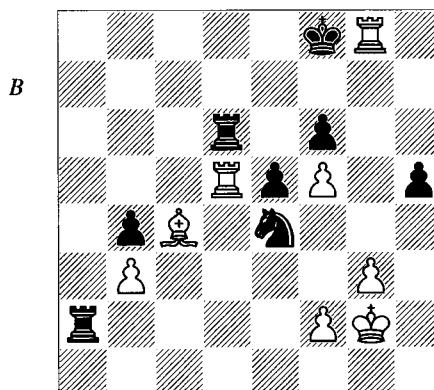
When I first saw this position, I had impression that Black was lost. And indeed, it is not at all clear how he can parry the threatened 43 $\mathbb{R}g8$. 42... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 43 $\mathbb{R}g8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ helps little after 44 $\mathbb{R}dd8$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 45 $\mathbb{R}b8$. However, Alekhine finds a series of remarkable moves...

42... $\mathbb{R}d6!$ 43 $\mathbb{R}g8$

Again it seems that Black's idea missed the point, because 43... $\mathbb{R}xd5$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ costs him material. But Alekhine, apparently on the brink of defeat just a move earlier, counterattacks...

43... $\mathbb{R}a2!!$ 44 $\mathbb{R}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 45 $\mathbb{R}g8+(D)$

45 $\mathbb{R}xd6$ $\mathbb{R}xf2+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ would not satisfy White either.



45... $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ 46 $\mathbb{H}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 47 $\mathbb{H}xa2$ $\mathbb{H}d2!$

Defending the second rank was not enough. This powerful move forces a simplification into a superior endgame.

48 $\mathbb{H}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ e4

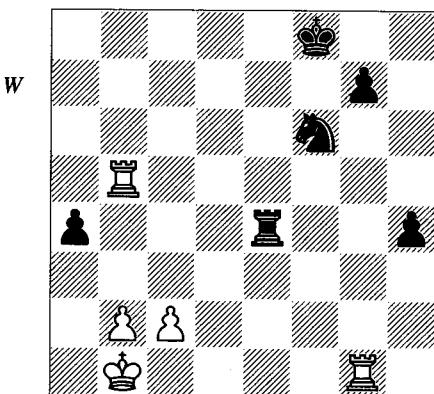
The coordinated action of the black rooks has borne fruit: White's king is cut off from the queenside. The knight is superior, even though this is a position with pawns on both wings, in which theoretically the bishop should be the better piece.

50 f4?!

Better is 50 g4, but 50...h4 51 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ is also advantageous for Black. On 50 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ Black can continue 51... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$.

50...e3

The end: Black won comfortably by walking his king along the dark squares to d4. Two rooks in harmony can work miracles.



Dolmatov – Dreev
Panormo ECC 2001

The question is how to keep in check the black kingside pawns and if possible to win one of them. Dolmatov's rooks do the job admirably:

42 $\mathbb{H}f5!$

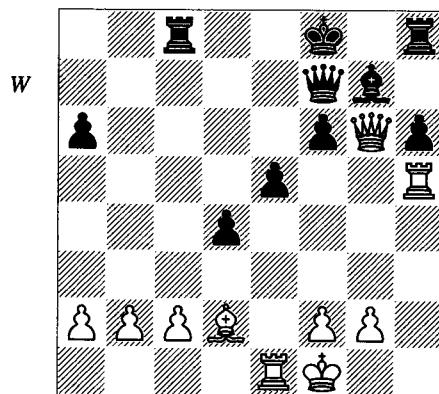
By pinning the knight, White paralyses the king as well, because now 42... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 43 $\mathbb{H}fg5$ would cost Black a pawn.

42... $\mathbb{H}c4$ 43 $\mathbb{H}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 44 $\mathbb{H}fg2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 45 $\mathbb{H}g4$ $\mathbb{H}f4$

A shrewd defence, but not adequate. In the game, White slowly prevailed by activating his

king by 46 $\mathbb{Q}c1$, but the post-mortem analysis showed he could have done the job quicker by 46 $\mathbb{H}xf4+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 47 $\mathbb{H}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 48 $\mathbb{H}g5!$ h3 (otherwise 49 $\mathbb{H}h5$ would paralyse Black) 49 $\mathbb{H}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 50 $\mathbb{H}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 51 $\mathbb{H}xf4$ g5 52 $\mathbb{H}f8$ g4 53 $\mathbb{H}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 54 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 55 c5 g3 when 56 $\mathbb{H}h4+!$ decides the issue at once. Again the victory can be ascribed to a high level of coordination.

But perhaps only the lack of coordination makes us understand fully its extraordinary value.



Ki. Georgiev – Kempinski
Saint Vincent 2000

There is little need to comment on this grievous position in which the black rooks have not attained their natural coordination. Let us see how the Bulgarian grandmaster exploits it.

28 $\mathbb{W}f5!$ $\mathbb{H}xc2$

On 28... $\mathbb{W}c4+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ there is 30 $\mathbb{W}e6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$.

29 $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 30 $\mathbb{W}c4$

The most important thing in such situations is to prevent the opponent from coordinating his forces.

30... $\mathbb{W}f7$ 31 $\mathbb{W}c8+$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 32 $\mathbb{W}f5$

32 $\mathbb{W}xa6$ allows 32... $\mathbb{Q}g8$.

After a round of exchanges and checks, the queen is back on its initial position. In the meantime White has lost a pawn, but to his favour: the open c-file is worth more than the c2-pawn.

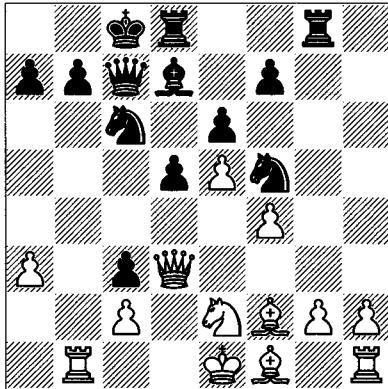
32... $\mathbb{W}b8?$

32... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33 $\mathbb{H}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ is more tenacious, but the prognosis remains bad.

33 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 1-0

When the coordination of the rooks is disrupted by a king misplaced in the centre, things tend to get worse and worse.

B



Nyman – Rittner
corr. 1972

This position is from a line of the French Defence that has been attracting players and analysts for decades. White's queen has spent several tempi winning a pawn on the kingside and returning to d3, at an obvious cost in terms of backward development. White's pieces are clumsily placed on his first two ranks and his rooks lack their normal healthy coordination on the first rank. Harmoniously developed, Black seizes the initiative...

15...d4!

This little thrust initiates fierce pressure against the white king. The pawn cannot be taken: 16 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}cxd4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 18 $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{R}xd4$ 19 $\mathbb{R}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ is bad for White.

16 h3

This is an attempt to put the kingside majority to use and get some breathing space. 16 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ would be met in the same manner.

16...f6!

The central pawn wedge protects White and in order to open the position it must be undermined.

17 exf6

17 g4 fxe5 18 gxf5 exf5 presents White with an ugly dilemma.

17...e5

The logical follow-up to the previous move: it breaks loose the barriers standing between

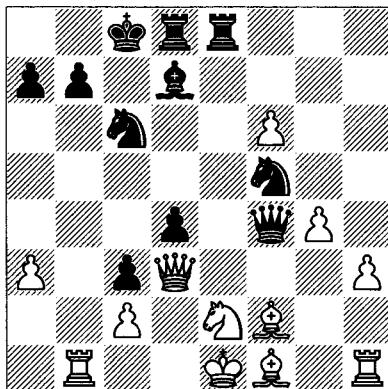
the white king and the black major pieces. Black does not fear 18 f7 $\mathbb{R}gf8$ 19 g4, when 19... $\mathbb{R}xf7$ offers a correct sacrifice.

18 g4 e4!

Another little detail earning time.

19 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{R}e8$ 20 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ (D)

W



21 $\mathbb{Q}g2$

Obviously, there is no time for piece grabbing with 21 gxf5 because of 21... $\mathbb{Q}e5$.

21... $\mathbb{R}xe2+$!

With such a disposition of forces the material sacrifice hardly counts.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{R}e8+$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{R}e3$ 24 $\mathbb{W}c4$

24 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ d3 27 cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}cd4$ is equally ugly for White.

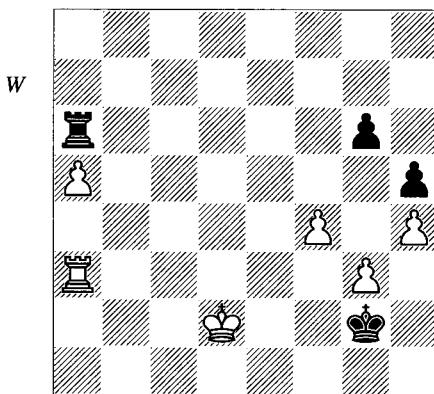
24... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{R}e2!$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ d3+

...and White lost his queen without any compensation. This crushing defeat was caused by White's backward development and the disrupted coordination on his back rank: White's rooks took no part in this game.

We learn that the rook's role is fundamentally determined by its relation to other pieces. Its strength in a given position depends mostly on the harmony of these relations. Endgame positions, as a rule, emphasize best the nature of the rook, its elementary properties and its strong ties with the king and the pawns.

We could say in general that the endgame throws full light on the rook. The emptier the space, the stronger its characteristics are revealed, and nowhere so impressively as in rook endgames where an active rook is set against a passive rook. The stronger one of them is, the weaker the other becomes. We shall observe this subtle relationship in a series of modern

endgames in order to acquire the feeling for the rook's movements and its properties.



Azmaiparashvili – Thorsteins
Reykjavik 1990

White is no less than two pawns up, but his passed pawn is stuck and he cannot break the blockade without giving up his pawn surplus, which gives Black chances to survive. So it's not really the material that makes the difference here. White can rely on the active position of his rook, ready to propel the a5-pawn as soon as the blockader leaves its place. With that in mind White continued...

44 ♕e2!

Now there is no retreat for the black king. 44...♔g1, for instance, loses to 45 ♔f3 ♔h2 46 ♜a1 and when the a6-rook retreats, the process can be repeated, leading to zugzwang. Thus...

44...♜e6+ 45 ♔d3 ♔xg3 46 a6 ♜e8 47 a7 ♜a8 48 ♕e4+ ♔xh4 49 ♔f3

Black has established material equality, but his rook is worse than before and his king is still shut on the edge and faces the same problem.

49...g5

After 49...♔h3, 50 ♜a2 provokes 50...h4 51 ♜a1 ♔h2 52 ♔g4 and both pawns will fall.

50 ♜a1

The white rook stays behind the passed pawn and, in contrast to the immobile a8-rook, retains its mobility. The threat of mate forces the response.

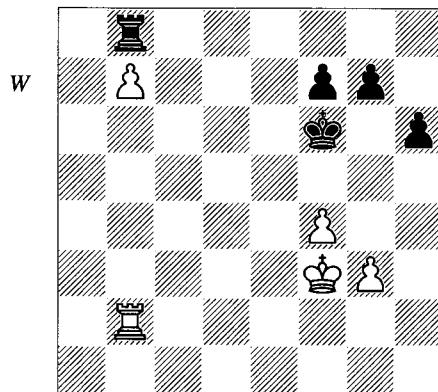
50...g4+

On 50...gxh4 there is 51 ♜a5.

51 ♔g2 g3 52 ♔f3 g2 53 ♔xg2 ♔g4 54 ♜a4 h4 55 ♔g1 ♔g3

Or 55...h3 56 ♔h2 ♔h4 57 f5+ ♔g5 58 ♜a5, etc.

56 f5 h3 57 ♜a3+ 1-0



Larsen – Browne
Las Palmas IZ 1982

This time we have material equality, but the strong, mobile white rook cooperates with the king to enable it to infiltrate.

59 ♔g4!

Why from this side? On 59 ♔e4 Black replies 59...♔e6 (in ECE, Larsen gives this move a question mark, while the weaker 59...♔e7 gets an exclamation mark) 60 ♜b6+ (60 f5+ is met not by 60...♔d7? 61 f6! {Larsen}, but 60...♔d6 61 ♔d4 ♔c6 62 ♔e5 ♜e8+ 63 ♔d4 ♜b8) 60...♔d7 61 ♔d5 ♔c7 62 ♔c5 ♜xb7 63 ♜xb7+ ♜xb7 64 ♔d6 g5! 65 fxg5 hxg5 and now 66 g4 f5 or 66 ♔e5 ♔c6 67 ♔f6 ♔d5. White, therefore, intends to break through from the kingside.

59...♔e6

After 59...g6 60 ♜b6+ followed by 61 f5 the position is obviously untenable.

60 f5+ ♔e5

60...♔d7 is strongly met by 61 ♔h5 ♔e7 (otherwise f6 wins) 62 ♜b6.

61 ♜b4

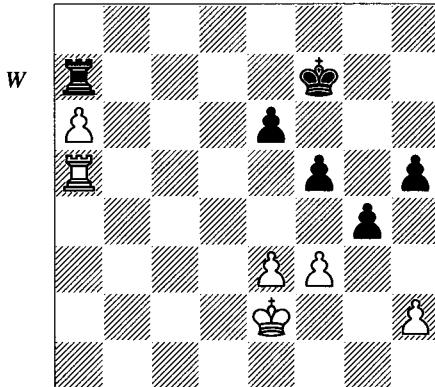
Each time when a sort of temporary impasse is reached there is a useful rook move.

61...g6

After 61...♔d6 62 ♔h5 ♔e5 63 g4 ♔f6 64 ♜b6+ ♔e7 65 f6+ gxh4 (alternatively, 65...♔f8 66 ♜c6) 66 ♔xh6 ♔f8 67 ♔h7 White is winning.

62 fxg6 fxg6 63 $\mathbb{B}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 64 $\mathbb{B}xg6$ $\mathbb{B}xb7$ 65 $\mathbb{B}xh6$ $\mathbb{B}g7+$ 66 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{B}f7+$ 67 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 68 g4

Without help from the king, which is cut off on the rank, the black rook is helpless against the passed pawn.



Panno – Najdorf
Argentina 1968

The rooks are again in their respective positions of strength and weakness, but White has a problem to think about – the potential black passed pawn on the kingside. Let us see how Panno copes with it:

43 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

43 fxg4 is answered by 43...hxg4, and 43 e4 by 43...f4.

43...h4 44 e4!

This is a crucial thrust to break up the pawn-mass, and was prepared by 43 $\mathbb{Q}f2$, which provoked 43...h4.

44... $\mathbb{Q}g6$

44... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is better in as much as it at least sets a trap: 45 exf5 exf5 46 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ g3 47 hxg3 hxg3 48 f4 $\mathbb{B}g7$ and now 49 a7? g2 50 $\mathbb{B}a6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 51 $\mathbb{B}a1$ fails to 51... $\mathbb{B}g3+!$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ g1 $\mathbb{B}+$ 53 $\mathbb{B}xg1$ $\mathbb{B}a3$. However, 49 $\mathbb{B}a1!$ g2 50 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{B}g4$ (or 50... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}g1$) 51 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ wins.

45 exf5+ exf5 46 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

If 46...g3 then White continues 47 hxg3 hxg3 48 f4, etc.

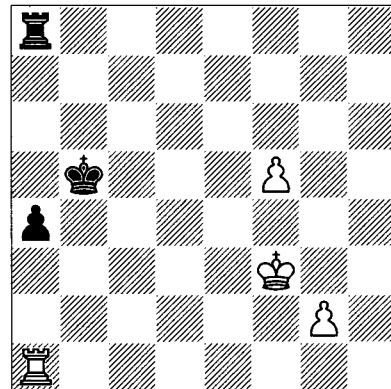
47 fxg4 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 48 $\mathbb{B}a2$

This modest but strong move prevents any counterplay. 48 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ also wins: 48... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 49 $\mathbb{B}a4$ f4 50 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 51 $\mathbb{B}a1$ h3 52 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ f3 53 $\mathbb{B}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}h1$ 54 $\mathbb{B}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}g3$

$\mathbb{Q}f1$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ and the black king reaches b6 quicker.

48... $\mathbb{B}e7+$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{B}a7$ 50 $\mathbb{B}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 51 $\mathbb{B}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

The pawn endgame is lost for Black.



Adams – Akopian
Khalkidhiki 1992

Comparing with the previous examples, here we have a strong black rook supporting the passed pawn, but two white kingside passed pawns visibly offset the uncomfortable passivity of the white rook. In order to stop the dangerous duo, the king must hurry back and at the same time push the passed pawn as far as possible. There is, however, the usual difficulty: it is not easy to discern in which order to do these two vital tasks. Fearing $\mathbb{Q}f4-e5-f6$, Akopian opted to retreat his king:

53... $\mathbb{Q}c5?$! 54 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 55 $\mathbb{B}a3$!

Keeping the pawn three squares away from promotion gives the rook some freedom which may become crucial later on.

55... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{B}a6$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}g4$

58 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}a5$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is more precise, reaching the desired position while avoiding the problem in the next note.

58... $\mathbb{B}a8$

58... $\mathbb{B}a5$ is correct, preventing 59 f6.

59 f6!

This move contains two subtle points: first, 59... $\mathbb{Q}g6?$ loses to 60 $\mathbb{B}h3!$ a3 61 $\mathbb{B}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 62 $\mathbb{B}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 63 $\mathbb{B}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 64 $\mathbb{B}e1$ a2 65 f7 and second, 59... $\mathbb{B}a6!$ allows White to infiltrate with 60 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{B}a8$ 61 $\mathbb{B}e3$, when 61...a3? 62 $\mathbb{B}e7+$

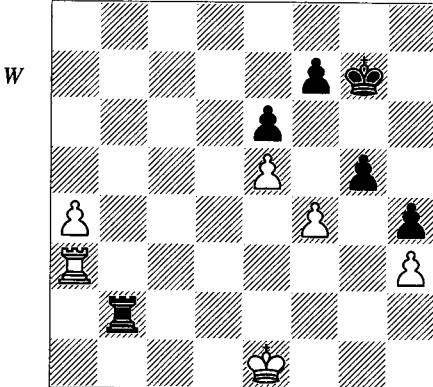
$\mathbb{g}8$ 63 $\mathbb{g}6$ a2 64 $\mathbb{g}7+$ $\mathbb{f}8$ 65 $\mathbb{h}7$ is winning for White. However, Nunn points out that 61... $\mathbb{h}8+$ 62 $\mathbb{g}4$ $\mathbb{g}6$ draws; e.g., 63 $\mathbb{e}7$ $\mathbb{h}7$ 64 $\mathbb{e}8$ $\mathbb{b}7$ 65 $\mathbb{g}8+$ $\mathbb{h}7$ 66 $\mathbb{a}8$ $\mathbb{g}6$, etc.

59... $\mathbb{a}6$ 60 $\mathbb{f}3?$ a3 61 $\mathbb{g}6+$ $\mathbb{f}8$ 62 $\mathbb{h}3$ ½-½

Adams had probably overlooked that 62 $\mathbb{g}5$ a2 63 $\mathbb{c}3$ $\mathbb{x}f6$ gives White nothing.

Returning to the initial position, the players found out that the passed pawn should have been forced forward and that 53...a3! denies White the vital tempi he could squeeze out in the actual game. Then after 54 $\mathbb{f}4$ $\mathbb{c}6$ 55 $\mathbb{e}5$ $\mathbb{d}7$ 56 $\mathbb{f}6$ $\mathbb{e}8$, White makes no progress in the event of 57 $\mathbb{g}7$ $\mathbb{a}7+$ 58 $\mathbb{g}8$ $\mathbb{e}7$. If instead the white pawns advance by 57 $\mathbb{g}4$, then the king will move to g8 to prevent the side attack: after 57... $\mathbb{f}8$ 58 $\mathbb{g}6$ a2 59 $\mathbb{f}6$ $\mathbb{g}8$ 60 $\mathbb{g}5$ $\mathbb{a}7$ 61 $\mathbb{h}6$ $\mathbb{a}6$ the pawns are stuck.

The lesson is simple: the further a pawn advances, the more limited is the rook blockading it. But no matter how true in general this is, we shall find numerous exceptions...



Velimirović – Sekulić
Yugoslav Cht (Bečici) 1993

I can imagine that Velimirović, impatient as ever, was sorely tempted to push his passed pawn forward. Responding to that first but erroneous impulse, he did just that...

38 a5? $\mathbb{g}xf4$ 39 a6 $\mathbb{b}8$ 40 a7 $\mathbb{a}8$ 41 $\mathbb{f}2$

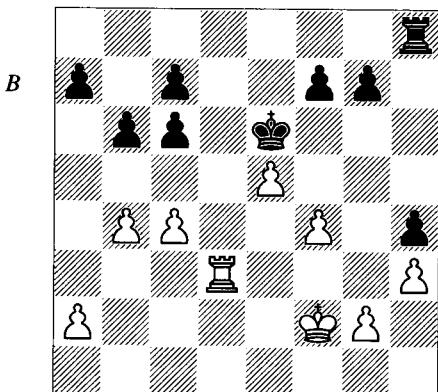
Perhaps White expected 41... $\mathbb{g}6$, when 42 $\mathbb{f}3$ $\mathbb{f}5$ 43 $\mathbb{a}5$ $\mathbb{g}5$ 44 $\mathbb{e}4$ would cost Black two pawns. But Black had a simple response:

41... $\mathbb{f}6$ 42 $\mathbb{exf6+}$ $\mathbb{x}f6$ 43 $\mathbb{f}3$ e5 44 $\mathbb{g}4$ $\mathbb{g}6$ 45 $\mathbb{a}6+$ $\mathbb{g}7$ 46 $\mathbb{x}h4$ f3 ½-½

After 47 $\mathbb{g}3$ e4 White will never be able to take the e4-pawn without losing the a7-pawn.

If Velimirović had been less impatient, he might have found the stronger 38 $\mathbb{fxg5!}$. Then 38... $\mathbb{g}6$ (38... $\mathbb{b}6$ loses to 39 a5 $\mathbb{a}6$ 40 $\mathbb{e}2$ $\mathbb{g}6$ 41 $\mathbb{f}3$ $\mathbb{x}g5$ 42 $\mathbb{e}4$) 39 a5 $\mathbb{x}g5$ 40 a6 $\mathbb{b}8$ 41 a7 $\mathbb{a}8$ 42 $\mathbb{f}2$ $\mathbb{f}5$ (or 42... $\mathbb{f}4$ 43 $\mathbb{a}5$ $\mathbb{e}4$ 44 $\mathbb{e}2$ $\mathbb{f}4$ 45 $\mathbb{d}3$ $\mathbb{f}3$ 46 $\mathbb{a}4$ and after 46... $\mathbb{d}8+$ 47 $\mathbb{d}4$ or 46... $\mathbb{g}3$ 47 $\mathbb{e}3$ we approach the state of zugzwang) 43 $\mathbb{a}5$ $\mathbb{f}4$ makes the black camp apparently impenetrable. However, Black will not be able to stop the white king: 44 $\mathbb{e}2$ $\mathbb{e}4$ 45 $\mathbb{d}2$ $\mathbb{d}4$ 46 $\mathbb{c}2$ $\mathbb{c}4$ 47 $\mathbb{b}2$ $\mathbb{b}4$ 48 $\mathbb{a}1$ $\mathbb{c}4$ 49 $\mathbb{a}4+$ $\mathbb{d}5$ (after 49... $\mathbb{b}5$ 50 $\mathbb{b}3$ $\mathbb{b}6$ 51 $\mathbb{b}4$ the passed pawn is taboo) 50 $\mathbb{a}5+$ $\mathbb{c}4$ 51 $\mathbb{a}3$ $\mathbb{c}3$ 52 $\mathbb{a}4$ $\mathbb{d}3$ 53 $\mathbb{b}3$ $\mathbb{e}3$ 54 $\mathbb{c}3$ when neither 54... $\mathbb{c}8+$ 55 $\mathbb{b}4$ $\mathbb{a}8$ 56 $\mathbb{c}5$ nor 54... $\mathbb{f}3$ 55 $\mathbb{d}3$ $\mathbb{g}3$ 56 $\mathbb{e}3$ $\mathbb{x}h3$ 57 $\mathbb{f}3$ is to any avail.

Unfortunately the rook is a bad blockader because it is reduced to complete passivity. In rook endgames this fact often comes to the fore.



Kasparov – Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 2001

As above, White's advantage consists partially of his kingside pawn-majority, but it is primarily based on the strong rook sitting on the open file and ready to exert pressure on the a-file as well. Understanding that time is not working for him, Kramnik does what he must...

30...a5 31 bxa5 $\mathbb{a}8$ 32 $\mathbb{a}3$ $\mathbb{f}5$ 33 $\mathbb{f}3$ $\mathbb{a}6$

Of course, exchanging rooks is out of the question, but 33...bxa5 would give White the b-file too. Black therefore stabilizes matters with the waiting text-move.

34 c5!?

Having in mind that the rook is a bad blockader and counting on his kingside pawn-majority, White increases the tension on the queenside and gives Black the move.

34...f6?

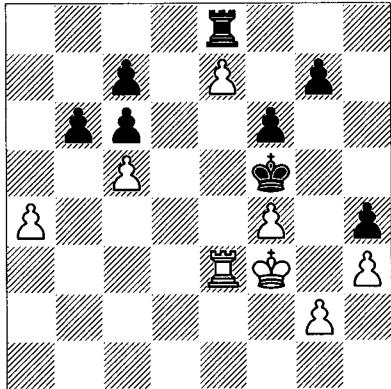
Of several options at his disposal, Black selects the worst. 34...bcx5 35 $\mathbb{R}a4$ c4 36 $\mathbb{R}xc4$ (or 36 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c5) 36... $\mathbb{R}xa5$ 37 a4 c5 is nicer for White, but not much more than that. Surprisingly, Kramnik in his lengthy annotations (in *Informator*) does not even mention 34...b5!? with the points 35 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ g5 and 35 g3 hxg3 36 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

35 $\mathbb{R}e3$!

The pressure exerted on the queenside and the stalemate situation which resulted there had a positive effect: 34...f6? opened the road to the e5-pawn and White quickly switches the rook to the centre to exploit his pawn-majority.

35... $\mathbb{R}xa5$ 36 e6 $\mathbb{R}a8$ 37 e7 $\mathbb{R}e8$ 38 a4 (D)

B



The potential passed pawn on the a-file keeps the queenside under control.

38... $\mathbb{Q}g6$

The only move; the e7-pawn must be dealt with at once. The decision is made easier because 39 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{R}xe7$ 41 $\mathbb{R}xe7+$? $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 42 f5 b5 wins for Black.

39 $\mathbb{R}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 40 $\mathbb{R}xc6$?

Was this due to time-trouble or did Kasparov overlook the excellent response? 40 f5 is correct, when 40... $\mathbb{R}xe7$ 41 $\mathbb{R}xc6$ is lost for Black.

Kramnik gives 40...g5 41 $\mathbb{R}xc6$ $\mathbb{R}xe7$, continuing 42 cxb6? cxb6 43 $\mathbb{R}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 44 $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$? 45 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ preventing the penetration, but instead 42 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ wins.

40... $\mathbb{R}a8$!

An obvious reply, but a strong one. The king will take care of the passed pawn, which ironically protects it on the second rank, while the rook becomes active.

41 $\mathbb{R}xb6$

41 $\mathbb{R}xc7$ bxc5 42 e8 $\mathbb{Q}+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 43 $\mathbb{R}xg7$ $\mathbb{R}xa4$ looks promising, but the weakness of the g2-pawn and the f4-pawn offsets the weakness of the f6- and h4-pawns and they are safe: 44 $\mathbb{R}h7$ c4 and 44 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{R}d4$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ c4 are good enough.

41... $\mathbb{R}xb6$ 42 $\mathbb{R}xb6$

42 $\mathbb{R}c4$ is met by 42... $\mathbb{R}a5$.

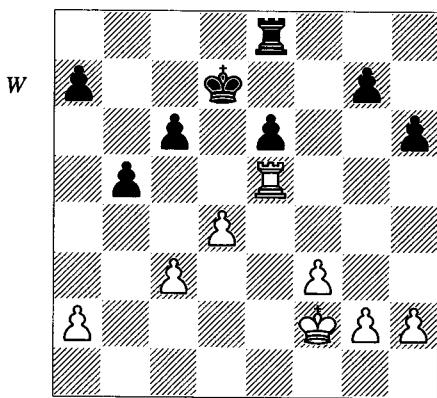
42... $\mathbb{R}xa4$ 43 $\mathbb{R}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 44 $\mathbb{R}e4$ $\mathbb{R}a3+$ 45 $\mathbb{R}e3$ $\mathbb{R}xe3+$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ f5 ½-½

Standing behind the pawn and supporting its advance establishes the most natural relation between the rook and the pawn. The pawn is propelled forward, while the rook remains active and mobile. In sharp contrast, as we see, is the position of the blockading rook, when its great dynamic force is reduced to a passive state. Blockading a passed pawn is one of the most uncomfortable positions for the rook – and not only in a rook endgame. In all types of positions the rook is out of place as a blockader; its nature is too dynamic for the static task and each time the situation happens the rook is devalued.

All the endgames we have analysed so far share one essential characteristic: the rook supporting its passed pawn was behind it. All the rest derived from that fact: free to move, the rook could win tempi, gradually helping the king to penetrate or causing a gradual deterioration of the enemy pawn-structure. However, even more important is the relationship between the rook and the king.

When playing a rook endgame, we depend on details and nuances. Despite that, we can regularly discern some deep logic behind the moves played and some general values we can rely upon. Summarizing, it mostly comes to the degree of activity the rook and the king can generate and their mutual coordination. Some simple signs help us to assess situations. One of these is centralization; by their very position,

centralized pieces imply some sort of advantage and regularly yield fruit.



**Em. Lasker – Spielmann
Moscow 1925**

From its post on e5, the white rook can exert pressure on both wings. For the time being there are no marked weaknesses in the black camp, but being limited to passive waiting is in itself a reason to worry.

23 ♕e3

The centralized king, as we already know, is an asset to appreciate; from its central position it can reach both wings relatively quickly.

23...♜b8 24 h4 ♜b6

24...b4 25 cxb4 ♜xb4 26 ♜a5 means a clear deterioration of Black's pawn-structure. His pawns look like remnant teeth of an old witch. Therefore, Spielmann wants to play as actively as possible, and threatens 25...♜a6.

25 a4

Necessary but powerful: 25...♜a6 is prevented.

25...a5

25...b4 26 cxb4 ♜xb4 27 ♜a5 is again unpleasant for Black.

26 ♔d3!

Nearer to the queenside to stop the potential passed pawn on the b-file.

26...♜b8

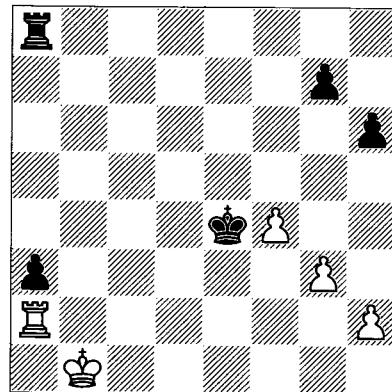
26...b4 27 c4 b3 is better, although after 28 ♔e1 the intruder is lost; then 28...♜b4 29 ♜b1 ♔c7 30 c5 is advantageous for White. The passive approach embodied by the text-move leads to more difficulties.

27 ♔c2 ♜b7 28 c4!

By forcing the fifth rank open, White enhances the power of his centralized rook and soon wins material.

28...bxa4 29 ♜xa5 ♜b4 30 ♔d3 ♔c7 31 c5 ♔b7 32 ♔e4 h5 33 g4

White is winning.



**Kasparov – Karpov
Moscow Wch (6) 1984/5**

Here too, we have a case of the far-advanced passed pawn supported by the rook from behind. In addition the black king is centralized and superior to the white king on b1. However, Black's a3-pawn needs constant protection and White's kingside pawn-chain is defended. So in spite of Black's obvious spatial superiority and his superior pieces, it seems there is only one way to keep the initiative:

50...♜b8+ 51 ♔a1

51 ♔c2 loses to 51...♜b2+, and 51 ♔c1 ♜b3 would enhance Black's preponderance. White must preserve his rook.

51...♜b2

51...♜b3 is no good here due to the obvious 52 ♔c2, activating the rook.

52 ♜xa3 ♜xh2 53 ♔b1 ♜d2

To make progress, the harmonious defence along the third rank must be challenged while the king is still so far from its pawns. Too slow is 53...♔f5? 54 ♔c1 ♔g4 55 ♔d1 ♜g2 56 ♜a7 g5 57 ♜a3!, when White should hold the draw.

54 ♜a6 ♔f5 55 ♜a7 g5 56 ♜a6 g4!

Worse is 56...♜h2 57 ♔c1 ♔g4 58 ♜g6 ♜h5 59 ♔d2 ♔xg3 60 ♔e3 g4 61 ♔e4 ♜h1 62 f5 ♜e1+ 63 ♔d5 h5 64 f6 ♜f1 65 ♔e6 h4 66 f7

$\mathbb{R}xf7$ 67 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ h3 68 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ h2 69 $\mathbb{R}h6$, and White is in time. The temporary pawn sacrifice relies on all sorts of advantageous elements: a more active king, a more active rook and a quicker pawn.

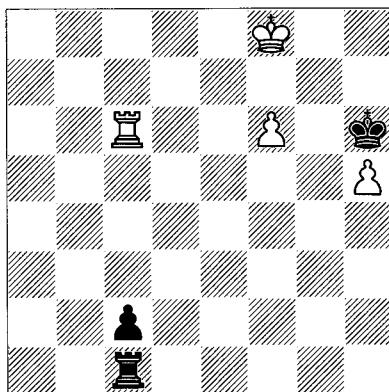
57 $\mathbb{R}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 58 $\mathbb{R}h5+$

The rest is not difficult. After 58 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{R}xg3$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}f3$ the black king is cut off along the file and the theoretical endgame is lost.

58... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 59 f5 $\mathbb{R}f2$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ g3 64 $\mathbb{R}h5$ $\mathbb{R}f4$ 65 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}e4+$ 66 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 67 $\mathbb{R}h1$ g2 68 $\mathbb{R}h3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 69 $\mathbb{R}h8$ $\mathbb{R}f4$ 0-1

The position of both kings and their temporary activity need to be an essential element in our assessments. Many a time, depending on the situation of the enemy king, having a rook in front of the passed pawn is not a bad thing, or it may even be advantageous.

B



Petrosian – Karpov
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1976

This position does look lost. While the lone black king fights White's superior forces, its rook is stuck in the most uncomfortable position in front of a passed but useless pawn. But Karpov proves there is more in the position than a superficial glance can see:

50... $\mathbb{Q}h7!$

As long as the king cannot approach the f6-pawn, the c2-pawn must be kept alive even at the cost of the rook's total passivity. 50... $\mathbb{R}a1?$ is premature: 51 $\mathbb{R}xc2$ (but not 51 f7+? $\mathbb{Q}h7$) 52 $\mathbb{R}xc2$ $\mathbb{R}a8+$ and the king cannot be protected from the checks) 51... $\mathbb{R}a8+$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{R}a7+$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ (53 $\mathbb{Q}d6?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5!$ is a theoretical draw)

53... $\mathbb{R}a6+$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{R}a5+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and White wins.

51 $\mathbb{R}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

51... $\mathbb{Q}h6?$ surrenders the g8-square to the white king, which is fatal. 52 f7 and now:

a) 52... $\mathbb{R}a1$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ $\mathbb{R}f1$ and White will force the enemy king to retreat gradually by using an old idea of Em.Lasker: 55 $\mathbb{R}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{R}f1$ 58 $\mathbb{R}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{R}f1$ 61 $\mathbb{R}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{R}f1$ 64 $\mathbb{R}c3+$ and the c2-pawn falls with check.

b) 52... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ is possible, but 53 h6! decides: 53... $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ and White wins by the same method as in line 'a', while after 53... $\mathbb{R}a1$ 54 $\mathbb{R}xc2$ $\mathbb{R}a8+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{R}a7+$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{R}a6+$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Black has no answer.

52 f7 $\mathbb{R}a1$

It's the last moment to free the rook.

53 $\mathbb{R}xc2$

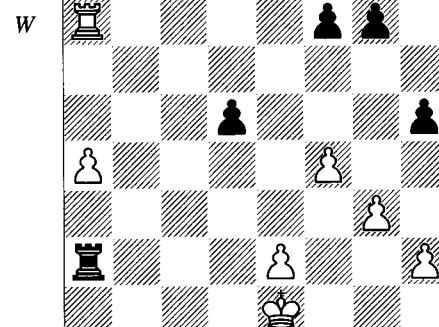
An attempt to hide the king on h6 fails: 53 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{R}e1+$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{R}f1+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{R}g1+$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{R}c1+$ 57 $\mathbb{R}xc1$ $\mathbb{R}g6+$ and the king is stalemated.

53... $\mathbb{R}a8+$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{R}a7+$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{R}a6+$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{R}a5+$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{R}a4+$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{R}a3+$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 60 $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 61 $\mathbb{R}f5$ $\mathbb{R}a6$

It's never too late to lose: 61... $\mathbb{R}a7?$ 62 h6 $\mathbb{R}a6$ (or 62... $\mathbb{R}xf7$ 63 h7) 63 $\mathbb{R}h5$ would do so.

62 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{R}h6$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{R}h7$

Now 64... $\mathbb{R}xf7$ cannot be prevented.



Kramnik – Timman
Wijk aan Zee 1999

We have another situation where the rook supporting the passed pawn is in front of it,

while the opposing black rook stands behind, mobile. However, the position of the rooks is not the only factor. The position of the kings is equally relevant and the first move made by Kramnik emphasizes it clearly:

28 f5!

Before advancing the passed a-pawn, White takes care to keep the black king as passive as possible. Black missed his chance to play ...g6 and activate his king and now the process will be much longer and more painful.

28...Ra1+ 29 Qf2

29 Qd2 is also possible because going after the f5-pawn costs too many tempi: 29...Rf1 30 a5 Rxf5 31 Rd7 d4 32 a6 Ra5 33 a7 costs Black the precious f7-pawn.

29...f6 30 a5 d4 31 Qf3 Qh7

31...Ra3+ 32 Qe4 Re3+ 33 Qxd4 Rxex2 34 a6 Ra2 (obviously there is no time to grab the h2-pawn) 35 Ra8+ is hopeless for Black.

32 a6 Qh6 33 h4 g6 34 fxg6 Qxg6 35 Ra8 Ra2

35...Qf5 is a more difficult nut to crack:

a) After 36 a7, 36...Ra2 prevents 37 Qf2 due to 37...d3. White can choose 37 e4+ dxex3 38 Qxe3 after which g4+ will never be adequate because the black g-pawn is a step quicker than the h4-pawn; on the other hand, if he decides to go around the board to grab the h5-pawn, then at the moment the king reaches f7, Black will play ...Ra3, preventing it from stepping onto the g-file. White must resort to a devious path...

b) 36 Qf2 and now:

b1) 36...Qg4 37 a7 Qf5 38 Qg2 Ra2 39 Qf1 Ra1+ 40 Qf2 Ra2 41 Qe1. Given that Black can only move his rook, the king will move from e1 to c5, whereupon the d4-pawn falls, after which e4+ will force the king into the open.

b2) If Black replies 36...Ra2, then after 37 Qe1 Qg4 38 a7 Qh3 39 Qd1 f5 (if 39...Qg2, there is 40 g4 hxg4 41 h5 g3 42 h6 Qf2 43 h7 g2 44 Rg8 and Black is the first to promote) 40 Qc1 Qg2 41 Qb1 the white king again penetrates to c5; the line is possible because no white pawn can be touched by either the king or the rook.

The text-move does not solve Black's difficulties, and indeed makes it easier for White.

36 Qf4 Qf7??

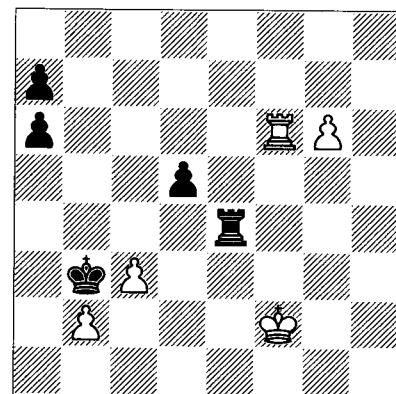
36...Qg7 is obviously better; it saves a tempo (after the text-move, 37 a7 threatens 38 Rh8) and White must find some good moves to win: 37 a7 Qh7 38 g4! (38 Qf5 is now met by 38...Qg7) 38...Ra4 (if 38...hxg4 then 39 Qxg4 and the pawn moves up to h6 paralysing the black king, whereupon both black pawns are doomed to a slow death) 39 g5 d3+ 40 e4 d2 41 Rd8 Rxa7 42 Rxd2 fxg5+ 43 Qxg5 and Black's hopes are vanishing. It was much easier in the actual game:

37 a7 Qg7 38 Qf5 Ra5+ 39 Qe4 Ra4 40 Qd5 Ra1

After 40...Qh7 41 Qc5 Qg7 42 Qb6 the d4-pawn falls anyway.

41 Qxd4 1-0

Rook endgames are extremely sensitive and each of them is a unique case, the rooks playing roles of a thousand nuances. Therefore, while being aware of what is best in principle, it is important to stay aware of their enthralling richness.



V. Platov
Shakhmaty, 1925

Threatened by 1...Qxb2, White must rest his hopes on his passed pawn, but how to exploit it? 1 g7 Rg4 2 Rf7 Qxb2, 1 Qf3 Re1 2 Qg2 Re2+ and 1 Rf3 Re8 2 g7 Rg8 3 Rf7 Qxb2 would hardly worry Black. But the famous composer was a witty man...

1 c4!

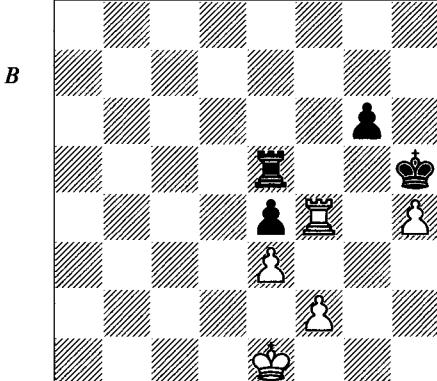
The idea is to expose the king on the third rank, so that after 1...dxcc4 2 g7 Rg4 3 Rf3+ Qxb2 4 Rg3 Rg7 5 Rg7 a5 6 Qe2 a4 7 Qd1 a3 8 Rb7+ White makes decisive material gains.

1... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 2 $\mathbb{g}7$ $\mathbb{H}g4$ 3 $\mathbb{H}f4+$!

Now the king is exposed on the fourth rank and the rook sacrifice helps to promote the pawn.

3... $\mathbb{H}xf4+$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{H}f1$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{H}b1$ 6 $g8\mathbb{W}$ $\mathbb{H}xb2+$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black is lost.



Beliavsky – Spraggett

Elista OL 1998

Black is a pawn down and his e4-pawn is another candidate for the gallows. It seems that nothing can be done against the king moving to d4. Beliavsky gives 54... $\mathbb{H}e6$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{H}d6+$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{H}d3+$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ and now 57... $\mathbb{H}a3$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{H}d3$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{H}c3+$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{H}c4$ 61 f3. Stronger is 57... $\mathbb{H}d8$ 58 $\mathbb{H}xe4$ $\mathbb{H}f8$, etc., but Spraggett finds something more effective.

54... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{H}f5!$

What about the e4-pawn?

56 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

It turns out that 56 $\mathbb{H}xe4$ $\mathbb{H}xf2+$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g5 gives White nothing.

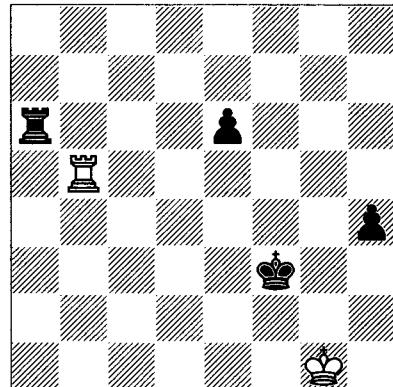
56... $\mathbb{H}xf4$ 57 $\mathbb{exf4}$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

On 59 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ there is 59... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ (not, however, 59... $\mathbb{Q}g4?$) 60 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 61 f5, when White wins).

59... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

The last important detail. The game is a draw.

In the following diagram, White is two pawns down in a seemingly miserable position, but he can rely on his rook!



Marović – Ungureanu

Constanza 1969

1 $\mathbb{H}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 2 $\mathbb{H}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 3 $\mathbb{H}e4!$

The point of White's defence: the rook single-handedly ties the black king to the defence of the h3-pawn and the a6-rook to the defence of the e6-pawn.

3...h3 4 $\mathbb{H}e3!$

White must be accurate. After 4 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 5 $\mathbb{H}e3$ e5, the subsequent 6... $\mathbb{H}g6$ will cut off the white king.

4... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{H}a2+$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 7 $\mathbb{H}xh3$ $\mathbb{H}f2$

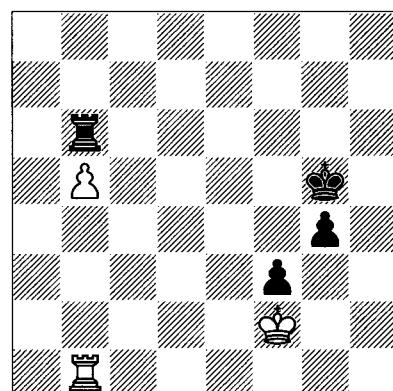
Otherwise the king crosses its Rubicon.

8 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{H}f4$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$

If 9...e5, then 10 $\mathbb{H}f3$ draws.

10 $\mathbb{H}a3$

White draws by checking from the side.



Serpel – Shabalov

Philadelphia 1997

White is a pawn down, but his passed pawn, supported by the rook, promises him chances to survive. However, the mere fact that it takes three moves to promote the pawn is quite a sobering detail. If Black were to move, he would continue 1... $\mathbb{E}h6$ 2 b6 $\mathbb{E}h2+3 \mathbb{Q}e3$ (or 3 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ g3) 3... $\mathbb{E}e2+4 \mathbb{Q}d3$ g3 5 b7 $\mathbb{E}e8$ 6 b8 $\mathbb{E}xb8$ 7 $\mathbb{E}xb8$ g2 and one of the black pawns will promote. This implies that 1 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ and 1 $\mathbb{E}b4$ would fail for this reason. Also, 1 $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xb5$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}b4$ is bad for White. Therefore White must go in for a forcing line:

1 $\mathbb{E}b3!$

Now 1... $\mathbb{E}h6$ does not work because of 2 b6 $\mathbb{E}h2+3 \mathbb{Q}g1$ when 3...g3 is not available any more (the point of 1 $\mathbb{E}b3$). But there is something else to worry White...

1... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 2 $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{E}e6$ 3 $\mathbb{E}h1+$

3 b6? would lose to 3... $\mathbb{E}e2+4 \mathbb{Q}g1$ g3 5 b7 $\mathbb{E}g2+6 \mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{E}h2$, etc.

3... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}e2$ 5 $\mathbb{E}h2$ $\mathbb{E}e1$ 6 b6

Annotating the game in *New in Chess* (No. 3, 2000) Serper gives this move an exclamation mark. As a matter of fact, losing the pawn on b6 instead of on b5 does not make any difference. White could continue 6 $\mathbb{E}b2$ $\mathbb{E}h1$ 7 $\mathbb{E}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g1+8 \mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}xb5$ 10 $\mathbb{E}b2$ $\mathbb{E}f5$ (otherwise 11 $\mathbb{E}b4$) 11 $\mathbb{E}a2$. Apart from that he had 6 $\mathbb{E}c2$ $\mathbb{E}h1$ (but not 6... $\mathbb{E}g1+7 \mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}xb5$ 9 $\mathbb{E}c4$) 7 $\mathbb{E}h2$ transposing into the same line.

6... $\mathbb{Q}g1+7 \mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}b1$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}xb6$ 9 $\mathbb{E}b2$

On 9 $\mathbb{E}h8$ there is 9... $\mathbb{E}b1$ 10 $\mathbb{E}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11 $\mathbb{E}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 12 $\mathbb{E}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ and the king runs towards safety on f1.

9... $\mathbb{E}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{E}b1$

Serper gives this move two question marks, suggesting that 10 $\mathbb{E}b5+$ gives an easy draw, based on 10... $\mathbb{E}f5$ 11 $\mathbb{E}b1$. However, Black responds 10... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ and the play turns back into the game course.

10... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11 $\mathbb{E}a1$?

On 11 $\mathbb{E}b5+$ Serper gives 11... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 12 $\mathbb{E}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$, continuing 13 $\mathbb{E}b3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 14 $\mathbb{E}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1!$, but White should play 13 $\mathbb{E}b2$ instead. The text-move loses since it gives Black a precious moment of respite to improve the position of his rook.

11... $\mathbb{E}e6$ 12 $\mathbb{E}a4$ $\mathbb{E}e4$ 13 $\mathbb{E}a5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14 $\mathbb{E}a1$

If 14 $\mathbb{E}b5$, then 14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$: 15 $\mathbb{E}a5$ $\mathbb{E}e1$ or 15 $\mathbb{E}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15 $\mathbb{E}a5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 16 $\mathbb{E}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 17 $\mathbb{E}a3+$

Or 17 $\mathbb{E}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ intending 18... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ followed by 19... $\mathbb{Q}d2$.

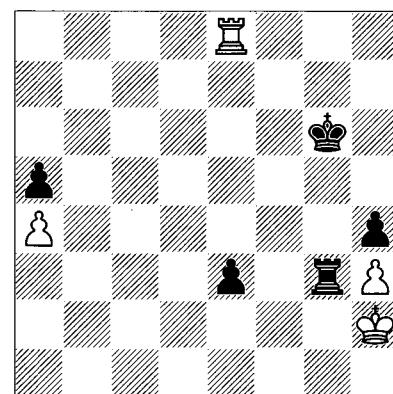
17... $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 18 $\mathbb{E}a2+$

Or 18 $\mathbb{E}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ followed by 19... $\mathbb{Q}d1$.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 19 $\mathbb{E}a1+$ $\mathbb{E}e1$ 20 $\mathbb{E}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 21 $\mathbb{E}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-1

Rook endgames are imbued with hidden details which are often missed, especially if time is pressing.

Another characteristic which distinguishes the rook is its property to divide the board along a file or a rank. It is in relation to the enemy king that the rook exhibits this essential quality: the rook is adept at cutting off the enemy king, confining it within a small area, or one in which it is ineffective. We analysed this very common situation when discussing the unfortunate circumstances that can befall the king. We shall return to the subject with a couple of illustrative cases, because errors in such situations are noticeably common in modern chess.

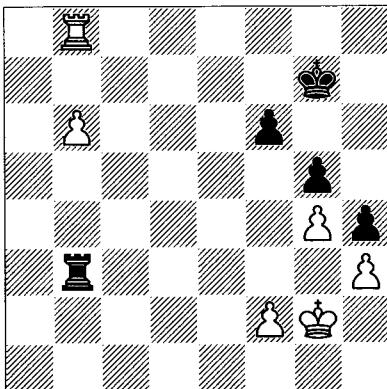


Golubović – Graf
Mitropa Cup (Leipzig) 2002

Black has just captured a pawn on g6, and here White resigned! He probably saw that 61 $\mathbb{E}g8+$ loses to 61... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 62 $\mathbb{E}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, but he failed to see that 61 $\mathbb{E}f8$ cuts off the king, preventing it from approaching his passed pawn. Then 61... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 62 $\mathbb{E}f7$ e2 63 $\mathbb{E}e7$ $\mathbb{E}a3$ 64 $\mathbb{E}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 65 $\mathbb{E}g2$ leads to a draw.

In the diagram on the following page, instead of forcing the white king to stay in its

B



Serper – A. Ivanov
New York 1996

corner by 1... $\mathbb{H}b2$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{H}b3$, Black carelessly played...

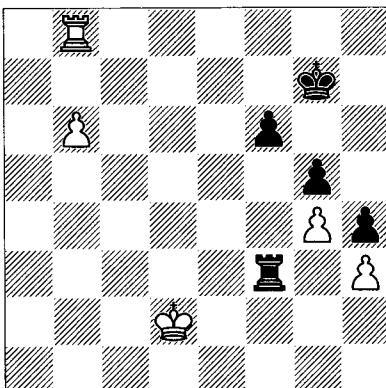
1... $\mathbb{Q}h7?$ 2 $f3!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

He probably believed that the white king is tied to the defence of the f3-pawn and remains cut off. Unfortunately, the f3-pawn is not as important as the h3-pawn and the king breaks loose...

5 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ $\mathbb{H}xf3$ (D)

5... $f5$ 6 $gxf5$ $\mathbb{H}xf3$ only eases White's job: 7 $b7$ $\mathbb{H}b3$ 8 $f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 9 $\mathbb{H}h8$ is a familiar trick.

W



6 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$

There is no time to grab the h3-pawn, while it takes some expensive tempi to reach the position behind the white passed pawn.

6... $\mathbb{H}f2+$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{H}f1$ 8 $\mathbb{H}d8!$ $\mathbb{H}b1$ 9 $\mathbb{H}d6$

The passive white rook has moved to an active position and advancing the king to c5 will free it to crush any resistance.

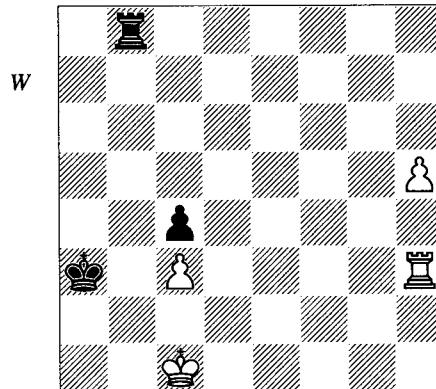
9... $\mathbb{Q}f7$

For the moment it is important that 9...f5 still does not work due to 10 $gxf5$ $g4$ 11 $hxg4$ $h3$ 12 $\mathbb{H}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 13 $g5$, etc.

10 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11 $\mathbb{H}c6$ $\mathbb{H}b2$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{H}b3$ 13 $\mathbb{H}d6!$

...and no good moves were available to Black any more.

White was shrewder and more cautious in the following examples:



Yandemirov – S. Ivanov
USSR 1998

As in Velimirović-Sekulić above, it is very tempting for White simply to push his passed pawn. However, he noticed that 1 $h6$ fails to give him victory after 1... $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 2 $h7$ $\mathbb{H}h8$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{H}d8+$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (luckily for Black, 4 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is not available due to 4... $\mathbb{H}d3+$) 4... $\mathbb{H}h8$, when the white king cannot cross the third rank without giving up the c3-pawn. Therefore White looked deeper and produced...

1 $\mathbb{H}h2!$

It is important to prevent 1... $\mathbb{Q}b3$. Now the conditions have been created to advance the pawn.

1... $\mathbb{H}b3$

In case of 1... $\mathbb{H}h8$, before pushing the h-pawn, White should first play 2 $\mathbb{Q}c2$, keeping the king away from the c3-pawn. After 2... $\mathbb{H}h6$ 3 $\mathbb{H}h4$ or 2... $\mathbb{H}b8$ 3 $\mathbb{H}h4$ the end is near.

2 $h6$ $\mathbb{H}xc3+$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}d1$

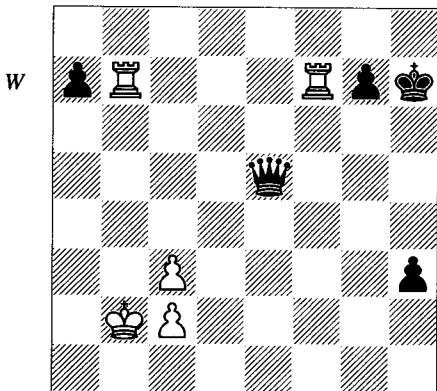
The only move, but a good one. 3 $\mathbb{Q}d2?$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ or 3 $\mathbb{Q}b1?$ $\mathbb{H}b3+$ gives Black the crucial tempo that saves him.

3... $\mathbb{H}b3$

Now 3... $\mathbb{R}d3+$ is not adequate in view of 4 $\mathbb{Q}c2 \mathbb{R}d8 5 h7 \mathbb{R}h8 6 \mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}a4 7 \mathbb{R}h5$, etc.

4 $\mathbb{R}h4!$

The fatal attack. The threat of 4... $\mathbb{R}b1+$ has been parried and the pawn cannot be defended. After 4... $\mathbb{R}b8$ 5 $\mathbb{R}xc4$ the win is simple, because the black king will be cut off.



Honfi – Kallinger
corr. 1989-92

The existence of the far-advanced passed pawn on h3 suggests that the white ship will soon sink, but Honfi finds an ingenious defence...

35 $\mathbb{R}f3!$

The fact that the h3-pawn cannot move forward is a small victory in itself; after 35...h2 36 $\mathbb{R}h3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 37 $\mathbb{R}b4$ g5 38 $\mathbb{R}d4$ $\mathbb{W}b5+$ 39 $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{W}e2$ 40 $\mathbb{R}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 41 $\mathbb{R}bh8$ the pawn would fall.

35... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 36 $\mathbb{R}g3$ $\mathbb{W}h6$

Again the pawn can't move because 36...h2 37 $\mathbb{R}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 38 $\mathbb{R}e7$ points out that the back rank is defenceless, but the text-move is apparently winning.

37 $\mathbb{R}bxg7+!$ $\mathbb{W}xg7$ 38 $\mathbb{R}xh3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 39 $\mathbb{R}d3$ $\mathbb{W}b7+$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ a5 41 e4

The plan becomes clear: White will give up his useless doubled pawn and establish control on the third rank.

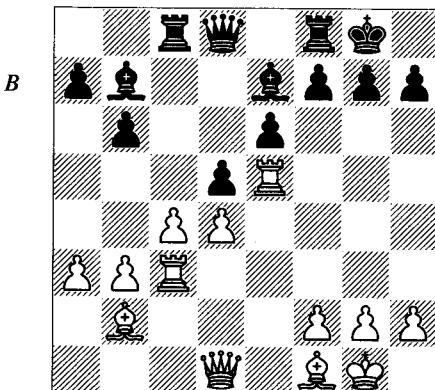
41... $\mathbb{W}b4$

After 41...a4 42 c5 $\mathbb{W}b4$ (or 42... $\mathbb{W}b5$ 9 c6) 43 c6 the c-pawn is too quick; then 43...a3 44 c7 $\mathbb{W}e1+$ 45 $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e3+$ 46 $\mathbb{R}d2$ obliges Black to repeat.

42 $\mathbb{R}b3$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ a4 44 $\mathbb{R}d3$ ½-½

We have reached a well-known theoretical position in which, owing to the c2-pawn, the protector of the second rank, the rook patrols the third rank and rules out ...a3 for good. The rule is simple: never allow ...a3!

In deep contrast to the passive blockading rook we examined earlier stands the potent cutting-off rook. The strength of the rook is always the consequence of the surroundings in which it acts. In that respect the clumsy blockader is not the only negative connotation and certainly not the worst case involving rooks. Errant rooks or those which have lost coordination are a pathetic sight to see. A common scenario is the scene after failed attacks, when the rooks which participated in it are left stranded on the wrong side of the board. What follows is a famous, striking example:



Keres – Smyslov
Zurich Ct 1953

By placing his rooks on c3 and e5, White has made his plan clear: his rooks will move to the kingside into what apparently ought to be a mating attack. However, Black reacts cold-bloodedly:

17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18 $\mathbb{R}h5$ g6 19 $\mathbb{R}ch3$ dx4!

As if unconcerned by what happens on the wing, Smyslov reacts calmly in the centre, which is at least a wise practical decision. After 19...gxh5 20 $\mathbb{W}xh5$ $\mathbb{R}e8$, White can choose between 21 $\mathbb{W}h6$ dx4 22 d5! $\mathbb{R}xb2$ 23 $\mathbb{R}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24 $\mathbb{R}h3$, securing a draw, and 21 a4 with serious attacking chances.

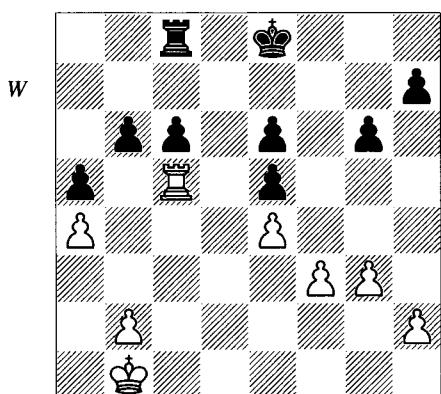
20 $\mathbb{E}xh7??!$

Now that the a8-h1 diagonal has been opened, a defence with ... $\mathbb{A}e4$ is available to Black. After 20 bxc4 gxf5 21 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ Smyslov advocated 21... $\mathbb{E}c5(?)$ 22 dxc5 $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 23 $\mathbb{E}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24 $\mathbb{E}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ but then 25 $\mathbb{E}d3$ gives Black severe problems, hence 21... $\mathbb{E}e8$ should be preferred. Since 20 $\mathbb{E}h6$ cxb3 leaves the white rooks misplaced, Bronstein's 20 $\mathbb{W}g4$ is White's best try.

20...c3! 21 $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xd4$ 22 $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$

...and the attack was beaten back. As a consequence, the white queen and both rooks are left misplaced on the h-file, while the c-pawn will make its way forward.

This was quite a common case of a rook gone astray after erroneous strategic assessments, but mostly the rook gets misplaced or happens to fall into captivity owing to miscalculations and blunders.



Flohr – Geller
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1949

Black has just played 32...b6, obliging White either to retreat or to grab the pawn on e5, which would risk excluding the rook from play. Flohr was reluctant to remain a pawn down...

33 $\mathbb{E}xe5?$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34 $\mathbb{E}g5$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{E}d4$ 36 b3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 37 h4 e5

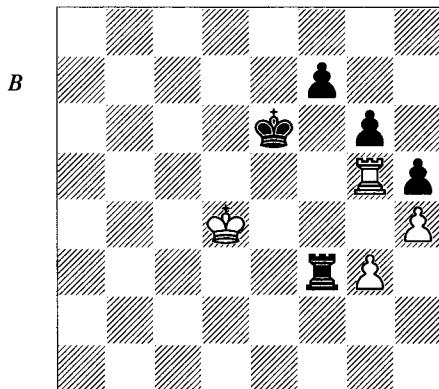
The rook is in a trap and Black can use his pawn-majority on the queenside to his advantage.

38 $\mathbb{E}g4$ b5 39 axb5 cxb5 40 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a4 41 bxa4 bx4 42 f4

A trap is set for White: after 42... $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}d4+44$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 45 h5 the rook gains its freedom. Geller, however, ‘falls’ into the trap.

42... $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7!!$

If the king moves to the e-file, then 44 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ a3 45 $\mathbb{E}g5$ wins, and if it retreats to f7, then 44 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ a3 45 fxe5 a2 46 $\mathbb{E}f4+$ wins. But at g7 no chances are conceded to White. If he takes the rook, the pawn queens; if 44 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ is tried, then 44...a3 45 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{E}a4$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ h6 47 h5 g5 wins.



Yusupov – Ljubojević
Linares 1992

Black's extra pawn means little in this general type of ending, but the position of White's king and especially his rook are worrying indeed. If he had any hope left, it was in his opponent, and indeed Ljubojević produced a hasty move...

52... $\mathbb{E}f5?$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ $\mathbb{E}xg5$

53... $\mathbb{E}f1$ 54 $\mathbb{E}a5$ is just a drawn ending.

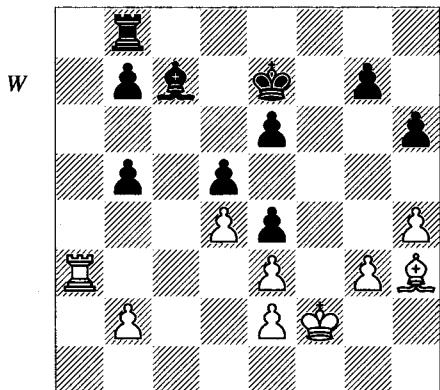
54 hxg5 f6 55 gxf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g5+ 57 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

The point is that 57... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 58 g4+ hgx4+ 59 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ leads to a draw. After all other moves, White keeps the distant opposition, and Black has no way to exploit his extra pawn.

58 $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ ½-½

If Black had not been so careless, and instead continued 52... $\mathbb{E}a3!$, White would have had no good response. After 53 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ f5+ 54 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black wins quickly, while 53 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (or 54 g4 $\mathbb{E}g3$) 54... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ leads to the same result, albeit a little more slowly.

The diagram overleaf features another striking case.



Andersson – Torre
Biel 1977

A great connoisseur of endgames, the Swedish grandmaster used to play stubbornly until nothing but the bare kings were left on the board. Sometimes he overdid it. Instead of taking a draw by 34 $\mathbb{R}c3$ or 34 $h5$, for example, he thought he could squeeze even out of this dry position some little half-chance; Ulf was pleased when he had a quarter-chance to look for. So he played...

34 $\mathbb{R}b3??$

...and was confronted by...

34... $b4!$ 0-1

After 35 $\mathbb{R}xb4$ $b5$ his rook would be stone dead.

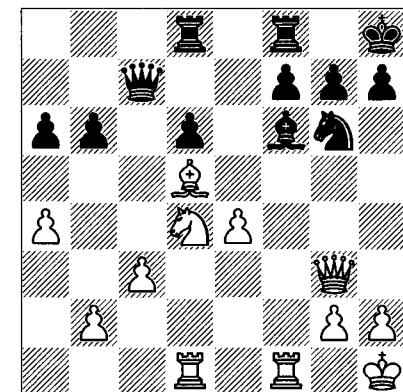
Rooks, Semi-Open Files and Ranks

The series of examples we have just discussed represent the rook at its worst: gone astray, trapped, having lost coordination with the other rook, in the role of a blockader. That is the reverse side of the potent, active rook we encountered earlier. Its life in the endgame moves in between, but mostly in total uncertainty. The saying that all the rook endgames end in a draw only shows how deep are their secrets.

Surprisingly, there are fewer uncertainties about the rook in the middlegame. Some of them we revealed when dealing with the weakness of files. We paid attention to the important theme of winning and commanding a file and

then we went a step further – to explain the purpose of the process: infiltration into the enemy position. No less important is the role of the rook on a semi-open file. Being a weapon of positional pressure as well as of attack, its influence is equally felt on semi-open files. The pressure is often exploited in the form of exchange sacrifices, aimed either at damaging the enemy pawn-structure and weakening the king's position, or at getting the upper hand in the centre by eliminating a minor piece, usually a knight, which props up its pawn-centre; then the whole central structure becomes exposed to counter-attack.

Our interest here is not in the exchange sacrifice itself or the material imbalance caused by it, but in the role of the rook on a semi-open file. So some relevant examples will suffice to throw light on the theme.



Stein – Parma
USSR-Yugoslavia, Lvov 1962

Black's last move was 27... $\mathbb{R}e8-f8$, showing that Parma was aware of the threat hanging in the air, but it was too late to do anything about it.

28 $\mathbb{R}xf6!$

No direct threats follow this exchange sacrifice and no material gain is entailed in it. Its purpose is in the damage done to the pawn-structure, in the weakened king position and the growing strength of White's centralized pieces.

28... $gxf6$ 29 $\mathbb{R}f2 \mathbb{Q}g8$ 30 $\mathbb{R}f1 \mathbb{R}de8$ 31 $\mathbb{R}f5$

The fact that White can gradually improve the position of his pieces unhampered speaks for itself.

31... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 32 $\mathbb{W}g3$

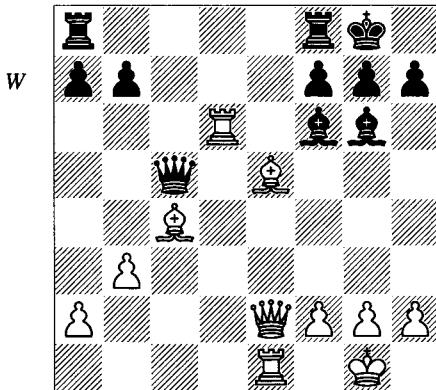
White threatens 33 h4.

32... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{E}e7$ 34 $\mathbb{E}xf6$ $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{E}xf7$ 36 $\mathbb{E}xf7$

The weakness of the back rank helps the winning procedure.

36... $\mathbb{E}e5$ 37 c4 $\mathbb{W}e8$ 38 $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 39 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 41 $\mathbb{E}f5$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 42 h3 0-1

The pin costs a whole rook.



Smyslov – Trifunović
Zagreb 1955

White has accumulated an initiative thanks to his opponent's errors in the opening. Smyslov had enhanced his advantage to the point where the following exchange sacrifice comes as no surprise:

26 $\mathbb{E}xf6!$ $\mathbb{G}xf6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

For the exchange, White gets much more than the approximate material compensation. The strength of his dark-squared bishop accentuates the weakness of the long dark-squared diagonal. Black is already facing mating threats. On 27... $\mathbb{W}f5$, for example, White continues 28 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ when 29 $\mathbb{W}b2$ cannot be prevented.

27... $\mathbb{W}h5$

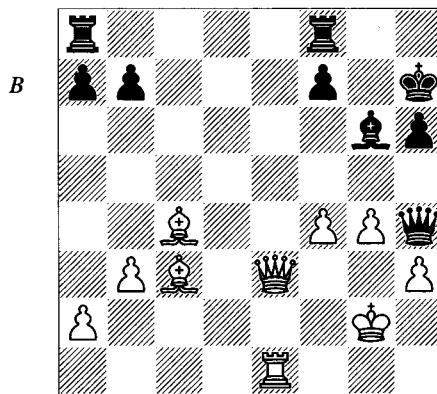
27... $\mathbb{W}c6$ is more tenacious, parrying the direct threats.

28 $\mathbb{W}e3$ h6 29 h3

Black has created some additional space for the king, but now his queen is in a tight spot and is in danger of being chased away. If that happens, the h6-pawn will also become vulnerable; it's easy to imagine White attacking it with $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and $\mathbb{W}e3$.

29... $\mathbb{W}f5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 31 g4 $\mathbb{W}g5$ 32 f4 $\mathbb{W}h4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ (D)

33 f5? $\mathbb{W}ae8!$ gives Black more survival chances.

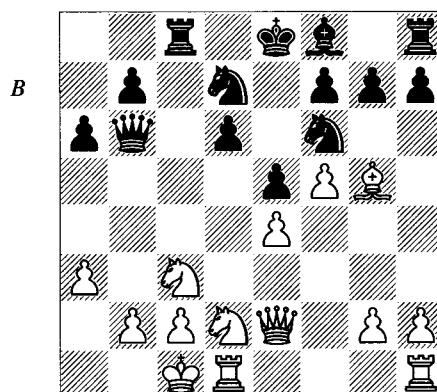


There is time for the quiet text-move because now 33... $\mathbb{W}fe8$ does not work due to 34 $\mathbb{W}xe8$ $\mathbb{W}xe8$ 35 $\mathbb{E}xe8$ f6 36 $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 37 $\mathbb{E}e6$, winning the queen.

33... $\mathbb{W}g8$ 34 $\mathbb{W}e7$

The simplest solution: the ending will be hopeless for Black. Trifunović's position suffered from the same malady as Parma's above.

However, the exchange sacrifice is often used in other ways, notably to affect the state of the centre.



Szabo – Petrosian
Saltsjöbaden/Stockholm IZ 1952

Black has postponed his kingside development, but for a good reason. Exploiting Szabo's superficial opening play and before White can

find time for $\mathbb{Q}c4$, Petrosian strikes at the traditionally vulnerable point c3:

14... $\mathbb{B}xc3!$ 15 $\mathbb{B}xc3$ d5

Black makes use of the mating threat on a3 to gain ground in the centre.

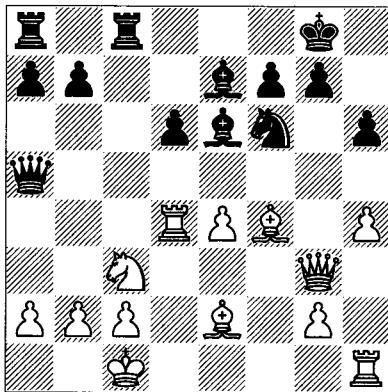
16 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

17 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is no better; Black can choose between 17... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ and 17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18 h4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19 hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

Black has gained a clear advantage.

B



Vasiukov – Boleslavsky
Kharkov 1956

White has just played 16 $\mathbb{W}f2-g3$, which seemed a fine solution: it increased the pressure against both d6 and the black king, while also defending the sensitive point c3. But it did not deter Black's reaction...

16... $\mathbb{B}xc3!$ 17 $\mathbb{B}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 18 $\mathbb{W}a3$

18 b3 would be met by 18...d5 with a crushing attack. White is compelled to exchange queens.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 19 $\mathbb{B}xa3$ d5!

Obvious but strong: Black captures a pawn and simultaneously neutralizes the pressure on the d-file. White's power in the centre is gone.

20 $\mathbb{B}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d2?$

b1 is a much quieter place for the king. Besides, the d2-square should be reserved for the bishop. As it is, White will have to give up the bishop-pair, a most inconvenient thing to do in the circumstances.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{B}d8+$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5!

Exploiting the exposed position of the white king in the centre, Black advances his majority.

25 $\mathbb{B}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 26 $\mathbb{B}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$

Not, of course, 26... $\mathbb{Q}c4+?$ because of 27 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$, but the text-move represents a fine solution.

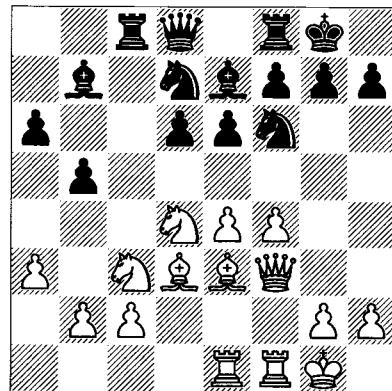
27 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$

Simplifying to an endgame with opposite-coloured bishops appears the best practical chance. 29 $\mathbb{B}a1$ $\mathbb{B}d2$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e4$, for instance, is met by 30... $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$, etc.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{B}d2$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{B}f2+$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ h5!

In the endgame Black was able to create two widely separated passed pawns, which gave him excellent winning chances. (On move 50 Vasiukov resigned.)

W



Donchev – Lukov
Bulgarian Ch (Sofia) 1982

Black's early fianchetto neutralized White's aspirations in the centre. The sacrifice on the semi-open c-file has been in the air for a couple of moves now. Perhaps the fact that he castled kingside made White less cautious and he continued with his plan:

13 g4?

In Yudasin-Kasparov, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988, White saw through the threat and played the stronger 13 $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (13... $\mathbb{B}xc3$ 14 $\mathbb{B}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ does not work due to 15 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$) 14 $\mathbb{Q}f2$, defending the vulnerable point e4. Donchev was too impatient to carry out his initial plan and he stumbled into a tactical stroke...

13... $\mathbb{B}xc3!$ 14 $\mathbb{B}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Whenever the central point e4 comes under strong pressure, the semi-open c-file can be put to good use. White's pawn-structure is damaged and his king stays exposed.

15 ♜c1?!

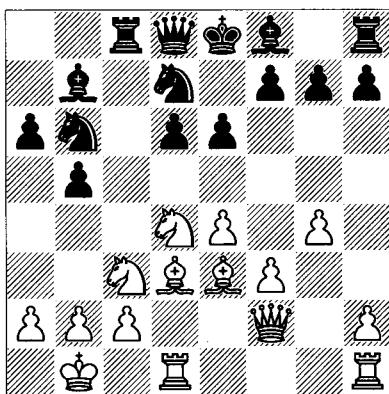
15 ♜f2 is essential.

15...♛a8 16 ♜h3 ♜fxe4 17 f5 e5 18 ♜b3
♜xd3 19 cxd3 ♜g5 20 ♜xg5 ♜xg5 21 ♜f2
♝c8

Black's advantage has become critical.

In all the examples involving the exchange sacrifice we have analysed, the side which offered the material did it for specific reasons and drew some specific, palpable advantages from it. Sometimes, however, the typical exchange sacrifice on the semi-open file, of the kind we have been analysing, has no clear-cut reasons and apparently no clear advantages can be perceived. I was impressed by a sacrificial idea carried out by Garry Kasparov in the following game.

B



Movsesian – Kasparov
Sarajevo 2000

White's last move was 13 ♜f1-d3, completing his basic development, but it smells of superficiality. Be it as it may, the champion was the wrong person to provoke in this way.

13...♝xc3! 14 bxc3 ♜c7

Discussing this situation in *New in Chess*, Kasparov does not say much about the sacrifice, because it was a natural thing to do, but he was not certain about the queen move: he preferred 14...♝a4, reserving the possibility of ...♛a5 and speeding up his development.

15 ♜e2 ♜e7 16 g5 0-0

At first glance the decision to castle kingside seems risky, but the course of the game corroborates the soundness of the judgement. To put it simply – the white king is in a more precarious position on b1 than the black king is on g8, because Black's counterattack is quicker.

17 h4 ♜a4 18 ♜c1

Played obviously to meet 18...♜xc3, but the question is whether the tempo could be put to better use.

18...♝e5

Black provokes 19 f4 in order to punish it energetically by 19...♜xd3 20 cxd3 d5 21 e5 b4 22 cxb4 d4.

19 h5 d5!

A standard theme: Black meets play on the flank with a central counterblow.

20 ♜h2

This is a good defensive move that also contains some attacking threats.

20...♝d6 21 ♜h3?

There is no time to spend a tempo like this. The accumulated energy gets released in response and I do not see how White could save the game after it. 21 ♜f4 is essential, planning 21...♜xc3+ 22 ♜xc3 ♛xc3 23 g6, whereupon 23...dxe4 fails to 24 h6 and 23...♝xf3 could be met by 24 gxh7+ (not 24 ♛g3? due to 24...♝a3 25 ♜c1 ♜xc1, etc.) 24...♝h8 25 ♜xd6!. For example, 25...♜xh2 26 ♜xf8 dxe4 27 h6 gxh6 28 ♜e2. Of course, Black can play 23...♝a3 24 ♜xe5 d4 25 gxh7+ ♜h8 26 ♜xd4 ♛b4+ 27 ♜a1 ♜xd4+ 28 c3 ♛xc3+ keeping a pleasant game, but White has avoided the type of sharp attack he faces after the text-move. In his *NiC* annotations, Kasparov gives as a winning continuation a long intricate line starting 21...b4! 22 cxb4 ♜c8 23 ♜c1 d4, but the impression is not so firm.

21...♜xd3 22 cxd3 b4!

This will open the king's position before White manages to create concrete attacking chances.

23 cxb4

Or:

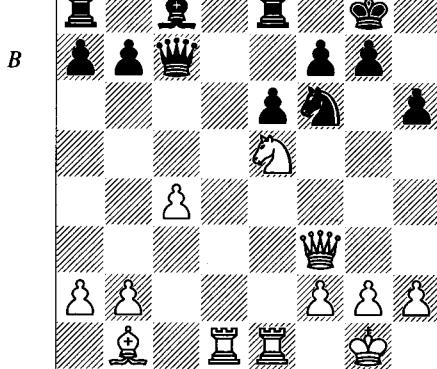
a) 23 g6 ♜xc3+ 24 ♜xc3 bxc3 is good for Black.

b) After 23 c4 dxc4, 24 g6 cxd3 opens the c-file for Black's attack, while 24 d4 c3 25 ♜a1 ♜c4 26 g6 h6 is also to his advantage.

23...♜c8 24 ♜a1

Now, instead of the elegant but complicated 24...dxe4 25 fxe4 ♜xe4, which after 26 g6 led to a protracted fight in the game, Black can finish it off by 24...♜xb4!. For instance: 25 h6 (or 25 ♜h2 ♜c2 26 h6 ♜c3) 25...♜c3+ (if 25...g6, then 26 ♜h2 ♜c2 27 ♜e5) 26 ♜xc3 ♜xc3+ 27 ♜b1 ♜b4+ 28 ♜a1 ♜xc1+ 29 ♜xc1 ♜b2#.

Although the principal aims of the rook are to exert pressure on semi-open files or to infiltrate via an open file, they are not the only fruit we can collect from the rook's operations. Commanding a file often implies we can use it to lift the rook along the ranks to the wings. We normally do this to prepare an attack. The third and the fourth ranks are naturally exploited for the purpose, but not so rarely the fifth too. The rook-lift is an important theme, and we should spend some time examining it.



Shakhzadze – Schaiber
Stalinabad 1949

White's pieces are ideally placed, and Black has fallen behind in development. He must still squander a couple of tempi to bring the bishop into play (1...♝d7 fails to 2 ♜xd7).

1...♜b8 2 ♜d4!

The centralized rook opens up various possibilities: doubling rooks on the open d-file or lifting it via the fourth rank to the kingside; but there is another idea, too...

2...♝b6 3 ♜f4??

The point is in further frustrating Black's development (3...♝b7 4 ♜d7 repeats the scene from above), while opening the third rank for the king's rook. White wants more than 3 ♜d3 ♜b7 4 ♜d7 ♜bd8 5 ♜xf6+ gxf6 6 ♜h7+ ♜f8 7

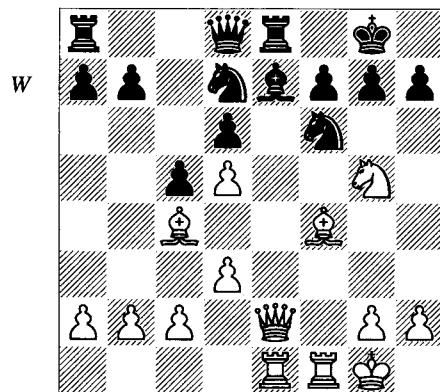
♜xh6+, when Black is a pawn down but very much alive.

3...♜f8 4 ♜e3 ♜b7?

4...♝d5! forces White into the murky 5 ♜xh6 f5 6 ♜h3 ♜xe3 7 ♜xe3.

5 ♜xf6! 1-0

5...gxsf6 6 ♜g3+ ♜h8 7 ♜h4 leads to mate.



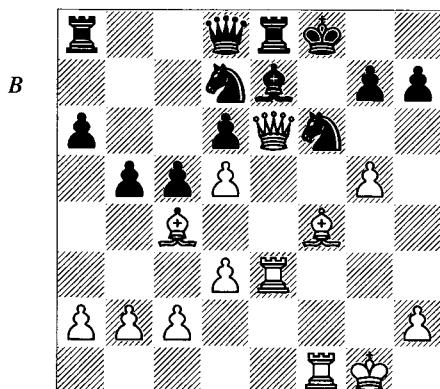
Volokitin – Kožul
Portorož Vidmar mem 2001

The first question every strong player would ask upon seeing this position is: does 15 ♜xf7 work? Volokitin was sure it worked and was able to back up this conviction:

15 ♜xf7! ♜xf7 16 ♜e6+ ♜f8 17 g4

Played for obvious reasons, but not necessary. The immediate 17 ♜e3! wins cleanly; e.g., 17...♜c8 18 ♜h6! paralyses Black before the final stroke, 19 ♜g3; 17...♝e5 18 ♜xe5 ♜c8 19 ♜xf6, etc.; or 17...♝b6 18 ♜h6 ♜d7 19 ♜g3!.

17...a6 18 g5 b5 19 ♜e3! (D)



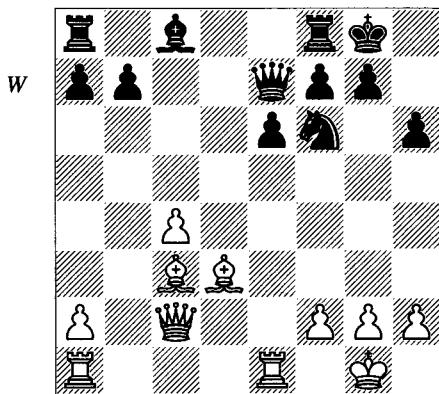
A nice point! The rook is lifted to the third rank to strike the fatal blow.

19... $\mathbb{Q}e5$

19... $\mathbb{B}xc4$ is refuted by 20 $\mathbb{G}xf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{G}xh6$ (21... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$) 22 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ with mate next move.

20 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 21 $g6!$ 1-0

21... $\mathbb{H}xg6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ leads to mate.



Alekhine – Colle

Bled 1931

Black enters the middlegame a pawn up, but visibly behind in development and under pressure from the strong bishop-pair.

19 $\mathbb{R}ab1!$

This is more precise than 19 $\mathbb{Q}e3$, when Black replies 19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ followed by 20... $\mathbb{Q}c6$. The point of the text-move is not so much to threaten 20 $\mathbb{Q}b4$, but to activate the rook on the semi-open file, on which it keeps an eye on b7 and, if necessary, can be lifted to the kingside via b5.

19... $\mathbb{R}d8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Moving the rook into an attacking position will significantly increase the pressure exerted by the bishops.

20... $b6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Caving in to pressure usually just invites more pressure. 22... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ is better, intending to meet the recommended 23 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ with 23... $\mathbb{Q}h8$, when 24 $\mathbb{Q}b5$, threatening 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{G}xf6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}h5$, is parried by 24... $\mathbb{Q}e4!$. However, 23 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ would justify White's 19th move; all the white pieces would join the attack.

23 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}b2!$

Danger comes from all sides. Black must open his shell.

24... $f6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

A new target has been created and the victim attracts the free-moving rooks on the e-file.

26... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27 $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

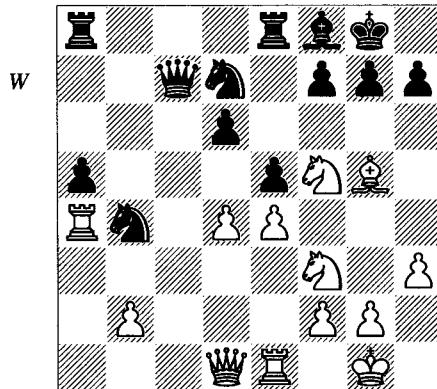
Trading two rooks for the queen would not be wise; the seriously weakened pawn-structure calls for action.

28... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $f5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$

It's time to take the reward. Not, of course, 31 $\mathbb{Q}xe6?$ due to 31... $\mathbb{Q}e4$, when Black beats off the attack.

31... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Black has no good reply.



Keres – Gligorić

Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade Ct 1959

In the jungle of the Ruy Lopez, Paul Keres could hear every single rustle. Having obtained a pleasant position from the opening, his thoughts, as usual, were concentrated on the enemy king. His next move, taking care of the c2-square in passing, leaves no misgivings about his intentions.

22 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $d5?!$

22... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ has been prevented and 22... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ hardly comes into consideration. The text-move on the other hand opens new possibilities for the queen's rook; it is as if Keres sensed his opponent's response.

23 $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Gligorić had intended 25... $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but upon noticing 26 $\mathbb{Q}h6+!$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ (27 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

$\mathbb{W}xd1$ 28 $\mathbb{B}xd1$ occurred to me, but I had to abandon the idea on account of 28... $\mathbb{B}a6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30 $exd5\mathbb{B}a7$ 27... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28 $\mathbb{W}d4!$, he gave it up. Indeed, 28... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ does not work due to 29 $\mathbb{Q}h6+\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30 $\mathbb{B}xf8+$ and mate, while 28... $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 29 $\mathbb{B}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 30 $\mathbb{W}b6$ also poses real danger; 30...d4, for example, loses to 31 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ d3 32 $\mathbb{W}e6$.

26 $\mathbb{B}g3\mathbb{B}a6?$

Although it perilously weakens the dark squares around the king, 26...g6 was essential. What follows is a winning stroke and some fine details of realization.

27 $\mathbb{W}xg7+!\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 28 $\mathbb{W}g4\mathbb{W}xf5$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xf5\mathbb{B}f6$

Further simplification through 29... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 30 $\mathbb{B}e3\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 31 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $dxe4$ 32 $\mathbb{B}xe4\mathbb{B}xe4$ 33 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ is inadequate because 33... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ loses to 34 $\mathbb{W}b7$ and otherwise he just faces a slow death. On 29... $\mathbb{B}a6$ Keres had in mind 30 $\mathbb{B}c1$, threatening 31 $\mathbb{B}c7$.

30 $\mathbb{W}d7\mathbb{B}fe6$ 31 $\mathbb{B}e3$

This rook follows in the tracks of the other one. The attack continues powerfully.

31... $dxe4$

31... $\mathbb{B}xe4?$ 32 $\mathbb{W}xe8+$ mates.

32 $\mathbb{B}g3$

Threatening 33 $\mathbb{Q}h6$.

32... $\mathbb{B}a8$ 33 $\mathbb{W}d4\mathbb{B}g6$ 34 $\mathbb{W}xe4\mathbb{B}c8$ 35 b3

...and Black's position proved untenable.

bishops, the lack of coordination in Black's position will tell against it. The first step taken by Topalov hints at things to come.

24 $\mathbb{B}d3!$

White detects the weakness of the f7-pawn.

24... $\mathbb{B}ad8$

On 24... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ there is 25 $\mathbb{B}e1\mathbb{W}f6$ (otherwise $\mathbb{B}xe6+$) 26 $\mathbb{B}f3\mathbb{W}g6$ 27 $\mathbb{B}xf7+\mathbb{W}xf7$ 28 $\mathbb{B}xe6+\mathbb{Q}f8$ 29 $\mathbb{B}xd6$, etc.

25 $\mathbb{B}f3\mathbb{Q}e5$ 26 $\mathbb{B}e1\mathbb{f}6$

Black has temporarily built a dam on the e-file, but in order to prop up the bishop, the e6-pawn has been permanently weakened.

27 $\mathbb{W}h5$

White offers the b2-pawn for the second time and with good reason: after 27... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 28 $\mathbb{B}b3\mathbb{W}d2$ 29 $\mathbb{B}b7+\mathbb{B}d7$ 30 $\mathbb{B}eb1$ (unfortunately, 30 $\mathbb{B}xe5\mathbb{fxe}5$ 31 $\mathbb{W}g6\mathbb{B}xb7$ is not enough for victory) one feels that the pressure exerted from both wings must bear fruit.

27... $\mathbb{W}b4$ 28 $\mathbb{B}xe5!\mathbb{W}xc4$

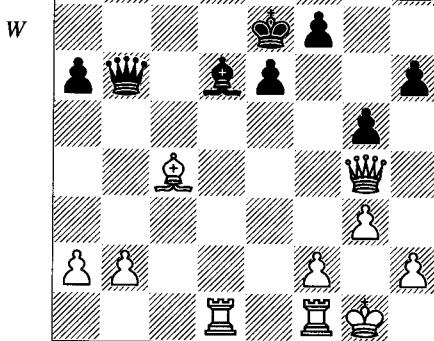
28... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 29 $\mathbb{B}f7+$ is fatal in view of 29... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 30 $\mathbb{W}xe6+\mathbb{Q}c7$ 31 $\mathbb{B}f7+\mathbb{Q}b8$ 32 $\mathbb{W}xa6$.

29 $\mathbb{B}e1\mathbb{W}xa2$ 30 $\mathbb{W}g6\mathbb{B}hf8$ 31 $\mathbb{W}xh6\mathbb{W}xb2$

The reduction of material has made the king more naked than it was. No wonder that tactical blows will finish it off.

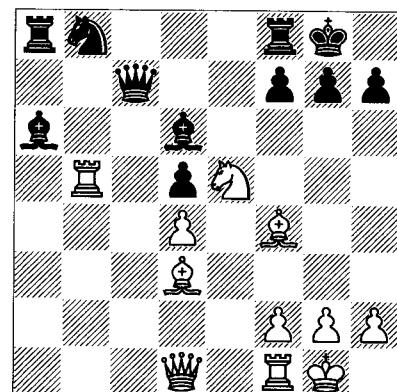
32 $\mathbb{W}g7+\mathbb{B}f7$ 33 $\mathbb{B}xe6+\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 34 $\mathbb{B}e3+$

White has excellent winning chances.



Topalov – Anand
Dortmund 2001

Although the black king is protected by pawns and in spite of the opposite-coloured



Anand – Karpov
Las Palmas 1996

By playing 20... $\mathbb{B}b7-a6$, Black hoped to swap the light-squared bishops and reduce the pressure on his king. But White was a step ahead.

21 ♜xh7+! ♕xh7 22 ♜h5+ ♔g8 23 ♜b3

Anand's attack depends on this rook-lift.

23...♜xe5?!

The course of the game demonstrates that this was premature. Preventing ♜h3 by 23...♜c8 is not of much help either because 24 ♜g3 proves equally crushing in view of the inevitable 25 ♜h6. Dzindzichashvili refuted 24...♝e7 25 ♜h6 ♜xe5 26 dxe5 g6 with 27 e6! ♜xe6 (27...♝xe6 28 ♜xf8) 28 ♜e5. But 23...f6 is tougher, although 24 ♜h3 fxe5 25 dxe5 ♜c4 (or 25...♜xf6 26 e6) 26 ♜e1 ♜xf4 27 ♜h7+ ♔f7 28 exd6 keeps a clear advantage.

24 ♜h3 f6 25 dxe5 ♜e7

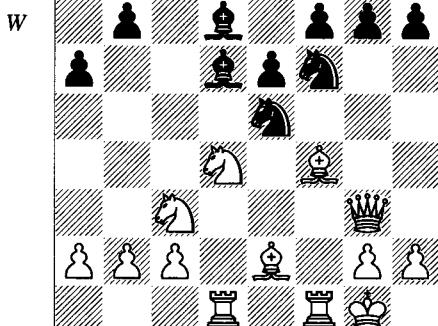
25...♜c4 is not so convincing as above because of 26 ♜e1 ♜xf4 27 ♜h8+ ♔f7 28 e6+ ♜e7 29 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 30 e7+, etc.

26 ♜h7+ ♔f7 27 ♜g3 ♜e8

Or 27...♜g8 28 ♜g6+ ♔f8 29 exf6 ♜xf6 30 ♜d6+, etc.

28 ♜xg7 ♜e6 29 exf6 ♜c6 30 ♜a1 ♜d8 31 h4

...and the defence was running out of steam.



Ljubojević – Andersson

Wijk aan Zee 1976

After a pawn sacrifice on e5 the pin and the pressure exerted on the d-file obliged Black to fight for his life. Feeling the heat, Andersson has just played 15...♜c7-b8, vacating the c7-square for the bishop, and for a moment it appeared he would keep the extra pawn without much trouble. But Ljubojević was up to the difficult task of keeping his initiative alive.

16 ♜d3!

By lifting the rook to the third rank, White gives his attack new life; he threatens 17 ♜e3.

16...♜e8

16...♜d5 would not prevent White's threat due to the crushing 17 ♜f5, nor would 16...♜c4 get rid of the pin due to 17 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 18 ♜xf6, when the other pin wins material.

17 ♜e4 ♜c6

Following his healthy sense for defence and his plan, Black avoids the unclear 17...♜xd3 18 ♜xd6 ♜a7, when Ljubojević had in mind 19 c3!.

18 ♜c3 ♜c6!

A tough guy, the little Swede! When you think you've got him, he slips out. To meet 19 ♜xc7, 18...f6 was less appealing due to 19 ♜c5. Black opts exactly for what seemed impossible because of 19 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 20 ♜f6+. But it turns out it's not a forced reply.

19 ♜xc7 ♜xd4 20 ♜d3 ♜a7 21 ♜c5

Normally one would not put the knight on c5, but it is necessary to control the f5-square (now 21...♜f5 22 ♜xf5 exf5 23 ♜e5 would please White). Besides, White feels that his initiative is slipping away, but true to himself continues to press. Black, on the other hand, still a pawn up, avoids the levelling 21...♜xc7 and gets ambitious; the tension rises again...

21...♜b5 22 ♜e5 ♜c6

22...♜xd3 23 ♜xd4 ♜xf1 would win the exchange but due to 24 ♜xe6 risk the whole game. Andersson plays this game as a true great defender: he risks little but presses his opponent to prove the pawn sacrifice was valid.

23 ♜xh7+ ♔xh7 24 ♜f4?

A familiar scene: this time it's the king's rook to be lifted into the attack. Ljubojević wants the win at all costs. White threatens 25 ♜h4+ ♔g8 26 ♜h3, when Black has no way to prolong his resistance. However, this was the point when White's ambition prevailed over common-sense. 24 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 25 ♜xg7+ followed by perpetual check was the best he could get. Now the tide should turn against him.

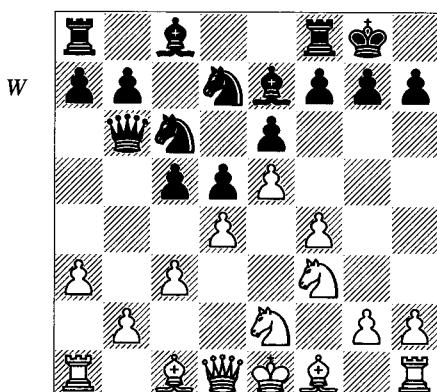
24...f6?!

Various annotators have pointed out stronger solutions in 24...f5 25 ♜h4+ ♔g8 26 a4 ♜xe5 27 ♜xe5 ♜d7 and 24...♜xe5 25 ♜h4+ ♔g8 26 ♜xe5 ♜b6!. They are both advantageous for Black, but even the text-move is not as bad as some of them make it sound.

25 $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26 $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ b6 28 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 30 $\mathbb{W}e4$ g5?

Having defended for a long time against White's ingeniously supported initiative, Black, as often happens when we defend complex positions, falls apart. Unfortunately, an extraordinary game was spoilt at the very end. The hidden defence 30... $\mathbb{W}xa2!$ 31 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ (31 $\mathbb{W}xa8$ is bad due to the exposed position of the white king) 31... $\mathbb{W}f7$ forces White to take perpetual check.

31 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}ch3$ $\mathbb{W}g7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}af7$ 34 a4 1-0



Anand – Shirov
Frankfurt rpd 2000

Black used to play this variation in a slightly different version, in which ...f6 preceded castling. The fact that Black has already castled prompted White into the following continuation.

10 h4 f6 11 $\mathbb{Q}h3$

Our position differs a great deal from numerous cases in which this manoeuvre was used to storm the black king. The light-squared bishop is still buried on f1 and the conditions for an attack do not as yet exist.

11... $\mathbb{Q}a5?$

We learn from our errors. In a later game, Anand-Shirov, Teheran FIDE Wch (4) 2000, Shirov improved on his play and kept the queen-side under control by 11...a5, which seems more appropriate.

12 b4 cxb4 13 axb4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

The knight has achieved its desired position, but sitting on c4 it does little.

14 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ a5?

While the clouds are gathering on the king-side, Black is trying to give some sense to 13... $\mathbb{Q}c4$, but the fact that the a-pawn is pinned makes the operation too slow. 14...fxe5 looks to me consistent with the whole idea Black applied in the opening.

15 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ f5

And indeed, it's too late for 15...fxe5 because of the routine 16 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g6$ threatening 20 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ with a quick mate. The text-move protects the king from the worst, but does not spare Black from the enduring pressure on the kingside.

16 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

16... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 17 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ (but not 17...g6? 18 $\mathbb{Q}h5$, when the attack penetrates) 18 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19 g4 is advantageous for White.

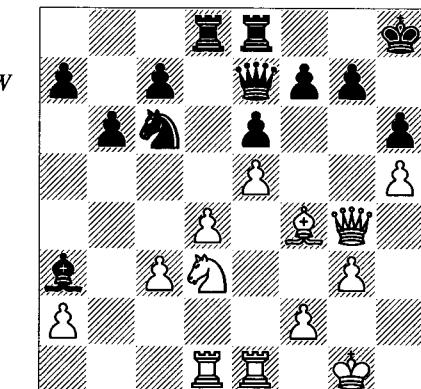
17 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xg5$

Much better than 18 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$. White's idea started by the manoeuvre h4 and $\mathbb{Q}h3$ fulfills its intentions.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g6 21 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ dxc4 22 b5

The last little stone in the mosaic: the dark-squared bishop joins the kingside forces in the final attack.

22... $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b6 24 $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 27 $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 1-0



Kramnik – Karpov
Dortmund 1997

White's initial advantage has been transformed into a spatial preponderance on the

kingside, but no weak spots can be discerned in the defensive formation and to make headway is not an easy task. It is clear, however, that the kingside is the sector in which further action can be expected.

21 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$

This is one of those moves we do not expect and it takes some time until we grasp the idea. The rook moves to the fourth rank to support a later pawn advance on the kingside, but also as a defensive measure against potential counter-pressure in the centre (by ...c5).

21... $\mathbb{W}d7$

The alternative was 21... $\mathbb{Q}a5$, followed by 22...c5, but Karpov probably felt his bishop was out of play, his king's position needed more protection and, besides, 22... $\mathbb{W}d5$ would activate the queen quickly.

22 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

The king's position is not so impenetrable and an inadvertent step like 22... $\mathbb{W}d5$ would be enough for a sudden collapse after 23 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$.

23 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 24 g4!

Utterly consistent with the preparatory moves played up until now.

24... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 25 g5 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 26 fxe3

Given that ...c5 would now be too late and result in only feeble pressure on d4, White should play 26 $\mathbb{W}xe3$ hgx5 27 $\mathbb{W}xg5$, when it is easy to imagine an irresistible attack on the g- and h-files, probably including a knight sacrifice on g6. The text-move stabilizes the pawn-centre for good and opens the f-file, but unnecessarily gives up a pawn and eases the defence.

26...hxg5 27 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ f6 30 e4

30 h6 is simpler and more logical. Having played 26 fxe3 to guard the centre against the counterblow ...c5, White should carry out his plan consistently.

30... $\mathbb{W}a3??$

What I do not like about White's last move is that it gives Black the option of 30...c5!?. The queen's sally to a3 and especially grabbing the c3-pawn while the house is on fire looks irresponsible.

31 exf6 $\mathbb{W}xc3??$

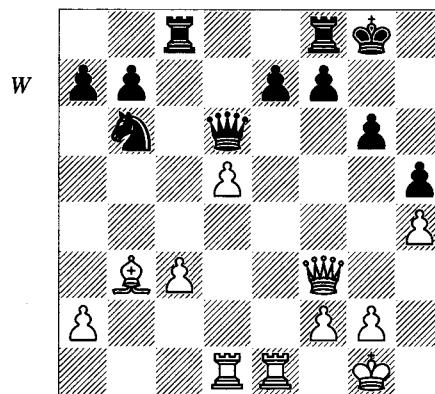
31...gxf6 is essential in order to continue resistance.

32 f7 $\mathbb{Q}c8$

If 32... $\mathbb{Q}ed8$ then 33 $\mathbb{Q}e5$.

33 d5 exd5 34 e5

Black is now definitely lost.



Smyslov – Liberzon

Moscow 1969

Temporarily, the white central pawns are blockaded and the bishop blocked by its own pawn. For the time being, the black queen does a good job blockading the pawn and keeping an eye on the vulnerable kingside. But White commands a spatial advantage and knows how to use it...

18 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Black must already worry about White playing g4.

19 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

Black feels the danger and he would like to transfer the knight to f6, but at the moment 19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is not possible due to 20 $\mathbb{Q}fe4$, followed if necessary by 21 $\mathbb{W}e3$. 19... $\mathbb{Q}cd8$ is better; the rooks should stay coordinated on the back rank.

20 $\mathbb{Q}e6$

The first sign of danger: the queen is an unreliable blockader.

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

Note that 20... $\mathbb{W}c5$ loses to 21 $\mathbb{Q}xg6+!$.

21 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

The queen reluctantly returns to d6. Again 21... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is out of the question due to 22 d6.

22 $\mathbb{Q}fe4$

White's spatial advantage gives him room to manoeuvre. White has managed to lift both rooks to attacking positions, thwarting Black's defensive schemes.

22...a5??!

Wishing to weaken the position of the bishop, Black only weakens his own knight.

23 a4 ♕f6? 24 ♜f4 ♖d6 25 ♜e6! ♖c5

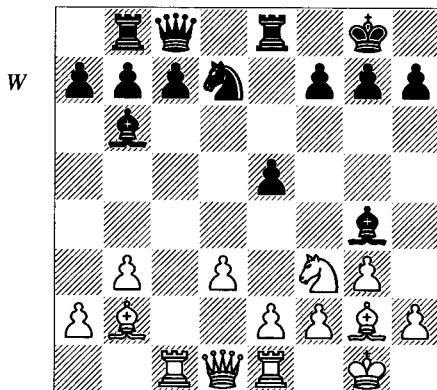
We understand now why 22...a5 was bad; Black cannot play 25...♖d8 and the black pieces are cut off from the king's position. The *coup de grâce* follows...

26 ♜xg6+! fxg6

Or 26...♜xg6 27 ♜g3+ ♔h7 28 ♜f5 ♜c6 29 ♜c2.

27 ♜xf8 ♖xc3 28 ♜f7+ ♔h6 29 ♜f4+ ♔g7 30 ♜f7+ ♔g8 31 d6 ♖xb3 32 ♜f8+ 1-0

We have already discussed the fact that of all the pieces on the board, the queen is the worst blockader and we use the queen as a blockader only in case of dire need; first, because whenever attacked by minor pieces it must retreat; second, because it's too valuable to squander its enormous dynamic potential on a static duty. Here the clumsiness of the queen granted White time to lift both his rooks into the attack.



Korchnoi – Arnason
Beersheba 1987

Black has emerged from the opening somewhat cramped, but with no visible weakness. Yet the very next move destabilizes the seemingly peaceful scene.

19 ♜c4!

Making use of the c-file and the empty fourth rank, White suddenly makes the kingside the centre of attention. The justification is in his slight spatial advantage and the pressure exerted

on the e5-pawn (and along the a1-h8 diagonal as a whole).

19...♝e6?

19...♝f5 is more cautious. Korchnoi gave 20 ♜c1 in *Informator*, continuing 20...f6 21 d4 e4 22 ♜h4 ♜e6 23 ♜xe4 with a promising exchange sacrifice. 20...h6 is of no avail due to 21 ♜a1, but instead of the weakening 20...f6? Black should play 20...♜d8. Therefore the immediate 20 ♜a1 looks better.

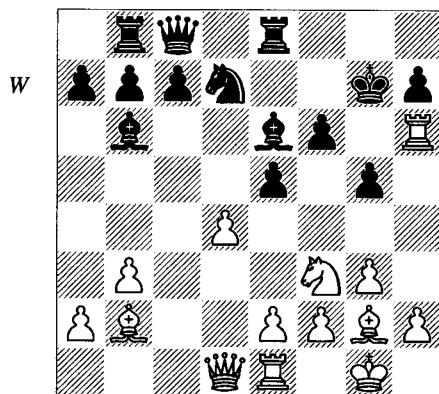
20 ♜h4 f6 21 d4!

This is the point of the previous manoeuvre. 21...e4 is prevented while 21...exd4 22 ♜xd4 is clearly advantageous for White. However, the text-move leads to far-reaching tactical complications one can hardly calculate.

21...g5

This move opens the king's position invitingly, but there was no real alternative.

22 ♜h6 ♔g7 (D)



23 dx5 ♔xh6 24 exf6

Two pawns would not be much in the way of compensation if it were not for the perilous position of the black king. White threatens 25 ♜xg5.

24...♜g8

This move protects the king against the aforementioned sacrifice. On 24...♜g6, planning to parry 25 ♜xg5 by 25...♜xf6, Korchnoi had in mind 25 ♜d2 h6 26 ♜h4+ ♔f7 27 ♜c2 ♜f8 28 ♜f3 with a tremendous attack.

25 ♜d2 ♜h5 26 h3 ♜c5 27 g4+ ♜xg4

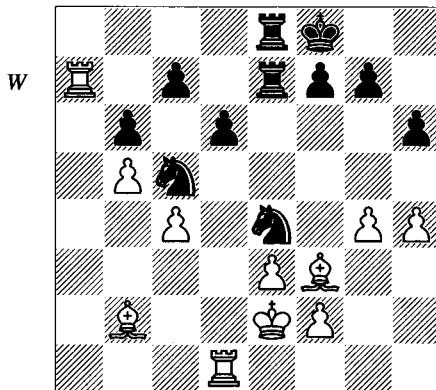
Giving back a good part of his booty is a bad sign for Black, but he had to accept the reality: 27...♔h6 cannot lead to anything good; Korchnoi saw a pretty refutation – 28 ♜xg5 ♜xg5 29

h4 $\mathbb{W}g8$ 30 b4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 31 f7 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 32 hgx5+ $\mathbb{W}xg5$
33 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$!

28 hgx4+ $\mathbb{W}xg4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Black has run out of good answers: 29... $\mathbb{W}f5$ 30 e4 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 31 $\mathbb{M}e3$ g4 32 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$; 29... $\mathbb{W}f4$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}g2$; or 29... $\mathbb{W}h4$ 30 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 31 e3, etc.

This as well as the previous examples illustrate how ranks are used as supply lines for an attack. It's mostly the third or the fourth rank which remain vacant after the opening skirmishes. Rarely, but it happens, the first rank is exploited for the same purpose.



Kramnik – Ulybin
Khalkidiki 1992

Although White's game is freer, the open file is in his hands and his bishops can awake at any moment, it is not quite clear how to proceed here. Black's knights at least temporarily thwart any initiative. But Kramnik was up to the task...

36 g5!

An unusual pawn sacrifice; trying to recall anything similar, I could not. A pawn for an open file, be it the g- or h-file, is nothing new, but in the type of formation we have on the board it strikes me as quite original.

36...hxg5 37 hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{M}c8$ 39 $\mathbb{M}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}aa1!$

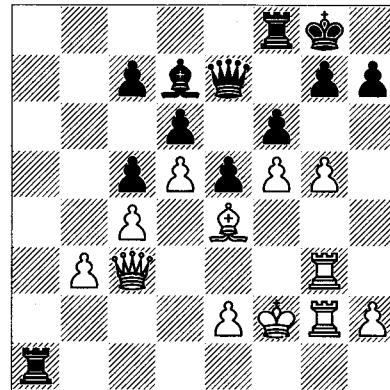
There is nothing that the white rook can do on a7 and Kramnik redeploys it along the first rank. It is bound for the other open file and into the mating attack.

40... $\mathbb{Q}ce6$ 41 $\mathbb{M}h4$ f6

Blocking the h-file by 41... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 42 $\mathbb{M}ah1$ $\mathbb{Q}ef8$ leaves Black suffocating.

42 $\mathbb{M}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 43 $\mathbb{M}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 44 $\mathbb{M}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 45 $\mathbb{M}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black will soon be in zugzwang. Kramnik demonstrated an excellent idea.



Khalifman – Liang Chong
China-Russia (Shanghai) 2001

White's pressure on the kingside looks dangerous, but we soon realize that winning the queen for two rooks would be a bad bargain, which justifies Black's continuation...

28... $\mathbb{M}aa8!$

If $gxf6$ is not a threat, then redeploying the rook along the first rank is quite sensible. The f5-pawn is shaky and doubling rooks on the f-file will make it apparent.

29 $\mathbb{Q}g1$

29 g6 would solve the defence of the f5-pawn, but the blockade would transfer the struggle to the queenside, where Black's chances are better.

29...fxg5 30 $\mathbb{M}xg5$ $\mathbb{M}f7$ 31 $\mathbb{M}h5$ $\mathbb{M}f6$ 32 $\mathbb{W}h3$ g6

White has some problems due to the weakness of his first two ranks together with the pin.

33 $\mathbb{M}g3$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 34 $\mathbb{W}h4?$

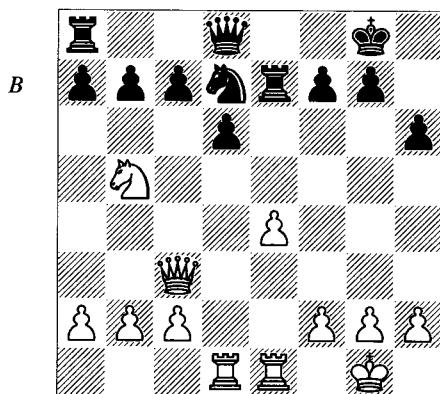
Eager to get out of the pin, Khalifman commits the decisive mistake. Correct is 34 $\mathbb{M}hg5$ $\mathbb{M}f8$ 35 $\mathbb{M}f3$, when Black will not be able to exploit the pin (35... $\mathbb{W}g7$ 36 $\mathbb{W}h4$).

34... $\mathbb{M}xf5$ 35 $\mathbb{M}xf5$ $\mathbb{M}xf5$ 36 $\mathbb{M}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 37 $\mathbb{M}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 38 $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 39 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

Black is a healthy pawn up.

Lifting a rook into the attack along a rank has been a widely used idea since Alekhine's time. But moving the rook into the battle area is not

the only purpose we encounter. Sometimes the rook gets centralized just to increase its activity.



Tarrasch – Em. Lasker
Düsseldorf Wch (4) 1908

White has achieved a spatial advantage and his better developed and coordinated pieces prompted him to look for more than the position objectively offered. His previous move, 15 $\mathbb{W}d4-c3$, looks rather too ambitious and Black's answer confirms this impression...

15... $\mathbb{E}e5$!

A clever way to defend the c7-pawn. The knight must retreat to a less favourable place than c3, where it could have gone a move earlier. The rook, on the contrary, becomes active on the fifth rank.

16 $\mathbb{Q}d4$

16 $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{B}xb5$ 17 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 19 $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ favours Black.

16... $\mathbb{E}c5$

16... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is perfectly good, but moving the rook along the fifth rank makes the play unbalanced and more to Lasker's liking.

17 $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 18 $f4$

There is nothing wrong with this move, but I would prefer the more modest 18 $\mathbb{E}e3$. One feels that the text-move strains the position unpleasantly.

18... $\mathbb{W}f6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 20 $c3$ $a5$ 21 $b3$ $a4$

A good provocative move.

22 $b4??$

This is an erroneous assessment for the simple reason that the black rook stands better on c4 than on c5. Objectively the position is still in

the balance, but there is some new uncertainty in the air which favours Black and his less exposed structure. The rook on c4 provokes ideas of refutation. Tarrasch could not get rid of the impression that a later $\mathbb{Q}b5$ would seize the initiative while the rook on c4 would remain passive and out of play. This was exactly the type of mirage to which Lasker's opponents would often succumb. The rook manoeuvre is not just an original idea, but it contains a dose of poison. 22 $c4$ was natural.

22... $\mathbb{E}c4$ 23 $g3$

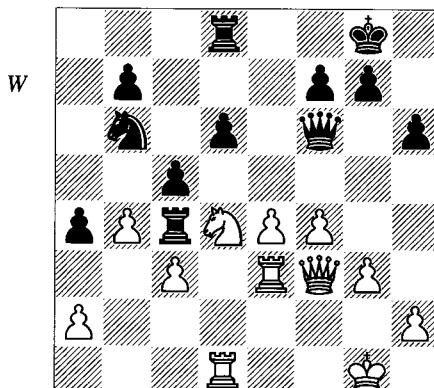
White was planning $e5$ sooner or later and to do that he decided to defend the $f4$ -pawn. Against 23 $\mathbb{Q}b5$, threatening to squeeze Black by playing $\mathbb{Q}a3$ and $\mathbb{E}d4$, Black would react by 23... $\mathbb{E}d8$ 24 $\mathbb{E}e3$ $d5$ with equal chances (V.Vuković). But White continues to believe he holds a significant advantage.

23... $\mathbb{E}d8$!

A difficult move to find and a difficult decision to take.

24 $\mathbb{E}e3$ $c5$ (D)

Had White instead of 23 $g3$ played 23 $\mathbb{Q}b5$, this freeing move would have been impossible due to 25 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $cx b4$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 27 $\mathbb{E}ed3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 28 $e5$. Here, however, it sets Black free.



25 $\mathbb{Q}b5?$

Correct is 25 $bx c5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$ with level play, but Tarrasch had been planning this tactical stroke on $d6$ since his 23rd move, and sticks to his plan.

25... $\mathbb{C}xb4$ 26 $\mathbb{E}xd6$ $\mathbb{B}xd6$ 27 $e5$ $\mathbb{E}xf4!$

A beautiful counterblow! 23 $g3$, after all, was played in vain.

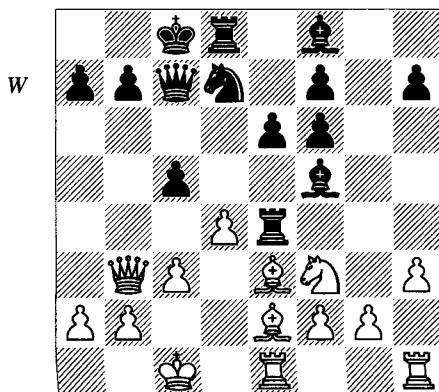
28 $gxf4$

28 exf6 loses to 28... $\mathbb{R}xf3$ 29 $\mathbb{R}xf3$ $\mathbb{R}d5$.

28... $\mathbb{W}g6+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}b1+$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}d2+$ 31 $\mathbb{R}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xa2$

Black's passed pawns will bring him victory.

The next example is as curious and dramatic as Lasker's play.



Levenfish – Konstantinopolsky
Leningrad 1947

A great connoisseur of the Caro-Kann, Konstantinopolsky has reached a type of position he understood deeply and loved to play. Here he had decided he could turn the domination on the semi-open g-file to his advantage and had used it to centralize his rook.

The diagram shows an extraordinary picture. We instinctively wonder what this rook is doing in the middle of a board full of minor pieces. The first impulse is how to try to trap the rook, and that is, judging from the continuation, what Levenfish must have thought when confronted by this brazen rook. However, he was in for a rude awakening.

Now 16 dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 17 $\mathbb{R}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}xe3$ is too ugly to contemplate, but then we see that 16 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ also fails, to 16...cxd4 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18 $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$. Levenfish chose a third possibility, but fared equally poorly:

16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ cxd4 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

The adventurous rook has fallen, but for a good cause. It has been replaced by an active bishop which menaces White's king, while the c5-square acts as a jumping-off point for Black's knight.

18 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

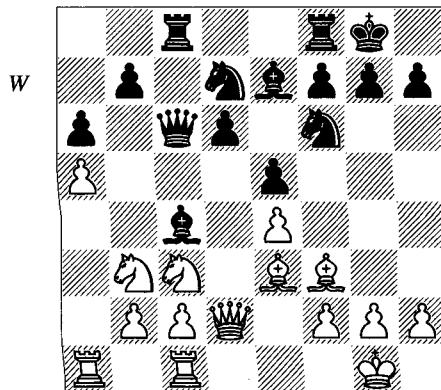
This is abject resignation. White's intended 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ loses to 18... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$: 19 $\mathbb{R}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ and 20... $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ cannot be parried; 19 $\mathbb{W}c4$ is also inadequate, due to 19...b5! 20 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{R}xd4$.

18... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19 $\mathbb{W}b4$

Or 19 $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20 $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dxc3 22 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{R}xd3$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 0-1

When the central files are occupied, for different reasons and purposes the rook's and knight's files (i.e. the a-, b-, g- and h-files) are common routes taken by the rook to join the battle.



Karpov – Portisch
London 1982

The middlegame is starting, and White can be happier with the outcome of the opening stage. There is an inner harmony in the activity of his pieces in the centre and on the queenside. The c3-knight and the f3-bishop see to it that no central thrust is possible, while the advanced pawn on a5, with the support of the b3-knight, the e3-bishop and the queen's rook thwarts any counterplay in that sector. White has achieved a spatial advantage on the wing, which enables him to increase the pressure...

15 $\mathbb{Q}a4!$

We owe it greatly to some of Karpov's games (remember, e.g., his 1974 match against Polugaevsky?) that this rook manoeuvre has become a standard idea in the Najdorf. The hole on b6 attracts the rook and it moves towards its destination.

15... $\mathbb{R}fd8$ 16 $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18 $\mathbb{R}xd5$ f5 19 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

The black light-squared bishop is a barrier to further activity on the queenside. When White played 17 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, he naturally planned how to eliminate the c4-bishop.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xb3??$ 20 $\mathbb{B}xb3$ f4?!

Two errors in two moves. Instead of taking on b3, Black should exchange the bishops and instead of surrendering the dominant central square e4 he should continue 20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, keeping the pawn-structure compact and healthy. Black exchanges pieces light-heartedly, probably relying on the opposite-coloured bishops. We shall see soon the magnitude of the mistaken assessment.

21 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 22 $\mathbb{B}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

A useless move; the e5-pawn will never be allowed to move, so it is better to play 22... $\mathbb{B}f8$ at once.

23 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 24 $\mathbb{B}e1!$

The superbly positioned b6-rook and the g4-bishop hold Black by the throat. The road is paved for the queenside pawn-majority to advance, but before that a detail must be taken care of – 24...e4 must be prevented. By moving to e4, the rook carries out both tasks simultaneously.

24... $\mathbb{R}c5$

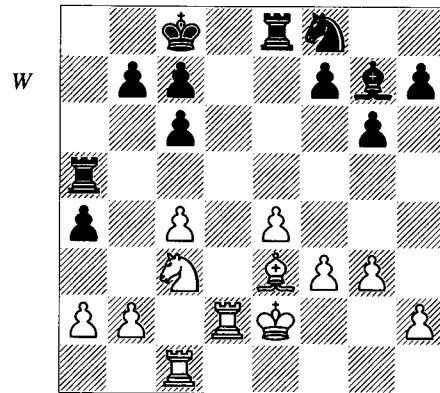
Water to White's mill; it's true, the position is strategically lost, but instead of doing nothing it was better to do something, such as 24... $\mathbb{B}f8$ with the idea of 25... $\mathbb{Q}d8$, for instance. The rest is hardly of any interest.

25 $\mathbb{E}e4$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 26 b4 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 27 c4 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 28 c5 $\mathbb{d}xc5$ 29 d6 $\mathbb{W}d8$ 30 $\mathbb{b}xc5$ f3 31 $\mathbb{W}d5$ $\mathbb{f}xg2$ 32 $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 33 $\mathbb{E}f5$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 35 d7 $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 36 $\mathbb{B}xb7$

...and Black resigned in a couple of moves.

In the following diagram, Black has just played 17... $\mathbb{B}a8-a5!$. Confronting White's pawn-majority on the kingside, the black pieces stand excellently and it is difficult to imagine how White could exploit that majority in the coming phase. On the contrary, one feels uncomfortable with the king eyed by the rook along the e-file and with the strong fianchettoed bishop unopposed on the diagonal. The first impulse, therefore, is to move the king from the e-file; it would stand better on f2. But Gulko had different impressions:

18 a3??



Gulko – Kramnik
Novgorod 1995

The point of this move is to fix the a4-pawn and tie the rook to its defence. On the other hand, given that Black can always take on c3 and that the b-pawn cannot move any longer, the disadvantages look more conspicuous. It is true that 18 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (but not 19 f4 due to 19...g5 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{g}xf4$ 21 $\mathbb{g}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$) 19... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ gets White nowhere, while 18 h4 can be met by 18... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19 f4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ f5. Sometimes one should listen to the first impulse and choose 18 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ in order to remove the king from the gaze of the e8-rook and to vacate the e2-square for the knight; White may need it.

18... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ g5

This is a useful move, discouraging a kingside pawn advance.

20 $\mathbb{Q}cd1?$

White, of course, knows that his pawn-structure will be damaged for good, but obviously believes that the bishop will be a match for the knight; an assessment which the game proves wrong.

20...f5 21 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 22 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ h5

23... $\mathbb{Q}ef8$ would be met by 24 $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$.

24 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ g4 25 f4 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}b6??$

28 c5 is inadequate due to 28... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$, but the text-move leads to an unfavourable rook exchange and a loss of time. White should play 28 $\mathbb{Q}f2$, even though 28...c5 also favours Black.

28... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}d4??$

30 $\mathbb{A}f2$ is more tenacious. The d4-square must stay vacant so that after 30... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (if 30... $b6$, then 31 c5) 31 c5, 31... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ (31... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 32 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 33 $\mathbb{R}a1$) can be met by 32 $\mathbb{R}d4$. Therefore Black should realize his advantage more slowly by 31... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, with ideas of ... $h4$.

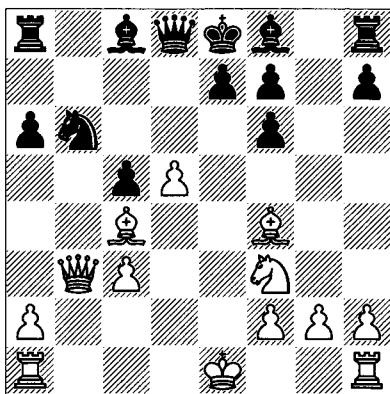
30... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 31 c5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

Threatening 32... $\mathbb{Q}e3+$.

32 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ b5

The endgame is won for Black. 33 $\mathbb{R}a1$ cannot be a long-term solution and 33 cxb6 cxb6, as played in the game, is obviously bad for White.

B



Beliavsky – Ehilst
Belfort 1988

Black still has a lot of pieces on his back rank and his king appears to be stuck precariously in the centre. Despite these worrying signs, Ehilst discovers an unexpected defensive resource...

12... $\mathbb{R}g8!$ 13 0-0 $\mathbb{R}g4$

In just two moves Black's initiative awakens the position.

14 d6

If 14 g3, then 14... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 15 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ is unpleasant, but the text-move opens the long diagonal for Black's queen's bishop and weakens the d-pawn.

14...e6 15 g3 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 16 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17 h3 $\mathbb{R}xf4$!

The attractive possibility of exerting pressure on the diagonals towards the white king fully justifies the slight material sacrifice.

18 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 19 $\mathbb{W}e3??$

On e3 the queen is exposed to the piercing advance of the f-pawn. At the same time Black's answer demonstrates that g3 is vulnerable, which gives his counterplay some additional momentum. Therefore, 19 $\mathbb{W}g4$ is a better way to counter the growing menace on the diagonals.

19... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h2??$

Threatened by 20... $\mathbb{W}c6$, White jumps out of the frying pan into the fire. 20 $\mathbb{R}ab1$, planning a counter-sacrifice on b7, was essential.

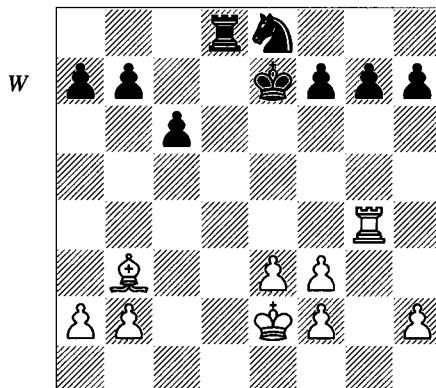
20...f5

This obvious, but very strong, pawn advance shatters the king's protection. Black's initiative, seized by the clever rook inroad on the semi-open g-file, is in full swing. After the further...

21 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f4 22 $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c6$

...the king's position became hopeless.

Passing into the endgame, the chances of lifting the rook along the rank do not diminish. On the contrary, on an emptier board they happen very naturally. A couple of illustrative examples will remind the reader of its importance.



Najdorf – Ståhlberg
Zurich Ct 1953

Najdorf's play in the preceding phase of the struggle has been rewarded by several positional assets: his rook is more active, his bishop superior to the passive knight, and even his king is in a somewhat better position. Perhaps it does not seem so much, but let us see what Najdorf makes out of his mobile rook on the fourth rank.

26 $\mathbb{R}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27 $\mathbb{R}a4$ a6 28 $\mathbb{R}f4$ f6? 29 $\mathbb{R}h4$
h6 30 $\mathbb{R}h5!$

The rook provoked weaknesses by moving along the fourth rank. Black uncritically accepted this, and these weaknesses now burden his position. To stay active, before his central pawns advance the rook moves to the fifth rank to thwart any counterplay.

30... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 31 f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 32 $\mathbb{R}c5$ $\mathbb{R}d6$ 33 $\mathbb{R}c1$

The job would have been completed by 33 f5, permanently fixing the weakness of the king-side pawn-island.

33...b6

Fortunately for White, Ståhlberg does not exploit the imprecision and fails to respond by 33...f5, giving the king some air.

34 f5 c5 35 f4 $\mathbb{R}c6$ 36 a4 b5 37 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$

The bishop anticipates 37...c4 and seeks a new open diagonal, vacating the b3-square for the b2-pawn, ready to undermine the pawn-chain.

37... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{R}c7$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Centralizing the bishop prepares a central pawn-thrust.

39...c4 40 e4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 41 axb5 axb5 42 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{R}a7$ 43 $\mathbb{R}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{R}c7$ 45 $\mathbb{R}c1$

45 $\mathbb{R}a1$ b4 could cause White some inconvenience. The text-move threatens 46 b3.

45... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

Aimed against 46 b3, when 46... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ would now be available.

46 $\mathbb{R}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 47 $\mathbb{R}a8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 48 e5!

At the proper moment!

48... $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$

49... $\mathbb{R}c5$ fails to 50 $\mathbb{R}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ fxe5 52 $\mathbb{R}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}b4$.

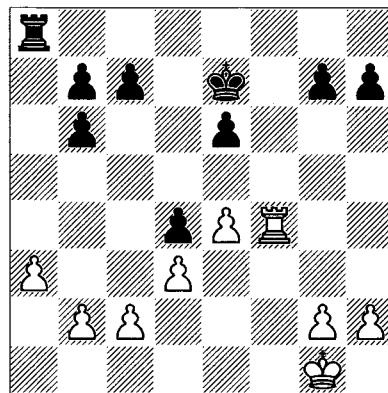
50 $\mathbb{R}g8$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 52 $\mathbb{R}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 53 exf6 $\mathbb{R}d7$ 54 $\mathbb{R}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}c6+!$ 1-0

In the following diagram, the pawn-structure slightly favours Black, and White must play carefully to avoid serious trouble. Black's rook can enter the scene on the a-file and from a5 use the open rank at will. Tarrasch, of course, did not miss the opportunity...

20... $\mathbb{R}a5!$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f1?$

The great tactician stumbles on his first step in this dry position. The course of the game teaches us that the best reaction was the passive 21 $\mathbb{R}f1!$ in order to meet 21... $\mathbb{R}b5$ by 22 $\mathbb{R}b1$ so that the king can reach d2 without creating

B



Marshall – Tarrasch
Nuremberg (7) 1905

holes in the pawn-structure. Equally so, a later ... $\mathbb{R}g5$ or ... $\mathbb{R}h5$ could be met by $\mathbb{R}g1$ or $\mathbb{R}h1$ respectively. The result would be level play. But White underestimates the problems involved.

21... $\mathbb{R}c5$

If 21... $\mathbb{R}b5$ at once, then White replies 22 b4 c5 23 e5 cxb4 24 axb4 $\mathbb{R}xb4$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$. Black, therefore, obliges the rook to retreat to a more passive position.

22 $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{R}b5$ 23 b3 $\mathbb{R}h5$

An important tempo-move to win time for ...b5, preventing the consolidation of the white pawn-structure by means of a4.

24 h3 b5 25 b4?

25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ is better, when Black should reply 25... $\mathbb{R}g5$.

25... $\mathbb{R}g5$

Denied access to c5, Black could immediately make use of the sixth rank to redeploy the rook by 25... $\mathbb{R}h6$. Then 26 $\mathbb{R}f4$ e5 27 $\mathbb{R}f5$ $\mathbb{R}e6$ transposes to the game, while 26 e5 blocks the sixth rank but, cut off from its base, the pawn becomes shaky; for example: 26... $\mathbb{R}h5$ 27 $\mathbb{R}e2$ b6 28 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29 $\mathbb{R}e4$ c5 followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}c6-d5$.

26 $\mathbb{R}f4$ e5 27 $\mathbb{R}f2$ $\mathbb{R}g6$ 28 $\mathbb{R}f5$ $\mathbb{R}e6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ g6 30 $\mathbb{R}f1$ $\mathbb{R}a6$ 31 $\mathbb{R}a1$ b6 32 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}a4$

A disagreeable waiting move from White's viewpoint.

33 c3

33 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ is met by 33... $\mathbb{R}a8$, when there is no time for $\mathbb{Q}b2$ because the open file must be defended, while 34 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c5 creates similar difficulties.

33...c5 34 cxd4

34 bxc5 bxc5 35 ♜c2 is strongly met by 35...c4! 36 cxd4 cxd3+ 37 ♜xd3 ♜xd4+ 38 ♜e3 ♜a4 followed by 39...b4.

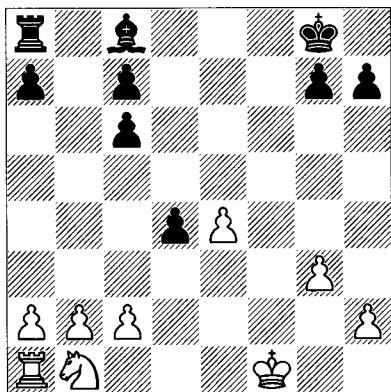
34...cxb4! 35 dxe5 ♜e6 36 d4 bxa3 37 ♜c3

a2

...and White runs out of good moves.

Two years later, Marshall was again on the losing side of an endgame that is relevant to our discussion. This time his opponent's rook used the b-file to threaten him.

B



Marshall – Em. Lasker
New York Wch (1) 1907

Four pieces are on their initial squares, material is level, and both sides have three pawn-islands. However, Black is to move. What does the privilege of moving first give him? After 19...♜a6+ 20 ♜g2 followed by 21 ♜d2, the black rook has no entry point, so he must find some other way forward...

19...♝b8 20 b3 ♜b5!

Just one little tempo makes a big difference. While the white pieces are still on the same positions, the black rook is moving freely on the fifth rank.

21 c4

Not an easy decision, but other options are also difficult:

a) 21 ♜a3 hardly comes into consideration due to 21...♜a5 22 ♜c4 ♜a6.

b) 21 ♜d2 ♜c5 22 ♜c1 ♜a6+ 23 ♜f2 ♜d3 costs White a pawn.

c) 21 ♜e2 brings the king nearer to the endangered c2-pawn and the e4-pawn, but further from the kingside pawns. Then 21...♜h5 22 h4 g5 23 hxg5 ♜h1 paralyses White long enough to bring the king in.

These lines explain White's choice in the game.

21...♜h5 22 ♜g1

Wishing to occupy the f-file with his rook, White avoids putting his king on g2.

22...c5 23 ♜d2 ♜f7

Centralizing the king is an important strategic detail in the endgame.

24 ♜f1+

A useless check. 24 a3 is better.

24...♜e7 25 a3 ♜h6!

The rook returns to the queenside, exploiting a newly opened rank.

26 h4

Another pointless move by White: 26 ♜a1 is better.

26...♜a6 27 ♜a1 ♜g4 28 ♜f2 ♜e6 29 a4 ♜e5 30 ♜g2 ♜f6 31 ♜e1 d3

Now nothing can parry the black king's penetration.

At the time when this game was played, the leading players were well aware of the rook manoeuvre lifting it from one wing to the other. We can find a series of impressive endgames characterized by typical rook manoeuvres along the ranks. But winning the file and penetrating to the seventh rank was for the long time the primary aim. Only with Alexander Alekhine did the rook-lift in the middlegame become a common and well-studied method of play. Later generations learnt from the numerous high-level games of his, some of which are included here. In modern chess, ranks are increasingly attractive routes for rook-lifting, especially in complex middlegame positions. Examples are numerous, reasons and purposes various. I took pains to choose between dozens of first-class cases. It has become an important middlegame theme and our selection reflects it.

9 Minor Pieces

We refer to bishops and knights collectively as minor pieces. The term implies that they are less valuable than the rook, and in principle they are. It is more difficult to determine which of the two is stronger. Their nominal value may be approximately the same, but tournament practice favours the bishop. I recall that the late Croatian master Vladimir Vuković, who kept statistics for about a decade, told me that in almost 60% of the cases he had scrutinized the knight was inferior. As a matter of fact that assessment does not come as a surprise, although it should not be taken at its face value. On the one hand, the knight has some inherent shortcomings: the knight cannot win a tempo (e.g., $w\mathbb{Q}a8, \mathbb{Q}h8, \Delta a7$ vs $b\mathbb{Q}d7$ is only a draw after $1... \mathbb{Q}c7$; note that the king steps onto the same colour as the knight's square); if caught on the edge of the board, it can be trapped by the bishop (bishop on e4 versus a knight on h4); in endgames with pawns on both wings it is somewhat slow. But on the other hand, the knight is a perfect blockader and is very powerful on an outpost; in an attack its fork is a deadly weapon; in the endgame it can often create a subtle barrier to the opponent's king; besides, we shall learn that even in unfavourable endgames it is not as lame as it appears to be. Naturally, in that respect the knight cannot match the long-ranged bishop, which reaches across the whole board and strikes distant targets. Especially in pairs, sweeping a larger track across the board, bishops grow into a tremendous force. Much, however, depends on the pawn-structures and the general situation. In closed positions the bishop is denied open diagonals, while the knight, capable of jumping over pawn-formations, is in its element and as a rule takes the upper hand. Even the play of the bishop-pair is tarnished in closed positions when the pair of knights proves superior. A closed, compact pawn-structure favours the knight, while open space sets free the bishop.

We can trace these qualities back to historical changes and reforms. The Indian *hastin*

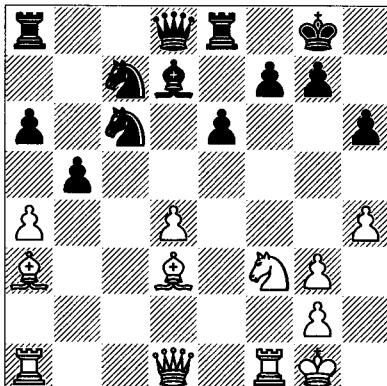
became the Arabic *al-fil*, but remained a slow piece, jumping just two squares diagonally. Only in the 15th century did reforms change its nature and made it the quick, long-ranged piece of modern chess. The knight, on the contrary, stayed what it was. Called *asva* in chaturanga, it jumped in the same manner as today. Put in the middle of the board, in eight jumps it made a perfect circle; how appropriate for the piece symbolizing water, an element whose movement is circular! In modern times its original symbolic meaning has been lost, but its movement remains intriguing: handicapped and privileged at the same time, the knight, like the bishop, depends on the circumstances and lives in harmony with its surroundings. That harmony is of our primary interest, because the relations between minor pieces and pawn-structures most commonly determine their basic value. When discussing the weakness of space we paid attention to some characteristics of the minor pieces (acting on an open diagonal or as blockaders and on outposts). Here we shall return to these topics to accentuate some essential qualities of the bishop and the knight.

Basic Traits; Advantages and Drawbacks

The most important trait of the bishop is its long range. A couple of illustrative examples will suffice to give a clear picture of the extraordinary relationship between the bishop and its diagonal.

In the following diagram, it strikes us at once that the black king's position is sensitive to pressure on the semi-open f-file and the two diagonals patrolled by white bishops, of which especially the light-squared one looks potentially dangerous. One starts considering $\mathbb{Q}g5$, but gives it up on account of $...f5$; then one considers $\mathbb{Q}c2$ and $\mathbb{W}d3$, lining up against the king.

W



Lisitsyn – Ragozin
Leningrad 1934

But Lisitsyn strikes a crushing blow without further preparation:

1 ♘h7+! ♖xh7

Declining the offer by 1... ♘h8 is of no great help – 2 ♗g5 falls on Black's head again.

2 ♗g5+! ♘g8

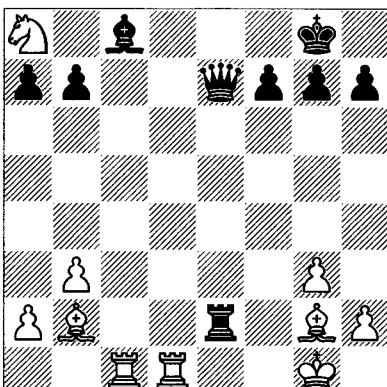
This time, taking does not help: 2...hxg5 loses to 3 ♕h5+ ♘g8 4 ♕xf7+ ♘h7 5 ♕h5+ ♘g8 6 hxg5 ♘e7 7 ♕f7+ ♘h7 8 ♘f2 and the mortal blow comes from h1.

3 ♕xf7 ♕b8 4 ♘xh6+ gxh6

Or 4... ♘h7 5 ♕h5, etc.

5 ♕g4+ ♘h8 6 ♘f7 1-0

B



Opočensky – Alekhine
Prague 1942

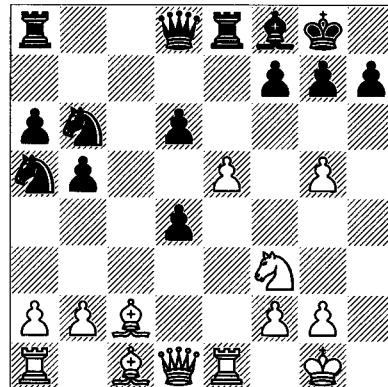
Opočensky entered this position satisfied that after the obvious 23... ♘xg2+ 24 ♘xg2 ♕e2+ he

could draw against the great Alekhine. But on the other side of the board sat a man who saw much more deeply...

23... ♘h3!!

I do not know how Opočensky survived this blow. A second before he 'had' a draw in his pocket, but now he was facing unconditional capitulation. 24 ♘xh3 loses to 24... ♕e3+ 25 ♘h1 ♕f3+, etc., while 24 ♘d8+ ♕xd8 25 ♘xh3 ♕xa8, as played in the game, meant just a postponement of the inevitable.

W



Spassky – Geller
Riga Ct (6) 1965

When the light-squared diagonal was opened by 19 e5, Geller was off his guard for a second (he replied 19... ♘e7-f8) and was struck by lightning:

20 ♘xh7+! ♖xh7 21 g6+!

It must have been this move that Efim Geller, himself an excellent tactician, missed. Since 21... ♘xg6 22 ♕d3+ f5 23 exf6+ does not work and 21... fxe6 22 ♘g5+ transposes into the game, the attack had a forced character.

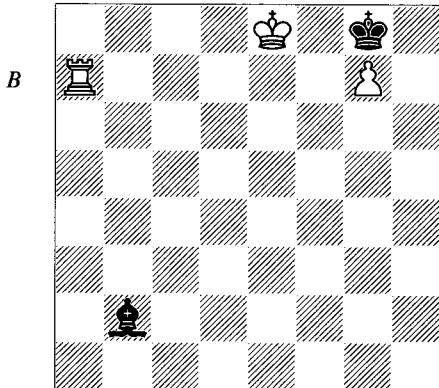
21... ♘g8 22 ♘g5 fxe6 23 ♕f3

...and Black had to part with his queen to ward off the mate.

The bishops are 'inspired' by open diagonals. Whenever you see a bishop sitting on an open diagonal, watch out! The very first move may be fatal!

The bishop's relations with other pieces and pawns define its other elementary qualities: the ability to cut off the enemy pieces and keep

them at bay, the ability to keep in check advancing enemy pawns, to paralyse the movement of the knight from a centralized post, and especially to win tempi (in the endgame the bishop is a tempo-winning machine). Some illustrative examples will throw more light on these facets of the bishop.



Vančura
28 Rijen, 1924

White possesses a big material advantage, but his rook is tied to the defence of the pawn, while the king is cut off on the wrong side of it. However, the pawn is taboo, because 1... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$? 2 $\mathbb{R}a6!$ would push the black king into the corner, when his position would become untenable. Besides, 1... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, for instance, loses to 2 $\mathbb{R}a4$ followed by 2... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 3 $\mathbb{R}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{R}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ and again the king is caught in the net. However, there is a way to keep the white pieces at bay...

1... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ 2 $\mathbb{R}b7$

White cannot leave the seventh rank because 2 $\mathbb{R}a2$, for example, is met by 2... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$.

2... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

2... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ loses to 3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 4 $\mathbb{R}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}f7$, etc.

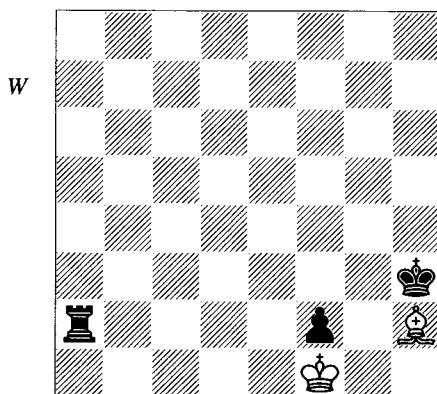
3 $\mathbb{R}b5$

3 $\mathbb{R}f7$ is no better due to 3... $\mathbb{Q}h6!$.

3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{R}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

White cannot improve the position of his pieces.

In Benko's study, the difficulties Black experiences are similar, although his victory seems



Benko
Magyar Sakkélet, 1967

at hand. 1 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ loses quickly to 1... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ followed by 2... $\mathbb{Q}f3$, while 1 $\mathbb{Q}d6$, for instance, fails to 1... $\mathbb{R}a6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{R}a5$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{R}f5$, etc. But the lonely defender, the bishop, rises to the occasion...

1 $\mathbb{Q}c7!$ $\mathbb{R}b2$

1... $\mathbb{R}a7$ would not work due to 2 $\mathbb{Q}b6$, when 2... $\mathbb{R}f7$ is answered by 3 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ and the king runs out.

2 $\mathbb{Q}d6$

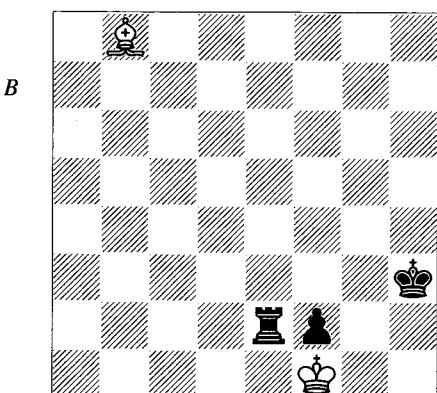
The only move, but good enough.

2... $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Or 2... $\mathbb{R}c2$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{R}c5$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{R}f5$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$.

3 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}e2$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}b8!$ (D)

But not 4 $\mathbb{Q}d2?$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$, when Black wins.

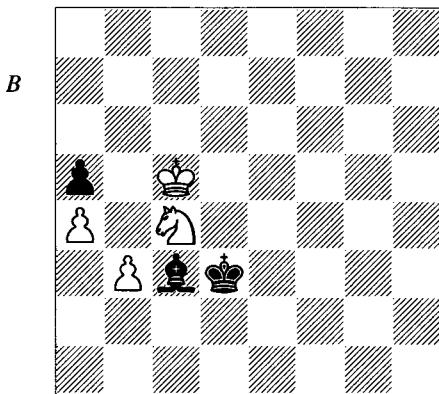


4... $\mathbb{R}e8$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$

...and the king is set free.

The bishop's ability to cut off the enemy king, although it lacks the extraordinary strength of

the rook in this respect, is sometimes of vital importance.



Parma – Gligorić
Bled 1961

The a5-pawn is doomed, so this endgame looked lost for Black, but see what happened:

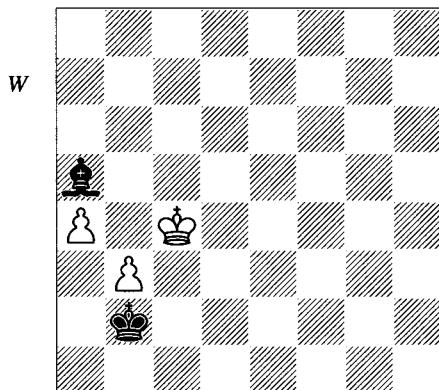
63...♝c2 64 ♜xa5

This does seem the end of it: **64...♜xa5 65 b4 ♜c7 66 a5 ♜b3 67 a6 ♜f4 68 b5** and one of the pawns will promote. However, Gligorić continued to fight:

64...♝b2! 65 ♜c4

65 b4 ♜a3 66 ♜c6 ♜xb4+ is an immediate draw, while after 65 ♜b5 ♜a3 the pawns are paralysed.

65...♜xa5 (D)



Now the knight can be captured as the circumstances have improved: the white king is worse and Black's king is better placed than before.

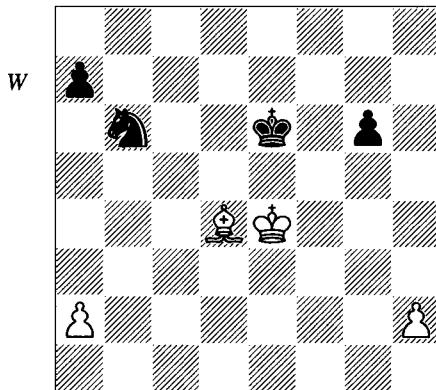
66 b4 ♜b6 67 a5 ♜f2 68 a6

In case of 68 b5 there is 68...♜a3 69 b6 ♜a4 and the pawns have been stopped. Note why the king had to cross to the a-file.

68...♜a7

68...♜a3 69 ♜b5 ♜b3 70 ♜a5 ♜c4 71 b5 ♜e1+ 72 ♜a4 ♜f2 is also good.

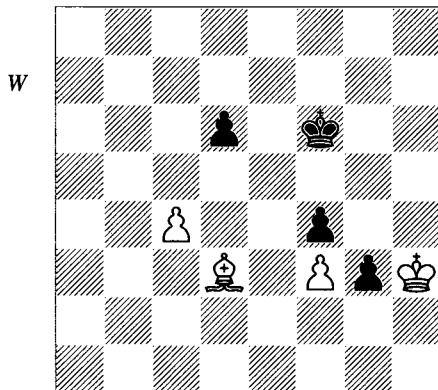
69 ♜b5 ♜c3 70 ♜a4 ♜b6 ½-½



Krnić – Flear
Wijk aan Zee 1988

½-½

My attention was attracted to this game by the fact that a draw was agreed in this position, even though it looks very difficult for Black. There is no immediate win, but the superior bishop and spatial advantage favour White so clearly that there cannot be any doubt whether to continue to fight for a win or not. For instance, after 41 ♜f4 ♜c8 42 ♜g5 ♜f7 43 ♜h6 we see that in just three moves Black's position has deteriorated. His options are reduced to waiting. Note that 43...a6 does not set the knight free, because then 44 ♜c5 paralyses the knight, and the black king will not be able to prevent the penetration by the white king. For example: 44...♜f6 45 h4 ♜f7 46 ♜h7 ♜f6 (46...a5 47 a4 is worse) 47 ♜g8! ♜f5 48 ♜f7 ♜g4 49 ♜e6 ♜xh4 50 ♜d7 and the knight is lost. The black king is too far away to reach the critical a8-corner in time. 43...♜b6 44 ♜h7 ♜c8 45 a4 ♜b6 46 a5 (46 ♜xb6 axb6 47 h4 also wins) 46...♜c8 47 h4 a6 48 ♜c5 ♜f6 49 ♜g8 is no better. One of those positions which in an elementary form demonstrate the bishop's superior qualities!



Sher – Lalic
Hastings open 1993/4

White has a large material advantage, but the protected passed pawn on g3 might seem an insurmountable barrier. But do not be pessimistic: the bishop can win tempi over and over again, gradually improving the state of things.

62 ♜f1 ♜g5

Obviously not 62...♜f5 because of 63 ♜h4 ♜e5 64 ♜g4, etc.

63 ♜g2! ♜h5 64 ♜h1!

The idea starts to dawn on us: the white king will cross to the queenside, while the bishop will stop the black king infiltrating via h3.

64...♜g5 65 ♜g2 ♜f5

If 65...♜h4, then 66 ♜g1 ♜h3 67 ♜g2+, etc.

66 ♜f1 ♜e5 67 ♜e2 ♜d4 68 ♜d2 ♜xc4 69 ♜g2 ♜d4

Or 69...d5 70 ♜h3 ♜b3 71 ♜d3 ♜b2 72 ♜d4 ♜c2 73 ♜e5, etc.

70 ♜f1 d5 71 ♜g2 ♜c4 72 ♜h3 d4 73 ♜f1+ ♜c5 74 ♜d3 ♜d5 75 ♜h3 ♜c5 76 ♜g2 ♜d5 77 ♜f1 1-0

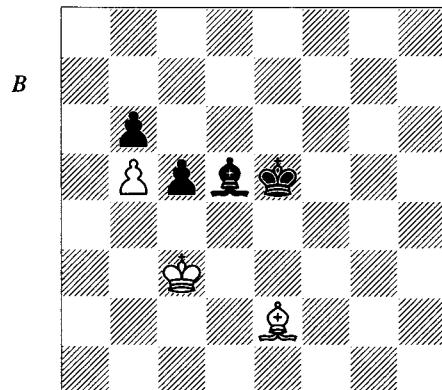
All the black pawns are easy prey.

In the next example, Black's material advantage does not seem to guarantee victory for the simple reason that ...c4 cannot be played unless the black king forces its way to d4.

1...♛e4 2 ♜d3+ ♛e3 3 ♜f1 ♛e6 4 ♜d3 ♜g4

The first little step: faced with the threat of 5...♜e2, the white bishop is obliged to switch to the other diagonal in order to protect the b5-pawn.

5 ♜g6 ♜e2 6 ♜e8 ♜f1 7 ♜c6



N. Vlasov – D. Sokolov
Alushta open 1994

7 ♜d7 is more tenacious, even though after 7...♛e2 8 ♜c2 ♜g2 9 ♜f5 ♛e1 10 ♜g6 ♜f3 Black will impose his will. His idea slowly becomes apparent: to circumvent the white king and come behind the b5-pawn. White cannot stop it by either 11 ♜c1 ♜e2 12 ♜e8 ♜d3, when the king walks to d4, or 11 ♜f5 ♜d1+! 12 ♜c3 ♜e2 13 ♜d7 ♜d1, which is similar to the game.

7...♛e2 8 ♜c2 ♜h3 9 ♜e8

It is clear now why 7 ♜d7 would have put more obstacles in Black's path: the e4-square here is not available to White (9 ♜e4 would be met by 9...♜e3) as f5 was in the above line.

9...♜f5+ 10 ♜c3 ♜d1 11 ♜h5+ ♜c1 12 ♜e2 ♜b1 13 ♜c4 ♜a1

13...♜c2 does not work due to 14 ♜e2 ♜a4 15 ♜c4, but 13...♜g4 14 ♜b3 ♜d1+ 15 ♜c3 ♜a4 16 ♜e2 ♜a2 17 ♜c4+ (17 ♜c4 ♜b3+) 17...♜a3 18 ♜e2 ♜b3, etc., does.

14 ♜b3 ♜b1!

Finally it becomes apparent that White has no means to stop the penetration either on the a-file or on the c-file.

15 ♜a3

If 15 ♜c3 then 15...♜a2 followed by ...♜d5 and the king moves to a5 to grab the pawn.

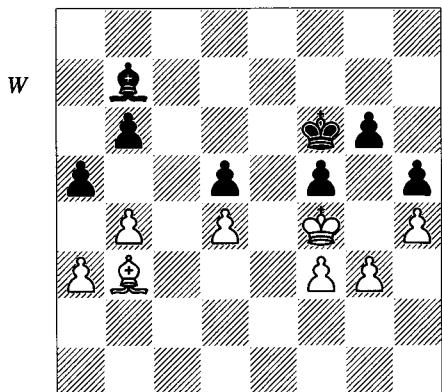
15...♜c2 16 ♜e2 ♜b1 17 ♜f1

The stalemate trick 17 ♜d1 ♜c1 would not help White.

17...♜c1

Black has achieved a decisive advantage. Winning tempi enabled Black to push his way through.

However, when trying to determine which side's bishops is superior, we should in general seek an answer in the pawn-structure...



Rustemov – Hector
Copenhagen 2001

Two details tell in White's favour: his king is in a superior position and his pawns are favourably placed on dark squares. His next move will add the third advantageous detail:

42 b5!

By restricting the black bishop to its short a8-b7 diagonal, White creates the conditions for a kingside breakthrough.

42...♝a8 43 g4

White threatens 44 gxh5 gxh5 45 ♜c2, which forces the following exchanges.

43...fxg4 44 fxg4 hxg4 45 ♜xg4 ♜b7 46 ♜f4 ♜c8

After 46...♜a8 47 ♜d1 ♜b7 48 ♜g4 ♜a8 49 ♜c8 Black is in zugzwang. Of course, giving up a pawn is a sort of capitulation.

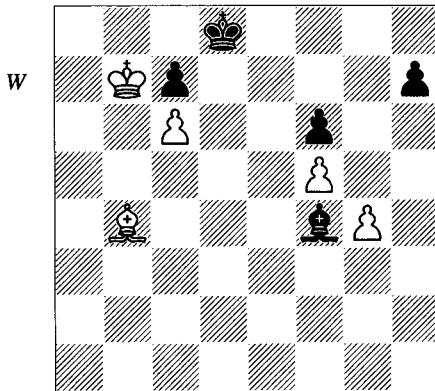
47 ♜xd5 ♜h3 48 ♜c4 ♜f5 49 d5 ♜c2 50 d6 ♜f5 51 ♜e2

White is on his way to victory (51...♜e6 52 ♜g4).

In the next diagram, the fact that Black's pawns are on the same colour squares as the bishops again heavily favours White; so much so that he manages to overcome the defence by straightforward tactical means...

1 g5!

Given that 1...♝xg5 loses at once to 2 ♜d6, Black must face a passed pawn – a new detail which changes the position essentially.



Bragin – Gavrilov
Russia 1993

1...fxg5

After 1...♝e5 2 g6 hxg6 3 fxg6, 3...♛e8 is met by 4 ♜a5 f5 5 ♜xc7 ♜c3 6 ♜d6 ♜a5 7 c7 ♜xc7 8 ♜xc7, keeping the black king cut off from the g6-pawn. Note that 3...f5 fails to 4 ♜d6!, when Black cannot keep both pawns under surveillance.

2 f6 ♛e8 3 ♜a5 g4 4 ♜xc7 ♜d2

Unfortunately, after 4...♜xc7 5 ♜xc7 g3 6 ♜d6 g2 7 c7 g1♛ 8 c8♛+ ♜f7 9 ♜e6+ Black must give up his queen to avoid mate.

5 ♜a6!

A subtle point: the bishop will be allowed to a5 only in worsened circumstances.

5...♝b4

The bishop must try to guard the f6-pawn.

6 ♜g3 ♛d8 7 ♜b7 ♜a5 8 ♜e1

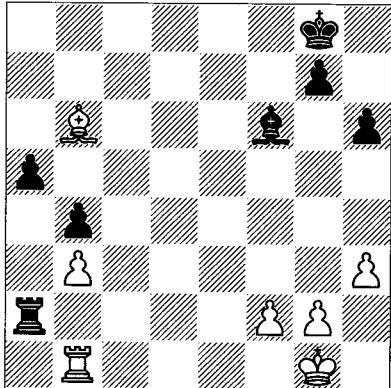
Now that the d8-square is occupied and the black bishop restricted, this manoeuvre wins.

8...♜c7 9 ♜h4 1-0

This example emphasizes the bishop's qualities and shortcomings simultaneously: what is advantageous for the white bishop proves disadvantageous for the black defender – the freedom to manoeuvre as opposed to lack of space, the pawns on the squares of the same colour which tie down the defender favour the attacker. We shall see that both minor pieces owe much of their activity to the type of pawn-structure in which they move. In all the phases of the game, but especially in the endgame, the pawns on the wrong colour, as a rule, decisively influence the result. Bishops in general depend on the colour of the pawn-formations, but also

on the colour of the promotion square; in the case of a rook's pawn and the promotion square of the wrong colour, the bishop is impotent and thus devalued. In many an endgame one must think about this circumstance well in advance.

B



Pachman – Szabo
Budapest 1948

This position, characterized by pawn-majorities on both wings, obviously favours Black. His rook is advantageously posted on its seventh rank, his queenside majority is more dangerous, and his bishop is placed in harmony with them. One would expect Black to centralize his king and increase his advantage to the critical point. But Szabo was impatient...

32...a4? 33 bxa4 ♜a1 34 ♜xa1 ♜xa1

Enough to win a piece, but is it enough to win the game?

35 ♜c5 b3 36 ♜a3 b2 37 ♜xb2 ♜xb2 38 ♜f1 ♜c3

38...♜f7 39 ♜e2 ♜e6 40 f4 ♜d5 gives White a pleasant choice between 41 ♜d3 and 41 ♜f3.

39 ♜e2 ♜f7 40 f4 h5

If 40...♜e6, then 41 ♜d3 ♜a5 42 ♜e4.

41 ♜f3 ♜a5 42 g4 hxg4+

After 42...h4 43 ♜e4 ♜e6 44 f5+ ♜f6 45 ♜d5 the bishop will be tied to the passed pawn and the king to the pawn-majority – no progress is possible.

43 ♜xg4!

After 43 hxg4 ♜e6 44 ♜e4 ♜d2 45 f5+ ♜f6 46 ♜d5 ♜b4 (but not 46...♜g5? 47 ♜e6 ♜xg4 48 ♜f7 ♜c3 49 ♜g6, etc.) White runs out of useful moves, but the text-move saves the game.

43...♜g6 44 f5+ ♜h6

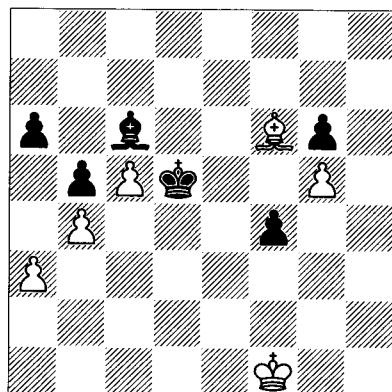
It becomes apparent that when playing 32...a4 Szabo overlooked an important detail – the h1-square is not the same colour as the black bishop. This means that 44...♜f6 45 h4 ♜d2 46 h5 ♜e5 47 a5 ♜xa5 48 h6 is a draw.

45 ♜h4 ♜c7 46 ♜g4 ♜a5 47 ♜h4 ♜d2 48 ♜g4 ♜e1 49 ♜f4 ♜h5 50 f6 gxh6 51 ♜f5 ½-½

The bishops are blind to other colours, a characteristic which turns against them in numerous circumstances. What happened to Laszlo Szabo is one of these notorious cases.

Talking of bishops and colours we reach the theme of opposite-coloured bishops. Passing like trains on parallel rails and blind to the other colour, they are powerful on their own rails and utterly impotent on the neighbouring one. They derive their strength from being unopposed by the enemy counterpart. It enables the bishop to fight alone successfully against several enemy pawns in the endgame, whenever the pawn-structure is relatively compact. They fail whenever the enemy pawns are divided between two wings with enough space between them for the enemy king to manoeuvre its way to one or the other side. Some apparently special rules govern their activity, and only good tournament practice can help us to understand them.

B



Bellon – Minić
Siegen OL 1970

After the olympiad, Minić gave a lecture in our club and this was one of the positions he demonstrated. Some elements speak in Black's favour, for example his centralized king, his passed pawn and his somewhat superior bishop. However, there is something deceitful about the

opposite-coloured bishops; how can one otherwise explain the innumerable errors committed in situations like this?

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

The first step, and the first blunder. Instead, 39...a5! wins painlessly: 40...a4 cannot be allowed while after 40 bxa5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ f3 43 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ Black creates another passed pawn that is widely separated from the f3-pawn, and this decides the game in his favour.

40 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5?$

The second step was even more disastrous than the first, because, as we shall see, 40... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ was a grave error, and because Minić, disillusioned by his omission a move earlier and aware of it, offered a draw, which Bellon, also utterly unaware of the hidden dangers, accepted as a natural thing, believing that 41 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ cements the draw.

41 $\mathbb{Q}d8?$ $\mathbb{Q}c6!!$

Why 41 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ is wrong and the repentant 41... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ so excellent we shall conclude from the following analysis.

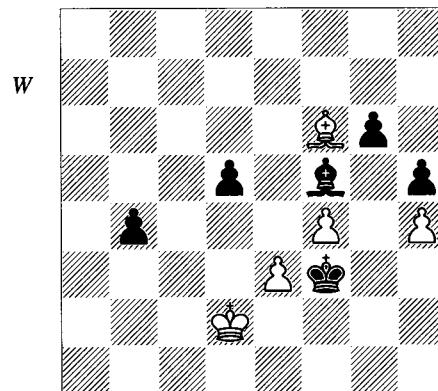
42 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ f3 43 $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Here 43... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ was suggested by a number of annotators as the winning move. The idea was to meet 44 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ with 44...a5 45 bxa5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$, but then 46 a6 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 47 a7 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 48 a8 $\mathbb{Q}!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 49 c6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ cements a draw. However, if Black first moves his king over to take the a3-pawn and then returns his king to f4, ...a5 will indeed win. All of a sudden we see a lot of zugzwang ideas. The king cannot retreat because on 44 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (otherwise 45...f2 followed by 46... $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ promotes Black's pawn) there is 45...a5! and White has no response. Either 46 bxa5 b4 or 46 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ makes possible the winning check on the light-squared diagonal. Giving up the g5-pawn by 44 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ just delays events. If the king stays on f2, then the black king moves to d3 after which the g-pawn advances to g3, when $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ wins outright while $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ a5 leads to a new passed pawn on the b-file. At that moment the white passed pawns will be utterly useless, while the black pawns cannot be held, because there is enough distance between them.

What, then, could White have done to prevent this inexorable course of events? He could do a relatively simple thing: 41 c6! $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 42

$\mathbb{Q}d8$ f3 43 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ changes the situation essentially because 43... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ can be met by 44 $\mathbb{Q}b6+$. If the king goes for the a3-pawn, $\mathbb{Q}a5$ will keep the position safe; the a5-square must be under its surveillance at all times.

Opposite-coloured bishop endings require a great deal of subtlety, and the truth is often only uncovered after the game. Minić was very disappointed to learn he missed all of this and gave a draw without analysis.



Kotov – Botvinnik
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1955

The position smells like a draw, but Botvinnik concocted an interesting and confusing manoeuvre. Black's chances lie in his passed pawn and having retreated the bishop to f5, he is ready to defend it.

57 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ b3 58 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

When Kotov played this move the situation looked rather simple: 58... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is an obvious draw. It seemed a natural end of Black's small advantage. But the next move heightened the tension again:

59 $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

The passed pawn is indirectly defended: 59 $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ would lose to 59...d4+ 60 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ dxе3 61 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ followed by 64... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$, when ...g5 will inevitably create a second passed pawn.

59 $\mathbb{Q}c5?$

White circumvents the trick and believes he is safe. After the game, wiser for the experience, he found 59 $\mathbb{Q}d2$. The point is that after 59...b2 (there is nothing else) 60 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 61

$\mathbb{Q}xb2$ White can control the d-pawn in simple fashion: 61...d4 (or 61... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, etc.) 62 $\mathbb{Q}c5$, etc.

The text-move walks straight into the ambush. 59 $\mathbb{Q}g5?$ was also tempting; for example, 59... $\mathbb{Q}f5?$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ d4 62 $\mathbb{Q}c5$. But 59... $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ is correct.

59... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

60 $h \times g$ 5 h4 61 f5 (or 61 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$) 61... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ h3 63 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ ends badly for White.

60...d4+! 61 exd4

61 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 62 g6 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 64 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (or 64 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$) 64...h4 and one of the pawns promotes.

61... $\mathbb{Q}g3$

Now we see what Botvinnik aims at: he will have two passed pawns of which one will cost Black a whole piece. The two white pawns, on the contrary, will be of no use whatever.

62 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 64 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ h4 65 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ 0-1

Black can retreat the rook, but giving up the c5-pawn changes the situation completely to White's advantage. If he defends the rook by 28... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, then 29 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c4 30 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ wins material. He had no alternative to...

28...g6 29 b4!

29 h4 is advantageous for White, but Keres is after something much more subtle.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 31 d7! $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}c1$!

The situation becomes clearer. Black must capture the d7-pawn with his bishop, whereupon the pin will win it.

32... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ b3 34 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e5$

The pawns are under control.

36... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

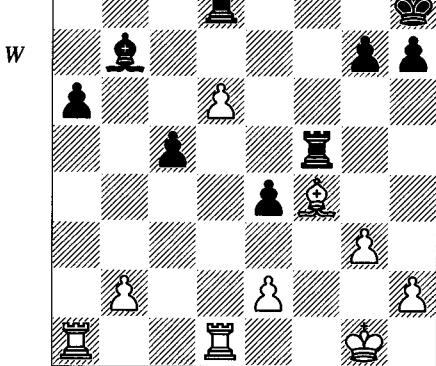
After 36...a5 37 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ b2 40 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}xf5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ the e4-pawn is doomed as well.

37 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

If 37... $\mathbb{Q}h8$, then 38 $\mathbb{Q}f6$.

38 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}a3$

White has a rather simple win.

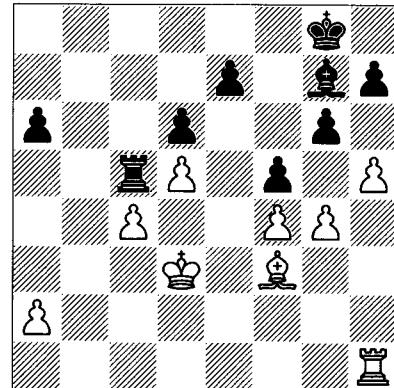


Keres – Richter
Munich 1936

Black is a pawn up and the only thing he has to worry about is the far-advanced d-pawn. But given the simplicity of the position it does not seem so dangerous. However, Keres finds the way to make it dangerous...

28 $\mathbb{Q}a5!$

This strong move immediately reveals the drawbacks of the black defence. White threatens 29 b4. Confronted by this unexpected threat,



Karpov – Kavalek
Nice OL 1974

An exchange of bishop for knight on c5 has led to this most interesting position. White did not hesitate to enter this endgame of opposite-coloured bishops and rooks. In view of the passive black king he felt rightly that he had a promising initiative.

30 h6!

The first step is to limit the activity of the black pieces.

30...♝f8?!

Black must keep his bishop in play no matter what it costs. Numerous annotators just mention in passing 30...♝h8 31 ♜b1 as winning for White, but it is not as simple as that:

a) After 31...♜c8 32 g5 ♛f7 33 ♜d1, followed by 34 ♜a4, Black, for all practical purposes a piece down, must lose; the a6-pawn will fall soon.

b) However, 31...♛f7?! is a more tenacious defence:

b1) If 32 gxf5, then 32...♝f6!, when White is better, but Black is still kicking. Note that in case of 32...♜a5, 33 fxg6+ ♛xg6 34 ♜e4+ ♛xh6 35 ♜h1+ ♛g7 36 ♜xh7+ ♛g8 37 ♜xe7 is inconclusive; then 37...♜a3+ 38 ♛e2 ♜xa2+ 39 ♛f3 ♜d4 keeps Black in the game. Stronger is 33 f6! ♜a3+ 34 ♜e4 exf6 (or: 34...♛xf6 35 ♜b8; 34...♝xf6 35 ♛g4) 35 ♜b7+ ♛e8 36 ♜b8+ ♛e7 37 ♜xh8 f5+ 38 ♜d4 ♜xf3 39 ♜xh7+ ♛e8 40 c5 ♜xf4+ 41 ♛c3 dxc5 42 d6 and one of the passed pawns will promote first.

b2) However, it is not the end of the story. White can proceed 32 ♜b8 ♜a1 33 g5 with the idea of ♜d1-a4-e8+. For example, 33...♜a5 (or 33...♜c7 34 ♜d1 e5 35 dxe6+ ♛xe6 36 ♜f3) 34 ♜d1 ♜xa2 35 c5 ♜a5 36 c6 ♜xd5+ 37 ♛e2 ♜c5 38 ♜b3+ d5 39 ♜d8 e6 (39...♜c3 40 ♜xd5) 40 ♜d7+ ♛e8 41 ♜a4, etc.

31 ♛c3?

31 g5! traps the bishop for good, and after 31...♜a5 32 ♜b1 ♜xa2 (or 32...♜a3+ 33 ♜b3) 33 c5! ♜a3+ 34 ♛e2 dxc5 (otherwise c6) 35 d6 exd6 36 ♜d5+ ♛h8 37 ♜b8 White wins.

31...fxg4

On 31...♝f7, the apparently strong 32 gxf5 gxf5 33 ♜h5+ ♛f6 (33...♛g8 34 ♜g1+ ♛h8 35 ♜f7) 34 ♜e1 fails to 34...e5 35 dxe6 ♜c7, but the simple 32 g5 wins.

32 ♜xg4 ♛f7 33 ♛e6+ ♛f6 34 ♛g8 ♜c7!

This ‘discovery’ defence must have slipped Karpov’s attention.

35 ♜xh7 e6 36 ♛g8 exd5 37 h7

37 ♜xd5 does not work due to 37...♜h7.

37...♝g7?

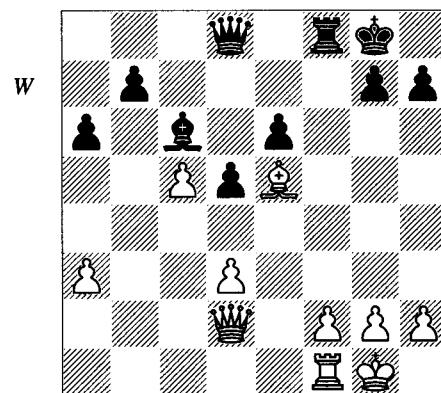
It is always hard to defend a difficult position: towards the end one usually stumbles. 37...♜xc4+ 38 ♜d3 ♛g7 39 ♜xd5 ♜c5 (but not 39...♜c8 40 ♜b7 followed by 41 ♜xa6) 40 ♛e4 (or 40 ♛e4 ♛h8) 40...♜h5 41 ♜g1 g5 42 fxe5+ ♜xg5 smells like a draw.

38 ♜xd5 ♜h8 39 ♜d3 ♛f5 40 ♛e3 ♜e7+ 41 ♜f3 a5 42 a4 ♜c7

Or 42...g5 43 ♜h5 ♛g6 44 ♜xg5+ ♛xh7 45 ♛e4+ followed by 46 ♜xa5, etc.

43 ♛e4+ ♛f6 44 ♜h6 ♜g7 45 ♛g4 1-0

Opposite-coloured bishops are often considered synonymous with drawish positions, which is far from true. In the hands of strong players they are a weapon to fear, and even more so in the middlegame positions in which, as a rule, they favour the attacking side. There is no secret why that is so: it is simply because the attacking bishop cannot be opposed by a defending bishop; their routes never cross.



Svidler – Sakaev
St Petersburg Ch 1996

White owes his advantage primarily to his centralized bishop, exerting pressure on the position of the black king. If Black were to move, he would achieve the same by 21...d4 and 22...♜d5. White will see to it that the light-squared bishop stays closed off...

21 ♜d4

Much stronger than 21 d4, which relinquishes the e4-square and unnecessarily opens the a6-f1 diagonal. It is important that the d4-square remains vacant; the white pieces may need to use it.

21...♛h4?!

To be honest, I do not see the point of this sally. Considering the unfortunate position of the bishop, 21...♛e8 looks to me more appropriate; then 22 ♜e2 ♜d7 23 ♜e1 would be met by 23...♝g6.

22 f4

White has fixed the backward e6-pawn and prepares a rook-lift on the third rank.

22... $\mathbb{H}f7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

Svidler thought 23... $\mathbb{W}h6$ was a better place for the queen. He gives 24 $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ with the point 25 $\mathbb{B}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 26 $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27 $\mathbb{B}xf7+$ $\mathbb{W}xf7$, but White can certainly play better; on 25 $\mathbb{W}e5$ there is 25... $\mathbb{W}f6$, but 25 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ followed by 26 $\mathbb{B}g3$ keeps the lid down.

24 $\mathbb{B}f3$ $h6$?

Sometimes the best policy is to wait passively. Creating a hole on g6 and at the same time offering a new target on h6 certainly cannot help the defence.

25 $\mathbb{B}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$

Or 25... $\mathbb{W}h4$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 27 $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ and White wins material.

26 $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$!?

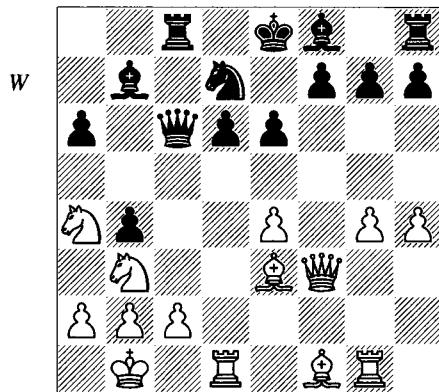
Black is worrying about the hole on g6, but bearing in mind the constant pressure exerted on g7, it is not clear how it could help. 27... $\mathbb{W}h4$ is better: 28 $\mathbb{B}g4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ (but not 28... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ followed by 30 $\mathbb{W}d4$) or 28 $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$.

28 $\mathbb{W}e2$!

The queen is transferred to the attacking post; White has exploited all the advantages of his opposite-coloured bishop very logically.

28... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29 $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{B}e7$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 32 $\mathbb{W}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34 $\mathbb{W}xh6$

...and the defence started to collapse.



Grishchuk – Shirov
New Delhi FIDE 2000

Although White is a whole piece up, the first impression tells against him, since the a4-knight

is beyond salvation. The fact that Black is behind with his development does not seem to cause any immediate difficulties either. However, things are not that simple.

18 $\mathbb{Q}ac5$! $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

20... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 21 $\mathbb{W}f2$ leaves the queen exposed to 22 $\mathbb{Q}g2$.

21 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

This magnificent bishop makes the difference, offering excellent compensation for the lost pawn. It thwarts any queenside counter-attack while it may cause grave troubles to Black's kingside in harmony with a later g5-g6.

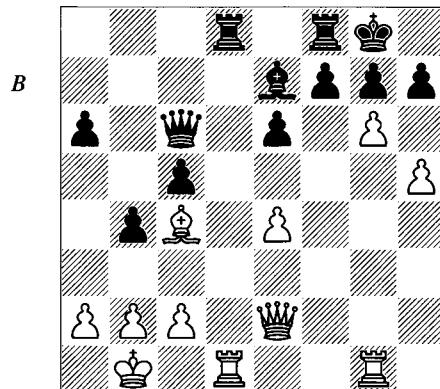
22... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{W}e2$

The point is not so much to grab the a6-pawn, but to prevent the queen's centralization on e5 by ... $\mathbb{W}c7-e5$.

23... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 24 $g5$ 0-0

Stronger is 24... $\mathbb{B}d8$, diminishing the attacking potential.

25 $h5$ $\mathbb{B}cd8$ 26 $g6$ (D)



Owing to White's superior bishop, this pawn advance has become a genuine menace to the black king.

26... $\mathbb{B}xd1$ + 27 $\mathbb{B}xd1$ $\mathbb{W}xg6$??

The quiet 27... $\mathbb{W}h8$ is necessary. Opening up the king's position favours the light-squared bishop. Its superiority in comparison to the e7-bishop grows menacingly.

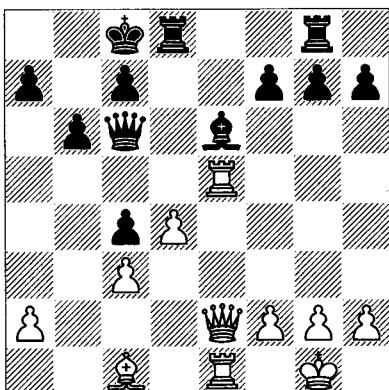
28 $\mathbb{W}xg6$ $\mathbb{B}f4$?

28... $\mathbb{W}xg6$ hardly comes into consideration due to 29 $\mathbb{W}g4$, while 28... $\mathbb{B}f6$ 29 $\mathbb{W}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 30 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ opens up the king's position. Only 28... $h6$ would promise peace to the king, but I think 29 $\mathbb{W}g4$ followed by 30 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ might give him too much peace in various endgames.

The text-move is an obvious blunder.

29 ♜h2 1-0

B



Steinitz – Em. Lasker
Moscow Wch (3) 1896

White's last move was 18 ♜a3-c1. Feeling rightly that his king will be more exposed than his opponent's, he obviously wanted to rule out a kingside attack, particularly with 18...g5. But it was not enough to deter Lasker, who responded exactly so:

18...g5!

Relying on the opposite-coloured bishops and sensing the weakness of the critical g2 point, Black opens the g-file with a pawn sacrifice. Of course, it is possible to decline the offer, but what is the alternative?

19 ♜xg5 ♜xg5 20 ♜xg5 ♜g8 21 f4 ♜d5 22 g3

The advantages obtained by the sacrifice are all too obvious: the exposure of the g5-bishop and the striking weakness of the long light-squared diagonal.

22...♝b7 23 h3 ♜b5

The queen and the bishop change places on the diagonal: a sign that the threats are becoming concrete.

24 ♜h2

24 ♜e5 is met by 24...f6!, and if 25 ♜xf6, then 25...♝b2 leads to mate.

24...♜g6 25 ♜c2 f6 26 ♜h4 ♜c6 27 g4

On 27 f5 Black would respond 27...♜h6 followed by ...♜h5.

27...♜d5 28 ♜f2 h5 29 g5

Or 29 f5 ♜g8.

29...fxg5 30 ♜xg5 h4!

Highly unpleasant! It narrows White's possibilities and in some situations it may make ...♜xg5 possible.

31 ♜f1 ♜g8 32 ♜d2 a5 33 a4?!! ♜e8 34 f5

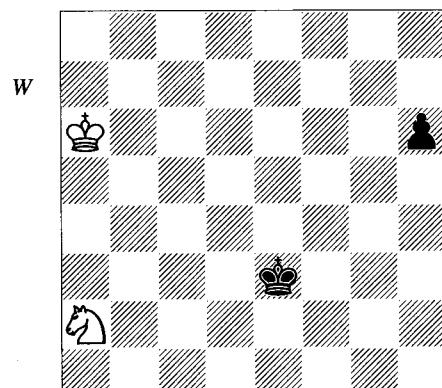
To prevent 34...♜e3, White must further expose his king.

34...♜g8! 0-1

A blasting reply! White has run out of useful moves and resigned at once. For instance, 35 ♜g1 ♜xf5 36 ♜f4 ♜xg5 37 ♜xg5 ♜f2+ leads to exchanges whereupon ...b5 wins. The power of the opposite-coloured bishop in attack is extraordinary. When assessing positions, one should forget stereotypes about its drawish character, and fear it!

Generally speaking, in the series of examples we have just examined, we outlined some fundamental traits of the bishop, both positive and negative. The ensuing illustrative examples will throw light on the basic characteristics of the knight. To understand the minor pieces we need a good comparison.

As a rule, the knight is treated as somewhat inferior to the bishop, which in a large number of examples may prove true, but only because the type of position favouring the bishop is more common, not because its basic qualities should be superior. Benjamin Disraeli said that there were three types of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics. The story about the knight's inferiority belongs to this third type. Practical chess wisdom will teach us better.



N. Grigoriev
Izvestia, 1932

The question is how to stop the fast-running passed pawn. The white king is far away, and between the knight and the pawn the black king seems to be an insurmountable barrier; 1 $\mathbb{Q}c3?$ $h5$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (or 3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ h4) 3...h4 4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ confirms the impression. However, Grigoriev demonstrates that appearances are deceiving.

1 $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ h5 2 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$

We notice at once that 2...h4 3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ h3 4 $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ leads to a well-known theoretical draw: before the pawn passes the third rank, the knight must reach either e3 or g4.

However, after the text-move, the knight seems definitely excluded from the kingside: 3 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ h4 4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ and the knight is barred. Grigoriev shows again that what we see is just a mirage.

3 $\mathbb{Q}a5!!$

There is another route: via c4 and d2 the knight plans to reach the key f1-square in time. 3... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (or 3... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c6+$) cannot prevent it because 4 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ leads to the desired square.

3...h4 4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f3$

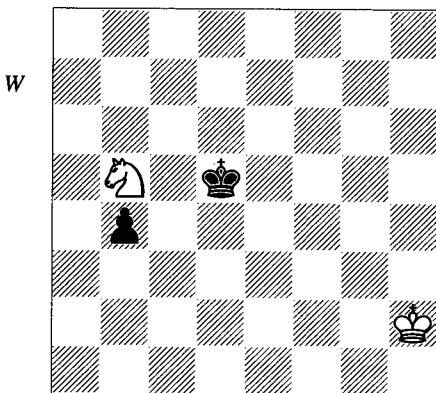
Or 4...h3 5 $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and we are in known waters.

5 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$

Of course, now 5 $\mathbb{Q}d2+?$ would fail because of 5... $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ h3, etc.

5... $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ h3 7 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

With a draw. The knight is quicker than we sometimes imagine!



N. Grigoriev (end of a study)
1938

There is obviously no time to wait because after 1 $\mathbb{Q}g2?$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ b3 the pawn cannot be stopped. But what can a lone knight do?

1 $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$

1... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ is a loss of time because as soon as the pawn advances there is $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}a3$. On 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ White replies 4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$, catching the pawn.

However, the text-move gives White a seemingly unsolvable problem.

2 $\mathbb{Q}e8!$

Paradoxically, moving the knight to the edge of the board and far from the pawn helps White's cause.

2... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

The pawn cannot move because of 2...b3 3 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ followed by either 4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ or 4 $\mathbb{Q}b5$.

3 $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$

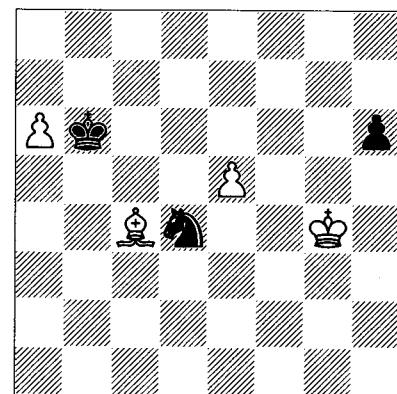
After 4...b3 5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$, 5...b2 again leads nowhere due to 6 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ and 5... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ is met by 7 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ b2 8 $\mathbb{Q}c4$.

5 $\mathbb{Q}c7!$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$

6 $\mathbb{Q}b5+?$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ b3 8 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$, on the contrary, loses.

6... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black can make no progress. By jumping to the edge of the board, the knight paralyses the passed pawn! Beautiful!



Dvoiry - Makarov
USSR 1990

Struggling against the apparently superior bishop and two passed pawns, the black knight has a seemingly impossible task; all the more so because his pawn also looks a hapless

creature without any future. But Makarov rests his hopes on precisely this pawn:

1...h5+!

The idea is to decoy the king into a geometrical alignment with some other crucial squares.

2 ♜xh5

The pawn is poisoned, but it must be taken because after 2 ♜g5 h4 3 ♜g4 h3 4 ♜g3 (4 ♜xh3 again leads into an unfavourable geometrical situation: 4...♜f3 5 e6 ♜g5+ 6 ♜g4 ♜xe6 draws) 4...h2 5 ♜g2 ♜a7 White is paralysed.

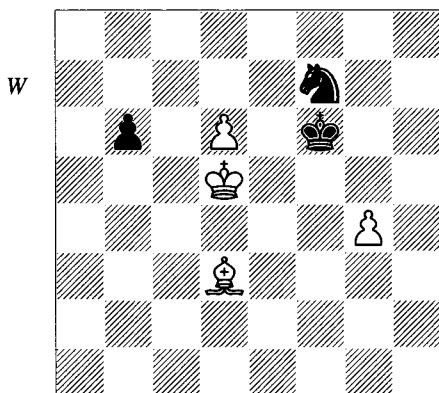
2...♜c6 3 e6 ♜d4 4 e7 ♜f5 5 e8 ♜e3!

The shortest way is not always the best: 5...♜g3+ 6 ♜g6 (necessary to make the following move) 6...♜e4 7 ♜f6 ♜c5 8 ♜d5+ ♜a7 9 ♜b4 would save the pawn.

6 ♜b5

On 6 ♜d3 (or 6 ♜e2) there follows 6...♜d5, which wins a tempo by threatening 7...♜f4+.

6...♜d5 ½-½



Marović – Korchnoi
USSR-Yugoslavia (Erevan) 1971

The game was adjourned but I did not pay much attention to the position, because the following day we played a new round, then there was a free day spent on a long excursion and only after that there was a special day for adjourned positions (in the huge country of the bright future, time was very cheap). I could not miss seeing some old Armenian monasteries and relied on our analysts who told me that “everything was winning” (the most dangerous assessment). Not checking things, I went to the

adjournment with an empty head, forgetting two things:

a) Viktor Korchnoi survived the siege of Leningrad;

b) I was playing against one of the few truly great endgame players of the 20th century.

I started to play as I had been told, but the growing technical difficulties gradually spoilt my satisfaction.

71 ♜c6?

Our second R.Marić told me that 71 ♜b5 wins: 71...♜g5 72 d7 ♜xg4 73 ♜e6 or 71...♜d8 72 d7 ♜e7 73 g5 ♜e6 74 g6 ♜d8 (or 74...♜f4+ 75 ♜c6 ♜e6 76 ♜c4) 75 g7 ♜f7 76 ♜d6. However, that was after the game, when I found that 71 ♜c4 and 71 d7 also win. Before the resumption, however, according to him and my negligence, the text-move was also decisive.

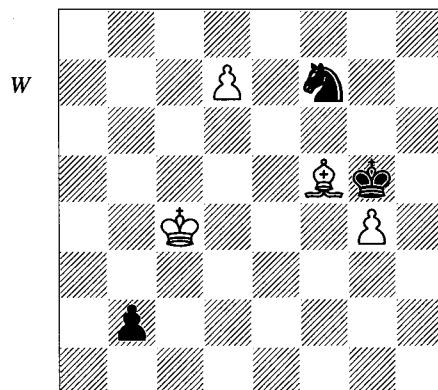
71...♜g5! 72 ♜f5

After 72 ♜e2 b5 White cannot stop the b-pawn without losing his own.

72...b5 73 ♜d5

This keeps hope alive; 73...♜xd6 does not work due to 74 ♜xd6 b4 75 ♜e5 b3 76 ♜e4 b2 77 ♜f3 and White is just in time to defend the pawn while keeping the promotion square under surveillance.

73...b4 74 d7 b3 75 ♜c4 b2 (D)



76 ♜c3

I was hopeful because I saw that 76...b1♛ 77 ♜xb1 ♜xg4 78 ♜d4 ♜g5 79 ♜a2! ♜d8 80 ♜e5 ♜g6 81 ♜d6 ♜f6 82 ♜c7 ♜e7 83 ♜d5 is winning for White.

76...♜f6!

When my opponent played this move, I felt at once there was something wrong with my

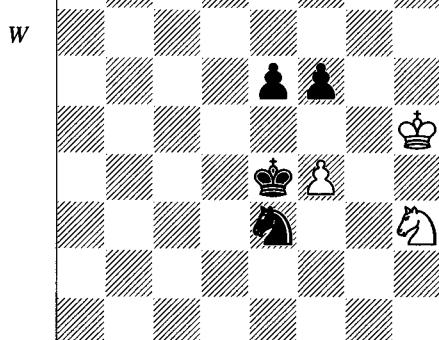
analysis. I took the pawn and as I went to the toilet I saw the rest clearly in my mind.

77 ♜xb2 ♜e7 78 ♜c3 ♛d6!

Coming back to the hall I met Aivar Gipslis, who said: "So you are winning". I replied: "Unfortunately, not any more." Gipslis could not have been thinking of 78...♛h6? because 79 ♜e6 obviously wins. He probably superficially calculated 78...♜e5?, when 79 ♜d4 ♜xd7 80 ♜xd7 ♛xd7 81 ♜d5 indeed wins. But there was the third option which I anticipated and which my opponent would not miss even if awoken at 3 o'clock in the morning.

79 ♜e6 ♜b7 80 ♜d5 ♜c5 81 d8♛+ ♜xd8
82 ♜d4 ♜d7 83 ♜e6 ♜f6 84 g5 ♜e7 85 ♜e5
♛h7 86 g6 ♜f8 ½-½

Korchnoi received thunderous applause from the packed hall. A quarter of a century later, during the Erevan Olympiad of 1996, I walked one morning to see the place. The building was decrepit and the space around it in a rueful state, so that I did not recognize it at first. Only Korchnoi's knight in my mind's eye stood unchanged.



Taimanov – Spassky
Leningrad 1952

Taimanov's chances to save the game do not look too bright here, because his second pawn cannot be defended for long. However, Taimanov also has a horse in the race.

52 ♜g6 ♜d5

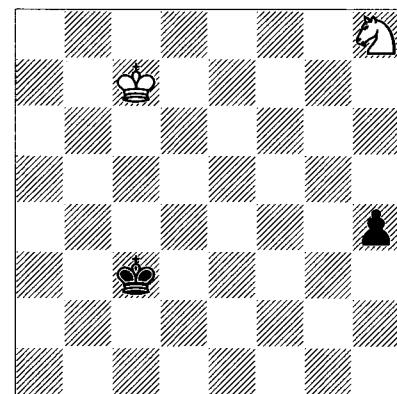
52...f5 would be met by 53 ♜g5+ (but not 53 ♜f6? ♜d5+).

53 ♜f7 ♜f5 54 ♜g1!

At the critical moment comes the critical manoeuvre!

54...♜xf4 55 ♜f3!

This hidden manoeuvre keeps the game in balance in spite of material loss. 55...e5 56 ♜h4+ or 55...♜e4 56 ♜d2+ ♜d3 57 ♜f1 f5 58 ♜f6 leads to a draw. The game continuation offered no more. After 55...♜g4 56 ♜h2+ ♜h3 57 ♜f1 f5 58 ♜f6 ♜h4 59 ♜e3 Black could not avoid 60 ♜xf5.



N. Grigoriev
'64', 1932

Killing time on a rainy Dortmund morning in 1973, Paul Keres was showing this position to Ciocaltea and me on a pocket set. I liked the solution and after lunch I wrote it down in my notebook. Only three squares separate the pawn from promotion and given the position of the king, placed so far away on c7, it seems impossible to stop it with the knight alone. However...

1 ♜f7!

1 ♜g6? h3 2 ♜f4 h2 3 ♜e2+ ♜d2 (but not 3...♜d3? 4 ♜g3, when the king cannot approach the knight) 4 ♜g3 ♜e1 followed by 5...♜f2 is obviously of no use to White.

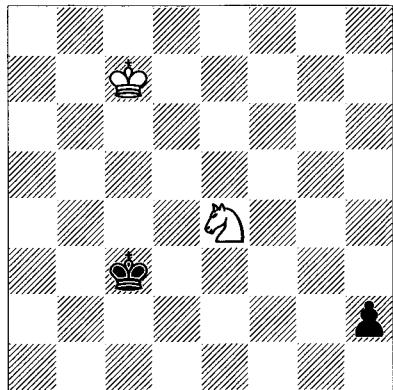
1...h3 2 ♜g5

2 ♜d6? is inadequate due to 2...♜d3, which prevents the intended continuation 3 ♜e4+. The knight reaches its destination by going via g5.

2...h2 3 ♜e4+ (D)

Suddenly White's idea becomes clear: after 3...♜d3 4 ♜g3! or 3...♜d4 4 ♜f2! the knight builds a minefield around the pawn, keeping

B



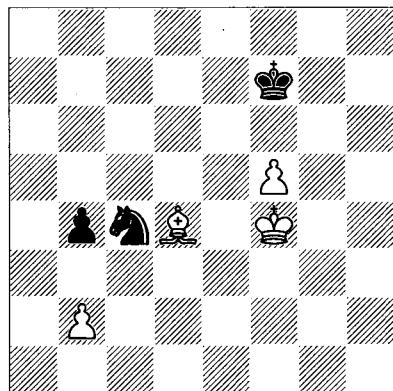
the black king at bay long enough for his own king to come to help.

3... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g3!$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$
7 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

With a draw.

Like an octopus, the knight defends its circle and no one can cross the line unscarred.

B



Kožul – Žaja
Pula open 1997

This position appears to promise Black little. It's easy to imagine that the white king will walk to the queenside, and that will be the end of matters. But the knight is a devilish piece...

60... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}e4$

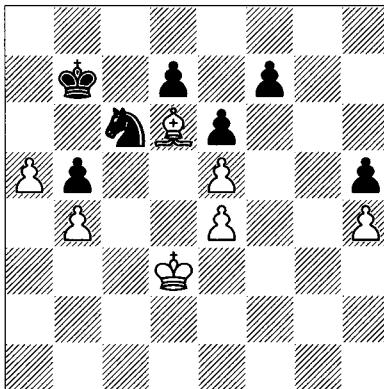
On 61 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ there is 61... $\mathbb{Q}e7$; Black must prevent $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and plans ... $\mathbb{Q}b3$.

61... $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ b3 1½-½

With other pieces it's always more or less a straightforward path, but the knight follows its own convoluted logic. Its moves are sometimes

paradoxical. The knight on a1 saves the game by being out of the game!

B



B. Wall – Vatnikov
USA 1992

A quick glance may deceive you: walk to g5, win the h5-pawn and that's it. But Black's powerful knight will see to it that no easy solutions are possible.

1... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

The idea is clear: the knight will block access via e5 and g5 by ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$, but given that c5 is also a route for possible penetration, will it be enough?

3 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4 a6

On 4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$, 4...d6 5 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ e5+ 6 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ plugs the gap. White pins his hope on his passed pawn: decoying the king to open a breach in the defensive line.

4... $\mathbb{Q}b6$

The bishop, of course, is taboo: 4... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ loses to 5 a7 $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 7 e5+, etc.

5 a7 $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}d8$

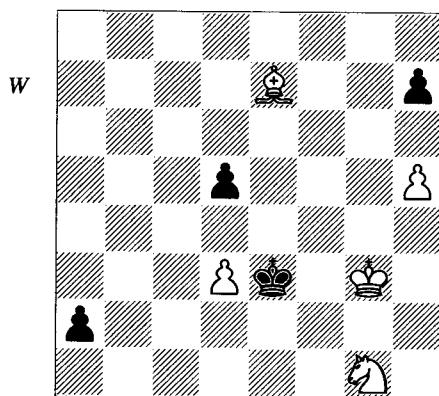
8 e5 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ keeps the door closed. With the sacrifice offered by the text-move, White would like to get in via d6, but Black can simply ignore it.

8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$

The bishop did its duty and won a tempo, but the position has remained closed. The king and the knight keep all the passes under surveillance.

In a restricted area near the edge of the board, the knight is not only good in defence of its turf

but it can get aggressive and dangerous. Its tentacles reach in different directions.



V. and M. Platov
Rigaer Tageblatt, 1909

It takes a flash of imagination to see through how the composers manage to disable Black's passed pawn at the point of promotion.

1 ♕f6 d4 2 ♔e2!

When shown the study, chess-players, accustomed to prosaic tournament practice, usually try to win by 2 ♔f3 a1♛ 3 ♕xd4+, but soon find out the endgame gives White nothing. Even when we see the second move in most cases it does not dawn upon us what the composer is up to. See and enjoy!

2...a1♛ 3 ♔c1!!!

I have given this move three exclamation marks: one for closing the back rank, one for disabling both the king and the queen, one for setting up the mating-net. 3...♛a5 loses to 4 ♕xd4+, when neither capturing the bishop nor 4...♛d2 works due to 5 ♔b3+. 3...h6 is of no avail either because of 4 ♔e5.

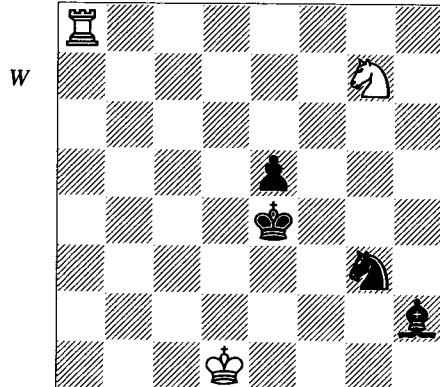
In the following diagram, Black has adequate material compensation for the exchange and if he were to move, the game would end in a draw. But the clumsy set-up of the black pieces makes his life difficult.

1 ♕a2! ♔g1 2 ♔g2

Black wins a whole piece, but the fun is only beginning!

2...♔f3! 3 ♕xg1 ♔f2 4 ♕e1 e4 5 ♔e6 e3

Black has created some saving chances by paralysing the rook. Now we notice that 6 ♔d4?

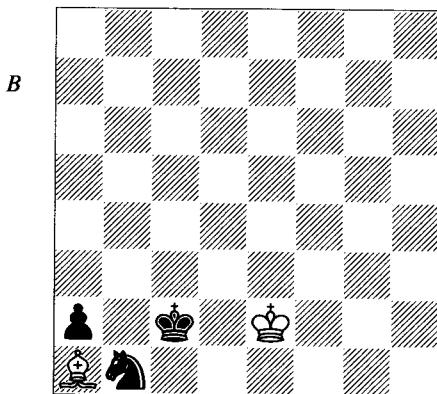


Liburkin
'64', 1935

e2+ 7 ♔xe2 ♔f1! bombards the white king by perpetual check which cannot be avoided. But do not be seduced by this nice point, because the study is deeper, and because White's own horse is also capable of impressive feats.

6 ♔c5!! e2+ 7 ♔d2 ♔f1+ 8 ♔c1 ♔xe1 9 ♔d3#

Beautiful indeed! Unfortunately, the reality of tournament play is less poetic, but nonetheless instructive:



Sakaev – Sunye
São Paulo 1991

Black's task does not look complicated at first. The knight should be played to b2, when ...♝b1 will win a piece. However, the problem starts there: due to the knight's inability to gain a tempo, the black king will be stalemated on a1 and the knight will not be able to help it.

90... $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 91 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 92 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

92 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ makes the process easier. 92... $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 93 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 94 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 95 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ catches the king on the wrong colour (in order not to lose a tempo the king must always step on the same colour on which the knight stands).

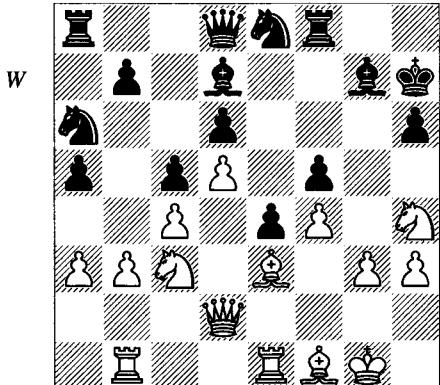
Now:

a) The game continued 92... $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 93 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b1?$ 94 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, and ended in a draw a few moves later. After 94... $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 95 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 96 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ the knight can't chase the king from the c-file.

But while the knight cannot win a tempo, the king can help! Black can win as follows:

b) 92... $\mathbb{Q}c1!$ 93 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (after 93 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 94 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 95 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 96 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ the critical c1-square is out of reach) 93... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 94 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ and the harmonious play of the king and the knight prevails. 95 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$, 95 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ and 95 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 96 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ (but not 96... $\mathbb{Q}xa1$? 97 $\mathbb{Q}c2)$ 97 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 98 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ are all winning for Black.

When we analyse the essential qualities of the knight, we find one way in which the knight excels above all the other pieces: the knight is a born blockader. Sitting in front of the enemy pawn and securely protected by it, it blocks the pawn, but, reaching out, its tentacles feel in all directions and over the pawn. A minor piece turns into a mighty defender.



Reshevsky – Mecking
Sousse IZ 1967

In this position, with a typical King's Indian Defence structure, White has just fixed the centre by 22 f4 e4, and his dark-squared bishop

conveniently blockades the e4-pawn. However, the new situation requires some regrouping and Reshevsky seeks better places for his key pieces...

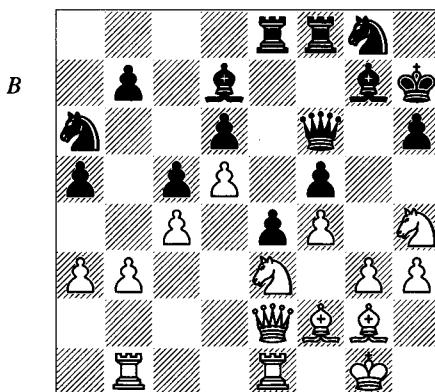
23 $\mathbb{Q}f2$

Played for two reasons: in expectation of the natural 23... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (followed by 24... $\mathbb{Q}g7$), but primarily to vacate the e3-square for the knight. If White could play on the queenside, the strong blockading bishop on e3 would be of colossal use, but the pawn-structure dictates that he should turn to the kingside, when the knight, a superior blockader, will replace the bishop on e3. Black's lame reaction only increases its power.

23... $\mathbb{Q}f6?$

This would make sense if it could be followed by ...h5, but how would he then protect the exposed pawns on f5 and h5 after White plays $\mathbb{Q}d1-e3$?

24 $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}ae8$ 27 $\mathbb{W}e2$ (D)



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

Black hopes to exchange a pair of knights by 28... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, but the long knight manoeuvre comes a step late. Supported by the mighty knight on e3, White breaks first.

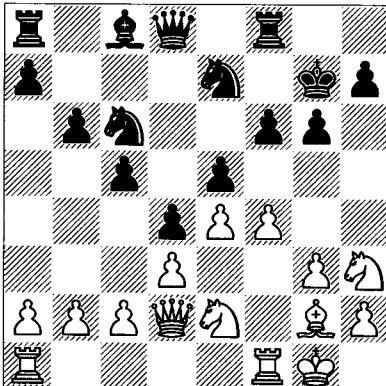
28 $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

Now it is too late to understand that 28...fxg4 29 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 30 $\mathbb{W}xe4+$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ is advantageous for White. Black has to live with it and his condition deteriorates rapidly.

28... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ fxg4 30 hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}hf5$

Black has been outplayed.

W



Taimanov – Stein
USSR Ch (Tbilisi) 1966/7

If Mark Taimanov, a brilliant player in those days, had one shortcoming, it was impatience. Seeing that Black has achieved a fine game from the opening, a cautious player would probably continue 14 c3, keeping the tension in the centre. Instead, White reacts nervously and at a stroke significantly worsens his position...

14 fxe5?

White could hardly hope for 14...fxe5? (when 15 ♜g5 is decisive) from his great opponent, but he probably expected he would be able to use the f4-square to infiltrate with his own knight. His hopes were quickly proved vain.

14...♜xe5 15 ♜f2

If 15 ♜hf4, White feared 15...♝g4.

15...g5!

This is the painful result of White's exchange of pawns: Black has been granted a marvellous central position for his blockader on e5, while White is denied any equivalent squares.

16 b4??

Another impatient reaction. It is true that the attempt to get a share of active play by 16 g4 ♜xg4 17 ♜xg4 ♜xg4 18 e5 fails to 18...♝xe5 19 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 (Stein), but when you are in unfavourable circumstances, the more you kick, the worse it gets.

16...cbx4 17 ♜xb4 ♜7c6 18 ♜b2 ♜d6

In anticipation of c3, Black strengthens his grip on the d-file.

19 ♜ac1 ♜e6 20 c3 dxc3 21 ♜xc3 ♜ad8 22 ♜fd1 ♜d4

As a result of the exchanges, a new blockader will appear on d4 with paralysing effect.

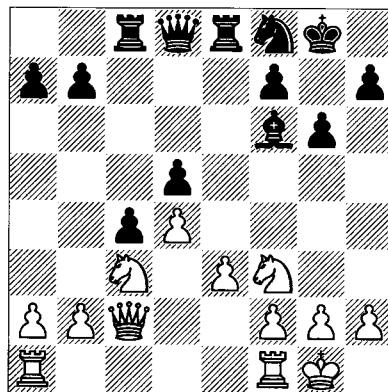
23 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 24 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 25 ♜c2 ♜f7 26 ♜f1 f5!

At the proper moment, when the knight's centralization threatened to alleviate the pressure, Stein opens the position to his full advantage.

27 exf5 ♜xf5 28 ♜e2 ♜g4

...and the h2-pawn is the minimum price White has to pay.

W



Reshevsky – Capablanca
Margate 1935

Trying to assess a closed position like this, the first thing we have to pay attention to is the pawn-structure. In our diagram the white pawn-formation limits Black's dark-squared bishop, but we note simultaneously that in case of passive play White might face a disagreeable advance of the pawn-majority on the queenside. These elements influence the choice of White's plan and Reshevsky's reaction was predictable.

15 b3?

Exploiting the fact that 15...cbx3 16 ♜xb3 costs Black the d5-pawn, White decides to settle things on his natural field of action, the queenside. Opening the b-file will neutralize Black's intended pawn advance on the queen-side.

15...♜a5?

Black replies with what appears an active move, but in fact represents a serious loss of time. The best response is probably 15...♜d7 and if 16 bxc4, then 16...♜xc4.

16 b4! ♜d8 17 ♜a4

A valuable tempo has been earned, which facilitates White's queenside plan. He threatens both $\mathbb{W}xa7$ and $\mathbb{W}b5$.

17...a6 18 b5 $\mathbb{W}e6$

Black would like to block lines with 18...a5, but 19 b6 would refute it.

19 $\mathbb{B}ab1 \mathbb{B}b8$ 20 $\mathbb{B}b2 \mathbb{A}e7$ 21 $\mathbb{B}xa6 \mathbb{W}xa6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}c2$

White's attack has yielded two valuable positional elements: pressure on the backward b7-pawn and the powerful blockader on c3 which constantly probes the weakness of the d5-pawn and constrains Black to passivity.

22... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23 $\mathbb{B}fb1 \mathbb{W}a7$ 24 a4 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e5!$

Threatening 26 $\mathbb{Q}c6$, but in fact with deeper plans on his mind, Reshevsky sets in motion a long knight manoeuvre. Its destination is the queenside by a long, yet hidden route.

25... $\mathbb{W}e8$ 26 f4

26 $\mathbb{B}b6!$ again threatens to play 27 $\mathbb{Q}c6$, which 26... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ fails to prevent.

26...f6 27 $\mathbb{Q}g4$

In order to break through on the queenside, sooner or later $\mathbb{Q}b5$ must be played. After the exchange of knights, the king's knight will take its place on c3 to fulfil all its functions: defending the a4-pawn, attacking the d5-pawn, and blockading the c4-pawn.

27... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 28 h3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}f2 \mathbb{A}a3$ 30 $\mathbb{B}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ f5 32 $\mathbb{Q}b5$

The time has come. With a pair of knights exchanged, White's control of the whole queenside will be overwhelming.

32... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xc7 \mathbb{Q}xc7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}e6$ 35 $\mathbb{W}f2$ b6 36 $\mathbb{W}f3$

White threatens 37 $\mathbb{B}b5$: 37... $\mathbb{B}d8$ 38 $\mathbb{B}ab2$ or 37... $\mathbb{B}xb5$ 38 axb5 $\mathbb{B}d8$ 39 $\mathbb{W}a7$.

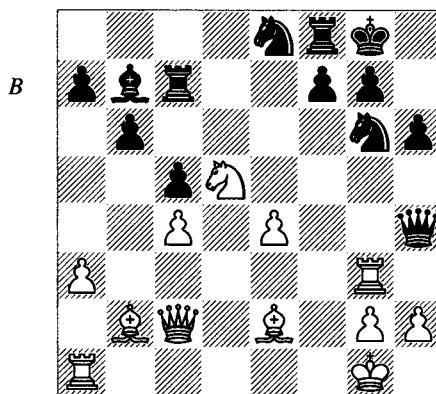
36... $\mathbb{B}d8$ 37 $\mathbb{B}ab2 \mathbb{W}e7!$ 38 $\mathbb{B}b4$

On 38 $\mathbb{B}b5$ Capablanca had prepared the reply 38... $\mathbb{W}a3!$ and if 39 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ then 39... $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 40 $\mathbb{W}xd5 \mathbb{W}xe3+$ with counterplay.

38... $\mathbb{B}d7$

I assume that Reshevsky as usual was in time-trouble and the fact that he now played the hesitant 39 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ reflects this. After a loss of time he found the right plan, moving the king to the queenside, but under worsened circumstances. As a matter of fact, 39 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ intending to bring the king to c2 would have prepared $\mathbb{B}b5$ and the black position burdened with the pawn weakness and opened king's position could

not last long. The subtle play of Reshevsky's blockaders on c3 played the key role in obtaining this big advantage.



Korchnoi – Kramnik

Vienna 1996

This was the picture of the struggle after 22 moves. White is a pawn down, but his d5-knight is quite a nuisance which Black must eliminate. When that happens, the black king-side will be exposed to strong pressure from White's two bishops and his major pieces. Kramnik responds logically:

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23 $\mathbb{B}xd5 \mathbb{Q}d6!$

The knight takes up its duty of blockading the passed pawn and we start to feel its beneficial influence on a number of important squares.

24 $\mathbb{B}f1$

On 24 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ Black can respond 24... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 25 $\mathbb{B}xg6$ $\mathbb{F}xg6$ 26 $\mathbb{W}xg6 \mathbb{Q}f5$.

24... $\mathbb{W}e8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}e5$

Simple and logical: on e5 the knight stands as a barrier to White's powerful dark-squared bishop. At the same time we feel the counter-pressure on c4, while ...b5 hangs in the air, which explains White's next move.

26 a4 $\mathbb{B}ce7$

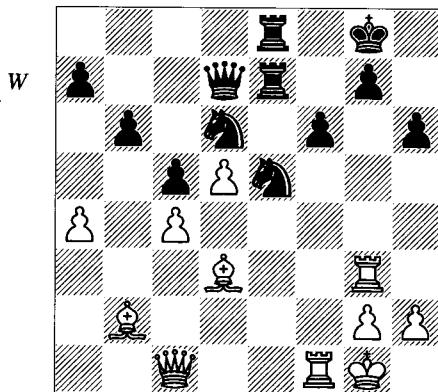
26... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 27 $\mathbb{B}h3 \mathbb{W}g5$ is also good, but the text-move is very consistent and natural.

27 $\mathbb{B}h3 \mathbb{W}g5$ 28 $\mathbb{B}g3 \mathbb{W}h4$ 29 $\mathbb{B}h3 \mathbb{W}g4$ 30 $\mathbb{B}g3 \mathbb{W}d7$

After repeating moves, Black decides to take risks. His king remains under great pressure and vulnerable and his decision was a courageous one. Not everybody would dare to play

so against such a formidable opponent. Young Kramnik was made of the right stuff!

31 ♜d2 ♜g6 32 ♜c3 ♜e5 33 ♜c1 f6! (D)



A necessary consequence of the previous decisions. Black must deal with the dark-squared bishop most energetically. There is no reason to fear 34 ♜xh6?, since 34...♜xd3 35 ♜xf6 ♜f5 36 ♜xf5 ♜e1+ leads to mate.

34 ♜xe5?

A sort of resignation. 34 ♜b1! would keep the pressure, preserving chances. Then 34...f5?! riskily opens the position; for example, 35 ♜xh6 ♜exc4 36 ♜c3 (then if 36...♜e4?, there is 37 ♜xe4 fxe4 38 ♜f4). The critical line is 34...♜dx4 35 ♜xh6 ♜f7 36 ♜xe5 ♜xe5, when 37 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 38 ♜h7+ ♜f8 39 ♜h8+ ♜e7 40 ♜xg7+ ♜f7 41 ♜xe5+ ♜d8 42 ♜b8+ leads to a draw. But at the board it was not an easy decision, even for Korchnoi. In any case, after the text-move, the knight on d6 proves too formidable.

34...fxe5 35 ♜xh6??

It was better to reconcile oneself to the material imbalance and play 35 ♜g6, than to allow Black to exclude the d3-bishop from play.

35...e4 36 ♜h5 ♜e5 37 ♜g6

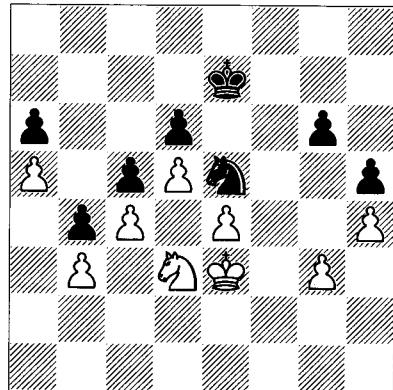
Or 37 ♜h4 exd3 38 ♜h3 ♜f5.

37...exd3

White is lost. 38 ♜h3 can be met by the prosaic 38...♜f5, as in the game, but the nicer 38...♜xh3 39 gxh3 d2 40 ♜xd6 ♜e1 works as well.

A blockading knight is a mighty piece indeed. When a strong blockading knight is set up, we should immediately consider how we might eliminate it...

W



Razuvayev – Ostojic

West Berlin 1988

Glancing at the position, one is tempted to say it's a dead draw, but Razuvayev knew better:

54 ♜g4!

This sudden thrust has a subtle point: after the blockade is untenable whatever Black tries.

54...♜xg4+

54...♜f6 55 gxh5 gxh5 56 ♜f4 ♜g4+ 57 ♜d2 ♜e5 58 ♜xh5 ♜xe4 59 ♜g7 demonstrates that Black perhaps could take care of the h-pawn, but not of the soon-to-be-passed a-pawn (the a6-pawn is doomed).

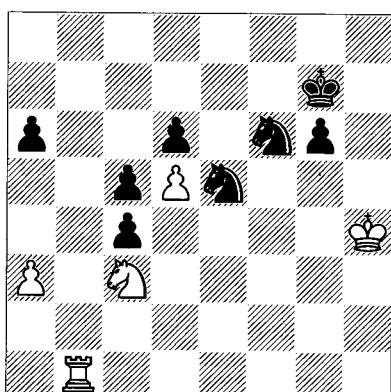
55 ♜f4 ♜f6

55...♜f6 again fails, this time to 56 e5+! dx5+ 57 ♜f3, etc.

56 e5 dx5+ 57 ♜xe5 ♜d6 58 ♜xg6

White is winning.

B



Ro. Hernandez – Marovic

Tallinn 1975

When we adjourned in this position, my opponent was satisfied with his position in view of his threat of $\mathbb{B}b6$. I assessed it differently. The key was in the blockader on c3. If Black can remove it, then the c-pawn will become a threat and the whole situation would change. I sealed...

41... $\mathbb{Q}f3+!$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}g3$

On 42 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ I had in mind 42... $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge4+$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$, setting free my passed pawns.

42... $\mathbb{Q}d4$

An important moment of respite: on the intended 43 $\mathbb{B}b6$ Black would reply 43... $\mathbb{Q}b5$.

43 $\mathbb{B}b7+?!$

Despite one's first impressions, this works to Black's advantage.

43... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 44 $a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

White has parried the threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}b5$, but now he is facing a new threat – penetration by the black king.

45 $\mathbb{B}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 46 $\mathbb{B}xa6$

After 46 $\mathbb{B}xd6$, Black can reply as in the game, while 46... $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ is also effective.

46... $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 48 $\mathbb{B}a8$

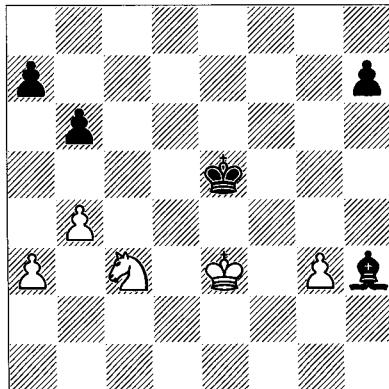
If 48 $\mathbb{B}xd6$, then 48... $c3$ 49 $\mathbb{B}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 50 $\mathbb{B}e1$ $c2$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ wins.

48... $c3$ 49 $\mathbb{B}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-1

On a great many occasions, success depends on the minor piece. This small series of games demonstrates impressively how important a role the knight plays as a blockader. It also broadens our view of the knight's essential qualities, especially compared to those which the bishop can boast of. What the bishop can do, the knight cannot, but vice versa as well. Their fundamental qualities come to the fore depending on other circumstances, primarily the pawn-structure. We shall compare some typical situations and see how the bishop and the knight fare in them. We shall watch them first in simple endgames and for a good reason: the essential values of a piece are best revealed in elementary circumstances.

In the following diagram, although White's pawns are on dark squares and the black king is opposed and temporarily kept at bay, the open space favours the long-ranged bishop. To exploit that advantage, the black king must penetrate to one wing or the other. A series of instructive preparatory moves follow:

B



Wirthensohn – Korchnoi

Biel 1979

46... $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}5!$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $a6$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Impressively simple bishop manoeuvres have limited the mobility of White's king and knight; the d5-square cannot be controlled any more.

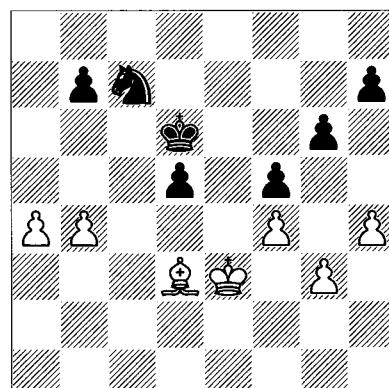
53 $a4$ $bxa4$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}b2$

The final attempt to stop further penetration, but the tempi-winning machine will force it through in a sequence of precise moves.

55... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 59 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

White has not been given the slightest chance.

B



Marović – Rukavina

Yugoslav Ch (Umag) 1972

Several factors tell against Black in this endgame, which was reached at the adjournment.

White's pawn-formation is more compact (two pawn-islands against three islands) and mobile. Supported by the superior bishop, the queen-side pawn unit may be transformed into a distant passed pawn, after which penetration by the white king becomes a very real danger. On the kingside White's pawn advance may also prove unpleasant and create tactical threats (Black must bear in mind h5-h6 followed by g4). The most unpleasant circumstance lies in the fact that Black's pawns are placed on light squares, the colour of the white bishop.

41...h5

This was the sealed move. Black was sure that by stopping h5 he reached an impenetrable position. However, the apparently logical text-move, by weakening the g6-pawn, makes White's task easier. 41... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is better.

42 $\mathbb{Q}d4$

In order to advance the queenside pawns, the king will be better posted at c3.

42... $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 44 a5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}d4$

It is important to force the black king back to d6 and relinquish the control of the b5-square.

45... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$

In his adjournment analysis, Black either did not see this hidden resource or he underrated it. The manoeuvre $\mathbb{Q}c2-a4$ will endanger the g6-pawn.

46... $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

By blocking the a4-e8 diagonal and restricting the bishop, Black solves his main problem, but only temporarily.

49 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

49 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ is premature because of 49... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$, etc.

49... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$

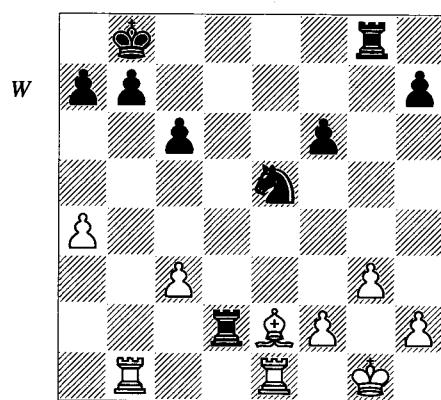
As simple as that. The point of 50 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ was that now 51... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ does not work due to 52 $\mathbb{Q}a4$. For instance, 52...d4 53 b5+ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 54 a6 bxa6 55 bxa6 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 57 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and White is quicker.

51...bx $c6$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 56 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 57 a6

In those days, the second time-control was at move 56, which explains the repetition of moves.

57... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 58 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ d4 59 a7 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 60 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 61 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 62 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 63 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 64 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ c5 65 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 1-0

White promotes with check.



Alekhine – Euwe
Rotterdam Wch (2) 1937

With this material balance, the relations between the white bishop and the black knight are crucially important.

24 f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}gd8?$!

25... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ should be preferred.

26 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}8d6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}be1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$

If 28... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$, then 29 $\mathbb{Q}g8$.

29 h4

White has gradually shaped the game to please his bishop. The kingside pawn-majority in harmony with the bishop becomes a major force to reckon with.

29... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5?$!

31...f5 32 h5 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ looks somewhat better, but 33 g4 keeps an advantage.

32 $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ h6 33 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

The h-pawn has been singled out as a weakness and it cannot be defended. Grabbing the white queenside pawns in return would be no consolation, because the h4-pawn is too quick.

34... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

35... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ slows down, but it does not impede, the king's penetration: 36 f5 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ carries the plan on.

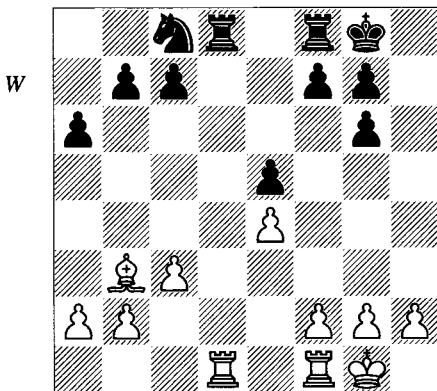
36 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}a2+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Or 38... $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 40 f5, etc.

39 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 40 g4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 41 g5 1-0

If we look back at these six positions featuring the struggle between the bishop and the knight, we notice that all of them have one characteristic in common – the pawn-structure. Each time the pawn-structure was broken into two or three pawn-islands divided between both wings. In between there was enough space

for the bishop to manoeuvre and for the king to penetrate. The pawn-formation favoured the long-ranged bishop. Those pawn-formations in which the pawns were placed on the bishop's colour proved especially difficult. The constant danger of being attacked limited the defensive possibilities beyond hope. It's useful to keep these positions in mind and, before the play reaches an endgame or at least during the transition, to shape it accordingly.



Bronstein – Simagin
Moscow Ch 1947

When we take a glance at the diagram, we understand at once that the pressure exerted by the bishop on f7 might increase if the f-file becomes open. Therefore, Bronstein's next move, despite its apparently mysterious nature, should not surprise us.

23 h4!

A subtle move. Considering that f7 is and will remain vulnerable, White wants to combine pressure on it with his desire to dominate the open d-file. At some point he intends to play f4, which means he must prevent ...g5 in time. Judging from his next move, it seems that Simagin did not perceive his opponent's intentions.

23...♝d6?

A critical loss of time. Black should play 23...♜xd1 24 ♜xd1 ♛d6 or 23...♝fe8, with the point 24 f4 exf4 25 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 26 e5 ♜e8 27 ♜xf4 ♜e7 28 ♜d4 ♛f8.

24 f4! exf4 25 e5 ♜xd1 26 ♜xd1 ♛b6

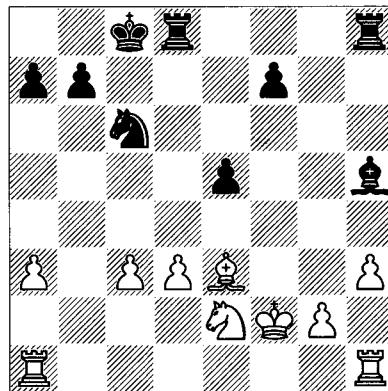
Temporarily preventing penetration by the rook. The knight on b6 is unstable.

27 c4 a5 28 c5 a4

Black now hoped for 29 cxb6 axb3 30 bxc7 bxa2 or at least to force White to retreat his bishop from its diagonal. But a surprise was in wait for him...

29 e6!

White is now winning. On 29...axb3 30 e7 ♜e8 31 ♜d8 bxa2 there is 32 ♜xe8+ ♛h7 33 ♜d8 (33 ♜h8+ should be sufficient as well) 33...a1♛+ 34 ♛h2 ♜e1 35 e8♛, etc.



Smyslov – Botvinnik
Moscow Wch (7) 1954

The players entered this endgame in which White has a material advantage, but Black has preserved counterplay. The d3-pawn hangs and in reply to 24 ♜ad1 there is 24...f5 (inserting 24 g4 ♛g6 would change nothing). Smyslov takes an important strategic decision.

24 d4! ♜xe2 25 ♛xe2 exd4 26 cxd4 ♜xd4+ 27 ♛f2

The sacrifice is explained by the fact that White's mobile bishop should prove more effective than Black's knight in an open position with pawns on both sides of the board and a passed h-pawn.

27...b6 28 ♜hd1

28 ♜ac1+ ♛b7 29 ♜hd1 is more precise, as after the text-move Black could play the simplifying 28...♝b3 29 ♜ab1 ♜xd1 30 ♜xd1 ♜d8.

28...♝e6 29 ♜ac1+ ♛b7 30 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 31 h4 ♜h8 32 g3 b5 33 ♛f3 a5

Botvinnik responds naturally, activating his pawn-majority.

34 ♛e4 ♜e8 35 ♛f3

35 g4 comes into consideration.

35... $\mathbb{H}h8$ 36 $\mathbb{H}c3$ f5 37 $\mathbb{H}d3?$!

37 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ (or the same idea a move earlier), intending to move the pawns was the most reasonable reaction to Black's advance. In addition, the white rook could exploit the e-file.

37... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{H}a8$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

The king becomes active and Black is nearer to security.

40 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ b4 41 h5 $\mathbb{H}a7$ 42 $\mathbb{H}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 45 $\mathbb{H}d3+$

On 45 g4 there is 45... $\mathbb{H}f7$.

45... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 46 $\mathbb{H}d2$ $\mathbb{H}h7$ 47 $\mathbb{H}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

This move has usually been awarded a question mark, but it is not yet fatal. Nevertheless, 47... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ is more natural.

48 a4 $\mathbb{Q}e7?$

Black hopes to eliminate the white pawns, even at the eventual cost of a piece. 48... $\mathbb{Q}c5?$ is too slow because of 49 h6 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}g7$, but 48... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (the target is the a4-pawn) looks good.

49 g4!

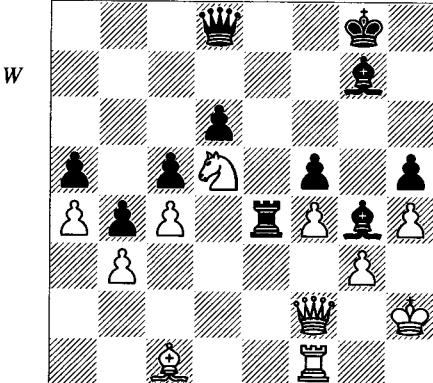
By 48... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ Black has doomed himself to passive waiting and now faces the punishment.

49...f4

49...fxg4+ 50 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ opens the door to f5 and the passed pawn cannot be stopped any more. The text-move is no better though...

50 $\mathbb{H}d2$ 1-0

50... $\mathbb{H}f7$ loses to 51 $\mathbb{H}d5$.



Karpov – Anand
Linares 1991

This closed position looks drawish, but Karpov, strangely enough, makes an erroneous decision to exchange rooks.

33 $\mathbb{H}e1?$

White should keep the position closed with 33 $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

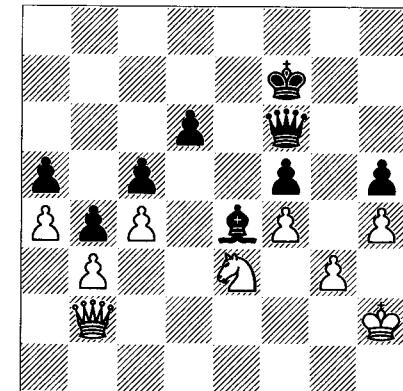
33... $\mathbb{H}xe1$ 34 $\mathbb{W}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

Suddenly we notice that as a consequence of the exchange White will have to concede the e-file because the white queenside pawn-structure is endangered by the unexpectedly awoken g4-bishop. The pawns on the light squares will sooner or later fall prey to it.

35 $\mathbb{W}d2$

35 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}a8$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ (or 36 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}e8!)$ 36...fxg4 37 $\mathbb{W}d2$ (or 37 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}f3$) 37... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ cannot be White's best option, but the text-move sets the light-squared bishop free.

35... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 38 $\mathbb{W}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}f6!$ (D)



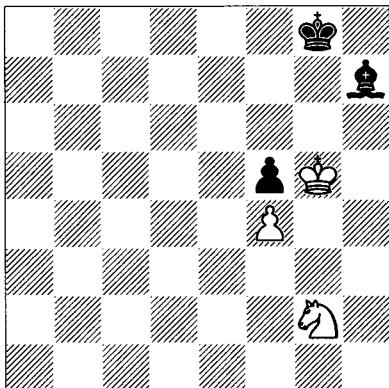
Affirming what is getting clearer at each new move: Karpov's pawn-formation, set on the light squares, will tell against him. The rest is actually very easy.

39 $\mathbb{W}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $d5$ 44 $cxd5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 0-1

We could say that Bronstein and Smyslov deserved to win and that Karpov deserved to lose. At the sensitive point of transition, Bronstein and Smyslov put their hope into the bishop and their assessment was correct. Karpov, on the contrary, failed to see the essential shortcoming of his pawn-formation, which proved to be the essential element on which Anand built victory.

However, the pawn-structure does not always favour the bishop. In chess there is always the reverse side. It's time to take a look at it.

W



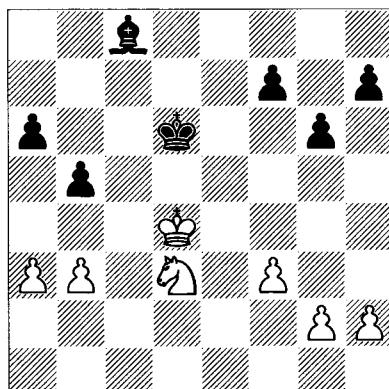
Troitsky
Novoe Vremia, 1898

1 ♜h6 ♜h8 2 ♜h4 ♜g8 3 ♜f3 ♜h8 4 ♜e5
♜g8 5 ♜c6 ♜h8 6 ♜e7

Mate follows next move.

It is good to start our analysis of the superior knight versus bad bishop with Troitsky's caricature of a bishop. Whenever we come across a bad bishop in practical master chess, it is always essentially the same case with innumerable nuances: a bishop limited by its own or the opponent's pawn-structure. If it were not for the f5-pawn, Black would draw without any difficulty at all, but here the bishop was fatally restricted by its own pawn.

W



Milov – Khenkin
French Cht 1998

White has a free hand to dictate the future course of events, but he miscalculated. He

continued 33 b4? and after 33...g5! 34 ♜c5 f5 35 g3 h6 36 ♜d3 ♜b7 37 ♜e5 ♜d5 he had squandered his advantage. White's spatial superiority and favourable pawn-structure suggested something else...

33 ♜c5!

By threatening 34 ♜e4+ to open the door for the king, White provokes 33...f5, which will transform the pawn-formation into a limiting barrier and further restrict the bishop's movement.

33...f5

Unfortunately, 33...a5 is not available due to 34 ♜e4+ ♜e6 (or 34...♜c6 35 b4) 35 b4 axb4 36 axb4 f6 37 ♜c3 ♜d7 38 ♜c5 ♜e5 39 g3 and the ending is lost for Black.

34 f4

In the c8-bishop we start to recognize a relative of Troitsky's bishop.

34...a5 35 b4 a4

After 35...axb4 36 axb4 Black reaches zugzwang even more quickly.

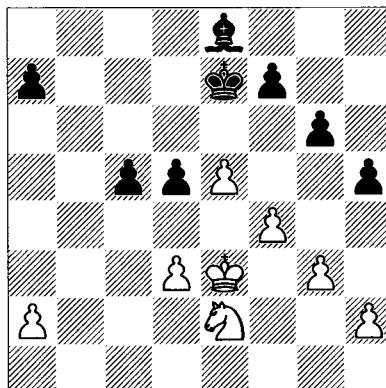
36 g3 h6 37 h3 g5 38 fxg5 hxg5 39 h4 f4

39...gxh4 is no better: 40 gxh4 f4 41 ♜e4.

40 hxg5 fxg3 41 ♜e4+

White is winning.

W



Alekhine – Yates
Hastings 1926

If Black were to move, his prospects would be quite different, but watch how Alekhine changes the nature of this position in just two moves:

33 d4 c4 34 f5

By granting Black a protected but inoffensive passed pawn on the c-file, White seizes the

initiative on the kingside. White threatens 35 fxg6 fxg6 36 ♜f4, while 34...gx f5 35 ♜f4 is equally harmful for Black.

34...g5 35 h4 f6 36 hxg5 fxg5 37 ♜g1!

The king will take care of the c4-pawn, while the knight will have a free hand on the kingside.

37...♜d7

Anticipating 38 ♜h3, Black could reply 37...g4, but 38 ♜e2 then takes care of the c4-pawn and the king gets the free hand on the kingside. On 37...h4, 38 g4 prepares 39 ♜h3, when the g5-pawn falls.

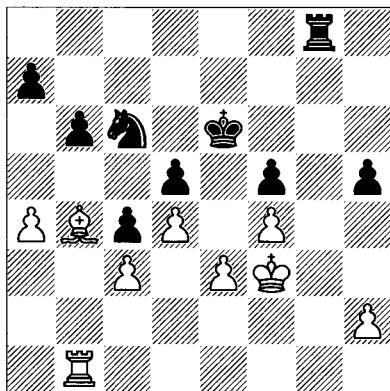
38 f6+ ♛e8

Or 38...♛f7 39 ♜f3 g4 (or 39...♛g6 40 ♜xg5) 40 ♜g5+ ♛g6 41 e6, etc.

39 ♜f3 g4 40 ♜h4 ♛e6 41 ♜g6 ♛f7 42 ♜f4 ♛d7 43 ♛e2 a5 44 ♛e3

Black is in zugzwang and will gradually lose his pawns.

B



Lautier – Kramnik
Tilburg 1997

In comparison with the previous examples, the bishop is free, on an open, but empty and useless diagonal. The open file controlled by the black rook is much more valuable and Black does not hesitate to exploit it...

37...h4!

Black threatens 38...h3 followed by penetrating with his rook, and this cannot be prevented.

38 a5

White resorts to desperate measures, since 38 ♛f2 h3 39 ♜g1 is obviously not available,

because after Black exchanges off all the pieces, the c-pawn will be too quick.

38...bxa5 39 ♜c5 ♜g7 40 ♜a3 h3 41 ♜b5 a4 42 ♜c5 ♜b8 43 ♜a5 a6 44 ♜xa4 ♜g2 45 ♜b4

White's action has slowed down, but not prevented, the kingside incursion. Note also that the white king is in danger: 45 ♜b4 ♜d7 46 ♜a4 ♜f6 47 ♜xa6+ ♛f7 48 ♜a7+ ♛e8 49 ♜e7+ ♛d8 50 ♜f7 ♜e4 51 ♜xf5 ♜d2#.

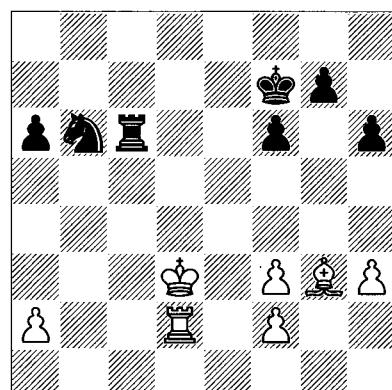
45...♜xh2 46 ♛g3 ♜e2 47 ♛xh3 ♜xe3+ 48 ♛g2 ♜c6

White has put up as much resistance as was reasonably possible given his limited resources, but now the formidable knight paralyses him and loss of material is unavoidable.

49 ♜xa6 ♜d7 50 ♛f2 ♜d3 51 ♜c5 ♜xc3 52 ♜b6 ♜b3 53 ♜a6 ♜d3 0-1

The effect of the pawn-formation on the real worth of minor pieces is obvious. However, one must be cautious in evaluating the chances. Various elements make the pawn-structure favourable or unfavourable to one of the minor pieces and a good positional assessment must take them all into account.

B



Boleslavsky – Smyslov
USSR Cht 1948

In principle this position featuring pawns on both wings should favour White, but his damaged pawn-structure bears heavily on the coming events.

32...♜c5!

The rook moves to the a-file: it will tie White's rook to the defence of the a2-pawn, while preserving its own mobility.

33 $\mathbb{B}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{B}a5$ 35 $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 36 $\mathbb{B}c6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 37 $\mathbb{B}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Black is gradually squeezing his opponent, who is running out of good moves.

38 $\mathbb{B}c5$

38 $\mathbb{B}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}a3+$ costs White a pawn, as does 38 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $fxe5+$.

38... $\mathbb{B}a3!$

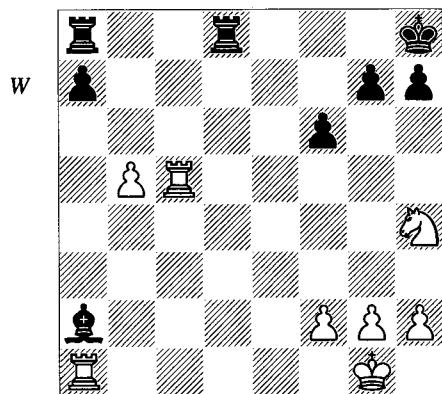
Finally in order to parry the mate White must swap his bishop for the knight, reaching a bad rook endgame.

39 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}a4+$ 40 $\mathbb{B}c4$

40 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is more tenacious but ultimately inadequate: 40... $fxe5$ 41 $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{B}a3+$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $a5$ 43 $\mathbb{B}d2$ $g6$ 44 $\mathbb{B}c2$ $h5$ 45 $\mathbb{B}b2$ $\mathbb{B}c3$ 46 $\mathbb{B}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$, etc.

40... $fxe5+$

White is losing. The damaged structure influenced the course of the game far more than the fact that the pawns were on both wings, which theoretically should help the bishop.



Leko – Adams
Wijk aan Zee 2001

Searching for critical details in order to assess this position correctly, we note that Black is handicapped by the backward pawn at a7, while White is favoured by better posted pieces; taken together these are two clear signs that Black must defend with great caution.

26 $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

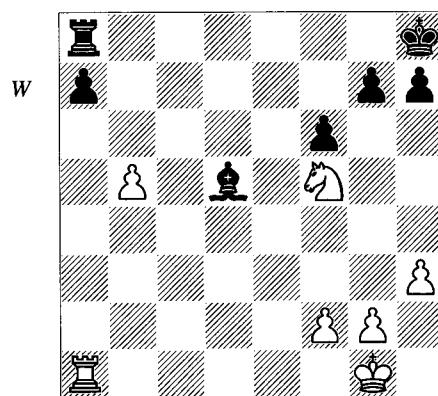
Directed against 27 $\mathbb{B}c7$, when 27... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 28 $\mathbb{B}a5$ $\mathbb{B}db8$ (obviously not 28... $\mathbb{B}d7?$ due to 29 $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 30 $b6$ $a6$ 31 $b7$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 32 $\mathbb{B}xa6$) levels the play.

However, 26... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ makes a better impression, keeping the knight away from f5. On 27 $\mathbb{B}c7$ there is 27... $\mathbb{B}dc8$ (27... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ loses to 28 $b6$; the seemingly saving 27... $\mathbb{B}d4$ is strongly met by 28 $\mathbb{B}a6!$; 27... $\mathbb{B}d7$ fails to 28 $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 29 $b6$ $a5$ 30 $b7$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 31 $\mathbb{B}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 33 $\mathbb{B}b5$, etc.) 28 $\mathbb{B}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $a5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$, when the valuable passed pawn should make up for the weakened king position.

27 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{B}d5?$

27... $\mathbb{B}d7$ leaves Black's a8-rook undefended and 28 $b6$ causes trouble again: for example, 28... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 30 $\mathbb{B}c6!$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 31 $\mathbb{B}a5$ paralyses Black in an unenviable position. The best defence was 27... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$, steering towards a tolerable rook endgame after 28 $\mathbb{B}a6$ $\mathbb{B}db8$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{B}xa6$ 31 $bx a6$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$ 32 $\mathbb{B}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $h5$ 34 $\mathbb{B}xa7$ $\mathbb{B}a1$.

28 $\mathbb{B}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (D)



29 $\mathbb{B}a5!$

In his analysis (in *Informator* 82) Leko is not so pleased with this strong, natural move and considers 29 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 30 $\mathbb{B}d1$ to be better:

a) After 30... $a5$ he gives the spectacular 31 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$, when his main line is 31... $a4?$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 33 $b6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 34 $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 35 $b7$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}e3!$, winning. He also gives a subvariation: 31... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ (to meet 32 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ with 32... $\mathbb{B}d7$) 32 $\mathbb{B}d7$, continuing 32... $\mathbb{Q}e4?$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 34 $b6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 35 $b7$ $a4$ 36 $\mathbb{B}c7$, when White eventually wins. However, stronger is 32... $a4$ 33 $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 34 $\mathbb{B}xb7$ $a3$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $a2$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{B}c3$, reaching a rook endgame where he has chances to save the game, although his king will be cut off on the back rank.

b) 30...h6 31 $\mathbb{B}d7$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ is also given by Leko, but he wrongly concludes that White wins by 32 $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 33 bxc6, but instead of his line 33... $\mathbb{B}c8(?)$ 34 c7 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}f1$, when the white king is in the square, 33... $\mathbb{B}b1+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{B}c1$ draws in simple fashion.

29...g6 30 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

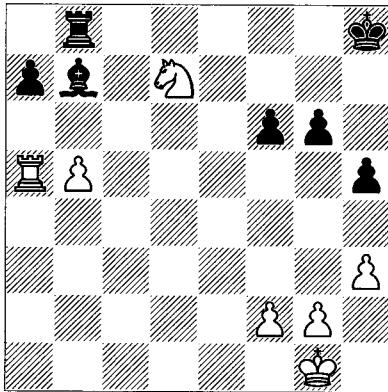
The knight is strutting all over the battlefield. It is superior to the bishop which is obliged to stay on the long diagonal to protect against b6. The temporary weakness of the f6-pawn also works in its favour. So, for instance, 31... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ loses to 32 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34 b6, etc.

31...h5

A losing move, but 31...f5 is not much better; for instance: 32 $\mathbb{Q}h2!$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (35... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ loses to 36 f3 $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 37 b6 axb6 38 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ bxc5 39 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ and the bishop is trapped) 36 f3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ with a clear advantage for White.

32 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (D)

B



33... $\mathbb{Q}a8$

Or 33... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e8!$, etc.

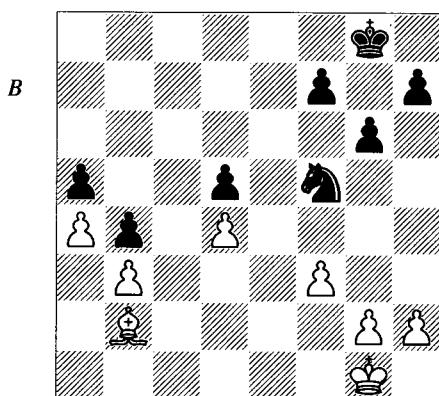
34 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ a6 35 bxa6 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$

37 h4!

The decisive penetration by the king to g5 has been prepared by fixing the pawns on light squares.

37... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 40 f3 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

White has forced a winning position (he carries out f5, after which the h5-pawn is also doomed).



Fairhurst – Keres

Hastings 1954/5

The closed character of the position apparently favours Black, perhaps even decisively. That was what Keres himself felt. He followed his intuition.

36... $\mathbb{Q}e3$

The first step is to slow down the king's centralization.

37 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ f5 39 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ f4 40 g4 $\mathbb{Q}xg3+?$ 41 hgx3

Both players have got what they wanted. White has trapped the knight, but Black will soon create a passed pawn on the h-file and at this moment it does seem decisive.

41...h5 42 $\mathbb{Q}e2?$

We shall see below what White should have played.

42...g5 43 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

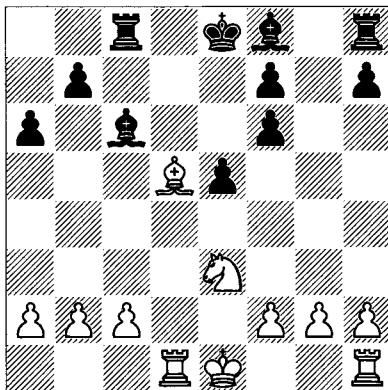
43 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ is better.

43...h4 44 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 46 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 49 $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 0-1

However, 42 f4! would have changed things greatly! Although it opens the way to the black king, it significantly slows down his kingside play. After 42... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 44 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 45 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$, when defeat seems unavoidable, the position conceals a tremendous chance for White – 46 $\mathbb{Q}c3!!$ and all of a sudden the situation changes so much that White wins. Firstly, 46... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ does not work due to 47 b4 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 48 f5!! This second mysterious move opens the black king to checks from b8 and later from g8 as well – 48... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 49 b5 h4 50 b6 h3 51 b7 h2 52 b8 $\mathbb{Q}+$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 53 $\mathbb{Q}g8+$, when the f5-pawn and

the d5-pawn fall, and the d4-pawn wins. In case of 46... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 47 $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 48 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g5 49 $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ White is in time to block the passed pawns with his king, and soon $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ will strike decisively.

B



Karpov – Taimanov
USSR Ch (Leningrad) 1971

White has just played a simple but powerful move – 18 $\mathbb{Q}c4-d5$. The exchange of one set of bishops reaches a simpler endgame in which the weak squares d5 and f5 remain under the white knight's control.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ f5 22 g3!

A subtle positional surprise: instead of the ‘normal’ 22 c3, which after 22...f4 gives Black fine play, White is ready to sacrifice the c2-pawn.

22...f4

Black has no real choice, because otherwise White would play 23 f4 himself.

23 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ exf4 24 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2+$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

The first point: Black has no time to grab the b2-pawn, because his king is perilously exposed and 25... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ forebodes nothing good.

25... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

On 25... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ there is no simplifying 27... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ due to 28 $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$.

26 $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d3!$

A multi-purpose piece: the knight can carry out many tasks simultaneously. Positions with pawns on both wings in general favour the

bishop, but here the powerful centralized knight dominates the scene from an unassailable light square.

27... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Exploiting the excellent coordination of his pieces, Karpov concentrates his power on the vulnerable point – the f7-pawn.

28... $b5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}e1$

While Black's pieces are uselessly arranged on the c-file, the less active of the white rooks is lifted into the attack.

29... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 33 f4

33 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ would be met by 33... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. Now Black is given a possibility to defend the pawn by 33... $\mathbb{Q}f8$, but it would entail a loss of material on the queenside.

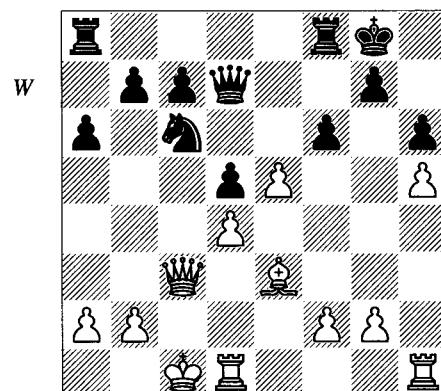
33... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

White threatens 36 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ – an important gain of time.

35... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

The small but well-coordinated white force sets up the mating-net and Black cannot escape without severe damage: 37... $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ (but not 38 $\mathbb{Q}d8+$? $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$) wins slowly, while 37... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ is answered by 39 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ h5 40 $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}e7#$.

We cannot believe blindly the general characteristics, but in a large majority of cases they will not fail us, either in the endgame or in more complex middlegame positions.



Quinteros – Larsen
Manila 1973

18 f4

This is the type of move we are often prone to play mechanically. Larsen impressively demonstrated what's wrong with it. Wiser for his lesson, we would rather choose 18 exf6 $\mathbb{K}xf6$ 19 $\mathbb{K}hg1$.

18...a5!

As if touched by a magic wand, the position changes fundamentally. The apparently impotent knight wakes up, threatening 19... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, when ... $\mathbb{A}a6$ or ... $\mathbb{W}f5$ is not difficult to imagine.

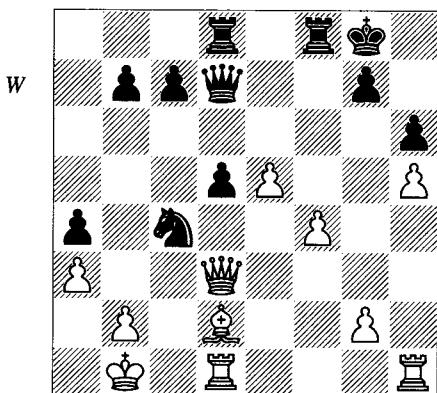
19 a3 a4

In two moves the position has been changed in the knight's favour; the strong squares b3 and c4 leave no doubt about what follows.

20 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 21 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $fxe5$ 23 $dxe5$

23 $fxe5$ $\mathbb{K}f2$ is not appealing for White. Thus we get a position characterized by two pawn-majorities. If you look attentively at the pawn-masses, you will notice that due to the mighty knight at c4 and general disposition of the pieces, White can set his pawns in motion only after lengthy preparations. Black, on the contrary, is ready to do so now.

23... $\mathbb{K}ad8$ (D)



Black threatens 24... $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$, winning material.

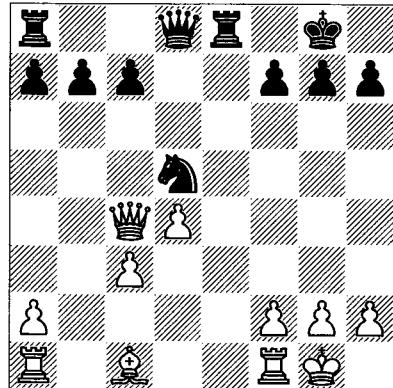
24 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ b5 25 $\mathbb{K}he1$ $\mathbb{K}fe8$ 26 $\mathbb{W}f3$ c5 27 $\mathbb{K}d3??$

27 g4 is more natural. Doubling rooks will not stop the black pawns.

27...d4 28 $\mathbb{K}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 29 g4 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 30 $\mathbb{K}e1$ c4 31 $\mathbb{K}dd1$ b4

...and the pawn avalanche will soon bury the white king.

B



Bobotsov – Portisch
Siegen OL 1970

If White were to move, he would probably look for a way to retreat his queen and prepare to play c4, combining it with pressure on the queenside. He would probably consider $\mathbb{K}b1$ or a4. However, it is Black to move, and he gives his opponent no respite...

15...b5!

Given that 16 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ loses material to the tactical point 16... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 17 $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$, the sudden pawn advance is intended to secure the centralized knight a lasting position on its splendid central square.

16 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17 a4

17 c4 comes into consideration. The text-move fails to achieve the desired effect.

17... $\mathbb{W}c6!$

A subtle positional move.

18 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Both 18 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 19 $axb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ and 18 $axb5$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ suit Black.

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

The third consecutive move worthy of a great positional player. White is forced to exchange queens, reaching an endgame in which the powerful knight is superior to the bishop.

19 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $bcx4$ 20 $\mathbb{K}ab1$ $\mathbb{K}ab8$ 21 $\mathbb{K}fc1$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 22 $\mathbb{K}f1$ a6?!

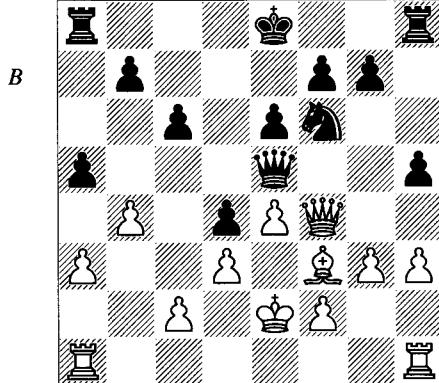
After 22...a5, White has no counterplay worth mentioning. This slight imprecision gives White some tactical chances.

23 $\mathbb{K}b4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 24 $cxb4$ c3!

It is only thanks to this hidden counter-blow that Portisch was able to keep his advantage and regain his composure.

25 ♜xc3 ♜e4 26 g3 ♛e8 27 ♜e1 ♜d7 28 ♜c4 ♜b6

Black gradually recovered his lost initiative and later won the game.



Fischer – Keres
Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade Ct 1959

By skilfully exploiting the opening errors of his young adversary, Keres reached this advantageous position. Several details speak in his favour, but we are primarily interested in the relation of the two minor pieces, on which the approaching endgame will depend in significant manner. Keres's next move shows that he was thinking along the same lines:

20...♜d7! 21 ♜xe5 ♜xe5

The knight occupies the desired central post and it is not so easy to get rid of it.

22 bxa5

On 22 ♜g2 Black replies 22...h4 23 f4 ♜g6 24 ♛f3 hxg3 25 ♛xg3 e5, continuing to dominate on the dark squares.

22...♜d7 23 ♜hb1 ♛c7 24 ♜b4 ♜xa5

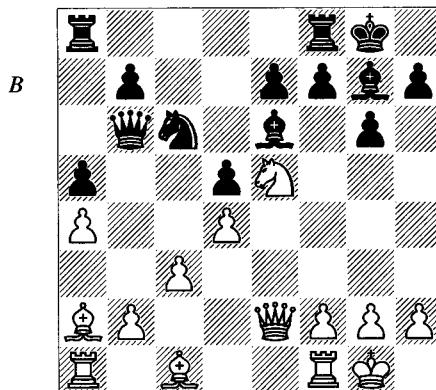
Just in time: the d4-pawn is taboo (25 ♜xd4 c5 traps the rook) and White can only try to activate his kingside pawns and his bishop.

25 ♜g2 g5! 26 f4 gxf4 27 gxf4 ♜g6 28 ♛f3 ♜g8 29 ♛f1 e5 30 fxe5 ♜xe5+ 31 ♛e2 c5

The strategic target has been reached: a splendid place in the very centre has been secured for the knight. The bishop, on the contrary, reminds us more and more of Troitsky's bishop from the study above.

32 ♜b3 b6 33 ♜ab1 ♜g6 34 h4 ♜a6 35 ♜h3 ♜g3 36 ♛f1 ♜g4 37 ♜h3 ♜xh4 38 ♜h1 ♜a8

...and Black's advantage was transformed into material.



Jimenez – Larsen
Palma de Mallorca 1967

When I was young, I was fortunate enough to meet even greater players than Bent Larsen, but I wonder if I ever met another player who was so free from clichés and routine play. His game against the Cuban international master of the old guard impressed both the plebs and the elite.

14...♜xe5! 15 dxe5 d4

The first impression is that by giving up his king's main defender, Black has weakened his position, but a more attentive examination of the exchanges confirms that Larsen's assessment was right. His activity in the centre becomes the dominating characteristic of the position.

16 ♜h6 ♜fd8 17 ♜xe6 fxe6 18 ♜fe1 ♜d5

Dashing White's hopes of playing 19 ♜g4.

19 ♜f4 ♜f8 20 g3

It is understandable that White wants to keep the bishop on its original diagonal; it would be out of play on g3.

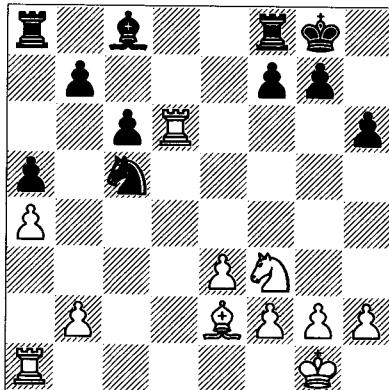
20...♜f5 21 ♜ad1?!

It is easier to criticize this move than to propose a better one. White is naturally preoccupied about the e5-pawn and the constant threat of ...d3. However, giving up the a4-pawn looks like resignation and 21 h4 seems the only reasonable option.

21...♜b3 22 h4 ♜xa4 23 ♜e4 ♜b3 24 cxd4 ♜xb2 25 ♜b1?! ♜xd4 26 ♜xb7 ♜dxe5!

...and Larsen's concept triumphed.

B



Torre – Ivanchuk
Istanbul OL 2000

Black, aware of the strength of his knight, continues logically:

18...♞g4!

He threatens to seize the file by 19...♝fd8 and White's following moves represent a desperate attempt to prevent it.

19 ♜c4 ♜xf3 20 gxf3 ♜fd8 21 ♜d4

White has temporarily managed to parry the immediate threat, but his position remains tense and sensitive.

21...♝f8 22 b3 ♜xd4 23 exd4 ♜d7 24 d5

It's now or never; otherwise White would have to live with his damaged pawn-structure on the kingside and an isolated pawn in the centre.

24...♝e5! 25 dxc6

On 25 f4 Black would continue 25...♝g6.

25...bxcc6 26 ♜e2

Better is 26 f4 ♜xc4 27 bxc4 ♜b8 when White can continue to resist by 28 ♜d1 ♜b4 (28...♜e7 is met by 29 ♜e1+, but not 29 c5 ♜d8) 29 c5 ♜c4 30 ♜d7 ♜xc5 31 ♜a7.

26...♜b8 27 ♜b1

27 f4 is again better than the passive game continuation.

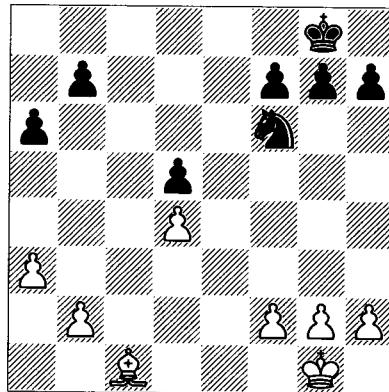
27...♜b4 28 ♜g2 ♜e7 29 ♜e1 ♜d6 30 ♜d1 ♜d4 31 ♜c2 f6 32 ♜g3 g5

The privileged position of the centralized knight is unassailable and White is slowly running out of useful moves.

33 ♜d1 ♜xd1 34 ♜xd1 ♜d3 35 ♜c2 ♜f4 36 ♜g4 ♜e5

Having isolated the white king, Black can enter the final operations.

B



Saidy – Fischer
USA Ch (New York) 1963/4

Can this simple endgame position be won? Well, Fischer, playing Black, obviously thought the chances were on the side of the knight and the course of the game proved him right. Speaking generally, and with the experience of the illustrative examples we have analysed in mind, it cannot surprise us. The position is rather closed, the bishop has neither targets nor useful diagonals, and the d4-pawn needs constant protection. In such a situation one prefers to possess the knight.

23...♞d7 24 ♜f1

In line with standard procedure, White hurries to centralize his king, but this manoeuvre is not justified by the further course of the game. It leads to a passive set-up which suits Black. The best continuation was 24 ♜e3 followed by more active play on the kingside (the pawns on h3 and g4, the king on g2 or g3).

24...♝f8 25 ♜e2 ♜e6 26 ♜d3 h5

Slowly but inexorably Black starts to seize space on the kingside.

27 ♜e3 ♜h7 28 f3 ♜g6 29 a4 ♜f5 30 ♜e2 g5 31 ♜f2 ♜d8 32 ♜d2 ♜g6 33 ♜e3 ♜e6 34 ♜d3 ♜f5 35 ♜e3 f6 36 ♜e2 ♜g6 37 ♜d3

I do not believe Fischer was in time-trouble; he never was. The repetition of moves just reveals that he was not quite sure which plan to adopt. It was better to play ...f5 earlier, because now 37 g4 f5 38 h3 came into consideration, setting up a barrier to the pawn advance. The manoeuvre ...♝c7-e8-f6 should then be met by the bishop manoeuvre ♜f2-g3-e5; just in time not to be forced to give up the pressure on g4.

37...f5 38 ♜e2??!

38 h3 is more precise.

38...f4 39 ♜f2 ♜g7!!

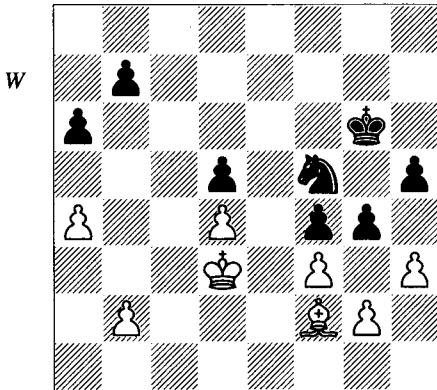
I find it strange that the promising 39...g4!? is passed over in silence by many annotators. For instance:

a) 40 h3 loses to 40...g3 41 ♜g1, after which the knight moves to h4 tying the white king to the defence of the g2-pawn. The black king then walks to the other side of the board, where the knight will help to open the door.

b) On 40 g3 there is 40...♜g5 41 gxf4 (41 fxg4 does not work due to 41...f3+) 41...♝xf3 42 h4 ♜f5 43 ♜e3 ♜h2!, when Black threatens 44...♝f1+ 45 ♜e2 g3. 44 ♜e1 avoids the threat, but 44...a5! leads to zugzwang (45 ♜xa5 g3 or 45 b3 b6).

c) If White waits with 40 ♜d3, Black has the unpleasant 40...♜g7 intending ...♜f5. For example, 41 ♜h4 ♜f5 42 ♜d8 fails to 42...♜e3 43 fxg4 hxg4 44 g3 ♜f1.

40 h3 ♜f5 41 ♜d3 g4! (D)



This is the best chance. White must obviously take twice.

42 hxg4 hxg4 43 fxg4 ♜h6 44 ♜e1?

After 44 ♜e2 ♜xg4 45 ♜g1 ♜g5 (alternatively, 45...♜f5 46 ♜f3 ♜f6 47 ♜h2 ♜h5 48 a5 ♜g5 49 g3) 46 ♜f3 ♜f5 47 g3 White holds on.

44...♜xg4 45 ♜d2 ♜f5 46 ♜e1 ♜f6 47 ♜h4 ♜h5 48 ♜e1 ♜g4 49 ♜e2 ♜g3+

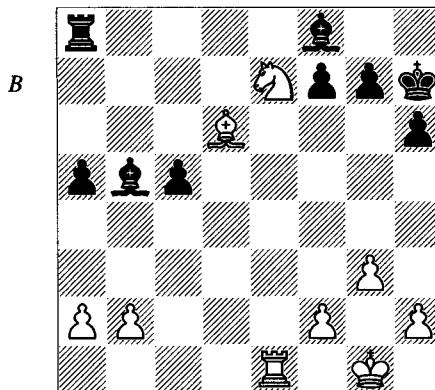
White's basic problem is that the pawn ending is lost for him, which makes the knight mobile and that in turn gradually pushes White into defeat. There is nothing he can do about it.

50 ♜d3 ♜f5 51 ♜f2 ♜h4

White has been outplayed.

Bishop-Pairs and Knight-Pairs

The bishop and the knight obviously depend on the surroundings. Various positional details influence their mobility and strength. With the bishop- or knight-pair there are basically few changes. The same positional elements bear on them and shape their activity.



**Darga – Portisch
Beverwijk 1964**

There have just been some exchanges, bringing about this simplified position. White's previous move, 26 ♜f4-d6 looked promising. He probably expected 26...c4, when 27 ♜f5 works in his favour. However, things went differently...

26...♞c4

The first sign that the pin might be quite uncomfortable. Now 27 b3 ♜e6 would leave the knight in danger. That little point forces the next few moves.

27 ♜xc5 ♜xa2 28 ♜a3 g6 29 ♜c1

The game develops unfavourably for White and he judges correctly that the exchange of rooks will bring about the best endgame he can get.

29...a4 30 ♜c8 ♜xc8 31 ♜xc8 ♜g7

Of course, it would be a huge error to exchange this strong bishop for the bishop tied to the b2-pawn.

32 ♜d6 f5 33 ♜f1 ♜d4!

A bad omen. While the centralization of the black king cannot be prevented, White gets

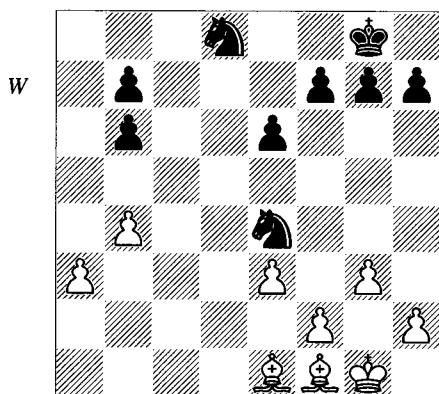
confronted with the fact that his king will not be able to reach the centre so easily.

34 ♜e2 ♜g7 35 f3 ♜d5! 36 h3 ♜f6 37 ♜e8+ ♜f7 38 ♜d6+ ♜e6 39 f4

Lacking reasonable moves, White opens the position further, but his pawns remain vulnerable on both wings.

39...♜c6 40 g4 ♜b6 41 ♜c8 ♜d8 42 ♜e3 ♜b7 43 ♜d6 ♜b6+ 44 ♜d3 ♜a6+ 45 ♜c3 ♜c7

...and White's position started to crack.



Korchnoi – Matanović
Palma de Mallorca 1968

A difficult middlegame led Black into accepting this ending with two knights versus two bishops. The lack of space tells against Black and his activity is reduced to passive resistance by the nature of the position.

25 f3 ♜d6 26 b5!

Several functions are implied by this modest pawn move: the c6-square has been denied to the d8-knight, the b4-square has been vacated for the dark-squared bishop and the b-pawns have been fixed.

26...♜f8 27 ♜c3 f6 28 ♜d3

As the pressure grows, the black pawn-structure deteriorates and becomes more pliable.

28...h6 29 ♜b4 ♜e7 30 f4 ♜d7 31 e4 ♜8f7 32 ♜f2 g6

Cramped in such a narrow space and faced with the eventual threat of e5, Black cannot wait. He was hoping for 33 ♜e3 and planned to meet it by 33...e5 34 f5 gxf5 35 exf5 h5.

33 e5!

This thrust simplifies the position, but also opens it up, making it more suitable for the bishops.

33...fxe5 34 ♜xg6 exf4 35 gxf4 e5

The reduction of material represents Black's last chance, but that, too, has its price: the white king joins the fight.

36 ♜f3 ♜e6 37 a4 ♜d5 38 h4 ♜e6

38...♜d4 39 f5 offers Black little hope.

39 ♜c2!

The quality of the bishop comes to the fore in the open space and its sudden movements from one side of the board to the other make it a fearful adversary.

39...♜f5 40 ♜b3+ ♜f6 41 fxe5+! ♜xe5+ 42 ♜e4

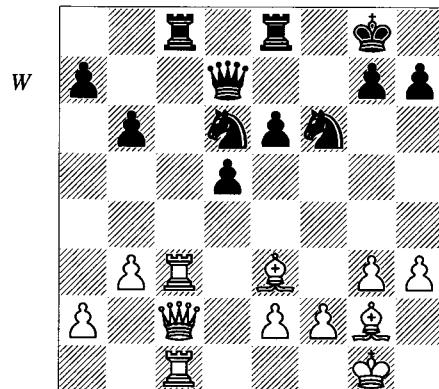
A pawn for a paralysing pin: a good trade!

42...♜xh4 43 ♜c3 ♜hg6 44 ♜d4

The fixed pawns have been doomed from the very beginning. Having attended to more important things, White turns to them.

44...h5 45 ♜xb6 ♜d7 46 ♜d4+ ♜e7 47 a5 h4 48 ♜d5

Although Black continued his resistance, it has become largely symbolic.



Stein – Parma
Moscow Alekhine mem 1971

Entering the middlegame, Parma managed to keep the position as closed as possible and to oppose the white major pieces on the c-file. What continues to worry him is his somewhat weaker pawn-structure divided into three islands and the lasting menace that it could be broken up by e4.

22 ♜f4 ♜xc3 23 ♜xc3 ♜c8 24 ♜b2 ♜f7?!

Black's life would be easier with the rooks exchanged. What Black failed to grasp, White understood at once, and with his next move kept a pair of them on the board.

25 ♜d1 ♜e7 26 g4

Black has covered all the potential weaknesses, but he remains vulnerable to the king-side pawn advance, which would disrupt the present harmony of the defensive units.

26...h6 27 ♜g3 ♜c5 28 ♜f1

This was not a simple decision, since it cedes the only open file to Black.

28...a5

After 28...♜c2 White had prepared 29 ♜a3, counter-attacking and infiltrating the queen into the black camp.

29 e3 ♜c3 30 ♜e2 ♜e4 31 ♜h2 ♜c6

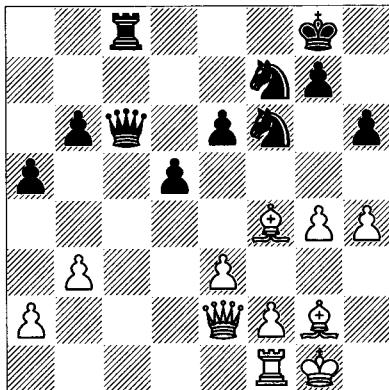
There turns out not to be much for Black to do on the c-file.

32 h4

By putting g5 under surveillance, White carries on his kingside plan.

32...♜f6 33 ♜f4 (D)

B



33...♜c2?

Waiting is rarely a good plan – this was Black's last chance to counter the increasing menace on the kingside. 33...e5 is necessary.

34 ♜a6 ♜c6

Black admits that he has forfeited a tempo. 34...♜xg4 does not work due to 35 ♜h3 h5 36 f3 g5 37 hxg5 ♜xg5 38 ♜g2.

35 e4!

What Stein was dreaming of for a long time finally comes true. The position opens up for the bishop-pair. White threatens 36 ♜c1, and

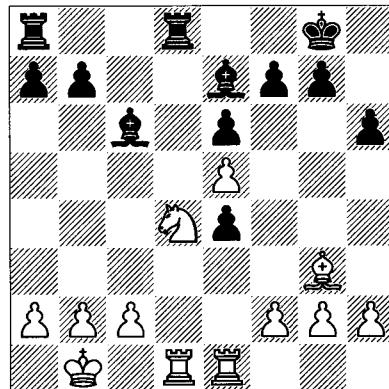
the defence literally falls apart in a couple of moves.

35...♜a8 36 exd5 exd5 37 ♜d3 ♜e6 38 g5 hxg5 39 hxg5 ♜e4 40 ♜h3 ♜g6

Or 40...♜c6 41 ♜c1.

41 ♜xd5 ♜d8 42 ♜e6 ♜xe6 43 ♜xe6 ♜f8 44 ♜c4

The white bishops are dominating the whole board.



Svidler – Kasparov
Linares 1999

An earlier exchange on e4 left the black pawn in danger, but the more attentively you look at the position the less imperilled it seems. The champion makes it obvious with his next move...

17...♜e8!

Black could defend the pawn by 17...♜d5, but with good reason he does not wish to allow 18 ♜b5.

18 c3

After 18 ♜xe4 the bishop returns: 18...♜c6 wins back the g2-pawn.

18...♜ac8 19 ♜c2??

White decides to eliminate this bone in his throat, but in doing so exposes his king.

19...b5 20 ♜xe4 b4 21 ♜e3 a5

Supported by the bishops from afar, the minority attack seizes a strong initiative and it becomes quite an effort for White to hold on.

22 ♜e2?

Grandmaster Dokhoian says 22 ♜ed3 was necessary (given that 22...f6 can then be answered by 23 ♜xe6). The fact is that the knight's

withdrawal invites the light-squared bishop into action, after which the pressure is hardly possible to curb.

22...♝c6 23 f3

If 23 ♜xd8+ then 23...♜xd8.

23...♜xd1 24 ♔xd1 ♚c5 25 ♜d3 ♜b5 26 ♜d2 ♜e3 27 ♜d6 bxc3

The more open the position, the more difficult it is to meet the threats.

28 ♜xc3

Recapturing with the pawn opens the b-file (28 bxc3 ♜a4+ 29 ♔e1 ♜b8), while taking with the knight exposes the kingside pawns.

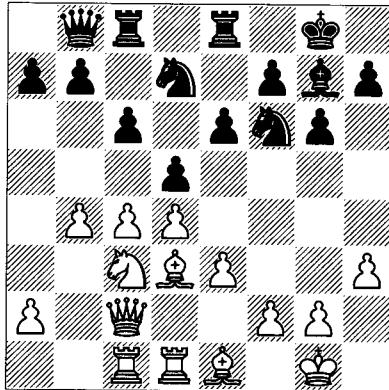
28...♞f1 29 ♜h4?!

The pawn advance on the kingside can be expected anyway; there's no need to spend a tempo inviting it.

29...g5 30 ♔e1 ♜xg2 31 ♔e2 ♜f4 32 ♜g3 ♜c1 33 ♜a4 h5

Black's initiative is obviously putting him well on top in the struggle. He will play ...h4, followed by ...♜f4, which will imperil the h2-pawn. The game will then become a largely technical issue.

B



Korchnoi – Yusupov
Lone Pine 1981

Early in the opening Yusupov had conceded the bishop-pair. After that he kept the position as closed as possible. White's previous move 16 b2-b4, however, develops an initiative which cannot be ignored. That is the problem we most often face when we try to curb the bishops' power: we cannot just sit behind a wall forever and when we try to react, the opening of the

position usually favours the bishops. Here we have reached that sensitive moment of transition, when Black knows he cannot wait any longer.

16...e5 17 dxe5 ♜xe5 18 cxd5 ♜xd5 19 ♜e2!

The position gets closer to White's desires and he preserves the bishop. It can be done, because the b4-pawn is just temporarily sacrificed.

19...♜xb4 20 ♜b3 ♜d5

Note that 20...♜a6 21 ♜xa6 bxa6 22 f4 costs Black a piece.

21 ♜xd5 cxd5 22 ♜xd5 ♜xc1 23 ♜xc1 ♜c8 24 ♜d1 ♜c6?!

The knight should stay on e5 as long as possible. Giving up the c4-square to the light-squared bishop is in itself a bad omen. 24...♜c7 is better.

25 ♜c4 ♜c7 26 ♜e4

Now that the bishop has reached its best diagonal, White takes care to keep it on it.

26...♜e5

26...♜a5 can be met by 27 ♜d5.

27 ♜b3 b5 28 ♜d5 a6 29 a4

White judges correctly that Black's queen-side pawns are vulnerable.

29...♞f6 30 ♜e4 ♜c4 31 axb5 axb5 32 ♜d5!

This is very consistent with 29 a4: the rook increases the pressure on the b5-pawn.

32...♞a8?!

Black has nothing better than 32...♜b8 33 ♜b4 ♜b7, accepting the role of a passive defender, but he believes that active defence is a better option. Unfortunately, his idea of playing against the weakness of the white first rank misses its target by a wide margin.

33 ♔f1 ♜a1 34 ♜e2

Coming out of its refuge, the king ignores the threat, while the rook remains grounded purposelessly on a1.

34...♝g7 35 ♜b4

In the end we find out it's the black first rank which is in peril!

35...♜b6 36 ♜d6 ♜c1 37 ♜xf6!

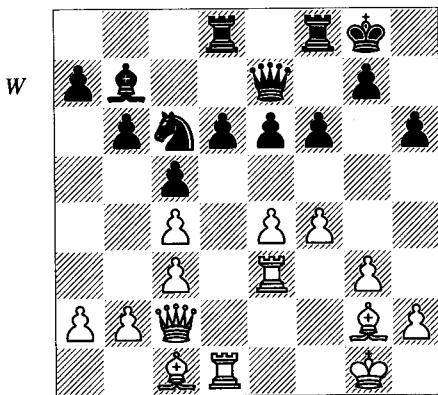
Forcing the king into the open.

37...♝xf6 38 ♜d4+ ♜g5 39 ♜e7+ 1-0

The black king is in a mating-net.

The game reveals the whole process of the struggle between the bishop and the knight in a

most instructive manner. Changing the position to suit the bishop-pair is a slow, painstaking process, played by Korchnoi with great clarity and consistency. He knows exactly what pleases his bishops and follows the general idea without wavering. It is not an easy thing to do and more often than not players spoil their chances. A missed detail, an unnoticed nuance and in a moment the position gets shaped contrary to our needs. The following game is a perfect warning.



Vaganian – Adams
Erevan OL 1996

It is not difficult to decide who is better: White has a spatial advantage, chances of advancing his kingside pawns, and a backward pawn on d6 to attack – these little details add up to a significant advantage for White. However, the position has a closed character, and it is an arduous task for White to achieve anything concrete.

18 h4 ♜d7 19 ♜h3 ♜f7

The manoeuvre ...♝d8-f7 strengthens the d6-pawn, but it is less convincing against a kingside pawn advance. The knight is therefore bound for e7.

20 ♜e2 ♜e7 21 ♜h2?

White misses the proper moment to open the position by 21 e5. Then 21...f5 22 exd6 ♜fd8, as given by Adams in *Informator*, is dubious in view of 23 ♜xe6. Black would have to resort to 21...fxe5 22 fxe5 ♜f5 (22...♜f3 or 22...♝g6 does not work because the e6-pawn is vulnerable), when 23 ♜f1 is advantageous for White. Adams now seizes his chance.

21...f5! 22 exf5 ♜xf5 23 ♜ed3

The e6-pawn is protected by tactical means: 23 ♜xe6 fails to 23...♜f3.

23...h5

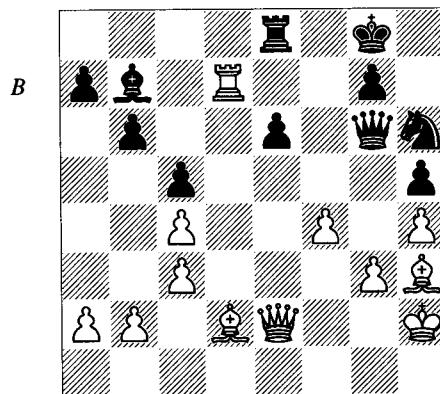
The d6-pawn is hanging, but preventing 24 h5 is a priority.

24 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 25 ♜xd6 ♜e8 26 ♜d3 ♜g6

The pawn sacrifice has substantially changed the kingside pawn-structure, and now it favours the unapproachable position of the black knight. It's true that White can eliminate it but in the arising position with opposite-coloured bishops, Black's light-squared one would be largely superior.

27 ♜d2 ♜h6 28 ♜d7 (D)

On 28 ♜e3 Black would reply 28...♝g4+ 29 ♜xg4 hxg4.



28...♜e4 29 ♜g2?

Taking into consideration the holes around his king, it would be wiser for White to activate his queen's bishop by 29 f5, when 29...exf5 (or 29...♝xf5 30 ♜g5) 30 ♜xh6 holds on. The text-move simplifies into an endgame with a bad bishop versus a strong knight, which becomes the lord of the light squares.

29...♝g4+ 30 ♜g1 ♜f6 31 ♜xa7

31 ♜xe4 obviously fails to 31...♝xg3+.

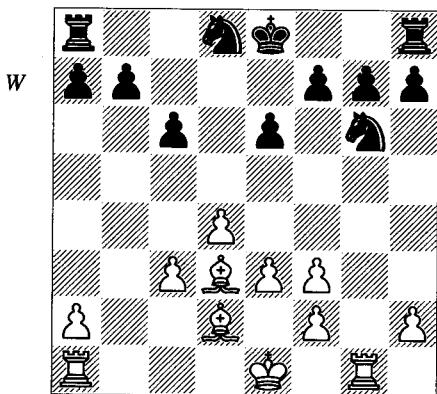
31...♝xg3 32 ♜e1 ♜g6 33 ♜h1 ♜xg2+ 34 ♜xg2 ♜g4 35 ♜c6 ♜h7 36 ♜d7

Or 36 ♜f3 ♜b1 37 ♜e2 e5.

36...♝b1 0-1

The transformation of the pawn-structure altered the nature of the position and together with it the significance of the minor pieces involved in the struggle. What suits the knight does not suit the bishop. A series of further

instructive cases will strengthen the reader's grasp of the subtle differences which influence the strength and weakness of minor pieces.



**Em. Lasker – Chigorin
Hastings 1895**

The exchange of queens at the transition from the opening into the middlegame brought about this highly interesting position, characterized by a struggle between the white bishops and the black knights. Chigorin's last move was 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7-g6$.

15 f4 0-0 16 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ 17 $\mathbb{R}g3??$

The two sides' plans have taken concrete form: while Black consistently follows the idea started by ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$, White has decided to keep the stable centre, double rooks on the g-file and play on the kingside. In principle, White's plan is wrong. With the course of the game in mind one is prone to think that this was the critical moment at which White erred. Opening the position by 17 f5 would better suit the bishops.

17...c5 18 $\mathbb{R}ag1$ c4! 19 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f5!

Black's last two moves are solutions of elementary simplicity. Black begins his struggle against the bishop-pair by blocking the position in his knights' favour. At the same time 20... $\mathbb{R}f7$ has been made possible and the threat of h4 loses its point. This fact implies that White's kingside strategy has been put in doubt.

20 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{R}f7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{R}c6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{R}a6$

Undoubtedly better than 22...a6.

23 a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24 $\mathbb{R}b1$

The kingside attack has failed and White transfers the pressure to the semi-open file on the other wing.

24... $\mathbb{R}d7$ 25 $\mathbb{R}gg1$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$

The d5-square has been reserved for this knight for quite a long time.

26 $\mathbb{R}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{R}a5$ 28 $\mathbb{R}gb1$ b6 29 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ g6 30 $\mathbb{R}b5$ $\mathbb{R}a6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}c1$

The bishop is idle on a3, but on c1 it cuts the rook off from the kingside. It is clear that White, whose bishops have been stifled by an unfavourable pawn-formation, starts planning how to carry out e4. In order to succeed he will need the bishop on c1 to defend the f4-pawn, but before that the quiet 31 $\mathbb{R}g1$ looks better.

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

The knight moves to a more active position; in view of the intended 32 $\mathbb{R}a1$ and 33 a5 it's a necessary step.

32 $\mathbb{R}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33 $\mathbb{R}bb1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

According to Levenfish, Black should consider the immediate 33...g5. In the game continuation, Black ends up having to play this move in worsened circumstances.

34 f3 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 35 $\mathbb{R}a3$ g5

White is ready to play e4, so Black cannot delay any further.

36 $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 37 e4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

After 38 exf5 exf5 39 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ the black knights would return to their dominant central positions.

38... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f4!

Chigorin leads his battle against the bishops with impressive consistency and manages to keep the blocked character of the position. Now the c4-pawn and the f4-pawn limit the bishop-pair.

40 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{R}a5$ 41 $\mathbb{R}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

This was the sealed move and witnesses say that Chigorin spent a long time on it. Perhaps he was worried about 42 e5. Later analysis demonstrated that 42...b5 43 $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 44 $\mathbb{R}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 45 dx5 b4 46 cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xe5+47$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ offers Black good chances in a sharp position.

42 $\mathbb{R}aa1$ e5 43 $\mathbb{R}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 44 $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{R}c7$ 45 $\mathbb{R}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 46 $\mathbb{R}d1$

46 d5 is not good due to 46... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, but the text-move, threatening 47 $\mathbb{Q}a2$, seems to create insoluble difficulties.

46... $\mathbb{Q}ed8!$

The dance of Chigorin's knights continues. 47 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ would be parried by 47... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 48 $\mathbb{R}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$, trapping the rook.

47 $\mathbb{R}d2?$

This moment of hesitation allows Black's knights to dominate the position. White should play either the passive 47 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ or 47 dxe5.

47... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 48 $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 49 dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}fxe5$ 50 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 51 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 52 $\mathbb{Q}dd5$ $\mathbb{Q}a1$

So the knight is indirectly defended while the threat of 53... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ leads to the final crisis.

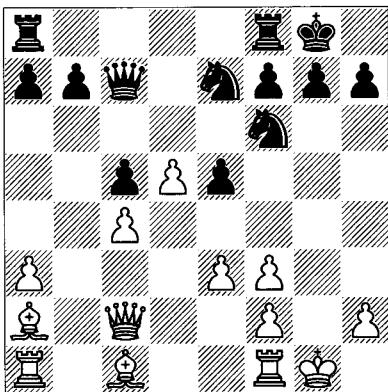
53 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 54 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$

If 54 $\mathbb{Q}f1$, then 54... $\mathbb{Q}cb4$.

54... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 55 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}ag1$

The king is caught in the net, and White resigned a few moves later. An epic struggle!

B



Taimanov – Euwe
Zurich Ct 1953

In comparison with the previous game, the details in the pawn-structure differ, but its nature is of the same kind. Following the opening developments the white bishops remain blocked by their own pawns, but the black knights swim easier in such waters. The first thing that may occur to Black is the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}e8-d6$, but taking into consideration White's weakened king's position Euwe undertakes a more ambitious plan; and rightly so because 15... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17 $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18 $\mathbb{W}h5$ $f5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ cannot worry White.

15... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b1$

White would prefer the routine choice in similar situations, namely 16 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 17 $\mathbb{W}e2$ planning 18 $\mathbb{Q}g1$, but he was afraid of 17...e4 18 fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$. However, Bronstein may have been right in assessing that then 19 f4 $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 20 $\mathbb{W}g2$ is White's most active option, although it entails an exchange sacrifice.

16... $\mathbb{Q}g6$

16... $\mathbb{W}h3$ is a very good alternative that has been underestimated by most annotators: 17 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ e4 (not 17... $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, but 17... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ is good) 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$! (not 18...exf3? 19 $\mathbb{W}xh7+$) 19 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ is very good for Black. It is curious that the doubling of White's f-pawns created a serious weakness, while the doubling of Black's f-pawns operated in his favour.

17 $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Thinking of his bishops White could adopt a less materialistic approach by 19 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}g2$, although 20...e4 (20... $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ is weaker due to 21 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 22 f4) 21 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ (or 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$) 21... $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ is advantageous for Black.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4??$

A hasty decision. The bishop cannot flee and a better time could be chosen for the exchange on e4. Richter proposed 19... $\mathbb{Q}e8$, but I like it less because of 20 d6 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d5$. V.Vuković suggested 19... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$, when White does best to continue with 20 $\mathbb{Q}d1$. Bronstein's 19... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ seems to me to be most to the point.

20 fxe4 f5

Here again the move 20... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ comes into consideration; for instance, 21 f3 f5 22 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$.

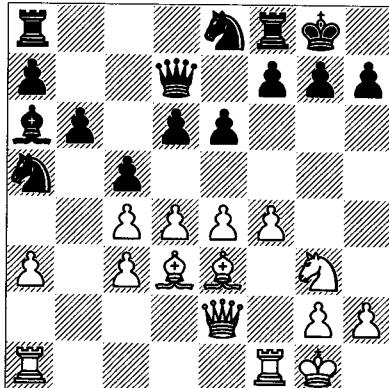
21 exf5??

After 21 f3 Euwe gives the continuation 21...fxe4 22 fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ + 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8+$, but it is not convincing in view of 24 $\mathbb{Q}e2$. Better is 21... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ and if 22 $\mathbb{Q}b2$, then 22...fxe4 23 fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$. Bronstein suggested 21 f4 and he must have considered 21...fxe4 22 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}b2$, when the passed pawns are not easy to deal with. Anyway, that was definitely a better practical chance than the text-move.

Had Black now (after 21 exf5??) continued 21... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ e4 followed by 23... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$, his strategy would have triumphed. After the game continuation, 21...e4, 22 f4! exf3 23 e4 again awakened the bishop. Although 23... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ kept an advantage, White's chances had improved and he managed to save his skin.

This game featured errors by both players, but they are most instructive errors worth analysing in the light of our theme.

B



Botvinnik – Reshevsky
The Hague/Moscow Wch 1948

As soon as the doubled pawns on the c-file were blocked, they became a liability. The c4-pawn is a notorious weakness in the Sämisch Variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defence. To balance the weakness Botvinnik has just played 14 f2-f4 so as to meet 14... $\mathbb{W}a4$ with 15 f5, creating counterplay on the kingside. Then 15...exf5 16 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 17 f6 and 15... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 16 fxe6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ would justify his decision. However, Reshevsky was alert to the bishops' menace, and blocks White's kingside play at its root.

14...f5! 15 $\mathbb{Q}ae1?$ g6 16 $\mathbb{Q}d1 \mathbb{W}f7$

While White wavers, Black is concentrated on the stability of the kingside. The c4-pawn will come later on the agenda. If Black tried to exploit the weakness by 16... $\mathbb{W}a4$, then 17 d5 would follow.

17 e5

Now 17 d5 would be met by 17... $\mathbb{Q}g7!$ 18 dx e 6 $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 19 exf5 gxf5, when 20... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ cannot be parried.

17... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ dx e 5

18...cx d 4 would be met by 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$. Therefore, Black keeps the position closed.

19 dx e 5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}e8$

Having provoked the blockade and secured his king's position, Black can return to other tasks; the poor devil at c4 is the target again.

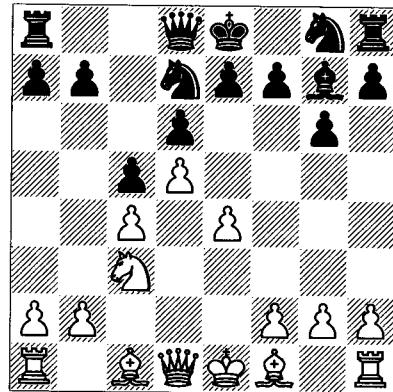
23 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 25 hxg3 h5 26 $\mathbb{Q}f2??$

26 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ is essential.

26... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b3!$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$

...and the endgame with rooks and minor pieces proved difficult for White. The constant pressure exerted on the c4-pawn coupled with the pressure on the open file will lead inevitably to zugzwang, and Reshevsky's knights won a perfect battle.

B



Topalov – Adams
Dortmund 1996

Only the initial opening moves had been played when Adams took a committal decision to trade his bishop for the knight, relying on his own knights proving effective in the resulting structure.

8... $\mathbb{Q}xc3+!$ 9 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}gf6$ 10 f3?! $\mathbb{W}a5$ 11 $\mathbb{W}b3$ 0-0-0

A couple of energetic moves have clarified Black's strategy. The exchange on c3 not only damaged White's pawn-formation, but it also made the black king's refuge on the queenside more secure; the semi-open b-file is too narrow a channel for any serious pressure. For that reason, White's 10th move missed the target. If he had played 10 $\mathbb{W}c2$, he would not have had to build such a rigid pawn-centre by 11 f3; 10... $\mathbb{W}a5$ could then be parried by 11 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, with possible ideas of castling queenside.

12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

In my opinion 12 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ comes into consideration.

12... $\mathbb{Q}dg8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Black is sticking to his plan. Having determined the state of affairs on the queenside, Black would also like to shape the kingside favourably. White, preoccupied with his basic

development, has failed to counter Black's plan; his tame approach has left events at Black's discretion. Of course, now it's too late for 14 h4, when 14... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ makes 15...f5 possible.

14... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 15 $\mathbb{W}c2$

Spiritless play; 15 g4 comes into consideration instead.

15...g5 16 0-0 $\mathbb{R}g6$

Precisely played: the king's rook is destined to defend the b7-pawn. That also explains why 14... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ was necessary; ...b6 would invite trouble and in order to keep his pawn-formation unexposed the king must move to a8.

17 $\mathbb{R}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 18 $\mathbb{R}fb1$ $\mathbb{R}b8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ h5 20 $\mathbb{W}d2$??

White provokes ...g4 in order to make f4 possible, but it turns out he is playing into his opponent's hands. There are positions in which one must be patient; the more you kick, the worse it gets. I recall Petrosian's comment at the end of our game in Zagreb 1965. Although White, he offered an early draw. When I suggested in the analysis room that he could play this or that, he said: "There are positions in which it is of great importance not to play anything". The master of that art knew all the secrets about it.

20...g4 21 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{G}xf3$ 22 $\mathbb{G}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 23 f4

It is much easier to advise not to play this than to propose an alternative. 23 $\mathbb{R}g1$, for example, is not better due to 23... $\mathbb{R}xg1+$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$. Among other things we have to keep in mind that at the end of the day, the c4-pawn may fall prey to the black knights.

23... $\mathbb{W}c8$!

The threatened foray to h3 is devastating and could be prevented only by 24 f5. That is not so appealing, but other moves simply lose.

24 $\mathbb{Q}f1$?

24 fx5? fails to 24... $\mathbb{W}h3$ 25 $\mathbb{R}g1$ $\mathbb{R}bg8$ 26 $\mathbb{R}xg6$ $\mathbb{R}xg6$ 27 exf6 $\mathbb{W}g2#$.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$! 25 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}h3$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f1$

26 $\mathbb{W}e2$ is refuted by 26... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

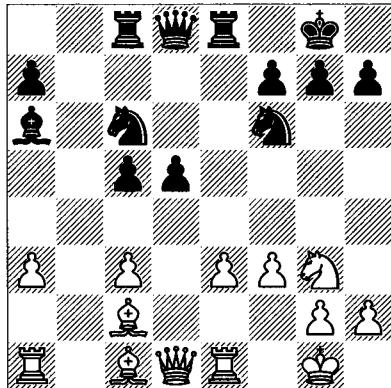
26... $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 27 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}xe4+$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

29 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ f5

...and Black's knights proved superior.

Generally speaking, closed positions favour the knights, but, of course, it is the concrete case with its concrete characteristics that determines what to do. Paul Keres understood this even as a youngster.

B



Stahlberg – Keres

Neuheim 1936

In the last round of the tournament Keres achieved this favourable position. It is favourable mostly because the white bishops have remained subjugated. And what does Keres do? Relying on the particular aspects of the position, and rightly disregarding general advice, he decides to open the position completely.

15...d4!

Based on particular details, the pawn thrust opens the position contrary to general notions.

16 exd4

The alternative is 16 cxd4 cxd4 17 e4 d3 18 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$, when Black's well-protected, far-advanced passed pawn remains a lasting nuisance in White's position.

16...cxd4 17 $\mathbb{R}xe8+$

17 cxd4 loses outright to 17... $\mathbb{W}xd4+$.

17... $\mathbb{W}xe8$ 18 cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

In entering this position, Keres assessed correctly that his untouchable knight in the middle of the board, supported by all the black force, seizes full control of the relevant space.

19 $\mathbb{Q}a4$

Stahlberg resorted to this because 19 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ loses to 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 20 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}e1+$ 21 $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{W}xf1+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$, etc., while 19 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ does not look adequate either.

19... $\mathbb{W}e5$ 20 $\mathbb{R}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Like with the bishops, one of the advantages of the knight-pair lies in the fact that one of them can be exchanged advantageously. The other bishop, placed on the edge of the board, is excluded by the surviving dominant knight on d4.

22 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 23 ♜h1?!

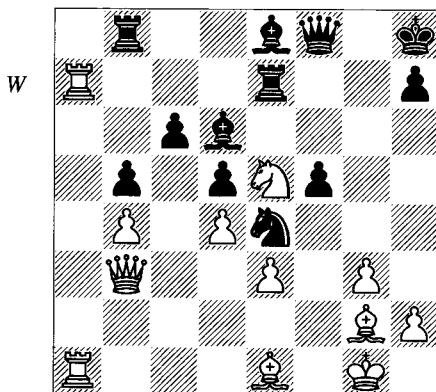
In his book of selected games Keres passes over the most tenacious defence, 23 ♜e1, although 23...♜xe1+ (23...♜e3? even loses to 24 ♜a5!) 24 ♜xe1 g6 25 ♜a1 f5 keeps an advantage in the ending.

23...h5!

With the back rank secured, further progress can be undertaken. Apart from the prosaic 24...♜xa3, Black threatens 24...h4 25 ♜e4 ♜e2 26 ♜e1 ♜xf3. The knights have dominated the scene once more.

Improving the Position of the Minor Pieces

Looking back at all these characteristic cases of the perennial competition between the bishop and the knight, we become aware of the barriers standing in their way. Details always differ, but as a rule it is the pawn-formation which suits one of the minor pieces and significantly influences the course of the struggle. If we are fully conscious of that causal link from the start of the game, we can often do much to increase the possibilities of our minor pieces. We can either try to change the nature of the pawn-formation or manoeuvre a minor piece to the place which best suits its abilities. This is an important component of our discussion of the minor pieces and we shall stay with it for some pages.



Bronstein – Botvinnik
Moscow Wch (22) 1951

At this moment Black might have thought that he had parried the threats, but if so it was a false feeling of security.

32 g4!

As long as the closed pawn-formation kept the dark-squared e1-bishop out of play, Black could live in peace. The breakthrough suddenly changes the nature of the pawn-structure and that in turn opens new prospects for the hemmed-in bishop.

32...fxg4

32...♜xe5 33 dxe5 ♜xe5? loses to 34 ♜b2.

33 ♜xe4 dxe4 34 ♜h4

The bishop breaks out with great force, and simultaneously the a2-g8 diagonal and the f-file open up, all to White's favour.

34...♜xe5

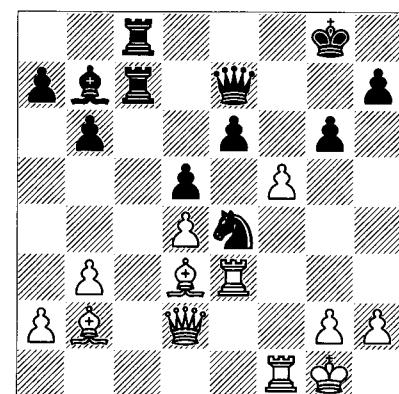
A desperate attempt. Note that 34...♜xa7 35 ♜xa7 would not diminish the direct threats. To neutralize 36 ♜f7+ Black could react with 35...♜f5, hoping for 36 ♜f7+ ♜xf7 37 ♜xf7 ♜d5, but after 36 ♜a2! the f7-square remains vulnerable to either ♜f7+ or ♜f7.

35 dxe5 ♜xe5 36 ♜f1 ♜g8

Or 36...♜h6 37 ♜f5.

37 ♜g3! ♜g7 38 ♜xg8+ 1-0

Examples, such as this, of the bishop's eruptive force are by no means rare.



Zukertort – Blackburne
London 1883

Black's last move was 23...♞f6-e4, blocking the diagonals towards his king. In case of 24 ♜xe4 dxe4 Black counted on the threat of 25...♜c2 to keep his hopes alive. But White plays exactly that:

24 ♜xe4! dxe4 25 fxg6

After 25 d5, 25...♜c2 26 ♜d4 e5 would block the diagonal again, leading to exchanges and a draw. The text-move, however, appears not to work...

25...♜c2 26 gxh7+ ♛h8 27 d5+ e5 28 ♜b4!

An important tempo-gaining move, keeping the bishop alive and renewing the threats.

28...♜e8c5

28...♜xb4 loses to 29 ♜xe5+ ♛xh7 30 ♜h3+ ♛g6 31 ♜g3+ ♛h6 32 ♜f6+ ♛h5 33 ♜f5+ ♛h6 34 ♜f4+ ♛h7 35 ♜h5#. 28...♜g7 29 ♜g3 is of little help to Black either.

29 ♜f8+!

The key move of the combination. The king is forced into the open.

29...♛xh7 30 ♜xe4+ ♛g7 31 ♜xe5+ ♛xf8

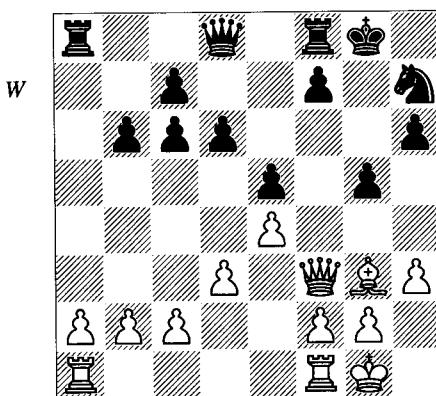
32 ♛g7+

The last little detail, winning the queen or mating.

32...♛g8 33 ♜xe7 1-0

The awakened bishop on the opened diagonal reached across the board to deliver the fatal blow.

There are numerous examples that teach us that bishops need open diagonals to function fully and give their best. From this we can deduct that if we possess bishops, we should try to open the position.



Smyslov – Dückstein
Zagreb 1955

The position after the opening stage does not look very bright for White. The g3-bishop is obstructed by the pawn-structure, seriously limiting its activity. Waiting tactics would just give

Black time to improve the position of his knight (for instance, by ...♞e8 and ...♝f8-e6/g6). Thus White acts energetically:

15 d4! exd4??

While White consistently fights for open space, Black inconsistently gives ground, instead of keeping the position closed by 15...f6, which would better suit his knight.

16 ♜d3 f5??

In case of 16...c5 Smyslov planned 17 f4 with compensation for the pawn. However, this would have given Black more chances.

17 exf5 ♜a5 18 ♜xd4 ♜d7 19 ♜c4+ ♛g7 20 b4 ♜axf5 21 a4!

The consequences are all here to see. White is about to create a passed pawn, while the black king will remain in the open – a profound change in just a couple of moves.

21...♝f6 22 a5 bxa5 23 bxa5 ♜c5 24 ♜a4 ♜a8

Black is pushed into dangerous passivity. From now on the rook will be tied to the passed pawn, allowing White a free hand in other sectors.

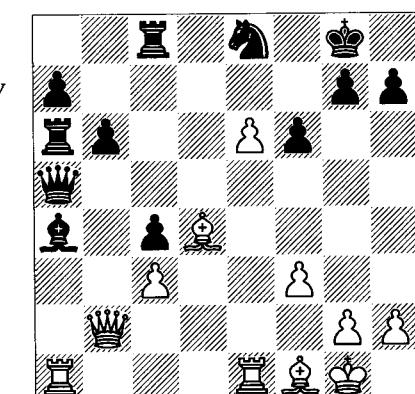
25 a6 ♜f5 26 ♜fe1 ♛f8

If 26...♝d5, there is 27 ♜d4+ ♛f7 (27...♜f6 fails to 28 ♜e5) 28 c4 with an advantage.

27 c4 ♜d7 28 ♜b4 ♜b6 29 ♜xd6+!

Set free, the bishop delivers the blow.

29...cxsd6 30 ♜xb6 1-0



Gligorić – Matanović
Bled 1961

White is a pawn down, but his far-advanced passed pawn is obviously a valuable asset.

Unfortunately, it is blocked, while the centralised dark-squared bishop is limited by Black's well-placed kingside pawns. The question is how to get the attack moving.

25 ♘e2!

Gligorić finds a way to activate his king's bishop.

25...b5

25...♗d5 avoids the pin on the a-file but fails for another reason: after 26 f4! ♗xe6 27 ♘f3 ♖d7 28 ♗b4 White controls the board.

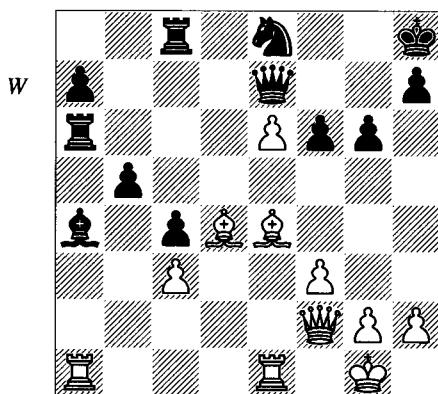
26 ♘d1 ♗c7 27 ♘c2!

The pin was just a means to move forward; the bishop is bound for the centre.

27...♗e7 28 ♘e4 ♘h8 29 ♗f2

Taking the e6-pawn would now cost Black an exchange, so there is time to move the queen into the attack.

29...g6 (D)



30 f4!

A well-timed advance, based on the point 30...♜xe6 31 ♘d5 ♜xe1+ 32 ♜xe1 ♖d6 33 ♘f7 ♘c7 34 ♗h4 ♘g7 35 ♜e6.

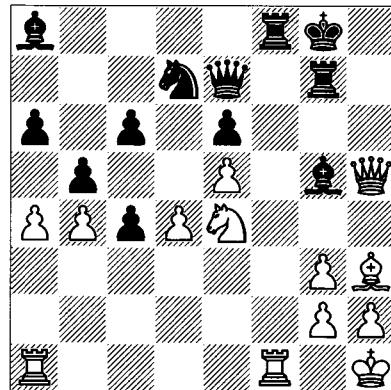
30...♘d6 31 f5 g5 32 ♘c2

The e6-pawn has been protected and the pin can still be exploited.

32...♗e8 33 ♗f3 ♜d8 34 ♗h5 ♘g8 35 h4 gxh4 36 ♜e4 ♘g7 37 ♜g4

Now White's major pieces will step in to finish Black off. The splendid manoeuvre of the white bishop made all this possible. We come across similar bishop manoeuvres mostly in the phase of preparations for an attack or during the attack itself. Ideas in which the bishop takes on a defensive role are rarer but equally useful and impressive.

B



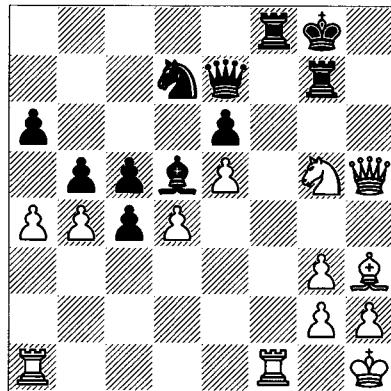
Kramnik – Anand

Belgrade 1997

Kramnik sacrificed a piece in the opening and had achieved a promising position. When this position was reached, he still appeared to be on top, threatening, for instance, 26 ♘xg5 ♜xg5 27 ♘xe6+ (27 ♗h6 also comes into consideration) 27...♔g7 28 ♗h4, when 28...♜h8 would fail to 29 ♘f7+. However, Anand produces a move of devastating strength:

25...c5!! 26 ♘xg5 ♘d5! (D)

W



W

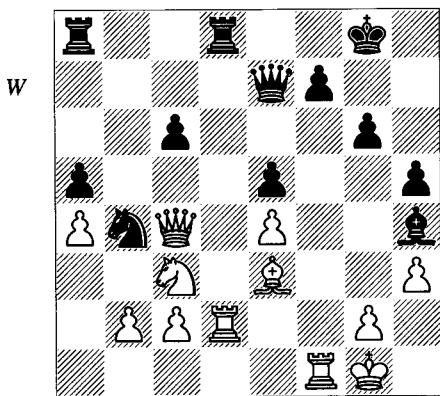
The nub of Black's idea! By giving back a whole piece, he protects the pivotal point e6, centralizes his outcast bishop and, as a by-product of the operation, wins the b4-pawn.

27 ♘f3 cxb4 28 axb5 axb5 29 ♘h4 ♗g5

The attack has been beaten back and Black's passed pawns then decided the issue.

Manoeuvres aimed at improving the knight's position are not so direct and so quick, but there

are many positions in which time does not matter so much – as a rule, closed positions in which the knight's devious logic and apparent slowness work miracles.



Karpov – Spassky
Moscow Ct (9) 1974

Although broken up, Black's pawn-structure on the queenside keeps all the vital squares under control, while the knight exerts pressure on c2, and the d8-rook opposes White's d2-rook on the open file – everything appears to be fine. It took just one move to change the perspective.

24 ♜b1!!

This is a move of tremendous power, and the first leg of a long manoeuvre which will take the knight via d2 and f3 to g5. At the same time c3 is made possible, forcing the b4-knight to retreat and spoiling the apparent harmony.

24...♛b7 25 ♜h2

In certain types of positions there is no hurry. What matters is forcing the enemy pieces to retreat and moving your own pieces to active positions. While the opponent's equilibrium breaks down, the harmony of the pressure you exert increases. When the knight reaches f3, the g3-square should be denied to the h4-bishop.

25...♝g7 26 c3 ♜a6 27 ♜e2!

White needs the d2-square for his knight. Of course, Karpov could vacate d2 by exchanging a pair of rooks, but he wisely decides to preserve them because the prospects on the d- and f-files are quite promising.

27...♜f8 28 ♜d2 ♛d8 29 ♜f3 f6

Black spoils White's idea of bringing his knight to g5, but also loosens his defensive

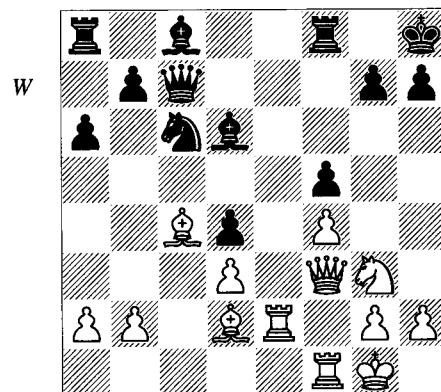
formation. The e6-square is now available to the white queen and the open file lies prostrate in front of the white rooks.

30 ♜d2 ♛e7 31 ♜e6 ♜ad8 32 ♜xd8

We see the reason for White bringing his queen into e6: now 32...♜xd8 would not work because of 33 ♜xe5.

32...♜xd8 33 ♜d1 ♜b8 34 ♜c5 ♜h8 35 ♜xd8! 1-0

If 35...♜xd8, then 36 ♛e7, etc.



Nimzowitsch – Rubinstein
Dresden 1926

White's pawn-formation restricts his minor pieces. Only the c4-bishop enjoys a nice place with a view towards the black king's position. If only the g3-knight were on g5! Perhaps that's exactly what occurred to Nimzowitsch at this very moment of the game and he listened to the call of imagination...

18 ♜h1!!

I admired this manoeuvre when I first read *My System* and now I discover it has not lost any of its quiet beauty. The knight is transferred via h1, f2 and h3 to g5. In view of the potential threats on the h-file and the weakened squares e6 and f7, this is a colossal idea!

18...♜d7 19 ♜f2 ♜ae8 20 ♜fe1 ♜xe2 21 ♜xe2 ♜d8

Black would rather exchange the second pair of rooks but 21...♜e8 fails after 22 ♜d5.

22 ♜h3 ♜c6 23 ♜h5 g6 24 ♜h4 ♜g7 25 ♜f2!

All the critical squares on the open file are under control and no immediate penetration is

possible. Therefore, White intends to cause disorder in the defence by playing against the weakness of the d4-pawn.

25...♝c5

On 25...♝b6 the same continuation, 26 b4, is highly unpleasant – 27 ♜c3 is threatened.

26 b4 ♜b6 27 ♜h4

Having forced the bishop out, the queen returns. White already had the follow-up in mind; otherwise he would have chosen 27 ♜e1.

27...♝e8 28 ♜e5! ♜f7

Unfortunately, 28...♝xe5 29 fxe5 helps the d2-bishop join the final assault. Nimzowitsch mentioned 28...h6 29 g4! fxg4? 30 f5 with crushing effect.

29 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 30 ♜g5

The knight reaches its destination in the nick of time, although after some intermediary events and delay. Often we worry whether we can accomplish the planned manoeuvre in time despite various tactical obstacles, but in most cases it is worth seeking more active posts if it is in harmony with the pawn-structure.

30...♝g8 31 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 32 ♜e1

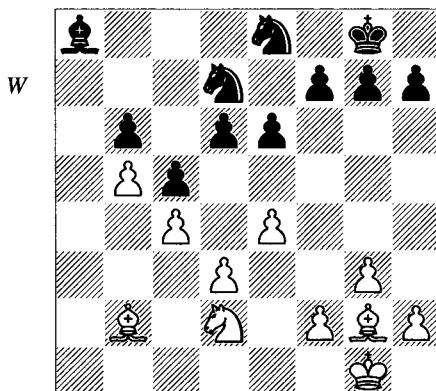
The timely exchanges on the open file have left it fully at White's disposal.

32...♝c6 33 ♜e7+ ♜h8

Or 33...♝h6 34 ♜e6, etc.

34 b5!

Black was compelled to resign a few moves later. 34...♝xb5 35 ♜e6 h5 36 ♜f6+ ♜h7 37 ♜g5+ ♜h6 38 ♜b4 demonstrates why the b4-square was vacated.



Kramnik – Illescas
Dos Hermanas 1997

What is White trying to squeeze out of this dry, prospectless position? What can his bishops do? These questions are probably asked by anybody who sees the diagram. But Kramnik was not discouraged. What's more, a remarkable idea occurred to him.

22 ♜b1!!

This modest, apparently irrelevant move conceals a striking idea. The knight is bound for a4, whence it intends to probe the only potential weakness in Black's defensive wall – the b6-pawn. Fine, but what then? Well, we shall see what can grow out of it.

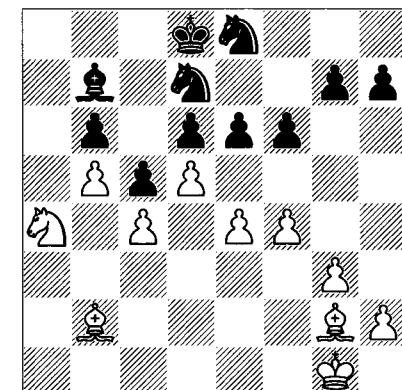
22...♝b7

Exchanging material by 22...♝e5 23 ♜xe5 dxe5 does not alleviate the defence: after 24 ♜c3 ♜d6 25 ♜a4 ♜c8 26 ♜h3 ♜f8 27 f4 exf4 28 gxf4 White holds all the important cards.

23 f4 f6 24 ♜c3 ♜f7 25 ♜a4 ♜e7 26 d4

Black could not have prevented this central thrust by ...e5, because then ♜h3 would have proved that the b6-pawn was a weak spot. To make sure that the b6-pawn does not depend only on the d7-knight, Black intends to transfer the king's knight to a8, but it also takes time because 26...♜c7 would be met most unpleasantly by 27 e5. Cramped on his first two ranks, Black is confronted with serious difficulties.

26...♜d8 27 d5 (D)



Consistent and strong: opening the h3-c8 diagonal will enhance the range of the light-squared bishop, obliging the black king's knight to retreat as far as a8.

27...exd5 28 exd5 ♜c7 29 ♜h3 ♜a8

Black had to strain himself to keep material equality, but at the cost of a visible passivity.

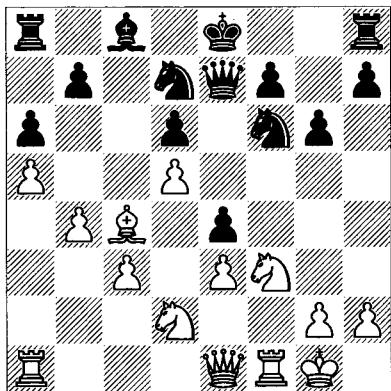
The white bishop-pair, on the contrary, thrives in the circumstances.

30 ♜e6 ♜f8 31 f5

Simple and logical: if Black ever takes on e6, the protected passed pawn will be a bone in his throat. At the same time it's not hard to imagine the g3-pawn marching to g5 to increase the pressure exerted by the b2-bishop.

31... ♜c8 32 ♜f2 ♜d7 33 g4

...and White's spatial preponderance combined with his more active pieces was reaching critical level. The mysterious knight manoeuvre made it all possible.



Alekhine – Tarrasch
Mannheim 1914

Black has just played 19...e4 and the first impulse is to continue 20 ♜d4 ♜e5 21 ♜f4 and grab the pawn. Then 21...♜xc4 22 ♜xc4 ♜xd5 is refuted by 23 ♜xe4, but after 21...0-0 the whole thing does not look so good. Alekhine had a better idea:

20 ♜g5!

After this the planned 20...♜e5 is not so appealing any more – 21 ♜b3 ♜f5 22 ♜a4+ is far from pleasant.

20...h6 21 ♜h3 ♜e5?!

After 21...♜e5, apart from 22 ♜f4, White can play 22 ♜f2, building pressure on the e4-pawn.

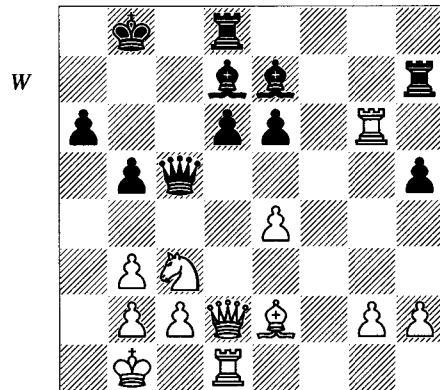
22 ♜c1 ♜g4 23 ♜f4 g5 24 h3 ♜gf6 25 ♜e2 ♜xd5 26 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 27 ♜d4!

In the end the knight has reached its desired destination in five moves instead of one and at the cost of a pawn, but in the meantime Black

was enticed to weaken his position dramatically. White threatens 28 ♜f5 ♜e5 29 c4, when the queen would be trapped in the middle of the board. Other options are no better.

27... ♜e5 28 ♜c4 ♜d5 29 ♜f5

...and Black was lost.



Keres – Botvinnik
Moscow 1956

In the preceding phase White won a pawn, but Black succeeded in placing his pieces optimally, where they protect the potential weak spots against infiltration. The realization of White's relatively small material advantage seems to be in question. Keres starts from the conclusion that the e6-pawn is potentially the most vulnerable point in the black camp and that his knight has been reduced to an onlooker. Having correctly detected the essential positional elements, it was easier to make the second step.

23 ♜a2!

The unemployed knight gets its assignment: for the time being it is bound for d3 to chase away the actively posted black queen.

23... ♜a7 24 ♜b4 ♜f8 25 ♜f3 h4 26 h3 ♜c8

27 ♜d3 ♜c7 28 ♜f4

The second leg of the tour has been reached: the e6-pawn is under attack, as envisaged at move 23. The long manoeuvre gives a new purpose to the g6-rook, which in the initial position we felt was somewhat misplaced.

28... ♜f6 29 ♜g4!

Black offered 29 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 30 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 31 ♜xd6 ♜e5 32 ♜d8 ♜xf4, but White does not

change his target. After the exchange of a pair of rooks both backward pawns will come under attack.

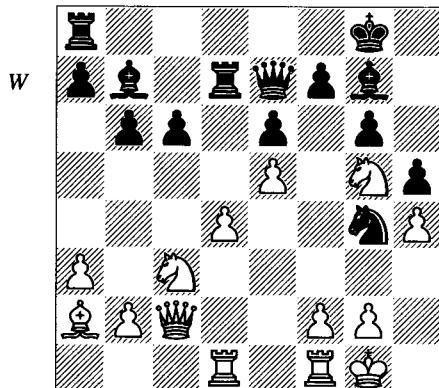
29... $\mathbb{R}xg6$

Note that 29... $\mathbb{R}hf7$ does not succeed due to 30 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$.

30 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$

Black no longer has any good moves.

Positional knight manoeuvres change positions and yield positive effects slowly but, if well thought up, irredeemably. Quite often, however, they are undertaken for more direct purposes: the knight is transferred straight into the attack.



Kramnik – Short
Dortmund 1995

A glance at the position tells us that Black is under strong pressure. His bishops have no scope, and his king's position is visibly weakened. We notice immediately the pressure exerted harmoniously on e6 and g6 by the white queen, the a2-bishop, and the g5-knight. However, there is nothing palpable as yet and the black formation is barely but sufficiently protected against sudden blows. The pressure must be increased.

21 $\mathbb{Q}e2!$

As soon as the knight reaches f4 the defensive wall will start to crack.

21... $\mathbb{R}ad8$

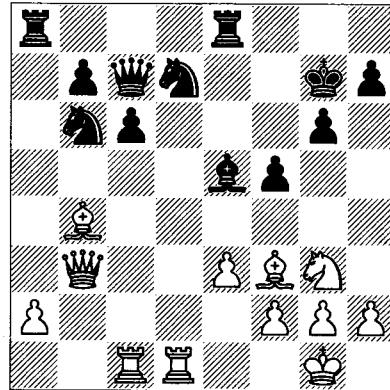
Unfortunately, 21... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ does not stop White and 22 $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xg6!$ $fxg6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25 $\mathbb{W}xg6$ crushes any resistance. Kramnik also gives 21... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xh5$, etc.

22 $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $fxe6$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xg6$

Black has no way to parry the threatened 24 $\mathbb{Q}f4$.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 1-0

In many cases it is well worth even a material sacrifice to improve the position of the minor pieces.



Smyslov – Uhlmann
Skopje 1969

White's threateningly placed major pieces and bishop-pair, together with the weakened position of Black's king, convince us of White's advantage, but at first we do not see how to make it more certain. Smyslov finds an ingenious way:

20 $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d4$

We know now that centralizing the knight was worth the h2-pawn; in the circumstances the pawn was a relatively small investment. Perched at d4, the knight has become a direct menace against which little can be done, since an exchange on d4 would just surrender the important long dark-squared diagonal to the b4-bishop.

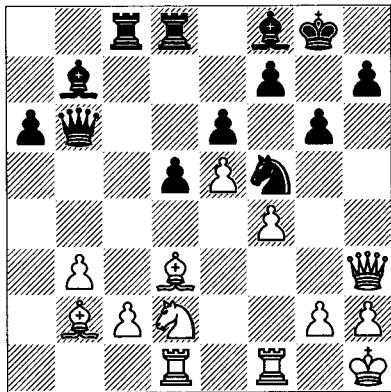
22... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 23 $\mathbb{g}3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 24 $a4!$

Black parried $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ but this unexpected advance disrupts the harmony of the defensive units. 24... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ is not quite adequate because of 25 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 27 $\mathbb{W}xa4$, when White regains the material with a positional advantage. Unfortunately, that was the most that Black could hope for from the position.

24... $\mathbb{W}f7?$ 25 $a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $cxd5$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black is in serious trouble.

W



Karpov – Taimanov
Moscow tt 1972

Taimanov's position looked fine at this moment of the game. His kingside is firm, while on the queenside ...a5, making ...a6 possible, could seize the initiative. Besides, 26...d3 does not work due to 26...d4. In such a situation the possibility Karpov opts for is very natural; he makes a virtue out of necessity:

26 ♜xf5! exf5 27 ♜f3 ♜xc2 28 ♜d4

By giving up a pawn and surrendering the bishop-pair, White injects life into his dormant position. The dark-squared bishop blockades the d5-pawn and simultaneously the queen's bishop behind it, but it is the knight which profits most.

28...♜c6 29 ♜h4 ♜e8

Played in the belief that the threatened 30 e6 has been prevented, but to Black's disappointment it hits him all the same.

30 e6!

A beautiful tactical stroke, in deep harmony with the general characteristics of the position.

30...fxe6 31 ♜e5

On 31 ♜f6 there is 31...e5.

31...♜c7 32 ♜xg6 ♜g7 33 ♜e5 ♜e7 34 ♜g3 ♜ec8 35 ♜fe1

White has recaptured one of the sacrificed pawns, but it is not the number of pawns which counts most here. Black's problem stems from the passive nature of the pawn-formation, the

passive b7-bishop and the fact that he cannot eliminate the ruler of the position – the knight on e5.

35...♜g8 36 ♜f3!

Another subtle positional point: when the dark-squared bishops are swapped, we shall watch the duel between the powerful centralized knight and the hemmed-in bishop at b7.

36...♝h8 37 ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 38 ♜d4 ♜xg3 39 hxg3 ♜c2c3 40 ♜xe6 ♜c8 41 ♜h2 ♜xb3

By 41...d4 42 ♜xd4 ♜e4 Black would activate the bishop, but instead of winning a pawn he would lose one and, what is more, 43 g4 would make it useless.

42 ♜d4 ♜b6 43 ♜xf5 ♜f8 44 ♜d4 ♜g8 45 ♜e7 ♜g7 46 ♜de1 ♜h6+ 47 ♜g1 ♜hg6 48 f5

After this final subtlety all is clear. 48...♜xg3 loses to 49 f6, etc.

The games we have examined teach us a convincing lesson: the minor pieces can play major roles. However, it does not happen by chance. Strongly conditioned by the pawn-structure, they must be developed and manoeuvred in complete harmony with the pawn-formations. As long as the game is in progress they must follow the subtle changes of pawn-formations and conform to them; an imaginative, never-ending, but rewarding process.

Now that we have reached the end of our considerations on the strength and weakness of pieces, we are hopefully more aware of the deep connections between the quality of chess space, the pieces acting in it and time which binds the board and chessmen into one inseparable whole. A game of chess develops in the constant metamorphosis of these three elements: spatial advantage transforms into a form of time we call initiative, which in turn transforms into material or vice versa, in all the various orders. It is of great importance for an aspiring chess student to grasp the essential values of chess space and material in order to be able to conceive the changes and to control them.

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Numbers refer to pages. When a player's name appears in **bold**, that player had White. Otherwise, the first-named player had White.

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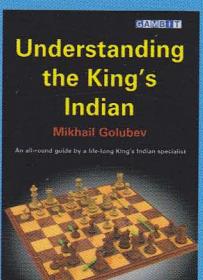
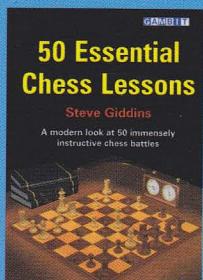
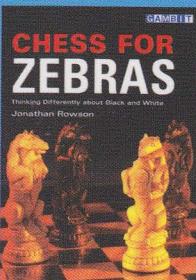
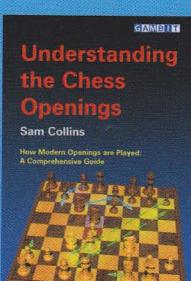
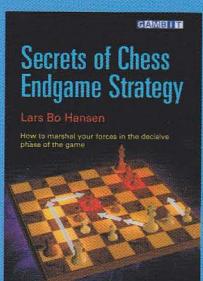
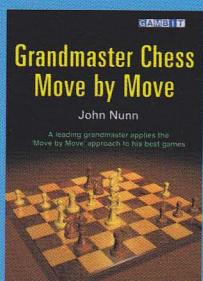
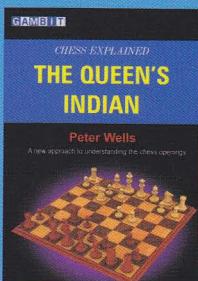
How can one determine if a piece is weak or strong? Or if a square is weak or strong? These are the principal questions that grandmaster and trainer Dražen Marović addresses in this important book.

By discussing carefully chosen games and positions, Marović explains how to recognize good and bad features of positions, and how to make use of one's advantages and exploit the opponent's weaknesses. Themes that crop up repeatedly include 'weaknesses' that are unexploitable (and therefore are not weaknesses at all), surrendering certain squares in order to gain more important squares, and material sacrifices to exploit major weaknesses.

- Strength and weakness on files and diagonals
- Vulnerabilities on the first and second ranks
- Static weakness and attack
- Characteristics of the pieces
- Outposts

Dražen Marović is a grandmaster from Croatia, who has won medals as both player and trainer for various national teams. His pupils include Bojan Kurajica, World Under-20 Champion in 1965, and Al Modiahki of Qatar, the first Arabian grandmaster. Marović has a wealth of experience as a writer, editor and television commentator on chess. He is a former trainer of the Croatian national team. This is his third book for Gambit. His two previous books discussed various aspects of pawn play, and have been warmly received by the chess-playing public.

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