

Learn from the Legends - Chess Champions at their Best

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by
Mihail Marin



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Learn from the Legends

Chess Champions at their Best

Mihail Marin
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Contents

	Bibliography	4
	Forewords	5
1	Akiba Rubinstein's Rook Endings	9
2	Alexander Alekhine and the Fourth Phase of the Game	69
3	In the Patriarch's Footsteps	95
4	Tal's Super Rooks vs. Two Minor Pieces	123
5	Petrosian's Exchange Sacrifices	149
6	Bobby Fischer's Pet Bishop	199
7	Karpov's Opposite Coloured Bishops Endings	233
8	Viktor, the "Non-Existent" Hero	263
	Biographies of Our Heroes	317
	Index of Games	330

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Foreword to the first edition

I started working on this book six years ago.

At the beginning of 1998, several members of my family (my wife, her twin sister, the sister's husband and myself) decided to add a new dimension to our chess activity by graduating from the respective session of the school of trainers, periodically organized by the Romanian Federation with the support of the Sports Committee. We all passed the exams rather easily, but the most laborious part remained, the diploma work.

Fortunately, we could choose the themes ourselves. Since I had some experience in writing articles for chess magazines, I did my best in providing the rest of the family with technical help, consisting mainly of the subject of investigation and the selection of games. The theses were considered as entirely satisfactory by the examiners and the four of us soon received our trainer's licences.

This is the way the draft idea of four of the chapters of this book was born. Although the initial goal had been achieved, I continued to be captivated by the thematic universe I had been given the chance to enter. After submitting the articles to thorough modifications and corrections, as well as giving them my personal touch, I published them in the Romanian magazine *Chess ExtraPres*. Not being entirely satisfied with the result, I continued working on it for publication in the Swedish magazine *Schacknytt*.

Soon, I dedicated my attention to other related subjects and shared my conclusions with the Swedish public. Unfortunately, the Romanian magazine ceased to exist in the meantime.

When the idea of joining this series of articles under the cover of a book first came up, one or two years ago, I thought that the main part of the work had been done already. However, when looking at the material again, I understood that a huge amount of effort was still needed, in order to give the necessary coherence to the whole. I also discovered an embarrassing number of mistakes in my previous analysis. Correcting them sometimes required a radical change in the structure. Moreover, several years after my first steps into this territory, my views as a chess writer had changed considerably, on both purely literary and on specific analytical matters. As a result of several months of tough work, the size of most chapters increased to more than double compared to the Swedish version.

Anyway, I am perfectly aware of the fact that for the reader the way a book has been written is of lesser interest than the book itself. Therefore, I shall move one step closer to the main subject.

Throughout chess history, the great champions have been enthusiastically acclaimed by the public, have dictated the fashion for a while, but, more importantly, have provided posterity with a wealth of study material of inestimable value. Clearly, each of them had his own specialties, certain territories where he acted like a true *virtuoso*, specific ways of playing that became proverbial.

Each chapter of this book focuses on the way a great player treated simplified positions with a certain material balance (for instance, bishop versus knight, minor piece versus rook, queen and rook versus queen and rook). The only exception consists of the chapter dedicated to Viktor Korchnoi, which in a certain way is a summing up of the rest of the book.

I have selected eight great players for this book. Six of them have managed to gain official recognition as the world's strongest player at the peak of their career. In the case of the remaining two, it was only

Caissa's whim that prevented them from becoming World Champions, but their art should nevertheless be held in the same high esteem as their colleagues.

Clearly, the gallery of great champions contains considerably more than just eight outstanding figures. However, I have not aimed to write a book on chess history. My basic idea was to focus on those players who have deeply impressed me at a certain moment of my chess career. Most of these experiences date back from my youth and have had a decisive influence over the way I stepped forward into maturity. Sometimes I have tried to illustrate the concrete way this influence took place by inserting one or two fragments from my own games.

I should also add that I first approached the chess classics in a rather spontaneous and chaotic way, described in the introduction to each chapter. Although in Romania chess was largely sustained by the communist state, there has always been a lack of good trainers. Therefore, most of the young improving players had to find their way to the top by themselves and I was no exception to this regrettable rule.

While working on each chapter individually, I had to take into account an important, though not very obvious aspect, highlighted by my friend and editor Jacob Aagaard. The main danger when dealing with games chosen from the practice of one sole player is that they look like what they really are, namely a random collection of games. I was saved by the abundance of practical examples available in the territories where my favourite champions excelled. My aim has been to choose the games in such a way that they fit into the progressive discourse of the respective chapter perfectly. I have indirectly tried to convince the reader of the fact that the game selection could not have been different.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the following people who have supported me in one way or another:

- to Mihai Panait from *Chess ExtraPress* and Ari Ziegler from *Schacknyt* for giving me the opportunity to publish my articles in their magazines,
- to Jacob Aagaard for his most valuable and original advice,
- and, last but not least, to my wife Luiza and my 5-year old son Victor, for enjoying chess as much as I do and thus giving meaning to my work.

Mihail Marin

Bucharest, May 2004

Foreword to the second edition

In our permanent search for absolute truth we (I have in mind various kinds of people: chess players, scientists, new-born babies) are often surprised to find that the path that we would like to be more or less straight is in fact a breathtaking spiral. Some statements that seemed to be definitive truths at a certain moment are refuted by new discoveries, which, in their turn, will soon lose their validity, eventually being replaced again by the previous conclusions.

This is a consequence of the fact that our minds tend to quantify the truth in “yes”, “no” or eventually “maybe”. We rarely take into account the restricted nature of our powers, and we resemble an old person who successively tries stronger and stronger glasses in order to improve his visual perception of the surrounding reality.

Preparing the second edition of this book meant a further advance along a spiral initiated a long time ago.

Although the first edition had been the result of a laborious process, I had little doubt that mistakes were unavoidable. I was also sure that in certain cases more detailed comments and explanations were needed. However, the main problem was that most of the chapters were built as a logical system and any change of assessment was likely to have complex implications regarding the overall structure.

Therefore, when Yuri Garrett, the editor from Caissa Italia, informed me that Andrea Malfagia had carried out a thorough check of the analytical material while translating the text for the Italian edition, I felt some sort of panic. Would I need to start all over again? Would it be necessary to re-write large parts of the book?

As I soon found out, my fears were only partially justified. Indeed, Andrea managed to unearth a considerable number of problems, but the pleasant surprise was that he did not content himself with that: he also strived to provide the solutions! Therefore, making the necessary changes in the text was not as difficult as I expected.

As a general rule, even in those cases where I did not agree with Andrea’s conclusions, they inspired me for further research or refining of the material. Sometimes, I decided to refrain from inserting his well-developed trees of variations if I considered that they only confirmed my initial conclusions.

A number of further mistakes and omissions have been highlighted by readers (most of them from Germany). I am most grateful to them, not only for the purely technical support but also for reminding me of the good habit the old Soviet authors had of keeping close contact with their readers.

My special thanks to Karsten Müller, who has accompanied me for a few steps around the spiral.

Last but not least, I am deeply honoured that the eminent trainer and writer Mark Dvoretzky was interested in my analysis of certain positions. He invited me to an exchange of views that ended, I hope, to our mutual benefit.

While the quality of the analysis is improved by this highly welcome help from several sources, I faced a considerable risk of damaging the overall fluency of the book, given the complex nature of most of the modifications. I hope that, with the help of my editors (including John Shaw who has been so patient making “my” English sound native; my special thanks to him), I have managed to deal with this issue

in an acceptable way. In certain cases, I have decided to keep an outline of the historical evolution of the assessment, in order to illustrate the idea of the spiral of truth. Maybe there was also a sentimental reason for doing so: I did not want certain paragraphs to be completely removed from the book.

I hope you enjoy this improved (but, in all probability, not ultimate) version of “the legends”.

Mihail Marin

Bucharest 11th November 2005

Akiba Rubinstein's Rook Endings



When, at the age of 18, it became clear that I had no other choice but to join the glorious Romanian army, some older friends warned me that the main thing I had to avoid was dying of boredom.

As a future student of the Polytechnic Institute I had been assigned to a technical division, which meant that I would spend most of the daytime in a classroom where nothing special was going to happen. (Indeed, most of my colleagues-in-arms used this time to sleep, with their heads on the tables. A few others would chat in low voices while even fewer would write letters to their beloved young ladies).

Following my friends' advice, I decided that I would spend the time available learning the Russian language; even then I already had a good collection of Soviet chess books, but could not take full advantage of it, since the linguistic barrier was rather difficult to overcome. I took with me a pocket dictionary and a carefully selected book (the criteria were: it had to be not too thick, in order to be easy to carry and hide; to be printed in hard cover in order to survive possible accidents; finally, it could not be one of the best books in my library, to avoid endless regrets in case of deterioration, loss, or confiscation by one of my superiors).

The main plan ended in total success: nine months later when, much to my relief, I became a civilian again, I felt able to read and understand most of my Russian chess books. And yet, there was something that I had not foreseen: the "carefully selected book" which I had carried so many times from the dormitory to the classroom and back, hidden under the military robe, very close to my heart, had become my chess Bible. A book I would open again and again to see for the *nth* time one game or another.

Some time ago, wishing to remember the good old days, I opened again that book: *Akiba Rubinstein*, written by Razuvaev and Murakhvery, and containing a biography and selected games of my classic idol. I was immediately struck by the same old feelings, but I also became curious: would the book stand up to the analysis of a more mature and critical eye?

Much to my disappointment, it did not. I discovered that Razuvaev's analysis contained countless mistakes or omissions and very little original work. But when I admitted this as a fact, I realized it had nothing to do with Rubinstein's games: they provided me with the same feeling of clarity, fluency and logic as 20 years ago.

I took it as my duty to publish my own commentaries on some of his games, and the obvious theme was his rook endgames: a great Akiba specialty.

However, this is a book dedicated mainly to World Champions. Therefore, the reader might wonder why it opens with a chapter about the games of a player who did not even play a match for the supreme title? I shall try to explain that there is more to my decision than subjective memories.

Until Alekhine's death in 1946, the World Champion had the personal right to choose his challenger for the title.

Was Akiba ever the best player?

Akiba reached his peak of form in the years preceding the First World War. In 1909 he obtained one of his best results ever, sharing first place with Lasker in St Petersburg, 3½ points ahead of the field. This was the moment when public opinion started considering Rubinstein as the most likely challenger for the title.

However, his magical year was 1912, when he won every single strong tournament he played in. These were long tournaments, with about 20 rounds to be played. Therefore, proving such absolute superiority was far from easy and, in fact, had no precedent since Morphy. Akiba's performance should be put at the same level as Kasparov's domination in the tournaments played around the turn of the millennium.

Much to Akiba's misfortune, the reigning champion in the pre-war years was Emanuel Lasker. Besides being a very strong player, Lasker knew how to take full advantage of the right to choose his opponent.

For instance, he practically forced Schlechter to play a match under scandalously unfair conditions (although it should be mentioned that even so he only retained his title with luck). Little wonder that he reigned for more than a quarter of a century.

Although there is not much historical evidence about it, we can suppose that Lasker also did his best to delay the seemingly inevitable match against Akiba. After long negotiations, the match was scheduled for October 1914 but then the war came and chess life was practically frozen. Akiba's nerves seem to have been seriously affected by the conflagration and, although he remained a fearsome opponent until his last important tournament (Prague Olympiad 1931), he was never the same player again. As a consequence he ceased to be, according to public opinion, a plausible challenger.

However, since during one specific period Akiba was clearly the strongest player in the world, I feel entitled to include his masterpieces in this book.

Rubinstein's name is closely linked with the main lines of such openings as the Nimzo-Indian, the Queen's Indian and the Tarrasch Defence. He invented several set-ups for Black that are still topical in the French Defence and the Ruy Lopez. He was also the first to play the modern Meran variation of the Semi-Slav defence.

Opening expert or endgame virtuoso?

Why is it then that I have focused on the endgames played by such a great opening expert?

Rubinstein was probably the first great player to use the so-called long plans, lasting through the whole game, from the opening till the endgame. His opponents didn't always understand Akiba's monumental play and were only concerned with parrying the immediate threats. Only after the game was over, did it become clear that Rubinstein had planned the contours of the ensuing endgame from a very early stage.

You will notice that more than once I have started analysing a game at an earlier moment than the endgame itself. There is also a complete game in this chapter. The reason for doing this is to illustrate the idea of the "long plan".

I have divided the material in accordance with the number of rooks present on board. As will soon become evident, this is more than a formal classification. Pure rook endings (one rook each) tend to be rather technical. Four-rook positions present far more tactical possibilities, although naturally they can also transpose to a pure rook ending.

Rook endgames are not only the most common in practice, but also the most difficult to analyse. The rook is such a strong and mobile piece that it allows countless tactical possibilities and makes over-the-board calculation especially difficult. I have tried to point out in my annotations the moment when one of the players missed a win or a draw, but the probability of mistakes in my comments is quite great, precisely because of these difficulties.

Rook endgames are well known for their drawish tendency. A material advantage of one or, in some extreme cases, two pawns is frequently difficult or even impossible to convert into a win. This does not really mean that Tartakower's axiom "all rook endings are drawn" should be taken literally, however. The technical purpose of this chapter is to highlight those elements that mark a clear advantage for one of the players, with an elevated probability of resulting in a win. (I made the specification "technical" because another purpose, this time of a sentimental nature, is to pay tribute to Akiba).

After a thorough study of Rubinstein's games, I have developed a rough method for preliminary evaluation of rook endings. For each favourable element such as an extra pawn, spatial advantage, the more active rook or an important weakness in the enemy camp, one point is awarded. If the difference between the two sides is one point (scores such as 1–0, or 2–1) the position is clearly better but not necessarily winning. This marks a significant difference compared with pawn, same-colour bishop, or knight endgames where the score 1–0 (equivalent to an extra pawn) is usually sufficient for a win.

With the exception of some extreme cases (for instance, the ending with f- and h-pawns) a score of 2-0 or 3-1 should guarantee a win.

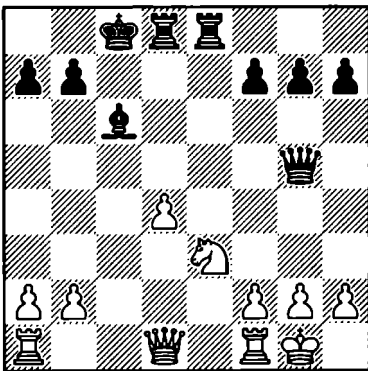
The reader should understand that this system is only a guideline. It can help the practical player (and definitely helped me throughout the years) to choose one or another ending when simplifying from the middlegame, but should not be treated as an infallible rule. Some concrete advantage might weigh much more than just one point, or on the contrary, have no real significance. We should take into account that a greater number of pawns present on the board would usually increase the winning chances, while a simplified position would normally help the defending side. This is an element that cannot be easily quantified. Besides, if chess were pure mathematics, it would be much less interesting.

At the same time, if a rook ending is winning it does not necessarily mean that the player with an advantage will automatically win it. We shall see from the selected examples that good, sometimes even intricate, technique is needed.

We shall make a further division between the situations where the stronger side has a material advantage and those where the superiority is only of a positional nature.

Converting a material advantage I

Akiba Rubinstein – Emanuel Lasker
St Petersburg 1909



An ideal situation for the stronger side is to have a minimal material advantage and some other kind of positional advantage. This is a specific example of the score 2-0.

Lasker had sacrificed (or rather lost) a pawn in the opening, but his position looks rather active. In view of the threat ... $\text{E}xe3$, it would seem that he would have no problem regaining his pawn. Unless...

16. $\text{E}c1!$

Akiba simply continues his development, cutting off most of the black attack's energy.

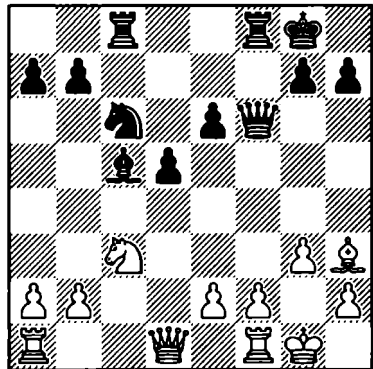
16... $\text{E}xe3$

The prophylactic 16... $\text{E}b8$ would give White an important tempo to develop his initiative: 17. $\text{E}c5$ Wf4 18. $d5$ $\text{E}xe3$ 19. $\text{W}c1!$ Just like in the game, this elegant move puts an end to Black's hopes for counterplay. 19... $\text{E}e4$ 20. $dxc6$ $bxc6$ 21. $\text{W}c3$ with a clear advantage for White, according to Lasker.

17. $\text{E}xc6\uparrow$ $bxc6$ 18. $\text{W}c1!$

It is worth mentioning that with the same intermediate move Rubinstein would later defeat another (this time, future) World Champion:

Akiba Rubinstein – Jose Capablanca
San Sebastian 1911



Black has built up strong pressure against the f2-pawn. In case of the timid 15... $e3$ he would consolidate his centre with 15... $\text{E}ad8$, obtaining a perfectly viable position. Noticing the slightly hanging position of the black bishop and the

c8-rook, Rubinstein initiated a thematic tactical operation.

15. ♖xd5! ♖h6?

Capablanca tries to solve by simple means a position that is basically quite complicated.

Obviously, 15...exd5? loses material to 16. ♖xd5 ♗h8 17. ♙xc8.

Recently, a Russian amateur chess player named Sorokhtin discovered that 15... ♙f2? would have allowed Black to stay in the game, for instance 16. ♗g2 ♖e5!. This is Sorokhtin's improvement over the variation 16... ♖f7? 17. ♖f4 given by Kasparov. For instance 17. ♖xf2 ♖xf2 ♗xf2 ♗d8 19. ♖e7 ♗h8 20. ♖b3 ♖xc7 21. ♖xe6 ♖d4 ♗g2 ♖d5 when the weakness of the white kingside as well as better piece coordination offers Black a reasonable game.

16. ♗g2 ♖cd8

This was the move Capa relied on. 16... ♙f2 would be less efficient now because of 17. ♖f4 for instance 17... ♖cd8 18. ♖a4 when White will win the e6-pawn.

17. ♖c1!

An elegant multi-purpose move. The queen escapes the unpleasant pin along the d-file, attacking the c5-bishop at the same time. By offering to be exchanged for the black queen, it also undermines the e6-square, making 17... ♖xd5 impossible.

17...exd5

Black would lose quickly after 17... ♖xc1? 18. ♙xc6 ♗h8 19. ♖axc1, or 17... ♖xd5? 18. ♖xh6 gxh6 19. ♙xc6 ♗ with a huge material advantage for White in both cases.

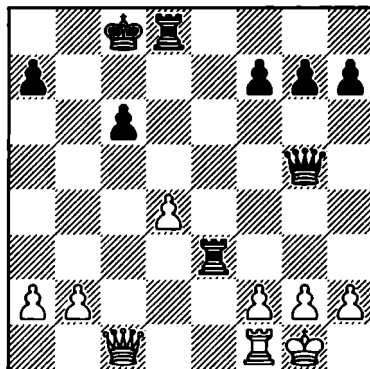
18. ♖xc5 ♖d2 19. ♖b5 ♖d4 20. ♖d3 ♖xd3 21. exd3

with a safe pawn up for White, who went on to win the game.

1-0



Let us now return to Rubinstein – Lasker.
(Position after 18. ♖c1)



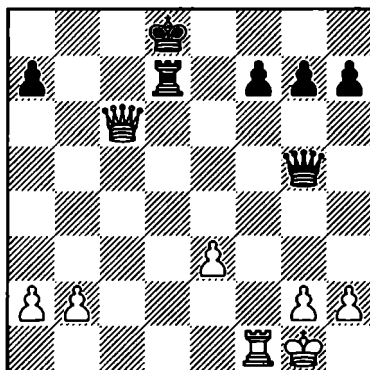
18... ♖xd4

18... ♖e5 19. ♖xc6 ♗h8 20. dxe5 ♖xe5 21 also looks winning for White due to Black weakened king's position.

19. ♖e3 ♖d7

19... ♖d6 20. ♖xf7

20. ♖xc6 ♗d8



21. ♖f4!

"A remarkable concept. White threaten decide the game with a direct attack against king: 22. ♖a8 ♗e7 (22... ♗c7 23. ♖c4! also I bad) 23. ♖e4 ♗. In order to avoid this, Black to exchange queens, entering a lost endgame (Lasker). By means of this remarkable rook White defends the e3-pawn and gains access to the e-line and to the queenside.

21...f5

Relatively best. Black takes the e4-square under control. He would lose after 21...♖a5 22.♗a8† ♕e7 23.♞e4† ♕f6 24.♗c6† ♕g5 25.h4†. The counterattack 21...♞d1† 22.♕f2 ♞d2† 23.♕e1 ♗xg2 would fail to 24.♞d4†! (overloading the rook) 24...♕e7 25.♗d6† and White wins. Both lines were indicated by Lasker.

22.♗c5 ♖e7

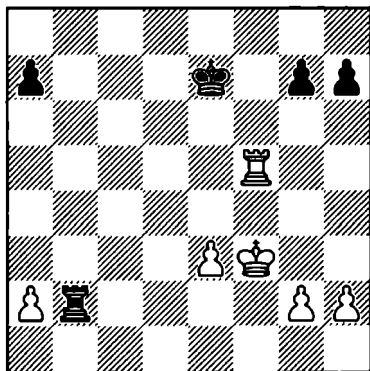
Now, 22...♞d1† 23.♕f2 ♞d2† 24.♕e1 ♗xg2 would simply lose the rook to 25.♗a5†.

23.♗xe7†

Actually Fritz considers 23.♗c3 to be equally strong, but that move would lead us to the next chapter.

23...♕xe7 24.♞xf5 ♞d1† 25.♕f2

Too passive would have been 25.♞f1 ♞d2 26.♞b1 ♞e2 with drawing chances for Black. 25...♞d2† 26.♕f3 ♞xb2

**27.♞a5! ♞b7**

An important moment. Besides his extra pawn, White has the more active rook. Black has nothing to compensate for White's trumps. Therefore, we can safely attach to the position the score of 2–0. White's win will require some accuracy but will never be put in any doubt.

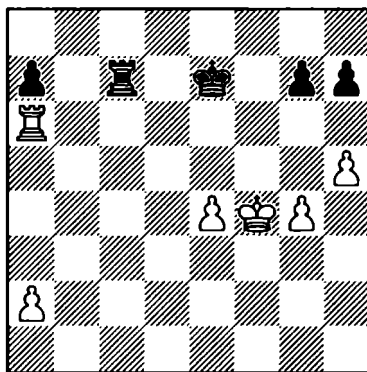
28.♞a6

A typical method in rook endings. With the last two moves, White has restricted both Black pieces' activity. In principle, if everything else failed, White could at some moment push his

a-pawn to a6 and then transfer the rook to b7. This is, however, not necessary for the moment: White should first strengthen his position on the other side. The only thing left for the World Champion was to wait for the execution.

28...♕f8 29.e4 ♞c7 30.h4 ♕f7 31.g4 ♕f8 32.♕f4

The attack on the kingside is massive. There would be little sense in keeping one of the pawns back, since it could be attacked at a later time. White is not in any hurry, since Black has only waiting moves at his disposal.

32...♕e7 33.h5**33...h6**

This move weakens the g6-square, but letting White advance all his pawns to the fifth rank was also a bit scary. In his old endgame book Lisitzin gives a nice winning method (I am sure it is not the only one): 33...♕f7 34.♕f5 ♕e7 35.g5 ♕f7 36.e5 ♕e7 37.g6 h6 38.♞e6† now Black faces a difficult choice:

a) 38...♕d7 would allow the incredible 39.♞f6!! A remarkable example of how a space advantage in an apparently blocked position can allow tactical solutions based on modification of the pawn structure. It happens all the time in modern lines of the King's Indian. 39...♕e8 (After 39...gxh6 40.g7 ♞c8 41.exf6 Black cannot stop the pawns, since the king cannot cross the eighth rank.) 40.♞f7 ♞xf7† 41.gxf7† ♕xf7 42.e6† and White will stalemate the black king,

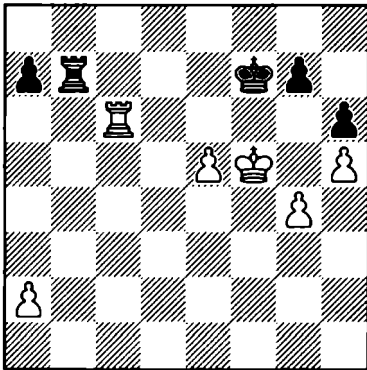
forcing g7-g5, hxg6 and mate within two moves. For instance, 42...♙e8 43.♚e5 ♔e7 44.♙d5 ♙e8 45.♙d6 ♙d8 46.e7† ♙e8 47.♙e6 a5 48.a4 g5 49.hxg6 h5 50.g7 h4 51.g8♞ mate.

b) 38...♙f8 39.♞d6 ♙e7 40.♞a6 ♞b7 (If 40...♙d7 then 41.♞f6 is again winning or 40...♙f8 41.♙e6 ♙e8 42.a4, planning a5, ♞d6, a6, when Black is too passive to resist) 41.♞c6 ♞d7 42.♞c8 once the rook captures the g7-pawn the game will be over.

34.♙f5 ♙f7 35.e5 ♞b7 36.♞d6

The only purpose of the following moves was to reach the 38th move where the game would be adjourned.

36...♙e7 37.♞a6 ♙f7 38.♞d6 ♙f8 39.♞c6 ♙f7



40.a3

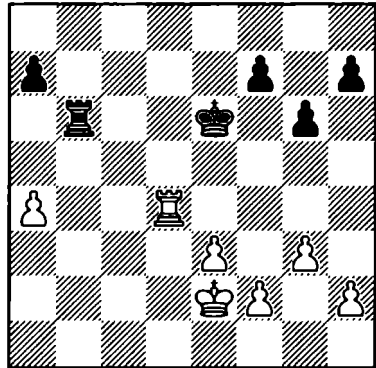
Black is in zugzwang: 40...♙f8 (40...♞e7 is well met by 41.e6† ♙g8 42.♙g6 ♞e8 43.e7 followed by ♞d6-d8 and White wins) 41.♙g6 ♞b3 42.♞c8† ♙e7 43.♞c7† ♙e6 44.♞xg7 winning.

Ironically, this nice win over the World Champion didn't help Akiba's cause. Although from a formal point of view Lasker acted as a gentleman and praised his opponent's play in his annotations, he also understood that he would have a tough (if not impossible) job defending his title against such a strong player. As is known Akiba never got a title match with Lasker...

1-0

It is, however, not always possible to have an extra pawn *and* the better-placed rook. If the enemy rook is more active, then an extra pawn guarantees only practical chances, but not a clear win. Here is a typical example.

Akiba Rubinstein – Aron Nimzowitsch Gothenburg 1920



Compared with the previous endings, it will soon be the defending side that has a more active rook. As compensation for White, there are more pawns on board and, besides, within just a few moves Rubinstein will obtain a very favourable configuration on the kingside. Therefore, a preliminary evaluation, based on the score 2-1, suggests that the position should be placed somewhere on the edge between a draw and a win for White. The further course of the game will support this evaluation. Faced with Rubinstein's strong and consequent play, Nimzowitsch will make just one significant mistake, but this will be enough for the balance to swing decisively in White's favour.

32.g4

In principle, Black would like to play ...h5, in order to defend his pawns more easily. Only the f7-pawn would need permanent care from the king, but this pawn is close enough to the centre to avoid the black monarch's decentralization.

After 32.g4, Black is at a crossroads: shall he allow g4-g5 or not? It is easy to say, already

knowing the game, that it was not a wise idea to allow g4-g5, but there is no completely satisfactory solution to the problem. For instance, h7-h6 would make a further plan based on h4-h5 quite unpleasant, while f7-f6 would weaken the seventh rank.

32...♖b2† 33.♔f3 ♖a2

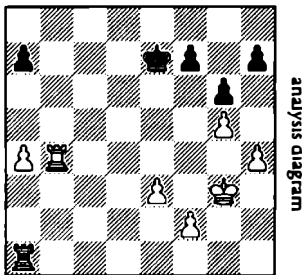
If the pawn had been on a2, Black would have submitted it to frontal attacks. In the situation given, the rook would have been passive on a6. From a2 (a1 or a3) it can also keep the kingside under observation.

34.g5 ♔e7 35.h4 ♔e6 36.♖f4

From here, the rook defends all the weak pawns, thus allowing the king some degree of freedom. Besides, Black has to be careful now, since White has created the unpleasant threat of ♖f6† and then ♖a6.

36...♔e7 37.♔g3 ♔f8

This certainly looks like a mysterious and rather passive move. Why did Nimzowitsch take his king away from the centre? Wouldn't 37...♖a1 have been more natural? I could quote Rowan Atkinson from *Johnny English*: "A simple question, but one that, I believe, has a complex answer." First of all, Nimzowitsch might have been concerned about the fact that in the centre his king would be slightly exposed. After 38.♖b4 White would create the immediate threat of winning a second pawn with ♖b7†.



a) Black's other concern is that, if kept in the centre, the king would fail to defend the h7-pawn, which could lead to trouble in the line:
38...♔e6 39.♖b8 ♖xa4 40.♖e8†!

An important intermediate check, allowing White to win a tempo later.

40...♔d6

40...♔f5? would lead to immediate catastrophe after 41.f3! with the threat of mating with e4.

41.♖h8 a5

The attempt to keep the king active and eventually transfer the rook behind the passed a-pawn with 41...♖c4 42.♖xh7 ♖c7 would be best met with 43.♖h8!! preventing Black from reaching his desired set-up and planning to answer 43...♔c6 with 44.h5 gxh5 45.♖xh5 when 45...a5 would lose to 46.g6 fxg6 47.♖xa5 and the black king is one step too far away.

42.♖x7

Now Black has to spend a tempo in order to protect his f7-pawn.

42...♔e6 43.h5 gxh5 44.♖xh5

and the disturbance of the balance clearly favours White. He will simply place his rook behind the a-pawn and then start advancing his kingside majority. Black's counterplay based on 44...♔f5 45.f4 ♔e4 would fail to 46.♖h7 winning.

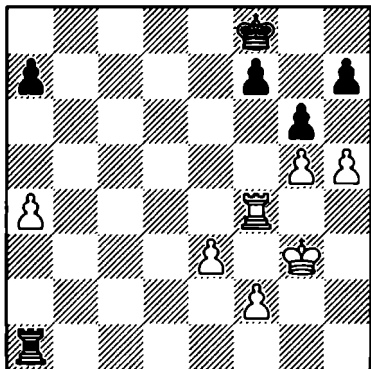
b) 38...♔d6? would be even worse because of 39.♖b7.

c) After releasing the pressure against the f2-pawn, 38...♔f8 would be less favourable than in the game. Although h5 is not possible any more because of gxh5 when the black rook would be ready to attack from the first rank, White can simply activate his king with 39.♔f4 putting Black in a critical situation.

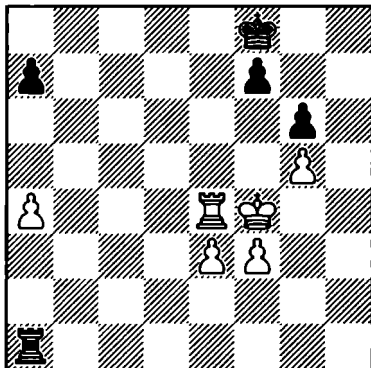
d) The best continuation is 38...a5! (Removing the pawn from the vulnerable a7-square and bringing it one step closer to promotion.) 39.♖d4 ♔e6 when Black would be a full tempo ahead compared with Variation "a" if White goes for the h-pawn. In case of a more neutral strategy, the presence of the h-pawns might have made White's task more difficult than in the game, because the h4-pawn needs permanent care.

However, all these aspects were probably not easy to foresee during the game. Besides, Nimzowitsch's move cannot be considered a mistake, since White cannot prove a win yet.

38.h5 ♖a1!



40...♖a2 41.♜h4 ♖h1† 41.♝g4 ♖g1†



39.hxg6

With his last move, Nimzowitsch defended against the very unpleasant threat 39.h6, which would have led now to an immediate draw after 39...♖g1† 40.♝h4 ♖h1† 41.♝g4 ♖g1†.

Nevertheless, the advance of the h-pawn can be considered a success for White, who managed to get rid of his potentially weak pawn. Besides, the black kingside has been weakened, making a further f7-f6 even less appealing than before.

Once the pawn structure has been more or less defined, the time has come to improve the position of the pieces.

39...hxg6 40.♖e4

White cuts off the enemy king from the rest of the board.

At this stage of the game, it is not entirely clear how important this achievement is, because the white rook is rather in its own king's way as well. At the same time, the rook is deprived of the possibility of lateral attacks, a detail that will make itself felt on the 49th move.

However, when playing a position without any shadow of counterplay for the opponent but at the same time not at all easy to win, it is essential to take advantage of every small detail before starting to carry out the main plan. This means to play from a position of strength. In our case, White's main plan is to transfer the king to a more active position and the black king would obviously try to interfere, if only it were allowed.

42...♖c1!

Once again, Nimzowitsch defends accurately. He prevents the further advance of the white king.

42...♖f1?, attacking the f3-pawn, would have been a rather inefficient way to put in practice the same idea, because of 43.♖e5! followed by ♖a5, when White will achieve the perfect combination of a material advantage and an active rook.

At the same time, in case of a neutral move such as 42...♖a2 the advance of the white king is decisive, for instance:

43.♝e5 ♖d2

This barrier is not too reliable, as we shall see, but 43...♝e7 is not so efficient either, because of 44.♝d5† ♝d7 45.♖f4 when Black has to return with his king to the kingside, 45...♝e7, allowing White to continue marching in with 46.♝c6. The only way to temporarily save the a-pawn is now 46...♖b2 but after 47.♖e4† ♝f8 48.♖e5 followed by ♖a5 or ♖b5 and ♝b7, White is easily winning. Please note that the e5-square is even more favourable for the rook than the f4-square was some moves ago. After a5 and f4, the rook will again defend all the remaining weaknesses, at the same time severely restricting the enemy king.

44.♖d4! ♖a2

Practically forced, because of the threat ♖d7.

45.♝f6!

This is a perfect illustration of the fact that

White, based on his spatial advantage and his extra pawn, can play on both wings. In the previous line the king aimed for b7, while now it targets the f7-pawn. Black can do very little to prolong the fight.

For instance, after 45...♗e8 one easy win is 46.♖e4† ♗f8 47.♖b4 winning the kingside pawns soon.

43.♖b4

43.♗e5 would have been answered by 43...♖c5†, when the careless 44.♗f6?? leads to mate after 44...♖f5, while 43.♖e5 would lead nowhere because of 43...♖c4†.

43...a5

This must have been a difficult decision to make. Generally speaking, there are pros and cons to such a move.

The pawn looks more vulnerable on a5, but as we shall see later in the game, Black has sufficient resources to protect it.

More important is the fact that the pawn restricts the white rook in its actions (the b4-square is not available any more), which means that the black king can advance on the seventh rank without fearing ♖b7 check and ♖xa7. Keeping the pawn on a7 would mean allowing White to restrict the black king while maintaining the rook on a more active position than the e4-square.

The following variation will prove that refraining from ...a5 for too long could have fatal consequences.

43...♖c2 44.♗e4 ♖c1 45.f4 ♖c2 46.♗d4

White already threatens to attack the enemy a-pawn, which was not possible earlier in view of ♖c4†.

46...♖a2 47.♗e5

White is playing on two wings. Although the main target is the a7-pawn, there are things to do on the kingside as well. 47.♗c5 would not be so effective because of 47...a5 48.♖c4 ♖b2.

47...♗g7

In order to prevent ♗f6, Black has to worsen the position of his king even more. White now has a free hand on the queenside.

48.e4 ♖a1 49.♗d6 ♖a2 50.e5

White has achieved maximum activity and, once again, all his weak pawns are defended.

50...♖a1 51.♗c6 a5

This is already forced now.

52.♖d4 ♖b1 53.♖d7!

Winning an important tempo by threatening e6.

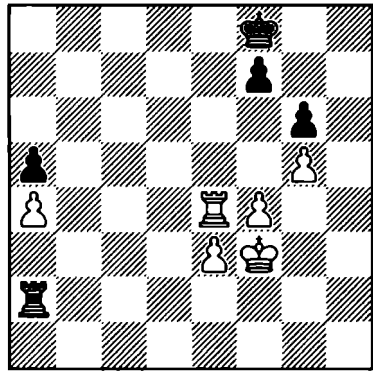
53...♗f8 54.♖a7 ♖b4 55.♖xa5 ♖xf4 56.♖a8† ♗e7 57.a5

The white pawn will decide the game. Black's counterplay on the other wing has not even started yet.

44.♖e4 ♖c3 45.♗g3 ♖a3 46.f4

The rook is defending all the weak pawns again.

46...♖a1 47.♗f2 ♖a2† 48.♗f3



White has arranged his pawns in the best formation and prepares the king's march to the queenside. Besides, with his king's triangulation Akiba has created zugzwang: Black has to worsen the position of either his rook or king.

48...♖a3

The other possibility would have been 48...♗g7.

It seems that White could have taken advantage of the remote position of the black king:

49.♖c4 ♗f8 50.♗e4 ♖a3!

Worse would be 50...♗e7 51.♗e5 with decisive threats.

51.♗d5!

The slow 51.♗d4 ♗e7 52.e4 might be insufficient for a win in view of 52...♗e6 (But not 52...f6? 53.♖c7† ♗d6 54.gxf6! queening) 53.♖c6† ♗e7 54.♖a6 ♖xa4† 55.♗e5 ♖b4! and, by giving up the pawn, Black sets up a fully satisfactory defensive position.

51...♖xe3

51...♗e7 would be even worse: 52.♕c6! (threatening ♗b5) 52...♖b3 53.♗e4† ♗f8 54.♗e5 and, compared with the main line, the white king is far more active.

52.♗c5 ♖f3 53.♗e4 ♗a3 54.♖xa5

In many other cases such an extra pawn, controlled by the enemy rook from behind, would not be enough for a win but the decisive factor here is the huge space advantage on the kingside.

54...♗e7

A passive strategy would also be hopeless: 54...♗a1 55.♗a7 ♗a3 56.a5 ♗a4† 57.♗e5 ♗g7 58.a6 ♗a5† 59.♗d6 ♗a4 60.♗c6 ♖xf4 61.♗c7 and Black has no time to generate counterplay on the kingside.

55.♗a7†

The careless 55.♗a8 ♗e6 56.a5 would allow strong counterplay: 56...♗a4† 57.♗e3 ♗f5.

55...♗e6 56.♗a6† ♗e7 57.♗e5

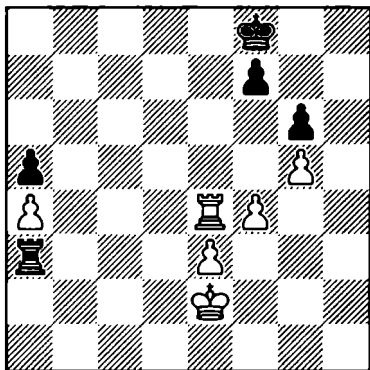
Threatening to push the king further back.

57...♗e3† 58.♗d5 ♗d3† 59.♗c5

After ♗a6-f6, White would win easily since, once again, he would have all the pawns defended.

49.♗e2

Now the same plan starting with 49.♗c4 would be less effective: 49...♗e7 50.♗e4 ♗d6! 51.♗d4 ♗a1 52.e4 ♗d1† and White cannot make much progress. With his move, Akiba threatens to bring his king to b2 and then capture the a5-pawn with the rook. Black must act quickly which, of course, Nimzowitsch understood perfectly.



49...f6!

Although this pawn break weakens the g6-pawn, it is the only way to activate the king and so generate some counterplay.

50.♗xf6 ♗f7 51.♗c4

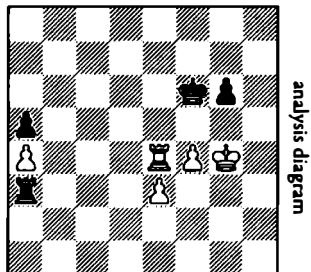
After 51.♗d2 Black would be just in time to create counterplay, for instance: 51...♗xf6 52.♗c2 ♗f5 53.♗e5† ♗f6! 54.♖xa5 ♗xe3 followed by ♖f3. Against the trickier 51.♗d1 Black should answer 51...♗a2! cutting off the king, rather than with the careless 51...♗xf6! 52.♗d2! when he would be in zugzwang.

52...♗f5 is bad now because the e3-pawn is defended and White can safely win the a-pawn with 53.♗e5†.

Retreating with the king to f7 would lose a tempo over the previous line, while after 52...♗a2† 53.♗c3 ♗a3† 54.♗b2 the white king would be prepared to support his a-pawn. Therefore, after 54...♗d3 55.♗e5 ♗f7 White can abandon the e3-pawn, reaching a winning ending with 56.♖xa5 ♗xe3 57.♗e5 ♖f3 58.♗e4 ♗f6 59.a5 and Black has no time to generate any kingside counterplay.

However, Nimzowitsch's accurate move 49...f6 also has a significant drawback, that will eventually lead him to defeat. After the exchange of pawns on the kingside, the g5-square has become available, creating a new path of invasion.

Therefore, White could have considered immediately changing the route of his king with 51.♗f3 ♗xf6 52.♗g4



Both armies have their pieces placed on optimal positions. The rooks are attacking (defending) the a4- and e3-pawns, while the kings keep the g5-square under observation. Black's problem is

that it is his turn to move and he will be forced to worsen the position of one of his pieces.

However, we cannot state yet that Black is in absolute zugzwang. This would mean that all possible continuations were losing, but only concrete analysis will prove the truth.

Black has three basic possibilities:

a) Release the pressure against the e3-pawn: 52...♠a1

b) Give up control of the g5-square: 52...♝f7

c) Release the pressure against the a4-pawn: 52...♞b3

Let us investigate them one by one.

a) 52...♠a1

This looks like the most natural move. The rook is prepared to act on both wings, keeping the a4-pawn under observation and ready to harass the enemy king. The move has a significant drawback, however: it allows the white rook a moment of freedom, sufficient to be transferred to c4, from where it will start lateral attacks against the black kingside. Play might continue 53.♞c4 ♠g1†

Passive defence is hopeless. White would strengthen his position to the maximum and then start the final attack, for instance 53...♠a3 54.e4 ♠a1 55.e5† ♝f7 56.♞c7† ♝e6 57.♞c6† ♝f7 58.♞f6† ♝g7 59.♠a6 ♠xa4 60.♝g5 ♝f7. The last hope. Black dreams of answering 61.♠xg6 with 61...♠xf4. Unfortunately, even here, the intermediate 62.e6† wins the rook. Besides, if he wishes to avoid concrete calculation, White has an easy way to avoid that with 61.♞f6†! ♝g7 62.♠xg6† winning.

54.♝f3 ♠a1!

It is best to return with the rook at once. 54...♠f1† would only help the king reach an active position after 55.♝e4 and, in view of the threat ♠c5, Black has no time to take the opposition with 55...♝e6. After the virtually forced 55...♠a1 the white king advances with decisive effect. For instance 56.♝d5 ♝f5 57.♝c6 ♠b1 58.♠c5† ♝e4 59.♠xa5 ♝xe3 60.♠b5 ♠c1† 61.♠c5 ♠a1 62.♠c4 and White wins.

55.e4 ♠f1†

The secret behind Black's defence is that he has to fight against possible invasion on both

wings simultaneously. The careless 55...♠a3† would lead to an already known position after 56.♝g4 with a win for White, but 55...♠a2 maintaining the possibility of ...♠g2† might also be playable.

56.♝e3 ♠a1

Once again, Black is best advised not to help the king advance too far.

57.♝d4 ♝e6!

The king is just in time to prevent White's further progress.

58.♝c5 ♠b1!

and we reach a position similar to those analysed in the notes to the 55th move. White cannot make progress.

b) 52...♝f7 is not to be recommended. Control over the g5-square is probably the most important issue. After 53.♝g5! Black is forced to play 53...♠a1 anyway, when after 54.♞c4 ♠g1† 55.♝h4 play can continue in a similar way to the previous variation, with the significant difference that the black king is worse placed. Finally:

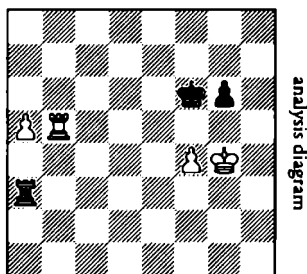
c) 52...♠b3 is probably just as good as 52...♠a1. Black is able to reach a draw only with precise play. For instance:

53.♠e5 ♠a3 54.♠xa5 ♠xe3 55.♠b5!?

If White keeps his rook in front of the pawn in view of a further a5-a6, he will later need the help of the king in order to make progress. This would leave the f4-pawn without defence, allowing sufficient counterplay.

55...♠a3 56.a5

Black's situation looks critical now.



56...♝g7!!

This voluntary retreat is the only saving move.

The king aims for the safest area on the board: in particular, the h6-square.

White's idea would be crowned with success after some neutral move such as 56...♖a1? 57.♖b6† ♔g7 58.a6. The black king cannot find any shelter now, since ...♗h6 can always be answered with f5. Therefore, White will be able to advance his pawn one square further, with decisive effect. For instance: 58...♖a4! 59.♗f3 Before executing the main plan, it is a good idea to avoid the pin along the fourth rank, thus preventing a further ...g5. 59...♗h7 60.♖b7† ♗h6 61.a7 and now Black has no useful active moves since 61...♗h5 is mated by 62.♖h7. Therefore, everything is prepared for the white king's march to the queenside. 61...g5 is not much help either because of 62.f5, when Black cannot fight against both passed pawns.

Also insufficient is 56...♗f7 because of 57.♖b7† when, in order to avoid the previous line, the king has to go to the last rank. This makes White's win rather easy, for instance 57...♗f8 58.♖a7 ♖a1 59.♗g5 ♖a4 60.a6 ♗e8 61.♗xg6 ♖xf4 62.♖b7 ♖a4 63.a7 followed by ♖b8†. 57.♖b7† ♗h6

White lacks just one tempo to advance his pawn to the sixth rank and defend it laterally. After

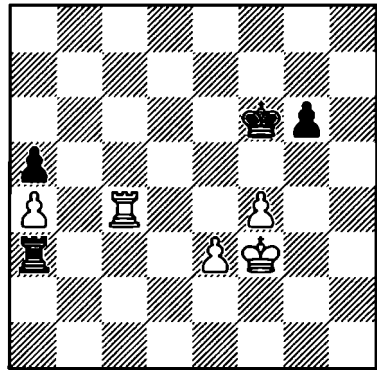
58.♖a7 ♖a1 59.♗f3 ♖a4 60.a6 ♖a1 61.♗e4 ♖a4† 62.♗e5 ♗h5

Black's counterplay is sufficient for a draw. Also possible is 60...g5! (suggested by Mühlberger) reaching a theoretically drawn position in case of the exchange of pawns with 61.fxg5† ♗xg5. White's only winning attempt would be to place his rook on a8 in order to keep the enemy king busy on the kingside (in view of the possible a7 and ♖h8) and then try to transfer his own king to the queenside. In this case, Black would regroup with ...♗g7 and ...♖f6, a set-up analysed a long time ago by Vancura.

As we have seen, White would not have obtained a winning position by an immediate attempt to invade Black's position through the g5-square. However, Black would have been forced to take some difficult decisions and defend very accurately.

We cannot know about Rubinstein's thought processes around this moment. We can only suppose that, by not yet revealing his secret intentions regarding the g5-square, he was hoping that Nimzowitsch would lose his vigilance.

This was what actually happened in the game. 51...♗x6 52.♗f3



Such moves are quite unpleasant for the opponent, who has to guess in which direction the king plans to advance.

52...♗e6 53.♗e4

Rubinstein could have transposed to the variation starting with 51.♗f3, examined in the comments to White's 51st move, by playing 53.♖e4†. Black is best advised to agree to that since the attempt to reach the same position with White to move, by playing 53...♗f7, would allow White to change plans with 54.♗e2!. After 54...♗f6 55.♗d2 it is Black who is in zugzwang. See the line starting with 51.♗d1 from the same comment.

53...♗d6

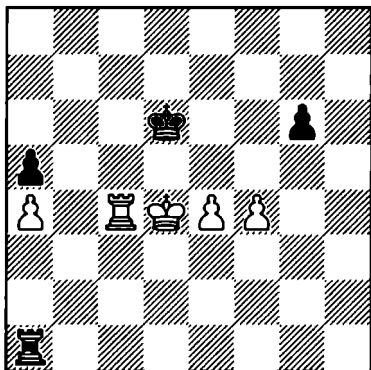
53...♖a1 54.♗d4 ♗d6 transposes to the game.

54.♗d4 ♖a1

This move is entirely correct. However, it might have induced in Nimzowitsch the feeling that the rook was not well placed on a3 any more, and that he has to change his defensive plan. We shall soon see that stereotypical thinking can have fatal consequences in rook endings.

55.e4

The first sensation is that White has a strong centralized position. However, a closer look reveals that his pieces are rather cramped on the fourth rank, lacking freedom of action. If we moved every kingside pawn (both colours) one square to the right, the situation would be different. White would have more chance to manoeuvre and regroup.



55...♞d1†

This natural check seems to be the losing move. Nimzowitsch defended rather well until this moment, but now he fails to understand the main danger: penetration of the white king on g5. 55...♞a3 (or maybe even 55...♞a2) would have saved the day. After the practically forced 56.e5† I found two defensive possibilities for Black. Both look rather dangerous, but both are completely sound.

a) 56...♣d7

The desire to prevent lateral attacks of the rook from the c-file is quite understandable, but, as we shall see in the b-variation, Black shouldn't fear them at all.

57.♣c5 ♞b3

This move became possible because the c5-square is not available for the white rook any more. At the same time, the move is necessary. Black has to prevent the king from attacking the a5-pawn.

58.♞d4† ♣e7

58...♣c7 would be bad for reasons that are not obvious: 59.♞d6 ♞b4 60.♞xg6 ♞xf4 61.♣b5

♞f5 62.♞c6† Here we are! White takes advantage of the poor position of the black king 62...♣d7 63.♞c5 and, with two extra pawns, White wins easily.

59.♞d6 ♞b4 60.♞xg6 ♞xf4 61.♣b5 ♞f5

Now, there is no defence for the e5-pawn and, rather surprisingly, the black king is close enough to the other pawn. For instance, 62.♣xa5 ♞xe5† 63.♣b6 ♞e1 64.a5 ♣d7 65.♣b7 ♞b1† 66.♞b6 ♞c1 67.a6 ♞c7† with a theoretical draw.

The other possible way is:

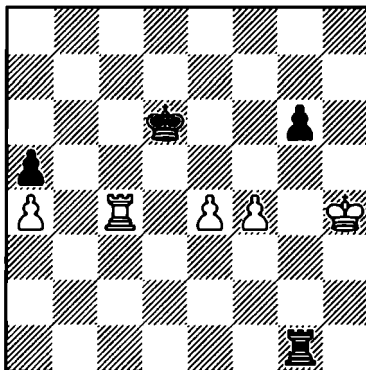
b) 56...♣e7 57.♞c7† ♣e6 58.♞c6† ♣f7 59.♣d5 ♞xa4 60.♞c7† ♣f8 61.♞a7 ♞xf4 62.♞xa5 g5 and the black pawn is fast enough to maintain the balance.

56.♣e3 ♞e1†

Now it is too late to return to the third rank defence. 56...♞a1 is met by 57.♣f3 just as in the game.

57.♣f3 ♞f1† 58.♣g4 ♞g1† 59.♣h4

The rook has not caused any trouble for the white king. Moreover, it has forced it to go to the best square!



59...♞b1

After 59...♞g2 it might seem that the black rook is keeping the white king passive. In fact, it would be the other way round...

60.♞d4† ♣e6

Or 60...♣c5 61.♞d5† ♣b4 62.e5 ♣xa4 63.e6 ♞e2 64.♞e5 queening.

61.♠d5

This move is possible precisely because the black rook was not attacking any of the white pawns.

61...♠e2 62.♠xa5 ♠xe4 63.♔g5

The black rook is too passive to offer an adequate defence against the attack on the kingside. For instance:

63...♠b4 64.♠a6† ♔f7 65.♠a7† ♔e6 66.a5

With a winning position.

60.♔g5 ♠b4

In my database, the moves end here. I suppose the game was adjourned and Nimzowitsch resigned without resuming play. Here are some possible reasons: 61.e5† ♔d7 (61...♔d5 won't work because of 62.♠c8 ♠xa4 63.♠d8† ♔e6 64.♠d6† ♔f7 and we have reached a position that is familiar to us from page 23. White wins with either 65.♠f6† followed by 66.♠xg6 or 66.♠xg6 ♠xf4 - otherwise Black would be just hopeless - 66.e6† winning the rook.) 62.♠c5 ♠xa4 63.♠d5† ♔e7 64.♠d6 and the two connected pawns ensure the win.

1-0

Converting a positional advantage

As mentioned in the introduction, material and positional factors are of equal importance in rook endings. In the example that we are going to examine, the position was marked by material equality until the very end of the game. White's win was made possible by purely positional factors. At the same time, the next game is probably one of the best examples of the "Akiba long-plan".

Akiba Rubinstein – Alexander Alekhine

Carlsbad 1911

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 c6 4.♘c3 ♞b6 5.♞c2 ♙g4 6.♙g5 ♘bd7 7.e3 ♘c4 8.♙f4 e6 9.♙d3 ♞a5 10.0-0 ♘xc3

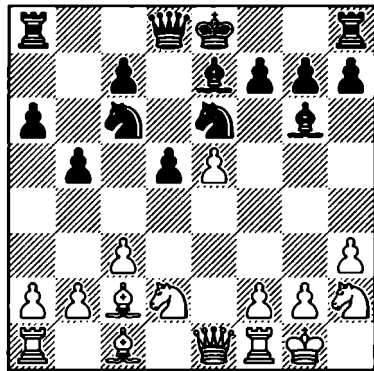
Alekhine was still too young for his great opponent. In the hope of gaining chances for an attack, or at least some complications, he allows Rubinstein to capture towards the centre four

times (!) with pawns, on the 11th, 12th, 17th and 23rd moves. No wonder that the resulting rook endgame will be very unpleasant for Black.

It is curious to note that one year later, confronted with the same opponent, Akiba demonstrated that he is not at all dogmatic, and that for the sake of piece activity he is ready to capture with a pawn away from the centre:

Alexander Alekhine – Akiba Rubinstein

Russian Championship, Vilnius 1912



Not suspecting anything, Alekhine played

15.♙xg6

and must have been rather surprised when Akiba answered:

15...f×g6!

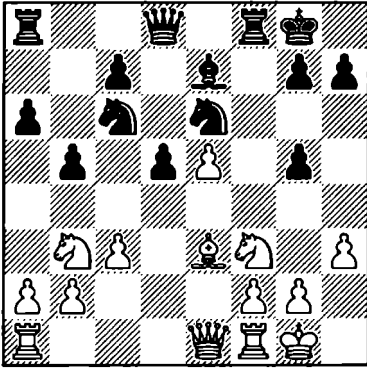
Although apparently improving the pawn structure, the more natural 15...hxg6 does not really prevent a kingside attack. After castling, there will be a permanent danger of a massive operation such as f4, g4, f5, etc. By capturing with the f-pawn Black opened the f-file having in mind both defensive ideas (f4 is strongly discouraged now) and, as we shall see, aggressive plans. The fact that White is left with a passed pawn in the centre is of little relevance, because the e6-knight safely blocks it.

16.♘b3 g5!

Definitively eliminating the danger of f4. Had Alekhine understood the strategic danger, he would probably have considered 16.f4, although

this pawn could have later become the object of an attack with ...g5.

17. ♖e3 0–0 18. ♠f3?!



Very carelessly played. Alekhine completely overlooked the exchange sacrifice.

18... ♞d7

Objectively speaking, the immediate 18... ♞xf3! might have been stronger, because in the game White could have prevented it. However, Rubinstein was not the kind of player to rush in. A subject we shall return to later in this chapter.

19. ♞d2?

Pushing his luck too much. 19. ♞e2 was absolutely necessary.

19... ♞xf3!

A thematic sacrifice, it is perfectly justified strategically and involves dangerous attacking ideas as well.

20. ♠f3 ♖xc5 21. ♞e2 ♞f8 22. ♠d2 ♠g6!

The numerous weaknesses in White's camp would offer Black excellent compensation even in the hypothetical case that the white king was on the other wing. The way it is, White is just lost.

23. ♞fe1 ♖d6

Black systematically concentrates his pieces around the enemy king. The threat ♠f4 is very unpleasant.

24. ♠f4?!

White wants to gain the f3-square, in order to establish some communication between his pieces

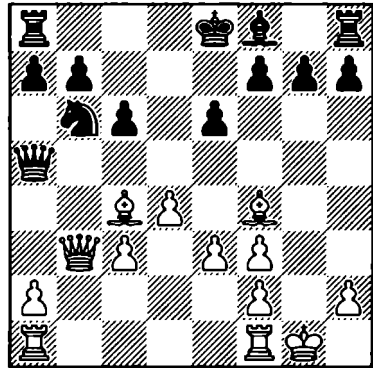
and the king. However, this costs him another pawn.

24... ♠exf4 25. ♞f1 ♠xh3† 26. ♠h1 g4 27. ♞e2 ♞f5

0–1

Back to our main game:

11. ♖xc3 ♖xf3 12. ♠f3 dxc4 13. ♖xc4 ♠b6 14. ♞b3



14... ♞d8

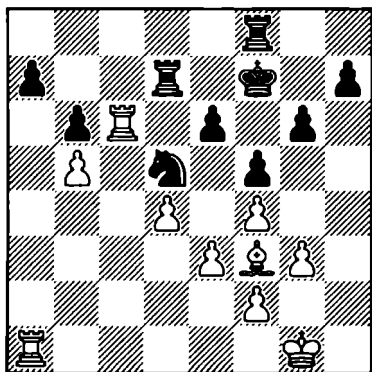
This game has an almost purely technical character and is intended to highlight a series of strategic aspects typical of Akiba's play.

However, this moment deserves a more concrete investigation.

Why didn't Black exchange on c4, in order to ease his defence and compensate for his slight lack of space? For once, the answer is of a tactical nature. As pointed out by Andrea Malfagia, after 14... ♠xc4 White would have the unexpected 15. ♞xb7!, taking advantage of Black's delay in development. The only way to parry the threats ♞xa8† and ♞xc6† followed by ♞xc4 is 15... ♠b6 when play may continue 16. ♞xc6† ♠e7 17. ♞b7† ♠e8. (If 17... ♠f6? the black king would face a decisive attack after 18. ♖e5† ♠g6 19. ♠h1! and, all of a sudden, one of the consequences of the exchange on f3 proves useful for White, who can include his rook into the attack along the g-file. Black is defenceless against the threat ♞g1(†) followed by ♞e4.) Now White can probably do

better than taking the draw by perpetual by playing 18.c4 with a very dangerous attack. Clearly such an attacking maestro as Alekhine had little trouble in sensing the danger of such a continuation, but what about Akiba? Would the great strategist have gone for such a sharp line? I believe there is little doubt about it: throughout his career Rubinstein created more than one attacking gem, with the necessary specification that his aggression always started from a very sound strategic base.

15.♠c2 ♖d6 16.♠g3 ♠xg3 17.hxg3 0–0 18.f4 c5 19.♠f3 ♗d7 20.a4 ♘d5 21.♗fc1 g6 22.♖b5 ♖xb5 23.axb5 cxd4 24.cxd4 b6 25.♗c4 f5 26.♗c6 ♖f7



27.♠xd5

This exchange is rather premature. 27.g4 came into consideration. The knight's best square is d5 anyway and therefore White could have chosen the right moment to exchange it.

27...exd5 28.♗a1 ♗fd8 29.♖f1 ♖e7 30.♖e2 ♗d6 31.♗c6

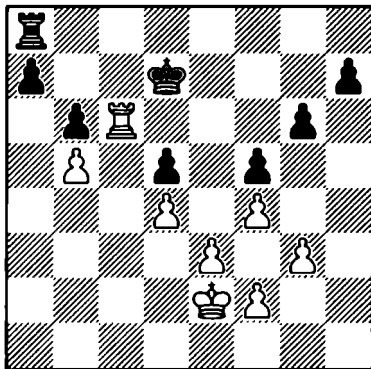
Rubinstein's hesitations during the next few moves will lead to a situation where, in the event of optimal play from his opponent, he would have lacked just one tempo that he needed to convert a better position into a win.

31...♗d7 32.♖d3 ♗a8 33.♗c6 ♗d6 34.♖e2!

This new indecision could have cost White half a point. Better was 34.♗xd6 ♖xd6 35.♗c6+ ♖d7 36.f3 with an extra tempo in comparison with the game. For instance, the critical 36...♗c8

37.♗xc8 ♖xc8 loses to 38.e4 when Black has no time to start his queenside counterplay, based on ...a6, while 38...♖d7 39.♖e3 transposes to the line 36...♗c8? from the notes to Black's 36th move.

34...♗xc6 35.♗xc6 ♖d7



The endgame is obviously better for White. His rook is more active, occupying a strong position on the only open file and making pawn advances rather difficult for Black on both sides. White can push his central pawns in different ways, either to create a passed pawn or to weaken the enemy's structure. One important detail is that in most cases Black cannot exchange rooks: the pawn endgame would be lost.

36.f3!

This is not the kind of committal move Akiba liked to play without due preparation, but in this concrete case he must have been concerned about preventing the exchange of rooks by means of ...♗c8. In the first English edition I considered 36.♖d3 to be better, but a hidden detail highlighted by the German reader Mühlberger proved the contrary.

I considered 36...a6! to be Black's best, but not entirely satisfactory, defence:

37.♗xb6 axb5 38.♗b7 ♖c6

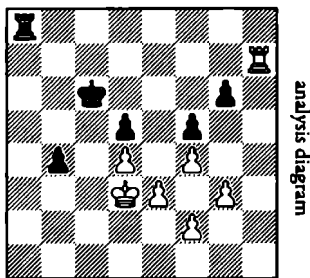
The king is more active here, threatening to support the passed pawn. 38...♖e6 would be easier to meet: 39.♗xh7 ♗a3† 40.♖e2 ♗a2† 41.♖f3 –this defence would be more dangerous

with the black king on c6: 41...b4 42.♔g7 ♖f6 43.♗b7 ♗b2 44.♗b6† and Black loses one of his weak pawns, while the b4-pawn is not too dangerous. For instance: 44...♗f7 45.♗d6 b3 46.♗xd5 ♗b1 47.♗b5 b2 48.♗e2 ♗e6 49.♗d2 ♗f1 50.♗xb2 ♗xf2† 51.♗c3 ♗f3 52.♗d3 ♗xg3 53.♗b6† ♗f7 54.d5 and White should win.

39.♗xh7 b4!

In my initial analysis I considered only 39...♗a3† 40.♗c2 ♗a2† 41.♗b3 ♗xf2 42.♗g7 ♗f3 43.♗xg6† ♗d7 44.♗b4 ♗xe3 45.♗xb5 when Black cannot hold his position and 39...♗a2 40.♗g7 b4 41.♗xg6† ♗b5 42.♗d6 ♗a3† 43.♗c2 ♗a2† 44.♗b3 ♗a3† 45.♗b2 ♗c4 46.♗c6† ♗d3 47.♗c5 ♗e4 48.♗b5 winning. The white pawns are an impressive defensive force.

After finishing these lines, I showed the position to a good friend of mine who, after failing to find an improvement in the above variations, suddenly suggested 39...b4 as an attempt to win a tempo.



40.♗g7

The joint analysis went 40.♗c2 ♗a2† 41.♗b3 ♗xf2 42.♗g7 ♗f3 43.♗xg6† ♗b5 44.♗e6 ♗xg3 45.♗e5 ♗c6 46.♗xb4 ♗d6! 47.♗c3 ♗h3 48.♗d3 ♗h5 and Black is just in time to defend the position. The line might look more risky for White, but it also seems to yield good winning chances.

40...♗b5 41.♗xg6 ♗a4 42.f3 b3

It is not easy to ensure the advance of the pawn. The preparatory 42...♗b8 might be too slow: 43.♗a6† ♗b3 44.g4 and, although not supported by the king, the white pawns are faster than the black one.

43.♗b6 ♗a3 44.g4 ♗xg4 45.♗xg4 b2 46.g5 ♗a2 47.e4 dxe4†

If 47...♗a3†? then 48.♗c2! winning the pawn. 48.♗xe4

and the black rook will be helpless against the white pawns.

Or if 36...♗b8 threatening a7-a5, then 37.♗c2 ♗a8 38.♗a2 ♗c7 39.f3 very much as in the game. 36...a5 is completely hopeless, since the e3-pawn has not been weakened; compare with the next note. 37.♗xb6 ♗c7 38.♗f6 winning.

Despite my initial conclusions, 36...♗c8! is entirely possible and in fact leads to a draw. For instance:

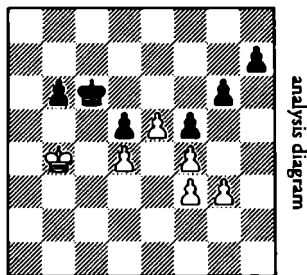
37.♗xc8 ♗xc8 38.f3 ♗b7 39.e4 a6!

At first sight this is just hopeless. I only gave the more natural but mistaken 39...dxe4†? 40.♗xe4 ♗xe4† 41.♗xe4 a5 42.♗xa6† ♗xa6. Black has managed to create a passed pawn, but after 43.g4! he lacks just one tempo to block the structure on the other side with h7-h5.

40.♗xa6† ♗xa6 41.e5

Curiously, this strong passed pawn doesn't guarantee a win. 41.g4 ♗b7 42.exf5 gxf5 43.♗c3 ♗c6 44.♗b4 would lead to a situation where neither side can afford to release the kingside tension. Therefore, a draw is unavoidable.

41...♗b7 42.♗c3 ♗c6 43.♗b4



Isn't Black just losing? Surprisingly not! 43...h5!

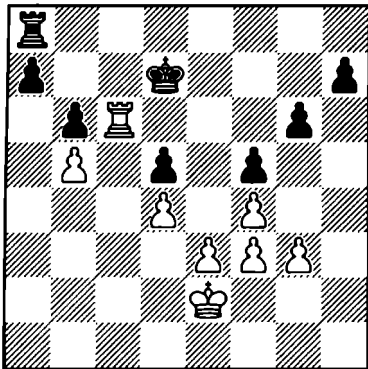
This is an important resource, highlighted by Mühlberger. Black creates the potential threat of a pawn break based on ...g5 and ...f4.

44.♗a4 ♗c7

Black cannot play for a win with 44...♔d7 45.♖b5 ♕e6? because after 46.♖xb6 g5 47.fxg5 f4 48.gxf4 h4 49.g6 h3 50.f5† he cannot prevent one of the enemy pawns from promoting, which would lead to a hopeless queen ending.

45.♖b5 ♕b7

But now White should content himself with a draw, because after 46.e6? ♕c7 47.e7 ♔d7 48.♖xb6 he would lose to 48...g5! 49.fxg5 f4!.



36...♖e8

Because of his structural problems, Black cannot exchange rooks with 36...♖c8 37.♖xc8 ♕xc8. White would create a passed pawn in the centre, while the b5-pawn stops two enemy pawns. Black's only chance would be to build a fortress:

38.e4 h6!?

Trying to deny the white king access to g5; after 38...fxe4 39.fxe4 dxe4 40.g4! Black will not be able to fight against the two passed pawns in the centre.

Or if 38...♔d7 39.♕e3 followed by g4, we would more or less transpose to the pawn ending analysed in the notes to White's 39th move.

39.e5 g5 40.g4!

After 40.fxg5? hxg5 the white king has no access to enemy territory.

40...fxg4 41.fxg5 hxg5

Hoping for 42.fxg4 with a draw.

42.♔f2!

This accurate move crushes all Black's hopes.

42...♔d7 43.♔g3 gxf3 44.♔xf3 ♕e6 45.♔g4

Such a move as 42.♔f2 is easy to overlook. The natural tendency is to consider the automatic recapture as the only possibility. Compare with 47.♔g2!! from the game Karpov–Kasparov (in the chapter “In the patriarch's footsteps”, page 101).

Spielmann recommended 36...a5 as the last saving chance for Black in the diagrammed position. Razuvaev claims to have refuted this move with 37.♖xb6 a4 38.♖a6 ♖xa6 39.bxa6 ♕c6 40.♔d3 ♕b6 41.♔c3 ♕xa6 42.♕b4 reaching a winning pawn endgame. Things are, nevertheless, a bit more complicated.

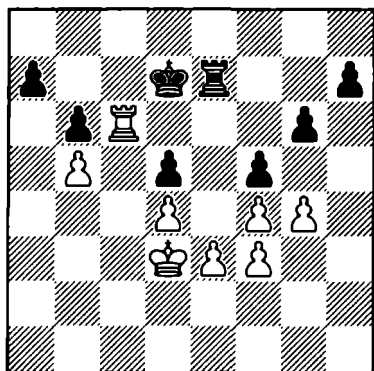
After 36...a5 37.♖xb6 we should stop for a moment and have a closer look at the position. As compensation for the sacrificed pawn, Black has managed to unbalance the position. We already know that pushing the a-pawn too early is hopeless; on the other hand ♖a6 is not yet a threat. White must be concerned not only about stopping the pawn, but also about the weakness of the e3-pawn. Simultaneously defending against two threats on different sides of the board is always difficult.

Keeping all this in mind, let us try to make the best moves for both sides. 37...♕c7 38.♖c6† ♕b7 39.♔d2 a4 40.♕c2 ♖e8! 41.♖c3 ♕b6 and Black seems to be out of any danger.

As we can see, Rubinstein's 36.f3 allowed an immediate and rather easy draw.

It was not at all typical for him to unnecessarily rush things; he would rather delay important decisions (such as advancing pawns) than precipitate matters. See, for instance, his previously mentioned game with the same opponent, where he could have captured on f3 (the same square as in our discussion of the present game!) one move earlier. However, we know already that 36.f3 was not worse than the more neutral 36.♔d3. Therefore, the real mistake has to be looked for in the previous phase of the game. Maybe this was not Akiba's best day ever, but even so it was enough to defeat one of the most remarkable figures of the first half of the century.

37.♔d3 ♖e7 38.g4



38...♖e6?! 39.♖c1?!

Razuvaev believes that the exchange of rooks would lead to a draw:

39.♖xe6 ♕xe6 40.g5

Or 40.e4 dxe4† 41.fxe4 fxg4!

40...♔d6 41.e4 ♕e6 42.exd5† ♔xd5 43.♔c3 ♕e6

44.♔c4 ♔d6 45.d5 ♔d7 46.♔d4 ♔d6

However, after 39.♖xe6 ♕xe6 he does not mention White's most natural answer:

40.gxf5† gxf5 41.e4

General exchanges on e4 would lead to a hopeless situation for Black. His king would have to guard the d- and f-pawns. This would allow his opposite number to capture the h-pawn and then return to support the advance of its own pawns. The black queenside majority does not count at all.

This leaves Black only the possibility of waiting tactics.

41...♔e7 42.e5 ♕e6 43.♔e3 ♔f7

Black has no chance to create a passed pawn on the queenside. For instance, if he would play ...a5 with the king on c7, the passed a6- and e5-pawns would be impossible to stop.

However, in case of waiting play from Black, White will be forced to sacrifice the pride of his position, the central pawn, in order to make progress on the kingside. This will allow Black to start counterplay on the other wing; the outcome of the game will be decided by a single tempo.

44.♔f2 ♔g7 45.♔g3 ♔f7

45...♔g6 is no improvement: 46.♔h4 ♔h6 47.e6

♔g6 48.e7 ♔f7 49.♔g5 ♕xe7 50.♔xf5 ♔d7 51.♔g5 and Black loses the promotion race.

46.♔h4 ♔g6 47.e6 ♔f6

47...h6 isn't tricky enough: 48.e7 ♔f7 49.♔h5 ♕xe7 50.♔xh6 ♔d6 51.♔g6 a5 52.bxa6 ♔c6 53.♔xf5 and we have reached the position of the main line.

48.♔h5 ♕xe6 49.♔g5 h5

Black cannot prove that his remote h-pawn is as dangerous as the two white f-pawns: 49...♔f7 50.♔xf5 ♔g7 51.♔g5 ♔f7 and now the most elegant win is 52.♔h6 ♔g8 53.f5 ♔f8 54.♔xh7 ♔f7 55.f6! –Otherwise, it is not possible to break the opposition: the other pawn has to stay on f3, in order to control e4–55...♔xf6 56.♔g8 ♔f5 57.♔f7 and White is winning.

50.♔xh5 ♔d6 51.♔g5 a5 52.bxa6 ♔c6 53.♔xf5.

And in the resulting queen endgame White will be two pawns up, which should guarantee him a win.

These lines were not easy to calculate and I assume that Rubinstein did not want to be distracted from his main plan.

From an objective point of view his decision can be criticized, of course. If the opponent makes a mistake that should make the winning process smoother, why not take advantage of it?

At the same time, given the concrete conditions of a practical game, frequent change of plans can lead to physical exhaustion and time trouble, especially if the final consequences of these plans are not easy to foresee. A practical guideline is:

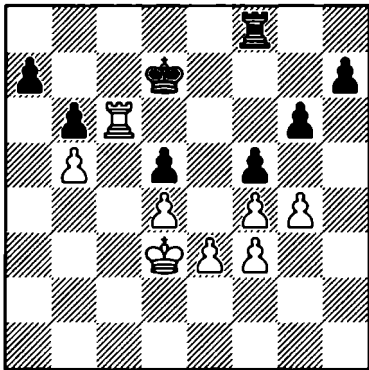
If the opponent does not prevent the main plan, we should not pay too much attention to the details, unless we face an obvious blunder, of course.

39...♖e7 40.♖h1

The next moves will not change the character of the position. It seems that Akiba didn't find the right plan from the beginning, or was he just trying to understand if the pawn endgame would really have been a draw?

Another reasonable hypothesis is that he was just following his and many fellow grandmasters' *do not hurry* policy.

40...♖e6 41.♖c1 ♘d7 42.♖e1 ♗f7 43.♖a1 ♘d6
44.♖c1 ♘d7 45.♖c6 ♗f8



46.♗e2!

The white king starts his journey to h4, in order to threaten decisive penetration.

46...♗f7 47.♗f2 ♗f8 48.♗g3

What a sensation of freedom for the white king! Protected by the rook and by the pawn chain, it has almost half of the board at its disposal. Nothing can really disturb its majestic walk from one side of the board to the other.

Comparatively, the black pieces have a rather narrow space at their disposal. The difference is similar to that between a real monarch's palace and a servant's humble room.

48...♖e8 49.♖c3 ♖e7 50.♗h4 h6

After this practically forced move, the sixth rank has been seriously weakened. The king returns to the centre to defend the e3-pawn, free the rook from its defensive tasks, and to create the decisive threat ♖c6.

51.♗g3 h5

Alekhine understands perfectly that passive play would offer no chances. In principle, he would have probably liked to play h6-h5 with the white king on f2, but after 51...♖e8 52.♗f2 h5 White would have the strong 53.♖a3 forcing Black into the passive 53...♖a8.

52.♗h4

Very instructive. Once the g5-square is available again, the king changes its route. The line 52.gxh5

gxh5 53.♗h4 might have seemed less clear to Rubinstein in view of:

53...♖g7!?

The more natural 53...♖h7 is not too effective: 54.♗g5 h4 55.♗xf5 h3 56.♖c1 h2 57.♖h1 followed by e4, ♗g4-g3, ♖xh2 and White wins.

A possible line would have been:

54.♗xh5 ♖g3 55.♖a3 ♖xf3 56.♖xa7† ♘d6 57.♖b7 ♖xe3 58.♖xb6† ♘c7 59.♖c6† ♘d7 60.♗g5 ♖e4 61.♗xf5 ♖xd4 62.♗e5 ♖b4 63.♖c5 d4!

But not 63...♖e4? 64.♗xd5 ♖xf4 65.♖c6! followed by ♗c5-b6 or ♗c4-b4-a5-b6, winning for White.

64.♖d5† ♗e7 65.♗e4 ♗e6

Transposing to a ♖+ vs. ♖ endgame with:

65...d3†? 66.♗xd3 ♖xf4 is again winning for White: 67.♗c3 ♗e6 68.♖d3 ♗e7 69.♗b3 ♖g4 70.♗a3 ♖f4 71.b6 ♖f6 72.b7 ♖f8 73.♖b3 ♖b8 74.♗a4.

66.f5† ♗e7

Now it is not clear how White could make further progress.

67.♖e5†

67.♗f4 d3† 68.♗e3 ♖b3 would improve only Black's position!

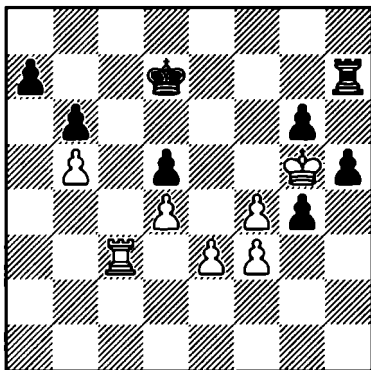
67...♗f7

67...♗f6? is dangerous: 68.♖e6† ♗f7 69.b6 and White manages to promote his position.

68.♗d3 ♗f6 69.♖d5 ♗f7

with a probable draw.

52...♖h7 53.♗g5 ♖g4



54.fxg4

Rubinstein avoids a nice trap: 54.♟xg6? g3!
55.♞xh7 g2! (Mühlberger pointed out that this is stronger than 55...h4?! as given by me in the first edition, which is good "only" for a draw by perpetual after 56.♞c6! h3 57.♞g6 h2 58.♞g7†.)
56.♞cl h4 and all of a sudden Black wins!

54...hxg4

If 54...h4 then 55.♟xg6 and the two connected pawns are unstoppable.

55.♟xg4

After 55.♟xg6 ♞e7 Black would have some chances.

55...♞h1

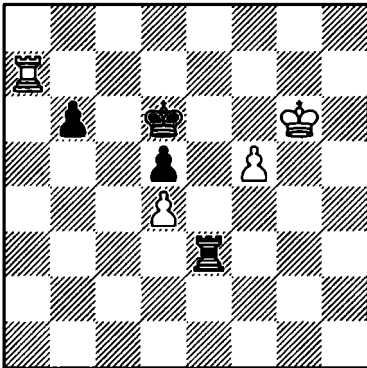
Black has too many weaknesses (a7, g6 and d5) to hope that a passive defence would give him any saving chances. For instance: 55...♞e7 56.♟g5 ♞e6 57.♞a3 ♟d6 and now the most precise way is to put Black in zugzwang 58.♟h6 (58.♞xa7 might well win as well, but why give up the e3-pawn?) 58...♞f6 59.♟g7 ♞e6 60.♟f7. Black cannot avoid the loss of either the g6-pawn or a7 (the latter one with check).

56.♟g5 ♞b1

56...♞g1† 57.♟f6 ♟d6 58.♞c6† ♟d7 59.♟e5 is also hopeless.

57.♞a3

More convincing than 57.♟xg6.

57...♞xb5 58.♞xa7† ♟d6 59.♟xg6 ♞b3 60.♞xc3

Black has managed to keep the material balance. With the d-pawns missing, the position would be a draw, since the b-pawn would cost White a rook, too. The way it is, with the d-pawns on board, the black king cannot effectively support his pawn.

61.f6 ♞g3† 62.♟h7 ♞f3

62...♞h3† 63.♟g8 ♞g3† would be met by 64.♞g7. Here we can see how well the white rook "happened" to be placed on the seventh rank.

63.f7 ♞f4

63...♟c6 64.♟g7 ♟b5 65.♞c7 is similar to the game.

64.♟g7 ♞g4† 65.♟f6!

It is obvious that the king can hide from checks only on f8, but the immediate 65.♟f8 would allow 65...♞d4 and, after giving up his rook for the pawn, Black would hold the draw. Before going to f8, the king drives away the enemy rook from the fourth rank, in order to prolong the life of his d4-pawn as much as possible.

65...♞f4† 66.♟f5 ♞f1 67.♟g6

White now threatens ♞a8, so that Black has to keep checking.

67...♞g1† 68.♟f6 ♞f1† 69.♟g7 ♞g1† 70.♟f8 ♞d1 71.♟e8 ♞e1† 72.♟d8 ♞f1 73.♞d7†

73.♞e7 would complicate matters slightly in view of 73...♞a1. White needs the slightly tricky 74.♞d7† ♟e6 75.f8♘†! ♟f6 76.♟c7 b5 77.♞d5 in order to win.

73...♟c6 74.♟e8 ♞f4

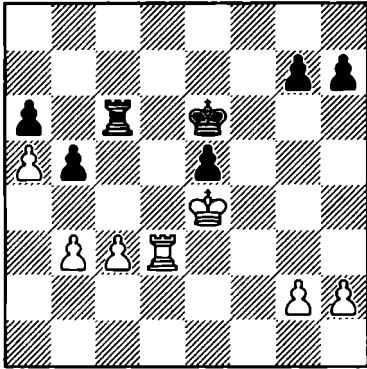
Black cannot start the counterattack yet with 74...♟b5 because of 75.♞d5†.

75.♞e7 ♟b5 76.♞c7!**1-0**

It's all over now: 76...♞e4† 77.♟d7 ♞f4 78.♟e7 ♞e4† 79.♟f6 ♞f4† 80.♟e5 and White captures the d-pawn. The black rook will be helpless against the white passed pawns.

In the previous example, both positional factors that marked White's advantage were static in nature. Therefore, attributing the score of 2-0 to the position was easy. In any case, it was an easier task than converting the advantage into a win. However, not all the rook endings are suited to such detailed treatment. Here is an example.

Akiba Rubinstein – Erich Cohn
 Carlsbad 1907



How shall we evaluate this position?

It is obvious that in the long run the weakness of the a6-pawn could make itself felt, but for the moment it is not easy to attack. For the time being, the c3-pawn is more exposed and one would say that the queenside score is about 1–1. Is the central passed pawn weak or strong? Depending on the future course of the game, it could be either.

The only element that clearly favours White is dynamic in nature and is related to the higher mobility of his rook, but how should we quantify this detail?

In such cases, in order to avoid a nasty headache and acute time trouble, one should forget about numbers and use intuition instead. From the further course of the game, we shall understand that, all other things being about equal, the initiative developed by such a strong piece as the rook can have a decisive influence. And, surprisingly, White's win will be considerably smoother than the abstract process of evaluation.
40. ♖h3!

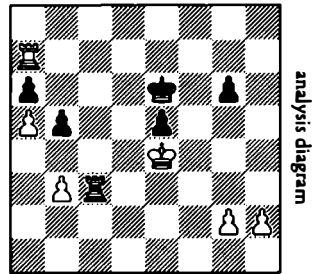
The black kingside pawns defend the sixth rank rather well, thus ensuring the stability of the king. However, these pawns are not defended and White provokes their advance in order to create a path for the rook.

40... h6

Knowing the further course of the game, I have

tried to make the move 40...g6 work. The basic idea is to protect the king, but I have to admit that White has two different plans that seem to lead to a win.

a) The most natural of them is, of course, 41. ♖xh7 when after the practically forced 41... ♖xc3 the white rook can switch to the other wing in order to harass the king with 42. ♖a7.



White not only has the more active pieces, but also better pawns. The kingside majority is very dangerous, especially if rooks are exchanged.

Play may continue:

42... ♖c6

Alternatively, 42... ♖xb3 43. ♖xa6† ♔f7 44. ♖b6 also looks hopeless for Black. White intends to advance his pawn to a7, based on the exposed position of the black king. After that, he will simply capture the b- and e-pawns with his king. The situation is somehow similar to that examined in the notes to White's 50th move of the game Rubinstein–Nimzowitsch (line c, 51... ♖b3), but more favourable for White because of the greater number of pawns on the board and the vulnerability of the black ones.

43. ♖g7

Diverting the king from the queenside in order to win a tempo.

43... ♔f6 44. ♖b7

With the deadly threat ♖b6.

44... ♖c3

Black has to counterattack. The passive 44... ♔e6 would lose without a fight after 45. h4!, winning an important tempo. Only after 45... ♖d6 creating the threat ♖d4†, should White exchange rooks with 46. ♖b6 when 46... ♖xb6

47. axb6 ♙d6 48. g4 is just hopeless for Black.
45. ♞b6 † ♙g5

Black's hopes are connected with the more active position of the king than in a previous line.

46. ♞xa6 ♞xb3 47. ♞e6 !

It becomes clear now that placing the king on the g5 -square is also not without drawbacks. White wins this pawn without loss of time.

47... b4 48. ♞xe5 † ♙g4

Logically striving for counterplay.

49. ♞e6 g5 50. a6 ♞a3 51. ♙d4

White's pieces have to divide the tasks. For the moment, the rook supports the a-pawn, while the king attacks and eliminates the enemy pawn.

51... ♞a2 52. ♙c4 ♞xg2 53. a7 ♞a2 54. ♞e7 ♙h3
55. ♙xb4

And it looks like Black's counterplay is just too slow. For instance:

55... ♙xh2

Or 55... ♞a1 56. ♞e3 † ♙xh2 57. ♞a3 queening.

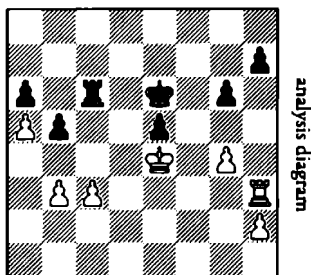
Now the simplest way is:

56. ♙b3 !

Preparing the same kind of mechanism as in the previous line, when any rook move along the a-file such as 56... ♞a6 is met with 57. ♞e2 † ♙g3 58. ♞a2 ♞xa7 59. ♞xa7 ♙f3 60. ♞f7 † ♙e3 61. ♞g7 ♙f4 62. ♙c2 and White easily stops the pawn.

Instead of 56. ♙b3 !, the equally tempting 56. ♞e2 † is less clear. The position with queen versus rook and pawn might not be so easy to win.

b) The second plan is of a more static nature. With 41. g4 ! White prepares to invade the sixth rank through f6 , after g5 and ♞f3 . For a while, Black's play is forced.



analysis diagram

41... ♞c7 42. g5

The other possible move order is also playable, but slightly less accurate. Taking advantage of the fact that White released the pressure against the h7 -pawn, Black gets some counterplay with 42. ♞f3 b4 ? 43. c4 ♞c5 although after 44. g5 ♞xa5 45. ♞f6 † ♙e7 46. ♞b6 ♞a2 47. ♙xe5 White's spatial advantage ensures him of clearly the better chances, but maybe not a definite win yet.

42... ♞f7

This move leads by force to a losing pawn ending, but the variation 42... ♞d7 43. ♞f3 ♞d2 44. ♞f6 † ♙e7 45. ♞xa6 is just as hopeless. Besides his huge spatial advantage, White has several dangerous candidates for promotion on the queenside.

43. ♞f3 !

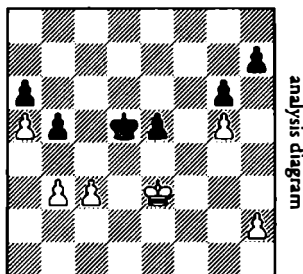
Of course, White should not allow ... ♞f4 †, driving away the king from its dominant position. However, the pawn ending needs some precise calculation.

43... ♞xf3 44. ♙xf3 ♙d5

44... ♙f5 has not much independent significance, since after 45. h4 both 45... e4 † 46. ♙e3 ♙e5 47. c4 bxc4 48. bxc4 and 45... e6 46. ♙e4 ♙d6 47. c4 transpose to the main line.

45. ♙e3

An instructive position. Although the black king is quite active, White wins thanks to his spatial advantage on both wings.



analysis diagram

For instance:

b1) 45... ♙d6

Refraining from advancing the pawn does not mean that Black will manage to keep it.

46.♔e4 ♕e6 47.c4 bxc4 48.bxc4 ♖d6 49.h4 ♕c5

After 49...♕e6 50.c5 Black is in zugzwang.

50.♕xe5 ♖b4

It is easy to establish that Black has no time to capture the c-pawn. White would queen his h-pawn in time to prevent a ♖.

51.♖d5 ♕xa5 52.c5 ♕b5 53.c6 ♖b6 54.♖d6 queening.

b2) 45...♕e6 does not make much difference.

After 46.♔e4 ♖d6 all White has to do is lose one tempo with 47.h3 ♕e6 48.h4 in order to transpose to the previous line.

b3) Relatively best is 45...e4. Play may continue:

46.h4

The careless 46.♖f4? allows the unexpected 46...b4!, for instance 47.cxb4 ♖d4 48.b5 e3 with sufficient counterplay for Black.

46...♕e5 47.c4 bxc4

White wins nicely after 47...b4 48.c5 ♖d5 49.c6 ♕xc6 50.♕xe4 ♖b5. Practically forced.

The white king threatened to go either to f6 or to c4. 51.♖d5!! A study-like idea. 51...♕xa5 52.♕c5 and, with his king stalemated, Black has to play 52...h5 when White wins with 53.gxh6 g5 54.h7, queening and mating on the next two moves.

48.bxc4 ♖f5 49.c5 ♕e5 50.c6 ♖d6 51.♕xe4 ♕xc6 52.♕e5

An exciting race now starts. The concrete manifestation of White's spatial advantage is that, although Black's king is closer to the enemy blockading pawn, he will need considerable more time than his opponent to promote his pawn.

52...♖b5 53.♖f6 ♕xa5 54.♖g7 ♖b4 55.♕xh7 a5 56.h5!

The only winning move.

56...a4 57.hxg6 a3 58.g7 a2 59.g8♖ a1♖ 60.♖f8†

and we have reached a theoretical winning position. True, not everybody might wish to play such a queen endgame over the board.

Recapping, both lines a) and b) are winning for White.

The former leads, with some degree of

uncertainty characteristic of many rook endings, to an easily winning position. The latter leads by force to a winning ending that requires patience and good technique. From a practical point of view, line a) might be better, while objectively speaking, line b) is more rigorous.

In case of the more sophisticated 40...♖d6!?, inviting White to a race starting with the capture on h7, the most technical answer seems to be 41.♖d3! h6 42.♖g3 g5 43.♕e4 maintaining firm control of the position.

Let us now follow the course of the game.

41.♖g3

White renews the threat to invade the sixth rank.

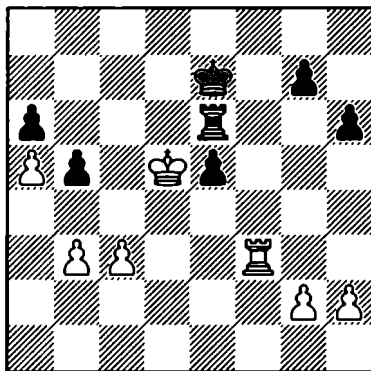
41...♖f6

The king has been driven away from its optimal position.

41...g5 would be no improvement in view of 42.♖h3 when the least evil is to abandon the e5-pawn at once with 42...♕e7.

42.♖d5 ♖e6 43.♖f3† ♕e7

Finally, the black army has been completely disorganized. We can now answer one of the questions regarding the evaluation of the position. At least for the time being, the central black pawn is more of a weakness than a strength. White's main plan is to create a dangerous passed pawn on the c-file. Therefore, the next move might cause some confusion.



44.g3!!

Typical of Rubinstein. *Do not hurry!* was one of his favourite principles. Of course, it would not apply in positions with active counterplay for the opponent, but this is not really the case here. The basic idea behind the last move is that on their initial squares the pawns were rather vulnerable to attacks such as ... $\text{Rd6}\dagger$ and ... Rd2 .

Since Black cannot use the given tempo to improve his position, it is useful to prevent such counterplay.

44...g6

Black prevents Rf5 . The more active 44... Rf6 would fail to 45. Rc3 Rf2 46. $\text{Rxe5}\dagger$ $\text{c}\dagger\text{d7}$ 47. $\text{c}\dagger\text{c5}$ and the a5-pawn will soon be unstoppable.

45.Rc3

By forcing Black's next move, Rubinstein prevents ... $\text{Rd6}\dagger$ for good.

45...c6 46.c4 bxc4 47.bxc4

Finally, the passed pawn has been created. The black pawn is hardly a match for it.

47...Rc8 48.Rf3\dagger c5 49.c5 e4

For one move, the weak pawn has become threatening.

50.h4\dagger c5 51.Rf4\dagger

Also good was 51. Rc3 .

51...c5 52.Rc4 Rb8

52... $\text{Rd8}\dagger$ would only help the white king get closer to the optimal b7-square with 53. $\text{c}\dagger\text{c6}$.

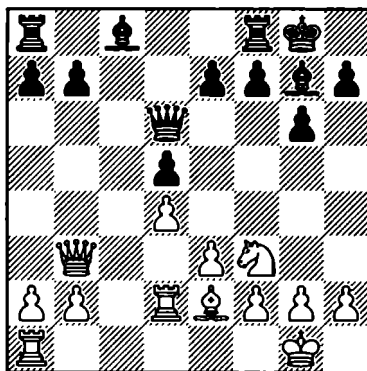
53.c6 g5 54.hxg5 hxg5 55.c7 c5 56.Rc1 1-0

In the near future, both rooks will have to sacrifice themselves for the enemy pawns. After this general exchange, the presence of the a-pawns would decide the game in White's favour. Therefore, Black resigned.

In fact, it is quite remarkable that from the initial position, the only form of static advantage we were sure about (the a6-weakness) persisted until the very end. I would like to say more about this *do not hurry* principle.

When I first saw the move 44.g3! from the previous example, I involuntarily remembered the following game:

Akiba Rubinstein – Efim Bogoljubow
Vienna 1922



Here the same modest advance of the g-pawn was dictated by a similar approach. The fact that this time it happened in a complicated middlegame does not affect the instructive character of the game. It is all about a way of thinking, irrespective of the number of pieces left on the board. White's better development guarantees him the occupation of the only open file. With each of his next eight consecutive moves, Rubinstein will improve the position of one of his pieces.

14.Rc1 b6 15.Rdc2 a6 16.Ra4

White keeps an eye on the a-pawn, thus creating additional problems for his opponent in the fight for the open c-file. 16.Rc7 would be premature because of 16... Rfc8 and the bishop is taboo in view of the hanging c1-rook.

16...a6 17.Rc7 b5

Bogoljubow apparently feared that he was still not prepared to place a rook on c8.

Indeed, after 17... Rfc8 ? 18. $\text{Rxc8}\dagger$ Rxc8 19. $\text{Rxc8}\dagger$ Rxc8 another aspect of White's 16th move is revealed with 20. $\text{R}\dagger\text{e8}\dagger$ winning the bishop.

After 17... Rac8 ? 18. Rxc8 Rxc8 White wins the a-pawn anyway with 19. Rxa6 , maintaining at the same time control of the c-file. And yet, this might have been a lesser evil for Black, who could have looked for saving chances in a position with opposite coloured bishops by playing 19... Rg4 since after 20. $\text{Qd2}!!$ Ra8 ! White seems to lose coordination. Black will later play...e5, thus opening the position for his pair of bishops.

With 17...b5, Bogoljubow probably hoped to restrict the enemy bishop, but underestimated the consequences of the dark-squared weaknesses.

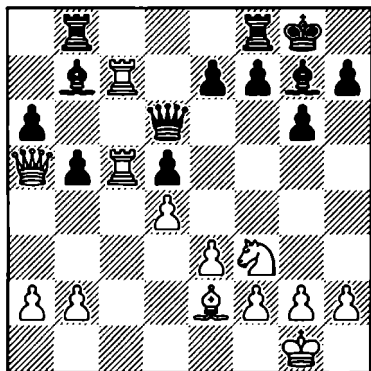
18. ♖a5

Little by little, the queenside invasion starts taking shape.

18... ♠ab8

With the c7-rook well defended, White can meet 18... ♠c8 with 19. ♖c5! threatening the bishop. The exchanges on c7 with 19... ♠xc7 20. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 (Or else 20... ♗c8 21. ♖xd6 exd6 22. ♠c6, leaving Black with chronic weaknesses on the d-file.) 21. ♖xc7 do not make Black's life easier. He will lose a pawn without any compensation.

19. ♖c5



19... ♠fd8!

This natural move has not received any attention from the commentators so far, including me in the first edition of this book. As Malfagia pointed out, the rook stands badly on d8 for several reasons. First of all, it is the dark-squared bishop that should aim for the d8-square, via f6, as Bogoljubow will discover later. Secondly, the rook is hanging on d8, enabling White to bring his knight into play on the very next move.

Malfagia recommended 19...e6 threatening the immediate ...♗f6-d8, and in case of 20. ♖c3, which prepares ♖e5, he suggests 20...f6 hoping to build a fortress and eventually gain counterplay in the centre with ...e5. I believe that White should continue 21. ♗d1 not only discouraging ...e5 in

view of the possible transfer of the bishop to b3, but also preparing a4 (eventually after b4), when ...bxa4, ♗xa4 would create the threat of extending the invasion via d7.

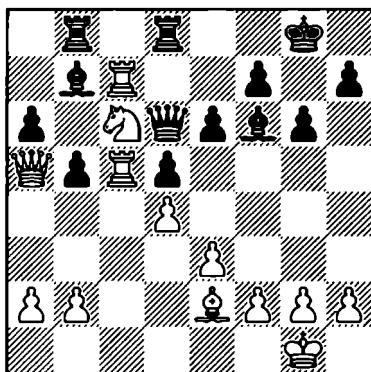
20. ♖e5!

White has occupied all the dark squares available in Black's camp. The last move is justified tactically by the fact that after 20... ♗xe5? 21. dxe5 the black queen will no longer be able to overprotect the d8 rook allowing after, for instance, 21... ♖xe5 the decisive blow 22. ♖xb7! winning a piece.

20... ♗f6 21. ♖c6 e6!

A good defensive move. Bogoljubow prepares to bring his bishop into play through d8 after the predictable ♖xb8, ♠xb8.

He could not exchange the intruder because after 21... ♗xc6 22. ♖5xc6 he would lose the queen.



White has installed his army in the territory. How many players, carried away by euphoria, would have started calculating long forced variations in order to win at once? And yet, after having moved forward eight times in a row (well, in fact ♠a1-c1 and ♠d2-c2 are moves along the ranks, but at the same time they were the shortest way for the rooks towards more advanced positions), Rubinstein played the apparently timid 22. g3!!

His philosophy is brilliantly simple.

Since Black cannot improve his position in any way, why should White refrain from making a generally useful move, avoiding any back rank

surprises and restricting at the same time Black's dark-squared bishop?

By capturing at once on b8, White would have obtained the same position as in the game, with the only difference that his pawn would still be on g2. As we shall see, this would not have decisively influenced the further course of the game, but it is always good to gain an additional useful tempo at no cost.

When reaching such a situation, one cannot know in advance whether such small details will really count or not. Sometimes they would, sometimes not really. What is almost certain is that they can hardly do any harm. Therefore, this "do not rush" attitude is part of every strong player's arsenal.

It is interesting to note that after 22.g3, Rubinstein will make another series of active moves, even more impressive than the previous series. It looks just as if he took a deep breath before the final attack.

22...♞dc8

The only way to question the objective merits of 22.g3 is 22...♞xc6 getting rid of the irritating knight.

However, after 23.♞5xc6 ♞f8 24.♞a6 White's advantage is indisputable and by no means smaller than in case of the immediate 22.♞xb8.

For instance, 24...b4 removing the pawn from the exposed square. 25.♞aa7 when White can choose the best moment to capture on f7, for instance after ♠g4, in order to put pressure on the e6-pawn. Black cannot prevent this tactical operation, because 25...♞a8 would only make the move 26.♞xf7 more effective, in view of 26...♞xf7 27.♞xa8 with two extra pawns, a better pawn structure and the more active pieces.

What if Bogoljubow had adopted a similar approach to Rubinstein's and played some neutral move such as 22...h5, waiting for his opponent to capture on b8?

The answer is that what is recommendable for the attacking side is not necessarily good for the defender. When under strong pressure, it is generally better not to advance the pawns until the attacker defines his intentions, in order to avoid creating dangerous weaknesses.

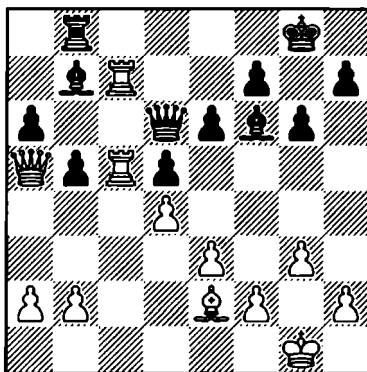
Besides, it was definitely not Bogoljubow's style to sit and wait.

23.♞xb8 ♞xb8

I suppose that Bogoljubow had put great hopes on this position. The white rook is somehow trapped on c7 and cannot avoid the pin after...♠d8. White will presumably need a long time to free himself (by means of ♞c3-c1, ♞c2) in order to threaten to save the rook and force...♠xc7. This would allow Black to improve his queenside structure with ...b4, ...a5 and obtain a worse but possibly defensible position.

A more ambitious way of using the few available tempi would be to prepare the central break...e5 in order to exploit the weakness of the long diagonal and the artificial positioning of the white pieces.

However, a bitter disappointment awaited him.



24.♠xb5!

It is rather instructive (and at the same time typical) that complete domination on the dark squares is crowned tactically on the light squares! This is one of the best illustrations of the fact that it is not a wise idea to arrange too many pawns on squares of the same colour as those on which one's own bishop is acting.

The naive hope that the passive bishop would safely defend all the pawns is usually crushed by such elegant means as Rubinstein's last move.

As Bronstein underlined in his classic book *Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953*, the weakness of the dark squares means a weakness of the neighbouring light squares as well!

Tactically, the move is based on the variation 24...axb5 25.♟xb5 (Even better than Chernev's recommendation from the book *Golden Dozen*, 25.♟a7, which should win as well.) and if 25...♟a6 then 26.♟d7 ♞f8 27.♞xb7 with a huge material advantage and the more active position for White.

24...♞d8 25.♞c8?!

The commentators unanimously acclaimed this move.

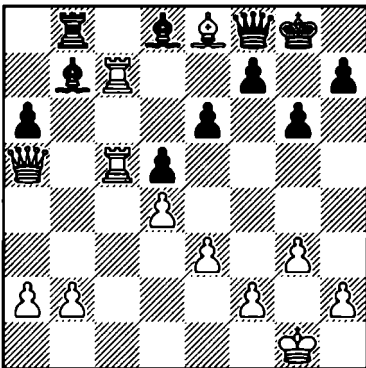
However, I believe that 25.♞f1, maintaining an extra pawn in the middlegame, would have been at least as good. The problem is that the text move allows Black to generate mass exchanges, getting rid of his passive bishop and obtaining some saving chances in a rook ending a pawn down. All the same, as we already know, Rubinstein had nothing against such a course of the game.

25...♟f8?

After this passive move, relying too much on the pin, Black is losing in more than one way. He should have played 25...♞xc7 when after 26.♟xc7 ♟xc7 27.♞xc7 ♞xe8 28.♞xb7 ♞c8 White will still need to work in order to convert his extra pawn.

The move 22.g3 has no decisive influence here, or after my recommendation 25.♞f1, but, as mentioned, it is useful anyway.

However, after Bogoljubow's mistake the difference made by the modest pawn move will be considerable.



26.♞xb7!

This elegant move is also the strongest but 26.♞xf7†, as indicated by Chernev, is also winning. For instance 26...♟xf7 27.♞xf7 ♞xa5 28.♞xb7 ♞xb7 29.♞xa5. White has two extra pawns and an easily winning position.

This is one of the variations where the usefulness of 22.g3 makes itself felt. After 29...♞xb2 White can safely play 30.♞xa6 re-establishing the difference of two pawns.

26...♞xa5 27.♞xb8

White has achieved a considerable material advantage and maintains a strong attack. Black is simply helpless.

27...♟d6 28.♞b7 ♞b6 29.♞c6 ♟b4

With the pawn on g3 this incursion of the black queen is not dangerous. White can safely capture the bishop, but before that he played 30.♞f7†

convincing his opponent about the uselessness of further resistance.

1-0

Double rook endings: Mating ideas

So far, we have examined positions where each side had one rook. These endings have a pure, technical character.

Things are different when there are four rooks on the board.

One of the basic principles of the endgame says that the king should be as close to the centre as possible, in order to take an active part in events. The only problem is that, with four rooks on the board, the position still keeps some middlegame influences. The stronger side can usually take advantage of this in two ways. One of them is to attempt a direct mating attack and, even if the enemy king manages to escape, gain another form of advantage out of it (such as to win one or several pawns). The other idea is to force the enemy king away from the centre and choose the right moment to transpose to a true endgame by exchanging one pair of rooks. A combined method is also possible, of course. It all depends on the opponent's defensive possibilities.

In such complex positions it would be, of course, too risky to calculate any points score. I will

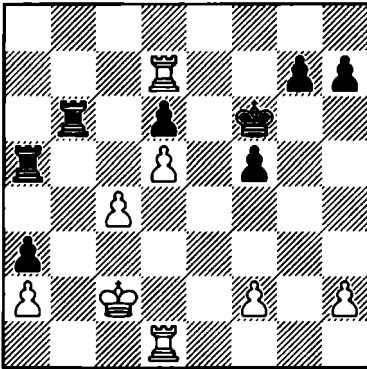
sometimes do that only after one pair of rooks is exchanged. As a start, let us examine a remarkable position where Rubinstein carried out a mating attack in an almost pure form.

Curiously, this endgame has generally escaped the attention of the commentators. For instance, Chigorin only mentions some possible improvements for him in the middlegame. I suppose that the sadness caused by defeat prevented him from enjoying the position itself.

One possible reason for the indifference demonstrated by the commentators is that Rubinstein was still too young to be taken seriously (in fact, Lodz 1906 was his first important tournament victory), while Chigorin was already old. (He actually died two years later.) These two great figures from the Russian empire were not destined to meet at their peak of form.

Akiba Rubinstein – Mikhail Chigorin

Lodz 1906



A superficial examination of the board could lead to the conclusion that Black's position is entirely viable. He has concentrated a significant number of forces on the queenside, planning to launch a strong attack with ♞a6 (overdefending the d6-pawn) ♞b2 , ♞xa2 , ♞xf2 followed by the advance of the a-pawn. At the same time, his king has better possibilities of centralization than his rival. In case of simplifications, it would be ready to invade along the long dark diagonal.

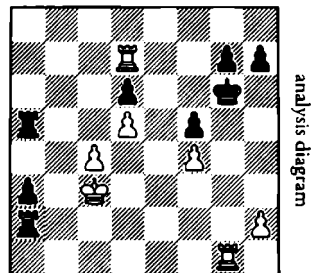
Now let me put my glasses on and have a deeper look. Everything will look reversed now. The black monarch's situation is unsafe, as he is cut off from his rooks. Its way back is stopped by the d7-rook, while the weakness of the e6-square gives the other rook the chance to be included in an eventual attack. The a5-rook is very passive and needs a considerable amount of time to be included into play. At the same time, Black's queenside plan is too slow to match a direct mating attack. These two latter aspects will give White the possibility of attacking with "quiet" moves, meaning moves which don't give check.

34.f4!!

Under different circumstances, this move would pursue purely strategic aims, such as blocking the black kingside majority, but in this case White creates the unpleasant threat ♞e1-e6 mate. Although Black has a tempo to prepare a defence, his situation is very dangerous.

34...g5

This move parries the initial threat, but does not guarantee a quiet life for the king. An attacking player himself, Chigorin might have rejected $34...♞b2$ $35.♞c3$ ♞xa2 purely by intuition. He was so used to being in the role of the hunter! The variations after $36.♞e1$ ♞g6 $37.♞g1$ are indicative of the devastating force displayed by two attacking rooks.



a) $37...♞f6?$ is obviously bad because of $38.♞gxg7$ followed by ♞d7 mate.

b) $37...♞h5$ allows White win a decisive tempo with $38.♞dxg7$ when the king cannot escape the mate. For instance $38...♞h6$ (Against $38...h6$ White has the elegant $39.♞h7$ when the threat

40.♠g5† ♖h4 41.♠xh6 mate cannot be adequately met.) 39.♠f7! A quiet move, creating the deadly threat 40.♠f6† ♖h5 41.♠g5† ♖h4 42.♠h6 mate. Black can do little against this threat.

c) Relatively best is 37...♖h6 and if 38.♠gxg7 (The most natural, but not the strongest capture, as we shall see.) then:

38...♠f2!

I do not exclude the possibility that Chigorin had overlooked this defensive resource. Black has to eliminate the f4 pawn as soon as possible, in order to gain some freedom of action for his king. In a short comment written decades ago, Konstantinopolsky mentions that 38...♠e2 loses to 39.♠g5 threatening 40.♠xd6 with mate and if 39...♠a6 then 40.♠f7 followed by 41.♠f6 mate.

39.♠xh7† ♖g6 40.♠hg7†

An important move. White cannot mate the enemy king and so if he wants to continue playing for a win then the move ♠a7 is necessary, stopping the a-pawn. However, before that it is important to drive the king as far from the centre as possible.

40...♖h6 41.♠a7 ♠xa7

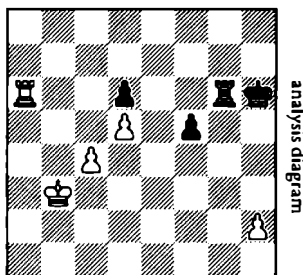
41...a2 leads to similar play to the main line after 42.♠h7†!. Once again, this is the best method of keeping the king far from the centre. 42...♖g6 43.♠xa5 ♖xh7 44.♖b3 and so on.

42.♠xa7 a2

Relatively best. Black wins time to defend his d6-pawn. 42...♠xf4 43.♠a6 looks pretty bad for him. The connected pawns are too strong.

43.♖b3 ♠xf4 44.♠xa2 ♠g4 45.♠a6 ♠g6

Black has managed to defend his weakness. However, his position is rather passive and, with accurate play, White should win.



46.♖c3!

Although c5 is White's main threat, it is essential to improve the position of the king first. After 46.c5 dxc5 47.♠xg6† ♖xg6 48.♖c4 Black is just in time to generate counterplay with 48...f4 49.♖d3 and now 49...♖f5! should be a draw.

46...♖g7

Black can hardly improve his position. In case of the apparently active 46...♖g5 White can take advantage of the exposed position of the enemy king with 47.c5! dxc5 48.h4†! winning a decisive tempo. For instance, 48...♖h5 49.♠xg6 ♖xg6 50.h5† as indicated by Malfagia.

47.♖d3

Now, the threat c5 becomes serious. One important aspect is that the g3-square is under control and Black does not have the option of an intermediate ♠g3†.

47...♖f7

47...♠h6 is an attempt to prevent c5 because of the possible ♠h3†, but White can easily find an antidote in 48.h4! ♠g6 49.h5 when after 49...♠h6 he would finally play 50.c5 anyway.

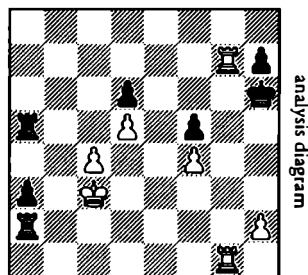
48.c5!

The king is active enough to make this move possible now.

48...dxc5 49.♠xg6 ♖xg6 50.h4

The black pawns are under control, while the white ones are impossible to stop. Therefore, White is winning. However, compared to the game continuation, this line might have offered better practical chances.

At least these were my conclusions in the first edition. Later, the German reader Andreas Schütte pointed out a more clear-cut and at the same time elegant win, starting with 38.♠dxg7!



The main threat of this move is far from obvious but nonetheless brutal: $\text{Ee7-c6}\dagger$, followed by $\text{Eg5}\dagger$ and Eh6 mate! The only way to try dismantling this mechanism is: $38\dots\text{E}f2$ (Simplifying to a single rook ending with $38\dots\text{E}a1$ would also be hopeless in view of $39.\text{E}xh7\dagger \text{Q}xh7$ $40.\text{E}xal$ when the a3-pawn will soon fall.) However, White can maintain his decisive initiative with $39.\text{E}g3!$ Threatening mate in one, thus forcing the enemy rook to release the pressure against the crucial f4-pawn. $39\dots\text{E}xh2$ $40.\text{Ee3}!$ Renewing the initial threat, starting with $\text{Ee6}\dagger$. $40\dots\text{Q}h5$ $41.\text{Ee7}$ $h6$ $42.\text{E}h7$ followed by $\text{Eg5}\dagger$ and $\text{E}xh6$ mate. A beautiful attacking sequence!

35. $\text{E}g5\dagger \text{Q}xg5$

The king bravely advances towards the enemy forces. It is true that he hardly had an alternative. After $35\dots\text{Q}g6$ $36.h4$ the only way of dismantling the mating net would be $36\dots h6$ when after $37.gxh6 \text{Q}xh6$ $38.\text{E}b1$ White has a huge advantage in the endgame. Not only is Black a pawn down, he also has weaknesses on a3 and d6.

36. $\text{Q}c3!$

A subtle move. Not finding a forced win yet, Rubinstein makes a prophylactic move. If Black wants to continue his plan, he will have to play $\text{E}b2$ without check, thus allowing the immediate capture of the d6-pawn.

36...h5

Once again, Chigorin refrains from starting the counterattack. Although Black's position remains dangerous anyway, White's attack would be more difficult to carry out after $36\dots\text{E}b2$.

The most efficient continuation seems to be:

37. $\text{E}g1\dagger \text{Q}f4$

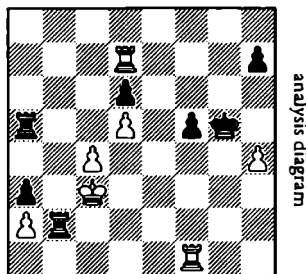
Black has to avoid the sixth rank. Otherwise, White would capture the d6-pawn with check, winning an important tempo in the pawn race that would follow.

38. $\text{E}f1 \dagger \text{Q}g5$

The king has to carefully plan his steps. After $38\dots\text{Q}e5?$ $39.\text{E}f7!$ $\text{E}xa2$ $40.\text{E}7xf5\dagger \text{Q}e4$ $41.\text{E}f6$ he cannot parry the threat Ee6 mate.

The white rooks occupy optimal positions and the time has come to include new forces into the attack.

39.h4!



White's attack is unstoppable now, for instance

a) $39\dots\text{Q}xh4$ $40.\text{E}g7$

With the brutal threat $\text{E}h1\dagger$.

$40\dots\text{E}h2$

$40\dots\text{Q}h3$ is even worse in view of $41.\text{E}h1\dagger \text{E}h2$ $42.\text{E}xh7\dagger$ winning the rook.

$41.\text{E}xh7\dagger \text{Q}g3$ $42.\text{E}xh2 \text{Q}xh2$ $43.\text{E}xf5$

White's position is easily winning. Both black pieces are poorly placed, while the remaining pawns are weak.

b) $39\dots\text{Q}g4$ $40.\text{E}g7\dagger \text{Q}h3$

The king tries to find shelter in the enemy pawn's shadow.

$41.\text{E}h1\dagger \text{E}h2$ $42.\text{E}xh2!$

Once again, the rook ending is favourable for White.

$42\dots\text{Q}xh2$ $43.\text{E}f7 \text{Q}g3$ $44.\text{E}xf5 \text{Q}xh4$ $45.\text{E}f6 \text{E}a6$

And now, besides the simple $46.\text{E}h6\dagger$ With a probable win, White could also try the more forceful:

$46.c5!$ $\text{Q}g5!$

This defence, by which Black approaches with the king with tempo, was highlighted by Malfagia, who also provided the antidote. In the first edition I only considered $46\dots\text{E}a5$ $47.c6 \text{E}xd5$ $48.\text{E}f4\dagger \text{Q}g3$ $49.\text{E}c4$ promoting the pawn.

$47.\text{E}e6 \text{E}a5$ $48.cxd6!$

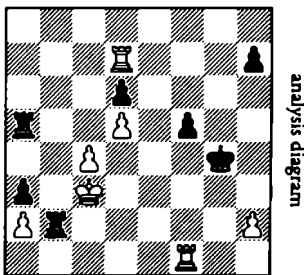
White changes his plans compared to the previous line, since the enemy king is one step closer now.

$48\dots\text{E}xd5$ $49.\text{Q}c4 \text{E}d2$ $50.\text{E}e5\dagger \text{Q}f6$ $51.\text{E}d5$

and the d-pawn cannot be stopped.

These were my conclusions in the first edition.

However, Malfagia pointed out that Black's king would be much more difficult to hunt after 38...♔g4, which deprives White of the possibility of including the h-pawn into the attack in the most efficient way. Here is Andrea's analysis:



39.♞g7† ♔h5!

39...♔h4 40.♞f4† would simply transpose to the line starting with 40...♔h5, while 40...♔h3 allows White to capture the f5- and h7-pawns without losing tempi after: 41.♞xf5 ♔h4 42.♞xh7† ♔g4 43.♞f8 ♔g5 44.♞g7† ♔h6 45.♞g3 ♔h7 46.h3! Removing this pawn from the attacked square and thus preventing the enemy rook from protecting its king along the h-file. 46...♞a7 Otherwise, ♞f4 would immediately lead to mate. 47.♞fg8! (avoiding the defence ...♞g7) 47...♞xa2 48.♞g4 ♔h8 49.♞h4† ♔h7 50.♞xh7† ♔xh7 51.♔b4 winning the a3-pawn and reaching an easily winning position.

In any case, after 39...♔h4 White has at his disposal other possibilities as well, for instance 40.♞xf5 or, especially, 40.♞xh7† ♔g5 41.h4† saving the h2-pawn without loss of time and using it to build a mating net, although after 41...♔g6 it is not entirely clear yet how to continue the attack. As we shall see, 39...♔h5 is more precise, because it does not offer White such a wide choice.

40.♞xf5† ♔h6! 41.♞f7 ♞xa2 42.♞xh7† ♔g6 43.♞hg7†!

The thematic intermediate check, with the purpose of driving the enemy king as far as possible from the main theatre of operations.

43...♔h6 44.♞a7 ♞xh2 45.♞xa5 ♔xg7 46.♞xa3 ♔f7!

But not 46...♔f6? which allows White to cut off the enemy king horizontally with 47.♞a7!, reaching a winning position by activating his own king after 47...♞h1 48.♞d7 ♞h3† 49.♔b4 ♔e5 50.♔b5 ♞c3 51.♞e7! ♔d4 52.♔c6 ♞xc4† 53.♔xd6 with a theoretical win.

47.♔b4! ♔e7 48.♔b5 ♞c2! 49.♞a7† ♔d8

Paradoxically, the king feels safer when restricted to the back rank than on the sixth rank!

50.♔c6 ♞xc4† 51.♔xd6

and now Black saves himself with 51...♔c8! (which is the only move).

Does this mean that Chigorin could have obtained good chances to save the game with 36...♞b2? Not at all. What really happened was that I was so impressed by Rubinstein's final attack that I wanted to make it work in this other line, too. In doing so, I forgot what I had written in my short note to 36.♔c3.

Looking at the position without any prejudice I understood (or rather remembered) that Chigorin refrained from 36...♞b2 because of the immediate 37.♞xd6 when White's connected passed pawns would be unstoppable, for instance 37...♞a8 (The only way to somewhat slow down the d-pawn, which would promote in case of 37...♞xa2 38.♞d8 ♞xh2 39.d6 followed by d7 and ♞g8.) 38.♞e6 ♞xa2 39.d6 ♞b2 40.c5 ♞bb8 (not only aiming to defend against the avalanche but also preparing ...a2 and ...♞b1) 41.d7 a2 42.♞a1 ♞d8 43.c6 f4 44.♔d4 and Black is completely helpless.

The conclusion of this analytical inaccuracy (or maybe inconsequence is a better definition) is that sometimes we search for the truth in abyssal depths, when we can find it just one step away from us...

37.h4†!

We are already familiar with this idea from a previous variation.

37...♔g4

37...♔xh4 would lose instantly to 38.♞g7 followed by ♞h1 mate, while against 37...♔f6 White mates with a sequence of accurate moves:

38.♞e1

Threatening mate in one.

38...f4 39.♞e6† ♔f5 40.♞g7

White intends to chase the king towards the

e-line, in order to make use of his own king to create the mating net.

40...f3

Once again this is the only way to avoid a mate, this time on g5.

41.♠g5† ♖f4

Now

42.♗d3!

creates the deadly threat of ♠f6 mate.

Another option is:

37...♗f4

This would have given Rubinstein the possibility of making even more quiet moves than in the game. The most accurate continuation would be:

38.♠g7!

With a familiar idea of forcing the enemy king towards the centre.

38...♞b2 39.♠f1 †!

The attacking sequence introduced by this move was pointed out by Malfagia. The king is forced to the most dangerous zone, where he is restricted by pawns from both sides. For once, making a "quiet move" such as 39.♠g6 would only prolong the fight in view of 39...♠f2.

39...♗e5

Forced, in order to avoid ♠e7 mate.

40.♠g6!

Threatening 41.♠e6 mate.

40...f4

The only way to clear a square around the king.

41.♠e1†

Or, with elegant symmetry, 41.♠e6† ♗f5

42.♠g1 f3 43.♠g5† ♗f4 44.♗d3 and wins.

41...♗f5 42.♠e6!

Threatening 43.♠g5 mate.

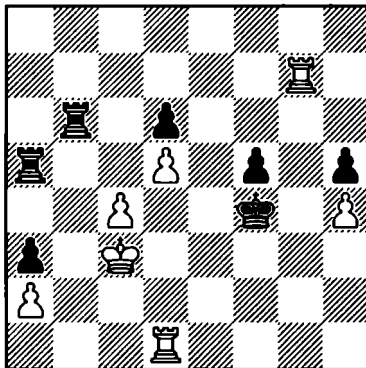
42...f3

Once again forced, but now White is just one step away from being perfectly coordinated, while Black is just parrying threats of mate in one.

43.♠g5† ♗f4 44.♗d3!

In order to avoid the double threat of mate on e4 or f6, Black has to give up a rook.

38.♠g7† ♗f4



39.♠g6!

A familiar picture. White threatens mate in two with 40.♠f1† ♗e3 41.♠e6 mate.

The f5-pawn fails to offer a reliable shelter to the king. It looks as if the monarch is trying to hide from the surrounding enemies behind a pillar. A shield would come in handy, of course, but the pawn is not well suited for such purposes. A knight would do the job much better, because of its high mobility in confined space.

39...♗f3

39...♗e3 does not change matters. White would mate after 40.♠f1 ♗e2 41.♠xf5 followed by 42.♠e6† ♗d1 43.♠f1 mate.

40.♠f1† ♗e2 41.♠xf5

1-0

In view of the threat 42.♠e6† ♗d1 43.♠f1 mate, Chigorin resigned.

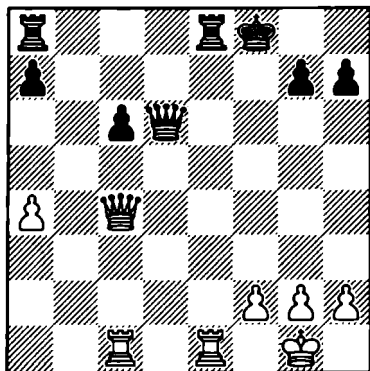
We shall examine several similar games, where under Akiba's magic touch the rooks display an impressive combined attack. And yet, the cases where the enemy king really gets mated, as happened in the previous example, are extremely rare. More common are the situations when the attacking side gets a material or positional benefit out of his strong initiative. This will be the central theme of the following sections.

Converting a material advantage II

The section dedicated to endgames with only one rook for each side opened with the game Rubinstein–Lasker, where White managed to convert his extra pawn into a win, helped also by the more active position of the rook. The next game features a similar situation, with the only (but significant) difference that all four rooks will be present on the board until the very end. Besides their general character, I have tried to highlight several other common points of the two games.

Akiba Rubinstein – Rudolf Spielmann

Vienna 1922



At a superficial glance the diagrammed position has not much in common with the game Rubinstein–Lasker. First of all, the kings find themselves on the same wing. However, after the next move one involuntarily remembers the rook lift Rf1-f4 from the other game.

25. R_c3!

Just as in the previous case, this is a multi-purpose move.

First of all, it creates the threat of a direct mating attack, starting with $\text{Rf3}\dagger$. Eliminating the dangerous rook with $25...Rxe3$ would not solve Black's problem, since after $26.fxe3$ the other rook would threaten to deliver an equally unpleasant check on f1.

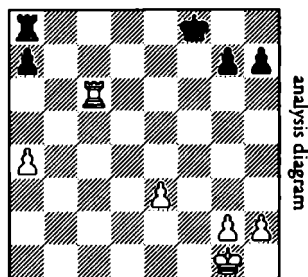
The slightly less obvious threat is directed against the c6-pawn. Once the first rank has been secured,

Rxc6 becomes entirely possible. It is easy to verify that Black cannot deal with both threats at the same time. Therefore, he chooses to give up the pawn.

As pointed out by Malfagia, the force of the last move becomes even more obvious if we take into account the following aspect: Rubinstein could have actually won the c6-pawn with $25.Red1 R\text{e}6$ $26.Rc5\dagger!$ (in order to force the enemy king away from the centre in view of the later exchange of queens) $26...Qg8$ $27.Rxc6 Rxc6$ $28.Rxc6$, but after $28...a5!$ (in order to prevent $Ra6$) Black could have offered entirely adequate resistance. For instance $29.Rc7 R\text{a}d8!$ $30.Rb1 Rb8!$ or $29.g3 R\text{e}4!$ and in both cases White is forced to keep one of his rooks passive in order to defend his a-pawn.

25...R_d5 26.Rxc6 Rxc6 27.Rxc6

A second remarkable moment. If Black exchanges rooks with $27...Rxe3$ $28.fxe3$ we would unexpectedly reach a practically identical endgame as in the game Rubinstein–Lasker.



The pawn structure is already the same. Besides, White will be just in time to place his rook on a6, as in the other game, since $28...a5$ $29.Rc5$ would not really improve the situation of the black rook.

Huge transpositions in the opening are quite frequent in contemporary chess. However, none of them is as impressive as the phenomenon that could have occurred in this game. One natural question is whether Spielmann knew the previous game and avoided that specific endgame on purpose. I am inclined towards a positive answer and here are my arguments.

In those distant years, so far still from the information explosion, chess players had the time and the possibility to study every essential game. St Petersburg 1909, where the game Rubinstein–Lasker was played, was a very strong tournament and one of Rubinstein's greatest triumphs, both from a sporting and a creative point of view.

Besides, a World Champion's defeat has always been accompanied by a lot of publicity. I am sure that the reader remembers quite well every one of Kasparov's defeats in recent years.

27...♖d8 28.g3 ♗d7 29.a5

We shall notice a slight difference in Rubinstein's plan, compared to the previous endgame. Instead of attacking the a7-pawn directly (For instance, by placing the rooks on the a5- and a6-squares.) he advances his own pawn to a6, thus giving the a7-weakness a permanent character.

In doing so, he takes into account the concrete circumstances of the position. With four rooks on the board it is impossible to establish total domination by static means. If Akiba had doubled his rooks on the a-file, then they would have lacked dynamism. Besides, one of the black rooks would have been able to defend the pawn and restrict the white king at the same time.

29...♗b8 30.h4!

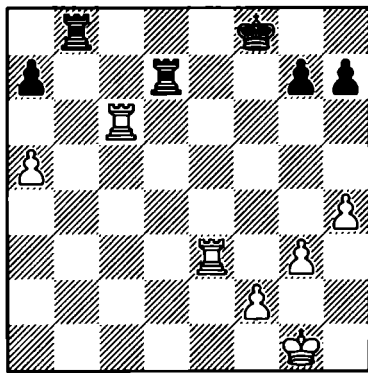
In this phase of the game Rubinstein concentrates on advancing both his wing pawns as far as possible. This is an interesting strategic method that can be seen in all three stages of the game: the opening, the middlegame and the endgame. Throughout his brilliant chess career it has been one of the favourite methods of Bent Larsen, one of the most original strategists ever, as the Soviets describe him.

Anyway, what is the secret idea behind such moves? Is the centre not the most important area to worry about?

We know that every pawn advance leaves behind a series of weak squares. The more central these squares are, the higher the positional damage can be. All this is rather abstract, I agree, because usually there are also some other pieces around to cover those relative weaknesses, but I believe there is some food for thought here.

The advance of a wing pawn is usually harmless

for its own position, but can be quite irritating for the opponent. If the white h-pawn reaches the sixth rank it would seriously weaken the important g7- and f6-squares. If the opponent tries to stop it with ...h6, then the g6-square would become weak, thus negatively affecting the elasticity of the pawn structure. Let us see what all this means in our specific case.

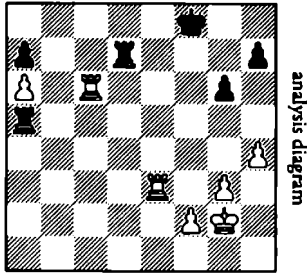


Just as in the game against Lasker, one important part of White's general plan is to win space on the kingside. However, with four rooks on the board, this has to be done with care, in order to avoid weakening his own king's position. The only pawn that leaves practically no weaknesses behind is the rook pawn, of course. As we shall see, Black cannot fight for space on equal terms, mainly because he is one pawn down on that part of the board. Besides, advancing any of his pawns would seriously weaken the king's position.

30...♗b5 31.a6 ♖a5 32.♔g2 ♖a2

Spielmann hurries to create some threats against the f2-pawn. Did he underestimate the force of Rubinstein's next move?

Knowing the further evolution of the game, it is easy to recommend 32...g6 (with the idea of preventing the further advance of the white h-pawn) but, in fact, this would have seriously weakened the kingside. With four rooks on the board, such a structure is not recommended and the king would not have been any safer than in the game.



Play might have continued:

33. Bf3†

Strictly speaking, this check is not really necessary; White could also play 33. Bb3. The fact is that the black king seems to be best placed on the f-file, close enough to the centre and his pawns at the same time. Therefore, the intermediate check might be useful and should be considered as the most accurate continuation.

As mentioned in the notes to the game Rubinstein–Alekhine, one cannot always know in advance whether such small details will count or not. However, as they can hardly do any harm, a strong technical player will always strive to take advantage of every apparently insignificant nuance of the position.

33... Qg7

On 33... Qe7 White might have played the same: 34. Bb3, with a possible transposition to the main line, although 34. Bc6 also looks promising. In order to save both weak a7- and h7-pawns, Black has to play 34... Bxd5 when White can slowly improve his position, starting with, for example, 35. g4. In this case, it should be mentioned that if Black tries to exchange all the rooks, the pawn ending resulting after 35... B5d6 36. g5! Bxf6 37. Bxf6 Bd6 38. Bxd6 Qxd6 is easily winning for White with 39. f4!. For instance 39... Qe6 40. Qg3! Qf5 41. Qf3 Qe6 42. Qe4 and Black is in zugzwang as indicated by Malfagia.

34. Bb3

Now Black has several ways to meet the threat Bb7:

a) 34... Qf8 35. Bb7

35. Bb7 is not bad either since 35... Bxa6? is impossible in view of 36. Bb8† followed by Bxa6.

35... Qe7 36. Bb8 winning.

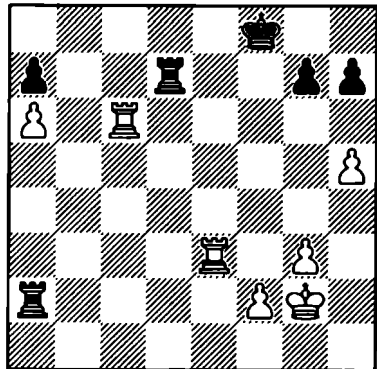
b) 34... Qh6 isn't a safer idea either: 35. Bb7 Bxb7 (Or 35... Bxa6 36. Bxg6†! and with his three pawns vs. only one black pawn on the kingside, White will win without difficulty.) 36. axb7 Bb5 37. Bc7 a5 38. g4! and the black king is suddenly in trouble.

c) 34... Re5 looks rather passive. After 35. Bb7 Bce7 36. Bxd7 Bxd7 37. g4 White would achieve the position from the final part of the general plan mentioned in the notes to the game Rubinstein–Lasker. Even if on the kingside there is still a long way until complete strategic victory, Black is restricted to passivity and cannot do much to halt the offensive.

As pointed out by Andreas Schütte, it is also possible to keep four rooks on the board for a while, by playing 35. Bc8 with the idea Bc8-b8-b7.

By keeping the pawn on g7, Spielmann hoped to defend his weaknesses more easily.

33. h5!



Besides its obvious strategic threat of h6, this move also creates a well-masked tactical threat (see the next note).

33... Ba5

If Black had played the natural 33... h6 then

his king would have come under strong fire after 34.♖c8† ♣f7 35.♟f3†

At this moment the fact that h4-h5 has taken the important g6-square under control becomes quite relevant, as the king cannot escape to this relatively safe square.

35...♣e7

Very similar would be 35...♣e6 36.♞e8† ♣d6 37.♞d3† ♣c7 38.♞xd7† ♣xd7 39.♞g8 winning the g-pawn and the game.

36.♞g8 ♣e6 37.♞e8† ♣d6 38.♞d3† ♣c7 39.♞xd7† ♣xd7 40.♞g8 winning.

We can see here a familiar picture. The reader might remember from the game Rubinstein–Chigorin how poorly the f5-pawn defended the king from a combined attack from two different sides. Spielmann's d7-rook does not safely shelter the king either.

And now is the right moment to step once more into the world of suppositions. Did Spielmann know the game Rubinstein–Chigorin? Most probably he did. If this was indeed the case, it is obvious that he tried to protect his king from such brutal treatment.

We can now understand in what a difficult situation he found himself, both psychologically and objectively. He had to avoid two entirely different dangers:

1) The transposition to a technically winning endgame for White, similar to the game Rubinstein–Lasker.

2) A mating attack as in Rubinstein–Chigorin. Spielmann must have felt like he was caught between the hammer and the anvil. His practical chances to survive were practically non-existent.

34.h6

Since Black seemed to have prepared a defence against the tactical threat, switching to the strategic method seems very natural.

In fact, White could have continued with his attacking plan, for instance

34.♖c8† ♣f7 35.♟f3† ♣e7 36.♞g8 ♞g5

36...♣e6 37.♞e8† ♣d6 38.♞d3† ♣c7 39.♞xd7† ♣xd7 40.♞g8 ♞g5 is not an adequate defence either because of 41.f4 ♞xh5 42.♞xg7† winning.

37.♞b3!

The white rooks are hitting from both sides again. The deadly threat is now ♞b7.

37...♣f7 38.♞a8! ♞xh5 39.♞b7

The a6-pawn is just too strong.

39...♞e7

White will also be easily winning after 39...♣e6 40.♞xd7 ♣xd7 41.♞xa7† ♣c6 42.♞xg7 or 39...♞hd5 40.♞xa7.

40.♞xa7 ♞xb7 41.axb7 followed by b7-b8♣†.

Rubinstein's move is a slower, but equally effective, method. I would like to discuss here an interesting psychological aspect.

At first glance, Akiba's general approach in taking this decision is quite opposite to his play on the 39th move of his game against Alekhine. Against the future World Champion, he stuck to his initial plan, in spite of the fact that he was given the possibility of winning in a faster way. In the game we are examining now, he changed his intentions without any apparent reason. Did the war years affect Rubinstein's style of thinking to this extreme?

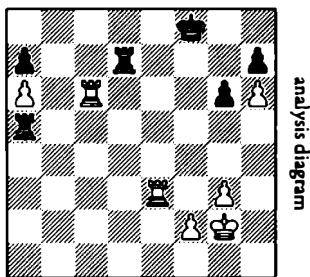
I believe they did not.

While the pawn ending that could have arisen in the game with Alekhine was far from easy to calculate, the position after 34.h6 is rather easy to win, at least for such an artist as Rubinstein. If there was no other choice, I am sure that he would have chosen the attacking solution, but even for a maestro there is always a degree of incertitude in such sharp positions. But with such a nice and risk free alternative as the pawn advance, which increases White's strategic advantage by exchanging a wing pawn for a more central one, why complicate matters?

Concluding, I would say that in both cases Rubinstein chose the more economical solution.

34...gxh6

Just like two moves earlier, 34...g6 deserves consideration. With the white pawn so far advanced, losing the h7-pawn could lead to an immediate catastrophe. However, the h6-pawn is more exposed as well and could be attacked by the king. Let us try to understand whether these differences can have a significant influence on the evaluation of the position.



37.♞c3 ♞f7

Black can't allow the exchange of one pair of rooks. For instance, after 37...♞e7 38.♞c7 ♞f7 39.♞xe7 ♞xe7 40.♞b3 with the idea of 41.♞b7, White will reach either a pawn ending where the minimal material advantage is decisive, or a rook ending with two extra pawns.

However, as we already know, keeping all the rooks on the board is not a solution either.

38.f4

The slow advance of the pawns will restrict more and more Black's breathing space.

38...♞fe7 39.♞h3 ♞f7 40.♞3c5 ♞f8 41.♞h4 ♞e7 42.♞b5 ♞f8 43.f5 ♞fe7 44.g4 ♞f7 45.♞h5 ♞e1 46.♞g5 ♞e7 47.♞b8

1-0

35.♞f3† ♞e7 36.♞b3

Until now, play was similar to that after 32...g6.

36...♞f7 37.♞b7 ♞xb7 38.axb7 ♞b5 39.♞c7† ♞f6 40.♞xh7 ♞g5

This is an ambitious idea. Black hopes to keep the enemy rook busy defending the pride of White's position, the far advanced pawns, in order to advance his modest soldier along the a-file. However, White has a simple tactical solution.

41.f4†! ♞h5 42.g4†!

Black has to release the pressure against h6.

42...♞g4 43.♞e7

Black cannot fight against both pawns simultaneously. The counterattack started with 43...♞b2† 44.♞f1 ♞f3 would come to a sudden end after 45.h7 ♞h2 46.♞e1! when, after avoiding the mate, White will promote one of his pawns.

The other way to attack the advanced pawn is 36...♞h5 but after 37.♞b7 ♞d8 comes 38.♞f6!

Again, these nasty attacks from different sides.

38...♞xh6

The rook would be rather misplaced on h6. For instance:

39.♞f8† ♞e7 40.♞a8 ♞d6

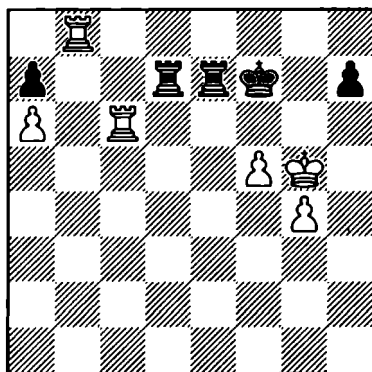
Practically forced in view of the threat 41.♞axa7 ♞xb7 42.axb7.

41.♞axa7 ♞xb7 42.♞xb7 ♞c6 43.♞f7 ♞h5 44.a7 ♞a5 45.♞xh7

With two extra pawns and an easily winning position.

35.♞xh6 ♞g7 36.♞c6 ♞f5

After having increased his advantage on the kingside, White's next step is to force the black rooks into passivity.



It might seem as though Spielmann resigned because of the threat ♞h6.

In fact, he is also in zugzwang. Black has to move one of his rooks, since 47...♞g7 would allow the fork 48.f6†.

However, after any rook move ♞b7 will become possible. For example, 47...♞d5 48.♞b7 ♞dd7 and now the simplest way is 49.♞xd7 ♞xd7 50.♞h6 ♞f8 51.♞c8† winning a second pawn.



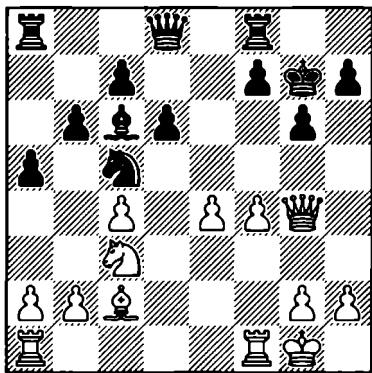
Converting a positional advantage: Play on two wings

We shall now move into a more complex world. In the following examples the initial position will be marked not only by material equality but also by the large number of pawns. In such cases strategic factors prevail over the material ones. The defending side would gladly give up a pawn in order to liquidate the whole structure on one wing, and so get a defensible position on the other side of the board.

We shall also see how Rubinstein elaborated and carried out middlegame plans in positions where only rooks and pawns are left on the board.

The following game features an already familiar idea: the attack of the wing pawns, this time in its most typical and, I would say, pure form.

Oldrich Duras – Akiba Rubinstein St Petersburg 1909



White has more space and seems to threaten a kingside attack. For Black it is time to prepare for a rook endgame, is it not?

19...♖xe4 20.♖xe4 f5 21.♖f3 fxg4 22.♗xe4 ♗xe4 23.♖xe4 ♖f6 24.♗f2

Suddenly, White has serious problems. Because of the weakness of the b2- and f4-pawns and also the exposed position of the queen, he cannot prevent Black from taking control of the open e-file.

Yusupov analysed the following line:
24.♖c6

Trying to take advantage of the hanging position of the a8-rook, which makes the natural defence of the c7-pawn with 24...♗f7 impossible.

24...♖d4† 25.♔h1

As we shall see, the king is badly placed here.

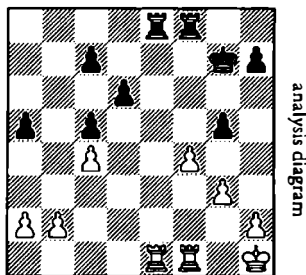
25...♖c5

The simplest way of eliminating the intruder.

26.♖xc5 bxc5 27.♗ae1 ♗ae8

The f4-pawn is in danger. After 28.g3 it looks as if White has parried the threat without having to give up control of the e-line. However, Black has not exhausted his resources yet.

28...g5!



After this energetic move, one of the black rooks will invade the enemy position through the second rank.

29.fxg5 ♗xf1† 30.♗xf1 ♗e2

With a clear advantage for Black. Here is where the unfavourable position of the white king makes itself felt. From g1 it would have supported the rook in the very effective defence 31.♗f2.

The way it is, White cannot generate any counterplay because his rook has no paths for invasion into the enemy camp. He also fails to defend all his weaknesses, in spite of his extra pawn. We could continue the variation with

31.♗b1 ♔g6 32.h4 ♔h5

when White is in serious trouble.

24...♗ae8 25.♖d5

Now 25.♖c6 would be easily parried with 25...♗e7. With his next moves Rubinstein will place his pieces on optimal positions.

25...♖f5

The black queen takes under control the whole complex of light squares, in particular the e4- and g4-squares. The queens will patiently look at each other. In principle, both sides should refrain from releasing this tension. If ...♝xd5 then cxd5 would leave Black with a backward pawn on c7, while ♜xf5 gxf5 would increase Black's control over the centre and reduce the mobility of White's kingside pawns. Logically, both players should try to convince the opponent to carry out the exchange. However, it will soon become clear that only Black can achieve this.

26.♖d1 ♖e4

Occupying a weak square and preparing to take total control of the e-file.

27.g3 ♖f8 28.♗g2

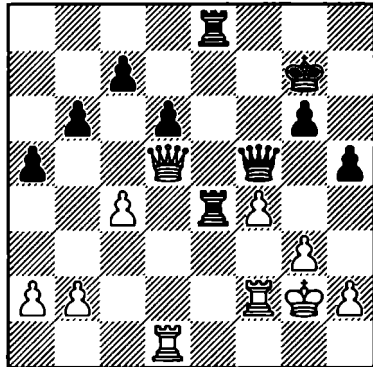
White can only sit and wait. Black's only relative weakness is the c7-pawn, which is rather difficult to attack. For instance, ♜c6 can be comfortably met by ♖8e7. The thematic queenside attack based on a3, b4 and c5 is not very effective under the concrete circumstances of the diagrammed position, because it would create only weaknesses. For instance, if we allow White to make two moves in a row, playing 29.a3 and 30.b4, he would simply lose either the c4- or the b4-pawn after ♝xd5.

Black's authoritative control of the e-file ensures him a stable advantage. However, immediate action by the rooks would only lead to exchanges and a probable draw. In fact, all Black's pieces are placed on optimal squares. This means that in order to make further progress the time has come for pawn moves.

On the queenside there is also nothing to improve on: Black's pawns are perfectly arranged, restricting the opponent's activity. Using a process of elimination, there is only one constructive move left.

28...h5!!

A wonderful multi-purpose move. After advancing one more square this pawn will threaten ...h3† with a mating attack. This would practically force White to exchange on f5. In the endgame the h-pawn would change its initial intentions and simply capture on g3, thus creating a weakness on this square.

**29.b3**

White cannot seriously consider playing 29.h4. This would seriously weaken the g3-square and give up any hope of creating a kingside passed pawn in the endgame.

29...♖e3!?

In order to play ...h4 under optimal circumstances, Black should place his king on f6. Bringing the king closer to the centre in view of the approaching endgame is only one of the ideas behind this move. Black would need the g-line for his e8-rook after the predictable sequence h5-h4, ♝xf5 gxf5, gxh4 in order to play ♖g8† and ♖g4. Therefore, the other rook is best placed on e4, denying the white queen access to d4 and ensuring a quiet life for the black king.

Rubinstein should have improved the position of his king immediately with 29...♔f6.

30.♖d4!?

White returns the favour, blocking this important square himself!

More stubborn would have been 30.♖dd2 and it seems that Black should have returned the rook to e4, in order to prepare ♔f6 and h4. I assume that this is precisely what Rubinstein would have done.

In any case Lasker pointed out, without giving an alternative, that 30...h4 would have been premature: 31.♝xf5 gxf5 32.gxh4 ♔f6 33.♖f3 and White can resist.

30...♟f6 31.h3?!

Duras probably wanted to take g4 under control, but he just weakens his pawn structure. Lasker gives a nice variation:

31.♞d2 h4

Threatening ...h3 with a mating attack.

32.♞xf5† gxf5 33.♞f3

33.gxh4 would be bad in view of 33...♞g8†

34.♟f1 ♠g4 and the white pawns are very weak.

33.♞c2 would be a little more stubborn than

Lasker's continuation, but would lead to the

same kind of position. For instance 33...hxg3

34.hxg3 ♞d3 35.♞f3 ♞e3 36.♞c2 ♟g6! when

the threat of mass exchanges on f3 followed by

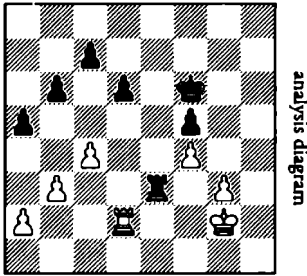
♟h5 with a winning pawn ending, forces White

to play 37.♞xe3 thus reaching after 37...♞xe3 a

position similar to the main line.

33...hxg3 34.hxg3 ♞e2† 35.♞f2 ♞xd2 36.♞xd2

♞c3



The black rook paralyses both white pieces. The king has to defend the weak g3-pawn, while the rook is confined to guarding the second rank.

The kingside operation has ended in success, and the next step would be a similar action on the

other wing. Black's basic plan would be to play

...a4-a3 (after a later ...♞c3, if allowed, in order

to discourage bxa4) and then transfer the rook to

b2. Let us see how this would work in practice.

37.♞c2

This is the only way to prevent Black's plan.

After 37.♟h3 ♞c3 38.♟h4 a4 39.♞b2 a3

40.♞e2 ♞c1 41.♟h3 ♞b1 White's counterplay

fails to impress, for instance 42.♞e8 ♞b2 43.♞a8

♞xa2 44.♞a7 ♞a1 45.♟g2 There is no time to

capture on c7 because Black would advance his

pawn to a2 followed by ♞h1† winning. 45...a2
Possibly not the only winning plan. 46.♟h2
♞b1 47.♞xa2 ♞xb3 48.♞a7 c5 followed by
...♞b4xc4 with a win.

37...a4

This is probably better than 37...♟g6 when after
38.♟h3 ♟h5 39.♞d2 ♞c3 40.♞d5 ♟g6 41.♞b5
White considerably activates his pieces.

38.bxa4! ♞a3 39.♟h3 ♞xa4 40.♟h4

For the moment, White has managed to
defend all his weaknesses. However, his rook
is completely immobile which gives Black the
possibility to play for zugzwang.

40...♞a3 41.♟h3

Black's previous move did not really allow any
freedom to the white rook. For instance, after
41.♞d2 ♞c3 42.♞d4 ♞c2 White loses the a-
pawn in view of the threat ...♞h2 mate.

41...♟g6

The king aims for g4.

42.♟h4 ♞d3 43.g4

White will not be able to avoid this move forever.
For instance, after 43.♟h3 ♟h5 44.♞b2 ♞c3

45.♞b4 ♞c2 46.a4 ♞a2 47.♞b5 ♟g6 48.♞b4

♟f6 he would have to advance his g-pawn

anyway, since the rook cannot move without

losing a pawn, while 49.♟h4?? allows mate in

one with 49...♞h2 mate.

43...fxg4 44.♟xg4 ♟f6

Although Black has no immediate threat yet,

White is forced to worsen the position of one of

his pieces, which will lead to the loss of a pawn.

This will be enough for a win.

Let us see two such variations.

45.♞e2 ♞c3 46.♞e4 ♞c2 47.a4 ♞g2†

Before attacking the doomed a4-pawn it is a

good idea to drive the king away from its active

position, thus preventing any counterplay based

on f5 and ♞e6†.

48.♟f3 ♞a2

White's position is in ruins.

White can try to give up a pawn immediately

with 45.f5 but after 45...♞d4† 46.♟f3 ♟xf5

47.♟e3 ♟e5 his king will not be able to reach the

relatively best b3-square. Black wins after 48.♞c1

♞h4 followed by ...♞h3† and ...♟d4.

31...h4 32.♞xf5†

32.g4 would lose material: 32...♔g3† 33.♗h2 ♖xd5 34.♗d5 ♜e3 35.♛c2 ♖xh3† 36.♗g2 ♜g3† 37.♗f1 ♖h1†! (this is even better than 37...♔xg4 as previously given by me, which is also winning of course) 38.♗e2 ♖h2† and, in order to avoid being mated, White has to give up a whole rook.

32...gxf5 33.gxh4 ♔g8† 34.♗f1

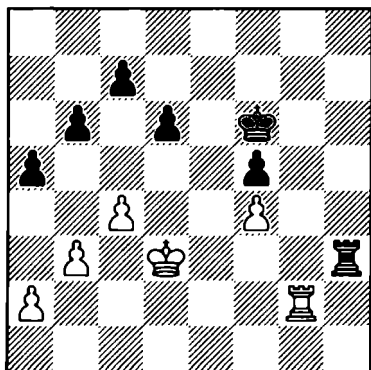
34.♗h2 ♔g3 is not much of an improvement for White.

34...♖xh3 35.♗e2 ♜e8† 36.♗d2 ♖xh4

Once again, Akiba's rookshave done a wonderful job. It is now time to exchange one of them.

37.♔g2 ♜eh8 38.♗c3 ♖h3† 39.♛d3 ♖xd3†

40.♗xd3 ♖h3†



41.♗d4?

This move must have been based on a miscalculation. Duras might have hoped to achieve counterplay by attacking Black's queenside pawns with his king. More stubborn would have been 41.♗e2. For example:

41...♛c3 42.♔g8

42.♗d2 is as bad as the game continuation as can be seen from the following line: 42...♖f3 43.♔g8 ♗e7 44.♔g7† ♗d8 45.♖f7 ♖xf4, planning to transfer the king to the more active c6-square. Black will later play either ♖f2xa2 or ♖f1 and f4 depending on the white king's placement. At the same time, 46.♗e3, trying to destroy Black's coordination, would be answered by 46...♛e4† 47.♗d3 ♛e5 and with two extra pawns Black will certainly win.

42...♗e7

42...♛c2† 43.♗d3 ♖xa2 44.♛c8 does not look entirely clear.

43.♔g7† ♗d8 44.♖f7 ♛c2† 45.♗d3 ♖xa2 46.♖xf5 ♖a3 47.♗c2 a4 48.bxa4 ♖xa4 49.♗b3

and, although Black seems to be winning. White is certainly doing better than in the game. A possible continuation would be 49...♖a1 50.♖f7 ♖a5 51.f5 ♛c5 followed by ...b5.

41...♖f3 42.♗d5 ♖xf4 43.♗c6 ♔g4!

Duras might have overlooked the defensive manoeuvre initiated by this move. White is two pawns down and has virtually no counterplay.

44.♖f2 ♔g7 45.♗d5 ♛e7 46.♖f1 ♗g5 47.♔g1† ♗f4 48.a3 ♗f3 49.♖f1† ♗g4 50.♔g1† ♗h3 51.♖f1 ♛e5† 52.♗c6 ♗g2 53.♖f4 ♗g3 54.♖f1 ♛c5† 55.♗b7 f4 56.♛c1

White has finally managed to create the slightly unpleasant threat of b4 followed by ♗xc7.

56...d5!

It is very instructive to follow how Akiba will avoid even the smallest shadow of counterplay till the very end. 57.b4 is impossible now in view of 57...♖xc4.

57.♔g1† ♗f2 58.♖b1 d4

If 58...dxc4 then 59.b4 undermining the queenside.

59.♛c1 d3 60.b4 axb4 61.axb4 d2 62.♛c2 ♗e3

Duras was also a study composer and he might have hoped to reach some lucky draw; otherwise we cannot explain why he did not resign now.

63.bxc5 d1♖ 64.♛c3† ♗d4 65.cxb6 ♗xc3

66.bxc7 ♗d7 67.c5 ♗b5† requires no further calculations.

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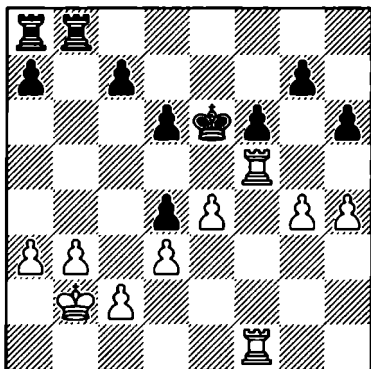
In the previous example, the flank operations were made possible by Black's solid domination in the centre.

A closed centre is also a favourable circumstance for this kind of action. This will be the case in the following game where, for a change, Rubinstein will carry out the attack on both wings with the help of the knight pawns.

The impact of this combined attack will be considerably higher than in the previous game for two basic reasons.

First of all, there will be more pawns involved in exchanges, thus generating significant modifications of the structure as well as opening more files. Secondly, the theatre of action will be closer to the centre, affecting more directly this important area of the board.

Akiba Rubinstein – Stefano Rosselli del Turco
Merano 1924



This endgame might be just as equal as it looks. However, there is still a lot of play left until a draw. Is the initial position of chess not equal as well?

26.g5

Akiba starts a typical minority attack. The main purpose is to distract one of the black rooks in order to start a similar operation on the other wing. 26.b4 would have been premature in view of 26...c5 threatening a7-a5.

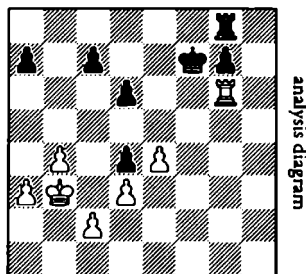
26...hxg5 27.hxg5 ♖f8

There might be some arguments in favour of 27...fxg5 28.♖xg5 ♖g8 and, although somewhat weak, the g-pawn might have a bright future. The dark side of this positional concession would be that it would allow the activation of the white rooks: 29.♖g6† ♔e7 30.b4 followed by ♔b3-c4.

Malfagia managed to support this point of view with some concrete variations:

30...♖af8? 31.♖xf8 ♔xf8 32.♔b3 ♔f7

Aiming to put the g-pawn into motion.



33.♖g5 ♔f6 34.♖f5†!

But not 34.♖a5 g5! 35.♖xa7? g4 and it is Black who now has the advantage.

35...♔e6 35.♔c4 g6!

Once again aiming to dislocate the white rook. After 35...g5 play would transpose to the main line with 36.♔xd4 g4 37.♖f2!

36.♖g5!

White continues to use his rook in order to gain time to approach with his king.

36...♔f6 37.♖a5 g5 38.♖f5†!

Having decoyed the king to f6, the rook can once again regroup without loss of time, by means of this check.

38...♔e6 39.♔xd4 g4 40.♖f2!

And, once the king has reinforced the rook in the task of controlling the enemy passed pawn, White has excellent prospects of converting his material advantage into a win.

28.b4

The main goal of the action initiated with this move is to isolate the d4-pawn from its colleagues. In principle, White should delay the exchange on f6 as much as possible, in order to avoid premature simplifications and the activation of the a8-rook.

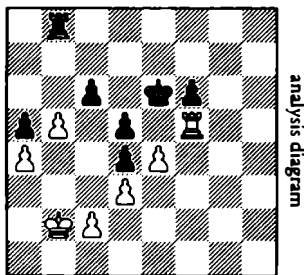
For instance, after 28.gxf6 ♖xf6 29.♖f6† gxf6 30.b4 Black gets a relatively safe position with: 30...a5!

But not 30...♖h8 31.♔b3 ♖h2 as given by me in the first edition, because of the simple continuation 32.♖f5 c6 33.♖a5 when the black rook would not be able to neutralize the pressure exerted by both enemy pieces on the weak a7- and d4-pawns, as pointed out by Andreas Schütte.

31.b5!?

The neutral 31.♖b3 is inoffensive and would transpose to a variation from the comment on the next move.

31...♞b8 32.a4 c6 33.♞f5 d5



Taking advantage of the temporary weakness of the b5-pawn, Black has managed to set up several points of tension, which will lead to mass exchanges, thus increasing the probability of a draw. White can try several continuations:

a) 34.♞h5 aims to clarify matters in the centre by removing the rook from the exposed square and enabling exd5†. However, this move seems to be too slow and Black can answer with 34...dxe4 35.dxe4 ♖d6! 36.♖b3 ♞e8 when the attack against the e4-pawn equalizes the chances.

b) 34.♖b3 is more natural but has the drawback of placing the king on an unfortunate square, allowing Black to liquidate to a dead draw with: 34...cxb5! 35.♞xd5 bxa4†

This is where the position of the king counts.

36.♖xa4 ♞c8 37.♖b3

37.♞xd4 ♞xc2 38.♖xa5 f5 would lead to an easy draw

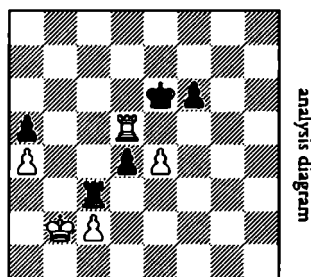
37...a4† 38.♖b2 a3†

and there is no way to preserve the c2-pawn, for instance 39.♖b3 ♞c3†.

c) 34.♖a3! might be the most consistent move. White gets the king out of the pin and avoids the intermediate bxa4† from the previous line.

However, after the more or less forced sequence 34...dxe4 35.dxe4 ♞c8 36.♖b2 cxb5 37.♞xb5 ♞c3 38.♞d5

The only way to fight for an advantage. White will win a pawn without losing his own e4-pawn.



38...♞h3!

This is the most active square for the rook, in view of the pawn race that will soon begin.

39.♞xd4 ♖e5 40.♞d5†

The apparently solid 40.♞c4 would leave White very passive. Black could simply play 40...♞h8 in order to be able to check from the back rank and then sit and wait.

40...♖xe4 41.♞xa5

Black's counterplay based on 41...f5 seems to be sufficient for a draw. For instance, 42.♞a8 f4 43.a5 f3 44.a6 and now the simplest would be 44...♞h7!, taking the a7-square under control, when White has no winning chances at all.

28...a5 29.♖b3

It was still too early for 29.gxf6, for instance 29...axb4 30.axb4 ♞xf6 31.♞xf6† gxf6 32.♖b3 ♞a7 when White cannot take advantage of his apparently better pawn structure. For example, after 33.♖c4 ♞a2 34.♞f2 ♞a4 35.♖b5 ♞a3 36.♖c6 ♞c3† it appears that White's weaknesses are just as significant as the black ones. However, with four rooks on the board, 29.b5 would have been more dangerous for Black than in the previous comment, mainly because of the passivity of the f8-rook.

29...axb4 30.axb4 c5

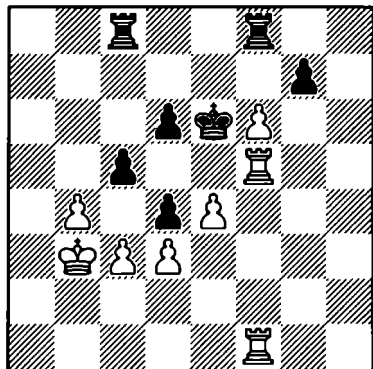
Black cannot play as in the previous line. After a waiting move such as 30...♞a7 White would be able to take advantage of his active f5-rook with 31.♖c4 ♞a2 32.♞f2 ♞a4 33.♞a5!.

31.c3

Rubinstein continues undermining the enemy centre, securing at the same time the position of his king. He knew the damage that two rooks can do far too well to fall into such a trap as 31.bxc5?? ♞fb8† 32.♖c4 ♞a4 mate.

31...♖ac8

31...dxc3 would lead to a similar pawn structure as in the game after 32.bxc5.

32.gxf6**32...gxf6**

Black is creating trouble for himself. Why not exchange the passive rook with 32...♖xf6 33.♖xf6† gxf6. White's advantage after 34.b5 looks rather symbolic. If he could manage to advance the pawn to b6 and support it with ♖b5 he would be close to winning, of course, but with a few accurate moves Black would be able to prevent this plan.

For instance:

34...dxc3 35.♖xc3 ♖a8 36.♖b1

36.♖b3 loses the pawn after 36...♖a5 37.♖c4 ♖a4† followed by ♖b4.

36...d5!

This counterplay is sufficient for a draw.

37.b6 dxe4 38.dxe4 ♖e5

Although Black will later have to give up his rook for the white b-pawn, the black f-pawn will be strong enough to ensure the draw.

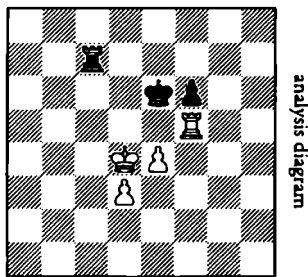
33.bxc5

33.b5!? seems to be a better chance for an advantage.

33...dxc5

Once again Black refrains from exchanging one pair of rooks. His last move must be regarded as a decisive mistake (in view of the comment on White's 38th move).

Rosselli might have noticed that after 33...♖xc5 34.♖xc5 dxc5 35.♖f5 he could not avoid the loss of one pawn and might not have had a very clear idea about how the position arising after, say, 35...♖c8 36.♖c4 ♖c7 37.cxd4 cxd4† 38.♖xd4 should be assessed or (even more importantly) handled. His fears are quite understandable, since even today theory is not very well organized in this territory, which can be described as "2 pawns versus 1 pawn, with a passed pawn against no passed pawn".



From all the endgame books I consulted (quite a few, I can assure you) only Averbakh's Encyclopaedia presents some well organized material, but he mainly focuses on positions where the passed pawn is one step ahead of his colleague, which in our case would mean that the d-pawn had reached the 5th rank already. Compared to that situation, the diagrammed position slightly favours White, who can display more flexibility in choosing his plans. I have examined this endgame rather carefully and have come to the conclusion that Black should be able to draw with a minimum of accuracy. Here are some illustrative variations:

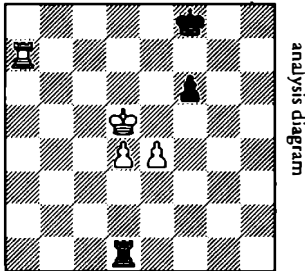
38...♖c1!

Black should hurry to place his rook behind the enemy pawns, in order to prevent White from making significant progress.

39.♖a5 ♖d1 40.♖a6† ♖e7 41.♖c4 ♖d2

This is the safest line of resistance. The rook should be placed behind the weaker pawn. Without being a mistake with a significant influence over the objective evaluation of the position, 41...♖c1† unnecessarily complicates Black's defensive task, requiring from him

higher accuracy than in the main line. The main thing is that after 42.♔d5 ♔d1 43.♖a7† 43...♗e8 would lose to 44.♗e6!. Therefore, the king has to occupy a less favourable square with 43...♗f8 when after 44.d4

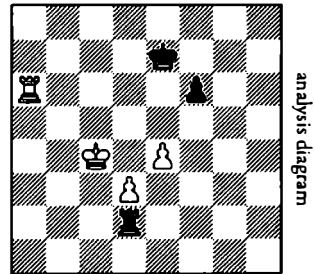


44...♗e1 sooner or later Black will have to attack the e-pawn since White threatens to improve his position with ♗c5, d4-d5. 45.♗c6 ♖xe4 46.d5 (Threatening 47.♖a8† followed by 48.d6 winning, since the black rook is too close to the enemy king to generate adequate counterplay) 46...♗c4! the white king has the d7-square at his disposal. True, this is not sufficient for a win, because the f-pawn is a satisfactory source of counterplay. For instance: 47.♗d7 f5 48.d6 f4 49.♗e6 Apparently, Black is in trouble in view of the threat ♖a8† followed by d7, but fortunately he can parry it with 49...♗e4† 50.♗d5 ♖e1! 51.♖a8† ♖e8 when after 52.♖a4 ♖e3! (defending the f3-square in advance) 53.♗c6 ♖c3† (continuing to harass the king and thus forcing it to block the pawn) 54.♗d7 f3 55.♖f4† ♗g7 56.♗d8 ♗g6 57.d7 ♗g5. Or 47...♗f7 48.d6 f5 49.♗d8† ♗f6 50.d7 f4 51.♖c7 ♖d4 52.♖c6† ♗e5 53.♗e7 (threatening ♖e6† followed by ♖d6 winning) 53...♖xd7†! 54.♗xd7 f3 with an obvious draw in both cases.

Some readers might argue that I should not have made such a distinction between 41...♖d2 and 41...♖c1, since Black is not in great danger in the first line either. This looks simple from an analytical point of view, of course, but during the game it is a good idea to choose the most restrictive continuation in order to avoid

becoming confused and to keep the probability of a mistake as low as possible.

Let's return now to the main line starting with 41...♖d2.



Play may continue:

42.d4 ♖e2 43.♗d5

Advancing the d-pawn with 43.♗d3 ♖e1 44.d5 allows Black to build up a relatively easy defensive set-up with 44...♖f1. White will not be able to dislocate the enemy rook from the f-file in order to penetrate with the king through the kingside. At the same time, an offensive on the other wing will be neutralised with checks from the first rank.

43...♗f7!

Once again the most accurate move. If 43...♖e1 44.♖e6† ♗f7 45.♗d6 ♖a1 46.♖e7† ♗f8 47.♖b7 ♖e1 48.d5 ♖xe4 49.♗c6 we reach a familiar position. From a practical point of view 48.d5 is slightly better than 48.e5 fxe5 49.dxe5 ♖d1† 50.♗e6 ♖a1 51.♖b8† ♗g7 with a well known drawn position.

44.♖a7† ♗e8

and White has no way to make progress.

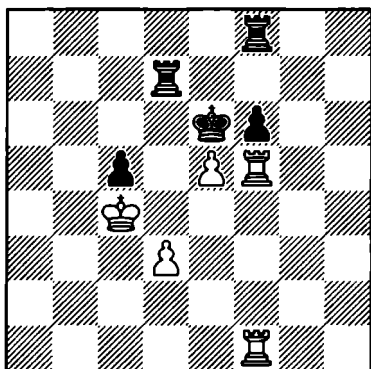
Even less dangerous for Black would be 34.cxd4 ♖b8†! Cutting the enemy king off from the main theatre of action. 35.♗a4 ♖xf5 36.♖xf5 ♖b1 and the position is rather drawish, in spite of White's extra pawn.

34.♗c4 dxc3 35.♗xc3 ♖c6 36.♗c4

In spite of the reduced material White keeps an advantage. His pawn structure is clearly better and, in fact, both isolated black pawns are under serious pressure. Especially bad is the situation of the f6-pawn: a future e4-e5 will actually win the pawn. We

can now see that Akiba's long-term plan (marked by g4-g5, b3-b4) has been very successful.

36...♖c7 37.e5 ♞d7



38.♞xf6?!

Rubinstein's intuition seems to have betrayed him at this moment. He might have more or less foreseen the further evolution of the game, but must have overlooked Black's possibility on the 41st move.

However, attributing Akiba's mistake to this excusable error of calculation would be a rather simplistic description of the situation. In fact, his decision is in complete opposition to his usual way of thinking, something we are already familiar with. Maybe this was just not his best day.

Let us try to imagine how Rubinstein would have judged this position in the other nine times out of ten.

The ending with one pair of rooks is obviously better for White, but no human would be able to foresee the ultimate consequences. It certainly offers practical chances and would be an acceptable way to play for a win if there is no better alternative available.

However, it is not difficult to establish that keeping all the rooks on the board would increase White's advantage. The fact is that Black does not have time to block the f6-pawn with the king and so one of his rooks will remain passive. At the same time, the white rooks will display

their habitual activity, due to White's spatial advantage.

After 38.gxf6 play might have continued:

38...♞d4†

38...♞f7 would lose the c-pawn since after 39.♞xc5 ♞xf6? 40.♖c6† White would win a rook.

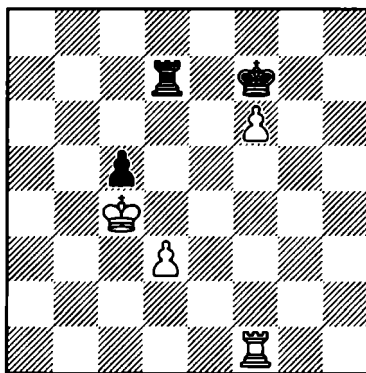
39.♞c3 ♞d6

39...♞d5 40.♞xd5 ♞xd5 is just hopeless: Black will fall into successive zugzwangs since the rook cannot move. For instance 41.f7 ♞e6 42.♞c4 ♞d6 43.♞f3 ♞c6 44.♞f6† ♞d7 45.♞xc5 etc.

40.f7 ♞d7 41.♞1f3

followed by ♞c4 and Black can hardly resist.

38...♞xf6 39.♞xf6 ♞f7



White has managed to win a pawn, but this does not guarantee a win yet. If Black had blocked the pawn with the rook then his position would have been critical, but like this, he can fight on. It is always useful to have the strongest piece (in our case, the rook) available for active operations.

Although it might seem that the c5-pawn is an easy victim, the weakness of the d3-pawn allows the black rook to resist quite well against the white ♞+♞. In most cases trading the f6-pawn for the c5-pawn would lead to a dead draw, since the black king would be rather close to the final pawn. The following moves are quite instructive and typical for such situations.

40.♖f3

Threatening ♖xc5.

40...♞c7 41.♖f5

Threatening ♞xc5 with tempo.

41.♖d5 would lead nowhere, because the rook has sufficient squares on the c-file. For instance, 41...♞c8 42.♖d6 c4 43.♖d7 ♞c5 with an obvious draw.

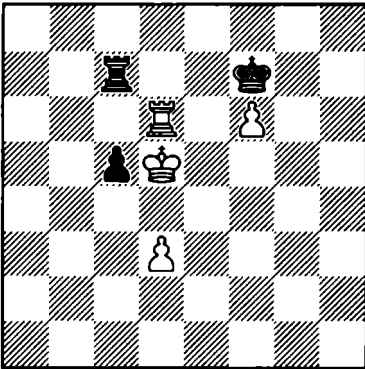
41...♞d7?!

This is not a real mistake yet, but the tendency of keeping his rook in a passive position will eventually lead Black to defeat. Rosselli might have had a fragmented vision of the position: the king stops the f-pawn while the rook fights on the other wing. Even in such positions as the King's Indian, where each player attacks on "his" side, communication between wings is possible; ignoring this detail can have fatal consequences.

41...♞a7! was more active and I cannot see how White can improve his position.

42.♞d5!

Suddenly, White makes some important progress. The rook will be more active on d6, defending both pawns and covering the king.

42...♞a7 43.♞d6 ♞c7 44.♖d5

This position seems to be a reciprocal zugzwang. If White were to move, on 45.♖e5 would follow 45...c4! and the seventh rank is protected (compare this with the note to Black's 45th move). Black could not have lost a tempo earlier, since 42...♞c7 (intending 43.♞d6 ♞c8

44.♖d5 ♞c7) would have been met by 43.♞xc5. However, White's further progress, made possible by Black's obligation to move, will not have decisive consequences yet, as we shall see.

44...♞c8 45.♖e5

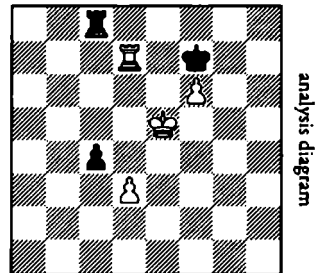
The king has reached an ideal position: it defends the f6-pawn, creating the threat of ♖d7 followed by ♖f5-g6 while also keeping an eye on the other wing, as we shall see. 45.♞c6? would lead nowhere: 45...♞d8† 46.♖c4 ♞d4† 47.♖c3 ♞d5. Once again, we see how effective a single rook can be in such cases.

45...♞c7?

This was the last moment when Black could have abandoned his passive strategy.

Rosselli might have thought that Black's defence is mainly based on exchanging his last pawn with c5-c4. However, it is difficult to find the right moment for it. The problem is that White still has a tempo for attack after the pawn push, while for the moment the black rook only has one square available that still defends c5. Rosselli preferred to defend the seventh rank first, but he will manage this only partially. Let us see what could have happened after 45...c4.

White would, of course, play 46.♞d7†.



Black would then have had an unpleasant choice:

a) 46...♖e8 47.♞h7 cxd3 48.♞h8† ♖d7 49.♞xc8 d2 At first it seems as if Black has managed to escape: if both sides queen, the most probable outcome is a perpetual. 50.♞c5!! d1♖ 51.♞d5† ♖xd5† 52.♖xd5 It is very easy to overlook that this is a winning position: Black cannot avoid losing the opposition on the last rank.

b) 46...♔g6

Keeping the king close to the pawn seems to make some sense.

47.♞g7† ♕h6 48.d4!

48.dxc4? ♜xc4 49.♞g8 is not enough: Black draws with 49...♞c7 50.♔e6 ♞c6† etc.

48...c3

Has the position become double-edged?

49.♞g1 c2 50.f7

Not really! The black king is out of play and the advance of the second white pawn decides:

50...♔h7 51.d5

c) 46...♔f8 47.♔f5

Aiming for g6.

47...c3

47...cxd3 48.♔g6 followed by ♜xd3-h3. Black has no time to activate his rook.

48.♔g6 ♔e8

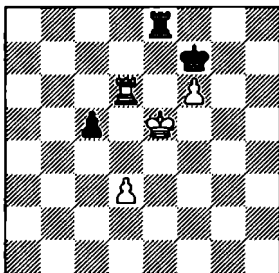
48...c2 loses to 49.♞h7 ♔e8 50.f7† ♔e7 51.f8♙†! ♔xf8 52.♞h8† ♔e7 53.♞xc8 winning the rook and stopping the pawn.

49.♞e7†

More elegant is 49.♞a7 c2 50.♔g7 with the terrible threat of f7-f8♙. For instance 50...♔d8 51.f7 ♞c7 52.♞a1! winning, but I chose the other possibility as the main line, since it has relevance even if the whole position was somehow shifted one line to the left.

49...♔d8 50.♞e1

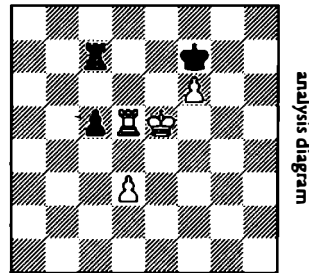
White wins by pushing his pawn. However, Black could probably have saved the day by means of 45...♞e8†!



46.♔f5 (46.♔d5 ♞c8 leads to a repetition of the position) 46...♞e3 or 46...♞e1 when it is hard to suggest a winning plan for White.

46.♞d8?

Rubinstein misses a nice way to put Black in zugzwang with 46.♞d5!



Black cannot avoid the decisive deterioration of his position. Here are some possible continuations:

a) 46...♔g6 or 46...♔f8 are met by 47.♞d8!(†) when after 47...♔f7 White can take advantage of the restricted position of the enemy rook by 48.♔d6 ♞a7 49.♞d7†! with a winning pawn ending.

b) 46...c4 loses the pawn after 47.♔d6 ♞c8 48.♔d7 followed by dxc4, when the black king will remain cut off from the white c-pawn.

c) This leaves Black with the necessity of moving the rook along the c-file. 46...♞c6 has the drawback of leaving the eighth rank undefended, allowing White additional possibilities:

47.♞d7† ♔e8

Black has to attack the rook, since 47...♔f8 allows 48.♔f5 followed by ♔g6.

48.f7†!

This move would not be possible if the black rook was on c8.

48...♔f8 49.♞d6!

Making the f6-square available to the king.

49...♞c8

In case of 49...♞c7 White has an already familiar idea at his disposal: 50.♞d8† ♔xf7 51.♔d6! followed by ♞d7† exchanging rooks and reaching a won pawn ending.

50.♔f6

Now White's simplest winning idea is ♞e6-e8†, reaching a won pawn ending. Black can still try 50...c4 51.dxc4 ♞c6 hoping for stalemate, but the simple 52.♔e6 or 52.♞e6 both win for White.

d) Black's most stubborn defence is 46...♞c8 but it shouldn't save him either after:

47.♞d7† ♕e8

47...♔g6 would leave the king terribly misplaced after 48.♞g7†.

48.♞h7

Forcing the enemy rook to occupy a more exposed square.

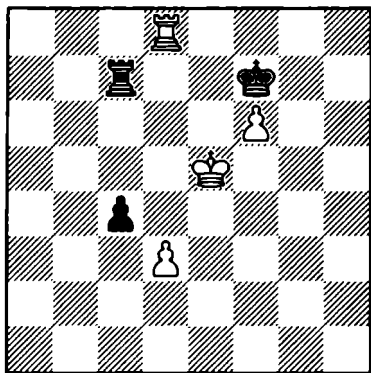
48...♞c6 49.♞a7

Before starting concrete operations, White should improve the position of his rook. One possible way to go wrong by hurrying in is 49.♕f5 ♞d6 50.♔g6 ♞xd3 51.♞h8† ♔d7 52.f7 ♞g3† with a draw. The king can only escape from checks by hiding on f8, but this would allow Black to generate adequate counterplay with his own pawn.

49...♞c8

What else? 49...♞b6 50.♞c7 or 49...c4 50.f7† ♕f8 51.♔d5 are equally hopeless. Now 50.♕f5 followed by ♔g6 wins.

46...c4?



This move should have immediately led to defeat. Rosselli might have feared that in case of more neutral continuations he would have the same problems as in the game, combined with the weakness of the c5-pawn. For instance: 46...♞c6 47.♞d7† ♕f8 48.♕f5 or 46...♞a7 47.♞h8 ♞a3 48.♞h7† ♕f8 49.♞d7 followed by either ♕e6, ♕f5-g6 or ♔d5xc5. In the previous edition I shared his point of view, but things are not that

simple. After 49...♞a1, suggested by Mühlberger, it is hard to see how White could achieve more than exchanging the f- and c-pawns, which would lead to a theoretical draw.

47.♞h8?

Incredible! Rubinstein misses a forced win.

47.♔d6! c3

He must have failed to see how he could stop this pawn. After 47...♞a7 48.dxc4 White wins easily, because the black king is cut off on the longer side of the pawn.

48.♞h8!!

Not an easy move to find, I agree. The position is quite remarkable. White threatens the deadly ♞h7† followed by ♞xc7, winning the black rook and stopping the pawn. Black cannot do anything about it. His rook is literally trapped: all the squares along the c-file are under white control, while the seventh rank is not safe either, because of the previously mentioned threat.

47...♞c6

47...♞c5† would allow 48.♔d6.

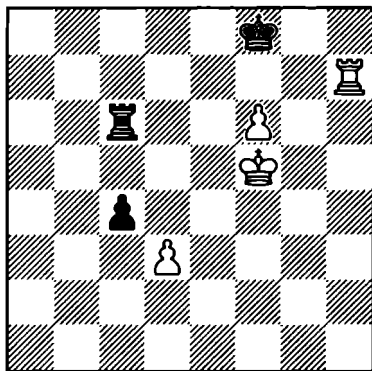
48.♞h7†

48.♔d5 misses the win by one tempo: 48...♞xf6 49.dxc4 ♕e7 50.c5 ♔d7

48...♕f8

The best square. Other moves would allow an immediate win: 48...♔g8? 49.f7†! ♕f8 50.♔d5 followed by dxc4. Or 48...♔g6? 49.♞g7† ♕h6 50.♞g8! (threatening f7-f8 check) 50...♞c7 51.dxc4 and Black loses.

49.♕f5



49...c3

Rosselli chooses the most natural continuation. He probably wanted his pawn to be supported by the rook, but it was more important to control the e1-square in certain lines. Besides, his rook is denied what could have been an easy route to activity: c2-g2.

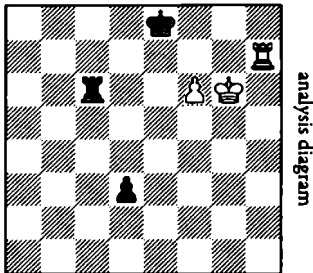
49...cxd3!?

This would have been entirely possible as well:

50.♔g6

50.♞d7 ♞c1 would lead to a simple Philidor position draw.

50...♔e8



51.♞e7†

After 51.♞h8† ♔d7 52.♞h1 ♞c2 53.f7 ♞g2† 54.♔f6 ♞f2† 55.♔g7 ♞g2† 56.♔f8 d2 White cannot free his king.

51...♔d8

51...♔f8 52.♞d7 followed by ♞d7xd3-h3 wins, as in a previous note.

52.♞e1

52.♞e3 ♔d6 53.♔g7 d2 54.f7 d1♞ 55.f8♞†

Usually in such situations the player to queen first is winning, but here Black is safe: 55...♔c7 56.♞c3† ♞c6.

52...♔d7!?

52...♞c2 would free the f-pawn too early, while the king is badly placed on the last rank. 53.f7 ♞g2† 54.♔h5 ♞h2† Because of the threat ♞e8, Black has to keep on checking. 55.♔g4 ♞h8 56.♔f5 d2 57.♞h1! winning an important tempo and the game.

53.♞d1!?

53.♔g7 ♞c2 54.f7 would now be safe for Black, although 54...♞g2† is the only move: 55.♔h6

(55.♔f8 is pointless) ♞f2 and White cannot make progress.

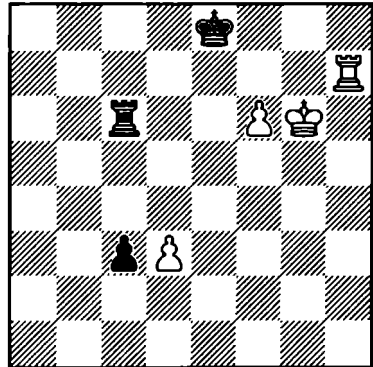
53...♞d6 54.♔g7 ♞d4 55.f7 ♞g4† 56.♔f6 ♞f4† 57.♔g6 ♔e7 58.♞e1† ♔d7

White cannot use his rook to cover the king.

50.♔g6

In spite of White's obvious progress, Black amazingly hasn't exhausted his defensive resources yet.

50...♔e8



51.♞h8†

It is obvious that White will have to retreat his rook in order to stop the enemy pawn. Rubinstein's desire to clear the way of his pawn before that is perfectly understandable.

Besides, the immediate 51.♞h1 would not be sufficient for a win. I suppose that Rubinstein calculated the following study-like variation:

51...c2 52.♔g7 ♞c7† 53.♔g8 c1♞!

Otherwise White would win with ♞e1†.

54.♞xcl ♞xcl 55.f7† ♔d7! 56.f8♞ ♞c8 with a draw.

However, the concrete solution he chose has the significant drawback of driving the enemy king to a more active square.

In the previous edition I claimed that White would have won with:

51.♞e7†

The attempt to keep the king in front of the enemy pawn with 51...♔f8 leads to a rapid loss after 52.♞a7 For instance 52...♔e8 53.♔g7 or

52...♞c8 53.♞h7!. These oscillations of the rook have great artistic value.

Therefore, Black has to play:

51...♝d8

When after

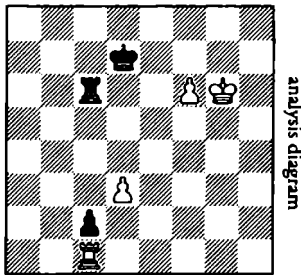
52.♞e1

I considered that his king would be just one step too far away to generate the counterplay Rosselli lacked in the game. My main line continued:

52...♝d7 53.♝g7 ♝d6 54.f7 ♞c8 55.f8♣† ♞xf8 56.♝xf8 ♝d5 57.♞e4!

and White keeps everything under control.

However, I was only partly right when I stated that 52...c2 (instead of 52...♝d7) 53.♞c1 ♝d7 would just transpose to the game.



Indeed, this is precisely the final position of the game, but with the significant difference that it is White to move now! It is Mühlberger's merit to have discovered that this is a mutual zugzwang, something quite remarkable with seven pieces on the board.

Before giving some concrete lines, I shall try to explain in abstract terms this curious situation. Reciprocal zugzwang implies optimal placement of all the pieces, of both colours. Any legal move (of either side) would just worsen the position. We can notice that the white rook lacks mobility, while the d-pawn safely prevents the black rook from being activated along the third or fourth rank. The fifth rank is much less suited for the purpose of counterplay, since it is situated too close to the white king. Advancing this central pawn would immediately allow effective counterplay starting with ...♞c3. The black rook is also submitted to firm restrictions: In order to maintain the balance,

it has to defend the c-pawn and pin the enemy f-pawn at the same time. The situation of the black king is directly influenced by the previously mentioned aspects. The only way of activating His Majesty would be to step onto the sixth rank, thus unpinning the f-pawn, which would have fatal consequences.

Finally, we shall examine some simple variations in order to explain why the obligation to move is unfavourable to the white king:

The most natural move is 54.♝g7 preparing the advance of the pawn, but in this case Black can regroup effectively with 54...♞c7 (or the equally good 54...♝e6) in order to re-build the defensive line along the seventh rank after 55.f7 ♝e6. In fact, the position certainly became simpler for Black now, since the king is prepared for launching effective counterplay after, say, 56.♞e1† ♝d5.

The only reasonable alternative is 54.♝f7 but this move hardly threatens anything because the f-pawn is blocked now. Most of the possible rook moves along the c-file would be sufficient for equality, but I have chosen the one that could lead to another position of mutual zugzwang: 54...♞c7 55.♝g7 ♝d6†!

Only this triangle manoeuvre saves the day.

The immediate 55...♝e6† loses to 56.♝g6 when Black is in zugzwang.

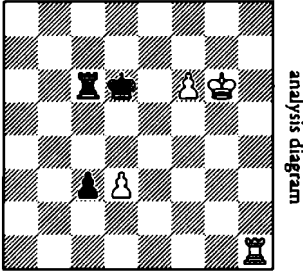
56.♝g6 ♝e6 and we have reached the same position but with White to move. He has nothing better than 57.f7 ♞xf7 58.♞e1† but then 58...♝d5 draws easily.

I shall mention one more interesting possibility. Instead of 52.♞e1, the straightforward 52.♝g7 would lead to another miraculous escape for Black after 52...c2 53.f7 ♝xe7 54.f8♣† ♝d7 and with accurate defence by Black the queen cannot reach the c1-square. For instance, 55.♣f5† ♝e8 56.♣e4† ♝d7 57.♣g4† ♝e8 58.♣h5† ♝d7 and White has nothing more than perpetual check. The careless 59.♣h3† would even lose after 59...♝c7 60.♣h2† ♝b7 when the pawn will promote.

51...♝d7 52.♞h1 c2?

Vulnerant omnes, ultima necat ("All of them wound, the last one kills") is an approximate translation.)

In chess, the winner is usually the player who makes the last but one mistake. As Rosselli indicated in *L'Italia Scacchistica*, 1924, he would have drawn without difficulty after the correct 52...♔d6.



His line continues 53.f7 ♔e5†(?) 54.♔g7(?) ♖c8 55.f8♗ ♗xf8 56.♔xf8 ♔d4 when the white king is too far away to support the rook.

However, Rosselli's analysis contains a serious flaw. Mühlberger pointed out that White can improve with 54.♔g5!! avoiding the eventual pin of the f-pawn with ...♖e7. After the forced 54...♖c8 White wins with 55.♖e1† ♔d4 56.♖e8. And yet, Rosselli's general assessment is correct. The only thing needed is to choose the trajectory of the king more carefully. Jacob Aagaard correctly pointed out that 53...♔d5† 54.♔g5 ♖c8 more or less transposes to Rosselli's variation, without allowing the transfer of the white rook to e8.

53.♖c1

1-0

After 53.♖c1 ♔e8 (As previously mentioned, the more active looking 53...♔e6 has the major drawback of releasing the pin of the f-pawn, allowing 54.f7 ♔e7† 55.♔g7 with an immediate win.) 54.♔g7 ♖c7† 55.♔g8! White would not only threaten ♖e1 followed by f7, but would also put Black in zugzwang: he would have had to abandon the c2-pawn or allow f7-f8 right away.

As far as I know, this is the first time this endgame has been submitted to a thorough analysis. In spite of the frequent mistakes from both sides I consider it, together with its hidden lines, quite instructive.

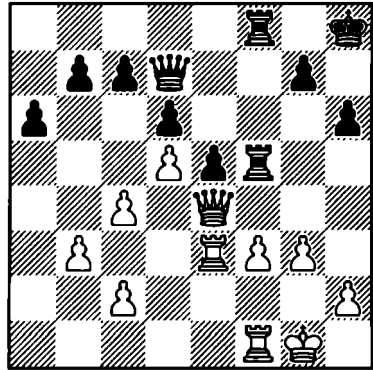
The last three games have in common the almost perfect symmetry of the actions carried out on the

opposite wings. Such artistic aspects can be more often found in studies, rather than in practical games. And yet Akiba was, above all, a great artist. If he had been at the same level as a practical player then chess history might have been quite different.

However, the artist had to play practical games all the time. And practice does not always offer the possibility of carrying out ideas in their purest form. But once the reader understands how effective an attack on two wings can be, the same as a rook's aggression from two different sides, I am sure he will enjoy the following game as well.

David Janowski – Akiba Rubinstein

Carlsbad 1907



The pawn structure is characteristic of the King's Indian Defence, although this opening was a rare bird in those remote days. Black has some pressure on the f-file, but this is obviously insufficient for a win.

29...♗d8!!

This is one of Rubinstein's most famous moves. Janowski, who was mainly an attacking player, could not have foreseen this and he must have thought that Rubinstein was planning ...♗g5 in order to strengthen the attack on the wing where he already had some pressure. Therefore, he played

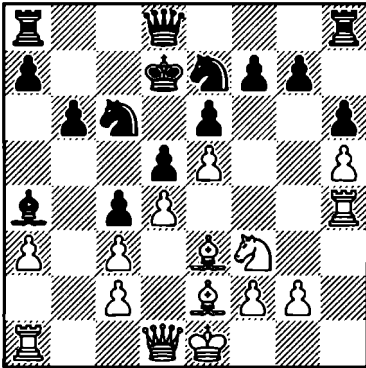
30.♗g4

just to get a shock after
30...♗b8!!

Using a highly original route the queen is transferred to the left wing. This does not yet guarantee an advantage for Black, but increases the probability of a mistake from White, who is under pressure on both sides.

This game inspired a more recent world title candidate:

Andrei Sokolov – Artur Yusupov
Candidates Match (1), Riga 1986



14...♖g8! 15.♞d2 ♗h7 16.♞c1 ♘c7 17.♞f4 ♞a8
18.♟h4 ♟d8! 19.♙g4 ♘b7 20.♞f3 ♙e8! 21.♞h3
g5! 22.hxg6 fxg6 with good counterplay for Black.

31.♘g2 ♞a7 32.♞fe1 ♞c5 33.♞e4 ♞b4

Now White has to permanently worry about a further a5-a4, weakening the queenside and opening the a-file in order to penetrate with the rooks.

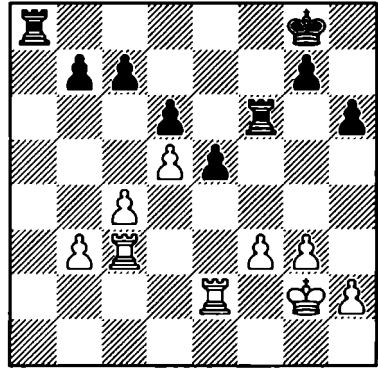
34.♞e2 ♞f6 35.♞d3 ♘g8

The last two moves were typical of Rubinstein. He improved the position of his pieces in view of the predictable endgame. The king was brought closer to the centre and the rook defended “in advance” the d6-pawn, which could become vulnerable after a later c4-c5. Nevertheless, here, or on the previous move, b7-b6 could have been better, slowing down White’s attack on the queenside.

36.♞c3 a5 37.♞xb4 axb4 38.c3 bxc3 39.♞xc3

As Jacob Aagaard pointed out, 39.♞a2 is not efficient in the fight for the a-file because of 39...c2!. The e3-rook is busy defending the f3-pawn forcing White to abandon the open file anyway with 40.♞xc2.

39...♞a8



40.♘h3?

It is not easy to find the right square for the king in such a position. On g2 it looks a bit passive, while on e4 it could become vulnerable. On the other hand, White had the active 40.c5 at his disposal, leaving the question of where to put the king for later. In this case Black could not have claimed any advantage.

40...b6 41.♘g4

Consequent... and bad!

41...♞a1 42.♞b2

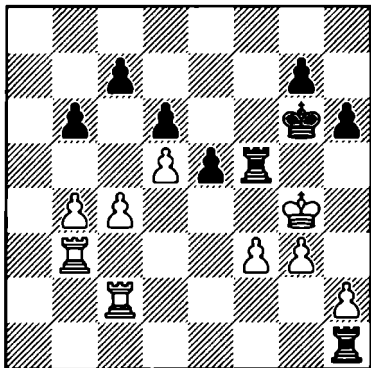
The *strategic* continuation 42.h4 ♞h1 43.h5 would have a serious tactical drawback: The white king would find himself in a mating net: 43...♘h7 44.♞a2 g6 45.hxg6 ♘xg6 46.f4 e4! mating in a few moves.

42...♘h7!

We already know (for instance from the game against Alekhine) that Rubinstein had no prejudice regarding such apparent loss of time. A few moves ago he considered it necessary to bring the king closer to the centre. However, after White’s adventurous play, starting with his 40th move, Akiba discovered that the king would be needed on g6 in order to build a mating net.

43.b4 ♖g6 44.♞b3

The attack on the queenside is not easy to carry out, since the d5-pawn would become weak. Meanwhile, dark clouds gather around the white king.

44...♞f5 45.♞c2 ♞h1

Just compare Akiba's rooks with their white colleagues! Black threatens 46...♞g5† 47.♖h3 ♞h5† 40.♖g4 ♞xh2 41.♞xh2 ♞xh2 not only winning material but, after the elimination of the important h2-defender, creating the threat of ...h5 mate!

46.f4

46.h4 would hardly be a solution because of 46...h5 mate, while 46.♞b2 would lose the f3-pawn: 46...h5† 47.♖h3 ♞xf3. Besides, the king would not have improved his situation...

46...cxf4 47.gxf4 h5† 48.♖g3 ♞g1† 49.♖f2 ♞g4

This move wins an important pawn, but once the mating threats disappear White will have chances to start a powerful queenside counterattack. His main trumps are a considerable advantage in space on the queenside, and the weakness of the c7-pawn. At first sight, it might seem that defending this weakness and preventing the thematic break ♖ at the same time is quite impossible. Therefore, it is highly instructive to follow the way Rubinstein limits White's counterplay.

50.♞f3 ♞gxf4 51.♞xf4 ♞xf4† 52.♖e3 ♖f5 53.♖d3 ♞f3† 54.♖d4 ♞b3!

This accurate move will force White to play the undesirable b5, after which the break based on c5 can be carried out only by tactical means. Basically, it is a more refined form of the manoeuvre ♞g4-g7 from the game against Duras.

55.♞f2† ♖g6 56.♞g2† ♖h6

White does his best: he pushed the enemy king to a passive position.

57.b5

57.♞a2 would have been answered by the accurate 57...b5! 58.♞a7 ♞xb4 winning, as the c7-pawn is taboo.

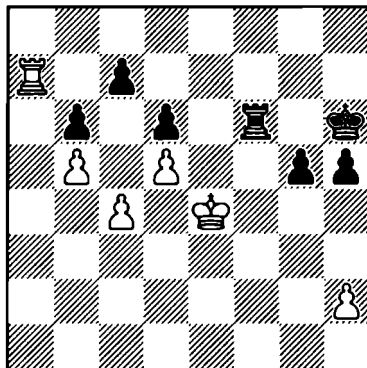
57...♞xb4? would be worse in view of the intermediate 58.♖c3! and only after 58...♞b1, 59.♞a7 winning the c7-pawn.

57...♞f3

Once the queenside incursion has been crowned with success, the rook returns to f7 in order to defend the weak pawn.

58.♖e4 ♞f6 59.♞a2

Or 59.h4 ♞g6 winning, as Lisitzin pointed out. The rook would go to g4, in order to attack the fourth rank weaknesses.

59...g5 60.♞a7**60...♞f4†!**

Another accurate move, pushing the king back to an unfavourable square, as we shall see in three moves.

61.♖d3 ♞f7 62.c5!?

The only chance.

62...dxc5 63.d6 ♞d7!

This would not have worked with the king on e4.

64.♖xc7 ♖xd6† 65.♙e4 ♖d4†!

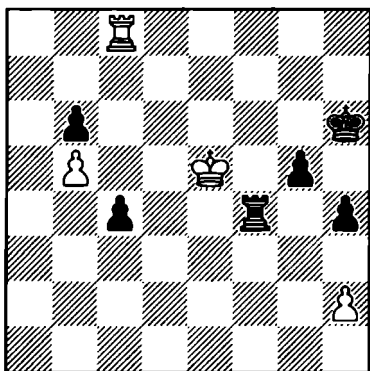
65...♗g6 would have been too passive: after 66.♙f5 White would threaten the unpleasant ♖c6. 66.♙f5

As we shall see, the white king will not be able to seriously threaten his black colleague. Therefore, 66.♙e3 came into consideration, in order to fight against the passed pawns. Even so, it is true that after 66...g4 followed by ♙g5-h4-h3 Black should win.

66...h4 67.♖c8

After 67.♖c6† ♙h5 68.♖xb6 White would have finally obtained some counterplay, but as Lisitzin indicated, after 68...♖f4† 69.♙e5 ♖f2 the black pawns would have been much faster.

67...♖f4† 68.♙e5 c4



The white king is cut off along the fourth rank and the rook cannot fight alone against all those advancing pawns.

69.♖h8† ♙g7 70.♖c8 ♙g6 71.♖g8† ♙h5 72.h3 c3 73.♖h8† ♙g6 74.♖g8† ♙h6 75.♖h8† ♙g7 76.♖c8 ♖f3 77.♖c6 ♖xh3 78.♖xb6 ♖f3

and just at the moment when he had created a passed pawn, White resigned.

0-1

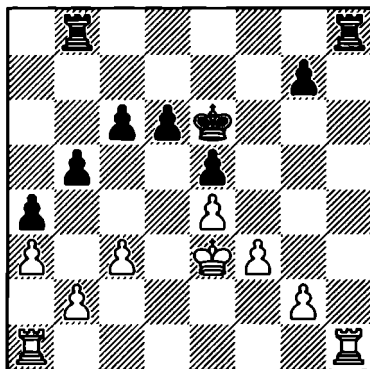
The pawn structure is the starting point for the objective evaluation of any position as well as for elaborating a plan. The previous examples

have been excellent illustrations of this axiom. Exaggerated optimism can lead to misguided plans and, quite logically, to catastrophe.

The next game is a typical example of what can happen when the defending side tries to equalize too quickly.

Gregory Levenfish – Akiba Rubinstein

Russian Championship, Vilnius 1912



Black has the better pawn structure and potential chances of penetrating with his king through the weakened squares of the queenside. White, the future author of a famous endgame monograph, tried to annihilate Black's supremacy in the centre but underestimated this last mentioned danger. Instead, he should have accepted that his position is worse and prepared to endure strong and long lasting pressure.

30...d5 31.g3 g5 32.f4?! ♗f4† 33.♗f4 dxe4 34.♙xe4 ♗f4 35.♙xf4 ♙d5

Suddenly it appears that White is also underdeveloped as the a1-rook is still out of play. It is hard to believe that the situation of this rook will actually become even worse.

36.♖hd1† ♙c5

Typical for Rubinstein. He does not want to give his opponent the possibility of defending the b2-pawn from b4. Actually, this still wouldn't have saved White: 36...♙c4 37.♖d4† ♙b3 38.♖b4† ♙c2 39.♖g1 c5! For instance: 40.♖g2† ♙b1 41.♖e4 ♖bf8† 42.♙e3 (White would lose

the rook after 42.♔e5 ♖e8† 42...♞h3† 43.♔d2 ♔xb2 with a decisive advantage.

37.♖d2 ♞hf8† 38.♔g3

Unfortunately for him, the white king has to go in the opposite direction to his wishes: 38.♔e3 ♖be8† (once again Rubinstein's rooks are very powerful) 39.♔d3 ♖d8† 40.♔c2 ♖xd2† 41.♔xd2 ♖f2† would be very similar to the end of the game.

38...♞b7 39.♔h2 ♞h7† 40.♔g1 ♖g7† 41.♖g2 ♖xg2† 42.♔xg2 ♖d8

White avoided the mate, but his king cannot come to help in time.

43.♔f3 ♖d2 44.♞a2

44.♞b1 ♔c4 is not much fun either.

44...♖d1

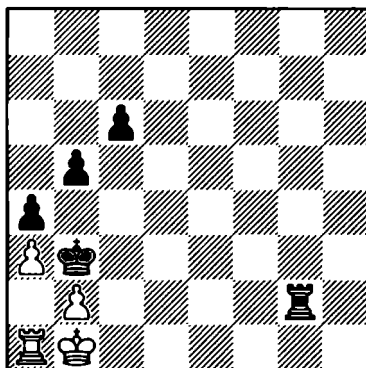
Actually, there was no trap at all. 44...♔c4 was entirely possible and if 45.b3† then 45...♔xc3, but Rubinstein must have been too amused by the position of the white rook to allow such an exchange.

45.♔e2 ♞h1 46.♔d3 ♖g1 47.c4

Desperation. If 47.♔d2 then 47...♔c4 winning easily.

47...♖g3†

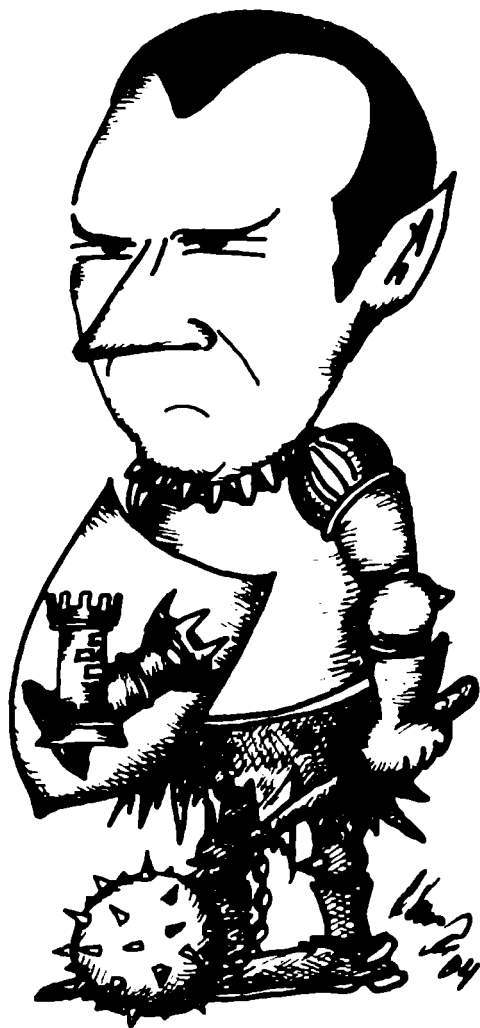
Levenfish did not really feel like finishing in the position after 48.♔c2 ♔xc4 49.♞a1 ♖g2† 50.♔b1 ♔b3.



In fact, if we did not know in advance, we would hardly suspect that this diagram and the previous one are both related to the same game. Publishing the two positions together with the question "Please try to find 5 small differences" would not be a very difficult test...

0-1

Alexander Alekhine and the Fourth Phase of the Game



We are all familiar with the magical attraction exerted by chess. Once a person (be it a child or an adult, it does not matter) has learned it properly he or she will long to play again and again and will feel the emotion of each game with intensity as if it was a matter of life and death.

Equally remarkable is the fact that even in the darkest periods of the history of mankind chess has managed to maintain its status as the royal game. Many of the greatest chess masters have also appeared to enjoy a protected status even when confronted by the most powerful dictators. A good example is the rather paradoxical attitude of the Soviet regime towards a certain refugee named Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine.

Coming from a rich and influential family, Alekhine had every reason to disagree with the political changes during what could have been the best years of his youth. The new regime took from him practically all his goods and wealth. There were even rumours that if had he not been such a strong chess player he would have been killed. After having failed to embark on the last ship with emigrants departing from Odessa, Alekhine had to find a way of making a living. His broad education allowed him to gain very good jobs, which he fulfilled conscientiously.

However, in 1921 the chance to play a tournament in France arose and Alekhine chose liberty; he never returned to his homeland. The future World Champion was strongly focused on his chess career and avoided making political declarations, but one relatively innocent statement he apparently made was enough for the Soviet leaders to declare him an enemy of the state.

We now reach the most interesting part of the whole issue. By normal Soviet standards, Alekhine should have immediately become a *non-person* whose name would have disappeared from all the archives, never to be officially mentioned again. However, the leaders seem to have understood that Alekhine was a unique figure, not only as a player but also as a commentator. His books on the New York tournaments of 1924 and 1927 were published in Russian (what is more, with the author's approval!) as well as many other games annotated by Alekhine.

The man who made Chigorin's dreams come true

With the passing years Alekhine became, in the official Soviet view, an essential link in the long chain of glorious Russian players. He was the man who made Chigorin's dreams come true and inspired Botvinnik to take over the relay. The other communist countries naturally shared this point of view. It is quite significant that, in my youth, the three most outstanding chess books published in Romanian were the translations from Russian of the best game collections of the following players: Chigorin, Alekhine and Botvinnik.

My whole childhood and, indirectly, my entire chess career were influenced by a book I found in my father's library, *300 partide alese ale lui Alehim* (Alekhine's 300 selected games), published in 1957.

Alekhine's moves and comments were those of the hero that every child needs for inspiration. Even the biographical chapter written by Panov was melodramatic enough (though strongly politicised, the way I see it now) to match any best-selling novel from the Romanian market.

For years I spent countless hours working with that book, or simply reading it. I allowed myself to be separated from my hero's games only for such boring activities as my school duties, eating or sleeping. This attitude was directly encouraged and inspired by the book itself. Panov writes that Alekhine's thoughts were permanently focused on chess even when he had to do something different, and that he always carried with him a pocket chess set.

Game collections of strong players are always instructive but are rarely presented in a systematic way. However, Alekhine's games were reserved by fate for a different treatment.

Soon after the champion's death one of the leading Soviet grandmasters, namely Alexander Kotov, started structuring the wealth of Alekhine's games according to tactical and strategic themes. This was intended to help the reader improve his understanding of chess. The final result of years of work

was the two volume book *Shakhmatnoe nasledie A. A. Alekhina* (Alekhine's chess inheritance).

I became acquainted with Kotov's book much later than with Alekhine's 300 selected games. Although I was familiar with most of the games, I understood that Kotov had done a really great job. His introductions to the chapters as well as the classification of the material are highly instructive.

It would have been, however, impossible to give deep comments to more than 360 games, so he limited himself to quoting Alekhine's own notes or stating some general considerations.

In this chapter, inspired by one of the sections of Kotov's work, I shall focus on a very interesting theme: positions where each side has only queen and one rook left (and pawns, of course). I have used examples cited by Kotov as well as some of his ideas. However, I have focused more than he did on the critical moments, dug deeper analytically and arranged the games in what seemed to me the most logical order.

General considerations

What makes these positions so special?

The first impulse is to classify them as endgames, because of the reduced number of pieces left on the board. On the other hand elements of the middlegame are also present: a queen in collaboration with a rook can be a devastating force, especially when attacking the enemy king.

This obvious difficulty of strictly classifying these positions caused Romanovsky to baptize them *the fourth stage of the game*, along with the opening, the middlegame and the endgame.

However, this definition only offers a limited solution from the abstract point of view of chess terminology. For practical reasons, it is more important to understand the way the dual character of the position is reflected in its evaluation and the choice of plans.

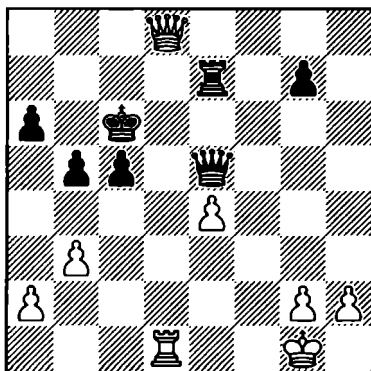
The most difficult decision to be made regards the kings' positions. For the eventuality that queens may be exchanged, the kings should be ready for rapid centralization. At the same time, kings are best advised not to abandon their residences while

middlegame influences remain. This obvious contradiction makes long term planning quite difficult for both sides.

For instance, if one of the players attempts a mating attack, he should constantly take into account that the initially exposed enemy king could instantly become a strong centralized piece in case of simplifications. In the game fragment presented below I benefited from this interesting psychological situation by turning a basically losing position into a win.

Valentin Stoica – Mihail Marin

Eforie 1988



Right after the opening my experienced opponent (future friend and trainer) carried out a nice tactical operation, winning a pawn and forcing my king to travel from g8 to c6. The material advantage and attacking chances are sufficient reasons to consider White's position objectively winning. However, proving this in practice is not easy since there is no immediate technical solution, while attacking the king with a reduced number of forces requires imagination and precise calculation.

Judging from the course of the game, it seems that my opponent completely underestimated my potential resources for counterplay. They consist of the queenside majority supported by the king and would become quite significant in the case of simplifications.

33. ♖c8†

Since the d-file does not offer White a direct path to the enemy king, he should have opened new lines on the queenside.

Therefore, the strongest move was 33.a4!. Facing the immediate threat of an attack along the a-file (or, in case of ...bxa4, the b-file) Black has to regroup with 33...♞c7. However, this move allows White to centralise his queen with 34.axb5† axb5 (Although strategically undesirable, 34...♟xb5 as suggested by Malfagia, would be relatively safer. The queenside weaknesses would be compensated by the vulnerability of the e4-pawn.) 35.♞d5† when after 35...♟b6 he can create decisive threats with 36.♞a1 ♞e8 37.b4!. The black king's shelter is destroyed and the attack is unstoppable. For instance 37...cxb4 38.♞d4† ♞c5 39.♞a6† winning the queen. Instead of 37.b4, the natural 37.♞d2 would be less clear because of 37...♟b7! and White has no clear continuation of the attack.

This variation was not easy to foresee from the beginning, although after 33.a4 intuition could have led White, step by step, on the right path.

A second best continuation was 33.h4!? securing the first rank (an important detail, as we shall see) and preparing a dangerous candidate for promotion in the endgame. Black would not be able to organize any counterplay, since his pieces would be practically tied up to the defence of the king.

If 33...♟b7, with the aim of placing the king on a safer square, White could play 34.♞d5† ♞xd5 35.exd5 with a clear extra tempo compared to the game, which would have made his winning chances significantly higher.

33...♟b6 34.♞d8†

34.a4 would still have been unpleasant for Black.

34...♟b7!?

Vali's intention might have been to repeat moves once in order to approach the time control, but he only helped me improve my king's position. The threat ...♞xe4 became real now.

35.♞d5†

This move allows the biggest part of the advantage to slip away.

Failing to find an attacking plan, Vali decides to

give the game a technical character. He might have hoped that the concession of exchanging queens would be compensated by the creation of a strong passed pawn, supported by the rook. This overlooks that the previously exposed black king will easily block it. This is an important detail because the black rook will be allowed to start dangerous counterplay.

35.♞e1, defending the pawn, should have been preferred. In this case, Black would have faced a difficult defence but no immediate danger of losing.

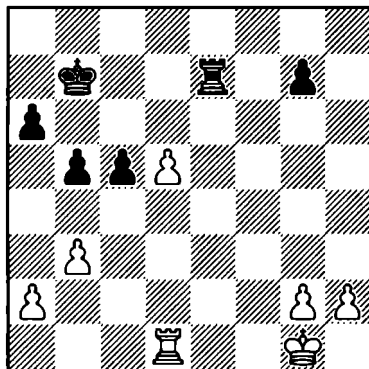
35...♞xd5

I had no interest in continuing to play with the queens on the board. After 35...♟b6, the queen incursion 36.♞a8 would lead nowhere because of 36...♞e8 when the queen has to return to d5, since 37.♞d8 even loses to 37...♞a1† 38.♟f2 ♞f6†.

Instead, White could have continued 36.♞d3 since 36...♞xe4 is not a threat any more because of 37.♞d6† ♟b7 38.♞xc5 with a clear advantage.

36.exd5

Finding himself in time pressure, my opponent must have been seduced by the idea that the immediate 36...♟c7, planning to block the pawn from d7, is not possible because of the fork on d6. As the further course of the game will prove, this detail is not sufficient for a win.

**36...♞e2**

During the game I did not hesitate for a moment to activate my rook.

However, the more solid 36... $\text{\textcircled{R}}d7$, intending to block the pawn with the king on d6, would have been entirely playable.

A possible continuation is 37.h4 $\text{\textcircled{C}}c7$ 38.d6 $\text{\textdagger}!$?. Allowing the king to reach the d6-square would mean giving up any winning attempts. In fact, I would already prefer Black's position.

38... $\text{\textcircled{R}}xd6$

This capture is also forced. Otherwise the black rook will stay passive for the rest of the game.

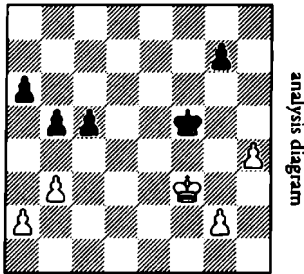
39. $\text{\textcircled{R}}xd6$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}xd6$ 40. $\text{\textcircled{C}}f2$

White's kingside majority is an important positional factor, but it is compensated by the black king's superior activity.

40... $\text{\textcircled{C}}e5$ 41. $\text{\textcircled{C}}e3$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}f5$

Threatening to attack the pawns with $\text{\textcircled{C}}g4$.

42. $\text{\textcircled{C}}f3$



42...a5

After general pawn exchanges the most probable outcome would be a position with white king and a-pawn versus black king. Since the black a-pawn is likely to be the last one to fall, it is useful to advance it as far as possible in order to allow the black king to reach the b8-square in time.

43.g4 \textdagger

The careless 43.a4?? even loses to 43...c4 44.bxc4 bxa4.

43... $\text{\textcircled{C}}e5$ 44. $\text{\textcircled{C}}e3$ a4 45.bxa4 bxa4 46.a3 c4 47.h5 $\text{\textcircled{C}}f6$ 48. $\text{\textcircled{C}}f4$ c3 49.g5 \textdagger $\text{\textcircled{C}}e6$ 50. $\text{\textcircled{C}}e3$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}f5$

It is easy to establish that the black king will reach the b8-square in time.

White can try a different move order, starting with 37. $\text{\textcircled{C}}f2$, when for a while play continues in similar fashion:

37... $\text{\textcircled{C}}c7$ 38.d6 \textdagger $\text{\textcircled{R}}xd6$ 39. $\text{\textcircled{R}}xd6$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}xd6$ 40. $\text{\textcircled{C}}e3$

$\text{\textcircled{C}}e5$ 41. $\text{\textcircled{C}}d3$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}d5$

Compared with the previous variation, the kingside has not yet been weakened. This allows the king to stay closer to the other wing in order to win space with 42.a4 $\text{\textcircled{C}}e5$ 43.a5 $\text{\textcircled{C}}d5$ 44.h4 $\text{\textcircled{C}}e5$ 45. $\text{\textcircled{C}}e3$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}d5$ and the threat of playing ... $\text{\textcircled{C}}c4$ followed by ... $\text{\textcircled{C}}xc4$ winning, forces White to repeat the position with 46. $\text{\textcircled{C}}d3$.

37.d6 $\text{\textcircled{C}}c8$ 38. $\text{\textcircled{R}}d5$ $\text{\textcircled{R}}c2$

While talking to my opponent fifteen years later, I considered that there was a good chance his wounds had healed so I finally opened the subject of this dramatic game.

Among other interesting things, Vali told me that he considers 38... $\text{\textcircled{R}}xa2$ to be sufficient for a draw as well, suggesting the following variation:

39. $\text{\textcircled{R}}xc5$ \textdagger $\text{\textcircled{C}}d7$ 40. $\text{\textcircled{R}}c7$ \textdagger $\text{\textcircled{C}}xd6$ 41. $\text{\textcircled{R}}xg7$ $\text{\textcircled{R}}a3$ 42.h4 $\text{\textcircled{R}}xb3$ 43.h5 $\text{\textcircled{R}}e3$!

The most efficient way to fight against White's advancing passed pawn.

44.h6 $\text{\textcircled{R}}e1$ \textdagger !

An important intermediate check.

45. $\text{\textcircled{C}}h2$ $\text{\textcircled{R}}e6$ 46.h7 $\text{\textcircled{R}}h6$ \textdagger 47. $\text{\textcircled{C}}g3$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}e5$ 48. $\text{\textcircled{C}}g4$ $\text{\textcircled{C}}f6$

Black is just in time to eliminate the main source of danger.

During the game I did not want to give up my c5-pawn so easily, as if anticipating the further course of the game. Vali even asked me whether I was playing for a win at this point of the game, but such a thought was beyond my ambition.

39.d7 \textdagger

With this nervous move exposing the passed pawn even more, White makes things easier for his opponent.

Black would have needed to show greater accuracy after 39. $\text{\textcircled{R}}g5$. The drawing path would have been quite narrow as we can see from the following variations.

39... $\text{\textcircled{C}}d7$ 40. $\text{\textcircled{R}}xg7$ \textdagger $\text{\textcircled{C}}xd6$ 41.h4

Capturing the a6-pawn with 41. $\text{\textcircled{R}}g6$ \textdagger $\text{\textcircled{C}}d5$ 42. $\text{\textcircled{R}}xa6$ would lose too much time, allowing Black strong counterplay with 42...c4 when the only one risking a loss would be White.

41... $\text{\textcircled{R}}xa2$

The pawn race that will start now is quite exciting, but its outcome will be peaceful.

Optically, it might look as if White's connected pawns will be more dangerous. However, the centralized black king has a significant influence on the evaluation of the position. For instance, it prevents the white rook from holding the c-pawn from behind. This variation is a clear illustration of how the exchange of queens can reverse the situation of the kings.

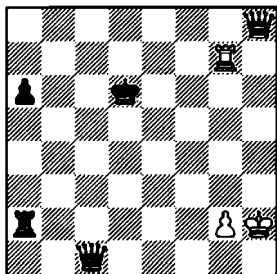
42.h5 c4 43.bxc4 bxc4 44.h6

White could stop the enemy pawn with 44.♖g3 but after 44...♞a5 he will not be able to defend his own runner, for instance 45.♞h3 c3 with a draw.

44...c3 45.h7 c2 46.h8♖ c1♖†

And here is where the unfavourable position of the white king comes into account. If Black had promoted without check, his king would have been quickly mated.

47.♔h2



analysis diagram

After a break of more than 10 moves, we are back in the world of major pieces endgames.

And again Black seems to be in trouble because of his exposed king.

However, he has the accurate 47...♞f4† 48.♞g3 ♞a4! defending the queen and the a-pawn at the same time while also creating the threat of simplification with ...♞h4†. Neither player can do anything to win.

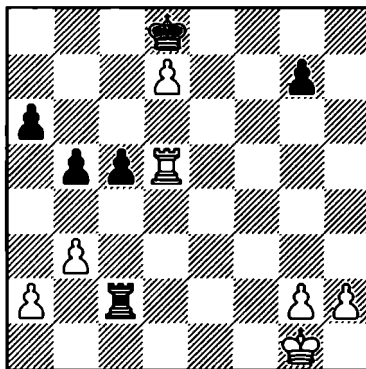
An interesting attempt to improve over this last variation is the immediate 43.h6! without capturing on c4.

Black is best advised not to take on b3, because from b1 his newly born queen would have no possibility of checking the white king after ♔h2, thus leaving her own king exposed to the attack. White's main idea is that after 43...c3 44.h7 c2

45.h8♖ c1♖† 46.♔h2 ♞f4† 47.♞g3 his b3-pawn considerably restricts Black's pieces.

However, the black king now has a reliable shelter on the queenside and after the calm 47...♔c7 his chances would not be worse at all.

39...♔d8



40.a4??

A horrible mistake just before the time control. Seven moves ago this would have been the winning move, but now it leads to disaster. After exchanging queens, Vali might have understood in a flash that a4 instead would have been an efficient method of increasing his advantage. This thought might have followed him subconsciously and, under time pressure, he could have advanced the pawn as a reflex caused by disappointment.

After a normal continuation, such as 40.h4, the game would have ended in a draw, for instance 40...b4 41.♔h2 ♞xa2 42.♞xc5 ♞a3! 43.♞c6 ♔xd7 with complete equality.

40...b4!

Suddenly the threat ...c4 is very strong. Because of the unfavourable position of his king, White is in big trouble.

41.♞d1!?

More stubborn would have been 41.♔f1. Play might have continued:

41...c4 42.♔e1 cxb3 43.♔d1 ♞c7 44.♞d2 a5!

Threatening to transpose to a winning pawn ending with ...♞d7. The immediate 44...♞xd7 would be premature because of 45.a5!

45. ♖b2

There is nothing else left for White.

45... ♜c3

By defending the b3-pawn, Black threatens to capture the d7-pawn with his king, when the win should not present any difficulties.

46. ♗d2 g6! 47. h3 g5

Now, dominated on both wings, White is in zugzwang.

41... ♙c4 42. h4

42. bxc4 loses to 42... b3 when the weakness of White's back rank will allow the pawn to promote without needing help from the black king.

42... ♙xb3 43. ♖h2 b2

Threatening 44... ♜c1.

44. ♖b1 ♕xd7 45. ♕g3 ♖e6

0-1

Although its first step was made to the left, the king is aiming for b3 in order to support the pawn's promotion. (The path is longer only from an optical point of view. Chess geometry differs from what we learn in mathematics).

Therefore, White resigned.

Choosing Alekhine as the model for this chapter was not a casual decision.

Alekhine was a great master of attack. When he transferred such important forces as the queen or rook from one square to another, important changes in the balance of the position occurred with frequency. At least, this was my sensation when working with his games. The positions are, however, so complicated that even he was sometimes unable to avoid mistakes at crucial moments.

It is essential to understand that, in spite of the special character of these positions, general chess principles are still valid. Elements such as the control of open lines or of the centre, passed pawns and king safety are still reliable criteria for the evaluation of positions as well as useful guidelines for choosing a plan.

However, one interesting difference is that the positional factors tend to explode into a direct mating attack, skipping the customary technical phase.

It is well known that in chess one single

favourable element of the position is generally not sufficient for a win. Let us try to apply this axiom to major piece endings. We can state that if the active side controls the only open line then some additional element, such as a strong passed pawn or a pawn weakness in the enemy camp, would be most welcome.

To a certain extent, positional evaluation based on these strategic elements is similar to the mathematical algorithm suggested on page 12 of the chapter dedicated to Rubinstein's rook endings. However, major piece endings are far too complex to be precisely formulated and we shall evaluate each position from this chapter individually and with some degree of uncertainty.

Open lines

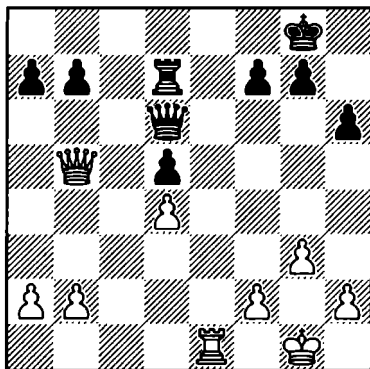
The main issue of this section is the control of open lines. Alekhine used them as an indirect path to the enemy king's position.

The following almost symmetrical position is a perfect illustration of our theme. The only elements that differ between the enemy armies are White's control over the e-file and his slightly more elastic kingside structure.

If we did not know that the position occurred in a real game, we would be tempted to believe that it was an instructional example.

Alexander Alekhine – Erich Eliskases

Buenos Aires Olympiad preliminary 1939



For the moment, both elements mentioned above have a transient character. With active play, Alekhine prevents his advantage from vanishing.

22.♞e8† ♖h7 23.h4!

The advance of this wing pawn not only puts the enemy king under serious pressure, but also creates the conditions for a better structure in case of further simplification.

23...a6

Kotov states that, unfortunately for him, Black cannot react with the strategically desirable 23...h5 because after 24.♞a8 a6 White would play 25.♣e2! creating the double threat of capturing the h5-pawn and penetrating through the last rank. Such retreats of the strongest piece are easy to overlook; see for instance the next game, Ståhlberg–Alekhine.

However, Black can improve over this instructive, but slightly cooperative, variation with 24...♞e7! as suggested by Jacob Aagaard.

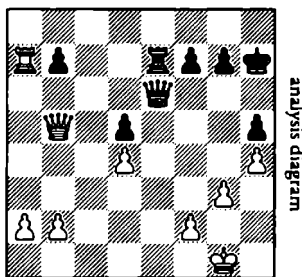
From a philosophical point of view, such an approach has deep significance. In Kotov's line, Black could not defend both his attacked pawns (a7 and h5) and survive at the same time. In the game Alekhine managed to consolidate both his domination along the e-file and the kingside space advantage, which means that Black was forced to make no fewer than two different concessions.

The conclusion is that Black has to give up something anyway, be it of a positional or material nature. Therefore, he should look for a way to make one single concession and get some compensation for it as well.

Specifically, 24...♞e7 seems to be the best way to carry out this abstract idea. Black gives up a pawn in order to gain chances to attack the enemy king, which is temporarily left without defenders. The critical position arises after:

25.♞xa7 ♣e6!

Better than the over-ambitious 25...♞e1† 26.♖g2 ♣e6 when after 27.♣d3† g6 28.♞xb7 followed by ♣f3 White has not only won a second pawn, but is the first to create pressure against the enemy kingside.



What is the most efficient way for White to return home with his pieces while still keeping his extra pawn?

A natural solution is 26.♣d3† but after 26...g6 Black threatens to win the b2-pawn with either ...♣b6 or with ...♣e1† followed by ...♞e2. The slightly strange looking 27.b3 would solve this problem, but would leave the rook completely out of play. Black could continue with the prophylactic move 27...♖g7, defending the f7-pawn and planning a rook invasion through the c-file.

It is hard to believe that White would have winning chances.

Instead White should probably give up his material advantage and try to recover his coordination as soon as possible. This is best achieved with:

26.♞a3!

When play might continue with:

26...♣e1†

The immediate attempt to attack the central pawn with 26...♣e4 is parried by 27.♣d3 pinning the queen and maintaining the material advantage.

27.♖g2 ♣e4†

27...♞e2 would make little sense because of 28.♞f3 defending the f2-pawn and attacking the f7-pawn at the same time.

28.♞f3 ♣xd4

Black has managed to win the pawn back, but White maintains the better piece coordination and the superior structure. The queenside majority is very dangerous, both with queens and without them.

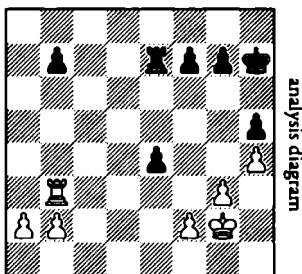
Playing on with queens on the board might offer White some kind of advantage after 29.♖f4 ♖e5 30.♗d3† g6 31.♗d4 ♗d7 32.a4 but I would prefer transposing to a rook endgame with:

29.♗d3†

Now White will be able to use the king to attack Black's central pawn. Black has two possible answers, but neither of them solves the problems in a satisfactory way.

a) Capturing on d3 with 29...♗xd3 would leave the d5-pawn rather exposed. After 30.♗xd3 ♗d7 31.♖f3 it appears that the white king has better possibilities of centralization than his opponent. (It is worth underlining that in order to win the pawn back Black had to drive the king to a more active square.) Play might continue 31...♗g6 32.♖e3 ♗e7† 33.♗d2 (forced, in order to prevent the invasion of the second rank) 33...♗d7 (the rook has to return to this passive square to defend both weak pawns) 34.♗f3 (cutting off the enemy king and preparing ♗d3-d4) 34...♗c7 35.♗c3?? (occupying the c-file with tempo, in order to have better possibilities of putting pressure on the enemy pawns) 35...♗e7 36.♗c5 ♗d7 37.♗d3 and Black faces a difficult defence.

b) A different idea would be 29...♗e4 but after 30.♗xe4† dxe4 it will soon become clear that Black has not really improved his structure: his kingside pawns are rather immobile. At the same time White's rook will be considerably more active than Black's after 31.♗b3.



In order to gain a complete picture of this kind of domination, I recommend that the reader refer

to the chapter dedicated to Rubinstein's rook endings.

Here are two variations illustrating White's ideas in this position.

31...f5 32.♗b6! (Restricting the enemy king) 32...g6 33.♖f1 ♗g7 34.♖e2 ♗d7 (aiming to meet ♖e3 with ...♗d3†) 35.a4! White will advance all his queenside pawns, while Black can only sit and wait. 35...♖f7 36.a5 ♗c7 37.b4 ♗c2† 38.♖e3 ♗c3† 39.♗d2 ♗c7 40.b5 ♗g7 41.a6 bxa6 42.bxa6 and once the pawn reaches the seventh rank (after ♗b7) Black's situation will become critical.

It might seem a wise idea to refrain from ...f5 and activate the king instead. However, after 31...♗g6 32.♗b5 f6 33.♖f1 the e4-pawn will soon become vulnerable, in view of the planned ♖e2-e3, thus making ...f5 necessary anyway. Black cannot get rid of this weakness with 33...e3 because of 34.fxe3 ♗xe3 35.♗xb7 ♗xg3 36.a4 when White's pawns are much faster than his opponent's.

Concluding, 24...♗e7 would have failed to solve Black's problems, but would have required great accuracy from White. The character of the play would be very different from the game.

24.♗e2 ♗d8 25.♗e7 ♗d7 26.♗e5 g6

Black has managed to avoid immediate danger, but is restricted to passivity. Kotov gives an instructive, though not forced, line to illustrate the dangers facing Black:

26...♗g6 27.h5 ♗b1† 28.♗g2 ♗xa2

The queen is obviously out of play here, but it would only need one or two tempi to get back to defend.

29.♗c2† g6 30.♗c8 ♗a4

Or 30...♗d6 31.♗f8 followed by ♗e8.

31.hxg6† ♗xg6 32.♗g8† ♗f6 33.g4

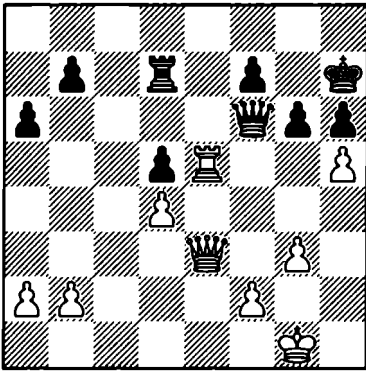
Threatening g5 followed by mate.

33...♗xd4 34.♗h8† ♗g6 35.♗g5†!

Winning the queen.

27.h5 ♗f6 28.♗e3

Within only seven moves, Alekhine has managed to consolidate both forms of advantage from the previous diagrammed position. The important e-file is under authoritative white control, while the advance of the h-pawn has prevented Black from arranging his own pawns in the optimal way.



28...♔d6

Kotov does not make any comment on this highly committal move. After this premature display of activity Black's position will deteriorate rapidly.

However, the final result of the game would not have been affected by a diametrically opposed, entirely passive, approach. Here is an illustration of what could have happened.

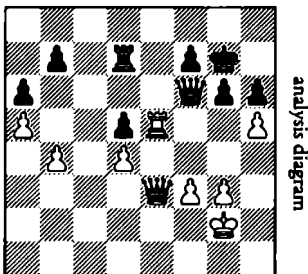
28...♔g7 29.b4

It is always useful to improve the position on both wings.

29...♔h7

29...b5 is not recommendable because after 30.hxg6 the natural recapture 30...fxg6 would lose a pawn to 31.♔e6.

30.a4 ♔g7 31.a5 ♔h7 32.♔g2 ♔g7 33.f3!?



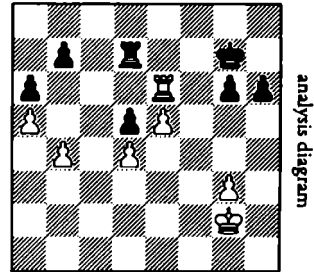
In White's main plan this pawn belongs on f4. However, since Black is basically reduced to the possibility of playing ♔g7-h7-g7, White can

easily reach an optimal position before his 37th move, by losing a tempo with the f-pawn.

33...♔h7 34.f4 ♔g7 35.hxg6 fxg6 36.♔e6 ♔f5 37.♔e5†

Here is where we can understand the idea behind 33.f3!?. It is important that the queen move is made with check, in order to avoid Black's counterplay based on ...♔c2.

37...♔xe5 38.fxe5



Black is reduced to passivity. His rook cannot move yet, because it would cause the loss of one of the b7- or d5-pawns. As we shall see, his king will soon find itself in a similar situation.

For the time being the natural plan is to improve the position of the kingside pawns.

38...g5

Against 38...h5 White should react actively with 39.g4! and if 39...h4 then 40.g5. Waiting passively does not help.

After 38...♔f7 39.♔f6† ♔g7 40.♔b6 Black finds himself in zugzwang. 40...♔f7 would lose the rook to 41.e6†, while 40...♔h7 would allow 41.♔d6!.

39.g4!

If allowed to push both his pawns, Black would be able to create dangerous counterplay: 39.♔h3 h5 40.♔b6 ♔c7! 41.♔d6 ♔c3 -threatening h4-42.♔g2 ♔c2† 43.♔f3 ♔c3† with a probable draw.

39...♔c7

There is nothing left other than this desperate counterplay.

40.♔d6 ♔c2† 41.♔f3 ♔c3† 42.♔f2 ♔c2† 43.♔e3 ♔c3† 44.♔d2 ♔g3 45.♔xd5 ♔xg4 46.♔d7† ♔g6 47.e6

White's pawns are faster, for instance 47...h5 48.d5h4 49.e7 ♖f7 50.d6h3 51.♘d8 ♘e4 52.♙f8† winning the rook just in time to stop the enemy passed pawn.

29.♚b3! ♚b6 30.hxg6†!

This is a good moment to carry out the exchange, because it leads to a further weakening of the enemy structure.

30...♙xg6

Capturing with the pawn would allow a mating attack after 30...fxg6 31.♚xd5 ♚xb2 32.♙d7† (Kotov).

31.♙xd5 ♚xb2

Within just a few moves the character of the position has changed completely. The advantage of controlling the open e-line has been converted into a strong passed pawn and a weak black king position.

32.♙f5

This is the best square for the rook. Besides putting pressure on the f7-pawn, it maintains the possibility of attacking along the g-file. 32.♙e7 would be less efficient because after 32...♖g7 the capture of the b-pawn with 33.♚b7? is impossible because of 33...♙b1† winning the rook.

32...♚b5?

This was probably caused by a tactical oversight. Kotov recommends 32...♖g8 when after 33.♙f4 Black could hope to put up some resistance. However, the uncoordinated black pieces seem to be unable to cope with the threats against the weakened kingside as well as with the dangerous passed pawn. For instance 33...b5 34.♙f3 (threatening ♙g4) 34...♚b1† (34...♖f8 does not work because of 35.♙a3†) 35.♖g2 ♖f8 36.♙f6 ♙g7 37.d5 and again, White has an decisive advantage.

33.♙xf7†

Black probably considered only the capture with the queen, when his drawing chances would have been considerable.

33...♖g8 34.♙f6†! ♙xd5 35.♙xg6† ♖h7 36.♚b6 ♙xd4

36...♙d7 would have been rather passive, but probably the lesser evil. White would have slowly improved his position on both wings, with a4-a5 and ♖g2, f4, ♖f3.

37.♙xb7† ♖g8 38.♚b6 ♘a4 39.♙xh6

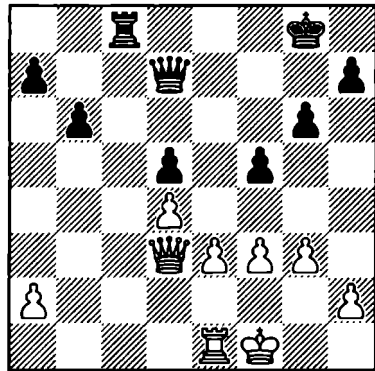
The rest is simple.

39...♙xa2 40.♖g2 a5 41.♘a6 a4 42.♘a7 a3 43.g4 ♖f8 44.g5 ♖g8 45.♖g3 ♘a1 46.♖g4 ♙gl† 47.♖f5 ♙g2 48.f4 a2 49.♖f6 1-0

Although in the following example the only open file will again be under the strict control of Alekhine's major pieces, we shall note a significant difference. The position is closer to what we expect from a practical game. Specifically, I mean that White, based on his central pawn majority, has the possibility of counterplay.

Gideon Ståhlberg – Alexander Alekhine

Zurich 1934



If underestimated, pawn breaks such as e4 or g4 could radically change the character of the position.

Besides the slow improvement of his position, Black's main task is precisely to prevent these ideas. Doing so by mechanical methods (that is, by maintaining a permanent surveillance of the e4- and g4-squares) would considerably restrict Black's piece activity. Therefore, White's counterplay should be kept under control by indirect, tactical means. This will not guarantee immediate success: the white king is too well protected to allow a direct attack.

This means that once maximum activity is

achieved Black should advance his queenside pawns, taking advantage of the passivity of the white pieces. At the correct moment this will allow him to force a better ending by exchanging queens.

28.♟f2

Kotov states that, generally speaking, the advance of the e-pawn would weaken the white king's position too much, which is precarious anyway.

This looks too superficial, as is the indication that after 28.e4 Black would simply win the a2-pawn with 28...dxe4 29.fxe4 fxe4 30.♞xe4 ♟f7† 31.♟g1 ♞xa2. In fact, after 32.d5! it is Black's king, which is quite exposed, while the black pieces are rather uncoordinated.

I should add that 30...♞d8 looks much stronger. Black maintains the threat against the a2-pawn, while putting the central pawn under pressure. The most probable outcome of the position would be a favourable, though not necessarily winning, rook endgame.

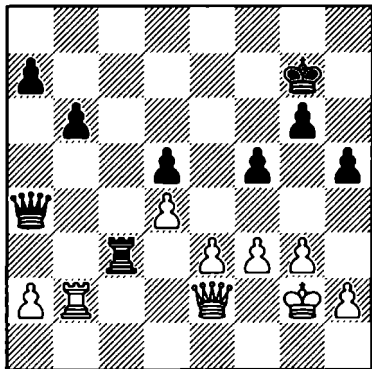
28...♞a4 29.♞e2 ♠c1 30.♞b2

30.e4 would now lose a pawn without any compensation after 30...fxe4 31.fxe4 ♞d1. For instance: 32.♞d2 dxe4!

30...♟g7 31.♞b3

The right moment to exchange a piece has not arrived yet.

31...♞c6 32.♞d3 h5 33.♟g2 ♠c3 34.♞e2 ♞a4



Instead of waiting passively, Ståhlberg decides to free himself at once. From an optical point of view the decision is natural. Once Black has concentrated his forces on the queenside, a counterblow on the opposite wing is logical and may create chances for a draw by perpetual. However, the Swede probably overlooked Black's strong reply.

It is difficult to give a final evaluation of this move. It should have led to a worse ending, but he did start from an unpleasant position.

On the previous move, Alekhine makes a comment that is quite typical for him: "Almost imperceptibly, Black has improved his position in a decisive way. White has no moves left." Thus he suggests that the careless advance of the g-pawn did not essentially change anything in an already losing position. In fact, this is a... double exaggeration.

First of all, if White had defended passively Black would have to work hard to make progress.

It's true that after 35.♞d2? ♞a3 36.♟f2 ♠xe3! Black wins an important pawn but White can play better.

For instance, after 35.♟f2 Black should probably proceed with the final part of his plan: 35...a6!?, planning b5, etc., when 36.g4? is bad because of 36...hxg4 37.fxg4 f4! 38.exf4 ♞xd4† 39.♟g2 ♠c3 with a strong attack.

Against 35.♞d2, which creates the threat e4, Black should probably answer 35...♠c4! planning 36...b5. For the moment, White should stick to his neutral strategy, for example with 36.♟f2. When the black pawn reaches, and therefore blocks, the fourth rank e4 will suddenly become possible.

Secondly, 35.g4 is not such a bad move, as we shall see below.

35...♞e8!

I have already mentioned that such long retreats are easy to overlook. Queens are extremely mobile pieces and can be rapidly transferred from one wing to the other.

36.♠b3?

Only this is the real mistake, but neither Kotov nor Alekhine seems to have been aware of it.

Demoralized by the unexpected course of events, Ståhlberg loses without a fight. He should have played 36.gxf5 when, at the cost of a pawn,

35.g4!?

he would have freed his position and obtained sufficient counter chances on the king's wing. For instance:

36...♖xe3 37.♞f2 gxf5 38.♞g3† ♞g6 39.♖c2! ♖a3

Threatening f4, which would restrict the white king.

40.♞xg6† ♖xg6 41.♖g3

Planning ♖f4.

41...♖a4 42.♖c6† ♖f7

42...♖g5? 43.h4 mate.

43.♖f4

With adequate counterplay.

36...♖xb3 37.♖xb3 hxg4 38.fg4 ♞e4†

White cannot afford to exchange queens. In the resulting pawn ending the queenside majority would ensure Black an easy win.

39.♖f2 fg4 40.♞e1

40.♞d1 would protect the unfortunate pawn on b3, but, after 40...a5, White's moves would have come to an end.

40...♞c2† 41.♖g3 ♞xb3 42.♖h4 ♞c2 43.♞g3 ♞f5 44.♞c7† ♖h6

0-1

The strong passed pawn

Another important strategic element is the presence of a far advanced passed pawn. By itself such an advantage is not of decisive importance, since the pawn is easy to block. Moreover, by attacking it with all his pieces the passive side can tie the enemy forces down to the defence of the pawn, thus restricting his active possibilities.

In order to hope for success, the active side needs an additional objective of play, such as the enemy king's position. The defender will find it much harder to cope with combined threats on two different parts of the board.

The final evaluation of the position greatly depends on how far advanced the pawn is and to what degree the king's position has been weakened. We shall see how slight alterations of these factors can strongly influence the position.

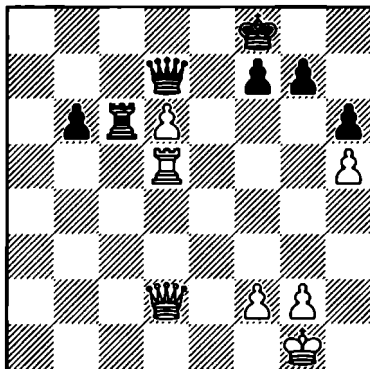
In the next game we can see these elements in their pure form.

Just as in the case of the game Alekhine –

Eliskases, one could not compose a position of more instructional value on this theme.

Alexander Alekhine – Paul Keres

AVRO, The Netherlands 1938



The white pawn is far advanced. Besides, Black has been forced to block it with the queen, which is certainly not the piece best suited for such a task.

Black has also a passed (though far less impressive) pawn and this would almost equalize the chances if White did not also have the advantage on the kingside.

Similarly to Alekhine – Eliskases, the h5-pawn creates the conditions for both a mating attack and a favourable endgame.

32...f6

This move creates additional weaknesses, but could Black refrain from it in the long run? Kotov states that this would be impossible in view of the weakness of the back rank. Let us try to see what could have happened if Black had played similarly to the game, but with the f-pawn on its initial square:

32...♖c8

For the moment, I shall not comment on this regrouping; for more details, see the game continuation.

33.g3 ♖d8 34.♞b4 b5 35.♞d4 ♖g8 36.♞d3

Keeping the h7-square under observation.

36...b4 37.♖e5! f6 38.♖e7

With a decisive attack.

33.♔d3!

Important prophylaxis. After the careless 33.♖b4, planning ♔d1 and ♗a4, Black could play 33...♙c1 † 34.♕h2 ♔c5! with favourable simplifications, when 35.♙xc5? is bad because of 35...♗xd6 †.

33...♔c8

Keres plays this part of the game very purposefully. He aims to free the queen from its blockading role and replace it with the rook.

33...♔c5 would be less effective now: White could play 34.♖b4 when after 34...♙xh5 35.♖xb6 the rook would be rather misplaced on h5. A natural follow-up would be 35...♙e5 36.♖c7 ♕e8 37.♔c3! when the threat ♖b8† followed by ♔c7 would be very hard to meet.

34.♖b4

For the moment this is the best square for the queen: it blocks and attacks the enemy pawn while supporting its own one.

34...b5

Black proceeds with his long-term plan. 34...♙c1 † 35.♕h2 ♔c5 would just transpose to the previous note after 36.♖xb6 while after 34...♔c6 35.♔d1 the threat ♗a4xc6 would be rather annoying.

35.♔d5

Alekhine immediately adapts to the new circumstances. Once the c5-square has lost its support, the rook returns to d5, thus preventing the queen from being driven away with ...♙c4.

35...♔d8

The simplification initiated by 35...♙c4 would be rather dangerous for Black. After the practically forced sequence of moves 36.♖xb5 ♖xb5 37.♙xb5 ♔d4 38.♙b8† ♕f7 39.♙b7† ♕f8 White can pose his opponent serious problems by playing 40.d7, planning to slowly improve the position with g3, ♕g2, etc. and only at the best moment play ♙b8† and ♔g8.

Therefore, Black has to hurry in starting active play. 40...♕e7 41.d8♖† ♕xd8 42.♙xg7 ♔d5 43.g4 ♕e8

43...f5 would lose instantly to 44.g5!

44.f4 ♕f8 45.♔g6.

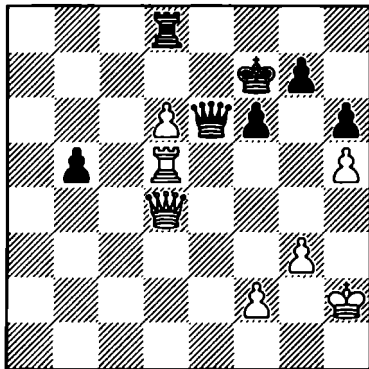
Now Black cannot parry White's strong threat of f5 because 45...f5 would only make things worse after 46.g5! winning.

36.g3 ♕f7

Necessary, in order to prepare the next move.

37.♕h2

White modified his kingside configuration in the best possible way to avoid intermediate checks or unpleasant pins.

37...♖e6 38.♖d4**38...♔d7**

Black has finally achieved his aim: the rook takes over the queen's blockading job. But was this necessary?

Speaking in general terms, yes. This way, Black will attack the advanced pawn more efficiently, thus creating the threat of simplifying to a drawish position with b4-b3, etc.

However, we shall see that if Keres had retreated the queen to d7, play could have transposed to what would have been the best defence in the game:

38...♖d7 39.♖d3 b4 40.♔d4 ♕f8

Avoiding ♖b3†, which would win the pawn.

41.♖c4 ♙b8 42.♖c7 ♔d8

After 42...♙b7? 43.♖xb7! ♖xb7 44.d7 the pawn would promote.

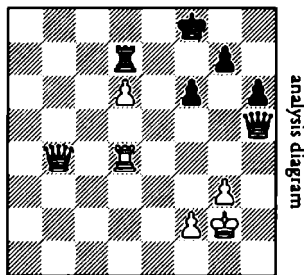
43.♖b6 ♖e8

The only chance is to attack the h-pawn.

44.♖xb4 ♖xh5† 45.♕g2 ♔d7

Black has managed to eliminate the pawn that put so much pressure on his kingside, but his b-pawn has also vanished. His pieces are also slightly uncoordinated for the moment.

Therefore, White will have more freedom of action.



Is the position winning for White? The following analysis suggests a positive answer, but we have to take into account a degree of uncertainty, given the practically unlimited possibilities of these powerful major pieces.

What is sure is that Black's task remains very difficult.

For example:

46.♖e4

Threatening ♜b8 followed by mate.

46...♔g8 47.♞c4† ♕h7

47...♞f7? would unexpectedly lead to a losing rook ending: 48.♖e8† ♕h7 49.♞xf7 ♖xf7 50.♖e7 ♖f8 51.d7 ♖d8 and now the white king is just one tempo closer to the theatre of action than his colleague: 52.♕f3 ♔g6 53.♕e4 A paradox of chess geometry.

48.♞c6 ♞f7 49.♔g1!

We shall see the importance of this prophylactic move later.

49...♔g8

I agree with Malfagia's remark that, in this whole illustrative line, Black's play looks a bit too passive, but the merits of the move 49...f5, suggested by him, are disputable, since after 50.♖e1 ♖a7 51.♞c5 White would threaten ♖e7 anyway while the f5-pawn might become more of a weakness than the premise for a counter-attack.

50.♞c8† ♕h7 51.♞c5

Black faces the highly unpleasant threat ♖e7.

For instance

51...♞g6

51...♔g8, suggested by Malfagia in order to prevent ♖e7, fails to free Black's position. White could improve his position little by little with, for instance, 52.g4 ♕h7 53.f3 eventually followed by the transfer of the king to g3 or h3. The dangers facing Black can be seen after the natural 53...♔g8 when White can start a devastating attack with 54.♞c8† ♕h7 55.♖e8 followed by f4. Obviously, White could have advanced his kingside pawns at an earlier stage of this whole line, but from a practical point of view I prefer the idea of starting the "torture" with such an inoffensive move as 49.♔g1, in order to try to avoid weaknesses and to give the exasperated opponent additional possibilities to go wrong.

52.♖e7 ♖xe7 53.dxe7 ♞e8

With the king on g2, 53...♞e4 followed by ♔g6 would have led to a better position for Black, but now it just loses to 54.♞e3.

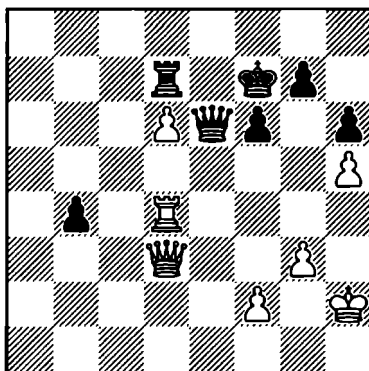
54.♞d6 ♔g6

Obviously forced in view of the simple threat ♞d8.

55.♞e6

White should win this queen ending.

39.♞d3b4 40.♖d4



Very subtle play. Alekhine transfers the rook to a square where it can easily join the attack via the e-line, in order to support the queen after invading the h7-square.

40...♖d8

Keres feels the danger and defends the back rank.

Kotov proves with some instructive lines that a neutral move such as 40...b3 would lose by force:

41.♖g6† ♕f8 42.♞e4 ♜f7 43.♞h7 ♞d8
43...♞xh5† 44.♔g2 ♞d5 would pin the rook, but would not prevent the mate after 45.♞h8† ♔f7 46.♞e8 mate.

44.♞e7 ♞xh5†

44...♞g8 45.♞e4, as given by Kotov, is similar to the main line.

45.♔g2 ♞d5† 46.f3 ♞g8

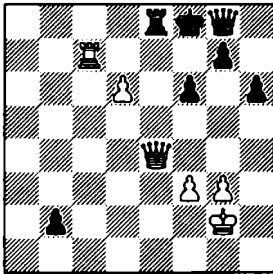
This is the most stubborn defence, requiring from White very imaginative play. Kotov only considers 46...♞d2† 47.♔h3 when Black cannot prevent both mating threats, on h8 and g7.

47.♞e4 b2 48.♞c7!

With the h-pawn on the board, as in a previous line, 48.d7 would win as well, because the king could not escape to g6.

48...♞e8.

Can White maintain his pressure?



analysis diagram

Yes he can!

49.d7!! ♞xe4 50.d8♞† ♞e8 51.♞d6† mating.

Another possible move is 40...♔f8 (suggested by Dorian Rogozenko). White would have needed more subtle play than in the previous branch of variations.

41.♞b5!

Once the black king has prepared against a kingside invasion it is a wise idea to hit on the other side of the board. As Rogozenko demonstrated, 41.♞h7 is not dangerous:

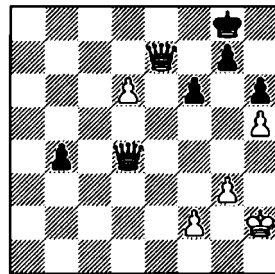
41...♞xd6 42.♞xb4 ♞b6 43.♞e4 ♞d7 44.♞a4 ♞e6! and Black defends.

41...♞e5

Apparently an excellent practical chance. 41...♞xd6? would be very bad because of 42.♞xb4 ♔e7 43.♞e4 winning material. At the same time, 41...♞e8 42.♔g1! ♞e1† 43.♔g2 ♞e8 44.♞xb4 ♞xh5 45.♞e4 would transpose to a line from the previous comment, where White was basically winning.

42.♞xd7! ♞xd4 43.♞e7† ♔g8

Apparently Black has saved the game. If the white pawn advances, the king could not escape the perpetual.



analysis diagram

44.♔h3!!

A strong prophylactic move. Black has to take the pawn with:

44...♞xf2

Thus misplacing his queen and allowing the white queen to occupy a central position.

45.♞e8† ♔h7 46.♞e4† f5

46...♔g8 is no better: 47.d7 ♞f1† 48.♔h4 ♞d1 49.♞a8† and the pawn promotes.

47.♞d3

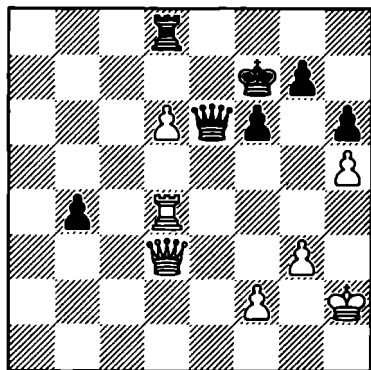
Black has no checks.

47...♞e1

There is nothing better than this. Black threatens mate in one.

48.♞xf5† ♔h8 49.d7

Thanks to his centralized queen, White will be able to avoid the perpetual. Both sides played the previous phase of the game very logically and practically without mistakes. At this moment, the game was adjourned and Alekhine had to seal his move.



48.f4

Black cannot prevent the threat ♖b6 followed by ♕e5 mate. The whole sequence is illustrative of the force that a queen and rook can display together.

41...♗f8 42.♖h7

Kotov points out that 42.♖g4 is not dangerous for Black: 42...♗f7 43.♖xb4 ♕xg6 44.hxg6 ♖xd6 45.♖b8† ♗e7 46.♖g8 f5 47.♖xg7† ♗f6 48.♖g8 ♖d7 49.♗h3 ♖g7 with a drawn ending.

42...♗f7

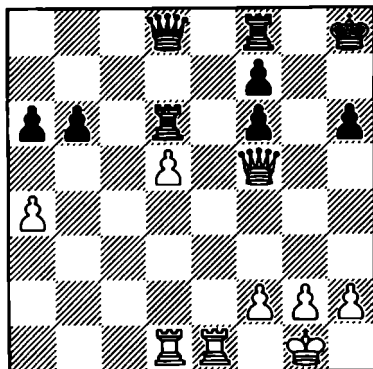
½–½

The next game features the same combination of positional factors: a white central passed pawn and a weakened black kingside.

However, it looks as if an invisible magician has adjusted the balance between them by moving one lever upwards, and the other one downwards. Indeed, if we look at the position we can immediately notice that the passed pawn is less advanced, but on the other hand the king's position is much weaker than in the previous example.

It will be interesting to follow how these modifications will influence the course of the game.

Alexander Alekhine – Edgar Colle Baden–Baden 1925



41.♖g6†?

This mistake annihilates all White's previous efforts. According to Yudovich's analysis, presented below, White would have won with:

41.♖xb4!

For instance:

41...♗xd6

41...♖xd6? loses instantly to 42.♖g6†.

42.♖c4† ♗f8

42...♗d5 allows 43.♖b7† followed by ♖c7.

43.♖b7 ♖d7 44.♖c8† ♗e7

After 44...♖d8 45.♖g4! Black cannot defend the g7-square.

45.♖b3!

A very instructive move; dangers surround the black king.

45...f5

45...♗f7 would be strongly met by the paradoxical 46.♖b8! while after 45...♖d8 46.♖g4 ♗f8 47.♖b7 we see an already familiar position.

46.♖g8 ♗f6

46...♖f6 allows the king to be driven away from his defenders after 47.♖e3† ♗d6 48.♖b8†.

47.♖e8!

The manoeuvres of the white pieces around the black king are quite instructive. Every time a new threat is created.

47...♖f7

47...♗g5 would be met by the spectacular 48.♖d3! ♖b6 49.f4† ♗g4 50.♖e2 mate.

The presence of an additional pair of rooks is of less significance, since their exchange on one of the open lines is quite predictable.

However, an important detail is that instead of having a passed pawn on the b-file, Black has a pawn majority there. Alekhine's next moves will be directed precisely against the creation of a black passed pawn.

37. ♖f4 ♘h7

37... ♘g7 would not change much because of 38. ♖g3† ♘h8 39. ♖e3 ♘g7 40. ♖d3 transposing to the game.

38. ♖e4† ♘h8 39. ♖e3 ♘g7 40. ♖d3! a5

Black is forced to block his own pawns, since 40... ♖c8? would lose a rook to 41. ♖g3†.

The first stage of White's plan is over. Black cannot easily create a passed pawn on the queenside, a significant detail that will allow the white pieces more freedom of action. This additional difference compared to the previous game will tilt the balance even more in White's favour. It is no wonder that the winning process will require slightly less accuracy and imagination and that Alekhine will actually win this game.

The next aim is to provoke the unfortunate double f-pawns to advance, in order to create new weaknesses.

41. ♖e3

Although this rook lift will not lead to an immediate mating attack, Black will have to make some positional concessions to avoid the danger. Specifically, in order to be able to include his d6-rook in the defence he will have to advance his f6-pawn.

41... ♖g8

Black cannot allow the enemy rook to take over the control of the g-file.

42. ♖h3 ♖d7 43. ♖e3 f5

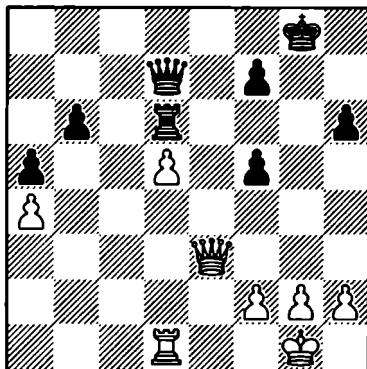
Relatively best. After 43... ♖h8 44. ♖g3† Black would have an unpleasant choice. Against 44... ♘h7 White would answer 45. ♖d3†, forcing 45... f5 under even more unpleasant circumstances for Black than in the game, while 44... ♘f8 would leave the rook on h8 unable to help the other forces.

44. ♖g3† ♘h7

Black cannot afford to block the g-file with 44... ♖g6 because this would allow the pawn to advance with 45. d6.

45. ♖xg8 ♘xg8

After the exchange of these rooks, we have reached a familiar material balance. Now White's plan is to force the f7-pawn to advance. This will not only weaken the seventh rank, e6- and g6-squares, but also block the sixth rank, leaving the king without the support of the d6 rook.



46. ♖g3† ♘h7 47. ♖b3

White will obviously need to put his king out of any danger with h3, but first ...b5 has to be prevented.

47... ♘g7

Black could have tried to fight for the a1–h8 diagonal with 47... ♖d8, for instance 48. h3 ♖f6. However, this would release the pressure against the d5-pawn and White could improve his position with 49. ♖e3 followed by ♖f4, ♖d3.

48. h3 ♖d8 49. ♖g3† ♘h7 50. ♖e5!

Black will not be able to tolerate for long such a centralized queen.

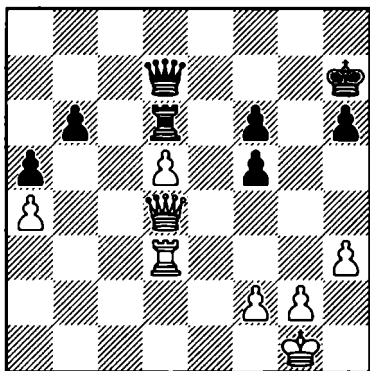
50... ♖d7 51. ♖d3

Black is now in zugzwang. He has nothing left other than to finally play...

51... f6

Thus marking the total success of White's strategy.

52. ♖d4



52...♖d8

The only possible drawback of White's previous play is that Black was finally allowed to break the queenside blockade.

After:

52...b5 53.axb5 ♖xb5 54.♙c3 ♗xd5

54...♗d7 would be strongly met by 55.♙c5 followed by ♖c4, ♙c7.

55.♙c7† ♕g6 56.♗a7

White has a strong attack, according to Alekhine. Let us try to continue the variation just a few moves:

56...♗e6

Keeping the f7-square defended and hoping to get counterplay after ...♙d1, ...♗e5, etc.

57.♙g7† ♕h5

Now 58.♙g3! as suggested by Dorian Rogozenko seems to leave the black king in a very delicate position. However, as indicated by Malfagia, Black can defend with 58...♗e1† 59.♕h2 ♗e5 60.♗f7† ♕h4 61.♗g6 ♗f4 and White cannot make any progress, because his rook is paralysed while the black pieces defend all the important squares, for instance 62.♕h1 ♙d1† 63.♕h2 ♙d6 with a draw by repetition.

Therefore, Malfagia is probably right when stating that White gets nowhere by sacrificing the pawn with 54.♙c3 and that he should content himself with a stable positional advantage (with, for instance, 54.♗e3) when the play would be to a certain extent similar to that

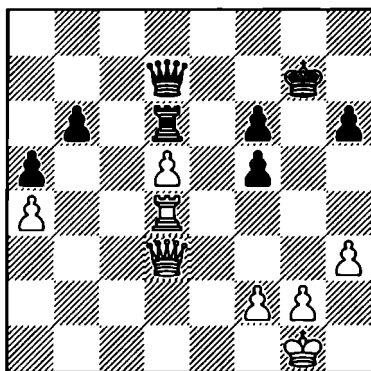
from Alekhine-Keres. True, the a-pawn looks a bit more annoying than the b-pawn, but on the other hand the black king has a much less safe residence.

In any case, after refraining from 52...b5 Black will be permanently doomed to passivity, thus simplifying White's technical task.

53.♖c4!

As in the previous game, Alekhine carries out a very instructive regrouping of his two major pieces.

53...♗d7 54.♙d4 ♕g7 55.♗d3



Although, technically speaking, the black pieces attack the enemy pawns while the white ones defend, the situation *de facto* is vice versa: it is Black who cannot make a single move with his pieces. For instance, ...♗c8 would lose to ♗g3†.

White is ready for the final attack. The threat g4 is quite annoying.

55...♕f7?!

Kotov briefly mentions that against other moves White would play just as in the game.

This is not entirely true. It is true that after 55...♕h7 56.g4 or 55...♕g8 56.g4 fxg4 57.♙xg4† followed by ♗g6 White gains a decisive attack.

Against 55...♕h8 White should play 56.g3 putting his opponent in zugzwang: on the next move g4 will be very strong.

However, after 55...♕f8 things are less clear. White should probably play: 56.g3

Another try is 56.♔h1 ♕e8 57.g4 but after 57...fxg4 58.♖g6† ♕d8 59.♖g8† ♗e8! 60.♖xg4 ♗e1† 61.♕g2 ♗e5 Black seems to defend.

56...♕e8 57.♕g2!?

The start of a daring plan: the king is going to f4 in order to attack the f5-pawn. Once again 57.g4 is not too convincing: 57...fxg4 58.♖g6† ♕d8 59.♖g8† ♕c7 60.♖xg4 ♖xd5! The tempting 57.♗e3† ♕f7 58.♗xh6 is also playable, but requires great accuracy in a rather sharp position. 58...♖xd5 59.♖h7† ♕e6 60.♖g8† ♕e5 61.♖c4 ♖d1† 62.♕h2 ♗d5. If Black could manage to exchange queens his position would be at least OK, because of the centralization of his king. 63.♗b8! ♕e6 64.♗c8† ♗d7 65.♖g8† and Black faces dangers on each step.

57...♕d8 58.♕f3

Black seems to have no remedy against ♕f4.

However, Malfagia highlighted a finesse in the position: Black can try 58...♗c8!? planning to answer the thematic 59.♕f4 with 59...♗c7! and if 60.♕xf5 then 60...♗d7† 61.♕xf4 ♗xh3 with some counterplay. In this case, White can maintain his obvious advantage with 59. h4! in order to avoid losing this pawn after the capture on f5.

56.g4! ♕f8

56...fxg4 would allow an irresistible attack: 57.♖h7† ♕f8 58.♖h8† ♕f7 59.♖xg4

57.gxf5

The rest is rather simple. White has opened a new line for attack. Black's pieces (especially the rook) are too passive to put up effective resistance.

57...♗c8 58.♖c4 ♗h5 59.♖g4 ♗f7 60.♗e3 ♗h7 61.♖g6

1-0

In the next game we shall notice further differences. White has a passed pawn, this time safely defended by his colleague from the c4-square. Since the black king's position is as weak as in the previous example, should this lead us to the conclusion that White's play is even easier? Not entirely. One significant detail is that the

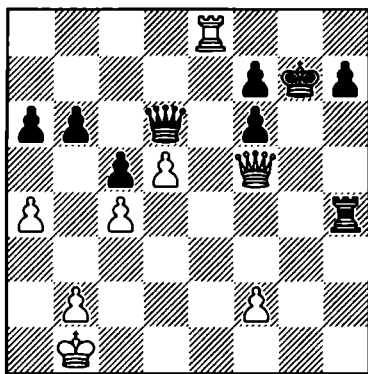
kings find themselves on opposite sides of the board. Therefore, the main issue of the game will be a direct mating attack. Although White will be the attacking side, he will play under the permanent danger of losing the initiative and falling under attack himself. An interesting psychological situation.

It is natural that once play becomes more concrete than in other examples, Kotov's comments are also more generous in variations. The lines given by him are generally correct and instructive though I am not sure to what extent he is quoting Alekhine's own comments.

Not being able to come up with something fundamentally new by myself, I have fallen back on a method that I generally dislike: I used the computer's help in order to uncover some mistakes and inaccuracies in the original comments.

Alexander Alekhine – Efim Bogoljubow

World Championship Match (19) in Germany and Holland 1929



34.♗c8 ♕h6

Black must evacuate the king as soon as possible. After a neutral move such as 34...b5 he would lose by force:

35.♖g8† ♕h6 36.♗e8 ♗c7

Black could try 36...♖h5 planning to meet 37.♗xf7 with 37...♖g5, but then White would simply prevent this with the calm 37.f4!.

37. ♖f8† ♘h5 38. ♖g7 h6

And now, rather than Kotov's 39. ♖h8 (which is not too bad either), White should play the elegant 39. ♖g1!! when Black would have no defence against ♖d1†.

35. ♖g8

Renewing the threat ♖e8.

35... ♖e7

We can now see the merits of Black's previous move. In order to continue his attack White has left the e7-square available to the enemy queen. Bogoljubov not only defends the e8-square, but also threatens to start a counterattack with ... ♖e4.

36. ♘a2!

White employs the same method. Black is almost in zugzwang: the rook must guard both the h-file and the g4-square (in order to prevent ♖g4) while the queen is tied down to the defence of e8 and f8.

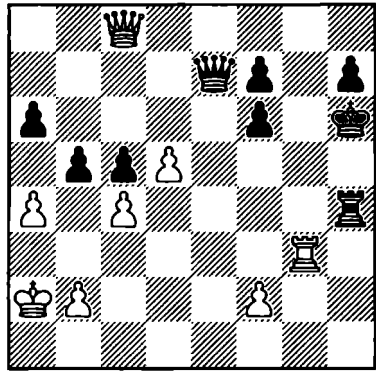
36... b5!?

The only reasonable alternative, 36... a5, was not positionally appealing, because it would deprive Black of any possibility of queenside counterplay. Moreover, with his king now completely out of danger White could create a genuine zugzwang position with 37. ♘b3. One of the black pieces would have to give up control of the vital squares mentioned above. For instance, if 37... ♖d6 then 38. ♖e8, threatening ♖xf7. After 38... ♖h3† 39. ♘a2 ♖h5 the most accurate continuation is 40. f4!, preventing ... ♖g5 and giving the threat ♖xf7 a decisive character.

The move played in the game not only fails to create dangerous threats, but will give White additional possibilities: in case of mass exchanges he will create an unstoppable passed pawn on the a- or b-file. The only positive thing about 36... b5 is that it maintains the double-edged character of the position. Unlike after 36... a5, when slow methods would also lead to success, White has to continue playing with energy.

37. ♖g3!

With the threat ♖g8. Compare this with the move 58. ♖g3! in the variation given on Black's 52nd move from the game Alekhine–Colle.



37... f5!?

This should have lost quickly. True, 37... ♘h5 would not have been better, as Kotov demonstrated: 38. ♖g8 h6 39. ♖h7 ♖d7 (or if 39... ♖g4 then 40. ♖f5† ♖g5 41. ♖h3 mate) 40. ♖g6! and White wins the queen.

However, a better practical chance would have been 37... ♖h5 when White could have been tempted to transpose to a better, though not entirely clear, queen ending: 38. ♖g8 ♖g5 39. ♖h3† ♖h5 40. ♖xh5† ♘xh5 41. ♖xh7†

And yet, with some additional effort of concentration, Alekhine might have found the way to prevent the defence ... ♖g5 with 38. f4! when White's attack would be unstoppable. For instance, 38... ♖h2 39. ♖g4 (threatening mate and keeping the e2-square under control) ♖f8 40. d6, but not 39. ♖g8? ♖xb2†! 40. ♘xb2 ♖e2† when Black draws, as indicated by Malfagia.

38. ♖f5

With the brutal threat 39. d6 ♖d6 40. ♖g5 mate. Kotov attaches an "?!" to this move and recommends 38. ♖g8! giving the following lines:

a) 38... f6 39. d6 ♖d7 40. ♖f8† ♘h5 41. ♖xf6 with mate.

b) Black can prevent the mate with 38... ♖f6 but cannot stop the d-pawn at the same time: 39. d6 ♖d4 40. d7 and Black's pieces are overloaded.

c) 38... ♖g4 39. ♖h3† ♖h4 40. d6! ♖f6 41. d7 ♖xh3 42. d8♖ winning.

However, Alekhine's choice is not that bad either.

38...f6

Black takes the g5-square under control. After 38...d4 White could have simplified to a winning pawn ending: 39. h3 f4 40. f4 f5 41. exh4 fxh4 42. fxh4 fxh4 and White can even choose which of the pawns he will promote.

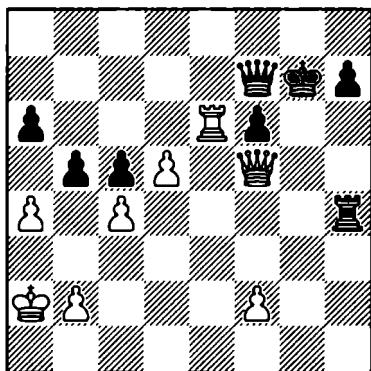
39. e3

Alekhine found himself in time trouble and failed to find the simple 39. e6! suggested by Kotov. Black would have been without defence, for instance 39...xc6 (39...d8 40. e8 or 39...e4 40. h3 f4 are no improvements) 40. dx6 e4 41. e3 ex3 42. fx3 g7 and now White can resolve the queenside tension in his favour with 43. cb5.

39...c7 40. e6

Kotov considers that this move allows Black to save himself. The truth is that White is still winning after the text move, although in a more complicated way. Once again, Kotov suggests 40. e6! as best and is basically right, but after 40...f8 White's simplest win is 41. e3 threatening e8 (Kotov gives a line starting with 41. e3 which also wins).

40...g7



41. d6?

Only this seems to be the final mistake. Kotov points out that the position would be rather unclear

after 41. xa6 xc4 42. axb5 b4 43. d6 g6 44. d7 f6 h6, but he is wrong in assessing 41. d6 f4 42. h3 g6 as not dangerous for Black.

First of all, White would gain a decisive attack, albeit one that is not easy to carry out over the board.

43. g3!

Kotov does not mention this move.

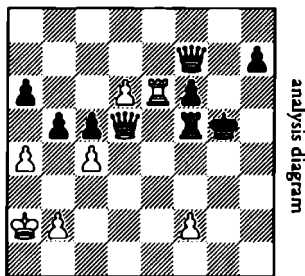
43...f5

43...f5 also leads to interesting play. After 44. xf4 xe6 45. f3 Black cannot avoid all the mined squares. Basically, he has to prevent both the exchange of queens (on either e3 or d5) and the placement of the white queen on the d-file with check. For instance, 45...h4 46. h1 g5 47. d5 winning.

44. d3 g5

After 44...g4 White has the elegant 45. e4 leading to an already familiar picture.

45. d5 f5



46. f4! g6

46...xf4 would lose the queen to 47. e4.

47. g2 f6 48. h3 h5

Or 48...g6 49. g4 f5 50. xg5 mate.

49. g4

Now Black is completely tied down:

49...bxc4

49...h1 allows a nice mate in one: 50. g5 mate.

50. d7 f8 51. e8 winning.

Secondly, after 43. d3 f6 h6 White has 44. e3 with similar play to the previous branch of variations (Kotov only gives 44. d7 d4, when White has no clear advantage, due to the fact that his king is exposed as well).

41...♖g6 42.♘d7†

Alekhine states that his first intention was 42.♖d7† ♖h6 43.♖e7 but then he noticed that Black is in time to generate counterplay with 43...♞xc4! 44.♞xf6 ♞xa4† 45.♖b3 ♞b4† 46.♖c3 ♞c4† when avoiding the perpetual with 47.♖d2 would not lead to anything good for White: 47...♞d4† 48.♖e3?! ♞e4†! 49.♖xe4 ♖xf6 and Black is already better.

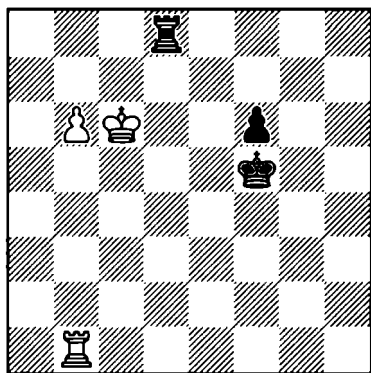
42...♖h6 43.♖xg6† ♖xg6

Play has transposed to a complex rook ending where White maintains some initiative, but which should end in a draw. Since the position is already beyond our main theme, I shall not give detailed comments.

44.axb5 axb5

44...♞xc4? would lose to 45.b3! ♞c2† 46.♖b1 (Korov).

45.cxb5 ♞a4† 46.♖b3 ♞b4† 47.♖c3 ♞xb5 48.♞c7 h5 49.d6 ♞b8 50.♞xc5 ♞d8 51.♞d5 h4 52.♖c4 ♖f7 53.♖c5 ♖e6 54.♞d4 ♞c8† 55.♖b6 ♖d7 56.♞xh4 ♞c6† 57.♖a5 ♞c2 58.b4 ♖xd6 59.f3 ♞c3 60.f4 ♞a3† 61.♖b6 ♖e6 62.♞h5 ♞f3 63.f5† ♖e5 64.b5 ♖f4 65.♖c6 ♖g4 66.♞h1 ♞c3† 67.♖d5 ♖xf5 68.♞b1 ♞d3† 69.♖c6 ♞d8 70.b6



70...♖g4?

A fatal mistake. Bogoljubow should have placed his king more actively, thus preventing the enemy king from approaching the f-pawn. 70...♖e4! would have led to a theoretical draw.

71.b7 f5 72.b8♖ ♞xb8 73.♞xb8 f4 74.♖d5 f3 75.♖e4

White is just in time to win.

75...f2 76.♞f8 ♖g3 77.♖e3

1-0

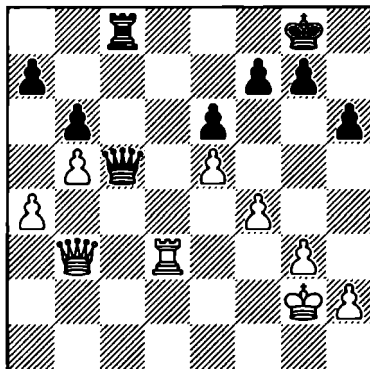
Odds and trends

Throughout this chapter we have seen that a positional advantage is a useful complement to a mating attack.

In the next example the situation is more balanced. White's exposed king position is, to a certain extent, compensated by his spatial advantage on both wings.

We shall also watch Alekhine in an opposite posture, that of a defender.

Alexander Alekhine – Gregory Levenfish Soviet Championship, Moscow 1920



28...♖c1!?

Black overestimates his chances for an attack. He should have prepared for the rook ending by playing 28...g5 followed by ...♖c2. In case of the predictable exchange of queens, White would have had a tough job defending his two weaknesses (a4 on the queenside and f4 or e5 on the other wing). Besides, the g7-square would have been very useful for the black king, as we shall see in a later comment.

Also interesting would have been 28...g6 keeping ...g5 in reserve for the case of a queen exchange while still clearing the g7-square.

29. ♖d1 ♜c2†

After 29... ♜xd1 30. ♞xd1 ♜c4 White could have started a counterattack with 31. ♞d8† ♖h7 32. ♞d7; it is here that the g7-square would have been useful for the king.

30. ♖f3 ♜b2

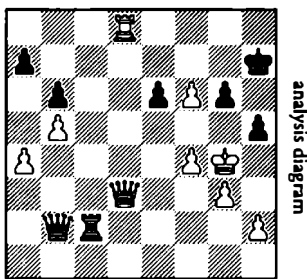
This must have been the position Levenfish was aiming for. He probably failed to foresee that with his pieces infiltrated so deeply into the enemy territory, the black king will be exposed too. It would not be a mating attack, just a perpetual.

31. ♞d8† ♖h7 32. ♖g4!

The king quits the danger zone before the attack really gets going. (We are familiar with this method from the previous game. See the move 34... ♖h6).

The necessity of the king's evacuation is underlined by the fact that the immediate 32. ♞d7?! would have led to a favourable ending for Black after 32... ♜c3†! 33. ♞d3 (33. ♖g4 ♜xh2 is even worse) 33... ♜xh2! 34. ♞xc3 ♜h5† 35. g4 ♜h3†.

Alekhine states that the move order chosen by him in the game is the only correct one. He gives 32. ♜d3† g6 33. ♖g4 as winning for Black after 33... f5† 34. exf6 h5†.



Kotov agrees with this evaluation but feels like illustrating it with concrete variations.

In fact, both eminent players and commentators made the same mistake during their analysis as Levenfish made during the game. They looked at the position in a one-sided way: focusing on the white king and overlooking the dangers facing his black colleague. Let us follow Kotov's variations.

a) 35. ♖h4 ♜xf6† 36. ♖h3 ♜b2! 37. ♖h4! ♖h6! 38. ♞h8†! ♖g7!

After awarding five consecutive exclamation marks, Kotov concludes that Black is winning. In fact, White can defend both his rook and the dangerous h4-d8 diagonal with

39. ♜d8

when both kings are under fire. The game should end in a draw after a series of only moves from both sides.

39... g5† 40. ♖xh5 ♞xh2† 41. ♖xg5 ♞xh8 42. ♜e7†

With perpetual check.

b) 35. ♖g5!!

The winning move. The exclamation marks are mine. Kotov considers the move impossible in view of Black's reply.

35... ♜c5†

At a superficial examination, this move looks more or less winning. However, the show is just about to start.

36. f5!!

A magical move; White is ready to sacrifice his queen in order to start a decisive counterattack.

36... ♞xf5†

The king easily hides from checks after 36... ♜c1† 37. ♖h4 ♜c4† 38. ♖h3 and Black is helpless.

37. ♜xf5 exf5 38. ♞d7† ♖g8 39. ♖xg6

The triumph of the spatial advantage. In spite of his huge material superiority, Black cannot avoid being mated. We can conclude that White could have safely interposed the check on d3, with a probable transposition to the game.

32... ♞xh2

Against 32... g6 Kotov gives the nice, though not necessary, 33. ♞h8†! ♖xh8 34. ♜d8† ♖h7 35. ♜e7 when Black cannot avoid the perpetual. We have already seen a similar picture: the black pieces are too far from their king.

32... h5† is not dangerous: White can simply take the pawn: 33. ♖xh5

33. ♜d3† g6 34. ♞d7 ♖g7

Black has to resign himself to a draw by perpetual. The aesthetic 34... ♞h4†? would unexpectedly lose to the calm 35. ♖f3! (Kotov).

35. ♞xf7†

½-½

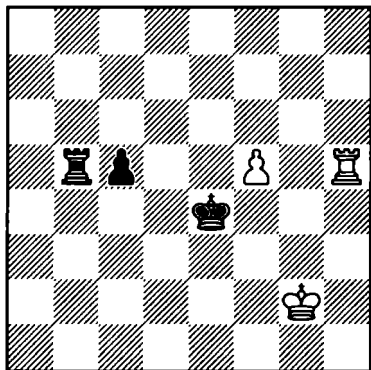
We are already familiar with the possible transformation of a position with major pieces into a rook (or queen) ending.

In one of the comments to the game Stoica–Marin we have seen that things can sometimes go according to a reversed scenario, too.

Here is one more example on this theme, this time from Alekhine's practice.

Walter John – Alexander Alekhine

17th German Chess Congress, Hamburg 1910



The position is almost symmetrical; the only significant difference is the more active position of the black king, but this will have a decisive influence over the final result.

51...c4 52.♖h4†

This tactical resource allows White to stay in the game for a while.

52...♗d3 53.♖h3† ♗d2

The king safely hides behind his colleague, thus allowing Black to win a decisive tempo. We can conclude that the white king is not only passive, but also misplaced.

54.♖f3

A very neat variation would be:

54.f6 c3 55.f7 ♖b8 56.♖f3 c2 57.♖f2† ♗d3

It is easy to establish that, for the time being, the king has to walk along the d-file. For instance after **57...♗c3?** White would draw immediately with **58.f8♖ ♖xf8 59.♖xf8 c1♖ 60.♖c8†. 58.♖f3† ♗d4 59.♖f4† ♗d5 60.♖f1 ♗e4!**

White is helpless.

Continuing with the checks would not help either: once the rook loses its king's support on the f-file, Black can answer **60.♖f5†** with **60...♗e4! 61.♖c5 ♗d3 62.♗f3 ♖f8** winning the pawn and the game.

54...c3 55.♖f2† ♗d3 56.♖f3† ♗d4!

A more direct way would have been **56...♗c4 57.♖f2 ♗b3.**

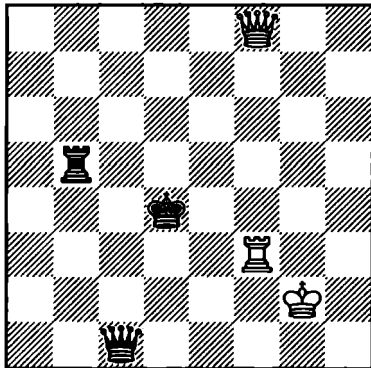
57.f6

White could have persisted with **57.♖f4†** when Black would have had nothing better than **57...♗d3** returning to the previously mentioned idea. **57...♗d5?** would allow White to escape with **58.♖f2!**

57...c2 58.f7

Once the c3-square has been cleared **58.♖f4†** would be of little help: **58...♗c3 59.♖f3† ♗b2 60.♖f2 ♗b1** winning, as in most other lines, by just one tempo.

58...c1♖ 59.f8♖



Here it is, the fourth phase of the game in its pure form. Unlike the previous cases it arose in a logical order, following the third phase: the endgame.

The player to move is usually winning in such situations.

59...♗d2† 60.♖f2

60.♗g3 would be no improvement: **60...♖g5† 61.♗h3 ♖h5†** with a decisive attack.

60...♖g5† 61.♗h3 ♖h5† 62.♗g3 ♖g5†

0-1

In the Patriarch's Footsteps



Throughout the history of chess it is hard to find a name whose authority could be compared with that of Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik.

The fact that, with the exception of two short breaks, he managed to maintain the title of World Champion for fifteen years is only part of the issue or, if you wish, only the external manifestation of it. The qualities that made Botvinnik unique in the chess world were his ability for deep insight into positions, his colossal analytical powers, and his art of expressing the essence of complicated matters in just a few simple words. Never before or after him did any other chess player reach such intellectual heights.

Even though he belonged to a different era many of his comments and statements are still mentioned in contemporary books, articles and magazines. I believe that I do not exaggerate by stating that in the former communist countries his huge analytical work is regarded as some sort of Chess Bible.

I must confess that I could not escape this tendency either, but for a long time the feeling manifested itself at the level of snobbery: similarly to somebody "believing" in the Bible without having read more than just a few lines during a rainy afternoon. Somewhere, deep inside, a shadow of doubt made its presence felt. After all, what current value can some analysis or statements have since they were written at a time when personal computers and chess modules existed only in the dreams of a few visionaries?

The essence of the position

Some time ago I had the occasion to analyse a rather interesting opening position. After a few days of hard work, assisted from time to time by computer, I was able to draw some conclusions which I could be fairly confident were correct.

I was, however, intrigued by the fact that I found in the database a reference to analysis by Botvinnik. Once I finished my work I opened the respective volume and ... I cannot describe my amazement! Within just a few lines, with a minimum of variations, Botvinnik explained very clearly the essence of the position; imagine how much time I would have saved if I had started my

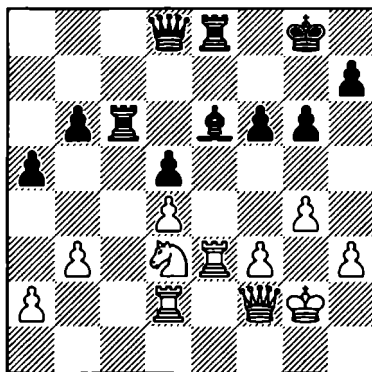
analytical work by looking in the right place... Just like a certain Thomas from ancient times: once I saw, I believed. From that moment on I started having infinite faith in most of the things Botvinnik wrote.

I wrote this rather long introduction because the starting point of the present chapter is a rather inoffensive commentary made by Botvinnik. This way I tried to justify the apparently disproportionate reaction (tens of hours of work) generated by a simple sign from the patriarch.

Referring to the diagrammed position, Mikhail Moiseyevich wrote, "The character of the fight in such kind of structures was well known to me from the game Levenfish-Kotov (the 11th USSR Championship, 1939) which I had annotated for the tournament book."

Mikhail Botvinnik – Tigran Petrosian

World Championship Match (14), Moscow 1963



White's advantage mainly consists of the knight's domination over the bishop, due to the fact that the d5-pawn is blocked on a light square. This minimal advantage alone would not be sufficient for a win, but White can try to provoke additional weaknesses on either of Black's wings.

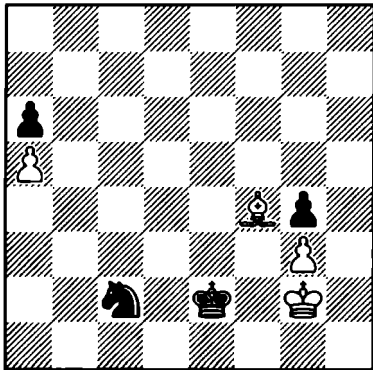
Botvinnik went on to win a nice game, but I was not satisfied. I did not find the respective book in my library and was burning with desire to follow in the footsteps of the great analyst.

I carefully studied not only the endgame of Levenfish–Kotov but also some other positions I happened to remember as being of interest for this theme. I shall now share with the reader the results of these analyses.

We shall start with a rather simple example that will illustrate a mechanism we shall deal with more than once throughout the article. The fact that the relevant pawns are blocked on the g3- and g4-squares instead of d4 and d5 is of no relevance to the winning plan.

Efim Geller – Mihai Suba

Moscow 1986



45...d3!

At this moment, Geller resigned. Suba's analysis from *Chess Informant* No. 42 continues like this:

46. g1 f3 47. b8 f5 48. h2 f2 49. a7 f3!

Black willingly enters into this pin. I remember that Suba was very proud of having discovered this paradoxical idea during his home analysis (the game had been adjourned a few moves earlier).

50. c5 f3!

Threatening f1.

51. g1 f5 52. a7 f3

The first phase (winning the pawn) ended successfully. In the near future it will be very important that the white king is not able to counterattack the other black pawn on a6. In

some of the following examples the final result of the game will depend on the possibility of this kind of counterplay.

53. c5 d2 54. h2 g3 55. h1 g2 56. h2 d1! 57. b6

Or 57. g1 g3 winning.

57...b3

Threatening ...xa5.

58. g1 g3 59. c7 h3 60. b6 d1

Planning ...e2.

61. f2 h2 62. f3 b3

Followed by xa5, when White will not be able to fight against two passed pawns.

0-1

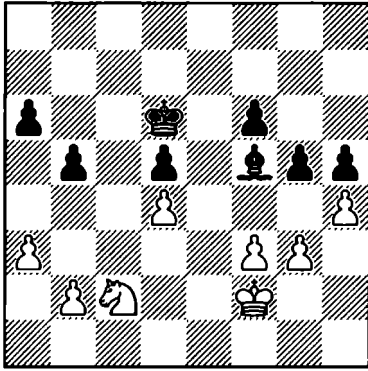
The next position is a rather favourable form of the endgame mentioned by Botvinnik. During the previous phase of the game the young, still insufficiently experienced, challenger to the world title had arranged too many of his pawns on light squares. It should be mentioned that we join the game shortly after the adjournment. The following mistakes will demonstrate the degree of difficulty of the position, which cannot be easily exhausted even in the conditions of home analysis.

This is a very famous game that has been submitted to thorough analysis by several eminent commentators. However, none of them seems to have uncovered all the hidden nuances of the position.

I shall frequently refer to Efim Geller's comments for *Chess Informant* as well as to the notes published in the book *Match na pervenstvo mira* by Averbakh and Taimanov. The co-authors of this latter book quote several comments made by Mikhailchishin without any mention about where they had been published before. This detail suggests to me that Mikhailchishin acted as a collaborator with the authors.

White's main idea is to open the position on the kingside. If this plan succeeds the next step would be a systematic offensive, according to the "Suba method", which would finally win the d5-pawn. The unfavourable disposition of the queenside pawns would make Black's counterplay impossible.

Anatoly Karpov – Garry Kasparov
World Championship match (9), Moscow 1984



45. ♖e3 ♙b1

Mikhalchishin recommends 45... ♖e6! offering the following variation:

46. b4 ♙g6 47. g4 hxg4 48. hxg5

I have tried to improve White's play with 48. ♖xg4 g4x4 49. ♖g2 ♙f5 50. ♖e3 ♙d3 51. ♖h3 but without success: after 51... ♙e2! the f-pawn has to be advanced: 52. f4 As we shall see later, White needs the f4-square in order to push the black king back.

48... ♗f3 49. ♗xf4 ♙e4!

It seems that 49... ♙h5! is also sufficient: 50. f7 ♖xf7 51. ♖xd5 although the black king is temporarily restricted by the knight (the e6 and g6 squares are unavailable), White cannot use this tempo to gain any real advantage. 51... ♖g7 52. ♖c2 ♖f6 53. ♖xa6 ♖f5 with sufficient counterplay. Mikhalchishin's variation is, however, more elegant.

50. ♖g4 ♖f7 51. ♖g3 ♖e6 52. ♖e5 ♖xf6 53. ♖d7 ♖f5 54. ♖c5 f2!

Black has to win space for his king.

55. ♖xf2 ♖f4 56. ♖xa6

Or 56. ♖e2 ♙f5! planning ... ♙c8 and clearing the e4-square at the same time; if 57. ♖xa6 then 57... ♖e4.

56... ♙d3! 57. ♖c5 ♙c4

We have reached a position of mutual zugzwang where, quite unluckily, it is White's turn to move.

46. b4 g4h4?

Garry's wish to stabilize the kingside position is understandable: he probably hoped to build an impenetrable fortress in spite of the large number of pawns situated on light squares. After White's unexpected answer Black's move can be considered the decisive mistake.

Taimanov and Averbakh recommend 46... ♙g6 evaluating the position as "slightly better for White". In fact, I believe that White is winning by force:

47. g4!

Not 47. ♖g2 g4x4! achieving the fortress from Garry's dreams. Slow regrouping in order to prepare g3-g4 would also fail: 47. ♖g2 ♙d3 48. ♖g1 ♙e2! In his excellent *Endgame Manual*, which I had not read yet while working on the first English edition of this book, Dvoretsky submitted this ending to a thorough analysis. Later, when he read my book, he indicated to me several points where our analyses were in contradiction. After an exchange of emails, we reached what we considered to be "the truth".

Here, for instance, he suggested the following winning method: 47. hxg5? (my symbol) 47... ♗xg5 48. f4. However, after 48... ♗xf4 (not considered by him) 49. ♗xf4 ♖e6 50. ♖f3 ♙f7 (50... ♙e8 might also be playable) 51. ♖f4 ♖f6 52. ♖f4 ♙g8 or 51. ♖g3 ♖f6 52. ♖h4 ♙e8, Black should not be in danger of losing. After all, his outside passed pawn is more dangerous than White's, which fully compensates for the other positional drawbacks.

47... ♖e6

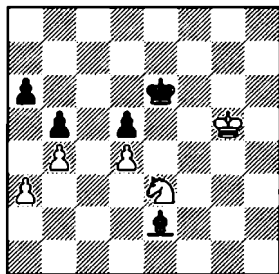
Any of the captures would lead to positions similar to the game: 47... g4x4 48. g4x5 ♙xh5 49. ♖f5 ♖e6 50. ♖xh4, or 47... hxg4 48. hxg5 ♗xf3 49. ♖xf3! ♗xg5 50. ♖g4. For more details see below.

48. ♖g3 ♙f7

Black tries to keep the position closed, but this is impossible.

49. hxg5 ♗xg5 50. g4x5 ♙xh5 51. f4! ♗xf4 ♙e2 53. ♖g5





analysis diagram

We find ourselves one step away from “Suba’s position”. If the white king could reach the f6 square the winning method would be already known.

This step is, however, not easy to make; with a concentrated effort Black will be able to resist on the kingside, but then the queenside configuration will come to White’s aid.

53...♖d3 54.♗g2 ♕e4 55.♖f4† ♔f7

This is the resistance position; the bishop is needed on e4.

56.♗h5 ♔e6 57.♖f6 ♖f3 58.♗g4 ♕e4 59.♗e5 ♖c2 60.♖c6

The bishop cannot come back to defend the queenside. After winning the a6-pawn the winning plan would include the return of the king to the queenside, combined with a3-a4. In the position with two pawns against one, the knight would be ideally placed on c3 and the king on a4. Black would not be able to prevent b4-b5, which would be easily winning.

Instead of 56...♔e6 in the line examined above, 56...♔e7 57.♖f6 ♖d3! would transpose to a position considered by Dvoretsky to be drawn (which explains why he suggested a different method on the 47th move). Capturing on d5 would make this square available to the black king for counterplay, as was the case at some later stage of the game. However, as Dvoretsky later admitted, he had not taken into account my plan based on 58.♗g4 (with the idea ♗e5-c6-b8) but suggested what he thought to be a satisfactory defence:

58...♖f1 59.♗e5 ♖h3.

And yet, I found a relatively easy way to win the a6-pawn:

60.♔g6

Intending ♖d3-c5.

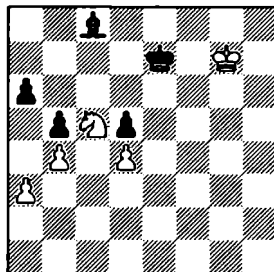
60...♔e6!?

Temporarily preventing the transfer of the knight to the desired square.

61.♖c6 ♔d6

61...♖f5?! would now be met by 62.♔g5 when ♖b8 cannot be parried.

62.♖a5 ♔e7 63.♖b3 ♖d7 64.♖c5 ♖c8 65.♔g7



analysis diagram

Black is in zugzwang. For a while I thought that the game was basically over, but soon I understood that there is still a lot of play left. Clearly, Black cannot allow the white king to occupy the f6-square, which would lead to a “Suba-win”.

Therefore, he has to surrender the a6-pawn.

65...♖f5

Cutting off the enemy king’s way back.

66.♖xa6 ♖d3

Preparing to defend both pawns with the bishop if necessary and now the white king cannot easily come back. I figured out such a plan: the knight has to go to either e5 or even e3 in order to enable the threat of breaking through with the king. White starts with:

67.♖b8 ♖c2 68.♖c6† ♔e6 69.♗e5

Now Black faces a choice of principle: to wait passively or launch a counterattack.

69...♔f5

From a practical point of view, this seems to be the best chance. 69...♔e7 preventing ♔f8 fails to 70.♗g4 ♔e6 71.♗e3 ♖d3 and now 72.♔h6 followed by the transfer of the king to f4 is possible, partly because the d5-pawn is hanging.

70.♔f7

I ended my analysis here, considering the position as winning for White. Dvoretzky agreed with me and put the remaining pieces together.

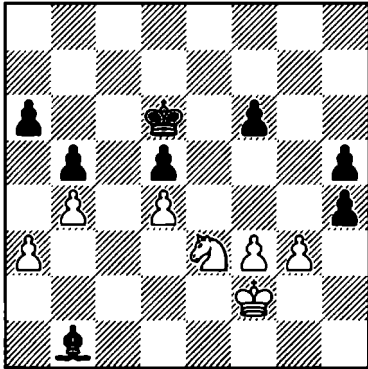
70...♙e4 71.♖c6 ♗d1 72.♙e6 ♗h5 73.♔d7!

Preventing ...♗e8.

73...♗g6 74.a4! bxa4 75.b5 a3 76.♖b4 and the b-pawn is unstoppable.

Sufficient, and possibly necessary, for a draw would have been 46...♙e6!

It is important to bring the king as close to the kingside as possible in order to be prepared for the thematic break g3-g4.



47.♖g2!!

When analysing a position an exchange like g×h4 h×g4 is made not as in a normal game, but by the simultaneous elimination of the g-pawns from the board. It is excusable that Kasparov missed Karpov's brilliant move. He might have noticed it over the board just after having pressed the clock.

The merits of the move are that it prevents the kingside from being blocked, keeping open a path for the planned invasion. The pawn sacrifice is only temporary: Karpov will win it back within just a few moves.

47...h×g3! 48.♙xg3 ♙e6

The activation of the black king will fail to counter White's plan. Here are some other defensive attempts.

48...♗g6 49.♖f4 ♗f7

From this square the bishop restricts the enemy knight and cooperates optimally with the f6-pawn. Several important squares are taken under control, such as g5, g6 and e5, e6. However, the f5-square is left without sufficient defence, since the knight prevents the enemy king from staying on e6.

50.♙h4 ♙e7 51.♖xh5 ♙e6

One of Black's problems in this kind of position is that the pawn endings are usually losing. For instance 51...♗xh5 52.♙xh5 ♙e6 53.♗g6 and soon after f4-f5 the f6-pawn will fall.

52.♖g7! ♙e7 53.♗g4 ♔d6 54.♖h5 ♗e6†

The only relatively efficient way to deny the f5-square to the white king. After 54...♙e6 55.♖f4† we can understand why the f4 square is needed, as mentioned in the comments to Black's 45th move. White would win with 55...♔d6 56.♙f5 ♙e7 57.♖g6†, facing Black with the unsolvable dilemma of whether to lose the f6-pawn at once or transpose to a losing pawn ending.

55.♙h4 ♙e7 56.♖f4 ♗f7 57.♗g4 ♗g8

The bishop is close to creating miracles. The f5-square is indirectly defended since White makes no progress after 58.♙f5 ♗h7†. However, the h5-square is left without defence.

58.♙h5 ♗f7† 59.♙h6 ♗g8 60.♗g7 ♗f7 61.♖g6†

A tempting plan would be 61.♖g2 ♙e6 62.♖e3 ♙e7 63.f4 ♗e6 64.f5 pushing Black's pieces even further back. However, placing a pawn on a light square is not such a good idea. Instead of the passive 64...♗f7? 65.♖g4, winning the f6-pawn for White, Black would get excellent drawing chances with 64...♗d7! 65.♖xd5† ♔d6 66.♖xf6 ♗xf5, which is similar to a line given below. Apparently, White has no winning plan.

61...♙e6 62.♖f8† ♙e7 63.♖h7 f5 64.f4

The rest is easy: the f5-pawn is impossible to defend.

49.♖f4† ♙f5

Black's activity is only superficial as will become clear after White's next move.

50.♖xh5!

The unpleasant threat to attack the queenside pawns with Qg7-e8-c7 forces the black king to retreat.

$50.\text{Qxd5}$ would have been weaker because it would have allowed Black to preserve the outside passed h5-pawn.

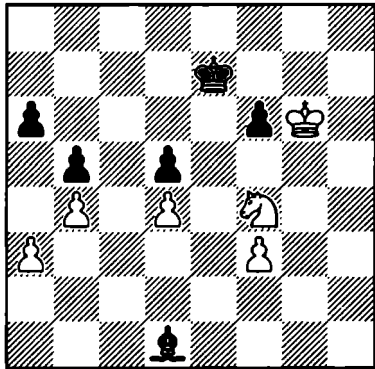
$50...\text{c6}$ $51.\text{Qf4}\uparrow$ c6

But now the king has to stay passive, since the threat against the d5-pawn was real this time. Compared to the note to Black's 48th move, White's progress on the kingside will be much smoother, because the bishop is even less efficient on the b1-h7 diagonal than it was on the f7-square.

$52.\text{c6}$ c2 $53.\text{c5}$ d1 $54.\text{c6}$ $\text{c7}!!$

Although we can suppose that Garry was in shock after the unexpected turn of events, he sets a refined trap into which Karpov will fall without blinking!

$54...\text{xf3}$ $55.\text{xf6}$ would have been just hopeless, according to the Suba method.



$55.\text{Qxd5}\uparrow$

The premature elimination of this pawn, opening the way to counterplay for the black king, will annihilate all the achievements of Karpov's previous brilliant play. In the next phase of the game more than one inaccuracy will be needed from Black in order to bring White's game on the winning path again.

White should have stuck to his initial plan by continuing with $55.\text{Qh5}!$.

Play might have continued:

$55...\text{c2}\uparrow$

We already know that $55...\text{xf3}$ $56.\text{Qxf6}$ is winning for White.

$56.\text{c7}$ c6

Black plays his last card: the counterattack.

$57.\text{Qxf6}$ b1

Or $57...\text{f5}$ $58.\text{Qxd5}!$ (as pointed out by Dvoretsky, this is much stronger than my initial recommendation $58.\text{c7}$ which could be followed by $58...\text{d1}!$, muddying the waters. $58...\text{b3}$ $59.\text{Qe7}\uparrow$ winning.) Dvoretsky considered $57...\text{d1}$ to be better, but White would win by familiar means after $58.\text{c6}$ xf3 $59.\text{c6}$.

$58.\text{Qg4}$ f5 $59.\text{c7}$ f4 $60.\text{c6}$ xf3 $61.\text{Qf6}$ c3 $62.\text{cxd5}$

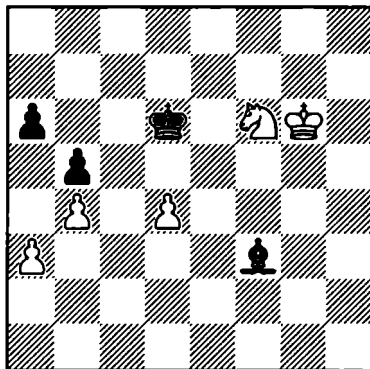
and the d-pawn decides.

The following phase of the game will be of a tactical nature. The importance and responsibility of each move will be very high for both sides.

$55...\text{c6}$

Kasparov considered it necessary to take the f5-square under control, in order to discourage an eventual Qxf6 .

Geller and Mikhalchishin recommend $55...\text{c6}$ $56.\text{Qxf6}$ xf3 mentioning that the win would not have been easy.



I would dare to say that Black would have had no special problems defending the position after: $57.\text{c5}$ g2 $58.\text{c4}$ b7

Black has to avoid at any cost the move d4-d5; bad would be 58...♗h3 59.♖e4 ♗c8? 60.d5 followed by ♖d4, ♗e4, ♖e5, ♗c5 etc.

59.♖e3 ♗c6 60.♖d3 ♗b7

Apparently the only move: otherwise Black would lose his a6-pawn.

61.♗e4† ♖d5 62.♗c3†

Or 62.♗c5 ♗c8 and White achieves nothing. Even if it would be Black's turn to move he would not be in zugzwang, since he would have...♗f5† followed by...♗c8 back.

62...♖d6

and I cannot see how White can improve the position.

56.♗c7†

Garry's idea would have been crowned by success after 56.♗xf6 ♗xf3 57.♖g5 ♗h1 and, because of the weakness of the a2-g8 diagonal, White cannot coordinate his pieces in order to make progress. Needless to say, with a black pawn on d5 the position would still have been winning.

56...♖d7

As mentioned by Averbakh and Taimanov, 56...♖d6? would have led to the same kind of position as in the comment to Black's 55th move. For instance:

57.♗e8†

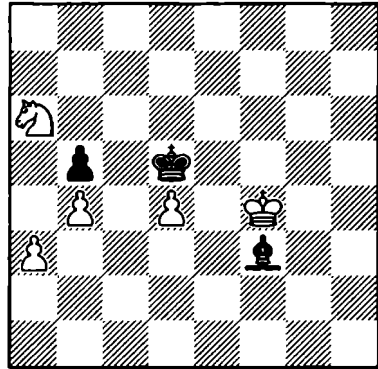
Or 57.♗xa6 ♗xf3 58.♖xf6 ♖d5 when Black's counterplay should be sufficient for an easy draw.

57...♖e7 58.♗xf6 ♗xf3 59.♖f5 ♖d6

As we know, there is no win here for White. This was, however, not so easy to establish over the board; Kasparov's defensive plan was to prevent White from consolidating, even if this would be connected with a new loss of material. 57.♗xa6 ♗xf3 58.♖xf6 ♖d6 59.♖f5 ♖d5 60.♖f4

In his comments for *Chess Informant* No. 42 Geller considers this position to be already winning. For a long time I considered this to be an exaggeration, until I saw Karsten Müller's brilliant analysis (see the comments on 66...♗b7). Now, after having experienced several successive changes of the assessment of certain positions, I believe that Geller came rather close to the truth

(at least from a practical point of view), but I prefer to refrain from a definitive verdict.



60...♗h1 61.♖c3

White has managed to defend his pawn and preserves a considerable material advantage. However, his poor coordination as well as Black's activity still makes the win quite problematic.

61...♖c4

Trying to prevent White from reaching the c3-square with his king.

62.♗c5 ♗c6

Black has to choose the squares for his bishop with great care.

For instance, 62...♗g2 would lose to 63.♗d3 ♖b3 64.♗f4! (winning a decisive tempo) 64...♗b7 65.♖d3 ♖xa3 66.♖c3 followed by d5, as pointed out by Averbakh and Taimanov.

With the bishop in the lower half of the board, 62...♖c3 would also be bad because it would allow 63.♗e4† ♖c4 (Necessary, in order to control the d5-square. Equally bad would be 63...♖b3 64.d5 ♗g2 65.d6 ♗h3 66.♖d4 ♖xa3 67.♖c5 and White will soon win the bishop.) 64.♗d6† ♖b3 65.♗xb5 ♖a4 66.♗d6 ♖xa3 67.b5 and the pawn is unstoppable.

I suppose that at this stage of the game Kasparov was quite confident about his position. White's pawn structure is not too favourable, while the black pieces are rather active. However, within the next few moves the white knight will display an impressive vivacity.

63. d3 ♖g2

Averbakh and Taimanov recommend a waiting strategy. For instance 63...♗e8 64.♖e5† ♗d5 “in order to resist with two pawns down”.

If White manages to place the knight on c3, while his king is on d3, he would push the enemy king back and win as in the comment to Black's 67th move. However, this is not possible to achieve, since Black would periodically check on g6 whenever the knight would try to approach the c3-square.

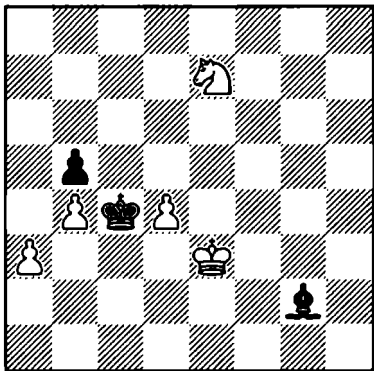
64. ♖e5† ♗c3

Kasparov tries to play actively, but 64...♗d5 would have been entirely possible with similar ideas to the previous note.

On the other hand 64...♗b3? would be bad because of 65.♗d3 then to transfer the knight to f6; if 65...♗xa3 then 66.♗c3.

65. ♖g6 ♗c4 66. ♖e7

Karpov has managed to find the most efficient square for the knight. It not only controls the d5-square, but also creates threats such as ♖c8-d6† or ♖c8-b6†, questioning the stability of the enemy king on c4. There is little wonder that, confronted with these unexpected problems, Kasparov cracked under the pressure.

**66...♗b3?**

Kasparov's desire to take the c8-square under control and, in this way, maintain his king's activity is understandable. The problem is that the bishop will be very passively placed here.

66...♗b3? loses to 67.d5 ♗xa3 68.d6 ♗h3 69.♖d5 as indicated by Averbakh and Taimanov.

Gipslis and Mikhalchishin recommended 66...♗h1! 67.♖c8 (67.d5 leads to a drawn pawn ending after 67...♗xd5) and Black can parry the threat ♖d6† with 67...♗d5 with an already familiar position.

During the second half of July 2004, I was enjoying a nice vacation between tournaments. My work on the book you are reading now had finished several weeks earlier and I was looking forward to its publication.

In this most pleasant state of mind, I received a rather alarming e-mail from my editor and friend Jacob Aagaard. He had just noticed that Timman had submitted the present game to a detailed analysis in his recently published book *Power Chess with Pieces*, apparently intended to be an ultimate guide on its subject. Jacob told me that he was going to compare my analysis with Timman's, and let me know about any critical points he found.

My worst expectations came true when he sent me a small file containing a winning method found by Timman in the diagrammed position together with some other minor points. Since my verdict was that White only has some practical chances, the problem had to be taken rather seriously, meaning that some structural changes had to be made. Just like in some of my nightmares: more than 15 years after having graduated from the Polytechnic Institute, I still occasionally dream that I have one more exam left...

Anyway, let us turn our attention to the position after 66...♗h1!

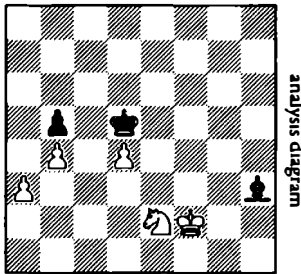
Now Timman's winning line starts with: 67.♖f5!

This move creates some concrete problems for Black, but are they really unsolvable? For the moment, I shall follow Timman's main line in *Power Chess with Pieces*.

67...♗d5

67...♗c3 is bad because of 68.♖d6 see below in my note to Kasparov's 67th move.

68.♖g3 ♗g2 69.♗f2 ♗h3 70.♖e2



However, now I seem to have found a significant improvement. Timman's line continues:

70...♖c4? 71.♗f3! ♙f1 72.♕g3 ♗d3 73.♗e3 ♗g6 74.♖c2

Very instructive play, precisely what one would expect from a player with such a deep understanding of chess as the Dutch champion. Timman's line underlines Black's problems of coordination. The bishop will not be able to return on the long diagonal too easily. However, I am not entirely sure whether this guarantees a win.

Further analysis is needed but here it would fall beyond our scope, since I managed to find a simple draw at an earlier moment. For the moment, I shall retain also Timman's statement that once White reaches the c3-square with his king, the win would become a matter of time, the next step being the exchange of the a-pawn for the black b-pawn.

My improvement consists of:

70...♗g4! 71.♗e3

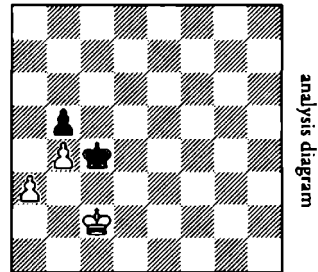
What else? 71.♖c3† is simplest met with 71...♗c4. Now Black should not fear entering the pawn ending with 71...♗xe2 72.♗xe2 ♗xd4. Timman must have considered this exchange impossible. An entirely excusable mistake: White's material advantage in the initial position is so big that one tends to believe that simplifications should always favour him.

73.♗d2

The plan initiated by 73.♗f3? fails painfully after 73...♗c3 74.♗e4 ♗b3 75.♗d4 ♗xa3 76.♗c5?? to 76...♗a4 and it is Black who is

winning. For the sake of truth I should add that 76.♗c3 is still a draw.

73...♗c4 74.♗c2



White's winning chances are connected with the pawn break a4 in a moment when Black's king is too far away, or with obtaining the opposition with his king on the fourth rank.

74...♗d5!

74...♗d4? loses after 75.♗b3 ♗d5 76.a4 and the black king is one step too far after 76...bxa4† 77.♗xa4 ♗c6 78.♗a5 with an elementary win.

White can try several moves, but none that leads to a win against accurate defence.

a) 75.♗d3 wins the opposition with the king on the third rank but fails to maintain the threat of a well-timed a4. White makes no progress after 75...♗e5! (The only move. 75...♗c6? loses to 76.♗e4! with a diagonal opposition.)

b) 75.♗b3 is answered with 75...♗c6.

c) 75.♗c3 ♗c6! Again forced. (75...♗d6? loses the opposition, the b5-pawn and the game after 76.♗d4 while after 75...♗e5 White opens the game on the queenside with 76.♗b3 ♗d5 77.a4. After 75...♗c6 White cannot win the opposition because the c4-square is under control.) 76.♗b3 ♗b7

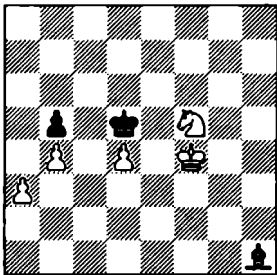
After analysing the pawn ending independently I have also checked in Averbakh's endgame Encyclopaedia. The position would be winning with the pawn on a2, because White can use the tempo a3 at the right moment to win the opposition. Averbakh also gives an ending that would result after shifting the position one file to the right and one rank forward when both

modifications obviously favour White. His verdict is nevertheless the same: a draw.

Initially, I was quite happy with having solved the problem raised by Jacob so easily, but then I became curious and felt like analysing further. Timman's idea of proving that the bishop feels a bit restricted along the apparently long h1–a8 diagonal, based on the fact that the king is best placed on d5, appealed to me.

Soon I discovered that 68.♔f4! is a much more dangerous move from a practical point of view than Timman's whole plan. In order to avoid trouble, Black has to watch his step. The basic idea is similar to Timman's, but White aims to take advantage of the restricted position of the bishop in a more refined way, without having to retreat his own pieces to the passive e2- and f2-squares.

Since the bishop's access to g2 is denied for the moment in view of the fork on e3, Black has a rather unpleasant choice between several ways of worsening his position.



analysis diagram

a) 68...♔c4 is the worst possible continuation. By giving up the control of the d5-square, Black allows White a relatively easy win. 69.♔e5 ♖c6 (After 69...♔b3 70.d5 ♗xa3 the nearest win is 71.♗e7!! when 71...♗xd5 allows White defend his last pawn with 72.♗xd5 while otherwise the d-pawn would be unstoppable.) 70.d5 ♗d7 and now 71.♗d6† ♔b3 72.♗d4 ♗xa3 73.♔c5 with an easy win. The black king is completely out of play and the threat of advancing the d-pawn with the support of the knight is decisive.

b) 68...♔e6 might look like a better king retreat since it maintains the control of the d5-square.

However, after 69.♗e3 Black is denied any form of counterplay, since his king is safely cut off. The position is similar to that examined in the notes to Black's 55th move, with the significant difference that the a6-pawn is missing here! White's main plan is to activate his king along a seemingly long route such as g5-g6-g7-f8-e8 and so on, aiming to attack the last remaining black pawn. Black cannot effectively prevent this because he has to guard the enemy d5-pawn at the same time. Here are some sample lines:

69...♗b7

69...♔f6 leads to zugzwang after 70.d5. With his bishop captive on h1, he will have to allow the white king to advance to the key e5-square.

70.♔g5 ♗e4

Trying to prevent the king from advancing.

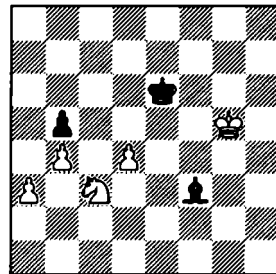
71.♗d1!

White takes advantage of the unfortunate position of the enemy pieces in order to transfer his knight on an even more favourable position.

71...♗f3

Black cannot take advantage of the temporary lack of defence of the d5-square because after 71...♔d5 72.♗c3† ♗xd4 73.♗xe4 ♔xe4 74.♔f6 White would win the pawn ending. The decisive factor is the unfavourable position of the black king; one step too far from the queenside.

72.♗c3



analysis diagram

The e4-square is under control now and the bishop will not be able to interfere with the white king's action for the time being.
72...♗c6 73.♔g6 ♗e8† 74.♔g7 ♗c6

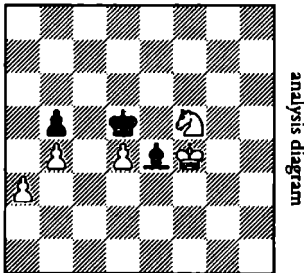
The bishop returns to the long diagonal in order to keep the enemy pawn under observation.

75. ♖f8 ♘d6 76. d5!

Finally, the white king has reached a sufficiently advanced position in order to ensure a win in case of the exchanges on d5.

76... ♗d7 77. ♖f7

And White will keep making progress until the final victory. By the method of elimination, Black should play 68... ♗e4 keeping his king on d5. The obvious drawback of this move is that the bishop is a bit hanging in the centre of the board.



White can make further progress with 69. ♗d6 ♗d3. This is the most natural move, defending the pawn, but at least two other bishop retreats are entirely possible:

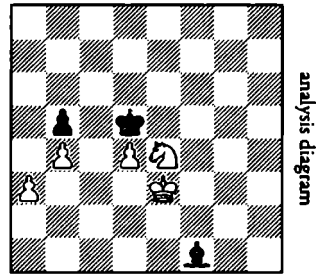
a) After 69... ♗c2 70. ♗xb5 ♗c4 White has three extra pawns already, but they are all vulnerable. The best practical chance is to give up the knight in order to win time for activating the king. 71. ♗e5 ♗xb5 72. d5 Black has the strong defensive move 72... ♗b3! (Making any further progress impossible for White. For instance, the clumsy 72... ♗g6? loses to 73. d6 ♗e8 74. ♗e6 ♗c6 75. ♗e7 ♗d7 76. b5† when the d-pawn promotes.) 73. d6 ♗c6 74. b5† ♗d7 75. b6 ♗c6.

b) 69... ♗g6 70. ♗xb5 ♗c4 is similar, for instance 71. a4 (71. ♗e5 ♗xb5 72. d5 ♗a4 73. d6 ♗e8 74. ♗e6 ♗xa3 and Black is just in time) 71... ♗xb4 72. d5 ♗e8! and after capturing the a-pawn the black king is close enough in order to ensure a draw. Returning to:

69... ♗d3

Play may continue:
70. ♗c3 ♗f1 71. ♗e4

Now Black faces a difficult decision again. Where should he move his bishop?

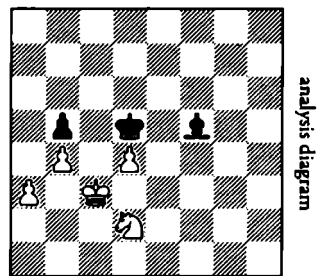


a) 71... ♗h3 places the bishop on a passive and, as we shall see, vulnerable square. After 72. ♗f6† ♗e6 (72... ♗c4 is even worse because of 73. d5) 73. ♗h5 White achieves an optimal regrouping with ♗f4 (an already familiar picture) because the bishop's position makes 73... ♗d5 impossible.

b) 71... ♗c4 leads to a similar result after 72. ♗d2 ♗a2 73. ♗d3 ♗e6 74. ♗e4 ♗b1† 75. ♗e3 planning ♗c3, when 75... ♗d5 is impossible again because of 76. ♗c3† winning the bishop.

c) The correct move is 71... ♗g2!. With the bishop on the long diagonal 72. ♗f6† is not dangerous because of 72... ♗c4.

True, after 72. ♗d2 ♗h3 73. ♗d3 ♗f5† 74. ♗c3 White reaches Timman's regrouping, but how is he going to carry out the break a3-a4? Black will simply keep his bishop on the a4-e8 diagonal when further progress seems impossible for White.



Timman restricts himself to explaining how White would win after exchanging the pawns but does not say how this exchange could be achieved.

And yet, without any connection with Timman's whole idea, the first moves suggested by him seem to be very strong. Shortly after the publication of the first English edition of this book, Karsten Müller sent me his analysis on this crucial moment of the game. His idea is simply brilliant: 69.♔d3! ♕f3 70.♖f1 ♕e4† 71.♗c3 ♕f3

For the moment, Black seems to be out of any danger, since the knight seems to have no way of reaching the b2-square.

72.♖e3† ♗d6

Karsten chose this continuation as his main line, but I believe that his main merit is to have discovered that after 72...♗e4 White can play 73.♖c4!! when accepting the sacrifice would leave Black helpless against the systematic advance of the white pawns, while 73...♗d5 74.♖b2 followed by a4 leaves White with two passed pawns.

[Shortly before the material of the second edition was sent to print, Karsten sent me a last minute discovery: The newly created Nalimov 6-men databases for this kind of position assesses the position arising after 74... ♕h5 75.a4 bxa4 76.♖xa4 ♗c6 as a draw. I do not have these tablebases, but here is what I can understand about the position: If White could manage to transfer his knight to c3, he would most probably win, but whenever the white king clears this square, the enemy king can attack one of the pawns in order to force his opposite number to return. Against a regrouping with the knight on e3 and the king on a3 (planning d5 and/or ♗a4-a5), Black can defend with his king on d6 and the bishop on b5. While all this certainly looks surprising, we can state that from a practical point of view Geller's assessment (see the comment on the 60th move) has an acceptable degree of accuracy.]

I would also mention that 72...♗c6 would take the c6-square away from the bishop after 73.♗b3 when Black cannot prevent a4.)

73.a4!

Now, 73.♗b3 would be met by 73...♕c6.

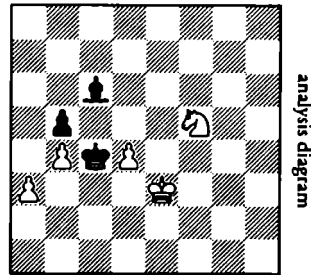
73...bxa4 74.♖c4† ♗c7 75.b5 ♕d5 76.♖e3 ♕b3 77.♗b4 ♗b7 78.d5 ♗c7 79.♖c4 ♕c2 80.b6†

♗b7 81.♗c5 ♕g6 82.♖a5† ♗b8 83.d6 ♕e8 84.b7 a3 85.♗b6 a2 86.♖b3 ♕d7 87.♖c5 ♕b5

The only way to cover both squares where Black could be mated by the knight.

88.d7 a1 ♖ 89.d8 ♖#.

And yet, this is not the last step towards the truth. I thought that Black had another satisfactory defence against 67.♖f5. Before finding the simple refutation of Timman's main line, I investigated the consequences of 67...♕c6



This move can be met with 68.♖d6†. Where should the black king go?

The position resulting after 68...♗c3 69.♖c8 is losing for Black and is analysed in the notes to the 67th move in the game.

The same applies to 68...♗b3 69.♗d3.

68...♗d5

This is a bit awkward but should not lead to defeat.

a) 69.♖c8 seems to be not too dangerous. Black continues:

69...♕b7 70.♖a7 ♗c4!

70...♕a6? places the bishop on a rather passive square. No wonder White wins after 71.♗d3 ♗d6 72.♗e4 ♕b7†! 73.d5! ♕xd5† 74.♗d4. Again, the bishop is misplaced. Black cannot effectively defend his last pawn. 74...♕c6 75.♖xc6 leads to a winning pawn ending for White, the same as 74...♕c4 75.a4 ♕f1 76.♖xb5† ♕xb5 not really worse than other moves 77.axb5. The attempt to win the trapped knight with 72...♗c7 fails to 73.d5 ♗b6 74.d6 and Black is one tempo late.

71.♗f4 ♗xd4 72.♖xb5† ♗d5

White's extra pawns are worthless without the

help of the king. True, Black should watch his step for a while, in order to avoid annoying forks.

73.♗e3 ♘c8

73...♗c6 allows the white king approach after 74.♖d4 ♗d7 75.♗d3 winning.

74.♖d4

74.♗d3 leads to an immediate draw after 74...♗a6 75.a4 ♗c6 76.♗c4 ♗xb5† 77.axb5† ♗b6.

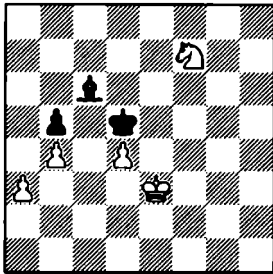
74...♗c4 75.♗e4

75.b5 is also inoffensive. After 75...♗b7 White has nothing better than advancing the other pawn too with 76.a4 when 76...♗b4 draws.

75...♗d7 76.♗e5 ♗a4

And Black will soon start attacking the enemy pawns.

b) 69.♖f7?!



Only this move manages to underline the slight lack of coordination reigning in Black's camp, but this seems to be insufficient for a win, too. After 69...♗e8 (69...♗d7 70.♗d3 is similar but 69...♗c4? loses to 70.♖e5†) 70.♖e5 White can bring his king to c3, but this is only a platonic consolation. The knight's domination over the bishop does not help, since the king is tied down to the defence of the d4-pawn.

However, this last hope to prove Black's position to be defensible was removed by an e-mail received from Steffen Pedersen. He correctly pointed out that after 67...♗c6 White can win with: 68.♗f4! 68...♗d7

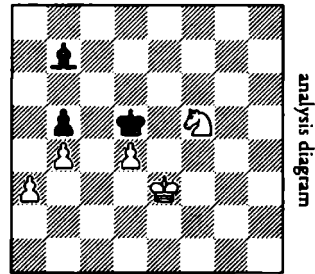
Unfortunately, the e8-square is denied to the bishop because of the fork on d6, while 68...♗b3 is more or less similar after 69.♗e5 ♗xa3 70.♗d6

69.♗e5 ♗b3 70.♖e3 ♗xa3 71.♗d6

and White is just in time to defend his b4-pawn and win the bishop for the d-pawn, with the support of the knight. This seems like another confirmation of Geller's evaluation after White's 60th move.

67.♖f5! ♗g2?!

Averbakh and Taimanov recommend 67...♗d5, "Facing White with bigger problems". I believe, however, that the win would have been rather simple:



68.♗d3

Here is the moment when the passivity of the bishop makes itself felt: Black cannot prevent his king from being driven away.

68...♗a8 69.♖e3† ♗e6 70.♖d1 ♗d6 71.♖c3

This is the best square for the knight in order to restrict the black king and sustain a queenside action.

71...♗c6 72.♗c2

The immediate 72.d5 ♗xd5 73.♖xb5† is also sufficient for a win, although with the a- and b-pawns there are some technical problems.

72...♗e6 73.♗b2 ♗d6 74.a4 bxa4 75.♗a3 ♗c7 76.b5 ♗d7 77.♗xa4

Black cannot fight against both pawns.

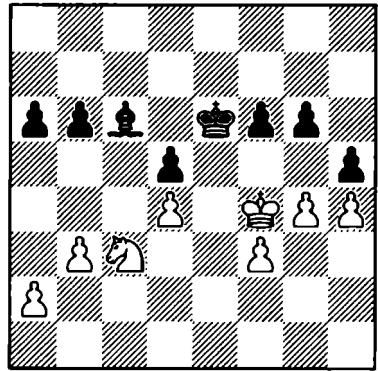
Initially, Dvoretzky considered 68...♗e6? 69.♖e3 ♗f3 to be drawish, but after reading my comments on 66...♗b7 (line b 68...♗e6) he understood that White would win with 70.♗d2 followed by the transfer of the king to the kingside.

67...♗b3 loses, as usual, to 68.♗d3.

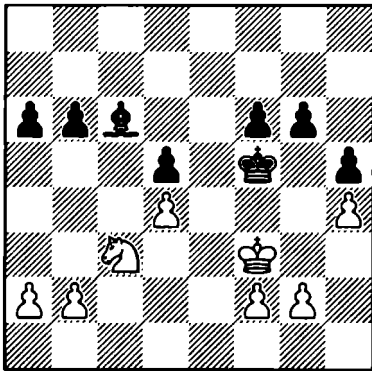
It is curious that none of the commentators mentioned the move 67...♗c3. Black hopes

to put his opponent in some sort of zugzwang. For instance, after 68.♔f4 he could safely play 68...♗b3. However, White can win with 68.♘d6 ♗c6 69.♘c8 (planning to take control over the d5-square in order to advance the pawn) 69...♗c4 70.♘b6† ♗b3 71.♗d3 followed by d5, winning. 68.♘d6† ♗b3 69.♘xb5 ♗a4 70.♘d6 1–0

We have seen that a favourable (for White) queenside structure is a useful complement to an advantage in the centre and to the kingside plan. In the next game, White will manage to win in spite of the fact that the queenside was not blocked.



Gregory Levenfish – Alexander Kotov Soviet Championship, Leningrad 1939



This is precisely the game mentioned by Botvinnik. I shall never abandon the hope that some day I shall find the book where his analysis was published, even if this would mean feeling shamed by the comparison.

35.♘d1 ♗b5

35...g5 would have led to a position similar to the previous game, with the significant difference that the black b-pawn is better placed.

36.♘e3† ♗e6 37.♗f4 ♗e2 38.f3 ♗d3 39.♘d1 ♗f1 40.g3 ♗b5 41.♘c3 ♗d7 42.g4

White could not hope to make progress without this move: tension is needed on the kingside.

42...♗c6 43.b3!?

This move, which has the obvious aim of taking the a4-square under control, will provoke Black into unjustified panic.

43...hxg4!?

This is not the losing move yet. However, after this concession Black will have to balance like an acrobat on the brink of defeat.

Bad, of course, would have been 43...♗b7? 44.♘a4 winning.

However, better would have been 43...♗f7 when the blocking of the diagonal h5-e8 would be only temporary. Black would manage to regroup just in time after:

44.♘e2

Planning ♘g3.

44...♗e6 45.♘g3 ♗e8

Achieving a safe position.

Without being a mistake, 43...♗e7 would have made the defence more difficult. White could have tried two different move orders.

a) 44.♘a4 hxg4!

This is the only correct move order: after 44...♗xa4? 45.bxa4 hxg4 46.♗xg4! White wins with f4-f5.

45.fxg4 ♗xa4 46.bxa4 ♗e6!

with equality. See also the comment on White's 45th move.

b) 44.gxh5 gxh5 45.♗f5 ♗f7 46.♘a4 ♗d7!?

It is necessary to push the king back.

47.♗f4 b5

The possible pawn endings are interesting, but, as mentioned, risky for Black. For instance, White

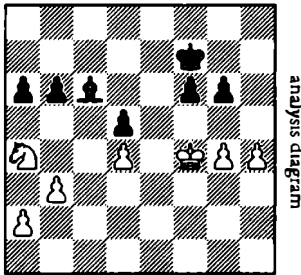
would win here after 47...♙xa4? 48.bxa4 ♖e6 49.a5! (an elegant way of creating zugzwang) 49...bxa5 50.a4 ♗e7 51.♙f5 ♕f7 52.f4, or, similarly, 49...b5 50.a3.

48.♙c5 ♙c8

There is no way for White to penetrate. In fact, this is a worse version of the fortress intended by Kasparov when he captured on h4, which reveals how great Black's defensive resources are.

44.fxg4 ♙f7 45.♙d1

I have spent a lot of time analysing the position after 45.♙a4.



Although Black has a simple solution at his disposal, for didactic purposes I shall give some of the losing lines.

Initially, my main line went 45...b5. This is an obvious concession, but can White make progress? It appears so...

46.♙c5 a5 47.a3!

Keeping Black's pawns under control.

47...♙a8

Black has to choose the squares for the bishop with care. 47...♙e8 would lose to 48.♙b7 a4 49.bxa4 bxa4 50.♙d6†. In the corner the bishop will be much safer, but also very passive. 47...b4 is obviously bad because after 48.axb4 axb4 the b4-pawn will be doomed. However, White must be accurate and attack the pawn from d3, since 49.♙a6 would lead nowhere in view of 49...♙a4!

48.h5 ♙g7

Black has to prevent the advance of the wing pawn: after 48...♙c6 49.h6! followed by g4-g5 White is winning.

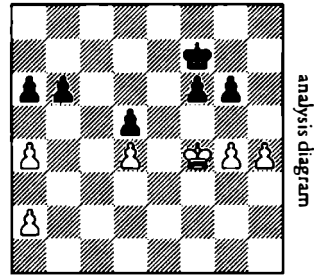
49.♙e6† ♕h6 50.♙f8!

At the cost of a temporary pawn sacrifice White opens the position.

50...gxh5 51.gxh5 ♕xh5 52.♙f5 ♕h4 53.♙e6 ♕g3 54.♙c7 ♙c6 55.♕xf6 ♕f4 56.♕e6 ♕e4 57.♕d6

White is in time to defend his pawns. Although Black is not forced to allow this kind of variation, they are quite instructive from a general point of view.

Black's correct defence is 45...♙xa4! 46.bxa4.



My initial analysis included the following lines:
a) 46...♙g7 47.h5 ♕h6 48.hxg6 ♕xg6 49.a5! and once again White wins by zugzwang.

b) 46...b5 47.axb5 axb5 48.h5 b4 (Or 48...♙g7 49.hxg6 ♕xg6 50.a3 winning in a well-known manner again.) 49.h6 ♕g8 50.g5 When I considered White's space advantage to be decisive. In fact, as highlighted by Malfagia, 50...fxg5† leads to a draw after 51.♙g4 ♕h8! (I might have missed this move in my initial analysis) 52.♕xg5 ♕h7 53.♕f6 ♕xh6 54.♕e5 g5 55.♕xd5 g4 56.♕e4 ♙g5 57.d5 ♕f6 58.♕f4 g3 59.♕xg3 ♕e5 60.♕f3 ♕xd5 61.♕e3 ♕c4 62.♕d2.

After having concluded the analysis, at a rather late hour of night, I put my head on my pillow with the satisfaction of a job well done. Suddenly, just before falling asleep, I was hit by Black's saving idea:

c) 46...♕e6! 47.a5

Black's idea is that after 47.h5 he can block the position with 47...g5†.

47...bxa5 48.a4 ♙f7 49.h5 ♙g7 50.hxg6 ♕xg6

Now, comparing with the previous lines, White lacks one reserve tempo in order to build the zugzwang.

45...♙d7 46.♖e3

The nice thing about White's position is that he can try to provoke small concessions on both wings without having to hurry or to care too much about counterplay.

46...♙e6 47.♖c2 ♙c8

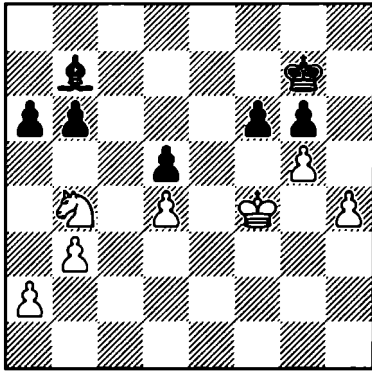
I am not sure why Kotov refrained from playing 47...a5!?

Generally, one should think twice before advancing a pawn in the endgame, because the weaknesses left behind are permanent. However, in this concrete case the weakness of the b5-square would be safely controlled by the bishop, which would cooperate perfectly with the pawns in order to create a barrier in front of the enemy king.

48.♖b4 ♙b7 49.♗5

An important move: the g6-pawn is fixed and the dark squares are put under pressure.

49...♗g7



50.♖d3

Levenfish plans to invert the roles of his pieces: the knight will be transferred to f4, keeping Black's pieces passive, while his royal highness will migrate to the left in order to create some weaknesses.

With the black pawn on b5, White would have had the following winning plan: 50.♖c2 ♙c8 51.♖e3 ♙e6 52.♖f1 ♙f5 53.♖g3 ♙b1 54.a3 ♙c2 55.b4 ♙d3 56.h5! with an already familiar scenario.

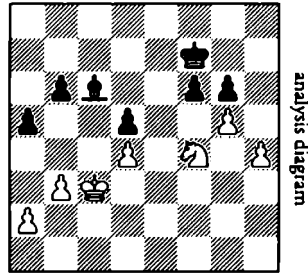
Under the concrete conditions of this game, however, the plan would have been insufficient: Black has the b5-square at his disposal and would have the possibility of active counterplay with the king (♗d6-c6-b5).

50...♙c8

Black had no time to activate his king: 50...♗f7 51.♖f3 ♗e6 52.♗g4! followed by ♖f4, etc.

51.♗e3 ♗f7 52.♖f4 ♙b7 53.♗d2 ♙c6 54.♗c3 ♙b7

Perfectly playable would have been 54...a5.



For instance:

55.b4 a4

But not 55...axb4! 56.♗xb4 with zugzwang.

56.a3

The zugzwang is only "partial", since Black would have survived with:

56...b5

The only move. If 56...♙b7 then 57.b5 winning the a-pawn.

57.♗d2 ♙b7 58.♗e3 ♙c6 59.♖e2

And now Black would have had the last opportunity to play:

59...fxg5!

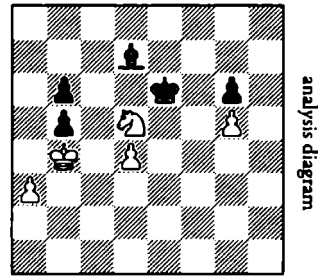
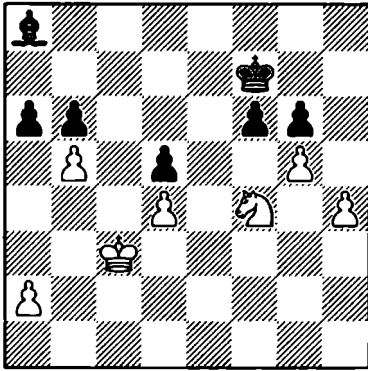
He would lose after 59...♙d7? 60.♗f4 ♗g7 61.♖g3 followed by h5, since the queenside would be blocked...

60.hxg5 ♙d7

In spite of the overwhelming optical advantage, White cannot win.

55.b4 ♙a8 56.b5!?

White makes the last winning attempt, putting the queenside under pressure. Faced with new concrete problems, Black's position will suddenly collapse.



56...a5?

This is the decisive mistake. Although arranging the pawns on dark squares may look natural the weakness of the b6-pawn will be of decisive significance.

Necessary was 56...axb5 57.♖b4 ♙c6 although after 58.a3 Black would have faced the difficult task of finding the only saving move from a relatively wide choice.

a) 58...f5

This is an awful move, of course.

59.♗c3 ♙b7 60.♗d2 ♙a8 61.♗e3 ♙c6!

After 61...♙b7 62.♗d3 the white king would have penetrated to e5, because 62...♗e6 loses the g6-pawn after 63.♗e5.

62.♗f2

62.♗d3 would be less efficient now: 62...♗e7 63.♗f4 ♗e6 64.♗e5 ♙e8.

62...♙b7 63.♗g3 ♙c6 64.h5 ♗xh5 65.♗h4

and the g-pawn is too strong.

b) 58...♗g7? 59.♗e6† and, since f7 is not available, Black loses his f6-pawn. This is why the exchange on g5 is needed.

c) 58...♙e8? 59.♗xd5 ♗xg5 60.hxg5 and the counterplay fails: 60...♗e6 61.♗c7† with a winning pawn ending.

d) 58...♙d7?! This interesting pawn sacrifice, similar to Kasparov's, will fail by one tempo. 59.♗xd5 ♗xg5 60.hxg5 ♗e6



d1) 61.♗xb6

A practical and complicated move.

61...♙e8 62.♗c5 ♗f5 63.d5 ♗xg5 64.d6 ♗f5

The g-pawn is not simple to stop. Initially, I considered this position to be a draw, but Malfagia corrected my evaluation. White should win here, but it requires study-like play:

65.d7 ♙xd7 66.♗xd7 ♗5 67.♗d4 ♗4 68.♗b6 ♗3 68...♗f4 69.♗d5† ♗f3 70.♗e3 ♗3 71.♗f5 ♗2 72.♗h4† ♗f2 73.♗xg2 leads to a winning pawn ending, while 68...♗e6 69.♗d5 ♗d6 loses the pawn to 70.♗e3 ♗3 71.♗f5†.

69.♗d5 ♗e6

Aiming to maintain the balance between play on the different wings. 69...♗g4 would simplify White's task after 70.♗e3 when the g-pawn would soon be lost.

70.♗e3 ♗f6

Because of the possible fork on f5, the king has to watch his step.

71.♗d5!

Playing on two wings as well, in order to prevent Black's counterplay.

71...♗f7 72.♗e5 ♗e8 73.♗e6 ♗f8 74.♗g2!

Improving the position of the knight in order to restrict the enemy king's activity. The straightforward 74.♗d6 ♗f7 75.♗c5 ♗e6 76.♗xb5 ♗e5 leads to a draw.

74...♗g7 75.♗f4 ♗h7 76.♗f5 ♗g8

The g7-square is denied to the king because of the fork on h5.

77.♗g4

and Black loses his pawn without counterplay.

d2) 61.♗f6

The most precise move although 61.♗e3!! might be playable.

61...♙c8

The bishop is once again forced to occupy a passive position: if 61...♙c6 62.d5!† with a winning pawn ending again.

62.♗xb5 ♖f5 63.♖h7 ♗e6

Black's only hope is connected with an attack against the knight in order to create a passed pawn; hopeless would be 63...♗e4 64.♗xb6 ♗xd4 65.a4.

64.♗xb6 ♗g8

After 64...♗e4 White has the simple 65.♗c5 and Black cannot fight against two passed pawns.

65.♗c6!

White sacrifices the knight in order to attract the bishop to a passive square; the worst possible on the whole board.

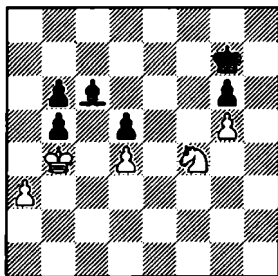
65...♗xh7 66.d5 ♗g8 67.d6 ♗e6 68.d7 ♗xd7†
69.♗xd7 ♗xg5 70.a4 ♗f5 71.a5

Black's pawn is one tempo too slow.

e) 58...fxg5!

Once again, this apparent concession is necessary in order to offer some freedom for the black king. Play may continue:

59.hxg5 ♗g7



analysis diagram

This is the difference: the check on e6 is not dangerous any more because of the simple 60...♗g8, and White can't make progress. He has to permanently take care about his g5-pawn.

57.♗d3

His Majesty successfully ended his mission on the queenside; the signal of retreat was already heard. What are the concrete achievements? The b6-pawn is now weak and the a4-square is available for the knight. At the same time the c6-square is

denied to the bishop, who has only b7 and a8 left. This creates additional possibilities of zugzwang.

57...♗b7 58.♗e3

Black cannot improve the position of either of his pieces, because his pawns need permanent protection.

58...♗a8

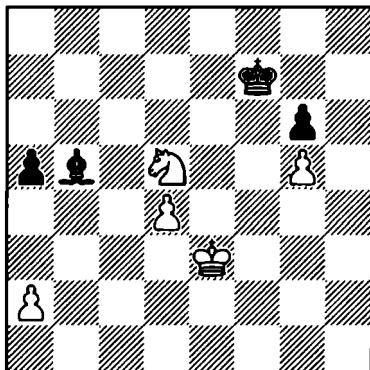
58...♗g7 is bad, because of 59.♖e6†.

58...fxg5 59.hxg5 ♗g7 does not work now: 60.♖d3 ♗f7 61.♗f4 ♗e6 and, although the e5-square is protected, the g6-pawn is left without defence. White wins with 62.♖e5.

59.♖d3!

The knight is aiming for a4. Placed on the worst possible square, the bishop will fail to capture the b5-pawn and defend its own d5-pawn by just one tempo.

59...♗b7 60.♖b2 ♗c8 61.♖a4 ♗d7 62.♖xb6 ♗xb5 63.♖xd5 fxg5 64.hxg5



White managed to win a pawn without allowing the slightest shadow of counterplay. The game is basically over.

64...♗c4

Or 64...♗e6 65.♖c7† winning the bishop.

65.♖c3 ♗e6 66.♗e4 ♗d6 67.d5 ♗c5

If 67...♗f1 then 68.♗d4 followed by ♖e4.

68.♗e5 ♗a6 69.d6 ♗c8 70.♖d5 ♗f5

Or 70...♗d7 71.♖e7.

71.♖e7 ♗d7 72.♖xg6 ♗b4 73.♖f8

1-0

Too many mistakes, the reader might say.

Let us look at the problem from a different angle: if one of the strongest exponents of the first Soviet wave was so hesitant after home analysis it might be that the position is really complicated. Black's main difficulty is of a psychological nature: move after move he has to choose between two or three different evils...

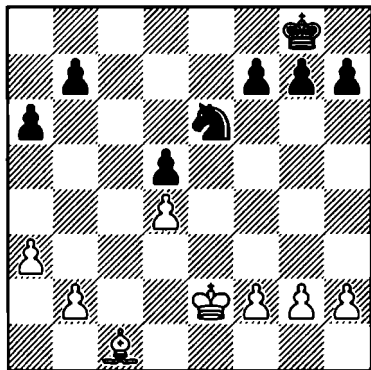
How many contemporary GMs would deal with the situation better than Kotov? Not an easy question to answer. It is easier to imagine, however, how many top GMs would have played with less efficiency than Levenfish.

In both previous examples Black's kingside weaknesses gave White the possibility of an invasion through that side of the board. One natural thought is that if the kingside pawns were placed on their initial squares Black would be out of any danger.

The following game (where, for a change, the colours are reversed) is a good illustration of the fact that things are not that simple.

Anthony Saidy – Robert Fischer

US Championship 1963/64, New York



By playing h4 or g3 at any moment of the game White would practically transpose to a familiar position. However, for the time being such concessions do not seem necessary and White avoids creating any weaknesses.

26.♠d3 h5 27.♙e3 ♖h7 28.f3

From a theoretical point of view this is the

correct arrangement of pawns: on squares of opposite colour to the bishop.

28...♜g6 29.a4

For the moment, this is also the correct arrangement of the queenside pawns. White should not rush in with a5 while there is a danger of invasion via b5. However, once Black has placed some of his kingside pawns on dark squares, making them vulnerable, a5 will become a permanent threat, because it would restrict Black's queenside mobility, preventing him in some cases from winning essential tempi with his pawns. At the same time, Black should not fight against this danger with an early ...b6, because this would only expose the pawn to the bishop's attacks.

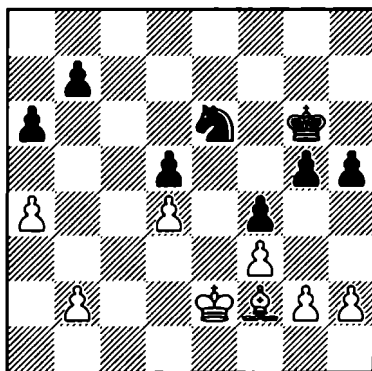
29...♜f5 30.♙e2 g5 31.♜f2 ♘d8 32.♙d2 ♜g6 33.♙e3 ♚e6 34.♜d3 ♜f5 35.♙e3 f6 36.♙e2 ♜g6 37.♜d3 f5

During the last few moves Black has systematically improved his position. Saidy limited himself to waiting moves, relying on the lack of weaknesses. Little by little it will become clear that the huge space advantage is at least as dangerous for White as placing the h- and g-pawns on dark squares would have been.

38.♙e2 f4!

As can be seen from the next comment, this is a favourable moment for Black to declare his intentions, because the necessity of defending the d-pawn restricts the possibilities of the white bishop.

39.♙f2



39...♟g7?

Fischer probably wanted to carry out the thematic pawn break, ...g4, in its optimal form. And yet, he seems to have failed to understand some of the subtleties of the position. Obviously, the f5-square is very important for Black, but he cannot occupy it with both his pieces at the same time. Transferring the knight to this square leaves the king slightly passive. Its activation will depend on the advance of the g-pawn, when, in fact, it should be the other way around: the activity of the king should be a premise for the kingside operations. At the same time, Black should have punished White's passive strategy on the kingside immediately since, as we shall see below, the change of plan represented by the modest advance of the pawn to h3 should have saved him at the last moment.

Concretely, this would have been a good moment to play 39...g4!, for instance: 40.♟d3 (40.fxg4 hxg4 would lead to a position that will be examined in the next comment, while 40.g3 fails to put up resistance in view of 40...♟f5 and Black is too active.) 40...♟g5! Now, there is enough space on this wing for the black pieces. Besides the general plan consisting of ...♟g7-f5 and g3, the last move takes the h4-square under control, thus preventing the activation of the bishop, which, if allowed, would probably save the game.

We can see now that the circumstances for playing ...g4 were really perfect: had the white king found itself on d3 already, White could have answered 39...g4 with 40.♞h4. White now has two main options:

a) Waiting passively with, for instance, 41.♞e2 would lead to a slow death.

41...♟g7 42.♞e1 ♟f5 43.♞f2 g3 44.hxg3 fxg3

In the first English edition of this book this position was analysed in the comments to White's 40th move.

45.♞g1

Despite my opinion in the previous edition, the pawn ending arising after 45.♞e3 ♟xe3 46.♞xe3 is losing for White because of 46...h4! 47.♞e2 h3 48.gxh3 ♟h4 49.♟f1 ♞xh3 50.♞g1 and now, for instance, 50...g2 as pointed out by Malfagia.

45...h4 46.♟f1

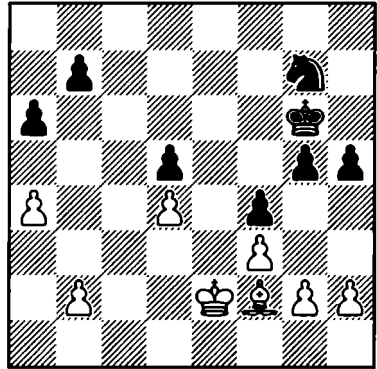
White has to place his pieces on such passive squares in order to prevent ...h4.

46...♞h5!

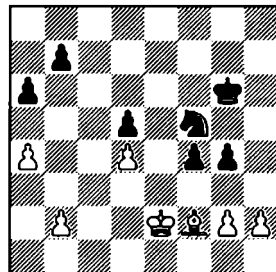
Black simply waits until White's pawn moves run out.

47.a5 ♟g5 48.b3 ♞h5 49.♞e1 h3 50.gxh3 ♞h4 and White is helpless against the g-pawn.

b) 41.♞e1, aiming to activate the bishop, is the other possibility, but would also fail after 41...♟g7 42.♞a5 gxf3! Just in time! 43.gxf3 ♞h4 Winning the h-pawn and the game.

**40.h3!**

Finally, White understands that continuing his policy of complete passivity will gradually ruin his position, and so he takes some measures against Black's main plan. In the previous edition, based on mistaken analysis, I considered this to be ... the losing move! There, I recommended 40.♟d3 ♟f5 41.♞e2 g4 42.fxg4 hxg4



analysis diagram

claiming that, as in the previous game, we have reached a case of "partial" (or rather apparent) zugzwang, adding that White has to make further concessions, but not all of them have decisive effects! In the meanwhile, some discoveries by Malfagia caused me to change my evaluation. Here are some possible continuations:

a) 43.a5 ♖h5 and the situation repeats itself, but White has worsened his queenside position.

b) 43.♙g1 ♖h4 44.♜f2 ♜f5 followed by ♜e4 with an easy win.

c) 43.♜f1 g3! 44.hxg3 fxg3 45.♙g1

What a square for the bishop...

45...♜g5

White will not be able to defend both his d4- and g2-pawns.

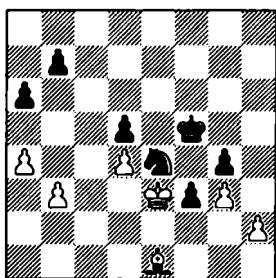
d) 43.♜d3 f3 44.g3

The best chance: otherwise the king would get to e4 or g2.

44...♞d6 45.♜e3 ♜f5

Blocking the f4-square, Black already threatens ...♞c4.

46.b3 ♞e4 47.♙e1



47...f2! 48.♙xf2 ♞xf2 49.♜xf2 ♜e4 50.♜g2 ♜xd4 51.h4 gxh3† 52.♜xh3

If 52.♜h2 then 52...♜e4 53.g4 d4 54.g5 ♜f5 and the d-pawn promotes.

52...♜e3 53.g4 d4 54.g5 d3 55.g6 d2 56.g7 d1♞ 57.g8♞ ♞h1†

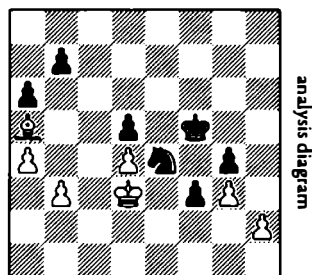
Black wins the enemy queen.

e) 43.b3

As we have seen, the control of the c4-square is important. All the other moves were unsatisfactory, but this modest looking move also fails to save White's game.

43...♜g5 44.♜d3 f3 45.g3 ♞d6 46.♙e1 ♞e4 47.♙b4! ♜f5 48.♙a5

Reaching this point, I wrote "It is curious that, in spite of the huge optical advantage, Black cannot win."



48...♞g5 49.♜e3 ♞h3 50.♙b6 f2 51.♜e2 ♜e4 52.♙c5

I ended my initial analysis here, with the brief comment "and White holds the position."

However, Black still has resources:

52...♞g1†! 53.♜xf2 ♞f3 54.♜g2

Striving for kingside counterplay, which I might have overestimated.

54...♞xd4 55.♙xd4

Against 55.b4 Malfagia suggested 55...♞f3, which might be winning as well, but strongest seems to be 55...♞b3! in order to avoid a continuation similar to the main line. White would then have to move the bishop away when the advance of the d-pawn would not allow him to generate the desired counterplay based on h3.

55...♜xd4

Now we have transposed to exactly the same position as after 50...♜xd4 in line d. Of course, White wins in the same way starting with 56.h4.

In their *Winning endgame technique*, Beliavsky and Mikhailchishin recommend:

40.g4 fxg3 41.♙xg3

Remarkably, 41.hxg3 would basically transpose to the game Levenfish-Kotov.

41...♞e6

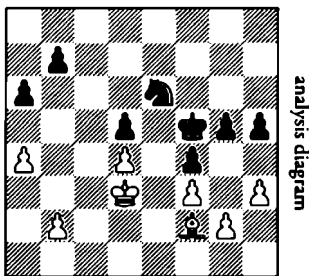
41...g4 does not offer more chances because after 42.fxg4 hxg4 43.♜e3 there is no way to make further progress.

42.h3(??) "building a fortress."

Obviously, the fortress would break down after the rather uncomplicated 42...♖xd4† and this might be the reason why the comment was not taken seriously so far. Actually, the authors must have had in mind something like 42.♗e3 ♕f5 (threatening g4) 43.h3 when, indeed, it is hard to see how Black can make any progress. White is coordinated well enough in order to control the f4-square, while the general exchanges generated by an eventual ...g4 would not offer winning chances because, unlike in the game Karpov-Kasparov, the queenside is not blocked and the white king can generate adequate counterplay if gradually pushed away from the d4-pawn.

40...♖f5

Despite my initial comment, this is not a real zugzwang! In view of some variations given in the next comments, which change my initial assessment, I tried to make 40...♖e6 work. The idea is to carry out the g4-break without having to worsen the position of the pieces, as happened in the game. The critical position arises after 41.♗d3 ♕f5



analysis diagram

a) The pawn break 42.g4†? is simply bad here because of 42...fxg3 43.♗xg3 ♖f4†.

b) The natural waiting move 42.♗e2? has the drawback of leaving the d4-pawn undefended, thus allowing Black put his plan to work in an optimal way.

42...g4 43.hxg4† hxg4 44.♗d3

The capture on g4 would lead to a position that will be analysed below.

44...♗g5 45.♗e1 ♖g7!

Now that Black has sufficient space for his pieces, the knight is transferred back to f5.

46.♗f2 ♖f5 47.♗e1

47.♗e2 is no improvement because of 47...g3

48.♗g1 ♖h4 49.♗f1 and now a series of neutral king moves will leave White in zugzwang, forcing him to abandon the g2-pawn and, with it, the game.

47...g3

and White cannot defend his g2- and d4-pawns simultaneously.

d) The correct defence would be 42.♗e1!. For instance, 42...g4 (In case of 42...♖f8, aiming to transfer the knight to g6 and only then advance the g-pawn, White could already play 43.g4† fxg3 44.♗xg3 ♖g6 45.♗e3 with the fortress presented above.) 43.hxg4† hxg4 and now 44.♗h4!, with the intention of keeping the bishop on the h4-d8 diagonal, would save the game. Black will have no way of strengthening his kingside pressure.

41.♗d3

The main alternative was:

41.♗g1 ♖h4 42.♗f2

But not 42.♗f2? ♖xg2 43.♗f1 ♖e3† 44.♗xe3 fxg3 45.♗e2 ♗f5 46.♗xe3 a5 and White will fall victim to successive zugzwangs.

In the previous edition, I ended my comment abruptly with:

42...♗f5

"Followed by g4." However, the fight is still on, as pointed out by Malfagia. White can play:

43.g4† fxg3† 44.♗xg3

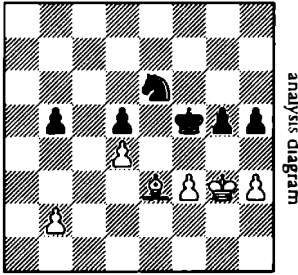
Although this is obviously a much worse form for him of Beliavsky and Mikhalchishin's fortress. The main difference is that from ♗ the king could simultaneously defend the d4-pawn and the f4-square, while now White has to coordinate his pieces with great care. Malfagia's analysis suggested that Black could still win, but I believe that with accurate play White should be able to defend. For instance:

44...♖g6 45.♗e3

White should take the f4-square under control as soon as possible. In case of the generally desirable 45.a5, which deprives Black of the possibility of winning some tempi with queenside moves, White would lose after 45...♖f4 46.♗e3 h4† 47.♗h2 ♖d3 48.b3 ♖e1.

45...b6

Aiming to keep the queenside alive.

46.♔d2 ♖f8 47.♙c1 ♜e6 48.♙e3 b5 49.axb5
axb5

analysis diagram

This is a critical position, where White is in apparent zugzwang.

a) White should probably refrain from kingside activity because after 50.h4 ♖f4! 51.hxg5 (or 51.♙f4 g4h4† with a winning pawn ending) 51...h4†! 52.♙h2 ♜xg5 the outside passed pawn gives Black excellent winning chances, in spite of the reduced number of pawns remaining on the board.

b) The ugly looking 50.b4, which places another pawn on a dark square, might be just playable. For instance, 50...♖d8 51.♙d2 ♜c6 52.♙c3 and I cannot see how Black can make progress.

c) Another curious possibility is 50.b3. Apparently Black would win with 50...♖d8, planning ...♜c6, ...♜a4, ...♜a5, which would win material, but White could unexpectedly bring his king into the defence with 51.♙f2!! (51.♙d2 ♜c6 52.♙c3 b4 53.♙b2 ♜a5 would illustrate Black's plan) 51...♜c6 52.♙e2 ♜a5 53.♙d3! when after 53...♜xb3 54.♙c3 ♜a5 55.♙b4 White's counterplay is sufficient for a draw.

41...g4

Once the white king stepped to the left this move became possible.

42.hxg4

You will probably not be surprised that after 42.♙e2 g3 43.♙g1 the total (and I would say ridiculous) passivity of the white bishop will lead White to catastrophe: 43...♙f7 44.♙e1 ♙e6 45.♙e2 ♙d6 46.♙e1 ♙c6 47.♙e2 ♙b6 48.b4 ♖h4 49.♙f1 ♙c6 and White is again in

zugzwang. He has to advance one of his queenside pawns, opening the door to the black king.

42...hxg4 43.fxg4 ♖h5 44.♙e1?

When I prepared the first edition of the book I was not aware of an older analysis by Timman, which had been mentioned by several sources along the time, including the recent *Fundamental Chess Endings* by Mueller and Lamprecht and *My Great Predecessors Volume 4* by Kasparov.

44.♙e2 ♖xg4 45.♙g1 ♙f5 46.♙f3

When Black would have no time to regroup in an optimal way because of the zugzwang position arising after:

46...♖f6 47.♙h2 ♖h5 48.a5!

The neutral 48.♙g1 would allow 48...♖g7 49.♙h2 ♜e6 followed by ...♖g5† and ...♙e4 with an easy win.

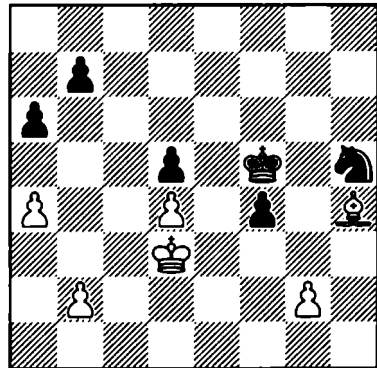
48...♙g5 49.g4 fxg3 50.♙xg3

As we know already, Black cannot win by the Suba-mechanism because the queenside is open, allowing White powerful counterplay.

44...♖xg4

The ending has reached familiar contours: the position was opened on the kingside. The queenside configuration favours White: some counterplay is possible there. This is why Black has to win the g2-pawn, not just exchange it!

45.♙d2 ♙f5 46.♙e1 ♖f6 47.♙h4 ♖h5



48.♙e1!

Saidy might have been demoralised by the course of the game: his last move considerably

simplifies Black's task. White could have posed more resistance with 48. ♖f2 ♘g4 49. ♘e2.

The road to victory would have been rather long and would have required great accuracy. Since this quality was characteristic of Fischer, even in his younger days, we can suppose that Saïdy was inspired to shorten his suffering, even if only subconsciously... Play could have continued:

49... ♖g3† 50. ♘d3 ♖f5

Black's idea is to play f4-f3 at the best possible moment, in order to conquer the d3-square for the king. However, premature would have been 50...f3 51. gxf3† ♘xf3 52. ♖e1 and, as mentioned, the counterplay on the queenside should be enough for a draw.

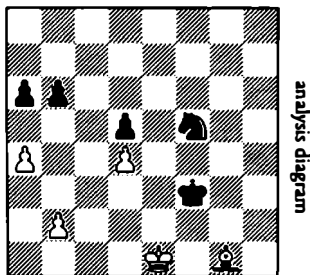
51. ♘e2 b6

The pawn ending arising after 51... ♖h4 52. ♖xh4 ♘xh4 would offer no winning chances because of 53. ♘f3 ♘g5 54. a5!. After the accurate 51... b6 White is in zugzwang again.

52. ♘e1

As we shall see later the inclusion of the moves 52. b3 b5 would weaken the third line, simplifying Black's task.

52...f3! 53. gxf3† ♘xf3 54. ♖g1



54... ♖h6!

This is the best way to prevent counterplay. Worse would be 54... ♘e4 55. ♘d2 ♖xd4 56. ♖f2 b5 57. axb5 axb5 58. ♖h4 ♖c6 59. ♖f6 and the white king will later attack the b5-pawn.

55. ♖h2

55. ♖f2 would change nothing: 55... ♖g4 56. ♖h4 ♘e3 and the black king gets to d3.

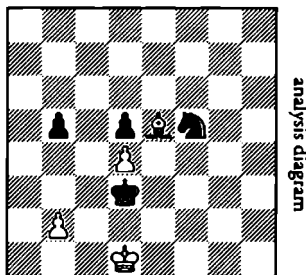
55... ♘e3 56. ♘d1 ♘d3

The first goal was achieved, but White's defensive resources are not yet exhausted.

57. ♖c7

White tries to weaken the black structure, reducing at the same time the number of pawns to the minimum.

57...b5 58. axb5 axb5 59. ♖e5 ♖f5



60. ♘c1 ♖xd4 61. ♘d1 ♖c6 62. ♖f4 b4

This is the moment when the weakness of the third line would have counted.

63. ♖g5 b3

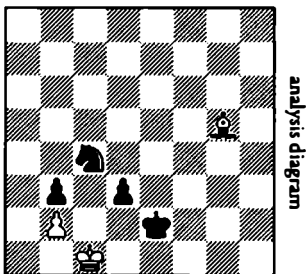
Black has to improve his position without allowing the white king to become active.

64. ♖f6 ♖a5 65. ♖g7 ♖c4 66. ♖f6 d4 67. ♘c1 ♘e3

68. ♖g5† ♘e2 69. ♖h6 d3

The first concrete progress in many moves.

70. ♖g5



70... ♖a5

Accuracy is still needed. 70...d2†? 71. ♖xd2 ♖xd2 would have stalemated the white king, while 70... ♖e5 with the masked threat d3-d2 would have been inefficient in view of 71. ♖d2.

71. ♖f4 ♖c6! 72. ♖d2

White has to control the b4-square: after 72.♙g5 Black would play 72...♖b4 followed by ♖a2 and d2.

72...♖e5

White is in zugzwang; he has to unblock the pawn.

73.♙g5 d2† 74.♙xd2 ♖d3† 75.♖b1 ♗xd2 76.♗a1

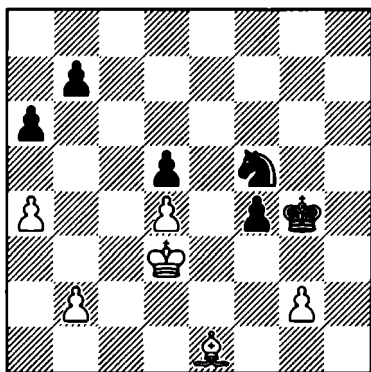
White has one last hope: could his position be a fortress?

76...♖e5 77.♗b1 ♖c4 78.♗a1 ♖a3!

Not at all: like a hedgehog pushed into the water by a cunning fox, he has to open the gates of the fortress, in desperate need of air to breathe.

48...♗g4 49.♗e2 ♖g3† 50.♗d3 ♖f5

This is the difference! Because the bishop does not defend the d4-pawn, the king cannot return to help the g2-pawn.



51.♙f2 ♖h4

As we know from a comment in the previous game, 51...f3 would have been insufficient: the queenside is not blocked.

52.a5

52.♙xh4 ♗xh4 53.♗e2 ♗g3 54.♗f1 f3 is easily winning for Black.

52...♖xg2 53.♗c3 ♗f3 54.♙g1 ♗e2 55.♙h2 f3 56.♙g3 ♖e3

0-1

Facing the threat ♖f5 White decided to call it a day.

There is a paradox in this chapter. We have

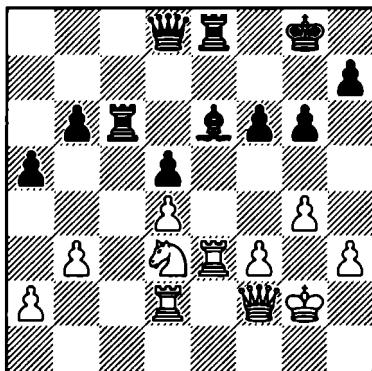
analysed three drawish endings, won every time by the side with a knight. Were these games instructive at all? I believe so. All the games were played at a very high level, which means that the mistakes were not casual.

I am sure that the reader will find more than one mistake in my annotations as well. Those acquainted with Botvinnik's writing, a monument of clarity and concision, will have the sensation that my exposition could have occupied only one third of the space. The patriarch himself might have said with a brief smile, "Not bad kid, not for your age".

My main hope, however, is that I have passed on to the reader the pleasure of examining this kind of position; they are much more complex than they seem. As a last and decisive argument I have also included the previously mentioned game played by Botvinnik, to show how the patriarch himself handled this kind of position.

Mikhail Botvinnik – Tigran Petrosian

World Championship Match (14), Moscow 1963



There is still a long way until the endgame, but Botvinnik, by knowing already what he should be aiming for, had an enormous practical advantage over his opponent. We shall see that Petrosian repeatedly fails to make use of his best defensive resources.

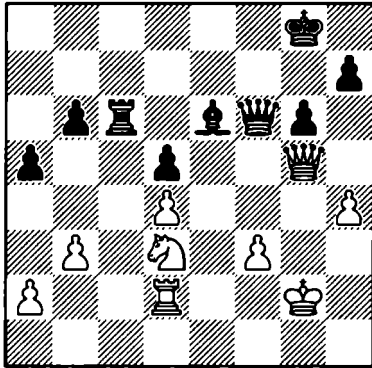
30.h4

"White prepares g4-g5 in order to weaken the dark squares in his opponent's camp" (Botvinnik).

30...♠f7 31.♞xc8† ♠xc8 32.♣e3 ♠f7 33.g5 ♠c6
34.♠f4 ♠f7

As indicated by Botvinnik, on f5 the bishop would be unable to support the d5-pawn after 34...♠f5 35.gxf6 ♞xf6 36.♣e5 ♠d6 37.♞e2.

35.♠d3 ♠c6 36.gxf6 ♣xf6 37.♣g5



37...♣xg5†!?

Petrosian gives up the tension too soon, helping White to improve his pawn structure. The g5-pawn will severely restrict Black's possibilities on the kingside.

37...♠g7 was necessary and if 38.♠f4 then 38...♠f7. Botvinnik states that he would have strengthened his position with 39.♠g3.

38.hxg5 a4?!

After having allowed an unfavourable structure to be created on the kingside, Petrosian weakens his position on the queenside as well. His pawns were well placed on dark squares, restricting the activity of the knight. In a certain sense his almost imperceptible mistakes on both wings are similar to Kotov's. If he would have thoroughly studied that game, he might have avoided them.

39.bxa4 ♞c4 40.a5!

This is it! White gets the c5-square for his knight.

40...bxa5 41.♠c5 ♠f5 42.♠g3 a4 43.♠f4 a3
44.♠e5 ♞b4

The immediate exchange of rooks 44...♞c2, with the hope of attacking the a2-pawn, would have failed to 45.♞xc2 ♠xc2 46.♠a6 ♠b3 47.♠b4 ♠c4 48.♠c2 and Black will soon lose his d5-pawn as well, as indicated by Botvinnik.

45.♠d3

Preventing ...♞b2.

45...♞b5

With such a difference in activity between the kings Black was, of course, in no position to exchange the minor pieces.

46.♠d6 ♠f7 47.♠c6 ♠xd3

Against 47...♞a5 White would have obtained a decisive advantage with 48.♠c5 (Botvinnik).

48.♞xd3 ♞b2 49.♞xa3 ♞g2 50.♠xd5 ♞xg5†
51.♠c6 h5

Black has obtained some counterplay, but White's pawn is by far the more dangerous.

52.d5 ♞g2 53.d6 ♞c2† 54.♠d7 h4

Botvinnik considers this a mistake in Petrosian's home analysis (the game had been adjourned) and recommended 54...g5 55.♞a5 ♠f6 56.♠d8 h4 57.d7 h3 although, as he states himself, White should win anyway: 58.♞a6† ♠g7 59.♞e6 h2 60.♞e1 ♠f7 and now the extra pawn decides: 61.a4

55.f4 ♞f2 56.♠c8 ♞xf4 57.♞a7†

1-0

The obvious advantage of prior knowledge helped Botvinnik win this game against a player who was only a few weeks away from becoming World Champion.

Besides offering a detailed analysis of a very narrow class of positions, this chapter is intended to advocate once again the necessity of endgame study in general. Finding the path out of a middlegame jungle is considerably easier if the player knows which kind of endgame he should be aiming for.

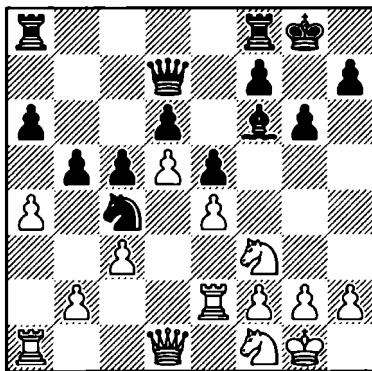
Tal's Super Rooks vs. Two Minor Pieces



The opening ceremony and the presentation of players at the Manila Interzonal, back in 1990, was held in the same place where the tournament was going to be played: a big sports pavilion with plenty of space for the spectators and acceptable ventilation, but with rather poor acoustics. Therefore, I had problems following Campomanes as he was introducing the players to the public in what seemed to be a rather arbitrary order. After Gurevich's name was announced by Campo I decided that I was the only Mihail left. Indeed, rather soon I heard my first name followed by a name with an accent on the first syllable, which contained an "a". I am used to this mistaken pronunciation of my family name (Marin is correct) and stood up instantly in a rather emotional mood. "What are all those people laughing at?" was my next thought. I looked in confusion at Campomanes, who explained with a smile: "No, Tal!"



Evgeny Ermenkov – Mihail Marin Kavala 1990



Black has a very comfortable position. He has the initiative on the queenside, while on the other wing White can hardly get any activity. For instance, preparing f4 would make little sense because this action would activate the bishop. In the long term it will be Black who could prepare...f5, in order to undermine the white centre.

17...♙g7?!

I failed to understand the right order of priorities. Black should have consolidated his queenside pressure first. The kingside break is not feasible in the near future anyway, because it would create weaknesses on the light squares.

Right after the game, I concluded that 17...♖f8 would have been more accurate. However, I cannot understand now in which way this mechanical concentration of black pieces on the queenside would have prevented White's plan. Play might have continued 18.a5! and suddenly Black faces concrete problems. For instance, after the natural: 18...b4 (During the post mortem I was convinced that with his rook on b8 Black would be better prepared for this move. However, 18...♖c7 also fails to solve Black's problems because of 19.b3 ♘xa5 20.♗e2 ♘b7 21.♗xa6 ♗xa6 22.♗xa6 with an advantage for White. The black knight is very badly placed, making the fight for the a-file impossible for Black.) 19.b3! ♘a3 20.c4 the black knight would be cut off from the rest of his army.

This small incident was rather beneficial for my popularity and when, a few minutes later, my name was announced I was rewarded with some of the most generous applause of that evening.

Thinking back to this amusing episode I wonder whether this was merely a matter of bad acoustics or something else, of deeper significance. How many of us have daydreamed of being Tal for at least one second of our lives? In Manila my subconscious might have detected this unique opportunity and caused me to stand up at the right moment.

This instant of artificial glory was rather easy to achieve but it is more difficult to be Tal at the chessboard, of course. However, just a couple of months after this incident I managed to play a nice game that I thought suited Tal's style rather well.

Black's only hope for counterplay is connected with the weakness of the a5-pawn, although this solves the problem of the misplaced knight only partially. There are two ways of attacking the pawn.

20...♟c7 only leads to an exchange of pawns if White wishes so after 21.♞e3 ♟xa5 22.♞c2 with a spatial advantage and the better pawn structure.

The plan ♠d8xa5-d8, a5-a4 is quite slow. 20...♠d8 21.h4 ♠xa5 22.h5 and with all the black pieces concentrated on the queenside, White has excellent attacking chances on the opposite wing.

Malfagia suggested an interesting attempt to initiate a tactical operation in the spirit of this chapter with 18...♠d8!? 19.b3 ♞xa5 20.♞ea2 sacrificing two minor pieces for a rook and a pawn with: 20...c4!? 21.♞xa5 ♠xa5 22.♞xa5 cxb3 23.♟xb3

He also gives White's best reaction in this case: 23...♞c8 24.♟a3

It is necessary now for Black to trade the weak a6- and d6-pawns for the c3-pawn in an attempt to activate the black major pieces, which would otherwise be pinned to the defence of these weaknesses.

24...♟c7

Or, alternatively, 24...♞c4 25.♞3d2 ♞a4 26.♞xa4 bxa4 27.♞c4 safely blocking the enemy a-pawns.

25.♞xa6 ♞xa6 26.♟xa6 ♟xc3

Now, instead of capturing on d6, White can avoid any trouble by playing 27.♟xb5!.

The white knights defend themselves, the king, and the e4-pawn in an optimal way while the weakness of the d6-pawn remains. Although it is hard to give a final evaluation of the position, the future is all White's.

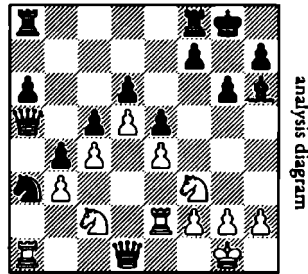
Since a4-a5 is such a dangerous positional threat, 17...♟c7 was probably best. After 18.b3 ♞b6 19.a5 ♞d7 another merit of the queen move is revealed: the d7-square is available to the knight and Black retains a comfortable position.

18.a5! b4

18...♟c7 would fail again to 19.b3! ♞xa5 20.♞ea2 ♞b7 21.♞xa6 ♞xa6 22.♞xa6 with an advantage for White. The black knight is very badly placed, making the fight for the a-file impossible for Black.

19.cxb4!?

This is a misjudgement of the position. My experienced opponent hoped to question the stability of the black knight. Better would have been the already familiar 19.b3! ♞a3 20.c4. For instance: 20...♟c7 21.♞e3 ♟xa5 22.♞c2 ♠h6



White has now two possible continuations:

a) 23.♟d3! was suggested by Malfagia as an improvement on my variation from the first edition. The idea is to take several important dark squares under control before capturing on a3. Malfagia's variation continues with:

23...f5 24.exf5 ♞xf5

24...gxf5 is risky in view of 25.♞h4 e4 26.♟h3 ♠g7 27.♞a2 ♟d8 28.♞xa3 bxa3 29.♞xf5 ♟g5 30.♞e3 with an advantage for White.

25.♞xa3 bxa3 26.♞ea2 ♞f4 27.♞xa3 ♟b6 28.♟c2

and White's advantage is restricted by the weakness of the b3-pawn.

b) After 23.♞xa3 bxa3 24.♞ea2 as given by me in the first English edition, Malfagia suggested: 24...♟c3!

Instead of 24...f5! 25.exf5 gxf5 26.♞h4 with a clear advantage, as I gave.

25.♞xa3 f5 26.♟c2 fxe4 27.♟xe4 ♠c1

With counterplay. However, Black still seems to be far from complete equality.

28.♞a6 ♟xa1

What else?

29.♞a1 ♞a1 30.g3

If White could manage to consolidate his position would be preferable, because of the excellent coordination between the queen and knight. Therefore, Black's most natural continuation is:

30...♞a3

Now it might seem that White has problems of coordination because of the weakness of the f3-square. However, after the courageous:

31.♞xe5! dxe5

31...♞e8 would leave White with a material advantage and the safer king after 32.♣c2!

32.d6

it is suddenly Black who is badly coordinated.

32...♞xb3 33.♣d5† ♠f7 34.d7 ♙g5 35.d8♣† ♙xd8 36.♣xd8† ♙g7 37.♣d5

Only White can play for a win. Black's problem is that mass simplifications lead to a pawn ending that is easily winning for White, in view of his outside passed pawn:

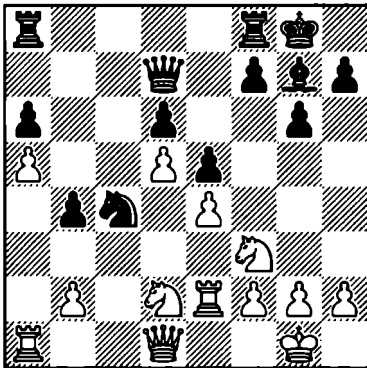
37...♞b1† 38.♙g2 ♞e1 39.♣xc5 ♞e2 40.♙f1 ♞exf2† 41.♣xf2 ♞xf2† 42.♙xg2

Probably better would be 30...♙h6† 31.♙g2 ♞a2, hoping to prevent White from making progress in view of the pressure against f2, but not immediately 30...♞a2 because of 31.♣b1.

In any case, my initial evaluation of Ermenkov's move was entirely justified, because in these variations it is only White who is hoping for an advantage, while in the game Black took over the initiative.

19...♙b4 20.♞1d2

This is the move White relied on when capturing on b4. He aims to exchange Black's most active piece.



20...♞xb2!

During and after the game, I considered this courageous move to be the only way to avoid being pushed back. In fact, even after the apparently cooperative line 20...♞xd2 21.♞xd2 ♣b5 22.♞b3 Black would retain an excellent position with 22...♙h6! denying access to c1 to the enemy rook and taking over control of the c-file after 23.♞c2 ♞ac8 followed by ...♞c4 and ...♞fc8.

Failing to notice that Black had a good position anyway, I was very proud of my move. The knight is heading for disaster without any apparent reason. I had read that one of Tal's favourite methods was to deliberately fall into the traps prepared by his opponents just to finally prove that his calculation was more accurate, and that the roles of the hunter and the prey can be easily reversed. Within a few moves, one more blow "in Tal's style" was planned.

21.♣b3 ♣b5 22.♞c3

Necessary, in order to prevent the knight's retreat via d3.

22...♙h6!

The point behind the whole operation initiated by 20...♞xb2. Black will emerge from this forced variation with a rook and a passed pawn versus two rather passive knights. Once again, this was a form of tribute to Tal, who used to joke that a rook is always stronger than two minor pieces and supported his point of view on numerous occasions.

During our brief post mortem analysis, Ermenkov confessed that he had seen this move when playing 19.♞1d2 but didn't believe that I would choose such a radical solution. "I underestimated you!", he added.

Indeed, players usually have a deep respect for material. Moreover, the sacrifice of two minor pieces for a rook is among the least popular and therefore the least expected in practical games.

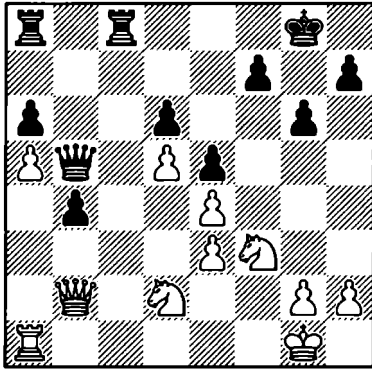
23.♣xb2

White cannot prevent his pawn structure being weakened. For instance, 23.♞ae1 would abandon the a4-square, allowing 23...♙xe3 24.♞xe3 ♞a4 with a decisive advantage for Black.

23...♙xe3 24.♞xe3 ♞fc8

In spite of the relative material equality, White's position is very difficult, possibly losing

already. He has to take care of both the enemy b-pawn and his e-file weaknesses at the same time.



25. ♖f1

This looks quite passive but the generally desirable 25. ♖b3, blocking the pawn, would lose material after 25... ♗d3.

25... ♗ab8

Black has placed his rooks on optimal positions. He threatens to either push the pawn or to penetrate the enemy position with ♗c3 or ♗d3.

26. ♖d3d2 ♗d3!?

Black's advantage has a very stable character and such a move does not spoil anything. However, as can be seen from a further comment, more accurate would have been 26... ♗c3 preparing ... ♗d3.

The merits of the move can be seen after a neutral reaction such as 27. h3 when after 27... ♗d3 the defence recommended below in the game continuation 28. ♗b1 is less effective because of: 28... b3!

28... ♗xb1 29. ♗xb1 b3 allows White to resist with 30. ♗b2.

One sample line, quite symptomatic of White's problems, is:

29. ♗xd3 ♗xd3 30. ♖c4

The only way to aim for counterplay. In case of a passive White strategy, a well timed ...f5 would blow the centre in the air.

30... ♗b4

Forcing the knight to reveal its real intentions.

31. ♖xd6 b2 32. ♗b1 ♗c3 33. ♗f2 ♗c1 34. ♖d2

Now, just when it looks as if White has consolidated, the quiet move 34... ♗f8 followed by 35... ♗e7 wins the courageous knight.

Chasing the rook away from c3 with 27. ♖b1 does not help either. After 27... ♗c5 28. ♖bd2 ♗d3 White's 29. ♗b1 is less efficient than it would have been in the game, because after 29... ♗xb1 30. ♗xb1 (30. ♖xb1 b3 is just as hopeless) the a5-pawn would be hanging. 30... ♗xa5 31. ♖c4 ♗a2 32. ♖xd6 ♗c2.

27. ♗c1!?

Not the best way to prevent the deadly threat ... ♗c2. The exchange of one pair of rooks clears the path for the passed pawn.

More stubborn would have been 27. ♗b1 when Black's best answer would have probably been to return with the queen to b5 and switch to the plan starting with... ♗c3. Allowing the exchange of queens would have allowed White some relief because he could then use his king for defensive purposes. Black couldn't have developed his initiative while the king is still on g1.

For instance:

27... ♗c3

Playing a whole tempo down compared to 26... ♗c3. No better is 27... ♗c2 28. ♗xc2 ♗xc2 29. ♗b1 and White is doing better than in the variation given in the notes to 26... ♗d3, since the pawn is less advanced. 27... ♗c2 achieves nothing after 28. ♗a2.

28. ♗xd3 ♗xd3 29. ♖c4

White has some counterplay. Black lacks one tempo to trap the knight after:

29... b3 30. ♖xd6 b2 31. ♗b1 ♗c3 32. ♖d2 ♗c1† 33. ♗f2 ♗b4 34. ♖e8!

When the position isn't entirely clear yet.

27... ♗xc1 28. ♗xc1 ♗c3!

Covering the c-file against an eventual invasion.

29. ♗b1 b3

The rest is easy.

30. ♗f2 b2 31. ♗a2 ♗c2 32. ♗b1 ♗c1 33. ♗e2 ♗b5

The rook is heading for a1.

34. ♗d3 ♗xa5 35. ♖g3

We cannot really claim that White lost by just

one tempo. If it was his move, 36.♖e2 would be impossible because of 36...♙a3† anyway.

35...♙a1

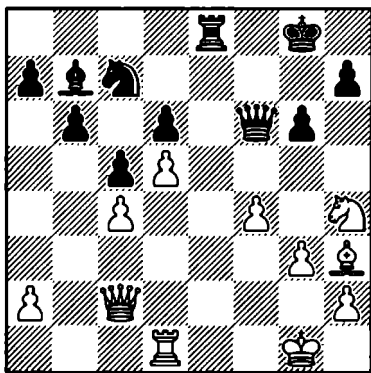
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Generally speaking, not a bad game, in spite of the mistakes. And yet, my claims to have played in Tal's style were rather exaggerated, though excusable in view of my young age.

First of all, "deliberately falling into the trap" was not the only way to get an advantage. At the same time, two knights frequently face problems fighting against a rook. The rook has a much more complicated task when playing against a knight and a bishop. It was this kind of position that was in fact Tal's specialty.

Sadly, eleven years later I had to admit that imitating the wizard from Riga was not so easy.

Catalin Navrotescu – Mihail Marin
Victor Ciocaltea Memorial, Bucharest 2001



White's kingside superiority is obvious. With his last move (22.c4) he consolidated his central pawn, aiming to leave both black minor pieces terribly misplaced. In order to avoid falling victim to a crushing mating attack, Black has to undermine White's centre immediately.

22...b5?!

In view of White's obvious answer, this is the start of a tactical operation resulting in Tal's pet sacrifice. Black had no time to prepare this move

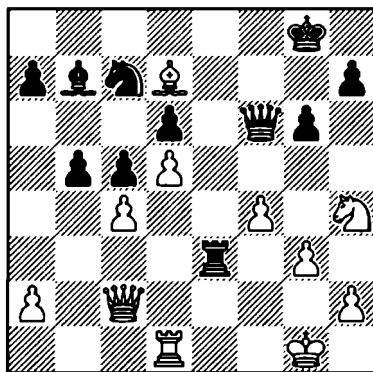
with 22...♙e7 because after 23.a4 he would be left without any counterplay.

23.♙d7 ♙e7?!

But this is a significant inaccuracy already. During the game I felt that I should immediately start the invasion of the weak dark squares with 23...♙e3 but became afraid that the rook would be vulnerable there while the complications are ongoing.

Indeed, I would have had to be prepared on each step for such moves as ♜d2 or ♘g2 and I didn't feel strong enough to calculate "everything". Only in the calm of my home laboratory did I manage to convince myself that there was no danger for Black connected with this move.

Let us have a closer look.



a) Against the immediate 24.♜d2 Black's main concern is to find a good square for the rook. After, for instance:

24...♙c3

24...♜e7? is bad because of 25.♙e6† when after 25...♙xe6 26.dxe6 ♜xe6 27.♜xd6 any attacking attempts along the long diagonal fail because the white knight defends the f3- and g2-squares quite safely. However, 24...♙a3 looks entirely playable as well.

25.♙xb5 ♙xd5

White does not even have the possibility of "winning" two minor pieces for a rook with 26.♙xd5, having blocked the d-file with the queen.

b) 24.♠g2 also fails to cause Black problems. One possible solution would be: 24...♗c3 25.♖b2 Pinning the rook and thus indirectly defending the c4-pawn. 25...b4 when Black has every reason to be satisfied with his achievements. His queenside progress is obvious while the white minor pieces are rather misplaced now. The black bishop will emerge out of the cage via a6-c4, thus undermining the d5-pawn and solving the problem of the c7-knight as well.

c) We can conclude that White cannot favourably deviate from the main variation by attacking the rook and should play 24.♗xh5 anyway when after: 24...♗xd5 25.♗xd5

25.♖d2 can be answered with 25...♖e7.
25...♗xd5 26.cxd5

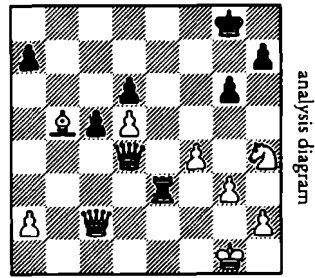
The intermediate 26.♖d2 would only make things worse for White after 26...♖d4 27.♖xd4 cxd4 28.cxd5 d3. White will soon have to fight against two passed pawns, since the a2-pawn cannot be saved because of the disorganized white army.

For instance 29.♗f2 allows 29...♗e2† when after 30.♗f3 ♖xa2 31.♗xd3 a5 the a-pawn is unstoppable. Relatively better is 29.♗f1 d2 30.♗e2. This is the only way to prevent both ...d1♖ and ...♗el† at the same time, but the bishop will stand in the king's way. 30...♖a3 31.♗d1 ♖xa2 32.♗e2 a5 33.♗f3 a4 34.♗d4?! 35.♗b5 ♖a1 and White will have to give up one of his pieces for the pawn and start a difficult fight for a draw.

From this point of view, Malfagia's suggestion 34.♗xd2 a3 35.♗b3 ♖b2 36.♗d3 a2 37.♗xa2 ♖xa2 38.♗e4 ♗f7?! (38...♖a6 39.♗c4! ♖b6 40.g4 looks passive for Black) 39.♗xd6† ♗e7 40.♗e4 ♖xh2 41.♗d4 seems to offer White better chances to save the game because of his strongly centralised position.

26...♖d4

So far we have followed the game continuation with the significant difference that the rook is placed actively on e3. Remarkably, the rook does not restrict the queen's action along the g1–d4 diagonal in a significant way. The threat of a discovered check is as strong as the check on d4 itself.



How dramatically the position has changed in just a few moves! Black has exchanged both his passive minor pieces for the enemy rook, while his major pieces occupy dominant squares. The white army is positioned rather chaotically and would need several tempi to regain coordination. Besides, the central pawn is a permanent source of worry for White. Black's main task is to maintain his initiative in order to prevent an efficient white regrouping. Let us examine White's possible reactions one by one.

1) Covering the diagonal with 27.♖f2 allows Black to force a promising ending with:

27...♗e1† 28.♗f1

28.♗g2 loses the central pawn with check after 28...♖xd5†.

28...♖a1 29.♖xd4 cxd4 30.♗f3 a5 31.♗xd4 a4 32.♗b5 ♖xa2.

White can stop the pawn only at the cost of one of his pieces. He has a hard job finding a defensible ending. In the absence of the d-pawns, giving up the knight for the pawn would save the day, but the way it is things are not that simple. Besides, he has no time to capture on d6 with 33.♗xd6? because after 33...a3 34.♗e4 ♖c2 35.d6 ♗f8 Black is winning easily.

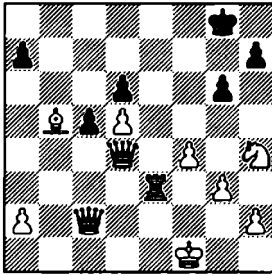
2) 27.♗g2 This is quite tricky. Immediately capturing the pawn with 27...♖xd5† would leave the black pieces rather exposed after 28.♗f2 ♖e4 (covering the c4-square and preventing the deadly pin) 29.♗f3 c4!? 30.♗g5 ♖d4 31.♖c3 ♖c5 32.♗f1. White has excellent chances for an attack. However, Black can force a draw with:

27...♗c3 28.♖e2

28.♖a4 loses the pawn in a bad form after 28...♖xd5†.

28...♖e3

White cannot really avoid the repetition. For instance, 29.♖c4 allows Black a powerful attack with 29...♗b2† 30.♔h3 ♖a3 followed by ♖xa2, when White's pieces are terribly misplaced.
3) 27.♔f1



analysis diagram

This is the most natural continuation and was played in the game as well. I have found two ways for Black to fight for an advantage, but White seems to be able to resist in both cases.

3x) 27...c4 is a neat way to take advantage of Black's superior activity. Capturing the pawn with the bishop is impossible because of the double attack on c3, but after:

28.♖xc4 ♖d2 29.♖c8†

But not 29.♗g2? ♖f3† 30.♔g1 ♖d1† winning.
29...♔f7 30.♔g1

I doubt whether Black can achieve more than a draw by repetition with:
30...♖d4 31.♔f1 ♖d1†

With his pieces strongly centralized, Black can afford to make a half-waiting move like:

3y) 27...♔g7 improving the position of the king in view of an eventual ...♖xd5. It is not easy for White to make a constructive move. Possibly best is 28.♗e2 taking the f3-square under control and preparing the return of the knight into play. Now, capturing on d5 would allow a strong counterattack along the long dark diagonal. However, Black can transpose to an apparently promising ending with:

28...♖c3 29.♖d1 ♖xd1† 30.♗xd1 ♖a3

But White's defensive resources should not be underestimated. For instance:
31.♗b3 a5 32.♔e2 a4 33.♗c4 ♖c3 34.♗d3 c4

By restricting the activity of the bishop, Black will finally win the a2-pawn, but the time invested in this operation will allow White to regroup efficiently.

35.♗e4 ♖c1 36.♗f3

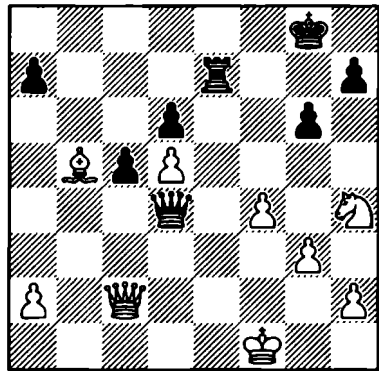
White should hurry with this manoeuvre. After 36.♔d2 ♖a1 37.♔c3 ♖xa2 38.♗c2 a3 39.♗f3 ♖a1 the a-pawn is unstoppable.

36...♖a1 37.♗d4 ♖xa2† 38.♗c2 ♖b2 39.♔d1

Black cannot promote his a-pawn. For instance, 39...♖b3 40.♗d4 ♖b2 41.♗c2 only leads to a repetition of moves.

Concluding, 23...♖e3 would have led to a balanced position, but Black's play seems to be easier, with practical chances for success.

24.♗xb5 ♗xd5 25.♖xd5 ♗xd5 26.♗d5 ♖d4†
27.♔f1



The position is obviously less favourable for Black than with the rook on e3. However, the final outcome of the game is far from clear and Black's compensation for the small material investment is acceptable. Since 27...c4 (as in the similar line, see above) is not possible, the best solution seems to be 27...♔g7!. It is not easy for White to find the best continuation here.

a) Defending the central pawn with 28.♗c4 is best answered with 28...♖e3. But not 28...♖e4 29.♗d3 planning ♗xg6, when 29.♗b3? (better is 29.♗e2 transposing after 29...♖c3 to a position examined above) allows the elegant 29...c4! since 30.♖xc4 loses to 30...♖d2 with decisive threats.

b) 28.♖c6 misplaces the bishop, allowing the c-pawn to advance with 28...c4. The counterplay initiated with 29.f5 is one tempo too slow, as can be seen in the line 29...c3 30.fxg6 ♖d2 31.♠f5† ♜f6 winning for Black.

c) 28.♗e2 looks like a solid move, aiming to keep all the pieces together, similarly to the lines with the rook on e3. However, Black can prove that the rook on the seventh rank has its merits too, by playing 28...♗b7 with adequate counterplay.

d) Possibly best would be 28.♠f3, taking advantage of the absence of the rook from the third rank and practically forcing 28...♞xd5 when after 29.♞c3† ♜h6 30.a4 the position is really hard to evaluate. Both kings feel insecure, but White's play might be easier.

Failing to understand that the king's position is Black's main problem, I played

27...♗b7?

when White gladly took over control of the e-file with

28.♞e2

Black has problems already, but 28...♜g7 might still have saved the day. However, the game ended rather abruptly after

28...c4 29.♠f3 ♞a1† 30.♜g2 c3 31.♜h3

This prophylaxis was not really necessary, since White would have won by force after 31.♞e8† ♜g7 32.♠g5 ♞xa2† 33.♜h3 ♞xd5 34.♗d7 with a mating attack.

31...♜g7 32.♠d4 ♞b2 33.♞e8 c2 34.♠e6† ♜h6

35.♞d8

1-0

When the game was finished, I felt as if the situation from Manila had repeated itself: I managed "to be Tal" for just one instant (when playing 22...b5) but then became a mere mortal again, fearing to calculate a thick branch of variations and missing further chances as well.

Some of the readers might ask themselves why I chose Tal as a model for this chapter. I am pretty sure that for many of us the first things that spring to mind when thinking about Tal are his sparkling attacks, involving sacrifices of huge amounts of material, such as a minor piece, a rook or even a whole queen. Why then did the master himself call

the exchange of two minor pieces for a rook his favourite sacrifice on Caissa's altar?

There might be several reasons for this.

First of all, such an exchange is usually possible only as a result of a complex tactical operation, as was partially the case in my two games presented above. It can all start as a tense strategic battle before exploding into a forced variation leading to this rather unusual material balance. Other times, the opponent might have the feeling of having calculated one move further than the wizard, only to find that the resulting position was less clear than expected. Clearly, Tal's fantasy found here a most fertile terrain.

Another aspect regards the finer points of the fight between a rook and two minor pieces, once the exchange (or sacrifice, however you prefer calling it) has been carried out. In order to be successful, the rook has to display a high rate of dynamism. Otherwise, the minor pieces would find stable squares and take over the control of the position. Since Tal was one of the most dynamic players ever born, he must have felt at home when fighting against the opponent's attempts to stabilize the position.

Finally, there might be some sentimentality involved here. Many of Tal's emblematic irrational attacks have failed against stubborn defence, but I have failed to find a single case when he lost after sacrificing two minor pieces for a rook, with the logical exception of a few games where the situation prior to the exchange operation was completely hopeless anyway.

Throughout his glorious career Tal has sacrificed two pieces for a rook under various circumstances and for numerous different reasons. In *Secrets of Chess Defence* I included a few examples of a defensive (or rather counter-attacking) nature. Since the book you are holding in your hand now is focused mainly on endings, I have chosen for this chapter only examples where this interesting material balance occurred in simplified positions.

In most of the examples I have chosen the starting position in such a way that the whole complexity of the previous struggle can be revealed. As mentioned before, the exchange operation is no less interesting than the fight of a rook versus minor pieces.

Finally, I have to mention that I sometimes referred to comments included in the four volumes of Tal's games published by *Chess Stars*. I have used the abbreviation *CS* for all these cases.

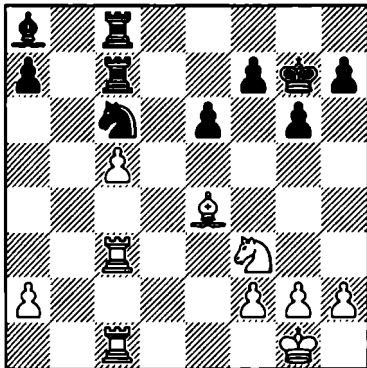
Rook vs. minor pieces endings

In the absence of any other pieces, a knight and a bishop might face difficulties reaching an optimal coordination. In the middlegame the help of a queen or a rook might come in very handy, but in the absence of such mighty pieces matters are more complicated. Of course, if play takes place only on a restricted area (for instance, one wing) the king can fulfil the task of coordinating the minor pieces quite well. However, if the side with a rook can pose threats on both wings, the king is too slow a piece to support his colleagues.

The typical situation where a rook is stronger than two minor pieces is when the player with a rook has an outside passed pawn. If the opponent rushes with all his pieces to stop that pawn, the opposite wing will become an easy target for the rook. Otherwise, the pawn might cost a whole piece. Neither of these situations is too rosy, of course.

Here is an instructive example, where the mentioned situation was reached after a relatively simple, though elegant, forced operation.

Levon Grigorian – Mikhail Tal
USSR Olympiad, Moscow 1967



White's passed pawn is more a source of trouble than strength. Taking advantage of a favourable tactical moment, Tal transposes to his favourite endgame:

30... ♖b4! 31. ♗xa8

White would lose the pawn after 31. ♖b1 ♖a6.

31... ♖xa2 32. ♗e4 ♖xc3 33. ♗xc3 ♗xc5

Black has a slight material advantage. Because of the weakness of the first rank, White will not be able to coordinate his pieces easily.

34. ♗c3 ♗c1† 35. ♖e1 ♗d8 36. ♖f1 ♗d2 37. ♗e2 ♗d4

Generally speaking, the exchange of one pair of rooks would favour Black, for reasons explained above: the minor pieces would have difficulties getting coordinated. However, with such an active position Tal wanted to get a better form of it.

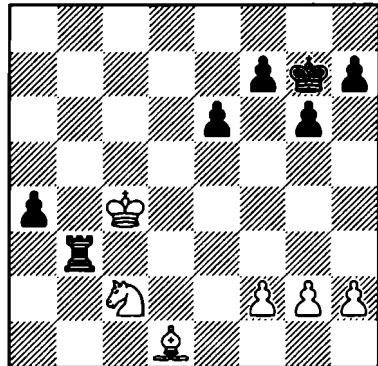
38. ♗f3 ♗b4

Planning ... ♗b1 followed by the march of the pawn.

39. ♗c2 ♗xc2 40. ♖xc2 ♗b2 41. ♗d1 a5 42. ♖e2 a4 43. ♖d3

As pointed out by Malfagia, 43. ♖d2 would have been more resistant, although it would allow 43... a3 44. ♖c1 ♗b3 when White is forced to play the pathetic 45. ♖a1. By playing 45... ♗b5! Black could keep the king cut off from the passed pawn and threaten to attack the pawns from the other wing, or just support his own pawn by advancing with the king along the dark diagonal.

43... ♗b3† 44. ♖c4



The king has approached, but the kingside is completely unprotected now.

44...♖b1 45.♙c2 ♖g1 46.♙f3 ♖f1 47.♗d3 ♖xf2 48.♙e4

White has no stable outposts for his pieces and will be easily pushed back.

48...e5 49.♗e3 ♖f6 50.♗d3 ♖b6 51.♗c3 ♖5 52.♙d5 ♖b1

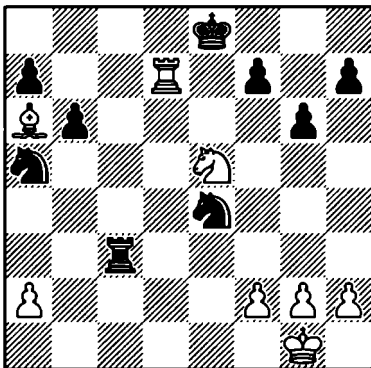
After 53.♙c6 ♖g1 54.g3 e4 White would lose all his kingside pawns, making any resistance futile.

0–1

For some unknown reason, the prejudice regarding the nominal strength of two minor pieces compared to a rook (the equivalent of 6 pawns vs. 5 or, depending on the situation, 4 and a half pawns) seems to be stronger than in the case of exchange sacrifices or banal pawn sacrifices.

In the following game Tal's opponent avoided an unpleasant rook ending, only to reach an even worse position. The most likely reason was that he relied on his "material advantage".

Milorad Knezevic – Mikhail Tal Leningrad 1977



White has just lost a pawn but seems to have adequate compensation, because of his active rook on the seventh rank and the passive knight on the edge of the board. There is only one

"small" problem to solve: the black knight has to be driven away from e4; otherwise the rook cannot abandon the control of the d2-square. Therefore...

27.f3 ♖c1† 28.♙f1

Everything seems to be defended and if the knight moves the rook can start capturing pawns on the seventh rank.

28...♗c4!!

All of a sudden, all the black pieces are very active, while all the white ones are hanging! I was curious whether the simpler 28...♗c6 would have the same effect. A short analysis showed that White would have stayed alive after 29.♖c7 ♗d2 30.♖c8†! ♗e7 31.♗xc6† ♗f6 (It is easy to establish that this is the only move: 31...♗d7? 32.♖d8†! or 31...♗e6? 32.♗d4† are both losing.) 32.♗f2 with a probable draw.

29.♗xc4

Unlike in the previous line, 29.♖c7? would lose to 29...♗ed2 since the black knights defend each other, but somewhat better might have been 29.fxe4 ♗xe5 30.♖xa7 ♗g4 31.♖a3 and Black has nothing better than transposing to a very promising rook endgame: 31...♗hx2 32.♗hx2 ♖xf1.

I imagine that Knezevic wasn't especially happy with such an outlook and preferred to "win" two pieces for the rook.

29...♗xd7 30.fxe4 ♖a1

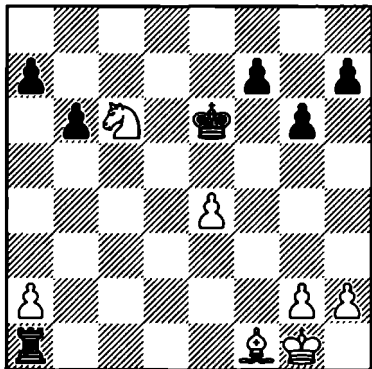
The game is basically over. With his king and bishop passive, White cannot avoid the loss of his queenside pawn.

31.♗e5†

Annotating the game for *Chess Informant* No.25, Minic and Sindic mention a nice trap: 31.a4 ♖xa4? (the correct 31...♗e7 avoids the trap and wins the pawn) 32.♗xb6†! axb6 33.♙b5† winning the rook.

31...♗e6 32.♗c6

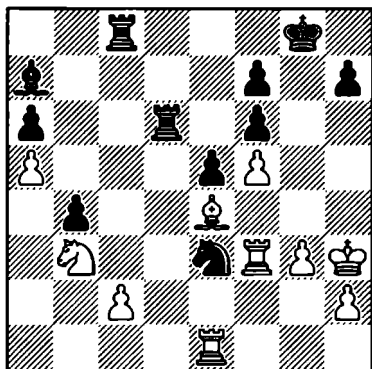
It is strange that CS gives several alternative lines around this moment, ending in positions with the connected passed a- and b-pawns and the assessment *minimal advantage*. In fact, even the position with only a passed a-pawn should be evaluated as at least offering a *clear advantage for Black*.



32...a5 33.♟f2 ♘d6 34.♞d8 ♜xa2† 35.♞c3 f6
36.g4 a4 37.g5 fxg5 38.♞f7† ♜e7 39.♞c4 ♜xh2
40.♞e5 a3
0-1

With the previous example we have stepped already into the territory of chess psychology: White was given a choice and failed to solve it correctly. The next game is of an even more subtle nature. The sacrifice will be made indirectly: the opponent will be given the opportunity to “win” two minor pieces for a rook!

Boris Spassky – Mikhail Tal
Tbilisi 1965



Black is a pawn up but this is not sufficient to win, because White safely blocks the kingside. His hopes are connected with the queenside, where White has weaknesses. Tal decided to immediately take the c2-pawn, “cooperating” by falling into a trap prepared by Spassky.

30...♞xc2 31.♜c1 ♜c4 32.♞d3

Spassky probably relied on this move: the rook is trapped on d6 and it is not clear how Black can avoid material losses.

32...♞d4!

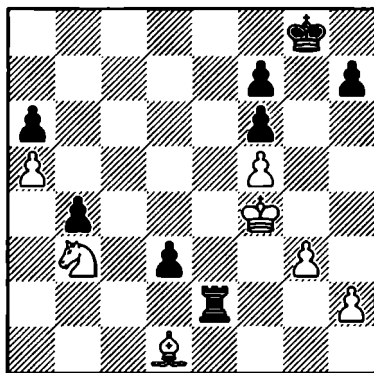
32...♞d3 33.♞xd3 ♜c3 34.♞xc2 ♞e3 would fail to 35.♜e1! (C5).

33.♜xc2

This move only makes things worse, but it is understandable that Spassky couldn't resist the temptation. Anyway, after 33.♞d2 ♜c7 34.♞b3 ♞dd7 Black retains his material and positional advantage.

33...♜xc2 34.♞xd4 exd4 35.♞xc2 d3 36.♞d1
♞d5 37.♟g4 ♜e5 38.♟f4 ♜e2!

White's pieces are paralysed now.



With rook and two pawns against two minor pieces Black has a material advantage. (In the middlegame the relative value of pawns is somewhat smaller and we could consider that two minor pieces should match a rook and two pawns. It is, however, appropriate to point out that such strict evaluations are not very reliable. Each position has to be estimated individually, in accordance with the concrete structure and piece disposal.)

39.h4 h5

We have reached a very nice zugzwang position. Black does not even need to march in with the king: White will be forced to open the gates of the castle.

40.♖c5

40.♖f3 would lose the bishop to 40...♞e1, while after 40.g4 hxg4 41.♔xg4 ♖b2! there is no satisfactory way to parry the threat 42...♞b1. Please note that the d3-pawn prevents the king from defending the bishop with ♖f3-e2.

40...♞e1 41.♗xh5

Tal must have been very happy to win the second game of the Candidates final match with one of his favourite methods. In the long run, however, this fine game did him a disservice: he relaxed prematurely, which proved of decisive importance when Spassky hit top form...

0-1



Rook vs. minor pieces with queens on the board

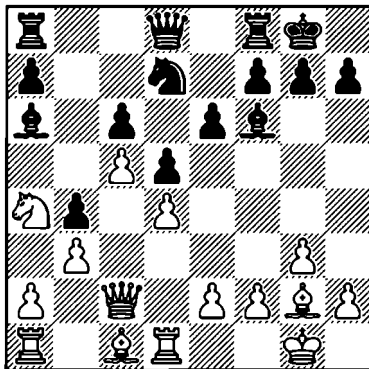
The presence of queens can change the character of the position dramatically. As we know already, the minor pieces feel much safer with a “big brother” (or sister!) around, but on the other hand the queen and rook tandem is able to display an irresistible force when attacking the enemy king (see also the chapter dedicated to Alekhine).

Just as in the previous section, if play takes place over the whole board, the side with a rook might gain an advantage.

In the next example the threats on both wings (against the black king and the weak a6-pawn) prevented Black from coordinating his pieces, allowing White to gradually consolidate his domination. The reader should also devote attention to the original way of reaching the material balance characteristic of this chapter.

Mikhail Tal – Mukniashvili

V.Karseladze Memorial, Gori 1968



We have here a complex position with blocked pawn chains. Not wishing to wait until White breaks with e4, Black starts a similar action in the centre.

14...e5 15.dxc5 ♗xc5 16.♗b2 ♗xb2 17.♖xb2 ♖5

A very ambitious move ruling out an eventual e4, which would put the black centre in immediate danger. Kochiev recommends 17...♞e7 “with counterplay.”

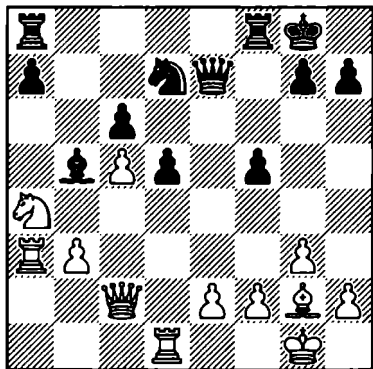
However, after 18.e4 ♖xc5 (or 18...dxe4 19.♗xe4 ♖xc5 20.♗xh7 ♗h8 21.♗f5 with a better pawn structure for White) 19.exd5 cxd5 20.♞xd5 White’s position looks slightly more pleasant. However, we shall see that the advance of the f-pawn will seriously weaken not only the pawn itself, but also the king’s position. Black seems to be doing well from a strategic point of view: the white bishop is neutralized, while his black colleague has a comfortable outpost on b5. Besides, the c5-pawn could become a chronic weakness.

18.a3!

A necessary pawn break, in order to activate the queen’s rook. It is still too early to foresee the great job both white rooks will do in this game, but I am convinced that Tal already had some idea about it (even if only a vague one).

18...bxa3 19.♞xa3 ♗b5 20.♖a4!

A strong move with a very clear idea in mind: the black fortress on the light squares has to be destroyed. Kochiev recommends 20.e3 as safer "with a slight advantage" but Black looks OK after 20...a5 followed by ♖e7, g6, ♜fb8, etc.
20...♞c7



21. ♖c3! ♞xc5 22. b4!!

Very typical of Tal's dynamism. The black queen is driven away from its perfect c5-square, from where it defended both the bishop and the d5-pawn (we shall see why this is important), and pinned the white knight. At the same time, the third rank is open for communication between White's pieces.

22...♞b6

This move looks entirely safe for Black: everything is defended, isn't it? After 22...♞xb4 Tal probably intended:

23. ♖xb5

Kochiev analyses only 23. ♞b3 ♖a4 24. ♞xb4 ♖xc2 25. ♖d2 ♖e4 26. f3 a5 27. ♞bb2 d4 28. ♞xd4 ♖d5 29. ♖xd5 cxd5 30. ♞xd5 ♖a7 when Black looks to be more or less OK. His passed pawn compensates for the f5 weakness as well as for the slight lack of coordination.

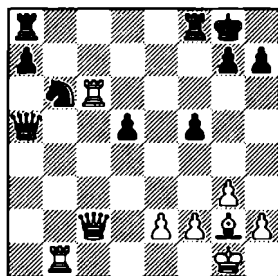
23...♞xb5 24. ♞b1 ♞c5 25. ♖c3

Black would then have had a tough job defending his numerous weaknesses (including the seventh rank). For instance:

25...♞e7?!

25...♞a5?! suggested by me in the first

edition without any further comment does not essentially change matters. Malfagia gives the following possible continuation: 26. ♞xc6 ♖b6.



analysis diagram

Although the queen finds herself in an uncomfortable position, Black can build up a reliable defensive line on the dark squares. It is hard to suggest possibilities for White other than recapturing his pawn, for instance 27. e3!? ♖ad8 28. ♞c7 ♖d7 29. ♞xd7 ♖xd7 30. ♖d1 ♖b6 31. ♞c6 transposing to a position in the spirit of the chapter dedicated to Alekhine, where the passed a-pawn offers Black compensation for the relatively unsafe king's position.

26. ♞xc6 ♖b6?! 27. ♞cx6 axb6 28. ♖xd5† ♖h8 29. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 30. ♞xb6

with a clear extra pawn and a safer king's position.

Malfagia gave some good reasons why Black should refrain from 22...♞c4, which were not mentioned by me initially.

23. ♞xd5! ♞xb4 24. ♞b3 ♞e7 25. ♖xb5!

Less accurate would be 25. ♞dx5 cxb5 26. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 27. ♞xf5. Although the threatened check on d5 will most likely lead to the win of the b-pawn, the remaining a-pawn would be more difficult to control with the knight, offering Black certain counterplay.

25...cxd5

If 25...cxb5 then 26. ♞e3! ♞f7 27. ♞xb5 winning, because of the double threat ♖d5 and ♖xa8.

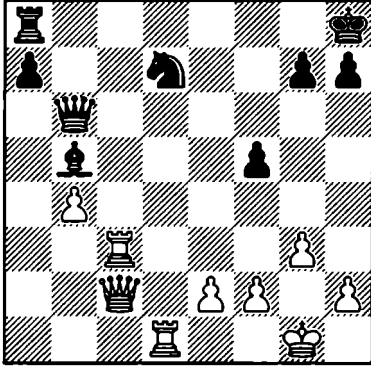
26. ♖xd5† ♖h8 27. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 28. ♞c7?!

More ambitious than the capture on f5, which isn't bad either with a clear advantage.

For the reader, already familiarized with our

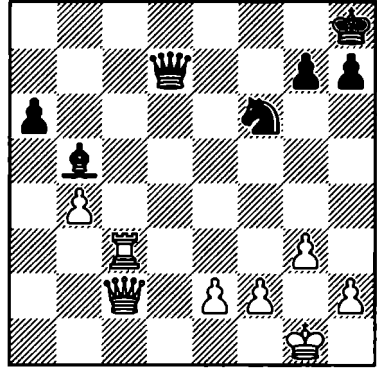
main theme, Tal's next move will not come as a total surprise, but his opponent might have simply thought that he had won a pawn, until he saw...

23. Qxd5! cxd5 24. Bxd5† Qh8 25. Bxa8 Bxa8
26. Bc3



minimal material advantage. However, in positions of this type it is quite risky to guide oneself with such formal criteria.

30... Bc8 31. Bf3 Qf6 32. Bc3 Bc7 33. Bc3



After a short journey, the second rook occupies this ideal square. It is time to draw some conclusions. Black's main problem is the exposed position of his king. Since ...g6 is not a favourable move, he will have to retreat the knight to the back rank. This means that, for some practical purposes, White will be an exchange up. However, from White's point of view things are also not so simple: in order to make progress, he will have to start an attack on the kingside. This will mean a fight in conditions of relative material equality because the knight will be useful then.

33... Bc6 34. Bc8† Qg8 35. e4 Bb3 36. Bc1 h5
This tempting action is double edged. We shall see that in the end it will be White who benefits from the opening of the h-file.

37. B3 h4 38. Bc2! hxc3

Black shouldn't have hurried with this exchange. He should have just made a waiting move, such as 38... Qf6, when White would have probably tried to slowly improve his position: 39. Bg2 freeing the queen and planning, for instance, Bg5.

39. Bg2! Bc7 40. hxc3 Bc4† 41. Qh1 Bf6

Kochiev recommends 41... Bxb4 but after 42. Qh2† Qh6 43. g4 White would seriously threaten Black's king.

The position has changed drastically within just a few moves. White's army is perfectly coordinated now and Black will have problems defending his back rank and the f5-pawn. This is one of those situations, described above, when the wings are "too far from each other" to allow the coordination of the minor pieces.

26... Bf8 27. Bc8

With the terrible threat Bxd7.

27... Bf6

Kochiev gives the following variation: 27... Qg8 28. Bb3† Qh8 29. Bxf8† Qxf8 30. Bf7 Bf6 31. Bxa7 Bxc2 32. Be1 "with a slight advantage". In fact, I believe that White's advantage is considerable, since after 32... Bf3 he can exchange queens with 33. Bc7 when the b-pawn is very difficult to stop.

Giving up the f5-pawn, as in the game, is a lesser evil. Black would only need one move to consolidate, ...a6, but White hits again with

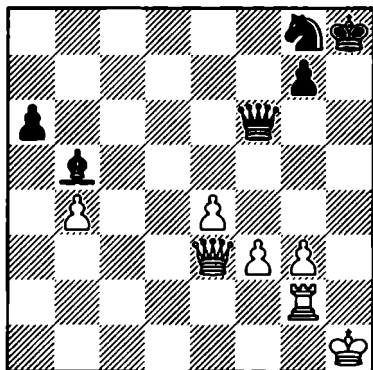
28. Bxd5! a6 29. Bxf8†

After 29. Bxf5 Bxf5 30. Bxf5 Bxc8 Black would have too much material for the queen.

29... Bxf8 30. Bxf5

After winning this pawn, White already has a

42. ♖e3



42... ♘e7?

This is a mistake that loses on the spot, but Kochiev's recommendation 42... ♘h6 wouldn't solve Black's problems either. White would have a choice between several promising plans, for instance 43. ♖f4! would be a try to push back the enemy queen. 43.g4 g5 44.e5 ♖f4 (44... ♖e7 45.e6 and all the black pieces are inactive) 45. ♖xf4 gxf4 46. ♖c2 and the f4-pawn will probably become a source of worry for Black.

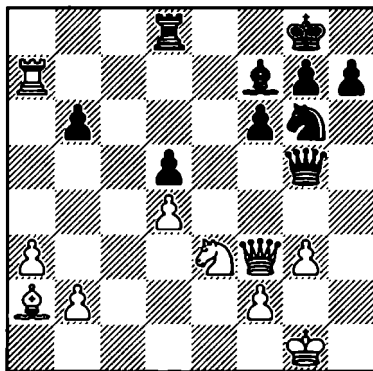
43. ♖h2† ♘g8 44. ♖b3† ♖f7 45. ♖h8†
1-0

In the game we have just seen many of the attacking possibilities remained out of sight. In order to avoid troubles for his king, Black had to remain passive for a long time. The final attack came rather prematurely after a serious mistake on Black's part.



The next example is a perfect illustration of the strength of the tandem ♖+♖ when attacking an exposed king. It all starts with an elegant combination and once the familiar material balance is reached White wins practically by force. Even so, he obviously could not calculate everything until the end; intuition must have played an important part.

Mikhail Tal – Bjørn Brinck Claussen
Havana Olympiad 1966



White has perfect piece coordination: all his forces are pointing at the d5-pawn (true, in the case of the rook only indirectly). Though elegant, the next move is not really a surprise:

33. ♘xd5!! ♗xd5

Worse is, of course, 33... ♗xd5 because of 34. ♗xf7!

34. ♖a8!

The point. White is not winning yet; he just gets Tal's favourite kind of position.

34... ♗xa2

As pointed out by Malfagia, the intermediate check 34... ♖c1† deserves some attention. The idea is that after 35. ♘g2 ♗xa2 36. ♗xd8† ♘f7 the c6-square is covered, thus preventing the infiltration of the white queen, which happened in the game. 37. ♖b7† ♘e7 38.d5? (or 38. ♗d7 ♖e1) The significant difference compared to what could have happened in the game is that Black has the defensive resource ♗xd5 at his disposal. At the same time, the weakness of the long light diagonal allows the threat d5-d6 to be parried in several ways, for instance 38... ♖c5.

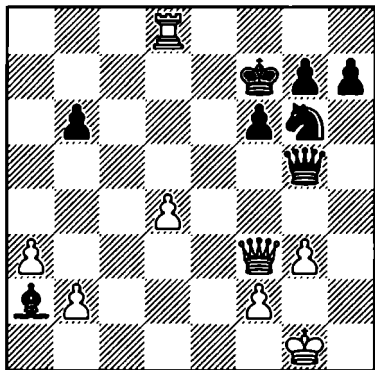
However, the intermediate check has the significant drawback of giving up control of the d5-square, which allows White to cut the enemy bishop off from the main theatre of operations with 37.b3!, winning a decisive tempo due to the threatened check on d5. For instance 37... ♖e1

(or 37...♞c7 38.♞d5† ♘e7 39.♞g8 winning) 38.♞d6! ♚f8 39.♞d5† ♘g6 40.g4 with a very strong attack.

35.♞xd8† ♘f7

35...♚f8 is impossible in view of 36.♞a8.

The tactical operation itself wasn't really difficult to calculate, but the assessment of the resulting position (especially given that it had to be made in advance) is an entirely different story. The black king is obviously exposed, but several positional factors seem to compensate for this inconvenience. First of all, White's pawn structure is not too compact. The d4-pawn is a potential weakness and the kingside pawns don't seem to offer a reliable shelter to the white monarch. At the same time, all Black's pieces are ready to fight for control of the important blockading d5-square (for instance, ♚g6-e7). There is, however, a slight paradox here: when too many pieces aim for the same square they often get in each other's way. This will be the main issue in some of the lines presented below. Besides, the game will never reach a static position; the magician from Riga will know how to make use of the dynamic factors.



36.♞c6!

This is a very strong move despite being without check (though it cannot really be considered a quiet move, since it threatens mate in one). Tal understood that while attacking it is of crucial importance to keep the c1-square under control, in order to prevent any form of counterplay. He must

have rejected the tempting 36.♞b7† intuitively, since the line given by him is incorrect: 36...♚e7 37.♞d7 f5 38.d5 ♘e8 (! according to Tal, but better would be 38...♞c1† 39.♘h2 ♞c5 as pointed out by CS. Indeed, the apparently winning 40.d6? would meet the boomerang effect after 40...♘d5!! (but not 40...♞xf2? 41.♞g2 when White wins) 41.♞xe7† ♘f6 and, thanks to the weakness of the long diagonal, Black wins! - Malfagia) and now White wins with 39.♞c7 (CS).

36...♚e7 37.♞e8† ♘e6 38.♞c8!

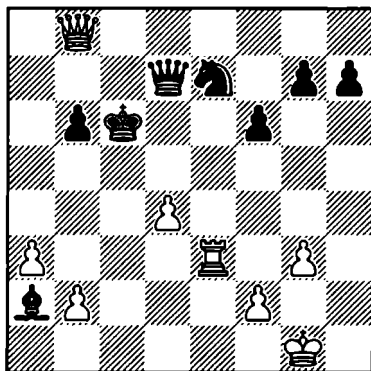
Perfect coordination again. The rook not only threatens the decisive ♞c6†, but also takes over the task of controlling the c1-square.

38...♞d5

This is the relatively best way to parry the threat. After 38...♘d5 the line is indicative of the bad coordination of Black's pieces: 39.♞c7 f5 40.♞d7† and Black loses one of his minor pieces, for instance 40...♘f7 41.♞xd5†. We can see a very similar picture after 38...f5 39.♞c6† ♘d5 40.♞c7 ♘e6 (after 40...♚g6 41.♞c6† ♘xd4 42.♞d7† White mates soon) and now 41.d5†! ♘xd5 42.♞d7†.

Black's queen move defends the immediate threats, but leaves the bishop out of play. White has time to regroup:

39.♞c3! ♞d7 40.♞e3† ♘d6 41.♞b8† ♘c6



42.a4

The sealed move, with a multi-purpose quality. White takes the b5-square under control in order

to create additional mating threats, and prepares to create an unstoppable passed pawn on the a-file.

42...♖d5 43.♖e1

Threatening a devastating check on c1.

43...♗d6

After 43...♗e7 White has the elegant 44.d5†!. This is quite illustrative of the lack of efficiency of Black's blockade: the pawn advances under the attack of all four black pieces. 44...♗xd5 (relatively best) 45.♗a8† ♕c5 46.♗f8 winning the pinned knight. It goes without saying that after 45.♗xe7? ♗d1† 46.♕h2 ♗h5† Black draws by perpetual, since 47.♔g2? ♗d5† is even losing for White.

44.♖c1† ♕d7 45.♗c8†

1-0

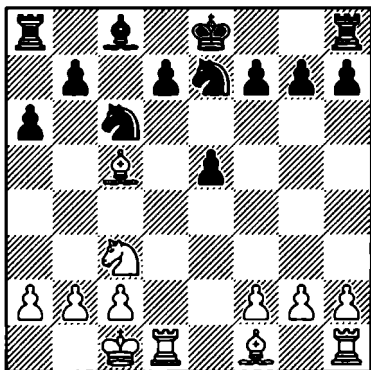
Complex endings: Objectivity and style of play

This chapter includes simplified positions that are situated somewhere on the dividing line between what we would call a queenless middlegame and a genuine ending. Complex endings sounds like an acceptable definition to me.

In the next game Tal's emblematic sacrifice allowed him to maintain the initiative and the lead in development that were just about to slip out of his hands as a consequence of a previous mistake.

Mikhail Tal – Tauve

Latvian Championships, Riga 1965



As compensation for the sacrificed pawn, White has a considerable lead in development. The next move, however, is premature.

14.♗e4

When rushing in with the knight, Tal might have been psychologically influenced by the fact that his opponent was not especially strong (Tauve finished last in the tournament). The d6-square was very tempting, of course, but moving for the second time with the same piece is not the best idea. More logical would have been 14.f4 as in Spassky–Utiasky, USSR 1960, or even 14.♗c4! b5 15.♗d5! (CS).

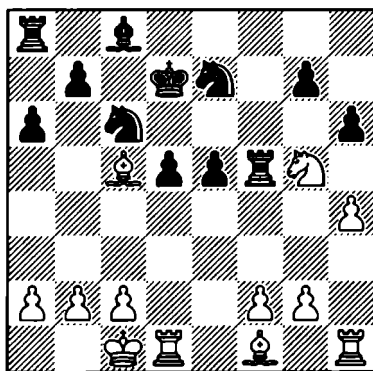
14...d5! 15.♗d6† ♕d7!

Black finds the best solution to the problem. He agrees to put his king on an unnatural square and return the extra pawn, in order to maintain the strong centre. 15...♕f8 16.♗xc8 ♖xc8 17.♗xd5 was, of course, what Tal hoped for.

16.♗xf7 ♖f8 17.♗g5 ♖f5

Well played again. If White could manage to force one of the central pawns to advance, he would have a clear advantage. The rook is useful on f5, because it defends e5. After 17...h6 18.♗f3 ♖f5 19.♗d3, intending ♖h1, White has the initiative. 19...e4? is impossible because of 20.♗xe4, of course.

18.h4 h6



This is the first critical moment of the game. If White retreats the knight, then Black could continue with 19...♕e6 or 19...♕c7, with a reasonable position.

19. ♔d3!?

Of course! Without counting the material, White develops another piece. If the rook retreats then White could continue with ♖f3 and ♗h1, with strong pressure along the central files.

Therefore, Black's answer is more or less forced.

19...hxg5 20. ♗f5† ♖f5 21.hxg5 ♗e6

After the forced tactical operation the position has calmed down and is... even more complicated than before!

A superficial look could suggest that Black is close to winning, with two pieces for a rook and an impressive pawn centre. There are, however, less obvious details that speak for White, too. First of all, the h-file has opened for the white rook and after White's next move Black will have some problems finishing his development. He also has a tough job defending all his pawns. (Not only the central ones, but also g7. If he would lose that one, then the g5-pawn would become a dangerous candidate for promotion). The white bishop occupies a strong, invulnerable position, restricting both the knights and the king. It would be difficult to claim an advantage for White (as was the case before 14. ♖e4!?) but we can conclude that Black continues to face complex problems.

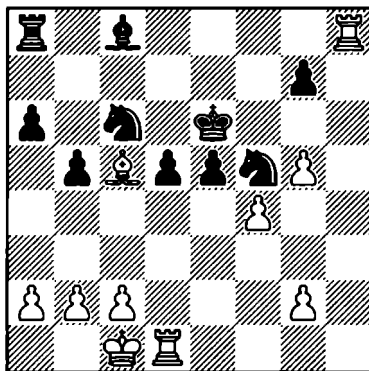
22. ♗h8

Another move that deserves to be mentioned is 22. ♗h7?!, with the idea of immediately attacking the g-pawn. However, it seems that Black could answer actively with 22... ♗f7! (Instead of the rather cooperative 22... g6? which would weaken the seventh rank. For instance 23. g4 ♖d6 24. ♗g7 ♖e4 25. ♗b6 ♖e7 26. ♗d8 ♖c6 27. f3 ♖xd8 28. fxg4 d4 29. ♗h1! ♗d6 30. ♗h8 ♗e6 31. ♗xg6 when White's rooks are hyperactive, the g-pawns are very dangerous and the black pieces are rather passive.) 23. ♗xd5 ♗e6! 24. ♗d1 ♗g6 followed by ... ♗xg5 and, in spite of having lost his compact pawn centre, Black is better because all his pieces have become quite active. (Malfagia)

22...b5

This is the natural way to continue, but serious consideration should have been given to 22...b6!? 23. ♗xb6 ♗b7. At the cost of an insignificant pawn, Black would have managed to complete his development. Since White cannot easily create

a passed pawn on either wing his slight material advantage does not make itself felt, while Black's central domination could have its say.

23.f4

White has to break Black's centre somehow. After 23. ♗e8† he would have a satisfactory defence in 23... ♖f7! followed by ... ♗b7. 23... ♖ce7?! would lead to some problems with coordination after 24.g4. For example 24... ♖d6? 25. ♗xe7† ♗xe7 26. ♗xd5 with a material and positional advantage; or 23... ♗f7?! 24. ♗f8† ♗e6 25.g6 planning ♗f7, when the g7-pawn would be in trouble. 23... ♗b7?!

Another natural move, after which Black is in trouble again. Taube might have noticed only the relatively inoffensive threat fxe5, missing the one actually played in the game. 23... exf4 would also have allowed White a strong initiative, for instance 24. ♗e1† ♗f7 25. ♗ee8 ♖f7 26. ♗hf8† ♗e6 27. ♗g8 ♗f7 28.g6! ♗f6 29. ♗g8† ♗e6 30. ♗f7 and White will win the material back with interest.

There was, however, a better way to cross White's plans:

23... ♖g3!

As indicated by *Chess Stars*. The g-pawn is safely blocked, while the threat ... ♖e2† followed by ... ♖xf4 is quite unpleasant. White can still make a draw with:

24. ♗e8†

But not 24. fxe5?! ♗b7 25. ♗h7 ♗g8 when Black's centralization gives him the advantage.

24...♔f7

24...♔d7 25.♖g8 looks dangerous for Black.

25.♖f8† ♔e6

White lacks just one tempo to create dangerous threats and is best advised to repeat moves.

After:

26.♖e1 ♖b7 27.g6

Planning ♖f7.

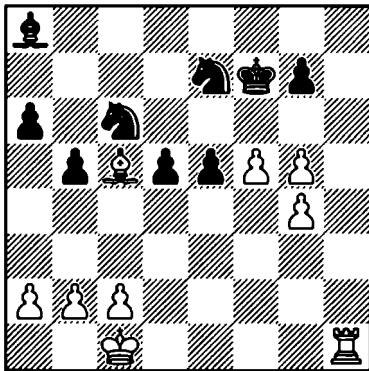
27...♖xf8 28.♖xf8 e4!

28...♔f6?! 29.fxe5† ♔xe5 (this dangerous pawn has to be taken) 30.♖xg7† leads to the kind of ending White is aiming for: the g2-pawn is a potential danger, while the queenside is inadequately defended. 28...♔h5 also looks playable, when after 29.fxe5 ♔xe5 30.g4 ♔f4 31.♖xg7 ♔fxg6 32.♖xe5 ♔xe5 it is already White who has to look for a draw with 33.♖h1 ♔xg4 34.♖h7 ♖c8 35.♖c7 ♖d7 36.♖a7 ♖c8 37.♖c7 repeating moves.

29.♖xg7 ♔e7!

And White is suddenly in trouble.

24.♖xa8 ♖xa8 25.g4! ♔fe7 26.f5† ♔f7 27.♖h1



The position has radically changed. Black has solved only partially the problem of development, since his bishop is passive and exposed at the same time. In addition, White's kingside pawn formation will be very difficult to stop.

27...♔g8

Black couldn't afford to allow a white rook on the eighth rank.

28.g6 d4 29.♖h7

With the terrible threat f6.

29...♔d5 30.g5

White creates two threats, both impossible to parry: 31.f6 gxf6 32.gxf6 ♔xf6 33.♖f7 followed by 34.♖f8† and 35.♖xa8 and the even stronger one, carried out in the game.

30...♔d8 31.♖d6 ♔c6

Or 31...e4 32.♖e5 with a total disaster.

32.♖f8!

Tal was not especially keen to part with his beautiful pawns (32.f6), just for the sake of winning material. After his move the rook will penetrate with devastating effect.

32...♔xf8 33.♖h8† ♔e7 34.♖xa8 ♔d6

Against a neutral move as 34...e4 White could play 35.f6† ♔xf6 (or 35...gxf6 36.g7 queening) 36.gxf6† ♔xf6 37.♖xa6 winning both knights.

35.f6! gxf6 36.g7 ♔ce7 37.♖xa6†
1-0

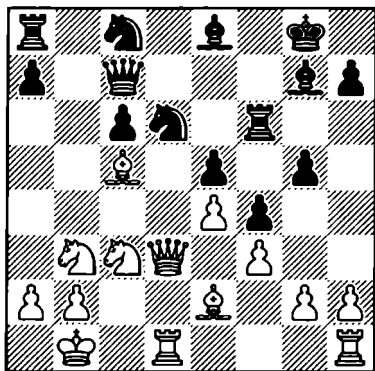
In view of 38.gxf6, Black resigned.

One of the most difficult things in chess (and in life) is to make choices. When everything is forced, then only good nerves and precise calculation is needed, but when two or more apparently equivalent ways are possible then the probability of a mistake increases. Every player (not necessarily of Tal's level) has his own tastes and preferences regarding not only certain opening variations or types of positions, but also specific tactical and strategic operations. There are moments in a game of chess when the choice can be made in accordance with one's own style, but in other situations it is necessary to stick to the only or best continuation, irrespective of what our heart would like to do.

So many times in his career, Tal chose to exchange two pieces for a rook mainly because he liked doing it. In most of the cases these decisions were not worse from an objective point of view and, frequently, they were better than the alternatives!

Many years after having lost his title back to Borvinnik, Tal declared that he could teach one or two things to that rising star of the late fifties he once was; even such a genius couldn't avoid "growing up". I will try now to illustrate how Tal's attitude towards his favourite sacrifice evolved through the years.

Mikhail Tal – Visotskiis Riga 1954



This is a game from Tal's early years. White has an obvious advantage: better pawn structure, better coordination of pieces. Instead of patiently increasing the pressure with, for instance, 21.♖d2 Tal played a surprise.

20.♘d5!? cxd5 21.♞xd5† ♚f7

Worse is 21...♘h8 22.♙xd6 ♞xd6 23.♞xa8 ♙c6 24.♞cl retaining the material advantage. 22.♞xa8 ♙c6

The queen is trapped, but White had planned 23.♙b6! axb6 24.♞cl

When it becomes obvious that White will have a rook against two not very well coordinated black pieces.

Black reacted inaccurately with:

24...♙a8!?

24...♙f8 as recommended by CS without further comments, in order to activate Black's worst piece, would have been better. Play might have continued 25.♙b5 ♙c5 26.♙xc6 ♞xc6 and the black queen seems to hold the position together rather well. Malfagia gives the following analysis which supports this point of view: After 27.♘c5!?, which leaves White with a passed a-pawn, against which the knight is supposed to have the most problems, Black can continue with 27...bxc5! (It is better to keep as much material on the board as possible. In case of 27...♞xc5 28.♞xc5 bxc5 29.♞cl c4 30.a4 the knights would

have a hard job fighting against the rook and the outside passed pawn, missing the support of the rook.) 28.♞hd1 c4 29.♞c3 ♘g7 30.a4!? ♘cd6 31.♞d5 ♞b6 32.a5 ♞b8 33.♞a6 g4 when Black has resources for counterplay. White could consider 27.♞hd1 as an alternative when, in the worst of the cases, play would transpose to the variation above.

In any case, Black's position certainly looks better than it did in the initial diagram. 24...♙f8 was certainly not an easy move to find, especially after the shock produced by 20.♘d5, which means that from a practical point of view Tal's decision was acceptable.

The other CS suggestion, 24...♞d7, is worse. White would retain a clear advantage after: 25.♞hd1!

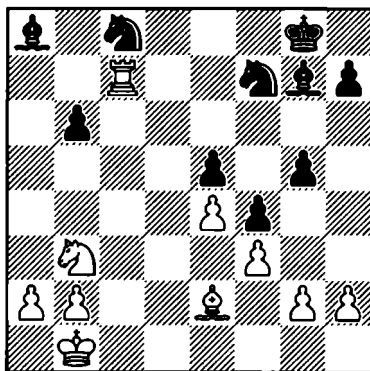
25.♙b5 also looks playable: 25...♙xa8 26.♙xd7 ♘cd6 27.♙c6 and, after exchanging the light-squared bishops, the rooks will penetrate into Black's position. CS only mentions 25.♞b8. 25...♞e8

25...♞xd1 does not work because of 26.♞xc8† ♞d8 27.♞xc6! with an extra pawn and a clear positional advantage.

26.♙b5! ♙xa8 27.♙xe8 ♞d6 28.♞xd6 ♘cxd6 29.♙c6

Once again, the exchange of bishops will leave the black queenside without sufficient defence.

25.♞xc7 ♞c6 26.♞c1! ♞xc7 27.♞xc7



White has a dream position: the badly coordinated

black pieces cannot do much against the queenside majority supported by the rook.

27... ♖cd6 28. ♖d2 ♙f8 29. ♙c4 b5

29... ♖xc4 would be no improvement. 30. ♖xc4 b5 (or 30... ♙c5 31. ♖c8† winning the undefended bishop) 31. ♖b6 and the a8-bishop is trapped again. Compare with the bishop from the game Tal–Tauve.

30. ♙e6 ♖g7 31. a4!

A nice tactical trick, underlining the rook's ability to act on both wings at the same time.

31... ♖f6

31... bxa4 is impossible in view of 32. ♖c4 ♖f6 33. ♙xf7 ♖xf7 34. ♖c8 attacking both bishops.

32. ♙xf7 ♖xf7 33. axb5

There is little left for Black to do now. This pawn is just too strong.

33... ♙b4

It is worth mentioning that, instead of 33... ♙b4, Black's attempt to prevent the white knight's access to c4 with 33... ♖d6 34. b6 ♙e7 would fail to 35. b3! ♙d8 36. ♖d7 ♖b7 37. ♖c4 with a winning position (Malfagia).

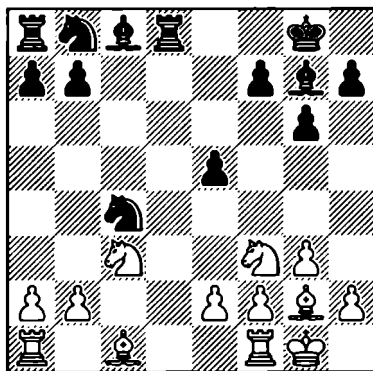
34. ♖c4 g4 35. ♖a7 ♖d3 36. ♖d3 ♙xe4† 37. ♖xe4 ♖g5 38. b6 ♙c5 39. ♖a6 ♖e6 40. b7

1–0

The conclusion of the note to Black's 24th move was that, in the event of a better defence from the opponent, Tal's sacrifice would have actually lost part of his advantage. This was one of the cases when following one's personal taste was not the best decision from an objective point of view. Let us see now how the mature Tal treated a similar psychological moment.



Mikhail Tal – Nino Kirov
Sukhumi 1972



White has emerged from the opening with a pleasant position. The d5-square is weak, the pressure along the light diagonal quite strong, and Black's development not too good. The only active black pieces, the c4-knight and the d8-rook, are rather vulnerable. However, the immediate 13. b3 is bad in view of 13... e4!

13. ♙g5!

A typical move.

13... ♖f6 14. ♖fd1!

Not giving Black time to breathe.

14... ♖d7!?

This is the only way to fight for the d-file.

15. ♖xd7 ♙xd7!?

This unnatural move is a mistake. The bishop will not be in time to neutralize his white colleague. After the better 15... ♖xd7 CS gives the line 16. ♙c1 ♖c5 17. b3 ♖b6 18. ♙e3 with an advantage for White.

As pointed out by Malfagia, 16... ♖f8! does not make any significant difference: White retains the better chances after 17. b3 ♖d6 18. ♙a3! ♖f5 19. ♖d1 ♖e6 20. ♖e4! (preventing Bf8).

16. ♖d2!

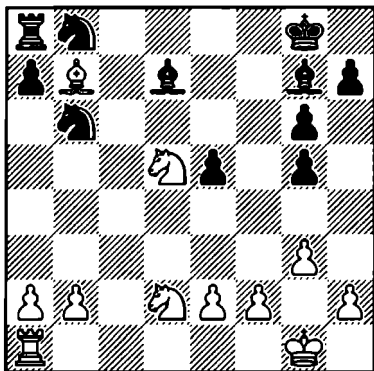
White had here the opportunity to initiate a familiar tactical operation with 16. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 17. ♙xb7. However, after 17... ♙c6 18. ♙xa8 ♙xa8 19. ♙e3 ♖bc6 the position would have been far from clear: the minor pieces control a lot of

squares and the black king has good possibilities of centralization. It would be interesting to know to what extent this line tempted Tal and if he needed a great effort of will to reject it. Without any further speculation, I shall just mention the facts: in spite of his well-known tastes Tal chose the objectively stronger continuation, offering him a better position without any risk.

16...♖b6?!

This mistake is based on a miscalculation. CS gives 16...♖d6 17.♗d5† ♖f8 18.♗e3 ♖a6 19.♖de4 ♖xe4 20.♖xe4 ♗c6 21.♗xc6 bxc6 22.♞c1 ♖b8 23.g4 with a clear advantage for White.

17.♗xb7 ♖g5 18.♖d5!



Kirov probably underestimated this move, failing to notice the fork on e7 if he develops a piece on c6.

18...♖c6 19.♗xc6

White has a safe extra pawn and the better structure; his position is basically winning. There is, however, one more interesting moment to come.

19...♞d8 20.♖e4 ♗f5 21.♖dc3 ♞c8 22.♗b7 ♞c7 23.♗a6 ♖a4 24.♖d5 ♞c2 25.♖xg5 ♖c5

Black's activity is obviously insufficient to save the game. White has two equally good moves, and now Tal chose the one in accordance with his tastes.

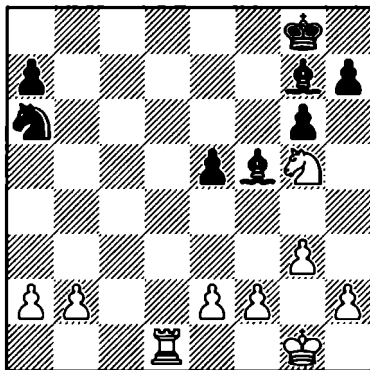
25.♖e3!?

More natural, but not necessarily better, would be 25.♖e7† ♖f8 26.♖xf5 ♖xf5 27.♗c8 h6 28.♗xf5! (CS).

25...♖xa6

Black has to accept the sacrifice, since 25...♞xb2 26.♗c4† is very good for White anyway.

26.♖xc2 ♗xc2 27.♞c1 ♗f5 28.♞d1



Black's pieces are now placed aimlessly (compare with the previous similar position from one of the notes) and have no chance to put up resistance against the rook.

28...♖c5

The attempt to prevent the activation of the rook with 28...♗f6 fails to 29.♞d6 (Despite appearances 29.♖xh7?! is also playable, because after 29...♗c7 White has the tactical resource 30.♖f6†! at his disposal when after 30...♗xf6 he wins back the piece with 32.♞d6. However, the text move is probably stronger, because it manages to win the a7-pawn.) 29...♗xg5 30.♞xa6 and the connected passed pawns decide the game easily (Malfagia).

30.♞d8† ♗f8 31.♞a8 h6 32.♖h7!

With every exchange Black's resistance becomes more and more feeble.

32...♖xh7 33.♞xf8 ♖a4 34.♞f7† ♖g8 35.♞xa7 ♖xb2 36.a4 ♗c4 37.a5 ♖a4 38.♞c7 ♗d5 39.e4!

1-0



The end of an impossible dream

In the late seventies Tal spent considerable time assisting Karpov with his second match against Korchnoi (Baguio 1978). The work helped both Karpov and Tal. Karpov managed to retain his title, while Tal won the Interzonal in Riga 1979 by a huge margin. In between, the two sparring-partners shared first place in one of the strongest tournaments ever, Montreal 1979.

Tal seemed to be on the right track for a new challenge for the world title, two decades after his match win against Botvinnik. However, the quarterfinal match against Polugayevsky (a player whom he had defeated brilliantly at the Interzonal) brought him a bitter disappointment. Tal lost three games without winning a single one.

The first game set the tone of the whole match and featured a paradoxical situation. Throughout his career Tal had surprised many strong players with his unusual sacrifice of two pieces for a rook. This time the roles were reversed and the magician was caught in his own net. This is a clear sign of how difficult it is to anticipate this atypical exchanging operation, even for the greatest expert...

21...♖c6? 22.♖db5 ♖a5 23.♙xc4 a6

This was meant to be a strong intermediate move.

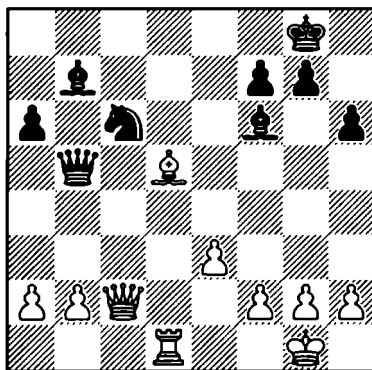
24.♖xd5!

Tal probably hoped for 24.♖a3 when he would have obtained a strong initiative in the centre with 24...d4.

24...♞xd5

The position arising after 24...axb5 25.♖xf6! gxh6 26.♞xd7 ♞xd7 27.♞xd7 bxc4 28.h3 would also be very good for White.

25.♞xd5 ♞xd5 26.♙xd5 ♖xb5



White has obtained a slight material advantage and, what is even worse for Black, one of his bishops is neutralized. I remember a commentary written by Tal about a game where his opponent carried out a brilliant attack: "I was so tempted to switch seats with him.", confessed the magician. His feelings now might have been similar...

27.a4 ♖b6 28.♞e4 ♖d8 29.♙xb7 ♖xb7 30.b4 ♜f8 31.♞d7 ♖d8 32.g3 ♖b8 33.♞c4 ♜e8 34.♞d5 ♖b7 35.b5?!

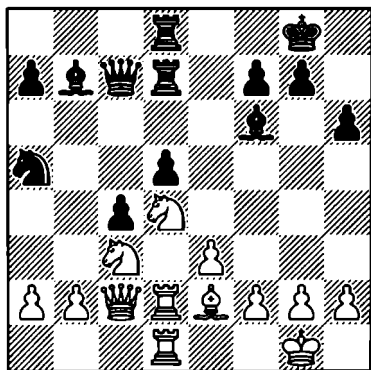
This is an inaccuracy that unnecessarily complicates White's task. It would have been better to prepare the creation of a passed pawn on the a-line, starting with 35.a5.

35...a5!

Now Black can put up some resistance.
36.h4 ♙e7 37.♞d1 ♖e6 38.♞c3 ♙b4 39.♞e5 ♙e7 40.♞c1 ♙f6?!

Lev Polugayevsky – Mikhail Tal

Candidates Match (1), Alma-Ata 1980



The position is quite complex and probably acceptable for Black. With his next move, Tal initiated a mistaken tactical operation:

Sveshnikov's suggestion 40...♗d8! would have been more stubborn. For instance 41.♖d6 ♗c7 42.♗a6 ♖b8 43.♞c6 ♘d7 and Black is still alive.

White should have aimed to invade the queenside light squares with his rook rather than with the queen. Therefore, 41.♞c6! might have been a better solution and if 41...♗c7 then he could return to a strategy of winning space with 42.♗e4! (threatening to win the enemy queen with ♞xe6†), for instance 42...♗d6 (or 42...♖b8 43.♗a6! ♘e7 44.♗g2 - preventing the eventual ♗xg3 - after which the manoeuvre ♖c6 followed

by b6 should decide) 43.♖d5 ♗e7 44.e4! ♘d8 45.♗a6 ♗b4 46.♖xb7 ♘xb7 47.♗a7 ♘d8 (or 47...♘d6 48.b6 ♗c5 49.e5! and the passed pawn is worth a whole enemy piece) 48.♗g2 planning f4, e5, ♘f3-e4-d5 and, finally, b6. The black forces are rather helpless, especially the bishop, which is irremediably pinned to the defence of the a5-pawn (Malfagia).

41.♖d6 ♗d8 42.♗a6

In view of the line 42.♗a6 ♖xa6 43.bxa6 ♗b6 44.♗b1, Tal resigned.

1-0

Petrosian's Exchange Sacrifices



I still remember the distant day in my youth when I entered the Russian bookshop in the centre of Bucharest, hoping to find there, as was possible from time to time, some interesting chess books. I was rather disappointed to see that the only title available was a collection of Petrosian's games. Neither the title of the book, *Strategija Nadejhnosti* (The strategy of safety), nor my general impression about the ninth World Champion's style of play were too inspiring, but I still decided to buy it. Sometimes it was possible to make some exchanges, especially with somebody who had two copies of the same book. Maybe I could convince one of my friends to give me Gufeld's Dragon book in exchange for Petrosian's?

This last thought of mine certainly needs some further clarification. More than one western reader would ask himself why I did not simply buy Gufeld's book? In the communist years books edited by western publishing houses were rather inaccessible to Romanian players. The price of such a book was equivalent to one month's average salary. Some Russians books arrived from time to time, at the incredible price of about 10 US cents, but they disappeared rather quickly from the bookshops. After a while many of them could be found on the black market, at a dramatically increased price of course.

Arriving home, I carelessly opened the book and saw a rather intriguing diagram: with his next move Petrosian placed the rook under the attack of two minor pieces. Somewhere in the annotations it was mentioned that such a sacrifice was rather typical for Tigran Vartanovich and this is how, quite unexpectedly, I started studying his games with great interest!

I started sacrificing exchanges whenever I had a chance..

I was so fascinated by Petrosian's art in this area that in a rather short time I started sacrificing exchanges whenever I had a chance. My Olympiad team-mates met my new habit with pronounced scepticism, in spite of my excellent results both in practical play and analysis. Some of them considered it nothing more than an eccentricity, though an excusable one, given my youth.

Not wishing to embark on endless discussions about the relativity of the rook's superiority over a minor piece, I used to claim that "I won the exchange" whenever given the opportunity to carry out my favourite tactical operation. I was once tempted to write an article based exclusively on my own exchange sacrifices that continued to occur rather frequently. Fortunately for the readers, I understood that this would be as if the moon would pretend to lighten the day. I was influenced by the brilliance of Petrosian's art; I did not really come up with anything new.

However, I have included two of my games in this chapter. In doing so, I have tried to emphasise how inspiring Petrosian's games can be for the practical player.

The examples have been selected from the highest level, including the two matches that opposed Petrosian with the young and brash Spassky.

I have purposely omitted some of the most famous examples, preferring to include some of the less frequently quoted, in an attempt to avoid regrettable repetitions, or even some sort of plagiarism.

In certain cases I have used Petrosian's detailed explanations: After all, he was the best expert on his own games. However, certain specifications are needed. Petrosian was basically an intuitive player. Describing his algorithm of thinking, Botvinnik once wrote that, move by move, Petrosian decided which piece needs to be transferred to a better square and then just transferred it. No deep calculation, no long variations, just pure intuition. It is true that this is partly a supposition, since on another occasion the same Botvinnik stated that Petrosian was the only great player whose style of play has not been totally *decoded* yet. I would also underline that we could not hope for a more qualified analyst on this territory, since Botvinnik had examined Petrosian's games in depth before their world title match in 1963.

We can now understand why most of Petrosian's comments have a general character, rarely containing concrete variations. One exception is the elegant variation from the note to White's 41st move of the game against Szabo. However, we could suppose that this line was the fruit of home analysis of the adjourned game.

Besides, my general feeling is that Petrosian limited himself to revealing his thoughts during the game, without making any additional investigation. At the same time, his comments are so sincere and so detailed that they offer a unique insight into the world of one of the most remarkable players from chess history.

I have made a detailed analysis of all the important moments from the games presented below and can assure the reader that the concrete variations usually confirmed Petrosian's general comments.

Psychological aspects

Breaking the material balance without immediate tactical compensation requires a deep understanding of the position and is, at the same time, an extremely dangerous weapon. Sometimes such sacrifices remained shadowed by mystery even after the conclusion of the game and the subtleties were revealed only later, when Petrosian published his annotations in the magazines of his time.

The main problem connected with making an exchange sacrifice is to overcome the psychological barrier, as Petrosian himself liked to say. We are taught from the very beginning the relative value of the pieces and this is why we instinctively avoid exposing a strong piece to an attack from a weaker one.

On the other hand, an opponent confronted with an exchange sacrifice faces a difficult psychological situation. The first thought is that having a material advantage the rest should be a matter of technique. Adapting to the new situation might need 2-3 moves, which usually is more than enough for the opponent to completely turn the game around in his favour.

In fact, I did not even suspect that there was an important measure of truth in my innocent joke regarding the "win of an exchange".

There are certain situations when an exchange sacrifice is carried out in the form of what could seem a mere blunder. The opponent needs a strong will and a clear head in order to disobey such a merciless master as the respect for material. Even strong and experienced players frequently fall into such psychological traps, and when the game is finished they understand that it was they, not the opponent, who had been tricked. Or, to put it differently, who had "lost" the exchange.

The following game, played more than 10 years after I had been initiated in this fascinating field, is a perfect illustration of this pattern.

Mihail Marin – Hannes Stefansson
Istanbul Olympiad 2000

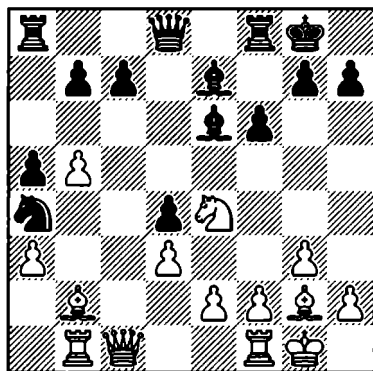
1.c4 ♖f6 2.♗c3 e5 3.♗f3 ♖c6 4.g3 d5 5.cxd5
♜xd5 6.♙g2 ♖b6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.d3 0-0 9.a3 ♙e6
10.b4 a5 11.b5 ♜d4 12.♙b2 ♙b3 13.♙c1 ♙e6

This was considered to be a safe line for Black. Less than one year earlier I had agreed to a draw by repetition when playing against Yakovich. Stefansson couldn't have known, however, that my decision had been dictated by the favourable tournament situation...

14.♙b1 f6 15.♜xd4 exd4 16.♖e4

White plans ♙c2, a4, ♙fcl and, at some moment, ♖c5. Black's pawn structure contains a lot of weaknesses and, therefore, my opponent decided to fight for the initiative.

16...♖a4



17. ♖a1!

It would have been harder to prove an advantage after the neutral 17. ♜c2 ♘b2 18. ♜xb2 since the pressure exerted by the dark-squared bishop would have been rather annoying.

17... ♗a2

Unfortunately, Olympiad playing halls are not optimal places for post mortem analysis. Therefore, I do not know what my opponent's thoughts were at this moment. Could he have believed that I had just blundered, overlooking his last move? This is a reasonable supposition. I believe that I displayed some nervousness after making my previous move, but it was generated by the fear that he would *refuse* the sacrifice!

I am sure my opponent understood that things are not entirely clear, but how could he have refrained from punishing me for what was so obviously an oversight? Anyway, his only comment after the game was that 17... ♗a2 had been a bad move...

Clearly, Black has to do something against the threat ♜c2. Otherwise, his last move would become simply a waste of time.

During the game I was more concerned about 17... b6 offering the exchange himself rather than winning it!

If 18. ♜c2 then 18... ♘c5 19. ♘xc5 (19. ♘d2, intending to regroup in order to attack the d4-pawn, is also not entirely effective because of 19... ♗d5 20. ♘f3 ♘e6 21. ♜a4 ♗c5 and Black is just in time to consolidate his spatial advantage in the centre.) 19... ♗xc5 20. ♗xa8 ♜xa8 when Black has perfectly adequate compensation. His pieces are very active. The weakness of the light squares around the king as well as the difficulties in opening some lines for the rooks (for instance, with e3) force White to play carefully.

However, 18. ♜c6! seems to offer White chances for an advantage, as I discovered later. Instead of immediately chasing the enemy knight, White hopes to take advantage of its passive and insecure position in a more indirect way.

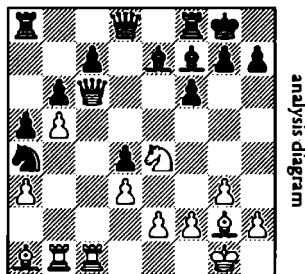
18... ♗a2?

18... ♗a2?! is worse because it places the bishop on an exposed position, while forcing the rook to move to a more active square with 19. ♖bc1.

After 19... ♗xa3? 20. ♜c2! too many black pieces would be hanging.

19. ♖c1

White brings his last piece into play, threatening the backward c7-pawn.



19... ♖c8

Alternatively, Black can try to counter attack with his bishops. After 19... ♗xa3 20. ♖c4! the rook is obviously taboo. 20... ♗xc4 would lose the knight after 21. ♜xc4†. Therefore, 20... ♘c5 is forced, when 21. ♖xd4 leaves White with a strong central pawn majority and the more active position.

19... ♗a2?! is not better than in the game. With the accurate 20. ♜c2! White can force favourable simplifications with 20... ♗b1 21. ♖xb1 ♘c5 22. ♜c4† ♘h8 and now he has a pleasant choice between 23. ♗xd4 with similar play to the game, and 23. ♘xc5 bxc5 (otherwise, Black would lose the d4-pawn) 24. ♗xa8 ♜xa8 25. a4 followed by ♗b2-a3.

20. ♖c4!

Based on the same tactical nuance as in a previous line.

20... ♗c8

It is hard to find anything better for Black.

21. ♖b7 ♘c5 22. ♘c5 bxc5

Again forced. 22... ♗xc5? would lose the important d4-pawn after 23. ♗xd4! ♗xd4 24. ♖xd4 ♜xd4 25. ♜xc8 with an advantage for White. And now the most accurate move is:

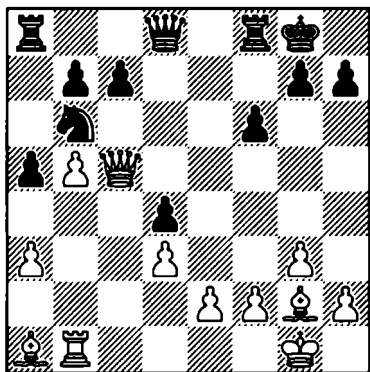
23. a4

Over-defending the b5-pawn and leaving for later the decision whether to attack the c5-pawn with ♗b2-a3 or the a5-pawn with ♜a6.

In case of 23...♙f7 I would probably have ignored the threat and played 24.♖a6 when after 24...♙xc4?! 25.dxc4 the a-pawn, supported by the strong bishop, would have been practically unstopable.

This mutual exchange of amiabilities, with both sides kindly offering the opponent the chance to win the exchange, is quite instructive. The Gordian knot of the position is the d4-pawn. If White can eliminate it, he would get a threatening central majority. In some lines the weakness is transferred to c5 and a5 (as in those lines where Black had to play...bxc5). Black is obviously aiming to maintain his central pawn without making any other positional concession. If he could do that, his spatial advantage would guarantee him an excellent game. For the time being, the minor pieces are best suited for the fight around the d4-pawn and, therefore, it makes little sense wasting valuable time in parrying such threats as ...♙xb1, respectively ♙xa8.

18.♖c2! ♙xb1 19.♙xb1 ♖b6 20.♖c5 ♙xc5
21.♖xc5



Around this point in the game I heard one of my older team-mates whispering (a bit too loudly, I must admit) in our captain's ear: "Look, Mihail has just won the exchange!" After so many years of perseverance I had finally been awarded the moral right to ignore, even in a team event, the nominal value of the pieces...

White's compensation for the slight material

deficit consists of too many aspects: Black was forced to retreat with the knight, the light squares are weak, the b7-pawn needs permanent defence and the central pawn is going to fall.

21...♙b8 22.♙xd4 ♖d7

When playing this rather mechanical move my opponent aimed to connect the rooks, but failed to take into account the particularities of the position.

During the game I believed that Black's last chance to retain a reasonable, though somewhat worse, position would be 22...♙f7. The purpose of this move is to defend the backward c7-pawn and block the weak a2-g8-diagonal at the same time. The importance of this last aspect is revealed by the fact that it is not favourable for White to continue as in the game 23.♙c3. Black would play 23...♖a4, without fearing the deadly check on c4. I planned to play 23.♙e3.

On the next move, depending on Black's reactions, I could have chosen between several possible moves such as ♙d2 or ♖c3 (attacking the a5-pawn), ♙f4, putting the backward pawn in danger or even ♖f5 or ♖h5, putting some pressure on the enemy kingside.

Just a few months later I had the pleasant occasion to have this position as White again, this time against Dragan Solak. He deviated and played:

22...♖c8

In his comments for *ChessBase Magazine*, Ribli considers the move 22...♖c8 to be "the fruit of home analysis". This is hardly true.

First of all, my younger opponent used more than one hour to reach this position. Secondly, he confessed after the game that he had prepared only against 1.c4 e5 2.g3 and was caught by surprise when I played 2.♖c3.

During the game, I considered it necessary to put pressure on the c7-pawn as soon as possible and played 23.♙c1.

The game continued:

23...♖e7 24.♙e3

With the idea of making the threat ♖xc7 real. 24.♖xc7?? was, of course, impossible because of 24...♙c8 25.♖xd8 ♙xc1† winning a rook, while the tempting 24.♖c4† ♖h8 25.♙a7 ♙a8

26.♙c5 does not achieve anything concrete after 26...♟b8.

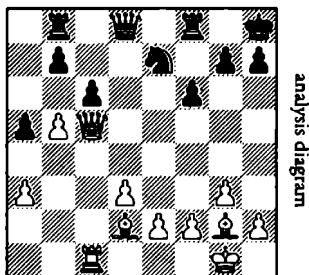
24...♖h8

Black could have also considered 24...c6 with similar play as in the game.

25.♙d2

For some reasons, I was afraid that 25.♟xc7 would open the c-file too early and allow strong counterplay.

25...c6!



Black sacrifices a second pawn in order to tempt White to give up his light-squared bishop.

26.bxc6 ♘xc6 27.♙xc6

Practically forced in view of the potential threat ...♘d4.

27...bxc6 28.♙xa5

White already has a material advantage, but his light squares have been seriously weakened.

28...♟e8 29.e3 ♟b5 30.♟c3 ♟d7 31.♙b4 ♟c8

32.♙c5

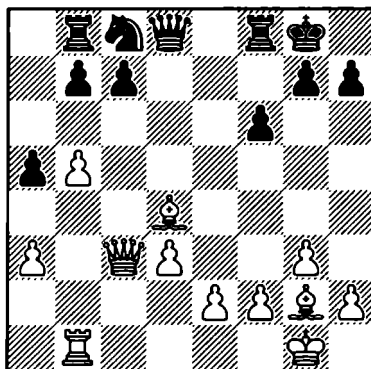
Prematurely opening the b-file. Clearly, the threat of ...c5 had to be parried somehow, but a better chance of retaining some advantage was 32.d4. For instance 32...♟h3 33.♟c2 ♟h5 34.f3 although it would have been quite difficult to make progress.

32...♟b8 33.d4 ♟b1 34.♙b4 ♟xc1 † 35.♟xc1 ♟d5

and Black maintained equality in view of his control over the light squares, Marin-Solak, Bucharest 2001.

I believe that a better reaction to "the fruit of my opponent's home analysis" would be 23.♟c3. This mysterious move certainly needs some clarification. White's queen and dark-squared

bishop were slightly misplaced and exposed on c5 and d4. As we shall see, 23.♟c3 is the start of the fastest possible regrouping.



For instance:

23...♘e7

Alternatively, 23...b6 weakens the c6-square, leaving White with strong pressure after 24.♟c1 ♘d6 25.♙e3 ♖h8 26.a4 planning h4, ♙f4, d4, eventually e4.

24.♙a7!

The bishop needed this diagonal in order to improve its position without loss of time.

24...♟a8 25.♙e3

Now the only way to avoid losing a second pawn would be

25...c6 26.bxc6 bxc6

when White preserves a stable advantage with, for instance:

27.♙c5

Compared to my game against Solak, the presence of the g2-bishop and the black knight clearly favours White, the structure being basically the same.

23.♙c3

Since 23...♘a4 is not possible, White hurries to attack Black's weaknesses.

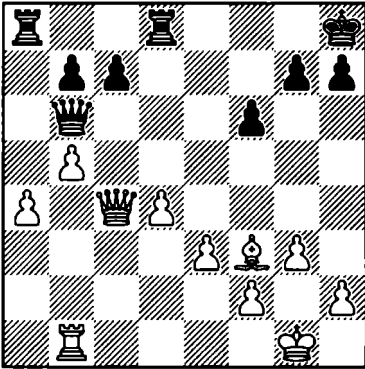
23...a4 24.♙a5

Although temporarily badly placed, the only potentially threatening black piece was the knight. Therefore, I did not hesitate to exchange it, especially since this was going to lead to the capture of another important pawn.

24... $\text{\textcircled{R}}\text{fe8}$ 25. $\text{\textcircled{B}}\text{f3}$ $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{e5}$ 26. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{b4}$ $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{e6}$ 27 $\text{\textcircled{A}}\text{xb6}$

Black would have a good defensive position after 27.d4 $\text{\textcircled{C}}\text{d5}$ 28. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{c4}$ $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{e4}$ 29. $\text{\textcircled{A}}\text{xe4}$ $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{xe4}$ and, in spite of the material advantage, it would have been difficult for White to break the blockade.

27... $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{xb6}$ 28.d4 $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{e6}$ 29. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{xa4}$ $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{a8}$ 30. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{c4}\dagger$
 $\text{\textcircled{C}}\text{h8}$ 31.a4 $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{cd8}$ 32.e3



With two pawns for the exchange White already has a material advantage. At the same time, he has achieved an optimal pawn formation in the centre, just as in Philidor's recommendations. The pawns are placed on and control squares of opposite colour to the bishop.

Advancing any of these pawns has obvious drawbacks. For instance, d5 would weaken the e5-square while e4 would weaken the d4-pawn. Both moves would also restrict the bishop's sphere of activity.

At the same time, the win cannot be achieved without a massive advance of the pawns.

This obvious contradiction means that White's technical task is far from easy. For the moment, he should increase his piece pressure on the enemy position, trying to force him to make new positional concessions. Another possible plan is to advance the flank pawns (for instance, g4, h4, h5) although in the presence of queens this should be done with care.

32...f5

There was no immediate need for this move. White's flank operation mentioned before should

have been prepared with $\text{\textcircled{C}}\text{c1}$, $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{b4}$, $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{c5}$ and $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{c4}$, in order to control the fifth rank and tie Black down to the defence of the c7-pawn. Under these circumstances, advancing the kingside pawns would have presented virtually no risks.

Andrea Malfagia indicated the following variation:

32...c6!

Aiming to open files for the rooks, although at the cost of one pawn.

33. $\text{\textcircled{A}}\text{c4}$

Defending the rook in order to threaten bxc6 , but also targeting the enemy king.

33... cxb5 34. $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{xb5}$ $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{a6}$

Black should pin the rook since, for instance, 34... $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{d6}$ would allow the decisive blow 35. $\text{\textcircled{A}}\text{hx7}$!

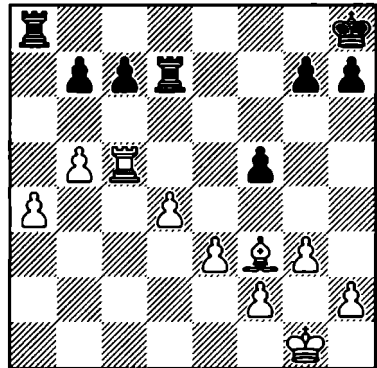
But after 35. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{f7}$! his position would remain suspicious in any case, since all the white pieces are targeting the black king. We can see here that, with the black pawn on f6, White can make use of the fifth rank and the e4-h7 diagonal in order to build up a dangerous attack.

33. $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{c1}$ $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{d7}$ 34. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{c5}$

As mentioned, the main plan consists of 34. $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{b4}$ followed by $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{c5}$ and $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{c4}$.

However, the slightly premature advance of the black f-pawn suggested to me the idea of a worthy alternative.

34... $\text{\textcircled{P}}\text{xc5}$ 35. $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{xc5}$



35... $\text{\textcircled{E}}\text{xa4}$?

This is a strategic error: Black gives up a central pawn for a wing pawn. Pressed for time, my opponent was happy to gain an open file for his rook, but this will hardly compensate for the central mass of white pawns.

More stubborn was 35...g6 when I planned to continue with 36.♠c4. Black would have to defend his pawn with 36...♠a7 (rather than with 36...♠b8 when 37.a5 would allow White to create a dangerous passed pawn.) The next phase of the game would be dedicated to the centralization of the kings. However, before starting the march White should insert the move 37.h4 eliminating the possibility of being left with a weakness on h2 (after, for instance, g5-g4). After 37...♗g7 38.♗f1 ♖f6 39.♗e2 ♗e7 40.♗d3 ♗d6 41.♗c3 ♠d8 42.♗b4 ♠da8 43.♠d1, followed by ♠b3 and ♠c5, White's winning chances remain intact.

36.♠xf5 g6 37.♠c5 b6 38.♠c2

Rather than keeping the rook in an *active* position, I preferred to safely defend my only weakness, the f2-pawn.

38...♗g7

It is difficult to say whether 38...g5 would have been better. Black would have slowed down the white pawns but would have weakened the light squares even more. I would have brought my king to g4 and played h2-h4.

39.h4 ♠b4 40.♗g2 ♠e7 41.♠c6 ♠a4 42.♠d2 ♠e6 43.♠c2

Although the activity of the black rooks is not really dangerous, White should refrain from advancing his central pawns for the time being. For instance, after 43.e4 ♠d6 he would lose a pawn.

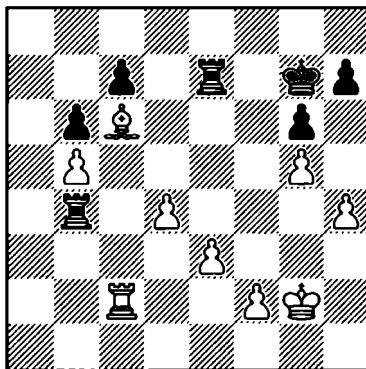
Therefore, the next step will be to win more space on the kingside, which also creates some possible (though not too probable) mating ideas, based on ♠d5 and ♠g8.

43...♠e7 44.g4 ♠b4

Throughout the game my opponent has avoided pushing his pawns, probably fearing the creation of additional weaknesses. In this position 44...h6!? deserved some attention. He would not only provoke the exchange of a pair of pawns after the predictable 45.g5 hxg5 46.hxg5 but also obtain some breathing space for the king. However, this would hardly have influenced the final result.

45.g5

White has considerably improved his position, continuing to follow Philidor's recommendations. The only exception is the b5-pawn, placed on a light square. However, this pawn blocks the b6- and c7-pawns and offers the bishop a stable outpost.



45...♠a4 46.♠d2 ♠e6

46...h6!? would once again have been worth trying.

47.♠d3

Overdefending the e3-pawn and thus preparing the next move.

47...♗h8

If Black tried to prevent White's next regrouping with 47...♠a2 then the immediate advance of the central pawns with 48.e4 would become possible. Black would have been reduced to passivity, for instance 48...♠e7 49.♗g3 followed by f4 and e5. 48.f4

As mentioned, White cannot win without pushing his pawns, even if this means creating some apparent weaknesses (in this case, e3).

48...♠a2† 49.♗g3 ♠e2 50.e4 ♠2xe4

Desperation.

51.♠xe4 ♠xe4 52.♗f3 ♠e7 53.♠c3 ♗g8 54.♠c6 ♗f7 55.d5 ♠d7 56.♗e4

The extra pawn and the centralized king guarantee the win.

56...♗e8 57.♗e5 ♠f7 58.♠f6

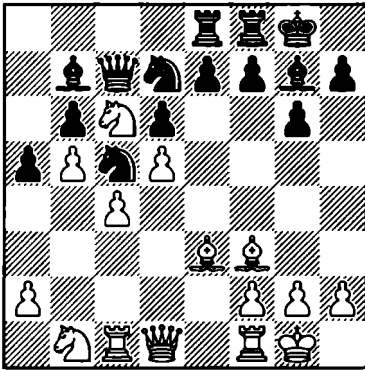
1-0

Black is helpless against the threat d5-d6.

The psychological situation connected with the win (or loss) of the exchange was not completely unfamiliar to me. I had read about it in the booklet *Shakhmatnii Lektsii* written by Petrosian.

Lajos Portisch – Tigran Petrosian

San Antonio 1972



Petrosian wrote: “Portisch has a clear positional advantage. He made his next move

24. ♖g5

and after my answer

24...e5

he thought for about ten minutes, looking all the time at me. He could not really understand: did I sacrifice the exchange or just blunder it? Finally, as he confessed after the game, he decided that I had just blundered and played...”

25. ♗e7

A familiar picture, is it not? Instead of this excusable mistake, White would have preserved some advantage with 25.dxe6 ♖xe6 although Black would have had good chances to consolidate on the dark squares.

25...f5! 26. ♗xf8 ♗xf8

The position has radically changed. In spite of his material advantage, White is reduced to inactivity. The apparently active c6-knight is in fact prisoner on a remote square. In his notes for *Chess Informant* No. 14, Ivkov recommended 26...♗xf8. This is not especially relevant, since White cannot do anything other than sit and wait. Petrosian probably wanted

to maintain control of the e7-square; we shall see more about this aspect later.

27. ♗e2 ♗h6

Preventing an eventual f4, which would open some lines for the rooks.

28. ♖c2 ♗c8 29. ♖c3 ♖fd7

Before undertaking any pawn advance, Black is best advised to regroup with his pieces. For instance, 29...f4?! would be strongly met by 30.♗g4! when 30...♗f5? 31.♗xf5 gxf5 is impossible in view of 32.♗h5 winning. However, 29...♗g7? might have been more effective than the move played in the game, for instance 30.♖e1 ♖fd7 31.♗f1 ♖f8 and now everything is prepared for the kingside expansion, as pointed out by Malfagia.

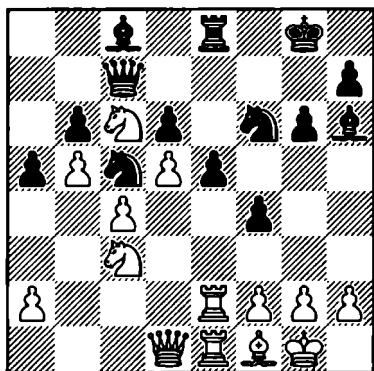
30. ♖e1 ♖f6 31. ♗f1 f4!?

Although Black has no clear threats yet, he can slowly improve his position in order to launch a kingside attack and torture his opponent for a long time.

And yet, a more concrete approach regarding the move order can be useful even in such a position, where tactical nuances seem to be virtually absent. Petrosian's last move is a significant inaccuracy, allowing White to exchange his captive knight for the important light-squared bishop: two far from equivalent pieces. The bishop could become one of the most dangerous attacking pieces, while the knight fulfils nothing more than an aesthetical role. For more details see the comments on 32...♖f8. Better would have been 31...♗h8 and if 32.♖c2 (threatening to escape with the knight through d4) then 32...♖f8. In this case, after 33.♖a4 ♖xa4 34.♗xa4 ♖d7, White could not play 35...♗e7? because of 35...♗c5, winning the knight. The fact that Petrosian failed to notice this possibility even after the game was over is a warning about the psychological danger facing the player who sacrifices the exchange. Once the artistic feeling has been satisfied, the practical player starts thinking about the result. Being an exchange down, perhaps one should be happy with a draw? This is how ambitious strategic plans can fail to achieve their logical conclusion.

32. ♖ce2!

Petrosian might have underestimated this move, which creates the strong threat of ♖d4-b3.



32...♖f8

As pointed out by Malfagia, 32...♗h8 would once again allow White to bring his knight into play with 33.♘d4! ♖f8 34.♘b3. The problems along the e-file are not completely solved by 32...♗f7! (aiming to defend the e8-rook while transferring the queen to the main theatre of operations). The fact is that after 33.♘a4 ♘xa4 34.♗xa4 Black is more or less forced to take the c5-square under control with 34...♘d7, which would leave the rook insufficiently defended, allowing the already familiar 35.♘d4!. It seems as if Black simply lacks one tempo to achieve the desired regrouping. As mentioned above, the culprit is the inaccuracy committed on the 31st move.

33.♘a4!

The correct approach. Portisch undoubtedly understood that his seemingly strong piece pressure in the centre cannot challenge Black's stability on the dark squares by tactical means. As pointed out by Malfagia, 33.♘xe5?! dxe5 34.d6 ♗d8 35.♗xe5 with the idea of invading the 7th rank would fail to 35...♗f7! 36.♗e7 ♗f8 37.♗xf7 ♗xf7 when the d6-pawn will perish without glory.

33...♘a4 34.♗xa4 ♘d7

Black has no time for 34...♗f7 because of 35.c5! and White becomes very active.

35.♘e7 ♗h8 36.♘xc8 ♗xc8

After the disappearance of this bishop, Black's chances for a successful kingside attack have diminished.

37.♗a3 ♘c5 38.♗f3 ♗f5 39.h3

½-½

Some thoughts about relativity

The reader should understand that this chapter is not intended to prove that a minor piece is always stronger than a rook. Such nonsense, in obvious contradiction to centuries of experience, has never crossed my mind. However, I have tried to emphasise how relative the objective strength of the pieces can be.

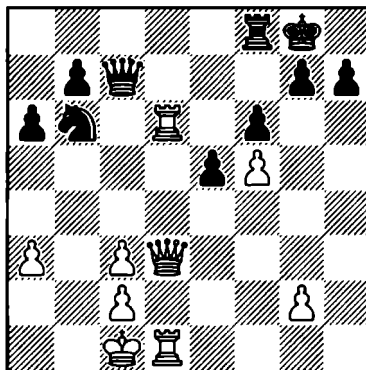
This section should dispel the reader's remaining doubts about the viability of this powerful positional weapon, the exchange sacrifice, by presenting some reversed situations. Under certain circumstances, a knight or a bishop *can*, indeed, be more effective than a rook.

I shall present two games where the dominance of a minor piece over the rook occurred in its pure form, in the absence of any other pieces.

In the first one, the knight will enjoy a much higher mobility than the enemy rook; not something we are used to.

Laszlo Szabo – Tigran Petrosian

Interzonal, Saltsjöbaden 1952



Right after the opening, a Scheveningen Sicilian, Petrosian had carried out the thematic exchange sacrifice on c3, in order to enable the central break ...d5 and obtain attacking chances. His positional compensation in the diagrammed position consists of the numerous pawn weaknesses in the enemy camp. On the other

hand, White's piece activity is quite impressive. With their next moves, both players will try to make the enemy king feel unsafe.

26...♖c5 27.♞d8!

This move is absolutely necessary. Besides generating chances for an attack, White removes the rook from a rather exposed position, as can be seen from the next variations.

27.♞b1? is an attempt to indirectly defend the a3-pawn, based on the fact that the black knight is hanging. The idea is to meet 27...♞c4 with 28.♞d5†.

However, after 28...♞xd5 White loses the exchange back to 29.♞gxd5 ♞e3 and is left with a ruined pawn structure.

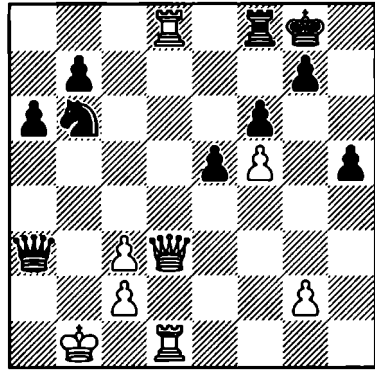
After a neutral move such as 27.g4? the simple 27...♞xa3† forces the king to abandon his residence with 28.♞d2(28.♞b1 would be even worse in view of 28...♞a4 29.♞d5† ♞h8 30.♞b3 ♞xc3† winning the queen) when the unfavourable position of the d6-rook allows 28...♞xd6! 29.♞xd6 ♞c4† 30.♞e2 ♞xd6 31.♞xd6 ♞c8 again with a winning ending for Black.

27...♞xa3† 28.♞b1 h5!?

It is rather difficult to give a straightforward evaluation to this remarkable move. Its primary and obvious aim is to clear the h7-square for the king. There is nothing really deep about that. The concrete threat is 29...♞a4, a move that wouldn't have been possible immediately in view of 28...♞a4 29.♞c4† when the back rank weakness makes itself felt; with the h7-square available this check would be answered by ...♞h7, but now after 29...♞h8 30.♞xa4 White wins.

However, if we look more deeply at the position, we can notice that the advance of the h-pawn has a long-term strategic goal as well: it prevents White from connecting his kingside pawns with a later g4. In the probable case of the exchange of queens, the whole white kingside will be left in ruins, being an easy target for the knight.

On the other hand, Black's last move has the serious drawback of weakening the king's position. You can read more about it below.



29.♞f8!?

Szabo's thoughts (and eyes) must have been strongly fixed on how to increase his pressure along the d-file. Other *unimportant* parts of the board might have simply escaped his attention. I suppose that, if seeing the position for the first time, an attacking player of his class would have had no problem finding the strong 29.♞h1!.

Black would have not only lost his courageous pawn, but would have been in some sort of zugzwang as well. The only piece that can move is the queen, meaning the failure of his attacking plans and leaving White with the initiative. Black would have faced a difficult defensive task.

Under the concrete conditions of a practical game, removing the rook from the central line is not an easy idea to find, especially since a few moves earlier White had played ♞h1-d1. Remarkably, Petrosian also failed to notice it when annotating the game.

Malfagia suggested what looks like Black's best practical chance:

29...♞c5 30.♞xf8† ♞xf8!?

For instance:

31.♞d8†

If immediately 31.♞xh5, then Black can cut off the way back for the enemy queen with 31...♞d5! 32.♞h8† ♞f7 33.c4 ♞e7! and the white king is too exposed to escape from perpetual check, once the queen has abandoned him for attacking purposes.

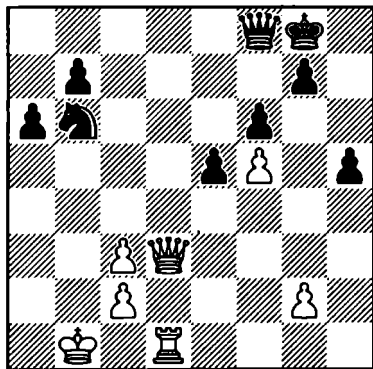
31...♟f7 32.♞xh5 ♜b5† 33.♝c1! ♞f1† 34.♞d1!

If 34.♝b2 then 32...♞a4†! secures Black at least a draw.

34...♞xg2!?

with unclear play.

29...♞xf8



30.♞c4!?

Petrosian correctly points out that if White was planning to exchange queens, this would have been the moment: 30.♞d8. He limits himself to mentioning that this would have offered White a better ending than in the game, but does not give any concrete lines.

The following illustrative variation entirely confirms his comment:

30...♞a4

Relatively best; Black clears the way for the b7-pawn.

31.♞xf8† ♟f8 32.♞d8†

This is better than 32.♞d7 when after 32...b5 33.c4 Black has the strong 33...♞b6! with similar play to the game.

32...♟f7 33.♞b8 b5 34.♞b7† ♟f8 35.c4! bxc4 36.♞c7 ♞c3† 37.♝c1

37.♝b2 is worse because of 37...♞d1† followed by ...♞e3.

37...♞e2† 38.♝d2 ♞d4 39.♞xc4 ♞xf5 40.♞a4.

White's pieces are much better coordinated than in the game, while the g2-pawn is still on the board. The most likely result in this complicated position is a draw.

Malfagia revealed some other possibilities in this critical position: First of all, he pointed out that 30.♞h1!? ♞c5 31.♞d8† ♟f7 would have basically transposed to the variation mentioned in the comment on White's previous move.

Even more unpleasant for Black might have been:

30.♞f3!?

Simultaneously attacking the b7- and h5-pawns. The only way of defending both pawns would be:

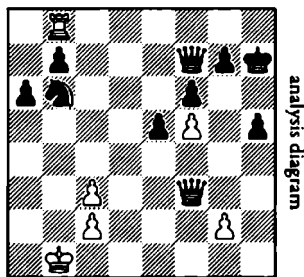
30...♞f7!?

This is awfully passive, since the queen would be in no position to harass the enemy king. After:

31.♞d8† ♟h7

White can attack the b7-pawn once more with 32.♞b8

and it seems that Black cannot generate sufficient counterplay. For instance:



32...♞c4

Or 32...♞d5 33.c4 e4! 34.♞b3! ♞c7 35.♞xb7 ♞c3† 36.♝b2 ♞a4† 37.♝a3! ♞c6 38.♞b8 ♞c5 39.♞h3 with a probably winning attack.

33.♞xb7! ♞d2† 34.♝b2!

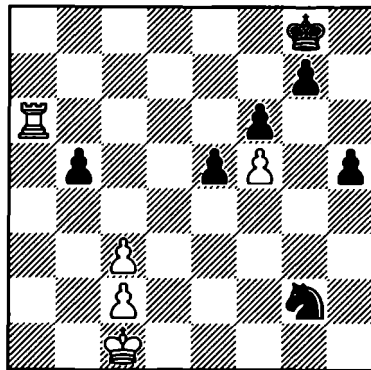
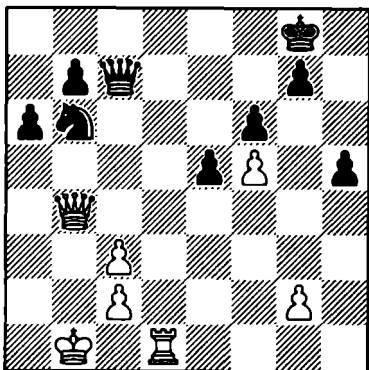
As will be seen, it is important that the white king avoids the first rank; from this point of view, 34.♝c1 would be weaker.

34...♞xf3 35.♞xf7 ♞h4 36.c4 ♞xg2 37.c5 h4 38.c6 h3 39.c7 h2 40.c8 ♞ h1 ♞ 41.♞f8

Winning.

However, Black can defend better with 30...♞c8! abandoning the h5-pawn in order to counterattack after 31.♞xh5 ♞a4.

30...♞c7 31.♞b4 ♞c7!



It would have made little sense to improve White's pawn configuration by exchanging queens on b4.

32. ♖d6

Petrosian criticizes this move, stating that White should have kept the queens on the board at any cost. He probably relied on the fact that White lost the ensuing endgame almost by force, but from a practical point of view this was not easy to foresee, since in many lines it all depends on a single tempo.

On the other hand, in the presence of queens Black can defend his own weaknesses much more easily, supporting the knight at the same time. What can White do against the threat ♖c4 followed by b5, completely isolating the white queen from the rest of the board?

For instance, after 32. ♖h1 ♖c4 33. ♖xh5 a5! 34. ♖a4 b5! 35. ♖a1 e4 White's disorganized army would have been helpless against the combined threats of advancing the passed pawn and attacking the king. After 36. ♖a2 ♖d6 37. ♖c1 e3 38. ♖h1 e2 39. ♖e1 ♖e5 White is paralysed.

32... ♖xd6 33. ♖xd6 ♖c4 34. ♖d7 b5

Black has to preserve this pawn in order to prevent White from creating a queenside passed pawn in the near future.

35. ♖a7 ♖e3 36. ♖xa6 ♖xg2 37. ♖c1

White's coordination could not have been worse. The king together with the doubled pawns forms a natural barrier to the rook in its attempt to stop the h-pawn.

Szabo makes a desperate attempt to activate his pieces, but in doing so he will have to give up the idea of winning the b5-pawn.

After 37. ♖b6 h4 38. ♖xb5 h3 his king would have been a mere spectator to the triumphal march of the black pawns, while the lone rook would have been helpless. Petrosian gives the following lines: 39. ♖a2

Or 39. ♖d5 e4 40. ♖c1 e3 and one of the pawns will promote.

39...e4 40.c4 e3 41.c5 e2 42. ♖b1 e1 ♖ 43. ♖xel ♖xel 44.c6 h2 with a decisive advantage.

37...h4 38. ♖d2 h3 39. ♖a1 ♖h4!

The knight works miracles. It will capture the f5-pawn, thus eliminating the last obstacle to his kingside pawns, and aims for the d6-square, safely blocking the queenside. As the final phase of the game demonstrates, reaching this set-up is sufficient for a win even if Black loses his h-pawn on the way.

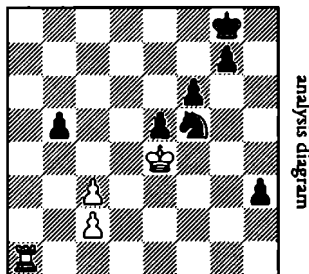
White should do everything he can to prevent this regrouping. His counterplay should be mainly directed against the b5-pawn. Its elimination would create a relatively dangerous passed pawn on the c-file.

40.c4!

Hoping to gain some activity for the king.

I suppose that Szabo had little time left for this last move before the control. When making this attempt to activate his king, he probably relied on the variation mentioned in the notes to White's 41st move, failing to understand that it was, in reality, losing for him.

Knowing the further course of the game, I concentrated my attention on the move 40.♔e3 (not mentioned by Petrosian) that seems to cause Black the biggest practical problems. After the virtually forced 40...♘f5† the white king can move forward with 41.♕e4 threatening to invade the enemy territory.



With his king still on g8, Black has to play very accurately in order to keep White's counterplay under control.

My first impulse when analysing the position was to play 41...♖e7 thus preventing the white king from advancing. White's most natural continuations are 42.♞b1 and 42.♞h1, immediately attacking one of the weak pawns. However, both these moves fail to solve the problems. For instance:

a) 42.♞b1 g5! An essential move, keeping all the passed pawns alive. 43.♕f3 f5 44.♞xb5 g4† 45.♕g3 e4 46.c4 ♕f7 and Black will be in time to stop the c-pawn. Later, his compact mass of kingside pawns will decide the battle.

b) 42.♞h1 ♕f7 43.♞xh3 ♕e6

Black has successfully activated his king. He only needs to transfer the knight to d6 in order to reach the position from the final phase of the game. White can try to prevent this with:

44.♕d3 g5 45.c4

But after 45...g4 followed by 46...bxc4† his pawns will be much faster than the white one.

White's correct continuation is the slightly paradoxical:

c) 42.♕f3!

Intending to capture the h-pawn with the king and the b-pawn with his rook. The king

manoeuvre is hardly a loss of time, since it has driven the knight to a relatively unfavourable square. I believe that Black cannot win this position, although some interesting play is still possible, as in the following line:

42...♖d5 43.♕g3

Even more accurate might be 43.♞b1 and if 43...♖xc3 then 44.♞b3 but I have given 43.♕g3 as the main line for its spectacular moments.

43...♖f4

Black has managed to defend the h3-pawn, but his knight has lost its mobility. Therefore, the queenside counterplay will be quite dangerous.

44.♞b1 g5 45.♞xb5 e4 46.♞b4!

An accurate move, stopping the dangerous pawn and cutting the enemy king off from the queenside.

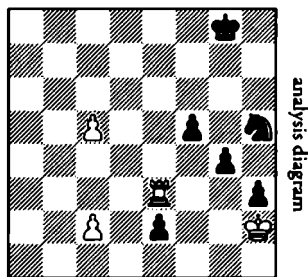
46...e3 47.♞e4 e2 48.c4 f5 49.♞e3

White's play is simple: he has to push his pawn. It is now Black who has to come up with something in order to make progress.

49...g4!

The knight is obviously taboo, because the king has to guard the h-pawn.

50.c5 ♖h5† 51.♕h2



51...♖g3!

A fantastic move. The knight cannot be captured by either of the white pieces. For instance, 52.♕xg3 loses to 52...f4† 53.♕xf4 h2. At the same time, Black threatens the decisive ...♖f1†. 52.♞e5 is not a solution because of 52...♖e4 followed by ...e1♞, while 52.♕g1 only apparently parries the threat. Black wins with 52...h2† 53.♕xh2 ♖f1†.

Does this mean that White is lost?

52.♞xe2!

Not at all! After this equally elegant move the c-pawn will be strong enough to guarantee a draw after the practically forced variation:

52...♖e2

The tempting 52...♖f1? does not work on account of 53.♗g1 h2† 54.♖xh2! ♖xh2 55.c6 ♖f3† 56.♗h1! and White wins - Jacob Aagaard.

53.c6 g3†

The knight cannot catch the pawn by normal means. He needs to win one tempo by means of check. However, attracting the enemy king to a vulnerable square will cost Black the whole pride of his position: the kingside phalanx.

54.♗xh3 ♖f4† 55.♗xg3 ♖g6 56.c7 ♖e7 57.♗f4 followed by c8♞.

We can thus conclude that 41...♖e7 is not sufficient for a win.

The correct continuation is 41...♖d6†! although the reasons are far from obvious. For instance, after:

42.♗d5 ♖f7

White can survive with:

43.♖h1!

But not 43.♗c5? when after 43...g5 44.♗xb5 g4 45.♖h1 ♖g5 the pawns are unstoppable.

43...♖g5 44.♗c6.

Now that the knight is immobile, this operation is quite opportune.

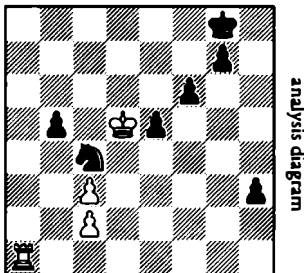
44...f5 45.♗xb5 f4 46.c4

Once again, this pawn ensures sufficient counterplay. Black's king is too passive to influence the outcome of the battle. For instance

46...f3 47.c5 f2 48.c6 ♖e6 49.♗c4

with a probable draw.

The point behind Black's 41" move is revealed by 42...♖c4!!



A remarkable position. It may seem that the knight is unstable here, because of the weakness of the b5-pawn. However, White needs two tempi in order to eliminate that pawn. This time would be sufficient for Black to create decisive threats with his h- and g-pawns.

We can, therefore, speak about a relative stability of the knight on the c4-square. As so many times in chess, a detail of a static nature is determined by dynamic factors.

White's relatively best continuation is 43.♖h1 in order to eliminate the most advanced of the promotion candidates. Black's most energetic continuation is 43...f5! when White's counterplay seems just too slow. For instance:

44.♗c5

Or 44.♖xh3 e4 45.♖h1 e3 46.♗c5 f4 when Black plans to simply improve his position with g5 followed by the approach of the king, while after 47.♗xb5 he wins outright with 47...♖d2 48.c4 e2. Because of the threat ...♖f1, Black wins a decisive tempo, forcing 49.♖a1 when after 49...f3 Black queens first.

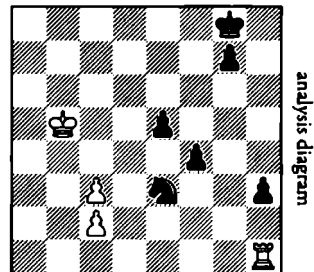
44...f4!

The most efficient way to build up the kingside play.

45.♗xb5

Returning with the king, in the hope of taking advantage of the weakness of the e4-square, does not look too promising either: 45.♗d5 g5 46.♖xh3 g4 and, with the help of the king and knight, these far advanced pawns will decide.

45...♖c3!



From here the knight not only controls the f1-square, but also is ready to catch the c-pawn.

46.c4 g5 47.c5

With 47.♖xh3 White would win a pawn but lose two tempi. After 47...g4 Black wins by advancing his pawns. For instance 48.♖h1 f3 49.c5 g3 50.c6 g2 51.c7 gxh1 ♖ 52.c8 ♗† ♔f7 and the king will easily escape the perpetual check somewhere around the f2-square, or 51.♖g1 f2 followed by ...f1 ♗ with check.

47...g4 48.c6 ♔d5

White's counterplay has disappeared, while the kingside pawns are already unstoppable. For instance:

49.♔c5 ♔e7 50.♔d6 ♔xc6!

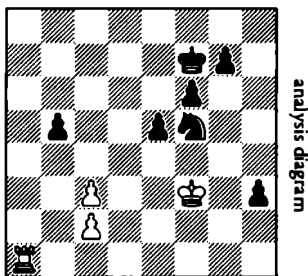
Distracting the enemy king.

51.♔xc6 g3 52.♔d5 g2 53.♖g1 f3

At least two of the pawns will soon promote.

In conclusion, 41.♔e4 has the significant drawback of allowing the knight to reach the c4-square.

Another interesting try for White is 41.♔f3. Instead of rushing in with the king, he aims to arrange his forces more harmoniously. The king will operate on the kingside, while the rook will aim to generate counterplay on the other wing. However, Black can take advantage of the fact that the knight is not attacked in order to consolidate before further actions. He should first bring his king closer to the centre with 41...♔f7 in order to prepare the winning set-up by placing the knight on d6.



White has nothing better than:

42.♖a5

Alternatively, 42.♖a7† ♔e6 43.♖b7 loses outright after 43...e4† 44.♔f2 e3† when the king alone cannot stop the pawns. 42.♖a6

aiming to prevent a further ...♔d6 fails similarly to 42...g5 planning ...♔e7 and ...♔d6 when 43.♖b6 only makes things worse in view of 43...g4†! 42.♔g4 does not prevent Black's basic plan and is best met by 42...♔e6 followed by ...♔e6. The immediate 42...♔d6 would be worse because of 43.♖a7†, when Black has problems defending both the knight and the g7-pawn.

42...e4†!

Black improves his kingside position with gain of time. Less clear would be 42...♔d6 because of 43.♖a7† ♔g6 44.♖d7.

43.♔g4

The most active continuation. 43.♔xe4 is impossible in view of 43...h2 44.♖a1 ♔g3† winning the rook, while after 43.♔f2 g5 44.♖b5 ♔e6 45.c4 g4 Black's pawns are impossible to stop.

Moves such as 46.♖b6† would only help the king to reach the optimal f4-square, starting with 46...♔e5.

43...h2 44.♖a1 ♔e6 45.♖h1 ♔e5

And Black has reached a stable position, where his pawns will slowly but surely decide. The b5-pawn could, if necessary, be defended with the thematic ...♔d6.

Although they do not change the evaluation of the position, all these lines are quite instructive. Several thematic aspects of the fight between the knight and the rook are revealed.

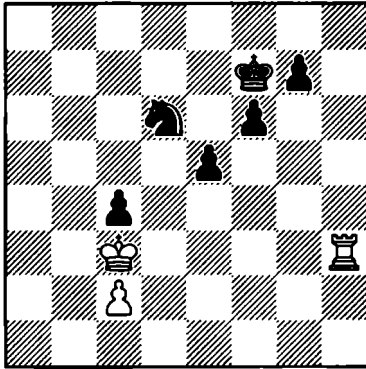
40...bxc4 41.♖h1

41.♔c3 ♔xf5 would simply have transposed, since White also loses after 42.♔xc4 ♔g3 43.♔d5 h2 44.c4 h1 ♗† 45.♖xh1 ♔xh1 46.c5 ♔g3 47.c6 ♔f5 and the black knight is just in time, as pointed out by Petrosian.

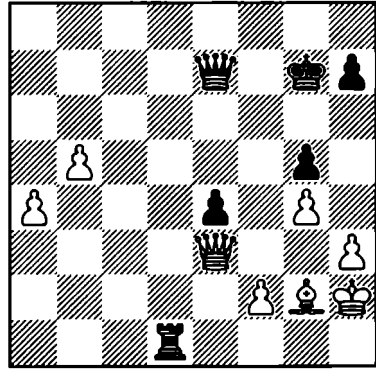
Remarkably, this generally slow and clumsy moving piece was much more efficient in operations carried out on different parts of the board than the long ranged rook.

This would not have been at all easy to calculate over the board, but I suppose that 41.♖h1 was the sealed move and that Petrosian had plenty of time to check everything in detail, against all White's possible continuations.

41...♔xf5 42.♔c3 ♔d6 43.♖xh3 ♔f7



Mihail Marin – Mikhail Golubev
Bucharest 1996



Petrosian plans to advance his pawns little by little. Szabo makes a last attempt to prevent this plan by a combined activity of his remaining pieces. The rook will aim to keep the king busy defending the pawns, while his own king will aim to question the stability of the knight.

44. Bh7 f5 45. Cb4 f4 46. Cc5 f3! 47. Bh1

White had no time for 47. Cxd6 . After 47... f2 48. Bh1 e4 49. Bf1 e3 50. Cd5 Black would be able to remove the king from the exposed square with, for example, 50... Cg8 in order to play 51... e2 .

47... e4

In view of the forced line 48. Cd4 Qf5! 49. Cxe4 Qg3! 50. Cxf3 Qxh1 with a winning pawn ending, Szabo resigned.

0-1

We have seen how efficient the knight can be when the enemy structure is in bad shape, as was the case in the previous game. The knight is well suited for both blocking and attacking weak pawns.

Compared to the knight, the bishop is a fundamentally different piece. Its main strength is the higher mobility offered by its long ranged action. In the next game the bishop's domination over the rook will rely on the possibility of indirectly controlling several diagonals at the same time.

Just as in the previous example, we shall start examining the game from an earlier stage than the endgame itself. Once again, the preliminary phase contains some instructive nuances.

From a formal point of view, White has more than sufficient material compensation, consisting of two outside passed pawns. True, they are not too dangerous yet and are likely to become vulnerable.

The main issue at this point is the exposed position of both kings. For White, the only way to parry a check along the h2-b8 diagonal is to interpose the queen. It is, however, White's turn to move. The black king enjoys more freedom than his colleague, but in order to avoid occupying an unfavourable position it should also use the protection of the queen. Therefore, we can conclude that, for both sides, the exchange of queens is in principle hard to avoid.

The only problem, to an even greater extent than in the previous game, is in which concrete form this operation will be carried out; the evaluation of the ensuing ending will depend on it.

41. Cc3!

White had two simple solutions to achieve a better endgame with no risk, but they barely offered chances for a win.

a) 41. Qxe4 Qe5! 42. Cg2 Bd4 43. Cc6 Qxe3 44. fxe3 Bxa4 45. b6 Bb4 46. b7 Cf6 and Black's pieces are active enough to prevent White from making progress.

b) 41. Qxe4 Qxe4 42. Qxe4 Bd4 43. f3 Bxa4 44. b6 Bb4 45. b7 Cf6 with a similar situation.

Besides its objective merits (all Black's answers lead him to worse positions than in the previous lines), the text move has an important practical quality: it forces the opponent to make a difficult choice between several unpleasant (some of them simply bad) alternatives.

41...♖h6?!

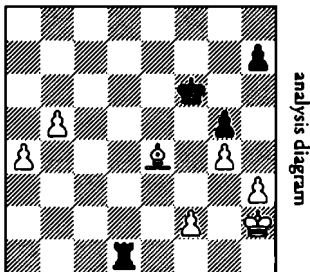
I imagine that Golubev wanted to maintain chances for an attack, a decision in accordance with his style of play. However, allowing the white queen to dominate the central squares is not such a wise idea.

Let us first eliminate the weak answers 41...♔g8?? (or f7) 42.♖b3† winning the rook, and 41...♖f8?? 42.♖h8† is not too encouraging either.

41...♔g6? would place the king on a vulnerable square, for instance 42.♖c6† ♔d6 43.♖xe4† ♖xe4 44.♗xe4† and White wins a decisive tempo for advancing the pawns.

Malfagia investigated the possible consequences of 42...♔g7 (instead of 42...♔d6 in the previous line), with the idea of striving for counterplay on the dark squares: 43.♗xe4 ♔d4 44.♗c2 ♖e5†! (The immediate 44...♔d2? would drop a rook to 45.♖c3†) 45.♔g2 ♔d2 However, after 46.♖b7† ♖f6 47.♖xh7 ♖f4 White manages to trade queens with 48.♖f5†, obtaining a winning endgame after 48...♖xf5 49.♗xf5 ♔a2 50.♔g3! ♔xa4 51.f3 ♔b4 52.♗d7 followed by the occupation of the c6-square, something Black should avoid, as indicated in the analysis on 41...♖f6 below.

Black's best practical chance would have been 41...♖f6?! 42.♖xf6† ♔xf6 even if this means losing a third pawn:
43.♗xe4



43...♔d4!

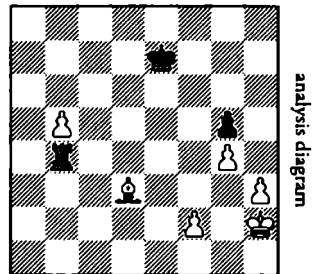
Black has no time for 43...h6 because of 44.b6. 44.♗xh7 ♔xa4 45.♗f5

If White managed to defend the b-pawn from c6, thus maintaining the bishop on a stable square, White would have every chance to win. Black has to prevent the manoeuvre ♗d7-c6 at any cost.

45...♔e7!

45...♔d4? would fail to 46.♗c8! (planning b6-b7 and ♗b7-c6) and if 46...♔b4 then simply 47.♗d7.

46.♗d3 ♔b4



Due to the unsecured position of the bishop White might have nothing better than to abandon the b-pawn and create two connected pawns on the kingside.

True, this would mean reaching a theoretical draw, but the position would still offer some practical chances.

42.♖c6† ♔d6

Black has to drive away the enemy queen from the long diagonal.

42...♖d6†?, with the same idea, would cause the rook to be attracted to a passive position for just a moment, sufficient for the white pawns to initiate their march after:

43.♖xd6† ♔xd6 44.a5 ♔d1 45.a6 ♔a1 46.♗f1!

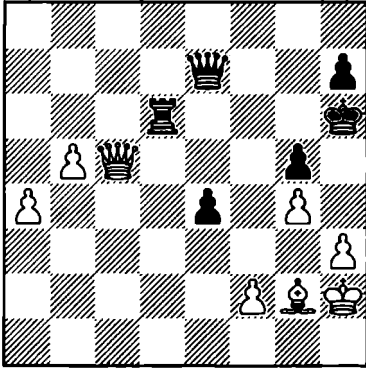
With this unexpected support from the bishop, the pawns become unstoppable.

46...♔xf1 47.a7 ♔xf2† 48.♔g3 ♔a2 49.b6 and one of the pawns will promote.

42...♔g7 would allow White to eliminate the central pawn and clear some space for his king: 43.♗xe4 ♔d4 44.♗c2!

43. ♖c5

Since White intends to put his pawns in motion, Black has to hurry creating threats against the white king.



43... ♖f8

After 43... ♖f8 White has the strong 44. ♖f5! when after 44... ♖xf5 45. gx5 the newly created passed pawn would have decisive importance: 45... ♗d1

Or 45... ♗d2 46. a5 ♗xf2 47. ♔g1! (but not 47. ♔g3 ♗xf5 48. ♗f1? ♗xf1 49. b6 e3! queening as well) 47... ♗a2 48. a6 e3 49. ♗f1 and Black cannot stop the pawns any more.

46. ♗xe4 ♗a1 47. b6 ♗xa4 48. b7 ♗b4 49. f6!

and the black king is completely cut off from the main events, while his colleague will be transferred to c6 with decisive effect.

44. ♖e5

I spent most of my remaining time evaluating the endgame that arises after this move.

The alternative was 44. ♖e3 ♗d3 45. ♖xe4 ♖d6† 46. ♔g1 ♗d1† 47. ♗f1 when, in spite of White's considerable material advantage, the final result is still highly uncertain. Black's pieces occupy dominant positions. The rook pins the bishop, while the queen controls several important dark diagonals. I believe that White would retain some practical chances, but could not claim a clear win.

Choosing this line would have been a more practical decision, because it was easy to calculate

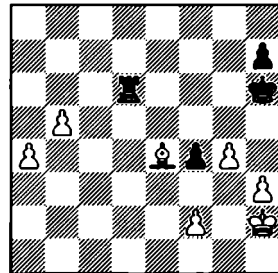
and would have avoided time trouble. From an objective point of view, the game continuation is stronger, because it leads to a winning position. The risk involved is of a practical nature, given the limited amount of time available.

On the other hand, 44. ♖f5 would have been bad because of 44... ♗f6!

44... ♗d2

The only possible move.

44... ♖f4† 45. ♖xf4 gx4 would have been a rather unfortunate method of exchanging queens since after 46. ♗xe4 the combined threats on both sides would have been too strong.



analysis diagram

46... ♗d4 47. ♗c6

47. f3 also seems to be winning: 47... ♗xa4 48. b6 ♗b4 49. b7 ♔g5 (otherwise h4, as in the main line) 50. ♔g2 ♔h4 51. ♔f2 ♔xh3 52. ♔e2 ♔h4 (will the king be back in time?) 53. ♔d2 ♔g5 54. ♔c3 ♗b6 (this exposed square is the only one available at this moment) 55. ♔c4 ♔f6 56. ♔c5 ♗b2 57. ♔d6 followed by ♔c7, eventually ♗c6, winning.

47... ♗xa4 48. h4 ♗b4 49. ♔g2 ♗b3

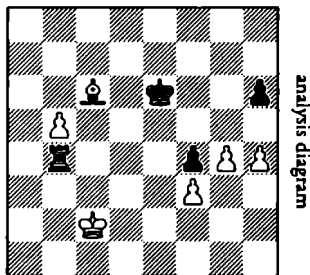
Black denies the king access to f3.

50. f3

Under different circumstances such a move would be an important concession, because it allows Black to cut off the king along the second rank. In this case the restriction is only superficial, as we shall see. Besides, after his last move all the white pawns are securely defended. 50... ♔g6 51. ♔f2 ♗b2† 52. ♔e1 h6

Trying to anticipate an eventual kingside action such as g5, h5-h6 in case the black king is busy on the other wing.

53.♖d1 ♖f6 54.♖c1 ♜b4 55.♖c2 ♖e6



56.g5!

The black king is distracted on the kingside so

White has a free hand on the opposite wing.

56...hxg5 57.hxg5 ♖f5 58.♖c3 ♜b1 59.♖c4
♖xg5 60.♖c5 ♖f6 61.♖d6!

Aiming for c7 while keeping the enemy king at
a distance.

61...♜b2 62.♖c7

Black is helpless in front of White's small but
perfectly coordinated army.

45.h4!

Just when Black seemed to have created strong
threats against the white king's position, this
accurate move, threatening mate in one, forces the
exchange of queens.

45...♞f4†

45...gxf4 would lose the rook to 46.♞h5† ♖g7
47.♞g5†.

46.♞xf4 gxf4 47.♞xe4 ♜xf2†

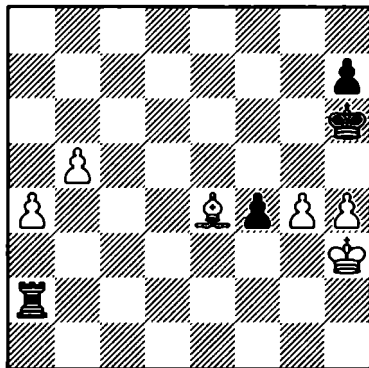
For Black this is obviously an improved version
of the endgame from a previous comment. The
absence of the f2-pawn is rather significant for the
further course of the game but, as we shall see, not
for the final result.

48.♖h3 ♜a2

In general terms, the winning plan consists of
advancing the b-pawn as far as possible in order
to tie down the rook, and then win the f4-pawn
by placing the bishop on the invulnerable e4-
square. The next step would be to transfer the
king to the queenside. As we shall see, this step
is not trivial.

The main technical problems are connected
with the unfavourable colour of the h8-square.

It is essential for White to maintain both his
kingside pawns on the board. Winning the rook
in exchange for the b-pawn but losing the g-pawn
on the way would lead to a well-known drawish
position where the light-squared bishop and the
h-pawn cannot win against the king.



49.g5† ♖h5

After 49...♖g7 50.b6 ♜xa4 51.b7 ♜b4 52.h5
h6?! 53.g6 White would be easily winning.

50.♞f3† ♖g6 51.♞e4† ♖h5 52.♞f3† ♖g6
53.♖g4!

The only correct move order. After 53.b6 ♜xa4
54.b7 ♜b4 55.♖g4 Black would play 55...h5†!
56.♖h3 (56.gxf4 leads to an immediate draw
after 56...♜xb7!). See also the note after Black's
48th move.) 56...♖f5 and White cannot attack the
f-pawn.

53...♜a4

Golubev chooses the relatively best kingside
structure.

53...h5† would make little sense now: 54.♖xf4
♜xa4† 55.♞e4† (winning an important tempo
that allows the b-pawn to reach the seventh rank)
55...♖g7 56.b6 ♜b4 57.b7 and White wins, while
53...h6 would be hopeless after 54.h5† ♖g7 55.g6
♜xa4 56.b6 ♜b4 57.b7.

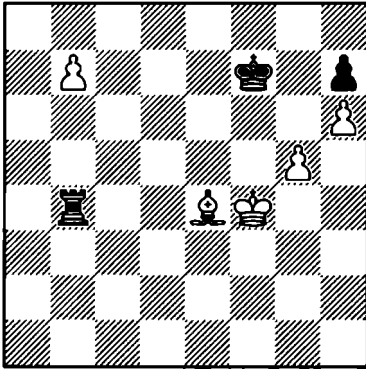
54.h5† ♖f7 55.b6 ♖e6 56.b7 ♜b4 57.h6!

Although played under time pressure, this is
the only winning move order. By creating the
potential threat g6, White prevents the enemy
pieces from becoming active.

After the careless 57.♔e4? Black would have exploited the neat resource 57...f3! mentioned by Golubev, for instance 58.♖xf3 ♕e5 59.♙c6 ♖f5 60.g6 hxg6 61.h6 ♖f6 with a draw.
57...♖f7

57...♕e5? would be impossible now in view of 58.g6 ♖f6 59.gxh7 and the doubled pawns defend each other in a similar way to the hedgehog's spines.

58.♙d5† ♖f8 59.♙c4 ♖g8 60.♖xf4 ♖f7



Once the second time trouble of the game was over, I discovered an aspect that had escaped my attention when I made my choice on the 44th move: the white king cannot go too far from the kingside pawns because ...♖xb7 followed by...♔g6 would draw.

In order to win, White has to occupy the f5-square with his king and then drive his colleague away by means of a check on d5. After that, everything would be prepared for the march to the queenside.

At first sight, however, this seems impossible to achieve: once the king gets to f5 the rook could check either on the fifth rank or on the f-file. Enjoying more freedom of action, White will solve this practical problem by using the threat of zugzwang. His king will repeatedly triangulate in order to pass the right (and obligation) to move to the opponent. Curiously, the generally mobile rook will not be able to do the same.

61.♖f5 ♖b5† 62.♖g4 ♖b4

62...♖b2 63.♙c6 transposes to a position that will be reached later in the game.

63.♖f4!

Reaching the same position as the previous diagram, except now it is Black to move. This is it, the first zugzwang position. The rook will have to abandon the pin.

The other possible way to carry out the same idea would have been:

63.♖h5? ♖g8!

Apparently pointless, but in fact quite subtle.

Worse would be 63...♖f8? because of 64.♙d5! with a genuine zugzwang.

64.♙c6 ♖h8 65.♙d5

It might seem that Black has to let the white king out. However 65...♖h4† draws immediately.

63...♖b2

The rook has to start attacking from behind.

63...♖b6 would also be answered with 64.♙c6.

64.♙c6

This is a remarkable position where all the light squares along the b-file are denied to the rook.

The b5-square is under direct control.

64...♖b3 would lose the rook.

The b1-square is under a slightly more subtle form of indirect control. 64...♖b1 allows 65.♙d5† when the king has to go back, allowing an easy win, since 65...♖g6 loses the rook to 66.♙e4†.

At the same time, moving the rook to b4 or b6 would allow 65.♖f5 followed by 66.♙d5† winning.

What about the black king? Did White's last move allow the enemy king some degree of freedom? Not really. Although the bishop has given up direct control over the g6-square, 64...♖g6? would unexpectedly allow mate in one with 65.♙e8.

Therefore, Black has to abandon his previously efficient defensive method and start attacking the enemy king from the second rank.

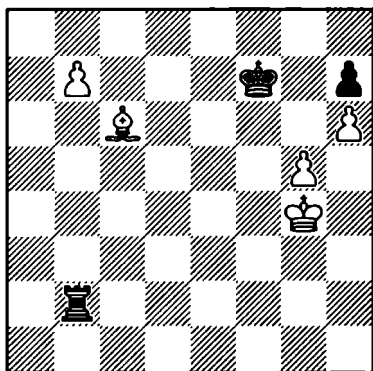
64...♖f2†

The last hope.

65.♖g3!

The final triangulation.

65...♖b2 66.♖g4



Removing a vital link in the opponent's pawn chain

More than two centuries ago, Philidor wrote that the pawn is the soul of chess. This statement could not be shattered by the huge number of games played since then or by the penetration of computers into our silent chess world. If the pawn structure is not healthy, there are few chances that the position itself is viable.

There are many examples where Petrosian sacrificed the exchange in order to eliminate an important pawn, controlling key points of the position. I have chosen three fragments from three different decades, but presenting a shocking similarity.

In the next game the sacrifice was made possible only by White's carelessness.

Octavio Troianescu – Tigran Petrosian Bucharest 1953

The second, and decisive, zugzwang position. There are no more checks on the second rank and the rook has to worsen its position.

66...♖b4†

66...♖b3 would be met by 67.♔f5! taking advantage of the fact that the f3-square is defended.

But not 67.♗d5† ♕g6 68.♗xb3?? with stalemate!

67.♔f5

The rest is easy.

67...♖b6 68.♗d5† ♕e7 69.♔e5

69.g6? would have been premature: 69...hxg6† 70.♔e5 ♔f8! drawing, but 69.♔e4 as suggested by Nikolaidis during the post mortem might have been a shorter way, based on the fact that after 69...♔f8 70.♔e5 Black faces the third zugzwang. For instance, 70...♖b1 71.♗d6 winning.

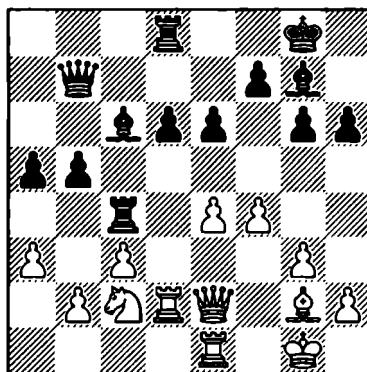
69...♔f8 70.♔d4 ♖b1 71.♔c5 ♖b2 72.♔c6 ♕e7 73.♔c7

Equally good would have been 73.g6 hxg6 74.h7 when Black cannot cope with both passed pawns.

After 73.♔c7 ♖c2† 74.♗c6 ♖b2 75.b8♗ ♖xb8 76.♔xb8 ♔f7 White is just in time to prevent the king from reaching the g6-square with 77.♗e4. Therefore, Mikhail resigned.

1-0

The time has come to concentrate on Petrosian's games exclusively. I have classified the material according to the goals pursued by the sacrifices.



Having the pair of bishops and a clear plan on the queenside, Black is clearly better. Without suspecting anything, the former Romanian champion tries to drive the rook away, planning to return then with the knight to c2, in order to prevent b5-b4. He was obviously not playing for a win.

25.♗e3?! ♖xe4! 26.♗xe4 ♗xe4

By sacrificing the exchange, Black managed to eliminate the important central pawn, which

ensured White some space advantage in the centre. As a consequence of this operation, all the light squares on the kingside become weak and the king itself is rather exposed.

27.♖c2 d5

A multi-purpose move. Besides consolidating his bishop on the e4-square Black also advances his relatively weak d6-pawn to a strong position, making the a3-f8 diagonal available for the other bishop at the same time.

28.♖d4? b4!

White should not have allowed this pawn break. Troianescu must have overestimated his chances in the position resulting after his 30th move.

29.♙b4 ♙b4 30.♙4

“Estimating this position a few moves ago, some players might have feared to sacrifice the exchange. White has obtained a passed pawn; the knight seems to be well placed on d4, preventing an invasion on the c-file, while the rook can be transferred to a1 in order to support the pawn.

The essence of the position lies in the weakened position of the white king. When making his 25th move, Black had to foresee the possibility of transferring the bishop to c5, after which it is clear that White’s seeming advantages lack any significance, while dark clouds gather around the white king. Now, of course, the most stubborn continuation would have been 30.h4 followed by the evacuation of the king to h2.

It is true that, having enough material and positional compensation for the exchange, Black could have changed his plans. For instance, after h4 it would have been a good idea to play e5 followed by the installation of the bishop on e5, continuing to trouble the king.” (Petrosian)

There are several interesting aspects of this remarkable comment that I would like to discuss in detail.

First of all, there is this *of course*. I am not sure at all whether I would even consider such a move as h4, weakening the king’s position even more. Why did Petrosian consider it to be White’s best chance? Is the weakening of the g3-square not too high a price to pay for obtaining the possibility of clearing the g1–a7 diagonal?

Hard to say, but Petrosian was probably bothered

by the fact that in order to attack that weakness he would have been practically forced to partially spoil the compactness of his own structure by playing ...e5.

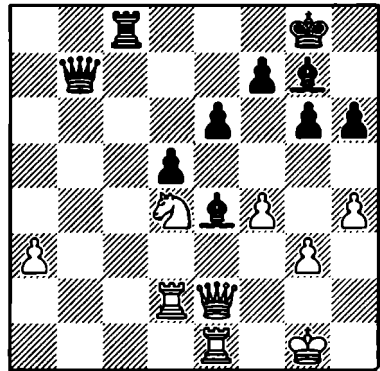
Equally intriguing is the fact that Petrosian does not suggest h2-h4 as an idea in principle, but specifically mentions:

30.h4

This means that he considers it to be an emergency of higher importance than securing the queenside. Let us try to see how play could have continued.

30...bxa3 31.bxa3 ♖c8

This continuation is in the spirit of Petrosian’s recommendation. Black plans to place the rook on the third rank, in order to start a concentrated attack against the g3-pawn. Also possible is the less imaginative 31...♙b6 32.♙e3 ♖a8 33.♖h2 ♖f8 when Black will win the a3-pawn, although this would probably lead to significant simplifications with some chances for a draw for White.



32.♖h2 e5 33.fxe5 ♖xe5 34.♙e3

The most stubborn continuation. Allowing the black rook to reach the third rank with 34.♙f2 could have disastrous consequences after 34...♖c3. For instance: 35.♖e3 ♙e7! (creating the threat of mate in two, starting with 36...♙xh4!) 36.♖f3 ♖c1! and, in order to parry the elegant threat 37...♙xh4!!† 38.♖xh4 ♖h1 mate, White has to return the exchange

with 37.♖xe4 when after 37...dxe4 38.♘xe5 ♖xe5 Black has winning chances because of his material advantage and safer king position.

34...h5

Black is in no hurry. After consolidating his kingside, he plans to continue ♖c4, ♗e7 (forcing ♕h1) and then ♖c7 followed by ♖c3. White's position is quite difficult.

Therefore, we can conclude that the merits of 30.h4 are of a practical rather than objective nature. We shall soon find out that putting this idea into practice at a later stage would not have been too appealing either.

30...♖a7 31.♖f2 ♖c8!

Avoiding the trap 31...♖xa4? when White would win the pawn back with 32.♘xe6! fxe6 33.♖xe4! maintaining a better position.

32.b3 ♘f8 33.♘b5

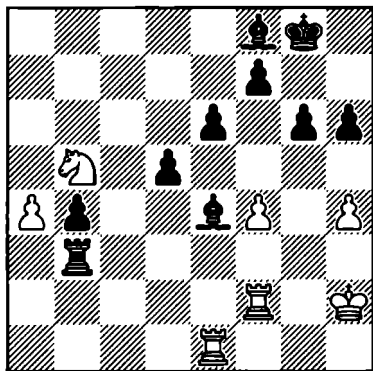
Let us try to find out whether this would be a better moment for White to play 33.h4. Black's most consequent continuation would be:

33...♖c3 34.♘b5

Since now 34.♕h2 would allow 34...♘c5 with perfect coordination for Black, White could consider embarking on the adventurous variation:

34...♖xg3† 35.♕h2 ♖xf2† 36.♖xf2 ♖xb3

Black has a considerable material advantage already, but isn't the a-pawn very dangerous? Concrete analysis proves that Black can keep things under control, maintaining his advantage.

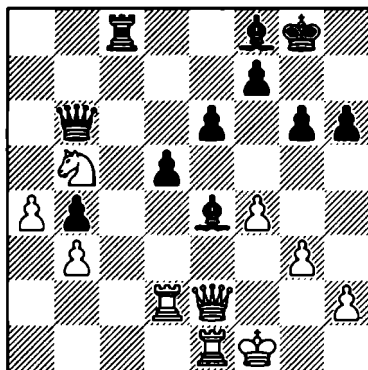


Immediately advancing the pawn with 37.a5 would leave the knight rather exposed on b5. Black could play 37...♘c5 38.♖a2 ♘d3! forcing the knight to occupy an even less favourable square with 39.♘c7 when after 39...♖a3 40.♖xa3 bxa3 41.a6 a2 42.♖a1 ♘c4 White has no possibilities of counterplay. The bishops control the whole position.

The position is not really suited for such prophylactic moves as 37.♖c1 either. With 37...♘e7 Black plans to start a devastating attack with ...♘h4. After 38.a5 the simplest continuation is 38...♘d3 taking advantage of the fact that the knight is unstable again (persisting with 38...♘h4 would lead to a rather difficult position to calculate after 39.♖a2 ♘g3† 40.♕g1 ♘xf4 41.♖c8† ♕g7 42.a6 although Black's attack might be more efficient than the passed pawn).

White's only way to fight on would be 39.a6!? ♘xb5 40.a7 ♖a3 41.♖c8† ♕g7 42.a8♖ ♖xa8 43.♖xa8 ♘h4 when Black would keep his material advantage in a rather unusual position. In order to gain survival chances, White should try to attack the f7-square. The only way to achieve this would be 44.♖fa2 b3 45.♖2a3 ♘c4 46.♖b8, but after 46...♘e7 47.♖a7 ♘d6 48.♖bb7 ♘xf4† 49.♕h3 Black avoids any possible problems with 49...g5, and his army of pawns will decide.

33...♖a6 34.♖c2 ♖b6† 35.♕f1



"Black has a nice position, but how can he win? It would be a good thing to invade through the c-

file, but all the squares are defended. Should Black play for mate? He would need to bring his pieces closer to the white king. If 35...♔c5 then 36.♖c1 and the extra exchange suddenly makes itself felt. The knight occupies a defended, secure position. Fortunately, there is a possibility of sacrificing the second exchange, thus marking clearly Black's advantage." (Petrosian)

35...♖c3! 36.♗xc3

Rejecting the sacrifice wouldn't change matters: with the rook infiltrated deep in White's position, Black would create deadly threats. 36.♗d4 ♔c5 37.♖ed1 ♔xd4 38.♖xd4 ♔f3 winning.

36...bxc3 37.♖c2

The rooks are completely dominated by the bishops. The connected a- and b-pawns are not dangerous at all; moreover, they restrict their own rooks. Here are some equally unpleasant alternatives for White:

37.♖a2 ♖xb3 38.♖aa1 c2

And the rooks are doomed to passivity while the threats along the weak diagonals are decisive.

After:

37.♖d3

Black is not forced to immediately recapture one of the exchanges. He can first provoke a further worsening of White's position by:

37...♔f5 38.g4

Or 38.♔g2 ♔xd3 39.♖xd3 ♖xb3 and the king is more exposed on g2.

38...♔xd3 39.♖xd3 ♖xb3

and in many lines the f4-pawn will be hanging.

37...♖xb3 38.♖ecl ♔b4!

Since the white rooks are not going anywhere, Black calmly strengthens his position.

39.g4

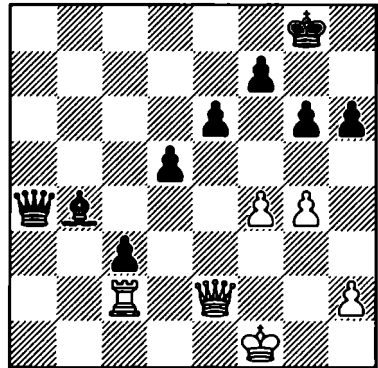
White probably wanted to gain some space for his king and prevent such threats as ♔f5-h3. At the same time, he hoped to open the enemy king's position with the typical Sicilian attack f4-f5, which, however, will fail painfully. The only thing achieved by White's last move is to expose his own king even more. As pointed out by Malfagia, more resistant might have been 39.♔f2!! which Black could have met with 39...h5!?, protecting the f5-bishop against the threat g4 and preparing ...d4. If now 40.h3 then 40...♔a5 (clearing the fourth

rank in order to render more effective an eventual ...♖xa4) 41.g4 h4! preventing the enemy king from finding breathing space on the third rank and keeping in reserve the possibility of capturing on a4 or c2 until the most suitable moment.

39...♔xc2 40.♖xc2

40.♖xc2? would be even worse because of 40...♖c4† 41.♔g2 ♖xf4.

40...♖xa4



At this point the game was adjourned. Black has a considerable material and positional advantage; the rest is a simple matter of technique.

41.f5 exf5! 42.gxf5 g5 43.h4

The c-pawn is strong enough to prevent the white pieces finding any form of activity, for instance: 43.♖a2 ♖c6 44.♖a6 ♖c8! 45.♖h6? c2

43...♔c5! 44.hxg5

Because of the exposed position of the king, White has to watch out for all kind of tricks such as 44.♖xc3? ♖a1† 45.♖e1 ♖xc1† 46.♔xe1 ♔b4 47.♔d2 d4 winning the rook.

44...♖f4† 45.♔e1

After 45.♔g2 Black could have forced a winning endgame by 45...♖xg5† 46.♔h2 ♔d6† 47.♔h1 ♖h4† 48.♔g1 ♖g3† 49.♔f1 (Against 49.♖g2 the most elegant continuation is 49...d4! when the apparently strong 50.♖xg3† ♔xg3 51.♖g2 is met by the calm 51...♔f8! and the central pawns are unstoppable.) 49...♖h3† 50.♖g2† ♖xg2†. Three pawns (or maybe four, as f5-pawn is also weak) are more than the rook can deal with.

45...♙g3† 46.♖d1 ♖g1† 47.♗e1 ♗xe1†
48.♗xe1 hxg5 49.♕e2 ♖d4!

Before connecting the pawns with d4, Petrosian transfers the bishop to a more active diagonal.

50.♖a2 ♗g7

50...♖f6 51.♖a5 d4 was another possible line.

51.♖d3

After 51.♖a5 Black has a pleasing indirect defence of the d5-pawn: 51...c2 52.♖d2 ♖c3†!

51...♖e5! 52.♖a5 ♖f6 53.♖xd5 ♖xf5

White has managed to "get rid" of the last weakness, but he is lost anyway.

54.♖e3 f6 55.♖c5 ♗g4 56.♖c4† ♗g3 57.♖e4 g4

After 58.♖f5 ♖f3 59.♖xg4 ♖e3 the c-pawn is unstopable.

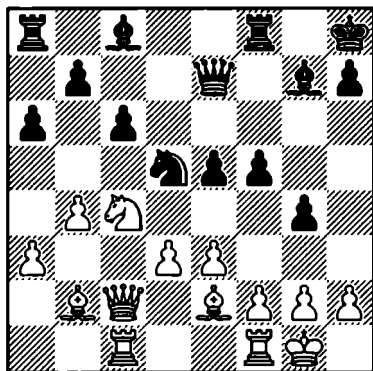
0-1

When preparing for a game, most players concentrate on looking at a selection of the opponent's recent games, in order to make a guess about the most probable opening. I suppose that during the morning preceding the following game Sosenko did not even suspect how useful it would have been to know the previous example, dating back more than a quarter of a century.

This time the thematic sacrifice on e5 came not after a moment of carelessness from the opponent, but as a consequence of his slightly hazardous play in the previous phase of the game.

Tigran Petrosian – Gennadi Sosenko

Tilburg 1981



We can see a typical Scheveningen position, but with reversed colours. Sosenko had previously advanced his kingside pawns in the hope of gaining attacking chances. In doing so, he neglected the development of his queenside and created several weaknesses in his position (on b6, d6 and, above all, e5).

With his next move, White starts the play against the e5-pawn.

21.♖fe1! ♖d7 22.♖f1

Threatening e3-e4.

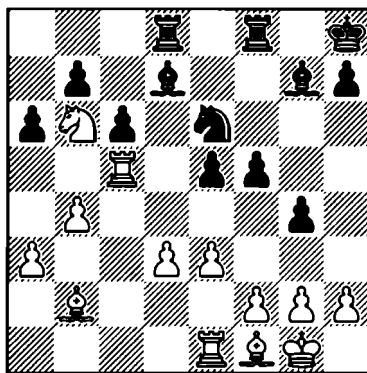
22...♖c7

Avoiding the break in the centre, but now the central pawn will suffer lateral attacks.

23.♖b6 ♖ad8 24.♗c5! ♗xc5 25.♖xc5 ♖e6

Practically forced, as after 25...♖fe8 there could have followed 26.♖c4 ♖e6 27.♖a5 and the black pawns are hopelessly weak.

25...e4 is not a solution either: 26.♖xg7† ♗xg7 27.♖xd7 ♖xd7 28.dxe4 fxe4 29.♖g5† Although by sacrificing (or losing) a pawn Black would somewhat activate his position.



26.♖xe5!

A familiar pattern. The sacrifice is not only very pleasing, but is also the best way to maintain the advantage: after the "neutral" 26.♖a5 Black can resist with:

26...c5!

Blocking the fifth rank and thus securing the e5-pawn.

27.bxc5

Or 27.♖xd7 ♔xd7 28.bxc5 ♔d5 29.♗c1 ♖c8
30.e4 fxe4 31.dxe4 ♔dxc5 32.♖axc5 ♗xc5
33.♗xc5 ♖xc5 34.♗e2 h5 35.f3 gxf3 36.♗xf3 h4
and the white bishop pair is not so impressive.

27...♗b5 28.♗c1 ♗xd3

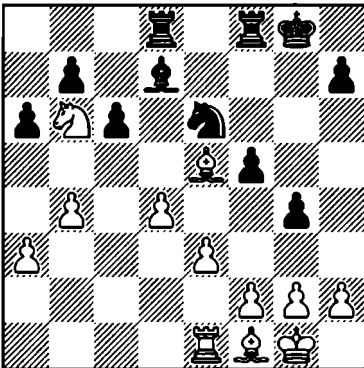
With mutual chances.

26...♗xc5

We already know how hard it is to refrain from “winning the exchange”. As pointed out by Malfagia, Black was not forced to capture on e5 immediately, because the b2-bishop is hanging. For instance, after 26...♔g8!? 27.♖xd7 ♔xd7 28.♖xe6 ♗xb2 29.a4, besides the fact that the presence of opposite coloured bishops increases the probability of a draw, the lack of space that the e6-rook has at its disposal allows an immediate draw by repetition with 29...♔f7 30.♖h6 ♔g7.

However, it seems to me that 27.♖c4, defending the bishop and threatening ♗a5, would more or less have transposed to the game since the seemingly active 27...b5?! 28.♖a5 ♗xc5 29.♗xe5 only weakens Black’s position while 29...c5? fails to 30.♗d6.

27.♗xc5† ♔g8 28.d4



Petrosian conducts his play in accordance with his previous experience. Once the bishop has occupied the e5-square, the d-pawn advances in order to secure its position and threaten ♗c4 (*déjà vu*, anyone?) followed by d5, when the black king would find itself under strong fire.

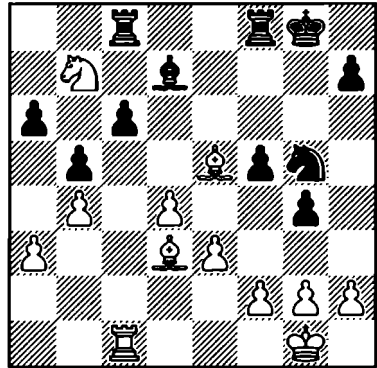
28...♗e8 29.♖c4

29.♗c4 would also have been possible: 29...♗f7!
30.♗f6 ♔de8! 31.♖d7 ♖xd4 32.♗d3 ♖b5 33.♖xf8
but, correctly estimating that his light pieces are not weaker than the black rooks, Petrosian prefers to strengthen the position.

29...b5 30.♖d6 ♗d7 31.♗c1

31.f3!? deserved serious attention in order to try to open a file on the kingside and thus create decisive threats against the black king.

31...♖g5 32.♖b7 ♖c8 33.♗d3



33...♖a8 34.♔f1 ♗e6 35.♗f4

35.♗xc6?! would have only opened a line for the black rooks: 35...♗d5 36.♗c7 (36.♖b6 ♖fb8) 36...♖f7

35...♖f7 36.♔e2

White threatens f2-f3, in order to open even more the position of the black king. In trying to stop the threat, Black will lose an important pawn. Sosonko might have been in serious time trouble by now.

Just as in a previous moment, 36.♗xc6 would have been bad because of 36...♗d5 37.♗c7 ♖fc8.

36...♗d5?

Preferable would have been 36...♔g7?! with the idea of ♔f6-e7.

37.♗xf5 ♖e5

This spectacular move does not help.

38.♗xc5 ♖xf5 39.♖d6 ♖ff8 40.e4 ♗c4† 41.♖xc4
bxc4 42.♗xc4 a5 43.♗d6!

Shattering Black’s last hope of activity, based on the eventual opening of the a-file.

43...♠f8 44.e5 axb4 45.♙xb4

Home analysis apparently convinced Sosonko that he had no chance to survive against White's mass of pawns. Therefore, he resigned.

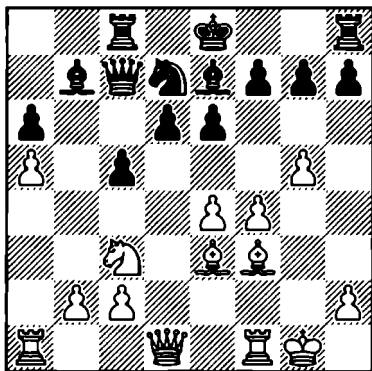
1-0

The following game is one of the first where Petrosian carried out a successful positional exchange sacrifice and proof that he had developed this habit in his younger years.

A significant difference compared to the previous examples is that his opponent seems to have anticipated the sacrifice on e4 and countered it purposefully. In order to justify the entire tactical operation, Petrosian had to open a new front on the kingside. When the conflict took a global character, White lost control of the position and went down rather quickly.

Dunaev – Tigran Petrosian

U-18 USSR Championship, Leningrad 1946



16...♠b8!

A few moves ago, the b-line opened as a consequence of an exchange of knights on c5. Although with loss of tempo, the rook occupies this line, aiming for the b4-square, in order to put pressure against the white central pawn. As we shall later see, it is important to delay castling.

17.♣d2 ♙c6 18.♘a4

White obviously did not want to wait passively while his opponent strengthens his pressure

against the e4-square with ...♠b4, ...♣b7, and so takes preventive measures.

18...♠b4 19.b3 ♙e4!

Petrosian confesses that he did not like 19...♙e4 much for two different reasons.

First of all, after 20.c3 ♙xf3 21.cxb4 ♙a8 22.bxc5 White gains the possibility of activating the rooks, by opening play on the queenside.

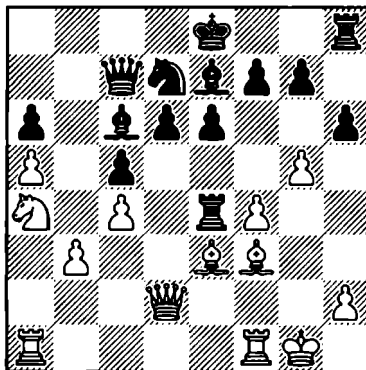
The other unpleasant reply would be 20.♙e4 ♙e4 21.c4 planning ♘c3. [Typesetter's note: This can be met by 21...h6! (or even 21...♙xg5!)] 21...22.♘c3 ♙xe3 23.♣xe3 hxg5 24.fxg5 ♘e5!.] Besides their practical value, Petrosian's comments are instructive from a psychological point of view: he does not even mention possible moves other than the captures on e4, thus suggesting that the necessity of the sacrifice is self-evident.

20.c4!

White was, of course, not willing to be submitted to the deadly pressure along the long diagonal after 20.♙e4 ♙xe4 followed by ...♙b7 and ...♣c6.

With his last move, he prepares to win the exchange in a reasonable form.

20...h6!



Without this move, the whole operation would have been incorrect. Black intends to activate the rook along the h-file, while undermining the white pawn formation.

21.g6?!

White decides to keep the h-file closed with the idea of achieving, at the cost of a pawn, pressure

along the g- and e-files. From a tactical point of view this decision is correct, but it is flawed strategically.

Dunaev obviously underestimated Black's answer. Petrosian recommends 21. ♖c3 when after 21... ♜xe3 22. ♜xe3 hxg5 23. fxg5 ♘e5 24. ♙xc6 ♜xc6 the position would be complicated.

As compensation for the exchange, Black has a pawn and the better structure. However, his more dangerous bishop has been exchanged, making White's position relatively safe.

Petrosian does not mention 21.h4. At his level such a move is probably not even worth considering, but let us try to see precisely what is wrong with it. In contrast to the game continuation, this move is the most ambitious from a strategic point of view, but can be refuted by tactical means:

21... hxg5 22. hxg5 ♙g5! 23. fxg5

23. ♖c3 is not much better: 23... ♜xe3 24. ♜xe3 ♙f6 with a fantastic position for Black.

Compared with the previous variation, the dark-squared bishop enjoys freedom of action and is a terrific piece.

23... ♜h4

Threatening to win the queen.

24. ♜g2

What else? If 24. ♜c3 then 24... ♘e5 with a powerful, probably decisive, attack.

24... ♙xf3 25. ♜xf3 ♜h1† 26. ♜xh1 ♜xh1† 27. ♙xh1 ♜b7 28. ♜af1 ♘e5 29. ♙g2 ♘xf3 30. ♜xf3 ♜xb3

White cannot save his knight:

31. ♖b6 ♜a2† 32. ♜f2 ♜xa5 33. ♖c8 ♜c7

With a winning position.

21... ♜5!

Black has consolidated in the centre and will soon start pushing his pawns. At the same time, the g6-pawn is doomed. The rest is just agony for White.

22. ♖c3 ♘f6 23. ♙xe4 ♜e4 24. ♜ad1 d5 25. ♙d5 ♙d5 26. ♜d4 27. ♙f4 ♜c8 28. ♘e2 ♜xf5 29. ♙g3 ♜xg6 30. ♘f4 ♜f7 31. ♜c2 g5 32. ♘e2 d3

0-1

Improving one's own pawn structure

Coming back to Philidor's famous statement, how many of us have on occasion looked with total disgust at our own pawn structure, divided into small pawn islands, sometimes doubled or even

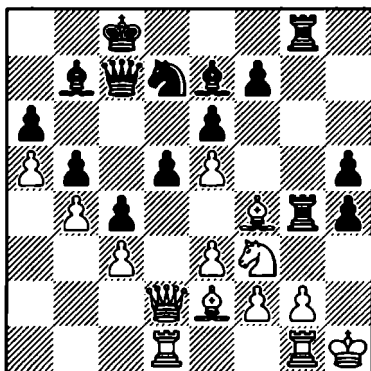
tripled? In such moments we certainly regret that pawns can move from one file to another only by capturing something, but we tend to forget that this is precisely why they offer excellent outposts for their own pieces.

A particular case of such a situation is the sacrifice of the exchange on such a square.

Let us follow a game played at the highest level. I have frequently referred to the notes published in *Chess Informant* No. 1, under the anonymous signature RR.

Boris Spassky – Tigran Petrosian

World Championship Match (7), Moscow 1966



Judging superficially, White has a good position because of his seemingly better pawn structure. He has the d4-square at his disposal while the black h-pawns could become weak.

In fact, the knight would be not threatening anything on d4, since it could not support any pawn attack on either wing. (things would of course be different if the queenside were not safely blocked). At the same time, the e5-pawn is rather weak, while Black's doubled pawns are fully compensated by the pressure along the g-file.

23... ♙f8!

Threatening 24... ♜f6 25. exf6 e5.

24. ♘h2?

We have seen quite a lot of this. Tigran's opponents attack an active rook with a minor piece. A rather inoffensive action!

Spassky should have consolidated his central pawn with:

24.♣d4

When 24...f6 would have been impossible because of 25.exf6 and the e5-square is under White's control. Black could have strengthened his pressure with:

24...♙g7

When it suddenly appears that White cannot easily chose a move. 25.♖h2 is probably better than in the game but still not entirely satisfactory. After 25...♗xe5 26.♖xg4 hxg4 the significant difference compared to the game is that the pin along the f4-c7 diagonal is more difficult to escape. However, Black's chances are to be preferred anyway, since White can hardly get active play. It should be mentioned that 27.♙xg4? is impossible because of 27...♖xg4 28.♙xc7 ♙xd4 29.♗xd4 ♖xf2† 30.♖h2 ♗xc7 with a decisive material advantage.

Another interesting possibility for Black would be 26...♖xg4 (instead of 26...hxg4) when after 27.♙xc7 ♖xf2† 28.♖h2 ♙xd4 29.♗xd4 ♗xc7 30.♗xh4 ♖e4 31.♙xh5 ♗g7 32.♗cl White manages to defend all his weaknesses, maintaining a playable position.

White could also consider making a waiting move. However, the natural:

25.♗d2

This has the serious drawback of weakening the first rank, thus allowing:

25...h3! 26.g3

26.gxh3 loses the important central pawn after 26...♗xg1†.

26...h4!

Not giving the opponent any time to breathe.

27.♖xh4 ♙xe5

A curious position with mutual pins along files and diagonals.

28.♙xg4 ♙xd4 29.♙xc7 ♙xc3!

An important intermediate move, placing the bishop on a square that is indirectly defended in view of the possibility of ...d4†.

30.♗c2

All the pins have been broken, but there are several hanging pieces now.

With the simple:

30...♗xc7

Black consolidates his advantage. He already has a material superiority while the white queenside pawns are weak.

Possibly the safest continuation for White is 25.♖h2 and if 25...♙h8 then 26.♖h1 inviting Black to come up with a constructive plan in order to open the position.

In fact, as pointed out by Malfagia, such a plan exists, although it is rather time consuming: 26...♗g6! with the idea of ♙g7, ♣d8-h8 (with ♖b8-a8 in order to prevent an eventual invasion of the enemy queen to a7) and, finally, at the right moment, ...f6.

24...♖xe5!

Against the timid retreat of the rook, White would have had a comfortable choice between 24...♗g7 25.♖f3 attacking the h4-pawn and inviting either the dark-squared bishop or the rook to return to their previous positions, and 25.♣d4, consolidating the central pawn, since 25...f6? would be impossible in view of 26.exf6! e5 27.fxg7! winning material.

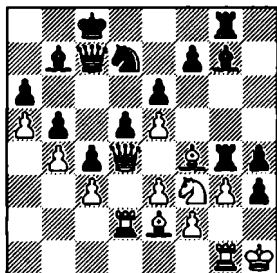
25.♖xg4 hxg4

As a consequence of the sacrifice, the black pawns gathered into a massive formation that will start to advance. In fact, as unexpected as it might have been for Spassky, this tactical operation can hardly be considered a sacrifice. Black won an important pawn and transformed his double pawns into a mobile formation.

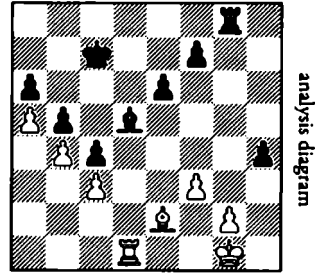
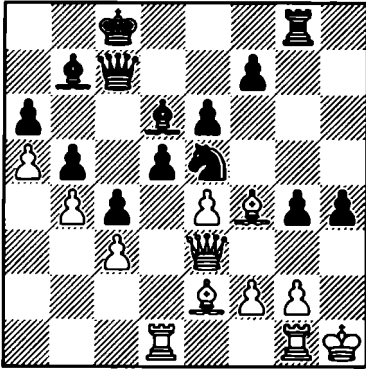
26.e4 ♙d6

26...dxe4?? is obviously impossible because of 27.♙e5 winning.

27.♣e3



analysis diagram



27...♖d7?!

Petrosian was the kind of player who would hardly rush in, even when this was favourable for him or simply necessary. We shall meet a similar symptom in his game against Rashkovsky.

By aiming to play methodically, Petrosian missed an excellent chance of increasing his advantage with 27...g3!.

After taking under control the f2-square and clearing the g4-square, Black creates the unpleasant threats ...♘d3 and ...♘g4, when ♗xd6 could be met by the intermediate ...♘f2.

Exchanging on e5 would be an important positional concession from White. All his queenside pawns would remain hopelessly weak.

Opening the h-file with 28.fxg3 hxg3 is also not recommendable. After 29.♖g1 f5! the threat ...♙h7† gives White no time to make any pawn exchange. Black will soon have an impressive central mass of pawns, after ...fxe4 or ...dxe4.

Possibly impressed by the way Black won the game, the anonymous *Chess Informant* annotator claims that

27...g3

would have achieved nothing because of:

28.f3

With an exclamation mark attached.

In fact, the move fails to parry any of the threats created by Black, who has an advantage after either 28...♘g4 29.fxg4 ♗xf4 or:

28...♘d3 29.♗xd6 ♘f2† 30.♙h7 31.♗xc7 fxg1 32.♗xg1 ♗xc7 33.exd5 ♗xd5

Black has emerged with an extra pawn out of the complications, but his h-pawn seems to be easy to eliminate. However, after:

34.♗d4 ♖h8 35.♗h2 ♘d6 36.♗h3 ♖h5!

The threat ♗e5-e3 maintains Black's advantage. After the relatively best:

37.♗g4 ♖e5 38.♗d2 ♖e3 39.♖c2 e5 40.♗xh4

White manages to re-establish material equality, but Black has not exhausted his resources yet.

40...e4?!

Also worth mentioning is the more solid 40...f5.

41.♗g3

41.f4 is worse because of 41...♗d3! when the rook is taboo because of ...cxd3 followed by...♗c4 and ...e3, while the threat 42...e3 is decisive.

41...exf3 42.♗xf3 ♗xf3 43.gxf3 ♗e5

In spite of the mass simplifications, White's situation is still difficult. After

44.♗g4 f6

he gets in zugzwang, having to retreat, one by one, his pieces with

45.♖c1 ♖e2 46.♗g3

when

46...f5

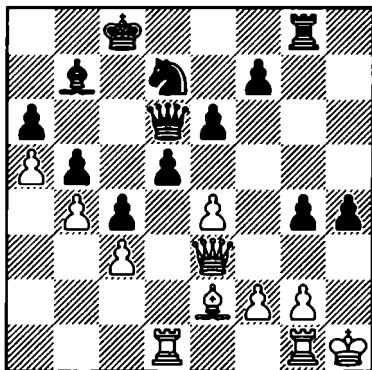
creates a new zugzwang position. For instance:

47.♖h1 f4† 48.♗g4 ♖g2† 49.♗h4 ♖c2 50.♗g4 ♖xc3 51.♖h5† ♘d4 52.♗xf4 ♖b3

and the black queenside pawns will decide.

Overdefending the f2-square with 28.♖g1 would solve the problem only partially. Black could play 28...♘g4 29.♗xd6 (after 29.♗xg4 ♗xf4

30. ♖e2 dxe4 Black is clearly better) 29... ♖xe3
 30. ♙xc7 ♖xd1 31. ♙xd1 ♙xc7 32. fxg3 ♖xg3
 33. ♖xf7 ♙b8 34. exd5 ♙xd5 when the c3-
 pawn is impossible to save. For instance, after
 35. ♙f3 Black would undermine this bishop with
 35... h3!
 28. ♙xd6 ♖xd6



29. ♖d4?

Too provocative. Why help the enemy pawns advance? Spassky must have overlooked (or underestimated) Petrosian's 30th move.

Chess Informant recommends 29. f4 as a possible improvement, giving the slightly cooperative variation 29... f5 30. e5 ♖c7.

More logical is 29... gxf3! weakening the white king's position and increasing the pressure along the h1-a8-diagonal. After 30. ♙xf3 ♖g3 31. exd5 h3 or 30. gxf3 ♖g3 Black has a strong attack.

A neutral move such as 29. ♖d2 should have been preferred, keeping Black's advantage within reasonable limits.

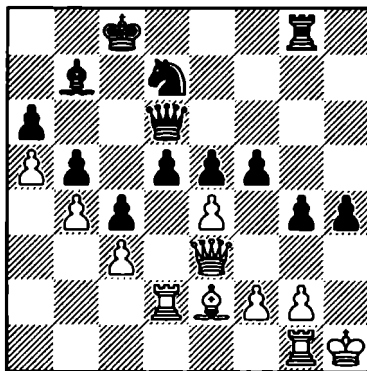
29... e5!

Gladly accepting the invitation.

30. ♖d2

If Petrosian had played against himself, the game might have continued 30. ♖xd5!? ♙xd5 31. ♖d1 ♖f6 32. exd5 and White would have had some chances to survive due to the control of the g1-a7 diagonal and the relatively exposed position of the black king.

30... f5!



Now, the black avalanche is unstoppable.

31. exd5

White does not have enough pawns in the centre to resist the offensive. Equally unpleasant would have been:

31. exf5 ♖f6!

31... h3!?, creating threats along the light diagonal, would also be interesting. Trying to question Black's superiority with:

32. f3?

Would only weaken the king's position, allowing the elegant variation:

32... ♖h5 33. fxg4 ♖g3† 34. ♙h2 d4!

With a strong initiative, as given by *Chess Informant*. White can do very little against the advancing pawns, since 35. cxd4? exd4 36. ♖xd4 would allow mate in two starting with 36... ♖f1†.

At the same time, it would be rather late now for 31. ♖xd5 because after 31... ♙xd5 32. ♖d1 ♖f6 33. exd5 the knight would not block the f-pawn any more, as was the case in a variation given above.

31... f4! 32. ♖e4

While the black bishop is on the board, an incursion like 32. ♖a7 is not dangerous: Black would simply answer 32... e4.

32... ♖f6 33. ♖f5† ♙b8 34. f3

34. ♖e6?! ♖e6 35. dxe6 is met by 35... ♖e4! with a decisive advantage. With his last move, Spassky took the e4-square under control, hoping to play ♖e6 next. Petrosian's intermediate move shatters his hopes.

34... ♙c8 35. ♖b1 g3 36. ♖e1 h3

The white king has not long to live.

37.♠f1

Or 37.gxh3 g2† 38.♔g1 ♚d7! with a decisive inclusion of the queen into the attack.

37...♖h8 38.gxh3 ♙h3 39.♔g1

If 39.♙h3 then 39...♚d7!

39...♙f1 40.♔c1

On 40.♖f1 Black could have played 40...♚d7 with the threats 41...♚h3 or 41...♚a7†.

40...c4! 41.♚d1

41.fx4 f3! would lead to a similar attacking position as in the game, but without the necessity of sacrificing a knight.

41.♖e4 would lose the queen after 41...♖h1†.

41...♙g4!

Quite elegant, but 41...♚d7 or 41...♚e5 would have been equally effective.

42.fxg4 f3 43.♖g2 fxg2†

After 44.♔xg2 ♚f4 there is no escape from mate. Therefore, Spassky resigned.

0–1

This was a crucial game of the first match between Petrosian and Spassky. The first six games had ended in draws and the World Champion managed to take the lead only with the help of his emblematic exchange sacrifice.

Breaking the opponent's initiative when the strategic superiority is on our side

It sometimes happens that the opponent makes important strategic concessions in his rush for the initiative. This is the case in such openings as the King's Indian and the Benoni. One of the key methods of maintaining the initiative could be to attack the as yet uncoordinated rooks with the minor pieces. Ignoring such a threat could yield us the tempo that we so badly need in order to stop the initiative.

The following game had a strong impact on the evolution of the theory of the Modern Benoni. I was rather intrigued to find out that Petrosian did not annotate it for *Strategia Nadezhnosti*. The game was only included in the final section of the book, without any comments. It was also published in *Chess Informant* No. 22 with some notes by Yudovich.

When I sank deeper into the position, I understood that Petrosian had reasons not to be very happy about the game as a whole.

Petrosian – Rashkovsky

44th Soviet Championship, Moscow 1976

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘c3 g6 7.e4 ♙g7 8.♙e2 0–0 9.0–0 ♖e8 10.♘d2 ♘bd7 11.a4 ♘e5 12.♖a3 b6

A few years later the plan based on 12...g5 became very popular. In 1976 fashion was still dictated by the Fischer–Spassky match, where the challenger had successfully employed the move ♘f6–h5.

13.♚c2 ♘h5 14.♙xh5 gxh5

Black spoiled his pawn structure, obtaining in exchange the bishop pair and some initiative.

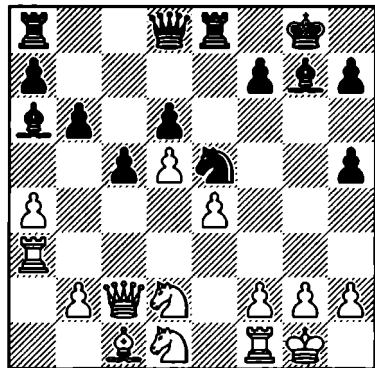
15.♘d1

This move is part of White's plan. The knight aims for the f5-square, clearing at the same time the third rank for the rook. The only drawback of the move is that, just for a moment, White's pieces are slightly uncoordinated, thus giving Black hope of counterplay.

15...♙a6

In a previous game Black had chosen another move order based on the same idea, namely 15...f5 16.exf5 ♙a6.

White took advantage of the early availability of the e4-square with 17.♘e4! ♙xf1 18.♔xf1 ♘f7 19.♖g3 with a very strong attack: Gligoric–Taimanov, Leningrad (Interzonal) 1973.



16.♖h3!

One of Black's ideas is: 16.♞e1? ♀5! 17.exf5 ♀c4!! 18.♞xe8† ♖xe8 19.♞g3 ♖e1† 20.♖f1 ♖a3 21.♞xg7† ♖h8! and White loses the queen.

Petrosian's idea is to occupy the light squares on the kingside, left without defence after the exchange of the bishop for the passive rook.

Nevertheless, this was not the only possible move order. He could have started with 16.♖e3! thus eliminating the possibility of 17...♀5 after 16...♞xf1 17.♖dxfl.

16...♞xf1 17.♖xf1

Black is at a crossroads. As so many times in the Benoni, it is not easy to maintain the balance between attack and defence. The pawn structure is highly asymmetrical and each player should attack on the side where he has an advantage, but the opponent's plans are likely to interfere, too.

17...b5!?

Rashkovsky aims to speed up his queenside play. A different approach was to take some prophylactic measures on the other wing.

Yudovich mentions 17...h4 as a possible improvement, without giving any further comments. This move would not have greatly changed the essence of the position. White would have had no problems invading the light squares, but the defended h-pawn might have slowed down the actions along the h-file.

Play might have continued:

18.♖de3 ♖g6 19.♖f5 ♞e5

Apparently Black has consolidated but his queen is tied down to the defence of the h-pawn, while the queenside attack has not even started yet. Therefore, White's kingside play would be almost unopposed. For instance:

20.♞f3

Threatening ♖h6†.

20...f6

Alternatively, 20...♞f6 allows White build up a strong attack with 21.♖h6† ♖g7 22.♖e3 when 22...♖xh6? is impossible because of 23.♖f5† ♖h5 24.♖dl mating soon. And now:

21.♞h3

Winning the h-pawn and maintaining all the pluses of the position. The ♒-square will soon be occupied by the other knight.

An interesting try would be 17...♀5. Black's idea is to deprive his opponent of the possibility of invading the light squares with his pieces, even if this will cost a pawn. In case of the natural 18.exf5 Black would play 18...h4 when White's play would be less simple than in the game. I would prefer:

18.♖g3! ♖e4 19.♖xh5 ♖g6 20.♖xg7!

After the exchange of this vital bishop, the black king will never find peace on that side of the board.

20...♖xg7 21.b3 ♖g8 22.♞b2 ♖g5 23.♖e3

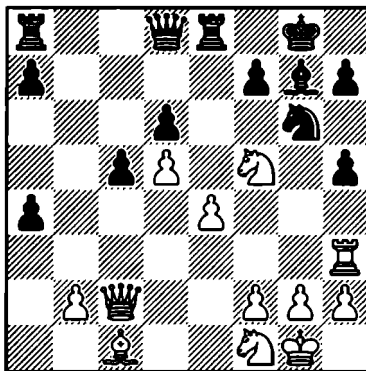
When White achieves a perfect regrouping and threatens to further increase his pressure on the kingside with ♞g3, ♖g4 and ♖c3.

18.♖de3

It would not have made sense for White to help the opponent to open lines on the queenside, for instance 18.axb5 ♖b6 19.♖c3 a6 20.bxa6 ♞xa6 and the weakness of the first rank would have made itself felt.

18...bxa4

Once again Black could have considered starting prophylactic play on the kingside with 18...♖g6 19.♖f5 ♞e5. Besides 20.♞xh5 when after 20...bxa4 we would simply transpose to the game, White could activate his queen with: 20.♖d2 ♞f4 The only way to prevent the threat of ♖h6. 21.♖c3 ♞e5 22.♖f3 with dangerous threats.

19.♖f5 ♖g6**20.♞xh5**

The position is rich in possibilities and there is little wonder that Petrosian chooses the continuation that best suits his positional style of play. He adopts a light-squared strategy, aiming to concentrate all his pieces on the kingside hoping that this will eventually lead to a tactical explosion.

Given the move order chosen by Black on his 18th move, White could have played:

20. ♖xg7 ♜xg7

When the black king's position would have been rather insecure. Petrosian might have been reluctant to give up his beautiful knight.

However, after:

21. ♖g3 h4 22. ♖h5†

The reserve knight would take the place of its colleague. The bishop could later be transferred to c3, h6 or even g5, taking advantage of the weakened dark squares. White's attack is very dangerous. After:

22... ♜g8

He can start concrete play immediately with:

23. ♖f3

It suddenly appears that the fork on f6 is not easy to parry. For instance 23... ♖e5 24. ♖f6† ♜h8 25. ♖g4 attacking both the rook and the f7-pawn when defending both with 25... ♖e7 loses the exchange back after 26. ♖g5. Against 23... ♜h8 the most accurate continuation is 24. ♖f5 with the strong threat ♖g5. Capturing the f7-pawn would only help Black win some time because of the exposed position of the rook. If 23... ♖f8 then 24. ♖f6† ♜h8 when 25. ♖d2 with the terrible threat of ♖h6 forces Black to give the exchange back with 25... ♖g8.

After:

23... ♖e7

White should play:

24. ♖c3

24. ♖g5 is less clear because of 24... ♖a5 when, because of the threat of mate, Black saves the rook.

24... ♖e5 25. ♖f6† ♜h8

25... ♜g7 is worse because of 26. ♖d2! ♖xf3†

27. gxf3 when Black cannot avoid the mate.

26. ♖h3 ♖g6 27. ♖g4†

With a decisive attack.

20... ♖e5 21. g3!?

Yudovich inserts here the sign corresponding to "minimal advantage for White", apparently considering Petrosian's 21st move as logical and strong. In fact, it could have caused him unexpected problems.

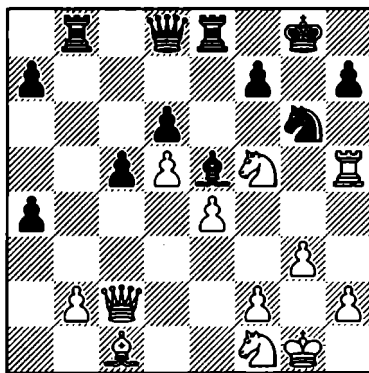
Just as one move earlier, Petrosian opts for a static strategy. He deprives the enemy minor pieces of the f4-square and plans to transfer his f1-knight to g4. This would indeed be the best plan if the queenside was closed, but the way it is, the speed of action is an important factor. Besides, 21. g3 seriously weakens the king's position, as we shall see from a further comment.

The most energetic and probably best continuation of the attack was 21. ♖d2 planning to transfer the queen to h6. Black would have two possible ways to obstruct the c1-h6 diagonal.

21... ♖f4 only loses time after the accurate 22. ♖c3 ♖e5 23. ♖h3 and the black king is in trouble.

21... ♖f4 requires slightly more inventiveness from White. After 22. ♖h6† ♜g7 the best way to continue the attack is 23. ♖d1! when 23... ♖xh5? leads to mate in a few moves after 24. ♖g4†.

21... ♖b8



22. ♖e3!?

The continuation of the same mistaken plan. The white king will soon be left without defenders.

It was still not too late for:

22. ♖d2

Besides creating the familiar threat of ♖h6, White also takes under control the e1–a5 diagonal which, as we shall soon find out, is of vital importance. In order to be ready to defend his h7-pawn, Black would have been practically forced to place a major piece on the seventh rank, in view of a further ...f6.

The move that better keeps the equilibrium between attack and defence seems to be

22...♟d7

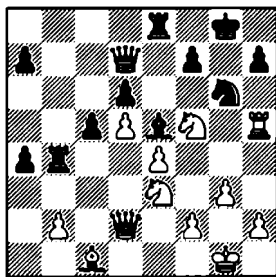
In this case, White should continue with 23.♟h6 f6 24.♞1e3 ♙xb2 25.♙xb2 ♜xb2 26.♞g4 ♖b1 † 27.♞g2 ♜f8 when Black would manage to defend and it would already be time to force a draw with 28.♜h3! a3 29.♟xg6†! hxg6 30.♞h6† ♔h8 31.♞f7†, as pointed out by Malfagia. And yet, for White this would have been better than what could have occurred in the game. In the first English edition I only analysed what I considered to be Petrosian's plan in an improved version, starting with:

23.♞1e3

Black would have a more difficult task building counterplay than in the game.

There are two basic ways of attacking the e4-pawn. After 23...♟b5 24.♞g4 ♟b4 25.♟h6 ♟e1 † 26.♞g2 ♟xe4† the white king finds a safe square with 27.♔h3 while his black colleague is in a desperate situation.

23...♟b4!



This is considerably better. Play may continue: 24.♞g4 ♜xe4 25.f3

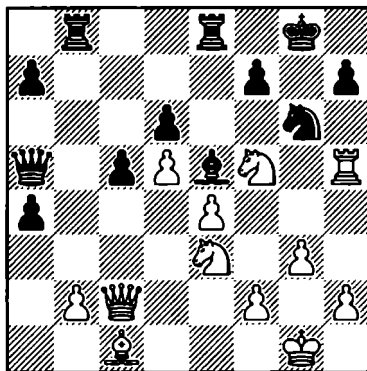
Now I only considered 25...♟b4 when 26.♟h6 f6 27.f4 offers White a strong attack. As pointed out by Malfagia, the best defence consists of:

25...♜c4! 26.♟h6 f6

Stopping White's attack, because now f4 would leave the c1-bishop undefended. It is far from clear how White could have continued his attack. 22...a3?

Rashkovsky fails to find the most rapid and efficient way to launch the counter attack. Better would have been 22...♟a5! as suggested by Yudovich with only the comment "complicated play", in some contradiction with his previous evaluation.

I believe that Black would have had the better chances in a double-edged position.



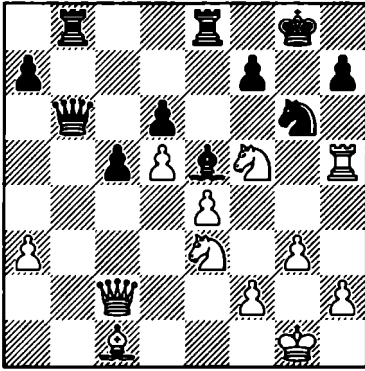
23.♙d2 ♟b5 24.♞c4 ♟b3 does not interfere with Black's plans at all.

After 23.♞c4 ♟e1† 24.♞g2 ♜ed8, winning the d6-pawn with 25.f4 ♙d4 26.♞cxd6 allows a decisive tactical operation starting with 26...♞xf4†! 27.gxf4 The c1-bishop has to guard the b2-pawn. 27...♟g1 † 28.♔h3 ♖b3† 29.♞g3 ♜xd6 when Black has a material advantage and an attack.

23.♞g4 leaves the queenside undefended, without creating any concrete threats. Black would create strong threats with 23...♟e1 † 24.♞g2 ♖b3 For instance 25.f4 ♙g7 26.♞xd6 ♖eb8 27.e5 a3! (undermining the c3-square) 28.bxa3 ♜c3 winning material.

In all these lines we can see the drawbacks of the whole plan involving g3 and the transfer of the f1-knight far from its own king.

23. bxa3 ♖b6



24. ♖d2!

This accurate move shows that the b-file is not of much use to Black.

24... ♖b3

Rashkovsky takes the c4-square under control. The black queen wouldn't have arrived in time after 24... ♖b1 either. White would play 25. ♖c4 ♖xc4 26. ♖cxd6 when 26... ♖xd6 is impossible because of 27. ♖h6! with unstoppable threats. Black could not hope for perpetual because after 27... ♖e1† 28. ♖g2 ♖e4† the king reaches a safe square with 29. ♖h3.

25. ♖g4 ♖b7 26. ♖g2

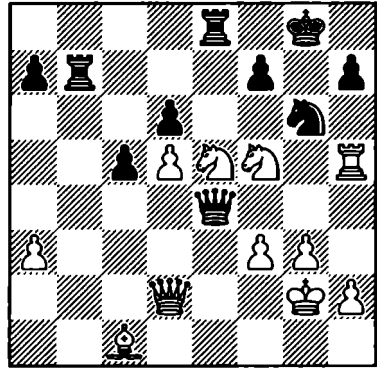
Yudovich attaches an exclamation mark to this move. However, since it is not entirely clear yet which is the safest square for the king, Petrosian could have immediately started the attack with 26. ♖h6 when after 26... ♖f6 he would have obtained an advantage with 27. ♖xd6! forking the rooks. If 27... ♖xd6? then 28. ♖xf6† ♖f7 29. ♖xh7† with a mating attack.

26... ♖c4

26... ♖f6 fails to consolidate Black's position because of 27. ♖xd6! This is a typical case when the domination on light squares is crowned tactically on dark squares. A similar situation, however reverted, occurred in the game Rubinstein–Bogoljubov, see page 35. 27... ♖xd6 28. ♖xf6† ♖f8 29. ♖h6† ♖e7 30. ♖xh7† ♖d8 31. ♖xg6 with a huge mass of passed pawns and a decisive attack.

27. ♖xc5 ♖xc4† 28. ♖3!

Simplest, although 28. ♖f3 ♖b3 29. ♖e3 would not have been too bad either.



28... ♖xc5 29. ♖h6† ♖f8 30. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 31. ♖g4 ♖cc7

1–0

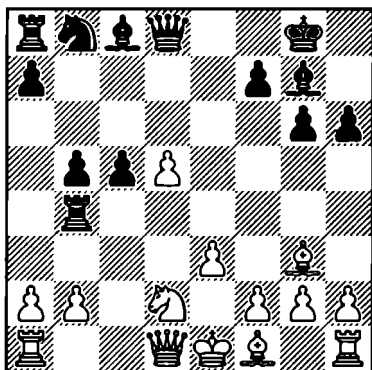
The next game has some points in common with the previous one. The opening played was the same, and Petrosian allowed one of his rooks to be captured by an enemy bishop. True, this time Black had to give up the pride of every Benoni fan, the dark-squared bishop, which is an explanation of why things went so much smoother for White than in the previous game.

In addition, I found the game in the same section of games without comments. Why did Petrosian not include it in the main section of the book or at least in his *Shakhmatniie Lektsii*? The game certainly was more correctly played than the previous one and could not have caused any kind of creative dissatisfaction to the winner. Unless it is pure chance (we should take into account the sad fact that Petrosian died while preparing the material for the book and the rest of the work was done by the publishing house) we could assume that the ninth World Champion treasured the games where the static factors were predominant. Against Nunn it was all about a lead in development and a simple attack against the king, not something typical for Petrosian's style of play.

However, the game is quite instructive from the point of view of our theme.

Tigran Petrosian – John Nunn

Hastings 1977–78



Black, one of the most dangerous attacking players ever born, sacrificed a pawn in order to activate his bishop to the maximum. Taking a closer look at the position, we can see that his action was not well founded from both a strategic and tactical point of view: his queenside is underdeveloped and the b4-rook is rather exposed. We could say that, if it were not for the strong bishop, Black's position would be simply hopeless. What will White play? This quiz needs a clue: the player handling the white pieces is Petrosian. Therefore...

16.b3! ♖xa1

Rejecting the exchange would mean admitting the complete failure of the whole opening strategy.

The immediate 16...♗xd5 could have been answered in a similar way as in the game, with 17.a3 ♜g4 18.♙e2 threatening ♙f3, although the simple 17.♖c1 planning ♙e2 would also be quite effective.

In this latter case Black could not prevent the development of the white bishop with 17...♗b7? because, after leaving the g4-square undefended, he would lose an exchange in an unfavourable form to 18.a3.

17.♗xa1

The queen has occupied a strong position on the weakened dark diagonal. If played at a later stage of the game, ♖e4 would create deadly threats.

17...♗xd5 18.a3 ♜g4

Worth mentioning is:

18...♖xb3

Returning the exchange with the aim of creating a mobile queenside majority but it would not have helped either. In *Chess Informant* No. 25, Cvetkovic considers 19.♙e2 ♖d3 20.♙f3 to be the best, claiming a clear advantage for White. He must have overlooked that after 20...♗d8 21.♙xa8 ♖xd2 White has no time to capture the knight with 22.♙xb8 because of 22...♗d3 23.♙f3 ♖c2 with a winning attack for Black. At the same time, after a neutral move such as 21.♖c1, defending the knight, Black would retain his extra pawn and a good position with 21...♖d5. Instead, White would have retained a dangerous initiative with the simple:

19.♖xb3 ♗xb3 20.♙e2

Mentioned by Cvetkovic as a slightly less accurate continuation.

20...♙b7 21.0–0

When the weakness of the kingside dark squares would leave Black no time to advance his pawns. Malfagia supported this point of view with the following analysis:

21...♖d7

Trying to control the dark squares surrounding the king.

22.♖d1 ♙c6 23.♙g4

More precise than 23.♖d6 ♖c8 24.♙g4 ♖c7 and now 25.♖xc6! ♖xc6 26.♙xd7 ♖a6 offers Black some counter-chances.

23...♖d8

Or 23...f5 24.♙f3! winning immediately.

24.♙c7

Winning material.

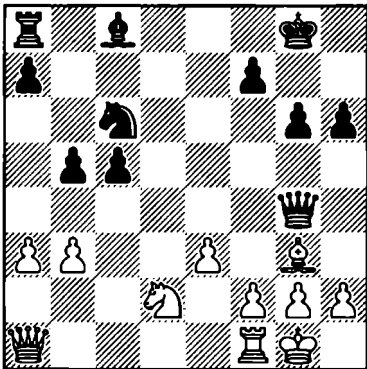
19.♙e2 ♖c6

Black has to return the exchange because on 19...♜g5 would have followed 20.♙f3 winning material.

20.♙f3!

Driving the black queen to a bad square.

20...♗c6 21.♙xg4 ♗xg4 22.0–0



White's advantage consists of the safer king position and the better-coordinated pieces. The disappearance of the dark-squared bishop has left chronic weaknesses behind. Petrosian will need only a few moves to take advantage of that.

22...♖b7 23.f3 ♖e6 24.♙e4 ♔d8 25.♙xc5

Although the knight's main target is the f6-square, it is useful to give the weakness of the c5-square a permanent character. At the same time, after Black's forced answer, White will win several tempi for his attack.

25...♗xe3† 26.♙f2 ♖e7 27.♗e1 ♖c7 28.h4

Provoking such additional weaknesses as ...h5 can prove useful at a later stage of the game.

28...h5 29.♙e4

Everything was prepared now for the return to the main plan.

29...♙e7 30.♙f6† ♗f8 31.b4

White has several ways to win. A rather spectacular one would have been 31.♙e3 ♙f5 32.♙e8!! threatening a deadly check on h8. After the practically forced 32...♗xe8 Black would lose his queen to 33.♙b6†.

31...♙c8 32.♙xh5

All roads lead to Rome. Once again, 32.♙e3 was a worthy alternative.

32...g×h5 33.♖h8† ♙g8 34.♙c5† ♔d6 35.♖e5 1-0

Others

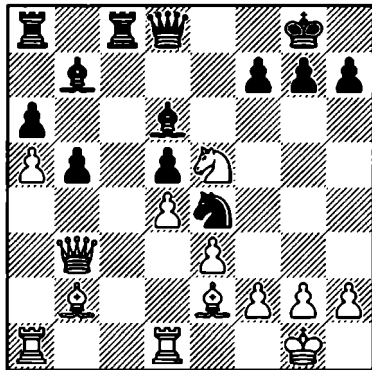
Not every exchange sacrifice can be strictly classified. Sometimes expressing in words the

essence of such an operation would be too long for a title. This is why the finer points of the sacrifices from this chapter are explained in the commentaries, rather than in the title.

The examples presented so far could lead the reader to the mistaken conclusion that the exchange sacrifice is mainly a spontaneous operation. For a player with deep strategic insight like Petrosian, this was hardly true. The next game is the best possible illustration about the way he used to anticipate and prepare his favourite tactical operation.

Boris Spassky – Tigran Petrosian

World Championship Match (11), Moscow 1969



White played the opening rather passively and Black's position is already better. He has a strong passed pawn, while the white majority cannot be advanced easily. Anticipating events, we should mention that Black also has an excellent outpost on c4, even if for the moment it seems to be rather well defended. On the other hand, the white knight can be easily driven away from e5 with f7-f6.

23...♖h4!

The point of this move might seem a bit obscure: White can easily parry Black's kingside threats, while winning some space with gain of time. If Spassky had understood what was awaiting him, he would have avoided weakening the light squares at all costs. He probably considered that the d5-pawn was his best guarantee against any

long diagonal activity of the b7-bishop, but the future will prove how wrong he was.

I have noticed that Spassky was a frequent victim of Petrosian's exchange sacrifices. This is a remarkable detail because we can be sure that, when preparing for the matches, his opponent's beloved method did not pass unnoticed.

Why did it happen then?

The explanation must be that it is very difficult to permanently take into account such operations, given our natural respect for material.

24.g3 ♖e7 25.f3?! ♔g5 26.h4 ♖e6 27.f4

As if hypnotized by the enemy knight, Spassky advances the whole flank. Can this really be dangerous for him? After all, neither the e6-knight nor the b7-bishop seem to be able to make use of the weaknesses created.

One important conclusion of this game is that one should avoid such weakening moves just *in principle*, without anticipating any concrete refutation.

27...f6

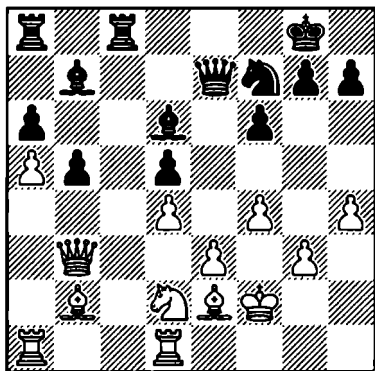
The time has come to drive this knight away. Compared to White's recent series of pawn moves, 27...f6 is a minor positional concession.

28.♖f3 ♔d8!

Petrosian transfers the knight to f7, in order to be prepared to take advantage of the weakness of the e4- and g4-squares.

29.♖f2 ♖f7 30.♔d2

I wonder whether at least in this moment Boris understood the trouble that was brewing.



30...♙c4!!

Suddenly, all the black pieces cooperate perfectly. The exchange sacrifice is the brilliant crowning of all the previous subtle play.

31.♖d3

The acceptance of the sacrifice would, of course, have been too risky. For instance 31.♔xc4? dxc4 32.♖c2 ♙c8 and White cannot stop the black pawns, while the knight might go to g4 in order to create some extra threats.

Or, alternatively, 31.♙xc4? dxc4 and, compared with the previous line, White also has problems on the long diagonal. Therefore, Black's authoritative control of the only open line cannot be challenged in any way.

31...♙e8 32.♙f3 ♙b4

As Boleslavsky pointed out, the dark-squared bishop has fulfilled its duty of provoking weaknesses on the light squares and can be exchanged now in order to facilitate their exploitation. It also frees the d6-square for the knight.

33.♙a3

Relatively best, in order to preserve the knight, one of the few pieces that can defend the light squares in an effective way.

33...♙xa3 34.♙xa3 ♔d6 35.♙e1 f5

"This far from obvious move demonstrates Petrosian's deep understanding of the secrets of the position. The weakening of the e5-square is of no significance, because the white knight cannot get there. After the installation of the knight on e4 and its inevitable exchange, Black has in mind to capture with the f-pawn, thus opening a path for his queen to the enemy position." (Boleslavsky).

36.♙a1

Maybe 36.♙a2!? deserved some attention, with the idea that after 36...♔e4† 37.♙xe4 fxe4 White could play 38.♖e2 placing the queen on a more active square (Malfagia).

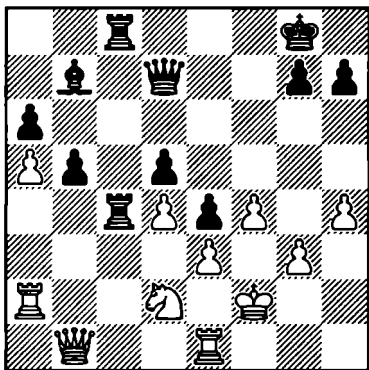
36...♔e4†

Bondarevsky seems to dislike this move and suggests 36...♙c8! as a simpler solution.

Boleslavsky has a different opinion. The way he sees it, after 37.♔b3 White would already threaten to occupy the c5-square, thus forcing 37...♔e4†. After 38.♙xe4 fxe4 White can already move his

queen to a better square than b1, namely 39.♖d1. It sounds reasonable to me.

37.♙xc4 ♜c4 38.♖b1 ♖d7 39.♙a2 ♜ec8



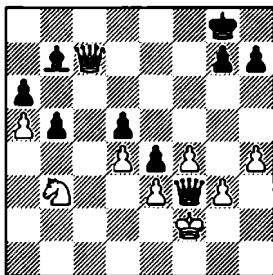
40.♝xc4

An important moment. Spassky finally takes the bull by the horns. His decision is partially motivated by the fact that a second black pawn has occupied a square along the light diagonal, thus restricting the bishop even in the case of ...dxc4.

Obviously disappointed by his pupil's position, Bondarevsky makes a very short comment on this move, mentioning that Spassky had nothing else left anyway.

Boleslavsky is far more explicit, although he also fails to exhaust the subject. He demonstrates with variations that 40.♝b3 is also insufficient because of 40...♖h3! when he takes into account two moves.

a) 41.♙h1 ♜c2† 42.♙xc2 ♜xc2† 43.♖xc2 ♖xh1 44.♖c7 ♖f3†



analysis diagram

“Black will manage to capture with check both e3- and g3-pawns and then return with the queen to c8.”

Let us check this statement.

45.♗e1 ♜xc3† 46.♗f1

The king could not go to d1 because this would have meant losing the knight with check.

46...♖f3† 47.♗e1 ♖xg3† 48.♗d2 ♖d3† 49.♗e1 ♖e3† 50.♗f1 ♖h3† followed by 51...♖c8.

We can conclude that Petrosian's second was right.

b) 41.♙g1 ♜c3 42.♝c5 ♜8xc5 43.dxc5 d4 “with decisive threats.” Black certainly has a nice position, but White can still resist with 44.♜e2. In fact, the exchange sacrifice on c5 is, for once, not necessary.

Black could play 42...♙f8 planning to continue with 43...♙c8, since 43.♝xb7? leads to a decisive attack after 43...♙xf4†!. Neither of the possible captures are likely to save White. 44.gxf4 ♖f3† 45.♗e1 ♜xc3† 46.♗d2 ♖f2† 47.♗c1 ♖xg1† 48.♗b2 ♜e2† 49.♗a1 ♜e1 winning the queen, or 44.exf4 ♖h2† 45.♙g2 ♖f3† 46.♗e1 ♖h1† with a similar result.

However, we can notice that, with the knight still on d2, ...♖h3 is not a threat, since the queen can be driven away with ♖h1. Therefore, White can try to sit and wait, for instance:

40.♙b2

Once he has secured total domination along the c-file, Black can move away the attacked rook with:

40...♜c3

This will achieve some freedom of action by not having to continually foresee what would happen in case of ♝xc4. Play might continue

41.♖d1 ♜8c6

Clearing the c8-square for the bishop.

42.♖b1 ♙c8 43.♖d1 ♖d8 44.♖a1 ♙g4

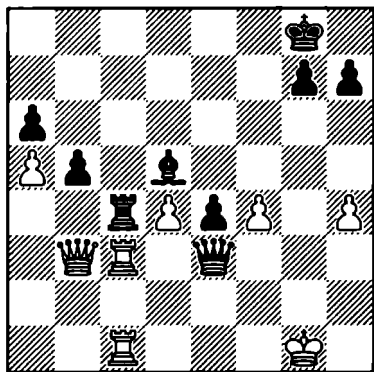
It is hard to believe that White will resist for long. Or if 44.♙a2, aiming to keep the g4-square defended, then 44...♙e6 followed by 45...♖c8 and the bishop gets to g4 anyway.

This line is a good illustration of what Bondarevsky must have had in mind when he wrote his brief comment.

40...dxc4 41.d5

Hoping to open some lines for his rooks, but losing a central pawn.

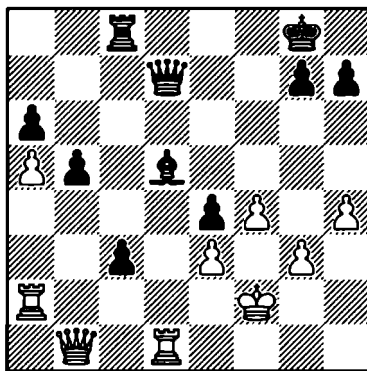
Bondarevsky recommends 41. ♖b4! as relatively best. He also mentions that after the solid 41... ♗d5 White would be reduced to complete passivity, facing such threats as ...c3 or ...♞g4. Boleslavsky tries to offer a more concrete refutation of 41. ♖b4 by giving the following long variation: 41...c3 42. ♗c2 ♗c4 43. ♞b3 ♞g4 44. ♗xc3 ♞f3† 45. ♗g1 ♞xg3† 46. ♗f1 ♞f3† 47. ♗g1 ♗d5 48. ♗e1 ♞xc3†! "With a rapid win." This is quite nice, indeed, but some more details are necessary; they were provided by Malfagia.



advancing the e-pawn or creating a direct mating attack.

41... ♗d5 42. ♗d1 c3

The game was adjourned and this move was sealed. The immediate threat is 42... ♗xa2 43. ♞xa2† ♞f7.



43. ♗c2 ♞h3

Dominated on both wings, White is helpless.

44. ♗g1 ♞g4 45. ♗g2 ♞f3† 46. ♗h2 ♞xe3 47. ♗5

This timid attempt to attack fails to prevent Black's plan of advancing his queenside pawns. Boleslavsky mentions that, together with Petrosian, he considered:

47. ♞d1 ♞d3 48. ♞g4

to be the main line. Besides the neutral 48... ♗f8

Black can embark on a long forced variation with:

48... ♞xc2† 49. ♗g2 ♞xg2†! 50. ♗xg2 e3† 51. ♗h2 ♗e8

When Black's pawns are impossible to stop. White has two ways of attacking both black pieces, but they fail in a similar painful way: 52. ♞d7 ♗f7, or 52. ♞h5 ♗f7. White's only chance is connected with the possibility of creating threats against the enemy king with:

52. h5 h6 53. f5

But Black is just in time to drive the queen away with:

53... ♗e4 54. ♞d1

Or 54. ♞g6 ♗f7 55. ♞xa6 e2 56. ♞a8† ♗e8 queening.

First of all, the technical problems in the endgame arising after 49. ♗xe3 ♗xc1† 50. ♗f2 ♗xb3 51. ♗xb3 can be easily solved by Black with 51... ♗d1! 52. ♗e3 (or 52. ♗b4 ♗d3 with an easily winning position) and now Black has the elegant 52... ♗d3†!

Secondly, after 44. ♗g2 (instead of 44. ♗xc3), with the threat of capturing on c3 under more favourable circumstances, Black can bring his last reserves into the attack with 44... ♗c8!, when the c3-pawn is taboo: 45. ♗xc3 ♞f3† 46. ♗g1 ♞xg3† 47. ♗f1 ♗h3† 48. ♗e2 ♗g4† 49. ♗d2 (49. ♗f1 would lead to mate after 49... ♞h3†! 50. ♗g1 ♗f3) 49... ♞f2† and Black wins a rook.

There might be better alternatives to the capture on c3, but it is hard to see how it would be possible to avoid the loss of at least one of the e3- or c3-pawns, after which Black wins by either

54...♙f7 55.♙d3 ♜e8 56.♙xc3 e2 57.♙e1

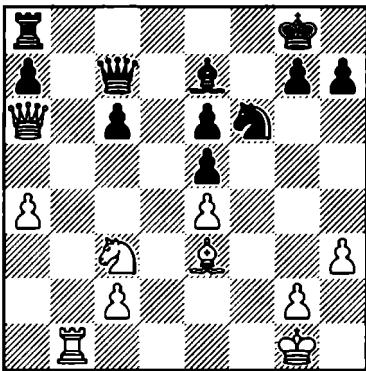
And now the b-pawn starts to advance with 57...b4 when White is helpless.

47...♙c5 48.♞f1 b4 49.♞b3 50.♞c2 c2
51.♙c1 e3 52.f7† ♜f8 53.♞f5 b2 54.♙xb2 c1♙
55.♙xg7† ♜xg7 56.♞g5†
0–1

We have seen more than once to what a degree Petrosian's opponents were caught unaware by his intentions. In most cases the disaster could have been avoided if they had given more attention to this facet of Petrosian's style. The next game features a more complex situation. The trap was so well masked that even the most cautious opponent could have fallen into it.

Although he played chess more as an amateur (he is also a renowned linguist), Robert Hübner repeatedly became a world title candidate. His first attempt was made in 1971, when he had to cross swords with Petrosian. The first six games ended in draws, but in the seventh fate seemed to smile on the German doctor.

Robert Hübner – Tigran Petrosian Candidates Match (7), Seville 1971



Despite his extra pawn, Black has serious problems. He has several weaknesses and the b-file is totally controlled by White. The main threat is ♙b7. If Black loses the a7-pawn his position

would become critical. The white outside passed pawn would be simply too dangerous.

20...h6!

A rather mysterious move. Black answers the strong queenside threats by timidly advancing a pawn on the other wing. The idea behind this move will become clear in the near future.

21.a5?

Not feeling the danger, Hübner aims to carry out his plan in an optimal form. However, even if he was not aware of Petrosian's habit of sacrificing the exchange, the previous move should have put him on his guard.

Better would have been 21.♙b7! ♙xb7 22.♞xb7 ♙d8! 23.♞xa7 ♞xa7 24.♙xa7 ♙a5 25.♙d1! ♜xe4 26.♙e3. After the match Petrosian confessed that he would not have liked to defend this position. The a-pawn is obviously stronger than the black double pawns in the centre.

And yet, the immediate threat ♜c4 can be easily parried with 26...♙d2, suggested by Malfagia. This move also contributes to setting up a barrier in front of the white king after 27.♜f2 e4 28.♙f1 ♜c4!. Black's position might be perfectly defensible.

21...♜h7!!

The continuation of the idea initiated on the previous move. By removing the king from the back rank, Petrosian prepares a refined trap.

22.♙b7!?

Consequent but bad. 22.♞b7 would not have been good either because after 22...♙c8 White would have found himself in an unpleasant pin. Hübner should probably have adopted a neutral strategy when he would most likely have been out of danger, despite his slight material deficit.

22...♙xa5!

Hübner might have relied on 22...♙xb7? when after 23.♞xb7 ♙d8 24.a6 his position would have been quite promising. For instance 24...♙a5 25.♙a4 ♜xe4 26.♞xa7, or 24...♙b6 25.♙xb6 axb6 26.a7. In both cases, the a-pawn would have been very dangerous. Petrosian's move must have come as a cold shower.

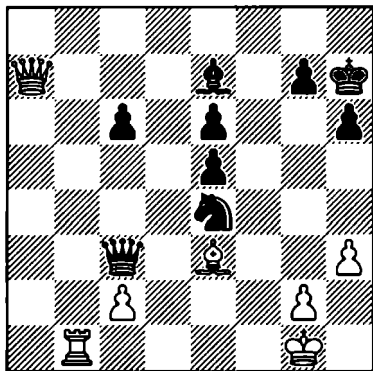
23.♙xa8 ♙xc3 24.♙xa7 ♜xe4

How radically the character of the position has changed in just a few moves!

Black has managed to eliminate not only the dangerous passed pawn, but also the important e4-pawn, which restricted the black knight. It can be felt that Black has the better coordination. His pieces control the centre of the board, while the white pieces are rather hanging. The queen is tied down to the defence of the g1-a7 diagonal because of the deadly check on c5.

The white king is also more exposed than his colleague. For instance, if White tried to regroup with 25.♖b3 Black would create decisive threats with 25...♗e1† 26.♔h2 ♙h4.

Hübner apparently understood the situation quite well, since around this moment he offered a draw. Although it is too soon to speak about a concrete advantage for Black, Petrosian decided to decline the offer. By now his play is obviously easier than White's.



25.♖f1

A difficult decision. In principle, White would be interested in simplifying, but after 25.♗xe7 ♗xe3† his position looks quite dangerous. Don't we all know that a knight and queen together form an awesome tandem?

It is possible that Hübner rejected this possibility purely by intuition. And indeed, after 26.♔h2?! ♗g3† 27.♔h1? ♔f2† Black would win two decisive tempi for the attack. White would already be lost: 28.♔g1 ♔hx3† 29.♔h1 ♔f4 30.♖g1 ♗g4! (threatening mate in two) 31.♔h2 and now

the sadistic 31...e4 underlines White's complete paralysis. There is no way to stop this pawn and parry the mate at the same time. True, 31...♗h5† 32.♔g3 ♔e2† would also be sufficient for a win.

This line is, however, too cooperative. In the case of 27.♔g1 it would not be easy for Black to prove anything concrete.

Malfagia suggested the following forced variation: 27...♗f2† 28.♔h1 (but not 28.♔h2? because of 28...♔d2!) 28...♔g3† 29.♔h2 ♔f1† 30.♔h1 ♔e3 31.♖g1 ♗xc2? 32.♗xe6 ♗e4 when, although Black is certainly on top, White is still breathing.

Even stronger is 26.♔h1! when after 26...♔f2† 27.♔h2 ♗f4† 28.♔g1 the threat ♗xe6, defending the important h3-pawn, would practically force Black to take a draw by perpetual with 28...♔hx3† 29.gxh3 ♗g3† 30.♔f1 ♗f3†.

Looking for ways for Black to play for more than just an immediate draw, Malfagia discovered that one interesting, though risky, possibility would be 26...♔c5! protecting the b7-square against the invasion of the white rook and preparing the defence of the g7-square with the queen, by advancing three-pawn. However, after 27.♖a1 ♗c3 28.♖a8! (taking into account Black's defensive plan, 28.♖a7 would only lose time in view of 28...e4) White could start a dangerous attack along the eighth rank. For instance, 28...e4 29.♗e8 (or 29.♖f8!?, with the threat of ♗e8, when Black has to look for a perpetual already) 29...e3 30.♗h8† ♔g6 31.♗e8† ♔f7 32.♗f7† ♔e4 and Black's king might well escape the mating danger, but not the perpetual check.

25...♙h4?!

The idea of this move must have been to take the f2-square under control and restrict the enemy bishop, thus creating the threat ...c5.

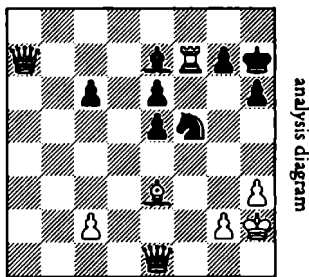
In principle, Black needs a plan of regrouping, in order to put his e5-pawn into motion and continue harassing the enemy king.

Later, Petrosian discovered that this could have been accomplished right away with:

25...♔g3! 26.♖f7

White is practically forced to create some threats, too. If 26.♖a1 then 26...♔f5 27.♙f2 e4 with a strong initiative.

26...♖e1† 27.♘h2 ♘f5!



A perfect move for this situation. The knight clears the g3-square, it defends both the bishop and the g7-pawn and traps the rook, putting it in immediate danger.

28.♙f2

28.♙g1 is worse because of 28...♖b4! defending the bishop and threatening ...♗g6 and ...♖f4 at the same time.

28...♖d2

With a clear advantage. For instance 29.g4 ♗g6! winning back the exchange and keeping two extra pawns, or:

29.♙g3 ♖d6!

And the white pieces are captive in different parts of the board, without any communication between them. The only way to save the rook is:

30.♖a1

When after

30...♗xg3 31.♗xg3 ♗g6!

Driving the enemy rook away and thus securing the g7-square before playing ...c4†.

32.♖f1 e4†

With a decisive attack, for instance:

33.♗f2 ♖c5† 34.♗e1 ♖xc2 35.♖f4 ♗b4† 36.♗f1 ♗c3

And the queen cannot save itself with, say, 37.♖a6 because of mate in two starting with 37...♖d1†.

26.♖f7 ♗f6

This retreat looks quite unpleasant for White, whose rook has been cut off from its king. However, as proved by some of the lines presented below, the rook is quite active here.

Besides, the knight is immobile because of the hanging bishop, thus making the advance of the e-pawn impossible. The position has become balanced again.

27.♘h2 ♖xc2

Taking advantage of the fact that White's activity is temporarily halted by the modest f6-bishop, Petrosian allows himself the luxury of grabbing another pawn. The black pawns will cause White a lot of worries, especially since the next part of the game was played in mutual time trouble.

28.♖d7 ♖b3 29.♙f2

More active would have been 29.♖f8.

After 29...♖xc3 30.♖e8 g5 31.♖f7† ♙g7 32.♖g8† ♗g6 33.♖f7† White gives perpetual check.

Black could try 29...♗h4 but, as indicated by Tal, White is under no immediate threats after 30.♖f7 ♙g3† 31.♗h1 ♗f6 32.♖a7! ♖b1† 33.♙g1.

29...♖d5

Here we feel the potential power of the doubled pawns; d5 is a perfect square for the queen as White would never play ♖xd5.

30.♖a7

30.♖e8? loses material to 30...♗d6.

30...♖d2 31.♖e3 ♖c2

Igor Zaitsev suggested 31...♖d4 32.♙g1 c5 as an improvement, but after 33.♖e2 ♖d5 34.♖c2 Black would suddenly have some problems because of the pinned knight. White would play ♖c7 next, in order to eliminate one dangerous candidate for promotion.

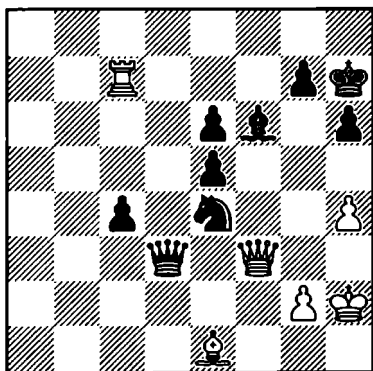
32.♙e1 c5 33.b4?!

Hübner probably wanted to deprive the black pieces of the important g5-square. Nevertheless, this last move considerably weakens the position of the king, in particular the pawn itself and the g4-square.

33...c4

It is obvious that Black's chances to promote this pawn are not realistic, but the white pieces will be diverted to unfavourable squares. This kind of position is especially unpleasant (for White, of course) in time trouble...

34.♖c7 ♖d3 35.♖f3



The endgame arising after 35. ♖xd3 cxd3 would be completely hopeless for White. For instance: 36. ♗d7

Parrying the threat of 37...d2.

36... ♖c5 37. ♗c7

37. ♗d6 would allow 37...e4.

37... ♖b3

Renewing the threat.

38. ♗c3

Again necessary, if 38. ♗d7 then 38...e4.

38... ♗g6

Once the king approaches, the pawns will become unstoppable.

35... ♗b1!

Despite his lack of time, Petrosian continues putting concrete problems to his opponent. With the help of some little tactical tricks, he will considerably improve his position.

36. ♗e3

36. ♗xc4 would have been bad in view of 36... ♖d6 37. ♗c7 ♗xel 38. ♗xf6 ♖e8 39. ♗xe6 ♗xh4† (but not 39... ♖xc7? 40. ♗f5† with saving chances for White) 40. ♗g1 ♖xc7 41. ♗f5† ♗g8 42. ♗c8† ♗f7 43. ♗xc7† ♗e7 with a winning queen endgame, as indicated by Tal.

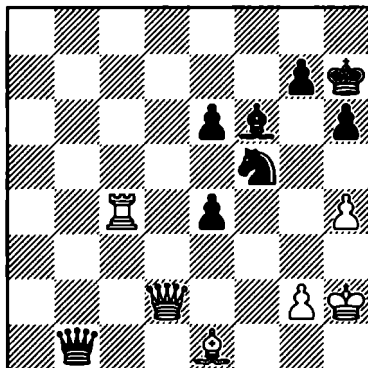
However, the calm 36. ♗c3 would have kept the situation under control.

36... ♖d6 37. ♗d2 ♖f5

Igor Zaitsev recommended 37...e4 as a winning move. However, after 38. ♗xd6 ♗xel 39. ♗f4 the black pawns are weak, making a draw the most probable result.

38. ♗xc4 e4

Black has finally reached his optimal regrouping. True, compared to the line starting with 25... ♖g3 the c-pawns have disappeared, which allows White to use his rook for defensive purposes.



39. ♗c2?

With his flag hanging, Hübner collapses.

Igor Zaitsev recommends 39. ♗e2 or 39. ♗b4 "with excellent drawing chances." In fact, neither move comes even close to that. Let us check them one by one.

39. ♗e2 loses almost by force after:

39... ♗e5† 40. ♗g1

This is the move that requires most inventiveness from Black.

If 40. ♗h1 then 40... ♖g3†.

While 40. g3 ♖d4 loses material, although the latter might be the best practical chance in view of 41. ♗xd4 ♗xd4.

40... ♖d4

Creating some interesting tactical possibilities and now:

a) 41. ♗f2 allows the elegant 41... ♗g3! when after 42. ♗f1 Black can further improve his position with 42... ♗d1 creating the threat ♖e2†. 43. ♗xg3 is impossible because of 43... ♖e2† 44. ♗f2 e3!† winning the queen.

b) 41. ♗f1 could also be answered by 41... ♗d1 threatening ... ♗g3, when 42. ♗f2 is strongly met by 42... ♗d3 with such deadly ideas as ...e3 or ... ♖e2†.

c) 41.♞d2 ♘f4! An echo variation to what we have already seen. After: 42.♞b4 ♞d1 White can hardly make a move. 43.♞xd4 loses the exchange back to 43...♞e3† when Black has every chance to win the endgame.

39.♞b4 does not look much better either. After 39...♞e5† 40.♙g1 ♞d3 White lacks any coordination. 41.♞xe4 leads to a difficult, probably losing, position after 41...♞d4†.

However, White had a simple and reliable solution in 39.♞b4. The queen cannot defend the e4-pawn any more. The endgame arising after 39...♞d3 (39...♞e5† changes nothing because of 40.g3) 40.♞xd3 exd3 41.♞b3 ♞xh4 is drawish.

39...♞xe1 40.♞xe4 ♞e5†

The game was adjourned and Hübner resigned without resumption. He also announced that he would not continue the match; the effect produced by the exchange sacrifice must have been very strong. The objective situation was not that desperate.

0–1

Intuition should always be double checked with concrete analysis

Petrosian's lucky number must have been seven. The reader certainly remembers that it was also the seventh game that brought him the lead against Spassky in 1966. And yet, the most important common characteristic of these games is the highly unexpected exchange sacrifice.

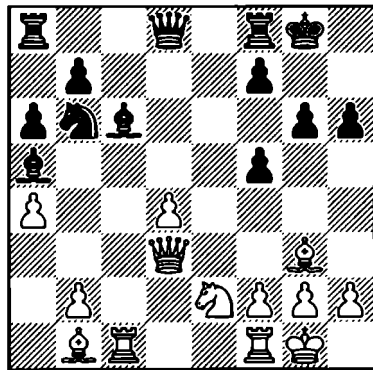
I hope that by carefully studying the games from this chapter the reader has managed to open new horizons for his playing style. As mentioned in the introduction, the main thing is to cross a certain psychological barrier. If a World Champion like Petrosian used the positional exchange sacrifice so frequently and with such success it means there is nothing wrong with it.

However, there is another side of the coin. I have already mentioned that, possessing a fantastic intuition, Petrosian tended to play less accurately when concrete calculation was needed. Botvinnik stated that there was an organic connection between Petrosian's strength and weaknesses. Being able to

choose a move without too much effort, the ninth World Champion did not work hard enough on developing his style of play in other directions. This relative weakness remained unpunished in some of the games presented above (such as the game against Rashkovsky and against Spassky in 1966) but this was not always the case.

The next game (the last one in this chapter) should be an alarm signal.

Tigran Petrosian – Alexander Tolush Soviet Championship, Tbilisi 1951



In this complicated position Petrosian thought that defending the a4-pawn was not necessary. He hoped to take advantage of the slightly unnatural position of Black's dark-squared bishop with:

22.♞c5

When his opponent bravely accepted the challenge with:

22...♙xa4

Petrosian might have thought that he would immediately win with:

23.♞xc6 ♞xc6 24.♞a3

Being used to sacrificing the exchange, he probably did not consider his material disadvantage in this position to be too significant. Besides, the situation of the black minor pieces looks desperate.

If this was indeed the course of his thoughts, we can say that Petrosian committed a double mistake.

First of all, a pawn and an exchange is a significant material investment and a player should be sure about what he is doing before starting such an operation.

The second aspect, of a more general character, is that intuition should always be double checked with concrete analysis.

Tolush was one of the most interesting tactical players of his generation. As a trainer, he helped Spassky develop his style in a period when he seemed to be stagnating as a consequence of relying too much on strategy. I believe that when capturing the a4-pawn Tolush had foreseen all the consequences of the forced operation.

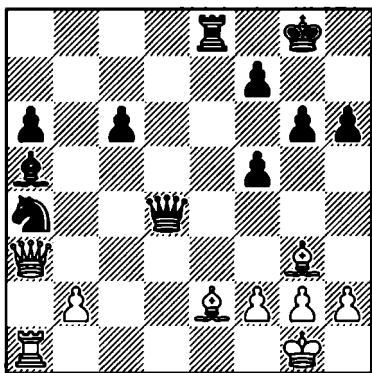
Starting with the next move, all Black's apparently passive major pieces will come into play. The first step is to undermine the d4-pawn.

Black has returned the exchange but continues to have a significant material advantage. However, his pieces still seem to be hanging and Petrosian played

27.♖a1

27.b3 is ineffective because of 27...♘c3.

27...♞e8!



It suddenly appears that it is not easy to find a good square for the bishop.

28.♗xa6

The only ways to prevent Black's next move were 28.♗d3 or 28.♗f3.

In the first case, Black could have simply retreated the bishop to b6, since after 29.♞xa4 the d3-bishop would also be hanging.

Malfagia pointed out an even more effective way: After 28...♘xb2 Black manages to rapidly regroup his pieces that were dispersed on the queenside, after which his material advantage, the weakness of the f2-square and White's back rank, as well as the passive position of the g3-bishop should be quickly decisive. For instance 29.♗xa6 ♗c3 30.♞c1 ♘d1! 31.♗f1 f4 32.♗h4 g5.

28.♗f3 also fails to keep up the attack against the knight. After 28...♗b6 29.♞xa4? ♞xa4 30.♞xa4 White gets mated with 30...♞e1.

28...♞e4

In spite of their apparently exposed positions, the black pieces defend each other impressively. For instance, White cannot drive away the rook with f3 because the pawn is pinned by the queen.

29.b4?!

Giving up a pawn for nothing. 29.♗d3 would also have been ineffective because of 29...♞e1† 30.♞e1 ♗xe1 when Black retains his extra pawn and an active position.

29...♞xb4 30.♞xb4 ♞xb4 31.♗e5 ♞c4 32.♗d6 ♗d2

It is instructive to follow how Tolush will overcome the technical difficulties by tactical means. Instead of trying to promote the c-pawn, he keeps it on a light square, in order to restrict one of the enemy bishops. At the same time, his minor pieces are very stable on the numerous weak squares available on the queenside.

33.♘f1 ♘b6 34.♗b7 ♘c4 35.♗c5 ♘a5 36.♗a8

A sad situation for the bishop.

36...♘b3 37.♞d1 ♗a5 38.♗d6 ♘d2†

Remarkably, this is the fourth time in the last five moves that the knight has attacked an enemy piece.

39.♘g1 ♞d4

Decisive material losses are unavoidable, for instance 40.♗c5 ♘f3† or 40.♞a1 ♞xd6 41.♞xa5 ♘b3. Therefore, Petrosian resigned.

0-1

Bobby Fischer's Pet Bishop



When I think back to my childhood, trying to remember the way I looked at chess in those happy years, the only image that remains clear in my mind is that of *The Match of the Century*: the Soviet World Champion Boris Spassky against the phenomenal American challenger, Robert James Fischer.

In 1972 I was seven years old and could already deal rather well with chess notation. Therefore, I had the chance to follow the course of the match by reading the relevant section of the Romanian sports newspaper, where the moves of each game were published the day after it was played. By the standards of those times, this was almost the equivalent of watching a match *live* on the Internet.

The fact that I was raised under the sign of such an outstanding event was a safe warranty that my entire life would be closely related to chess. How could I have seriously considered any other profession after having been allowed such a wonderful insight into high-class chess? True, I later graduated from the Polytechnic Institute, but this was more to refine my education rather than an attempt to build up a career, since I never had the slightest intention of working as an engineer.

Unfortunately, as so often in life, the other side of the coin also made its presence felt. Fischer's unique results as well as the general level of his play had an inhibitory effect on my development at a later stage. Watching his games, I had the firm conviction that no one else would ever come so close to perfection. (I must add that with the passing years my attitude has not changed a bit). Seeing with my own eyes what I considered to be the limit of human powers was slightly discouraging. From a psychological point of view, it certainly helps to believe that the path on which you are walking has endless potential.

The most important discoveries in chess history

When, in my late teens, I became aware of the importance of studying the classics (and Fischer prematurely became one of them by retiring from playing in official events after 1972) I faced a paradoxical psychological problem. I was able to study in depth the games of any of the great chess players from the past, but never submitted Fischer to a thorough examination. The explanation was that I simply did not feel prepared for such a daring intellectual challenge. I first had to study and know by heart *everything* that had been played before Fischer in order to have any chance of understanding his own inheritance: a genuine sublimation of the most important discoveries in chess history.

And yet, shortly after becoming a grandmaster I managed to make some progress in this field, which had previously seemed to be denied to me forever. I bought a wonderful compilation of most of the significant articles written about Fischer's glorious career: *744 partii Roberta Fischera*. I suspect that the authors (A. Golubev and Gutzait) did not care too much about such trivial things as respecting copyright, but the fact is that it contains material of very high value.

Yuri Balashov: a qualified commentator

Among others, I was deeply impressed by Yuri Balashov's detailed comments on the fourth game of the Fischer–Taimanov match. Balashov was one of Taimanov's seconds during that dramatic event and was obviously aware of all the subtleties of the highly instructive final phase of the game. In addition, his diploma work for graduation from the Sportive University consisted of a thorough study of Fischer's style of play. Concluding, I could have hardly dreamed of a more qualified commentator.

Balashov's comments not only showed me that Fischer's games could be studied after all, with a fair chance of understanding them, but also opened for me a concrete direction for investigation. In the previously mentioned game, Fischer used his phenomenal technique to convert the apparently minimal superiority of the bishop over the knight into a victory.

I soon found out that handling this type of ending was one of Fischer's specialties. I also discovered that he had a predilection for the king's bishop (meaning the light-squared bishop as White and the

dark-squared bishop when playing with the black pieces). There is little wonder about this psychological inclination, since some of Fischer's favourite openings were the King's Indian and the Sozin Attack, where the king's bishop is a key piece with a crucial influence over the character of the position.

This preference did not manifest itself only in the endgame. Here is a remarkable example featuring a non-standard utilization of the white light-squared bishop in a complex middlegame.

Robert James Fischer – Shimon Kagan Nathanya 1968

1.e4 c6 2.d3 d5 3.f3 g4 4.h3

This was one of Fischer's favourite ways to counter the Caro-Kann. White aims to win the pair of bishops at a very early stage of the game, when it is still questionable whether this is a real advantage.

4...xf3 5.xf3 f6 6.d3 e6

Black's policy for the next phase of the game is simple. He will place most of his pawns on light squares in order to restrict the bishop's activity. For a while it will seem as if his strategy will prevail over White's straightforward play. The entire depth of Fischer's conception will be revealed only in the final phase of the game (see the comments on the 21st move).
7.a3!?

An important moment. In his first participation in a Candidates Tournament, back in 1959, Fischer invariably played 7.g3 aiming to reach a King's Indian set-up as soon as possible. However, after 7...b4 8.d2 d4 9.b1 b6 he repeatedly got in trouble. It is significant that even a player like Keres, who was a convinced devotee of the Classical lines in the Ruy Lopez, switched to the Caro-Kann against Fischer, in order to take advantage of this weak point in his opening repertoire.

With the apparently modest move 7.a3, White

prevents the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. Without the help of his colleague, the light-squared bishop risks becoming a passive piece, as had happened to Fischer so many times in 1959. Besides, any exchange of pieces should favour Black, whose position is rather cramped.

7...b7 8.g4

This is not an attacking move. White simply wins space on the kingside, discouraging his opponent from castling on this wing.

8...d6 9.g5 f8 10.h4 e7 11.h5 b6
12.h3

Again, this is not an act of aggression. The e6- and g6- squares have sufficient defence to prevent a tactical operation based on g5-g6. Besides enabling short castling, the idea behind Fischer's move is to discourage Black's eventual plans to open the position on this wing, by putting the e6-square under severe pressure.

12...0-0 13.a4

Once the king has defined his position, Fischer starts a typical diversion. Black is forced to immediately choose the most appropriate queenside structure.

13...a5

This is the most natural reaction, preventing White from also winning space on this other wing. However, at a later stage of the game this will be the only black pawn blocked on a dark square, and will give White the possibility of launching the decisive attack.

The more restrained 13...a6 might have been a more logical alternative.

14.0-0 h8 15.h1 f5

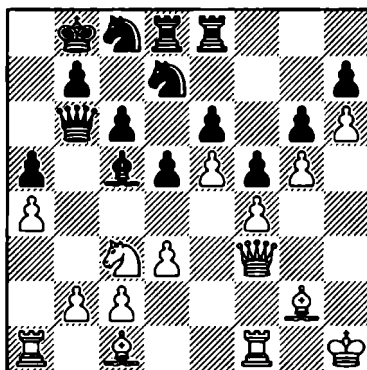
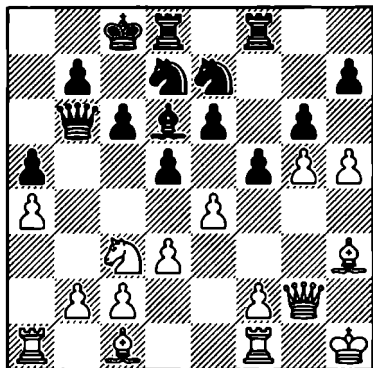
Although the white king has castled on the short side, in the long run it is White who would have chances for a pawn storm on this wing. Therefore, Kagan decides to ensure himself against such aggression, restricting the enemy bishop even more at the same time.



16. ♖g2!

White is not at all concerned about crossing his opponent's plans. Opening the position with 16.gxf6? would be rather risky, giving Black the possibility of obtaining active play along the f-file starting with 16...♟xf6.

With his last move Fischer cleared the way for his f-pawn, in order to win space in the centre.

16...g6

Why did Fischer spend two tempi transferring the bishop to a diagonal where it has as little scope as on its previous location?

The time has come to explain White's whole strategy up to this moment. The potential force of the white bishop has encouraged Black to place most of his pawns on light squares. As logical as this approach might seem, it severely restricted Black's active possibilities. He never managed to cross the fifth rank, allowing White to achieve a considerable spatial advantage. Despite any superficial evidence, we could say that Black has not restricted the bishop; it is the other way around!

The idea behind 21.♔g2 is just a continuation of this pattern. Black is kindly asked to forget about any central expansion. The bishop will not play a significant part in the decisive phase of the game; the advantage obtained so far can be converted without its help. White's plan, based on opening the queenside, will prove surprisingly effective. Lacking space for manoeuvres, Black's pieces will not manage to regroup in time.

21...♟c7

A well planned but rather slow action. The king tries to escape to the other wing, while the knight is transferred to a6, in order to slow down the queenside attack. In any case, there was hardly anything better for Black.

22.♗e2 ♖b8 23.c3 ♗d7 24.♗d2!

White does not have to lose a tempo for the defence of the b2-pawn because 24...♟xb2? would

17.h6

The same policy: Black is deprived of any form of kingside activity. Besides, White's enormous space advantage on this side would present certain dangers for Black in case of mass simplifications. One possible way of underlining the relative weakness of Black's kingside would be a well timed ♗h5!

17...♟b8 18.f4 ♟fe8

It is difficult to say whether by this point of the game Kagan understood Fischer's main plan. However, while the tension remained in the position Black had to permanently consider the possibility of White opening the centre with ♟e1 and exf5. Therefore, his last moves are logical, although they will basically be useless after the centre is blocked.

19.e5!

For the moment, this move might seem rather illogical. White gives up any hope of activating his light-squared bishop.

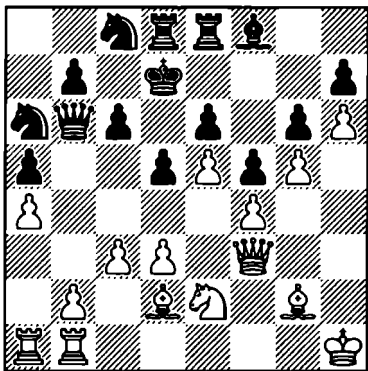
19...♗c5 20.♟f3 ♖c8 21.♗g2

unexpectedly lead to mate after 25.♟f1 ♖xd2 26.♟xb7.

This final position is a splendid illustration of Black's lack of space. The presence of the rook on e8, relatively useful a few moves ago, has fatal consequences for the king.

24...♖a6 25.♟f1 ♜f8

Another sign of Black's helplessness. The king could not cross the a3-f8 diagonal while the bishop was on c5 because d4 would have won a piece.



26.b4!

The signal to start the decisive attack.

26...axb4 27.cxb4 ♜xb4?!

By opening the b-file right away, Black makes things easier for Fischer. However, he would have only prolonged the suffering with 27...♜e7 28.b5 ♘c5 29.a5 ♜c7 30.bxc6 bxc6 (30...♜xc6 loses material to 31.♟c1 ♜b5 32.♘d4 ♜xd3 33.♟b4) 31.a6 and the pawn is hardly stoppable.

28.a5 ♜c5 29.d4 ♜f8 30.♟xb4 ♘xb4 31.♜c3 ♖a6 32.♟xb7 ♘c7 33.♘c1 ♟e7 34.a6

Black lost on time.

1-0

Returning to our main territory, the endgame, let us make some general observations.

Most of the examples in the main section of this chapter are from 1970-72, the period of Fischer's final ascension. His opponents were among the strongest players of that time. I considered that

this was the only way this chapter would meet the expectations of the most demanding readers.

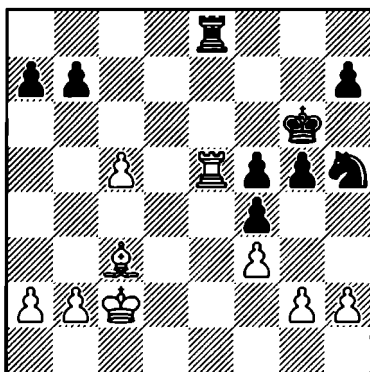
Regarding Fischer's legendary accuracy in endgames, the fact that he did not use the help of any second for his Candidates matches in 1971 is quite telling. Several members of the Soviet delegations had to admit that Bobby's solitary analysis of the adjourned games was usually better than their collective efforts.

And now, let us examine some typical situations featuring the bishop's superiority over the knight.

The bishop's domination over the knight

The long ranged bishop is able to immobilize a knight placed on the edge of the board without the additional help of other pieces or pawns. Here is an example where this picture can be seen in its pure form.

Robert James Fischer – William Addison
US Open, Cleveland 1957



Black cannot afford to exchange all the remaining pieces because his inferior pawn structure would lead him to defeat in the pawn ending. Fearing that his knight would remain captive on the h-file in case of an exchange on e5, Addison played: 27...♘f6

In principle, it would have been desirable to avoid the exchange of rooks, but after, say,

27...♞c8 White would take advantage of the passive position of the knight with 28.♞e6† ♕f7 29.♞h6 ♖g7 (sadly, there is no alternative to this move) 30.♞xh7 ♞g8 31.♞xg7† reaching an easily winning pawn ending. However, after:

28.♞xe8 ♖xe8 29.♙e5!

it becomes obvious that the knight has only changed one prison for another.

29...♙h5

A desperate bid for counterplay. As mentioned, 29...♖f6 would lose to 30.♙xf6 ♕xf6. For instance 31.♖d3 ♕e5 32.♖c4 followed by the advance of the queenside pawns.

30.♖d3 g4 31.b4 a6 32.a4 ♞f3 33.♞f3 ♙h4 34.b5 axb5

Similarly, after 34...a5 White would play 35.b6! followed by 36.c6.

35.a5!

The simplest continuation. After the thematic break c6, Black will not be able to stop the a-pawn, not even at the cost of the knight.

35...♙h3 36.c6!

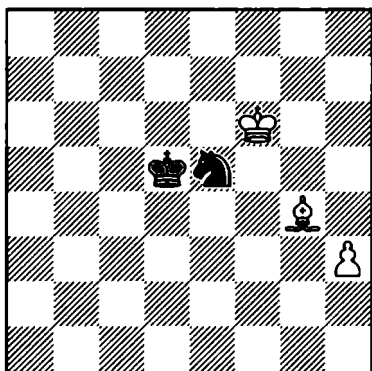
1-0

This was an extreme case, of course. Here is a more complex case of the bishop's domination over the knight.

The fact that Black lost a theoretically drawn position speaks volumes about the practical difficulties faced by the player with a knight.

Robert James Fischer – Mark Taimanov

Candidates Quarterfinal (2), Vancouver 1971



Fischer had missed an elementary win right after the adjournment (something not at all typical of him). Taimanov's excellent defence in a position that remained difficult nearly brought its reward. The diagrammed position is a theoretical draw.

Tired by all the previous suffering and bearing the burden of the increasing score (0-2 already, since the adjourned game was continued after the conclusion of the third game) he blindly rushed the king towards the pawn with:

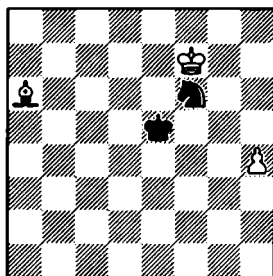
81...♙e4?

Quite unexpectedly, after this move White is already winning. As usual, Fischer will not let his chance slip away. By making some "only moves", he will get the third point in the match. Black could have drawn with no fewer than three moves here:

a) 81...♙d6 82.♙e2

A central knight is difficult to restrict completely with a lone bishop. The e2-square is the most efficient location for the time being. First of all, the knight has to be kept away from the f3-square. However, the d7-square becomes available and the knight can start jumping with energy.

82...♖d7† 83.♕f7 ♕e5 84.h4 ♖f6 85.♙a6



analysis diagram

Now, besides the active 85...♕f4 which leads to an immediate draw, Black can also defend passively with:

85...♖h7 86.♙c8 ♖f6 87.♙h3

If 87.♖g6 ♖d5! 88.h5 ♖f4† eliminating the pawn.

White obtained an apparent zugzwang position, but the horse continues to work miracles:

87...♖h7 88.♖g7 ♖f6 89.♖g6 ♖d5! and 90.h5 is impossible because of 90...♖f4†.

b) 81...♘d3 82.h4 ♖f4

This is probably the easiest way, taking advantage of the favourable colour of the queening square. The white king is distracted in order to free the way for the black king to the saving corner.

83.♔f5 ♘d6 84.♔xf4 ♘e7

Since the king cannot be prevented from reaching the h8-square, the draw is obvious. And finally:

c) 81...♔d4

A similar idea but a better square than e4, as chosen by Taimanov in the game. The king is less exposed on a dark square.

82.♙d1

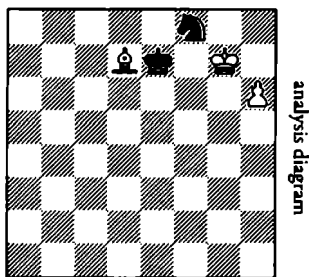
Or 82.♙c8 ♖f3 blocking the pawn, since 83.♙b7 ♘h4 84.♔g5 is not dangerous in view of 84...♔e5! 85.♔xh4 ♔f6, aiming for the h8-square.

82...♘d7† 83.♔f5 ♘d5 84.h4 ♘d6 85.♔g6

After 85.h5 ♔e7 the king arrives just in time.

85...♔e5† 86.♔g7 ♔e7 87.h5 ♘d7 88.h6 ♖f6!

88...♘f8 would be too passive and would allow White to win after 89.♙g4 ♔e8 90.♙c8 ♔e7 91.♙d7!!.



analysis diagram

A real triumph of the bishop's domination.

89.♙b3

Once again White has obtained maximum activity, but the knight can simply start checking:

89...♘h5† 90.♔g8 ♖f6†

with a draw.

82.♙c8!

Fischer displays his usual accuracy.

82.♔g5 ♖f7† or 82.♙d1 ♘d7† 83.♔g5 ♘c5 84.h4 ♔e6† 85.♔g4 ♖f4 would have allowed Black to save himself.

Fischer's move is the best possible. The bishop is transferred far from any eventual attack, keeping several key squares under observation. The g4- and d7-squares are controlled directly, while the f3- and d3-squares are denied to the knight by indirect means. (See also the next comment).

82...♔f4

Due to the unfavourable position of the king 82...♖f3, aiming to block the pawn as soon as possible, would lose to 83.♙b7†. Or, symmetrically, 82...♘d3 (aiming for f4) would allow 83.♙f5† followed by 84.♙xd3.

83.h4 ♖f3

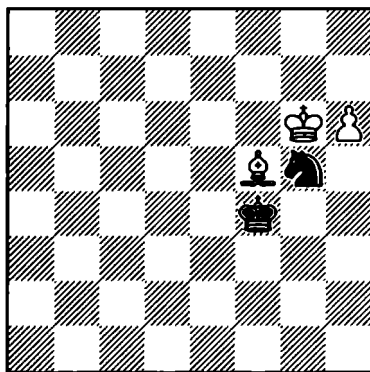
83...♔g4† 84.♔g7 ♘h2 85.h5 ♖f3 86.h6 ♔g5 87.♔g6 would have led to a zugzwang position; a genuine zugzwang this time!

84.h5 ♔g5 85.♙f5!

Another important move, preventing the knight from checking from h7 or e4.

85...♖f3 86.h6 ♔g5 87.♔g6

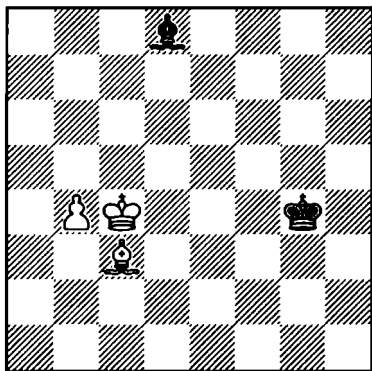
Black is in zugzwang. The bishop restricts both the knight and the king, preventing such moves as 87...♔g4 or 87...♔e6 with the idea of meeting 88.h7 with 88...♘f8†.



87...♖f3 88.h7 ♔e5† 89.♔f6
1-0

As a curiosity, I would mention that long before this game there had once been a situation with the roles reversed:

Mark Taimanov – Robert James Fischer
Buenos Aires 1960



Somebody who did not know the theory of bishop endings very well would intuitively try to place the king in front of the pawn. In a certain sense, this was exactly what Taimanov did in the second game from Vancouver, rushing in with the king in chaotic fashion. Without any hesitation, Fischer chose the other way (the correct one) and achieved a draw without any difficulties.

80...♟f4 81.b5 ♘c4 82.♙d4 ♙c7 83.♟c5 ♟d3
84.♟c6 ♟c4 85.♙b6 ♙g3 86.♙a7 ♙c7
½-½

Although in the rest of the chapter we shall see several pure bishop versus knight endings, the reader will notice that in every starting position there will always be at least one pair of rooks on the board.

The reason behind this way of structuring the material is that the preliminary phase, preparing the optimal moment to exchange, is of no lesser importance than the handling of the pure ending itself. Besides, Fischer's main strength lay precisely in connecting these two phases of such endings.

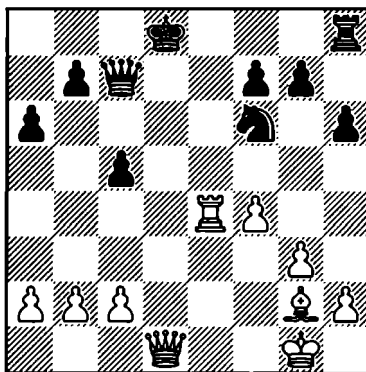
The typical "good" bishop

The most typical situation consists of open positions with pawns on both wings, where the bishop's higher mobility ensures its superiority over the knight.

The theme of domination, highlighted in the previous section, remains valid of course. At the same time, the bishop has the ability to repeatedly win (or lose) tempi over the knight in order to put the opponent in zugzwang.

In case of a symmetrical pawn structure, the bishop can simultaneously create threats on both wings. The knight is usually able to defend only one of them, while the king is best advised to stay in the centre, thus preventing the activation of his colleague. Therefore, the creation of weaknesses on at least one of the wings is hard to avoid. The next example is a perfect illustration of such situations. In fact, this is the game mentioned in the introduction, which first gave me an insight into Fischer's creations.

Robert James Fischer – Mark Taimanov
Candidates Quarterfinal (4), Vancouver 1971



22...♞d7!

Taimanov was trailing in the match by 3–0 and has been under attack for many moves; he hopes to gain some relief by exchanging queens. In fact, the endgame is very difficult for Black and, besides, Fischer was especially strong in positions where the opponent lacked any counterplay.

Preferable was 22...♟c8 although White's advantage would have been unquestionable. Malfagia suggested the following plan for White: 23.♞e5 ♙d8 (or 23...♙e8 24.♞d5! ♖6 25.♞e6 with a clear advantage) 24.♞e2 planning h3, ♟h2,

♖e3 with pressure on the c5-pawn, which cannot be easily defended because of the weakness of the long light diagonal.

23. ♖xd7 ♗xd7?!

Another mistake after which, looking at the game, we can conclude that Black loses by force!!

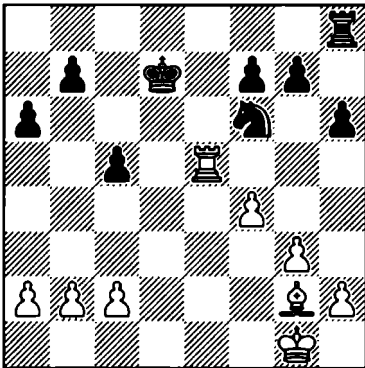
The best defensive chance consisted of trying to transfer the knight to d6, in order to take under control such important squares as b5, c4, e4 and f5. This, together with the c5-pawn, would create a barrier in front of the white king. A better way to try to achieve this aim was suggested by Balashov: 23... ♗xd7 24. ♖e1 b6 25. ♗f1 a5 26. ♗b5 (attacking the f7-pawn with 26. ♗c4 would not prevent 26... ♖e8, because of the hanging position of the white rook) 26... ♖e8!

Compared to the game, the rook occupies a more active position than on f8. Now comes 27. ♖d1 ♖e7 followed by ♗c7, ♗f6-e8-d6, and there is hope for Black.

As pointed out by Andrea Malfagia, 24. ♖e3?! looks slightly more active for White (instead of 24. ♖e1) although after 24... b6 25. ♗f1 a5 26. ♗b5 ♖e8 27. ♖b3! ♖e6 28. ♗c4 ♖e7 29. ♗f2 ♗c7 Black retains adequate defensive possibilities.

If the position had arisen twenty moves later the Soviet team of analysts would have probably found the best defence, but there was still a long way till the adjournment. On the other hand, Fischer's over-the-board handling of the endgame is rather impressive.

24. ♖e5



White's first aim is to improve the position of his own pieces, at the same time preventing Black from becoming active (for instance, occupying an open line with the rook or bringing the knight to d6).

We shall call this *phase 1* of the general plan.

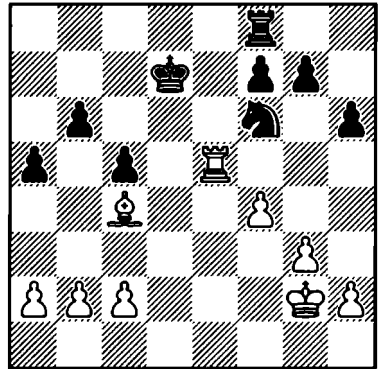
24... b6

Black faces a difficult choice regarding the pawn structure on the queenside. After 24... ♗d6 25. a4! (but not 25. ♗xb7? ♖b8 26. ♗xa6 ♖xb2 27. ♗c4 ♖xc2 28. ♗xf7 c4 with strong counterplay) 25... b5 26. a5 the a6-pawn would be potentially weak.

25. ♗f1 a5 26. ♗c4!

The bishop has done a great job along the h1-a8 diagonal. In the middlegame it put the black king under serious pressure, causing Taimanov to transpose to this unpleasant ending. Subsequently, it has forced Black to weaken his queenside even more, by advancing the pawns on dark squares. Since there is nothing else left to attack on that part of the board, the bishop needed to be transferred to c4 in order to put the f7-pawn under pressure and prevent the black rook from becoming active.

26... ♖f8 27. ♗g2



A brief look at the position suggests that *phase 1* was successfully completed. White's pieces occupy dominant positions while Black cannot demonstrate the slightest form of activity.

Phase 2 will consist of creating weaknesses in Black's position on both wings. Only in this way will his winning attempts have chances of success.

On the queenside White will play a2-a4, thus ensuring later access for the king, as well as some space for manoeuvring with the bishop.

On the kingside he will start a massive offensive, trying to block at least one black pawn on a light square.

27...♖d6

The attempt to bring the knight to d6 would only worsen Black's position after 27...♗e8 28.♙b5† ♕d8 29.♞d5† ♖c7 (even worse would be 29...♗e7 30.♞d7† ♖e6 31.♞b7) 30.♞d7† ♖c8 31.♞e7.

27...♖d8, following the same idea, would be too slow because of 28.♖f3 ♗e8 29.♗e4 when 29...♗d6† would still not prevent the king from marching in. The rook endgame would of course be completely losing for Black, because of the weaknesses on both wings and the passive positioning of his pieces.

28.♖f3 ♗d7

In case of 28...♗e8 (with the vague hope of reaching the d6-square) White could seriously consider converting his positional advantage into a material one with 29.♙xf7!.

29.♞e3 ♗b8 30.♞d3† ♖c7 31.c3

An important move, restricting the knight without affecting in any way the elasticity of White's queenside structure.

31...♗c6 32.♞e3

At first glance it might seem that in this phase of the game both players are moving their pieces rather randomly. In fact, since the black rook is doomed to passivity, the main conflict is centred on the possible transfer of the knight to d6. With his last move, Fischer prevented 32...♗e7.

32...♖d6

Taimanov takes the e7-square under control, but places the king on an exposed square: a detail that will make further regrouping quite difficult.

33.a4 ♗e7

Black would not succeed in transferring the knight to d6 via d8-b7 with 33...♗d8 34.h4 ♗b7 35.h5 ♖d7 because after 36.♙b5†! he could not prevent the penetration of the white rook. For instance 36...♖d8 37.♞d3† followed by 38.♞d7.

Advancing the f-pawn in order to free the rook would be an important positional concession. For

instance, 33...f5 would lose the g7-pawn after 34.♞e6† ♖d7 35.♞g6, while 33...f6 would allow the white king to march in with 34.♖g4 when the knight would not be able to cover the weaknesses with 34...♗e7 because of 35.♞e6†. The king would not be able to defend both the knight and the b6-pawn.

34.h3

Knowing the further course of the game, this might look like a loss of time. In fact, White had no reason to hurry. For the moment, Black is basically restricted to knight moves and Fischer decided to wait for the best moment to advance his pawn to h4. With the knight on e7, the immediate 34.h4 would be premature because of 34...h5 followed by ...g6 and ...♗f5, when Black would achieve some stability.

34...♗c6

Possibly pressed by time, Taimanov decides to remain passive.

34...♗f5

Would only have helped White develop his initiative with:

35.♞e5 g6 36.g4 ♗e7 37.h4

More interesting would have been 34...♗c8 aiming for d6. White would have needed to play accurately in order to prevent this plan.

After:

35.h4 ♖d7 36.♙b5†

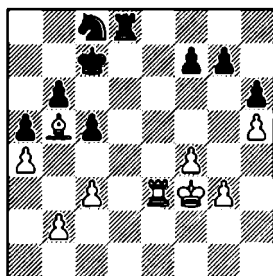
Forced, in order to prevent the immediate 36...♗d6.

36...♖c7 37.h5

Black would now gain some freedom for his rook with:

37...♞d8

How should White continue?



a) The straightforward 38.♔e8 f5 39.♙g6 ♖d6 40.♞e5 would allow sufficient counterplay with 40...♜c4 41.♞e7† ♞d7 42.♞x7† ♜xd7 43.♙xf5† ♜c6 44.♙e4† ♜d6 45.b3 ♖d2† 46.♜e3 ♜xb3. The immediate threat is ...c4, while the black queenside majority is no less dangerous than White's superiority on the other wing. There would be no way to take advantage of the rather isolated position of the knight. For instance, 47.♜d3 ♜c1† 48.♜c4 would fail to 48...♜e2 winning one of the kingside pawns.

b) More precise seems to be 38.♜e2! preventing the radical activation of the black rook. For instance, the rook lift 38...♞d6 would fail to cross White's kingside plans after 39.g4 ♞f6 40.♜f3 when, among others, the threat ♞e8-g8 is quite unpleasant. Activating the knight with 40...♖d6 would allow the decisive penetration of the rook on the seventh rank with 41.♞e7† ♜d8 42.♞a7 when Black would be hopelessly passive.

As pointed out by Malfagia, 35...♜c7 (instead of 35...♜d7) is more tricky. The fact is that, despite my initial thoughts, this move threatens 36...♖d6 since 37.♞e7? is impossible in view of 37...♜d8, placing both white pieces under attack. White's simplest solution might be 36.♙b5 ♞d8 37.♜e2, when Black's extra tempo compared to the previous line (35...♜d7) should not have a decisive influence over the further course of the game.

35.h4

White threatens h4-h5, g3-g4, ♜g3-h4, g4-g5, ♜g4 with an unstoppable initiative. Taimanov now decides to radically prevent this plan, but the price will be very high: All his pawns will be blocked on light squares, becoming potential targets for the bishop.

Knowing the further course of the game, it is easy to criticize him for having been a bit too cooperative. On the other hand, let us remember the game Saidy–Fischer from the chapter *In the Patriarch's footsteps* (see page 115). Saidy avoided creating kingside weaknesses, at the cost of allowing Fischer to build up an impressive space advantage. The consequences were as unfavourable as those of Taimanov's strategy.

Therefore I would assume that, from the perspective of the final outcome of the game,

his decision was no better or worse than waiting passively.

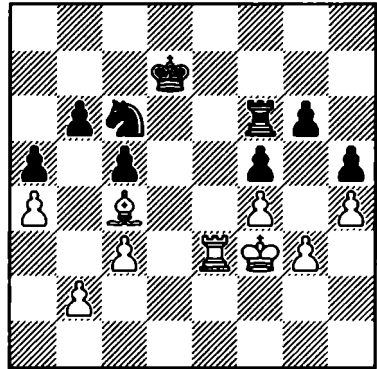
35...h5 36.♞d3†!

One clear sign of White's domination is that he can switch his rook's position according to necessity. Once a black kingside pawn has been advanced, the rook is needed on the fifth rank.

36...♜c7 37.♞d5 f5

After 37...g6 White would play 38.♙b5 preparing f4-f5, without having to fear ♜e7-f5.

38.♞d2 ♞f6 39.♞e2 ♜d7 40.♞e3 g6



White "scored" rather well in *phase 2*. All the black kingside pawns have been blocked on light squares and they are likely to become easy targets for the bishop.

There is nothing more to do now with rooks on the board. Nevertheless, *phase 3* (centralization of the king and exchanging rooks in order to get a technically winning endgame) has to be handled with care. Once the rooks disappear, under no circumstances should the knight be allowed to reach d6, because this would create an impenetrable fortress.

41.♙b5 ♞d6 42.♜e2

Exchanging rooks with 42.♞d3 ♞xd3† 43.♙xd3 would have been premature because of 43...♖d8 44.♙c4 ♜e7 45.♜e3 (or 45.♙d5 ♜f7 46.♙xf7 ♜xf7 47.♜e3 ♜e6 48.♜d3 ♜d5 with complete equality) 45...♜b7 46.♜d3 ♖d6 and White cannot make any progress.

42...♜d8

Black is in some sort of zugzwang. For instance, 42...♠f6 would have allowed the white king to advance to b5, crossing the d-file, while 42...♖c7 would let the rook infiltrate Black's position. Both situations are rather hopeless. Therefore, Taimanov decides to allow the exchange of rooks under favourable circumstances for White.

43.♠d3 ♖c7 44.♠xd6 ♖xd6

The next step, *phase 4* is rather obvious and is a fruit of *phase 2*. The bishop will attack the g6-pawn, tying down the knight to defence, while the king will attack the symmetrical weakness: the b6-pawn.

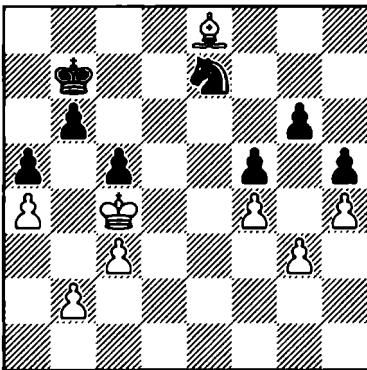
45.♖d3 ♖e7

Black has to take care about possible deviations from the main plan. For instance, after 45...♖c7 White could transpose to a winning pawn endgame with 46.♠xc6 ♖xc6 47.♖c4 ♖c7 48.♖b5 ♖b7 when the placement of his queenside pawns will allow him to lose the two tempi necessary for reaching two successive zugzwang positions with 49.c4! ♖c7 50.♖a6 ♖c6 51.♖a7 ♖c7 and 52.b3! ♖c6 53.♖b8, when Black will lose all his queenside pawns.

46.♠e8 ♖d5 47.♠f7†

A typical picture. The bishop makes perfect use of its ability to act on two different diagonals by keeping the knight passive and driving the enemy king away from the centre, thus clearing the way for its own king.

47...♖d6 48.♖c4 ♖c6 49.♠e8† ♖b7



50.♖b5

Phase 4 will not be completed until the white king has reached the a6-square. White will have to make use of zugzwang in order to achieve this.

As we shall soon convince ourselves, the final part of this long plan, *phase 5*, will be of a sacrificial nature and would not be successful with the king on b5.

50...♖c8

Black can still be dangerous! There is a threat of mate in one.

51.♠c6† ♖c7 52.♠d5 ♖e7 53.♠f7!

Starting from this moment, Fischer will repeatedly make use of the bishop's ability to lose tempi (in some ways, similar to the triangulation method) in order to pass the obligation to move to the opponent and thus put him in zugzwang.

Unfortunately for Black, he cannot use his king to avoid this: the weakness of the b6-pawn makes any triangulation impossible.

The last move is the start of a well-calculated manoeuvre that will be concluded with White's 56th move.

After 53.♠f3 ♖g8 White would have had nothing to do other than returning to d5, as there would be a threat of ♖f6-e4. It would also be too early to start *phase 5* with:

53.♠b3 ♖b7 54.♠f7 ♖a7! 55.♠xg6 ♖xg6 56.♖c6

Black seems to be able to survive with:

56...c4 57.♖d5

Or 57.♖b5 ♖f8 followed by ♖h7-f6-e4.

57...b5! 58.♖e6

58.axb5 ♖b6 59.♖xc4 ♖e7 leads nowhere.

58...bxa4 59.♖f7

Black's counterplay is sufficient after 59.♖xf5 too. For instance:

59...♖f8 60.♖g5 ♖b6 61.♖xh5 ♖b5 62.g4 a3 63.bxa3 ♖a4 64.g5 ♖xa3 65.g6 ♖xg6 66.♖xg6 a4 with a draw.

59...♖h8† 60.♖g7 ♖b6 61.♖xh8 ♖b5 62.♖g7 a3 63.bxa3 ♖a4 64.♖g6 ♖xa3 65.♖xf5 ♖b3 66.♖g6 a4 67.f5 a3 68.f6 a2 69.f7 a1♙ 70.f8♙ with a probable draw.

53...♖b7 54.♠b3 ♖a7

For the moment, Taimanov hopes to keep the gates closed on the white king. 54...♖c8

would just transpose to the variation given in the comments to the 58th move after 55.♔d5† ♖c7 56.♗a6 ♘d6 57.c4!

55.♔d1 ♗b7

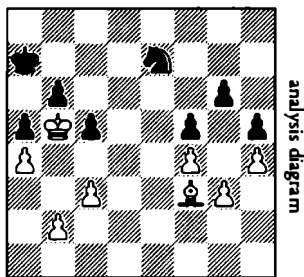
As pointed out by Andrea Malfagia, the attempt to activate the knight with 55...♘g8 56.♗c6 ♘f6 fails to 57.♗d6! ♘e4† 58.♗e7 ♘xg3 59.♗f7 with a decisive attack against the weak kingside pawns.

56.♔f3†

This is the moment when we can understand the accuracy of Fischer's 53rd move. It was essential that ♔f3 is made with check, which would not have been possible without losing a tempo with the bishop. With his king on c7 Black would have time to start counterplay with 56...♘g8.

56...♗c7

The alternative was 56...♗a7. Obviously, this move is a bit passive, but will the white king be able to penetrate through the c6-square? In order to achieve this White has to resort to zugzwang.



Balashov recommends

a) 57.♔g2! (my evaluation) but this move is not the shortest way:

57...♘g8!

Black has to hurry in order to generate counterplay.

58.♗c6 ♘f6 59.♗d6 ♘e4† 60.♗e5 ♘xg3 61.♗f6?

Better is 61.♔f3 ♗a6 and now simplest is 62.c4! preventing Black's counterplay, as feeble it might be. However, this would hardly be the most straightforward way (see also variation b). 61...♘e2!

This is the moment when the main drawback of 57.♔g2 makes itself felt. The e2-square is available to the knight.

62.♗g5 b5!

The careless 62...♗a6? loses the knight to 63.♔f1.

63.axb5 ♗b6 64.♔f1 ♘g3 65.♔c4 a4 66.♗xg6 ♗a5

In order to capture one of the pawns White has to transfer the bishop, which would leave possibilities of counterplay on the queenside.

I believe that the most accurate move is:

b) 57.c4! White not only prevents queenside counterplay, but also leaves the bishop on the best square in view of the predictable counterplay on the other wing. The difference makes itself felt after: 57...♘g8 58.♗c6 ♘f6 59.♗d6 ♘e4† 60.♗e5 ♘xg3 (if 60...♘d2 then 61.♔d5) 61.♗f6 When, deprived of both his ideas, namely ...b5 and ...♘e2, Black is completely helpless. For instance 61...♗b8 62.♗xg6 ♗c7 63.♔xh5 with an easy win for White.

57.♗a6

The most difficult step of *phase 4* has been achieved: the king has reached the a6-square. However, the bishop has been forced to temporarily occupy a slightly passive position. In order to proceed with *phase 5* it is necessary to transfer it back to f7.

This step back is connected with some subtleties that remained behind the scenes, since Taimanov did not make any attempt to activate his knight.

57...♘c8 58.♔d5 ♘e7

The last possibility of deviating from the linear course of the game (but not of the match, since the result would have remained the same) would have been 58...♘d6, aiming for the e4-square.

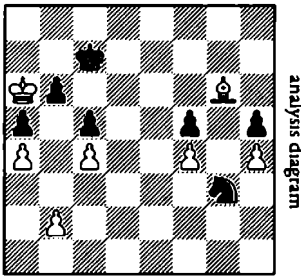
Once again, White's best continuation would have been 59.c4!! paralyzing the black queenside. For a while, the play would have followed a forced course.

59...♘e4

Because of the weakness of the g6-pawn there is no way back.

60.♔f7 ♘xg3 61.♔xg6

The position, even if it did not arise in the game, deserves a diagram.



Black is in zugzwang again. He has to move either his king or his knight.

a) 61... $\text{d}e2$ would lead to a hopeless ending after:
62. $\text{d}xh5$ $\text{d}xf4$ 63. $\text{f}3$ $\text{d}g6$

The only way to block the pawn is on a dark square, and so not accessible to the bishop.
64.h5 $\text{d}h8$ 65.h6 $\text{d}f7$ 66.h7 $\text{d}h8$ 67. $\text{d}h5$ $\text{c}c6$
68. $\text{c}a7$ $\text{c}c7$ 69. $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}f7$ 70. $\text{d}e2$ $\text{d}h8$ 71. $\text{d}h5$

With this typical manoeuvre, Black is put in zugzwang again.
71... f4 72. $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}f7$ 73. $\text{d}e2$ $\text{d}h8$ 74. $\text{d}h5$

Soon the white king will have access to b8. In fact, it seems that we have different endgames on the two wings. On one side, the bishop clearly dominates the knight, while on the other side we can see a pawn endgame!

b) The attempt to maintain the opposition of the kings with 61... $\text{c}c6$ 62. $\text{c}a7$ $\text{c}c7$ would fail to:
63.b3!

Without the help of this important reserve tempo White's win would be more complicated, if possible at all. This is a clear sign that advancing pawns in the endgame without a clear purpose should be avoided.

63... $\text{d}e2$

Or 63... $\text{c}c6$ 64. $\text{c}b8$ winning.

64. $\text{d}xh5$ $\text{d}xf4$ 65. $\text{d}f3$

and we have the same situation as after 61... $\text{d}e2$.

After Taimanov's last move, we are very close to *phase 5*. In order to better understand Fischer's next move, we should first explain what this final part of the general plan consists of.

White can reach a maximum of activity with his bishop on e8, restricting both black pieces to the utmost. It is important that in such a position

it is the opponent's turn to move. In fact, Black's only possible move would be ... $\text{c}d8$, attacking the bishop, when the only way to make progress would be $\text{d}xg6$ $\text{d}xg6$, $\text{c}xb6$, initiating *phase 5*.

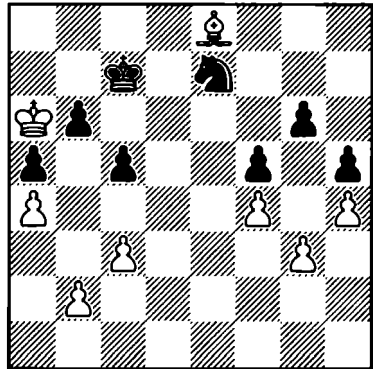
Let us follow the way Fischer will make this transition.

59. $\text{d}c4$!

As much as possible the zugzwang should be obtained without the participation of the pawns, which are ideally placed on b2 and c3 in view of the planned sacrifice to g6. Let us have a look at some lines in which White pushes one of the pawns.

59. $\text{d}f7$ $\text{c}c6$ 60. $\text{d}e8$ † $\text{c}c7$

And now:



a) 61. $\text{c}a7$ leads nowhere because of 61... $\text{d}c8$ †
62. $\text{c}a8$ $\text{d}e7$.

b) 61.b3 This unnecessarily weakens the queenside structure. 61... $\text{c}d8$ 62. $\text{d}xg6$ $\text{d}xg6$
63. $\text{c}xb6$ c4! disrupting White's pawns.

c) 61.c4

After this move White's structure loses part of its flexibility.

61... $\text{c}d8$ 62. $\text{d}xg6$ $\text{d}xg6$ 63. $\text{c}xb6$ $\text{c}d7$ 64. $\text{c}xc5$

Or 64. $\text{c}xa5$ $\text{c}c6$!

64... $\text{d}e7$ 65. $\text{c}b6$ $\text{d}c6$ 66.c5 $\text{d}b8$ 67. $\text{c}xa5$

White has won another pawn, but Black has considerably activated his position.

67... $\text{c}c6$ 68.b4

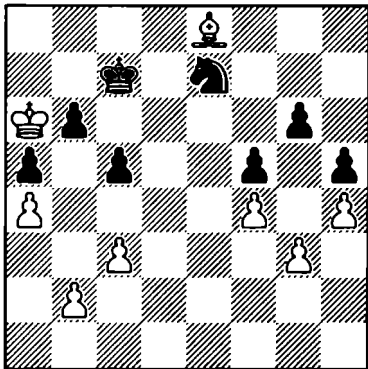
68. $\text{c}b4$ is no better because of 68... $\text{d}a6$ †.

68... $\text{d}d7$ 69. $\text{c}a6$ $\text{d}b8$ † 70. $\text{c}a7$ $\text{d}d7$ 71.a5 $\text{c}c7$
72.a6 $\text{c}c6$

It seems that White cannot make progress.

59...dxc6 60.♠f7 ♖e7 61.♙e8

Finally, Black is forced to allow the initiation of phase 5, by leaving the b6-pawn undefended for an instant.



A very observant reader might object that this diagram is identical to the previous one! And yet, this is not a misprint: the diagrams refer to different moments of the variation with the significant difference being that in each of them it is the other side's turn to move!

61...♗d8 62.♙xg6!

With this move White achieves two goals: he drives the knight to a bad position and avoids the creation of a black passed pawn on the kingside.

It is quite instructive that once the bishop has successfully fulfilled every possible little job, White has no regret in sacrificing it. In a certain sense, the same thing happened with the rook. After having taken every advantage of its presence, Fischer exchanged it in order to make further progress.

62...♖xg6 63.♗xb6 ♗d7

Or 63...♖e7 64.♗xa5.

64.♗xc5 ♖e7 65.b4 axb4 66.cxb4

Two connected pawns, an active king, and the weak pawns on the other wing; all this should be enough for a win.

66...♖c8

If Black concentrated only on the passed pawns with 66...♗c7 67.b5 ♗b7 68.a5 ♖c8 White would switch to the kingside: 69.♗d5!

67.a5 ♖d6 68.b5 ♖e4† 69.♗b6 ♗c8 70.♗c6 ♗b8 71.b6

1-0

In view of 71...♖xg3 72.a6 ♖e4 73.a7† ♗a8 74.b7† ♗xa7 75.♗c7 Taimanov resigned for the fourth consecutive time in the match.

If Taimanov could find some sort of excuse for all the previous defeats, such as "I was better at a certain moment!" or "It was a dead draw!" then this game certainly showed Fischer at his very best. Starting with the 24th move, his play was nothing short of perfect. (In the book *Russians vs. Fischer* Taimanov is quoted as saying that his opponent played with the resourcefulness of Sherlock Holmes and he could only spectate.)

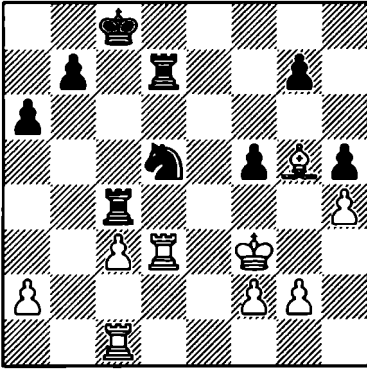
Another remarkable aspect is that he seemed to be so sure about his plan and the final result that not even once did he repeat moves in order to win some thinking time or approach the moment of adjournment. This clearly contradicts the general recommendations of the Soviet School, which apparently were made only for those up to the level of super grandmasters, but not for perfect players.

In the previous example the pawn structure was basically symmetrical. In the initial position neither player could create passed pawns on either wing. If the pawn structure is asymmetrical the bishop's superiority can show itself in even more impressive form. This long ranged piece can simultaneously support its own pawn majority (or passed pawn) and stop the opponent's pawns on the other wing.

This will be one of the main features of the next game although we shall soon notice some similarities with the previous example, too.

Robert James Fischer – Mikhail Tal
Candidates Tournament, Curacao 1962





Looking at the queenside, we could believe that Black has a good position. White's structure is rather weak and the white rooks seem to be doomed to defend the c3-pawn.

A deeper analysis would nevertheless reveal that there are certain details favouring White. First of all, his king is ready to infiltrate the enemy pawns as soon as the pressure on f4 is relieved.

On the other hand, the c3-pawn is not that important: Black would still need a lot of time to create a passed pawn after capturing it, while the black king does not really participate in the fight. In this light White's next move should not surprise us.

28.♖cd1! ♜xc3

The best chance. 28...♖b6 would fail to 29.♗e3 ♜xd3 30.♜xd3 when after both

30...♖d7 31.♗d4 and 30...♖a4 31.♗d4 the bishop would defend the c3-pawn, obstruct the fourth rank in order to allow ♖f4, and restrict the enemy knight. It is remarkable that the "weak" pawn proves itself useful, ensuring a strong outpost for the bishop.

29.♜xc3† ♖xc3 30.♜c1 ♜c7 31.♗f4 ♜c6

31...♜c5 would only transpose to the game in case of 32.♗d6 ♜c6 33.♗e5, while 32.♗d2 would probably be an even better alternative for White. For instance 32...♖e4 33.♜xc3† ♖xc3 34.♖f4 g6 35.f3 ♖e6† 36.♖e5 ♖d7 37.♖f6 ♖f8 38.♖f7 when the black kingside would be in serious danger.

32.♗e5

At the cost of one pawn, White has managed to improve the position of his pieces without loss of time.

32...♖d5

This is the best square for the knight, denying the white king access to f4.

Capturing the second pawn with 32...♖xa2 would leave the knight out of play and would have caused a rapid defeat after 33.♜xc6† bxc6 34.♗xg7 c5 35.♖f4 c4 36.♖xf5 c3 37.g4! c2 38.♗b2 hxg4 39.h5 and the white pawn will soon promote. Here we can see the bishop's ability to fulfil offensive and defensive missions at the same time.

Andrea Malfagia pointed out that the attempt to stop the advance of the white pawns with 38...♖d7 (instead of 38...hxg4) would fail to 39.gxh5! ♖e7 40.h6 ♖f7 41.h7 c1 ♜ 42.♗xc1 ♖g7 when White traps the isolated black knight with 43.♗d2! winning easily. For instance, 43...♖xh7 44.♖e6 a5 45.♖d5! ♖g6 46.f4 ♖f5 47.h5 a4 48.♖c4 and, while the white pawns defend each other, the white king would slowly "clear" what is left from the opposite wing.

33.♜d1!

Exchanging rooks with 33.♜xc6† bxc6 would make little sense now, since after 34.♗xg7 ♖d7 White would have no easy way to make progress.

The idea behind Fischer's move 33.♜d1! is to destabilize the knight.

33...♖f6?

The decisive mistake.

Under no circumstances should Tal have allowed the enemy king to infiltrate via f4. Therefore, retaining the knight on d5 with 33...♜c5 was essential when after 34.♗xg7 ♖d7 he could have stayed in the game. Fischer could then have tried to activate his rook with 35.♜e1 but after 35...♜a5 he should spend a tempo taking the a3-square under control with 36.♗f8 in order to meet 36...♜xa2 with 37.♜e5, winning the important f5-pawn. (After 36.♜e5 ♜a3† 37.♖e2 ♜xa2† the king cannot escape the checks).

However, compared to the previous note things would be much more complicated, due to the presence of rooks. By preserving his extra pawn

Tal probably hoped to keep trouble away, not realizing that very soon he would be reduced to total passivity.

34. ♖f4 g6

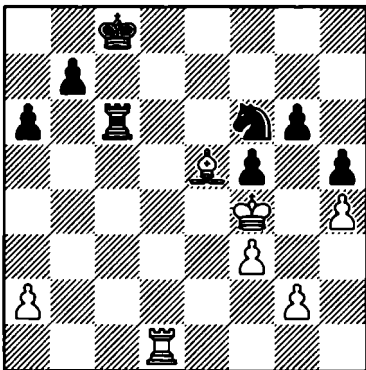
Black's counterattack starting with 34...♖c2 would have failed to 35.♗d4! (all the kingside pawns are important, since they are practical candidates for promotion) 35...♞xa2 36.♕xf5 b5 37.♗g6 and, compared to the previous note, the white king is much more active while his colleague is completely out of play. Besides, once again the bishop proves itself much stronger than the knight, acting both in defence and attack.

35. f3!

White takes control of some important squares, restricting the knight.

Black cannot take advantage yet of the weakness of the second rank, because the rook is tied down to the defence of the knight.

The kingside structure is very similar to the queenside configuration from the game Fischer-Taimanov. In fact, only a mirror-like reflection is needed in order to get a relation between the respective positions.



35... ♖d7

This is relatively the best way to prepare the second rank counterplay by freeing the rook from its defensive jobs. On the other hand, the knight will severely restrict its own king. A first consequence is that the white rook will no longer be needed on the d-file to cut off the enemy king,

Secondly, unexpected mating ideas with only a few pieces on the board become possible.

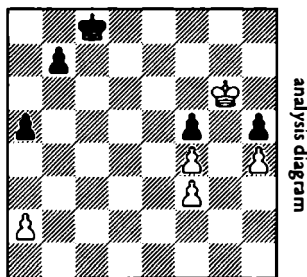
36. ♗d6 ♖c2 37. g3 ♖e2

The rook has to guard the e-file, in order to secure both the g6-pawn and the king. After 37...♞xa2 38.♞e1 (threatening mate in one) 38...♗d8 39.♖e6 all the black kingside pawns fall.

38. ♗g5 ♖e6 39. ♗f4

Preparing the exchange of rooks with ♗d6. 39...♖f8 40.♗d6 a5!

Although played under time pressure, this last move before the control is the best practical chance. I do not know whether Tal had time to calculate the following long variation or if he simply relied on his phenomenal intuition. Anyway, 41.♞xe6 would have only led to a draw after 41...♗xe6† 42.♗xg6 ♖xf4† 43.gxf4



43...b5 44.♕xf5 (44.♕xh5? would even lose to 44...b4 45.♗g6 a4 46.h5 b3 47.axb3 a3! 48.h6 a2 49.h7 a1 ♖ followed by ... ♖h8) 44...b4 45.♗e4 a4 46.♗d3 b3 47.axb3 axb3 48.♗c3 ♗d7 49.♗xb3 ♗e6 50.♗c3 ♗f5 51.♗d3 ♗xf4 52.♗e2 ♗g3 53.♗e3 ♗xh4.

Knowing the further course of the game, one could suggest that 40...b5 would have been a better way of preventing the immediate exchange of rooks, by clearing the b7-square for the king. However, after 41.♗h6 ♖e2 the a6-pawn would be hanging and White would eliminate forever any possible queenside danger with 42.♞xa6.

41. ♗h6 ♖e2 42. ♗d2 ♖e7

42...♖e6 would have allowed an elegant and very unexpected mate after 43.♗g7 ♖d7 44.♞c2† ♗d8 45.♗g5† ♗e8 46.♞c8.

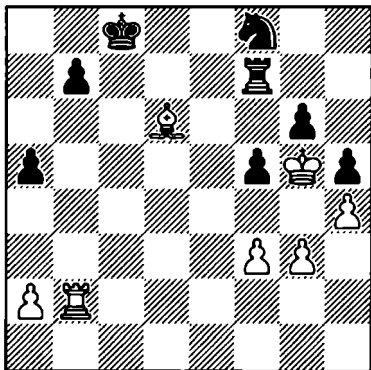
43.♙d6 ♖h7† 44.♗g5 ♜f7

Black has to stay passive.

A nice example of domination is the line 44...♖d7 45.♗xg6 ♖h8 46.♗g7 ♜e8 47.♗f7 ♜e1 (The black rook has only dark squares at its disposal, thus allowing a decisive discovery. 47...♗d8 would not have helped either because of 48.♙c7†, winning the rook anyway) 48.♜c2† ♗d8 49.♙c7† ♗c8 50.♙xa5† winning the black rook.

45.♞b2!

Tal somehow managed to defend his weaknesses, but Fischer creates an original zugzwang position. We can easily convince ourselves that any move simply loses material.



45...f4 46.♙xf4 ♜f5† 47.♗h6 b5 48.♙d6 b4

48...♜xf3 49.♜xb5 would have made things easier for White, as the black queenside majority would have been destroyed.

49.g4 ♜xf3 50.g5!

This pawn will be a very dangerous candidate for promotion.

50...♖e6

The only chance to confuse matters is to keep the minor pieces on the board.

51.♗xg6 ♜d3 52.♙e5 ♜e3 53.♗f5 ♖f8 54.♜g2!

Placing the rook behind the pawn and creating the threat of g6 (which was not possible immediately because of ...♖xg6!).

54...♜f3† 55.♙f4 ♗d7 56.g6 ♖e6 57.g7 ♜xf4†

After 57...♖xf4 58.♗e4 ♖xg2 59.♗xf3 ♖xh4†

White would play the accurate move 60.♗e4!, dominating the knight and allowing the pawn to advance unhindered.

58.♗e5 ♜f8 59.gxf8 ♖xf8 60.♗d5 a4 61.♜g7† ♗e8 62.♗d6 b3 63.a3!

White is not interested in exchanges on the queenside, since his rook will easily capture both enemy pawns. Therefore, Tal resigned.

1-0

Unfortunately, these two wonderful players did not have many chances to cross swords while at the top of their form. In Curacao, Tal was in very bad physical shape and had to withdraw from the tournament after having completed only three quarters of the games. At the previous edition of the Candidates Tournament the situation had been completely reversed: an inspired Mikhail Tal defeated the obviously talented but still green Fischer, then only 15, with the resounding score of 4-0...

The apparently "bad" bishop

In the previous section the bishop's superiority was obvious and could be deduced by applying some general criteria (such as higher mobility, the possibility of attacking the enemy pawns, etc.). We shall see now that such general principles should be handled with care.

Usually, the placement of one's own pawns on squares of the same colour as the bishop is considered unfavourable, especially if the pawns are blocked. In fact, this is the typical situation of a "bad" bishop, dominated by the enemy knight.

The examples included in this section will prove that things are, as always, relative. Surprisingly, the fact that a knight is not able to find a stable square will weigh more in the balance than the static factors.

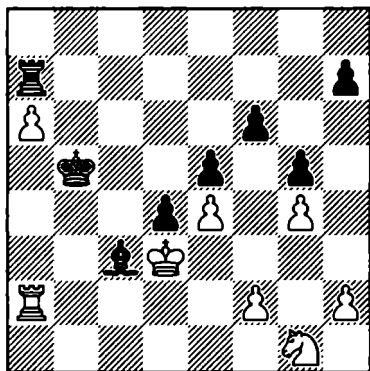
At the same time, the reader should be aware of the fact that if the player with a bishop has a spatial advantage in the centre we could hardly speak about a bad bishop. Although the pawns partially restrict the bishop's activity, there will be sufficient available diagonals left. This will be the case in both examined examples.

Besides, the presence of rooks will create the foundation for attacking ideas.

Here is a game of crucial importance for the history of chess.

Tigran Petrosian – Robert James Fischer

Candidates final (6), Buenos Aires 1971



42. ♖e2

This move was sealed before the adjournment. Since the loss of the a6-pawn is unavoidable, the position obviously favours Black.

And still, how serious are his winning chances? If we mechanically apply general endgame principles, we would conclude that White has a "good" knight compared with the "bad" black bishop and there should be no real problem in reaching a draw.

Nothing of the kind! The unsafe position of the king prevents, as we shall see, the knight's transfer to d3 (the perfect blockading square), d5 or at least c4, while the bishop "cuts" into White's position like a sharp knife.

In cooperation with the rook and the passed pawn, this bishop can create deadly threats. Therefore, all White can do is wait passively. Have we seen this before?

42... ♗a5

Black has to capture the pawn without trading rooks which, after a small regrouping like ♖c1 ♗e2, ♖d3, would lead to a draw. The problem is that the white knight would have enough squares

available to avoid zugzwang. For instance, after 42... ♗b4 43. ♖c1 ♖xa6 44. ♖xa6 ♗xa6 45. ♗e2 ♗b5 46. ♖d3 ♗c4 47. ♖3 ♗a3 Black would not be able to take under control all the eight squares available to the knight. Therefore, all White would have to do in order to maintain the fortress would be to move the knight back and forth with, for instance, 48. ♖f2 ♗c1 49. ♖d3.

43. ♖b2†

White could have tried to transfer the knight to one of the above mentioned squares with 43. ♖g3 Black would have had two possible ways to capture the pawn:

In a commentary published in the Soviet press of those times, Korchnoi suggests:

43... ♗xa6?

The question mark was attached by me, while Korchnoi gives it an exclamation mark.

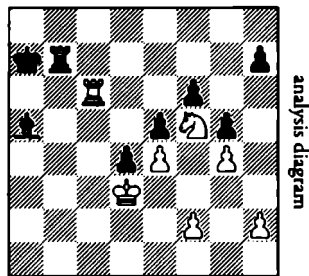
44. ♖f5 ♖c7

Black should be careful not to allow the activation of the white king; if White could coordinate his pieces the situation on the board could change dramatically. For instance: 44... ♖b7 45. ♖d6 ♖b3† 46. ♗c4 ♖c3† 47. ♗d5 d3 48. ♖c4 winning the bishop.

45. ♖c2

45. ♖d6 would allow a typical attack: 45... ♖c3† 46. ♗e2 d3† 47. ♗e3 d2† 48. ♗xd2 ♖a3† winning the rook.

45... ♖b7 46. ♖c6† ♗a7



Now Korchnoi's line, without mentioning any other possibilities, continues 47. ♖c5 ♗e1 48. ♗e2 ♗c3 and all of a sudden the white pieces have deserted their king, which will not be able to stand the combined attack of the rook,

bishop and d-pawn. However, after the more courageous

47.♞xf6 ♞b3† 48.♔c4

it seems to me that Black cannot win, mainly because of the passivity of his king.

I would recommend:

43...♞xa6!

keeping the king in an active position. Now, after

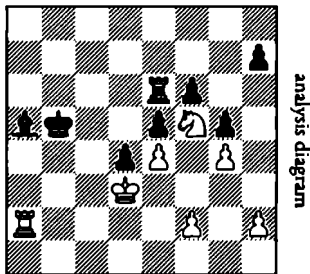
44.♖f5

Korchnoi only mentions two lines, both insufficient for a win, in order to reject the move 43...♞xa6:

a) 44...♞c6 45.♞c2 ♙c3 46.♖e7 ♞a6 47.♖d5 ♞a3 48.♖xc3† ♔b4 49.♞b2† ♔c5 50.♞c2 with a draw,

b) and 44...♔b4 45.♖e7 with a reasonable defensive position.

c) However, Black has the accurate move 44...♞e6!! at his disposal:



It is important to prevent the knight's access to the vital squares.

Play may continue:

45.♞a1

45.♖g7 would remove the knight from the favourable routes and would allow the black king to advance after 45...♞c6 46.♞c2 ♙c3 47.♖f5 ♔b4. 45.♞c2 would allow 45...♙c3 followed by ...♔b4.

45...♙b4!

The bishop now takes charge of the d6-and e7-squares, freeing the rook. At the same time, the king is defended against possible checks.

46.♞a7 ♞c6 47.♞b7† ♔a4 48.♞d7

The rook has to control the d-file, avoiding lines

like 48.♞xh7 ♞c3† 49.♔e2 d3† 50.♔e3 d2! winning the rook after a discovered check.

48...♞c3† 49.♔e2 ♔b3

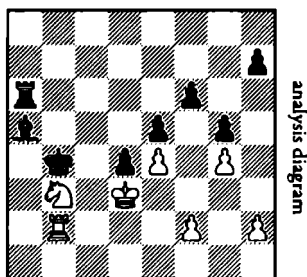
Planning ...♔c2. Now, although located on a rather aesthetic position, the knight seems to be worse off than on e2.

Another try to improve the knight's position, taking advantage of the fact that Black has yet to capture the pawn, would have been 43.♖c1 ♞xa6 44.♖b3 ♔b4 45.♞b2.

Both the rook and the pawn endings would be hopeless. Black has serious problems making progress, mainly because of the narrow space (only two files, a and b).

Throughout his analysis, Korchnoi correctly points out Petrosian's possible alternatives, but the lines and conclusions given by him are, unfortunately, not always as accurate. He now suggests two winning methods that, as far as I understand, are not convincing at all.

The only winning attempt that I was able to find is rather paradoxical, including the exchange of rooks at the right moment, when the knight is far enough from the key square d3. Under these circumstances the white king would not be able to block the pawn and prevent the infiltration of his rival through d1.



a) Korchnoi's first variation is 45...♙b6 (threatening ...♞a3) 46.♖xd4† ♔a3 47.♞b3† ♔a2 winning material. In fact, after 46.♖d2† ♔c5 47.♞c2† ♔d6 48.♖c4†, White regroup perfectly and is entitled to hope for a draw.

b) It is a better idea to avoid the discovered check with 45...♔a3. However, after 46.♖c5! Black is again at a crossroads:

b1) 46...♖xb2? is not enough in view of 47.♞xa6 ♖c1 48.♗e2 ♗c2 49.♞c5 and White was just in time to block the d-pawn and obtain a draw.

b2) Korchnoi's second line continues 46...♗c6 47.♞b3† ♗a2 48.♞b5 ♗b4 49.♞xb4 ♗xc5 50.♞b6 ♗c3†, but after 51.♗d2 the situation is not at all clear. By the way, what is the black king doing on a2? For instance 51...♞f3 52.♗e2 ♞f4 53.f3 d3† 54.♗e3 followed by ♞d6 and Black is definitely not winning.

b3) 46...♞b6!!

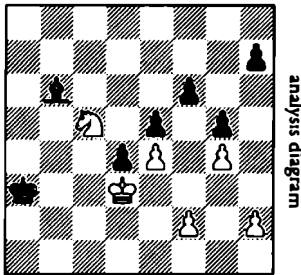
Here we are!

47.♞xb6

47.♗c2 ♗c3 would be rather passive for White.

47...♗b6.

After the exchange of rooks under unfavourable circumstances for White (the d3-square is not available), a very difficult fight lies ahead. Just as in the game Fischer–Taimanov, there are two almost independent scenarios, although the board is now cut horizontally (not vertically as was the case there). We shall have the pawn ending on the lower half of the board and the bishop's domination over the knight on the upper part.



48.♞d7

The knight should harass the bishop as much as possible. After the less ambitious 48.♞a6 best seems to be 48...♗b2 with similar ideas to the main line.

48...♗d8 49.♞c5

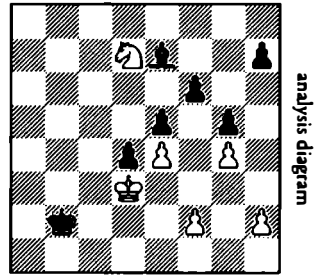
Desperately trying to establish communication between the knight and the rest of the position. After 49.♗d2 ♗b4! the knight would be in danger.

49...♗e7!

Black has to drive the knight away from the d3-square. 49...♗b2? 50.♗e2 followed by ♞d3 would draw for White.

50.♞d7 ♗b2!

The king aims for the e1-square.



51.♞b6

The white king alone can do very little against the invasion.

For instance, 51.♗d2 ♗b4† 52.♗d1 ♗c3 53.♞xf6 ♗d3 and it looks like White will lose most of his pawns. 54.♞xh7 is not possible in view of 54...♗e7, trapping the knight. Or 52.♗d3 ♗c1 53.♞xf6 ♗d1 with similar consequences. Andrea Malfagia felt like continuing the variation with a few more illustrative moves: 54.♞xh7 ♗e7 55.h4!! g4 56.g5 Paradoxically, the dominated knight is in turn dominating the squares the bishop needs in order to stop the enemy pawn. The racing pawns have about the same speed, but with a small difference revealed at the end of the next sequence: 56...h3 57.g6 h2 58.g7 h1♞ 59.g8♞ ♞f1 mate(!).

51...♗c1 52.♞d5

Hoping to reach the d3-square via b4. The immediate 52.♗e2 would lose instantly to 52...♗c2 followed by 53...d3†.

52...♗d8 53.♗e2 ♗a1!

At any cost, Black has to take the vital b4-square under control. 53...♗c2? would lead to a draw after 54.♞b4†.

54.♗d3

Before threatening to capture the f6-pawn, White has to safely block the d-pawn.

54...♔d1!

Black has certainly made progress, but there is still a lot of work to do. The endgame now acquires a clearly defined character.

55.♖xf6 ♕e1 56.♝xh7

This capture is now possible, due to the slightly different position of the bishop. Nevertheless, it cannot really save White.

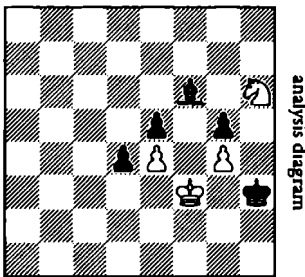
56...♗d8 57.♝f8

Here are some other attempts to obtain counterplay:

57.f4 gxf4 58.g5 f3 and Black will queen with check, winning, or 57.h4 gxh4 58.g5 h3 59.g6 h2 60.g7 h1 ♖h1 ♗f1† 62.♔c2 d3† queening the second pawn.

57...♔xf2 58.♖d7 ♗c7 59.♖c5 ♗d6 60.♖e6 ♗e7 61.♖g7 ♔g2 62.♖f5 ♗f6 63.♔e2 ♔xh2 64.♔f3 ♔h3 65.♖h6

White has managed to isolate the black king on the edge of the board, but now the passed pawn will finally advance.

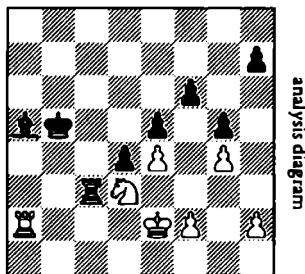


65...d3! 66.♔c3 ♗g7 67.♖f5 ♗f8 68.♔xd3 ♔xg4

Malfagia pointed out that a tempting idea would be 44.♔e2! ♗c6 45.♖d3 immediately achieving the optimal placement for the knight. He also provided extensive analysis proving that Black should win anyway.

Black should first of all play 45...♗c3 pinning the enemy king to the defence of the knight, which in turn cannot abandon the blockade because this would allow the decisive activation of the black rook. With the exception of the limited pawn moves, this leaves White with rook moves only. However, the rook is also submitted to a double restriction: it has to defend the c2-square and to control the

a-file at the same time, in order to prevent better coordination of the black forces. It is self-evident that Black has zugzwang ideas at his disposal.



a) As mentioned already, 46.♖e1 is not possible because of 46...♗h3 when the attempt to defend the kingside with 47.♖f3 fails to 47...d3† 48.♔e3 ♗b6† when White loses the knight.

b) The insertion of the moves 46.f3 h6 before moving the knight does not change too much, for instance 47.♖f2 (47.♖e1? ♗e3† and 47.♖b2 ♗c2† 48.♔d1 ♗xh2 are equally bad for White) 47...♗e3† 48.♔f1 ♗xf3 winning.

c) Unfortunately for him, White's pawn moves come quickly to an end. For instance:

46.h3 h6

But not 46...♗b3? 47.♗b2! and, once he exchanges rooks, White obtains an entirely reliable fortress.

47.f3 ♔b6!

The introduction to a triangulation designed to put White into zugzwang again.

48.♗b2† ♔c6 49.♗a2 ♔b5

Here it is! Black has passed the obligation to move to his opponent and the rook has to abandon its optimal a2-square.

50.♗d2

White's lack of coordination is revealed by the fact that 50.♖b2 leads to fatal interference on the second rank, allowing a rapid win after 50...♗c2† 51.♔d1 ♗d2† 52.♔c1 ♗c3.

50...♗a3 51.♗b2†

Too passive would be 51.♗c2 ♗c3 52.♖c1 ♔c4 53.♖d3 ♗a1 54.♖c1 ♗b1 55.♖d3 ♗h1 when the penetration of the rook to the kingside would soon conclude the game.

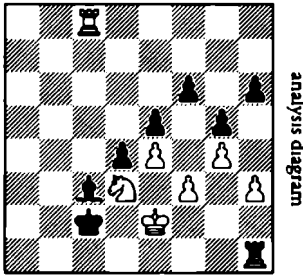
51...♖c4 52.♖b8 ♖a2!

Winning a crucial tempo.

53.♖b2 ♖a1 54.♖b8 ♖c1!

Building a bridge for the king's intended crossing of the c-file.

55.♖c8† ♖b3 56.♖b8† ♖c2 57.♖c8 ♖h1



58.♖b4†

White finally manages to activate his knight, but his counterplay will not compensate for abandoning the blockade.

58...♖b3 59.♖d5 ♖xh3 60.♖c6 ♖h2† 61.♖f1 ♖c2 62.♖xf6 ♖d1! 63.♖b6

Or 63.♖e6 ♖e1! 64.♖xe5 ♖f2† 65.♖g1 ♖xf3 and wins. After 63.♖g1 ♖c2! 64.♖xh6 d3! the passed pawn finally breaks through.

63...♖d2 64.♖g1

64.♖b1† doesn't save the game either after 64...♖c2 65.♖b6 d3.

64...♖e2 65.♖xh6 ♖e3† 66.♖xe3† dxe3

with an easily winning rook ending.

Many years ago, Larsen wrote, "In any long analysis there is at least one mistake." The lines given are by no means forced, but it is also not easy to find significant improvements for White. Anyway, I hope that I managed to illustrate well enough some typical aspects of the fascinating fight between knights and bishops.

I will now quote from Korchnoi's notes. (The paragraph I am quoting was placed in another moment of the game, but this is not important.) He refers to Fischer's decision to trade pieces on the 28th move, in a position with a substantial positional advantage. "If the resulting endgame is really winning, the exchanges initiated on move 28 are the result of an impressively deep conception."

Rather courageously, Korchnoi was the only top Soviet grandmaster to openly praise Fischer's play; the official policy was to diminish his merits.

43...♖xa6 44.♖b1 ♖c7

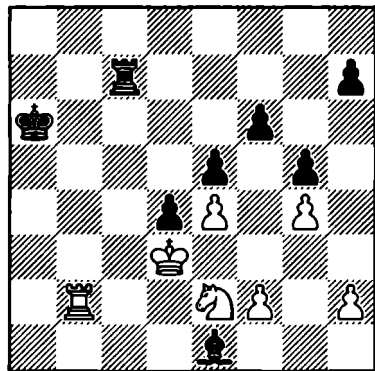
Black's plan is to advance with the king, since White controls all the penetrating squares of the rook. As we mentioned, the narrow space available creates serious practical problems. The king has to use the bishop as a shield but, since the b4-square is controlled by White, the formation ♖b5+♖b4 is not easy to achieve either.

45.♖b2

Korchnoi suggests 45.f3 as a possible improvement, "in order to avoid the regrouping of the black pieces!" In this case, Black would have had to use the plan mentioned in the next note, by all evidence it is sufficient for a win.

45...♖e1

In fact, this is a remarkable moment. In the final comments to the fourth game of the Fischer-Taimanov match I mentioned that Fischer was not the kind of player who would repeat moves to gain time for thinking or confuse the opponent. It would therefore be interesting to know what his thoughts were when playing 45...♖e1.



Did he already know that in case of the accurate 46.♖b1 he would have to retreat with the bishop and look for a different plan? Did he want to test Petrosian's nerves by attacking the f-pawn?

Most probably, we shall never know. However, in order to better understand the psychological

background, we should take into account that the game was played at one of the tensest moments of Fischer's career. After having crushed Taimanov and Larsen by 6-0, he found himself all square after five games of his match against Petrosian. Therefore, we can excuse him for this slight hesitation in a game where he finally had the chance to unbalance the situation.

46.f3?!

Black will now manage to regroup with ...♗b5 and ...♙b4.

46.♖b1!? deserved attention, for instance:

46...♙f2 47.♖f1 ♙e3 48.♖xf6† ♗b5 49.♖e6

Now Korchnoi analyses 49...♖a7 50.♖xe5† ♗b4 51.♙xd4 ♖a3† 52.♗e2 ♙xd4 53.♖xg5 with equality. In case of the exchange of rooks the endgame would be drawn since even if White loses all his pawns the favourable colour of the h1-corner, opposite to the bishop, would save him. At the same time, chances for a mating attack with rooks on the board are rather low. I have unsuccessfully tried to find an improvement for Black. For instance:

49...♙f4!? 50.♙xf4

Black threatened both the logical ...♖a7 and the trivial ...♙xh2.

50...♖c3† 51.♗d2 exf4 52.♖h6

and White is likely to survive. But not 52.♖e8? ♖h3 winning.

It is true that after 46.♖b1 Black can return with 46...♙a5 and after 47.♖b2 try another plan, this time one that is rather difficult to prevent: 47...♙b6 48.♖b1 ♖c5 49.♖a1† (White has to take over control of the a-file. 49.♖b2 would allow the activation of the black rook with 49...♖a5.) 49...♗b7 50.♖a2 ♖b5 followed by ...♗c6, ...♙c5, ...♖b1, ...♙b4 and Black seems to break through.

Malfagia felt like giving a more detailed illustration of this plan that I mentioned in the first English edition. He suggested:

51.♙c1?!

This denies the enemy rook access to b3 and aims for a fortress based on placing a knight on d3. In this case, the plan indicated by me, namely:

51...♗c6

Or 51...♖b1 52.♗c2 ♖b4 53.♙d3 ♖c4† 54.♗d2 ♖c3.

Now this would allow White play the defensive set-up with:

52.♖c2†! ♙c5 53.♗e2

With the idea to follow with ♙d3. But Black can deal with this with an adjustment of the initial plan. Malfagia indicated:

53...♗b7!

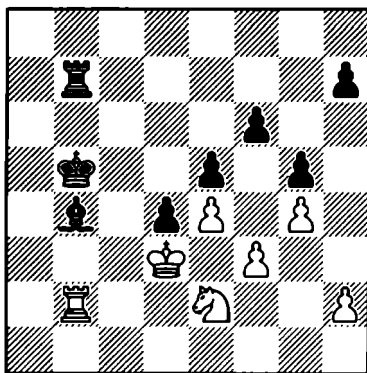
Covering the squares along the c-file against the enemy rook's invasion.

54.♙d3 ♙a3 55.♖a2 ♖b3

when the black king can finally advance, proving once again the validity of the motto "reculer pour mieux sauter"! (Editor's Note: This is a French proverb with a literal translation being "to step back in order to make a better leap forward".)

White's most natural reaction would be to take advantage of the relative slowness of Black's plan by generating kingside counterplay with 56.h4!? g4h4 57.♖a1. And yet, his initiative fails to save him by just one tempo after 57...♗b6! 58.♖h1 ♗b5 59.♖xh4 ♗c4 60.♖xh7 ♖xd3 61.♖c7† ♙c5 62.♖xc5† ♗xc5 63.♗xd3 when the pawn ending is losing because of 63...♗d6! (yet another retreat!) 64.f4 ♗e6 65.f5† ♗f7 and the white king cannot fight on two wings.

46...♗a5 47.♖c2 ♖b7 48.♖a2† ♗b5 49.♖b2† ♙b4



After the coordination of his pieces, Black has achieved a technically winning position. Using similar manoeuvres as before, the king will keep advancing shadowed by the bishop.

50.♖a2 ♖c7 51.♖a1 ♖c8 52.♖a7

Korchnoi suggests 52.♖a2. After a closer look we can notice that the practically forced line 52...♞c7 53.♖a1 ♘e7 54.♖a2 ♘b4 55.♞b2† ♘a3 56.♞b8 ♘b4 (once again b4 is the best square for the bishop) 57.♞b6 ♘b3 would have led to a similar position to that reached on the same, 57th, move of the game. Therefore, we cannot even talk about prolonging the resistance. In the final position of the variation, 58.♞xf6 would allow an immediate win: 58...♞c2!

52...♘a5 53.♞d7

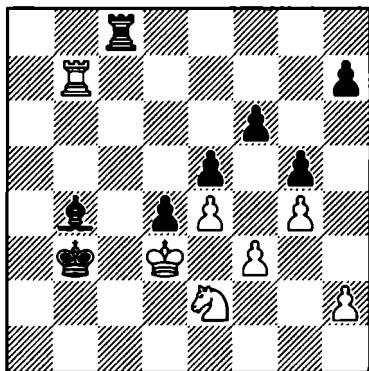
53.♞xh7 would have left Black with a free hand on the queenside, while the capture of the h-pawn would have little significance after 53...♞b6 54.♞f7 ♖a8 55.♞xf6 ♖a3† 56.♘d2 ♘a5† 57.♘d1 d3 58.♘c1 d2 and the pawn is unstoppable.

53...♞b6 54.♞d5† ♘c5 55.♘c1 ♘a4 56.♞d7 ♞b4 57.♘e2

Or 57.♖a7† ♘a5 58.♘e2 ♞b8 59.♘c2 ♞b5 followed by ...♘a3, ...♞c5, ...♘b3, etc.

As pointed out by Malfagia, the attempt to transfer the knight to d3 with 60.♘c1 would be strongly met by 60...♞c5† 61.♘b2 ♞c3 and the base of the pawn chain will fall.

57...♘b3 58.♞b7



58...♖a8 59.♞xh7

If the knight tried to help with 59.♘c1† then after 59...♘b2 60.♘e2 (nothing is changed by 60.♞xb4† ♘xc1 61.♞b3 ♖a2 and we shall soon see a case of a king decisively cutoff) 60...♖a3† 61.♘c4 d3 62.♞xb4† ♘c2 we would have

yet another example illustrating the knight's difficulties in fighting against advanced pawns.

59...♖a1 60.♘xd4†

There was nothing better left. The mating threat could also have been stopped by 60.♘g3 but 60...♖a2 (renewing the threat) 61.♘f1 ♞f2 would have led to the loss of the knight in even worse circumstances.

60...♞xd4 61.♞xd4 ♞d1† 62.♘e3 ♘c5† 63.♘e2 ♞h1 64.h4 ♘c4

Fischer avoids the rather naive trap 64...♞xh4? 65.♞xh4 g4 66.f4 h3 67.♘f1 ♘c4 68.g5 fxg5 69.fxg5 ♘d3 70.g6 ♘d4 71.g7 ♞xg7 (unfortunately, the bishop has to give up control of the g1-square before his king reaches the f3-square) 72.♘g1 and the white king reaches the safe corner.

65.h5 ♞h2† 66.♘e1 ♘d3

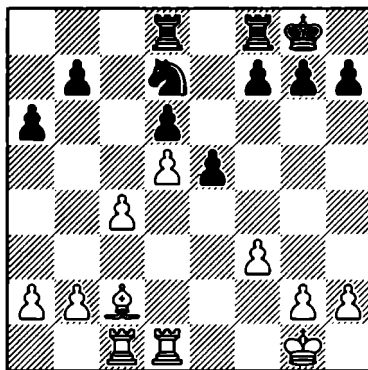
Threatening mate on the back rank, and in view of 67.♘f1 ♘e3 68.♞f7 ♘d4, White called it a day. 0-1

This game marked the decisive transformation in the match. Fischer immediately won three more games rather convincingly, reaching the *satisfactory* score of 6½-2½ thus obtaining the official right to challenge Spassky's world title.

The next game features a slightly different picture. The chains of pawns are only partially blocked, while the structure is asymmetrical.

Robert James Fischer – Hector Rossetto

Mar del Plata 1959



At first sight the endgame seems fairly comfortable for Black. The central pawn structure could suggest (as in the previous game) that the knight is no worse than the bishop. Besides, the central pawn majority would tell in the long run.

In fact, White has a very clear plan: advance the c-pawn, supported by its colleague from the b-file.

Black's main problem is that the knight has no stable blockading square at his disposal. For instance, the d7-square is of the same colour as the bishop. If he could play ...a5 and ...c5 everything would be perfect, but it is White's turn to move...

21. b4 g6

In order to ensure some stability for the knight, Black would need to take both f5- and a4-squares under control. Unfortunately for him, he has no time for it. For instance, after 21...a5 22.a3 axb4 23.axb4 ♖a8 White would be just in time to play 24.♗f5 maintaining his advantage.

As pointed out by Malfagia, there is no time to activate the knight on the other wing by means of 21...f5. After 22.♗a4 ♘f6 Black's plan to prevent the advance of the c-pawn by putting pressure on the d5-pawn fails to 23.c5!. The weakness of the b3-g8 diagonal renders the central pawn invulnerable.

22. ♗a4 b6

Rossetto takes preventive measures against White's queenside attack. 22...♘b6! would be no solution because of 23.♗b3 followed by c4-c5.

Black is also not prepared for an active operation such as 22...b5 23.cxb5 ♘b6 24.♗b3 axb5. The courageous advance of the b-pawn has left only weaknesses behind. After 25.♗c6 the knight would be obviously misplaced, while the bishop safely controls all the important weaknesses of the white queenside.

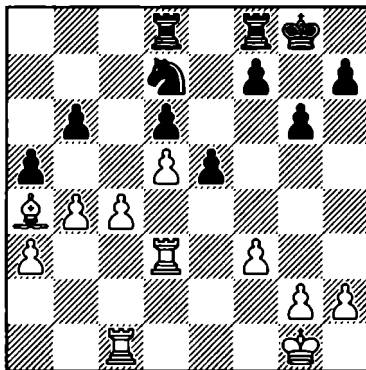
23. ♗d3

Making use of his spatial advantage, Fischer activates his rook along the third rank.

23...f5!?

An important inaccuracy, after which White's advantage becomes quite significant.

Fischer recommends the inclusion of the moves 23...a5 24.a3 (less precise would be 24.♗xd7?! ♗xd7 25.bxa5 bxa5 26.c5 dxc5 27.♗xc5 a4 when Black would have saving chances in the double rook ending).



And only now 24...f5.

Indeed, in order to play c4-c5 White would first have to exchange the minor pieces, which would leave Black with significant drawing chances.

However, things are not that simple. With his pieces concentrated in the centre and on the kingside, Black is not sufficiently well prepared to handle the tense queenside situation. He should avoid exchanging on b4, since after ♗c6 White would invade through the a-file. (Of course, things would be different if the f8-rook was placed on a8.) At the same time, the knight is practically immobilized on d7, in order to keep the c5-square under control.

Enjoying a space advantage and more mobile pieces, White could prepare the opening of the queenside at his convenience.

I believe that the move Fischer recommended, 24...f5, is not the best. Black prematurely weakens the e5-square and the position of his king. White can take advantage of these aspects with 25.♗e3! putting the e5-square under immediate pressure.

In case of the indifferent 25...♗g7 White would play 26.♗xd7 ♗xd7 27.bxa5 bxa5 28.c5 dxc5 29.♗xc5 winning a pawn and maintaining chances to harass the enemy king.

The only way to over-defend the e5-square is 25...f8 but this move puts the knight in an unpleasant pin, allowing White open the play under favourable circumstances with 26.c5! bxc5 27.bxc5.

Black faces an unpleasant dilemma:

a) 27...dxc5 allows White invade the seventh rank with 28.f3 e7 29.f7 f8 30.d6 g7 31.fcb1 with strong pressure. Now the careless 31...f6? would lose immediately to 32.fb8 fxb8 33.fxb8† f7 34.f3†.

b) The attempt to solve the positional problems by means of an exchange sacrifice with 27...fxc5!? 28.fxe8 fxe8 also leaves White with the better prospects because he would manage to occupy the open files on the queenside. For instance 29.fb1 d8 30.f5 a4 31.f6 f7 32.f3 g5 (unfortunately, the king cannot cross the sixth rank because of fxc5) 33.f4 h5 34.f6 g4 35.f6 followed by f5 and the activation of the king.

Instead of 24...f5, more prudent seems to be 24...g7 although refraining from f7-f5 would allow White to prepare his queenside play unhindered.

Play might continue:

25.f3 f6

This might be a better moment to play 25...f5 since the previously examined variation would not be possible any more. However, the weaknesses left behind by the f-pawn could tell after 26.fxd7 fxd7 27.fxa5 fxa5 28.f5 f8 29.a4. There are four rooks on the board and the white ones are the more active.

26.f6 h5

26...f7? is impossible because after 27.fxa5 fxa5 28.f7 the knight would be in a deadly pin.

27.f2 h4 28.fcb1 g5 29.f7

and soon the threat of fxa5 (eventually combined with fxd7) will become valid.

24.f3!

This is the difference! The white rook has this square at its disposal, forcing the knight to leave the d7-square, because of the threat fxd7 and fxa6.

24...f8

Black opts for passive defence. His queenside pawns would have been in danger after 24...f6

25.f6. Or 24...a5 25.fxa5 fxa5 26.f6! f6 (If 26...f8 then 27.f5 winning the a-pawn; or 26...f6 27.f6! fxc4? 28.f3 d2 29.f2 trapping the knight.) 27.fxa5 with a clear advantage (as indicated by Fischer).

25.c5 bxc5

After 25...b5 hoping to keep the position closed, Fischer gives the following winning plan: 26.f3 f7 27.f6 f7 28.f3 f7 29.a4 bxa4 30.fxa4 f7 31.f4 winning the a6-pawn.

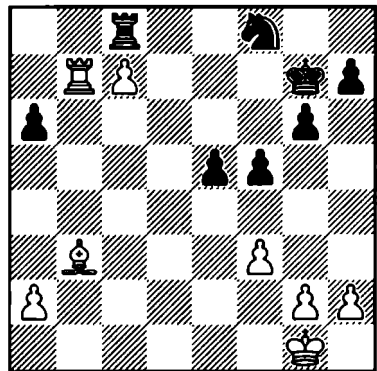
26.fxc5 dxc5 27.fxc5 f7

The attempt to get counterplay with 27...f7 28.f7 f6 would have failed to 29.f3 f8 (29...f5 loses the knight after 30.f5) 30.fxa6 fxd5 31.fxd5 fxd5 32.f7 and doubling the rooks on the seventh rank is, as usual, decisive.

28.f3 f7 29.d6 d7 30.f7 f6

30...f6 31.f7 f7 32.f7 f8 33.f3 (threatening f6) 33...f8 34.f8 f6 35.f8 fxc8 f6 and the pawn will cost Black a whole knight.

31.f7 f7 32.f7 f8 33.f3



A rather amusing zugzwang position. The knight cannot move because it would allow f6. Any king move would leave the knight undefended, allowing f8. Unblocking the c-pawn with a rook move would be met by the pawn promotion with a discovered check.

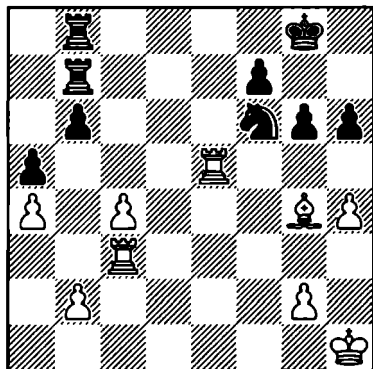
33...a5 34.a4 h6 35.h3 g5 36.g4 f7 37.f7 1-0

More about the relativity of the notions "bad" and "good" bishop

We have already seen that a bishop restricted by its own pawns is not necessarily a bad bishop. In the games examined in the previous section the bishop exerted long-term pressure on the enemy position in spite of the apparently unfavourable circumstances.

Sometimes the status of the minor pieces in such positions depends of just one tempo. In the next game a single hesitation was enough to determine the destruction of Black's position.

Robert James Fischer – Mark Taimanov Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970



If Black could manage to bring his knight to c5, he would probably be better. This is, however, not so easy to achieve and the white c-pawn will act as predicted by Nimzowitsch in his famous *My System*: "The passed pawn is a criminal, who should be kept under lock and key. Mild measures, such as police surveillance, are not sufficient."

40. ♖f3

Fischer places his pet bishop on a nice diagonal.

40... ♗d7?!

Taimanov had to take a difficult decision on the last move before the time control. 40... ♗c7, leaving the d7-square available to the knight, in view of its transfer to c5, was necessary. Taimanov

probably feared: 41. c5 (41. ♗b5 is not dangerous because of 41... ♗d7) but this would have been a lesser evil than the game continuation, since Black would have had the accurate 41... ♗d7?! at his disposal. (The slightly cooperative continuation 41... bxc5 42. ♗cxc5 ♗xc5 43. ♗xc5 ♗xb2 44. ♗xa5 ♗a2 45. ♖g1 followed by the transfer of the king to b1 might have given White some chances.) White could have maintained his initiative with 42. ♗e7 when play might have continued 42... ♖f8 (not 42... bxc5? 43. ♗d5 ♗f8 44. ♗f3 with a winning domination) 43. ♗ce3 bxc5.

White undoubtedly has adequate compensation, but the position is double edged. He cannot play the apparently decisive 44. ♗d5? because of 44... ♗b6!! and Black is suddenly winning!

After 40... ♗c7 another possible continuation, highlighted by Malfagia, is 41. b3?! defending the c4-pawn in an attempt to free the c3-rook from this task. However, after 41... ♗d7 42. ♗e7 ♖f8 43. ♗ce3 ♗bc8 44. ♗d5 ♗c5, Black manages to defend everything.

41. ♗b5!

After this preparatory move, the breakthrough will be very strong.

41... ♗d4

When placing his rook on the d-file, Taimanov might have counted on this apparently active move. If White was forced to defend his h-pawn with 42. g3 Black would take advantage of the weakness of the second rank with 42... ♗d2! (42... ♗d7? would be bad because of 43. c5! bxc5 44. ♗xb8† ♗xb8 45. ♗xc5 when the threats ♗c8† and ♗xa5 are quite unpleasant) and if 43. c5 then 43... ♗e8! threatening mate. After the practically forced 44. ♗c1 Black would first eliminate the queenside danger with 44... bxc5 and then start looking for the best way to continue the attack against the white king.

42. c5! ♗xh4†

Black has managed to win a pawn but, on the opposite wing, White will create a practically unstoppable passed pawn.

43. ♖g1 ♗b4 44. ♗xb4! axb4 45. ♗c4 bxc5

Black would fail to stabilize the queenside with 45... ♗d7 46. c6 ♗c5 because of 47. a5! destabilizing the knight.

46.♠c5 ♘g7

The attempt to activate the knight with 46...♠d7 fails to:

47.♠d5!

Keeping the crucial e5-square under control.

47...♠b6 48.♠b5 ♠d7 49.♠b7

With the terrible threat of advancing the a-pawn.

49...♠c5

What else? If 49...♠f8 then 50.a5 ♠c5 and now already 51.♠c6! ♠xb5 52.♠xb5 ♠e6 53.a6 ♠c7 54.a7 ♠e7 55.♠c6 winning the knight and the game.

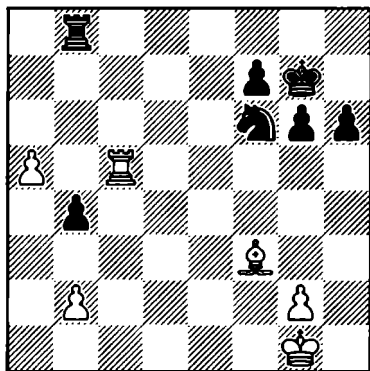
50.♠xc5 ♠xb7 51.♠b5!

Because of the passivity of his king, Black cannot capture on b5, thus losing the b4-pawn and, most probably, the game.

47.a5

We can see here the light-squared bishop at its best. By controlling the long diagonal it causes Black huge problems in the fight against the passed pawn. At the same time it safely defends the last remaining kingside pawn, in case of a later attacking attempt from Black.

Also, Black's material advantage has little significance, since the b4-pawn is hopelessly weak.



47...♠e8 48.♠c1 ♠e5 49.♠a1!

The rook hurries back to defend the first rank and support the passed pawn from behind.

49...♠e7 50.♠f2!

White throws his last reserves into the fight, in order to give maximum support to the a-pawn.

50...♠e8

Dominated by the bishop, the knight has to choose this passive route. The apparently more active

50...♠e4†

Would allow White to transpose to an easily winning rook ending with:

51.♠xe4 ♠xe4 52.a6 ♠e8 53.a7 ♠a8

When his king would be faster than Black's in the following race:

54.♠e3 ♠f6 55.♠d4 ♠e6 56.♠c5 ♠d7 57.♠b6 ♠c8 58.♠c1† ♠d7 59.♠b7

Winning the rook and the game.

51.a6 ♠a7 52.♠e3 ♠c7 53.♠b7

The triumph of the bishop.

53...♠e6 54.♠a5!

White takes the c5-square under control in order to prevent ...♠c5, which would attack for the second time both the bishop and the pawn. Now, 54...♠e8 would not be dangerous because of the simple 55.♠b5.

54...♠f6 55.♠d3 ♠e7 56.♠c4 ♠d6 57.♠d5†

The kings do not fight on equal terms. Unlike his opponent, White can use his active rook to get his king to the optimal squares. Even the start of the race had not been entirely fair. Being busy blocking the a-pawn, Black had to allow the white king to start the journey to the queenside first.

57...♠c7 58.♠b5

Black is helpless. As soon as he is checked along the c-file, he would have to allow the decisive ♠b6. Therefore, Taimanov resigned.

1-0

Soviet press criticized Fischer for childish attitude...

It is funny that the Soviet newspapers published articles criticizing Fischer for playing for a win at a time when he had already ensured qualification for the Candidates. Instead of appreciating the performance of winning the last eight games of the Interzonal (including the one we have just seen), the article claims that this was a highly unprofessional and rather childish attitude.

The ostentatious scepticism of the Soviet press was obviously caused by the fact that among Fischer's victims there were more and more Soviet players. However, this campaign did not help Fischer's next opponents on his way to the supreme throne (Taimanov, Petrosian, Spassky) who might have had problems taking seriously a player who was officially pictured as a big child.

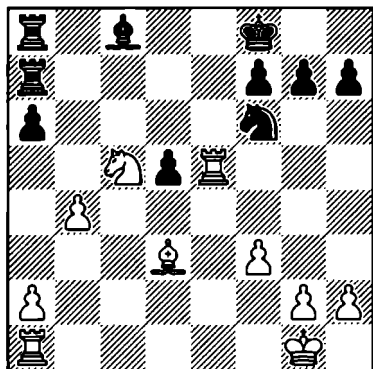
Another wave of criticism was raised by what the Soviets considered Fischer's straightforward and inflexible way of thinking. The next game is an excellent example of the American's flexibility in a highly controversial theme: good and bad bishops.

Robert James Fischer – Tigran Petrosian

Candidates final (7), Buenos Aires 1971



After the loss in the sixth game (see the section *The apparently bad bishop* on page 217) Petrosian was trailing by one point. He decided to play a solid, though somewhat passive, opening in order to make a draw and recover from the shock. Against another opponent he might well have succeeded, but once Fischer reached his best form there was no mortal able to stop him.



White's advantage is obvious. The black rooks are tied to defending the weak pawn, which cannot be advanced in view of a decisive b4-b5. The white minor pieces are also considerably more active than the black ones.

With his next move, Petrosian tries to correct this last detail.

21...♖d7 22.♜xd7†!

Deeply impressed by this move, Polugayevsky wrote:

"A characteristic moment for Fischer's creation. He light heartedly trades his strong knight for the passive black bishop, completely changing the character of the position. We shall see now the domination of the white bishop over the black knight. If White had played the natural 22.a4 (preventing 22...♖b5) Black would have continued 22...♖c6 followed by 23...♜d7."

We should also remember one of Tarrasch's rules:

It is not important which pieces you exchange but those that remain on the board!

22...♞xd7 23.♞c1

White controls both open lines, while Black's only pride, the d-pawn, is safely blocked. The immediate threat is ♞c6.

23...♞d6 24.♞c7

Although for the moment the rook does less harm on the seventh rank than on the sixth, it certainly puts Black under pressure.

24...♜d7 25.♞e2

Black cannot prevent the centralization of the white king, since his pieces have to defend the weaknesses.

25...g6 26.♝f2 h5 27.f4 h4

Polugayevsky recommends 27...♜b6 28.♞e7 ♞f6 but this would not have changed the fundamental nature of the position.

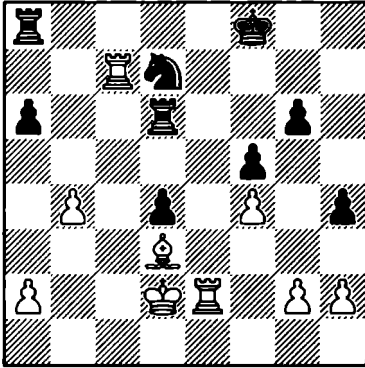
28.♝f3 ♝5!

Just weakening the position.

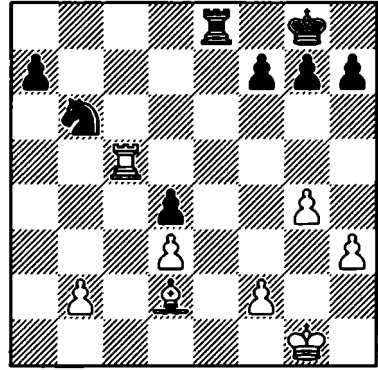
29.♝e3 d4†

Petrosian's desire to prevent the king from occupying the d4-square is quite understandable, but the advance of the pawn opens new diagonals for the bishop.

30.♝d2

**Robert James Fischer– Boris Spassky**

Return Match, Sveti Stefan/Belgrade (17) 1992

**30...♖b6**

Black already found himself in some sort of zugzwang.

On 30...♗f7 there could have followed 31.♞e5, taking advantage of the newly created pin and planning 32.♞a5 when Black has serious problems with the a6-pawn.

Activating the a8-rook with 30...♞b8 31.a3 ♞bb6 would seriously weaken the back rank, allowing 32.♞c8† ♗f7 (or 32...♗g7 33.♞e7† ♗f6 34.♞h7 with a similar picture) 33.♞c4† ♗f6 34.♞h8 when besides the banal ♞xh4 White also threatens ♞h7 with a mating attack.

31.♞ee7 ♖d5 32.♞f7† ♗e8 33.♞b7 ♖xb4 34.♞c4

1-0

Twenty years later

Time moved on and people started to forget Fischer. Then, all of a sudden, twenty years after his last official game, Fischer sat down again at the chessboard. Opposite him was his old rival, with whom he had kept close relations all these years: Boris Vasilievich Spassky.

The match was precisely what two formerly great players were supposed to offer: an impressive display of ideas, alternating with childish mistakes. And, of course, Fischer once again had the opportunity to play his favourite endgame, except this time he had the queen's bishop.

Due to the weakness of the a7- and d4-pawns (easier to attack and more difficult to defend than the b2- and d3-pawns!) White is clearly better. For the moment, the rook has to be prevented from getting to e2.

28.♗f1! ♖6

The next step is to restrict the black pieces to passivity.

29.♞a5

This is the optimal square for the rook. It not only attacks the a7-pawn but also keeps the kingside under serious pressure.

29...♞e7 30.♞b4 ♞d7 31.♞c5 ♗f7 32.♗e2

Suddenly, Black is in trouble. After the white king's centralization the d4-pawn will be lost.

32...g5!?

As usual in passive positions, choosing the optimal pawn structure is not easy. Should one allow the opponent to build up a considerable spatial advantage or prevent it at the cost of weakening one's own pawns?

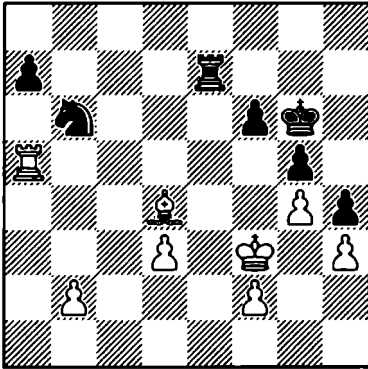
In fact, I am not entirely sure whether there exists such a thing as the best solution, since in such situations each concrete structure tends to have its drawbacks. It might be more a matter of style and inspiration.

With his last move Spassky decided to create kingside counterplay. The main drawback of this plan will become clear at a later stage.

Anyway, the neutral 32...♗e6 would have allowed White to consolidate his spatial advantage with 33.f4 g6 34.f5†!. Here we can see the efficiency of the white rook. 34...♗f7 35.♗f3 Besides, Black would have created a new dark-squared weakness anyway.

33.♗f3 ♖g6 34.♗e4 h5 35.♗xd4 ♖e7† 36.♗f3 h4

As a result of Black's kingside operation White will have to permanently worry about the weakness of the h3-pawn.



37.♗c5 ♖e1

Once again, Spassky prefers active defence. 37...♗d7 38.♗e4 would not have been especially appealing.

38.♖xa7 ♖d5

At the cost of a second pawn, Spassky has managed to place his pieces optimally. However, this is only a temporary achievement. With accurate play Fischer will restrict Black's activity.

39.♗f8

Suddenly, it appears that the black pawns form some sort of cage around their own king. This is precisely the drawback of Spassky's plan, initiated with 32...g5. The king's placement on g6 is not casual, since there was no other way to play h7-h5. Now the terrible threat of ♖g7† followed by a discovered check forces the enemy rook to retreat.

39...♖e8

39...♖h1 would have led to the loss of the knight after 40.♖g7† ♗h6 41.♗d7†, under less

favourable circumstances than in the game, since the white king would have been close enough to defend the kingside.

As pointed out by Malfagia, the attempt to give breathing space to the king with:

39...f5! 40.gxf5† ♗xf5 41.♖a5

This leads Black to complete passivity.

41...♗e6 42.♗h6 ♖e5

Or 42...♖f4 43.♗xg5 ♖xd3 44.♗hx4 ♖xb2 45.♗g4 winning. While 42...♖h1 43.♗xg5 ♖hx3† 44.♗e4 ♖f6† 45.♗d4 ♖g4 46.f4 ♖f3 47.f5†! ♖xf5 48.♖xf5 ♗xf5 49.♗hx4 is winning as well.

43.♖a6† ♗f5

Or 43...♗f7 44.d4 ♖f5† 45.♗e4 ♖e7 46.b4 ♖b5 47.♗d3 and, once the king is prepared to support the distant passed pawn, Black's fate will be sealed.

44.♗g7 ♖e7 45.♗d4 ♖f7 46.♗e3 ♖g7 47.d4 ♖g8 48.♖a5 ♗e6 49.b4

40.♗d6

From this square the bishop controls no fewer than four of the knight's possible jumps. In view of the weak h3-pawn the most important of them would be ...♖f4.

40...♖e6 41.♗d7 ♖b6

Black can do little more than try to disorganize White's pieces. The threat of advancing the b-pawn is rather strong.

42.♗d8 ♖d5 43.b4 ♖e1

Now that the white rook has been forced away from the seventh rank and ♗f8 is not such a terrible threat any more, the black rook obtains some freedom of action.

44.b5

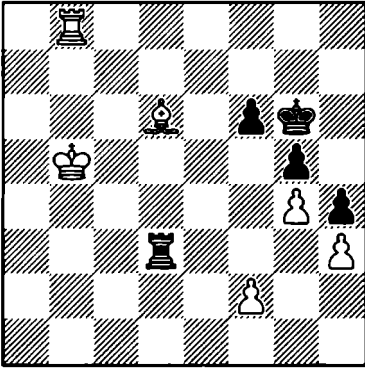
44.♗f8?! allows 44...♖f4 when 45.♗d7 would be parried with 45...♖e8 followed by ...♖xh3.

44...♖b1 45.♖b8 ♖b3 46.♗e4 ♖c3†

Not being able to stop the b-pawn by normal methods, Spassky chooses the best practical chance. By means of a well-calculated variation, he sacrifices the knight, hoping to eliminate all the remaining white pawns.

Of course, against Fischer this would have meant having to defend 50 moves with a rook vs. rook and bishop, but he does not even get there. His king will fall under a mating attack.

Winning the b5-pawn with 46.. ♖xb5 47. ♖xb5 ♖c3† 48. ♗d4 ♖xb5† 49. ♗c5 would have been hopeless, since the pawn could have been stopped only at the price of abandoning the whole structure of the kingside, nicely arranged on dark squares. 47. ♗d4 ♖xb5† 48. ♗c4 ♖c3† 49. ♗xb5 ♖xd3



50. ♗c6!

The white king is too far away to defend the pawns. Therefore, its next destination is the f7-square, in order to help build the mating net.

50... ♖xh3

Spassky hurries to start the pawn grabbing, but White's attack will be faster. After more than twenty years, the position is very similar to the final part of the game Petrosian–Fischer...

51. ♗d5 ♖f3 52. ♗e6! ♖xf2

Black had no time to advance the h-pawn because White would create decisive threats. For instance: 52...h3 53. ♖g8† ♗h7 54. ♗f7 h2!! (By sacrificing this pawn, Black hopes to win some time. After 54... ♖xf2 55. ♖g7† ♗h8 56. ♖g6 ♗h7 57. ♗f8 he would be mated.) 55. ♗xh2 ♖xf2 56. ♗d6 f5 57. ♖g7† ♗h6 58. ♖g6† ♗h7 59. ♖f6! f4 60. ♗f8 ♖h2 61. ♖f5 winning.

53. ♖g8† ♗h7 54. ♗f7 ♖a2 55. ♖g7† ♗h6

Black keeps the g6-square under control, since 55... ♗h8 56. ♗g6 followed by ♖b7 and ♗e7xf6† would obviously be hopeless.

56. ♗f8 ♖a7† 57. ♗xf6 ♖a6†

Exchanging rooks with 57... ♖xg7 would not help because after 58. ♗xg7† ♗h7 59. ♗f7 h3 the bishop stops the pawn with the simple 60. ♗e5.

58. ♗f7

1–0

And in view of the possible variation 58... ♖a7† 59. ♗g8 ♖xg7† 60. ♗xg7† ♗g6 61. ♗e5, Spassky resigned.

Karpov's Opposite Coloured Bishops Endings



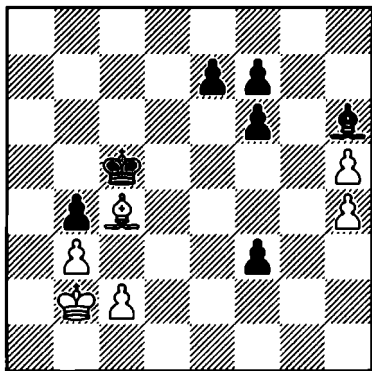
Opposite coloured bishops endgames have long been considered among the best refuges for the defending side in the middlegame. So many times one or even two extra pawns have proven insufficient for the win in such endings. Unlike the middlegame where opposite bishops only make things worse for the weaker side, in the endgame it is usually difficult to break the opponent's fortress, based on placing most of his pawns on squares of the same colour as his own bishop.

And yet there are many subtleties beyond the apparent simplicity of these kinds of positions. There is also a special magic in positions where bishops act in the same small world, but never actually meet. When Boris Spassky divorced from his first wife, he declared that they were just like two opposite bishops. What a beautiful metaphor!

Opposite coloured bishops endings have been a speciality of most of the top Romanian players. A possible explanation is that one of the most popular openings in Romania is the Benoni, which makes the probability of reaching such endings rather high.

Here is my favourite example:

George Grigore – Mihail Marin
Eforie 2002



The structure is rather unusual. During the middlegame and the complex endgame with rooks and opposite coloured bishops, the central mass of pawns offered a safe residence to the king (the pawn now placed on the f3-square spent most of his time on e5, coming from d6!) but lacked mobility. What an irony that in the end these clumsy looking pawns became unstoppable in their race to the last rank.

We shall notice more than once the perfect position of the black bishop on h6. It stops the enemy pawns and creates, together with the pawns, some sort of barrier in front of the white king.

40.c3 e5

An accurate move just before the control. However, it is worth mentioning that 40...f5 was probably just as good, with the possibility of transposing to the game.

41.cxb4† ♖xb4 42.♗d3

After half an hour of thinking, my opponent chose the most stubborn continuation.

42.♖c2 would have allowed Black to create a strong pawn formation on the opposite colour to his own bishop, just as in Philidor's recommendations, with:

42...e4 43.♗d5

There is no time for 43.♗f7 because of 43...e3 44.♗d1 e2† 45.♗e1 ♖c3 followed by ...♗d2 and ...e1♙.

43...f5 44.♗d1

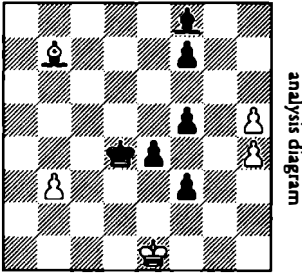
Or 44.♗b7 f2 45.♗a6 f4 followed by ...f3 winning. Quite an instructive position: the white king will have to stay on d1 and the bishop will be limited to the f1–a6 diagonal. With the help of zugzwang, the black king will capture all the pawns and then go to g2.

44...♖c3 45.♗e1

Or 45.♗xf7 e3 46.♗c4 e2† and, after the exchanges on e2, the bishop on h6 will safely defend his own pawn while stopping the enemy ones.

45...♗d4 46.♗b7 ♗f8!





An important move, suggested by Dr Lucian Vasilescu while I was showing him the game in a very relaxed mood on the beach of the Black Sea. A bishop can fight against two separated enemy pawns if they are not too advanced (more precisely, if each of them has to cross more than two squares of the same colour as the bishop).

47.♙f2 ♗e5 48.♗g3 ♖b4 49.h6

It is too late for counterplay, but 49.♙f2 also fails to save the day because of 49...♙f4 50.♖a6 e3† 51.♙f1 ♗e5 and the black king and bishop can share the jobs of stopping and then capturing the white pawns, while the white pieces are stuck to their defensive tasks.

49...♖e1† 50.♗h2 ♙f4 51.h7 ♖c3

Followed by e3-e2-e1♙ winning.

42...f2 43.♗c2 f5!

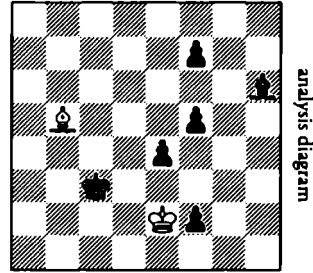
Intuitively, I thought that this was the only winning move. During the game I calculated: 43...e4 (which would drive the bishop to the good c4-square from where it would defend the b3-pawn) 44.♖c4 f5 45.♙d1 f4 46.♗e2 f5 47.♖e6 ♗c3 48.♖xf5 ♗d4 (48...e3 would allow a blockade on the light squares, starting with 49.♖e4) 49.♙xf2 and Black cannot prevent his pawns from being blockaded on dark squares and stop the white pawns at the same time. However, as John Shaw has pointed out, 48...f3† 49.♙xf2 e3† is winning, since after 50.♙xf3 ♗e2 the last remaining black pawn is unstoppable.

44.♙d1

There is no time for 44.♖c4: 44...f4 45.♙d1 f3 followed by e5-e4-e3, as in a previous note.

44...♙xb3 45.♗e2 e4 46.♖b5 ♗c3

As strange as it might seem, White loses this position only because of his pawns on the h-file! Try to imagine the position without these useless pawns.



After the study-like 47.♙f1!! followed by transferring the bishop to the long diagonal, White would reach a draw with the help of stalemate. Let us try to follow Black's winning attempt:

a pawn has to be pushed to f3 and then, with the king on f4 follow up with e4-e3, threatening the deadly e3-e2. What a pity that right at that moment White would have ♖xf3!

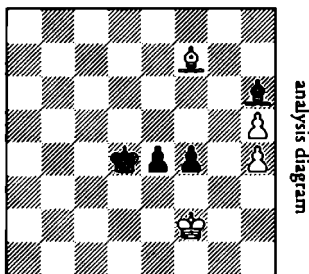
With the white pawns on the h-file, Black can unblock them at the right moment, thus having time to proceed with e4-e3-e2. This might seem a bit cruel and unfair for White, but if those pawns had not been there in the initial position, Black would probably have had time to sacrifice his f-pawn (f2-f1), since the bishop would have guarded the b3-pawn and the king would have had more freedom of action.

47.♖e8 f1♙†

When I started analysing this endgame, with the secret thought of publishing it as a rare case of a study-like practical position, I hoped with all my heart that my 47th move was the only winning way. For a while, to my bitter disappointment, I managed to find a winning plan for Black in the position with equal pawns (!) arising after 47...f6 48.♖g6 ♗d4 49.♖xf5 ♗e5 50.♖d7 f5 51.♙xf2.

Or:

47...♗d4 48.♖xf7 f4 49.♙xf2



In order to better understand the position, let us make some theoretical considerations, removing, for the moment, the white h-pawns. The only efficient method of fighting against connected pawns in such endgames is to place the bishop on a square where it would attack one of the pawns, controlling at the same time the square in front of its colleague. (In our specific case, the bishop should stay on g2-h1 and the king on e2.) This way, the black king would be severely restricted and no further improvement of the position would be possible. However, such a set-up is impossible to achieve from our position.

Let us now place the white bishop on the d1-h5 diagonal to see whether there is a difference. We can notice that the f3-square is under control, but the e4-pawn is not attacked. Black would bring his bishop to h4, forcing the king to g2 (or e2) and then march with his own king to e3 (or g3) in order to support f4-f3. Once the pawns reach the third rank there would be no saving chance at all: placing the bishop on d1 with the king on f1 would be of no use, because White would get into zugzwang. Black would make a waiting move with the bishop on the e1-h4 diagonal.

Let us try to see whether the presence of the h-pawns can influence the outcome of the battle with the black pawns on the third rank. It is very probable that, in order to advance his connected pawns, Black would have to allow a white pawn to advance to h7. White would keep his bishop on the f1-a6 diagonal and the king on the f1- and e1-squares. Under these

circumstances, placing the bishop on c3 would not bring a win to Black. Suppose the king would march to h6 (in order to capture the pawn and reduce the endgame to a theoretical one) or to b4 (in order to win right away). Black would play the unexpected ...♙e2! and after ...fxc2, ♖xe2 ...♙d4 (the king is too far away to defend the pawn) h8♚ the game would end in a draw.

Black can be trickier than that: he can place the bishop on d4 (preventively defending the e3-pawn) and then go with the king to h6. ♙e2 would be of little use now, in view of ...fxc2 followed by ...♜xh7. If ♜h6 would be answered by ♙d3, then ♜g7 would create a zugzwang position: the h7-pawn would be lost and with it the game.

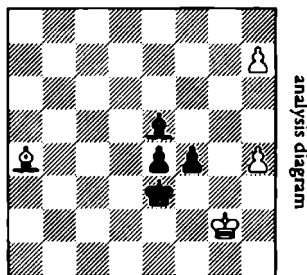
Now we are ready to investigate the position with the pawns on the fourth rank and the h-pawns on the board.

49...♜e5 50.♙b3 ♙f8 51.♙d1 ♙c5† 52.♜g2 ♜d4
53.h6 ♜e3 54.h7 ♙d4 55.♙a4

The bishop hurries to a better position under the newly created circumstances.

55...♙e5

55...f3† 56.♜g3 would make no difference.



56.♜h3!

The start of effective counterplay. 56.♙b5 f3† followed by ...♜f4 would allow the pawns to advance to the third rank.

56...f3 57.♜g4!

This was the hardest move to find in the whole analysis. The idea is to prevent the black king from being installed on f4, after which e4-e3 would win as explained.

57...♔d4

Placing the bishop on a more active and less exposed position.

58.♘b5 ♘d2

58...♗f2 59.♙c6 would lead nowhere.

59.♙c6 f2 60.♘b5 e3 61.♙f3

Without the white pawns, this position would have been easily winning since after 61...♗e1

Black would have had no adequate defence against the two different threats, f2-f1 and e3-e2. However, in our concrete case, Black draws with:

62.h8♙ ♔xh8 63.♗xe3

My final conclusion is that it was essential for Black to keep his f7-pawn and f2-f1 was the only winning move.

48.♗xf1 ♘d3

This square is of maximal efficiency: the king defends the e4-pawn and controls the e2-square.

49.♗f2

White has no time to capture the pawn: 49.♙xf7 e3 followed by ...e2 and ...♔d2. Keeping a third pawn on the board makes the win easy, because not even the sacrifice of the white bishop for the pawns could guarantee the draw.

49...f6

According to my wife, who witnessed this part of the game, the last move provoked a strange grimace on my opponent's face. Maybe he had in mind that 49...♗d2 was also winning, and considered my move to be pure snobbery, but I had already foreseen another regrouping.

50.♔d7 f4 51.♙f5 ♘d4 52.♙g6 ♗e5 53.♙e8 f3

54.♗g3 f5 55.♔d7 ♔d2 56.♗f2

Or 56.♙c6 ♔e1† 57.♗h2 ♗f4 followed by ...♙c3 and e3-e2.

56...♗f4

0-1

In order to win an apparently drawish opposite coloured bishops ending one needs a natural talent for long term planning, the ability to maintain the tension in equal positions and elevated technical accuracy. Keeping these qualities in mind, we could hardly dream of a better model than the twelfth World Champion, Anatoly Evgenyevich Karpov.

Just like most Romanian teenagers of my generation, I did not appreciate Karpov's merits as a player at the very beginning of his glorious era. The reason was that we were all tempted to associate his image with that of the oppressive Soviet empire. Who else had ever received such unlimited support from the government in order to bring the world title back to the big red motherland?

And yet, with the passing years these feelings lost some of their intensity. Little by little I understood that in chess, like in art, the most important thing is the final result, embodied in the games and analysis, and not events behind the scenes.

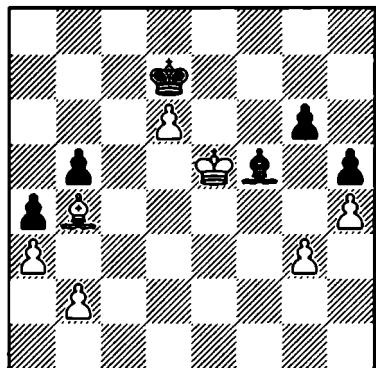
I cannot help regretting the fact that I did not start studying Karpov's masterpieces earlier. But, as they say, it is better late than never. This chapter is the result of an investigation carried out many years after the twelfth champion's peak of form.

Pure opposite coloured bishops endings

In the absence of any other pieces and with a normal pawn structure, the presence of opposite coloured bishops is usually a safe warranty against troubles, even in the case of a minimal material disadvantage.

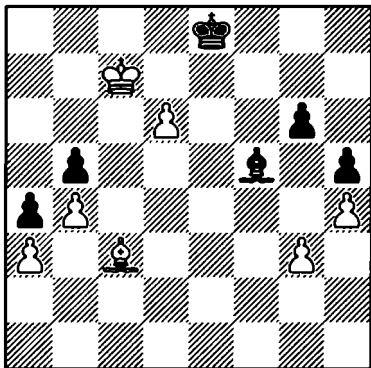
In his monumental endgame Encyclopaedia, Yuri Averbakh identifies three archetypical drawn positions.

The first archetypical drawn position



This is the simplest situation. The black king safely blocks the passed pawn, while the bishop defends with success all the weak pawns. White cannot do anything to confuse his opponent.

The second archetypal drawn position



Here, both black pieces cooperate to stop the enemy pawn. At the same time, the bishop has to defend all the pawns. Some accuracy is needed in order not to lose coordination. For instance, after 1.♖b6

the only correct move is

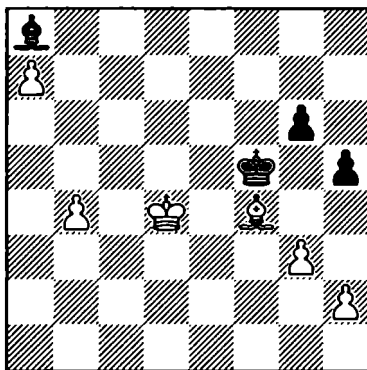
1...♗d7!

while 1...♗d3? loses to 2.♖c6 and, in order to stop the d-pawn, Black has to give up the b5-pawn.



In endings with opposite coloured bishops the advance of the passed pawns can only be supported by the king. Therefore, if the defending side could create a barrier in front of the enemy king, by a combined effort of both his pieces, he would achieve a draw. Remember, these positions should help for guidance but, as we shall see, one should relate to them in a creative way. Let's look at:

The third archetypal drawn position



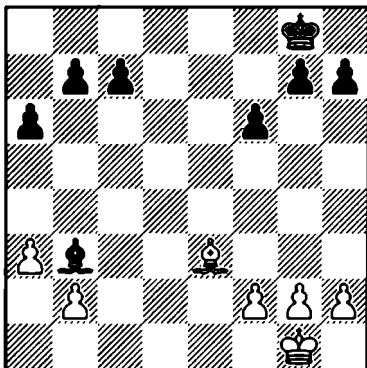
White cannot win. Black will create a dynamic barrier along the h2-b8 and h1-a8 diagonals.

1.♖c5 ♕e6 2.♖b6 ♕d7 3.b5 ♖c8!

Here, too, accuracy is needed. For instance, 3...♗f3 would lose to 4.a8♖! ♗xa8 5.♖a7 ♗f3 because the king would manage to cross the barrier with 6.♖b8! White wins after 6...♗g2 7.b6 ♖c6 8.♖a7! followed by 9.b7, but not 8.b7? ♖b6 when Black wins the pawn.

Lubomir Ljubojevic – Anatoly Karpov

Milan 1975



The position is obviously drawn. It is nevertheless instructive to follow how White,

a very strong player with a remarkable talent, committed slight inaccuracies that were severely punished by Karpov's iron technique. This ending is a remarkable example of what catastrophe can happen by not knowing the archetypical drawn positions.

26.f3

In such endgames a general rule is that the defending side should arrange his pawns on squares of the same colour as his own bishop, in order to avoid creating new weaknesses. This was stated by Averbakh as early as 1954 and then reformulated by most authors of endgame books.

White already has potential problems on the queenside where Black has chances to create a passed pawn. This alone would not be enough for a win. Black needs to keep his opponent busy on the other side, too.

The simplest defensive plan, in the spirit of Averbakh's first typical drawing position, would be to protect the queenside with the king and the other wing with the bishop, but this is impossible if the kingside pawns are on light squares. In order to avoid a second weakness, preferable would have been:

26.h4 ♖f7

Black could try to prevent White's king from following his natural trip to the centre via f1 by 26...♙c4 but then the white pawns on the queenside, with the help of the bishop, could block the black majority: 27.♙f4 c6 28.a4 ♖f7 29.a5 ♙e6 30.b4 ♗d5 31.g3 with a draw. We can see now how important it is for Black to keep his bishop on b3: it prevents the pawns from advancing and preserves the weak b3-square for the king.

27.♙f4 c6 **28.♙d6** ♙e6 **29.♙f8** g5!

Black tries to create some asymmetry on the kingside; 29...g6 would not offer too many chances: 30.♖f1 ♗d5 31.♙e1 ♗c4 32.♗d2 ♙a4 33.g3 ♗b3 34.♗c1 b6 35.♙g7 f5 and Black cannot make any progress, since the king has already arrived at c1.

30.g3 ♗f5 **31.♙e7!**

White would create unnecessary problems with the careless 31.♖f1? g4 32.g4 ♗g4 33.♙e7 ♗xh4 34.♙xf6† ♗g4 and Black would

have a passed pawn on the kingside and a majority on the other wing; it could be enough for a win.

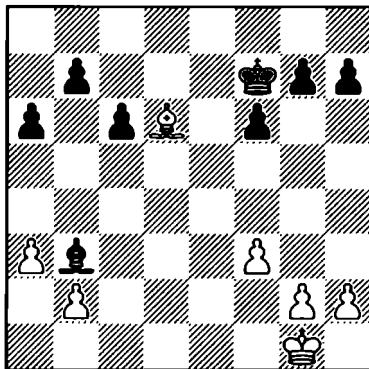
31...g4 **32.gxh4**

Black cannot make progress.

26...♗f7 **27.♙f4**

27.♗f2 was, of course, more natural.

27...c6 **28.♙d6**



28...♙e6 **29.♙f8**

Not really necessary but Ljubojevic seems to have imagined a mistaken defensive plan, where the bishop defends the queenside. This is a natural explanation of his obsession with the long diagonal. Quite good would have been 29.♙c7 ♗d5 30.♖f2 ♗c4 31.♙e2 ♙a4 32.♗d2 ♗b3 33.♗c1 with a draw.

29...g6 **30.♖f2** a5 **31.♙e3** **b6** **32.h4** c5

The attacking side can put his pawns on squares of the same colour as the enemy's bishops, in order to restrict it. The f8-bishop seems to be in a sort of trap, but the danger is more of a psychological nature by now.

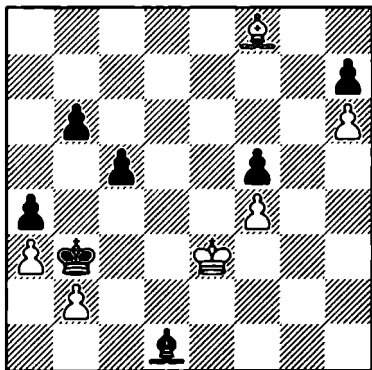
33.g4 ♙d1

The bishop takes in his visor the enemy pawns.

34.♙e4 a4 **35.h5!?**

This is already asking for trouble. The simple 35.g5 followed by f4 would have achieved a comfortable form of Averbakh's first drawn position.

35...gxh5 **36.gxh5** f5† **37.♙e3** ♗d5 **38.h6** ♗c4 **39.f4** ♗b3



Because of the weakness of the f- and h-pawns, which Ljubojevic had created voluntarily, White seems to lack just one tempo for the saving regrouping.

40. ♖g7?

This seems to be the losing move but it is, at the same time, White's only excusable mistake in this game! After the previous childish inaccuracies drastic measures were now needed:

40. ♖d2 ♗xb2

After 40... ♖f3 41. ♖c1 White reaches a safe position.

41. ♗xd1 c4!?

This move requires very precise defence; 41... ♗xa3 would not be enough either: 42. ♖c2 ♗b4 43. ♖b2 b5 44. ♖e7 ♖c4 45. ♗a3 It is the weakness of the a-pawn that prevents Black from winning. 45... ♖d4 46. ♖d6 c4 47. ♗b4 ♖d3 48. ♖e5 and Black cannot make progress.

42. ♖g7† c3 43. ♖e2!

A passive strategy would lead to defeat: 43. ♖e5 b5 44. ♖f6 The bishop cannot take under control the b4-square, because this would allow c2-c1=Q 44... b4 45. ♗xb4 a3 46. ♖xc3† ♗xc3 47. ♖c1 a2 and the pawn is unstoppable.

43... ♖c2 44. ♖e3!

Once again the only move. Bad would be 44. ♖e5 b5 45. ♖d6 ♗b1 winning.

44... b5 45. ♖d4

and White is just in time. The race might

continue: 45... ♖d2 46. ♖c5 c2 47. ♖b2 c1 ♗† 48. ♖xc1† ♗xc1 49. ♗xb5 ♖d2 50. ♗xa4 ♖e3 51. ♖b3 ♗xf4 52. a4

With a probable draw. Of course, it was not easy for Ljubojevic to decide to enter such lines, especially if he believed that the bishop could safely defend the queenside.

I shall allow myself a short digression. When, several years ago, I started studying endgames intensively this was one of the first games I analysed by myself. For some unclear reasons I was convinced that not many players in the world dedicate much time to this interesting phase of the game, because of their obsession regarding the opening.

Now I believe that I was wrong. Shortly before sending the material of this book for final revision I found out that a certain Villeneuve had independently analysed this very endgame and drawn very similar conclusions. I cannot suspect him of knowing my articles, since they were published only in Romanian and in Swedish. (This comment was made for the first English edition. Later I found out that Villeneuve had an even better reason for not being aware of my analysis: he had published his work some 20 years earlier...)

The good news is that all around the world there are people who enjoy working on endgames!

40... ♗c2

The white king is cut off from the queenside. It has to defend some pawns that are actually not under attack...

41. ♖e5 ♖h5

Before taking action, Karpov improves the position of his bishop. It is remarkable that the c5-pawn restricts not only the white bishop but also the white king.

42. ♖f6

Another instructive line would be 42. ♖c7 ♗xb2 (42... b5!?) 43. ♖xb6 c4 44. ♖c5 defending the a-pawn. 44... c3 45. ♖d4 Hoping to trade the a-pawn for the c-pawn. 45... ♖b3 46. ♖d3 c2 47. ♖d2 ♖d1! Defending the pawn and creating the threats ... ♗xa3 or, if White defends the a3-pawn, ... ♖b2. 48. ♖c1 ♗xa3 49. ♖e5 ♖b3 50. ♖d4 a3 51. ♖e5 a2 52. ♖d4 ♖c4 53. ♖e5 ♖d5

and the king will go to g6, in order to trade the a2-pawn for the h6-pawn, thus reaching a winning ending.

42...♙f7 43.♙e5 ♖b3

Black prepares the advance of the pawns, supported by the king and by the bishop. The position is probably winning already.

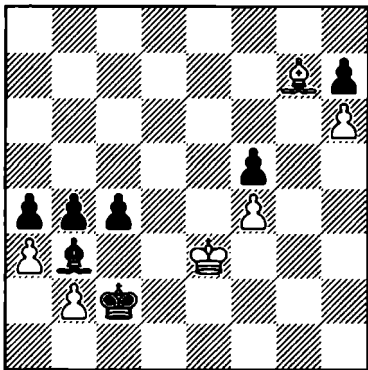
44.♙g7 b5 45.♙f8

If the bishop moves along the long diagonal with 45.♙e5, Black would play 45...b4 creating the threat c5-c4 as in the game, and if 46.axb4 cxb4 then White would have to sacrifice the bishop for the a-pawn.

45...c4 46.♙g7

46.♙b4 ♖xb2 47.♙d2 (or 47.♙d4 c3 48.♙xc3† ♖xa3 49.♙c5 ♙c4 followed by ...♙b3, ...a3, etc.) 47...c3† 48.♙xc3† ♖xa3 followed by b4; at best White would be able to sacrifice the bishop for both black pawns, but then the pawns left on the other side would decide.

46...b4!



White lacks one tempo to reach the saving square c3.

47.♙d4

The more spectacular line is:

47.axb4 c3 48.bxc3

Or 48.♙xc3 a3 49.bxa3 ♖xc3 winning.

48...♙c4!

After this elegant blocking move, the a-pawn is unstoppable.

49.b5

The best chance. If 49.♙d4 a3 50.♙xc4 a2 with an easy win, but not 49...♙b3? 50.b5!

49...a3!

There is no way back: 49...♙xb5? 50.♙d4 a3 51.c4 a2 52.♙d5 ♙a6 53.c5 ♖b1 54.c6 a1♙ 55.♙xa1 ♖xa1 56.♙e6 ♙c8† 57.♙f7 and White is suddenly winning!

50.b6 a2 51.b7 a1♙ 52.b8♙

White has managed to promote the pawn right after the black one but, just like in a study, there is a mating net around the king:

52...♙g1† 53.♙f3 ♙d5† 54.♙e2 ♙d1† 55.♙f2 ♙f3† 56.♙e1 ♙g3†

56...♙c4 with the deadly threats ...♙f1 or ...♙e2 is also playable.

57.♙f1 ♙c4 mate.

47...c3

The rest is easy.

48.bxc3 bxa3 49.c4 a2 50.♙c5 ♖b1 51.♙b4 a1♙ 52.♙xa1 ♖xa1 53.c5 ♖b2 54.c6 a3 55.c7 ♙e6 56.♙c5 a2 57.♙d6 ♙c8 0-1

It is remarkable that such a talented player can lose an easy endgame like this. Or maybe there is no such thing as an “easy” endgame?

In any case, Matanovich's annotations in *Informant* No. 20 on the final part of the game are of a general nature while the very few lines given are incorrect or at least incomplete. This might mean that the average time used to annotate a game does not allow understanding all the subtleties of the position.

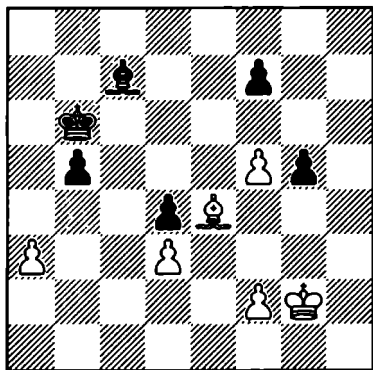
Leaving aside speculation, we can conclude that White lost mainly because he did not follow the right plan: that of achieving the first type of drawn position mentioned by Averbakh. However, before resorting to this generally safe defensive method, one should be sure that the pawn structure allows it.

By contrast to Ljubojevic, White lost the following ending precisely because he mechanically aimed for such a defensive position in a situation that did not make it suitable. True, the fragment is taken from a rapid game and, although both players are quite good at this rhythm of play, we cannot really

blame White for repeatedly failing to hit on the right solution.

Although this solution was in fact quite simple I have given a detailed analysis of several related positions, in order to highlight some typical aspects of the central theme of this chapter.

Bartłomiej Macieja – Anatoly Karpov
Rapid Match (4), Warsaw 2003



White is going to lose his a3-pawn in the near future. Since he cannot avoid this, he has to choose the most efficient defensive plan.

Macieja must have thought that he had no problems at all. He could simply hold the b-pawn with his king, while his bishop will defend all the kingside pawns. As we shall see, things are not that simple.

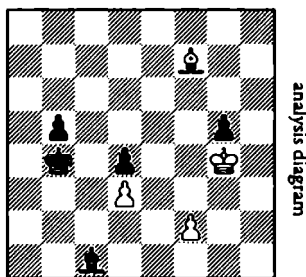
43. ♖d5

This is a logical move, preparing for the fight against the b-pawn.

However, equally good would have been 43. ♜f6 provoking favourable simplifications and allowing the activation of his king. Black would fail to prove an advantage after both 43... ♗c5 44. ♔f3 ♖e5 45. ♗g4 ♗xf6 46. ♔f5 ♖e7 47. ♗e5 and 43... ♖e5 44. ♖d5 ♗xf6 45. ♗xf7 ♖e7 46. ♗g3 ♗xa3 47. ♗g4 ♗c1 48. ♔f5 ♗c5 49. ♗e4.

In fact, in this last line White does not even need the help of the king to prevent the advance of the b-pawn. After, say:

49. ♗g4 ♗b4



analysis diagram

he would have the thematic 50. ♖e8! and if 50... ♗a5 then 51. ♗f7 and Black cannot make any progress. 51...b4 allows White to completely close the queenside with 52. ♖b3 while 51...♗a4 is again met with 52. ♖e8.

This remarkable defensive method is only efficient against the b- and g-pawns, because of the lack of space for the active side's king. As we shall see, Macieja could have used this method at several further moments, with an easy draw.

Also possible was 43. ♔f3 but after 43... ♜f6 White has only one correct plan, based on reversing the defensive roles of the pieces. We already know that the bishop alone can prevent Black from making progress on the queenside. Therefore, the king should be employed to protect the numerous kingside weaknesses.

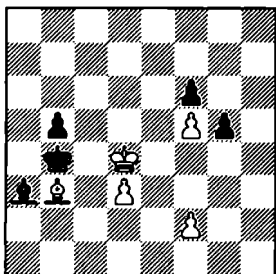
Mechanically aiming for Averbakh's first drawn position would be wrong. Let us follow a hypothetical variation:

44. ♗e2 ♖d6 45. f3

In the set-up corresponding to Averbakh's first drawn position, f3 would be necessary at some moment anyway, in order to avoid ...g4, which would create an additional weakness on f2.

45... ♗xa3 46. ♗d2 ♖b4† 47. ♗c2 ♖c3 48. ♗b3 ♗c5 49. ♗c2 ♗d6 50. ♗d1 ♗e5 51. ♗c2 ♗f4 52. ♗d1 ♖e3 53. ♗c2 b4

Suddenly, things are not that rosy for White. There are two factors that decisively influence the evaluation of the position. First of all, the bishop has to defend too many pawns, completely lacking mobility. Secondly, the two fronts on which the battle takes place are too close to each other. White is in zugzwang. If it would be Black's turn to move, this would



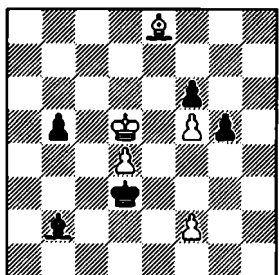
However, I believe that White can generate sufficient counterplay by placing his king on d5 and advancing his pawn to d4, followed by an eventual attack against either the b4- or the f6-pawn.

Basically, most bishop moves should draw, but here is just a sample variation:

48. ♖f7 ♖b2† 49. ♔d5 ♔c3 50. d4 ♔d3

50...b4 would allow 51. ♖e6 followed by ♔xf6.

51. ♖e8!



The bishop will be quite effective on the f1–a6 diagonal, creating, together with the f2-pawn, some sort of barrier in front of the white king.

51...b4 52. ♖b5†

Now the tricky 52...♔c3, hoping for 53. ♔xe6? ♔xd4! 54. ♔xf6 ♔c5† winning the bishop, is best answered with 53. ♖a4 when 53...♖a1 54. ♔e6 b3 55. ♖xb3 ♔xb3 56. ♔xf6 leads to total simplification.

More constructive is:

52...♔d2 53. ♔c4 g4

Hoping to take advantage of the weak f2-pawn.

White should attack the g4-pawn as soon as possible, starting with:

54. ♖e8!

Thus slowing down Black's plan. After:

54...♔e2 55. ♖h5 ♔f3 56. d5 ♖e5 57. ♔xb4 ♖d4 58. d6 ♖xf2 59. ♔b5 ♖g3 60. ♔c6 ♖xd6 61. ♔xd6 ♔f4

Threatening ...g3.

62. ♖e8 ♔xf5 63. ♖c6 ♔f4 64. ♔e6

White draws.

44...♖d6 45. ♔e2

The king is aiming for the queenside. In fact, as we already know, this plan is fundamentally wrong.

The simplest continuation would have been 45. ♔g4 ♖xa3 46. ♖e6 with a simple draw.

It is rather late now for counterplay based on attacking the d4-pawn 45. ♔e4 since after 45...♖xa3 46. ♔xd4? ♖c5† Black will create a second outside passed pawn. 46.f4? would not solve the problem either because of 46...g4 with a similar picture. Of course, even in this line, White should simply play 46. ♔f3 aiming for g4.

45...♖xa3 46.f3

This move is no real concession, since the correct defensive method is still available after it.

In chess, as in everyday life, reality can be subjective. Sometimes, that which exists is not as important as that which we are aware of. Judging a certain historical moment (or analysing a particular game of chess) should be done by also taking into account the subjective reality of that specific moment.

Therefore, the next comment is describing the correct method of defence in an abstract sense, since Maciejka was obviously not aware of it during the game. By placing this last pawn on a light square, White weakens the e3-square, making Black's technical task rather linear. More inventiveness would have been required in order to break the fortress with the pawn on f2. Clearly in this case the white king would have had to remain on the kingside, in order to defend the pawn, but we already know that the white bishop can safely hold the b-pawn alone.

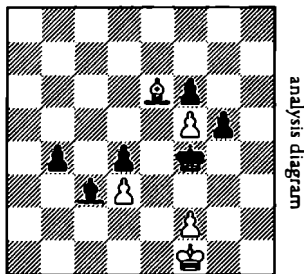
The critical position arises after:

46. ♔d2 ♔c5 47. ♖e6 ♖b4† 48. ♔e2 ♖c3 49. ♖d7

b4 50.♙e6 ♖d6 51.♗d1 ♜e5 52.♜e2 ♜f4
53.♜f1

In order to make further progress, Black needs to get the e3-square for his king. This can only be achieved with the help of the g-pawn. However, the immediate 53...g4 54.♜e2 g3 would lead nowhere because of 55.fxg3†. It means that in the moment when Black plays ...g3, the white king should not control the e3-square.

Therefore, a triangulation is needed in order to pass to White the right to move.



53...♜f3 54.♗d5† ♜g4 55.♙e6 ♜f4 56.♜e2 g4

White has nothing better than to retreat with the king.

57.♜f1 g3 58.fxg3†

58.♜g2 is no improvement over the main line, because after 58...♗e1 59.fxg3† ♜e3 the bishop is optimally placed in order to prevent White's last chance for counterplay, based on g4-g5.

58...♜e3

We have seen this before. The black bishop cuts off the white king from the main theatre of action.

59.g4!?

Or, alternatively, 59.♙c4 ♜d2 60.g4 ♜c2 61.g5 fxg5 62.f6 when Black is just in time to stop the enemy pawn with 62...b3 63.f7 ♙b4.

59...♜xd3 60.g5 ♗d2

Once the d3-pawn has been eliminated, Black can win the queenside battle without the help of the bishop, which can be safely transferred to h6 in order to stop the g-pawn.

61.g6

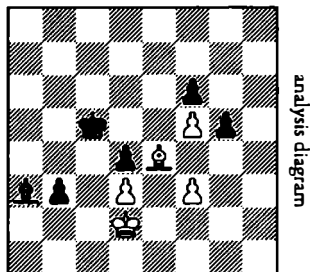
61.gxf6 ♜c2 makes no difference.

61...♗h6 62.♜e1 ♜c2

White cannot fight against both passed pawns.

46...♜c5 47.♙e6

This move is still correct, although Macieja's idea when playing it is wrong. After the apparently more solid 47.♙e4? Black would have won with a familiar method, with the favourable difference that after 47...b4 48.♜d2 b3 the white king could not approach the pawn yet.



Play might have continued:

49.♙b7 ♜d6 50.♙e4

Or if 50.♙c8 ♜e5 51.♙e6 then 51...b2 52.♜c2 ♜f4 winning one of the f-pawns.

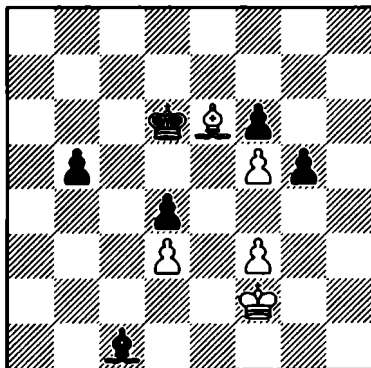
50...♜e5 51.♗d1 ♜f4 52.♜d2 ♙b2 53.♗d1 53.♗d5 would be of no help because of 53...♙c3† followed by ...b2 and ...♜xf5.

53...♙c3 54.♜c1 ♜e3 55.♜d1 b2 56.♜c2 ♜e2

57.♙c6 b1♙† 58.♜xb1 ♜xd3 59.♜c1 ♜e2

and we have reached an already known winning position.

47...♜d6 48.♜f2 ♙c1



49.♖e2?

Finally the losing move. 49.♖g3 was still sufficient for a draw.

49...♗e5 50.♖f2 ♖f4

It is all over now. The rest is just a matter of elementary technique. We can conclude that White's main aim should have been to prevent the enemy king from reaching the f4-square. More than the b-pawn, this was the essential issue of the position.

51.♗d7 b4 52.♗e6 ♗d2 53.♖e2 ♗e3

White is in zugzwang. He has to either allow a further advance of the b-pawn or give up one of his own pawns.

54.♗d5 ♖xf5 55.♖f1 ♖f4 56.♖e2 f5 57.♗e6 ♗g1

57...g4 58.fxg4 fxg4 would have won as well. After 59.♗c4 ♖g3 60.♗e6 the white bishop could not really play on two wings. Black would answer with a waiting move such as 60...♗h6 clearing the e3-square and at the same time placing White in zugzwang. Moving the bishop would allow either 61...♖h2 followed by 62...g3 or 61...b3. Playing with the king would make 61...♖f3 possible.

However, Karpov's move is not bad either. Since White is reduced to passivity, he places his pieces on optimal squares before starting to advance the pawns.

58.♖f1

I imagine that after some neutral moves like 58.♗c4 Karpov would have transferred his bishop to h4 with 58...♗h2 59.♗d5 ♗g3 60.♗e6 ♗h4 61.♗d5 and then finally played 61...g4 62.fxg4 fxg4 when after 63.♗e6 g3 64.♗d5 he would queen one of his pawns with 64...b3! 65.♗xb3 g2 and the white king is a mere spectator.

58...♗h2 59.♖g2 ♗g3 60.♗c4 ♗h4 61.♗e6 ♖e3

Now that the enemy king has moved away, this is the simplest way.

62.♖xf5 b3 63.♗e6 b2 64.♗a2 ♖xd3 65.♖h3 ♖e3 66.♖g4 d3 67.f4 d2

0-1

**Opposite bishops with rooks**

The presence of one or two pairs of rooks on the board determines a significant change of situation.

Although from a formal point of view we are still in the endgame, we can also notice certain middlegame influences. The main problem facing the defending side is the arrangement of the pawns. As we already know, in order to avoid problems in case of exchanging rooks he should place his pawns on squares of the same colour as his bishop. On the other hand, this would seriously weaken the opposite squares, when all of a sudden some mating ideas might become available.

We can meet similar contradictions in the chapters dedicated to Alekhine's major pieces and Rubinstein's double rook endings.

Deciding which is the lesser evil is by no means easy. I have noticed that Karpov's opponents have generally avoided weakening the king's position in the hope of exchanging rooks. And in most of the cases, they were probably wrong! Although quite risky at first glance, such a defensive method would have offered better chances of survival.

We can conclude that the active side's main trump is of a psychological nature. The attacker can slowly improve his position, counting on the opponent to wait passively, without taking crucial decisions.

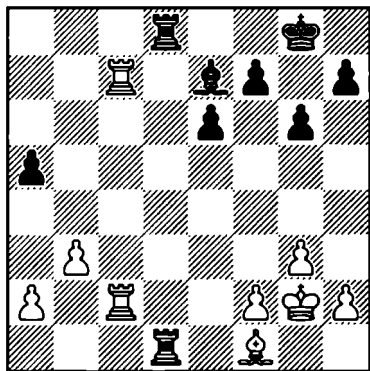
With one pair of rooks on the board, there are several factors that can offer chances for success. We shall study them one by one.

Converting a minimal positional advantage

Adding one pair of rooks can transform a trivial drawn position into an interesting and complicated one. Although the positions examined in this section should have objectively ended in draws, Karpov's opponents were not able to cope with the practical problems facing them at every step.

The following game is a brilliant illustration of how constant pressure can be converted into a winning bishop ending, by exchanging rooks at the right moment.

Boris Alterman – Anatoly Karpov
European Cup, Israel 1995



Black's minimal advantage consists of the higher mobility of his pawn structure. For the time being, the white queenside pawns are impossible to advance because of the bishop's control over the a3-f8 diagonal. At the same time the black kingside majority is difficult to prevent from advancing by simple mechanical means.

26...♖b4

It is difficult to believe that Karpov had foreseen the study-like finish of the game, where the bishop's perfect placement on precisely this square will be an important element.

However, it is remarkable that this square is best suited for the whole long preliminary phase, too. For the moment, it defends the a5-pawn and controls some important squares, such as d2.

27.♞c8

In order to reduce Black's attacking potential, White exchanges one pair of rooks.

27...♞xc8 28.♞xc8† ♜g7 29.♞c2

The rook is more or less forced to defend the second rank. Even if White could arrange some defence of the f2-pawn, such as ♖e2 and ♜f1, the penetration of the black rook to the second rank would force a2-a4, which would completely annihilate the potential threat of creating a passed pawn on the queenside. In this case, Black could concentrate his attention entirely on the other wing.

29...♜f6

A very cautious move. It appears that the kingside pawns are not that easy to advance. A more natural way of doing it would start with 29...f5

Planning ...♜f6, ...g5-g4, ...h5 (see also the game Beliavsky-Karpov below, on page 251). However, in this concrete position White would immediately obtain counterplay with 30.♞c7†. For instance: 30...♜f6 (against 30...♜h6 the sequence 31.♖c4 e5 32.♖g8 would be rather annoying) 31.♞xh7 ♞d2 32.♞c7 and White is in time to prevent ...♖c5. After 32...♞xa2 he could continue 33.♞c6 with the idea ♖c4, thus being the first to create concrete threats.

29...♞d7, with the idea of defending the seventh rank and preparing ...f5, would be met by 30.♖b5 when the rook would have to either give up control of the d-file or admit the failure of his plans.

I would prefer 29...g5 intending ...♜g6, ...h5, etc. White would face the typical dilemma whether to block the position with g4 or not. Clearly, Black should generally avoid moving his pawns on dark squares, in order to restrict the enemy bishop to the maximum. However, in the game Karpov will do it in a worse form.

30.♖e2 ♞d7

For the moment, White has ejected the intruder but his position remains a bit passive.

31.h4

A useful multi purpose move, made possible by Black's indecision on the 29th move. White gets rid of the potential h2-weakness. Besides, if Black starts a massive advance of his pawns then exchanges would be unavoidable, thus approaching the safe drawing zone.

31...e5

It is not easy to figure out another way of making progress, but this is a bigger concession than ...g5 would have been two moves ago. The main difference is that ...e5 temporarily weakens some central squares, which are always quite important.

32.h5!?

This natural move, aiming to exchange one pair of pawns, is a significant inaccuracy. Its far from obvious drawback is that it makes the g5-square available to the enemy king, thus helping Black to carry out his kingside plan.

It is curious that Alterman advanced a pawn to a light square when this was bad and refrained from doing so at a more advanced stage of the game when this would have been necessary.

The reason might have something to do with the fact that advancing the wing pawns is generally considered not to create significant weaknesses.

Anyway, this would have been a good moment to make use of the weaknesses left behind by Black's last move with 32.♞c6† when the king would have had a hard job finding a safe square. For instance 32...♝f5 33.g4† ♜e4 34.♞c4† ♜d5 35.♙f3† ♜e6 36.♞c6† ♜e7 37.g5 and White has considerably activated his position. Black could have hardly claimed any advantage.

32...♝g5 33.hxg6 hxg6 34.♝f1 ♞d6

Having been given an unexpected chance, Karpov maintains his calm. He is in no hurry at all. Before advancing his f-pawn he over-protects the g6-pawn. Why allow unnecessary complications? Besides, frying the opponent's nerves is not such a bad idea. **35.♝g2 f5 36.♝f1**

This is the second critical moment. White had to decide whether to play 36.f3.

Knowing the further course of the game, it is easy to say that this would have been the best practical decision. From an optical point of view, this move would seriously weaken the king's position. But can Black really take advantage of it? Combining the pressure along the h-file and the a7-g1 diagonal is practically impossible.

Black could try several plans. One of them would be to play ...f4 at some moment in order to put even more pressure on the dark squares. However, this would practically give up any hopes of an advantage in case of exchanging the rooks. Creating a passed pawn in the centre with 36...e4 37.fxe4 fxe4 does not look like a very promising idea either. The pawn would be not too threatening. For instance, after 38.♜f2 ♝f5 39.♜e3 ♞d5 White can parry the strong threat ...♙c5† with 40.♙a6 preparing the activation of his pieces.

After 36.f3 I would try to carry out ...e4 with the support of the rook. Since the immediate 36...♞d4 could be answered with 37.♜f2 when 37...e4 is met by 38.♜e3, Black should be more tricky. For instance:

36...♞d5

Taking the c5-square under control in view of an eventual ...♙c5, and only if:

37.♙c4

Then:

37...♞d4 38.♙e2

38.♜f2 e4 39.♜e3 is now met by 39...♙c5.

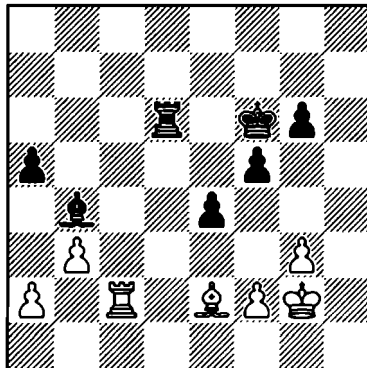
38...e4 39.fxe4 ♞xe4

When the weakness of the g3-pawn would maintain a stable edge for Black. In any case, this would have been a lesser evil for White than the game continuation.

36...♝f6 37.♝g2

37.f3! was still worth trying.

37...e4



Karpov has reached a dominant central position with his pawns on squares of opposite colour to his own bishop. At the same time, he opened the long diagonal for his king, creating the threat of an invasion on the queenside.

38.♝f1 ♜e5 39.♝g2 g5 40.♝f1 ♞h6 41.♝g2 ♞d6 42.♝f1 ♞d8 43.♝g2 f4 44.f3

White had to abandon his policy of neutrality. The threat f4-f3 was too strong.

However, having waited until the very last moment before advancing this pawn to a light square, White's passivity will soon tell in a rather unexpected way. **44...e3 45.g4**

Alterman keeps the position as closed as possible, probably fearing some additional attacking possibilities along the g-file.

He could have won a tempo compared to the game by exchanging on f4 instead of blocking the position with g4. However, after 45.gxf4† gxf4 46.♟f1 ♞d2 this would have basically no significance.

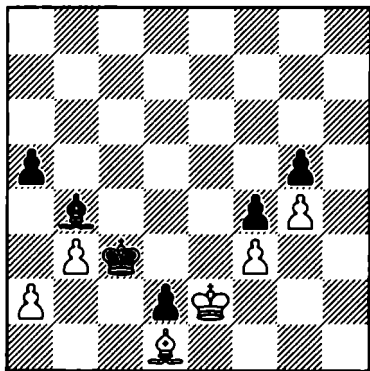
Clearly, the exchange on d2 would lead to a similar position as in the game. The only possible difference is that, by defending the bishop, White can avoid the exchange of rooks with 47.♞c8, which is hardly a solution since after 47...♞xa2 he would not be able to guard the e3-pawn and defend the b3-pawn at the same time. (Or, if you wish, to simultaneously prevent the threats ...♞a1† followed by ...♞e1 and ...♞b2.) Grabbing the f-pawn would just make things worse after 48.♞e8† ♟d4 49.♞e4† ♟c3 50.♞xf4 ♞a1† 51.♟g2 ♟d2 and the e-pawn is unstoppable.

45...♞d2!

What a shock this must have been for White! Can Black really hope for anything? After all, the white pawns are safely placed on light squares.

The only possible defensive method corresponds to Averbakh's second position, but is not too effective in this specific case. Although it is far from obvious yet, White will very soon be in zugzwang because his bishop is restricted by his own f3- and b3-pawns.

46.♞xd2 exd2 47.♞d1 ♟d4 48.♟f2 ♟c3 49.♟e2



49...♟b2

It is important to keep the b3-pawn blocked. After the careless 49...♞a3? White's bishop would

suddenly escape from the cage: 50.b4! ♞xb4 51.♞b3 ♟b2 52.♟d1 with an easy draw.

50.♟d3

After 50.a4 ♟c1 White loses his bishop.

Or 50.a3 ♟xa3 51.♟d3 ♟b2 and Black wins by zugzwang again! Instead of 50...♟xa3, the elegant 50...♟c1 is also possible, but would complicate matters a bit: 51.a4 Clearly White cannot take the bishop, since he would get in zugzwang again. 51...♞c5 52.b4 axb4 and, compared to the game, White has the passed a-pawn.

50...♟b1!

Black has to reach the zugzwang position without moving his bishop: 50...♟c1 51.♟e2 ♞e? would again allow the saving 52.b4!

Also bad would have been 50...♟xa2? 51.♟c2 with a draw.

51.a3 ♟c1! 52.♟e2 ♞xa3 53.b4

Finally, White had to sacrifice both his pawns in order to save the bishop, although not the game.

53...axb4 54.♞a4 ♞b2 55.♞d1 ♞d4 56.♞b3 ♞e3 57.♞a4 ♟b2 58.♟d1 b3 59.♞c6

White is in zugzwang again. If 59.♟e2? then 59...♟c2 with an easy win.

59...♟a1

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Recapping, White lost the game because of two basic mistakes.

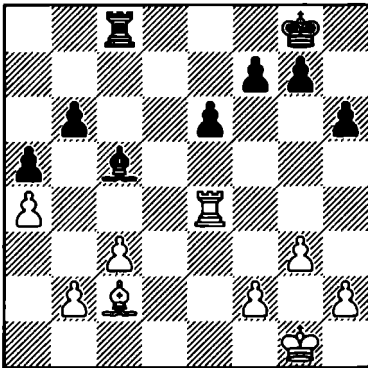
First of all, he missed his chance on the 32nd move. Instead of activating his rook, he weakened a crucial dark square. However, this is quite understandable. Alterman must have been psychologically prepared for a long and passive defence. After all, this was the general character of the position. Besides, one single hesitation like that during more than 30 moves is certainly not above the admissible limit.

Secondly, he did not make the right choice regarding the kingside pawn structure. This was not a one-move mistake, but a consequence of a general evaluation of the position. However, this was also an understandable error. Intuitively, weakening the dark squares with f3 looked rather dangerous. Why not wait until Black plays ...f4 and only then block the pawns with f3? Karpov's answer to this question was simply brilliant.

White's potential counterplay on the 32nd move was possible because, although relatively passive, the white rook was placed on an open file.

In the next example there will be only one open file available. Besides, its occupation would bring no real advantage to either of the players.

Alexander Beliavsky – Anatoly Karpov
Tilburg 1993



We can notice a certain similarity with the previous example. White's situation on the queenside looks a little better than in the other game, since his pawns are more flexible and, at the same time, do not restrict his own bishop.

On the other hand, the greater number of pawns should favour the attacking side.

30...♟f8 31.♟f1 ♟e7

Black has no intention of fighting for the open line, since this would lead to an exchange of rooks. He transfers the king to the centre in order to cover all the penetration squares on this file.

32.♞e1

Finding the right place for the rook seems a crucial issue in this position. Jacob Aagaard suggested that the rook belongs on c4, in order to threaten b4. Jacob also pointed out that 32.♞c4 would be premature in view of 32...♞d8 33.♟e2 ♟xf2! winning an important pawn.

Therefore, he recommended:
32.♟e2

Preparing ♞c4, estimating that White should be

able to draw. I believe that he is basically right, but some accuracy is still needed from White. Black could continue with:

32...f5 33.♞c4 ♞d8

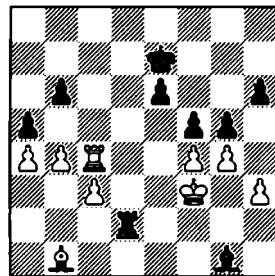
Renewing the threat to capture on f2. The natural:

34.f4

Would allow Black to create dangerous, though apparently not decisive, threats after:

34...g5 35.b4 ♟g1 36.h3 ♟h2 37.♟f3 ♞d2 38.♟b1 ♟g1

Capturing on g5 at any moment would mean helping Black to improve his pawn structure. In view of the threat ...♟f2† followed by a discovered check, White is forced to clear the g3-square with 39.g4 when, in spite of the exposed position of the white king and bishop, Black seems to have no decisive continuation. The best I could find is:



39...♞b2 40.♟d3 ♟f2† 41.♟g3 e5!

Black could win a pawn with 41...♞d2 42.♟b1 ♟h2† 43.♟f3 ♟g4† 44.hxg4 ♟xf4 but this would allow White to consolidate on the light squares and thus obtain a safe position.

42.fxg5 f4†

After 42...e4 43.♟xe4! White would get a lot of pawns for the bishop.

43.♟h4 ♟f3 44.♟e4 ♟f2† 45.♟h5 ♟xh3† 46.♟g6 hxg5 47.♟xg5

When White has sufficient activity to compensate for the connected passed pawns.

White could avoid these complications by playing the more restrained 34f3 (instead of 34.f4) with the intention of placing his kingside pawns on light squares with g4 and h3. Since Black

would have no concrete way to take advantage of the chronic weakness of the dark squares, the game might have ended peacefully, thus confirming Jacob's evaluation.

32..♙d6 33..♞d1 ♞c5

We can notice that Karpov managed to solve the problem of activating his rook in a better way than his opponent. Unlike Beliavsky, he understood at the right moment that the c-file is of more importance than the open d-file. Basically, the pressure along this file discourages any queenside action. And, similarly to Jacob Aagaard's suggestion, the rook can efficiently use the fifth rank in order to switch between the opposite wings.

34..♙d3

Beliavsky should probably have played 34.h4 and it is very likely that the same plan that functioned against Alterman would not have been enough here. Unfortunately for Beliavsky, he was going to be Karpov's first victim in this kind of position and it was more difficult for him to organize his play. Or was it simply that, without any antecedents available, he simply underestimated the danger?

34...g5

Now the situation on the kingside is better for Karpov than in the previous example. This should compensate for White's "improvement" on the other wing.

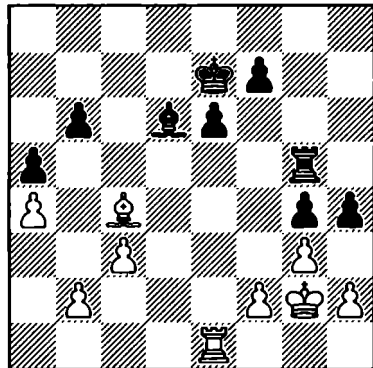
35..♙b5 h5 36..♝g2 ♞f5 37..♙d3 ♞e5 38..♝f1

Another defensive plan would have started with 38.h3. However, this would have allowed Black a wider choice than 34.h4. Besides the natural plan of advancing his pawns to light squares (h5, g4), Karpov could have considered playing h5-h4, in order to take advantage of the weakness of the g3-square.

38...g4 39..♞e1 ♞d5 40..♙c4 ♞g5 41..♝g2

When playing this, Beliavsky must have either failed to anticipate Karpov's next move or simply wanted to provoke it, relying on his apparently strong 43rd move. (See also the comments below). In either case, time pressure might have had some influence. Be that as it may, 41..♞e4!? was probably better. Black could try 41...e5!? 42..♙d5 f5 43..♞c4 h4, but White would obtain strong counterplay with 44..♞c6! ♙c5 45.b4!, as indicated by Malfagia.

41...h4!



If White had exchanged the h-pawns (by playing h2-h4 before g7-g5) this move would not have been available.

42..gxf4

Beliavsky had a difficult choice: either to spoil his pawn structure or to allow a black pawn to h3. The latter did not really look appealing for him: 42..♞e4 h3† 43..♝f1 e5 followed by ...f5.

42...♞h5 43..♞e4?

Beliavsky might have overlooked Black's 43rd move. The rook would have been more useful on the apparently passive square... h1:

43..♞h1 ♞xh4 44..♙b5

Removing the bishop from its exposed position and thus preparing h3. In any case, Karpov's recommendation is:

44...f5

44...♞h3 would allow 45..♙e2 f5 46.f3 with a reasonable position for White.

45.h3 f4!? 46.hxg4 f3† 47..♝g1 ♞xg4†

With a clear advantage according to Karpov. This fails to impress. For the moment the f3-pawn is weaker than the f2-pawn and the black king is exposed to lateral attacks from the rook. Especially after:

48..♝f1

White would already threaten to win the f3-pawn with 49..♞h3 ♞f4 50..♙c6. The only possible way to prevent this would be:

48...e5

The main drawback of this move is that it weakens the light squares, thus allowing White to start strong counterplay with:

49. ♖h7†

The king cannot go to e6 because of 50. ♗d7† winning the rook. 49... ♜f6 leads nowhere because of 50. ♖h6† when Black has to either go back with the king or offer the exchange of rooks with an immediate draw. At the same time:

49... ♜f8

Looks rather passive and cannot be regarded as a serious winning attempt. White would continue:

50. ♖h6

When after:

50... ♗e7

He would already have two satisfactory continuations.

First of all, the prudent 51. ♗c6 e4 52. ♖e6, attacking the enemy pawns, would leave Black with nothing better than forcing a draw by repetition with 52... ♖h4 53. ♜g1 ♖g4†.

Secondly, the apparently risky:

51. ♖xb6

Would also lead to a draw after:

51... ♖h4 52. ♖g6 ♖h1† 53. ♖g1 ♖h2 54. ♗c4 ♗c5

55. ♖g8† ♜e7 56. ♖g7†

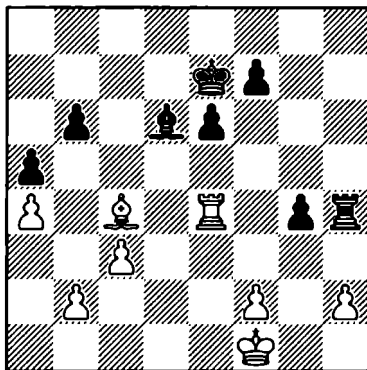
When the black king would have no place to hide because 56... ♜f6 would lose the f3-pawn to 57. ♖f7†. At the same time, if Black blocks the checks with the bishop, then ♗d5 ♖h3, ♖g3 would win the f3-pawn.

Instead of Karpov's 45... f4!?, Black's best chance to preserve an advantage would be 45... ♗c5! 46. hxg4 (Obviously forced in view of the threat gxh3† attacking the f2-pawn. 46.f3 would hardly change anything because it would allow Black to create two connected passed pawns anyway.) 46... ♖xg4† 47. ♜f3 e5, as indicated by Malfagia.

43... ♖xh4 44. ♜f1

Under different circumstances this would have been a strong prophylactic move. White hopes to play h2-h3 on the next move.

Against 44... ♗xh2 the simple 45.f3 would simplify the position, making a draw the most probable result.



44... e5!

It is easy to overlook such a move. All Karpov's previous play has been concentrated on placing his pawns on light squares. However, the unfortunate position of the white rook allows him to temporarily weaken the f5-square.

By removing this pawn from the exposed square, Black threatens f7-f5. The position is practically winning for him now, although the technical phase remains highly instructive.

45. ♗d5

45.h3 would not save the pawn either because of 45... f5!.

45... f5 46. ♖c4 ♖xh2 47. b4

White has to take the c5-square under control, in order to protect his last remaining kingside pawn. As so often in worse positions, it is not possible to obtain something without giving up something else in exchange. In our case, the newly created queenside tension will allow Black to include his bishop into the final attack on the 51st move.

47... e4

The triumph of Black's strategy.

Just like Alterman, Beliavsky has constantly refrained from moving his kingside pawns onto light squares, allowing Karpov to occupy them with his own pawns.

In order to prevent the transfer of the black bishop to h4, White has to immediately start queenside counterplay.

48. ♖c6

Knowing the further course of the game, one would suspect that including the exchange on a5 would have been a wise idea before moving the rook to c6.

In the first edition I wrote that after 48.bxa5 Black could play the immediate 48...g3! 49.fxg3 e3 when the white rook would deny the bishop access to c4. Therefore 50.♗f3 would be forced, but the bishop is more exposed here. Black should first eliminate the dangerous a-pawn with 50...bxa5 when the threat of ...♗f2† would become real. After the practically forced 51.♗e2 Black would have time to capture the second pawn with 51...♗xg3 when his pawns would become unstoppable. For instance 52.♖c5 f4 53.♗f5 ♗f2† 54.♗e1 f3! winning, since 55.♗xf3 would lose the rook to 55...♗xf3†.

The conclusion is that White has to clear the c4-square at once (as Beliavsky did), thus leaving the b4-pawn vulnerable.

This is not entirely true. As pointed out by Malfagia, instead of 53.♗f5 White has at his disposal the stronger 53.♗xa5! ♗f2† 54.♗e1 f3 55.♗xf3 ♗xf3† 56.♗e2 eliminating the last enemy pawn, thus reaching a draw. Malfagia suggests 52...♗f2† 53.♗e1 ♗f4†! 54.♗d1 ♗xa4 55.♗xf5 ♗a2 as winning for Black, but after 56.♗c4 the result still seems to be a draw.

In fact, the mistake in my initial comment should be searched for at a much earlier stage. Instead of the overcautious 49...bxa5 Black can safely win the bishop with 49...♗f2† 50.♗e1 ♗xf3 since the advance of the a-pawn, which I feared so much, 51.a6 is strongly met by 51...♗f2! 52.a7 ♗a2 when the only way to prevent the mating attack based on ...♗xg3† and ...e2† is 53.♗f4 ♗xf4 54.gxf4 which, however, makes 54...♗xa4 possible, when Black preserves his huge material advantage.

48...g3!

Everything was prepared for the operation initiated with this pawn break. Within a few moves, the bishop and the e-pawn will join the rook to create decisive threats against the enemy king.

Capturing the pawn with 48...axb4 49.cxb4 ♗xb4 would have allowed White to obtain sufficient counterplay with 50.♗e6† (but not 50.♗xb6? ♗xf2†! winning an essential pawn and

the game) 50...♗d7 51.♗e5! (this is more accurate than 51.♗f6 when after 51...♗h5 52.♗e6† ♗e7 White cannot play 53.♗xf5? because of the intermediate check 53...♗h1† allowing Black to win material after 54.♗g2 ♗xe6) and now 51...♗h5 leads nowhere because of 52.♗xe4! with an immediate draw. White's coordination in this line is better than after 51.♗f6 because, among others, the bishop controls the h1-square.

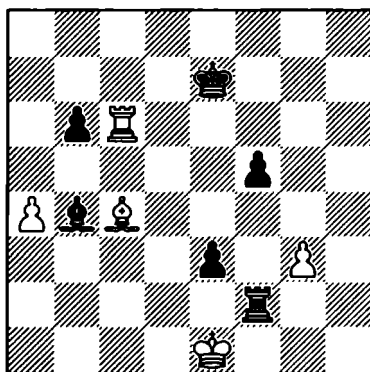
49.fxg3 e3 50.♗c4

Necessary, in order to prevent the pawn from advancing.

50...♗f2† 51.♗e1

Or, alternatively, 51.♗g1 axb4 52.cxb4 ♗c2 and, with his forces pinned, White cannot prevent the promotion of the e-pawn: 53.♗b5 e2 54.♗f2 ♗xg3†!

51...axb4 52.cxb4 ♗xb4†



The cooperation of the black pieces is decisive.

The activation of the black bishop along this diagonal has been made possible by White's previous queenside play.

Compared to a previous variation, 52...♗xg3 is not possible now because of 53.♗e6† ♗d7 54.♗xe3 winning the e3-pawn when 54...♗c2† is not dangerous because the g3-bishop is hanging as well.

53.♗d1 ♗d2† 54.♗c1 ♗d7!

A strong prophylactic move, removing the king from its exposed position and questioning the stability of the white pieces.

This kind of accuracy is still needed. Black would lose his advantage after 54...♔a3?! 55.♖b1 ♖b2† 56.♗a1 ♗d7 57.♞e6 (suddenly, this pawn is not easy to defend) 57...♞c2 58.♞xe3 ♔c5 59.♔b5† with a draw.

55.♞xb6

If White tries to prevent the pawn from advancing with 55.♞e6, the hanging position of his pieces would allow Black to win by force with the elegant 55...♞d4 56.♔a2 (56.♔b3 simply transposes to the main line after 56...♞d3 57.♔a2 ♔a3†) 56...♔a3† 57.♖b1 ♞d1† 58.♗c2 ♞d2† 59.♖b1 ♖b2†! (this intermediate check is essential, since after the immediate 59...♞xa2? White would answer 60.♞xe3! and, quite unexpectedly, Black's pieces are hanging too) 60.♗a1 ♞xa2† followed by 61...♗xe6.

55...♔a3† 56.♖b1 e2

It is all over now.

57.♔xe2 ♞xe2 58.a5 ♔d6 59.a6 ♞e5 60.♗c2 ♞a5 61.♖b7† ♗e6

0-1

Regarding these two games, there is one interesting psychological aspect that I would like to discuss.

Both endings could have been drawn with correct defence. Of course, Black was the only one who could play for a win, but a huge effort combined with some help from the opponent was needed in order to get something palpable out of it.

How many players would have maintained the same level of concentration after finally reaching a clear advantage? A most natural reaction would be to "celebrate" the partial success with a slight relaxation (after all, life is a bit more than hard work, is it not?), thus allowing the opponent to escape, just when a win was not that far.

We have seen that Karpov was immune to such tendencies. He continued playing at full strength until the opponent's capitulation. Maybe he was firmly convinced that he would win the endgames from the very start and did not consider the partial successes as something to care about.

The next game is a good illustration about the difficulties of maintaining a constant level of concentration in such cases.

Alexander Fauland – Mihail Marin

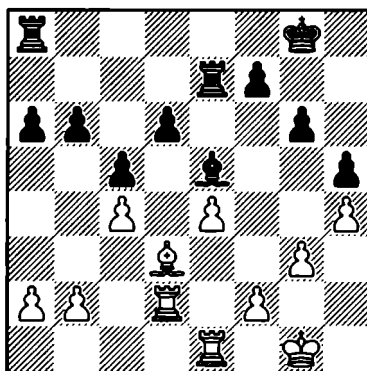
Thessalonica Olympiad 1988

This last round game was played under difficult psychological circumstances. After an excellent 5th place in 1984 and an honourable 12th place in 1986, the Romanian team had played rather modestly so far in the 1988 Olympiad. In those years of the communist era such a constant decline of results was rather hard to explain to the authorities, and there was a serious risk that the whole team would face some disciplinary punishments. Therefore, a high score in the last round was desperately needed.

Completely missing the whole point, a man who introduced himself as the captain of our last round opponents (the Austrian team) asked me during breakfast whether I would agree to a short draw in my game on the third board. I refused instantly but the man was quite insistent. I briefly explained to him that we were hoping to improve our result but then he suddenly asked: "How much would they pay you for a good classification?"

Feeling that the conversation had entered dangerous territory, I pretended that I had to get another cup of tea and actually rushed to my room.

Although my opponent never offered a draw during the game, he obstinately played for simplifications. Such a course did not bother me at all, since I have always been confident about the practically unlimited possibilities to outplay the opponent offered by the endgame.



Although Black has a comfortable position because of his strong bishop, he cannot claim an advantage. White's spatial superiority should insure him against any troubles. Only a long series of small concessions will lead him to the edge of the precipice.

23...b5!

Taking advantage of a small tactical nuance (the a2-pawn is hanging), Black puts some pressure on the white queenside.

24.♠c2 ♘g7 25.♘g2 b4

Exchanging on c4 would only help White activate his bishop. By blocking the queenside I was aiming to play a5-a4 followed by ...b3, thus marking the vulnerability of the b2-pawn. The next step would be to open the play on the other wing by means of ...f5, in order to exchange one pair of rooks and try winning that weak pawn.

26.♗c2

White hopes to activate his bishop via a4 but, in doing so, he allows the pawn structure to become asymmetrical.

26.b3 a5 27.♗c2 would have been a safer choice.

26...♗b2 27.♠xd6 a5 28.f4?

This is already a mistake, allowing Black to create dangerous queenside threats. 28.♗a4, blocking the a-pawn, was necessary. In this case, after 28...♗d4 29.f4 ♖6 the most probable result would have been a draw.

28...a4!

After this move Black will have the permanent threat of ...b3, axb3 a3, creating a dangerous outside passed pawn.

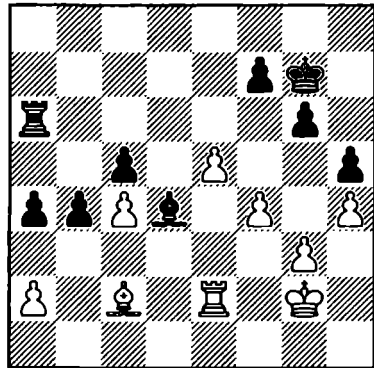
29.e5

29.♗xa4 would lead to a better endgame for Black after 29...♠xa4 30.♠xb2 ♠xc4. His rooks are more active and his pawn structure more compact.

29...♗d4 30.♠b6 ♠ea7 31.♗e4 ♠a6 32.♠xa6?!

After this new concession White can hardly save the game. He should have kept his only active piece with 32.♠b7 ♠a7 33.♠b8 in order to hope for some counterplay. I would have probably played 33...b3 34.axb3 a3 35.♠a2 ♖6 maintaining a better position.

32...♠xa6 33.♗c2



33...b3!

A good moment to carry out this thematic operation.

34.axb3 a3 35.♗b1 ♠b6 36.♗a2

The bishop has been forced to occupy a miserable position. The time has come to open the e-file and exchange rooks in order to initiate the king's march to b2, using the b4-square. The white king will not be able to prevent this plan in a satisfactory way, because it will be busy fulfilling defensive jobs on the other wing.

36...♖6 37.♠xf6†

37.e6 would soon lose the pawn after 37...♗f8.

37...♗xf6 38.♗f3 ♠c6 39.♠xe6† ♗xe6

Black is ready to carry out the final and decisive part of his plan. White has to hurriedly create some kingside counterplay, getting rid of some of his weaknesses as well.

40.g4 ♗c3!

The bishop moves one step further from the enemy king, in order to be ready to occupy one of the important e1-h4 and c1-h6 diagonals.

Black should not release the tension himself with 40...hxg4† since this would help White get rid of his kingside weaknesses with 41.♗xg4 ♗d6 42.f5 gxf5† 43.♗xf5 when after 43...♗c6 the white king would be in time to defend the queenside with 44.♗e4 followed by ♗d3-c2.

41.f5†

The best practical chance. White has to get rid of the h5-pawn in order to gain some freedom of action for his king.

After 41.gxh5? gxh5 42.♔g3 ♕e1† 43.♔h3 ♔f5 Black would be easily winning because of the passivity of the enemy king.

41...gxh5 42.gxh5

The pawn structure has suffered significant modifications. White has managed to create an outside passed pawn too, thus restricting Black's possibilities. At the same time, his king has achieved a higher degree of mobility. Instead of being tied to the defence of the h4-pawn, it "only" has to guard the f4-pawn, which allows him to control some important central squares.

42...♗d2 43.♔e2 ♗h6

The situation is partially similar to the game Grigore–Marin (page 235). From h6 the bishop blocks the doubled pawns and supports its own pawn at the same time.

44.♔d3 f4

Around this moment I was quite confident about a win, although I do not remember whether I had already calculated the variations presented below.

While I was walking, waiting for my opponent's move, the Austrian captain approached and put an end to my pleasant state of mind by whispering in my ear something like: "What a pity that you misplayed such a promising position!"

When I think back to that remote day, I am not sure whether he disturbed me on purpose or was just trying to be kind, though in a rather clumsy way. During the morning he might have been just tactless, while during the game he could have simply misunderstood what looked like a simple position. Anyway, under the pressure of the moment, I took it as a psychological attack. After the conclusion of the game, I put all the blame for my failure on this small incident. Sixteen years later, I am not so sure about it any more. I believe that the main reason was my premature relaxation after having obtained a winning position out of nothing.

45.♔c4 ♔d6 46.b4

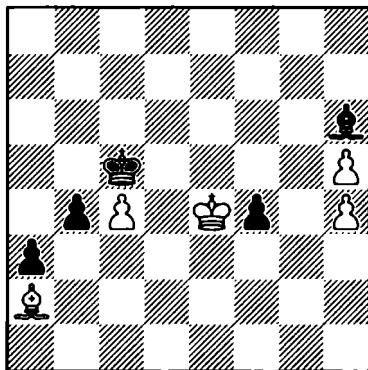
Sooner or later, White will have to play this anyway, in order to prevent the king's march to b2.

46...cxb4 47.♗b3 ♔c5 48.♗a2

For the moment Black's pawns are safely blocked

and they need the help of the king in order to advance.

Clearly, the f-pawn has to be sacrificed in order to distract the white king from control of the d4-square. Before initiating this operation, the bishop should be placed on f8 in order to stop both the c- and the h-pawn.



I sank into deep calculation and managed to work out the following winning variations:
48...♗f8!

This is the best moment for initiating the planned operation. The white bishop is ideally placed on a2, as far as possible from the black king's attacks. Therefore, Black's last move has created a position of zugzwang.

White has two basic continuations:

a) 49.♔xf4 places the king on a dark square, thus allowing Black to win one tempo after 49...♔d4 50.h6 (50.c5 is not efficient either, because of 50...♗xc5 51.h6 ♔c3 followed by ♗d4) 50...♗h6†. After 51.♔f5 the bishop would return to the optimal position with 51...♗f8 when Black would win easily with ...♔c3.

b) 49.♗b3 would be relatively better. Black would have to sacrifice the pawn on a light square with 49...f3 but after 50.♔xf3 ♔d4 he would get the tempo back because the white bishop is more exposed on b3.

The main line continues:

51.h6 ♗h6 52.c5 ♗g7

52...♔xc5? would lead to a draw after 53.♔e4.

53.♖f4

53.c6 ♖e5 54.h5 is not efficient because of 54...♗c3. Malfagia pointed out that one possible conclusion would be 55.h6 ♗xb3 56.h7 a2 57.c7 a1♖ 58.c8♗ ♖c3† when after exchanging queens Black would have an elementary win.

53...♖e5† 54.♖f5

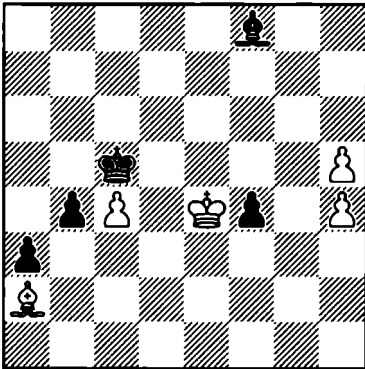
Apparently, the black pieces are overloaded, but in fact 54...♗c3 is winning, for instance:

55.♗xe5 ♗xb3 56.c6 a2 57.c7 a1♖† and the unfavourable position of the king leads White to disaster, or 55.♖d5 b3 56.♗xe5 a2 57.c6 a1♖ 58.c7 ♖a6 59.♖e6 b2 and White has no hope.

Although I saw all these variations, I was instinctively afraid that White might find an improvement after 54...♗c3. Therefore, I decided to triangulate in order to get the same variation with an extra tempo, failing to notice that I would actually lose an essential tempo.

48...♗c6?! 49.♗f3 ♗d6 50.♗e4 ♗c5 51.♖b3 ♖f8 52.♖a2!

Unlike the previous analysis, the white bishop improves its position.



52...f3?!

Consequent but bad. It was not too late to make a new triangulation and return to the right path with 52...♖h6 53.♖b3 ♗c6 54.♖a2 ♗d6 55.♖b3 (55.♗d4 is useless because of 55...f3 56.♗d3 ♗c5) 55...♗c5 56.♖a2 ♖f8! winning as shown above. 53.♗f3 ♗d4 54.h6 ♖xh6 55.c5 ♖g7 56.h5 ♗c3 57.c6 ♖e5 58.h6

White's counterplay is just sufficient for a draw. 58...b3 59.♖xb3 ♗xb3 60.h7 a2 61.c7 a1♖ 62.h8♗ ♖f1† 63.♗e4 ♖f4† 64.♗d5 ♖d4† 65.♗c6 ♖e4† 66.♗b6 ♖d4† ½–½

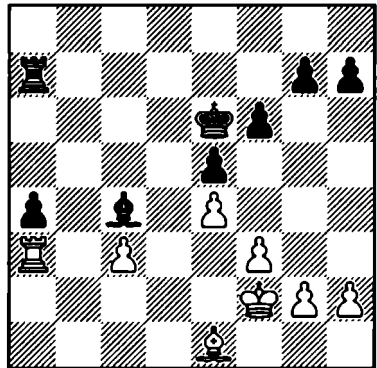
The outside passed pawn

In pure opposite bishops endings an outside passed pawn is possible to block, according to one of Averbakh's drawn positions. However, with rooks on the board, such a pawn can be a dangerous weapon, giving the active side additional possibilities. If the defender blocks the pawn with his rook he would risk getting into a passive position, allowing the opponent to start an attack on the other wing. The bishop is also not a perfect blockader any more. Under certain circumstances the active side could simply sacrifice the exchange in order to break the blockade.

Here is an example where, in spite of material equality, Karpov's passed pawn was more dangerous by far than his opponent's.

Richard Meulders – Anatoly Karpov

Brussels 1987



The kingside pawn structure is perfectly symmetrical. Neither player can claim an advantage on that side of the board yet.

Black's main chances lie on the queenside, where he has an extremely dangerous passed pawn. The white c3-pawn is far less impressive. Being safely

blocked, it can only serve for defensive purposes, offering the bishop relative stability on b4.

Why did I mention *relative*, the reader could ask. The answer is given in the comments to the 58th move.

Within the next few moves White will have to replace the blockading piece (bishop instead of the rook) in order to avoid complete passivity but this will take a lot of time, allowing Black to considerably improve his position.

46...♣d6 47.♠d2 ♣c6 48.♠c1 ♣b5

With his last moves Karpov has transferred the king to the queenside, eyeing an invasion through the c4-square.

49.♠a1 ♠d7!

Another important element of Black's general plan. By invading the enemy position through the only open file, Black will exert strong pressure against both wings.

50.♠a3

White could have tried to prevent the planned invasion with 50.♣e1 but this would not have brought the desired relief after 50...♠b3 51.♠a3 ♣c4 52.♠b4 ♠c2! (threatening ♣b3-b2) 53.♠a3 ♠d1 † 54.♣e2 ♠h1 55.h3 ♠b3 and the white rook would have been trapped. Black would have kept the enemy king busy on the kingside defending his pawns and sacrificed the exchange on c3 at the right moment. After that, White would have lost any stability on the queenside.

50...♠d2 † 51.♣g3

The control of the d-file brings its first fruits. The white king has been forced to occupy a passive position, far from the main theatre of action. Under certain circumstances the exchange of rooks would lead to an easily winning position, precisely because the king will not be able to fight against the outside passed pawn.

51...h5!

Very typical for Karpov. Before proceeding with the queenside plan he tries to obtain an optimal situation on the other wing as well. Of course, such an approach is possible only in positions where the opponent has no counterplay at all.

In view of the threat 52...g5, when the king would suddenly get in some trouble, White's answer is forced.

52.h4

By including this pair of pawn moves, Black prevented for a long time any form of counterplay based on the activation of the king. Indeed, the barrier formed by the g4- and f4-squares is impossible to cross.

52...♠b3

The bishop blocks the b-file, strengthens the control over the d-file and clears the c4-square for the king, all at the same time.

53.♠f8 ♠d8!

If Black was forced to advance at least one of his pawns on the kingside there would be some small hope of counterplay after sacrificing, at the right moment, the bishop for the passed pawn.

54.♠b4

54.♠xg7? is impossible in view of 54...♠g8.

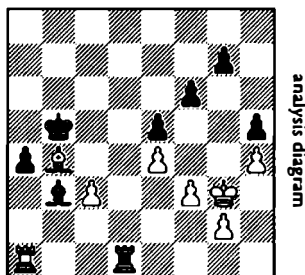
54...♣c4!

I have attached an exclamation mark to this move not because of its objective merits, although it is the strongest move in this position, nor because it was hard to find, since it is the most natural move in the world, but for the fact that it avoids a well-masked trap.

With the white king so far away, offering the exchange of rooks with

54...♠d1

looks rather tempting.



However, after:

55.♠xd1 ♠xd1 56.♣f2 ♣c4 57.♣e1

Chess geometry proves once again to be a tricky matter. In spite of appearances, the white king will arrive just in time to prevent the a-pawn from promoting. One important detail is that the black bishop is severely restricted by the

white pawn chain and its only way out of this sort of cage is along White's king's trajectory to the queenside. Play would continue:

57...♗c2

The bishop should leave the b3-square available for the king.

58.♖d2 ♗b1

58...♗d3 does not create the threat of ...♖b3 yet. After 59.♗f8 the only way to try making progress is 59...♗f1 when 60.♖c2 draws similarly to the main line.

One interesting possibility would be 58...♖b3?, with the idea of blocking the access of the enemy king. However, White can save himself by means of a pawn attack on the other wing. For instance:

59.♗f8! (59.♖c1? would lose a decisive tempo after 59...♗d3 60.♖d2 ♗f1 winning) 59...♗b1! 60.♖c1 ♗d3 61.♖d2 ♗f1! 62.♖c1! ♗xg2 (White also draws after 62...a3 63.♖b1 ♗xg2 64.♗xg7 ♗xf3 65.♗xf6 ♗xe4† 66.♖a1 ♖xc3 67.♗xe5† ♖b3) 63.♗xg7 ♗xf3 64.♗xf6 ♗xe4 65.♗xe5 a3 66.c4! with a draw, as indicated by Malfagia.

59.♖c1 ♗d3 60.♖b2!

The text move is simplest, but 60.♗f8 is also sufficient. If Black then tries 60...♖b3 we have transposed into the variation given after 58...♖b3? and White draws with 61.♖d2 ♗f1 62.♖c1!.

Black has nothing better than 60...♗f1 but the symmetrical 61.♗f8 leads to an easy draw.

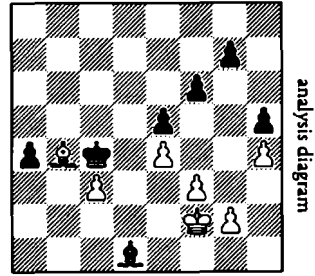
In this variation White first uses a method in the spirit of Averbakh's third position, in order to achieve a genuine first kind of drawn position.

55.♖f1 ♗d1!

Having won an important tempo over the previous line, Black can now safely offer the exchange of rooks.

56.♖f2

As expected, the ending resulting after 56.♖xd1 ♗xd1 is winning for Black. After the practically forced 57.♖f2 Black has to decide whether to make use of the extra tempo for improving the position of his bishop or to activate the king.



Concrete analysis shows that Black should not rush in with 57...♖b3? because after 58.♖e1 ♗c2 59.♖d2 ♗b1 his pieces would be rather congested on the queenside, failing to create threats on the other wing. Not surprisingly, White can defend successfully after 60.♗a5! (removing the bishop from the b4-square in order to prepare the next move) 60...a3 61.c4 ♖xc4 62.♗c3. Black cannot make further progress on the queenside. At the same time, it is already too late for attacking the kingside pawns, because after 62...♗d3 63.g3 ♗e2? 64.f4! it appears that White's pieces are on optimal positions for both defence and counter attack. Instead of 59...♗b1 Black could try 59...♖b2, once again with the idea of blocking the access of the enemy king. However, the black king is tactically exposed on b2, which allows White to defend with the thematic 60.c4! as indicated by Malfagia.

Besides, 60.♗a3!† is also sufficient for a draw since 60...♖xa3? is impossible because after 61.♖xc2 g5 62.g3 or 61...g6 62.g4 Black would be in zugzwang.

The correct continuation is:

57...♗c2!

Preparing a better fate for the bishop. For the time being the black king is well placed on c4, safely blocking the c4-pawn and thus restricting the white bishop.

58.♖e2 ♗d3† 59.♖d2 ♗f1 60.g3 ♖b3

Now that the bishop has finally escaped the cage, the time has come to activate the king. Another possible move order would start with 60...♗g2 followed by ...♖b3.

61.♔c1

If White tries the same defensive method as after 57...♗b3, with 61.♙a5, Black plays 61...♙g2 when the white king cannot defend the weak pawns and support the bishop on c3 at the same time.

61...♙g2 62.♗b1!?

Aiming for the a1-square, in order to block the pawn. After 62.f4 ♙xe4 Black wins an important pawn, cutting off the enemy king from the a1-corner at the same time.

62...♙xf3 63.♙f8

This counterplay will fail to solve the problems.

63...♙xe4† 64.♗a1 ♙d5 65.♙xg7 e4

and the second passed pawn decides the outcome of the game.

56...♙d3 57.♙f8 ♙d8 58.♙b4 ♙b8

Suddenly it appears that the b4-square is not so safe for the bishop. The threat of ...♙xb4, destroying White's queenside fortress, forces the bishop to abandon the outpost.

59.♙a3 ♙d8 60.♙b4 ♙d7!

A very instructive moment. Karpov is not interested in winning the c3-pawn. After 59...♗xc3 60.♙b2† followed by f4 White would generate some counterplay, winning some space for the bishop on the long diagonal at the same time, in order to prevent the a-pawn from queening.

The c3-pawn is quite useful for Black, because it restricts the enemy bishop.

61.♙f1 ♙d1!

After some neutral moves, possibly made under time pressure, Karpov finds the right plan. By cutting the white rook off from the queenside he creates the strong threat of ...♗b3.

62.f4 ♙d3†!

This intermediate check was enough to convince White of the uselessness of his resistance. Before taking on f4, Black forces the white king to retreat, making any counterplay impossible:

63.♗h2 exf4 64.♙xf4 ♗b3

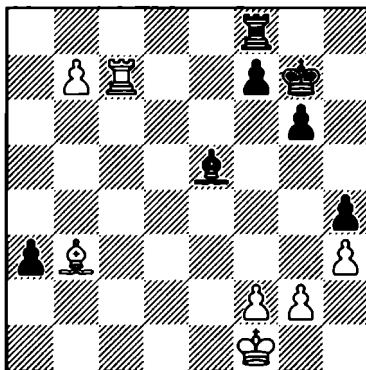
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In the game Meulders-Karpov it was not at all difficult to establish whose pawn was the more dangerous. The black a-pawn was not only far more advanced than its rival, but also more

remote from the opposite wing. It would be interesting to know which of these factors is of greater importance. The next game may give some answers.

Anatoly Karpov – Nigel Short

Lucerne 1989



Both pawns need to pass through only one more square controlled by the enemy bishop. At the same time, the black pawn is on a more remote file. However, having reached the seventh rank, the white pawn allows Karpov to achieve a typical set-up after

43.♙c8

Of course, the more active placement of the white rook was also a telling factor.

Black is completely reduced to passivity, while the white king will slowly march to the queenside.

43...g5 44.♗e2 f5 45.♗d3 g4

Black has nothing better to do than advancing these pawns, in the hope that his spatial advantage will offer him saving chances at a later stage of the game.

46.f3 gxf3 47.gxf3 ♙f4 48.♗d4

A degree of accuracy is needed. The white bishop is a very powerful piece, stopping the enemy pawn and preventing the black pieces from approaching the queenside. Therefore, it is a good idea not to cross the a2-g8 diagonal, in order to prevent ...♗f7.

48...♙d6

Taking the c5-square under control does not achieve the desired result.

49.♘d5

The bishop has to move away allowing the king to advance on a dark square.

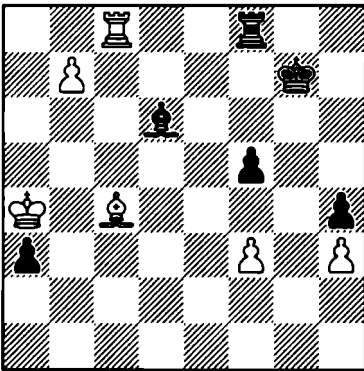
49...♙g3 50.♘c5 ♔e5 51.♙a2 ♙f4 52.♘b5 ♙g3 53.♘a4

The king's final destination is the a7-square, in order to win the bishop with b8=Q.

Answering ♘a6 with ...♙b8 would not solve the problem because of ♙xb8 followed by ♘a7.

However, before carrying out the main plan White has to win the a-pawn or get some other form of advantage out of its vulnerability. Otherwise, the ending with an extra bishop would be impossible to win.

53...♙d6 54.♙c4



54...♙f6

Short correctly estimates that, with his bishop immobile, passive play would lead to defeat. Here is a sample variation, analysed by Fracnik:

54...♙h8 55.♘b3 ♙f8 56.♘a2!

Putting Black in zugzwang. The immediate 56.♙b5?! would allow 56...♘f7 followed by ...♘e7 and ...♙d8.

56...♙h8 57.♙b5!

Now White is just in time transferring the bishop to e8 in order to block the eighth rank.

57...♙f8 58.♙e8 ♘f6 59.b8♙ ♙xb8 60.♙xb8 ♘e7 61.♘xa3

Black loses because the pawn ending arising after

61...♙xe8 62.♙xe8† ♘xe8 63.♘b4 ♘e7 64.♘c5 ♘e6 65.f4 is just hopeless.

55.♘b3

Instead of this overcautious move, White could have played 55.b8♙ ♙xb8 56.♙xb8 with the point that the tactical trick 56...♙a6†!? 57.♙xa6 a2 is refuted by the even more elegant 59.♙g8†! ♘xg8 60.♙c4† as indicated by Malfagia.

55...♙g6 56.b8♙ ♙xb8 57.♙xb8 ♙g3 58.♙g8†!

Exchanging rooks is the simplest solution.

58...♘f6 59.♙xg3 hxg3 60.♙f1 ♘g5 61.♙g2 ♘f4 62.h4

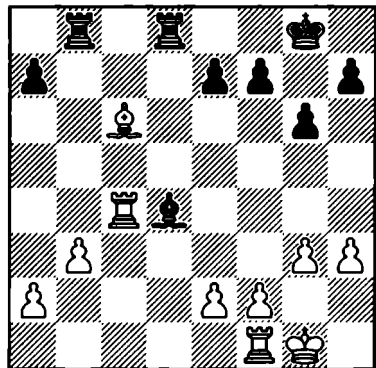
It is all over now. Black's counterplay is too slow.

62...♘e3 63.h5 ♘f2 64.♙h3 ♘xf3 65.h6

1-0

In both these games the strength of the passed pawn was sufficient by itself to guarantee a victory. However, things are not always that simple. For instance, a queenside majority is considerably more difficult to advance than an already existing passed pawn. In such cases, in order to obtain chances for success, the active side should try to create an additional weakness on the opposite wing.

Anatoly Karpov – John van der Wiel
Amsterdam 1988



This position looks really difficult to win. The extra pawn on the queenside is difficult to advance while the black kingside is very solid. Compare, for instance, with the case of the e-pawns being

removed from the board. White would have had an obvious additional target on f7.

On the other hand, the white e-pawn has its importance, too. By being able to take under control the d4-square, it will make the transfer of the bishop from one wing to the other more difficult.

23.b4! ♖e5 24.♞e4

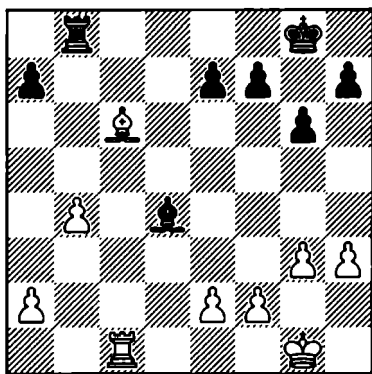
For the moment, White cannot prevent the enemy bishop from being transferred to the g1–a7 diagonal, where it can effectively fight against the passed pawn.

Karpov considers it useful to make his opponent tired with all sorts of deviations from the main plan, which at this stage consists of advancing the queenside pawns as far as possible. Such an approach is, of course, impossible to explain in lifeless *Informant* (No. 45) annotations and Karpov & Zaitsev restrict themselves to mentioning 24.f4!? ♞d4 25.♞f1 “with a clear advantage”.

24...♞f6 25.♞c1 ♞d4

It is difficult to say whether this exchange is really in Black's interest. Simplifications are generally desirable but, at the same time, one cannot help thinking that Black exchanges his most active piece, thus reducing his possibilities of counterplay.

26.♞xd4 ♞xd4



27.♞c4 ♞e5

27...♞b6 would be premature in view of 28.a4.

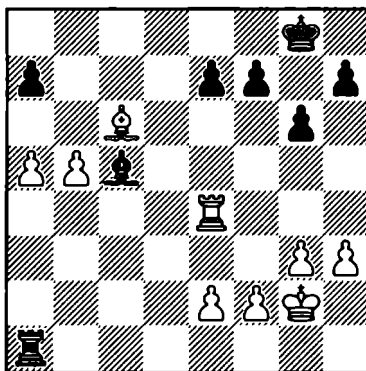
Black considers it useful to force the white pawns onto light squares and only then regroup to the best defensive formation.

28.♞e4

Once again, Karpov suggests 28.f4!?, for instance 28...♞d6 29.b5 with a clear advantage. During the game he seems to have been reluctant to weaken the g3- and e3-squares in order to avoid Black's counterplay. I believe that he was right.

28...♞d6 29.b5 ♞c5 30.a4 ♞d8 31.a5 ♞d1†

32.♣g2 ♞al



Black has activated his rook, in accordance with Tarrasch's recommendations. The rook should be placed behind the pawns.

33.♞c4

Before pushing the candidate pawn, Karpov drives the bishop away from the blockading b6-square. This achievement does not have a permanent character, but it seems to have inhibited van der Wiel's desire to transfer the bishop to b6 in the near future.

33...♞d6 34.a6

It was too early for decisive action with 34.b6! because of 34...♞xa5 35.b7 ♞a6! with a probable draw (but not 35...♞a2? 36.♞b4 ♞b8 37.♞d4 winning). For the moment, the queenside pawns are safely blocked, but Black has to permanently take into account the possibility of the b6-break.

34...♣g7

Black should have transferred his bishop to b6 at any cost. van der Wiel might have feared the weakening of his kingside after 34...♞c7!? 35.♞e8 ♞b6 36.♞f4 f6 but, as we shall see, he will have to push his f-pawn later anyway.

35.g4

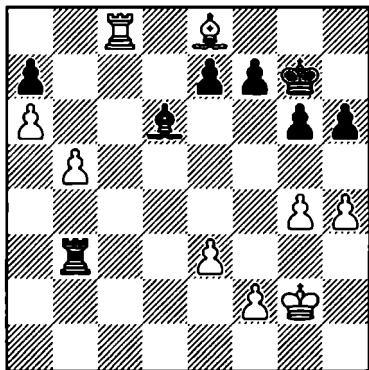
Since there is little action on the queenside yet, Karpov tries to provoke a weakness in Black's camp on the other wing. In view of the previous note, 35. $\text{♙c8}!$? might have been better, with g4, h4 to follow.

35...h6

35... $\text{♙c7}!$ should have been played.

36.♙c8

Now Black can forget about ♙c7-b6 .

36...♖a3 37.h4 ♗f8 38.♙c8 ♖g7 39.e3 ♖b3**40.♖f3**

We can see now that refraining from f2-f4 was a wise decision. Karpov probably did not know in advance what configuration of pawns he would need, but it is better to keep the pawns back as long as possible and advance them only when this would serve an important purpose.

40...f5

Finally, Black has to create this weakness. The white king threatened to advance to the queenside, for instance ♖e4 , ♙c1 , ♖d5-c6-b7 . At some moment White would have sacrificed the exchange in order to break the final line of resistance. The preventive e7-e6 would leave the bishop without any stability on d6 and would weaken the f7-pawn, with fatal consequences.

Karpov underlines the fact that the black rook is forced to guard the b- or the a-line giving the variation 40... $\text{♖b2}!$ 41. $\text{♖e4}!$ ♙f2 42.b6 with a win for White.

After the less committal 40... ♖b4 the white king would have had more freedom of action than in the game: 41. ♖e2 for instance: 41... ♖b3 42. ♖d2 $\text{♖b2}†$ 43. ♖c3 ♖b4 44. g5 hxg5 45. hxg5 ♗f8 46. f4 ♖g7 47. ♙d8 ♖b1 48. ♖c4 followed by ♖d5-c6 .

41.g5!

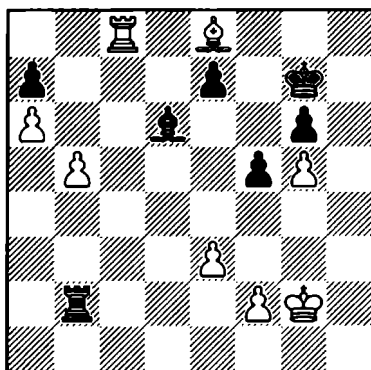
Karpov is more concerned about the "permanent" details of the position than about the dynamic ones. The white king would have had the possibility of a faster activation than in the game after 41. $\text{gx}f5$ $\text{gx}f5$ 42. ♖e2 but his black colleague would have enjoyed some freedom, too, because of the availability of the f6-square.

After the move played in the game, the white monarch is in a better position than his rival anyway. Besides, White has an additional target on g6.

41...♖b2 42.♖g2

Karpov is not in a hurry. The first thing he cares about is to prevent any form of counterplay, possible after, for instance 42. ♙d8 ♙b4 43. ♙d7 ♙e1 .

However, he might have missed a hidden tactical detail, pointed out by Malfagia: instead of 43. ♙d7 White can play 43.b6! ♙e1 44. ♙d1 (But not 44.bxa7? $\text{♙xf2}†$ 45. ♖g3 $\text{♙d2}†$ 46. ♖h3 ♙xd8 47. ♙c6 ♙f2 48. $\text{a8}♘$ ♙xa8 49. ♙xa8 ♙xe3 and if there is anyone who can claim an advantage, it is certainly not White!) 44... $\text{♙xf2}†$ 45. ♖g3 $\text{♖b2}†$ 46. ♙xe1 with a decisive advantage.

42...hxg5 43.hxg5

This was the position Karpov has been aiming for. By having created threats on both wings, White has obtained excellent winning chances. In fact, in none of the variations analysed from this moment on could I find a draw for Black, in case of best play from White. However, the position is too complicated for a 100% accurate verdict.

From a practical point of view, it is more important to mention that the only thing needed now is to transfer the king to the queenside, preferably to b7. However, this process will not be that smooth.

Because of the threats on both wings, the black pieces are restricted in several ways. The king is obviously forced to stay on one of the g7- or h7-squares, the former being preferred from a general point of view, because it is closer to the centre and of opposite colour to the white bishop.

The bishop cannot move at all: ...♗e5 would be answered with ♖a8 while a move along the a3-d6 diagonal would make ♗c7 possible. In both cases, White would win the a7-pawn.

The rook has to prevent b6 at any cost and restrict the activity of the white king at the same time. This leaves Black with the possibilities of moving ♖a2-b2 only, or, if really needed, ♖h7-g7.

43...♖a2

White should also permanently count with the advance of the black f-pawn, aiming to weaken the dark squares and get some freedom for the bishop.

However, at this moment 43...f4 would lose to 44.exf4 ♗xf4 45.♖f3 (but not 45.♖a8? because of 45...♗e3) 45...♗d6 46.♖e4 ♖a2 47.♖d5 ♖b2 48.♗c4 and there is nothing that can prevent the king reaching b7.

44.♖f1 ♖b2

Once again, 44...f4 was not possible because of 45.exf4 ♗xf4 46.♖a8 when the indirect defence of the a7-pawn with 46...♗d6 fails to 47.♗xa7 ♗xf2† 48.♖xf2 ♗c5† 49.♖f3 ♗xa7 50.♖e4 with an easy win.

How should White proceed now? The most direct approach 45.♖e1 would give Black reasonable counterplay after 45...♗b4† 46.♖d1 ♖a5 and White's kingside pawns are just as weak as the black ones. General exchanges and a draw seem the most probable outcome.

With the king on f1, the move 45.♗c6 (with the idea of putting indirect pressure against the g6-pawn and thus making the bishop manoeuvre to b4-a5 impossible) would simply lose the b5-pawn after 46...♗xb5 since 46.♗xd6? would fail painfully to the intermediate check 46...♖b1 †.

The severe restriction of Black's actions, mentioned in a comment above, suggests White's possibility of playing for zugzwang.

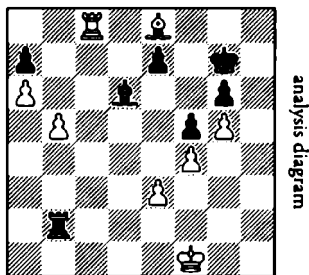
45.♖g1

The idea behind this mysterious move is to triangulate with ♖g1-g2-f1 and put Black in some sort of zugzwang. Although Karpov will be successful with it, I do not believe that it is the best move in this position.

First of all, Black could have avoided being tricked by the triangulation. However, this would not have been such a problem, since it would have actually forced White to find the right path.

Secondly, and more importantly, the zugzwang itself will be only relative. Since in the case of transferring the king to the queenside the f2-pawn will be hanging at some moment, the best way to pass the right to move to Black would have been:

45.f4



As we know, Black has an unpleasant choice between 45...♖a2 and 45...♖h7.

a) Surprisingly, 45...♖a2 is easier to deal with. White would play as in a similar situation from the game: 46.♗c6! taking advantage of the fact that the b5-pawn is temporarily not attacked and preventing the bishop from moving. After 46...♖b2 White can indirectly defend the pawn with 47.♖e1!.

Now 47...♙b4† (47...♞b5? loses to 48.♞d6 ♞b1† 49.♞d1. This trick is obviously possible only with the king on e1.) 48.♙d1 ♞d2† 49.♙c1 ♞d6 loses to 50.♞d6 ♙xd6 because of 51.b6 ♙c5 52.b7 ♙d6 53.♙c2 and Black can do virtually nothing against the transfer of the white king to c7, since his own king would be busy defending the g6-pawn.

b) From a practical point of view, the better move seems to be

45...♙h7

and, although White should still win, the path to success is quite narrow. The drawbacks of 45...♞a2 were possible to take advantage of immediately, by improving the position of the white rook but the unfavourable position of the king on h7 will count only at the end of long complicated variations. Play may continue:

46.♙e1 ♙b4† 47.♙d1 ♙a5 48.♙c1!

Now, after 48.♞c6 Black can safely defend with 48...♞d2† 49.♙c1 ♞d6. Where should Black go with the rook? 48...♞d2 would leave the bishop overloaded after 49.b6!. Black could move the rook elsewhere along the second rank, for instance with:

b1) 48...♞f2

Creating the threat ...♙d2† and ...♙e3. However, after:

49.♞c6! ♙d2† 50.♙b1 ♙xe3

White can carry out the thematic breakthrough:

51.b6!

When Black can stop the a-pawn only by sacrificing the bishop after:

51...♞f1† 52.♙a2 axb6 53.a7 ♙d4

Obviously the only move, preparing ...♞a1†. 54.♞c4!

Threatening ♞a4 or ♙a4.

54...♞a1† 55.♙b3 ♞xa7 56.♞xd4

And White should win without too much effort.

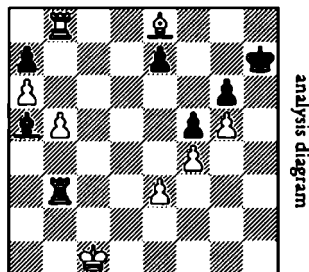
This leaves us with a move along the b-file, such as:

b2) 48...♞b3 White has a choice between several tempting continuations, but only one of them is clearly winning:

x) 49.♞c6 ♞b5 50.♞e6 ♞c5† 51.♙d1 ♙d8 52.♙xg6† ♙g7 53.♙e2 is better for White.

y) 49.♙c2 ♞xe3 50.♞c6 e5! 51.♙xg6† ♙g7 52.♙xf5 exf4 offer an advantage, but Black can still fight.

z) The best move is 49.♞b8! creating the threat of ♞b7, with a simultaneous attack against the e7- and a7-pawns and maintaining the breakthrough with b6 in reserve.



Black has a basic choice between defending either of the pawns in advance.

z1) The apparently solid 49...♙b6 allows the thematic exchange sacrifice 50.♞xb6! which wins rather easily after 50...axb6 51.♙c6 ♞a3 52.♙b2 ♞a5 53.♙c3 ♙g7 (53...♞a4 does not prevent White's plans because of 54.♙b3 ♞a5 55.♙c4 e6 56.♙d4 and the king breaks through anyway) 54.♙d4 and the black king is just one step too far from reaching a fortress with 54...e6 and ...♙e7. This is one of the moments where the drawbacks of the move 45...♙h7 are obvious. After 54...♙f7 55.♙d5 ♙f8 White clears the c6-square with 56.♙b7 and will soon win the rook for the a-pawn.

z2) 49...♞e3 basically does not change much. White's simplest way might be 50.♙c6! creating such threats as ♞b7 or b6, although two more direct approaches are also possible.

50.b6!? ♙xb6 51.♞xb6 axb6 52.♙b2! Taking the a3-square under control. 52...♞e2† 53.♙b3 ♞e3† 54.♙b4 Here White should win, although some accuracy will be needed, since 54...♞e1 planning ...♞b1† and ...b5 would complicate matters somewhat.

Also good is 50.♞b7!? ♙b6 51.♞xb6 axb6

52.♙c6 ♖a3 53.♗b2 ♖a5 54.♗c3 when the absence of the e3-pawn should not count too much compared with a previous line. The fact is that after an eventual ...e5, fxe5, the f-pawn will be under the bishop's control.

45...♖a2

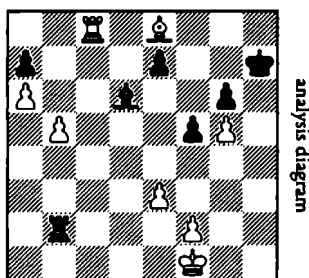
After 45...♖b1† 46.♗g2 ♖b3! White would have had nothing better than to return to the position examined in the previous comment with 47.f4 ♖b2† 48.♗f1.

46.♗g2 ♖b2 47.♗f1

The triangulation has succeeded, with Black's collaboration. But is this really so good for White? 47...♖a2?!

van der Wiel probably chose this move for general reasons, such as that the king should stay closer to the centre. He obviously overlooked or simply underestimated the force of Karpov's next move.

Anyway, better would have been 47...♗h7 (not mentioned by Karpov) when the best White could do would be a new triangulation in order to reach again the same position as after Black's 44th move and then play f4. In a certain sense, this situation is similar to that from my game against Fauland. Would Karpov have found the strength to admit his mistake and return to the right track?



With the pawn on f2, the immediate 48.♗e1 would be worse than in the similar variations analysed above.

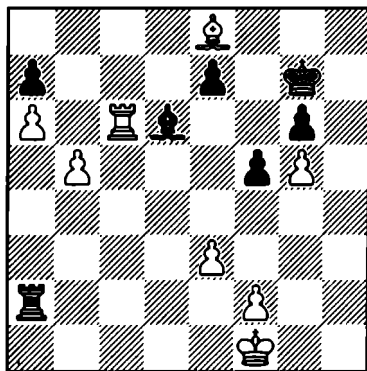
For instance, after 48...♗b4† 49.♗d1 ♗a5 50.♗c1 ♖xf2 51.♖c6 ♗d2† 52.♗b1 ♗xe3 53.b6 ♖f1† 54.♗a2 axb6 55.a7 ♗d4 56.♖c4 ♖a1† 57.♗b3 ♖xa7 58.♖xd4 the absence of the f-pawn makes the position impossible to win for White.

The maximum that he could reach would be a rook plus bishop versus rook ending. Black could either drive the bishop away from its active position with 58...♖a8 or attack the g5-pawn at once with 58...♖a5 59.♖h4† ♗g7 60.♖h6 f4 when after 61.♖xg6† ♗h7 White will have to give it up, in order to stop the f-pawn.

Malfagia indicated that, instead of 50.♗c1, White could try 50.♖c6 ♖b5 51.♗xg6† ♗g7 52.♗e2 with the idea of attacking the f5-pawn and, eventually, the enemy king, but Black can react effectively with 52...♖b2† 53.♗f1 (the king has to retreat since 53.♗f3? would allow 53...♗e1) 53...f4! 54.exf4 ♗d2 activating his pieces to the maximum. White could continue with 55.♗e4 ♗xf4 56.♖h6! coordinating his forces around the enemy king and creating the threat ♖h7† followed by g6, but it is far from clear whether this would be enough to convert his advantage. The main problem is that it is hard to include his own king into the attack, since ♗g2 can always be met by ...♗e3.

The last diagrammed position is also a less favourable moment for playing 48.f4 since this would give Black the possibility of improving the position of his king with 48...♗g7.

All White could get would be a better, but not necessarily winning, position with 49.♗e1 ♗b4† 50.♗d1 ♗a5 51.♗c1 ♖b3 52.♖c6 when Black can win the important b5-pawn with 52...♗f8! 53.♗xg6 ♖xb5. 48.♖c6



An important moment. White slightly changes the set-up, which creates some new, different, problems for Black. Besides its objective merits, this is psychologically unpleasant for the defending side. Once you have acquired certain reflexes about the position it is not easy to make a general “refresh” and adapt to the newly created circumstances.

From the sixth rank, the rook targets the g6-pawn, thus immobilizing the bishop and supporting b5-b6 at the same time.

48...♖h7

Karpov considers this to be a mistake and recommends 48...♞b2. As we shall see, the moves are more or less equivalent. Play might have continued:

49.♕e1

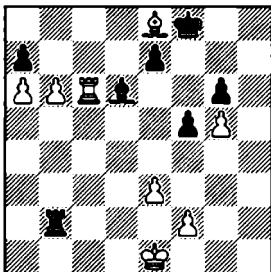
Planning ♕d1. We shall see in the next note what would happen if Black would allow it.

49...♕f8!

Karpov mentions that 49...♞xb5? is not possible: 50.♞xd6 ♞b1† 51.♞d1 winning. Now we see an important consequence of the “triangle”: the king is on a favourable square. The typical regrouping does not help either: 49...♞b4† 50.♕d1 ♠a5 51.f4 ♠b6 (Black’s counterplay comes a move too late: we can see how effective the rook is on the sixth rank.) 52.♞xg6† ♕f8 53.♠d7 (threatening the fatal ♠e6) 53...♕f7 54.♞e6 and White is two pawns up with all the weaknesses safely defended. Unfortunately for Black 54...♞xb5? would fail to 55.g6†.

50.b6

50.♠xg6 ♞xb5



analysis diagram

50...axb6 51.♠xg6!

This might be the simplest way. Karpov gives some long lines starting with 51.♞c8 and ending with a slight advantage for White. There are several errors in those analyses; for instance, White has an immediate draw in the main line and what Karpov considers to be a forced mate is just complicated again. In order to avoid making the lecture of the text too difficult, I completely eliminated that part of the tree.

51...♠a2 52.♞xb6 f4

Everything forced till now; Black is two pawns down but hopes to get some play on the dark squares.

53.♠b1!!

This move not only forces the black rook to quit the second line, but also clears the way for the g5-pawn, which might have been in danger after gxf4 ♠xf4.

53...♠a1

After 53...♠a3 White could play with all confidence 54.exf4 ♠xf4 55.g6 since there would be no danger of the rook being overloaded: ♠b1 is not under attack anymore. Now White can avoid any trouble with:

54.♕e2!?

54.exf4 might also be OK: 54...♠xf4 55.g6 threatening ♕e2, ♠d3 and if 55...♠c7? then 56.♞b7 followed by a7.

54...♠c5 55.♞b8† ♕g7 56.♠d3

Everything is safely defended and Black has no chance to escape, since the exchange of rooks would lead to a lost opposite bishops ending. The two passed pawns are too advanced and too far from each other. One favourable detail is the light colour of the a8-corner. If all else fails White could win the endgame with bishop plus this pawn versus king.

49.♕e1 ♠b4†

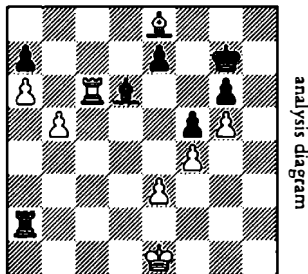
Karpov and Zaitsev do not mention the neutral 49...♕g7. White’s win (if really possible) would have been by no means trivial as the next variations demonstrate.

It is a pity that with the passing of the years Karpov had lost his appetite to comment on every little nuance of the position. *Sto pobednih partii* (100 won games), published in 1984 was such a

wonderful book: my favourite lecture for years. I also wonder how big Karpov's contribution to the comments on the present game really was (in addition to signing them, of course!).

Anyway, here is a possible scenario after the mentioned move:

50.f4



analysis diagram

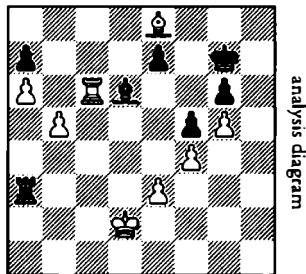
stop the pawn: 55...♖a3 56.♟xd6 and White wins.

52.♞d2

Not 52.♞c2? ♟xb5! 53.♟xd6?? ♞c5† winning.

52...♖a3

On 52...♟xb5 then 53.♟xd6 ♟b2† 54.♞c3 wins.



analysis diagram

In order to approach with the king, White will have to sacrifice one of the kingside pawns. It is better to give to the e3-pawn this unfortunate task, at least for two reasons:

1) White's structure would remain more compact, and

2) The king will be one step closer to its target when leaving the e3-pawn *en prise*.

50...♟b2 51.♞d1

This is the main line I chose for the first edition relying on the fact that, as indicated by Jacob Aagaard, 51.b6 axb6 52.♞c4 b5 53.♖a4? with the idea of creating interference on the a-file, would actually lose after 53...bxa4 54.a7 a3 55.a8♙ a2 followed by ...♟b1† and ...a1♙. However, instead of sacrificing his rook, White has the simple 53.♞c8! ♖a2 54.♟xb5 suggested by Malfagia, when his advantage is probably decisive. The main threat is to transfer the king to b1 when the black rook would be helpless against the combined action of the white pieces. The attempt to activate the bishop with 54...e5 only weakens the seventh rank and fails to 55.♞d8 ♟b4† 56.♞d1 exf4 57.♞d7† ♞f8 58.a7 followed soon by a check on the back rank and a8♙.

51...♟b3

51...♖a2 would be worse: 52.♞c1 ♖a3 53.♞b2 ♞xc3 54.b6 axb6 55.a7 and there is no way to

How should White continue now?

a) 53.♞c2 seems insufficient because of 53...♟xe3 54.b6 axb6 55.♞c3 and now Black has two possible continuations.

a1) 55...♟xc3† 56.♞xc3 ♟b8 might be too risky, although I am not 100% sure whether this endgame is really winning for White, since Black would have some counterplay with e7-e5 at the right moment. The b-pawn would have to be sacrificed, of course, in order to offer some freedom to the bishop.

a2) 55...♞c2† 56.♞b3 ♖e1 57.♞b2 ♞c2† 58.♞c2 ♞e3 59.♞d2!

Preventing ...♖a3.

59...♟c5!

I cannot see how White can make progress (worse would have been 59...♟b8 60.♞d8! or 59...♟xf4 60.a7 ♟e5† 61.♞a2 ♖e1 62.♟a4! winning in both cases). Later Malfagia supported my point of view with the following analysis:

60.a7 ♖a3 61.♞d7 b5!?

Black plays actively, but he can also choose 61...♖a5 62.♞c7 ♟d6 which looks like a sound defence.

62.♞c7! ♖xa7! 63.♞xc5 ♖a4

Aiming to eliminate all the white pawns. For instance:

64.♖e5!?

The lines 64.♖xb5 ♖xf4 65.♖b6 ♘f8! 66.♗xg6 ♖g4 and 64.♖c6! ♖xf4 65.♖xg6† ♘f8 66.♗d7 ♘f7 67.♖b6 e6! 68.♖xe6 ♖g4 both lead to a draw.

64...♖xf4 65.♖xe7† ♘g8 66.♗xg6 ♖g4

The last pawn will vanish. Stronger is:
b) 53.♖c8!

Once the first goal has been achieved (more freedom for the king) the rook returns to the eighth rank, in order to restrict its rival to the a- and b- files again. Black seems to be helpless against the white king's invasion to b7. Play may continue:

53...♖b3 54.♘c2 ♖a3 55.♘b2 ♘h7 56.♗f7! ♘g7
57.♗b3 ♖a5 58.♗c4 ♖a3 59.♖c6

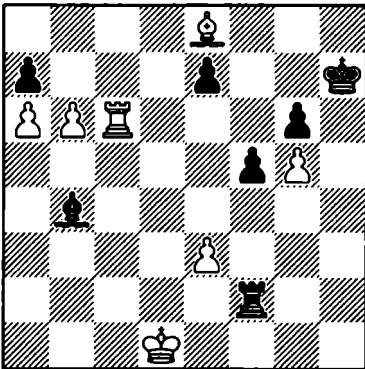
Black has to give up control of the third rank, thus allowing the king's advance with decisive effect, since

59...♖xe3

would lose immediately:

60.b6 axb6 61.♖xd6 exd6 62.a7 ♖e8 63.♗d5
50.♘d1 ♖xf2

50...♗d6 would be similar to the previous note.
51.b6!



Due to the black pieces' chronic lack of coordination, White is now winning.

51...axb6 52.a7 ♖d2† 53.♘c1 ♖a2 54.♖c4!

This bishop could not find a safe square throughout all the endgame...

54...♗d2†

If 54...♗c5 then 55.♖a4.

55.♘d1 b5 56.♖c2 ♖xa7 57.♘xd2 b4 58.♖c6
♖a2† 59.♘d3 ♖a3† 60.♘c2 b3 61.♗xg6†
1–0

The mating attack

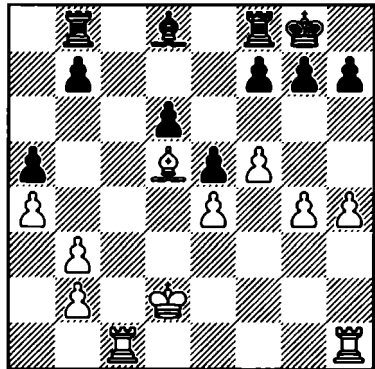
We already know that in the middlegame the presence of opposite coloured bishops is a catalyst for dangerous mating attacks, because the active side plays practically with an extra piece.

The absence of queens does not completely exclude this possibility.

Here is a relatively simple example, where the domination of the light squares proved a decisive factor.

Anatoly Karpov – Henrique Mecking

Hastings 1971



How many times has White's Sicilian kingside attack failed in the middlegame?

Despite massive simplifications, Black's position is very difficult. The presence of opposite coloured bishops makes the attack very dangerous.

Let us have a look at the other wing as well: It might seem that Black is practically one pawn up, due to the doubled white b-pawns. In fact, it is precisely vice versa. While the possibility of a later b3-b4 looks completely reasonable, there is no real future for the d6-pawn, which in fact restricts his own bishop.

22...g5

Hoping for some sort of blockade on the kingside and preventing g5-g6.

The alternative would have been to open the play on the other wing with 22...b5. In this case maintaining the tension with 23.♞c2 would allow Black to obtain reasonable counterplay with 23...bxa4 24.bxa4 ♖b6 25.♞c6 ♗c5 26.b3 ♞fc8 as indicated by Malfagia. He also gave 23.axb5! as a better reaction, with the possible continuation 23...♞xb5 24.♞c6 ♞b6 25.♞c3 controlling the c-file and reserving the choice of playing on the more appropriate wing, depending on the circumstances. Indeed, the b-file is safely defended now and the pseudo-active 25...a4? only makes things worse after 26.g5 ♖h8 27.♞a1! axb3 28.♞a8 with a winning attack for White.

23.fxg6 hxg6 24.♗d3 ♖g7 25.h5

White puts Black's pawns situated on light squares under serious pressure.

25...♗b6

25...♗g5 would allow 26.♞c7.

26.♞h3 ♗c5

Black has consolidated on the queenside, but... his king will miss the bishop as a defender.

27.♞f1 f6

This move weakens the king's position even more, but Black could not allow the devastating h5-h6. For instance: 27...b6 28.h6† ♖g8 29.h7† ♖g7 30.h8♙† ♞xh8 31.♞xf7† ♖g8 32.♞b7† followed by mate.

28.hxg6 ♖xg6 29.♞h1 ♞be8 30.♞h7 ♖g5 31.♖e2!

Every piece joins the attack.

31...♖f4

The g4-pawn is the only piece which offers some protection to the black king: 31...♖xg4? would lead to mate after 32.♞g7† ♖f4 33.♞f1†.

32.♞1h3 ♗d4?!

Black overlooks White's threat. He should have finally taken the g4-pawn, although after 32...♖xg4 33.♞h1! ♞g8 (the only move) 34.♗xg8 ♞xg8 35.♞f1 White would have had every chance to convert his advantage into a win.

33.♞g7

Not finding an adequate defence against ♞f3 mate, Black resigned.

1-0

Restricting the enemy bishop

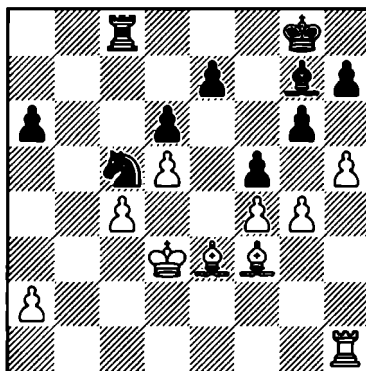
That was a rather smooth job. The black bishop was uselessly acting on the empty dark diagonals, allowing White a material superiority in attack.

In the next game we shall see a completely different picture. White's strategy will be directed towards restricting the enemy bishop by placing the pawns on squares of the same colour. The mating ideas (of which many were not seen in the game, remaining in the background) will be favoured by the huge advantage of space. The game is also evidence of the fact that Karpov's predilection for opposite coloured bishops dates back from his youth.

It will also be interesting to compare Karpov's notes with those from the endgame against van der Wiel. Although they fail to exhaust the possibilities, they certainly are of great help in the search for the truth.

Anatoly Karpov – Lubomir Kavalek

Nice Olympiad 1974



If the king retreats to the second rank, then Black would get strong counterplay with 29...♞b8. Karpov must have calculated the next move in advance.

29.♗xc5! ♞xc5

Karpov writes that after 29...dxc5 30.h6 ♗d4 31.♞b1

Black's position would have been difficult as well. Indeed, after

31...fxg4

Avoiding the exchange on g4 in the hope of restricting the enemy bishop would not be of much help. For instance 31...♖d8 32.♗b6 ♗d6 33.♗b8† ♕f7 34.g5 followed by ♗d1–a4–e8. Black could not play ...e6 at any moment, because this would lead to the loss of the h7-pawn and to the opening of yet another light diagonal.

32.♗xg4 ♗a8 33.♗e6† ♕f8 34.♗b7

White could combine the threats against the a6-pawn with those along the seventh rank (based on a well timed d6) in order to get a decisive advantage.

30.h6 ♗f8

A sad square for the bishop, but 30...♗h8 would have been even worse. After 31.♗b1 the bishop would suddenly get into immediate danger. White would gain a decisive advantage after 31...fxg4 (After the passive 31...♗c8 White could have blocked the position with 32.g5. The winning plan would have been ♗b7, ♗f3–d1–a4–d7–e6 and then the capture of the a5-pawn.) 32.♗b8† ♕f7 33.♗xg4. Suddenly, the black king finds himself in a mating net, not allowing the bishop to escape with 33...♗a1 (33...♗f6 would make the line one move shorter after 34.♗e6 mate) because of 34.♗e6† ♕f6 35.♗f8 check and mate.

As Karpov pointed out, the intermediate 30...fxg4 would not have helped either:

31.♗xg4 ♗f8

31...♗f6 would be even worse because of 32.♗e6† ♕f8 33.♗b1 and White is mating.

32.♗e6† ♕h8 33.f5 ♗a5

33...gxf5 34.♗g1 followed by ♗g8 mate.

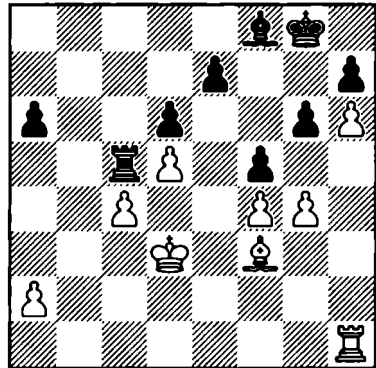
34.♗b1 ♗a3† 35.♕e2!

The king aims for a safe square. Once the checks are over, Black will be ready to resign.

35...♗xa2† 36.♕f1 ♗xh6 37.f6!

Black has to give up the bishop for nothing in order to avoid the mate on g8.

After 30...♗f8 White has to make a principled choice whether to consolidate his kingside pressure or take preventive measures against Black's intended queenside action.



31.♕c3

Karpov opts for the latter solution.

Later, he came to the conclusion that 31.g5 was also possible when after 31...♗a5 32.♗b1! the black rook does not seem to create enough trouble alone, while its colleagues are almost stalemated. Karpov gives the following instructive lines:

a) 32...♗xa2 33.c5 ♗a3† 34.♕e2 dxc5 35.d6 with a decisive attack.

b) 32...♗a3† 33.♗b3

b1) The endgame without rooks is also sad, since Black would have two weaknesses, the h7- and a6-pawns. However, some accuracy is still needed from White.

33...♗xb3† 34.axb3 a5 35.♕c3 ♕f7 36.♕b2 e5 37.dxe6† ♕xe6 38.♗d5† ♕d7 39.♕a3 ♗e7 40.♕a4 ♗d8

Now 41.♗g8 ♕e8 42.♕b5, given by Karpov as winning, would be strongly met by 42...d5! opening an important diagonal for the bishop and threatening to attack the white pawn chain with ...♗c7. Malfagia provided the following analysis: the natural attempt to parry the threat with 43.♕c6 dxc4 44.bxc4? fails to 44...a4 45.c5 a3 46.♕b7 ♗a5! 47.c6 ♕d8 followed by ...♗c7 and the white kingside will soon vanish. White could try the counterintuitive continuation 43.♗xh7?! ♕f7 44.c5! but Black's counterplay oriented against the f4-pawn allows him to save the game after 44...♗c7 45.c6 ♗xf4 46.♕c5 ♗c7 47.♕xd5 f4!. The white king

cannot improve his already dominant position, because he has to watch the enemy passed pawns.

Malfagia also suggested an efficient remedy for this problem: the most accurate continuation is the immediate:

41.♖b5!

When after:

41...♙c7

White should first activate his king as much as possible

42.♖a6! ♕d8 43.♖b7

Only now, after:

43...♕d7

White should unblock the d5-pawn with:

44.♙g8 d5 45.♙xh7

The main difference compared to the previous lines is that the black king cannot imprison the white bishop, because this would mean leaving his own undefended.

45...♙xf4 46.♙xg6 dxc4!?

An interesting attempt of obtaining counterplay, justified by the fact that after 46...♙xg5 47.h7 ♙f6 48.c5! Black would be helpless against the advancing pawns.

47.♙xf5! ♕d6 48.h7 ♙e5 49.bxc4 ♖c5

Black has considerably activated his king but... 50.♖c8!

...his colleague returns into play with decisive effect.

50...a4 51.♕d7 a3 52.♙b1 ♖xc4 53.♙a2†

The white bishop will bravely sacrifice itself for the pawn, meanwhile the white king will come to support the passed pawns.

b2) With rooks it is maybe even simpler. 33...♙xa2 34.c5 dxc5 35.d6 e6 36.d7 c4†!? 37.♖xc4 ♕d2 38.♖b7 ♙e7 39.♖b8† ♖f7 40.♖h8 ♙xd7 41.♙xh7† and White should be winning, since he will also capture the g6-pawn.

c) 32...♖f7!? Karpov recommended this as the best chance giving the following lines:

33.♖b2 ♙a3† 34.♖b3 ♙xa2 35.c5 dxc5 36.d6 c4†

Once again, this seems to be the best defence.

36...♖e6 37.♖b8!

Both 36...exd6 37.♙d5† ♖e8 38.♖b8† ♖e7 39.♙xa2 and 36...♙a4 37.♙d5† e6 38.♖b7† ♖e8 39.♙c6† ♕d8 40.♖b8 mate are clearly worse.

37.♖xc4 exd6 38.♙d5† ♖e8 39.♖b8† ♖e7 40.♖b7† ♕d8 41.♙xh7

With a clear advantage. Let us continue just a few moves more:

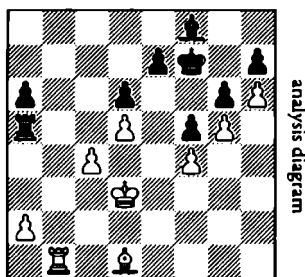
41...♙a4† 42.♖d3 ♙xf4 43.♖g7 ♖h4 44.♙xg6

White is clearly better, but can he really win?

This last variation is remarkable in the sense that the solitary black rook has managed to generate adequate counterplay.

But maybe White can improve his play at an earlier stage.

Instead of the slightly cooperative 33.♖b2, I believe that 33.♙d1, preparing the activation of the bishop, would be better. In this case, Black's position would have remained very difficult, probably lost.



For instance:

33...♙xa2

33...e5 is just hopeless because of 34.dxe6† ♖xe6 35.♖b7 ♙e7 36.♙f3 ♖f7 37.♙d5† ♖e8 38.♖b8† ♕d7 39.♖h8 winning the whole kingside structure, while the black counterplay has not even started yet.

34.♖b7

Planning ♙b3 and c5.

34...a5

This does not prevent the plan. The only thing needed is a change of move order.

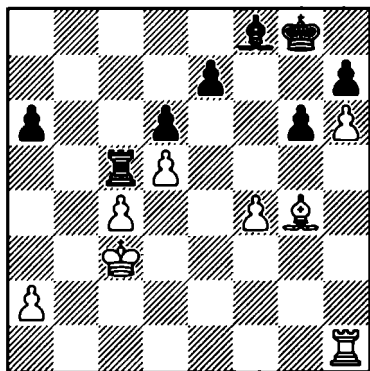
35.c5! dxc5 36.d6 ♙a3† 37.♖c4

Black cannot stop the d-pawn and save his bishop at the same time.

31...♙xg4

31...♙a5 would be answered with 32.♖b3 intending a4 and ♖b4.

32.♙xg4



32...♠f7

Kavalek decides to sacrifice a pawn in order to free his king from the cage. Karpov recommends 32...♞c7 as the more stubborn defence. He mentions that after 33.♙e6† ♣h8 34.f5! (relying on the fact that 34...gxf5? is impossible because of 35.♞g1, mating on g8) 34...♞b7 (parrying the elegant threat of 35.♞b1 ♙xh6 36.f6!!, blocking the king's escape and leading to mate after 36...exf6 37.♞b8† ♣g7 38.♞g8) White cannot increase the pressure on the g6-pawn with 35.♙f7 because of 35...♙xh6! 36.♞xh6 ♣g7 37.♞h2 ♣xf7 38.♞xh7† ♣f6. Therefore Black would have succeeded in playing 35...♞b8, preventively defending the back rank, thus enabling 36...gxf5. From his comment we could infer that Black would get some chances for survival, anyway, better ones than in the game.

In fact, I believe that Kavalek's move is not only more logical, but also stronger than Karpov's suggestion. Allowing the king to be pushed to the corner is hardly a good idea.

In Karpov's line, after 34...♞b7 White only needs a few accurate moves in order to prove Black's hopelessness.

White has already created tension on the kingside, he has to open the play on the other wing as well. From this perspective, the best move is 35.a3! taking the b4-square under control and thus preventing ...♞b4† after ♣d4 and c5.

Let us see first what would happen if Black would follow Karpov's recommendation:

35...♞b8 36.♣d4 gxf5!

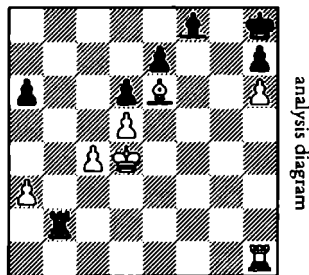
My evaluation. Black should not open his king's position without being forced to.

37.♙xf5!

It is important to eliminate this pawn at once. Otherwise it could interfere with White's future plans. Black is allowed one instant of freedom, but will this be enough to get counterplay?

37...♞b2 38.♙e6

White renews the threat of ♞g1. What can Black do?



a) Returning with the rook would mean accepting total passivity. Although most players would reject this move intuitively, the concrete refutation is quite elegant.

38...♞b8 39.c5!

The only way to make progress on this wing.

39...dxc5† 40.♣xc5 a5

The black rook starts feeling a bit insecure. The pawn advance prepares to create some additional space on the queenside, which will prove insufficient, however.

41.♣c6 a4 42.♣c7 ♞a8 43.♞h2!

Putting Black in zugzwang.

43...♞e8 44.♙d7 ♞a8 45.♙c6

and the rook will soon be lost. The queenside domination is impressive.

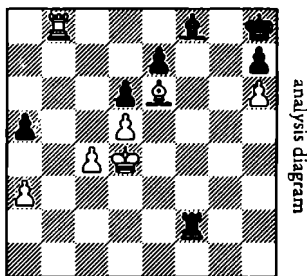
b) More natural is to cover the g-file with 38...♞g2 threatening at the same time to attack the far advanced pawn with ...♞g6. However, after 39.♞b1 it appears that 39...♙xh6 is impossible because of 40.♞b8† followed by 41.♞g8†, winning the rook.

Inserting a check with 39...♙d2† is also useless, because after 40.♣c3 ♙xh6 41.♞g1 the bishop would be overloaded.

It means that Black will have to stay passive, allowing ♖b8, when the rook will have to defend the bishop from the f-file. White would then break with c5 and activate his king decisively. Is this the whole truth?

Not really. After a more careful examination of the position, we can notice that all of Black's kingside will be stalemated after ♖b8. This means that if Black had no moves available with his a-pawn he could start checking, even with his rook en prise, aiming for perpetual check or stalemate.

Therefore, the best continuation is 39...a5! when after 40.♖b8 ♖f2



White has to hurriedly bring his king to a safe zone with:

41.c5! dxc5† 42.♔xc5

Play may continue:

42...♖c2† 43.♔d4

Before crossing the b-file with the king, White has to remove the rook. If the black pawn had been on a4 already, this would have been impossible.

43...♖f2 44.♖a8 a4 45.♔c5 ♖c2† 46.♔b6 ♖c6† 47.♔b7 ♖c7† 48.♔b8 ♖b7† 49.♔c8 ♖c7† 50.♔d8

On either check, White would capture with his bishop. Therefore

50...♖c1
is forced. But then White wins by force with:
51.♔e8 ♖f1 52.♔f7! ♔xh6 53.♔xe7† ♔g7 54.♖g8 mate.

Malfagia suggested the slightly more tricky 48...♖c1 aiming to leave White's pieces congested on the queenside. I believe that in this case the more accurate way.

49.d6!

Giving some freedom of movement to Black in order to make stalemate ideas unavailable or more restricted.

49...exd6 50.♔b7 ♖f1 51.♔d5!

Once the rook has been diverted, this pawn should be blocked in order to avoid any form of counterplay. However, its presence on the board would make itself felt in a negative way for Black, since such checks as ...♖f7† are impossible in view of the calm ♔xf7 and Black is not stalemated, having the move ...d5. White's main plan is to capture the a4-pawn. The attempt to win the f8-bishop is more problematic since the central area is rather unsafe for the king, in view of the possible checks with the undefended rook.

51...♖b1† 52.♔a7!

The safest square, since the check on b7 is impossible because of ♔xb7.

52...♖f1 53.♔a6 ♖f5 54.♖b8!

A waiting move that, as we shall see, places the rook on the best square in view of the main plan.

54...♖f4 55.♔a5 ♖f5 56.♔xa4 ♖f4† 57.♔b3!

There are no checks available now. For instance, if 57...♖b4† then 58.♖xb4 unpinning the bishop, while 57...♖f3† fails for already familiar reasons.

57...♖f1 58.♔b4

The start of the final regrouping. White clears the b3-square for the bishop.

58...♖f4† 59.♔c3 ♖f1 60.♔b3!

It is all over now. The advance of the a-pawn is impossible to prevent, while the counterplay based on the promotion of the d-pawn fails.

60...d5 61.a4 d4† 62.♔c4 d3 63.a5 d2 64.a6 d1♚ 65.♔xd1

and Black can resign already, since the g8-square has become available to the king and there are no stalemate ideas available any more.

And still, this is not the end of the story. In chess, there is always room for improvement. Black can insert a check on his 38th move with

c) 38...♖d2† and only after 39.♔c3 cover the g-file with 39...♖g2. With his king on the third rank, White will have to work harder to carry out the plan from the previous variation. For a

while play would continue according to a familiar scenario.

40. ♖b1 a5 41. ♚b8 ♜f2 42. ♚a8!

42.c5 would be premature because of 42...dxc5

43. ♜c4 ♞c2† when the king cannot advance to b5. The continuation that causes White most problems is now:

42... ♜f3†

42...a4 would simply transpose to the previous line after 43.c5 dxc5 44. ♜c4 ♞c2† 45. ♜b5 ♜f2 46. ♜xc5 winning.

43. ♜d4 ♜f4† 44. ♜e3 ♜f1 45.c5!

Here is the difference: White has to carry out this breakthrough with his king on the third rank.

45...dxc5 46. ♜d3 ♜f4 47. ♜c3

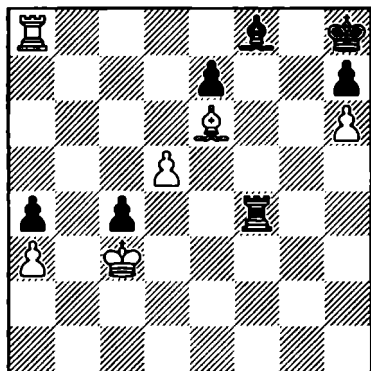
White plays for zugzwang. Sooner or later, the rook would have to give up control of the fourth rank.

47...a4 48. ♜d3 c4†

48...♞d4† would lose instantly to 49. ♜e3 when the rook could not return to the f-file.

49. ♜c3

Curiously, this might be a reciprocal zugzwang.



If White were to move:

50. ♜b4 would allow 50...c3!† 51. ♜xc3 ♞c4†, when the king will not be able to cross the fourth rank. If 50. ♞d8 or 50. ♞e8, the king would be deprived the possibility of escaping along the back rank. Placing the rook on b8 or c8 would also be bad because the king would not be able to use the respective files.

Let us consider some alternatives to Karpov's recommendation.

Starting immediate queenside counterplay with 35...a5 (instead of 35...♞b8) would also fail by one tempo after 36. ♜d4 a4 37.c5 dxc5† 38. ♜xc5 ♞b3 39. ♜c6 ♞xa3 40. ♜d7 ♞b3 41.d6 ♞d3 42. ♜e8 ♞xd6 43. ♜xf8.

White's material might be insufficient for a win, but after 43...gx f5 44. ♞g1 ♞d8† 45. ♜f7 a3 46. ♞g7 a2 47. ♞xf5 he would mate the enemy king.

Staying passive would be the most stubborn continuation. White would have played c5, transferred the king to an advanced position (such as c6) and then carried out the operation d6 cxd6, f6, when the threat of ♞d5, f7 and ♞e1-e8 would have been hard to meet. However, finding the concrete form of following this plan, in accordance with Black's reaction, might have been more difficult than in the previous variations.

33. ♞c6† ♜f6

33...♜e8 would be answered by 34. ♞b1.

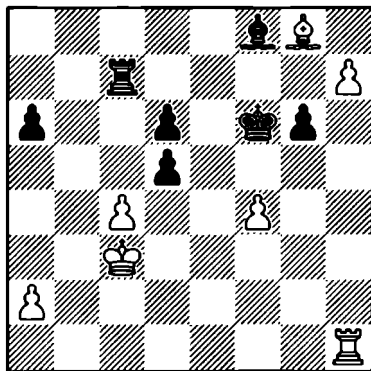
34. ♞g8 ♞c7

The attempt to solve the problems by tactical means with 34...♞xh6?! fails after 35. ♞xh6 ♜g7 36. ♞xh7† ♜xg8 37. ♞xe7 and Black will soon lose the d6-pawn and the game.

By defending the e7-pawn, Black already threatens ...♞xh6. Therefore White has to capture the pawn at once, although he might have wanted to improve his position first with, say, ♜d3.

35. ♞xh7 e6 36. ♞g8 exd5 37.h7

37. ♞xd5?! would be bad in view of 37...♞h7.



37...♙g7?

Kavalek misses his best chance. He should have eliminated the important c4-pawn with the intermediate check 37...♞xc4! and only after 38.♔d3 play 38...♙g7

39.♙xd5.

39.h8♞ ♙xh8 40.♞xh8 would allow 40...♞c8! with a probable draw, for instance: 41.f5! ♔g7 42.♞h7 ♔xg6 43.fxg6 ♞c1.

Now after 39.♙xd5 play may continue 39...♞c5 40.♙b3 ♙h8

The position is similar to that from the game, with the significant difference that the c4-pawn is missing. This not only leaves the c-file available for counterplay, but also deprives the bishop of any stability in the centre.

Black's chances to save the game would have been considerable.

We can already draw some conclusions about the critical decisions in this game.

By refraining from advancing the pawn to g5 when given a choice, Karpov allowed Black a certain freedom of action. Kavalek felt the favourable moment and took his king out with ...♔f7.

Curiously, Karpov considers this move to be inaccurate. In fact, both when making his 31st move and when commenting on Black's 32nd move, he commits the same mistake. He considers the activity of the black rook a more important issue than the king's position, thus according priority to dynamic factors over the static ones.

Decades later, when he had acquired huge experience at the highest possible level, his attitude in a similar situation was diametrically opposed. See his 41st move in the game against van der Wiel.

38.♙xd5

38.h8♞ ♙xh8 39.♞xh8 would lead only to a draw: 39...♞xc4! (39...♔g7 40.♞h7) 40.♔d3 ♞c8!. But not 40...♔g7 41.♙xd5 ♞c5 42.♞g8 ♔h7 43.♙b3 and White keeps his extra bishop.

38...♙h8

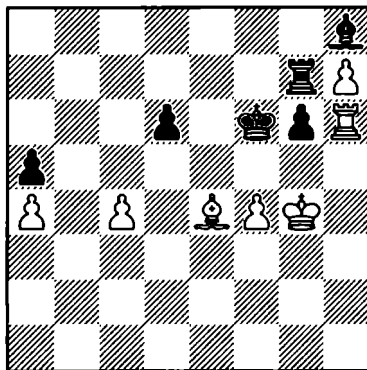
38...♞c8!?

39.♔d3 ♔f5 40.♔c3 ♞c7 41.♔b3 a5 42.a4 ♞c7 43.♙c4 ♔f6 44.♞h6 ♞g7

As Karpov points out, Black has to "pack" all his pieces in order to defend the g6-pawn. 44...♔g7?

(maybe this question mark is not too relevant, since Black is lost anyway) would lose to 45.♞xg6 ♔xh7 46.♞g1 ♔h6 47.♞h1 ♔g7 48.♞h7 winning the rook.

45.♔g4



In view of the line 45...♔f7 46.♔g5 Black resigned. Quite a nice position, by the way!

1-0

A crucial game

Before the rise of Garry Kasparov, the most difficult moment of Karpov's career was his world title match against Korchnoi, held in Baguio, back in 1978. Although after his defection Korchnoi was constantly boycotted by the Soviet players, and thus lacked the possibility of playing in tournaments at the highest level, he proved to be very well prepared for this match, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view. He dominated the first part of the match in an authoritative way but, surprisingly, Karpov was the one who managed to score the first win, in the eighth game. Korchnoi equalized in the eleventh and then adjourned the thirteenth game in a promising position.

The time had come for Karpov to change the course of events. Rather suggestively for the theme of this chapter, in the next game he decided to counter his opponent's favourite opening with a forced transposition to an opposite bishops ending.

Anatoly Karpov – Viktor Korchnoi

World Championship Match (14), Baguio City
1978

1.e4 e5 2.d3 d6 3.♖b5 a6 4.♗a4 d6 5.0-0
♜xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♖b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♗c5
10.♜b2 0-0 11.♗c2 ♗f5 12.♜b3 ♗g4

In the previous games of the match where this opening was played, Korchnoi did not have any problems in maintaining equality. After Karpov's surprising novelty 12...♗g4 was abandoned in favour of the older 12...♗g6.

13.h3 ♗h5 14.g4!

In all the monographs (including the respective chapter of *ECO* authored by Korchnoi) this move was considered completely inoffensive.

14...♗g6 15.♗xe4

This is actually the novelty, leading to a very pleasant endgame for White.

15...dxe4 16.♜xc5 eaf3 17.♗f4!

17.♝xd8 would have spent a valuable tempo, allowing Black to start an attack against the e5-pawn. As we shall see, Black will not be able to avoid the exchange of queens.

17...♝xd1

Otherwise, Black would simply lose his far advanced pawn, as we can see in the following lines: 17...♝e7 (17...♝h4 18.♝xf3 or 17...♝e8 18.♝e1) 18.♝d5! ♜a5 19.b4 ♜c4 20.♝fe1.

As a result of his novelty, Karpov forced the transposition to an opposite bishops ending. This is rather suggestive of his confidence in the possibilities offered by such positions.

18.♗ard1

The time has come to draw our first conclusions. White has a strong knight on c5 and controls the only open file. Because of the weakness of the a6-pawn, Black cannot fight for this file yet. At the same time, the f3-pawn is weak. Things look pretty bad for Black but, although confronted with an unpleasant opening surprise, Korchnoi will defend very well for a while.

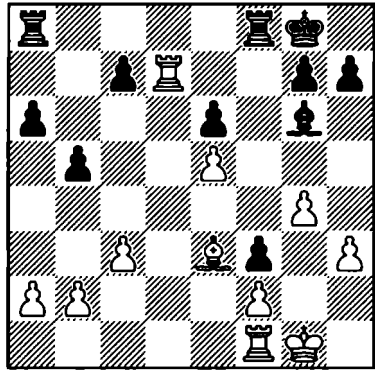
18...♜d8!

The first aim is to exchange the strong knight. After that the absence of any minor pieces other than the opposite bishops will give Black chances to build up a fortress.

19.♗d7

More ambitious than 19.e6 ♜xe6 20.♜xe6 fxe6 21.♗xc7 with only a minimal advantage.

19...♜e6 20.♜xe6 fxe6 21.♗e3



21...♗ac8

Karpov writes that after the exchange of one pair of rooks with 21...♝f7! 22.♝fd1 White would have had enough space to keep the rook on the seventh rank.

Indeed after 22...♗c8 23.♗c5 ♗e4 24.♝xf7 ♝xf7 25.♗d7 ♝g6 26.♝h2 ♗c6 27.♝e7 ♗d5 28.b3 Black would have been practically paralysed, facing the unpleasant threat h4-h5-h6.

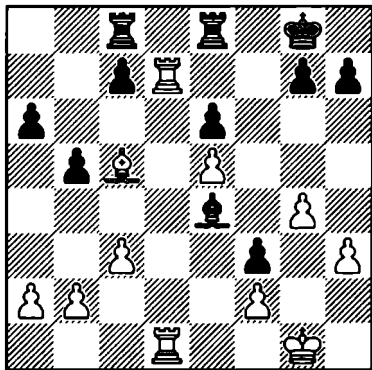
22.♝fd1 ♗e4

Korchnoi decides to transfer the bishop to d5, in order to break communication between the white rooks. Apparently, this should solve most of Black's problems. Is there any way that White can increase his pressure? Yes, there is.

The main plan consists of transferring the king to g3 and then advancing his h-pawn to h6. The weakness of the kingside dark squares would create the conditions for a strong attack. For instance, the bishop could be transferred to f6 via e7. If Black would play h6 himself, then g4-g5 would have similar effects.

23.♗c5 ♝fe8!

The rook takes control of the e7-square and restricts to a minimum the possibilities of the white rook on the seventh rank.



24. ♖7d4!?

Karpov does not make any comment on this move. He probably did not like his rook to remain captive on d7, but was this really dangerous for him?

It might seem that 24. ♖h2 would have been more accurate. The main idea is that the rook occupies a strong position on the seventh rank and Black cannot tolerate it there.

For instance, after 24... ♗d5 25. b3 Black could not offer an exchange of rooks on d8, because this would lose a piece to ♖xd8 followed by c4. In case of 25... a5 26. ♖g3 a4 White would react with 27. bxa4 bxa4 28. a3 followed by h4-h5 anyway.

At the same time, after the intermediate 24... ♗c6 White would simply win a tempo in the variation: 25. ♖7d4 ♗d5 26. b3 a5 27. ♖g3 ♖a8 28. h4 a4 29. c4 bxc4 30. bxc4 ♗c6

If we compare with the position arising in the variation given in the comments on Black's 27th move, the extra move h4 gives White the possibility of maintaining his domination with 31. ♗a3 ♖a5 32. ♖f4 when 32... g5† is not possible at all. Having stabilized the position, White would simply proceed with his main plan, based on h4-h5.

Why then did Karpov retreat with his rook without being forced to? A possible explanation is that he wanted to have a rook on d4, in order to create the potential threat of b3 and c4. With

one rook on d7, the move ♖d1-d4 would be impossible because of ... ♗c6, forcing ♖e7 with simplifications.

At the same time, the loss of tempo does not have great significance, because the mentioned counterplay based on ... g5† would only make things worse for Black. See the comments to Black's 27th move below.

Although 24. ♖h2 might be slightly more accurate, we can say that 24. ♖7d4 is a simpler practical decision, restricting Black's possibilities.

24... ♗d5 25. b3

Black's main problem is that he cannot consolidate his bishop with ... c6, because after c4 he would lose material. Therefore, he has to continually consider the exchange sacrifice on d5.

However, with the c6-square available, the sacrifice is not too effective. For instance, 25. ♖xd5 exd5 26. ♖xd5 would simply be answered with 26... c6 winning the important e5-pawn.

25... a5

The only possibility of getting some counterplay.

26. ♖h2 ♖a8

The ambitious 26... a4 would have been strongly met by 27. c4 bxc4 28. bxc4 ♗c6 29. a3 ♖b8 30. ♗b4 keeping Black's counterplay under control (Karpov).

27. ♖g3 ♖a6

Karpov writes that Korchnoi's move is connected with a mistaken plan and is probably based on the underestimation of White's ideas.

He also states that more consequent would have been:

27... a4!

And after:

28. c4 bxc4

Karpov also gives 28... ♗c6!?, aiming to exchange the maximum number of queenside pawns, as playable, but after 29. cxb5 ♗xb5 30. b4 ♗c6 31. a3 White would consolidate his position and could proceed with his main plan.

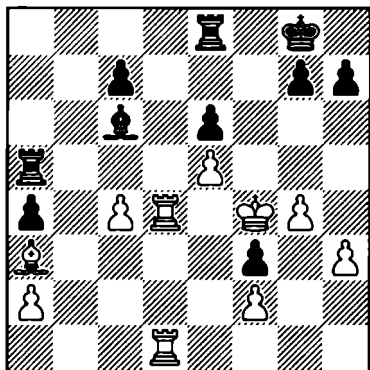
29. bxc4 ♗c6

White now has no time for 30. a3 because of 30... ♖a5 winning the e5-pawn. However, even

though a whole tempo down compared to a variation presented above, White seems to be able to maintain the domination with:

30.♠a3 ♖a5 31.♜f4!

31.♠e1 would lead nowhere because of 31...♞aa8! intending ...♞ad8, when Black would solve most of his problems. The fact is that Black seems to be in no position to undermine the e5-pawn with g7-g5†.



The immediate 31...g5† 32.♜xg5 ♞xe5† 33.♜f6 looks pretty bad for Black, because he has no time to start counterplay based on 33...♞e2 because of 34.♞d8 winning immediately. Let us check whether including the moves:

31...h6 32.h4

would change anything by clearing the h7-square for the king.

The critical variation continues:

32...g5† 33.hxg5 hxg5† 34.♜xg5 ♞xe5† 35.♜f6 ♞e2

Otherwise, Black would be doomed to passivity.

36.♞d8 ♞xf2 37.♞xe8† ♠xe8 38.♞d8 ♞g2

Black has to take the g-file under control as soon as possible. 38...♞xa2 would lose outright to 39.♞xe8† ♜h7 40.g5 ♞g2 41.♞e7† ♜g8 42.g6 when White would mate soon.

39.♞xe8† ♜h7 40.♞e7† ♜g8 41.♞g7† ♜h8 42.♞f7!

This accurate move keeps the f-pawn under observation. Black cannot reach a saving rook

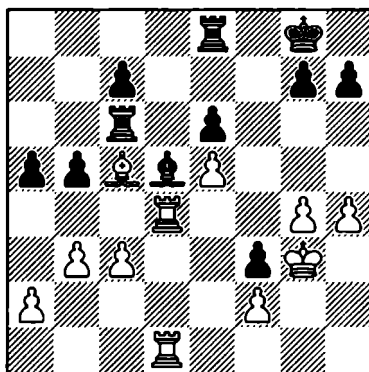
versus rook and bishop ending. For instance, after:

42...♞xg4 43.♜xe6 ♞xc4 44.♞xf3

He would have no time to attack the last white pawn with 44...♞c2 because of 45.♜f7! starting a mating attack again.

It is difficult to give a final evaluation of Korchnoi's plan. If he had stayed passive and lost a long game, he would have been criticized for not trying anything active. It is rather curious that Karpov, such a big specialist in proving that he won by force from the very first move, suggested that Black could have defended successfully. This might have been intended as a refined opening trap. Why not tempt another victim to enter this unpleasant endgame?

28.h4 ♞c6:



Knowing the further course of the game, it is easy to recommend 28...a4 but then 29.c4 bxc4 30.bxc4 would lead to similar positions as in the previous comment.

Black could not solve his problems with 30...♞c6 because after 31.cxd5 ♞xc5 32.d6 cxd6 33.exd6 too many of his pawns would be hanging.

29.♞xd5!

A thematic sacrifice, made possible by Black's last move, depriving the pawn of the c6-square. White will immediately obtain a pawn. In addition, the f3-pawn is quite vulnerable and the queenside weak.

This is a typical method for the fight involving opposite coloured bishops and rooks. The

defending side can sometimes use the bishop in order to keep his position together, or preserve drawing chances in case of simplifications. Eliminating such a bishop can be simply necessary for the active side, meaning that an exchange sacrifice is the only possible method to make progress.

29...cxd5 Bxd5 Bce6 31. d4

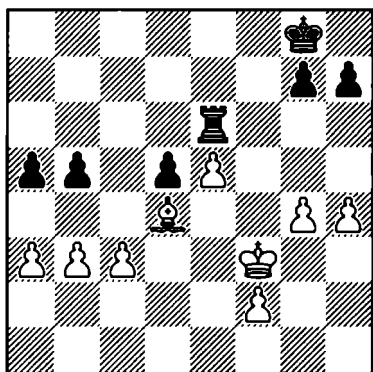
This bishop ensures White central stability in a better way than the black bishop did.

31...c6 32. Bc5

Karpov believes that his opponent underestimated this move, expecting 32. Bd7 c5, which would eliminate one of White's trumps, the e5-pawn. After the text move, the white rook occupies an ideal position. The main threat is a4, in order to weaken even further the queenside pawns.

32... Bf8

The force of White's position is illustrated by the following variation: 32... Bd8 33. Qxf3 Bd5 34. Bxd5 cxd5 35. a3!!



A remarkable move. Karpov writes that before starting to advance the kingside pawns he intended to build a fortress on the other wing, in order to prevent any form of counterplay on that side of the board. (35. Bc3 would be less accurate because of the possible complications arising after 35... Bb6 36. h5 g6 37. Qf4 gxh5 38. Qg5 h4!!) 35... g6 36. Bc3 Bc8 37. f4 (threatening f5) 37... Bf8 38. e6!

Malfagia pointed out that instead of 35... g6 Black could consider 35... Qf7 36. Bc3 Bb6 37. h5 Qe6 (but not 37... g6? 38. e6! Qxe6 39. Bg7 winning) 38. f4 g6 aiming to question White's space advantage. However, his rook would remain dangerously misplaced. After 39. Bc5 the king would have to return in order to parry the deadly threat Bf8.

Keeping this line in mind, 35... Qf8! suggests itself as an improvement, with the same idea of centralizing the king, but without restricting the rook in any way. However, it is likely that the general evaluation of the position remains the same: White has a clear advantage.

33. a4!

After this strong move Black will not be able to hold his position together any more.

33... bxa4 34. bxa4 g6 35. Bxa5

The f3-pawn will soon meet the same fate as his colleague on a5.

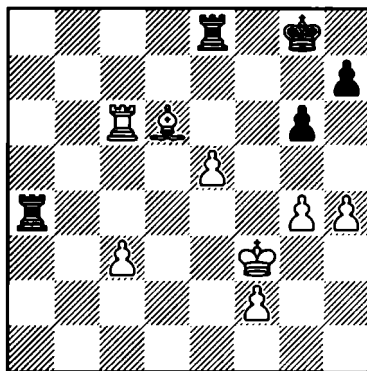
35... Bc8 36. Ba7!

Another accurate move, planning to meet 36... Ba8 with 39. a5.

36... Bf7 37. Ba6! Bc7

Black cannot play for simplifications with 37... c5 38. Bxc5 Bxc5 because of 39. Ba8+ Qg7 40. Bd4 winning material (Karpov).

38. Bc5 Bcc8 39. Bd6 Ba8 40. Bxc6 Bxa4 41. Qxf3



With three pawns for the exchange, White is easily winning.

One of the possible reasons why Korchnoi kept on playing is that he had just lost the previous adjourned game, from a favourable position.

Curiously, in that game he had sacrificed the exchange himself, in a more or less similar situation, with opposite bishops on the board. True, in that game there were still queens on the board, while his king's position was not too safe.
 41...h5 42.gxh5 gxh5 43.c4 ♖a2 44.♖b6 ♜f7
 45.c5 ♖a4 46.c6 ♜e6 47.c7 ♜d7 48.♖b8 ♖c8
 49.♜e3

Clears the way for the f-pawn.

49...♖xh4

This not only fails to generate adequate counterplay, but also places the rook on a vulnerable square. White takes advantage of this immediately.

50.e6!†

A diversion sacrifice that quickly concludes the game. The variation 50...♜xd6 (the drawback of the previous capture on h4 can be seen after 50...♜xe6 51.♙g3! when White removes the bishop from the attacked position with tempo) 51.♖xc8 ♖c4 52.♗d8! ♜xc7 53.e7 is hopeless for Black. Therefore...

1-0

Viktor, the "Non-Existent" Hero



By the time the 33rd Olympiad was held (Elista 1998) I considered my collection of Russian chess books printed in the seventies to be more or less complete. In the years after the collapse of the Iron Curtain one of my chess friends from Bucharest had been running a second-hand bookshop and I had been by far his most active customer, to the mutual benefit of both.

Therefore, while studying the shelves of the bookshop improvised at the entrance in the New Vasiuki Chess Palace where the games of the Kalmykian Olympiad took place, I was surprised to see two books that I had never heard about: *Grossmeister Geller* from the popular collection *Viidaiostchiesia Shakhmatisti Mira* (The World's Outstanding Chess Players, published in 1976) by Damsky and *Tri matcha Anatolia Karpova* (Three Matches of Anatoly Karpov, 1975) written by none other than Botvinnik. My first impulse was to buy them, of course, but I changed my mind when hearing the price, since it was four or five times higher than what Emil Pessi (this is my friend's name) used to charge me for such books. “Well, I shall order them in Bucharest.” was my final decision.

Dva matcha...tri matcha...

And yet, once I arrived home, I soon regretted my decision. Emil was quite puzzled by the titles I mentioned. Apparently, he had never seen these books either. After some brief thought, he offered me *Dva matcha* (Two matches) written by Kasparov ten years after Botvinnik's book and which I already had in my library, of course.

I had to wait for several years to get those rarities (my special thanks to my Swedish friends!) and once they finally joined my library my first aim was to understand why two books printed in quantities of 50,000 and 65,000 copies respectively (!) would be so hard to find.

The puzzle was not too complicated to solve, although for a reader who has never lived in a communist country it might all seem like science fiction. The books had the following things in common: they contained games and photos of Korchnoi and were published shortly before his escape to the West. I suppose that only a limited number of books were sold; the rest were either withdrawn from the bookshops or never sent to them when the authorities discovered this act of high treason.

Indeed, after choosing freedom Korchnoi was not as lucky as Alekhine had been more than half a century earlier. The authorities considered him as a non-person and an enemy of his former motherland (although from a logical point of view this looks like a slight contradiction to me: how can you call an enemy a non-existent person??).

The Soviet GMs were forced to boycott every single tournament where the refugee was invited. This left Korchnoi with serious problems finding good tournaments, since the organizers obviously preferred to invite two or three outstanding Soviets rather than him.

Opening books published in the Soviet Union often quoted his games, as they were generally essential for the respective variations, but never mentioned by whom they were played. “The *n*th game from Baguio” was the most explicit hint that I found in such cases, although the game variation usually ended abruptly without any mention.

The only concession was made by the chess magazines that published the games played by Korchnoi in the Candidates Matches and in his two World Title matches against Karpov. However, he was only referred to as *the Challenger* or *the opponent*.

As often happens, this extreme attitude of the authorities led to an opposite effect than intended. Surrounded by such a cloud of mystery and romanticism, Korchnoi soon became very popular in the Eastern countries.

As a teenager born and raised in a communist country, I could not have dreamed of a better-suited hero for my dreams, though it was quite irritating not to find any pictures of my idol. I can still remember the intensity of my feelings during Korchnoi's matches from the World Championship cycles

1976-1978 and 1979-1981. I was enormously happy after each of his advances through the Candidates matches but was inconsolable after his double failure against the protégé of the Soviet regime, Anatoly Evgenyevich Karpov.

Beyond my subjective sympathy, there was something else that I could not understand. My feeling was that Korchnoi was the stronger player, while Karpov was just lucky. How could somebody defend his World title by simply taking advantage of a few favourable moments offered to him by Caissa? After the catastrophe in Merano 1981, I finally decided that my limited chess understanding must have caused this feeling and ceased to think seriously about the whole matter.

Recently, I understood that my decision was wrong. In *Tri matcha Anatolia Karpova*, dealing with Karpov's path to the World Title in 1973-74, Botvinnik's description of the balance of forces between the two rivals was quite similar to my own thoughts. The only difference is that Botvinnik managed to describe in just a few words what looked like a rather complicated matter. Although Korchnoi's play was much more interesting and in a certain sense deeper, Karpov's practical strength was higher. After this belated revelation, I looked back to some of the games that had been saved forever in my memory and analysed them thoroughly. I have selected some of them, which I consider will suit the general structure of this book. You can find them below.

Viktor the rebel

Korchnoi's defection was not his only act of rebellion. (In the positive sense of the word, of course). Throughout his career, he constantly refused to follow the mainstream if he considered that it was flowing in the wrong direction. Here are some examples.

At the Candidates tournament held in Curacao 1962, he was the only Soviet not to join the "non-combatdrawing cooperative" suggested by Petrosian and embraced by Geller and Keres in order to save energy for the numerous weeks of play. From a practical point of view, Korchnoi was wrong, because he could not maintain his lead until the end precisely because of exhaustion. However, his decision was in perfect accordance with the spirit of fighting chess and sport in general.

In 1971, an American named Robert James Fischer became the first post-war challenger from a country other than the Soviet Union. The authorities were slightly alarmed and did their best to help Spassky defend the World Title. A council made up of Botvinnik, Smyslov, Tal, Keres and Korchnoi was convened in order to analyse Fischer's strong and weak spots and to suggest the best strategy to be followed by the Soviet Champion. Most of these illustrious gentlemen agreed that Fischer's opening repertoire was too limited, that he was unsure in unclear positions, where Spassky excelled, etc., etc. In no way did they take the looming danger too seriously.

With one exception.

Unlike his colleagues, Korchnoi pointed out two important aspects. He felt that Fischer was progressing rapidly and that his real strength and level of play by the time the match was going to take place was quite difficult to evaluate. He also predicted that the American would play closed openings with White as an alternative to his emblematic 1.e4. Unfortunately for Spassky, nobody took Korchnoi seriously. Fischer's score in the games where he opened with 1.c4 in Reykjavik is quite educational: two wins and two draws from four games...

The games included in this section introduce Korchnoi as a rebel in a rather abstract way. After having examined Petrosian and Tal's positional sacrifices in their respective chapters, we shall now face the other side of the coin. Throughout his career, Korchnoi firmly believed in the virtues of a material advantage and was considered the best specialist in converting it into a win.

Here are two examples played in his second match against a former colleague after his escape from the Soviet Union.

Viktor Korchnoi – Lev Polugayevsky
Candidates Semi-final (1), Evian 1977

1.c4 ♖f6 2.♘c3 ♜6 3.♙f3 ♖6 4.e4 ♙b7 5.♙d3
♜5 6.e5

This certainly looks like a premature action, but Korchnoi had a concrete variation in mind.

6...♗g4 7.h3

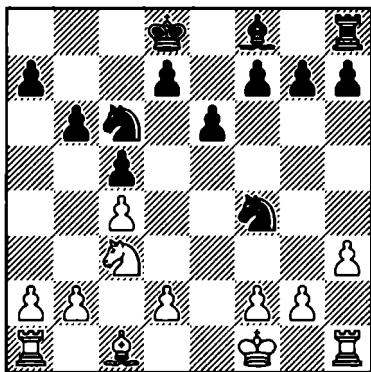
There is already no way back, since the e5-pawn is too weak.

7...♙f3! 8.♙xf3 ♖xe5 9.♙xa8 ♖xd3† 10.♙c2

Of course, White does not like the idea of an enemy knight on d3.

10...♖f4† 11.♙f1 ♖c6 12.♙xd8† ♙xd8

This was the position both players had been aiming for. Black's compensation for the exchange is obvious. He has the more compact structure (partially because he is a pawn up) and has strong control of the crucial d4-square. It is difficult to suggest any active plan for White. Neither on the wings nor in the centre does his pawn structure allow him to start an attack. In fact, I believe that most players would prefer to play with the black pieces, but Korchnoi's purposeful play in the next phase of the game will keep the balance.



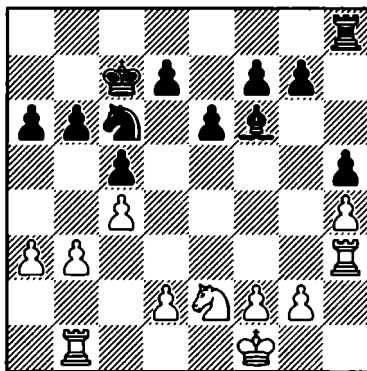
13.b3 ♖d3 14.h4!

This modest looking pawn move is the only way to get rid of the irritating knight while still allowing the activation of the king's rook along the third rank.

14...♙e7 15.♙h3 ♖xc1 16.♙xc1 h5 17.♙d1!

White cannot sit and wait until Black finishes his development with ...a6, ...♙c7 and starts active play with ...b5 or ...d5. By creating the threats d4 and b4, Korchnoi will force his opponent to start play on the queenside at an earlier stage than he might have wanted to.

17...a6 18.a3 ♙c7 19.♖e2 ♙f6 20.♙b1



20...b5!

In his brief notes for *Chess Informant*, Keene attaches a “?!” to this move and recommends 20...♙e7? instead, without any further comment. He must have been influenced by the final outcome of the game, because otherwise such an assessment is hard to explain.

Polugayevsky's move is both strong and ambitious at the same time. I am pretty sure that at this point of the game he was playing for a win and was not content to just hold the position.

Anyway, after 20...♙e7 play could have continued 21.♙f3 ♙f8 22.g3 g6 23.♙e1 defending the d2-pawn and thus preparing ♙f4 (possibly followed by ♙e4) without fearing ...g5. The threat of d4 would probably have forced Black to advance one of his pawns anyway. For instance, with ...f5 although it is far from clear whether White would get any concrete advantage out of it.

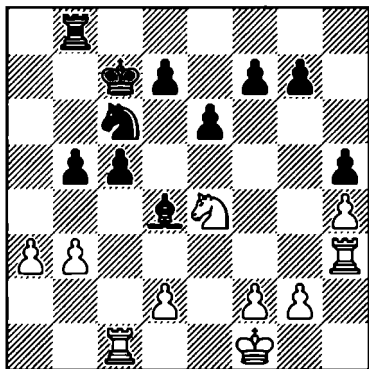
Another radical way to prevent b4 would have been 20...a5 but this would mean giving up the ambition of playing for an advantage with Black.

21.♖c3 ♙b8 22.♙b5 ♙xb5

After this new concession that White was

forced to make, Black's advantage regarding the pawn structure has increased. He has only one big group of pawns, while White has three rather weak islands. With his next moves Korchnoi aims to question the safety of the enemy king.

23. ♖e4 ♗d4 24. ♖c1



24... ♖a8!?

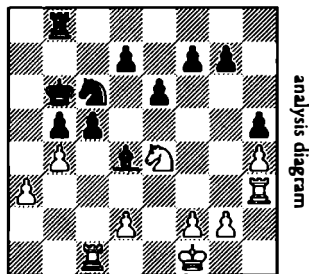
"??" according to Keene.

This is a double exaggeration. First of all, the move does not lead to a massive change of the evaluation, as we usually expect when we see a double question mark. Until now Black's position was preferable and will become roughly equal (though easier to play for White) after this inaccuracy. Secondly, I can understand Polugayevsky's state of mind around this moment. Korchnoi's logical play might have shaken his faith in the strength of his own position.

Since 24... d6 would weaken the e6-square leading to some problems after 25. ♖g5, the only favourable way to defend the c5-pawn would be 24... ♗b6. But wouldn't the king be rather exposed there? In the endgame His Majesty is supposed to be an active piece, but what if the position bears some middlegame influences?

Specifically, Polugayevsky's main worry must have been connected with the move 25. b4 aiming to open the position on the queenside, in order to create threats against the black king. However, I have managed to find no fewer than two acceptable answers to this radical action. In both

cases, the king will prove a very effective piece and will be out of any real danger.



a) 25...c4

If Black managed to keep the position closed, his advantage would become significant. Therefore, White must act energetically.

26. ♖d6

Necessary, in order to prevent ...d5.

26...f5 27.a4

The attempt to undermine the c4-pawn with 27.d3 would fail to 27...c3 when White has no easy way to attack the c3-pawn with his knight. Meanwhile, his queenside is doomed in view of the threat 28... ♖a8 29. ♖a1 ♖xb4.

27...bxa4!

This pawn, supported by the powerful bishop, will cause White considerable trouble.

28. ♖xc4!?

Aiming to question Black's queenside stability in view of the threat b5. 28. ♖xc4† can be answered with 28... ♗c7 followed by ... ♖xb4.

28... ♗e5!

By attacking the unstable white knight, Black can easily dismantle the queenside mechanism. 28... ♗b2 is less accurate, though not really bad. White can maintain his initiative with 29. b5 a3 30. bxc6 a2 31. ♖b3† ♗c7 32. ♖b7† ♗xd6 33. ♖a4 although after 33... ♖xb7 34. ♗b7 ♗c7 35. ♖xa2 ♗f6 Black should have no problems drawing.

29. b5!?

White has no time to step back. If 29. ♖f7 then 29... ♗b2.

29... ♖a5 30. ♖d3!?

This elegant move allows White to keep his

position together for a while, but fails to help him to reach a satisfactory position.

30...♔xd6

The rook was obviously taboo because of the knight fork.

31.♔xd6† ♖xb5 32.♔c3 ♖b7

Due to the strong a-pawn, White is in serious danger.

b) Black can also capture the b4-pawn with 25...cxb4 26.axb4 ♖xb4.

The maximum that White can achieve is a draw by repetition with:

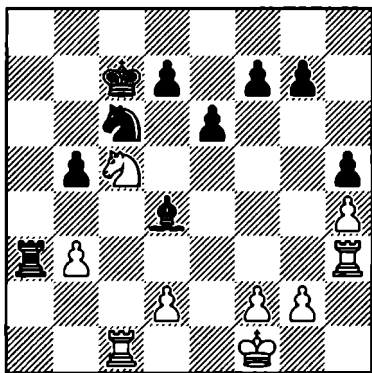
27.♖b3 ♖c6 28.♖cb1 ♖a5

But not 28...b4? 29.♖xb4!† when, in case of capturing on b4, Black will lose either his rook or bishop.

29.♖a3† ♖b6 30.♖ab3 ♖a5

The fact is that under no circumstances should White allow the move ...b4, when in the fight against this pawn he will effectively be material down, due to the passive placement of his king.

25.♖xc5 ♖xa3



After this exchange of pawns, Black's structure has become slightly less compact. He already has two pawn islands. However, his rook is quite active now.

Looking at the further phase of the game, the first sensation is that Polugayevsky's hesitation has marked a radical change of psychological territory. However, I do not believe that Korchnoi's approach changed in any way. His play will

be just as strong and ambitious as it was before Black's 24th move. The only difference is that the position suddenly allowed him a bit more than it did before. Virtually with every move Black will be forced to make small concessions, although White's progress will be more of an optical rather than objective nature.

26.♖d3!

A strong move, creating the threat 27.♔xd4 ♖xd4 28.♖xe6†. Black has to make further structural concessions.

26...e5

The attempt to preserve the pawn structure intact with 26...♔d6 would fail to the elegant attacking operation. 27.♖e4!† ♖e5 28.♖e1 ♔d5 29.♖c3† ♖c5 30.♖e2!† ♔d5 31.♖c1 ♖e4 32.♖f3 f5 33.♖f4! Combining a direct attack against the king with threats against the kingside pawns, as indicated by Malfagia.

27.f4!

Continuing to undermine Black's central position.

27...d6 28.♖e4 ♔d7 29.fxe5 ♖xe5

One more reason for disappointment for Black. The generally desirable 29...dxe5, keeping the central structure compact, would cut off the bishop from the kingside. This would allow White to build up strong pressure with 30.♖f3 when Black has to place his knight on a rather passive square with 30...♖d8 (30...f6 is worse because of 31.♖g3). White can then start slowly improving his position with 31.♖e2 maintaining the better chances in the endgame.

However, after the text move things are still not disastrous for Black. His king is definitely more active than his rival, while his pieces are quite stable in the centre. White has no obvious way of converting his material advantage.

30.♖g5 ♖b4 31.♖f3

The energy displayed by this rook along the third rank is remarkable. Black is forced to create further weaknesses.

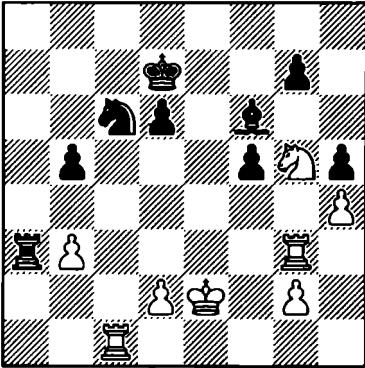
31...f6 32.♖f7 ♖d4

The bishop is best suited to defend weaknesses on different parts of the board at the same time. Therefore, Black should avoid exchanging it, at least for the moment.

33.♠g3 f5 34.♔e2

Finally, the white king is approaching the centre. His further possibilities of activation are rather obscure, because of the barrier created by Black's minor pieces. But in the event of unexpected simplifications, the king might suddenly become active.

34...♙f6 35.♘g5 ♘c6



36.♔d1

The first moment of slowing down on Korchnoi's part. The king will not be better placed on d1 than it was on f1. In some cases, he would be even more exposed. For instance, by placing the knight on d4 Black would create a dangerous mating net.

White could have tried 36.♘e6!? practically forcing Black to enter the following line: 36...♗xe6 37.♗xc6 ♙xh4 38.♗d3 ♔e7 39.♗b6 when the b5-pawn would fall.

However, the strong kingside majority as well as the reduced number of pawns would keep White's advantage (if any) within controllable limits.

With his text move, Korchnoi aimed to maintain the tension and it eventually proves to be effective, after some further hesitation from his opponent.

36...♘d4

Quite a natural move. However, it has the drawback that it allows the white rooks to connect for the first time in this game.

Attacking the pawn with 36...♘a5!? would not be effective because White would get rid of the pin with the intermediate 37.♗f3 g6 and then

force the exchange of rooks with 38.b4, which would suddenly increase his chances of success. I believe that Black would have had little trouble maintaining the balance in case of calm but slightly disruptive play, such as 36...♙b2 (forcing the rook to a more passive square) 37.♗b1 (37.♗c2? is impossible because of 37...♗a1† 38.♔e2 ♘d4† winning the exchange back) 37...♙e5.

In fact, this is White's main problem: his rooks cannot find absolutely stable squares. Any further progress could be achieved only by tactical means, which, as far as I can understand, are not available if Black plays carefully.

37.♠g3

Finally, the black king faces concrete threats. Taking into account Polugayevsky's probable time trouble, this should be regarded as a decisive achievement already. By the time the first control is reached, his position will be hopeless.

37...♗a7?!

Releasing the pressure against the b3-pawn will deprive Black of one important defensive resource (see the comments on Black's 39th move below). A more effective way of defending the c7-square would have been 37...♘e6 attacking the c3-rook at the same time. After 38.♗c8 ♘c5 Black has a solid position.

38.♘f3!

An important intermediate move. White could not invade the enemy position immediately because after 38.♗c8? he would lose material to 38...♘xb3. After both 39.♗c2 and 39.♗c6, Black would play 39...♗a1† followed by the fork 40...♘d4†. This is where the exposed position of the white king on d1 makes itself felt.

38...♘e6?!

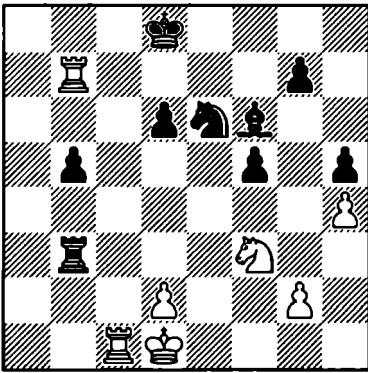
Black instinctively avoids simplifications. However, by placing the knight on e6 he takes away an important escape square from his own king, thus putting him in a dangerous situation. Better would have been 38...♘f3 39.♗f3 ♔e6 (but not 39...g6?! 40.♗g3! completely spoiling Black's structure) 40.♗e3† ♔d5. Although White certainly has every reason to try converting his minimal material advantage, Black's centralized king and compact position entitle him to hope to resist.

39.♠c8 ♖a3?!

This is the final and probably decisive inaccuracy of a series initiated with the 36th move.

A better try was 39...♘c5 even though it would have been strongly met with 40.♖1xc5 dxc5 41.♠xc5, taking advantage of the fact that the black rook no longer attacks the b3-pawn and transposing to an ending with an extra pawn for White. However, this would still have offered some practical chances of survival for Black, because of his better kingside structure, the powerful bishop, and the greater activity of his pieces.

After Polugayevsky's move his king will face mating threats.

40.♖b8 ♠xb3 41.♖b7† ♘d8

Polugayevsky might have hoped that his minor pieces would offer adequate defence both to his king (by covering the important c7- and a1-squares and thus restricting the rooks) and to the relatively weak g7-pawn. White's strong continuation will prove the contrary.

42.♘g5!

The crowning of Korchnoi's consequent play throughout this dramatic game. Finally, White is attacking with all his forces. Black will soon lose his stability.

42...♗xg5

Black had to eliminate this annoying knight. After 42...♘c5 he would lose to 43.♘f7† followed by 44.♘xd6†.

He rightly decided to keep his knight on the board. After 42...♘g5?! 43.hxg5 ♗e5 (even worse would be 43...♗xg5 because of 44.♖a1) 44.♠c7 the bishop would prove rather ineffective in defending the king against the doubled rooks.

43.hxg5 ♖b4

The black rook needs the fourth rank in order to be included in a defensive plan. After 43...♠g3 White would win with 44.♖a1 ♘c7 45.♖aa7 and the c3-square is not available to defend the knight.

44.g6!

Another strong move, removing the pawn from a vulnerable square, placing it one step closer to the queening square and blocking the g7-weakness. Black has no counterplay at all, so why rush with 44.♖a1 ♖a4.

44...♠g4

The attempt to create some tactical threats with 44...♖h4 fails to the calm 45.♠c3 while 45.♖a1? is obviously impossible because of 45...♖h1†, while after 45.♠c6?? the variation is just one move longer: 45...♖h1† 46.♗c2 ♘d4† 45.♖a1 ♘c7

The exchange of rooks with 45...♖a4 46.♖xa4 bxa4 would not save Black, mainly because of his passive king. Here are some sample lines:

47.♖f7 f4 (47...a3 changes nothing because of 48.♗c1, while after 47...♘f4 48.♖xg7 ♗e8 49.g3 Black fails to generate counterplay against the g6-pawn by just one tempo) 48.♗c1 ♗e8 49.♗b2 The king threatens to eliminate Black's passed pawn and continue his triumphal march as far as, for instance, d6. There is little Black can do to prevent this plan.

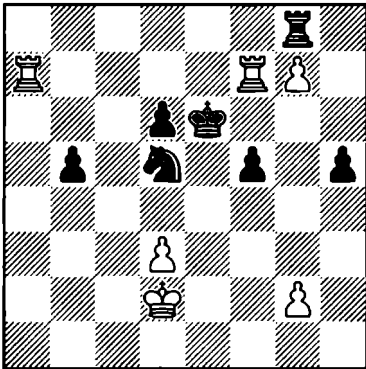
46.♖aa7 ♗c4 47.d3 ♠c3 48.♗d2 ♠c5 49.♖b8† ♗c7 50.♠c8!

Underlining the fact that the king cannot defend both wings at the same time.

50...♗d7 51.♠g8

After the elimination of the g7-pawn, the game is basically over. This should not prevent us enjoying Korchnoi's accuracy until the end, of course.

51...♗e6 52.♖xg7 ♘d5 53.♠gf7 ♠c8 54.g7 ♠g8



55.g3!

Korchnoi's home analysis must have proven that the most effective winning plan is based on zugzwang. Therefore, blocking the black kingside pawns immediately is a good idea.

Rushing in with 55. f6 d6 56. f7 would not be entirely clear after 56... d7 , when both white rooks would be hanging. The threat is ... g7 while after 57. g8 f7 Black still has some hope.

55...b4 56. f6 d6 57. c2

This is it; Black has no moves available. Both 57... e5 58. e7 † and 57... d5 58. e6 † would win the knight for White.

57...h4

Desperation. The symmetrical 57... f4 58. gxf4 h4 would have allowed White to include his f-pawn into the attack with 59. f5 †, as indicated by Malfagia.

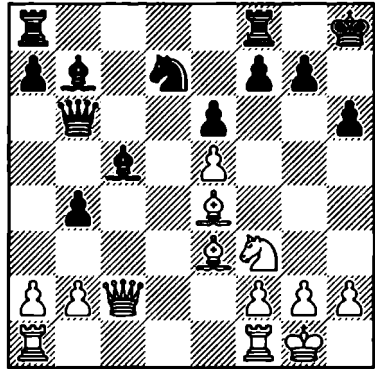
58. gch4 f4 59. h5 f3 60. h6

1-0

And now, here is a slightly less correct, though equally tempting, exchange of two minor pieces for a rook and a pawn "refuted" by Viktor in a long and interesting ending.



Viktor Korchnoi – Lev Polugayevsky
Candidates Semi-final (3), Evian 1977



19. e6 !

At the time this game was played, White's last move was a novelty over 19. e5 .

19... e3

In order to solve his problems, Polugayevsky decided to carry out a tactical operation in Tal's style. 19... e4 would have allowed White to maintain the initiative with:

20. e4 e6 21. d6 b5 22. e5 e5
23. f4

Malfagia continued this line with an instructive analysis, proving that White can maintain his initiative deep into the endgame:

23... b7 ?! 24. e6 d8 d8

Aiming to put the e5-pawn under pressure. White should react by occupying the c-file with:

25. e1 ! d6 26. c4 ! c4 27. e4 e8
28. f1 !

A necessary precaution, because after the immediate 28. d4 e7 29. e4 ? the game would suddenly come to an end with 29... e1 mate. After the text move the threat against the b4-pawn becomes real, more or less forcing Black's reply.

28... a5

However, White can now redirect his threats against this newly weakened pawn with:

29. d4 e7 30. e8 † e8 31. d6

After capturing on a5 the minimal material advantage would offer White excellent winning chances in the knight endgame.

20.♠xd7 ♖ac8

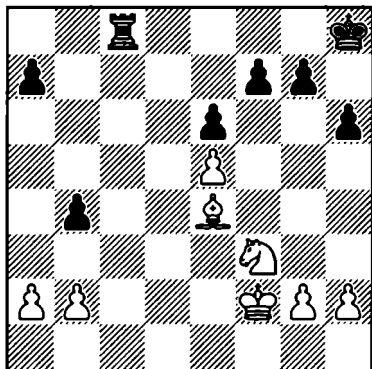
Again avoiding a slightly worse middlegame that would have arisen after 20...♙xe4 21.♜xe4 ♙c5 22.♠xf7 ♠xf7 23.♜xa8† ♠f8 24.♜e4 when the pressure against the f2-pawn does not offer Black enough compensation for the lost pawn. White can slowly improve his position with g3, ♜g2, h4-h5, while all Black can do is sit and wait.

21.♠xb7 ♖xc2 22.♠xb6 ♠xf2

As Keene pointed out in his notes in *Chess Informant* No. 24, 22...♙xf2† is worse in view of 23.♠xf2 ♠xf2 24.♜xf2 when after 24...axb6 Black's pawns are too weak and White can consolidate his advantage with 25.♙d4.

23.♠xf2 ♙xb6 24.♜f1 ♙xf2 25.♜xf2 ♖c8

This is the position Polugayevsky had been aiming for. From a materialistic point of view, the situation is balanced; as we know, in the ending the relative value of the pawns increases. Two files separate the white pawn formations and Black hopes to successfully attack the relative weaknesses on b2 and e5. The further course of the game is a brilliant illustration of the possibilities of cooperation between two minor pieces, a rather different picture compared to what we have seen in the chapter on Tal.



26.♙d4! ♖c1 27.♙b3

A first important moment: White's minor pieces

control several crucial squares on the first rank, making the queenside practically invulnerable. A long time ago, during my teenage years, I heard an older trainer mentioning the notion of "cooperation between the pieces". I did not understand from the beginning what he had in mind. Soon after that, however, I discovered that a knight and a bishop placed on squares of the same colour a short distance apart can create a kind of barrier for the enemy pieces; in our case, the squares a1, b1, c1. We shall meet this idea more than once in this game, every time in a different part of the board.

27...♠h1

The supposedly active rook has only this part of the first rank available.

28.h3 ♜g8

Black has nothing better than centralizing the king, although this will be time-consuming.

29.a3!

White liquidates the queenside weaknesses in order to gain freedom for his pieces.

As pointed out by Malfagia, the objective merits of White's last move become evident if we consider the natural alternative 29.♜e2, aiming to attack the b4-pawn with the king. After 29...♜f8 30.♜d3 the interference on the b1-h7 diagonal allows Black to react with 30...♠b1! and if 31.♜c2 ♖e1 32.♙d2 ♜e7 33.♜b3 then 33...♠e2, when White does not manage to activate his king.

29...bxa3 30.bxa3 ♜f8 31.a4

Besides the obvious purposes of winning space on the queenside and creating a dangerous candidate for promotion, the advance of the wing pawn is also connected with a deeper idea.

31...♜e8 32.a5

Another barrier has been built, this time in the way of the black king: d6, c6, b6, b7. Black is restricted to passivity.

32...♜d7 33.♜e2 ♜c7 34.♜d2 ♠f1 35.♜e2 ♠h1 36.♜d2 ♠f1 37.♜c3 ♖e1 38.♙c5

It is remarkable how stable the white pieces are in the centre of the board without the direct help of the pawns.

38...♠a1 39.♜b4 ♖e1 40.♜b5 ♜b8

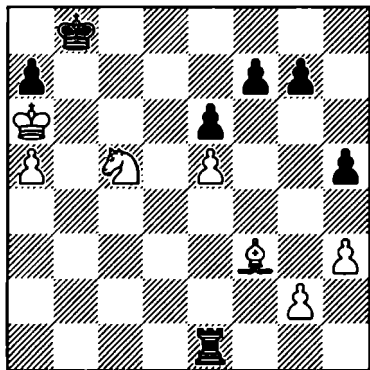
Black had no need to retreat his king so early. He could have waited until after White's ♜a6.

41.♖a6

Keene criticised this move and recommended 41.♖c6. Although he might be right, the move played is relevant for the case if Black had played something other than 40...♗b8.

41...h5

Keene considers this a strong move. However, this pawn will soon become a weakness. 41...♗c1? would be bad: by releasing the pressure along the e-file, Black would allow 42.♖b7 followed by ♖d6.

42.♗f3**42...h4**

42...g6 would seriously affect the flexibility of the black pawns by weakening the f6-square. Play could have continued:

43.♖e4 ♗e3 44.♖d6 ♗xe5 45.♖xf7 ♗e1 46.♖h8 g5

Black would also fail to generate counterplay after 46...e5 47.♖xg6 e4 48.♗xh5 ♗f1 (preventing ♖f4) 49.♖e7!. White changes the route; in doing so, he will win an important tempo because of the check on the next move. 49...e3 50.♖c6† ♗c7 51.♖d4 and White will win.

47.♗xh5 e5 48.♖f7 e4

This pawn is less dangerous than it might seem. 49.♖xg5 e3 50.♖e6

The pawn will be safely blocked after ♖f4 or ♖d4. This is a less subtle form of cooperation, when the minor pieces concentrate their action on a single square.

43.♖e4 ♗e3 44.♖d6

By attacking the f7-pawn, White forces events.

44...f6

44...♗xe5

would lose to

45.♖xf7 ♗e1 46.♖d8

according to Keene. Let us prolong the variation for the sake of clarity.

46...e5 47.♖c6† ♗c7 48.♖xa7 e4 49.♗g4 e3 50.♖b5† ♗c6

50...♗b8 would place the king on a passive and exposed square. After 51.♗b6 there is no time for 51...e2 because of 52.a6 winning.

51.♖d4† ♗c5 52.♖c2

Now White wins the dangerous pawn and, most probably, the game.

With his move, Polugayevsky relies on the dynamism of his connected pawns.

45.exf6 gxf6 46.♖b5 e5 47.♖xa7 e4

The position has become rather sharp. Black's passed pawn demands that White is accurate. It should be mentioned that the generally desirable 47...f5 would lose a pawn after 48.♖c6† ♗c7 49.♖e7 threatening both ♖d5† and ♖xf5.

48.♗g4 ♗c7

The king has to escape from the danger zone and take an active part in the game. After 48...♗e1 White could play 49.♗b6 and if 49...♗b1† then 50.♖b5 followed by a6.

49.♖b5† ♗c6 50.♖d4†

This is a favourable network of squares, allowing White to block the enemy pawns.

50...♗c5 51.♖f5 ♗a3 52.♖xh4 ♗b4 53.♗b6 ♗a5

After a virtually forced sequence, both sides have eliminated important enemy pawns. In spite of the reduced material left on the board White's winning chances remain intact. He will first have to block the black pawns, then both kings will rush to the kingside.

54.♖f5 ♗e5 55.♗c6 ♗c3

Keene criticized this move and suggested 55...e3! with an exclamation mark attached but without any further annotations. We shall examine the advance of the pawn a few moves later, at the second moment when Keene considers it necessary; the two lines transpose to each other. By keeping his pawn on e4, Polugayevsky obviously

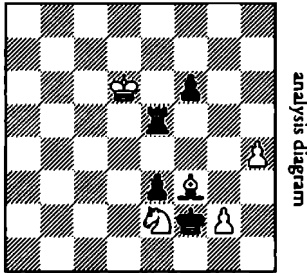
wanted to deprive the white bishop of the stable f3-square.

56. ♖g3 ♗d2 57. ♗d6 ♖e1

Let us see what would have happened if he had advanced the pawn with 57...e3. As mentioned, the white bishop would get the excellent f3-square, but would this be sufficient for a win? Let us analyse some variations:

58. ♖f3 ♖e1 59. h4 ♗f2 60. ♖e2

This is the kind of position Polugayevsky wanted to avoid. White has achieved an almost optimal set-up: his pieces safely block the enemy pawn while defending the kingside. In the future, the h-pawn will get reliable support from the bishop. Quite important is the fact that the black king cannot cross the barrier formed by the third rank. The only thing needed in order to reach a winning position is to cross the e-line with the king. As we shall see, this is not easy to achieve.



60... ♖e8

The counterplay based on 60...Re5 is too slow in view of 61. h5 Re2 62. ♖c3! when, because of the threat ♖d1†, Black cannot continue chasing the knight, thus allowing White an essential tempo in order to carry out his plan.

61. ♗d7 ♖e5

This well defended square offers Black some stability on the e-file. However, he will soon have to give it up by advancing the f-pawn.

62. h5

Black is in some sort of zugzwang.

If Black avoids advancing his f-pawn with, say,

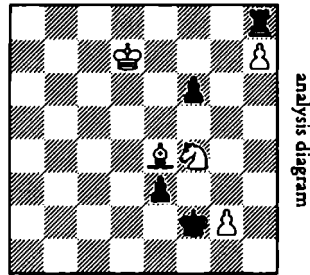
a) 62... ♖e1 White should also win with accurate play.

a1) 63. h6 is premature because of 63...Re5 when 64. h7 is impossible because of 64...Re7†.

However, Malfagia made the following specifications: instead of the cooperative 64. h7 White could cause Black more trouble with 64. ♖f4!, preventing ...Re6, which would win the h-pawn. At the same time, the king cannot go to f2 because of the fork on h3.

However, it seems that Black can save himself after 64...Re8, although in most of the lines by pure miracle. For instance:

65. ♖e4 ♗f2 66. h7 Re8 Now:



a11) 67. g4! makes Black's life easier after 67... ♖g3 68. ♖d3 ♗xg4 69. ♖e6 ♖g5 followed by ... ♗h6 and the capture on h7.

a12) 67. ♖d3† ♖g3!

This is the right square for the king, keeping the option of playing in any of the critical areas. 67... ♗f1! would be bad because of 68. g4! e2 69. ♖e6 e1 ♖ 70. ♖xe1 ♗xe1 71. ♗xf6 with an easy win.

68. ♖e6 f5! 69. ♖xf5 e2 70. ♗f6 Re8h7!

Once again accuracy is needed: 70... ♖d8? loses to 71. ♖e4 Re3 72. h8 ♖ e1 ♖ 73. ♖h3† ♗f4 74. ♖xd3.

71. ♖xh7 ♗xg2

with a draw, because the inevitable ♗f1 will force White give up his knight.

a13) 67. ♖e6 ♖g3!

Once again the best. The hurried 67...e2? would lose to 68. ♖xe2 ♗xe2 69. ♗xf6 ♖e3 70. ♖g7 ♖d8 71. ♖d5!.

68. ♖e2† ♗f2 69. ♖c1 f5! 70. ♖xf5 ♗xg2 71. ♗f7 ♗f3

White lacks just one tempo to defend the pawn

with his king in order to prevent the promotion of the enemy pawn with ♔d3 . For instance:
 72. ♖g7 e2 73. ♕d3 ♖xh7† 74. ♕xh7 ♗e3 75. ♖e1 ♗d2 76. ♕f3† ♗d1

With a draw.

a2) 63. ♗d8!

Placing the king on a less exposed square, in view of further attacks by the rook from the a-file.

63... ♖e6

Black must keep an eye on the h-pawn. After a neutral move such as 63... ♗f2 White would win with 64. h6 ♖b5 . The rook aims to give check on the back rank in case the pawn advances immediately. Moving to the a-file would be bad because the a8-square is under control. 65. ♗e7! and Black is helpless.

64. ♕f4!

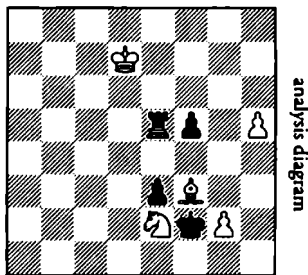
Once the black king is one square further from g3, the knight enjoys some freedom.

64... ♖a6 65. ♗e7 f5 66. ♗f7

White wins.

Therefore:

b) 62... f5 is practically forced. Black needs space in order to fight against the h-pawn. Once cleared, the sixth rank will offer certain tactical possibilities. If it were Black's turn to move here, he would be in zugzwang, being forced to worsen the position of either the rook or the king.



However, passing the right to move to the opponent is apparently impossible for White. For instance, the attempt to start a triangulation with

b1) 63. ♗c6 would fail to 63... ♖e6† 64. ♗d5 ♖e7! and White has achieved nothing.

b2) Advancing the h-pawn at this stage is premature, for instance 63. h6 ♖a5! .

Therefore, White has to include his knight into the attack. When doing so, he takes into account that at some moment he would have to give up his bishop for the e-pawn.

However, if he can win the f5-pawn in the meantime, the rook will prove helpless against the two passed pawns supported by the king and the knight.

White has two constructive knight moves at his disposal.

b3) 63. ♕f4 looks natural, but places the knight on a rather unstable square. After:

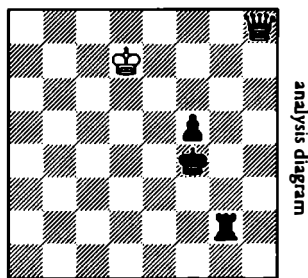
63... ♗g3 64. h6

Black's best practical chance consists of:

64... ♗xf4

White wins rather easily after 64... ♖a5 65. ♕h5† ♗f2 66. ♕f6 f4 67. ♗e6! (Advancing the pawn would lead to an immediate draw after ... ♖a7† , ... ♖xh7 and ... e2 . After 67. ♗e6! , the threat is 68. h7 ♖a8 69. ♕g8 .) 67... ♖a7 68. ♗f5 e2 69. ♕xe2 ♗xe2 70. ♗xf4 and the black king is too passive to change the course of the game.

65. h7 e2 66. ♕xe2 ♖xe2 67. h8♖ ♖xg2



We have reached a theoretically winning position for White but, from a practical point of view, things are far from easy.

Malfagia provided the following analysis:

68. ♖d4†! ♗g3!

68... ♗g5? is bad because of 69. ♖g7† while after 68... ♗f3?! 69. ♖d5†! White wins the f5-pawn immediately.

69. ♖e3†! ♗g4 70. ♗e6 f4 71. ♖e4 ♗g3 72. ♗f5! f3

Black has managed to group his remaining pieces together, but the white king has approached alarmingly. The next step for White is to clear the f4-square for the king.

73. ♖f4† ♔f2 74. ♗d2† ♔g3 75. ♗d6†! ♔h3

Or 75... ♔f2 76. ♔f4 ♔e2 77. ♖e5† ♔f2 78. ♖e4 winning the pawn.

76. ♔f4 ♖f2

Forced, in order to avoid the mate.

77. ♖g6 ♔h2! 78. ♖g3† ♔h1 79. ♖h3†! ♔g1 80. ♔g3

and the black pawn will soon fall. This looks quite convincing, but who could foresee all this in advance, while making a choice on the 63rd move?

Therefore, White has good reasons to try the other suggested knight move:

b4) 63. ♔d4 This move does not threaten anything obvious yet, but puts pressure on the f-pawn. Black has several ways to react:

b4a) 63... ♔g3 places the king on an exposed square, which can be felt after 64. h6 ♖a5 65. ♔e6 ♖a6† 66. ♔f7 and the pawn is taboo.

b4b) 63... f4 leaves the f-pawn very vulnerable after:

64. ♔e2

But not 64. h6? ♖a5 when White cannot support his pawn and guard the e-pawn at the same time.

64... ♔f1 65. ♔d6 ♖a5

Or 65... ♖e8 66. ♔xf4 winning.

66. ♔e6

and White wins easily, while 66. ♔xf4 would unnecessarily complicate matters after 66... ♖f5.

b4c) 63... ♔g1 places the king on a relatively safe but rather passive square. White wins with:

64. ♔d6 ♖e8

Or 64... ♖a5 65. ♔e6 crossing the e-file.

65. ♔xf5 e2

With the king on f1 this move would be impossible because of ♔g3†.

66. ♔xe2 ♖xe2 67. g4

Black's pieces are terribly misplaced, standing in each others way, for instance:

67... ♖g2 68. h6!

The g-pawn is poisoned. If Black captures it, he could not stop the h-pawn.

68... ♔f2 69. ♔e5 ♖g1

Before continuing the king march, Black has to lose one tempo in order to avoid the fork on h4. 70. ♔f6

Black is helpless.

It is hard to give a simple and definitive evaluation of Polugayevsky's text move. He was obviously afraid that if White stabilized the position with ♔e2 and ♔f3 further home analysis would show a clear win.

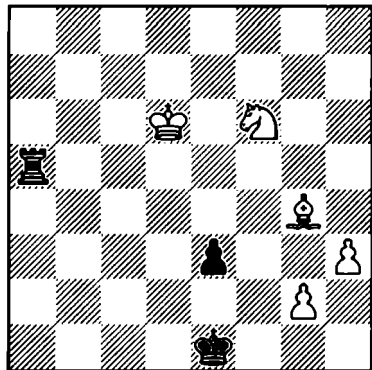
The fight might have lasted longer after 57... e3, but on the other hand Korchnoi's brilliant play in the game wasn't easy to foresee.

I am not sure whether the game was adjourned after the control on the 56th move or 16 moves later. If the first case is correct (which I doubt), Polugayevsky's 57th move might have been the sealed one. If not, then it means that he had to make the decision over the board. Not an easy task.

58. ♔h5!

White should not wait until the black king reaches the f2-square. Since the e-pawn is still far from the promoting square, the knight can afford to undermine the stability of the rook.

58... e3 59. ♔xf6 ♖a5



60. ♔e4!!

A fantastic move and a remarkable position. For the third time, the white pieces set up a barrier in front of Black's pieces. The black king is practically paralysed.

60...c2 61.♙f3

Everything is safely defended now and Black cannot avoid the loss of his last pawn.

61...♖a6†

The pawn would perish right away in the symmetrical lines 61...♗f1 62.♖g3† and 61...♗d1 62.♖c3†.

62.♗c5 ♖a5† 63.♗b4

The checks are over and White will win the pawn with ♖g3 or ♖c3, retaining a huge material advantage. Therefore, Polugayevsky resigned.

1-0

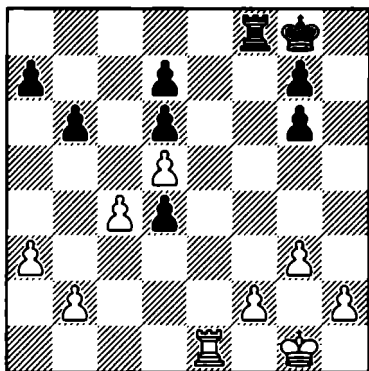
Akiba's successor

In the late seventies, I heard an old trainer saying that Korchnoi was the best specialist in rook endings. Therefore, when two decades later the book *Practical Rook Endings* was published, authored by the great Viktor himself, I was covered with delight. And yet, I felt rather frustrated by the selection of games: none of my favourite examples from Korchnoi's practice were examined there!

While I am pretty sure that Korchnoi's criteria for choosing the games must have been better than mine, I want to share with you my analysis of what I consider a highly interesting game fragment.

Viktor Korchnoi – Lajos Portisch

Candidates Quarter Final (1), Bad Kissingen 1983



A very curious position. White has the better pawn structure and his rook controls the only open line. Could this mean that he is close to winning? If we considered only the static factors, yes.

However, Black has dynamic compensation. As David Bronstein proved in many games, double (or, as in this case, triple) pawns also mean more open lines for the rooks.

At the same time, Black has a passed pawn; if supported by the rook it could become very strong. The kingside doubled pawns should also not be regarded in a one sided way: although they are obviously weak, White cannot easily create a passed pawn on this wing.

25...♖c8!?

Portisch looks for complicated ways of obtaining active play. Instead of his plan, the weakness of the f3- and b3-squares would have allowed him to invade White's camp in a more natural way with 25...♖f3!. For instance:

26.♖e7

Passive defence does not look too impressive either: 26.♖d1 ♖b3 27.♖d2 ♗f7 and Black is definitely not worse. At the right moment ...b5 will break the white pawn chain.

26...♖b3 27.♖xd7 ♖xb2 28.♗f1

The king has to approach the pawn through this passive route. After the careless 28.♗g2?? intending ♗f3-e4 (or e3), Black unexpectedly wins with 28...d3 29.♗f3 ♖e2! followed by a rook retreat along the e-file, when the d-pawn is unstoppable. It is remarkable how useless the white rook is in this final position. The complex chain of pawns cuts its communication with the lower part of the board.

28...d3 29.♗e1 ♖e2† 30.♗d1 ♖xf2 31.♖xd6 ♖xh2 32.♖d7

Both sides had a good time, capturing several enemy pawns. There is some symmetry in this apparently irrational position. Each side has a strong passed pawn on the d-file, while keeping the enemy king cut off on the last rank.

Now 32...a5? is bad because after 33.♖b7 Black would have no time to defend his b6-pawn, in view of the deadly threat d6, ♖b8† and d7.

Better is 32...♖c2! and the most probable result is a draw by exhaustion of resources.

After 31.♞xd6 Black can also try a more ambitious move:

31...♝f7!?

Aiming to include his king into play instead of leaving it cut off on the back rank. Play can become incredibly sharp after:

32.♞d7†

Safer is 32.♞e6 ♞xh2 33.♞e3 with a probable draw.

32...♝f6 33.♞xa7 ♝e5

Black's counterplay is very dangerous.

34.♞e7† ♝d4 35.d6 ♝c3 36.d7 ♞f1†

Black should take the first opportunity to force a draw. After the more ambitious 36...♞a2 White is faster by just one tempo: 37.♝e1 ♞a1† 38.♝f2 d2 39.♞e3† ♝xc4 40.d8♣ d1♣ 41.♣c8† with a winning attack.

37.♞e1 ♞f2

White cannot avoid the repetition as after 38.d8♣? ♞a2 Black is winning.

It is difficult to tell whether Portisch's decision on his 25th move was dictated by excessive optimism or by an overestimation of the dangers facing him in the lines presented above. He might have also relied on psychological factors: since 25...♞f3 was so natural, it might have been precisely what Korchnoi was waiting for, so why not surprise him?

26.b3b5!

Without this temporary pawn sacrifice Black's previous move would have been senseless. However, compared with the previous lines, White's spatial advantage on the queenside is a permanent source of danger.

27.♞b5 ♞c3

The position has become even more irrational. Black's counterplay is very strong.

28.♝f1!

Another hidden aspect of the position is now revealed: White has the more active king, allowing him to keep the opponent's counterplay under control. Trying to defend all the pawns with 28.♞b1 would have failed after 28...d3 29.♝f1 d2! and the threat 30...♞c1 forces White to abandon the queenside with 30.♞d1 ♞xb3 31.a4 ♞b4 32.♞xd2 ♞xa4 with a probable draw.

28...d3

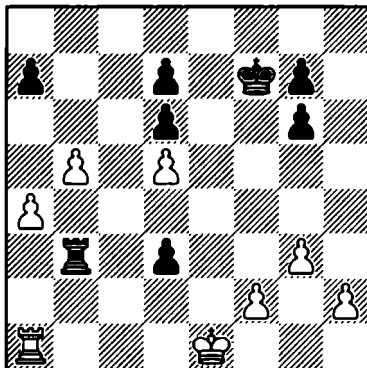
Before capturing the b3-pawn, Black has to prevent the penetration of the white rook to e7 by creating concrete threats with his pawn. It is true that this will weaken the pawn, but there is no other choice. For instance: 28...♞xb3 29.♞e7 d3 30.♝e1 ♞xa3 31.♝d2 and Black has too many weaknesses. Both the b5- and d5-pawns are dangerous candidates for promotion.

Malfagia supported my point of view with the following variations: 31...♞b3 32.♞xd7 ♞xb5 33.♞xd6 ♞b2† 34.♝xd3 ♞xf2 when, although Black has managed to maintain the material balance so far and considerably simplified the position, the passed d-pawn will cause him insurmountable problems after 35.♞a6 ♞xh2 36.♞xa7. For instance, 36...♝f8 37.d6 ♝e8 38.♞xg7 and White will soon be two pawns up.

29.a4 ♝f7 30.♞a1!

The rook defends the a-pawn in advance in order to clear the way for the king to the centre. In spite of his apparently dominant position, Black will not be able to prevent White from activating his pieces. All his pawns are too weak for that.

30...♞xb3 31.♝e1



31...♞b2

The main merit of the plan chosen by Portisch on his 25th move is that the d5-pawn has been weakened. From this point of view, more logical, although insufficient, would seem 31...♝f6. White has to defend the fourth rank somehow; otherwise Black's counterplay would be too strong.

32.♔d2

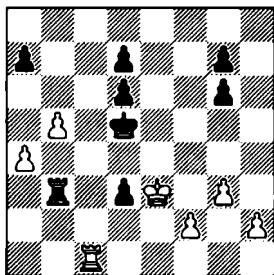
It is better to use both available pieces for this purpose. If they act separately White could get into danger. For instance 32.♖c1 ♕e5 33.♖c4 ♕xd5 34.♖g4 ♖b2 35.h4 ♖e2†. Now, 36.♕f1? loses right away to 36...♖e8! 37.♖b4 d2 38.♖b1 ♕d4 with a decisive intervention of the king. However, after the relatively better 36.♕d1 ♖xf2 Black threatens to block the fourth rank with ...♕c5, ...d5-d4, in order to proceed with the decisive attack, ...♕c4-c3. With his uncoordinated pieces White can do little to prevent this plan.

32...♕e5 33.♕e3 ♕xd5

Black has won a pawn, but his structure is very vulnerable.

34.♖c1

White has managed to stop Black's initiative and threatens to start a powerful counterattack with ♖c7.



analysis diagram

Black has nothing to do other than attack the white queenside formation with 34...a6.

34...♖a3 is worse because of 35.♖c7 ♖xa4 36.♖xd7 ♖b4 37.♖xa7 ♖xb5. Now, the careless 38.♖xg7! allows 38...♕c4! with counterplay, but better is 38.♕xd3 38...♖b3† 39.♕e2 and White should probably win.

35.♖xa6 ♖b4

35...♖a3 makes White's play easier: 36.♖c7 ♖xa4 (36...♕e6? allows 37.♖c4! winning) 37.♖xd7 ♖xa6 38.♖xg7 ♕c4! 39.♖c7†! (destroying Black's counterplay) 39...♕d5 40.♕xd3 with good winning chances.

36.♖a1!

By placing the rook behind the a4-pawn, White

will force the enemy rook to occupy a passive position.

36...♖b6 37.a7 ♖a6 38.♕xd3 ♖xa7 39.h4 ♖a5 40.♖e1!

Because of the active position of the enemy king, the standard plan of systematically pushing the opponent back wouldn't be easy to carry out. Instead, the kingside weaknesses come to White's aid.

40...♖xa4 41.♖e7

With a probable win for White.

Once again, Malfagia felt like continuing my variation for a few more moves with:

41...♕c6 42.♖xg7 ♖g4 43.♕e3 d5 44.♕f3 ♖e4 45.♖xg6† d6 46.h5 ♖e5!

Winning a tempo in order to be able to advance the d5-pawn while keeping the enemy king cut off.

47.g4 d4 48.♖g8 d3 49.♖c8† ♕d5 50.♖c1 ♕d4 51.h6 d2 52.♖d1 ♕c3 53.h7 ♖e8 54.g5

The connected pawns are unstoppable.

32.♖a3!

A very strong move, marking a great change in the game. The previously passive rook starts to display very effective activity.

32...d2†

This move reveals the triumph of White's strategy. Once the pawn is safely blocked (and attacked) by the king, the rook and pawn tandem no longer create dangerous threats.

When he entered this line, Portisch might have relied on forcing a draw by repetition with 32...♖e2† noticing at the last moment that White can answer strongly with:

33.♕d1! ♖xf2 34.a5

Creating the threat b6 and if ...axb6 then a6! Black is at a crossroads.

a) 34...♖b2 fails to solve Black's problems: 35.b6 a6 (obviously the only move) 36.♖xd3 and Black's situation is critical.

b) Another way of reaching the eighth rank is 34...♖c2 35.b6 axb6 36.a6 ♖c8 37.♕d2 ♕e7.

This is the whole idea: Black wants to transfer the king to the queenside without blocking the eighth rank, while still keeping the white king cut off along the c-file.

38.♕xd3 ♕d8

Advancing the a-pawn now would prematurely expose it but White has the strong waiting move:

39.h4!

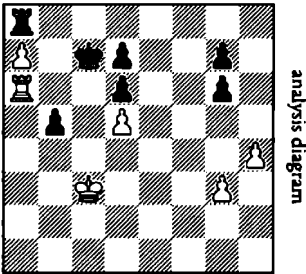
When Black has nothing better than weakening the sixth rank with:

39...b5

39...c7 would lead to a losing pawn ending after 40.♞c3† d8 41.♞xc8† ♗xc8 42.♗c4 ♗b8 43.♗b5 ♗a7 44.g4 g5 45.h5 and Black is in zugzwang.

40.a7 ♞a8 41.♗c3 ♗c7 42.♞a6!

A very instructive position. We can observe the multiple negative aspects of the doubled pawns: immobility and vulnerability being just the start.



42...g5!?

Black will get in zugzwang anyway; he tries to spoil his opponent's structure as well.

43.h5! g4 44.♗b4 ♗b7 45.♞xd6 ♞d8 46.♞g6

Black is not able to hold his position:

46...♞h8 47.♞xg7 ♗xa7 48.♞d7† ♗b8

48...♗b6 allows White to keep both his passed pawns with 49.♞d6† ♗c7 50.♞c6† ♗d7 51.h6.

49.♗xb5 ♞xh5 50.♗c6

Winning.

c) 34...♞xh2

This move allows Black to stop the pawn at the last possible moment:

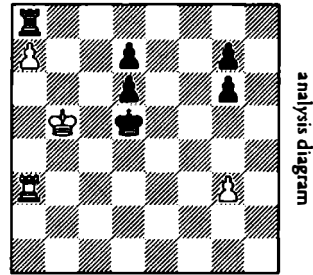
35.b6 axb6 36.a6! ♞h8 37.♗d2!

White should not hurry advancing his a-pawn because this would allow the enemy king to cross the d-file through d8.

37...b5

Black takes the c4-square under control thus restricting the enemy king. 37...♞a8 38.♗xd3 ♗e7 is just one tempo too slow: 39.♗c4 ♗d8 40.♗b5 ♗c7 41.♞c3† ♗d8 and now the most technical way is to play for zugzwang: 42.g4 (the immediate capture on b6 would be less clear because of 42...♞b8†) 42...g5 43.♞cl g6 44.♞c3! and Black runs out of moves.

38.♗xd3 ♗f6 39.a7 ♞a8 40.♗c3 ♗e5 41.♗b4 ♗xd5 42.♗xb5



We are close to the conclusion. Will Black be in time pushing his pawns after losing the rook?

42...♗e4 43.♗b6 d5 44.♗b7 ♞xa7† 45.♞xa7 d4 46.♗c7 d3 47.♗xd7 d2 48.♞a1

The last sequence did not need any special comment but now the importance of each move becomes very high.

c1) Rushing in to win with the rook for the d-pawn with 48...♗d3 fails to 49.♗e6 ♗c2 50.g4 d1♞ 51.♞xd1 ♗xd1 52.g5 winning.

c2) Going for the g-pawn with 48...♗f3 is also insufficient, for instance: 49.♗e6 ♗xg3 50.♞d1 g5 51.♞xd2 g4 52.♗f5 g6† 53.♗g5 followed by ♞d3 winning.

c3) And yet, Black can save himself with 48...g5!

The main idea behind this move is to have the king on e4 for as long as possible, while still playing useful moves, in order to restrict the activation of the white king. Malfagia, who indicated this defensive resource, provided the following analysis:

49.♗e6

49.g4 brings the pawn closer to the promoting zone, but after 49...♗f3 50.♗e6 ♗xg4 51.♞f1!?

♠h3! 52.♠f5 g4 53.♠e4 g3 54.♠f3 g2 55.♠g1 g5 Black manages to save himself.

49...g4 50.♠g1! ♠f3 51.♠f5

Now Black can defend himself.

51...♠f2!

But not 51...♠e2? when White obtains a study-like win with 52.♠xg4 d1♠ 53.♠x1 ♠xd1 54.♠f3!! For instance 54...♠d2 55.g4 ♠d3 56.♠f4 ♠d4 57.♠f5 ♠e3 58.g5 ♠f3 59.g6! winning.

52.♠b1 ♠xg3 53.♠d1 ♠f3 54.♠x2 g3

With a draw.

Obviously, all this was impossible to foresee, but objectively speaking 32...d2♠ can be regarded as the decisive mistake, though an entirely excusable one.

33.♠e2

Korchnoi chose this square in order to discourage any further activation of the enemy king.

33...♠f6

The attempt to simplify the position with 33...d1♠♠ 34.♠xd1 ♠xf2 leads to a familiar situation after 35.a5.

34.♠f3♠ ♠e7

The king has to defend the seventh rank.

34...♠e5 would be strongly met by 35.♠f7 and, with the pawn already on d2, Black fails to create dangerous threats. It is here that the e2-square proves to be the right choice.

35.h4

White is in complete control of the situation and can afford to improve his position. At the first glance, it might seem that White has a material advantage, but this is just an optical illusion generated by the fact that Black's pawns are placed on three files only...

35...♠a2 36.♠f4 ♠e8 37.♠c4 ♠e7

37...d1♠♠ would be bad in view of 38.♠xd1 ♠xf2 39.♠c7 when White would create two connected passed pawns.

38.♠e4♠

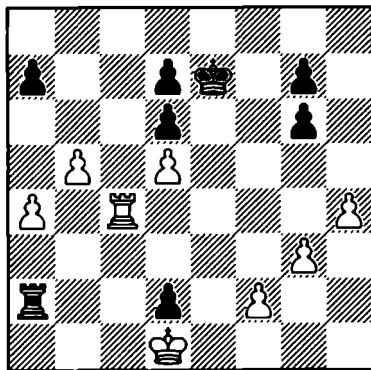
Korchnoi decided not to force events before the adjournment, in order to have the possibility of a thorough analysis.

38...♠f7 39.♠d1 ♠f6 40.♠e2 ♠f7

40...d1♠♠ would be bad again, although this time for an additional reason: 41.♠xd1 ♠xf2

42.♠f4♠ ♠xf4 43.gxf4 and the black king is not able to defend both wings: 43...♠e7 44.a5 ♠d8 45.♠e2 winning.

41.♠f4♠ ♠e8 42.♠d1 ♠e7 43.♠c4



This is the position Korchnoi aimed for after the adjournment. Quite unexpectedly, Black is in zugzwang.

43...♠f6

Relatively best. The rook is obviously immobile, having to defend the d2-pawn and keep the a4-pawn under observation, while other king moves are even worse: 43...♠d8? leaves the kingside pawns without defence after 44.♠g4, while 43...♠e8 allows 44.♠c8♠ ♠e7 45.♠a8! ♠xa4 46.b6 ♠b4 (obviously forced in order to prevent b7-b8) 47.bxa7 ♠a4 when White probably has more than one winning plan. The simplest might be 48.♠xd2 ♠f7 49.f4 ♠a1 50.g4 ♠a4 51.g5 ♠a1 52.♠c3 ♠a2 53.♠b4 ♠a1 54.♠b5 ♠e7 (forced, in order to prevent the white king's infiltration through c7) 55.♠g8 ♠xa7 56.♠xg7♠ and the rest is easy.

44.♠c7

Finally, a concrete action.

44...♠xa4 45.♠xd7 ♠b4 46.♠xd6♠ ♠f5

Just as on the 43rd move, it is not easy to choose the best square for the king. For instance, after: 46...♠f7 47.♠d7♠ ♠f6 48.♠b7?! ♠d4

Otherwise White would simply advance his d-pawn.
49.♠xa7 ♠xd5 50.♠a6!♠

An important intermediate move. After 50.b6 ♖b5 51.b7 ♖b2 Black is in time to defend his far advanced pawn.

50...♟f7 51.b6

Black will soon have to abandon his d-pawn (or else the entire kingside) in order to stop the b-pawn:

51...♟d4 52.♖a7† ♟f6 53.b7 ♖b4 54.♟xd2

Now, by transferring the king to the queenside, White will win easily.

47.♟d7 ♖xb5 48.♖xg7 ♖xd5?!

Black overestimates his counterplay. Knowing in advance the further course of the game, it is easy to state that more practical chances (or at least longer resistance) would have been offered by 48...a5, although White should be able to win. For instance:

49.♟xd2 ♖xd5† 50.♟e3 ♖b5 51.♖a7 ♖b3†

52.♟e2 ♖a3 53.♟f1 ♖a2 54.♟g2 ♟g4 (Black has to keep his pawn on the fifth rank, in order to protect his king from checks.) 55.♖a8 ♟f5 56.♖f8† ♟g4 57.♖f6 ♟h5 58.♟h3 and Black cannot hold his position.

49.♖xa7 ♟g4 50.♖a2 ♟f3 51.♖xd2

White has enjoyed a rich harvest and holds a considerable material advantage. Black's apparently dangerous counterplay against the white kingside will be easily repelled because of the weakness of the g6-pawn.

51...♖f5 52.♖d6 g5

52...♟xf2 leads to a similar situation after 53.♖xg6.

53.hxg5 ♖xg5

53...♟xf2 allows 54.♖f6!.

54.♖f6† ♟g2 55.♟e2

It is only a matter of time before the connected pawns advance. Therefore, Portisch resigned.

1-0

Viktor Korchnoi – a universal player

Korchnoi's repeated failures to win a match against Karpov may have done a good service for him in the long run. Had he become a World Champion at the peak of his career he might have gradually lost his appetite for the fight, as happened with so many of the winners of the supreme crown.

Instead, at an age when most other players are long retired or play at a much lower level than they used to, Viktor continues fighting with the same energy. It is as if he would like to convince the chess world about what a great player he really is...

And he definitely has a lot to teach the new rising stars. A player who has fought on equal terms with no fewer than eight different World Champions (not counting the recent KO system winners) must necessarily be the possessor of a universal and absolutely sound style of play. This keeps him at a high level no matter what rule changes FIDE introduce in the rate of play or system of tournament, and allows Korchnoi to defy the passing years.

At the age of 70, Korchnoi won a strong tournament where the average age of his opponents was less than half of his own.

In the next game, played against one of the most talented rising stars from mother Russia, Korchnoi carried out a long-term plan in Rubinstein's style. Especially impressive is his technique in the complex ending of this game.

Korchnoi – Grischuk

Biel 2001

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6

As a strange coincidence, it is worth mentioning that all four wins by Korchnoi in this tournament (three with White and one with Black) started with the Slav Defence. Even though it is true that the present game deviated rather quickly to a Stonewall Dutch.

4.e3 f5 5.♘d3

This move surprised me a bit when I first saw it. I always considered that the bishop belonged on e2, in order to leave the d3 square for the knight! White's main plan includes the exchange of the dark-squared bishops with ♗a3. If Black captures on a3, the best way of reactivating the queen's knight would be the manoeuvre ♖a3-c2-e1-d3.

A fairly recent game of mine continued:

5.♗e2 ♖f6 6.0-0 ♗d6 7.b3 ♞e7 8.♗b2 0-0?!

More accurate seems to be 8...♖bd7 in order to delay castling: 9.♞c1 b6 10.♗a3 ♗b7 11.♗xd6

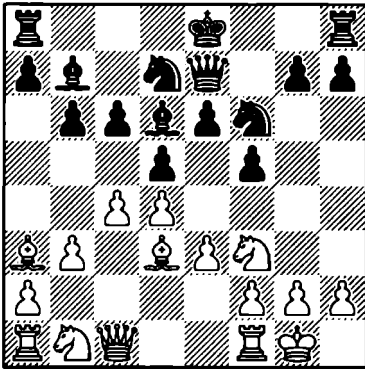
♞xd6 12. ♞a3 ♞xa3 13. ♘xa3 and now the king can move to an ideal square 13... ♖e7 from where it would defend the e6-pawn.

9. ♞c1 b6 10. ♗a3 ♗b7 11. ♗xd6 ♞xd6 12. ♞a3 ♞xa3 13. ♘xa3 a5

½-½ Marin–Nisipeanu, Bucharest 2001. In this position White should have played on with 14. ♜fd1 ♘bd7 15. ♘c2 followed by ♘e1-d3.

The merits of Korchnoi's move will become clear later.

5... ♖f6 6.0-0 ♗d6 7.b3 ♞e7 8. ♗b2 b6 9. ♞c1 ♗b7 10. ♗a3 ♘bd7



Grischuk probably knew that he had to delay castling, but with the bishop on d3 there is a slight difference. If he had understood Korchnoi's plans, he would have delayed the development of this knight instead! Nevertheless, even after the more tricky 10...0-0 White would have some useful waiting moves at his disposal such as 11. ♞b2!?, inviting his opponent to develop the knight to d7 anyway.

Less accurate now would be 11.cxd5?! cxd5 12. ♗xd6 ♞xd6 13. ♘c3 ♗a6! and Black would have solved a large part of his problems. You will see in the game what a sad future this bishop has.

Of course, 11. ♗xd6 ♞xd6 12. ♞a3 ♞xa3 13. ♘xa3 would have been another option and the black king would have to lose two tempi in order to get to e7.

11.cxd5!

This exchange in the centre is the culmination of White's play in the first phase of the game.

11...cxd5

Another rule of the Stonewall says that Black should always be able to recapture with the e-pawn on d5, otherwise his situation could suddenly become critical.

Here is where the apparently irrelevant difference in the bishop's positioning becomes clear: the f5-pawn is hanging! At the same time, the d3-square is not so important for the knight, as from a3 it would have b5 at its disposal.

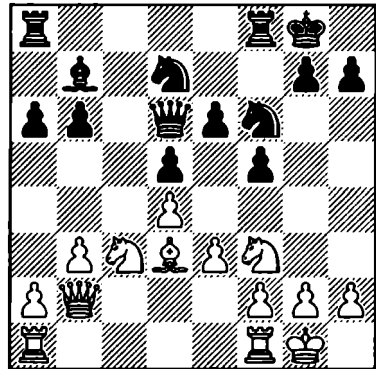
12. ♗xd6 ♞xd6 13. ♘c3

Black's position in the centre has lost flexibility. White, who in the meanwhile has also exchanged the dark-squared bishops, has a clear advantage.

13...a6

Preventing ♘b5 followed by ♞c7, but creating another weakness.

14. ♞b2 0-0



15.b4

From a conceptual point of view, a very strong move but, concretely, maybe not the best. White's general idea in this second phase of the game will become clear a few moves later.

As for the move order chosen, Korchnoi might have thought like this: "White has plenty of time to take advantage of Black's central dark-squared weaknesses. For the moment it is more important to provoke the creation of a favourable structure on the queenside."

On the other hand, some prophylaxis regarding the opposite side of the board would also have been useful, as will become clear from a further comment.

15. ♖e2 is a rather typical move, safely defending the kingside, but it would allow 15... a5!! eventually followed by ... ♗a6. It is rather difficult to say which move would have been better or, to put it in another way, which would have made fewer concessions to Black. For instance, after 16. ♖a1 ♗a6 17. ♗xa6 ♖xa6 18. ♖c2 ♖aa8 19. ♖f1 White would gain total control of the c-line.

15... ♖a8

Black did not have time for 15... b5 with the intention of transferring the knight to c4 because of 16. a4!. Nevertheless, Grischuk should have searched for counterplay on the other side as indicated by Dieter Nisipeanu, a player who would rather die than stay passive in an inferior position.

We analysed two main continuations.

a) 15... f4?!

Interesting, but probably not entirely satisfactory.

16. exf4 ♖h5 17. ♖e2

After the apparently solid 17. g3 Black could get a strong attack with the spectacular 17... ♖xf4 18. gxf4 ♖xf4, for instance 19. ♖e1 ♖xd4 20. ♖d1 ♖g4† 21. ♖g2 d4 as suggested by Dieter.

17... ♖xf4 18. ♖xf4 ♖xf4 19. ♖a1

Intending to consolidate White's positional advantage with ♖e5.

19... ♖xf3?!

This typical exchange sacrifice is the only way to avoid a passive position.

20. gxf3

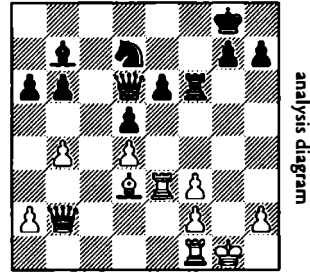
Black certainly has some compensation because of his better pawn structure, but White seems to be able to keep things under control and preserve at least a slight advantage.

Malfagia provided the following analysis, more or less supporting my point of view:

20... ♖f8 21. ♖e3!

Preparing to put pressure on the weak e6-pawn.

21... ♖f6



In his turn, Black starts attacking the isolated white kingside pawns, while defending the e6-pawn laterally.

22. ♖f1 ♖h6 23. f4!

The point! At the price of one pawn, White opens the communications between the wings, enabling the rook's access to the kingside.

23... ♖xf4 24. ♖g3 e5?!

What else? Without this attacking attempt, the black minor pieces would remain passive. Among others, 24... ♖f6? is impossible because of 25. ♖xe6.

25. dxe5 d4 and now:

a1) The tempting 26. ♖c1? which seems to win a tempo for a decisive counterattack along the c-file by threatening to exchange queens, is brilliantly refuted by:

26... ♖xh2!!

But not 26... ♖xc1? 27. ♖xc1 ♖xe5 28. ♖c7 ♖f3† because of 29. ♖xf3! ♗xf3 30. ♗c4† ♖f8 31. ♖f7† ♗e8 32. ♖xf3 winning.

27. ♖xh2

27. ♖xf4 would only make the game shorter by one move after 27... ♖h1 mate.

27... ♖h4† 28. ♖h3 ♖xf2 mate.

a2) The correct defence is 26. ♗e4! ♗xe4 (26... ♖xe5 exposes Black to a decisive attack after 27. f4! ♖b8 28. ♗xb7 ♖xb7 29. ♖c7) 27. ♖xd4 ♖xe5 28. ♖xe4 and White has a winning position.

b) 15... ♖g4 16. ♖e2?!

One move later than suggested above, White starts the fight for the dark central squares. 16. h3 would only improve the knight's position and weaken the king's position in view of 16... ♖h6 17. ♖e2 ♖f7! defending the e5-square, and

planning g5-g4, when the prematurely advanced h3-pawn would help Black create an attack.

16...e5!

Black should play actively, in order to take advantage of White's slightly uncoordinated forces.

17.dxe5 dxe5 18.dxe5 dxe5 19.♖ad1 d6g4 20.dg3

20.g3? would mean playing with fire in view of 20...♗h6 21.h4 g5! with a strong attack.

20...f4 21.d5f5! ♗e5

Better than 21...♗d7 22.h3! when White would manage to consolidate.

22.♗xe5 dxe5 23.♙c2 f3! 24.d1e7† ♗h8 25.d1xd5 fxg2 26.♗xg2 d6g4 27.e4

Once again, the weaknesses in White's position compensate to a certain extent the minimal material advantage.

All these lines are far from clear, but Black simply did not deserve to get such counterplay, because of his strategically inferior position. This means that the previously mentioned 15.d2 could be a slight improvement regarding the specific move order of putting the main plan into practice.

16.a4

In view of the suggestion made on Black's next move, 16.d2! seems to be more accurate, leaving the advance of the a-pawn for later.

16...d4?!

A stereotypical move. The black knight is unstable and not at all threatening on this square. Grischuk probably already intended the transfer of the knight to d6, but underestimated White's 19th move. It is worth mentioning that this plan has a dark side: d6 is in fact the perfect square for the queen, which keeps an eye on both sides and the centre. After the inclusion of the moves ...♖ac8 and a4, the operations on the kingside could have been even more effective than on the previous move.

17.d2e2 ♗e7 18.♖fc1 d6

Considering the colours of the two bishops left on the board, we have a small paradox here: Black would like to put another pawn on a light square with b6-b5 in order to install the knight on c4... 19.b5!

...but White puts a pawn on a light square himself!

The explanation is quite simple. Instead of treating the problem of the pawn structure mechanically, Korchnoi carries out his long-term plan of restricting the enemy minor pieces in a very concrete and consequent way.

19...a5

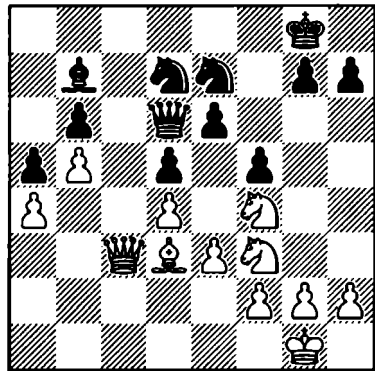
After 19...axb5 20.axb5 d4 21.♗b3 the knight would not be too stable on c4.

20.♗a3

The position of the black queen certainly looks much less active now than a few moves ago.

Since both sides have more or less equal rights in the fight for the c-file, the general exchange of rooks is practically unavoidable.

20...♖xc1† 21.♖xc1 ♖c8 22.♖xc8† dxc8 23.♗c3 ♗d6 24.d4 d7



The endgame is obviously better for White, because of his more flexible pawn structure and the higher mobility of his pieces.

Should this be enough for a win? Only weeks of analysis could give a definitive answer to this question. Or, as in Korchnoi's case, fifty years of experience at the highest level.

25.h4

Thus, the third phase of the general plan starts.

After having gained the advantage in the centre in phase 1 (starting with cxd5) and on the queenside in phase 2 (by means of b4, a4, b5) White must determine a favourable structure on the kingside too. Korchnoi wrote in his book of selected games that his strategic play was inferior to his tactical

abilities. Looking at this game, I would say that this statement was caused by exaggerated modesty (or perhaps by a very high estimate of his own tactical abilities).

25...♖f8 26.h5 ♙c8 27.♗e5 ♙d7 28.f3 ♙e8 29.g4 g5

Grischuk might have underestimated White's next move, otherwise he would have considered playing 29...g6!.

30.♗e2!?

A remarkable decision. My feelings about this move varied during the few days spent on trying to understand this endgame. For the moment, I will limit myself to observing that White keeps the pawn on h5 in order to restrict Black's pieces.

A reasonable alternative would have been 30.hxg6 hxg6 (even worse would be 30...♗fxg6 because of 31.♗h5! with strong kingside pressure) 31.g5 and, despite the closed character of the position, White would have had chances to win. At some moment his king could penetrate via f4-d6 while e3-e4 could also be an effective break if played at the right time: when Black's pieces are uncoordinated (or simply far from the d5-square) because of other defensive tasks.

30...♗d7 31.♗g2 h6 32.♗g3

Because of the pressure on f5, Black must take a decision.

32...fxg4 33.fxg4 ♗xe5

It is really difficult to criticize such a move: Black exchanges another piece, spoils White's pawn structure and takes control of the c5-square. Nevertheless, it is obvious that his position becomes more and more passive...

34.dxe5 ♖c5 35.♖d2

After 35.♖xc5 bxc5 Black's pieces would have successfully blocked the white b-pawn. We shall discuss this exchange later.

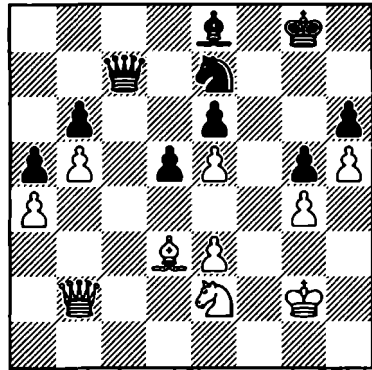
35...♖c7

35...♖b4? 36.♖xb4 axb4 37.♗e2 and the b4-pawn will fall.

36.♖b2 ♗g7 37.♗e2 ♗g8

As pointed out by Malfagia, Black could have tried 37...♗f7! with the idea of preparing the manoeuvre ♗g8-h7, and if now 38.♗d4 then 38...♗f8! when the threat of ♖xe5 allows Black to resist. (instead 38...♗h8 would allow a

decisive infiltration by 39.♖f2! ♗g8 40.♗g6! ♗g7 41.♗xf7 ♖xf7 42.♖c2!) White should probably play 38.♖c3! with a similar course of play as in the game.



38.♗f2

Black's position looks quite solid. The only possible break, e3-e4, does not seem so impressive for the moment.

On the other hand, Black's pieces are desperately passive. For instance, the knight has only four (bad) squares at its disposal, while the bishop is restricted not so much by its own pawns, but by the white ones!

We can see here the continuation of the paradox mentioned above. White has more pawns on light squares than Black, but his bishop is clearly stronger than the "tall pawn" on e8.

38...♗f7 39.♖d4 ♗g7 40.♖c3!!

I must confess that when I reached this stage of the game with my analysis I felt that I couldn't continue alone. The mystery behind White's last move was too deep to be solved by one mortal alone.

I hurried to my friend Dieter Nisipeanu's place, just "next door", and we both tried to understand the mystery of this offer of a queen exchange. Of course, we immediately understood that Korchnoi also employed a small psychological trick. It was the 40th move and Grischuk probably did not have enough time to judge the resulting endgame. But what about the objective merits of the move

itself? I will try to reveal our conclusions in the notes to the next move.

40...♖b8

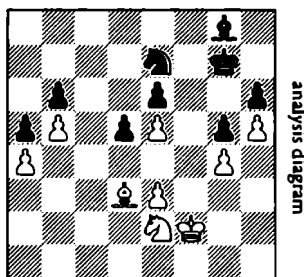
After 40...♖xc3 41.♗xc3 Black would have been practically forced to play:

41...♗g8!

In order to threaten the activation or even exchange of the bishop via h7 and thus fight against the central break e4. Black would have no chances if he tried a neutral strategy such as 41...♗f8. After 42.e4!? dxe4 43.♗xc4 he would not be able to bring his king to the queenside with 43...♗e8 because of 44.♗d6†. Therefore, he would have been helpless in view of White's plan to attack the b6-pawn. Against this central break 42...d4 would not have helped either. After winning this pawn, White would have had the additional possibility of playing ♗f5, after first bringing the king to d4.

42.♗e2!

The only way to prevent ...♗h7, by creating threats against the e6-pawn.



White would next bring his king to d4, creating the potential threat of ♗b3xa5, ♗c5, etc. Black would have to hurry with his king to c7, but then the bishop would be left alone on the kingside, where he would be hunted by White's light pieces with ♗g6, e4, ♗g3xe4-f6. After that, the sequence ♗xg8 ...♗xg8 ♗f7 would finally lead to the loss of the e6-pawn. It is really difficult to believe that Korchnoi could calculate all this, but it appears his intuition functioned quite well.

There is another remarkable point to White's last move. In this particular position, the

generally favourable 40...♖c5 is not playable! Black's main problem is that his minor pieces are too badly placed to support the pawns after the structural modifications.

For instance:

41.♖xc5 bxc5 42.b6

Threatening ♗b5 in order to prevent ...♗c6 and thus make the b-pawn unstoppable.

42...♗c6

Pretty forced. 42...c4? would prevent ♗b5 but would allow 43.♗d4! instead, with similar consequences, namely b7-b8♖.

43.♗b5 ♗b8 44.♗c1

Threatening ♗c1–b3xa5.

44...c4

In such situations a modest pawn can only solve the problems temporarily. The b3-square is taken under control, but the knight gains access to d4.

45.♗e2 ♗f8 46.♗d4 ♗e7 47.e4!

The numerous weaknesses in Black's camp (h6, a5, etc) would have decided.

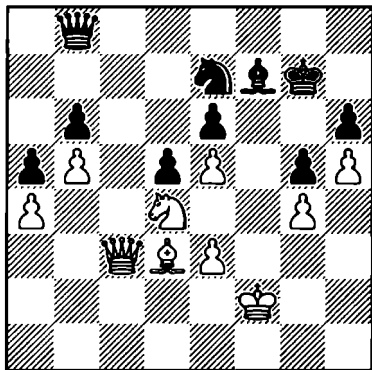
Together with Dieter, I tried to guess whether Korchnoi had been in control of the situation throughout the game or if 40.♖c3 was just the consequence of a sudden panic, generated by doubts if the position was winning at all. The manner in which White's play works out in practically all lines strongly suggests that the master knew what he was doing.

41.♗d4

Now that the black queen has been pushed back from the c-file, White can stop worrying about any form of counterplay.

We can also feel the consequences of White's spatial advantage. Black can switch his queen from one wing to the other only along the eighth rank, which would create serious problems of coordination since the other pieces might need this rank as well. One possible explanation for this could be the absence of reasonable moves, similar to zugzwang.

White's communication between the wings is broader (and thus more rapid), including the first two ranks. Therefore, creating simultaneous threats on the opposite wings would be comparable to obtaining a decisive advantage.



41...♞d8

41...♔g8 would have led to a similar disaster after 42.♞a3!.

41...♞xe5? would lose to 42.♖f5+♔f6 43.♞xe5+♔xe5 44.♖xe7, of course. This is further proof of the perfect timing of 40.♞c3.

Possibly better would have been 41...♔f8!?. Play could have continued:

42.♖b3

42.♖c6?! would be premature in view of 42...♞c7! followed by ...♗e8.

42...♔g7 43.♔e2 ♔f8 44.♔d2 ♔g7 45.♗c2

Planning the centralization of the king with ♔d3-d4, followed by the sacrifice on a5 with ♖xa5, when Black could hardly stop the white connected pawns.

45...♗g8!?

Preventing the centralization of the white king for the time being.

46.♞a1!

White threatens to switch his queen to the kingside at the first favourable opportunity. It is hard to believe that Black's position could resist very long against the numerous threats. Here is a sample line provided by Malfagia:

46...♞c7 47.♗d3

Preventing the infiltration to c4.

47...♔h8!?

If 47...♔f8 then 48.♞f1+ followed by ♞f6.

48.♞a3! ♖c8 49.♞f8

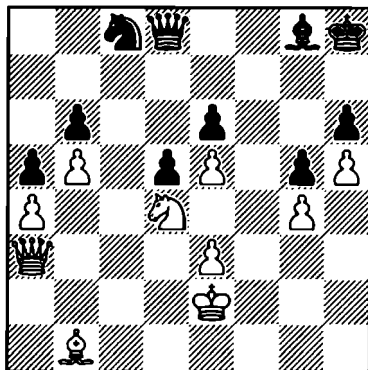
Winning.

Anyway, after Black's move in the game, White has no more worries with the e5-pawn and he will have the chance to create dangerous threats on both wings.

42.♔e2 ♗g8 43.♗b1 ♔h8 44.♞a3 ♖c8

Another necessary though sad retreat, in order to defend the d6-square.

This position is a pinnacle of White's domination. All Black's pieces are displayed chaotically along the eighth rank, as if they have given up any hope of putting up further resistance.



45.♗g6

Not hitting on the right idea immediately. 45.♞c1 would have made the game two moves shorter.

45...♔g7 46.♗b1 ♔h8 47.♞c1 ♖e7 48.♞f1

Here it is, the decisive switch of the queen, creating the simple but hard to meet threat ♞f6 mate.

48...♖c8 49.♖c6

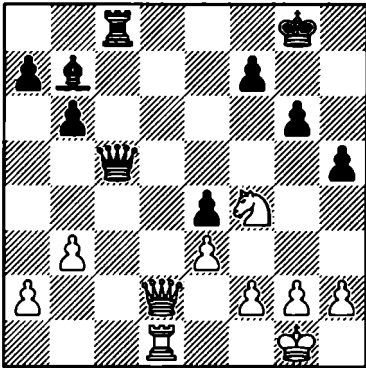
After 49...♞c7 50.♞f8 Black could not defend the h6-pawn and the c8-knight simultaneously. Therefore, Grischuk resigned.

1-0

To end the chess analysis part of this book here is another game against a young and talented player, this time a Cuban. The ending of good knight vs. bad bishop bears a certain resemblance with those examined in the chapter *In the patriarch's footsteps*. The only difference, of a rather formal

nature, is that the fight is carried out around the f7-pawn (instead of d5). The rest is quite similar, including some not very obvious but quite significant mistakes from both sides, undoubtedly the consequences of the high complexity of the position.

Viktor Korchnoi – Lázaro Bautista Bruzon
Hoogeveen 2001



White's position is more pleasant, because of his more active knight and the slightly weakened black kingside structure. For the moment, the rights over the open central files are more or less equal.

With his next move, Black offers the exchange of queens, aiming to avoid one of the well-known attacks delivered by a queen in cooperation with a knight. ("Queen and knight, they're alright!")

23...♙c2

Generally speaking, 23...h4 would be desirable, because it would win some space and would prevent the kingside being blocked on light squares. However, with queens on the board, this move would only weaken the position and White could have played 24.♙d7 intending h3 (in order to avoid any back rank troubles) followed by ♖g4. **24.h4!**

This well-timed move parries two threats at the same time: the rather obvious one on the first rank and the positional one, h5-h4.

Black faces the danger of playing an endgame with a "bad" bishop against a strong knight.

24...♙xd2 25.♙xd2 ♖c6?!

More accurate would have been 25...♙c7 and Black's position might have been completely sound. For Black, the c-line is more important than the d-line, which can be easily covered by the knight (d4).

26.♖h2 ♖f8 27.♙c2 ♖e7 28.♖c2 ♖d6 29.♖d4

29.♖g3! was an important alternative. Korchnoi probably wanted to be sure that he would provoke the exchange of rooks, in order to reach the knight vs. bishop endgame. However, there is no convenient way for Black to avoid it after 29.♖g3! anyway. For instance:

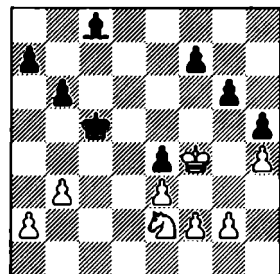
a) 29...♖e5 would have transposed after 30.♖d4 ♖d7 31.♙xc8 ♖xc8 32.♖c6† to a line from the notes to Black's 31st move.

b) 29...♙e8 30.♖f4 followed by ♖d4 and, besides ♖g5-f6, White has the threat of invading through the c-file.

Moreover, it seems that it would have been Black who would have to look for a way of transposing to a reasonable form of the previously mentioned ending, with the immediate:

c) 29...♖b7 30.♙xc8 ♖xc8 31.♖f4 Now any neutral move would be followed by 32.♖c3 which would lead to troubles with the central pawn. Any attempt to generate queenside counterplay with ...♖c5 could generally be parried with a3. Black would not be in time to effectively attack the newly created weakness of the b3-pawn with his bishop because the knight would capture on e4 with check. Then it is just in time to defend its own pawn from d2.

Therefore, it looks like Black would get chances to save the day only with the immediate 31...♖c5!



analysis diagram

Suggested by Malfagia, when the mentioned plan is not available yet for White, since the knight finds itself on e2 still. Here are some possible winning attempts:

c1) Malfagia's point was that 32.a3 is not too efficient now because of 32...♙e6 33.♖d4 ♗d5 34.♗e5 a5 planning ...b5, ...♗b7 and ...a4, in order to clear the c4-square for the king.

c2) Malfagia gives 32.♗xe4 as winning, but after the logical sequence:
32...♗b4!

32...♗b7† 33.♗e5 ♗xg2 34.♖f4 ♗c6 35.♖d3† might be better for White, though double-edged, as pointed out by Malfagia.

33.♗e5 ♗a3 34.♗f6 ♗xa2 35.♖d4

Here misses Black's strong counter-attacking move:

35...a5!!

He only mentions 35...♙e6 36.♖xe6 fxe6 37.♗xg6 ♗xb3 38.g4 which is winning for White.

36.♗xf7 b5!

Black now saves himself after a breathtaking clash.

37.♗xg6

37.e4? a4 38.bxa4 bxa4 39.e5 ♗b2 40.♖b5 ♗d7! even leads to trouble for White.

37...a4 38.♗xh5!? axb3 39.♖xb3 ♗xb3 40.♗g5 b4 41.h5 ♗e6 42.h6 ♗g8 43.e4 ♗c4 44.e5 b3 45.e6 ♗xe6 46.h7 b2 47.h8♙ b1♙

and a draw cannot be avoided.

c3) 32.♗g5!! This leads to even more exciting play, reserving the f4-square for the knight in order to question the stability of Black's bishop on e6. For instance:

32...♗b4 33.♗f6 ♗e6!

The straightforward 33...♗a3? loses the pawn race after 34.♗xf7 ♗xa2 35.♗xg6 ♗xb3. Black has to capture this pawn, but the king is badly placed on this square. 36.♗xh5 a5 37.♗g5 a4 38.h5 ♗e6 39.h6 ♗g8 40.♗g6 a3 41.♗g7 and White wins by just one tempo, since 41...a2 is strongly met by 42.♖c1† ♗b2 43.♖xa2.

34.♖f4 ♗xb3!!

The key of Black's defence. The way for the queenside pawns is cleared as quickly as possible.
35.axb3 ♗xb3 36.♗xf7 a5 37.♖xg6

Changing the move order with 37.g4 would hardly bear any fruit after 37...a4! 38.g5 a3 39.♖xg6 a2 40.♖e7 a1♙ 41.g6 ♗c2 42.g7 ♙a2† 43.♗f8 ♙a8† 44.♗f7 with a draw by perpetual.

37...a4 38.g4 hxg4

It is important to remove one white pawn from the board even at the cost of one tempo, since after 38...a3 39.gxh5 a2 40.h6 a1♙ 41.h7 Black cannot make any use of his extra move, while the second h-pawn will soon cause him trouble.
39.h5 a3 40.h6 a2 41.h7 a1♙ 42.h8♙ ♙xh8 43.♖xh8 b5

Black's counterplay is sufficient for a draw.

29...♗d7 30.♗xc8 ♗xc8 31.♗g3

Taking the pawn with 31.♖b5†?! ♗c5 32.♖xa7 would suddenly transform the strong knight into a bad one after 32...♗d7!.

31...a5

Black would have liked to avoid the further advance of the white king on the dark squares, of course, but after 31...♗e5 the complications would have been unfavourable for him:

32.♖c6† ♗d6 33.♖xa7 ♗d7

Again, the bishop cuts off the knight's way back, but compared to the variation from the previous note, White is two tempi up. This will allow him to get very active play.

34.♗f4 b5 35.♗xe4 ♗c5 36.♗e5 ♗e6

Attacking the knight with 36...♗b6 would be premature in view of the counter attacking move 37.♗d6!.

37.♗f6 ♗b6

Apparently, White's counterplay has failed. And yet, his pieces suddenly recover their coordination. Admittedly, it is in an indirect way with

38.♖c8†! ♗xc8 39.♗xf7

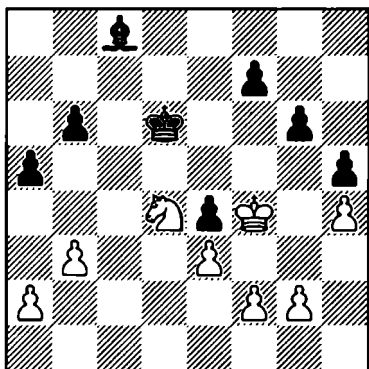
Suddenly, it is Black's pieces that are not working together. After

39...♗f5 40.f3 ♗b1 41.a3

the white pawns are stronger than the bishop, especially since the black king is rather passive for the moment. A possible line would be:

41...♗c5 42.e4 ♗d4 43.♗xg6 ♗c3 44.♗xh5 ♗xb3 45.♗g6 ♗xa3 46.h5 ♗a2 47.h6 ♗g8 48.♗g7
Winning.

32. ♖f4



This must have been the position Korchnoi was aiming for. Black's problems consist in the unfavourable arrangement of his kingside pawns, in conjunction with the activity of the white king.

Fortunately for Bruzon, he has no problems on the other side of the board. It is always easier to defend against threats on just one wing.

Commentators on such positions are usually tempted, especially if they happen to have been on the winning side of the game, to present at the very beginning of the endgame the general plan as the collection of several partial plans.

In one of his books Dvoretsky remarked that this way of telling the story of a game is of little practical and instructional value, as during the game players usually choose their plans little by little and only rarely have a complete overview of it from the very beginning. This is also the way I am going to present the events in this game.

32...♖b7 33.a3

Phase I: Prophylaxis. A useful move, avoiding any counterplay based on ...♖d5 and a5-a4.

33...♖d5 34.♔g5

Start of phase II: The white king tries to penetrate as deeply as possible into the black position.

34...♔e5!?

This should have been the decisive mistake! Obviously, Black had to avoid ♔g5-f6, but the correct way to do that was 34...♔e7! and if 35.♔h6 then 35...♔f8!.

In order to understand the lines and notes below, it is useful to compare with the notes to the 42nd White move in the game line, where I explain all the subtleties in detail.

36.f4 exf3 37.gxf3 ♖a8

Black could probably also play 37...♖b7 38.e4 ♖a6 but it is safer to wait before activating the bishop till White's pawn reaches b5.

38.e4 ♖b7 39.b4

39.e5 is not dangerous because of 39...♔e7!. Now that the e5-square is not available for the knight anymore, this move is possible and in fact necessary!

In case of the "neutral" move 39...♖d5 White wins with 40.f4 ♖e4 41.f5! gx f5 42.♔xh5 the black king is one step too far away. After 39...♔e7! 40.♔g5 ♖d5 41.f4 ♖e4 we reach the drawn game position after the 45th move.

39...axb4 40.axb4

The same plan as recommended further on, but with a significant difference in the king's positioning.

40...♖a6

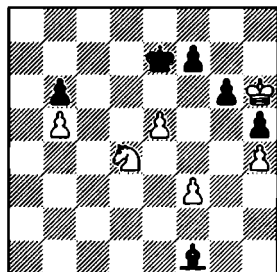
40...♖a8? would lead to trouble after 41.b5 ♖b7 42.♖c6 (controlling the e7-square) 42...♖c8 43.♔g5 ♔g7 (the only way to stop ♔f6, but the king is badly placed on g7) 44.e5 (preventing ...f6† and gaining total control of the dark squares) 44...♖e6 45.♖d4 ♖d5 46.f4 followed by f5.

41.b5 ♖c8 42.♖c6 ♖h3!

This counterplay is enough for a draw.

43.e5 ♖f1 44.♖d4 ♔e7

Due to the weakness of the b5-pawn, White cannot make real progress.



analysis diagram

Malfagia felt like continuing this long variation with few more moves:

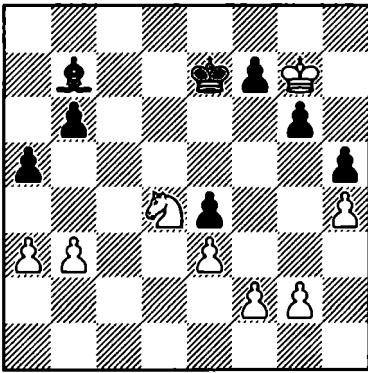
45.f4 ♕d3 46.♖g5 ♗f1 47.f5 gxf5 48.♗xf5
or 48.♗xh5 f6! 49.♖xf5† ♗e6 50.exf6 ♗xf6
51.♖d4 ♗e5 52.♖c6† ♗f5! 53.♖a7 ♗e2†
54.♗h6 ♖g4 with similar result.
48...♗h3† 49.♖g5 ♗g4 50.♖f5† ♗e6 51.♖d6
f6†! 52.exf6 ♗xd6 53.♗h6 ♗e6 54.♖g7 ♗e5
55.f7 ♗xf7 56.♗xf7 ♗f5

With a draw.

35.♗h6 ♗f6 36.♗h7 ♗b7 37.♖g8 ♗e7

As a punishment for the unjustified “activity” on move 34, the king has to retreat now. It was impossible to resist with 37...♗c8 38.♗f8 ♗d7 because of 39.a4 and Black is in zugzwang!

38.♗g7



“I have long suspected, whenever the books I have read began discussing dark square weaknesses or an attack on the dark squares, that the subject under discussion was not only beyond my understanding, but beyond the author’s as well. Certainly, I would say to myself, it must be true that the enemy dark squares will be weak if his pawns stand on light squares and he loses his dark-square bishop. But if he then removes all his pieces from the dark squares, what will be left for me to attack?”

Such was my line of reasoning, until the day I realised that a weakness of the dark squares is also a weakness of the pieces and pawns on the light squares...

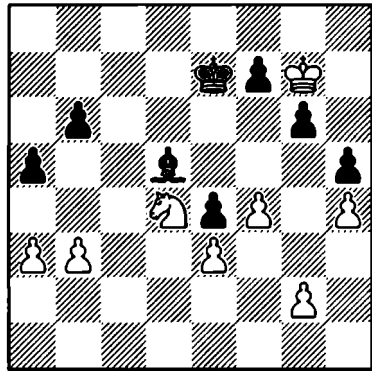
“The point of an attack on the dark squares is that, by placing my pawns and pieces on the dark, I attack my opponent’s pieces and pawns on the light.”

This is the first comment of the first annotated game from Bronstein’s masterpiece *Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953* and it certainly applies here. However, the concrete way to prove that is far from easy for White. This is another moment when Bronstein’s thoughts about weaknesses on light squares and on dark squares applies perfectly (see page 37).

38...♗d5

The first difference compared with the position after Black’s best defence is that the bishop has to permanently guard the c6-square: 38...♗a6 (intending ...♗f1) would be met by 39.♖c6† when the black king has no good squares, for instance: 39...♗e8 40.♖e5 (40.♗f6! also looks all right) or 39...♗d6 40.♖d8 and White wins the f7-pawn in both cases.

39.f4



Phase III: White starts winning space in the centre. It might seem illogical to exchange one of the black weaknesses situated on light squares, but without the help of the pawns White can hardly make any progress.

It is interesting to note that if the endgame had arrived from a Catalan (one of Korchnoi’s favourite openings in the past) this move would not have been possible, as the pawn would

already have been on g3! Later we shall see another example of a pawn (b3), which, after having fulfilled a useful job of restricting Black's pieces at a certain stage of the game, becomes a weakness in the endgame.

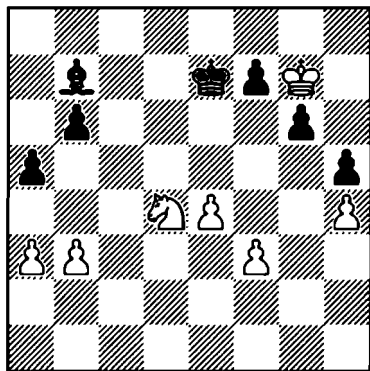
39...cxf3

Forced, because of the threat f5, breaking Black's structure.

40.gxf3 ♖a8

Now and later 40...g5 wouldn't achieve much, for instance 41.hxg5 h4 42.♖f5† but White has to consider this threat permanently.

41.e4 ♖b7



42.e5?

Phase IV: White blocks the black pawns and prepares for a break with f5. In fact, as logical as this plan might seem, the move all but misses the win!

Phase IV should have taken place on the other wing with 42.b4! axb4 43.axb4. White intends to restrict the black bishop even more and get an outpost on c6 for his knight with a further advance of the pawn to b5. Let us examine Black's possible reactions:

a) 43...♗a6 is still impossible in view of 44.♖c6†.

b) 43...b5 would prevent White's main plan, but would create an additional weakness. White would win with:

44.♗h6!

A strong prophylactic move. The immediate

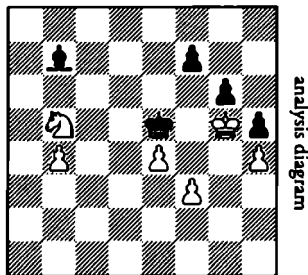
44.♖xb5 would lead to unnecessary complications after 44...g5. Also insufficient would be 44.e5 because it would allow the bishop to escape the cage with 44...♗d5. For instance, 45.f4 ♗c4 46.♗h6 ♗f1! 47.♗g5 ♗d3 48.f5 gxh5 49.♗f4 f6 50.♖xf5† ♗f7 51.♖g3 ♗g6 52.♖e4 fxe5† 53.♗xe5 ♗xe4 54.♗xe4 ♗e6 with equality.

44...♗f6

44...♗d6 is strongly met by 45.♗g5, when Black cannot defend both the b5- and f7-pawns simultaneously.

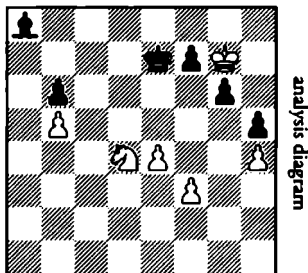
45.♖xb5 ♗e5 46.♗g5

Black has no counterplay for the pawn.



As pointed out by Malfagia, one last attempt to save the game would be 46...♗c6 but White has the paradoxical 47.♖a7!. This looks like a self-imprisonment in view of 47...♗d7, but in fact it manages to build up a reliable queenside fortress after 48.b5 ♗d6 49.b6, when Black is defenceless against the threats on opposite wings.

c) 43...♗a8 44.b5!



This is the point: White simply wants to play $\text{d}6$, transposing to a very promising queen ending practically by force. Remarkably, White has as many pawns placed on light squares as his opponent, which is not really customary in endings with a good knight versus a bad bishop. This must have been one of the reasons why Korchnoi advanced his e-pawn instead.

In the diagrammed position, play may continue 44... $\text{b}7$ 45. $\text{d}6!$ $\text{xc}6$. Practically forced. As we know already, both 45... $\text{c}e6$ 46. $\text{d}d8$ † and 45... $\text{c}e8$ 46. $\text{cf}6$ are winning for White. 46. $\text{bxc}6$ b5 47. $\text{c}7$ $\text{d}7$ 48. $\text{cxf}7$ b4 49. e5 b3 50. e6† $\text{cxc}7$ 51. e7 b2 52. e8 $\text{c}b1$ 53. $\text{c}e5$ † followed by 54. $\text{c}f6$ or 54. $\text{c}e4$. The endgame offers excellent winning chances for White, although it is not easy to claim that he has a 100% winning position (queen endgames are more complicated than that). In any case, *Phase V* would have been rather long.

42... $\text{d}5$ 43. $\text{c}h6$

By transferring the king to g5, White prepares *Phase V*, see below.

43... $\text{b}7$ 44. $\text{c}g5$ $\text{d}5$ 45. $\text{f}4$ $\text{c}e4$ 46. $\text{f}5$

Phase V: The breakthrough; it looks more dangerous now than it really is.

46... $\text{g}f5$ 47. $\text{c}f4$

White had no time for 47. $\text{c}xh5$ because of 47... $\text{f}6!$ and, all of a sudden, the white king feels very uncomfortable on the edge of the board.

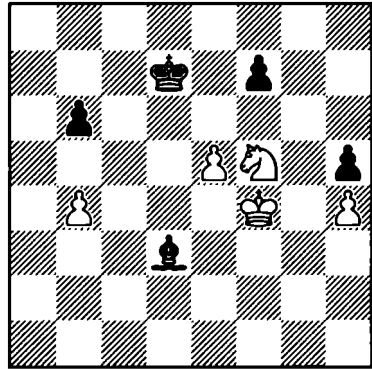
47... $\text{c}d7!$

For the time being, Bruzon defends very well. After 47... $\text{d}3$ 48. $\text{cxf}5$ † $\text{c}d7$ 49. $\text{d}d4$ Black would not have been able to defend his h-pawn properly: 49... $\text{c}e7$ 50. $\text{c}g5$ $\text{g}g6$ 51. e6! $\text{c}f8$ 52. $\text{c}f6$ winning.

48. b4

This is the moment when, quite unexpectedly, the b3-pawn is an obstacle to White's winning attempts because after 48. $\text{cxf}5$ $\text{c}c2!$ 49. $\text{d}d4$ $\text{d}d1$ Black would have transferred the bishop to a good diagonal avoiding the knight's domination. It is hard to find a way to make progress for White. For instance 50. $\text{c}f5$ $\text{c}e7$ 51. $\text{c}g5$ $\text{g}g4$, or 51. $\text{c}e4$ $\text{g}g4$ 52. $\text{c}d5$ $\text{c}d7$ intending ... $\text{c}e6$.

48... $\text{axb}4$ 49. $\text{axb}4$ $\text{d}d3$ 50. $\text{cxf}5$



50... $\text{c}e6?$

This move will lose a decisive tempo. Black had to go as quickly as possible for the b-pawn. Incidentally, 50... $\text{c}xf5??$ would also have lost, in a rather elementary way after 51. $\text{cxf}5$ $\text{c}e7$ 52. b5 $\text{c}f8$ 53. $\text{c}f6$ $\text{c}e8$ 54. e6 $\text{c}f8$ 55. $\text{c}e5!$ heading for the b6-pawn.

Black would have achieved a draw after:

50... $\text{c}c6$ 51. $\text{d}g3$

51. $\text{d}d6?$ would allow 51... $\text{f}6!$ 52. $\text{d}f7!$ $\text{c}c4!$ when White suddenly faces problems. Going for the f-pawn with 51. $\text{d}h6$ would not help either: after capturing the b-pawn, Black will sacrifice his bishop at the right moment for White's passed pawn and the b-pawn will ensure a draw.

Malfagia suggested 51. $\text{d}e7!$? with the plan of liquidating the queenside after 51... $\text{c}b5$ 52. $\text{d}c8$, but, as he himself pointed out, Black seems to be able to defend successfully. Here is the simplest of the solutions suggested by him: 52... $\text{c}xb4$ 53. $\text{d}xb6$ $\text{c}c5$ 54. $\text{d}d7$ † $\text{c}d4$ 55. $\text{d}f6$ $\text{c}e2$ and White does not seem to be able to attack the enemy pawns because his e5-pawn is also weak, for instance 56. $\text{d}e4$ $\text{d}d3$ 57. $\text{d}d6$ $\text{g}g6$.

51... $\text{c}b5$

51... $\text{g}g6?$ would place the bishop on an exposed square. White would play 52. $\text{c}g5$ threatening to advance his e-pawn or to capture on h5 at the same time.

52. ♖xh5 ♗xb4

And it is easy to compare with the game, where White won by just one tempo. It is difficult to guess what Bruzon actually missed when playing his move.

51. ♖g7† ♗d5 52. ♖xh5 ♗c4 53. ♗g5 ♗xb4

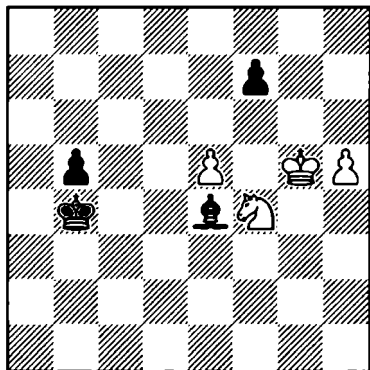
54. ♖f4 ♗e4

Or 54... ♗h7 55. ♗f6 ♗c5 56. ♗xf7 winning.

55. h5

Phase VI: the pawn race.

55... b5



56. e6!

An elegant way to end the game: Korchnoi cuts all possible routes of the bishop to the h7-square. 56... ♗e6 57. ♖g6 ♗a3 58. h6 b4 59. h7 b3 60. h8 ♖ b2 61. ♖c3† ♗a2 62. ♖c4† 1–0

Everything works out well for White till the very end: 62... ♗a1 63. ♖a4† ♗b1 64. ♖xe4†

In spite of the inaccuracies committed by both players (and most definitively by the annotator himself!) this is a very instructive game.



Biographies of Our Heroes



Each chapter of this book contains some biographical notes about their protagonists; however, I included only information that suited the general structure of each section. For readers interested in finding out more about our heroes I have given below further information, of both an objective and subjective nature. I have generally aimed to avoid repetitions, both with respect to the previous chapters and between different biographies, in order to save the editor's publishing space and not to abuse the reader's patience. Therefore, if you read one of the biographies separately, you might find it incomplete.

Akiba Rubinstein was, together with Paul Keres, one of the strongest players not to have had the opportunity of a world title match.

Akiba was born on December 12 1882 in Stawiski, in what is now Poland as the twelfth child of a poor Rabbi's family. He learned chess rather late, at the age of sixteen, which partially explains why he occasionally was guilty of small tactical oversights, although he was generally able to calculate long forced combinations.

After discovering the hidden beauty of the royal game, Akiba decided to deviate from the path chosen for him by family tradition, the study of the Talmud, and to become instead a chess professional.

Akiba's life and career are clouded in mystery. A possible reason for this was his unwillingness to talk or write about himself, possibly caused by his excessive modesty. Another aspect of Rubinstein's character was his enduring care about others. During his games, he never sat in his chair while the opponent was thinking. Instead, he retreated to a remote corner, waiting for his turn to move. This quixotic attitude occasionally led him to defeat by overstepping the time limit, since he stuck to his habit even when short of time.

Rubinstein's progress was slow but systematic. In 1912 he won every single tournament he played, Bad Pistyan, Breslau, San Sebastian and Vilnius. Public opinion considered him as possibly the strongest player in the world already and a match against Lasker seemed to be unavoidable.

Unfortunately, the First World War strongly affected him psychologically and after 1918 he never became one of the main challengers to the title. However, he remained one of the world's leading players and occasionally obtained outstanding tournament victories such as in Vienna 1922, Marienbad 1925 and Rogaska Slatina 1929. In 1930, he scored a fantastic 15 out of 17 at the Hamburg Olympiad, playing on the top board of the Polish team, which won the gold medals.

Who could have foreseen that this was to be one of Rubinstein's last tournaments? Starting from 1933 he spent his days in asylums and sanatoriums, due to a serious mental illness.

One is tempted to consider the post war champions as belonging to a completely separate generation than Akiba. It is quite shocking to learn that from his hospital room he was aware of the results of the Botvinnik-Smyslov matches.

Akiba Rubinstein died on March 14 1961; the same year Botvinnik won his title back from Tal.





Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine was World Champion between 1927–1935 and 1937–1946. The way his name is pronounced by many Westerners (Alakain) is mistaken. Alekhine is just the French transcription from Cyrillic. Most Russians use the pronunciation **Al-yo-hin**, but Alekhine referred to himself as **Al-ye-hin**. Alekhine was born on November 1, 1892 into a rich family from Moscow. His parents apparently had an adventurous life and he was raised by his grandparents.

As soon as he became acquainted with the game of chess, at the age of seven, he felt an irresistible attraction to it. On many occasions he waited until his grandparents fell asleep in order to take his chess set out from under the bed and spend most of the night studying by candlelight. Much later, when he was already a strong player, he would take out his pocket chess set at the most unexpected moments and, much to his friends' amazement, start checking an idea he had been just hit by.

The house he was living in during his childhood was frequently visited by several strong masters, which greatly contributed to Alekhine's rapid improvement. One of his early trainers, Duz-Khotimirsky, used to joke that Alekhine struggled during his whole career to correct the erroneous knowledge received from him in his childhood.

Unlike his great predecessors Lasker and Capablanca, who pretended that chess was nothing more than a hobby for them, Alekhine publicly and repeatedly declared his total dedication to the royal game. However, his way to the chess crown was not smooth at all.

The dramatic political changes in Russia put Alekhine's safety and social stability in serious danger. It is no wonder that he chose to emigrate when given a chance in 1921.

The golden fence of \$10,000, instituted by Capablanca for those wishing to challenge him, was as great an obstacle in Alekhine's rise to the chess throne as the Cuban's huge talent and practical strength.

Curiously, Alekhine started preparing for a match against Capa while Lasker was still the reigning champion. He made no secret about his belief that the old king's days were numbered. Alekhine's permanent quest for improvement, his great capacity for work, as well as his natural talent, brought their reward in Buenos Aires 1927 when he managed to defeat the invincible chess machine, as Capa was then considered. By winning that highly memorable match by 6–3 (with 25 draws) Alekhine became the fourth World Champion.

Having achieved the aim he had been pursuing so many years, Alekhine continued to play and win tournaments, thus proving that his coronation had not been lucky. His superiority over the other leading grandmasters reached a peak in tournaments like San Remo 1930 and Bled 1931 where he won by a margin of 3½ and 5½ points respectively.

The chess world can only regret that a revenge match between Alekhine and Capablanca was never played. The relations between these two marvellous players had deteriorated even before Buenos Aires '27 and any pretext was good enough for the new champion to avoid an uncomfortable challenge from the Cuban. This is how the idea of the two matches against Bogoljubow (in 1929 and 1934) came about. The champion won with the convincing scores of 15½–9½ and 15½–10½ respectively.

Ironically, Alekhine himself remarks in one of his comments to an emphatic win against his challenger: "This game is a clear hint about the pointlessness of the whole match."

In the long run, this aura of invincibility did a disservice to Alekhine. Little by little, he became addicted to cigarettes and alcohol. His first match against Euwe (1935) found the champion far from his best physical and sporting form. To widespread astonishment, the teacher of mathematics from Holland managed to defeat the legend by the score of 15½–14½.

This was the moment when Alekhine had to prove the strength of his character. He quit smoking and drinking alcohol and started preparing seriously for the return match. When the fight started again, in 1937, Euwe faced a completely changed opponent, who defeated him impressively 15½–9½.

The Second World War marked the start of Alekhine's final decline. He was at the Buenos Aires Olympiad when war broke out in 1939. Many leading grandmasters decided to stay in Argentina but Alekhine returned to Europe. One possible reason was that the Nazis threatened to confiscate several of his third wife's properties. Once in Europe, Alekhine participated in tournaments and simultaneous displays organized in the occupied territories. Clearly, the German authorities intended to use the champion's name for propaganda reasons but sometimes they were not really happy with the image of a Russian intellectual beating 75 Aryan officers at the same time.

By that time, a series of articles with a pronounced anti-Semitic character and signed by Alekhine were published, but personally I doubt that they were really written by him.

Anyway, once the war was over, Alekhine faced the danger of being charged with collaborating. In order to avoid trouble, he spent his last years in the neutral countries Spain and Portugal, where his life was marked by poverty. His last hope came with an invitation to the first big post war tournament, London 1946. However, it all ended in bitter disappointment when the US Chess Federation insisted that Alekhine's invitation had to be cancelled on account of his behaviour during the war.

On March 24 1946 Alekhine was found dead in his small hotel room. The last photo of the great champion is quite evocative: Alekhine was sitting in front of a chessboard...

Mikhail Moiseyevich Botvinnik was World Champion between 1948–1957, 1958–1960 and 1961–1963 and won the Soviet championship 6 times (1931, 1933, 1939, 1941, 1944 and 1952).

Botvinnik was born on August 17th, 1911 near St Petersburg. He learned to play chess at the age of twelve.

Unlike his great predecessor, he happened to be the right man at the right moment and in the right place. The Soviets desperately wanted to conquer the chess world title, in order to prove the force of their collective intellect. Botvinnik was chosen as the man best suited to accomplish this.

Mikhail Moiseyevich's main merit was that he understood the huge responsibility weighing on his shoulders and did his best to honour the practically unlimited support from the officials. However, the reader should understand that he was not a "yes-man" who would never question the orders and suggestions coming from above. Here is one significant example.

After the first half of the 1948 world title match-tournament Botvinnik was firmly in the lead. He was



asked what he would think if the other two Soviet participants, Smyslov and Keres, would deliberately lose to him in the remaining games. This idea must have been generated somewhere at the top of the political hierarchy, possibly by Stalin himself. Botvinnik not only rejected the whole plan, but also felt insulted. "They want to diminish my merits, now that it is clear that I will win the championship anyway!"

Subsequently, after being crowned as World Champion, Botvinnik "forgot" to send a letter of praise and thanks to Stalin, as he did after his success in the strong tournament at Nottingham 1936.

This act of personal courage and dignity was a political mistake at the same time. Botvinnik's influence diminished and soon he had to suffer the bitter consequences.

Shortly before the Helsinki Olympiad in 1952, at the insistence of several of his colleagues headed by Smyslov and Keres, Botvinnik was excluded from the team. The reason given was that he could not play high-level chess anymore!! Before 1948 such a thing would never have happened, especially since the claim was obviously ridiculous.

Botvinnik introduced a new dimension into chess, that of scientific preparation. Methods that are well known nowadays were completely ignored by players before the Second World War.

One of Botvinnik's greatest successes before winning the world title was his victory in the tournament at Nottingham 1936, which confirmed his place among the world's elite.

For many years, a match against Alekhine was planned. This was not a smooth process, because Alekhine was not only a refugee from his motherland, but also a supposed collaborator with the Nazis.

The situation became even more complicated when the champion died undefeated. Several interested parties exerted strong pressures. One popular idea was to award the crown to Euwe.

Finally, the already mentioned match-tournament of the five strongest players in the world was arranged for 1948. The first two fifths were played in The Hague while the rest of it was held in Moscow. Botvinnik's clear-cut victory marked the start of a long period of Soviet domination.

Once the supreme aim was achieved, Botvinnik started to share his time and energy between chess and his engineering profession. Naturally, this meant that he played less often than before and that he was not always in his best form.

No fewer than seven matches for the world title, from 1951 to 1963, marked the second half of Botvinnik's career. Curiously, he never beat a challenger at the first attempt. He drew his matches with Bronstein in 1951 and with Smyslov in 1954, lost to Smyslov in 1957, to Tal in 1960, and to Petrosian in 1963. However, he proved to be an awesome opponent in the return matches, mainly because of his self-discipline and capacity of studying his opponent's style as well as learning from defeats. This is why he was able to win his title back in 1958 and 1961, each time in a more convincing way than he had lost the first match. True, his score against Smyslov was not as impressive, but it would have been greater if Botvinnik had not forgotten about his clock in a winning position towards the end of the match. By 1963 the champion's right to play a return match was abolished, but Botvinnik already seemed to be tired by the fight at the highest level. At the age of 52 he was not young any more.

At the beginning of the seventies, Botvinnik retired from competitive chess. However, he continued to be preoccupied by the thought processes that allow a player to take over-the-board decisions. Accordingly, his chess activity became focused on two main directions, which, by the way, were not

completely alien to him in the sixties either. The first of them, possibly Botvinnik's favourite, was the development of a computer program that would be able to compete with the best players in the world. However the road investigated by Botvinnik, based on strict rules and a computer that actively investigates long term properties of a position before making a decision, has so far not been a successful one. Instead the brute force programs such as Fritz, Shredder, Junior and others, which rely mainly on massive calculation have shown the way for computer chess.

Secondly, he founded a chess school where young talents were advised on their difficult way to the top. From the pupils of this school I will only mention the most impressive names, those of Karpov and Kasparov.

Botvinnik passed away on May 5, 1995, at the respectable age of 83. Until the last moment he remained an active person. He apparently also maintained his communist convictions until the end. It is probably too early to judge his complex character. Perhaps some day history will give a definitive answer.

Mikhail Nekhemyevich Tal was World Champion for just one year, 1960–1961, and won the Soviet championship on 6 occasions (1957, 1958, 1967, 1972, 1974 and 1978).

Tal was born on November 9 1936 in Riga. He learned chess around the age of seven. He described his addiction to chess in a colourful way: "When one of us first plays chess, he is like a man who has already caught a dose of microbes of, say, Hong Kong flu. Such a man walks along the street, and he does not yet know that he is ill. He is healthy, he feels fine, but the microbes are doing their job." (*The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal*, Cadogan 1997)

Tal's rise to the top was no less spectacular than his style of play. In 1957 and 1958 he won the Soviet championship, later in 1958 the Interzonal, in 1959 the Candidates tournament and, finally, in 1960 the match against Botvinnik, with the resounding score of 12½–8½. At the age of 23 he became the youngest World Champion up to that moment.

Unfortunately, Tal's huge talent was often overshadowed by his precarious health. He never tried to explain his defeat in the return match from 1961 by his health problems, but it is certain that before the next Candidates Tournament (Curacao 1962) he was suffering from kidney failure. Consequently, Tal played much below his potential and even had to retire before the last quarter of the event.

Being used to such blows from fate, Tal managed to maintain a light-hearted and sardonic attitude to his occasional sporting failures. When Taimanov called him by telephone during the Curacao tournament, asking him about how things were going, Tal answered: "I am doing just great! I have a kidney less, I ruined my tournament and I have also lost my money. As for the rest, it's a total disaster!"

In the sixties, Tal remained one of the favourites among the candidates to the title. In 1965 he reached the final, but was eliminated by Spassky, while in 1968 he lost to Korchnoi in the semi-finals after a hard fought match.

Gradually, his style of play became more mature and Tal started to launch his characteristic attacks from a sounder positional basis. In the seventies he reached a peak of his strength. Some of his major



achievements in this period are the wins in Tallinn 1971, Sukhumi 1972, Wijk aan Zee, Tallinn and Sochi 1973, Tallinn and Leningrad 1977 and Montreal 1979. Curiously, he had to wait until 1979 to qualify for the Candidates again. Although he achieved that in a rather convincing form (by winning the Riga Interzonal with a margin of $3\frac{1}{2}$ points) he lost practically without any fight his quarterfinal match against Polugayevsky.

In the eighties, Tal continued to be one of the protagonists of the super tournaments such as Reykjavik 1987 and Reykjavik 1988. However, his general state of health deteriorated progressively.

Tal played his last tournament in Barcelona 1992. After a few rounds, he started feeling unwell again. The organizers suggested he should retire, but Tal insisted on doing his job until the end. Some of his opponents understood the situation and agreed to short draws against him. However, the last round saw a big fight and Tal won in brilliant style. Fate decided that the last move of this game was $38.\text{♔e1}$. The king returned to its initial square as if announcing that the King from Riga was to complete his journey as a mortal rather soon. On June 28, 1992 Tal moved into eternity.



Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian was World Champion between 1963–1969 and won the Soviet championship 4 times (in 1959, 1961, 1969 and 1975).

Petrosian was born on June 17 1929 in Tbilisi, Georgia to Armenian parents. He learned how to play chess at the age of twelve.

The Tiger from Yerevan, as he was later called, emerged into the national and international arena as a very solid and cautious player, who was first concerned about his own safety and only then about attacking the enemy position. Botvinnik wrote that Petrosian was the only great player whose style of play has not been completely understood yet. As a researcher in the field of the algorithm of chess thinking, Botvinnik also stated that during a game Petrosian mainly decided which piece needed to be transferred to a better position and then simply transferred it.

Among others, this way of thinking had the advantage of a considerable economy of time and energy, which could be felt in the decisive phase of the game.

Petrosian's economic attitude manifested itself in terms of tournament strategy as well. After his honourable but not entirely successful experiences during the Candidates Tournaments from Zurich 1953, Amsterdam 1956 and Yugoslavia 1959, Petrosian came up with an interesting, though possibly not entirely ethical idea, on the way to Curacao 1962.

Candidates' tournaments are long and exhausting events, we should save our energy, he explained to Keres and Geller. Wouldn't it be a wise idea to agree quick draws when playing against each other? The only Soviet who didn't join this unofficial association was Korchnoi, who later wrote that Keres should not have accepted it either, since he was considerably stronger than his comrades.

Be that as it may, Petrosian won the Curacao Candidates, half a point ahead of Keres and Geller. Korchnoi had been in the lead in the first part of the tournament, but tired towards the end.

In 1963, Petrosian went on to win his match against Botvinnik with the score of $12\frac{1}{2}$ – $9\frac{1}{2}$, thus becoming the 9th World Champion. According to Tal, the difference of three points does not entirely reflect the ease with which Petrosian achieved this result.

Three years later Petrosian defended his title against Spassky, whom he defeated by 12½–11½. At the closing banquet, the champion expressed his belief that the next match for the title would see the same players sitting opposite each other again.

Quite prophetic words! After moving through the Candidates matches in the same convincing way as he had done in the previous cycle, Spassky challenged Petrosian again. This time he was successful with the score of 12½–10½ and Petrosian joined the honourable gallery of ex-World Champions.

Petrosian continued to be a frequent participant in the Candidates matches, but he never managed to become a challenger again. In 1971 he eliminated Hübner in the quarterfinals. The German doctor resigned the match while trailing 3–4, invoking the poor conditions of play. Later that year, Petrosian defeated Korchnoi 5½–4½ by drawing 8 games in a row and then winning one when his opponent played too aggressively, possibly exasperated by the peaceful course of the match. Fittingly, a final draw finished the match. However, Petrosian proved unable to stop Fischer's charge and lost the final 6½–2½.

The next cycle also started well for Petrosian, who in the quarterfinals eliminated Portisch 7–6, after a tough fight. However, he resigned his semi-final match against Korchnoi after only 5 games, when he was trailing by two points already. Apparently, the relations between the opponents became tenser than Petrosian could stand.

The ex-World Champion seems to have been affected by this fight since his next two attempts to climb the chess Olympus ended in the same painful way, by being eliminated in the quarterfinals by Korchnoi. Paradoxically, he had his chances in 1977, which was Korchnoi's golden year, but the match from 1980 was a rather one-sided affair.

At the beginning of the eighties, Petrosian started working on his book of selected games. He had somewhat lost his appetite for play and seemed to have decided to use another form of self-expression. In 1984 Petrosian suddenly felt ill; it was an illness from which he could not recover. On August 13, 1984 the 9th World Champion passed away without finishing his book. This task was completed by Eduard Shekhtman. The reader knows already how much I enjoyed reading *Srategija Nadejhnosti*. I sometimes try to imagine how much more interesting it would have been if Petrosian had been able to complete his last work...

Robert James Fischer was World Champion for only three years, between 1972–1975, although he was never defeated as champion. Fischer also won the US championship on 8 occasions, in 1957/58, 1958/59, 1959/60, 1960/61, 1962/63, 1963/64 (this one with the perfect score of 11 out of 11! The last game for him to win was as Black against Saidy, see page 115), 1965 and 1966. He was born in Chicago on the 9th of March 1943 but Fischer is, of course, most closely associated with New York where his family moved when he was six.

In that same year Fischer learned how to play chess from his elder sister Joan. Rather soon, he decided to dedicate all his time and energy to his publicly declared goal of becoming World Champion. For that purpose, he didn't hesitate to abandon his school studies that, according to his own statement, could not in any way help him to improve in chess.



In 1958 Fischer became the youngest player ever to be a Candidate for the world title by qualifying from the Portoroz Interzonal. His result (a shared 5th–6th place out of 8 players) at the Candidates tournament held in several Yugoslavian cities was more than honourable but also proved that Fischer still had a lot of work to do in order to challenge the Soviet hegemony.

The next cycle started promisingly for Fischer, who won the Stockholm Interzonal held in 1962 by a margin of 2½ points. However, the Curacao Candidates Tournament brought him a bitter disappointment, since he finished 4th, without being able to question the supremacy of the Soviet trio Petrosian, Keres and Geller.

Many commentators, mainly from the Soviet Union, concluded that Fischer achieved his successes in lesser tournaments (including the Interzonals) because he was very strong against weaker players, against whom he scored high percentages. Since in the Candidates Tournament there were no outsiders, the rest was easy to explain. Many years passed before this point of view was proved to be wrong...

For Fischer's fans all over the world, the next title attempt ended in an even more deceptive way. After the first ten rounds of the Sousse Interzonal, 1967, Bobby had the lead with the fantastic score of 8½ points. No one doubted that the young American would obtain yet another outstanding result. The shock came when the news that Bobby had retired from the tournament was made public.

Equally disappointing was the fact that during the next two years Fischer participated only in two major events. Was Bobby going to abandon his plans to become World Champion?

Just when people started writing him off, Fischer made a sensational comeback at the memorable USSR vs. The Rest of the World Match. The first remarkable thing was that the usually over-ambitious American didn't argue with Larsen when the Dane claimed the right to play on the first board. Fischer won his mini-match with Petrosian quite convincingly, with the score 3–1.

Later that year, Bobby scored another impressive win in the Interzonal held in Palma de Mallorca, with a margin of 3½ points over the next placed. The Soviets were not alarmed yet: Fischer had done similar things before, without coming even close to a match against the champion.

However, history does not always repeat itself and Bobby became a challenger by eliminating both Taimanov and Larsen with the incredible score of 6–0 and then Petrosian by "only" 6½–2½. The Soviets became slightly alarmed and provided Spassky with huge technical support for his pre-match preparation.

As for Spassky, he seemed to enjoy the prospect of a fight against Fischer. Hadn't he beaten the American three times in their previous games?

However, Caissa had made her decision already. In Reykjavik 1972 Fischer won the match rather convincingly with 12½–8½ and was crowned as the 11th World Champion.

There is something really intriguing about the start of the match. In the first game, Fischer equalized rather easily with Black but then suddenly sacrificed a bishop in a dead drawn position and lost. In the second game he didn't show up and lost by forfeit. I cannot help remembering Bobby's ambitious statement back in the sixties that he would defeat Botvinnik in a match even if starting from the score of 0–2, and Nona Gaprindashvili (the women's World Champion at that time) even giving her the odds of one minor piece. The results of the first two games of the match against Spassky must be a coincidence but it would definitely suit Fischer's mysterious image if it were not.

After seeing his dream come true, Bobby didn't play a single official game. In 1975 he didn't agree with FIDE about the terms of the planned match against the new challenger, Anatoly Karpov. After some hesitation, FIDE decided to disqualify Fischer and crown Karpov as the new champion.

In recent years Fischer's name has been involved in several controversial events. I prefer to imagine that this is all about an entirely different person. The Fischer I knew gave up chess immediately after becoming the greatest World Champion ever; and he never came back.

In addition to the purely chess inheritance Fischer left us, he was also the first grandmaster to actively fight for an improvement in the general conditions of play in tournaments. Silence, the intensity of light in the playing room, and a higher level of appearance fees were among Fischer's main concerns.

Although he was often criticized for this, sometimes in a sarcastic way, by the commentators (mainly Soviets, of course), no one can deny that most of the players in the 1970s and 1980s could practise their favourite game as professionals mainly because of Fischer's efforts.

Above all, Fischer remains for me a phenomenon who could defeat alone such a powerful system as the Soviet chess school. His dramatic rise as well as his mysterious disappearance can only be compared with that of another American, born more than 100 years before Fischer, the legendary Paul Morphy.

Anatoly Evgenyevich Karpov was World Champion between 1975–1985 and 1993–1999. He won the Soviet championship 3 times (in 1976, 1983 and 1988 together with Kasparov).

Karpov was born on May 23, 1951 in Zlatoust. He learned chess from his father at the age of four.

Just like Botvinnik, the young Anatoly was chosen by the Soviet authorities to be the man to bring the supreme title back from the West. However, he seems to have been a much more obedient tool in the authorities' hands than the Patriarch.

Karpov's advancement was quite rapid, though less spectacular than Tal's. He managed to become World Champion at the first attempt. In 1973 he shared the win of the Leningrad Interzonal with Korchnoi and then eliminated Polugayevsky and Spassky rather convincingly. His final match in 1974 with Korchnoi was a less one-sided affair, but the minimal score of 12½–11½ allowed him to become Fischer's official challenger.

The fact that Karpov became Champion by default gave rise to numerous malicious comments. I shall refrain from any speculation, but will only underline that the 12th World Champion did his best to prove that he deserved his crown. For ten years, no other player came even close to challenging his overall supremacy in tournaments. Karpov's defeats as well as his failures to win a tournament were so rare as to cause a sensation.

However, the reigning champion had to defend his title in matches against a challenger every three years. The historic confrontation in Baguio 1978 between Karpov and Korchnoi saw the champion on the verge of disaster. However, by winning the 32nd game Karpov managed to defeat his former countryman with a minimal score again (6–5 with 21 draws).

The next match, Merano 1981, saw the same players facing each other again. However, at the age of



50 Korchnoi was not able to seriously threaten his awesome opponent. Karpov won with the score of 6–2 and 10 draws.

Although Korchnoi failed to become a challenger again, the chess world had the chance to follow matches from the “K–K” series for a long time yet. A rapidly rising star from Baku, who liked to call himself “Perestroika’s son”, started causing Karpov many sleepless nights. I shall not enter into further detail regarding the five Kasparov–Karpov matches, which are recent history and probably known by most of the readers. The only thing I would like to mention is that Kasparov could only prove a microscopic superiority and that Karpov remained the second best player in the world until 1990, with no one coming even close to challenging his position.

In the early nineties, Karpov started to slowly slide down in the world’s hierarchy. His defeat in the Candidates semi-final against Short was symptomatic. However, when Kasparov and Short (who also won the final against Timman in the meanwhile) decided to play their match outside FIDE’s auspices, Karpov was given the chance to play for the “official” world title again.

In spite of the fact that he defeated Timman quite convincingly, Karpov’s new crown was much less credible than the one he won by forfeit 18 years earlier, since he was obviously not the strongest player in the world anymore.

At least this was the prevailing opinion until Karpov brilliantly won the 1994 Linares tournament with 11/13, 2½ points ahead of Kasparov. However, this proved to be an isolated result of this height in the long run.

Karpov defended his title in 1996 by winning his match against the FIDE challenger Gata Kamsky rather convincingly.

Once again the system of determining the World Champion changed completely. In 1998 this led to Karpov receiving the supreme crown almost as a present on a silver platter from FIDE. For some strange reasons, he was awarded the right to play directly in the final, against an opponent who had only two days available to travel across Europe and relax after three weeks of stressful KO matches. By defeating Anand in the play off, Karpov became a World Champion again.

But all these political manoeuvres will be well forgotten in the future. What will remain forever are the images of one of the greatest chess players ever born and Karpov’s games from his golden years. They are surely worth looking at...



Viktor Lvovich Korchnoi is the most remarkable player not to become World Champion in the history of chess. However, he was proclaimed Soviet champion four times (1960, 1962, 1964/5 and 1970) and on three consecutive occasions was only one step away from becoming World Champion (1975, 1978, 1981).

Korchnoi was born on the 23rd of March 1931 in Leningrad. (There is some confusion regarding his birthday, since most sources, including Korchnoi’s *400 wins* published in 1978 and co-authored by Viktor himself, give the 23rd of July. Coincidence meant that my son was born precisely on this date and we named him Victor, of course. Later I learned about the other version of

Korchnoi's birthday and decided to ask the great man himself to shed some light on this matter. He mentioned the 23rd of March as his real birthday, but had nothing against giving me an autograph on the back of a picture of my son anyway.)

The most curious thing about Korchnoi's career is that, in spite of having repeatedly been a Candidate to the World Title starting from the early 1960s, he achieved his highest results between 1973 and 1981, meaning from the age of 42 until 50. True, in those remote days chess was more of a science and an art with only an incidental sporting implication, with that old fashioned system of 40 moves in 5 hours, adjournments, and free days in the tournaments. The age of high performance hadn't even started to drop towards the unthinkable level we are facing today.

However, most of Korchnoi's contemporaries started their downward trajectory around or even before reaching the age of 40.

I found the explanation for this remarkable phenomenon in the introduction to the book *Izbrannii partii*, published in 1996 on the occasion of Korchnoi's first visit to St Petersburg after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. According to his own confession, around the age of 30 Korchnoi started being dissatisfied from a creative point of view with his style of play, although he was unanimously acclaimed as a USSR champion and a very enterprising player. For 10 long years, he tried to relearn the basics of chess from the beginning. Such an ambitious attitude based on objectivity and self-criticism explains Korchnoi's strength in his late forties as well as his stunning results around the age of 70.

Mentioning Korchnoi's best results would mean basically repeating what I have written above, since his career intersected with those of Petrosian and Karpov. One thing I am almost sure about: if somebody would ask Korchnoi which was his best game, he would answer that he has not played it yet... As I write these lines he is leading with 5 out of 6 in a category 15 tournament...

Index of complete games

Rubinstein	–	Alekhine	24
Marin	–	Stefansson	152
Petrosian	–	Rashkovsky	182
Fischer	–	Kagan	202
Karpov	–	Korchnoi	278
Korchnoi	–	Polugayevsky	287
Korchnoi	–	Grischuk	303

Index of game fragments

Alekhine	–	Bogoljubow	89
Alekhine	–	Colle	86
Alekhine	–	Eliskases	76
Alekhine	–	Keres	82
Alekhine	–	Levenfish	92
Alekhine	–	Rubinstein	24
Alterman	–	Karpov	248
Beliavsky	–	Karpov	251
Botvinnik	–	Petrosian	97, 121
Dunaev	–	Petrosian	177
Duras	–	Rubinstein	49
Ermenkov	–	Marin	125
Fauland	–	Marin	255
Fischer	–	Addison	204
Fischer	–	Petrosian	229
Fischer	–	Rosetto	224
Fischer	–	Spassky	230
Fischer	–	Taimanov	207, 227
Fischer	–	Tal	214
Geller	–	Suba	98
Grigore	–	Marin	235
Grigorian	–	Tal	133
Hübner	–	Petrosian	192
Janowski	–	Rubinstein	63
John	–	Alekhine	94
Karpov	–	Kasparov	99

Karpov	–	Kavalek	271
Karpov	–	Mecking	270
Karpov	–	Short	261
Karpov	–	van der Wiel	262
Knezevic	–	Tal	134
Korchnoi	–	Bruzon	310
Korchnoi	–	Polugayevsky	292
Korchnoi	–	Portisch	298
Levenfish	–	Kotov	109
Levenfish	–	Rubinstein	66
Ljubojevic	–	Karpov	239
Macieja	–	Karpov	243
Marin	–	Golubev	166
Marin	–	Solak	155
Meulders	–	Karpov	258
Navrotescu	–	Marin	129
Petrosian	–	Fischer	218
Petrosian	–	Nunn	187
Petrosian	–	Sosonko	175
Petrosian	–	Tolush	196
Polugayevsky	–	Tal	147
Portisch	–	Petrosian	158
Rubinstein	–	Bogoljubow	35
Rubinstein	–	Capablanca	13
Rubinstein	–	Chigorin	39
Rubinstein	–	Cohn	32
Rubinstein	–	Lasker	13
Rubinstein	–	Nimzowitsch	16
Rubinstein	–	Rosselli del Turco	53
Rubinstein	–	Spielmann	44
Saidy	–	Fischer	115
Sokolov	–	Yusupov	64
Spassky	–	Petrosian	178, 188
Spassky	–	Tal	135
Stahlberg	–	Alekhine	80
Stoica	–	Marin	72
Szabo	–	Petrosian	159
Taimanov	–	Fischer	207
Tal	–	Brinck Claussen	139