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Introduction

Welcome to the Course!

□ About this Course We have all seen examples of annotated games where one side outplays the other, reaches a winning position, and then "it is just a matter of technique". But "a matter of technique" is not necessarily easy! A decisive advantage can come in any number of forms, and there will be different blueprints necessary to help us convert different types of advantages. Anyone who has ever read any of my previous work knows why I create chess content - namely, to make myself a better player. Every single word I have ever written has been because it was with respect to a topic that I was interested in, and writing a book on the topic would provide me with an opportunity to do the necessary research, leading me to grow my own knowledge of the game. Additionally, being forced to understand a theme well enough to put it into clear words that a reader can easily follow suggests a much higher level of understanding than simply studying until "I think I get it" pops into my head. Converting an Extra Pawn was originally a class at Killer Chess Training (KCT), the online academy that I co-own with Jacob Aagaard. Throughout a large period, from the 2nd of November 2022 until the 27th of January 2024, I taught thirty classes in total on the theme of converting an extra pawn. The material was well received, and we ultimately decided to turn it into a book, choosing my favorite lessons. Whenever I teach a class online, I do not have the engine running. I am a good chess player, but I make mistakes. I miss resources at times, and I might misunderstand an important theme; no matter how strong or accomplished a player might be, any analysis that they do without a machine running is bound to have errors. For this to become a book, I had to go back and recheck such details. The process of going through the same games, this time with an engine running, allowed me to see where a lot of my mistakes were. More often than not, my spontaneous analysis was correct. But it was not so rare that I would miss something, and occasionally I would be so massively off base that I wondered what I could possibly have been thinking! Chess engines have a way of making us feel stupid, especially when dealing with positions that I would call simple but difficult. Broadly speaking, I think such a description would apply to any position where the right move or idea makes perfect sense once it is shown or explained, but it is extremely hard for a human to come up with in the first place. □ Why this Topic? The theme was chosen because of its high practical value. An extra pawn is one of the most common kind of advantages, and having an advantage does not mean much if we don't score the full point in the end. Ultimately, I think there are three important elements to a successful conversion, and I have dedicated one chapter to each one of them. In order, they are: 1) Stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. 2) Evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes to the structure, will help you win, and which will favor your opponent. 3) Come up with a plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game, the plan making use of the extra pawn at some point, or in some other way justifying its presence. We need to have a clear understanding of what the extra pawn is trying to achieve. It is rare that only one of these three sets of skills will be necessary to turn an extra pawn into a win against a competent opponent. Indeed, of the twenty-nine games in this book, exactly one sees a situation where two of the three points are irrelevant. Most of the games showcase all three. As such, this book might seem less organized than others. While Chapter 1 focuses primarily on stabilizing the position

and avoiding counterplay, there are plenty of moments within those games that would be better placed in Chapter 2 or 3. The same can be said for the other two chapters. Ultimately, I chose not to break apart any games and split their fragments into separate sections - we will never see the first move of a game until the last move of the previous one has been covered. So, while games in Chapter 1 (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) should illustrate stabilizing the position as being the most relevant factor, it will not be the only one. Neither will making the right changes be the only element in Chapter 2, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) nor will finding the correct plan for the pawn be the only component in Chapter 3. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) One of the things that makes chess so beautifully complex is that so many different skills and bits of knowledge are necessary to play a complete game. Additionally, I strongly believe in “milking a game”, and by that I mean learning absolutely everything I possibly can from it. As such, while every single game in the book was explicitly chosen because acquiring and converting an extra pawn was the most relevant element, I think I would do a disservice to my readers if I did not describe and discuss other elements of chess as well. So, while converting an extra pawn is in focus, you will also encounter explanations of the early middlegames that help set the stage for the phase when converting the extra pawn becomes relevant. □ Game Selection Ten out of the twenty-nine games in this book came from my own practice. Each one saw instructive moments of what to do, or what not to do. I annotate most of my own games anyway, but by presenting them in a KCT class, these annotations inevitably get altered. I would get a lot of questions I did not know the answer to, or moves proposed that I had not analyzed. The other nineteen encounters are games that I did not play, but that made a strong impression on me in one way or another, and piqued my interest enough that I wanted to analyze them, both on my own and in class. I indeed feel that the process of teaching the class, and then of turning it into a book, helped my own understanding - by a good margin. Converting an extra pawn is an extremely difficult skill to master (just look at how many 2700+ players mess up in the upcoming games!), and there are no real rules or tricks to go by that will help you in any of the three sections. Rather, the hope is that this book will teach you how to think about the three different steps in converting the pawn into a point, and that the twenty-nine games help you find the right thought process when you find yourself in a fresh position with one extra point of material. It is my sincere hope that my readers will find this topic as interesting as I did, and that studying this book will turn a lot of extra pawns into extra points. Sam Shankland Walnut Creek, 2025

1) Stabilize

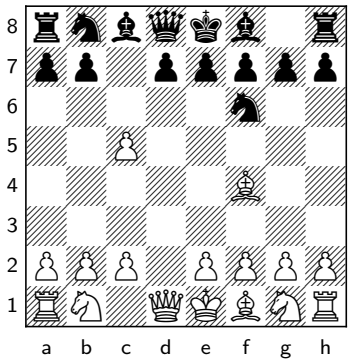
Introduction

In this first chapter of the book, we are going to see games that primarily focus on stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. However, we will see in every section, this one included, that it is hard to fit a game neatly into only one part of the book. Converting an extra pawn is a multi-part process, and while some games will see a larger portion of the process in one area as opposed to the other two, I find that it is more or less never the case that only one skill set is needed, and that the other two are completely irrelevant. Let's dive straight into the first game to see what I mean.

Sam Shankland-David Anton Guijarro Introduction

This game illustrates all of the four elements of converting an extra pawn, but it is a particularly good example of the first one: stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. After the game was played, I annotated it in full. While some of the annotations are outside the scope of converting an extra pawn, I did leave in most of the notes as I felt it would be a waste to remove them.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 c5 3.dxc5!?



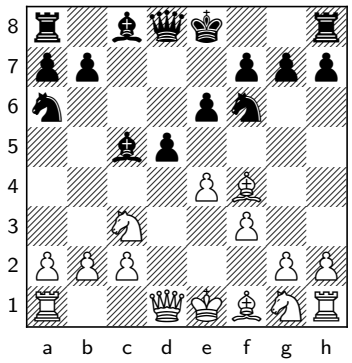
This is nothing special for White, but it at least forced Black to play a Sicilian or French structure. My hope was that this would help me reach a sharp position.

3... ♘a6 4.f3! e6!

The best move, and not easy to find given Black had already played ...Na6. After

4... ♘xc5N 5.e4 d6 6.♕d2 , White will play Nc3 and O-O-O. It's a strange Sicilian because Black's development looks so accelerated, but White also has not burned a lot of time on Nf3-xd4-b3 where the knight ends up sucking anyway. Black must be objectively fine, but I thought it seemed interesting and would get my opponent out of his comfort zone.

5.e4 ♗xc5 6.♘c3 d5!



Again, Black finds the best move.

6... ♕b6? is a tempting mistake. After 7.♕d2 ♗xg1 8.♖xg1 ♕xg1 9.♗d6 , Black is in massive trouble, despite his extra rook.

7.♕d2 O-O?!

Finally, he falters. After

7... dxe4 , Black should be fine in the endgame.

8.O-O-O

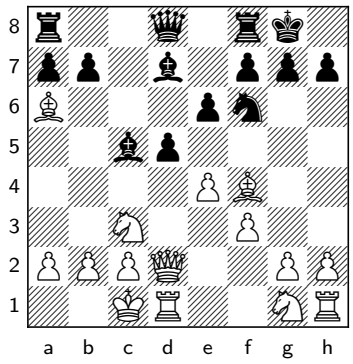
I knew this position was promising for White, but it's also sharp, and there is a need for caution.

8... ♗d7!?

The first move out of my preparation. It makes a lot of sense, as Black wants to play ...Qb6 without running into Na4. I had only checked

8... ♕a5 9.♔b1 , with an edge for White.

9.♗xa6?



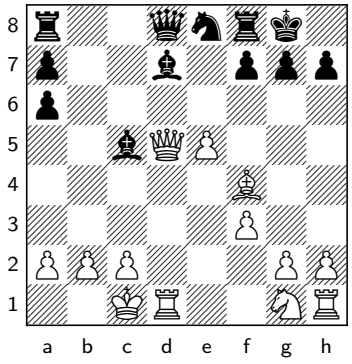
I burned a lot of time here, but still miscalculated. I should have just played a Steinitz structure with

9.e5 ♘e8N 10.♘ge2N , when White should be a little better.

9... bxa6 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♘xd5?

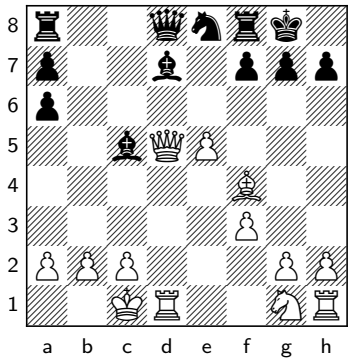
This compounds the previous error. I thought the tactics were working in White's favor, but I missed a key detail.

11... exd5 12.♕xd5



We reach the first critical position. Black has several options. My opponent played quickly and missed a chance to turn the tables and perhaps even score a quick victory.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #1



12... ♕b6?

My opponent played this move quickly, but it was actually a big mistake and gave me exactly what I wanted.

13.♕xd7!

I am not sure what Black missed here. Perhaps he was planning a ...Nf6 trick, but only later realized that I don't have to capture on f6.

13.♕xa8? allows ♘f6N , when White's queen is trapped. There will be rough material parity, and Black's bishops look menacing.

13... ♘f6?

Black played the best move

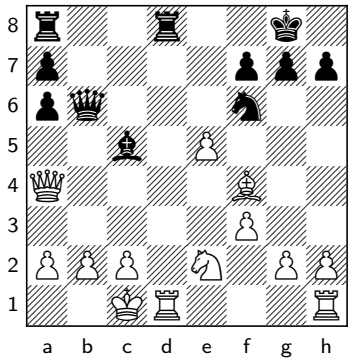
13... ♘c7N 14.♘e2N ♘e6N White is up two pawns, but he needs to work out how to defend his position while facing some notable threats. Black can take on f4 followed by a check on e3, he can stack his rooks on the b \- and c-files to go after White's king, he can flick in ...Ba3 at some moment; we have to be careful. But White is not out of defensive resources. One nice thing about having a more substantial material advantage is that you can give some of the material back to stabilize the position, and then retain the rest of the extra material to bring the point home. After the text, as long as White avoids the automatic reply, he is good to go.

14.♕a4!

After Instead,

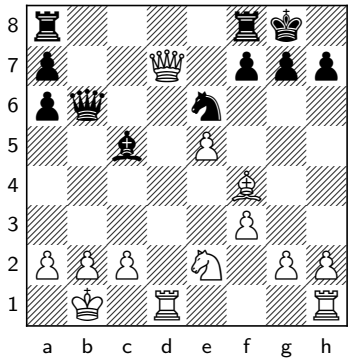
14.exf6? ♖fd8 leaves White facing a major problem on the d-file, with ...Be3+ in the air.

14... ♖fd8 15.♘e2N



, Black has no major threats, and two pawns up is two pawns up.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #2



15... ♗a3

Always be careful... How can White solidify his position?

16.b3!

White would absolutely love to bring the bishop back to c1, solidifying the queenside and getting it off the hanging square. However,

16.♗c1? runs straight into ♗xb2 . Oops! Up next is ...Rab8. White is lucky to

be able to bail into a slightly worse endgame with 17.♕d6 ♗xe5† 18.♕xb6 axb6 .

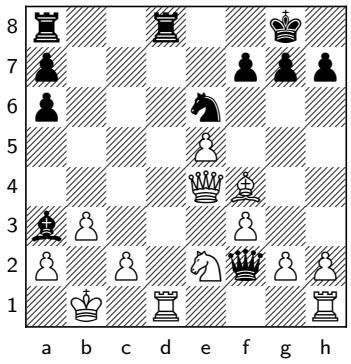
16... ♕f2

White is certainly going to lose at least one of his extra pawns. The two extra pawns are the source of White's advantage. Does White have a way of only losing one of the pawns (as losing both pawns would negate his advantage), or does White have another try to keep more material?

17.♕d3!

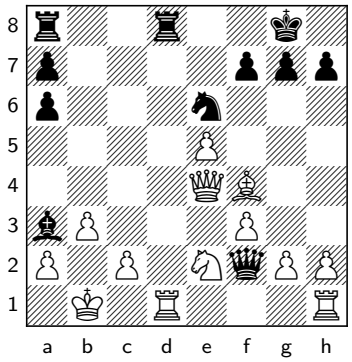
This is the best square for the queen, as the knight and the f-pawn are protected. Furthermore, White can centralize the queen on the e4-square if she is attacked.

17... ♖fd8 18.♕e4!



18.♕e3? ♕xg2 19.♗g3 has the idea of trapping the queen with Nf4. But Black is winning back the pawn, and after ♗c5 20.♕e4 ♘g5N , he has full counterplay.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #3



18... ♕xg2

White has mostly stabilized the position, but not entirely. If we were to move along and think about the next step, it would be to evaluate which exchanges of pieces will favor us. In theory, I would expect almost any exchange to work well, but the problem is that Black's queen is annoying on g2.

19.♖dg1!

This harasses the queen and allows White to regroup. The rook on h1 doesn't really want to leave because of the loose h2-pawn. I decided that expelling the enemy queen should be the top priority, and in order to do so, it is imperative that we keep all four rooks on the board, at least for now.

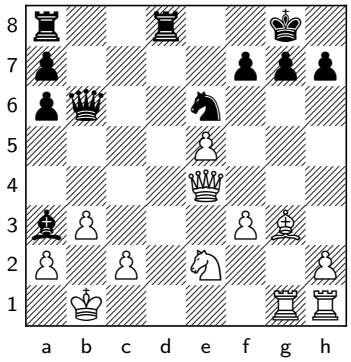
19.♖hg1 looks tempting, as it brings the last piece into the game to expel the annoying queen. But allowing a pair of rooks to be exchanged means she can remain on the kingside and be a nuisance: ♖xd1† 20.♖xd1 ♖c8 With a pair of rooks off the board, Black has counterplay. It all comes down to his queen being allowed to remain on g2. White is still clearly better, but has lost a good chunk of his edge.

19... ♕f2 20.♗g3!

The strongest, according to the computer. Instead, I played the more human

20.♖f1 , as I thought the bishop belonged on c1 and wasn't sure what I was doing after ...Qb6.

20... ♕b6



...Rac8 and ...Rd2 are on the way. I somehow missed one detail.

21.♗h4!

I can immediately attack the d8-rook and force it to abandon the open file, because it must keep defending its colleague on a8. Instead, after the natural

21.f4? ♖ac8 , Black has a threat of ...Rd2, and things are not going in the right direction.

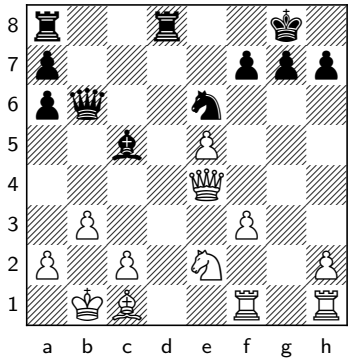
21... ♖dc8 22.f4!

Now and only now, White starts the kingside assault. Black is unable to bring a rook to d2, and he does not have any notable counterplay. My computer claims he will be mated if he does not try to trade queens with ...Qb4 or ...Qc6, but trading into an endgame with a pawn less, no counterplay, and with White controlling the only open file does not offer much hope of salvation. For example:

22... ♕c6 23.♕xc6 ♖xc6 24.♖d1

White wins.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #4



22... ♖ac8

White has a couple of decent options, but I like the one I chose for its thematic nature.

23.♖d1!

Previously, White did not want a pair of rooks to be exchanged. But this had nothing to do with the rooks, and everything to do with being annoyed by a queen on g2. Black's queen is now sidelined away from the kingside, and we can happily bring the rook back to the open file without fear.

23... ♗f8

This is not the move of a player who is threatening to create counterplay.

24.♗b2

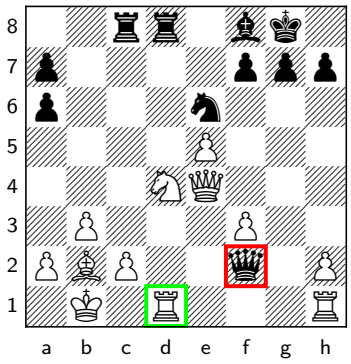
White controls the d4-square and reduces counterplay even further. Of course, if the whole reason I was happy to exchange rooks was that Black's queen had left the kingside, we must consider what happens if she returns. Also possible is

24.♘f4N .

24... ♕f2

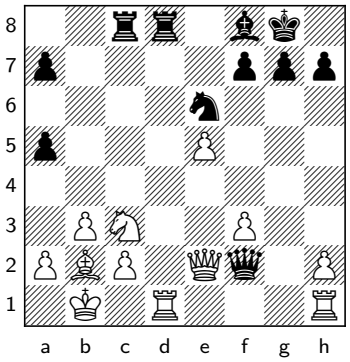
24... a5 25.♘c3N This may not have been best, but it gets the knight to a sensible square and shuts down the c-file.

25.♘d4!



Just because the rook went to d1 does not mean we have to allow its exchange! Black's queen is in some danger of being trapped, and White has everything protected. Furthermore, if the knights are exchanged, then e5-e6 can come through quickly. Black is lost.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro
Exercise #5



26... ♕h4

I just needed one more move to close out the game. But this is where things started to go wrong.

27.a4!

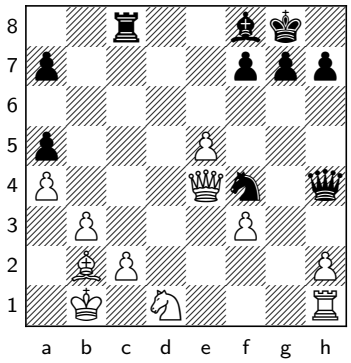
This would have been powerful prophylaxis, stopping ...a5-a4 from Black once and for all. White puts the knight on d6 next, doubles the rooks on the d-file, and wins easily. I was concerned about knight jumps to d4 and f4, but they are nothing to be worried about. For instance, after After My choice

27.♕e1? ♖xd1† 28.♘xd1N ♕h5 29.♕g3 a4 30.♕g4 , Black reaches a similar endgame to the one that arose in the game. White could have done so much better.

27.♘e4?N complicates my task considerably. It is a natural plan, as once the knight gets to d6, it closes down Black's counterplay, closes the open files, and enables Qe4. The knight cannot be taken as the b2-bishop becomes a monster. White can double the rooks on the d-file behind the knight. Nevertheless, I allow Black to play an annoying move which keeps the game going. The ma-

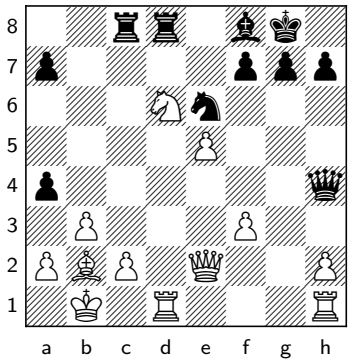
chine claims I am still totally winning, but this was definitely the first step in the wrong direction. a4 The a-pawns are coming! 28.♘d6N ♖b8 White is still winning, but I should be a bit precise. I made a mistake.

27... ♘f4N 28.♕e4 ♖xd1† 29.♘xd1N



, White wins with Bc1 coming next.

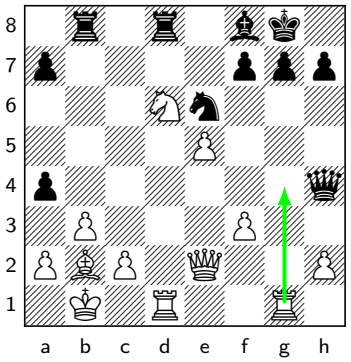
Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #6



28... ♖b8

White is still winning, but I should be a bit precise. I made a mistake. Can you find a natural and human way to stabilize and win the game?

29.♖hg1!



White's king should still be safe if Black plays ...axb3, but not if Black can then bring the second a-pawn with ...a5-...a4. By placing a rook on the g4-square, White not only ensures that this will never happen, but also prepares for f3-f4 to set his own kingside play in motion. I was a bit too desperate to trade queens. The machine finds

29.♕e4? ♕xe4 30.♘xe4N a5 White has managed to exchange queens, but Black has achieved ...a5-...a4, the extra pawn is hard to get moving, and there are some weaknesses on the white kingside. White is still doing well, but now there is work to do.

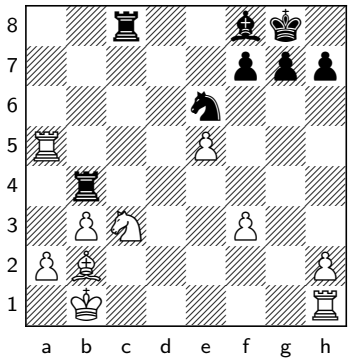
29.f4 , and cries checkmate. But who cares – it is tricky, and 27.a4! would have won the game with no discussion, as would have

29.♖hg1 followed by the rook going to g4.

29... axb3 30.axb3 a5 31.♖g4

Counterplay with ...a5-...a4 is forever stopped, and White can decide the game with either a kingside attack or Rg4-Ra4.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #7



34... ♖f4

Black has the twin threats of ...Rxf3 and ...Bb4. How should White proceed?

35.♖f1!

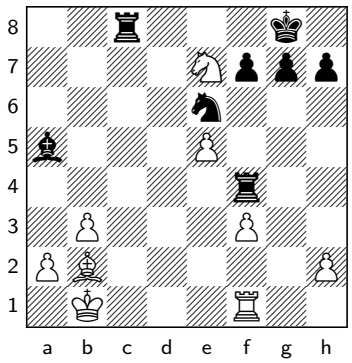
This is the move White really wants to make to save the pawn. It looks like it blunders the bigger threat, which is ...Bb4. But... what happens if we play it anyway? The 'Shankland Rule' in action!

35.♘e2?N This move was played on way too general grounds. Yes, White would like to exchange the knights, but Black's rook on f3 will be a real source of counterplay, and he can hope to make a passed pawn of his own. ♖xf3 36.♘d4N White has lost one pawn back, but has achieved the exchange of knights, restricting counterplay and allowing Rb5 and the march of the a-pawn. ♘xd4N 37.♗xd4 But things are not so easy. I managed to mess things up and not get the ball in the net.

35... ♗b4 36.♘d5!

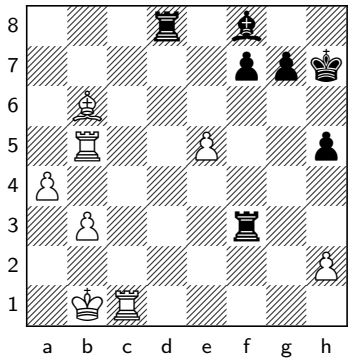
Remember, no matter how strategic and thematic a position may look, you always have to be looking for tactical tricks to help you achieve your goals.

36... ♗xa5 37.♘e7†!



White wins back a full rook and stabilizes with two pawns up. It is all over.

Shankland-Anton Guijarro Exercise #8



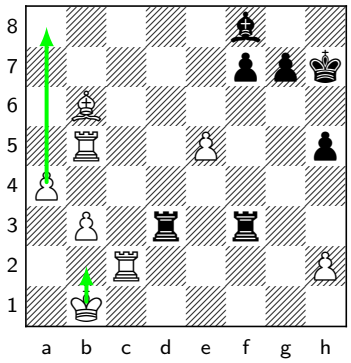
41... ♖dd3!!

I was certain that After 42... Rdd3 44...Rdd1 , White has to be careful since perpetual check is threatened on f3, and it's not so easy to prevent because of White's poor coordination. The computer finds many ways, but

what I had planned was 45.Bf2! Black is out of checks and out of luck, but not 45.a5? Rf3+ 46.Kc4 Rf4+ with a draw. I was absolutely livid when I saw this move, but White is still clearly winning if he finds the right way. I had seen the winning move, but I had not evaluated it correctly:

41... ♖d2 was coming. I had calculated 42.♖c2 ♖f1† 43.♔b2 ♗a3† Note that at this moment with the rook on f1, the following move is possible: 44.♔c3 White wins after ♖d7 45.b4 ♖f3† 46.♔c4 ♖f4† 47.♔b3

42.♖c2!



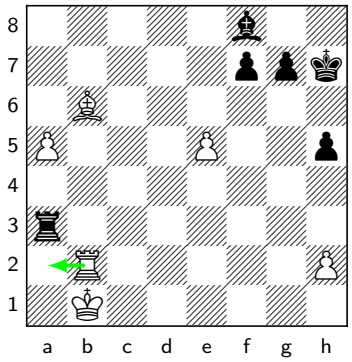
It is very close, but this move still wins. I did not consider it seriously enough. If White gets Kb2 next to reach perfect coordination, the game is obviously over, so Black must grab the pawn. After While it was next to impossible to calculate

42.♔b2 , the same trick with ...Ba3+ now works because I cannot bring my king to c3. The black rook is now on f3 rather than f1: ♖d2† 43.♖c2 ♗a3† Black survives. White is missing Kc3.

42.♖c2 to the end, it should have been clear that it offered better chances. I played

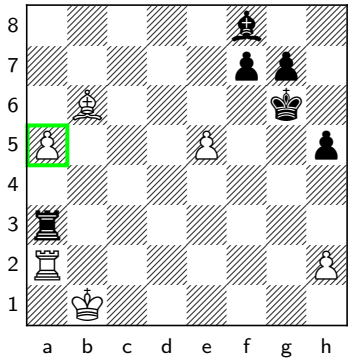
42.a5? ♖xb3† Finally, Black has reached a holdable position, and my opponent did not give me another chance.

42... ♖xb3† 43.♖xb3 ♖xb3† 44.♖b2 ♖a3 45.a5



Next, my rook will support the pawn from a2.

45... ♔g6 46.♖a2!

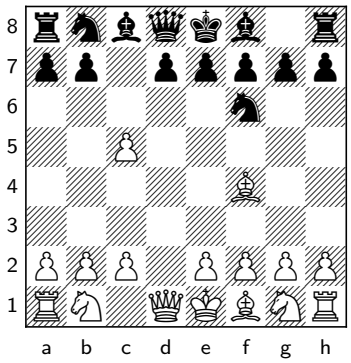


Still some work to do, but White is on the right track. See the annotated game for a detailed analysis. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

Sam Shankland-David Anton Guijarro, Prague 2020

This game illustrates all of the four elements of converting an extra pawn, but it is a particularly good example of the first one: stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. After the game was played, I annotated it in full. While some of the annotations are outside the scope of converting an extra pawn, I did leave in most of the notes as I felt it would be a waste to remove them.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 c5 3.dxc5!?



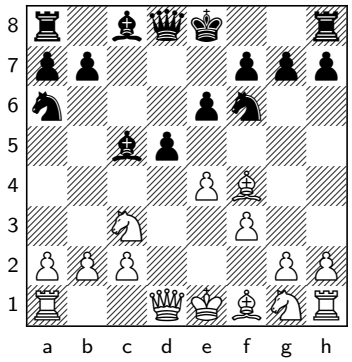
This is nothing special for White, but it at least forced Black to play a Sicilian or French structure. My hope was that this would help me reach a sharp position.

3... ♘a6 4.f3! e6!

The best move, and not easy to find given Black had already played ...Na6. After

4... ♘xc5N 5.e4 d6 6.♕d2 , White will play Nc3 and O-O-O. It's a strange Sicilian because Black's development looks so accelerated, but White also has not burned a lot of time on Nf3-xd4-b3 where the knight ends up sucking anyway. Black must be objectively fine, but I thought it seemed interesting and would get my opponent out of his comfort zone.

5.e4 ♗xc5 6.♘c3 d5!



Again, Black finds the best move.

6... ♕b6? is a tempting mistake. After 7.♕d2 ♗xg1 8.♖xg1 ♕xg1 9.♗d6 , Black is in massive trouble, despite his extra rook.

7.♕d2 O-O?!

Finally, he falters. After

7... dxe4 , Black should be fine in the endgame.

8.O-O-O

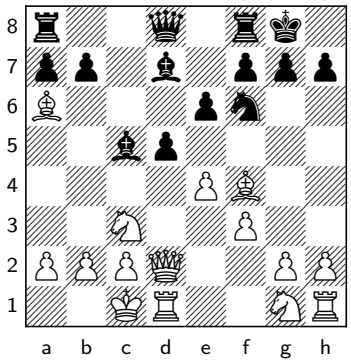
I knew this position was promising for White, but it's also sharp, and there is a need for caution.

8... ♗d7!?

The first move out of my preparation. It makes a lot of sense, as Black wants to play ...Qb6 without running into Na4. I had only checked

8... ♕a5 9.♔b1 , with an edge for White.

9.♗xa6?



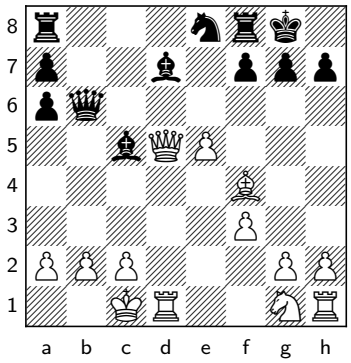
I burned a lot of time here, but still miscalculated. I should have just played a Steinitz structure with

9.e5 ♘e8N 10.♘ge2N , when White should be a little better.

9... bxa6 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♘xd5?

This compounds the previous error. I thought the tactics were working in White's favor, but I missed a key detail.

11... exd5 12.♕xd5 ♕b6?



My opponent played this move quickly, but it was actually a big mistake and gave me exactly what I wanted. Black missed a chance to turn the tables and perhaps even score a quick victory. □ □ I expected

12... g5? is the wrong direction, and 13.♕xc5 gxf4 14.♕d5 is excellent for White. The black kingside has been weakened, and the bishop on f4 was not playing a key role in the game, unlike the black bishop on c5. The line could continue: ♕c7 15.♕xa8 ♗f5 16.♖d2 ♘f6N 17.♕xf8† ♔xf8 18.exf6 White is winning.

12... ♕a5 , which is clearly the best move. After 13.♕xd7?

13.♕xa8 ♘d6N An energetic counter. 14.♕d5 ♗e6 15.♗d2 I had seen this and thought it was the saving resource. Black's queen is forced away from a2, and I can consolidate with Qd3 and Bc3 next. However, the problem arises after: ♕b6 16.♕d3 and now not ♗f5? 17.♕b3 , and White is much better, but 16\. Qd3 16...Rb8! 17.b3 Bf5!! I somehow missed this move. It works at this moment specifically, because White has played b2-b3 and therefore cannot bring his queen to b3. 18.Qe2 Ba3+ 19.Kb1 Rc8 White is soon mated.

13... ♕xa2 , Black's attack crashes through.

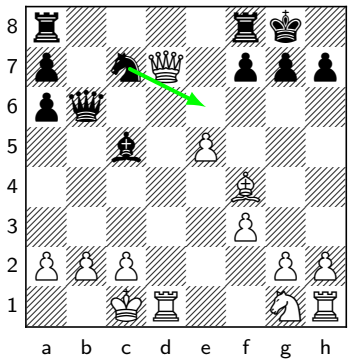
13.♕xd7!

I am not sure what Black missed here. Perhaps he was planning a ...Nf6 trick, but only later realized that I don't have to capture on f6.

13.♕xa8? allows ♘f6N , when White's queen is trapped. There will be

rough material parity, and Black's bishops look menacing.

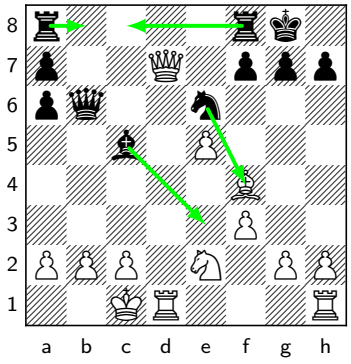
13... ♘c7



After

13... ♘f6?N , as long as White avoids the automatic reply, he is good to go. 14.exf6? ♖fd8 leaves White facing a major problem on the d-file, with ...Be3+ in the air. 14... Nf6 14.Qa4! Rfd8 15.Ne2 Black has no major threats, and two pawns up is two pawns up.

14.♘e2 ♘e6



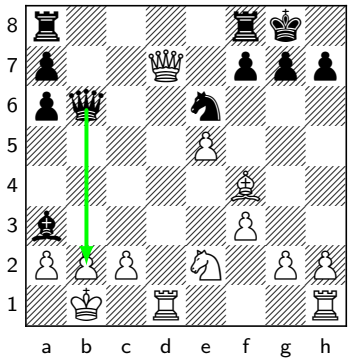
White is up two pawns, but he needs to work out how to defend his position while facing some notable threats. Black can take on f4 followed by a check on e3, he can stack his rooks on the b \- and c-files to go after White's king, he can flick in ...Ba3 at some moment; we have to be careful. But White is not out of defensive resources. One nice thing about having a more substantial material advantage is that you can give some of the material back to stabilize the position, and then retain the rest of the extra material to bring the point home.

15.♔b1!

This was a tough move to find. It might look natural enough because it stops the direct threat of ...Nxf4 followed by a check on e3, but it also does not do anything to extricate my queen, and it puts my king in the line of fire. My original instinct was to evacuate the queen, but then I noticed: After 15. Kb1 16...Nxf4? 17.Nxf4 Qh6 18.Kb1 Rb4 19.Qa5 White wins, while 15\. Kb1 16...Qc7 has the idea of ...Rb4 but is well met by 17.Rd7 .

15.♕a4 ♖ab8 16.b3 ♗b4 My queen is actually in more danger here than she was on d7. Apart from ...Nc5, Black is also threatening to take on f4, again followed by a check on e3. Things are already going wrong. 17.a3 ♗e7 White has weakened his queenside. Black can follow up easily with ...Nc5, ...Rfc8, and then sacrifice something somewhere. With the pawn on a3, there is a strong likelihood that White will be mated.

15... ♗a3

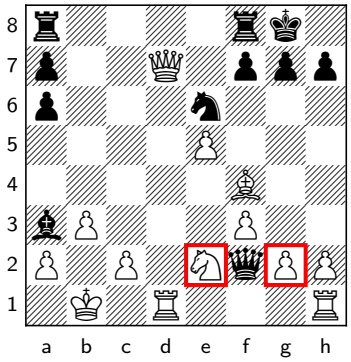


Now, White would absolutely love to bring the bishop back to c1, solidifying the queenside and getting it off the hanging square. But always be careful...

16.b3!

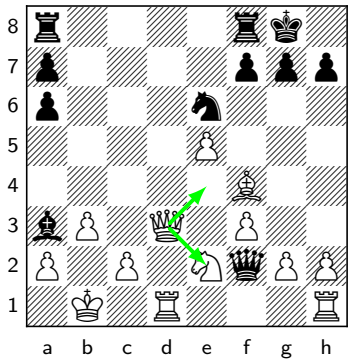
16.♗c1? runs straight into ♗xb2 . Oops! Up next is ...Rab8. White is lucky to be able to bail into a slightly worse endgame with 17.♕d6 ♗xe5† 18.♕xb6 axb6 .

16... ♕f2



White is certainly going to lose at least one of his extra pawns. The two extra pawns are the source of White's advantage. Does White have a way of only losing one of the pawns (as losing both pawns would negate his advantage), or does White have another try to keep more material?

17.♕d3!



This is the best square for the queen, as the knight and f-pawn are protected. Furthermore, White can centralize the queen on the e4-square if she is attacked.

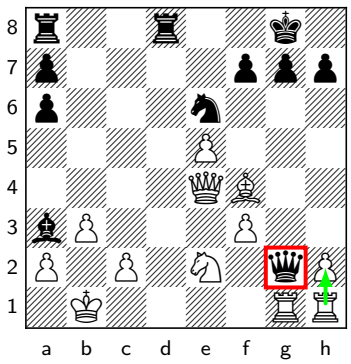
17... ♖fd8 18.♕e4!

18.♕e3? ♕xg2 19.♗g3 has the idea of trapping the queen with Nf4. But Black is winning back the pawn, and after ♗c5 20.♕e4 ♘g5N , he has full counterplay.

18... ♕xg2

White has mostly stabilized the position, but not entirely. If we were to move along and think about the next step, it would be to evaluate which exchanges of pieces will favor us. In theory, I would expect almost any exchange to work well, but the problem is that Black's queen is annoying on g2. It means that the rook on h1 doesn't really want to leave because of the loose h2-pawn. I decided that expelling the enemy queen should be the top priority, and in order to do so, it is imperative that we keep all four rooks on the board, at least for now.

19.♖dg1!



This harasses the queen and allows White to regroup.

19.♖hg1 looks tempting, as it brings the last piece into the game to expel the annoying queen. But allowing a pair of rooks to be exchanged means she can remain on the kingside and be a nuisance: ♖xd1† 20.♖xd1 ♖c8 With a pair of rooks off the board, Black has counterplay. It all comes down to his queen being allowed to remain on g2. White is still clearly better, but has lost a good chunk of his edge.

19... ♕f2 20.♖f1

This was a human decision and should be good enough, but there was a stronger option.

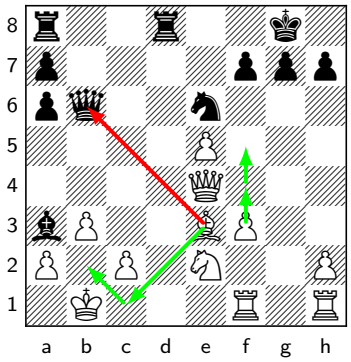
20.♗g3 was strongest according to the computer. The text move is more human, as I thought the bishop belonged on c1 and wasn't sure what I was doing after ♕b6 when ...Rac8 and ...Rd2 are on the way. I somehow missed that after 21.♗h4 I can immediately attack the d8-rook and force it to abandon the open file, because it must keep defending its colleague on a8. ♖dc8 22.f4 Now and only now, White starts the kingside assault. Black is unable to bring a rook to d2, and he does not have any notable counterplay. My computer claims he will be mated if he does not try to trade queens with ...Qb4 or ...Qc6, but trading into an endgame with a pawn less, no counterplay, and with White controlling the only open file does not offer much hope of salvation. For example: ♕c6 23.♕xc6 ♖xc6 24.♖d1 White wins.

20... ♕b6

White needs to consider which pieces he would like to exchange, which he would not like to, and what he is trying to accomplish.

20... ♕g2 is met effectively by 21.♖hg1 , when we see that since Black was unable to trade a pair of rooks on d1, the queen is less secure on the kingside. Following ♕h3 22.♗c1 Black will never take on h2 since a rook could come to h1. This would not have been the case if White had allowed a pair of rooks to be exchanged. As such, the queen is not really making any notable counterplay on the kingside, and White should break through with f4-f5. In the meantime, the white king is safe on b1 with Black's queen sidelined on h3.

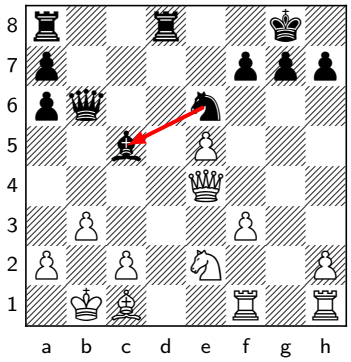
21.♗e3!



This gets the bishop off f4 with a gain of tempo and gets ready for f4-f5. But it also provokes the bishop away from the active a3-square to c5. It is important for White that the bishops are not exchanged. He does not want a rook to land on d2. Something that Magnus Carlsen shared with me some time ago is that in positions where one side has weakened the pawn cover around their king but is facing no immediate threats, the other side should be looking to trade off the minor pieces and just leave the heavy pieces on the board. To illustrate, after

21.♗c1 ♗xc1 followed by ...Rac8, ...Rd2 and ...Nc5 and Black has good play.

21... ♗c5 22.♗c1!



A nice regrouping. Black can't play ...Nc5 anymore, his bishop has been provoked away from its active post, my bishop gets to b2 protecting the queenside, and f4-f5 is coming. White should be winning.

22... ♖ac8

White has a couple of decent options, but I like the one I chose for its thematic nature.

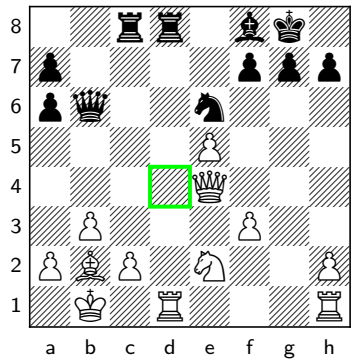
23.♖d1!

Previously, White did not want a pair of rooks to be exchanged. But this had nothing to do with the rooks, and everything to do with being annoyed by a queen on g2. Black's queen is now sidelined away from the kingside, and we can happily bring the rook back to the open file without fear.

23... ♗f8

This is not the move of a player who is threatening to create counterplay.

24.♗b2



White controls the d4-square and reduces counterplay even further. Also possible is

24.♘f4N .

24... a5

Of course, if the whole reason I was happy to exchange rooks was that Black's queen had

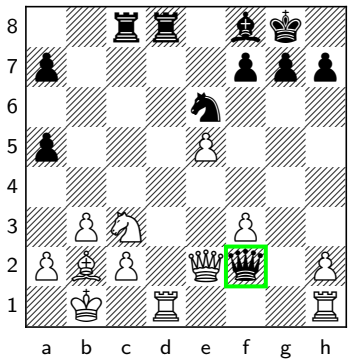
left the kingside, we must consider what happens if she returns:

24... ♕f2 25.♘d4N Just because the rook went to d1 does not mean we have to allow its exchange! Black's queen is in some danger of being trapped, and White has everything protected. Furthermore, if the knights are exchanged, then e5-e6 can come through quickly. Black is lost.

25.♘c3

This may not have been best, but it gets the knight to a sensible square and shuts down the c-file.

25... ♕f2 26.♕e2!

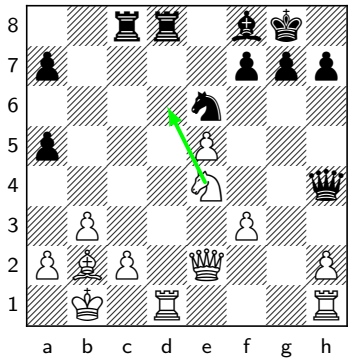


Of course, White should be happy to exchange the queens, as Black's queen is the only real source of counterplay.

26... ♕h4

I just needed one more move to close out the game. But this is where things started to go wrong.

27.♘e4?

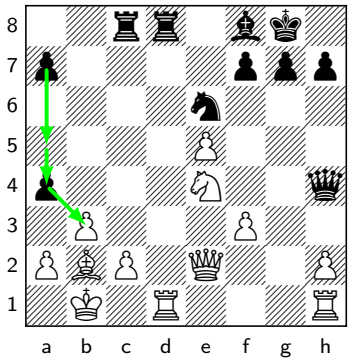


This complicates my task considerably. It is a natural plan, as once the knight gets to d6, it closes down Black's counterplay, closes the open files, and enables Qe4. The knight cannot be taken as the b2-bishop becomes a monster. White can double the rooks on the d-file behind the knight. Nevertheless, I allow Black to play an annoying move which keeps the game going. The machine claims I am still totally winning, but this was definitely the first step in the wrong direction. After

27.♕e1? ♖xd1† 28.♘xd1N ♕h5 29.♕g3 a4 30.♕g4 , Black reaches a similar endgame to the one that arose in the game. White could have done so much better.

27.a4 would have been powerful prophylaxis, stopping ...a5-...a4 from Black once and for all. White puts the knight on d6 next, doubles the rooks on the d-file, and wins easily. I was concerned about knight jumps to d4 and f4, but they are nothing to be worried about. For instance, after ♘f4N 28.♕e4 ♖xd1† 29.♘xd1N White wins with Bc1 coming next.

27... a4!



The a-pawns are coming!

28.♘d6 ♖b8

White is still winning, but I should be a bit precise. I made a mistake.

29.♕e4?

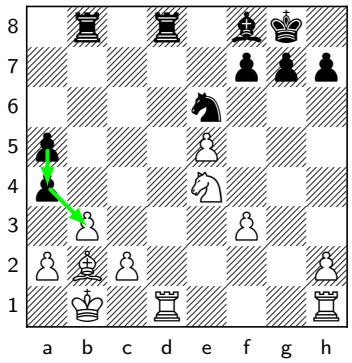
I was a bit too desperate to trade queens. In my opinion, by far the most natural and human way to win the game was The machine finds

29.♖hg1 . White's king should still be safe if Black plays ...axb3, but not if Black can then bring the second a-pawn with ...a5-...a4. By placing a rook on the g4-square, White not only ensures that this will never happen, but also prepares for f3-f4 to set his own kingside play in motion. After axb3 30.axb3 a5 31.♖g4 counterplay with ...a5-...a4 is forever stopped, and White can decide the game with either a kingside attack or Ra4.

29.f4 , and cries checkmate. But who cares – it is tricky, and 27.a4! would have won the game with no discussion, as would have

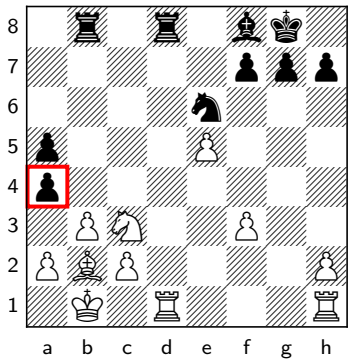
29.♖hg1 followed by the rook going to g4.

29... ♕xe4 30.♘xe4 a5!



White has managed to exchange queens, but Black has achieved ...a5-...a4, the extra pawn is hard to get moving, and there are some weaknesses on the white kingside. White is still doing well, but now there is work to do.

31.♘c3

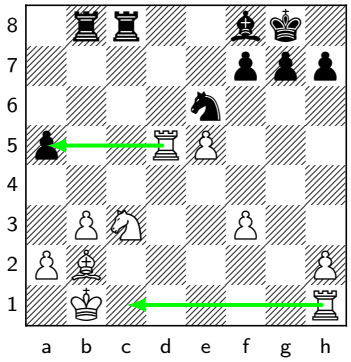


This avoids ...a5-...a4 but also moves the knight further away from its ideal destination on d6. According to the machine, best was

31.♖xd8 ♖xd8 32.bxa4 grabbing the a4-pawn like this, splitting the structure. After ♘c5N 33.♘xc5N ♗xc5 , my computer

claims White is winning, but also claims that the best move by far is a2-a3, which I don't understand. This is not easy for a human to properly evaluate!

31... axb3 32.cxb3 ♖dc8 33.♖d5



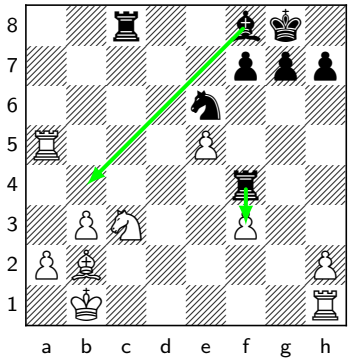
Attacking the a5-pawn and planning to bring the other rook to c1.

33... ♖b4?!

Better was

33... ♗b4 , although after 34.♖c1 , I don't like Black's chances – the extra pawn looks good. Still, it's not over just yet. He can still try to resist.

34.♖xa5 ♖f4



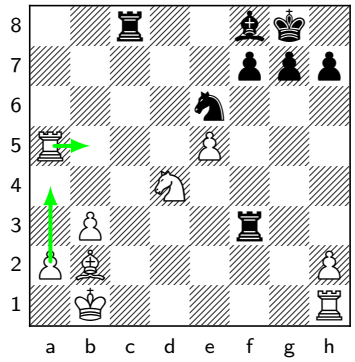
Black has the twin threats of ...Rxf3 and ...Bb4. How should White proceed?

35.♘e2?

This move was played on way too general grounds. Yes, White would like to exchange the knights, but Black's rook on f3 will be a real source of counterplay, and he can hope to make a passed pawn of his own. Remember, no matter how strategic and thematic a position may look, you always have to be looking for tactical tricks to help you achieve your goals.

35.♖f1 is the move White really wants to make to save the pawn. It looks like it blunders the bigger threat, which is ...Bb4. But... what happens if we play it anyway? The 'Shankland Rule' in action! ♗b4 36.♘d5N ♗xa5 37.♘e7†N White wins back a full rook and stabilizes with two pawns up. It is all over.

35... ♖xf3 36.♘d4



White has lost one pawn back, but has achieved the exchange of knights, restricting counterplay and allowing Rb5 and the march of the a-pawn.

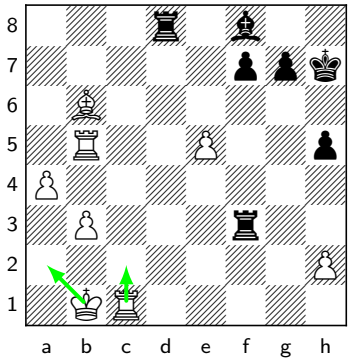
36... ♘xd4 37.♗xd4

But things are not so easy. I managed to mess things up and not get the ball in the net.

37... h5! 38.♖c1 ♖e8 39.♖b5 ♔h7

An important part of converting an extra pawn, or really any winning position, is keeping your head on straight if something goes awry. At this point, I calculated out a2-a4 to what I thought was a forced win. Indeed, a2-a4 is the best move, but I had missed a key defensive resource. Had I been able to properly reset and think again once the position came on the board, I surely would have won the game.

40.a4! ♖d8 41.♗b6?

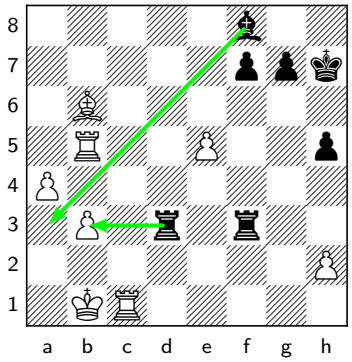


This has the idea of playing Rc2 and Ka2, defending everything, and White is winning. White is still winning after the text move, but I missed a trick that makes my life much harder. After

41.♖c4? ♖f1† 42.♔c2 ♖h1 Black has good counterplay, as the g \- and h-pawns are coming, the white king has nowhere to hide, and Black will be able to get his rook behind the a-pawn.

41.♗b2 consolidates the position and would have won. After 41\. Bb2 41...Rd2 42.a5 Rff2 43.Bc3 , the bishop controls the b2-square and leaves Black without counterplay. I was worried about 41...h4 42.a5 Ra8 , when my pawns are clumsy and slow, and the bishop would have been better on b6. But this would have done the job after 43.b4 . White should win with Rc2 and Bc3, defending everything, and then Rb7, b4-b5, and so on.

41... ♖dd3!!



I was absolutely livid when I saw this move. It looks so stupid, and after Kb2, he should just have to resign, but there is this miraculous trick with ...Ba3+. And there is no way he would have found it if not for getting more time at this exact moment. Of course, being angry and upset about the timing of when my opponent got more time on his clock will do absolutely nothing towards finding the best move. White is still clearly winning if he finds the right way, and I had time, too. Had I approached the situation more maturely, I would have won. I was certain that White wins after 42... Rdd3 44...Rd7 45.b4 Rf3+ 46.Kc4 Rf4+ 47.Kb3

41... ♖d2 was coming. I had calculated 42.♖c2 ♖f1† 43.♔b2 ♗a3† Note that at

this moment with the rook on f1, the following move is possible: 44.♔c3 ♖dd1 White has to be careful since perpetual check is threatened on f3, and it's not so easy to prevent because of White's poor coordination. The computer finds many ways, but what I had planned was: 45.♗f2 Black is out of checks and out of luck. Not

45.a5? ♖f3† 46.♔c4 ♖f4† with a draw.

42.a5?

While it was next to impossible to calculate Rc2 to the end, it should have been clear that it offered better chances. □ After □ I had seen the winning move, but I had not evaluated it correctly: B) I also saw 42. a5 48.Kd3 when 48...Bc5 49.Kc4 wins, so 48...Rxe5 49.a6 Re8 and thought it should be a draw. After a6-a7 and ...Ra8, I am unable to prevent ...Bd6-...Bb8, trading the bishop for the a-pawn and simplifying down to a probably drawn 3-against-1 on the kingside. However, when calculating, always be wary of automatic moves: 50.Kc4! If White doesn't rush with putting the pawn on a7, Black will not necessarily be able to sacrifice the bishop. 50...Bd6 51.Rd2! After 51...Bf4 52.Rd8! Re7 53.a7 , Black must give his rook for the pawn instead of the bishop. Or 42\. a5 51...Bb8 52.Rd8! Once the rooks come off, White will bully the bishop off the b8-square and make a full extra queen. C) I was surprised to discover that the computer says that White is also winning after 48.a6!? Rxb6 49.a7 Rc6+ 50.Kd3 Rc8 51.a8=Q Rxa8 52.Rxa8 . This position looks drawn to me, but I can't argue with Stockfish.

42.♔b2 , the same trick with ...Ba3+ now works because I cannot bring my king to c3. The black rook is now on f3 rather than f1: ♖d2† 43.♖c2 ♗a3† Black survives. White is missing Kb2-c3.

42.♖c2 It is very close, but I think this move still wins. I did not consider it seriously enough. If White gets Kb2 next to reach perfect coordination, the game is obviously over, so Black must grab the pawn. ♖xb3† 43.♖xb3 ♖xb3† 44.♖b2 ♖a3 45.a5 ♔g6 46.♖a2 ♖b3† 47.♔c2 ♖b5 I saw this far in the game and thought it was probably a draw. White cannot play a5-a6, and once ...Bc5 comes, the bishops are traded, and Black gets his rook to a8, it will take years for the white king to get to b7. In the meantime, Black can advance with his own king on the kingside and make counterplay with his g \- and h-pawns. But White does just barely win. – A) 48.♗d4 This is the cleanest way. I had seen the move, but I quickly discarded it on general principles. This was a mistake. In order to win the game, I needed to calculate deeply to make up for my previous errors. ♗c5 49.♔d3 ♗xd4 50.♔xd4 ♔f5 51.a6 ♖b8 52.a7 ♖a8 It's surprising to me that White is winning. I would think that it will take the king way too long to reach b7, Black will take the e5-pawn, send his kingside, and hold. Apparently, this is just wrong. 53.♔d5 h4 54.♔c6 ♔xe5 55.♔b7 ♖xa7† 56.♖xa7 g5 57.♖a5† ♔f4

58.♔c6 g4 59.♔d6 g3 60.♖a4† An important resource. ♔g5

60...♔f3 loses to 61.♖xh4 g2 62.♖h3† ♔f2 63.♖g3 g1♕= 64.♖xg1 ♔xg1 65.h4 f5 66.♔e5 and wins.

61.h3 f5 62.♔e5 g2 63.♖a1 f4 64.♔e4 White wins by a single tempo.

42...♖xb3†

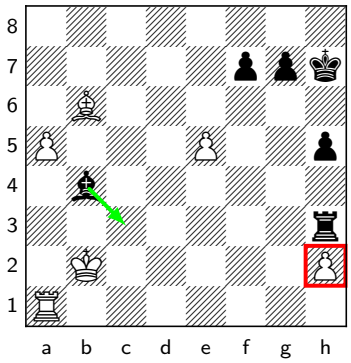
Finally, Black has reached a holdable position, and my opponent did not give me another chance.

43.♖xb3 ♖xb3† 44.♔c2 ♖a3 45.♔b2 ♗b4 46.♖a1

I had seen this far and completely missed the game move.

46.♖c6 should just be a draw after ♖xa5 47.♗xa5 ♗xa5 .

46...♖h3!



Black is fine, as I cannot push the a-pawn. I thought Black had to head for

46...♗xa5 47.♗xa5 ♖h3 . Even this is probably a draw, but it will be a tough defense for Black, and the best he can hope for is rook and bishop against rook, which will be tedious with no time; especially against someone who has studied it a lot.

47.♖a4

47.a6? is not to be recommended: ♗c3† 48.♔a2 ♖xh2† An important in-between move seals White's fate. 49.♔b3 ♗xa1 50.a7 ♖b2† 51.♔a3 ♖xb6 52.a8♕= ♖e6 Black wins. I don't care that the machine claims zeroes; no human will ever hold this from the White side.

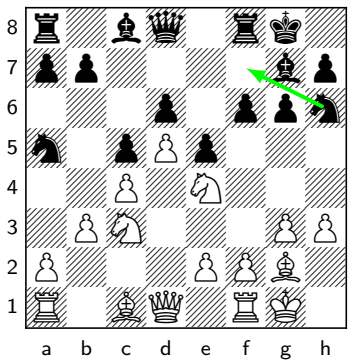
47...♖xh2† 48.♔c1 ♗xa5

While I played quite poorly at several moments to let him survive, I have to give David Anton props for defending very well. He certainly made my life difficult enough that I faltered.

Magnus Carlsen-Alexander Morozevich Introduction

I've always enjoyed looking over games from young Magnus. You can clearly tell the brilliance was there, but he also had such a different style than we see from him today.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 O-O 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 c5 7.O-O ♘c6 8.d5 ♘a5 9.♘d2 e5 10.b3 ♘g4 11.h3 ♘h6 12.♘de4 f6



12... f5 13.♘g5N is a problem.

13.♘xd6!?

The adventurous route. □ □ After □ □ □ In modern times, I'd expect Magnus to play a move like

13.f4? weakens the long diagonal and gives Black a good game after f5 .

13.♘b5?N , Black is able to defend the d-pawn with ♘f7N . Black is ready for ...a6 and ...f5, and the white pieces get pushed backwards.

13.♗xh6? does not work: ♗xh6 14.♘b5N f5 15.♘exd6N a6 16.♘xc8N axb5 The knight is trapped on c8.

13.g4 is the computer suggestion, but it is hard to understand.

13.♗d2 .

13... ♕xd6 14.♘e4 ♕d8

Black would be OK after

14... ♕b6 15.♗a3 ♖d8 16.♗xc5 ♕c7 .

15.♘xc5 f5?!

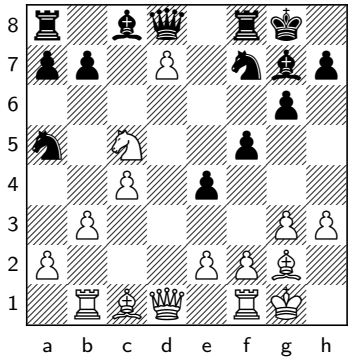
Black did not need to give back the extra piece so easily.

16.d6 e4 17.d7 ♘f7

Not

17... ♗xa1 , as Black's position collapses after 18.♗xh6 .

18.♖b1!



18.dxc8♕?= is not possible, as after ♖xc8 both the a1-rook and c5-knight are hanging.

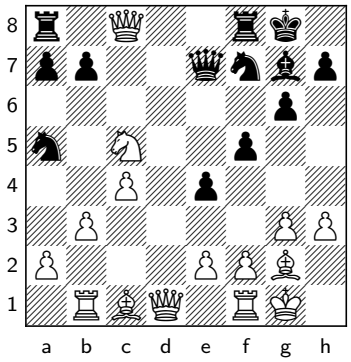
18... ♕e7 19.dxc8♕

Our theme of converting an extra pawn starts after

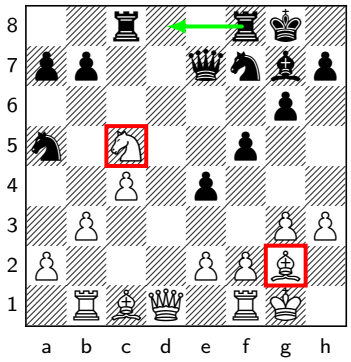
19... ♖axc8

. White is a pawn up, but Black has obvious compensation. Black has a lead in development and more active pieces. In particular, the g2-bishop is poor. The extra pawn on the queenside is a long way from having any influence on the game. White has a lot of work ahead of him to win.

Carlsen-Morozevich Exercise #1



19... ♖axc8



White is a pawn up, but Black has obvious compensation. Black has a lead in development and more active pieces. In particular, the g2-bishop is poor. The extra pawn on the queenside is a long way from having any influence on the game. White has a lot of work ahead of him to win. The immediate issue is that the knight is loose. What to play?

20.♘a4!

Magnus made the right decision. As we'll see now, the alternatives are worse. White's first goal in this position is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. This move is best because it enables the c1-bishop to be developed on b2. □ □ After the natural

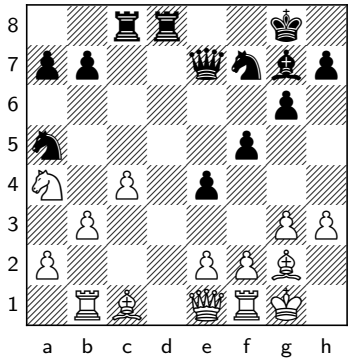
20.♗a3? even loses: b6 21.♕d7 ♕xd7 22.♘xd7N ♖fd8 The knight is trapped.

20.♗e3 ♖fd8 where does the queen go? 21.♕c1 puts the queen on the same file as the black rook, which Black can exploit with b6 22.♘a4N b5 . White would already need to perform some small acrobatics to avoid getting in trouble. 21... Rfd8 21.Qe1! Nc6! White is uncoordinated and ...Bd4 is coming. The knight will have to move off of c5 all the same, and I dislike that White's bishop was forced to the e3-square.

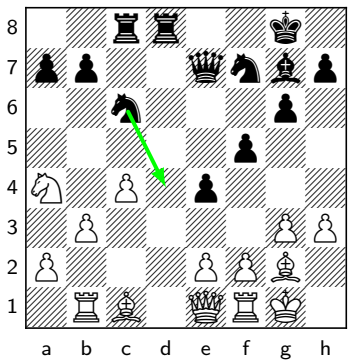
20... ♖fd8 21.♕e1 ♘c6N

Black wants to jump with the knight to the active d4-square. Black's counterplay is not sufficient to knock White out over the next few moves, but White should definitely be concerned about the ...b5 break. We'll continue in our next exercise.

Carlsen-Morozevich Exercise #2

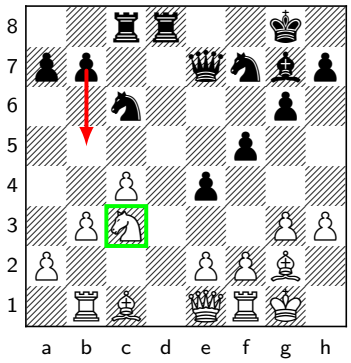


21... ♘c6



Black wants to jump with the knight to the active d4-square. Black's counterplay is not sufficient to knock White out over the next few moves, but White should definitely be concerned about the ...b5 break. Trading off the c-pawn would open the c-file, which is how I would expect Black to hope to invade. Technically, Black has taken control of the d-file, but White has the access squares on that file well under control. By contrast, White does not have the c2-square under control.

22.♘c3!



This is a good place to start. White regroups his wayward knight to a superior square while simultaneously preventing ...b5. After the natural

22.♗b2 ♗xb2 23.♖xb2 ♕e5 , White is not able to prevent ...b5. He is still better, but this is already a step in the wrong direction.

22... ♘d4

A critical moment. Best was:

23.♘d5!

The knight is on a nice, active outpost, but this is not the main point. The biggest idea is that by shutting down the open d-file, White prevents the threat of ...Nc2. Since he does so with tempo, White will be in time to push a2-a4, making sure that Black does not get to advance ...b5 to open the c-file. □ □ White wants to prevent Black's main source of counterplay which is ...b5, but □

23.♗e3? will allow an unfavorable piece exchange for White: ♘c2N 24.♕c1 ♘xe3N After 25.fxe3? , I have seen worse fianchettoed bishops but not that many.

25.♕xe3 ♗d4 Black is better. His pieces are very active.

23.a4? would see the white queen being returned to the box: ♘c2N That is, unless White resigns instead.

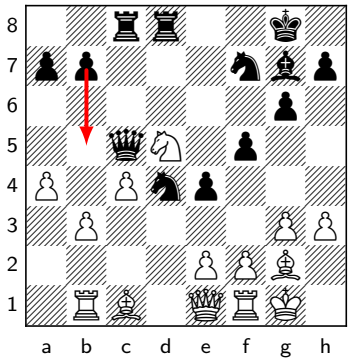
23.♗b2? was played in the game. This is the natural move and good for an advantage, but it is second best. b5 Magnus should not have allowed this, but he found a good reply which keeps a favorable position:

23... ♕c5

Magnus may have been afraid of

23... ♖xd5 , but after 24.cxd5 ♖c2 the computer demonstrates excellent prophylaxis with 25.♔h1 ♖xa2 26.♗b2 White is close to winning.

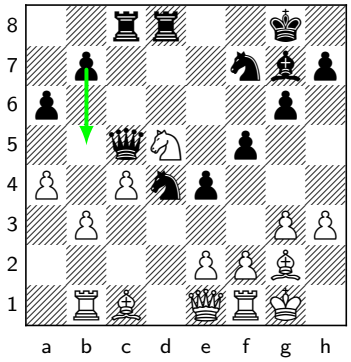
24.a4!



White prevents Black's immediate counterplay with ...b5. Be3 is coming next, at a moment when Black's knight is stuck on d4, and he could even lose a piece with moves like Qd2 and Rd1 to follow. For the moment, Black's pieces are on good squares, but they cannot be improved, and there is nothing for them to achieve. Not

24.b4 ♕xc4 25.♘e7†N ♔f8 26.♘xc8N ♘c2N , and Black wins.

24... a6



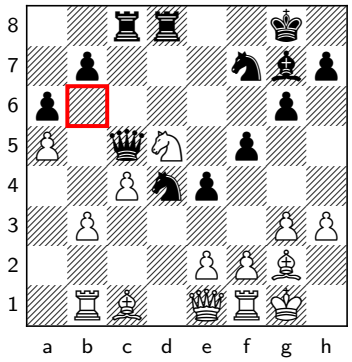
The machine doesn't care much about what White plays, but I do. After

24... b5 is not actually prevented per se, but after 25.axb5 ♘xb5N White has been able to maintain his c4-pawn, which holds his position together, and Black will not invade on the c-file. My computer offers a healthy +2.5, and I don't think it is being unreasonable.

24... ♘xb3N 25.♖xb3 ♕xc4 26.♘e7†N ♔h8 27.♖xb7 or

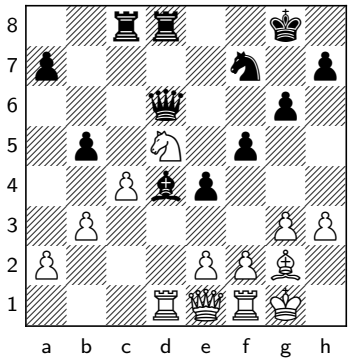
27.♖b4 , White wins.

25.a5!



Of course – no ...b7-b5 for you! White has consolidated his extra pawn and is well on his way to scoring the full point.

Carlsen-Morozevich Exercise #3



26... ♗e5

The natural move. For the moment, White seems reasonably stable, which brings us to the next step of converting the extra pawn: evaluating which piece exchanges and changes to the pawn structure will favor us. How should White proceed?

27.cxb5!

The critical attempt. White cannot prevent his c-pawn from being captured, so he might as well capture on b5. This is a big pawn to win, but it has to be well calculated and evaluated. Morozevich did not simply leave it hanging because he did not feel like protecting it; he surely had an idea. Also after the weakening The game went

27.f4? Black is fine: ♗g7 or

27... bxc4 28.fxe5 ♕c5† The knight is captured next, and White needs to start looking for equality.

27.♕a5? This is sensible as it connects the rooks, but it is definitely not best, and Black should be able to hold on. bxc4 Morozevich starts exchanging and simplifying down to a holdable opposite- bishop position. This should not have been allowed. 28.♘e3N ♕c7 29.♕xc7 ♗xc7 30.♘xc4N The position has changed completely in the last few moves. White has stabilized the position, and Black has no counterplay. But the position has also simplified and is not far from a draw with opposite-colored bishops. The computer agrees, with a verdict near 0.00.

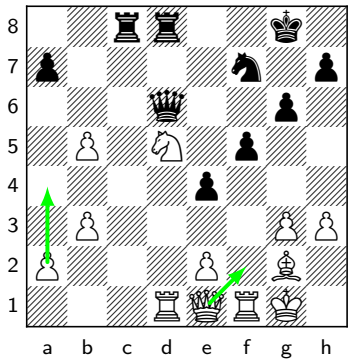
27... ♗xg3!

I have to imagine this is what Magnus was scared of. After Also inadequate is

27... ♖c2 28.♘e3N White wins.

27... ♕c5? 28.b4 , and the queen has to retreat and admit she lost time, leaving White two pawns up.

28.fxg3!

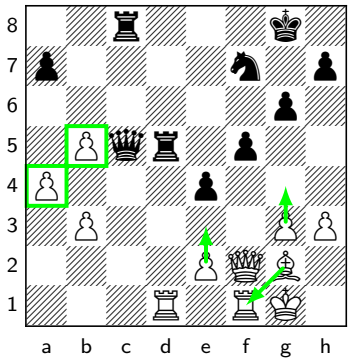


One of the key elements to converting an extra pawn is to consider which change of pawn structure is favorable. Is this change in structure favorable to White? Yes! White can connect the rooks with Qf2 and then consolidate the queenside structure with a2-a4, leaving him with a three-on-one majority on the queenside. At

that point, his pawn mass will eventually prove decisive and lead to a promotion. The issue is that he loses a kingside pawn. But how much does this matter? Black was not attacking on the kingside; his pieces are clearly placed to try to make trouble on the queenside. Instead,

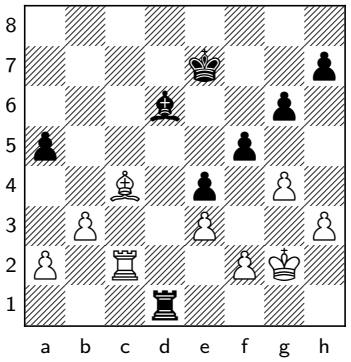
28.♕b4? is complacent and gives Black good drawing chances: ♗h4 29.♕xd6 ♖xd6 Up next is ...Rcd8. The proud knight on d5 turns out not to be so fantastic! Wouldn't White love to exchange it for the h4-bishop? He could have, by taking on g3 on move 28 instead.

28... ♕c5† 29.♕f2! ♖xd5 30.a4!



White's king is safe as can be, and he should be totally winning. The queenside pawn mass will be decisive, Black can hardly avoid some heavy piece exchanges, and White's g2-bishop will not be passive forever. It can be regrouped with e2-e3 and Bf1, or potentially even broken out with a well-timed g3-g4.

Carlsen-Morozevich Exercise #4



40... f4?

I think My computer claims Black is still holding, but his life just got a lot harder. Why does this fail?

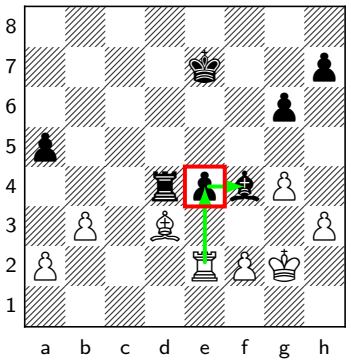
40... ♗b4 was the easiest way – get the rook to d2!

40... ♔f6 easily saves the game as well, but I prefer to force the rooks off right away.

41.exf4

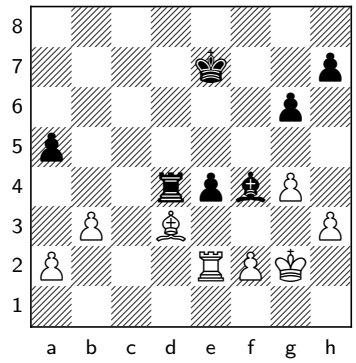
A no-brainer in view of ...f3.

41... ♗xf4 42.♖e2 ♖d4 43.♗d3!



White captures the e4-pawn. A nice tactical point. I assume Morozevich missed it when contemplating move 40.

Carlsen-Morozevich Exercise #5



43... ♔f6

This is another critical moment. Again, which pieces does White want to exchange, and which change in structure does he want?

44.♗xe4!

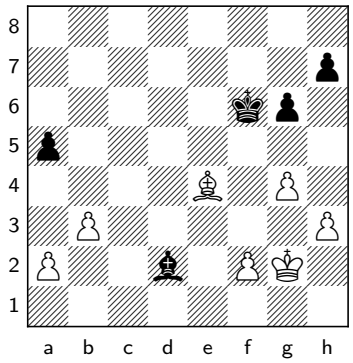
It is clear that White does not want to exchange rooks, as that results in a pure opposite-colored-bishops endgame. Black would then have good saving chances despite the two-pawn deficit. But Black can force the exchange of rooks after either recapture. So, what structure does White desire in the opposite-colored-bishop endgame? After

44.♖xe4? ♖xe4 45.♗xe4 ♔g5 Black should hold. His dark square blockade will not be broken. 46.♔f1 ♔h4 47.♗g2 ♗c7 48.♔e2 ♗b6 49.♔d3 ♗xf2 50.♔c4 ♔g3 51.♗f1 ♗e1 52.a3 h5 53.gxh5 gxh5 54.b4 axb4 55.axb4 ♔f4 56.b5 ♔g5 57.b6 ♗g3 and the black king will reach the corner. White can never win.

44... ♖d2

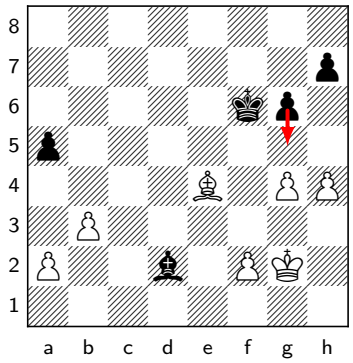
Morozevich forces the rooks off, but this allows White an important chance to change the pawn structure.

45.♖xd2 ♗xd2



It is important for White to prevent ...g5 and fix the kingside pawns as weaknesses:

46.h4!



Black will lose as he did in the game. Instead, the game went

46.♔g3? ♗e1 but instead, Black should have played

46... ♔e5

Magnus Carlsen-Alexander Morozevich Morelia 2007

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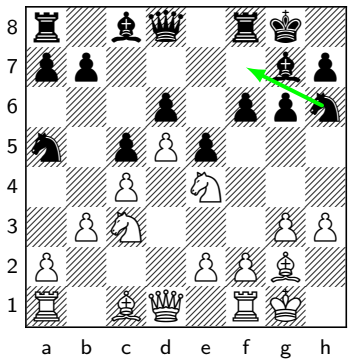

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13.♘xd6!?

The adventurous route. □ □ After □ □ □ In modern times, I'd expect Magnus to play a move like

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13.♘b5?N , Black is able to defend the d-pawn with ♘f7N . Black is ready for ...a6 and ...f5, and the white pieces get pushed backwards.

13.♗xh6? does not work: ♗xh6 14.♘b5N f5 15.♘exd6N a6 16.♘xc8N axb5 The knight is trapped on c8.

13.g4 is the computer suggestion, but it is hard to understand.

13.♗d2 .

13... ♕xd6 14.♘e4 ♕d8

Black would be OK after

14... ♕b6 15.♗a3 ♖d8 16.♗xc5 ♕c7 .

15.♘xc5 f5?!

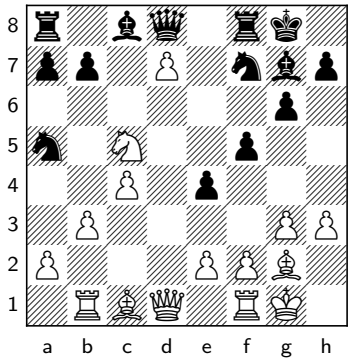
Black did not need to give back the extra piece so easily.

16.d6 e4 17.d7 ♘f7

Not

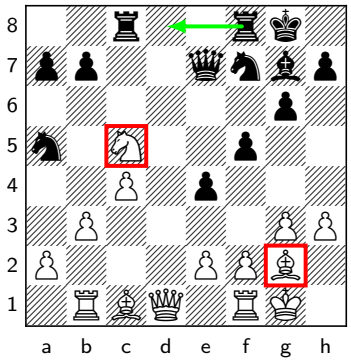
17... ♗xa1 , as Black's position collapses after 18.♗xh6 .

18.♖b1!



18.dxc8♕?= is not possible, as after ♖xc8 both the a1-rook and c5-knight are hanging.

18... ♕e7 19.dxc8♕ ♖axc8



This is where our theme of converting an extra pawn starts. White is a pawn up, but Black has obvious compensation. Black has a lead in development and more active pieces. In particular, the g2-bishop is poor. The extra pawn on the queenside is a long way from having any influence on the game. White has a lot of work ahead of him to win. The immediate issue is that the knight is loose. Magnus made the right decision.

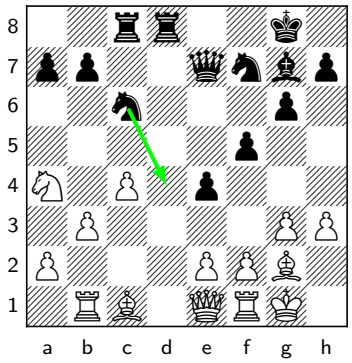
20.♘a4!

White's first goal in this position is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Carlsen's move is best because it enables the c1-bishop to be developed on b2. The alternatives are worse: □ □ After the natural

20.♗a3? even loses: b6 21.♕d7 ♕xd7 22.♘xd7N ♖fd8 The knight is trapped. But not 20...Rxc5? 21.Bxc5 Qxc5 22.b4 and White wins.

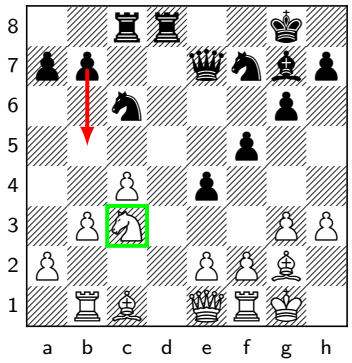
20.♗e3 ♖fd8 where does the queen go? 21.♕c1 puts the queen on the same file as the black rook, which Black can exploit with b6 22.♘a4N b5 . White would already need to perform some small acrobatics to avoid getting in trouble. 21.Qe1! Nc6! White is uncoordinated and ...Bd4 is coming. The knight will have to move off of c5 all the same, and I dislike that White's bishop was forced to the e3-square.

20...♖fd8 21.♕e1 ♘c6



Black wants to jump with the knight to the active d4-square. Black's counterplay is not sufficient to knock White out over the next few moves, but White should definitely be concerned about the ...b5 break. Trading off the c-pawn would open the c-file, which is how I would expect Black to hope to invade. Technically, Black has taken control of the d-file, but White has the access squares on that file well under control. By contrast, White does not have the c2-square under control.

22.♘c3!



This is a good place to start. White regroups his wayward knight to a superior square while simultaneously preventing ...b5. After the natural

22.♗b2 ♗xb2 23.♖xb2 ♕e5 , White is not able to prevent ...b5. He is still better, but this is already a step in the wrong direction.

22... ♘d4

A critical moment.

23.♗b2?!

This is the natural move and good for an advantage, but it is second best. □ □ White wants to prevent Black's main source of counterplay, which is ...b5, but □ Best was 23\. Bb2 24...a6 The machine doesn't care much about what White plays, but I do. 25.a5! Of course –no ...b5 for you! White has consolidated his extra pawn and is well on his way to scoring the full point. After 23. Bb2 24...Nxb3 25.Rxb3 Qxc4 26.Ne7+ Kh8 27.Rxb7 or 27.Rb4 , White wins.

23.♗e3? will allow an unfavorable piece exchange for White: ♘c2N 24.♕c1 ♘xe3N After 25.fxe3? , I have seen worse fianchettoed bishops but not that many.

25.♕xe3 ♗d4 Black is better. His pieces are very active.

23.a4? would see the white queen being returned to the box: ♘c2N That is, unless White resigns instead.

23.♘d5N The knight is on a nice, active outpost, but this is not the main point. The biggest idea is that by shutting down the open d-file, White prevents the threat of ...Nc2. Since he does so with tempo, White will be in time to push a2-a4, making sure that Black does not get to advance ...b5 to open the c-file. To illustrate: ♕c5 Now not 24.b4 ♕xc4 25.♘e7†N ♔f8 26.♘xc8N ♘c2N , and Black wins., but 24... Qc5 24.a4! White prevents Black's immediate counterplay with ...b5. Be3 is coming next, at a moment when Black's knight is stuck on d4, and he could even lose a piece with moves like Qd2 and Rd1 to follow. For the moment, Black's pieces are on good squares, but they cannot be improved, and there is nothing for them to achieve. 24...b5 is not actually prevented per se, but after 25.axb5 Nxb5 White has been able to maintain his c4-pawn, which holds his position together, and Black will not invade on the c-file. My computer offers a healthy +2.5, and I don't think it is being unreasonable.

23... b5!

Magnus should not have allowed this, but he found a good reply which keeps a favorable position:

24.♘d5!

□ □ However,

24.e3 was also possible, but it looks risky: ♘f3†N 25.♗xf3 exf3 , with ...Ng5 on the way, this looks scary for White. Still, the computer survives, though I can understand why White would not want to play like this. A good start is: 26.♘d5N ♕d6

27.♕c1 ♘g5N 28.♔h2 h5 White is a bit better here, but the game goes on.

24.♘xb5N ♘xb5N 25.cxb5 ♖c2 gives Black enough counterplay to guarantee equality.

24... ♕d6 25.♗xd4! ♗xd4 26.♖d1! ♗e5

The natural move. For the moment, White seems reasonably stable, which brings us to the next step of converting the extra pawn: evaluating which piece exchanges and changes to the pawn structure will favor us. The engine likes

26... bxc4 27.♖xd4 cxb3 28.e3 b2 29.♕d2 ♕a3 where Black is holding on, but it is hard for a human to play like this. For example: 30.♔h2 ♖c1 31.♘f6†N ♔g7 32.♖xd8 ♘xd8N 33.♕xd8 b1♕= 34.♘e8†N ♔f7 Black survives. Beings made of flesh and blood do not play chess like this.

27.♕a5?

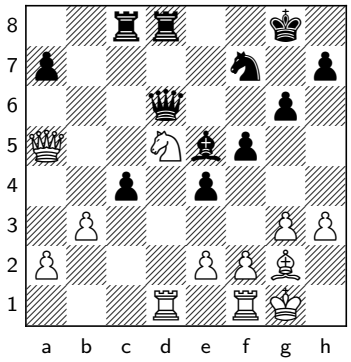
This is sensible as it connects the rooks, but it is definitely not best, and Black should be able to hold on. Also after the weakening The critical attempt was: I have to imagine 27...Bxg3! is what Magnus was scared of. 28.fxg3! One of the key elements to converting an extra pawn is to consider which change of pawn structure is favorable. Is this change in structure favorable to White? Yes! White can connect the rooks with Qf2 and then consolidate the queenside structure with a2-a4, leaving him with a three-on-one majority on the queenside. At that point, his pawn mass will eventually prove decisive and lead to a promotion. The issue is that he loses a kingside pawn. But how much does this matter? Black was not attacking on the kingside; his pieces are clearly placed to try to make trouble on the queenside. 28...Qc5+ 29.Qf2! Rxd5 30.a4! White's king is safe as can be, and he should be totally winning. The queenside pawn mass will be decisive, Black can hardly avoid some heavy piece exchanges, and White's g2-bishop will not be passive forever. It can be regrouped with e2-e3 and Bf1, or potentially even broken out with a well-timed g3-g4. Instead, 28.Qb4? is complacent and gives Black good drawing chances: 28...Bh4 29.Qxd6 Rxd6 Up next is ...Rcd8. The proud knight on d5 turns out not to be so fantastic! Wouldn't White love to exchange it for the h4-bishop? He could have, by taking on g3 on move 28 instead.

27.f4? , Black is fine: ♗g7 or

27... bxc4 28.fxe5 ♕c5† The knight is captured next, and White needs to start looking for equality.

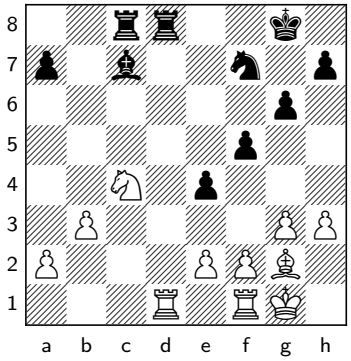
27.cxb5 White cannot prevent his c-pawn being captured, so he might as well capture on b5. This is a big pawn to win, but it has to be well calculated and evaluated. Morozevich did not simply leave it hanging because he did not feel like protecting it; he surely had an idea. After ♖c2 28.♘e3N , White wins. Also inadequate is 27...Qc5? 28.b4! , and the queen has to retreat and admit she lost time, leaving White two pawns up.

27... bxc4!



Morozevich starts exchanging and simplifying down to a holdable opposite- bishop position. This should not have been allowed.

28.♘e3 ♕c7 29.♕xc7 ♗xc7 30.♘xc4



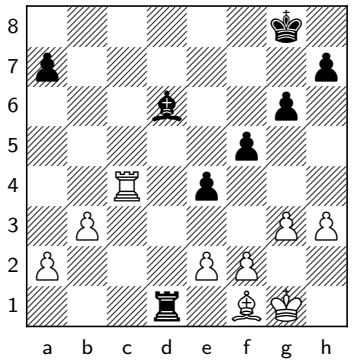
The position has changed completely in the last few moves. White has stabilized the position, and Black has no counterplay. But the position has also simplified and is not far from a draw with opposite-colored bishops. The computer agrees, with a verdict near 0.00.

30... ♘e5! 31.♖xd8†

This gives White the most practical winning chances. In order to obtain rook activity, White needs to trade a pair of rooks. White gives Black one open file and obtains the other. The alternative

31.♘e3N ♖xd1 32.♖xd1 ♗b6 is equal. White has to allow either ...Bxe3, incarcerating his bishop, or ...Rc2.

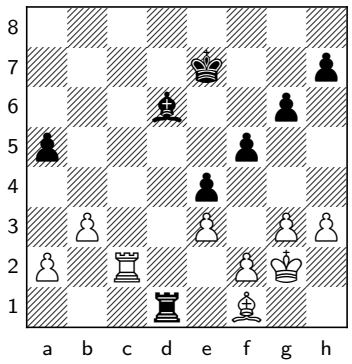
31... ♖xd8 32.♖c1 ♘xc4 33.♖xc4 ♖d1† 34.♗f1 ♗d6?!



It is hard to understand this move. The computer doesn't mind much, but the alternative looks so much more natural to me: Why not put the bishop on the most active square, where it is also anchored? After

34... ♗b6 35.e3 ♖d2 36.a4 ♖a2 , Black is clearly fine: 0.00.

35.e3 a5 36.♔g2 ♔f7 37.♖c2 ♔e7



Morozevich's play over the last few moves has been lackluster. Even so, it is not clear

whether White will be able to win. There are opposite-colored- bishops, the extra pawn is contained, and Black has no major weaknesses. Magnus played really well from here. What pieces and pawns does White want to exchange, and which changes in structure would be in his favor? I would have much preferred immediately taking the second rank with

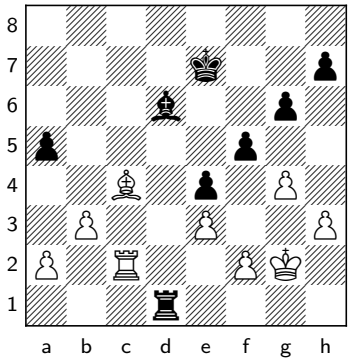
37... ♗b4 . Next is ...Rd2, and I don't see Black ever losing this game.

38.♗e2

White needs to aim for g3-g4 to create kingside weaknesses, as well as being able to attack the queenside. In opposite-colored-bishop endings, the attacking side should create weaknesses to stretch the defender's resources.

38.g4 was possible to play immediately as well, but I don't mind White gaining a tempo for his bishop.

38... ♖d5 39.♗c4 ♖d1 40.g4



White managed to get his bishop to c4 for free before playing g3-g4, which should help his position slightly. Black needed to make a critical choice on the last move before the time control.

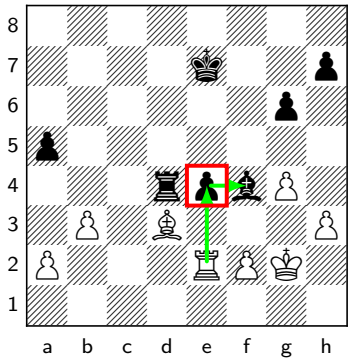
40... f4?

Black is still holding, but his life just got a lot harder. Again, I think My computer claims

40... ♗b4 was the easiest way – get the rook to d2!

40... ♔f6 easily saves the game as well, but I prefer to force the rooks off right away.

41.exf4 ♗xf4 42.♖e2 ♖d4 43.♗d3!



A nice tactical point. I assume Morozevich missed it when contemplating move 40.

43... ♔f6

This is another critical moment.

44.♗xe4!

Again, which pieces does White want to exchange, and which change in structure does he want? It is clear that White does not want to exchange rooks, as that results in a pure opposite-colored-bishops endgame. Black would then have good saving chances despite the two-pawn deficit. But Black can force the exchange of rooks after either recapture. So, what structure does White desire in the opposite-colored-bishop endgame? After

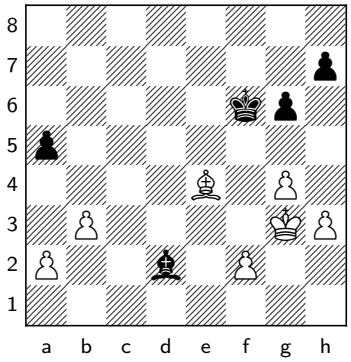
44.♖xe4? ♖xe4 45.♗xe4 ♔g5 , Black should hold. His dark square blockade will

not be broken. 46.♔f1 ♔h4 47.♗g2 ♗c7 48.♔e2 ♗b6 49.♔d3 ♗xf2 50.♔c4 ♔g3 51.♗f1 ♗e1 52.a3 h5 53.gxh5 gxh5 54.b4 axb4 55.axb4 ♔f4 56.b5 ♔g5 57.b6 ♗g3 and the black king will reach the corner. White can never win.

44... ♖d2

Morozevich forces the rooks off, but this allows White an important chance to change the pawn structure.

45.♖xd2 ♗xd2 46.♔g3?



It is important for White to prevent ...g5 and fix the kingside pawns as weaknesses:

46.h4 Black will lose as he did in the game.

46... ♗e1

This allows White another chance to put the pawn on h4. Also after Black should have played

46... h5 , White wins: 47.f4 hxg4 48.hxg4 g5 and 49.fxg5†?

49.f5 ♔e5 50.♗b7 ♗c3

50... ♗c1 51.♔f3 ♗f4 52.♔e2 ♔d4 .

51.♔f3 Black has to defend against threats on both sides of the board, and he will not be able to do this. No better is

49... ♗xg5 50.♗b7 ♔e5 51.♔f3 ♔d4 is a draw, but

46... ♔e5 47.♗c6 ♗f4† The king is kicked off of the g3-square. 48.♔f3 g5 Preventing h3-h4 and securing the draw.

47.♔f3 ♗b4

I'm not sure what Magnus had in mind after

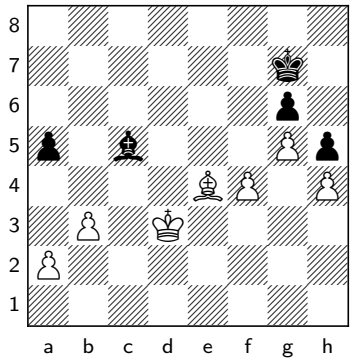
47... ♔g5 . The only winning move is to bring the king back to g3.

48.h4! h6 49.♔e2! ♗d6

My instinct would have been to try to blockade the dark squares at all costs with

49... g5 , but this will not save the game. Black will be left with a weakness on h6 after 50.h5 . There is still some work to do, but White will win. Black's king has to remain on the kingside to prevent White's king from running to h7. In the meantime, the queenside will start moving. ♔e5 51.♔d3 ♔f4 52.f3 ♔e5 53.♔c4 ♔d6 54.♔b5 ♗d2 55.a3 ♔c7 56.b4 axb4 57.axb4 and Black will lose because the white king can go after the g6-pawn. Without the h-pawns, Black would hold.

50.♔d3 ♗c5 51.f4 h5 52.g5† ♔g7

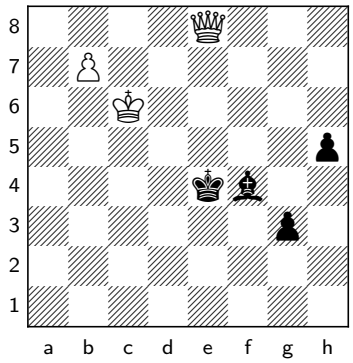


Due to the pawn weakness which Magnus has fixed on the kingside, the black king is forced back to defend the g6-pawn. This allows the white king to penetrate on the queenside.

53.♔c4 ♗d6

Black understandably goes for a race, but it won't be close.

54.♔b5 ♗xf4 55.♔xa5 ♗g3 56.♔b5 ♗xh4 57.a4 ♗xg5 58.a5 ♔f6 59.a6 ♗e3 60.♔c6 g5 61.b4 ♔e5 62.b5 ♔xe4 63.b6 g4 64.a7 g3 65.a8♕ ♔f3 66.b7 ♗f4 67.♕f8 ♔e4 68.♕e8†

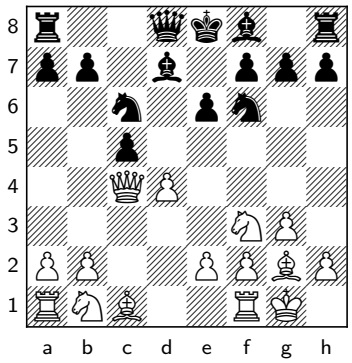


Magnus's play was not perfect this game by any stretch, but he executed phase one of converting the extra pawn extremely well - there was no moment where Morozevich could have found any real counterplay. But, Magnus struggled with the second part, namely deciding which piece exchanges and changes to the pawn structure would favor him. Still, he ultimately won the game, and I am quite sure that he would not have brought in the full point if he had not played accurately as soon as he ended up with the extra pawn. The position was quite dangerous, and consolidating the pawn was a very good first step.

Liren Ding-Radoslaw Wojtaszek Introduction

Next up, we'll take a look at a game that saw another 2800+ player ultimately convert the pawn up, but not without some hiccups along the way. While Ding did not always make the right exchanges down the road, in the initial phase where he had to consolidate the pawn, he did a very good job.

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c5 3.♗g2 ♘c6 4.d4 ♘f6 5.O-O e6 6.c4 dxc4 7.♕a4 ♗d7 8.♕xc4



Through a Reti move order, the game quickly transposes into an open Catalan.

8... cxd4

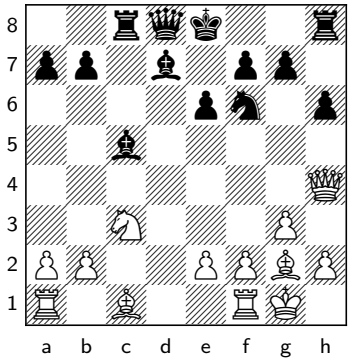
Black's main reply, which is probably best, is

8... b5

9.♘xd4 ♖c8

The point of the Catalan is to argue that the g2-bishop is better than its light-squared counterpart. This can happen where Black's bishop is on b7 and White pushes e2-e4. Moreover, if Black takes on c4 and his bishop remains stuck on c8 to defend the b7-pawn, the position is usually lost for Black. Here, Black evacuated his pieces from the long diagonal with the hope that the white bishop would then be shooting into thin air.

10.♘c3 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♗c5 12.♕h4 h6



Black sacrificed a pawn, with the idea that White's queen is lacking squares and might get into trouble accordingly.

13.♗xb7

Which White duly accepted.

13... ♖b8

White is a pawn up and should consider the key principles in such positions. The first principle is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and his next move was a lovely example of this principle in action.

14.♘e4!

Retreating the bishop would have allowed active counterplay:

14.♗f3 This leaves a bolthole for the queen on g2, but after ♖b4 15.♕h3 e5 16.♕g2 ♕c8 Black is fine as there is a lot of pressure on White's position. It is hard for White to develop the c1-bishop, as moving it hangs the b2-pawn, and b2-b3 is met by ...Bd4. White's queen may get pushed even further back to h1 after ...Bh3.

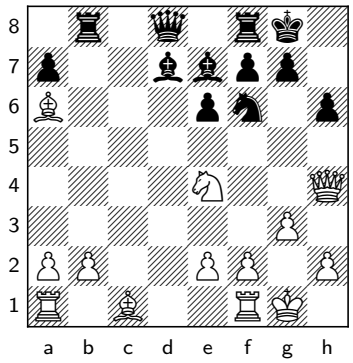
14... ♗e7!

After the removal of the light-squared bishops with Trying to be clever with

14... ♖xb7? 15.♘xc5N ♖c7 16.♘xd7N White is winning.

14... ♗xf2†? fails to a knight check on d6.

15.♗a6 O-O



A key point is that Black was not able to harass the white queen with

15... ♖b4? , as after 16.♘xf6†N , he must retake with the pawn. This weakens

his structure considerably; White's queen gains the h5-square, and Black has no effective counterplay.

16.♖d1

Stronger is the move Ding played subsequently: 16\. Rd1 17...Bxb2 18.Bxb2 Rxb2 19.Rfc1 Coming next is Bd3 to provoke ...g6, followed by h2-h4 to attack the hook on g6, or Qe3 with a double attack. Black's position is a little loose, and he is slightly worse.

16.♘xf6†N ♗xf6 17.♕e4 and Ding did eventually convert his extra pawn also after ♗b5 18.♗xb5 ♖xb5 19.a4 in Ding Liren –Harikrishna, Internet (rapid) 2022.

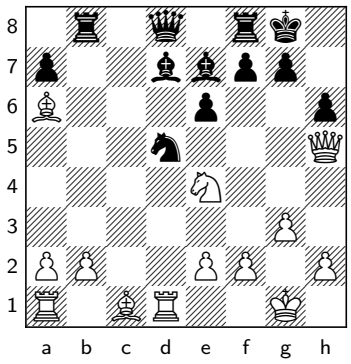
16... ♘d5 17.♕h5

White is in no immediate danger but is a long way from making his extra pawn count. The computer even claims the position after

17... ♗c6

is absolutely equal, but this is a bit misleading. White is a pawn up and can hope to consolidate while avoiding counterplay.

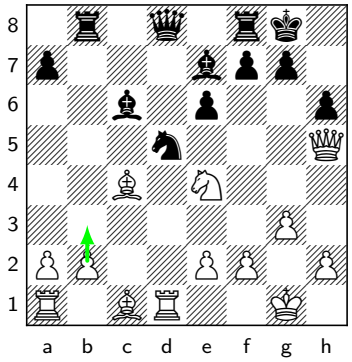
Ding-Wojtaszek Exercise #1



17... ♗c6

White is a pawn up and can hope to consolidate while avoiding counterplay. How to proceed?

18.♗c4!



This is a good way to prepare for b2-b3 to come next. Furthermore, placing the bishop on a safe square takes away Black's option of winning a tempo with ...Qb6. □ 18\. Bc4 18...Qb6 19.Bxh6 gxh6 20.Qxh6 Qxb2!? If the queen is allowed to retreat to g7, White will have to resign. So, the only try would be 21.Nc3 , blocking the long diagonal, but after 21...Nf6 White is anyway forced to give the perpetual. □ White wants to develop his bishop on b2 and remove the pressure on his b-pawn. The move he really wants to play is therefore

18.♗d3 also places the bishop on a safe square but blocks the d-file and doesn't put pressure on the d5-knight. The way to justify this retreat would be going for a kingside attack involving Bxh6, but those turn out to offer no more than perpetual check. ♘b4?N looks tempting, as Black will get to eliminate the d3-bishop. However, the knight was strong on d5, and moving it runs

into 19.♗f4 . White manages to complete development, and Black is in some trouble.

18.b3? , but, unfortunately, he cannot get away with it just yet for tactical reasons.White's knight is short of squares, and his pieces are hanging. ♕b6 This prepares ...f5 by defending the e6-pawn. 19.♗c4 when Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn after ♘f6N 20.♘xf6†N ♗xf6 21.♗e3 , but should play 19. Bc4 19...f5! instead. Now White can't play 20.Qg6? Be8! and the queen reveals how much more useful she is on b6 than she was on d8, as e6 is not hanging! Therefore, White should limit the damage with 20... Nf6 20.Bxd5! Bxd5 21.Be3 Qb4 Black has a healthy bishop pair, White's king is a bit loose, and the e4-knight is going to be a bad piece. Black definitely should be fine despite the pawn down, and White has not done a great job of consolidating the position and containing the counterplay. 21... Bxf6 21.Qg6 again failed to 21...Bxe4 22.Bxh6 Rf7 .

18... ♕c8?

This allows White to fix his coordination and complete his development.

18... ♕b6 looks the most consistent to me. The engine also likes

18... ♕e8 .

19.b3!

This is the move White really wants to play, but it required precise calculation. □ Another way to try and stabilize is B) The developing 19. b3 20...Rfd8 is also fine for Black, but not 20...Bb4? when White can develop with 21.Rac1 but 21.Bxh6! just wins on the kingside and is stronger. 21...gxh6 22.Qxh6 Be7 23.Ng5 and White wins. C) Or 19. b3 20...Nf6?! 21.Nxf6+ Bxf6 22.Bc3 Bxc3 23.bxc3 Bb5 24.Rd2 Rfc8 25.Rad1! and White is doing well. □ The computer says the best move is

19.♗b3 although the bishop is awkwardly placed and tied to the defense of the b-pawn. ♕a6 20.♗d2 and now: – A) ♗b5? 21.♖e1 ♖fd8 22.♕f3 The engine says 0.00, but it looks to me like Black still has some work to do to prove his compensation.

19.♗xh6 gxh6 20.♕xh6 f5 21.♘g5N ♗xg5 22.♕xg5† ♔f7 , and White is slightly better after opening the position with 23.e4 Still, I don't mind the move Ding played in the game.

19... f5!

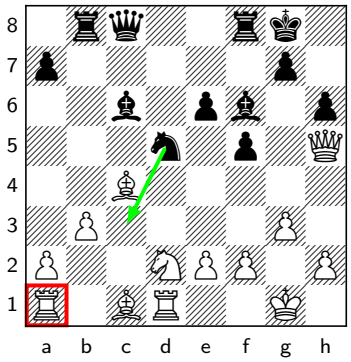
Black needs to seek active counterplay.

20.♘d2

20.♗xd5? does not work: ♗xd5 21.♘d2N ♕c2 Followed by ...Bf6, when the White position starts to fall apart at the seams.

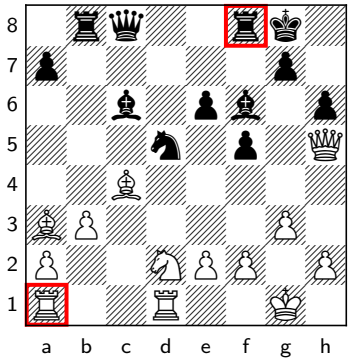
20.♕g6 doesn't work due to fxe4 21.♗xh6 ♗f6 .

20... ♗f6



It looks like White is in some trouble now because of the hanging rook on a1, and moving it to b1 would allow a fork on c3. But White is still in good shape if he plays well.

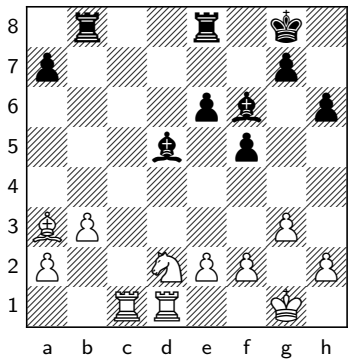
21.♗a3!



It is important to counterattack the f8-rook, and Ding must have seen this move in advance before pushing b2-b3. White doesn't want to exchange his strong c4-bishop for the d5-knight, as the bishop exerts pressure on the a2-g8 diagonal and is restricting the black queen from invading on the c-file or moving to a6. Nor does he want to move the rook and walk right into a fork:

21.♖b1? ♘c3N White loses material.

Ding-Wojtaszek Exercise #2



24... a5

The position has changed. White is no longer worried about any counterplay. He has consolidated his extra pawn, and his pieces are on reasonable squares. He is now thinking about how to plan to make his extra pawn count. Black has a strong bishop pair, and it looks like there is a long way to go before the extra pawn will become relevant. Which pieces would White like to exchange?

25.♘c4!

As Black's main source of counterplay is his bishop pair, it makes sense for White to trade one half of that pair - the dark-squared bishops. But this is going to be hard to achieve. White attacks the a-pawn and fights against Black's intended ...a4.

25.♖c2 looks logical, as it protects the a2-pawn and gets ready for Bb2 next. However: a4 26.b4

26.bxa4 is safer, but also not ambitious at all. After ♖a8 27.♗b2 ♗xb2 28.♖xb2 ♖xa4 , the a2-pawn is not long for this world.

26... ♗e7 27.♖b1 ♖ec8 Black has fully equalized. In fact, White should be careful not to lose control.

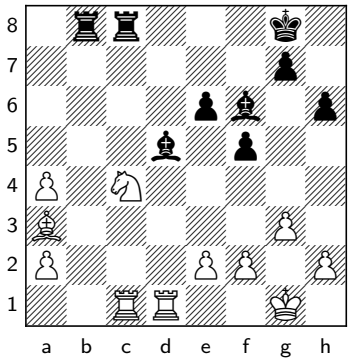
25... a4

25... ♗xc4 26.♖xc4

26.bxa4!

The game went

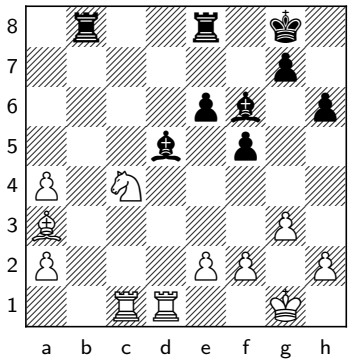
26... ♖ec8



and we'll continue in our next exercise.

26... ♖a8 fails to 27.♘b6N

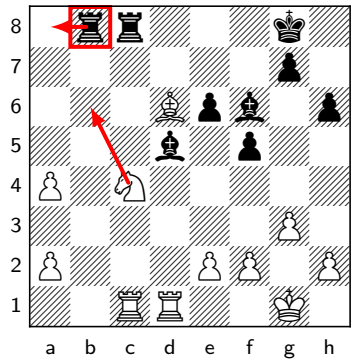
Ding-Wojtaszek Exercise #3



26... ♖ec8

Another critical position. How did White continue?

27.♗d6!



A great decision by Ding. He forces the b8-rook to move to an inferior square, and Black's main defensive idea of ...Ra8 is prevented due to Nb6. After The problem with

27.♘d6N ♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♗e7? , Black is close to equalizing with ...Ra8.

27.♘e3N is that after ♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♗xa2 , when White plays Bd6, Black will be happy to be given a chance to go to a8. Including the rook trade on c1 is a good idea for Black, as removing the white rook from the d-file allows the option of ...Bd4.

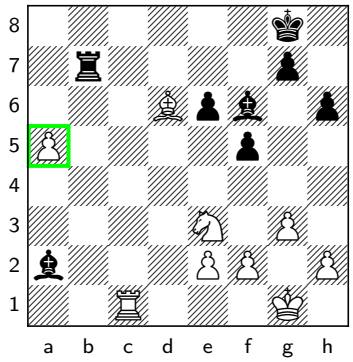
27... ♖b7

27... ♖a8 28.♘b6N

28.♘e3!

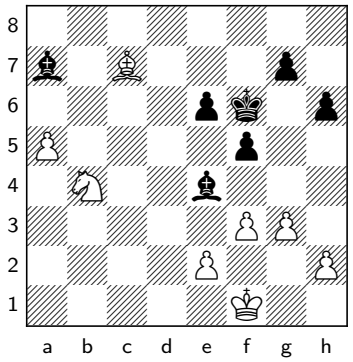
Now that Black's rook was forced to come to the less-than-ideal b7-square, White retreats the knight.

28... ♖xc1 29.♖xc1 ♗xa2 30.a5



The next phase of the game has been completed. White has secured the existence and the advance of his passed a-pawn. He now needs to decide which endgames will be winning for him. White wants to trade more pieces. White's king is slightly awkward, and Black has a strong bishop pair combined with his rook, making it difficult for White to coordinate. The same-colored-bishop endgame is clearly winning for White. So White is happy to exchange his knight for Black's light-squared-bishop. Opposite-colored-bishop endgames are also won for White, provided White can get his king to the center. This is because Black's kingside pawn structure allows White's bishop to harass the pawns and provoke weaknesses. The a-pawn will distract Black's bishop, and White should be able to stretch the defenses sufficiently to win. Basically, White is happy with any trade of minor pieces. So, White should win routinely with the exchange of rooks and any one pair of minor pieces. These considerations helped White find his next few moves.

Ding-Wojtaszek Exercise #4



38... ♗b7

White has a clean way to finish the game. Can you find it?

39.♗b6!

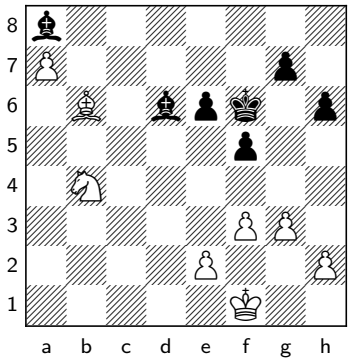
39.♘d3?N played in the game, is less convincing.

39... ♗b8

This is presumably what Ding was concerned about. After

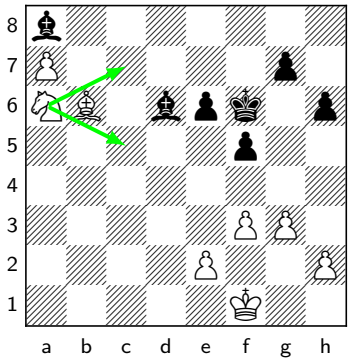
39... ♗xb6 40.axb6 ♔e5 41.♔f2 ♔d6 42.♔e3 ♔c5 , Black has reached the b-pawn, but in doing so, he will lose his kingside. The exchange of dark-squared-bishops has allowed White's king to invade: 43.♘d3†N ♔xb6 44.♔d4 ♔c7 45.♔e5 Black's case is hopeless.

40.a6! ♗a8 41.a7 ♗d6



We should know from our earlier assessment that the opposite-bishop endgame should be winning if Black is left with kingside weaknesses.

42.♘a6!



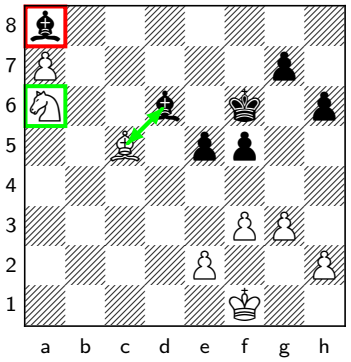
White has several winning threats all centered around offering piece trades on either c5 or c7.

42... e5

Black ensures the opposite-colored-bishops endgame will be drawn, because White will lose access to the e5-square. But it allows an even more favorable exchange: We'll see

42... ♔e7 in our next exercise.

43.♗c5



It is simplest to force the exchange of bishops. The opposite-bishops endgame resulting from

43.♘c7?N ♗xc7 44.♗xc7 ♔e6 is now drawn. Black's king has reached the center first, and he has been able to put the pawn on e5. This prevents White from creating weaknesses by harassing the pawns with his bishop from e5. Without a second weakness to attack, White should not win the game. Of course, in practice, there would be some chances.

43... ♔e6 44.♔f2

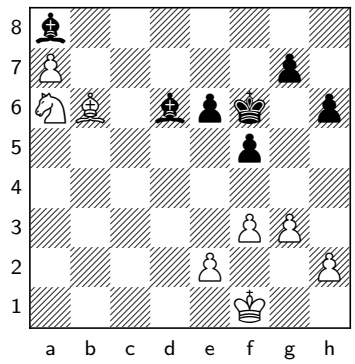
The text move wins a tempo compared with

44.♗xd6 ♔xd6 .

44... ♔d5 45.♗xd6 ♔xd6 46.♔e3 ♔c6 47.♘b4†N ♔b6 48.♘d3N

White wins routinely, as Black's king has been distracted to the queenside.

Ding-Wojtaszek Exercise #5



42... ♔e7

This feels like the most natural to me. How should White proceed?

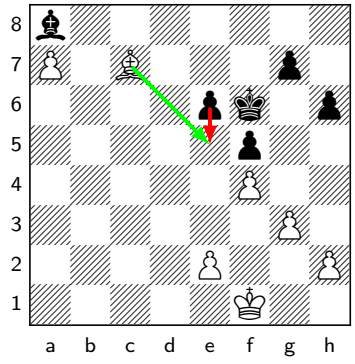
43.♘c7!

White can confidently go for the opposite bishops position here.

43.♗c5 and

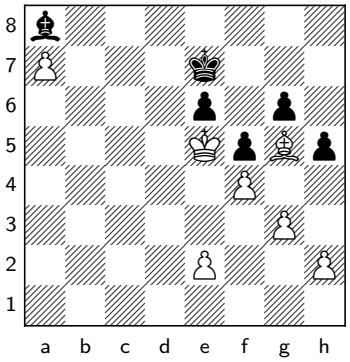
43.♗c7 also win, but I like the clarity of the opposite-colored-bishops endgame.

43... ♗xc7 44.♗xc7 ♔f6 45.f4!



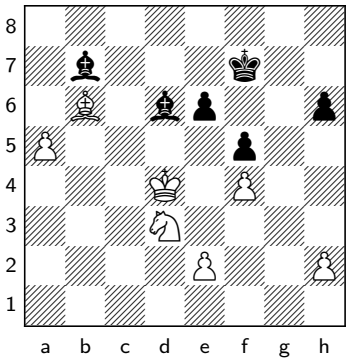
Black's idea of ...e5 is prevented. White's bishop will sit on e5, and Black's defenses will be stretched. The following is a good sample variation of White's winning plan; Black can do nothing but wait.

45... ♔f7 46.♗e5 g6 47.♔f2 ♔e7 48.♔e3 ♗b7 49.♔d4 ♗a8 50.♗g7 h5 51.♔e5 ♗b7 52.♗h6 ♗a8 53.♗g5†



Black's king has to allow a decisive penetration.

Ding-Wojtaszek Exercise #6



46.♘c5?

Why didn't Ding go for this exchange?

46... ♗xc5†!

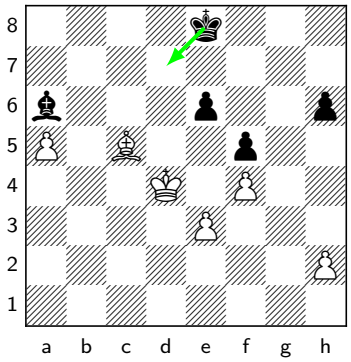
After the exchange of the g-pawns, the opposite-colored-bishop endgame will be drawn.

47.♗xc5

Also inadequate is

47.♔xc5 ♔e7 48.♗c7 ♗a6 49.♔b6 ♗xe2 50.a6 ♔d7 51.a7 ♗f3 , and Black draws using a classic barrier. There is no way for the white king to reach b8 and help the pawn forward.

47... ♗a6 48.e3 ♔e8

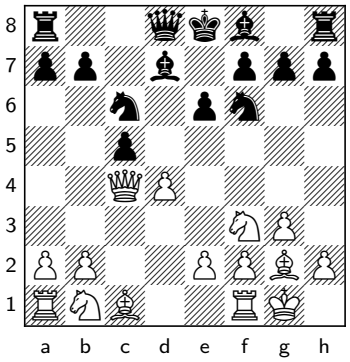


The absence of g-pawns means that Black's king is not tethered to the kingside for defensive purposes. He should be able to hold by bringing the king to defend against the enemy a-pawn.

Liren Ding-Radoslaw Wojtaszek, Shenzhen 2018

Next up, we'll take a look at a game that saw another 2800+ player ultimately convert the pawn up, but not without some hiccups along the way. While Ding did not always make the right exchanges down the road, in the initial phase where he had to consolidate the pawn, he did a very good job.

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c5 3.♗g2 ♘c6 4.d4 ♘f6 5.O-O e6 6.c4 dxc4 7.♕a4 ♗d7 8.♕xc4



Through a Reti move order, the game quickly transposes into an open Catalan.

8... cxd4

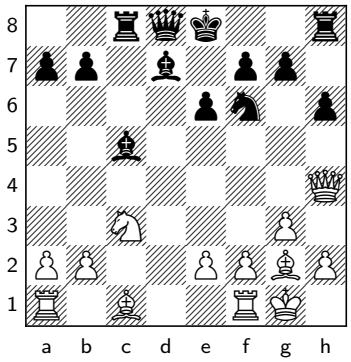
Black's main reply, which is probably best, is

8... b5

9.♘xd4 ♖c8

The point of the Catalan is to argue that the g2-bishop is better than its light-squared counterpart. This can happen where Black's bishop is on b7 and White pushes e2-e4. Moreover, if Black takes on c4 and his bishop remains stuck on c8 to defend the b7-pawn, the position is usually lost for Black. Here, Black evacuated his pieces from the long diagonal with the hope that the white bishop would then be shooting into thin air.

10.♘c3 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♗c5 12.♕h4 h6



Black sacrificed a pawn, with the idea that White's queen is lacking squares and might get into trouble accordingly.

13.♗xb7

Which White duly accepted.

13...♖b8

White is a pawn up and should consider the key principles in such positions. The first principle is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and his next move was a lovely example of this principle in action.

14.♘e4!

Retreating the bishop would have allowed active counterplay:

14.♗f3 This leaves a bolthole for the queen on g2, but after ♖b4 15.♕h3 e5 16.♕g2 ♕c8 Black is fine as there is a lot of pressure on White's position. It is hard for White to develop the c1-bishop, as moving it hangs the b2-pawn, and b2-b3 is met by ...Bd4. White's queen may get pushed even further back to h1 after ...Bh3.

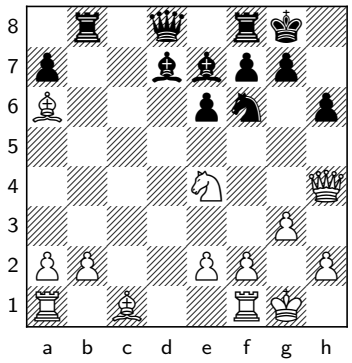
14...♗e7!

After the removal of the light-squared bishops with Trying to be clever with

14...♖xb7? 15.♘xc5N ♖c7 16.♘xd7N White is winning.

14...♗xf2†? fails to a knight check on d6.

15.♗a6 O-O



A key point is that Black was not able to harass the white queen with

15...♖b4? , as after 16.♘xf6†N , he must retake with the pawn. This weakens his structure considerably; White's queen gains the h5-square, and Black has no effective counterplay.

16.♖d1

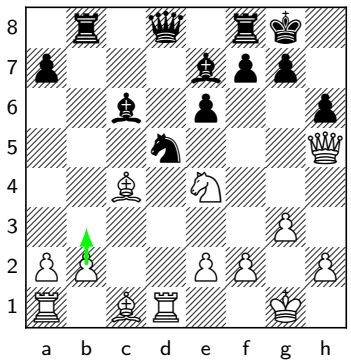
Stronger is the move Ding played subsequently: 16\. Rd1 17...Bxb2 18.Bxb2 Rxb2 19.Rfc1 Coming next is Bd3 to provoke ...g6, followed by h2-h4 to attack the hook on g6, or Qe3 with a double attack. Black's position is a little loose, and he is slightly worse.

16.♘xf6†N ♗xf6 17.♕e4 and Ding did eventually convert his extra pawn also after ♗b5 18.♗xb5 ♖xb5 19.a4 in Ding Liren –Harikrishna, Internet (rapid) 2022.

16...♘d5 17.♕h5 ♗c6

White is in no immediate danger, but is a long way from making his extra pawn count. The computer even claims the position is absolutely equal, but this is a bit misleading. White is a pawn up and can hope to consolidate while avoiding counterplay.

18.♗c4!



This is a good way to prepare for b2-b3 to come next. Furthermore, placing the bishop on a safe square takes away Black's option of winning a tempo with ...Qb6. □ 18\. Bc4 18...Qb6 19.Bxh6 gxh6 20.Qxh6 Qxb2!? If the queen is allowed to retreat to g7, White will have to resign. So, the only try would be 21.Nc3 , blocking the long diagonal, but after 21...Nf6 White is anyway forced to give the perpetual. □ White wants to develop his bishop on b2 and remove the pressure on his b-pawn. The move he really wants to play is therefore

18.♗d3 also places the bishop on a safe square but blocks the d-file and doesn't put pressure on the d5-knight. The way to justify this retreat would be going for a kingside attack involving Bxh6, but those turn out to offer no more than perpetual check. ♘b4?N looks tempting, as Black will get to eliminate the d3-bishop. However, the knight was strong on d5, and moving it runs into 19.♗f4 . White manages to complete development, and Black is in some trouble.

18.b3? , but, unfortunately, he cannot get away with it just yet for tactical reasons.White's knight is short of squares, and his pieces are hanging. ♕b6 This prepares ...f5 by defending the e6-pawn. 19.♗c4 when Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn after ♘f6N 20.♘xf6†N ♗xf6 21.♗e3 , but should play 19. Bc4 19...f5! instead. Now White can't play 20.Qg6? Be8! and the queen reveals how much more useful she is on b6 than she was on d8, as e6 is not hanging! Therefore, White should limit the damage with 20... Nf6 20.Bxd5! Bxd5 21.Be3 Qb4 Black has a healthy bishop pair, White's king is a bit loose, and the e4-knight is going to be a bad piece. Black definitely should be fine despite the pawn down, and White has not done a great job of consolidating the position and containing the counterplay. 21... Bxf6 21.Qg6 again failed to 21...Bxe4 22.Bxh6 Rf7 .

18... ♕c8?

This allows White to fix his coordination and complete his development.

18... ♕b6 looks the most consistent to me. The engine also likes 18...Qe8 .

19.b3!

This is the move White really wants to

play, but it required precise calculation. □ Another way to try and stabilize is B) The developing 19. b3 20...Rfd8 is also fine for Black, but not 20...Bb4? when White can develop with 21.Rac1 but 21.Bxh6! just wins on the kingside and is stronger. 21...gxh6 22.Qxh6 Be7 23.Ng5 and White wins. C) Or 19. b3 20...Nf6?! 21.Nxf6+ Bxf6 22.Bc3 Bxc3 23.bxc3 Bb5 24.Rd2 Rfc8 25.Rad1! and White is doing well. □ The computer says the best move is

19.♗b3 although the bishop is awkwardly placed and tied to the defense of the b-pawn. ♕a6 20.♗d2 and now: – A) ♗b5? 21.♖e1 ♖fd8 22.♕f3 The engine says 0.00, but it looks to me like Black still has some work to do to prove his compensation.

19.♗xh6 gxh6 20.♕xh6 f5 21.♘g5N ♗xg5 22.♕xg5† ♔f7 , and White is slightly better after opening the position with 23.e4 Still, I don't mind the move Ding played in the game.

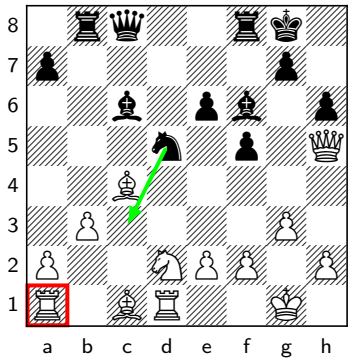
19... f5!

Black needs to seek active counterplay.

20.♘d2

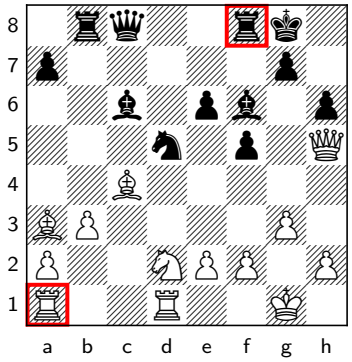
20.♗xd5? does not work: ♗xd5 21.♘d2N ♕c2 Followed by ...Bf6, when the White position starts to fall apart at the seams.

20... ♗f6



It looks like White is in some trouble now because of the hanging rook on a1, and moving it to b1 would allow a fork on c3. But White is still in good shape if he plays well.

21.♗a3!



It is important to counterattack the f8-rook, and Ding must have seen this move in advance before pushing b2-b3. White doesn't want to exchange his strong c4-bishop for the d5-knight, as the bishop exerts pressure on the a2-g8 diagonal and is restricting the black queen from invading on the c-file or moving to a6. Nor does he want to move the rook and walk right into

21.♖b1? ♘c3N and White loses material.

21... ♕e8

The computer claims that Black is just about holding after

21... ♗xa1 22.♗xf8 ♕xf8 23.♖xa1 ♕f6 due to a knight sortie to c3 and a2. Wojtaszek's approach is more natural.

22.♕xe8 ♖fxe8

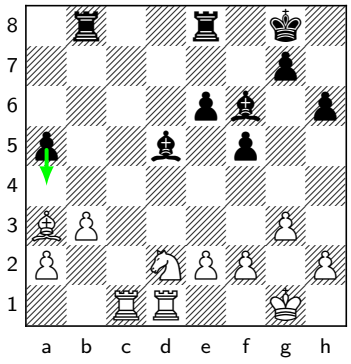
The absence of queens means that Black's knight can move without hanging the f5-pawn. Also, the bishop is no longer needed to prevent a black queen from accessing a6 or c2. Finally, the weakened light squares around White's king also lose most of their significance. This explains:

23.♗xd5!

After

23.♖ac1 ♘c3N , White loses his extra pawn and his advantage.

23... ♗xd5 24.♖ac1 a5



The position has changed. White is no longer worried about any counterplay. He has consolidated his extra pawn, and his pieces are on reasonable squares. He is now thinking about how to plan to make his extra pawn count. Black has a strong bishop pair, and it looks like there is a long way to go before the extra pawn will become relevant. Which pieces would White like to exchange? As Black's main source of counterplay is his bishop pair, it makes sense for White to trade one half of that pair, the dark-squared bishops. But this is going to be hard to achieve.

25.♘c4!

White attacks the a-pawn and fights against Black's intended ...a4.

25.♖c2 looks logical, as it protects the a2-pawn and gets ready for Bb2 next. However: a4 26.b4

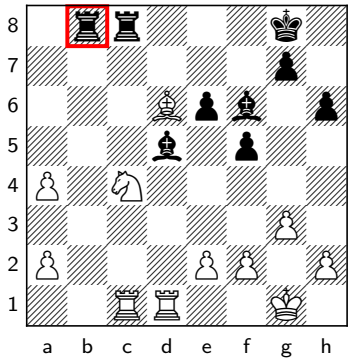
26.bxa4 is safer, but also not ambitious at all. After ♖a8 27.♗b2 ♗xb2 28.♖xb2 ♖xa4 , the a2-pawn is not long for this world.

26... ♗e7 27.♖b1 ♖ec8 Black has fully equalized. In fact, White should be careful not to lose control.

25... a4 26.bxa4! ♖ec8

26... ♖a8 fails to 27.♘b6N

27.♗d6!



A great decision by Ding. He forces the b8-rook to move to an inferior square, and Black's

main defensive idea of ...Ra8 is prevented due to Nb6. After The problem with

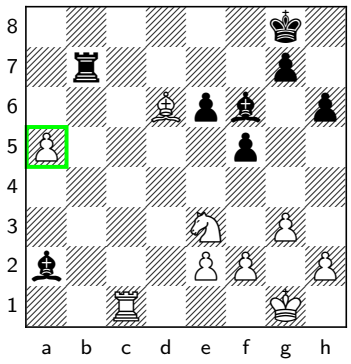
27.♘d6N ♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♗e7? , Black is close to equalizing with ...Ra8.

27.♘e3N is that after ♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♗xa2 , when White plays Bd6, Black will be happy to be given a chance to go to a8. Including the rook trade on c1 is a good idea for Black, as removing the white rook from the d-file allows the option of ...Bd4.

27... ♖b7 28.♘e3!

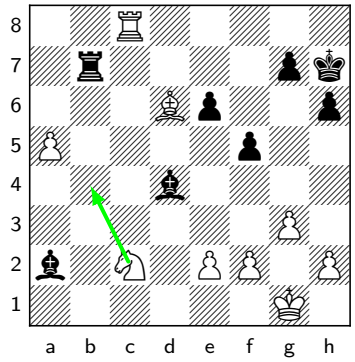
Now that Black's rook was forced to come to the less-than-ideal b7-square, White retreats the knight.

28... ♖xc1 29.♖xc1 ♗xa2 30.a5



The next phase of the game has been completed. White has secured the existence and the advance of his passed a-pawn. He now needs to decide which endgames will be winning for him. White wants to trade more pieces. White's king is slightly awkward, and Black has a strong bishop pair combined with his rook, making it difficult for White to coordinate. The same-colored-bishop endgame is clearly winning for White. So White is happy to exchange his knight for Black's light-squared-bishop. Opposite- colored-bishop endgames are also won for White, provided White can get his king to the center. This is because Black's kingside pawn structure allows White's bishop to harass the pawns and provoke weaknesses. The a-pawn will distract Black's bishop, and White should be able to stretch the defenses sufficiently to win. Basically, White is happy with any trade of minor pieces. So, White should win routinely with the exchange of rooks and any one pair of minor pieces. These considerations helped White find his next few moves.

30... ♗d4 31.♖c8† ♔h7 32.♘c2!



White wants to reroute his knight to b4, where it blocks Black's open b-file and harasses the light-squared bishop. Furthermore, trading pieces is one thing, changing the structure is another. When contemplating the piece trades mentioned above, we thought about them under the presumption that the structure would stay the same. After

32.♔g2? ♗xe3 33.fxe3 ♗d5† 34.♔f2 ♖b5 , White has some chances, but much less than in the game continuation. A large

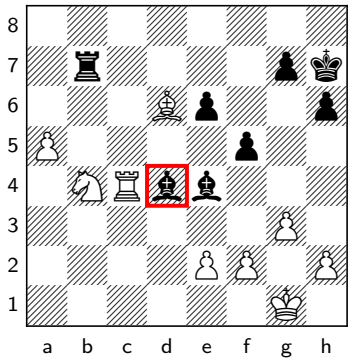
problem is that 35.♖c5 is no longer possible, as the pure opposite-colored-bishops endgame is drawn.

32... ♗d5?!

The engine prefers the logical option of activating the rook before the b-file is blocked by a knight on b4, but the lines given are far from obvious:

32... ♖b1† 33.♔g2 ♗d5† 34.f3 This is the position Black needed to try and make work. But it is flimsy, and it's not hard to imagine that Black could quickly collapse. – A) I would probably try to calculate ♖g1†? 35.♔h3 ♗f2 , since f2 looks relatively safe and Black has some ideas of ...g5 with counterplay against the king on h3. But this loses in many ways, including the prosaic 36.♗c5 ♗xc5 37.♖xc5 , when the black rook has trouble reaching the a-file. – B) 34\. f3 34...Bf6! This is already hard, as the bishop stops fighting against the advance of White's a-pawn. However, every other square was worse, since the bishop would be unstable and become a target. 35.Nb4 If White is allowed to take on d5 comfortably, it will be all over, and the bishop doesn't have a good square to go to. 35...Rb2! Stockfish finds a narrow path to escape. Why this works is still unclear to a human, and White, anyway, has good chances. For example: 36.Rc2!? The rooks are forced off the board, reducing Black's ability to engineer counterplay.

33.♘b4 ♗e4 34.♖c4!



This attacks the bishops, which are placed awkwardly. Also, the d4-bishop is short of squares. □ □ White does not want to play □ Similarly, □

34.e3? weakens the light squares around White's king. After ♗b2 35.a6 ♖d7 , White needs to find 36.f3 to equalize.

34.♖c7? when Black can respond with ♖b5 . After 35.a6 ♖a5 , Black is already threatening checkmate and has good chances to hold.

34.a6? allows ♖b5 , and the rook will be well-placed on a5.

34... ♖d7 also works.

34.♔f1 is the second-best move, preparing f2-f3, and White indeed holds some advantage. But Black can be a nuisance with ♖d7 or

34... ♖b5 , against both of which it is not easy to stabilize.

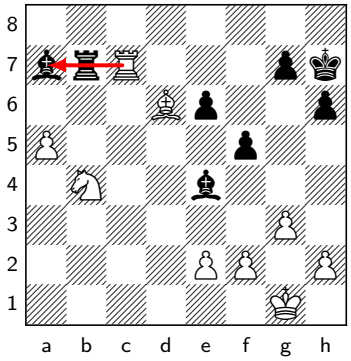
34... ♗a7?

Black had to play

34... e5 . It was the only chance, but

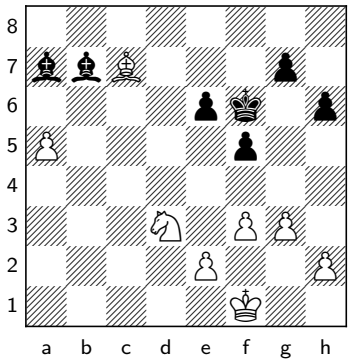
it creates more weaknesses, and the black pieces are awkward. For example, after 35.♔f1 ♖d7 36.♗c7 ♗b6 37.f3 , Black will end up in a pawn down endgame, and I would expect him to lose, irrespective of the engine evaluation.

35.♖c7!



White forces a trade of rooks. Black must acquiesce and is unable to respond with ...Rb5, because his bishop was lured to a7.

35...♔g6 36.♔f1 ♔f6 37.f3 ♖xc7 38.♗xc7 ♗b7 39.♘d3?!



The cleanest way to finish the game was: □ B) With 39. Nd3 42...e5 , Black ensures the opposite-colored-bishops endgame will be drawn, because White will lose access to the e5-square. But it allows an even more favorable exchange: 43.Bc5 It is simplest to force the exchange of bishops. 43...Ke6 44.Kf2 (The text move wins a tempo compared with 44.Bxd6 Kxd6 45.Kf2) 44...Kd5 45.Bxd6 Kxd6 46.Ke3 Kc6 47.Nb4+ Kb6 48.Nd3 White wins routinely, as Black's king has been distracted to the queenside. The opposite-bishops endgame resulting from 39. Nd3 43.Nc7? Bxc7 44.Bxc7 Ke6 is now drawn. Black's king has reached the center first, and he has been able to put the pawn on e5. This prevents White from creating weaknesses by harassing the pawns with his bishop from e5. Without a second weakness to attack, White should not win the game. Of course, in practice, there would be some chances.

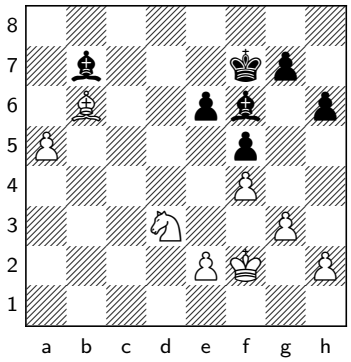
39.♗b6 After ♗xb6 40.axb6 ♔e5 41.♔f2 ♔d6 42.♔e3 ♔c5 , Black has reached the b-pawn, but in doing so, he will lose his kingside. The exchange of dark-squared-bishops has allowed White's king to invade: 43.♘d3†N ♔xb6 44.♔d4 ♔c7 45.♔e5 Black's case is hopeless.

39...♗d4

39...♗b8 This is presumably what Ding was concerned about. 40.a6 ♗a8 41.a7 Bd6 We should know from our earlier assessment that the opposite-bishop endgame should be winning if Black is left with kingside weaknesses. 42.Na6! White has several winning threats all centered around offering piece trades on either c5 or c7. – A) ♔e7 This feels like the most natural to me, but now White can confidently go

for the opposite bishops' position. 43.Nc7! 43...Bxc7 44.Bxc7 Kf6 42.f4 Black's idea of ...e5 is prevented. White's bishop will sit on e5, and Black's defenses will be stretched. The following is a good sample variation of White's winning plan; Black can do nothing but wait. ♔f7 43.♗e5 g6 44.♔f2 ♔e7 45.♔e3 ♗b7 46.♔d4 ♗a8 47.♗g7 h5 51.Ke5 Bb7 48.♗h6 Ba8 53.Bg5+ Black's king has to allow a decisive penetration.

40.f4 ♔f7 41.♗b6 ♗f6 42.♔f2?



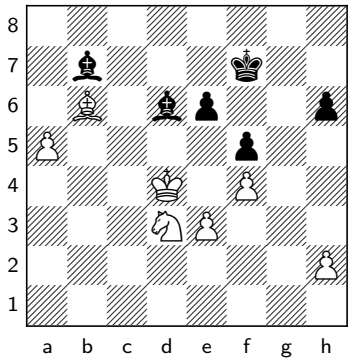
White has drifted a bit, but he had another chance to go for the opposite- bishops position with

42.♘c5N ♗d5 43.a6 followed by a7 and Na6.

42... g5! 43.♔e3 gxf4† 44.gxf4

The change of g-pawns was favorable to Black. In addition to the generic claim that pawn exchanges are favorable for the defender, it also has the concrete implication that the opposite-colored-bishop endgame will be drawn.

44... ♗e7 45.♔d4 ♗d6 46.e3



To illustrate the sentiment expressed above:

46.♘c5?N ♗xc5† 47.♗xc5

47.♔xc5 ♔e7 48.♗c7 ♗a6 49.♔b6 ♗xe2 50.a6 ♔d7 51.a7 ♗f3 , and Black draws using a classic barrier. There is no way for the white king to reach b8 and help the pawn forward.

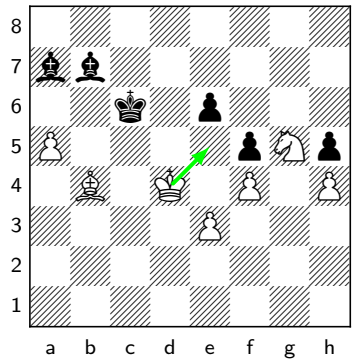
47... ♗a6 48.e3 ♔e8 The absence of g-pawns means that Black's king is not tethered to the kingside for defensive purposes. He should be able to hold by bringing the king to defend against the enemy a-pawn. Also inadequate is

46... ♔e8

At this point, Black should be making a draw. Ding eventually won anyway, but he could have helped himself out by cashing in earlier. This is a good reminder that even World Champions can have trouble evaluating the proper piece exchanges when converting an extra pawn!

47.♗c5 ♗c7 48.♗b4 ♗b8 49.h4 h5 50.♘f2 ♔d7 51.♘h3 ♔c6 52.♘g5

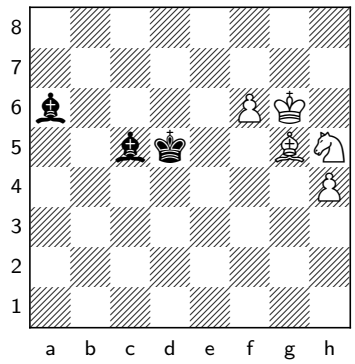
♗a7†??



I'm not sure what happened here. I guess Wojtaszek was worn down from the laborious defense. This allows the white king to invade. After

52... ♔b5 53.♗c5 ♗d5 , Black should not lose.

53.♔e5 ♗xe3 54.♘xe6 ♗c8 55.♘g7 ♗f2 56.♘xf5 ♔b5 57.♗e7 ♔xa5 58.♔f6 ♔b6 59.♔g6 ♔c6 60.♘g7 ♔d5 61.f5 ♔e5 62.♗g5 ♗c5 63.f6 ♗a6 64.♘xh5 ♔d5

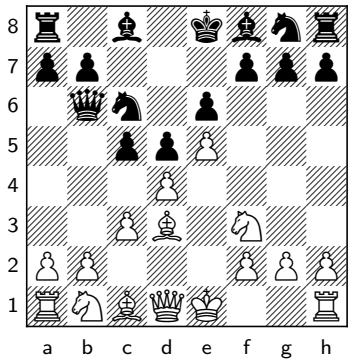


This game was a good example of eliminating counterplay early on and then evaluating which pieces should be exchanged. Most of Ding's decisions were right, but even he had trouble at a couple of moments! I found this to be a fascinating game to study.

Vahap Sanal-Sarin Nihal Introduction

As in most modern games between strong players, there is a lot of interest in understanding the themes in the opening and early middlegame. In terms of the topic of this book, Nihal did an excellent job in this game of winning a pawn and successfully holding on to it. It is a good illustration of the key principles of converting an extra pawn. In particular, it is an instructive demonstration of the formulation of effective plans for improving the position of the pieces.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♕b6 6.♗d3



This move has fluctuated in popularity over the years.

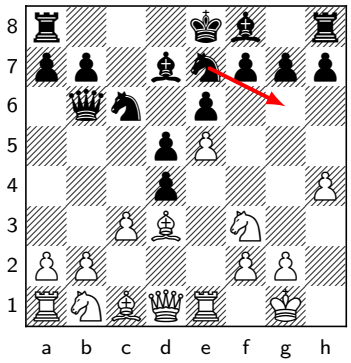
6... ♗d7 7.O-O cxd4 8.♖e1

White plays for the initiative and argues that ...dxc3 will accelerate his development. He's also waiting for the g8-knight to go to e7 before

launching the h-pawn. White can also sacrifice a pawn with

8.cxd4 ♘xd4N 9.♘xd4N ♕xd4 10.♘c3N , but this has been known for a while to be more than fine for Black.

8... ♘ge7 9.h4



This is prophylaxis against the knight going to g6.

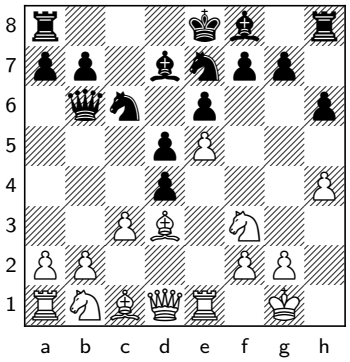
9... h6

White played

10.h5

, and this is a good place to start thinking about what to do with the extra pawn. Black does not need to be worried about getting crushed in the next few moves. His main concern is the difficulty in completing development. The e7-knight is poorly placed and does not have an obvious way to improve. While the king is safe on e8, he will need to castle at some point to connect the rooks. But neither side of the board looks safe.

Sanal-Nihal Exercise #1



10.h5

Black does not need to be worried about getting crushed in the next few moves. His main concern is the difficulty in completing development. The e7-knight is poorly placed and does not have an obvious way to improve. While the king is safe on e8, he will need to castle at some point to connect the rooks. But neither side of the board looks safe. How to play?

10... a6!

This is a good move for several reasons. The main one is that it prompts White to decide about what to do in the center. Black's most significant problem is his e7-knight. It wants to go to c6. So, Black would like to get the c6-knight off its current square, ideally exchanging it. That's why he's daring White to play cxd4, when after ...Nxd4 the c6-square has been vacated for the other knight. Black doesn't seem to be able to castle kingside. He cannot move his g-pawn as that would be much too weakening. So, he would have to move the e7-knight, then the f8-bishop, and then castle short. The only square for the knight is currently c8, which seems less than fantastic. This should lead Black to think that perhaps castling long is the way to go. Trying to clear the c6-square for the e7-

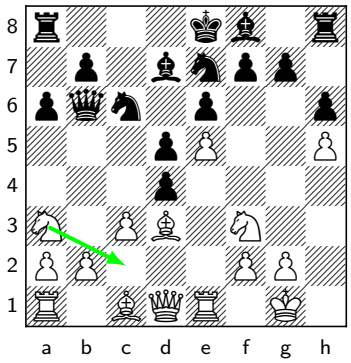
knight in the most direct way runs into a relatively large problem: Insisting on castling kingside would be a bad idea: But what about

10... dxc3? 11.♘xc3N ♘d4?N 12.♘xd4N ♕xd4 13.♘b5N Game over. So, Black prepares this line by playing ...a7-a6 first.

10... ♘c8N 11.♘bd2?N dxc3 12.bxc3 ♗e7 13.♘b3N O-O? 14.♗b1 Black's pieces on the queenside are unable to save their king against the blunt threat of landing the queen on h7.

10... O-O-O immediately? In principle, this is probably where Black's king will want to end up, but he is not ready to go there just yet. After 11.a4 , followed by b4, the queenside pawn mass is coming.

11.♘a3?



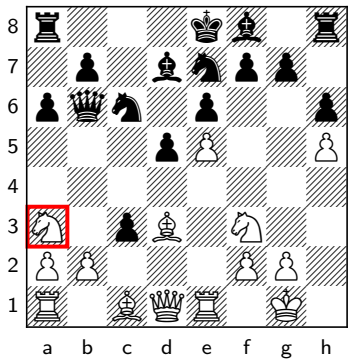
The machine thinks this is really bad. From a human perspective, the maneuver Na3-Nc2 does not look very different from Nd2-Nb3. But we will come to see the differences as the game progresses.

11.♘bd2N should be preferred, with the main point that Black's ...Nc8 plan as played in the game would be less effective: ♘c8?N

11... dxc3 12.bxc3 ♘c8N 13.♖b1 and White has a nice initiative. It will be hard for Black to castle long because of the well-placed rook on b1. After ♕c7 14.c4 it is hard for Black to finish development without an accident.

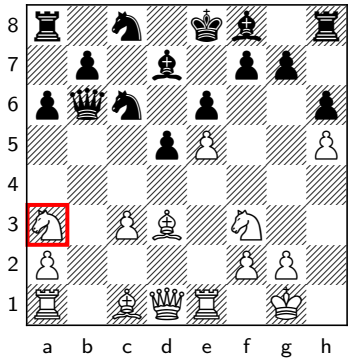
12.c4 is excellent for White. Instead,

11... dxc3!



This makes sense since White is not able to recapture with the knight.

12.bxc3 ♘c8!



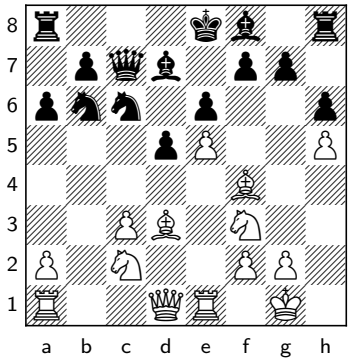
An excellent plan to take advantage of the positioning of White's queenside knight. The move Black wants to play is The engine also likes

12... O-O-O? , but after 13.♖b1 ♕c7 14.♗e3 or

14.♕e2 , White is winning. This line shows us that White is going to take the b-file with his rook and force Black's queen back to c7. Also, that there are two other issues for Black with castling long. First, that White can line up on the a6-pawn by playing Qe2. Second, that after Be3 White has control of the b6-square. While Black wants to castle on the queenside eventually, to connect the rooks and get them into play, his king is safe in the center currently. What can he do to improve his pieces before he is able to castle on the queenside?

12... ♘a5N 13.♖b1 ♕c7 but often accompanies this with taking on c3, which isn't how humans play.

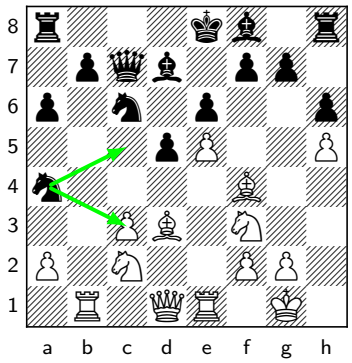
Sanal-Nihal Exercise #2



15.♖b1

How should Black proceed?

15... ♘a4!



Patience. A big mistake would be

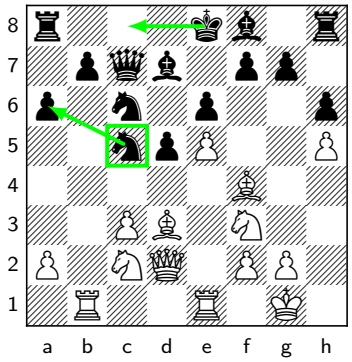
15... O-O-O? 16.♕e2 A sacrifice is coming on a6, and Black is not in time to get the knight to c5 to stop this.

16.♕d2

Clearly not

16.c4 ♘c3N .

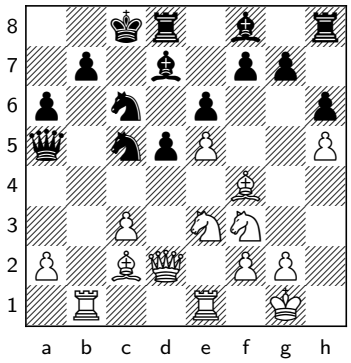
16... ♘c5



This is the logical move. Black is close to being able to castle queenside safely, and his pieces are coordinating much better than they were before. The computer has a strong preference for going after the c3-pawn with

16... ♘a5N 17.♘cd4N ♕xc3 , but I take no issue with Nihal's move.

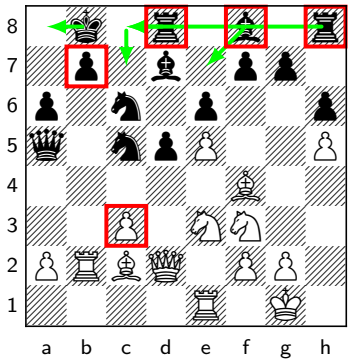
Sanal-Nihal Exercise #3



19.♖b2!

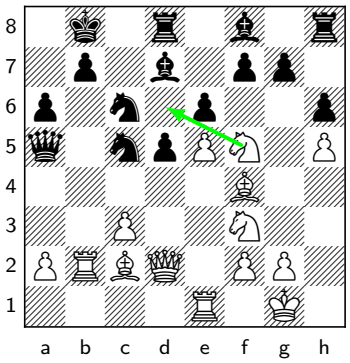
This was the correct move, trying to double on the b-file. Black is still better, but there will be more chances to complicate the game. How should Black react?

19... ♔b8!



We see Jacob's three questions in action. White's idea is to double rooks on the b-file. Black's worst-placed pieces are the f8-bishop and the two rooks. White has a pawn weakness on c3 on the half-open c-file, and Black's b7-pawn is a weakness that needs protecting. These considerations point to the plan of moving the king to a8 to vacate the c-file, ...Be7, and doubling rooks on the c-file via the c7 and c8 squares. Black will then be overprotecting the b7-pawn and threatening to take the c3-pawn. A two-pawn advantage would then be clearly decisive. Black is happy to exchange pieces, but it is difficult to facilitate in the current structure. Once the c-pawn is taken, Black will be able to exchange pieces easily. White can try to exploit a tactical motif, but it does not save him.

20.♘f5!



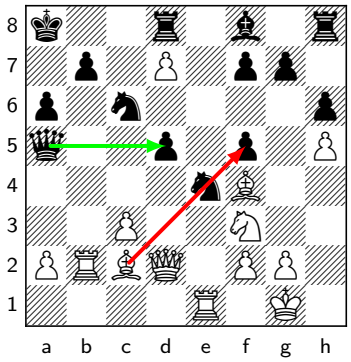
This looks scary.

20.♖eb1 would be wrong. After ♗c8 , Black has protected b7, and the knight is ready to jump to e4, followed by ...Bc5.

20... exf5!

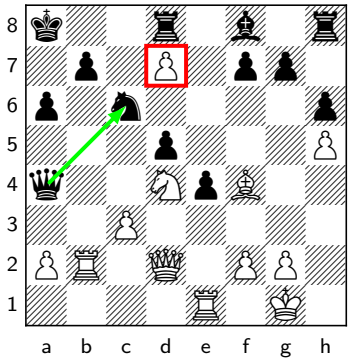
Black can get away with this.

21.e6† ♔a8 22.exd7 ♘e4!



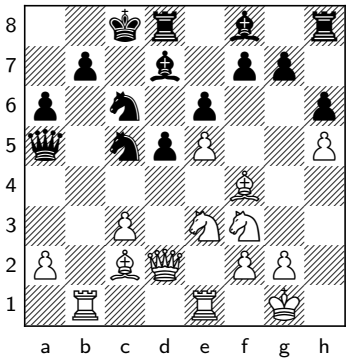
The key move, allowing Black to keep both d5 and f5 protected.

23.♗xe4 fxe4 24.♘d4 ♕a4!



The d7-pawn will fall, and Black has good chances to win. Still, the fight is far from over, and this would give White much better chances to resist than what he chose in the game.

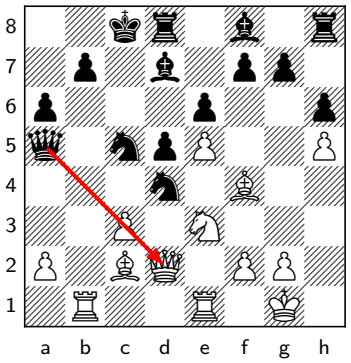
Sanal-Nihal Exercise #4



19.♘d4?

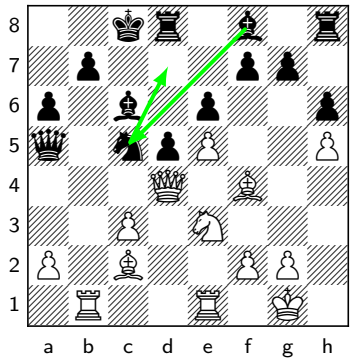
This is a misunderstanding of the position, as Nihal convincingly demonstrates.

19... ♘xd4!



Black trades off a pair of knights at a moment when White cannot take back with the c-pawn. The more minor pieces are exchanged, the closer Black gets to crashing through on the c-file, finally making use of his extra pawn. White is missing b2, so the c3-pawn should eventually fall in a pure heavy piece position. Additionally, the absence of a white b-pawn allows Black's pieces to squares which would otherwise be either unsafe or outright unavailable.

20.♕xd4 ♗c6!



Highlighting yet another drawback of White's 19th move. On c6, the bishop is stable and helps overprotect the b7-pawn even further. Moreover, clearing the d-file effectively prevents White from pushing c3-c4. In order to be able to play c3-c4, White therefore first needs to get his queen off the d-file, but this is easier said than done! Also, Black is ready for ...Ne4 or ...Nd7 followed by ...Bc5. Black's pieces are improving their coordination in excellent fashion. Also good was

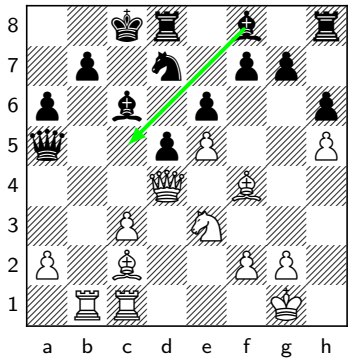
20... ♗a4 , offering piece trades to simplify the position and highlight the extra pawn. But as the game continuation shows, the bishop on c6 is excellently placed and stronger than its white counterpart.

21.♖ec1

As hinted to above,

21.c4? loses to dxc4 22.♕xc4 ♗b5 , when the queen needs to step on b4. That amounts to both positional and tactical capitulation. 23.♕b4 ♕xb4 24.♖xb4 ♗e7 .

21... ♘d7!

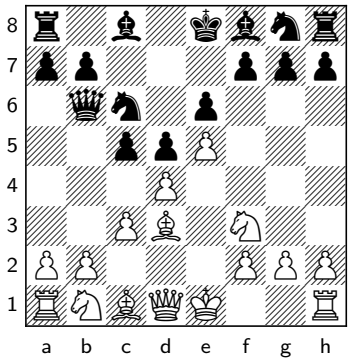


Clearing the c5-square for the bishop.

Vahap Sanal-Sarin Nihal, Belgrade 2021

As in most modern games between strong players, there is a lot of interest in understanding the themes in the opening and early middlegame. In terms of the topic of this book, Nihal did an excellent job in this game of winning a pawn and successfully holding on to it. It is a good illustration of the key principles of converting an extra pawn. In particular, it is an instructive demonstration of the formulation of effective plans for improving the position of the pieces.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♕b6 6.♗d3



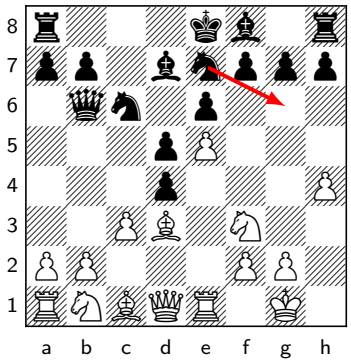
This move has fluctuated in popularity over the years.

6... ♗d7 7.O-O cxd4 8.♖e1

White plays for the initiative and argues that ...dxc3 will accelerate his development. He's also waiting for the g8-knight to go to e7 before launching the h-pawn. White can also sacrifice a pawn with

8.cxd4 ♘xd4N 9.♘xd4N ♕xd4 10.♘c3N , but this has been known for a while to be more than fine for Black.

8... ♘ge7 9.h4



This is prophylaxis against the knight going to g6.

9... h6 10.h5

This is a good place to start thinking about what to do with the extra pawn. Black does not need to be worried about getting crushed in the next few moves. His main concern is the difficulty in completing development. The e7-knight is poorly placed and does not have an obvious way to improve. While the king is safe on e8, he will need to castle at some point to connect the rooks. But neither side of the board looks safe. How would Black be able to castle kingside? He cannot move his g-pawn as that would be much too weakening. So, he would have to move the e7-knight, then the f8-bishop, and then castle short. The only square for the knight is currently c8, which seems less than fantastic. This should lead Black to think that perhaps castling long is the way to go.

10... a6!

This is a good move for several reasons. The main one is that it prompts White to decide about what to do in the center. Black's most significant problem is his e7-knight. It wants to go to c6. So, Black would like to get the c6-knight off its current square, ideally exchanging it. That's why he's daring White to play cxd4, when after ...Nxd4, the c6-square has been vacated for the other knight. □ Trying to clear the c6-square for the e7-knight in the most direct way runs into a relatively large problem: □ Insisting on castling kingside would be a bad idea: □ But what about

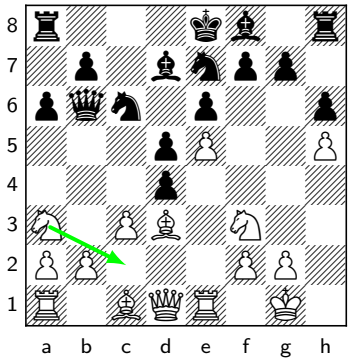
10... dxc3? 11.♘xc3N ♘d4?N 12.♘xd4N ♕xd4 13.♘b5N Game over. So, Black prepares this line by playing ...a7-a6 first.

10... ♘c8N 11.♘bd2?N dxc3 12.bxc3

♗e7 13.♘b3N O-O? 14.♗b1 Black's pieces on the queenside are unable to save their king against the blunt threat of landing the queen on h7.

10... O-O-O immediately? In principle, this is probably where Black's king will want to end up, but he is not ready to go there just yet. After 11.a4 followed by b4 the queenside pawn mass is coming.

11.♘a3?



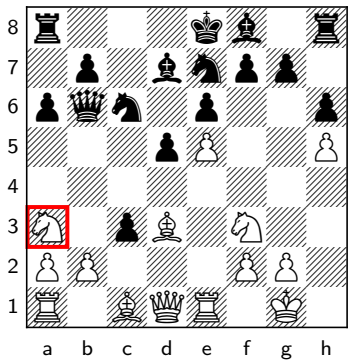
The machine thinks this is really bad. From a human perspective, the maneuver Na3-Nc2 does not look very different from Nd2-Nb3. But we will come to see the differences as the game progresses.

11.♘bd2N should be preferred, with the main point that Black's ...Nc8 plan as played in the game would be less effective: ♘c8?N

11... dxc3 12.bxc3 ♘c8N 13.♖b1 and White has a nice initiative. It will be hard for Black to castle long because of the well-placed rook on b1. After ♕c7 14.c4 it is hard for Black to finish development without an accident.

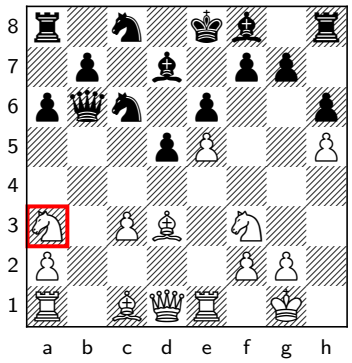
12.c4 is excellent for White. Instead,

11... dxc3!



This makes sense since White is not able to recapture with the knight.

12.bxc3 ♘c8!



An excellent plan to take advantage of the positioning of White's queenside knight. The engine also likes The move Black wants to play is

12... ♘a5N 13.♖b1 ♕c7 but often accompanies this with taking on c3, which isn't how humans play.

12... O-O-O? , but after 13.♖b1 ♕c7 14.♗e3 or

14.♕e2 , White is winning. This line shows us that White is going to take the b-file with his rook and force Black's queen back to c7. Also, that there are two other issues for Black with castling long. First, that White can line up on the a6-pawn by playing Qe2. Second, that after Be3 White has control of the b6-square. While Black wants to castle on the queenside eventually, to connect the rooks and get them into play, his king is safe in the center currently. What can he do to improve his pieces before he is able to castle on the queenside?

13.♘c2

White tries to reroute the knight and fights for control over the d4-square, also preparing a good response to Black's idea of developing with a gain of tempo by going ...Bc5. For example,

13.c4? allows: ♗c5 14.♗e3 ♗xe3 15.♖xe3 Following the exchange of dark-squared-bishops, kingside castling could become a reasonable option, as there is no sacrifice on h6. Moreover, after ♘8e7N 16.cxd5 exd5? there is no Bc2/Qd3 Turton doubling, as Black would be able to respond to it with ...Bf5.

13.♖b1 is natural, and I'm a bit surprised White could resist it, but indeed his position is less than fantastic. The big difference with having the knight on d2 is that he is much less ready to play c3-c4. For example: ♕c7 14.c4 ♗b4 Black develops with tempo and is ready to return with the c8-knight to e7. The knight dearly regrets choosing a3 instead of d2.

13... ♕c7!

Black continues regrouping his pieces, aiming to castle queenside under favorable circumstances. If Black could choose any square to put the c8-knight, it would be c5. This deals with the two issues previously referred to regarding queenside castling, and means that Black would be safe when he does so. Therefore, Black moves the queen to allow the knight to come to b6 next, from where it could jump to a4 and, eventually, c5. Again, the knight being on b3 would have worked much better for White against this plan than it does on c2. □ □

13... ♗c5? is a possible option, which again highlights that the knight would be better on b3. But it is not the right time for it, as it weakens the kingside. After 14.♘fd4N , the queen is coming to g4, and White gets a strong initiative.

13... ♘8a7?N looks artificial compared with the text move. The knight is heading somewhere, but it is unclear where exactly. After 14.a4 , Black continues having trouble finding a safe place for his king. and connecting the rooks.

14.♗f4

This was a move in the wrong direction. White makes sure to prevent kingside castling, but Black has already decided against it. After 14\. Bf4 15...Bc5!? and ...N8e7 is also excellent

for Black

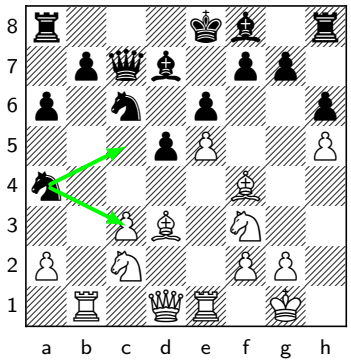
14.c4 dxc4 15.♗xc4 ♘b6N 16.♗b3 the knight on c2 is bad and would dearly love to be on e4 eyeing d6. Black is a clear pawn up with active pieces and should be able to castle on the queenside safely. His dark-squared-bishop can come to c5 to counter a bishop on e3, and White's light-squared-bishop is a long way from a sacrifice on a6.

14... ♘b6

The naive

14... ♗e7 15.♖b1 O-O? 16.♕d2 is clearly checkmate. Black cannot stop a sacrifice on h6.

15.♖b1 ♘a4!



Patience. A big mistake would be

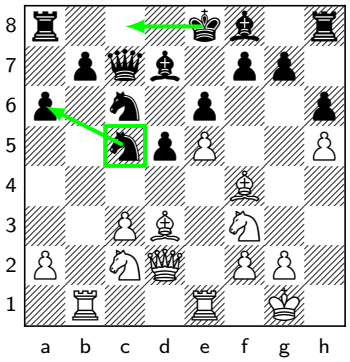
15... O-O-O? 16.♕e2 . A sacrifice is coming on a6, and Black is not in time to get the knight to c5 to stop this.

16.♕d2

Clearly not

16.c4 ♘c3N .

16... ♘c5



This is the logical move. Black is close to being able to castle queenside safely, and his pieces are coordinating much better than they were before. The computer has a strong preference for going after the c3-pawn with

16... ♘a5N 17.♘cd4N ♕xc3 , but I take no issue with Nihal's move.

17.♘e3 ♕a5!

This steps out of the way of the Nxd5 idea, allowing queenside castling. Also ...d4 may be a threat under some circumstances. Moreover, White is prevented from playing c4 to try to open the game. Black has finally stabilized the position! This is the first step towards converting the extra pawn. Black would lose control of the position if he were too hasty:

17... O-O-O 18.♘xd5N exd5 19.e6 with a mess. One advantage of the knight being on c5 is that Black is able to meet c4 with ...d4, keeping the position closed. If the knight is exchanged for the d3-bishop, it is harder for Black to keep the position closed in that way:

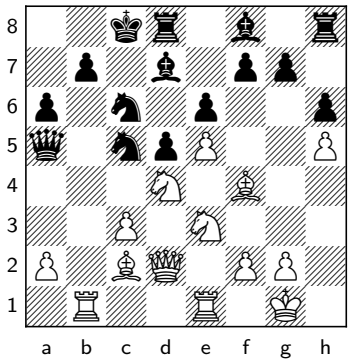
17... ♘xd3N 18.♕xd3 O-O-O The computer now finds the convincing 19.c4

d4 20.♘d5N and White has a large advantage.

18.♗c2 O-O-O

Finally! Black has managed to castle queenside in a position where he is not worried about Bb6, Bxa6, or indeed any other counterplay. He is no longer looking to consolidate; rather, he is now looking to convert his extra pawn. But the conversion is a long way away.

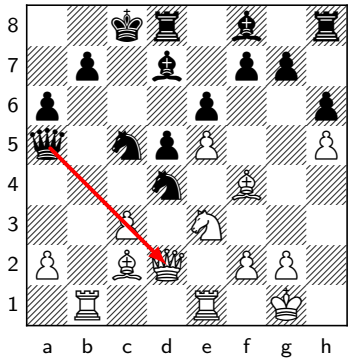
19.♘d4?



This is a misunderstanding of the position, as Nihal convincingly demonstrates. Correct was

19.♖b2 , trying to double on the b-file. Black is still better, but there will be more chances to complicate the game. ♔b8 We see Jacob's three questions in action. White's idea is to double rooks on the b-file. Black's worst-placed pieces are the f8-bishop and the two rooks. White has a pawn weakness on c3 on the half-open c-file, and Black's b7-pawn is a weakness that needs protecting. These considerations point to the plan of moving the king to a8 to vacate the c-file, ...Be7, and doubling rooks on the c-file via the c7 and c8 squares. Black will then be overprotecting the b7-pawn and threatening to take the c3-pawn. A two-pawn advantage would then be clearly decisive. Black is happy to exchange pieces, but it is difficult to facilitate in the current structure. Once the c-pawn is taken, Black will be able to exchange pieces easily. White can try to exploit a tactical motif, but it does not save him. 20.♘f5N exf5 21.e6† ♔a8 22.exd7 ♘e4N 23.♗xe4 fxe4 24.♘d4N ♕a4 The d7-pawn will fall, and Black has good chances to win. Still, the fight is far from over, and this would give White much better chances to resist than what he chose in the game.

19... ♘xd4!



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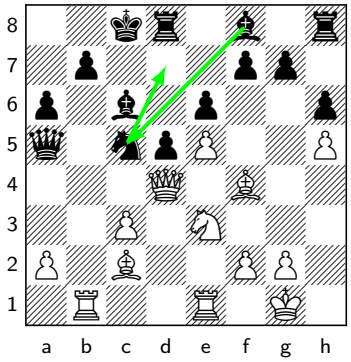

Highlighting yet another drawback of White's 19th move. On c6, the bishop is stable and helps overprotect the b7-pawn even further. Moreover, clearing the d-file effectively prevents White from pushing c3-c4. In order to be able to play c3-c4, White therefore first needs to get his queen off the d-file, but this is easier said than done! Also, Black is ready for ...Ne4 or ...Nd7 followed by ...Bc5. Black's pieces are improving their coordination in excellent fashion. Also good was

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21.♖ec1

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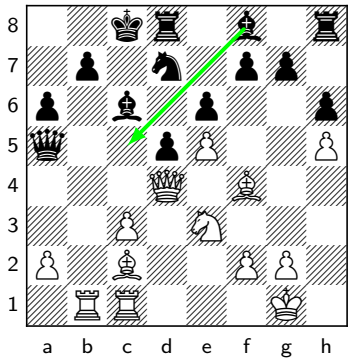
21.c4? loses to dxc4 22.♕xc4 ♗b5 , when the queen needs to step on b4. That amounts to both positional and tactical capitulation.

21... ♘d7!



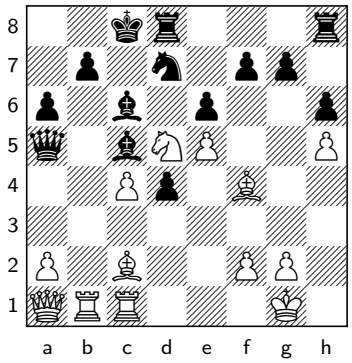
Clearing the c5-square for the bishop.

22.c4

What else? Even if this is bad, not trying for counterplay would anyway lose slowly. For example:

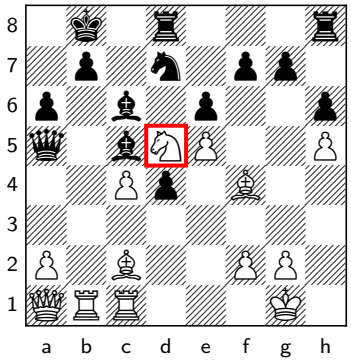
22.♖b3 ♗c5 23.♕d2 ♔b8 Black can revert to the plan of doubling rooks on the c-file. The fact that his bishop got the c6-square and a pair of knights has been exchanged makes this easy to pull off. A desperate approach such as 24.♘f5?N is called for but doesn't help. Black could even ignore this knight with ♔a8 , or just get on with it and go for

22... ♗c5 23.♕a1 d4! 24.♘d5



White tries to make a mess, which is an appropriate course of action considering the circumstances.

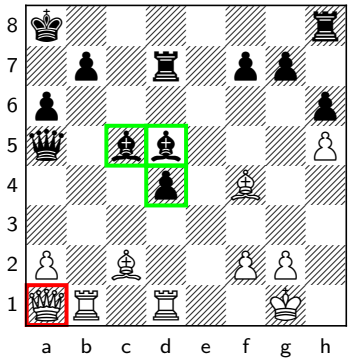
24... ♔b8!?



Again, Nihal chooses the simplest solution. The knight is trapped and will be taken next. Black will win another pawn and with it the game. Black had no need to enter the complications after

24... exd5 25.cxd5 ♗xd5 26.♗f5 , even though they work out in his favor.

25.♖d1 exd5 26.e6† ♔a8 27.cxd5 ♗xd5 28.exd7 ♖xd7

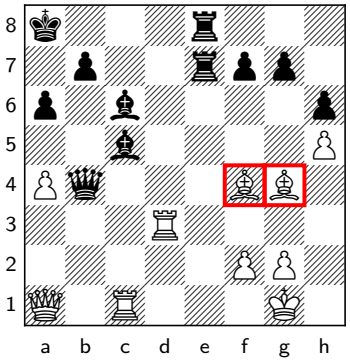


With two extra pawns and the more active position for Black, there's not much more to discuss.

29.♗f5 ♖e7 30.a4 ♖he8

Black even has an open file to work with, and White cannot trade rooks due to the two-pawn deficit.

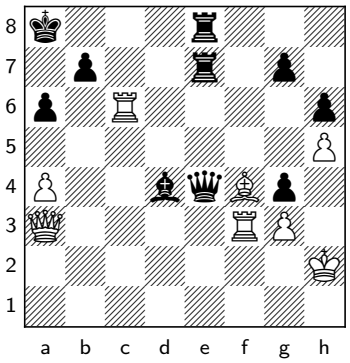
31.♖bc1 ♗c6 32.♗g4 d3 33.♖xd3 ♕b4



Nice and simple. Even stronger than

33... ♖e1† 34.♔h2 ♗xf2

34.g3 ♕e4 35.♖f3 ♗xf2† 36.♔h2 ♗d4 37.♕a3 f5 38.♖xc6 fxg4



A fantastic game by Nihal. Two plans to regroup the Black pieces are particularly memorable and instructive. 1) The pirouettes of the knight from g8-e7-c8-b6-a4-c5 to secure the queenside and enable castling there. Then it finally retreated to d7 to enable ...Bc5. 2) The plan

at the note to the 19th move to maneuver the bishop to e7, king to a8 and doubling the rooks on the c-file.

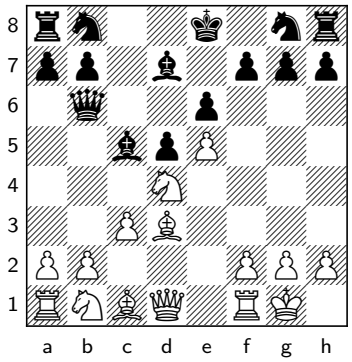
Alexander Grischuk-Alexander Morozevich Introduction

This game was played in the 2011 World Cup, which was the first World Cup I participated in. It features a number of mistakes from both sides. Despite this, it is a good illustration of our themes. On gaining an extra pawn, White strove to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, but his execution of this was only partially successful. Hence, the game also illustrates the opportunities for counterplay that this provided to Black, although these were largely not taken advantage of.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♗d7 5.♘f3 ♕b6 6.♗d3 cxd4 7.♘xd4

7.O-O ♘c6N 8.cxd4 ♘xd4N 9.♘xd4N ♕xd4 10.♘c3N is a better version for Black. The dark-squared bishop is an important defender.

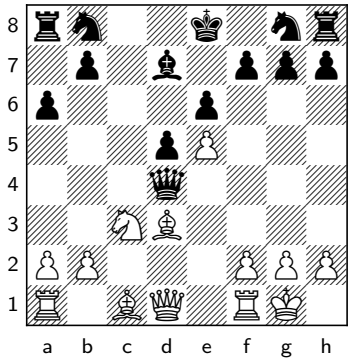
7... ♗c5 8.O-O



Grischuk simply ditches the pawn.

8.♕g4 is preferred by the engine.

8... ♗xd4 9.cxd4 ♕xd4 10.♘c3 a6



Black understandably wants to keep unfriendly pieces out of the b5-square. This is just about playable. □ Black cannot get away with □ The prescribed engine solution is

10... ♕xe5? . After 11.♖e1 ♕d6 12.♕g4 White is winning.

10... ♘c6N , but this is not really something one could go for without being excellently prepared. Against White's relatively obvious attacking ideas, Black only holds by performing a bit of computer magic. One

critical line goes: 11.♘b5N ♕xe5 12.♖e1 ♕b8 13.♕g4 ♔f8 14.♗f4 e5 15.♕xd7 ♘f6N Black regains the piece with approximate equality.

11.♖e1 ♗c6

Black is pushing his luck. The most natural move is best, so

11... ♘e7N . The reason Morozevich didn't play it was probably 12.♗e3 ♕xe5 13.♗c5 . However, this isn't as terrible for Black as it may seem at first: ♕f6 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♘xd5N ♕d6 16.♕h5 ♔f8 17.♗e4 exd5 18.♗xd5 ♕g6 White is only slightly better, and Black should hold with some more accurate defensive moves.

12.♘e2!

The c3-knight was probably White's worst-placed piece, as it was dominated by black pawns. Hence the rerouting.

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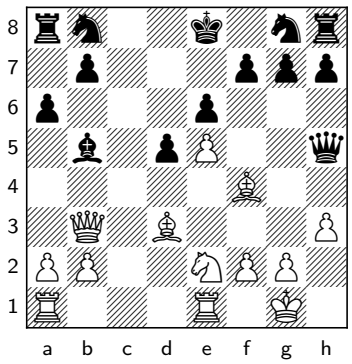
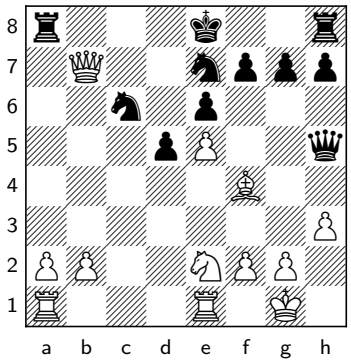
14... ♗b5 15.♕b3



This is the natural human move, but in conjunction with the previous one, they amount to White's advantage fully evaporating. The computer finds an unusual resource, and that's why it does not criticize White's decision on the 14th move:

15.♕c1? Threatening a devastating check on c8 along with Ng3 and Bg5. ♘e7N loses to 16.♘g3N ♕h4 17.♗g5 ♕b4 18.a3 ♕a5 19.♗xe7 and White's attack is unstoppable. Black has to play 15\. Qc1 15...Nc6! 16.Ng3 Qh4 Is this so bad? 17.Bf5! Yes, it is. White avoids a piece exchange, and next up is Bg4 to try to trap Black's queen. Humans don't play chess like this.

15... ♘e7 16.♗xb5† axb5 17.♕xb5† ♘bc6 18.♕xb7



The game has been transformed. White is now a pawn up, but his initiative has disappeared, and Black is no longer in danger of getting wiped off the board.

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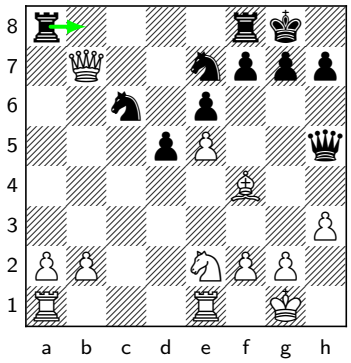

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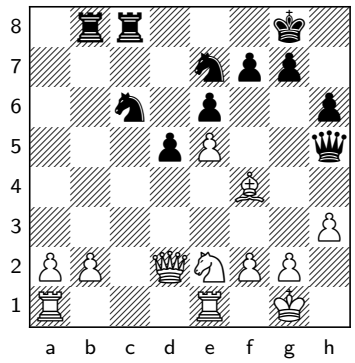
19... ♖fc8 . This puts the rook on an active square and makes it difficult for the queen to get to d2.

20.♕c3 ♖fc8 21.♕d2 h6



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22.♖ac1

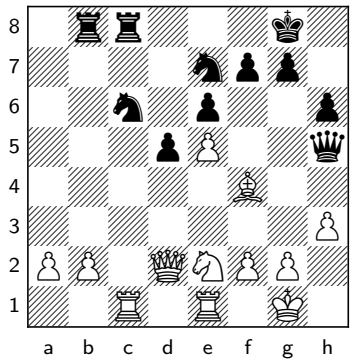
Before taking any drastic measures, White develops the last piece. Morozevich played

22... ♕h4

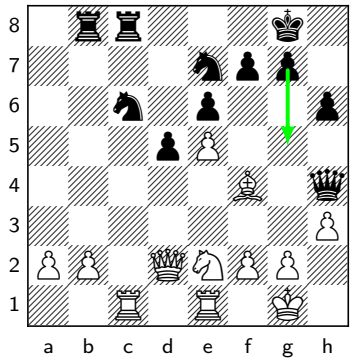
How would you continue as White and why?

22... ♘xe5N 23.♘g3N wins for White.

Grischuk-Morozevich Exercise #1

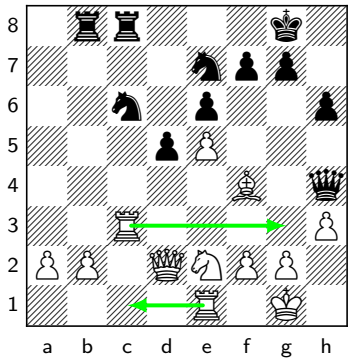


22... ♕h4



White is in principle happy with all exchanges. However, his queen is currently a key defender of the queenside. The queen is defending the b2-pawn and discouraging ...Nb4 and ...Nd3. So, it is too early for White to exchange queens. Relevantly, the idea behind Black's last move is to play ...g5 followed by ...Qb4. How would you continue as White and why?

23.♖c3!



White's worst-placed piece is the e1-rook. Again, if it could choose any square to go to, it would be somewhere on the c-file. From there, it neutralizes counterplay, pressures the c6-knight, and prepares Nd4. The easiest way to achieve this is to move the c1-rook forward to vacate the c1-square for the other rook. Therefore, this is the best move to accomplish White's plan. □ □ 23\. Rc3 23...Nf5 24.g4? Black's active knights were annoying, and this way Grischuk pushes the f5-knight backwards, while also blocking the black queen's access route to the b4-square. However, pushing pawns creates weaknesses, and weaknesses tend to destabilize one's position. 24.Rc3 no longer makes the same sense, as after 24...g5 , the g3-square is controlled by the knight on f5. However, I think natural was 23. Rc3 24.Ng3! , as the knight on f5 is active, unlike the e2-knight. 24...Nfe7 25.Kg2 Ra8? This is a slow move which doesn't add sufficient pressure on White's position. Better was 25...Ng6! 26.Bg3 Qe7 . The e5-pawn is under pressure, and the white king might feel the effects of pushing the g-pawn if the black queen moves to b7. Funnily enough, the queen could also jump to b4, so blocking the fourth rank wasn't effective in stopping her from getting there.

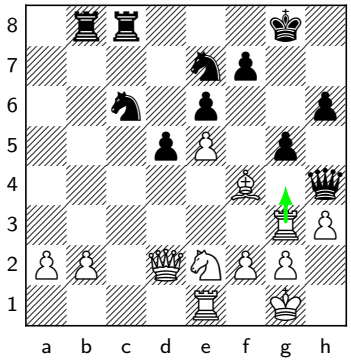
23.♖c2? tries to improve White's worst-placed piece as laid out above, but it doesn't deal with Black's threat, and after g5 24.♗g3 ♕b4 , Black has solved most of his problems.

23.b3? This is a natural and good move, but also a typical super-GM mistake, and it was Grischuk's choice in the game. To his credit, it did render g5? inefficient, since after 24.♗e3 ♘xe5N , the c4-square is controlled, and White can seize a decisive initiative with 25.f4

23... g5

23... ♘f5N 24.♖ec1 is already decisive.

24.♖g3!



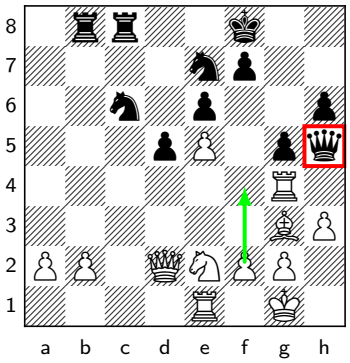
This is the reason White wanted the rook to be on c3 rather than c5. White's threat of Rg4 followed by Bxg5 is impossible to counter adequately.

24.♗g3? ♕b4 is equal.

24... ♔f8

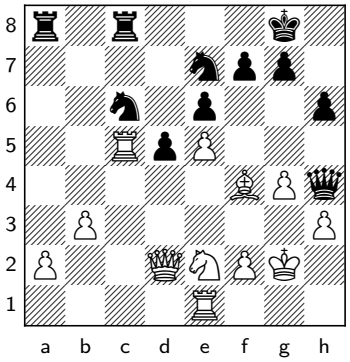
24... ♘g6N loses the queen to 25.♖g4 ♕h5 26.♘g3N .

25.♖g4! ♕h5 26.♗g3



Black's queen has been prevented from going where it wantes to go. Also, White can now consider pushing f2-f4 and going for checkmate. This line also serves as further testament to Black wanting a queen trade.

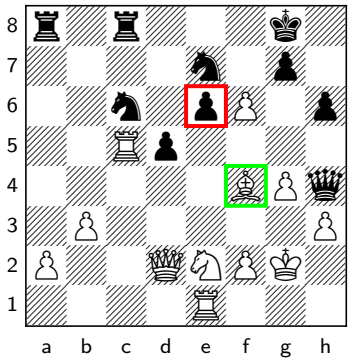
Grischuk-Morozevich Exercise #2



26... f5!

The e1-rook was about to slide to c1, when White would be fully coordinated, and the game would be over. Black needs some counterplay at all costs. This is the next critical moment in the game.

27.exf6!



This feels almost an automatic choice. The idea behind Black's thrust was to loosen the pawn cover around the white king, and taking en passant keeps White's kingside structure solid. Black has made the e6-pawn into a weakness, and the open e-file can be used by White's heavy pieces to attack that weakness. Also, the f4-bishop is opened up. I'm not sure how or why Grischuk did not play it. I suspect he must have miscalculated something, as positional considerations give a clear verdict in favor of taking on f6. Too loosening for White is: Grischuk's decision was surprising:

27.♗g3? ♕g5 28.f4 ♕g6 29.g5 What else? hxg5 30.fxg5 f4 Black's pieces are coming to life quickly.

27.gxf5? ♘xf5N 28.♖ec1 ♘ce7N 29.♖xc8† ♘xc8N This has not been a clean conversion of the extra pawn, and White needs to be worried for his safety. Black can quickly generate a dangerous initiative by moving the c8-knight to g6 via e7, and the rook to f8. Despite his previous missteps, from here onwards Grischuk displayed good technique.

27... ♕xf6 28.♗g3 e5

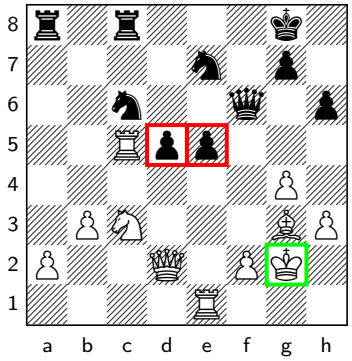
Even worse are the alternatives:

28... ♘g6N 29.♖ec1

28... ♖f8 29.♘f4N

28... ♘e5N 29.♖xc8† ♖xc8 30.♗xe5 ♕xe5 31.♘d4N . In all three cases, Black collapses.

29.♘c3

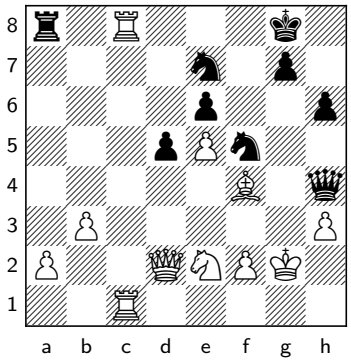


The g3-bishop keeps the white king safe; the center pawns are hanging, and White is a pawn up. The computer thinks pushing b3-b4-b5 first is even stronger, but I like the human move. For example,

29... d4 30.♘e4±N

and White sits comfortably in the driver's seat.

Grischuk-Morozevich Exercise #3



29... ♘xc8

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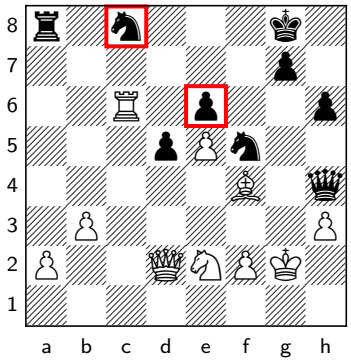
30.♖c6!



White exerts pressure on the e-pawn, which makes it hard for Black to play ...Ng6 with a kingside attack. It also forces a concession from Black. The engine finds the tough but instructive An example of how White could suddenly collapse is Also bad is

30.♗h2? ♕e4† , when there is no 31.f3 because of ♘h4†N .

30.♘d4?N ♘xd4N 31.♕xd4 ♘e7N . Black is threatening both the pawn on a2 and ...Nf5, seizing a sizeable initiative. If White tries to hold on to the a-pawn with 32.a4? , then ♘f5N 33.♕d2 d4 is actually winning for Black according to the machine. The white pawns have a hard time advancing, and Black will soon start combining threats against them and the white king. One example of how to do this would be retreating with ...Qe7 to threaten ...Qb7+.

30... ♕e7?

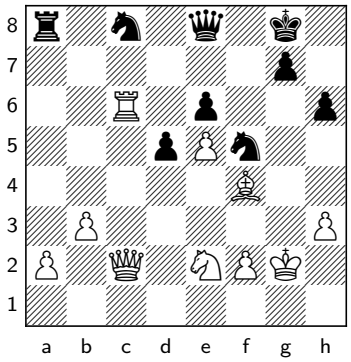
30... ♔f7 is better, but the king blocks the f-file, and after ...Ne7 is met by Rc7, the black king will have to move again to allow the knight to move.

30... ♕d8!! , preparing ...d4 and ...Qd5+, and indirectly protecting e6 without taking the e7-square away from the knight on c8.

31.♕c2 ♕e8 32.a4

What is Black's best way of generating counterplay? We'll see it in our next exercise.

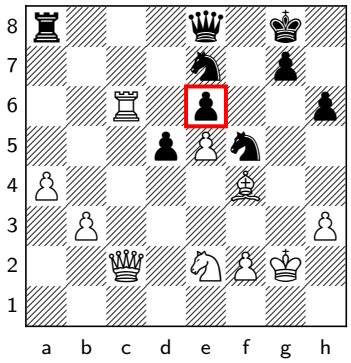
Grischuk-Morozevich Exercise #4



32.a4

We're going a bit off-topic, but this is very instructive. Black missed a very nice idea here. Can you find it?

32... ♘ce7!



This is the move Black wants to play, but it looks like White is stopping it by attacking the e-pawn... This is an example of the Shankland Rule – what happens if I play it anyway? Morozevich played the automatic

32... ♕g6†? 33.♗g3 ♘ce7N but Grischuk's 34.♘f4N highlights that Black lost time by moving his queen to g6.

33.♖xe6?

Yes, this is a mistake, but we needn't check anything else. The point is that Black knows the knight must go to e7, while the queen's destination is still unclear.

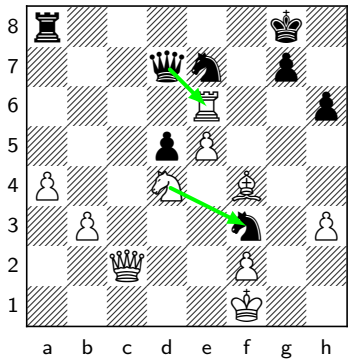
33... ♘h4†!

33... ♖c8? fails to 34.♕d3 .

34.♔f1

I suspect Morozevich only considered bringing the queen to h5 in some capacity, but a quiet move is absolutely devastating.

34... ♕d7! 35.♘d4 ♘f3!



White's position is falling apart.

Alexander Grischuk-Alexander Morozevich, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011

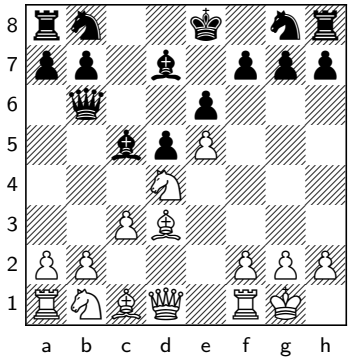
This game was played in the 2011 World Cup, which was the first World Cup I participated in. It features a number of mistakes from both sides. Despite this, it is a good illustration of our themes. On gaining an extra pawn, White strove to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, but his execution of this was only partially successful. Hence, the game also illustrates the opportunities for counterplay that this provided to

Black, although these were largely not taken advantage of.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♗d7 5.♘f3 ♕b6 6.♗d3 cxd4 7.♘xd4

7.O-O ♘c6N 8.cxd4 ♘xd4N 9.♘xd4N ♕xd4 10.♘c3N is a better version for Black. The dark-squared bishop is an important defender.

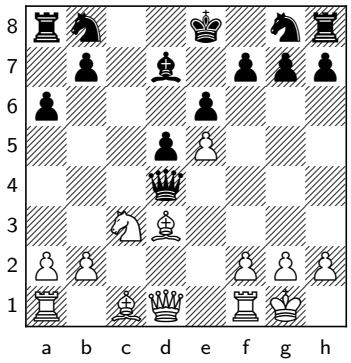
7... ♗c5 8.O-O



Grischuk simply ditches the pawn.

8.♕g4 is preferred by the engine.

8... ♗xd4 9.cxd4 ♕xd4 10.♘c3 a6



Black understandably wants to keep unfriendly pieces out of the b5-square. This is just about playable. □ Black cannot get away with □ The prescribed engine solution is

10... ♕xe5? . After 11.♖e1 ♕d6 12.♕g4 White is winning.

10... ♘c6N , but this is not really something one could go for without being excellently prepared. Against White's relatively obvious attacking ideas, Black only holds by performing a bit of computer magic. One critical line goes: 11.♘b5N ♕xe5 12.♖e1 ♕b8 13.♕g4 ♔f8 14.♗f4 e5 15.♕xd7 ♘f6N Black regains the piece with approximate equality.

11.♖e1 ♗c6

Black is pushing his luck. The most natural move is best, so

11... ♘e7N . The reason Morozevich didn't play it was probably 12.♗e3 ♕xe5 13.♗c5 . However, this isn't as terrible for Black as it may seem at first: ♕f6 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♘xd5N ♕d6 16.♕h5 ♔f8 17.♗e4 exd5 18.♗xd5 ♕g6 White is only slightly better, and Black should hold with some more accurate defensive moves.

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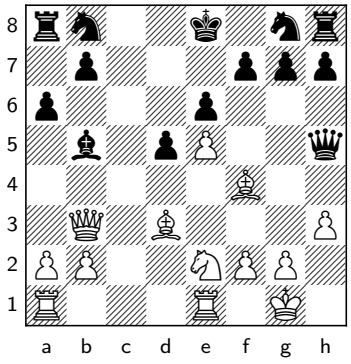

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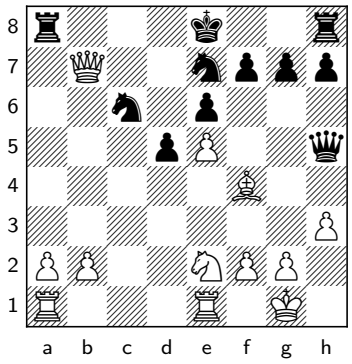

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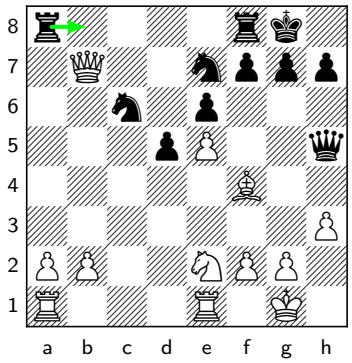

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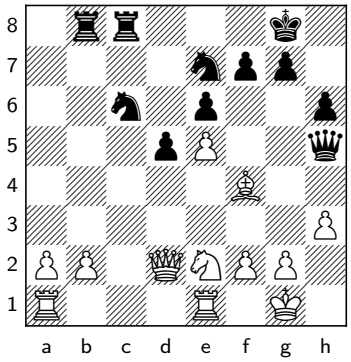

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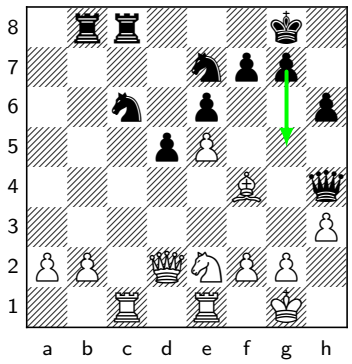

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23.♖c2? tries to improve White's worst-placed piece as laid out above, but it

doesn't deal with Black's threat, and after g5 24.♗g3 ♕b4 , Black has solved most of his problems.

23.♖c3 when ♘f5N 24.♖ec1 is already decisive. 23\. Rc3 23...g5 24.Bg3? Qb4 is equal. 24.Rg3! This is the reason White wanted the rook to be on c3 rather than c5. White's threat of Rg4 followed by Bxg5 is impossible to counter adequately. 24...Kf8 (24...Ng6 loses the queen to 25.Rg4 Qh5 26.Ng3) 25.Rg4! Qh5 26.Bg3 Black's queen has been prevented from going where it wants to go. Also, White can now consider pushing f2-f4 and going for checkmate. This line also serves as further testament to Black wanting a queen trade.

23... ♘f5

To his credit, Grischuk's move did render

23... g5? inefficient, since after 24.♗e3 ♘xe5N the c4-square is controlled, and White can seize a decisive initiative with 25.f4 .

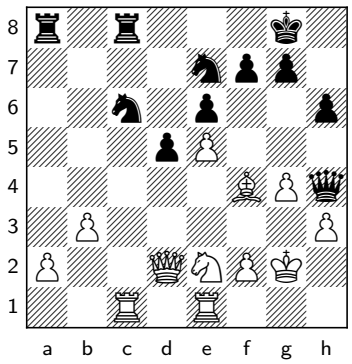
24.g4?

Black's active knights were annoying, and this way Grischuk pushes the f5-knight backwards, while also blocking the black queen's access route to the b4-square. However, pushing pawns creates weaknesses, and weaknesses tend to destabilize one's position. But I think natural was

24.♖c3 no longer makes the same sense, as after g5 the g3-square is controlled by the knight on f5.

24.♘g3N , as the knight on f5 is active, unlike the e2-knight.

24... ♘fe7 25.♔g2 ♖a8?



This is a slow move which doesn't add sufficient pressure on White's position. Better was

25... ♘g6N 26.♗g3 ♕e7 . The e5-pawn is under pressure, and the white king might feel the effects of pushing the g-pawn if the black queen moves to b7. Funnily enough, the queen could also jump to b4, so blocking the fourth rank wasn't effective in stopping her from getting there.

26.♖c5 f5!

The e1-rook was about to slide to c1, when White would be fully coordinated, and the game would be over. Black needs some counterplay at all costs. This is the next critical moment in the game.

26... ♘g6N wouldn't work now due to 27.♖ec1

27.gxf5?

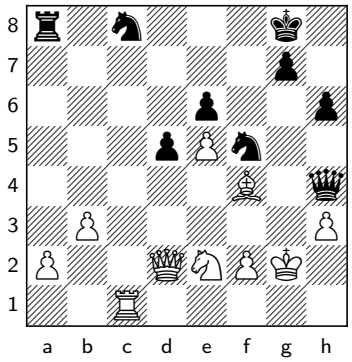
A surprising decision by Grischuk. Too loosening for White is: But Even worse are

27. gxf5 28...Ng6 29.Rec1 , 27. gxf5 28...Rf8 29.Nf4 and 27. gxf5 28...Ne5 29.Rxc8+ Rxc8 30.Bxe5 Qxe5 31.Nd4 . In all three cases, Black collapses.

27.♗g3? ♕g5 28.f4 ♕g6 29.g5 What else? hxg5 30.fxg5 f4 Black's pieces are coming to life quickly.

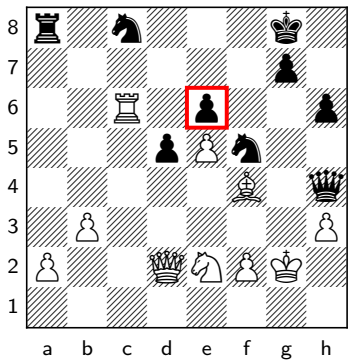
27.exf6 feels almost an automatic choice. The idea behind Black's thrust was to loosen the pawn cover around the white king, and taking en passant keeps White's kingside structure solid. Black has made the e6-pawn into a weakness, and the open e-file can be used by White's heavy pieces to attack that weakness. Also, the f4-bishop is opened up. I'm not sure how or why Grischuk did not play it. I suspect he must have miscalculated something, as positional considerations give a clear verdict in favor of taking on f6. The game could continue: ♕xf6 28.♗g3 e5 29.♘c3N The g3-bishop keeps the white king safe; the center pawns are hanging, and White is a pawn up. The computer thinks pushing b3-b4-b5 first is even stronger, but I like the human move. For example, d4 30.♘e4±N White sits comfortably in the driver's seat.

27... ♘xf5 28.♖ec1 ♘ce7 29.♖xc8† ♘xc8



This has not been a clean conversion of the extra pawn, and White needs to be worried for his safety. Black can quickly generate a dangerous initiative by moving the c8-knight to g6 via e7, and the rook to f8. Despite his previous missteps, from here onwards Grischuk displayed good technique.

30.♖c6!



White exerts pressure on the e-pawn, which makes it hard for Black to play ...Ng6 with a kingside attack. It also forces a concession from Black. An example of how White could suddenly collapse is Also bad is

30.♗h2? ♕e4† , when there is no 31.f3 because of ♘h4†N .

30.♘d4?N ♘xd4N 31.♕xd4 ♘e7N . Black is threatening both the pawn on a2 and ...Nf5, seizing a sizeable initiative. If White tries to hold on to the a-pawn with 32.a4? , then ♘f5N 33.♕d2 d4 is actually winning for Black according to the machine. The white pawns have a hard time advancing, and Black will soon start combining threats against them and the white king. One example of how to do this would be retreating with ...Qe7 to threaten ...Qb7+.

30... ♕e7?!

The engine finds the tough but instructive

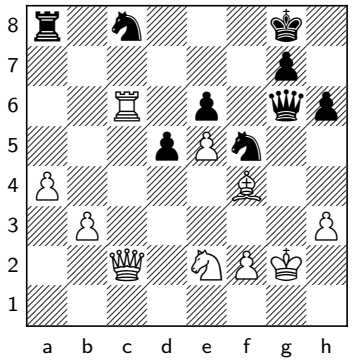
30... ♔f7 is better, but the king blocks the f-file, and after ...Ne7 is met by Rc7, the black king will have to move again to allow the knight to move.

30... ♕d8!! , preparing ...d4 and ...Qd5+, and indirectly protecting e6 without taking the e7-square away from the knight on c8.

31.♕c2 ♕e8 32.a4

What is Black's best way of generating counterplay?

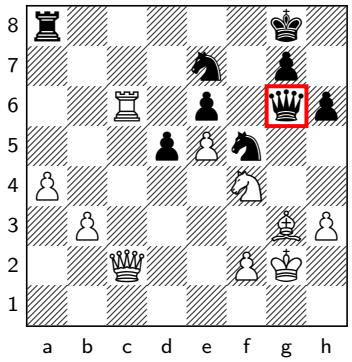
32... ♕g6†?



The move Black wants to play is

32... ♘ce7N , but it looks like White is stopping it by attacking the e-pawn.. This is an example of the Shankland Rule – what happens if I play it anyway? 33.♖xe6? Yes, this is a mistake, but we needn't check anything else. ♖c8? fails to 34.♕d3 , but after 33. Rxe6 33...Nh4+! 34.Kf1 , I suspect Morozevich only considered bringing the queen to h5 in some capacity, but a quiet move is absolutely devastating. 34...Qd7! 35.Nd4 Nf3! White's position is falling apart.

33.♗g3 ♘ce7 34.♘f4



Grischuk's highlights that Black lost time by moving his queen to g6.

34... ♕f7

□ The move Black wants to play to keep his initiative on the kingside is White should play 35... Qf7 35.Rc3 and the game goes on. □

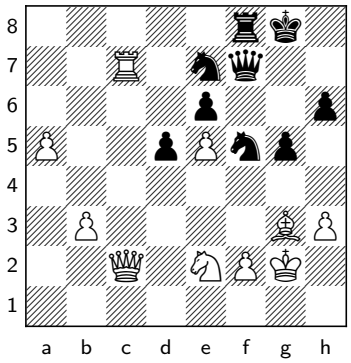
34... ♕g5 . It looks like it is prevented by 35.♘xe6?N , but what happens if we play it anyway? The answer is

35.♖xe6 ♖c8 , then 36.♕d3 is the only square for the queen that doesn't drop anything. After d4 Black is threatening ...Rc3 and gets a nice initiative.

35... ♕g6 and White loses material. If

34... ♕xg3† is cute but results in a lost endgame for Black after 35.fxg3 ♘e3†N 36.♔f2 ♘xc2N 37.♖xc2 ♖b8 38.♘xe6N ♖xb3 .

35.♖c7 g5 36.♘e2 ♖f8 37.a5?!



This allowed Black an unnecessary chance, but it was hard to find. Better was

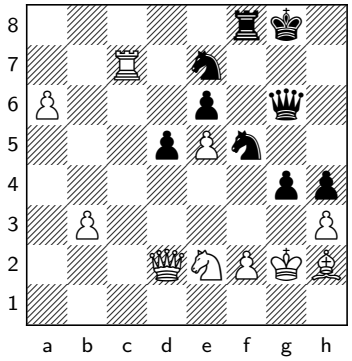
37.♕d3 , preventing ...d4. White has everything under control and can start pushing the pawns next.

37... h5?

Black could have saved the game:

37... d4 38.a6 ♘e3†N 39.fxe3 ♕f1† 40.♔h2 d3 41.♕xd3 ♖f2† 42.♗xf2 ♕xf2† 43.♔h1 ♕f1† With a perpetual.

38.♕d2! ♕g6 39.a6 h4 40.♗h2 g4



The position looks extremely scary around White's king. At the same time, evaluating which exchanges or what the pawns will do long term is unnecessary. White clearly will make a queen without much of a fight. Therefore, his one and only priority is to keep his king safe. With a couple of good moves, Grischuk cleaned up. I suppose it was a bit fortunate that this was his first move after time control.

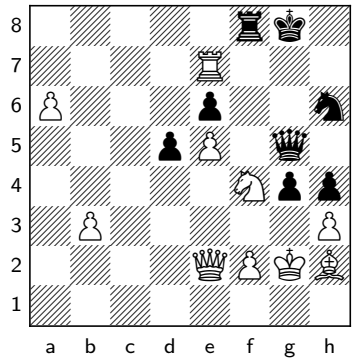
41.♘f4! ♕g5 42.♕e2!

Nerves of steel; White's king will be absolutely safe on h3, and the queen is coming to g4 soon enough.

42... ♘h6

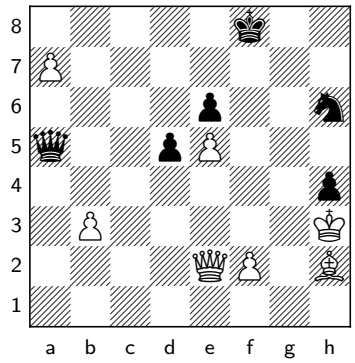
42... g3 43.♕g4 is curtains.

43.♖xe7!



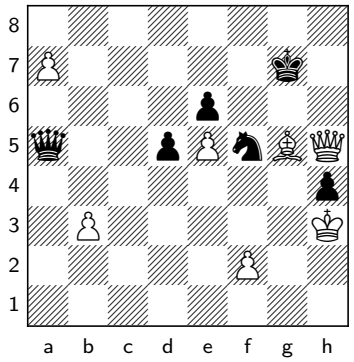
White starts swapping off Black's attacking pieces. The rest wasn't notable.

43... gxh3† 44.♔xh3 ♕xe7 45.♘g6 ♕b4 46.♘xf8 ♔xf8 47.a7 ♕a5



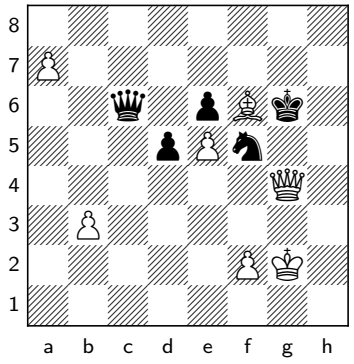
To shamelessly plug Small Steps 2 Success (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) once more: «The best way to push through a far advanced lone passed pawn is often to attack the enemy king on the other side of the board.» Grischuk displays this concept beautifully:

48.♗f4 ♘f5 49.♕h5! ♔g7 50.♕g5† ♔h7 51.♕h5† ♔g7 52.♗g5!



Mate is coming.

52... ♕c3† 53.♔g2 h3† 54.♕xh3 ♕c6 55.♗f6† ♔g6 56.♕g4†



This game was a bit sloppy. While Grischuk did eventually win, I think he could have done himself a big favor by playing 27... f5 27.exf6! when he had the chance, which would have done a very good job of consolidating the position and restricting counterplay.

Ray Robson-Sam Shankland Introduction

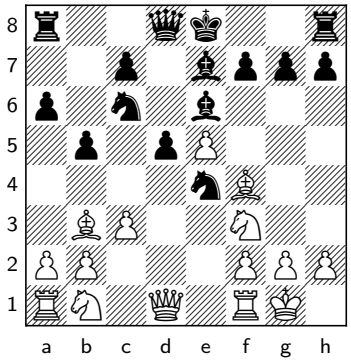
One of my most cherished memories is winning the 2018 US Championship with

the highest performance rating seen since Fischer's iconic 11-0 victory in 1963. One of my key wins came in round 4, when I defeated Ray Robson with the black pieces, and had to convert an extra pawn to do so.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.O-O ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3

This is the main move.

9... ♗e7 10.♗f4!?



I did not recall checking this move, but when I got back to the room after the game, I saw that it was part of my analysis.

10.♘bd2N leads to the main lines.

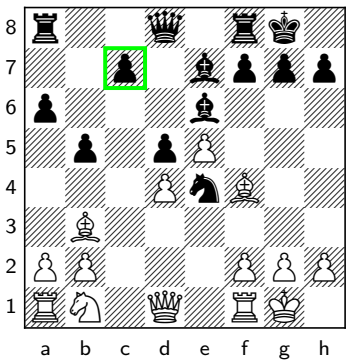
10... O-O 11.♘d4 ♘xd4!?

I was improvising over the board at this point, and I came up with the ...Nd6 idea that you'll see executed below. It is probably not enough for equality. The reason is structural; White will take the half-open c-file and pressure the weak pawn on c7. If Black wants to move the attacked knight from c6 then, compared with the knight retreat to b8, Black retains more options with

11... ♘a5N . This is because the best square for this knight is to return to c6 after having played ...c5. The knight on a5 has more options than on b8, such as taking the bishop on b3 or moving to c4. But White is still much better after 12.♗c2 c5? 13.♘xe6N fxe6 14.♕g4 . Black is in trouble on the light squares, and the e4-knight is almost trapped.

11... ♕d7 was a better way to fight for equality. Black does not need to spend time moving the knight away from c6, where it is reasonably placed. Losing the bishop pair should not be a significant issue for Black due to the strong knight on e4.

12.cxd4



Black is left with a horrible structure in the long term, and he should be looking for direct counterplay. The moves ...c5 and ...f6 are screaming to be played, and I chose the right one:

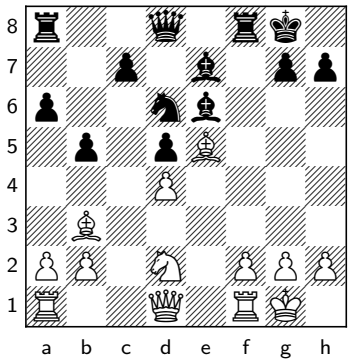
12... f6!

The alternative

12... c5? runs into 13.f3 . and Black is in some trouble. For example: after ♘g5N

14.h4 , White wins a piece. 13. f3 13...cxd4 is a typical sacrifice that sometimes works in the Open Spanish, but this is not one of those moments. 14.fxe4 dxe4 15.Nd2 A piece is a piece, and White should ultimately prevail. Black is not able to create any direct counterplay or set his central pawns in motion.

13.♘d2 fxe5 14.♗xe5 ♘d6!



Keeping the position complex. The knight blocks the bishop's path to the c7-pawn and eyes the c4-square. Trades on c4 would shut down the c-file. After

14... ♘xd2?N 15.♕xd2 , White has the simple plan of doubling rooks on the c-file and applying pressure to the immobile weak c7-pawn. White will ultimately be able to advance his pawns on the kingside, and his bishop on e5 is strong.

15.♗c2 ♕d7!

Developing a new piece and preparing for ...Nc4 next. The back rank is cleared to enable the last piece to come into play with ...Rae8. The move Black wants to play to challenge the e5-bishop and threaten the b2-pawn is Also inadequate is

15... ♘c4?N . Unfortunately, this is a case of right idea, wrong timing. After 16.♕h5 Black is mated.

15... ♗f5? 16.♗xf5 ♖xf5 17.♕c2 . Black is in trouble. Trading these bishops works in White's favor at least in the short term, as the c-file is unblocked. Attacking down the c-file is White's best plan.

16.♖e1?!

White had several good moves, but White loses time with:

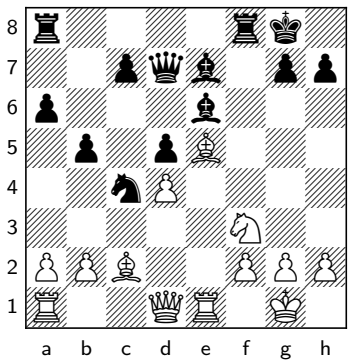
16.b3 appeals to me the most. Black will never get ...Nc4 in and should be a bit worse, for example: ♘f7N 17.♕h5 ♘g5N 18.♕e2 I prefer White.

16.♕h5 ♗f5 17.♗xf5 ♕xf5 18.♕xf5 ♖xf5 19.b3 Otherwise, ...Nc4 would come. c5 Alleviating any positional danger down the c-file. 20.dxc5 ♖xe5 21.cxd6 ♗xd6 Black should hold here. The d-pawn is more of a passed pawn than a weakness with queens off the board, and moving the king to e6 to defend the pawn is possible.

16... ♘c4!

This had to be calculated thoroughly, but indeed none of White's tricks on the e-file work.

17.♘f3?!



This is not terrible, but it was played with a faulty idea in mind. White cannot go pawn-grabbing: Better was

17.♗xc7? ♗g4 18.f3 ♕xc7 19.fxg4 ♗b4 Black wins material.

17.♘xc4N dxc4 18.♖e3 . White can dream of attacking and has the somewhat more pleasant side of equality. Still, I would not be too worried with Black.

17... ♗g4!

Threatening ...Bxf3, and the knight cannot be defended. White must clear his queen off the d1 square with a gain of tempo, but he chose the wrong way to do so. But not

17... ♘xb2?N 18.♕b1 and White wins.

17... ♘xe5N 18.♘xe5N ♕e8 to stop Qh5, but even something like 19.♘g6N is very dangerous.

18.♕d3?

I suspect Ray saw this position and automatically played ...Bf5 for Black in his calculations. It is a natural move, but entirely wrong. Once I made my move, his body language quickly began to change as he realized he was much worse. The best try was to put the queen behind the bishop instead: B) 18\. Qd3 18...g6! An incredibly difficult computer solution. The point is to lose the g-pawn rather than the h-pawn. 19.b3! is too engine-oriented to be considered relevant. 19.Bxg6 Bf6! This is Black's cleanest option. He really is threatening to take on g6, as well as take on f3 when White's kingside will be much more compromised than Black's. The computer offers only one route to equality. (19...Bb4?! is the machine's choice, but it looks much less clear: 20.Ng5 Bf5 21.Bxf5 Qxf5 22.f4 Bxe1 23.Qxe1 Stockfish and its nerves of steel claim Black is just better, but it looks dangerous to me. I prefer the more human solution.) After 20.Bd3 Bxf3 , White is in big trouble, for instance 21.Bxc4 bxc4 22.gxf3 Kh8! , and White's king starts feeling the heat. 18\. Qd3 20.b3! Bxf3 21.bxc4! hxg6 22.gxf3 dxc4 23.Qxg6+ Qg7 24.Qxg7+ Bxg7 I definitely prefer Black, but the game goes on.

18.♕b1 The position is massively complicated, and nearly impossible for humans to play. – A) My plan during the game was ♗xf3 . Then after 19.♗xh7† ♔h8 20.gxf3 ♖xf3 , the machine insists on equality, but the position is obviously tense and either side could lose immediately with a single imprecise decision.

18... g6!

It is a little counterintuitive to weaken the dark squares around the king, but it is fully justified. White faces two powerful threats in ...Nxb2 and ...Bxf3, and he cannot prevent both

of them. Not only does ...Nxb2 collect a pawn, but the knight will also then be able to return permanently to c4, protecting the c7-pawn. Furthermore, ...Bxf3 would shatter White's structure and allow Black to take on e5, then follow up with ...Bd6 and ...Qh3. As we saw above, with the queen on b1, White would at least be able to take on g6, but with the queen in front of the bishop, there is no way out. After

18... ♗f5? 19.♕c3 , White is ready for b2-b3 and has a nice edge.

19.b3

I expected After

19.♗g3 during the game, though after ♗xf3 20.gxf3 ♘xb2N 21.♕e2 ♗b4 , White's position is a train wreck.

19.♘d2N , Black has any number of good continuations, of which I prefer ♗f5 due to its simplicity: 20.♕e2 ♘xb2N 21.♖ab1 ♘c4N Black is a clean pawn up.

19... ♗xf3! 20.bxc4

Trying to keep material balanced with

20.gxf3? would not have helped: ♘xe5N Black is absolutely winning thanks to the pawn structure. After 21.♖xe5

21.dxe5 ♕e6 White's 4 against 2 majority on the kingside is rather useless, while Black will easily crash through with ...c5-...c4.

21... ♗d6 , the queen is coming to h3, and Black wins on the spot.

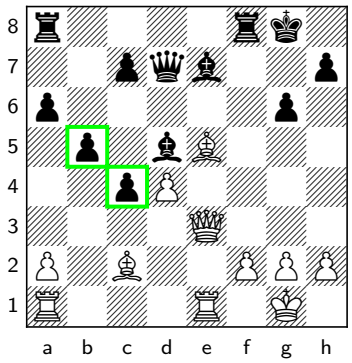
20... dxc4!

Black clears the a8-h1 diagonal, in particular the d5-square for the bishop. The d-file opens to potentially threaten the d4-pawn. The resulting pawn mass is more flexible if compared with the recapture with the b-pawn.

20... ♕g4? allows White to completely flip the script with 21.♗g3 , threatening both black bishops.

20... bxc4? 21.♕e3 is nice for Black, but not nearly as convincing as the game continuation. It's a bummer that the bishop does not get the d5-square.

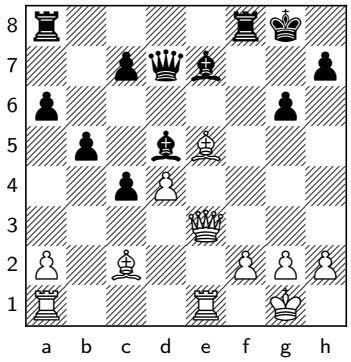
21.♕e3 ♗d5



The dust has settled, and Black is much better. He has won a critical pawn and improved his structure. Still, his king lacks cover, and if White is able to get h4-h5 through, he will create a lot of counterplay, underlining his powerful e5-bishop. The first step towards converting the extra pawn is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and accurate play will be needed to nip any attacking hopes in the bud. Once the position is stabilized, the remaining steps should be largely irrelevant. Black's queenside pawn mass will not face any particular resistance in the long

term, and simply pushing the pawns forward will be more than enough to win the game.

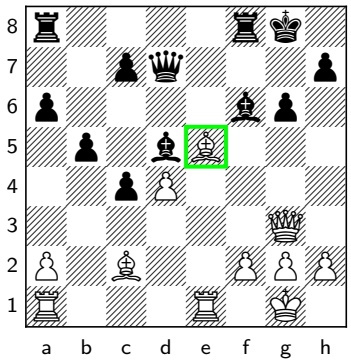
Robson-Shankland Exercise #1



22.♕g3

The first step towards converting the extra pawn is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and accurate play will be needed to nip any attacking hopes in the bud. With that in mind, how should Black play?

22... ♗f6!



First things first – contest White's most menacingly placed attacking piece! But Black does not necessarily want to exchange on e5; this would enable White to get his rook to e5 and double rooks on the e-file. Or White can recapture with the d-pawn and play f4-f5 with definite counterplay. Rather, Black would be happy to leave the tension with the bishops as is for the moment. The first rule of calculation is to always examine all checks and captures:

22... ♗d6? 23.♗xg6 ♗xe5 24.♖xe5 hxg6 25.♖xd5 An immediate draw. Moving the bishop to f6 instead prevents this by blocking the diagonal of the e5-bishop. Not

25.♕xg6† ♕g7 26.♕xg7† ♔xg7 27.♖xd5 ♖ad8 , when Black's pawns are stronger.

23.♗xg6

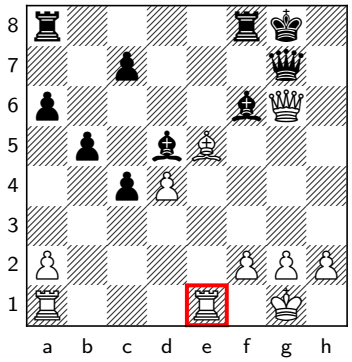
Black is ready for this. Ray's

23.h4 was not subtle. White clearly wants h4-h5. We'll come back here in our next exercise.

23... hxg6

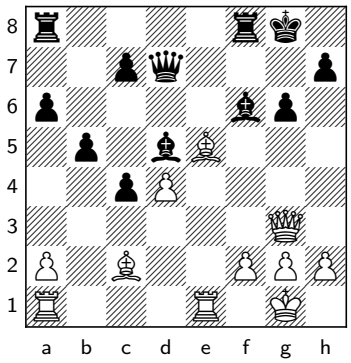
Now we are not forced to trade on e5 first.

24.♕xg6† ♕g7−+



White's rook hasn't joined the action, and Black is simply winning.

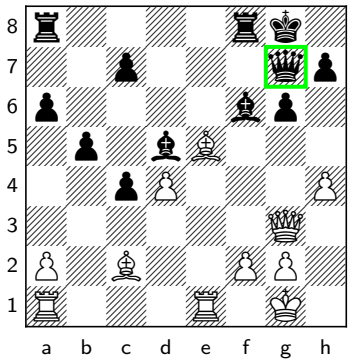
Robson-Shankland Exercise #2



23.h4

This is not subtle. White clearly wants h4-h5. How should Black react?

23... ♕g7!



Another good move, stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. Black prevents h4-h5 and gets the queen to her best post. Also bad is

23... ♗e6? with the idea of ...Bf5 loses a lot of time and allows h4-h5.

23... ♔h8? 24.h5 gxh5 25.♕g5 , when Black needs to slam the brakes: ♕g7

25... ♕c6? even loses to 26.♕h6 ♖f7 27.♗xh7

26.♗xf6 ♕xf6 27.♕xd5 ♕xf2† is a draw by perpetual check on f2 and h4.

24.h5?

This has been defused. Understandably, Ray didn't go for the h-pawn push and played

24.♖e3 instead. We'll continue in our next exercise.

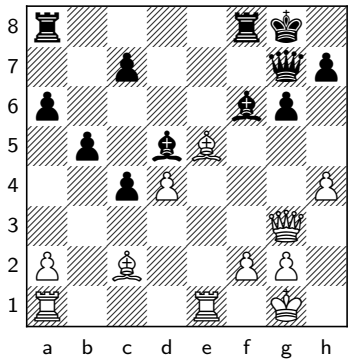
24... gxh5!

Black can safely take the pawn thanks to the well-placed queen on g7, and all White has done is open up lines for counterplay against his own king. For example:

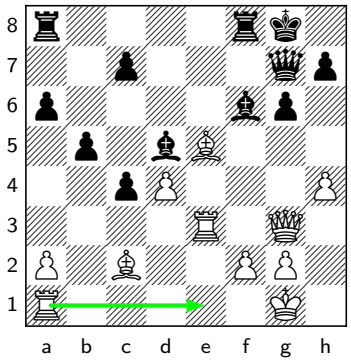
25.♕h3 ♕g4

White needs to trade queens to avoid being mated, but he is obviously lost in the endgame as well.

Robson-Shankland Exercise #3

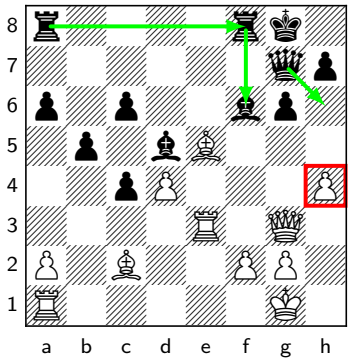


24.♖e3



What's the best way to stabilize Black's position?

24... c6!



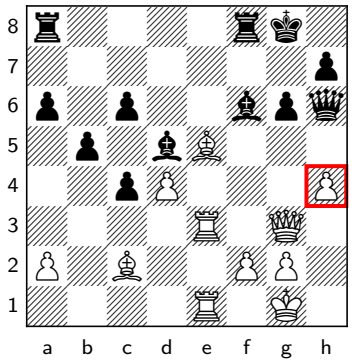
A tough move, but a strong one. Every instinct I had was telling me to activate my a8-rook, but in fact, it is more important to keep a secure structure in the center. Black plans ...Qh6 next, which will force White to take on f6 due to the threat of ...Bxh4, and then with the queen on h6, h4-h5 is never on the cards. I don't want to trade bishops due to To be clear, it's not like

24... ♗xe5 25.♖xe5 c6 26.h5 and I can no longer take on h5 due to Rg5. My king is in bad shape. I would love to trade queens, but that's just impossible.

24... ♕h6 was also possible, threatening ...Bxh4 and mate, and forcing White to trade the bishops on Black's terms. I disliked the forced 25.♗xf6 ♖xf6 26.♕e5 , and somehow completely missed the simple ♖d6 . Nevertheless. this final rook move is a little awkward. The game move is clearly stronger.

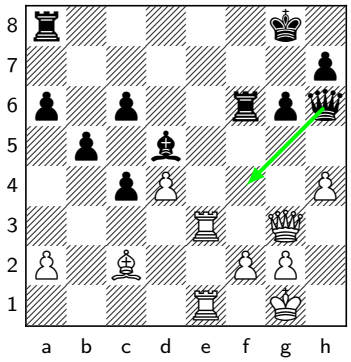
24... ♖ae8? isn't better for Black after 25.♖ae1 . But the rook on e8 doesn't help me much to make progress and could even be used by White as a tactical target, as could also happen with the currently unprotected bishop on d5. The game move is both safer and more productive in terms of helping me formulate an active plan.

25.♖ae1 ♕h6!



White does not want to capture f6, since it badly weakens his control of the all-important f4-square – but what choice does he have? The threat of ...Bxh4 is massive.

26.♗xf6 ♖xf6



I was satisfied with the progress of the last few moves, and I started thinking that if Black can get his queen to f4, he should win easily. From there, the queen will be the boss of the kingside and the center, and she cannot be dislodged because any queen trade will immediately transpose into a won rook ending. The game continued

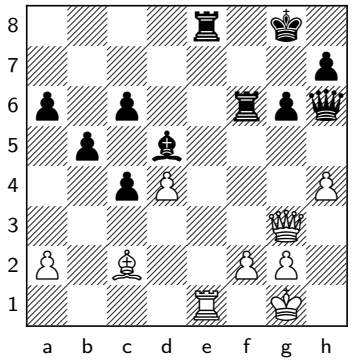
27.f3

27.♖e8† ♖xe8 The rook from a8 participates by taking on e8. There was no need to lose a tempo moving it previously. There were more pressing matters. 28.♖xe8† Black needs to find a way to get out of the checks. It can be done, but accurate calculation is required. Let's move on to our next exercise.

27... ♕f4

would win routinely. White will never be able to make any threats, and Black's position is fully stabilized.

Robson-Shankland Exercise #4



28.♖xe8†

Black needs to find a way to get out of the checks. It can be done, but accurate calculation is required.

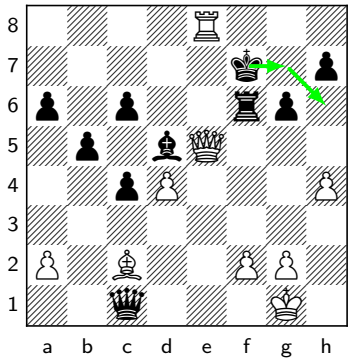
28... ♔f7!

After

28... ♖f8? 29.♖xf8† ♕xf8 30.h5 White gets annoying amounts of counterplay.

28... ♔g7 works, but in an inhuman way. The text is much more natural: 29.♕c7† ♗f7 30.♕e7 ♕c1† 31.♗d1 ♕xd1† 32.♔h2 Apparently Black wins with g5 which, of course, I did not consider. The text was by far the simplest route to a full point.

29.♕e5 ♕c1†!



Black clears the h6 square to hide on. The careless

29... ♔g7? 30.♕e7† ♖f7 31.♕e5† is a draw. Black does not have access to the h6-square for this king.

30.♗d1

I was very happy with myself for my next move:

30... ♔g7!

White only gets a couple of checks, and then Black's queen can come to f4, easily consolidating and winning. I certainly did not need to take the bishop to have a winning material advantage - the extra pawn is already quite sufficient. Keeping my queen on c1 to control the c1-h6 diagonal and stop all the counterplay is far more important than going piece hunting. It turns out taking the bishop was indeed winning, but only with an entirely ridiculous computer sequence:

30... ♕xd1† 31.♔h2 ♖e6 32.♖xe6 ♗xe6 33.♕c7† Black needs eight only moves in a row. ♔e8 34.♕b8† ♔e7 35.♕c7† ♗d7 36.♕e5† ♔d8 37.♕b8† ♗c8 38.♕d6† ♔e8 39.♕xc6†

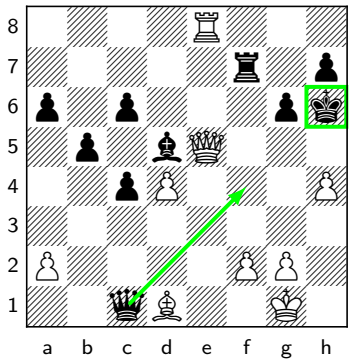
39.♕e5† ♔d7 40.♕g7† ♔d8 41.♕f8† ♔c7 42.♕e7† ♗d7 Finally, the king hides. Why bother with any of this when the game move exists?

39... ♗d7 40.♕e4† ♔d8 41.♕a8† ♔e7 42.♕e4† ♗e6 43.♕b7† ♔f6 or

31.♕e7†

31.♖e7† is easily met with ♗f7 and ...Qf4 coming next.

31... ♖f7 32.♕e5† ♔h6



This is why I did not take his bishop. Black's king does not have to worry about any checks on the c1-h6 diagonal.

33.♕e1 ♕f4

As soon as Black plays ...Qf4 safely, the game is over.

34.g4 ♔g7

The last important move, making sure that there are no sneaky tricks involving Rg8: no checks, no lines needed, no discussion. Black has stabilized the position, and the game wins itself.

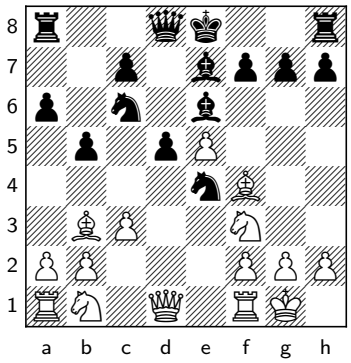
Ray Robson-Sam Shankland, Saint Louis 2018

One of my most cherished memories is winning the 2018 US Championship with the highest performance rating seen since Fischer's iconic 11-0 victory in 1963. One of my key wins came in round 4, when I defeated Ray Robson with the black pieces, and had to convert an extra pawn to do so.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.O-O ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3

This is the main move.

9... ♗e7 10.♗f4!?



I did not recall checking this move, but when I got back to the room after the game, I saw that it was part of my analysis.

10.♘bd2N leads to the main lines.

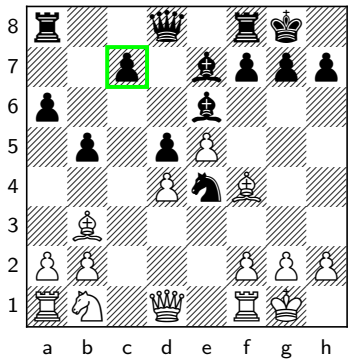
10... O-O 11.♘d4 ♘xd4!?

I was improvising over the board at this point, and I came up with the ...Nd6 idea that you'll see executed below. It is probably not enough for equality. The reason is structural; White will take the half-open c-file and pressure the weak pawn on c7. If Black wants to move the attacked knight from c6 then, compared with the knight retreat to b8, Black retains more options with

11... ♘a5N . This is because the best square for this knight is to return to c6 after having played ...c5. The knight on a5 has more options than on b8, such as taking the bishop on b3 or moving to c4. But White is still much better after 12.♗c2 c5? 13.♘xe6N fxe6 14.♕g4 . Black is in trouble on the light squares, and the e4-knight is almost trapped.

11... ♕d7 was a better way to fight for equality. Black does not need to spend time moving the knight away from c6, where it is reasonably placed. Losing the bishop pair should not be a significant issue for Black due to the strong knight on e4.

12.cxd4



Black is left with a horrible structure in the long term, and he should be looking for direct counterplay. The moves ...c5 and ...f6 are screaming to be played, and I chose the right one:

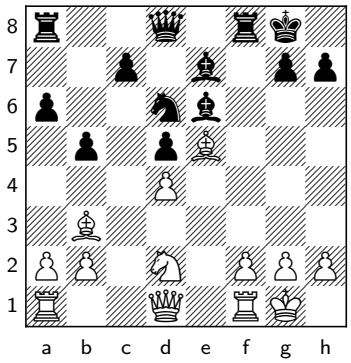
12... f6!

The alternative

12... c5? runs into 13.f3 . and Black is in some trouble. For example: after ♘g5N 14.h4 , White wins a piece. 13. f3 13...cxd4 is a typical sacrifice that sometimes works in the Open Spanish, but this is not one of those moments. 14.fxe4 dxe4 15.Nd2 A piece is a piece, and White should ultimately

prevail. Black is not able to create any direct counterplay or set his central pawns in motion.

13.♘d2 fxe5 14.♗xe5 ♘d6!



Keeping the position complex. The knight blocks the bishop's path to the c7-pawn and eyes the c4-square. Trades on c4 would shut down the c-file. After

14... ♘xd2?N 15.♕xd2 , White has the simple plan of doubling rooks on the c-file and applying pressure to the immobile weak c7-pawn. White will ultimately be able to advance his pawns on the kingside, and his bishop on e5 is strong.

15.♗c2 ♕d7!

Developing a new piece and preparing for ...Nc4 next. The back rank is cleared to enable the last piece to come into play with ...Rae8. The move Black wants to play to challenge the e5-bishop and threaten the b2-pawn is Also inadequate is

15... ♘c4?N . Unfortunately, this is a case of right idea, wrong timing. After 16.♕h5 Black is mated.

15... ♗f5? 16.♗xf5 ♖xf5 17.♕c2 . Black is in trouble. Trading these bishops works in White's favor at least in the short term, as the c-file is unblocked. Attacking down the c-file is White's best plan.

16.♖e1?!

White had several good moves, but White loses time with:

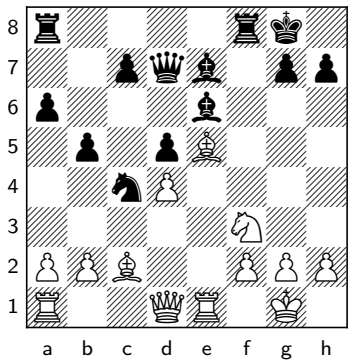
16.b3 appeals to me the most. Black will never get ...Nc4 in and should be a bit worse, for example: ♘f7N 17.♕h5 ♘g5N 18.♕e2 I prefer White.

16.♕h5 ♗f5 17.♗xf5 ♕xf5 18.♕xf5 ♖xf5 19.b3 Otherwise, ...Nc4 would come. c5 Alleviating any positional danger down the c-file. 20.dxc5 ♖xe5 21.cxd6 ♗xd6 Black should hold here. The d-pawn is more of a passed pawn than a weakness with queens off the board, and moving the king to e6 to defend the pawn is possible.

16... ♘c4!

This had to be calculated thoroughly, but indeed none of White's tricks on the e-file work.

17.♘f3?!



This is not terrible, but it was played with a faulty idea in mind. White cannot go pawn-grabbing: Better was

17.♗xc7? ♗g4 18.f3 ♕xc7 19.fxg4 ♗b4 Black wins material.

17.♘xc4N dxc4 18.♖e3 . White can dream of attacking and has the somewhat more pleasant side of equality. Still, I would not be too worried with Black.

17... ♗g4!

Threatening ...Bxf3, and the knight cannot be defended. White must clear his queen off the d1 square with a gain of tempo, but he chose the wrong way to do so. But not

17... ♘xb2?N 18.♕b1 and White wins.

17... ♘xe5N 18.♘xe5N ♕e8 to stop Qh5, but even something like 19.♘g6N is very dangerous.

18.♕d3?

I suspect Ray saw this position and automatically played ...Bf5 for Black in his calculations. It is a natural move, but entirely wrong. Once I made my move, his body language quickly began to change as he realized he was much worse. The best try was to put the queen behind the bishop instead: B) 18\. Qd3 18...g6! An incredibly difficult computer solution. The point is to lose the g-pawn rather than the h-pawn. 19.b3! is too engine-oriented to be considered relevant. 19.Bxg6 Bf6! This is Black's cleanest option. He really is threatening to take on g6, as well as take on f3 when White's kingside will be much more compromised than Black's. The computer offers only one route to equality. (19...Bb4?! is the machine's choice, but it looks much less clear: 20.Ng5 Bf5 21.Bxf5 Qxf5 22.f4 Bxe1 23.Qxe1 Stockfish and its nerves of steel claim Black is just better, but it looks dangerous to me. I prefer the more human solution.) After 20.Bd3 Bxf3 , White is in big trouble, for instance 21.Bxc4 bxc4 22.gxf3 Kh8! , and White's king starts feeling the heat. 18\. Qd3 20.b3! Bxf3 21.bxc4! hxg6 22.gxf3 dxc4 23.Qxg6+ Qg7 24.Qxg7+ Bxg7 I definitely prefer Black, but the game goes on.

18.♕b1 The position is massively complicated, and nearly impossible for humans to play. – A) My plan during the game was ♗xf3 . Then after 19.♗xh7† ♔h8 20.gxf3 ♖xf3 , the machine insists on equality, but the position is obviously tense and either side could lose immediately with a single imprecise decision.

18... g6!

It is a little counterintuitive to weaken the dark squares around the king, but it is fully justified. White faces two powerful threats in ...Nxb2 and ...Bxf3, and he cannot prevent both of them. Not only does ...Nxb2 collect a pawn, but the knight will also then be able to return permanently to c4, protecting the c7-pawn. Furthermore, ...Bxf3 would shatter White's structure and allow Black to take on e5, then follow up with ...Bd6 and ...Qh3. As we saw above, with the queen on b1, White would at least be able to take on g6, but with the queen in front of the bishop, there is no way out. After

18... ♗f5? 19.♕c3 , White is ready for b2-b3 and has a nice edge.

19.b3

I expected After

19.♗g3 during the game, though after ♗xf3 20.gxf3 ♘xb2N 21.♕e2 ♗b4 , White's position is a train wreck.

19.♘d2N , Black has any number of good continuations, of which I prefer ♗f5 due to its simplicity: 20.♕e2 ♘xb2N 21.♖ab1 ♘c4N Black is a clean pawn up.

19... ♗xf3! 20.bxc4

Trying to keep material balanced with

20.gxf3? would not have helped: ♘xe5N Black is absolutely winning thanks to the pawn structure. After 21.♖xe5

21.dxe5 ♕e6 White's 4 against 2 majority on the kingside is rather useless, while Black will easily crash through with ...c5-...c4.

21... ♗d6 , the queen is coming to h3, and Black wins on the spot.

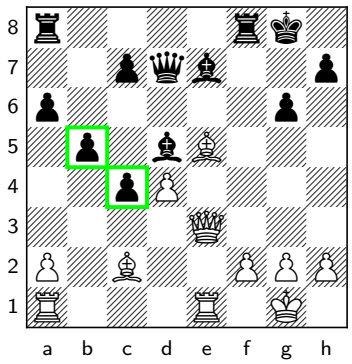
20... dxc4!

Black clears the a8-h1 diagonal, in particular the d5-square for the bishop. The d-file opens to potentially threaten the d4-pawn. The resulting pawn mass is more flexible if compared with the recapture with the b-pawn.

20... ♕g4? allows White to completely flip the script with 21.♗g3 , threatening both black bishops.

20... bxc4? 21.♕e3 is nice for Black, but not nearly as convincing as the game continuation. It's a bummer that the bishop does not get the d5-square.

21.♕e3 ♗d5



The dust has settled, and Black is much better. He has won a critical pawn and improved his structure. Still, his king lacks cover, and if White is able to get h4-h5 through, he will create a lot of counterplay, underlining his powerful e5-bishop. The first step towards converting the extra pawn is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and accurate play will be needed to nip any attacking hopes in the bud. Once the position is stabilized, the remaining steps should be largely irrelevant. Black's queenside pawn mass will not face any particular resistance in the long term, and simply pushing the pawns forward will be more than enough to win the game.

22.♕g3 ♗f6!

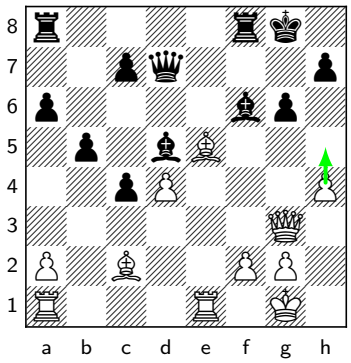
First things first – contest White's most menacingly placed attacking piece! But Black does not necessarily want to exchange on e5; this would enable White to get his rook to e5 and double rooks on the e-file. Or White can recapture with the d-pawn and play f4-f5 with definite counterplay. Rather, Black would be happy

to leave the tension with the bishops as is for the moment. The first rule of calculation is to always examine all checks and captures:

22... ♗d6? 23.♗xg6 ♗xe5 24.♖xe5 hxg6 25.♖xd5 An immediate draw. Moving the bishop to f6 instead prevents this by blocking the diagonal of the e5-bishop. Not

25.♕xg6† ♕g7 26.♕xg7† ♔xg7 27.♖xd5 ♖ad8 , when Black's pawns are stronger.

23.h4



This is not subtle. White clearly wants h4-h5.

23... ♕g7!

Another good move, stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. Black prevents h4-h5 and gets the queen to her best post. Also bad is

23... ♗e6? with the idea of ...Bf5 loses a lot of time and allows h4-h5.

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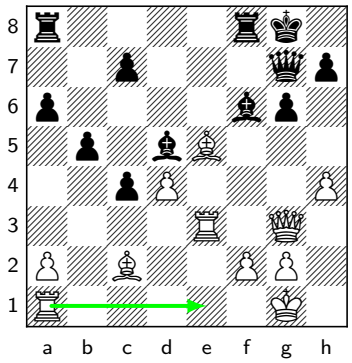

24.h5? allows gxh5 Black can safely take the pawn thanks to the well-placed queen on g7, and all White has done is open up lines for counterplay against his own king. For example: 25.♕h3 ♕g4 White needs to trade queens to avoid being mated, but he is obviously lost in the endgame as well.

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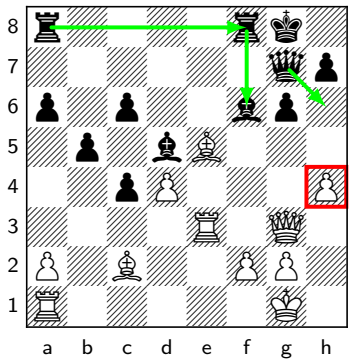
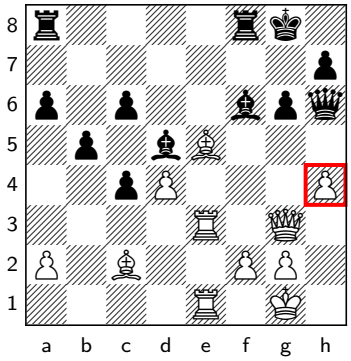


A tough move, but a strong one. Every instinct I had was telling me to activate my a8-rook, but in fact, it is more important to keep a secure structure in the center. Black plans ...Qh6 next, which will force White to take on f6 due to the threat of ...Bxh4, and then with the queen on h6, h4-h5 is never on the cards. To be clear, it's not like

24... ♕h6 was also possible, threatening ...Bxh4 and mate, and forcing White to trade the bishops on Black's terms. I disliked the forced 25.♗xf6 ♖xf6 26.♕e5 , and somehow completely missing the simple ♖d6 . Nevertheless. this final rook move is a little awkward. The game move is clearly stronger.

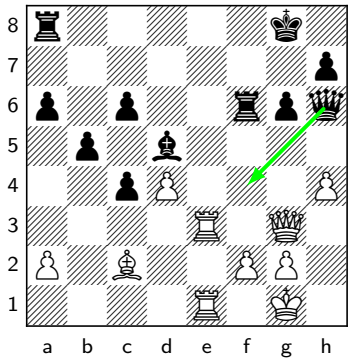
24... ♖ae8? isn't better for Black after 25.♖ae1 . But the rook on e8 doesn't help me much to make progress and could even be used by White as a tactical target, as could also happen with the currently unprotected bishop on d5. The game move is both safer and more productive in terms of helping me formulate an active plan.

25.♖ae1 ♕h6!



White does not want to capture f6, since it badly weakens his control of the all-important f4-square – but what choice does he have? The threat of ...Bxh4 is massive.

26.♗xf6 ♖xf6



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27.f3 ♕f4 would win routinely. White will never be able to make any threats, and Black's position is fully stabilized.

27... ♖xe8

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28.♖xe8†

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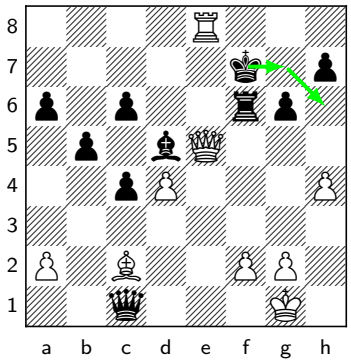
28... ♔g7 works, but in an inhuman way. The text is much more natural: 29.♕c7† ♗f7 30.♕e7 ♕c1† 31.♗d1 ♕xd1† 32.♔h2 Apparently Black wins with g5 which, of course, I did not consider. The text was by far the simplest route to a full point.

29.♕e5 ♕c1†!



Black clears the h6 square to hide on. The careless

29... ♔g7? 30.♕e7† ♖f7 31.♕e5† is a draw. Black does not have access to the h6-square for this king.

30.♗d1

I was very happy with myself for my next move:

30... ♔g7!

White only gets a couple of checks, and then Black's queen can come to f4, easily consolidating and winning. I certainly did not need to take the bishop to have a winning material advantage-the extra pawn is already quite sufficient. Keeping my queen on c1 to control the c1-h6 diagonal and stop all the counterplay is far more important than going piece hunting. It turns out taking the bishop was indeed winning, but only with an entirely ridiculous computer sequence:

30... ♕xd1† 31.♔h2 ♖e6 32.♖xe6 ♗xe6 33.♕c7† Black needs eight only moves in a row. ♔e8 34.♕b8† ♔e7 35.♕c7† ♗d7 36.♕e5† ♔d8 37.♕b8† ♗c8 38.♕d6† ♔e8 39.♕xc6†

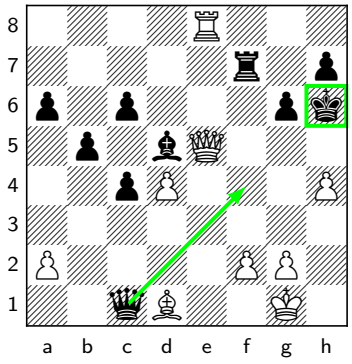
39.♕e5† ♔d7 40.♕g7† ♔d8 41.♕f8† ♔c7 42.♕e7† ♗d7 Finally, the king hides. Why bother with any of this when the game move exists?

39... ♗d7 40.♕e4† ♔d8 41.♕a8† ♔e7 42.♕e4† ♗e6 43.♕b7† ♔f6 or

31.♕e7†

31.♖e7† is easily met with ♗f7 and ...Qf4 coming next.

31... ♖f7 32.♕e5† ♔h6



This is why I did not take his bishop.

Black's king does not have to worry about any checks on the c1-h6 diagonal.

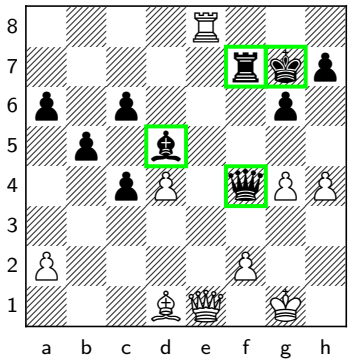
33.♕e1 ♕f4!

As soon as Black plays ...Qf4 safely, the game is over.

34.g4

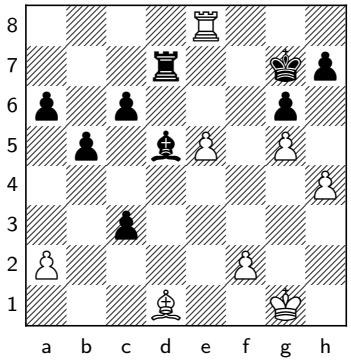
34.g3 ♕xd4 is equally hopeless.

34... ♔g7!



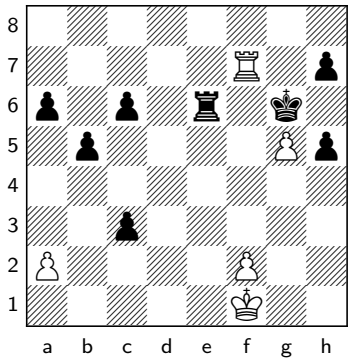
The last important move, making sure that there are no sneaky tricks involving Rg8: no checks, no lines needed, no discussion. Black has stabilized the position, and the game wins itself.

35.g5 c3 36.♕e5† ♕xe5 37.dxe5 ♖d7



The rest requires no commentary.

38.h5 gxh5 39.♗c2 ♗f7 40.♖c8 ♖d2 41.♖c7 ♖xc2 42.e6 ♖e2 43.♖xf7† ♔g6 44.♔f1 ♖xe6



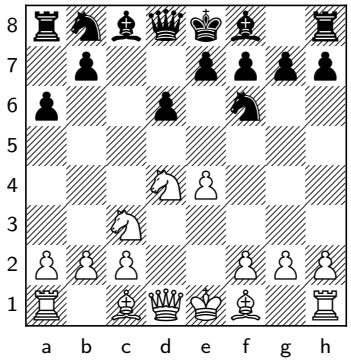
The theme of this game was very much stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. None of the other elements of converting an extra pawn were at play, but this is largely because Black was up more than a pawn. I also had a massively superior queenside structure. As such, in the long term, simply pushing my pawn mass would easily win without any kind of a fight, regardless of which exchanges were made. Therefore, stabilizing the position was all that mattered, and I made quite a few good decisions that eliminated White's hope for counterplay.

Ruslan Ponomariov-Judit Polgar Introduction

Next up, we will see a game from the generation before mine. While there were certainly some mistakes in this game, Ponomariov did manage to convert his extra pawn. The fact that Polgar was not able to generate enough counterplay to save the game even when Ponomariov did not play the most precise consolidating moves at a

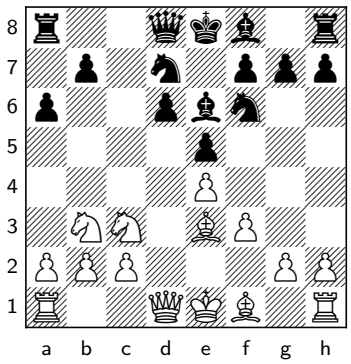
few moments is a testament to how tough playing with, or against, an extra pawn can be.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6



The players of this era were happy to play exciting openings!

6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f3 ♘bd7



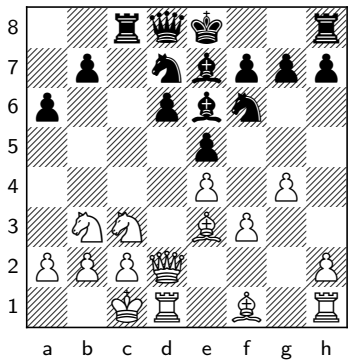
This is not best according to modern theory, but that is somewhat outside the scope of our main topic.

9.♕d2 ♗e7 10.O-O-O ♖c8?

This is an example of a positional misunderstanding from a top player of a previous generation. It might look totally normal to develop the rook to its seemingly best square, but in fact, it only loses time. Black's best plan in this structure is to castle and start throwing the a \- and b-pawns forward. When this happens, will the rook really be better on c8 than a8? Probably not. And certainly not better enough to justify spending a tempo to get it there. For example:

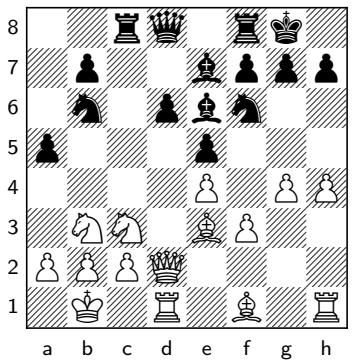
10... O-O 11.g4 b5 12.g5 b4 13.♘e2N ♘e8N 14.f4 a5 With ...a4 coming next, the rook is looking very decent on a8.

11.g4!



Any other move and ...h5 would get Black back on track.

11... ♘b6 12.♔b1 O-O 13.h4 a5?



Another bad move. This is a poor plan against the English Attack in general, but if

Black is going to play it, the rook is needed on a8! The knight should also be on c6 so that it can go to the weakened b4-square in the event of White responding with a4.

14.g5

This makes some sense as White is gaining space, but it does allow the possibility of counterplay with ...Ng3 and ...f6 later. It was also possible to take the pawn immediately, but it was much less convincing:

14.♘xa5?N d5 15.g5 ♘xe4N 16.fxe4 d4 White remains much better, but the situation becomes much messier than it was in a game, and it is not too hard to see the tables turn. The number of players who reached winning positions with White against Polgar in the Sicilian is quite large. The number of players who actually managed to win the game is quite a bit smaller! The first step in this case is to take the pawn, stabilize the position, and avoid counterplay. I would argue that White's last few moves haven't done a fantastic job of it.

14.a4 is the normal modern antidote to ...a5. Black can barely move. Ponomariov might have been worried about: ♘c4N

14... ♗c4 leaves Black with terminal weaknesses on the light squares after 15.♗xb6 ♕xb6 16.♗xc4 ♖xc4 17.g5 followed by Nd5. White's advantage is crushing.

15.♗xc4 ♖xc4 Black is dreaming of some counterplay on the queenside light squares, maybe with a well-timed ...b5. But after 16.♘c1N it is now known that such structures are a disaster for Black. White will play N1a2 and b2-b3 to solidify the queenside. Later, he may play Nb5, c4, and Nac3, and Black will be strategically squished to death.

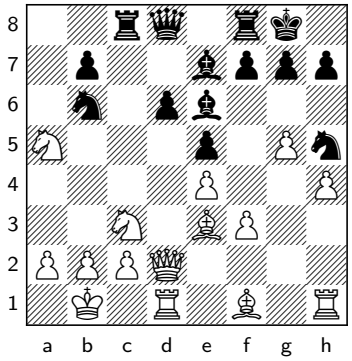
14... ♘h5 15.♘xa5

The main point behind White's 14th move is that ...d5 is not a thing in this version. The game continued

15... ♖a8

and I hate to hammer the same point home over and over again too aggressively, but this move perfectly highlights why ...Rc8 was a mistake in the first place. White has an extra pawn and needs to consider the principles of converting it. Ponomariov missed a good opportunity here.

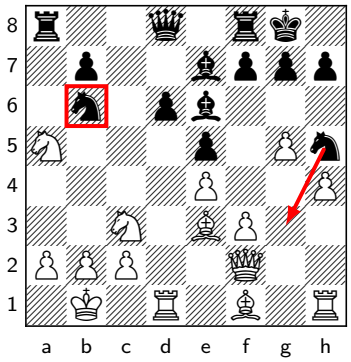
Ponomariov-Polgar Exercise #1



15... ♖a8

White has an extra pawn and needs to consider the principles of converting it.

16.♕f2!



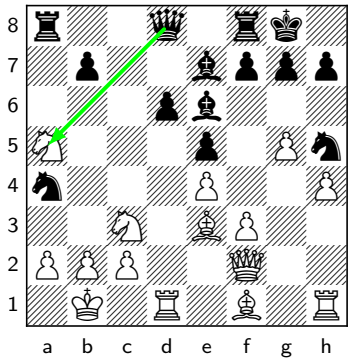
This multi-purpose move was best. White hits the b6-knight and defends against ...Ng3, keeping the position under control. □ White doesn't need a second extra pawn to win the game, and he should be looking to consolidate the first one. In that sense, □ □

16.♘xb7?N is asking for trouble: ♕c7 17.♘xd6N ♖fd8 White is rapidly losing control.

16.♗xb6? aims to take control of the d5-square, but it allows Black's queen to come out and gives her h5-knight a nice square on f4. This is a big step in the wrong direction. After ♕xb6, the machine wants to retreat the knight to b3 anyway, so there wasn't much point in chopping the b6-knight to gain access to c4.

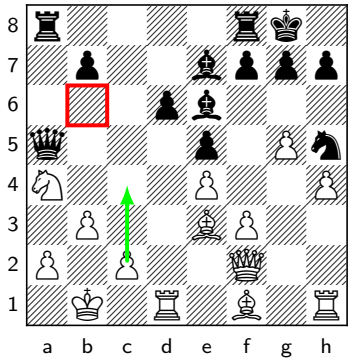
16.♘b3?N is not bad, but Ponomariov missed a good opportunity to obtain a larger and cleaner advantage. ♘g3N Black starts jumping forward. White needs to consider how to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Also, which piece exchanges are favorable to him.

16... ♘a4



I have to imagine this was the move that Ponomariov was concerned about.

17.♘xa4 ♕xa5 18.b3!

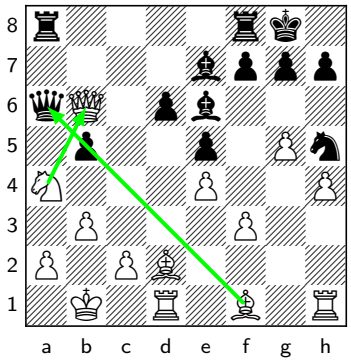


If White is allowed to play c4 and Nb6 (or Bb6) next, he is winning, as Black will never be able to break through on the queenside.

18... b5

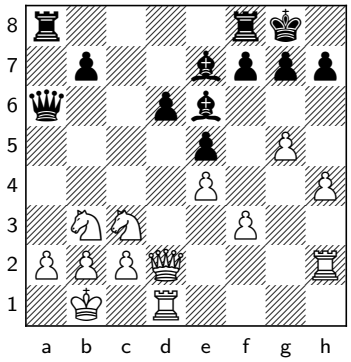
It looks like White has a problem, but a little creativity solves it.

19.♗d2! ♕a6 20.♕b6!



The piece is saved, and Black won't last long.

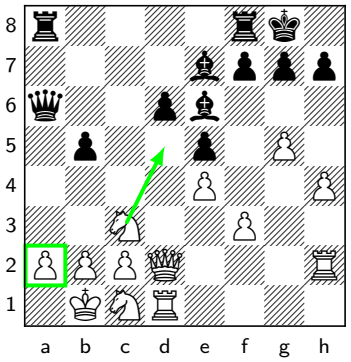
Ponomariov-Polgar Exercise #2



20... b5

Black's counterplay is coming fast. Step one is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. White did not do a perfect job on the previous moves, so now there's only one way forward.

21.♘c1!



An important resource that White needed to foresee when contemplating his 17th move. White is just in time to consolidate the position by protecting the a2-pawn and getting ready for Nd5. After The game went Instead,

21.a3? weakens the queenside and does not even really stop Black from executing her main plan: b4 What happens if I do it anyway? 22.axb4 ♖fb8? 23.b5 ♖xb5 White is rapidly losing control.

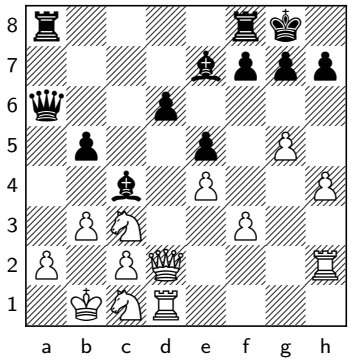
21... b4

21... ♗c4 Polgar prepares ...b4 with her bishop placed on the right side of the knight on d5. 22.b3 ♖fb8 Given the nature of the position with opposite side castling and open files, White has done a good job of stabilizing and avoiding counterplay. At this point, he needs to come up with a plan for how to make the extra pawn count. Let's move on to our next exercise.

22.♘d5N

Black's attack is over.

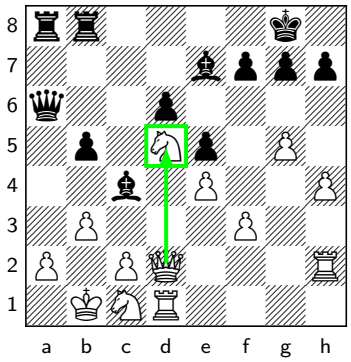
Ponomariov-Polgar Exercise #3



22... ♖fb8

Given the nature of the position with opposite side castling and open files, White has done a good job of stabilizing and avoiding counterplay. At this point, he needs to come up with a plan for how to make the extra pawn count.

23.♘d5!



This is simple and strong. White makes use of the outpost and does so at a moment when it is possible to recapture with the queen. □□□The computer suggests

23.bxc4? is what Black was hoping for: bxc4† 24.♘b3N d5 25.exd5 ♗b4 My machine gives −5. To say the least, White did not stabilize and did not avoid counterplay!

23.h5? is a bit generic, and after b4 24.♘d5N ♗xd5 , White cannot recapture on d5 with the queen, due to the hanging g5-pawn.

23.f4? , but I don't like it. I much prefer Ponomariov's choice. Black's main compensation lies in her bishop pair, which currently does not seem to be doing much. But once f3-f4 is played, that previously useless piece could potentially end up being a monster on g7. For example: exf4 24.♕xf4 g6 25.h5 ♗f8 26.hxg6 and after hxg6? , White has the instructive

26... fxg6 27.♕h4 ♖a7 White is not going to deliver checkmate, his g5-pawn will drop off in any endgame, and he always has to worry about the bishop coming to g7 if his pieces ever leave the h-file. The computer claims that White is totally winning, but in human terms, it does not look convincing at all.

27.♖dh1 ♗g7 28.♕f6 , which is admittedly quite pretty. Better is

23... ♗xd5

Black cannot tolerate the knight on d5.

24.♕xd5

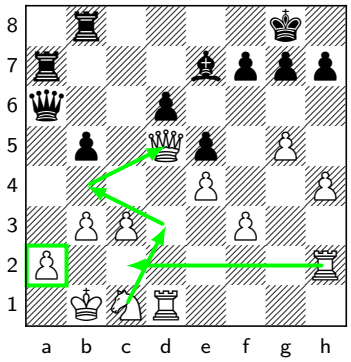
Black can try to double rooks on the a-file:

24... ♖a7

But here, White has a strong regrouping plan to win the game. Judit went for

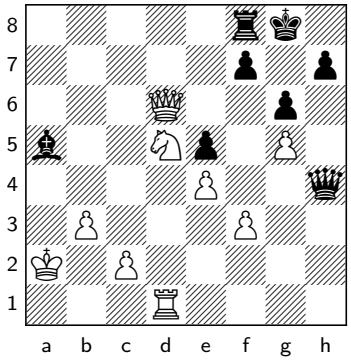
24... b4 instead.

25.c3!



Followed by Rc2, Nd3-Nb4, retreating the queen, and Nd5. The rook will keep the a2-pawn safe.

Ponomariov-Polgar Exercise #4



40... ♗d8

It is important to note how The last relevant moment of the game. If White can hold on to the g5-pawn and capture the e5-pawn, then his two queenside pawns will win the game.

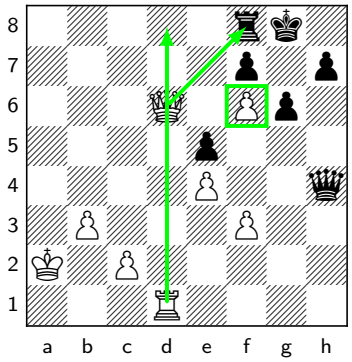
40... ♕xg5 loses to 41.♘f6†N ♔g7 42.♕xf8† and Black can resign, due to the fork on h7.

41.♘f6† ♗xf6

How should White take back on f6? After

41... ♔g7 42.♕xe5 ♗xf6 43.♕xf6† , White remains two healthy pawns up.

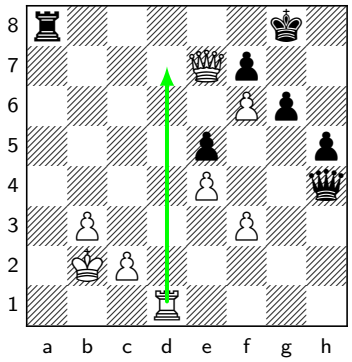
42.gxf6!



Threatening Qxf8+. It might look tempting to take with the queen to keep the structure more standard-looking and hope that the queenside pawns will count. But it misses a key resource:

42.♕xf6? h5 The h-pawn is coming, and it is coming quickly. Black should have enough counterplay to hold on.

42... ♖a8† 43.♔b2 h5 44.♕e7

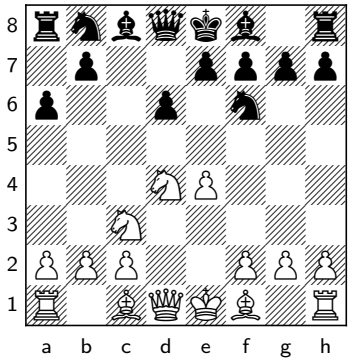


The same theme emerges after the threatened Rd7. Black cannot then play ...Rf8 due to Qxf8+.

Ruslan Ponomariov-Judit Polgar, Wijk aan Zee 2005

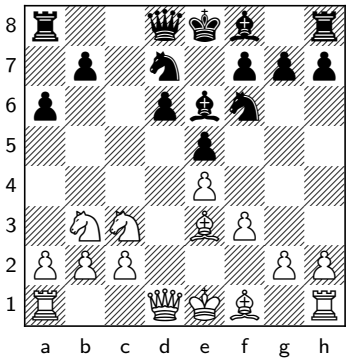
Next up, we will see a game from the generation before mine. While there were certainly some mistakes in this game, Ponomariov did manage to convert his extra pawn. The fact that Polgar was not able to generate enough counterplay to save the game even when Ponomariov did not play the most precise consolidating moves at a few moments is a testament to how tough playing with, or against, an extra pawn can be.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6



The players of this era were happy to play exciting openings!

6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f3 ♘bd7



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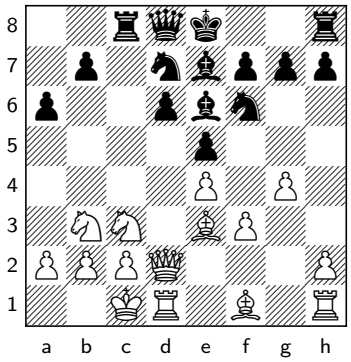
This is an example of a positional misunderstanding from a top player of a previous generation. It might look totally normal to develop the rook to its seemingly best square, but in fact, it only loses time. Black's best plan in this structure is to castle and start throwing the a \- and b-pawns forward. When this happens, will the rook really be better on c8 than a8? Probably not. And certainly not better enough to justify spending a tempo to get it there. For example:

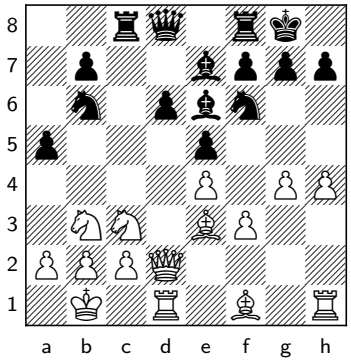
10... O-O 11.g4 b5 12.g5 b4 13.♘e2N ♘e8N 14.f4 a5 With ...a4 coming next, the rook is looking very decent on a8.

11.g4!



Any other move and ...h5 would get Black back on track.

11... ♘b6 12.♔b1 O-O 13.h4 a5?



Another bad move. This is a poor plan against the English Attack in general, but if Black is going to play it, the rook is needed on a8! The knight should also be on c6 so that it can go to the weakened b4-square in the event of White responding with a4.

14.g5

This makes some sense as White is gaining space, but it does allow the possibility of counterplay with ...Ng3 and ...f6 later. It was also possible to take the pawn immediately, but it was much less convincing:

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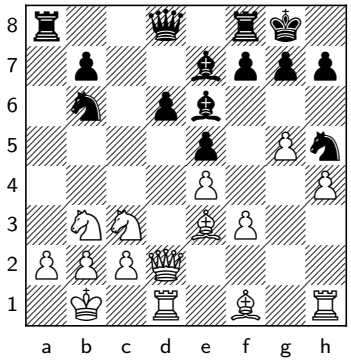
14... ♘h5 15.♘xa5

The main point behind White's 14th move is that ...d5 is not a thing in this version.

15... ♖a8

I hate to hammer the same point home over and over again too aggressively, but this move perfectly highlights why ...Rc8 was a mistake in the first place. White has an extra pawn and needs to consider the principles of converting it.

16.♘b3?!



This is not bad, but Ponomariov missed a good opportunity to obtain a larger and cleaner advantage. □ White doesn't need a second extra pawn to win the game, and he should be looking to consolidate the first one. In that sense, □ □ Best was the multi-purpose

16.♘xb7?N is asking for trouble: ♕c7 17.♘xd6N ♖fd8 White is rapidly losing control.

16.♗xb6? aims to take control of the d5-square, but it allows Black's queen to come out and gives her h5-knight a nice square on f4. This is a big step in the wrong direction. After ♕xb6, the machine wants to retreat the knight to b3 anyway, so there wasn't much point in chopping the b6-knight to gain access to c4.

16.♕f2 White hits the b6-knight and defends against ...Ng3, keeping the position under control. ♘a4N I have to imagine this was the move that Ponomariov was concerned about. 17.♘xa4N ♕xa5 18.b3 If White is allowed to play c2-c4 and Nb6 (or Bb6) next, he is winning, as Black will never be able to break through on the queenside. b5 It looks like White has a problem, but a little creativity solves it. 19.♗d2 ♕a6 20.♕b6 The piece is saved, and Black won't last long.

16... ♘g3!

Black starts jumping forward. White needs to consider how to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Also, which piece exchanges are favorable to him.

17.♗xb6!

Ponomariov doesn't allow Black to take on f1 and bring the b6-knight to c4.

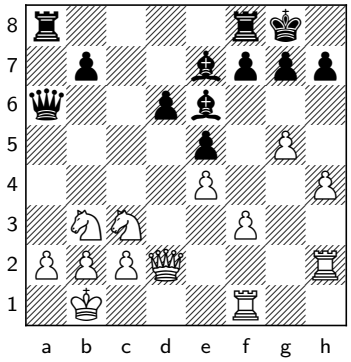
17.♖g1 was also fine, but Ponomariov's choice was stronger both objectively and practically. To illustrate: ♘xf1N 18.♖gxf1 ♘c4N There is little risk of Black's knight creating a checkmating attack. However, it has become a strong piece; better than the e3-bishop. Strategically, the exchange of it should be in White's favor – thus, the game move was superior. Coming back to this position, after the white queen moves, Black can continue being a nuisance. She can either use her f-pawn to break on the kingside, or by push the b-pawn forward, daring

White to open yet another file on the queenside.

17... ♕xb6 18.♖h2

White's rook is forced to a slightly awkward square.

18... ♘xf1 19.♖xf1 ♕a6!

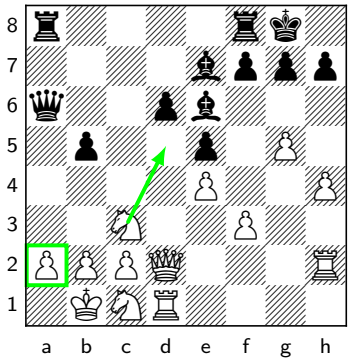


Black increases the pressure with a gain of tempo, preparing ...b5.

20.♖d1 b5

Black's counterplay is coming fast. Step one is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. White did not do a perfect job on the previous moves, so now there's only one way forward.

21.♘c1!



An important resource that White needed to foresee when contemplating his 17th move. White is just in time to consolidate the position by protecting the a2-pawn and getting ready for Nd5.

21.a3? weakens the queenside and does not even really stop Black from executing her main plan: b4 What happens if I do it anyway? 22.axb4 ♖fb8? 23.b5 ♖xb5 White is rapidly losing control.

21... ♗c4

Polgar prepares ...b4 with her bishop placed on the right side of the knight on d5. After

21... b4 22.♘d5N , Black's attack is over.

22.b3 ♖fb8

Given the nature of the position with opposite side castling and open files, White has done a good job of stabilizing and avoiding counterplay. At this point, he needs to come up with a plan for how to make the extra pawn count.

23.♘d5!

This is simple and strong. White makes use of the outpost and does so at a moment when it is possible to recapture with the queen. □ □ □ The computer suggests

23.bxc4? is what Black was hoping for: bxc4† 24.♘b3N d5 25.exd5 ♗b4 My machine gives −5. To say the least, White did not stabilize and did not avoid counterplay!

23.h5? is a bit generic, and after b4

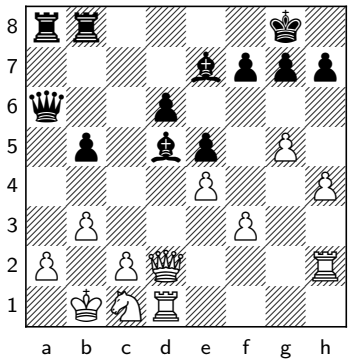
24.♘d5N ♗xd5 White cannot recapture on d5 with the queen, due to the hanging g5-pawn.

23.f4? , but I don't like it. I much prefer Ponomariov's choice. Black's main compensation lies in her bishop pair, which currently does not seem to be doing much. But once f3-f4 is played, that previously useless piece could potentially end up being a monster on g7. For example: exf4 24.♕xf4 g6 25.h5 ♗f8 26.hxg6 fxg6

26... hxg6? , White has the instructive 27.♖dh1 ♗g7 28.♕f6 , which is admittedly quite pretty.

27.♕h4 ♖a7 White is not going to deliver checkmate, his g5-pawn will drop off in any endgame, and he always has to worry about the bishop coming to g7 if his pieces ever leave the h-file. The computer claims that White is totally winning, but in human terms, it does not look convincing at all. After

23... ♗xd5



Black cannot tolerate the knight on d5.

24.♕xd5 b4

If Black tries to double rooks on the a-file with

24... ♖a7 , White has a strong regrouping plan to win the game: 25.c3 Followed by Rc2, Nd3-Nb4, retreating the queen, and Nd5. The rook will keep the a2-pawn safe.

25.♖hd2

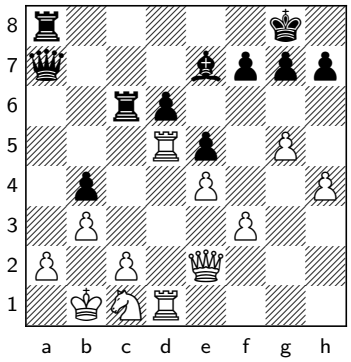
Other moves appeal much more to me, but Ponomariov's choice does not spoil anything. □ One approach I would consider is □ Alternatively, it also makes more sense for White to play for mate now, when compared with the note to the 23rd move. There are ways of opening the kingside without allowing Black's bishop to reach the powerful long diagonal through the g7-square. For example, after □ Finally,

25.a4 . This is explained by the risk of the b8-rook coming to a5. White will have to play a4 at some point. Ponomariov chose to play it later, but it also made sense to play it now. After bxa3 26.♔a2 , Black has no counterplay. White should win by slowly rerouting his knight to d5.

25.♖g2? , h4-h5 is on the way, without the need to include f3-f4. This looks like a convincing solution to me.

25.c3 is again a good plan, as White is quickly able to consolidate his position: bxc3 26.♖c2 ♖c8 27.♕d3 Followed by Ne2. The c3-pawn will fall, and White should win easily.

25...♖c8 26.♕d3 ♕a3 27.♕b5 ♕a7 28.♕e2 ♖c6 29.♖d5



White's last moves have not accomplished much, and now Black really does have some plans to make counterplay.

29...g6!

This helps facilitate the ...f6 break, fixing the g5 and potentially even the h4-pawn as a weakness.

30.♖b5 ♖a6

Ponomariov correctly transformed the position, but his task has still gotten harder.

31.a4!

Ponomariov finally plays this after Black has activated her rook. But the b5-rook is awkward where it stands. It does not protect the c2-pawn, and the kingside pawn mass can become weak following ...f6. For those reasons, the rook would be better placed on g2.

31...bxa3 32.♘a2

After

32.♔a2 ♖a5 33.♖xa5 ♕xa5 34.♘d3N f6 , Black is getting some counterplay.

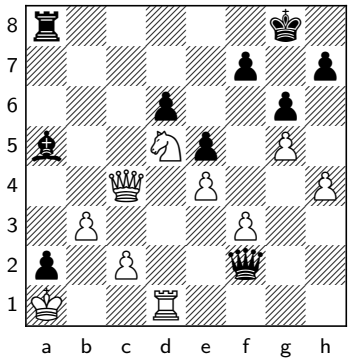
32...♗d8 33.♕c4 ♖a5 34.♘c3 a2†! 35.♔a1 ♗b6?

The bishop will have to move again to recapture on a5, and this costs Black a valuable tempo. More constructive is An even better approach for Black is:

35...♔g7? , which prepares ...f6 next. The machine just laughs at it, but it looks potentially annoying for a human to face: – A) 36... Kg7 36.Rxd6? runs into 36...Rxb5! 37.Qxb5 Qe3! 38.Qxe5+ Kg8 and Black has decent counterplay. White's kingside is starting to fall. – B) Also after 36... Kg7 36.Nd5? Rxb5 37.Qxb5 Qf2 , Black equalizes. – C) Correct is: 36... Kg7 36.b4! Ra3 37.Rbd5 Qf2 38.Nb5 Rxf3 This line was discussed in the KCT session. I felt Black was taking too many pawns and that White was losing control, but the computer, with its big fat +4 evaluation, begs to differ. Still, in human terms, it has become messier than desired.

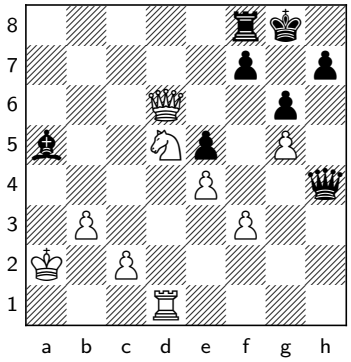
35...♕a6 36.♖b4 ♕xc4 37.♖xc4 ♗b6 The bishop is coming around to f2, and White only has a small advantage to work with.

36.♖xa5 ♗xa5 37.♘d5 ♕f2



Black is getting some kingside counterplay, but it is too slow.

38.♕c6! ♖f8 39.♔xa2 ♕xh4 40.♕xd6!



Black is not able to capture on g5 to get the h-pawn running, due to a powerful tactic. If White can hold on to the g5-pawn and capture the e5-pawn, then his two queenside pawns will win the game.

40... ♗d8

It is important to note how

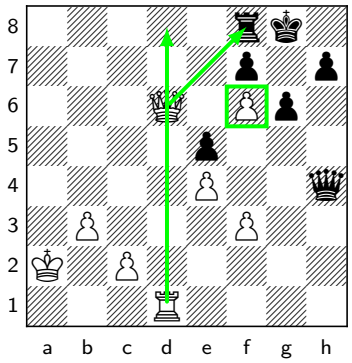
40... ♕xg5 loses to 41.♘f6†N ♔g7 42.♕xf8† and Black can resign, due to the fork on h7.

41.♘f6† ♗xf6

The last relevant moment of the game. How should White take back on f6? After

41... ♔g7 42.♕xe5 ♗xf6 43.♕xf6† , White remains two healthy pawns up.

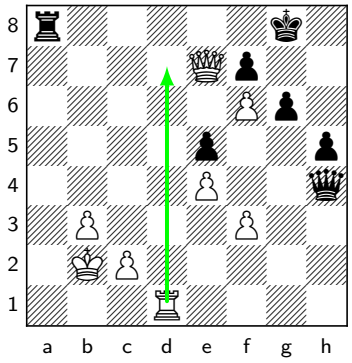
42.gxf6!



Threatening Qxf8+. It might look tempting to take with the queen to keep the structure more standard-looking and hope that the queenside pawns will count. But it misses a key resource:

42.♕xf6? h5 The h-pawn is coming, and it is coming quickly. Black should have enough counterplay to hold on.

42... ♖a8† 43.♔b2 h5 44.♕e7



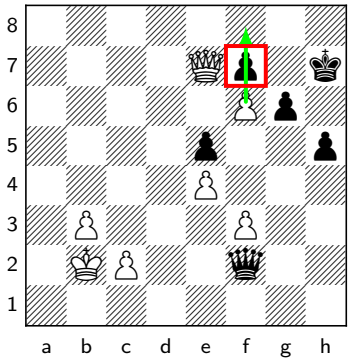
The same theme emerges after the threatened Rd7. Black cannot then play ...Rf8 due to Qxf8+.

44... ♕f2 45.♖d8†

Without rooks, Black will not have any queenside counterplay, and the f-pawn will promote. Another clean way to finish the game off would have been:

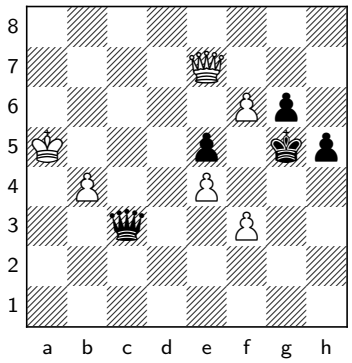
45.♖d7 ♔h7 46.♕xf7† ♔h6 47.♕g7† ♔g5 48.f7 ♕xf3 49.♕xe5† ♔g4 50.♖d5 Black's king is not long for this world. A nice line, illustrating what I already wrote in Small Steps 2 Success: (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) «When you have a far-advanced passed pawn in the middlegame, it is usually best for you to attack the enemy king. With the significant space advantage, your opponent will be stretched by blending threats of promoting the pawn with threats to give mate.» For example, Shankland-Gareyev, Las Vegas 2012, at Black's 43rd move. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) Also, Vachier-Lagrave - Leko, Batumi Olympiad 2018 at Black's 41st move. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) There are many more examples in the book, as it is a common theme that is well worth remembering.

45...♖xd8 46.♕xd8† ♔h7 47.♕e7



White's f-pawn will promote. Ponomariov easily escaped the checks.

47...♕d4† 48.♔a2 ♔h6 49.♕xf7 ♕c5 50.♕g7† ♔g5 51.♕e7 ♕xc2† 52.♔a3 ♕c1† 53.♔b4 ♕d2† 54.♔b5 ♕d3† 55.♔a5 ♕c3† 56.b4

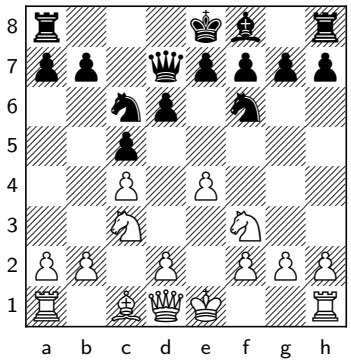


White's king will make it to b7, when there will be no more checks, and the f-pawn will promote. The game is instructive for our theme, particularly with respect to stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay, as well as evaluating which piece exchanges are favorable. Ponomariov's play was not perfect, but it was enough to take down a formidable opponent.

Viswanathan Anand-Maxime Vachier-Lagrave Introduction

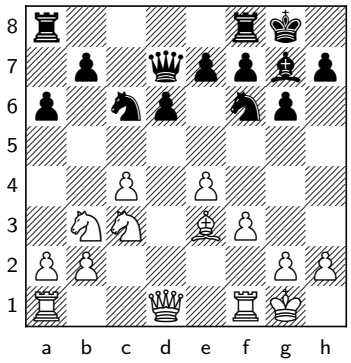
Vishy is a timeless wonder. He was fifty-two years old when this game was played, and he still showed that he is more than capable of playing crisp, clean chess, and taking out a top player many years his junior. Once he got the extra pawn, his conversion was impeccable.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5† ♗d7 4.♗xd7† ♕xd7 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♘c6



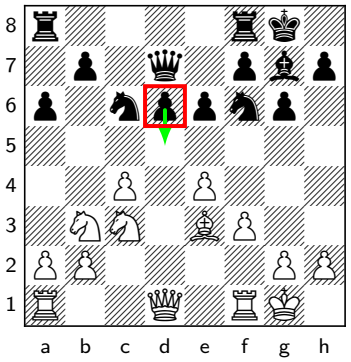
Black is doing fine in these lines from a theoretical perspective. An exchange of minor pieces favors the side with less space, and Black's queen has come to the d7-square where it supports Black's pawn breaks with ...d5 and ...b5. MVL later went astray, and the game is a good illustration of our theme. MVL's pain is our gain.

7.d4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 g6 9.f3 ♗g7 10.♗e3 O-O 11.O-O a6 12.♘b3



This was a novelty at the time the game was played.

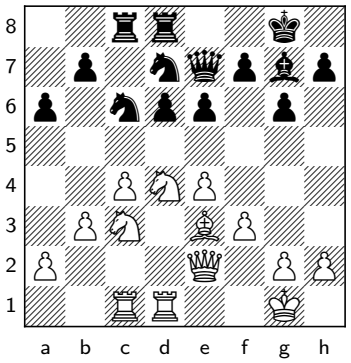
12... e6



A normal move in these types of positions. Black protects the d5-square and prepares ...d5. However, he is unlikely to achieve the latter, as moving a rook to d8 can be met by Bb6. If I recall correctly, Black can equalize with

12... ♘e5N 13.♕e2 and now ♕e6 14.c5 dxc5 15.♘xc5N ♕c4 .

13.♕e2 ♕e7 14.♖fd1 ♖fd8 15.♖ac1 ♖ac8 16.♘d4 ♘d7 17.b3



A simple and solid improving move.

17... b5?!

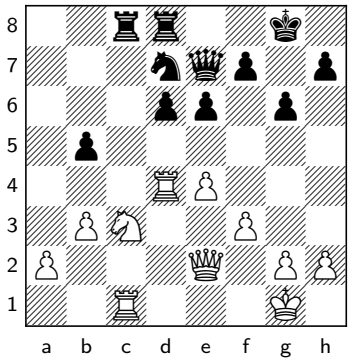
Changing the character of the position completely. Black offers a pawn to break out of the bind, and White needs to calculate rather than rely on strategic considerations. Black should be basically fine after

17... ♘xd4N 18.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 19.♖xd4 ♘f6N . He can place his queen on c7 and king on e7, defending his only weakness. He can also try to get in the ...b5 break at an opportune moment. I don't see much for White to do, and enough pieces have been traded for the extra space to lose most of its significance.

18.cxb5 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 20.♖xd4

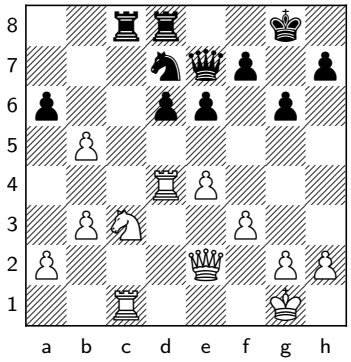
After

20... axb5



, White has more than one way to win a pawn. How should he play?

Anand-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #1

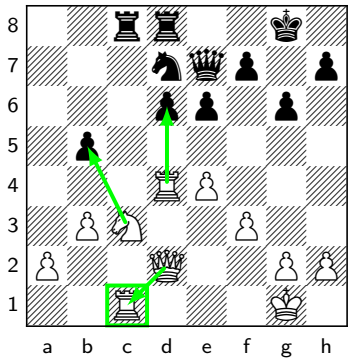


20... axb5

White has everything under control after White has more than one way to win a pawn. How should he play?

20... d5 21.exd5 ♕c5 22.♕f2 , with a decisive material advantage.

21.♕d2!



White is threatening both Nxb5 and Rxd6. This is clearly the best way to win the pawn. After

21.♕xb5? , it is awkward for White to break the pin, and Black should be fine: ♖c5 22.♕f1 Probably forced to keep the c1-rook protected. ♖dc8 23.♘e2N ♖xc1 24.♘xc1N ♕g5 The rook is about to enter on c2. Black has plenty of activity to compensate for the missing pawn.

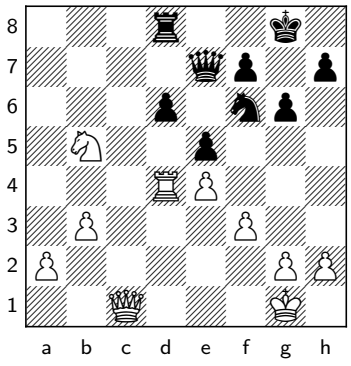
21... ♘f6!

This was the best, for reasons I'll explain now. I took a poll here in the Killer Chess Training session. MVL went with the wisdom of crowds: Before moving on, let's also mention that

21... ♖b8? The principles behind converting an extra pawn should also be considered from the perspective of the defender. Which pawn would Black rather lose? MVL wrongly chose the d6-pawn. After White's rook captures on d6, Black is not able to exchange the knights easily, when he would gain some chances to hold in a queen or rook endgame. Black's top priority should be to prevent White from consolidating and to generate counterplay against White's weakened king position. 22.♖xd6 b4 23.♘e2N ♘e5N 24.♖d1 ♘c6N Black creates the threat of taking on d6 followed by ...Rd8. White needs to be precise.

21... ♖c5? turns out to be a complete waste of time after 22.b4 followed by Nxb5.

22.♘xb5 ♖xc1† 23.♕xc1 e5!



White has everything under control after

23... d5 24.e5 ♘d7N .

24.♖d1

This is the most logical, bearing in mind the principle of stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. After

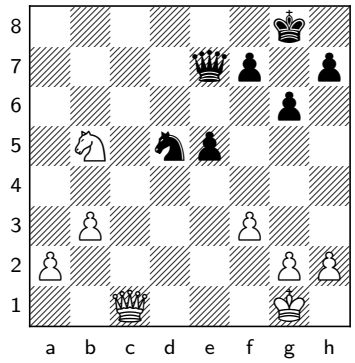
24.♖c4 d5 25.♖c7? ♕b4 , Black is already better. White's kingside has been weakened by f2-f3, his knight is offside, and Black's pieces are springing to life.

24.♖d2 does not make a difference to choosing d1 after d5 25.exd5 ♖xd5 .

24... d5

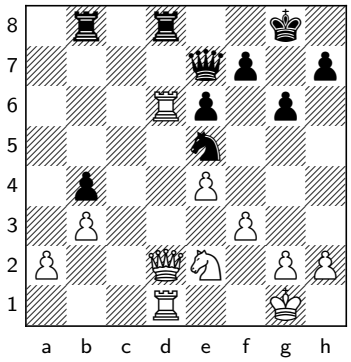
Counterplay!

25.exd5 ♖xd5 26.♖xd5 ♘xd5N

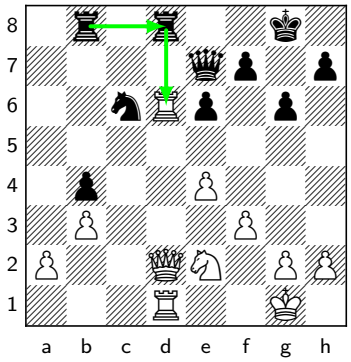


This is not clear. White's kingside is open to an attack, and his queenside pawns will be slow to advance. Black has real saving chances, so much so that the computer claims the game is equal. In human terms, this is surely incorrect – Black has some defending to do. But I think his chances are not bad, and certainly better than they were in the game, where MVL gave the d6-pawn instead.

Anand-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #2

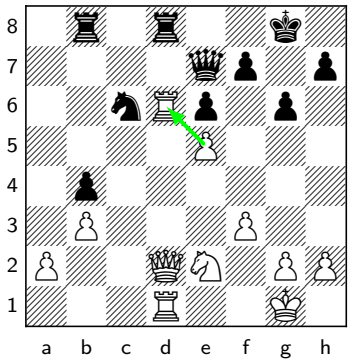


24... ♘c6



Black creates the threat of taking on d6 followed by ...Rd8. White needs to be precise.

25.e5!



Vishy finds the best way to counter Black's threat. White supports the rook and is happy to recapture on d6 with the pawn. Always be aware of your opponent's ideas. Also insufficient is the simplistic

25.♔f1? ♖xd6 26.♕xd6 ♖d8 would be unfortunate.

25.♖xd8†? , as after ♖xd8 26.♕c2 ♖xd1† 27.♕xd1 ♕a7† , Black wins the a2-pawn and equalizes directly.

25... ♕a7†

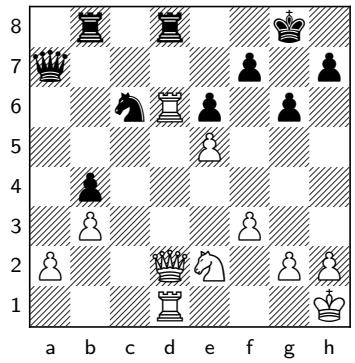
25... ♖xd6 26.exd6±

25... ♘xe5N 26.♖xd8†

26.♔h1

26.♔f1 looks more natural to me, but the evaluation should not change much. In fact, the machine prefers Vishy's move. Let's move on to our next exercise.

Anand-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #3

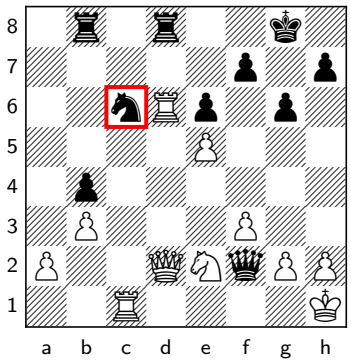


26... ♕f2

White needs to evaluate which exchanges and which changes to the structure are favorable. White doesn't want to allow Black to play

...Rdc8, avoiding all the rook exchanges, but he also does not want to exchange rooks with no change to the structure. What he does want is for Black to exchange on d6 and to recapture with the e5-pawn, bringing a passer to d6 that Black will be hard- pressed to contain. How can he accomplish this goal?

27.♖c1!



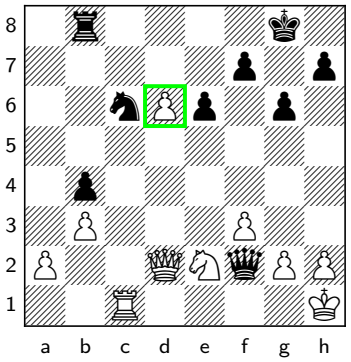
White forces Black to take on d6 by pressuring the knight on c6. Totally bad is White is only slightly better after

27.♖xd8†? ♖xd8 28.♕c2 ♖xd1† 29.♕xd1 ♘xe5N . Black gets back his lost pawn and has a nice position thanks to his better structure and more active pieces.

27.♘g3N ♕xd2 28.♖1xd2 ♖dc8 29.f4 g5? . It is clear that Black's counterplay was not properly contained.

27.f4 ♖dc8 does not look so clean. Next, ...Ne7-...Nf5 is coming, which will be annoying to deal with.

27... ♖xd6 28.exd6

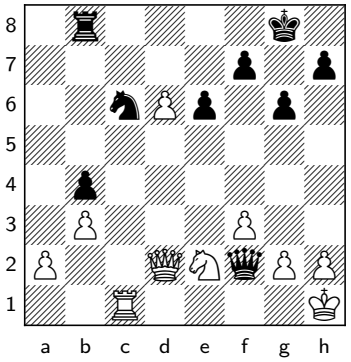


Goal accomplished! MVL played

28... ♘e5N

and now what? We'll continue in our next exercise.

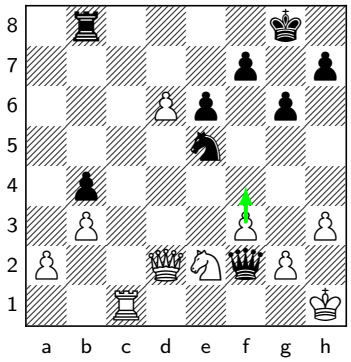
Anand-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #4



28... ♘e5

Now what? Vishy showed his class.

29.h3!



Initially, I thought that the idea of this move was prophylaxis against the knight coming to g4 after f3-f4. The knight will be short of squares, and d6-d7 will then be possible. In fact, the computer shows that this wins because it creates luft for White's king. B) 29\. h3 30.Rc2 is nicely answered by 30...Rb5! C) Making luft again looks sensible, but after 29. h3 30.h3 , rather than transposing to the game with ...Rb5, Black has 30...Rd8! and with ...Nf6-...Nd5 coming next, Black should be fine. A more logical attempt for White was B) Black survives the worst with 29. h3 29...Rc8!! , but this is both hard to comprehend and doesn't solve all of Black's problems. Instructively, since you should not play open positions for long without making luft, White's best is again 30.h3!

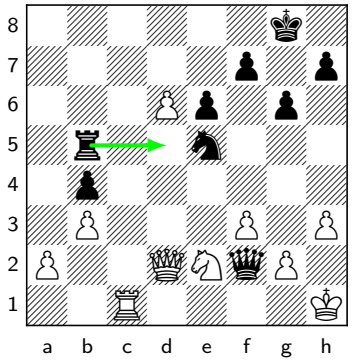
29.f4? only forces the knight back to where it (sort of) wanted to go anyway. White wins after ♘g4?N

29... ♘d7N To plug Small Steps 2 Success (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) yet again: «When facing a single passed pawn that needs to be blockaded, the lower the material value of the blockading piece, the happier you will be.» Indeed, with the knight blockading the pawn on d6, nothing works: – A) 30.♖c7 ♖d8 is equal, with ...Nf6 coming.

30.d7 but stronger is

29.♖d1? putting the rook behind the passed pawn, and now: – A) ♖b5? This is technically the losing move, but it is natural for Black to try to put the rook on d5, blocking the d-file. 30.♘d4N This is what White would be hoping for, and the main threat behind putting the rook on d1. ♕xd2 31.♖xd2 ♖d5 32.f4 An important resource, without which none of this would make sense. ♘d7N 33.♘f3N White wins. But not 30... Rb5 30.Qb2?? Nd3! and it is Black who wins, or 30... Rb5 30.d7? running into 30...Nxd7 31.Qxd7 Qxe2 .

29... ♖b5



The drawback of this move is the weakening of the back rank, which White now exploits. After

29... ♘d7N 30.♖c7 ♖d8 , anything wins, but I like taking advantage of the fact that the f3-pawn has not been pushed to f4:

31.♕g5 f6 32.♕b5 The blockade is undermined, as is the shelter of the black king. White should win easily.

30.f4!

Now and only now, White goes for f4.

30... ♘d7

30... ♖d5 is refuted by 31.♕xd5? . Other moves also win, but I like this one. exd5 32.fxe5 The d-pawn is coming. ♕f5 33.♘d4N ♕f4 34.♖c8† ♔g7 35.♘f3N No checks, and it's all over but the crying.

31.♕d4!

Due to the threat of mate on the back rank, Black cannot take the knight. Of course, the point is:

31... ♕xe2

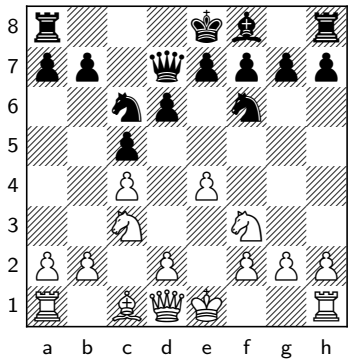
31... ♕xd4 32.♘xd4N ♖d5 33.♘c6N ♖xd6 34.♘xb4N The rest of the game was relatively easy, as Black has no active counterplay.

32.♖c8† ♘f8 33.♖xf8†! ♔xf8 34.♕h8#

Viswanathan Anand-Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Stavanger 2022

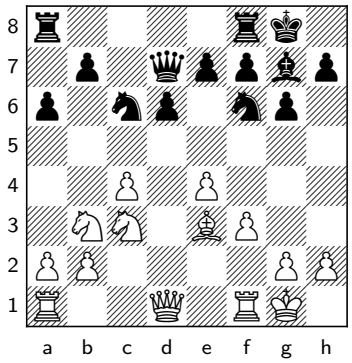
Vishy is a timeless wonder. He was fifty-two years old when this game was played, and he still showed that he is more than capable of playing crisp, clean chess, and taking out a top player many years his junior. Once he got the extra pawn, his conversion was impeccable.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5† ♗d7 4.♗xd7† ♕xd7 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♘c6



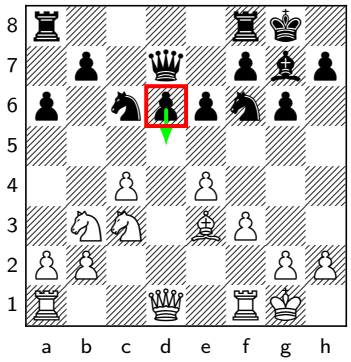
Black is doing fine in these lines from a theoretical perspective. An exchange of minor pieces favors the side with less space, and Black's queen has come to the d7-square where it supports Black's pawn breaks with ...d5 and ...b5. MVL later went astray, and the game is a good illustration of our theme. MVL's pain is our gain.

7.d4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 g6 9.f3 ♗g7 10.♗e3 O-O 11.O-O a6 12.♘b3



This was a novelty at the time the game was played.

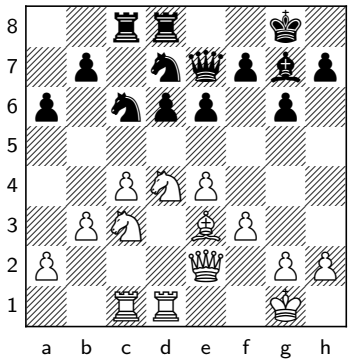
12... e6



A normal move in these types of positions. Black protects the d5-square and prepares ...d5. However, he is unlikely to achieve the latter, as moving a rook to d8 can be met by Bb6. If I recall correctly, Black can equalize with

12...♘e5N 13.♕e2 and now ♕e6 14.c5 dxc5 15.♘xc5N ♕c4 .

13.♕e2 ♕e7 14.♖fd1 ♖fd8 15.♖ac1 ♖ac8 16.♘d4 ♘d7 17.b3



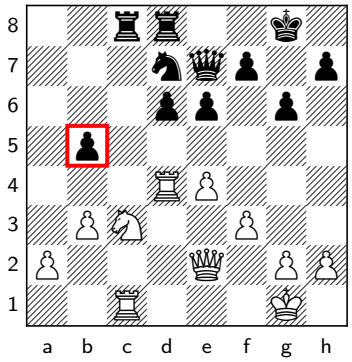
A simple and solid improving move.

17...b5?!

Changing the character of the position completely. Black offers a pawn to break out of the bind, and White needs to calculate rather than rely on strategic considerations. Black should be basically fine after

17...♘xd4N 18.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 19.♖xd4 ♘f6N . He can place his queen on c7 and king on e7, defending his only weakness. He can also try to get in the ...b5 break at an opportune moment. I don't see much for White to do, and enough pieces have been traded for the extra space to lose most of its significance.

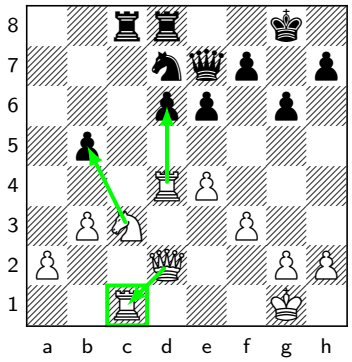
18.cxb5 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 20.♖xd4 axb5



White has more than one way to win a pawn. How should he play? White has everything under control after

20...d5 21.exd5 ♕c5 22.♕f2 , with a decisive material advantage.

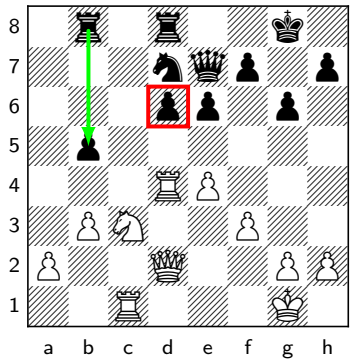
21.♕d2!



White is threatening both Nxb5 and Rxd6. This is clearly the best way to win the pawn. I took a poll here in the Killer Chess Training session. MVL went with the wisdom of crowds: After

21.♕xb5? , it is awkward for White to break the pin, and Black should be fine: ♖c5 22.♕f1 Probably forced to keep the c1-rook protected. ♖dc8 23.♘e2N ♖xc1 24.♘xc1N ♕g5 The rook is about to enter on c2. Black has plenty of activity to compensate for the missing pawn.

21... ♖b8?

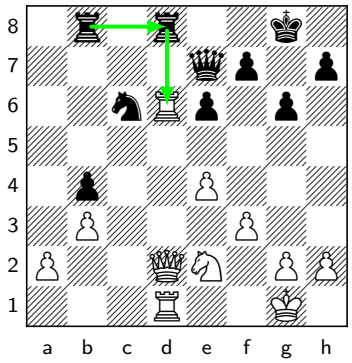


The principles behind converting an extra pawn should also be considered from the perspective of the defender. Which pawn would Black rather lose? MVL wrongly chose the d6-pawn. After White's rook captures on d6, Black is not able to exchange the knights easily, when he would gain some chances to hold in a queen or rook endgame. Black's top priority should be to prevent White from consolidating and to generate counterplay against White's weakened king position. For all of the above, best was: B) 22... Rb8 24.Rd2 does not make a difference to choosing d1 after 24...d5 25.exd5 Rxd5 26.Rxd5 . C) After 22... Rb8 24.Rc4 d5 25.Rc7? Qb4 , Black is already better. White's kingside has been weakened by f2-f3, his knight is offside, and Black's pieces are springing to life. Before moving on, let's also mention that

21... ♘f6N 22.♘xb5N ♖xc1† 23.♕xc1 e5 A) 24.♖d1 This is the most logical, bearing in mind the principle of stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. d5 Counterplay! 25.exd5 ♖xd5 26.♖xd5 ♘xd5N This is not clear. White's kingside is open to an attack, and his queenside pawns will be slow to advance. Black has real saving chances, so much so that the computer claims the game is equal. In human terms, this is surely incorrect – Black has some defending to do. But I think his chances are not bad, and certainly better than they were in the game, where MVL gave the d6-pawn instead.

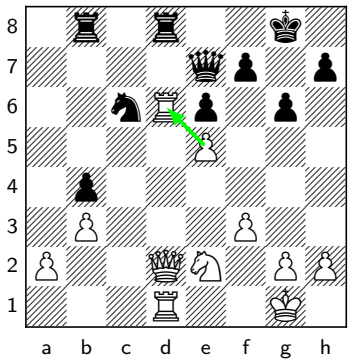
21... ♖c5? turns out to be a complete waste of time after 22.b4 followed by Nxb5.

22.♖xd6 b4 23.♘e2 ♘e5 24.♖d1 ♘c6



Black creates the threat of taking on d6 followed by ...Rd8. White needs to be precise.

25.e5!



Vishy finds the best way to counter Black's threat. White supports the rook and is happy to recapture on d6 with the pawn. Always be aware of your opponent's ideas. Also insufficient is the simplistic

25.♔f1? ♖xd6 26.♕xd6 ♖d8 would be unfortunate.

25.♖xd8†? , as after ♖xd8 26.♕c2 ♖xd1† 27.♕xd1 ♕a7† , Black wins the a2-pawn and equalizes directly.

25... ♕a7†

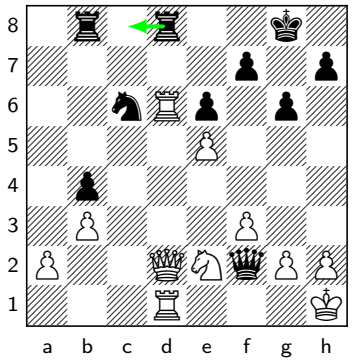
25... ♖xd6 26.exd6±

25... ♘xe5N 26.♖xd8†

26.♔h1

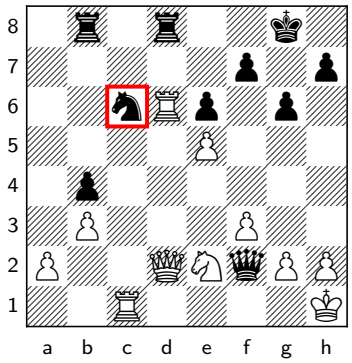
26.♔f1 looks more natural to me, but the evaluation should not change much. In fact, the machine prefers Vishy's move.

26... ♕f2



White needs to evaluate which exchanges and which changes to the structure are favorable. White doesn't want to allow Black to play ...Rdc8, avoiding all the rook exchanges, but he also does not want to exchange rooks with no change to the structure. What he does want is for Black to exchange on d6 and to recapture with the e5-pawn, bringing a passer to d6 that Black will be hard- pressed to contain. How can he accomplish this goal?

27.♖c1!



White forces Black to take on d6 by pressuring the knight on c6. □ Totally bad is □ White is only slightly better after □

27.♖xd8†? ♖xd8 28.♕c2 ♖xd1† 29.♕xd1 ♘xe5N . Black gets back his lost

pawn and has a nice position thanks to his better structure and more active pieces.

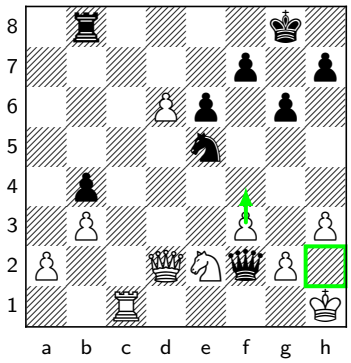
27.♘g3N ♕xd2 28.♖1xd2 ♖dc8 29.f4 g5? . It is clear that Black's counterplay was not properly contained.

27.f4 ♖dc8 does not look so clean. Next ...Ne7-...Nf5 is coming, which will be annoying to deal with.

27... ♖xd6 28.exd6 ♘e5

Now what?

29.h3!



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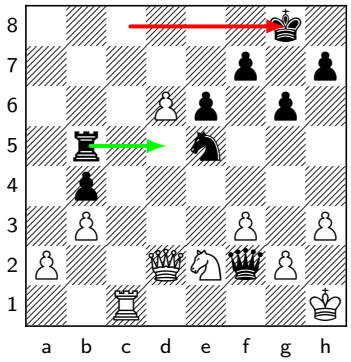
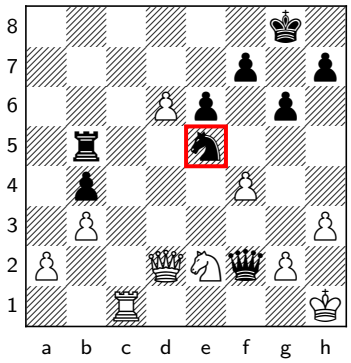
29... ♖b5



The drawback of this move is the weakening of the back rank, which White now exploits. After

29... ♘d7N 30.♖c7 ♖d8 anything wins, but I like taking advantage of the fact that the f3-pawn has not been pushed to f4: 31.♕g5 f6 32.♕b5 The blockade is undermined, as is the shelter of the black king. White should win easily.

30.f4!

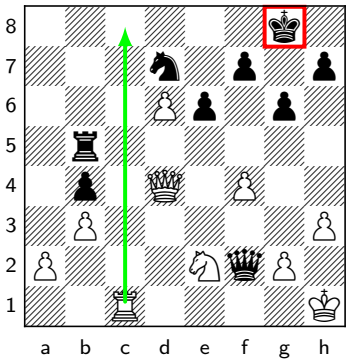


Now and only now, White goes for f3-f4.

30... ♘d7

30... ♖d5 is refuted by 31.♕xd5? . Other moves also win, but I like this one. exd5 32.fxe5 The d-pawn is coming. ♕f5 33.♘d4N ♕f4 34.♖c8† ♔g7 35.♘f3N No checks, and it's all over but the crying.

31.♕d4!



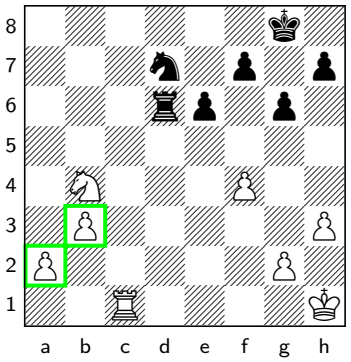
Due to the threat of mate on the back rank, Black cannot take the knight.

31... ♕xd4

Of course, the point is:

31... ♕xe2 32.♖c8† ♘f8N 33.♖xf8† ♔xf8 34.♕h8#

32.♘xd4 ♖d5 33.♘c6! ♖xd6 34.♘xb4



The rest is relatively easy, as Black has no active counterplay.

34... e5

Black could try But 35... e5 35.Nc6 seems a clear-cut way to victory. 35...Rxf4 36.a4 Rf2

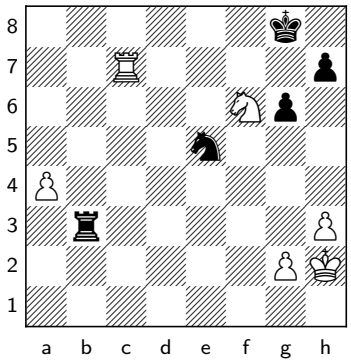
37.a5 Ra2 38.b4 White's pawns are very fast, and the black knight is kind of trapped.

34... ♖d4 when White should win after 35.♖c4 ♖xc4 36.bxc4 ♘c5N , but compromising the structure is unnecessary.

35.fxe5 ♘xe5 36.♖c5 ♖d1† 37.♔h2 f6 38.a4 ♖b1 39.♖c3 ♖a1 40.♖c7

MVL had seen enough.

40... ♖a3 41.♘d5N ♖xb3 42.♘xf6†N

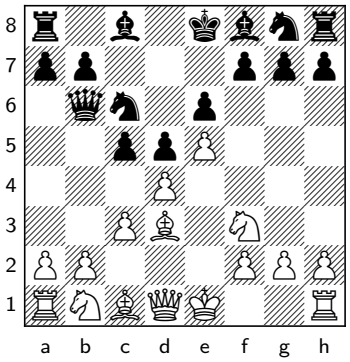


and the h7-pawn falls next. Vishy did a good job of evaluating when and how to grab the extra pawn, stabilizing the position, and forcing the piece exchanges and pawn structure transitions that he wanted. Then the game ended precisely when the extra pawn was ready to make itself felt. That's pretty much the complete picture of a flawless conversion.

Andres Rodriguez Vila-Varuzhan Akobian Introduction

The next is an interesting online game, played in a World Cup qualifying event.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♕b6 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.♗d3



We again meet this line that involves a sacrifice of the d-pawn. It used to be popular, then went under a cloud as it was thought to be unsound. Recently, it has made a comeback.

6.dxc5? is premature, as after ♗xc5 it is difficult for White to defend the sensitive f2-pawn. Trying to trap the bishop with 7.b4? does not work out for White.

6... cxd4!

6... ♗d7? prepares the capture on d4, but is a poor move order. After 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 , White is able to defend f2 with 8.O-O , which is a desirable developing move. Black has some problems developing naturally, because ♘ge7?N runs into 9.b4 . This time the bishop is trapped.

7.cxd4

Nowadays,

7.O-O is considered a better attempt to fight for the initiative. We already saw the game Sanal – Nihal from this position, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) and while Black won there as well, White

could have played better to generate more compensation.

7... ♗d7

Obviously,

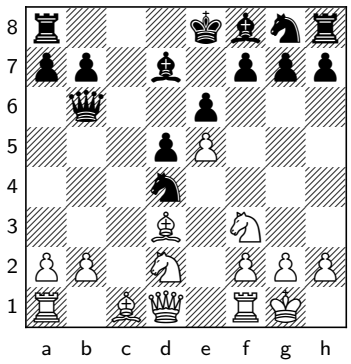
7... ♘xd4?N 8.♘xd4N ♕xd4 9.♗b5† is not a good idea.

8.O-O

The d-pawn is attacked, and there isn't a convenient way to defend it. After

8.♗c2 ♘b4N , the c2-bishop doesn't have a good home, since 9.♗b3? ♗b5 spells problems for White. The bad French bishop is transformed.

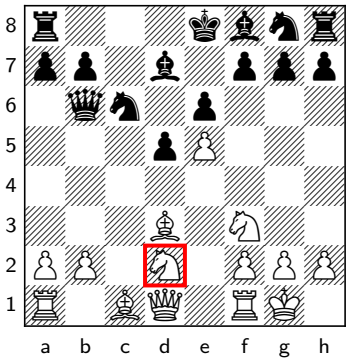
8... ♘xd4 9.♘bd2



The text is a better approach for White according to the engines compared to the old line, which went

9.♘xd4N ♕xd4 .

9... ♘c6



A reasonable option, untangling the pieces in the center. □ Black is not ready for □ I would have preferred: □

9... ♗b5 , as he falls even further behind in development. White can exploit this with: 10.♗xb5† ♘xb5N 11.♘b3N Up next are Be3, Rc1 and a4. This is dangerous for Black.

9... ♗c5 Developing a piece. 10.♘xd4N ♗xd4 11.♘f3N and now ♘e7N looks good enough. A critical approach for White would be: 10... Bc5 10.b4!? Nxf3+ 11.Qxf3 (After 11.Nxf3 Qxb4 12.Rb1 Qa4 , the queens might come off, and Black is slightly for choice.) 11...Bd4 12.Qg3 Ne7 13.Rb1 Bb5! 14.Qxg7 Rg8 15.Qxh7 Bxe5 I like the black central pawns, but the engine thinks it is equal. 12... Ne7 13.Nb3?? runs into 13...Bxa1 14.Be3 d4 and Black wins.

9... ♘xf3†N 10.♘xf3N helps White complete development.

10.♘b3 ♕d8

While it is clear that the queen will have to move again after Be3, this is not the most flexi-

ble move. It is not yet clear whether the queen is best placed on d8 or c7. If the white dark-squared bishop does not develop to e3, then the queen is not compelled to move at all. It is better to keep options open, and it may become clearer which square, if any, should be preferred after White gives us more information about his preferred setup. But what are the alternatives? □ □ Also bad and defying general principles is □

10... d4? fails to keep the position closed, and it weakens crucial squares, which White can immediately underline with 11.♘bd2?N , eyeing both c4 and e4. That's not the only way to a large advantage for White. But

11.♘fxd4?N isn't one of them. While it is tactically available and eliminates the d4-pawn, Black can refrain from taking back on d4 and instead go for ♘xe5N , when White doesn't have enough for the missing pawn.

10... f6? . For example: 11.♗f4 ♗e7 12.♖c1 fxe5 13.♘xe5N ♘f6N Black is OK after 14.♖e1? O-O , so 14... Nf6 14.Nxd7! Kxd7 Forced, as taking with the knight would allow a devastating check on h5. It would be an understatement to say that White has more than sufficient compensation for his pawn; in fact, he is totally winning. Since direct solutions fail, let's recalibrate. Black is way behind in development, particularly as Be3 is coming, gaining further time on the black queen. The only way for Black to stay in the game is to keep the position closed, so that White is not able to use his development advantage to open lines. At the same time, he should catch up in development as fast as he can.

10... ♘ge7N is the best way to do so, planning ...Ng6 and ...Be7. If White plays 11.♗f4? , as in the game, Black does not need to move his queen from b6. If White chooses the normal

11.♗e3 , then ♕c7 is a bit better than going to d8, as from c7 the queen pre-emptively defends the b7-pawn in case White goes forward with Nc5. But even if the queen were to end up on d8, at least it would be because she got pushed there, not because she retreated voluntarily.

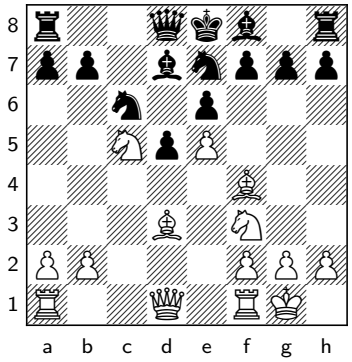
11.♗f4

11.♗e3 should have been preferred, meaning that Black's previous move was decent, only not the most logical.

11... ♘ge7

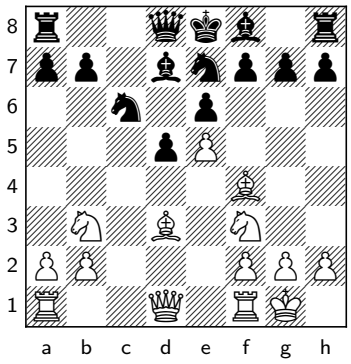
Here,

12.♘c5N



came. How should Black play?

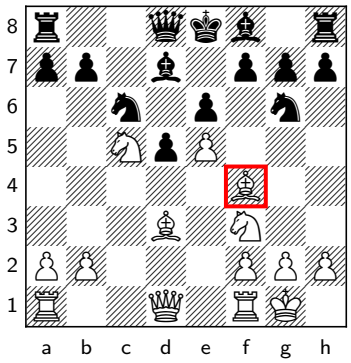
Rodriguez Vila-Akobian Exercise #1



12.♘c5

How should Black play?

12... ♘g6!



The logical follow-up to the knight coming to e7, and proof that choosing f4 for the bishop wasn't all that wise. White cannot afford to grab the pawn:

13.♘xb7

Too many pieces are left hanging. Some calculation is needed to prove this, but it is not too difficult. White played

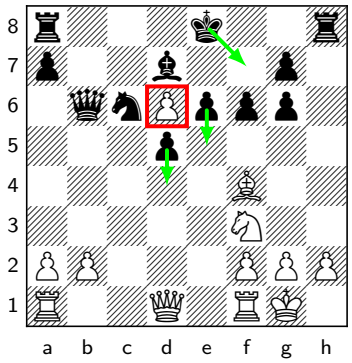
13.♗g5 and now the queen is attacked for real. What candidate moves are available for Black and which would you choose? That's your next exercise!

13... ♕b6 14.♗xg6

This is good news for Black, but

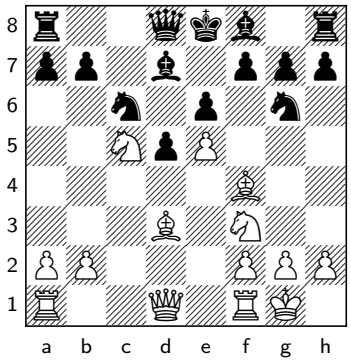
14.♘d6†N is not possible due to the hanging bishop on f4.

14... hxg6 15.♘d6† ♗xd6 16.exd6 f6!

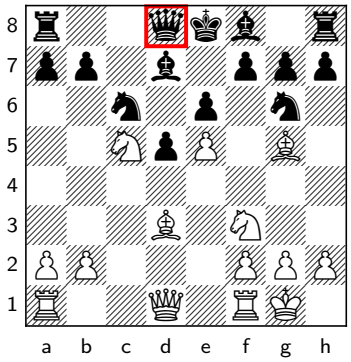


White has restored material equality, but is facing massive strategic problems instead. Black's king will be perfectly safe on f7, and White might suffocate under an avalanche of pawns on the dark squares. The d6-pawn looks more like a weak isolani as opposed to a dangerous passer.

Rodriguez Vila-Akobian Exercise #2

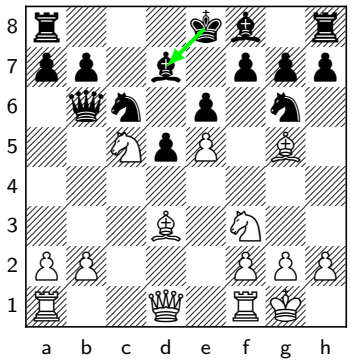


13.♗g5



The queen is attacked for real. What candidate moves are available for Black and which would you choose?

13... ♕b6!?



I did an online poll on the position above in a session at Killer Chess Training. The participants were fairly evenly split between the text move and Blocking the threat with the f-pawn is asking for trouble: It looks like the problem with The same rationale makes me want to avoid

13... ♕c7 . While the computer says that c7 is the right square, it doesn't feel right to me. I like the queen on the active b6-square, and it is unlikely that Black is ever going to want to capture the e5-pawn. To elaborate, I see two high- importance problems for Black: finding long-term security for the king, and getting the h8-rook to play an active part in the game. By castling to develop the rook, Black would be placing his king in greater danger than it faces in the center. It is better to recapture the bishop on d7 with the king, develop the h8-rook to the queenside, and then move the king back to e8 - the safest square available. The first step to converting an extra pawn is to stabilize the position and prevent counterplay. Black's other options do not fit well with this objective.

13... f6? For reasons we have already covered, Black really wants the center to remain closed, and now that it will open, White has multiple routes to real compensation. See more details (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

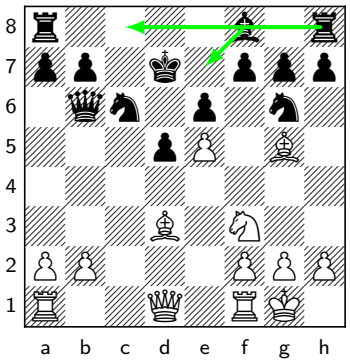
13... ♗e7 is that after 14.♘xb7N , the knight is coming to d6. In fact, this is

playable for Black, as after ♕b6 15.♗xe7? ♔xe7 , coming to d6 would always drop the pawn on e5, and Black is winning. Hence, White should go for 15... Qb6 15.Nd6+ Bxd6 16.exd6 O-O , which is looks a bit more pleasant for Black, who's hoping to set the central pawns in motion. In some ways, this is a good line, in which Black applied the Shankland Rule, and played 13...Be7, a move he wanted to play anyway, but at first seemed impossible. However, it's hard for humans to accept altering the situation so drastically, without a crystal-clear verdict of the resulting position. In that regard, I prefer the game continuation.

13... ♕c7 The computer's preference, with the idea of taking back on d7 with the queen and trying to castle short. Of course, in an objective sense, it must be right, but, in human terms, I prefer the game continuation once again. More details (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game, but let's see a sample continuation here: 14.♘xd7N If ♔xd7 we can see the queen is worse on c7 that it would be on b6.

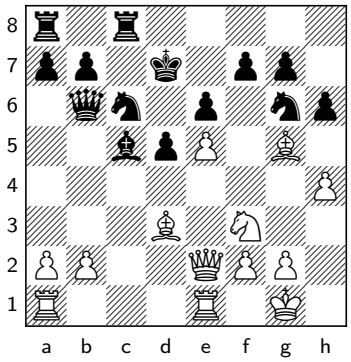
14... ♕xd7 15.♖e1 ♗b4 The only reasonable way to activate the h8-rook is to develop the f8-bishop and then castle kingside. 16.♖e2 O-O 17.h4 Is the black king safer on g8? I would prefer e8. The engine claims Black is good to go, but only due to a direct approach. f6 Without this one, I would be very worried. 18.exf6 gxf6 19.♗h6 ♖f7 20.h5 ♘ge7N 21.♘h4N According to the almighty engine, Black is more or less winning. Simultaneously, I would understand a human being scared to enter this position from afar. ♗c5 22.♖c2 ♗b6 23.♕g4† ♔h8 24.♕h3 Up next could be Ng6+. I think there is a lot of danger in relying too much on computer analysis to evaluate middlegame play. Yes, objectively these were the best moves, and Black is objectively much better. But how easy is it for a human to get here? One would have to evaluate a position like this one correctly and calculate some important lines as well. I do not mind Akobian's choice.

14.♘xd7 ♔xd7



As long as the e5-pawn is alive, White won't be able to open lines, and therefore, the black king is safe. ...Be7 and ...Rfc8 will complete Black's development, and then Black can ponder whether the king is okay on d7 or e8, or it could head to g8 eventually.

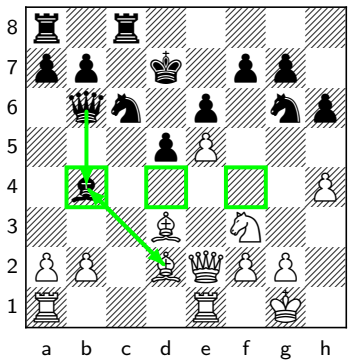
Rodriguez Vila-Akobian Exercise #3



18.♗d2

This is where Akobian began to falter. He has stabilized the position. Changes in the pawn structure are not currently likely. He needs to consider which pieces should be exchanged.

18... ♗b4!



This is my preference. The highest priority is to get dark-squared bishops off the board. It enables the black queen to centralize and gain access to the dark squares b4, d4, and f4, which is likely to be relevant later in the game. This also prevents White from playing b2-b4 to try to gain space and open lines. □ Even though, in general, all trades would be beneficial, I would advise against □ Hence, it is important to push the knight back: 19... Bb4 19.h5 This is also the logical follow-up to h2-h4. If White doesn't do this soon enough, the e5-pawn could hang in many lines, just like in the one we just mentioned. 19...Nge7 20.b4! Only now that the knight is not attacking the e5-pawn. 20...Nd4 21.Qd1 Nxf3+ 22.Qxf3 Bd4 23.Rab1 White can hope for some counterplay on the kingside, and it is hard for Black to continue making progress without losing sight of any of the soft spots in his position. Or 19...Nf8 20.b4! Nd4!? 21.Qd1 Nxf3+ 22.Qxf3 Bd4 23.Rab1 Nd7 24.Qf4 , when White has ideas of a2-a4, but also combinations of Rb3 and Bg6 are possible, aiming to attack on the kingside.

18... ♘d4?N 19.♘xd4N ♗xd4 due to 20.♗xg6 , which weakens Black's kingside.

18... ♔e8? This is part of Black's plan. But the king does not need to go to e8 now. It will only need to go there when White plays Rc1 and b2-b4-b5 to open the queenside. The result is that Black loses time and thus some control over the position. 19.a3? was played in the game. White does not even need this for b2-b4, so it's a pure waste of time. We'll come back to this position in our next exercise.

19.b4? doesn't work either. White would be happy to see Black capture the b-pawn, as a deadly pin and loss of material would follow. But after ♗d4 , the e5-pawn is falling.

19.h5

is not scary now, as after

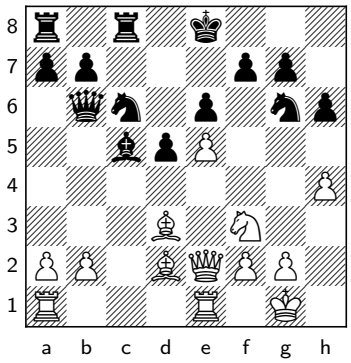
19... ♘ge7N

because we didn't trade knights, White's queen doesn't have access to the g4-square.

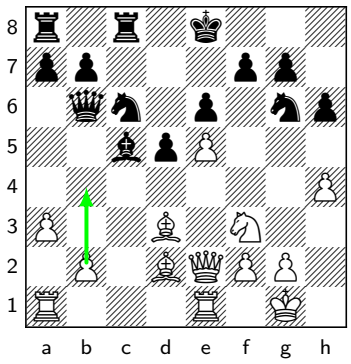
20.♗xb4 ♕xb4

guards the h4-square. 20... Nge7 20.Nh4 Bxd2 21.Qxd2 Qb4 nips White's kingside plans in the bud.

Rodriguez Vila-Akobian Exercise #4

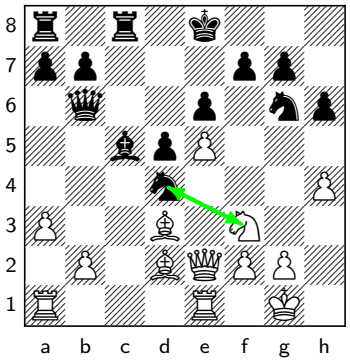


19.a3?



White does not even need this for b2-b4, so it's a pure waste of time. What should Black do?

19... ♘d4!



Remember, we have already established that Black would like to exchange any of the pieces.

19... a5? Akobian misses a good chance to increase his advantage. His move is also positionally risky, since instead of stopping b2-b4, it might encourage it. Again, White should have played 20.h5 , and only start thinking after the knight is kicked backwards. Instead, after

20.♖ac1 , Akobian did not need to be asked twice. ♘d4N 21.♘xd4N ♗xd4 The e5-pawn is in trouble.

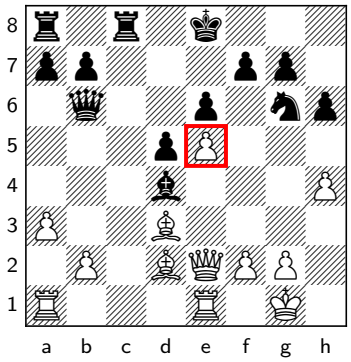
20.♘xd4

A sad necessity. In other lines, White retreats the queen, so that after the exchange of knights, the c5-bishop is loose, and the queen is developed for free. But in this version,

20.♕d1? is not possible. ♘b3N also wins, but after

20... ♕xb2 21.♖b1 ♘xf3†N 22.gxf3 ♕d4 , White has fallen apart.

20... ♗xd4

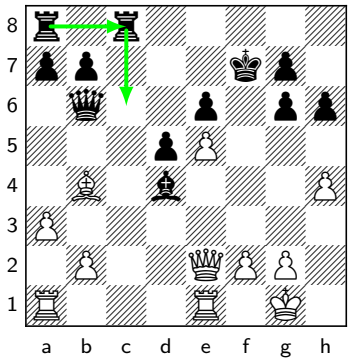


This also forces White to take on g6, due to the threat to take on e5.

21.♗xg6 fxg6

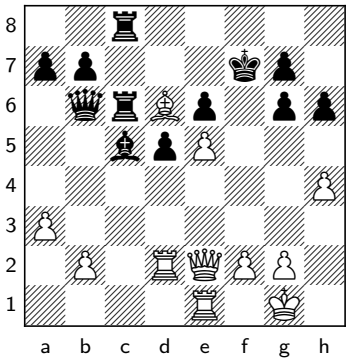
Black is solid. Next, he will double rooks on the c-file. The inclusion of ...Ke8 and a3 should be in Black's favor. For example:

22.♗b4 ♔f7!?



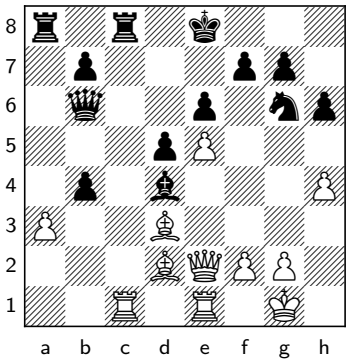
Now the black king is clearly better on the kingside than in the center.

23.♖ad1 ♖c6 24.♗d6 ♖ac8 25.♖d2 ♗c5



With Black fully mobilized, it is hard to imagine White ever getting enough counterplay.

Rodriguez Vila-Akobian Exercise #5



23.♗xb4

White is in bad shape. How should Black proceed? What is White threatening?

23... ♖xc1!

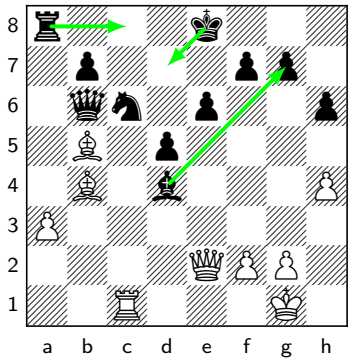
The right call. This might look wrong because it cedes the c-file, but Black will take it back soon enough with ...Kd8 and ...Rc8. Then, he will not be left with a bad rook on a8, nor will White have a useful rook on e1. The black king is not in tons of danger, despite being restricted

by the b4-bishop. Rather, White is threatening h4-h5, Qg4, Qxg7, and Qxh6, with the complete annihilation of the black kingside. When evaluating the best way to keep the kingside safe, the answer should be obvious: grab the e5-pawn. Black will then be able to use his d4-bishop to defend the base of the pawn chain, and White's queen will not come to g4. However, Black should be careful to execute his idea in the right manner, keeping in mind the second principle, which is that we need to always evaluate which exchanges of pieces will favor us. □ □ Akobian erred with

23... ♘xe5?N is not the best way to do it: 24.♗b5† Now not ♘c6?N and compared with the line shown below, where Black includes a capture on c1, the a8-rook is now terrible and will remain so for the foreseeable future. By contrast, the e1-rook can make itself feel useful. After 25.♕f3 , White is threatening Rxe6, and Black is crushed. 24\. Bb5+ 24...Kd8 25.Rb1 Black's a8-rook is dire and, despite the engine's evaluation of an advantage for Black, proceeding from here is quite difficult.

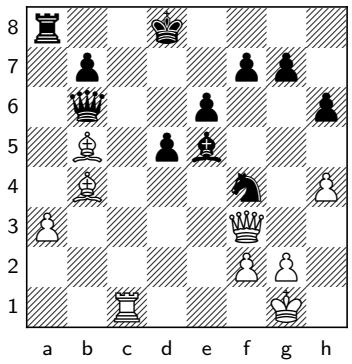
23... ♘f4?N Always be aware of your opponent's resources. The knight is exposed on this square after White checks on b5. It would have been much safer on c6, having taken the e5-pawn, where it also helps to secure the king. 24.♗b5† ♔d8 25.♕f3 ♖xc1 26.♖xc1 ♗xe5 What's the knight doing on f4?

24.♖xc1 ♘xe5 25.♗b5† ♘c6



Black wins. The d4-bishop defends the black kingside. The a8-rook is able to activate itself on the c-file, and the king can relocate to the queenside via d7 and c7. In this same position with rooks on e1 and c8 as well, Qe2-f3 was a crusher, with Re1xe6 on the way. As is, without the e1-rook, White is lacking any kind of way to increase the pressure. Black should convert without any serious issues.

Rodriguez Vila-Akobian Exercise #6

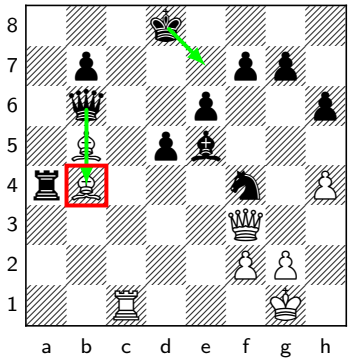


27.a4?

White could have maintained the balance with A serious mistake. Akobian made now an excellent decision.

27.♗f1 , when g2-g3 is not a small threat: ♔e8 28.h5 Now g2-g3 threatens to win a full piece. d4 How else does the knight get a square? But this allows White a route to invade. 29.♕e4 The queen is ready to come to h7, and Black needs to be precise not to lose immediately.

27... ♖xa4!



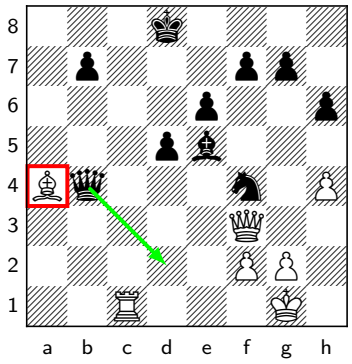
Akobian's rook was passive and not a good piece. By giving it up, he is able to capture White's dark-squared bishop, while also taking a third pawn. Once he has the e7-square for his king, he will face no more threats.

27... ♖c8? is similar, but with a pawn more and a more active rook for White. This is all that's needed to turn the evaluation around completely: 28.♗e7†

28.♖xc8†? ♔xc8 29.g3 is also winning for White.

28... ♔xe7 29.♖xc8 The extra pawn on a4 changes everything. Black has no passer, the queen is out of play, and the b5-bishop is anchored on a nice square. Kicking the knight backwards with g2-g3 combined with Re8+ is a huge threat, and Black is done for.

28.♗xa4 ♕xb4



Black is clearly winning. The bishop on a4 is forced to dreadful squares to avoid losing material directly, and White has no way to activate his pieces. With three pawns for the exchange, Black is effectively material up, and the first rule of any position with a greater quantity of smaller pieces against a larger piece is to always ask how active the larger piece is. Here, White's rook might look good, but in fact it is not doing anything, it has nothing to attack, and no prospects to improve. After The game continued

29.♗c2?

29.♗b3 is possible, but it does not look like much of an upgrade for the bishop. A clean way to win would be ♕d2 30.♖d1 ♕c3 31.♕xc3 ♘e2†N 32.♔f1 ♘xc3N followed by pushing the pawns in unison. The first rule of any exchange sacrifice is: how good are the rooks? White's rook is not terrible, but pales in comparison to Black's minor pieces and powerful pawn center.

29.♕e3 ♗d6 30.♗d1 ♘d3N This is surely good enough, but there was an even stronger option.

30... d4 was winning on the spot. White's queen is bullied away from the defense of the e1-square: 31.♕e4 f5 Time to resign.

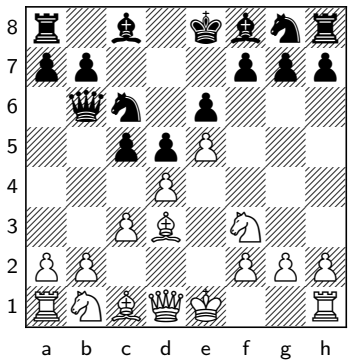
29... ♕d2

Black wins material directly.

Andres Rodriguez Vila-Varuzhan Akobian, World Cup Internet Qualifier 2021

The next is an interesting online game, played in a World Cup qualifying event.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♕b6 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.♗d3



We again meet this line that involves a sacrifice of the d-pawn. It used to be popular, then went under a cloud as it was thought to be unsound. Recently, it has made a comeback.

6.dxc5? is premature, as after ♗xc5 it is difficult for White to defend the sensitive f2-pawn. Trying to trap the bishop with 7.b4? does not work out for White.

6... cxd4!

6... ♗d7? prepares the capture on d4, but is a poor move order. After 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 , White is able to defend f2 with 8.O-O , which is a desirable developing move. Black has some problems developing naturally, because ♘ge7?N runs into 9.b4 . This time the bishop is trapped.

7.cxd4

Nowadays,

7.O-O is considered a better attempt to fight for the initiative. We already saw the game Sanal – Nihal from this position, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) and while Black won there as well, White could have played better to generate more compensation.

7... ♗d7

Obviously,

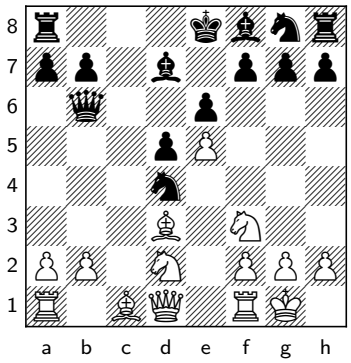
7... ♘xd4?N 8.♘xd4N ♕xd4 9.♗b5† is not a good idea.

8.O-O

The d-pawn is attacked, and there isn't a convenient way to defend it. After

8.♗c2 ♘b4N , the c2-bishop doesn't have a good home, since 9.♗b3? ♗b5 spells problems for White. The bad French bishop is transformed.

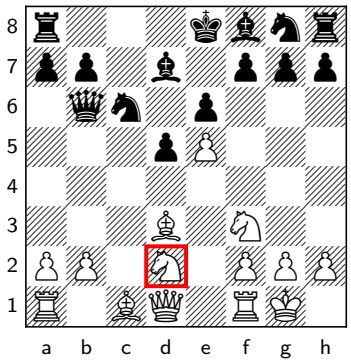
8...♘xd4 9.♘bd2



The text is a better approach for White according to the engines compared to the old line, which went

9.♘xd4N ♕xd4 .

9...♘c6



A reasonable option, untangling the pieces in the center. □ Black is not ready for □ I would have preferred: □

9...♗b5 , as he falls even further behind in development. White can exploit this with: 10.♗xb5† ♘xb5N 11.♘b3N Up next are Be3, Rc1 and a4. This is dangerous for Black.

9...♗c5 Developing a piece. 10.♘xd4N ♗xd4 11.♘f3N and now ♘e7N looks good enough. A critical approach for White would be: 10... Bc5 10.b4!? Nxf3+ 11.Qxf3 (After 11.Nxf3 Qxb4 12.Rb1 Qa4 , the queens might come off, and Black is slightly for choice.) 11...Bd4 12.Qg3 Ne7 13.Rb1 Bb5! 14.Qxg7 Rg8 15.Qxh7 Bxe5 I like the black central pawns, but the engine thinks it is equal. 12... Ne7 13.Nb3?? runs into 13...Bxa1 14.Be3 d4 and Black wins.

9...♘xf3†N 10.♘xf3N helps White complete development.

10.♘b3 ♕d8

While it is clear that the queen will have to move again after Be3, this is not the most flexible move. It is not yet clear whether the queen is best placed on d8 or c7. If the white dark-squared bishop does not develop to e3, then the queen is not compelled to move at all. It is better to keep options open, and it may become clearer which square, if any, should be preferred after White gives us more information about his preferred setup. But what are the alternatives? □ □ Also bad and defying general principles is □

10...d4? fails to keep the position closed, and it weakens crucial squares, which White can immediately underline with 11.♘bd2?N , eyeing both c4 and e4. That's not the only way to a large advantage for White. But

11.♘fxd4?N isn't one of them. While it is tactically available and eliminates the d4-pawn, Black can refrain from tak-

ing back on d4 and instead go for ♘xe5N , when White doesn't have enough for the missing pawn.

10... f6? . For example: 11.♗f4 ♗e7 12.♖c1 fxe5 13.♘xe5N ♘f6N Black is OK after 14.♖e1? O-O , so 14... Nf6 14.Nxd7! Kxd7 Forced, as taking with the knight would allow a devastating check on h5. It would be an understatement to say that White has more than sufficient compensation for his pawn; in fact, he is totally winning. Since direct solutions fail, let's recalibrate. Black is way behind in development, particularly as Be3 is coming, gaining further time on the black queen. The only way for Black to stay in the game is to keep the position closed, so that White is not able to use his development advantage to open lines. At the same time, he should catch up in development as fast as he can.

10... ♘ge7N is the best way to do so, planning ...Ng6 and ...Be7. If White plays 11.♗f4? , as in the game, Black does not need to move his queen from b6. If White chooses the normal

11.♗e3 , then ♕c7 is a bit better than going to d8, as from c7 the queen pre-emptively defends the b7-pawn in case White goes forward with Nc5. But even if the queen were to end up on d8, at least it would be because she got pushed there, not because she retreated voluntarily.

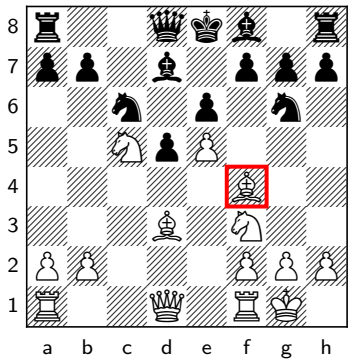
11.♗f4

11.♗e3 should have been preferred, meaning that Black's previous move was decent, only not the most logical.

11... ♘ge7 12.♘c5

How should Black play?

12... ♘g6!



The logical follow-up to the knight coming to e7, and proof that choosing f4 for the bishop wasn't all that wise.

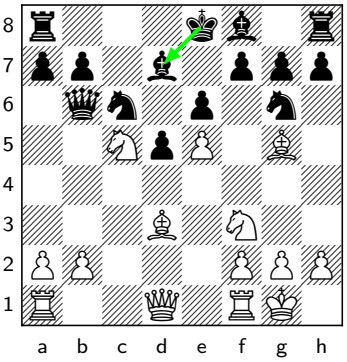
13.♗g5

The queen is attacked for real. What candidate moves are available for Black and which would you choose? White cannot afford to play

13.♘xb7N , as too many pieces are left hanging. Some calculation is needed to prove this, but it is not too difficult: ♕b6 14.♗xg6 hxg6 15.♘d6†N ♗xd6 16.exd6 f6 White has restored material equality, but is facing massive strategic problems instead. Black's king will be perfectly safe on f7, and White might suffocate under an avalanche of pawns on the dark squares. The d6-pawn

looks more like a weak isolani as opposed to a dangerous passer.

13... ♕b6!?



I did an online poll on the position above in a session at Killer Chess Training. The participants were fairly evenly split between the text move and □ Blocking the threat with the f-pawn is asking for trouble: □ It looks like the problem with □ The same rationale makes me want to avoid

13... ♕c7 . While the computer says that c7 is the right square, it doesn't feel right to me. I like the queen on the active b6-square, and it is unlikely that Black is ever going to want to capture the e5-pawn. To elaborate, I see two high- importance problems for Black: finding long-term security for the king, and getting the h8-rook to play an active part in the game. By castling to develop the rook, Black would be placing his king in greater danger than it faces in the center. It is better to recapture the bishop on d7 with the king, develop the h8-rook to the queenside, and then move the king back to e8 - the safest square available. The first step to converting an extra pawn is to stabilize the position and prevent counterplay. Black's other options do not fit well with this objective.

13... f6? For reasons we have already covered, Black really wants the center to remain closed, and now that it will open, White has multiple routes to real compensation: 14.exf6 gxf6 15.♘xd7N

15.♘xb7?N is not bad either: ♕c7 16.♗xf6 ♖g8 17.♘g5N ♗e7 This important only move slows down White's attack, and the game remains complicated. White is winning after 15. Nxb7 15...Qb6? 16.Bxf6 Rg8 17.Ng5! Qxb7 18.Qh5 , and the threats are too powerful.

15... ♔xd7 16.♗e3 Black's king is not too happy in the center like this when White has opened lines. This is in stark contrast to how the game ended up going, where Black's king was happy as could be on d7, as the center remained closed.

13... ♗e7 is that after 14.♘xb7N , the knight is coming to d6. In fact, this is playable for Black, as after ♕b6 15.♗xe7? ♔xe7 , coming to d6 would always drop the pawn on e5, and Black is winning. Hence, White should go for 15... Qb6 15.Nd6+ Bxd6 16.exd6 O-O , which is looks a bit more pleasant for Black, who's hoping to set the central pawns in motion. In some ways, this is a good line, in which Black applied the Shankland Rule, and played 13...Be7, a

move he wanted to play anyway, but at first seemed impossible. However, it's hard for humans to accept altering the situation so drastically, without a crystal-clear verdict of the resulting position. In that regard, I prefer the game continuation.

13... ♕c7 The computer's preference, with the idea of taking back on d7 with the queen and trying to castle short. Of course, in an objective sense, it must be right, but, in human terms, I prefer the game continuation once again. Let's see how the game could continue: 14.♘xd7N ♕xd7 15.♖e1 ♗b4 The only reasonable way to activate the h8-rook is to develop the f8-bishop and then castle kingside. 16.♖e2 O-O 17.h4 Is the black king safer on g8? I would prefer e8. The engine claims Black is good to go, but only due to a direct approach. – A) For example, ♖fc8? 18.h5 ♘f8N 19.h6 leads to a position that highlights the point nicely: is Black's king safer on g8, or would he rather be on e8? – B) 17\. h4 17...f6! Without this one, I would be very worried. 18.exf6 gxf6 19.Bh6 (Again, after 19.h5 Nge5! 20.Nxe5 fxe5 21.Re3 , Black's position looks a bit scary at first, but is objectively winning.) 19...Rf7 20.h5 Nge7 21.Nh4 According to the almighty engine, Black is more or less winning. Simultaneously, I would understand a human being scared to enter this position from afar. 21...Bc5 22.Rc2 Bb6 23.Qg4+ Kh8 24.Qh3 Up next could be Ng6+. I think there is a lot of danger in relying too much on computer analysis to evaluate middlegame play. Yes, objectively these were the best moves, and Black is objectively much better. But how easy is it for a human to get here? One would have to evaluate a position like this one correctly and calculate some important lines as well. I do not mind Akobian's choice.

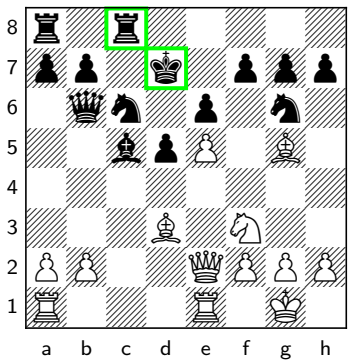
14.♘xd7 ♔xd7 15.♖e1?

The computer claims White needed to play:

15.♖c1 when ♗c5 is also sensible for Black, trying to finish development and stabilize instead of grabbing a second pawn. However, in this line, it is obvious that the engine's suggestion is better than the game continuation, as the pawn on f2 isn't hanging. And if Black isn't taking on e5, why protect it in the first place?

15... ♘gxe5?N 16.♘xe5†N ♘xe5N 17.♗e3 ♕a5 18.♗d4 ♗d6 It looks like Black is just about consolidating two pawns up, but the machine finds some energetic play to keep White in the game: 19.♗c3 ♕d8 20.♗f5 Not exactly the most obvious sequence – White has reasonable counterplay, though he is also not better.

15... ♗c5 16.♕e2 ♖hc8!



This develops the rook and allows the king to come back to the safe e8-square. The setup Akobian envisioned when he moved the queen to b6 is complete –his king is safe, far away from the kingside, he has no bad pieces, and White has virtually no counterplay.

17.h4

The most natural, trying to make something happen on the black kingside, which currently looks abandoned, but fully stable and inaccessible at the same time. □ 17. h4 17...Nd4? falls into the trap, as after 18.Qd1! Black loses material. The point is 18...Nxf3+ 19.Qxf3 and f7 will fall.

17.b4 sets a trap, but if Black doesn't fall for it, it's not a good move. □ ♗xb4 They say it takes veins of ice to play a move like this one, but there isn't much to fear. 18.♖eb1

18.♖ab1 ♕c7 19.♖ec1 ♗a5? A safe and human way of doing it. The bishop comes to b6, hiding the b7-pawn behind it. It will be hard for White to justify the two-pawn deficit.

18... ♕c7 or

17... h6

Black still needed to focus on consolidating, due to the threat of h4-h5. He starts by kicking the bishop and reducing the power of h4-h5.

18.♗d2

This is where Akobian began to falter. He has stabilized the position. Changes in the pawn structure are not currently likely. He needs to consider which pieces should be exchanged.

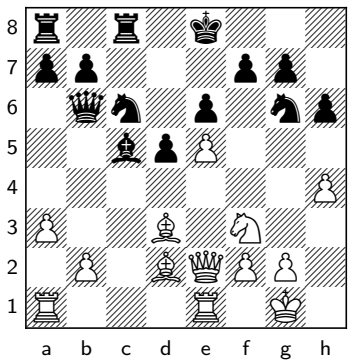
18... ♔e8?!

This is part of Black's plan. But the king does not need to go to e8 now. It will only need to go there when White plays Rc1 and b2-b4-b5 to open the queenside. The result is that Black loses time and thus some control over the position. Even though, in general, all trades would be beneficial, I would advise against Instead,

18... ♘d4?N 19.♘xd4N ♗xd4 20.♗xg6 which weakens Black's kingside.

18... ♗b4 is my preference. The highest priority is to get dark-squared bishops off the board. It enables the black queen to centralize and gain access to the dark squares b4, d4, and f4, which is likely to be relevant later in the game. This also prevents White from playing b2-b4 to try to gain space and open lines. Coming back to the game, what should White play to take advantage of Black's slow play?

19.a3?



White does not even need this for b2-b4, so it's a pure waste of time. What should Black do? However, Hence, it is important to push the g6-knight back:

19.b4? doesn't work either. White would be happy to see Black capture the b-pawn, as a deadly pin and loss of material would follow. But after ♗d4 , the e5-pawn is falling.

19.h5 This is also the logical follow-up to h2-h4. If White doesn't do this soon enough, the e5-pawn could hang in many lines, just like in the one we just mentioned. ♘ge7N

19... ♘f8N 20.b4 ♘d4?N 21.♕d1 ♘xf3†N 22.♕xf3 ♗d4 23.♖ab1 ♘d7N 24.♕f4 , when White has ideas of a2-a4, but also combinations of Rb3 and Bg6 are possible, aiming to attack on the kingside.

20.b4 Only now that the knight is not attacking the e5-pawn. ♘d4N 21.♕d1 ♘xf3†N 22.♕xf3 ♗d4 23.♖ab1 White can hope for some counterplay on the kingside, and it is hard for Black to continue making progress without losing sight of any of the soft spots in his position. Or

19... a5?!

Akobian misses a good chance to increase his advantage. His move is also positionally risky, since instead of stopping b2-b4, it might encourage it. Remember, we have already established that Black would like to exchange any of the pieces: In other lines, White retreats the queen, so that after the exchange of knights, the c5-bishop is loose, and the queen is developed for free. But in this version, 20... a5 20.Qd1? is not possible: 20...Nb3 also wins, but after 20...Qxb2 21.Rb1 Nxf3+ 22.gxf3 Qd4 , White has fallen apart.

19... ♘d4N 20.♘xd4N A sad necessity. ♗xd4 This also forces White to take on g6, due to the threat to take on e5. 21.♗xg6 fxg6 Black is solid. Next, he will double rooks on the c-file. For example: 22.♗b4 ♔f7? 23.♖ad1 ♖c6 24.♗d6 ♖ac8 25.♖d2 ♗c5 With Black fully mobilized, it is hard to imagine White ever getting enough counterplay.

20.♖ac1

Again, White should have played

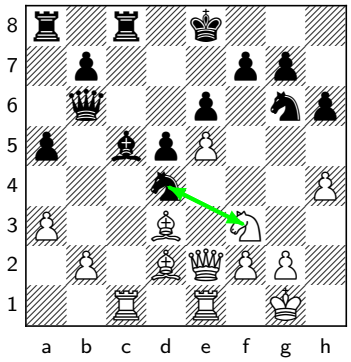
20.h5 , and only start thinking after the knight is kicked backwards. For example, ♘ge7N

20... ♘f8N 21.♖ad1 ♘d7N 22.♗f4 is a similar story.

21.♖ab1 a4 22.g3 and Black is for choice. Nevertheless, White is solid, and

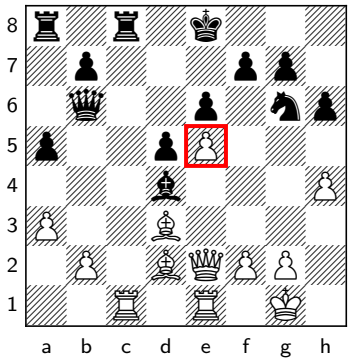
if Black tries to trade pieces with ♘d4N 23.♘xd4N ♗xd4 , White could hope for some counterplay involving Qg4.

20... ♘d4



Akobian did not need to be asked twice.

21.♘xd4 ♗xd4



The e5-pawn is in trouble.

22.b4!?

The engine calls the game move the decisive mistake and asks for

22.♗xg6 . That is depressing, and the text move even turned out successfully, so who are we to judge.

22... axb4 23.♗xb4

White is in bad shape. How should Black proceed? What is White threatening? The black king is not in tons of danger, despite being restricted by the b4-bishop. Rather, White is threatening h4-h5, Qg4, Qxg7, and Qxh6, with the complete annihilation of the black kingside. When evaluating the best way to keep the kingside safe, the answer should be obvious: grab the e5-pawn. Black will then be able to use his d4-bishop to defend the base of the pawn chain, and White's queen will not come to g4. However, Black should be careful to execute his idea in the right manner, keeping in mind the second principle, which is that we need to always evaluate which exchanges of pieces will favor us.

23... ♘f4?

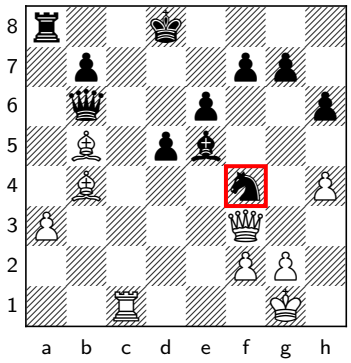
Always be aware of your opponent's resources. The knight is exposed on this square after White checks on b5. It would have been much safer on c6, having taken the e5-pawn, where it also helps to secure the king. □ However, □ Instead,

23... ♘xe5?N is not the best way to do it: 24.♗b5† Now not ♘c6?N and compared with the line shown below, where Black includes a capture on c1, the a8-rook is now terrible and will remain so for the foreseeable future. By contrast, the e1-rook can make itself feel useful. After 25.♕f3 , White is threatening Rxe6, and Black is crushed. 24\. Bb5+ 24...Kd8 25.Rb1 Black's a8-rook is dire and, despite the engine's evaluation of an advantage for Black, proceeding from here is quite difficult.

23... ♖xc1 is correct. This might look

wrong because it cedes the c-file, but Black will take it back soon enough with ...Kd8 and ...Rc8. Then, he will not be left with a bad rook on a8, nor will White have a useful rook on e1. After 24.♖xc1 ♘xe5N 25.♗b5† ♘c6N , Black wins. The d4-bishop defends the black kingside. The a8-rook is able to activate itself on the c-file, and the king can relocate to the queenside via d7 and c7. In this same position with rooks on e1 and c8 as well, Qf3 was a crusher, with Rxe6 on the way. As is, without the e1-rook, White is lacking any kind of way to increase the pressure. Black should convert without any serious issues.

24.♗b5† ♔d8 25.♕f3 ♖xc1 26.♖xc1 ♗xe5



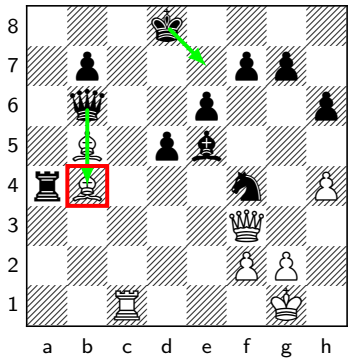
What's the knight doing on f4?

27.a4?

A serious mistake. White could have maintained the balance with

27.♗f1 , when g2-g3 is not a small threat: ♔e8 28.h5 Now g2-g3 threatens to win a full piece. d4 How else does the knight get a square? But this allows White a route to invade. 29.♕e4 The queen is ready to come to h7, and Black needs to be precise not to lose immediately.

27... ♖xa4!



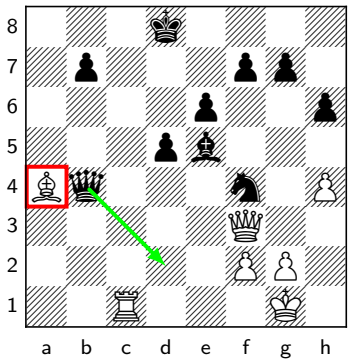
An excellent decision from Akobian. His rook was passive and not a good piece. By giving it up, he is able to capture White's dark-squared bishop, while also taking a third pawn. Once he has the e7-square for his king, he will face no more threats.

27... ♖c8? is similar, but with a pawn more and a more active rook for White. This is all that's needed to turn the evaluation around completely: 28.♗e7†

28.♖xc8†? ♔xc8 29.g3 is also winning for White.

28... ♔xe7 29.♖xc8 The extra pawn on a4 changes everything. Black has no passer, the queen is out of play, and the b5-bishop is anchored on a nice square. Kicking the knight backwards with g2-g3 combined with Re8+ is a huge threat, and Black is done for.

28.♗xa4 ♕xb4



Black is clearly winning. The bishop on a4 is forced to dreadful squares to avoid losing material directly, and White has no way to activate his pieces. With three pawns for the exchange, Black is effectively material up, and the first rule of any position with a greater quantity of smaller pieces against a larger piece is to always ask how active the larger piece is. Here, White's rook might look good, but in fact it is not doing anything, it has nothing to attack, and no prospects to improve.

29.♕e3

After

29.♗c2? ♕d2 , Black wins material directly.

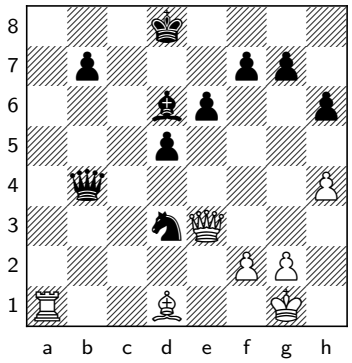
29.♗b3 is possible, but it does not look like much of an upgrade for the bishop. A clean way to win would be ♕d2 30.♖d1 ♕c3 31.♕xc3 ♘e2†N 32.♔f1 ♘xc3N followed by pushing the pawns in unison. The first rule of any exchange sacrifice is: how good are the rooks? White's rook is not terrible, but pales in comparison to Black's minor pieces and powerful pawn center.

29... ♗d6! 30.♗d1 ♘d3

This is surely good enough, but there was an even stronger option.

30... d4 was winning on the spot. White's queen is bullied away from the defense of the e1-square: 31.♕e4 f5 Time to resign.

31.♖a1



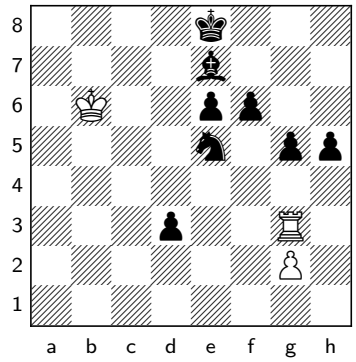
With white bishops on b4 and b5, a rook invasion to a8 would have hurt Black. Here, he does not care about it. The tactical point behind Black's move was

31.♕xd3 ♕e1† 32.♕f1 ♗h2† , winning the queen.

31... ♘xf2! 32.♖a4 ♘xd1!

Always check all checks and captures! Game over.

33.♖xb4 ♘xe3 34.♖xb7 ♔e8 35.♔f2 ♘g4† 36.♔e2 h5 37.♔d3 ♗g3 38.♔d4 ♗xh4 39.♔c5 ♗e7† 40.♔c6 ♘e5† 41.♔c7 f6 42.♖b3 d4 43.♖g3 g5 44.♔b6 d3

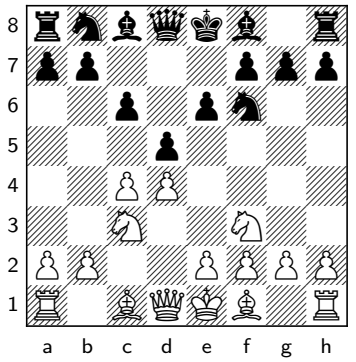


An interesting game, instructive in terms of restricting counterplay and converting the extra pawn. From a human perspective, Akobian's 13. Bg5 13...Qb6!? made a lot of sense compared with the engine's preference of 13...Qc7 , as well as with 13...Be7 , which gave back the pawn without a clear reason. Later on, he could have made life easier for himself by playing more directly with 18. Bd2 18...Bb4! , 19. a3 19...Nd4! , or 23. Bxb4 23...Rxc1! , all of which were helpful not only in stabilizing the position, but also in making the correct exchanges to convert the extra pawn.

Sam Shankland-Yannick Gozzoli Introduction

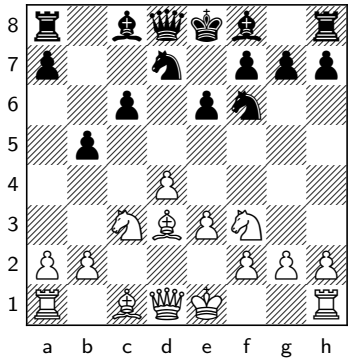
After starting with three wins in the first three rounds of the 2016 Biel Masters, I made it up to Board 1, and stayed there throughout to ultimately win the tournament. The first key victory on the top table came against Yannick Gozzoli, when I converted a pawn quite precisely.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6



At the time this game was played, the Semi-Slav had dropped out of popularity, and I was not expecting it.

5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♗d3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 b5 8.♗d3



Black has four serious moves at his disposal.

8... a6

This is an ambitious move which pushes the chaos button. Black puts a higher priority on the break ...c5, neglecting kingside development. By keeping the bishop away from d6 for the moment, Black ensures that e4 and Ne4 both come without winning a tempo. In my course, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) I give

8... ♗d6 , which is the modern move, but

8... b4 and

8... ♗b7 are fine too.

9.e4

White needs to be direct to play for an advantage. After Also,

9.♘e4N , Black achieves his thematic break with c5 .

9.O-O does not work well, as after ♗b7 10.e4 c5 11.e5 , Black has two reasonable options. cxd4 is good, as is

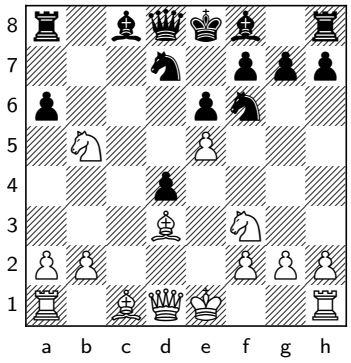
11... ♘d5N , since taking back on d5 with the bishop is possible.

9... c5 10.e5 cxd4

After

10... ♘d5?N 11.♘xd5N exd5 , Black has a losing pawn structure and a huge problem regarding development.

11.♘xb5



This was one of the main topics of debate in the World Championship match between Anand and Kramnik in 2008, with Team Anand pioneering the black side. Black is comfortable with easy development after

11.♘e4N ♘xe4N 12.♗xe4 ♖b8 .

11... ♘g4

11... axb5 is the most principled move, leading to complications: 12.exf6 gxf6 when 13.♗xb5 is not possible yet due to

13.O-O ♕b6 14.♕e2 ♗b7 Anand won two games as Black from his position, although Black's position is a little shaky.

14... b4 is also good.

13... ♕a5† .

12.♘bxd4?!

I played this move with the right idea in mind, and I vaguely remembered the position that White should be aiming for. But this was an inaccurate move order. □ □ But □

12.♗e4? is misguided due to axb5 13.♗xa8 ♕a5† .

12.♘d6†N is possible: ♗xd6 13.exd6 ♕a5† 14.♕d2 ♕c5 The machine gives White some edge, but it does not look fully convincing to me.

12.♕a4 is White's best move. After ♗b7 13.♘bxd4N , we transpose to the game continuation while never allowing the check on b4.

12... ♗b7

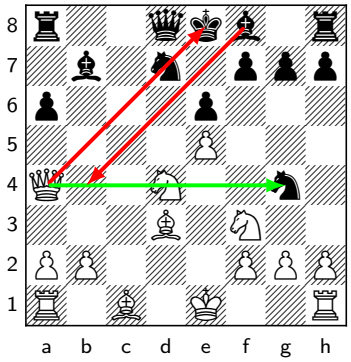
Failing to capitalize on my mistaken move order. Grabbing the pawn on e5 would be too optimistic: But

12... ♘gxe5?N 13.♗e4 ♖b8 14.O-O White's lead in development should be de-

cisive. Up next is Bf4.

12... ♗b4† gains some time for Black to develop and just about equalizes directly. It would not have been possible if I had started with 12.Qa4! instead.

13.♕a4!



A great multi-purpose move. White prevents the capture of the e5-pawn by pinning the d7-knight, he controls the b4- and a5-squares, and he threatens Nxe6, as well as h2-h3. The defense of the e5-pawn is illusory after Nor does

13.♕e2 , as Black has ♘gxe5N 14.♘xe5N ♕a5† anyway.

13.O-O prevent Black from taking on e5.

13... ♕b6

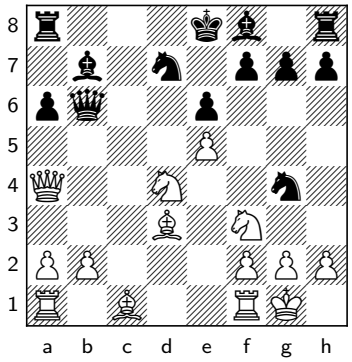
A clever response, increasing the pressure on my position. It prevents the threat of Nxe6 and threatens ...Qb4+, so h2-h3 is also countered.

13... ♗c5 14.♘xe6N

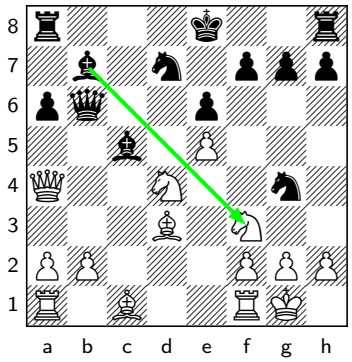
14.O-O

White is a pawn up. Due to the activity of Black's pieces, White has not yet met the first principle of conversion, which is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay.

Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #1



14... ♗c5



White is a pawn up, but, due to the activity of Black's pieces, he has not yet met the first principle of conversion, which is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Black's threat is ...Bxf3. How should White proceed?

15.h3!

This is the move White wants to play, kicking the knight away. It doesn't prevent Black from playing ...Bxf3, but what happens if White plays it anyway? Too ugly for White is

15.♗e3 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 ♘xe5N .

15... ♗xf3

Not

15... ♘xf2?N is a bit too ambitious: 16.♖xf2 ♗xf3 17.♖xf3 ♗xd4† 18.♔h1 Black cannot castle, and he should be crushed in the center with moves like Bg5 and Rd1 in the air.

16.hxg4

And Black's obvious moves are swiftly refuted.

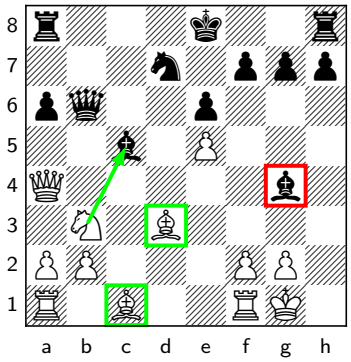
16.♗e3? ♗c6 17.♕b3 ♗xd4 when White loses a piece.

16... ♗xg4?

16... ♗xd4 17.gxf3 ♗xe5 18.♖d1 White no longer has an extra pawn, but Black's king is trapped in the center.

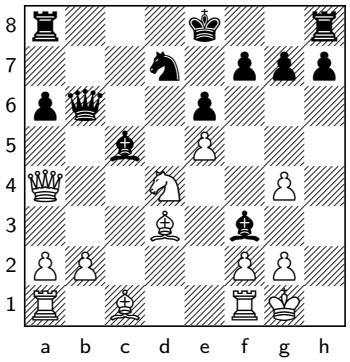
16... ♗d5 is Black's most natural reply, and it was my opponent's choice. He remains a pawn down, but his initiative continues. We'll see this position next.

17.♘b3!



Black needs to deal with the loose g4-bishop, which means White will exchange on c5 when Black will have to recapture with his queen. A key facet of converting an extra pawn is the transformation of advantages. Here, White will gain the bishop pair, space, and good play on the queenside at the cost of giving back his extra pawn. The machine gives +4, which I think is a bit too much in human terms, but Black is definitely lost.

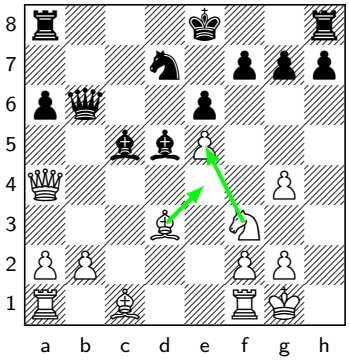
Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #2



16... ♗d5!

Black remains a pawn down, but his initiative continues. White has successfully stabilized the position to a reasonable degree. The next thing for him to consider is which piece exchanges he would like to make.

17.♘f3



This is the most natural move, supporting the e5-pawn. Whilst all minor piece exchanges would favor White, in particular, he would love to trade light- squared-bishops. In order to achieve this, White needs to facilitate Be4. This indicates that a move of the knight is justified rather than Be3.

17.♘b3N had been played at least a couple of times in the past, but b3 is not the best square for the knight.

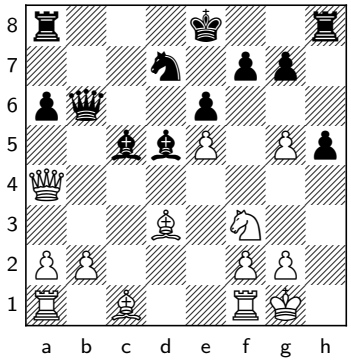
17... h5 18.g5

White correctly keeps the h-file closed. Black castled now, which was a mistake. Let's move on to our next exercise.

18.♗e4? would be unfortunate: hxg4 19.♗xd5 g3 Game over. But not

19... gxf3 20.♗xf3 or 19. Bxd5 19...exd5 20.Qxg4+-

Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #3

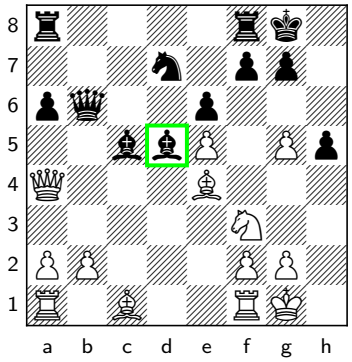


18... O-O?

Black should have played White has an important move, which I was happy to find. The first step is clearly to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, as Black's pieces are active. Additionally, White should be thinking about which pieces he wants to exchange. Immediately, the light-squared bishops should come to mind – Black's is obviously fantastic. How should White continue? Time for the Shankland Rule!

18... ♕b7 , when he is more or less okay after 19.♕f4 .

19.♗e4!



Black was threatening ...Bxf3 followed by ...Nxe5. This move might seem automatic, but it unfortunately runs into ...Bxf2+ with ...Nc5 to follow. What happens if I do it anyway? It turns out that Black is unable to safely capture on f2, and White is much better, since he has been able to play this consolidating move, trading off Black's best piece. □ □ White is not yet ready for □

19.♕xd7? is problematic, due to ♗c6 , when White's queen is trapped, and he needs to pitch his d3-bishop immediately to give her a retreat square. After 20.♗h7† ♔xh7 21.♕d3† g6 Black's bishops are monsters, and he is better despite the pawn less.

Also, ...Bb5 is not a small threat, and it's not that easy for White to prevent it.

19.g6? , as it allows Black's main threat of ♗xf3 followed by ...Nxe5.

19.b4? does not work, for example: ♕xb4 20.♕xd7? ♖ad8? 21.♕c7 ♗xf3 Black regains the material, and White's position will soon collapse.

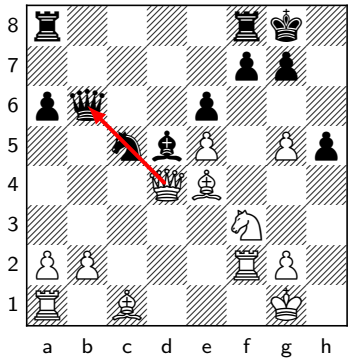
19... ♗xf2†?

The immensely important tactical point is that this move is not possible. Gozzoli went

19... ♗xe4 20.♕xe4 After the exchange of bishops, White's king is safer, and he has active prospects. His next move will be g5-g6, making use of his extra pawn to smash open the kingside. This means that Black has to spend a tempo on preventing g5-g6 rather than making counterplay. g6 White has now fully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay, and he is currently facing no direct threats. But he is also a long way from converting the extra pawn. The f1-rook is tethered to the defense of the f2-pawn, his f3-knight is tied to the defense of the weak e5-pawn, and he is lagging in development. White needs to come up with a plan to reorganize his pieces. 21.b3 I did not play this with the intention of fianchettoing my bishop. The bishop does not achieve much from there, and it walks into ...a5-...a4. With that plan, Black would not only be creating a weakness on b3, but also trading off pawns, which is desirable when you are down material. My computer finds

21.♗d2 , which is even stronger. The bishop goes to its desired square without burning time on b2-b3 first, and, in some cases, White can even consider b2-b4 instead. The tactical point is that ♕xb2 would fail to 22.♖fb1 ♕a3 23.♖b3 , and Black loses his queen.

20.♖xf2 ♘c5 21.♕d4!

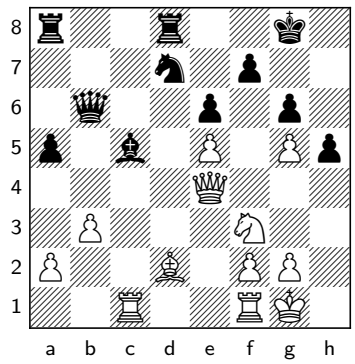


Black is unable to take on e4 with the knight, and he loses material after

21... ♗xe4 22.b4

An example of the use of calculation and tactics to justify a correct strategic decision.

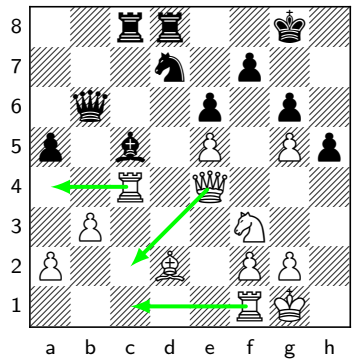
Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #4



23... ♖ac8

A natural reply, but it has a drawback which White can exploit.

24.♖c4!



The a5-pawn is weak, and Ra4 is coming. It is difficult for Black to address this threat in a way that keeps the f1-rook passive and prevents it from coming to c1. However, if Black simply returns to the defense of his a5-pawn with

24.♕a4 is possible, but not thrilling. ♘xe5?N does not work, due to 25.♘xe5N

25.♗xa5? ♗xf2† and Black wins.

25... ♖xd2 26.♘c4N Black has a capture with check on f2, but no more, so he loses an exchange and the game. But not

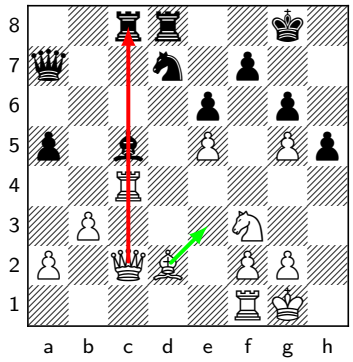
24... ♕a7

This is the most challenging move in practice, as Ra4 can be met with ...Bb6. Additionally, ...Nb6 could be coming next. White still cannot activate the f1-rook.

24... ♖a8 , White probably has nothing better than to return with his queen to the excellent e4-square. It is rare that misplacing an excellent piece (such as a safe queen on e4) can be beneficial.

24... ♕b5 would be ideal, placing Black's queen on a more active square, but it frees the f1 rook, and after 25.♖fc1 Black has no compensation left and is obviously lost. He is also facing concrete problems on the c-file. Returning to the game, we can ask ourselves: which piece exchanges would White like to make in order to help him convert his extra pawn? The exchange of bishops would be in White's favor due to the pressure from the c5-bishop. Such a trade would free the f1-rook from its defensive perch. So, White wants to play Be3. He cannot play it now as it would shatter his structure. But what can he do to try to play it in the future?

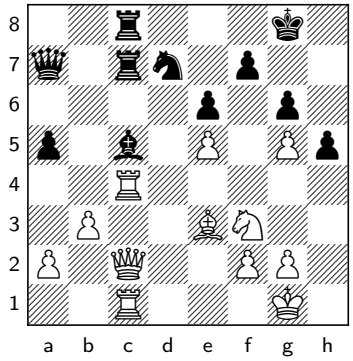
25.♕c2!



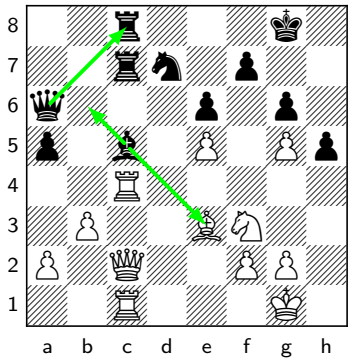
White pins the bishop and prepares Be3, while he also prevents ...Nb6. Even with Be3 clearly telegraphed as White's next move, how can Black prevent it? The only way would be to somehow break the pin on the c-file, and this proves impossible without a serious concession of some kind. Instead, a quiet move like

25.g3? enables Black to regroup his knight towards d5 with ♘b6N .

Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #5



27... ♕a6

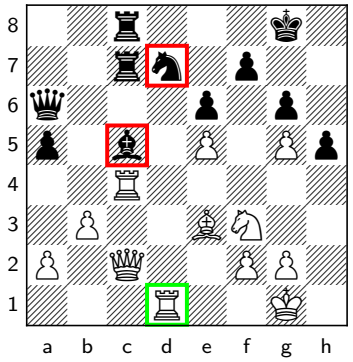


Black cannot play Now what? By moving the queen to a6, Black has the not-so-subtle idea of playing either ...Bxe3 or ...Bb6 next.

27... ♗xe3? 28.♖xc7 wins immediately,

27... ♗b6? without getting the queen off a7 first, as White has 28.♖xc7 ♖xc7 29.♕xc7 ♕xc7 30.♖xc7 ♗xc7 31.♗d4 White's pieces are tied to the defense of the e5-pawn... for now. Black will need to move the knight for his king to enter the game, and then White's knight can maneuver to c4 via d2.

28.♖d1!



A powerful move, taking advantage of the queen leaving the a7-square. The capture on e3

is prevented with just the two heavy pieces on the c-file rather than all three. Therefore, the rook from c1 was free to go, and it makes the blunt threat to take on d7, which Black can do nothing about. After Including the final piece in the fight with

28.♗d4 ♗b6 , the game goes on.

28.♘d2N was suggested by quite a few people in the KCT session. It is second best, and it should win with best play, but I find it significantly less convincing than what I ended up doing: ♗xe3? loses to

28... ♗b6 29.♕e4 ♖xc4 30.♘xc4N ♗xe3 31.♕xe3 a4 White is a clean pawn up. But several times in my course Shankland's Chess Calculation Workbook (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) I referred to the simple evaluation technique: would you beat Carlsen from here? I am pretty sure I would, but I would not be confident about scoring 100%. I could see myself messing it up one time out of ten.

29.♖xc7 ♖xc7 30.♕xc7 ♗xd2 31.♕d8† as the d7-knight is pinned, and Rc8 is coming.

28... ♗b6

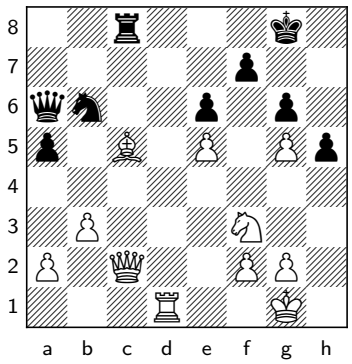
This is not working now. The game continued

28... ♗xe3 loses simply to 29.♖xc7

28... ♘b6N 29.♖xc5 ♖xc5 30.♗xc5 ♕b5 In converting an extra pawn, consider which piece exchanges are favorable. The computer claims White wins with more or less every move, but care should be taken. The first step towards not winning this game wouldn't be to make the win impossible; it would be to make the win harder.

29.♖xd7+— ♖xd7 30.♖xc8†

Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #6



30... ♕b5

In converting an extra pawn, consider which piece exchanges are favorable. The computer claims White wins with more or less every move, but care should be taken. The first step towards not winning this game wouldn't be to make the win impossible; it would be to make the win harder.

31.a4!

Black is winning back the piece anyway, but White can set the terms. One way to hallucinate would be The computer claims White also wins with The main alternative was

31.♗e7? ♖xc2 32.♖d8† ♔h7 33.♗f6 and then resign after ♖c8 .

31.♔h2? , but after ♖xc5 we are already in only-move territory: 32.♖d8†

♔g7 33.♕e4 ♘d5N 34.♘d4N ♕b6 35.♖d7 This sequence is not impossible to find, but I could imagine a strong player messing it up.

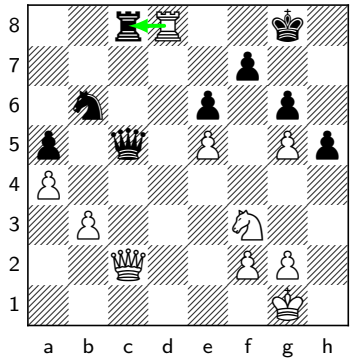
31.♖c1 ♘d7N 32.♘d4N , which is admittedly also completely winning. Still, I believe the game move is a tiny bit cleaner.

31... ♕xc5

This would be ideal, but White is not forced to take the queen just yet. The game continued

31... ♖xc5 32.axb5 ♖xc2 33.♖d6 ♘d5N 34.b6 ♖c8 and White needs to find one last move to seal the deal. That will be your last task in this chapter.

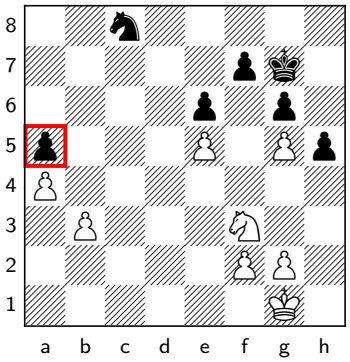
32.♖d8†!



Trading everything.

32.♕xc5 ♖xc5 should be winning, but the pressure on the e5-pawn is annoying.

32... ♔g7 33.♖xc8 ♕xc8 34.♕xc8 ♘xc8

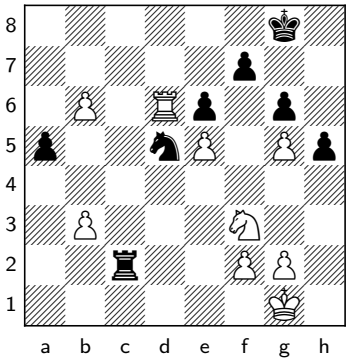


The a5-pawn is a huge weakness, and White's pieces are faster in coming to the queenside.

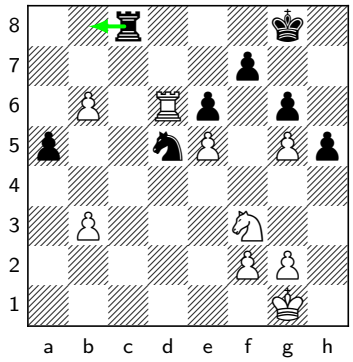
35.♘d4 ♘e7N 36.♔f1 ♔f8 37.♔e2 ♔e8 38.♔d3 ♔d7 39.♔c4

is a sample continuation.

Shankland-Gozzoli Exercise #7



34... ♖c8



White needs to find one last move to seal the deal. Otherwise, Black is still in the game, as he is threatening to siege and capture the b6-pawn.

35.♘d2!

Black is totally paralyzed after this powerful move, and it prompted him to resign. Let's see what would happen if Black were to continue instead of resigning. Instead, White has good winning chances after

35.♘d4?N ♖b8 should hold for Black.

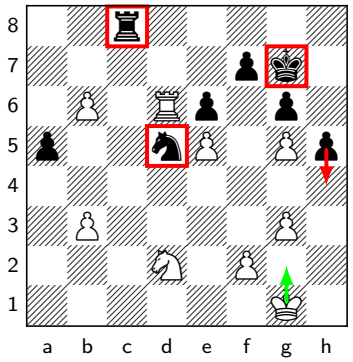
35.b7? ♖b8 36.♖d7 ♔f8 37.♘d4N ♔e8 38.♘c6N ♔xd7 39.♘xb8†N ♔c7 40.♘c6N ♔xb7 But after capturing either the a \- or f-pawn, the ball is not yet in the back of the net.

35... ♔g7

Black's king cannot stay on the back rank, let's say with

35... ♔f8 , due to 36.♘c4N , when a4 loses to 37.bxa4 ♖xc4 38.b7 ♖b4 39.♖d8† . And the rook cannot leave the c-file for the same reason, nor can it leave the eighth rank.

36.g3



Based on the above, it might not come as a huge surprise that Black is in zugzwang! Again,

36.♘c4N does win, but it's not necessary, it's more complicated, and I find the text more pleasing.

36... ♔g8

loses to

36... ♖c1† 37.♔h2 ♖c8 38.♔g2 Move please! After ♖b8 39.♘c4N , there's no more ...a4. If 38\. Kg2 38...Kh7 39.b7 (39.Ne4 Rb8 40.Nf6+ decides as well.) 39...Rb8 40.Rd7! Black must lose a tempo on ...Kg7. 40...Kg7 41.Nc4 No more ...Nb6, and White is ready for either Nxa5 or Nd6 next.

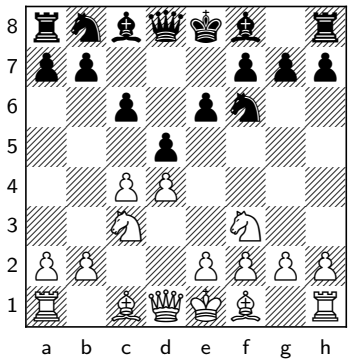
37.♘c4N

Sam Shankland-Yannick Gozzoli, Biel Masters 2016

After starting with three wins in the first three rounds of the 2016 Biel Masters, I made it up to Board 1, and stayed there throughout to ultimately win the tournament. The first key victory on the top table

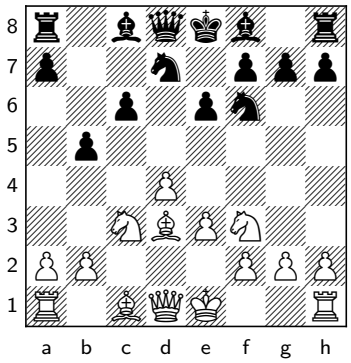
came against Yannick Gozzoli, when I converted a pawn quite precisely.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 e6



At the time this game was played, the Semi-Slav had dropped out of popularity, and I was not expecting it.

5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♗d3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 b5 8.♗d3



Black has four serious moves at his disposal.

8... a6

This is an ambitious move which pushes the chaos button. Black puts a higher priority on the break ...c5, neglecting kingside development. By keeping the bishop away from d6 for the moment, Black ensures that e4 and Ne4 both come without winning a tempo. In my course, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) I give

8... ♗d6 , which is the modern move, but

8... b4 and

8... ♗b7 are fine too.

9.e4

White needs to be direct to play for an advantage. After Also,

9.♘e4N , Black achieves his thematic break with c5 .

9.O-O does not work well, as after ♗b7 10.e4 c5 11.e5 , Black has two reasonable options. cxd4 is good, as is

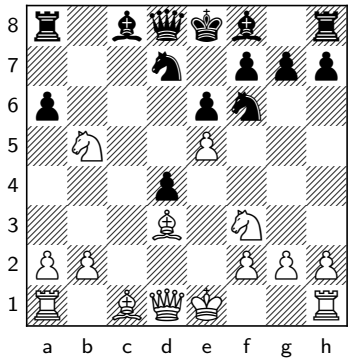
11... ♘d5N , since taking back on d5 with the bishop is possible.

9... c5 10.e5 cxd4

After

10... ♘d5?N 11.♘xd5N exd5 , Black has a losing pawn structure and a huge problem regarding development.

11.♘xb5



This was one of the main topics of debate in the World Championship match between Anand and Kramnik in 2008, with Team Anand pioneering the black side. Black is comfortable with easy development after

11.♘e4N ♘xe4N 12.♗xe4 ♖b8 .

11... ♘g4

11... axb5 is the most principled move, leading to complications: 12.exf6 gxf6 when 13.♗xb5 is not possible yet due to

13.O-O ♕b6 14.♕e2 ♗b7 Anand won two games as Black from his position, although Black's position is a little shaky.

14... b4 is also good.

13... ♕a5† .

12.♘bxd4?!

I played this move with the right idea in mind, and I vaguely remembered the position that White should be aiming for. But this was an inaccurate move order. □ □ But □

12.♗e4? is misguided due to axb5 13.♗xa8 ♕a5† .

12.♘d6†N is possible: ♗xd6 13.exd6 ♕a5† 14.♕d2 ♕c5 The machine gives White some edge, but it does not look fully convincing to me.

12.♕a4 is White's best move. After ♗b7 13.♘bxd4N , we transpose to the game continuation while never allowing the check on b4.

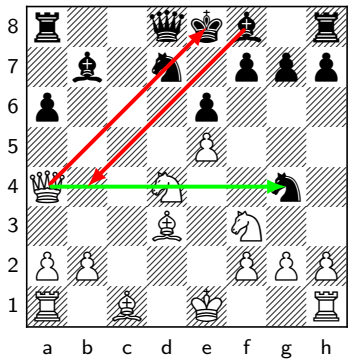
12... ♗b7

Failing to capitalize on my mistaken move order. Grabbing the pawn on e5 would be too optimistic: But

12... ♘gxe5?N 13.♗e4 ♖b8 14.O-O White's lead in development should be decisive. Up next is Bf4.

12... ♗b4† gains some time for Black to develop and just about equalizes directly. It would not have been possible if I had started with 12.Qa4! instead.

13.♕a4!



A great multi-purpose move. White prevents the capture of the e5-pawn by pinning the d7-knight, he controls the b4- and a5-squares, and he threatens Nxe6, as well as h2-h3. The defense of the e5-pawn is illusory after Nor does

13.♕e2 , as Black has ♘gxe5N 14.♘xe5N ♕a5† anyway.

13.O-O prevent Black from taking on e5.

13... ♕b6

A clever response, increasing the pressure on my position. It prevents the threat of Nxe6

and threatens ...Qb4+, so h2-h3 is also countered.

13... ♗c5 14.♘xe6N

14.O-O ♗c5

White is a pawn up. Due to the activity of Black's pieces, White has not yet met the first principle of conversion, which is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Black's threat is ...Bxf3.

15.h3!

This is the move White wants to play, kicking the knight away. It doesn't prevent Black from playing ...Bxf3, but what happens if White plays it anyway? Too ugly for White is

15.♗e3 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 ♘xe5N .

15... ♗xf3

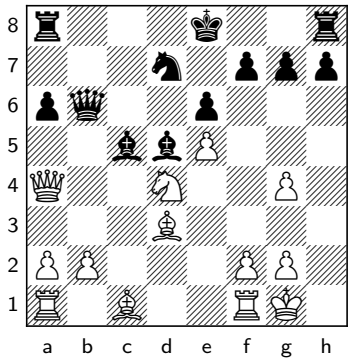
Not

15... ♘xf2?N is a bit too ambitious: 16.♖xf2 ♗xf3 17.♖xf3 ♗xd4† 18.♔h1 Black cannot castle, and he should be crushed in the center with moves like Bg5 and Rd1 in the air.

16.hxg4

16.♗e3? ♗c6 17.♕b3 ♗xd4 when White loses a piece.

16... ♗d5!



This is Black's most natural reply. He remains a pawn down, but his initiative continues. White has successfully stabilized the position to a reasonable degree. The next thing for him to consider is which piece exchanges he would like to make. Whilst all minor piece exchanges would favor White, in particular, he would love to trade light-squared-bishops. In order to achieve this, White needs to facilitate Be4. This indicates that a move of the knight is justified rather than Be3. □ □

16... ♗xg4? is swiftly refuted by 17.♘b3N . Black needs to deal with the loose g4-bishop, which means White will exchange on c5 when Black will have to recapture with his queen. A key facet of converting an extra pawn is the transformation of advantages. Here, White will gain the bishop pair, space, and good play on the queenside at the cost of giving back his extra pawn. The machine gives +4, which I think is a bit too much in human terms, but Black is definitely lost.

16... ♗xd4 17.gxf3 ♗xe5 18.♖d1 White no longer has an extra pawn, but

Black's king is trapped in the center.

17.♘f3

This is the most natural move, supporting the e5-pawn.

17.♘b3N had been played at least a couple of times in the past, but b3 is not the best square for the knight.

17... h5 18.g5

White correctly keeps the h-file closed.

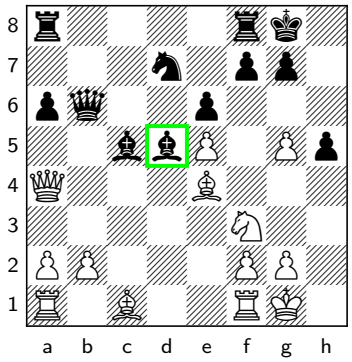
18.♗e4? would be unfortunate: hxg4 19.♗xd5 g3 Game over.

18... O-O?

White has an important move, which I was happy to find. The first step is clearly to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, as Black's pieces are active. Additionally, White should be thinking about which pieces he wants to exchange. Immediately, the light-squared bishops should come to mind – Black's is obviously fantastic. It might then seem automatic to play Bd3-e4, but this would unfortunately run into ...Bxf2+ with ...Nc5 to follow. Moreover, Black is threatening ...Bxf3 followed by ...Nxe5. How should White continue? Time for the Shankland Rule! Black should have played

18... ♕b7 , when he is more or less okay after 19.♕f4 .

19.♗e4!



What happens if I do it anyway? It turns out that Black is unable to safely capture on f2, and White is much better, since he has been able to play this consolidating move, trading off Black's best piece. □ □ White is not yet ready for □

19.♕xd7? is problematic, due to ♗c6 , when White's queen is trapped, and he needs to pitch his d3-bishop immediately to give her a retreat square. After 20.♗h7† ♔xh7 21.♕d3† g6 , Black's bishops are monsters, and he is better despite the pawn less. Also, ...Bb5 is not a small threat, and it's not that easy for White to prevent it.

19.g6? , as it allows Black's main threat of ♗xf3 followed by ...Nxe5.

19.b4? does not work, for example: ♕xb4 20.♕xd7? ♖ad8? 21.♕c7 ♗xf3 Black regains the material, and White's position will soon collapse.

19... ♗xe4

The immensely important tactical point is that

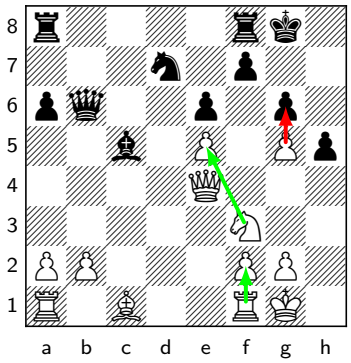
19... ♗xf2†? is not possible due to:

20.♖xf2 ♘c5N 21.♕d4 Black is unable to take on e4 with the knight, and he loses material after ♗xe4 22.b4 .

20.♕xe4

After the exchange of bishops, White's king is safer, and he has active prospects. His next move will be g5-g6, making use of his extra pawn to smash open the kingside. This means that Black has to spend a tempo on preventing g5-g6 rather than making counterplay.

20... g6



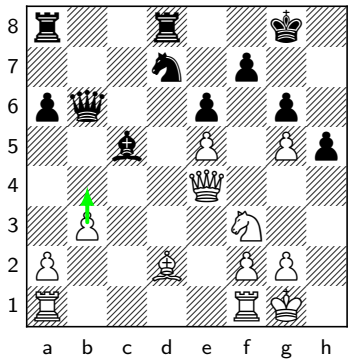
White has now fully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay, and he is currently facing no direct threats. But he is also a long way from converting the extra pawn. The f1-rook is tethered to the defense of the f2-pawn, his f3-knight is tied to the defense of the weak e5-pawn, and he is lagging in development. White needs to come up with a plan to reorganize his pieces.

21.b3

I did not play this with the intention of fianchettoing my bishop. The bishop does not achieve much from there, and it walks into ...a5-...a4. With that plan, Black would not only be creating a weakness on b3, but also trading off pawns, which is desirable when you are down material. My computer finds

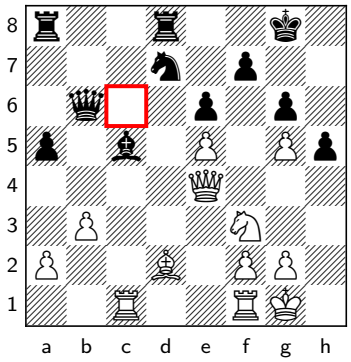
21.♗d2 , which is even stronger. The bishop goes to its desired square without burning time on b2-b3 first, and, in some cases, White can even consider b2-b4 instead. The tactical point is that ♕xb2 would fail to 22.♖fb1 ♕a3 23.♖b3 , and Black loses his queen.

21... ♖fd8 22.♗d2!



The computer is ambivalent between putting the bishop here or on b2. To human eyes, the d2-square makes more sense. The possibility of putting the bishop on e3 in some cases is preserved. From d2, the bishop restricts Black's pieces. Moreover, b2-b4 is in the air, and Black is encouraged to play ...a5. But the pawn on a5 does not come without downsides. With the bishop on d2, Black has to consider White playing both bxa4 and b4 after ...a4. Also, the a8-rook is tied to the defense of the isolated a5-pawn, as Qa4 is in the air.

22... a5 23.♖ac1

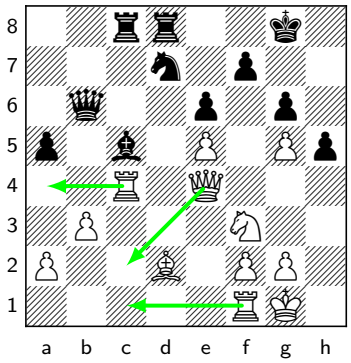


White increases the pressure on the black position. The bishop looks active on c5, but Black would probably prefer it to be on f8, allowing it to regroup to g7 and target the e5-pawn, while also clearing the c5-square for the knight. However, the c5-bishop is not free to move, due to threats such as Rc6 or Be3.

23... ♖ac8

A natural reply, but it has a drawback which White can exploit.

24.♖c4!



The a5-pawn is weak, and Ra4 is coming. It is difficult for Black to address this threat in a way that keeps the f1-rook passive and prevents it from coming to c1. However, if Black simply returns to the defense of his a5-pawn with 24. Rc4 24...Ra8 , White probably has nothing better than to return with his queen to the excellent e4-square. It is rare that misplacing an excellent piece (such as a safe queen on e4) can be beneficial.

24.♕a4 is possible, but not thrilling. ♘xe5?N does not work, not due to 25.♗xa5?

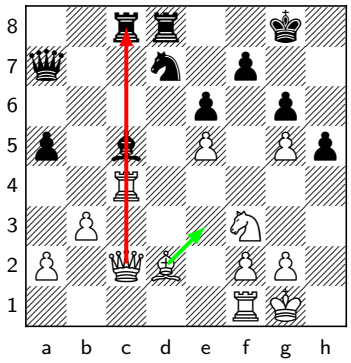
25.♘xe5N ♖xd2 26.♘c4N Black has a capture with check on f2, but no more, so he loses an exchange and the game.

25... ♗xf2† and Black wins, but

24... ♕a7

24... ♕b5 would be ideal, placing Black's queen on a more active square, but it frees the f1 rook, and after 25.♖fc1 Black has no compensation left and is obviously lost. He is also facing concrete problems on the c-file. The text is the most challenging move in practice, as Ra4 can be met with ...Bb6. Additionally, ...Nb6 could be coming next. White still cannot activate the f1-rook. Returning to the game, we can ask ourselves: which piece exchanges would White like to make in order to help him convert his extra pawn? The exchange of bishops would be in White's favor due to the pressure from the c5-bishop. Such a trade would free the f1-rook from its defensive perch. So, White wants to play Be3. He cannot play it now as it would shatter his structure. But what can he do to try to play it in the future?

25.♕c2!



White pins the bishop and prepares Be3, while he also prevents ...Nb6. Even with Be3 clearly telegraphed as White's next move, how can Black prevent it? The only way would be to somehow break the pin on the c-file, and this proves impossible without a serious concession of some kind. Instead, a quiet move like

25.g3? enables Black to regroup his knight towards d5 with ♘b6N .

25... ♖c7

After

25... ♕a6 26.♖c1 , White is preparing Be3 again, and an exchange of all the pieces to win the game. As always, once the pressure against f2 is relieved –even for a moment –White can free the f1-rook and win.

26.♗e3 ♖dc8

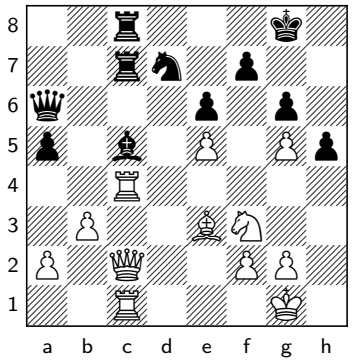
White now has a forced win, which I was able to calculate through to the end. This is a good position from which to practice your calculation skills.

27.♖c1

The first move is not too hard, but White needs to find the right follow-up as well. After

27.♖d1? ♗xe3 , the c7-rook is not hanging, and Black wins.

27... ♕a6

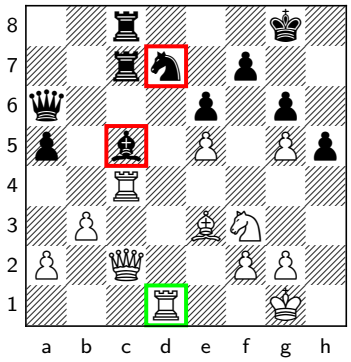


Now what? By moving the queen to a6, Black has the not-so-subtle idea of playing either ...Bxe3 or ...Bb6 next. □ □ Black cannot play

27... ♗xe3? 28.♖xc7 wins immediately.

27... ♗b6? without getting the queen off a7 first, as White has: 28.♖xc7 ♖xc7 29.♕xc7 ♕xc7 30.♖xc7 ♗xc7 31.♗d4 White's pieces are tied to the defense of the e5-pawn... for now. Black will need to move the knight for his king to enter the game, and then White's knight can maneuver to c4 via d2.

28.♖d1!



A powerful move, taking advantage of the queen leaving the a7-square. The capture on e3 is prevented with just the two heavy pieces on the c-file rather than all three. Therefore, the rook from c1 was free to go, and it makes the blunt threat to take on d7, which Black can do nothing about. After Including the final piece in the fight with

28.♗d4 ♗b6 , the game goes on.

28.♘d2N was suggested by quite a few people in the KCT session. It is second best, and it should win with best play, but I find it significantly less convincing than what I ended up doing: ♗xe3? loses to

28... ♗b6 29.♕e4 ♖xc4 30.♘xc4N ♗xe3 31.♕xe3 a4 White is a clean pawn up. But several times in my course Shankland's Chess Calculation Workbook (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) I referred to the simple evaluation technique: would you beat Carlsen from here? I am pretty sure I would, but I would not be confident about scoring 100%. I could see myself messing it up one time out of ten.

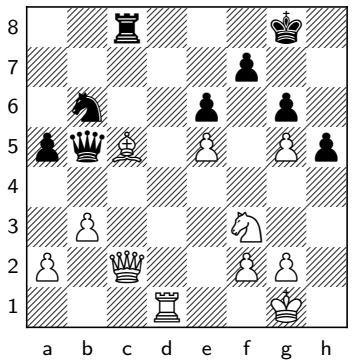
29.♖xc7 ♖xc7 30.♕xc7 ♗xd2 31.♕d8† as the d7-knight is pinned, and Rc8 is coming.

28... ♘b6

28... ♗xe3 loses simply to 29.♖xc7 , as does

28... ♗b6 to 29.♖xd7 ♖xd7 30.♖xc8†

29.♖xc5 ♖xc5 30.♗xc5 ♕b5



In converting an extra pawn, consider which piece exchanges are favorable. The computer claims White wins with more or less every move, but care should be taken. The first step towards not winning this game wouldn't be to make the win impossible; it would be to make the win harder.

31.a4!

One way to hallucinate would be The computer claims White also wins with The main alternative was

31.♗e7? ♖xc2 32.♖d8† ♔h7 33.♗f6 and then resign after ♖c8 .

31.♔h2? , but after ♖xc5 we are already in only-move territory: 32.♖d8† ♔g7 33.♕e4 ♘d5N 34.♘d4N ♕b6

35.♖d7 This sequence is not impossible to find, but I could imagine a strong player messing it up.

31.♖c1 ♘d7N 32.♘d4N , which is admittedly also completely winning. Still, I believe the game move is a tiny bit cleaner.

31... ♖xc5

After

31... ♕xc5 , 32.♕xc5 ♖xc5 should be winning, but the pressure on the e5-pawn is annoying. Instead, White has 32... Qxc5 32.Rd8+! , trading everything: 32...Kg7 33.Rxc8 Qxc8 34.Qxc8 Nxc8 The a5-pawn is a huge weakness, and White's pieces are faster in coming to the queenside. 35.Nd4 Ne7 36.Kf1 Kf8 37.Ke2 Ke8 38.Kd3 Kd7 39.Kc4 is a sample continuation.

32.axb5

This is also the computer's choice, but perhaps more human was:

32.♕xg6†? fxg6 33.axb5 After Rd6 and Nd4, Black's kingside will collapse.

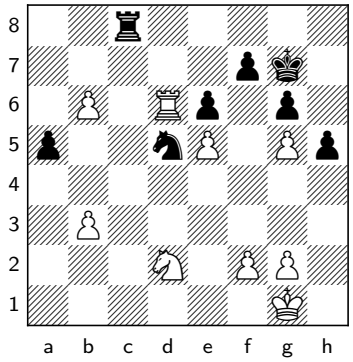
32... ♖xc2 33.♖d6! ♘d5 34.b6 ♖c8 35.♘d2!

1-0 Black is totally paralyzed after this powerful move, and it prompted him to resign. Let's see what would happen if Black were to continue instead of resigning. White has good winning chances after

35.♘d4?N ♖b8 should hold for Black.

35.b7? ♖b8 36.♖d7 ♔f8 37.♘d4N ♔e8 38.♘c6N ♔xd7 39.♘xb8†N ♔c7 40.♘c6N ♔xb7 But after capturing either the a \- or f-pawn, the ball is not yet in the back of the net.

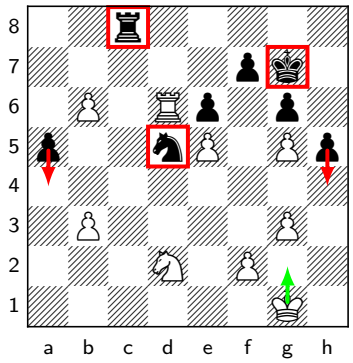
35... ♔g7



Black's king cannot stay on the back rank, let's say with

35... ♔f8 , due to 36.♘c4N , when a4 loses to 37.bxa4 ♖xc4 38.b7 ♖b4 39.♖d8† . And the rook cannot leave the c-file for the same reason, nor can it leave the eighth rank.

36.g3



Based on the above, it might not come as a huge surprise that Black is in zugzwang!

36.♘c4N does win, but it's not necessary, it's more complicated, and I find the text more pleasing.

36...♖c1†

Again,

36...♔g8 loses to 37.♘c4N .

37.♔h2 ♖c8 38.♔g2

Move, please!

38...♔h7

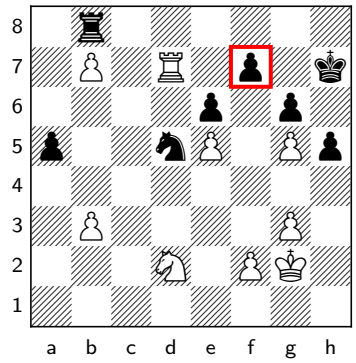
After

38...♖b8 39.♘c4N , there's no more ...a4.

39.b7

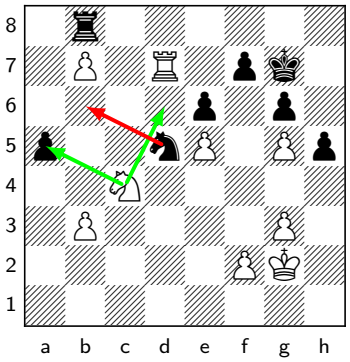
39.♘e4N ♖b8 40.♘f6†N decides as well.

39...♖b8 40.♖d7!



Black must lose a tempo on ...Kg7.

40...♔g7 41.♘c4



No more ...Nb6, and White is ready for either Nxa5 or Nd6 next. This game is a good illustration of both stabilizing the position while avoiding counterplay and evaluating which piece trades favor the conversion of the extra pawn. Still, it was not entirely strategic. I also needed to see quite a few tactical tricks to help put my plans in motion.

Conclusion

This chapter saw a lot of games where the side with the extra pawn had to consolidate their position. There is some argument that I could have cut the coverage of each of the games once the position had stabilized, since then evaluating which pieces and pawns to exchange, and what the ultimate plan for the additional pawn should be, would fall outside of the scope of the present chapter. I chose not to, because I like milking games for all of the instructional value that they may contain. As such, while the primary focus of our first section was about stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay, there were countless moments when evaluating piece and pawn exchanges correctly, as well as coming up with a plan for the pawn, were extremely relevant. Which is a good segway for us to venture into Chapter 2!

2) Make the Right Changes

Introduction

In this second part of the book, we will be looking at situations where the extra pawn is either fully or mostly stable, and where the most critical decisions are the ones around which piece exchanges, pawn exchanges, or structural changes the pressing side should be aiming for. Of course, we will inevitably keep discussing Phases 1 and 3 of the conversion as well.

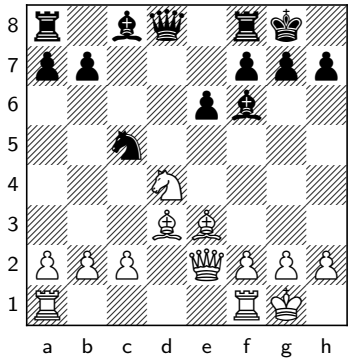
Sam Shankland-Lisandro Munuz Introduction

As always, we must remember the key steps towards converting an extra pawn. 1) Stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. 2) Evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns and changes to the structure will help you win, and which will favor your opponent. 3) Come up with a plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game, the plan making use of the extra pawn at some point or in some other way justifying its presence. We need to have a clear purpose of what the extra pawn is trying to achieve. People will often think that making a passed pawn is the top priority. This can be the case, but I find this is untrue more often than not. Creating a passed pawn would fall under the umbrella of the third rule.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♗e7 4.♗d3 dxe4 5.♘xe4 ♘d7 6.♘f3 ♘gf6 7.♕e2 c5 8.♘xf6† ♗xf6 9.♗e3

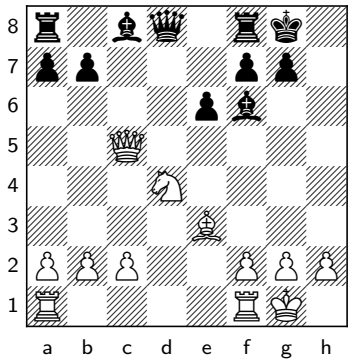
9.d5 ♘b6N 10.♗b5† ♔f8 is another option.

9...O-O 10.O-O cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘c5



The first step to converting an extra pawn is to win a pawn in the first place! The knight has moved to an undefended square, so...

12.♗xh7† ♔xh7 13.♕h5† ♔g8 14.♕xc5



White has duly won a pawn with a simple tactic. At the moment, Black's position is actually not so bad, and his bishop pair provides him with some compensation. But he decided to trade off the bishop pair, aiming to simplify to an opposite-colored bishop position:

14... b6 15.♕c4 ♗xd4?!

This was a questionable decision. Black would have had reasonable compensation for the pawn after either

15... e5 followed by ...Be6, or

15... ♗b7 . Now, White has an important choice to make. Obviously, he will take on d4. But should he take with the queen or the bishop? This is a good place to stop and consider the three main elements to converting an extra pawn referred to at the start of the game. First off, it seems like the position is mostly stable, and White should not have to worry a ton about avoiding direct threats. The most important element is therefore to consider which exchanges of pieces favor White, and which resulting endgames give the most winning chances. There are a few relevant points here. First, the king and pawn ending is clearly winning for White, but Black will fight tooth and nail not to let this occur. The next best thing would be a queen endgame, as then White should be able to make a passed c-pawn and push it straight through. However, we have to be realistic. There are opposite-colored bishops on the board, and what are the odds that we will be able to force their exchange? Approximately zero. Assuming that the bishops will remain on the board, White needs to consider which other endings to aim for. It is clear that a pure opposite-colored bishop endgame should be an easy draw for Black, as the kings would have a similar level of activity. As such, we cannot simply plan to try to exchange all of the major pieces, and we should be careful about which ones remain on the board. If we reach an endgame with only queens and opposite-colored bishops, Black should make an easy draw. This is because he will be able to stick his queen on an active square, constantly threaten the exchange of queens, and White can never acquiesce. This is already leading us to think that exchanging queens might not be the worst idea. There is more to converting the extra pawn, but chess is a game of many decisions, and we only need to consider enough to help us make the right call at the present moment.

16.♕xd4!

Trying to keep the queens would be a mistake.

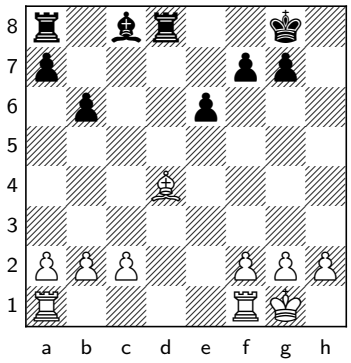
16.♗xd4? Black has multiple defensive attempts: ♗a6 Ideally, Black would not want to trade off the bishops, but his activity will fully justify their exchange. The first step towards converting an extra pawn is to stabilize the position, and White has failed to do so.

16... ♗b7? is not bad either. White is unable to prevent ...Qd5, which would force an exchange of queens anyway. Except this time, the black bishop would land on the ideal d5-square. This was not a luxury Black got to enjoy in the game. Black could also

try for some dynamic counterplay involving ...Qg5, but this is slightly abstract, and he should be careful not to run out of threats.

17.♕xa6 ♕xd4 Black has managed to reach a heavy-piece endgame. He has taken the center with the queen and is threatening the b2-pawn. White will be forced to play a sad move like Rab1 to maintain the material advantage, and after ...Rfd8, Black will have full control of the only open file. In human practice, White still should be a little better, but I believe his winning chances are much worse here than they were in the game continuation. He has not achieved anything resembling stability, and I don't think he has a great plan to contest Black's activity in the future either.

16... ♕xd4 17.♗xd4 ♖d8



Let's play some silly moves for illustrative purposes. B) If Black allows White to dominate the file, things are not easy either. 17. Bxd4 18...Bc6 19.Rfd1 Rfe8 20.Rd2 Re7 21.Rad1 Rc8 22.h3 Rcc7 intending to place a rook on d7 next. Again, at least one set of rooks will go off the board, and White doesn't accomplish much.

17... ♗b7 18.♗e3 and now: A) ♖fd8 19.f3 ♖d7 20.♔f2 ♖ad8 21.♔e2 Let's just ignore that Black would have ...Ba6 in this specific position. We're discussing the d-file. The point is that Black dominates the open file, and the only way to contest it is by trading all the rooks, not just one set, resulting in a drawn opposite-colored bishop endgame.

18.♖fd1

There are two more things to consider now. Firstly, while we know that exchanging all the rooks will lead to a drawn bishop endgame, we must consider whether White would like to exchange one pair of rooks or not. In order to properly figure this out, we need to think about what White's extra pawn on the queenside is aiming to accomplish. It might be tempting to think that the idea should be to make a passed pawn, but this would not be correct. A plan such as c4, b4, and c5 will not work. Black can easily blockade our passer with his bishop on the c6-square. Instead, the plan should be to use the queenside pawns to fix the enemy queenside pawns on dark squares, control the queenside to give White's pieces easier access, and eventually win one of Black's pawns. A good way of executing this plan would be to advance a4, b3, and c4. Once this happens, Black's pawns will be stuck on dark squares indefinitely. After proper preparation, perhaps bringing the king to c3, White can later look for b5 to fix the pawns even further. Then, the king comes to b4, and White will be ready for a5 or c5, hoping to eventually win the a7-pawn. When we consider that White's best plan might involve walking his king all the way from g1 to b4, it becomes clear that

this will not work if Black can keep all of the rooks on the board. He can stack them up on the d-file. White will not be able to bring the king to d3, and if the bishop ever moves, all of the rooks will come off. As such, it makes logical sense that White would like to exchange one pair of rooks. Let's see how this plays out in the game. Trying to close the d-file with

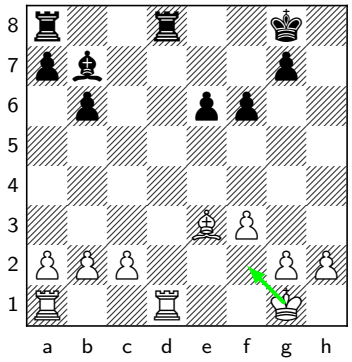
18.c3 allows Black to play what he wants to: b5 A good rule of thumb is that when you are defending an opposite-colored bishop endgame, you want to put your pawns on the same color as your bishop. In contrast, the attacking side should put their pawns on the same color as the opposing bishop.

18... f6

In an ideal world, Black would like to play

18... b5 We already mentioned that a good rule of thumb is that in opposite-colored- bishop endgames, the defending side should be putting pawns on the same color as his bishop, trying to make a fortress. Indeed, part of the point of White's main plan with a2-a4 is to fix the enemy pawns on dark squares. However, while this move is positionally desirable, it runs into a concrete problem: 19.♗e3 This is an important resource for White. Since Black has not yet been able to advance ...a6, the rook on a8 is stuck in place defending the a7-pawn. Hence, Black is not able to effectively contest the open d-file. ♗b7 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.♗xa7 Black is not without defensive resources, but things are not going in the right direction. For example: ♗e4 22.c4 This is clever. bxc4 23.♗e3± The pawn structure has changed in a way that clearly favors White. He has an outside passer, and Black has a weak isolated pawn that will always require protection.

19.♗e3 ♗b7 20.f3

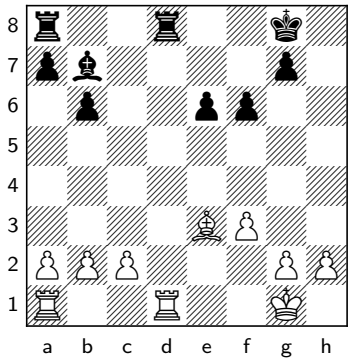


Blunting the b7-bishop and clearing the f2-square for the king. After

20... ♔f7

comes our first important decision.

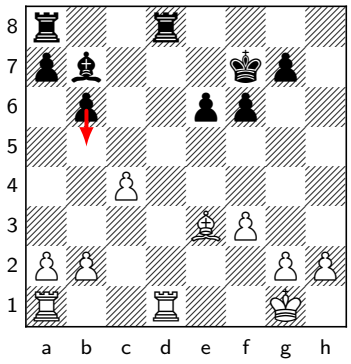
Shankland-Munuz Exercise #1



20... ♔f7

What should White do? What does Black want to do?

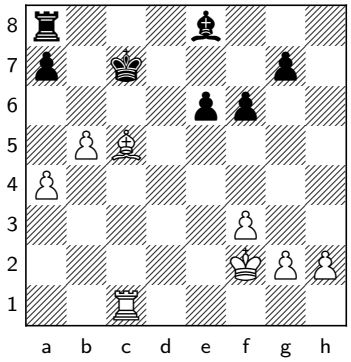
21.c4!



This or

21.a4 would have been best, preventing any hope of ...b5. White retains good winning chances.

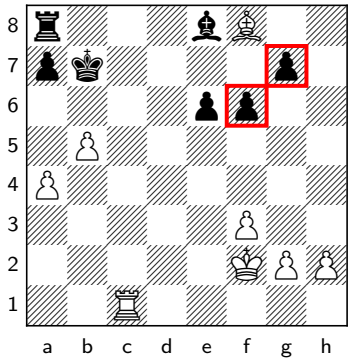
Shankland-Munuz Exercise #2



29... ♔b7

The position has changed a lot. Black brought his king all the way to b7. He has defended his queenside fairly well, so what should we do?

30.♗f8!



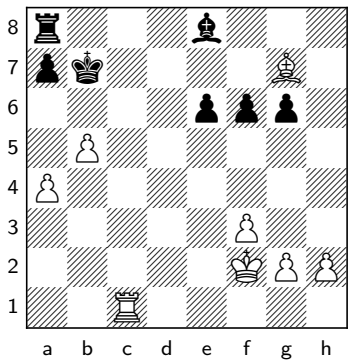
Attack the other side! Black is forced to weaken himself. Including 30. Bf8 31.Re1! Bd7 and only now going 32.Bg7 is the clever engine suggestion. The point is that if Black goes for the same thing he tried in the game, the e6-pawn will be hanging.

30... g6 31.♗g7 a6?

This is desperate but, to give credit to my opponent, it is also Black's best practical chance. It was critical to consider what would happen if Black tried to maintain material parity on the kingside:

31... f5 We'll continue in our next exercise.

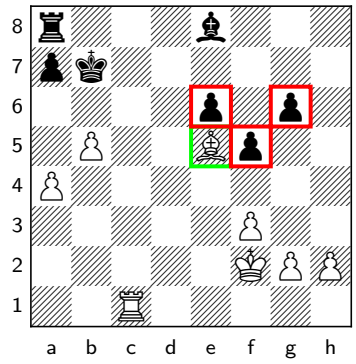
Shankland-Munuz Exercise #3



31... f5

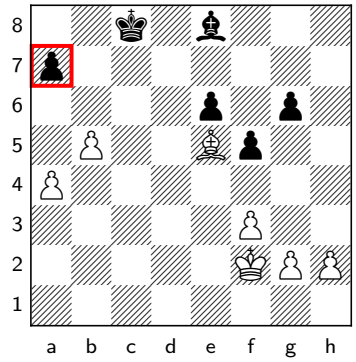
We should always ask ourselves which exchanges will help us win the game.

32.♗e5!



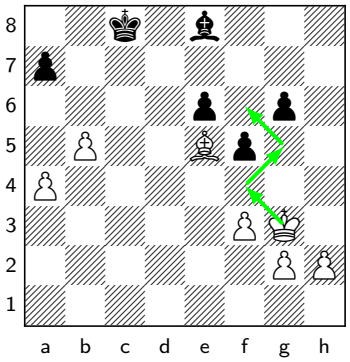
Here, the change to the kingside pawn structure means that White will win the pure opposite-color bishop endgame, because he can bring the king to g5. This is similar to the Ding Liren-Wojtaszek game. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

32... ♖c8 33.♖xc8 ♔xc8



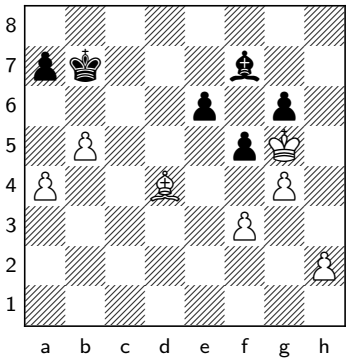
The a7-pawn has been fixed as a weakness, so the black king is going to be stuck defending it. If he had been able to advance ...a6 earlier, the king would be free to run to defend the kingside.

34.♔g3



Moreover, the kingside structure has been fixed. White places his king on g5, plays g2-g4, and then pushes his h-pawn all the way to h8.

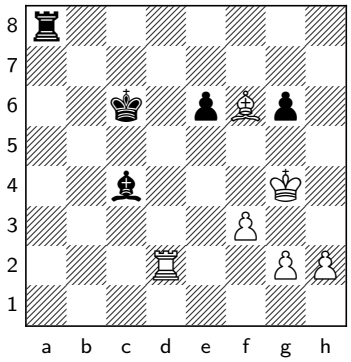
34... ♔b7 35.♔f4 ♔b6 36.♗d4† ♔b7 37.♔g5 ♗f7 38.g4



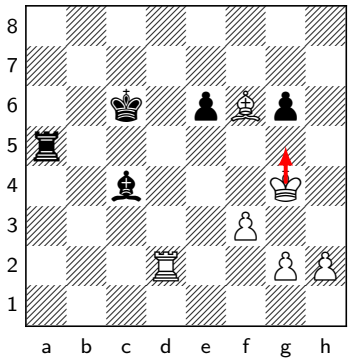
The h-pawn is coming, and it will not be stopped.

38.♔f6 works as well, taking yet another pawn.

Shankland-Munuz Exercise #4

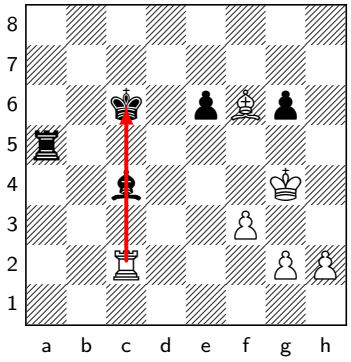


37... ♖a5



Black cuts the king off from reaching g5. What is the cleanest way for White to finish the game?

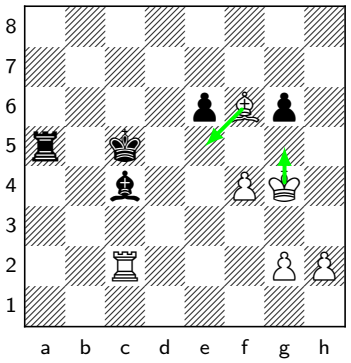
38.♖c2!



This forces Black's king to block the fifth rank, allowing the white king to advance to g5. Trying to put the bishop on e5 might be tempting, but after

38.f4 ♖h5 , Black is still fighting.

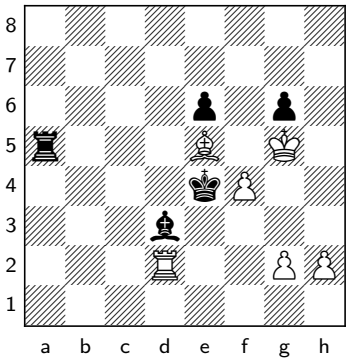
38... ♔c5 39.f4!



There was no need to rush with the king coming to g5. Putting the pawn on f4 works perfectly now, because Black's rook is unable to reach the f5- or h5-square before White anchors the bishop on e5. The game continued

39... ♔d5 40.♔g5 ♔e4† 41.♗e5

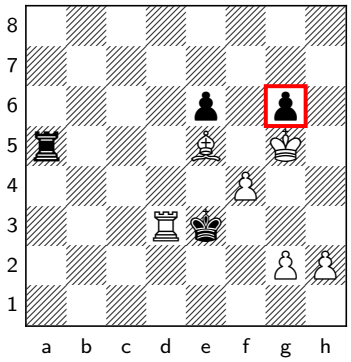
Shankland-Munuz Exercise #5



42... ♔e3

Not a hard exercise, but certainly a nice finish. How would you play?

43.♖xd3†!



The final blow. White was going to have to give an exchange to win the g6-pawn one way or another. Simultaneously, Black's king is pulled further away from the kingside.

43...♔xd3 44.♔xg6 ♔e4 45.g4 ♔f3 46.h3 ♔g3 47.g5

The g-pawn is decisive.

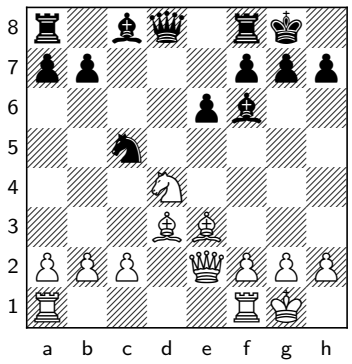
Sam Shankland-Lisandro Munuz, Miami 2009

As always, we must remember the key steps towards converting an extra pawn. 1) Stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. 2) Evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns and changes to the structure will help you win, and which will favor your opponent. 3) Come up with a plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game, the plan making use of the extra pawn at some point or in some other way justifying its presence. We need to have a clear purpose of what the extra pawn is trying to achieve. People will often think that making a passed pawn is the top priority. This can be the case, but I find this is untrue more often than not. Creating a passed pawn would fall under the umbrella of the third rule.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♗e7 4.♗d3 dxe4 5.♘xe4 ♘d7 6.♘f3 ♘gf6 7.♕e2 c5 8.♘xf6† ♗xf6 9.♗e3

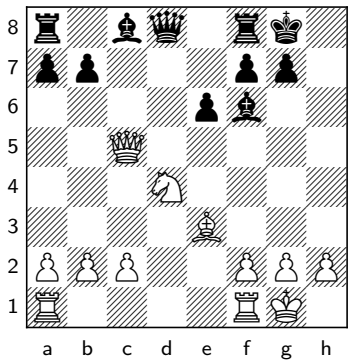
9.d5 ♘b6N 10.♗b5† ♔f8 is another option.

9...O-O 10.O-O cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘c5



The first step to converting an extra pawn is to win a pawn in the first place! The knight has moved to an undefended square, so...

12.♗xh7† ♔xh7 13.♕h5† ♔g8 14.♕xc5



White has duly won a pawn with a simple tactic. At the moment, Black's position is actually not so bad, and his bishop pair provides

him with some compensation. But he decided to trade off the bishop pair, aiming to simplify to an opposite-colored bishop position:

14... b6 15.♕c4 ♗xd4?!

This was a questionable decision. Black would have had reasonable compensation for the pawn after either

15... e5 followed by ...Be6, or

15... ♗b7 . Now, White has an important choice to make. Obviously, he will take on d4. But should he take with the queen or the bishop? This is a good place to stop and consider the three main elements to converting an extra pawn referred to at the start of the game. First off, it seems like the position is mostly stable, and White should not have to worry a ton about avoiding direct threats. The most important element is therefore to consider which exchanges of pieces favor White, and which resulting endgames give the most winning chances. There are a few relevant points here. First, the king and pawn ending is clearly winning for White, but Black will fight tooth and nail not to let this occur. The next best thing would be a queen endgame, as then White should be able to make a passed c-pawn and push it straight through. However, we have to be realistic. There are opposite-colored bishops on the board, and what are the odds that we will be able to force their exchange? Approximately zero. Assuming that the bishops will remain on the board, White needs to consider which other endings to aim for. It is clear that a pure opposite-colored bishop endgame should be an easy draw for Black, as the kings would have a similar level of activity. As such, we cannot simply plan to try to exchange all of the major pieces, and we should be careful about which ones remain on the board. If we reach an endgame with only queens and opposite-colored bishops, Black should make an easy draw. This is because he will be able to stick his queen on an active square, constantly threaten the exchange of queens, and White can never acquiesce. This is already leading us to think that exchanging queens might not be the worst idea. There is more to converting the extra pawn, but chess is a game of many decisions, and we only need to consider enough to help us make the right call at the present moment.

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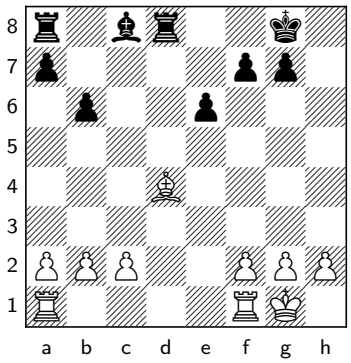

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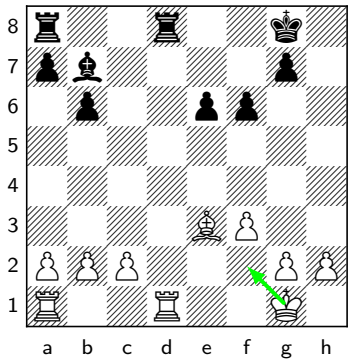


Blunting the b7-bishop and clearing the f2-square for the king.

20... ♔f7

What should White do?

21.♖xd8?

Thematically, this move makes sense, as we know that White wants to exchange one pair of rooks. But there was no need to rush. The rook on d8 was not going anywhere, and this gave my opponent some additional defensive chances.

21.♔f2 allows b5 , as 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♗xa7 fails to ♖d2† .

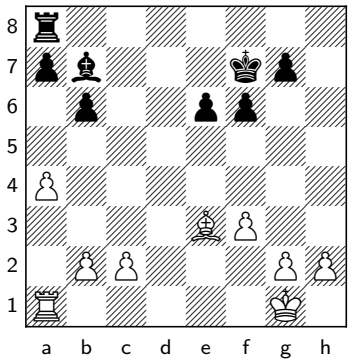
21.a4 or

21.c4 would have been best, preventing any hope of ...b5. White retains good winning chances.

21... ♖xd8 22.a4

Black does not have a route to full and comfortable equality, but he should hold. However, this requires better play than what he showed in the game.

22... ♖a8?



This is passive, and White is allowed to play in accordance with his plan undisturbed. There's more than one move that holds, but 23... Ra8 23.c3 Bd5 The bishop is anchored and stops White's pawns from reaching their desired destinations. 24.a5 This looks like the most testing try. But does White even have a threat? 24...g5! White is unable to play Ra4 to help push his pawn due to ...b5. He is also not able to take twice on b6 due to ...Rb8 trading off pawns on the queenside. Black has the simple plan of ...Kg6, ...Rc7, and ...b5. The game is close to a draw.

22... ♖c8 looks the most convincing to me by far. Black denies White the opportunity to place his pawns on light squares: Trying to insist on putting the pawns on light squares with 23.♖c1 e5 24.c4 runs into ♗c6 25.b3 ♖d8 , and Black starts developing serious counterplay with ...Rd3 coming next. White has failed in his mission to stabilize.

23.♔f2

Do not rush! Black has no counterplay, and White gradually improves his position. Too impatient is:

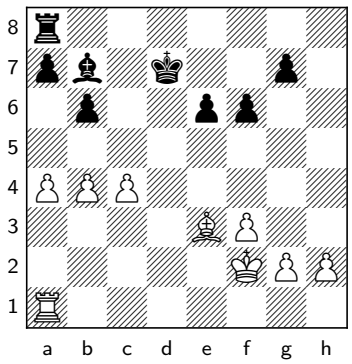
23.a5 bxa5 24.♖xa5 a6 White can boast of the passed c-pawn, but Black's defenses are solid, and the black rook is free to become active.

23... ♔e7

Black's last move is an indication of his plan to bring the king towards the queenside. It turns out to be ineffective. In this version,

23... ♖c8 isn't as effective as it used to be, since Black has wasted a tempo. After 24.♖c1 e5 25.c4 ♗c6 26.b3 ♖d8 , the bishop on e3 is protected, so ...Rd3 isn't a big threat, and 27.c5 gives White excellent chances to convert the extra pawn.

24.c4 ♔d7 25.b4



White's plan is being set in motion. His pawns are moving to light squares to fix the enemy queenside.

25... ♔c7

The maneuver of the black king shows that Black wanted to overprotect his queenside. Next up, he might want to play something like ...Rd8 activating the rook, claiming that the king is an adequate defender of the pawns on b6 and a7.

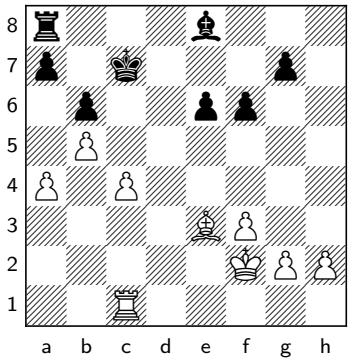
26.♖c1!

I like this move a lot. Since Black has brought the king to c7, he does not need to worry so much about a4-a5. He can safely ignore that advance. But c4-c5 will be harder to ignore with White's rook on c1. After

26.c5? is the right idea, but rushed. After bxc5 27.♗xc5 a6⩱ , the a-pawn is no longer weak. Black can potentially put the bishop on c6 next, and it will be hard for White to make further progress.

26.a5 , Black no longer has to take on a5. He still has a tough defense ahead, but the plan in the game is much stronger.

26... ♗c6 27.b5 ♗e8

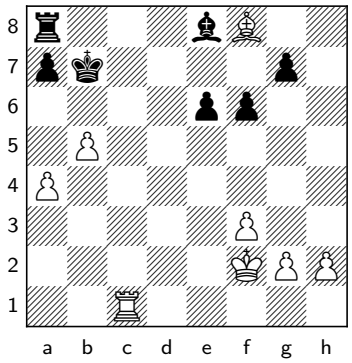


Black regroups the bishop to try to pressure White's pawns from the other side, but it is too slow, and he is left with too many weaknesses.

28.c5 bxc5 29.♗xc5 ♔b7

The position has changed a lot. Black brought his king all the way to b7. He has defended his queenside fairly well, so what should we do?

30.♗f8!



Attack the other side! Black is forced to weaken himself.

30.♗d6 ♖c8 leads White nowhere. This pure bishop endgame would be drawn. It's essential to provoke the kingside pawns forward.

30... g6 31.♗g7

Including

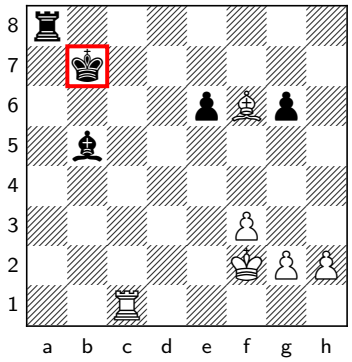
31.♖e1 ♗d7 and only now going 32.♗g7 is the clever engine suggestion. The point is that if Black goes for the same thing he tried in the game, the e6-pawn will be hanging.

31... a6!?

This is desperate but, to give credit to my opponent, it is also Black's best practical chance. It was critical to consider what would happen if Black tried to maintain material parity on the kingside:

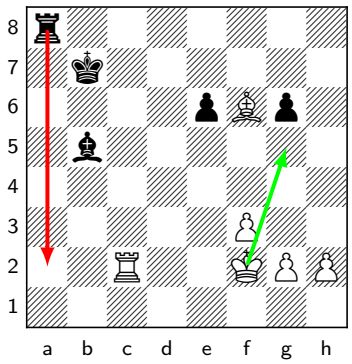
31... f5 We should always ask ourselves which exchanges will help us win the game. Here, the change to the kingside pawn structure means that White will win the pure opposite-color bishop endgame, because he can bring the king to g5. 32.♗e5 Here, the change to the kingside pawn structure means that White will win the pure opposite-color bishop endgame, because he can bring the king to g5. This is similar to the Ding Liren-Wojtaszek game. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) ♖c8 33.♖xc8 ♔xc8 The a7-pawn has been fixed as a weakness, so the black king is going to be stuck defending it. If he had been able to advance ...a6 earlier, the king would be free to run to defend the kingside. Moreover, the kingside structure has been fixed. White places his king on g5, plays g4, and then pushes his h-pawn all the way to h8: 34.♔g3 ♔b7 35.♔f4 ♔b6 36.♗d4† ♔b7 37.♔g5 ♗f7 38.g4 The h-pawn is coming, and it will not be stopped.

32.♗xf6 axb5 33.axb5 ♗xb5



The situation has changed again. The queenside pawns are all gone, and White will need to win the game on the kingside alone. This should be achievable. Black's king is cut off from the defense, and his pawns are isolated and vulnerable to attack. This is clearly a position where the plan of making a passed pawn would be wrong. White should instead be trying to bring his king to g5.

34.♖c2!



This is an important move, securing the second rank before bringing the king. After

34.♔g3? ♖a2 , it is hard to make further progress with the king. The computer claims that White's best chance is to play Rg1 to free the king to run up to g5, but this

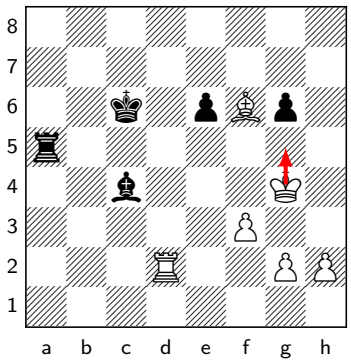
will relinquish the cut on Black's king and allow him to come back to the defense. The result is still up for grabs.

34... ♗d3?!

This loses some time and makes White's task slightly easier. Better was

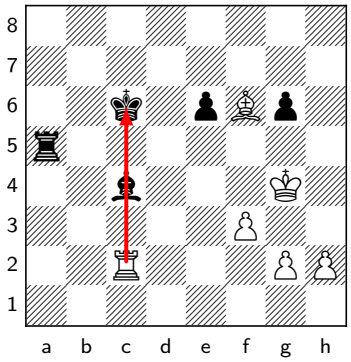
34... ♖c8 fighting for the c-file in order to bring the black king towards the kingside.

35.♖d2 ♗c4 36.♔g3 ♔c6 37.♔g4 ♖a5



Black cuts the king off from reaching g5. What is the cleanest way for White to finish the game?

38.♖c2!



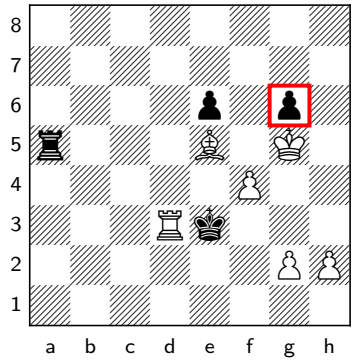
This forces Black's king to block the fifth rank, allowing the white king to advance to g5. Trying to put the bishop on e5 might be tempting, but after

38.f4 ♖h5 , Black is still fighting.

38... ♔c5 39.f4!

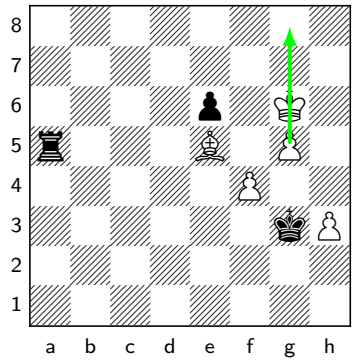
There was no need to rush with the king coming to g5. Putting the pawn on f4 works perfectly now, because Black's rook is unable to reach the f5- or h5-square before White anchors the bishop on e5.

39... ♔d5 40.♔g5 ♔e4† 41.♗e5 ♗d3 42.♖d2 ♔e3 43.♖xd3†!



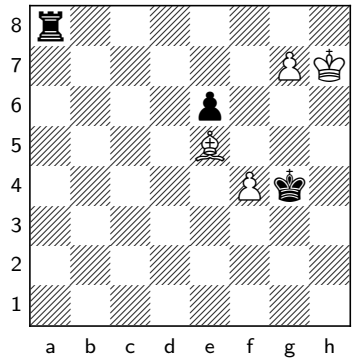
The final blow. White was going to have to give an exchange to win the g6-pawn one way or another. Simultaneously, Black's king is pulled further away from the kingside.

43... ♔xd3 44.♔xg6 ♔e4 45.g4 ♔f3 46.h3 ♔g3 47.g5



The g-pawn is decisive.

47... ♔xh3 48.♔h5 ♔g3 49.g6 ♔f3 50.g7 ♖a8 51.♔g6 ♔g4 52.♔h7

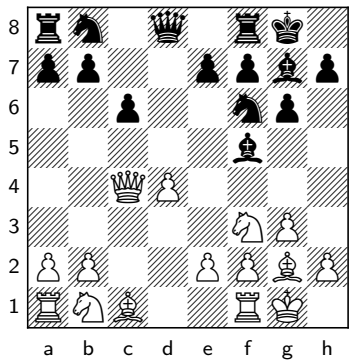


This game was played many years ago when my playing strength was much lower. However, despite some mistakes, the game is interesting and a good illustration of how to convert an extra pawn, particularly with respect to evaluating which piece and pawn exchanges would help bring in the full point and which would not.

Anish Giri-Peter Svidler
Introduction

Next up, we will see a clinic from Peter Svidler. Of course, he is a human, and his play was not perfect, but his understanding of how to convert an extra pawn, especially with respect to making the right piece exchanges, was spot on.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 c6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗g2 d5 6.♕b3 O-O 7.O-O dxc4 8.♕xc4 ♗f5



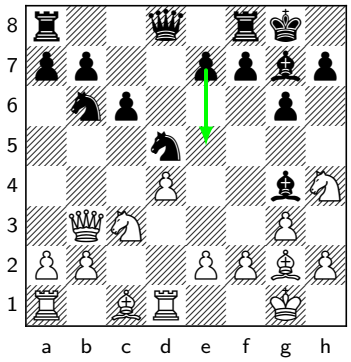
This is recommended by Svidler in his Grünfeld LTR and is a reasonable line for Black. I have played it as Black against Svidler himself, as well as against Wojtaszek.

9.♖d1 ♘bd7 10.♘h4

The natural

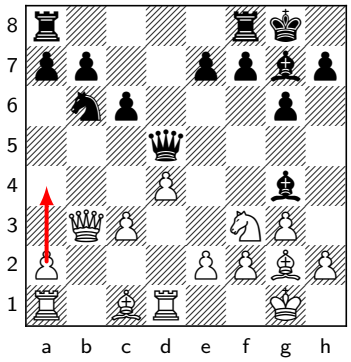
10.♘c3?N is misguided. After ♗c2 11.♖d2 ♘b6N , White's queen is in trouble, as she has been denied access to the b3-square. Black has a good position due to the better coordination.

10... ♘b6 11.♕b3 ♗g4! 12.♘c3 ♘fd5



This is a typical move in this Fianchetto Grünfeld structure, helping to enable ...e5 under the right circumstances.

13.♘f3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♕d5



The queen would like to go to a5, and Black momentarily prevents a4.

15.♗a3?!

This is not the right square for the bishop. I would prefer

15.♗f4 , though I think Black is basically fine.

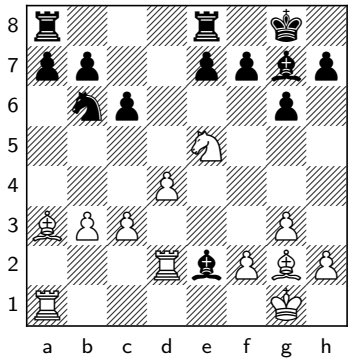
15... ♖fe8 16.♘e5

White offers a pawn.

16... ♕xb3 17.axb3 ♗xe2

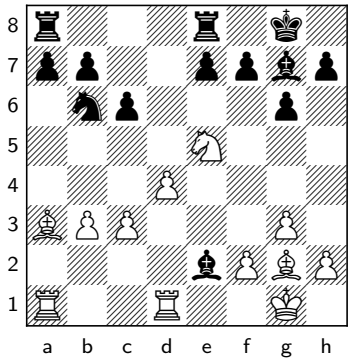
After

18.♖d2



, we reach an interesting situation. Black is a pawn up, and certainly not worried about any direct counterplay causing trouble. That said, White's pieces are much more active, and Black's are quite clumsy, plus White has nice central control with his pawns. The machine claims it is more or less balanced, but, in human practice, I would prefer the black side. Svidler showed tremendous understanding in the upcoming moves to turn the tide in his favor. The first question is what to do about the hanging bishop on e2.

Giri-Svidler Exercise #1



18.♖d2

We reach an interesting situation. Black is a pawn up, and certainly not worried about any direct counterplay causing trouble. That said, White's pieces are much more active, and Black's are quite clumsy, plus White has nice central control with his pawns. The machine claims it is more or less balanced, but, in human practice, I would prefer the black side. Svidler showed tremendous understanding in the upcoming moves to turn the tide in his favor. The first question is what to do about the hanging bishop on e2.

18... ♗xe5!

A mature decision. Giving up the fianchettoed bishop is often a difficult candidate move to consider. In this case, Black surely won't feel any danger around his king with the queens off the board. By eliminating the e5-knight, he makes sure that his other bishop reaches its ideal post on e6. Other moves were much worse. □ □ A better option is

18... ♗a6? is ruled out for concrete reasons: 19.♗c5 Other ways were also possible, but this is simple and good enough. Black cannot do much about White taking on c6 next. The bishop is not only passive and poorly placed on a6, but it is also vulnerable to a direct attack.

18... ♗h5 but the bishop is again locked out of play and vulnerable to attack. For example: 19.f4? is also good. White prevents ...g5, and the bishop remains in danger of being trapped by h3 and g4. If Black wants to take on e5, White can take with the f-pawn, capturing towards the center.

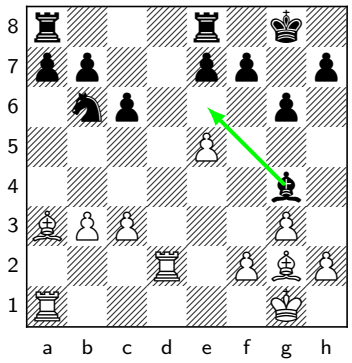
19.h3 g5 20.♗c5 With Rda2 coming next, White will surely win back at least his lost pawn.

19.dxe5?!

White takes the wrong bishop. In hindsight, Anish probably wished he had opted for

19.♖xe2 . After ♗f6 20.♗c5 , White is ready for Rea2 next to win back his lost pawn. Black's best chance is to accept that the pawn will be lost and hope to maintain a superior structure. ♘d5N 21.♗xd5 cxd5 22.♖xa7 ♖xa7 23.♗xa7 ♖c8 24.♗c5 b6 25.♗xb6 ♖xc3 I have to imagine White should hold with good play. The computer even claims zeroes, but I think there is still some work to be done.

19... ♗g4!



The bishop regroups for the ideal e6-square. Black can now meet

20.♗c5

with

20... ♘d7N

White cannot take on a7 without losing a pawn of his own on e5. If

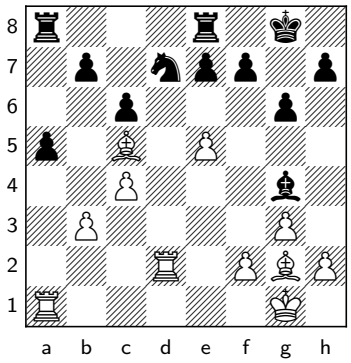
21.♗d4

, then

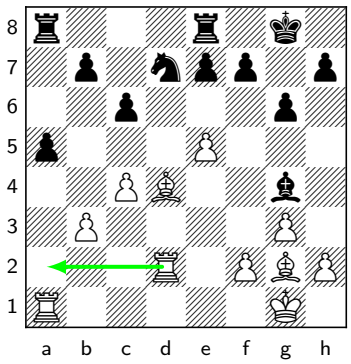
21... a6

and Black keeps his extra pawn.

Giri-Svidler Exercise #2

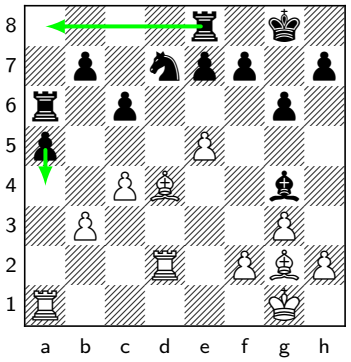


22.♗d4



White is threatening Rda2 to win the a-pawn. If material parity is reached, Black will be in grave danger, due to White having the bishop pair and extra space.

22... ♖a6!



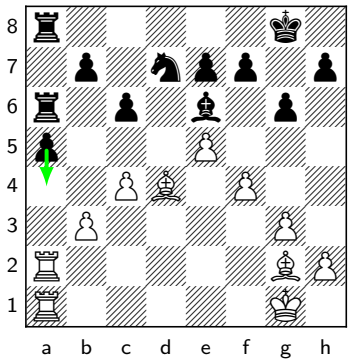
This is a fantastic move by Svidler. It enables the defense of the a-pawn by both rooks. A rook on a8 may look passive, but it is passive with a purpose – to help force the a-pawn through. This is a good example of where Jacob Aagaard's favorite three questions could help in finding the best move: Where are the weaknesses? Which is the worst-placed piece? What is your opponent's idea? In this case, the worst-placed piece is the e8-rook, the weakness is your a5-pawn, and White's idea is Rda2. Once we figure this out, stacking the rooks on the a-file makes perfect sense.

23.♖da2 ♖ea8 24.f4

White probably believed that the position was balanced. He solidifies the position and enables his king to come towards the center. What changes to the pawn structure does Black want? Black would like to create a pawn weakness for White on the queenside. If Black is able to play ...Be6, ...a4, trade pawns and isolate the c-pawn, he would achieve this. Another point is that while this is not an opposite-colored-bishop endgame, White does have a bishop of the opposite color to Black's. If that's confusing, let's call it a bishop that is unopposed. A general principle in such endgames is, if you want to try to

win, put your pawns on the same color complex as the opposing bishop. Therefore, Black would like to play ...c5 and ...b6. This would fix the white pawns on the light squares, which enables Black to attack the b-pawn in the long term. Should this happen, White would have no counterplay. Furthermore, Black's extra pawn would restrict White's dark-squared bishop, rendering it unable to attack the black pawn mass, whereas the black bishop is able to attack the queenside pawns. There are similarities to Berlin Defense structures here. The problem is that Black is not able to play ...c5 directly due to tactical issues. So, he should be looking for ways to prepare this plan in the future.

24... ♗e6



By threatening the ...a4 advance, Black tries to provoke the g2-bishop to move off its current active diagonal. After

24... c5? 25.♗c3 Black is not ready for ...b6, so White takes on a5 next and is at least equal.

25.♗f1?

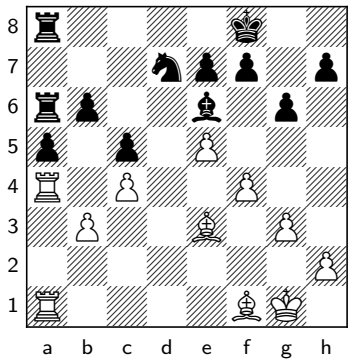
This allows Black's planned change in the pawn structure. White should have hung tight with a move like

25.♗f3 , but this is so hard for a human to do! Black's last move clearly has ...a4 in mind, and it is not easy to just ignore it. After a4 26.♖xa4 ♖xa4 27.bxa4 ♗xc4 , the computer shows zeroes. Does this look like zeroes to you? I can easily understand why Anish would have wanted no part of this. Up next are ...e6, ...Bd5, and ...c5. Black's pieces will become active, and it is not hard to imagine that soon he will more or less be a clean pawn up.

25... b6!

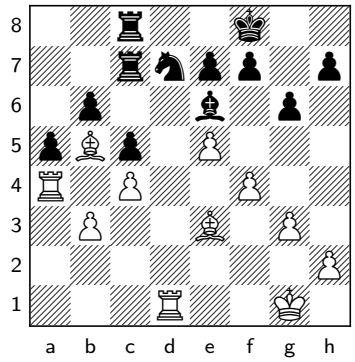
25... c5 was also possible and should soon reach the same kind of position.

26.♗e3 ♔f8 27.♖a4 c5



Stage one of Black's plan is complete. He has solidified his queenside pawns on the dark squares. What comes next? Well, now that his queenside is secure and White has clearly prevented any hope of ...a4, Black's two rooks don't have any reason to stay on the a-file.

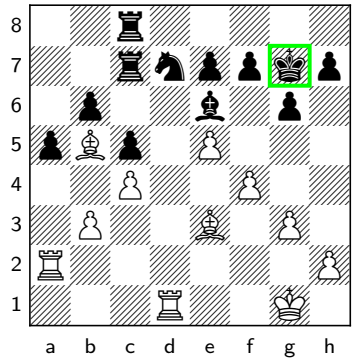
Giri-Svidler Exercise #3



32.♖a2

How should Black continue?

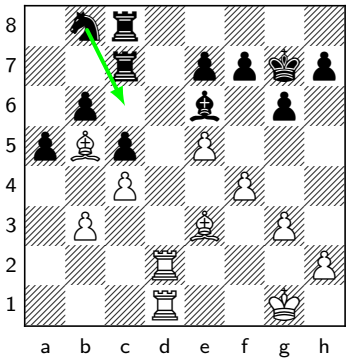
32... ♔g7!



We need to always pay attention to the opponent's resources.

32... ♘b8?N would allow 33.f5 , and White is actually winning due to the threat of Bh6+ followed by Rad2 and a deadly check on d8.

33.♖ad2 ♘b8



After thorough preparations, the knight is finally rerouted towards a better circuit.

Anish Giri-Peter Svidler, St Louis 2016

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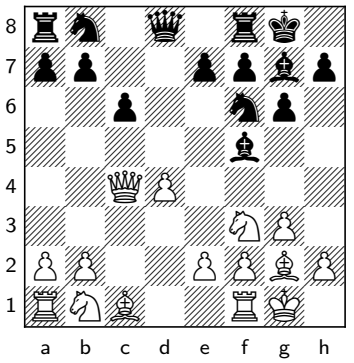

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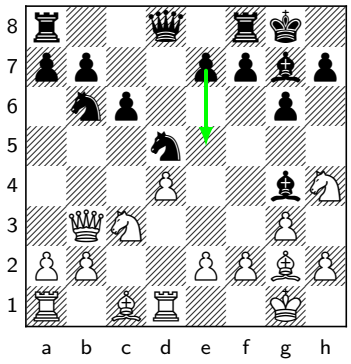
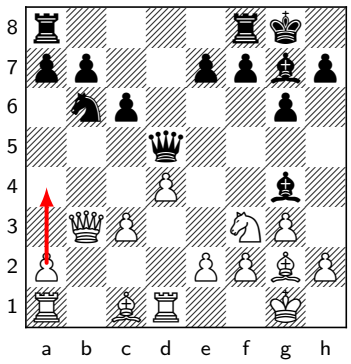
10... ♘b6 11.♕b3 ♗g4! 12.♘c3 ♘fd5



This is a typical move in this Fianchetto Grünfeld structure, helping to enable ...e5 under the right circumstances.

13.♘f3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♕d5



The queen would like to go to a5, and Black momentarily prevents a4.

15.♗a3?!

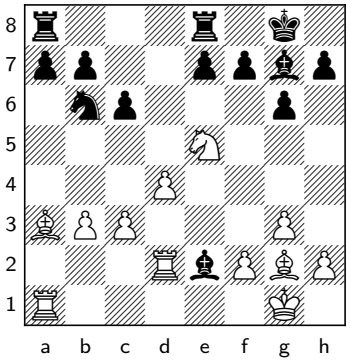
This is not the right square for the bishop. I would prefer

15.♗f4 , though I think Black is basically fine.

15... ♖fe8 16.♘e5

White offers a pawn.

16... ♕xb3 17.axb3 ♗xe2 18.♖d2



We reach an interesting situation. Black is a pawn up, and certainly not worried about any direct counterplay causing trouble. That said, White's pieces are much more active, and Black's are quite clumsy, plus White has nice central control with his pawns. The machine claims it is more or less balanced, but, in human practice, I would prefer the black side. Svidler showed tremendous understanding in the upcoming moves to turn the tide in his favor. The first question is what to do about the hanging bishop on e2.

18... ♗xe5!

A mature decision. Giving up the fianchettoed bishop is often a difficult candidate move to

consider. In this case, Black surely won't feel any danger around his king with the queens off the board. By eliminating the e5-knight, he makes sure that his other bishop reaches its ideal post on e6. Other moves were much worse. □ □ A better option is

18... ♗a6? is ruled out for concrete reasons: 19.♗c5 Other ways were also possible, but this is simple and good enough. Black cannot do much about White taking on c6 next. The bishop is not only passive and poorly placed on a6, but it is also vulnerable to a direct attack.

18... ♗h5 but the bishop is again locked out of play and vulnerable to attack. For example: 19.f4? is also good. White prevents ...g5, and the bishop remains in danger of being trapped by h3 and g4. If Black wants to take on e5, White can take with the f-pawn, capturing towards the center.

19.h3 g5 20.♗c5 With Rda2 coming next, White will surely win back at least his lost pawn.

19.dxe5?!

White takes the wrong bishop. In hindsight, Anish probably wished he had opted for

19.♖xe2 . After ♗f6 20.♗c5 , White is ready for Rea2 next to win back his lost pawn. Black's best chance is to accept that the pawn will be lost and hope to maintain a superior structure. ♘d5N 21.♗xd5 cxd5 22.♖xa7 ♖xa7 23.♗xa7 ♖c8 24.♗c5 b6 25.♗xb6 ♖xc3 I have to imagine White should hold with good play. The computer even claims zeroes, but I think there is still some work to be done.

19... ♗g4!

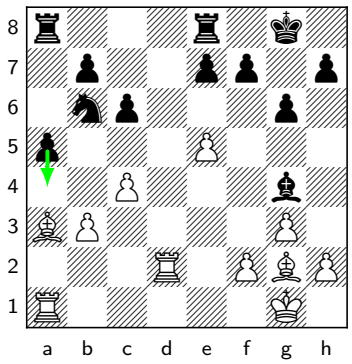
The bishop regroups for the ideal e6-square.

20.c4

Black is not worried about counterplay, but it is hard to come up with a credible plan. White has the bishop pair, more space, and it feels as though his pieces are more active. Black is not able to challenge White's control of the d-file, as the e7-pawn is loose, and White can block the g4-bishop with f2-f3. So, what should he do? In the lines mentioned above,

20.♗c5 , with the plan of swinging the rook to a2, would have won back the pawn for White. In this case, the d4-pawn was dragged to e5, and after ♘d7N White cannot take on a7 without losing a pawn of his own on e5. If 21.♗d4 , then a6 and Black keeps his extra pawn.

20... a5!



This is a major part of Black's plan. His problem is that his extra pawn on the queenside

is not playing a part in the game. By getting the pawn to a5, the threat of ...a4, undermining the c4-pawn, will be hanging over White's head. Additionally, Black is starting the process of fixing his pawns on dark squares to restrict his opponent's unopposed bishop. Trying to close down the queenside with

20... a6 is not good: 21.h3 ♗e6 22.♖ad1 White is ready to play Bc5, and the knight is unable to come back to d7.

21.♗c5

The threat of ...a4 was real, and White tries to fight against it. White is not in time to play After

21.h3 as ...a4 comes too fast: ♗e6 22.♖ad1? If White could safely play Bc5 next and force Black's knight to an uglier square than d7, he should be fine. He is a tempo short. a4 23.♗c5 ♘d7N What happens if I do it anyway? 24.♖xd7 ♗xd7 25.♖xd7 axb3 Black's b-pawn will cost White one of his bishops, and Black will win with the extra exchange.

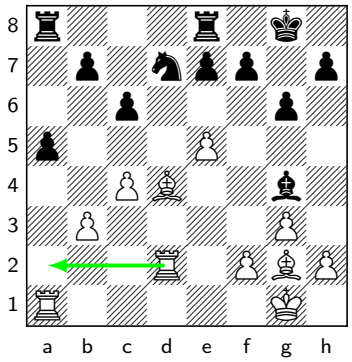
21.c5? ♘d7N , White's queenside pawns are too weak.

21... ♘d7!

It is important that Black can retreat the knight to this square. Furthermore, the bishop needs to retreat to d4 to keep the e5-pawn protected.

21... a4? is hasty, and after 22.♗xb6 axb3 23.♖b1 ♗f5 24.♖db2 , White wins.

22.♗d4



White is threatening Rda2 to win the a-pawn. If material parity is reached, Black will be in grave danger, due to White having the bishop pair and extra space.

22... ♖a6!

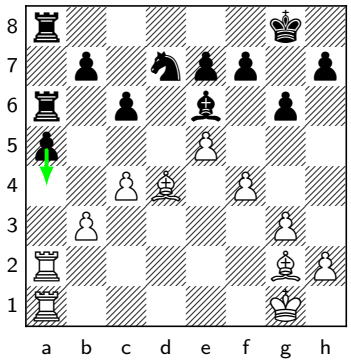
This is a fantastic move by Svidler. It enables the defense of the a-pawn by both rooks. A rook on a8 may look passive, but it is passive with a purpose – to help force the a-pawn through. This is a good example of where Jacob Aagaard's favorite three questions could help in finding the best move: Where are the weaknesses? Which is the worst-placed piece? What is your opponent's idea? In this case, the worst-placed piece is the e8-rook, the weakness is your a5-pawn, and White's idea is Rda2. Once we figure this out, stacking the rooks on the a-file makes perfect sense.

23.♖da2 ♖ea8 24.f4

White probably believed that the position was balanced. He solidifies the position and enables his king to come towards the center. What changes to the pawn structure does Black want? Black would like to create a pawn weakness for White on the queenside. If Black is able to play ...Be6, ...a4, trade pawns and isolate the c-pawn, he would achieve this. Another point is

that while this is not an opposite-colored-bishop endgame, White does have a bishop of the opposite color to Black's. If that's confusing, let's call it a bishop that is unopposed. A general principle in such endgames is, if you want to try to win, put your pawns on the same color complex as the opposing bishop. Therefore, Black would like to play ...c5 and ...b6. This would fix the white pawns on the light squares, which enables Black to attack the b-pawn in the long term. Should this happen, White would have no counterplay. Furthermore, Black's extra pawn would restrict White's dark-squared bishop, rendering it unable to attack the black pawn mass, whereas the black bishop is able to attack the queenside pawns. There are similarities to Berlin Defense structures here. The problem is that Black is not able to play ...c5 directly due to tactical issues. So, he should be looking for ways to prepare this plan in the future.

24... ♗e6



By threatening the ...a4 advance, Black tries to provoke the g2-bishop to move off its current active diagonal. After

24... c5? 25.♗c3 Black is not ready for ...b6, so White takes on a5 next and is at least equal.

25.♗f1?

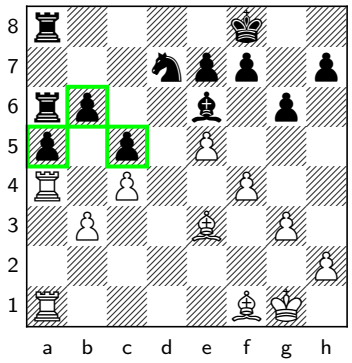
This allows Black's planned change in the pawn structure. White should have hung tight with a move like

25.♗f3 , but this is so hard for a human to do! Black's last move clearly has ...a4 in mind, and it is not easy to just ignore it. After a4 26.♖xa4 ♖xa4 27.bxa4 ♗xc4 , the computer shows zeroes. Does this look like zeroes to you? I can easily understand why Anish would have wanted no part of this. Up next are ...e6, ...Bd5, and ...c5. Black's pieces will become active, and it is not hard to imagine that soon he will more or less be a clean pawn up.

25... b6!

25... c5 was also possible and should soon reach the same kind of position.

26.♗e3 ♔f8 27.♖a4 c5



Stage one of Black's plan is complete. He has solidified his queenside pawns on the dark squares. What comes next? Well, now that his queenside is secure and White has clearly pre-

vented any hope of ...a4, Black's two rooks don't have any reason to stay on the a-file.

28.♗g2

Black has made tremendous progress over the last few moves. The a4-rook will take a long time to transfer to the d-file. Black has been able to consolidate the position, but he is still a long way from the extra pawn being able to play a key role in the game. The black knight is poorly placed on d7, and it would be helpful for it to be rerouted to c6, where it eyes the weak squares on b4 and d4. But first, it is important to choose a good square for the threatened rook.

28.b4 does not work: cxb4 29.c5 ♘xc5N 30.♗xc5 bxc5 31.♗xa6 ♖xa6 32.♖xa5 ♖xa5 33.♖xa5 c4 and the pawns are too strong. The white king is not in time to stop them. 34.♔f2 b3 35.♔e3 b2 36.♖b5 c3 Black wins.

28... ♖e8!

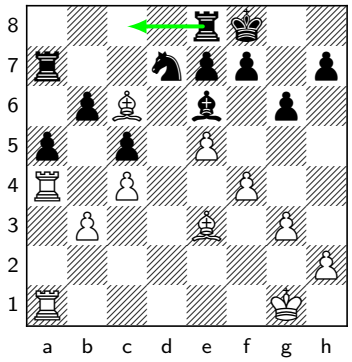
An accurate choice of square.

28... ♖c8? is where the rook would like to go eventually, but at the moment it loses an exchange to 29.♗b7 .

28... ♖d8 walks into an unnecessary pin after 29.♖d1 .

28... ♖8a7 leaves a rook placed passively on a6.

29.♗c6 ♖a7!



This allows ...Rc8, ...Nb8 and potentially ...Bd7, regrouping the pieces and making exchanges which should favor Black.

30.♗b5

Again, not working for White is

30.b4 due to: cxb4 31.♖xb4 ♖c7 32.♗xd7 axb4 33.♗xe8 ♔xe8 34.♗xb6 ♖xc4 and ...b3 is coming. Even if White now finds his only chance with 34... Kxe8 34.Rb1! , Black has a clean extra pawn and excellent chances to win. 34...Rxc4 35.Bd2

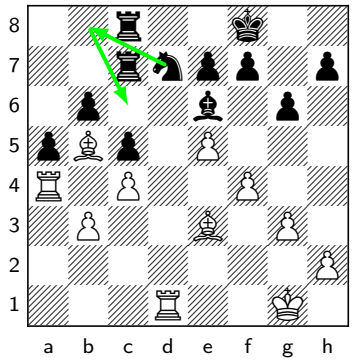
30... ♖c8

Unpinning the knight.

31.♖d1

One important point to consider here is that the opposite-colored bishop endgame would be a nightmare to defend for White due to the weak b3-pawn. Therefore, not only is Black not worried about White trading on d7, but he even welcomes this exchange.

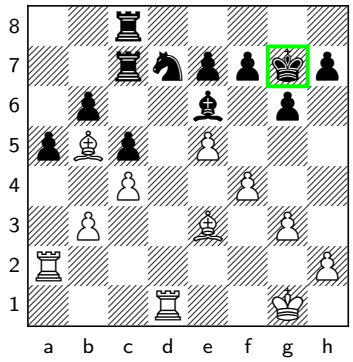
31... ♖ac7!



I like this move: nice, simple, and no need to complicate. Black could have gotten away with bringing the knight to b8 directly, but there was no rush. With the black rook off the a-file, Black will never need to worry about any surprises involving b3-b4. He can always take with the a-pawn. The natural

31... ♘b8N is fine, but 32.b4 looks quite scary. Black is winning, but he needs to calculate precisely: cxb4 33.♗xb6 ♖b7 Now 34.c5 runs into ♗b3 , or 34... Rb7 34.Be3 Bxc4 and Black wins. The line is not so deep, and it is findable, but it was much easier to simply bring the rook to c7 first.

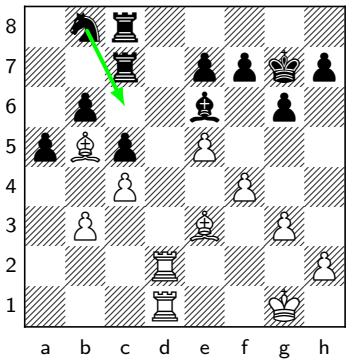
32.♖a2 ♔g7!



We need to always pay attention to the opponent's resources.

32... ♘b8?N would allow 33.f5 , and White is actually winning due to the threat of Bh6+ followed by Rad2 and a deadly check on d8. ♗xf5 34.♗h6† ♔g8 .

33.♖ad2 ♘b8

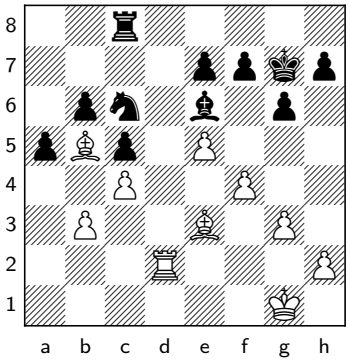


After thorough preparations, the knight is finally rerouted towards a better circuit.

34.♖d8 ♘c6 35.♖xc8 ♖xc8

Black's plan has been successfully completed. The knight is clearly stronger on c6 than d7.

36.♖d2



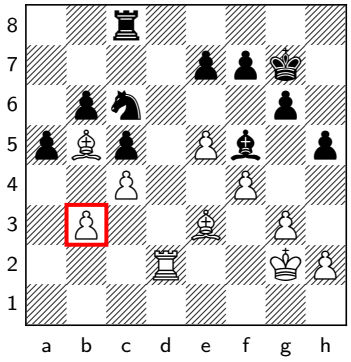
White waits and asks Black to come up with a plan. An opposite-colored bishop ending after

36.♗xc6 ♖xc6 would not save White either. The way to exploit Back's extra pawn is not to push it through to try to create a passed pawn. Rather, it means both that White cannot harass the queenside pawn mass, and that he will never be able to play b3-b4. Black can seek to exchange rooks on d7 via c7, and then move his bishop to c2 to pick up the queenside pawns. This is again reminiscent of the Berlin Defense structure.

36... h5

With nothing concrete happening, Black takes the opportunity to gain some space.

37.♔g2 ♗f5



The bishop is no longer needed on e6 and relocates to a more active diagonal, eyeing the c2-square and the weakness on b3.

38.h3

What type of endgame should Black be aiming for? He does not want a pure rook endgame, given that he does not have control of the d-file. Nor does Black want to trade White's dark-squared bishop, which is the worst piece on the board. Black will probably win a pure opposite-colored bishop endgame, even if White tries to make a fortress by placing his king on c3, as then Black's king will be able to ransack the kingside. Black would welcome an exchange of light-squared bishops, resulting in a good knight against bad bishop endgame. These considerations result in a number of promising options for Black. It is open to debate what the cleanest way through is, and the machine claims Black has several winning moves.

38... f6

This is not criticized by the engine. However, in human terms, I don't love it. I think there was an easier way, and it is all based on evaluating which exchanges favor Black. □ □ Black cannot play □ So, I think by far the easiest and cleanest route to a full point was: 39... f6 39.Kf2 Rd8! 40.Bxc6 Rxd2+ 41.Bxd2 Bxc6 This is the kind of position that we were discussing before. Black has simplified down to an opposite-colored bishop endgame, and he is easily winning. The main point is that his extra pawn is providing a huge advantage in piece activity and fixing a key weakness, not that it can create a passed pawn. White's bishop is forever passive and unable to make counterplay, and Black has two winning plans. One is to bring the bishop to c2. The other is to provoke the h3-pawn to h4 and then bring the king to g4. Both of these plans involve using only the light squares, and as such, White's king is the only piece that can fight back. The king is a short-range piece and certainly cannot control both g4 and b3 at the same time. Let's see how this

might play out in practice: 42.Ke3 Bg2 43.h4 Kf8! Black's king will run to g4 via the light squares. 44.Be1 Ke8 45.Bd2 Bh3 46.Be1 Bf5! The threat of ...Bc2 forces White's king to retreat. 47.Kd2 Kd7 48.Bf2 Be4! The king is coming to g4, and that will be that. White's king is stuck defending the c2-square. 49.Be1 Ke6 50.Bf2 Kf5 51.Be1 Kg4 52.Bf2 Kf3 53.Be1 Bf5 Zugzwang – time to resign.

38... ♘d8N would be similar to the way Svidler played in the game, but after 39.♗d7 ♗xd7 40.♖xd7 it is annoying that the king has to go back to the passive f8-square. I suspect that when playing ...f6, Svidler had envisioned the ...Nc6-d8-e6 plan, but wanted to make sure his king would end up on f6 instead.

38... ♖d8? with the knight on c6 unprotected.

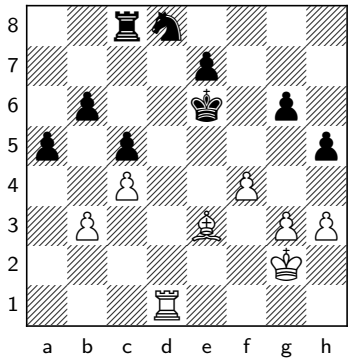
38... ♗e4† Black protects the knight on c6, allowing him to safely bring the rook to d8 next. White can try 39.♔f1 , aiming to prevent ...Rd8, but it is time for the Shankland Rule: ♖d8 What happens if I do it anyway? 40.♗xc6 ♖xd2 41.♗xe4 ♖b2 Black takes on b3, and the a-pawn is easily decisive. White's bishops are quite unimpressive.

39.exf6† ♔xf6 40.♗a4 ♘d8 41.♗d7!

Black's bishop on f5 was a monster, so Giri correctly assesses that the only chance would be to eliminate it. Continuing to wait with

41.♗b5 would not have helped after ♘e6N . Black is ready for ...Rd8 next. This time, he does not even allow a pure opposite-colored bishop endgame. 42.♗d7 ♖d8 43.♗xe6 ♖xd2† 44.♗xd2 ♔xe6 is straight up losing for White due to ...Bc2.

41... ♗xd7 42.♖xd7 ♔e6 43.♖d1

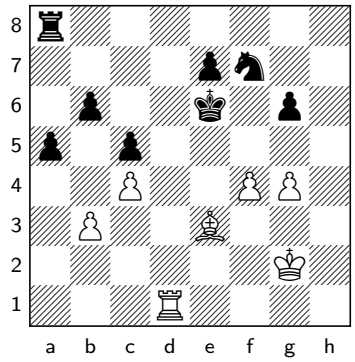


Black has accomplished his intended maneuver. However, White can hope to generate some counterplay by pushing the kingside pawns. Now that he has weakened his pawns, Black needs to keep rooks on the board as the knight against bishop endgame is drawn – the white king gets the e4-square. Winning has been complicated, but it is still possible.

43... ♘f7

Black aims to reroute the knight to the fantastic square on d6, where it will threaten ...a4.

44.g4 hxg4 45.hxg4 ♖a8?



I don't get this move. As noted above, But I can't see why Black did not continue with the plan of

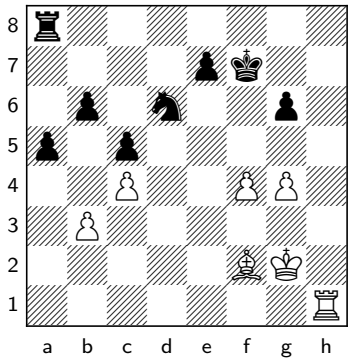
45... ♖d8? fails: 46.♖xd8 ♘xd8N 47.♔f3 Due to the fracturing of Black's pawns, White is able to get his king comfortably to the e4-square, since there is no ...f5+. White can then get in f5+ and gain control of the d5-square, and his previously bad bishop can go to f4 to eyeball c7. He should hold.

45... ♘d6N . Up next is ...a4. White will be too slow to reorganize the way he did in the game: 46.♗f2 a4 47.bxa4 ♘xc4N Black wins.

46.♗f2!

Anish quickly seizes his chance at counterplay: Bh4 and Re1+ will be annoying to deal with.

46... ♘d6 47.♖e1† ♔f7 48.♖h1?



Even the best players in the world can make elementary-looking mistakes every now and then. Black would only have had a small advantage after:

48.♗h4 when ♘c8N is nicely met with 49.♖d1 , threatening Rd8. If 48\. Bh4 48...Ra7 49.Kf3 Black's pieces are passive. After 49...a4 50.bxa4 Nxc4 51.f5! gxf5 52.gxf5 Nd6 53.Re5 pawns are rapidly disappearing, and I don't see a great plan to make further progress. A pawn is a pawn, but White should hold with good defense.

48... a4

The c4-pawn drops, and Black wins. The rest wasn't really noteworthy.

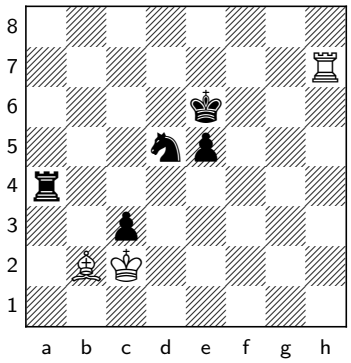
49.bxa4

After

49.♖h7† ♔g8 , White cannot take on e7 and has to resign instead.

49... ♖xa4 50.♖h7† ♔f8 51.♖h8† ♔g7 52.♖b8 ♘xc4 53.♔f3 ♔f7 54.♗h4 e5 55.f5 gxf5 56.gxf5 ♘d6 57.♖xb6 ♖f4† 58.♔e2 ♘xf5 59.♗g5 ♘g3† 60.♔e3 ♖g4 61.♗d8 ♘f5† 62.♔f3 ♖f4† 63.♔e2

♘d4† 64.♔e3 ♘e6 65.♖b7† ♔g6 66.♗a5 ♖a4 67.♗c3 ♔f6 68.♔d3 ♘f4† 69.♔c2 ♘d5 70.♗b2 c4 71.♖d7 ♔e6 72.♖h7 c3!



The cleanest and most efficient of many winning moves.

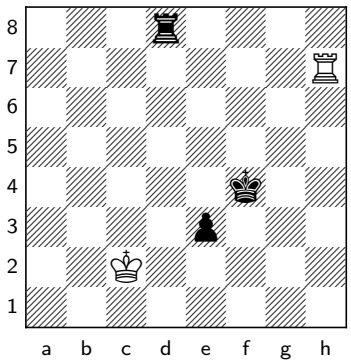
73.♖h6†

73.♗xc3 ♖c4 would reach a winning pawn endgame.

73... ♔f5 74.♖h5† ♔f6 75.♗xc3 ♖c4 76.♔d3 ♖xc3† 77.♔e4 ♖c4†! 78.♔xd5 ♖d4† 79.♔c5 ♖d1!

White is not even close to setting up frontal checks.

80.♔c4 e4 81.♔c3 e3 82.♖h2 ♔f5 83.♔c2 ♖d8 84.♖h7 ♔f4

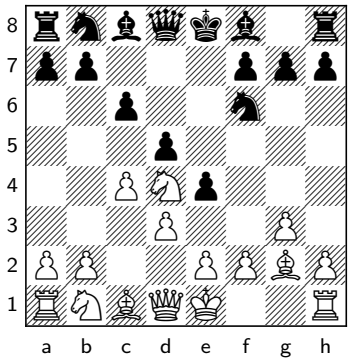


A masterclass from Svidler, who showed many good ideas and deep understanding. In particular, we should note again his plan to play ...a5 and then double his rooks on the a-file so as not to lose his a-pawn and to threaten ...a4. This provoked the white bishop back to the f1-square, which allowed ...b6 and ...c5. Also commendable were the regroupings of the pieces that occurred later in the game. His play was not perfect, but playing a perfect game is rare! He did superbly well to get the full point against a strong opponent, something which was not a given from the position after White's 20th move.

Sam Shankland-Kacper Piorun
Introduction

The following game was a frustrating one for me. After I got back to the room, Jacob told me something like, 'He (Piorun) lost a pawn the way I lose my keys to my house!' Without speculating as to how clumsy he is for getting locked out of his own home, I tend to agree that I won a pawn very easily. I had multiple chances to convert the pawn, but failed every single time, and ultimately drew the game. Having better evaluations of which piece exchanges, or changes to the structure, would favor me would surely have changed the result.

1.c4 e5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 c6 4.♘f3 e4 5.♘d4 d5 6.d3



This was supposed to be testing, but, largely because of this game, I changed my mind and offered

6.cxd5 in my Neo-Catalan (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) repertoire.

6... ♕b6 7.dxe4

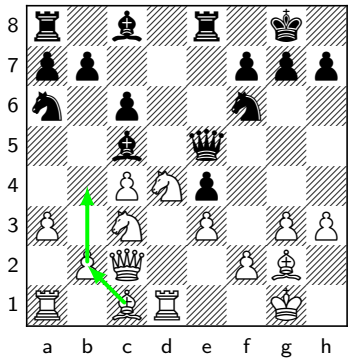
Black's point is

7.♘b3N dxc4 .

7... ♗c5 8.e3

Black has achieved a good position with his bishop-and-queen battery. This has led to White playing e2-e3, which blocks his c1-bishop. That way, my bishop is not able to come out to g5 and help undermine Black's protection of the e4-pawn.

8... dxe4 9.♘c3 O-O 10.O-O ♖e8 11.h3 ♕c7 12.♕c2 ♕e5 13.♖d1 ♘a6 14.a3



White restricts the a6-knight, while also enabling b4 and Bb2.

14... ♗f8 15.b3

I had some internal debate between b2-b3 and b2-b4, ultimately settling for the tamer option. I was calculating:

15.b4 c5 16.b5 This is interesting and messy.

16.bxc5 ♘xc5N 17.♗b2 Black has some weak squares in his position, namely d5, d6, and c7, as well as some tactical problems on the long diagonal. White has a small advantage, and an easy way to proceed would be to retreat the d4-knight to b3, aiming for Nd5. It is simple but important that ♘d3?N drops a pawn to 18.♘xe4N .

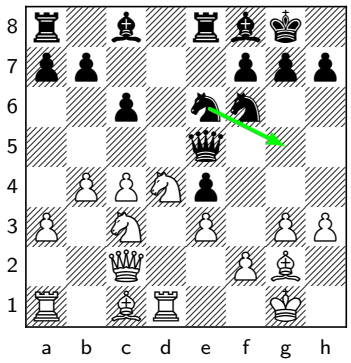
16... cxd4 17.exd4 ♕h5 18.bxa6 ♗xh3 This is wildly complicated. Instinctively, it felt too dangerous for White. The computer does not worry about the isolated c-pawn and prefers:

15... ♘c5?!

This came as a pleasant surprise. Black should have preferred

15... ♕h5 , with good play on the kingside.

16.b4! ♘e6



The seemingly desirable

16... ♘d3N is not possible due to the typical 17.♘xe4N , snaffling a pawn, as ♘xc1N is met by 18.♘xf6†N

17.♘xe6!

This exchange is helpful for White. He stops the idea of ...Ng5 and clears the d4-square for other pieces. The bishop, knight, and rook are all candidates. □ □ □ The machine offers

17.♗b2? would be ideal but, sadly, it is asking for trouble. After ♘g5N , the attack is coming, and it will be scary.

17.♘xe4?N is too optimistic: ♘xe4N After 18.♗xe4

18.♕xe4 ♕xe4 19.♗xe4 ♘xd4N 20.♖xd4 g6 White does not have a good way to deal with the bishop coming to g7, and he will end up losing an exchange. The resulting position should be roughly balanced, but if anyone is better, it is Black.

18... ♘g5N , Black will at least win his lost pawn back, and White's kingside looks a bit tender.

17.h4? as an alternative, which feels unnatural to me. I did not even consider it.

17... ♕xe6

Black would be in big trouble after

17... ♗xe6? 18.♗b2 ♕h5 .

18.♗b2

White has finished development, Black's hopes for a kingside attack are in the past, and the e4-pawn is a big weakness.

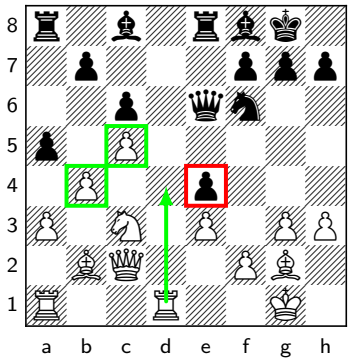
18... a5?

The e4-pawn was doomed, and Black should have tried to maintain material parity:

18... ♕xc4 19.♖d4 ♕e6 20.♖ad1 White will take back the lost pawn next move, and he should be slightly better thanks to his activity, but at least Black managed to keep the material balance even. This is better than the immediate

20.♘xe4N ♘xe4N 21.♖xe4 when ♕g6 is annoying.

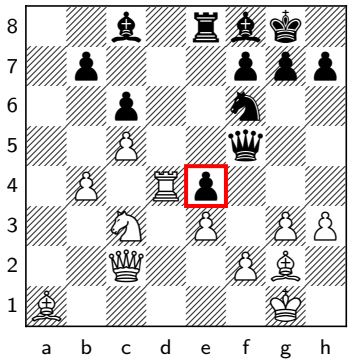
19.c5!



This ensures that neither the c \- or b-pawns hang, and White is ready for Rd4 to scoop up e4. Also good for White is

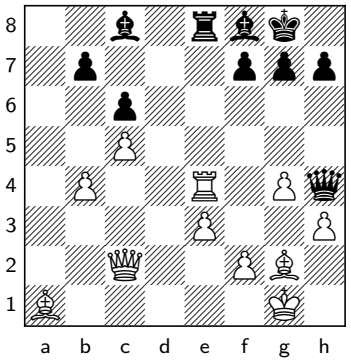
19.♘a4N , the main point being that after axb4 20.axb4 Black cannot play ♗xb4 due to 21.♘c5N .

19... axb4 20.axb4 ♖xa1 21.♗xa1 ♕f5 22.♖d4



Just like that, the e4-pawn is lost.

22... ♕h5 23.g4 ♕h4 24.♘xe4 ♘xe4 25.♖xe4

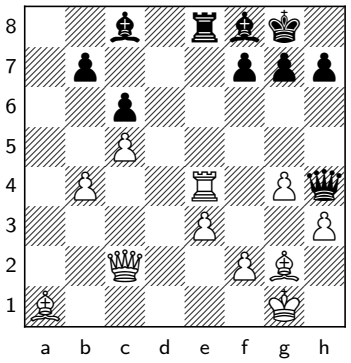


We have entered the conversion phase. White has won a pawn. The center is open, so Black's kingside attack shouldn't work. Black played

25... ♖d8

, and it is time for White to consider the familiar principles for converting an extra pawn.

Shankland-Piorun Exercise #1

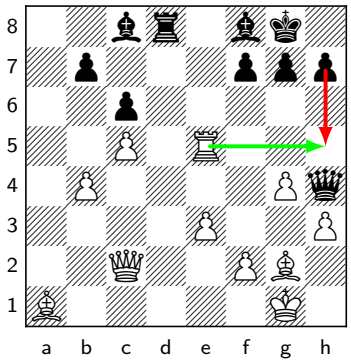


25... ♖d8

We have entered the conversion phase. White has won a pawn. The center is open, so Black's kingside attack shouldn't work. It is time for White to consider the familiar principles for converting an extra pawn. White is not going to

push his extra pawn and promote it on the kingside. Instead, it can be used to weaken Black's king.

26.♖e5!

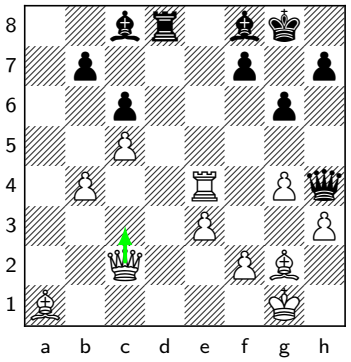


Even as things currently stand, White has more pawns in front of his king, and it could be possible to try to prove that Black's king is actually the one in danger. White prevents ...h5 and threatens Rh5, winning the game immediately. □ □

26.b5? is too aggressive. After cxb5 27.♖d4 h5 , Black is fine.

26.♗e5? This is a natural move. White wants to reroute the bishop to the g3-square, where it will dispel hope of counterplay. But it is a step in the wrong direction and the miss of a strong opportunity.

26... g6 27.♖e4!

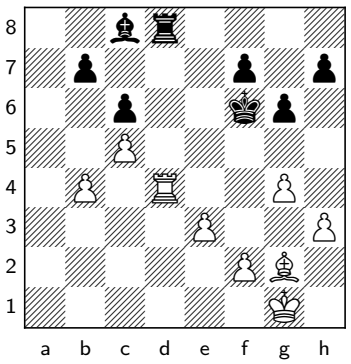


With ...g6 provoked, White's threat is Qc3.

27... ♗g7

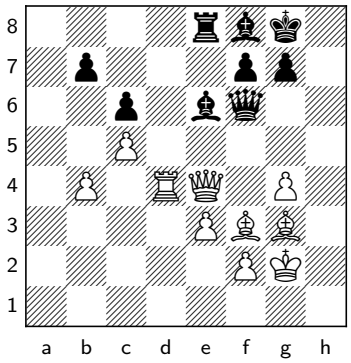
This is forced, but the exchange of dark-squared bishops is in White's favor. Black will be left with weak queenside pawns on the light squares that will become long-term targets, and White's pawns on the dark squares will be perfectly secure.

28.♗xg7 ♔xg7 29.♕c3† ♕f6 30.♕xf6† ♔xf6 31.♖d4



The pure bishop endgame is hopeless for Black, but keeping the rooks on doesn't look any better. Also 29\. Qc3+ 29...Kg8 30.Rd4 is comfortably winning for White. If Black chooses to retain the rooks, White's would be the more active.

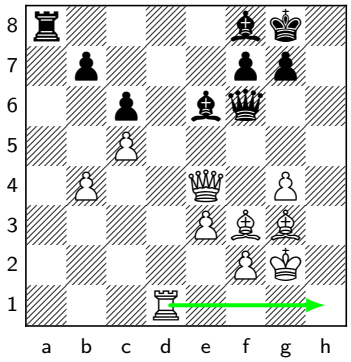
Shankland-Piorun Exercise #2



35... ♖a8

White needs to think about what his extra pawn is doing for him. It is not going to promote any time soon; what it does is keep his king safe. How should he play?

36.♖d1!



Of course, White should have followed his plan consistently. I saw this during the game, but remember being spooked by the possibility of ...Bd5.

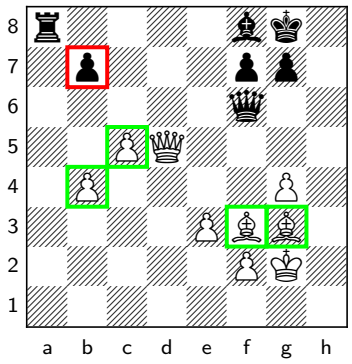
36.♕e5? A bad decision. A queen exchange favors Black, as White's best hope of victory lies in checkmate. With the queens off, the only way to convert the extra pawn is to create a passed pawn on the kingside, which is a much harder objective. ♕xe5 37.♗xe5 ♗e7 38.♔g3 f6 39.♗d6 ♔f7 It seems fairly clear that the dark-squared bishops will leave the board. However, White should think carefully about whether he wants the pawn structure to change.

36... ♗d5

Anything else would allow the rook to come to h1, with major threats. E.g.,

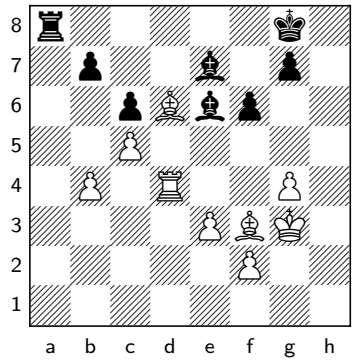
36... g6 would run into 37.♗e5 . But this offers no relief.

37.♖xd5 cxd5 38.♕xd5



This is clearly decisive. White's king is securely defended, so Black's rook will not be able to create any trouble. White will win easily once the b-pawn falls.

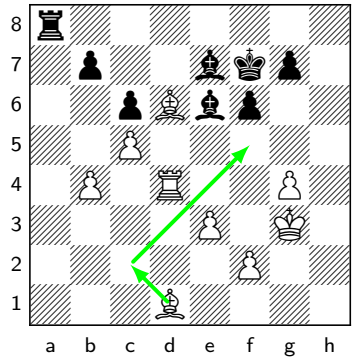
Shankland-Piorun Exercise #3



39... ♔f7

It seems fairly clear that the dark-squared bishops will leave the board. However, White should think carefully about whether he wants the pawn structure to change.

40.♗d1



My plan was to reroute my bishop to f5, aiming for a pure rook endgame. After

40.b5 cxb5 41.♗xb7 ♖a4 , Black has counterplay with the outside passed pawn.

40.♗xe7? is also inadequate. For example: ♔xe7 41.♖d1 ♖a4 42.♖b1 ♗c4 White is not going to achieve b4-b5.

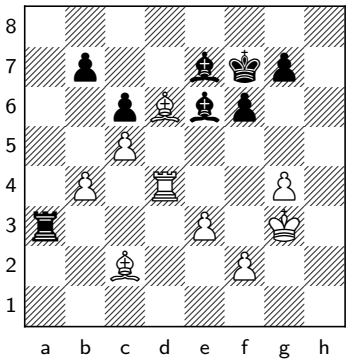
40... ♖a3 41.♗c2

Figuring out this bishop regroup was a good start, but after

41... ♗xd6†

, here comes another critical decision. Let's move on to our next exercise!

Shankland-Piorun Exercise #4



41... ♗xd6†

This is the critical moment. How should White recapture?

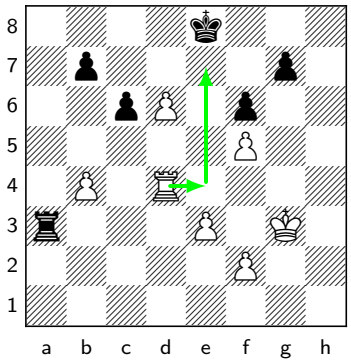
42.cxd6!

This was the way! After

42.♖xd6? , it is difficult for White's king to invade. This is due to the structure once the bishops have been exchanged on f5 with the g-pawn landing on f5. With the pawn on g4 and the light-squared bishops exchanged, White would win routinely with g4-g5, and the f5-square is available for the king. With the pawn on f5 instead of g4, as we will see in the game, White's king will be kept out. ♔e7 Now we see White's problem. If I play Bf5 and take back with the

pawn, Black's king is quite fine on e7, and can switch to f7 if and when White transfers the rook to the g-file. Had I taken back with the pawn on my last move, I would have a pawn on d6, stretching the defenses. Black's king would be unable to stop the d-pawn while simultaneously defending g7. But what else can I do? 43.♗f5 ♗xf5 44.gxf5 More details (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

42... ♔e8 43.♗f5! ♗xf5 44.gxf5



Due to the pawn being on d6 rather than c5, Black's king must immediately retreat. This allows White to stretch the defenses.

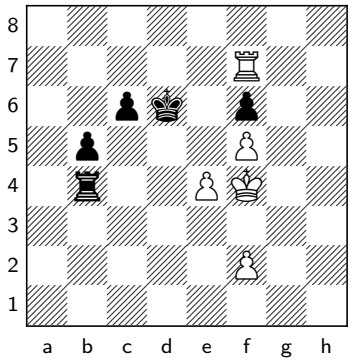
44... ♔d7

What else? A check on e4 was coming next.

45.♖g4! ♔xd6 46.♖xg7

Black can take the b4-pawn, but he will be way too slow to save the game.

46... b5 47.♔f4 ♖b3 48.♖f7 ♖xb4† 49.e4

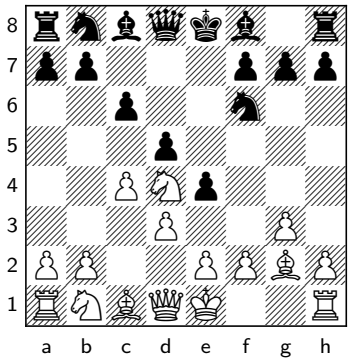


White is winning the race as his pawns are further advanced, and Black will lose time with his king.

Sam Shankland-Kacper Piorun, Matanzas 2017

The following game was a frustrating one for me. After I got back to the room, Jacob told me something like, 'He (Piorun) lost a pawn the way I lose my keys to my house!' Without speculating as to how clumsy he is for getting locked out of his own home, I tend to agree that I won a pawn very easily. I had multiple chances to convert the pawn, but failed every single time, and ultimately drew the game. Having better evaluations of which piece exchanges, or changes to the structure, would favor me would surely have changed the result.

1.c4 e5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 c6 4.♘f3 e4 5.♘d4 d5 6.d3



This was supposed to be testing, but, largely because of this game, I changed my mind and offered

6.cxd5 in my Neo-Catalan (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) repertoire.

6... ♕b6 7.dxe4

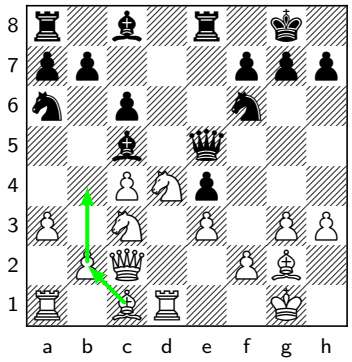
Black's point is

7.♘b3N dxc4 .

7... ♗c5 8.e3

Black has achieved a good position with his bishop-and-queen battery. This has led to White playing e2-e3, which blocks his c1-bishop. That way, my bishop is not able to come out to g5 and help undermine Black's protection of the e4-pawn.

8... dxe4 9.♘c3 O-O 10.O-O ♖e8 11.h3 ♕c7 12.♕c2 ♕e5 13.♖d1 ♘a6 14.a3



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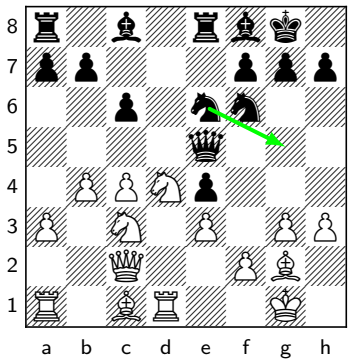

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White has finished development, Black's hopes for a kingside attack are in the past, and the e4-pawn is a big weakness.

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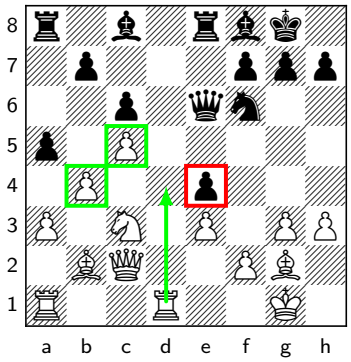

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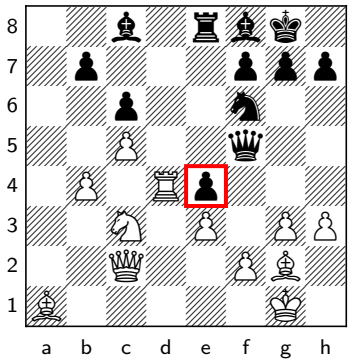
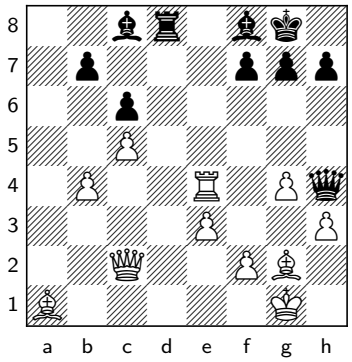
19... axb4 20.axb4 ♖xa1 21.♗xa1 ♕f5 22.♖d4



Just like that, the e4-pawn is lost.

22... ♕h5 23.g4 ♕h4 24.♘xe4 ♘xe4 25.♖xe4 ♖d8



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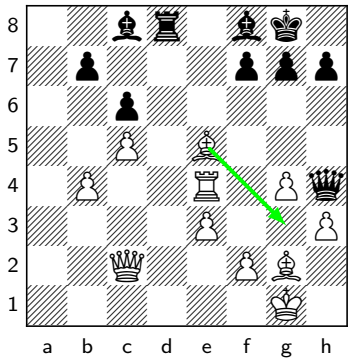
26.♗e5?!



This is a natural move. White wants to reroute the bishop to the g3-square, where it will dispel hope of counterplay. But it is a step in the wrong direction and the miss of a strong opportunity. □ □ White is not going to push his extra pawn and promote it on the kingside. Instead, it can be used to weaken Black's king. Even as things currently stand, White has more pawns in front of his king, and it could be possible to try to prove that Black's king is actually the one in danger:

26.b5? is too aggressive. After cxb5 27.♖d4 h5 , Black is fine.

26.♖e5 White prevents ...h5 and threatens Rh5, winning the game immediately. g6 27.♖e4 With ...g6 provoked, White's threat is Qc3. ♗g7 This is forced, but the exchange of dark-squared bishops is in White's favor. Black will be left with weak queenside pawns on the light squares that will become long-term targets, and White's pawns on the dark squares will be perfectly secure. 28.♗xg7 ♔xg7 29.♕c3† ♕f6 30.♕xf6† ♔xf6 31.♖d4 The pure bishop endgame is hopeless for Black, but keeping the rooks on doesn't look any better. Also 29\. Qc3+ 29...Kg8 30.Rd4 is comfortably winning for White. If Black chooses to retain the rooks, White's would be the more active.

26... h5 27.♗c7!

It is good to provoke Black's rook to an awkward square.

27.♗g3 is not so clear after ♕f6 . It is not easy for White to fully consolidate due to the weakness on g4 and the clumsy rook.

27... ♖d7

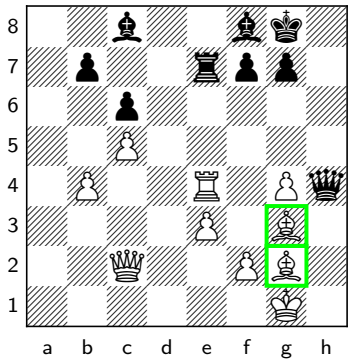
This looks bad, but there is no other square.

28.♗e5?!

I don't recall why I changed my mind. Stronger was

28.♗g3 ♕d8 29.♗f3 followed by Kg2. White is a healthy pawn to the good.

28... hxg4 29.hxg4 ♖e7 30.♗g3



A good consolidating move, asking the queen where she wants to go. After

30.♗f3? ♕h7 , Black's counterplay is sufficient for equality, due to the many threats against the misplaced white pieces. The main one currently is ...Rxe5.

30.♗d6? fails to ♖xe4 31.♕xe4 ♕xg4 , as 32.♕e8 allows ♕d1† with perpetual check.

30... ♕g5

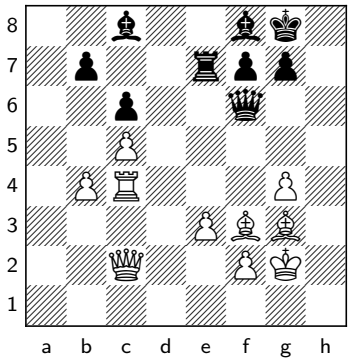
White is also better after

30... ♕h7 .

31.♗f3 ♕g6 32.♖c4

This is forced to avoid losing the g4-pawn.

32... ♕f6 33.♔g2

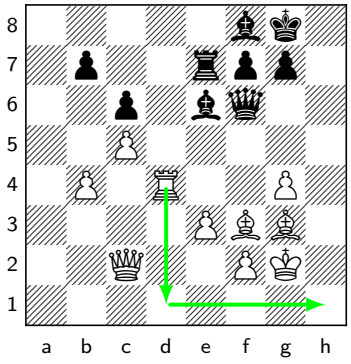


Despite some imperfect play, White has managed to consolidate the extra pawn and is no longer worried about Black creating serious counterplay.

33... ♗e6

White now needed to come up with a plan to bring the game to its conclusion. As White has more pawns in front of his king, his goal should be to attack Black's king.

34.♖d4



A pretty rook maneuver, aiming for Black's weaknesses on the h-file once the rook gets to h1. If Black tries to exchange rooks with ...Rd7, White would be happy for the structure to be changed following e3xd4. Too much too soon would be:

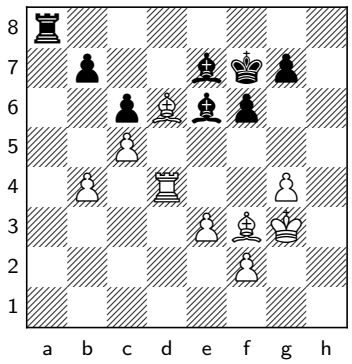
34.g5? ♕xg5 35.♖h4 g6 Black is surviving.

34... ♖e8 35.♕e4 ♖a8 36.♕e5?

A bad decision. White needs to think about what his extra pawn is doing for him. It is not going to promote any time soon; what it does is keep his king safe. Thus, a queen exchange favors Black, as White's best hope of victory lay in checkmate. With the queens off, the only way to convert the extra pawn is to create a passed pawn on the kingside, which is a much harder objective. Of course, White should have followed his plan consistently with:

36.♖d1 . I saw this during the game but remember being spooked by the possibility of ♗d5 . Anything else would allow the rook to come to h1, with major threats. But this offers no relief, as 37.♖xd5 cxd5 38.♕xd5 is clearly decisive. White's king is securely defended, so Black's rook will not be able to create any trouble. White will win easily once the b-pawn falls.

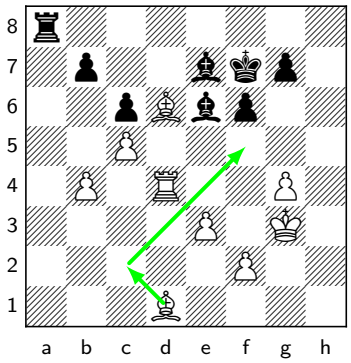
36... ♕xe5 37.♗xe5 ♗e7 38.♔g3 f6 39.♗d6 ♔f7



It seems fairly clear that the dark-squared

bishops will leave the board. However, White should think carefully about whether he wants the pawn structure to change.

40.♗d1



My plan was to reroute my bishop to f5, aiming for a pure rook endgame. After

40.b5 cxb5 41.♗xb7 ♖a4 , Black has counterplay with the outside passed pawn.

40.♗xe7? is also inadequate. For example: ♔xe7 41.♖d1 ♖a4 42.♖b1 ♗c4 White is not going to achieve b4-b5.

40... ♖a3 41.♗c2 ♗xd6†

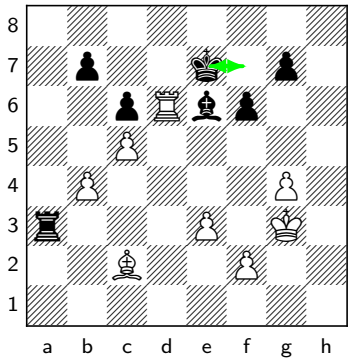
This is the critical moment.

42.♖xd6?

After this, it is difficult for White's king to invade. This is due to the structure once the bishops have been exchanged on f5 with the g-pawn landing on f5. With the pawn on g4 and the light-squared bishops exchanged, White would win routinely with g4-g5, and the f5-square is available for the king. With the pawn on f5 instead of g4, as we will see in the game, White's king will be kept out.

42.cxd6 was the way: ♔e8 43.♗f5 ♗xf5 44.gxf5 Due to the pawn being on d6 rather than c5, Black's king must immediately retreat. This allows White to stretch the defenses. ♔d7 What else? A check on e4 was coming next. 45.♖g4 ♔xd6 46.♖xg7 Black can take the b4-pawn, but he will be way too slow to save the game. b5 47.♔f4 ♖b3 48.♖f7 ♖xb4† 49.e4 White is winning the race as his pawns are further advanced, and Black will lose time with his king.

42... ♔e7



Now we see White's problem. If I play Bf5 and take back with the pawn, Black's king is quite fine on e7, and can switch to f7 if and when White transfers the rook to the g-file. Had I taken back with the pawn on my last move, I would have a pawn on d6, stretching the defenses. Black's king would be unable to stop the d-pawn while simultaneously defending g7. But what else can I do?

43.♗f5

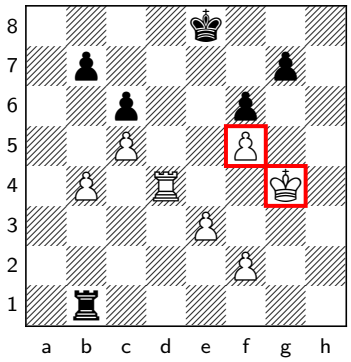
In an ideal world, I would be able to bring the king to f4 before putting the bishop on f5, but this is not happening:

43.♔f4 g5† No bishop to f5 for me.

43...♗xf5 44.gxf5 ♖b3 45.♖d4 ♔e8 46.♔g4

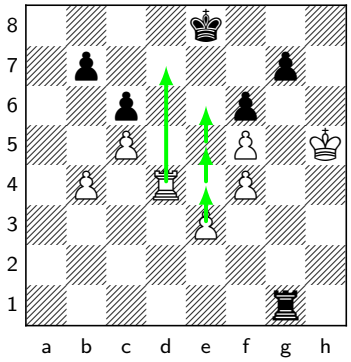
46.♖g4 ♔f7 is nothing now.

46...♖b1



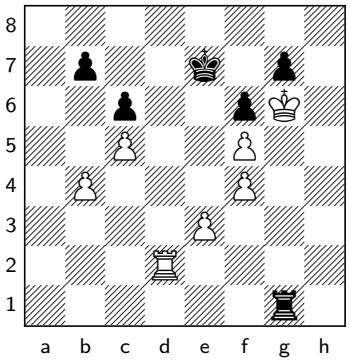
Imagine White's king and f5-pawn could switch spots...

47.♔h5 ♖g1 48.f4



Black has to stop my Kg6 invasion, but doing so with the king would allow Rd7, while doing it with the rook leaves my hands free to push e4-e5-e6. I thought Black couldn't stop all my ideas, but I was wrong.

48...♔e7 49.♖d2 ♖h1† 50.♔g6 ♖g1†



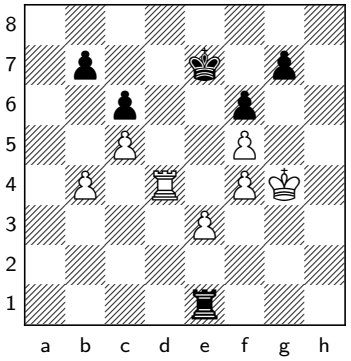
I realized that, much to my chagrin, my plan of bringing the king to g8 would not work.

51.♔h5

After Let's imagine Black didn't have this resource and was forced to wait. Then, after 51. Kh5 51...Rg3 52.e4 Rg1 53.Rd6 Rg2 54.Kg8 , White is winning. So it all comes down to Black having ...Kf7 as a possibility.

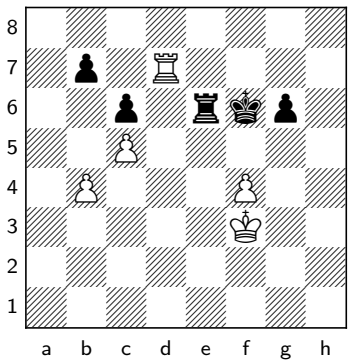
51.♔h7 ♔f7 , Black has mating threats, and I need to force a perpetual right away. After 52.♖d7† ♔f8 , White is forced to take the perpetual with53.Rd8+ since if 53.♖xb7? ♖h1† White is mated, thanks again to the pawn on f5.

51...♖h1† 52.♔g4 ♖b1 53.♖d4 ♖e1



Black is clearly holding. I tried a bit more, but, predictably, failed to get anything.

54.♔f3 ♖b1 55.♔e4 ♖b3 56.♖c4 ♔d7 57.♔d4 ♔e7 58.e4 ♖b1 59.♔d3 ♖b3† 60.♔e2 ♖b2† 61.♔f3 ♖b1 62.e5 ♖f1† 63.♔g2 ♖d1 64.♖e4 ♖d3 65.♔f2 ♖h3 66.♔e2 ♖h5 67.♔f3 ♖xf5 68.♔g4 g6 69.exf6† ♔xf6 70.♖d4 ♔g7 71.♖d1 ♖f7 72.♖d2 ♔f6 73.♖d6† ♔g7 74.♖e6 ♖d7 75.♖e8 ♔f6 76.♖f8† ♔g7 77.♖b8 ♔f6 78.♔f3 ♖e7 79.♖f8† ♔g7 80.♖d8 ♔f6 81.♖d6† ♖e6 82.♖d7

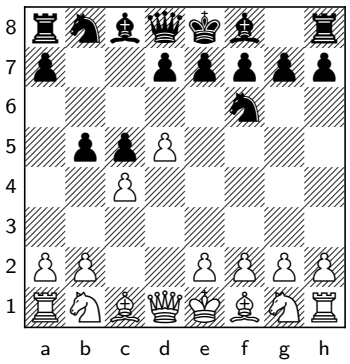


Piorun defended well in this game, which was instructive for our theme. There were a couple of noteworthy points in particular. White should not have exchanged queens, because his best hopes lay in delivering mate. The evaluation of which rook endgame was winning was also key, especially the change in the pawn structure. Had I understood that I would not be able to keep the pawn structure as is, and that I would need to play gxf5, I might have then realized that my winning plan should have been to choose the pawn structure with cxd6.

Sam Shankland-Martin Haubro Introduction

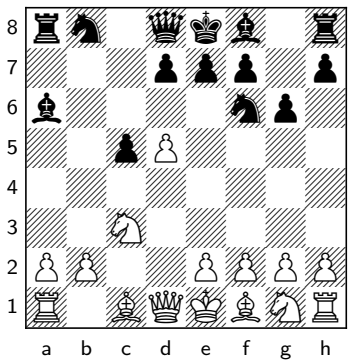
Let's again summarize from previous games the key points to a successful conversion of an extra pawn: 1) Stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. 2) Evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes to the structure, will help you win, and which will favor your opponent. 3) Come up with a plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game, the plan making use of the extra pawn at some point or in some other way justifying its presence. We need to have a clear purpose of what the extra pawn is trying to achieve. The following game is a good illustration of all three points.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5



Black loses a pawn as early as move 3!

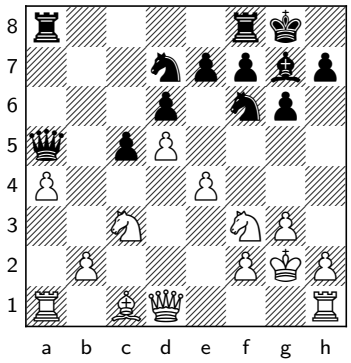
4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♗xa6



Nowadays, it's well-established that the right move order is

6... ♗g7 7.e4 O-O asking White to move the f1-bishop or 8.♘f3N ♕a5 and then recapture on a6 in better circumstances.

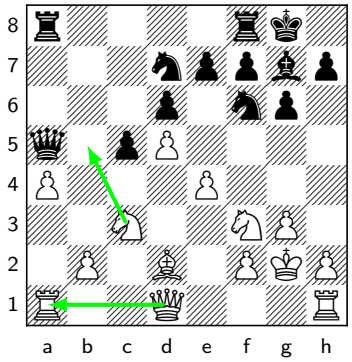
7.e4 ♗xf1 8.♔xf1 d6 9.♘f3 ♘bd7 10.g3 ♗g7 11.♔g2 O-O 12.a4 ♕a5



White is obviously a pawn up, but every player who has ever faced the Benko Gambit will have lost horribly to it at some point despite the material count – I certainly have, and this game could have been another such case! Being a pawn up does not mean that the game will win itself. For example, it is unrealistic to consider running with the extra pawn on the queenside. Instead, White needs to think carefully about how to approach the upcoming position, bearing in mind the key points repeated above. Step one is to stabilize the queenside and restrict any counterplay there. A great way to do this is to play b2-b3 to support the a4-pawn, which in turn will support a knight on b5. This shuts down the b-file, stopping any counterplay there. White's extra space means that he can then launch an attack in the center or on the kingside. To defend against a kingside attack, it would be normal to trade pieces to reduce the checkmating potential of the attacker. But that would also be in White's favor in the long term, as he has the extra pawn on the queenside. Better was something like

12... ♕b6 13.♕e2 ♖fb8 .

13.♗d2!



White defends the a1-rook, and it becomes impossible for Black to prevent Nb5. White needs to be carrying out his plan with care. For example,

13.♘d2?N is not good, because after ♖fb8 it is going to be difficult to achieve the blocking of the b-file. Putting the knight on

b5 is currently impossible, due to the unfortunate position of the a1-rook. Also, moving the knight to b5 is a higher priority than moving the other knight to c4. A knight on b5 will also block the f1-a6 diagonal should the black queen move to a6, eyeing the weak d3- and c4-squares.

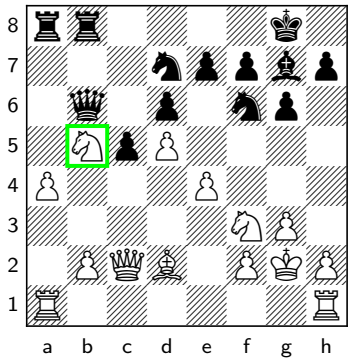
13.♕e2? defends the e4-pawn to enable Nb5, but Black can prevent this with ♖fb8 , again highlighting the unfortunate circumstance of the unprotected a1-rook. Then a typical idea for White is 14.♖a3 , protecting the rook to facilitate Nb5, but in this version this allows ♖b4 . The threat to the e4-pawn stops Nb5 yet again, and Black has started developing an initiative.

13... ♖fb8

This is almost automatic in the Benko, but the b-file is about to be blocked, so its efficiency could be questioned. In any case, should Black attempt to prevent Nb5 by walking away from the e1-a5 diagonal, let's say with

13... ♕b6 , then White would simply defend the e4-pawn. For example, with 14.♕e2? , and Nb5 is unstoppable. White does not need to defend the b-pawn; the black queen would be trapped if the pawn is taken.

14.♘b5 ♕b6 15.♕c2

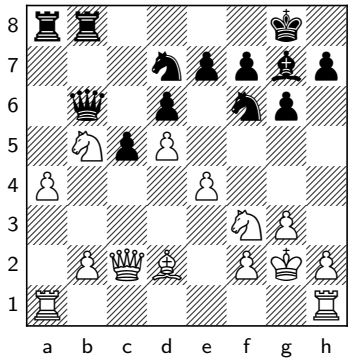


White has accomplished the first stage of his plan effectively. The b5-knight is secure, and Black has no immediate counterplay. Black regrouped the knight towards c7 with

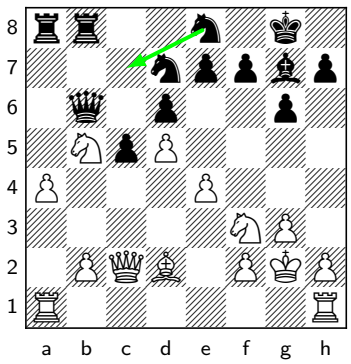
15... ♘e8N

trying to eliminate its tremendous counterpart on b5. This is a key moment, and the decision White made now defined the game.

Shankland-Haubro Exercise #1



15... ♘e8



The knight heads towards c7, trying to eliminate its tremendous counterpart on b5. This is a key moment of the game, Try to find the right plan for White.

16.♖ab1!

The engine's preference. The rook gets off the a1-h8 diagonal, allowing the b-pawn to move, and this is the best square. Let's see the alternatives: A) White can also prepare the push with 16. Rab1 18.b3 Qb7 19.a5 . Note that the white bishop secures the a5-pawn and denies the black queen access to the b4-square. White has the simple plan of Rb1 and b3-b4. Then White will win with two connected passed pawns after b5, or the b-file opens, leading to the trade of major pieces, which White desires. B) C)

16.♖a3? This is a typical move. By getting the rook off the a1-square, White gets ready to move the b-pawn. It is also instructive to examine the position if Black merely waits: ♖b7 is discussed (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

16... ♘c7N 17.♘xc7N ♕xc7 With the bishops on the board, White is able to play: 18.b4 Black is unable to capture the pawn, and White is winning. The bishop on d2 turns out to be far more relevant than its counterpart on g7. cxb4 This just fails to: 19.♕xc7 bxa3 20.♕xd7 White wins.

16.♖a2 is similar to putting the rook on a3, but it allows Black to muddy the waters by sacrificing his queen, although White still has a narrow path to advantage. Of course, ♘c7N

16... ♕xb5? 17.axb5 ♖xa2 18.♖b1 ♖xb5 19.♕c4 ♖bxb2 20.♖xb2 ♖xb2 21.♕a4 White still has good winning chances, but it would have been so much cleaner not to allow the sacrifice.

17.♘xc7N ♕xc7 18.b4 is White's point.

16.♗c3? The text move represents a misunderstanding of the position. If White can keep the current pawn structure, then the white dark-squared bishop is much better than the black one. Let's consider this: if all the minor pieces are exchanged, it will be difficult for White to make any progress. Black will create pressure on the b-file with his major pieces, tying White down. If White tries to prepare the e5 central break with f2-f4, the second rank is weakened, and ...c4 will be powerful. White has weaknesses and will not be able to exchange the major pieces; he has no open files for them. Hence, instead of exchanging bishops and bringing

Black closer to the scenario we just outlined, White should seek to prevent ...Nc7 with one of the alternatives.

16... ♘c7

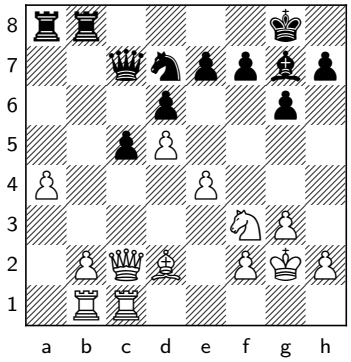
After

16... ♕a6 17.b3 , Black has no counterplay.

17.♘xc7

Immediately winning is 17. Nxc7 18.b4 , but for some reason I was worried about 18...Qa7 19.a5 cxb4 , with ...Nc5 coming. I have no idea why! White is totally winning: 20.Rxb4 Rxb4 21.Bxb4 This position is another perfect example of why White's dark-squared bishop is better than Black's.

17... ♕xc7 18.♖hc1?



Even this quiet move works just fine.

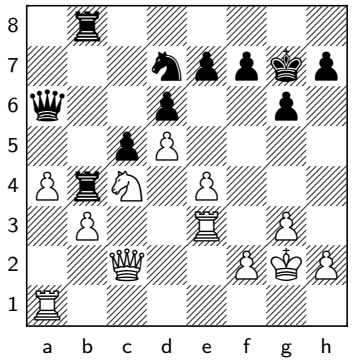
18... ♕a7

If we were to imagine this exact same position without the dark-squared bishops, the difference would be enormous. White would not be able to push a4-a5, he would lose control of the b4-square – which Black could use for his rook – and he would have no further plan to make progress. As is:

19.a5

White is ready for b2-b4 next, exchanging off his weak pawn, opening the queenside, and leaving himself up a clean passer. Black is done for.

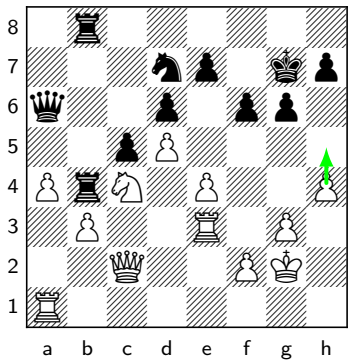
Shankland-Haubro Bonus Exercise



23... f6

Black wants to trade knights to increase the pressure on the b3-pawn. White would love to exchange heavy pieces. Any hopes of achieving White's goal involve opening up some lines on the kingside. Should he try f4 and e4-e5 or h4-h5?

24.h4!

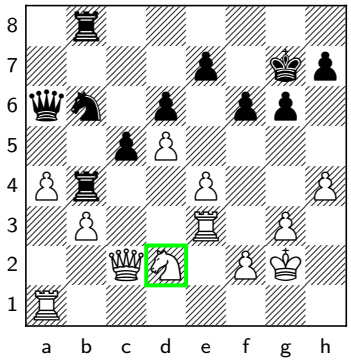


This was the way!

24.f4? A case of 'right general idea, wrong execution'. ♘b6N Black forces off the knights. 25.♘xb6N A sad necessity. We already knew from the get-go that a pure heavy-piece endgame would be in Black's favor. In stark contrast to the main line,

25.♘d2N is nicely met with c4 , highlighting that an open position will make White regret moving the f-pawn. The engine isn't that afraid from the white side, but Black is already practically for choice. 26.a5 cxb3 27.♖xb3 ♕e2† Compare this position to our main line.

24... ♘b6 25.♘d2



White plans h5, opening lines towards Black's king. With all of his pieces on the queenside, Black will struggle to defend against a direct attack. The f-pawn can stay in place for now and only advance later if needed.

25... c4

This is ineffective for many reasons with the pawn on f2.

26.a5!

The cleanest. White wins.

26... cxb3 27.♖xb3

An example of the importance of a pawn on f2. ...Qe2 is not a check now.

Sam Shankland-Martin Haubro, Helsingor 2015

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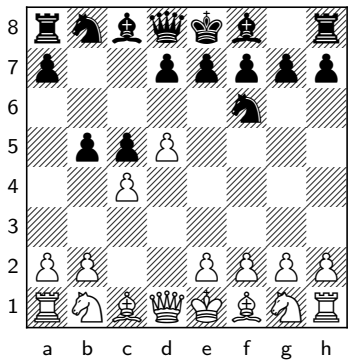
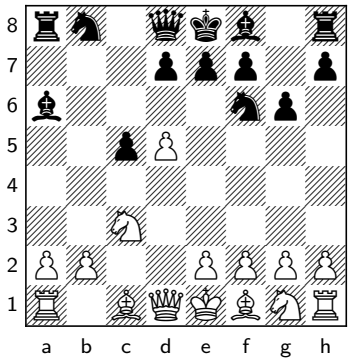


Black loses a pawn as early as move 3!

4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♗xa6



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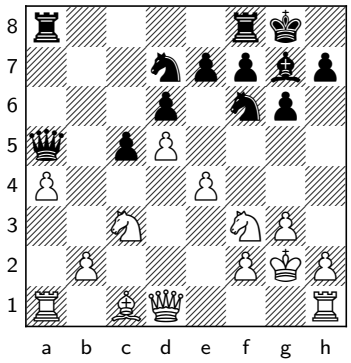

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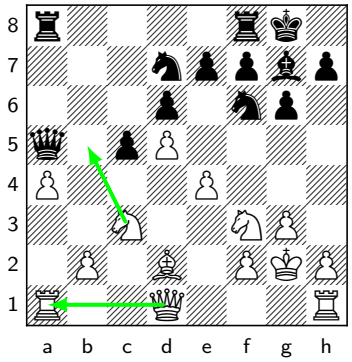


White defends the a1-rook, and it becomes impossible for Black to prevent Nb5. White needs to be carrying out his plan with care. For example,

13.♘d2?N is not good, because after ♖fb8 it is going to be difficult to achieve the blocking of the b-file. Putting the knight on

b5 is currently impossible, due to the unfortunate position of the a1-rook. Also, moving the knight to b5 is a higher priority than moving the other knight to c4. A knight on b5 will also block the f1-a6 diagonal should the black queen move to a6, eyeing the weak d3- and c4-squares.

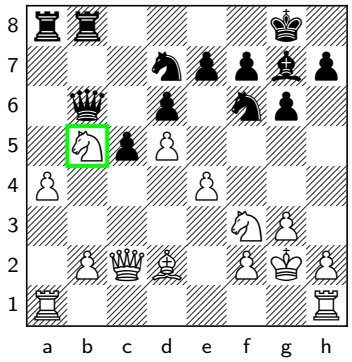
13.♕e2? defends the e4-pawn to enable Nb5, but Black can prevent this with ♖fb8 , again highlighting the unfortunate circumstance of the unprotected a1-rook. Then a typical idea for White is 14.♖a3 , protecting the rook to facilitate Nb5, but in this version this allows ♖b4 . The threat to the e4-pawn stops Nb5 yet again, and Black has started developing an initiative.

13...♖fb8

This is almost automatic in the Benko, but the b-file is about to be blocked, so its efficiency could be questioned. In any case, should Black attempt to prevent Nb5 by walking away from the e1-a5 diagonal, let's say with

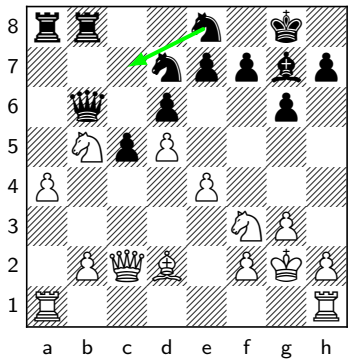
13...♕b6 , then White would simply defend the e4-pawn. For example, with 14.♕e2? , and Nb5 is unstoppable. White does not need to defend the b-pawn; the black queen would be trapped if the pawn is taken.

14.♘b5 ♕b6 15.♕c2



White has accomplished the first stage of his plan effectively. The b5-knight is secure, and Black has no immediate counterplay.

15...♘e8



The knight heads towards c7, trying to eliminate its tremendous counterpart on b5. This is a key moment of the game.

16.♗c3?

The text move represents a misunderstanding of the position. If White can keep the current pawn structure, then the white dark-squared bishop is much better than the black one. Let's consider this: if all the minor pieces are exchanged, it will be difficult for White to make any progress. Black will create pressure on the b-file with his major pieces, tying White

down. If White tries to prepare the e5 central break with f2-f4, the second rank is weakened, and ...c4 will be powerful. White has weaknesses and will not be able to exchange the major pieces; he has no open files for them. Hence, instead of exchanging bishops and bringing Black closer to the scenario we just outlined, White should seek to prevent ...Nc7 with one of the following options: A) White can also prepare the push with 16. Bc3 18.b3 Qb7 19.a5 . Note that the white bishop secures the a5-pawn and denies the black queen access to the b4-square. White has the simple plan of Rb1 and b3-b4. Then White will win with two connected passed pawns after b5, or the b-file opens, leading to the trade of major pieces, which White desires. It is also instructive to examine the position if Black merely waits: 16. Bc3 16...Rb7 17.Rb1 After 17...Nc7 18.Nxc7 Rxc7 19.Qc4 Qa6 20.Qxa6 Rxa6 21.a5 c4 22.b4 c3 23.Bc1 , White is winning in typical fashion. Mobilizing the queenside cleanly highlights the importance of the extra pawn. Or 16. Bc3 17...Rbb8 18.Bc3 White is happy to exchange bishops only if he can recapture with the b-pawn, as is the case here. Under no circumstances must he exchange bishops on g7. If Black continues waiting, then the f3-knight will come to c4, strengthening White's grip. 18...Bxc3 19.bxc3 White can play c4 next to bolster the knight on b5 for the rest of the game. Black has no counterplay, and White now has an open file, such that the issue of him not being able to trade major pieces goes away. B) C) The engine's preference is: Immediately winning is 16. Bc3 18.b4 , but for some reason I was worried about 18...Qa7 19.a5 cxb4 , with ...Nc5 coming. I have no idea why! White is totally winning: 20.Rxb4 Rxb4 21.Bxb4 This position is another perfect example of why White's dark-squared bishop is better than Black's.

16.♖a3? As mentioned above, this is a typical move. By getting the rook off the a1-square, White gets ready to move the b-pawn. ♘c7N 17.♘xc7N ♕xc7 With the bishops on the board, White is able to play: 18.b4 Black is unable to capture the pawn, and White is winning. The bishop on d2 turns out to be far more relevant than its counterpart on g7. cxb4 This just fails to: 19.♕xc7 bxa3 20.♕xd7 White wins.

16.♖a2 is similar to putting the rook on a3, but it allows Black to muddy the waters by sacrificing his queen, although White still has a narrow path to advantage. Of course, ♘c7N

16... ♕xb5? 17.axb5 ♖xa2 18.♖b1 ♖xb5 19.♕c4 ♖bxb2 20.♖xb2 ♖xb2 21.♕a4 White still has good winning chances, but it would have been so much cleaner not to allow the sacrifice.

17.♘xc7N ♕xc7 18.b4 is White's point.

16.♖ab1 The rationale is similar; the rook gets off the a1-h8 diagonal, allowing the b-pawn to move. ♘c7N 17.♘xc7N ♕xc7 18.♖hc1? Even this quiet move works just fine. ♕a7 If we were to imagine this exact same position without the dark-squared bishops, the difference would be enormous.

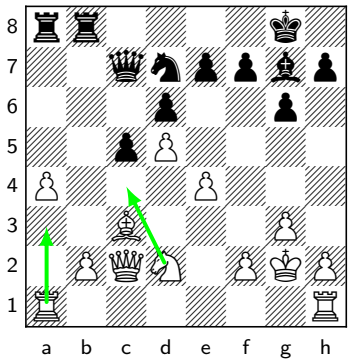
White would not be able to push a4-a5, he would lose control of the b4-square –which Black could use for his rook –and he would have no further plan to make progress. As is: 19.a5 White is ready for b2-b4 next, exchanging off his weak pawn, opening the queenside, and leaving himself up a clean passer. Black is done for.

16...♘c7 17.♘xc7

The idea of rerouting the knight to c4 does not work:

17.♘a3N ♗xc3 18.bxc3 This was good for White with the knight on b5 being able to be supported with c4, but that is not the case in this line after ♕b3 , with an equal position. For example, if 19.♖hb1 then ♕xa4 .

17... ♕xc7 18.♘d2



My plan was Ra3 to control the b3-square, followed by Nc4 and Bd2, resulting in good coordination and a large advantage for White. I had some good alternatives: Similarly,

18.♖hb1? is a natural move, making it hard for Black to take on c3, and threatening Bxg7 followed by b4. After ♗xc3 19.bxc3 White should be happy to take with the pawn on c3. It will prevent Black's rook from coming to b4 and open an avenue to make some trades.

19.♕xc3? ♖b4 leads to the exact structure and piece assortment that White does not want. Black's rook on b4 is going to be incredibly annoying, and I would actually prefer Black.

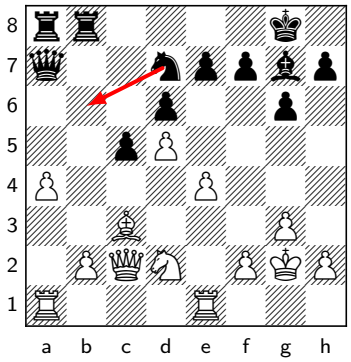
19... ♖xb1 20.♖xb1 White is better with the open b-file and passed a-pawn. Still, Black remains solid after something like ♕c8 , hoping for some counterplay against White's a-pawn after lifting the rook and getting the queen to a8 or a6.

18.♖a3 and

18.♖a2 would again be decent, daring Black to take on c3. However, I believe I should have gone with

18.♗xg7 . It is anti-positional to allow the bishop exchange, but, concretely, it does allow me to improve my knight: ♔xg7 19.♘d4N White remains much better with the hope of bringing his knight to b5 or, in some cases, c6. It is still not nearly as good as it could have been.

18... ♕a7 19.♖he1



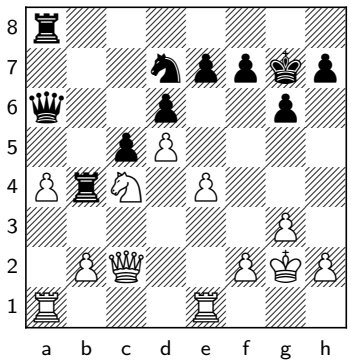
This is prophylaxis against the knight leaving d7, as e4-e5 may then be possible.

19... ♕a6 20.♗xg7

Stockfish claims this move is best, but I think it is a mistake in human terms. White should not be exchanging these bishops unless he has a clear way of keeping Black's rook off the b4-square.

20.♘f3N looks like an improvement. It's not easy for Black to improve, and he has to stay ready to meet e4-e5.

20... ♔xg7 21.♘c4 ♖b4!



An automatic move for Black, made possible by my poor decision to trade dark- squared bishops. 21. Nc4 21...Rb4 would be impossible with them on the board.

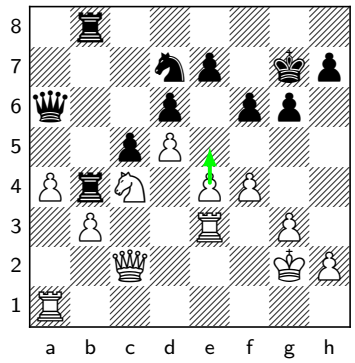
22.b3 ♖ab8

22... f6 is still good for White according to the engine, but it does not look clear to me. Black has prevented e4-e5, he is ready to play ...Nb6, and he is contesting the important squares. Most significantly, White has no route both to trade the pieces he wants and to make the extra pawn count.

23.♖e3 f6

With the dark-squared bishops exchanged, the game cannot be won on the queenside. Thus, the best plan should be to keep the queenside secure and try to attack on the kingside. Black will struggle to defend if exchanging pieces is a non-starter.

24.f4?



A case of 'right general idea, wrong execution'. The way to do it was

24.h4 ♘b6N 25.♘d2N . White plans h5, opening lines towards Black's king. With all of his pieces on the queenside, Black will struggle to defend against a direct attack. The f-pawn can stay in place for now and only advance later if needed. c4 is ineffective for many reasons with the pawn on f2.

For example: 26.a5 and White wins. An example of the importance of a pawn on f2 is cxb3 27.♖xb3 , and there is no ...Qe2+.

24... ♘b6!

Black forces off the knights.

25.♘xb6

A sad necessity. We already knew from the get-go that a pure heavy-piece endgame would be in Black's favor. In stark contrast to the 24.h4! line above,

25.♘d2N is nicely met with c4 , highlighting that an open position will make White regret moving the f-pawn. The engine isn't that afraid from the white side, but Black is already practically for choice. 26.a5 cxb3 27.♖xb3 ♕e2† Compare this position to the note on White's 24th move.

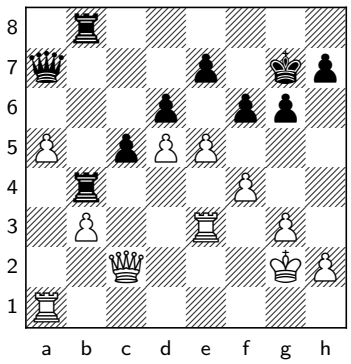
25... ♕xb6

25... ♖8xb6 is also equal.

26.a5

26.♖a3? loses to c4 .

26... ♕a7 27.e5



White tries to break in the center, but Black has sufficient counterplay on the queenside and against the exposed white king. I left in some notes that I had written directly after the game, but consider them a bonus, since they are not relevant to our theme.

27... fxe5 28.fxe5 ♕b7

I was expecting a draw following

28... c4 .

29.♖d1

I was also calculating: After 29. Rd1 30...Qxd6? 31.Rd1 , White has a nearly decisive advantage. I badly misevaluated this position during the game, thinking Black should be fine.

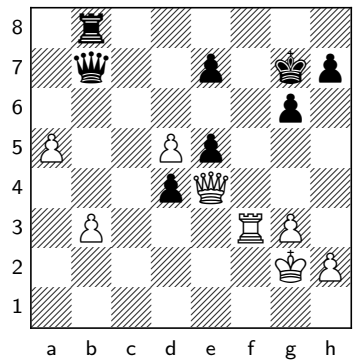
29.exd6 ♕xd5† 30.♔g1 ♕d4 31.♕c3 ♕xc3 32.♖xc3 exd6 With equality.

29... ♖d4! 30.♖xd4 cxd4 31.♖f3 dxe5!

I thought 31\. Rf3 32...Qxe5 33.Qxb8 Qe2+ 34.Rf2! Qe4+ 35.Kh3! Qe6+ 36.g4! Qe3+ 37.Kg2! Qe4+ 38.Kg3 Qe3+ 39.Rf3 Qe5+ 40.Kh3 No more checks. I don't know where I got lost, but somehow, I did not find this whole line, and I thought Black had a perpetual.

31... ♕xd5? was a draw, but it was a miscalculation. White is in fact winning: 32.♕c7 I saw ♖xb3 all the way to mate: 33.♕xe7† ♔h6 34.♕h4† ♔g7 35.♕f6† ♔h6 36.♕f4† g5 37.♕f6† ♔h5 38.g4† ♔xg4 39.♕f5† ♔h5 40.♕xh7† ♔g4 41.h3#

32.♕e4

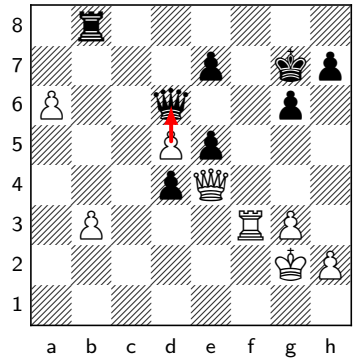


With eight minutes on my clock,

32.♕c6 didn't even occur to me. The text move looked so natural, but it's probably not the best. After this, the game could continue: ♕xc6 33.dxc6 ♖c8 34.b4 ♖xc6 35.♖a3 Mayhem follows: e4 36.b5 is also interesting.

36.a6 d3 37.♔f2 ♖f6† 38.♔e3 ♖f3† 39.♔xe4 d2 40.♖a1 ♖c3 41.a7 ♖c1 Leading to a drawn queen endgame –pretty sick line if you ask me. 41... Rc3 41.Rd1 is also a draw after 41...Rc4+ 42.Kf3 Rxb4 .

32... ♕c7 33.a6 ♕d6!



Blocking any ideas of d5-d6. For example,

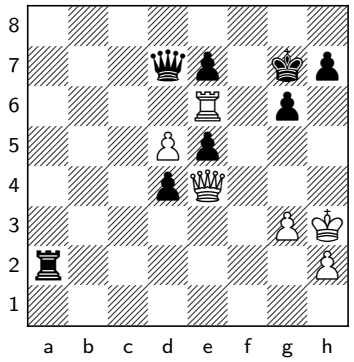
33... ♖b6? 34.a7 ♖a6? loses to 35.d6 and a8=Q, so Black needs to go for 34\. a7 34...Qxa7 , but after 35.Qxe5+ he would experience major practical problems due to his exposed king. Again, the importance of stopping d5-d6 is highlighted after 35...Rf6 36.d6! Qb7 , and Black will need to hold a pawn-down rook endgame.

34.♖f2 ♖xb3 35.a7?

I was way too optimistic.

35.♖e2 would have promptly led to a draw: ♖a3 36.♕xe5† ♕xe5 37.♖xe5 ♔f7 38.♖e4 ♖xa6 39.♖xd4 Time to shake hands.

35... ♖a3! 36.♖c2 ♖xa7 37.♖c6 ♖a2† 38.♔h3 ♕d7† 39.♖e6



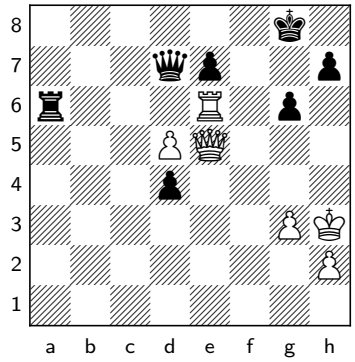
I thought I had enough counterplay, but the computer just laughs.

39... ♖a6?

Oof –I was lucky to survive this one. After

39... ♕c8 40.♕xe5† ♔g8 , Black wins. The d-pawn is about to start running, and 41.♕xd4 loses to ♕c2 .

40.♕xe5† ♔g8 41.♕b8† ♔g7 42.♕e5† ♔g8

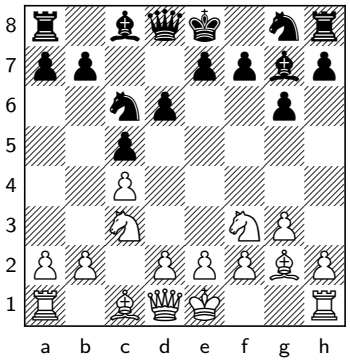


And a draw was agreed. This game was defined by my misunderstanding of piece exchanges. Had I realized that an exchange of dark-squared bishops would be heavily in Black's favor, I surely would have consolidated and won on the queenside, using my d2-bishop to help support moves like b4 or a5. As is, I not only allowed a bishop exchange but even forced it, spending valuable time. Before long, Black had the more comfortable position and, by the end, I was lucky to make a draw.

Magnus Carlsen-Maxime Vachier-Lagrave Introduction

While we already saw young Magnus early on, and he was impressive, a more mature Magnus looks even stronger. In the present encounter, he accepts a pawn sacrifice and converts it just about perfectly.

1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.♘c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 d6



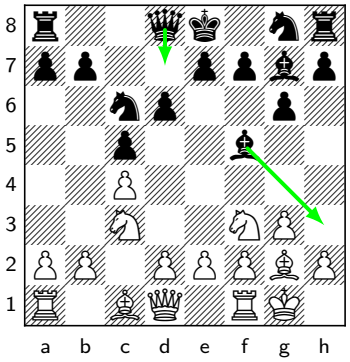
A reasonable way for Black. Historically,

5... e6 is also good, while Black does not equalize after

5... ♘f6N .

5... e5 was thought to be fine for Black, but that is no longer the case. For those interested in the theory here, I have heard that some people like my course... (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

6.O-O ♗f5



Black plans ...Qd7 and ...Bh3 to exchange White's strong light-squared-bishop.

6... ♖b8 is another respectable way for Black and was played against me by Gukesh in a rapid game in 2022.

6... ♘f6N is nice for White in my opinion after 7.d4 . This might be liked by some King's Indian aficionados, but it's not everyone's cup of tea from the black side, and there isn't a direct way to equalize.

7.h3

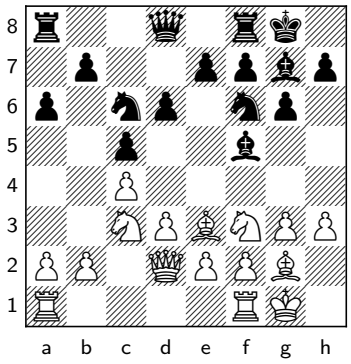
This is prophylaxis. White prepares to meet ...Qd7 with Kh2. A standard plan in the Symmetrical English is

7.a3 ♕d7 8.b4 , trying to provoke ...b6 with pressure on the long diagonal. But if Black can exchange the g2-bishop, as he is here, then there are no problems with the black position. And that is exactly what happens after ♗h3 .

7... ♘f6 8.d3

8.d4 is now less of an issue for Black, as it can be met by ♘e4N .

8... O-O 9.♗e3 a6 10.♕d2



Harmonious development from Carlsen, highlighting that the pawn on h3 also prevents ...Ng4.

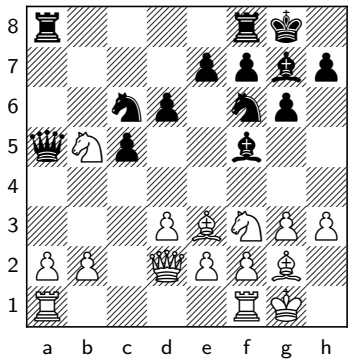
10... b5?!

This changes the character of the position. Black offers a pawn for Benko- style compensation. White is not forced to take it, but he decided to go for it:

11.cxb5 axb5 12.♘xb5

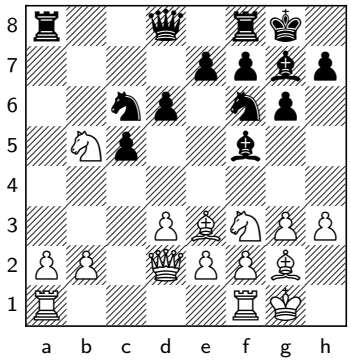
The structure resembles a Benko Gambit, but there are differences. In the Benko, exchanging queens is often favorable for Black. After the natural

12... ♕a5



, should White exchange queens here or preserve them by retreating the knight to c3? To consider the principles of converting an extra pawn, White needs to think of how to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in pawn structure, are favorable to him.

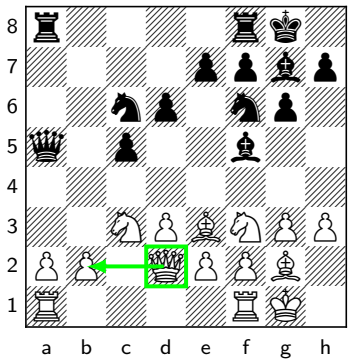
Carlsen-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #1



12... ♕a5

The structure resembles a Benko Gambit, but there are differences. In the Benko, exchanging queens is often favorable for Black. Should White exchange queens here or preserve them by retreating the knight to c3? To consider the principles of converting an extra pawn, White needs to think of how to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in pawn structure, are favorable to him.

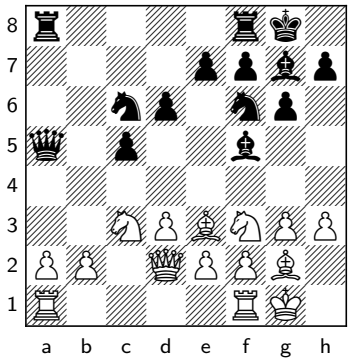
13.♘c3!



The computer is agnostic between the two options, but I have a strong preference. The first goal when being up a pawn is to stabilize the position and eliminate counterplay. As in the Benko Gambit, Black's main source of counterplay will be the open a \- and b-files. The b2-pawn is a much larger target than the a2-pawn, and the queen on d2 defends that pawn naturally. The engine likes 13. Nc3 14.a4 , but it creates weak squares, and the b2-pawn remains loose. After 14...Nd5 15.Bd2 Ndb4 , Black has strong counterplay on the queenside, and the only way to keep everything together is through tactical means. With the text move, White retains a defender of the b2-pawn and is not forced to play Rfb1. This makes it easier for him to achieve b2-b3 with a solid structure. It is clearly much too simplistic to argue that you should always exchange queens if you are a pawn up. The concrete features of the position need to be considered.

13.♕xa5 is in Black's favor: ♖xa5 14.♘c3N ♖b8 White needs to defend the b2-pawn in an awkward and passive way: 15.♖fb1 Choosing the other rook would leave a2 unprotected. Nevertheless, it is difficult for White to make progress with b2-b3, as disaster awaits on the long diagonal.

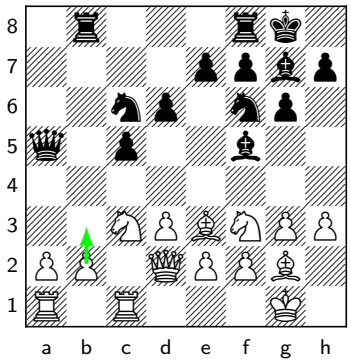
Carlsen-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #2



13... ♖ab8

I would have preferred the other rook to b8, but the position does not change a whole lot. Black obviously has some compensation for his missing pawn, and White should be trying to stabilize the position to avoid counterplay. Magnus put on a clinic.

14.♖fc1!



White prepares b2-b3 by overprotecting the c3-knight. It is a moot point which rook to put on c1. Given that Black has moved his a8-rook to b8, it feels more intuitive to place the a1-rook on c1 as the need for it to be on a1 has reduced. □ After □ □

14.♖ac1 ♖fc8 15.♖fd1 e5 16.b3 , the difference with the game is minimal.

14.b3? is strategically desirable, shutting down the active rook on the b-file, but it also has the drawback of reducing the defense of the c3-knight. Black can take advantage of the tactical opportunity: ♘g4N Black is better with an unopposed dark-squared bishop after 15.♖fc1? ♘xe3N 16.fxe3 ♗h6 , so better is 15... Ng4 15.Nd5 Qxd2 16.Bxd2 Bxa1 17.hxg4 Be6! Black will remain an exchange up. While White is not worse yet, he has clearly lost control.

14.♖fb1 is passive for no apparent reason.

14... ♖fc8 15.b3! e5

White has made good progress towards stabilizing the position, and he will not face threats any time soon. He now needs to work out how best to convert the extra pawn. Winning by promoting the passed a-pawn is clearly not on the agenda for the near future, and Black has a useful amount of extra space in the center. The first issue, though, is that the intention of Black's last move is to prepare ...Nd4. Prophylaxis is needed against this idea.

16.♗h6!

The reasoning behind this move is twofold. First, the g7-bishop has more potential than its White counterpart, despite the current blockage on the long diagonal. Second, should ...Nd4 ever come, White will be able to take it with the knight without losing a piece to a fork. The last two moves by White have been clever preparation for this bishop sortie, defending both the c3-knight and b2-pawn.

16... ♘d4

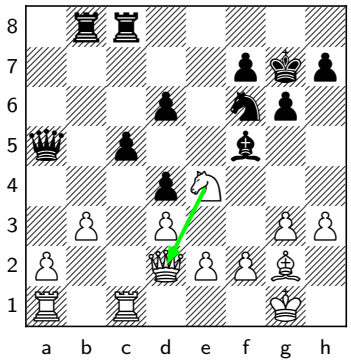
After

16... ♗h8 17.♘g5N , White gets an initiative in addition to the pawn, with Nge4 possibly coming next. The machine recommends ♗g7 , bringing the bishop straight back.

17.♗xg7 ♔xg7

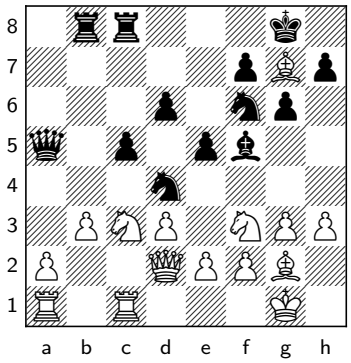
17... ♘xf3†N was MVL's choice, and finding White's best reply will be our next exercise.

18.♘xd4 exd4 19.♘e4



This is just amazing for White.

Carlsen-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #3



17... ♘xf3†

Another key decision is required from White. Is a change in the pawn structure favorable for the conversion of the extra pawn?

18.exf3!

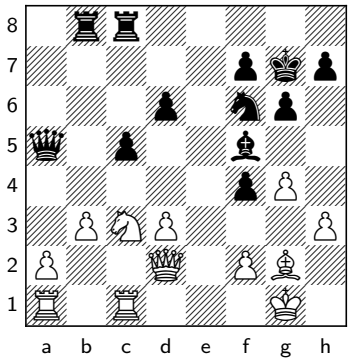
White's plan is not to do anything immediately with the pawn majority on the queenside. Rather, it is to stabilize that majority as solidly as possible, and then to undertake active play in the center and/or on the kingside. This will highlight that Black cannot afford to trade pieces. A good way for White to try to exchange pieces is to open lines in the center. Once White opens up the bishop again with f4 and plays fxe5, he will have created a weakness for Black on c5. The machine thinks that

18.♗xf3 is almost equally good, followed by the retreat of the bishop, then pushing f2-f4. If that is the plan anyway, it makes more sense to recapture with the e-pawn, save a tempo, and keep a more robust shelter for the white king.

18... ♔xg7 19.f4! exf4

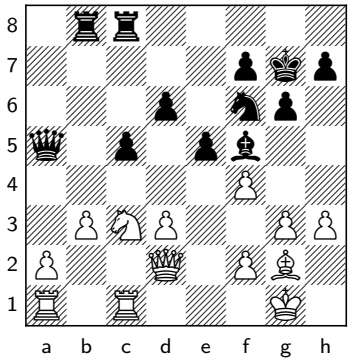
19... ♕a6 was played in the game. Let's see in our next exercise if you can do better than Magnus.

20.g4!



White saves the d3-pawn, and Qxf4 comes next.

Carlsen-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #4



19... ♕a6

How should White proceed?

20.♘e4!

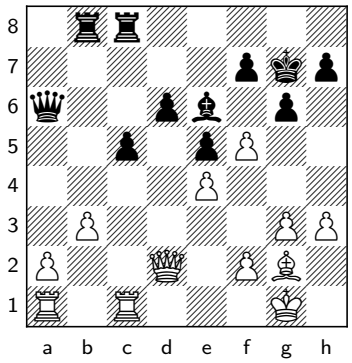
This was the way to do it, and it is preferable to play it without exchanging on e5 first. The game went

20.fxe5? , which is not bad, but White could have done even better, keeping in line with thinking about how the extra pawn will ultimately win the game.

20... ♘xe4

20... ♗xe4 might be better, but this is anyway depressing. After 21.dxe4 White has play both on the d-file against the d6-pawn, and some ideas of increasing the pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal with Qb2.

21.dxe4! ♗e6 22.f5!

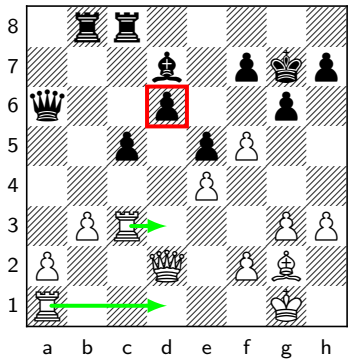


This illustrates perfectly why it was better not to include a capture on e5.

22... ♗d7

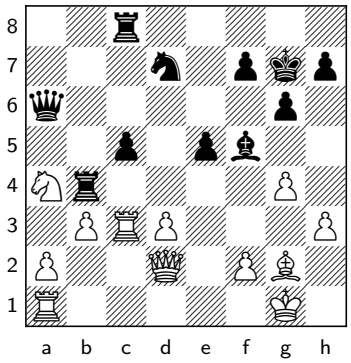
22... gxf5 23.♕g5†

23.♖c3



White can triple on the d-file in short order, and Black is busted.

Carlsen-Vachier-Lagrave Exercise #5



23... ♗e6

This is another critical moment. A key part of converting an extra pawn is to consider which exchanges are favorable and which are not.

24.♖ac1!

This is much easier than what Magnus played, which is nevertheless correct.

24.♘xc5N Both this move and the alternative win, but sometimes, simple principles go a long way. When you are ahead in material, you should usually trade pieces, not pawns. Jacob Aagaard sets this out clearly in A Matter of Endgame Technique (page 623): «In general, the side with an advantage is in favor of exchanging pieces, as the conversion of the advantage will become easier the less counterplay is possible. The pawn ending is the great joy of the holder of a material advantage. On the other hand, the defender is, in general, in favor of the exchange of pawns, as a position a piece down without pawns is far less dangerous than being a piece down with many pawns on the board.» It has to be said that the machine initially prefers Magnus's move, but I think it is underestimating the human element and how difficult the remaining moves will become. Indeed, even Magnus did not find the best way, and when I let my computer run long enough, it eventually did confirm that the alternative was stronger. ♖xc5

24... ♘xc5N 25.♖xc5 ♖xb3 The key move, which had to be seen in advance. 26.♖xc8 ♗xc8 Following the exchange of pawns, Black's drawing chances have increased. Still, I find it very unlikely that a human could hang on.

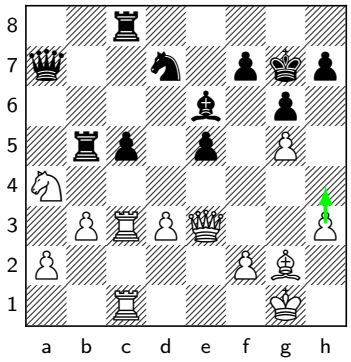
25.♖xc5 ♘xc5N 26.♕xb4 and White wins.

24... ♕a7 25.♕e3 ♖b5

Black cannot move, and all of his pieces are stuck on passive squares. After

25... ♖d4 26.♘xc5N , the e-pawn hanging with check is the culprit.

26.g5!

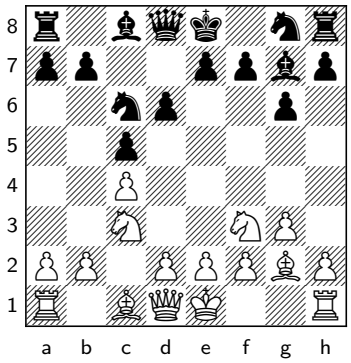


White will win with a kingside attack, with Black's pieces being mere observers on the queenside.

Magnus Carlsen-Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Baden-Baden 2019

While we already saw young Magnus early on, and he was impressive, a more mature Magnus looks even stronger. In the present encounter, he accepts a pawn sacrifice and converts it just about perfectly.

1.c4 c5 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.♘c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 d6



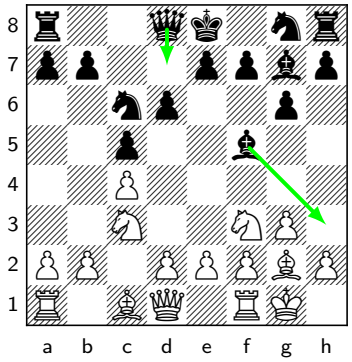
A reasonable way for Black. Historically,

5... e6 is also good, while Black does not equalize after

5... ♘f6N .

5... e5 was thought to be fine for Black, but that is no longer the case. For those interested in the theory here, I have heard that some people like my course... (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

6.O-O ♗f5



Black plans ...Qd7 and ...Bh3 to exchange White's strong light-squared-bishop.

6... ♖b8 is another respectable way for Black and was played against me by Gukesh in a rapid game in 2022.

6... ♘f6N is nice for White in my opinion after 7.d4 . This might be liked by some King's Indian aficionados, but it's not everyone's cup of tea from the black side, and there isn't a direct way to equalize.

7.h3

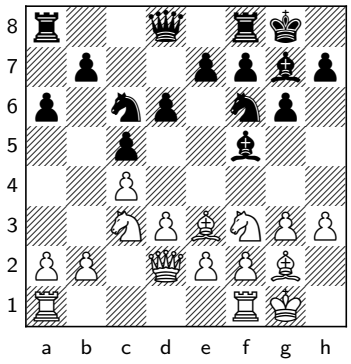
This is prophylaxis. White prepares to meet ...Qd7 with Kh2. A standard plan in the Symmetrical English is

7.a3 ♕d7 8.b4 , trying to provoke ...b6 with pressure on the long diagonal. But if Black can exchange the g2-bishop, as he is here, then there are no problems with the black position. And that is exactly what happens after ♗h3 .

7... ♘f6 8.d3

8.d4 is now less of an issue for Black, as it can be met by ♘e4N .

8... O-O 9.♗e3 a6 10.♕d2

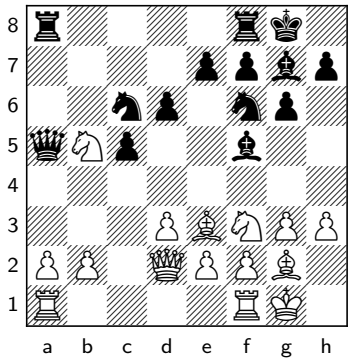


Harmonious development from Carlsen, highlighting that the pawn on h3 also prevents ...Ng4.

10... b5?!

This changes the character of the position. Black offers a pawn for Benko- style compensation. White is not forced to take it, but he decided to go for it:

11.cxb5 axb5 12.♘xb5 ♕a5



The structure resembles a Benko Gambit, but there are differences. In the Benko, exchanging queens is often favorable for Black. Should White exchange queens here or preserve them by retreating the knight to c3? To consider the principles of converting an extra pawn, White needs to think of how to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay, and which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in pawn structure, are favorable to him.

13.♘c3!

The computer is agnostic between the two options, but I have a strong preference. The first goal when being up a pawn is to stabilize the position and eliminate counterplay. As in the Benko Gambit, Black's main source of counterplay will be the open a \- and b-files. The b2-pawn is a much larger target than the a2-pawn, and the queen on d2 defends that pawn naturally. The engine likes 13. Nc3 14.a4 , but it creates weak squares, and the b2-pawn remains loose. After 14...Nd5 15.Bd2 Ndb4 , Black has strong counterplay on the queenside, and the only way to keep everything together is through tactical means. With the text move, White retains a defender of the b2-pawn and is not forced to play Rfb1. This makes it easier for him to

achieve b2-b3 with a solid structure. It is clearly much too simplistic to argue that you should always exchange queens if you are a pawn up. The concrete features of the position need to be considered.

13.♕xa5 is in Black's favor: ♖xa5 14.♘c3N ♖b8 White needs to defend the b2-pawn in an awkward and passive way: 15.♖fb1 Choosing the other rook would leave a2 unprotected. Nevertheless, it is difficult for White to make progress with b2-b3, as disaster awaits on the long diagonal.

13... ♖ab8

I would have preferred the other rook to b8, but the position does not change a whole lot. Black obviously has some compensation for his missing pawn, and White should be trying to stabilize the position to avoid counterplay. Magnus put on a clinic.

14.♖fc1!

White prepares b2-b3 by overprotecting the c3-knight. It is a moot point which rook to put on c1. Given that Black has moved his a8-rook to b8, it feels more intuitive to place the a1-rook on c1 as the need for it to be on a1 has reduced. □ After □ □

14.♖ac1 ♖fc8 15.♖fd1 e5 16.b3 , the difference with the game is minimal.

14.b3? is strategically desirable, shutting down the active rook on the b-file, but it also has the drawback of reducing the defense of the c3-knight. Black can take advantage of the tactical opportunity: ♘g4N Black is better with an unopposed dark-squared bishop after 15.♖fc1? ♘xe3N 16.fxe3 ♗h6 , so better is 15... Ng4 15.Nd5 Qxd2 16.Bxd2 Bxa1 17.hxg4 Be6! Black will remain an exchange up. While White is not worse yet, he has clearly lost control.

14.♖fb1 is passive for no apparent reason.

14... ♖fc8 15.b3! e5

White has made good progress towards stabilizing the position, and he will not face threats any time soon. He now needs to work out how best to convert the extra pawn. Winning by promoting the passed a-pawn is clearly not on the agenda for the near future, and Black has a useful amount of extra space in the center. The first issue, though, is that the intention of Black's last move is to prepare ...Nd4. Prophylaxis is needed against this idea.

16.♗h6!

The reasoning behind this move is twofold. First, the g7-bishop has more potential than its White counterpart, despite the current blockage on the long diagonal. Second, should ...Nd4 ever come, White will be able to take it with the knight without losing a piece to a fork. The last two moves by White have been clever preparation for this bishop sortie, defending both the c3-knight and b2-pawn.

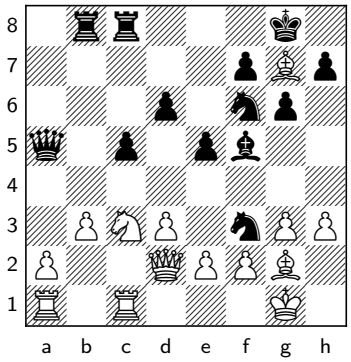
16... ♘d4

After

16... ♗h8 17.♘g5N , White gets an initiative in addition to the pawn, with Nge4 possibly coming next. The machine recommends ♗g7 , bringing the bishop straight

back.

17.♗xg7 ♘xf3†



Another key decision is required from White. Is a change in the pawn structure favorable for the conversion of the extra pawn? The alternative of

17... ♔xg7 18.♘xd4N exd4 19.♘e4N is just amazing for White.

18.exf3!

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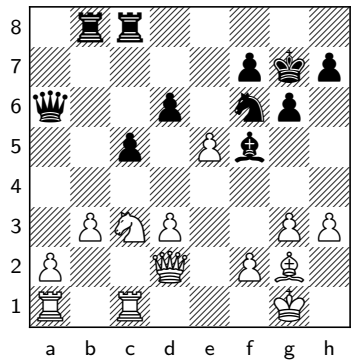
18... ♔xg7 19.f4! ♕a6

If

19... exf4 20.g4 , White saves the d3-pawn, and Qxf4 comes next.

20.fxe5?!



This is not bad, but White could have done even better, keeping in line with thinking about how the extra pawn will ultimately win the game.

20.♘e4N was the way to do it, and it is preferable to play it without exchanging on e5 first: ♘xe4N

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21.dxe4 ♗e6 22.f5 This illustrates perfectly why it was better not to include a capture on e5. ♗d7 23.♖c3 White can triple

on the d-file in short order, and Black is busted.

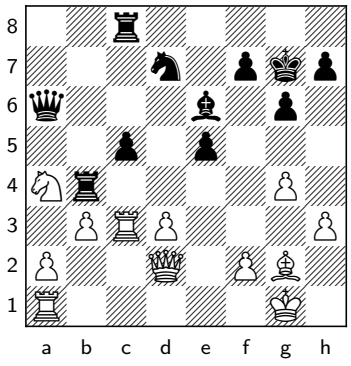
20... dxe5 21.♘a4!

White attacks the weakness on c5, shuts down the a-file, and vacates the c3-square for his rook. It immediately becomes apparent how much better is the active defense of the d-pawn performed by the text move compared with the sad With captures on e5 included,

21.♖d1 .

21.♘e4N is not best. After ♘xe4N 22.dxe4 ♗e6 , Black has the potential to both embarrass White on the d-file, and to force ...c4 through. White is still clearly for choice, but it would have been much better to have this position with the f4- and d6-pawns on the board. Magnus only took on e5 because he had a different concept in mind, as shown by his move in the game.

21... ♘d7 22.♖c3 ♖b4 23.g4 ♗e6



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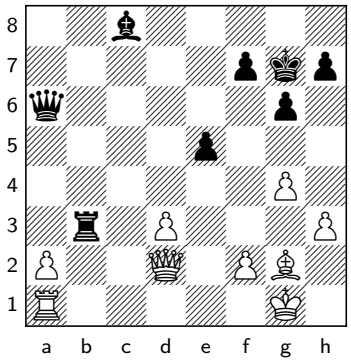
24.♖ac1 ♕a7 25.♕e3 ♖b5 Black cannot move, and all of his pieces are stuck on passive squares.

25... ♖d4 26.♘xc5N , the e-pawn hanging with check is the culprit.

26.g5 White will win with a kingside attack, with Black's pieces being mere observers on the queenside. After

24... ♘xc5 25.♖xc5 ♖xb3! 26.♖xc8 ♗xc8



Following the exchange of pawns, Black's drawing chances have increased. Still, I find it very unlikely that a human could hang on.

27.♖c1!

At first, I thought this move was a mistake, since the computer clearly prefers something else. Upon further examination, in human terms, I believe Magnus's choice is best, and best by a lot. It starts a forcing sequence for the next several moves. □ □ □ □ The machine finds

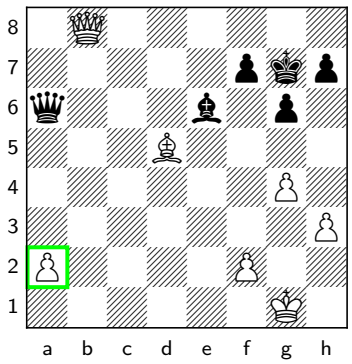
27.♗f1? is too passive: ♖a3 28.d4 ♕d6 Black should hold without problems.

27.d4? is also insufficient: ♖a3 28.dxe5 ♗e6 Black wins the a2-pawn, and he should routinely hold any of the resulting four-against-three endgames on the kingside.

27.♕c2 does not threaten the rook after ♗e6 .

27.♕c1? . Black's rook is threatened, and he cannot play ...Rxd3 on account of Bf1. If the rook moves backwards, then the a-pawn starts advancing. So Black needs to choose ♖a3 , but that allows 28.♕c7 . White is happy to exchange the a-pawn for the e-pawn, provided the d-pawn is not dragged to e5, as he is left with a passer. ♕e6 29.♖b1 White plans to dislodge the queen from e6 with Rb6. ♖xd3 30.♖b6 ♖d1† 31.♔h2 ♖c1 32.♕xc1 ♕xb6 33.♕xc8 ♕xf2 This is not a trivial line at all, and I am not sure if White is winning or not. However, I am sure that despite the machine's relatively optimistic evaluations, White's chances are much less than they were in the game. For example, after 34.♕c3 ♕xa2 35.♕xe5† ♔g8 , there aren't many pawns left on the board. Black only needs to trade White's g-pawn off because White has the wrong pawn for the bishop. White might be winning, but this is not clear to me at all.

27... ♖xd3 28.♕e2 ♗e6 29.♕xe5† ♔g8 30.♖b1! ♖d8 31.♖b8 ♖xb8 32.♕xb8† ♔g7 33.♗d5!



A key tactical point in White's operation. But the prosaic

33.♕b2†? ♔g8 34.a3 would have also

provided good chances of converting the pawn.

33... ♗xd5 34.♕e5†

According to the machine, the resulting queen ending is a draw. In human terms, I think White's chances of winning are over 90%. Basically, the way Black can hold is to sit forever while White tries any of a hundred or more different ways to coordinate his king and queen to force the a-pawn to advance a single square. And if it moves once, the move counter starts again... I don't think this can be held. In fact, MVL even gave White a winning position with his very first move in this endgame.

34... f6?

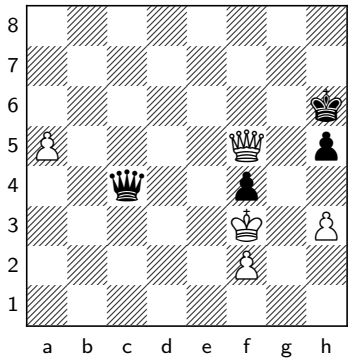
The black king is weakened, and the machine claims White is winning already.

34... ♔g8 35.♕xd5 ♕a3 was the best chance. The engine assesses this with zeroes, and that's why it criticized Carlsen's decision on the 27th move. Calling this evaluation misleading is an understatement.

35.♕xd5 h5 36.gxh5! gxh5 37.♕d7†! ♔g6 38.a4!

Just like that, it's all over. The pawn is moving.

38... ♕e2 39.♕d5 f5 40.a5 f4 41.♔g2 ♔h6 42.♕f5 ♕c4 43.♔f3

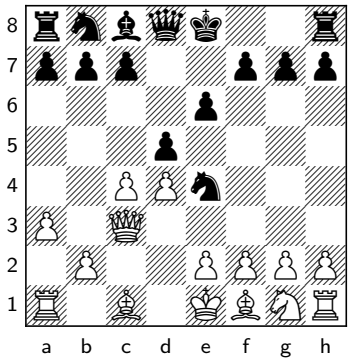


Magnus's display was extremely impressive in this game. After grabbing the pawn, he found a perfect plan to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Then, he did an equally good job of evaluating which piece exchanges and changes to the pawn structure would set him on the path to victory. In the end, he won precisely because of the extra a-pawn.

Garry Kasparov-Michael Adams
Introduction

Any material produced by me would be incomplete if I didn't cover a game by my favorite player. Kasparov showed some interesting ideas in the opening and later expertly converted an extra pawn.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♕xc3 ♘e4



This would not be the line I'd recommend against the 4.Qc2 Nimzo, but it was fairly popular at the time.

7.♕c2 e5?!

It is now known that

7... c5 is Black's best move for equality.

8.cxd5!

When the center pawns are exchanged, White will be left with a center pawn and Black won't. White also has the bishop pair. The only question is if Black can do something with his temporary lead in development before White consolidates.

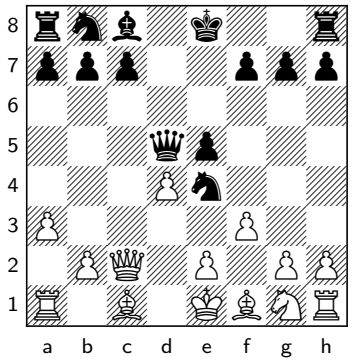
8.f3? would be a perfect case of 'right idea, wrong execution'. ♕h4† Oops!

8.dxe5 leads to a huge mess after ♗f5 .

8... ♕xd5

8... ♗f5 is tempting, aiming to maximize Black's development. But White has multiple routes to a clear advantage. The most convincing is 9.g4 , which forces Black's bishop back to g6 with a gain of tempo. After ♗g6 10.♕a4† , we note that ...Bf5-d7 is not a thing anymore. Normal is ♘d7N 11.♗g2 and White is quickly catching up in development. He even has an extra central pawn at this point. Black is in big trouble.

9.f3!



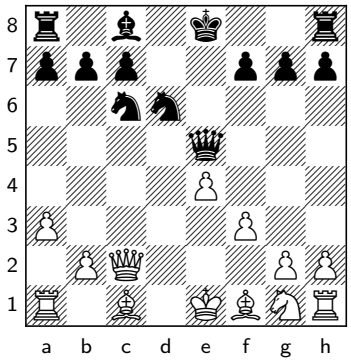
Black's queen has been forced to d5, so there is no check on h4, and Black is forced to retreat his knight.

9.dxe5? would be a large misstep. After ♘c6N , Black is accelerating his development, and White has missed the opportunity to expel the e4-knight. After 10.f3 , Black's knight is already on c6, so he can simply ignore this threat by making a bigger one of his own: ♘d4N Things are already going badly wrong for White.

9... ♘d6 10.dxe5

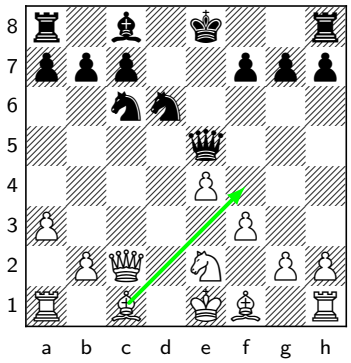
The knight has retreated, and this capture gains another tempo on it. Black is forced to recapture the pawn when he would rather be developing his queenside pieces.

10... ♕xe5 11.e4! ♘c6



White has the better position and should have a long-term advantage with his larger center and bishop pair. The c1-bishop in particular is a strong piece, whereas Black's bishop on c8 is restricted by White's central pawns. But Black has counterplay with his active pieces.

12.♘e2!



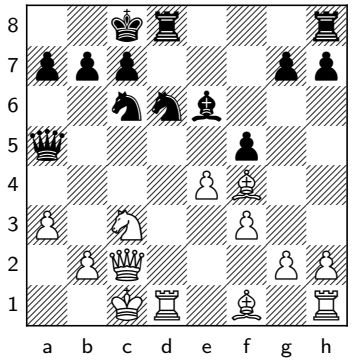
Kasparov plays a powerful novelty, preparing to harmoniously develop his pieces. He wants to develop the c1-bishop on f4, clearing the back rank to enable queenside castling. This brings his king to safety quicker than trying to castle kingside, it immediately centralizes the a1-rook, and from c1, the king helps to protect the weak queenside pawns. He remains flexible over the development of the f1-bishop, as the best square for it is not yet clear. Keep your options open in the early stages of the game by first developing pieces to the squares where it is clear they belong – here the bishop on f4 and the king on c1. Once that happens, White can start to think about what to do with the rest of his pieces. Theory at the time gave

12.♗e3 followed by Ne2 and Bf4. Obviously, winning a tempo by playing Ne2 first is not the worst idea!

12...♗e6 13.♗f4 ♕a5† 14.♘c3

14.♕c3 would have been my instinct and White is comfortably better here as well, but Kasparov's move was certainly no worse. Perhaps I am too biased in favor of exchanging queens.

14...O-O-O 15.O-O-O f5



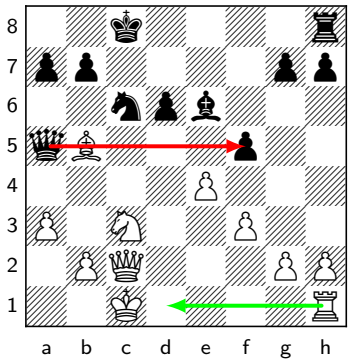
Adams does not have all the time in the world before the bishop pair starts to matter, so he aims to immediately target White's center and open the position for his more active pieces. Kasparov's reaction was right on point.

16.♗xd6!

An effective transformation of advantages. White gives up his bishop pair to cripple Black's

structure and loosen the pawn cover around his king.

16... ♖xd6 17.♖xd6 cxd6 18.♗b5!



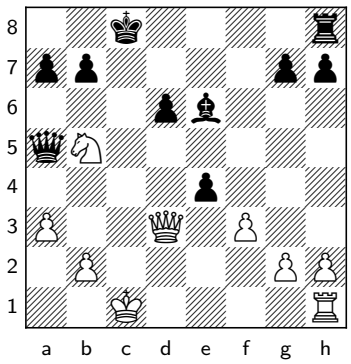
White continues with his development and puts pressure on the knight. Notably, he also cuts off the black queen's support of the f5-pawn and clears the d1-square to bring his last piece into the game.

18... ♘d4

Black did not want his queenside pawn structure to be shattered. In hindsight, Adams should have chosen

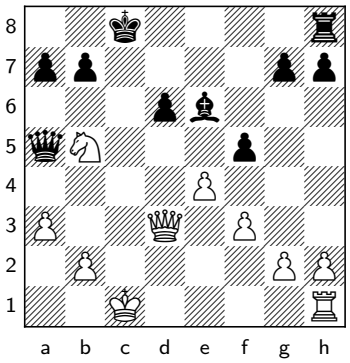
18... g6 . Still, after 19.♖d1 , White is obviously for choice.

19.♕d3 ♘xb5 20.♘xb5 fxe4

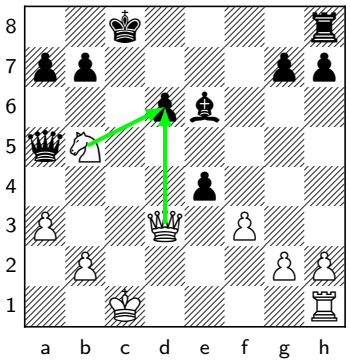


introduces the first critical moment of the game when it comes to our topic. White has three sensible options to win a pawn. One where he keeps the current pawn structure and exchanges knight for bishop. One where he keeps the current pawn structure and doesn't exchange minor pieces. And one where the f3-pawn moves to e4 with no exchange of minor pieces. This decision will have a major impact on White's ability to convert the extra pawn.

Kasparov-Adams Exercise #1



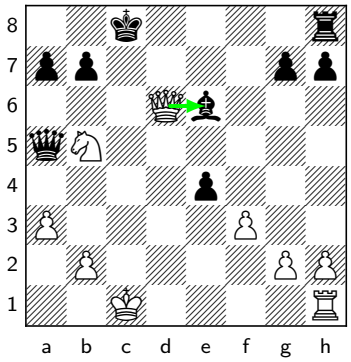
20... fxe4



The first critical moment of the game when it comes to our topic. White has three sensible options to win a pawn. One where he keeps the current pawn structure and exchanges knight for

bishop. One where he keeps the current pawn structure and doesn't exchange minor pieces. And one where the f3-pawn moves to e4 with no exchange of minor pieces. This decision will have a major impact on White's ability to convert the extra pawn.

21.♕xd6!



I created a poll for the KCT attendees of mixed chess ability to vote on these three options. Interestingly, the most popular option was to alter the pawn structure. I think this would be a serious mistake, and that Kasparov chose the right way. This came second in the poll. The bishop is a stronger piece than the knight, which does not have a secure post. Furthermore, White is not able to put his pawns on light squares around his king to restrict the bishop. So, eliminating it is a good idea. The other path is: And 22.Nxe4 came last. White keeps the pawn structure as is and avoids trading minor pieces. Unfortunately, this will not work out that well. The first step towards converting the extra pawn is stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay, and now the loosened light squares around the white king can start to become annoying. For example, after something like

21.♘xd6†N ♔b8 22.fxe4 That's what most people voted for. ♖d8? The knight on d6 is a target rather than being on an outpost. White has not done a good job on the first principle of converting an extra pawn, which is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Moreover, the passed pawn is firmly blockaded by Black's bishop. While the computer is not as pessimistic about the previous few moves as I am, it also does confirm that the game continuation was stronger. It also mentions

22... ♕g5† 23.♕d2 ♕c5† 24.♔b1 ♖f8 , closing in on full equality.

21... ♕xb5

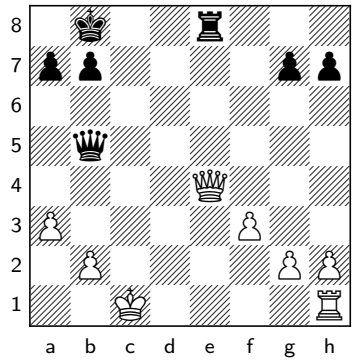
21... ♖d8 23.Qe3 a6 it's not easy for White to keep things under control: 22.♖e1 ♗b3 This is quite an annoying bishop. Wouldn't it be nice if the minor pieces were exchanged?

22.♕xe6† ♔b8 23.♕xe4

White has moved closer towards consolidating the position. But it will still be difficult to convert an extra pawn in a heavy-piece endgame. Adams played

23.fxe4? allows Black to immediately and safely regain material parity with ♕g5† followed by ...Qxg2.

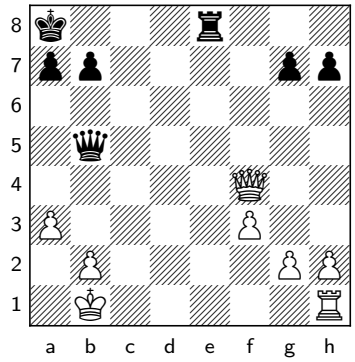
23... ♖e8



, but before answering the question on move 21 it was important to calculate well and notice that

23... ♕g5† does not win the g2-pawn due to 24.f4 .

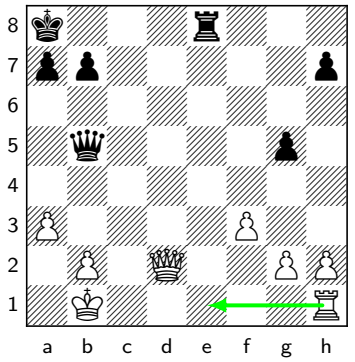
Kasparov-Adams Exercise #2



25... g5

White now does not have to worry too much about counterplay, since his king is relatively safe. He needs, however, to consider three things: which exchanges of pieces and pawns are favorable, what changes in structure are favorable, and what is the plan for the extra pawn to accomplish something worthwhile.

26.♕d2!



The best move, facilitating the exchange of rooks. White is ready for Re1 next, and Black will not be able to try to reach a rook endgame. To demonstrate the second scenario with some decidedly second-rate moves for illustrative purposes: B) And to illustrate the first scenario with some equally dumb moves: 26. Qd2 32.Ka1 Kb8 33.Kb1 Kc7 34.Ka2 Kc6 35.Kb1 Re3 36.Rf1 With the passive white rook, the game is drawn.

26.♕f7 This move has a number of plus points. It threatens the h7-pawn, guards the a2-g8 diagonal to allow the king to come to a2, and ties down the black queen to the defense of the rook. But it is not the best move as it is not contributing to the activation of White's rook. A queen endgame is the best endgame for White. It is more stable than a rook endgame. It would also take White a few preparatory moves to exchange queens, which would allow Black's rook time to invade on e2. The rook ending is then less likely to be a win. In addition, particularly relevant is the rook endgame guideline, which I covered in Chapter 17 of

my course, Theoretical Rook Endgames (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) To quote from the chapter on pawns on both sides with no passed pawns: «In rook endgames with no passed pawns, the attacking side a pawn up, and pawns on both sides of the board, there is a thought process that can lead to the right evaluation. You should first forget about the side of the board that has equal pawns and focus solely on the side that has the pawn up. – 1.If that endgame alone with no other pawns would be winning, it will cease to be winning and become drawn if the attacking rook is stuck in a passive position defending pawns on the other side of the board. – 2. If the endgame with only the pawn-up side of the board would be drawn, it will cease to be drawn and become lost if the defending rook is stuck passively defending a pawn on the other side of the board. – 3. If neither rook is stuck passively defending, the result will probably be the same as what it would be if the secondary pawn mass were not on the board.» After this move, we get a foggy version of the third scenario, the absence of clarity stemming from the presence of queens. However, it is clear that with the black pieces being so active, White should not have enough to win. Let's examine alternatives. The one endgame that White really does not want is a rook endgame where Black has the more active rook.

26.♕f6 ♕e5 27.♕xe5 ♖xe5 28.h4 h6 29.hxg5 hxg5 30.g4 ♖e8 31.♖d1 a6 and now: – A) After 32.♖d5 , Black is lost, as his rook is stuck passively defending the g-pawn: ♖g8 33.♖f5 White is the only one moving.

26... ♕f5†

The machine prefers to wait with

26... a6 , but after the simple 27.♖e1 , White has excellent winning chances. Modern engines often misevaluate pawn- down queen endgames, insisting they are drawn when, in human practice, holding them is more or less impossible. My machine offers +0.1 here, but I suspect that White should win well over half the time. Black's defensive strategy would be something along the lines of 'Sit tight and hope that White can't make progress.' In a rook endgame, this is often fairly feasible, especially if the defending rook can get behind the attacker's passed pawn. But in a queen endgame, there is no way to permanently secure the passer with the queen alone.

27.♔a1

With queens: 27. Ka1 32...Qf5 33.f4 gxf4 34.gxf4 The queen is not good at controlling pawns. Qe5 will lift the blockade at some point, and the white queen is better than a rook at supporting a passed pawn, as she can multitask.

27... ♕f4

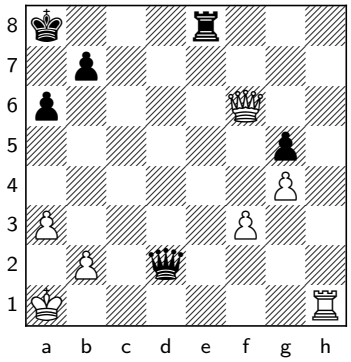
would be Black's attempt to force a rook endgame. At this point,

28.♕d7

would win a pawn immediately, but it is important to note that the rook endgame would also be winning because Black's rook ends up passive:

28.♖d1? ♕xd2 29.♖xd2 ♔b8 30.♔b1 ♔c7 31.♔c2 White has a simple plan of Kd1 and Re2 (or Rd4 and Kd2). Black will not be able to exchange rooks, but otherwise, White's rook will start harassing Black's pawns. And if Black is forced to defend one of the pawns passively with the rook, White wins. At this point, such a scenario is inevitable with good play from White. To illustrate the difference between queens and rooks when it comes to defending endgames: 30\. Kb1 30...Re2 31.Rg1 h5 32.Kc1 g4 33.fxg4 hxg4 34.h3 gxh3 35.gxh3 Rh2

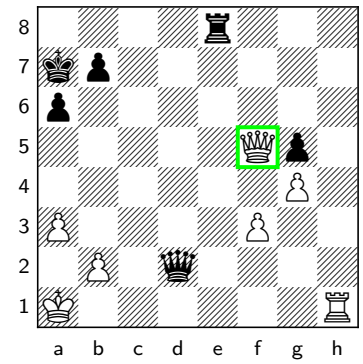
Kasparov-Adams Exercise #3



35...♔a7

Kasparov made here another impressive move.

36.♕f5!



This restricts Black's rook, as it is mate with Qc5+ if the rook comes to e2. More importantly, it takes control of the b1-h7 diagonal, enabling Kb1 and Rc1. This consolidates White's position. The principles already set out for rook endgames also apply with queens also on the board. The activity of the rooks is key, and White's will then be more active than Black's. This position is a perfect example of why the machine often misevaluates queen endgames in human terms. Apparently, it is zeroes after

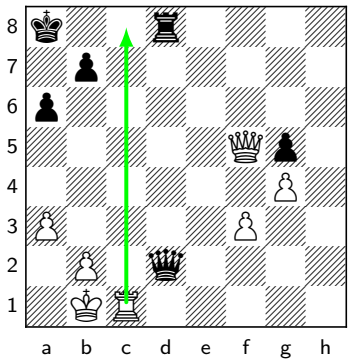
36.♖f1 does not work, as Black's pieces become too active after ♖e2 . The threats on the first and second rank are annoying and tie down White's pieces on passive squares. 37.f4 is playing to lose on account of gxf4 38.♖xf4? ♖e1† 39.♔a2 ♕d5† with checkmate to follow.

36...♔a8

36...♕d4 , which is the best move by a wide margin. Who would ever play such a move?

36...♖e2 37.♕c5† promptly leads to mate.

37.♔b1 ♖d8 38.♖c1!



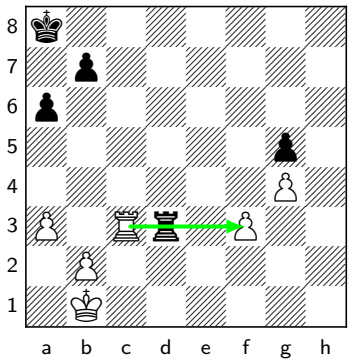
White brings his rook to its best file. This does allow Black to transition into a rook endgame, but will it hold?

38... ♕d3†

The most important alternative to the game. Adams played

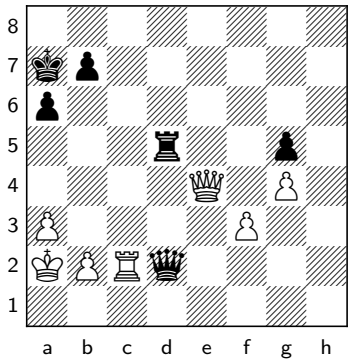
38... ♖d5 39.♕e4 ♔a7 40.♖c3 White prepares Qe3+. If White can then get his rook to f5, he should be winning the rook endgame. From c3, the rook is also able to go to b3 and target b7.

39.♕xd3 ♖xd3 40.♖c3!



Black could hold if the white rook were stuck on f1. As is, White wins.

Kasparov-Adams Exercise #4



42... ♕d3

Should Kasparov have accepted the offer to exchange queens?

43.♖e2!

Yes, but only on his own terms. If he were to take Black's queen directly, his rook would have been rendered passive on f2:

43.♕xd3? ♖xd3 44.♖f2 With a draw. Of course,

44.♖c5 ♖xf3 45.♖xg5 is always holdable for Black. Much more surprising is that the pawn endgame is a draw, as White cannot play f3-f4 and Black's king is too active:

44.♖c3 ♖xc3 45.bxc3 ♔b6 46.♔b3 ♔c5 A few good decisions will be required further down the line, but Black should hold.

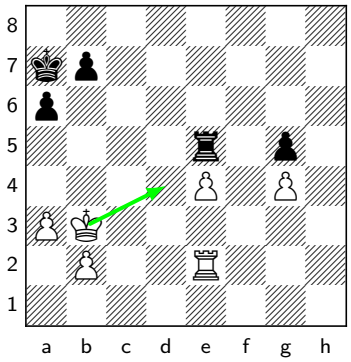
43... ♕xe4

The rook endgame is winning with the change of structure and the rook behind the passed pawn. According to the almighty machine,

43... ♖d4 leads us to another critical moment we'll see next.

43... ♔b8 would have kept Black in the game. It does not feel human to me, and even if Adams had played it, I suspect he would have lost in the end.

44.fxe4! ♖e5 45.♔b3

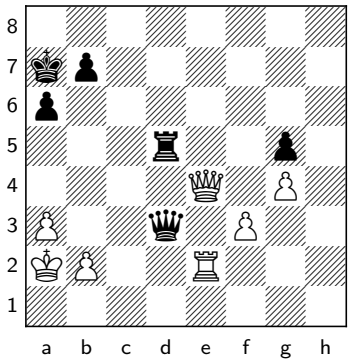


For example,

45... ♔b6 46.♔c4 ♔c6 47.♔d4 ♔d6

.

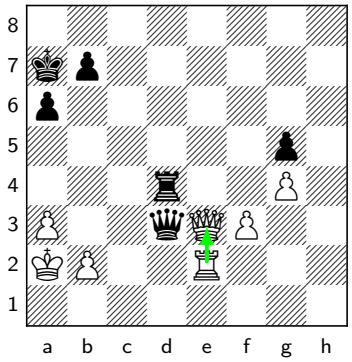
Kasparov-Adams Exercise #5



43... ♖d4

Again, White has to make the right decision about exchanges, and again, Kasparov was up to the task.

44.♕e3!



Again, Kasparov shows the understanding that the rook endgame is drawn only if Black is able to play ...Rd3 and keep White's rook passive.

44... a5?

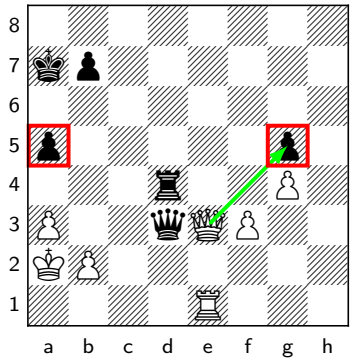
I don't see Black saving this game in any case, but this only made things worse. As we have already shown, Had Adams continued to wait with

44... ♕xe3 45.♖xe3 is winning for White. Without ...Rd3 as a possibility, Black will not be able to force White's rook onto a passive square, defending the weak pawn on f3. As such, White wins by bringing his rook to f5 and centralizing his king, as seen earlier. ♖f4 46.♔b3 ♔b6 47.♔c3 ♔c5 48.♔d3 ♔d5 49.♔e2 freeing the white rook.

44... ♔b8 45.♖e1 ♖d5 , White would

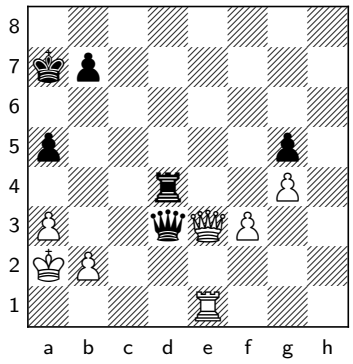
still need to be a bit creative to find a winning plan.

45.♖e1!



White frees the queen from the defense of the rook to threaten Qxg5. The a5-pawn hanging afterwards increases the strength of this threat. We'll continue in our next exercise.

Kasparov-Adams Exercise #6



45... ♔a6

The position has changed thanks to the move ...a5. Kasparov underlines this perfectly.

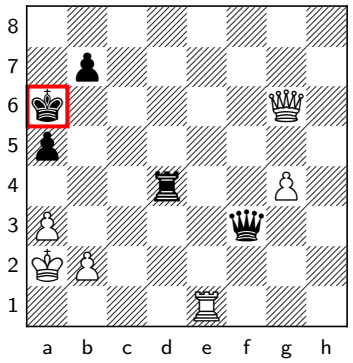
46.♕xg5!

No more exchanges!

46... ♕xf3

One of the guidelines I set out in Small Steps 2 Success (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) was: «Even when well blockaded, a far-advanced passed pawn can significantly strengthen attacking prospects.» Previously, Black's king never would have been in danger. But now that he has weakened the pawn cover with ...a5, White has a viable plan to win by blending a dangerous passed pawn on one side of the board with a direct attack against the enemy king on the other side.

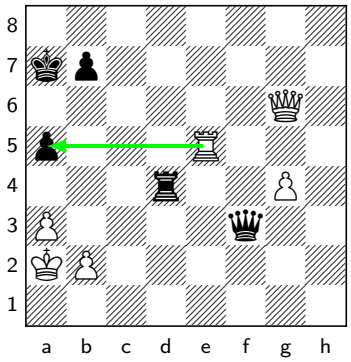
47.♕g6†!



It would be totally the wrong strategy to try to save the g-pawn instead with

47.♖g1? . Black easily has it under control if he does not need to worry about threats to his king. For example, a4 , threatening an immediate draw with ...Qb3+ followed by ...Rd1+.

47... ♔a7 48.♖e5!



Black would be making a draw with the pawn back on a6. As is, he is lost.

48... ♖d5

□ □

48... b6 is not possible for a number of reasons. For example, 49.♖b5 wins, but so do the more forceful

49.♕g7† and

49.♖xa5† .

48... ♖a4 This is not a good sign for Black. The rook is forced onto a dreadful-looking square to avoid a direct mating attack, and the g-pawn is free to run. That said, White needs to be careful to avoid any tricks. 49.♕h5 This provokes more weaknesses while keeping the rook on e5 protected. The routine

49.g5? would allow a surprising counterblow: ♖xa3† 50.bxa3 ♕f2† White will lose his rook back, and Black will equalize material. Despite the computer's insistence on equality, Black still has a lot of work to do to save the game thanks to the g-pawn, but things have clearly gone in the right direction for him.

49.♕f5!

A rather cute line.

49... ♕xf5 50.♖xf5

And White wins.

50... ♖d4 51.♖xa5†

51.g5? a4 .

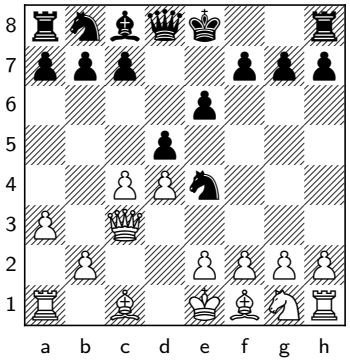
51... ♔b6 52.♖g5

but not

Garry Kasparov-Michael Adams, Linares 2005

Any material produced by me would be incomplete if I didn't cover a game by my favorite player. Kasparov showed some interesting ideas in the opening and later expertly converted an extra pawn.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♕xc3 ♘e4



This would not be the line I'd recommend against the 4.Qc2 Nimzo, but it was fairly popular at the time.

7.♕c2 e5?!

It is now known that

7... c5 is Black's best move for equality.

8.cxd5!

When the center pawns are exchanged, White will be left with a center pawn and Black won't. White also has the bishop pair. The only question is if Black can do something with his temporary lead in development before White consolidates.

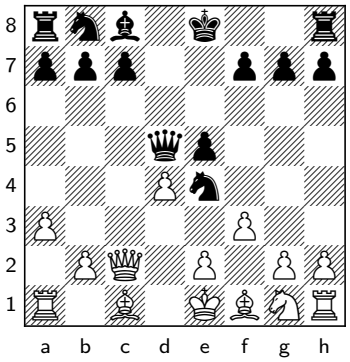
8.f3? would be a perfect case of 'right idea, wrong execution'. ♕h4† Oops!

8.dxe5 leads to a huge mess after ♗f5 .

8... ♕xd5

8... ♗f5 is tempting, aiming to maximize Black's development. But White has multiple routes to a clear advantage. The most convincing is 9.g4 , which forces Black's bishop back to g6 with a gain of tempo. After ♗g6 10.♕a4† , we note that ...Bf5-d7 is not a thing anymore. Normal is ♘d7N 11.♗g2 and White is quickly catching up in development. He even has an extra central pawn at this point. Black is in big trouble.

9.f3!



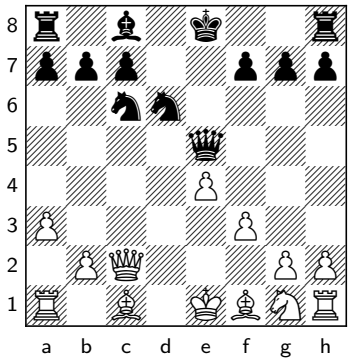
Black's queen has been forced to d5, so there is no check on h4, and Black is forced to retreat his knight.

9.dxe5? would be a large misstep. After ♘c6N , Black is accelerating his development, and White has missed the opportunity to expel the e4-knight. After 10.f3 , Black's knight is already on c6, so he can simply ignore this threat by making a bigger one of his own: ♘d4N Things are already going badly wrong for White.

9... ♘d6 10.dxe5

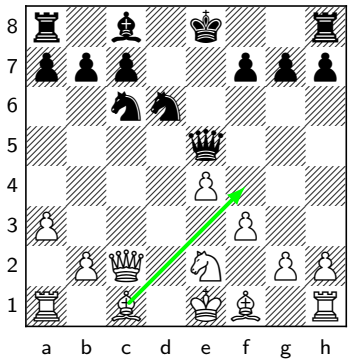
The knight has retreated, and this capture gains another tempo on it. Black is forced to recapture the pawn when he would rather be developing his queenside pieces.

10... ♕xe5 11.e4! ♘c6



White has the better position and should have a long-term advantage with his larger center and bishop pair. The c1-bishop in particular is a strong piece, whereas Black's bishop on c8 is restricted by White's central pawns. But Black has counterplay with his active pieces.

12.♘e2!



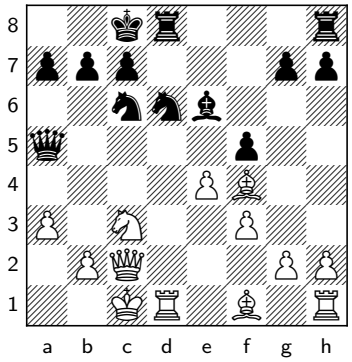
Kasparov plays a powerful novelty, preparing to harmoniously develop his pieces. He wants to develop the c1-bishop on f4, clearing the back rank to enable queenside castling. This brings his king to safety quicker than trying to castle kingside, it immediately centralizes the a1-rook, and from c1, the king helps to protect the weak queenside pawns. He remains flexible over the development of the f1-bishop, as the best square for it is not yet clear. Keep your options open in the early stages of the game by first developing pieces to the squares where it is clear they belong – here the bishop on f4 and the king on c1. Once that happens, White can start to think about what to do with the rest of his pieces. Theory at the time gave

12.♗e3 followed by Ne2 and Bf4. Obviously, winning a tempo by playing Ne2 first is not the worst idea!

12...♗e6 13.♗f4 ♕a5† 14.♘c3

14.♕c3 would have been my instinct and White is comfortably better here as well, but Kasparov's move was certainly no worse. Perhaps I am too biased in favor of exchanging queens.

14...O-O-O 15.O-O-O f5



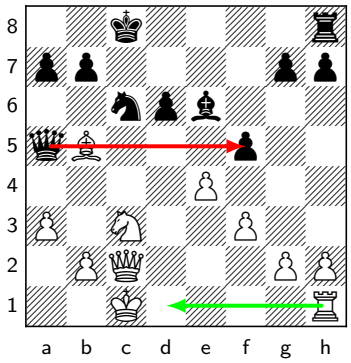
Adams does not have all the time in the world before the bishop pair starts to matter, so he aims to immediately target White's center and open the position for his more active pieces. Kasparov's reaction was right on point.

16.♗xd6!

An effective transformation of advantages. White gives up his bishop pair to cripple Black's

structure and loosen the pawn cover around his king.

16... ♖xd6 17.♖xd6 cxd6 18.♗b5!



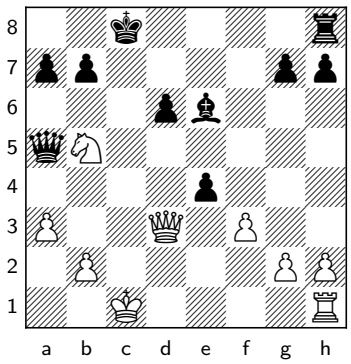
White continues with his development and puts pressure on the knight. Notably, he also cuts off the black queen's support of the f5-pawn and clears the d1-square to bring his last piece into the game.

18... ♘d4

Black did not want his queenside pawn structure to be shattered. In hindsight, Adams should have chosen

18... g6 . Still, after 19.♖d1 , White is obviously for choice.

19.♕d3 ♘xb5 20.♘xb5 fxe4



The first critical moment of the game, when it comes to our topic. White has three sensible options to win a pawn. One where he keeps the current pawn structure and exchanges knight for bishop. One where he keeps the current pawn structure and doesn't exchange minor pieces. And one where the f3-pawn moves to e4 with no exchange of minor pieces. This decision will have a major impact on White's ability to convert the extra pawn. I created a poll for the KCT attendees of mixed chess ability to vote on these three options. Interestingly, the most popular option was to alter the pawn structure. I think this would be a serious mistake, and that Kasparov chose the right way.

21.♕xd6!

This came second in the poll. The bishop is a stronger piece than the knight, which does not have a secure post. Furthermore, White is not able to put his pawns on light squares around his king to restrict the bishop. So, eliminating it is a good idea. The other path is: And 22.Nxe4 came last. White keeps the pawn structure as is and avoids trading minor pieces. Unfortunately, this will not work out that well. The first step towards converting the extra pawn is stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay, and now the loosened light squares around the white king can start to become annoying. For example, after something like

21.♘xd6†N ♔b8 22.fxe4 That's what most people voted for. ♖d8? The knight on d6 is a target rather than being on an outpost. White has not done a good job on the first principle of converting an extra pawn, which is to stabilize the position and

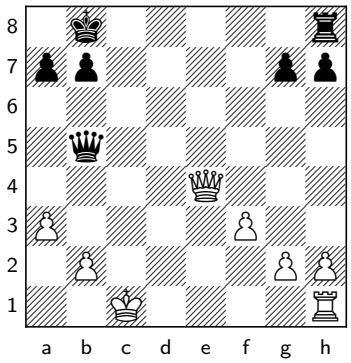
avoid counterplay. Moreover, the passed pawn is firmly blockaded by Black's bishop. While the computer is not as pessimistic about the previous few moves as I am, it also does confirm that the game continuation was stronger. It also mentions

22... ♕g5† 23.♕d2 ♕c5† 24.♔b1 ♖f8 , closing in on full equality.

21... ♕xb5

21... ♖d8 23.Qe3 a6 it's not easy for White to keep things under control: 22.♖e1 ♗b3 This is quite an annoying bishop. Wouldn't it be nice if the minor pieces were exchanged?

22.♕xe6† ♔b8 23.♕xe4



White has moved closer towards consolidating the position. But it will still be difficult to convert an extra pawn in a heavy-piece endgame.

23.fxe4? allows Black to immediately and safely regain material parity with ♕g5† followed by ...Qxg2.

23... ♖e8

Before answering the question on move 21, it was important to calculate well and notice that

23... ♕g5† does not win the g2-pawn due to 24.f4 .

24.♕f4†

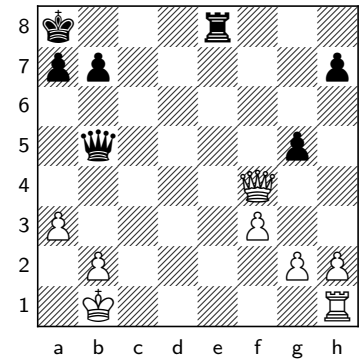
The question is whether White has enough time to stabilize, so giving this check to win a tempo is as logical as it is essential.

24... ♔a8 25.♔b1

Another logical move, bringing the king closer towards safety.

25.♖d1 was a good alternative.

25... g5



White now does not have to worry too much about counterplay, since his king is relatively safe. He needs, however, to consider three things: which exchanges of pieces and pawns are favorable, what changes in structure are favorable, and what is the plan for the extra pawn to accomplish something worthwhile.

26.♕f7

This move has a number of plus points. It threatens the h7-pawn, guards the a2-g8 diagonal to allow the king to come to a2, and ties down the black queen to the defense of the rook. But it is not the best move as it is not contributing to the activation of White's rook. A queen

endgame is the best endgame for White. It is more stable than a rook endgame. It would also take White a few preparatory moves to exchange queens, which would allow Black's rook time to invade on e2. The rook ending is then less likely to be a win. In addition, particularly relevant is the rook endgame guideline, which I covered in Chapter 17 of my course, Theoretical Rook Endgames (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) To quote from the chapter on pawns on both sides with no passed pawns: «In rook endgames with no passed pawns, the attacking side a pawn up, and pawns on both sides of the board, there is a thought process that can lead to the right evaluation. You should first forget about the side of the board that has equal pawns and focus solely on the side that has the pawn up. – 1.If that endgame alone with no other pawns would be winning, it will cease to be winning and become drawn if the attacking rook is stuck in a passive position defending pawns on the other side of the board. – 2. If the endgame with only the pawn-up side of the board would be drawn, it will cease to be drawn and become lost if the defending rook is stuck passively defending a pawn on the other side of the board. – 3. If neither rook is stuck passively defending, the result will probably be the same as what it would be if the secondary pawn mass were not on the board.» After this move, we get a foggy version of the third scenario, the absence of clarity stemming from the presence of queens. However, it is clear that with the black pieces being so active, White should not have enough to win. Let's examine alternatives. The one endgame that White really does not want is a rook endgame where Black has the more active rook. To demonstrate the second scenario with some decidedly second-rate moves for illustrative purposes: B) And to illustrate the first scenario with some equally dumb moves: 26. Qf7 32.Ka1 Kb8 33.Kb1 Kc7 34.Ka2 Kc6 35.Kb1 Re3 36.Rf1 With the passive white rook, the game is drawn. Instead of all that, the best move facilitates the exchange of rooks: With queens: 26. Qf7 32...Qf5 33.f4 gxf4 34.gxf4 The queen is not good at controlling pawns. Qe5 will lift the blockade at some point, and the white queen is better than a rook at supporting a passed pawn, as she can multitask.

26.♕f6 ♕e5 27.♕xe5 ♖xe5 28.h4 h6 29.hxg5 hxg5 30.g4 ♖e8 31.♖d1 a6 and now: – A) After 32.♖d5 , Black is lost, as his rook is stuck passively defending the g-pawn: ♖g8 33.♖f5 White is the only one moving.

26.♕d2 White is ready for Re1 next, and Black will not be able to try to reach a rook endgame. ♕f5† 27.♔a1 ♕f4 This would be Black's attempt to force a rook endgame. At this point, 28.♕d7 would win a pawn immediately, but it is important to note that the rook endgame would also be winning because Black's rook ends up passive:

28.♖d1? ♕xd2 29.♖xd2 ♔b8 30.♔b1 ♔c7 31.♔c2 White has a simple plan of Kd1 and Re2 (or Rd4 and Kd2). Black will not be able to exchange rooks, but otherwise, White's rook will start harassing Black's pawns. And if Black is forced

to defend one of the pawns passively with the rook, White wins. At this point, such a scenario is inevitable with good play from White. To illustrate the difference between queens and rooks when it comes to defending endgames: 30\. Kb1 30...Re2 31.Rg1 h5 32.Kc1 g4 33.fxg4 hxg4 34.h3 gxh3 35.gxh3 Rh2

26... h6

26... ♖e2 27.♕g8† wins the h7-pawn.

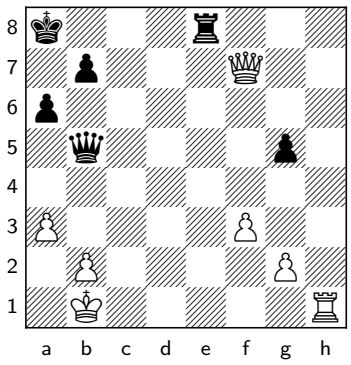
27.h4

This makes use of the control of the a2-g8 diagonal, highlighting that White does not need to worry about a back-rank check from the black rook, when there is no check once the king reaches a2.

27... a6

27... gxh4 28.♖xh4 ♖e1† 29.♔a2 is another point of Qf7. The queen controls the a2-g8 diagonal, and the white king is safe.

28.hxg5 hxg5



In some ways, computers have become almost too strong for their opinion to be always relevant. The engine claims this is a draw, whereas this is both far from obvious in human play and misleading when evaluating practical chances.

29.♕f6

Kasparov hints at trading rooks with Rh8 next.

29.♕g7 is similar.

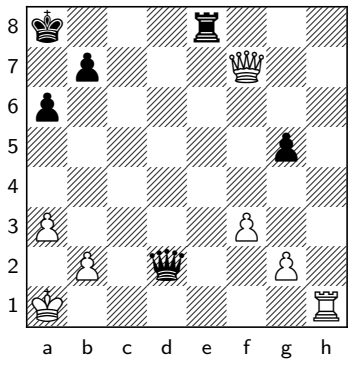
29... ♕d3†

29... ♖e2? is once again impossible thanks to 30.♖h8† ♔a7 .

30.♔a1 ♕d2

Adams displays good resourcefulness. He defends the g5-pawn, and Rh8 is prevented due to perpetual check on d1 and d5. White does not need to worry about a perpetual check with his rook on h1, but Black is threatening to take the g2-pawn. Kasparov came up with an excellent plan for the next few moves.

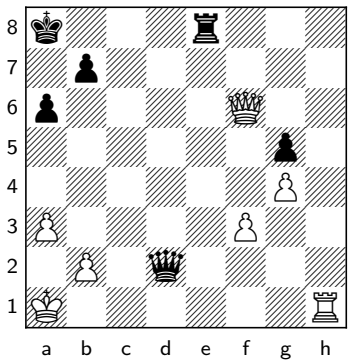
31.♕f7



This only repeats moves, but it gets White closer to the time control. Black equalizes easily after

31.g3 ♕g2 , when White loses his extra pawn.

31...♖e5 32.♕c7 ♖e8 33.♕f7 ♖e5 34.♕f6 ♖e8 35.g4!



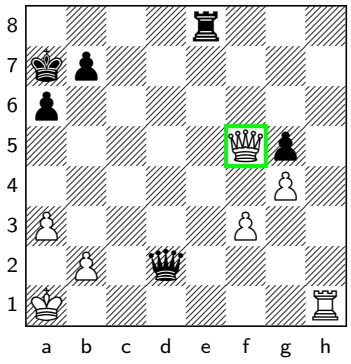
The second time around, Garry makes the right move.

35...♔a7

After

35...♖e1† 36.♖xe1 ♕xe1† 37.♔a2 ♕e3 38.♕f5 , White wins by centralizing his queen (the first principle of queen endgames) on e4, and then bringing his king over to g6. Black's king is cut off, so fighting options against this plan are limited. ♔b8 39.♕e4 ♕d2 40.♔b3 is a sample continuation. White's king can't be contained.

36.♕f5!



This restricts Black's rook, as it is mate with Qc5+ if the rook comes to e2. More importantly, it takes control of the b1-h7 diagonal, enabling Kb1 and Rc1. This consolidates White's position. The principles already set out for rook endgames also apply with queens also on the board. The activity of the rooks is key, and White's will then be more active than Black's. This position is a perfect example of why the machine often misevaluates queen endgames in human terms. Apparently, it is zeroes after

36.♖f1 does not work, as Black's pieces become too active after ♖e2 . The threats on the first and second ranks are annoying and tie down White's pieces on passive squares. 37.f4 is playing to lose on account of gxf4 38.♖xf4? ♖e1† 39.♔a2 ♕d5† with checkmate to follow.

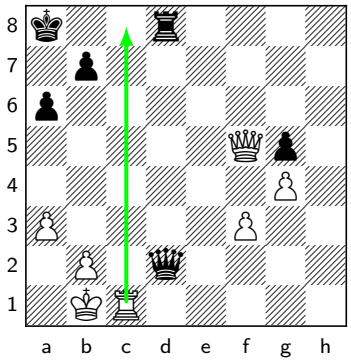
36...♔a8

As mentioned above,

36...♕d4 , which is the best move by a wide margin. Who would ever play such a move?

36...♖e2 37.♕c5† promptly leads to mate.

37.♔b1 ♖d8 38.♖c1!



White brings his rook to its best file. This does allow Black to transition into a rook endgame, but will it hold?

38... ♖d5

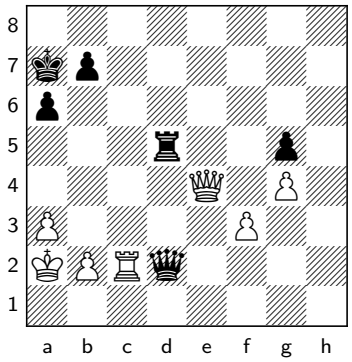
Let's examine the important alternative:

38... ♕d3† 39.♕xd3 ♖xd3 No, it will not hold. 40.♖c3 Black could hold if the white rook were stuck on f1. As is, White wins. ♖d5 41.♖c8† ♔a7 42.♖f8 White is ready to bring his rook to f5 next, and Black's rook will end up passively defending g5. We already know this will not be good enough for him to save the game. – A) After ♖d7 43.♖f5 ♖g7 44.♔c2 , White walks the king straight to f6, and Black can't do a thing about it. – B) 42\. Rf8 42...Rd6 43.Rf5 Rg6 44.a4 with more than one winning plan. For example, b5, and after the trade of pawns, bring the king to e4 and push f4. – C) 42\. Rf8 42...Rd3 This would be Black's only chance to go active, but it will not save him. 43.Kc2 Re3 44.a4! I like this move the most. The plan for White is to bring his rook to f5 and pawn to a5. Afterwards, he can connect his king with the kingside pawn mass to defend f3. Then g5 will fall, and Black will not have nearly enough queenside counterplay to make it into a fight. 44...Kb6 45.Rf5 Kc6 46.a5 Kc7 What else? All Black can do is wait. 47.b4 Kc6 48.Kd2 Rb3 49.Ke2 Rxb4 50.Rxg5 White wins easily.

39.♕e4 ♔a7 40.♖c3!

White prepares Qe3+. If White can then get his rook to f5, he should be winning the rook endgame. From c3, the rook is also able to go to b3 and target b7.

40... ♕d1† 41.♔a2 ♕d2 42.♖c2?



Following through with the initial plan would have won:

42.♕e3† ♕xe3 43.♖xe3 White will quickly get his rook to f6 and then f5. I'm not quite sure how Kasparov missed this simple idea, because he clearly understood the concept based on the decision he made on the next move. ♖d6 44.♔b3 ♖f6 might still win for White, but Black just got huge saving chances by being able to activate his rook. Stronger is 44... Rd6 44.Re5! Rf6

45.Rf5 and White is easily winning, as mentioned above.

42... ♕d3

Should Kasparov have accepted the offer to exchange queens?

43.♖e2!

Yes, but only on his own terms. If he were to take Black's queen directly, his rook would have been rendered passive on f2:

43.♕xd3? ♖xd3 44.♖f2 With a draw. Of course,

44.♖c5 ♖xf3 45.♖xg5 is always holdable for Black. Much more surprising is that the pawn endgame is a draw, as White cannot play f3-f4 and Black's king is too active:

44.♖c3 ♖xc3 45.bxc3 ♔b6 46.♔b3 ♔c5 A few good decisions will be required further down the line, but Black should hold.

43... ♖d4

The rook endgame is winning with the change of structure and the rook behind the passed pawn after According to the almighty machine,

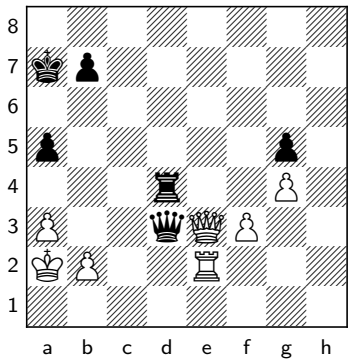
43... ♕xe4 44.fxe4 For example, ♖e5 45.♔b3 ♔b6 46.♔c4 ♔c6 47.♔d4 ♔d6 48.♖h2

43... ♔b8 would have kept Black in the game. It does not feel human to me, and even if Adams had played it, I suspect he would have lost in the end.

44.♕e3!

Again, Kasparov shows the understanding that the rook endgame is drawn only if Black is able to play ...Rd3 and keep White's rook passive.

44... a5?



I don't see Black saving this game in any case, but this only made things worse. As we have already shown, Had Adams continued to wait with

44... ♕xe3 45.♖xe3 is winning for White. Without ...Rd3 as a possibility, Black will not be able to force White's rook onto a passive square, defending the weak pawn on f3. As such, White wins by bringing his rook to f5 and centralizing his king, as seen in the note regarding 38...Qd3+. ♖f4 46.♔b3 ♔b6 47.♔c3 ♔c5 48.♔d3 ♔d5 49.♔e2 freeing the white rook.

44... ♔b8 45.♖e1 ♖d5 , White would still need to be a bit creative to find a winning plan.

45.♖e1!

White frees the queen from the defense of the rook to threaten Qxg5. The a5-pawn

hanging afterwards increases the strength of this threat.

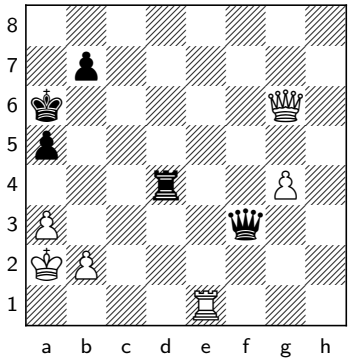
45... ♔a6

The position has changed thanks to the move ...a6-a5. Kasparov underlines this perfectly.

46.♕xg5! ♕xf3

One of the guidelines I set out in Small Steps 2 Success (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) was: «Even when well blockaded, a far-advanced passed pawn can significantly strengthen attacking prospects.» Previously, Black's king never would have been in danger. But now that he has weakened the pawn cover with ...a5, White has a viable plan to win by blending a dangerous passed pawn on one side of the board with a direct attack against the enemy king on the other side.

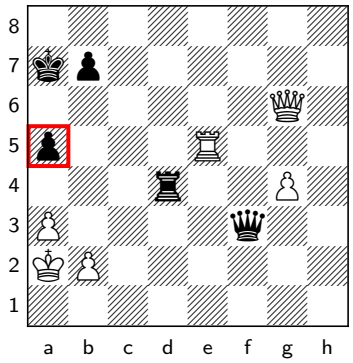
47.♕g6†!



It would be totally the wrong strategy to try to save the g-pawn instead with

47.♖g1? . Black easily has it under control if he does not need to worry about threats to his king. For example, a4 , threatening an immediate draw with ...Qb3+ followed by ...Rd1+.

47... ♔a7 48.♖e5!



Black would be making a draw with the pawn back on a6. As is, he is lost.

48... ♖a4

This is not a good sign for Black. The rook is forced onto a dreadful-looking square to avoid a direct mating attack, and the g-pawn is free to run. That said, White needs to be careful to avoid any tricks. □ □ □ A rather cute line is

48... b6 is not possible for a number of reasons. For example, 49.♖b5 wins, but so do the more forceful

49.♕g7† and

49.♖xa5† .

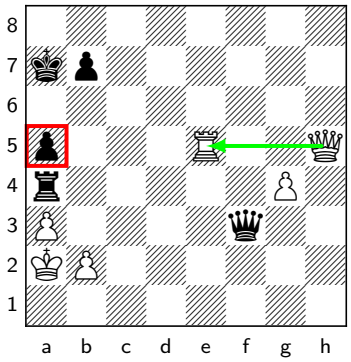
48... a4 49.♖a5† ♔b8 50.♕e8† ♔c7 51.♕e5†

48... ♖d5 49.♕f5 ♕xf5 50.♖xf5 and White wins. ♖d4 51.♖xa5†

51.g5? a4 .

51... ♔b6 52.♖g5 but not

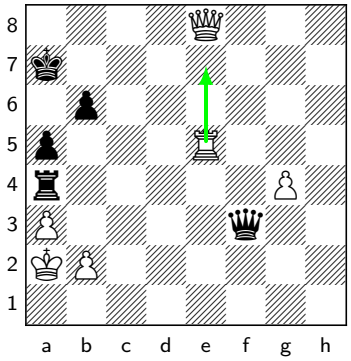
49.♕h5!



This provokes more weaknesses while keeping the rook on e5 protected. The routine

49.g5? would allow a surprising counterblow: ♖xa3† 50.bxa3 ♕f2† White will lose his rook back, and Black will equalize material. Despite the computer's insistence on equality, Black still has a lot of work to do to save the game thanks to the g-pawn, but things have clearly gone in the right direction for him.

49... b6 50.♕e8!



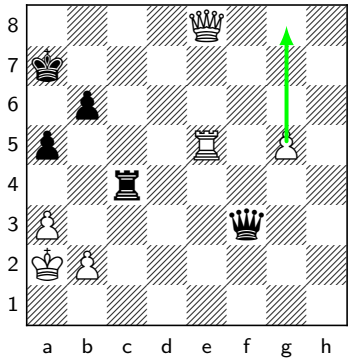
The check on e7 is not a small threat.

50... ♖c4

With this move, Black avoids immediate mate, but his defenses will be stretched.

50... ♖xg4 51.♖e7† ♔a6 52.♕c8† ♔b5 53.♖e5† ♔a4 White has many checkmates. 54.♕c6† ♕xc6 55.b3# This one is pretty cool.

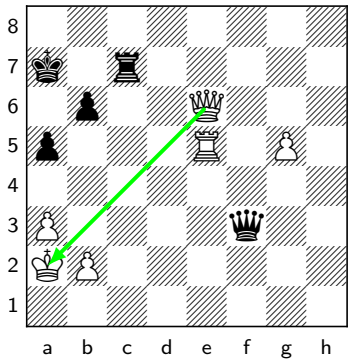
51.g5!



White wins by combining threats to Black's king with advancing the passed pawn. The principle of two weaknesses. Imagine Black's pawns were back on b7 and a6; we would have an altogether different situation on our hands! Kasparov absolutely made the right call to only exchange the f3-pawn for the g5-pawn once Black's king had become vulnerable. After

51.♖e7† ♔a6 , there are no more checks.

51... ♖c7 52.♕e6



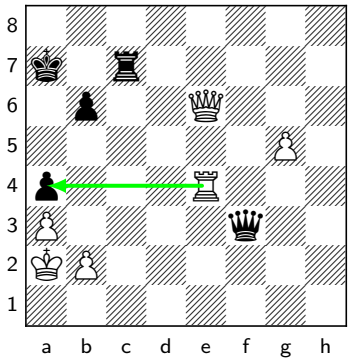
White controls the a2-g8 diagonal to prevent any checks.

52... a4

The rook endgame is winning:

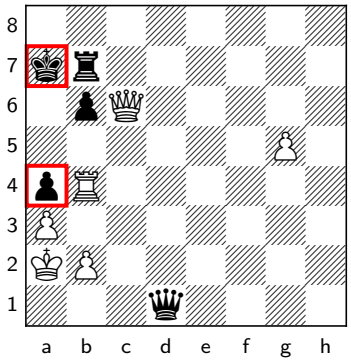
52... ♕f7 53.♕xf7 ♖xf7 54.g6 The rook gets behind the passed pawn.

53.♖e4



White relentlessly attacks the black king.

53... ♕d1 54.♖b4! ♖b7 55.♕c6

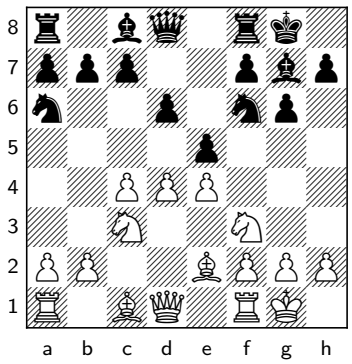


Another pawn drops, and Adams was forced to resign. Kasparov displayed good technique in this game. He understood that it was correct to trade the knight for the bishop and to coordinate with 36... Ka7 36.Qf5! , 37... Ka8 37.Kb1 and 38... Rd8 38.Rc1! He correctly evaluated which rook endgames were winning (although he did misevaluate one transition). He then correctly assessed that creating a passed pawn on g4 worked once Black had weakened his king's position. All in all, a great performance.

Yuri Shulman-Alexander Onischuk Introduction

This game features a fascinating endgame with an extra pawn. While it's not as clean a model game as some others in illustrating the key principles of converting an extra pawn, it is nevertheless quite instructive.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 O-O 6.♗e2 e5 7.O-O ♘a6



At the time of recording my Lifetime Repertoires: Sam Shankland's 1.d4 course (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) for Chessable, I said some unflattering things about this approach from Black in the main line of the King's Indian. In general, I still think it is not

Black's best move to put the knight on a6, but I checked it further some time later and realized that it was much better than I gave it credit for. Afterwards, I even used it myself to beat GM Muhammad Muradli with the black pieces.

8.♖e1

8.♗e3 is currently considered to be the strongest approach for White.

8...♕e8

The text move, along with the even more popular

8... c6 , were the old ways of playing for Black. These lines are now only rarely seen, thanks in no small part to an idea that Jon Ludvig Hammer and I came up with around the time this game was played (see note to White's 11th move).

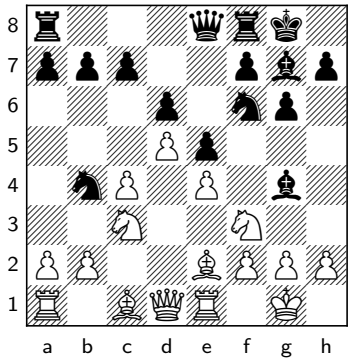
8...♗g4 was my choice against Muradli, and I think it is Black's best move. It is also by far the trendiest in recent practice.

9.♗f1! ♗g4 10.d5 ♘b4

Of course,

10...♘c5N is met by 11.b4 . As well as having the idea ...Bxf3 to cripple White's kingside structure (recapturing with the queen on f3 is impossible due to the knight fork on c2), Black is aiming to play ...a5 and then put the knight back on a6 towards c5. In general, a pawn on a5 and a knight on a6 tends to mean good coordination for Black in the KID structures with ...e7-e5 and d4-d5 played. However, in many cases, the knight on a6 without the pawn on a5 is absolutely atrocious. For this reason, Black is willing to lose a full two tempos on ...Nb4, ...a5, and ...Na6 back.

11.♗e2?



This is a calm and safe path, but it is also far less convincing than the alternative.

11.a3 is surely the best path. White allows his kingside pawns to become crippled, but Black's knight will be forced back to a6 without having time to play ...a5: ♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♘a6N 13.b4 White stops ...Nc5, sidelining the a6-knight, and takes all the space on the queenside. Black is not going to give mate without his queen's knight or his light-squared-bishop. Black would normally like to play ...f7-f5-f4 and ...g6-g5-g4. But here after ...f4, White would play Bh3 and then ask what comes next. I like this position for White and played it myself against Robert Hess a couple of years after this game was played.

11...a5

Of course.

12.♗e3

White is threatening c4-c5. In general, a good rule of thumb in the King's Indian positions with White castling short and pushing d4-d5 is that if he can quickly play c4-c5 safely, he is much better, if not outright winning. Black would do well not to ignore this threat.

12.a3 only forces the knight to where it wants to go anyway.

12... ♘h5?

This was a serious mistake. Black not only ignores the threat of c4-c5 but also worsens the coordination of his pieces. While I am surely not the most experienced KID player out there,

12... ♘a6N looks more or less automatic to me.

13.♕d2?

White makes an equally large mistake in return. Far more normal would be to execute the break White had prepared with Instead, keeping both bishops was best: 13\. Qd2 14...f5 outright loses to 15.exf5! . This reaction tends to work well when Black's knight is on h5. After the desirable 15...gxf5 , White has 16.Nxe5! . The simplest of plenty of winning moves – why is the knight on h5?

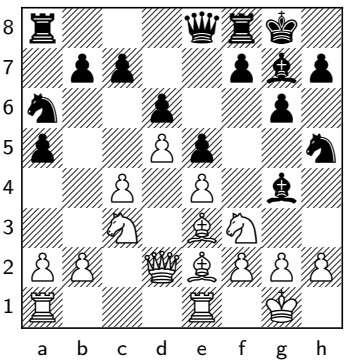
13.c5 , but after ♘f4N , Black would get one of the white bishops, giving him some chances for counterplay. White is better, but not as much as he could be.

13.h3 The King's Indian does not work well for Black when he plays both ...Bg4 and ...Nh5. The knight looks active on h5, but it is actually poorly placed more often than not. The reason is that once h2-h3 comes, Black doesn't want to take on f3. But retreating the bishop makes it hard to push for ...f5 due to tactics against the knight on h5. This case is no different. ♗xf3

13... ♗d7 The h5-knight is awkwardly placed. 14.c5 White is successfully blowing up the queenside, and Black's only hope will be to make kingside counterplay. This proves impossible, as his only break is ...f5, and it cannot happen without the h5-knight suffering tactical consequences. ♘f4N This might look a bit active, but it is totally toothless. 15.♗f1 Now Black cannot play ...f5 on pain of getting slaughtered on the e-file. But what else can he even hope to accomplish? f5 16.♗xf4 exf4 17.exf5 My machine gives +4, and I don't think I can argue with it this time.

14.♗xf3 ♘f4N is abysmal for Black after 15.♖f1 , pre-emptively moving the rook away from the incoming invasion of a black knight on d3. The black knights are about to be pushed back with a2-a3 and/or g2-g3.

13... ♘a6



I do not play the King's Indian Defense often, but what I like about it is the flexibility which it often gives Black. There is often a subjective choice to be made between a number of attractive moves. At this junction, Onischuk chooses the strategic one he should have made on his previous turn. Black obtains good compensation for the pawn after But Black had an option that appears to me to be even more promising: 14... Na6 14.exf5 This would be my instinct for White, and the position gets messy. We discussed some of the following variations in a KCT session. 14...gxf5 Of course, Black takes with the pawn, and now: – A) 15.h3 loses after 15...Bxf3 16.Bxf3 f4 17.Bd4 Qg6 18.Qd1 Nf6 . White's tricks run out, and he loses the house. 17.Qd1 also doesn't work due to 17...fxe3 B) The only way for White to maintain the balance according to the engine is 14... Na6 15.a3! Na6 and only now 16.Ng5! , with a mess. The reason why this inclusion is important can be seen in the line below. C) 14... Na6 15.Ng5? Black would really like his bishop to be on d7, to be able to play ...Qg6. It looks like White is getting the light-squared bishops off and invading on e6 next, but this is not the end of the story. 15...Bxe2 16.Qxe2 White's knight is going to e6, but the counterplay is coming. 16...f4! 17.Bd2 Qg6! 18.Ne6 f3! 19.Qf1 Nc2! That's why the knight had to be pushed back to a6 with 15.a3!. In this version, Black's pieces are starting to look pretty good, and White is in trouble.

13... ♘f4N , although it is probably better for Black to hold such a forcing move in reserve: 14.♗d1 is the computer's choice, not being worried about a knight coming to d3.

14.♗xf4 exf4 15.a3 ♘a6N 16.♕xf4 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 prevents the crippling of the queenside pawn structure. But Black's pieces are more active, and White does not have a constructive plan after

17.♗xf3 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♕e5 Black's knight is much better than White's bishop. The game could continue: 19.♕xe5 dxe5 20.♖ab1 ♖ab8 21.♖b5 b6 22.d6 cxd6 23.♖eb1 ♘c5N 24.♖xb6 ♖xb6 25.♖xb6 ♖d8 The e4-pawn is loose, so White is not able to coordinate. Black's king is coming to the center, and his rook to c8. The engine suggests its favorite zeroes.

17... ♘c5N .

13... f5? This would have been a clever try to punish Qd2 not only as a missed chance, but also as a misplacement of pieces. Normally, with the knight on h5 and the bishop on g4, ...f5 would be well met with h2-h3. But here, this proves impossible. The whole point is that after 14.h3? ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 , Black is strategically busted. But

that does not matter when you can win a piece with f4 . That's a common reason why the queen should not be on d2. Amusingly, my computer claims 14... f5 14.Qd1 , casting further doubt on Shulman's choice to put his queen on d2.

14.♘b5

This is a bit weird, but it has an idea of pinning the a6-knight to the defense of the c7-pawn, as well as clearing the path for the queen to attack the pawn on a5.

14... ♘f4

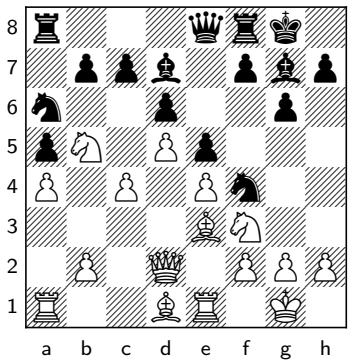
This is logical and tempting, since the knight looks pretty on f4, and Black is almost never worried about Bxf4. Nevertheless, it makes ...f5 both less threatening and harder to execute. Since Black has prevented c4-c5, my instinct is to prefer

14... ♗d7 , with ...f5 to come next. After 15.♕xa5 f5 , Black has good attacking chances for the pawn.

15.♗d1 ♗d7!

Black corrects the placement of his bishop and threatens to win a pawn with ...Bxb5.

16.a4?



This move by a strong player is hardly conceivable to modern eyes. It denies White the hope of making any play on the queenside with a3, b4 and c5. In contrast, Black's play on the kingside will eventually come. Instead of accepting a static disadvantage, it would have made sense for White to unbalance the position: □ □ After □ Trying to keep things quiet with

16.♕xa5 is the critical move which White should probably have tried. A possible continuation would be: ♘d3N 17.♖e2 when ♘ac5?N is not bad either, but I find

17... f5 to be more in the spirit of the King's Indian. 18.♕d2 fxe4 19.♘g5N ♗xb5 20.cxb5 ♕xb5 21.♘xe4N The machine gives White a little edge, but Black's position doesn't seem bad to me.

16.g3 ♘h3†N 17.♔g2 f5 , the engine claims White's position is playable, but Black is getting exactly the type of kingside play he is usually looking for.

16.♘c3N is best met with ♘h5N , preparing ...f5 by taking away White's option of Bxf4 and exf5. It is amusing that Black jumped in with the knight to f4 only two moves ago, but Bd1 and Nc3 are not all that constructive anyway. Since White doesn't have the queen on d1 and bishop on e2, there isn't enough tactical pressure against the knight on h5, and ...f5 is unstoppable.

16... b6

Since Black has obtained a static positional

advantage, there is no need to rush, and he can spend a tempo protecting the a5-pawn.

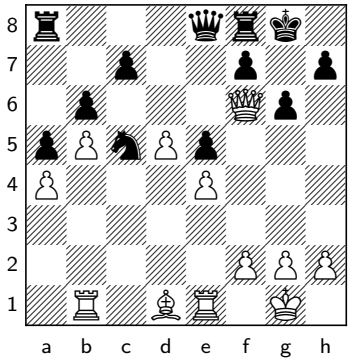
17.♗xf4 exf4 18.♕xf4

White changes the nature of the position, but he was being over-optimistic if he thought he could achieve the e4-e5 break.

18... ♗xb2

18... ♗xb5 followed by ...Nc5 also looks good due to the strong knight that's about to appear on the c5-outpost. It's a bit surprising to me that the machine thinks this position is equal.

19.♖b1 ♗e5 20.♘xe5 dxe5 21.♕f6 ♗xb5 22.cxb5 ♘c5

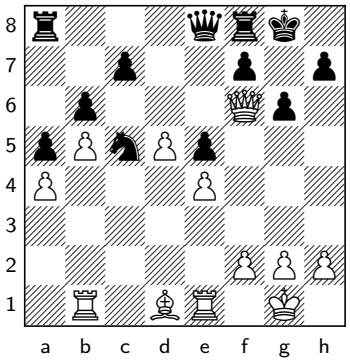


The material is still balanced, so we're not in 'converting an extra pawn' territory yet, but this is an instructive moment. White played

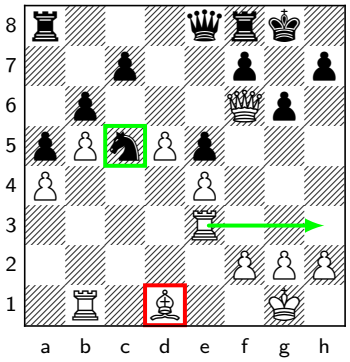
23.♖e3

, and Black has to react to his aggressive intentions on the kingside.

Shulman-Onischuk Bonus Exercise #1

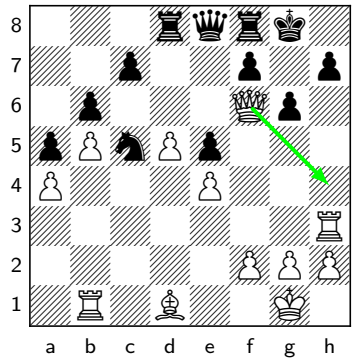


23.♖e3



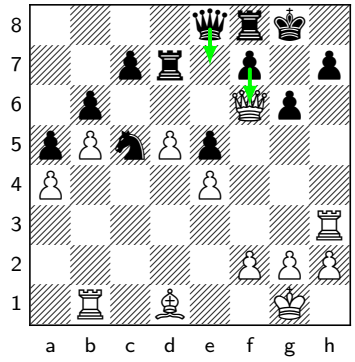
Black is hoping for a good knight against bad bishop scenario, but apart from the bad bishop, White has no weaknesses. If the knight and bishop were exchanged, White would be clearly winning by ganging up on the backward c-pawn. But here, there are more pressing issues. White is about to launch a kingside attack with Rh3. How should Black react?

23... ♖d8! 24.♖h3



The threat is Qh4. White is trying to deliver mate.

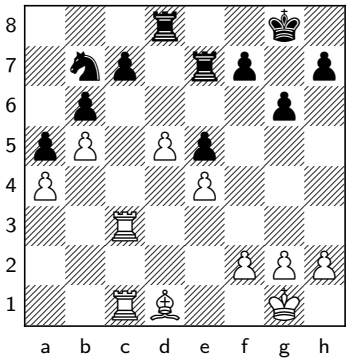
24... ♖d7



Black prepares ...Qe7 to exchange queens. He is also ready to play ...f6 to defend laterally against the threat of mate after Qh4. After

24... ♖d6? 25.♕h4 h5 26.♗xh5 , Black loses at least a pawn.

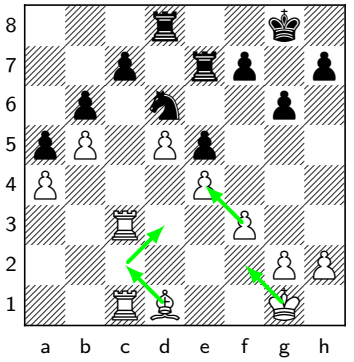
Shulman-Onischuk Bonus Exercise #2



29... ♘d6

At this point, while giving the lecture for KCT, I asked what White should play, and Kirk Ghazarian, now a grandmaster, immediately wrote 'Rxc7, no- brainer'. I could not help myself, and decided to make a poll: Take on c7? A) Yes, it is a no-brainer. B) No, Kirk has no brain. How would you play?

30.f3



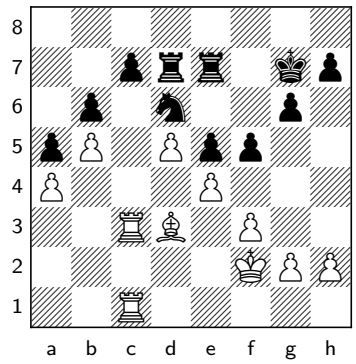
The wisdom of the masses prevailed, and the majority did not want to change the structure. This is the choice of the computer, on the grounds that Black has no way to make progress. White waits with the king on e3 and the bishop on d3. To human eyes, it looks as though Black should have a long-term advantage of the better minor piece, but White's rooks are way too good

on the c-file, while Black's will remain passive defending a weak pawn. For example:

30.♖xc7? This makes White's life harder. It was only Kirk's immediate reaction, of course. ♖xc7 31.♖xc7 ♘xe4N 32.f4? This was too optimistic. After

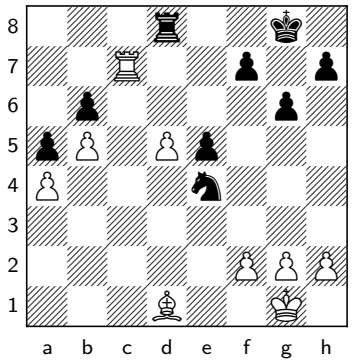
32.♖c6 , White would objectively hold, although Black should be able to get to a four-against-three situation on the kingside. This would not be a bad enough version for it to be lost for White, although there would be more moves to be made. The following line looks natural and human: ♖xd5 33.♗f3 ♖d4 34.♖xb6 ♖xa4 35.g3 ♘c3N 36.♗c6 ♖b4 37.♖a6 ♘xb5N 38.♖xa5 ♘d4N The knight is better than the bishop, and White has some suffering up ahead, but I would expect a draw.

30...♖dd7 31.♔f2 f5 32.♗c2 ♔g7 33.♗d3



Maybe someone smarter than me could come up with a credible plan for either side to make something happen in this position, but I can't. I'd expect a draw to be agreed somewhere around here. Without minor pieces, White's dominant rooks would win the game; without rooks, White would probably be lost after some ...Nb7-...Nc5 regroup. However, neither scenario is realistic.

Shulman-Onischuk Exercise #1



32.f4?

Too optimistic. This is the most critical decision of the game. Black has three tempting tries in ...Rxd5, ...exf4, and ...Nc5. The wisdom of crowds again prevailed in the poll taken at the KCT session.

32...♘c5!

The cleanest way to win. □ □

32... exf4 also wins, but the calculation to justify it is harder. That's why I think the line above was the cleaner way: 33.♗f3 ♘c5N 34.♖c6 ♘xa4N 35.d6 Up next is Bd1, kicking the knight away. That way, White could get a second far-advanced passed pawn after taking on b6. Care must be taken. ♔g7 The point of this move is

hard to see from afar, but it does make sense when you peel back the layers: 36.♗d1 ♘c5N 37.♖xb6 ♘e4N And now if 38.♗f3 Black is able to play ♖xd6 as Rb8 isn't a check with the king on g7. After 39.♖a6 ♖d4 40.♖xa5 f5 , Black should win, but there is still some work to do.

32... ♖xd5? The most obvious move, but not the best. Black should understand that White's best hopes of saving the game lie in reaching a rook endgame with one pawn less and a mostly symmetrical structure. As such, Black should be either trying to alter the structure or maintain the minor pieces. As it turns out, either of the other two options would have won, and Onischuk chose the only one that allowed White to retain a defensible position. 33.♗b3?

33.♗f3 , a painful way to lose a chess game would be ♖c5?

33... ♖d4 34.♗xe4 ♖xe4 35.fxe5 ♖xe5 If the queenside pawns are liquidated, it is clearly a draw. Black can defend his queenside with ...Re6, but this is also a clear draw. Let's again refer to Theoretical Rook Endgames, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) where I broke down positions where one side is a pawn up, with pawns on both sides of the board and no passed pawns. The guideline is first to consider the side of the board with an extra pawn. In our example, without the queenside pawns, the position on the kingside would be a draw. Then, the position of the defending rook on the other side of the board is considered. On the queenside, the defending rook is not tied passively to the defense of a pawn. Therefore, the position should be drawn. As such, we have to conclude that taking on d5 on move 32 was a serious mistake that should have cost Black half a point. He should have tried to understand which piece exchanges were in his favor before making that decision.

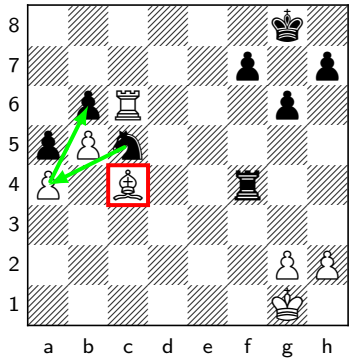
34.♖c6 Oops. Surprisingly, Black can basically resign.

33... ♖c5 is game over. After

33.fxe5 ♖xd5 34.♗e2 ♖xe5 35.♗c4

White tries to get counterplay on f7.

35... ♖f5 36.♖c6 ♖f4!



Followed by ...Nxa4. The knight is clearly better than the bishop, while the same position without minor pieces would be an easy draw for White. Perhaps this is what Onischuk missed. It was important to see from the start that Black can play this move. It wouldn't be hard to believe that he only examined

36... ♘xa4?N However, an important rule of calculation is always to be wary of automatic moves. In this case, after 37.♗b3 ♘c5N 38.♗a2 Black will lose the b6-pawn, and White might just save the game with good defense.

37.♗a2 ♘xa4N 38.♗b3

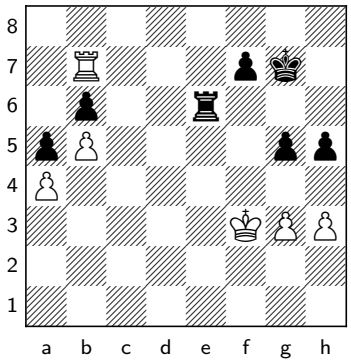
can now be met by

38... ♘c5N 39.♗a2 ♖a4

or

39... ♖d4 The key is that the rook got to the 4th rank with tempo.

Shulman-Onischuk Exercise #2



40... ♔g6

Black is not going to win this game on the kingside. His best chance is trying to transfer his king to the queenside to take the a \- and b-pawns. This will abandon his kingside, but he hopes that, as he has a material advantage on the kingside, it will take White too long to take enough pawns. White needs to make sure that as soon as he starts taking Black's kingside pawns, he will have a passed pawn. Is

41.h4!

41.g4 or

41.h4 the best place to start?

41.g4? While this is still a technical draw, it was a bad practical decision on the first move after the time control. It gives Black the possibility of liquidating the kingside. White will then not have a passed pawn on the kingside to counter Black's queenside invasion. But it also might mean, as played in the game, that if the kingside pawns are retained, White does not obtain a passed pawn. f5 42.gxf5† ♔xf5 43.♖h7? White should stick with the Theoretical Rook Endgames (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) program and use the rook to harass the undefended black pawn. Hence, correct was

43.♖b8 You can see the rest of the game next. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

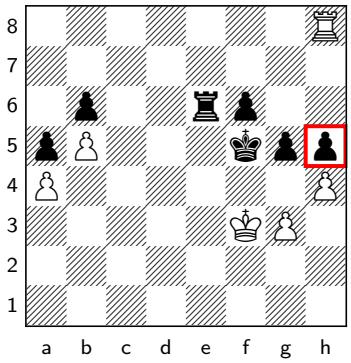
41... f6 42.♖b8

White correctly waits and continues to pressure the b6-pawn. I can't even think of anything for Black to try. The rook is stuck defending b6, and ...Kf5 can always be met by a rook transfer to the h-file, which will quickly give White a passed pawn. White would lose after wasting a tempo:

42.♖c7? g4† 43.♔f4 ♖e1 44.♖c6 ♖a1 45.♖xb6 ♖xa4† 46.♔e3 ♖a3† 47.♔f2 ♖a2† There is still some work to be done for Black, but White's king gets trapped on the back

rank, since 48.♔e3 loses the g3-pawn to ♖g2 .

42... ♔f5 43.♖h8=

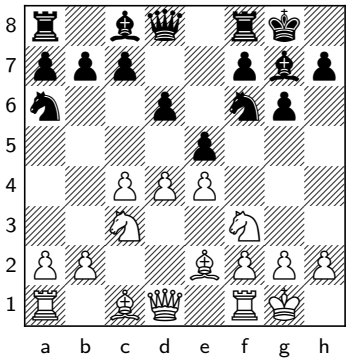


If Black focuses on the queenside, White will immediately get a passed pawn and create counterplay on the kingside.

Yuri Shulman-Alexander Onischuk, St Louis 2009

This game features a fascinating endgame with an extra pawn. While it's not as clean a model game as some others in illustrating the key principles of converting an extra pawn, it is nevertheless quite instructive.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 O-O 6.♗e2 e5 7.O-O ♘a6



At the time of recording my Lifetime Repertoires: Sam Shankland's 1.d4 course (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) for Chessable, I said some unflattering things about this approach from Black in the main line of the King's Indian. In general, I still think it is not Black's best move to put the knight on a6, but I checked it further some time later and realized that it was much better than I gave it credit for. Afterwards, I even used it myself to beat GM Muhammad Muradli with the black pieces.

8.♖e1

8.♗e3 is currently considered to be the strongest approach for White.

8... ♕e8

The text move, along with the even more popular

8... c6 , were the old ways of playing for Black. These lines are now only rarely seen, thanks in no small part to an idea that Jon Ludvig Hammer and I came up with around the time this game was played (see note to White's 11th move).

8... ♗g4 was my choice against Muradli, and I think it is Black's best move. It

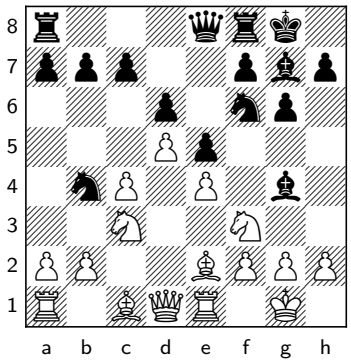
is also by far the trendiest in recent practice.

9.♗f1! ♗g4 10.d5 ♘b4

Of course,

10... ♘c5N is met by 11.b4 . As well as having the idea ...Bxf3 to cripple White's kingside structure (recapturing with the queen on f3 is impossible due to the knight fork on c2), Black is aiming to play ...a5 and then put the knight back on a6 towards c5. In general, a pawn on a5 and a knight on a6 tends to mean good coordination for Black in the KID structures with ...e7-e5 and d4-d5 played. However, in many cases, the knight on a6 without the pawn on a5 is absolutely atrocious. For this reason, Black is willing to lose a full two tempos on ...Nb4, ...a5, and ...Na6 back.

11.♗e2?



This is a calm and safe path, but it is also far less convincing than the alternative.

11.a3 is surely the best path. White allows his kingside pawns to become crippled, but Black's knight will be forced back to a6 without having time to play ...a5: ♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♘a6N 13.b4 White stops ...Nc5, sidelining the a6-knight, and takes all the space on the queenside. Black is not going to give mate without his queen's knight or his light-squared-bishop. Black would normally like to play ...f7-f5-f4 and ...g6-g5-g4. But here after ...f4, White would play Bh3 and then ask what comes next. I like this position for White and played it myself against Robert Hess a couple of years after this game was played.

11... a5

Of course.

12.♗e3

White is threatening c4-c5. In general, a good rule of thumb in the King's Indian positions with White castling short and pushing d4-d5 is that if he can quickly play c4-c5 safely, he is much better, if not outright winning. Black would do well not to ignore this threat.

12.a3 only forces the knight to where it wants to go anyway.

12... ♘h5?

This was a serious mistake. Black not only ignores the threat of c4-c5 but also worsens the coordination of his pieces. While I am surely not the most experienced KID player out there,

12... ♘a6N looks more or less automatic to me.

13.♕d2?

White makes an equally large mistake in return. Far more normal would be to execute the break White had prepared with Instead, keeping both bishops was best: 13\. Qd2 14...f5 outright

loses to 15.exf5! . This reaction tends to work well when Black's knight is on h5. After the desirable 15...gxf5 , White has 16.Nxe5! . The simplest of plenty of winning moves – why is the knight on h5?

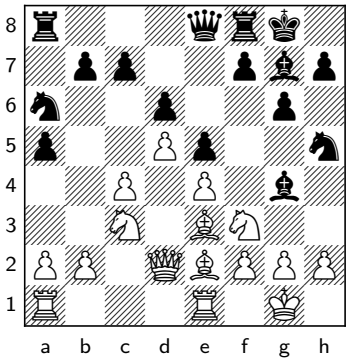
13.c5 , but after ♘f4N , Black would get one of the white bishops, giving him some chances for counterplay. White is better, but not as much as he could be.

13.h3 The King's Indian does not work well for Black when he plays both ...Bg4 and ...Nh5. The knight looks active on h5, but it is actually poorly placed more often than not. The reason is that once h2-h3 comes, Black doesn't want to take on f3. But retreating the bishop makes it hard to push for ...f5 due to tactics against the knight on h5. This case is no different. ♗xf3

13... ♗d7 The h5-knight is awkwardly placed. 14.c5 White is successfully blowing up the queenside, and Black's only hope will be to make kingside counterplay. This proves impossible, as his only break is ...f5, and it cannot happen without the h5-knight suffering tactical consequences. ♘f4N This might look a bit active, but it is totally toothless. 15.♗f1 Now Black cannot play ...f5 on pain of getting slaughtered on the e-file. But what else can he even hope to accomplish? f5 16.♗xf4 exf4 17.exf5 My machine gives +4, and I don't think I can argue with it this time.

14.♗xf3 ♘f4N is abysmal for Black after 15.♖f1 , pre-emptively moving the rook away from the incoming invasion of a black knight on d3. The black knights are about to be pushed back with a2-a3 and/or g2-g3.

13... ♘a6



I do not play the King's Indian Defense often, but what I like about it is the flexibility which it often gives Black. There is often a subjective choice to be made between a number of attractive moves. At this junction, Onischuk chooses the strategic one he should have made on his previous turn. Black obtains good compensation for the pawn after But Black had an option that appears to me to be even more promising: 14... Na6 14.exf5 This would be my instinct for White, and the position gets messy. We discussed some of the following variations in a KCT session. 14...gxf5 Of course, Black takes with the pawn, and now: – A) 15.h3 loses after 15...Bxf3 16.Bxf3 f4 17.Bd4 Qg6 18.Qd1 Nf6 . White's tricks run out, and he loses the house. 17.Qd1 also doesn't work due to 17...fxe3 B) The only way for White to maintain the balance according to the engine is 14... Na6 15.a3! Na6 and only now 16.Ng5! , with a mess. The reason why this inclusion is important can be seen in the line below. C) 14... Na6 15.Ng5? Black

would really like his bishop to be on d7, to be able to play ...Qg6. It looks like White is getting the light-squared bishops off and invading on e6 next, but this is not the end of the story. 15...Bxe2 16.Qxe2 White's knight is going to e6, but the counterplay is coming. 16...f4! 17.Bd2 Qg6! 18.Ne6 f3! 19.Qf1 Nc2! That's why the knight had to be pushed back to a6 with 15.a3!. In this version, Black's pieces are starting to look pretty good, and White is in trouble.

13... ♘f4N , although it is probably better for Black to hold such a forcing move in reserve: 14.♗d1 is the computer's choice, not being worried about a knight coming to d3.

14.♗xf4 exf4 15.a3 ♘a6N 16.♕xf4 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 prevents the crippling of the queenside pawn structure. But Black's pieces are more active, and White does not have a constructive plan after

17.♗xf3 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♕e5 Black's knight is much better than White's bishop. The game could continue: 19.♕xe5 dxe5 20.♖ab1 ♖ab8 21.♖b5 b6 22.d6 cxd6 23.♖eb1 ♘c5N 24.♖xb6 ♖xb6 25.♖xb6 ♖d8 The e4-pawn is loose, so White is not able to coordinate. Black's king is coming to the center, and his rook to c8. The engine suggests its favorite zeroes.

17... ♘c5N .

13... f5? This would have been a clever try to punish Qd2 not only as a missed chance, but also as a misplacement of pieces. Normally, with the knight on h5 and the bishop on g4, ...f5 would be well met with h2-h3. But here, this proves impossible. The whole point is that after 14.h3? ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 , Black is strategically busted. But that does not matter when you can win a piece with f4 . That's a common reason why the queen should not be on d2. Amusingly, my computer claims 14... f5 14.Qd1 , casting further doubt on Shulman's choice to put his queen on d2.

14.♘b5

This is a bit weird, but it has an idea of pinning the a6-knight to the defense of the c7-pawn, as well as clearing the path for the queen to attack the pawn on a5.

14... ♘f4

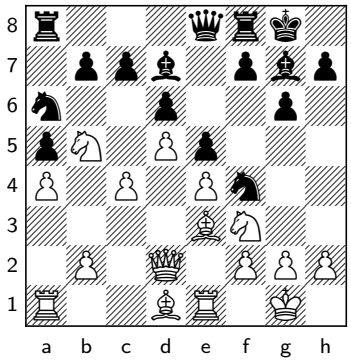
This is logical and tempting, since the knight looks pretty on f4, and Black is almost never worried about Bxf4. Nevertheless, it makes ...f5 both less threatening and harder to execute. Since Black has prevented c4-c5, my instinct is to prefer

14... ♗d7 , with ...f5 to come next. After 15.♕xa5 f5 , Black has good attacking chances for the pawn.

15.♗d1 ♗d7!

Black corrects the placement of his bishop and threatens to win a pawn with ...Bxb5.

16.a4?



This move by a strong player is hardly conceivable to modern eyes. It denies White the hope of making any play on the queenside with a3, b4 and c5. In contrast, Black's play on the kingside will eventually come. Instead of accepting a static disadvantage, it would have made sense for White to unbalance the position: □ □ After □ Trying to keep things quiet with

16.♕xa5 is the critical move which White should probably have tried. A possible continuation would be: ♘d3N 17.♖e2 when ♘ac5?N is not bad either, but I find

17... f5 to be more in the spirit of the King's Indian. 18.♕d2 fxe4 19.♘g5N ♗xb5 20.cxb5 ♕xb5 21.♘xe4N The machine gives White a little edge, but Black's position doesn't seem bad to me.

16.g3 ♘h3†N 17.♔g2 f5 , the engine claims White's position is playable, but Black is getting exactly the type of kingside play he is usually looking for.

16.♘c3N is best met with ♘h5N , preparing ...f5 by taking away White's option of Bxf4 and exf5. It is amusing that Black jumped in with the knight to f4 only two moves ago, but Bd1 and Nc3 are not all that constructive anyway. Since White doesn't have the queen on d1 and bishop on e2, there isn't enough tactical pressure against the knight on h5, and ...f5 is unstoppable.

16... b6

Since Black has obtained a static positional advantage, there is no need to rush, and he can spend a tempo protecting the a5-pawn.

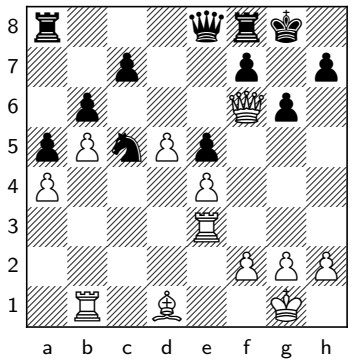
17.♗xf4 exf4 18.♕xf4

White changes the nature of the position, but he was being over-optimistic if he thought he could achieve the e4-e5 break.

18... ♗xb2

18... ♗xb5 followed by ...Nc5 also looks good due to the strong knight that's about to appear on the c5-outpost. It's a bit surprising to me that the machine thinks this position is equal.

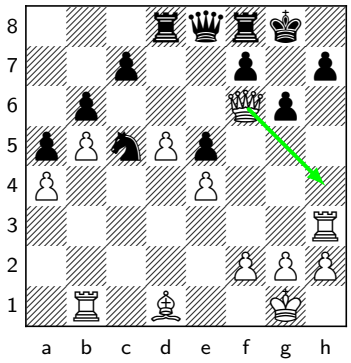
19.♖b1 ♗e5 20.♘xe5 dxe5 21.♕f6 ♗xb5 22.cxb5 ♘c5 23.♖e3



Black is hoping for a good knight against bad bishop scenario, but apart from the bad

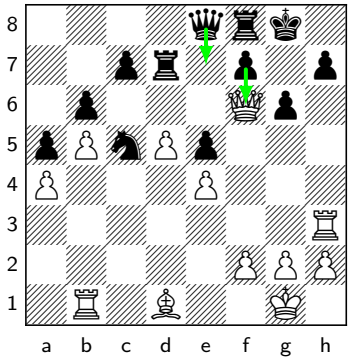
bishop, White has no weaknesses. If the knight and bishop were exchanged, White would be clearly winning by ganging up on the backward c-pawn.

23... ♖d8! 24.♖h3



The threat is Qh4. White is trying to deliver mate.

24... ♖d7



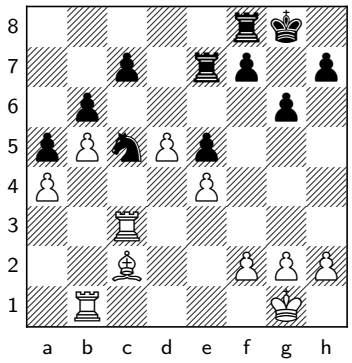
Black prepares ...Qe7 to exchange queens. He is also ready to play ...f6 to defend laterally against the threat of mate after Qh4. After

24... ♖d6? 25.♕h4 h5 26.♗xh5 , Black loses at least a pawn.

25.♗c2

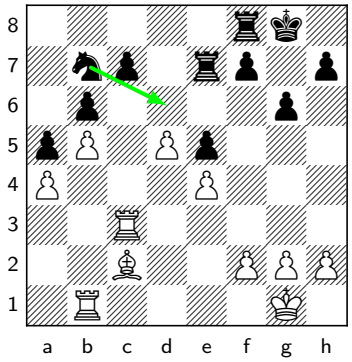
25.♗g4? is met nicely by ♕e7

25... ♕e7 26.♕xe7 ♖xe7 27.♖c3



White is not clearly worse. Things could go wrong for Black if White is allowed to sacrifice the exchange on c5 and recapture the c-pawn with the other rook. The first rule of exchange sacrifices is to always ask, 'How good are the rooks?' If the enemy rooks are active, the exchange sacrifice will almost always fail, no matter what the compensation is. Here, if White were to sacrifice an exchange on c5 and take back the pawn with the second rook, Black's rooks would be very far from anything one might consider active, and White's additional compensation would be notable.

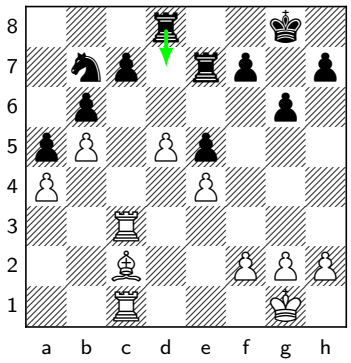
27... ♘b7



A good decision, maneuvering the knight to the d6-square. A sample line would be

27... f5 Not a good move, but let's see a position where the exchange sacrifice would work. 28.♖c1 fxe4 29.♖xc5 bxc5 30.♗xe4 This is very dangerous for Black. The rooks lack good prospects, the c5-pawn is toast, and the d6 and b6 breaks are always a headache.

28.♖c1 ♖d8



Black prepares to overprotect the c7-pawn with ...Rdd7.

29.♗d1

White gets ready to go Bg4 if a rook were to appear on d7.

29... ♘d6

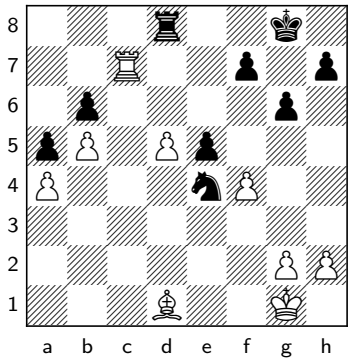
At this point, while giving the lecture for KCT, I asked what White should play, and Kirk Ghazarian, now a grandmaster, immediately wrote 'Rxc7, no- brainer'. I could not help myself, and decided to make a poll: Take on c7? A) Yes, it is a no-brainer. B) No, Kirk has no brain. The wisdom of the masses prevailed, and the majority did not want to change the structure.

30.♖xc7?

This makes White's life harder. It was only Kirk's immediate reaction, of course.

30.f3 is the choice of the computer, on the grounds that Black has no way to make progress. White waits with the king on e3 and the bishop on d3. To human eyes, it looks as though Black should have a long-term advantage of the better minor piece, but White's rooks are way too good on the c-file, while Black's will remain passive defending a weak pawn. For example: ♖dd7 31.♔f2 f5 32.♗c2 ♔g7 33.♗d3 Maybe someone smarter than me could come up with a credible plan for either side to make something happen in this position, but I can't. I'd expect a draw to be agreed somewhere around here. Without minor pieces, White's dominant rooks would win the game; without rooks, White would probably be lost after some ...Nb7- ...Nc5 regroup. However, neither scenario is realistic.

30... ♖xc7 31.♖xc7 ♘xe4 32.f4?



This was too optimistic. This is the most critical decision of the game. Black has three

tempting tries in ...Rxd5, ...exf4, and ...Nc5. The wisdom of crowds again prevailed in the poll taken at the KCT session. After

32.♖c6 , White would objectively hold, although Black should be able to get to a four-against-three situation on the kingside. This would not be a bad enough version for it to be lost for White, although there would be more moves to be made. The following line looks natural and human: ♖xd5 33.♗f3 ♖d4 34.♖xb6 ♖xa4 35.g3 ♘c3N 36.♗c6 ♖b4 37.♖a6 ♘xb5N 38.♖xa5 ♘d4N The knight is better than the bishop, and White has some suffering up ahead, but I would expect a draw.

32... ♖xd5?

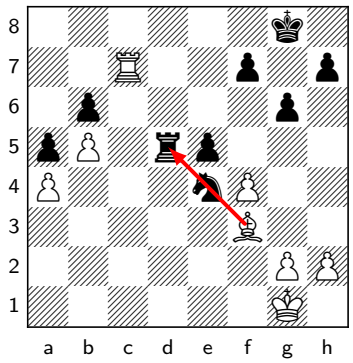
The most obvious move, but not the best. Black should understand that White's best hopes of saving the game lie in reaching a rook endgame with one pawn less and a mostly symmetrical structure. As such, Black should be either trying to alter the structure or maintain the minor pieces. As it turns out, either of the other two options would have won, and Onischuk chose the only one that allowed White to retain a defensible position. □ The cleanest way to win was: □

32... ♘c5N 33.fxe5 ♖xd5 34.♗e2 ♖xe5 35.♗c4 ♖f5 36.♖c6 It was important to see from the start that Black can play ♖f4 followed by ...Nxa4. The knight is clearly better than the bishop, while the same position without minor pieces would be an easy draw for White. Perhaps this is what Onischuk missed. 37.♗a2 ♘xa4N 38.♗b3 can now be met by ♘c5N 39.♗a2 ♖a4 or

39... ♖d4 The key is that the rook got to the 4th rank with tempo.

32... exf4 also wins, but the calculation to justify it is harder. That's why I think the line above was the cleaner way: 33.♗f3 ♘c5N 34.♖c6 ♘xa4N 35.d6 Up next is Bd1, kicking the knight away. That way, White could get a second far-advanced passed pawn after taking on b6. Care must be taken. ♔g7 The point of this move is hard to see from afar, but it does make sense when you peel back the layers: 36.♗d1 ♘c5N 37.♖xb6 ♘e4N And now if 38.♗f3 Black is able to play ♖xd6 as Rb8 isn't a check with the king on g7. After 39.♖a6 ♖d4 40.♖xa5 f5 , Black should win, but there is still some work to do.

33.♗f3



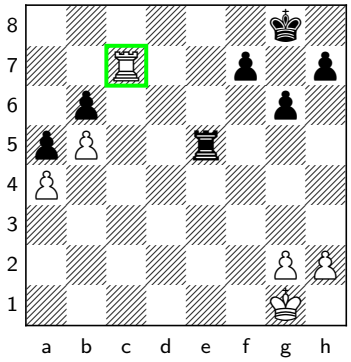
33.♗b3? ♖c5 is game over.

33... ♖d4

A painful way to lose a chess game would be:

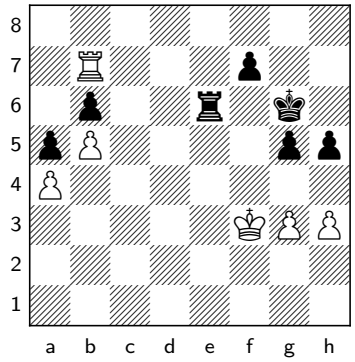
33... ♖c5? 34.♖c6 Oops. Surprisingly, Black can basically resign.

34.♗xe4 ♖xe4 35.fxe5 ♖xe5



If the queenside pawns are liquidated, it is clearly a draw. Black can defend his queenside with ...Re6, but this is also a clear draw. Let's again refer to Theoretical Rook Endgames, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) where I broke down positions where one side is a pawn up, with pawns on both sides of the board and no passed pawns. The guideline is first to consider the side of the board with an extra pawn. In our example, without the queenside pawns, the position on the kingside would be a draw. Then, the position of the defending rook on the other side of the board is considered. On the queenside, the defending rook is not tied passively to the defense of a pawn. Therefore, the position should be drawn. As such, we have to conclude that taking on d5 on move 32 was a serious mistake that should have cost Black half a point. He should have tried to understand which piece exchanges were in his favor before making that decision.

36.♖b7 ♖e6 37.♔f2 g5 38.♔f3 h5 39.h3 ♔g7 40.g3 ♔g6



Black is not going to win this game on the kingside. His best chance is trying to transfer his king to the queenside to take the a \- and b-pawns. This will abandon his kingside, but he hopes that, as he has a material advantage on the kingside, it will take White too long to take enough pawns.

41.g4?

While this is still a technical draw, it was a bad practical decision on the first move after the time control. It gives Black the possibility of liquidating the kingside. White will then not have a passed pawn on the kingside to counter Black's queenside invasion. But it also might mean, as played in the game, that if the kingside pawns are retained, White does not obtain a passed pawn. White needs to make sure that as soon as he starts taking Black's kingside pawns, he will have a passed pawn:

41.h4 f6 42.♖b8 White correctly waits and continues to pressure the b6-pawn. I can't even think of anything for Black to try. The rook is stuck defending b6, and ...Kf5

can always be met by a rook transfer to the h-file, which will quickly give White a passed pawn.

42.♖c7? g4† 43.♔f4 ♖e1 44.♖c6 ♖a1 45.♖xb6 ♖xa4† 46.♔e3 ♖a3† 47.♔f2 ♖a2† There is still some work to be done for Black, but White's king gets trapped on the back rank, since 48.♔e3 loses the g3-pawn to ♖g2 .

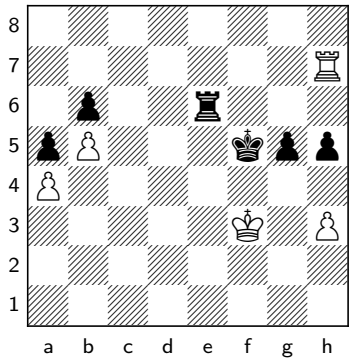
42... ♔f5 43.♖h8 If Black focuses on the queenside, White will immediately get a passed pawn and create counterplay on the kingside. White would lose after wasting a tempo:

41... f5 42.gxf5†

Continuing to wait with

42.♖b8 was also fine, but it looks risky to a human eye: fxg4† 43.hxg4 hxg4† 44.♔xg4 ♔f6 My computer screams it's a draw, but I would not be even remotely confident of this in a practical game. Black's king is running towards b4, and if White's rook ever tries to cut him off, Black's rook can start to harass the a4-pawn.

42... ♔xf5 43.♖h7?



White should stick with the Theoretical Rook Endgames (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) program and use the rook to harass the undefended black pawn. Hence, correct was

43.♖b8 .

43... ♔g6 44.♖d7

44.♖b7 loses to ♖f6† 45.♔e3

45.♔g2 ♔f5 and the black king runs to the queenside. 46.♖h7 h4 Compared to the position at the end of the 41.h4! line, White's kingside counterplay is slower. It simply takes more tempi to create a passer.

45... g4 or

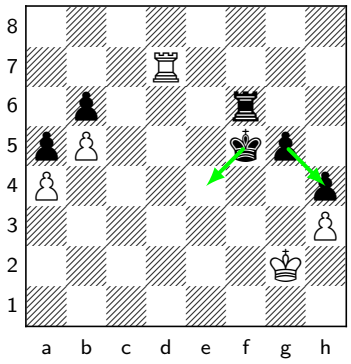
44... ♖f6†! 45.♔g3

White had a draw, but only by making four ridiculous moves in a row:

45.♔e3 g4 46.h4 g3 47.♖d5 ♔h6 White goes from only move to only move, according to the computer. I'm not even sure why these moves are forced! 48.♖d2 or

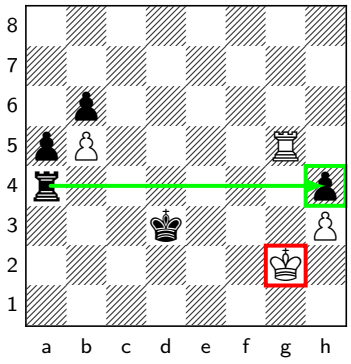
48.♖d1 .

45... h4† 46.♔g2 ♔f5!



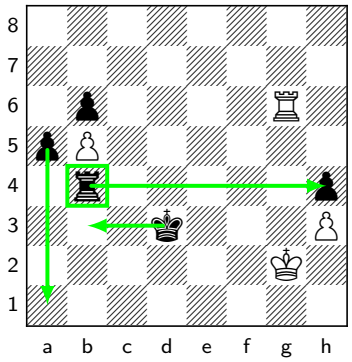
White's counterplay on the kingside is now much too slow. The race is not even close. Imagine a 100-meter race between Usain Bolt and Jacob Aagaard... even that would seem closer than the time it will take for White to bring the rook to take g5, then h4, then get out of the way, then push the h-pawn, then bring the king to support it. By contrast, Black has a clean route to the queenside.

47.♖d8 ♔e4 48.♖g8 ♔f4! 49.♖d8 ♔e3 50.♖e8† ♔d3 51.♖g8 ♖f4 52.♖xg5 ♖xa4



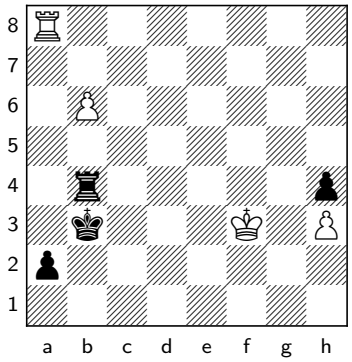
This neatly cuts off White's king and keeps the h4-pawn safe.

53.♖g6 ♖b4



The rook is an awesome piece. It will keep White's passed pawn at bay, keep the h4-pawn secure, and Black can bring his king to b3. It's all over.

54.♖xb6 ♔c4 55.♔f3 a4 56.♖b8 a3 57.b6 a2 58.♖a8 ♔b3



The key moment in the game was the decision needed at Black's 32nd move. This decision highlighted the importance of evaluating which piece exchanges are favorable when converting (or fighting against) an extra pawn. It also showcased the importance of precise calculation at a critical moment.

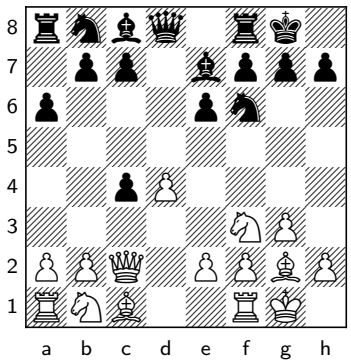
Surya Ganguly-Alexander Onischuk Introduction

This is a game played between two good friends of mine at the World Team Championship. It started with the old main line of the Catalan.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.♘f3 O-O 6.O-O dxc4 7.♕c2

White's main option.

7... a6



Black wants to develop his light-squared bishop on the long diagonal to oppose the g2-bishop. But it is important to precede the development of the bishop with ...a7-a6 and a2-a4. This is because after

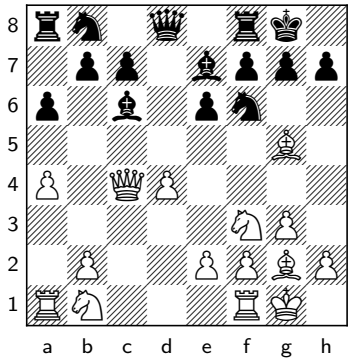
7... ♗d7 8.♕xc4 ♗c6 9.♘c3N ♘bd7N 10.♕d3 , Black is unable to prevent White from grabbing all of the space in the center with e4. White is then much better, as Black is uncoordinated and unable to break with ...c5.

8.a4

This has been the most popular approach for many years now.

8.♕xc4 was Boris Avrukh's first recommendation in 2008 and the old main line. Nevertheless, he also switched to the text move in his updated Grandmaster Repertoire in 2015.

8... ♗d7 9.♕xc4 ♗c6 10.♗g5



If White plays as in the previous line to prepare e4 with Nevertheless, a decent alternative to the text move for White is

10.♘c3?N , the insertion of the moves with the a-pawns is important, as Black is able to counter with b5 It turns out the pawn on b5 cannot be taken, and White is about to lose a lot of time: 11.♕d3 b4 12.♘b1N ♗e4 Black has managed to kick both the queen and knight and has created an escape square for his light-squared bishop, enabling the ...c5 pawn break in some lines. White has not been able to achieve e4 and stands worse. No matter where the queen goes, Black can follow up with 13.– c5 and 14.– Nbd7 .

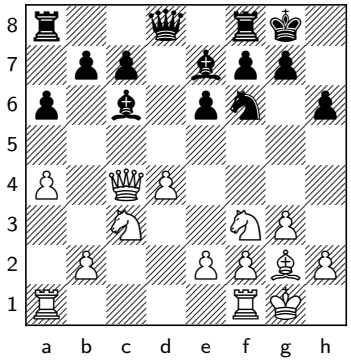
10.♗f4 , when a relatively popular direction is: ♗d6 11.♕c1 I once beat Jorden van Foreest from this position, in the final round of the 2021 Prague Masters to

clinch the tournament victory. Black has some problems to solve in both this position and the one that occurs in the game we're currently studying. Of course, he should be fine in both cases if he knows what to do and how to coordinate his pieces.

10... ♘bd7 11.♘c3

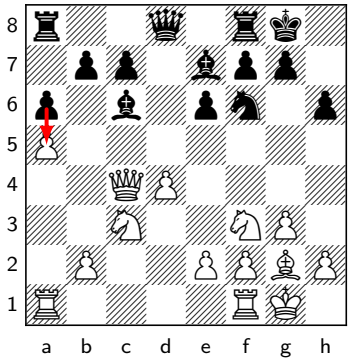
White can play this now, as the a1-rook is protected, so ...b5 is no longer a threat. In addition, the black knight has already moved from b8 to d7, so the c6-bishop would be hanging as well.

11... h6 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6



Black is fine, although White has various ways to apply some pressure.

13.a5!?



Advantageously fixing the queenside structure, before Black gets to play ...a5. If I played

13.♖fe1 , White has some pressure after ♗xf3

13... ♗d5 , as he would get a comfortable structure after the exchange of minor pieces: 14.♘xd5N exd5 is fully equal. 14... Bd5 14.Qd3 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 c6 The key to this structure is that White would gain an advantage if he could safely clamp down with a5. However, this will not be possible in this version, as the white queen has been distracted from the defense of the weak b4-square; pushing the pawn to a5 would therefore lose it to ...Bb4. Instead, it is Black who will achieve ...a5, after which ...Qb6 will eye the weaknesses on b4 and b2.

14.♗xf3 c6 . But Black is able to play

13.e3? against Karjakin in the 2021 World Cup, with the idea: ♕d6 14.♖fb1 White is pushing for b4, inviting Black's queen to come there prematurely. Karjakin correctly chose not to and played a5 instead, which is indeed best, but I still managed to win the game. My main point was:

14... ♕b4 15.♕xb4 ♗xb4 16.♘e5N ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♗d6 18.♘d3N The knight is able to sit proudly on the d3-square, a typical occurrence in the Catalan. From there, it will help launch a strong minority attack. White should be a bit better with b5 coming next. Black would like to play 17\. Kxg2

17...c5? , but it backfires due to 18.Na2! , when Black's coordination is disturbed.

13... ♕d6

Black demonstrates that he is aware of the key ideas in this structure. The idea of White's move was that in the line

13... ♗d5 14.♕d3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 it is White who has been able to place his pawn on a5. White should have an edge here, particularly as the knights have not been exchanged.

14.♖fd1 b5

This is not the most natural move for Black, and it was not his best option. Neither should Black rush to place his queen on b4: Hence, Black should improve his pieces before taking direct action, and he would have a relatively comfortable position after choosing a simple developing move like

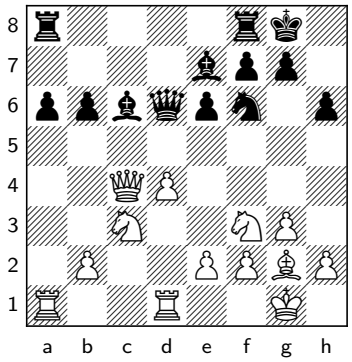
14... ♕b4 15.♕xb4 ♗xb4 16.♘e5N ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♖fd8 18.♘d3N White is now able to meet ♖xd4 with 19.e3 ♖c4 20.♖a4 , winning an exchange. Therefore, the d4-pawn was immune, and White is able to exert some pressure in the endgame. That would not be the case if, for example, Black had waited for White to push the e-pawn to e4 before going for ...Qb4.

14... ♖fd8 .

15.axb6

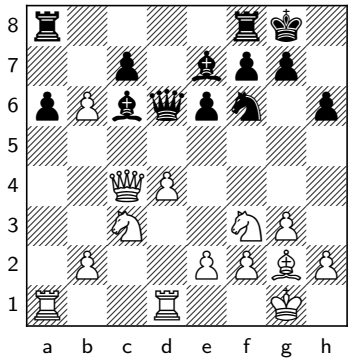
Our first critical moment comes after

15... cxb6



. Part of converting an extra pawn is winning an extra pawn. What should White play?

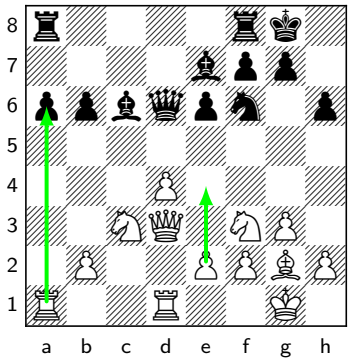
Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #1



15... cxb6

Part of converting an extra pawn is winning an extra pawn. What should White play?

16.♕d3!



This threatens both Rxa6 and e2-e4, demonstrating that the exchange of the white a-pawn for the black c-pawn was in White's favor. Taking on a6 immediately doesn't work out well for White: B) Also bad for White is 16. Qd3 17.Qa2? Rxa6 18.Qxa6 Ra8 19.Qb6 Nd7 , when 20.Nxb5 is the only way to save the queen, but 20...Nxb6 leaves Black with an extra piece. C) Comparatively better is 16. Qd3 17.Qxc6?! , yet after 17...Rxa6 18.Qxd6 Rxd6 , Black is slightly better – White only has a pawn for the exchange. D) 16\. Qd3 17.Rxc6! The only way to avoid major trouble. 17...bxc4 18.Rxd6 Bxd6 19.Ne5 White will either take the pawn on c4 or seriously annoy the black rooks by planting the knight on c6. It should be holdable with best play, but Black is the one pushing.

16.♖xa6 b5 and now: A) After 17.♘xb5?N ♗xb5 , White can resign.

16... b5

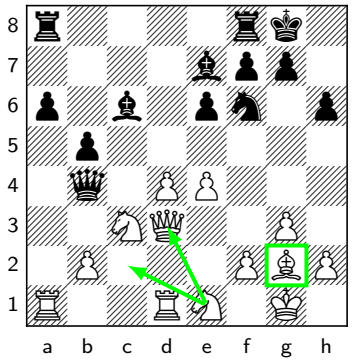
A natural alternative to the game continuation

16... ♗b7 Black's best option, trying to hang on to the weak pawn on a6.

17.e4! ♕b4

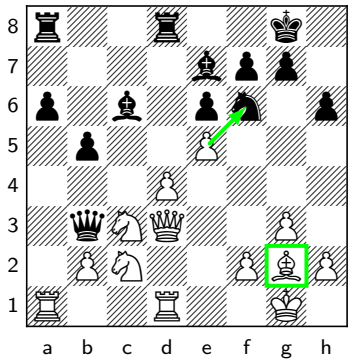
White now has a strong maneuver, highlighting the weakness of the a6-pawn, and the need for the a8-rook to remain guarding that pawn.

18.♘e1!



White clears the long diagonal for the g2-bishop to show its strength, while rerouting the knight towards either c2 or d3, harassing the black queen in the process. For example:

18... ♖fd8 19.♘c2 ♕b3 20.e5!



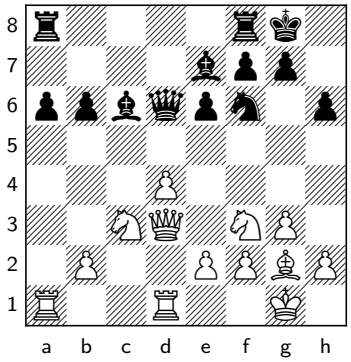
White is much better, as Black loses material after both:

20... ♗xg2

20... ♘d5N 21.♘xd5N ♗xd5 22.♕xb3 ♗xb3 23.♗xa8 ♗xc2 .

21.exf6

Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #2



16... ♗b7

Black's best option, trying to hang on to the weak pawn on a6. How did Surya continue?

17.e4 ♕b8

Walking away from e4-e5. The momentum of the game over the last couple of moves has been in White's favor, and Ganguly now finds another strong move. The positionally desirable

17... ♕b4 was not possible, as the queen would find herself in trouble. For example: 18.♖a4 ♕b3 19.♘d2N ♕xb2 20.♖b1 And it is the hunter who is trapped in the end.

18.e5!

It is tempting to kick the knight off the f6-square, but this allows it to land on d5. Therefore, White should consider including d4-d5 first, aiming to take the d5-square away from the knight. As shown below, this typical operation does not work in this case. However, White should also pay attention to the Shankland Rule – the move White wants to make is e4-e5, but it looks like it doesn't work; what happens if he plays it anyway? Let's examine the aforementioned idea:

18.d5? This is a typical maneuver in the Catalan and similar openings. White wants to force Black to occupy the d5-square with a pawn before pushing e4-e5, thus blocking the b7-bishop and misplacing the f6-knight. However, a useful rule of thumb is that this rarely works if Black can respond with ...Ne4, which is indeed the case here. For example: ♖d8

18... exd5? 19.e5 ♘e4?N 20.♘xd5N , when Black's position quickly collapses.

19.♕e2 exd5 20.e5 ♘e4N Black is at least fine and could soon become clearly better if White is not careful. White's idea is successful after the unsophisticated

18... ♘d5

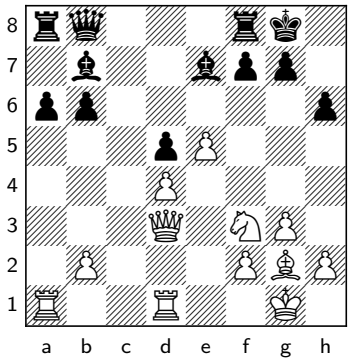
This is correct, but it drops a pawn. After

18... ♘d7?N 19.d5 , White's center looks menacing, and the e5-pawn is immune from capture: ♘xe5?N 20.♘xe5N ♕xe5 21.d6 ♗xg2 22.dxe7 White wins material.

19.♘xd5

Exploiting the weakness of the a6-pawn. Black has a losing structure after:

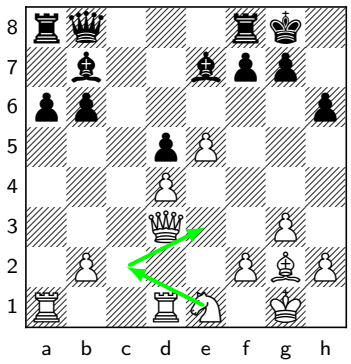
19... exd5?



Onischuk played

19... ♗xd5 20.♖xa6 White has won a pawn, but Black has some compensation. He has the bishop pair, and the d4-pawn is weak. Also, the extra pawn on d4 is a long way from making itself count.

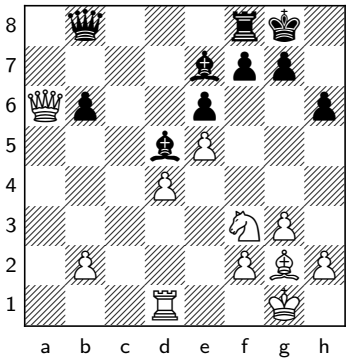
20.♘e1!



Or

20.♘d2N with the same Nf1-Ne3 idea. White will combine threats to the d5-pawn with an attack against the black king. Up next is Nc2-Ne3, and f2-f4-f5 is always in the air. Black has no counterplay at all.

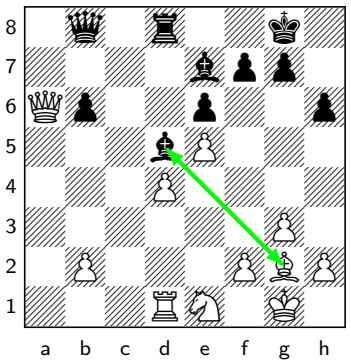
Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #3



21... ♖d8?!

It wasn't easy to distinguish among the slight differences between Black's approaches, but this is a second inaccuracy in a row. This is a good moment to remind ourselves of the principles behind converting an extra pawn: 1) Stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. 2) Evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes to the structure, will help you win, and which will favor your opponent. 3) Come up with a plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game, the plan making use of the extra pawn at some point or in some other way justifying its presence. We need to have a clear purpose of what the extra pawn is trying to achieve. With that in mind, how should White proceed?

22.♘e1!



White's position is stable, and he is not facing any direct threats. To use the extra pawn most effectively, White needs to accomplish the d4-d5 break. At first sight, this looks difficult to achieve, as Black has the square well guarded. But his e7-bishop does nothing to prevent the push, whereas the white knight can position itself to support it. As far as exchanges go, White clearly wants to exchange the light-squared bishops, robbing Black of his bishop pair. Black's remaining dark-squared bishop will be weaker than the white knight, and White will be able to achieve the d4-d5 break. Exchanging both sets of minor pieces would be likely to lead to a draw, as Black would merely double his major pieces on the d-file. Opposite-colored bishops left on the board, together with the major pieces, would give White good winning chances (although this is unlikely to happen). White would then be able to achieve the d4-d5 push easily. Also, White would have the strong plan of pushing h2-h4-h5 and then establishing a queen-and- bishop battery on the b1-h7 diagonal. The exchange of the knight for the dark- squared bishop would quickly lead to the exchange of the light-squared bishops as well. White does not want the exchange of his light-squared bishop for Black's dark-squared bishop, as the long diagonal would be too weak, particularly with the queens remaining on the board. So, having done that assessment, we ultimately can conclude that the best exchange White can hope to arrange is to get the light-squared bishops off the board.

22... ♗xg2

How does White want to coordinate his pieces with the aim of eventually achieving d4-d5? White would be happy with a queen exchange, as it would be much easier for White to bring his king to e4 to support d4-d5 than it would be for Black to bring his king to the center. The best square for the knight is e3, where it covers all the key squares and supports d4-d5. It would therefore be desirable to recapture with the knight, but this leaves White's central pawns lacking in defense. Is White able to recapture with the knight?

23.♔xg2!

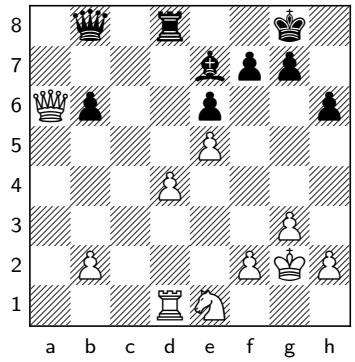
In converting the extra pawn, White needs to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Taking with the knight would be more strategically desirable, and thus the ideal scenario, but it runs into concrete issues. In this case, White is safe, and the knight will only be one move slower to get to e3. After

23.♘xg2?N fails to the neat reply: ♗c5 24.♕c4 ♕xe5 25.dxe5 ♖xd1† 26.♘e1N ♖xe1† 27.♔g2 ♖xe5 Black is not going to lose this game. In fact, I would prefer his side of the board, and I could at least imagine an accident happening to White.

23... ♗c5 24.♘c2N

, there are no ...Qxe5 tricks and White keeps the position under control.

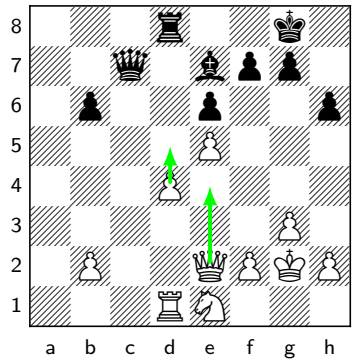
Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #4



23... ♕c7

How does White continue with his plan? What is the best square for White's queen?

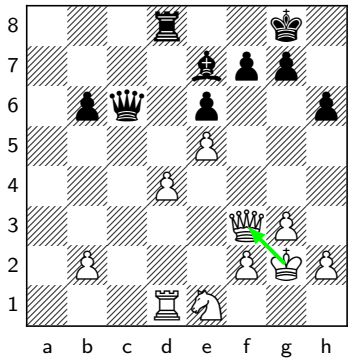
24.♕e2!



White wants his queen to be on e4, where it defends the center, controls the long diagonal, and powers the d4-d5 break.

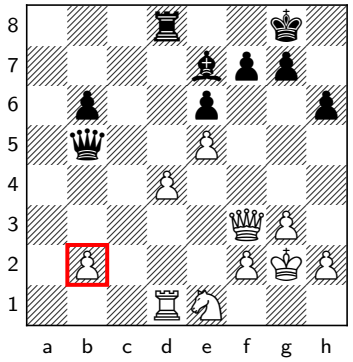
24.♕d3 would allow Black the possibility of playing f6 .

24... ♕c6† 25.♕f3



As previously mentioned, White is happy with the trade of queens.

25... ♕b5



Black harasses the b2-pawn, to which White has only one response. After

25... ♕xf3† , White happily centralizes his king with 26.♔xf3 .

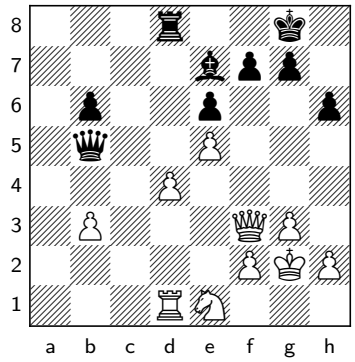
26.b3

There followed

26... ♕a5

It is still slightly difficult for White to coordinate. Let's move on to our next exercise.

Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #5



26... ♕a5

It is still slightly difficult for White to coordinate. How can he improve his position?

27.h4!

Ganguly understands that Black doesn't currently have a threat, so he is not in any hurry to reach the desired constellation of pieces. He first makes a useful improving move on the kingside and waits until the next move to start reshuffling his pieces. The d3-square is ideal for his rook, as from there it defends the b3-pawn. So, the ideal setup is knight on e3, queen on e4, and rook on d3. □ □ □

27.♖d3? is not possible, as it hangs the knight.

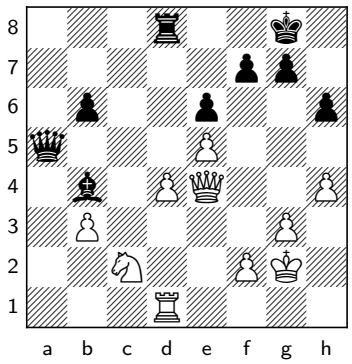
27.♘c2?N is met by ♕a2 . This is annoying, as White cannot then move the knight to e3 or the queen to e4.

27.♕e4 is the correct order of doing things, and it was fine too. Nevertheless, Surya not being in a rush is instructive and was a wise approach.

27... ♗f8 28.♕e4! ♗b4 29.♘c2N ♗c3

Black is trying to pressure the d4-pawn and make it hard for the knight to reach d3. We'll continue in our next exercise.

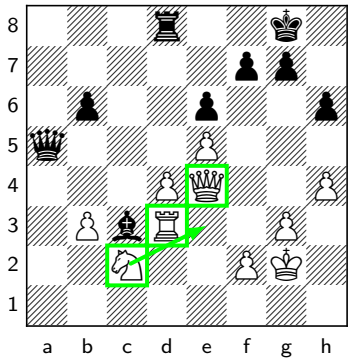
Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #6



29... ♗c3

Black is trying to pressure the d4-pawn and make it hard for the knight to reach d3. How should White continue?

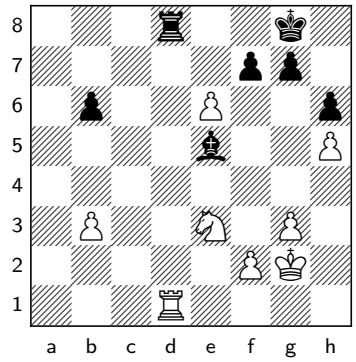
30.♖d3!



Still though, Black has no direct threats, and White does not need to rush. After

30.♘e3N ♕b4 my computer claims White still wins, but it is getting trickier. The d4-pawn will not be easy to save.

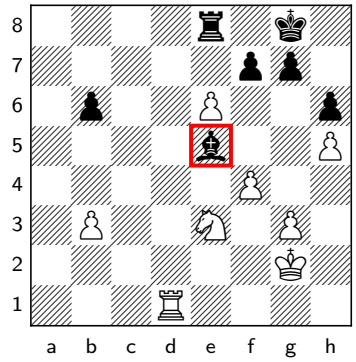
Ganguly-Onischuk Exercise #7



37... ♖e8

How should White proceed?

38.f4!



This is the cleanest way towards victory. The wrong move order would be

38.exf7† ♔xf7 39.f4? ♗xf4 and White loses all his advantage.

38... ♗f6

Or

38... ♗b8 39.exf7† ♔xf7 40.♖d7† and White wins.

39.exf7† ♔xf7 40.♘c4N

The game is effectively over.

40.♖d7† and

40.♔f3 also win.

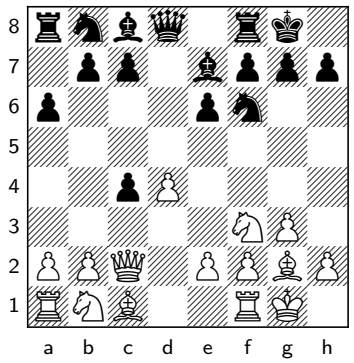
Surya Ganguly-Alexander Onischuk, Astana 2019

This is a game played between two good friends of mine at the World Team Championship. It started with the old main line of the Catalan.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.♘f3 O-O 6.O-O dxc4 7.♕c2

White's main option.

7... a6



Black wants to develop his light-squared bishop on the long diagonal to oppose the g2-bishop. But it is important to precede the development of the bishop with ...a7-a6 and a2-a4. This is because after

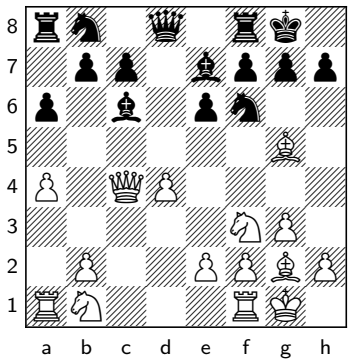
7... ♗d7 8.♕xc4 ♗c6 9.♘c3N ♘bd7N 10.♕d3 , Black is unable to prevent White from grabbing all of the space in the center with e4. White is then much better, as Black is uncoordinated and unable to break with ...c5.

8.a4

This has been the most popular approach for many years now.

8.♕xc4 was Boris Avrukh's first recommendation in 2008 and the old main line. Nevertheless, he also switched to the text move in his updated Grandmaster Repertoire in 2015.

8... ♗d7 9.♕xc4 ♗c6 10.♗g5



If White plays as in the previous line to prepare e4 with Nevertheless, a decent alternative to the text move for White is

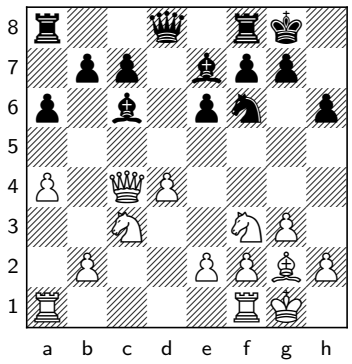
10.♘c3?N , the insertion of the moves with the a-pawns is important, as Black is able to counter with b5 It turns out the pawn on b5 cannot be taken, and White is about to lose a lot of time: 11.♕d3 b4 12.♘b1N ♗e4 Black has managed to kick both the queen and knight and has created an escape square for his light-squared bishop, enabling the ...c5 pawn break in some lines. White has not been able to achieve e4 and stands worse. No matter where the queen goes, Black can follow up with 13.– c5 and 14.– Nbd7 .

10.♗f4 , when a relatively popular direction is: ♗d6 11.♕c1 I once beat Jorden van Foreest from this position, in the final round of the 2021 Prague Masters to clinch the tournament victory. Black has some problems to solve in both this position and the one that occurs in the game we're currently studying. Of course, he should be fine in both cases if he knows what to do and how to coordinate his pieces.

10... ♘bd7 11.♘c3

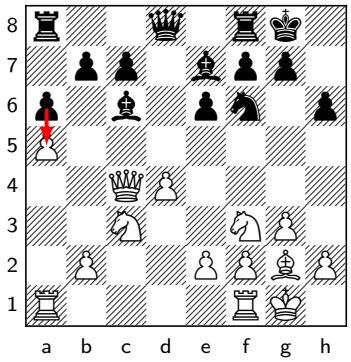
White can play this now, as the a1-rook is protected, so ...b5 is no longer a threat. In addition, the black knight has already moved from b8 to d7, so the c6-bishop would be hanging as well.

11... h6 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6



Black is fine, although White has various ways to apply some pressure.

13.a5!?



Advantageously fixing the queenside structure, before Black gets to play ...a5. If I played

13.♖fe1 , White has some pressure after ♗xf3

13... ♗d5 , as he would get a comfortable structure after the exchange of minor pieces: 14.♘xd5N exd5 is fully equal. 14... Bd5 14.Qd3 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 c6 The key to this structure is that White would gain an advantage if he could safely clamp down with a5. However, this will not be possible in this version, as the white queen has been distracted from the defense of the weak b4-square; pushing the pawn to a5 would therefore lose it to ...Bb4. Instead, it is Black who will achieve ...a5, after which ...Qb6 will eye the weaknesses on b4 and b2.

14.♗xf3 c6 . But Black is able to play

13.e3? against Karjakin in the 2021 World Cup, with the idea: ♕d6 14.♖fb1 White is pushing for b4, inviting Black's queen to come there prematurely. Karjakin correctly chose not to and played a5 instead, which is indeed best, but I still managed to win the game. My main point was:

14... ♕b4 15.♕xb4 ♗xb4 16.♘e5N ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♗d6 18.♘d3N The knight is able to sit proudly on the d3-square, a typical occurrence in the Catalan. From there, it will help launch a strong minority attack. White should be a bit better with b5 coming next. Black would like to play 17\. Kxg2 17...c5? , but it backfires due to 18.Na2! , when Black's coordination is disturbed.

13... ♕d6

Black demonstrates that he is aware of the key ideas in this structure. The idea of White's move was that in the line

13... ♗d5 14.♕d3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 it is White who has been able to place his pawn on a5. White should have an edge here, particularly as the knights have not been exchanged.

14.♖fd1 b5

This is not the most natural move for Black, and it was not his best option. Neither should Black rush to place his queen on b4: Hence, Black should improve his pieces before taking direct action, and he would have a relatively comfortable position after choosing a simple developing move like

14... ♕b4 15.♕xb4 ♗xb4 16.♘e5N ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♖fd8 18.♘d3N White is now able to meet ♖xd4 with 19.e3 ♖c4 20.♖a4 , winning an exchange. Therefore, the d4-pawn was immune, and White is able

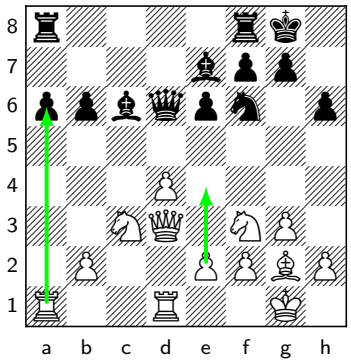
to exert some pressure in the endgame. That would not be the case if, for example, Black had waited for White to push the e-pawn to e4 before going for ...Qb4.

14... ♖fd8 .

15.axb6 cxb6

What should White play?

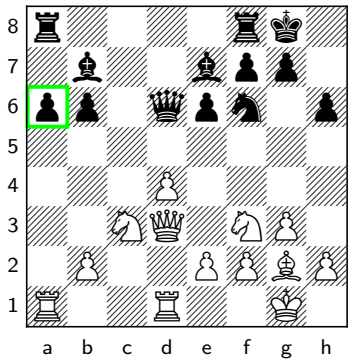
16.♕d3!



This threatens both Rxa6 and e2-e4, demonstrating that the exchange of the white a-pawn for the black c-pawn was in White's favor. Taking on a6 immediately doesn't work out well for White: B) Also bad for White is 16. Qd3 17.Qa2? Rxa6 18.Qxa6 Ra8 19.Qb6 Nd7 , when 20.Nxb5 is the only way to save the queen, but 20...Nxb6 leaves Black with an extra piece. C) Comparatively better is 16. Qd3 17.Qxc6?! , yet after 17...Rxa6 18.Qxd6 Rxd6 , Black is slightly better – White only has a pawn for the exchange. D) 16\. Qd3 17.Rxc6! The only way to avoid major trouble. 17...bxc4 18.Rxd6 Bxd6 19.Ne5 White will either take the pawn on c4 or seriously annoy the black rooks by planting the knight on c6. It should be holdable with best play, but Black is the one pushing.

16.♖xa6 b5 and now: A) After 17.♘xb5?N ♗xb5 , White can resign.

16... ♗b7



Black's best option, trying to hang on to the weak pawn on a6. A natural alternative would be:

16... b5 17.e4 ♕b4 White now has a strong maneuver, highlighting the weakness of the a6-pawn, and the need for the a8-rook to remain guarding that pawn. 18.♘e1N White clears the long diagonal for the g2-bishop to show its strength, while rerouting the knight towards either c2 or d3, harassing the black queen in the process. For example: ♖fd8 19.♘c2N ♕b3 20.e5 White is much better, as Black loses material after both ♗xg2

20... ♘d5N 21.♘xd5N ♗xd5 22.♕xb3 ♗xb3 23.♗xa8 ♗xc2 .

21.exf6 and

17.e4 ♕b8

Walking away from e4-e5. The momentum of the game over the last couple of moves has been in White's favor, and Ganguly now

finds another strong move. The positionally desirable

17... ♕b4 was not possible, as the queen would find herself in trouble. For example: 18.♖a4 ♕b3 19.♘d2N ♕xb2 20.♖b1 And it is the hunter who is trapped in the end.

18.e5!

It is tempting to kick the knight off the f6-square, but this allows it to land on d5. Therefore, White should consider including d4-d5 first, aiming to take the d5-square away from the knight. As shown below, this typical operation does not work in this case. However, White should also pay attention to the Shankland Rule – the move White wants to make is e4-e5, but it looks like it doesn't work; what happens if he plays it anyway? Let's examine the aforementioned idea:

18.d5? This is a typical maneuver in the Catalan and similar openings. White wants to force Black to occupy the d5-square with a pawn before pushing e4-e5, thus blocking the b7-bishop and misplacing the f6-knight. However, a useful rule of thumb is that this rarely works if Black can respond with ...Ne4, which is indeed the case here. For example: ♖d8

18... exd5? 19.e5 ♘e4?N 20.♘xd5N , when Black's position quickly collapses.

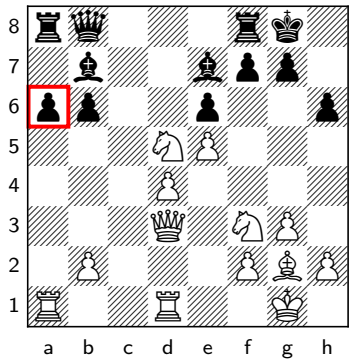
19.♕e2 exd5 20.e5 ♘e4N Black is at least fine and could soon become clearly better if White is not careful. White's idea is successful after the unsophisticated

18... ♘d5

This is correct, but it drops a pawn. After

18... ♘d7?N 19.d5 , White's center looks menacing, and the e5-pawn is immune from capture: ♘xe5?N 20.♘xe5N ♕xe5 21.d6 ♗xg2 22.dxe7 White wins material.

19.♘xd5



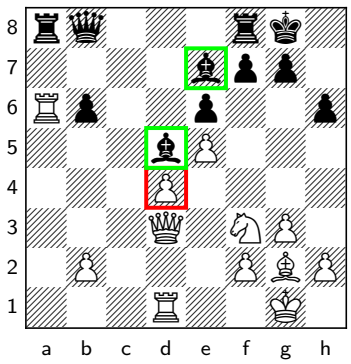
Exploiting the weakness of the a6-pawn.

19... ♗xd5

Black has a losing structure after:

19... exd5? 20.♘e1N White will combine threats to the d5-pawn with an attack against the black king. Up next is Nc2-Ne3, and f2-f4-f5 is always in the air. Black has no counterplay at all.

20.♖xa6



White has won a pawn, but Black has some compensation. He has the bishop pair, and the d4-pawn is weak. Also, the extra pawn on d4 is a long way from making itself count.

20... ♖xa6?!

A more flexible option was

20... ♖d8 .

21.♕xa6 ♖d8?!

21... ♕c7 was more to the point, introducing ideas of creating counterplay involving an invasion down the c-file or harassing the white rook with ...Bb3. The queen on c7 is important, as this way the white rook is denied access to the c-file. It wasn't easy to distinguish among the slight differences between Black's approaches, but this is a second inaccuracy in a row. This is a good moment to remind ourselves of the principles behind converting an extra pawn: 1) Stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. 2) Evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes to the structure, will help you win, and which will favor your opponent. 3) Come up with a plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game, the plan making use of the extra pawn at some point or in some other way justifying its presence. We need to have a clear purpose of what the extra pawn is trying to achieve. White's position is stable, and he is not facing any direct threats. To use the extra pawn most effectively, White needs to accomplish the d4-d5 break. At first sight, this looks difficult to achieve, as Black has the square well guarded. But his e7-bishop does nothing to prevent the push, whereas the white knight can position itself to support it. As far as exchanges go, White clearly wants to exchange the light-squared bishops, robbing Black of his bishop pair. Black's remaining dark-squared bishop will be weaker than the white knight, and White will be able to achieve the d4-d5 break. Exchanging both sets of minor pieces would be likely to lead to a draw, as Black would merely double his major pieces on the d-file. Opposite-colored bishops left on the board, together with the major pieces, would give White good winning chances (although this is unlikely to happen). White would then be able to achieve the d4-d5 push easily. Also, White would have the strong plan of pushing h2-h4-h5 and then establishing a queen-and- bishop battery on the b1-h7 diagonal. The exchange of the knight for the dark- squared bishop would quickly lead to the exchange of the light-squared bishops as well. White does not want the exchange

of his light-squared bishop for Black's dark-squared bishop, as the long diagonal would be too weak, particularly with the queens remaining on the board. So, having done that assessment, we ultimately can conclude that the best exchange White can hope to arrange is to get the light-squared bishops off the board. How does White achieve the desired exchange?

22.♘e1! ♗xg2

How does White want to coordinate his pieces with the aim of eventually achieving d4-d5? White would be happy with a queen exchange, as it would be much easier for White to bring his king to e4 to support d4-d5 than it would be for Black to bring his king to the center. The best square for the knight is e3, where it covers all the key squares and supports d4-d5. It would therefore be desirable to recapture with the knight, but this leaves White's central pawns lacking in defense. Is White able to recapture with the knight?

23.♔xg2!

In converting the extra pawn, White needs to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Taking with the knight would be more strategically desirable, and thus the ideal scenario, but it runs into concrete issues. In this case, White is safe, and the knight will only be one move slower to get to e3.

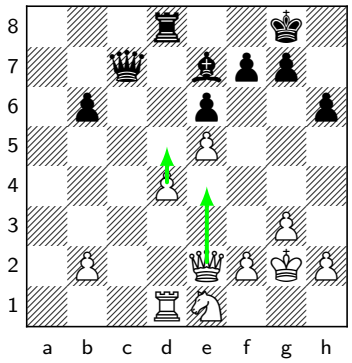
23.♘xg2?N fails to the neat reply: ♗c5 24.♕c4 ♕xe5 25.dxe5 ♖xd1† 26.♘e1N ♖xe1† 27.♔g2 ♖xe5 Black is not going to lose this game. In fact, I would prefer his side of the board, and I could at least imagine an accident happening to White.

23... ♕c7

How does White continue with his plan? What is the best square for White's queen? After

23... ♗c5 24.♘c2N , there are no ...Qxe5 tricks and White keeps the position under control.

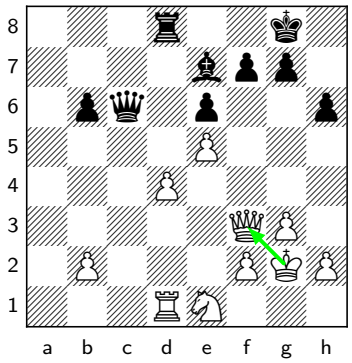
24.♕e2!



White wants his queen to be on e4, where it defends the center, controls the long diagonal, and powers the d4-d5 break.

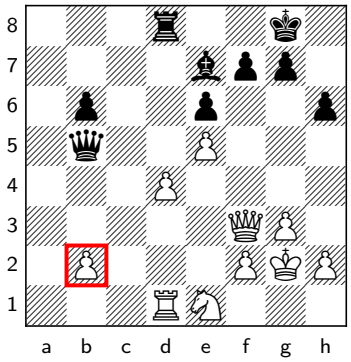
24.♕d3 would allow Black the possibility of playing f6 .

24... ♕c6† 25.♕f3



As previously mentioned, White is happy with the trade of queens.

25... ♕b5



Black harasses the b2-pawn, to which White has only one response. After

25... ♕xf3† , White happily centralizes his king with 26.♔xf3 .

26.b3 ♕a5

It is still slightly difficult for White to coordinate. How can he improve his rook? The d3-square is ideal, as from there it defends the b3-pawn. So, the ideal setup is knight on e3, queen on e4, and rook on d3.

27.h4!

Ganguly understands that Black doesn't currently have a threat, so he is not in any hurry to reach the desired constellation of pieces. He first makes a useful improving move on the kingside and waits until the next move to start reshuffling his pieces. □ □ □

27.♖d3? is not possible, as it hangs the knight.

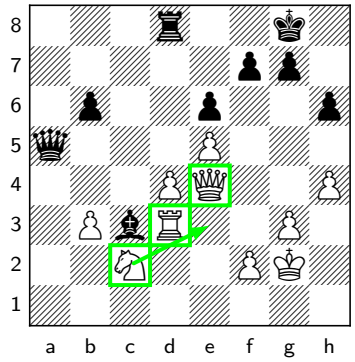
27.♘c2?N is met by ♕a2 . This is annoying, as White cannot then move the knight to e3 or the queen to e4.

27.♕e4 is the correct order of doing things, and it was fine too. Nevertheless, Surya not being in a rush is instructive and was a wise approach.

27... ♗f8 28.♕e4! ♗b4 29.♘c2 ♗c3

Black is trying to pressure the d4-pawn and make it hard for the knight to reach d3. Still, though, he has no direct threats, and White does not need to rush.

30.♖d3!



White is ready to move his knight to e3 next and then push d4-d5. After

30.♘e3N ♕b4 , my computer claims White still wins, but it is getting trickier. The d4-pawn will not be easy to save.

30... ♗d2

This is aimed against the desired knight move, as White does not want to allow an exchange of minor pieces. If Black were to wait, White can finally bring the knight to e3:

30... h5 31.♘e3N ♕b4 32.♘c4N The d4-pawn is safe, and the knight is coming to d6; Black is done for.

31.♕c6!

I like this move, which increases White's domination. Black is almost in zugzwang.

31... ♗c1

Let's also examine:

31... h5 32.♕f3 Back we go, harassing the new weakness on h5. g6 33.♕b7 Black is defenseless against the threat of Rf3, possibly preluded by a pawn sacrifice on d5.

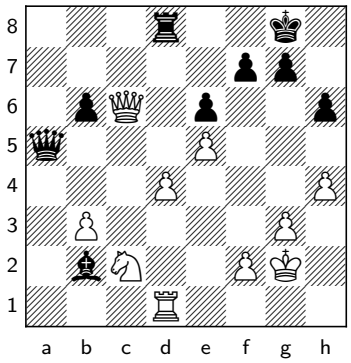
33.g4? looks logical, but Black is saved by a computer line: hxg4 34.♕xg4 ♖c8 35.h5 ♖xc2 36.hxg6 f5 37.exf6 ♕g5 With a miraculous escape.

32.♖d1

The text move does not spoil anything, but

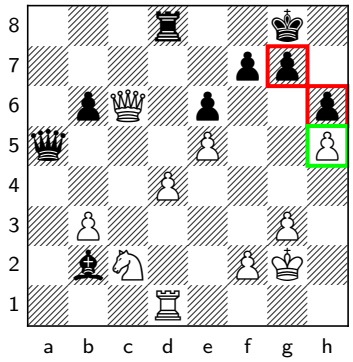
32.b4 would have exploited the drawback of the bishop moving away from the protection of b4. This further disturbs Black's coordination and denies the bishop access to the d2-square.

32... ♗b2



Black has maximized his opposition to the white plan of d4-d5, but this has meant he has neglected the defense of his kingside. He also has no direct threats.

33.h5



Gaining space and advantageously fixing the kingside structure.

33... ♕a8

Onischuk felt compelled to exchange queens, as he had started feeling the heat on the kingside. This will not save the game, but that was an impossible task anyway. White would at some point push the pawn to b4, kicking the queen away from a5. Then, the black queen wouldn't have many better prospects than acquiescing to the trade. Nevertheless, keeping things as complicated as possible might have been a better practical approach.

34.♕xa8 ♖xa8 35.♘e3!?

This is well calculated, but the slower

35.♔f3 would also have been good enough.

35... ♖d8 36.d5! ♗xe5

If

36... exd5 , both captures win: 37.♘xd5N

37.♖xd5 ♖xd5 38.♘xd5N ♗xe5 .

37... ♗xe5 runs into 38.♘e7†N or

37.dxe6 ♖e8

37... ♖xd1 fails to 38.e7 , which is a major tactical point behind White's decision on move 35.

38.f4!

This is the cleanest way towards victory. The wrong move order would be

38.exf7† ♔xf7 39.f4? ♗xf4 and White loses all his advantage.

38... ♗f6

Or

38... ♗b8 39.exf7† ♔xf7 40.♖d7† and White wins.

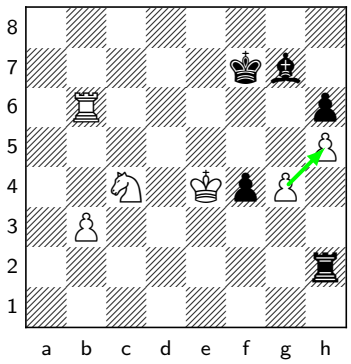
39.exf7† ♔xf7 40.♘c4

The game is effectively over.

40.♖d7† and

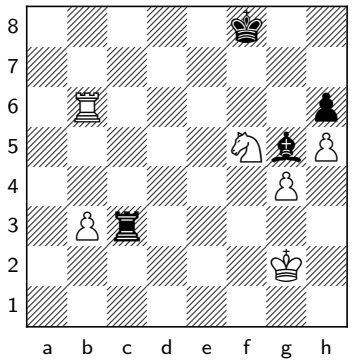
40.♔f3 also win.

40... ♖e2† 41.♔f3 ♖c2 42.♔e4 ♖h2 43.♖d5 g5 44.♖d7† ♔e8 45.♖d6 ♗g7 46.♖e6† ♔f7 47.♖xb6 gxf4 48.g4



Very professional, saving the h5-pawn.

48... ♗f6 49.♘d6† ♔f8 50.♔xf4 ♗g5† 51.♔g3 ♖d2 52.♘f5 ♖d3† 53.♔g2 ♖c3

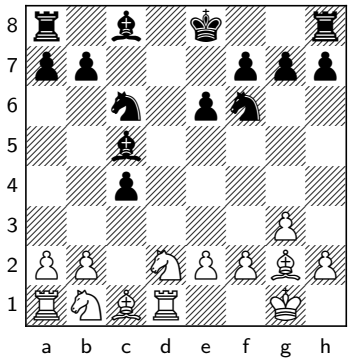


The important point in this game was the decision on White's 22nd move to exchange light-squared bishops, then to maneuver the knight to e3 to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. Also noteworthy is the subsequent optimal placement of the white pieces to achieve the d4-d5 break.

Pentala Harikrishna-Wang Hao Introduction

I played in the Prague Masters 2023, and I saw this game live. Despite Hari being borderline worse with White out of the opening, he played very well from then on and ultimately showed good technique in converting an extra pawn.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 c5 6.O-O ♘c6 7.dxc5 ♕xd1 8.♖xd1 ♗xc5 9.♘fd2



This is not a great move, but the idea is clear. White wants to take on c4 without allowing Black to play ...c4-c3.

9.♘bd2N is the main move by far, and for obvious reasons. However, c3 compromises White's structure. He still has chances to push a bit in the endgame, but theory suggests Black is doing fine.

9...♘d4

But the old

9...♗xf2†? doesn't work for many reasons. For example: 10.♔xf2 ♘g4†N 11.♔g1 ♘e3N 12.♗xc6† bxc6 13.♘c3N ♘xd1N 14.♘xd1N A lovely picture of dark-square weaknesses!

9...♘a5N is also satisfactory: 10.♘a3N ♗xa3 11.bxa3 White is going to get the dark-squared bishop to c3 via b2, but Black is OK.

10.♘c3

What should Black do?

10...♘d5!

An important move, as otherwise White recaptures the c-pawn and consolidates effectively, reaching an approximately winning position. By challenging the knight on c3, Black uses the e2-pawn as the source of his counterplay. We said it once already: Black can't tarry around. Whenever Black takes on c4 in the Catalan, if White can take the pawn back while maintaining control of the long diagonal, he often ends up more or less winning. This position is no exception. After

10...♗d7? 11.♘xc4N ♗c6 12.♗e3 , White gets a dream version of the Catalan. Black is losing on the spot.

10...♘g4?N was suggested in the KCT session, but it is way too adventurous. The cleanest refutation would be: 11.♘de4N Black cannot defend his bishop with b6 due to the hanging rook on a8.

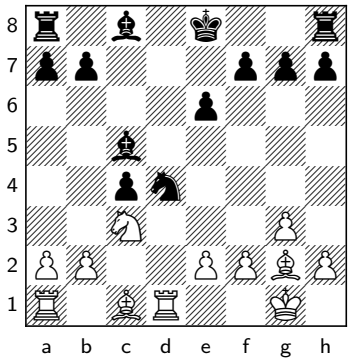
11...♗b6 12.♘d6†N ♔e7 13.♘xc4N White got back his lost pawn without allowing either counterplay or Black to contest the long diagonal. So, Black is busted.

11.♘de4

The alternative

11.♘xd5N exd5 12.♗xd5 ♗h3 is well-known to be fine for Black. He can even castle queenside!

11...♘xc3 12.♘xc3



Black is up a pawn at the moment and not facing any immediate threats. Nevertheless, White clearly has reasonable compensation. The white pieces are more active, the c8-bishop remains passive, and Be3 is coming.

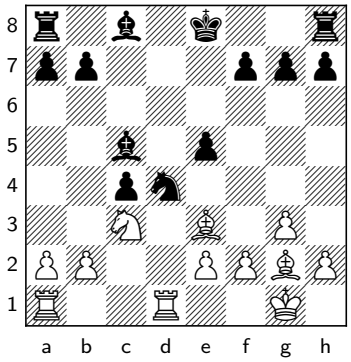
12... e5

A fine decision. This supports the d4-knight and includes the c8-bishop in the game.

13.♗e3

The position after 13...O-O-O is quite dangerous for White, but Harikrishna found a good way to solve most of his problems.

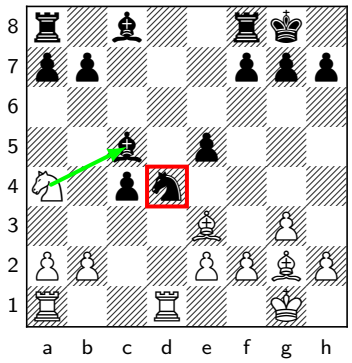
Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #1



13... O-O

This is quite dangerous for White, but Harikrishna found a good way to solve most of his problems.

14.♘a4!



Trying to remove the black bishop from protecting the d4-knight. After

14.♘e4?N has a similar idea to the text move, but it does not achieve much and exposes the e2-pawn after ♗b6 . That's the main reason why the knight should try to harass the black bishop via a4, when the bishop cannot retreat to b6 without getting captured.

14.♔f1? ♗g4? , it would be harder for White to navigate the complications and regain his pawn, than it would be for Black to develop an initiative.

14... ♘xe2†!?

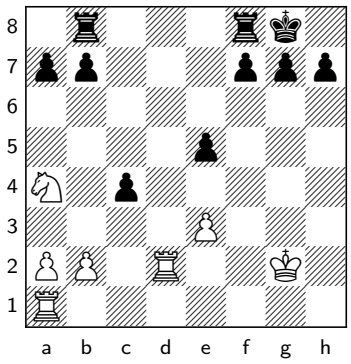
It turns out that this is actually possible. Though in human terms, I can see why Wang Hao did not go for it and played

14... ♗e7 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♖xd4 instead.

15.♔f1! ♗xe3 16.fxe3

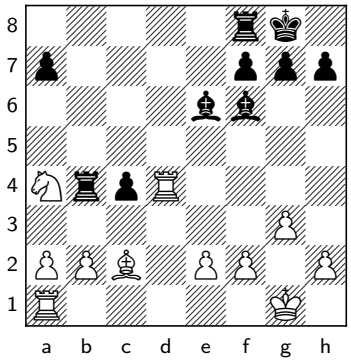
The knight is just about trapped –this was White's idea with 14.Na4!. But Black can get a lot of pawns if he plays his cards right:

16... ♗g4 17.♖d2 ♖ab8 18.h3 ♘xg3†N 19.♔f2 ♗xh3 20.♔xg3 ♗xg2 21.♔xg2



Black should be fine, but just because he could take on e2, it doesn't mean he had to. The game continuation was fine as well, and intuitively easier to navigate.

Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #2



20.♖d2

Here, Black made a surprising decision fairly quickly. What should he have done?

20... ♖xb2!

The first rule of calculation is to examine all checks and captures, and this is another example where this rule could prove to be useful. This capture was Black's best approach. □ The flashy □ Even worse is □

20... ♖xa4? doesn't work, as it merely simplifies the position with White a clear pawn ahead: 21.♗xa4 c3 22.bxc3 ♗xc3 23.♖ad1 ♗xd2 24.♖xd2 Black has lost his bishop pair and remains a pawn down.

20... ♗xb2? 21.♘xb2N Now ♖xb2 runs into

21... c3 22.♘d3N , White wins a piece. This is not a nice way to lose a game.

22.♗xh7† and after

20... g6? was a bit meek. 21.♖b1 ♗f5? If Black's last move was a mistake that reduced his winning chances, this is even more serious, as it allows White to completely alter the narrative. We'll continue in our next exercise. Black would have kept a slight edge after

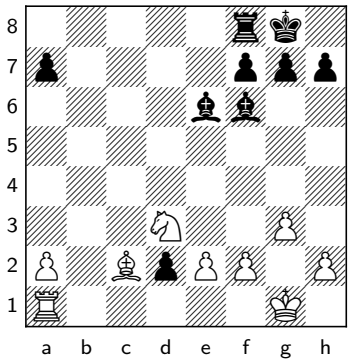
21... ♖fb8 . He can always regain the missing pawn whenever he wants to, and it is up to White to make sure that nothing bad happens.

21.♘xb2 c3 22.♘d3

22.♖d6 is hopeless for White after cxb2 followed by ...Rc8. Black's b-pawn will

cost White too much material.

22... cxd2



It would already be enough to see this far, as it is clear that Black's chances have improved compared to the starting position of this operation. The game could continue: Black shouldn't choose 23... cxd2 24...Rd8 25.Nxe6 fxe6 26.e3 , as once White can simplify to opposite-colored bishops, he should be fine. The king will come to e2, and Black won't break through.

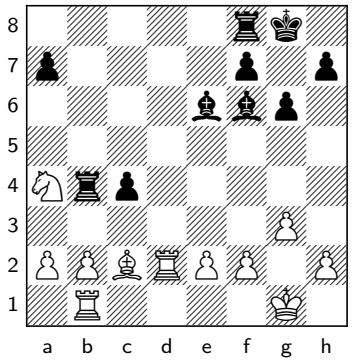
23.♖d1 ♗c3 24.♘c5N

White is lucky not to be totally lost. He is just in time to take the d2-pawn, but then there will still be some suffering afterwards.

24... ♗xa2 25.♘e4N ♗b4 26.♘xd2N a5

The a-pawn and the bishop pair promise Black good winning chances.

Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #3



21... ♗f5?

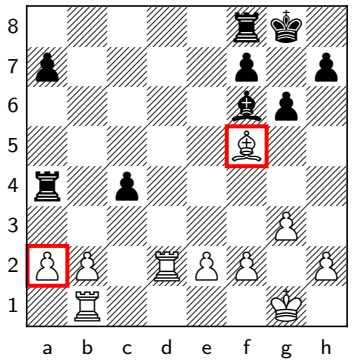
A serious mistake that allows White to completely alter the narrative.

22.♗xf5!

But not

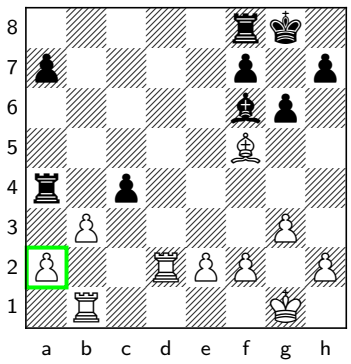
22.♘c5?N c3 and Black wins.

22... ♖xa4



The bishop and a2-pawn are both hanging.

23.b3!

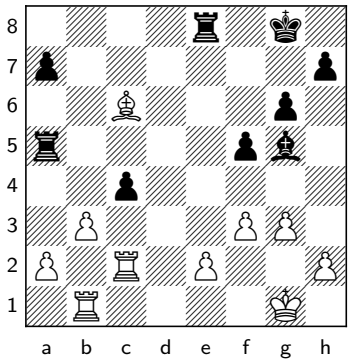


I suspect that this is the move that Wang Hao missed. Indeed, it alters the situation completely. White saves his a2-pawn and will be a pawn up. Still, the position should be defensible thanks to the opposite-colored bishops. □ □

23.♗e4? loses to ...c3 with a double threat on the d2-rook and the e4-bishop.

23.♗c2? ♖xa2 looks quite dangerous for White, with ...c3 on the way.

Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #4



27... cxb3

White has successfully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay. The next step in converting the extra pawn is considering which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in structure, both sides want. To that effect, what should White play? Obviously, he will take on b3, but there is a huge difference in evaluation between the two possible structures.

28.♖xb3!

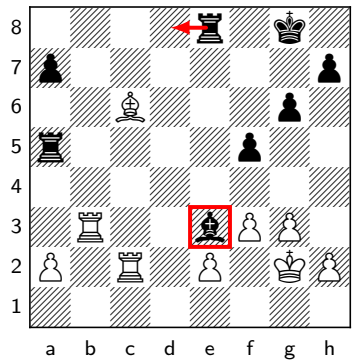
The first point here is that pawn structure matters less than piece activity and piece exchanges. There is no significant long-term difference in the pawn being on a2 or b3. Having said that, there is a slight preference for the pawn being on the a-file. To understand why, we can compare the possibilities of this pawn reaching a6 or b5. With a b5-pawn, if Black places his bishop on b6 and rook on e7, he is close to a fortress – there are no real breakthrough attempts. With the pawn on a6, Black will not have a secure outpost for the bishop on b6, as Rxb6 will be a constant threat. More importantly, which pieces does White want to exchange? White wants to keep both rooks on the board, as the seventh rank is weak, and Black has a potentially poorly placed rook on a5. Taking with the rook on b3 means that it is much harder for Black to organize exchanges by means of ...Be3+ and ...Rc5. Furthermore, White's rook is much more active on b3 than it would be on b1 with the pawn on b3 in front of it. To see the contrast, we can examine:

28.axb3? ♗e3† 29.♔g2 ♖d8 Black plans to exchange a pair of rooks with ...Rc5, place his bishop on b6, and keep his remaining rook on d6 and king on g7. It will be difficult for White to break through, and I suspect it should be a draw with good defense.

28... ♗e3†

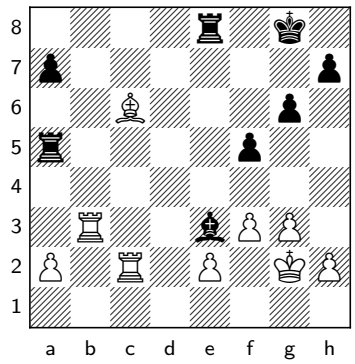
Otherwise, White plays f3-f4.

29.♔g2



Unlike in the line where White captures on b3 with the pawn, Black now cannot play ...Rd8-d2 with the intention of exchanging rooks on d2. Also, ...Rc5 is never possible due to Rxe3. Ultimately, all of the rooks will stay on the board, which is heavily in White's favor.

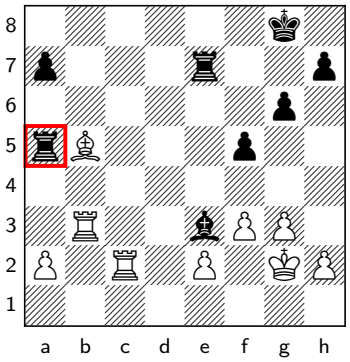
Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #5



29... ♖e7

Black is threatening 30.–

30.♗b5!



White needs to deny Black the possibility of exchanging rooks. This freezes the a5-rook out of play. If Black tries to unfreeze the rook with ...a6, he will be left with a weakness on a6, which will be hard to defend. With

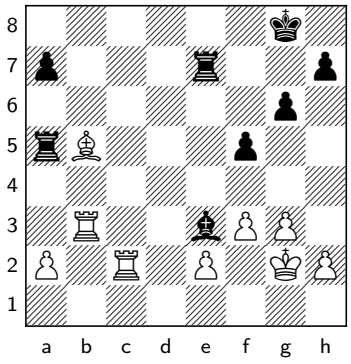
30.♖c5 , as 31.Rxe3 would be met with 31...Rxc6! , since the rook is on e7 instead of e8 and thus not hanging with check. What to do?

30... ♔g7

Black sensibly gets his king off the color of the white bishop. What should White play?

30... ♔g7 , Black sensibly gets his king off the color of the white bishop. Let's move on to our next exercise.

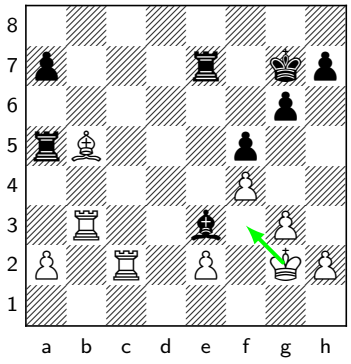
Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #6



30... ♔g7

Black sensibly gets his king off the color of the white bishop. What should White play?

31.f4!



White's best path. This improves White's position as much as possible, since the worst-placed piece was his king. White doesn't give up on a2-a4, but he can make some preparatory moves first, aiming to move Black's bishop to an unfortunate square. It might look like there are endless dark squares to work with, but this is not actually true – as is often the case. For example, b6 is not a safe square, as then after a2-a4, when Black responds with ...a6, the bishop would hang on b6.

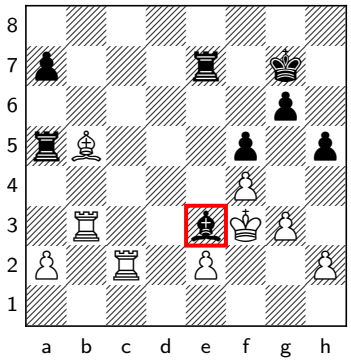
31.a4? If White can play a2-a4 and Rc6, completely freezing the a5-rook, Black will be dead. This is because four units will then not participate in the game – the a5-rook, the a7-pawn, the b5-bishop, and the a4-pawn. This means that White will be effectively an exchange and a pawn up, so clearly winning. But if White plays a2-a4, he needs to consider whether the reply ...a7-a6, breaking Black's rook out, is a problem. Maybe it would be wiser to do something else first, as Black wants to wait for a2-a4 before playing ...a7-a6. This is because without a2-a4, the bishop would drop back to d3, where it eyes the weak a6-pawn. Then Black's rook is still stuck on a5 defending that pawn. The d3-square is not available once White plays a2-a4, as the bishop needs to defend the pawn being on a4. a6 By pushing a2-a4 too soon, White is forced to let the a5-rook out of the cage, which significantly increases Black's drawing chances. 32.♗c6 What should Black play? That's our next exercise.

31... h5

As explained, Black should not play

31... a6? unprovoked. After 32.♗d3 , the rook is stuck defending the a6-pawn.

32.♔f3



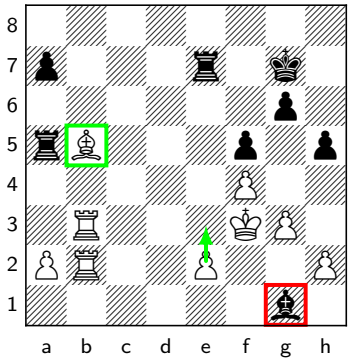
The bishop needs to move, as the rook ending resulting from Rxe3 is winning for White, due to his rook coming to c7. But where can the bishop go? There is no fully safe square for it on the g1-a7 diagonal.

32... ♗g1

This is the safest square Black can ask for. □ After □32...Bb6 places the bishop on a square where it will be hanging after ...a7-a6, so Black will not have time to activate his a5-rook:

32... ♗d4 , the bishop is again hanging, prompting 33.♖d2 . As we shall see in the main line, all the squares that remain on the g1-a7 diagonal are unfortunate.

33.♖cb2!



By overprotecting the bishop on b5 White threatens e2-e3, trapping the g1-bishop.

33.a4 a6 34.♗d3 Thanks to the hanging bishop on b6, White is free to retreat his own bishop to d3 without losing the a4-pawn. ♗c5 35.♖c4 The a5-rook is marooned, and White should win easily.

33.e3? fails to ♖xe3† .

33... ♗d4

33... ♗c5 is met with 34.a4 . As soon as the bishop sits on c5, a2-a4 becomes attractive. Following a6 35.♗c6 , we see that the c5-bishop is blocking in the a5-rook, which still cannot properly join in the game.

34.♖d2

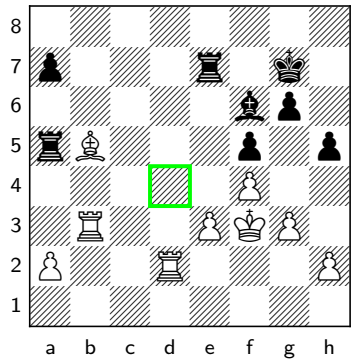
White gains a tempo going to the d-file.

34... ♗f6

Where else? After

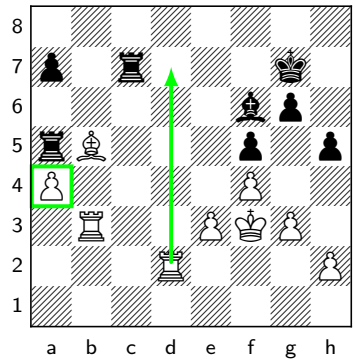
34... ♗g1 35.♖d1 , the bishop needs to choose between c5 and b6, and we saw that both allow a good version of a2-a4.

35.e3!



Controlling d4 and proving that the black bishop is also dominated on the a1-h8 diagonal. Black is almost in zugzwang.

35... ♖c7 36.a4!

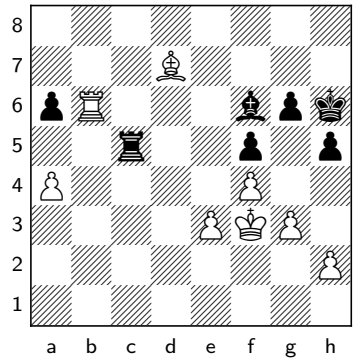


The time is right.

36... a6 37.♖d7† ♖xd7 38.♗xd7

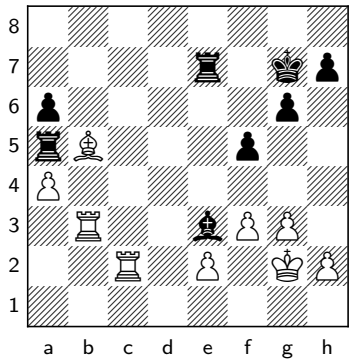
We can finally appreciate the concrete point. When Black moves his rook out of the way, the loose bishop on f6 will give White the time he needs to win more material:

38... ♖c5 39.♖b7 ♔h6 40.♖b6



Both the a6- and g6-pawns are in trouble, and more material is coming White's way. Even though all those nuances are not easy to figure out during the game, White could find the correct path step by step by trying to improve his position to the maximum before entering concrete complications.

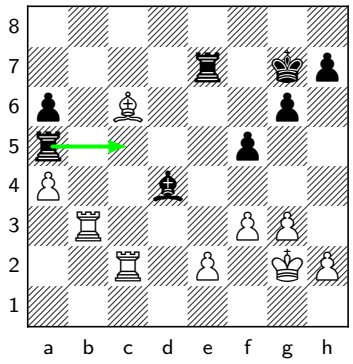
Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #7



32.♗c6

What should Black play?

32... ♗d4!

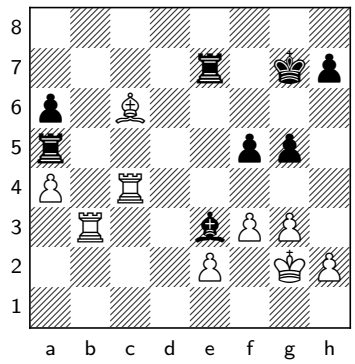


In contrast with the line seen in the previous exercise, Black is now ready for ...Rc5 next, and there is nothing White can do about it. Black has a long defense ahead anyway, but he may just save the game. The game went

32... ♖c5? is positionally desirable, but chess is a concrete game, and it loses to 33.♖xe3 .

32... g5? Missing a golden opportunity. 33.♖c4 There's no more ...Bd4, and the a4-pawn is protected one more time, allowing the white bishop to move. Black missed his last chance now. We'll continue in our next exercise.

Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #8

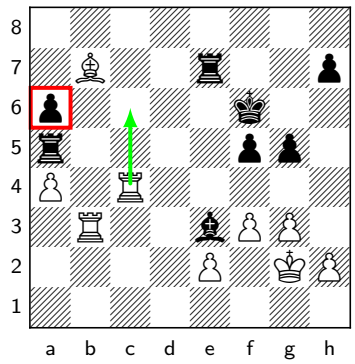


33... ♔f6?

Black is threatening 34.–

33... ♖ae5 was the absolute last chance. I suspect Black would lose anyway, but he can still fight a bit.

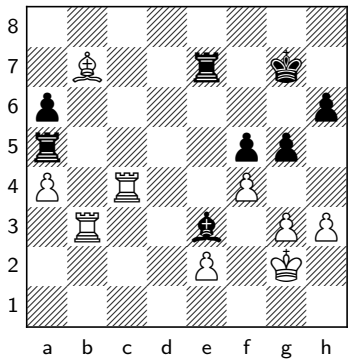
34.♗b7!



This ties the a5-rook to the defense of the a6-pawn. It also threatens Rc6+, winning a second pawn.

34.♖c5 , as 35.Rxe3 no longer works now that the e7-rook is defended. Harikrishna went back on the right track with an excellent move.

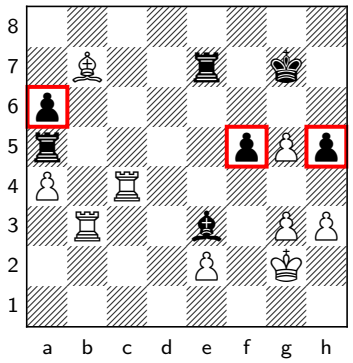
Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #9



36... h5

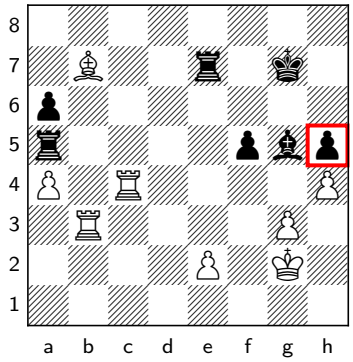
Part of converting an extra pawn is evaluating which changes in the pawn structure are favorable. How should White proceed?

37.fxg5!



Black has weakened his kingside pawns and the squares around his king.

37... ♗xg5 38.h4



White freezes the h5-pawn as a weakness.

38... ♖e3

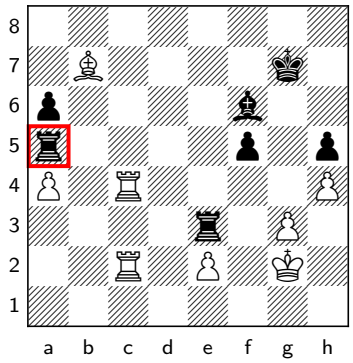
38... ♖xe2† 39.♔f3 is a decisive double attack. Does White want to exchange rooks?

39.♖b2!

No, he doesn't. It is never too late to fumble it.

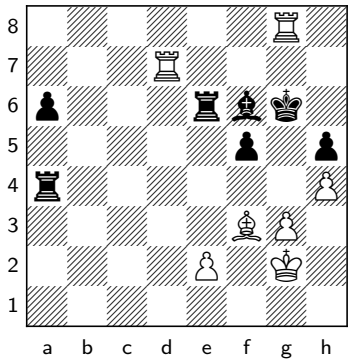
39.♖b6? looks extremely tempting, but in fact, it is a blunder: ♖xe2† 40.♔f3 ♗d8 Black will survive.

39... ♗f6 40.♖bc2



While White is not going to break through directly on a6, the a5-rook being tied down means that White can invade on the eighth rank, creating mating threats. If Black tries to bring one of his heavy pieces back to defend, he will lose the a6-pawn.

Harikrishna-Wang Exercise #10



45... ♔h6

The last question of the game: what should White play?

46.♗xh5! ♖d4

46... ♖e7 47.♖d6 is also decisive.

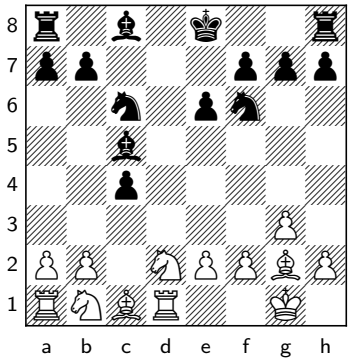
47.♖f7 ♖dd6 48.♔h3

The point is that coming next is Bg6, and ...Rxe2 will not come with check. Wang Hao had seen enough.

Pentala Harikrishna-Wang Hao, Prague 2023

I played in the Prague Masters 2023, and I saw this game live. Despite Hari being borderline worse with White out of the opening, he played very well from then on and ultimately showed good technique in converting an extra pawn.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 c5 6.O-O ♘c6 7.dxc5 ♕xd1 8.♖xd1 ♗xc5 9.♘fd2



This is not a great move, but the idea is clear. White wants to take on c4 without allowing Black to play ...c4-c3.

9.♘bd2N is the main move by far, and for obvious reasons. However, c3 compromises White's structure. He still has chances to push a bit in the endgame, but theory suggests Black is doing fine.

9...♘d4

But the old

9...♗xf2†? doesn't work for many reasons. For example: 10.♔xf2 ♘g4†N 11.♔g1 ♘e3N 12.♗xc6† bxc6 13.♘c3N ♘xd1N 14.♘xd1N A lovely picture of dark-square weaknesses!

9...♘a5N is also satisfactory: 10.♘a3N ♗xa3 11.bxa3 White is going to get the dark-squared bishop to c3 via b2, but Black is OK.

10.♘c3

What should Black do?

10...♘d5!

An important move, as otherwise White recaptures the c-pawn and consolidates effectively, reaching an approximately winning position. By challenging the knight on c3, Black uses the e2-pawn as the source of his counterplay. We said it once already: Black can't tarry around. Whenever Black takes on c4 in the Catalan, if White can take the pawn back while maintaining control of the long diagonal, he often ends up more or less winning. This position is no exception. After

10...♗d7? 11.♘xc4N ♗c6 12.♗e3 , White gets a dream version of the Catalan. Black is losing on the spot.

10...♘g4?N was suggested in the KCT session, but it is way too adventurous. The cleanest refutation would be: 11.♘de4N Black cannot defend his bishop with b6 due to the hanging rook on a8.

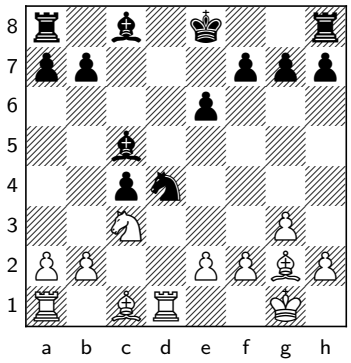
11...♗b6 12.♘d6†N ♔e7 13.♘xc4N White got back his lost pawn without allowing either counterplay or Black to contest the long diagonal. So, Black is busted.

11.♘de4

The alternative

11.♘xd5N exd5 12.♗xd5 ♗h3 is well-known to be fine for Black. He can even castle queenside!

11... ♘xc3 12.♘xc3



Black is up a pawn at the moment and not facing any immediate threats. Nevertheless, White clearly has reasonable compensation. The white pieces are more active, the c8-bishop remains passive, and Be3 is coming.

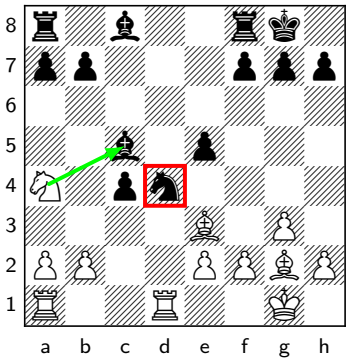
12... e5

A fine decision. This supports the d4-knight and includes the c8-bishop in the game.

13.♗e3 O-O

This is quite dangerous for White, but Harikrishna found a good way to solve most of his problems.

14.♘a4!



Trying to remove the black bishop from protecting the d4-knight. After

14.♘e4?N has a similar idea to the text move, but it does not achieve much and exposes the e2-pawn after ♗b6 . That's the main reason why the knight should try to harass the black bishop via a4, when the bishop cannot retreat to b6 without getting captured.

14.♔f1? ♗g4? , it would be harder for White to navigate the complications and regain his pawn, than it would be for Black to develop an initiative.

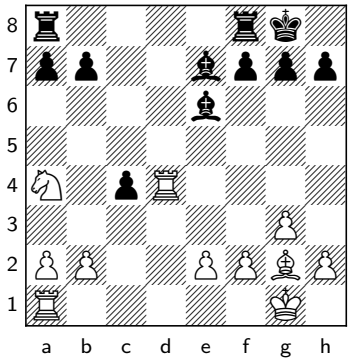
14... ♗e7

It turns out that

14... ♘xe2†?N is actually possible. Though in human terms, I can see why Wang Hao did not go for it. 15.♔f1 ♗xe3 16.fxe3 The knight is just about trapped – this was White's idea with 14.Na4!. But Black can get a lot of pawns if he plays his cards right: ♗g4 17.♖d2 ♖ab8 18.h3 ♘xg3†N 19.♔f2 ♗xh3 20.♔xg3 ♗xg2

21.♔xg2 Black should be fine, but just because he could take on e2, it doesn't mean he had to. The game continuation was fine as well, and intuitively easier to navigate.

15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♖xd4 ♗e6



If Black is allowed a move to consolidate, he would be clearly winning. So, White has to go pawn-grabbing.

17.♗xb7 ♖ab8 18.♗e4 ♖b4!?

I suspect Wang Hao was hoping to play for a win. A relatively straightforward way to full equality was:

18... ♗f6 19.♖d2 ♖b4 20.♘c3N ♖xb2 21.♖xb2 ♗xc3 22.♖ab1 ♗xb2 23.♖xb2 When a draw is close.

19.♗c2 ♗f6! 20.♖d2

Here, Black made a surprising decision fairly quickly. What should he have done?

20... g6?

This is a bit meek. □ The flashy □ Even worse is □ But the first rule of calculation is to examine all checks and captures, and this is another example where this rule could prove to be useful. Black's best approach was: Black shouldn't choose 21... g6 24...Rd8 25.Nxe6 fxe6 26.e3 , as once White can simplify to opposite-colored bishops, he should be fine. The king will come to e2, and Black won't break through.

20... ♖xa4? doesn't work, as it merely simplifies the position with White a clear pawn ahead: 21.♗xa4 c3 22.bxc3 ♗xc3 23.♖ad1 ♗xd2 24.♖xd2 Black has lost his bishop pair and remains a pawn down.

20... ♗xb2? 21.♘xb2N Now ♖xb2 runs into

21... c3 22.♘d3N , White wins a piece. This is not a nice way to lose a game.

22.♗xh7† and after

20... ♖xb2 21.♘xb2N c3 when 22.♖d6 is hopeless for White after cxb2 followed by ...Rc8. Black's b-pawn will cost White too much material. 22... c3 22.Nd3 cxd2 It would already be enough to see this far, as it is clear that Black's chances have improved compared to the starting position of this operation. The game could continue: 23.Rd1 Bc3 24.Nc5! White is lucky not to be totally lost. He is just in time to take the d2-pawn, but then there will still be some suffering afterwards. 24...Bxa2 25.Ne4 Bb4 26.Nxd2 a5 The a-pawn and the bishop pair promise Black good winning chances.

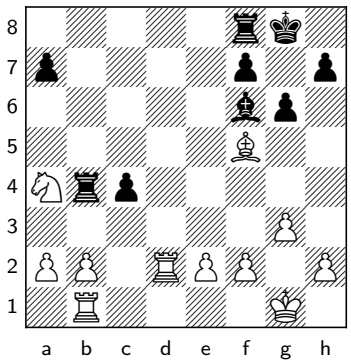
21.♖b1 ♗f5?

If Black's last move was a mistake that reduced his winning chances, this is even more serious, as it allows White to completely alter the

narrative. Black would have kept a slight edge after

21... ♖fb8 . He can always regain the missing pawn whenever he wants to, and it is up to White to make sure that nothing bad happens.

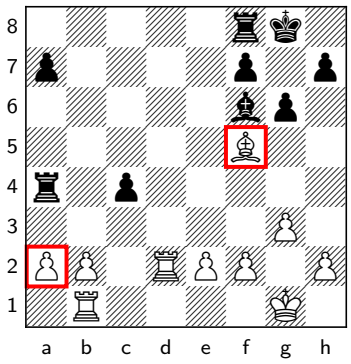
22.♗xf5!



But not

22.♘c5?N c3 and Black wins.

22... ♖xa4



The bishop and a2-pawn are both hanging.

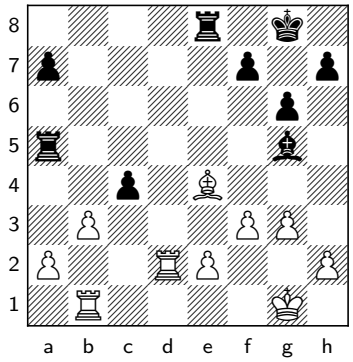
23.b3!

I suspect that this is the move that Wang Hao missed. Indeed, it alters the situation completely. White saves his a2-pawn and will be a pawn up. Still, the position should be defensible thanks to the opposite-colored bishops. □ □

23.♗e4? loses to c3 with a double threat on the d2-rook and the e4-bishop.

23.♗c2? ♖xa2 looks quite dangerous for White, with ...c3 on the way.

23... ♖a5 24.♗e4 ♖e8 25.f3 ♗g5



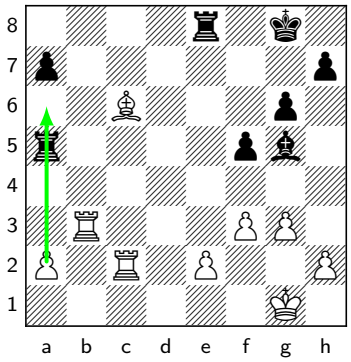
I think Black should have kept his passed pawn with:

25... c3 26.♖c2 ♖d8 27.♗d3 ♖a3 I don't see White winning this.

26.♖c2 f5 27.♗c6 cxb3

White has successfully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay. The next step in converting the extra pawn is considering which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in structure, both sides want. To that effect, what should White play? Obviously, he will take on b3, but there is a huge difference in evaluation between the two possible structures.

28.♖xb3!



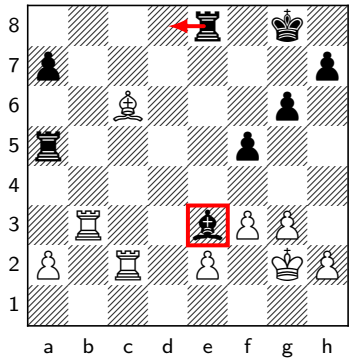
The first point here is that pawn structure matters less than piece activity and piece exchanges. There is no significant long-term difference in the pawn being on a2 or b3. Having said that, there is a slight preference for the pawn being on the a-file. To understand why, we can compare the possibilities of this pawn reaching a6 or b5. With a b5-pawn, if Black places his bishop on b6 and rook on e7, he is close to a fortress – there are no real breakthrough attempts. With the pawn on a6, Black will not have a secure outpost for the bishop on b6, as Rxb6 will be a constant threat. More importantly, which pieces does White want to exchange? White wants to keep both rooks on the board, as the seventh rank is weak, and Black has a potentially poorly placed rook on a5. Taking with the rook on b3 means that it is much harder for Black to organize exchanges by means of ...Be3+ and ...Rc5. Furthermore, White's rook is much more active on b3 than it would be on b1 with the pawn on b3 in front of it. To see the contrast, we can examine:

28.axb3? ♗e3† 29.♔g2 ♖d8 Black plans to exchange a pair of rooks with ...Rc5, place his bishop on b6, and keep his remaining rook on d6 and king on g7. It will be difficult for White to break through, and I suspect it should be a draw with good defense.

28... ♗e3†

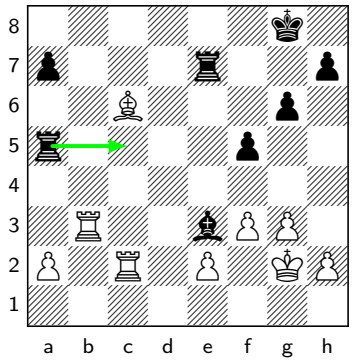
Otherwise, White plays f3-f4.

29.♔g2



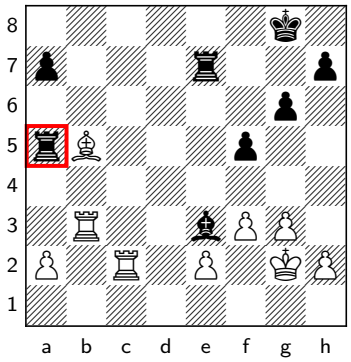
Unlike in the line where White captures on b3 with the pawn, Black now cannot play ...Rd8-d2 with the intention of exchanging rooks on d2. Also, ...Rc5 is never possible due to Rxe3. Ultimately, all of the rooks will stay on the board, which is heavily in White's favor.

29... ♖e7



Black is threatening 30.–

30.♗b5!



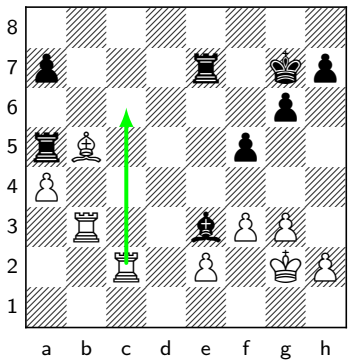
This freezes the a5-rook out of play. If Black tries to unfreeze the rook with ...a6, he will be left with a weakness on a6, which will be hard to defend.

30.♖c5 , as 31.Rxe3 would be met with 31...Rxc6! , since the rook is on e7 instead of e8 and thus not hanging with check. White needs to deny Black the possibility of exchanging rooks.

30... ♔g7

Black sensibly gets his king off the color of the white bishop. What should White play?

31.a4?



If White can play a2-a4 and Rc6, completely freezing the a5-rook, Black will be dead. This is because four units will then not participate in the game – the a5-rook, the a7-pawn, the b5-bishop, and the a4-pawn. This means that White will be effectively an exchange and a pawn up, so clearly winning. But if White plays a2-a4, he needs to consider whether the reply ...a7-a6, breaking Black's rook out, is a problem. Maybe it would be wiser to do something else first, as Black wants to wait for a2-a4 before playing ...a7-a6. This is because without a2-a4, the bishop would drop back to d3, where it eyes the weak a6-pawn. Then Black's rook is still stuck on a5 defending that pawn. The d3-square is not available once White plays a2-a4, as the bishop needs to defend the pawn being on a4. Due to the explanations above, White's best path was: B) 31\. a4 32...Bb6 places the bishop on a square where it will be hanging after ...a6, so Black will not have time to activate his a5-rook: 33.a4! a6 34.Bd3 Thanks to the hanging bishop on b6, White is free to retreat his own bishop to d3 without losing the a4-pawn. 34...Bc5 35.Rc4 The a5-rook is marooned, and White should win easily. C) 31\. a4 32...Bg1 This is the safest square Black can ask for. 33.Rcb2! By overprotecting the bishop on b5, White threatens e2-e3, trapping the g1-bishop. (33.e3? fails to 33...Rxe3+) 33...Bc5 is met with 34.a4! . As soon as the bishop sits on c5, a2-a4 becomes attractive. Following 34...a6 35.Bc6! we see that the c5-bishop is blocking in the a5-rook, which still cannot properly join in the game. 31\. a4 33...Bd4 34.Rd2 White gains a tempo going to the d-file. 34...Bf6 Where else? (After 34...Bg1 35.Rd1 , the bishop needs to choose between c5 and b6, and we saw that both allow a good version of a2-a4.) 35.e3! Con-

trolling d4 and proving that the black bishop is also dominated on the a1-h8 diagonal. Black is almost in zugzwang. 35...Rc7 36.a4! The time is right. 36...a6 37.Rd7+ Rxd7 38.Bxd7 We can finally appreciate the concrete point. When Black moves his rook out of the way, the loose bishop on f6 will give White the time he needs to win more material: 38...Rc5 39.Rb7! Kh6 40.Rb6! Both the a6- and g6-pawns are in trouble, and more material is coming White's way. Even though all those nuances are not easy to figure out during the game, White could find the correct path step by step by trying to improve his position to the maximum before entering concrete complications.

31.f4 This improves White's position as much as possible, since the worst-placed piece was his king. White doesn't give up on a2-a4, but he can make some preparatory moves first, aiming to move Black's bishop to an unfortunate square. It might look like there are endless dark squares to work with, but this is not actually true – as is often the case. For example, b6 is not a safe square, as then after a2-a4, when Black responds with ...a6, the bishop would hang on b6. As explained, Black should not play a6? unprovoked. After 32.♗d3 , the rook is stuck defending the a6-pawn. 31\. f4 31...h5 32.Kf3 The bishop needs to move, as the rook ending resulting from Rxe3 is winning for White, due to his rook coming to c7. But where can the bishop go? There is no fully safe square for it on the g1-a7 diagonal. – A) After 32...Bd4 , the bishop is again hanging, prompting 33.Rd2 . As we shall see, all the squares that remain on the g1-a7 diagonal are unfortunate.

31... a6!

By pushing a2-a4 too soon, White is forced to let the a5-rook out of the cage, which significantly increases Black's drawing chances.

32.♗c6

What should Black play?

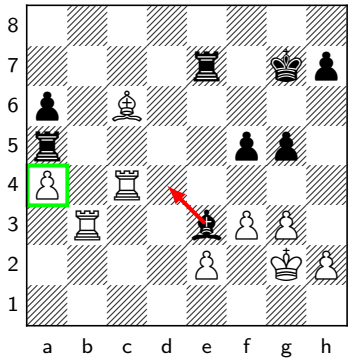
32... g5?

Missing a golden opportunity. However, after

32... ♖c5? is positionally desirable, but chess is a concrete game, and it loses to 33.♖xe3 .

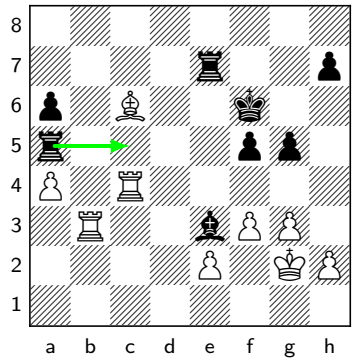
32... ♗d4 , Black is ready for ...Rc5 next, and there is nothing White can do about it. Black has a long defense ahead anyway, but he may just save the game.

33.♖c4!



There's no more ...Bd4, and the a4-pawn is protected one more time, allowing the white bishop to move.

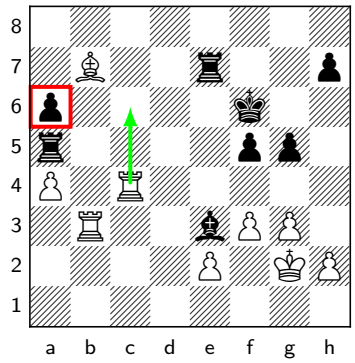
33... ♔f6?



Black is threatening 34.–

33... ♖ae5 was the absolute last chance. I suspect Black would lose anyway, but he can still fight a bit.

34.♗b7!



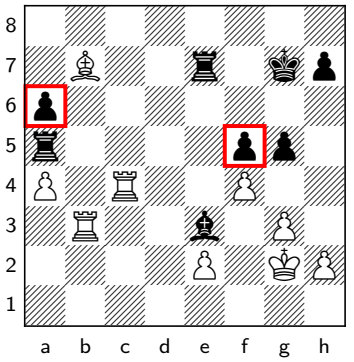
This ties the a5-rook to the defense of the a6-pawn. It also threatens Rc6+, winning a second pawn.

34.♖c5 , as 35.Rxe3 no longer works now that the e7-rook is defended.

34... ♔g7

Black is now stuck.

35.f4



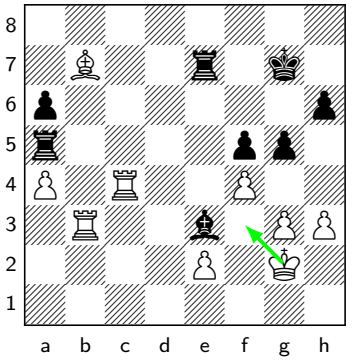
Fixing a second weakness on f5.

35... h6

On

35... g4 36.♗c8 ♔f6 , White can simply play 37.♖b7 ♖xb7 38.♗xb7 The black rook is still stuck, and Rc6+ is coming.

36.h3

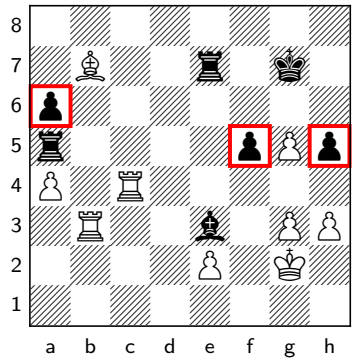


White prepares his king coming to f3 to kick the bishop, which is running short of squares. It would seem unwise to rush with the king and allow the h2-pawn to be fixed.

36... h5

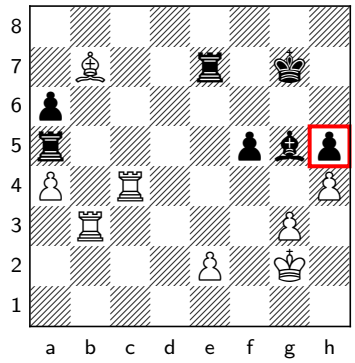
Part of converting an extra pawn is evaluating which changes in the pawn structure are favorable.

37.fxg5!



Black has weakened his kingside pawns and the squares around his king.

37... ♗xg5 38.h4

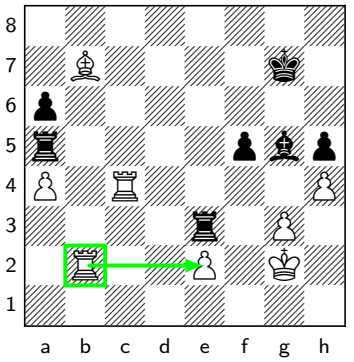


White freezes the h5-pawn as a weakness.

38... ♖e3

38... ♖xe2† 39.♔f3 is a decisive double attack. Does White want to exchange rooks?

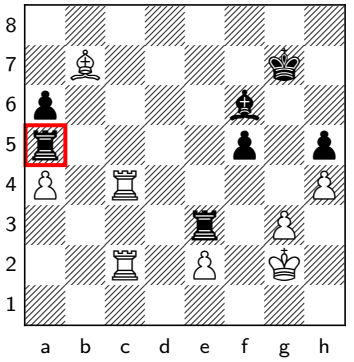
39.♖b2!



No he doesn't. It is never too late to fumble it.

39.♖b6? looks extremely tempting, but in fact, it is a blunder: ♖xe2† 40.♔f3 ♗d8 Black will survive.

39... ♗f6 40.♖bc2



While White is not going to break through directly on a6, the a5-rook being tied down means that White can invade on the eighth rank, creating mating threats. If Black tries to bring one of his heavy pieces back to defend, he will lose the a6-pawn.

40... ♔g6

40... ♗e5 is comfortably met with 41.♗f3 .

41.♗f3!

The a5-rook is allowed to move, but it is of no consequence. White can invade with his own rooks to the back ranks, and the h5-pawn will drop.

41...♖e6

41...♖ae5 is too late, as the rooks are coming. For example: 42.♖c8 ♖e7 43.♖g8† ♗g7 44.♖c6† ♖3e6 45.♖xe6† ♖xe6 46.♗xh5† Winning a second pawn.

42.♖d2 ♖ae5 43.♖c8 ♖a5

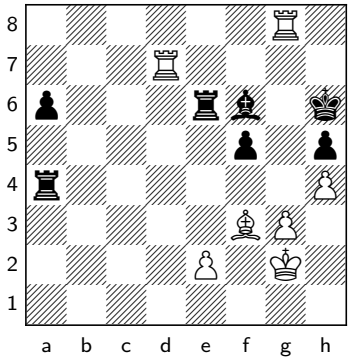
Trying for counterplay. Trying to stop the invasion with

43...♖e8 is met by: 44.♖xe8 ♖xe8 45.♖d6 a5 46.♖a6 ♖e5 47.♔f2 Next comes Bxh5+, and White wins.

44.♖d7!

Enough messing around – it's time to end it.

44...♖xa4 45.♖g8† ♔h6

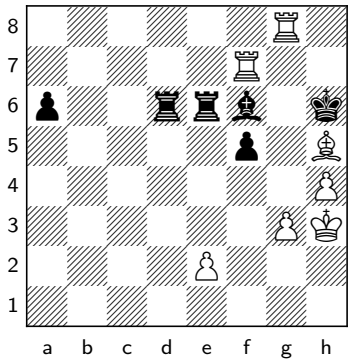


The last question of the game: what should White play?

46.♗xh5! ♖d4

46...♖e7 47.♖d6 is also decisive.

47.♖f7 ♖dd6 48.♔h3

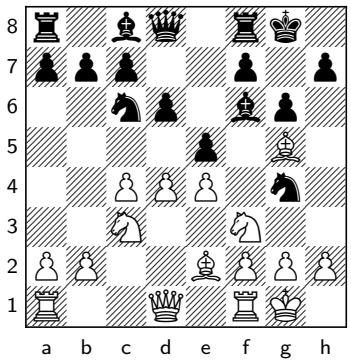


The point is that coming next is Bg6, and ...Rxe2 will not come with check. Wang Hao had seen enough. Hari's technique was not perfect, particularly with respect to pushing a2-a4 a little too early, but he clearly understood the themes. Taking with the rook on b3, and then placing the bishop on b5 as a means to keep Black's rook stuck on a5, showed a good understanding of which pawn structure White wanted, as well as which piece exchanges.

Samuel H. Reshevsky-Robert J. Fischer Introduction

I always find it interesting to go back in time and look at games from top players of generations long past. There are some ways in which modern top players are vastly superior, and others where there isn't much difference in their abilities. In the present game, Fischer himself definitely demonstrated a lack of understanding that I would not expect from a player of today's era.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♗e2 O-O 6.♘f3 e5 7.O-O ♘c6 8.♗e3 ♘g4 9.♗g5 ♗f6



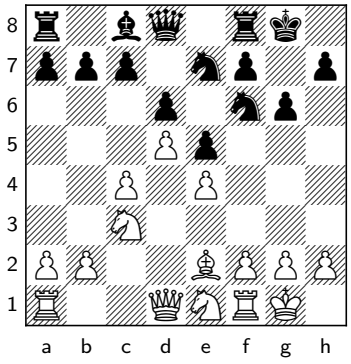
Trading the dark-squared bishop would be frowned upon nowadays. Instead, the automatic response would be

9... f6 , and Black has a decent King's Indian.

10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.d5 ♘e7

We are not yet at the stage of conversion of the extra pawn. However, this is an instructive standard King's Indian position in which to consider the best plan for White.

12.♘e1!

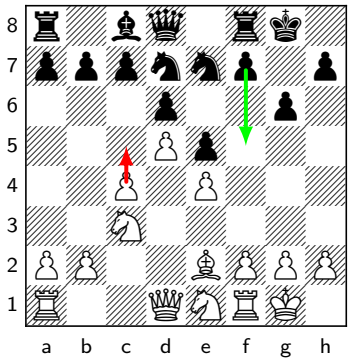


White also had a direct option available:

12.♘d2N also prevents ...Nh5, but a better way of doing this is the retreat to e1, as the knight can be rerouted to d3. Another point of the knight retreat is that, while the f2-f4 advance is normally not a good idea for White in the King's Indian, this is an exception: with the dark-squared bishops off the board, Black will not be able to take full advantage of the e5-square. Furthermore, there's no reason to fear the opening of the a1-h8 diagonal.

12.c5? Generally, I don't trust this move in the King's Indian if Black can capture the pawn, and White's idea is to capture the e5-pawn in exchange. However, for reasons similar to those mentioned in the note above, it is not a bad choice in this setting. With the dark-squared bishops already traded, Black is less able to take advantage of the a1-h8 diagonal. For example: dxc5? 13.♘xe5N is terrible for Black. Without a bishop on g7, this simply gives White an advantage because of the big center. 12\. c5 12...Bg4 13.cxd6 cxd6 14.Nd2 Bxe2 15.Qxe2 Nh5 Black has some kingside play and ...f5 is looming, but White holds a slight objective edge due to the play on the queenside and down the c-file.

12... ♘d7



Another typical move for this structure, preventing c5 and preparing ...f5. Trying to control the queenside with

12... a5 13.♘d3N b6 allows White to advance on the kingside unobstructed. For example: 14.♕d2 ♘d7N 15.f4 exf4 16.♖xf4 With excellent play on the kingside.

13.♘d3 f5

How should White respond?

14.exf5!?

An interesting choice by Reshevsky. □ When I showed this game at Killer Chess Training, the majority went for □ A natural attempt would be to go for: 14\. exf5 15.exf5? is not to be recommended. After 15...g5! White loses his f5-pawn, and he looks to be approximately lost. Also after 14\. exf5 15.Rxf4?! g5 , White is in danger of being structurally busted.

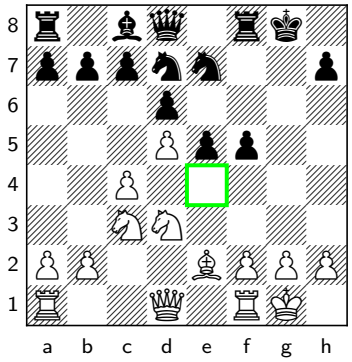
14.f3 . This is a reasonable move, although Black wasn't threatening to play ...fxe4. Thus, it would be better to only play this move once the black knight had returned to f6, loosening control over the c5-square and allowing c5. Moreover, after f4 White is missing the option of Bg4, which could be a useful resource. Meanwhile, c5 is defended against, although it might be possible to sacrifice the c-pawn in any case. A normal continuation would be: 15.♖c1 g5 16.c5 when keeping the structure with ♘f6N is also fully playable. On

16... dxc5? , 17.♕b3? is a good alternative.

17.b4 cxb4 18.♘b5N c6 This position would be good for White with bishops on f2 and g7 but is just chaos in this iteration.

14.f4 But a problem with this is that White does not have control over the e5-square and is thus not ready to play e4-e5. According to the engine, this was White's best option, but, in human terms, I am not that impressed. exf4 15.♘xf4N ♘e5N 16.♕d2 The machine gives White some edge, but it doesn't look that fantastic to me. For example: fxe4 17.♘xe4N ♘f5N Black's position is quite active.

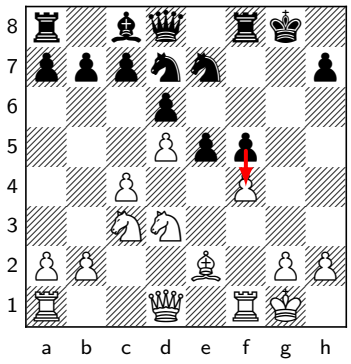
14... gxf5



I think it was Botvinnik who said: «Every Russian schoolboy knows that, if White takes on f5 in the King's Indian, Black should recapture with the g-pawn.» The reason for this is that if White gains a clamp over the e4-square, then the g7-bishop is permanently bad. In this case, it would have been better to recapture with

14... ♘xf5N . This all comes down to understanding the King's Indian. As is, the absence of dark-squared bishops renders this position totally fine for Black. For example: 15.♘e4N ♘f6N Black has an excellent position, with ...Nd4 and ...Bf5 possibly coming up. There is no bad bishop on g7 to ruin this picture. 15... Nxf5 15.Qd2 Nf6 is also equal.

15.f4!



Stopping the f5-pawn in its tracks. After a less careful move like

15.♕d2 Black would go f4 , gaining space and clearing the way, both for the c8-bishop and for the e7-knight to start jumping towards d4 through f5.

15... ♘g6

The structure after

15... e4 is normally good for White in the King's Indian. This is particularly so in this case, with Black missing his powerful g7-bishop. This also means that he does not have the option of exchanging that bishop for the c3-knight, a typical trade after which Black can play to leave White with a weak dark- squared bishop. This can be facilitated by playing ...b6 and ...Nf6, although that plan is more common when there is a black pawn on c5. In any case, these considerations do not apply in this position, as there are no dark-squared bishops present, while Black also has fewer pieces around his king. A good way to continue for White would be: 16.♘e1N or

16.♘f2N ♘g6N and now 17.♕d2 White's plan is to maneuver the f2-knight to e3 via d1, then regroup the kingside with Kh1, Rf2, and Rg1, and finally strike with g2-g4 at the right moment.

16.♕d2 ♖e8?!

The rook doesn't accomplish anything particularly impressive on the e-file.

16... ♘f6N should have been preferred.

17.fxe5

A good choice by Reshevsky, as Black is unable to recapture ...dxe5 due to the undefended f5-pawn. During the KCT session, another approach was suggested: 17\. fxe5 17...e4 Black is not thrilled about making this advance, but

with ...Nf6 to follow, he will gain some time. 18.Ne1 Nf6 19.Be2 White lost some time but ultimately reached the structure he was aiming for. Still, Black can fight: 19...c5!? Now 20.dxc6 is preferred by the engine, but then Black gets a large pawn center. 20.Nc2 h5 21.Ne3 a5 Black is ready for ...b6, solidifying the queenside. Then ...Ra7-g7 could come. White is a bit better, but the game goes on.

17.♖ae1 also makes sense, increasing White's activity without resolving the tension.

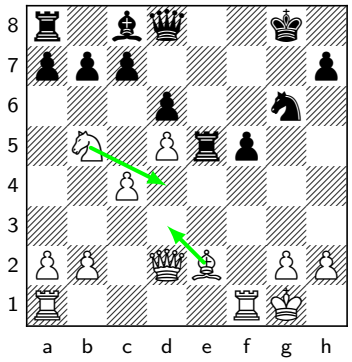
17.♗h5? This is not a bad option, but I prefer Reshevsky's move for its simplicity. ♘f6?N is premature: 18.♗xg6 hxg6 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♕h6 Not only is the g6-pawn under threat, but Rae1 is coming as well. Black will get crushed on the kingside.

17... ♘dxe5 18.♘xe5 ♖xe5

18... dxe5 would be strongly met by 19.c5 .

18... ♘xe5N warrants the same reaction as the game continuation, but in this version the f5-pawn is even less protected.

19.♘b5!



White prevents ...c6. The plan is simply Bd3 and Nd4, ganging up on the f5-pawn.

19... ♗d7 20.♗d3?!

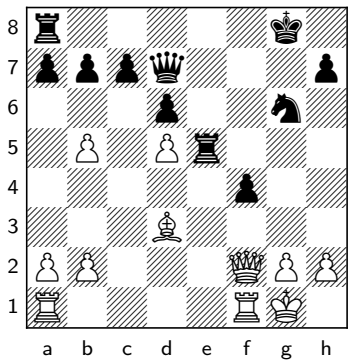
I don't get why White would allow Black the option of taking on b5, instead of opting for

20.♘d4N followed by Bd3 and doubling on the f-file if needed. The f-pawn looks doomed.

20... ♗xb5

Black snatches his chance to prevent Nd4.

21.cxb5 ♕d7 22.♕f2 f4



Black forces White to trade minor pieces and change the character of the game. White should not allow a tempo for ...Rf8, which would support the f-pawn. After

22... ♖f8 23.♕xa7 , White would also have good chances to convert the extra pawn. With his move in the game, Fischer threatens to get a better version of this.

23.♗xg6 hxg6 24.♕xf4

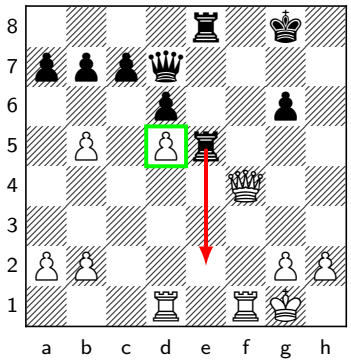
Black cannot safely take on either d5 or b5.

24... ♖ae8

We have finally arrived at the position where White is a pawn up. It is far from a clean and easy conversion. The rules for converting an extra pawn start with Step 1: White needs to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. His position is not currently stable. What is Black threatening and what should White do about it? The main threat is ...Rxd5, and a subsidiary threat is ...Re2.

24... ♖xd5 increases White's advantage after 25.♕e4 ♖f5 .

25.♖ad1



This deals neatly with both threats. It defends the d5-pawn, and an invasion on the second rank can be met by Rd2. After

25.♕g3 ♕g7 , Black eyes b2 while protecting his king, and he should be able to regain the missing pawn. The engine insists on giving White an advantage, but it isn't going to be easy to prove that in practice.

25... ♕g7

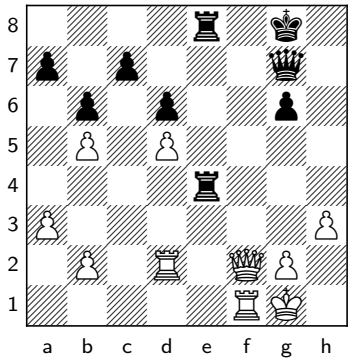
How should White stabilize the position and avoid counterplay?

26.h3!

Black did not have a threat, so White correctly plays a move which marginally improves his position, giving his king a flight square.

26.b3 is another good option, removing the pawn from the exposed square.

26... ♖e2 27.♖d2 ♖2e4 28.♕f2 b6 29.a3



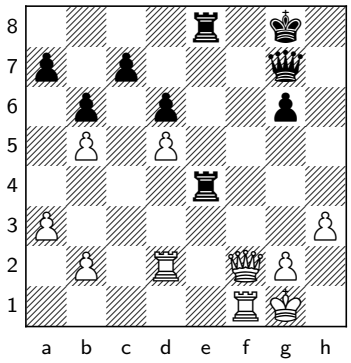
This prevents the annoying ...Rb4, continuing with the theme of stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. After Fischer's

29... ♖8e5

, we reach the most critical moment for converting an extra pawn. White has successfully stabilized the position. He now needs to come up with a long-term plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game. He should also evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and which changes in the pawn structure will help win the game, and which will favor the opponent. It doesn't look as though any pawns are going to be exchanged in the near

future. So, the focus should be on which piece exchanges are favorable. It is clear that the pawn ending is winning for White. But Black will not allow this, and it is not possible to force it. A rook endgame would be less clear, and I would expect Black to have serious drawing chances.

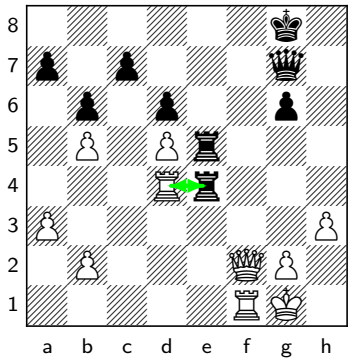
Reshevsky-Fischer Exercise #1



29... ♖8e5

This is the most critical moment for converting an extra pawn. White has successfully stabilized the position. He now needs to come up with a long-term plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game. He should also evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and which changes in the pawn structure will help win the game, and which will favor the opponent. It doesn't look as though any pawns are going to be exchanged in the near future. So, the focus should be on which piece exchanges are favorable. It is clear that the pawn ending is winning for White. But Black will not allow this, and it is not possible to force it. A rook endgame would be less clear, and I would expect Black to have serious drawing chances.

30.♖d4!



The extra pawn for White is on the kingside. In the long term, the queenside pawns are about equal in terms of weaknesses. The pawns on d5 and c7 are equally weak, and I could easily see a lot of queenside pawns starting to come off. The pawns on the kingside are not going to make a queen easily. It will take a long time for them to advance, and Black's king will be in front of them. Once we realize that the extra pawn on the kingside won't do all that much for us in a rook endgame, we have to think about what it could accomplish with the queens still on the board. The answer is simple: it keeps our king safe, while Black's is in more danger. Therefore, it is best for White to go after Black's king. If Black tries to relieve the pressure against his king by trading pieces, White will win the pawn endgame if all the pieces are exchanged. In a double- rook endgame, Black's king will be safe and will sit on g7 with a rook on e7. If White can get to a queen endgame, due to the attacking potential of the white queen, the importance of the extra pawn would be highlighted. Therefore, White should be aiming to exchange rooks rather than queens. The correct path becomes clear after developing our understanding of the situation. As mentioned above, White should offer a trade of rooks.

30.♕f6? was played and should have enabled Black to save the game.

30... ♖e2

Trying to keep the rooks is logical, and it's the reply we should check, but Black cannot afford to go pawn-grabbing. □ After □ □ A more challenging continuation would be

30... ♖f5 31.♖xe4 ♖xf2 32.♖xf2 , the white rooks should be able to run circles around the queen. It's the black king's precarious position that renders the situation hopeless.

30... ♖xd4 31.♕xd4 helps the white queen get into the game. Qg4 eyeing the c8-square is an idea.

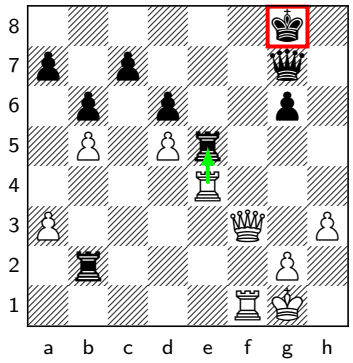
30... ♕e7 , indirectly protecting the e4-rook to threaten ...Rf5 under better circumstances. By allowing trades, Black reduces White's attacking potential, but pieces coming off the board get the game closer to a pawn endgame: 31.♖xe4 ♖xe4 32.♕f6 This works, but only for a specific reason. ♕xf6 33.♖xf6 ♔g7 34.♖f3 White gets the rook to c3, winning by forcing the black rook to go passive. Without this resource, Black would be fine.

31.♕f3 ♖xb2

Black has regained the lost pawn, but he will shortly be crushed.

31... ♖e8 What else? 32.♖f4 ♖2e7 would ensure Black doesn't get checkmated but leave him with zero counterplay. White would pile up the pressure with 33.♖f6 and Qg4-Qg5.

32.♖e4!



White removes Black's most important defender, causing the black kingside to collapse. For example:

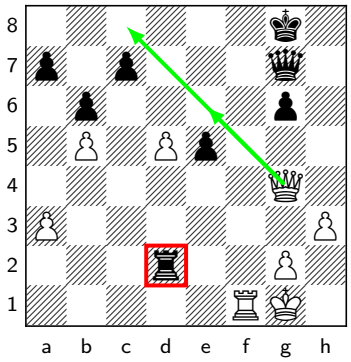
32... ♖d2

Someone in class offered

32... ♖xe4 , but 33.♕xe4 ♕d7 34.♕xg6† reminded me of the 'That was easy' red button. I am not letting on whether one such button is sitting on my desk at home or not...

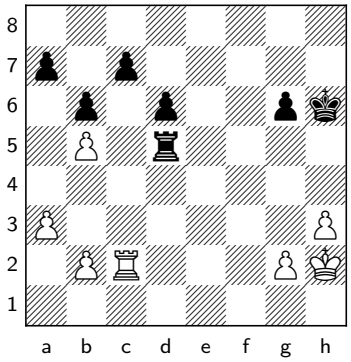
32... ♖f5 33.♕g4 isn't that much better, with Black's king being so exposed.

33.♖xe5 dxe5 34.♕g4!

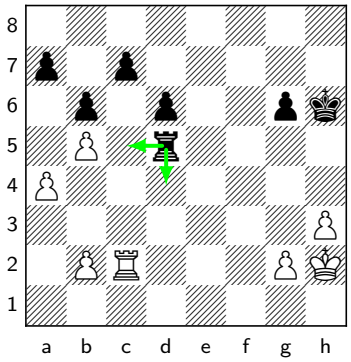


Black will soon be mated or suffer enormous material losses.

Reshevsky-Fischer Exercise #2



36.a4



Should Black play

36... ♖c5!

36... ♖c5 or This was correct.

36... ♖d4?

36... ♖d4? should have been the losing mistake. 37.b3 ♖d3 38.♖xc7 ♖xb3 39.♖xa7 Including ♖b4 and 40.♖a6 does not change anything, as White can take on b6 and transpose to the lines shown below. 39\. Rxa7 39...d5 40.Rd7 Rd3 (40...Rb4 loses immediately to 41.Rxd5 Rxa4 42.Rd6 , when Black will be two pawns down instead of one.) 41.Rd6 Rd4 White needs to consider how the extra pawn is going to help him. How does he win? We'll see it in our next exercise.

37.♖c3!

I'm sure this is what Fischer was worried about. If Black ever takes on c3, following b2xc3, his queenside pawn mass is impotent and will not make a passed pawn, leaving him in a lost pawn endgame. Simultaneously, the black rook can never move away because c7 will fall. However, White's rook is sort of stuck, too, so it is natural to think of this position almost like a pawn endgame. And while that may look lost for Black, in fact, he will hold. Most instructively, that's the case specifically because he will move his rook away at a key moment. □ □ □

37.♖xc5? bxc5 is a routine draw, due to Black's protected passed d-pawn.

37... ♖xc3?

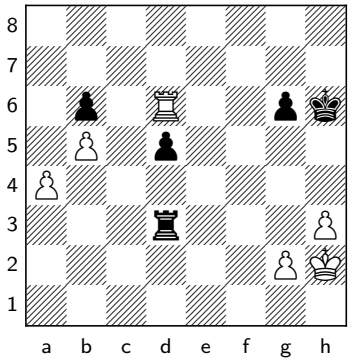
37... d5? is something Black should

avoid, as after ...d4 the pawn endgame suddenly becomes lost, due to White's idea to play Ke4 and b4. More details (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

38.bxc3

is indeed easily winning for White.

Reshevsky-Fischer Exercise #3



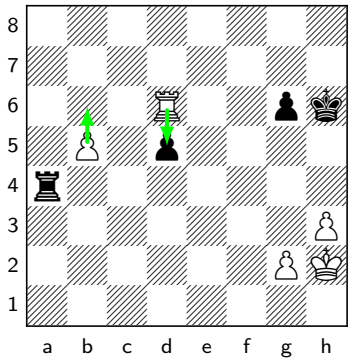
41... ♖d4

How does White win? He needs to consider how the extra pawn is going to help him.

42.♖xb6!

White's extra pawn on the kingside isn't going to promote. However, it can be used to keep Black's king stuck on the kingside, so that White can win the game on the kingside and/or in the center.

42... ♖xa4 43.♖d6!



This was the correct continuation, ensuring that the white rook would be as active as possible, eyeing all three of the relevant pawns.

43.♔g3? was a huge mistake, allowing Black to freeze the white rook in front of the passed pawn. ♖b4 .

43... d4 44.♔g3 ♖b4 45.b6

followed by Kf3 etc. This endgame is deeply analyzed (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game. Black's problem is that his king cannot freely approach the center, because losing g6 would be equivalent to resignation. That's how White's extra pawn on the kingside proves its worth.

Samuel H. Reshevsky-Robert J. Fischer, New York 1961

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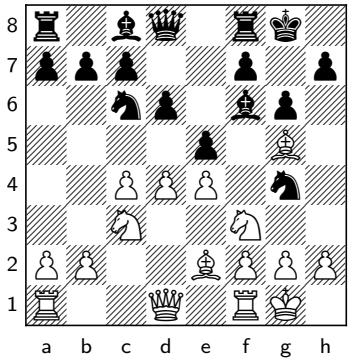

Trading the dark-squared bishop would be frowned upon nowadays. Instead, the automatic response would be

9... f6 , and Black has a decent King's Indian.

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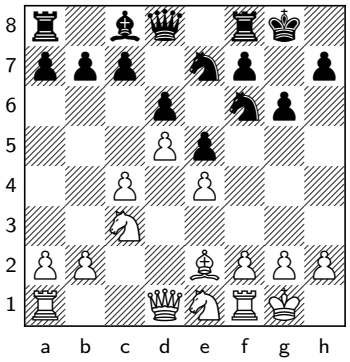

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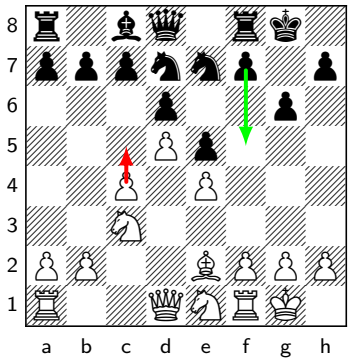
ter. 12\. c5 12...Bg4 13.cxd6 cxd6 14.Nd2 Bxe2 15.Qxe2 Nh5 Black has some kingside play and ...f5 is looming, but White holds a slight objective edge due to the play on the queenside and down the c-file.

12... ♘d7



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13.♘d3 f5

How should White respond?

14.exf5!?

An interesting choice by Reshevsky. □ When I showed this game at Killer Chess Training, the majority went for □ A natural attempt would be to go for: 14\. exf5 15.exf5? is not to be recommended. After 15...g5! White loses his f5-pawn, and he looks to be approximately lost. Also after 14\. exf5 15.Rxf4?! g5 , White is in danger of being structurally busted.

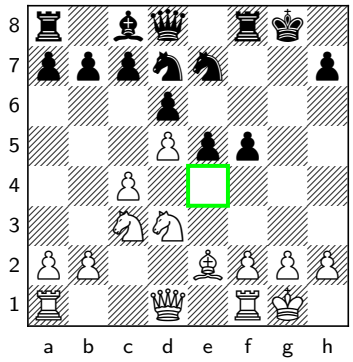
14.f3 . This is a reasonable move, although Black wasn't threatening to play ...fxe4. Thus, it would be better to only play this move once the black knight had returned to f6, loosening control over the c5-square and allowing c5. Moreover, after f4 White is missing the option of Bg4, which could be a useful resource. Meanwhile, c5 is defended against, although it might be possible to sacrifice the c-pawn in any case. A normal continuation would be: 15.♖c1 g5 16.c5 when keeping the structure with ♘f6N is also fully playable. On

16... dxc5? , 17.♕b3? is a good alternative.

17.b4 cxb4 18.♘b5N c6 This position would be good for White with bishops on f2 and g7 but is just chaos in this iteration.

14.f4 But a problem with this is that White does not have control over the e5-square and is thus not ready to play e4-e5. According to the engine, this was White's best option, but, in human terms, I am not that impressed. exf4 15.♘xf4N ♘e5N 16.♕d2 The machine gives White some edge, but it doesn't look that fantastic to me. For example: fxe4 17.♘xe4N ♘f5N Black's position is quite active.

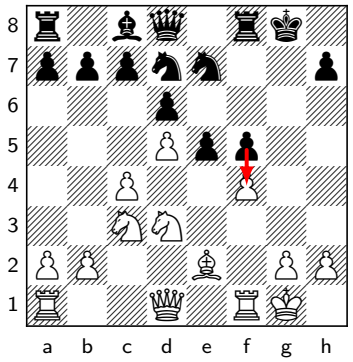
14... gxf5



I think it was Botvinnik who said: «Every Russian schoolboy knows that, if White takes on f5 in the King's Indian, Black should recapture with the g-pawn.» The reason for this is that if White gains a clamp over the e4-square, then the g7-bishop is permanently bad. In this case, it would have been better to recapture with

14... ♘xf5N . This all comes down to understanding the King's Indian. As is, the absence of dark-squared bishops renders this position totally fine for Black. For example: 15.♘e4N ♘f6N Black has an excellent position, with ...Nd4 and ...Bf5 possibly coming up. There is no bad bishop on g7 to ruin this picture. 15... Nxf5 15.Qd2 Nf6 is also equal.

15.f4!



Stopping the f5-pawn in its tracks. After a less careful move like

15.♕d2 Black would go f4 , gaining space and clearing the way, both for the c8-bishop and for the e7-knight to start jumping towards d4 through f5.

15... ♘g6

The structure after

15... e4 is normally good for White in the King's Indian. This is particularly so in this case, with Black missing his powerful g7-bishop. This also means that he does not have the option of exchanging that bishop for the c3-knight, a typical trade after which Black can play to leave White with a weak dark- squared bishop. This can be facilitated by playing ...b6 and ...Nf6, although that plan is more common when there is a black pawn on c5. In any case, these considerations do not apply in this position, as there are no dark-squared bishops present, while Black also has fewer pieces around his king. A good way to continue for White would be: 16.♘e1N or

16.♘f2N ♘g6N and now 17.♕d2 White's plan is to maneuver the f2-knight to e3 via d1, then regroup the kingside with Kh1, Rf2, and Rg1, and finally strike with g2-g4 at the right moment.

16.♕d2 ♖e8?!

The rook doesn't accomplish anything particularly impressive on the e-file.

16... ♘f6N should have been preferred.

17.fxe5

A good choice by Reshevsky, as Black is unable to recapture ...dxe5 due to the undefended f5-pawn. During the KCT session, another approach was suggested: 17\. fxe5 17...e4 Black is not thrilled about making this advance, but with ...Nf6 to follow, he will gain some time. 18.Ne1 Nf6 19.Be2 White lost some time but ultimately reached the structure he was aiming for. Still, Black can fight: 19...c5!? Now 20.dxc6 is preferred by the engine, but then Black gets a large pawn center. 20.Nc2 h5 21.Ne3 a5 Black is ready for ...b6, solidifying the queenside. Then ...Ra7-g7 could come. White is a bit better, but the game goes on.

17.♖ae1 also makes sense, increasing White's activity without resolving the tension.

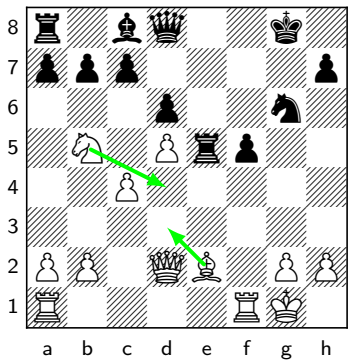
17.♗h5? This is not a bad option, but I prefer Reshevsky's move for its simplicity. ♘f6?N is premature: 18.♗xg6 hxg6 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♕h6 Not only is the g6-pawn under threat, but Rae1 is coming as well. Black will get crushed on the kingside.

17... ♘dxe5 18.♘xe5 ♖xe5

18... dxe5 would be strongly met by 19.c5 .

18... ♘xe5N warrants the same reaction as the game continuation, but in this version the f5-pawn is even less protected.

19.♘b5!



White prevents ...c6. The plan is simply Bd3 and Nd4, ganging up on the f5-pawn.

19... ♗d7 20.♗d3?!

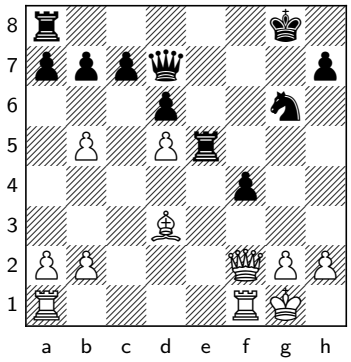
I don't get why White would allow Black the option of taking on b5, instead of opting for

20.♘d4N followed by Bd3 and doubling on the f-file if needed. The f-pawn looks doomed.

20... ♗xb5

Black snatches his chance to prevent Nd4.

21.cxb5 ♕d7 22.♕f2 f4



Black forces White to trade minor pieces and change the character of the game. White should not allow a tempo for ...Rf8, which would support the f-pawn. After

22... ♖f8 23.♕xa7 , White would also have good chances to convert the extra pawn. With his move in the game, Fischer threatens to get a better version of this.

23.♗xg6 hxg6 24.♕xf4

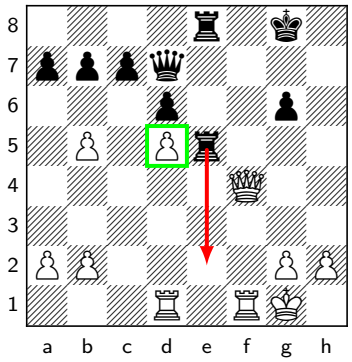
Black cannot safely take on either d5 or b5.

24... ♖ae8

We have finally arrived at the position where White is a pawn up. It is far from a clean and easy conversion. The rules for converting an extra pawn start with Step 1: White needs to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. His position is not currently stable. What is Black threatening and what should White do about it? The main threat is ...Rxd5, and a subsidiary threat is ...Re2.

24... ♖xd5 increases White's advantage after 25.♕e4 ♖f5 .

25.♖ad1



This deals neatly with both threats. It defends the d5-pawn, and an invasion on the second rank can be met by Rd2. After

25.♕g3 ♕g7 , Black eyes b2 while protecting his king, and he should be able to regain the missing pawn. The engine insists on giving White an advantage, but it isn't going to be easy to prove that in practice.

25... ♕g7

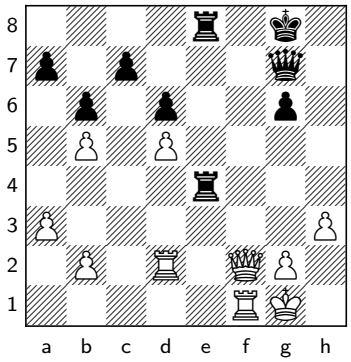
How should White stabilize the position and avoid counterplay?

26.h3!

Black did not have a threat, so White correctly plays a move which marginally improves his position, giving his king a flight square.

26.b3 is another good option, removing the pawn from the exposed square.

26... ♖e2 27.♖d2 ♖2e4 28.♕f2 b6 29.a3



This prevents the annoying ...Rb4, continuing with the theme of stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay.

29... ♖8e5

This is the most critical moment for converting an extra pawn. White has successfully stabilized the position. He now needs to come up with a long-term plan of how the extra pawn will eventually win the game. He should also evaluate which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and which changes in the pawn structure will help win the game, and which will favor the opponent. It doesn't look as though any pawns are going to be exchanged in the near future. So, the focus should be on which piece exchanges are favorable. It is clear that the pawn ending is winning for White. But Black will not allow this, and it is not possible to force it. A rook endgame would be less clear, and I would expect Black to have serious drawing chances. The extra pawn for White is on the kingside. In the long term, the queenside pawns are about equal in terms of weaknesses. The pawns on d5 and c7 are equally weak, and I could easily see a lot of queenside pawns starting to come off. The pawns on the kingside are not going to make a queen easily. It will take a long time for them to advance, and Black's king will be in front of them. Once we realize that the extra pawn on the kingside won't do all that much for us in a rook endgame, we have to think about what it could accomplish with the queens still on the board. The answer is simple: it keeps our king safe, while Black's is in more danger. Therefore, it is best for White to go after Black's king. If Black tries to relieve the pressure against his king by trading pieces, White will win the pawn endgame if all the pieces are exchanged. In a double-rook endgame, Black's king will be safe and will sit on g7 with a rook on e7. If White can get to a queen endgame, due to the attacking potential of the white queen, the importance of the extra pawn would be highlighted. Therefore, White should be aiming to exchange rooks rather than queens.

30.♕f6?

This should have enabled Black to save the game. The correct path becomes clear after developing our understanding of the situation as mentioned above: B) After 30. Qf6 30...Rf5 31.Rxe4 Rxf2 32.Rxf2 the white rooks should be able to run circles around the queen. It's the black king's precarious position that renders the situation hopeless. C) A more challenging continuation would be 30. Qf6 30...Qe7 , indirectly protecting the e4-rook to threaten ...Rf5 under better circumstances. By allowing trades, Black reduces White's attacking potential, but pieces coming off the board get the game closer to a pawn endgame: 31.Rxe4 Rxe4 32.Qf6! This works, but only for a specific reason. 32...Qxf6 33.Rxf6 Kg7 34.Rf3! White gets the rook to c3, winning by forcing the black rook to go passive. Without this resource, Black would be fine.

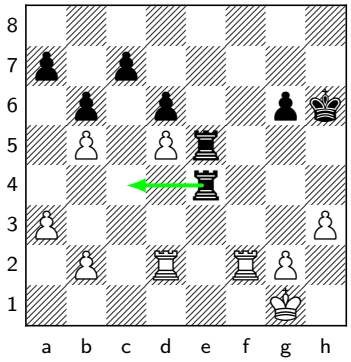
30.♖d4 Offering a trade of rooks. – A) ♖e2 Trying to keep the rooks is logical, but Black cannot afford to go pawn- grabbing. 31.♕f3 ♖xb2 Black has regained the lost pawn, but he will shortly be crushed. 32.♖e4 White removes Black's most important defender, causing the black kingside to collapse. For example: ♖d2

32... ♖xe4 , but 33.♕xe4 ♕d7 34.♕xg6† reminded me of the 'That was easy' red button. I am not letting on whether one such button is sitting on my desk at home or not...

32... ♖f5 33.♕g4 isn't that much better, with Black's king being so exposed.

33.♖xe5 dxe5 34.♕g4 Black will soon be mated or suffer enormous material losses. Someone in class offered

30... ♕xf6 31.♖xf6 ♔g7 32.♖ff2 ♔h6!



This is logical, as Black wants to wait for Rf7 before playing ...Rc4. And if Rc2, he hints at taking on d5, when the capture on c7 won't come with a check.

32... ♖c4? is awkward for Black after 33.♖c2 .

32... ♖e7 is fine, but I like the more active contour of the game continuation.

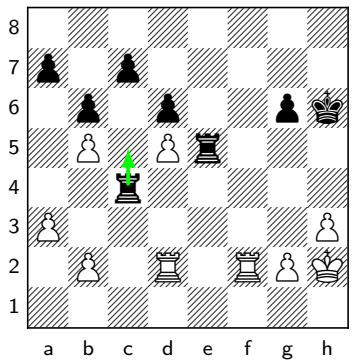
33.♔h2

After

33.♖f7 ♖c4 , Black brings the rook to c4 exactly at the moment when White cannot contest it with Rd2-c2. Black should save the game.

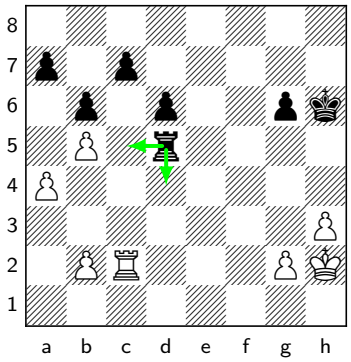
33.♖c2 can be met by ♖e7 , when it is not easy for White to make progress as he needs to keep an eye on his own weak pawns.

33... ♖c4



Black wants ...Rc5.

34.♖c2 ♖xc2 35.♖xc2 ♖xd5 36.a4



Should Black play ...Rc5 or ...Rd4?

36... ♖d4?

This should have been the losing mistake. Correct was: B) 36\. a4 37...d5?! is something Black should avoid, as after ...d4 the pawn endgame suddenly becomes lost, due to White's idea to play Ke4 and b4. For example: 38.Kg3 Kg5 39.h4+ By some miracle, 39...Kh6!! holds, but Black would not survive a fair-play inspection. It is the last of his four legal moves that any human would consider. 39...Kf5 40.Kf3 d4 41.g4+ Ke5 42.Rxc5+ bxc5 43.b3! Kd5 44.h5 gxh5 45.gxh5 Ke5 46.h6 Kf6 47.Ke4 Kg6 48.b4! cxb4 49.Kxd4 Kxh6 50.Kc4 Kg5 51.Kxb4 And so on. C) 36\. a4 37...Kg5 38.Kg3 Kf5 39.Kf3 g5 40.g3 Rd5! Only now that the black king has been centralized, the rook can leave the c5-square and allow White to take on c7. Black is holding. White has had to weaken his kingside to make progress. 41.Rxc7 Rd3+ 42.Kf2 Rb3 Black should hold, and relatively comfortably so. Another way to do it would be 37... Rd4 40...Kf6 , but going backwards should be contrary to our intuition, and Black will need to eventually abandon c7 anyway.

36... ♖c5 when 37.♖xc5?

37.♖c3 I'm sure this is what Fischer was worried about. If Black ever takes on c3, following b2xc3, his queenside pawn mass is impotent and will not make a passed pawn, leaving him in a lost pawn endgame. Simultaneously, the black rook can never move away because c7 will fall. However, White's rook is sort of stuck, too, so it is natural to think of this position almost like a pawn endgame. And while that may look lost for Black, in fact, he will hold. Most instructively, that's the case specifically because he will move his rook away at a key moment. – A) ♖xc3? 38.bxc3 is indeed easily winning for White.

37... bxc5 is a routine draw, due to Black's protected passed d-pawn.

37.b3 ♖d3 38.♖xc7 ♖xb3 39.♖xa7 d5

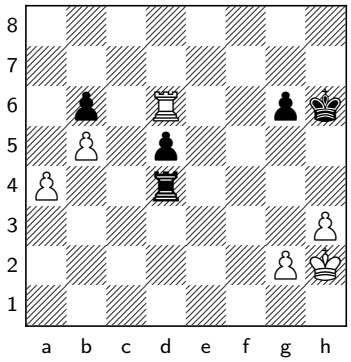
Including

39... ♖b4 and 40.♖a6 does not change anything, as White can take on b6 and transpose to the lines shown below.

40.♖d7 ♖d3

40... ♖b4 loses immediately to 41.♖xd5 ♖xa4 42.♖d6 , when Black will be two pawns down instead of one.

41.♖d6 ♖d4



How does White win? He needs to consider how the extra pawn is going to help him.

42.♖xb6!

White's extra pawn on the kingside isn't going to promote. However, it can be used to keep Black's king stuck on the kingside, so that White can win the game on the queenside and/or in the center.

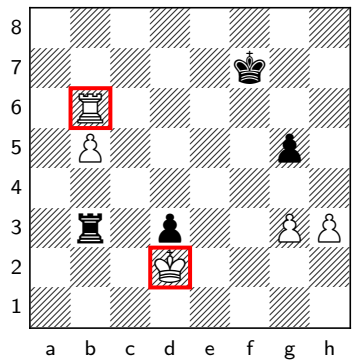
42... ♖xa4 43.♔g3?

A huge mistake, allowing Black to freeze the white rook in front of the passed pawn. Correct was: The most testing is 43. Kg3 46...Kg5 , so the king doesn't get off, but equally insufficient. 47.Ke3 Rb3 48.g3! A nice and important detail, playing for zugzwang. – A1) 48...Kf5 49.h4 Zugzwang. 49...d2+ 50.Kxd2 Rxg3 51.Rd5+ The rook comes to b5, and Black can resign. A2) It's important to note that 43. Kg3 48...d2+ fails to 49.Kxd2 Rxg3 50.Rd3! , and the rook gets behind the passed pawn. A3) After 43. Kg3 48...Kh6 49.h4 Kh5 50.Rc6 Kh6 51.g4 , the black king is stuck on the kingside, and White wins without any trouble. For example: 51...Kg7 52.g5 Kf7 53.Kd2 Black is in zugzwang. I cannot resist the temptation to mention: 43. Kg3 48.Kd4? d2 49.Kc5 This approach does not win for White, as I explained in Theoretical Rook Endgames. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) White will not be able to build a bridge in the style of the Lucena position, as the black pawn on the seventh rank would constantly threaten to become a queen. To illustrate: 49...Rb2 50.Kc6 Kh6 51.b7 Rc2+ 52.Kd7 Rb2 53.Kc8 Rc2+ 54.Kb8 Kg5 It's a draw, as White has no way to make progress. B) 43\. Kg3 45...Kg5 also loses to: 46.Kf3! White threatens to infiltrate with his king via e4 and d5. 46...Kf5 What else? 47.g4+! Underlining that if Black centralizes his king, he loses on the kingside: 47...Ke5 48.Rxg6 Rb3+ 49.Kg2 d3 50.Kf3! White controls the black passer and wins due to his two extra pawns. A pleasing detail is that 43\. Kg3 49.Kf2!? is even stronger: 49...Rxh3 50.Rg5+! Kf4 51.Rb5! Rooks belong behind passed pawns. 51...Rh2+ 52.Kg1 Rh8 53.b7 Rb8 54.Kf2 Kxg4 55.Ke2 And White wins prosaically.

43.♖d6 Ensuring that the white rook will be as active as possible, eyeing all three of the relevant pawns. d4 44.♔g3 Black's problem is that his king cannot freely approach the center, because losing g6 would be equivalent to resignation. That's how White's extra pawn on the kingside proves its worth. ♖b4 45.b6 and now: – A) d3 Black tries to use his d-pawn as a deflection, but he'll turn out to be a tempo short. 46.♔f3 d2 47.♔e2 ♖b2 48.h4 Black can only move his king, but there are not many moves available. ♔g7 49.g4 ♔f7 50.g5 ♔g7 51.♖d7† ♔f8 52.b7

43... ♖b4 44.♖b8 d4 45.♔f3 ♖b3†

46.♔e4 d3 47.♔e3 g5 48.♖b6† ♔g7 49.♔d2 ♔f7 50.g3



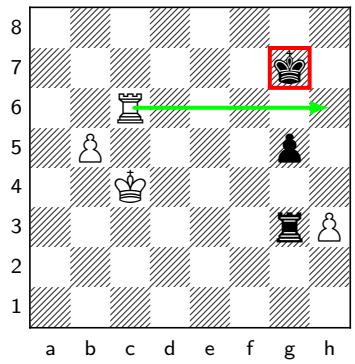
As White didn't play Rd6, his king is stuck preventing the d-pawn from queening. With the white rook on d6, the white king would be free to advance and create threats, for example, from g4.

50... ♖b2†??

If Black had waited, White would not have been able to achieve anything. The black king will remain on the kingside to take care of the passed h-pawn when it comes down the board.

50... ♔g7 draws.

51.♔xd3 ♖b3† 52.♔c4 ♖xg3 53.♖h6 ♔g7 54.♖c6



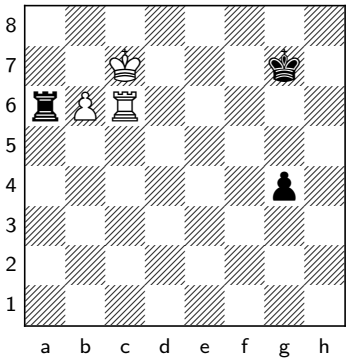
Black's king is cut off along the sixth rank, so Black is never able to sacrifice his rook for the b-pawn as he will always lose the resulting endgame with rook against pawn.

54... ♖xh3 55.b6 ♖h1 56.♔b5 ♖b1† 57.♔a6 ♖a1† 58.♔b7 g4 59.♔c8 ♖a6

Or

59... ♖b1 60.b7 g3 61.♖c3 and White wins.

60.♔c7



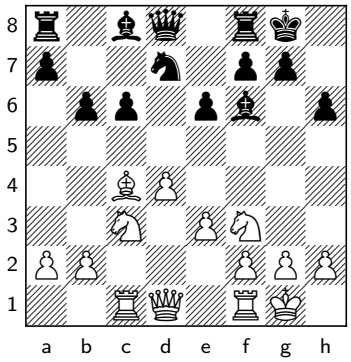
Both sides made quite a few errors in evaluating which pieces and pawns they should be trying to exchange. Ultimately, Fischer made the last error. But it is telling that even with top players painting the picture, we can watch the half-point be passed back and forth like this. Converting an extra pawn is not an easy business, no matter who you are.

Anatoly Karpov-Boris Spassky Introduction

Moving forward a little bit in time, we see two more schooled players in Karpov and

Spassky contest a position involving an extra pawn. They did not make as many strategic errors as Fischer and Reshevsky did, but there were still some notable mistakes. This was one of my favorite games to analyze, both in terms of figuring out what Karpov did right, and where his play left room for improvement.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗e7 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♗g5 O-O 6.e3 h6 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.♖c1 c6 9.♗d3 ♘d7 10.O-O dxc4 11.♗xc4 b6?!



This isn't truly bad, but Black could have been more direct. In our day, it is known that Also, 12... b6 12.d5 Nb6 13.Bb3 e4! 14.Nxe4 Bxb2 15.Rc2 cxd5 is comfortable for Black. The other immediate break with

11... e5 clearly equalizes. For example: 12.♘e4N exd4 13.♘xf6†N ♘xf6N 14.♘xd4N ♕e7 With equality.

11... c5 is also fine for Black.

12.e4!

This not only gains space in the center but also serves as good prophylaxis against both ...c5 and ...e5.

12.♘e4?N leaves the knight in a vulnerable spot after ♗e7 . Black is ready for ...Bb7 and ...c5. When the break on c5 comes, the knight will be hanging on e4. It would be better placed on c3, facilitating d5.

12... ♗b7

□ □

12... e5? was the best approach a move ago, but now it falls flat on its face. After 13.d5 Black has a bad bishop on f6, and White will end up with a strong piece on d5. White is much better. Black is missing both ...Nb6 and ...e4.

12... c5? is even worse for Black: 13.e5 After ♗e7

13... cxd4 14.exf6 dxc3 15.fxg7 The black king has been weakened, and the white pieces have arrived at the center first. The engine already claims the attack against the black king should be decisive, and that is not hard to believe. How should White proceed?

14.d5 , Black would be able to solve his problems if he was able to play ...Nb6, but a pawn is on that square. As things stand, White wins.

13.e5!

I like this move a lot. White rules out any

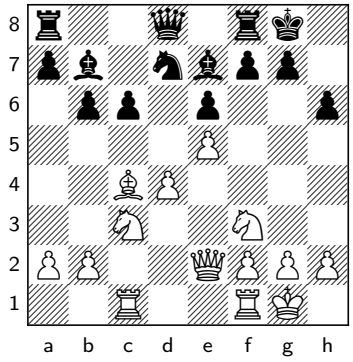
hope of ...e5, and now that the bishop will be forced back to e7, White will be ready to meet ...c5 with d5. 13\. e5 14.d5 should be preferred, but after 14...exd5 15.Nxd5 Ne5 Black should be fine. Once the knights are exchanged, his bishop will anchor itself on d4. This is a much better square than e7!

13.♕e2 was suggested in the KCT session, but it is a less accurate version of the same idea. The reason is that after c5 14.e5? Black has an important in-between move. ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♗g5 White is not getting d5 in. In fact, his center is crumbling, and he loses a pawn on the spot.

13... ♗e7

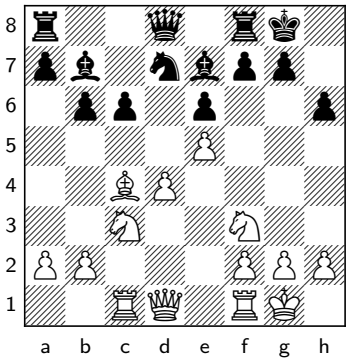
Here comes our first instructive point, though not yet on the topic of converting an extra pawn. After

14.♕e2



, how should Black play? A hint would be that familiarity with the Moscow Variation of the Semi-Slav could be helpful.

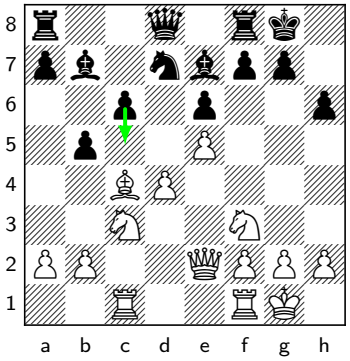
Karpov-Spassky Exercise #1



14.♕e2

How should Black play? A hint would be that familiarity with the Moscow Variation of the Semi-Slav could be helpful.

14... b5!



These types of positions are terrible for Black if he does not get the ...c5 break in. It is often worth playing it even at the cost of a pawn. That is the break this move preludes. An important part of the reasoning behind White's last few moves is that

14... c5? is met with 15.d5 . Black has no ...Bxf3, which he would have in a similar line after 13.Qe2. White has a large edge.

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play on the queenside and will get mated on the kingside.

15.♗d3

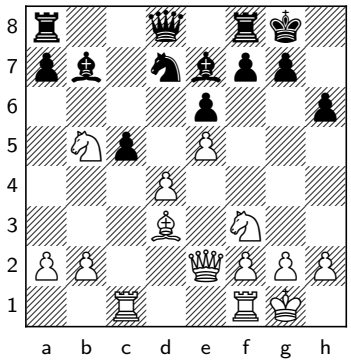
15.♗b3 can be met in a few ways, including the relatively simple b4 followed by ...c5.

15... c5!

Black's dark-squared bishop would be better placed on g7, where it would target the newly weakened e5-pawn. That's where it would be if this were the Semi-Slav. In any case, this break is the way to go. Black is not in time for

15... a6? , as after 16.♘e4N ♕b6 17.♕e3 , he will not get ...c5 in, and he is totally lost thanks to his passive pieces. Eventually, White will crush the kingside.

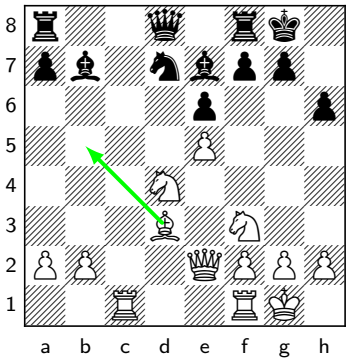
Karpov-Spassky Exercise #2



16... cxd4

Natural but inaccurate. Karpov now made a mistake. Can you do better?

17.♘bxd4!



This frees up the b5-square for the white bishop. □ □ □

17.♗e4? It should be fairly clear that the d4-pawn will fall, and White will end up with an extra pawn. He then needs to stabilize the position and prevent counterplay, as well as evaluate which exchanges are in his favor. Is the exchange of the b7-bishop for the f3-knight in White's favor? Yes, it is. It gives White some attacking prospects with Qe4. Black has weak light squares, which will help White to coordinate his pieces faster. The b7-bishop is the best piece on the board. White would also be reasonably happy with the exchange of bishops, in order to try to take advantage of the weak c6-square. This explains the text move, although it is a somewhat careless choice, as it was not calculated correctly; Black could have solved his problems directly. So, White should have captured on d4 with one of the knights. Either way, Black is likely to reply with ...Nc5. White does not want to allow Black to obtain two bishops against two knights. Does White have a way of saving the d3-bishop

whilst blunting or exchanging off the monster on b7, as the first step in converting the extra pawn?

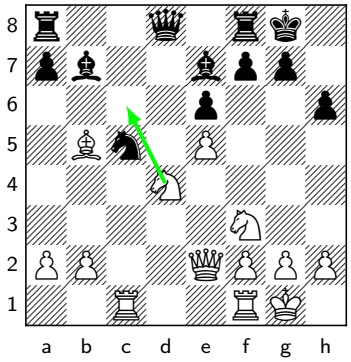
17.♘fxd4?N runs into ♘c5N 18.♗b1 a6 White has to give back his extra pawn right away.

17.♖c7? is strongly met by ♗xf3 , when Black wins.

17... ♘c5

17... ♗xf3 18.♘xf3N followed by Qe4 gives White an attack in addition to the pawn.

18.♗b5!



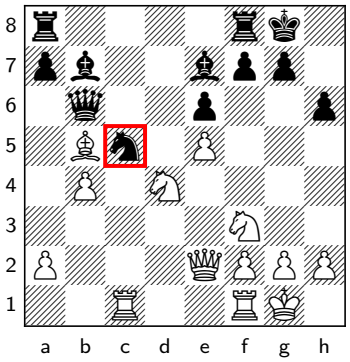
This is an important move as Black is not in time to cover the c6-square. His b7-bishop will be neutralized.

18... ♕b6

This covers the c6-square but runs into another problem.

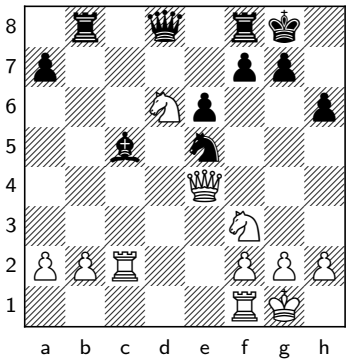
18... a5 The best move in a bad position. 19.♘c6N Other moves are good, but I like immediately trading off Black's best piece. ♗xc6 20.♗xc6 ♖b8 21.♗b5 With Rc2 and then Rfc1 coming next, White's extra pawn is looking quite good.

19.b4!



With an amazing position for White.

Karpov-Spassky Bonus Exercise

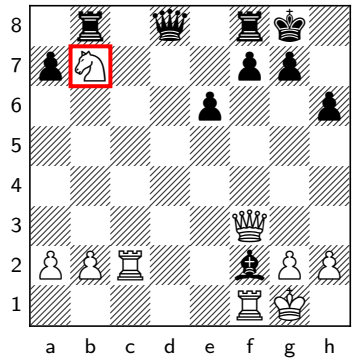


23.♘b7?

When calculating, one must consider the fork on b7 to be the critical move. Instead of resigning, as a human might be inclined to do, Black can turn the tables. This is a hard exercise, but you're welcome to try!

23.♘xe5N should be preferred, with equality.

23... ♘xf3† 24.♕xf3 ♗xf2†!!



Black throws the bishop on f2. Surprisingly, none of the four pieces can safely take it!

25.♔xf2

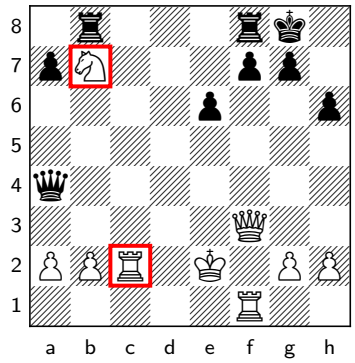
After If the other rook takes, then after

25.♕xf2 is the easy one as it allows ♖xb7 .

25.♖fxf2 ♖xb7 26.♕xb7 ♕d1† , Black wins back the rook and emerges a pawn up.

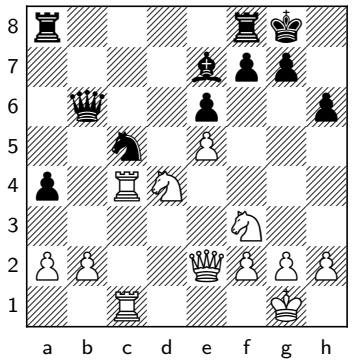
25.♖cxf2 ♕b6 , the knight is trapped.

25... ♕d4†! 26.♔e2 ♕a4!



Black attacks the c2-rook, and the b7-knight will fall in some lines to a check on b5 or a6. Black wins. This is incredibly difficult, but computers are good at chess!

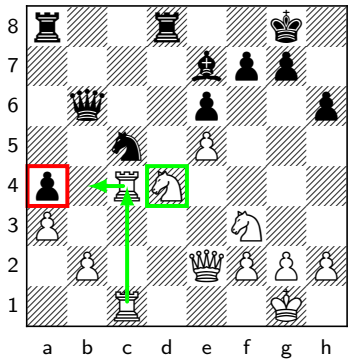
Karpov-Spassky Exercise #3



22... ♖fd8

At this point, it is clear that White has stabilized the position. His pieces are all on good squares, and he is facing no threats. So, what comes next? We need to think about how the extra pawn will ultimately win the game, and which exchanges of pieces, pawns, or changes to the pawn structure will be in our favor. With the present piece assortment, it seems unlikely that White can hope to make a passer and shove the passed pawn up the board.

23.a3!



What the extra queenside pawn can do is fight for key squares and keep its colleagues safe. White's plan should be to try to tether Black's

pieces to the defense of the a4-pawn, which lacks a pawn that can defend it. Therefore, this would have been my choice. White has the simple plan of getting the rook to b4. This stops Black from creating counterplay against b2. The rooks can land on b4 and c4, and then the queen could go to c2. This bolsters the d4-knight and threatens the a4-pawn, rendering Black's pieces passive. For example: □ □ □ However, that's not the only way to play it. In my view,

23.♖1c3? has the potential idea of continuing with Qc2, tripling pieces on the open file, and playing for b2-b3 later. However, after ♖d5 24.♕c2 ♘d7N White's plan runs aground. It is not easy to protect the pawn on e5.

23.h3? This is not the most purposeful. ♖d5 This is a good, safe, and active spot for the rook, from where it also targets the white pawn on e5. White slowly improved his position bit by bit over the next few moves, but it is difficult to make significant progress. The black bishop in particular is a good defensive piece, and the e5-pawn will require protection. 24.a3 is no longer effective, as Black is closer to generating counterplay with ♘d7N , which attacks the e5-pawn and stops Rb4 at the same time. 24... Rd5 24.R1c2 Bf8! This makes sure that a possible Nc6 won't threaten the bishop, and that Rc8 is not a check. In doing so, Black gets ready to move the knight.

23.h4? is also a decent plan. Black has put his pieces on the queenside to thwart White's progress there. So, it is a reasonable idea to advance pawns on the kingside in this way, followed by g2-g4-g5. This reminds me of some positions in the Benko Gambit, and, indeed, I did not play h2-h4 when it was clearly best at a key moment in the game against Martin Haubro (see here (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)). In that opening, White usually supports his pawns on the queenside and then tries to break through in the center and on the kingside, targeting the black king. Black cannot help matters by trading pieces, the normal response to an attack on the king, as the a-pawn will then simply win. This position is similar. If Black brings his knight back to defend his kingside, then the presence of the b-pawn will make itself felt. This strategy also reminds me of the famous game, Karpov – Taimanov, Leningrad 1972. White had a good knight against a bad bishop with a closed center. Karpov's 26th to 29th moves were h4 (which prompted the reply ...h7-h6), g4, h5 and g5 respectively. This opened up the kingside, and Karpov won with an attack on the king. Here, starting to throw h4 and g4 is a decent plan, and while I think a3 is stronger, I still like this much more than what Karpov played.

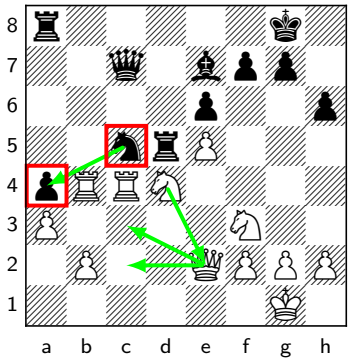
23... ♖d5

The most natural. After I can't imagine any human playing

23... ♗f8 24.♖b4 ♕a6 25.♕xa6 ♖xa6 26.♖b5 , White has succeeded in keeping Black passive and containing any chances of counterplay.

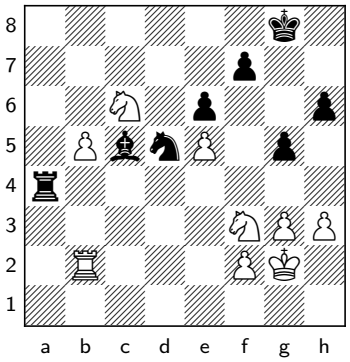
23... ♘b3?N , but it is the best move to illustrate the point of what White's extra pawn is doing for him. The b2-pawn allowed him to push a2-a3 with Rb4 coming next, precisely because the pawn is safe on a3, protected by the extra pawn on b2. After 24.♘xb3N axb3 , Black is totally busted. But imagine if White's pawn on b2 were not there. The evaluation would be a bit different!

24.♖b4! ♕c7 25.♖cc4!



Along with the temporary pin down the c-file, the pressure against the a4-pawn keeps the c5-knight in place, unable to regroup to d7 to target the weaknesses. White can continue with Qc2 and Ne2-c3. Eventually, the a4-pawn should fall. This is in stark contrast to how the game went, where Black had a reasonable plan to target the e5-pawn.

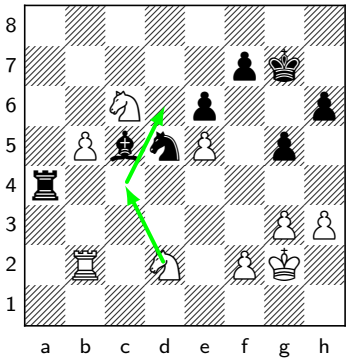
Karpov-Spassky Exercise #4



39... ♔g7

This is the next position I want to focus on. It is a good one in which to consider the three questions that Jacob Aagaard notes as often being relevant. In this position in particular, the most important question is: which is the worst-placed piece?

40.♘d2!



This knight is currently White's worst-placed piece. Its ideal square is d6.

40.h4 g4 does not change the position much.

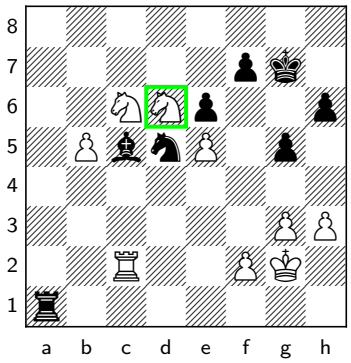
40.♘e1N followed by Nd3 was my initial thought, but Karpov's plan is even stronger.

40... ♗b6 41.♖c2!

The knight can get to d6 via c4. White takes advantage of the black rook, not targeting the b-pawn. The computer still sees nothing amiss with Black's position, but it is starting to get dangerous. It doesn't seem surprising that White won this.

41.♔f3 would have been met with h5 , and White is unable to play Ne4.

41... ♖a1 42.♘c4 ♗c5 43.♘d6

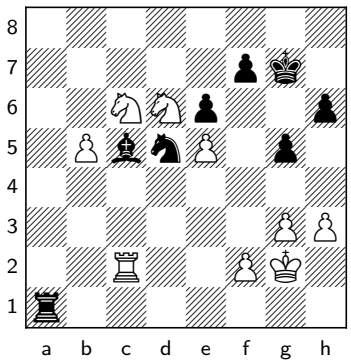


Black played

43... ♗b6

The knight has arrived on d6 . What should White do next?

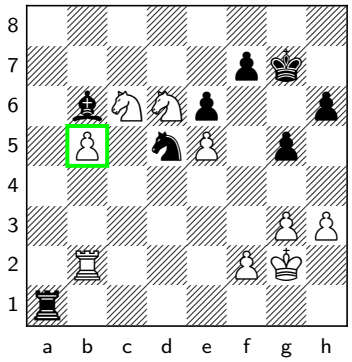
Karpov-Spassky Exercise #5



43... ♗b6

The knight has arrived on d6. What should White do next?

44.♖b2!

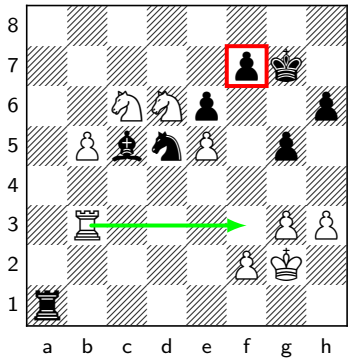


The rook has served its purpose on c2, which was to get the knight to d6. So, it moves back to support the b-pawn.

44... ♗c5

Now what? Karpov missed a strong maneuver of the rook to the kingside with:

45.♖b3!



The rook is coming to f3, coordinating decisively with the newly arrived knight on d6. Again, White is attacking on the kingside, in the spirit of the Benko Gambit. Black is unable to properly defend the f7-pawn because all his pieces are set up to keep the b-pawn under control. Even in the endgame, we see the same principle at play: when you have a far-advanced passed pawn that your opponent currently has under control, the best plan is often to make unrelated threats to the enemy king.

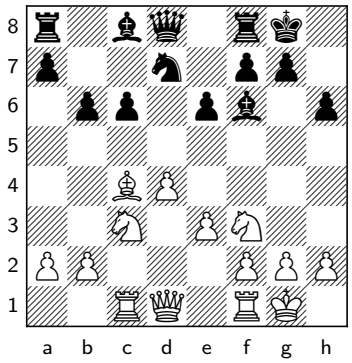
45.♘d8?N This was the right idea, aiming for the kingside weaknesses. But it's a wrong execution, as it allows the e5-pawn to be traded off. ♗d4 46.♖c2 ♗xe5 47.♘8xf7N ♗xd6? Better was

47... ♗f6 , freezing the white knights. I don't see how they will untangle, and Black should save the game.

Anatoly Karpov-Boris Spassky, Lucerne 1985

Moving forward a little bit in time, we see two more schooled players in Karpov and Spassky contest a position involving an extra pawn. They did not make as many strategic errors as Fischer and Reshevsky did, but there were still some notable mistakes. This was one of my favorite games to analyze, both in terms of figuring out what Karpov did right, and where his play left room for improvement.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗e7 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♗g5 O-O 6.e3 h6 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.♖c1 c6 9.♗d3 ♘d7 10.O-O dxc4 11.♗xc4 b6?!



This isn't truly bad, but Black could have been more direct. In our day, it is known that Also, 12... b6 12.d5 Nb6 13.Bb3 e4! 14.Nxe4 Bxb2 15.Rc2 cxd5 is comfortable for Black. The other immediate break with

11... e5 clearly equalizes. For example: 12.♘e4N exd4 13.♘xf6†N ♘xf6N 14.♘xd4N ♕e7 With equality.

11... c5 is also fine for Black.

12.e4!

This not only gains space in the center but also serves as good prophylaxis against both ...c5 and ...e5.

12.♘e4?N leaves the knight in a vulnerable spot after ♗e7 . Black is ready for ...Bb7 and ...c5. When the break on c5 comes, the knight will be hanging on e4. It would be better placed on c3, facilitating d5.

12... ♗b7

□ □

12... e5? was the best approach a move ago, but now it falls flat on its face. After 13.d5 Black has a bad bishop on f6, and White will end up with a strong piece on d5. White is much better. Black is missing both ...Nb6 and ...e4.

12... c5? is even worse for Black: 13.e5 After ♗e7

13... cxd4 14.exf6 dxc3 15.fxg7 The black king has been weakened, and the white pieces have arrived at the center first. The engine already claims the attack against the black king should be decisive, and that is not hard to believe. How should White proceed?

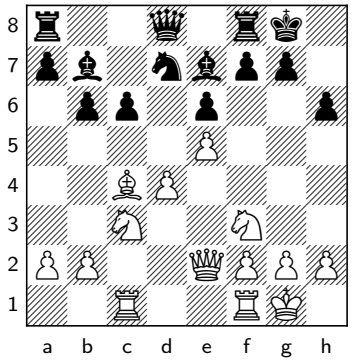
14.d5 , Black would be able to solve his problems if he was able to play ...Nb6, but a pawn is on that square. As things stand, White wins.

13.e5!

I like this move a lot. White rules out any hope of ...e5, and now that the bishop will be forced back to e7, White will be ready to meet ...c5 with d5. 13\. e5 14.d5 should be preferred, but after 14...exd5 15.Nxd5 Ne5 Black should be fine. Once the knights are exchanged, his bishop will anchor itself on d4. This is a much better square than e7!

13.♕e2 was suggested in the KCT session, but it is a less accurate version of the same idea. The reason is that after c5 14.e5? Black has an important in-between move. ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♗g5 White is not getting d5 in. In fact, his center is crumbling, and he loses a pawn on the spot.

13... ♗e7 14.♕e2



How should Black play? A hint would be that familiarity with the Moscow Variation of the Semi-Slav could be helpful.

14... b5!

These types of positions are terrible for Black if he does not get the ...c5 break in. It is often worth playing it even at the cost of a pawn. That is the break this move preludes. An important part of the reasoning behind White's last few moves is that

14... c5? is met with 15.d5 . Black has no ...Bxf3, which he would have in a similar line after 13.Qe2. White has a large edge.

14... a6 is slow, as 15.♕e4 stops ...c5. After b5 16.♗d3 g6 17.h4 , Black has no play on the queenside and will get mated on the kingside.

15.♗d3

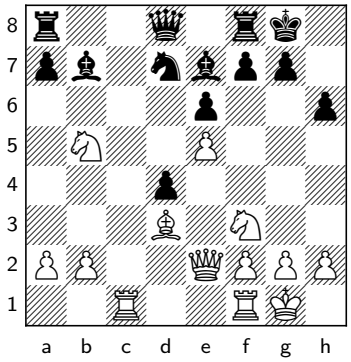
15.♗b3 can be met in a few ways, including the relatively simple b4 followed by ...c5.

15... c5!

Black's dark-squared bishop would be better placed on g7, where it would target the newly weakened e5-pawn. That's where it would be if this were the Semi-Slav. In any case, this break is the way to go. Black is not in time for

15... a6? , as after 16.♘e4N ♕b6 17.♕e3 Black will not get ...c5 in, and he is totally lost thanks to his passive pieces. Eventually, White will crush the kingside.

16.♘xb5 cxd4



Natural but inaccurate. Karpov now made a mistake. Can you do better?

16... ♖b8 is the engine's top choice, but it's not easy playing like this.

17.♗e4?

It should be fairly clear that the d4-pawn will fall, and White will end up with an extra pawn. He then needs to stabilize the position and prevent counterplay, as well as evaluate which exchanges are in his favor. Is the exchange of the b7-bishop for the f3-knight in White's favor? Yes, it is. It gives White some attacking prospects with Qe4. Black has weak light squares, which will help White to coordinate his pieces faster. The b7-bishop is the best piece on the board. White would also be reasonably happy with the exchange of bishops, in order to try to take advantage of the weak c6-square. This explains the text move, although it is a somewhat careless choice, as it was not calculated correctly; Black could have solved his problems directly. So White should have captured on d4 with one of the knights. Either way, Black is likely to reply with ...Nc5. White does not want to allow Black to obtain two bishops against two knights. Does White have a way of saving the d3-bishop whilst blunting or exchanging off the monster on b7, as the first step in converting the extra pawn? □ To put words into moves: □ □

17.♘bxd4N This frees up the b5-square for the white bishop. ♗xf3 18.♘xf3N followed by Qe4 gives White an attack in addition to the pawn. 17\. Nbxd4 17...Nc5 18.Bb5! This is an important move as Black is not in time to cover the c6-square. His b7-bishop will be neutralized. 18...a5 The best move in a bad position. (18...Qb6 19.b4! is amazing for White.) 19.Nc6 Other moves are good, but I like immediately trading off Black's best piece. 19...Bxc6 20.Bxc6 Rb8 21.Bb5 With Rc2 and then Rfc1 coming next, White's extra pawn is looking quite good. That's how White should have played.

17.♘fxd4?N runs into: ♘c5N

18.♗b1 a6 White has to give back his extra pawn right away.

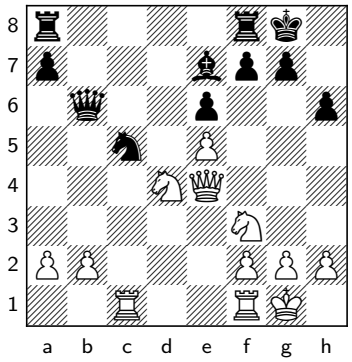
17.♖c7? is strongly met by ♗xf3 , when Black wins.

17... ♗xe4 18.♕xe4 ♕b6?!

The first step in the wrong direction. Black should have found:

18... ♘c5N 19.♕xd4 ♘d3N The knight ensures enough counterplay. 20.♖c2 At this point, surely, the easiest solution is to retreat the knight to b4, followed by grabbing the a2-pawn and restoring material parity. However, there was one funny line we found in a KCT session that merits a mention: ♗c5? When I first saw this move suggested, I was not a fan. 21.♕e4 It looks like Black is asking for trouble, with the knight on d3 overextended, unable to move without hanging the bishop, and a pin on the d-file is coming in short order. ♗b6 22.♘d6N is just winning for White. But the machine finds a fantastic resource. 21\. Qe4 21...Rb8! The best defense is counterattack. 22.Nd6 It looks like Black is more or less lost, but computers are tricky... 22...Nxe5! (After 22...Bxd6 23.Qxd3 Bc7 24.Qxd8 Bxd8 25.Rd1 , White has convincingly consolidated his extra pawn and is well on the way to winning. Black has no counterplay at all.) Now 23.Nxe5 should be preferred, with equality, but when calculating, one must consider the fork on b7 to be the critical move. 23.Nb7? This is a hard exercise! Instead of resigning, as a human might be inclined to do, Black can turn the tables. 23...Nxf3+ 24.Qxf3 Bxf2+!! Black throws the bishop on f2. Surprisingly, none of the four pieces can safely take it! □ 25.Qxf2 is the easy one as it allows 25...Rxb7 . □ After 25.Rfxf2 Rxb7! 26.Qxb7 Qd1+ , Black wins back the rook and emerges a pawn up. □ If the other rook takes, then after 25.Rcxf2 Qb6! the knight is trapped. □ 25.Kxf2 Qd4+! 26.Ke2 Qa4! Black attacks the c2-rook, and the b7-knight will fall in some lines to a check on b5 or a6. Black wins. This is incredibly difficult, but computers are good at chess!

19.♘bxd4 ♘c5?



This condemns Black to suffering forever. Spassky needed to play: B) 20... Nc5 21.Qg4 is easier to deal with but will also raise Black's blood pressure a little bit: 21...Rfe8 22.Nc6 Bf8 23.Qf4 f5! 24.exf6 Qxf6 Black should hold, but White will retain some pressure.

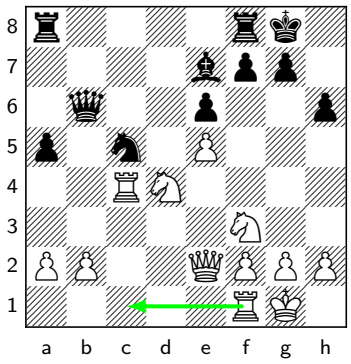
19... ♕xb2 With the light-squared bishops exchanged, Black has many weakened light squares on the queenside, and he

does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn. It is not easy to calculate the variations, but the effort is needed to make the capture on b2 work. Otherwise, Black is simply much worse. After 20.♘c6N

20.♖c7 This looks incredibly scary. ♘c5N It's crucial to win this tempo against the white queen in order to escape the skewer along the seventh rank. – A) 21.♕c6? This might not be strictly best, but it would be the hardest to calculate. ♖ae8? fails to 22.♖xe7 ♖xe7 . Instead, 2. c4 21...Bd8! 22.Rxf7 is terrifying to try and work out from afar, but Black is good to go if he calculates well. 22...Kxf7! 23.Qxa8 Bb6! 24.Qc6 Qxa2 Amazingly, if anyone is better, it has to be Black. After 22... Rae8 22.Qxc5 Bxc7 23.Qxc7 Qxa2 , Black should be fine. His outside a-pawn will be very annoying to deal with, as the knights lack any anchored squares to use to keep it under control.

20... ♗c5 , Black is fine.

20.♕e2 a5 21.♖c4!



A sensible move. The rook goes to a safe square, from where it can influence events on both sides of the board. At the same time, the c1-square is vacated for the f1-rook to join in on the action. While the piece assortment is not the same, it reminds me a bit of the Rc1-c4 move that I chose against Gozzoli in Game 10. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) I had not studied this game yet at the time, but still found the same idea.

21... a4 22.♖fc1 ♖fd8

At this point, it is clear that White has stabilized the position. His pieces are all on good squares, and he is facing no threats. So, what comes next? We need to think about how the extra pawn will ultimately win the game, and which exchanges of pieces, pawns, or changes to the pawn structure will be in our favor. With the present piece assortment, it seems unlikely that White can hope to make a passer and shove the passed pawn up the board. Instead, what the extra queenside pawn can do is fight for key squares and keep its colleagues safe. White's plan should be to try to tether Black's pieces to the defense of the a4-pawn, which lacks a pawn that can defend it.

23.h3?!

This is not the most purposeful. □ Instead, my choice would have been: B) After 23. h3 23...Bf8 24.Rb4 Qa6 25.Qxa6 Rxa6 26.Rb5 , White has succeeded in keeping Black passive and containing any chances of counterplay. C) I can't imagine any human playing 23. h3 23...Nb3? , but it is the best move to illustrate the point of what White's extra pawn is doing for him. The b2-pawn allowed him to push a3 with Rb4 coming next, precisely because the pawn is safe on a3, protected by the extra pawn on b2.

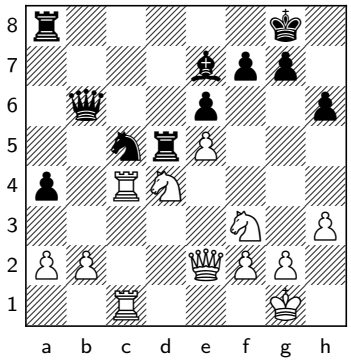
After 24.Nxb3 axb3 Black is totally busted. But imagine if White's pawn on b2 were not there. The evaluation would be a bit different! □ However, that's not the only way to play it. In my view,

23.♖1c3? has the potential idea of continuing with Qc2, tripling pieces on the open file, and playing for b2-b3 later. However, after ♖d5 24.♕c2 ♘d7N White's plan runs aground. It is not easy to protect the pawn on e5.

23.a3 White has the simple plan of getting the rook to b4. This stops Black from creating counterplay against b2. The rooks can land on b4 and c4, and then the queen could go to c2. This bolsters the d4-knight and threatens the a4-pawn, rendering Black's pieces passive. For example: – A) ♖d5 The most natural. 24.♖b4 ♕c7 25.♖cc4 Along with the temporary pin down the c-file, the pressure against the a4-pawn keeps the c5-knight in place, unable to regroup to d7 to target the weaknesses. White can continue with Qc2 and Ne2-c3. Eventually, the a4-pawn should fall. This is in stark contrast to how the game went, where Black had a reasonable plan to target the e5-pawn.

23.h4? is also a decent plan. Black has put his pieces on the queenside to thwart White's progress there. So, it is a reasonable idea to advance pawns on the kingside in this way, followed by g2-g4-g5. This reminds me of some positions in the Benko Gambit, and, indeed, I did not play h2-h4 when it was clearly best at a key moment in the game against Martin Haubro (see here (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)). In that opening, White usually supports his pawns on the queenside and then tries to break through in the center and on the kingside, targeting the black king. Black cannot help matters by trading pieces, the normal response to an attack on the king, as the a-pawn will then simply win. This position is similar. If Black brings his knight back to defend his kingside, then the presence of the b-pawn will make itself felt. This strategy also reminds me of the famous game, Karpov – Taimanov, Leningrad 1972. White had a good knight against a bad bishop with a closed center. Karpov's 26th to 29th moves were h4 (which prompted the reply ...h7-h6), g4, h5 and g5 respectively. This opened up the kingside, and Karpov won with an attack on the king. Here, starting to throw h4 and g4 is a decent plan, and while I think a3 is stronger, I still like this much more than what Karpov played.

23... ♖d5!



This is a good, safe, and active spot for the rook, from where it also targets the white pawn on e5. White slowly improved his position bit by bit over the next few moves, but it is difficult to make significant progress. The black bishop in particular is a good defensive piece, and the e5-pawn will require protection.

24.♖1c2

24.a3 is no longer effective, as Black is closer to generating counterplay with ♘d7N , which attacks the e5-pawn and stops Rb4 at the same time.

24... ♗f8!

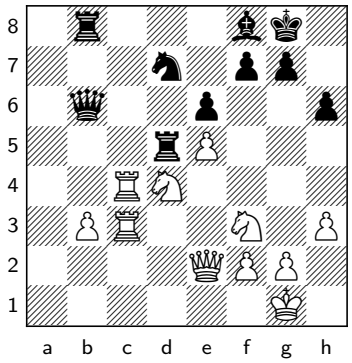
This makes sure that a possible Nc6 won't threaten the bishop, and that Rc8 is not a check. In doing so, Black gets ready to move the knight.

25.♖2c3 ♖b8?!

This isn't terrible, but there was something clearly better. Already,

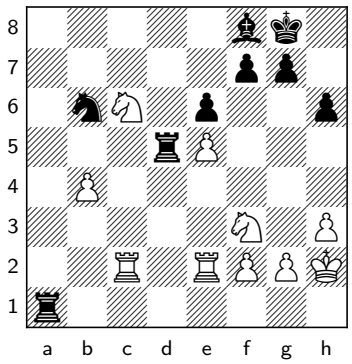
25... ♘d7N equalizes. White's pieces are passive and tasked with dealing with Black's threats. The only way to stop ...Nxe5 would be to bring the c3-rook to a horrible square with 26.♖e3 , and after ♖aa5 Black further highlights the disparity in activity between the two armies.

26.b4 axb3 27.axb3 ♘d7



White's coordination leaves a lot to be desired. He would have been much better off not allowing the exchange of the a-pawns and trying to win the a4-pawn instead. The machine claims this is already just about equal, but in human terms, there is still more work to do. In any case, Karpov could have done himself a favor earlier, by doing a better job of evaluating which changes to the pawn structure would best help him convert the extra pawn.

28.♘c6 ♖a8 29.b4 ♖a1† 30.♔h2 ♕a6 31.♖c2 ♘b6 32.♖e4 ♕xe2 33.♖exe2



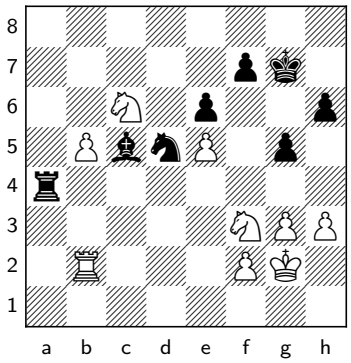
The queens have come off. This is in White's favor, but the b-pawn is well contained, and the f3-knight is poorly placed.

33... ♖dd1 34.♖a2 ♘d5?!

Black didn't need to allow the exchange of rooks. White will be left with a clean extra pawn and will not face any direct threats, so there will be chances to win, even if making progress turns out to be difficult. After

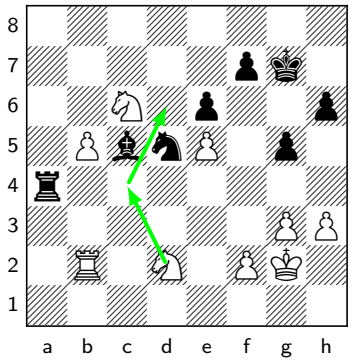
34... ♖ab1 followed by ...Nd5, Black might just win the b-pawn straight up, with an obvious draw.

35.♖xa1 ♖xa1 36.♖b2 ♖a4 37.b5 ♗c5 38.g3 g5 39.♔g2 ♔g7



This is the next position I want to focus on. It is a good one in which to consider the three questions that Jacob Aagaard notes as often being relevant. In this position in particular, the most important question is: which is the worst-placed piece?

40.♘d2!



This knight is currently White's worst-placed piece. Its ideal square is d6.

40.h4 g4 does not change the position much.

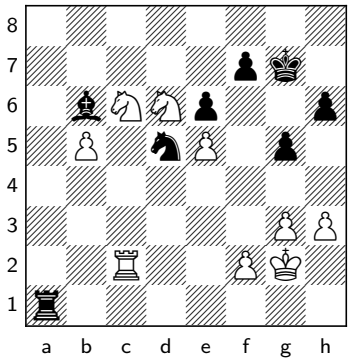
40.♘e1N followed by Nd3 was my initial thought, but Karpov's plan is even stronger.

40... ♗b6 41.♖c2!

The knight can get to d6 via c4. White takes advantage of the black rook, not targeting the b-pawn. The computer still sees nothing amiss with Black's position, but it is starting to get dangerous. It doesn't seem surprising that White won this.

41.♔f3 would have been met with h5 , and White is unable to play Ne4.

41... ♖a1 42.♘c4 ♗c5 43.♘d6 ♗b6



The knight has arrived on d6. What should White do next?

44.♖b2!

The rook has served its purpose on c2, which was to get the knight to d6. So, it moves back to support the b-pawn.

44... ♗c5

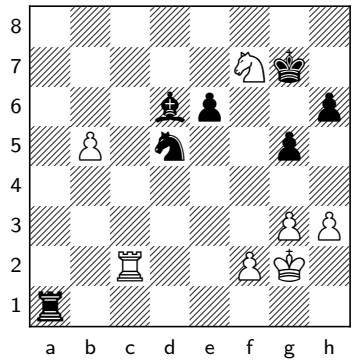
Now what?

45.♘d8?!

This was the right idea, aiming for the kingside weaknesses. But it's a wrong execution, as it allows the e5-pawn to be traded off. Karpov missed a strong maneuver of the rook to the kingside with:

45.♖b3 The rook is coming to f3, coordinating decisively with the newly arrived knight on d6. Again, White is attacking on the kingside, in the spirit of the Benko Gambit. Black is unable to properly defend the f7-pawn because all his pieces are set up to keep the b-pawn under control. Even in the endgame, we see the same principle at play: when you have a far-advanced passed pawn that your opponent currently has under control, the best plan is often to make unrelated threats to the enemy king.

45... ♗d4 46.♖c2 ♗xe5 47.♘8xf7 ♗xd6?!

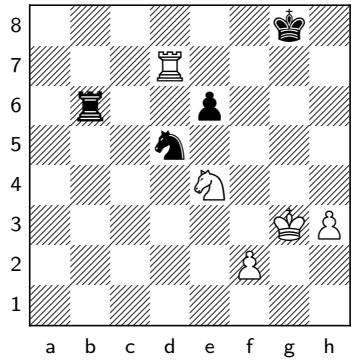


47... ♗f6 was the better move, freezing the white knights. I don't see how they will untangle, and Black should save the game.

48.♘xd6 ♖b1

Black should have drawn this endgame.

49.♖c8 h5 50.♖e8 ♔f6 51.♖h8 h4 52.♖h6† ♔e7 53.♘e4 hxg3 54.♔xg3 ♖xb5 55.♖h7† ♔f8 56.♘xg5 ♔g8 57.♖d7 ♖b6 58.♘e4



This should definitely be a draw, but Black has to be careful. In general, when playing pawn-down rook endgames, the best job for the rook is harassing enemy pawns from behind. This position is no exception, and Black should have held fairly easily by bringing the rook to the first rank.

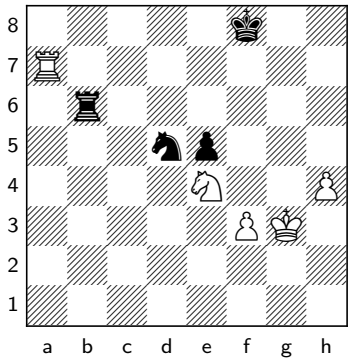
58.♘xe6N ♖xe6 59.♖xd5 and Black should avoid getting cut off with Rd7 by playing ♔g7 Still a lot of work to do, but this is a draw, as explained in detail in Theoretical Rook Endgames. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

58... ♔f8?!

The first step in the wrong direction. It is definitely still a draw, but also a sign that Spassky did not have the best sense of how his pieces should coordinate. The king was quite fine on g8. As per the principle set out above, Black should have gone for

58... ♖b1 , with an easy draw. For example: 59.h4 ♖g1† 60.♔f3 ♖h1 White will be left with a single pawn. 61.♔g4 ♖g1† and now the king should go back to the third rank. 62.♔h5? Don't be that guy! ♘f4†N 63.♔h6 ♖g6#

59.h4 ♔e8 60.♖a7 ♔f8 61.f3 e5?



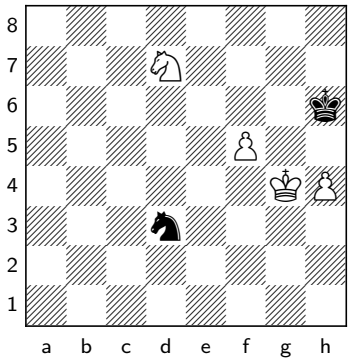
A blunder which weakens the e-pawn. Black is now lost. The best way to save the game was to bring the king back to g8, and the rook to the first rank:

61... ♔g8 62.h5 ♖b1 Black wasted four tempos, yet he is just in time to save the game by bringing the rook to harass the enemy pawns from behind.

62.♖a5 ♖g6† 63.♔h2 ♘f4 64.♖xe5

It's all over.

64... ♖g2† 65.♔h1 ♖g7 66.♖f5† ♖f7 67.♖xf7† ♔xf7 68.♔h2 ♔g6 69.♔g3 ♘d5 70.♘d6 ♘e3 71.♔f4 ♘g2† 72.♔g4 ♘e3† 73.♔f4 ♘g2† 74.♔g3 ♘e3 75.♘e4 ♘d5 76.♘c5 ♔f5 77.♘d3 ♘f6 78.♘f4 ♔e5 79.♘g2 ♔f5 80.♘e3† ♔g6 81.f4 ♘e4† 82.♔f3 ♘f6 83.f5† ♔h5 84.♘g2 ♘d7 85.♔g3 ♔h6 86.♘e3 ♔h5 87.♘g4 ♘c5 88.♘f6† ♔h6 89.♔g4 ♘d3 90.♘d7



An interesting game which included many instructive moments. There were some phases where both players did very well, and some phases where the play could have been improved. Particular thanks go to all of the folks who attended my online lesson on this game at Killer Chess Training. They were kind enough to share the enjoyment of the game with me, and to provide their ideas on the key moments –on Christmas Day 2023!

Sam Shankland-Roman Yankovsky Introduction

This is an old game of mine in which I played well to win an extra pawn, but erred in trying to convert it. It was played in the last round of an open tournament in California. I was half a point ahead of the field, and a draw would clinch me clear first. Despite the tournament situation, I was the higher-rated player, and I had White, so I was hoping to get a victory in the game.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♗g5 ♗g7 4.♘bd2 c5 5.c3 ♕b6 6.♘c4 ♕c7 7.e3 O-O 8.♗d3

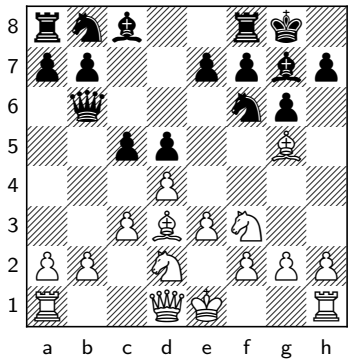
8.♗e2 is more natural.

8... d5 9.♘cd2

Black went

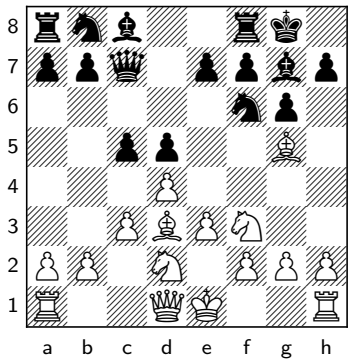
9.♘ce5N looks more active, but the knight on e5 can be used by Black as a target, for example with ♘e4N , threatening ...f6.

9... ♕b6



threatening to take on b2. What should White do about it? It is not an easy decision, as the various structures that arise need to be assessed.

Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #1



9... ♕b6

Black threatens to take on b2. What should White do about it? It is not an easy decision, as the various structures which arise need to be assessed.

10.♕b3

This is the most natural move, and it turns out fine for White. The pawn on b2 is defended actively, but what about the tension between the two queens? White does not have enough attacking potential for On the other hand, a viable alternative is

10.O-O? ♕xb2 .

10.♖b1 . But this is a passive reaction, and one should first examine the more natural continuation that occurs in the game.

10... c4

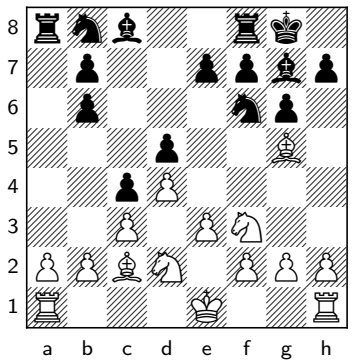
As any London player knows, this would have been the critical option. But in this case, it is also decent for White. Typically, the trade happening on b3 would leave White with a better structure: Black correctly opted for keeping the tension with

10... ♕xb3 11.axb3 cxd4 12.exd4 White will continue with b4 to gain space on the queenside. It is difficult for Black to keep the a-pawn defended, as his rook will be stuck on a8. If Black ever plays ...a6, both b5 and Nb3-c5 will be awkward to deal with. Moving the b-pawn to b6 will also create weaknesses. White will probably castle kingside if the light-squared bishops remain on the board, as e2 is not a fully safe square for the king. If those bishops are exchanged, say with ♗f5 , then it is probably better for White to bring his king to the center, on to the strong and safe d3-square. In any case, White has a clear advantage.

10... ♘c6N 11.O-O ♖e8? but here,

11... c4 was correct, as the white king is already committed to the kingside.

11.♕xb6 axb6 12.♗c2



This is a significantly better square for the bishop than e2.

12... b5

What do you think of this pawn structure? The most relevant factor to consider in such positions is always whether Black is able to get in ...b4. Once one comes to this realization, it is not hard to find an improvement in White's play.

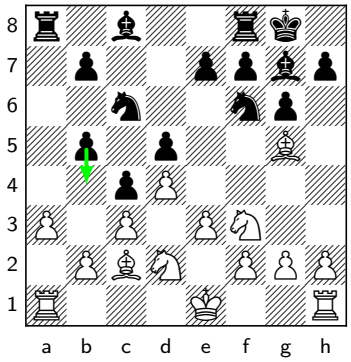
13.a3!

13.O-O ♘c6N 14.a3 White has prevented ...b4, as the b4-square is controlled twice, and the rook on a1 is protected. It is also important that White has seized the b1-h7 diagonal. This means that he can break in the center with e3-e4. It also means that White is able to deal satisfactorily with

Black's plan of ...Nd7-b6-a4, targeting the weak b2-pawn. White will meet this with Rb1 without getting hit by ...Bf5. ♗f5 A pragmatic approach by Black, fighting for control over the e4-square. Instead,

14... ♘d7?N 15.e4 e6 is a logical attempt by Black, trying to keep the structure in the center and transfer the knight to a4. Nevertheless, after 16.♖fe1 ♘b6N 17.e5 ♘a4N 18.♖ab1 Black's efforts on the queenside are fruitless, since b2 is safely protected. In contrast, White's kingside attack is very much a reality. The absence of queens doesn't help Black much, as plenty of pieces are still on the board to assist with a checkmating attack.

13... ♘c6



At this point, ...b4 is a threat.

14.O-O-O!

The engine's choice, with good reason.

14.O-O would transpose to 13.O-O studied above.

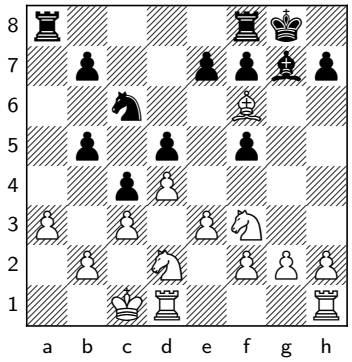
14.♔e2? leaves the king vulnerable in the center after ♘d7N followed by ...f7-f6 and ...e5. Black is more than fine. But not

14... ♗f5? , when White would be allowed to justify the placement of his king, similarly to what happens after castling long.

14... ♗f5

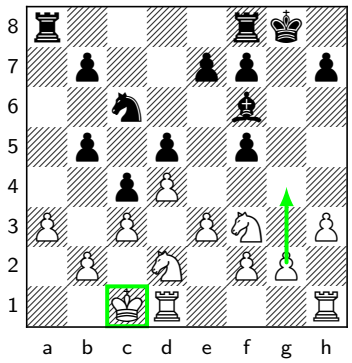
14... ♘d7N is best, but after 15.e4 , White holds a clear advantage, even if it isn't much according to the engine.

15.♗xf5 gxf5 16.♗xf6!



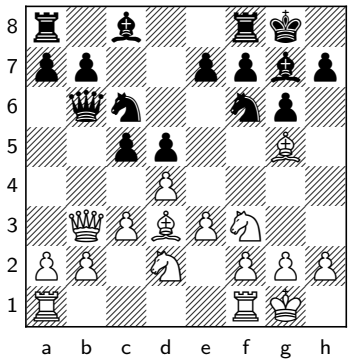
Eliminating the option of ...Ne4.

16... ♗xf6 17.h3!



Black is not in time to stop g4, so White is much better. The king is clearly better on c1 than g1.

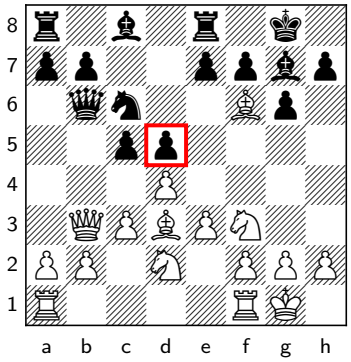
Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #2



11... ♖e8?

What's wrong with this move?

12.♗xf6



An unpleasant surprise for Black. White removes the defender of the d5-pawn, and there's no way to save it. After White castled, this had become a threat, and Black failed to notice it.

12... ♗xf6

White wins a pawn in even cleaner fashion after

12... ♕xb3? 13.♘xb3N ♗xf6 .

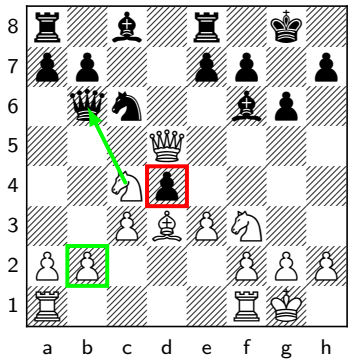
12... exf6 was possible, but it wouldn't help Black much. The position would be similar to the one seen in the game.

13.♕xd5 cxd4

Black needs to include this capture before taking on b2, so as not to lose the pawn on c5. After

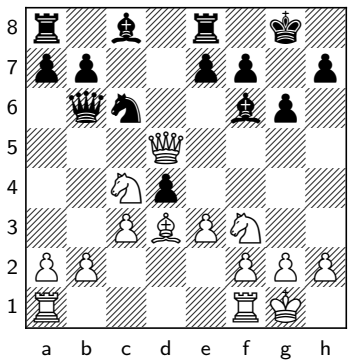
13... ♕xb2 14.♕xc5 , White wins. White is a pawn up, and the black queen is close to being trapped.

14.♘c4!



An important intermediate move, protecting the pawn on b2 before recapturing on d4.

Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #3



14... ♕c7

White has a critical decision to make. Part of converting an extra pawn is evaluating which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and which changes in the pawn structure, are going to be conducive to overall success. Regardless of which pawn White recaptures with, if he can contain Black's counterplay, he will be winning. This is illustrated by imagining the position after either pawn recapture, but with the white queen on d2: Black would be a pawn down with no counterplay. Coming back to the game position where the queen is on d5, Black will counter either pawn recapture with ...e5 or ...Be6 and try to make trouble. As such, White should be gravitating towards the option that feels the most solid.

15.exd4!

In a KCT poll, this capture won by a large margin. White keeps the b4-square under control and places another pawn on the long diagonal, so that he will still be blunting the f6-bishop in case Black ever manages to get in the break on e5. Instead, I played

15.♘xd4?N is weird, as it surrenders some control of the center for no apparent reason, and neither white knight is fully stable. After ♖d8 16.♕f3 ♗d7 White might be for choice, but Black's chances have improved, as there is no easy way forward.

15.cxd4? This relinquishes control of the b4-square, which means that I'll have to always reckon with ...Nb4. ♗g4 Black threatens ...Nb4, as the e8-rook is defended. He gains a tempo, as White needs to deal with that threat. Then, he wants to play ...Rad8 and ...e5, with good chances to equalize. Other alternatives (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) are mentioned in the annotated game, but obviously, before taking on d4 with the c-pawn, I had to see that

15... ♘b4?N does not work due to 16.♕b5 . The hanging rook on e8 ruins Black's day.

15... ♗e6

The natural response.

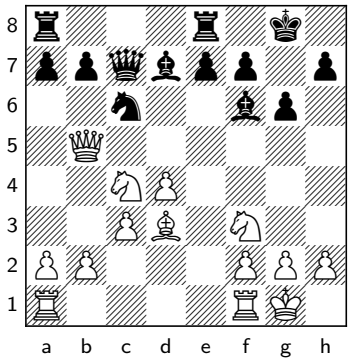
15... e5? doesn't work, as after 16.dxe5 ♘xe5N 17.♘cxe5N ♗xe5 18.♖fe1 White wins a piece.

15... ♗g4 can be met nicely in many ways, a simple one being 16.♘e3N ♖ad8 17.♕e4 , forcing simplification.

16.♕b5!

16.♕e4? allows the equalizing tactic ♘xd4N , as Black can regain the piece due to the hanging knight on c4.

16... ♗d7



I rejected the recapture with the e-pawn as I thought this move was annoying. How should it be met?

17.♕c5!

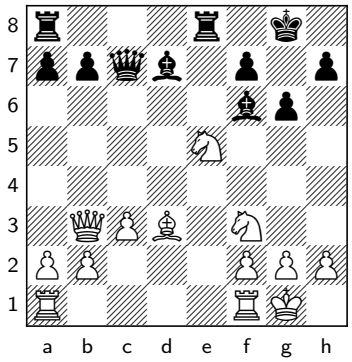
Suggested by the computer. I did not see this move, and it is clearly best. Black does not get ...e5 in, and White is well on his way to consolidating the pawn.

17.♕b3 This was the main line in my calculations. If White gets to centralize his rooks, the game will be over. e5 Black needs to unbalance the position. 18.dxe5 ♘xe5N 19.♘cxe5N ♗xe5 I saw this position and assessed it as unconvincing for White. I would have preferred the pawn to be on e3 rather than c3. I could then play Rac1 with a gain of tempo and trade on e5, when the odds of winning the rook endgame are much higher –that's why I opted for 15.cxd4?!. But White has an important resource here. Can you find it? That's our next exercise.

17...b6 18.♕a3

The queen feels relatively safe.

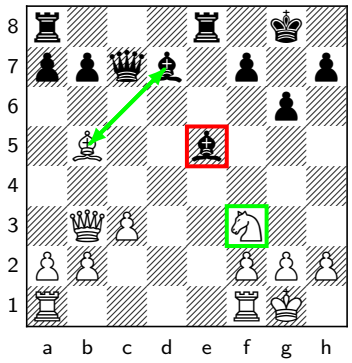
Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #4



19...♗xe5

I saw this position and assessed it as unconvincing for White. But there is an important resource here. Can you find it?

20.♗b5!

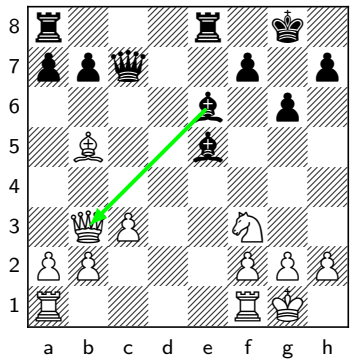


Does White want a rook endgame? No, but White is also not particularly happy about the black bishop pair. The endgame with the knight against Black's dark- squared bishop is excellent for White. The rook endgame which arises after

20.♘xe5N is going to be roughly equal. For example: ♖xe5 21.♗c4 ♗c6 22.♖ad1 ♖ae8 Black's pieces are active, and the only plan White has is to try to contest the c6-bishop. Unfortunately, this will not win:

23.♗d5 ♗xd5 24.♖xd5 ♖xd5 25.♕xd5 ♖e2 26.♕b5 ♕e7 27.g3 The engine gives 0.00. In human practice, I think Black still has some work to do, but I have to imagine the position will be held when he is so much more active.

20... ♗e6!



The only move by following the process of elimination. After

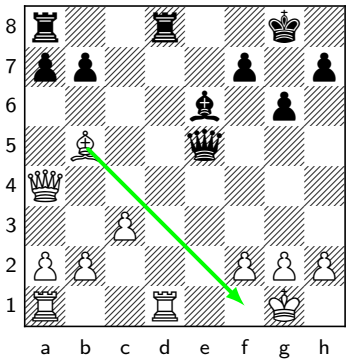
20... ♗f6 21.♗xd7 ♕xd7 22.♖ad1 , Black will be dead after Rd2 and Rfd1. He has no hope of getting active, as the white knight defends the e1-square. Black is also not able to exchange his bishop for the knight, as the knight stands on a light square. White has stabilized his position completely.

21.♕a4 ♖ed8

After

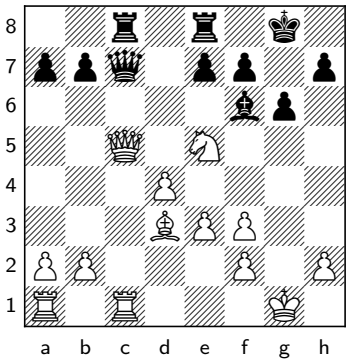
21... ♖e7? 22.♘xe5N ♕xe5 23.♖fe1 , White has activated all of his pieces, and he does not need to worry about Black forcing a transition down to a heavy-piece endgame with a rook on the second rank.

22.♘xe5 ♕xe5 23.♖fd1



White is ready for Bf1 next, and he should stabilize, keeping the extra pawn. For unknown reasons, my computer claims Black is only slightly worse, but I think White is well on his way to converting the pawn.

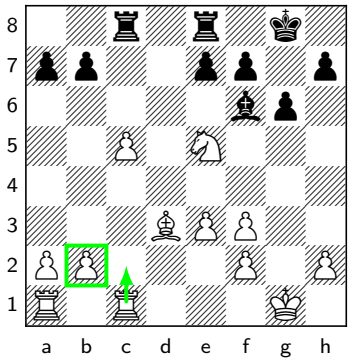
Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #5



19... ♕xc5

This was a critical moment. Does White want to exchange a pair of rooks? A hint here is to remember the first step in converting an extra pawn.

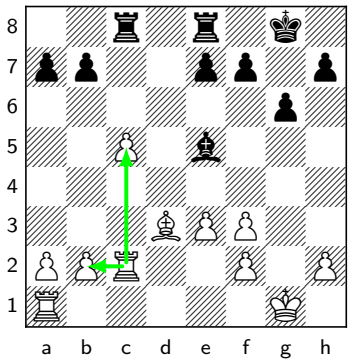
20.dxc5!



White can defend the weak b2-pawn with Rc2.

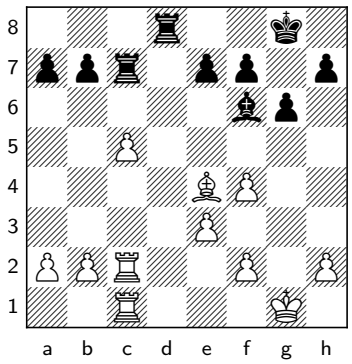
20.♖xc5 would have been much weaker. After ♖xc5 21.dxc5 ♗xe5 22.♖b1 , White's rook is forced to a passive square, and the second rank has been weakened –not great as far as stability is considered. A normal continuation would be: ♖d8 23.♗e4 ♖d2 24.b4 b6 Black has counterplay due to the rook on the second rank. It should not have been allowed to get there. Of course, White still has practical chances, but Black should hold with good defense.

20... ♗xe5 21.♖c2



White has a rook behind the c-pawn, so it is harder for Black to attack it. Also, Black cannot hope to invade the second rank. White has successfully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay.

Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #6

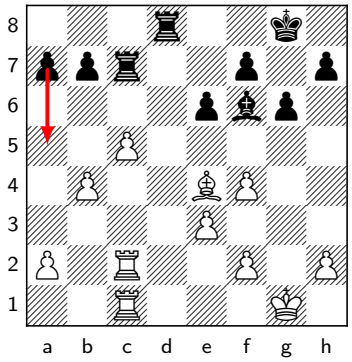


24... e6?!

What has Black missed? What is White's winning plan?

24... a5 was a must.

25.b4!



White has prevented ...a5 and gained space.

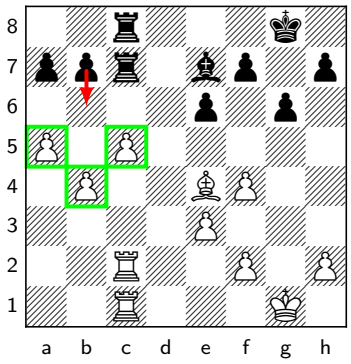
25... ♗e7 26.a4!

26.b5 strikes me as the wrong plan. ♖dc8 27.c6 bxc6 28.bxc6 ♖d8 It's not so easy to make further progress.

26... ♖dc8

26... b6 was correct.

27.a5!

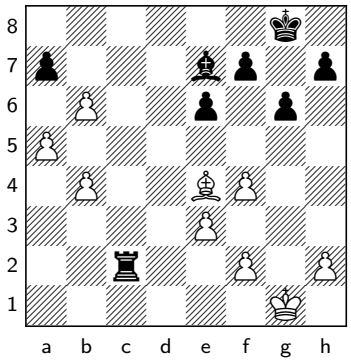


Black wanted to simplify the queenside and block a single remaining pawn on a dark square. That's why ...b6 was Black's best chance to save the game on the previous move. So, White should not simplify the queenside but should aim to win a pawn by pushing the a-pawn to a6. Black won't be able to reply ...b6 as cxb6 is crushing. If Black captures on a6, White will double rooks on the a-file and take on a7. To illustrate how

27... b6

falls flat:

28.cxb6 ♖xc2 29.♖xc2 ♖xc2

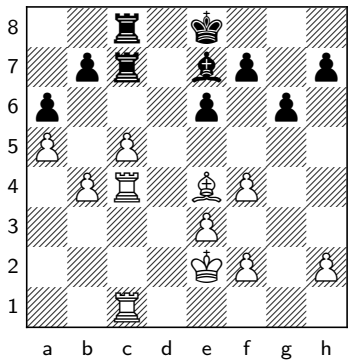


White can even ignore that rook and go

30.bxa7 ♖c8

.

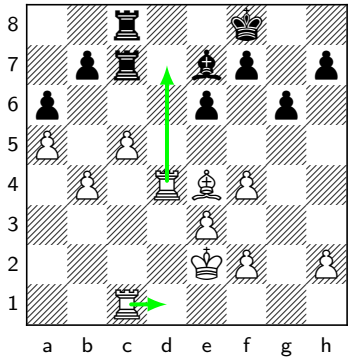
Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #7



30... ♔f8

Here, I missed a clean way to convert my extra pawn. Can you do better?

31.♖d4!



With the simple plan of Rcd1 and Rd7. Black's only attempt to stop it would be to bring the king to e8, but this would be a temporary solution.

31.♔d3? My plan was to run the king to a4, push c6, trade everything, and take

a6 at the end. This probably works, but it makes the win more difficult to achieve in practice. ♗h4 32.♖1c2 ♔e7 33.♔c3 ♖d8 34.♔b3 ♖d1 35.c6 There are two problems with my plan that have already started manifesting themselves. With the white kingside weakened, the black bishop is already harassing the pawns. Secondly, the bishop ending may become drawn even with connected passed pawns if the black king is active. This is indeed what happened in the game. Black is also getting counterplay on the d-file with his rook.

31... ♔e8 32.♖cd1 ♗f8

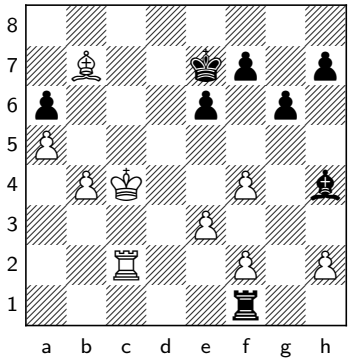
White has a neat regrouping to finish the game.

32... ♗f6 allows 33.♖d6

33.♗c2! ♗e7 34.♗a4† ♔f8 35.♖d7

White will trade all of the rooks, and then the bishop will be free to ransack the queenside before Black's king can come to defend it. Three connected passers will be more than enough.

Shankland-Yankovsky Exercise #8



39... ♖xf2

Should White exchange rooks or not?

40.♖c1!

40.♖xf2? I falter on the last move before the time control, because I did not realize the defensive setup Black had in mind. ♗xf2 41.e4 ♗e3 42.f5 exf5 43.exf5 gxf5 44.♗xa6 This is a draw, despite the connected passed pawns on the queenside. How does Black save the game? ♗d2 Dvoretsky calls this defensive technique in the crosshairs. The white king needs to defend the a-pawn so that the b-pawn can advance, which means it has to go to a4.

40.♖c1 is a double-edged winning attempt by keeping rooks on the board. Objectively, it does win, but things get messy. Tell me again why I didn't simply double rooks on the d-file and transfer the bishop around to a4? g5 41.♗xa6 gxf4 42.exf4 ♖xf4† 43.♔b3 ♗f2 The engine says this is winning for White, but in human terms, there is still a lot of work to be done.

Sam Shankland-Roman Yankovsky, California 2012

This is an old game of mine in which I played well to win an extra pawn, but erred in trying to convert it. It was played in the last round of an open tournament in California. I was half a point ahead of the field, and a draw would clinch me clear first. Despite the tournament situation, I was the

higher-rated player, and I had White, so I was hoping to get a victory in the game.

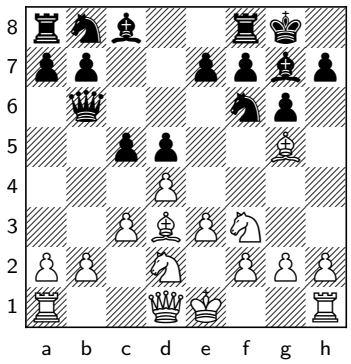
1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♗g5 ♗g7 4.♘bd2 c5 5.c3 ♕b6 6.♘c4 ♕c7 7.e3 O-O 8.♗d3

8.♗e2 is more natural.

8... d5 9.♘cd2

9.♘ce5N looks more active, but the knight on e5 can be used by Black as a target, for example with ♘e4N , threatening ...f6.

9... ♕b6



Black threatens to take on b2. What should White do about it? It is not an easy decision, as the various structures which arise need to be assessed.

10.♕b3

This is the most natural move, and it turns out fine for White. The pawn on b2 is defended actively, but what about the tension between the two queens? White does not have enough attacking potential for On the other hand, a viable alternative is

10.O-O? ♕xb2 .

10.♖b1 . But this is a passive reaction, and one should first examine the more natural continuation that occurs in the game.

10... ♘c6

Black correctly opts for keeping the tension. □ Typically, the trade happening on b3 would leave White with a better structure: □ Nevertheless, as any London player knows, the critical option would have been: B) Once one comes to this realization, it is not hard to find an improvement in White's play, already on move 13: 11... Nc6 13.a3! Nc6 At this point, ...b4 is a threat. 14.O-O would transpose to 13.O-O studied above. 14.Ke2?! leaves the king vulnerable in the center after 14...Nd7! followed by ...f6 and ...e5. Black is more than fine. But not 14...Bf5? when White would be allowed to justify the placement of his king, similarly to what happens after castling long. 14.O-O-O! The engine's choice, with good reason. 14...Bf5 15.Bxf5 gxf5 16.Bxf6! Eliminating the option of ...Ne4. 16...Bxf6 17.h3! Black is not in time to stop g4, so White is much better. The king is clearly better on c1 than g1. 11... Nc6 14...Nd7! is best, but after 15.e4 White holds a clear advantage, even if it isn't much according to the engine.

10... ♕xb3 11.axb3 cxd4 12.exd4 White will continue with b4 to gain space on the queenside. It is difficult for Black to keep the a-pawn defended, as his rook will be stuck on a8. If Black ever plays ...a6, both b5 and Nb3-c5 will be awkward to deal with. Moving the b-pawn to b6 will also create weaknesses. White will probably castle

kingside if the light-squared bishops remain on the board, as e2 is not a fully safe square for the king. If those bishops are exchanged, say with ♗f5 , then it is probably better for White to bring his king to the center, on to the strong and safe d3-square. In any case, White has a clear advantage.

10... c4 But in this case, it is also decent for White. 11.♕xb6 axb6 12.♗c2 This is a significantly better square for the bishop than e2. b5 What do you think of this pawn structure? The most relevant factor to consider in such positions is always whether Black is able to get in ...b4. – A) 13.O-O ♘c6N 14.a3 White has prevented ...b4, as the b4-square is controlled twice, and the rook on a1 is protected. It is also important that White has seized the b1-h7 diagonal. This means that he can break in the center with e3-e4. It also means that White is able to deal satisfactorily with Black's plan of ...Nd7-b6-a4, targeting the weak b2-pawn. White will meet this with Rb1 without getting hit by ...Bf5. – A1) ♘d7?N 15.e4 e6 is a logical attempt by Black, trying to keep the structure in the center and transfer the knight to a4. Nevertheless, after 16.♖fe1 ♘b6N 17.e5 ♘a4N 18.♖ab1 , Black's efforts on the queenside are fruitless, since b2 is safely protected. In contrast, White's kingside attack is very much a reality. The absence of queens doesn't help Black much, as plenty of pieces are still on the board to assist with a checkmating attack. – A2) 14\. a3 14...Bf5! A pragmatic approach by Black, fighting for control over the e4-square. 15.Bxf5 gxf5 With the break on e4 under control, Black is planning to start maneuvering the f6-knight towards a4. 16.Bxf6! Hence, the knight is eliminated before it proves to be a nuisance. 16...Bxf6 Chances are approximately equal. This position highlights why castling short was not best. White's king would be much happier in the center or on the queenside, hoping to play h3 and g4.

11.O-O

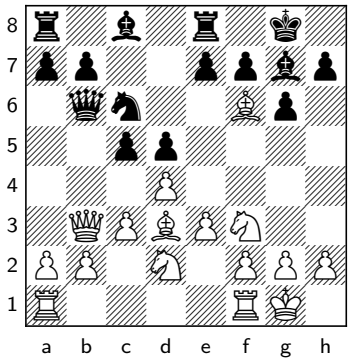
In contrast with the game,

11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.♕xd5 is not working now because after ♕xb2 there's no Nc4, as the a1-rook is hanging.

11... ♖e8?

11... c4 was correct, as the white king is already committed to the kingside. 12.♕xb6 axb6 13.♗c2 b5 14.a3 ♗f5 15.♗xf5 gxf5 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.h3 is not a problem now due to h5 and g4 is stopped.

12.♗xf6



An unpleasant surprise for Black. White removes the defender of the d5-pawn, and there's no way to save it. After White castled, this had become a threat, and Black failed to notice it.

12... ♗xf6

White wins a pawn in even cleaner fashion after

12... ♕xb3? 13.♘xb3N ♗xf6 .

12... exf6 was possible, but it wouldn't help Black much. The position would be similar to the one seen in the game.

13.♕xd5 cxd4

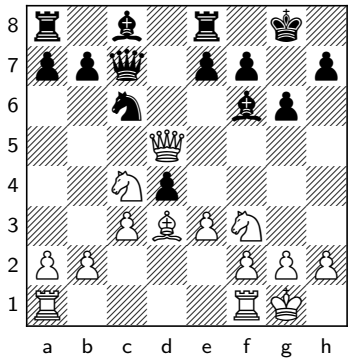
Black needs to include this capture before taking on b2, so as not to lose the pawn on c5. After

13... ♕xb2 14.♕xc5 , White wins. White is a pawn up, and the black queen is close to being trapped.

14.♘c4!

An important intermediate move, protecting the pawn on b2 before recapturing on d4.

14... ♕c7



White has a critical decision to make. Part of converting an extra pawn is evaluating which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and which changes in the pawn structure, are going to be conducive to overall success. Regardless of which pawn White recaptures with, if he can contain Black's counterplay, he will be winning. This is illustrated by imagining the position after either pawn recapture, but with the white queen on d2: Black would be a pawn down with no counterplay. Coming back to the game position where the queen is on d5, Black will counter either pawn recapture with ...e5 or ...Be6 and try to make trouble. As such, White should be gravitating towards the option that feels the most solid.

15.cxd4?!

This relinquishes control of the b4-square, which means that I'll have to always reckon with ...Nb4. □ □ In a KCT poll, the third capture won by a large margin: □ 15. cxd4 15...Bg4 can be met nicely in many ways, a simple one being 16.Ne3! Rad8 17.Qe4 , forcing simplification. □ 15. cxd4 15...Be6 The natural response. 16.Qe4? allows the equalizing tactic 16...Nxd4 , as Black can regain the piece due to the hanging knight on c4. 16.Qb5! Bd7 I re-

jected the recapture with the e-pawn as I thought this move was annoying. How should it be met? 17.Qb3 was the main line in my calculations. If White gets to centralize his rooks, the game will be over. The computer suggests 17.Qc5! , which I did not see, and it is clearly best. Black does not get ...e5 in, and White is well on his way to consolidating the pawn. After 17...b6 18.Qa3 , the queen feels relatively safe. On 17.Qb3 , Black has several options: – A) After 17...b5? 18.Ne3! , the knight is merely driven towards where it wanted to go anyway, and the threat of Nd5 is huge. B) 15\. cxd4 17...Be6?! is also inadequate. For example: 18.Qc2 Bxc4 It is a bad sign that the machine wants this move, but White was threatening Ne3. 19.Bxc4 e5 20.d5 Ne7 21.Nd2 The advantage is clear and easy to handle. C) 15\. cxd4 17...e5! Black needs to unbalance the position. 18.d5? is what White wants to play thematically, but it is met concretely with 18...e4! , when Black is okay. He will have two open bishops against two knights. 18.dxe5 Nxe5 19.Ncxe5 Bxe5 Does White want a rook endgame? No, but White is also not particularly happy about the black bishop pair. I saw this position and assessed it as unconvincing for White. I would have preferred the pawn to be on e3 rather than c3. I could then play Rac1 with a gain of tempo and trade on e5, when the odds of winning the rook endgame are much higher – that's why I opted for 15.cxd4?!. But White has an important resource here. Can you find it? 20.Bb5! The endgame with the knight against Black's dark-squared bishop is excellent for White. 20...Be6! The only move by following the process of elimination. (After 20...Bf6 21.Bxd7 Qxd7 22.Rad1 , Black will be dead after Rd2 and Rfd1. He has no hope of getting active, as the white knight defends the e1-square. Black is also not able to exchange his bishop for the knight, as the knight stands on a light square. White has stabilized his position completely.) 21.Qa4 Re7?! 22.Nxe5 Qxe5 23.Rfe1 White has activated all of his pieces, and he does not need to worry about Black forcing a transition down to a heavy-piece endgame with a rook on the second rank. 21...Red8 22.Nxe5 Qxe5 23.Rfd1 White is ready for Bf1 next, and he should stabilize, keeping the extra pawn. For unknown reasons, my computer claims Black is only slightly worse, but I think White is well on his way to converting the pawn. The rook endgame which arises after 15. cxd4 20.Nxe5 is going to be roughly equal. For example: 20...Rxe5 21.Bc4 Bc6 22.Rad1 Rae8 Black's pieces are active, and the only plan White has is to try to contest the c6-bishop. Unfortunately, this will not win: 23.Bd5 Bxd5 24.Rxd5 Rxd5 25.Qxd5 Re2 26.Qb5 Qe7 27.g3 The engine gives 0.00. In human practice, I think Black still has some work to do, but I have to imagine the position will be held when he is so much more active.

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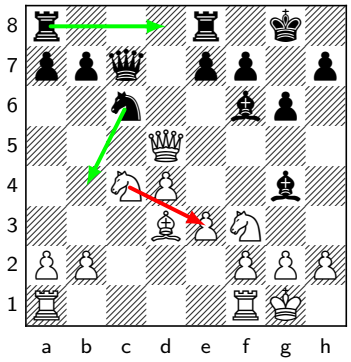
15.exd4 White keeps the b4-square under control and places another pawn on the long diagonal, so that he will still be blunting the f6-bishop in case Black ever manages to

get in the break on e5. □ e5? doesn't work, as after 16.dxe5 ♘xe5N 17.♘cxe5N ♗xe5 18.♖fe1 White wins a piece.

15... ♗g4!



Black threatens ...Nb4, as the e8-rook is defended. He gains a tempo, as White needs to deal with that threat. Then, he wants to play ...Rad8 and ...e5, with good chances to equalize. With my pawn on c3, there would be no ...Nb4, and I could challenge that bishop with Ne3. □ Obviously, before taking on d4 with the c-pawn, I had to see that □ □

15... ♘b4?N does not work due to 16.♕b5 . The hanging rook on e8 ruins Black's day.

15... e5? makes no sense, as it opens the center when White is more active. Black needs to first develop, exploiting White's hanging pieces, and only then strike in the center. For example: 16.dxe5 ♘xe5N 17.♘cxe5N ♗xe5 18.♗b5 Followed by Rac1, and White wins.

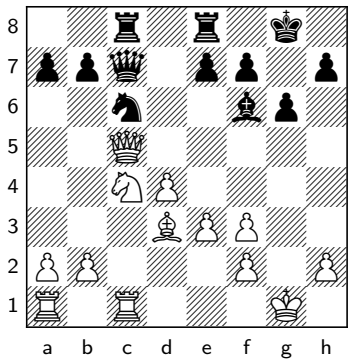
15... ♗e6? might look tempting, but it's blocking the pawn on e7. After 16.♕b5 ♗d7 17.♕b3 e5 18.dxe5 ♘xe5N 19.♘cxe5N ♗xe5 20.♖ac1 , I get exactly what I described in the note to White's 15th move. This structure is a huge improvement for White. Getting the rook to an open file with a gain of tempo is super helpful, and Black cannot put his bishop on c6 without allowing Bb5. This position was the reason I chose to take with the c-pawn, but I had underestimated the way Black played in the game.

16.♕c5

I accept a weakening of my kingside structure, so that I at least don't lose a tempo moving my bishop.

16.♗e2 ♖ad8 followed by ...e5 gives Black decent counterplay.

16... ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♖ac8 18.♖fc1



Black is now OK, broadly speaking.

18... ♘e5?

A direct move, aiming to simplify the position into an opposite-colored bishop endgame. Black underestimated the winning chances an

endgame like that would allow me. Which exchanges does White want to maximize his winning chances? Black does not get enough compensation for a piece after:

18... ♘xd4?N 19.exd4 ♕f4 20.♕d5 ♗xd4 21.♕e4 White's king is safe enough.

18... ♕d7 is the engine's choice. The threat of taking on d4 forces White's queen back to a3, where she will feel a bit sidelined. For example: 19.♕a3 ♖c7 20.♗f1 ♔g7 White is a bit better, but the game goes on.

19.♘xe5

White can also give the pawn back and argue that the black knight ends up misplaced: Also possible is: 19. Nxe5 20.Kg2 Nh4+ 21.Kh3 Rxc7 22.Nd2 Rec8 23.Rxc7 Rxc7 24.Ne4 Nf5 25.Nxf6+ exf6 White should take on f5, as otherwise the knight will come to d6. But after the capture on f5, it will take him a long time to harass the tripled pawns. Moreover, the white king is a long way from performing his main task, which is to shepherd the d-pawn through. Also ...Rc2 is coming.

19.♕xc7? ♘xf3†N 20.♔f1 The most promising. As the pawn on h2 isn't actually hanging, the king heads towards e2. ♖xc7 21.♔e2 After ♘xh2N

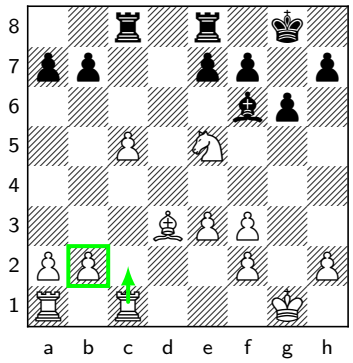
21... ♘g5N 22.♖c3 White's activity gives him a big advantage. Up next is Rac1, with Na5 to follow. I probably should have considered something like this more seriously, but I was not ready to give back my extra pawn just yet.

22.♖h1 ♘g4N 23.f3 , the knight is trapped.

19... ♕xc5

This was a critical moment. Does White want to exchange a pair of rooks? A hint here is to remember the first step in converting an extra pawn.

20.dxc5!



White can defend the weak b2-pawn with Rc2.

20.♖xc5 would have been much weaker. After ♖xc5 21.dxc5 ♗xe5 22.♖b1 , White's rook is forced to a passive square, and the second rank has been weakened –not great as far as stability is considered. A normal continuation would be: ♖d8 23.♗e4 ♖d2 24.b4 b6 Black has counterplay due to the rook on the second rank. It should not have been allowed to get there. Of course, White still has practical chances, but Black should hold with good defense.

20... ♗xe5 21.♖c2

White has a rook behind the c-pawn, so it is harder for Black to attack it. Also, Black cannot hope to invade the second rank. White has

successfully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay.

21... ♖ed8?

The rook doesn't achieve anything here, and it will soon be repurposed.

22.♗e4 ♖c7 23.f4! ♗f6 24.♖ac1 e6?!

24... a5 was a must.

25.b4!

White has prevented ...a5 and gained space. What is his winning plan?

25... ♗e7 26.a4! ♖dc8

26... b6 was correct.

27.a5!

Black wanted to simplify the queenside and block a single remaining pawn on a dark square. That's why ...b6 was Black's best chance to save the game on the previous move. So, White should not simplify the queenside but should aim to win a pawn by pushing the a-pawn to a6. Black won't be able to reply ...b6 as cxb6 is crushing. If Black captures on a6, White will double rooks on the a-file and take on a7.

27... ♔f8

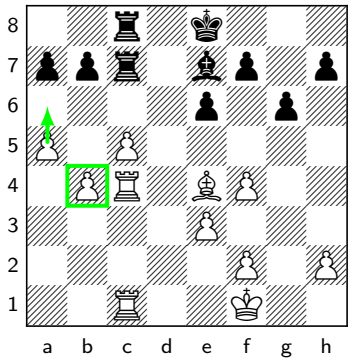
To illustrate how

27... b6 falls flat: 28.cxb6 ♖xc2 29.♖xc2 ♖xc2 White can even ignore that rook and go 30.bxa7 ♖c8 .

28.♔f1

28.a6 was already an option.

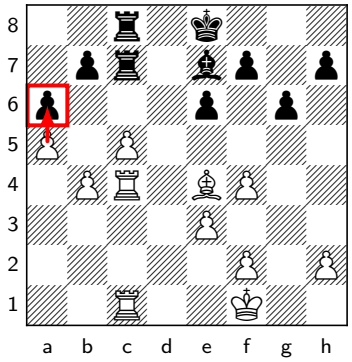
28... ♔e8 29.♖c4



Also possible was the direct

29.a6 bxa6 .

29... a6



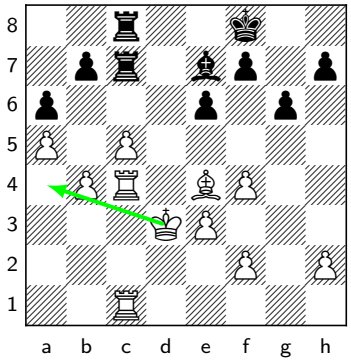
Black thought he could not wait any more, so he fixes another pawn on a light square, and the position becomes static. White is totally winning and only needs to come up with the best plan; something I did not do. The position is stabilized with no counterplay for Black. What is the extra pawn currently doing for White? It is keeping his queenside pawn mass totally secure, rendering all of Black's pieces passive, and it fixes the b7-pawn as a weakness. All that needs to happen from here is for White to find the right coordination to make sure that b7 gets captured. Let's see what happens if Black sits and waits:

29... ♖d8 30.♔e2 ♖dc8 31.a6 when b6 fails again to

31... bxa6 32.♖a1 ♖d8 33.♖xa6 , White has time to go Rc2-Rca2-R2a4, and Black struggles to defend the a7-pawn. The position looks winning for White.

32.cxb6 ♖xc4 33.♖xc4 ♖xc4 34.bxa7 ♖c8 . After

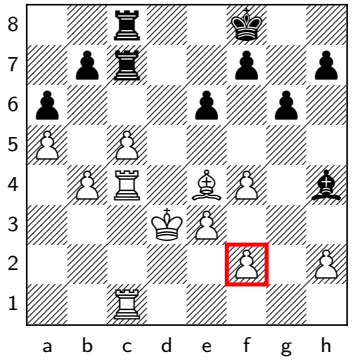
30.♔e2 ♔f8 31.♔d3?!



My plan was to run the king to a4, push c6, trade everything, and take a6 at the end. This probably works, but it makes the win more difficult to achieve in practice. There was a cleaner way:

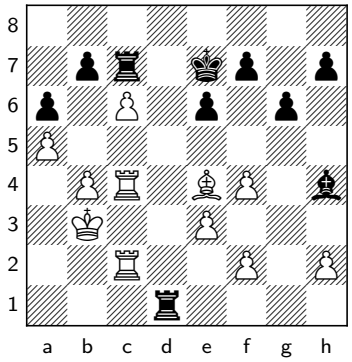
31.♖d4 With the simple plan of Rcd1 and Rd7. Black's only attempt to stop it would be to bring the king to e8, but this would be a temporary solution. ♔e8 32.♖cd1 ♗f8 White has a neat regrouping to finish the game. 33.♗c2 ♗e7 34.♗a4† ♔f8 35.♖d7 White will trade all of the rooks, and then the bishop will be free to ransack the queenside before Black's king can come to defend it. Three connected passers will be more than enough.

31... ♗h4



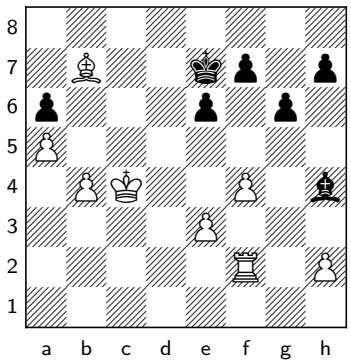
This could never have happened with the rook on the d-file.

32.♖1c2 ♔e7 33.♔c3 ♖d8 34.♔b3 ♖d1 35.c6



There are two problems with my plan that have already started manifesting themselves. With the white kingside weakened, the black bishop is already harassing the pawns. Secondly, the bishop ending may become drawn even with connected passed pawns if the black king is active. This is indeed what happened in the game. Black is also getting counterplay on the d-file with his rook.

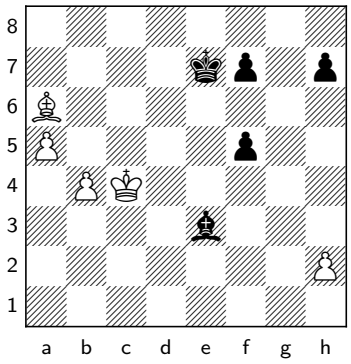
35... bxc6 36.♖xc6 ♖xc6 37.♗xc6 ♖b1† 38.♔c4 ♖f1 39.♗b7 ♖xf2 40.♖xf2?



I falter on the last move before the time control, because I did not realize the defensive setup Black had in mind.

40.♖c1 is a double-edged winning attempt by keeping rooks on the board. Objectively, it does win, but things get messy. Tell me again why I didn't simply double rooks on the d-file and transfer the bishop around to a4? g5 41.♗xa6 gxf4 42.exf4 ♖xf4† 43.♔b3 ♗f2 The engine says this is winning for White, but in human terms, there is still a lot of work to be done.

40... ♗xf2 41.e4 ♗e3 42.f5 exf5 43.exf5 gxf5 44.♗xa6



This is a draw, despite the connected passed pawns on the queenside. How does Black save the game?

44... ♗d2!

Dvoretsky calls this defensive technique in the crosshairs. The white king needs to defend the a-pawn so that the b-pawn can advance, which means it has to go to a4.

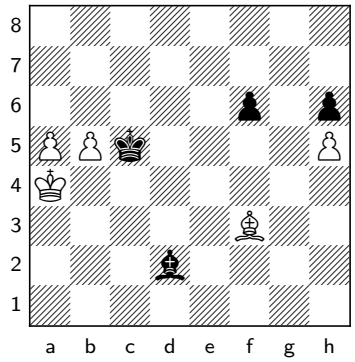
45.♗c8 ♔d6 46.♗xf5 h6 47.♗e4 f6 48.♔b5 ♗c3 49.h4 ♗e1 50.h5 ♗d2 51.♗f3 ♗c3 52.♔a4

OK, the king has reached a4.

52... ♗d2 53.b5

And the pawn advances.

53... ♔c5



But the white king has been boxed out. There is no file left for White to use to bring his king to a6 to shepherd the pawns home – the board ends. That's why this defense only works against a \- and b-pawns (or g \- and h-pawns). A draw was soon agreed.

54.b6

My king can never get to a6, and Black can just wait. Pushing the pawn further leads nowhere.

54... ♗e1 55.b7 ♗g3=

A disappointing result in the game, but on the plus side, it was enough for tournament victory. Of course, I was much younger and worse at chess than I am now, but it is important to pinpoint the moments when I went wrong. I could have won if I had found the correct plan at the end, evaluating that I should be aiming to trade all the rooks specifically, once I am sure I can bring my bishop around to c8 to take both b7 and a6. Instead, I went for the c5-c6 plan, which was not the right change to the structure, and I allowed my opponent to save the game.

Sam Shankland-Jacek Tomczak Introduction

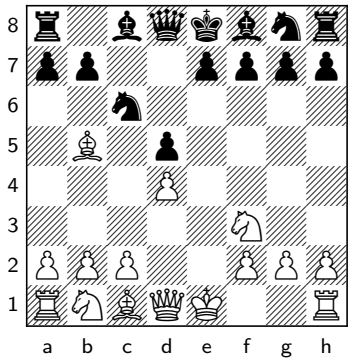
This was a particularly painful game for me, as it effectively cost the US team the 2018 Olympiad title. I won a pawn but failed to convert it. As a result, we lost the match against Poland, since Hikaru Nakamura stumbled against Kacper Piorun. China went on to win the event on tiebreak.

1.e4

The opening of this game is similar to a line in the Ragozin, but with colors reversed:

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3N ♘f6N 4.♘c3N ♗b4 5.♕a4† The queen check disturbs Black's coordination by forcing the knight to c6.

1...c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.♗b5



At the time, this was thought to be a reasonable line for White, but it is nowadays seen as not particularly challenging for Black.

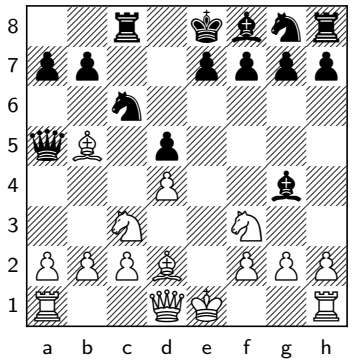
5... ♕a5†

If anything, this idea is stronger for Black than the similar line is for White in the Ragozin. This is because the black knight is not yet on f6. After ...Bg4, ...e6, and ...Bd6, the knight is likely to be better placed on e7 than f6. From there, it defends the c6-knight and will be able to target the d4-pawn.

6.♘c3 ♗g4 7.♗d2

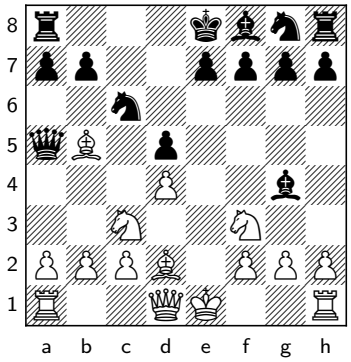
Black has only one good response, which is

7... ♖c8



to defend the pawn indirectly. Instead, he retreated his queen, and I'm quite proud of my reply.

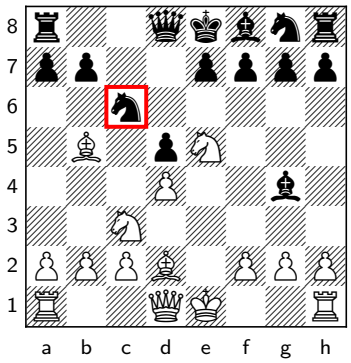
Shankland-Tomczak Exercise #1



7... ♕d8?

Black defends against White's obvious threat of taking on d5 but walks straight into another trick.

8.♘e5!



A nice application of the Shankland Rule. If there is a move you want to play which your opponent is preventing, consider what happens if you play it anyway. I remember my opponent was not happy seeing this arrive! This was not a result of home cooking; I found it over the board. The quiet

8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 e6 is only marginally better for White.

8... ♗xd1

The critical line. The justification to sacrifice the queen is not particularly difficult.

8... ♗d7 This came after a long thought. It is sad, but at least it prevents a catastrophe. 9.♗xc6 White correctly maintains the e5-knight for attacking purposes. We'll continue in our next exercise. But not

9.♘xd5?N due to ♘xe5N .

9.♘xd7N is similar to the 8.h3 line mentioned above. Black has no structural problems or bad pieces. White should aim for more than merely obtaining the bishop pair.

9.♘xc6 ♕b6

This is the most complicated among the black options. □ □ □ After □

9... ♕d6 loses to 10.♘e5†N ♔d8 11.♘xf7†N .

9... ♕d7 is also easy: 10.♘e5N ♕xb5 11.♘xb5N Black has problems on both d1 and c7.

9... ♕c7 , White is spoilt for choice. For example: 10.♘e5†N

10.♘xd5N ♕xc6 11.♖xd1 also wins, as does 10... Qc7 10.Nxe7+ .

10... ♔d8 11.♘xf7†N ♔c8 12.♘xd5N ♕xc2 13.♖c1 and Black can resign.

9... bxc6 is the engine's preference, but it's the easiest to calculate out of all the pos-

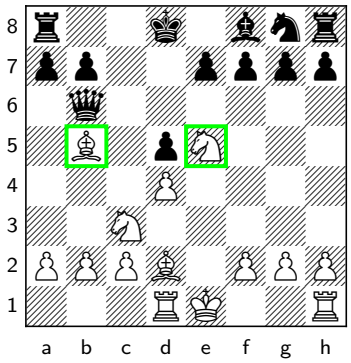
sibilities. After 10.♗xc6† ♕d7 11.♗xd7† , White will have a clean extra pawn.

10.♘e5†

But not

10.♘xd5?N ♕xb5 11.♘c7†N ♔d7 12.♘xb5N bxc6 and Black remains a piece up.

10... ♔d8 11.♖xd1!



The best line, when White's developed army can bully the vulnerable black king and queen in numerous ways going forward.

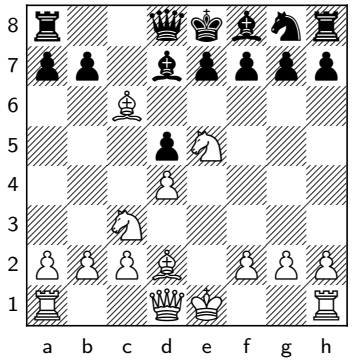
11.♘xf7†?N That's how I was planning to continue. ♔c8 12.♔xd1? This was my idea, so that Black doesn't have a check on e6 that threatens the knight on f7. White will have two pieces and a rook for the queen, which I thought was enough to guarantee victory, despite the knight possibly getting trapped on h8. However, the king is stranded on d1, and the harmony of the white army is disturbed. The engine claims Black can hold. I still believe White would have easier play and excellent practical chances, but playing for an attack was stronger. That's why

12.♖xd1 is again preferred by the machine, who isn't afraid to be down material and claims that after ♕e6† 13.♘e5N White wins despite the material deficit.

11... ♕e6 12.♗d7 ♕b6 13.♗h3

is the point. Nxf7 is now a threat.

Shankland-Tomczak Exercise #2



9... ♗xc6

White now faces a critical and difficult decision. The queen is definitely going to f3; this should be fairly obvious. But do we go to f3 directly, or do we play Qh5 first, provoke ...g6, and only then go to f3? It is not an easy decision; I spent some time and came up with the wrong answer.

10.♕h5!

This was correct.

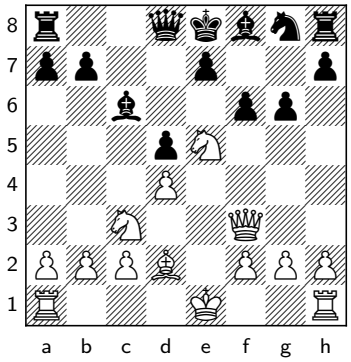
10.♕f3? As mentioned already, f6 is not possible in this line due to 11.♕h5†

g6 12.♘xg6N , and this is the (flawed) reason that I chose to go to f3 directly instead of stopping on h5 first.

10... g6 11.♕f3

We need to examine if

11... f6



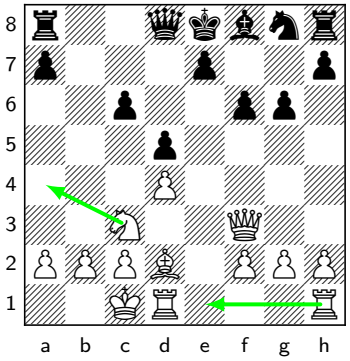
This is a possible defense for Black in this line that wouldn't work if the pawn was still on g7, as in that case a check on h5 would decide. So, this would be a reason to prefer 10.Qf3 – but only if it works. During the game, I did not grasp how horrible the resulting positions are for Black. I was thinking that if Black could finish development, let's say with ...e7-e6, ...Bd6, ...Ne7-f5, and ...Rhe8, then he would be okay. But this is not going to happen. Since the option of

11... f6 works.

11... f6 doesn't work, Black has to play

11... ♘f6N and the question becomes one of comparison. Should White prefer this position over the 10.Qf3 line and, if so, why? 12.g4 This utilizes White's lead in development, threatening g4-g5. h6 Forced. 13.h4 In the game, I reached this exact position, but with the pawn on g7 rather than g6. e6 This is what worked for Black in the game. But with the pawn on g6 instead of g7, the f6-knight is undefended and in serious trouble. You can check the alternatives (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game. 14.g5 hxg5 15.♗xg5 This is exactly why the pawn was lured forward to g6. Due to the f6-knight already hanging, Black cannot bring the bishop to d6 to challenge the e5-knight. ♗e7 16.h5 A nice detail. gxh5 17.♖g1 Black can barely move, and he will be crushed on the kingside. I understood that these lines with the knight on f6 would be a better version for White if the black pawn was on g6 instead of g7. I only rejected 10.Qh5! because of 11...f6.

12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.O-O-O



On the agenda are Rhe1 and Na4. Black is struggling to develop.

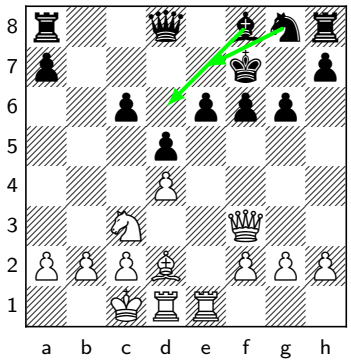
13... e6

There is no way Black can survive after surrendering control of the e6-square, so this is

practically forced. Of course,

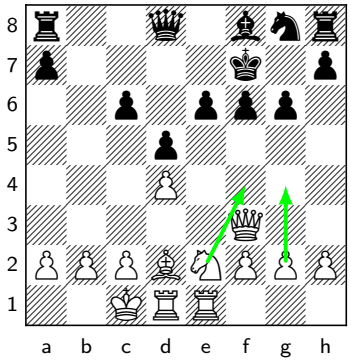
13... e5 is not possible. Checkmate will come quickly after 14.dxe5 fxe5 .

14.♖he1 ♔f7



I had seen this far and was not sure how to break through further. Black wants ...Bd6 and ...Ne7, and while his position is bad, it didn't seem critical. I had missed an important idea.

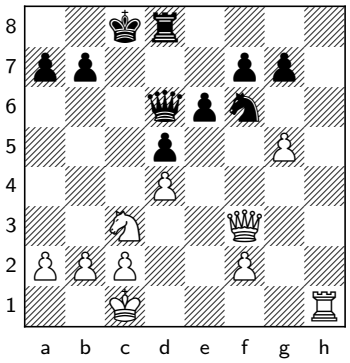
15.♘e2!



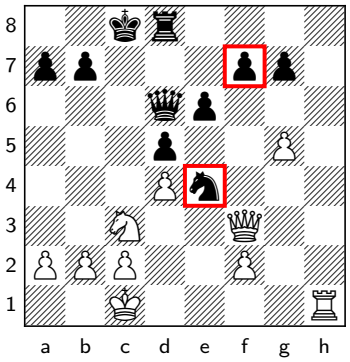
This is crushing. And once you see it, it makes perfect sense, and it becomes obvious that the machine is right. I had only considered

15.♘a4?N , which is good for White but not that convincing.

Shankland-Tomczak Exercise #3



20... ♘e4



White has a critical decision to make. He is going to win a pawn. But which pawn does he want to take and why, and how is he going to convert the game after that?

21.♕xf7!

A useful calculation technique is elimination. Taking on e4 can be eliminated as Black obtains enough counterplay:

21.♘xe4N dxe4 22.♕xe4

22.♕xf7 ♕xd4 23.♕xe6† ♔b8 Mate is threatened. 24.a3 ♕xf2 25.♕xe4 ♕d2† 26.♔b1 ♕xg5 Black has won back his material and is fine. The side who is up

in material wants to exchange pieces, not pawns. In this line, pawns are getting exchanged.

22... ♕xd4 is nothing at all.

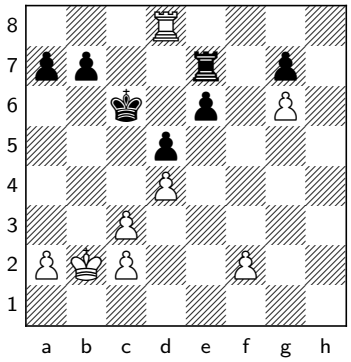
21... ♘xc3

21... ♘xg5N 22.♕xg7 is comfortably winning for White.

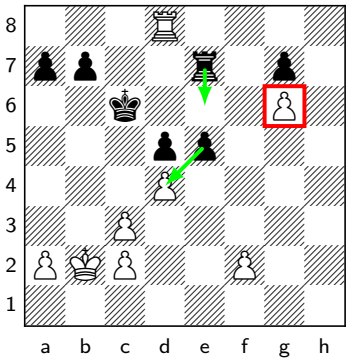
22.bxc3

The doubled c-pawns provide good shelter for the white king, who is able to hide on the opposite side of a black attack. How is White going to convert the extra pawn? In terms of stabilizing the position to avoid counterplay, White is already reasonably stable. So, White needs to evaluate which exchanges are in his favor and which are not.

Shankland-Tomczak Exercise #4

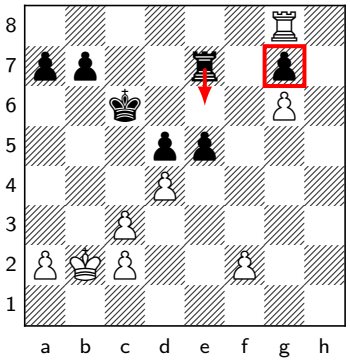


30... e5



Black is threatening ...exd4 and ...Re6. The structure is fluid and can change in a lot of ways. I chose the wrong way.

31.♖g8!



This prevents ...Re6 and was the way to win. I rejected it as I thought Black would draw by walking his king over to the g6-pawn. But I missed that White is then able to bring the rook back to f8 once Black's king sits on e6, without fearing ...Re6.

31.dxe5? This allows Black to make a draw. My plan for my extra pawn was to take on g7, put my rook on f7, and then my pawn on g7. With a passed pawn defended laterally along the seventh rank, Black would

never be able to use his rook to take any queenside pawns, and my king will run back through c1-d1-e1-f1, kicking the rook off g2. Once the rook retreats, then the king runs up to f2, f3, f4, and so on, and my extra pawn becomes a queen. This might sound all nice and good, but as we will see, it runs into a problem, and I would have won if I had better evaluated which pawn exchanges White wants to make.

31... ♔d6

31... e4 32.♔b3 makes things easy for White, who can play c3-c4 since the pressure on the d4-pawn has been released.

32.♔b3

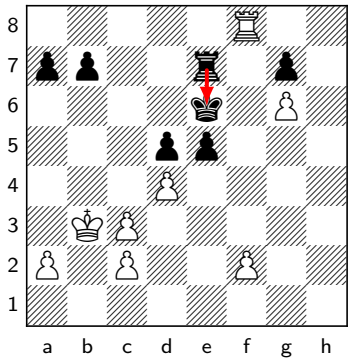
White plans to go forward, and, more importantly, Black is in some sort of zugzwang.

32... ♔e6

For example, if Black waits with a move such as

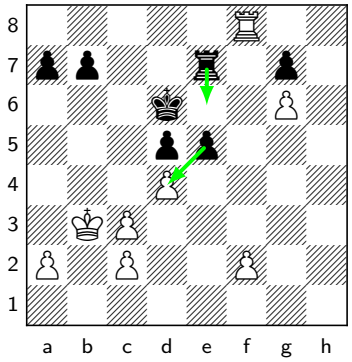
32... b6 , White just walks his king up and plays for an eventual c3-c4. Moreover, pushing pawns shouldn't really be classified as 'waiting'. Weaknesses are created each time a pawn moves, and Black has no waiting moves with his pieces.

33.♖f8!



What I missed. The drawback of Black's last move is that the e6-square is no longer available for his rook. White is therefore able to cut off the black king from the kingside.

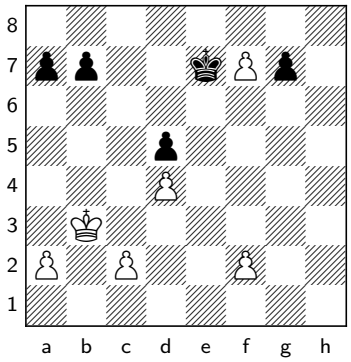
33... ♔d6



Black is threatening to take on d4 and go ...Re6 again, but White is too fast with his own play. The easiest solution is to force a pawn endgame. Starting with

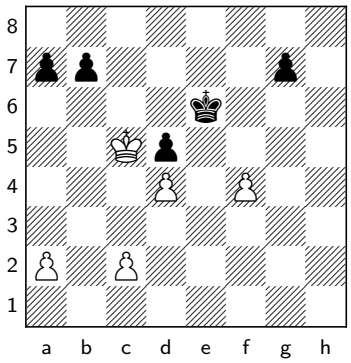
33... exd4 would lead to the same thing.

34.♖f7! exd4 35.cxd4 ♖xf7 36.gxf7 ♔e7



and now it's White's king's turn.

37.♔b4 ♔xf7 38.♔c5 ♔e6 39.f4



Black will soon be in zugzwang. The king cannot move, and if the b-pawn moves, White gets the c6-square. It's all over.

Sam Shankland-Jacek Tomczak, Batumi Olympiad 2018

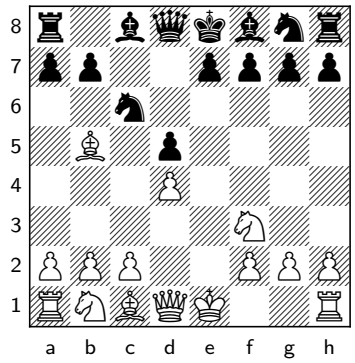
This was a particularly painful game for me, as it effectively cost the US team the 2018 Olympiad title. I won a pawn but failed to convert it. As a result, we lost the match against Poland, since Hikaru Nakamura stumbled against Kacper Piorun. China went on to win the event on tiebreak.

1.e4

The opening of this game is similar to a line in the Ragozin, but with colors reversed:

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3N ♘f6N 4.♘c3N ♗b4 5.♕a4† The queen check disturbs Black's coordination by forcing the knight to c6.

1...c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.♗b5



At the time, this was thought to be a reasonable line for White, but it is nowadays seen as not particularly challenging for Black.

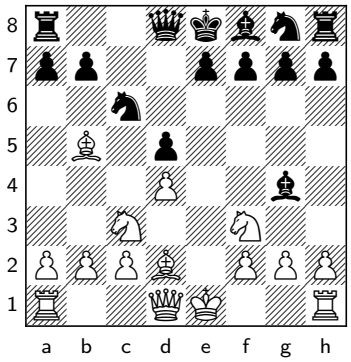
5...♕a5†

If anything, this idea is stronger for Black than the similar line is for White in the Ragozin. This is because the black knight is not yet on f6. After ...Bg4, ...e6, and ...Bd6, the knight is likely to be better placed on e7 than f6. From there, it defends the c6-knight and will be able to target the d4-pawn.

6.♘c3 ♗g4 7.♗d2

Black has only one good response.

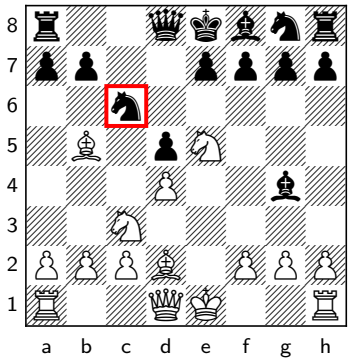
7...♕d8?



Black defends against White's obvious threat of taking on d5 but walks straight into another trick. He should have defended the pawn indirectly with

7... ♖c8 . The d-pawn cannot be taken as the b5-bishop would then hang, since the fork on c7 has been prevented.

8.♘e5!



A nice application of the Shankland Rule. If there is a move you want to play which your opponent is preventing, consider what happens if you play it anyway. I remember my opponent was not happy seeing this arrive! This was not a result of home cooking; I found it over the board. The quiet

8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 e6 is only marginally better for White.

8... ♗d7

This came after a long thought. It is sad, but at least it prevents a catastrophe. The justification to sacrifice the queen is not particularly difficult. The critical line is:

8... ♗xd1 9.♘xc6N and here: □ ♕d6 loses to

9... ♕d7 is also easy: 10.♘e5N ♕xb5 11.♘xb5N Black has problems on both d1 and c7. □ After

9... ♕c7 , White is spoilt for choice. For example: 10.♘e5†N

10.♘xd5N ♕xc6 11.♖xd1 also wins, as does 10... Qc7 10.Nxe7+ . □ 9...bxc6 is the engine's preference, but it's the easiest to calculate out of all the possibilities. After 10.Bxc6+ Qd7 11.Bxd7+ , White will have a clean extra pawn. □ 9...Qb6 This is the most complicated among the black options. 10.Ne5+ Kd8 The best line is 11.Rxd1! , when White's developed army can bully the vulnerable black king and queen in numerous ways going forward. 11.Nxf7+?! That's how I was planning to continue. 11...Kc8 12.Kxd1?! This was my idea, so that Black doesn't have a check on e6 that threatens the knight on f7. White will have two pieces and a rook for the queen, which I thought was enough to guarantee victory, despite the knight possi-

bly getting trapped on h8. However, the king is stranded on d1, and the harmony of the white army is disturbed. The engine claims Black can hold. I still believe White would have easier play and excellent practical chances, but playing for an attack was stronger. That's why 12.Rxd1! is again preferred by the machine, who isn't afraid to be down material and claims that after 12...Qe6+ 13.Ne5 White wins despite the material deficit.

10... ♔d8 11.♘xf7†N ♔c8 12.♘xd5N ♕xc2 13.♖c1 and Black can resign.

10.♘e5†N ♔d8 . □

9.♗xc6!

White correctly maintains the e5-knight for attacking purposes. Not

9.♘xd5?N due to ♘xe5N .

9.♘xd7N is similar to the 8.h3 line mentioned above. Black has no structural problems or bad pieces. White should aim for more than merely obtaining the bishop pair.

9... ♗xc6

White now faces a critical and difficult decision. The queen is definitely going to f3; this should be fairly obvious. But do we go to f3 directly, or do we play Qh5 first, provoke ...g6, and only then go to f3? It is not an easy decision; I spent some time and came up with the wrong answer.

10.♕f3?!

Correct was: B) Since the option of 10. Qf3 11...f6 doesn't work, Black has to play 11...Nf6 and the question becomes one of comparison. Should White prefer this position over the 10.Qf3 line and, if so, why? 12.g4! This utilizes White's lead in development, threatening g5. 12...h6 Forced. 13.h4 In the game, I reached this exact position, but with the pawn on g7 rather than g6. B1) 13...Rh7 looks horrible. For example, White is winning after 14.O-O-O Nd7 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.h5 g5 17.Qg3 e6 18.f4 Bd6 19.Qd3 . B2) One way for Black to try and justify the pawn on B3) 10\. Qf3 13...e6 This is what worked for Black in the game. But with the pawn on g6 instead of g7, the f6-knight is undefended and in serious trouble. 14.g5! hxg5 15.Bxg5! This is exactly why the pawn was lured forward to g6. Due to the f6-knight already hanging, Black cannot bring the bishop to d6 to challenge the e5-knight. 15...Be7 16.h5! A nice detail. 16...gxh5 17.Rg1 Black can barely move, and he will be crushed on the kingside. I understood that these lines with the knight on f6 would be a better version for White if the black pawn was on g6 instead of g7. I only rejected 10... Bxc6 10.Qh5! because of 10. Qf3 11...f6 .

10.♕h5 g6 11.♕f3 and now: A) Let's first examine f6 This is a possible defense for Black in this line that wouldn't work if the pawn was still on g7, as in that case a check on h5 would decide. So, this would be a reason to prefer 10.Qf3 – but only if it works. During the game, I did not grasp how horrible the resulting positions are for Black. I was thinking that if Black

could finish development, let's say with ...e6, ...Bd6, ...Ne7-f5, and ...Rhe8, then he would be okay. But this is not going to happen. 12.♘xc6N bxc6 13.O-O-O On the agenda are Rhe1 and Na4. Black is struggling to develop. e6 There is no way Black can survive after surrendering control of the e6-square, so this is practically forced. 14.♖he1 ♔f7 I had seen this far and was not sure how to break through further. Black wants ...Bd6 and ...Ne7, and while his position is bad, it didn't seem critical. I had missed an important idea. 15.♘e2N This is crushing. And once you see it, it makes perfect sense, and it becomes obvious that the machine is right. I had only considered

15.♘a4?N , which is good for White but not that convincing.

10... ♘f6

As mentioned already,

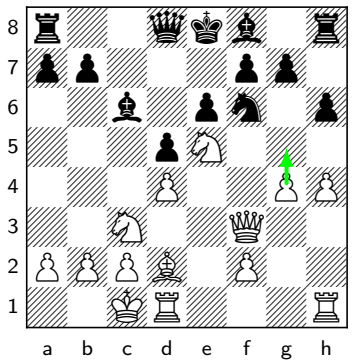
10... g6 would be: 11... g6 13...Bg7 14.O-O-O White is now threatening g5, which is a significant problem. The e5-knight is too strong, and Black is not able to remove it. He cannot castle, as he will be mated in short order. The reason he cannot castle is revealed in the following line: 14...O-O 15.h5! g5 16.Bxg5! hxg5 17.h6 Bh8 18.h7+ Black cannot avoid checkmate.

10... f6 is not possible in this line due to 11.♕h5† g6 12.♘xg6N , and this is the (flawed) reason that I chose to go to f3 directly instead of stopping on h5 first.

11.g4 h6 12.h4 e6

With the pawn on g7 the f6-knight isn't that vulnerable, so this is normal.

13.O-O-O



I wasn't all that impressed by

13.g5 hxg5 14.♗xg5 , as it doesn't come with a tempo against the knight on f6. So, it made sense to first castle and create the stronger threat of g5, followed by taking back on g5 with the h-pawn.

13... ♗d6 14.♗f4!?

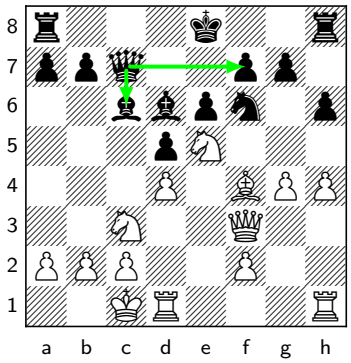
If the e5-knight is coming off the board, White would prefer to exchange it for Black's dark-squared bishop, so I refrained from taking on c6. Instead, I try to make the trade happen on my own terms. The exchange would now bring my bishop to the strong e5-square. Sadly, After

14.g5? does not quite work: ♗xe5 15.dxe5 d4 The tables have turned, and Black is the one winning.

14.♘xc6N bxc6 15.g5 ♘g8N or

15... ♘d7N , Black is worse but still kicking.

14... ♕c7



Black tries to get closer to completing development. He's also defending against the renewed threat of g5 by protecting c6 and f7 and pinning the knight on e5.

15.♗h2!?

I like this move, even though it is not the engine's first choice. I wanted to push my g-pawn and make trouble for Black, but I also wanted to prevent ...Ne4 in response (although it turns out I was wrong about that). Furthermore, I wanted to be able to meet castling long with Nxc6, Bxd6, and g5. So, I moved the bishop off the square where it could be captured with check. □ The reason I didn't play □ It is also important to note that □ The immediate

15.♗g3? was: ♘e4N 16.♘xe4N dxe4 17.♕xf7† ♕xf7 18.♘xf7N ♗xg3 Black's bishop ends up on g3 and can capture the f2-pawn. Then the passed e-pawn is powerful. White is losing control of the position. I wanted the same thing, but with the black bishop on h2 instead of g3.

15.♗xh6? does not work: ♖xh6 16.g5 ♗xe5 17.dxe5 d4 Black wins. 17... Bxe5 17.gxh6 Bf4+ is even worse.

15.g5 can be met with ♘e4N . I was not keen on this position, but the engine points out that my evaluation was wrong. 16.gxh6 Before anything else, White leaves Black with a weak pawn on h6. gxh6 17.♘xe4N dxe4 18.♕e3 O-O-O 19.♗xh6 ♗xe5 20.dxe5 ♕xe5 The engine gives an evaluation around +2, which I found surprising. Upon further inspection, White has a passed h-pawn and is able to harass the black king on the dark squares: 21.f4 ♕a5 22.♗g7 The bishop will be outstanding on e5. ♕xa2 23.b3 White wins, but only computers can play chess like this.

15... O-O-O

15... ♘e4?N would allow me to fully demonstrate my point after: 16.♘xe4N dxe4 17.♕xf7† ♕xf7 18.♘xf7N ♗xh2 19.♘xh8N Compared with the 15.Bg3 line, the black bishop has landed on the wrong square, and he is unable to capture on f2. ♗f4† 20.♔b1 e3 21.♘g6N White can afford to let one of his rooks go. ♗xh1 22.♖xh1 White will have two healthy extra pawns.

16.♘xc6

Following through with the plan.

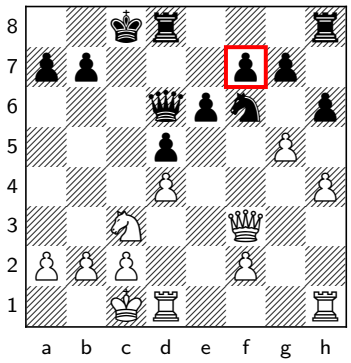
16... ♕xc6!

After

16... bxc6? 17.♗xd6 ♖xd6 18.g5 , the black knight is unable to retreat to d7 due to

the weak f7-pawn. Moving the knight elsewhere will be met by Na4. This would mean strategic annihilation, due to the weakness of the c5-square and the looseness of the black king.

17.♗xd6 ♕xd6 18.g5



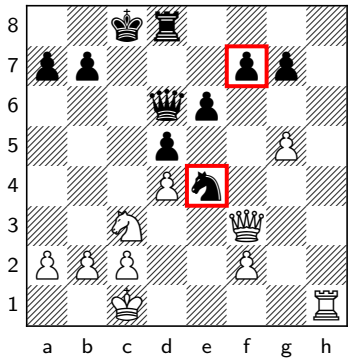
Going for the f7-pawn. It looks like everything is proceeding smoothly.

18... hxg5?

After this, White is once again winning. It wasn't easy to calculate and tell the lines apart as there are many options for White on each turn, but 19... hxg5 19.gxh6 is what a human would play, when after 19...Rxh6 20.Nxe4 dxe4 21.Qxe4 , the engine insists on full equality, but White has an extra pawn.

18... ♘e4N holds for Black. A main difference compared to the game can be seen in the following line: 19.♕xf7 ♘xc3N 20.bxc3 ♖hf8 21.♕xg7 ♖xf2 White's king is too weak, and the game will end in a draw by perpetual check.

19.hxg5 ♖xh1 20.♖xh1 ♘e4



White has a critical decision to make. He is going to win a pawn. But which pawn does he want to take and why, and how is he going to convert the game after that?

21.♕xf7!

A useful calculation technique is elimination. Taking on e4 can be eliminated as Black obtains enough counterplay:

21.♘xe4N dxe4 22.♕xe4

22.♕xf7 ♕xd4 23.♕xe6† ♔b8 Mate is threatened. 24.a3 ♕xf2 25.♕xe4 ♕d2† 26.♔b1 ♕xg5 Black has won back his material and is fine. The side who is up in material wants to exchange pieces, not pawns. In this line, pawns are getting exchanged.

22... ♕xd4 is nothing at all.

21... ♘xc3

21... ♘xg5N 22.♕xg7 is comfortably winning for White.

22.bxc3

The doubled c-pawns provide good shelter for the white king, who is able to hide on the opposite side of a black attack. Compared to

the note regarding 18...Ne4!, there is a pair of rooks missing and the h-file is open. This means that Black's rook can never lift itself from the eighth rank, as then the white rook would come to h8. How is White going to convert the extra pawn? In terms of stabilizing the position to avoid counterplay, White is already reasonably stable. So, White needs to evaluate which exchanges are in his favor and which are not. The king-and-pawn endgame should be winning for White, as he is able to meet ...b5 with Kb3 and a4 (although a draw is likely if the black queenside pawns arrive on b5 and a4 with the white pawn on a3). In terms of pawn exchanges, White would like to play c4 at some point, to get rid of his deficient structure. White will have much better chances of doing this in a rook endgame rather than a queen endgame. With the black queen on c7, it will be hard for White to force the c4 advance. Moving the white queen to the queenside to support the advance will weaken the white kingside. In a rook endgame, Black will not be able to hold the kingside and at the same time prevent c4. Also, the white king can centralize himself strongly on d3 without having to worry about checks. For these reasons, a rook endgame is much more promising for White than a queen endgame. It is not that difficult to obtain such an endgame.

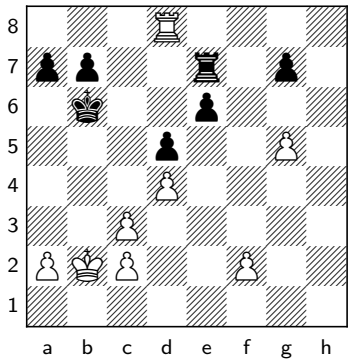
22... ♖d7

22... ♖f8 loses to 23.♕xg7 , and Rh8 is coming.

23.♖h8† ♔c7 24.♕e8 ♔b6 25.♕f8 ♖e7 26.♖g8

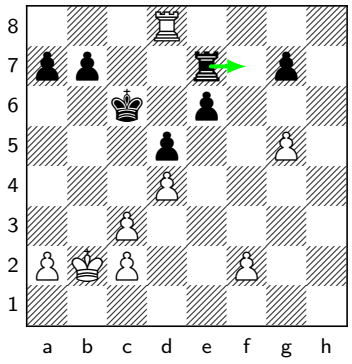
26.♕d8† was another way to exchange queens, but with the text move, White achieves placing the king on b2 before the exchange.

26... ♕c7 27.♔b2 ♕d7 28.♕d8† ♕xd8 29.♖xd8



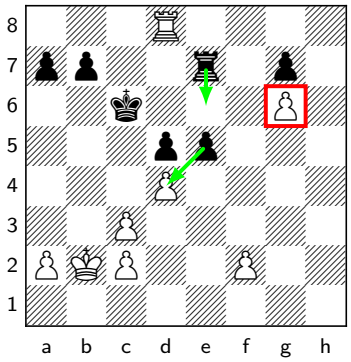
We have arrived at the rook endgame, which I had correctly evaluated as winning.

29... ♔c6



Black enables ...Rf7 by preventing Rd6+, so White prevents it.

30.g6 e5



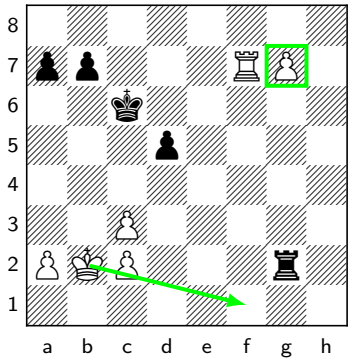
Black is threatening ...exd4 and ...Re6. The structure is fluid and can change in a lot of ways. I chose the wrong way.

31.dxe5?

This allows Black to make a draw. My plan for my extra pawn was to take on g7, put my rook on f7, and then my pawn on g7. With a passed pawn defended laterally along the seventh rank, Black would never be able to use his rook to take any queenside pawns, and my king will run back through c1-d1-e1-f1, kicking the rook off g2. Once the rook retreats, then the king runs up to f2, f3, f4, and so on, and my extra pawn becomes a queen. This might all sound nice and good but, as we will see, it runs into a problem, and I would have won if I had better evaluated which pawn exchanges White wants to make. The way to win was: □ 31. dxe5 31...Kd6 32.Kb3 White plans to go forward, and, more importantly, Black is in some sort of zugzwang. For example, if Black waits with a move such as 32...b6 , White just walks his king up and plays for an eventual c4. Moreover, pushing pawns shouldn't really be classified as 'waiting'. Weaknesses are created each time a pawn moves, and Black has no waiting moves with his pieces. 32...Ke6 33.Rf8! What I missed. The drawback of Black's last move is that the e6-square is no longer available for his rook. White is therefore able to cut off the black king from the kingside. Starting with 33...exd4 would lead to the same thing as 33...Kd6 Black is threatening to take on d4 and go ...Re6 again, but White is too fast with his own play. The easiest solution is to force a pawn endgame. 34.Rf7! exd4 35.cxd4 Rxf7 36.gxf7 Ke7 37.Kb4 Kxf7 38.Kc5 Ke6 39.f4 Black will soon be in zugzwang. The king cannot move, and if the b-pawn moves, White gets the c6-square. It's all over.

31.♖g8 This prevents ...Re6. I rejected it as I thought Black would draw by walking his king over to the g6-pawn. But I missed that White is then able to bring the rook back to f8 once Black's king sits on e6, without fearing ...Re6. □ e4 32.♔b3 makes things easy for White, who can play c4 since the pressure on the d4-pawn has been released.

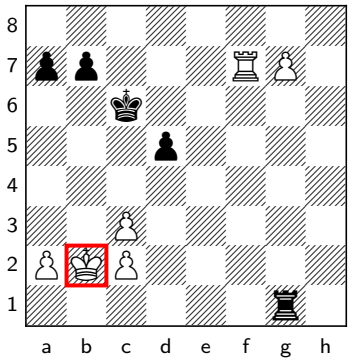
31...♖xe5 32.♖g8 ♖f5 33.♖xg7 ♖xf2 34.♖f7 ♖g2 35.g7



I had seen this line and thought it was completely winning for me. My passed pawn is defended laterally by the rook on the seventh rank.

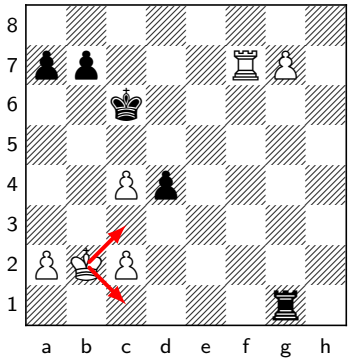
My queenside pawns are currently defended, and my king will connect with my passed pawn to win the game. Or so I thought. Why is this plan flawed?

35... ♖g1!



Due to White's deficient queenside structure, his king is unable to reach his passed pawn. I spent some time kicking myself, and then (mis)calculating the consequences of Black capturing the c-pawn I was about to sacrifice.

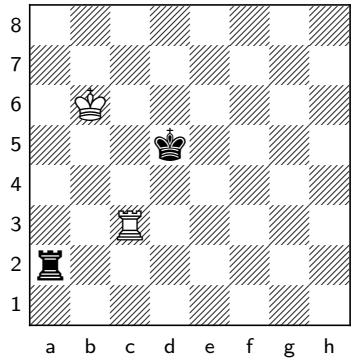
36.c4 d4!



The white king is unable to join the fight.

36... dxc4 also holds with some precise moves later on, but it is more natural to restrict the white king.

37.c5 b6 38.cxb6 axb6 39.♔b3 ♔c5 40.♔a4 ♖g2 41.♔b3 ♖g3† 42.♔b2 ♖g1 43.♖a7 ♔c6 44.♔a3 ♔c5 45.♔a4 ♖g4 46.♖c7† ♔d6 47.♖c4 ♖xg7 48.♔b5 ♔d5 49.c3 dxc3 50.♖xc3 ♖g2 51.♔xb6 ♖xa2



In terms of converting the extra pawn, I did well in some respects, but not in others. I correctly evaluated that a rook endgame was the best endgame for White. But I incorrectly evaluated the change to the structure in that endgame. The ending of the game is instructive, and it was also appropriate for me to give it as an example in the chapter on rook to the side of the passed pawn of Theoretical Rook Endgames. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN)

3) Plan for the Pawn

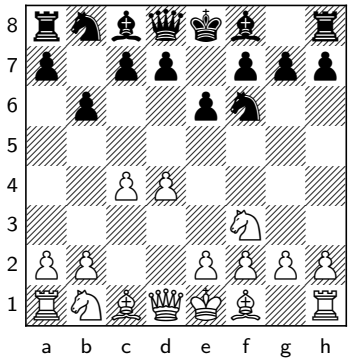
Introduction

Finally, we come upon the section about having a plan for the pawn. The most obvious case is simple –the pawn will become a queen. For example, in my game (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) with Ray Robson (Chapter 1, Game 6), it was not hard to figure out that my extra pawn on c4 was part of a queenside pawn mass that would easily reach the first rank if given the time. However, most cases are not so clean-cut. Then, understanding what an extra pawn actually does for you can be tough! It is of vital importance to find the right plan for the pawn and, as we will see, even elite players can mess this up.

Alexander Grischuk-Michael Adams Introduction

To begin with, we will see a game where Grischuk showed that a plan for an extra pawn can have absolutely nothing to do with ever hoping to turn it into a queen.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6

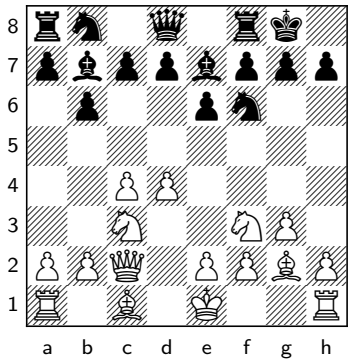


The Queen's Indian Defense has seen a decrease in popularity in recent years, but at the time it was quite topical.

4.g3 ♗b7 5.♗g2 ♗e7 6.♘c3 O-O

6...♘e4N is the best move. In the Queen's Indian, Black should meet Nc3 with ...Ne4. Otherwise, White gets to put the queen on c2, and the opportunity goes away. Black has less space, so it makes sense to exchange some pieces.

7.♕c2



White would have a huge position if he were able to castle and finish building the center with e2-e4.

7.d5 is another way to prevent ...Ne4.

7... c5

Adams challenges the center before it's too late.

8.d5

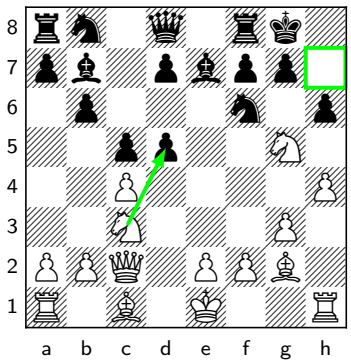
Thematically, this is the move White wants to make. He does not want to allow ...cxd4, and he wants to gain more space.

8... exd5 9.♘g5

9.♘d2N is too passive, but

9.♘h4N is the best move, eyeing the vulnerable f5-square.

9... h6 10.h4!



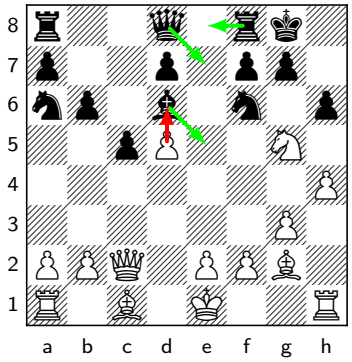
This is a relatively old game, but Grischuk shows some understanding of the modern era. He is going to take on d5 next, and he makes sure to keep his knight on its perch for the moment. One might be initially tempted by

10.♘xd5N ♗xd5 11.♗xd5 , but after ♘c6N White doesn't have a comfortable answer. 12.h4 is what we want, but

12.♗xc6 is positionally forced, but dxc6 13.♘f3N ♕c8 is excellent for Black yet again. White will not benefit from the pawn structure, as Black's pieces will be the more active. Up next is ...Qe6 and ...Ne4, and Black's play flows naturally.

12... ♘b4N is good for Black. He gets a Benoni structure with many pieces already exchanged. The kingside attack is evaporating, so White's knight on g5 and pawn on h4 lose most of their meaning. So,

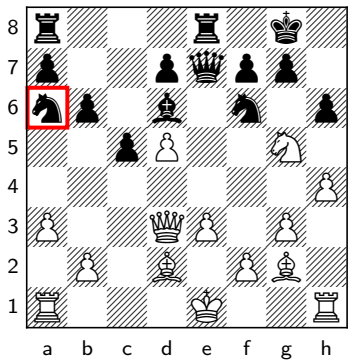
10... ♘a6 11.♘xd5 ♗xd5 12.cxd5 ♗d6



Black prevents d5-d6, clears the e-file to be used by his rook, vacates the e7-square for the queen, and creates the option to activate his bishop through e5 if needed. White always needs to make sure that Black cannot safely take on g5. Indeed, here he cannot, and the justification is straightforward. But that doesn't mean Black will never be able to. After

12... hxg5? 13.hxg5 , the knight on f6 is hit, and it cannot move on pain of a mate on h7. Black immediately loses back the piece and is hit with a vicious kingside attack.

13.♗d2 ♘b4 14.♕b1 ♖e8 15.a3 ♕e7 16.e3 ♘a6 17.♕d3



A strong move from Grischuk, which centralizes the queen and attacks the a6-knight.

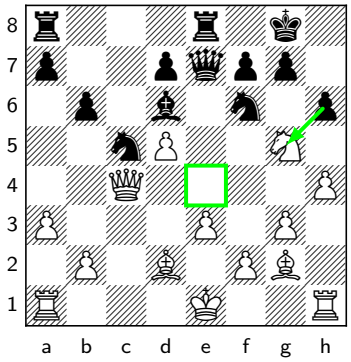
Black's plan was to play ...c4 and ...Nc5, regrouping his knight towards the center. If the knight now retreats to c7, it would be on a much worse square than c5. Then White might hope to castle long and start a kingside attack. Adams changes the nature of the game:

17... c4!?

Black pitches a pawn, insisting that the knight isn't going to retreat.

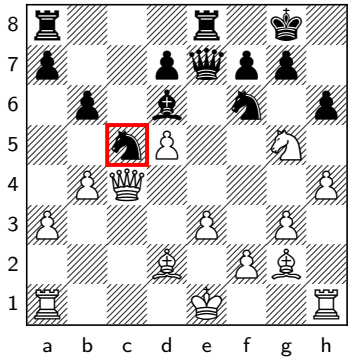
17... ♘c7N would keep material level, but after 18.♗c3 Black faces a menacing initiative. Note that here Black is almost ready to capture the knight because he has hxg5 19.hxg5 ♘e4N but White can increase the pressure with 20.♖h4 f5 21.O-O-O It's not over yet, but White is going to double up on the h-file with a dangerous long-term initiative. ♗e5 running into 22.d6 is a nice touch.

18.♕xc4 ♘c5



The position has changed dramatically. White is a pawn up and has the bishop pair. However, he is not able to castle queenside due to the open c-file, and Black has good piece activity. White needs to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. The g5-knight is now hanging for real, White is not castled, his queen is exposed, and the e4-square is about to be occupied by a black knight.

19.b4!



White wants to force the c5-knight to the sidelines before attending to his own knight on g5. After

19.♘h3?N ♖ac8 , the black knights are coming to g4 and e4, and the white knight lacks potential on h3. Black is for choice.

19... b5!

Black needs to fight for the initiative. Even worse is

19... ♘a4?N concedes to White's intentions, and the knight on a4 is both misplaced and vulnerable.

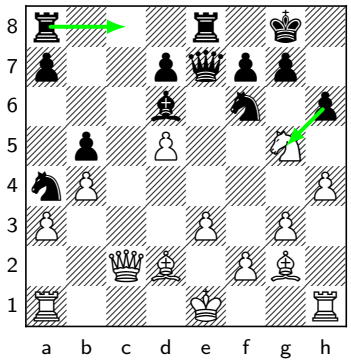
19... ♘ce4?N , which allows mass exchanges: 20.♘xe4N ♘xe4N 21.♗xe4 ♕xe4 22.♕xe4 ♖xe4 23.♔e2 ♖e5 24.♖hd1 Black cannot safely take on d5, and White will remain a clean pawn up against clearly insufficient counterplay. The point is that

after ♖xd5 25.♗c3 Black will lose the pawn on d7.

20.♕c2

20.♕xb5? runs into ♘b3N , and White will lose at least the knight on g5.

20... ♘a4



The a4-knight is indeed on the rim in this version as well, but at least it's not hanging, which makes a huge difference as Black doesn't need to lose a tempo protecting it. From White's perspective, ...Rac8 is coming, but it is not going to be a knockout. The knight on g5 is hanging for real now, and it must be retreated.

21.♘f3!

This is the best square for the knight, as it prevents ...Be5 for the moment, and the knight can dream of a bright future on d4. White does not have enough fuel on the fire after

21.♘h3?N would misplace the knight and allow ...Be5.

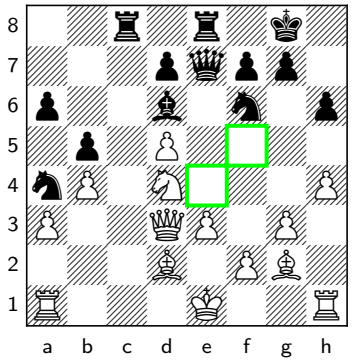
21.♖d1? ♖ac8 22.♕b1 , when Black can already win in many ways, the simplest one being to grab the piece on offer: hxg5 23.hxg5 ♘e4N 24.♖h4 ♖c4 White can resign. The entire justification behind leaving the knight hanging on g5 was that if Black ever takes it, after hxg5, White will have mate threats on h7. Now, this is not the case since Black is able to clog the b1-h7 diagonal.

21... ♖ac8

White was not worried about

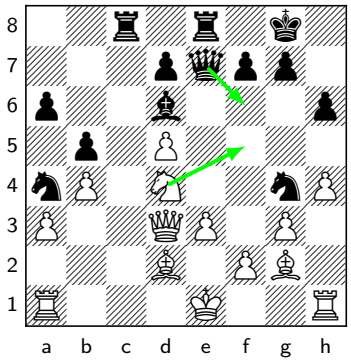
21... ♘xd5?N , as after 22.♘d4N he should regain his extra pawn. The g2-bishop opening up would provide White with a large positional advantage, even if material parity was restored.

22.♕d3 a6 23.♘d4



White eyes the f5-square and controls e4 with his bishop, fighting against ...Ne4 or ...Qe4.

23... ♘g4

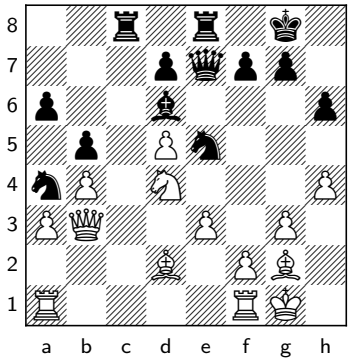


Adams prepares to respond to Nf5 with ...Qf6. An argument can be made that the extra pawn is, to some extent, a bug rather than a feature. Without it, White would have 24... Ng4 24.Nf5 here and, in general, Black would be stuck with an isolated pawn on an open file. Of course, an extra pawn is an extra pawn, but it's clearly not very useful in this position. We need to figure out how to change that.

24.O-O ♘e5 25.♕b3 ♘c4N

Black's pieces have become active, and White has a critical decision to take. Should he preserve the bishop? The c4-knight is clearly the more active piece, but the bishop defends the important c3-square. Some calculation is required.

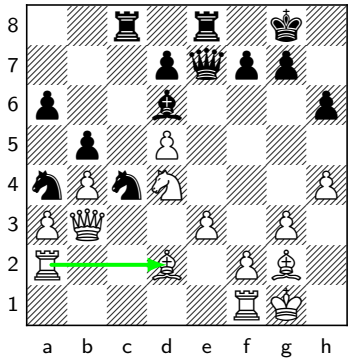
Grischuk-Adams Exercise #1



25... ♘c4

Black's pieces have become active, and White has a critical decision to take. Should he preserve the bishop? The c4-knight is clearly the more active piece, but the bishop defends the important c3-square. Some calculation is required.

26.♖a2!



I believe this is the best option, which moves the rook off the long diagonal, so that the knight will not be pinned on d4 after ...Be5. Most of Black's counterplay is contained. Grischuk decided to preserve the bishop with

26.♘f5?N does not work: ♕e5 27.♘xd6N ♘xd2N After 28.♕d3

28.♕d1 ♘xf1N 29.♘xe8N ♘xe3N The white structure is destroyed, and Black wins material.

28... ♘xf1N the a1-rook is loose.

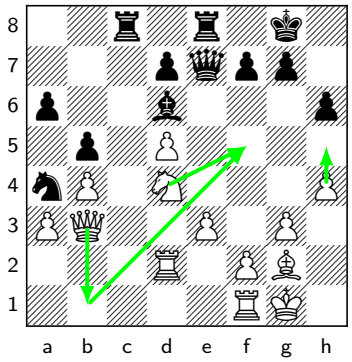
26.♗c1 . His plan is to maneuver his a1-rook to e2 via a2. One option then is to expand in the center by pushing the e \- and f-pawns. If White could achieve this, then the black knights on the queenside will be

sidelined, and the plan makes use of the extra pawn. This is not bad, but White could have done better. ♗e5 This is the problem with Grischuk's plan of keeping the dark-squared bishop. If White must recapture on d4 with the e-pawn, then Black will have both open files, and the extra d-pawn at first sight is not significant. The bishop pair is not necessarily stronger than the knight pair in this structure, as the knights are on stable outposts, and the bishops are somewhat restricted. White could try to recapture on d4 with a piece by going for 27.♖d1 , but after ♘d6N , it looks a little uncomfortable. White's pieces are uncoordinated, and the d1-rook will be exposed to a knight landing on c3. Black is down a pawn, but all his pieces are excellent. Grischuk went for the prudent option 27... Be5 27.Ra2! Bxd4 28.exd4 Qf6 Black has sufficiently active pieces for the computer to opine that Black has managed to equalize. In human terms, White still has chances for an edge, but he needs to come up with a plan that makes the extra pawn useful.

26... ♘xd2

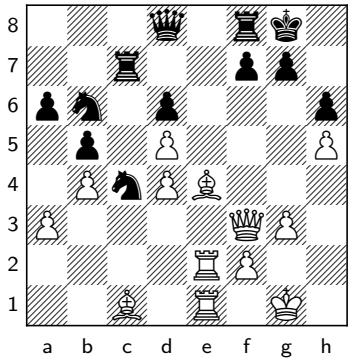
26... ♗e5 allows 27.♘f5N ♕f6 28.e4 , with an excellent position for White.

27.♖xd2

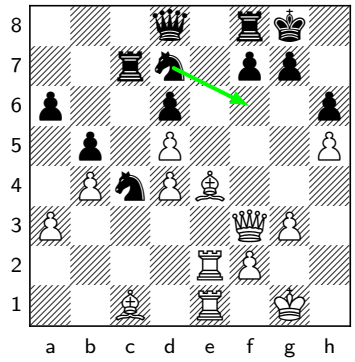


White has consolidated his position, and Nf5 is a serious threat. It could be combined with a kingside attack after h5 and Bf3 to control the ...g6 break, followed by rerouting the queen to g4 via f5. When we think about what White's extra pawn is doing here, it clearly has more to do with the kingside than the center. If Black had a pawn on e6, for example, it would be completely impossible to start such a kingside attack.

Grischuk-Adams Exercise #2

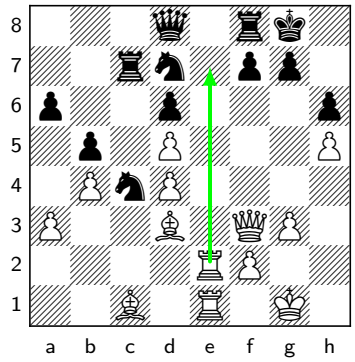


35... ♘d7



The knight comes to the defense. Grischuk played a couple of great moves to break Black's resistance.

36.♗d3

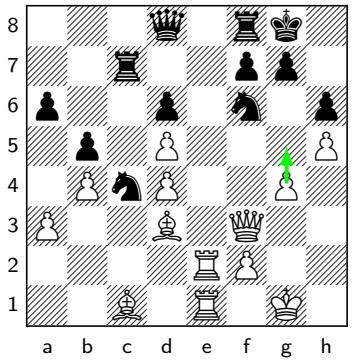


Threatening to invade with the rook on e7.

36... ♘f6

Black's knight attempts to shore up the kingside. But his other knight... it looks nice, but how can it ever actually help save his king, or even create counterplay?

37.g4!



The knight on f6 makes attacking the hook on h6 even more inviting for White, as the black queen cannot access the kingside. White is no longer worried about ...Qh4 ideas. It is noteworthy that the c1-bishop is good on its starting square, both defending a3 and attacking h6. This is often the case, with the main issue usually being that the bishop blocks the development of the rook on the same side. Here, the a1-rook was developed via a2 and e2 instead. A comparison can be made with Black's typical maneuver in the Ruy Lopez of ...Re8 and ...Bf8.

37... ♘b6 38.g5

Black's position is collapsing. A nice and relatively relevant line is

38... ♘fxd5N

is met with

38... hxg5 39.♗xg5 ♘bxd5N 40.♕xd5 ♘xd5N 41.♗xd8 , when recapturing on d8 would allow a back-rank checkmate.

39.♕f5

or

39.gxh6 .

Alexander Grischuk-Michael Adams, Calvia 2007

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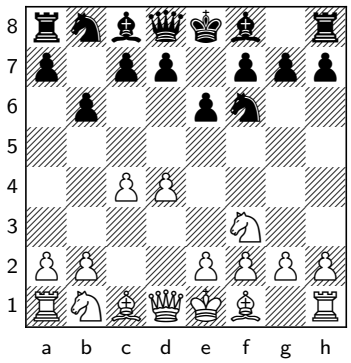

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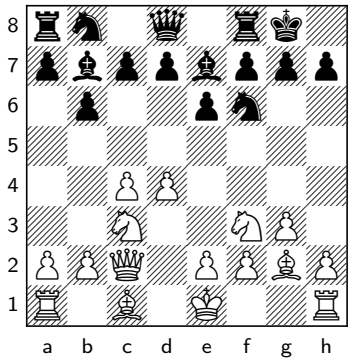

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Adams challenges the center before it's too late.

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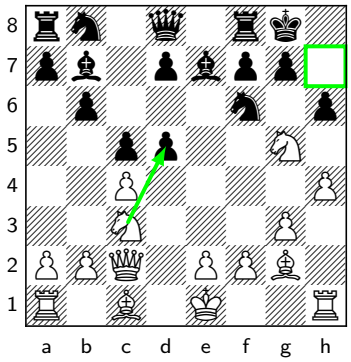

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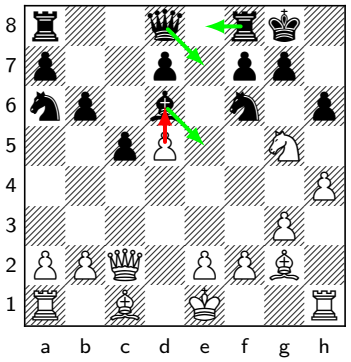

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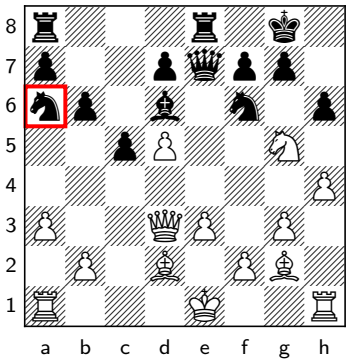

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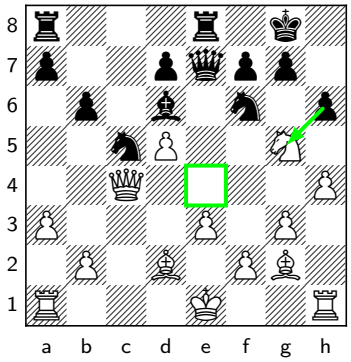
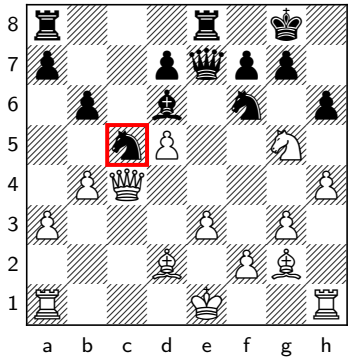
17... ♘c7N would keep material level, but after 18.♗c3 Black faces a menacing initiative. Note that here Black is almost ready to capture the knight because he has hxg5 19.hxg5 ♘e4N but White can increase the pressure with 20.♖h4 f5 21.O-O-O It's not over yet, but White is going to double up on the h-file with a dangerous long-term initiative. ♗e5 running into 22.d6 is a nice touch.

18.♕xc4 ♘c5



The position has changed dramatically. White is a pawn up and has the bishop pair. However, he is not able to castle queenside due to the open c-file, and Black has good piece activity. White needs to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. The g5-knight is now hanging for real, White is not castled, his queen is exposed, and the e4-square is about to be occupied by a black knight.

19.b4!



White wants to force the c5-knight to the sidelines before attending to his own knight on g5. After

19.♘h3?N ♖ac8 , the black knights are coming to g4 and e4, and the white knight lacks potential on h3. Black is for choice.

19... b5!

Black needs to fight for the initiative. Even worse is

19... ♘a4?N concedes to White's intentions, and the knight on a4 is both misplaced and vulnerable.

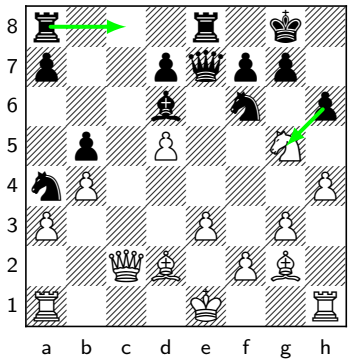
19... ♘ce4?N , which allows mass exchanges: 20.♘xe4N ♘xe4N 21.♗xe4 ♕xe4 22.♕xe4 ♖xe4 23.♔e2 ♖e5 24.♖hd1 Black cannot safely take on d5, and White will remain a clean pawn up against clearly insufficient counterplay. The point is that

after ♖xd5 25.♗c3 Black will lose the pawn on d7.

20.♕c2

20.♕xb5? runs into ♘b3N , and White will lose at least the knight on g5.

20... ♘a4



The a4-knight is indeed on the rim in this version as well, but at least it's not hanging, which makes a huge difference as Black doesn't need to lose a tempo protecting it. From White's perspective, ...Rac8 is coming, but it is not going to be a knockout. The knight on g5 is hanging for real now, and it must be retreated.

21.♘f3!

This is the best square for the knight, as it prevents ...Be5 for the moment, and the knight can dream of a bright future on d4. White does not have enough fuel on the fire after

21.♘h3?N would misplace the knight and allow ...Be5.

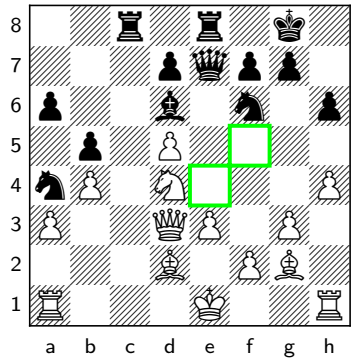
21.♖d1? ♖ac8 22.♕b1 , when Black can already win in many ways, the simplest one being to grab the piece on offer: hxg5 23.hxg5 ♘e4N 24.♖h4 ♖c4 White can resign. The entire justification behind leaving the knight hanging on g5 was that if Black ever takes it, after hxg5, White will have mate threats on h7. Now, this is not the case since Black is able to clog the b1-h7 diagonal.

21... ♖ac8

White was not worried about

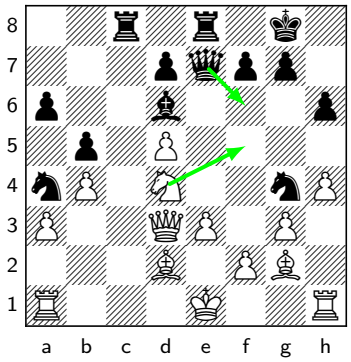
21... ♘xd5?N , as after 22.♘d4N he should regain his extra pawn. The g2-bishop opening up would provide White with a large positional advantage, even if material parity was restored.

22.♕d3 a6 23.♘d4



White eyes the f5-square and controls e4 with his bishop, fighting against ...Ne4 or ...Qe4.

23... ♘g4

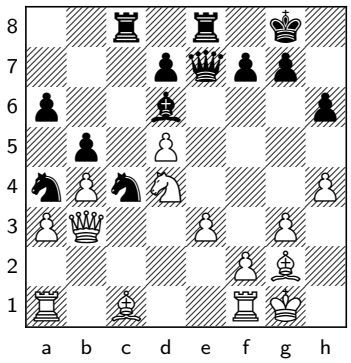


Adams prepares to respond to Nf5 with ...Qf6. An argument can be made that the extra pawn is, to some extent, a bug rather than a feature. Without it, White would have 24... Ng4 24.Nf5 here and, in general, Black would be stuck with an isolated pawn on an open file. Of course, an extra pawn is an extra pawn, but it's clearly not very useful in this position. We need to figure out how to change that.

24.O-O ♘e5 25.♕b3 ♘c4

Black's pieces have become active, and White has a critical decision to take. Should he preserve the bishop? The c4-knight is clearly the more active piece, but the bishop defends the important c3-square. Some calculation is required.

26.♗c1

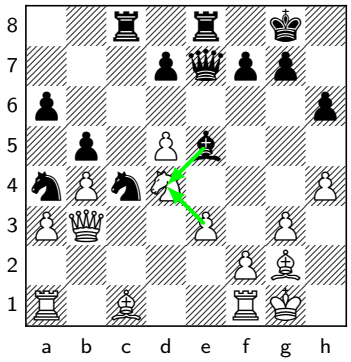


Grischuk decided to preserve the bishop. His plan is to maneuver his a1-rook to e2 via a2. One option then is to expand in the center by pushing the e \- and f-pawns. If White could achieve this, then the black knights on the queenside will be sidelined, and the plan makes use of the extra pawn. This is not bad, but White could have done better. □ □ Best was

26.♘f5?N does not work: ♕e5 27.♘xd6N ♘xd2N when after 28.♕d3 ♘xf1N , the a1-rook is loose. 28... Nxd2 28.Qd1 Nxf1 29.Nxe8 Nxe3! The white structure is destroyed, and Black wins material.

26.♖a2 , which moves the rook off the long diagonal, so that the knight will not be pinned on d4 after ...Be5. Most of Black's counterplay is contained. ♗e5 allows 27.♘f5N ♕f6 28.e4 , with an excellent position for White. 26\. Ra2 26...Nxd2 27.Rxd2 White has consolidated his position, and Nf5 is a serious threat. It could be combined with a kingside attack after h4-h5 and Bf3 to control the ...g6 break, followed by rerouting the queen to g4 via f5. When we think about what White's extra pawn is doing here, it clearly has more to do with the kingside than the center. If Black had a pawn on e6, for example, it would be completely impossible to start such a kingside attack.

26... ♗e5



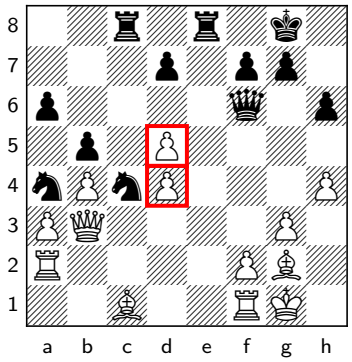
This is the problem with Grischuk's plan of keeping the dark-squared bishop. If White must recapture on d4 with the e-pawn, then Black will have both open files, and the extra d-pawn at first sight is not significant. The bishop pair is not necessarily stronger than the knight pair in this structure, as the knights are on stable outposts, and the bishops are somewhat restricted.

27.♖a2!

The prudent option. White could try to recapture on d4 with a piece by going for

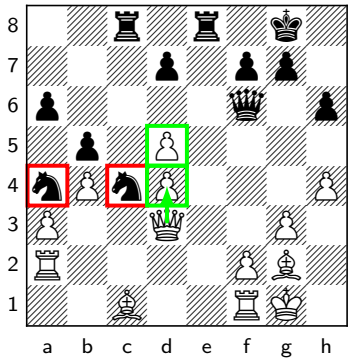
27.♖d1 , but after ♘d6N it looks a little uncomfortable. White's pieces are uncoordinated, and the d1-rook will be exposed to a knight landing on c3. Black is down a pawn, but all his pieces are excellent.

27... ♗xd4 28.exd4 ♕f6



Black has sufficiently active pieces for the computer to opine that Black has managed to equalize. In human terms, White still has chances for an edge, but he needs to come up with a plan that makes the extra pawn useful.

29.♕d3



White starts with protecting the d4-pawn. What are the doubled d-pawns doing for White? It is clear they are not useful for creating a passed pawn, but they are restricting the black knights to some degree. For example, the d4-pawn is protecting the c3-square by blocking Black's queen, as well as denying the c4-knight the e5-square. In fact, the knights are stuck on the queenside and rendered incapable of joining the fight on the kingside.

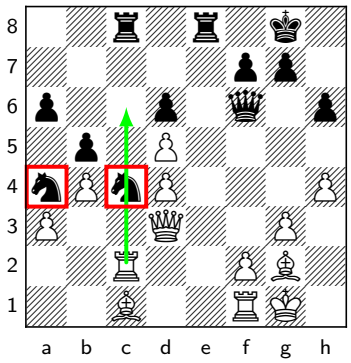
29... d6?

A serious mistake, as Black misses his chance to create counterplay on the c-file.

29... ♘cb6N was better and would have allowed Black to achieve near equality following White's incorrect decision on the 26th move. His knights are looking quite good. One simple threat that isn't easy to parry is ...Nc3 followed by ...Nc3xd5.

29... ♘d6?N isn't as strong, but is also better than the game continuation. Black had to try to create counterplay on the c-file, by any means necessary.

30.♖c2!



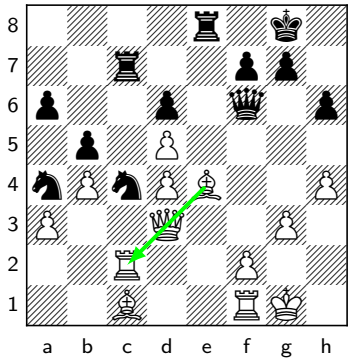
A good prophylactic move. The rook controls the c3-square and freezes the c4-knight, as Black cannot allow Rc6. This makes use of White's extra pawn, as after a recapture of the rook on c6, the other d-pawn can come to d5. Another plan for White is to maneuver the g2-bishop to c2, to create a Turton doubling. This would be powerful combined with h4-h5. That's especially true with the open e-file, which means a rook on e1 would prevent Black's king from coming out to e7.

30... ♖c7

Black might want to double rooks either on the c \- or e-file.

30... ♘cb6N 31.♖c6 is obviously horrible for Black.

31.♗e4



White overprotects the rook on c2 and looks towards the black kingside. □ White cannot remove the protection of the d5-pawn. After □ □ On the other hand,

31.♗h3? ♘ab6N , the bishop needs to return to g2.

31.♗f4? does not improve the bishop and it unfreezes the c4-knight by granting it access to the b2-square.

31.h5? is one way to improve White's position without making any commitments.

31... ♖ec8?

Fighting for the c-file is a losing battle. We can see the perks of having that extra pawn on the d-file: if not for the d4-pawn, Black would have ...Ne5 ideas. Black's best option to fight was

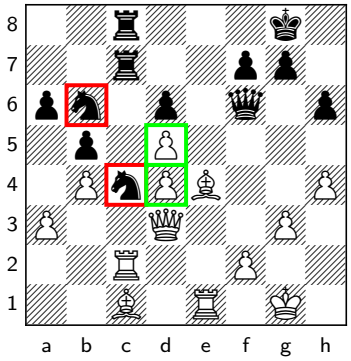
31... ♘cb2N , exploiting the hanging bishop on e4 to break the pin and relieve some of the pressure. 32.♗xb2 is not possible due to ♖xc2 33.♕xc2 ♘xb2N−+

32.♖e1!

White simply improves his worst-placed piece. He might consider Ree2 next to ensure the queenside is fully secure, but he can also try to create his own play on the e-file. Black is stuck, and the d-pawns are restricting the ability of his knights to join the defense via the center. More deeply, it is prophylaxis against Black's ideas of moving the c4-knight, due to the weakness of Black's back rank. For example, a slow move such as

32.h5 would allow ♘cb6N when 33.♖c6 can be met with ♖xc6 34.dxc6 d5 , isolating the c6-pawn and keeping Black in the game.

32... ♘ab6



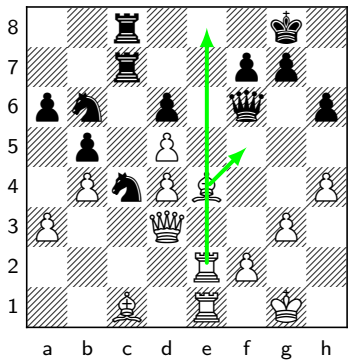
This doesn't do much, but there wasn't anything better for Black. Again, White's doubled pawns are doing an excellent job of restricting Black's options. ...d5 and ...Nd6 is not a thing thanks to the d5-pawn. For illustrative purposes: how do you stop ...d5 if there were not a white pawn there? By playing 33... Nab6 33.d5 , but that would allow 33...Ne5 . Trying to solve the back-rank problem with Ideally, Black would like to play

32... h5 followed by ...g6 is outright impossible due to 33.♗g5 .

32... ♘cb6N due to the idea shown in the note above regarding 32.h5. But Grischuk's last move was designed to refute this: 33.♖c6 ♖xc6 34.dxc6 d5 35.♗f5 It's quite nice that Black cannot take the pawn on c6. ♕xc6 36.♗xc8 The first thing to consider when pondering exchange sacrifices is how good the rooks are. If the rooks are good, this almost always trumps other considerations, and the exchange sacrifice fails. White's rook is good, and Black is done for. Another line in which the rook on e1 turns out to be useful is

32... ♘cb2N 33.♖xc7 ♖xc7 34.♕e2 , and there is no ...Nc3, as the bishop on e4 is protected.

33.♖ce2!



White envisages Bf5 and Re8+. He no longer needs to worry about the c4-knight moving to create trouble on the c-file, as its retreat has been blocked by the superfluous knight on b6.

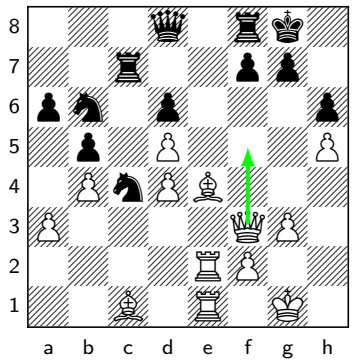
33... ♖f8

A sad move, but it's hard to suggest an improvement.

34.h5!

If the d4-pawn was missing, Black would have ...Ne5. If the d5-pawn was missing, Black would have ...d5 and ...Nd6, with a successful regrouping of his pieces. So, the d-pawns continue to play a key role in restricting Black's pieces. Without one of them, White's chances of a direct kingside assault would be close to zero. As is, Black has six points of material that will badly struggle to join the defense.

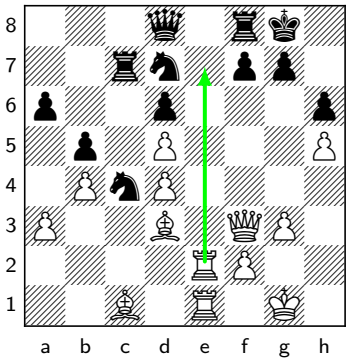
34... ♕d8 35.♕f3



White takes advantage of the drawback of Black's previous move to bring his queen closer to the black king. The threat is Qf5.

35.g4 was also strong, playing for g4-g5.

35... ♘d7 36.♗d3

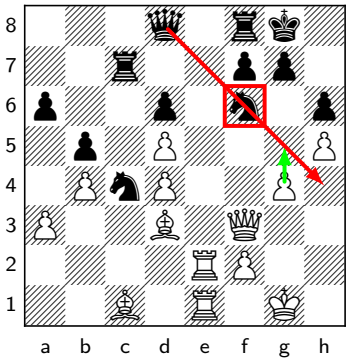


Threatening to invade with the rook on e7.

36... ♘f6

Black's knight attempts to shore up the kingside. But his other knight... it looks nice, but how can it ever actually help save his king, or even create counterplay?

37.g4!



The knight on f6 makes attacking the hook on h6 even more inviting for White, as the black queen cannot access the kingside. White is no longer worried about ...Qh4 ideas. It is noteworthy that the c1-bishop is good on its starting square, both defending a3 and attacking h6. This is often the case, with the main issue usually being that the bishop blocks the development of the rook on the same side. Here, the a1-rook was

developed via a2 and e2 instead. A comparison can be made with Black's typical maneuver in the Ruy Lopez of ...Re8 and ...Bf8.

37... ♘b6 38.g5 ♖xc1

Desperation, as the alternatives are clearly lost: A nice and relatively relevant line is

38... ♘fxd5N is met with 39.♕f5 or

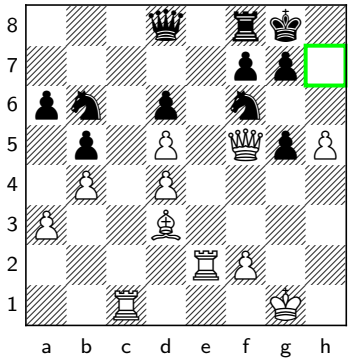
39.gxh6 .

38... hxg5 39.♗xg5 ♘bxd5N 40.♕xd5 ♘xd5N 41.♗xd8 , when recapturing on d8 would allow a back-rank checkmate.

39.♖xc1

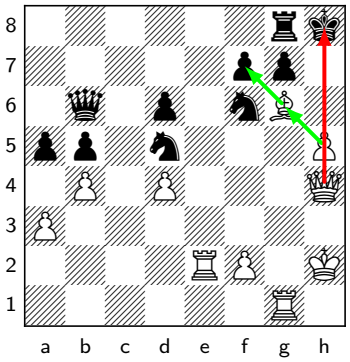
Again, the first rule of exchange sacrifices is: how good are the rooks? Both white rooks are strong, so unsurprisingly, the exchange up will be more than enough to win the game.

39... hxg5 40.♕f5



This immobilizes the f6-knight.

40... ♘bxd5 41.♕xg5 ♔h8 42.♔h2 ♕b6 43.♖g1 ♖g8 44.♕h4 a5 45.♗g6!

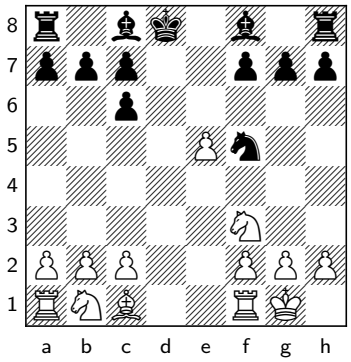


A pleasing move to finish with. I quite like how Grischuk demonstrated the importance of building a plan that makes your extra pawn count. The extra pawn was doubled, so he could never hope to trade down to an endgame and make a queen. However, the importance of his extra pawn was the focal point nonetheless. By restricting the black knights from coming to their king's defense, the two white d-pawns played a decisive role.

Sam Shankland-Ray Robson Introduction

I am breaking a bit of a personal rule here by paying close attention to a rapid game, my excuse being the extent of its interest to our theme. I was playing an elimination match with Ray, and he had won the previous game, so I needed to win this one.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.O-O ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8† ♔xd8



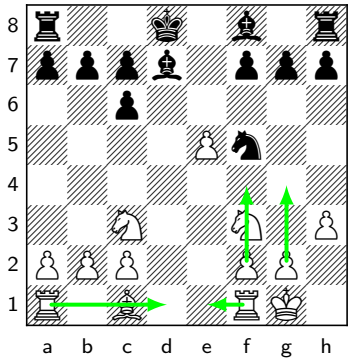
I had done a fair amount of preparation on the Berlin endgame to get ready for this tournament.

9.♘c3

This has gone a bit out of fashion, but I think it still has a lot of merit to it. The main move currently is:

9.h3 This is aimed as prophylaxis against the king reaching c8. But I would rather allow the king to the queenside, since that reaches more double-edged positions than ones we normally expect to get in the Berlin. In general, I think that White should only be pushing h2-h3 if Black's king goes to the queenside, and committing to h2-h3 so soon allows for the plan of keeping the king on the kingside to be more effective: ♔e8 10.♘c3N h5 The inclusion of h2-h3 and ...h7-h5 is heavily in Black's favor. One concrete reason can be seen after: 11.♗g5 ♗e7 12.♗xe7 ♔xe7 Black will follow with ...h4, and White will not be able to use his kingside majority. The h3-pawn would be better placed on h2 to allow a gradual advance of the kingside pawns. I think Black is totally fine in a position like this one, and I covered it in detail in my Berlin LTR. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) The point of starting with h2-h3 is seen clearly after: 9\. h3 9...Bd7 10.Rd1 Kc8 11.g4! Ne7 12.Ng5! By saving a tempo not playing Nc3, the g4-pawn is defended, and White has great play on the kingside. For example: 12...Be8 13.f4 White is able to expand on the kingside directly, which is not a luxury he can often enjoy. Black's position remains playable, and in fact I tried it myself with Black once against MVL, making a draw without ever having to worry about much ⁻but it's a game.

9... ♗d7 10.h3

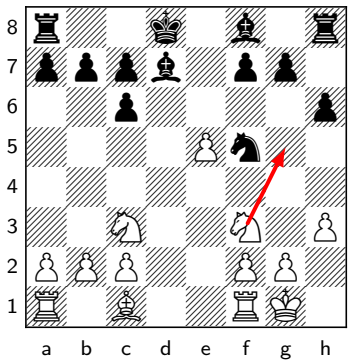


In general, White's rooks belong on e1 and d1. White's best plans are to gain space with f2-f4 and g2-g4 or play e5-e6. As such, a move like But not 10. h3 10...h6?? 11.g4 Ne7 12.e6! and White wins.

10.♖d1? would disrupt the coordination between the pieces. To illustrate: ♔c8 11.h3 h6 12.b3 b6 13.♗b2 c5 A position like

this one is a perfect example. What is the rook doing on a1?

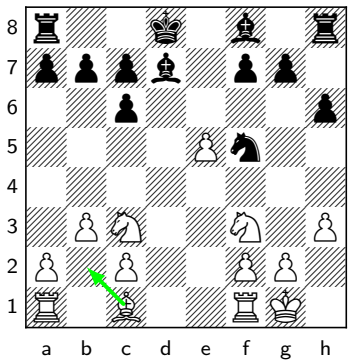
10... h6



Black is able to prevent Ng5, as the rook did not go to d1. He is now ready for ...Kc8 and ...c5. This is the first critical moment for White in deciding how to continue his development and coordinate his pieces. After

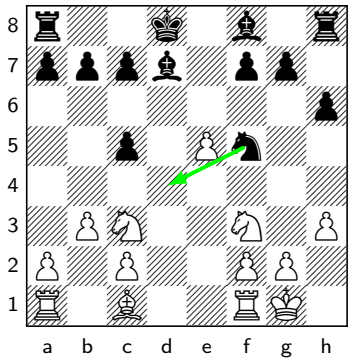
10... ♔c8? , White gets a good version of the above line, as the rook has not had to go to d1. 11.g4 ♘e7N 12.♘g5N ♗e8 13.f4 with an advantage.

11.b3



The c1-bishop wants to pressure the part of the board that Black's king does not defend. While Black has not definitely committed his king to c8 yet, his previous moves have been consistent with that plan. Therefore, the c1-bishop is best placed on the long diagonal to attack the kingside, which will be undefended by Black's king.

11... c5



Trying to change the nature of the game directly. It is flexible, because it is part of the ...Kc8 plan, but it also has the idea of playing ...Nd4 to change the character of the game. In the Berlin, Black often plays ...Be7 and ...Nh4 to trade off the knight. In this case, Black is hoping to achieve the knight exchange while also straightening his pawn structure and freeing the c6-square for his bishop. If Black tries to pull a fast one with

11... ♔c8 is the main move. After 12.♗b2 c5 13.♖ad1 , White has been able to put the correct rook on d1. The game is complicated and interesting, and White has reasonable chances.

11... ♔e8 and put the king on the kingside instead, we will see that the pawn going to h6 is not great for his coordination:

12.g4 ♘e7N 13.♔h2 h5 14.♔g3 With an edge for White.

12.♘d5!?

This is a more interesting move than the one I tried in Game 1 of this match. It is prophylaxis against ...Nd4. The first game in this match saw:

12.♖d1 also prevents ...Nd4 but misplaces the rook: ♔c8 13.♗b2 b6 The rook on a1 is obviously misplaced. It would rather be on f1, where it could either go to e1 next to help push e5-e6, or simply remain on f1 and help advance the f-pawn.

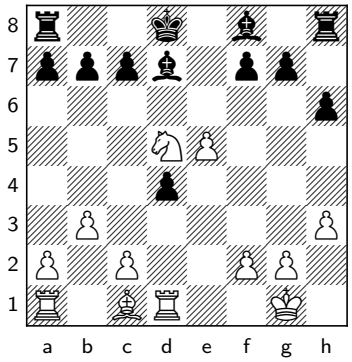
12.♗b2 ♘d4N 13.♘xd4N cxd4 14.♘e4N c5 15.c3 dxc3 16.♗xc3 White achieved an interesting position, and at some point in the game, I was winning, but Black is fine. He can exchange his f8-bishop for the knight when it comes to d6 and place his other bishop solidly on c6.

12... ♘d4?!

Ray insists on playing his idea anyway. The best move is

12... a5 , with the not-so-subtle intention of ...a4. After 13.a4 the knight jump works nicely, as there is a key detail down the line which allows Black to equalize: ♘d4N 14.♘xd4N cxd4 15.♖d1 ♗c5 16.♗b2 c6 17.♘f4N ♖e8 18.c3 dxc3 19.♗xc3 ♔c7 20.e6 ♗xe6 The b3-pawn is attacked due to the insertion of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4. In the same line after 12...Nd4, the b3-pawn is defended by the a2-pawn. This is a difficult nuance for Black to appreciate over the board in a rapid game.

13.♘xd4 cxd4 14.♖d1



Black is facing immediate problems.

14... c6?!

□ We already explained above what happens after: □

14... ♗c5 15.♗b2 c6 Now 16.b4? is not bad either, and it is another move that would not be possible had Black flicked in ...a7-a5 and a2-a4.

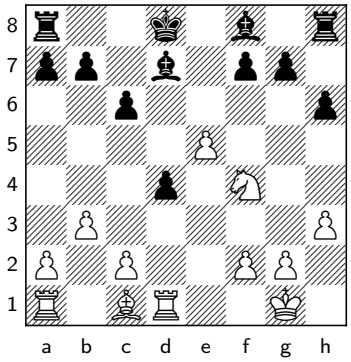
16.♘f4N ♖e8 17.c3 dxc3 18.♗xc3 ♔c7 19.e6 ♗xe6 20.♗xg7 It's nice that b3 is not hanging, and Black is in some trouble.

14... c5 was the best way to fight back, but it is a difficult move to play. A logical line would be: 15.c3 dxc3 16.♗e3 ♔c8 17.♖ac1 ♗c6 18.♖xc3 b6 White's coordination is better in this line than it was with the knight on e4 and bishop on c3 in the 12.Bb2 line seen above. 19.b4 ♔b7 20.bxc5 b5 White is better, but Black is not without counterplay.

15.♘f4

This was the first move out of my preparation, but it was not a hard one to play. The knight had no other squares.

Shankland-Robson Exercise #1

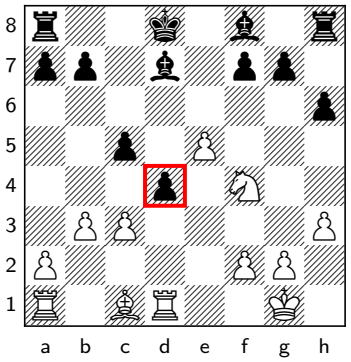


15... c5?

Ray played Too optimistic. Black would obviously be fine if he had a move or two to consolidate, but White can strike hard with a powerful idea.

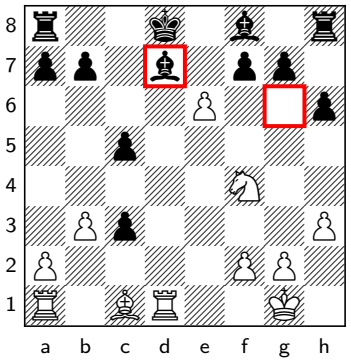
15... g5 16.♘h5N and if c5 , White again plays 17.c3 , since dxc3 allows 18.♘f6N . After 16. Nh5 16...Kc7 17.Rxd4 I won my pawn, but Black is facing no further threats. He has the bishop pair on an open board, he can get his rooks to the center, and the h5-knight is currently offside. I will need to work hard to convert the extra pawn. We'll continue in our next exercise.

16.c3!



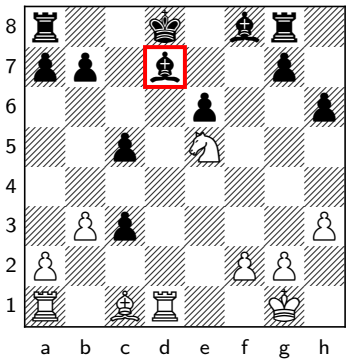
Black is unable to take on c3, and he will lose at least a pawn. At the same time, White is ahead in development, and the center is opening. The important line is:

16... dxc3? 17.e6!



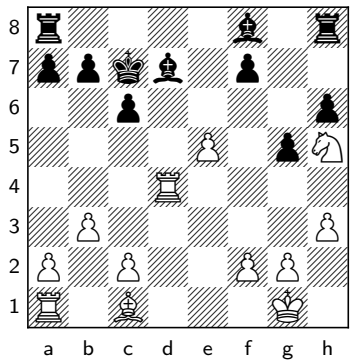
A thematic push.

17... fxe6 18.♘g6! ♖g8 19.♘e5



White wins a piece.

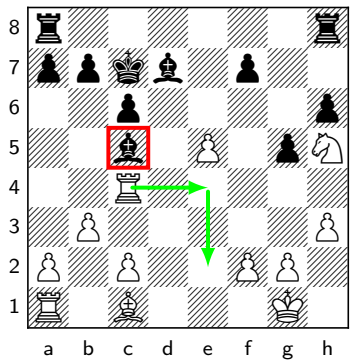
Shankland-Robson Exercise #2



17... ♗c5

The first principle in conversion is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. How should White place and coordinate his pieces to achieve this? In particular, if the d4-rook could choose any square –as in Bughouse, if you will – where would it like it to go?

18.♖c4!?



White needs to protect the vulnerable c2-pawn and prevent the black rook invading on d2. As such, it makes sense to transfer the rook to e2 instead of trying to maintain control of the open file. But before getting my rook to e2, I wanted to gain a tempo against Black's bishop, in order to prevent it coming to the a1-h8 diagonal. □ □ But □ I was concerned about Black's bishop getting to the a1-h8 diagonal, but after

18.♖e4 would lead to a similar position.

18.♖d1? ♗f5 19.♗b2 ♖hd8 is equal.

19... ♗xc2 .

20.c4 is met by ♗c2 , and Black becomes too active to ever be worse. White is much better for tactical reasons after

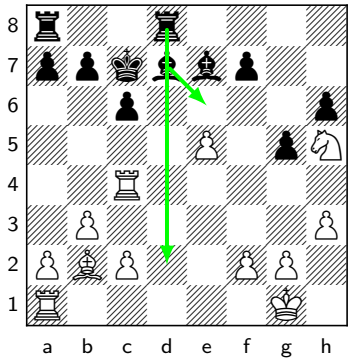
18.♖d2? ♗b4? 19.♖e2 ♗c3 20.♖b1 , White will be in time to play Bb2.

18... ♗e7

In hindsight,

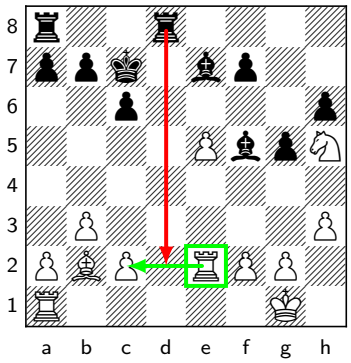
18... b6 was probably better, but it is an awkward one to play.

19.♗b2 ♖hd8



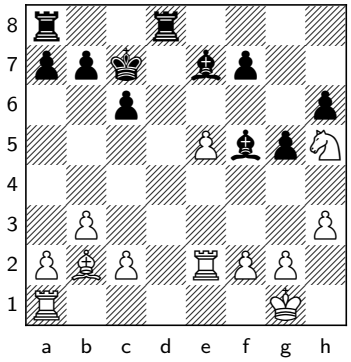
Black's threat of ...Be6 followed by ...Rd2 is not messing around. But I had already figured out the right regrouping:

20.♖e4! ♗f5 21.♖e2

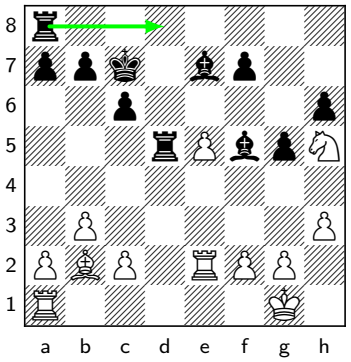


White has successfully maneuvered his rook to e2. He has successfully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay – Black does not have any threats, or any means to make any threats.

Shankland-Robson Exercise #3

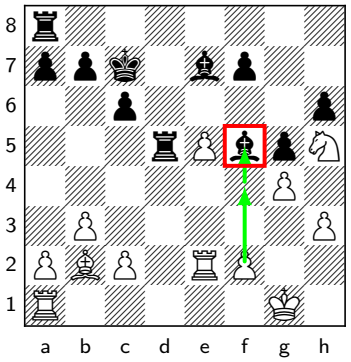


21... ♖d5



Black tries to double on the open file. White needs to come up with a plan to make his extra pawn count. This includes considering which piece and pawn exchanges are favorable to him.

22.g4!



Gaining space and asking the f5-bishop a question before moving forward. A pure bishop endgame with Black managing to get his king to e6 may not be a win. But if Black cannot bring in his king, then it is winning. So, White wants to get in e5-e6 under favorable circumstances. This would open the diagonal for the b2-bishop and allow the creation of weaknesses on the king-side. Furthermore, trading the knight for the e6-bishop would significantly simplify this task and increase the likelihood of success. Hence, in

general, White's biggest goals should be to trade a pair of minor pieces and to try to push e5-e6 through. Finally, White needs to be relatively fast. If he fools around for too long, he risks allowing Black to solidify the position and hope that the bishop pair saves him. □ White is also much better after □

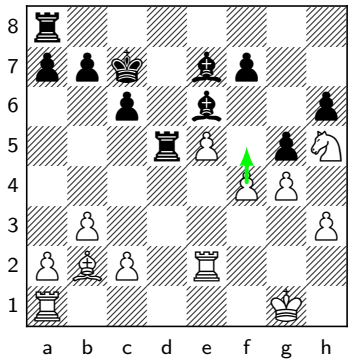
22.♘g7N , which essentially forces ♗e6 as otherwise e5-e6 comes with devastating effect. But if the bishop were to retreat to e6, then starting with g2-g4 is better. In this case, after 23.♘xe6†N fxe6 24.♖f1 ♖ad8 25.♗c1 White has a large advantage, but there is still a long way to go.

22.e6? was suggested during the KCT session, and it follows the Shankland Rule nicely. It is clearly the move White wants to play; it looks like it is not possible, but we have to ask: what if I do it anyway? Unfortunately, the answer is that it increases Black's drawing chances by a large margin: ♗xe6 23.♘g7N ♗c5 It turns out that White cannot easily win back the pawn he sacrificed, because of the pressure against f2. Of course, White is still better, but he should not give up his material advantage so cheaply.

22... ♗e6

22... ♗g6 In the game, Black abandoned the e6-square, targeting the knight on h5 instead. We'll come back to this position in our next exercise. The alternative wasn't any better.

23.f4!



This underlines the advantage of 22.g4! over 22.Ng7. It is usually difficult for White to mobilize the kingside majority in the Berlin.

23... ♖ad8!?

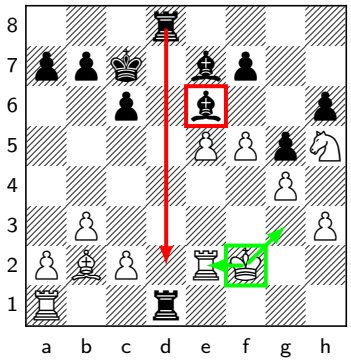
Black is trying to invade with a rook to d1 and then bring his bishops to c5 and d5.

23... gxf4 24.♘xf4N White gets an improved version of the 22.Ng7 line. ♖d7 25.♘xe6†N fxe6 26.♖f1 and White got f4 (and g4!) for free. Bc1 harassing the h6-pawn comes next.

24.f5!

Another example of the Shankland Rule. This is the move White wants to play, but it allows counterplay from Black. What happens if we play it anyway?

24... ♖d1† 25.♔f2!



With the king on f2 instead of h2, Black cannot play ...R8d2 as the e6-bishop is hanging. That means Black is unable to get his rook to d1 and his bishop to d5 at the same time, and that's why the text move wins. Black can only try a spite check. □ □ □ Finally, after

25.♖e1 fails to ♗c5† 26.♔f1 ♖1d2 27.♖e2 ♖d1† with a draw.

25.♖xd1 allows Black to get what he wanted: ♖xd1† 26.♔h2 ♗d5 White doesn't have a good way to parry the threats against his king. It's only a perpetual that Black threatens with ...Rh1+ and ...Rg1+, but there's no way to stop it.

25.♔h2 ♖8d2 Black has good counterplay.

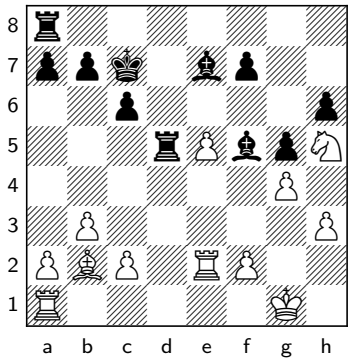
25... ♗c5† 26.♔g3

But there are no more checks.

26... ♖xa1 27.♗xa1 ♗d5 28.♘f6N ♗h1 29.♖e1

White wins.

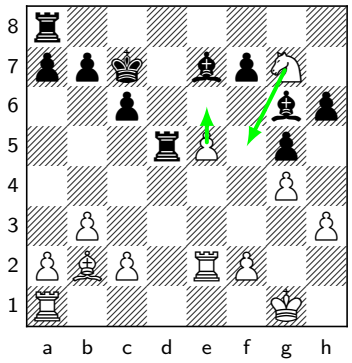
Shankland-Robson Exercise #4



22... ♗g6

Black abandons the e6-square, targeting the knight on h5 instead. How should White proceed?

23.♘g7!



With this move, I could have executed the same idea as in the game in a more threatening manner. White can still bring the knight to f5 if he so desires, but e5-e6 can be an idea too.

23.♘g3?N The only reason to bring the knight back is to go to f5 next. Here, ♔d7 would have offered better saving chances. Black needed to realize that part of White's winning plan involves advancing e5-e6, and that occupying the square with the king

would make it much harder to push the pawn through. The game went

23... ♖ad8? 24.♘f5N This was a bit too patient. I should not have shied away from

24.e6 . The game could continue: f6 25.c4 ♖d2 26.♖ae1 White is ready to bring the knight to f5 next, and he should win without much further discussion.

23... ♔d7

This was Black's best chance in the game, but now it falls on its face:

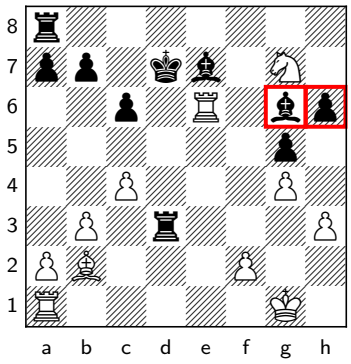
24.c4

Or

24.e6† fxe6 and now 25.c4 , but allowing

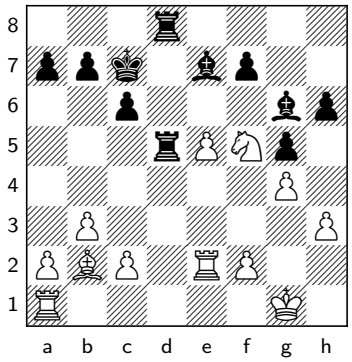
25.♖xe6 ♗xc2 is unnecessary.

24... ♖d3 25.e6†! fxe6 26.♖xe6



White wins: he got everything he wanted, and Black's kingside is collapsing.

Shankland-Robson Exercise #5



24... ♗f8?!

White has managed to get the knight to f5, making the bishop pair less effective. The move White really wants to play is e5-e6, so he gets ready for this push. I missed a direct chance here. Can you do better?

24... ♗b4 was a better square for the bishop, stopping the a1-rook from reaching e1. Black is down material and cannot afford to be too risk-averse, and losing the h6-pawn is not the biggest deal: 25.♘xh6N ♖d2 26.♖ae1 ♖xc2 Black is getting reasonable counterplay.

25.e6!?

It turns out that this push was good. I disliked that Black could take on e6 and then take on f5, but a little creativity shows that White is still in good shape: □ □ □

25.h4? allows Black to become active: h5 26.hxg5 hxg4 27.♘e3N ♖d2 28.♖ae1 ♗c5 or

28... g3 .

25.♘e3?N merely forces Black's rook to where it wants to go by inviting it to d2.

25.♖ae1 A pragmatic move given the time control. It bolsters the e2-rook so that White does not need to be worried about ...Rd2. It also lends more support to the e5-e6 break. While it is not a mistake, it does miss the most direct chance. a5 26.♔g2? This was too refined. I again needed to see the same tactic I missed on the previous move. In this case, it is an even stronger version thanks to my rook improving to the e1-square. White is still winning after my move, but the first step towards not winning a winning position is failing to knock your opponent out when you have the chance. To illustrate:

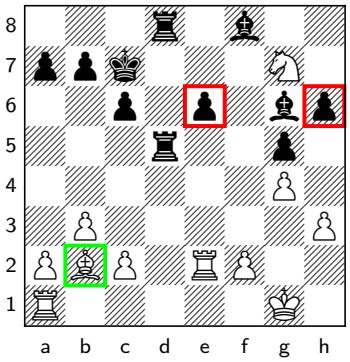
26.e6 ♗xf5

26... fxe6 27.♘g7N We have seen this before; White wins. In this case, 26... a5 26.Ne3!? is also good, as after 26...Rd2 27.Rxd2 Rxd2 28.Bc3! , White collects another pawn.

27.e7 wins on the spot.

25... fxe6

After



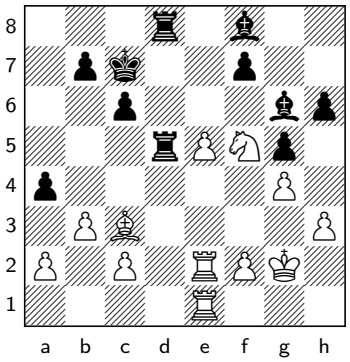
I had missed this key detail. Black will lose the pawn back in short order, and White has managed to open up the b2-bishop. Black is busted. After

26.♖xe6? ♗xf5 27.gxf5 ♖xf5 , Black is indeed fine.

26... ♗xg7 27.♗xg7

Not even the presence of opposite-colored bishops is going to save Black because he'll lose his whole kingside.

Shankland-Robson Exercise #6



27... ♖8d7

Another missed chance. White has a very powerful sequence.

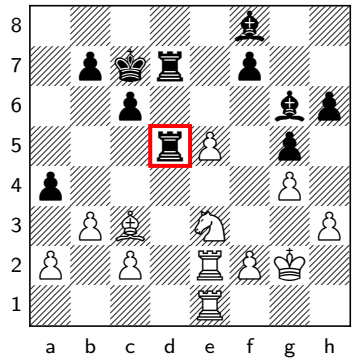
28.♘e3!

25... fxe6

After

25... ♗xf5 26.gxf5 , the threat of e6-e7 prevents Black from taking on f5, and he is in big trouble.

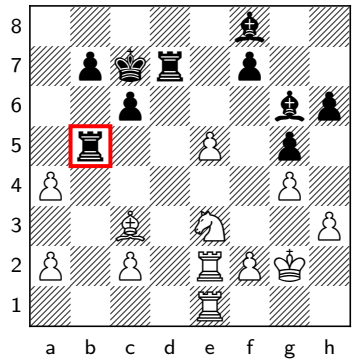
26.♘g7!



This wins an exchange at once.

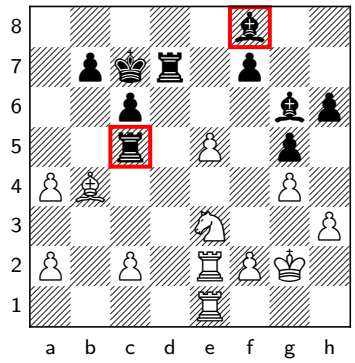
28.♖e3? b5 This is possible now that it doesn't lose to Ba5+. Rapid games lead to some poor decisions! The point is:

28... ♖b5 29.bxa4!



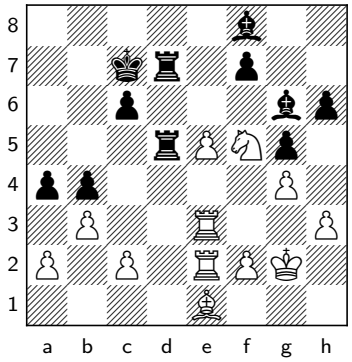
The rook is trapped.

29... ♖c5 30.♗b4

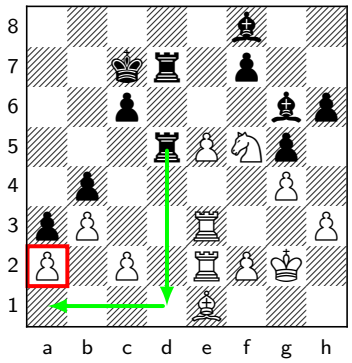


Step one towards converting an extra pawn: take material when your opponent gives it to you!

Shankland-Robson Exercise #7

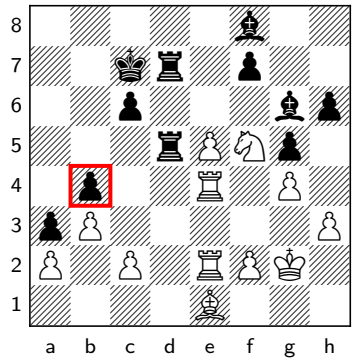


30... a3



Black is planning to go after the a2-pawn with ...Rd1. The position has changed significantly. White needs to alter plans accordingly: Black's pawn advance has generated the potential for counterplay, but it has also left his king vulnerable to attack. I found the right idea, but went for the wrong execution.

31.♖e4!



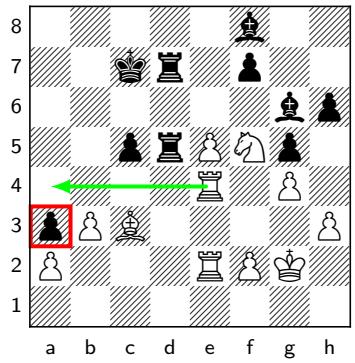
Forcing Black's hand. This was a convincing winner.

31.♘d6?N This is fancy, but it also needlessly complicates White's task. The point is to remove the guard of the b4-pawn and take both b4 and a3.

31... c5 32.c3!

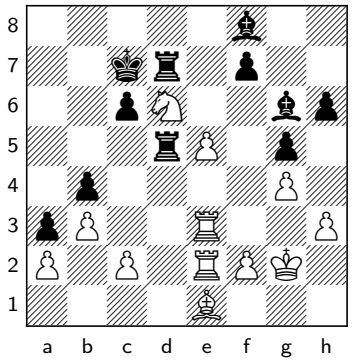
Black needs to take on c3 to avoid losing another pawn, but that won't do.

32... bxc3 33.♗xc3



Black cannot stop the rook from coming to a4 to take on a3.

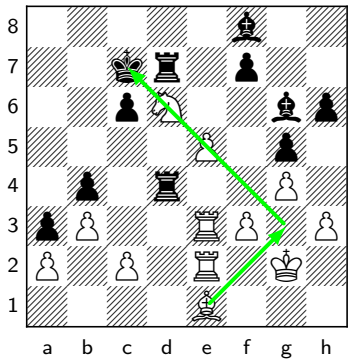
Shankland-Robson Exercise #8



31... ♖d4

This might be the toughest exercise in the course. How should White play? Hint: you wanna have some plan for your e5-pawn.

32.f3!



The correct move, with the idea to bring the bishop to g3. I played The way to do that was to allow cxb4 instead: 32. f3 32...Rd3! 33.cxb4 Rxe3 34.Rxe3 Bxd6 35.exd6+ Rxd6 This is not convincing for White. The opposite-colored bishops and counterplay against the a2-pawn give Black excellent chances to hold.

32.c3? , the most obvious attempt, but it could have run into a powerful resource. bxc3? Black needed to understand that he cannot allow the d6-knight to be bolstered under any circumstance, and he

should not have allowed the bishop to reach b4. 33.♗xc3 ♖d1 34.♗b4 The game is over, as White is going to take another pawn without ever allowing Black to take on d6.

32... ♗xd6 33.♗g3!

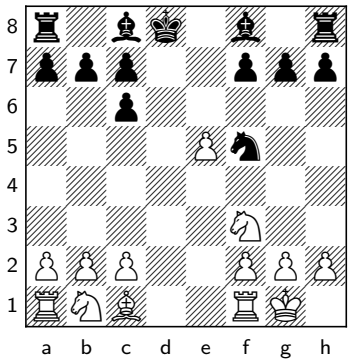
The key move, instead of the automatic

33.exd6† ♔xd6 . White wins. This is quite hard for a human to spot.

Sam Shankland-Ray Robson, St Louis rapid 2023

I am breaking a bit of a personal rule here by paying close attention to a rapid game, my excuse being the extent of its interest to our theme. I was playing an elimination match with Ray, and he had won the previous game, so I needed to win this one.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.O-O ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8† ♔xd8



I had done a fair amount of preparation on the Berlin endgame to get ready for this tournament.

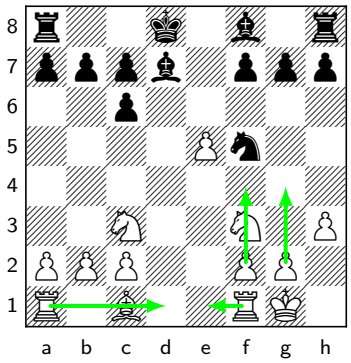
9.♘c3

This has gone a bit out of fashion, but I think it still has a lot of merit to it. The main move currently is:

9.h3 This is aimed as prophylaxis against the king reaching c8. But I would rather allow the king to the queenside, since that reaches more double-edged positions than ones we normally expect to get in the Berlin. In general, I think that White should only be pushing h2-h3 if Black's king goes to the queenside, and committing to h2-h3 so soon allows for the plan of keeping the king on the kingside to be more effective: ♔e8 10.♘c3N h5 The inclusion of h2-h3 and ...h7-h5 is heavily in Black's favor. One concrete reason can be seen after: 11.♗g5 ♗e7 12.♗xe7 ♔xe7 Black will follow with ...h4, and White will not be able to use his kingside majority. The h3-pawn would be better placed on h2 to allow a gradual advance of the kingside pawns. I think Black is totally fine in a position like this one, and I covered it in detail in my Berlin LTR. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) The point of starting with h2-h3 is seen clearly after: 9\. h3 9...Bd7 10.Rd1 Kc8 11.g4! Ne7 12.Ng5! By saving a tempo not playing Nc3, the g4-pawn is defended, and White has great play on the kingside. For example: 12...Be8 13.f4 White is able to expand on the kingside directly, which is not a luxury he can often enjoy. Black's position remains playable, and in fact I tried it my-

self with Black once against MVL, making a draw without ever having to worry about much –but it's a game.

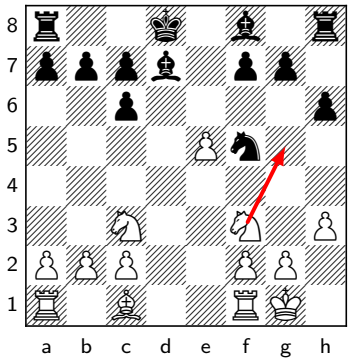
9... ♗d7 10.h3



In general, White's rooks belong on e1 and d1. White's best plans are to gain space with f2-f4 and g2-g4 or play e5-e6. As such, a move like But not 10. h3 10...h6?? 11.g4 Ne7 12.e6! and White wins.

10.♖d1? would disrupt the coordination between the pieces. To illustrate: ♔c8 11.h3 h6 12.b3 b6 13.♗b2 c5 A position like this one is a perfect example. What is the rook doing on a1?

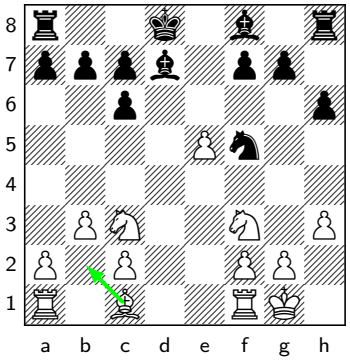
10... h6



Black is able to prevent Ng5, as the rook did not go to d1. He is now ready for ...Kc8 and ...c5. This is the first critical moment for White in deciding how to continue his development and coordinate his pieces. After

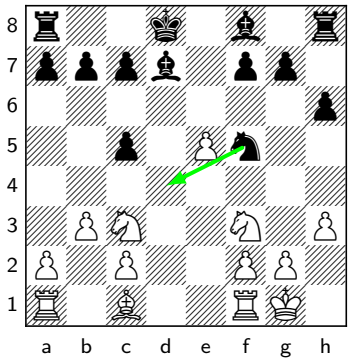
10... ♔c8? , White gets a good version of the above line, as the rook has not had to go to d1. 11.g4 ♘e7N 12.♘g5N ♗e8 13.f4 with an advantage.

11.b3



The c1-bishop wants to pressure the part of the board that Black's king does not defend. While Black has not definitely committed his king to c8 yet, his previous moves have been consistent with that plan. Therefore, the c1-bishop is best placed on the long diagonal to attack the kingside, which will be undefended by Black's king.

11... c5



Trying to change the nature of the game directly. It is flexible, because it is part of the ...Kc8 plan, but it also has the idea of playing ...Nd4 to change the character of the game. In the Berlin, Black often plays ...Be7 and ...Nh4 to trade off the knight. In this case, Black is hoping to achieve the knight exchange while also straightening his pawn structure and freeing the c6-square for his bishop. If Black tries to pull a fast one with

11... ♔c8 is the main move. After 12.♗b2 c5 13.♖ad1 , White has been able to put the correct rook on d1. The game is complicated and interesting, and White has reasonable chances.

11... ♔e8 and put the king on the kingside instead, we will see that the pawn going to h6 is not great for his coordination: 12.g4 ♘e7N 13.♔h2 h5 14.♔g3 With an edge for White.

12.♘d5!?

This is a more interesting move than the one I tried in Game 1 of this match. It is prophylaxis against ...Nd4. The first game in this match saw:

12.♖d1 also prevents ...Nd4 but misplaces the rook: ♔c8 13.♗b2 b6 The rook on a1 is obviously misplaced. It would rather be on f1, where it could either go to e1 next to help push e5-e6, or simply remain on f1 and help advance the f-pawn.

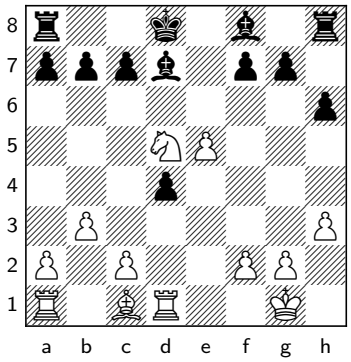
12.♗b2 ♘d4N 13.♘xd4N cxd4 14.♘e4N c5 15.c3 dxc3 16.♗xc3 White achieved an interesting position, and at some point in the game, I was winning, but Black is fine. He can exchange his f8-bishop for the knight when it comes to d6 and place his other bishop solidly on c6.

12... ♘d4?!

Ray insists on playing his idea anyway. The best move is

12... a5 , with the not-so-subtle intention of ...a4. After 13.a4 the knight jump works nicely, as there is a key detail down the line which allows Black to equalize: ♘d4N 14.♘xd4N cxd4 15.♖d1 ♗c5 16.♗b2 c6 17.♘f4N ♖e8 18.c3 dxc3 19.♗xc3 ♔c7 20.e6 ♗xe6 The b3-pawn is attacked due to the insertion of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4. In the same line after 12...Nd4, the b3-pawn is defended by the a2-pawn. This is a difficult nuance for Black to appreciate over the board in a rapid game.

13.♘xd4 cxd4 14.♖d1



Black is facing immediate problems.

14... c6?!

□ We already explained above what happens after: □

14... ♗c5 15.♗b2 c6 Now 16.b4? is not bad either, and it is another move that would not be possible had Black flicked in ...a7-a5 and a2-a4.

16.♘f4N ♖e8 17.c3 dxc3 18.♗xc3 ♔c7 19.e6 ♗xe6 20.♗xg7 It's nice that b3 is not hanging, and Black is in some trouble.

14... c5 was the best way to fight back, but it is a difficult move to play. A logical line would be: 15.c3 dxc3 16.♗e3 ♔c8 17.♖ac1 ♗c6 18.♖xc3 b6 White's coordination is better in this line than it was with the knight on e4 and bishop on c3 in the 12.Bb2 line seen above. 19.b4 ♔b7 20.bxc5 b5 White is better, but Black is not without counterplay.

15.♘f4

This was the first move out of my preparation, but it was not a hard one to play. The knight had no other squares.

15... g5

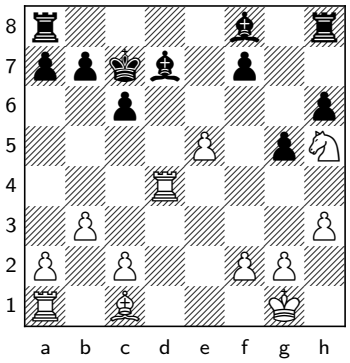
15... c5? is too optimistic. Black would obviously be fine if he had a move or two to consolidate, but White can strike hard with a powerful idea. 16.c3 Black is unable to take on c3, and he will lose at least a pawn. At the same time, White is ahead in development, and the center is opening. The important line is: dxc3? 17.e6 fxe6 18.♘g6N ♖g8 19.♘e5N White wins a piece.

16.♘h5 ♔c7

If

16... c5 , White again plays 17.c3 , since dxc3 allows 18.♘f6N .

17.♖xd4



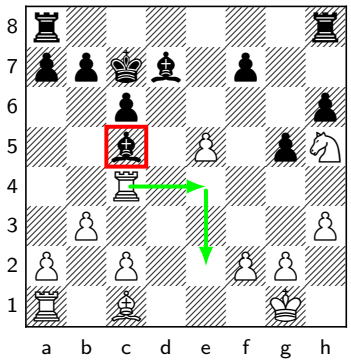
I won my pawn, but Black is facing no further threats. He has the bishop pair on an open board, he can get his rooks to the center, and the h5-knight is currently offside. I will need to work hard to convert the extra pawn.

17... ♗c5

The first principle in conversion is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. How should White place and coordinate his pieces to

achieve this? In particular, if the d4-rook could choose any square – as in Bughouse, if you will – where would he like it to go? White needs to protect the vulnerable c2-pawn and d2-square. As such, it makes sense to transfer the rook to e2 instead of trying to maintain control of the open file.

18.♖c4!?



The rook is best placed on e2 to defend the c2-pawn and prevent the black rook from invading on d2. But before getting my rook to e2, I wanted to gain a tempo against Black's bishop, in order to prevent it coming to the a1-h8 diagonal. □ But □ I was concerned about Black's bishop getting to the a1-h8 diagonal, but after

18.♖d1? ♗f5 19.♗b2 ♖hd8 is equal.

19... ♗xc2 .

20.c4 is met by ♗c2 , and Black becomes too active to ever be worse. White is much better for tactical reasons after

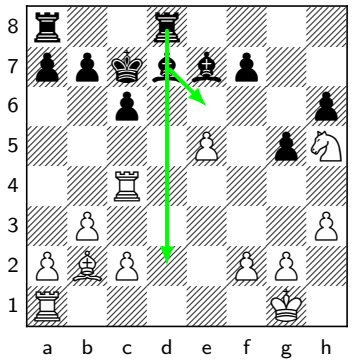
18.♖d2? ♗b4? 19.♖e2 ♗c3 20.♖b1 , White will be in time to play Bb2.

18... ♗e7

In hindsight,

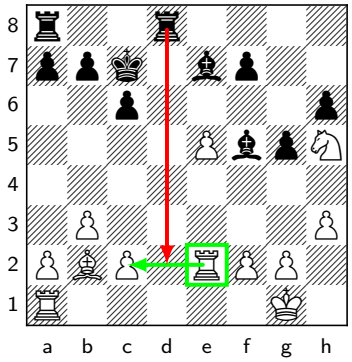
18... b6 was probably better, but it is an awkward one to play.

19.♗b2 ♖hd8



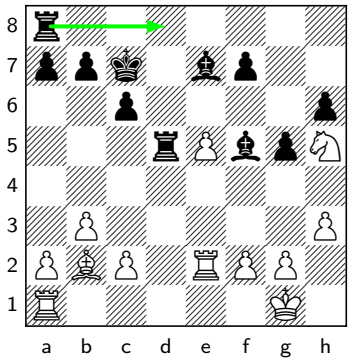
Black's threat of ...Be6 followed by ...Rd2 is not messing around. But I had already figured out the right regrouping:

20.♖e4! ♗f5 21.♖e2



White has successfully maneuvered his rook to e2. He has successfully stabilized the position and avoided counterplay – Black does not have any threats, or any means to make any threats.

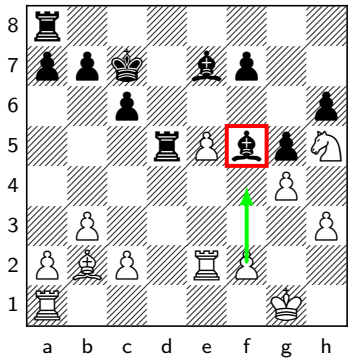
21... ♖d5



Black tries to double on the open file. White needs to come up with a plan to make his extra pawn count. This includes considering which piece and pawn exchanges are favorable to him. A pure bishop endgame with Black managing to get his king to e6 may not be a win. But if Black cannot bring in his king, then it is winning. So, White wants to get in e5-e6 under favorable circumstances. This would open the diagonal for the b2-bishop and allow the creation of weaknesses on the kingside. Furthermore, trading the knight for the e6-bishop would significantly simplify this task and increase the likelihood of success. Hence, in general, White's biggest goals should be to trade a pair of minor pieces and to try to push e5-e6 through. Finally, White needs to be relatively fast. If he fools around for too long, he risks allowing Black to solidify the position and hope that the bishop pair saves him. White wins easily after

21... g4? 22.♘g7N followed by e5-e6.

22.g4!

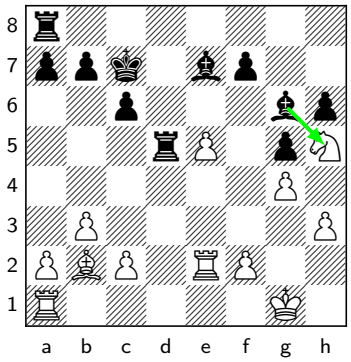


Gaining space and asking the f5-bishop a question before moving forward. White is also much better after

22.♘g7N , which essentially forces ♗e6 as otherwise e5-e6 comes with devastating effect. But if the bishop were to retreat to e6, then starting with g2-g4 is better. In this case, after 23.♘xe6†N fxe6 24.♖f1 ♖ad8 25.♗c1 , White has a large advantage, but there is still a long way to go.

22.e6? was suggested during the KCT session, and it follows the Shankland Rule nicely. It is clearly the move White wants to play; it looks like it is not possible, but we have to ask: what if I do it anyway? Unfortunately, the answer is that it increases Black's drawing chances by a large margin: ♗xe6 23.♘g7N ♗c5 It turns out that White cannot easily win back the pawn he sacrificed, because of the pressure against f2. Of course, White is still better, but he should not give up his material advantage so cheaply.

22... ♗g6



Black abandons the e6-square, targeting the knight on h5 instead. The alternative wasn't any better:

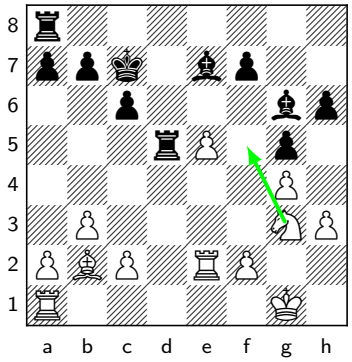
22... ♗e6 23.f4 This underlines the advantage of 22.g4! over 22.Ng7. It is usually difficult for White to mobilize the kingside majority in the Berlin. ♖ad8? Black is trying to invade with a rook to d1 and then bring his bishops to c5 and d5. 24.f5 Another example of the Shankland Rule. This is the move White wants to play, but it allows counterplay from Black. What happens if we play it anyway? ♖d1† and now: – A) 25.♔f2 With the king on f2 instead of h2, Black cannot play ...R8d2 as the e6-bishop is hanging. That means Black is unable to get his rook to d1 and his bishop to d5 at the same time, and that's why the text move wins. Black can only try a spite check.

25.♖e1 fails to ♗c5† 26.♔f1 ♖1d2 27.♖e2 ♖d1† with a draw. – C)

25.♖xd1 allows Black to get what he wanted: ♖xd1† 26.♔h2 ♗d5 White doesn't have a good way to parry the threats against his king. It's only a perpetual that Black threatens with ...Rh1+ and ...Rg1+, but there's no way to stop it. – D) Finally, after 25... Rd1+ 25.Kh2 R8d2! , Black has good counterplay.

25... ♗c5† 26.♔g3 But there are no more checks. ♖xa1 27.♗xa1 ♗d5 28.♘f6N ♗h1 29.♖e1 White wins. – B)

23.♘g3?!



The only reason to bring the knight back is to go to f5 next. I could have executed the same idea in a more threatening manner:

23.♘g7N White can still bring the knight to f5 if he so desires, but e5-e6 can be an idea too. For example, ♔d7 , which was Black's best chance in the game, now falls on its face: 24.c4 ♖d3 25.e6† fxe6 26.♖xe6 White wins: he got everything he wanted.

23.e6? wins as well from an objective standpoint, but it is unnecessary to allow the capture on h5.

23... ♖ad8?!

23... ♔d7 would have offered better

saving chances. Black needed to realize that part of White's winning plan involves advancing e5-e6, and that occupying the square with the king would make it much harder to push the pawn through.

24.♘f5

This was a bit too patient. I should not have shied away from

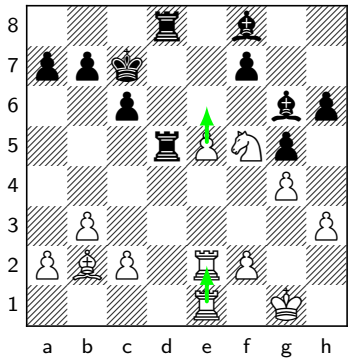
24.e6 The game could continue: f6 25.c4 ♖d2 26.♖ae1 White is ready to bring the knight to f5 next, and he should win without much further discussion.

24... ♗f8?!

White has managed to get the knight to f5, making the bishop pair less effective. The move White really wants to play is e5-e6, so he gets ready for this push.

24... ♗b4 was a better square for the bishop, stopping the a1-rook from reaching e1. Black is down material and cannot afford to be too risk-averse, and losing the h6-pawn is not the biggest deal: 25.♘xh6N ♖d2 26.♖ae1 ♖xc2 Black is getting reasonable counterplay.

25.♖ae1



A pragmatic move given the time control. It bolsters the e2-rook so that White does not need to be worried about ...Rd2. It also lends more support to the e5-e6 break. While it is not a mistake, it does miss the most direct chance. □ □ □ But it turns out that

25.h4? allows Black to become active: h5 26.hxg5 hxg4 27.♘e3N ♖d2 28.♖ae1 ♗c5 or

28... g3 .

25.♘e3?N merely forces Black's rook to where it wants to go by inviting it to d2.

25.e6? was good. I disliked that Black could take on e6 and then take on f5, but a little creativity shows that White is still in good shape. After ♗xf5 26.gxf5 , the threat of e6-e7 prevents Black from taking on f5, and he is in big trouble. 25\. e6 25...fxe6 26.Ng7! I had missed this key detail. Black will lose the pawn back in short order, and White has managed to open up the b2-bishop. Always remember to look for little tactical tricks to help you advance your strategic goals, and always be wary of auto-

matic moves whenever you are calculating. After 26.Rxe6? Bxf5 27.gxf5 Rxf5 , Black is indeed fine.

25... a5 26.♔g2?!

This was too refined. I again needed to see the same tactic I missed on the previous move. In this case, it is an even stronger version thanks to my rook improving to the e1-square. White is still winning after my move, but the first step towards not winning a winning position is failing to knock your opponent out when you have the chance. To illustrate: In this case,

26.e6 ♗xf5

26... fxe6 27.♘g7N We have seen this before; White wins.

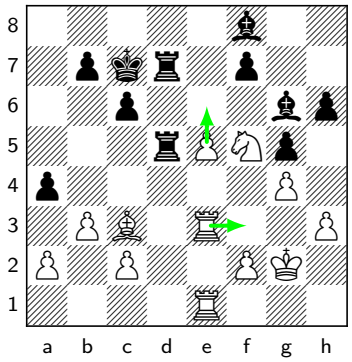
27.e7 wins on the spot.

26.♘e3?N is also good, as after ♖d2 27.♖xd2 ♖xd2 28.♗c3 , White collects another pawn.

26... a4 27.♗c3

The idea behind this move was to prevent Black from gaining more space with ...b5. The bishop on c3 prevents ...Rd2 and enables the maneuver Re3-Rf3 to overprotect the knight before playing e5-e6. I had underestimated the power of playing a fast e5-e6 push. I felt that getting the rook to f3 would allow it to come through in full force.

27... ♖8d7 28.♖e3?!



I somehow missed It's too late for

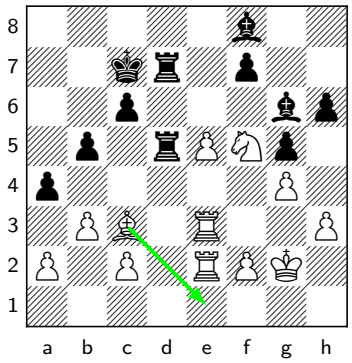
28.♘e3N , which wins an exchange at once. Rapid games lead to some poor decisions! The point is: ♖b5 29.bxa4 ♖c5 30.♗b4 The rook is trapped.

28.e6 as after fxe6 Black controls the g7-square.

28... b5

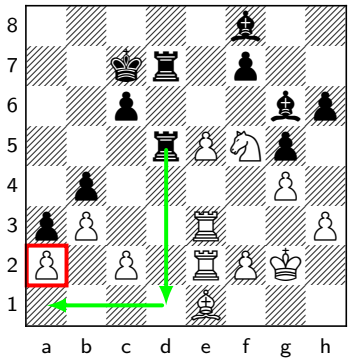
This is possible now that it doesn't lose to Ba5+.

29.♖1e2



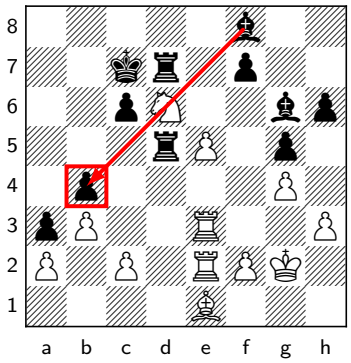
Vacating the e1-square for the bishop retreat.

29... b4 30.♗e1 a3



Black is planning to go after the a2-pawn with ...Rd1. The position has changed significantly. White needs to alter plans accordingly: Black's pawn advance has generated the potential for counterplay, but it has also left his king vulnerable to attack. I found the right idea, but went for the wrong execution.

31.♘d6?!



This is fancy, but it also needlessly complicates White's task. The point is to remove the guard of the b4-pawn and take both b4 and a3. A convincing winner was:

31.♖e4 c5 32.c3 Black needs to take on c3 to avoid losing another pawn, but after bxc3 33.♗xc3 , he cannot stop the rook from coming to a4 to take on a3.

31... ♖d4

This is the human decision. □ After □ □ Black's best chance to offer resistance would have been:

31... ♗xd6? 32.exd6† followed by Bxb4 and Bxa3, White wins easily.

31... c5? loses to 32.♘e8†N . White wins the exchange and the game. Always examine all checks and captures.

31... ♖7xd6 32.exd6† ♗xd6 It is not that easy for White to make further progress. Defending c2 is annoying, and pushing c2-c3 could allow an invasion of the bishop to b1. Nevertheless, after 33.c3 ♗d3 34.cxb4 ♗xe2 35.♖xe2 White should still win, while 33\. c3 33...c5?! allows 34.cxb4 cxb4 35.f3 . The bishop can come to g3, and the rooks should win in an open position.

32.c3?

The most obvious attempt, but it could have run into a powerful resource. Correct was

32.f3 with the idea to bring the bishop to g3. After ♗xd6 33.♗g3 , White wins. This is quite hard to spot for a human.

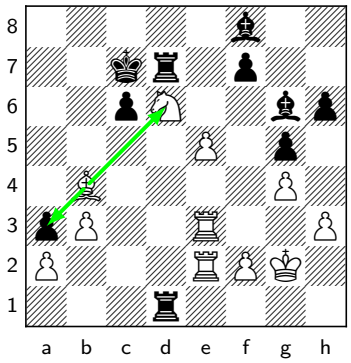
32... bxc3?

Black needed to understand that he cannot allow the d6-knight to be bolstered under any circumstance, and he should not have allowed the bishop to reach b4. The way to do that was to allow cxb4 instead:

32... ♖d3 33.cxb4 ♖xe3 34.♖xe3 ♗xd6 35.exd6† ♖xd6 This is not convincing for

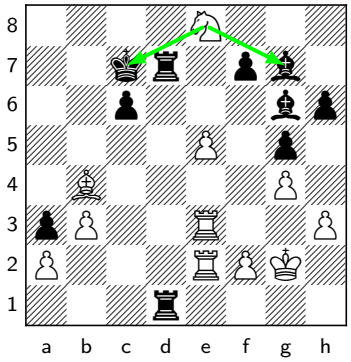
White. The opposite-colored bishops and counterplay against the a2-pawn give Black excellent chances to hold.

33.♗xc3 ♖d1 34.♗b4!



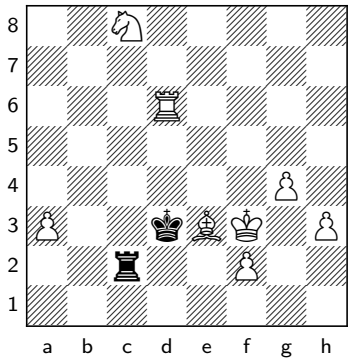
The game is over, as White is going to take another pawn without ever allowing Black to take on d6.

34... ♗g7 35.♘e8†



This should have been the final move of the game! For some reason, presumably due to clock-induced inertia, Ray carried on playing.

35... ♔b6 36.♘xg7 c5 37.♗xa3 ♖a7 38.b4 ♗d3 39.bxc5† ♔c6 40.♗b4 ♗xe2 41.♖xe2 ♖a1 42.a3 ♖d7 43.e6 fxe6 44.♖xe6† ♔b5 45.♘f5 ♖dd1 46.c6 ♖ac1 47.♖xh6 ♖h1 48.♘g3 ♖hg1† 49.♔f3 ♔c4 50.♗d2 ♖c2 51.♗xg5 ♖b1 52.♗e3 ♖b8 53.c7 ♖f8† 54.♘f5 ♖a2 55.c8♕† ♖xc8 56.♘d6† ♔d3 57.♘xc8 ♖c2 58.♖d6†



An interesting game, and an important one for me. I was able to convert my extra pawn by stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay, then realizing that the change in the pawn structure with e5-e6 was the best way to make use of the extra pawn. Like most rapid games, it was not free from mistakes, and I should have played e5-e6 instead of preparing it for so long. As a result of my indecisiveness, Black was allowed to continue fighting. Even though I did understand that e5-e6 was the right idea, I missed it at several moments because I did not calculate accurately enough. This should have cost me half a point, and I was fortunate that Ray was unable to find 32. c3 32...Rd3! To be fair, he was down to playing on increment.

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov-Magnus Carlsen Introduction

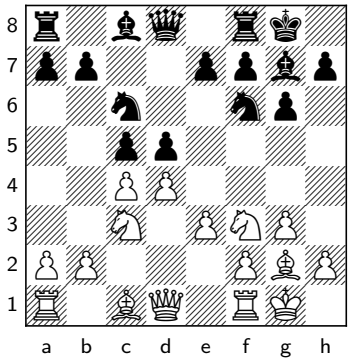
Magnus was half a point behind Mamedyarov in the tournament and needed to win this game.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 O-O 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 c5 7.O-O ♘c6 8.e3

I explore

8.d5 ♘a5N 9.♘d2N e6 10.♖b1 exd5 11.cxd5 in my Neo-Catalan series, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) with an interesting b4-Bb2-Qa1-Ne4 plan to put pressure on the kingside.

8... d5



Black has equalized comfortably.

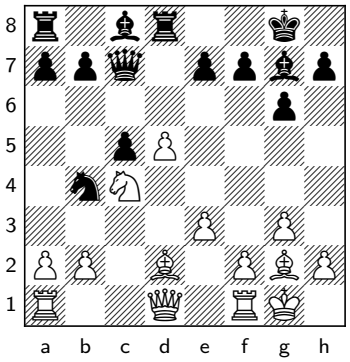
9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xd5 ♕xd5 11.♘e5 ♕d6 12.♘c4

12.♘xc6N bxc6 is harmless here because White's e2-e3 prevents the bishop from reaching the f4-square.

12... ♕c7 13.d5 ♖d8

13... ♘e5N was more normal, with an equal game.

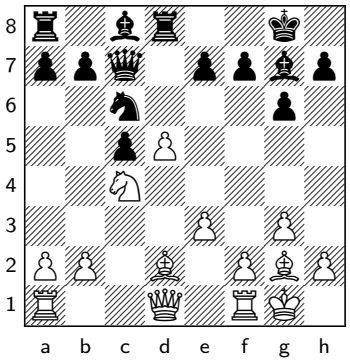
14.♗d2 ♘b4?N



It is rare to see a mistake this large from Magnus so early in the game. Again,

14... ♘e5N should have been preferred. Black certainly is not worse.

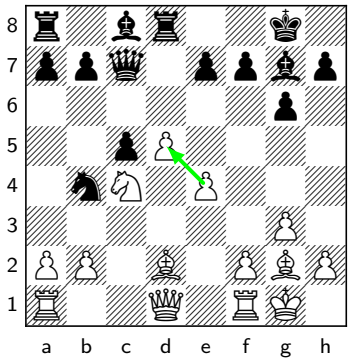
Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #1



14... ♘b4?

Alright, no extra pawn to convert here, but this is a good calculation exercise. How can we punish Magnus's mistake?

15.e4!



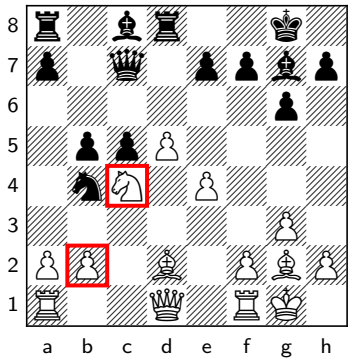
It turns out that White's most natural continuation was also the strongest! Classic Shankland Method. This is the move we want to play. White shuts down the d8-rook, gains space in the center, and prevents Black from taking on d5, but it looks like it runs into trouble. The knight on c4 can be kicked away, and then the b2-pawn would fall. But we have to ask: what happens if I do it anyway? □ □ Also bad for White is: □

15.a3? does not work for White: ♘xd5N 16.♗a5 b6 17.♗xd5 ♗e6 The tactics work in Black's favor, and White ends up losing a lot of material.

15.♗c3? ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘xd5N What happens if I do it anyway? 17.♗xd5 e6 18.e4 exd5 19.exd5 b5 White's proud center is long gone, and he has some suffering coming up thanks to his weakened light squares.

15.♗xb4? was played in the game. While this is not terrible, and White is still quite fine, Mamedyarov let a big chance slip.

15... b5



Black gains space, hits the knight and aims to take on b2. This doesn't work well, but it has to be tried. If Black doesn't go for it, White plays a2-a3, kicks the black knight to the sidelines, and then captures the center with Bf4.

16.♗f4!

White hits the queen and tries to gain the e5-square for his knight. Still, one needs to see more than this before being able to pull the trigger on 15.e4! But the critical move by Black seems to be a different one:

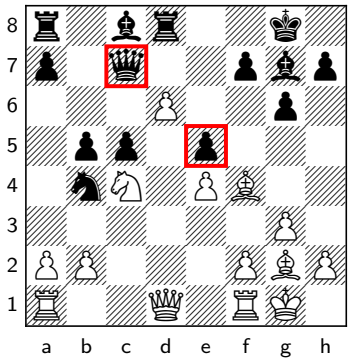
16... e5

Two white pieces are hanging at the same time. After

16... ♕d7 17.♘e5N , the knight blocks the long diagonal with gain of tempo. White is massively better, as a2-a3 and Nc6 are coming. This means that Black is practically forced to take on e5, but that is a tragedy.

16... ♕b7 The only way for Black to stay in the game. We'll see this in our next exercise.

17.d6!



This is what Mamedyarov missed. Anything else loses, but with this push White severs the connection between the queen and the e5-pawn, and can simply take on e5 next, winning. An important line to calculate is

17.dxe6? fails to ♖xd1 18.♗xc7 ♖xf1† 19.♖xf1 ♗xe6 White loses his queenside.

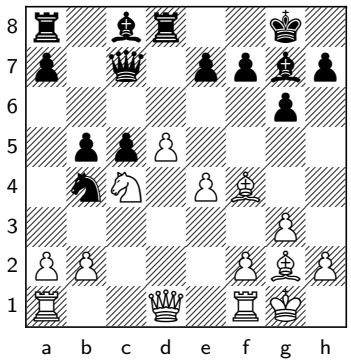
17... bxc4

, but White wins easily:

18.dxc7 ♖xd1 19.♖fxd1 exf4 20.♖d8† ♗f8 21.e5

Black loses everything.

Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #2



16... ♕b7!

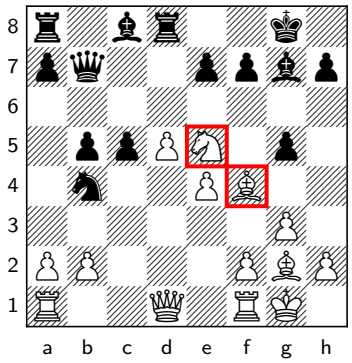
The only way for Black to stay in the game. How should White proceed?

17.♘e5!

Again, this is the move White wants to play, putting the knight on an active square. It looks as though it is prevented tactically, but what happens if White plays it anyway?

17.a3? bxc4 is at least fine for Black.

17... g5?!



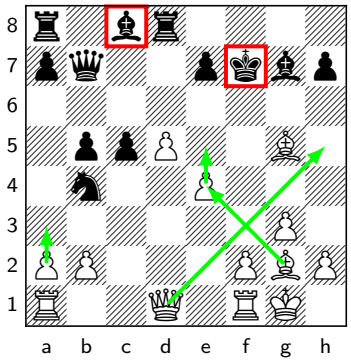
17... f6 is correct, but it is obviously depressing for Black.

18.♘xf7!

Another important move White needed to spot from afar. The good-looking

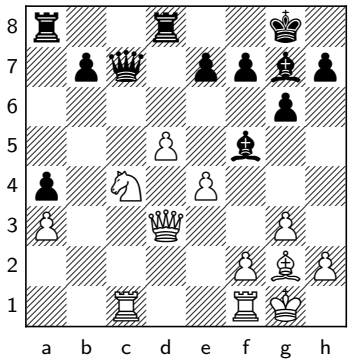
18.♕h5 leads nowhere after gxf4 19.♕xf7† ♔h8 . There is no effective way to continue with the attack.

18... ♔xf7 19.♗xg5

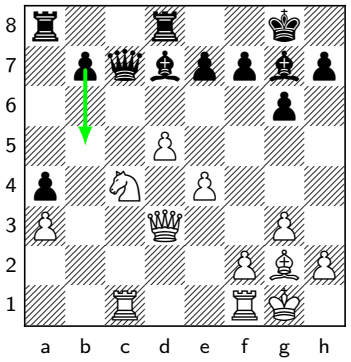


White has two pawns, a continuing attack, and a space advantage for the piece. It is difficult to develop the c8-bishop, and the knight will get kicked back. White is threatening stuff like Qh5+, e4-e5 and Be4. Black is in deep trouble.

Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #3

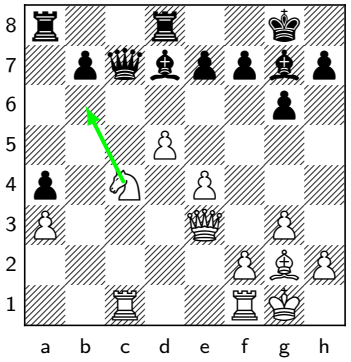


20... ♗d7



With the h1-a8 diagonal closed, ...b5 is a thing. How should White play?

21.♕e3!



This excellent move highlights the negatives of Black's bishop maneuver. It is a multipurpose move. White threatens Nb6, winning material. He simultaneously removes the queen from the d-file and from a potential pin on the f1-a6 diagonal. At the same time, e4-e5 is prepared, without having to play f2-f4. Finally, even if f2-f4 is needed, the possible queen check on c5 has been prevented. Presumably, one of the reasons Black was hoping to provoke e3-e4 was that A line that would justify inviting the white e-pawn forward would have been:

21.f4? can be answered with ♕c5† exploiting the open g1-a7 diagonal. Af-

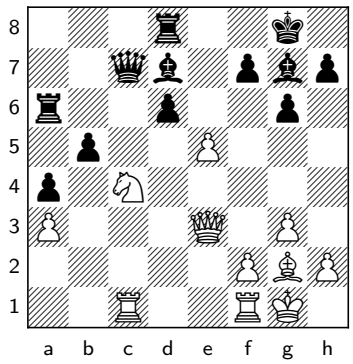
ter 22.♔h1 ♗b5? , White cannot contain Black's counterplay.

21.d6? exd6 22.♘e5N ♗c6? And Black is even a bit better. His last move is a direct consequence of the g2-bishop being blunted by its own pawn on e4.

21... ♖a6 22.e5!

This is clearly the move White wants to make. It looks like it walks into ...b5, but... what happens if I do it anyway?

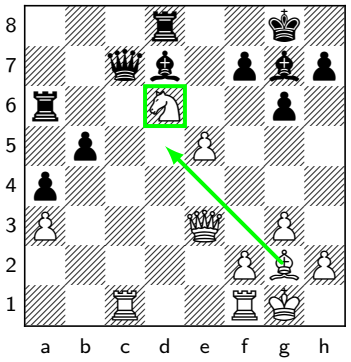
22... b5 23.d6! exd6



Magnus found again the best defense:

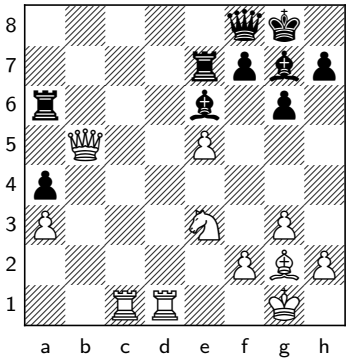
23... ♕b8 24.dxe7 ♖e8 White needed to calculate well to keep the position under control. 25.♖fd1 White simply improves his worst-placed piece, counterattacking the d7-bishop.

24.♘xd6

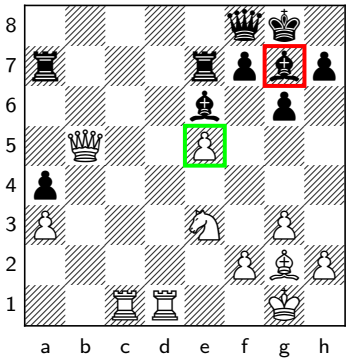


The bishop is coming to d5, the d6-knight is a monster, and Black has serious problems finding safe squares for his pieces. White is much better.

Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #4

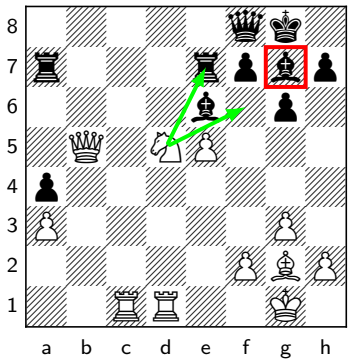


28... ♖aa7



Finally, White has won a pawn, leading us to the meat of our discussion about this game. The first issue to address is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. This is not a significant consideration in this position. White has only one pawn weakness on a3, but that is not a pressing issue. Instead, White needs to consider which exchanges are desirable and how he is going to use his extra pawn to win the game.

29.♘d5!



It is clear that the extra pawn is not going to run down the board and win that way. The main use of the extra e5-pawn is to restrict the g7-bishop. Hence, White should trade pieces such that Black is left with the poor g7-bishop against one of White's better minor pieces. White is happy to get opposite-colored bishops. This may also help him to attack. For example, Black's king could come under serious fire if Black were to weaken his kingside with ...f6. Moreover, the f7-pawn could become vulnerable after ...Bf8.

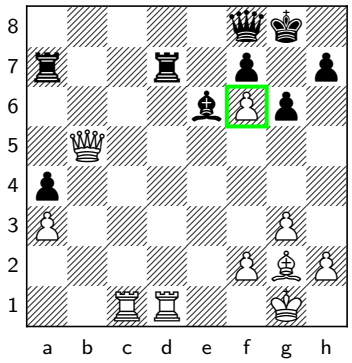
29.f4? is loosening and should not be an immediate priority. After ♖ec7 , Black gets good counterplay on the dark squares.

29... ♖ed7!

Allowing White to take the other bishop instead would have given Magnus better defensive chances. Nevertheless, this does not solve all of Black's problems. The machine finds 29. Nd5 30...Qe8! and claims it's the only move to keep the fight going. After 31.Qd3 Rad7 32.f4 Bf8 , Black has a lot of suffering ahead, but the engine insists the position is defensible.

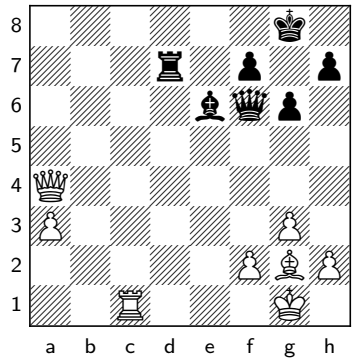
29... ♗xd5? This is a rare case of Magnus making a strategic mistake. The main value of White's extra pawn is restricting the g7-bishop, so accepting simplification while keeping the bad piece is not a recipe for happiness. 30.♖xd5 ♖eb7? 31.♕d3 The threat to the back rank is a major problem for Black to deal with, and he will be forced into complete passivity.

30.♘f6† ♗xf6 31.exf6



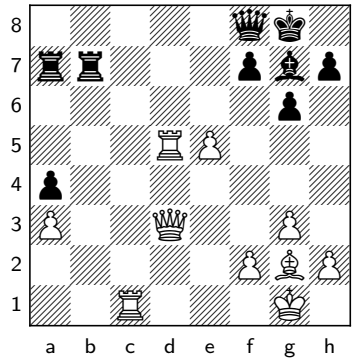
The pawn on f6 is extremely dangerous. The computer fights back with:

31... ♕d8 32.♖xd7 ♖xd7 33.♕xa4 ♕xf6



Black retains drawing chances, but White is happy to have removed one of the bishops from the board and to have left himself with an outside passer.

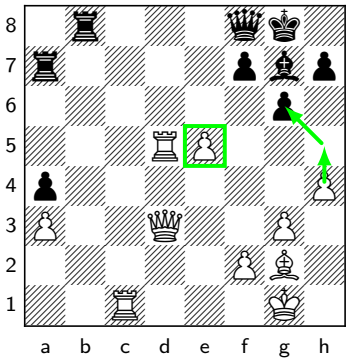
Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #5



31... ♖b8

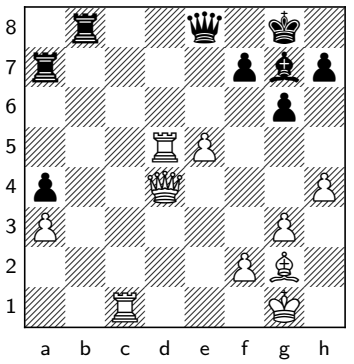
Black goes passive and does not have a clear plan for how to continue, as no pieces can be exchanged anytime soon. White should be thinking about the best way to use his extra pawn.

32.h4!



I really like this. The plan is obviously to play h5, tickling Black's kingside. Doing so will more or less force Black's bishop to remain on the passive g7-square, where it is blunted by the e5-pawn. Eventually, after enough preparation, White can consider pushing e5-e6 to tear open lines towards the enemy king. An added bonus of bringing the pawn to h5 is that it will make it impossible for Black to ever try to break out his bishop with ...f6.

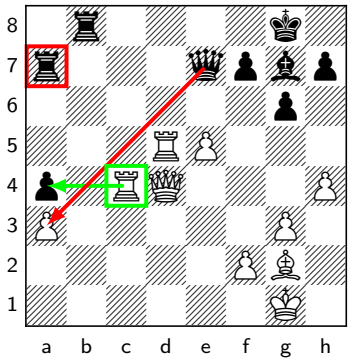
Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #6



33... ♕e7

Can you find the cleanest win for White?

34.♖c4!



White gets the rook off the hanging c1-square. This prevents ...Qxa3 due to the possible capture of the a7-rook. It also restricts the same a7-rook by forcing it to defend a4.

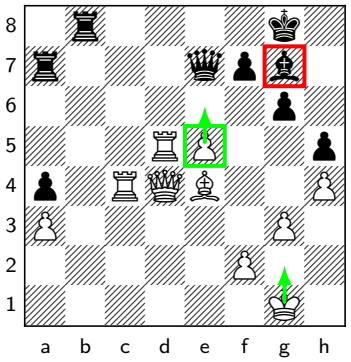
34.f4? A serious mistake. There are two reasons to play this move: to support the e5-pawn, and to smash through the kingside with f4-f5 to give mate. Neither of these reasons are compelling at the moment. In the meantime, the move costs a tempo, and it weakens the king's cover. This is what Black needed to be able to regroup his bad bishop. ♗f8 Magnus rarely misses such chances. Black is happy to regroup his bishop like this. White is too slow to generate mating threats on the kingside, and his own king is not in the best spot either.

34... h5

What else?

34... ♗f8 35.h5 is even worse.

35.♗e4

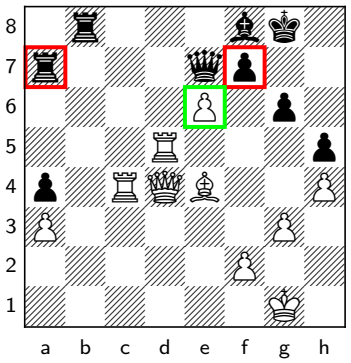


White is in no rush. He can play his king to g2 or h2 next, and eventually push f2-f4 once he is ready. This position perfectly highlights the value of the e5-pawn. Black's g7-bishop is horribly blocked, but it can't regroup without his king getting slaughtered.

35... ♗f8

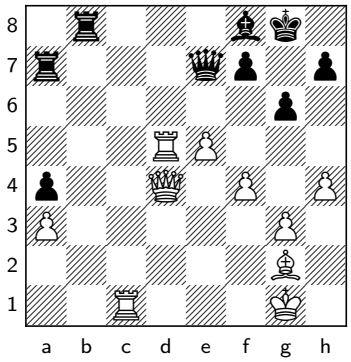
The alternative was passively waiting to die. I challenge you to try and find a move for Black!

36.e6!



The extra pawn makes itself felt even more. Black will be mated if the f7-pawn leaves its place, but there is no alternative as taking with the queen on e6 would drop the rook on a7.

Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #7



35.♔h2

Black had an opportunity to gain counterplay by taking advantage of the weakening caused by White's 34th move. It was difficult, but it was there all the same.

35...♖c7!

This is the move Carlsen should have played. White's move prevents I can only assume that the clocks were getting low. Here, Mamedyarov played

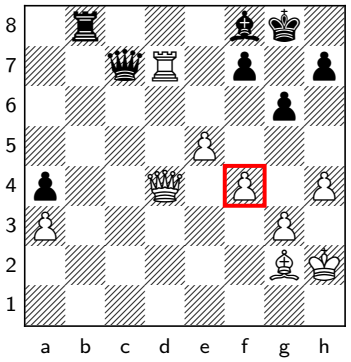
35...♕xa3 , as 36.♕xa7 ♕xc1 is not a check: 37.♕xb8

35...♖ab7? and missed another chance, but that's our next exercise.

36.♖xc7 ♕xc7

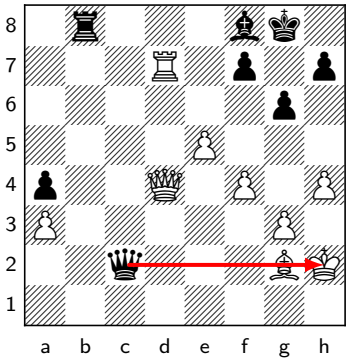
This looks suicidal, as Black's inviting the white rook to d7...

37.♖d7



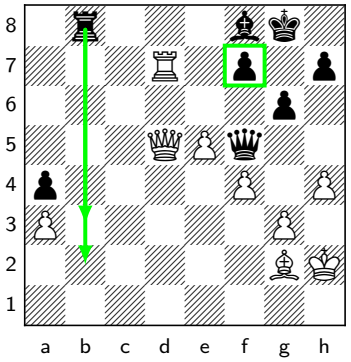
But it turns out that Black can survive because White's pawn is on f4 rather than f2:

37...♕c2!



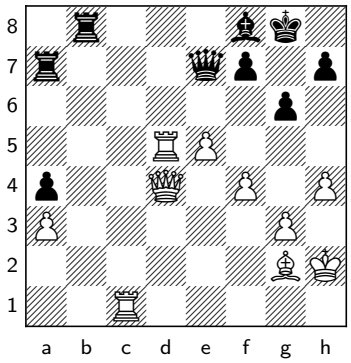
Pinning the bishop stops Bd5.

38.♕d5 ♕f5!



White is only slightly better, as Black has all of the direct threats under control. The rook can activate itself on b2 or b3 in the next few moves, creating counterplay.

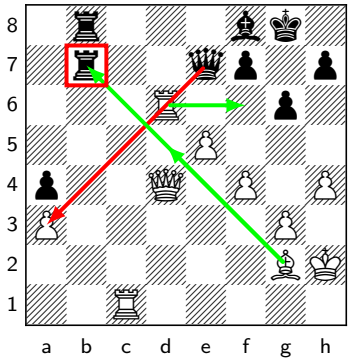
Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #8



35... ♖ab7?

I can only assume that the clocks were getting low. I'm sure Mamedyarov saw the right move, as it is fairly obvious. It's the next move that he likely missed.

36.♖d6!



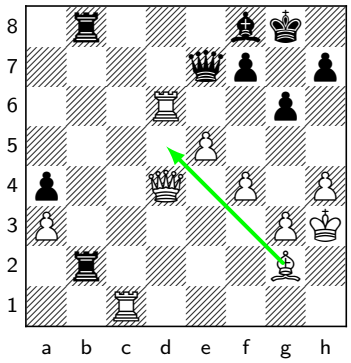
This was the way to go. White blocks the black queen from taking a3 and opens the long diagonal to bully the b7-rook off the seventh rank. It makes perfect sense. But we're not done yet.

36.♕xa4? Mamedyarov misses another chance. This should not be enough to win the game. We've already established that the main strength of White's e5-pawn is to restrict the enemy bishop, and that White needs to play for a kingside attack with h4-h5 for that restriction to be more effective. In that regard, it makes sense that White should not want to exchange the queens. Additionally, White should generally try to keep the a-pawns on the board. It's the side down on material that wants to trade pawns. With the queenside eliminated, Black can focus all his attention on holding together the kingside. ♕xa3 37.♕xa3 ♗xa3 Trading queens has helped Black because his king is no longer in danger. White was using his extra pawn to restrict Black's dark-squared bishop, but it found a way out via f8. What the extra pawn was also capable of doing was to provide more shelter to White's king, enabling a kingside pawn advance to further expose his black counterpart. An attack against the king is generally strengthened by the presence of opposite-colored bishops. With the queens off, such attacks lose most of their vigor, and Black's defensive chances have increased significantly.

36... ♖b2

This looks like a problem.

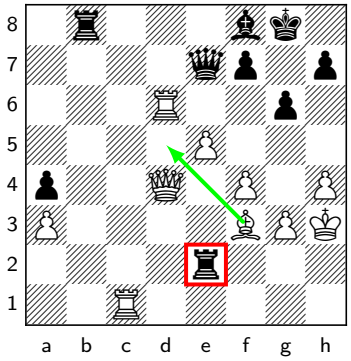
37.♔h3!



White is ready for Bg2-d5 next, and he will crash through on f7.

37.♖d7 ♕e6 leads White nowhere.

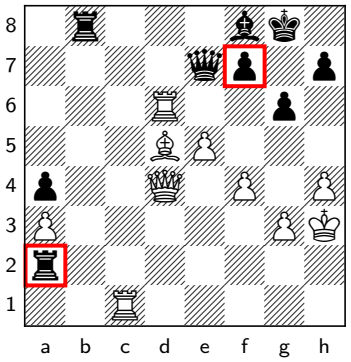
37... ♖e2 38.♗f3!



Before going to d5, White makes sure that Black cannot double his rooks on the second rank.

38.♗d5? is too hasty. After ♖bb2 Black has obvious counterplay.

38... ♖a2 39.♗d5!



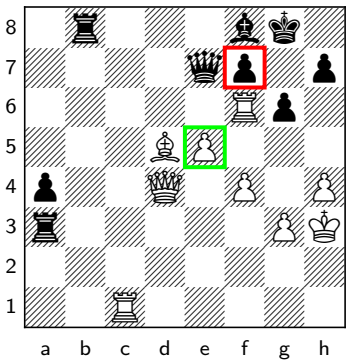
Now and only now, the bishop comes to d5. Since Black's rook is hanging on a2, he cannot double on the second rank.

39... ♖xa3

After

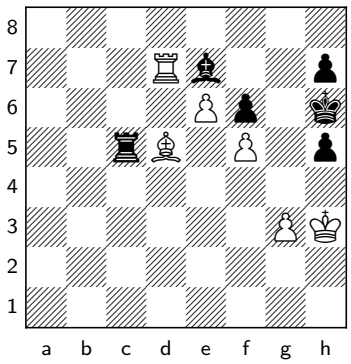
39... ♖e2 40.♗c4 , the rook is trapped.

40.♖f6



It's all over. This position highlights the important role of the extra e5-pawn. If not for this pawn, Black would have 40. Rf6 40...Bg7 , although in this position, after 41.Rxf7 Bxd4 42.Rxe7+ Kh8 , White would win anyway, thanks to 43.Rcc7 . But the point stands: the e5-pawn restricted the bishop in many lines, controlled the f6-square, and hinted at some e5-e6 threats.

Mamedyarov-Carlsen Exercise #9

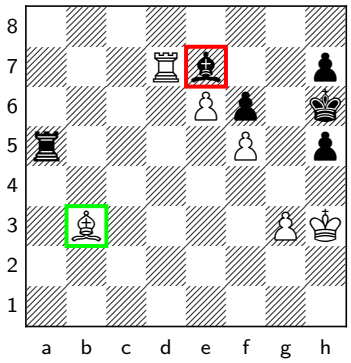


51... ♖a5?

How could White win here?

51... ♗f8 is ugly and passive, but it holds. I don't see a plan for White to improve his position any further.

52.♗b3!



This was a winner. The hanging bishop on e7 will matter. The game went

52.♖xe7 is premature, as after ♖xd5 Black is ready for ...Rxf5.

52.♗c6? ♗a3 53.♖f7 ♖e5 54.♔h4 ♗c1? Magnus was clearly off form in this game.

54... ♗b4 55.♖xf6† ♔g7 56.♖f7† ♔h6 57.♖b7 ♗c5 White can make no further progress, and it's not easy to keep the f5-pawn protected.

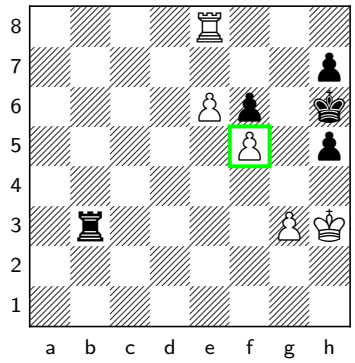
55.e7 and White resigned. Surprisingly Black could still make a draw:

52... ♖a3

After

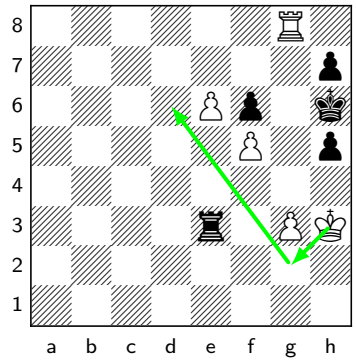
52... ♗a3 53.e7 ♗xe7 54.♖xe7 ♖xf5 55.♗c2 The key. ♖c5 56.♖xh7† ♔g5 , there is still some work to do, but White should win.

53.♖xe7! ♖xb3 54.♖e8!



And the black rook is not in time to capture the f5-pawn..

54... ♖e3 55.♖g8!



Black's king is frozen out of play, and White can bring his own king around to push the e6-pawn through.

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov-Magnus Carlsen, Biel 2018

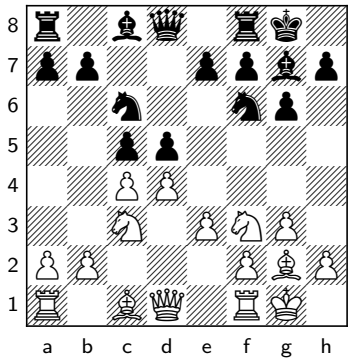
Magnus was half a point behind Mamedyarov in the tournament and needed to win this game.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 O-O 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 c5 7.O-O ♘c6 8.e3

I explore

8.d5 ♘a5N 9.♘d2N e6 10.♖b1 exd5 11.cxd5 in my Neo-Catalan series, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) with an interesting b4-Bb2-Qa1-Ne4 plan to put pressure on the kingside.

8... d5



Black has equalized comfortably.

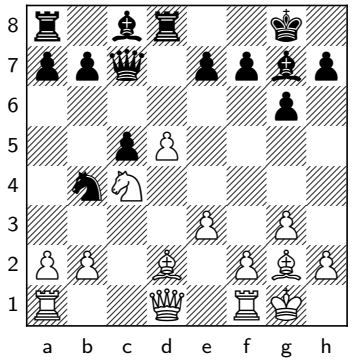
9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xd5 ♕xd5 11.♘e5 ♕d6 12.♘c4

12.♘xc6N bxc6 is harmless here because White's e2-e3 prevents the bishop from reaching the f4-square.

12... ♕c7 13.d5 ♖d8

13... ♘e5N was more normal, with an equal game.

14.♗d2 ♘b4?



It is rare to see a mistake this large from Magnus so early in the game. Again,

14... ♘e5N should have been preferred. Black certainly is not worse.

15.♗xb4?!

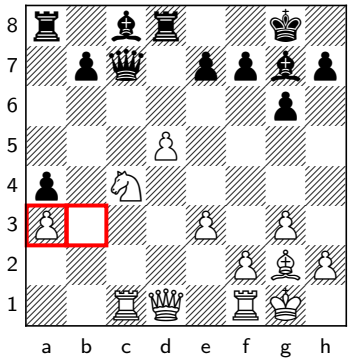
While this is not terrible, and White is still quite fine, Mamedyarov lets a big chance slip. □ □ Also bad for White is: It turns out that White's most natural continuation was also the strongest: C) But the critical move by Black seems to be a different one: 15. Bxb4 16...e5 Two white pieces are hanging at the same time. 17.dxe6? fails to: 17...Rxd1 18.Bxc7 Rxf1+! 19.Rxf1 Bxe6! White loses his queenside. 17.d6! This is what Mamedyarov missed. Anything else loses, but with this push, White severs the connection between the queen and the e5-pawn, and can simply take on e5 next, winning. An important line to calculate is 17...bxc4 , but White wins easily: 18.dxc7 Rxd1 19.Rfxd1 exf4 20.Rd8+ Bf8 21.e5 Black loses everything.

15.a3? does not work for White: ♘xd5N 16.♗a5 b6 17.♗xd5 ♗e6 The tactics work in Black's favor, and White ends up losing a lot of material.

15.♗c3? ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘xd5N What happens if I do it anyway? 17.♗xd5 e6 18.e4 exd5 19.exd5 b5 White's proud center is long gone, and he has some suffering coming up thanks to his weakened light squares.

15.e4 White shuts down the d8-rook, gains space in the center, and prevents Black from taking on d5. This is clearly the move that he wants, but it looks like it runs into trouble. The knight on c4 can be kicked away, and then the b2-pawn would fall. But we have to ask: what happens if I do it anyway? b5 Black gains space, hits the knight, and aims to take on b2. This doesn't work well, but it has to be tried. If Black doesn't go for it, White plays a2-a3, kicks the black knight to the sidelines, and then captures the center with Bf4. 16.♗f4 White hits the queen and tries to gain the e5-square for his knight. Still, one needs to see more than this before being able to pull the trigger on 15.e4!. – A) After ♕d7 17.♘e5N , the knight blocks the long diagonal with a gain of tempo. White is massively better, as a2-a3 and Nc6 are coming. This means that Black is practically forced to take on e5, but that is a tragedy. – B) The only way for Black to stay in the game is 16\. Bf4 16...Qb7! when 17.a3? bxc4 is at least fine for Black. Again, 17... Qd7 17.Ne5! is the move White wants to play, putting the knight on an active square. It looks as though it is prevented tactically, but what happens if White plays it anyway? 17...f6 is correct, but it is obviously depressing for Black. 17...g5?! 18.Nxf7! Another important move White needed to spot from afar. (The good-looking 18.Qh5 leads nowhere after 18...gxf4 19.Qxf7+ Kh8 . There is no effective way to continue with the attack.) 18...Kxf7 19.Bxg5 White has two pawns, a continuing attack, and a space advantage for the piece. It is difficult to develop the c8-bishop, and the knight will get kicked back. White is threatening stuff like Qh5+, e4-e5, and Be4. Black is in deep trouble.

15... cxb4 16.♖c1 a5 17.a3 bxa3 18.bxa3 a4!



Clever. Black stops all of Qb3, Qa4, and a3-a4, while gaining space and fixing the a3-pawn on a dark square.

19.♕d3 ♗f5?

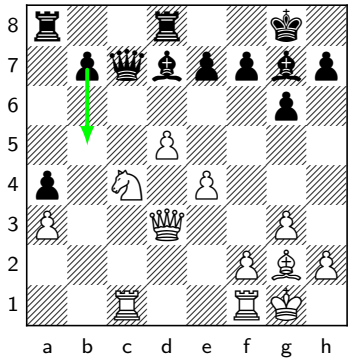
Inviting White's pawn to e4 was too optimistic from Magnus. White would love to play e3-e4, f2-f4, and e4-e5 to shut down the dark-squared bishop. □ Indeed, the immediate □ However, it was a far superior option for Black to just keep the bishop on c8 for the time being: □ Black can't play

19... ♗d7? isn't great. White has 20.d6 exd6 21.♘e5N , with a small but safe advantage in the opposite-colored bishop position that ensues. For example: ♕a5 22.♘xd7N ♖xd7 23.♗d5 The strong bishop on d5 ensures White's safety and makes Black's position uneasy. If the pawn were on e4 instead of e3, then this doesn't work as well for White, as the bishop is stuck on g2. This might have been one of the reasons Black tried to provoke the pawn to e4.

19... ♖b8 This gets the rook off the long diagonal and prepares ...b5. Black is slightly better, as the a3-pawn is weak, and Black has the bishop pair. White will struggle to make use of his central pawn majority.

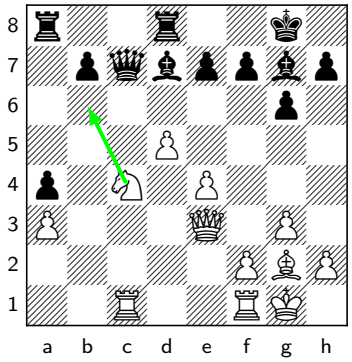
19... b5 right away because of 20.d6

20.e4 ♗d7



Now, ...b5 is a move. How should White play?

21.♕e3!



This excellent move highlights the negatives of Black's bishop maneuver. It is a multi-purpose move. White threatens Nb6, winning material. He simultaneously removes the queen from the d-file and from a potential pin on the

f1-a6 diagonal. At the same time, e4-e5 is prepared, without having to play f2-f4. Finally, even if f2-f4 is needed, the possible queen check on c5 has been prevented. Presumably, one of the reasons Black was hoping to provoke e3-e4 was that As explained above, in the note to 19...Bd7?!, a line that would justify inviting the white e-pawn forward would have been:

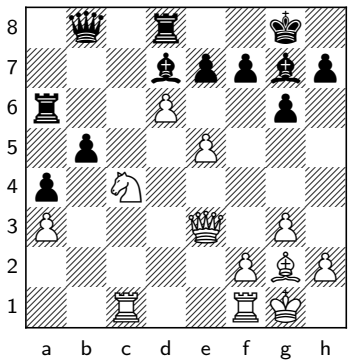
21.f4? can be answered with ♕c5† exploiting the open g1-a7 diagonal. After 22.♔h1 ♗b5? White cannot contain Black's counterplay.

21.d6? exd6 22.♘e5N ♗c6? and Black is even a bit better. His last move is a direct consequence of the g2-bishop being blunted by its own pawn on e4.

21... ♖a6 22.e5!

This is clearly the move White wants to make. It looks like it walks into ...b5, but... what happens if I do it anyway?

22... b5 23.d6! ♕b8!



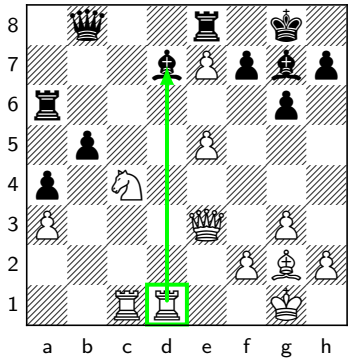
After

23... exd6 24.♘xd6N , the bishop is coming to d5, the d6-knight is a monster, and Black has serious problems finding safe squares for his pieces. White is much better.

24.dxe7 ♖e8

White needed to calculate well to keep the position under control.

25.♖fd1!



White simply improves his worst-placed piece, counterattacking the d7-bishop.

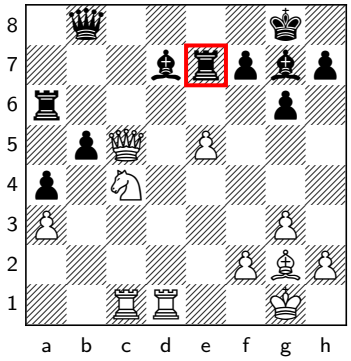
25.♘d6?N also works, but only just about and only because of spectacular tricks. After ♖xe7 it looks like material is going to fall, because Black is threatening both the pawn on e5 and ...Rxd6. Nevertheless, the engine spots 26.♕d3 . Compared to the game, this is already suboptimal, as White has used time to move the queen to d3 instead of activating his rook to d1, which is a concession. The tactical justification is that ♗xe5? is met with

26... ♖xe5 , when White needs to find: 27.♘xf7N ♗f5 28.♘xe5N ♗xd3 29.♗d5† With a draw by perpetual check, since the king cannot step on f8 on account

of the fork on d7. This is fun, but almost irrelevant to what one should be calculating during the game. For one, Mamedyarov's move tries to play for an advantage, while 25.Nd6?! allows a forced draw. – For another, Black could also opt to reject the draw and play a quiet move instead of capturing the pawn on e5. Let's say 26\. Qd3 26...Be6!? , and the game continues.

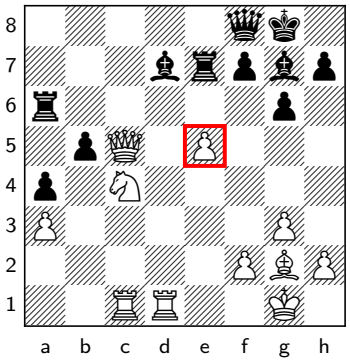
27.♘c8N – □ Even more resourcefulness is required in dealing with

25... ♖xe7 26.♕c5!



A powerful move, making it difficult for Black to save the rook. He is still okay, but he needs to be extremely precise, and even Magnus was not up to the task.

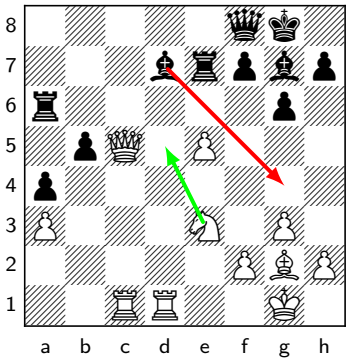
26... ♕f8?



Black tries to continue putting pressure on the e5-pawn, but Mamedyarov had prepared a strong reply.

26... ♗f8 should have been preferred. After 27.♘d6N the knight gets to d6 in a superior version compared to 25.Nd6?!. The pawn on e5 is safe, and White's position looks nice, but the computer finds a path to equality: ♖e8 28.♕c7 ♕xc7 29.♖xc7 ♗xd6 30.exd6 ♖d8 The game should end in a draw.

27.♘e3!



The knight is heading for d5 and prevents ...Bg4, which would remove the bishop from its current vulnerable square with a gain of tempo. I suspect Magnus assumed

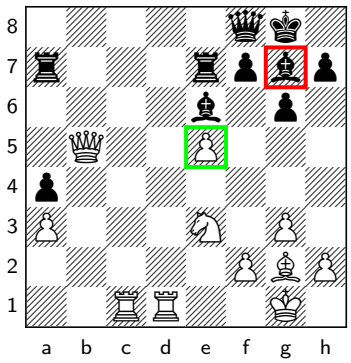
27.♘b6N was coming instead. Then indeed, after ♗g4 Black is fine. 28.f3 ♖xe5 is annoying with the knight hanging on b6.

27... ♗e6

A sad necessity. Magnus gets the bishop off the vulnerable d7-square and counters the Nd5 threat. But he loses a pawn.

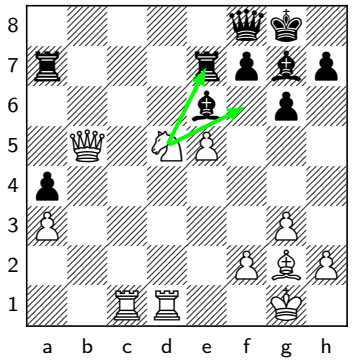
27... ♗xe5 fails to the simple tactic 28.♖xd7 .

28.♕xb5 ♖aa7



Finally, White has won a pawn, leading us to the meat of our discussion about this game. The first issue to address is to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. This is not a significant consideration in this position. White has only one pawn weakness on a3, but that is not a pressing issue. Instead, White needs to consider which exchanges are desirable and how he is going to use his extra pawn to win the game. It is clear that the extra pawn is not going to run down the board and win that way. The main use of the extra e5-pawn is to restrict the g7-bishop. Hence, White should trade pieces such that Black is left with the poor g7-bishop against one of White's better minor pieces.

29.♘d5!



White is happy to get opposite-colored bishops. This may also help him to attack. For example, Black's king could come under serious fire if Black were to weaken his kingside with ...f6. Moreover, the f7-pawn could become vulnerable after ...Bf8.

29.f4? is loosening and should not be an immediate priority. After ♖ec7 , Black gets good counterplay on the dark squares.

29... ♗xd5?

This is a rare case of Magnus making a strategic mistake. The main value of White's extra pawn is restricting the g7-bishop, so accepting simplification while keeping the bad piece is not a recipe for happiness. He would have gained better defensive chances by playing

29... ♖ed7 and allowing White to take the other bishop instead. Nevertheless, this does not solve all of Black's problems. After 30.♘f6†N ♗xf6 31.exf6 , the pawn on f6 is extremely dangerous. The computer fights back with: ♕d8 32.♖xd7 ♖xd7 33.♕xa4 ♕xf6 Black retains drawing chances, but White is happy to have removed one of the bishops from the board and to have left him-

self with an outside passer.

30.♖xd5 ♖eb7?

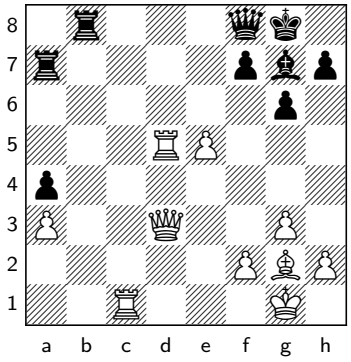
The machine finds

30... ♕e8 and claims it's the only move to keep the fight going. After 31.♕d3 ♖ad7 32.f4 ♗f8 , Black has a lot of suffering ahead, but the engine insists the position is defensible.

31.♕d3!

The threat to the back rank is a major problem for Black to deal with, and he will be forced into complete passivity.

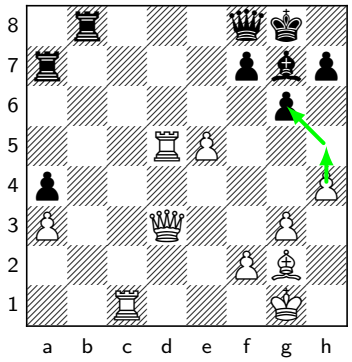
31... ♖b8



Black goes passive and does not have a clear plan for how to continue, as no pieces can be exchanged anytime soon.

31... ♖b3 fails to 32.♕d4 ♖a8 33.♖d7 . White will crash through on f7 with Bd5 next.

32.h4!



I really like this. White should be thinking about the best way to use his extra pawn. The plan is obviously to play h5, tickling Black's kingside. Doing so will more or less force Black's bishop to remain on the passive g7-square, where it is blunted by the e5-pawn. Eventually, after enough preparation, White can consider pushing e5-e6 to tear open lines towards the enemy king. An added bonus of bringing the pawn to h5 is that it will make it impossible for Black to ever try to break out his bishop with ...f6.

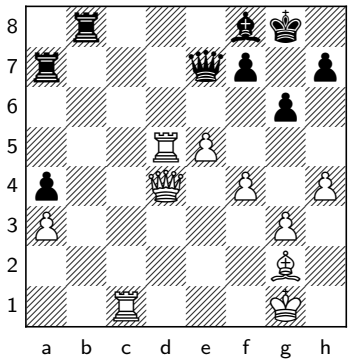
32... ♕e8 33.♕d4 ♕e7 34.f4?

A serious mistake. There are two reasons to play f2-f4: to support the e5-pawn, and to smash through the kingside with f4-f5 to give mate. Neither of these reasons is compelling at the moment. In the meantime, the move costs a tempo, and it weakens the king's cover. This is what Black needed to be able to regroup his bad bishop. The cleanest win was:

34.♖c4 White gets the rook off the hanging c1-square. This prevents ...Qxa3 due to the possible capture of the a7-rook. It also restricts the same a7-rook by forcing it to defend a4. h5 What else? 35.♗e4

White is in no rush. He can play his king to g2 or h2 next, and eventually push f2-f4 once he is ready. This position perfectly highlights the value of the e5-pawn. Black's g7-bishop is horribly blocked, but it can't regroup without his king getting slaughtered. ♗f8 The alternative was passively waiting to die. 36.e6 The extra pawn makes itself felt even more. Black will be mated if the f7-pawn leaves its place, but there is no alternative as taking with the queen on e6 would drop the rook on a7.

34... ♗f8!



Magnus rarely misses such chances. Black is happy to regroup his bishop like this. White is too slow to generate mating threats on the kingside, and his own king is not in the best spot either.

35.♔h2

White's move prevents After

35.h5 ♕xa3 , Black gets excellent counterplay. The c1-rook is hanging, and if something like 36.♖d1 even ♖d7 is possible. Black had an opportunity to gain counterplay by taking advantage of the weakening caused by White's 34th move. It was difficult, but it was there all the same.

35... ♖ab7?

I can only assume that the clocks were getting low. Carlsen should have played:

35... ♕xa3 as 36.♕xa7 ♕xc1 is not a check: 37.♕xb8

35... ♖c7 36.♖xc7 ♕xc7 This looks suicidal because it allows 37.♖d7 , but it turns out that Black can survive because White's pawn is on f4 rather than f2: ♕c2 Pinning the bishop stops Bd5. After 38.♕d5 ♕f5 , White is only slightly better, as Black has all of the direct threats under control. The rook can activate itself on b2 or b3 in the next few moves, creating counterplay.

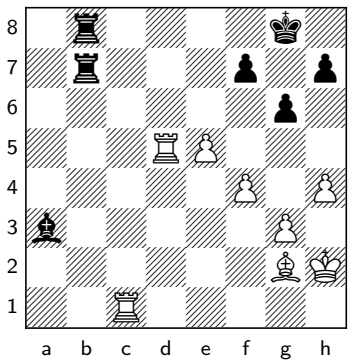
36.♕xa4?

Mamedyarov misses another chance. This should not be enough to win the game. We've already established that the main strength of White's e5-pawn is to restrict the enemy bishop, and that White needs to play for a kingside attack with h4-h5 for that restriction to be more effective. In that regard, it makes sense that White should not want to exchange the queens. Additionally, White should generally try to keep the a-pawns on the board. It's the side down on material that wants to trade pawns. With the queenside eliminated, Black can focus all his attention on holding together the kingside. The way to go was:

36.♖d6 I'm sure Mamedyarov saw this move, as it is fairly obvious. White blocks the black queen from taking a3 and opens

the long diagonal to bully the b7-rook off the seventh rank. It makes perfect sense. It's the next move that he likely missed. ♖b2 37.♔h3 White is ready for Bd5 next, and he will crash through on f7. ♖e2 Before going to d5, White makes sure that Black cannot double his rooks on the second rank. 38.♗d5? is too hasty. After ♖bb2 Black has obvious counterplay. 38... Re2 38.Bf3! Ra2 39.Bd5! Now and only now, the bishop comes to d5. Since Black's rook is hanging on a2, he cannot double on the second rank. After 39...Re2 40.Bc4! , the rook is trapped. 39...Rxa3 40.Rf6 It's all over.

36... ♕xa3 37.♕xa3 ♗xa3



Trading queens has helped Black because his king is no longer in danger. White was using his extra pawn to restrict Black's dark-squared bishop, but it found a way out via f8. What the extra pawn was also capable of doing was to provide more shelter to White's king, enabling a kingside pawn advance to further expose his black counterpart. An attack against the king is generally strengthened by the presence of opposite-colored bishops. With the queens off, such attacks lose most of their vigor, and Black's defensive chances have increased significantly.

38.♖cd1 ♗e7

While the endgame is a draw with best play, White should still try to exert the maximum amount of pressure.

39.♔h3

White could have also started with Forcing the rook trade doesn't succeed:

39.h5 , but the text was fine too. The break on h5 is not going anywhere, because Black will not be playing ...h5 himself. That would weaken g6 more than anything else.

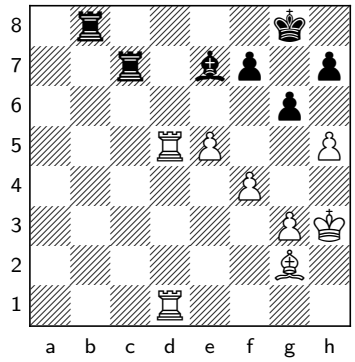
39.♖d7? ♖xd7 40.♖xd7 ♔f8 Black is closer to a fortress following the rook exchange. But not

40... ♗c5? 41.♗d5 ♖f8 42.g4 , when White is winning, as Black is permanently paralyzed and can only await execution.

39... ♖c7

39... h5 weakens Black's structure and helps White strike more effectively with 40.f5 gxf5 41.♖f1 . White threatens to win both f5 and h5.

40.h5!



40.♖d7 fails once again: ♖xd7 41.♖xd7 ♔f8 Without h5-h6 as a way to fix the h7-pawn as a weakness, Black doesn't have much to worry about. 42.h5 can be met with gxh5 .

40... gxh5

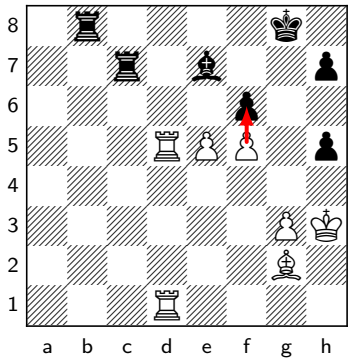
This looks like a concession, but staying still wasn't going to cut it. After

40... ♔g7? 41.♖d7 White is winning. The pawn being on h5 makes all the difference: ♖xd7 42.♖xd7 ♔f8 43.h6 The h7-pawn is fixed, and White wins. The easiest plan is to transfer the rook to b7 and the bishop to b3. Then, eventually g3-g4 and f4-f5 will come. The pawn on h6 means that Black's rook will not be able to wander off and create any counterplay, as it must always defend the back rank.

41.f5

The time control is reached. Black has a very tough defense ahead, but the position definitely should be drawn.

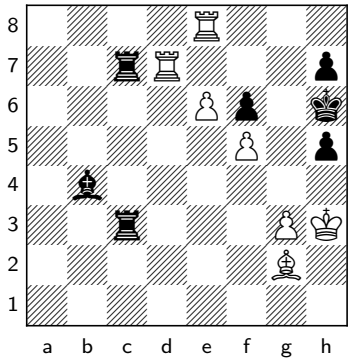
41... f6!



Of course, Black cannot allow White to push f5-f6, fixing the f7-pawn as a long-term weakness and forever confining the black king to the back rank. After After42... f6 43...Rxd8 44.Rxd8 , the game will end soon, as Bd5 and e5-e6 is unstoppable.

41... h4 , White has 42.f6 , which wins easily. For example: ♗f8 43.♖d8? ♖cc8 44.♖xc8 ♖xc8 45.♖d7 The bishop comes to d5, and f7 falls, followed by an advance of the e-pawn.

42.e6 ♖b3 43.♖d7 ♖bc3 44.♖a1 ♔g7 45.♖a8 ♔h6 46.♖e8 ♗b4

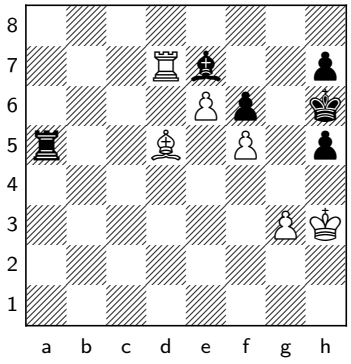


White is unable to make further progress.

47.♖b8 ♗e7 48.♗e4 ♖3c4

48... ♖e3? was a way to try and force the issue, the point being that after 49.♖xc7 ♗d6 Black regains the full rook.

49.♗d5 ♖4c5 50.♖b7 ♖xd7 51.♖xd7 ♖a5?



51... ♗f8 is ugly and passive, but it holds. I don't see a plan for White to improve his position any further.

52.♗c6?

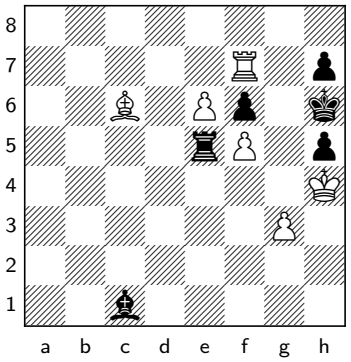
After

52.♗b3 was a winner. The hanging bishop on e7 will matter: ♖a3 53.♖xe7 ♖xb3 54.♖e8 ♖e3 55.♖g8 Black's king is frozen out of play, and White can bring his own king around to push the e6-pawn through.

52... ♗a3

52... ♗a3 53.e7 ♗xe7 54.♖xe7 ♖xf5 55.Bc2! Rc5 55.♖xh7† ♔g5 there is still some work to do, but White should win.

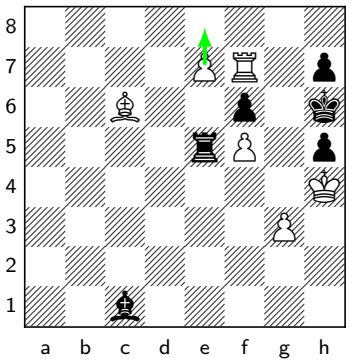
53.♖f7 ♖e5 54.♔h4 ♗c1?



Magnus was clearly off form in this game. Surprisingly, Black could still make a draw:

54... ♗b4 55.♖xf6† ♔g7 56.♖f7† ♔h6 57.♖b7 ♗c5 White can make no further progress, and it's not easy to keep the f5-pawn protected.

55.e7



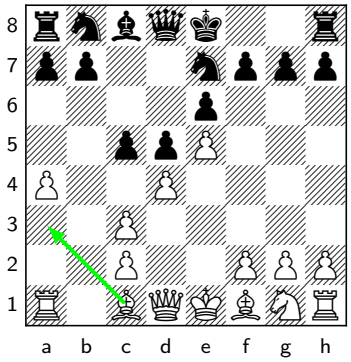
This was an instructive game for our theme. Mamedyarov made some good decisions and some bad ones, particularly concerning which pieces and pawns to exchange. This meant that the game should have ended in a draw. Nevertheless, he did eventually earn the full point, and against Carlsen no less. Despite his mistakes, it was instructive to see how Mamedyarov managed to use his extra pawn to blunt

the enemy bishop and to attack the black king. In the end, it was this same pawn that forced resignation.

Veselin Topalov-Evgeny Bareev Introduction

One of the most depressing ways to lose a chess game is to offer some material early in the game for activity, never really get it going, and eventually lose to the material. Even the best players in the world lose like this at times – I certainly have! In the game below, Topalov found himself in this unfortunate situation.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 ♘e7 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 c5 7.a4



The wisdom back then was that the bishop was best placed on the a3-f8 diagonal. Also, placing the pawn on a4 prevents ...Qa5-a4 in some lines. However, Black will not take on d4, and the bishop will remain shut out and will lose time to relocate.

7.♕g4 and 7.h4 are better alternatives.

7... ♕c7 8.♘f3

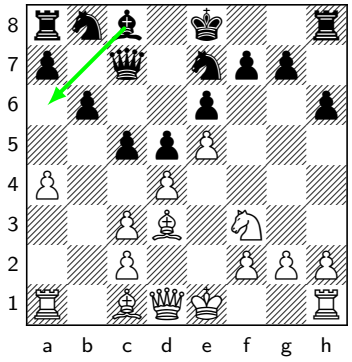
White is now not able to move his queen to g4 and provoke kingside weaknesses.

8... h6

After

8... b6 9.♗b5† ♗d7 10.♗d3 , the pawn on a4 has some merit as it prevents ...Ba4, after which Black would castle queenside and have a comfortable game.

9.♗d3 b6



Black wants to exchange light-squared bishops. In the Winawer, White will often reply to ...b6 with Bb5+ to disturb Black's coordination. That's why Black waited for White to develop the bishop to d3 and only then pushed his pawn to b6. It's important to note that

9... c4? 10.♗e2 b6 is not as good for Black as the move order seen in the game, as here White has not been provoked to play a4-a5. Instead, he can continue with Ba3, O-O, Nh4 and f2-f4, with good attacking chances.

10.a5

A direct move. Topalov wants to open the a-file and get rid of his weakness. This obviously involves sacrificing a pawn, and he was more than willing to part with it.

10... bxa5?!

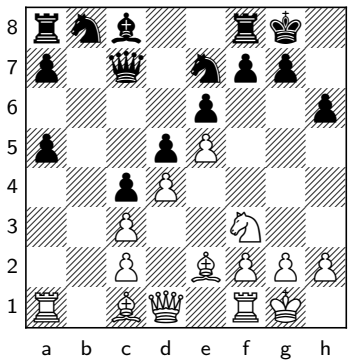
This was a bit too optimistic. Eventually the extra pawn did win Black the game, but only after White misplayed the initiative in the upcoming moves. Black should have stuck with the standard strategic Winawer plan of exchanging the light-squared bishops. His position looks comfortable to me after

10... ♗a6

11.O-O c4!?

An interesting move to lock the position and attempt to win with the outside passed a-pawn. But that is a long way off! Even if Black isn't facing any immediate threats, White has the slow plan of Ba3, Nh4, and then f2-f4-f5. The a3-bishop will be stopping the a-pawns as well as putting pressure on Black's position.

12.♗e2 O-O



Black has an extra pawn, and White's doubled pawns on c2 and c3 are not impressive, which gives the impression of two extra pawns for Black. However, Black has no entry points on the queenside, and the a5-pawn is not likely to move forward. So, what's the plan for those extra a-pawns? Not clear.

13.♖e1?

Topalov started to falter and badly misplaces his pieces. I don't get what he was aiming for with this regrouping. More to the point would have been

13.♗a3 , with the aforementioned Nh4 and f2-f4 on the way. White's kingside attacking prospects look promising; I would not want to be Black!

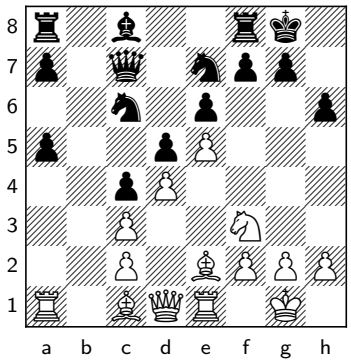
13... ♘bc6

Premature would be: In the game, 14... Nbc6 14.Ba3 was again preferable, but Topalov played 14.Bf1?! With no major threats on the horizon, we have to consider which exchanges of pieces and pawns we want. In this case, that is related to having a clear plan for what our extra pawn will accomplish for us. The extra pawn is a passer on the a-file. Even the briefest of glances should let us know that this pawn will pose no threat of promotion for a long time. White's bishop is going to a3, which is its best square anyway, and then the a-pawns will be firmly under control. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the a-pawns are not restricting any of White's pieces in a meaningful way. So, what are the a-pawns actually doing for us? While objectively, Black is not better yet, Bareev clearly understood what Black should be playing for.

13... f6 14.exf6 ♖xf6 15.♘e5N White has not had to place his e2-bishop on the passive f1-square. It is now free to move to the

more active squares on g4 or h5.

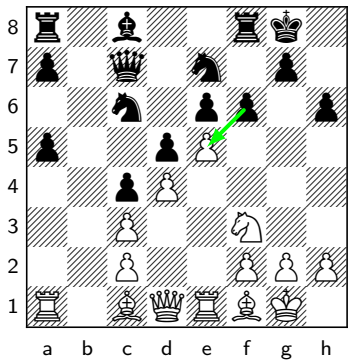
Topalov-Bareev Exercise #1



14.♗f1?!

With no major threats on the horizon, we have to consider which exchanges of pieces and pawns we want. In this case, that is related to having a clear plan for what our extra pawn will accomplish for us. The extra pawn is a passer on the a-file. Even the briefest of glances should let us know that this pawn will pose no threat of promotion for a long time. White's bishop is going to a3, which is its best square anyway, and then the a-pawns will be firmly under control. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the a-pawns are not restricting any of White's pieces in a meaningful way. So, what are the a-pawns actually doing for us? While objectively, Black is not better yet, Bareev clearly understood what Black should be playing for. With no major threats on the horizon, we have to consider which exchanges of pieces and pawns we want. In this case, that is related to having a clear plan for what our extra pawn will accomplish for us. The extra pawn is a passer on the a-file. Even the briefest of glances should let us know that this pawn will pose no threat of promotion for a long time. White's bishop is going to a3, which is its best square anyway, and then the a-pawns will be firmly under control. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the a-pawns are not restricting any of White's pieces in a meaningful way. So, what are the a-pawns actually doing for us? While objectively, Black is not better yet, Bareev clearly understood what Black should be playing for.

14...f6!

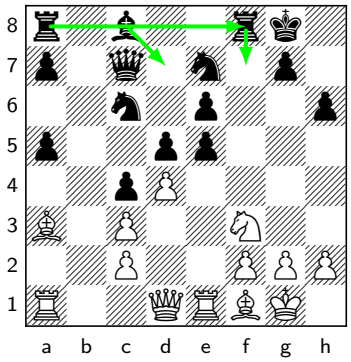


An excellent decision. It turns out that the best way to make use of the extra pawn on the a-file is to open the kingside. White will be less able to fight for key squares on one side of the board when at least some minimal attention must be paid to the other side as well. Additionally, we would expect that most exchanges of pieces should favor Black. With the kingside opening, it may become hard for White to keep pieces on the board.

15.♗a3

Having exerted some pressure on White's center, Black now needs to plan for the next few moves.

15...fxe5!

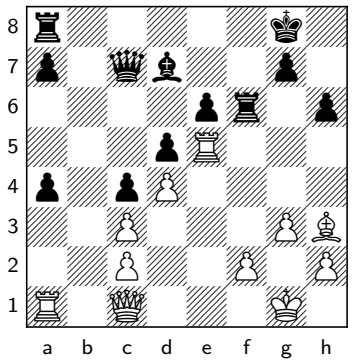


I like the clarity of Bareev's plan. After taking on e5 Black can play ...Bd7, ...Rf7 and ...Raf8. This will maximize Black's presence on the kingside. We also discussed at length the consequences of locking down the kingside:

15... ♗d7? was suggested during a KCT session. The idea is to maintain the tension in the center and reroute the bishop to the kingside via e8. But the bishop may not make it there. For example: 16.exf6 ♖xf6 17.♘e5N White has good counterplay, as the desirable ♗e8? would allow 18.♘g4N , forcing the rook to the awkward g6-square in order to protect the pawn on e6.

15... f5? This is inconsistent with Black's plan outlined above. The only pawn break available on the board is g2-g4, so it will be White who chooses when to open the position. 16.h4 Preventing ...g5. White plans h5 and Nh4. Then either g2-g3, Ng2-Nf4, Bh3, Kg2, Rh1 and eventually g3-g4; or f2-f4, Kh2, Be2, g2-g3, Rg2, Qd2, Rag1, and so on. The point is that White plays g3-g4 only when all his pieces are on optimal squares. Checkmate is then likely to follow. In the meantime, Black does not have any counterplay whatsoever. You'll find an instructive discussion of this position (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

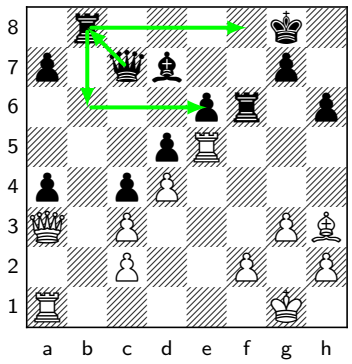
Topalov-Bareev Exercise #2



22.♕a3

What would you play here as Black?

22... ♖b8!



Black plans to bring the queenside rook to b6 and bolster the e6-pawn before challenging White's queen by maneuvering his own to f8 later. White will not want to exchange queens,

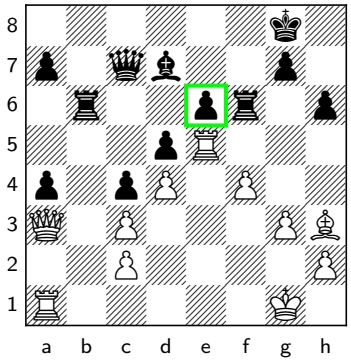
so his queen will be restricted. Going straight to the kingside would not be best. After

22... ♖af8 23.f4 , Black's only way to open the kingside further will be ...g5, and this will be hard to pull off. The computer wants to immediately bring the rook back to b8.

23.f4

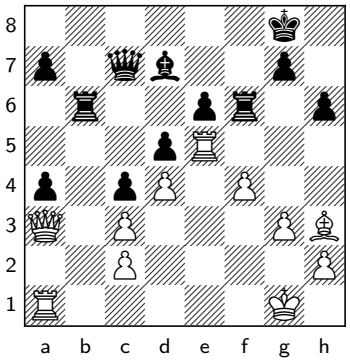
As in the note above, Black's only way to open the kingside is a well-timed ...g5. This might look like a pipe dream, but it is closer to a reality than one might first think. It will come down to blending threats on both sides.

23... ♖b6



A nice stabilizing maneuver. Let's move on to our next exercise.

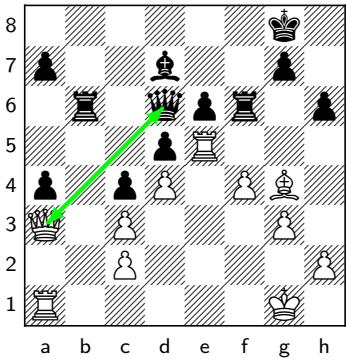
Topalov-Bareev Exercise #3



24.♗g4

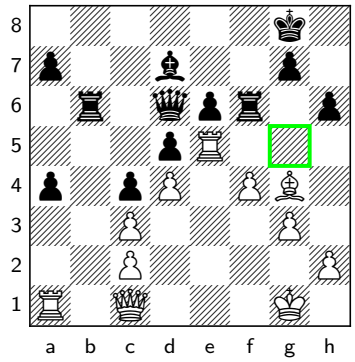
Not the move Topalov played, but the move that intuitively appeals to me most. White gets ready for h4 as a means to prevent the break on g5. How should Black react?

24... ♕d6



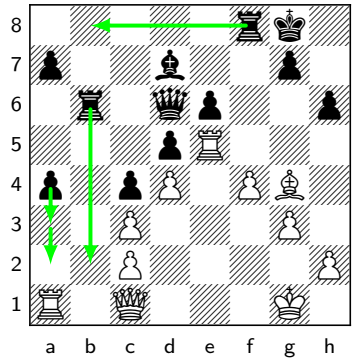
We want to trade queens to deprive White of counterplay.

25.♕c1



White's pieces are excellently placed to stop the break on g5.

25... ♖f8!



So Black can switch gears. Up next are ...Rfb8, ...Rb2, and ...a3-...a2. What is White supposed to do about it? Having to put a rook on e5 to prevent ...g5 does not do him any favors in containing Black's play on the queenside. Something like

26.♕e3

trying to create counterplay allows an immediate

26... a3

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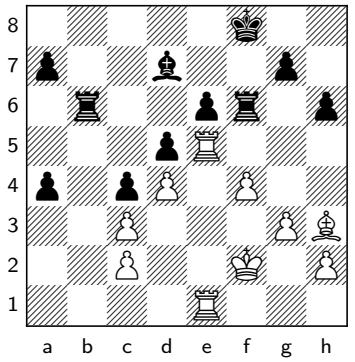
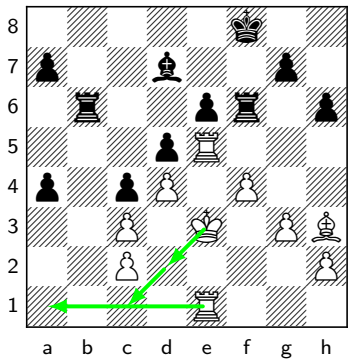
Topalov-Bareev Exercise #4



27.♔e3



Topalov brings his king to the center. He may consider regrouping with Kd2, Ra1 and Kc1. How should Black proceed?

27... g5!

The Shankland Rule in action. The move we want to play appears to be prevented. What happens if we play it anyway? A second front is opened.

27... ♔e7 with the idea of rerouting the king to the queenside is possible, but it misses an opportunity.

28.fxg5

It was important to calculate something against this natural reply. The game continued

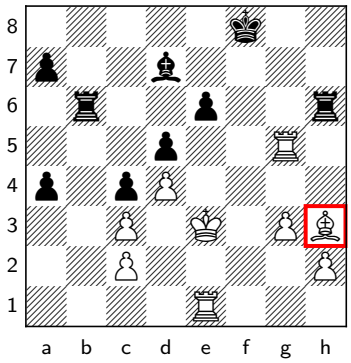
28.f5 is not possible, due to the loose h3-bishop: exf5 29.♖xd5 f4† It is time to stop the clocks.

28.♗g4 gxf4† 29.gxf4 White is left with a second weakness in the shape of the f4-pawn. Black has threats on both sides of the board, and White is not able to exchange pieces and relieve some of the pressure due to the possibility of the a-pawn quickly advancing. ♖b2 As a result of opening the kingside, White's defenses are stretched.

28... hxg5 29.♖xg5

This would be terrifying with queens on the board, but here, Black is safe.

29... ♖h6!?

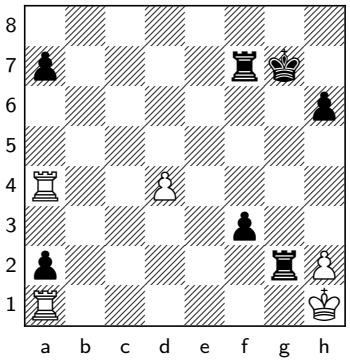


A nice human solution. Black is clearly winning.

30.♗g4 ♖xh2 31.♖c1 a3−+

.

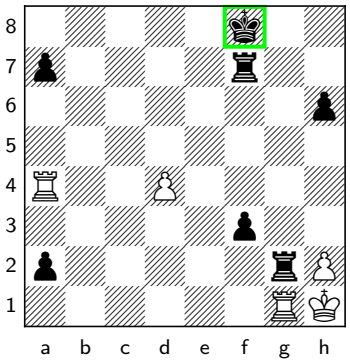
Topalov-Bareev Exercise #5



47.♖g1

Black to play and win.

47... ♔f8!

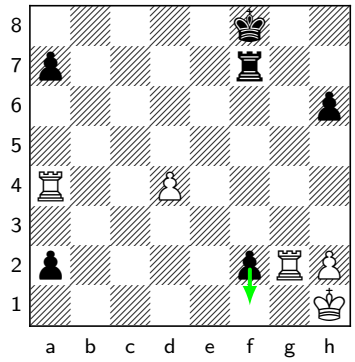


Any other king move would do. Well,

47... ♔h8 or

47... ♔h7 would! As long as Rxg2 does not come with a check, it's all over.

48.♖xg2 f2!



Well spotted.

49.♖g1

49.♖xf2 ♖xf2 50.♔g1 ♖b2 and Black promotes.

49... f1♕!

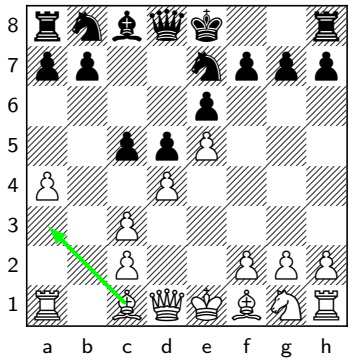
Don't take that rook!

49... fxg1♕†= 50.♔xg1 and Black's rook can't support the a-pawn. White saves the endgame.

Veselin Topalov-Evgeny Bareev, Wijk aan Zee 2004

One of the most depressing ways to lose a chess game is to offer some material early in the game for activity, never really get it going, and eventually lose to the material. Even the best players in the world lose like this at times – I certainly have! In the game below, Topalov found himself in this unfortunate situation.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 ♘e7 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 c5 7.a4



The wisdom back then was that the bishop was best placed on the a3-f8 diagonal. Also, placing the pawn on a4 prevents ...Qa5-a4 in some lines. However, Black will not take on d4, and the bishop will remain shut out and will lose time to relocate.

7.♕g4 and

7.h4 are better alternatives.

7... ♕c7 8.♘f3

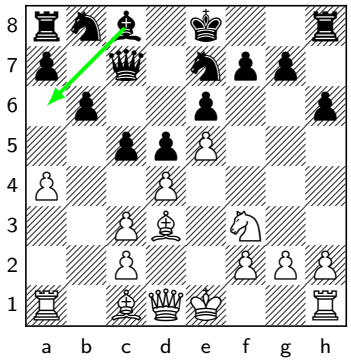
White is now not able to move his queen to g4 and provoke kingside weaknesses.

8... h6

After

8... b6 9.♗b5† ♗d7 10.♗d3 , the pawn on a4 has some merit as it prevents ...Ba4, after which Black would castle queenside and have a comfortable game.

9.♗d3 b6



Black wants to exchange light-squared bishops. In the Winawer, White will often reply to ...b6 with Bb5+ to disturb Black's coordination. That's why Black waited for White to develop the bishop to d3 and only then pushed his pawn to b6. It's important to note that

9... c4? 10.♗e2 b6 is not as good for Black as the move order seen in the game, as here White has not been provoked to play a4-a5. Instead, he can continue with Ba3, O-O, Nh4 and f2-f4, with good attacking chances.

10.a5

A direct move. Topalov wants to open the a-file and get rid of his weakness. This obviously involves sacrificing a pawn, and he was more than willing to part with it.

10... bxa5?!

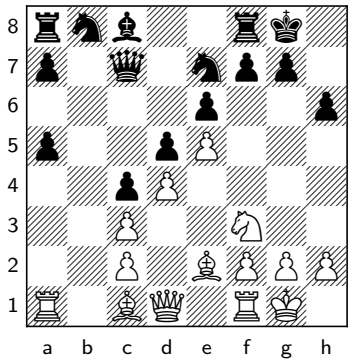
This was a bit too optimistic. Eventually the extra pawn did win Black the game, but only after White misplayed the initiative in the upcoming moves. Black should have stuck with the standard strategic Winawer plan of exchanging the light-squared bishops. His position looks comfortable to me after

10... ♗a6

11.O-O c4!?

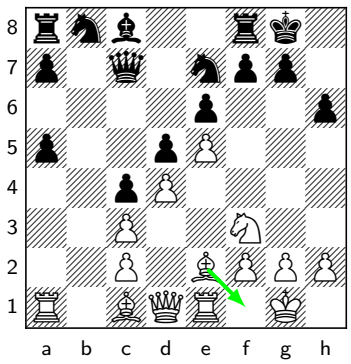
An interesting move to lock the position and attempt to win with the outside passed a-pawn. But that is a long way off! Even if Black isn't facing any immediate threats, White has the slow plan of Ba3, Nh4, and then f2-f4-f5. The a3-bishop will be stopping the a-pawns as well as putting pressure on Black's position.

12.♗e2 O-O



Black has an extra pawn, and White's doubled pawns on c2 and c3 are not impressive, which gives the impression of two extra pawns for Black. However, Black has no entry points on the queenside, and the a5-pawn is not likely to move forward. So, what's the plan for those extra a-pawns? Not clear.

13.♖e1?



Topalov started to falter and badly misplaces his pieces. I don't get what he was aiming for with this regrouping. More to the point would have been

13.♗a3 , with the aforementioned Nh4 and f2-f4 on the way. White's kingside attacking prospects look promising; I would not want to be Black!

13... ♘bc6

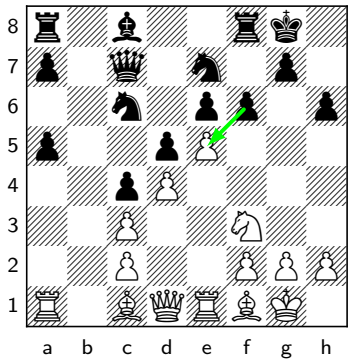
Premature would be:

13... f6 14.exf6 ♖xf6 15.♘e5N White has not had to place his e2-bishop on the passive f1-square. It is now free to move to the more active squares on g4 or h5.

14.♗f1?!

14.♗a3 was again preferable. White's last two lame moves have left Black feeling much safer than he should have, and we can start thinking about making use of the extra pawn. In terms of stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay, White's last two moves did that for us. With no major threats on the horizon, we have to consider which exchanges of pieces and pawns we want. In this case, that is related to having a clear plan for what our extra pawn will accomplish for us. The extra pawn is a passer on the a-file. Even the briefest of glances should let us know that this pawn will pose no threat of promotion for a long time. White's bishop is going to a3, which is its best square anyway, and then the a-pawns will be firmly under control. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the a-pawns are not restricting any of White's pieces in a meaningful way. So, what are the a-pawns actually doing for us? While objectively, Black is not better yet, Bareev clearly understood what Black should be playing for.

14... f6!

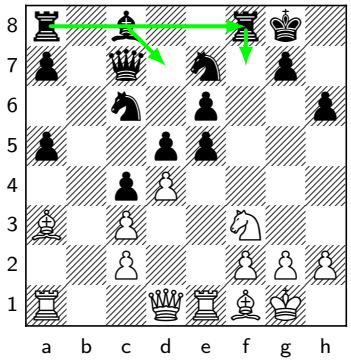


An excellent decision. It turns out that the best way to make use of the extra pawn on the a-file is to open the kingside. White will be less able to fight for key squares on one side of the board when at least some minimal attention must be paid to the other side as well. Additionally, we would expect that most exchanges of pieces should favor Black. With the kingside opening, it may become hard for White to keep pieces on the board.

15.♗a3

Having exerted some pressure on White's center, Black now needs to plan for the next few moves.

15... fxe5!



I like the clarity of Bareev's plan. After taking on e5, Black can play ...Bd7, ...Rf7 and ...Raf8. This will maximize Black's presence on the kingside. □ □ We also discussed at length the consequences of locking down the kingside: B) Lashing out doesn't help: 16... fxe5 21...g5 22.hxg6 when 22...Nxg6 is not possible. The first rule of exchange sacrifices is checking the activity of the rooks, and White's rooks are good after 23.Nxg6 Bxg6 24.Bxf8 After 22...Bxg6 23.Nxg6 Qxg6 24.Bh5 , White has a winning kingside attack and can regain the a5-pawn by taking on e7 whenever he wants.

15... ♗d7? was suggested during a KCT session. The idea is to maintain the tension in the center and reroute the bishop to the kingside via e8. But the bishop may not make it there. For example: 16.exf6 ♖xf6 17.♘e5N White has good counterplay, as the desirable ♗e8? would allow 18.♘g4N , forcing the rook to the awkward g6-square in order to protect the pawn on e6.

15... f5? This is inconsistent with Black's plan outlined above. The only pawn break available on the board is g2-g4, so it will be White who chooses when to open the position. 16.h4 Preventing ...g7-g5. White plans h4-h5 and Nh4. Then either g2-g3, Ng2-Nf4, Bh3, Kg2, Rh1 and eventually g3-g4; or f2-f4, Kh2, Be2, g2-g3, Rg2, Qd2, Rag1, and so on. The point is that White plays g3-g4 only when all his pieces are on optimal squares. Checkmate is then likely to follow. In the meantime, Black does not have any counterplay whatsoever. We discussed the following line, which I think is instructive enough to be kept in the book: ♗d7 17.h5 ♗e8 18.♘h4N Now f4? only helps White after 19.♕g4 . Instead, 18\. Nh4 18...Bf7 19.f4 Qd7 20.Be2 Qe8 21.Kh2 and here: – A) 21...Kh7 22.g4! Preparing this further is also possible, but not necessary. 22...fxg4 23.Bxg4 Rg8 and here White is winning after 24.Qf3 and a more careful execution of the break on f5. 24.f5? is careless. 24...exf5 25.Nxf5 Nxf5 26.Bxf5+ g6 27.Bh3 Be6 28.Qf3? It is always great fun when a poll is taken in the online sessions at Killer Chess Training. Here, I and over half the class thought White was better. Only one person had the surprisingly correct computer evaluation of this position:

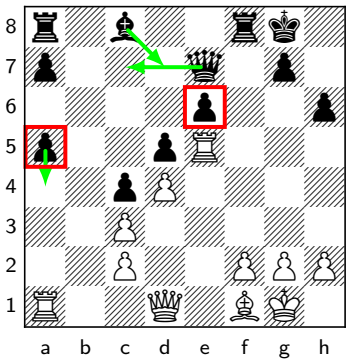
0.00! 28.Bxe6! Qxe6 29.Rf1 wins for White, though.

16.♗xe7?

I am always fascinated whenever I see an old game of a world-class player who makes an alarmingly poor strategic decision that no top player would ever consider today. I can't even imagine Bxe7 coming into my head as a candidate move. Of course, Topalov could have just had a bad day; throughout the entire game, he played well below the level he was normally showing at the time. However, I do suspect that often, and perhaps in this case, a move like this one represents a gap in chess knowledge and understanding, between today and the previous era which time – and computers – ultimately eliminated. The bishop was surely White's best piece, pressuring Black's kingside while simultaneously keeping Black's only major trump, the a5-pawn, firmly at bay. Exchanging it for a superfluous knight is hard to understand and impossible to justify. Normal was 16\. Bxe7 17.Nd4!? is actually possible, applying the Shankland Rule, because after 17...Nxe5 , White has: 18.Nb5! Qb6 19.Nd6! Qxf2+ 20.Kh1 With a huge mess.

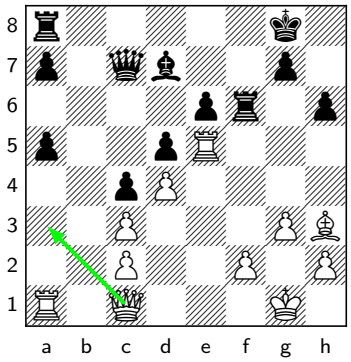
16.dxe5 and a line we looked at in the session started with: ♖f7 This overprotects the e7-knight, discouraging Nd4 because of the now hanging pawn on e5. It also unpins the e7-knight and allows it to go to g6. It also prepares the doubling of rooks on the f-file. The f3-knight has limited options. Still, after something like: 17.♗d6 ♕d8 18.♘d4N ♗d7 19.g3 , White has reasonable compensation for the pawn.

16...♕xe7! 17.♘xe5 ♘xe5 18.♖xe5



White has voluntarily traded a bunch of minor pieces in the last few moves, which certainly plays to Black's advantage. But the drawback is that now we have to return to step one. Since the c6-knight has been removed, the previously secure a5-pawn is loose. The next stage of Black's plan should be to stabilize the position and avoid counterplay. His plan is to defend the a5-pawn with the queen, and then play ...Bd7 and ...a4. The a-pawn will then be securely defended. But it is not going to become a queen anytime soon. Then, as we already described above, Black will return to the plan of opening the kingside. This will stretch White's defenses, making it hard for him to hold both sides of the board at once.

18...♕c7 19.g3 ♗d7! 20.♗h3 ♖f6 21.♕c1?!



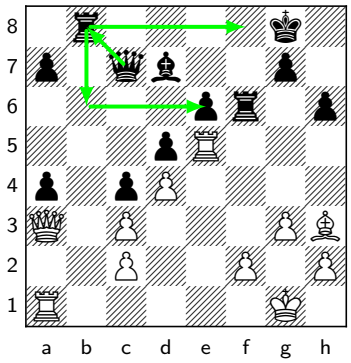
White begins a dubious maneuver, as his queen will be passively placed on a3. She will basically be babysitting the a4-pawn and doing nothing else. That's quite a big piece to be performing such a small duty! Black's kingside chances will go way up with nine points of material sidelined and unable to fight back. I would have gone active immediately with

21.♕e2 . After ♖e8 22.f4 with f4-f5 potentially on the way, White is still worse, but he is not without counterplay.

21... a4 22.♕a3

What would you play here as Black?

22... ♖b8!



Black plans to bring the queenside rook to b6 and bolster the e6-pawn before challenging White's queen by maneuvering his own to f8 later. White will not want to exchange queens, so his queen will be restricted. Going straight to the kingside would not be best. After

22... ♖af8 23.f4 Black's only way to open the kingside further will be ...g5, and this will be hard to pull off. The computer wants to immediately bring the rook back to b8.

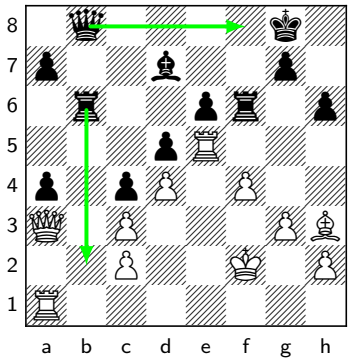
23.f4

As in the note above, Black's only way to open the kingside is a well-timed ...g5. This might look like a pipe dream, but it is closer to a reality than one might first think. It will come down to blending threats on both sides.

23... ♖b6 24.♔f2

24.♗g4 is the move that intuitively appeals to me most. White gets ready for h4 as a means to prevent the break on g5. ♕d6 25.♕c1 White's pieces are excellently placed to stop the break on g5. ♖f8 So Black can switch gears. Up next are ...Rfb8, ...Rb2, and ...a3-...a2. What is White supposed to do about it? Having to put a rook on e5 to prevent ...g5 does not do him any favors in containing Black's play on the queenside.

24... ♕b8!



It might look as though Black wants ...Rb2, but in fact he is planning to play ...Qf8 followed by ...g5.

25.♖ae1

White could have waited passively with the rook on a1 as a means to keep the a-pawn at bay. But with the heavy pieces stuck on the queenside... we know what to do: It is a bad sign that the computer wants

25.♕c1 g5 White's a1-rook will not be helpful at all with the fight in the center and on the kingside. For example, after 26.♕e3 gxf4 27.gxf4 ♕f8 White's position is crumbling.

25.♔e3 . After ♕f8 , again, 26.♕c1

26.♕xf8† ♔xf8 27.♗g2 The pawn can come to h4 next to prevent ...g5, and Black is still some way away from coming up with a convincing winning plan. Nevertheless, the queen trade has largely removed White's ability to create any counterplay, which makes Black's play easier.

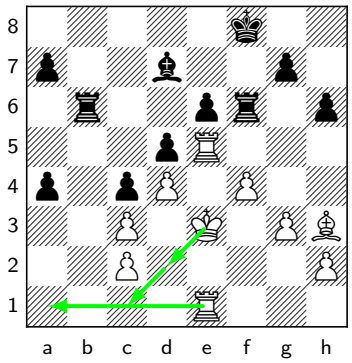
26... g5 is crushing. Imagine White had his a1-rook on f1: then ...g5 would not be a thing –but ...a3 would be.

25... ♕f8! 26.♕xf8†

The queen trade is not a good sign for White. However, A reminder from Small Steps 2 Success: (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) «Even when well blockaded, a far advanced passed pawn can significantly strengthen attacking prospects.»

26.♕c1 allows a3 followed by ...Rb2 and ...Ba4. White's position collapses. Black is combining threats on both sides.

26... ♔xf8 27.♔e3



White brings his king to the center. He may consider regrouping with Kd2, Ra1, and Kc1. How should Black proceed?

27... g5!

The Shankland Rule in action. The move we want to play appears to be prevented. What happens if we play it anyway? A second front is opened.

27... ♔e7 with the idea of rerouting the king to the queenside is possible, but it misses an opportunity.

28.♗g4

It was important to calculate something against

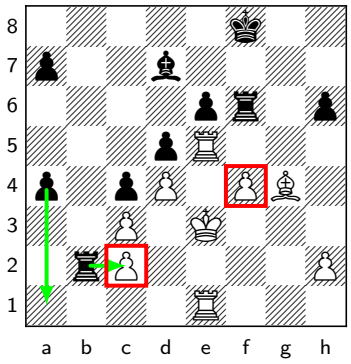
28.fxg5 hxg5 29.♖xg5 , when ♖h6? is a nice human solution. Black is clearly winning.

28.f5 is not possible, due to the loose h3-bishop: exf5 29.♖xd5 f4† It is time to stop the clocks.

28... gxf4† 29.gxf4

White is left with a second weakness in the shape of the f4-pawn. Black has threats on both sides of the board, and White is not able to exchange pieces and relieve some of the pressure due to the possibility of the a-pawn quickly advancing.

29... ♖b2



As a result of opening the kingside, White's defenses are stretched.

30.f5

White is lost and correctly tries to confuse matters. □ □ □ After □

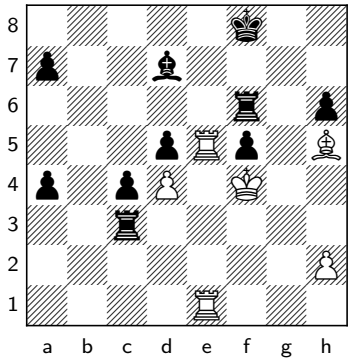
30.♗d1 a3

30.♖a1 ♖xc2

30.♔d2 ♖xf4 , Black is able to breakthrough precisely because he had created the second weakness on f4.

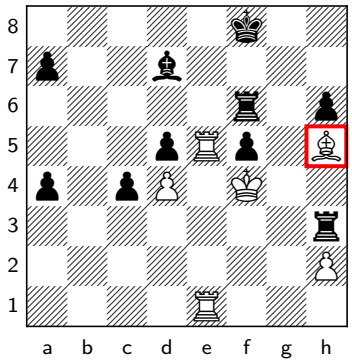
30.♖c1 is too passive to be considered. After a3 Black's pawn will make it all the way to a2.

30... exf5 31.♗f3 ♖xc2 32.♔f4 ♖xc3 33.♗h5



Every move wins for Black. Bareev chooses the most convincing one.

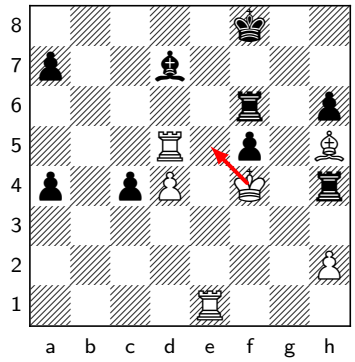
33... ♖h3!



The bishop is kicked away.

33... a3 34.♖xd5 ♗e6 35.♖d6 ♔e7 36.♖a6 is unnecessarily messy.

34.♖xd5 ♖h4†!



A strong intermediate move, preventing White's king from getting to the e5-square. After

34... ♖xh5? 35.♖xd7 , Black should still win, but White actually has a plan with the king coming to e5 next and the d-pawn starting to advance.

35.♔g3

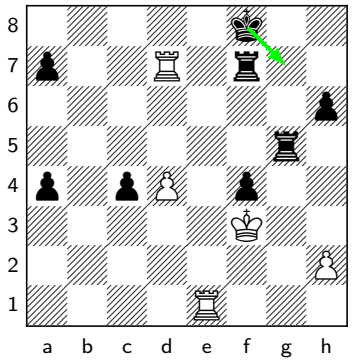
A sad necessity. This is not where the king wants to go, but other options lost heavy material directly. □ After □ □ Finally,

35.♔e5 ♖e6† 36.♔xf5 ♖xh5† , Black takes everything.

35.♔f3 ♗c6 also wins immediately.

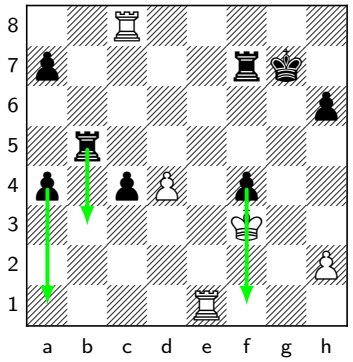
35.♔e3 ♖e6† 36.♔d2 ♖xh5 37.♖xd7 c3† wins the rook on e1.

35... ♖xh5 36.♖xd7 f4† 37.♔g4 ♖g5† 38.♔f3 ♖f7



Black is able to contest the seventh rank, as a rook trade leads to a hopeless rook endgame for White.

39.♖d8† ♔g7 40.♖c8 ♖b5!

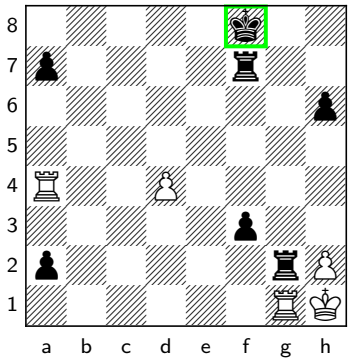


The rook is about to give a devastating check on b3, after which both the a4- and f4-pawns will start advancing. With the time control reached, the rest was unnecessary, but Bareev did show a nice tactic at the end.

41.♖xc4 ♖b3† 42.♔f2 a3 43.♖a4 f3 44.♖a1 ♖b2† 45.♔g1 ♖g2†! 46.♔h1 a2! 47.♖g1

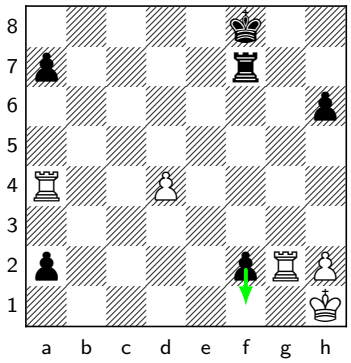
Black to play and win.

47... ♔f8!



Any king move would do. As long as Rxg2 does not come with a check, it's all over.

48.♖xg2 f2!



Well spotted.

49.♖g1

49.♖xf2 ♖xf2 50.♔g1 ♖b2 and Black promotes.

49... f1♕!

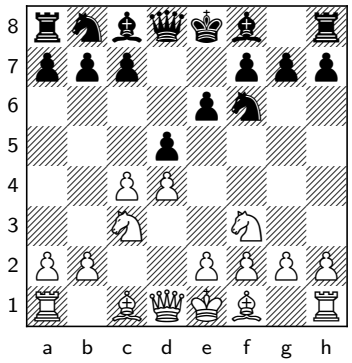
Don't take that rook!

49... fxg1♕†= 50.♔xg1 and Black's rook can't support the a-pawn. White saves the endgame. Topalov did not bring his best form to this game, but Bareev's play was instructive all the same. Once he collected his extra pawn on a5, he clearly understood that the most prudent course of action was to try to pick a fight in the center. In that way, he would be taking advantage of White having to always pay some attention to the potential for the passer to start running. The complications in the center would also highlight White's inability to exchange too many pieces. Ultimately, Black won the game on the kingside, specifically because White could not bring all his pieces over to defend, when there was an extra passed pawn on the other side of the board.

Magnus Carlsen-Veselin Topalov Introduction

The next game is from 2008. Carlsen was only 17 at the time but already had a FIDE rating of 2775! Topalov at the time was equally strong, or perhaps even a little stronger.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3



If White tries to play a Carlsbad with

4.cxd5 exd5 5.♘c3N there are a couple of issues for him. The knight is on f3, whereas after Bd3, it is often best placed on e2. More importantly, Black can get his bishop to f5 before the white bishop gets to d3, as a tempo has been spent on Nf3. Black is, therefore, able to equalize relatively easily, despite the line experiencing a bit of a renaissance lately.

4... ♗e7

This line of the Queen's Gambit Declined has always been a staple of top-level chess. Currently, it is much less popular than the Ragozin and Semi-Slav. I am not sure why, as

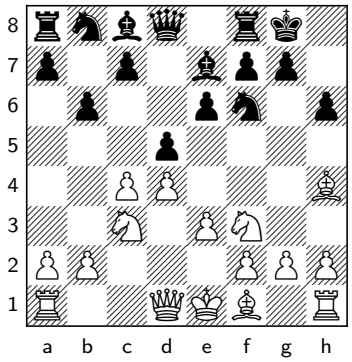
4... ♗e7 remains fully sound for Black.

5.♗g5

According to modern theory,

5.♗f4 gives Black more issues to solve. This is the move I recommend in my 1.d4 LTR. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) The white dark-squared bishop being on the h4-d8 diagonal makes it easier for Black to defend by exchanging pieces with ...Ne4.

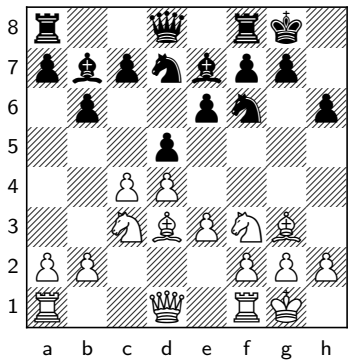
5... h6 6.♗h4 O-O 7.e3 b6



The Tartakower Variation. With the bishop on f4, I am not a fan of Black's structure after c4xd5 and ...Nxd5. However, with the bishop on g5/h4, and following the exchange of bishops on e7, Black's development has been accelerated, and his position is fine. The Lasker Variation with

7... ♘e4N is also fine for Black. The exchange of bishops brings his queen to e7, which will make it easier for him to play ...c5 later.

8.♗d3 ♗b7 9.O-O ♘bd7 10.♗g3



An admission that the bishop went to the wrong diagonal in the first place. Topalov has comfortably equalized. After

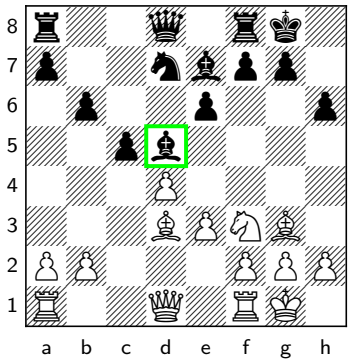
10.cxd5 ♘xd5N 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♘xd5N ♗xd5 , Black will equalize if he gets ...c5 in. The bishop exchange has enabled Black's queen to move off the d-file. In the version with bishops on f4 and e7, White is able to make the ...c5 break harder to achieve by moving his queen to c2 and putting a rook on d1.

10... c5

The logical and direct break in the center. White is able to play a bit after

10... ♘h5N due to the poor b7-bishop after the exchange on d5. A sample line that was discussed in a KCT session went: 11.cxd5 ♘xg3N 12.hxg3 exd5 13.♖c1 c5 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.e4 ♘b6N 16.exd5 ♘xd5N 17.♘xd5N ♕xd5 18.♗c4 ♕f5 Black is basically fine.

11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5



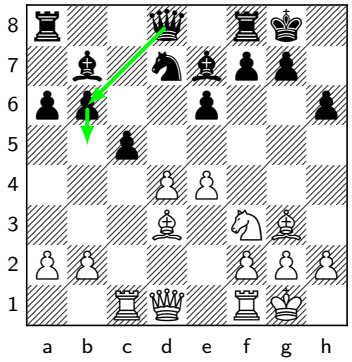
Clearly not

12... exd5 . If you were able to talk to the bishop on b7, he would be furious. This is particularly awkward with the dark-squared bishops still present, and the black queen struggling to find a nice square.

13.e4

This loosens White's control over the center a little and strikes me as asking for trouble. I doubt Magnus would play it today.

13... ♗b7 14.♖c1 a6

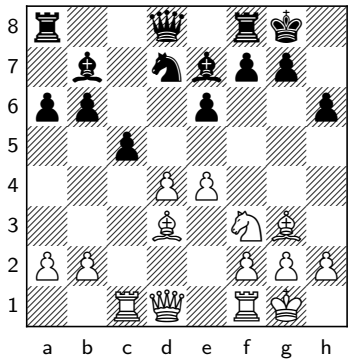


Black prepares ...b5. So far, the game has been unexceptional, with Black equalizing fairly easily. With

15.b4?

, Magnus decided to rock the boat. What was White's intention behind this move, and how should Black proceed?

Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #1



15.b4!?

Before this move, the game had been unexceptional, with Black equalizing fairly easily. With his last move, Magnus decided to rock the boat. What was White's intention behind this move, and how should Black proceed?

15... cxb4!

In my opinion, this is the best reply in human terms. The computer is fairly agnostic and even gives a slight preference for taking on d4 instead, but I like grabbing the pawn, and I find that White's best continuation afterwards is entirely inhuman. Magnus did not even play the first move correctly! □ After □ The following natural human approach was suggested by some of the folks in the KCT session:

15... cxd4 , the game could continue: 16.♖c7 ♖b8 17.♖c4 ♖c8 18.♖xd4 ♕e8 with equality.

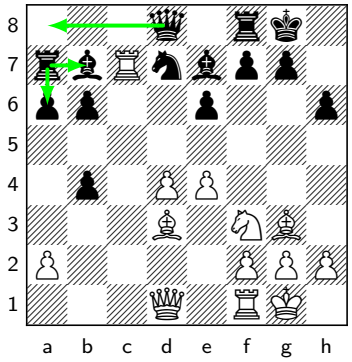
15... ♖c8? Black wants to play ...cxb4 only after the c7-square has been protected. This makes sense abstractly, but it has a concrete defect. A white major piece can come to the b-file, attacking the b7-bishop after an exchange of pawns. Then, if the bishop moves, the a6-pawn is hanging. And when White gets to play Bxa6, the rook will be hanging on c8. More details (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

16.♖c7!

The more challenging continuation. Black has two candidate moves. Both of them leave Black slightly in a tangle, but one is preferable. Which would you choose?

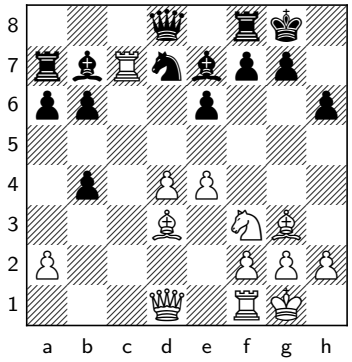
16.♗c7? was Magnus's choice in the game, but Topalov managed to untangle his pieces. ♕e8 17.♕e2 Black is a pawn up, but in a passive position. How should he go about converting the extra pawn? We'll come back to this position later.

16... ♖a7!



16... ♖b8 is also possible, but I prefer the rook on a7. It defends the a6-pawn and enables the queen to come to a8. Let's see a couple of white tries.

Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #2



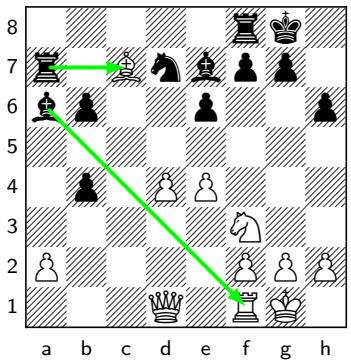
17.♗xa6

This is not a problem for Black. Can you find the refutation? The first rule of calculation is examining all checks and captures. If you want further evidence that this is the case, check out my course (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) Shankland's Chess Calculation Workbook and see how many of the positions you can solve using this principle alone!

17... ♕xc7!

Black gets rid of White's best piece and kills all his activity.

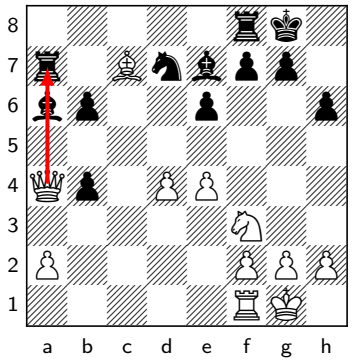
18.♗xc7 ♗xa6



The computer also mentions the incredible

18... ♗xe4? when the verdict is of course 0.00!

19.♕a4!



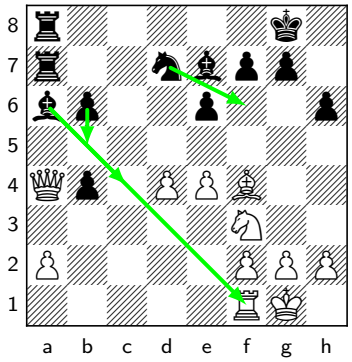
Without this, White would be entirely busted.

19.♗g3 ♗xf1 followed by ...Rxa2 is not something White wants to see.

19... ♖c8 20.♗f4

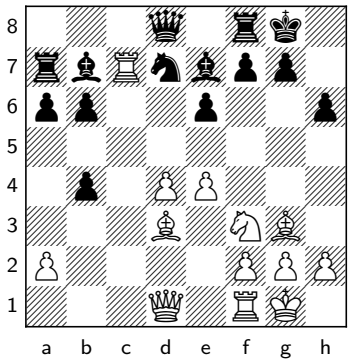
20.♕xd7 loses after ♖axc7 followed by ...Bxf1.

20... ♖ca8!



White has a lot of problems to solve despite the extra queen. The rook is hit, and once it moves, ...Nf6 and ...Bd3 are coming, or ...Bc4 followed by ...b5 anchoring the bishop. White has weak pawns on both a2 and e4. If a2 falls, the b4-pawn will become a monster. The machine just barely holds this together, but I would expect a human to go down hard.

Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #3

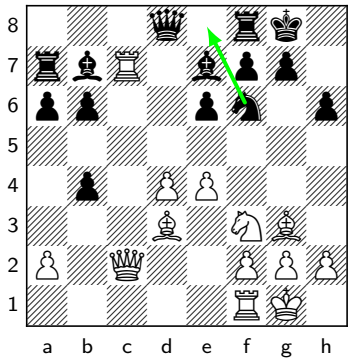


17.♕c2

Instead of capturing the pawn on a6, the engine gives a strange move. It makes sense if you peel back the layers, but I can't really imagine a human playing This feels like the human move to me, but it is not too inspiring. How should Black proceed?

17.♕c1 . Why wouldn't the queen go to c2 instead? There is a concrete reason: ♘f6N 18.♘e5N The threat is Nc6. Black should be careful, but he is still fine. a5 Black makes sure to keep all his pawns defended and prepares ...Bd6. 19.♘c6N What else? ♗xc6 20.♖xa7 ♗xe4 I don't see Black ever losing this position. Time to return to the human realm.

17... ♘f6

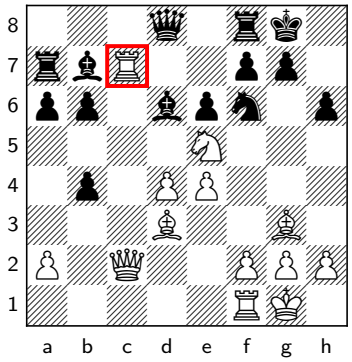


Black's main idea is to untangle with ...Ne8 next.

18.♘e5

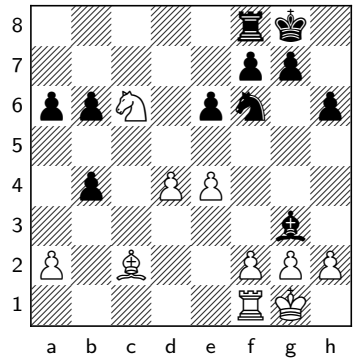
This feels like the way to try to punish Black.

18... ♗d6!



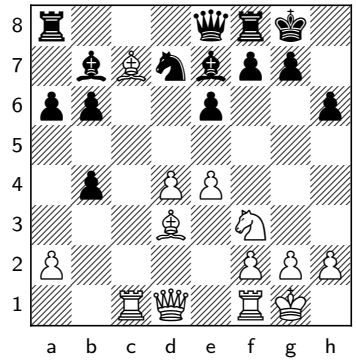
This works like a charm here, but not with the queen on c1. 18. Ne5 18...Bd6? Black finds himself in trouble: 19.Rxb7! Rxb7 20.Nc6 Rc7 21.Nxd8! And here we see the point. Because White's queen is on c1, rather than c2, when Black captures it, White brings the rook to the open file. 21...Rxc1 22.Rxc1 Bxg3 23.Nc6 A rook on c1 is more active than a bishop on c2, and White is much better.

19.♖xb7 ♖xb7 20.♘c6 ♖c7 21.♘xd8N ♖xc2 22.♗xc2 ♗xg3 23.♘c6N



After a long string of precise moves, the position fizzles down to equality.

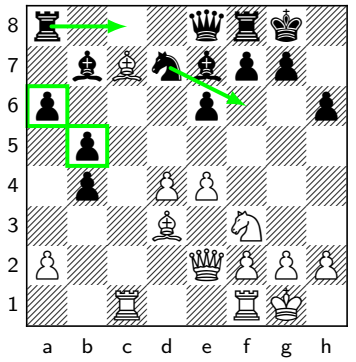
Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #4



17.♕e2

Black is a pawn up, but in a passive position. How should he go about converting the extra pawn? Step one is stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. In this case, Black's position is stable but passive, and his pieces are stuck. So, in this case, stabilizing the position equates to the need to get his pieces into the game and reach decent coordination. What should he play?

17... b5!



In order to untangle his pieces, there are a couple of moves that spring to mind. Firstly, Secondly,

17... ♘f6N to put pressure on the e4-pawn, and perhaps following it up by ...Qa4 and ...Rfc8.

17... ♖c8 to contest the open c-file. If the bishop moves, Black can exchange rooks on c1, put his queen on a8, and the other rook on c8. This would exchange off Black's passive pieces and simplify into a pawn-up endgame. Both of these ideas fail due to loose pawns on b6 and a6, respectively. The text move prepares both of the ideas above by protecting the b \- and a-pawns. It is not a perfect solution, as after ...Nf6, Black can no longer play ...Qa4 due to the pawn being on b5. If the queen goes to d7 instead, it can be hit by the knight coming to e5. Still, it is definitely the best try, and ...Nf6 and ...Rc8 will come soon enough.

18.♗a5 ♖c8!

This is the natural move, immediately contesting the c-file. It looks like it allows White to take back the pawn on b4 by playing Qb2, but

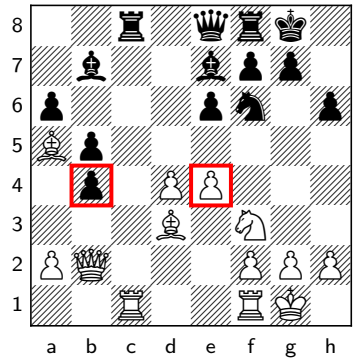
we have to ask: what happens if I do it anyway? Topalov came up with the right answer.

18... ♘b8N is a creative idea that was suggested in the KCT session, but White's activity is too dangerous for my liking: 19.♖c7 ♘c6N 20.♗b6 ♖b8 21.d5 ♘d8N Apart from Black's last move being far from obvious, I don't like how much White's pieces have been activated in general.

19.♕b2

If White is allowed to comfortably take on b4, the position would simply be equal.

19... ♘f6!



This highlights the drawback of the queen leaving e2 by attacking the loosened pawn on e4. White is not able to defend it in a satisfactory way. Also slightly better for Black is

19... ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 ♕a8 , highlighting the same issue.

20.♘d2

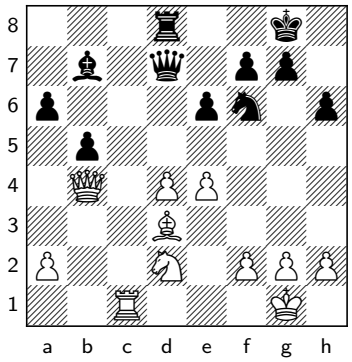
The most secure way to protect e4, but then Black can target d4 instead. After White would like to play In the game, White tried

20.e5? ♘d5N , the game is over. Black has consolidated his extra pawn and activated his pieces. He can play ...Rc3, ...Qa8 and ...Rfc8. White's a5-bishop is out of the game.

20.♖fe1 , but this is hit by ♖xc1 and White cannot take back with the rook.

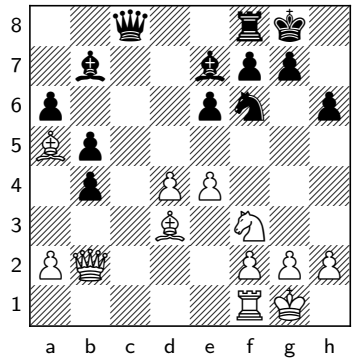
20.♖xc8 ♕xc8 21.♘d2?N This might look fine at first, but there is a tactical refutation.

20... ♕d7! 21.♗xb4 ♗xb4 22.♕xb4 ♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♖d8

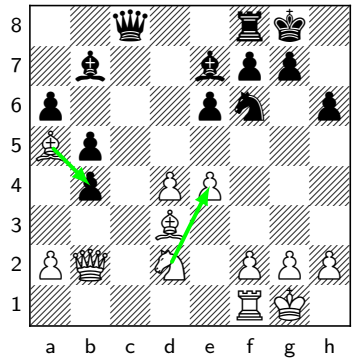


There is no way to keep both e4 and d4 alive.

Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #5

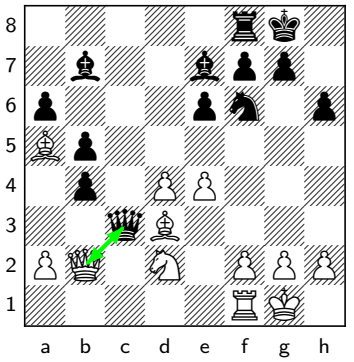


21.♘d2?



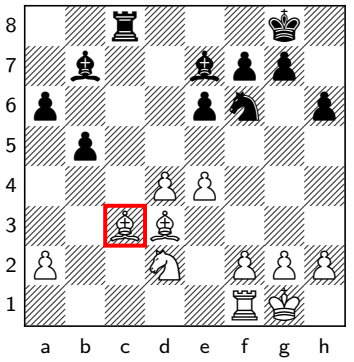
This might look fine at first, but there is a tactical refutation. Black now needs to think about the other steps in converting an extra pawn. Which exchanges favor him, how can the pieces be improved, and so on. White will not be worse if he can take the b4-pawn, particularly if he gets Rc1 in first.

21... ♕c3!



This was well calculated. Black temporarily gives up his extra pawn, but he will win it back later, and under favorable circumstances. The b4-pawn was hard to defend, and Black will instead end up with a more solid extra pawn.

22.♕xc3 bxc3 23.♗xc3 ♖c8!



Things are much worse than appearances might suggest. There is no way for White to hold it together.

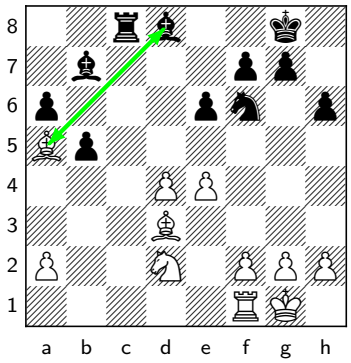
24.♗a5

The only option to stop the black bishop from reaching b4. Black needs to strike while the iron is hot. One quiet move and the advantage would evaporate. Similarly,

24.♖c1? ♗b4 ends the game by winning material.

24.♗b2 is met with ♗b4 , when Black hits the knight and wins the e4-pawn.

24... ♗d8!



White is unable to avoid losing a pawn. Topalov calculated excellently and worked out which exchanges of pieces and pawns were in his favor. He untangled his position and traded his weak b4-pawn for one of the white central pawns. After

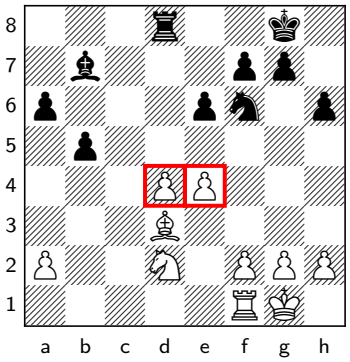
24... b4? 25.f3 ♖c3 26.♗b1 , White is able to untangle with Bb1 and Rc1. The position is objectively equal, but I would be worried here as Black. The b4-pawn could become a long- term weakness. The c5-square is weak, and the b7-bishop is bad.

25.♗xd8

White also loses the pawn after

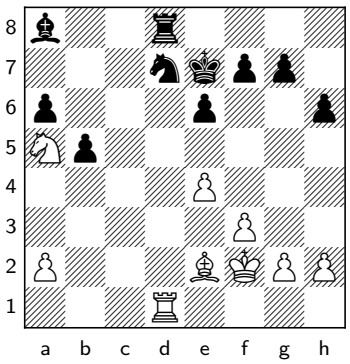
25.♗b4 ♗b6

25... ♖xd8

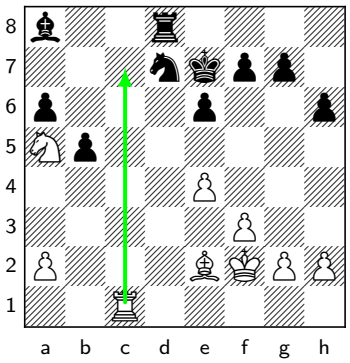


The d4-pawn cannot be protected, as moving the knight will allow Black to take on e4 instead, which would be even worse.

Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #6

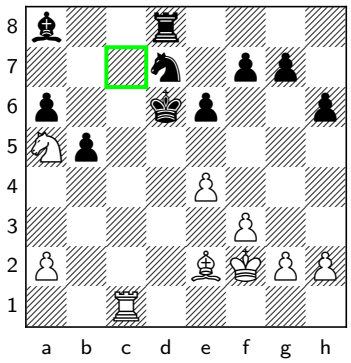


32.♖c1



White tries to take advantage of the open file. How should Black respond?

32... ♔d6!



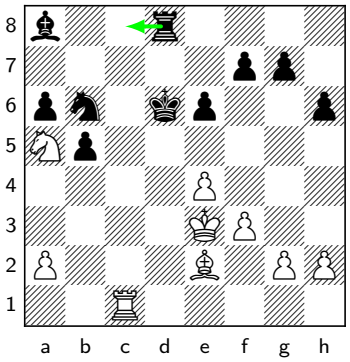
This stops the rook from coming to c7.

33.♔e3

After

33.♖d1† ♔c7 , the black king makes it to b6 to remove the annoying white knight. The black queenside pawns are currently fixed on the light squares, and even if one of them could advance, that would weaken the neighboring pawn. Moving the king to the queenside protects the pawn mass and enables it to be set in motion safely. Then, the bishop can relocate itself to the f1-a6 diagonal, where it will be much more effective than it is on a8. For example: 34.♔e3 ♔b6 35.♘b3N ♗c6 Black is ready for ...a5 and ...b4. White is done for.

33... ♘b6!



Back to basics. When you are ahead on material, you want to trade pieces, not pawns. When you are behind on material, you want to trade pawns, not pieces. This principle is covered in depth elsewhere, for example in Chapter 5 of Jacob Aagaard's A Matter of Endgame Technique. Another issue for Black is that his pieces have not been activated. His rook in particular is underutilized. Topalov's last move allows his rook to come to the open c-file, which is a much better spot than the d-file. If White does not acquiesce to the rook trade, Black's rook might run rampant.

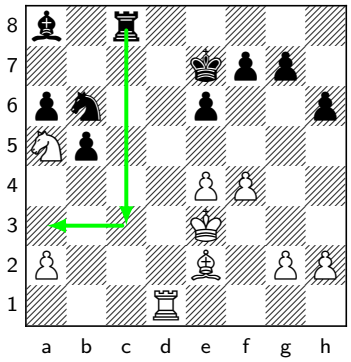
34.f4 ♖c8!

Black would win easily if White retreated his rook.

35.♖d1†

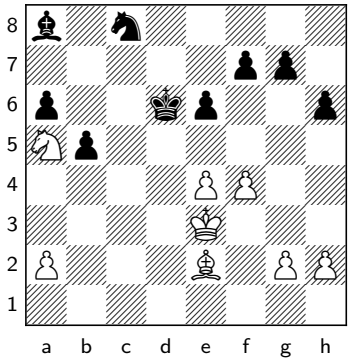
35.♖xc8 ♘xc8N 36.♔d4 was the game continuation.

35... ♔e7



For example, the rook coming to c3 then a3 looks rather convincing.

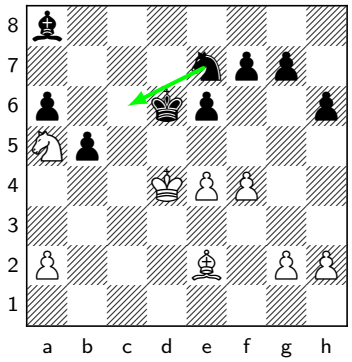
Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #7



36.♔d4

The white king restricts its black counterpart. White wants to gain space with a well-timed e4-e5. How should Black proceed?

36... ♘e7!



Black angles for ...Nc6+ to trade yet more pieces. The natural attempt by White to gain space is not effective:

37.e5†

37.♗f3 Instead, with the game move, White prepares e4-e5+. How should Black meet this? That's our next exercise.

37... ♔c7

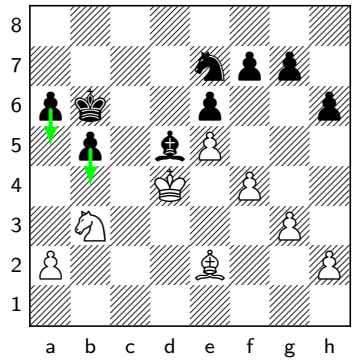
If White could simultaneously play g2-g3 and Kc5, he would have excellent holding chances thanks to his blockade on the dark squares. As is, he has to either allow Black's king to reach b6, or drop another pawn on g2.

38.g3

Or

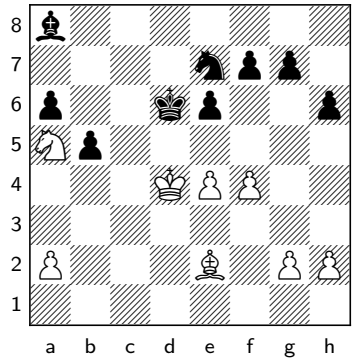
38.♔c5 ♗xg2−+

38... ♔b6 39.♘b3 ♗d5



Black got everything he wanted, and now he can push his queenside pawns.

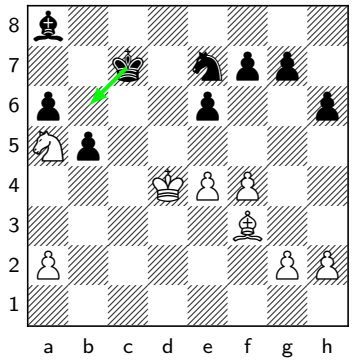
Carlsen-Topalov Exercise #8



37.♗f3

White prepares e4-e5+. How should Black meet this?

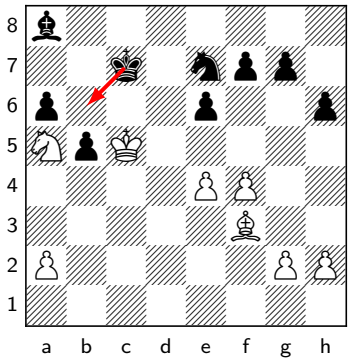
37... ♔c7!



A sensible choice. The king is aiming for b6. Black could also win by trading knights directly, but I find Topalov's choice to be more idiot-proof. And making things idiot-proof is important even for the best players in the world!

37... ♘c6†N 38.♘xc6N ♗xc6 39.♗d1? White is ready for g2-g3 next, with e4-e5+ to follow. The king would then come to c5, and it would be a draw. Black only has one winning move. f6 Black threatens ...e6-e5+, followed by getting his own king to c5, so White's reply is forced. 40.e5† fxe5† 41.fxe5† ♔c7 White does not have time to invade with his king, thanks to the threat to the g2-pawn. 42.g3 ♗d5 43.a3 ♔c6 Black wins with ...a5 coming next. This line isn't trivial, so Topalov made the right choice in keeping things simple.

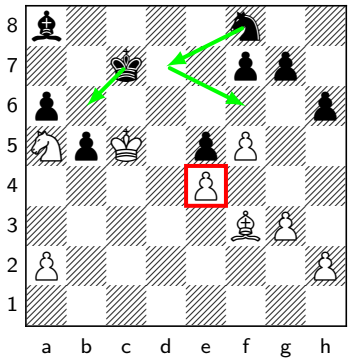
38.♔c5



This does a good job of containing Black's queenside pawns, but White's kingside is now lacking support. Black can take advantage of this. Magnus went for

38.♘b3N ♔b6 39.♔e5 White tries to enter the black camp via d6. Otherwise ...Nc6+ and ...a5 would clearly have meant that the game is over, as White's pieces would have been beaten backwards, and Black's pawns would have mobilized. But the text is no better, as Black can grab a second pawn.

38... ♘g6 39.g3 e5 40.f5 ♘f8

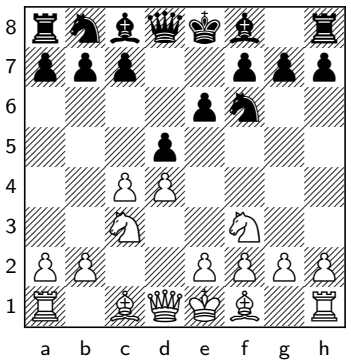


The knight is coming to f6 via d7 where it will target the e4-pawn, the king is coming to b6, and the queenside pawns are advancing. With threats on both sides of the board, Black is convincingly winning.

Magnus Carlsen-Veselin Topalov, Bilbao 2008

The next game is from 2008. Carlsen was only 17 at the time but already had a FIDE rating of 2775! Topalov at the time was equally strong, or perhaps even a little stronger.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3



If White tries to play a Carlsbad with

4.cxd5 exd5 5.♘c3N there are a couple of issues for him. The knight is on f3, whereas after Bd3, it is often best placed on e2. More importantly, Black can get his bishop to f5 before the white bishop gets to d3, as a tempo has been spent on Nf3. Black is, therefore, able to equalize relatively easily, despite the line experiencing a bit of a renaissance lately.

4... ♗e7

This line of the Queen's Gambit Declined has always been a staple of top-level chess. Currently, it is much less popular than the Ragozin and Semi-Slav. I am not sure why, as

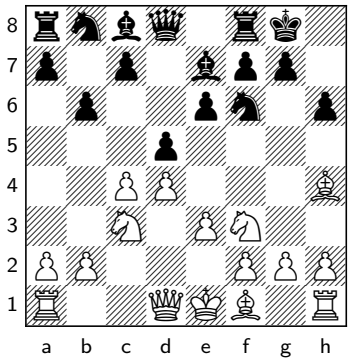
4... ♗e7 remains fully sound for Black.

5.♗g5

According to modern theory,

5.♗f4 gives Black more issues to solve. This is the move I recommend in my 1.d4 LTR. (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) The white dark-squared bishop being on the h4-d8 diagonal makes it easier for Black to defend by exchanging pieces with ...Ne4.

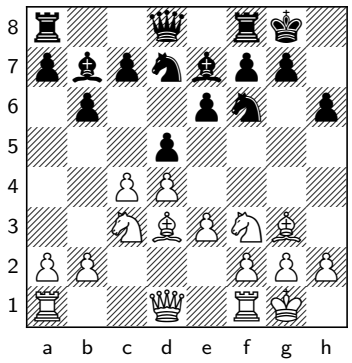
5... h6 6.♗h4 O-O 7.e3 b6



The Tartakower Variation. With the bishop on f4, I am not a fan of Black's structure after c4xd5 and ...Nxd5. However, with the bishop on g5/h4, and following the exchange of bishops on e7, Black's development has been accelerated, and his position is fine. The Lasker Variation with

7... ♘e4N is also fine for Black. The exchange of bishops brings his queen to e7, which will make it easier for him to play ...c5 later.

8.♗d3 ♗b7 9.O-O ♘bd7 10.♗g3



An admission that the bishop went to the wrong diagonal in the first place. Topalov has comfortably equalized. After

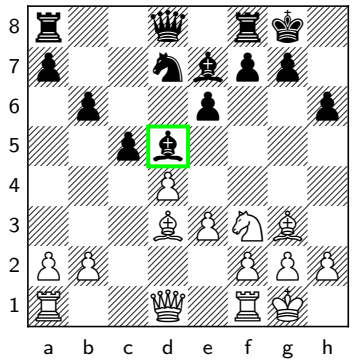
10.cxd5 ♘xd5N 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♘xd5N ♗xd5 , Black will equalize if he gets ...c5 in. The bishop exchange has enabled Black's queen to move off the d-file. In the version with bishops on f4 and e7, White is able to make the ...c5 break harder to achieve by moving his queen to c2 and putting a rook on d1.

10... c5

The logical and direct break in the center. White is able to play a bit after

10... ♘h5N due to the poor b7-bishop after the exchange on d5. A sample line that was discussed in a KCT session went: 11.cxd5 ♘xg3N 12.hxg3 exd5 13.♖c1 c5 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.e4 ♘b6N 16.exd5 ♘xd5N 17.♘xd5N ♕xd5 18.♗c4 ♕f5 Black is basically fine.

11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5



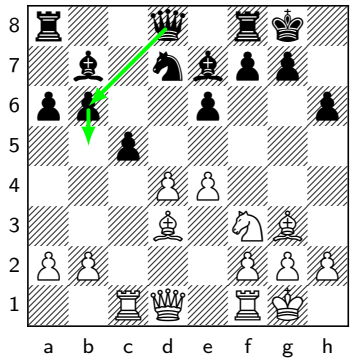
Clearly not

12... exd5 . If you were able to talk to the bishop on b7, he would be furious. This is particularly awkward with the dark-squared bishops still present, and the black queen struggling to find a nice square.

13.e4

This loosens White's control over the center a little and strikes me as asking for trouble. I doubt Magnus would play it today.

13... ♗b7 14.♖c1 a6



Black prepares ...b5.

15.b4!?

Before this move, the game had been unexceptional, with Black equalizing fairly easily. With his last move, Magnus decided to rock the boat. What was White's intention behind this move, and how should Black proceed?

15... cxb4!

In my opinion, this is the best reply in human terms. The computer is fairly agnostic and even gives a slight preference for taking on d4 instead, but I like grabbing the pawn, and I find that White's best continuation afterwards is entirely inhuman. Magnus did not even play the first move correctly! □ After □ The following natural human approach was suggested by some of the folks in the KCT session:

15... cxd4 , the game could continue: 16.♖c7 ♖b8 17.♖c4 ♖c8 18.♖xd4 ♕e8 with equality.

15... ♖c8? Black wants to play ...cxb4 only after the c7-square has been protected. This makes sense abstractly, but it has a concrete defect. A white major piece can come to the b-file, attacking the b7-bishop after an exchange of pawns. Then, if the bishop moves, the a6-pawn is hanging. And when White gets to play Bxa6, the rook will be hanging on c8: 16.bxc5 bxc5 After 17.♖b1 , the engine finds that Black obtains sufficient compensation by sacrificing the exchange with ♗a8 18.♗xa6 ♗xe4 19.♗xc8 ♕xc8 20.♖c1 c4 , but after 17... bxc5 17.Qb3! Bc6 18.d5! , Black's bishop has run out of squares. Not as convincing for White is: 18.Bxa6? Ra8 19.Bd3 Ba4!

White is a bit uncoordinated, and his extra pawn is less than fantastic.

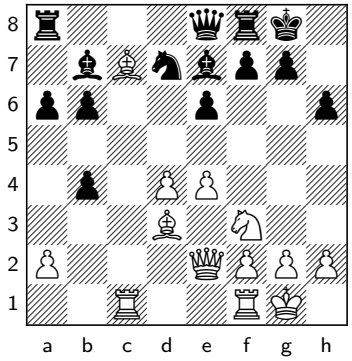
16.♗c7?!

The more challenging continuation for Black was: B) 16\. Bc7 17.Bxa6 is not a problem for Black. Can you find the refutation? The first rule of calculation is examining all checks and captures. If you want further evidence that this is the case, check out my course (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) Shankland's Chess Calculation Workbook and see how many of the positions you can solve using this principle alone! 17...Qxc7! Black gets rid of White's best piece and kills all his activity. 18.Bxc7 The computer mentions the incredible 18...Bxe4!? when the verdict is of course 0.00! 18...Bxa6 19.Qa4! Without this, White would be entirely busted. 19...Rc8 and now 20.Qxd7 loses after 20...Raxc7 followed by ...Bxf1, while if 20.Bf4 Rca8! , White has a lot of problems to solve despite the extra queen. The rook is hit, and once it moves, ...Nf6 and ...Bd3 are coming. White has weak pawns on both a2 and e4. If a2 falls, the b4-pawn will become a monster. The machine just barely holds this together, but I would expect a human to go down hard. C) Instead of capturing the pawn on a6, the engine gives a strange move. It makes sense if you peel back the layers, but I can't really imagine a human playing 16. Bc7 17.Qc1! . Why wouldn't the queen go to c2 instead? There is a concrete reason: 17...Nf6 18.Ne5! The threat is Nc6. Black should be careful, but he is still fine. 18...a5! Black makes sure to keep all his pawns defended and prepares ...Bd6. 19.Nc6 What else? 19...Bxc6 20.Rxa7 Bxe4 I don't see Black ever losing this position. However, the immediate 16. Bc7 18...Bd6? doesn't work. With the queen on c2, it would work like a charm. As is, Black finds himself in trouble: 19.Rxb7! Rxb7 20.Nc6 Rc7 21.Nxd8! And here we see the point. Because White's queen is on c1, rather than c2, when Black captures it, White brings the rook to the open file. 21...Rxc1 22.Rxc1 Bxg3 23.Nc6 A rook on c1 is more active than a bishop on c2, and White is much better.

16.♖c7 Black has two candidate moves. Both of them leave Black slightly in a tangle, but one is preferable. Which would you choose? ♖b8 is also possible, but I prefer the rook on a7. It defends the a6-pawn and enables the queen to come to a8.

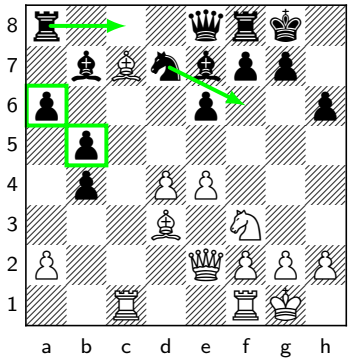
16...♖a7 and now: – A) 17.♕c2 This feels like the human move to me, but it is not too inspiring. Time to return to the human realm. ♘f6N Black's main idea is to untangle with ...Ne8 next. 18.♘e5N ♗d6 19.♖xb7 ♖xb7 20.♘c6N ♖c7 21.♘xd8N ♖xc2 22.♗xc2 ♗xg3 23.♘c6N After a long string of precise moves, the position fizzles down to equality.

16...♕e8 17.♕e2



Black is a pawn up, but in a passive position. How should he go about converting the extra pawn? Step one is stabilizing the position and avoiding counterplay. In this case, Black's position is stable but passive, and his pieces are stuck. So, in this case, stabilizing the position equates to the need to get his pieces into the game and reach decent coordination. What should he play? In order to untangle his pieces, there are a couple of moves that spring to mind. Firstly, ...Nf6 to put pressure on the e4-pawn, and perhaps following it up by ...Qa4 and ...Rfc8. Secondly, ...Rac8 to contest the open c-file. If the bishop moves, Black can exchange rooks on c1, put his queen on a8, and the other rook on c8. This would exchange off Black's passive pieces and simplify into a pawn-up endgame. Both of these ideas fail due to loose pawns on b6 and a6, respectively.

17... b5!



The text move prepares both of the ideas above by protecting the b \- and a-pawns. It is not a perfect solution, as after ...Nf6, Black can no longer play ...Qa4 due to the pawn being on b5. If the queen goes to d7 instead, it can be hit by the knight coming to e5. Still, it is definitely the best try, and ...Nf6 and ...Rc8 will come soon enough.

18.♗a5 ♖c8!

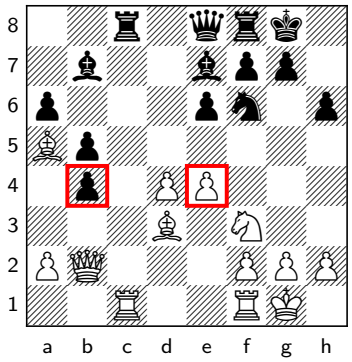
This is the natural move, immediately contesting the c-file. It looks like it allows White to take back the pawn on b4 by playing Qb2, but we have to ask: what happens if I do it anyway? Topalov came up with the right answer.

18... ♘b8N is a creative idea that was suggested in the KCT session, but White's activity is too dangerous for my liking: 19.♖c7 ♘c6N 20.♗b6 ♖b8 21.d5 ♘d8N Apart from Black's last move being far from obvious, I don't like how much White's pieces have been activated in general.

19.♕b2

If White is allowed to comfortably take on b4, the position would simply be equal.

19... ♘f6!



This highlights the drawback of the queen leaving e2 by attacking the loosened pawn on e4. White is not able to defend it in a satisfactory way. Also slightly better for Black is

19... ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 ♕a8 , highlighting the same issue.

20.♖xc8

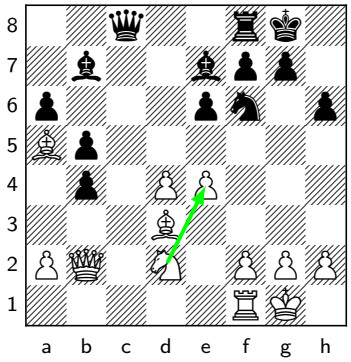
□ After □ White would like to play □ The most secure way to protect e4 is

20.e5? ♘d5N , the game is over. Black has consolidated his extra pawn and activated his pieces. He can play ...Rc3, ...Qa8 and ...Rfc8. White's a5-bishop is out of the game.

20.♖fe1 , but this is hit by ♖xc1 and White cannot take back with the rook.

20.♘d2N , but then Black can target d4 instead: ♕d7 21.♗xb4 ♗xb4 22.♕xb4 ♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♖d8 There is no way to keep both e4 and d4 alive.

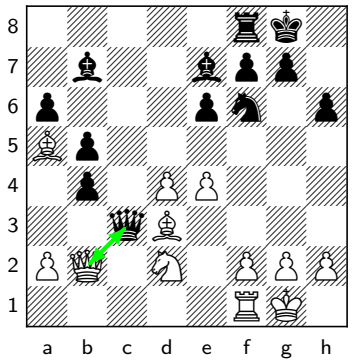
20... ♕xc8 21.♘d2?



This might look fine at first, but there is a tactical refutation. Black now needs to think about the other steps in converting an extra pawn. Which exchanges favor him, how can the pieces be improved, and so on. White will not be worse if he can take the b4-pawn, particularly if he gets Rc1 in first.

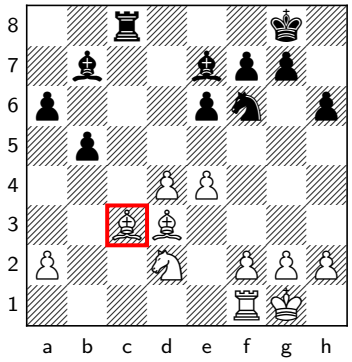
21.♖e1 was forced, but Carlsen likely wanted to use his rook to challenge the c-file.

21... ♕c3!



This was well calculated. Black temporarily gives up his extra pawn, but he will win it back later, and under favorable circumstances. The b4-pawn was hard to defend, and Black will instead end up with a more solid extra pawn.

22.♕xc3 bxc3 23.♗xc3 ♖c8!



Things are much worse than appearances might suggest. There is no way for White to hold it together.

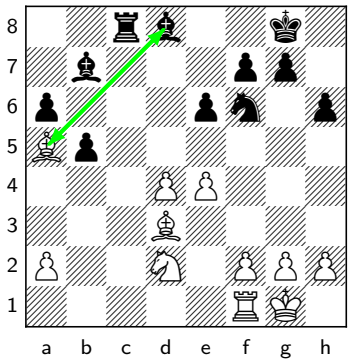
24.♗a5

The only option to stop the black bishop from reaching b4. Black needs to strike while the iron is hot. One quiet move and the advantage would evaporate. □ □ Similarly,

24.♖c1? ♗b4 ends the game by winning material.

24.♗b2 is met with ♗b4 , when Black hits the knight and wins the e4-pawn.

24... ♗d8!



White is unable to avoid losing a pawn. Topalov calculated excellently and worked out which exchanges of pieces and pawns were in his favor. He untangled his position and traded his weak b4-pawn for one of the white central pawns. After

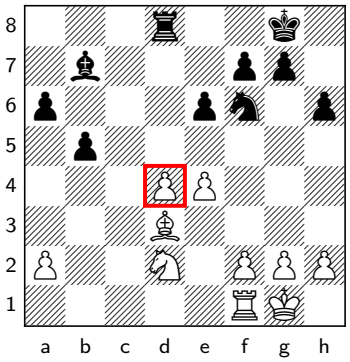
24... b4? 25.f3 ♖c3 26.♗b1 , White is able to untangle with Bb1 and Rc1. The position is objectively equal, but I would be worried here as Black. The b4-pawn could become a long- term weakness. The c5-square is weak, and the b7-bishop is bad.

25.♗xd8

White also loses the pawn after

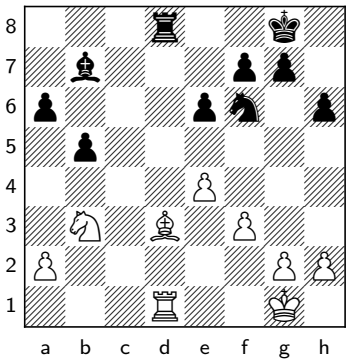
25.♗b4 ♗b6

25... ♖xd8



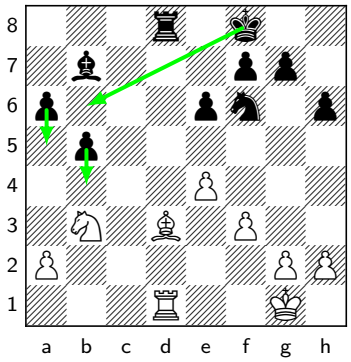
The d4-pawn cannot be protected, as moving the knight will allow Black to take on e4 instead, which would be even worse.

26.♖d1 ♖xd4 27.♘b3 ♖d8 28.f3



Black has stabilized the position with an extra pawn, but there is still some work to do to bring home the full point. Black is not worried about direct counterplay, but his bishop is bad. He needs a plan to activate his pieces to make use of his extra pawn.

28... ♔f8



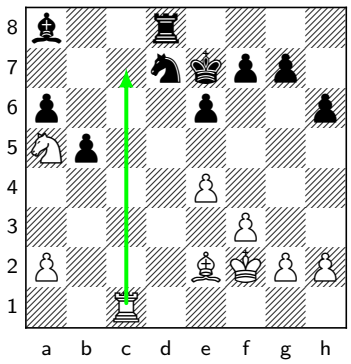
Which exchanges would Black be happy to see in this position? The answer is that he is happy with any exchange, but it is not easy for him to force them. The first step is for Black to get his king to the center to protect his rook. This enables him to play ...Nd7 without self-pinning, followed by ...Ne5, attempting to force a trade of rooks. If allowed, the king will go to b6 and support the advance of the queenside majority, which Black would love to have on dark squares. Not

28... ♘d7?N 29.♗e2 , when Black cannot easily break the pin.

29.♔f2 ♘d7 30.♗e2

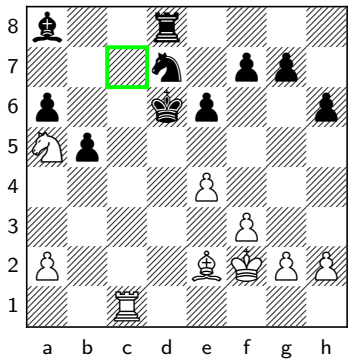
Not allowing the exchange of rooks.

30... ♔e7 31.♘a5 ♗a8 32.♖c1



White tries to take advantage of the open file. How should Black respond?

32... ♔d6!



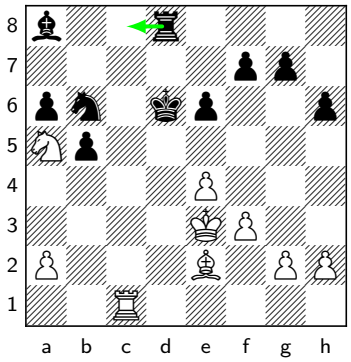
This stops the rook from coming to c7.

33.♔e3

After

33.♖d1† ♔c7 , the black king makes it to b6 to remove the annoying white knight. The black queenside pawns are currently fixed on the light squares, and even if one of them could advance, that would weaken the neighboring pawn. Moving the king to the queenside protects the pawn mass and enables it to be set in motion safely. Then, the bishop can relocate itself to the f1-a6 diagonal, where it will be much more effective than it is on a8. For example: 34.♔e3 ♔b6 35.♘b3N ♗c6 Black is ready for ...a5 and ...b4. White is done for.

33... ♘b6!



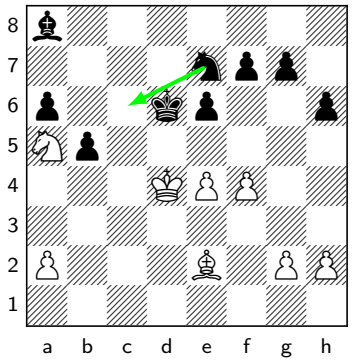
Back to basics. When you are ahead on material, you want to trade pieces, not pawns. When you are behind on material, you want to trade pawns, not pieces. This principle is covered in depth elsewhere, for example in Chapter 5 of Jacob Aagaard's A Matter of Endgame Technique. Another issue for Black is that his pieces have not been activated. His rook in particular is underutilized. Topalov's last move allows his rook to come to the open c-file, which is a much better spot than the d-file. If White does not acquiesce to the rook trade, Black's rook might run rampant.

34.f4 ♖c8! 35.♖xc8

Black would also win easily after

35.♖d1† ♔e7 . For example, the rook coming to c3 then a3 looks rather convincing.

35... ♘xc8 36.♔d4 ♘e7!



Black angles for ...Nc6+ to trade yet more pieces.

37.♗f3

Instead, with the game move, White prepares e4-e5+. How should Black meet this? The natural attempt by White to gain space is not effective:

37.e5† ♔c7 If White could simultaneously play g2-g3 and Kc5, he would have excellent holding chances thanks to his blockade on the dark squares. As is, he has to either allow Black's king to reach b6, or drop another pawn on g2. 38.♔c5

38.g3 ♔b6 39.♘b3N ♗d5

38... ♗xg2 or

37... ♔c7!

A sensible choice. The king is aiming for b6. Black could also win by trading knights directly, but I find Topalov's choice to be more idiot-proof. And making things idiot-proof is important even for the best players in the world!

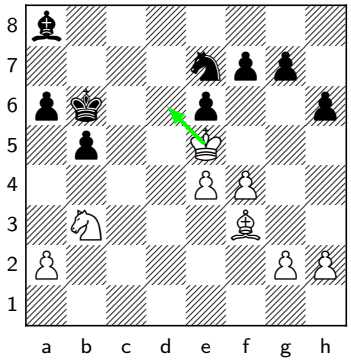
37... ♘c6†N 38.♘xc6N ♗xc6 39.♗d1? White is ready for g2-g3 next, with e4-e5+ to follow. The king would then come to

c5, and it would be a draw. Black only has one winning move. After f6 Black threatens ...e6-e5+, followed by getting his own king to c5, so White's reply is forced. 40.e5† fxe5† 41.fxe5† ♔c7 White does not have time to invade with his king, thanks to the threat to the g2-pawn. 42.g3 ♗d5 It was not too late to blunder the win away, as 43.a3 ♔c6 Black wins with ...a6-a5 coming next. This line isn't trivial, so Topalov made the right choice in keeping things simple.

38.♘b3

38.♔c5 does a good job of containing Black's queenside pawns, but White's king-side is now lacking support. Black can take advantage of this with: ♘g6N 39.g3 e5 40.f5 ♘f8N The knight is coming to f6 via d7 where it will target the e4-pawn, the king is coming to b6, and the queenside pawns are advancing. With threats on both sides of the board, Black is convincingly winning.

38... ♔b6! 39.♔e5

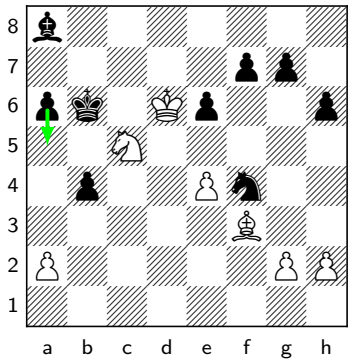


White tries to enter the black camp via d6. Otherwise ...Nc6+ and ...a5 would clearly have meant that the game is over, as White's pieces would have been beaten backwards, and Black's pawns would have mobilized. But the text is no better, as Black can grab a second pawn.

39... ♘g6†! 40.♔d6 ♘xf4 41.♘c5

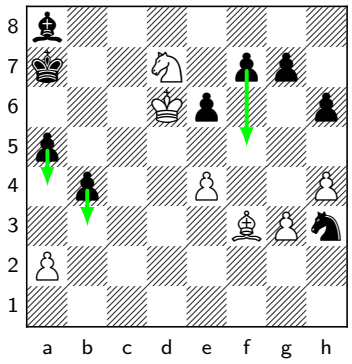
41.♔e7 f5 wins.

41... b4



White is clearly going down, and the rest of the moves don't require any comment.

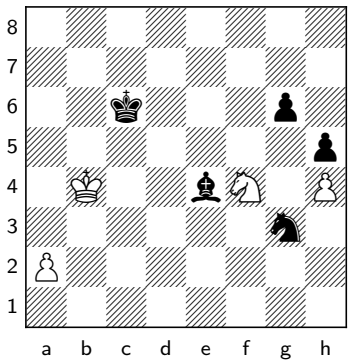
42.h4 a5 43.g3 ♘h3 44.♘d7† ♔a7



White can't stop all the black pawns.

44... ♔b5? Don't be that guy! 45.♗e2† ♔a4 46.♘b6†N ♔a3 47.♘xa8N ♔xa2 Black may still be winning here, but there's no need to go for this.

45.♔c5 f5 46.♔b5 fxe4 47.♗h5 e3 48.♔xa5 g6 49.♗g4 h5 50.♗e2 ♘g1 51.♗f1 e2 52.♗xe2 ♘xe2 53.♘f8 ♗e4 54.♘xe6 ♘xg3 55.♘f4 ♔b7 56.♔xb4 ♔c6

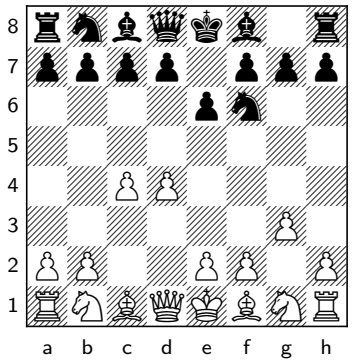


The conversion stage of this game was perhaps less fascinating than some of the other games in this book. But it is nevertheless instructive to examine the decisions Topalov took to bring his advantage home in the simplest way possible. He understood that his extra b-pawn might not be long for this world, but he made sure that it was able to distract White's pieces enough that he could pressure the center and conquer the open c-file. Once he achieved a healthier passed pawn by collecting d4, his plan to eventually mobilize the seemingly stuck queenside pawns was executed flawlessly.

Sam Shankland-Andrei Volokitin Introduction

To close out the book, I'd like to show an extremely painful game for me in which I failed to convert an extra pawn. It's an opportunity for you to learn from my mistakes.

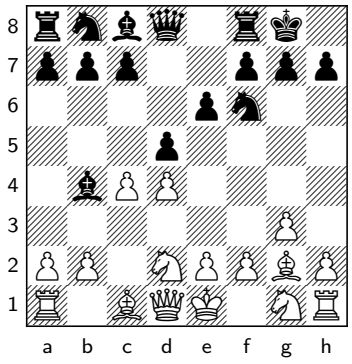
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3



One point of this move order is that after

3.♘f3N d5 4.g3 ♗b4† , blocking the check with the knight entails a pawn sacrifice: 5.♘bd2N dxc4 White does not win a piece with a check on a4.

3... d5 4.♗g2 ♗b4† 5.♘d2 O-O



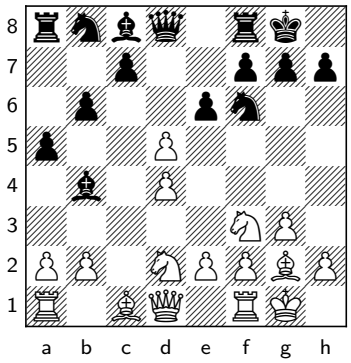
Black now cannot capture on c4 due to White having the bishop on g2 rather than the knight on f3:

5... dxc4? 6.♕a4† ♘c6N 7.♗xc6† and White wins a piece.

6.♘f3 b6

6... dxc4 is possible here though, but this is a more promising version for White. Let's not go any further.

7.O-O a5 8.cxd5



As I mention in my 1.d4 LTR, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) it is often a good idea to go for this capture when Black combines ...d5 with ...b6. □ As far as alternatives go, □ Nothing special for White is □ Finally,

8.b3 makes Black's last move look sensible by allowing a4 . Also, White should leave the b3-square open as a post for his queen.

8.♘e5N ♗b7 .

8.a3 ♗xd2 9.♗xd2 dxc4 10.♘e5N ♖a7 11.♘xc4N ♕xd4 looks okay for Black.

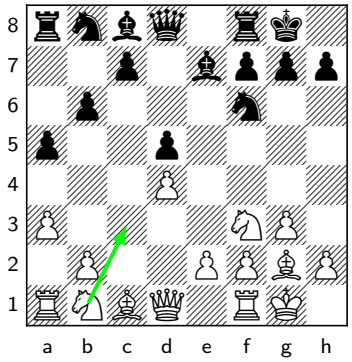
8... exd5

A positional struggle will follow, and White needs to work out where his pieces belong.

9.a3! ♗e7

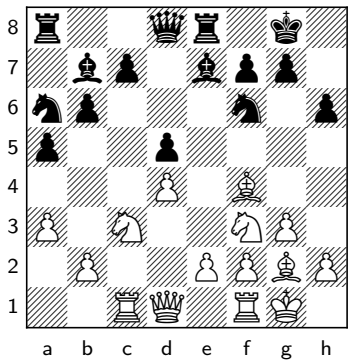
9... ♗d6? is excellently met with 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘g5N , when the bishop turns out to be vulnerable on d6, as a knight is about to appear on e4.

10.♘b1!



A typical regrouping. The knight will be well placed on c3. Including 9.a3! before retreating the knight ensured that the black bishop would end up on the passive e7-square compared to the more active d6.

10... ♗b7 11.♘c3 ♖e8 12.♗f4 h6 13.♖c1 ♘a6?!

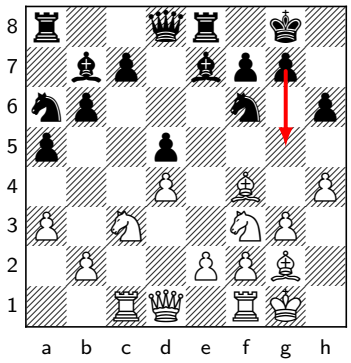


White is better every which way, but I am not fully satisfied with the move I chose.

13... ♘bd7?N made more sense from a positional standpoint, with the knight coming to f8 and e6. But it is concretely impos-

sible, as after 14.♘b5N Black collapses on the c7-square.

14.h4



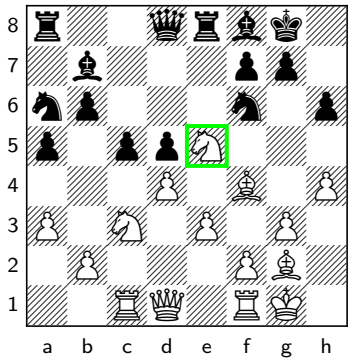
This is prophylaxis against ...g5, but that was not an immediate concern for White. Best was:

14.♕b3 This is prophylaxis against Black's plan of ...c6, ...Nc7 and ...Ne6, as the b6-pawn is under pressure. Moreover, when White plays Ne5, he will threaten e2-e4. In addition, ...c5 is prevented due to Na4. Finally, some ideas of Nb5xc7 followed by Qxb6 are enabled. The queen is fantastically placed on b3. One could try to relieve some of the pressure exerted against the black queenside by going ♗d6 , but after 15.e3 ♗xf4 16.exf4 , the knight is coming to e5 next, and Black's position is on the brink of collapse.

14... ♗f8 15.e3 c5

White is better, even though the queen isn't on b3 and there is no Na4 with pressure against b6. But there's no value in dwelling on the past – let's find a good move for White.

16.♘e5!



The knight is strong and stable on this outpost, and the way is cleared for the bishop to pressure d5.

16.♕b3 walks straight into c4 , when the queen should retreat, as the overoptimistic 17.♕b5? is severely misguided: ♖e6 18.♘e5N ♘c7N 19.♕a4 b5 Black has been gifted several tempos, and White is already in a bit of trouble.

16... cxd4

This is sad, as White's pieces will be far more active in the ensuing symmetrical structure. But

16... c4? is just losing to 17.♘xc4N

17.exd4 ♘c7

I spent about twenty minutes deciding on the best way to continue.

18.♕b3!?

This is quite logical and forcing. From this spot, the queen eyes both d5 and b6, while also putting some X-ray pressure towards f7. I spent some time calculating: B) 18\. Qb3 20...Qd8 loses in similar fashion to 21.Rc7+ Re7 22.Rxb7! C) 18\. Qb3 20...Qxc1! Always examine all checks and captures. This is the only

move, but Black holds his position together, and I was even worried about becoming worse. 21.Qxc1 Nxd5 The computer gives this as equal, but in a practical game, White could easily end up being worse. Black has no weaknesses. He can double his rooks on the d-file and place his bishop on f6, and it is tough for the queen to prove her worth.

18.♘xf7?N This looks terribly tempting, but it has a concrete flaw. ♔xf7 19.♗xc7 ♕xc7 20.♘xd5N The complications are not over, so we should not be eager to stop calculating. – A) ♕b8 loses forcibly to: 21.♖c7† ♖e7 22.♖xb7 Removing the defender of the light squares. ♖xb7 23.♘xf6N when ♔xf6

23... gxf6 24.♗d5† pushes the king into the center. – A1) ♔g7 allows

24... ♔e7 25.♖e1† ♔d8 26.♕f3 ♖aa7 27.♕xf6† ♗e7 28.♕h8† ♔d7 29.♗e6† ♔c6 30.♖c1† Black needs to block the check by ditching his bishop, after which the situation is hopeless. – A3) 24\. Bd5+ 24...Ke8 is trickier: 25.Qh5+ Kd8 26.Bc6! White threatens Qe8+ followed by Qd8#. 26...Re7 27.Qd5+ The rook on a8 drops, and White wins. 26\. Qf3 26...Kc7 27.Rc1 also wins.

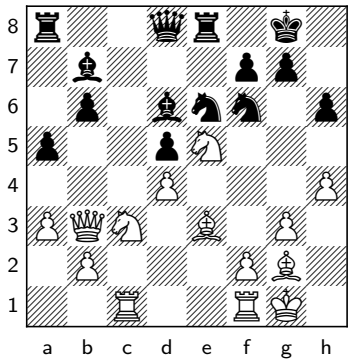
25.♕g4† and mate. – A2)

24.♕f3† wins the rook on b7, and

18... ♘e6 19.♗e3

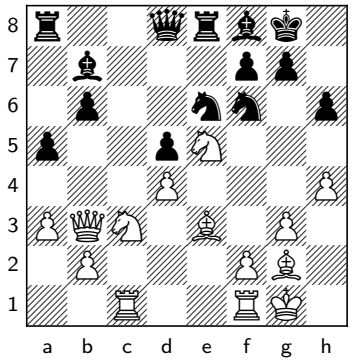
After

19... ♗d6



, the f1-rook is White's last piece that's yet to be developed. Where would you put it?

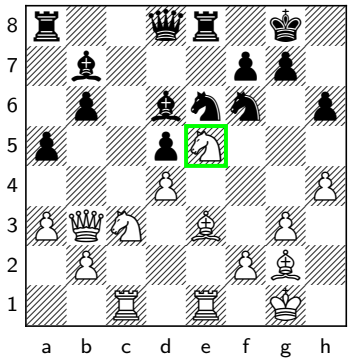
Shankland-Volokitin Exercise #1



19... ♗d6

The f1-rook is White's last piece that's yet to be developed. Where would you put it?

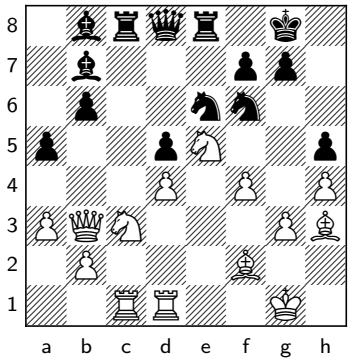
20.♖fe1



This should be preferred, supporting the knight on e5. Luckily, my opponent missed this too, and the game continued 20. Rfe1 20...Rc8? 21.f4 Bb8 22.Bf2 h5 23.Bh3 Ne4? This allows a tactical strike. Let's move on to our next exercise.

20.♖fd1? The result of a tactical oversight. I had completely missed ♘xd4N After 21.♗xd4 ♗xe5 22.♕xb6 , Black is slightly worse, but he's also much closer to saving this game. No matter how quiet the position looks, we need to always examine all checks and captures!

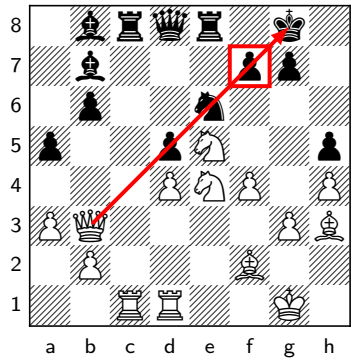
Shankland-Volokitin Exercise #2



23... ♘e4?

This allows a tactical strike. Can you spot it?

24.♘xe4!



Removing the pawn from d5 will help the white queen influence events on the kingside. □ □ But considering different move orders is an important calculation technique. After

24.f5? is hasty and destabilizing, and White completely collapses after ♘xf2N 25.♔xf2 ♘xd4N

24.♘xf7?N , Black has an important intermediate move: ♖xc3 White loses his chance to flick in Nxe4, and Black is already objectively a bit better.

24... ♖xc1

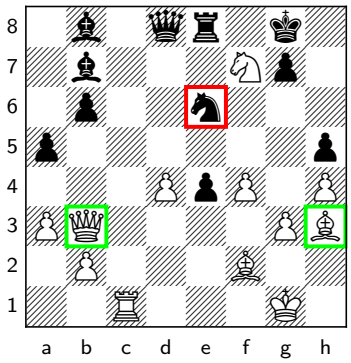
24... dxe4 25.♘xf7N is an even worse version for Black compared to the game since he does not even get to take on d4.

25.♖xc1 dxe4

25... ♗xe5 26.dxe5? is not too bad for White either, but

26.♗xe6 is best. fxe6 27.♘g5N ♗f6 28.♕d1 g6 29.♕d3 ♔g7 30.g4 White crashes through on the kingside. Taking on g5 would bring a disaster on the dark squares, and hxg4 means a disaster on g6 or h7 after 31.h5

26.♘xf7!



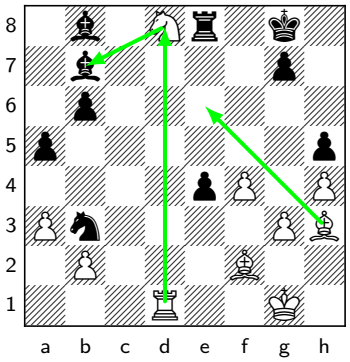
Finally, White gets to underline the big problem with Black's decision to jump with the knight to e4. The pressure against the tender e6- and f7-spots decides.

26... ♘xd4

There is no better way for Black to continue the fight. After

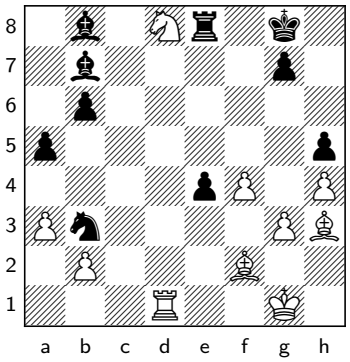
26... ♔xf7? 27.♗xe6† ♖xe6 28.f5 White wins an exchange and the game. But not 27... Kxf7 27.f5? Bd5 and Black is okay.

27.♘xd8† ♘xb3 28.♖d1!



A multi-purpose move. White defends the knight and threatens both Nxb7 and Be6+.

Shankland-Volokitin Exercise #3



28... e3

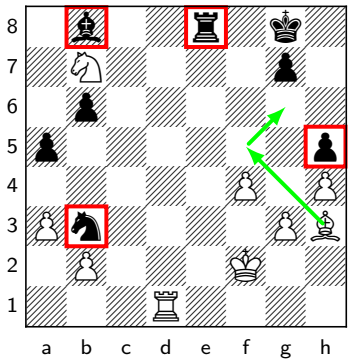
It is at this point that we need to consider the guidelines for converting an extra pawn. In this position, we should not be particularly worried about counterplay. So, the most relevant question becomes: which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in the structure, are favorable?

29.♘xb7!

It was better to allow the opposite-colored bishops.

29.♗e6†? This was the first step in the wrong direction. My hope was to grab the e3-pawn, keeping the same piece assortment and avoiding a possible transition into an opposite-colored-bishop position.

29... exf2† 30.♔xf2



Generally, opposite-colored bishops are supposed to be helpful for the defending side in pawn-down endgames, but here we see a different situation. The h5-pawn is an easy target, and Black's pieces are horribly passive. The rook is stuck in place on the e8-square, as both Rd8+ and Be6+ are moves that could potentially win a piece. The knight is stuck on b3, as going to c5 would allow even more pawn weaknesses. The bishop is terrible on b8, without much scope to improve. White has a straightforward plan to play Bf5-Bg6, and there is not much that Black can do about it.

30... ♔f7

After

30... ♔f8 31.♗f5 and

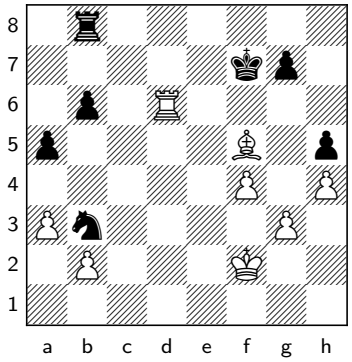
30... b5 31.♗f5 are easy to disregard, as the bishop reaches g6 and White wins.

30... ♘c5N 31.♘xc5N bxc5 , anything wins. 32.♖d5 highlights the weaknesses.

31.♘d6†!

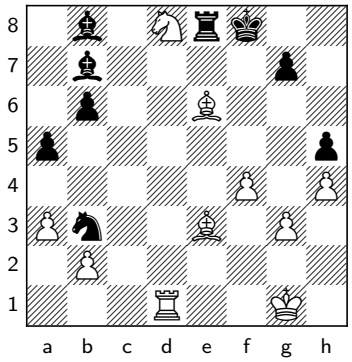
No more opposite-colored bishops!

31... ♗xd6 32.♖xd6 ♖b8 33.♗f5



White will win the h5-pawn, and further resistance is futile.

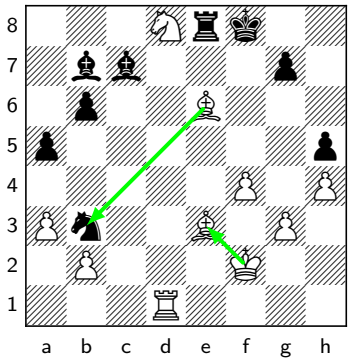
Shankland-Volokitin Exercise #4



30... ♗c7!

White had another important decision to make, again with respect to piece exchanges and changes to the pawn structure.

31.♔f2!

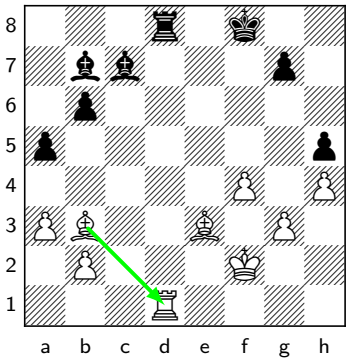


Much better than the game continuation. By protecting the e3-bishop, White is getting ready to capture on b3 next. Black must take on d8 and exchange rooks anyway, but we can note a big difference compared to how the game went.

31.♖d7? The rooks are coming off the board no matter what. Nevertheless, White needed to carefully consider the circumstances under which this would materialize. The move I chose allows Black to force a pawn exchange on the queenside, which greatly increases his drawing chances. ♗xd8 32.♖f7† ♔g8 33.♖e7† ♔f8 34.♖xe8† ♔xe8 35.♗xb3 ♗f6 This is massively different than the endgame in the main line. The black dark- squared bishop is active, and the threat against b2 forces off one of the pawns on the queenside.

31... ♖xd8

After

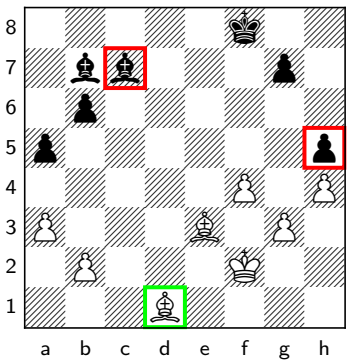


31... ♗xd8 32.♗xb3 , Black cannot prevent Rd7, and White wins.

32.♗xb3!

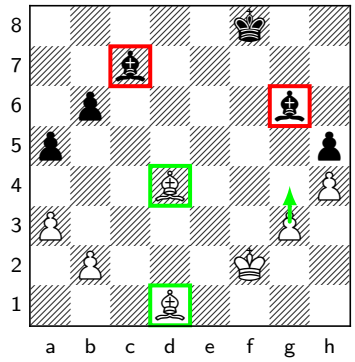
32.♖xd8†? allows ♗xd8 33.♗xb3 ♗f6 , when the threat against b2 is highly unpleasant.

32... ♖xd1 33.♗xd1



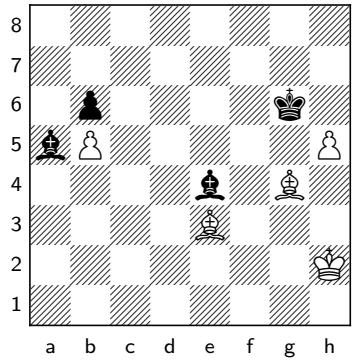
While the rooks get exchanged in both cases, there are a couple of key differences on display between this position and the one that occurred in the game. First and foremost, Black is not getting his bishop to f6 to harass White's queenside. As such, he does not get to trade off another pawn. Secondly, White's own bishop has reached d1, immediately targeting the weakness on h5, which Black will struggle to defend:

33... g6 34.f5! ♗e4 35.fxg6 ♗xg6 36.♗d4



Both of Black's bishops are forever stuck on passive squares. White is ready for g3-g4 to come next, and with his queenside perfectly secure, this will be decisive.

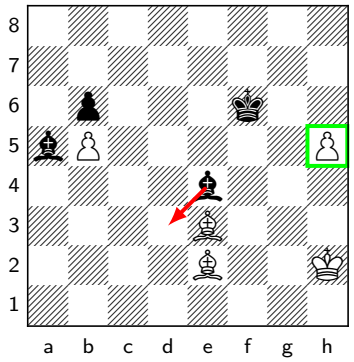
Shankland-Volokitin Exercise #5



47... ♔f6

This is a critical moment. The material is very reduced. We need to watch out for Black's attempts to activate his pieces and liquidate by trading one pawn and giving up one bishop for the other one.

48.♗e2!



It is important for White not to allow the enemy bishop into d3. From d3, the bishop would harass the b5-pawn and force the white bishop to a passive square to defend it. With that option off the table, White wins by maneuvering the king to e2 and the bishop to d3, at which point Black will not be able to both avoid a trade of light-squared bishops and stop the h-pawn. Let's see how that could transpire: Instead, after 48. Be2 50.Kf2! , Black can only sit and wait. 50...Kg7 51.Bc4 Kf6 52.Ke2+- The bishop comes to d3 next, and White wins. It was extremely important that the pawn did not have to advance to h6 too soon. You can find a more detailed analysis (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) in the annotated game.

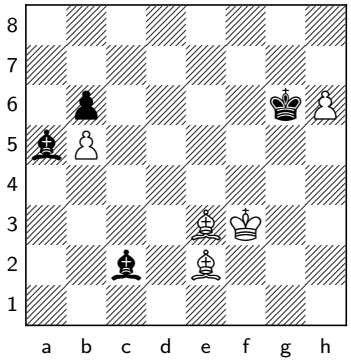
48.♔g3? This allows Black to save the game, and it all comes down to what I am hoping my extra pawn will do for me. The material is reduced enough that White's plan needs to be to turn the h-pawn into a queen. Nothing else will work. It is doable, but only under the condition that White's bishops are more active than their black counterparts, and that the black king cannot harass the pawn. To this effect, it is extremely im-

portant that the pawn remains on h5 for the moment. If the pawn is pushed to h6 too fast, Black will be able to place his king on g6 to harass it, and then the a5-bishop will become free, at which point White can no longer hope to promote the h-pawn. That is exactly what my move allowed Black to get. ♗d3 It is a draw. White's bishop will be forced to the passive d7-square, and it will not be able to effectively fight to help the h-pawn advance while simultaneously defending b5. Furthermore, Black will be able to play ...Be2 next, which forces White to advance his h-pawn before his king is able to support it. 49.♗d7 ♗e2 50.h6 ♔g6 51.♗e8† ♔h7 52.♗c6 Now we see the issue. Because White's pawn was forced further up the board to h6, Black is able to free his a5-bishop, as I will not be able to capture b6 without allowing h6 to fall as well.

48... ♔e5 49.♔g3 ♔f6

This is not forced, but plans are more important than moves at this stage. Now not

50.h6? ♗c2 51.♔f3 ♔g6

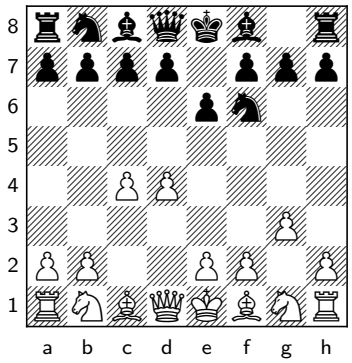


which leads to a similar situation to the one I reached in the game. Because the pawn has been moved to h6, Black was allowed to threaten it with his king, so he can now free his a5-bishop. It's a draw.

Sam Shankland-Andrei Volokitin, Isle of Man 2019

To close out the book, I'd like to show an extremely painful game for me in which I failed to convert an extra pawn. It's an opportunity for you to learn from my mistakes.

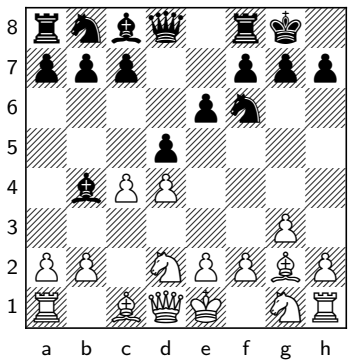
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3



One point of this move order is that after

3.♘f3N d5 4.g3 ♗b4† , blocking the check with the knight entails a pawn sacrifice: 5.♘bd2N dxc4 White does not win a piece with a check on a4.

3... d5 4.♗g2 ♗b4† 5.♘d2 O-O



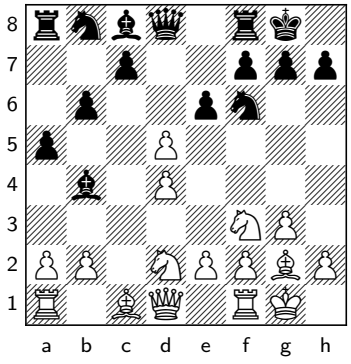
Black now cannot capture on c4 due to White having the bishop on g2 rather than the knight on f3:

5... dxc4? 6.♕a4† ♘c6N 7.♗xc6† and White wins a piece.

6.♘f3 b6

6... dxc4 is possible here though, but this is a more promising version for White. Let's not go any further.

7.O-O a5 8.cxd5



As I mention in my 1.d4 LTR, (See the corresponding variation from the PGN) it is often a good idea to go for this capture when Black combines ...d5 with ...b6. □ As far as alternatives go, □ Nothing special for White is □ Finally,

8.b3 makes Black's last move look sensible by allowing a4 . Also, White should leave the b3-square open as a post for his queen.

8.♘e5N ♗b7 .

8.a3 ♗xd2 9.♗xd2 dxc4 10.♘e5N ♖a7 11.♘xc4N ♕xd4 looks okay for Black.

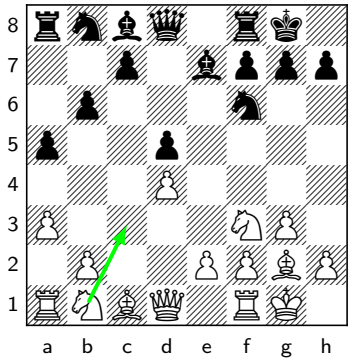
8... exd5

A positional struggle will follow, and White needs to work out where his pieces belong.

9.a3! ♗e7

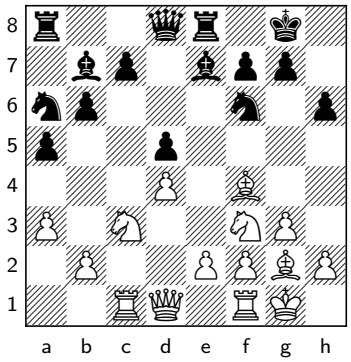
9... ♗d6? is excellently met with 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘g5N , when the bishop turns out to be vulnerable on d6, as a knight is about to appear on e4.

10.♘b1!



A typical regrouping. The knight will be well placed on c3. Including 9.a3! before retreating the knight ensured that the black bishop would end up on the passive e7-square compared to the more active d6.

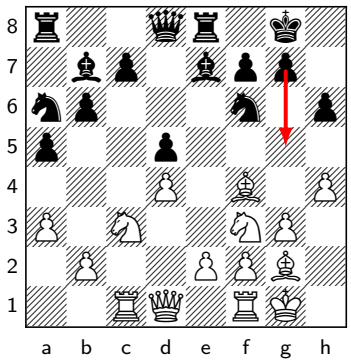
10... ♗b7 11.♘c3 ♖e8 12.♗f4 h6 13.♖c1 ♘a6?!



White is better every which way, but I am not fully satisfied with the move I chose.

13... ♘bd7?N made more sense from a positional standpoint, with the knight coming to f8 and e6. But it is concretely impossible, as after 14.♘b5N Black collapses on the c7-square.

14.h4



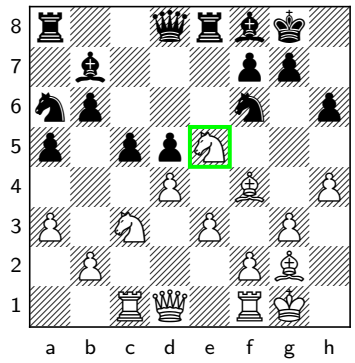
This is prophylaxis against ...g5, but that was not an immediate concern for White. Best was:

14.♕b3 This is prophylaxis against Black's plan of ...c6, ...Nc7 and ...Ne6, as the b6-pawn is under pressure. Moreover, when White plays Ne5, he will threaten e2-e4. In addition, ...c5 is prevented due to Na4. Finally, some ideas of Nb5xc7 followed by Qxb6 are enabled. The queen is fantastically placed on b3. One could try to relieve some of the pressure exerted against the black queenside by going ♗d6 , but after 15.e3 ♗xf4 16.exf4 , the knight is coming to e5 next, and Black's position is on the brink of collapse.

14... ♗f8 15.e3 c5

White is better, even though the queen isn't on b3 and there is no Na4 with pressure against b6. But there's no value in dwelling on the past –let's find a good move for White.

16.♘e5!



The knight is strong and stable on this outpost, and the way is cleared for the bishop to pressure d5.

16.♕b3 walks straight into c4 , when the queen should retreat, as the overoptimistic 17.♕b5? is severely misguided: ♖e6 18.♘e5N ♘c7N 19.♕a4 b5 Black has been gifted several tempos, and White is already in a bit of trouble.

16... cxd4

This is sad, as White's pieces will be far more active in the ensuing symmetrical structure. But

16... c4? is just losing to 17.♘xc4N

17.exd4 ♘c7

I spent about twenty minutes deciding on the best way to continue.

18.♕b3!?

This is quite logical and forcing. From this spot, the queen eyes both d5 and b6, while also putting some X-ray pressure towards f7. I spent some time calculating: B) 18\. Qb3 20...Qd8 loses in similar fashion to 21.Rc7+ Re7 22.Rxb7! C) 18\. Qb3 20...Qxc1! Always examine all checks and captures. This is the only move, but Black holds his position together, and I was even worried about becoming worse. 21.Qxc1 Nxd5 The computer gives this as equal, but in a practical game, White could easily end up being worse. Black has no weaknesses. He can double his rooks on the d-file and place his bishop on f6, and it is tough for the queen to prove her worth.

18.♘xf7?N This looks terribly tempting, but it has a concrete flaw. ♔xf7 19.♗xc7 ♕xc7 20.♘xd5N The complications are not over, so we should not be eager to stop calculating. – A) ♕b8 loses forcibly to: 21.♖c7† ♖e7 22.♖xb7 Removing the defender of the light squares. ♖xb7 23.♘xf6N when ♔xf6

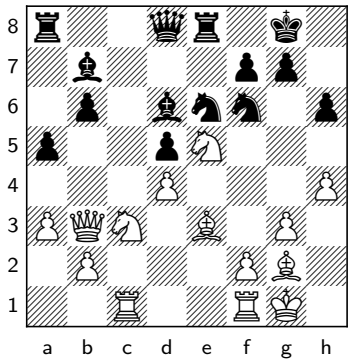
23... gxf6 24.♗d5† pushes the king into the center. – A1) ♔g7 allows

24... ♔e7 25.♖e1† ♔d8 26.♕f3 ♖aa7 27.♕xf6† ♗e7 28.♕h8† ♔d7 29.♗e6† ♔c6 30.♖c1† Black needs to block the check by ditching his bishop, after which the situation is hopeless. – A3) 24\. Bd5+ 24...Ke8 is trickier: 25.Qh5+ Kd8 26.Bc6! White threatens Qe8+ followed by Qd8#. 26...Re7 27.Qd5+ The rook on a8 drops, and White wins. 26\. Qf3 26...Kc7 27.Rc1 also wins.

25.♕g4† and mate. – A2)

24.♕f3† wins the rook on b7, and

18... ♘e6 19.♗e3 ♗d6



The f1-rook is White's last piece that's yet to be developed. Where would you put it?

20.♖fd1?

The result of a tactical oversight. Of course,

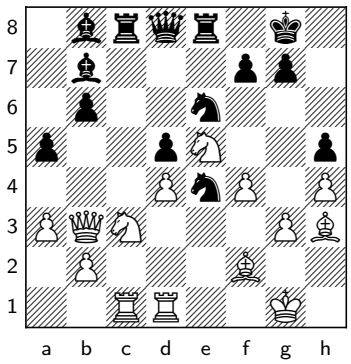
20.♖fe1 should be preferred, supporting the knight on e5.

20... ♖c8?

I had completely missed

20... ♘xd4N After 21.♗xd4 ♗xe5 22.♕xb6 , Black is slightly worse, but he's also much closer to saving this game. No matter how quiet the position looks, we need to always examine all checks and captures! Luckily, my opponent missed this too.

21.f4 ♗b8 22.♗f2 h5 23.♗h3 ♘e4?



This allows a tactical strike.

24.♘xe4!

Removing the pawn from d5 will help the white queen influence events on the kingside. □ □ But considering different move orders is an important calculation technique. After

24.f5? is hasty and destabilizing, and White completely collapses after ♘xf2N 25.♔xf2 ♘xd4N

24.♘xf7?N , Black has an important intermediate move: ♖xc3 White loses his chance to flick in Nxe4, and Black is already objectively a bit better.

24... ♖xc1

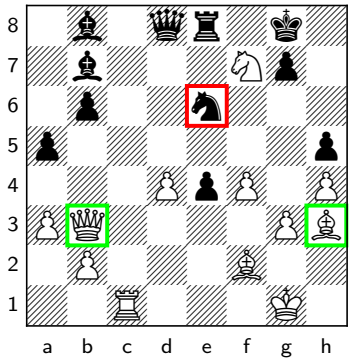
24... dxe4 25.♘xf7N is an even worse version for Black compared to the game, since he does not even get to take on d4.

25.♖xc1 dxe4

25... ♗xe5 26.dxe5? is not too bad for White either, but

26.♗xe6 is best. fxe6 27.♘g5N ♗f6 28.♕d1 g6 29.♕d3 ♔g7 30.g4 White crashes through on the kingside. Taking on g5 would bring a disaster on the dark squares, and hxg4 means a disaster on g6 or h7 after 31.h5

26.♘xf7!



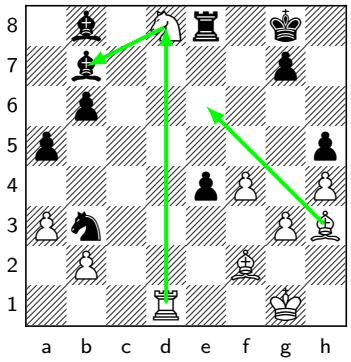
Finally, White gets to underline the big problem with Black's decision to jump with the knight to e4. The pressure against the tender e6- and f7-spots decides.

26... ♘xd4

There is no better way for Black to continue the fight. After

26... ♔xf7? 27.♗xe6† ♖xe6 28.f5 White wins an exchange and the game. But not 27... Kxf7 27.f5? Bd5 and Black is okay.

27.♘xd8† ♘xb3 28.♖d1!



A multi-purpose move. White defends the knight and threatens both Nxb7 and Be6+.

28... e3

It is at this point that we need to consider the guidelines for converting an extra pawn. In this position, we should not be particularly worried about counterplay. So, the most relevant question becomes: which exchanges of pieces and pawns, and changes in the structure, are favorable?

29.♗e6†?

This was the first step in the wrong direction. My hope was to grab the e3-pawn, keeping the same piece assortment and avoiding a possible transition into an opposite-colored-bishop position. But it was better to allow the opposite-colored bishops. □ After 29. Be6+ 30...Nc5 31.Nxc5 bxc5 anything wins, but I would opt for 32.Rd7! . Black can barely move. A way the game could come to a conclusion would be: 32...Kf8 33.Bf1 Re7 34.Rd8+ Re8 35.Rd5! g6 36.Bd3 White will easily win a second pawn on the kingside. □ 29. Be6+ 30...Kf7 31.Nd6+! No more opposite bishops! 31...Bxd6 32.Rxd6 Rb8 33.Bf5 White will win the h5-pawn, and further resistance is futile.

29.♘xb7N exf2† 30.♔xf2 Generally, opposite-colored bishops are supposed to be helpful for the defending side in pawn-down endgames, but here we see a different situation. The h5-pawn is an easy target, and Black's pieces are horribly passive. The rook is stuck in place on the e8-square, as both Rd8+ and Be6+ are moves that could potentially win a piece. The knight is stuck on b3, as going to c5 would allow even more pawn weaknesses. The bishop is terrible on b8, without much scope to improve. White has a straightforward plan to play Bf5-g6, and there is not much that Black can do about it. For example: □ ♔f8 31.♗f5 and 30. Kxf2 30...b5 31.Bf5 are easy to disregard, as the bishop reaches g6 and White wins.

29... ♔f8

Black loses a bishop after

29... ♖xe6? 30.♘xe6N exf2† 31.♔xf2 . There is no suitable way to prevent Rd8+. For example: ♔f7

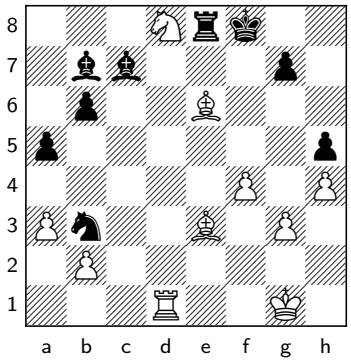
31... ♔h7 32.♖d8 ♗a7 33.♖d7 ♗c8 34.♘g5†N

32.♘d8†N or

30.♗xe3

I thought it was over.

30... ♗c7!



But this keeps the game going. White had another important decision to make, again with respect to piece exchanges and changes to the pawn structure.

31.♖d7?

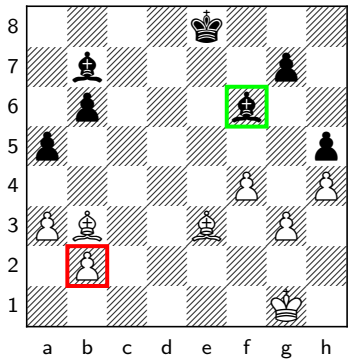
The rooks are coming off the board no matter what. Nevertheless, White needed to carefully consider the circumstances under which this would materialize. The move I chose allows Black to force a pawn exchange on the queenside, which greatly increases his drawing chances. It was much better to opt for:

31.♔f2 By protecting the e3-bishop, White is getting ready to capture on b3 next. Black must take on d8 and exchange rooks anyway, but we can note a big difference compared to how the game went. After ♗xd8

31... ♖xd8 and now 32.♖xd8†? allows ♗xd8 33.♗xb3 ♗f6 , when the threat against b2 is highly unpleasant. So, 32... Rxd8 32.Bxb3! Rxd1 33.Bxd1 While the rooks get exchanged in both cases, there are a couple of key differences on display between this position and the one that occurred in the game. First and foremost, Black is not getting his bishop to f6 to harass White's queenside. As such, he does not get to trade off another pawn. Secondly, White's own bishop has reached d1, immediately targeting the weakness on h5, which Black will struggle to defend: 33...g6 34.f5! Be4 35.fxg6 Bxg6 36.Bd4 Both of Black's bishops are forever stuck on passive squares. White is ready for g3-g4 to come next, and with his queenside perfectly secure, this will be decisive.

32.♗xb3 , Black cannot prevent Rd7, and White wins.

31... ♗xd8 32.♖f7† ♔g8 33.♖e7† ♔f8 34.♖xe8† ♔xe8 35.♗xb3 ♗f6



This is massively different than the endgame in the note above. The black dark-squared bishop is active, and the threat against b2 forces off one of the pawns on the queenside.

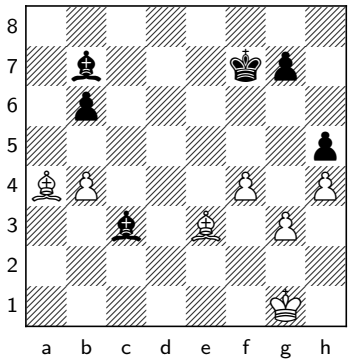
36.♗a4†

Trying to keep all the pawns on the board with

36.♗c1? is way too passive, and after

♗d4† 37.♔f1 ♗f3? , Black should hold without too many problems.

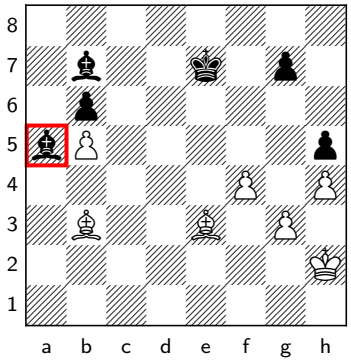
36... ♔f7 37.b4 axb4 38.axb4 ♗c3?



When this bishop moves to a5 to defend the b6-pawn, it will be locked out of play. Whereas after

38... ♗e7 39.b5 ♗d8 , Black's bishop can also go to c7, from where it can discourage f4-f5 and control the e5-square. This position is hard to evaluate. It is right on the border between drawn and lost for Black. That's a lot better than clearly lost, as it was after Black brought the bishop to a5.

39.b5 ♗e1 40.♗b3† ♔e7 41.♔h2 ♗a5

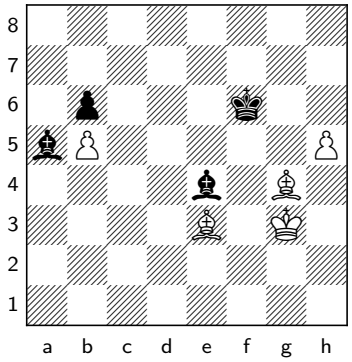


Black should lose when his bishop is stuck on a5 like this, but I let him off the hook once again:

42.♗d1 g6 43.f5 ♔f6 44.fxg6 ♔xg6 45.g4 hxg4 46.♗xg4 ♗e4 47.h5† ♔f6

This is a critical moment.

48.♔g3?

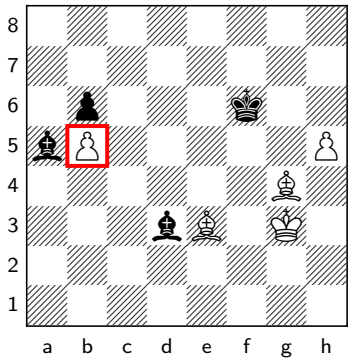


This allows Black to save the game, and it all comes down to what I am hoping my extra pawn will do for me. The material is reduced enough that White's plan needs to be to turn the h-pawn into a queen. Nothing else will work. It is doable, but only under the condition that White's bishops are more active than their black counterparts, and that the black king cannot harass the pawn. To this effect, it is extremely important that the pawn remains on h5 for the moment. If the pawn is pushed to h6 too fast, Black will be able to place his king on g6 to harass it, and then the a5-bishop will become free, at which point White can no longer hope to promote the h-pawn. That is exactly what my move allowed Black to get. Correct was: Instead, after 48. Kg3 50.Kf2! , Black can only sit and wait. 50...Kg7 51.Bc4 Kf6 52.Ke2+- The bishop comes to d3 next, and White wins. It

was extremely important that the pawn did not have to advance to h6 too soon. 52...Bf5 53.Bd3 Bxd3+ 54.Kxd3+- White is also winning after 53...Bd7 54.h6 Bc3 55.Bxb6+- It's important to realize that sacrificing a piece and trying to set up a fortress with 55...Bxb5 56.Bxb5 Kg6 57.Be3 Kh7 wouldn't save Black. Here's an illustrative variation: 58.Bd3+ Kh8 59.Kf3 Bb2 60.Kg4 Bc3 61.Kf5 Bb2 62.Kg6 Bc3 63.Bc4 Bb2 64.Bc5 followed by Bf8-Bg7 and it's game over.

48.♗e2 It is important for White not to allow the enemy bishop into d3. From d3, the bishop would harass the b5-pawn and force the white bishop to a passive square to defend it. With that option off the table, White wins by maneuvering the king to e2 and the bishop to d3, at which point Black will not be able to both avoid a trade of light-squared bishops and stop the h-pawn. Let's see how that could transpire: ♔e5 49.♔g3 ♔f6 This is not forced, but plans are more important than moves at this stage. Now not 50.h6? ♗c2 51.♔f3 ♔g6 which leads to a similar situation to the one I reached in the game. Because the pawn has been moved to h6, Black was allowed to threaten it with his king, so he can now free his a5-bishop. It's a draw.

48... ♗d3!

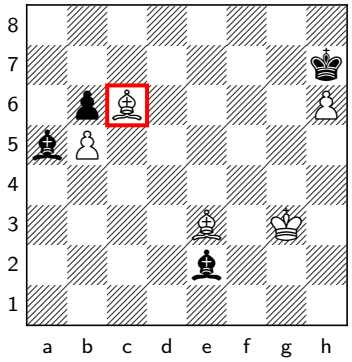


It is a draw. White's bishop will be forced to the passive d7-square, and it will not be able to effectively fight to help the h-pawn advance while simultaneously defending b5. Furthermore, Black will be able to play ...Be2 next, which forces White to advance his h-pawn before his king is able to support it.

49.♗d7 ♗e2! 50.h6

50.♗e8 is obviously clumsy, and a way for Black to find his way to a draw would be: ♗e1† 51.♔f4 ♔e7 Another pair of pawns comes off, and there is nothing left to play for.

50... ♔g6 51.♗e8† ♔h7 52.♗c6



Now we see the issue. Because White's pawn was forced further up the board to h6,

Black is able to free his a5-bishop, as I will not be able to capture b6 without allowing h6 to fall as well:

52... ♗e1† 53.♔g2 ♗c3! 54.♔f2 ♗d3

Black will wait with his bishop on d3. White cannot do anything about this. I cannot take on b6 as the h6-pawn would drop. My light-squared bishop needs to remain on the b5-e8 diagonal, and so it is not able to fight for the h7-square.

55.♔f3 ♔h8!

Of course, Black does not allow a check on the b1-h7 diagonal. There is not much else for White to try.

56.♔g4 ♔h7 57.♔g5 ♗b4 58.♗d7 ♗e7†!

Not

58... ♔h8 59.♗f5 ♗xb5 60.♗d4†

59.♔g4 ♔g6 60.♗e8† ♔h7 61.♗c6 ♗f8 62.♔f3 ♗xb5

62... ♗xh6? 63.♗e4† ♗xe4† 64.♔xe4 was my last trick. The pawn endgame is won. ♗xe3 65.♔xe3 ♔g6 66.♔e4 ♔f6 67.♔d5

63.♗e4†

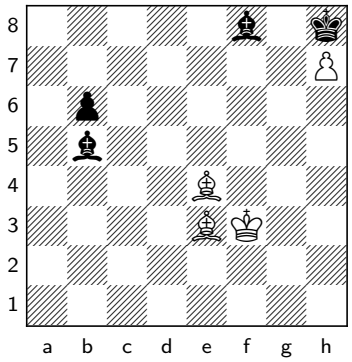
63.♗xb5 ♗xh6=

63... ♔g8

It's never too late to lose:

63... ♔h8 64.♗d4† ♔g8 65.h7†

64.h7† ♔h8



An interesting game with lots of instructive moments. I made three key mistakes in converting the extra pawn at moves 29, 31, and 48. It was only the final one that sealed the draw, but in my opinion, the first two were just as big. The first step towards failing to win a won position tends to be an inaccuracy that makes the win harder, not the final mistake which alters the objective evaluation.

Conclusion

This was the shortest section, as it can sometimes be obvious what the extra pawn will do for you. But as we saw, there are plenty of cases where it might not be so clear, and finding a plan is tough! Similarly, there can be cases where it might be evident enough what you are hoping the pawn can do for you, but properly making it happen is hard –my encounter with Volokitin in the final game surely comes to mind. One of the first things we are taught as chess players is the importance of formulating a plan. When you have an extra pawn, correctly making a plan that effectively makes use of your asset can easily mean the difference between winning and not. This completes our coverage of converting an extra pawn. For anyone who has studied the preceding sections closely, you may find yourself asking something along the lines of: «Okay, how do I put this into practice? What rules and guidelines can I learn from having gone through these 29 games?» I hate to break it to you, but beyond a few little nuggets of overall chess wisdom you may find scattered through the pages, there are no major guiding principles that will suddenly turn pawns into points. My main hope is that by instilling the right thought process of breaking the conversion into three distinct phases, and then showing a lot of examples of each phase both done well and done poorly, your instincts will have improved. When you find yourself with an extra pawn over the board, always try to assess which of the three skill sets you need to be applying to the position in front of you, and then do it to the best of your ability. Then, after every move your opponent makes, reassess which skill set you should be relying on most. Ultimately, if you have gone through this book thoroughly, I would expect that you will see a substantial improvement in all three of the skill sets, and that this will hopefully help you convert your extra pawns with confidence in your own tournament practice.