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Preface

Fifteen years ago, in 2008, I started with my work on middlegames in chess, and my first book on this topic was titled *Winning Chess Middlegames*. That book was (mostly) based on middlegames arising from 1.d4 openings and was divided into four basic pawn structures:

- White has doubled c-pawns (like in the Nimzo-Indian Defence and similar openings);
- White has hanging pawns in the centre;
- White has an isolated pawn; and
- White has a pawn majority in the centre.

That book was well received and I was often asked if there would be a similar work involving middlegames coming from 1.e4 openings.

At that time I was still an active player; my White-side openings were based on 1.d4 while my main weapons with Black were different variations of the Ruy Lopez. Understandably, at that time I was not in a hurry to delve into all the different Sicilians, Frenches, and Caro-Kanns.

At the end of 2013, I finished my career as an active player and started coaching. My early 'training jobs' were with promising young players like Alireza Firouzja, Parham Maghsoodloo and Salem AR Saleh. Obviously, 1.e4 openings and the middlegames arising from them became my daily routine now... when I had spent enough time investigating those middlegame positions, the old question resurfaced: why not a book on *Winning Chess Middlegames with 1.e4 Structures*? I considered I was up to the job now, and this book is a product of that decision.

The middlegames arising from 1.e4 openings are very diverse, and it was next to impossible to include all of them in one book in a proper way. So I had to make choices.

I understand that some readers may be disappointed that, for example, the Sicilian Pawn Storm, the Sicilian Dragon, the Open Ruy Lopez, the French Tarrasch and the Caro-Kann are not included in this book, but... I had to make choices. It is quite possible that somewhere, within a few years, I may find the time and energy to write another edition including the middlegames coming from these openings.

As for the opening lines that did find their way into this book, I wanted to analyse the positions thoroughly, and the material presented

is predominantly aimed at improving the reader's playing level. I have tried to present the knowledge I have acquired during twenty years as a top-level player plus a coaching career of ten years, working with some of the world's best players of today, in an accessible way so that readers of different chess levels can benefit from it.

As its name suggests, the book is aimed at middlegame improvement; however, I also share a sizeable portion of my opening knowledge. I hope that the chosen games will inspire the reader on his/her journey to chess improvement.

Ivan Sokolov

Amsterdam, November 2023

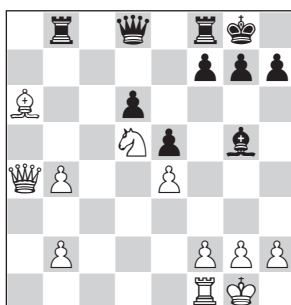
CHAPTER 4

The Sveshnikov Variation

The Sveshnikov Sicilian is rich with ideas, and half of this book could have been devoted to it. With our limited space, my choice is personal and I have opted for two ideas for White that I like very much. Also, I think they can be useful for the reader in practical play.

One idea is a positional exchange sacrifice; the other is an attacking idea related to a rook swing along the second rank. In both cases, we have quite a number of top-level examples.

The exchange sacrifice

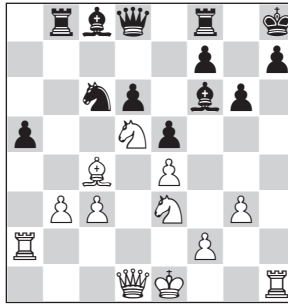


Diagrammed is the result of a typical idea to sacrifice an exchange, as seen in a number of top-level games. We have different versions of this idea, but positionally/strategically, the concept is the same.

In return for the exchange White gets light-square control, a dominant knight on the d5-outpost, and a passed b-pawn.

Black is to move in the diagrammed position and has to decide on a plan to create counterplay. Black's best counterplay options here are related to the push of the f-pawn (...f5). In Kasparov-Shirov, which we will analyse below, White got an even better version of the diagrammed position with an extra pair of knights on the board.

The second rank rook swing



The second diagram shows a nice attacking idea for White seen in a couple of top-level games. White has first sacrificed the h-pawn to open the h-file and now has just played b3, clearing the second rank for a rook transfer. White will push f4, then swing his rook an a2 to the kingside and obtain a powerful attack. To my knowledge, this idea was invented by Ruslan Ponomariov and it has later been replicated in some top-level games.

Exchange sacrifice/light-square domination

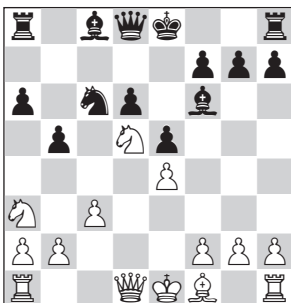
For a good understanding of the positional exchange sacrifice with which White tries to achieve light-square domination, this game by Kasparov is an important cornerstone, and the next game Anand-Van Wely is another important building block. When the first game was played, it was (to my knowledge) a novel idea. Having to solve new strategic problems in over-the-board play, Shirov quickly got into trouble and Kasparov celebrated a smooth victory. As we will see, things are actually rather complex.

Game 22 B33

Garry Kasparov 2805
Alexei Shirov 2740

Horgen 1994

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙f4 e5 8.♙g5 a6 9.♗a3 b5 10.♗d5 ♙e7 11.♙xf6 ♙xf6 12.c3



12...♙b7

Predominantly due to this game, this continuation has slowly

disappeared from practice, perhaps unjustifiably since Black's play can be improved.

12...♙g5 is nowadays considered to be the main move.

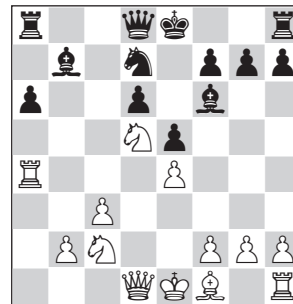
13.♗c2

Black's knight on c6 needs to be improved. Usually Black either opts for the game plan or plays 13...♗e7 which after 14.♗xf6 exf6 leads to a different pawn structure.

13...♗b8 14.a4

In general, the standard plan for White here. In this particular case, Kasparov already had the ensuing exchange sacrifice in mind.

14...bxa4 15.♙xa4 ♗d7



16.♙b4!

Preparing a positional exchange sacrifice. In this game, everything went perfectly for White. Either Alexei was not aware of White's plan, or he underestimated it, and White's strategic idea worked to full extent. There is however a risk associated with White's idea: if the exchange is not sacrificed on b7, the rook will be a bit awkward on b4.

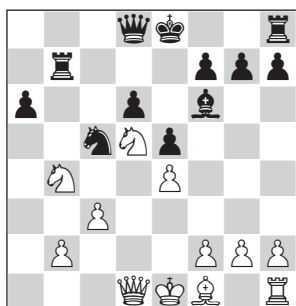
16...♗c5?!

Definitely helping White with the execution of his planned exchange

sacrifice; the knight will be out of play on b7.

The correct decision was 16...♖a7 when matters are far from clear as White's exchange sac now works considerably less well:

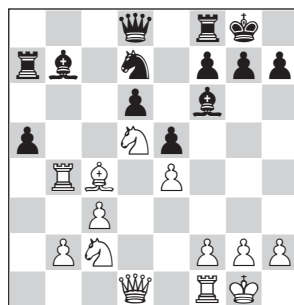
A) The exchange sacrifice now leads to approximate (dynamic) equality, e.g. 17.♞xb7 ♞xb7 18.♘cb4 (18.b4?, trying to control c5 (similar to Kasparov) now does not work with Black's knight on d7, as Black is actually better after 18...a5) 18...♘c5 (Black may also opt for 18...a5, when best for White is to gain back the exchange with 19.♙a6 ♚a8 20.♙xb7 ♚xb7 and it is doubtful if White has any advantage here)



analysis diagram

19.♙xa6! ♘xa6 20.♘xa6 0-0 (Black may decide to collect the b2-pawn: 20...♞xb2, and after 21.♘ab4 (the threat is ♚a1) 21...♚a5 22.♚c1 ♚a3 23.♘xf6+ gxf6 24.0-0, to me the position looks promising for White but my Stockfish gives around equality) 21.♘ab4 and compared to our main game (see below), we have a different situation. White has compensation for the exchange, but not more;

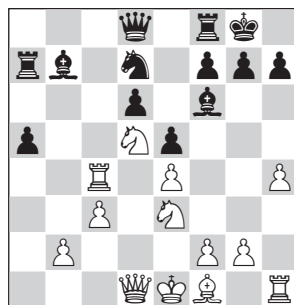
B) White can play for light-square domination with 17.♙c4!?, however after 17...0-0 18.0-0 a5...



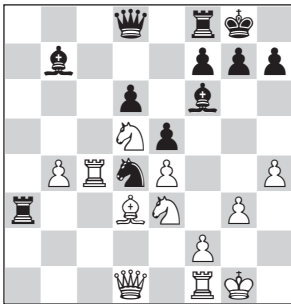
analysis diagram

... the rook is awkwardly placed on b4; best is to sacrifice a pawn: 19.♞a4 ♘c5 20.♞a3 ♘xe4 21.♚e2 ♘g5 (21...♘c5 leads to White's advantage after 22.b4 ♘e6 23.♞f1) 22.♘ce3 ♘e6 23.b4 and White definitely has compensation but probably not more;

C) Twenty-four years later, Alexei tried Kasparov's idea as White, but even though he won that game, he didn't get an opening advantage: 17.♘ce3 0-0 18.h4! (this typical idea to limit Black's bishop does not work that well here because Black can improve the bishop in another way) 18...a5 19.♞c4.

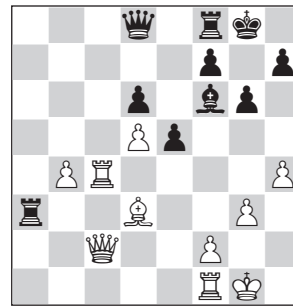


The critical moment; here Black has a possibility to improve on the game by executing a typical plan in a Sveshnikov structure! 19...♖c5 (better was 19...♗b8! with ...♙d8 and ...♘b6 to follow. White's rook on c4 is clumsy and Black has a comfortable, perhaps even somewhat better position) 20.b4. Shirov's rook will now be liberated, but Black gets the d4-square for his knight: 20...axb4 21.cxb4 ♘e6 (White may have had regrets about pushing h4, as now he needs to spend a move protecting it and it can also be a target for a piece sacrifice in the future) 22.g3 ♘d4 (the position can be evaluated as dynamically balanced) 23.♙d3 ♖a3 24.0-0

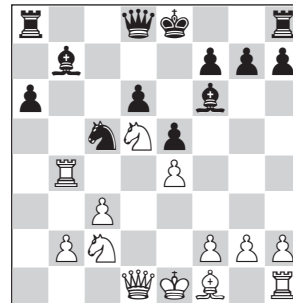


24...g6 (a standard Sveshnikov move, but Black had an interesting tactical option at his disposal: the piece sacrifice 24...♙xh4!? 25.gxh4 ♙xd5 26.exd5 ♗xh4. Black already has two pawns for the piece and White's king is not secure, White needs time to coordinate his pieces. Your engine will give you zeros, but in practice it might be easier to play this position as Black) 25.♘c2. Now

we get a position with opposite-coloured bishops: 25...♘xc2 26.♗xc2 ♙xd5 27.exd5.



White has a passed b-pawn, but Black can easily deal with it and is not worse. 27...♗a8? (a step in the wrong direction; correct was 27...♗b8 followed by ...♙d8, ...♙b6, ...f5, with sufficient counterplay) 28.♖c6! ♖d8 29.b5 ♗a5 30.♖b1. Now White is in the driving seat and his b-pawn is powerful. White soon won in Shirov-Lindh, Sweden tt 2018.



After the text move, Kasparov gets what he was hoping for!

17. ♖xb7! ♘xb7 18.b4

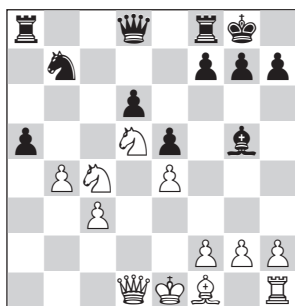
Black's knight on b7 will be passive for quite some time. White has total light-square domination. Compared to Anand-Van Wely (below) White does not have a passed b-pawn,

but the presence of an extra pair of knights (Black having a passive one on b7) definitely favours White. Shirov tries to create counterplay by opening the a-file (also giving White a passed b-pawn).

18...♙g5 19.♘a3!

The right place for the knight on c2 is the c4-square, so first improving the knight is the most precise.

19...0-0 20.♘c4 a5



Kasparov chooses the most human move, completing his development.

21.♙d3

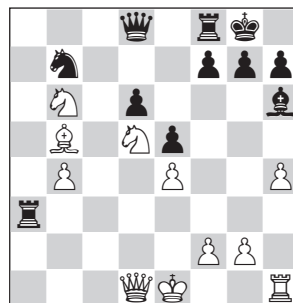
Probably the most precise was 21.h4! ♙h6. The bishop on h6 controls the (not exactly important) c1-h6 diagonal, but does not control e7, allowing White some tactical motifs: 22.♘cb6!

A) After 22...♖a7 we see the effects of Black's bishop being chased to h6 and not controlling the e7-square: 23.♘c8! ♖a8 24.♘ce7+ ♗h8 25.♙b5 and White has total domination;

B) 22...♖b8 23.g3 and Black is very passive, Stockfish 15 even gives White a winning advantage (plus two);

C) 22...axb4 23.cxb4! (playing for positional domination is the most

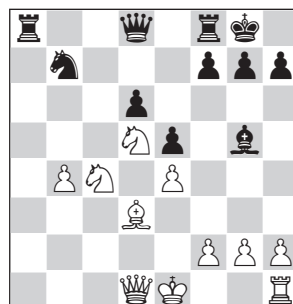
practical here; on 23.♘xa8 Black can sacrifice a piece with 23...bxc3! (23...♗xa8? is a strategic blunder, as after 24.cxb4 White has a huge advantage with his passed b-pawn and total domination): 24.♘ab6 ♙d2+ 25.♗e2 ♘c5 and in a game between humans, this position does not look clear) 23...♖a3 24.♙b5.



analysis diagram

White has full domination and definitely plenty of compensation. Play may continue 24...f5 25.♘c4 ♖a7 26.exf5 ♖xf5 27.g3 followed by castling, with light-square domination while Black doesn't have any counterplay. Such positions are what White aims for with his exchange sacrifice.

21...axb4 22.cxb4



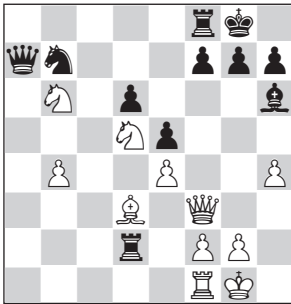
22...♗b8?!

My Stockfish 15 (at a decent depth) advises Black to be patient, to ‘sit on his hands’ and go for something like 22...♖a7 23.0-0 (23.h4?! ♕xh4 23.♗cb6 ♜e8=) 23...♗h8 24.g3 g6, claiming that it will be difficult to improve things for White. I have tried to play this position against my Stockfish, and of course failed to improve White’s position; Black has defensive resources. For a human it’s not easy to employ a ‘rope-a-dope’ strategy here, so it’s easy to understand that Shirov wants to create counterplay.

23.h4!

This typical idea (send Black’s bishop to h6) improves White’s situation here (as tactics, later on, related to ♗e7+ will appear).

23...♕h6 24.♗cb6 ♖a2 25.0-0 ♗d2
Black does not really have counterplay as his d2-rook lacking support.
26.♜f3 ♜a7



27.♗d7

The most direct, but not the most precise. The point is that the bishop on d3 will be hanging in lines where White wants to capture ♜xf7. Black’s pieces are paralysed and there was no need for White to

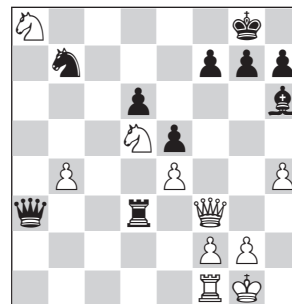
be in a hurry. Best was 27.♕b5! so as to play ♗d7 and, when the f8-rook moves, ♗e7+ followed by ♜xf7. Black will first lose his extra exchange (since after White’s ♗d7 his f8-rook cannot move) and then White’s b-pawn will decide. Black’s bishop on h6 continues to control plenty of empty squares.

27...♗d8?

This loses quickly. Best was 27...♖a8! when White has a clear advantage but Black can still fight. White’s best is to hope for a move repetition (and then play ♕b5):

A) 28.♗e7+ does not achieve the aim as after 28...♗h8 29.♜xf7, the d3-bishop is hanging (therefore 27.♕b5! was needed) and Black can simply take 29...♗xd3, and after 30.♗f8 play 30...♜a2! when White has to force perpetual check with 31.♗eg6+ hxg6 32.♗xg6+ ♗h7 33.♗f8+;

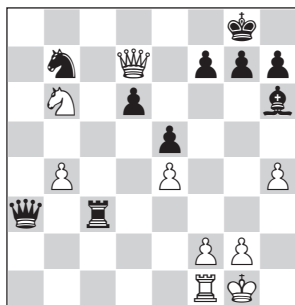
B) 28.♗7b6! ♜a3 and now White has nice tactics due to Black’s bad king position and bad piece coordination, but not a clear win (28...♖f8 allows the precise 29.♕b5!, with a winning advantage): 29.♗xa8! ♖xd3.



analysis diagram

B1) 30. ♖f6+ looks flashy but brings not more than a draw after 30... ♕f8! (30... gxf6? loses to 31. ♖g4+ ♕g7 32. ♖c8+ ♕f8 though (as usual) White still has to be precise: 33. ♖c7! and Black does not get the time to coordinate his pieces: 33... ♖xb4 34. ♖e8! d5 35. ♖xf6+ ♕g7 36. ♖h5+ ♕g8 37. ♖g4+ ♕h8 38. ♖f5 and White wins in a few moves) 31. ♖xh7+ ♕g8 32. ♖f6+ ♕f8 33. ♖f5 ♖xa8 34. ♖d5 ♕g8! and White has nothing better than a draw by move repetition 35. ♖e7+ ♕f8 36. ♖d5;

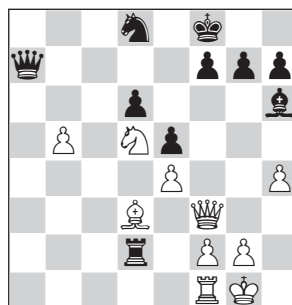
B2) 30. ♖e2 ♖xd5 (30... ♖d2 loses to 31. ♖b5 ♖xa8 32. ♖c7! ♖b8 33. ♖a1) 31. ♖b6! (White's knight is needed on b6 as in some lines the move ♖d7 is needed; 31. ♖c7? is not precise as after 31... ♖d4 32. ♖g4 g6 33. ♖c8+ ♕f8 White needs to be able to play ♖d7) 31... ♖d3 32. ♖g4 ♖c3 33. ♖d7.



analysis diagram

Here the only way for Black not to get mated immediately is 33... g5 (33... g6? leaves Black's king boxed in after 34. ♖e8+ ♕g7 35. ♖d7 g5 36. h5) 34. ♖xb7 – White has a large advantage and should win.

28. ♖xf8 ♕xf8 29. b5

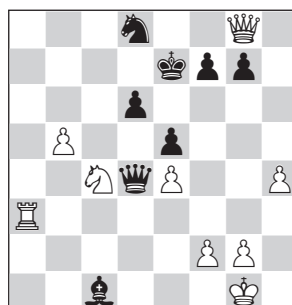


Now White's life is easy. Black's pieces are still not coordinated. White has a passed b-pawn plus an attack, and Kasparov executes with energetic play right until the end.

29... ♖a3 30. ♖f5! ♕e8 31. ♕c4 ♖c2 32. ♖xh7 ♖xc4 33. ♖g8+ ♕d7 34. ♖b6+ ♕e7 35. ♖xc4 ♖c5

White has many ways to finish the game off here; Garry characteristically chooses the most hard-hitting option.

36. ♖a1! ♖d4 37. ♖a3 ♕c1



38. ♖e3!

A nice concluding move. White had an even nicer move at his disposal with a similar idea: 38. ♖xd6!.

1-0

Game 23 B33

Viswanathan Anand

2792

Loek Van Wely

2647

Wijk aan Zee 2006

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4
 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♕g5 a6
 8.♗a3 b5 9.♗d5 ♕e7 10.♖xf6 ♖xf6
 11.c3 ♕g5

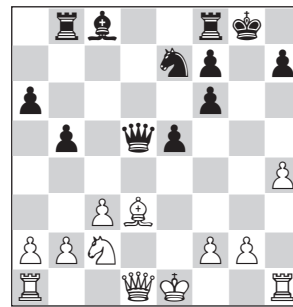
This is not a theory book, but some opening info never hurts. The text, 11...♕g5, has established itself as the main line nowadays, because Black is not in a hurry to show his hand by quickly castling. The immediate 11...0-0 has been played by a number of very strong players; however, after 12.♗c2 ♖b8, 13.h4!...



... is a clever and useful move – stopping ...♕g5, enabling g3 followed by ♕h3, and getting ready to push the h-pawn further (definitely if Black plays ...g6), while still not showing his hand regarding his king position. Black would like to play ...♗e7, trading a pair of knights, but that allows ♗xf6+, damaging his kingside pawn structure.

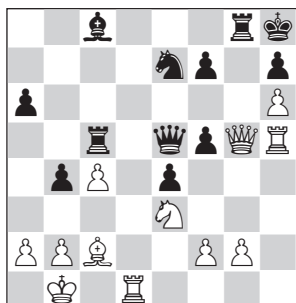
A) With Black's king open after 13...♗e7 14.♗xf6+ gxf6 we have two

games with Kasparov (as White) castling queenside: 15.♕d3! (in his first outing, Garry went for 15.♖d2 ♕b7 16.♕d3 d5 17.exd5 ♖xd5 18.0-0-0 here, Kasparov-Kramnik, Novgorod 1994. Garry celebrated victory, however Black's play could have been improved and in the same position a couple of months later he opted for the more precise text move). In Kasparov-Lautier, Moscow 1994, Black followed Kramnik's plan, hoping for counterplay: 15...d5 16.exd5 ♖xd5.



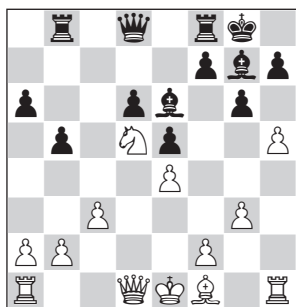
Now we see the advantage of the 15.♕d3! move-order: 17.♗e3! ♖e6 18.♖h5. Just like in the game against Kramnik, White will castle queenside but here he has a better version: 18...e4 19.♕c2 b4 20.c4 ♖h8 21.0-0-0!. White's king is safe on the queenside, and he has a better pawn structure plus attacking chances on the kingside. White is clearly better. The game did not last long; I will give it until the end because of the beautiful last move: 21...f5 22.♖g5 ♖b6 23.h5 ♖c6 (Black does not have any counterplay; if 23...♖g8 24.♖f4 ♖h6 the bad coordination of Black's pieces is

obvious after 25. ♖c7) 24. ♖b1 ♖c5 (now on 24... ♗g8 25. ♖f4 ♖h6 White has the unpleasant 26. ♖b8!) 25.h6! (weaving a mating net!) 25... ♖e5 26. ♗h5! ♗g8.



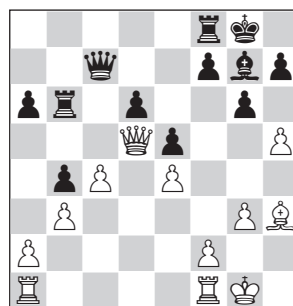
White to play and Black to resign! 27. ♗g4!! and mate or decisive material loss cannot be avoided: 27... ♗xg5 28. ♗xe5 or 27... ♖e6 28. ♗d8;

B) Carlsen, playing Black, took the logical decision to place his bishop on g7 first and then play ... ♗e7: 13...g6 14.g3 ♗g7 15.h5. Now Black tries to get rid of White's dominant knight: 15... ♗e7 16. ♗ce3 ♗xd5 17. ♗xd5 ♗e6.



Now Wesley So played a good strategic move that almost always works in such positions: 18. ♗h3!. Black is forced to make a decision,

as ignoring this move is not easy: 18... ♗xd5 (if Black ignores the move anyway and plays 18... ♖d7, White has a clear advantage after 19. ♗xe6 20. ♗xe6 fxe6 21. ♗e3±). Black has to allow his pawn structure to be damaged, otherwise the knight on d5 is a monster: 19... fxe6 20. hxe6 hxe6 21. ♗e3±) 19. ♖xd5 (Black hopes to stabilize the queenside) 19...b4 20.c4 ♖c7 21.0-0 ♗b6 22.b3.



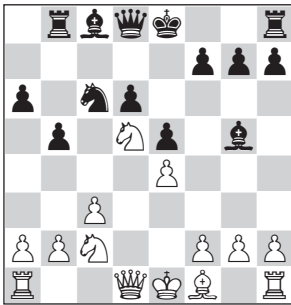
We get this type of position more often in the Sveshnikov (which is the reason I selected this game) and it would be a mistake to evaluate this as drawish due to the opposite-coloured bishops. White has a clear advantage while Black has no counterplay: 22... ♗d8. Wesley So is an excellent technical player but here he committed an unusual (for him) mistake.

White had to continue to slowly improve his position when Black would be under long-term pressure struggling for a draw. For example, 23. ♗ad1. White has many plans here: triple on the d-file or think about pushing the f4-pawn. I am not sure if White's advantage is as

large as your engine will assess it (around +1) but Black definitely faces a long-term struggle for a draw.

In a hurry to improve his position, So played 23.a4? bxa3 and now Black had a target (the b3-pawn) and the position was equal! 24.hxg6 hxg6 25.♖xa3 ♕c5 (the queen trade leads to a drawish endgame) 26.♗fa1 ♕xd5 27.cxd5 ♖h6 and a draw was soon agreed in So-Carlsen, Stavanger 2019.

12. ♖c2 ♗b8

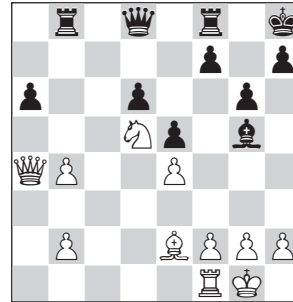


Anand goes for the main move (today as well as at the time). Vishy probably had the ensuing exchange sacrifice in mind already. Was he inspired by Kasparov-Shirov, a game that he obviously knew? It's not easy to say, as the exchange sacrifice (based on light-square domination) Vishy is about to execute had already been tried in a lesser-known game from grandmaster practice.

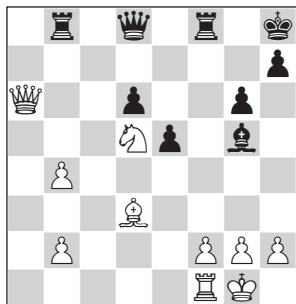
13.a4

In another high-level game thirteen years later, White was definitely inspired by this game from Anand! Let's take a look

at the critical moment: 13.♖e2 0-0 14.0-0 ♖h8 15.♖g4 ♖b7 16.♗cb4 ♗xb4 17.cxb4 g6 18.a4 bxa4 19.♗xa4 ♖c6 and now White sort of copied Anand's idea with 20.♖e2 (if White does it in a slightly different way with 20.♗xa6 ♖b5 21.♖e2 ♖xa6 22.♖xa6, Black also, just like in the game, gets good counterplay after 22...f5) 20...♖xa4 21.♗xa4.

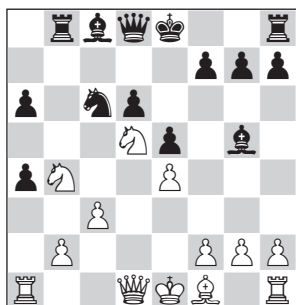


If we compare this position to our main game (see comment after the move 19...♗e8 – Black plays 19...g6 instead) we see that Giri is two tempi down compared to Anand (actually better compared to the stem game Barua-Lalic) as Black's pawn is already on g6, Black is to move and the pawn on a6 has not yet been taken! Black has comfortable play here with 21...f5! 22.exf5 ♗xf5. Probably, Magnus had already calculated the coming tactical motif. It should be mentioned that a draw would have been enough for Carlsen to win the tournament, so he was not ambitious (Black could have shown ambition by playing 22...gxf5!?): 23.♖d3 ♗f8 24.♗xa6



24...♙d2! 25.♖c4 (25.b5?! ♙a5 leads to Black's advantage) 25...♗c8
 26.♗e4 and now comes the tactical solution Magnus had probably calculated when playing 22...♞xf5:
 26...♙xb4 27.♘xb4 ♞f4 28.♗c6 end
 it all ended peacefully in a drawn endgame: 28...♞fxb4 29.♗xd6 ♗f8
 30.♗xe5+ ½-½ Giri-Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2019.

13...bxa4 14.♘cb4



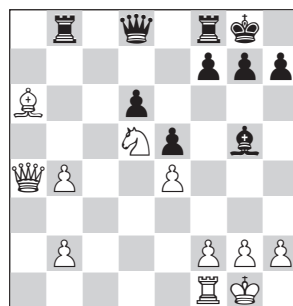
14...♙d7

Main theory nowadays is 14...♘xb4, the starting point of the theoretical discussion being 15.cxb4 0-0 16.♞xa4 a5! when we have many top-level games; the current assessment seems to be 'a dynamic balance'.

15.♙xa6 ♘xb4 16.cxb4 0-0 17.0-0 ♙c6
 Black could have stopped White's exchange sac by playing 17...♗e8

but then White has an advantage after the simple 18.b3 19.♗xb3. White has light-square domination, a passed b-pawn and control of the a-file; Black has no real counterplay. Now Vishy goes for a positional exchange sac that had already been seen in grandmaster practice some years earlier, so it's quite possible that Anand knew that game:

18.♞xa4! ♙xa4 19.♗xa4

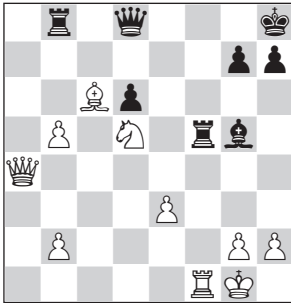


Compare this position to (the same sacrifice idea in) Giri-Carlsen, in the comment after 13.a4 (White playing 13.♙e2). Well, it cannot really be compared, because in that game Black had played three more moves: ...♗h8, ...g6, ...f5, and also his pawn on a6 was still alive! Probably guided by the logic 'I am material up – a queen trade makes sense' Loek went for that:

19...♗e8

Black struggles to create counterplay here anyway, so keeping the queens on did not equalize either: 19...♗h8 20.♙b5! (20.b5 ♗d7 21.♗c4 f5 was about equal in Ragger-Markos, Austria tt 2007) 20...f5 (20...g6 does not bring Black the counterplay he is hoping for

after 21.♔c6 f5 22.b5 fxe4 23.♖xe4) 21.exf5 ♖xf5 22.♔c6. Now, best for Black is probably to go for a pawn sacrifice: 22...e4 23.b5 e3 24.fxe3...



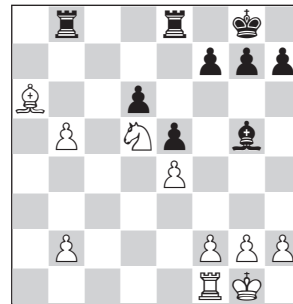
... assuming he finds the brilliant 24...♖f6!, but White still has some advantage after 25.♖xf5 ♖xf5 26.h4.

The stem game went 19...g6 20.♖c6. Now Black went for the typical bishop transfer to b6: 20...♔d2 21.b5 ♔a5 22.♔b7 f6 (including the ♖f8 in the game) 23.b4 ♔b6 24.♗xb6 ♖f7.



The game Barua-Lalic, Ubeda 1998, saw a ‘clean-up’ into a drawn endgame after 25.♗d1 ♖xb7 26.♖xd6 ♖xd6 27.♖xd6 ♖xb6=. White’s play can be improved with 25.♖c4! and after 25...♖xb7 26.♗d5 Black struggles for a draw.

20. ♖xe8 ♖fxe8 21.b5



We have a type of position White is happy to get. Yes, the queens are off, but the light-square domination from the middlegame still persists. White’s plan is relatively easy: push the pawn to b7, then ♗d5-b4-c6 (get your exchange back) and win a superior endgame. Black urgently needs counterplay, which is difficult to find.

Van Wely goes for the most logical – and typical of a Sveshnikov – counterplay idea:

21...f5 22.b6

Vishy continues on his path and keeps the position closed. It is doubtful if Black gets enough counterplay after 22.exf5 e4 23.b6.

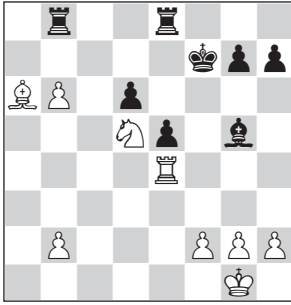
22...fxe4

White stands better, but how much better isn’t easy to tell.

Vishy comes up with an interesting pawn sac:

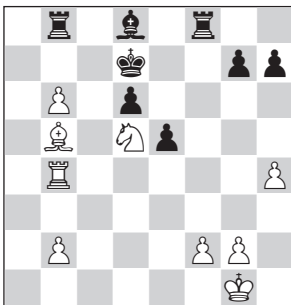
23.h4!?

With a limited number of pieces, White sacrifices a pawn to penetrate the c-file. The most logical alternative for White looks to be 23.♖e1 when Black needs to improve his king: 23...♔f7 24.♖xe4.



analysis diagram

Black's position is difficult to defend, but the engine always has ideas: 24...♖f8! (the arguably more logical 24...♗d8 25.♗b4 ♕e6 loses to 26.♗c4 ♖f8 27.b7. White wants to play simply ♗b5, ♘b4, ♘a6 and Black cannot stop this: 27...♗d7 28.♗b5+ ♕e6 29.♗c6 followed by ♗b5, ♘b4, ♘a6). Now White needs to spend a move to drive Black's bishop away: 25.h4 (25.♗b4 ♗d2) 25...♗d8 26.♗b4 ♕e6 and things are not the same as in the comment to 24...♗d8: 27.♗c4 ♗d7 28.♗b5+.



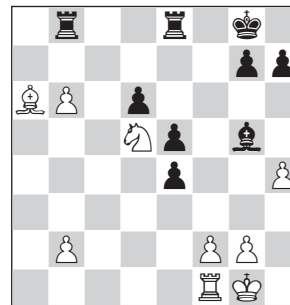
analysis diagram

Here Black has the defensive resource 28...♗c8!! 29.♗c4+ (it's never too late to do something stupid: 29.♗c6?? ♗xb6) 29...♗b7 30.♗c6+ ♕c8.



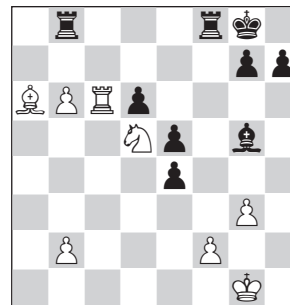
analysis diagram

Strangely, White does not have a killer check here and has to go for 31.b7+ ♖xb7 32.♗xb7+ ♕xb7 with (still) some advantage, but Black has reasonable chances to survive.



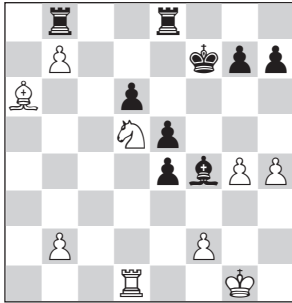
23...♗d2?

For better or worse, the pawn had to be taken! 23...♗xh4!. The c-file penetration is less decisive than it looks: 24.♖c1 ♖f8 25.g3 ♗g5 26.♖c6



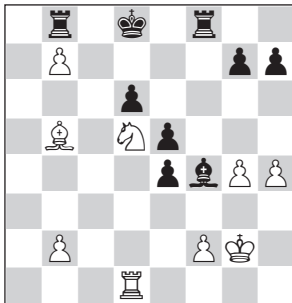
analysis diagram

26...♟f7! with approximate equality after 27.♙c4 ♟g6 (or 27...h5) 28.♞xd6+ ♟f5.
24.b7 ♟f7 25.♞d1 ♙h6 26.♟b4 ♟e7 27.♟d5+ ♟f7 28.g4 ♙f4



29.♞e1?

Logical but not precise. Apparently, it was better not to force matters, as after 29.♟g2 Black runs out of useful moves while 29...♞f8 loses to 30.♙c4 ♟e8 (30...♞xb7 31.♟xf4+ ♟e8 32.♟e6) 31.♙b5+ ♟d8.



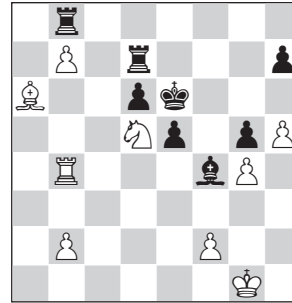
analysis diagram

Now White reminds Black of his weak king with 32.♞a1! and gets a winning advantage, e.g. 32...♞f7 33.♞a6.

29...g5!

A strong move, keeping Black in the game! He could also have chosen

a different move-order: 29...♞ed8 30.♞xe4 ♞d7 31.♞b4 g5! (the immediate 31...♟e6 does not work that well after 32.♞b5 g5 33.♟b4) 32.h5 ♟e6

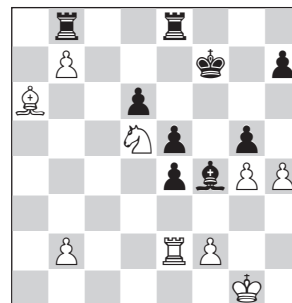


analysis diagram

33.♞b5 (White has no deadly discovered check after 33.♙c4 ♙d2) and we see why it was good to protect the bishop on f4: 33...e4⇌.

30.♞e2

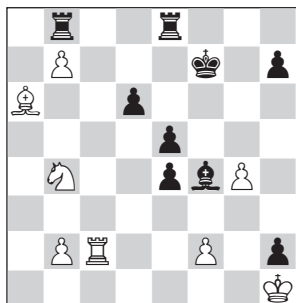
White renews the idea of the c-file penetration. After the (perhaps most logical) 30.h5 Black holds with 30...♞ed8! 31.♞d1 (31.♟b4?? ♙d2 31.♞xe4 ♟e6) 31...♞d7=; if 30.♞xe4, Black again eliminates the b-pawn with 30...♞ed8! 31.♞c4 ♞d7=.



30...♞ed8?

Van Wely (again) refrains from pawn-grabbing and this proves to

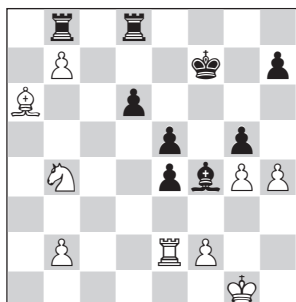
be the decisive mistake. Normally Loek loves to take material! 30...gxh4! had to be played. The advanced h-pawn helps Black to create counterplay and probably this will save the game! A logical run of play can be 31.♖c2 h3 32.♕h1 h2 33.♘b4.



analysis diagram

Black's situation looks hopeless but thanks to his advanced h-pawn he can save the game: 33...h5! 34.♘c6 and now another hidden resource: 34...♖a8! 35.bxa8♖ ♖xa8 36.♘b4 hxg4 and it will probably end in a draw; Black has enough pawns for the piece.

31.♘b4

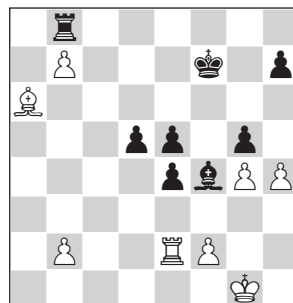


Now White is easily winning and Anand brings it home with a steady hand.

31...d5 32.♘c6

The simple threat is 33.♘xd8 ♖xd8 34.♖c2 with ♖c8 to follow, so 30...♖ed8? proves to be a loss of two tempi.

32...♗g8 33.♘xb8 ♖xb8



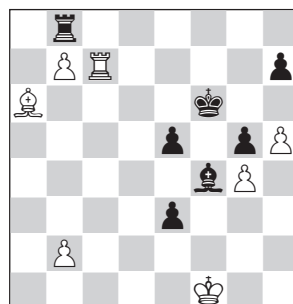
34.h5!

In essence, creating another passed pawn, as Black's h-pawn is going to fall.

34...♕e7 35.♕f1 d4 36.♖c2 e3 37.fxe3

Sadly for Black, he has to take with the pawn:

37...dxe3 38.♖c7+ ♕f6



39.♖xh7

White's passed pawns are impossible to stop.

39...e4 40.♗c4 ♖d8 41.♖f7+ ♕e5 42.♖d7

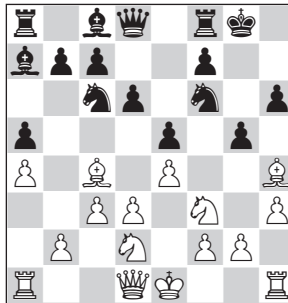
And Black resigned.

CHAPTER 6

Italian, Petroff, Ruy Lopez

From the huge area of 1...e5 systems, I have opted for examples that were likely to occur in the reader's practical play, coming from the often-played openings the Italian, the Petroff, and the Ruy Lopez.

The 'Italian Dilemma'



White's pin with ♗h4 is annoying for Black, and the most clear-cut way to solve it is a radical one – pushing ...g5. The problem, next to the weakening of the kingside, is that White may sacrifice a piece on g5. Most of the time, this is easy to calculate, but it may simply work for White. After facing (and not successfully solving) this dilemma often in my career with Black, I ended up playing ...h6 most of the time, to stop the annoying pin of ♗g5.

A typical Italian sacrifice

We have an instructive recent top-level game (and one in the comments) where the piece sacrifice on g5 works excellently for White.

Game 37 C54

Anish Giri 2768

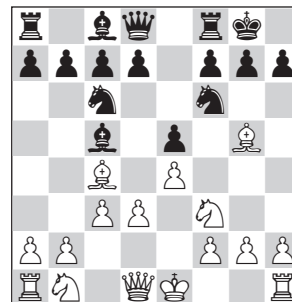
Ding Liren 2788

Bucharest 2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗f6

Probably Anish was inspired by the following game played by Magnus

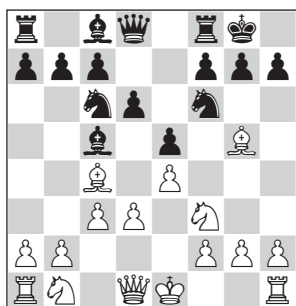
Carlsen six years prior: 3...♗c5 4.c3 ♗f6 5.d3 0-0 6.♗g5.



This standard pin is a bit unpleasant for Black. As in our

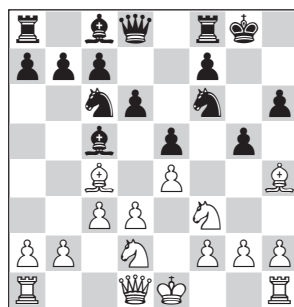
main game, the pin cannot really be ignored. Retreating the bishop to e7 looks a bit passive, while the most radical way (chasing White's bishop away by pushing ...g7-g5) gives White tactical possibilities like in our main game.

6...d6 (due to his pawn still being on d7, Black can opt for 6...h6 7. ♖h4 ♘e7 with play similar to the recent game Yu Yangyi-Dardha – see the comment to 6...d6 below)



7. ♘bd2! (a well-thought-out move-order. By delaying castling, as Anish will also do in our main games, White keeps sacrificial possibilities on g5, while by defending his e4-pawn he also – sort of – rules out Black's ...♘e7 plan of solving the pin on the h4-d8 diagonal. In case of 7.0-0, Black has a well-known plan to solve the pin by playing 7...♘e7!. Black wants to play ...♘g6 with ...h6 to follow, and is not worried about the doubling of his f-pawns: 8.d4 ♘b6 and now, compared to 7.♘bd2!, White's e4-pawn is hanging. After 9.♘bd2 Black plays 9...♘g6 with ...h6 to follow, while after 9.♘xf6 gxf6, Black's bishop pair, the open

g-file (for ...♖g8) and the potential ...f6-f5 pawn push compensate for the doubling of the f-pawns) 7...h6 (now, the unpinning move 7...♘e7 does not work as White's e4-pawn is defended and White gets a stable advantage after the simple 8.d4. Black is forced to make a concession, giving up the centre with 8...exd4 – with the e4-pawn defended, 8...♘b6? now simply drops a pawn after 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♘xe5 ♖d6 11.♘d3 – 9.cxd4 ♘b6 10.♘xf6 gxf6 11.0-0 and White has a pleasant advantage) 8.♘h4. Now, Karjakin opts for the most radical way to solve the annoying pin: 8...g5



9.♘xg5!. If I remember correctly, when watching this game live, Magnus was still blitzing out his moves here. He goes for a well-known tactical theme (though it was at the time a novelty in this particular position) and was most probably still in his opening preparation. Karjakin now took his time (interestingly enough, he had underestimated this known sacrificial idea just like Ding) 9...hxg5 10.♘xg5. As the usual result of this thematic sacrifice,

White has already grabbed two pawns for the knight, while Black is still far from solving the annoying pin) 10...♔g7 (10...♙e6 11.♖f3 ♘g7 transposes to the text) 11.♖f3 ♙e6 (nowadays, theoretical preparation has advanced to lower-section Olympiad teams and at the Chennai 2022 Olympiad we saw 11...♜h8 12.♞f1 (12.0-0-0 is a better execution) 12...♞a5 (12...♙e6 transposes to 11...♙e6 12.♞f1 ♜h8) 13.♞e3 ♞xc4? (13...c6! was necessary) 14.♞d5 ♞xd5 15.♙xd8 ♜xd8 16.exd5 and later White won in Mwadzura-Montes Orozco, Chennai 2022).

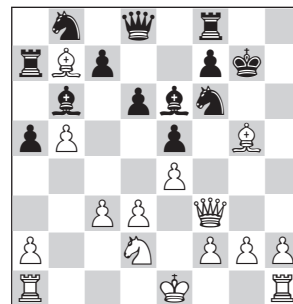


White has a big advantage here, however the execution is far from easy, even for a World Champion. White can successfully capitalize on his pin and gain a full point, but precision is needed. Flashy Stockfish or other top engine assessments are not easy to prove in a human game. Magnus went on to get an advantage, but did not derive the most from it and Karjakin ultimately escaped with a draw:

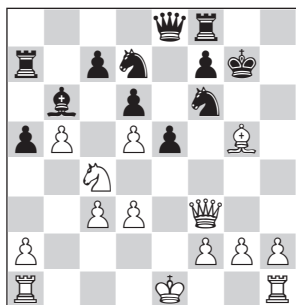
A) 12.b4 ♙b6



13.♙d5!. An unpleasant move! The trade with 13...♙xd5 14.exd5 is not really an option here, as White will get a great outpost on e4 for his d2-knight, while the standard plan ...♞b8-bd7 will cost a pawn on b7. Karjakin goes for the best defence: 13...a5! 14.b5 ♞b8 15.♙xb7 (White got a third pawn for his knight while the pin on the h4-d8 diagonal still persists) 15...♜a7 (Black's most precise defence was 15...♞bd7! and after 16.♙c6! (White should not be greedy as after 16.♙xa8 ♖xa8 the h4-d8 pin has been solved while Black's pieces start to coordinate nicely) 16...♜h8 17.h4 ♖f8 18.♞c4 ♜c8. White has three pawns for a piece and clear pressure, but Black has decent survival chances).



A1) 16.♙d5 was a logical move, but not the best: 16...♘bd7 17.♗c4 ♙xd5 18.exd5 ♖e8 (other options were 18...♗g8 or 18...♖h8).



The pin has finally been solved! White has pressure, and Black was certainly not out of the woods yet, but Karjakin defended well and the game ended in a draw, Carlsen-Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2017;

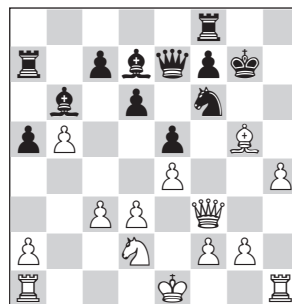
A2) Strongest for White was 16.♙c6!, insisting on eliminating the knight on b8 and making it harder for Black to solve the pin. Black is in big trouble, for example:

A21) 16...♙d7? does not work after 17.h4! ♗xc6 (17...♖h8 18.♗c4+-) 18.bxc6 ♙xc6 19.♖h3 with ♗g3 to follow, with a winning advantage for White;

A22) In case of 16...♗xc6 17.bxc6, the only way to get out of the pin here is by giving up an exchange: 17...♖h8. Now White takes space: 18.d4! ♖h6 (18...exd4?? blunders into 19.e5 dxe5 20.♗e4) 19.♙xh6+ ♗xh6 20.d5 ♙g4 21.♖g3 and White has a material and positional advantage and should win;

A23) 16...♗bd7 17.♙xd7 ♙xd7. Here it looks to me that the most

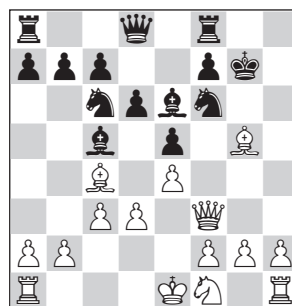
logical human continuation is 18.h4 (my Stockfish wants me to play 18.♗c4 ♙xb5 19.h4 and says White has a winning advantage) when Black tries to solve the pin with 18...♖e7:



analysis diagram

19.h5! and the next couple of moves look forced: 19...♖e6 20.h6+ ♗g6 21.h7! ♗xg5 22.h8♖ ♖xh8 23.♖xh8 ♖g4 24.♗e2. Black's pieces have no coordination – ♖a7 is hopelessly out of play. White should win this, e.g. 24...♙xb5 25.♖ah1 ♙d7 26.♖8h6;

B) The best execution was 12.♗f1!, provided that White is precise.



analysis diagram

Black cannot solve his problems here:

B1) 12...♙xf2+? does not really help as after 13.♗e2! (13.♗xf2? is wrong

due to the simple 13...♞xe4+ 14.dxe4 (♞xg5) Black has won a pawn but has opened the f-file, so White now easily gets a decisive advantage, e.g. 13...♙b6 14.h4 ♖h8 15.♗h2. The open f-file indeed comes in handy for White here, and the only way for Black to resist a bit longer is 15...♗b8 16.♞af1 ♗bd7; however, Black loses material after the simple 17.♙xe6 fxe6 18.♗g4 ♖f8 19.♙h6+ ♖h7 20.♙xf8 ♞xf8 21.♗xf6+;

B2) Black's best defence is to improve the knight and rook: 12...♗b8 13.♗g3 ♖h8.

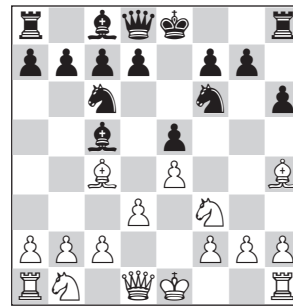


analysis diagram

Here White has an important idea that will be repeated in the main Giri-Ding game: 14.♗f5+! ♙xf5 (14...♖g6? is out of the question due to the simple 15.h4) 15.♞xf5 ♗bd7 and the combination of the h4-d8 pin plus pressure on the f-file (the f7-square) proves decisive here. White opens files and gets his piece back with a decisive advantage: 16.0-0-0 ♞e7 17.h4 ♖ag8 18.d4! exd4 (or 18...♙b6 19.f4+--) 19.cxd4. Black is forced to give back the piece: 19...♞xe4 (or 19...♙b6 20.♞he1) 20.♙xf6+ ♗xf6 21.♞g5+

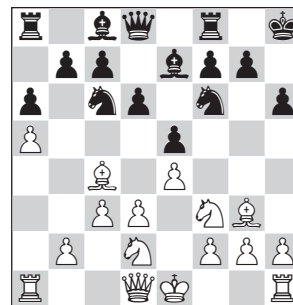
♞g6 22.♞xg6+ ♖xg6 23.dxc5 with a winning advantage for White.

4.d3 ♙c5 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙h4



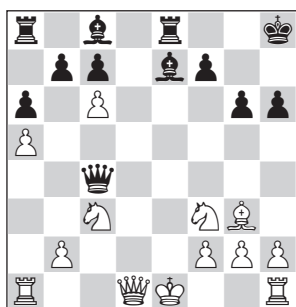
6...d6

With the pawn still on d7, one thematic way for Black to solve the problem of the pin is 6...♙e7. At the moment of writing, we have one recent top-level game that went 7.♙g3 (strategically Black is happy with the trade after 7.0-0 d6 8.a4 ♗h5 9.♙xe7 ♞xe7=) 7...d6 8.a4 0-0 9.♗bd2 (counterplay for Black? Push the f-pawn!) 9...♖h8! (given that Black has a change of heart in a few moves, he could have opted for the immediate 9...g6 10.a5 a6 11.0-0 ♗h5) 10.a5 a6 11.c3



11...g6!?. Not a mistake, however I don't like Black's unnecessary mixing of plans. Black wants to

play ...♘h5 but has weakened his kingside. 11...♘h7 is perhaps not precise because White probably has some advantage after 12.♖b3 f5 13.exf5 ♜xf5 14.0-0, but consistent and strong was 11...♘g8!. Black has active counterplay and is not worse, e.g. 12.♖b3 (or 12.d4 f5) 12...f5 13.exf5 ♙f6! with ...♗e7 to follow. After 11...g6, White takes central action: 12.d4 exd4 13.cxd4. Black reacts correctly: 13...♘xe4 14.♘xe4 d5 15.♙xd5 ♖xd5 16.♘c3 ♗c4 17.d5 ♜e8 18.dxc6.



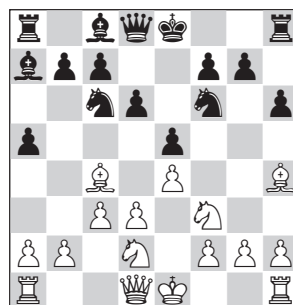
A tough decision: which check should Black give? 18...♙f6+ (18...♙b4+! was stronger, when after 19.♘e5 f6 20.♖d2 ♚g7 21.0-0-0 fxe5 we have an unclear, dynamically balanced game) 19.♘e2 ♙g4 20.0-0 ♖xe2. White has an advantage here, but does not play accurately: 21.cxb7 ♖xd1. Now after 22.♜fxd1 ♜ab8 23.♜a4 ♙xf3 24.gxf3 ♜xb7 the endgame was drawish, but thanks to a few mistakes by Black, White managed to win in Yu Yangyi-Dardha, Sharjah 2023. The double attack on Black's f7- and b7-pawns would have yielded White an advantage: 21.♖b3! ♖e6

(or 21...♙xf3 22.gxf3 bxc6 23.♖xf7) 22.♖xb7.

7.c3 a5

I assume that further theoretical discussions will be in the direction of 7...g5 8.♙g3 a6 9.♘bd2 ♙a7 as in Giri-Keymer, Wijk aan Zee 2023.

8.♘bd2 ♙a7



Probably inspired by Magnus's game, Anish keeps delaying his kingside castling:

9.a4!

We have had 9.0-0 g5 in a couple of top-level games.

9...0-0

If Black wanted to push his g-pawn, it was a good idea to do it now. For example, 9...g5 10.♙g3 ♖e7.

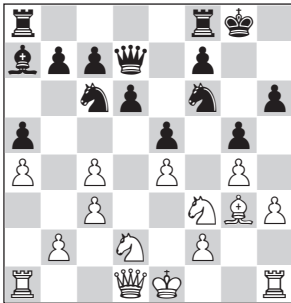
10.h3!

Similar to Karjakin, Ding Liren now goes for a radical solution to the h4-d8 pin:

10...g5

If Black plays 10...♖e7, we see another idea behind 10.h3: 11.g4! and Black is in trouble: 11...g5 12.♙g3 (12.♘xg5!? comes into consideration even here) 12...♚g7 13.♖e2 ♙e6 14.0-0-0! with h4 to follow. White has a strong attack – Black may collapse in a few moves.

Probably Black's best option was 10...♖e6 and after 11.g4 (11.♘h2!? is another plan to consider) 11...♗xc4 12.dxc4 (12.♘xc4 leads to an equal ending after 12...d5! 13.exd5 ♖xd5 14.♗xf6 e4! 15.dxe4 ♖xe4+ 16.♖e2 ♗fe8 17.♖xe4 ♗xe4+ 18.♙f1 ♗xc4 and a draw is the most likely result) 12...g5! 13.♗g3 ♖d7.



analysis diagram

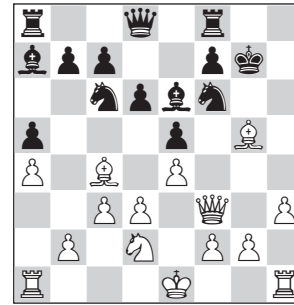
I prefer White here, but my Stockfish gives me zeros after 14.♖e2 ♘e7 15.0-0-0 ♘g6! (15...♖xa4? is not a good idea as White is fast with his attack after 16.h4) 16.h4 ♙g7 17.hxg5 hxg5 18.♘xg5 ♗h8 with apparent equality.



11.♘g5!

Bingo! Giri gets a situation like in Carlsen-Karjakin.

11...hxg5 12.♗xg5 ♙g7 13.♖f3 ♗e6



Similar to Carlsen-Karjakin, White should emerge victorious here with precise play, but it's not easy! Like Carlsen, Giri does not execute in the most precise way and gives his opponent a chance to escape. Probably still in his home prep, Anish started with a precise move:

14.♘f1! ♗h8

Another logical way to defend was 14...♘b8, when after 15.♘g3 ♗h8 16.♘f5+! ♗xf5 17.♖xf5 ♘bd7 we reach a situation similar to what could have happened in Carlsen-Karjakin: the h4-d8 pin combined with pressure on the f-file (the f7-square) should prove decisive. White opens files and gets a winning advantage with 18.h4. 18.♗f1 is also good, and 18.0-0-0 should also work well for White.

15.♘e3

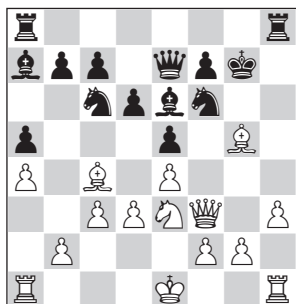
Black has different options to try to solve his problems but, provided White plays accurately, none of them seems to work.

15...♖e7

15...♘b8 16.♘f5+! transposes to lines given in the previous comment.

If Black removes White's annoying knight with 15...♗xe3 then White

takes advantage of the open f-file:
 16.fxe3 ♖b8 (16...♙xc4 doesn't work due to 17.0-0 ♖bd7 18.♚g3! and White wins: 18...♗h5 19.♙xe6 ♗xg3 20.♙xf7+ ♔g6 21.♙xd8. A different order of capturing with 15...♙xc4 does not work either due to 16.♗g4!. Black prevents an immediate annihilation with 16...♙xf2+ 17.♗xf2 ♙e6, but the f-file and the pin now prove decisive: 18.0-0 ♖g6 19.h4 ♖b8 20.d4 and White should win.



Giri has the right idea but does not execute in the most precise way:

16.0-0-0

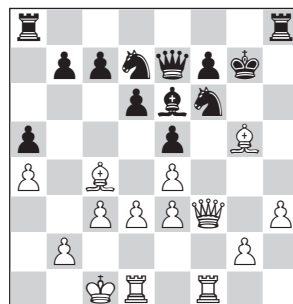
More accurate was to 'pro-actively' start pressuring on the f-file with 16.♙f1!. Black has nothing better than 16...♖b8, and now White goes for the already mentioned idea 17.♗f5+! ♙xf5 18.♚xf5 ♖bd7 19.0-0-0 and he will push f4, opening the f-file. Black can't get out of the pin or create real counterplay, e.g. 19...c6 20.♔c2 (removing his king from the check with ...♙e3; now White is ready to push f4) 20...b5 21.♙a2 bxa4 22.f4 and Black cannot defend against White's multiple threats.

The immediate 16.♗f5+ is not clear as after 16...♙xf5 17.♚xf5 Black has 17...♗d8! with ...♗e6 to follow.

16...♙ag8

Ding Liren does not take his chance. If the f-file is opened now, White does not have an imminent threat, so this was the moment for Black to remove White's knight:

A) 16...♙xe3+! 17.fxe3 ♖b8. Black is on time now, and we probably have a dynamic balance: 18.♙h1 ♖bd7.



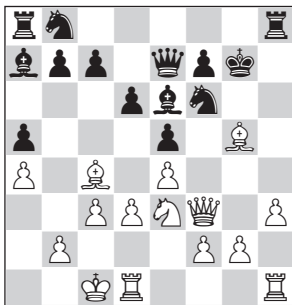
analysis diagram

The position is tense, and it is easy to go wrong, White needs to be smart to keep the balance here!

- A1) 19.♚g3 is wrong due to 19...♗h5!;
- A2) 19.♙f2 does not work in view of 19...♙xc4 20.dxc4 ♚e6! 21.♙df1 ♗h7 and Black wins, e.g. 22.♚g3 (or 22.♚xf7+ ♚xf7 23.♙xf7+ ♔g6) 22...♗xg5 23.♚xg5+ ♔f8 24.♙xf7+ ♚xf7 25.♙xf7+ ♔xf7 and Black has too many pieces for the queen;
- A3) After 19.♙d5! the engine gives zeros, while in case of 19...c6 (also possible is 19...♙h7 or 19...♔g6) we see the reason why White inserted 19.♙d5! as now 20.♚g3! leads to

a balanced position: 20...♖h5
 (alternatively, Black can go for an interesting, materially unbalanced position with 20...♔f8!? 21.♙xf6 ♗xf6 22.♚f3 ♗xd5! 23.♙xe7+ ♗xe7 with unclear play) 21.♙xe7+ ♗xg3 22.♙xe6 ♗xf1 23.♙xd7 ♗xe3 24.♙e1 ♗xg2 (24...f6? loses to 25.♙xe3 ♔f7 26.♙xd6 ♙ad8 27.♙f3 ♙xd7 28.♙xe5) 25.♙g1 f6!. White cannot collect the black knight and keep both of his bishops: 26.♙f5 ♔f7 27.♙xg2 ♔xe7 28.♙g7+ ♔f8 29.♙xb7 ♙g8 and it is easier for White here, but a draw is the most likely result.

B) In case of 16...♗b8...



analysis diagram

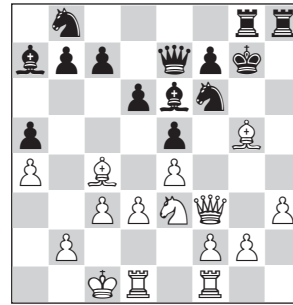
... White goes for a well-known solution: 17.♗f5+! ♙xf5 18.♚xf5 ♗bd7 19.♙he1! (ruling out Black's ...♙e3+ and getting ready for the files to open) 19...♙h5 20.f4 exf4 21.d4 and White wins soon.

Anish understands that he has given Ding a chance, and now he continues precisely!

17.♙hf1!

Now White has a winning advantage, and Giri executes with a steady hand.

17...♗b8

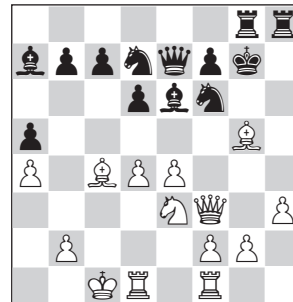


White goes for a direct execution, immediately opening the centre.

18.d4

The idea we already established as good for White, 18.♗f5+ ♙xf5 19.♚xf5, should work here as well as after 19...♗bd7 20.♔b1 with f4 to follow, Black cannot keep his stuff together.

18...exd4 19.cxd4 ♗bd7



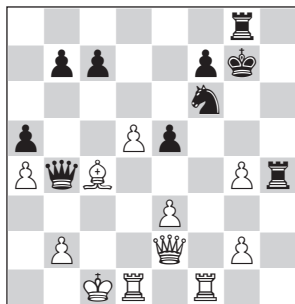
20.e5

Direct and strong. White gets his piece back while the attack continues.

20.h4 was probably working too.

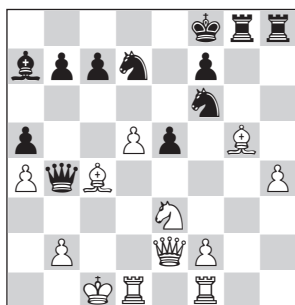
20...dxe5 21.d5 ♚b4 22.♚e2 ♙xh3

Another way to give back the piece was 22...♙xe3+ 23.fxe3 ♙g4 (23...♗xd5 loses to 24.♙xd5 ♚c5+ 25.♚c2) 24.♙xf6+ ♗xf6 25.hxg4 ♙h4.



analysis diagram

Black's king remains weak: 26. ♖f5!
 ♖xg4 27. ♗d3 ♘xd5 28. e4 ♘f6
 29. ♖df1 ♖g6 30. g4 with g5 to follow,
 and Black will soon get mated.
23. gxh3 ♖f8 24. h4

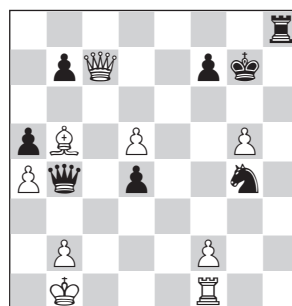


Ding Liren hopes to create practical survival chances:

24... ♗d4 25. ♖xd4!
 25. ♗b5 also looks good.
25... exd4 26. ♘f5 ♖xg5
 26... ♘e5 loses to 27. ♗b5.
27. hxg5 ♘e5
 27... ♘e8 loses to 28. ♖e1 ♘g7 29. d6.
28. ♗b5 ♘fg4 29. ♖b1 ♖g8 30. ♘h6+!
♘xh6 31. ♖xe5 ♘g4 32. ♖xc7

Now White is up material while his attack still continues.

32... ♖g7



33. g6! ♖f8
 Or 33... ♖xg6 34. ♖g1 f5 35. f3.
34. gxf7 d3 35. ♖g1 ♖xf7 36. ♖c3+
 And facing an endgame down a piece, Black resigned.

Rook lift ideas in the Petroff



The Petroff Defence (or in some opening manuals 'the Russian') has a reputation of a quiet, solid choice where Black aims to equalize the game.

Well, in many lines of the Petroff, this reputation is entirely mistaken, as we get sharp dynamic play. One of the ways for White to seize the initiative is by using a rook lift. Sometimes the rook is lifted via the fifth rank (♖b1-♖b5) and sometimes also via the second rank (♖a2-♖e2). Usually we get sharp play, and the games I have selected show the dynamics.

Game 38 C42

Nigel Short 2650

Valery Salov 2630

Amsterdam 1989

The rook lift ideas we are about to see in this game were novel at the time and were difficult to evaluate in the pre-computer era. The positions we will reach are very dynamic, with razor-sharp tactics – perhaps not what you would expect from a ‘quiet Petroff’.

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♞f6 3.♟xe5 d6 4.♟f3

♜xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♙d6 7.0-0 0-0

8.c4 c6 9.♟c3 ♜xc3 10.bxc3 ♙g4

Nowadays, theoretical discussions go in the direction of **10...dxc4**

11.♙xc4 ♙f5.



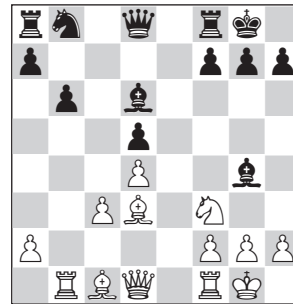
11.cxd5

If White places his rook on b1 with **11.h3 ♙h5 12.♖b1**, we can get different types of positions: **12...dxc4 13.♙xc4 b5 14.♙d3 ♞d7** with comfortable play for Black, as for

example in Ljubojevic-Khalifman, Reykjavik 1991.

11...cxd5 12.♖b1 b6

Black’s best move is considered to be **12...♞d7**. We can get dynamic positions where White sacrifices a pawn: **13.h3 ♙h5 14.♖b5 ♞b6** (modern theory considers that **14...♞f6** equalizes) **15.c4! ♙xf3 16.♗xf3 dxc4 17.♙c2**. We have quite a number of top-level games with this position. White definitely has compensation for the sacrificed pawn but perhaps not more.



White now goes for a nice rook lift that is worth remembering:

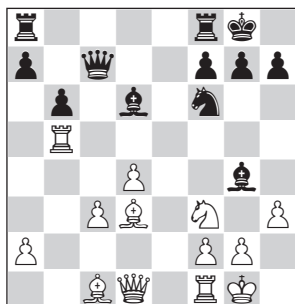
13.♖b5!

Nowadays, armed with strong engines, we all understand that White stands better here. In the ensuing positions we have sharp tactical play, offering plenty of ideas to a gifted player and very difficult to assess clearly without silicon assistance. In the late 1980s and

early 1990s, this was a hotly debated line on top level.

13...♙c7

Black can opt for a positional pawn sacrifice here, provided they understand the dangers: 13...♘d7 14.♗xd5 ♘f6 15.♖b5 ♗c7 16.h3.



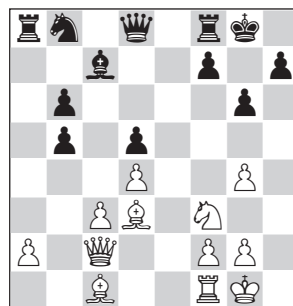
analysis diagram

And now Black can play for a light-square blockade with 16...♙e6 17.♗c2 ♙c4 18.♖f5 ♘d5.

14.c4

Direct; however, best for White was to ask Black a difficult question about his bishop: 14.h3!. Black does not have a good retreat, so he has to harass White's rook: 14...a6 (14...♙h5? loses to the simple 15.c4 ♗d6 16.g4 ♙g6 17.♗xd5) when White's best option is to go for an exchange sac with 15.hxg4! (my Stockfish is also enthusiastic about the slightly different exchange sacrifice 15.♗xd5! ♗xd5 16.hxg4 ♘d7 17.♗c2, with more than just compensation for White) 15...axb5 16.♗c2 g6.

It is obvious that White has great compensation here, but in pre-computer days, judging the size of it was far from easy.

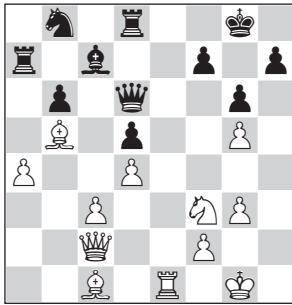


It took top players quite some time to understand that White has a clear advantage here. Precision is needed! Black's biggest problem is that he is unable to coordinate his pieces.

In the following game, Ivanchuk masterfully increased the pressure and finished with a direct mating attack: 17.♙xb5! (in a top-level game two years prior, White opted for a more direct but less precise continuation: 17.♙h6 ♖e8 18.♙xb5 ♗e4 19.g5; the bishop on h6 stands great if aided by more forces to mate Black's king, but the way the game went, the bishop remained out of play and Black saved a draw in Short-Gelfand, Brussels ct 1991) 17...♗d6 (on 17...♘d7, White should, like Ivanchuk, continue limiting Black's pieces with 18.g5! as getting the exchange back with 18.♙h6 allows the good defensive resource 18...♘f6! 19.♙xf8 ♙xf8±) 18.g3! and now:

A) If 18...♘c6, White can continue similar to Ivanchuk in the game: 19.♙g2 f5 20.♖h1! and Black is in trouble (20.♙f4 ♗d7 21.g5 is less good; White gets a dominant knight

but trades off too many pieces:
 21...♙xf4 22.gxf4 ♖c7 23.♙xc6
 ♖xc6 24.♘e5 ♗d6 25.a4 ♖a5 26.♖b1
 and the game Sokolov-Nikcevic,
 Vrnjacka Banja 1998, later ended in
 a draw) 20...♖ae8 21.♘g5 ♖e7 22.♖h6
 and Black cannot keep his kingside
 intact, e.g. 22...♘d8 23.♙d3! ♘f7
 24.♘xf7 ♖exf7 25.gxf5 ♗d7 26.g4;
 B) 18...♖a7 19.♖e1 ♘d7 20.g5!
 (limiting the knight on d7
 and preparing the ♘f3-h2-g4
 manoeuvre) 20...♖d8. Sensing that
 Black does not have any counterplay,
 White takes his time: 21.a4! ♘b8.



analysis diagram

Now the time has come for a
 mating attack! 22.♘h2! ♖f8 23.♘g4
 ♙d6 24.♙g2 (Black's situation is
 hopeless, White's attack wins by
 itself) 24...♙h8 25.♖h1 ♖g7 26.♘f6
 h5 27.♖d1, and not willing to wait
 for 28.♖xh5, Black resigned in
 Ivanchuk-Bareev, Linares 1993.

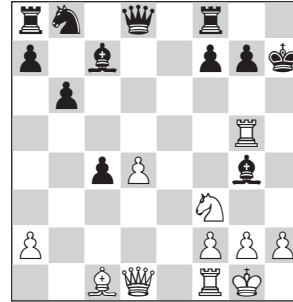
14...♖d6?!

This lands Black in trouble. A few
 months later, Jan Timman versus
 Nigel Short came up with the
 best continuation for Black here:
 14...dxc4!. The position is very
 tactical, and dynamically balanced.

In the pre-computer era, it could
 easily take days of analyses to
 investigate all the possibilities in
 such positions.

A) 15.♙xc4 should not worry
 Black: 15...♖d6 16.g3 ♘c6;

B) Jan must have investigated the
 tactical 15.♙xh7+!? ♙xh7 16.♖g5.



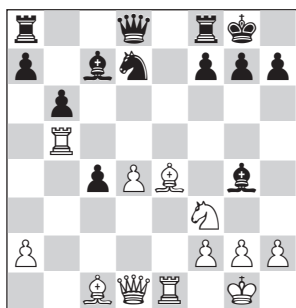
analysis diagram

B1) 16...♙xf3? is a blunder that
 loses by force: 17.♖xf3 ♘d7 18.♖h3+
 (18.♖h5+ also wins: 18...♙g8
 19.♖xg7+! ♙xg7 20.♙h6+ ♙f6
 21.♙g5+; Black gets enough material
 for the queen but his pieces
 coordinate badly and the king is
 overexposed) 18...♙g8 19.♖h5 f6
 20.♖e1!, cutting off the escape route;
 Black's king will soon be mated;

B2) Modern-day silicon brain
 analyses point out an interesting
 tactical line ending in equality:
 16...♙c8! 17.d5 and now Black needs
 to make a prophylactic decision:
 17...♙g8! (moving the king to a safer
 place) 18.♖d4 f6 19.♖h5. White has
 a strong attack, but he is also a piece
 down. Best play probably leads to a
 draw: 19...♘c6! 20.♖xc4 b5! 21.♖xc6
 (21.♖h4 ♘e7 doesn't look like a
 winning attempt) 21...♖e8 22.♖xa8

♙xh5 23.♙xa7 ♘d6 24.♙d4 ♘b7
25.♚d1 ♚d8 and Black has enough
compensation to hold;

C) Short went for arguably the
most logical continuation: 15.♘e4.
Here Timman missed a beautiful
positional sacrifice: 15...♘d7!
(15...♘c6 was played in Short-
Timman, Hilversum m 1989)
and if 16.♚e1?! (Black has full
compensation after 16.♘xa8 ♙xa8)



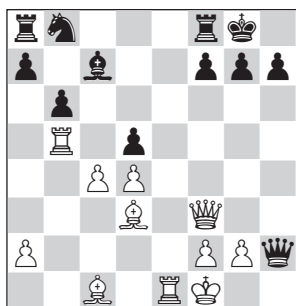
analysis diagram

Black insists on sacrificing an
exchange: 16...♘f6! 17.♘xa8 ♙xa8
18.h3 ♘e6 and Black has a great
game here. White faces a struggle
for a draw.

15.♚e1!

White is not afraid of ghosts and
lets Black execute his threat.

15...♘xf3 16.♙xf3 ♙xh2+ 17.♔f1



White is better developed as the
black queen on h2 can easily be a
liability here. However, the position
is still complicated (a lot of tactics)
and mistakes start to happen:

17...♘c6?!

17...♘d7 18.♚xd5 ♘f6 19.♚f5± gave
Black better surviving chances.

18.♚xd5 ♚ae8

18...g6? loses to 19.♚d7.

19.♘e3?

Throwing away a relatively easy
win. The way to convert was
19.♚xe8! ♙h1+ (19...♚xe8? loses to
20.♚h5 ♙d6 21.♘a3 (or 21.♘xh7+
♔f8 22.♘a3) 21...♘b4 22.♘xh7+ ♔f8
23.♘g6! and Black loses decisive
material or gets mated, or both)
20.♔e2 ♚xe8+ 21.♘e3 (the bad
position of Black's ♙, ♘, ♘ plus ♔
decides) 21...♙a1 22.♙h3 g6 23.♙d7.

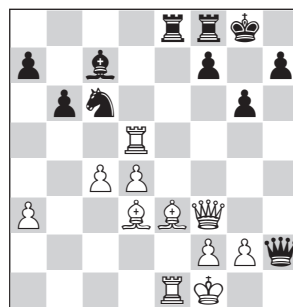
19...g6

Now Black is back in the game!

19...f5 was also possible.

White decides to stop 20...♘b4, but
this costs time.

20.a3



20...♙h1+?!

This check actually improves
White's king.

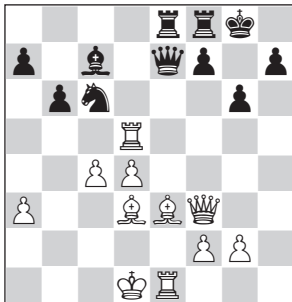
Black had to exploit White's weak king with 20...f5!. Now the queen on h2 is suddenly well placed, and White's best option is to simplify into a drawish endgame: 21.♖h3 (21.g3 f4 22.gxf4 ♕xf4 does not look like a winning attempt) 21...♗xh3 22.gxh3 f4 23.♕d2 ♖xe1+ 24.♔xe1 ♖d8 25.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 and a draw is the most likely outcome here.

21.♔e2 ♗h4

Now White pursues a good idea to utilize the h-file, but he does not do it in the most precise way:

22.g4

Correct was 22.♔d1!, removing Black's threat of 22...♗xd4. Now White's king is relatively safe while he has various threats – ♖d7 or g4 followed by ♖h1: 22...♗e7.



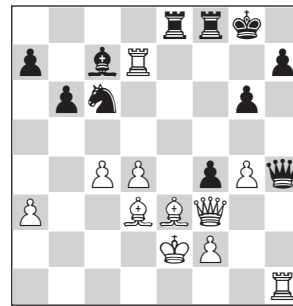
analysis diagram

Naturally, White is not going to allow 23...♗xa3: 23.c5! bxc5 and now is the time to utilize the h-file: 24.♖h1! cxd4 25.♗h3 f5. Black escapes mate, but ends up in a bad position. 26.♕c4 ♔h8 27.♕g5 ♗g7 28.♕h6 ♗e7 29.♕xf8 ♖xf8 30.♖e1 ♗g7 31.♗d3 and White has a large advantage and should win.

22...f5!

Black now has enough counterplay to hold!

23.♖d7 f4! 24.♖h1



24...♗f6?

A crucial blunder.

This sharp game could have ended peacefully had Black gone for 24...♗xd4+! 25.♖xd4 ♗g5! (25...♗f6? does not stop ♗d5+ and loses to 26.♖d7) and we get a drawish endgame after 26.♗d5+ (26.♗h3 is not a winning attempt as White may only get himself in trouble after the simple 26...♖e7) 26...♗xd5 27.cxd5 ♕d6 or 27...fxe3=.

25.♗d5+

Black now loses decisive material.

25...♖e6

Or 25...♖f7 26.♖xh7.

26.g5

Too many black pieces are hanging.

26...♗xd4+ 27.♔d1 1-0

Game 39 C42

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I like this game because, similar to Short-Salov, it contains a rook lift on the fifth rank by White. This