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FEAR AND FORTUNE IN CHESS

THE ART OF EXPLOITING YOUR OPPONENT'S RISK-AVERSION

PART TWO OF THE ASTANA MATCH ANALYSIS: **NERVES AND FORTUNE – DING'S FINAL STEPS TOWARDS THE WORLD CROWN**

CHESS HISTORY: **WAS ALEXANDER ALEKHINE A NAZI?**

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To risk or not to risk?



The high-stakes mindset: Unleashing the psychological power in chess

By GM Aleksandar Colovic
www.alexcolovic.com
Photo: David Llada

Several weeks ago I read the following quote by Magnus Carlsen. It was said at a training camp in Norway and I was pleasantly surprised by Carlsen's honesty.

Here it is.

"I think the most important thing that I have realised over the years is that [a] lot of people fear me. I learnt to use that against people. Specially once you realise that your opponent is not mentally prepared to play for a win, then you can take [a] lot more chances. During games, sensing your opponent's mental state is very useful. For instance, take my games against Wesley So, specially in shorter time controls, you can see, I am always giving him chances to play risky moves and he almost never takes them. This means that I have a massive psychological advantage playing him. He is an amazing player and his understanding (of the game) is probably not worse than mine but I am able to push him around because he is not willing to take risks. Not being willing to take risks is an extremely risky strategy because it means you will get pushed around and bullied basically".

At the Superbet Classic (6-15 May, part of the Grand Chess Tour), So started with a fine win with the black pieces against Firouzja. Then a series of draws ensued, something quite typical of So's performances. Not for lack of trying, mind you, but because of what Carlsen said above, choosing safe paths.

In round six So met the newly-crowned World Champion. Let's take a closer look...

Ding Liren **(2788)** – Wesley **So (2760)**

Superbet Classic 2023 Bucharest ROU (6), 12.05.2023

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e5 3.e3 A small deviation from Game four in Astana, where Ding played the same move after the inclusion of 3.♘f3 ♘c6. The major difference is the possibility of developing the knight on e2.

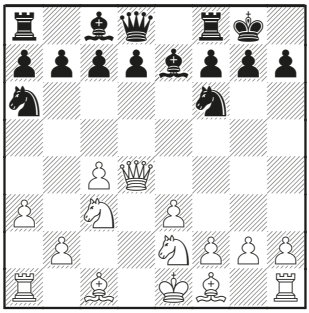
3...♗b4 An important alternative is 3...♘c6.

4.♘ge2 Here it is.

4...0-0 5.a3 ♗e7 With the knight on e2, it makes little sense to take on c3.

6.d4 exd4 7.♕xd4 So had already faced the other recapture with 7.♘xd4 but after 7...d5 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 he had no problems in the game Andreikin,D (2729)-So,W (2771) CGC KO 2022 chess.com INT rapid (4.4) 0-1

7...♘a6



A very rare move, but the idea of the development of the knight on a6 had already been implemented by Praggnanandhaa, only after 7...a5. The usual moves are 7...♖e8, 7...c6 and 7...♘c6.

8.♕d1 In view of the upcoming ...♘c5, threatening ...♘b3, White retreats with the queen in advance to cover the b3-square.

8...c6 9.♘f4 ♘c7 Black is aiming for the ...d5 push to solve the problem of the lack of space.

10.e4 White is trying to stop ...d5. This is ambitious, but also risky. White's main risk in these lines of the English Opening (when he plays in the centre) is lag in development and, while he does have a certain margin of safety, he should be careful not to push this type of play too hard as then he may be blown off the board.

10...♖e8 In fact, the immediate 10...d5 was possible. After 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♘fxd5 *(or 12.exd5 ♖e8 13.♗e2 g5! 14.♘h5 ♘xh5 15.♗xh5 ♘xd5! gives Black great play, as taking the knight leads to a spectacular loss after 16.♕xd5? ♗f6+ 17.♔f1 ♖e1+!! 18.♔xe1 ♗xc3+ 19.bxc3 ♕xd5)* 12...♘fxd5 13.exd5 ♗f6 and Black regains the pawn with equal play.

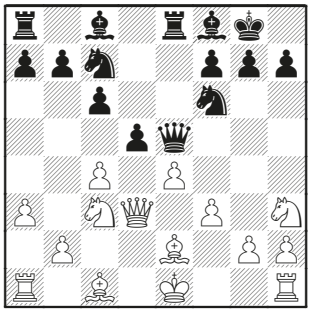
11.♗e2 White naturally wants to put more pieces on the e-file, but it was better to defend the e4-pawn by putting the bishop on d3. Now Black gains tempi by attacking the central pawn and White, in spite of being only one move away from castling, is in serious danger of never getting the time to move his king out of the centre.

11...♗f8 12.♕d3 ♕e7 13.f3 ♕e5 The queen on e5 supports the ...d5 break.

14.♘h3? Too ambitious, after which Black firmly takes hold of the initiative and White's king remains stuck in the centre. Ding spent almost half an hour on this move.

It was high time to evacuate the king with 14.0-0 after which White is only marginally worse: 14...d5 15.cxd5 cxd5 16.♘fxd5 ♘fxd5 17.f4! this is more precise than the immediate capture on d5. 17...♕e6 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♕xd5 ♕xd5 20.♘xd5 ♖xe2 21.♗e3! and now it is White who has a lead in development, which compensates for the opponent's bishop pair. White wants to exchange the rook with ♖f2, while the pawn on b2 is taboo in view of 21...♖xb2? 22.♘c7 ♖b8? 23.♗xa7.

14...d5!



In classical fashion, Black opens the game while the opponent's king is still stuck in the centre.

15.♗f4 ♕e7 16.cxd5 cxd5 17.♘f2 White's hope is to organise his defences behind the e4-pawn.

17...♘e6 18.♗e3 d4! Black shifts the attack from the e-file to the d-file.

19.♗xd4 ♖d8 20.♗xf6 ♕xf6 21.♘g4 The only move.

21.♕b1? ♘f4 leads to complete collapse after 22.0-0 ♕g5 23.g3 ♗c5 with ...♖d2 and ...♗h3 coming.

21...♕g5 22.h4 Ding continues with tempo play.

22.♕e3 wasn't much better as it leads to a grim endgame after 22...♘f4 23.h4 ♘xg2+ 24.♔f2 ♘xe3 25.hxg5 ♘xg4+ 26.fxg4 ♗e6 where Black has excellent winning chances.

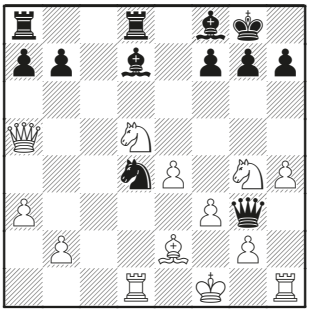
22...♕a5 23.♕b5 This was White's idea, to move the queen away from the attack with tempo.

23...♕c7 Black will never exchange queens as his attack is raging on. Now the threat is ...♕g3.

24.♘d5 ♕g3+ 25.♔f1 ♗d7 The first critical moment. So's move keeps the advantage, but now he is no longer winning.

25...♖xd5! was the winning move. 26.exd5 ♘f4 27.♘e3 a6!! So actually saw this, but after 28.♕a5 ♗d7 threatening ...♖e8. 29.♕e1 he missed that the simple 29...♕g6 was just crushing as ...♖e8 and ...♗c5 will create a decisive attack.

26.♕a5 ♘d4 27.♖d1!?



A move that is to an extent typical of Ding Liren's style. He seeks tactical defence and is successful at creating a mess at the board.

27.♕e1 was the alternative. 27...♘xe2 28.♕xe2 ♖ac8 still looks very dangerous for White, but objectively he should survive.

27...♘xe2 28.♖h3 b6! 28...♕b8 29.♘df6+! gxf6 30.♘xf6+ ♔h8 31.♖xd7 is quite all right for White.

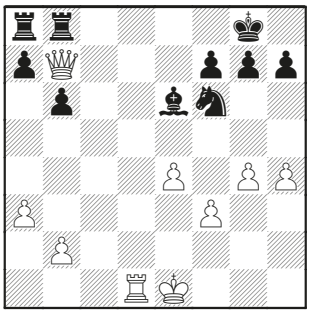
29.♕a6 ♗xg4! Great queen sacrifice and the only way to keep the advantage.

29...♕b8 30.♕xe2 ♗e6 31.♖h1 is a much improved version for White compared to the comment on move 27.

30.♖xg3 ♘xg3+ 31.♔e1 ♗e6 Materially speaking Black is well ahead, with a rook and two bishops for a queen and a pawn, but the position is very chaotic and this gives the defending side more chances.

32.♕b7 ♖db8 33.♕c7 White uses the queen to harass the opponent's forces.

33...♘h5 34.g4 ♘f6 35.♘e7+ ♗xe7 36.♕xe7 ♖e8 37.♕b7 ♖eb8

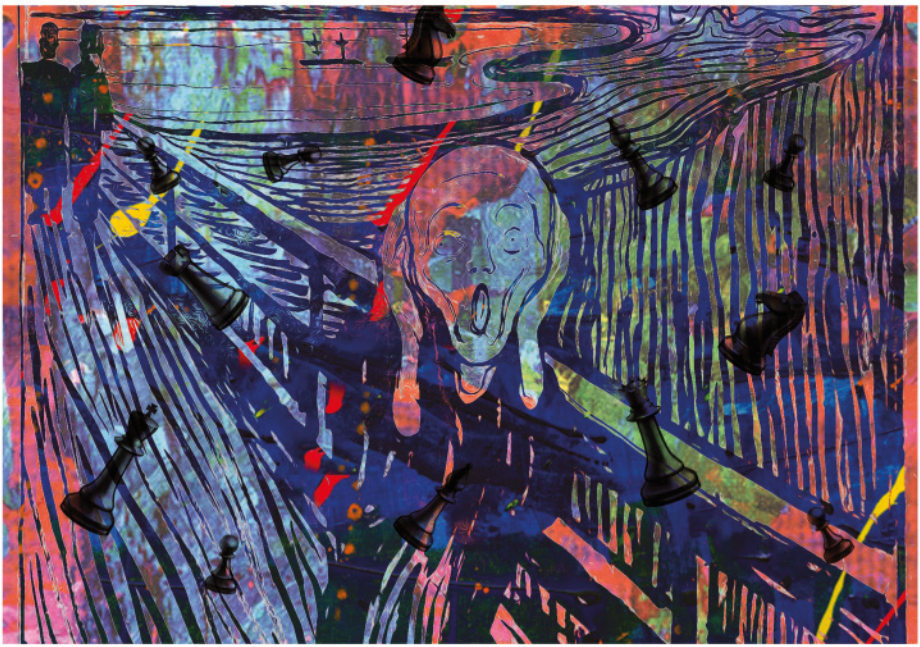


So decides to repeat moves and draw. The engine gives Black a winning advantage here, but So's words precisely explain the difference between human and computer approaches. "I just thought things went out of control. It doesn't even make sense looking at the computer these days, because they're just too strong and the evaluation is inhuman, so totally unrealistic, but I thought the position was very complicated at that stage. I was also disappointed that I missed a very good winning chance against Deac the other day, so I wasn't especially hoping for much today."

37...h5! 38.g5 ♘h7 with the idea of ...♘f8-g6 would have continued the game. So could also have made these moves and reached the time-control, when he could have examined the position in greater detail. After the game, he confessed: "Now that I see the evaluation it was very stupid for me to repeat, but during the game I wasn't 100% sure who's better, or how much better I really am."

38.♕e7 ♖e8 39.♕b7 ♖eb8 40.♕e7

½-½



A game that illustrates Carlsen's words perfectly. A powerful game by So, but when a situation arose when he had to decide whether to risk or not, first when he had a chance to sacrifice on d5 and second when he had to decide whether to continue the game, he took the safe paths.

The fact that that position was objectively winning for him even makes the point stronger - he relied on his assessment and calculation, as he admitted he wasn't sure what was going on, so instead of risking he decided not to, but you can easily imagine another player continuing the game without the slightest hesitation, in spite of not being in control.

So's words about the computer evaluation deserve special note. He is absolutely right and we should bear in mind that the computers are so strong nowadays that they are capable of calculating practically until the end, so for them the term 'messy position' doesn't apply. They simply calculate through the mess and come up with outrageously high evaluations, which to humans mean very little. The computer evaluation of 'completely winning' may be based on a series of only moves in extremely complicated positions, moves which are impossible for a human to execute without fail.

To paraphrase George Orwell - for humans, some positions are more winning than others. In So's case, he was just unlucky that he ended up in the latter ones.

So's approach is very similar to Petrosian's. Both of them came from poverty and for them securing good living was of utmost importance, so a bird in hand was always better than the one in the bush. It's nearly impossible to change one's approach and style after so many years, especially if it has brought so much success. But I would really like to see So take bigger risks - I am sure his results would improve and he might even get a shot at the title. As we saw, beating the World Champion was only a whisker away.


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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE MATCH AND THE 18 GAMES THAT DETERMINED THE NEW WORLD CHAMPION (PART TWO)



NERVES AND FORTUNE – DING'S FINAL STEPS TOWARDS THE WORLD CROWN

By GM Aleksandar Colovic; www.alexcolovic.com
Photo: FIDE/ Steve Bonhege / Anna Shtourman / David Llada

In the first part of this guide to the match between Ian Nepomniachtchi and Ding Liren held in Astana between 7th April and 1st May, we looked in detail at the first 10 classical games. In this part, we will examine the final eighth games: four in the classical part of the match and four in the rapid.

The first 10 games showcased both players' uncompromising appetite for victory, with a focus on an open, direct fight rather than theoretical debates and drawish lines. As a result, five out of ten games were decisive, and the players' strength swung dramatically during the match.

Overall, it seemed that in the first 10 games, Nepomniachtchi was the one who faired better: he took the lead three times, seemed more stable and was a point ahead.

Trailing his opponent for the third time, Ding had to push hard just to equalise. Playing catch-up can sometimes be easier than maintaining the lead, but that is a risky road as the other side may get a break and move one step further ahead.

As we reached the final four games of the classical stage of the match, it was obvious that it was becoming tougher and that tiredness has started to affect both Nepomniachtchi and Ding.

By this point, it still seemed that Nepomniachtchi is the one who is dictating the course of match. However...

Game 11:
HEIGHTENED NERVOUSNESS COMES TO THE FORE

Nepomniachtchi – Ding, ½ - ½
24.04.2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 After giving his team enough time to repair it, Ding returns to his main defence.

4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.a3 This time Nepomniachtchi returns to the line he has used in the past, also against the same opponent. As a reminder, in Game 5 he went for 8.c3.

8...♘a5 Ding executes the typical maneuver before castling.

8...0-0 9.♘c3 ♘a5 10.♗a2 ♗e6 11.b4 ♗xa2 12.♖xa2 ♘c6 13.♗g5 brought Nepomniachtchi an important win in the previous Candidates tournament: Nepomniachtchi,I (2774)-Ding Liren (2805) FIDE Candidates 2020 (6.3) 1-0.

9.♗a2 c5 10.♘c3 ♗e6 11.♗g5 Just like in Game 5, Nepomniachtchi plays positionally and fights for control of the light squares and the d5-square in particular.

11.♘h4 is a sharper alternative and was in fact tried by Nepomniachtchi against Carlsen. 11...0-0 *(11...c4 is another option, but Ding probably doesn't have good memories with it. 12.♘f5 ♗xf5 13.exf5 0-0 Perhaps 13...d5 is an improvement here. 14.dxc4 ♘xc4 15.♗xc4 bxc4 16.♗g5 with good control of the light squares in the centre, which gives White some advantage Caruana,F (2787)-Ding,L (2766) Tata Steel-A 78th 2016 (7) 1-0)* 12.♘f5 ♗xf5 *(12...♖c8 looked risky for Black after 13.♗g5 ♗xf5 14.exf5 ♘e8 15.♗e3 ♗g5 16.♗d5 Giri,A (2769)-Ding,L (2755) Sinquefield Cup 4th 2016 (3) ½-½)* 13.exf5 d5 14.♕f3 c4 with unclear play in the game Nepomniachtchi,I (2784)-Carlsen,M (2862) Skilling op KO rapid 2020 (2.23) ½-½.

11...0-0 The main move.

11...c4 is an alternative, but probably White can improve on this game: 12.♘d2 12 b4 and 12.dxc4 are possible ideas. 12...0-0 13.♗xf6?! ♗xf6 14.♘d5?! ♗xd5 15.exd5 e4 was good for Black in the game Anand,V (2803)-Ding,L (2782) Grand Slam Final 8th 2015 (2) ½-½.

12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♘d5 We have a similar scenario to Game 5 where White dominates the light squares along the a2-g8 diagonal and has control of the d5-square.

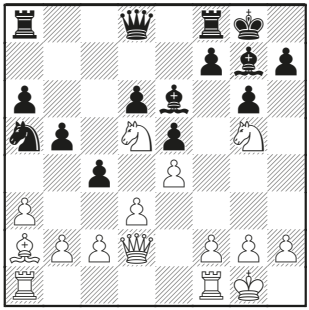
13...g6 Ding follows his own game from last year. 13...♖c8, 13...c4 and 13...♘c6 are all valid alternatives.

14.♕d2 An improvement. White doesn't really need the c3 move here.

14.c3 ♗g7 15.♕d2 c4! gave Black good counterplay in Nihal,S (2670)-Ding Liren (2811) chess.com SpeedChess 2022 blitz (2.27) 1-0.

14...♗g7 15.♘g5 An aggressive try, with the idea of f4.

15...c4?!



Ding spent more than 12 minutes on this decision, but it allows White to keep the initiative.

15...♗d7?! shows the dangers Black is facing: 16.f4 h6? *(16...exf4 is better, but after*



17.♕xf4 things look dangerous for Black and in fact his only move is to go back with the bishop 17...♗e6) 17.f5! and the attack is very strong, for example, 17...hxg5 18.f6 ♗h6 19.h4 and White is winning;

15...♘c6 16.f4 ♘e7! is a nice maneuver to neutralise White's threats. Black controls the f5-square, so no f5-ideas are possible, but he also seeks to exchange the centralised knight on d5 and the powerful bishop on a2. 17.f5 now this isn't dangerous. *(17.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.fxe5 ♗xe5 is just equal.)* 17...gxf5 18.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 19.♘xe6 fxe6 20.exf5 d5 and Black successfully blunted the bishop on a2.

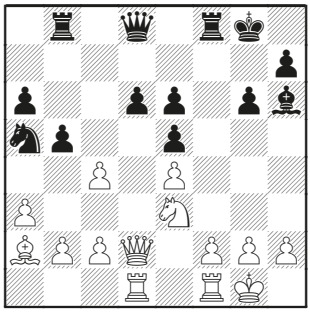
16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.♘e3 Now the whole construction of the pawns on c4 and e6 looks very shaky.

17...♗h6 The only way to slow White down and indirectly defend the pawn on c4.

18.♖ad1 White centralises his pieces.

18...♖b8 Black anticipates the opening of the position (and the b-file in particular after White takes on c4) and places the rook on the b-file, when after ...bxc4 it will attack the pawn on b2. 18...♖c8 was another idea, directly defending the pawn on c4. Still, even here after 19.♕e2 ♗xe3 20.♕xe3 ♖c6 Black's positions looks a bit loose. For the moment he keeps the bishop on a2 shut, but this also keeps his knight on a5. An important factor is also White's safer king, so as long as the queens are on the board Black won't be entirely safe.

19.dxc4?!



A very strange decision by Nepomniachtchi, practically agreeing to a draw. He said he was hoping to get a rook endgame and a pawn up, but that won't happen. This decision gives the impression that Nepomniachtchi

was avoiding risk at all cost and was playing for a draw, content with his one-point lead. But, unlike Carlsen, who could play dry and safe chess and not allow chances when up in the match, Nepomniachtchi wasn't able to do to same in the next games.

19.♕e2! was natural, avoiding the pin and forcing the exchange on e3. After 19...♗xe3 20.♕xe3 Black has some problems to solve. He must be precise on the next two moves with 20...♔g7! *(20...♕c7?! shows the dangers of Black's position. After 21.dxc4 ♘xc4 22.♗xc4 bxc4 23.b4 cxb3 24.cxb3± White has a stable advantage - he has the safer king, he can double on the d-file to attack the backward d6-pawn and he can create a passed pawn on the queenside.)* 21.dxc4 bxc4! Black should keep the bishop on a2 alive. *(21...♘xc4? is worse as after 22.♗xc4 bxc4 23.♕a7+ ♖f7 24.♕xa6 ♖xb2 25.♖xd6 White wins a pawn.)* 22.♖b1 *(now after 22.♕a7+ ♖f7 23.♕xa6 ♕c7! is an important difference, as the capture on b2 will attack the bishop that remained on the board.)* 22...♕b6 and objectively Black is fine. Still, there was absolutely no risk for White to try this and see if Black is precise in defence.

19...♘xc4 Now mass simplifications occur.

20.♗xc4 bxc4 21.♕xd6 ♕xd6 22.♖xd6 ♗xe3 23.fxe3 ♖xf1+ 24.♔xf1 ♖xb2 The rook endgame is a simple draw as the black rook is active and both sides have pawn weaknesses.

25.♖xe6 ♖xc2 26.♖xa6 ♖a2 27.♖c6 ♖xa3 28.♖xc4 ♖xe3 29.♔f2 ♖a3 30.♖c5 It appears that White is winning a pawn, and this was what Nepomniachtchi was hoping for, but Ding finds a precise defence.

30...♖a2+! First Black chases away the white king from the centre.

31.♔f3 ♖a3+ 32.♔g4 ♖a2! 33.♔h3 ♖e2! And now places the rook behind the e-pawn. White cannot keep the extra pawn because after

34.♖xe5 ♔f7 The black king harasses the rook.

35.♔g3 ♔f6 36.♖e8 ♔f7 37.♖e5 ♔f6 38.♖e8 ♔f7 39.♖e5

½-½

Nepomniachtchi didn't try to squeeze the maximum from the promising opening and this gave away heightened nervousness. Perhaps he was hoping that his preparation (the easy draw in the previous game with Black) will see him safely draw the remaining games, but in a volatile match up to this point, it was unreasonable to hope for that. Chances were abundant in every game and taking into consideration Ding's fighting spirit, a one-point lead was anything but safe.

These considerations all came into play in the next game.

Game 12:
AN AMAZING GAME THAT SHOOK NEPOMNIACHTCHI

Ding – Nepomniachtchi, 1-0
26.04.2023

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.e3 Another sideline by Ding Liren. This was famously tried by Carlsen in Game 8 in his match with Karjakin, a game he lost.

3...c5 4.♘bd2 cxd4 Nepomniachtchi again goes for the simple approach, aiming for the reversed Carlsbad structure. However, the Carlsbad was not a lucky choice for him - he ended up slightly worse in Game 3, he lost Game 6 and he also lost this game, though not before a lot of adventures.

5.exd4 ♕c7 The first strange move. There was no need to commit the queen so early, especially as White doesn't threaten ♗f4. The usual move is 5...♘c6.

6.c3 ♗d7?! The second strange move. This is a case of a player remembering an opening idea, but failing to remember precisely in which position it is played.

6...♘c6 is the best move according to Ding's preparation and he was happy to see Black's 6...♗d7. What Nepomniachtchi likely tried to remember was 7.♕c2 *(After 7.♗d3 ♗g4 8.0-0 e6 9.♖e1 ♗d6 10.♘f1 0-0 11.♗g5 we have the same position in the game but with an extra tempo for Black! 11...♘d7 12.♗h4 ♗f4 13.♗g3 ♘f6 14.♗xf4 ♕xf4 15.♕d2Jussupow,A (2595)-Gustafsson,J (2615) Bundesliga 0506 2005 (2.1) ½-½)* 7...♗d7! *(7...♗g4 8.♗b5 a6 9.♗xc6+ ♕xc6 10.♘e5 gives White some initiative.)* 8.♘b3 ♗g4! which works nicely for Black.

7.♗d3 White had an interesting alternative in 7.♘e5 ♘c6 and now either 8.f4 or 8.♘df3, in both cases establishing a strong knight on e5.

7...♘c6 8.0-0 8.h3!? was a good alternative, forcing Black to live with a passive bishop after 8...e6 *(8...e5? is just bad 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♕e2 wins a piece.)* 9.0-0 ♗d6 10.♖e1 0-0 11.♕e2 with a standard position that is considered more favourable for White thanks to the bad bishop on d7. In addition to this, White also has easy play with ♘e5, ♘df3 etc.

8...♗g4 Black loses a tempo, but at least he activates his bishop.

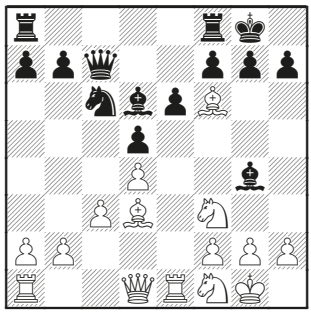
9.♖e1 Again White had a wide choice. He could have started play on the queenside with moves like 9.b4 or 9.♕a4, or he could have avoided the pin with 9.♕e1.

9...e6 10.♘f1 ♗d6 11.♗g5 11.♘g3 is met by 11...♘h5

11...0-0 Black is a tempo down compared to the Jussupow-Gustafsson game above, but his position remains solid.

12.♗xf6?!





Ding spent 28 minutes on this move. It resembles his decision to take on f6 in Game 2, which was also on the 12th move (!). In both cases the decision was unfortunate, as the open g-file can only be used by Black. Instead, he had several possible alternatives.

12.a4 is a generally useful move, something akin to Game 6, when Ding grabbed space on the queenside in a similar manner;

12.♘g3 is what Ding considered as a main alternative. 12...♘h5 13.h3!? ♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♘xg3 15.fxg3 ♗xg3 16.♖e3 ♗d6 is what he calculated. The pawn sacrifice looks promising, but Black can defend after 17.♕h5 g6 18.♕f3 ♗e7 19.♗f4 ♕d8 with the idea of ...♗g5;

12.♖c1 is another generally useful move. For example after 12...♖ac8 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.c4 White can try to use the rook on c1 to open the position since Black's king is weakened;

12.♗h4 is the move played by Jussupow in the above-mentioned game against Gustafsson. 12...♖ae8 *(here the move 12...♘d7? that was played by Gustafsson is bad in view of 13.♗xh7+! ♔xh7 14.♘g5+ and White wins.)* 13.♗g3 this is a standard maneuver to exchange Black's active bishop. 13...♗xg3 14.hxg3 with unclear play as here opening the centre with *(14.♘xg3 allows 14...e5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♗e2 ♘xf3+ 17.♗xf3 ♖xe1+ 18.♕xe1 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♖e8 and White's wrecked kingside structure gives Black comfortable play.)* 14...e5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♘e3 now doesn't lead to the weakening of White's kingside.

12...gxf6 13.♘g3 f5 It's curious that Black had a forced draw from this position! After 13...♔h8 14.h3 ♗xh3! leads to a forced draw. Of course, this was impossible for the players to calculate: 15.gxh3 ♖g8! this is more precise than taking on g3 immediately as Black wants to be able to take on g3 with the rook. 16.♕e2 ♗xg3 17.fxg3 ♖xg3+! 18.♔h1 ♖xh3+ 19.♘h2 ♕g3 attacking the bishop on d3, so White doesn't really have a choice but to move it. 20.♗c2 ♖xh2+! this sacrifice leads to a perpetual check. 21.♕xh2 ♕f3+ 22.♕g2 ♕h5+ with a draw, as White cannot step in the g-file in view of ...♖g8.

14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♘e7 Black is careful and doesn't allow a possible sacrifice on f5.

15...♗xg3?! 16.fxg3 with g4 next only helps White;

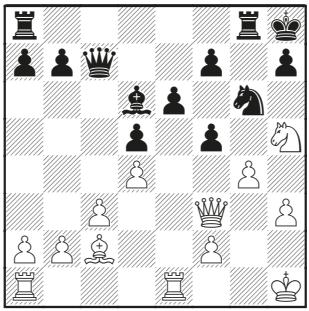
15...♔h8 looks natural, but here White can try 16.♘xf5!? exf5 17.♕xf5 f6 18.♖e6 with good compensation for the piece. He will likely pick up a third pawn and can then play against Black's king, For example *(18.♕xd5?! ♘e7! allows Black to consolidate.)* 18...♖ad8! *(18...♖f7?! 19.♕xd5* with ♕h5, ♖ae1 *is excellent for White.)* 19.♖xf6 ♖xf6 20.♕xf6+ ♕g7 21.♕f3 this is objectively unclear, but the opposite-coloured bishops help White - he can use his bishop to create threats against Black's king and also to attack the d5-pawn.

16.♘h5 ♔h8 17.g4 The game enters a very sharp phase. Ding is not afraid to go forward.

17...♖g8 18.♔h1 ♘g6 Both sides are piling up forces on the kingside.

18...♖g5?! looks natural as Black would like to double the rooks, but after 19.♖g1 ♖ag8 20.♘f6 ♖8g6 White has the unexpected 21.♘e8! ♕d8 22.♘xd6 ♕xd6 23.gxf5 and he obtains an advantage after 23...♘xf5 *(or 23...exf5 24.♖xg5 ♖xg5 25.♖g1 as Black's pawn structure is a mess.)* 24.♖xg5 ♖xg5 25.♖g1 ♖xg1+ 26.♔xg1 and with the threat of ♗xf5 White has a stable advantage.

19.♗c2?



This was correctly labelled a mistake by Ding after the game. He spent 13 minutes on this move.

19.gxf5? is bad after 19...♘h4 20.♕e3.

A) 20...♖g2 could lead to a pretty mating finale if White is not careful with 21.♕h6? *(21.f4 is the only move*, *leading to an unclear position.)* 21...♖h2+! 22.♔g1 ♖g8+ 23.♔f1 ♗e7! 24.f6 ♘f5! a great move, preventing mate on h7 and diverting the bishop from d3, thus allowing the queen to come to c4 with devastating effect after 25.♗xf5 ♕c4+ 26.♖e2 ♖h1#;

B) 20...exf5! threatening ...f4 and in case of 21.f4 ♘g2 wins the exchange

In fact, 19.♖g1 was best.

A) 19...♘h4 20.♕e2 f4 21.♘f6 *(21.f3 ♕d8!; 21.g5)* 21...♖g7 22.g5 f3 23.♕e1 leads to an incredibly complicated position with quite unorthodox placement of pieces;

B) 19...♗h2 20.♖g3!? this is a very curious exchange sacrifice. *(20.♖gf1 was suggested by Ding Liren as a better than what he chose in the game. He is right, this is objectively equal.)* 20...♗xg3 21.fxg3 gives White good compensation. 21...♘e7 *(21...f4 22.gxf4 threatening f5. 22...f5 23.♖e1 leads to a position where White has good compensation for the exchange, pressing on e6 and on the light squares.)* 22.gxf5 e5 *(or 22...exf5 23.♖e1 which is also unclear.)* 23.♕f2 e4 24.♗e2 ♖g5 25.g4 and the position is very messy.

19...♘h4! Now Black obtains a huge advantage.

20.♕e3 20.♕d3 is also met by 20...♖g6 and White won't have threats on the b1-h7 diagonal.

20...♖g6 20...f4 was a good alternative. 21.♕d3 ♖g6 22.f3 ♕e7 with similar play as in the game with ...♖h6, ...♖g8, ...♕g5 all coming as Black piles up on the kingside.

21.♖g1 f4! Nepomniachtchi plays this phase of the game very energetically.

21...♗h2? would be a mistake as here 22.♖g3! wins for White because the knight on h4 is stranded after Black takes on g3 and White recaptures with a pawn.

22.♕d3 ♕e7 Ding thought he was nearly lost here. His evaluation was correct.

23.♖ae1 23.g5 with the idea or ♖g4 is met by 23...h6! *(23...♘f5? is bad as now White takes over the initiative on the kingside with 24.♕f3 ♖xg5 25.♖xg5 ♕xg5 26.♖g1 ♕h6 27.♕g4 threatening ♗xf5.)* 24.gxh6 ♖xh6 25.♗d1 ♘g6 with the idea of ...♕h4.



23...♕g5! Another precise move.

23...♖h6? loses the advantage to 24.♘f6! and White is out of danger. 24...♕xf6 25.g5 ♕g6 26.gxh6 ♕xd3 27.♗xd3 ♘f3 leads to an equal endgame;

23...♖ag8?! is also imprecise as it allows 24.g5! a move that Black prevented with his game move. The pawn on g5 severely limits Black's pieces on the kingside and trying to get rid of it leads to unclear play. 24...h6 *(or 24...f5 25.gxf6 ♕f7 26.♕d1 ♖xg1+ 27.♖xg1 f3! 28.♖g7 ♖xg7 29.♘xg7 ♕xf6 30.♘e8 with an equal endgame after 30...♕g5 31.♕g1 ♕xg1+ 32.♔xg1)* 25.♘f6 ♖8g7 26.♘h5 hxg5!? *(26...♖g8 27.♘f6 is a repetition.)* 27.♘xg7 ♖xg7 28.c4! stirring up play on the other side of the board, as if the complications on the kingside weren't enough.

24.c4 Desperation. White doesn't want for Black to pile up with ...♖ag8, ...♖h6 with an eventual sacrifice on h5 at some point and tries to create some counterplay. As usual in lost positions, such measures only hasten the end, and this one is not an exception.

24.♗d1 was the alternative, to defend passively and hope for a miracle.

24...dxc4 Nepomniachtchi proposed 24...♖c8 as better, but there is nothing wrong with taking the pawn.

25.♕c3 This creates some vague threats connected with the discovered check d5, but for now they are harmless as Black always has ...e5.

25.♕xc4? ♘f3 loses on the spot;

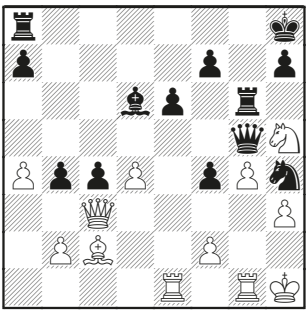
25.♕e4 ♖b8 doesn't bring much either.

25...b5 Black secures his extra pawn.

26.a4 Undermining Black's structure. What else can White do?

26.♗xg6 is hopeless. 26...hxg6 27.d5+ e5 the knight on h5 is lost, but it's important for Black after 28.♘g3 fxg3 29.fxg3 to find 29...b4! as the only move to win - by forcing the queen to move Black frees the f3-square for the knight, while taking the knight loses elementary to 30.gxh4 bxc3 31.hxg5 cxb2 and the pawns will win at least a rook.

26...b4?!



The moment when Nepomniachtchi starts to drift. This still wins, but Nepomniachtchi starts to play bad moves.

26...a6 made more sense, to let White show what he had in mind. 27.axb5 axb5 28.d5+ e5 29.♖a1 was Ding's intention, but after 29...♖c8 *(or 29...♖ag8 30.♗xg6 hxg6 31.♘g3 fxg3 32.fxg3 b4! with the same motif as in the previous note.)* 30.♖a6 b4! again with the same idea of ...♘f3.

27.♕xc4 ♖ag8? Played only after 27 seconds! This move lets all the advantage slip!

27...♘f3! was still winning for Black, with the forcing line 28.♕c6 ♘xe1 29.♕xa8+ ♖g8 30.♕e4 ♘xc2 31.♕xc2 ♕h4 and ...f5 next will crack White's kingside position wide open.

28.♕c6? Less than 2 minutes, which is what Ding spent on this move, was not enough to see the tactical refutation of Black's last move.

It was actually possible to take the rook: 28.♗xg6! hxg6 29.♕c6 gxh5 Black must play this. *(29...♗b8? 30.d5! wins for White and is what both players missed, as Ding himself admitted after the game.)* 30.♕xd6 ♘f3 31.♕c5! Forcing the exchange of queens and landing in an equal rook endgame after 31...hxg4 32.♕xg5 ♖xg5 33.hxg4 ♘xg1 34.♖xg1.

28...♗b8? A minute and 23 seconds spent and not only missing the win but also losing! What a turnaround!

28...♘f5! was winning. The point is that after 29.♗xf5 exf5 30.♖e8 fxg4 31.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 32.♕e8+ ♗f8 defends everything and White cannot defend his knight on the rim.

29.♕b7? Five minutes on this move, but it's another mistake. However, with both players having already missed the d5-idea, it wasn't very likely they would find it now.

29.♗xg6! hxg6 *(29...♘xg6 30.♕b7 leaves White up an exchange.)* 30.d5! wins for White and was missed by Ding. 30...♕xd5+ *(30...exd5 31.♘f6 is the main point - the knight gets an escape route; 30...gxh5 31.dxe6 fxe6 32.gxh5 ♕xh5 33.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 34.♕xe6+ and White wins a lot of material; 30...♗e5 31.dxe6 fxe6 32.♕xe6 ♗xb2 33.♕f7*

threatening both ♘xf4 and ♖e7.) 31.♕xd5 exd5 32.♘f6 with a decisive material advantage for White.

29...♖h6? Only 1 minute and 10 seconds on this move, Black continues the series of bad moves.

29...♘f5! was again strong. There is no more attack on the kingside, but after 30.♖d1 ♕h4 31.♕f3 ♘e7 Black can put the knight on d5 and threaten ...f5, so White's position remains difficult.

30.♗e4! The position finally stabilises. Ding thought he may be better here, but objectively the position is equal.

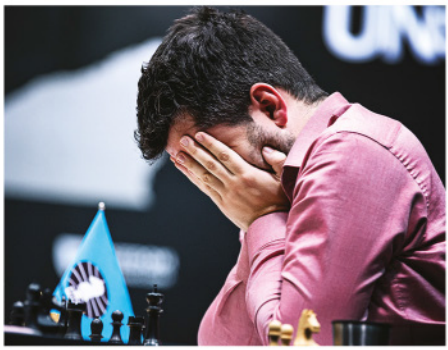
30...♖f8? Bluntly defending the pawn on f7, but allowing White to take the pawn on b4 with tempo.

30...f5? is bad, as 31.gxf5 ♕xh5 32.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 33.♖g1+ wins;

30...♗d6 made sense, defending the pawn on b4, the tactical point being that taking on f7 is bad now. 31.♕xa7 *(31.♕xf7? ♗e7! traps the white queen, the threat is ...♖f8.)* 31...♘f5 again this motif. 32.gxf5 ♕xh5 33.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 34.♖g1+ ♖g6 leads to sharp play, for example, 35.♕a8+ ♔g7 36.f6+ ♔h6 37.♖xg6+ fxg6 38.♗f3 White has dangerous passed pawns, but Black should be able to hold;

30...f3!? is a very double-edged try. 31.♕xf7 ♘g2 32.♕xf3 ♘xe1 33.♖xe1 is sharp and unclear, with both kings unsafe;

30...♖hg6 is an unobvious move that was also satisfactory for Black. The line is far from easy though: 31.♗xg6 hxg6 32.d5! ♘f3 the only move. *(32...exd5? opens the e-file and White wins after 33.♕xf7 gxh5 34.♖e7)* 33.dxe6 ♘xe1 34.exf7 ♖f8 35.♖xe1 gxh5 36.♕xb8! ♖xb8 37.♖e8+ ♔h7 38.f8♕ ♖xe8 39.♕xe8 hxg4 with an equal queen endgame.



31.♕xb4 Now White has an advantage.

31...♕d8 32.♕c3?! Ding keeps it solid and consolidates, but this lets some of his advantage slip.

32.d5! was forceful and strong. 32...e5 *(32...exd5 33.♕d4+ f6 34.♕xd5 gives White a big advantage. He's a pawn up and has better pieces.)* 33.♖c1 with ideas to play on the queenside. The tactical justification is that 33...f5? doesn't work in view of 34.♕b7! *(*or *34.gxf5 ♖xh5 35.♕b7)* 34...♖g8 35.gxf5 ♖xh5 36.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 37.♖c8 winning the queen.

32...♘g6 33.♗g2?! A second consolidating move after which White no longer has an advantage.

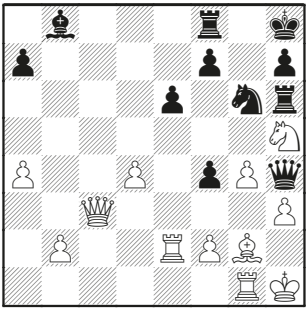
33.♖e2! ♕h4 34.♗g2! will arise later in the game after Black's imprecision on the next move.

33...♕h4?! White deals with the threat against the pawn on f2 easily. Probably Nepomniachtchi connected this move with his next one, but that one turns out to be a horrible blunder.

33...♗d6 kept the balance. With neither side having direct threats, but with a lot of tactical possibilities due to the weakened kings, the position remains very tense. 34.♕c6 *(34.b4 ♕e7 attacks the pawn on b4 and also threatens the skewer ...♗b4.)*

34...♖g8 when it's difficult to make progress for either side.

34.♖e2



34...f5?? Nepomniachtchi spent almost 3 minutes on this move and still missed White's next. White is already better, but there was no need to lose immediately.

34...a5 35.f3! secures the kingside and threatens ♕xa5;

34...♕g5 35.b4 and the queenside pawns move forward;

34...♖g8 35.b4 is similar.

35.♖xe6 Black's position falls apart now.

35...♖xh5 The 16 minutes spent on this move were clearly too late spent.

35...f3 36.d5+ ♗e5 37.♖xe5 fxg2+ 38.♖xg2 either king move wins, too, but why not just take the pawn. 38...♘xe5 39.♕xe5+ ♖hf6 40.d6 is devastating;

35...fxg4 36.d5+ ♗e5 37.♖xe5 ♘xe5 38.♕xe5+ ♖hf6 39.♘xf6 and White is a piece up with an easy win.

36.gxh5 ♕xh5 37.d5+ ♔g8 38.d6 Threatening ♗d5 or ♖e7.

1-0

An amazing game! Ding' fighting decision to take on f6 was risky and he was outplayed, but he continued to seek chances and was eventually rewarded. A win for Nepomniachtchi would have given him a 2-point lead and likely the title of a World Champion. And yet, in a winning position, he started to play fast and badly. Ding also wasn't precise, but kept his nerve better and capitalised when his opponent eventually collapsed.

The game was a major shock for Nepomniachtchi. He lost the lead and the match initiative in the worst possible manner, by ruining a won game. His shaken state of mind was clearly visible in the next game.

Game 13:
AN UNEVEN GAME

Nepomniachtchi – Ding, ½-½
27.04.2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 Ding regained confidence in his trusted weapon. At the end of the match trust in one's repertoire is necessary for at least some calming of the nerves.

4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 Nepomniachtchi returns to the line from Game 5.

8...0-0 9.h3 ♗b7 10.♗e3 But here he deviates, not wanting to see Ding's improvement. In Game 5 he continued with 10.a4.

10...♘a5 Black's standard reaction in many lines of the Ruy Lopez. He gains a tempo by attacking the bishop on b3 and expands in the centre with ...c5.

11.♗c2 c5 12.♘bd2 ♖e8 Another standard regrouping, planning ...h6 and ...♗f8.

The immediate 12...♘c6 also looks possible, as the advance in the centre 13.d4

gives nothing after 13...cxd4 14.cxd4 exd4 15.♘xd4 ♘xd4 16.♗xd4 ♘d7 with smooth piece play as compensation for the weak pawn on d6.

13.a4 h6 Black prepares ....♗f8 and then if allowed, ...d5.

13...♗f8 14.♗g5!? h6 15.♗h4 was possible, but perhaps Ding didn't have good memories of the ♗g5 pin from the previous games;

13...b4?! is not very desirable. 14.cxb4 cxb4 15.♘b3 gives White too many nice light squares on the queenside.

14.d4?! Nepomniachtchi messes up his preparation. He spent almost 14 minutes here, but still failed to understand that he should have taken on b5 first.

It was necessary to exchange on b5 first before advancing in the centre. Now after 14.axb5 axb5 15.d4 Black should obtain good play after 15...cxd4 *(15...exd4!? is a sharper try. 16.cxd4 ♘c6 17.♖xa8 ♕xa8 18.d5 ♘b4 19.♗b1 ♕a4 with the position somewhat resembling the lines from the Zaitsev Variation)* 16.cxd4 exd4 usually Black captures twice on d4, in order not to allow the space-gaining d5. *(16...d5?! is premature, as 17.dxe5 ♘xe4 18.♘d4 gives White a nice blockading knight on d4.)* 17.♘xd4 ♘c4 Ding played this move in the game, so it's likely he would have played it here, too. *(17...♕d7?! 18.♘f5 ♗f8 19.♕f3 gives White some initiative; 17...♗f8!? 18.♘xb5 d5 also gives Black good play, as he immediately regains the pawn.)* 18.♘xc4 bxc4 19.♗a4 ♖f8 Black has good play in view of the attack on the e4-pawn. 20.♘c6 *(20.♖c1 ♘xe4 21.♗c6 ♖b8 22.♗xb7 ♖xb7 23.♘c6 ♕d7 24.♖xc4 ♗g5 leads to simplifications and equality.)* 20...♕c7! 21.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 and again the attack on e4 guarantees Black against any problems, for example 22.f3 d5!

14...exd4 15.cxd4 cxd4 16.♘xd4 ♘c4 Black has already equalised, but Nepomniachtchi continues along his assumed prepared lines.

17.♘xc4?! 17.axb5!? was better. The doubling of the e-pawns gives White tactical chances, for example 17...♘xe3 18.fxe3 axb5 19.♖xa8 *(19.♗d3 is an alternative, targeting the b5-pawn.)* 19...♕xa8 20.♘f5 with some threats on the kingside.

A) 20...♘xe4? 21.♘xg7! shows White's potential. 21...♘g3 *(21...♔xg7? 22.♘xe4 ♗xe4 23.♕d4+ wins for White, as Black's king is just too weak.)* 22.♕g4 ♘xf1 23.♘f5+ ♗g5 24.♘xf1 with fantastic compensation due to Black's weak king;

B) 20...♗c8! Black must keep an eye on the active knight. 21.♗b3 ♗xf5 22.♖xf5 ♕a7 with a balanced position.

17...bxc4 18.f3?! Nepomniachtchi admitted that he wasn't happy with his position and decided to defend passively. There was still no need for that just yet.

18.♕e2 ♖c8 19.f3 was a better version, as the queen can come to f2. For example 19...♗f8 20.♘f5 d5 21.♖ad1 ♕c7 22.♗d4 ♗c5 23.♕f2 ♗xd4 24.♖xd4 ♖cd8 when the central tension will be resolved and simplifications will follow;

18.b3!? was another idea, to get rid of the c4-pawn. It sacrifices the e4-pawn, but after 18...cxb3 19.♗xb3 ♗xe4 20.a5 White obtains compensation for the pawn thanks to his more active pieces.

18...♗f8 Now ...d5 inevitably happens and Black takes a firm hold of the initiative.

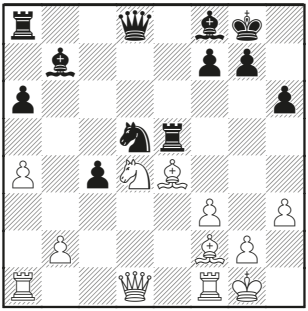
19.♗f2 Getting the bishop away from the undefended square on the e-file.

19.a5 with the idea of ♗a4 looks promising, but Black has a strong exchange sacrifice after 19...d5! 20.♗a4 dxe4! 21.♗xe8 ♕xe8 with tremendous initiative thanks to the unopposed light-squared bishop;

19.♗f4 was what Nepomniachtchi initially wanted to play, but after 19...d5 20.e5 ♘d7 he has problems defending the e5-pawn and his loose pieces, for example, 21.♖e1 ♗b4! 22.♖e2 ♕h4! forcing White to move the g-pawn. 23.g3 *(23.♗h2? ♗c5 24.♖d2 ♘xe5 wins for Black.)* 23...♕d8 and White's weak king will be a long-term problem.

19...d5 20.exd5 ♘xd5 21.♗e4 A critical position. Ding spent more than 25 minutes on his move and didn't come up with a very good one.

21...♖e5?!



An unexpected move. The idea is to have the knight on d5 defended, but Black loses most of his advantage now.

Simpler moves were also better. For example 21...♖b8! creates the threats of ...♘b4 or ...♘f4 and practically forces White to take on d5. 22.♗xd5 ♗xd5 taking with the queen is also very good. 23.♕d2 and here Ding didn't see a way to push for more. He must have been a bit impatient because Black has the stable advantage of the pair of bishops and doesn't need to force matters. For example after 23...♕b6 attacking the pawn on b2 24.♘f5 ♕e6 25.♘g3 ♖ed8 Black has a serious advantage;

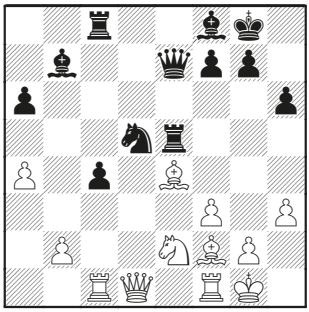
21...♕g5 was another option for Black. 22.h4 ♕f4 23.♖e1 ♖ad8 and again White must be careful as Black's rooks on the central files are annoying;

21...♕c7 with the idea of ...♖ad8 was what Nepomniachtchi didn't like. White's best is 22.♗xd5 ♗xd5 23.♕c2 and he has a somewhat better version than the similar position that arose after 21...♖b8;

21...♘f4!? was also considered by Ding, leading to a "dark ocean" and for that reason he didn't calculate it very deeply. It leads to some fascinating positions after 22.♗xb7 ♖b8 23.♗e4 ♕g5 when Black's attack is quite serious. 24.g3 ♘xh3+ 25.♔g2 ♘xf2 26.♖xf2 ♗c5∞ with good compensation, but no advantage.

22.♖c1 ♖c8 23.♘e2 23.♕d2 was better, connecting the rooks. The position is tense, but objectively balanced.

23...♕e7?!



An awkward move, blocking the bishop on f8. Now White is out of danger.

23...f5 24.♗b1 is still very unclear;

23...♕e8! with the same ideas was better. The tactical point is that White cannot play as in the game with 24.♕d4 *(or 24.♗d4? ♘e3! 25.♗xe3 ♗xe4 26.fxe4 ♖xe4 and Black regains the piece and remains a pawn up.)* 24...f5 25.♗g3? in view of *(25.♗xd5+ ♖xd5 26.♕b6 ♕d7 is much better for Black.)* 25...♗c5 winning the queen.

24.♕d4! A move missed by Ding. White is fine now.

24.♗d4 ♖e6∓ *(24...♖xe4 25.fxe4 ♕xe4 26.♘g3∞; 24...♖d8!? 25.♗xe5 ♘e3 26.♕e1 ♗xe4 27.fxe4 ♕xe5∓).*

24...f5 Initiating complications that involve an exchange sacrifice.

25.♗g3 The only move.

25...♖xe4 25...fxe4 was another way to sacrifice the exchange. After 26.♕xe5 *(or 26.♗xe5 exf3 27.♖xf3 ♕e6 threatening ...♗c5. 28.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 29.♘g3 ♖f7 with an equal position.)* 26...♕xe5 27.♗xe5 exf3 28.gxf3 ♗c5+ 29.♗d4 ♘f4! 30.♘xf4 ♗xd4+ 31.♔g2 ♗e3 32.♘g6 threatening ♘e7, so Black cannot regain the exchange. 32...♔h7 33.♖ce1 ♗d4 34.♘e7 ♖c5 with a dynamically balanced endgame - the bishops are very strong and White has pawn weaknesses.

26.fxe4 ♕xe4 27.♕xe4 fxe4 Black has good compensation for the exchange. He has a strong control of the light squares and potential counterplay against White's pawn on b2.

28.♖fd1 28.♘c3 ♗c5+ 29.♔h2 ♘b4 with ...♘d3 to come is fine for Black;

28.♖f5 ♘b4 with the same idea.

28...♘b4 The knight aims for the d3-square.

28...♗e7 with the idea of ...♗g5 or ...♗f6 was a good alternative.

29.♖d7 ♗c5+ 30.♔h2 ♗c6 31.♖c7 ♖xc7 32.♗xc7 ♗d5 White's problem is that he cannot activate the rook.

33.♘c3 ♘d3! 34.♖c2 ♗c6 35.a5 ♔f7 Black simply centralises the king.

36.♖e2 36.♘e2 ♗d5 37.♘f4 ♘xf4 38.♗xf4 ♔e6 and White still cannot get his rook to break free.

36...♘c1 Both players saw the nice move 36...♔e6! with the idea 37.♘xe4 ♗xe4 38.♖xe4+ ♔d5 39.♖e8 ♘xb2 and the c-pawn forces White to give a perpetual after 40.♖d8+ ♔e4 41.♖e8+ ♔d5 *(41...♔d3? 42.♗e5! is dangerous, as indicated by Ding.)* 42.♖d8+ with a draw.

37.♖e1 37.♘xe4 ♗g1+! 38.♔xg1 ♘xe2+ was indicated by Nepomniachtchi as another drawing line.

37...♘d3 38.♖e2 ♘c1 39.♖e1 ♘d3

½-½

A very uneven game. For the first time in the match, Nepomniachtchi ended up worse with White out of the opening and was in serious danger, but then it was Ding's turn to miss his chances. Probably both were satisfied with the draw, but not very much - Nepomniachtchi was happy to survive a scare, but unhappy that he couldn't move away from the shock from the previous game; Ding - happy to have had a smooth game with Black that late in the match, but unhappy that he failed to capitalise on his chances. In such a state both players came to the final game of the classical portion of the match.

Game 14:
A ROLLER-COASTER

Ding – Nepomniachtchi, ½ - ½
29.04.2023

With the match tied, it was interesting to see how Ding would approach the last game. Carlsen was always eager to draw the last game and go for the tie-break, for example, like against Karjakin and Caruana - in the game against the latter he even had a close-to-winning advantage! Ding already showed his fighting spirit in the match, it remained to be seen how aggressive he would be in a situation where one mistake could cost him everything. With both players tense to the extreme, a volatile game was to be expected, irrelevant of the position.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 Ding goes for a more theoretical approach in the last game, the London and the Colle served their purpose.

3...♗b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♗d2 This line is one of the most topical against the Nimzo-Indian. Ding, however, again has an idea that takes the game away from the theoretical paths.

5...d5 6.a3!? Here it comes. Usually White plays 6.♘f3 and ♗d3 before playing a3.

6...♗e7 6...♗xc3 7.♗xc3 ♘e4 or 7...b6, is the alternative.

7.♘f3 c5 This is the most challenging, Black plays directly in the centre.

In a previous game, Ding had already played this position. His opponent chose 7...b6 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♖c1 c5 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.♗d3 with an unclear position in Ding,L (2806)-Praggnanandhaa,R (2642) Chessable Masters KO rapid 2022 (3.32) 1-0; 7...♘bd7 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗d3 c6 is another option. Firouzja,A (2778)-Giri,A (2760) FTX Crypto Cup 2022 rapid (3.2) ½-½.

8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♕c2 White had other moves like 9.cxd5 and 9.b4.

9.cxd5; 9.b4.

9...dxc4 Usually Black waits for White to develop the light-squared bishop before taking on c4, but Nepomniachtchi plays in a straight-forward manner, going for a symmetrical position and continuing development.

9...♘c6 would be a natural continuation when White would likely play 10.♖d1 *(or the very sharp 10.0-0-0!? though this does seem way too risky for a last game.)*

10.♗xc4 ♘bd7! Precise development.

10...b6?! 11.♘e4 gives White certain initiative;

10...♘c6?! 11.♖d1 is also unpleasant for Black, as his queen doesn't have good hiding squares and he cannot easily develop the bishop on c8, for example, 11...♕e7 12.♘e4 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4 is problematic for Black who cannot easily finish the development of his queenside;

10...♗d7 11.0-0 ♗c6 12.e4 gives White slight initiative.

11.♖d1 White had other ways to develop, too.

11.b4 ♗e7 12.♘d4 ♘e5 13.♗e2 ♗d7 14.0-0 ♕b8! with ...♖c8 to come gives Black satisfactory development;

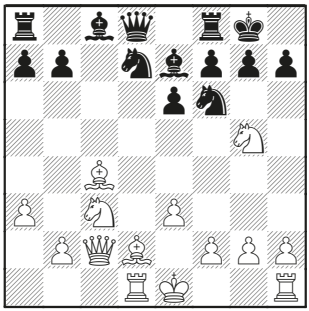
11.0-0 b6 12.♘e4 ♗b7 13.♘xc5 ♘xc5 is also equal because Black can play ...♘e4 and eliminate White's bishop pair. 14.♗c3 ♘fe4;

11.0-0-0?! is not very appropriate as the sharp pawn sacrifice 11...b5!? *(or even 11...b6 gives Black good play.)* 12.♗xb5 ♖b8 would allow Black an attack on White's king.

11...♗e7?! A strange retreat.

11...b6 was natural and good. 12.♘e4 ♗b7 13.♘xc5 ♘xc5 is quite alright for Black. He has smooth development and a knight coming to e4 won't be any weaker than a bishop. 14.♗c3 ♕e7 15.0-0 ♖ac8 with one of the knights landing on e4 next.

12.♘g5?!





A typical moment. Ding shows courage and willingness to fight, but this is way too optimistic. He said that he was very excited at the attacking prospects after this move, but he was soon to realise that his evaluation was mistaken.

12.e4! was good and put Black under some pressure. 12...♕c7 this is the only way to deal with the threat of e5. *(12...e5?! 13.♗e3 is very good for White, who will castle and plant a knight on d5, with a big advantage.)* 13.♘b5 puts another awkward question - where to retreat with the queen.

A) 13...♕c6 14.e5 ♘d5 *(14...♕e4+?! 15.♕xe4 ♘xe4 16.♗e3 is a very promising endgame for White, who has pressure on Black's undeveloped queenside.)* 15.0-0 ♘7b6 16.b3 ♗d7 17.♖c1 with some initiative for White;

B) 13...♕b8 14.♗e2 b6! the difficulty in this exchange sacrifice consists of its correct evaluation. *(14...a6 provokes 15.♘c7 but the knight cannot easily be chased away from c7: 15...♖a7 16.e5! b5 17.♖c1 ♘d5 18.♘xd5 exd5 19.♗e3 ♖b7 20.♗d4 with a stable advantage.)* 15.♘c7 ♗b7 16.♘xa8 ♖c8 17.♗c3 ♗xe4 18.♕d2 ♕xa8 19.0-0 with a rather unclear position - Black has good compensation in view of his good pieces, but an exchange is an exchange.

12...h6 13.h4 No going back now.

13.♘xf7?! is not very good. 13...♖xf7! *(13...♔xf7? leads only to a draw after 14.♗xe6+ ♔xe6 15.♕b3+ ♔f5 it's curious that on a board full of pieces White cannot take better advantage of that king on f5! 16.♕c2+ ♔e6 with a perpetual check.)* 14.♗xe6 ♘c5 15.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 and the two light pieces are worth more than the rook and two pawns.

13...♕c7! A good move, targeting the bishop on c4 and having in mind ideas like ...♕c6 or ...♕e5.

13...b6? 14.♘ce4 is bad for Black, who only weakened the long diagonal and cannot take on e4 as after ♕xe4 there would be a threat of mate on h7 and a threat to take the rook on a8.

14.♗e2 The moment when White decides to abandon his attacking wishes. Unwillingly, it has to be added, as Ding spent almost 22 minutes on this move.

14.♘b5? ♕c6 attacks the pawn on g2 and only forces the knight to return to f3: 15.♘f3 ♘b6 and with the exchange of queens it is Black with a more favourable endgame after 16.♗d3 ♕xc2 17.♗xc2 ♗d7 as White's pieces are loose;

14.♘ce4?! ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 b5 16.♗d3 ♕xc2 17.♗xc2 a5 is a great endgame for Black, who can continue with ...b4, ...♘b6 and so on, with the initiative on the queenside;

14.♗d3 ♖d8 or 14...b6 also easily defuses White's attempts; 14.♗b3 ♕c6 *(14...b6? 15.♘d5 is bad for Black; 14...♕e5 15.♘e2!? with the idea of ♗c3. 15...♘c5 16.♗c3 ♕f5 17.♘f3 ♘xb3 18.♕xb3 with an approximately balanced position, White will continue with ♘g3 and likely ♗b4, to eliminate Black's advantage of the bishop pair; 14...♘c5 15.♘ce4 ♘fxe4 16.♘xe4 b6 17.♘xc5 ♗xc5 is another equal position that would likely lead to simplifications.)* 15.e4 ♗c5 threatening ...hxg5 and ...♘g4. 16.♘f3 ♘g4 17.0-0 ♕c7 with a complex middlegame ahead.

14...♖d8?! A telling move. Even though White didn't really have threats on the kingside, Nepomniachtchi solidifies his kingside with ...♘f8. This reaction shows fear and a desire to play with a margin of safety.

14...b6 was better, finishing development. 15.♖c1 ♕b8 16.♘ge4 ♗b7 17.0-0 ♖c8 and Black has better-placed pieces.

15.♖c1 ♘f8 After 15...♕b8?! I would have expected Ding to go for 16.g4!? ♘f8 *(16...b6 17.♘xf7! ♔xf7 18.g5 leads to mayhem.)* 17.♘ge4 with g5 next and all of a sudden White does have an attack! *(17.♘xf7 ♔xf7 18.g5 is again possible.)*

16.♘ge4 ♘xe4 16...♘e8 looks unnatural, though it's balanced after 17.♘d5!? ♖xd5 18.♕xc7 ♘xc7 19.♖xc7 ♖d7 20.♖c2

17.♘xe4 17.♕xe4 was an alternative. 17...♕b6 *(17...♕d6 18.♘b1!? is a curious move, threatening ♗b4.)* 18.♘a4 ♕b3 the queen is short of squares, but it cannot be trapped. 19.♗c3 *(19.♗d1 ♕b5 20.♗e2 leads to repetition.)* 19...♕d5 20.♕xd5 exd5 *(20...♖xd5 21.♗d4 gives White some initiative as now his pieces are well-placed for the endgame.)* 21.♗e5 ♘e6 is an acceptable IQP endgame for Black, who controls the d4-square.

17...♕xc2 18.♖xc2 ♗d7 19.♗b4?! Ding spent only 5 minutes on this move and it seems he already planned his 21st move, too. But this is hasty and it lands White in some trouble.

19.♖c7 ♖ab8 20.h5 White must spend a tempo like this so he can castle and bring the other rook back into the game. Luckily, here he has the time to do that. 20...♖dc8 21.♖xc8 ♖xc8 22.♗c3 with 0-0 and ♖d1 to come, with an equal endgame;

19.h5 was also possible. Black has some lead in development, due to the white king still being in the centre, not allowing the other rook to come into play, but he cannot get much out of it. 19...♗c6 20.♗f3 ♖ac8 21.♗c3 and White will slowly untangle, 0-0 comes next.

19...♗xb4+ 20.axb4 ♗c6 21.♘c5? Played very quickly, after only 22 seconds! This is a serious mistake. Ding again treats the position too dynamically (like on move 12.♘g5?!) and again it's a dubious decision.

21.♗f3 was necessary. White is under pressure because of his worse structure, for example, 21...♘g6 22.♘c3 *(or 22.♘c5 ♗xf3 23.gxf3 ♖ac8 24.♖c3 b6 25.♘e4 f5 26.♘d2)* 22...♗xf3 23.gxf3 ♖ac8 24.f4 in both cases with worse, but defensible position for White.

21...♗xg2 22.♖g1 White is hoping to obtain compensation for the pawn, but Black can control it.

22...♗d5?! Black provokes e4 in order to be able to play ...♖d4, but it was better to do so in a slightly modified version.

The immediate 22...♗c6! was better, intending to provoke e4 after. 23.b5 ♗d5 now with a pawn on b5 Black has 24.e4 *(or 24.♖g4 b6 25.♘a6 ♖ac8 26.♖c3 ♖xc3 27.bxc3 ♗b7 and Black stabilised the position, remaining a clear pawn up.)* 24...b6! and the exchange gives him a superior version of the position compared to the game. 25.exd5 bxc5 26.♖xc5 ♖xd5 27.♖xd5 exd5 with a passed pawn on the d-file.

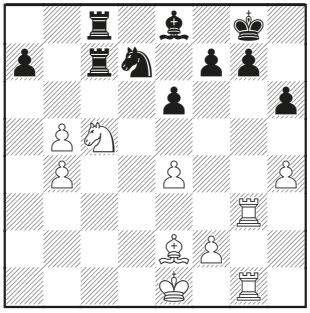
23.e4 ♗c6 24.b5 ♗e8 25.♘xb7 White regained the pawn. Black's idea must have been to play

25...♖d4 And this still gives him some initiative, but White avoided the scary moment.

26.♖c4 ♖d7 27.♘c5 ♖c7 28.♖c3! Unpinning the knight by defending the rook.

28...♖ac8 29.b4 29.♘b7 is good, but not an easy one to see. After 29...♖xc3 30.bxc3 ♖xc3 31.♔d2 ♖c7. 32.♘d6 ♗d7 33.♗h5! g6 34.f4 White's activity and domination compensate for the pawn.

29...♘d7 30.♖cg3?



White abandons the queenside and banks on his play along the g-file. It's a wrong decision, with Ding yet again hoping dynamic play would bail him out.

The patient 30.♔d2 ♘xc5 31.bxc5 ♖xc5 32.♖gc1 ♖xc3 33.♖xc3 ♖xc3 34.♔xc3 ♔f8 35.e5 would have led to a relatively easily drawn bishop endgame. White is active and his advanced e5-pawn effectively limits Black's movement. After 35...f6 36.f4 fxe5 37.fxe5 g5 38.hxg5 hxg5 39.♔b4 White's bishop controls the g5-pawn and the king threatens to penetrate with ♔c5.

30...♘xc5?! Impatiently cashing in.

30...g6! was much better. White cannot avoid losing a pawn anyway, because 31.♘xd7 *(31.h5 ♘xc5 32.bxc5 ♖xc5 33.hxg6 fxg6 is also great for Black.)* 31...♖xd7! threatens ...♖c1 or ...♖d4, attacking the pawns on e4 and b4.

31.bxc5 ♖xc5 32.♖xg7+ ♔f8 33.♗d3 White managed to defend his weak pawns.

33...♖d8 33...♗xb5 leads to a drawn rook endgame after 34.♗xb5 ♖xb5 35.♖g8+ ♔e7 36.♖xc8 ♖b1+ 37.♔e2 ♖xg1 38.♖c7+ ♔f6 39.♖xa7 ♖g4 40.f3 ♖xh4 41.♔f2 when White easily holds this 3 vs 2 on the same flank.

34.♔e2? The wrong square, but an understandable move.

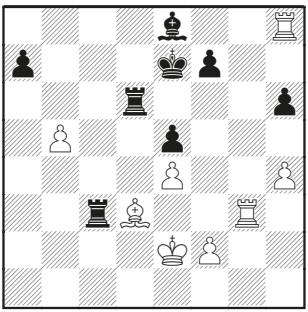
Self-pinning is never easy, but here it was necessary: 34.♔d2! ♗xb5 35.♖g8+ ♔e7 36.♖xd8 ♔xd8 37.♗xb5 ♖xb5 38.♖g8+ ♔e7 39.♖a8 with a drawn rook endgame, similar to the one in the game.

34...♖c3! This is the problem with White's last move.

35.♖g8+ ♔e7 36.♖1g3 e5? The final mistake in this extremely nervous game. Nepomniachtchi spent 1 minute and 45 seconds on this move.

36...♖b3! 37.♖h8 ♖d4! gives Black a decisive advantage. His pieces are much better coordinated and soon enough he will also win material. 38.♖xh6? fails to 38...♖dxd3 39.♖xd3 ♗xb5

37.♖h8 ♖d6



38.b6! The saving resource. The point is that in the upcoming rook endgame, White manages to get an active rook behind Black's passed pawn.

38...♖xb6 38...axb6 isn't better. 39.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 40.♗b5+ ♖cc6 41.♖a3! ♔e7 42.♗xc6 ♖xc6 43.♖a7+ and the active rook saves the day.

39.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 40.♗b5+ ♖xb5 41.♖xc3 The rook endgame is objectively drawn and in spite of all Nepomniachtchi's efforts, Ding didn't allow any chances.

41...♔d7 Black tries to stop the white rook from activating, but this isn't possible because White has

42.♖f3 Hitting the pawn on f7. The king must defend it and then the rook again threatens to become active along the c-file.

42...♔e7 43.♖c3 a5 Black had no choice, but to allow the rook to come behind the passed pawn.

44.♖c7+ ♔f6 45.♖c6+ ♔g7 46.♖a6 ♖b2+ 47.♔f3 ♖a2 48.♔g3 48.h5 was also possible, but the position of the h-pawn doesn't change the evaluation. 48...a4 49.♔g3 a3 50.♔f3 with similar play as in the game. *(50.f3?? would be a losing mistake as 50...♖a1 51.♔g2 a2 wins for Black, who can just walk his king to the queenside, then to e3 and f4, putting White in zugzwang.)*

48...h5 49.♖a8 ♖a1 50.♔g2 White just waits now.

50...a4 51.♖a5 f6 52.♔f3 a3 53.♖a6 ♔f7 54.♔e3 ♔e8 55.♔e2 ♔e7 56.♔f3 ♖a2 57.♔e3 ♖a1 58.♔e2 ♔f7 In case of 58...a2 59.♔f3 ♔d7 60.♖a4 White just moves the rook along the a-file and when the Black king comes to b3 he starts giving checks from behind. The king on f3 safely guards the pawns and Black has no winning attempts. The same applies if White keeps the king on g2.

59.♔f3 ♖a2 60.♔e3 ♔e7 61.♔f3 ♔d7 Black decides to move to the queenside and activate his rook. The price to pay is a pawn on the kingside.

62.♖xf6 ♖b2 63.♖a6 ♖b3+ 64.♔g2 ♔c7 65.f4! The only move.

Passive defence for one move too long would have lost: 65.♔h2?? ♔b7 66.♖a4 ♔c6 67.f4 exf4 68.♔g2 ♔b5 69.♖a8 ♔c4 and Black wins.

65...exf4 66.e5 Now White's e-pawn doesn't allow Black to roam freely with his king. White's king deals with the f-pawn and the rook controls the a-pawn.

66...♔b7 67.♖a4 ♔c6 68.♖a6+ ♔b5 69.♖a7 ♔b6 Going forward is also a draw: 69...♔b4 70.e6 ♖e3 71.e7 ♔b3 72.♖b7+ ♔c2 73.♖a7 ♔b2 74.♖b7+ ♔a1 75.♔f2 a2 76.♔f1 and the Black king can never get out.

70.♖a8 ♔c5 71.♖a6 ♔b5 72.♖a7 ♔b6 73.♖a8 ♔c6 73...♖e3 74.e6 with the threat of e7 would force the exchange of the e for the a-pawn.

74.♖a6+ ♔d7 75.♔f2 ♔e7 76.♔g2 ♖e3 77.♔f2 ♖g3 78.♔f1 ♖c3 78...♖g4 79.♖xa3 ♖xh4 80.♔g2 ♔e6 Even without White's e5-pawn this is a draw, but with the e5-pawn it's much easier. 81.♖a5 ♖g4+ 82.♔f3

79.♔f2 ♖e3 80.♔g2 ♔d7 81.♔f2 ♔c7 82.e6 ♔d8 83.♖a7 ♔e8 84.♔g2 With a cut-off king Black cannot hope anymore and reconciles to the draw.

84...♖xe6 85.♖xa3 ♖g6+ 86.♔f2 ♖g4 87.♖a5 ♖xh4 88.♔f3 ♔e7 89.♖f5 ♔e6 90.♖xf4 ♖xf4+

½-½

A roller-coaster game. It was Ding who initiated a full-fledged fight, but it was Nepomniachtchi who got all the chances. An interesting end of the classical part of the match: Ding showed relentless willingness to push and seek chances and this put both players in a situation where a lot depended on their calculations under extreme tension. Ding was creating chances and giving chances, he often pushed too far, like in the last game, and was then forced to defend tenaciously to save a draw. Nepomniachtchi has only himself to blame for not taking those chances, often spoiled because of his way too hasty decisions in critical moments.

THE TIE-BREAK



Ding got the white pieces in the first game of the tie-break and he continued with the same strategy. He employed yet another (after the London and the Colle) rare variation.

Game 1: BOTH PLAYERS STABLE

Ding – Nepomniachtchi, ½ - ½
30.04.2023

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.c3 Another uncharacteristic choice for a World Championship match. But in rapid games, the element of surprise is even more important and Ding's opening was a success.

3...c5 4.dxc5! The only realistic try for White, as otherwise, Black is comfortable.

4...e6 If he's worried about playing a pawn down, Black can play 4...a5.

5.♗e3 White can also play 5.b4.

5...♗e7 The most popular move here is 5...♕c7.

6.g3 ♘c6 6...0-0 7.♗g2 a5 is another set-up for Black. In this line, we can find a game by Ding's second, Rapport. 8.0-0 ♘a6 9.c4 ♘xc5 *(9...dxc4 10.♘a3 ♘d5 11.♗d4 gave White some Catalan pressure in the game Rapport,R (2735)-Shankland,S (2731) Saint Louis Champions Showdown rapid 2019 (9.5) 0-1)* 10.♘c3 dxc4 11.♘e5 again with typical Catalan pressure Kramnik,V (2753)-Gelfand,B (2669) Levitov Chess 50k 2022 blitz (6.4) 1-0.

7.♗g2 0-0 8.b4 ♘g4 Black must try some active fast before White finishes development and consolidates the position.

9.♗d4 ♕c7 9...b6 is a common idea in these positions. Black exchanges the space-grabbing c5-pawn and relies on good central control and piece play to obtain compensation for the pawn. 10.cxb6 axb6 11.b5 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♘e5 with an objectively balanced position;

9...e5?! 10.h3 exd4 11.hxg4 is good for White, who now threatens to take on d4, while after 11...dxc3 12.b5 ♘a5 13.♘xc3 ♗xg4 14.♘xd5 he is a clear pawn up with a winning position.

10.0-0 e5 The alternative was to go for another type of position with 10...b6.

11.h3 The only way to deal with Black's central push.

11...exd4 Nepomniachtchi goes for the more concrete solution, but this gives White the initiative.

It was possible to retreat: 11...♘f6 12.♗e3 h6 13.♘bd2∞ when Black's centre compensates for the pawn deficit.

12.hxg4 dxc3 13.♘xc3 ♘xb4 14.a3 ♗f6 14...♘c6 15.♘xd5 ♕d8 16.♖c1 ♗xg4 17.♕b3 gives White the initiative thanks to his excellent knight on d5 and the pressure on the queenside.

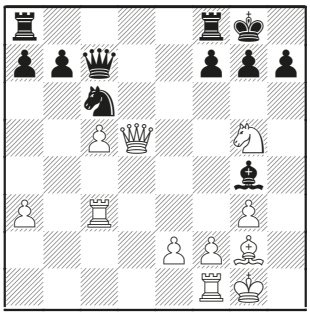
15.♖c1 15.axb4?! ♗xc3 16.♖b1 a5! undermines White's pawn duo on the queenside and is good for Black.

15...♗xc3 16.♖xc3 ♘c6 17.♕xd5 White had two other promising continuations.

17.g5 gains space on the kingside and pins down Black's pawns there;

17.♕a4 is another option. 17...♗d7 18.e3 solidifies the position. White's c5 pawn is better than Black's d5-pawn - while both are isolated, White's pawn gives him more space and a possibiity to attack Black's pawn on b7.

17...♗xg4 18.♘g5!?



This poses concrete problems. Apart from the threat of ♕e4, attacking the bishop on g4 and the pawn on h7, White also plans ♘e4-d6. The alternative was to start with 18.♕e4.

18...h6 18...♕e7?! 19.♖e3 ♕f6 20.♘e4 only helps White;

18...♖fe8?! it's better to place the other rook here, as we shall see. 19.♕d3 g6 20.♘e4 and the knight lands on d6, or in case of 20...♕e5 21.♕d6! ♔g7 22.♕xe5+ ♖xe5 23.e3 White has a pleasant edge, always connected with the move ♘d6;

18...♖ae8! this is best, the point being that after 19.♕d3 g6 20.♘e4 ♕e5 21.♕d6 Black has the move 21...f5! which is only possible because the rook stayed on f8 and now covers the f6-square.

19.♘e4 White continues with the plan, sacrificing a pawn.

19.♕e4 hxg5 20.♕xg4± was a decent alternative, with the long-range bishop giving White a pleasant position.

19...♖ae8 19...♗xe2 20.♖e1 ♗g4 21.♘d6 gives White good compensation. Black is passive, but he can resist, for example, 21...♗e6 22.♕e4 ♖ad8 23.♖b1 ♖b8.

20.e3 Not giving Black a second chance to take the pawn.

20...♖e5 21.♕d2 21.♕d6?! ♕a5 gives Black strong counterplay, threatening ...♖xe4.

21...♖d8? Nepomniachtchi starts an attack, but objectively it can be refuted.

21...♗h3! was also more or less Black's only way to keep a balanced game, but that is not so easy to understand. 22.♗xh3 ♖xe4 23.♗g2 ♖e5 24.♖fc1 gives White a pleasant position, but Black is also fine.

22.♘d6 ♖h5 This is Nepomniachtchi's idea. He plans ...♘e5.

Undermining the knight doesn't work: 22...b6? 23.cxb6! ♕xd6 24.♕xd6 ♖xd6 25.b7 and White wins.

23.♖b1? The 2 minutes and 20 seconds weren't enough for Ding to understand the need for prophylactic defence of the c5-pawn. After this imprecision the tables turn and it is White who needs to be more careful.

23.♖fc1! was very strong and refuted Black's idea. The point is that 23...♘e5 24.e4 b6 25.f4 leaves Black with nothing as he doesn't have the ...♘f3 trick like in the game;

23.♕c2! with the same idea of 23...♘e5 24.f4 was also strong.

23...♘e5 24.e4 b6 Everything hangs, but Ding manages to steer clear of trouble.

25.cxb6 25.f4 ♘f3+ is the key idea for Black. After 26.♗xf3 ♖xc5! makes all the difference and here we see why it was important for White to have the c5-pawn safely defended. Now after 27.♖xc5 ♕xc5+ 28.♕f2 ♕xf2+ 29.♔xf2 ♗xf3 30.e5 Black is a clear pawn up, though White can resist with that excellent knight on d6.

25...axb6!

18+

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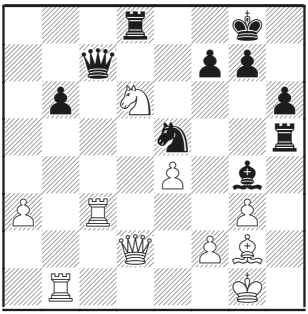
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A pretty queen sacrifice, though not a very complicated one.

26.♘b5 The only move for White.

26.♖xc7?? ♘f3+ 27.♗xf3 ♗xf3 leads to inevitable mate on h1.

26...♖xd2 An important moment. Nepomniachtchi could have kept the queens on the board, which would have kept the tension and risen the stakes. But after almost four minutes of thought, he decided to release the tension and go for a draw. It is notable how the players dealt with the tension, especially at the end of the match - Ding was eager to create it and didn't shy away from it, while Nepomniachtchi aimed to release it and run away from it.

26...♕e7!? would have forced White to find the precise 27.♕e1! with a very unclear position. *(27.♕e3 ♕d7! threatens ...♕d1, so now the only move for White is 28.f4 ♘f3+ 29.♗xf3 ♗xf3 30.♕xf3 ♖xb5 31.♖xb5 ♕xb5 and this gives Black excellent chances as the weak white king will never be safe as long as the queens remain on board; 27.♕f4? ♕d7! wins for Black as the threat is ...♕d1, mating.)*

27.♘xc7 ♗h3 Both players saw the drawing mechanism that happened in the game.

27...♘d3 is simply met by

A) 28.f3? ♗h3 wins for Black;

B) 28.f4 leads to unnecessary complications after 28...♘f2 *(or even 28...♖h3!? 29.♗xh3 ♗xh3 30.♖xd3 this is the safest. 30...♖xd3 31.♔f2 with an equal endgame.)* 29.♘d5 ♘h3+ 30.♗xh3 ♖xh3 31.f5;

C) 28.♖f1 ♗e2 29.♖b1 ♗g4 30.♖f1 when repetition can occur.

28.♗xh3 ♖xh3 29.♔g2 ♖h5 30.♖b5 ♖d1! The rook rejoins the other one via the h1-square!

31.♘d5 ♖dh1 White cannot avoid perpetual check.

32.♘e7+ ♔h7 33.♖xe5 ♖1h2+ 34.♔g1 Going to f3 would lose the rook on e5, so draw is inevitable.

34...♖h1+ 35.♔g2

½-½

The opening was quite promising for Ding, it gave him an advantage, but at the critical moment he missed the need for prophylaxis and then he had to find precise moves to defend against Nepomniachtchi's attack. In spite of the few inaccuracies, inevitable for rapid games, the game was played well by both players, Nepomniachtchi's daring attack along the h-file quite an enterprising, if refutable, reaction to White's central grip.

Game 2: EQUAL CHANCES

Nepomniachtchi – Ding, ½-½
30.04.2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 In rapid it is even more important to play openings that one feels and knows best, so Ding sticks to his Marshall.

4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.a4 A third different attempt by



Nepomniachtchi. In the classical games he tried 8.c3 and 8.a3. It seems that his team prepared this move for the rapid games, as he repeated it in the 4th game as well.

8...♗d7 9.h3 A rare set-up. After 8.a4 the more common moves are 9.♘c3, 9.♗d2 or 9.c3.

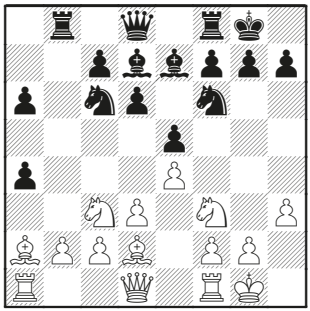
9...0-0 10.♗e3 ♘a5 An old game by Carlsen went 10...♗e6 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.♘bd2 b4 13.c3 with a slightly better position for White Adams,M (2710)-Carlsen,M (2848) London Classic 4th 2012 (5) 0-1.

11.♗a2 bxa4 The move 11...c5 is a major alternative.

12.♗d2 In the 4th game Nepomniachtchi deviated with 12.♘c3.

12...♘c6 12...c5!? made more sense, and possibly Ding wanted to improve with this move had Nepomniachtchi repeated up to this point in the fourth game. 13.♗xa5 ♕xa5 14.♘c3 ♕b6 was equal in one correspondence game from 2013.

13.♘c3 ♖b8?!



After this Black drifts into a worse position. He will be hard-pressed to find compensation for his worse structure - the isolated pawn on a6 will require constant protection.

13...a3 14.bxa3 doesn't entirely solve the problem. The pawn structures are symmetrical, but White's light-squared bishop is better than both Black's bishops;

13...h6 14.♘xa4 a5 is an attempt to use the a-pawn to control the b4-square and support and knight there. White cannot really play c3 as that would leave his knight on a4 stranded, so after 15.♗c4 ♗e6 16.♘c3 ♘b4 Black obtains acceptable position;

13...♘d4 is the move Ding played on the next move. It was better to do so immediately.

A) 14.♗c4 c6 *(or 14...♕e8!? making it difficult for White to regain the pawn on a4.)* 15.♘xa4 d5 with counterplay in the centre;

B) 14.♘xd4 exd4 15.♘d5 *(15.♘e2 c5 16.♘g3 ♖b8 the pawn on a4 remained alive and now it helps Black with counterplay on the b-file.)* 15...♘xd5 16.♗xd5 ♖b8 again the a4-pawn helps Black to attack the b2-pawn.

14.♘xa4 ♘d4 15.♗c4! A precise move.

15.♘xd4 exd4 16.♗c4 allows 16...♗c6! with the idea of ...d5, with good play for Black *(or 16...♗b5 which is also fine for Black.)*

15...c6 Ding seeks counterplay in the centre.

Black cannot take the pawn on b2, since 15...♘xf3+?! 16.♕xf3 ♗xa4 17.♖xa4 ♖xb2? 18.♗b3 traps the rook;

15...♗b5 16.b3 ♗xc4 17.bxc4± strengthens the White central pawn structure and doesn't solve the problem of the a6-pawn.

16.♘xd4 Nepomniachtchi plays positionally.

16.♗xa6 it was possible to take the pawn, though Black does obtain counterplay after 16...♖a8 17.♗c4 d5 18.♗b3 dxe4 *(or 18...♗d6 which is less forcing.)* 19.dxe4 ♘xb3 20.cxb3 ♘xe4 21.♘xe5 ♗xh3! 22.♘xc6 ♕c7 23.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 24.♗e3 ♗e6 and the opposite-coloured bishops guarantee Black against trouble;

16.♘c3 was a good alternative. 16...♖xb2 17.♘xd4 exd4 18.♘e2 threatening ♗b3 to trap the rook. 18...♖b8 19.♖xa6 *(or 19.♘xd4 d5 20.exd5 cxd5 21.♗xa6 when White is a clear pawn up.)* 19...c5 20.♕a1 with significant pressure as White's pieces have a much higher potential in this position.

16...exd4 17.♗f4 White's pieces are much better placed than Black's.

17.♗xa6? d5 gives Black compensation, the knight on a4 and the bishop on a6 are out play now.

17...♗e6 17...♖b5 18.b3 stabilises the position and the rook on b5 doesn't really have any promising squares to go to;

17...♖a8?! defends the pawn on a6, but it's way too passive. After 18.e5 dxe5 19.♗xe5 White has a big advantage.

18.♖e1 Continuing in the same style.

18.♗xe6 fxe6 19.♗h2 was also possible, though after 19...e5 White may have been worried his bishop on h2 is out of play, though 20.b3 with the idea of ♘b2-c4 and eventually f4 is still promising for White;

18.♗xa6 taking the pawn was possible, but after 18...♕a5! 19.♗c4 ♘xe4 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.dxe4 ♖xf4 22.♕xd4 ♕b4 Black obtains counterplay.

18...a5 Finally removing the pawn from harm's way.

19.♕f3 19.♗h2 is a prophylactic move, moving the bishop to a safe square. 19...♘d7 20.b3 d5! is a tactical resource for Black. 21.exd5 cxd5 22.♗xb8 ♘xb8 *(22...♕xb8? 23.♗xd5 wins for White.)* 23.♗b5 ♕c7 with murky compensation - White's light pieces are out of play so he needs to act energetically, for example 24.c4 dxc3 25.d4 ♖c8 when the advanced pawn on c3 gives Black sufficient compensation;

19.e5 ♘d5 20.♗h2 ♘c7! 21.♗xe6 ♘xe6 22.exd6 ♗xd6± 23.♗xd6 ♕xd6 still leaves White with a structural advantage, but the simplifications have eased Black's defence;

19.♗xe6 fxe6 20.e5 ♘d5 21.♗g3 ♗h4! allows Black to stir up some counterplay.

19...♖b7?! Removing the rook from the sensitive h2-b8 diagonal, but it was more important to avoid the central e5-push.

19...♘e8! was better as it avoids e5. It also allows for ...♘c7. Black has a good position now.

20.e5! ♘d5?! 20...♗d5! was better, as it forces simplifications. After 21.♗xd5 ♘xd5 22.exd6 ♗xd6 23.♗xd6 ♕xd6 24.♖e4 White maintains an advantage, but Black managed to exchange pieces and has good chances to defend.

21.exd6? Too hasty. Nepomniachtchi spent a mere minute on this decision.

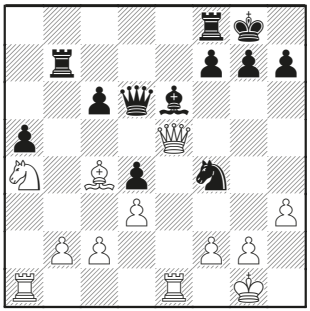
21.♗g3! kept the tension and the advantage. But, as we noted, Nepomniachtchi was too eager to release the tension in the latter stages of the match and here it hurt him. 21...♖d7 *(21...♘b4 22.♗xe6 fxe6 23.♕g4! d5 24.♕xe6+ ♔h8 25.♖e2 defends everything and White is a clear pawn up.)* 22.♖e4 attacks the pawn on d4. 22...♘c3!? 23.bxc3 d5 Black regains the piece, but after 24.♖xd4 dxc4 25.♖xd7 ♕xd7 26.♘b6 ♕b7 27.♘xc4 ♗xc4 28.dxc4 in spite of the tripled pawns White has a solid advantage.

21...♗xd6 22.♗xd6 ♕xd6 Black is out of danger now.

23.♕e4 ♘f4?! Ding spent almost 2 minutes on this decision.

23...♘b4! was easier, the point being 24.♗xe6 ♖e7! with easy equality.

24.♕e5?



Missing the last chance in this game. Nepomniachtchi spent a bit more than a minute on this move.

24.b3! was better. After 24...♗xc4 25.bxc4 ♘e6 26.♕e5± the weakness of the a5-pawn starts to tell again.

24...♕xe5 25.♖xe5 ♗xc4 26.dxc4 ♖b4! The key move. Black creates active counterplay and draws the game.

27.♖c5 27.b3 d3! is the crucial resource for Black.

27...d3! Soon all the pawns on the queenside will be exchanged.

28.cxd3 The only move, but not a very difficult one.

28.c3?? ♖xa4! 29.♖xa4 d2 30.♖a1 ♘e2+ 31.♔f1 ♘c1 and the d-pawn promotes;

28.g3?? ♖xa4! 29.♖xa4 d2 again wins for Black.

28...♘xd3 29.♖xc6 ♘e5 30.♖c7 30.♖c5 ♘xc4 is the same.

30...♘xc4 31.♘c5 ♘xb2 32.♘d7 32.♖xa5 ♖c4 33.♖aa7 h6 is just dead equal.

32...♖e8 33.♖xa5 ♘d3 34.♖g5 ♖f4 34...h6 35.♘f6+ ♔f8 36.♘d7+ ♔g8 is a repetition.

35.f3 h6 36.♖d5 ♘b4 37.♖d6 ♖f5 38.♖b7 ♖d5 39.♖db6 ♖d8 40.♘f6+ gxf6 41.♖xb4 ♖d4 42.♖xd4 ♖xd4 43.♔h2 ♔g7 44.♖b2 ♖d5 45.♖a2 ♖d4 46.♖b2 ♖d5 47.♖a2 ♖d4

½-½

A similar scenario to the first game, where White had a very promising position, only to spoil it. Both players must have felt they had their chances, but they were not exact in converting them.

Game 3: PLAYING IT SAFE

Ding – Nepomniachtchi, ½ -½
30.04.2023

1.♘f3 After 1.d4 and 1.c4, Ding tries a third first move.

1...d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.0-0 ♗e7 5.c4 In the leaked games there were several KIAs after 5.d3, but here Ding goes for a Reti. He aims for a risk-free position where he can exert some Catalan-type pressure.

5...0-0 6.b3 c5 Nepomniachtchi sticks to the most solid lines.

6...d4 was played in Ding's last tournament before the match. After 7.e3 c5 8.♘e5 ♕c7 9.f4 ♘bd7 10.♘d3 Ding managed to obtain a winning position but blundered and lost. Ding Liren (2811)-Giri,A (2764) 85th Tata Steel Masters 2023 (9.2) 0-1.

7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♗b2 ♘c6 9.d4 cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 Taking with the bishop is an alternative.

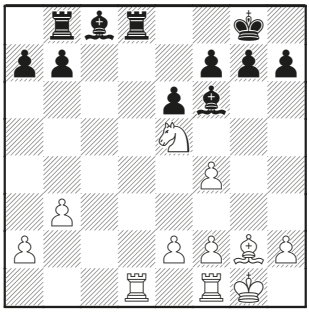
11...♗f6 12.♕d2 ♘f4! Played after only 13 seconds! This indicates that Nepomniachtchi was ready for this line and in fact he manages to make an effortless draw. The alternatives are taking on b2 and 12...♗d7.

13.gxf4 ♕xd2 14.♘xd2 ♗xb2 15.♖ad1 15.♖ab1 ♗f6 16.♖bc1 ♖d8 17.♘e4 eventually led to a win for White, but objectively Black is fine. Kramnik,V (2792)-Mamedyarov,S (2808) Paris GCT rapid 2018 (3) 1-0

15...♗f6 16.♘c4 Putting the knight on e4 was an alternative, but it doesn't bring much anyway. After 16.♘e4 ♗e7 17.♖d2 ♖d8 *(17...♖b8 18.♖c1 looks a bit unpleasant for Black, but if he's patient he should be fine.)* 18.♖fd1 ♖xd2 19.♖xd2 ♖b8 20.♘d6 b5! stopping ♘b5 and equalising.

16...♖b8 17.♘e5 17.♘d6 b6 was fine for Black and it was played in Nakamura,H (2768)-So,W (2766) Airthings Masters Div 1 W rapid 2023 (2.2) ½-½.

17...♖d8



Black had a choice here. Nepomniachtchi spent 3 minutes on this move.

17...♗xe5 18.fxe5 b6 was the most straight-forward option. After 19.♖d2 ♗b7 20.♗xb7 ♖xb7 21.♖c1 g6 Black should be able to hold the rook endgame without too many problems;

17...h6 with the idea of ...g5 was suggested by Anand. 18.♖d2 g5 19.e3 keeps the knight on e5 and the pawn on f4, but after 19...gxf4 20.exf4 b5 Black is still fine.

18.♖xd8+ 18.e3 has been played before. After 18...♔f8 19.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 20.♖d1 ♗f6 21.♖c1 ♔e8! was correct and Black's position is safe. *(21...♗xe5? 22.fxe5 a5 23.♖c7 is White's dream scenario in this line. Artemiev,V (2716)-Duda,J (2753) Pepe Cuenca Invitational 2020 (2.13) ½-½).*

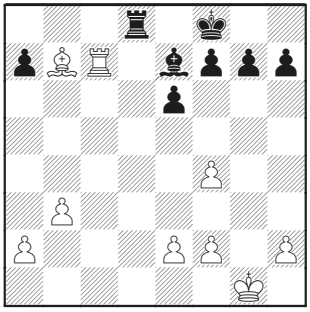
18...♗xd8 19.♖d1 ♗e7 Going to c7 was also possible. Both moves make a draw.

19...♗c7 20.e3 ♔f8 21.♘d7+ ♗xd7 22.♖xd7 ♗b6 23.♗xb7 ♖d8= forces the exchange of rooks, with a draw as in the game. The difference with the game is that here White cannot avoid the exchange because the bishop on b6 covers the c7-square.



20.♘d7 ♗xd7 20...♖a8? is just bad. After 21.a4 Black is paralysed.

21.♖xd7 ♔f8 22.♗xb7 ♖d8 23.♖c7



This is the difference, White manages to keep the rooks on the board. But even this is only temporary.

23...a5! A safe square for the pawn.

24.♖c4 Ding spent almost 7 minutes on this move, but there aren't really any chances for White.

24.e3 g6 25.♖c2 ♖d1+ 26.♔g2 ♗b4 with the idea of ...♖d2 also exchanges rooks;

24.♗e4 g6 25.♗d3 ♖d4! again forces the exchange of rooks as White cannot defend the pawn on f4 except for ♖c4.

24...♗b4 With the e7-square available for the king, Black now threatens ...♖d2, not fearing a check on the 8th rank.

25.♖c2 ♖d2 Forcing the exchange of rooks, after which the draw is elementary.

26.♖xd2 ♗xd2 27.e3 ♗b4 28.♔f1 ♔e7 29.♔e2 ♔d6 30.♔d3 ♗e1 31.♔e2 ♗b4 32.♔d3 ♗e1 33.♔e2

½-½

Ding tried to play safe with the Reti Opening, but it only allowed Nepomniachtchi to show his excellent preparation and make a draw without much effort. This must have given Nepomniachtchi a boost for the final game with the white pieces. In the whole match, he usually managed to obtain promising positions with White and he won two nice games, so he had all the reasons to be optimistic.

Game 4: THE GAME WHICH DECIDED THE MATCH

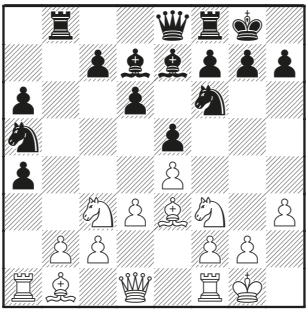
Nepomniachtchi – Ding
30.04.2023

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.a4 ♗d7 9.h3 0-0 10.♗e3 Nepomniachtchi repeats his choice from the second rapid game, with an intended improvement on move 12.

10...♘a5 11.♗a2 bxa4 12.♘c3 Here comes the deviation from the second game, where 12.♗d2 was played.

12...♖b8 13.♗b1 Played quickly, as it's the engine's preferred move, but I think this was a rather unfortunate preparation for Nepomniachtchi for such a crucial game. Even though the engine may like White's position (somewhere in the range of 0.05) to play with a buried bishop on b1 for a human is repulsive, and not only visually. My impression is that for this game Nepomniachtchi's team didn't take into consideration the human factor, which becomes so much more important when there isn't much time on the clock to figure things out by calculation.

13...♕e8



Ding spent 4 minutes on this move, though he must have been aware that White's last move was the engine's top choice, just like the queen move.

13...♖xb2 is actually possible. After 14.♘xa4 ♖b8 15.♘c5 ♘c6 16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♖xa6 ♖a8 White's pair of bishops counts for very little;

13...c5 is the main alternative. 14.♘xa4.

A) 14...♗xa4?! 15.♖xa4 ♖xb2 16.♗a2 the bishop returns and this gives White good compensation;

B) 14...♘c6 15.♗c1 Safarli, E (2694) -Tomashevsky, E (2722) EU-Cup 32nd Novi Sad 2016 (4.4) ½-½ 15...♘e8!? with the idea of ...♘c7, to cover both a6 and d5, looks like a compact position for Black;

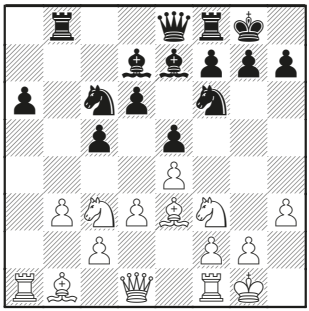
C) 14...♕c7 15.♘d2 *(15.♗d2 ♘c6*Sutovsky,E (2673)-Wagner,D (2487) EU-ch 14th Legnica 2013 (6) ½-½*)* 15...d5 was already good for Black in Guseinov,G (2634)-Matlakov,M (2689) FIDE World Cup 2015 (1.1) 1-0;

D) 14...c4 may be another promising try for Black.

14.b3 c5 The natural move.

Black had a stunning alternative at his disposal, though one that is too outrageous for such an important game: 14...♔h8!? 15.♘xa4 ♘c6 16.♘c3 g5!! and whichever way White takes on g5, Black follows up with ...♖g8 and obtains great play.

15.♘xa4 ♘c6 16.♘c3?!



Played after only 21 seconds! It appears that Nepomniachtchi mixed up his preparation and now he ends up in a worse position.

16.c3 ♗e6 17.♗c2 getting the bishop back into the game was better. Black has no problems, but neither has White. 17...h6 keeps the tension in the position. *(17...♘d7 allows 18.d4 with mass simplifications after 18...exd4 19.cxd4 cxd4 20.♘xd4 ♘xd4 21.♗xd4 ♗f6 22.♗xf6 ♘xf6 23.♕xd6 ♗xb3 with a likely draw.)*

16...a5 Defending the pawn. White really has nothing to show for the buried bishop on b1.

17.♘d2 ♗e6 18.♘c4 d5 Ding naturally advances in the centre, but this eases White's problems as it allows him to help the hapless bishop.

18...♕d7 was better, as it's not clear what White can do about the bishop on b1. 19.f4 *(19.♘xa5? ♖a8 loses material.)* 19...exf4 20.♗xf4 ♕d8 defends the pawn on a5 and slowly prepares ...♖b7 and ...d5.

19.exd5 ♘xd5 20.♗d2? White spent only 7 seconds on this move!

20.♘xd5 ♗xd5

A) 21.♘xa5? is bad in view of 21...♖a8 22.♗d2 ♘xa5 23.♗xa5 *(23.♖xa5? ♖xa5 24.♗xa5 ♕a8 wins for Black, thanks to the double attack on the bishop on a5 and the pawn on g2.)* 23...♖a6! with the idea of ...♖g6, which gives Black a strong attack;

B) 21.c3 was natural, getting the bishop to c2, with a compact position. 21...f5 22.f3 ♕h5 with an unclear position.

20...♘xc3?! Less than 2 minutes spent on this decision, and again it's a sub-optimal one. Black keeps slightly better chances, but by keeping the knights he would have big chances!

20...♘f4! was best. The knight is dangerously close to White's kingside and eliminating it 21.♗xf4 *(*if White tries to live with the knight, then after *21.♖e1 ♘g6* intends ...f5, when White can do little to stop Black's developing attack on the kingside.*)* 21...exf4 gives Black absolute control of the dark squares, so moves like ...♘d4 and ...♗f6 are easily coming. Black has a big advantage here.

21.♗xc3 ♗xc4 This was Black's idea when he exchanged the knights. He hopes to stabilise the structure and start play on the kingside, using the fact that the bishop on b1 still cannot take part in the game.

22.bxc4 This gives Black a passed a-pawn, but it's not a bad move.

22.dxc4 also made sense. 22...♖d8 23.♕e2 f5 24.♗xa5 ♘xa5 25.♖xa5 e4 with good compensation - comparing the bishops is all that is necessary.

22...♗d8 The bishop will come to c7, from where it defends both a5 and e5 and also can take part in a kingside attack after a possible ...e4.

23.♗d2 ♗c7 Completing the transfer.

24.c3 White must try to give the bishop on b1 some life.

24...f5 Black follows his plan to play on the kingside.

25.♖e1 25.f4? is an attempt to stop Black's kingside expansion, but it backfires: 25...exf4 26.♗xf4 ♗xf4 27.♖xf4 ♖b2 and White only helped Black become even more active;

25.♗c2 was possible.

A) or 25...e4!? 26.f4! *(26.dxe4 f4* is excellent for Black, who threatens ...f3 and will establish a dark-square blockade on e5*.)* 26...exf3 27.♕xf3 ♖b2 is unclear, with chances for both sides;

B) 25...♕g6 with the idea ...♕d6 is the same maneuver Ding executed in the game. 26.f4

(26.♕e2 ♕d6 27.f4 g5! breaks the blockade on f4 and gives Black attacking chances, for example 28.fxg5 ♘e7 with ...♘g6 next, when the threat will be ...e4.) 26...♕f6 threatening ...exf4 and eyeing the c3-pawn. The position is very double-edged.

25...♖d8 Ding brings all the pieces to the centre.

25...♕g6 was a bit more precise, as it takes control of the g5-square. 26.♗c2 *(26.♕f3? runs into 26...e4 27.dxe4 ♕d6 threatening ...♕h2 and ...♕xd2, winning.)* 26...♖bd8 with a similar position to the game.

26.♖a2 White improves the position of the rook. It can be very useful along the second rank.

26.♗g5!? was an additional option for White, trying to unsettle the harmonious black pieces. 26...♖d7 *(26...♖d6?! 27.♗e3! makes it difficult to deal with the defence of the c5-pawn as after 27...♗b6 28.f4 suddenly Black's pieces are awkwardly placed.)* 27.♕f3 e4 28.dxe4 ♘e5 29.♕e3 f4 if Black can sustain this blockade he would be doing great, but here White can break the blockade. 30.♗xf4! ♘f3+ 31.♕xf3 ♗xf4 32.e5! otherwise ...♕e5 or ...♗e5 would have established the blockade. 32...♗h2+ 33.♔xh2 ♖xf3 34.gxf3 ♖a7 with a very unclear position, but White is by no means worse here after 35.e6 with the idea ♗e4-d5.

26...♕g6 With the idea of ...♕d6.

27.♕e2 ♕d6 28.g3 Stopping any threats along the h2-b8 diagonal.

28...♖de8 It always makes sense to put a rook on the same file as the opponent's queen. The position is objectively balanced and very tense. Black doesn't have direct threats, as both ...f4 (weakens the light squares and allows a blockade with something like ♕e4) and ...e4 (currently well controlled) don't bring much, but on the other hand White also finds it difficult to play with that bad bishop on b1 and less space. Add to this the extreme importance of the result of the game, and you get what follows.

29.♕f3 The threat is ♕d5.

29...e4?! This is tempting, but it's not good. The main problem is that it finally gives the bishop on b1 some work to do! What White couldn't do the whole game, Black is giving it to him without even asking.

29...♘e7 stops ♕d5, but it does look that it puts the knight in the way of the rook. After 30.♗g5 ♕g6 31.h4 h6 32.♗xe7 ♖xe7 the position remains tense.

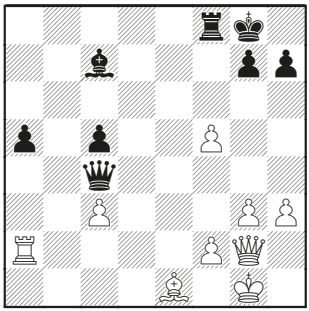
30.dxe4 ♘e5 This was Black's idea, to activate the knight.

31.♕g2 ♘d3?! The natural follow-up, though it must have felt as a disappointment to exchange the bishop on b1.

31...♔h8! was the best move, objectively, but it's impossible to play this calm move in such a volatile position. 32.f4! *(32.♗f4 g5! 33.♗xg5 fxe4 34.♗xe4 ♘f3+ 35.♗xf3 ♖xe1+ 36.♔h2 ♕g6 is another very sharp line with another "unclear" evaluation.)* 32...♘xc4 33.e5 ♕b6 now Black shifts his attention to the queenside and his passed a-pawn. It's a mess, with all three results possible.

32.♗xd3 It must have been a huge relief for Nepomniachtchi to get rid of the dead wood!

32...♕xd3 33.exf5 ♖xe1+ 34.♗xe1 ♕xc4



35.♖a1? The natural move, but missing a great chance to take over the initiative and the advantage.

It has to be admitted that the move 35.♖d2! is almost impossible to play, burying the other bishop so soon after getting rid of the one on b1! The threat is ♕d5 or ♕c6 and ♖d7, activating the heavy pieces. The line White had to foresee is 35...♖xf5? *(35...♗d8 with the idea of ...♗f6 is better, but White is still on top.)* 36.♕c6! ♗xg3 37.♖d8+ ♔f7 38.f4!! and White wins, but this is science fiction!

35...♖xf5 Now the game is equal.

36.♗d2 h6 37.♕c6 ♖f7 Other moves worked as well. Ding prefers to keep everything defended. There are a lot of tactical shots in the position, so it made sense to keep the danger at a minimum, fearing an accidental blunder.

37...♕d3 38.♗xh6 ♗xg3! leads to a drawn rook endgame after 39.fxg3 ♕xg3+ 40.♕g2 ♕xg2+ 41.♔xg2 gxh6 42.♖xa5; 37...♕d5 38.♕xc7 ♖xf2! *(the simple 38...♕xd2 39.♕c8+ ♖f8 40.♕xc5 loses a pawn, though after 40...a4 the passed a-pawn should give enough compensation.)* 39.♔xf2 ♕xd2+ 40.♔f1 ♕d3+ with a perpetual check;

37...♗e5 38.♖xa5 ♗xg3! 39.♖a8+ ♔h7 40.♖h8+! is another nice line with mutual sacrifices. 40...♔xh8 41.♕c8+ ♕g8 42.♕xf5 ♗d6 ending in another drawn position.

38.♖e1 ♔h7 Covering the g6-square.

38...a4? would be premature in view of 39.♗xh6! gxh6 40.♕g6+ and White wins after 40...♔f8 41.♕xh6+ ♖g7 42.♕c6.

39.♗e3 ♗e5 Removing the bishop from the attacked square and attacking the c3-pawn.

39...♕xc3 was also possible. 40.♕e4+ ♔h8 41.♖c1 ♕e5 42.♕xe5 ♗xe5 43.♖xc5 ♗c7 with an equal endgame, as 44.♗d2 is met by 44...♗b6.

40.♕e8 40.♗xc5 ♗xg3! is also only equal, for example 41.fxg3 *(*or *41.♕e6 ♕xe6 42.♖xe6 ♗b8)* 41...♖f5 42.♕b6 ♖xc5 43.♕b1+ ♔g8 44.♖e8+ ♔f7 45.♖a8 when neither king is safe.

40...♗xc3!? Looks dangerous at first sight, as it allows the pin with ♖c1, but Ding calculated precisely that he can get away with it. From this moment onwards he's trying to keep the game going rather than settle for a draw.

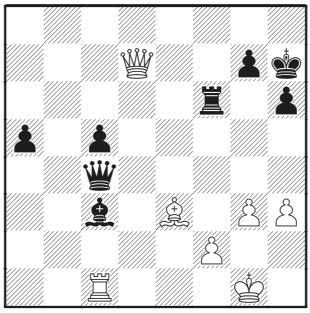
40...♖f5 would have avoided any complications.

41.♖c1 Threatening ♖xc3.

41...♖f6 The only move!

41...♖a7? loses to the simple 42.♗d2; 41...♖f3? loses to 42.♖xc3 ♕xc3 43.♕e4+ picking up the rook on f3.

42.♕d7!



Nepomniachtchi also plays moves that pose problems.

42.♗d2 ♖f3 defends the bishop on c3. *(*or *42...♕d4 43.♗xc3 ♕xf2+ 44.♔h1 ♕f3+ with a perpetual check.)*

42...♕e2! Forcing Ding to find the only move again!

42...a4? 43.♕d1! loses as the threat is ♕c2, to win the bishop.

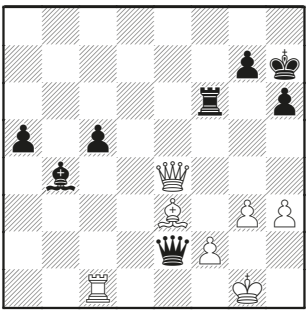
43.♕d5 43.♗xc5 was possible, for example 43...♗e1 44.♕a7 ♖c6 45.♕f7 ♖f6 46.♕a7 with a repetition.

43...♗b4! The first courageous move.

43...♗d4 was what everybody was expecting, leading to simplifications and blitz after 44.♗xd4 cxd4 45.♕xd4.

44.♕e4+ 44.♗xc5 was possible, but White would be on the defensive after 44...♗e1 45.♕g2 ♗d2 as he needs to defend the f2-pawn and the passed a-pawn can start moving forward.

44...♔g8 45.♕d5+ ♔h7 46.♕e4+



Now everybody expected a draw by perpetual check, when Ding played the move that ultimately made him a World Champion.

46...♖g6!! Deciding to continue the game while having less time on the clock! Ding shows great courage, a true character of a champion. The words of the wise Emmanuel Lasker came to mind - Ding shows "the passion that whips the blood when great stakes can be gained by resolute and self-confident daring." Objectively the position remains equal and drawn, but psychologically it was clear that from this moment onwards he dominated the game.

47.♕f5 Nepomniachtchi was shocked and while this is still OK, soon enough, when both players started to play with only a minute or two left on the clock, he succumbed.

47.♖c2 ♕d1+ 48.♔h2 ♕d6 and Black keeps the extra pawn, though this is still 0.00;

47.h4 h5 and the game goes on.

47...c4! A strong move, planning ...♕d3, when Black gets rid of the pin on the b1-h7 diagonal.

48.h4? A losing mistake, though in mutual time-trouble a lot is yet to come.

48.♕f4! was the only move, attacking the pawn on c4. The subtle idea is 48...c3 49.♕f5! and now there is no ...♕d3! But nobody plays like this in time-trouble.

48...♕d3 Black is objectively winning now.

49.♕f3 ♖f6 49...♗d2! was winning even faster, as the c-pawn marches forward.

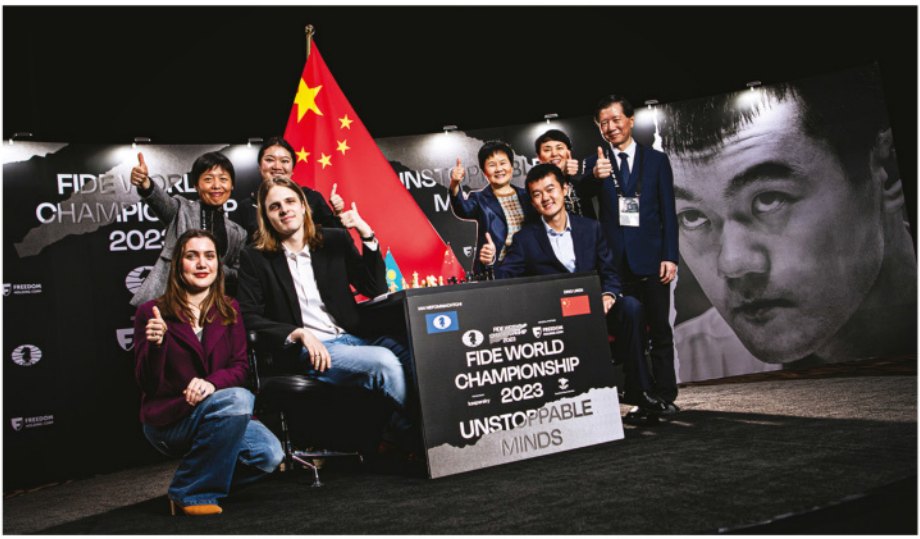
50.♕g4 c3 51.♖d1 ♕g6 52.♕c8 ♖c6 53.♕a8 Both players had around 1 minute left, plus the usual 10-second increment.

53...♖d6? Ding tries to avoid all counterplay, but this allows White a chance to save the game!

53...c2! 54.♖d8 c1♕+ 55.♗xc1 ♖xc1+ 56.♔h2 ♕c6! parries all threats and wins on the spot - the mate of h1 is threatened and White cannot avoid the exchange of queens, all he has is one check on h8.

54.♖xd6 ♕xd6 Ding wants to keep everything defended, even though taking with the bishop offered better chances.

55.♕e4+ ♕g6 56.♕c4! Now White's queen is active and the pawns cannot advance easily.

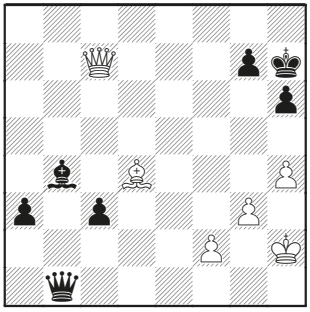


56...♕b1+ 57.♔h2 a4 58.♗d4 White now can create threats against Black's king.

58...a3 The final critical moment.

58...♕b3 is met by 59.♕c7! ♗f8 60.♗xc3 with a draw.

59.♕c7??



And the final mistake of the match. Nepomniachtchi didn't have much time, but he spent 14 seconds on this move, failing to find one of the three saving moves. The fairy tale finally got its happy ending.

59.♗xg7 ♔xg7 60.♕d4+ leads to a perpetual check, but this is not so easy to see or calculate with seconds left on the clock;

59.h5 was the more human way to make a draw. White stops ...♕g6 and now threatens ♕f7. 59...♗f8 *(59...a2? 60.♕f7 even wins for White!)* 60.♕f7 and White takes on c3 on the next move after 60...♕d3 61.♗xc3!;

59.♕d5 was another good option, though somewhat vague. The point is that Black cannot improve his position and even with a tempo less the move ♕f7 saves White, for example, 59...a2 60.♕f7! as now after 60...♕g6 61.♕xa2 White picks up the pawn;

The immediate 59.♕f7? is bad in view of 59...♕g6 and this line should have helped White understand the need to stop ...♕g6.

59...♕g6 Now, it's finally over.

60.♕c4 c2 61.♗e3 ♗d6 Other moves were also possible, but they don't really matter. White is tied down and it's only a matter of

time before Black regroups and promotes one of the pawns.

62.♔g2 h5! A good technical move. Black stops White's idea of h5, after which he would always threaten checks along the b1-h7 diagonal.

63.♔f1 ♗e5 Taking control of the a1-square and planning ...♗b2.

64.g4 Desperation.

64...hxg4 65.h5 ♕f5 66.♕d5 g3 Now White's position falls apart on all fronts.

67.f4 a2 68.♕xa2 ♗xf4 Mate will follow soon, and Nepomniachtchi congratulated Ding Liren on becoming a World Champion.

0-1

A truly epic game, completing Ding Liren's miraculous fairy tale in a deserving fashion!

FROM UNDERDOG TO WORLD CHAMPION

Ding trailed the whole match and only went ahead in the last game, but it was exactly then when it mattered.

He was experiencing problems with the black pieces but won the match when playing as Black. In the decisive moments, he was more composed and was willing to risk and push for the win. In the end, he was rewarded.

The match was a bitter disappointment for Nepomniachtchi. Throughout the event, he looked like someone who expected to win, someone who didn't allow for any other outcome. He played well and in fact could have won easily, if only he were more precise in the winning positions he obtained in the 12th and 14th games. But, in a fairy tale, the unlikely hero always wins the prize.

THIS MATCH SHOWED US HOW STRONG MAGNUS CARLSEN WAS

The chess world witnessed a very exciting match. Following it closely, with all of the ups and downs, I came to understand how strong Magnus Carlsen was when playing these matches. His level was so consistent that he never played moves that resulted in sudden drops in the evaluation, something that was quite common in the match in Astana. That is why he could beat volatile Nepomniachtchi 4-0, taking advantage of all the chances he got and without allowing a single chance to his opponent.

In view of his recent interviews, it is very unlikely that we will see Carlsen enter the World Championship cycle again. His shadow over the new World Champion will remain, at least for a while, but it shouldn't bother anyone.

We now enter a new era of the champion being *primus inter pares*, like Botvinnik considered himself, and Ding Liren is definitely a worthy champion. We will not see his dominance in tournaments, but maybe we will see him dominate matches like the Patriarch.

As for Nepomniachtchi, he will try to win the Candidates tournament for a third time. Third time's a charm? Who knows, in fairy tales, everything is possible.

SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE

UK VS UKRAINE CHESS MATCH

By IM Shaun Taulbut

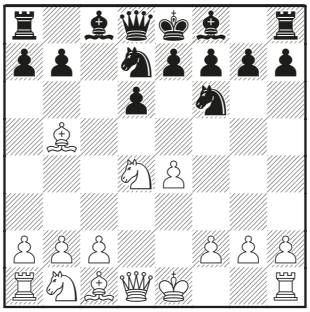
This eight-game match between Michael Adams and Andrei Volokitin was organised by Chess in Schools and Communities (CSC). The first half was held at the Ukrainian Embassy and the second half at the European Bank for Reconstruction in Canary Wharf London. Andrei Volokitin, three-time Ukrainian champion, won the match 4.5-3.5.

We look at some of the decisive games starting with a win by Volokitin in game 2

Micahel Adams – Andrei Volokitin

UK vs UKR Solidarity m London ENG (2.1)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5+ ♘d7 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♘gf6

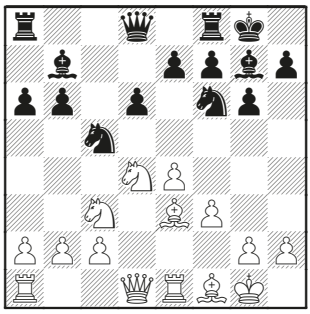


6.♗d3 The gambit 6.0-0 ♘xe4 7.♖e1 has its merits as White has a very quick development; in this game Michael Adams plays a slower line.

6...♘c5 7.♘c3 g6 8.0-0 ♗g7 9.♖e1 The switchback 9.♗b5+ ♗d7 10.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 11.f3 is also playable.

9...0-0 10.♗f1 b6 10...d5 is worth consideration here.

11.f3 ♗b7 12.♗e3 a6

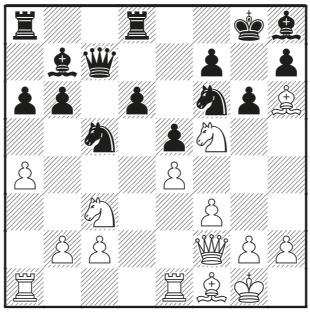


Black prepares ...b5 a normal plan in this type of position whereas White looks to play on the kingside.

13.♕d2 ♕c7 14.a4 If 14.♗h6 ♗xh6 15.♕xh6 b5 16.a3 ♕b6 17.♕e3 ♖ac8 with near equality.

14...♖fd8 15.♗h6 ♗h8 Black retains his dark squared bishop; slightly risky but Black has foreseen an adequate defence.

16.♕f2 e5 17.♘f5



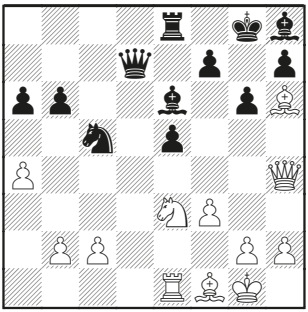
Black cannot take the knight because of ♕g3+;

17.♘b3 is worth consideration but the move in the game is more combative.

17...d5 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♕h4 Aiming for a knight check at e7 creates an awkward threat but Black can defend with his rooks.

19...♖d7 20.♘xd5 ♗xd5 21.♖ad1 ♖e8 Black now has defended e7 and White has no active follow up allowing Black to consolidate his position.

22.♘e3 ♗e6 23.♖xd7 ♕xd7



Black now has the easier game as he can play against the White queenside pawns.

24.♖d1 ♕c7 25.b3 ♗g7 Black decides to offer the exchange as the White kingside initiative has been neutralised.

26.♗g5 26.♗xg7 ♔xg7 27.♗c4 e4 favours Black.

26...h5 26...e4 is worth consideration.

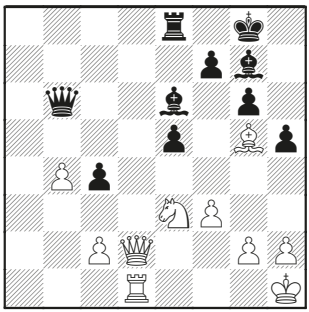
27.♘c4 If 27.g4 hxg4 28.♘xg4 ♗xg4 29.♕xg4 ♘e6 30.♗xa6 ♕xc2 31.♖c1 ♕b2 with an advantage for Black.

27...♘b7 Protecting d6 is sound allowing Black to advance with ...b5.

28.♔h1 28.♗d3 may be better here.

28...b5 29.axb5 axb5 30.♘e3 ♕c5 31.b4 ♕b6 32.♕e1 ♘d6 33.♕d2 ♘c4 34.♗xc4 The alternative 34.♘xc4 ♗xc4 35.♗xc4 bxc4 36.♗e3 ♕c6 is slightly better for Black.

34...bxc4

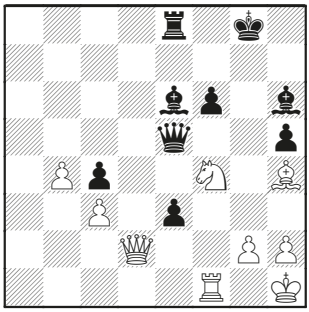


The position favours Black with the two bishops as the White b-pawn is securely blockaded.

35.c3 ♕b5 36.♗d8 e4 37.f4 If 37.fxe4 ♕e5 regains the material.

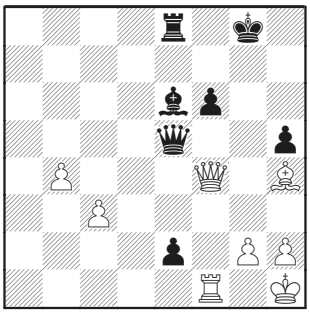
37...♕b8 38.♗g5 f6 39.f5 If 39.♗h4 ♕xf4 40.♗g3 ♕g5 is strong.

39...gxf5 40.♗h4 f4 41.♘d5 ♕e5 42.♘xf4 ♗h6 43.♖f1 e3



The passed pawn is now very dangerous and White has few moves only a queen move threatening ♕g6+.

44.♕c2 ♗f5 45.♕e2 ♗xf4 46.♕xc4+ ♗e6 47.♕xf4 e2



This pawn advance wins material as the White rook is forced forwards

48.♖f3 ♖d8 The most precise continuation; 48...e1♕+ 49.♗xe1 ♕xe1+ 50.♖f1 ♕xc3 51.♕xf6 ♕xf6 52.♖xf6 ♔g7 53.♖f4 still offers White some hope.

49.h3 ♖d1+ 50.♔h2 e1♕ 51.♗xe1 ♖xe1 52.b5 ♔f7 53.♔g3 h4+ 54.♔h2 If 54.♔xh4 ♖e4 wins.

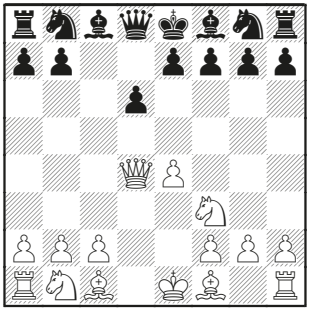
54...♔g6

0-1

Micahel **Adams** - Andrei **Volokitin**

UK vs UKR Solidarity m London ENG (4.1)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♕xd4



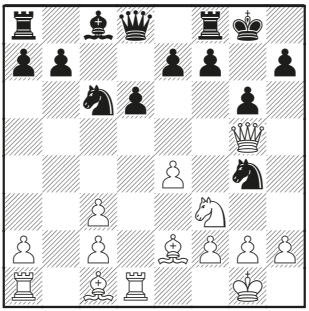
An energetic line aiming for rapid development by White

4...♘f6 A possible alternative is 4...♘c6 5.♗b5 ♕a5+ 6.♘c3 when if 6...♕xb5 7.♘xb5 ♘xd4 8.♘fxd4 ♔d7 9.f4 ♘f6 10.♘c3 e6 11.e5 with an advantage for White.

5.♗e2 ♘c6 6.♕e3 g6 7.0-0 ♗g7 8.♖d1 0-0 8...♘g4 is worth consideration.

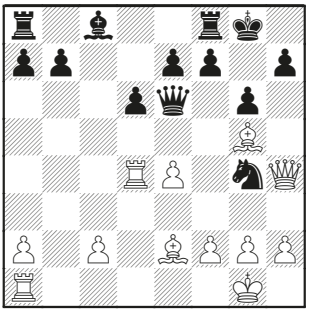
9.♘c3 ♘g4 10.♕g5 ♗xc3 Worth consideration is 10...♕b6 11.♕h4 ♗f6 12.♘g5 h6 13.♘d5 hxg5 14.♘xb6 gxh4 15.♘xa8 ♘d4 16.♖d2 ♗e5 17.h3 ♘f6 with complex play.

11.bxc3



A double edged position in which White has a clear plan of attacking on the kingside in the absence of the fianchettoed bishop. Black now goes after the doubled pawn.

11...♕a5 12.♕h4 ♕xc3 13.♗d2 ♕f6 14.♗g5 ♕e6 15.♘d4 ♘xd4 16.♖xd4

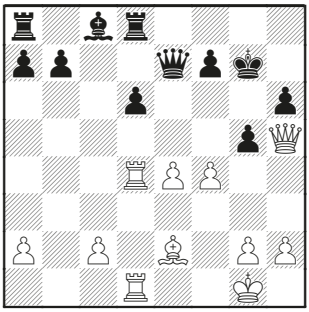


Black has won a pawn but has weaknesses on the dark squares.

16...h6 Best is 16...♘e5 17.♗xe7 *(17.f4 ♘c6 18.♖a4)* 17...♘c6 18.♗f6 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 f6 with a better position for Black.

17.♗xe7 g5 18.♕xg4 ♕xe7 If 18...♕xg4 19.♗xg4 ♗xg4 20.♗xf8 wins for White.

19.♕h5 ♔g7 20.♖ad1 ♖d8 21.f4

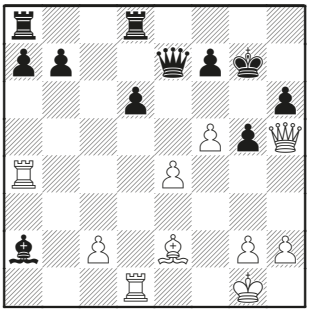


This strong move gives White a big advantage as Black cannot easily develop.

21...♗e6 If 21...gxf4 22.e5 ♕g5 23.exd6 ♗e6 24.d7 with an edge for White.

22.f5 ♗xa2 If 22...♗c8 23.♖f1 ♕f6 24.e5 ♕xe5 25.f6+ wins as the Black king cannot defend the pawns on h6 and f7.

23.♖a4 White wins the bishop and the game.



23...d5 24.♖xa2 dxe4 25.♖f1 ♕f6 26.♕g4 ♖e8 27.♖a4 e3 28.♕f3 ♖e7 29.♖a3 ♖c8 If 29...♖ae8 30.♖xa7 is winning.

30.c4 ♖c6 31.♖xa7 ♖b6 32.♖a3 ♕e5 33.♖d3 ♖f6 34.h4 gxh4 35.♕g4+ ♔h7 36.♕xh4 ♖e8 36...♖xf5 37.♖xf5 ♕xf5 38.♕xe7 ♕f2+ 39.♔h1 ♕xe2 40.♕xf7+ ♔h8 41.♖d8#.

37.♖d5 ♕b2 38.♖e1 ♖g8 39.♕d4 ♕b4 40.♖d1

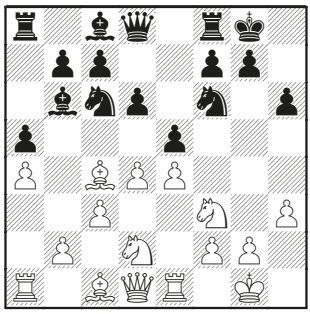
1-0

Volokitin won game 5 with an interesting pawn sacrifice offer which was not accepted

Andrei Volokitin – Michael Adams

UK vs UKR Solidarity m London ENG (5.1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.0-0 ♘f6 5.d3 0-0 6.h3 d6 7.c3 ♗b6 8.♖e1 h6 9.♘bd2 ♘e7 10.a4 a5 11.d4 ♘c6



12.♖a3 An interesting pawn sacrifice; White plans to swing the rook along the third rank if Black captures on d4; the alternative was 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♗f1.

12...♖e8 Best is capturing with 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♘xd4 14.♖d3 ♘xf3+ 15.♘xf3 ♗e6 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.e5 ♘d5 when Black has the upper hand.

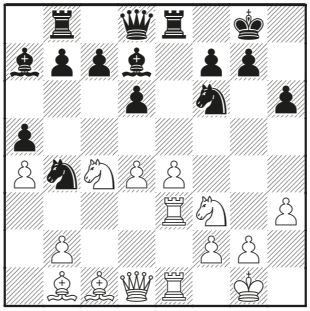
13.♗a2 ♗a7 Capturing with 13...exd4 14.cxd4 ♗xd4 15.♘xd4 ♘xd4 16.♖g3

was perhaps better though White has play on the kingside.

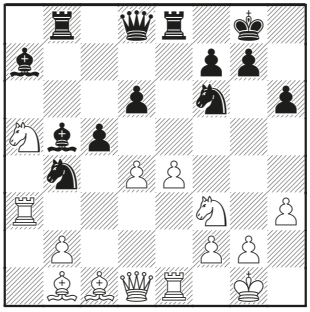
14.♖b3 ♖b8 14...exd4 15.cxd4 ♗xd4 is again worth consideration.

15.♗b1 ♗d7 The final chance to capture; 15...exd4 16.cxd4 ♗xd4 17.♘xd4 ♘xd4 18.♖g3, agin with White having play for the pawn.

16.♘c4 exd4 17.cxd4 ♘b4 18.♖be3 White has better prospects with his developed rook on e3.



18...b5 19.axb5 ♗xb5 20.♘xa5 c5 21.♖a3



The rook switchback holds the White position together although Black gets some counterplay for the pawn.

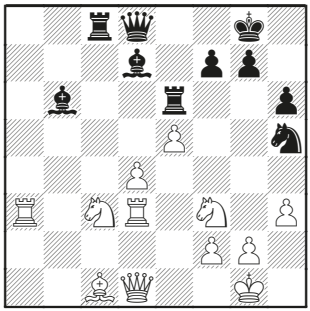
21...♗b6 22.♘b3 c4 23.♘bd2 ♘d3 24.♖e3 ♖c8 25.b3 d5

Black aims for an open position but White is careful to keep the centre closed and keep the bishops from gaining too much activity

If 25...♘xc1 26.♕xc1 cxb3 27.♕b2 is good for White.

26.e5 ♘h5 26...♘e4 27.♘xe4 dxe4 28.♖xe4 ♗c6 is best with counterplay.

27.bxc4 dxc4 28.♘e4 ♖e6 29.♘c3 ♗d7 30.♗xd3 cxd3 31.♖xd3



White is winning with his extra pawns and the Black knight on h5 is short of moves

31...♖g6 32.♔h2 ♗f5 33.g4 ♗xd3 34.♕xd3 ♘f6 35.exf6 ♖xf6 36.♔g2 h5 37.g5 ♖e6 38.♗f4 ♗c5 39.♖b3 ♗d6 40.♗xd6 ♕xd6 41.♘e4 ♕d5 42.♘g3

1-0

UK vs UKR Solidarity match, London Tue 21st Mar 2023 - Thu 30th Mar 2023
Leading Final Round 8 Standings:

Rk	SNo	NAME	FED	Rtg	Pts
1	2	GM Volokitin, Andrei	UKR	2665	4.5
2	1	GM Adams, Michael	ENG	2687	3.5

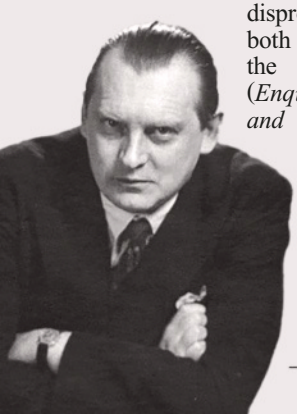
WAS ALEKHINE A NAZI?

By Grandmaster Raymond Keene OBE

A perennially fascinating question, which has provoked multiple pages of debate, is whether Alexander Alekhine, World Champion from 1927-1935 and again from 1937-1946, when he died in possession of the title in Portugal, was a Nazi. I have written about this in non-chess related journals on previous occasions (**see my column in The Article of 24/07/2021**). I believe that readers of the specialist BCM will be interested in this topic which I explored in my column for The Article.

Vast amounts of ink have been expended on this question, but Dr. Christian Rohrer of Stuttgart University has in 2021 published a paper, which must surely represent something approaching the last word on this sensitive matter.

Racism might be termed to have been invented as a concept by the noted, mainly 19th-century, scientist Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a relative of Charles Darwin, who set out to prove that Darwin's belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, as part of his general theory of evolution, was in fact justified. Learning this surprised me, since I was brought up in the belief, reinforced by many a Sir David Attenborough TV programme, that the inheritance of acquired characteristics was heretical anathema to true Darwinists. But no, Darwin believed at first in this heresy, until Galton's experiments with rabbits inadvertently disproved it. Galton went on both to invent and recommend the procedure of Eugenics (*Enquiry into Human Faculty and its Development*,*1883)*, on which much Nazi ideology is based.



Eugenics posited that purity of race by breeding improved humanity. In fact, the opposite is true, as Prof Arpad Elo, inventor of the chess rating system once explained to me at a lecture in Hong Kong. Exogamy strengthens the biological unit, rather than weakening it, in much the same way as entertaining a wide range of thought and encouraging debate improve, rather than undermine, the thinking process. The ruling Habsburg family of the Holy Roman Empire was notorious for inbreeding, which ultimately caused the infamous Habsburg Chin, resulting in the unfortunate consequence that some members of the family experienced difficulties in eating food.

Indeed, I would go further, endorsing the conclusions of the Human Genome Project, and argue that race does not biologically exist. Interestingly, the motto of the World Chess Federation, FIDE, is "*Gens Una Sumus*", "We Are One Race"; not, as in the mischievously false anagrammatic mistranslation by British Grandmaster Jon Speelman, 'Us uses guns, man'. This might be deemed a particularly biting shaft of wit, given that, in the post-Ukraine invasion period, FIDE, almost alone amongst international governing bodies, still boasts a Russian as its President.

In my view, based, as noted above, on the conclusions of the Human Genome Project, so-called "race" is simply nature's reaction to climate, geographical conditions and the prevailing topological brightness and angle of the sun. Consider that human and chimpanzee DNA is identical to over 95 percent, while we even share fifty percent of our genetic footprint with the humble mushroom! So how much closer are all humans to each other?

Although chess is conveniently black and white, discussions around the hot topics of racism and gender identity are frustratingly of a greyer hue. Nevertheless, the modern preoccupation with racism, far from coincidentally, mirrors the obsession with gender politics. Thus, the CEO of

USA Weightlifting, Phil Andrews, recently observed that to object to 'trans' men entering female championships is to be on the wrong side of history. To me it seems that entry into female competition by a human former male, endowed with the traditional upper body strength associated with the male physique, prejudices the opportunities of born female sportspersons. A debate is currently raging on social media between former swimming champion Sharron Davies and Harry Potter author JK Rowling on the one side, and numerous woke sporting authorities on the other, as to the wisdom of permitting trans males into female sporting competitions.

Muscle power and brain power are different. In most chess events, there is no longer a separation of sexes or genders. Strength at the game, purely and simply, decides who competes or not.

The story of Alexander Alekhine's life is a mixture of powerful artistry and tragically misdirected genius. A political trimmer, he supported whatever regime would allow him to earn a living as a chess player. The nadir came in 1941 when he published three articles in the Nazi press directed against Jewish players. His subsequent denial of authorship was disproved in 1956 when the holograph manuscripts were found amongst his wife's effects.

He joined the Communist Party in 1921 and worked as an official interpreter, but later settled in France as a naturalised citizen. From the safety of exile he attacked the Soviet regime. Interestingly , the great chess strategist Aron Nimzowitsch was also to make a living by delivering lectures highly critical of the Bolshevism which had seized control of his former homeland, Latvia. Nimzowitsch never attempted reconciliation with Stalin's regime, while Alekhine's later attempts to conciliate with the Soviet authorities failed and he never returned to Russia, where the Communist regime was giving increasing prominence and support to chess and its foremost exponents.

In 1927 world champion Capablanca accepted Alekhine's challenge, and unexpectedly conceded the title after a mammoth struggle in Buenos Aires. Although he now dominated the chess world like a Colossus, brushing aside the resistance of established grandmasters as if they were mere beginners, discerning critics noticed disturbing signs of impatience in Alekhine's games. Not content with the inevitable incidence of drawn games, especially when one is facing strong opposition and one has the black pieces, Alekhine began to force events at every turn, running hideous risks in his desperate efforts to crush every opponent.

By 1935 Alekhine's impatience had become exacerbated by a new reliance on the stimulation offered by alcohol. Alekhine lost his title in 1935 to the Dutchman, Max Euwe. The pre-match contract had stipulated that Alekhine had the right to a return bout. Alarmed by his loss, Alekhine suppressed his desire for drink and regained the laurels from Euwe in 1937, thus becoming the first man to win the World Championship twice. He retained the crown until his death, the only champion ever to die while in possession of the world chess title.

He was playing for France in the Buenos Aires Olympiad of 1939 when war was declared and as captain he refused to allow his team to play against Germany. On returning to Europe he joined the French army as an interpreter .

In 1941 he fell under Nazi influence. Not only did the aforementioned regrettable articles appear in print, perhaps losing him the chance of a visa to the USA, but he also played in tournaments in Germany and occupied countries. After the war, these actions were later construed as collaboration and in 1946 he was refused an invitation to the London tournament.

Alekhine was, of course, still World Champion - the opportunity for matches having been severely limited by the constraints of World

War II. However, the young challenger Mikhail Botvinnik was eager for a match to take place. This was arranged in March 1946 under the auspices of the British Chess Federation, but, the day after the news was dispatched by telegram, Alekhine died from a heart attack. Alekhine would have undoubtedly lost had he played Botvinnik, but the match would have done much to restore his fortunes and reputation.

The last word on Alekhine's Nazi affiliations has apparently now been pronounced by Dr. Christian Rohrer in his paper on Alekhine and the Nazis: "*With regard to his actions and behaviour towards the National Socialist regime, Alekhine is not aptly characterised as an "opportunist", at least if one is to mean that an opportunist seizes opportunities that he considers favourable for himself, accepting negative consequences and disregarding general norms and values. Alekhine, however, by no means simply seized opportunities that presented themselves to him here and there. Rather, he himself contributed significantly to the fact that these opportunities arose in the first place. Alekhine's actions and behaviour were those of a calculated tactician who - in the manner characteristic of a chess master - thinks in terms of variations."*

I was particularly impressed by Dr. Rohrer's subtle differentiation between types of opportunism. Alekhine was in straitened circumstances when he died in 1946, but his powers of recuperation were legendary and, at his time of passing, the USSR and British Chess Federations were, as previously noted, in the process of funding and hosting a challenge by the rising Soviet star Mikhail Botvinnik.

There is only one way to compare the relative chessboard strengths of Alekhine and Botvinnik during the period 1940 to 1946. That bridge is provided by Paul Keres, the Estonian Grandmaster, who had scored a notable triumph at the AVRO tournament of 1938 (ahead of Botvinnik, Alekhine, Euwe and Capablanca) and thus occupied a special place in the halls of honour of world chess. Somehow Keres contrived to compete in both Soviet and German events during the war period, a feat of inter-dictatorial prestidigitation, walking a tightrope between Stalin and Hitler, which many observers of the chess scene believed would lead to Keres' liquidation during the post-war years. But not so, and Teflon Keres survived to be recognised as a permanent member of the world's leading triumvirate for another two decades after the close of The Great Patriotic War.

In tournaments from 1940/1941, Keres finished ahead of Botvinnik in one event, but behind him in another. His score vs. Botvinnik amounted to four draws and one loss. As for Alekhine, Keres tied with Alekhine once, during the 1940-1943 period, but finished behind him three times and in individual games he lost out by three losses with three draws and, again, no wins. If Alekhine had survived to meet Botvinnik's challenge, I believe that the old warhorse , relying on his unique creative opportunism, as identified by Dr Rohrer, would have lost the match, but, as the Klingons say in Star Trek, it would have been glorious.

The game for this month was played during the hegemony of the Nazi imperium in Central Europe.

Alexander **Alekhine** - Paul **Keres**

Munich, 18.09.1942

1.d4 Based on notes by Alekhine

1...♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.c4 ♗b7 4.g3 e6 5.♗g2 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.b3 Avoiding the inevitable simplification that would occur after 7.♘c3 ♘e4; Alekhine always preferred complexity to simplicity, where possible, unlike Capablanca who never seemed perturbed by opponents who sought to trade down to a draw.

7...d5 Avoiding a pitfall. If 7... c5 8.d5 ♘xd5 ? 9.cxd5 ♗f6 10.dxe6 ♗xa1 11.♘g5 ♗xg2 12.exf7+ ♖xf7 13.♘xf7 ♕f6 14.♘h6+ gxh6 15.♔xg2 ♕c6+ 16.f3 when White holds a decisive advantage.

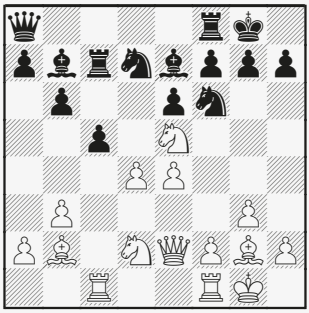
8.♘e5 c6 Alekhine regarded 8... c5 now as safer and more enterprising.

9.♗b2 ♘bd7 10.♘d2 c5 11.e3 Sustaining the central tension and at the same time gaining a certain advantage in space. Keres' double move of the c-pawn is not impressive when trying to equalise as Black against a super Grandmaster of the initiative, such as Alekhine.

11...♖c8 12.♖c1 ♖c7 13.♕e2 ♕a8 The rook at c7 is not secure, and this move helps White to undertake a favourable mobilisation. Much better was 13...♕b8, followed by 14...♖fc8.

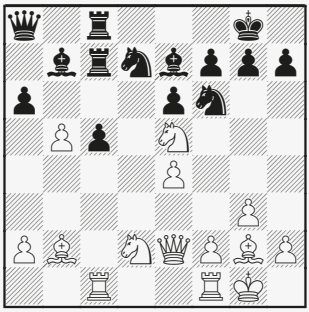
14.cxd5 ♘xd5 15.e4 Even more incisive is 15.♗xd5 ♗xd5 16.e4 ♗b7 17.d5!

15...♘5f6 Missing his last chance which resides in: 15... ♘xe5! 16. exd5 ♘d7 17.♘c4 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♕xd5.



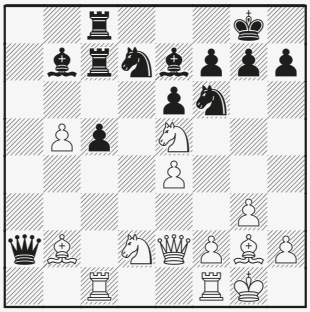
16.b4! Taking the greatest possible advantage of the deficient position of the black rook at c7.

16...♖fc8 17.dxc5 bxc5 18.b5 a6?



Also after 18...♘xe5 19.♗xe5 ♖d7 20.♘b3 Black's game would be inferior, but allowing the opening of the a-file is practically suicidal.

19.a4 axb5 20.axb5 ♕a2



Keres must have overlooked the rejoinder. In any case his position is already hopeless.

21.♘ec4!

21...♕a8 22.♗xf6 ! Winning the exchange anyway.

22...gxf6 If 22...♗xf6 23.b6 or 22...♘xf6 23.♘b6 etc.

23.b6 ♖c6 24.e5 ♖xb6 25.♘xb6 ♘xb6 26.♗xb7 ♕xb7 27.exf6 ♗xf6 28.♘e4 ♗e7 29.♕g4+ ♔h8 30.♕f4! Threatening not only 31.♕xf7 but also 31.♘xc5!

30...♗f8 31.♘xc5 ♕c7 After 32...♖xc5 White would recover the piece either at d4 or at e5.

32.♘xe6 ♕xf4 33.♘xf4

1-0

OBITUARY: MICHAEL JOHN FRANKLIN
(2ND FEBRUARY 1931 – 25TH APRIL 2023) FM 1980

In 1959 we find him graded just below the top six in England, but four years earlier, with the Grading List in its infancy, he was ranked "2a" and as high as forth if you please!

In 1960 we spot him weighing in on board two for Surrey. Michael enjoyed the occasional postal game. Picked for the 1964 England Olympic squad he returned a quietly impressive four wins out of six. In 1978 he won the Aaronsson Masters in London beating such as Webb, Ornstein, Crouch, Werner and Rayner and ahead of Tim Harding, Nunn and Hartston. Several grandmasters were left trailing. He remained an unashamed amateur though such as the Lloyds Bank Masters and so many club teams welcomed him warmly.

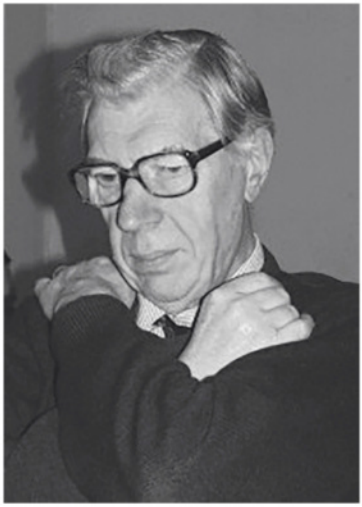


Photo: Cathy Rogers

Michael Franklin – Hans Ree

London System v KID A48
Anglo-Dutch Match, 1964

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 Michael was also a great believer in the Colle System - involving, of course, an early e3 - but here we see him beating a future Grandmaster with another from his armoury.

3.♗f4 ♗g7 4.e3 0-0 5.♘bd2 d6 6.♗c4 ♘bd7 7.h3 Deceptively quiet. White's favourite since about 1956, when in the last round of the British Championship, he employed it against a rampaging Hugh Alexander. He declined an early draw but went on to lose.

7 … ♕e8 8.0-0 e5 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♗h2 ♕e7 11.e4 ♘h5 12.♕e2 ♘c5 13.♕e3 c6 14.♖fe1 b5 'White's pieces are more harmoniously disposed than Black's slightly congested forces' - Barden.

15.♗f1 ♘a4 16.b3 ♘b6 17.♖ac1 ♘d7 18.c4 b4 19.c5 ♘hf6 20.♘c4 ♘e8 21.♘a5 ♘b8 22.♕d2 f6 23.♕xb4 ♘c7 24.♕a3 g5 25.♘c4 g4 26.hxg4 ♗xg4 27.♘d6 ♗xf3 28.♘f5 ♕e8 29.gxf3 ♕h5 30.b4 ♗h6 31.♖cd1 ♔h8 32.♗c4 ♗f4 33.♗xf4 exf4 34.♔f1 a5 35.♔e2 axb4 36.♕b2 'This threatens 37.♖d8+ and 38.♕xf6+ so it is no surprise that Black succumbs to a little combination' - Harding.

36… ♖a3 37.♗b3 ♘b5 38.♕xf6+ 1-0.

He may have hated last round games, twice going down in the British Championship when a substantial prize might have been his. Similarly, Franklin withdrew whilst leading at the Hastings Challengers - all in the last round - when his wife suffered a bereavement. Such family loyalty. He stopped playing around 2010.

Franklin was a sports fan, often spectating with Frank Parr who, of course, has also left us. Chess loses a most courteous, well-dressed gentleman. His ashes were laid to rest at South London Crematorium.

James Pratt

Openings for Amateurs

By Pete Tamburro; ptamburro@aol.com



Vasily Smyslov Competes in the 12th USSR Chess Championship, 1940
Collection of the Wolrd Chess Hall of Fame

REFUTED IN 1945, YET STILL PLAYED!

There is a virus that infects all amateur players. We want to play our favourite gambits so we can catch somebody early. It saves time for a bite to eat before the next round. It saves us from thinking about complex middle game positions. And, God be praised, it saves us from studying endgames because we'll never see one!

Most average players spend their time on the main lines of Sicilian, French, Caro-Kann, Alekhine, Pirc and Modern defences. They keep you busy as White. Just the various Sicilian lines dominate much of a white player's efforts. So, when White plays 1.e4 and gets 1....e5 in reply, 2.♘f3 is often immediately played with an intention to play a Ruy Lopez or Italian Game and, if you're gambit oriented yourself, a Scotch or Goring Gambit. Then, your opponent upsets the apple cart with 2...f5, the Latvian Gambit. Aargh! "Haven't seen that in years. What was that line that busts it?"

Once, at a U.S. Open, I was paired with someone I had known for years. I cheerfully greeted him, we shook hands and sat down to play. When he played 2...f5, I then remembered he was the leading expert on it and played it all the time. I remembered a Nimzo game and a Sir George Thomas one as well, but decided to go with Nimzo. Six hours later I won - in the endgame. It's about that time a player should swear an oath to know the blasted refutation.

Smyslov, at age 24, busted it sky high in 1945, yet there have been books on it and magazine theory articles and a host of amateur games in the databases. Instead of Morphy v. the Duke of Brunswick and his

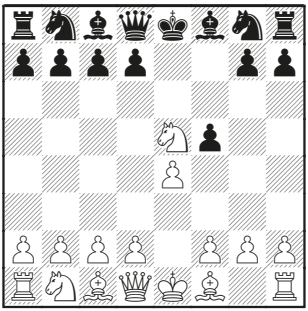
buddy, maybe this game should be in the chess teacher's repertoire.

To be honest, it's lasted this long because, as with all gambits, it's tricky - as you will see in the little side variations, so you really need to go over every little note in this game, and that play it over annually to remind you. Let's get started!

Vassily V Smyslov - Mikhail Pavlovich Kamishov

Moscow-ch24 1944/45 Moscow (17), 1945

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 f5 3.♘xe5



We're not going to go over all the alternatives for White. Instead we will concentrate on where Black may vary to trick you. The knight capture is best. It captures a pawn and opens up the possibility of ♕h5+, which we will see does occur in some variations.

3...♕f6 If you're going to fall for some really tricky move, this will be the move. You need to know what to do for each, or the game will be short for all the wrong reasons.

A really popular one, often seen online, is...

A. 3...♘c6 It sets a trap by encouraging an unsuspecting queen to win a rook. Our advice is to - fall into the trap! 4.♕h5+ g6 5.♘xg6 ♘f6 6.♕h3 A truly magical square in this line. 6...hxg6 Setting the trap! 7.♕xh8 ♕e7 8.d3 fxe4 9.♘c3! Development rears its ugly head! White even allows a discovered check with two consecutive pawn captures. In exchange, White has developed his knight and will develop his two bishops to active squares - and you're the exchange up! 9...exd3+ 10.♗e3 dxc2 11.♗d3 ♔f7 Desperately trying to get ♗g7 in, followed by d5. 12.♗c4+ d5 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5+ ♗e6 15.♗xe6+ ♕xe6 16.0-0 ♖e8 17.♕c3+- and the first big liquidation will be complete when the queen takes the pawn. Black is hopelessly lost;

B. 3...♕e7 Almost Petroff-like in its way, but that f5 pawn has irretrievably created a weakness. 4.♕h5+ g6 5.♘xg6 ♕xe4+ 6.♗e2 ♘f6 7.♕h3 That spot again! 7...hxg6 8.♕xh8 ♕xg2 This, over the board, can look scary, but what you have to ask yourself is what is Black's plan and how do you meet it? The plan seems obvious: castle queenside and harass White's queen. You as White also have to castle queenside and get your queen out of h8. Count the moves for Black: d5, ♗e6, ♘c6, 0-0-0. For White: ♖f1, d4, ♘c3, ♗e3, 0-0-0. Black seems to have an edge of one move; HOWEVER, Black has to protect the ♘f6! So he can't castle! He has to play ♔f7, and, worse yet, since he's not castled, the ♗f8 can't uncover an attack by the rook. So, you're OK! Look at everything, count the sequence of moves and that will help you think at the board. 9.♖f1 ♔f7 10.d3 ♘c6 11.♕h4 d6 12.♗e3 ♗e6 13.♘d2 ♕d5 14.♖g1 ♗e7 15.♘f3+-;

This one looks like responsible development, so you have to be careful.

C. 3...♘f6 4.♗c4 ♕e7 5.d4! You don't put either piece on f7. Figure it out! *(A hint: 5.♘f7 ♕xe4+)* 5...d6 6.♘f7 Now you do! The difference is the pawn on d4. It masks the bishop from the queen check. 6...♖g8 7.♘c3 h6 *(7...c6 8.e5 d5 9.♘d6+ ♔d8 10.♗d3+-)* 8.♘d5 *(Even 8.e5)* 8...♕xe4+ 9.♕e2! Actually forced if you want to win. 9...♕xe2+ 10.♔xe2! *(NOT 10.♗xe2?? ♘xd5 11.♘xh6 gxh6-+)* 10...♔xf7 11.♘xf6+! *(NOT 11.♘xc7+?? d5 12.♗b3 ♗d6 13.♘xa8 ♖e8+ 14.♔f1 ♘c6 15.c3 f4-+ It's variations like this that keep people playing the Latvian. Booby traps everywhere.)*

4.♘c4 fxe4 You survived move three. Congratulations! There is really only one played alternative here:

4...♕f7 5.♘e3.

A) Although there are two little subvariations: 5...♘f6 6.♗c4 ♕g6 7.exf5 ♕g5 8.d4+-;

B) 5...c6 6.♗c4 ♕f6 7.0-0 f4 8.♘g4 ♕g5 9.h3 ♘e7 *(9...d5 10.exd5 cxd5 11.♖e1+ ♗e7 12.♗b5++-)* 10.d4 d5 11.exd5 cxd5 12.♗b5+ ♘bc6 13.♘e5 a6 14.♘f3 ♕f6 15.♗xc6+ bxc6 16.♖e1+-;

C) 5...d5 6.exd5 ♘f6 7.♘c3 f4 8.♘c4 ♘xd5 9.♘e5 ♕f5 10.d4 and the advantage is obvious. The knights give the queen fits in a good many of these lines, and getting the pawn out to d4 allows White to free himself a pawn up.

5.♘c3 ♕g6 Here there is a handful of alternatives:

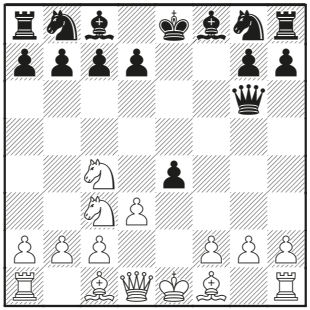
A. 5...♘e7 6.♘e3 d5 *(6...♕e5 7.d4! exd3 8.♗xd3 d5 9.0-0 d4 10.♘c4+-)* 7.♘cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♕h5++-;

B. 5...♕e7 6.♘d5+-;

C. 5...♕e6 6.♘e3 c6 7.d3 d5 8.dxe4 dxe4 9.♗c4+-;

D. 5...c6 6.♘xe4 ♕e6 *(6...♕g6)* 7.♕h5+ g6 *(7...♔d8 8.♕e5 d5 9.♘g5! ♕e8 10.♕xe8+ ♔xe8 11.♘e3 h6 12.♘f3 ♗d6 13.b3! ♘e7 14.♗b2 ♔f7 15.♘e5++-)* 8.♕e2 d5 9.♘ed6+ ♔d8 10.♘xb7+! ♔c7 11.♕xe6 ♗xe6 12.♘ca5+-

6.d3!



The key move to keep in your head to remember the main line. The capture by the bishop on d3 is almost decisive if Black takes there. And the g2 pawn and rook are immune because once the bishop hits d3 it can go to e4 and hit the queen on g2, and there is also the ever present and even more deadly ♕h5+. He who takes the king's pawn also sleeps in the streets.

6...♗b4 Normal, but you will also see 6...♘f6 and this will test your chess skills: 7.dxe4 ♗b4 8.♘e3 ♗xc3+ 9.bxc3. You are for a short moment a pawn up, but your queenside is shattered. Black will get castled first and have an f-file to operate on. On the plus side for White are the ownership of the two bishops, a secure king after castling and the ability to eventually dissolve the troubled pawns. You are going to have to pay attention. 9...♕xe4 10.♗d3 ♕c6 11.♗b2 0-0 12.c4! You have to contest the traditional d5 freeing move. If Black plays it you exchange and get your bishop to c4. That's a big deal.

A) Better is 12...d6 13.0-0 ♗e6 14.♘d5! ♗xd5 15.cxd5;

A1) Unsuccessful is 15...♘xd5 16.♕h5 g6 *(16...h6 17.♕g6; 16...♘f6 17.♗xf6; 16...♖f6 17.♗e4)* 17.♗xg6;

A2) 15...♕a4 16.♖b1 ♘bd7 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♖xb7 ♖f7 19.c4 ♕xa2 20.♗f5± And White is clearly superior. Still, you have to play it out. For the average player, this may be the most challenging line, so play with possibilities a bit at home. The open lines and superior mobility of the queen, rooks and especially the bishops win the day if properly utilised;

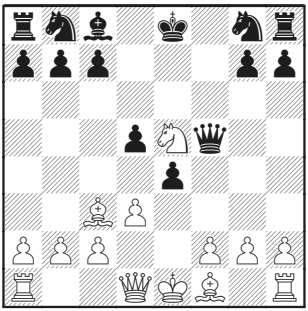
B) 12...d5?? 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♕xd5 15.♗xh7++- Nasty little line;

6...exd3 7.♗xd3 ♕e6+ *(7...♕xg2 8.♕h5+ g6 9.♕e5+ ♗e7 10.♕xh8 ♕xh1+ 11.♔e2+-)* 8.♘e3+-.

7.♗d2 ♗xc3 7...♘f6 8.♘xe4 ♗xd2+ 9.♕xd2 ♘xe4 10.dxe4 ♕xe4+ 11.♘e3 0-0 12.♗d3 ♕e5 13.0-0 *(13.0-0-0 works, too.)* 13...c6 14.♘c4+-

8.♗xc3 d5? Not a happy choice by Kamishov, but there aren't any saving ones. 8...♘f6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.dxe4 b5 *(10...0-0 11.♕d5+ ♔h8 12.f3 d6 13.0-0-0±)* 11.♕h5+

9.♘e5 ♕f5

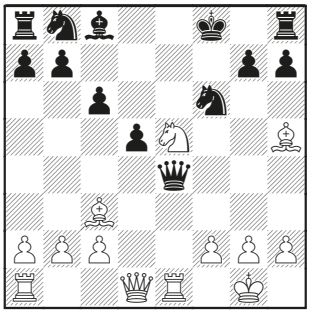


This move is symbolic of the flaw in the Latvian. We're told from the beginning of our chess education that bringing the queen out early is a bad idea. In all these lines the black queen often just wanders around, looking for a place to call home. White brings his queen out from time to time in these lines, but there is usually a stinging check or a rook capture involved. Make no mistake about it, the queen can wreak havoc in the white position if given the opportunity. Thus, you have to treat the lady with respect. Her vulnerability helps you develop, as is demonstrated in the lines above. It's important to stay calm, especially since you're usually up in material or minor piece development.

10.dxe4 ♕xe4+ 11.♗e2 ♘f6 11...♕xg2 12.♗h5+ g6 13.♗f3+-.

12.0-0 c6 The harassment of the black queen keeps going after 12...0-0 13.♗f3 ♕f5 14.♗xd5+ ♘xd5 15.♕xd5+ ♕e6 *(15...♔h8 16.♖ae1 c6 17.♘f7++-)* 16.♕d3+-.

13.♗h5+ ♔f8 14.♖e1



This position needs a diagram because it shows the utter bankruptcy of this line. Black's queenside trio is still sitting there. The king has had to get off the open e-file with no castle to hide inside. Smyslov can win any number of ways here. He picks one that shows a sense of humour.

14...♕h4 15.♗g6 15.♘g4 ♗xg4 *(Real team play is evidenced after 15...♕xh5 16.♗b4+ ♔f7 17.♖e7+ ♔g6 18.♕d3+ ♘e4 19.♘e5+ ♔f6 20.♕d4)* 16.♗b4+ ♔g8 17.♗xg4 ♘xg4 18.♖e8+ ♔f7 19.♖xh8 ♕xh2+ 20.♔f1 ♕h1+ 21.♔e2 ♕xg2 22.♖f8+ ♔e6 23.♖e8+ ♔d7 24.♖e7+ ♔d8 25.♕g1+-.

15...♘a6 16.♕e2 ♗h3 17.♘f3 and the queen has no place to hide or prevent the mate back home. A fitting final move.

1-0

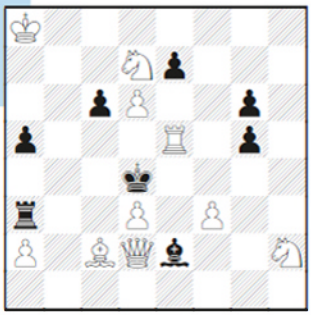
Thank you, GM Smyslov, for showing the way long ago. We just need to study your game.

PROBLEM WORLD

by Christopher Jones
cjajones1@yahoo.co.uk
Grandmaster of Chess Composition

Solutions are given on page 382

1



Leonid Lyubashevsky and Leonid Makaronez (Israel)

Mate in 3

ORIGINAL

2

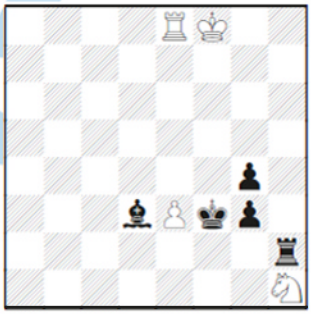


Darko Nesek (Croatia)

Helpmate in 2 - 2 solutions

ORIGINAL

3

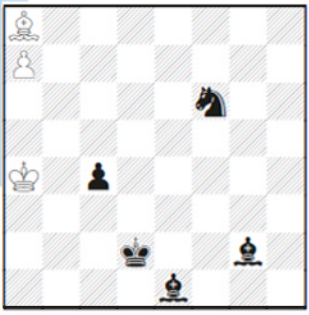


Abdelaziz Onkoud (France)

Helpmate in 2.5 - 2 solutions

ORIGINAL

4



Andrew Kalotay (USA)

Helpmate in 3 - 2 solutions

ORIGINAL

QUOTES AND QUERIES

A DEBATE LASTING NEARLY A CENTURY AND A HALF

By Alan Smith

6230 Your Theorists have debated the validity of 3...c5 in the Queen's Gambit Declined for over 140 years. When the sequence 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.g3 became popular, new methods were sought for Black. One such was the von Hennig - Schara gambit. Here is the first example of the acceptance of this gambit.

Ernst **Grünfeld** - Anton **Schara**

Vienna, 1918

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4!? 5.♕xd4 ♘c6 6.♕d1 exd5 7.♕xd5 ♗d6 8. ♗g5 ♘ge7 9.♕d2 f6 10.♗h4 ♕d6 11.♘f3 ♗b4 12.e3 ♗f5 13.♗c4 ♘a5 14.♗d3 ♖d8 15.♘d4 ♘ac6 16.♘xf5? ♘xf5 17.♗g3 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 ♘e5 19.♗b5+ ♕xb5

0–1

Ernst Franz Grünfeld, *Band 1*, *1911 - 1920*, Michael Ehn

Fast forward to 1929 and Heinrich von Hennig preferred 7...♗e6, accepting an endgame a pawn down, and duly defeated Benzinger in 33 moves.. Soon afterwards attention turned to 7...♗d7 which became the main line. The following game is a salutary tale.

B. van **Rossem** - Dr Jan **Selman**

Correspondence, 1933

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4 5.♕xd4 ♘c6 6.♕d1 exd5 7.♕xd5 ♗d7 8.a3 ♘f6 9.♕g5? White thought he was attacking; he soon found out otherwise.

9...♘d4 10.♕e3+ ♗e6 11.♕d3 ♗c4!12.♕xc4? ♘c2 ♯ , 12.♕d2 ♗b3 13.♖b1 ♘c2+ 14.♔d1 ♕a5 is quite hopeless.

0–1

De Limburger, 4th May 1935

Dr Ariel **Mengarini** - Miroslav **Radojcic**

Forum Open, New York 1967

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4 5.♕xd4 ♘c6 6.♕d1 exd5 7.♕xd5 ♗d7 8.♘f3 ♘f6 9.♕d1 ♗c5 10.e3 ♕e7 11.a3 11.♗e2 is better: 11...0-0-0 12.♗e2? Overlooking a tactic. Barden thought 12.♗d2 was correct.

12...♗h3! 13.♕c2 ♗xg2 14.♖g1 ♗xf3 15.♕f5+ 15.♗xf3 ♘d4 16.♕d1 ♘xf3+ 17.♕xf3 g6

15...♔b8 16.♕xf3 ♘e5 17.♕f5 g6 18.♕c2 ♖d7 19.b4 ♗b6 20.♗b2 ♖c8 21.♖d1

♖dc7 22.♕b3 ♗xe3! 23.fxe3 23.♘d5 ♘xd5 24.♖xd5 ♗f4

23...♘f3+ 24.♗xf3 Barden analysed 24.♔f2 ♖xc3 25.♗xc3 ♖xc3 26.♕xc3 ♘e4+, which is better for Black but by no means cut and dried.

24...♕xe3+ 25.♗e2 ♕xg1+ 26.♔d2 ♕g5+ 27.♔c2 Running for cover does not work: 27.♔e1 was better.

27...♘e4 28.♖d3 ♖xc3+! 29.♗xc3 ♖xc3+ 30.♖xc3 ♕d2+ 31.♔b1 ♘xc3+ 32.♔a1 ♕c1+.

0–1

Guardian, 28th October 1967

Dr Mengarini was no pushover; he won games from Reshevsky and Larsen.

R.A. **Lee** - John Harold **Beaty**

Yorkshire Championship, 1968

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4 5.♕a4+ ♗d7 6.♕xd4 exd5 7.♕xd5 ♘c6 8.a3 ♘f6 9.♕d1 ♗c5 10.e3 ♕e7 11.♘f3 0–0–0 12.♕c2 ♔b8 13.♗e2 g5 14.0–0 g4 15.♘d2 15.♘h4 was a viable alternative.

15...♘e5 16.♘c4 ♗c6 17.b4 17.♘xe5 dodges the following sacrifice.

17...♘f3+! 18.♗xf3 White had to try 18.gxf3 gxf3 and now the columnist suggested 19.e4; there might follow 19...♖hg8+ 20.♔h1 fxe2 21.♗f4+ ♔a8 22.♕e2 ♗d4 23.♖ac1 ♗xc3 24.♖xc3 ♘xe4 25.f3 ♘xc3! 26.♕e7 ♗xf3+ 27.♖xf3 ♖d1+, mating. White does have better, though: 23.b5! should hold.

18...gxf3 19.g3 ♕e6 20.e4 ♕h3 21.♗f4+ ♔a8 22.♘e3 ♘g4

0–1

Huddersfield and Holmfirth Examiner 11th October 1969

This game won the I.M.Brown prize for the best game of the 1967-68 season.

How well does the counter gambit stack up against grandmaster opposition? The following game shows that it still retains a bite.

Jan Hein **Donner** - Johannes van **Baarle**

Netherlands Championship, Leeuwarden 1977

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4 5.♕a4+ ♗d7 6.♕xd4 exd5 7.♕xd5 ♘c6 8.♕d1 8.♗g5 ♘f6 9.♕d2

8...♘f6 9.♘f3 ♗c5 10.e3 ♕e7 11.♗e2 0–0–0 12.♗d2 12.0-0 g5 13.b4 is the critical line. Bronznik thinks Black is okay after 13...♗xb4 14.♗b2 g4 15.♘d4 ♔b8 16.♘cb5 ♖hg8.

12...g5 13.♕c1 g4 14.♘d4 14.♘h4 is a better try.

14...♔b8 15.0–0 h5 16.♖e1 h4 17.♘xc6 ♗xc6 18.e4 ♖xd2! A thematic exchange sacrifice.

19.♕xd2 ♕e5 20.♖ad1? g3 21.♖f1 h3 22.♗f3 hxg2 23.♗xg2 gxf2+ 24.♖xf2 ♘g4.

0-1

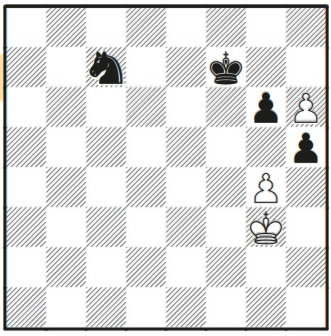
Leeuwarder Courant 3rd May 1977

White can decline the counter gambit with 4.e3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♘f6 which transposes into games from the St Amant - Staunton match: White has struggled to demonstrate an edge.

Endgame Studies

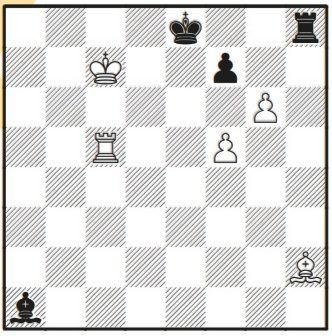
by Ian Watson
ian@irwatson.uk

1



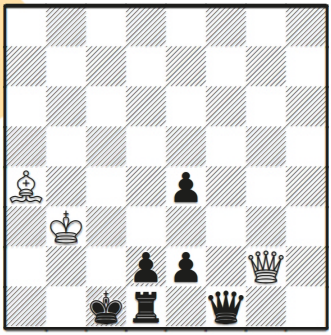
S Inostroza
The Problemist 1990
DRAW

2



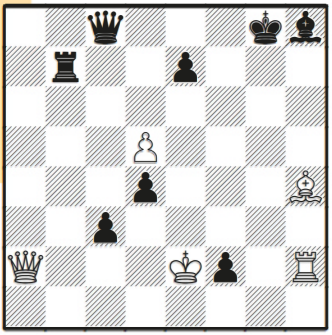
S Kriuckov
Zadachi i Etyudi 1927
WIN

3



M Minski
Magyar Sakkvilag 2023
WIN

4



S Nielsen
ChessStar 2023
WIN

The British Champion

The new British Chess Solving Champion is David Hodge. He won the title in the finals which were held in May at Nottingham. This month, we'll look at the four studies that were included in the finals. The British Chess Solving Championship, sponsored by Winton, is an annual event, although, because of COVID, there was no event in 2021 or 2022. David Hodge takes over the mantle of British Champion from GM John Nunn who won the 2020 event.

Solvers in the Winton BCSC have to solve a mix of types of chess problem, and endgame studies. There are two competitions, the BCSC itself and a grading limited competition for those with solving Elo ratings below 2,000. Your first two studies are from the under 2,000 event and the second two from the Championship itself. You can compare your solving prowess with that of the competitors.

In the under 2,000 event, the highest score on the two studies was seven out of the ten points available (five points for each study), so no-one got them both fully correct. The two studies in the Championship were very difficult; no-one got more than 2 points out of the five on the first one, and only one solver, GM Jonathan Mestel, got more than two points on the second one, getting 4 out of 5 for it. However, although the Championship is restricted to UK solvers, there is an Open solving event held at the same time and using the same problems. This attracts solvers from several countries, and it was won by the young Lithuanian Kevinas Kuznecovas; he got one point for the first of these two challenging studies, but the full 5 for the second one. So, if you can get more than 7/10 on the first two studies, and more than 6/10 on the second pair, you will have trounced the Nottingham solvers...

A reminder of the usual solving procedures: You'll need to set up these positions on a board. In solving events, you can use a chess set and you can move the pieces to try and help you solve. You solve against the clock; for these four studies give yourself an average of 30 minutes for each one, so 120 minutes in total. Points are awarded according to how much of the composer's solution you find, with five points available for each study if you find it all. In the answers, I'll show you where the points were awarded. You need to find the composer's main line; you can also write down sidelines if you're not sure what the main line is, but only the main line moves earn points. So, look for the most artistic, elegant line.

The solutions are on page 383.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

This month's problems

This month we have a typically well-wrought three-move problem from our frequent and esteemed Israeli contributors. There is an excellent, inconspicuous key move, and then a number of accurate continuations. After that, three helpmates. Regular readers will be familiar with this genre, in which Black is usually the one who initiates a collaborative sequence of moves that end up with him being mated. Quite often, though, the amount of play in the position is such that the composer specifies that the total number of moves is an odd number, and so in Abdelaziz's problem you are looking for two WBWBW# sequences. In all three helpmates there is an interesting relationship between the two solutions. We are pleased to welcome to this column Darko Nesek. Any Croatian readers may be familiar with his problem column in *Sahovski Glasnik*.

An excellent, inconspicuous key move

If you have had a go at solving the three-mover you will know how rigorous an approach is required. Even if you spot that in order to make threats the white queen must get on to the c-file care is needed. The way to do it is 1.♗b1!. If this were a solving contest then in order to gain points for the key move you would be required to specify its threat, and you would score zero if you said 1.♕c2. After 1.♗b1 and 2.♕c2 Black can defend with 2…♖c3! - the white queen needs to be able to meet that self-blocking move to c3 by playing ♕g1, and so the threat is 2.♕c1, when the two threats on the c-file can nicely be differentiated thus: 2…exd6 3.♕c4 and 2…♗xd3 (or …♖xd3) 3.♕c5. (Problem aesthetics: it's always regarded as important that the apparent crudity of making two threats is counteracted by there being defences that specifically require uniquely each of the threatened mates.) There are numerous black defences. After 1…c5 we have 2.♕c1 ♗xf3 (now check) 3.♘xf3. Or try 1… ♗xd3; now 2.♖c5! threatens 3.♕f2 and 2…♖xa2 is met by 3.♕xd3. Or 1…♖xd3 2.♕xa5 and now 2…♖c3 doesn't prevent the threatened 3.♖e4 and 2…♔c4, which does stop 3.♖e4 from being mate, is met by the other threat,3.♕c5. (Again, the importance of having multiple threats all being uniquely required in one continuation.) A further defence is 1…exd6, and now we have 2.♖e4+ ♔d5 3.♕xg5. Or 1… ♗d1 2.♕b2+ ♖c3 3.♕f2. (This queen really gets around a lot!) Or 1…♖xa2 2. ♗xa2 (threat 3.♖e4) ♗xf3 3.Sxf3. Or 1…♖b3, when 2.axb3, threatening 3.♕b2, does the trick. The composers were especially pleased to generate so much play from defences on d3.

Plain sailing(?) – the three helpmates

Well, plain sailing from my point of view - no lengthy explanations required! In Darko's problem, we see the kind of diagonal / orthogonal parallelism between solutions that is the meat and drink of composers of shorter helpmates - 1.♕xd5 ♖d4 2.♕xf7 ♗xf7 and 1.♕xe2 ♗d3 2.♕xh2 ♖xh2. The pair of solutions also demonstrate a nice reciprocity of roles between the white rook and bishop.

There is also reciprocity between the roles of the two white officers in Abdelaziz's helpmate - 1…♘f2 2.♗e2 ♘d3 3.♖f2 ♘e1 and 1…♖e4 2.♖e2 ♖xg4 3.♗e4 ♖xg3. There are a number of other points of comparison between solutions. In both solutions, the square occupied by White on his first move is occupied by Black on his second (a feature often named after the great Russian composer Umniov, though in the field of helpmates some prefer the more home-spun description 'follow-my-leader'). There is a precise equivalence in the way in which each white officer makes all three moves in one solution, and in the way in which each black officer in turn blocks

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the square e2. Another feature (named after another Russian exponent, Chumakov) is that the black pawns, vitally blocking squares in the first solution, are both captured in the second.

In Andy's three-move helpmate, the white bishop must move to allow a promotion at a8. In the first solution, the black g2 bishop is in the way, and would stymie the eventual mate if it moved away from g2 in a way that maintained its guard on that square, so the solution runs 1.♗h1 ♗xh1 2.♔e2 a8=♕ 3.♔f1 ♕g2. The sweeping moves by the white bishop and queen down the long diagonal strikingly illustrate the Bristol theme. A different approach is adopted in the second solution. In this case, it is the black knight that would stymie the eventual mate if it remains on the board, so the only one of its eight legal moves that works is the one that sacrifices it on the square to which the white bishop is going to have to move (cf. the first solution!). Thus we have 1.♘e4 ♗xe4 2.♔c3 a8=♕ 3.♗d2 ♕h8. Rather along the lines of what I said about the first of our problems, White's queen(s) certainly get around! And I admire the craftsmanship that provides that the black bishop diagrammed at e1 supplies a necessary square-block in both solutions.

SOLUTIONS TO ENDGAMES (See page 380)

Inostroza

1.gxh5 (1 point) **g5 2.♔g4 ♘e6 3.♔f5 ♔g8 4.♔xe6** (+1 point =2) **g4 5.♔f5** (+1 = 3) **g3 6.♔g6 g2 7.h7+** (+1 = 4) **♔h8 8.♔h6** (+1 = 5) draws.

1...gxh5 2.♔h4 ♔g6 3.h7.

Kriuckov

Hopefully, you remembered that in studies castling is legal unless it can be proved from the diagram position that it is illegal. That doesn't affect the main line of this study but is relevant to a sideline.

1.♗e5 (1 point) **♗xe5+ 2.♖xe5+** (+1 point = 2) **♔f8 3.♖e8+** (+1 = 3) **♔xe8 4.g7** (+1 = 4) **♖g8 5.f6** (+1 = 5) wins.

1.♔d6? fxg6 2.♔e6 0-0. 3...♔g7 4.f6+.

Minski

1.♕g7 ♕f7+ 2.♕xf7 (1 point) **♖g1 3.♕c4+** (+1 point = 2) **♔d1 4.♕xe4 ♖g3+ 5.♔b2+** (+1 = 3) **♔e1 6.♗d1** (+1 = 4) **♖e3 7.♕h1+** (+1 = 5) wins, for example 7...♔f2 8.♕h2+ ♔f1 9.♗xe2+ ♖xe2 10.♕h1+ ♔f2 11.♔c2.

Lots of sidelines; all the following are deviations from the main line: 1...♕f3+ 2.♔a2; 2...♖f1 3.♕c7+ (3.♕c4+? ♔d1 4.♕xe4 ♔e1 5.♕h4+ ♖f2) ...♔d1 4.♕g3; 3.♕c7+? ♔d1 4.♔b2+ ♔e1; 4...♔e1 5.♕h4+ ♔f1 6.♕f6+ ♔e1 7.♕c3 ♖g5 8.♗d7 ♖d5 9.♕g3+ ♔f1 10.♗h3 mate; 5.♔a2+? ♔e1 6.♗d1 ♖e3 7.♕h1+ ♔f2 and the white king is too far away; 5.♔c4+? ♔e1 6.♗d1 ♖g4 7.♕xg4 exd1♕; 7.♕xe3? ♔xd1 8.♕f3 ♔e1 9.♕g3+ ♔f1 10.♕f3+ ♔e1 11.♔c3 d1♕. Whew! This was really tough. I got 2.♕xf7 but then wrote 2...♖f1, not realising that 2...♖g1 is a stronger defence. So did a lot of solvers. Minski is a brilliantly devious composer.

Nielsen

1.d6+ e6 2.d7 (1 point) **f1♕+ 3.♔xf1 ♖xd7 4.♕xe6+ ♖f7+ 5.♗f6** (+1 point = 2) **♕a6+ 6.♔f2** (+1 = 3) **♗g7 7.♕e8+ ♖f8 8.♖h8+** (+1 = 4) **♔xh8 9.♕xf8+ ♔h7 10.♕xg7** (+1 = 5) mate.

Not so many sidelines as in the Minski, but more than enough to tax the tired solver.

2...♖xd7 3.♕xe6+; 3...♕xd7 4.♕a8+ ♔f7 5.♖f2+ ♔g6 6.♕g8+ ♕g7 and e.g. 7.♕xe6+ ♔h7 8.♖h2; 6.♔g1? ♕a1+; 6.♕xa6? ♖xf6+: 6.♔g2? ♕b7+; 6...♗xf6 7.♕xa6 ♗e5+ 8.♔g2 ♗xh2 9.♔xh2; 7.♕xa6? ♖xf6+.

I got as far as 5.♗f6 and assumed that was the end of the study; oops! I overlooked 5...♕a6+. If I'd known this was by the World Champion of study composing, I'd have looked further, but you aren't told who composed the studies until after the solving stops.

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