

SAY NO TO CHESS PRINCIPLES!

by
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KEY TO SYMBOLS

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+-	White has a decisive advantage
-+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
△	with the idea of
▷	better is
≤	worse is
N	novelty
+	check
#	mate

FOREWORD

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I feel it my duty to explain myself to the reader.

Nowadays, if you walk into any chess shop, you'll see thousands of books with the same tried and true 'updated and overanalyzed examples' gathering dust on the shelf. Even though I understand that my book will likely take its rightful place in the depths of those same bookcases, I wrote it anyway. What is it that lurks behind this decision? Is it avidity? Vanity? Stupidity? Or perhaps maybe greed compounded by stupid vanity? What really was it that pushed me to make this childish mistake?

Once upon a time, after my immigration from a country of — at first constantly victorious, but then later vanquished — socialism, to a country of freedom and capitalism, I got a call from a fellow grandmaster. It wasn't that we hadn't seen each other recently. Rather, he called to discuss our different opinions concerning whether someone can, in Russia, push people to attend unsanctioned meetings and marches — in the name of freedom and development — that would probably lead to their imprisonment. And we discussed this as those not personally ready to share their fate, but rather as those preferring to fight alongside those prisoners for the same freedoms, from the bitter confines of a different country as an immigrant.

Among other things during our discussion, he suggested I write a book. As he suggested several bright literary ideas, he also warned me that his friend, a publisher of chess literature, would send me a writing contract. Soon enough the contract showed up in my mail, and after some deep and anguished thought, tortured by foreboding, I signed it. It wasn't that I was excited about writing this book, but I thought, rather, "What if...it somehow writes itself?" Until of course it did no such thing. As the days went past the following year I blissfully forgot my literary obligations, until I was awoken from my cheerful ignorance by letters politely asking for the manuscript. Kindly explaining that the absence of said manuscript was thanks in large part to writer's block, I tried to escape writing the aforementioned work, until I was shown a friendly document I had signed (the contract!), mentioning several of my promises. It

became clear that I should fulfil my obligations. At least in this way I wouldn't have to feel guilty about the trees that had been chopped down to make the paper ordered and purchased to print and advertise my book!*

Two years have passed since that day and the book is finally with us, which brings me immense pleasure. I decided to comment on my own games, among which are ones of significance. But as you will see, they are not necessarily grouped according to quality, but by specific topics. I chose those that featured unique, non-standard games, inventive approaches, as well as those involving less trivial evaluations. Sometimes the games cover more than one topic, which is something hinted at by the diagrams. For the sake of ease I wanted to show only a minimum number of variations, but at the same time I did not want to gloss over or skip any critical moments and mistakes. I also wanted to make the difficult seem simple and accessible, and to make the diagrams useful as training material for various levels of difficulty.

* Author's note: In chapter 7 of *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, **Stepan (Styopa) Bogdanovich Likhodeev** is the director of the *Variety Theatre*. Waking up with a hangover he sees the very polite and affable Woland, who shows him a contract with Stepan's own 'dashing' signature. Likhodeev does not remember anything about this contract and is certain he has never seen this person before in his life.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

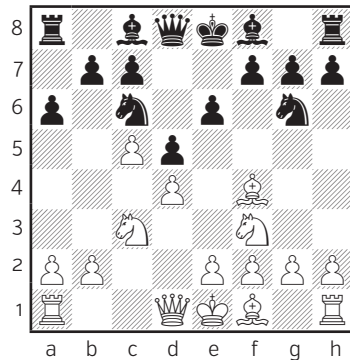
Chess has very strict, but also fairly simple, rules: rapid development, control of the center with pawns or pieces, timely castling and defense of the king, the creation of various weaknesses in the opponent's position, attacking those weaknesses, and control of open lines. At the same time a player shouldn't get his queen stuck in the enemy camp, or ruin his own pawn structure. Those who know these rules will succeed.

It is necessary for a chess player to know opening and endgame theory, standard combinations and motifs, as well as pawn structures and many other things. A lot of the topics listed demand a very straightforward type of thinking or approach. However it also happens that chess players often discover significant resources which formally exist outside the typical rules of chess. Those who know how to break all the rules and work around those specific guidelines reach the very top. Currently, when thousands of chess books dissect the same standard ideas in great detail, let us remember that first there were those who origi-

nally discovered them, implemented them, and made them standard, as well as those who broke the rules and created completely new ones.

1

▷ **Alexander Alekhine**
▶ **Akiba Rubinstein**
The Hague 1921



The game has only begun and is still in the opening stage. 7. ♖g3 looks normal with the follow-up moves e3, and ♙d3 which lead to an equal game. Instead, this happened:

7. ♖e3

This is already a significant moment, and you might think that it

comes with the idea of $g3$ and Bg2 . But because the bishop has nothing to do on $g2$, Rubinstein reacted without any particular concern.

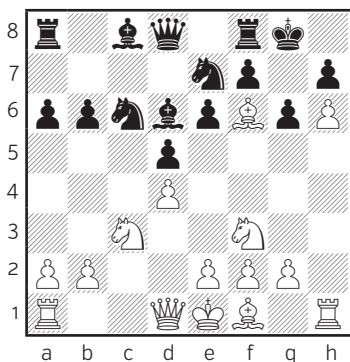
7...b6 8.cxb6 cxb6 9.h4!

Today we all know that a knight on $g6$ is like a magnet for the h-pawn, and sure enough this was also clear to Alekhine.

9...Bd6

Of course, it was necessary to play $9...h5!$.

**10.h5 Nge7 11.h6 g6 12. Bg5! 0-0
13. Bf6**



It's not just that Alekhine has not castled but that he isn't developing either! Instead, he seems to be playing with only bishop and pawn.

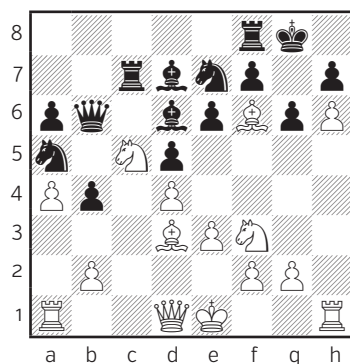
On the other hand, Rubinstein, a classical positional player, did

everything by the rules and still wound up in a worse position. But as we shall see, that's not all.

13...b5 14.e3 Bd7 15. Bd3 Rc8 16.a4!

Other players would have castled here, but Alekhine was simply ahead of his time.

**16...b4 17. Ne2 Qb6 18. Nc1! Rc7
19. Nb3 Na5 20. Nc5!**

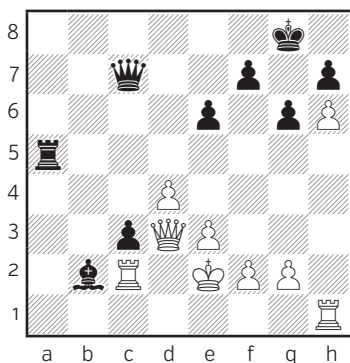


Now it's time to play with just one knight.

**20...Nc4 21. Bxc4! dxc4 22. Ne5
Bxe5 23. Bxe7 Bd6 24. Bxf8 Bxf8
25. Nxd7**

Not realizing that $25. Rc1!$ is stronger still.

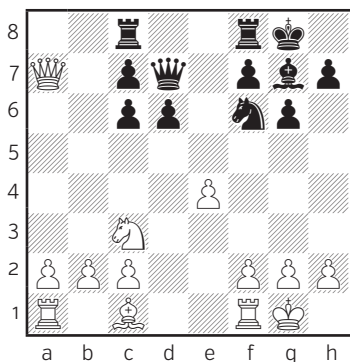
**25...Rxd7 26.a5 Qc6 27. Qf3 Rd5
28. Rc1 Qc7 29. Qe2 c3 30.bxc3 bxc3
31. Qxa6 Rxa5 32. Qd3 Ba3 33. Rc2
Bb2 34. Qe2+-**



...and as soon as the rook enters the game, Black can resign. Alekhine implemented a truly original idea in this game.

2

- ▷ Aaron Nimzowitsch
 - ▷ Jose Raul Capablanca
- St Petersburg 1914



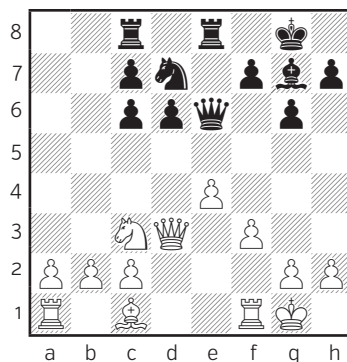
This game became famous because of the (at least for that time) unusual plan of attack on the queenside along the a- and b-files. Nowadays nobody would be surprised by such

ideas, similar as they are to the Benko Gambit. But one hundred years ago this was just SHOCKING.

14. ♖a6

Nimzowitsch stood out because of his fresh outlook on chess, and he and his friends tried to find new ways and develop revolutionary ideas and concepts. In this game he played solid, cautious chess, like most players in his situation would have. During one training session for younger players, Mark Dvoretsky pointed out this distinct idea to us. He instead suggested leaving the white queen on a7 to tie up the black heavy pieces due to pressure against the c7-pawn. Even though we didn't analyze the position in much detail, the concept is what stayed with me. The game continued:

14... ♖fe8 15. ♕d3 ♗e6 16. f3 ♘d7



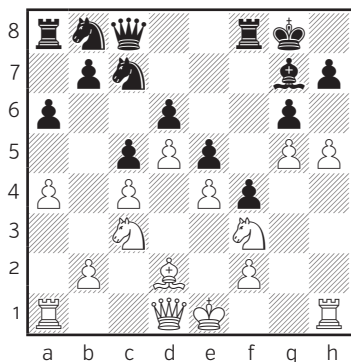
And Capablanca tore up the queenside of the 'Master of the Blockade'.

3

▷ Yuri Averbakh

▶ Boris Spassky

Leningrad 1956



A young Boris Spassky had played the opening rather superficially and found himself in a strategically lost position. White has a space advantage all over the board, and the attack against the black king should begin momentarily. Unwilling to make peace with his role as a passive observer in the ensuing struggle, Spassky takes drastic action to change the direction of the battle.

16...♖c6

This certainly doesn't change the evaluation of the position, but it does force his opponent to make a few precise moves. It's likely that the inspiration for this type of bluff was Dr Emanuel Lasker, who was

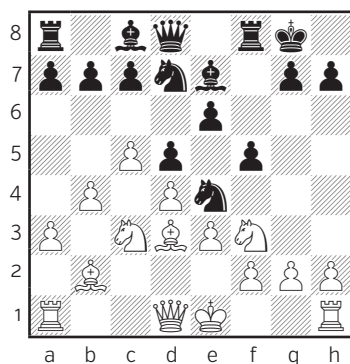
famous for his individual approach to each opponent and position. Yuri Averbakh couldn't convert the advantage, and the game perhaps cost him a few years of his life.

4

▷ Tigran Petrosian

▶ Robert James Fischer

Bled 1959

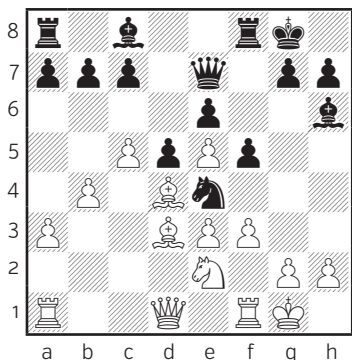


An inexperienced Bobby Fischer, naïve and proud, places his knight in the center, intending to use it as a shield to mobilize the rest of his pieces. But it's possible that, upon seeing this move, a faint smile quivered at the corners of 'Iron Tigran's' mouth, who, as it sadly turns out, was one of the least 'iron-like' among the world champions.

11.♞e2!

The knight is masterfully surrounded on all sides.

11... ♖f6 12.0-0 ♜e7 13.♘e5 ♘xe5
14.dxe5 ♙g5 15.♙d4 ♙h6 16.f3



Finally, it's time to banish it from e4.

16... ♘g5 17.c6±

Black's pieces are scattered in all directions and were soon destroyed.

White plays a lifeless opening that doesn't involve any realistic plans, but due to his strong center he is able to defend.

It seemed logical to consider 16.. ♖bc8.

Also strong is 16.. ♜d7.

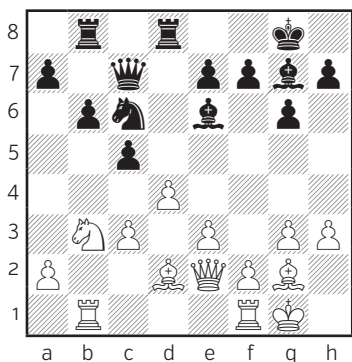
However, the patriarch had an epiphany:

16... ♘a5!

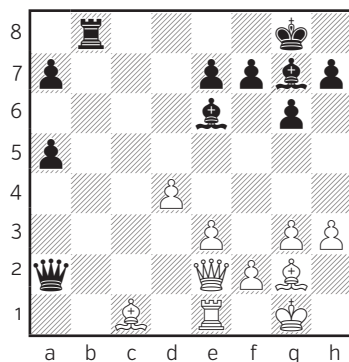
A knight on the rim is not always badly placed, and doubled pawns can offer other types of advantages as compensation. I take my ushanka hat off to him here.

5

▷ Ilia Abramovich Kan
▷ Mikhail Botvinnik
Moscow 1953



17.♘xa5 bxa5 18.♖xb8 ♖xb8 19.♙c1
cxd4 20.cxd4 ♜c4 21.♖e1 ♜xa2±



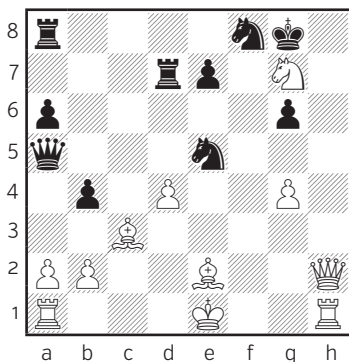
And Black has a huge advantage.

6

▷ Viswanathan Anand [2781]

▷ Peter Svidler [2713]

Linares 1999

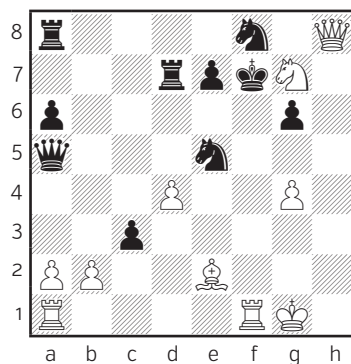


In an extremely complex and eventful game, Peter Svidler was completely outplayed, and it looks like the white attack is now unstoppable. Even so, the unbelievable move 29...♘f7!! would have allowed him to keep defending.

The game continued:

29...♘f7 30. ♔h8+ ♕f7 31.0-0+!

1-0



And Black resigned. How is it possible that the initially well-hidden black king was checkmated, and the white one, standing in the eye of the storm in the center of the board all day, was the one who announced the decisive check? Is Viswanathan Anand a god from Madras, or is this something a mere mortal can learn to do as well?

Upon analyzing dozens of my own games I became convinced that such play is not only something one can learn, but rather something one has to learn. In other words, rare maneuvers that dig deep past the limits of traditional chess knowledge are necessary for success.

CHAPTER 1

PLAY WITHOUT CASTLING

Castling is a move designed to coordinate the rooks and safely reposition the king. It follows that one can do without it when the king is relatively safe in the center, and when the rooks can be developed along either wing, or could enter the game sometime later. When Wilhelm Steinitz suggested that the king can be used in the middlegame, both for attack and defense, he of course meant only in the vicinity of those eight squares that the king itself attacks and defends, regardless of where it is standing.

Despite the need to castle in the opening most of the time, there is still some room left for cases which can be alternatively interpreted. It may be rare in open games to find examples that legitimately ignore castling, but in closed games a player doesn't need to rush to castle at all, and can focus on making essential moves, as well as camouflaging plans of true intent.

Clearly the king is most vulnerable on an open line, and in those cases a check by a heavy piece is lethal, but as is often the case, the f1 (f8)

and d1 (d8) squares can be reliable safe havens. Furthermore, even artificial castling can prove helpful. By declining to castle one can often gain some sort of long-term material or positional advantage. It may also be judged best to avoid castling if one side has started an attack on the wing, or if it is discerned that the king will prove better placed in the center as the contours of an endgame start taking shape. It all depends on the specific position and one needs to be prepared for any developments, all the while remembering the recommendations of Steinitz, the first world champion.

1

▷ **Evgeny Bareev [2650]**

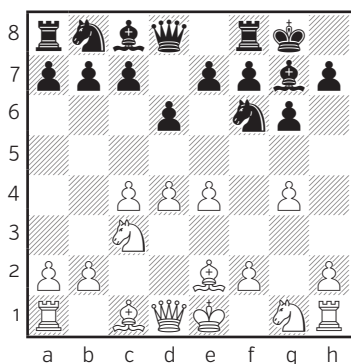
▶ **Stefan Djuric [2540]**

Bled 1991

Throughout 1990, and until November 1991, I was riding a high and wasn't afraid to take risks and lose. I also often won, as it turned out, claiming many top prizes in tournaments. Stefan Djuric was a player of a similar style to me — he de-

vised plans over the board without worrying about the result. The tournament in Slovenia, won by Predrag Nikolic, was not a qualifier for the world championship, making it more conducive to inventiveness and a fighting spirit, but it also retained a distinctly friendly atmosphere.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♖g7 4.e4 d6
5.♙e2 o-o 6.g4

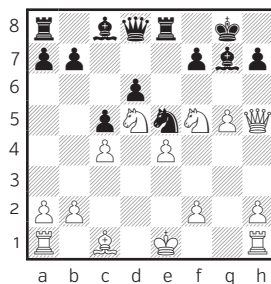


In those years it became fashionable to play an early g2–g4 in almost any opening or position. I made my own contribution to the trend and pushed the g-pawn early in many openings, which the reader will notice throughout this book.

Here, to put it mildly, the move is questionable, but back then I truly believed I could climb any mountain.

6...a6

6...c5! 7.d5 e6 8.g5 ♘h5 9.♙xh5 gxh5
10.♚xh5 ♜e8 11.♘ge2 exd5 12.♘xd5
♘d7 13.♘g3 ♘e5 14.♘f5



14...♘g6? (14...♙xf5 15.exf5 ♘xc4+
16.♙f1 ♜e5 17.♚f3 ♚d7=) 15.♘xg7±
o-o (29) Mamedyarov,S (2763)-Radjabov,T (2744) Moscow 2010.

7.g5 ♘h5

And an even more recent one: 7...
♘fd7 8.h4 b5 9.h5 ♘c6 10.♘f3
e5 11.d5 ♘d4 12.♙e3 b4 13.♘a4
f5 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♘h4 f4
16.♙xd4 ♚xg5∞ ½–½ (50) Akobian,V (2615)-Kamsky,G (2678) Saint Louis 2016.

8.♙e3 b5

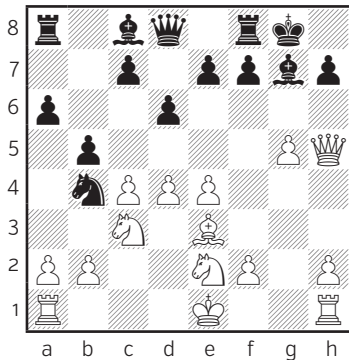
This makes sense. After all, my king won't have a safe haven anywhere on the board until the endgame.

A decent alternative is 8...♘c6 9.d5
♘a5∞.

9.♙xh5

Less dangerous is 9.cxb5! axb5 10.♙xb5 c6 (10...c5 11.♘ge2 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♙b7 13.o-o e5 14.♘de2 ♘a6±) 11.♙e2 ♚b6 12.♚d2 f5, where Black has compensation but White has play as well.

9...gxh5 10.♚xh5 ♘c6 11.♘ge2 ♘b4



12.♚d2!?

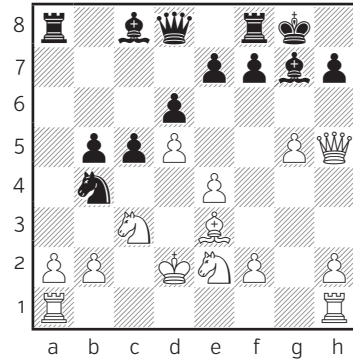
A sincere challenge to a duel. I don't know what I didn't like about castling. My opponent should now look for an opportunity to get at my king, either via the center or queenside. Even though the central pawns are mobile, there are so many that the king can hide behind them.

12...c5

Curiously, my position isn't as bad as it seems. For instance, in the variation 12...bxc4 13.f4 d5 (13...c5 14.f5 ♖b8 15.♗hg1∞; 13...e6 14.♗hg1 c5 15.♗g4 ♖h8 16.♗h4 h6 17.f5∞) 14.f5 dxe4 15.f6 ♙h8 16.♗af1 e5 17.♗hg1

♚d7 18.g6 fxg6 19.♘xe4∞ everything remains very tense.

13.cxb5 axb5 14.d5



At least now the king is OK in the center.

14...♘xa2!?

It didn't take long for Stepan Djuric to throw a challenge right back at me.

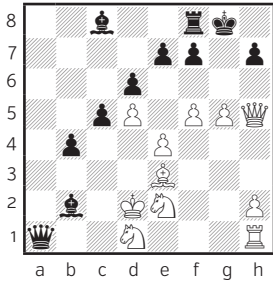
I was expecting the thematic 14...c4 15.a3 ♘d3 followed by the pawn march 16.f4 ♘xb2 17.f5, where White feels quite good: 17...♘a4 18.♙d4 ♙xd4 19.♘xd4 ♘xc3 20.♙xc3∞.

15.♗xa2 ♗xa2 16.♘xa2 ♚a5+

Energetic, but stronger was 16...♙xb2! 17.♘ac3 ♚a5 18.♗g1 (18.♗b1 ♙xc3+ 19.♘xc3 b4 20.♘d1 ♙a6±) 18...b4 19.♘d1 ♙g7 20.♙e1 b3+ 21.♙f1 b2 22.♘xb2 ♙xb2 23.♙g2±, with advantage for Black.

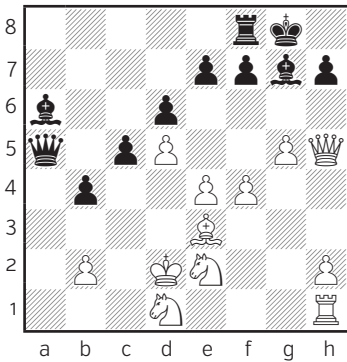
17. ♖ac3 b4 18. ♗d1 ♕a6

There was another resource: 18... ♖a1!? 19. f4 ♕xb2 20. f5



20... ♕g7 (20... ♕c3+ 21. ♗exc3 bxc3+ 22. ♖e2+-) 21. f6 exf6 22. gxf6 ♖xf6 23. ♖g1 ♖h8 24. ♖g5 ♖a1=, with a sharp game.

19. f4



19...c4?

A miscalculation. It wasn't too late to maintain equality with 19... ♖a2 20. ♖g1 ♕c3+ (20... ♕xb2 21. ♖e1 b3 22. f5 ♕xe2 23. ♖xe2 ♕e5 24. ♖g2 ♖xe2+ 25. ♖xe2 c4 26. ♕d2

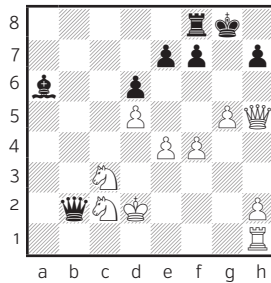
b2 27. ♗xb2 ♕xb2=) 21. ♗exc3 bxc3+ 22. ♖xc3 ♖b8 23. ♖d2 ♖a5+ 24. ♖c2 ♖a4+= with perpetual check.

20. f5!

It's almost impossible that anyone would find the variation 20. ♕d4 ♕xd4!

[20...c3+ 21. bxc3 bxc3+ (21... ♕xd4 22. cxd4 ♖a2+ 23. ♖e3 b3 24. ♗dc3 ♖c2 25. ♖c1 ♕xe2 26. ♖xc2 ♕xh5 27. ♖b2±) 22. ♕xc3 ♖a2+ 23. ♖e1 ♖c8 24. ♕xg7 ♖xg7 25. ♖f3+-]

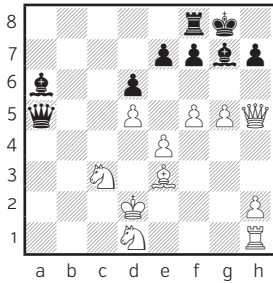
21. ♗xd4 c3+ 22. bxc3 ♖a2+ 23. ♖e3 bxc3 24. ♗xc3 ♖a3! 25. ♖d2 ♖b2+ 26. ♗c2



26... ♕d3!! 27. ♖xd3 ♖c8 28. ♖d1 ♖xc3+ 29. ♖e2 ♖b2! = with equality, otherwise it would be death even after 20. ♕d4.

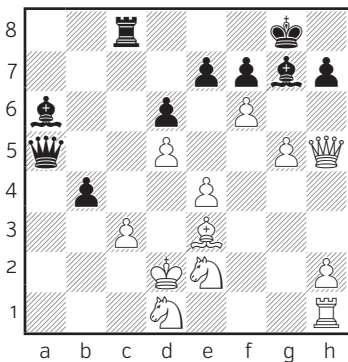
20...c3+ 21. bxc3 ♖c8

Once again, it isn't human to find 21...bxc3+ 22. ♗exc3



22...♖b4!! and Black somehow manages to keep attacking: 23.f6 exf6 24.gxf6 ♕xf6 25.♖g1+ ♔h8 26.♖g3! (worse is 26.♖h6 ♕xc3+ 27.♘xc3 ♖b2+ 28.♔d1 ♖b3+! 29.♔e1 ♖xc3+ 30.♕d2 ♖a1+ 31.♔f2 ♖d4+ 32.♖e3 ♖f6+ 33.♖f4 ♖d4+ 34.♕e3 ♖b2+ 35.♔g3 ♖g8+ 36.♔h4 ♖xg1 37.♕xg1 ♖g7=) 26...♕xc3+ 27.♘xc3 ♖b2+ 28.♔e1 ♖xc3+ 29.♕d2 ♖a1+ 30.♖d1±, and the game should end in a draw.

22.f6



22...bxc3+?

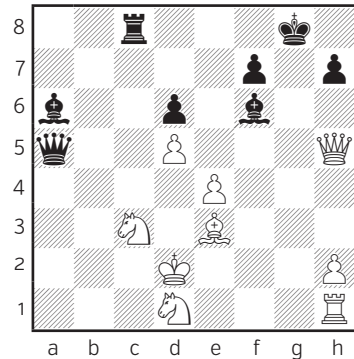
Harsh, but only 22...exf6 would have worked, though even after

this White is up in all variations: 23.gxf6 ♕xf6 24.♕d4 (or 24.♖g1+ ♔h8 25.♔e1 bxc3 26.♖h6 c2+ 27.♔f2 cxd1♘+ 28.♖xd1 ♕g7 29.♕d4±; or 24.♔e1 bxc3 25.♖g1+! ♔h8 26.♖h6 c2+ 27.♔f2 cxd1♘+ 28.♖xd1 ♕e5 29.♕d4±) 24...bxc3+ 25.♕xc3 ♕xe2 26.♔xe2 ♖b5+ 27.♔f3!

[27.♔e1 ♕xc3+ (27...♖xc3 28.♖g1+ ♔f8 29.♖h6+ ♔e7 30.♖g8+-) 28.♘xc3 ♖xc3 29.♖g5+ ♔f8 30.♖d8+ ♖e8 31.♖xd6+ ♖e7 32.♖b8+ ♖e8 33.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 34.♔f2 ♖h3=]

27...♖d3+ 28.♔f4 ♖xc3 29.♖g4+ ♔f8 30.♘xc3 ♖xc3 31.♖f1!±.

23.♘exc3 exf6 24.gxf6 ♕xf6



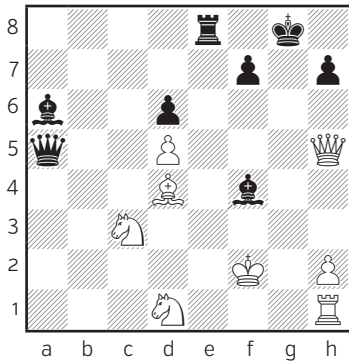
25.e5!+-

Simple and pretty.

25...♕xe5 26.♕d4 ♕f4+

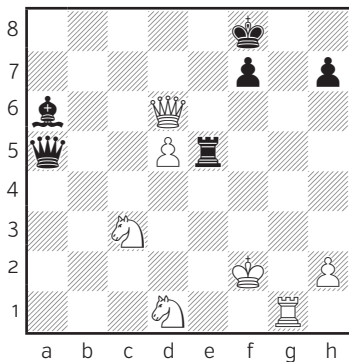
26...♕xd4 27.♖g4+ ♕g7 28.♖g1+-

27. ♔e1 ♚e8+ 28. ♔f2



The king, having passed through the worst of the storm, has found peace.

28... ♚e5 29. ♚g5+ ♔h8 30. ♚xe5+ ♚xe5 31. ♚f6+ ♔g8 32. ♚g1+ ♔f8 33. ♚xd6+



And it's mate in three, which is why Black resigned.

It's hard for me conclusively to determine when and under what circumstance I developed an unquenchable desire to keep the king in the center at every opportunity, when comfort-

able or otherwise. If I were to venture a guess, it is a result of studying the works of Capablanca and Alekhine. Look over their games and you can find many examples.

1-0

2

▷ Vassily Ivanchuk [2740]

▶ Evgeny Bareev [2675]

Elista 1998

Stating that I didn't find Vassily Ivanchuk (Divine Vassily) an easy opponent doesn't really say enough. The first time he stood in my way was in 1985, when he prevented me from reaching the world junior championships (under-20). Ever since then, much like a vampire, he has enjoyed feasting on my blood in various competitions.

In this case, it was at a tournament organized by Kirsan Illyumzhinov in Elista, where he knocked me out in the semi-final. It has lately become trendy to bash Kirsan, even though I am grateful for everything he did for chess throughout his years as president. After all, nobody knows what would have become of chess, and where generations of chess players born in the '90s would be, if he hadn't held up