

Sarhan Guliev

Winning Chess Manoeuvres

Strategic Ideas that Masters Never Fail to Find

New In Chess 2015

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Chapter 7

Positional Sacrifices (Part One)

The pawn sacrifice is the smallest sacrifice possible in a chess game.

A minor piece (not to mention a rook or queen) we are only prepared to sacrifice for clear gain, but a pawn is another matter. Not for nothing does the lexicon of chess equate the word 'sacrifice' with 'discard'. 'I discarded this pawn', as if brushing off a speck of dust or throwing away an old pair of trousers.

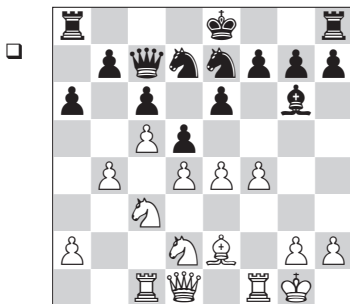
For what do we sacrifice a pawn? For whatever we want. For an open line. To shut an enemy piece out of the game (maybe only temporarily). For the initiative, which in turn we may convert into something more real. For a favourable change in the pawn structure. To reach a draw ending quickly. Etc.

Of course, one should not underestimate the importance of material in chess, even a pawn. An incorrect pawn sacrifice can cost the game. But it is no coincidence that the number of pawns sacrificed is many times greater than the number of pieces. One does not throw away pawns left, right and centre, but nor does one stand on ceremony.

Vladimir Kramnik

Veselin Topalov

Dortmund 1999



16.f5!?

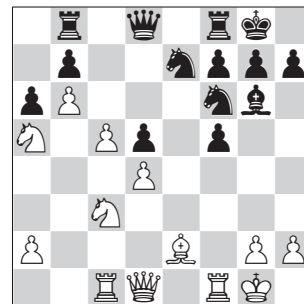
«A very risky and not obligatory decision, but I wanted to sharpen up the battle» – Kramnik.

16...exf5 17.exd5 cxd5

After 17... exd5 Kramnik gives 18. c4 xc3 (or 18...0-0 19. xd5 xd5 20. d6) 19. xc3 0-0 20.d5 «with a strong initiative». This variation can be continued: 20... cxd5 21. xd5 f6 – and it looks as though the knight, once estab-

lished on e4, will cement the black position. But after 22. d6 ac8 23. xc7 xc7 24. d6 e4 25. d3 one has to admit that the initiative remains with White.

**18.b5 0-0 19.b6 d8 20. b3 f6
21. a5 b8**



Here we can draw preliminary conclusions about White's pawn sacrifice. The bishop on g6 is shut out of play, which is one thing. White has obtained a numerical superiority on the queenside, whilst Black's kingside majority is immobile and can hardly become a

threat in the near future – point two. And thirdly, White has a very dangerous plan: to sacrifice the knight on b7, take on a6 and then have his passed pawns sweep all before them. For all this, the position remains unclear. Black does have an extra pawn, after all. If Black manages to ‘untangle’, White will have cause to regret his choice. Everything will depend on the next few moves.

22.a4 ♖e4

A very important moment. It is tempting to implement the plan at once: 23.♖xb7!? ♜xb7 24.a5. But at this very moment, Black unveils his own trumps – an attack on the king. For example: 24...♗c6 25.♞a4 ♘xc3 26.♞xc3 ♞f6 27.♙xa6 ♜e7 28.♞d1 (28.♞d3 f4) 28...♙h5 29.♞d2 ♜e4 (not at once 29...♞e1+ 30.♙f1) 30.♞cd3 ♞e1+ 31.♙f2 ♞h4+ with mate. Instead of 24...♗c6, Kramnik analyses 24...f4!? 25.♙xa6 ♞b8 26.♗xe4 dxe4 27.c6 ♗xc6 28.♞xc6 f3 and admits that the resulting position is not to his taste. White has too many pieces on the queenside, and too few defending his king.

The piece sacrifice should not be hurried, but requires further preparation. First of all, Kramnik transfers his knight from c3 to b4.

23.♗a2 f6

It was worth considering 23...f4!?. This is also a typical device, incidentally – returning the extra pawn to activate his pieces. It is important that after 24.♞xf4 ♗f5 25.♗xb7 ♞xb7 26.♙xa6, Black can solve his problems with 26...♞xb6! 27.cxb6 ♞xb6, with a probable draw. On 23...f4 24.♞xf4 ♗f5, Kramnik had prepared the reply 25.♞d3 ♞g5 26.♞cf1 ♞fe8 27.♙d1, «and the position is hard to judge».

24.♗b4 ♙e8

Black has managed to solve one problem: he has brought his bishop into play. But his pawn mass on the kingside is still rooted to the spot and his position remains passive. It only needs 2-3 moves, before he can start moving the great colossus on the f- and g-files, so it follows that White has 2-3 tempi to continue manoeuvring, in preparation for the sacrifice on b7.

25.♞c2!

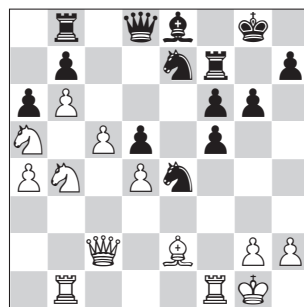
The logic of this move (which Kramnik himself described as ‘key’) is hard to understand without the grandmaster’s commentary. White rejected 25.♗xb7!? ♞xb7 26.♙xa6 because of the thematic 26...♞xb6! 27.cxb6 ♞xb6. More dangerous is 26.a5, but then 26...♗c6 27.♗xc6 ♙xc6 28.♙xa6 ♜e7. «It is very hard to eliminate the enemy bishop from c6», writes Kramnik, and himself suggests a method: put a rook on b1 and the bishop on b5. But after 29.♞b1 there follows 29...♗c3 with a fork. This is why White first puts his queen on c2.

25...g6

25...g5!? is more active.

26.♞b1 ♞f7

The preparations are complete. It is time to act.



27.♗xb7!

In a sense, this move is the continuation of the plan begun as far back as 16.f5!?.

It is hard to believe, but this is so. By his pawn sacrifice at move 16, White obtained a pawn majority on the queen-side, and then the advance b4-b5-b6 created a potential passed pawn. And realising this pawn majority was only possible with the aid of the sacrifice of the knight on b7.

27...♖xb7 28.a5 ♘c6 29.♘xc6 ♙xc6 30.♙xa6 ♖b8 31.♙b5!

This is what White was aiming at, when he put his queen on c2 and his rook on b1.

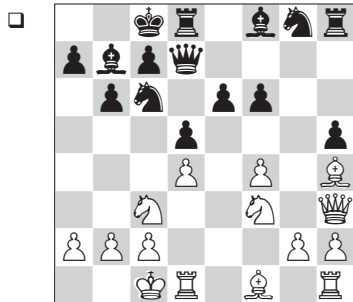
Black's blockade collapses. The passed pawns promote. After

31...♖c8 32.♙xc6 ♖xc6 33.a6

the outcome of the game was decided. Topalov resigned at move 40.

Vlastimil Jansa
Raymond Allen Weinstein

Helsinki 1961



If it were Black's move, he would play ...♘c6-e7-f5, plugging the holes in his position.

13.f5!?

«The positional pawn sacrifice should be in the arsenal of every chess player!» – Jansa.

I would add that inserting the moves 13.♖e1 ♖e8 is in Black's favour, as he can then meet 14.f5 with 14...e5.

13...exf5 14.♙d3 ♘ce7 15.♘e2

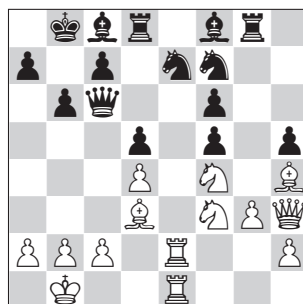
The changes in the structure have favoured White. Black's pawns are

broken and weak, whilst White's knights have a blockading square on f4 and the open e-file is available for his rooks.

It is hard to suggest a sensible plan for Black. The doubled pawns on the f-file make one think of using the outposts on e4 and g4, but how can we get the knights there? The e7-knight is defending f5 and the other knight defending f6. It seems they will be tied up for a long time.

But despite this, Black found and executed a plan to get his knights to the outpost. He transfers a knight via g8-h6-f7-g5-e4!

15...♘b8 16.♘b1 ♙c8 17.♘f4 ♖c6 18.g3 ♘h6 19.♖he1 ♘f7!? 20.♖e2 ♖g8 21.♖de1



White plays too academically. Perhaps he only noticed Black's aim too late. One more move (22.♖f1 ♘e4), and the position will be equalised.

Realising this, Jansa tries to sharpen the game, but this attempt should not have been crowned with success.

21...♘g5!? 22.♙xg5 fxg5 23.♘e6 g4 24.♘xd8

By continuing now with 24...♖e8, Black could have emerged intact in all variations. On 25.♖f1 or 25.♖h4 there follows 25...gxf3, nor is anything changed by the intermediate 25.♖xe7 ♙xe7.

24... ♖d7

A nightmarish mistake. Perhaps Black simply mixed up the moves, by comparison with the variation 24. ♖xh5 gxf3 25. ♗xd8 ♖d7.

Raymond Allen Weinstein was a very talented, developing young player, who was one of the chess hopes of America. Doctors soon diagnosed a psychological imbalance and later he was arrested (among other things, for attacking a chess master, Johan Barendregt). The story ended with his incarceration in a mental hospital, from which he has never emerged.

25. ♗e5

White emerges with an extra exchange and Black soon resigned.

A special place in opening theory is occupied by variations which involve a positional pawn sacrifice. Here we are not talking about such lines as the King's Gambit (where sharp combinative possibilities supersede positional considerations) or the Queen's Gambit, where the sacrificed pawn is regained almost at once. No, here we are concerned with lines where the pawn sacrifice is real, but the compensation for the material consists of positional factors.

One example is the Benko Gambit (1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5!?) and the related Blumenfeld Gambit (1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 c5 4.d5 b5). It is not immediately obvious what Black gets for the pawn, but it is clear he will not regain it any time soon. Even so, theory considers the Benko to be sound, whilst the Blumenfeld is much more often declined than accepted!

The following game was an important one for the theory of the Blumen-

feld. This opened people's eyes, clearly demonstrating the plan, with the help of which Black shows the correctness of his pawn sacrifice.

Siegbert Tarrasch

Alexander Alekhine

Bad Pistyan 1922

1.d4 ♗f6 2.♗f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5!? 5.dxe6

Nowadays White almost exclusively plays 5. ♗g5.

5...fxe6 6.cxb5 d5

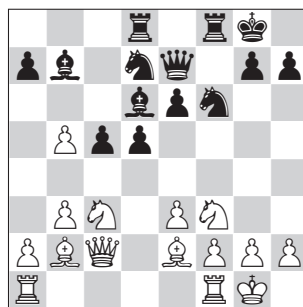
«Black has a strong pawn centre, which will be supported by bishops from b7 and d6; in addition, the f-file is opened for his rooks. These positional advantages are sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn» – Kotov.

7.e3 ♗d6 8.♗c3 0-0 9.♗e2 ♗b7

10.b3 ♗bd7 11.♗b2 ♖e7 12.0-0

The king will also not be able to rest peacefully on the queenside. For example, 12. ♖c2 e5 13.0-0-0 d4 14.exd4 cxd4 15.♗c4+ ♖h8 16.♗e2 ♗e4 17.♖d2 ♗b6 with a strong attack (Postojev-Harikrishna, Mainz 2006).

12... ♖ad8 13. ♖c2



Both sides have completed their development and united their rooks. It might appear that White has a healthy extra pawn.

13...e5! 14. ♖fe1 e4 15.♗d2 ♗e5 16.♗d1 ♗fg4

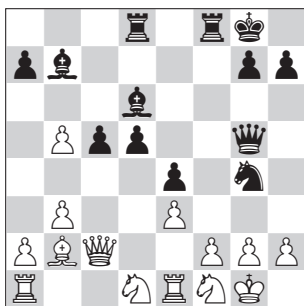
Subsequent generations of players have copied Alekhine's plan without hesitation. Here is a typical example: 14.♖ae1 (instead of 14.♖fe1) 14...e4 15.♟d2 ♟e5 16.f4 exf3 17.♟xf3 ♟fg4, and it is hard to know what to advise White (Sinadinovic-Sahovic, Nis 1981).

17.♟xg4 ♟xg4 18.♟f1

The knights, pinned to the back rank, defend the squares f2 and h2.

But what protects g2?

18...♞g5!



The decisive strengthening of the attack. All that remains is to bring the knight round via g4-h6-f5-h4 and White will be in terrible trouble.

Speaking honestly, his position is hopeless. Black can quietly regroup, strengthen his position, and his opponent has nothing with which to oppose this. One rarely sees White, after fewer than 20 moves, fall into such a passive, hopeless position. Yet one cannot really criticise any one of his moves. Perhaps he really should not have taken the pawn on move 5!

19.h3 ♟h6 20.♞h1 ♟f5 21.♟h2

With the intention after 21...♟h4 of replying 22.♞g1, covering the vulnerable point. But the position has long since come to resemble a leaky boat – you repair one leak and another springs up. White somehow manages to cover

his kingside, but now his centre collapses.

21...d4 22.♟c1

After 22.exd4 Black wins with both 22...cxd4, and the more forcing 22...e3 23.♞g1 (or 23.♟xe3 ♟xe3 24.fxg3 ♞g3) 23...♟g3+! 24.fxg3 ♞xg3 with mating threats. Not only is the h2-knight hanging, so is the pawn on h3.

22...d3 23.♞c4+ ♞h8 24.♟b2 ♟g3+!

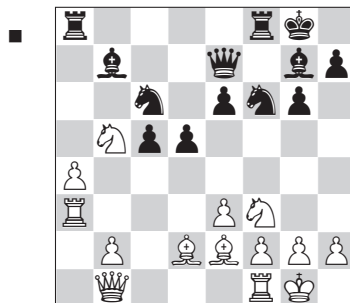
Not 25.fxg3 ♞xg3, attacking the knight and rook. And this means that it is time to draw the curtain. But Tarrasch played

25.♞g1

allowing the knight into e2, and continued the hopeless resistance until move 40.

Jeroen Piket Veselin Topalov

Madrid 1997



This game began with a Benko Gambit. In the course of the battle, the structure took on characteristics of the Blumenfeld. Probably Piket, a cultured player, knew of the famous predecessor game. But he could not do anything.

16...e5!

By comparison with the game Tarrasch-Alekhine, here we can identify several nuances, which are in White's favour.

In particular, he has a strong knight on b5, his rook can operate along the third rank and his a4-pawn is both extra and passed.

But even so, the game did not last long and was extremely one-sided. There is nothing to say. Black, with the appropriate amendments, carried out Alekhine's plan and White did nothing to place this classical plan in doubt.

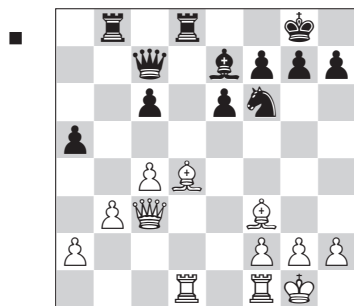
17.h3 ♖h8 18.♞c1 e4 19.♘h2 d4 20.exd4 cxd4 21.♚a2 ♜ad8 22.a5 d3 23.♙g4 ♘d5 24.a6 ♘cb4 25.♚b3 ♘xa6 26.♘c7 ♘axc7 27.♚xb7 ♜b8 0-1

Now let us look at some examples of pawn sacrifices to achieve a draw.

Viswanathan Anand is one of the great defenders of modern chess, maybe the greatest of all. Many young players could learn a lot from his games, and memorise many defensive devices, which they can use in their own games. But who taught Anand himself?

**Alexey Shirov
Viswanathan Anand**

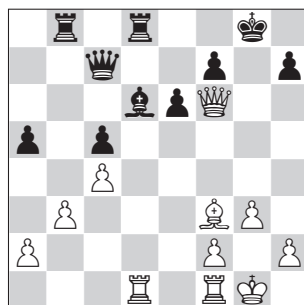
Linares 2002



Black's position is unpleasant, and not merely because of the threat of 21.♙e5 ♙d6 22.♜xd6! ♜xd6 23.c5. This tactical threat is not hard to meet.

The real issue is more concrete factors. White has two bishops, the better pawn structure (fewer 'islands'), and his opponent has no counterplay. Almost any exchange brings White closer to the endgame, in which all of the above factors will have greater significance. Almost any exchange; but not every one!

20...♙d6 21.g3 c5!? 22.♙xf6 gxf6 23.♚xf6



The position has been transformed. Black has sacrificed a pawn, but White already no longer has the bishop pair. Furthermore, exchanges are no longer in his favour, because the remaining minor pieces on the board are opposite-coloured bishops, which means exchanges will increase the chances of a draw.

As far as the extra pawn is concerned, formally this is the pawn on b3. It is unlikely to become passed. Black has only one problem: his exposed king. This is where White's winning chances lie. His plan is clear: firstly, not to exchange queens, and secondly to try to get a rook to the g-file.

23...♙e7 24.♚h6

Or 24.♚c3 ♜xd1 25.♜xd1 ♜d8 26.♞e1 ♜d4, and Black holds the balance – analysis by Sakaev.

24...♚e5 25.♞de1 ♚f6 26.♚h5 ♙f8 27.♞e4 ♜d4 28.♜xd4 ♚xd4 29.♞e1

Possibly greater chances were offered by 29.♖d1, and if 29...♗f6 30.♖d7 ♖d8, then 31.♗a7, eyeing up the pawns on a5 and f7.

29...♗f6 30.♖e4 ♙g7 31.♖f4 ♗e7

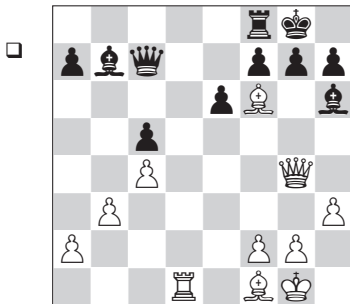
There is still a lot of play left, but in the end, Black held the draw.

A pawn sacrifice, forcing a position with opposite-coloured bishops, followed by putting the pawns on a5 and c5, supported by the dark-squared bishop, stopping White creating a passed pawn on the queenside – did Anand think this up himself at the board?

It is very possible that he did. He is a player of the very highest class. But let us examine the following position.

**Mikhail Botvinnik
Ilya Rabinovich**

Leningrad 1934



In an early edition of his best games collection, Botvinnik wrote: «...on

26.♖d3

Black replies 26...♙e4 27.♙xg7 ♙xg7 28.♗xe4 ♖d8 followed by ...a7-a5! and ensures the draw, despite White's extra pawn.»

In a purely chess sense, this note is not correct. White cannot play 27.♙xg7 because of 27...f5!. So it is no surprise that this note is not present in later editions of Botvinnik's notes. But that is not the main thing.

Compare the position after move 29 in the game Shirov-Anand. Isn't it remarkably similar?

Had Anand seen this note? Who knows? I am sure he would have seen the game Botvinnik-Rabinovich, and I would like to think that he saw the notes also, studied them, analysed them, found the mistakes, and remembered everything. At the necessary moment, his memory produced the recommendation and the Indian GM utilised it.

I remember one incident. In Baku, in the republic chess centre, a meeting was organised between young players and the leading Azeri player of those days, Elmar Magerramov, who had just become a GM. I hung on his every word. One piece of advice he gave, which I particularly remember, was 'When you study the games of great players, analyse not just the moves played, but also the variations and notes. Analyse them – and play them over on the board, without fail!'

One can read something about this in relation to Nimzowitsch also. He advised that when studying annotated games, one should use two chess sets, one to play the main moves and the other for the notes. A very sensible proposal. If you do everything on one board, then, especially if the notes are very detailed, it is easy to get confused. With two sets, that will not happen.

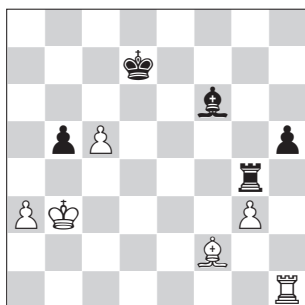
But let us return to our subject: the pawn sacrifice to make a draw. It is rare, but sometimes one even sees this done where the sacrifice is already the second pawn. Why would one voluntarily go into a position two pawns down?

It turns out to be possible. For example, certain rook endings (especially

where the defender's king and rook are active) have drawing tendencies. And why suffer in a position a pawn down, when one could give up a second pawn to force favourable exchanges and get to a known draw?

Viktor Kortchnoi
Anatoly Karpov

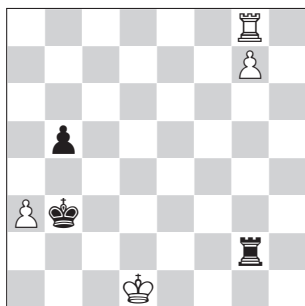
Moscow 1974



Black's position is unenviable. He is a pawn down, and a second pawn hangs. Karpov takes a difficult decision: he gives up the h5-pawn, but takes play into a rook ending.

**63...♗c6!? 64.♖xh5 ♕d4! 65.♕xd4
♖xd4 66.♗g5 ♖e4 67.g4 ♖a4**

The assessment of the position depends largely on that arising after 68.♖g8 ♗xc5 69.g5 ♖g4 70.g6 ♖g3+ 71.♗c2 ♗c4 72.g7 ♖g2+ 73.♗d1 ♗b3.



analysis diagram

White can easily overcome the cutting-off of his king: 74.♗e1 and 75.♗f1, but then what? If he takes the king to f6, then Black checks on f1, driving the king away from the g7-pawn, and then returns the rook to g1. And there is no point in taking the king towards the b5-pawn, because Black defends it with his rook from g5. Let us try one tactical nuance: 74.a4!? ♖g1+ (it seems 74...b4 75.a5 ♖g6 76.a6 ♖d6+! 77.♗e2 ♖d7 78.♗e3 ♗a3 is also sufficient for a draw) 75.♗d2 ♖g2+ 76.♗d3 ♖g3+ 77.♗e4 bxa4 78.♖b8+ ♗c2 79.g8♗ ♖xg8 80.♖xg8 a3 – again a draw.

Kortchnoi plays differently, but also fails to achieve anything:

**68.♗b2 ♖f4 69.♗c2 ♖f3 70.♗b2
♖f2+ 71.♗c3 ♖f3+ 72.♗d4 ♖f4+
73.♗e5 ♖a4 74.♖g8 ♖xa3 75.g5
♗xc5 76.g6 ♖g3 77.♖c8+ ♗b4
78.♗f6 ♖f3+ 79.♗e6 ♖g3 80.♗f7
♗a3 81.g7**

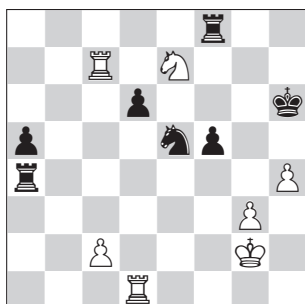
Draw.

To be fair, we should say that another solution is possible in the diagram position: 63...h4! 64.gxh4 ♖g2. Now what can White do? His bishop cannot move, because of mate in one. After 65.♖f1 ♗c6 we reach a curious zugzwang (66. h5 ♖h2). That leaves only 65.♖d1+, but then 65...♗c7 (of course, not 65...♗c6?? 66.♖d6+ and 67.♖xf6) 66.♕d4 ♕xh4 67.♗b4 ♗c6, and Black is close to a draw.

These last variations do not devalue Karpov's achievement. His method of defence deserves every attention. And it brings to mind this classical example:

Carl Schlechter
Emanuel Lasker

Vienna 1910

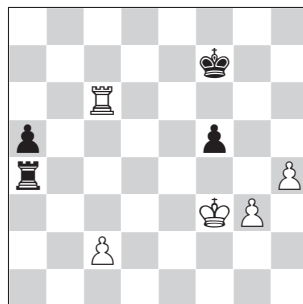


Material is currently equal, but Black has three weaknesses more. By trying to defend them, he almost certainly condemns himself to defeat: 47...♖c4 (threatening a knight fork), and then: 48.♗h3 ♜b4 49.♞d5 f4 50.g4 f3 51.♞h5+ ♗g7 52.♘d5+ ♗g8 53.♞hh7! or 48...f4 49.♘d5 f3 50.♘b6! f2 (50...♘xb6 51.♞xd6+ ♗h5 52.♞h7#) 51.♘xa4 ♘d2 52.♞d7.

47...♞f7! 48.♞xd6+ ♗h7 49.♞e6 ♗g6!

A well-known device: Black strives to reach a rook ending at all costs.

50.♞xg6 ♞xe7 51.♞gc6 ♞xc7
52.♞xc7+ ♗g6 53.♞c6+ ♗f7
54.♗f3



But even the rook ending looks difficult, if not lost, at first sight. He is a pawn down and his king is cut off on the 6th rank. The threat is c2-c4 followed by ♗f3-f4. What is to be done?

54...♞e4!! 55.♞c5 ♗f6 56.♞xa5 ♞c4

This is the basis for the classic rule of rook endings: 'activity is more important than material'. The white rook has to defend the c2-pawn and the king the g3-pawn. And Black just bides his time.

57.♞a6+ ♗e5 58.♞a5+ ♗f6 59.♞a2 ♗e5 60.♞b2 ♞c3+ 61.♗g2 ♗f6

Soon, Schlechter accepted the inevitable. Draw!

BIOGRAPHY

Sarhan Babash oglu (in Russian: Babashovich) Guliev was born in 1968 in the town of Ashagy Molly, Azerbaijan, and today lives in its capital, Baku.

In 1989, 1991 and 1997 he became the chess champion of Azerbaijan. Before that, he also won the national junior title three times. In the 1990s, Guliev won many tournaments and he represented his country in international competitions. In 1995 he earned the Grandmaster title.

In 1992, Guliev graduated in engineering and economics. In 1996 he graduated as a sports instructor at the Russian State University of Physical Culture and Sport in Moscow. From 2000 onwards he has worked as a chess coach, for, among others, the national teams of Iran, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. In 2011 he was awarded the title of FIDE Senior Coach, and in 2013 he received the title of Honoured Coach of Azerbaijan.

Guliev has written 11 chess books, of which *Tutorial Chess Endings* was translated in 8 languages. At this moment he is a teacher at the Azerbaijan State Academy of Physical Culture and Sports.