

Magnus Carlsen's Norwegian Rat

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From Chapter 1

Game #2

V.Kotronias (2581) – R.Rapport (2693)

Greek Team ch (Achaia) 2013

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 d5 4.e5 Ne4 5.Nce2 f6 6.f3 Ng5 7.Bxg5 fxg5
8.Qd2 e6



Welcome to the other French Defense. In this version, black:

1. Owns bishop pair.
2. Controls dark squares.
3. Is a touch behind in space--which is perfectly normal for French structures.
4. Black is behind in development, which doesn't bother us much since the game remains closed.

The non-pawn sacrifice is safer than Magnus' lunge in the previous with 8...c5!?.

9.Nh3 Be7 10.f4

10.Nf2 c5 11.dxc5 Nc6 12.Nd3 was played in V.Schweitzer-O.Soubirou, Metz 2018. Here, the pawn sacrifice 12...b6! is promising 13.cxb6 Qxb6 14.0-0-0 0-0 with tremendous dark square play and attacking chances from the open lines on the queenside for the sacrificed pawn.

10...g4!?

A single new move contains the power to turn a once-revered line into one which is now looked down upon with disrespect, or vice versa! This is objectively risky, to the possible point of outright dubious, yet it dramatically increases the level of complications, which all Nor-Ratters desire.

Next game, we look at the objectively better move 10...gxf4.

11.Nf2 h5 12.h3! g3!?

We must realize that some sinners don't want to be saved, even when threatened with eternity, immersed in a lake of fire. The forward g-pawn goes deeper and deeper down its rabbit hole. The idea is to give up a pawn to gain time by displacing White's e2-knight.

12...gxh3 13.g4! looks promising for White, who can go after g6 and Black's king.

13.Nxg3 c5 14.dxc5

14.c3 cxd4 15.cxd4 Nc6 (the threat is ...Bb4) 16.Ne2 Qb6 17.0-0-0 Bd7 18.g4 Bb4 19.Qd3 0-0-0, which the engine calls dead even here. If 20.Qxg6?! Na5 21.b3 Kb8 22.Kb2 Rc8, the engine prefers Black's attack to White's two extra pawns.

14...Bxc5 15.Bb5+ Nc6 16.b4!?



Our mutual friend GM Vasilios "Kotro" Kotronias is a huffy guy when it comes to the initiative! This is a radical attempt to grab the initiative at the cost of weakening the queenside pawns and pretty much eliminating queenside castling as an option for White.

White looks better after the calmer line 16.Nd3 Bb6 17.0-0-0 Bd7 18.Kb1 Qe7 19.Ne2.

16...Bb6 17.0-0 Bd7!?

Wow. Is Rapport planning to castle long, into the storm? 17...0-0 looks better.

18.c4 Qh4 19.Kh2 0-0-0!? 20.c5

Black may not mind this since he plans to undermine e5. The option is to go for 20.cxd5 exd5 21.Bxc6 Bxc6 22.a4, when White's chances look better.

20...Bc7 21.Nd3!?

21.Bxc6 Bxc6 22.Ne2 d4!? offers Black dangerous play, although objectively, the engine is emphatic about White's chances being better.

21...Nxe5!



22.Nxe5

a) 22.Bxd7+ Nxd7 allowed Black to regain the lost pawn.

b) 22.fxe5? Bxb5 Black regained the sacrificed pawn with a clear advantage due to the bishops in an open position.

22...Bxb5 23.Nxg6

White forks queen and rook.

23...Qf6 24.Nxh8 e5!?



Rapport is temporarily down a full rook yet received loads of play for it:

1. Black's bishops are super-scary in the open position.

2. The dark squares around White's king are weak, and he is in danger.
3. Black's passed d-pawn may later be pushed up the board while White is tied down to defend his king.
4. h8–knight and f1–rook hang simultaneously, so White isn't really up a full rook.

The less daring among us would have opted for 24...Bxf1 25.Rxf1 Qxh8 26.Qe3 Qh6 27.Qf3 h4 28.Ne2 Qf6 The engine calls it close to even.

25.Nf7!

Kotro decoys Black's queen away from f6, gaining time.

25...Qxf7 26.fxe5! Bxf1 27.Rxf1 Qg7 28.Nxh5 Qxe5+ 29.Nf4



Kotro defended well and is up two pawns. There is the small matter of dealing with Black's enduring initiative. An engine will defend perfectly and like White, while we imperfect humans tend to mess such positions up on the defending side.

29...Qf5! 30.g3 Rh8!

Threat: ...Bxf4, followed by ...Qxh3+. This forces a further loosening of White's king.

31.Qg2 d4

This is really unpleasant for White, who can only wait since he dares not push his two kingside passers up the board.

32.Rf3 Kb8 33.Nd3 Qe6 34.Kg1 a6 35.g4!?

Hey, we just said: "he dares not push his two kingside passers up the board!" White can draw if he does nothing, yet drawing when two pawns up is an unbearable thought, so Kotro goes for it, risking his king in the process. Now both sides grope about in this sunless universe.

35...Bd8 36.Qf2 Qe4 37.a4 Bg5!

That bishop is going to be a real pain on e3.

38.Qf1 Be3+ 39.Kh2 Qe8 40.c6!?



Kotro is willing to give up a pawn to swap rooks, thereby making his king a tad safer--but just a tad!

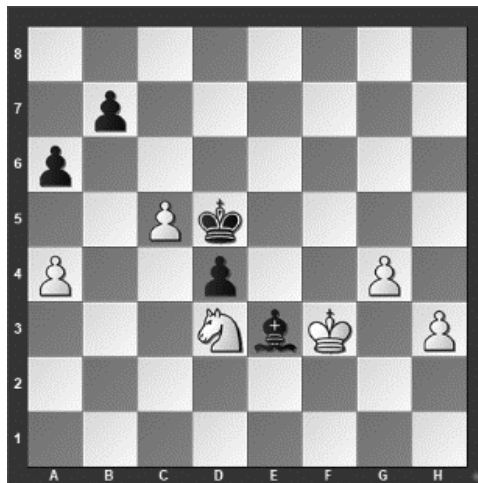
40...Qxc6 41.Rf8+ Rxf8 42.Qxf8+ Kc7 43.Qe7+ Kb8 44.Qf8+ Kc7 45.Qc5!

Okay, queens come off the board, and White wins with his two connected kingside passed pawns...except he doesn't!

45...Qxc5 46.bxc5

46.Nxc5 Kc6 47.Kg3 Bd2 48.Nb3 Bxb4 49.Nxd4+ Kd5 50.Nf5 Ke4! The engine calls it dead even and predicts a draw.

46...Kc6 47.Kg3 Kd5 48.Kf3



He can't allow Black's king into e4.

48...Bg5!

How annoying. White's pawns are frozen on their squares, unable to move forward.

49.Ke2?!

49.Nf2! (zugzwang) 49...Bh6 50.h4 Kxc5 51.g5 Bf8 52.Ke4 b5 53.axb5 a5! 54.b6! Kxb6 55.Kxd4! a4! (55...Bc5+?? 56.Kd5 Bxf2 57.g6 wins) 56.Nd3 Kb5 57.h5 Be7 58.g6 Bf8 The game should end in a draw, since White is tied down on the queenside.

49...a5 50.Kf3 Bf6?!

50...Be7! 51.Kf4 Kc4 52.Ke4 Kc3 53.Ne5 Bg5 54.Nd3 is drawn.

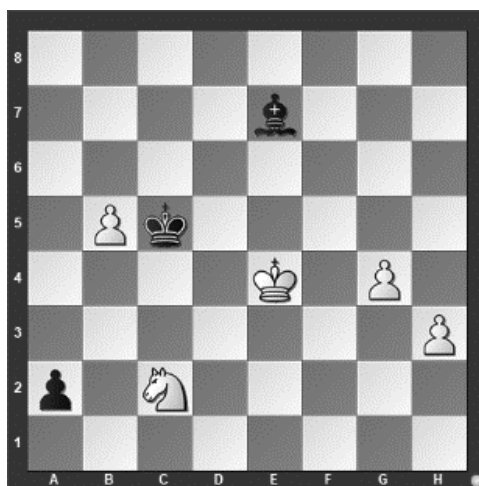
51.Kf4

51.Nf2! offers White excellent chances to win.

51...Kc4 52.Ke4 Be7 53.Ne5+ Kxc5 54.Nf3 b5!

Black has just enough play to hold the draw.

55.axb5 a4 56.Nxd4 a3 57.Nc2 a2



Exercise (critical decision): Should White play 58 Kd3 Kxb5, allowing Black to draw? Or should he go for the full point with 58 Kf5?

Answer: White overrated his chances and should have taken the draw.

58.Kf5??

Ah yes, the good old wrong place/wrong time syndrome. As the saying goes: Don't bring a knife to a gunfight. The grand illusion of life is that we believe in permanence when in reality, everything is temporary. White's win is long gone, and he should have settled for the draw.

58.Kd3 Kxb5 59.Kc3 Bf6+ 60.Kb3 a1Q 61.Nxa1 Bxa1 is a draw.

58...Kxb5 59.g5

White's future appears to be blue skies, birdsong, roses, and rainbows. Spoiler Alert: It isn't, since Black's passed a-pawn and king are about to overwhelm White's overworked knight.

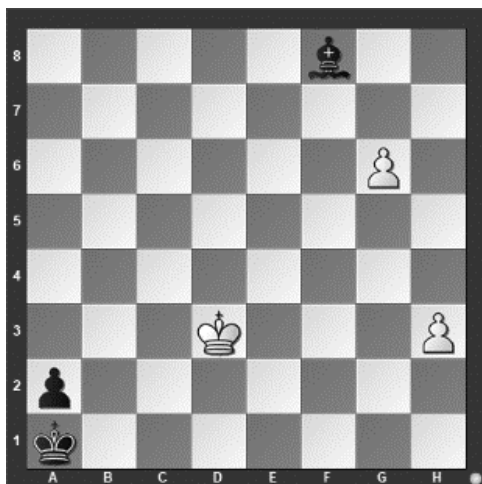
59...Kc4 60.g6 Bf8 61.Ke4

61.Kf6 Kc3 62.Na1 Kb2 wins.

61...Kc3 62.Na1

If you are wrongly charged with a crime and emphatically declare your innocence to the arresting officer, he or she will not be moved by your play since they will be thinking: "That's what they all say." It's too late for regrets. White is completely lost, and Kotro must have been kicking himself for rejecting the draw earlier.

62...Kb2 63.Kd3 Kxa1



Winning is so much more gloat-worthy when we do it from a position where we were supposed to be fighting for a draw. 63...Kxa1 64.Kc2 Bh6 65.h4 Bg7 66.h5 Bh6 (zugzwang) 67.g7 Bxg7 68.Kc1 Bf8 69.Kc2 Bh6 (zugzwang number 2) 70.Kb3 Kb1 wins. **0-1**

From Chapter 6

Game #34

M.Antipov (2511) – R.Rapport (2687)

European blitz ch (Warsaw) 2013

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 Nf6 3.e5 Nh5 4.Be2 d6 5.Bxh5 gxh5 6.exd6 Qxd6
7.Qxh5!?**

White will be lucky to equalize in this version.

7.Ne2 Rg8 8.0–0 Bf5 9.Nbc3 h4 Black is doing well, U.Calgaro-D.Rozzoni, Italy 1997. If 10.Bf4, then 10...Qg6 11.g3 Na6 12.Qd2 0–0–0, and we already prefer Black.

7...Qxd4!



Novelty, and a good one. Let's face it: most of us need theory's validation, and on any new move, we encounter the subconscious assumption that there must be something wrong without a new move. After all, why hadn't anyone played it before? White's idea merely has the appearance of legitimacy since, as usual with the Norwegian Rat, we enter the carnival house of mirrors, where nothing is as it seems. White returns the sacrificed pawn in the misguided belief of future gains tempi on our queen. Black can be satisfied in this position since we own bishop pair, open g-file, and light-square control. White's slight development lead doesn't entirely make up for what he gave away.

8.Nc3

8.Ne2 is also met with 8...Qg4!.

8...Qg4!

White's development lead is greatly negated by the removal of queens, and Black already stands slightly better.

9.Qxg4 Bxg4 10.Nd5

Not so scary since c7 is easy to defend.

10...Na6

How fortunate that White swapped away his light-squared bishop and cannot play the now fictional Bxa6.

11.Bf4

11.Ne2 is a touch more accurate, although Black still stands better.

11...0-0-0 12.Ne3 Bd7

Slightly better is 12...Bh5!, intending to later transfer over to g6.

13.Be5?!

The bishop travels under an assumed name. I'm not sure why White opted to lose a tempo. In any case, ...f7-f6 followed by ...e7-e5 was coming.

13.Nf3 intending Ng5, can be met with 13...f6.

13...f6 14.Bc3 e5 15.0-0-0 Nc5



Rapport's position is the comforting parable of the responsible chipmunk who stored nuts and acorns for sustenance against the long winter ahead.

1. Black owns bishop pair in an open position.

2. Black controls the light squares.

3. Black controls the center.

4. Black owns the open g-file.

5. Black leads in development.

Conclusion: White is fighting for his life.

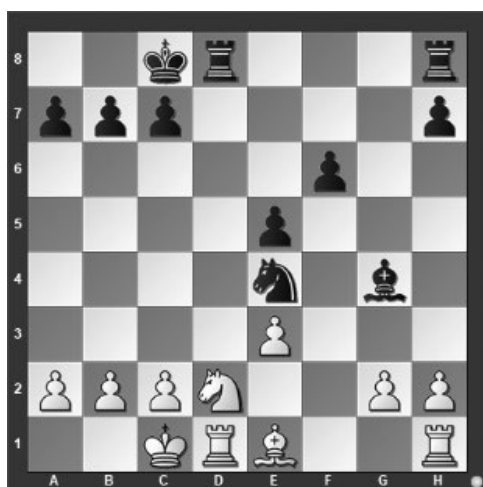
16.Nf3

16.Ne2 is more accurate.

16...Ne4 17.Be1 Bc5

17...Bh6! is even stronger.

18.Nd2 Bxe3! 19.fxe3 Bg4!



20.Nf3

20.Bh4 Rhg8! 21.Nxe4 Rxd1+ 22.Rxd1 Bxd1 23.Nxf6 Rd8 24.Ne4 Rd7 25.Nf6 Rd6 26.Ne4 Rg6! 27.Kxd1 Rg4! and White is busted.

20...Rxd1+ 21.Kxd1 Ng5!

Black wins a vital pawn.

22.Kc1

22.Ke2?? loses on the spot to 22...e4

22...Bxf3 23.gxf3 Nxf3 24.Bg3 e4 25.Rf1 h5!

Black's rook will soon infiltrate to g2.

26.Rd1



White has had enough and resigned at the same time. After 26.Rd1 Rg8, 27.Bf4 Rg2 is lost for White. **0–1**

