

Sergey Karjakin
Best Games
of the Minister of Defence

Alexander Kalinin

Sergey Karjakin: Best Games of the Minister of Defence

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Cover photograph © Eteri Kublashvili. Karjakin at the Vugar Gashimov Memorial Tournament, Shamkir, 2019

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Foreword by Sergey Karjakin

There probably isn't a single chess player in the world who doesn't dream about a collection of his best games. I, however, had to put that idea on hold because the modern chess professional's life is very busy: when you're not playing in tournaments, you are preparing for them.

So, this book by Distinguished Coach of the Russian Federation, grandmaster Alexander Kalinin, was a pleasant surprise for me. Turning its pages, I remembered the events and games of my childhood with great excitement. After all the time that had passed, I can say that at the age of ten or twelve, my style was largely the same as it is today: a classical approach to the game, with a striving for a harmonious blend of a clear strategic line and tactical nuances of the concrete position. It was also interesting to read the author's take on my memorable World Chess Championship match against Magnus Carlsen.

The main part of the book comprises 50 thoroughly annotated games, broadly covering my best achievements at the chessboard. The annotations are captivating and not overloaded with computer variations; instead, the author provides practical explanations so that the reader can use this games collection to study all three stages of the chess game.

I hope that this book will be a fun read and help to further popularize the art of chess.

Introduction

This book focuses on the career to date of grandmaster Sergey Karjakin. At the time this book was written, the World Chess Championship match against Magnus Carlsen in 2016 remains Sergey's greatest achievement; the Norwegian had a tough time defending his title and was just one game away from losing it to the man from Crimea.

After that fierce, dramatic battle, there seemed to be a crisis in the Russian grandmaster's play, even though in the next Candidates' Tournament Karjakin was close to becoming the challenger again. But at the last moment, Caissa, the chess goddess, chose Fabiano Caruana instead...

Caissa is a jealous woman and demands full dedication from her subjects. After the 2016 match, Sergey devoted much of his time to public life, which of course didn't help him in improving his fighting qualities and further pursuing the chess crown.

Sergey Karjakin's best games will naturally provide aesthetic pleasure to chess fans and show them the rich creative potential of the talented Russian grandmaster.

The future will show whether he's able to realize this potential to the full.

Alexander Kalinin,
Moscow, January 2020

The “pure” opposite-coloured bishop ending is won for White, because he manages to stretch his opponent’s defence on both flanks.

47. ... ♔c7-d8
 48. ♔g4-f3 ♘c3-d2
 49. ♔f3-e4 ♔d8-e7
 50. f4-f5! ...

Trading the e6 pawn allows the White king to break into the opponent’s camp through d5 or f5.

50. ... e6xf5+
 51. ♔e4xf5 ♘d2-c1
 52. a4-a5 ♘c1xa3
 53. a5-a6 ♘a3-c5
 54. ♔f5-e4 ♔e7-e6
 55. ♘b5-c4+ ♔e6-d7
 56. ♔e4-d5 ♘c5-f2
 57. e5-e6+ ♔d7-c7
 58. ♘c4-b5 ♘f2-h4
 59. a6-a7
 1–0

Rook and knight battles

The examples in this section are quite similar. First of all, Sergey faces off against the ex-world champion Vishy Anand in both games.

Secondly, in both cases, the White rook’s transfer to a5 literally “froze” the weak a7 pawn, which, in turn, tied up the Black pieces forced to defend it. But, while in game 74, White won with a relatively simple attack against his opponent’s pawn weaknesses, game 75 is a true endgame masterpiece; the presence of all four rooks allowed White to introduce middlegame motifs into

the game, organizing a direct attack against the king.

No. 74. Sergey Karjakin – Viswanathan Anand A13

Moscow (Candidates’ Tournament) 2016
 English Opening

1. ♘g1-f3 d7-d5
 2. e2-e3 ...

This modest move shows White’s intention to push the battle back into the middlegame.

2. ... ♘g8-f6
 3. c2-c4 e7-e6
 4. b2-b3 ♘f8-e7
 5. ♘c1-b2 0-0
 6. ♘b1-c3 c7-c5

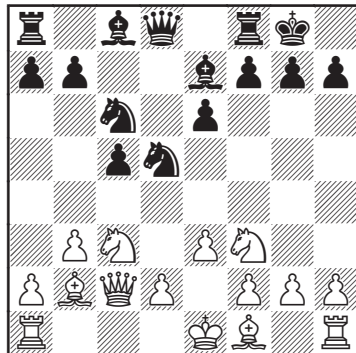
Continuing the maneuvers with 6...b6 was also possible.

7. c4xd5 ♘f6xd5

7...exd5 8. d4 ♘c6 9. ♘e2 ♘g4
 10. dxc5 ♘xc5 11. 0-0 led to a typical isolated queen’s pawn position in the center.

With the game move, Black avoids any long-term weaknesses, but exposes the kingside a bit.

8. ♔d1-c2 ♘b8-c6



9. h2-h4!? ...

An aggressive novelty that threatens ♖g5.

Earlier, White tested 9. a3 ♖xc3 10. ♗xc3 ♗d7 11. ♗e2 ♖c8 12. 0-0 b6 13. ♖b2 ♗f6 14. b4, transposing to a Hedgehog-like position with colours reversed, Lysyj – Zhou Weiqi (China 2015).

9. ... b7-b6**10. a2-a3 ...**

The immediate 10. ♖g5 did not give any advantage due to 10...f5.

Making the useful “Sicilian” move a2-a3, White is waiting for the Black bishop to go to b7.

10. ... f7-f5

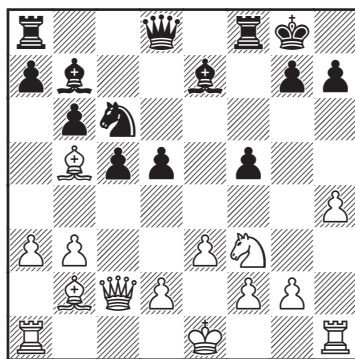
After 10...♗b7, Black had to look out for 11. ♖g5 g6 12. ♖ce4!?, with kingside threats involving the knight sacrifice on h7, while 10...h6 can be met with 11. g4!?

Afterwards, the h2-h4 line came into fashion and was repeatedly tested in practice. For instance, in the game Adhiban – Gagare (Dubai 2016), there followed 10...♗f6 11. ♗b5 ♗b7 12. ♖g5 g6 13. ♖ce4 ♗xb2 14. ♖xb2 h6 15. h5! hxg5 16. hxg6 f6 17. ♖xg5 with an attack for the sacrificed piece.

Anand decides to immediately preclude the opponent’s attacking opportunities, accepting the weakness in the center (e5 and e6 square) as a trade-off.

11. ♗f1-b5 ♗c8-b7**12. ♖c3xd5 e6xd5**

After 12...♖xd5 13. ♗c4 ♖d6 14. h5 h6, the e6 pawn was rather weak.

**13. d2-d4! ...**

Attacking the weak Black c5 and d5 pawns. Black’s position is obviously compromised by the f5 pawn. Returning to the move h2-h4, it only proves the old adage that a position is only minimally weakened by the advance of the rook pawn.

13. ... ♖a8-c8**14. d4xc5 b6xc5****15. 0-0 ♗e7-f6**

Trading the b2 bishop will allow him to neutralize the opponent’s pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal, but the main downside of the move f7-f5, the weakness of the whole dark-square complex in the center, isn’t going away.

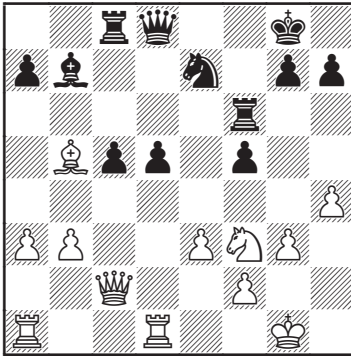
16. ♖f1-d1 ...

Of course, White is not satisfied with 16. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 17. ♖xc5 because of 17...♖e5.

16. ... ♖c6-e7**17. ♗b2xf6 ♖f8xf6****18. g2-g3 ...**

It wasn’t necessary to play this so soon. Gradual improvement with 18. ♖ac1 also looked quite good. In this case, 18...♖a5 could be met with 19. ♗d7! ♖c7 20. ♗a4 ♖c8 (20...d4? 21.

b4!) 21. ♖e5, with an initiative for White.



18. ... ♗b7-a6?

A serious positional error. After the light-squared bishop trade, the central pawns lose their dynamics. The immediate 18...d4?! was too premature due to 19. ♖e2!, but 18... ♗b6 19. ♖e2 (19. ♗e2 d4!) 19... ♖c7!? (having the maneuver ♖e7-c8-d6-e4 in mind) allowed Black to keep the necessary tension.

19. ♗b5xa6 ♖f6xa6

20. ♖c2-c3 ...

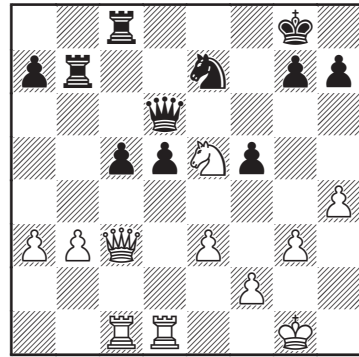
The flaws of the move f7-f5 are now exacerbated by the real vulnerability of the central pawns. Interestingly enough, however, if the Black knight was on f6 rather than e7, his position would've been completely satisfactory!

20. ... ♖a6-b6

21. ♖a1-c1 ♖d8-d6

22. ♖f3-e5 ♖b6-b7

Overprotecting the d7 square to decrease the "attacking radius" of the aggressive e5 knight (22...♖b8? 23. ♖d7).



23. ♖e5-d3! ...

The White knight changes its trajectory, harassing the c5 and d5 pawns.

23. ... c5-c4

After 23...♖bc7, there's 24. ♖f4 with the subsequent rook doubling on the d-file.

24. b3xc4 ♖c8xc4

Settling for the isolated queen's pawn. There was an elegant line 24... dxc4 25. ♖e5 ♖f6 26. ♖xc4+! ♖xc4 27. ♖d8+, and White wins a pawn.

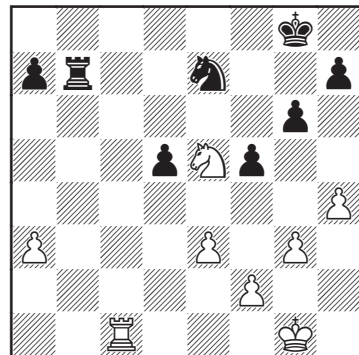
25. ♖c3-e5! ...

The queen exchange underlines the static flaws of Black's position.

25. ... ♖d6xe5

26. ♖d3xe5 ♖c4xc1

27. ♖d1xc1 g7-g6



In the ensuing rook and knight ending, White has an advantage because of his better pawn structure and active pieces.

28. ♖c1-c5! ...

The rook goes to a5, paralyzing the opponent's forces.

28. ... ♔g8-g7

29. ♖c5-a5 ♔g7-f6

30. ♞e5-d3 ♖b7-c7

31. ♖a5-a6+ ♔f6-g7

32. ♞d3-f4 ♖c7-d7

33. ♔g1-f1 ...

White gradually improves his position with the subsequent moves.

33. ... ♞e7-g8

34. ♞f4-e6+ ♔g7-f7

35. ♞e6-d4 ♞g8-e7

36. ♞d4-b5 ♞e7-c8

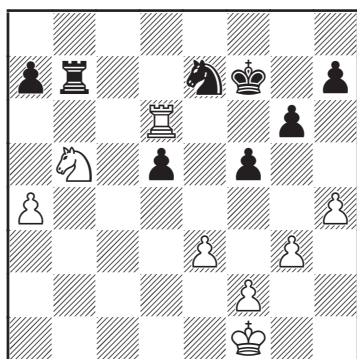
37. a3-a4 ♖d7-b7

38. ♖a6-c6 ♞c8-e7

39. ♖c6-a6 ♞e7-c8

40. ♖a6-c6 ♞c8-e7

41. ♖c6-d6 ...



41. ... ♖b7-b6?

Loses immediately. However, even passive defence didn't give Black any chances to save the game because of

the White king's march to the center of the board.

42. ♖d6-d7 a7-a6

43. ♞b5-c3 ...

After 43...♔e6, there's 44. ♖xe7+! ♔xe7 45. ♞xd5+, winning.

1-0

No. 75. Sergey Karjakin – Viswanathan Anand D37

Shamkir 2019

Queen's Gambit

1. d2-d4 ♞g8-f6

2. c2-c4 e7-e6

3. ♞g1-f3 d7-d5

4. ♞b1-c3 ♖f8-e7

5. ♖c1-f4 ...

A long time ago, putting the bishop on f4 was considered a good way to get a “fresh” position (as opposed to the “hackneyed” 5. ♖g5). Tigran Petrosian liked to employ this move; he preferred to make his opponents think for themselves as much as possible.

Now, however, this line is very well-analyzed, and the fact that these opponents only truly started playing by themselves after the 31st (!) move doesn't even raise eyebrows.

5. ... 0-0

6. e2-e3 c7-c5

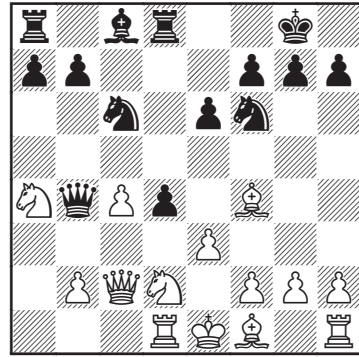
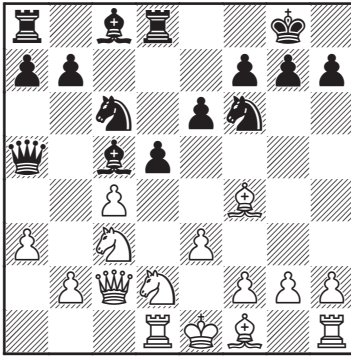
7. d4xc5 ♖e7xc5

8. ♖d1-c2 ♞b8-c6

9. ♖a1-d1 ♖d8-a5

10. a2-a3 ♖f8-d8

11. ♞f3-d2 ...



11. ... d5-d4!?

This sharp line with a piece sacrifice was introduced by grandmaster Anatoly Lutikov.

As an alternative, there's the calm 11...dxc4 12. ♔xc4 ♕e7 13. 0-0 ♖h5, but modern grandmasters like playing forced lines as Black.

12. ♖d2-b3 ♖a5-b6

13. ♘c3-a4 ♕c5-b4+

14. a3xb4 ...

In the source game Petrosian – Lutikov (Moscow 1966), the incumbent world champion, with his unique sense of danger, preferred to avoid his opponent's main line and came up with 14. ♔e2!?. After 14... ♖a6 15. ♘xd4 ♕e7 16. ♘xc6 ♖xc6 17. ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 18. ♔d1 b6 19. ♘c3 ♕a6 20. ♖a4 ♖xa4+ 21. ♘xa4 ♖c8 22. ♘c3 Black had equalized, and they agreed to a draw.

14. ... ♖b6xb4+

15. ♘b3-d2 ...

15. ... e6-e5

In the game Doroshkevich – Gipslis (Tbilisi 1967), there followed 15...♖a5 16. b3 (16. ♖b3 e5 17. ♕g5) 16...♘b4 17. ♖b1, and now, 17... e5 (in the actual game, Black played 17... b5 18. ♘b2 ♕b7 19. f3, and the game ended in White's favour) 18. ♕g5 ♕f5! 19. e4! (there was an incredibly beautiful finish after 19. ♖xf5? e4!! 20. ♖xa5 ♘c2+ 21. ♔e2 d3#!) 19... ♘xe4 20. ♕xd8 ♖xd8 21. ♘xe4 ♘c2+ 22. ♔e2 d3+ (22...♕xe4!?) 23. ♖xd3 ♕xe4 24. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 25. ♖d1 ♘d4+ 26. ♔e1 ♘c2+ 27. ♔e2 ♘d4+ ends the bloody fight with perpetual check!

All those brilliant lines, which could give a lot of pleasure to a curious analyst in the old days, can now be produced literally in seconds after pushing a single button on the computer...

Concerning the theoretical value of the move 15...♖a5 – after 16. ♖b3 e5 17. ♕g5, it transposes into the actual game.

16. ♕f4-g5 ♖b4-a5

17. ♖c2-b3 ♘c6-b4

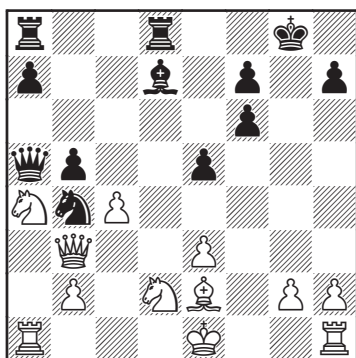
18. ♔g5xf6 g7xf6

Black has good compensation for his sacrificed piece: he's ahead in development, and his opponent's forces are in disarray.

19. ♖f1-e2 ♘c8-d7

20. ♜d1-a1 d4xe3

21. f2xe3 b7-b5



22. 0-0 ...

Since 22. cxb5 is met with 22... ♔e6 23. ♖d1 ♜ac8 24. 0-0 ♘c2, White returns the piece to complete his development. As often happens in gambits, the defending side can seize the initiative if it can “dump” the extra material at the right time.

22. ... b5xa4

23. ♖b3-c3 ...

Black now has an extra pawn (even though it's doubled), but his king's position is compromised. With his next moves, Black tries to consolidate the situation on the kingside.

23. ... f6-f5

24. ♘d2-f3 f7-f6

25. ♘f3-h4 ♘b4-c6

26. ♖c3-a3 e5-e4

27. ♔e2-d1 ...

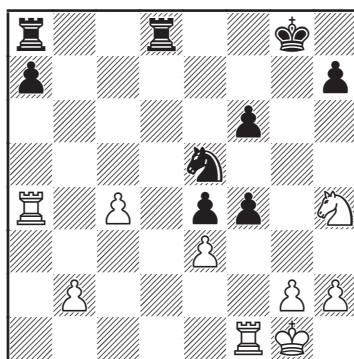
Black has managed to get the queen to defend the kingside, and White now seeks to regain the lost material on the queenside. Importantly, capturing the a4 pawn also entails the light-squared bishop trade, which makes the f5 square all the more vulnerable.

27. ... ♘c6-e5

28. ♔d1xa4 ♖a5xa4

29. ♖a3xa4 ♘d7xa4

30. ♜a1xa4 f5-f4



31. c4-c5! ...

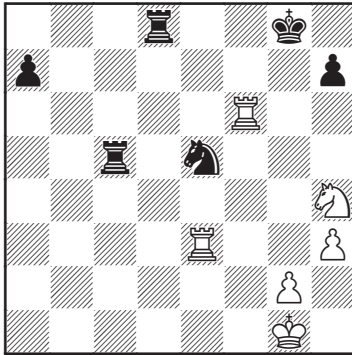
The first truly “new” move in this game; by the way, the computer shows it as the first line.

In the game Aronian – Caruana (London 2018, rapid), there occurred 31. ♜xf4 ♜d1+ 32. ♜f1 ♜xf1+ 33. ♔xf1 ♜b8 34. b4 ♘xc4 35. ♘f5 ♜b5 36. g4 h5 37. h3 hxg4 38. hxg4 ♘e5, and, due to the complete depletion of resources, a draw was soon agreed.

After 31. exf4 ♘d3, Black is not in any trouble either.

31. ... f4xe3

32. ♖a4xe4 ♜a8-b8
 33. ♜e4xe3 ♜b8xb2
 34. h2-h3 ♜b2-c2
 35. ♜f1xf6 ♜c2xc5



There isn't much material left on the board, and it seems incredible that in a game between two supergrandmasters, it's possible to play for a win here!

However, White has some subtle advantages. Firstly, the Black pawns are isolated and can be attacked; secondly, the Black king's position is less safe, which can be an important factor due to the presence of all four rooks on the board.

36. ♜f6-a6! ...

Pinning the a7 pawn and tying the Black pieces to its defence.

36. ... ♞e5-c6
 37. ♞h4-f3 ♜d8-c8

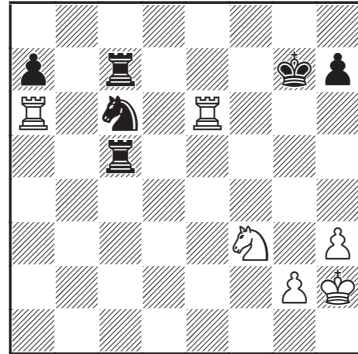
Only here, Sergey got into a long think for the first time.

38. ♜e3-e6! ...

A great prophylactic move! Black was preparing to exchange a pair of rooks with 38...♜a5. Also, the White rooks are now attacking the

c6 knight, and it's impossible to stop them with 38...♞f7?? because of 39. ♜exc6! ♜8xc6 40. ♜xc6 ♜xc6 41. ♞e5+.

38. ... ♜c8-c7
 39. ♞g1-h2 ♞g8-g7



40. ♜a6-a4! ...

A brilliant change in direction! Exploiting the awkward placement of the Black pieces, White turns his sights to the kingside.

40. ... h7-h5

Black doesn't let the White rook get to g4, but weakens the g6 and g5 squares.

After 40...♜e7!?, White shouldn't just grab a pawn with 41. ♜xe7+ ♞xe7 42. ♜xa7 ♞f6, when a draw is on the horizon. Instead, he should keep up the pressure with 41. ♜g4+ ♞f8 42. ♜d6, with an uncomfortable position of the Black king.

41. ♜a4-a6! ...

The rook has created a kingside weakness, and now it calmly returns. It turns out that it's not that simple for Black to make any kind of active move. While if Black just sits and

waits, White can move his knight to e4, creating new problems. In some lines, a king's march towards h4 is also possible.

41. ... ♖c6-e7
 42. ♗f3-d4 ♘e7-f5
 43. ♗d4-e2 ♙c5-c4?!

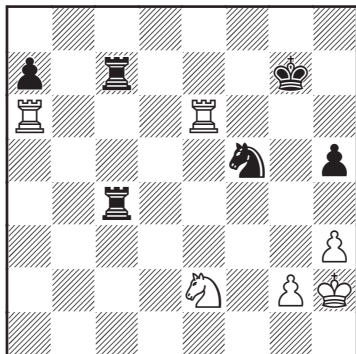
Black's unwillingness to let the knight move to f4 is completely understandable, but now White increases his advantage with clockwork precision.

43...h4! was recommended as the best defence, for instance:

a) 44. ♗f4 ♖g8!, and Black is ready to meet 45. ♙g6+ with 45... ♙g7;

b) 44. ♙g6+ ♖h7 45. ♙g5 ♗e3! In these lines we see Black's intention to sacrifice the a7 pawn and exchange a pair of rooks;

c) 44. ♗g1 ♙c1 45. ♗f3 ♙b1 (with both counterplay ♙c7-c1 and the simplifying ♙b1-b6 in mind) 46. ♙a5 ♙cc1 47. ♙xa7+ ♖f8 48. ♙a8+ ♖g7 (48...♖f7?? 49. ♗g5+ ♖g7 50. ♙a7+ ♖f8 51. ♙f7+ ♖g8 52. ♙e8#) 49. ♙a7+ ♖f8 50. ♙a8+, with perpetual check.



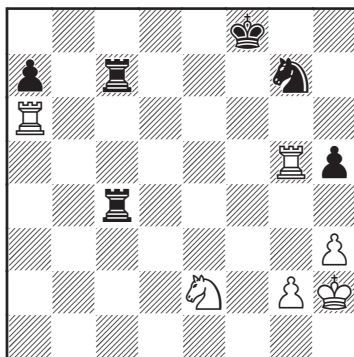
44. ♙e6-g6+ ♖g7-f8

44...♖h7 could be met with 45. ♙gf6 ♗g7 (45...♙4c5 46. ♗f4) 46. ♗f4 ♖g8 47. ♙ad6, tightening the coil around the Black king. The threats are very real, as shown in the line 47...a5? 48. ♗g6 ♖h7 49. ♗e5 ♙c3 50. ♙h6+ ♖g8 51. ♙d8+, winning. While after 47...♗e8, White can play 48. ♙d8 ♙c8 49. ♙g6+ ♖f8 (49...♖f7?? 50. ♙d7+ ♖f8 51. ♗e6# or 49...♖h7?? 50. ♙d7+ ♖h8 51. ♙h6+ ♖g8 52. ♗g6, mating) 50. ♙xc8 ♙xc8 51. ♙a6 ♗g7 52. ♙a5, and White wins the h5 pawn.

45. ♙g6-g5! ...

Freeing up the way to h6 for the queen's rook!

45. ... ♗f5-g7



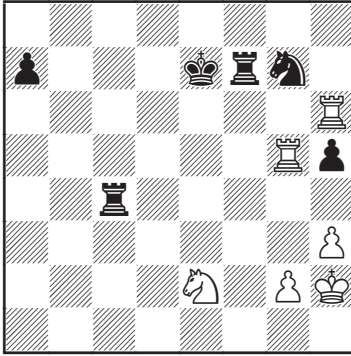
46. ♙a6-f6+! ...

A subtle Zwischenschach! The attempts 46. ♗g3 h4 and 46. ♙h6 ♙4c5 were not enough.

46. ... ♙c7-f7

After 46...♖g8, there's 47. ♗g3 h4 48. ♗f5 ♙4c5 49. ♙fg6, and the Black knight falls.

47. ♙f6-h6 ♖f8-e7



48. ♖g5-a5! ...

Again attacking the a7 pawn!

48. ... ♔e7-e8

Or 48...♖c7 49. ♘g3, winning the h5 pawn.

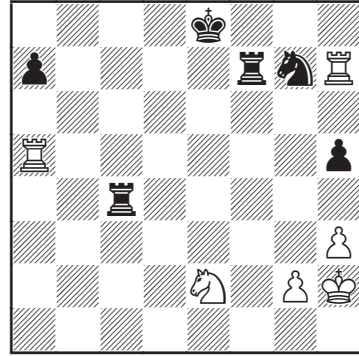
49. ♖h6-h8+! ...

Another precise *Zwischenschach*.

49. ... ♖f7-f8

50. ♖h8-h7 ♖f8-f7

50...♖c7, as before, is met with 51. ♘g3.



51. ♖a5-e5+! ...

The swift rook maneuvers literally tear Black's defence apart! After 51... ♔f8??, there's 52. ♖h8#!

51. ... ♔e8-d8

52. ♖e5xh5 ...

The h5 pawn has fallen, and the position is now technically won for White. The Indian grandmaster resigned.

1-0

It's a small pity that this game "truly" began only on move 31, but White's impeccable endgame technique makes one forget about this small "flaw"!