

Cyrus Lakdawala

Squeeze Play



PLAY MAGNUS
GROUP OF COMPANIES

EVERYMAN CHESS

www.everymanchess.com

About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 40 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

Also by the Author:

1...b6: Move by Move

1...d6: Move by Move

A Ferocious Opening Repertoire

Anti-Sicilians: Move by Move

Bird's Opening: Move by Move

Botvinnik: Move by Move

Capablanca: Move by Move

Carlsen: Move by Move

Caruana: Move by Move

First Steps: the Modern

Fischer: Move by Move

Korchnoi: Move by Move

Kramnik: Move by Move

Larsen: Move by Move

Opening Repertoire: ...c6

Opening Repertoire: Modern Defence

Opening Repertoire: The Slav

Opening Repertoire: The Sveshnikov

Petroff Defence: Move by Move

Play the London System

The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move

The Caro-Kann: Move by Move

The Classical French: Move by Move

The Colle: Move by Move

The Four Knights: Move by Move

The Modern Defence: Move by Move

The Nimzo-Larsen Attack: Move by Move

The Scandinavian: Move by Move

The Slav: Move by Move

Contents

About the author	3
Bibliography	5
Introduction	6
1 Blood from a Stone: How Magnus Squeezes Wins Out of Nothing	9
2 The Squeeze: Exploiting a Territorial Advantage	25
3 Exploiting Weakness on a Single Colour	79
4 Exploiting a Superior Minor Piece	108
5 Initiative and Superior Piece Activity	145
6 Exploiting a Superior Pawn Structure	220
7 Exploiting Imbalances	278
8 Accumulating Advantages	320
9 Converting Extra Material	372
10 Winning From Less than Nothing	440
Index of Complete Games	463

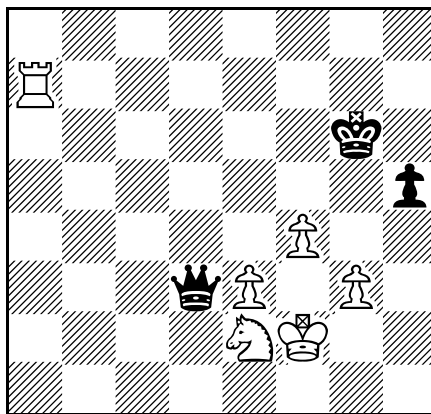
Introduction

“Being still and doing nothing are two very different things.” – Jackie Chan

Tacticians are car dealers, in that they may go a fortnight without a single sale. But then if only one car is sold, the commission pays the dealer’s salary for the entire half month. Strategists, on the other hand, are closer to candy store owners, where sweets are sold at 25 cents a piece. 25 cents is not a lot of money, yet if you sell a thousand of them each day, the accumulation of sales still comes to a satisfying profit. This book is about the candy store business model, where we examine the art of slow, strategic accumulation of advantages, over the one-punch knockout.

Is it possible for a something to emerge from nothingness, seemingly without any preceding cause? Well, I don’t know, and I leave the question for physicists and philosophers. In chess though there is a player who routinely squeezes out wins from a base of *virtually* nothing—and against world-class players. His name is Magnus Carlsen. The idea of this book popped into my head after watching his titanic win in game six of his world championship match game against his recent challenger, Ian Nepomniachtchi. This is the position after White’s 82nd move.

Ma.Carlsen-I.Nepomniachtchi World Championship (Game 6), Dubai 2021



I sometimes wonder what the unimaginable strain of a world championship match is like, where millions of pairs of eyes watch, comment upon and criticize every decision the participants make. Like many of you, I watched the game live and, for 90% of it, thought there was no way Magnus was going to win, especially since he endured time pressure – literally for hours! – as he was down to just seconds, living off the 30 second increment. Magnus and Nepo had drawn five times in a row before this game. In fact, it had been years since there was any decisive result in Magnus’ title defences. I groaned in misery after the opening stage, since I assessed the resulting position as a 99.9% chance of a draw. I underestimated the remaining 0.1%!

Never have I ever seen a human’s play so closely resembling an engine, as it did in the ending of this one, which turned out to be the longest game ever played in world championship history. This game possibly exerted a jolting influence on Nepo’s psyche, as he essentially collapsed for the remainder of the match. Magnus displayed a staggering performance which brought to mind Michael Jordan’s immortal flu game where, after a sleepless night of fever and vomiting, Jordan went on to score 38 points against the Utah Jazz, leaving the Mailman Carl Malone weeping in frustration.

What exactly is Magnus’ system for winning seemingly unwinnable positions?

- ♠ He looks for subtle imbalances. Nobody wins from a base of nothing. This book is about how to nurture our position’s potential until it turns into something tangible. Magnus is a genius at seeking out and spotting such concealed imbalances, even in the driest of positions.
- ♠ The white and black armies in a chess game are contradictory forces, in that the enhancement of one side automatically diminishes the power of the other. Once Magnus achieves an imbalance, he is a master of the accumulation of advantages, some so subtle and hidden the opponent barely notices. Only after the passing of ten or so moves does the opponent realize that their position deteriorated.
- ♠ The amateur sees the ordinary in almost every situation, while a world champion sees hidden meaning within the ordinary. Magnus is the most geometrically alert player in the world. He notices his opponent’s camouflaged inaccuracies and ruthlessly takes advantage of them. Our position’s tolerance is not bottomless. Even without an outright blunder, a string of even slight inaccuracies, when tallied, can come to the same as an outright blunder.
- ♠ There is no such thing as a random occurrence in chess. When there is no advantage to build on, we still have access to one weapon: we can wait for the opponent’s error. Even a rock which has been lying inert at the bottom of the ocean for billions of years will at some point erode away. Magnus understands this principle and possesses the patience of a Zen master or, perhaps more accurately, a beast of prey who is willing to wait, no matter how long it takes. He waits for that fleeting moment of drowsiness, rest or inattention from his opponent and

then pounces. He waited 136 moves to beat Nepo in the sixth game of their match!

♠ There are two types of miracles:

a) The supernatural kind, where your wish is granted by magic or divine intervention. The version where you say “I have a feeling this is the winning lottery ticket,” along with about 100 million other people. The difference is that you were correct and won, while the other 99.99999% were wrong.

b) The statistical kind, where you beat steeply unfavourable odds.

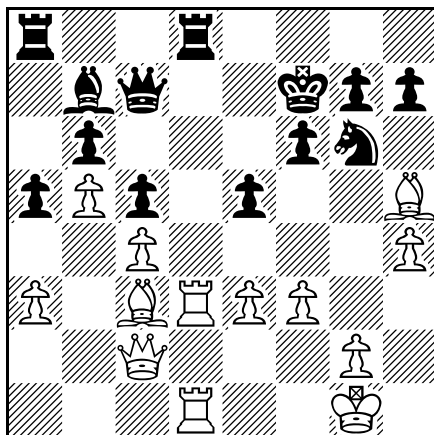
This book is about number two on the list.

We all understand how difficult it is to win a won game. How much more so then when we stand either equal or hold only a slight edge? This book is based on extracting the full point in such situations. It is of the Mostly Magnus variety, where very many of the games are his. I also loaded the book with a starting line-up of Karpov, Capablanca, Andersson and, for comic relief, a few of my games as well. In some of the endings covered, I push the analysis further than I customarily do, since the goal here is to smoke out each position’s inner truth. These sidelines are optional; you may choose to skip them and only go over the main annotations.

Best of luck in squeezing future opponents.

Cyrus Lakdawala
San Diego, October 2022

Game 60
Ma. Carlsen-Z. Almasi
 European Club Cup, Kemer 2007



The young Magnus has accumulated the following advantages:

1. Queenside space and the ability to expand further on the kingside.
2. The bishop pair, though they don't look all that impressive with this structure, since neither side is able to create a passed pawn.
3. White can think about taking over the d-file at some point with ♕d2.
4. Black's knight is pinned.

Exercise (planning): From the data, come up with White's optimal plan.

Answer: White can get away with f3-f4!, intending to push again with f4-f5, winning Black's knight.

31 ♕f2?!

Magnus provokes ...e5-e4, correctly assessing that it is in White's favour. Still, this building move is not White's best.

The direct 31 f4!! increases White's advantage to dangerous proportions: 31...exf4 32 exf4 ♕f8 33 g3 ♖e7 34 ♙g4! (threat: ♗d7) 34...♗xd3 (34...♙e4?? fails to the simple 35 ♗xd8+ and Black's bishop falls at the end) 35 ♗xd3 ♗e8 36 ♗d6 ♗xd6 37 ♗xd6 ♗e3 38 ♕f2! ♗xc3 39 ♗d8+ ♕f7 40 ♗d7+ ♕f8 41 ♗xb7 ♗xc4 42 h5! (even stronger than taking on b6) and Black is busted, whether he sacrifices the knight or not.

31...e4!

Provocation accepted! This is still Black's best option, according to the engine.

32 fxe4 ♕e7?

Imaginative, yet a clear mistake.

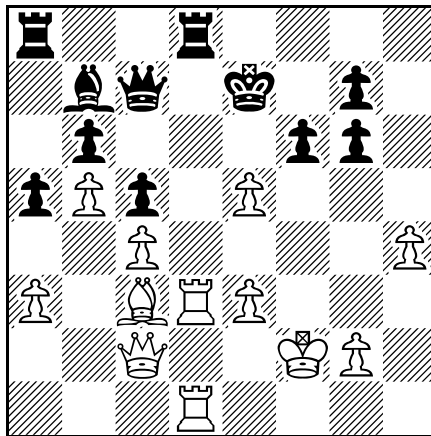
a) 32...♙xe4? 33 ♜xd8 ♙xc2 34 ♜8d7+ ♜xd7 35 ♜xd7+ ♙f8 36 ♙f3 ♜b8 37 h5 ♘e7 (37...♘h4 allows 38 ♙d5) 38 h6 and the undermining is decisive.

b) 32...♜e7! 33 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 was correct, and if 34 e5 ♜xd1 35 ♜xd1 fxe5 36 ♜g4 ♜e6, it's difficult to see how White can improve his position.

33 ♙xg6?!

Magnus intuits that his best shot for the full point is to force a queen ending with opposite-coloured bishops. The engine prefers 33 e5! fxe5 (or 33...♘xe5 34 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 35 ♜xh7) 34 ♙g4 (threat: ♜d7 again) 34...♜xd3 35 ♜xf3 (threat: h4-h5) 35...♜d8 (or 35...♜f8+ 36 ♙e2) 36 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 37 ♜xd8 ♙xd8 38 h5, followed by ♙xe5, with a winning minor piece ending.

33...hxg6 34 e5!



The best move, albeit not as strong as on the previous turn.

34...fxe5

Not 34...♙e4?? 35 exf6+ and wins, whether Black recaptures or not: 35...♙f7 (or 35...gxg6 36 ♜d7+) 36 ♜xd8 ♙xc2 37 ♜8d7+ etc.

35 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 36 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 37 ♜xg6 ♜f8+ 38 ♙g3 ♜f6 39 ♜h5!

Black's problem: if he protects his e5-pawn with ...♙d6, then White's queen infiltrates via e8.

39...♙d6

But there's no real choice. 39...♙d7 40 ♙xe5 ♜e6 41 ♜g5 g6 42 ♜f4 is lost for Black.

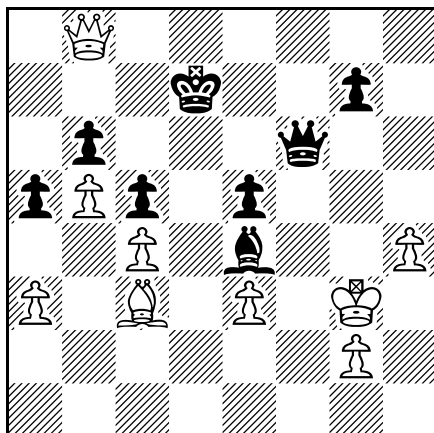
40 ♜e8 ♙e4

He wants to swap queens on g6.

41 ♜b8+

Hitting both the b6- and e5-pawns.

41...♙d7



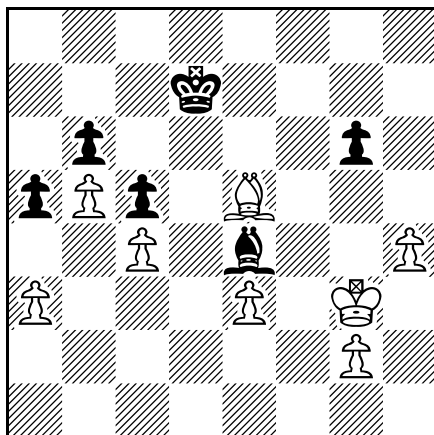
Exercise (critical decision): Assess the opposite-coloured bishops ending after 42 ♖xe5+ etc. Is it a win for White or is it drawn? If the latter, what should White play instead?

Answer: The bishop ending is not yet a forced win, but it's the best chance for White.

42 ♖xe5!

42 ♗xe5? only leads to perpetual check after 42...♖g6+ 43 ♔f4 ♖f5+ 44 ♔g3 ♖g6+ 45 ♔f2 ♖xg2+ 46 ♔e1 ♖g1+ and so on.

42...♖xe5+ 43 ♗xe5 g6



He can't allow White two connected kingside passed pawns.

44 ♗f6

I wonder whether Magnus considered 44 a4!? here. Fixing yet another pawn on the

light squares, vulnerable to Black's bishop, feels counterintuitive, yet it sets him immediate problems: 44...♔d8! (it's too soon to go pawn hunting: 44...♙c2? allows 45 ♗f4 ♙xa4 46 ♗g5 ♙c2 47 ♗f6! a4 48 ♙a1 ♙d3 49 g4 ♗d8 50 ♗g7! and White wins) 45 ♗h3 (unfortunately 45 ♗f4? would drop the g-pawn) 45...♔d7! (still waiting) 46 g4 ♙c2! (now is the right moment, while White's king is blocked by his own g-pawn) 47 h5 (or 47 ♗g3 ♙xa4 48 ♗f4 ♙e6) 47...gxh5 48 gxh5 ♙xa4 49 ♗g4 ♙c2 50 ♗f4 (or 50 ♗g5 ♙e6) 50...♙h7 (before e3-e4 blocks it off) 51 ♗g5 ♙e6! 52 ♙c7 ♙d3 53 h6 ♗f7 54 e4 (or 54 ♙xb6 ♙xc4 55 ♙xa5 ♙xb5) 54...♙xc4 (not 54...♙xe4?? 55 ♙xb6 ♙d3 56 ♙xa5! ♙xc4 57 b6 ♙d5 58 ♙c3 and wins) 55 e5 ♙xb5 56 e6+ ♗g8 and Black draws.

44...a4!

Almasi responds correctly.

a) 44...♙d3? is met by 45 ♗f4 ♙xc4 46 ♗g5 ♙d3 47 ♙e5 (threat: ♗f6) 47...♙e6 48 ♙c7 ♗f7 49 ♙xb6 a4 (after 49...♙xb5 50 ♙xa5 White will soon own three passed pawns) 50 ♙xc5 ♙xb5, reaching the same position as after 50 ♙xc5 in the game, and with White to move.

b) 44...♙e6? is even worse: 45 ♙d8 ♙d3 46 ♙xb6 ♙xc4 47 a4! ♙b3 48 ♙xa5 ♙xa4 49 b6 ♙c6 50 ♗f4! c4 (not 50...♙xg2? 51 e4 ♗d7 52 b7 and wins, since Black's king is unable to approach the b-pawn) 51 g4 and Black is busted.

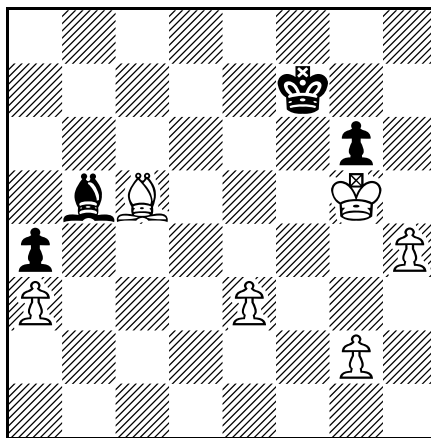
45 ♙e5 ♙d3?

Again too soon. As in the 44 a4 line above, Black must wait for the right moment to target the queenside pawns: 45...♔d8! 46 ♗h3 ♗d7 (46...♙f5+ 47 g4 ♙e6 will do too) 47 g4 (or 47 ♙b8 ♗c8) 47...♙d3! (now is the time and for the same reason) 48 h5 gxh5 49 fxg5 ♗e6 (moving inside the square of the h-pawn) 50 ♙c7 ♙xc4 51 Bab6 ♙xb5 52 ♙xc5 ♗f5 and Black draws.

46 ♗f4 ♙xc4 47 ♗g5 ♙e6

If 47...♙d3? 48 ♗f6 ♙e4 49 g4 ♙d3 50 h5 gxh5 51 gxh5 ♙e4 52 h6 ♙d3 53 ♗g7 ♗e6 54 ♙c7 c4 55 ♙xb6 c3 56 ♙a5 c2 57 ♙d2, the c-pawn's ambitions are halted and White wins.

48 ♙c7 ♗f7 49 ♙xb6 ♙xb5 50 ♙xc5



Squeeze Play

Clearly Black's financial reserves have dwindled, yet there remains a couple of obstacles to White's win:

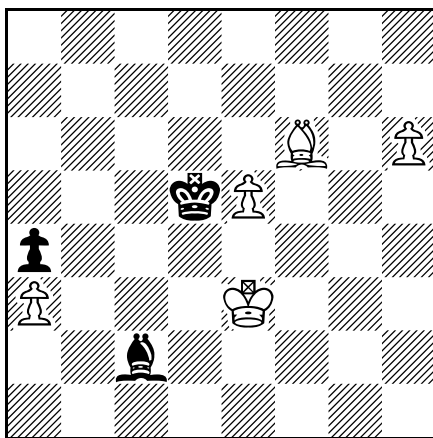
1. The bishops of opposite colours worry White about the likelihood of Black blockading both (future) passed pawns.

2. If Black can give up his bishop and g-pawn for White's three kingside pawns, and then get his king to a8, it's a draw despite White's extra piece.

The engine initially assesses this as only "+=". Then its numbers progressively increase to +3, +4, +5, as it accepts that White is winning. Let's see how Magnus demonstrated that over the board:

50...♙f1 51 g4 ♘d3 52 ♔f4 ♙e6 53 e4 ♙e2 54 ♘d4 ♘d1 55 ♙h8 ♙e2 56 ♔g5 ♔f7 57 h5 gxf5 58 gxf5 ♙f3 59 e5 ♔e6 60 ♙f6 ♙e4 61 ♔f4 ♘c2

White's goal is easily defined: How to break Black's pesky blockade of the light squares?
62 h6 ♔d5 63 ♙e3



Believe it or not, the king is heading for the g8-square.

63...♙g6 64 ♔d2 ♙e6 65 ♔c3 ♔d7 66 ♔b4 ♘c2 67 ♔b5!

Magnus of course avoids the trap 67 h7?? ♙xh7 68 ♔xa4 ♙f5 69 ♔b5 ♔c7 70 a4 ♔b7 and draws, since Black can give up his bishop for the e-pawn to reach a rook's pawn and wrong-coloured bishop draw.

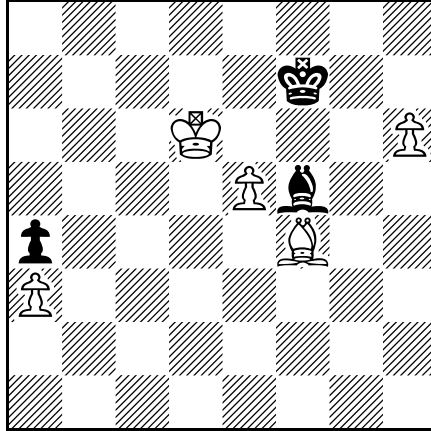
67...♔e6 68 ♔c6 ♙g6 69 ♔c7 ♙f5 70 ♔d8 ♔f7

The white king can't be allowed to complete its journey.

71 ♙g7!

Zugzwang. Black must concede either the e8- or d7-square to White's king.

71...♙g6 72 ♔d7 ♙f5+ 73 ♔d6 ♙g4 74 ♙f6 ♙f5 75 ♙g5 ♙g4 76 ♙f4 ♙f5



So far, the position has been as motionless as a Desert Horned lizard awaiting the unlucky fly's approach in the hope of a delicious breakfast.

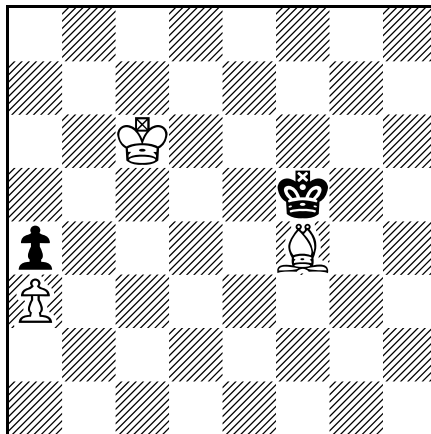
Exercise (calculation): Without moving the pieces, try and work out the ramifications of 77 e6+. Does it win? If not, then what is White's winning plan?

Answer: Pushing the e-pawn wins, though you need to calculate 23-ply to confirm it, which seems a steep climb to most club-level players. For a world-class grandmaster, it's a leisurely picnic and Magnus probably calculated it to move 88 in, I'm guessing, less than a minute.

77 e6+! ♔xe6

If 77...♔e8 78 e7, White wins by ♔e6-f6, ♗g5, ♔g7 and h6-h7.

78 h7 ♔g7 **79** ♔xe6 ♔xh7 **80** ♔d5 ♔g6 **81** ♔c6 ♔f5



Exercise (combination alert): Finish the calculation. What is the winning move?

Answer: Abandon the bishop and pick off Black's a-pawn.

82 ♖b5! 1-0

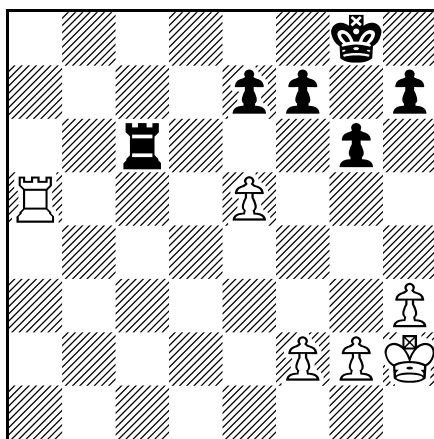
No, this isn't a glaring inconsistency. The key move of the calculation is to give the bishop away, after which 82...♙xf4 83 ♖xa4 ♜e5 84 ♖b5 ♙d6 85 ♖b6 ♙d7 86 ♖b7 ♙d6 87 a4 ♜c5 88 a5 wins. Coincidentally, the same ending was reached in another game, B.Damljanovic-I.Sarenac, Belgrade 2012, where Black waited for a4-a5 (on move 97) before resigning.

Saving the bishop, on the other hand, is a double question mark move which allows the black king to reach the drawing corner: 82 ♔h2?? ♜e6 83 ♖b5 ♙d7 84 ♖xa4 ♜c8 85 ♖b5 ♖b7 and it ends in a draw. When miracles like this occur in our games, we need to pinch ourselves to determine if we really are awake, or if our incredible luck is just some glorious dream.

Game 61

R.Ponomariov-Ma.Carlsen

Nice (rapid) 2010



“Why aren't the players agreeing to a draw?” you quite sensibly ask. “After all, world-class players don't lose such endings.” My answer: You keep forgetting about my easily verifiable theory that Magnus has made a deal with the devil, where he gets to win completely drawn endings in exchange for his soul. So drawn is this position that even if, by some miracle, White loses a pawn, he should still (at least theoretically) hold the draw with three versus four pawns on the same side.

39...♖c4!

The rook cuts off both f2-f4 and h2-h4 ideas, at least temporarily.

40 ♖g3 e6 41 f4

There is actually no need to push the f-pawn, which gives Black the hint of a hope with the undermining plan of ...h7-h6 and ...g6-g5. Instead, 41 h4! is White's clearest way:

41...h6 42 f3 ♖g7 43 ♖a2 g5 44 hxg5 hxg5 45 ♖e2 ♖g6 46 ♖e4! ♖xe4 (or 46...♖c2 47 ♖h3 ♖f5 48 g4+ ♖g6) 47 fxe4 ♖h5 48 ♖f2! ♖g4 49 g3! ♖h3 50 ♖f3 ♖h2 51 ♖g4 ♖g2 52 ♖xg5 ♖xg3 53 ♖f6 ♖f4 54 ♖xf7 ♖xe5 55 ♖e7 is a dead draw.

41...h6!

Black's only prayer is to toss in the undermining ...g6-g5 at some point.

42 ♖f3

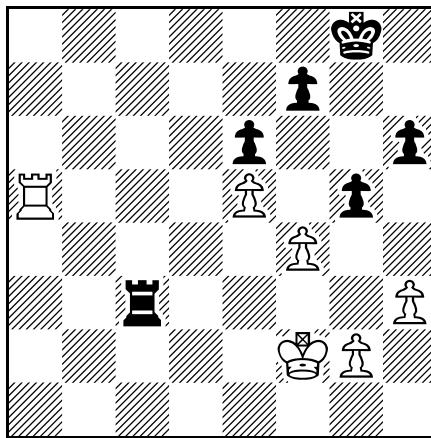
White has several paths to a draw.

a) 42 h4! is again possible, since 42...g5 43 hxg5 hxg5 44 fxg5 ♖g7 45 ♖a8! ♖e4 46 ♖f3! ♖xe5 47 ♖g4 is still a draw.

b) 42 ♖g4! is more sneaky, and if 42...g5?! 43 ♖h5! ♖xf4 44 ♖xh6 ♖f8 45 ♖xg5 ♖f2, obviously it's Black who is now fighting for the draw.

42...♖c3+ 43 ♖f2

Sometimes a move can be an inaccuracy, even when the engine says it isn't. Why back the king up and give Black at least a glimmer of practical chances? 43 ♖g4! is a certain draw.

43...g5!

As mentioned above, Black's only prayer is to undermine support for the e5-pawn.

44 fxg5

White would love to support the f4-pawn with 44 g3. The problem is that it hangs the h3-pawn after 44...gxf4 45 gxf4 ♖xh3. Yet even here, the engine assesses it at 0.00. Your winning chances are pretty low when the opponent falls for your trap and the rude engine says you still can't win. Nonetheless, a human could easily botch the defence and lose this

Squeeze Play

with White.

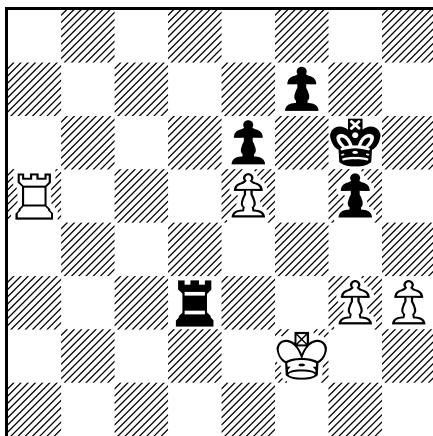
44...hxg5 45 ♖a4 ♔g7 46 ♜g4! ♔h6

46...♔g6? allows 47 h4.

47 g3

47 h4 is still possible: 47...gxh4 48 ♜xh4+ ♔g5 49 g3 ♜c5 50 ♜f4 ♔g6 51 ♜g4+ and the position remains drawn.

47...♔h5 48 ♜a4 ♔g6 49 ♜a5 ♜d3!



Worrying White about ...♜d5 ideas.

50 h4!?

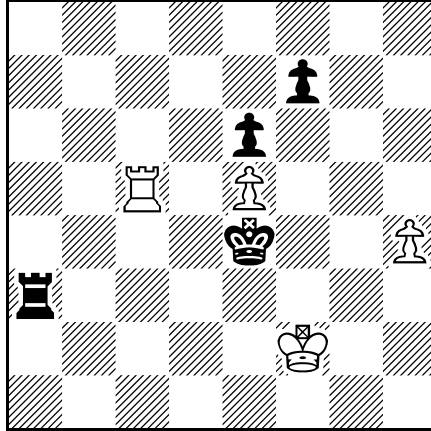
Pono reasons: Exercise caution too far and you risk Timidity, Caution's nervous cousin. This committal move isn't strictly necessary, yet it's logical since the more pawns removed from the board, the more likely a draw will result. On the downside, it splits White's pawns, making them slightly more vulnerable to attack.

White could just wait with 50 ♜b5 and ask how Black plans to proceed. 50...♔f5 is of no help since 51 ♜b7 ♔g6 52 ♜b5 simply repeats the position. 50...♜d5?! is nothing special either. In fact it is Black who fights for the draw: 51 ♜xd5 exd5 52 ♔e3 ♔f5 53 ♔d4 ♔e6 54 g4 ♔e7 54 ♔xd5 ♔d7 and Black is exceedingly lucky that the game remains drawn.

50...gxh4 51 gxh4 ♜d7 52 ♔e3 ♜b7 53 ♔f4 ♜b4+ 54 ♔g3 ♔f5 55 ♜a7 ♜g4+! 56 ♔f3 ♜g7

56...♜xh4 57 ♜xf7+ ♔xe5 is dead drawn.

57 ♜a5 ♜g1 58 ♜b5 ♜a1 59 ♜c5 ♜a3+ 60 ♔f2 ♔e4!



Magnus keeps finding ways to increase his practical chances, even if the position remains drawn empirically. This way his f-pawn is safeguarded by ...♖f3+.

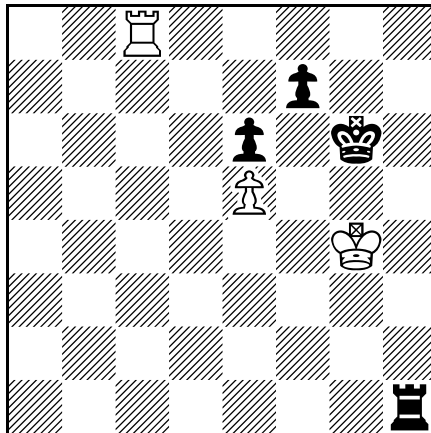
61 h5 ♖a8 62 ♔g3

So far so drawn. The *Stockfish 15* assessment is still 0.00.

62...♔f5 63 ♔h4 ♗a4+ 64 ♔g3 ♗g4+ 65 ♔f3 ♗f4+ 66 ♔g3 ♔g5 67 h6 ♗g4+ 68 ♔f3 ♗h4 69 ♗c7 ♔g6 70 ♗c8 ♗xh6

So Magnus cleverly found a way to win White's h-pawn. The bad news is that the position is still completely drawn.

71 ♔g4 ♗h1



Exercise (critical decision): Should White make a neutral move like 72 ♔f4 or give a rook check on g8?

Answer: In this case the “patzer sees a check...” rule applies, although nobody can call a 2737-rated player a patzer.

72 ♖g8??

This move is in terrible discord with the position’s requirements. Magnus seems magically just to wear his opponents down. Instead, 72 ♔f4! is drawn, as after 72...♗h4+ 73 ♕e3 ♕f5 74 ♖c7 ♗h7 75 ♔d4 ♗h4+ 76 ♕e3, Black can’t make the slightest progress.

72...♕h7

It’s unlikely that even as a toddler Magnus would have fallen for 72...♕h6?? 73 ♗h8+.

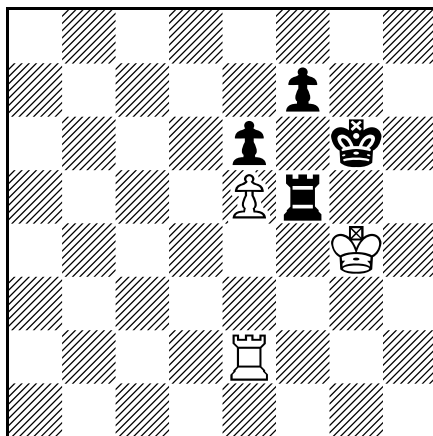
73 ♗a8 ♗f1!

Oops. Now White’s king is cut off. The f5-square is the perfect spot for Black’s rook, where it simultaneously attacks e5, while covering f7.

74 ♗a2

Nor can White afford lateral defence of his e-pawn: 74 ♗a5 ♗f5 75 ♗b5 ♕g6 76 ♗a5 f6! forces White’s resignation.

74...♕g6 75 ♗g2 ♗f5! 76 ♗e2



Exercise (planning): White’s e5-weaking begins to draw unwanted attention. What is Black’s winning plan?

Answer: Transfer the king to d5, ganging up on the pawn.

76...♕g7!

We reach the point in the horror movie where we hear the grating sound of skeletal fingers scratching at the coffin’s lid. There isn’t a damned thing White can do about Black’s king walking round to d5.

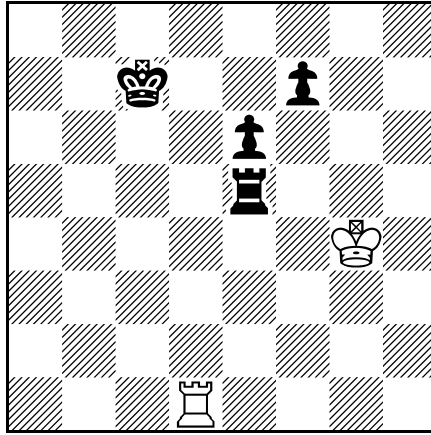
77 ♕g3 ♕f8! 78 ♗e4 ♕e7 79 ♕g4 ♕d7 80 ♗d4+

Or 80 ♗e2 ♕c6 81 ♗e1 ♕d5 and the e5-pawn falls.

80...♕c6 81 ♗d6+ ♕c7! 82 ♗d1

Refusing to pay your taxes on the grounds of rugged individualism is unlikely to appease the IRS at tax time. Pono is forced to pay up and he can resign here.

82...♖xe5



At last.

83 ♖f1

Hey, I distinctly said “and he can resign here.” Conversion from this point is beyond trivial for a player rated 2800+, even with no time on the clock.

83...f5+ 84 ♔g5 ♕d6 85 ♔f6 ♖e4 86 ♗d1+ ♕c5

Black’s king being cut off isn’t a problem since his rook and two pawns can make progress by themselves.

87 ♗d8 f4 88 ♔g5 e5 89 ♔g4 ♖e3 90 ♗d1 ♕c4 91 ♗d2 f3 92 ♔g3 e4 93 ♔f2 ♗d3

Black’s king is allowed back into play.

94 ♖a2 ♕d4 95 ♖a4+ ♕e5 96 ♔g3 ♗d2

Intending ...♗g2+ and ...♔f4.

97 ♖a5+ ♕d4 98 ♖a4+ ♕e3 99 ♖a3+ ♕e2 100 ♔f4 f2 0-1

Game 62

Ma.Carlsen-H.Nakamura

Meltwater Tour Final (online rapid) 2021

Ruy Lopez

1 e4

In the Meltwater Tour Final of 2021 Magnus was at his terrifying best, winning clear first place with two rounds to spare. I watched this game online and it was impossible not to compare his endgame mastery with Capablanca and Fischer at their best.

1...e5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 ♗b5 ♖f6

Squeeze Play

The popularity of Berlin Defence of the Ruy Lopez undoubtedly stems from Vladimir Kramnik's brilliant use of it when he took down the heavily favoured Garry Kasparov in their 2000 world championship match. The frustrated Kasparov was unable to win a single game against it, essentially negating the advantage of the white pieces. The unanswered question was: why didn't Kasparov simply switch to Queen's Pawn openings? Maybe pride, since that would be an admission that Kramnik had neutralized 1 e4.

4 d3

The battleground tabiya for Kasparov and Kramnik ran 4 0-0 ♖xe4 5 d4! ♜d6! 6 ♙xc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 ♜f5 8 ♚xd8+ ♜xd8, after which Kramnik, the immovable object, held a draw every time this position was reached.

4...♙c5 5 ♙xc6

This leads to a funky version with a structure similar to an Exchange Ruy. 5 c3 and 5 0-0 are also played.

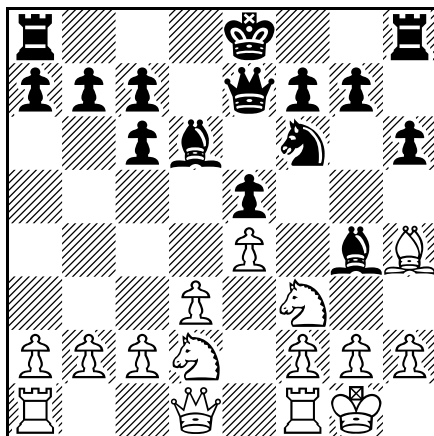
5...dxc6 6 0-0

6 ♜xe5?? is a boneheaded blunder due to 6...♚d4! threatening mate on f2 as well as White's loose knight. After 7 ♙e3 ♚xe5 8 d4 ♚xe4 9 dxc5 ♚xg2 10 ♚f1 ♙h3, it's time for White to resign.

6...♙d6 7 ♙g5

Provoking ...h7-h6 and ...g7-g5. 7 ♜bd2 is more common.

7...h6 8 ♙h4 ♚e7 9 ♜bd2 ♙g4



10 h3!?

A risky choice seeing as he's already committed to kingside castling, since Black might later try to pry open White's king with ...g7-g5-g4 ideas, although such an advance needs to be properly timed. For example, 10 ♜c4 0-0-0 11 h3 ♙h5 12 ♚e2 g5 13 ♙g3 g4?, as in A.Firouzja-H.Nakamura, St. Louis (online blitz) 2020, fails to 14 ♜fxe5! gxh3 15 ♚e3 ♜b8 (or 15...hxg2 16 ♚xa7!, threatening ♚a8 mate) 16 ♜xc6+! bxc6 17 e5 and White regains the piece with a clear advantage.

10...♙h5 11 d4!

Principles: *Create confrontation and open the game when ahead in development.*

Moreover, Black's queen is dangerously placed on e7, vulnerable to e4-e5 ideas.

11...0-0-0

11...exd4?? is a poisoned pawn: 12 e5! ♙xe5 13 ♖e1 g5 14 ♙g3 ♘d7 15 ♙xe5 ♘xe5 16 g4, breaking the pin and winning material.

12 ♖e1 ♗e6?!

This loses time. 12...g5 13 ♙g3 ♘d7 14 ♘c4 f6 looks okay for Black.

13 c4!

Intending d4-d5.

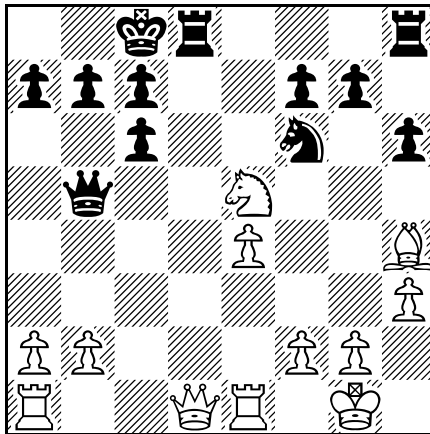
13...♙xf3 14 ♘xf3!

Magnus leaves the c4-pawn is loose and dares Naka to go pawn grabbing.

14...♗xc4!?

Hikaru refuses to back down. 14...g5!? 15 ♙g3 g4 16 d5 cxd5 17 exd5 ♗f5 18 ♘xe5 gxh3 19 ♘xf7 ♙c5 20 ♗f3! is still in White's favour.

15 dxe5 ♙xe5 16 ♘xe5 ♗b5



Exercise (combination alert): White's extra piece is temporary due to Black's double attack on the queen and e5-knight. How should White respond?

Answer: Zwischenzug/knight fork.

17 ♘xc6!!

With this shot, White earns himself a superior ending. Nakamura probably expected 17 ♗b3?! ♗xe5 18 ♗xf7 ♘d7 19 ♗b3 ♘h5!, intending ...g7-g5, when Black looks okay.

17...♗xc6

No choice. 17...♖xd1?? walks into 18 ♘xa7+ (burn witch, burn) 18...♗b8 19 ♘b5 ♖xa1 20 ♖xa1 and Black is down a piece.

Squeeze Play

18 ♖b3 ♜d7!

Now f7 is secured and c7 reinforced. Nakamura correctly avoids 18...g5?? 19 ♙g3 ♞xe4 20 ♜ac1 ♞c5 21 ♖a3 b6 22 b4 and White wins a piece.

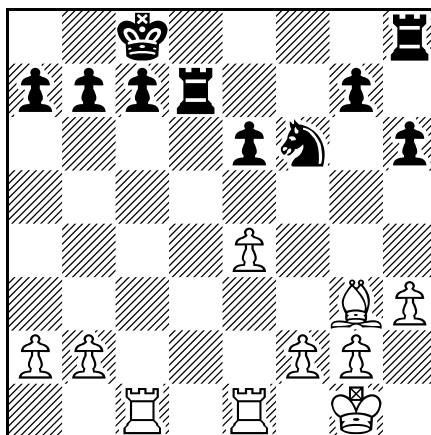
19 ♜ac1 ♖e6!?

It can't be a comfortable decision to enter an inferior endgame voluntarily against possibly the greatest endgame player of all time. 19...♖b6 may be superior.

20 ♖xe6

The engine prefers 20 ♖a4, whereas Magnus is not one to turn down an advantageous ending.

20...fxe6 21 ♙g3



As the game was being played, both Ian Nepomniachtchi and Peter Leko ominously warned that this was the sort of position one must evade at all costs when facing Magnus, since odds are high that he will inexorably grind you to dust with the patience of the ocean's tide.

White's advantages:

1. Black has to cope with three pawn islands to White's two – and when it comes to pawn islands, less is more.
2. Black's e-pawn is isolated, although for now it doesn't appear all that weak.
3. Principle: *A bishop is usually the superior minor piece over a knight in endings with opposing wing pawn majorities, since the bishop can be utilized simultaneously for attack and defence, while the knight is only capable of one or the other.*
4. White's pawn majority is more mobile than Black's. This means that White will be the favourite in a future promotion race, since he is likely to produce a passed pawn, while Black's status on that front is not so clear.
5. The c7-pawn can turn into a target if White doubles rooks on the open file.

21...b6

Intending to activate his majority with ...♙b7 and ...c7-c5.

22 ♖c6!

Triple purpose:

1. White gains time by attacking e6.
2. White clogs any ...c7-c5 ideas.
3. White prepares to double rooks on the c-file, tying Black down to defence of c7.

22...♗e8 23 ♕e5!

Oh no you don't. The ...e6-e5 push is prevented, while the b2-pawn is covered in case of a future ...♗d2.

23...♙b7 24 ♖ec1 ♗ee7

24...♗xe4?? is madness, as it allows rook infiltration with 25 ♖xc7+ ♖xc7 26 ♖xc7+ ♙a6 27 ♖xg7 and White wins.

25 f3

The loose e-pawn is covered.

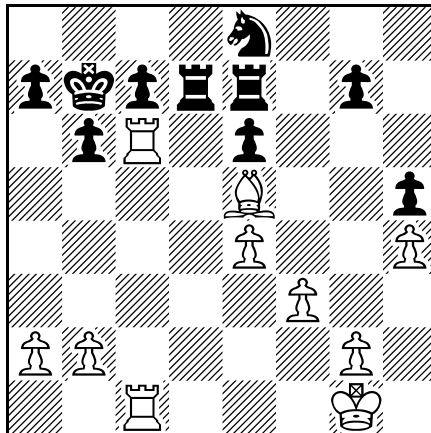
25...♗e8

It's not a good sign when every piece is forced into defensive mode.

26 h4!

Besides discouraging ...g7-g5, one idea is to continue with h4-h5, fixing g7 as a target.

26...h5?!



Exercise (planning): Black overreacted, unnecessarily creating a hole on g5. Come up with a plan for White to exploit this factor.

Answer: Principle: Use your king as a fighting piece in the ending.

27 ♙h2!

Magnus' king heads for g5.

27...g6?!

He shouldn't create further dark square weaknesses. 27...♗d6 was preferable.

Squeeze Play

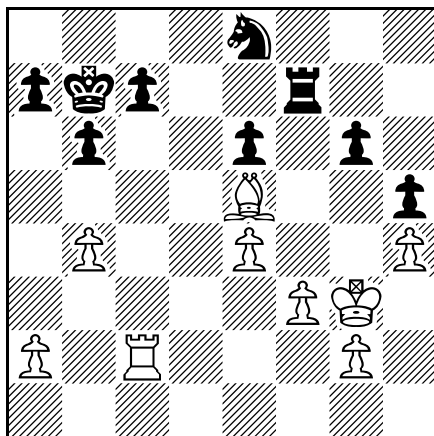
28 ♔g3! ♖d2

Discouraging ♕f4, due to ...♖xg2, forcing White to back off his blockade of c6.

29 ♖6c2 ♗xc2 30 ♗xc2 ♖f7!

It's imperative that king infiltration be prevented. 30...c5?? 31 ♕f4 ♖d7 32 ♔g5 is completely lost for Black.

31 b4!



Endgame principle: *Suppress the opponent's pawn majority.* Now ...c7-c5 is prevented.

31...a6 32 a4!

The idea is to push to b5, locking down the c7-pawn as a permanent target.

32...♖f8

Black can only wait and hope White has no way to make progress.

33 b5 axb5 34 axb5

White must watch out for ...♘d6, attacking the b5-pawn, if not just yet.

34...♔c8

The immediate 34...♘d6?? is unplayable: 35 ♗xd6 cxd6 36 ♖c6 ♖d8 37 ♕f4 and Black is unable to defend against ♔g5 and ♔xg6, while the d-pawn is too slow: 37...d5 38 ♗xe6 d4 39 ♖c6 d3 40 ♖c1 wins.

35 ♖a2 ♔d7

Black doesn't fear rook infiltration, so there is no need for 35...♔b7.

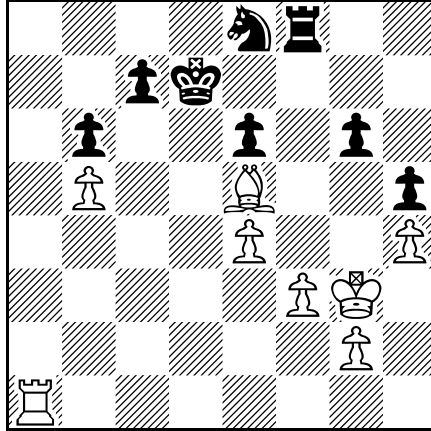
36 ♖a8 ♖f7

Unpinning his knight.

37 ♖a1!?

Why a1, rather than the more natural a2-square? Perhaps because Magnus envisions a future ♖g1, ♕f2 and g2-g4.

37...♖f8

**38 ♕f2?!**

Keep in mind that this is a rapid game – 15 minutes for each side with 15-second increments added after each move – so it’s essentially a slow-motion blitz game. The engine prefers 38 ♖d1+ ♕e7 39 ♗c1 ♕d7 40 ♗c6 ♗f7 41 ♕f2 ♗f8 42 ♕e3, when Black is tied down, although it doesn’t give any indication of how to make progress if Black just moves his rook back and forth.

38...♖d6!

The tactical alert Nakamura suddenly threatens both ...♗xb5 and ...♗xe4+!, exploiting the pin on the f3-pawn.

39 ♗xd6

Magnus pays for his inaccuracy, regretfully handing over his powerful bishop.

39...♕xd6!

Black should now hold the draw. Not 39...cxd6?? 40 ♖a7+ ♕e8 41 ♕e3 ♗f7 42 ♖a8+! ♕d7 43 ♖a6! and White wins a pawn since 43...♕c7?? gets skewered by 44 ♖a7+.

40 ♖d1+ ♕e7?!

The king refuses to vacate control over d7, with the defiance of a drunk bar patron who won’t leave, even though asked by the bouncer who is twice his size and strength.

Black draws if his king exits with 40...♕c5! 41 ♗c1+ ♕xb5 42 ♗xc7 e5 43 ♗e7 ♕c4 44 ♗xe5 b5, when White’s former euphoria begins to dissipate. The b-pawn is fast which should give Black enough to hold the game, at least according to the engines. Let’s look a bit deeper: 45 ♗e6 b4 46 ♗xg6 ♗b8 47 ♕e3 b3 48 ♗c6+ ♕b4 49 ♕d2 ♗d8+ 50 ♕c1 ♗g8! 51 e5 ♗xg2 52 e6 ♗e2 53 f4 ♕b5 54 ♗d6 ♕c5 55 ♖a6 ♕b5 is a repetition draw.

41 ♕e3

When you are unable to fool your opponent, then allow the opponent to fool himself. Magnus tempts Black into seizing the open a-file.

41...♖a8?

Principle: *Don’t suddenly strive for activity when the plan is a fortress draw.* When we

Squeeze Play

lose a chess game, we take on the aspect of reprimanded pupil, determined not to repeat old errors, yet we repeat them all the same. Nakamura is betrayed by his natural instinct to act immediately, over a mixture of action and caution. After 41...♔f6! 42 ♖d7 (or 42 ♔f4 e5+) 42...♞a8! 43 ♞xc7 ♞a5 44 ♞c6 ♞xb5 45 ♔f4 ♔e7! 46 e5 (or 46 g4 ♔d7!) 46...♞b2 47 g4 ♞b3! 48 ♞c7+ ♔f8 49 gxh5 gxh5 50 ♞h7 b5 51 ♞xh5 ♔g7 Black should hold the game.

42 ♞c1?

The evaluation briefly switches from winning to drawing again. He should play 42 ♔f4! first, after which 42...♞a2 43 ♞c1 ♔d7 44 g4 transposes to the game.

42...♔d7?

Black can still resist with 42...♞a5! 43 ♞xc7+ ♔f6 as in the variation after 41...♔f6! above.

43 ♔f4!

At last.

43...♞a2

If 43...♞a5 44 ♔g5 ♞xb5+ 45 ♔xg6 ♞a5 46 g4 hxg4 47 fxg4, White wins easily.

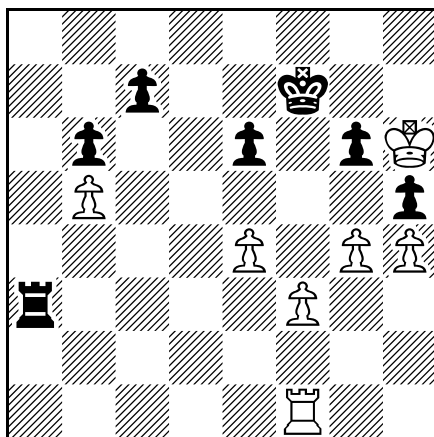
44 g4 ♞a3

Or 44...♞f2 45 g5! ♞h2 46 ♔e5 ♞xh4 47 ♔f6! ♞f4+ 48 ♔xg6 ♞xf3 49 ♔h7! and Black is busted.

45 ♞f1!

Principle violation: *Avoid passivity in rook endings.* In this case it is a justified exception, since White covers the base f3-pawn, which in turn allows his king to go on a raid to g5 and onward.

45...♔e7 46 ♔g5 ♔f7 47 ♔h6!



Magnus intends g4-g5! followed by f3-f4-f5, creating a passed g-pawn. Nakamura is helpless against this plan. This is more straightforward than 47 ♞c1 ♞xf3 48 gxh5 gxh5 49 ♞xc7+ ♔e8 50 ♔xh5 ♞f4 51 ♔g5 ♞xe4 52 h5, which also wins.

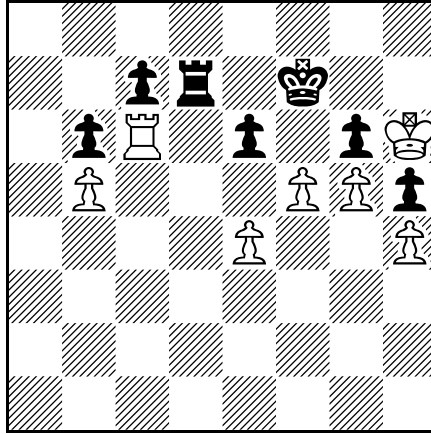
47...♞c3

If 47...♖b3 48 ♜c1 ♜xb5 49 ♜xc7+ ♔f6 50 g5+ ♔e5 51 ♔xg6, White's g-pawn promotes first.

48 g5! ♜d3 49 ♜c1! ♜d7

Black's rook is forced into a state of passivity, since 49...♜xf3 50 ♜xc7+ ♔e8 51 ♔xg6 is hopeless.

50 ♜c6 ♜e7 51 f4! ♜d7 52 f5!



This planned breakthrough creates a passed g-pawn.

52...gxf5 53 exf5 exf5 54 ♜f6+ ♔g8 55 ♜xf5 ♜d6+ 56 ♔xh5 c6 57 bxc6 ♜xc6 58 g6! ♜c8
58...♔g7 59 ♜f7+ ♔g8 60 ♔h6 wins.

59 ♔g5

The simple idea is to make way for the h-pawn to run up the board.

59...♜b8 60 h5!

Magnus calculates that there is no need for a defensive move like ♜b5.

60...b5 1-0

Sudden death has a way of putting a crimp on our long-term plans. Black will be mated long before he promotes: 61 h6 b4 62 h7+ ♔g7 63 ♜f7+ ♔h8 64 ♔h6 (threat: g6-g7 mate) 64...♜b6 65 ♜f8 mate.