

NEIL McDONALD

ATTACK!

THE SUBTLE ART OF
WINNING BRILLIANTLY

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About the Author

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Introduction

A world champion gives the following advice in his autobiography, “To be passive ... is fatal to the beginner or medium player – such players *must* be aggressive. He *must* attack, because only in that way can he develop his imagination, which is a very important thing.”

You might think this is Tal or Alekhine endorsing the virtues of their dashing style of play. In fact the quotation is from Capablanca writing in *My Chess Career* back in 1920. In other words the positional maestro, whose careful approach meant he avoided defeat *for eight years*, is telling us to attack. Only when we’ve reached a high level should we pause and consider if a strategic style suits us better. Now that’s food for thought.

Did Capa follow his own advice? Well he played thousands of simultaneous games in his younger years and used them to try out sacrifices and speculative attacks. These games are extant and are fun to play through. There are also beautiful attacks in his serious games – he won several brilliancy prizes – though he only went for broke when the needs of the position demanded it. He wouldn’t have been Capablanca otherwise.

Even if you prefer a steady positional game with the gradual accumulation of advantages, it is vital that you know how to attack and make sacrifices. For example your opponent might play in a highly provocative style which gives him excellent winning chances unless you punish him with an aggressive counter-action. Or you might build up a winning positional advantage but then see it dissipate and even lose in the end because you lacked the resolution to make a sacrifice. And remember that becoming a good attacker will open your eyes to the *defensive* resources inherent in a position. When you are attacked, which is of course inevitable, this knowledge will make you a more resilient defender.

The purpose of this book is to deepen your understanding of dynamic chess. The nature of an attack is that it can’t always be explained by general principles: sometimes a check-mate on the board is the only certain proof of the correctness of a sacrifice.

For this reason I’ve included a lot of variations. When you first play through a game feel free to skip the murky details and focus on the general flow. You can always return later to examine the finer points of the struggle. If you are very serious you can treat the variations as tactical exercises. Whatever path you choose you’ll be improving your tactical flair.

As well as being useful for developing your imagination in Capablanca style I hope you find the games entertaining and full of enjoyable surprises.

Neil McDonald,
Gravesend, February 2021

Chapter One

Trapping the King in the Centre

In the opening a player aims to gain a foothold in the centre, develop pieces at a pace reasonable for the setting, and castle the king into safety. The purpose of a rough and ready gambit is to offer a pawn or even a piece to short-circuit this methodical build up. The philosophy is that the overall material balance won't matter if the attacker can crash through an ill-prepared defence or at least maintain a long-term initiative.

An extreme form of the gambit ideal is to catch the king in the centre and drag him out into the open before other pieces are capable of protecting him.

Game 1 **A. Shirov-J. Lapinski** Daugavpils 1990

The King's Gambit in its most uncompromising form involves heavy sacrifices. It has an earnestness unspoilt by the realities of positional chess. "You tell me the weakest square in Black's position is f7. Well then, why mess about? Open the f-file and let's get at it!"

1 e4 e5 2 f4

White dislodges the pawn from e5 in order to build an unopposed centre with d2-d4. He hopes eventually to pick off the pawn with ♙xf4, when he will have the open f-file along which to attack f7 with a rook (after O-O) and a bishop (after ♗c4) and maybe a knight (after ♘f3 and then ♘e5 or ♘g5). The queen will also be expected to lend a hand in assailing the weak point.

2...exf4

Objectively this is probably the best response, but it does fall in somewhat with the

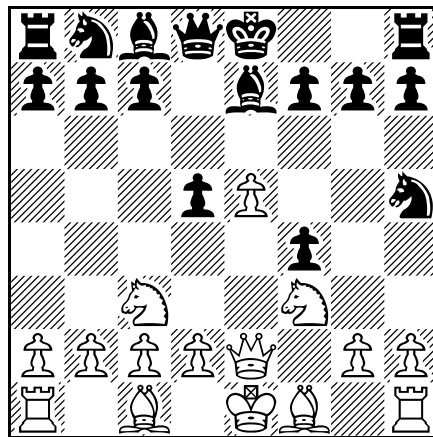
Attack!

plans of a gung-ho opponent. More 'annoying' for such a fellow would be 2...d5 leading to a different type of struggle after 3 exd5 exf4 4 ♖f3 ♖f6 5 ♙c4 ♗xd5 6 0-0 ♙e7 etc.

3 ♖f3 g5

Black is also unyielding. He not only bolsters the advanced pawn but, given the chance, intends to drive the white knight from f3 and seize the initiative himself.

The England grandmaster Mark Hebden used to be a big fan of the King's Gambit in his youth. He told me for nostalgia's sake he decided to give it one more go in a tournament as White in 2019. The game continued 3...♖f6!? 4 e5 ♗h5 and Mark was already regretting his choice because he couldn't remember any of the theory of this line. His opponent meanwhile was moving briskly and confidently. There followed 5 ♕e2 ♙e7 6 ♗c3 d5 (actually Black should castle with at least equal chances, but he sees no reason not to grab some space). Hebden sat gloomily wondering what to do about Black's looming counterplay on his centre. Then suddenly his mood brightened.



Question: Can you see what cheered Hebden up?

Answer: The move 6...d5?? was a howler as 7 exd6 ♕xd6 8 ♕b5+! won the hanging knight on h5 in M.Hebden-K.Ansmann, South Normanton 2019. Black immediately resigned. You should always watch out for double attacks by the queen in the opening.

4 ♙c4

Not being swayed from his chosen course even though it demands a piece sacrifice. Less venturesome players might prefer the variation 4 h4 g4 5 ♗e5 (it's OK to save the knight now as White's fourth move has cut out a disruptive check by the black queen on h4) 5...♖f6 6 ♙c4 d5 7 exd5 ♙d6 8 d4 ♗h5 with a messy struggle.

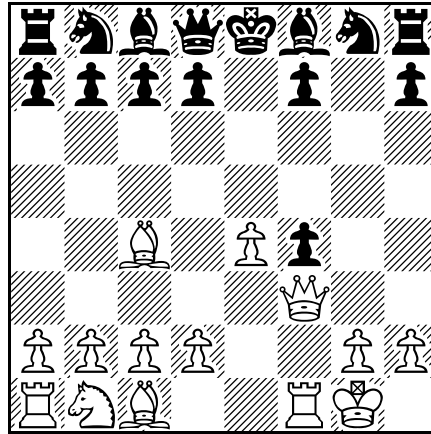
4...g4

Again the sharpest response. Black refuses to 'blink' with 4...♙g7, though after 5 d4 d6 6 0-0 h6 White would have trouble arranging a breakthrough on the f-file, whereas in the game it is handed to him on a plate.

5 0-0!

Saying farewell to the knight on f3, but White wants to keep the initiative, not concede it with 5 ♖e5 ♜h4+.

5...gxf3 6 ♜xf3



It's hard not to admire the elegant efficiency of White's build up. He has castled and brought his queen, bishop on c4 and rook on f1 into strong attacking positions. Meanwhile the black pawn stump on f4 makes a sad impression.

Nonetheless Black can point out that an extra piece is worth a lot of suffering. It is a huge material investment which will cost the game if the compensation proves insufficient.

And the compensation needed has grown in size over the decades and centuries. Nowadays everyone from the world champion to a club player is a better defender than their counterparts of 50 years ago, to say nothing of the difference compared to 100 years ago.

Question: Try to find a specific move which is Black's best response to White's build up along the f-file. What do you like about it?

Answer: 6...♜f6!

A brilliant defensive move. Firstly, Black makes a hole on d8 for the king to retreat into if necessary. Secondly he guards the vulnerable point on f7 and the barrier on f4 (in principle White won't want to exchange queens as it severely weakens his pressure on the black king). And thirdly there is the threat of 7...♜d4+, winning the bishop on c4.

Finally it is an unwritten rule that the best place for the queen is on the third rank.

7 e5!

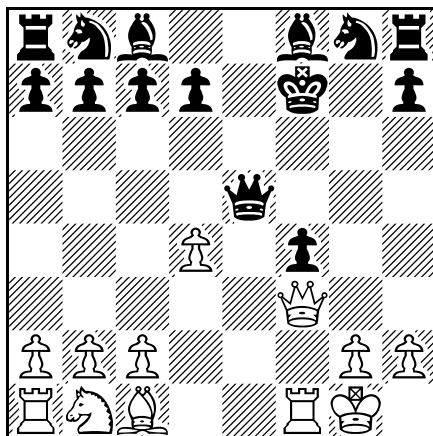
Distracting the black queen from her defence of f7 and clearing more lines as a prelude to a second major sacrifice.

7...♜xe5 8 ♖xf7+

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Throwing more wood on the fire. More restrained is 8...♙h6 9 ♘c3 ♘e7 etc, when castling kingside is already an option. Therefore White elects to give up a second piece to speed up the attack and keep the black king floating around in the centre.

8...♙xf7 9 d4!



Gaining more time for the mobilisation of the queenside pieces.

9...♙xd4?

White's lead in development and the discomfort of the black king is surely worth *one* piece, but is it really enough for *two* pieces? One of the golden rules when facing an attack with heavy sacrifices is to give back *some* material in order to draw its fangs.

The game move is one pawn grab too many. After 9...♙f5! Black is ready to develop his knight to f6 which confounds the attack. After 10 ♙xf4 Black can gradually unfold with 10...♘f6 11 ♘c3 d6 etc. So 10 g4 is the big test. The problem is that the exposed white king then becomes a resource for the defence. Following 10...♙g6! (still keeping f6 free for the knight) 11 ♙xf4 ♘f6 12 ♙e5 ♙e7 13 ♘c3 d6 14 ♙xf6 Black can exploit a possible discovered check with 14...♙xg4! (though to be honest even without this tactic 14...♙xf6 15 ♘d5 ♘d7 16 ♖ae1 ♖f8 should win for Black, but it's certainly more tricky) 15 ♙d5+ ♙e6+ 16 ♙g5 (or 16 ♙g5+ ♙g7 and g5 is pinned and hanging) 16...♙xf6! (the cleanest, though White also doesn't have enough for a piece after 16...♙xg5+ 17 ♙xg5+ ♙e8) 17 ♖xf6+ (the last try) 17...♙xf6 18 ♖f1 ♘d7 19..♖xf6+ ♘xf6. The white attack is at a standstill. Black has too much for the queen and is about to launch his counterattack against the white king.

In the cherished attacking masterpieces of the 19th century you don't get that sort of clinical defence. But back then stockfish was a type of unsalted fish not a mega-brain chess computer.

Here Lapinski seems to feel honour bound to accept every sacrifice. I doubt very much if Shirov would have chosen such a cavalier opening when facing a more experienced opponent. Indeed, it is hard to imagine anyone speculating against Kramnik in this fashion.

10 ♖e3!

Utilising the pin on the f-file.

10... ♕f6

The alternative 10... ♕g7 allows White to press on with 11 ♘c3!? ♗f6 12 ♘d5 when only a computer program could hope to defend as Black.

Question: If you've studied the analysis of 9... ♕f5 above could you outline some reasons why the black queen is worse placed on f6 than on f5?

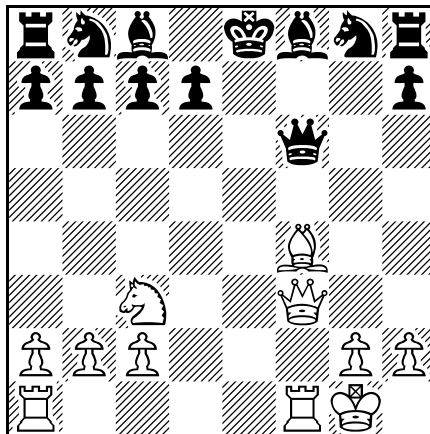
11 ♗xf4

Answer: Shirov will take full advantage of the black queen being on f6 rather than f5. It is a vital boost to his initiative that the knight is blocked from going to f6. A second blessing for him is that the queen will be vulnerable (after he develops with ♘c3) to attack by ♘d5 or ♗e4. And thirdly his own queen has access to d5 or h5 as attacking squares.

11... ♖e8

The king hopes for sanctuary on d8 but it will prove to be his tomb. It was better to stay on the kingside and try to hide behind the other pieces, though after say 11... ♗e7 12 ♘c3 ♗f5 13 ♘d5 White's attack is rampant.

12 ♘c3



12... ♘c6

The last chance was 12... ♗e7 to prevent the next move when White can build up with 13 ♖ae1 planning 14 ♘d5 etc.

13 ♘d5

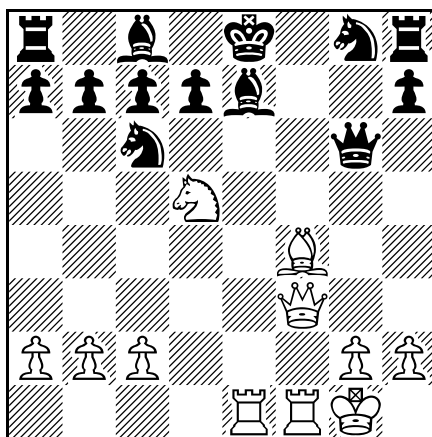
You'll see further examples in this book of the power of an unchallenged white knight on d5 or e5.

13... ♕g6 14 ♖ae1+ ♖e7

My Stockfish claims that after 14... ♗ge7 15 ♗xc7 (preparing what seems a totally killing

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check on f6) 15...d6! 16 ♖f6+ ♕f7 White has nothing better than to give perpetual check with 17 ♗d7+ ♖e8 18 ♗f6+. Of course White could still maintain the tension in other ways. Nonetheless this variation shows how very difficult it is to mate a king, even in hopeless-looking positions. It also explains why computer programs have ridiculous ratings like 3300 Elo (at the time of writing Magnus Carlsen's peak classical rating has been a lowly 2882 back in 2014). We are not only inferior to computers in technical matters such as calculation, we are also hampered by psychological baggage: I doubt any human would have any truck with a variation which sends the king into the line of fire of the white queen and rook on f1.



15 ♗d6!

A rocket-charged clearance move. The threat is immediate mate on f8.

15...♖d8

Question: Can you see two ways to clinch it?

Answer: 16 ♗f8+!

We all love a queen sacrifice. This is more elegant than 16 ♗xc7+ ♖e8 17 ♗f8 mate (note e7 is pinned).

16...♗xf8

If 16...♗e8 all the same it's 17 ♗xc7 mate.

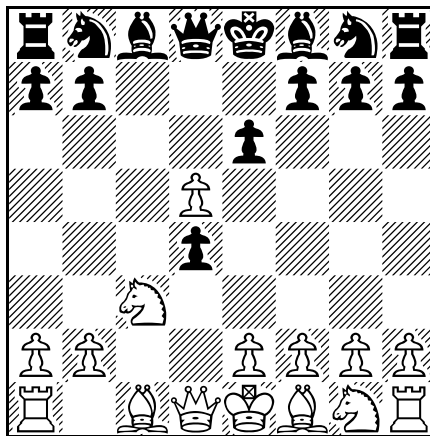
17 ♗xc7 mate

There's nothing wrong with the romantic philosophy of attacking at all costs without caring about the result. But I've found most players *do* care very much about the result. Their love for cruder gambit lines begins to wane when they start playing stronger opponents and suffer demoralising defeats. Or more likely their efforts are easily neutralised and they are dragged into dull endgames.

It has to be faced that an attacking foray which is essentially against the strategic requirements of a position can be exploited by a skilful defender. Nonetheless the Evans Gambit or King's Gambit aren't strategically wrong in themselves. They only fall short in the 'primitive' lines where White pursues an attack in reckless fashion rather than choosing a more measured option.

Game 2
Zi Han Goh-R.Pert
 London 2019

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 cxd5 cxd4



IM Richard Pert tries out the von Hennig-Schara Gambit. Evidently he hoped his ten-year-old opponent hadn't got around to studying it yet!

The zwischenzug 5 ♖a4+! would have been annoying for Black as after 5...♙d7 6 ♗xd4 he no longer has the strong reply in the game. A long theoretical line continues 6...exd5 7 ♗xd5 ♘c6 8 ♘f3 ♘f6 9 ♗d1 ♙c5 10 e3 ♗e7 11 ♙e2 0-0-0 12 0-0 g5.

5 ♗xd4?

Question: Can you suggest a way for Black to exploit the queen's early arrival on d4?

Having developed his pieces to active squares Black seeks to attack on the kingside but 13 b4! is a strong counterblow. It returns the pawn in order to open the b-file for the major pieces, clear b2 for the bishop, and, by deflecting the black bishop from c5, reduce the pressure on the white knight when it goes from f3 to d4. After 13...♙xb4 14 ♙b2 g4 15 ♘d4 ♗b8 16 ♘cb5! there are a lot more open lines around the black king than its white counterpart.

Attack!

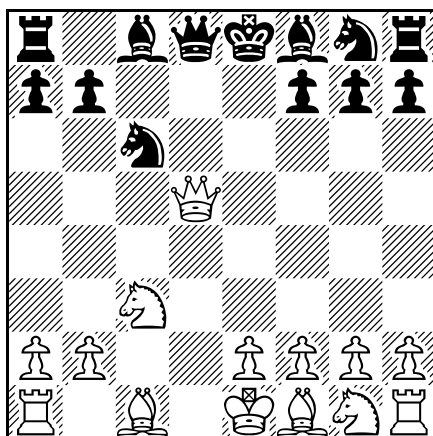
Black is far from lost but 13 b4! has clearly snatched the initiative from his hands. He had hoped that White would play some passive moves and let him build up his kingside attack in peace.

Answer: 5...♖c6!

Black gains time to develop by utilising the pin on d5. He didn't have this option in the analysis above as after 5 ♖a4+ ♕d7 6 ♖xd4 there is no pin-the bishop on d7 is stuck in the way.

6 ♖d1 exd5 7 ♖xd5

Letting the pawn live with 7 ♖f3 allows it to disrupt White's game with 7...d4, while the wet 7 e3 hands Black a lead in development and more space for free after 7...♖f6. Still White could then develop with 8 ♖f3, 9 ♕e2 and 10 0-0. As a practical decision that would have been better than grabbing the pawn and coming under a big attack.



7...♖c7!

There is an old saying that every gambit is sound in practice. We could amend it to say: every gambit is sound when the opponent hasn't analysed it before the game.

Objectively speaking White is fine, but this is a horrible position to have to muddle through if you don't come armed with opening knowledge. Fears are going to start crowding in. For example how can you avoid your queen being hounded from pillar to post? And even more terrifyingly, how can you stop Black landing a big check in your soft underbelly with ...♖b4 and ...♖c2, when the king is driven into the open?

Ask a computer program these two questions and the answer you will get is: easily! At the last moment when ♖c2 is about to cause a massacre our silicon friend will show us a neat little move to keep out the horse. It will allay our anxiety over the queen by guiding her calmly through a series of prods by the black pieces towards an unlikely shelter. There's no problem playing as White here if you are nerveless and can calculate umpteen moves ahead without making any errors: in other words exactly what a human player is not.

8 ♖b5?

White doesn't have time for this manoeuvre when he has no kingside pieces in play. After 8 ♖f3 he can weave his way to safety: 8...♗f6 (or 8...♗b4 9 ♕d1! ♗f6 10 e4 and Black won't be able to invade on c2) 9 ♕g5! (a pretty 'unhuman' post for the queen!)

If now 9...h6?! 10 ♕f4! (gaining time by hitting the enemy queen) 10...♕d8 11 ♕b5! and having oscillated the queen on the fifth rank White is ready to develop with 12 e3 etc. In reply to 11...♕d7 most humans would settle for 12 ♕b3, but a computer will tell you, nope, don't be modest, just play 12 ♕xb7! – it's better to be two pawns up than one.

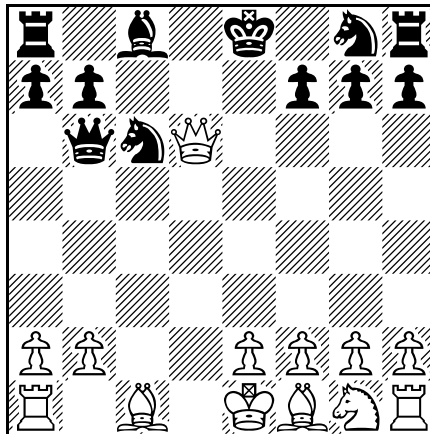
Instead after 9...♗b4?! 10 ♕f4! ♕b6 (here 10...♗c2+? 11 ♖d1 ♕b6 12 ♖xc2 would do very nicely for White) 11 ♖c1 the c2-square is secure.

So Black should give up on trying to land a tactical blow and mobilise his pieces e.g. 9...♕e6 10 e3 ♖d8 (here 10...♗b4 still rebounds after 11 ♕b5+) 11 ♕e2 ♕e7 12 0-0 (not 12 ♕xg7 as 12...♖g8 13 ♕h6 ♖xg2 favours Black) 12...0-0 13 ♗b5 ♕d7 14 ♗fd4. White is under some pressure due to the superior coordination of the black pieces (he has a bishop still stuck on c1 and his queen remains out on a limb) but his king is safe and he still has an extra pawn. It is dynamically equal.

8...♕b6 9 ♗d6+?!

Carrying out his fatal plan. Here my computer suggests 9 ♕e4+ ♕e6 10 ♗c3 ♗f6 11 ♕b1! which solves the problem of the weak c2-square and the wandering queen at the same time. But I doubt many humans would want to retreat their knight back to c3, let alone envisage putting their queen on b1 (Black would have a strong initiative after 11...♕b4 etc.).

9...♕xd6 10 ♕xd6



Question: Can you see the refutation of White's play?

Answer: 10...♗d4!

Finally Black gets to land a bloody blow against c2. Unusually the exchange of queens

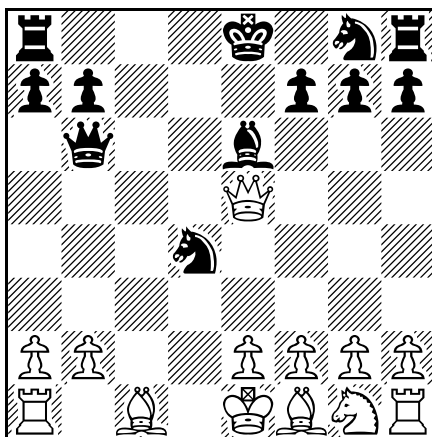
Attack!

would empower Black's initiative rather than dampen it down. Pert chooses d4 for his knight as following 10...♘b4 11 ♖xb6 axb6 12 ♔d1 White can squirm on, though 12...♙e6 is still highly unpleasant for him.

11 ♗e5+

After 11 ♖xb6 axb6 12 ♔d1 (or 12 ♖b1 ♙f5 etc.) White has covered the c2-square, but disaster now strikes with 12...♘b3! exploiting the pin on a2. Black wins the exchange whilst keeping up his attack with 13 ♖b1 ♙f5 14 axb3 ♙xb1. Goh rightly decides it's better to face a raging attack on his king than simplify to a losing endgame against a much higher-rated player as there's (very slightly) more chance of Black messing it up.

11...♙e6



12 ♗xg7

There's no good defence, e.g. after 12 ♖b1 ♘f6 13 e3 ♘c2+ 14 ♔d1 0-0! you really don't have to calculate that much as Black here. It would be very strange if the white king managed to fend off the attack of all the black pieces whilst walking around in the centre. Play can continue 15 ♔xc2 ♖ac8+ 16 ♔d1 ♖fd8+ 17 ♙d2 (or 17 ♔e2 ♙g4+ 18 f3 ♖c2+ 19 ♔e1 ♗b4+ and White is reduced to 20 ♗c3 giving up the queen to stay alive a little longer) 17...♖xd2+ 18 ♔xd2 ♗b4+ 19 ♔d1 ♘e4 threatening mate on d2. White has an extra rook but what good does it do when his kingside is still asleep and his king is wide open? 20 ♗d4 ♙g4+ 21 f3 ♘f2+ 22 ♔e2 ♖c2+ and mate next move.

12...0-0-0!

A powerful castling which threatens mate in one.

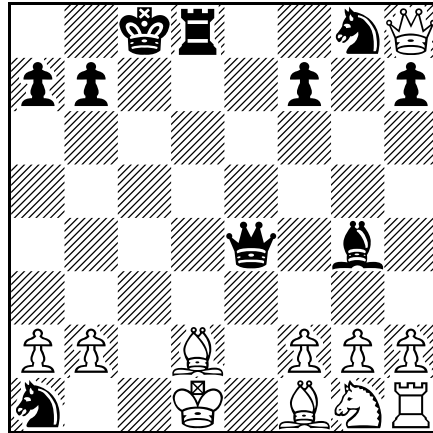
13 e4 ♗b4+ 14 ♙d2 ♘c2+ 15 ♔e2 ♗xe4+ 16 ♔d1

Or 16 ♙e3 ♙c4 mate.

16...♘xa1

It feels rather pedantic to point out that there is a faster mate with 16...♗e1+ 17 ♔xc2 ♗xd2+ 18 ♔b1 ♗d1.

17 ♗xh8 ♙g4+! 0-1



There are other ways force mate but the bishop check is instructive as it obliges White to block a possible escape route for his king via f3. Here's a pretty finish: 18 ♖f3 ♔c2+ 19 ♔e1 ♚xd2+! 20 ♗xd2 ♘c2 mate.

An energetic attack by Pert and a lesson in the dangers of accepting a gambit if unprepared.

All the details matter

In one of his books IM Bill Hartston talks about luck in chess. If I remember correctly, the example he gives is of a player as White starting a complex tactical sequence which lasts many moves. Eventually the murky fight burns out to a simple position. White then wins because he has a pawn on h3. If the pawn had been on h2 he would have lost. He couldn't have known the massive effect this small difference would have when he started to play sharply. In other words he was lucky!

Many combinations succeed or falter due to one tiny detail, but it's a moot point whether you can blame luck. I don't remember Kasparov being unlucky when he launched attacks with sacrifices which couldn't be calculated to an end. His intuition seemed to tell him if the little details would work out for him.

I assume Hartston chose a pawn being on h3 rather than h2 to illustrate his point as it feels such an insignificant difference. But we can easily imagine White's success in a middlegame attack being dependent on whether he has found time for h2-h3 to make a hole for his king. If he has not then Black might suddenly launch a saving (or winning) counterattack based on a back rank mate. But was White unlucky, or did he commit himself without taking a sensible precaution?

I was reminded of the importance of small details when I examined the following fantastical (I've chosen that word carefully) game between two well-known master players of the 1920s.

Game 3
E.Steiner-E.Colle
 Budapest 1926

1 e4 ♘f6!?

Something of a trendy move at the time as it had been adopted by Alekhine, after whom the defence is now named, only five years earlier in 1921. And the very first player the world champion had beaten with his new opening was ... Endre Steiner.

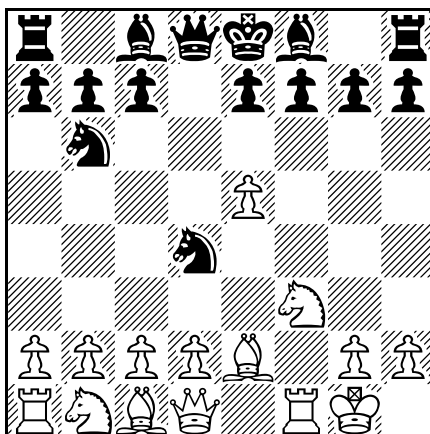
2 e5 ♘d5 3 ♙c4

Diverging from 3 d4 which he played against Alekhine.

3...♞b6 4 ♙e2 d6 5 f4 ♞c6 6 ♞f3 dxе5

Beginning to play with fire. Development with 6...♙f5 7 d4 e6 8 0-0 ♙e7 was a safe approach.

7 fxе5 ♞d4 8 0-0!?

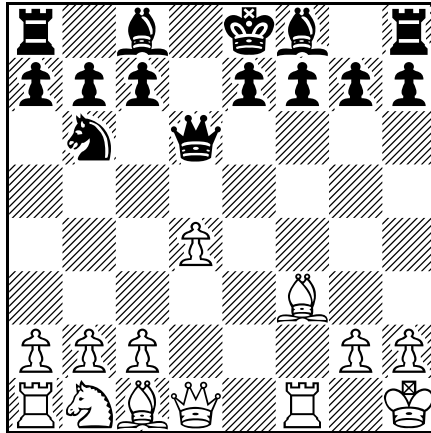


Steiner offers a pawn to speed up his development.

8...♞xf3+?

Acceptance of the gambit is far too dangerous. It wasn't too late for 8...♙f5 and 9...e6 with a reasonable game.

9 ♙xf3 ♙d4+ 10 ♙h1 ♙xe5 11 d4 ♙d6



12 c4

A vigorous alternative was piece play with 12 ♘f4! ♕d7 (to deter ♖b5 after White's next move. Not 12...♗xf4? 12 ♘c6+ winning the queen) 13 ♖c3 when Black has difficulty developing as 13...e6 14 d5! breaks open lines while 13...g6 is also unsatisfactory: 14 a4!? (threatening to trap the knight with 15 a5 and also creating a base on b5 for his own horse – hence Black's reply) 14...c6 15 a5 ♖d5 16 ♘xd5! cxd5 17 ♗f3 ♘g7 (the weakness of f7 means that Black is already doomed after 17...e6? 18 ♘e5 ♗g8 19 ♖b5!) 18 ♖xd5 and White has regained his pawn with a strong attack.

12...♕d7

Avoiding 12...♖xc4? which costs a piece after 13 ♗a4+.

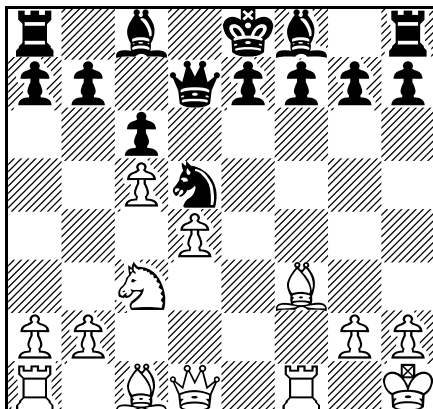
13 ♖c3 c6

Colle declines the second pawn offer as following 13...♖xc4 14 ♘f4 White's lead in development has increased and he will gain even more time by kicking the knight with 15 ♕e2.

14 c5!

Also very strong is 14 d5! cxd5 (the computer suggestion 14...f6 is far from inspiring after 15 ♕e2) 15 c5! when the black horse no longer has the d5-square. Then 15...d4 16 cxb6 dxc3 17 ♗b3! (with ideas against the f7-square) 17...e6 18 ♗d1 ♕e7 19 ♗xc3 leaves Black in a total mess with two pieces blocking his king from castling to safety.

14...♖d5



Question: What's the best way to get the white queen into the attack?

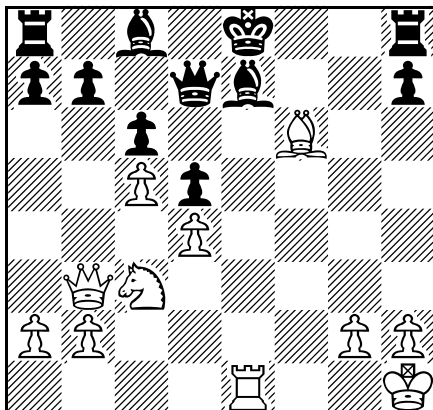
15 ♖b3?

Answer: Instead 15 ♕xd5! cxd5 16 ♖h5 e6 (or 16...g6 17 ♖e5 attacking h8 and planning 18 ♘xd5 would be winning for White) 17 ♕d2 leaves Black in deep trouble. It's best not to rush things when simple development leaves the opponent to stew. Just how is Black going to get his pieces out or evacuate his king from the centre? He can't develop his bishop to e7 without dropping f7. If he tries 17...g6 then 18 ♖e5 will ensure he doesn't get to castle kingside.

15...e6 16 ♕xd5 exd5 17 ♕g5 f6 18 ♖ae1+ ♕e7

With Black about to castle Steiner's initiative is flagging. He might continue 19 ♕f4 0-0 20 ♘e4 and 21 ♘d6 when he'd have some compensation for the missing pawn. Instead he tried the enterprising (and entirely wrong) sacrifice.

19 ♖xf6 gxf6 20 ♕xf6

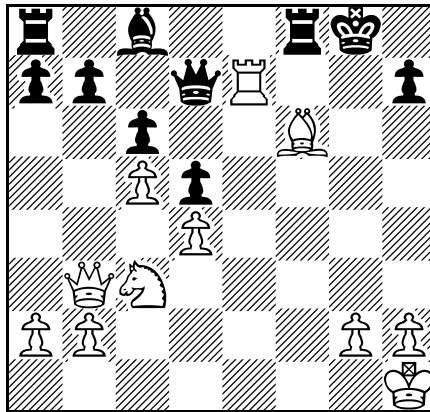


Question: At first glance it all seems over for Black as catastrophe is about to follow on e7. But how can he refute White's combination?

Answer: 20...0-0!

Exactly. Castling removes the king from the pin on the e-file and so makes White's weak back rank the key tactical factor. Not good enough would be 20...♖f8 with the same idea as after 21 ♕xe7! ♜xe7?! (he's busted anyhow) 22 ♜xe7+ Black is in check and has no time to play 22...♗f1 mate. You might expect Steiner to slap his forehead in disgust and then resign, but instead he continued serenely with...

21 ♜xe7



Question: Hopefully one of the easier puzzles in the book. Black to play and win.

21...♜xf6

Answer: The first oddity. This is good enough to win a rook(!), but you'd expect Colle to play 21...♜xe7 in a flash, when 22 ♕xe7 ♜f1 is mate, while otherwise Black pockets the bishop on f6 as well, leaving him with two extra rooks.

22 ♜xd7!?

The second eccentricity. But well, we might conclude that Steiner is annoyed with himself for his blunder and is letting Black mate him. In any case there was little point playing on a rook down after 22 ♜e1.

22...♕xd7

And now things are getting truly bizarre. Both players are missing mate in one!

23 ♖e4 ♜f7

The last moment of madness, after which the game follows a logical course again – or at least for a couple of moves.

24 ♜g3+ ♜g7 25 ♖f6+ ♜h8 26 ♜e5 ♕h3 27 ♖h5 1-0

Attack!

Anyone prefer 27 gxf3, winning a piece for nothing?

An unusual time to resign, as 27... ♗xg2+ 28 ♔g1 ♖ag8 29 ♘xg7 ♗xg7 he can fight on, though 30 ♖b8+ ♗g8 31 ♖xb7 would eventually win.

Was that really Endre Steiner playing White, a player who won two board medals at Olympiads for Hungary, against Edgar Colle playing Black, the Belgian master and inventor of an opening system named after him? Yes indeed. The logical parts of the game attest to the high level of understanding of both players. But we still need an explanation for the absurd parts. I'll quote from the *Oxford Companion to Chess*:

"(after 13...c6) Steiner accidentally knocked his king off the board with his coat sleeve and replaced it on g1."

Aha.

If you play through the game again, but this time putting the king on g1, you'll see that all the moves make sense. Black has no back rank resource: Steiner's sacrifice with 19 ♗xf6! is sound as well as imaginative, and Colle's moves make the best of a bad lot. At the end 26... ♗h3 doesn't just drop a piece as with the king on g1 the bishop can't be captured. And Black was well advised to resign, because 27... ♗xg2 doesn't save the bishop with check, so 28 ♖xg7 mate is possible in reply.

You might be wondering what happened when the misplacement of the white king was discovered after the game. The result was allowed to stand, despite Colle's appeal.

This is a curious anecdote from chess history, but it illustrates a very serious point about chess strategy. All the details matter. Shifting a piece from one square to another might seem of trifling significance, but it can change the assessment of a position. A sacrifice such as 19 ♗xf6 can be splendid with the king on g1, but a crass oversight with the king on h1. The same can apply to tiny differences in a pawn structure. Many times a black king's defences are rock solid when he has a pawn on h7; push the pawn to h6 and suddenly there is a hook for a white piece sacrifice with ♗xh6! or perhaps a target for a white pawn when it advances with g4-g5.

Going back to Bill Hartston, if he saw this game he'd probably make some notes for a new edition of his 1970s book *How to Cheat at Chess*!

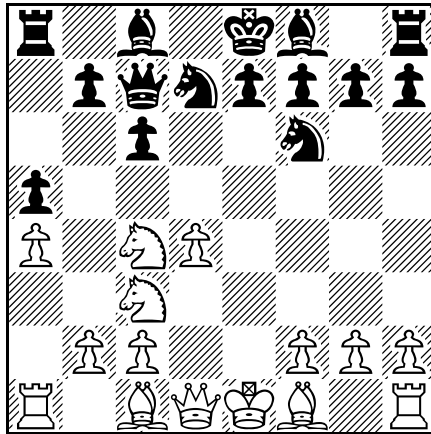
So far we have looked at games in which a sacrifice tempted the defender from the straight and narrow. No such provocation was needed in the following two examples. Black brings down an attack on his king's head by wasting a precious tempo on a luxury pawn move rather than developing a piece.

Game 4
M.Carlsen-A.Utegaliyev
Moscow 2019

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖xd5 3 ♘c3 ♖d6

A perfectly acceptable system which imbalances the game from the start. Magnus Carlsen has used it as Black himself, though mostly in rapid and blitz games. We could debate the wisdom of playing one of the world champion's favoured opening lines against him (it might even be a good idea as he might not want to reveal what he thinks is the best response to it!)

4 d4 c6 5 ♘f3 ♘f6 6 ♘e5 ♘bd7 7 ♘c4 ♚c7 8 a4 a5?



Question: What is the best way for White to build up his initiative?

If you adopt a sharp opening line you need to be well-versed in the theory, as the game move is a significant loss of time. It is true it stops White gaining any more space on the queenside, which is a noble aim. However, the position is not quiet enough to permit Black the extravagance of a non-developing move. He is after all still three moves from castling kingside. The usual moves are 8...♗b6 or 8...g6.

Answer: 9 ♚f3!

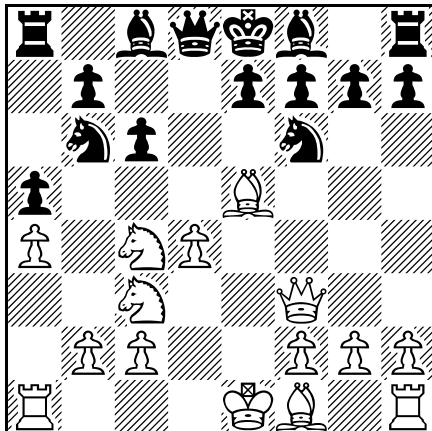
White's queen enters the struggle and supports his next move when he gains further time for his initiative.

9...♗b6

The natural developing move 9...e6 already runs into trouble after 10 ♙f4 ♚d8 11 ♘d6+ ♙xd6 12 ♙xd6 when White's monster of a bishop on d6 keeps the black king stuck in the centre.

10 ♙f4 ♚d8 11 ♙e5

Not only defending d4 but also with the less apparent aim of hampering the development of Black's kingside.



Question: With that in mind can you see a cracking response to 11...g6, planning 12...♗g7 to get the bishop out?

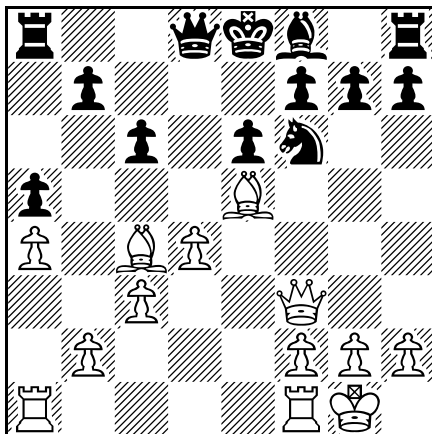
11...♞bd5

Answer: Resigning (and accepting stoically that the game is going to be published everywhere) would be the least bad option for Black after 11...g6? 12 ♖d6+! seeing that 12...exd6 13 ♗xf6 or 12...♙d7 13 ♞xf7 both cost him a rook.

12 ♞xd5 ♞xd5 13 c3

Preparing his next move without letting Black molest the bishop with 14...♞b4. Carlsen realises he doesn't need to hurry: his Kazakhstani opponent will be forced to weaken himself at some point to shake off the pressure on g7.

13...♞f6 14 ♗d3 ♗e6 15 0-0 ♗xc4 16 ♗xc4 e6



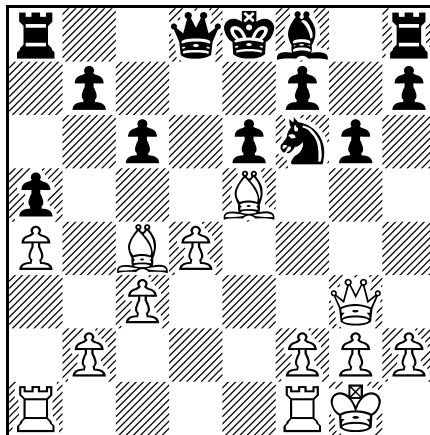
Question: Black hopes that by conceding the bishop pair he has bought himself time to complete his kingside development with 17...♗e7 and 18...0-0. Can you see how Carlsen proved him wrong?

Answer: 17 ♖g3!

To paraphrase the great world champion Emanuel Lasker, there are three types of chess moves: developing moves, those which increase the power of your pieces, and those which stop the opponent's pieces doing stuff. By attacking g7 Carlsen prevents the bishop on f8 from entering the game as 17...♗e7 18 ♖xg7 ♖g8 19 ♗h6 is awful for Black (though I could imagine Carlsen flummoxing an opponent in a blitz game if he were playing Black with 19...♗d7!? and then an attack down the g-file!).

17...g6

Utregaliyev switches to Development Plan B: a fianchetto on g7.



Question: Here's a question I don't get to ask often: can you find a powerful tactic for White which Carlsen missed?

18 f4

Answer: To be fair it was a rapidplay game, but Carlsen could have crashed through in the centre if he had found 18 d5!! White breaks through what appears to be the most secure square in the black centre. Now 18...♗xd5 fails at once to 19 ♗xh8. After 19...exd5 20 ♖fe1! the opening of the e-file is decisive – the black king can't flee the 21 ♗xf6+ discovered check with 20...♗d7 as 21 ♗h3+ drags him back, while 20...♗e4 does no good as 21 ♗xh8 leaves the knight on e4 pinned. Finally 18...cxd5 keeps the e-file closed but opens up a lethal diagonal after 19 ♗b5+ ♖e7. Now 20 ♗c7! wins the black queen as after 20...♗c8 21 ♗d6 is mate.

Attack!

After 18 d5!! objectively best for Black is 18...♗g7 19 dxe6 0-0, giving up material in order to castle. But White can do even better than 20 exf7+ with 20 ♖fe1! for example 20... fxe6 21 ♗c7! ♖h5 22 ♗xd8 ♖xg3 23 ♗e7 and Black will suffer severe losses.

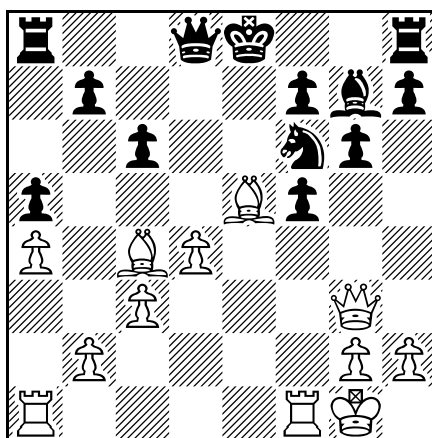
18...♗g7?

An obvious reply which allows White gets to catch the king in the centre after all. Much more resistant was 18...♗e7! which misplaces the bishop but stops it from becoming a target on g7. After 19 ♖ae1 0-0 20 f5 exf5 21 ♖xf5 etc. Carlsen would have all his pieces poised for the attack, but it's much nicer for Black to have the king behind a wall of pawns on g8 than stranded on a draughty centre square.

19 f5!

In the event of 18...♗e7 19 f5? Black could have kept the centre blocked with 19...gxf5, whereas now this would drop the bishop on g7.

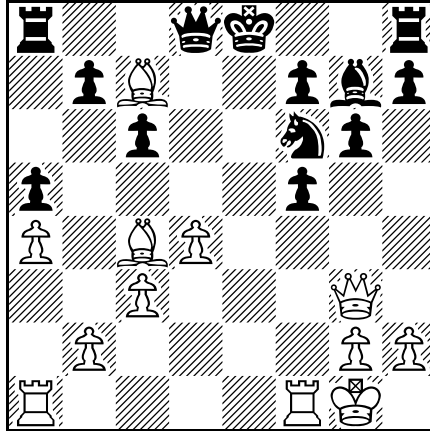
19...exf5



Question: How does White stop Black castling and enjoying his extra pawn?

Answer: 20 ♗c7!

The direct 20 ♗d6 would be pretty effective after 20...♖e4? 21 ♖ae1 etc. though not as strong as the game move. But 20...♗d7!! would be a fly in the ointment. If then 21 ♖ae1 ♖e4? allows the crushing 22 ♖xe4 fxe4 23 ♖xf7+, but 21...♖h5! forces the queen away, say 22 ♖e3, when 22...♗xd6 pockets a piece (the black king isn't quite out of the woods but this would be a disaster for White). The game move is far more effective as it clears the e-file with gain of time.



Question: If you fancy a tactical exercise, you might like to work out the best responses to 20...♖h5, 20...♗e4 and 20...♚d7.

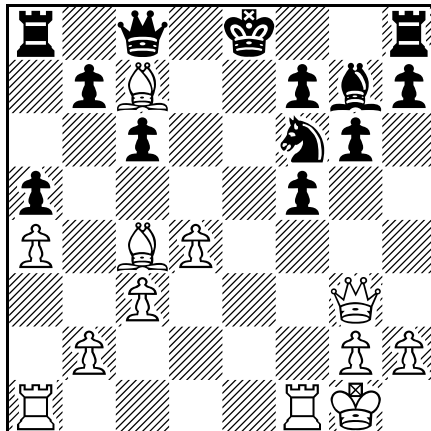
Answer: White emerges a piece up after 20...♗h5 21 ♖ae1+ (either rook will do) 21...♔f8 (or 21...♔d7 22 ♚d6+♔c8 23 ♗xd8 wins) 22 ♗xd8 ♗xg3 23 ♗e7+ ♔g8 24 hxg3.

Instead 20...♗e4 21 ♖ae1 ♗e7 22 ♖xe4 fxe4 (or 22...♗xe4 23 ♖e1) 23 ♗xf7+ ♗xf7 24 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 25 ♗f4+ ♔g8 26 ♗xe4 gives White a winning initiative with the immediate threat of mate in two beginning 27 ♗e6+. Though this line might be Black's best option as White still has work to do after say 26...♔f7 27 ♗f4+ ♔g8 28 ♚d6 h5 30 ♗xg6 ♖f8 31 ♗e5 ♖h7 31 h3 etc.

Finally if 20...♚d7 21 ♖ae1+ ♔f8 (it's the same old story after 21...♗e4 22 ♖xe4+ fxe4 23 ♗xf7+ etc.) 22 ♗d6+ ♔g8 23 ♖e7 attacking the queen and threatening to mate with 24 ♗xf7+. It is to avoid this double attack in the game Black chose c8 for his queen rather than d7, but it doesn't help him much.

20...♚c8

Question: Now 21 ♖ae1+ ♔f8 22 ♚d6+ ♔g8 23 ♖e7 would do the business for White, but can you see a more incisive way to conclude the attack? (the answer is revealed by the next move).



Answer: 21 ♔d6!

Not letting the black king budge from e8.

21...♘e4 22 ♖ae1

Question: What is White's threat? And try to figure out the most decisive reply to 22...♗f8 – you might find it in a flash but it looks a bit weird to me!

22...♔d7

Answer: Black blocks 23 ♖xe4+! fxe4 24 ♙xf7 mate. Instead 22...♗f8 defends f7 but 23 ♗f4! leaves Black with no way to stop 24 ♗fxe4+ fxe4 25 ♖xe4+ with a quick mate (do you also think 23 ♗f4 is rather odd? I guess I'm not used to putting rooks on that square, especially in order to go sideways).

23 ♖xe4+!

Our familiar breakthrough to conquer the f7-square.

23...fxe4 24 ♙xf7+ ♗xf7 25 ♖xf7 ♙xf7 26 ♔d7+ 1-0

It's mate in two with 26...♙f8 27 ♙d6+ ♙g8 28 ♗e6, while after 26...♙f6 27 ♙e5+ the computer tells me it's mate in eight moves, but Black doesn't need to look any further than the loss of his bishop to know it's time to resign.

Apart from the hiccup at move 18 – and we can't expect perfection even from the world champion in a rapidplay game – this was an excellent lesson in attacking chess. It shows the danger of indulging in slow moves such as 8...a5 when you haven't castled and the situation in the centre isn't fixed. This lapse meant that Black had to play the entire game against one of the greatest players in chess history without moving his rooks even once. It's no wonder the defence was hopelessly outnumbered.