

Cyrus Lakdawala

Carlsen

move by move



EVERYMAN CHESS

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www.everymanchess.com

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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 30 years and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

Also by the Author:

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Contents

About the author	3
Series Foreword	5
Bibliography	6
Introduction	7
1 Carlsen on the Attack	23
2 Carlsen on Defence and Counterattack	88
3 Carlsen on the Dynamic Element	166
4 Carlsen on Exploiting Imbalances	231
5 Carlsen on Accumulating Advantages	294
6 Carlsen on Endgames	357
Index of Openings	428
Index of Complete Games	429

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(Ishi Press International 2013)

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Chess Life Magazine

New In Chess Magazine, with annotations by Magnus Carlsen, Vladimir Kramnik, Simen Agdestein and Jon Ludvig Hammer

Online

Chess Today, with annotations by Maxim Notkin, Vladimir Barsky, Mikhail Golubev, Ruslan Sherbakov, Jacob Aagaard and Alex Baburin

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Chesspub, with annotations by Tony Kosten, John Watson, John Emms, Maxim Notkin and Glenn Flear

Introduction

"Any fool can make something complicated. It takes a genius to make it simple."

– Woody Guthrie

Each world champion brings forth new wonders of his mind. When we examine the games of a great player, what we really desire is to share in the flow of genius, from his mind to ours. We crave the paradisiacal taste of beauty, which most of us try and produce, and so rarely do in our games. When we arrive in critical situations in our games we come close to being Rembrandts and da Vincis, close to producing a masterpiece, if only we achieve that rapturous final touch of colour, but we just can't seem to get it right. We all have our favourites, and seek to play like replica Morphys, Laskers, Alekhines, Capablanca, Tals, Fischers, Kasparovs or Carlsens.

Only three players in the history of chess were born with the faculty of near-omniscient intuition: Morphy, Capablanca and Fischer. Now it's time to add a fourth name to the list: Sven Magnus Øen Carlsen was born November 30, 1990 in Tønsberg, Norway.

I find it hard to believe that I'm writing a book on a kid my son's age, whose staggering achievements by age 23 stunned the chess world. At an age when most others have their mind on the next college dorm party, Carlsen is the reigning world chess champion. And not just any champion, but a once-in-a-generation anomaly/genius, whose thought patterns may radically alter the game.

When Magnus was just two years old, he was capable of solving a 50-piece jigsaw puzzle. At age four, he competently corralled entire Lego sets, which were designed for children between the ages of 10 to 14. Then world chess history was altered when Magnus' father bought him Bent Larsen's book *Find the Plan*. As you may have guessed, the young Magnus displayed startling aptitude for chess, even more than jigsaw puzzles or Lego sets. Magnus was no monomaniacal little Alekhine or Fischer. Astoundingly, he only studied about three hours a day, and had many other interests, like football (soccer for us Americans), skiing and comic books (now this is my kind of world champion!). One wonders just how strong he would be if he had the Alekhine/Fischer obsessive personality.

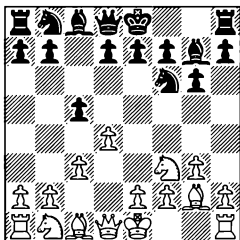
GM Simen Agdestein, in his book *How Magnus Carlsen Became the Youngest Chess Grandmaster in the World: The Story and the Games* (the entire book feels like it is compacted in the title alone!), writes about how at the 2002 Norwegian Championship finals, an older man saw a boy running around the playing area and demanded that he leave the

area. It had to be explained to him that the boy was Magnus Carlsen, age 11, who had every right to be there, since he qualified for his country's championship.

From a rating perspective, Carlsen entered the rarefied atmosphere of the World's elite by the time he barely entered his teens. In his early years, when Carlsen went through his romanticist period, he focused mainly on attack. To a child, an adult is seemingly omniscient. Then when that same child grows up, he or she may think about that same adult from the past, and realize he or she was a complete dolt. From the wise perch of age, when we look back on the chess of our youth, we wince painfully upon reviewing our bone-headed early games. Carlsen will probably never experience this particular agony, since he was the first player in history to achieve the astounding feat of earning a number one world chess ranking as a teenager, at age 19.

I think the way he regards his rivals is: "I view you as an enemy, but not a threat." Carlsen gives the impression of a person of utter ordinariness, who is stress-free at the board (obviously a mirage), and of a person who is thinking about his upcoming vacation, rather than one straining at the board. He finds himself in that rare category of world champions who emit humility. Morphy, Lasker, Euwe, Spassky and Anand are the others who come to mind (although some would disqualify Morphy, since he wasn't officially a world champion), not to be confused with low self-esteem.

The Larsen Opening Playbook



The opening of a chess game is a realm of rules within rules – which is perhaps why some with a creative inclination chafe at the rigidity and choose to bend the rules to their liking. If you were the world chess champion and played one of your main rivals for first place in the final round, would you open a chess game 1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 g3 ♙g7 4 ♙g2 c5 5 c3, as Carlsen did as White, in his critical final round game versus Caruana, at the Gashimov Memorial?

In a group email, my friend IM Tony Saidy described Carlsen's choice as "craven". Some

GMs, like Evgeny Sveshnikov, have also criticized Carlsen's opening play. GM Yasser Seirawan and I defended Carlsen's opening play. I ask: why is it deemed cowardice if we bypass opening theory and make it a contest of pure chess skill, removing opening preparation and computers from the equation? A great chess player's ideas don't die when he or she does. I just finished a book on Bent Larsen, who did exactly that his entire career – and nobody can call him a coward. And I can say the same of Carlsen, as well. I view Carlsen's opening choices as a pure spirit in an otherwise debauched opening theory-loving world, and rejoice in his vision as an iconoclastic outlook which spits in theory's face.

Carlsen refuses to submit to the tyranny of conformity in the early part of the game (at least most of the time). He isn't a believer in the conveyor-belt system of opening study, where everyone agrees to play the same fashionable line, in perfect symmetry with their opponents. Wikipedia says of Carlsen's opening play: "He does not focus on opening preparation as much as other top players, and plays a variety of openings, making it harder for opponents to prepare against him."

How can a World Champion not be in tune with the most worshipped part of our game – opening theory? So the question arises: why would a player like Carlsen, whose mind is a compendium of opening knowledge, deliberately bypass this phase of the game? Perhaps this is why some with a creative inclination, like Larsen and Carlsen, arc it to their liking. Today's computer-generated opening lines are a kind of boot camp, which prepares us for the real battle over the board, with flesh-and-blood opponents. Carlsen, by reverting to Larsen's opening playbook, simply wants to remove computers and homework from the equation.

The Anand Match

In 2013, Carlsen defeated then world champion Vishy Anand by a lopsided score of 6½-3½, winning games five, six and nine, without a single loss. His match strategy was to defang Anand out of the opening, virtually attempting to bypass that entire region, with milque-toast opening lines with White and Black (please see Larsen's Opening Playbook). Then Carlsen played as safely as possible, attempting to not lose, more than to win. He then just picked up a game here and a game there, winning the match with apparent ease.

Anand came back strongly, shocking the world by winning the Candidates' tournament decisively, thus earning the right to a rematch, which is scheduled for November 2014. My prediction is that Anand, having learned painful lessons from the Chennai match, will not lose this time without a fight, and will somehow adjust his own match strategy. Will it be enough to dethrone Carlsen? I could be wrong, but I doubt it. The FIDE rating system is a rather accurate gauge of strength, and Carlsen's towering, near-2900 rating makes his defeat unlikely – although not impossible. Also, in world championship matches, there are x-factors like nerves, how well a player sleeps, and if a player remains healthy throughout the match.

In June 2014, Carlsen added both the rapid and blitz world championships to his growing portfolio of world titles. In the rapid he scored 11 out of 15, to take clear first, with

eight wins, six draws and a lone loss – to Anand (!), who tied for second place, a half point behind, along with Caruana and Morozevich. So I wouldn't be too quick to count Anand out in their upcoming rematch.

Carlsen's Strengths

Where to begin!? There are so many of them!

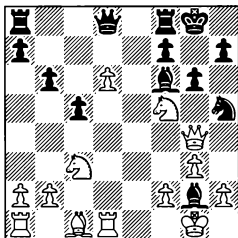
1. Planning and Assessments

The art of assessment is simply the skill of correctly weighing this against that. In every complex position there are two truths:

i. The outward appearance, which allows us a general (if superficial) understanding of our overall plan.

ii. The position's actual hidden reality, which we limited humans rarely discover over the board. Carlsen is never satisfied with the former, of mere appearance, and possesses a fundamental probing mechanism which allows him to access the true mode. Even in the most baffling positions, Carlsen manages to harness his intellect to a single, essential guiding plan or idea (and even when he is unable to decipher a position's ultimate truth, then he makes do with a provisional truth), while many opponents grope blindly. I am convinced it is this element in Carlsen's play which is why he is the reigning world champion.

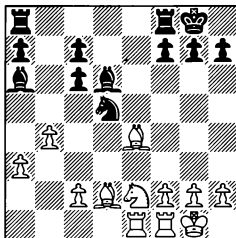
Carlsen's planning ability is the kind which is obvious to a point, yet completely opaque to scrutiny after that point. He simply spots subtleties and anomalous geometries which few in the world comprehend.



In this position as White, against Ivanchuk at the Melody Amber rapid tournament, Carlsen has just moved his knight from d4 to f5, handing Black both bishop-pair and control over the seemingly deadly h1-a8 diagonal. As it turned out, Carlsen's attack was faster. How he understood this, I can't say. He just knew. His assessments are sunken grandeur, like a pirate ship's treasure, now at the ocean's floor.

2. Strategic understanding

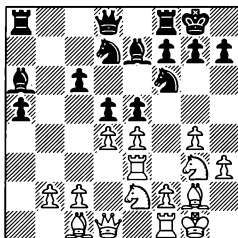
In some positions, it is as if only Carlsen can hear the music, while others only experience silence. Each tiny, incremental gain feeds into the strategic collective. In the most barren of positions, or ones which lack reassuring lines of reference, Carlsen spots geometric anomalies, which the rest of us never dreamed even existed.



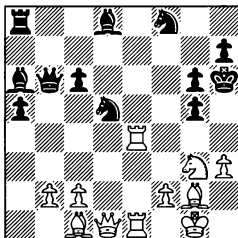
This is Carlsen-Caruana, from their 2011 Biel encounter. It appears as if Black exerts considerable pressure on White's position – until Carlsen's move is revealed. He responded with the startling 19 Qd4! , after which he picked up a pawn, the bishop-pair and a light-square bind for the exchange. Caruana was unable to save the game from that point on.

3. Initiative and Attack

Absolute intemperance when it came to offering material was one of Tal's most endearing traits. Carlsen has this Tal-like trait: when he is wrong about an idea, he tends to be aggressively wrong, unafraid of the consequences of his previous actions. In other words, he sometimes overreaches in attempting to recreate the wheel. For example:



In this position as White against Radjabov, from Biel, 2007, Carlsen violated a middle-game taboo, by lifting his rook into a crowded intersection. In this case, Carlsen really did reinvent the wheel. His incredibly risky idea paid off when the following position was reached later in the game:

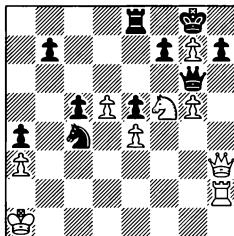


Here Carlsen found an elegant knockout blow (I won't say what the move is, because it is a combination alert exercise from Chapter One).

Carlsen doesn't attack as often as he did in his youth, but when he does, he never holds back. Remember his awful loss as White to Svidler in the final round of the 2013 Candidates' tournament (Carlsen was unbelievably lucky that Kramnik lost that round as well, with the black pieces to Ivanchuk, otherwise Kramnik would have been Anand's challenger).

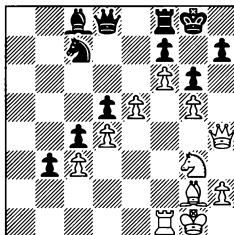
4. Defence

Survival of an ordeal offers its own perverse satisfaction, which comes to those who cheat death. On defence, Carlsen is equipped with a genetically coded survival apparatus, which keeps him breathing in positions where all others would drown. Currently I would place him as the premier defensive player in the world.



The once powerful wizard's thaumaturgic abilities appear on the wane, as Black's spells sputter and cough. Carlsen found himself in this utterly wretched position versus an enraged Hikaru Nakamura. Houdini assesses at +15.85 – about two queens up for White. I really can't explain how Carlsen managed to win such a position against world-class opposition.

When playing for a win, Carlsen is rarely afraid to risk all on a single game. He tends to push forward with an almost egoless courage – unafraid of loss and refusing to waste energy protecting his reputation of invincibility.



Carlsen was Black in the ninth game in Chennai, against a desperate world champion. Anand was down two games, with time running out, so this was his kitchen sink effort. White plans the simple ♖h6, followed by ♜f4 and ♜h4, with mate on h7. The comps tell us the game is even with perfect play. Carlsen kept up his end, defending perfectly, and it was Anand who went astray, losing the game, and all hope of retaining his title.

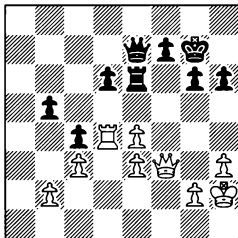
5. Intuition

There are two types of chess players in the world:

1. The player who relies on logic (Alekhine, Euwe, Botvinnik, Petrosian, Kasparov, Kramnik, Anand).
 2. The player who relies on faith (Morphy, Capablanca, Smyslov, Tal, Fischer, Karpov).
- Carlsen clearly fits into category 2.

6. Endings

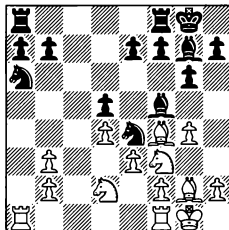
Carlsen is the undisputed number one endgame player in the world at the time of writing. In the Endings chapter of this book, I deliberately placed games which were even, or close to even, and then show how Carlsen impossibly wins drawn games against the world's best players.



This is Anand-Carlsen, from their 2013 world championship match. The position looks like it would be a breeze for Anand to hold. He didn't.

7. The Combinational Eye

So extraordinarily inhuman are some of Carlsen's comp-like combinational ideas, that they almost emit a disorienting, make-believe feel to them.



In this position against Gelfand, Carlsen calmly pushed his g-pawn to g4. Subsequent computer analysis backs up his decision. My question is: how did this move even come into his algorithmic radar? I call it the iceberg factor, where his intuition spots moves which even a computer would miss.

Is Carlsen the Greatest Ever?

When Carlsen is in his prime, he tends to defeat his opponents with the insolent ease of a Capa or Fischer in his prime. How does Carlsen compare with legends of the mythic past? Well, it's too early to say. Carlsen may be the world champion, but he certainly hasn't reached his peak at age 23, at the time of writing. His future domination may well surpass other contenders, like Morphy, Capablanca, Fischer, Karpov and Kasparov.

IM and computer chess specialist professor Ken Regan estimated perfection – God's playing strength – at around an Elo 3600 rating. Carlsen is inching ever closer to shattering the 2900 mark and I predict will be the first to break this barrier. So for now, he is around 700 rating points away from perfect chess.

Here is an early Carlsen game, where he comes close to upending a legendary world champion.

Game 1

M. Carlsen-G. Kasparov
 Reykjavik (rapid) 2004
Queen's Gambit Declined

Chess professionals are not considered to be employed, the way someone would be who worked for a corporation. At age 13, GM (!) Carlsen was already a professional chess player. To my mind this astounding game equals or surpasses peak performances of past prodigies.

gies like Capablanca and Fischer. Carlsen, barely out of his teens, holds a draw (nearly winning) against a former world champion, who at the time was still the highest rated player in the world. At the time, Kasparov outrated Carlsen by 347 rating points.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♙f6 4 ♜c3 e6 5 ♙g5 ♜bd7 6 e3 ♚a5 7 ♜d2

The idea is to discourage both ...♙e4 and also ...♜xc4, since that enables ♜xc4. Against Mamedyarov, Carlsen varied with 7 cxd5 ♜xd5 8 ♜c1 ♜xc3 9 bxc3 ♙a3 (9...♚xa2 10 ♙d3 offers White a massive development lead and strong centre for the pawn) 10 ♜c2 b6 11 ♙e2 ♙a6 12 0-0 ♙xe2 13 ♚xe2 0-0 14 e4 ♜ac8 15 e5!? ♚a4 16 c4 ♜fe8 17 ♜d1 c5 18 d5 exd5 19 ♜xd5 ♙f8 20 h4 h6 21 ♙e3 ♜g6 22 ♚d3, by when White stood better due to his kingside chances, ownership of the d-file and the fact that Black's remaining bishop is out of play on a3, M.Carlsen-S.Mamedyarov, Shamkir 2014.

7...♙b4

After 7...♜xc4 8 ♙xf6 ♜xf6 9 ♜xc4 ♚c7 10 ♜c1 ♙e7 11 g3 0-0 12 ♙g2 ♜d8 13 0-0 ♜d5 14 ♚b3 ♙d7 15 ♙e5 Black has yet to equalize, since he failed to achieve either the ...c5 or ...e5 central breaks, H.Nakamura-B.Gelfand, Moscow 2010.

8 ♚c2 0-0 9 ♙e2 e5

A thematic freeing break.

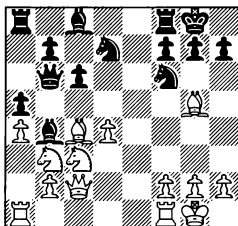
10 0-0 exd4 11 ♜b3 ♚b6

If 11...♚c7 12 ♜xd4 dxc4 13 ♙xc4 ♚e5?! (13...♙d6 minimizes White's opening edge) 14 ♜f3 (14 ♙f4 ♚a5 15 ♜fd1 also looks difficult for Black, who has trouble unravelling) 14...♚e7 15 a3 ♙a5 16 ♜ad1 ♙c7 17 ♙a2 ♜e8 18 ♙h4 h6 19 ♜d4! ♚c5 20 ♜fd1 and White achieved a clear plus in the opening, A.Beliavsky-S.Smagin, Kiev 1986.

12 exd4

Carlsen is happy to take on the isolani. 12 ♜xd4, eyeing f5, is also a thought.

12...♜xc4 13 ♙xc4 a5 14 a4!?



An example of Carlsen's uncompromising style of his youth.

Question: Isn't White worried about creating an eternal hole on b4?

Answer: Carlsen judges that the dynamic factors override the b4 weakness. A more positionally-minded player (remember, Carlsen was a 13-year-old at the time of the game, and no kid that age plays positionally) would try 14 a3 ♖d6 15 ♙e3 ♜c7 16 h3 ♘b6 17 ♙d3 h6 18 ♘c5 ♘bd5. Black unravelled and looks fine to me.

14...♜c7 15 ♙ae1?

We sense in White's country an ever growing spirit of militarism within the populace.

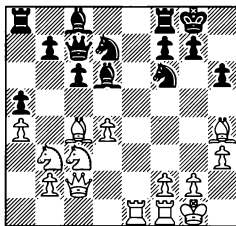
Question: Isn't it more natural to bring the other rook to e1?

Answer: The text looks like White's most aggressive option, where he actually may be contemplating future f4 options. Therefore he leaves his king's rook on f1.

15...h6 16 ♙h4 ♙d6

White retains nagging pressure after this move. Black unravels and equalizes after 16...♘b6! 17 ♙d3 ♘bd5 18 ♙g3 ♙d6, N.Muzyka-J.Bures, correspondence 2007.

17 h3



17...♘b6

Question: Can Black get away with weakening his kingside in order to win a pawn with 17...g5?

Answer: A trap! White has no intention of playing 18 ♙g3, and instead bangs out 18 ♜g6+! after which Black must resign.

18 ♙xf6!

The bishop lashes out in a frenzied manner, as if his salvation depended upon it. Carlsen erodes Black's control over d5.

18...♟xc4 19 ♞e4!

The tactician's credo: avoid making a decision until all the facts are distorted. We are still within theory's realm. In his younger days, Carlsen didn't avoid trendy opening theory.

19...♞h2+!

Kasparov finds the best move in a maze of bad ones:

a) 19...gxf6?? 20 ♜xf6+ ♟g7 21 ♚h7+! ♟xf6 22 ♚xh6+ ♟f5 23 g4 is mate. "The previous warm regards I extended to you are hereby rescinded," declares Black's bitter king, who now holds a bit of a grudge against the g4 upstart.

b) 19...♞b6?? 20 ♜xd6 gxf6 (20...♚xd6 21 ♞e7 wins material) 21 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 22 ♞e4 when Black's king is self-enclosed, unable to interact with his defenders.

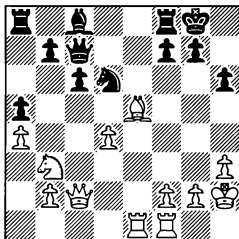
c) 19...♞e6 20 ♜bc5 ♞d5 was V.Sladek-R.Pietrocola, correspondence 2009. White continues to exert nagging pressure after 21 ♜xd6! ♜xd6 22 ♞e7 ♚c8 23 ♞e5.

20 ♟h1 ♞d6?

Planning in such positions is a bit like the rewrite of yesterday's rough draft. Sometimes we shrug our shoulders and enter a dismal line for want of anything better, since everything else looks worse. This move is a blunder, after which Kasparov finds himself in deep trouble.

Black should play 20...b5! 21 g3! ♞xh3 22 ♟xh2 ♞xf1 23 ♜bc5! (23 ♞xf1 gxf6 24 ♜xf6+ ♟g7 25 ♜h5+ ♟h8 26 ♜f6 is drawn) 23...♚c8 (threatening mate in two moves) 24 ♞xf1 ♚f5! (after 24...gxf6?? 25 ♜xf6+ ♟g7 26 ♚h7+! ♟xf6 27 ♚xh6+ ♟e7 "God spared my life and must have a plan for me" muses Black's king; strangely enough, this was the final thought of his life: 28 ♞e1+ forces mate) 25 ♚c1! ♞fe8 26 f3 ♚g6 (not 26...gxf6?? 27 ♚xh6 ♚g6 when Black's queen, much like Jane Eyre, endures a life of financially humble circumstances as a governess for the black king, and 28 ♜xf6+ wins Black's queen) 27 axb5 cxb5 28 b3 ♜b6 29 ♞e5 when White stands a shade better, with bishop and knight for rook and pawn. Black may be able to generate sufficient counterplay by pushing forward his queen-side pawn majority.

21 ♟xh2 ♜xe4+ 22 ♞e5 ♞d6



Black's forces feel out of synch, their movements as jerky as dancing marionettes.

23 ♖c5

If we travel from White's position to Black's, it's like walking from an affluent part of town into a ghetto. Even stronger was 23 d5! ♜d7 24 dxc6 bxc6 (the black structure's wound blooms rose red) 25 ♚e2!! (25 ♚d1?! is met with 25...♜f5! 26 ♜xf5 ♜xf5 27 ♜c5 when Black has chances to save the game) 25...♜f5 (defenders squirm and flop about, like fish dredged from the ocean, now in the net; 25...♚a6?? hangs a piece to 26 ♜c5 ♜f5 27 ♜xa6) 26 ♚d1 ♜a7 27 ♜d4! ♜xd4 28 ♚xd4 ♜c7+ 29 ♚e5 ♜a7 30 ♚e3! (an ominous wind blows across the kingside; ♚g3 is in the air) 30...♚e6 31 ♚d6 ♚ae8 32 ♚xc6 ♚c8 33 ♚g3 g5 (33...f6 34 ♚xc8!, and if 34...♚xc8 35 ♜g6 Black's king fights down a feeling of nausea, which happens on cue each time his sister pays him a visit: 35...♜f7 36 ♜xh6! when 36...fxe5 can be met with 37 ♚xg7+! ♜xg7 38 ♜xe6+, with an easy win) 34 f4 when White has a winning attack.

23...♚d8 24 d5!

Carlsen continues to stroke c6 and d6, as if they were his cats. Black is caught in a dual pin.

24...♜d7

It becomes obvious that the defenders are bathed in utter confusion. The queen, who finds herself on the receiving end of White's malice, understands that when in the presence of the powerful, silence is a virtue. Kasparov hopes to heal the c6 contusion, or failing that, at least prevent it from getting worse.

25 ♜d4

The knight's entwining tentacles reach deeply into the heart of Black's weakness.

25...♜f5

25...cxd5 26 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 27 ♚xd6 ♚xd6 28 ♚e8+ ♜h7 29 ♚c1 wins material.

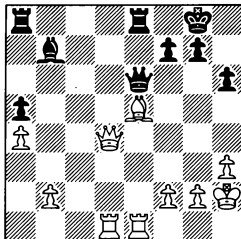
26 dxc6 bxc6 27 ♜xc6 ♚e8

People who endure privation best are those who fail to notice alternatives.

28 ♚d1 ♜e6

When we are losing, there comes a point when we go beyond fear, since we already count ourselves as among the dead. Black is not only down a pawn, but also remains under pressure in the centre. Kasparov's back and forth defensive swayings have the effect of a lullaby on Carlsen, who begins to misplay the position.

29 ♚fe1 ♚b7 30 ♜d4 ♜xd4 31 ♜xd4

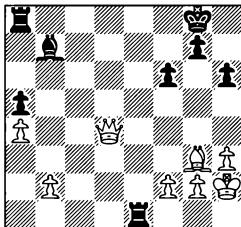


Now the opposite-coloured bishops offer Black some hope.

31... ♖g6

Question: Should Black opt for two rooks for his queen with 31...f6 32 ♗g3 ♜xe1 33 ♜xe1 ♜xe1?

Answer: If we continue the line further, we see that Black loses material here. In fact, let's turn this into an exercise.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and win heavy material.

Answer: Double attack. 34 ♜d7! ♗e4 (the bishop is unable to vacate the h1-a8 diagonal; 34...♗a6?? hangs a rook to 35 ♜d5+) 35 f3! and White wins a piece, since both the bishop and e1-rook hang.

32 ♕g4?!

The queen flits about, here and there – but mostly there. Is it possible for right and wrong to simultaneously coexist within the same idea? If you are 13 years old and have a chance to play risk free for the win a pawn up in an ending, versus a legendary world champion, wouldn't you also enter such a line?

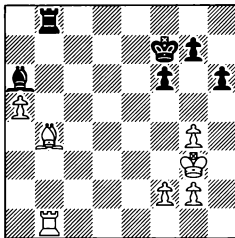
However, swapping queens greatly enhances Black's drawing chances, due to the presence of opposite-coloured bishops. Now White's previous heavy toils – winter's withered apples still on the tree, destined never to be consumed – produce meagre fruit. Carlsen should have gone for 32 f3! ♖ac8 33 ♖g3 ♜xe1 34 ♖xe1 ♜c2 35 ♜d8+ ♖h7 36 ♜d2 ♜c1 37 ♜d6 ♜f5 38 ♜xa5 ♜c5 39 ♜d2 ♖xf3! 40 ♜e3 ♜c2 41 ♜d2. White's two connected passed pawns offer serious winning chances.

32...♜xg4 33 hxg4 ♖c6!

This move forces White to weaken his b-pawn.

34 b3 f6 35 ♖c3

White may have a better shot at extracting the full point with the line 35 ♜d6! ♖xa4 36 bxa4 fxe5 37 ♜e4 ♜f8 38 ♜g3 ♜f4 39 ♜xf4 exf4+ 40 ♜xf4 ♜c8 41 ♜d4 ♜f7 when Black's draw isn't so automatic.

35...♜xe1 36 ♜xe1 ♜d5 37 ♜b1 ♜f7 38 ♜g3 ♜b8 39 b4 axb4 40 ♖xb4 ♖c4 41 a5 ♖a6

White's extra pawn is firmly blockaded and White finds himself in an annoying pin along the b-file. If rooks come off the board, the position is an easy draw for Black.

42 f3 ♜g6 43 ♜f4 h5!

Endgame principle: the defending side benefits from pawn trades.

44 gxh5+ ♜xh5 45 ♜h1+

Carlsen rids himself of the b-file pin. The plan to transfer White's king to the queenside fails to win: 45 ♜e4 ♜b5 46 ♜d4 ♜g6 47 ♜b2 ♜f5 48 ♖c3 ♜xb2 49 ♖xb2 ♜f4 50 ♖c1+ ♜g3 51 ♜c5 ♜xg2 52 ♜b6 ♖f1 53 f4 ♜f3 54 a6 ♖xa6 55 ♜xa6 g5 56 fxg5 fxg5 57 ♖xg5, with a draw.

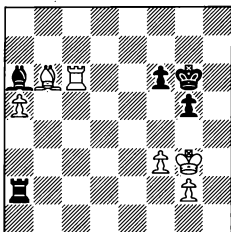
45...♟g6 46 ♖c5 ♜b2

Targeting g2.

47 ♟g3

47 g4 ♙b7 48 ♜e1 ♜b3 49 ♜e3 ♜xe3 50 ♟xe3 is also drawn.

47...♜a2 48 ♙b6 ♟f7 49 ♜c1 g5 50 ♜c7+ ♟g6 51 ♜c6?!



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen's last move, intending ♙d4, is a mistake. How did Kasparov exploit it?

White can at least play on after 51 ♜c1, although I think Carlsen had only minute chances of converting even here against Kasparov.

Answer: Deflection. White's bishop must abandon coverage of a5 in order to defend g2.

51...♙f1!

This move renders White's winning attempts null and void.

52 ♙f2 ½-½

After 52...♜xa5 53 ♙d4 ♜a6 rook and rook vie for prominence, with neither side coming out ahead.

Many thanks to my editors, John Emms and Richard Palliser, for their work on this book, and also thanks to Nancy for proof reading and for allowing so many unauthorized sips of her coffee. May we Carlsenize our chess with flashes of his genius.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
September 2014

Chapter One

Carlsen on the Attack

Back around 2002-2004, when I was first introduced to Magnus Carlsen's games, I became convinced that he was the second coming of Mikhail Tal. In his early games, the attack seemed to be the 90% object of his focus. Today, as world champion, Carlsen has calmed down considerably ("matured", as the annotators like to say), and is often compared with Capablanca – Tal's polar opposite.

Most of his earlier sacrificial attacks fall into that hazy twilight between boldness and folly (i.e. the first game of the chapter). As we all know, world champions don't like to lose games, so today we see a far more cautious Carlsen (perhaps a necessary emendation, since playing at the very highest levels requires course correction from a youthful style), who perhaps feels watched and judged by fans and rivals alike, like a minister's son, with a secret wild streak, who fears exposure of his true nature. Once in a while though, we still detect the emergence of the old, kid Carlsen, where optimism leaps over concerned caution, as demonstrated in the final three games of the chapter, where he attacks with an all-consuming passion, free from constraints or boundaries of any kind.

Game 2 **M.Carlsen-S.Nyysti** Helsinki 2002 *Four Knights Game*

1 e4 e5 2 f3 c6 3 c3 f6 4 a3

Question: This looks like a random move. What is its purpose?

Answer: There is actually nothing wrong with the move (although I didn't advocate it in my

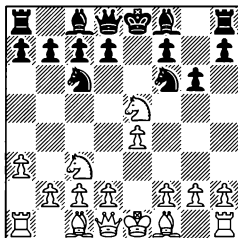
Four Knights book). White wants to play Black, but with a (hopefully) useful extra move a3, perhaps useful if White may later expand with b4.

4...g6

This move makes Carlsen's coming eye-popping sacrifice all the more tempting.

4...d5 is the normal reaction to White's passive looking 4 a3: 5 ♖b5 (or 5 exd5 ♜xd5 6 ♖b5 ♜xc3 7 bxc3 ♜d6 8 d4 exd4 9 ♜e2+ ♜e7 10 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 11 cxd4 ♜d7 12 O-O O-O-O 13 ♜e3 and the ending is even, N.Short-Wang Yue, Liverpool 2007; okay, I admit a3 isn't all that useful) 5...♜xe4 6 ♜e2 ♜xc3 7 ♜xe5+ ♜e7!? (a pawn sacrifice; Shirov isn't the type to chicken out with dull equality after 7...♜e7 8 dxc3 ♜d7) 8 ♜xc3 O-O 9 ♜xc6 bxc6 10 ♜xc6 ♜b8 11 d4 ♜b6 12 ♜c3 ♜a6 13 ♜e3 ♜b8 14 ♜e5 ♜b7 15 b3 and Black achieved full compensation for the pawn, with a development lead and the bishop-pair, I.Glek-A.Shirov, Dresden 2006.

5 ♜xe5!?



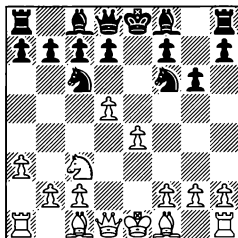
Who among us has not at some time been borne aloft by the enticing call of sacrificial speculation? Even as a child, Carlsen refused to be ruled by convention or precedent, constantly experimenting, constantly rooting out odd ideas. His decision is similar to the curious case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, with Carlsen following his meek 4 a3 with a deranged-looking piece sacrifice. "The pattern is clear – Magnus likes to sacrifice material. The correctness of the variation is not the main thing; White gets a lasting initiative, and that is most important," writes GM Simen Agdestein.

Question: What the hell! Why did White just give away a piece for one pawn?

Answer: I don't think we are in Kansas anymore. Well, I suppose we shouldn't expect a feast of restraint from an 11-year-old. I do concede this idea is suffused with optimism, more than actual power behind it. Believe it or not, this sacrifice isn't nearly as unsound as it

looks, since White gains numerous tempi on Black's prancing knights, as they evade White's central pawns. In fact, Houdini rates it virtually even and my database shows White scoring 54.3% from this position – in the range of an average score for White.

5...♟xe5 6 d4 ♟c6 7 d5



7...♟b8?!

Catastrophe often commences with a single insignificant looking misstep, and I suspect it is this move which may be the parent of Black's coming difficulties. Black undevelops to hang on to his extra piece, no matter how dear the cost in tempi.

I would opt for the GM's pragmatic solution 7...♟g7!, played with the philosophy: what use is all our wanting, when reality dictates that we cannot have? In such positions we should measure success and failure with greatly shortened yardsticks. Black wisely returns the piece to achieve a dynamically balanced position, where White's a3 doesn't make all that much sense. After 8 dxc6 bxc6 9 ♟d3 0-0 10 0-0 d6 I would be happy to play Black's side, E.Gullaksen-J.Pinter, Barcelona 2007.

Question: What about playing 7...♟e5, with the intention to return the piece, in exchange for breaking up White's pawn centre?

Answer: I can't find a single game in the database with your suggestion. Let's take a look: 8 f4 ♟eg4 9 e5 ♟c5 10 exf6 ♟f2 11 ♖e2+ ♜f8 12 ♟e4! ♟xe4 13 ♖xe4 ♜xf6 14 ♖e5 ♟g7 15 ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 16 ♟d2 ♜e8 17 b4 ♟d4 18 c3 ♟f2 19 ♟d3 d6 20 ♟b2 ♟e3+ 21 ♜c2 ♟g7 22 c4+ f6 23 ♜hf1 with equal chances. So your idea doesn't look so bad, and in fact, may be a huge improvement over Black's continuation in the game.

8 e5

Kid Carlsen's intent is innocent of adornment, yet effective. He plans to push his opponents off the board, preferably on to the ninth rank.

8...♟g8

A journey, once embarked upon, compels us forward, or in this case backward. Surreal stuff. I suppose a gardener can view the stark winter garden and still imagine the coming summer's bloom. One defect with our eyes and brains is if we witness a traumatic sight, there is no way to unsee it. Just look at Black's undevelopment-fest!

I get the feeling that Paul Morphy, if he were with us today, would raise a pair of disapproving eyebrows at Black's interpretation of the opening. Opposite powers collide, with soft yin's attempts to evade hard yang. Black's position feels as constricted as an overly tight shirt on an obese person, where excess fat pushes out at every opportunity from its enclosed casing. In my database, Black scores 20% from this position. Do you still believe White's sacrifice was unsound? Black may be up a piece, but his position doesn't make for a pretty picture, with White's pawns lunging on e5 and d5, and Black still grossly behind in development.

If 8...♖h5 9 ♜e2 f5 (U.Reyer-G.Hoegerl, correspondence 2008), *Houdini* suggests 10 g4! fxg4 11 ♖e4, and if 11...d6 12 exd6 ♜f7 13 ♙g5 ♜d7 14 h3!. *Houdini* rates this at even, but I feel like White still gets strong compensation for the piece, and prefer his side.

9 d6!

We note an absence of internal check on Carlsen's growing territorial ambitions. How on earth is Black going to complete his development now?

9...cxd6!

A violation of the principle: avoid opening the game when behind in development. *Houdini* suggests the nauseating alternative 9...c6 10 ♙c4 when it will be a miracle if Black survives.

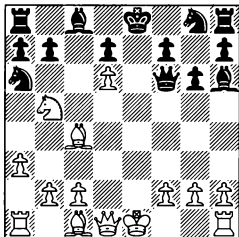
10 exd6

Threat: ♜e2+.

10...♜f6 11 ♖b5! ♖a6

Now White's knight gets to hang out on b5, free from fear of ...a6.

12 ♙c4 ♙h6



13 ♖e2?!

I feel a bit ashamed giving an 11-year-old kid a dubious mark for not finding 3267-rated *Houdini*'s suggestion, especially when I think back and realize just how painfully idiotically I played at that age. Stronger is 13 f4! based on the principle: the side with more space should avoid swaps. Analysis runs: 13... ♖h4+ 14 g3 ♖h5 15 ♖xh5! gxh5 16 ♖e3 ♖g7 17 0-0-0 b6 18 ♖he1 ♗f8 19 ♖d5 ♖b8 20 b4 ♗f6 21 ♖c4 ♖b7 22 ♗xa7 ♗e8 23 ♖g1 h4 24 ♖b5 ♗f6 25 ♖e7 and Black is busted.

13... ♗f8 14 ♖e3

The idea is to open the f-file if Black swaps. 14 f4 doesn't work as well for White, now that his queen sits on the open e-file: 14...b6 15 ♖e3 ♖b7 16 0-0 ♖e8 17 ♖ae1 ♖f5 18 ♖f2 ♗f6 19 ♖d4 ♗e4! when Black's pieces slowly emerge and gain activity. *Houdini* rates this at dead even.

14... ♖xe3 15 fxe3 ♖h4+

Only a person with a death wish would consider 15... ♖xb2?, which allows Black's development lag to increase. 16 0-0 f6 17 ♗d4 ♖b6 18 ♖xg8! ♖xd6 (Black can't allow ♖xf6+) 19 ♖c4 and White regained his piece with a winning attack.

16 g3 ♖h5 17 ♖f2 ♖f5 18 ♖e2

I would actually consider declining the draw and playing a piece-down ending with 18 ♖xf5 gxf5 19 0-0 ♗h6 20 ♗d4. It feels like White still has full compensation for the piece, since he soon picks up another pawn for it.

18... ♖h5 19 ♖f2

It's a little disorienting to see a future world champion, and candidate for greatest chess player of all time, aim for a repetition draw versus a 2242-rated player. But at age 11, we were all intimidated when we played adults.

19... ♖f5 20 ♖e2 ♗h6?!

The will to fight sometimes exceeds the body's ability to follow. If Nyysti were clairvoyant and could view the future, I'm pretty certain he would have claimed the threefold repetition and taken the draw, had he known he played a future world champion. "Black should have been content with a draw," writes Agdestein, with vast understatement.

21 ♖f1?!

21 0-0-0! is correct and gives White a close to winning attack.

21... ♖h5 22 ♖f2 ♖f5

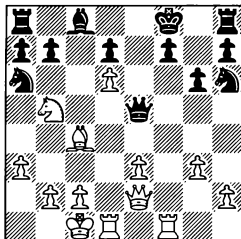
Here we go again.

23 ♖e2 ♖e5?

The queen's guard slowly goes down, as an infant calms to a mother's lullaby. He still refuses the draw. 23... ♖h5! was correct.

24 0-0-0

Now Black is busted. Kid Carlsen is completely in his element of attack. Just watch how he takes control of the entire board.



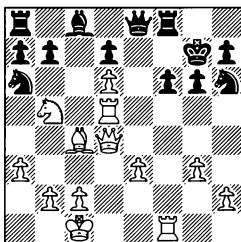
24...♔g7 25 ♜d5! ♜e8 26 ♜d2!

Intending to transfer to the a1-h8 diagonal. Also tempting is 26 ♜f3! when I can't visualize any scenario where Black escapes.

26...♜f8 27 ♜d4+

From g7, the black king peers into the queen's face with the same look of a mouse gazing upon the owl who is about to consume him.

27...f6



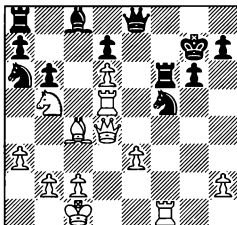
Exercise (planning): The worst part of defending such positions is that it's too early to resign, and yet all we can do is await the inevitable boot to our soon-to-be-tender rear end. Find White's most efficient attacking continuation.

Answer: Play for g5! Black's kingside displays a red, angry welt on f6.

28 g4! b6

28...Qxg4 29 ♖xg4 ♜xe3+ 30 ♜b1 Qc5 31 Qd4! (threatening Qf5+, as well as ♜xc5)
31...♜e4 32 ♜g3 b6 33 ♜e1 traps the queen in mid-board.

29 g5 Qf5 30 gxf6+ ♜xf6



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen gained a decisive material advantage after his next shot. Do you see it?

Answer: Removal of the guard, overloading the defender.

31 ♜dx5! gxf5 32 ♜g1+ ♜g6

Black's queen can only shake her head at her incompetent king, the way a kindly teacher regards a slow-witted student. A doctor looks for three factors in a medicine:

1. A cure.
2. A booster for the immune system, which prevents the sickness from arising in the first place.
3. An ease to suffering, where there is no cure.

It feels like Black applied number three on the list with his last move.

33 ♜xg6+

The kingside is a tangle of arms and legs of the corpses of defenders.

33...Qxg6

Black's king is obliged to abandon the relative safety of his enclave, to brave the perils of the open road.

34 Qd5 ♜b8 35 e4 Qb7 36 exf5+ ♜xf5 37 ♜g4+ ♜f6

To the clinically depressed king's mind, the saving of his own life doesn't seem worth the bother.

38 ♜h4+

The deranged queen, a jealous and vindictive ex-girlfriend, refuses to loosen her embrace on Black's king.

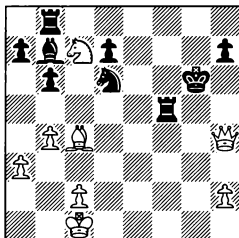
38...♖g6 39 ♙c4 ♜c5 40 b4

Simpler is 40 ♜d4 ♚g5 41 ♙f7+.

40...♜e4 41 ♜c7

I don't understand the motivation behind this move. I would play 41 ♚g4+ ♚g5 42 ♚xd7.

41...♜xd6?



Exercise (combination alert): The defences of Black's position are frayed to the nub, as he stares into the face of ruin. Previously raw aggression was White's single hue, but now a new shade emerges, encouraging him to acts of theft. White to play and win more material.

Answer: Double attack. Black's knight falls.

42 ♚g3+! 1-0

"Our wisdom, grace and courage is celebrated with much renown, as we prepare to add a new chapter to Our glory," brags the obnoxious white queen, who loves the sound of her own voice, as she plunders all which is portable.

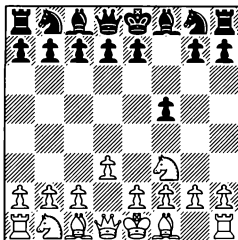
Game 3
M.Carlsen-S.Dolmatov
Aeroflot Open, Moscow 2004
Dutch Defence

1 ♜f3

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 f5!? is the somewhat questionable Latvian Gambit. Here 3 d3!? (this timid response is certainly not its refutation, if one exists; 3 ♜xe5! is supposed to be White's the-

theoretical best) 3...d6 4 ♖c3 transposes to Carlsen's game.

1...f5 2 d3!?



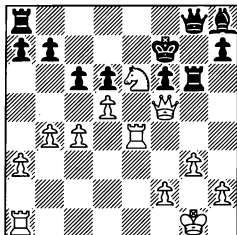
An anti-Dutch system where White can switch to an English formation with c4, or play for e4.

2...d6!

Probably Black's best response. Dolmatov isn't confused by Carlsen's tricky opening play.

Question: Why not 2...♟f6 in order to halt e4?

Answer: The move fails to discourage White, who can make a gambit out of it: 3 e4!? (yes, Carlsen still plays this gambit, even as world champion) 3...d6 (acceptance is a From's Gambit a full move up for White, which looks terribly risky for Black after 3...fxe4?! 4 dxe4 ♟xe4 5 ♟d3 ♟f6 6 ♟g5 g6 7 h4! d5 8 h5 ♟g4 9 f3 ♟xh5 10 g4 ♟d6 11 gxf5 ♟g3+? 12 ♟f1 ♟xh5 13 ♟h3 ♟d6; this was B.Gonzalez-O.Vargas, Costa Rica 1997, and now White has 14 ♟xh5 gxf5 15 f4 ♟h6 16 f5 when Black is hopelessly behind in development) 4 exf5 ♟xf5 5 d4 ♟d7 6 ♟c3 g6 7 ♟d3 ♟g7 8 0-0 ♟c6 9 d5 ♟b4 10 ♟xf5 gxf5?! (even after 10...♟xf5 11 ♟d4 ♟h5 12 ♟e6 ♟xd1 13 ♟xd1 ♟f7 14 a3! Black has problems as c2 is poisoned: 14...♟xc2? 15 ♟g5+ ♟f8 16 ♟a2 when the c2 would-be intruder is stranded) 11 a3 ♟a6 12 ♟d4 ♟c5 13 b4 ♟ce4 14 ♟xe4 fxe4 15 ♟e6 ♟g8 16 ♟b2 c6 17 c4 (White has a winning bind, since his e6-knight has a paralysing effect on Black; Carlsen now won without even breaking a sweat) 17...♟h8 18 ♟e1 ♟g6 19 ♟xf6! exf6 (19...♟xf6 20 ♟h5! ♟xa1 21 ♟xh7 wins) 20 ♟h5 ♟f7 21 ♟f5 ♟g8 22 g3 ♟f7 23 ♟xe4.



White's remaining knight looks a wee bit better than Black's unfortunate bishop, M.Carlsen-A.Rodriguez Vila, Caxias do Sul (rapid) 2014.

3 e4!?

Instead, 3 g3 and 3 c4 will transpose to the English versus Dutch or King's Indian formation.

3...e5 4 dxc3

It looks like Black may have equalized, since this position can be reached from the Latvian Gambit, where White has tossed in the rather meek d3.

4...dxc6

After 4...dxc6 5 exf5 dxf5 6 d4 e4 7 dxc4 d7 8 e2! Black has no good method of protecting e4, as in J.Benjamin-D.Gurevich, St Martin 1992. Black finds himself in an awkward situation. For example, 8...d5? is met with a trick: 9 dxc5! when a queen check on h5 regains the piece if it is accepted. However, 8...e7 9 dxc5 is also difficult for Black and 8...dxc6 is met with 9 d5!, also with tricks on h5.

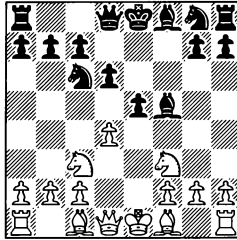
5 exf5!

White's best chance for an edge. 5 g3 appears too slow: 5...dxc6 6 dxc4 e7 7 dxc4 d7 8 h3 h6 9 dxc4 fxe4 10 dxe4 e8 11 dxc4 d8 12 e3 e8! (...dxc4 is in the air) 13 g4! dxc4 14 dxc5 f7 15 dxc4 dxc5 saw Black activate his bad bishop and look forward to at least even chances in the coming complications, N.Kirov-V.Malaniuk, Baku 1983.

5...dxc5?!

Believe it or not, Dolmatov's coming problems may stem from this most natural of moves. Black completely equalizes after the odd 5...dxc5! 6 d4 exd4 7 dxc4 dxc4 8 dxc4 dxc5 with even chances. The critical difference is that Black gains a tempo in this line and isn't behind in development.

6 d4!



6...dxd4

Once again, Black's best response.

Question: Can Black go for c2 with 6...dxb4?

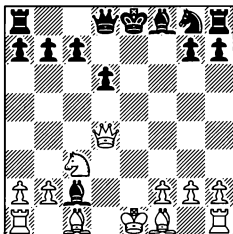
Answer: A violation of the principle: avoid moving the same piece more than once in an open position. White seizes the advantage after 7 ♖b5+ c6 8 ♖a4 e4 9 ♘g5 d5 10 f3! (principle: create confrontation and open the game when leading in development) 10...exf3 11 0-0! and Black found himself fatally behind in development, M.Krasenkow-S.Kindermann, Panormo 2001.

Question: Fair enough. How about gaining a tempo with 6...e4?

Answer: White doesn't have to move the knight and can counter with 7 d5! exf3 8 dxc6 bxc6 9 ♗xf3 when Black lags in development and stands clearly worse. However, Black somehow managed to win both games from this position in the database.

7 dxd4 exd4 8 ♗xd4 ♖f6

GM Tony Kosten calls 8...♗xc2 "legal, but very greedy", giving it an interesting mark. I would change the assessment to '?!'. The pawn grab looks way too risky.



Question: I wouldn't know how to punish Black from here. How should White proceed?

Answer: I understand your point. Over the board, the logical proofs are so much more difficult to produce than the original assertions. *Houdini* suggests 9 ♖c4 ♜f6 10 ♜d2! ♜e5+ 11 ♙e2 ♙g6 12 ♘b5! ♜d8 (12...d5? is met with the sneaky 13 ♜xd5!) 13 0-0. It looks to me like White gets an eternal initiative and attack for the pawn, in view of his development lead and Black's precarious king's position.

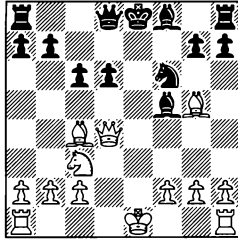
9 ♙c4!

A new move and a huge improvement over 9 ♙d3 ♙xd3 10 ♜xd3 c6 11 0-0 ♙e7 12 ♘e2 (12 ♘e4 ♘xe4 13 ♜xe4 0-0 also gives White nothing, O.Romanishin-V.Malaniuk, Tallinn 1987) 12...d5 13 ♘d4 ♜d7 14 ♙g5 0-0 15 ♜ae1 ♙d6 and Black achieved an excellent position, K.Lerner-E.Bareev, Kiev 1986.

9...c6

Logical. Black seeks to shut down the c4-bishop's diagonal and light-square influence with ...d5.

10 ♙g5!



When an (attacking) addict relapses, is there such a thing as a moderate relapse? Carlsen offers c2, or if declined, plans to castle queenside.

10...b5!

Black is on high alert, the way an animal in the forest grows rigid at a flicker of motion in the leaves. Criticized by Kosten, but I think this move may be Black's best shot in the position. I don't see equalizing alternatives.

Question: It feels to me as if Black made his last move without conviction backing it up. What about the more natural 10...d5?

Answer: This gesture of good will falls flat in the face of White's hostile answer, since it only masks the pain, rather than cures it. The trouble is White ignores it and castles long anyway: 11 O-O-O! (threat: ♖e5+) 11...♙e7 (after 11...dxc4?? 12 ♜e5+ ♜e7 13 ♜xf5 Black can resign) 12 ♜he1! (threat: ♜e5!) 12...O-O 13 ♜e5 ♜c8 14 ♜xe7 dxc4 15 ♜c5 and Black loses a pawn, since 15...♙e6? is met with 16 ♜d6 with a winning position.

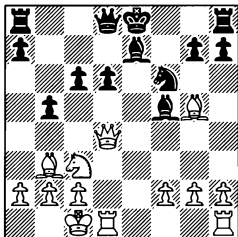
b) 10...♙xc2? ruins White's queenside castling, but at too high a developmental price: 11 O-O ♙e7 12 ♜ae1 ♙f8 (the kingside is a dustbin to hide Black's numerous strategic difficulties) 13 ♜e2 h6 (not 13...♙g6?? 14 ♜fe1 h6 15 ♙h4 and e7 can't be covered) 14 ♙h4 d5 15 ♜xc2 dxc4 16 ♜xc4 sees White regain the sacrificed pawn with a completely winning position.

11 ♙b3 ♙e7?

This natural move is too slow. Black should try the radical 11...h6! 12 ♜e3+ (if 12 ♙d2 ♜e7+ 13 ♙f1 O-O-O! 14 a4 b4! 15 ♜xb4 d5 16 ♜xe7 ♙xe7 with some compensation for the pawn, since Black controls the centre and White's h1-rook will be out of play for a while) 12...♙d7 13 ♙xf6 ♜xf6 14 O-O-O when his position is more resilient than first appearances indicate. *Houdini* analysis runs: 14...b4 15 ♙e2 (or 15 ♙e4 ♙e5 16 ♜he1 ♜xe4 17 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 18 ♜xe4 a5 and Black has reasonable chances to hold the position, despite his con-

tinuing frightful lag in development) 15...♙c7 16 ♘d4 ♙d7 17 ♚he1 d5 18 c4 dxc4 19 ♙xc4 ♙c5 (Black's king remains safe while out in the open) 20 ♘e6+ ♙xe6 21 ♚xc5 ♚f4+ 22 ♙b1 ♚f5+! 23 ♚xf5 ♙xf5+ 24 ♙d3 ♙xd3+ 25 ♙xd3 ♚ae8 and Black survives.

12 0-0-0



Black is desperately behind in development, with his king still sitting idly in the middle of the board.

12...♚d7

Not 12...d5? 13 ♚he1 0-0?? 14 ♚e5 with the familiar double attack theme.

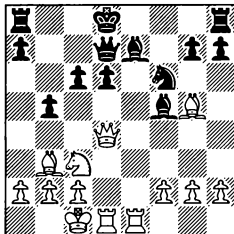
13 ♚he1 ♙d8

Alternatively:

a) 13...0-0-0 walks into 14 g4! ♙xg4 (the bishop must cover e6; 14...♙g6?? hangs the queen to 15 ♙e6) 15 ♚xe7! (deflection/pin) 15...♚xe7 16 ♚xg4+ ♘xg4 17 ♙xe7 ♘xf2 18 ♙e6+ ♙b7 19 ♚e1 ♚de8 20 ♙d7 with a winning ending for White, whose bishops rule.

b) 13...♙f8 14 g4! (the trick works in this version as well) 14...h6 15 ♙f4 c5 16 ♚d2 c4 17 ♙xc4 bxc4 18 gxf5 ♚xf5 19 ♙b1 is hopeless for Black, whose king remains in mortal danger. "The sooner you accustom yourself to your new circumstances, the better," lectures White's snugly safe king to his exasperated f8-brother.

Is there such a thing as an orderly retreat from a losing battle? The injured black king's nurses can do no more for him now, other than to warm him with a shawl, plump his pillow and spoon him lime Jello. After 13...♙d8 Black's position clings to life with a tenuous grip and White's attack is pliant as the gentle give of soil underfoot in the forest.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen press home his attack?

Answer: Removal of the guard/double attack/pin.

14 ♖xe7!

The bishop's unfortunate departure leaves an irreplaceable defensive gap in Black's position. After this shot, the defenders find themselves disoriented, as if brushed in the face by a moth's wings in pitch darkness.

14... ♛xe7

Black's queen is resolved to stand up to her bully d4-sister, yet she involuntarily makes a curtsy of deference in her intimidating presence.

After 14... ♛xe7?? 15 ♗xf6+ (the bishop stares down Black's king, not as a supplicant, but as a warrior on equal terms with a foe) 15... gxf6 16 ♖e1+ ♔d8 17 ♛xf6+ ♔c8 18 ♖e7 Black's game collapses.

15 ♛f4!

Now f5 and d6 hang simultaneously, and Black's position crumbles.

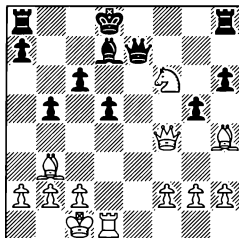
15... ♗d7 16 ♗e4!

The siege engines pound away at d6 and f6 without respite.

16... d5

16... ♗f8 17 ♗xd6 (threat: ♛b4! and ♛a5 mate) 17... a5 18 ♛d4 ♔c7 19 ♗f4 will be a bloodbath.

17 ♗xf6 h6 18 ♗h4 g5



Exercise (combination alert): Black's king is frozen in place in the middle, with dream legs which refuse to run or move, despite the perilous instability all around him. The line between difficult and busted is thin as an old cobweb and is about to snap. It appears as if Black regained some material, but this is an illusion. Find White's trick and Black resigns.

Answer: Discovered attack.

19 ♖d4! 1-0

After 19...♗f8 (19...gxh4 20 ♕xd5 is crushing) 20 ♕xd5 cxd5 21 ♗xd5 ♖c8 22 ♗g3 White has two pawns for the exchange, threatens ♗d6 and the b5-pawn, and also has a crushing attack.

Alexander Nikitin said afterwards that he had never seen a game played on this high a level by a 13-year-old – quite a meaningful endorsement, since Nikitin was one of Kasparov's coaches.

Game 4

M.Carlsen-P.H.Nielsen

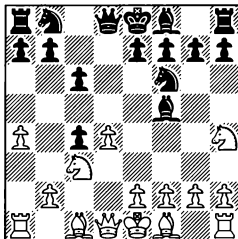
Sigeman, Malmo & Copenhagen 2004

Slav Defence

1 d4

Carlsen has always been a two-fisted player, equally proficient with 1 e4 and 1 d4.

1...d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♗f6 4 ♗c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♗f5 6 ♗h4



6...g4!?

Provocative. Nielsen goads his 13-year-old opponent forward, tempting him with free tempi. The alternatives:

a) 6...e6 tends to be Black's safest option: 7 dxf5 exf5 8 e3 bbd7 9 xc4 b6 10 d3 d7 11 O-O, A.Ambartsoumian-C.Lakdawala, Century City 2002. White usually plays for f3 and e4, which isn't so easy to achieve, since d4 is tender.

b) 6...c8 7 e3 e5 8 xc4 exd4 9 exd4 e7 10 O-O 0-0 11 e1 d5 12 f3 e6 13 b3 a6 14 d2 (14 bxb7 ab4 15 e5 b8 16 xa7 a8 is drawn by repetition) 14...ab4 15 e4 f5 16 e5 a5 17 c5 xc5 18 dxc5 c7 was M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura, London 2009. White exerts dark-square pressure after 19 xd5 dxd5 20 dc4.

c) 6...d7!?! (I have experimented with this strange move) 7 e4 (or 7 e3 e6 8 xc4 c5 9 O-O dc6 10 f3 cxd4 11 exd4 b4 and Black achieved a satisfactory Queen's Gambit Accepted position, 'Sobreviviente'-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 2005) 7...e6 (threat: ...xe4) 8 f3 b5 9 g5 (the position resembles fashionable Semi-Slav Botvinnik Gambit lines) 9...e7 10 e5 d5 11 xe7 xe7 12 e2 O-O 13 O-O a5 14 e4 a6 15 axb5?! (White should play 15 d2) 15...cxb5 16 xa5 b4 17 a2 ac7 with a queenside initiative for Black, R.Buhmann-A.Shirov, Mainz (rapid) 2005.

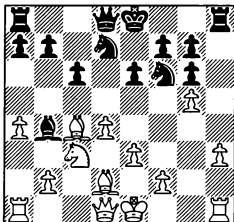
7 h3 h5 8 g4 g6 9 xg6 hxg6 10 e3

White covers against ...xg4 and regains c4.

10...e6 11 xc4 b4 12 d2 bbd7

The immediate 12...a5 clamps down on the b4 hole and keeps options open for a future ...a6.

13 g5!?



No 13-year-old in the world is going to hold back on a free pawn push. White holds a territorial advantage and the bishop-pair, while Black controls the b4 hole and remains weakness free.

Question: Isn't White risking over extension?

Answer: When one side takes on active pieces in exchange for a weakened structure, it is as if beholding an otherwise beautiful woman with missing teeth. He certainly is, but Black risks underextension: getting pushed off the board. But saying this, I think Carlsen's last move was a bit hasty and on the cusp of dubious. It may have been better to go with the calmer 13... ♖f3.

13... ♖d5

Maybe this is just a Slav player's bias, but I prefer Black's game after 13... ♖xc3! 14 bxc3 ♖e4 15 f4 (I doubt White gets full compensation for the pawn after 15 h4 ♖xg5 16 ♖g4 ♖h7 17 f3 ♖hf6) 15... ♖b6 16 ♖d3 ♖d5! 17 ♖f3 (Black's knights look better than White's pair of bishops after 17 ♖h2 ♖c4 18 ♖c1 ♖cd6 19 ♖c2 c5 20 c4 ♖c6 21 ♖b2 ♖f8) 17... ♖xc3 18 0-0 ♖xf3 19 ♖xf3 ♖cd5 20 ♖b1 0-0-0 21 a5 ♖d7. I don't buy that White's bishop-pair offers full compensation in the ending. Still, *Houdini* disagrees and assesses at a dead even '0.00'.

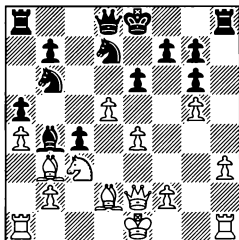
14 e4 ♖b6 15 ♖b3 a5

Seizing control over b4 and preventing White from tossing in the disruptive a5.

16 ♖e2 c5

At some stage, Black must either toss in ...c5 or ...e5, since failure to do so risks asphyxiation. Black can also come at White's centre from the other way, with 16...e5 17 dxe5 ♖xe5 (Black can sacrifice a pawn here with 17...♖c5!? 18 ♖c2 ♖e6 19 0-0-0 ♖d4 20 ♖f1 ♖e7, intending to castle long) 18 0-0-0 ♖d3+?! (this turns out to be a waste of time; Black should play 18... ♖e7 19 f4 ♖ed7) 19 ♖b1 ♖c5 20 ♖b5! ♖xb3 21 ♖xb4 axb4 22 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8, which was M.Carlsen-Z.Andriasian, Budva 2003, and now 23 ♖d1! gives White a winning position.

17 d5 c4!

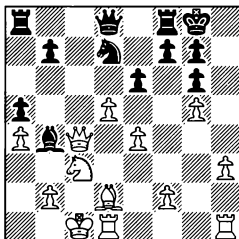


An enterprising pawn sacrifice, for which Black gets one of White's precious bishops, opens c5 for a knight and lines against White's king, if he decides to castle long. In such situations, our spirit seems to split, making two of us: one urging caution; the other begging to risk all for glory's sake.

Question: Where does White put his king? It looks to me like there is no safe place on the entire board.

Answer: Exactly. This is what Nielsen had in mind with his sacrifice. White's king remains unsafe, no matter where Carlsen places him.

18 ♖xc4 ♜xc4 19 ♝xc4 0-0 20 0-0-0!



Sometimes the only sensible course is to embrace the irrational. Opposite wings it is.

Question: This looks like suicide for White's exposed king. Is Carlsen outside the jurisdiction of chess laws which govern the rest of us?

Answer: Sometimes our heart goes to war with our spine, demanding that we risk all. White's king is actually safer than it first appears. Carlsen decides to stake his king to a clear location, refusing to allow Black's initiative to cook at a low boil. Now the parties invest energies in diverse toils. Alternatives:

a) 20 dxe6 ♖e5 21 ♜d5 ♜xd5 22 exd5 ♙f3+ 23 ♚e2 ♙xd2 24 ♜xd2 fxe6 when Houdini rates at even, but I can only see White losing from here.

b) 20 0-0 ♜c8 21 ♜d4 ♙b6 22 ♜fd1 ♜e8 23 ♜d3 exd5 24 ♙xd5 ♙xd2 25 ♜xd2 ♙xd5 26 ♜xd5 ♜e7 threatens both e4 and ...♜c5. Black stands at least even after 27 ♜ac1 ♜xc1 28 ♜xc1 ♜xe4 29 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 30 ♜c8+ ♙h7 31 ♜c7 ♙b4 32 ♜xf7 ♙xb2.

20...♜c8 21 ♜e2 exd5 22 ♙b1!

After 22 exd5? ♙c5 23 ♙b1 ♙xc3 24 ♙xc3 ♙xa4 White finds himself overextended. **22...♙xc3!?**

I question this decision and still prefer Black's chances after 22...♜c7! 23 exd5 ♙b6 when White must worry about a coming ...♙c4.

23 ♙xc3 ♙c5

Alternatively, 23...♜g5 24 ♜xd5 ♜g2 25 ♜e1 ♜xh3 26 ♙xa5 ♜fe8 27 f3 ♜c5 28 ♜xc5 ♙xc5 29 ♜b5 ♜c8 30 ♜e3 ♜d7 31 ♜xd7 ♙xd7 32 ♙d2 when White has the superior chances since his bishop outworks Black's knight in the opposite-wing majority ending.

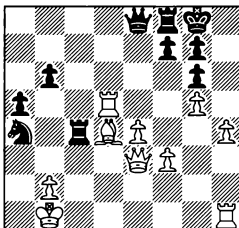
24 ♜xd5 ♜e8

Double attack on a4 and e4.

25 f3 b6

Nielsen understandably wants to avoid the mentioned ending after 25...♜xa4 26 ♜d1 ♜c4 27 h4 a4 28 ♜d4 ♜xd4 29 ♙xd4 when White has all the chances.

26 ♜e3 ♙xa4 27 ♙d4 ♜c4 28 h4!



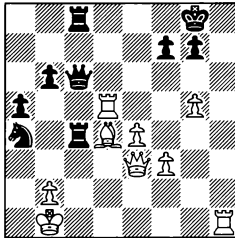
28...♖c6?

If you are drowning in a polluted river, the vile stench is a lower priority to the fact that you are drowning. Now the moment is lost. Nielsen underestimates his opponent's attacking chances, while overestimating his own. He had to try 28...♘c5! 29 ♙xc5 (29 h5 probably leads to a draw after something like 29...♖a4 30 ♙c3 ♘b3 31 ♙hd1 ♖a1+ 32 ♙c2 ♖a4 33 ♙b1 ♖a1+) 29...♙xc5 30 ♙xc5 bxc5 31 ♙c1 ♖e6 32 ♙xc5 ♙d8 when Black's position is singed, more than burned. His initiative is constructed purely for function over show, now stripped to its bare essentials. He drums up compensating play against White's exposed king, despite the reduced material on the board: for example, 33 ♙xa5 ♙d1+ 34 ♙c2 ♙f1 35 ♙a8+ ♙h7 36 ♙a3 ♖c4+ 37 ♙c3 ♖a4+ 38 ♙b3 ♖c4+. Despite ever shifting circumstances, neither side is able to wrest an advantage from the other.

29 h5 gxf5

Otherwise, 29...♙c8 30 hxg6 fxf6 31 ♙e5 ♙c2 32 ♖b3 ♙c1+ 33 ♙xc1 ♖xc1+ 34 ♙a2 ♖c4 35 ♙d8+ ♙h7 36 ♖xc4 ♙xc4 37 ♙d7 wins.

30 ♙xh5 ♙c8 31 ♙h1!



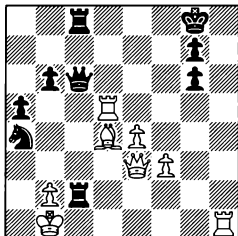
Covering the first rank. Strangely enough, Black has no good way to proceed with his attack, while White's is just about to begin on the other side.

31...♙c2

An example of Black's difficulties: 31...♘c5 walks into 32 ♙xg7! (the bishop, a clergyman only in name, carries his bible everywhere, yet never seems to open it, or follow any of its advice in his dealings with his fellow human beings) 32...♙xg7 33 g6! with an unstoppable attack.

32 g6! f6

Alternatively, 32...♖xg6?? 33 ♙g5 wins and 32...♙xb2+ 33 ♙a1 doesn't change anything - White wins. Note too 32...fxg6.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and force mate.

Answer: Deflection/pin. 33 ♖h8+! ♔f7 (the king is impelled forward against his will, by a power surpassing his own; if 33...♙xh8 34 ♜h6+ ♔g8 35 ♜xg7 mate – Black’s king lived a miner’s life of perpetual darkness, by day and night, and is destined to die in darkness as well) 34 ♜f4+ ♔e7 35 ♜g5+ ♔f7 (the king’s wearisome journey feels like it has a beginning, yet no end) 36 ♜f5+! gxf5 37 ♜xg7+ ♔e6 38 ♜h6 mate. The black king’s high birth and connections are a weak shield against the ruthless rook’s powers.

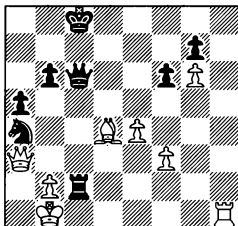
33 ♜dh5

Threatening mate on the move. Also crushing was 33 ♜e1! intending ♜h8+! and ♜h1+: 33...♜xb2+ (this is too little, too late, the way you think of a witty comeback to an insult, hours after its infliction) 34 ♔a1 ♜a2+ 35 ♔xa2 ♜c2+ (the queen engages in futile effort; she is the 50-year-old woman who tries to fit into her prom dress, despite the fact that she is 60 pounds heavier than her high school days) 36 ♔a1 (Black is out of checks) 36...♙f8 (White threatened a nasty rook sacrifice on h8; indeed, 36...♙c3 is met with 37 ♜h8+! ♙xh8 38 ♜h4+ ♔g8 39 ♜h7+ ♔f8 40 ♜h8+ ♔e7 41 ♜xg7+ and mate next move) 37 ♜d7 when Black is defenceless.

33...♙f8 34 ♜a3+

34 e5! ♜xb2+ 35 ♔a1 f5 36 e6 ♔e8 37 ♜xf5 ♜b5 38 ♜f7 forces mate.

34...♔e8 35 ♜h8+ ♔d7 36 ♜xc8 ♙xc8



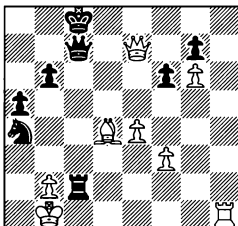
Exercise (combination alert): Black's army is a tumble of disharmonious, misshapen forms. Find White's cleanest path to victory.

Answer: Weak back rank/deflection/double attack.

37 ♖e7!

Threat: ♜h8+. The queen's immodest preening infuriates her homely c6 sibling.

37...♜c7



Exercise (combination alert): White has a simple trick to win material here:

Answer: 38 ♜e8+

His sister is the last person Black's king wanted to run into. The double attack picks off the loose knight.

38...♙b7 39 ♖xa4 ♜c4

Black's attempted counter double attack fails.

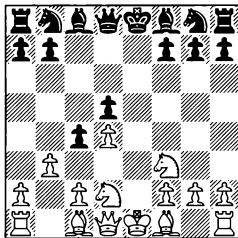
40 ♖d1 1-0

Game 5
M.Carlsen-P.Nikolic
Wijk aan Zee 2005
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♖gf3 c4!?

The experienced GM attempts to confuse his young opponent with an offbeat line. Normal is to head for an isolani position with 5...♘c6 6 ♙b5 ♙d6 7 dxc5 ♙xc5 8 0-0 ♖ge7 9 ♖b3 ♙d6, A.Karpov-V.Korchnoi, Moscow 1974. Karpov and Korchnoi tested this line over and over in their 1974 Candidates' Final match. Both sides claimed success: Korchnoi scored a draw with Black in every encounter, while Karpov claimed that he "tortured" Korchnoi, draining him from the long strain of defence in the games.

6 b3



6...cxb3

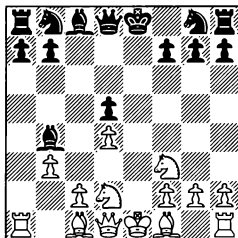
Question: Can Black get away with 6...c3?

Answer: I don't think so. Black won't be able to support the extended c3-pawn in his under-developed state: for example, 7 ♘b1 ♙b4 8 ♙b5+ ♙d7 (or 8...♘c6 9 a3, and now if 9...♖a5? 10 ♖e2+ ♖ge7 11 ♙f4 0-0 12 ♙a4! when Black's bishop has no place to go) 9 ♖e2+ ♖e7, J.Christensen-A.Fonts, correspondence 2000. White can continue 10 ♙xd7+ ♖xd7 11 0-0 ♖bc6 12 a3 ♙a5 13 ♙e1 ♜c8 14 b4 ♙b6 15 ♖xc3!, and if 15...♖xd4?? 16 ♖xd4 ♙xd4 17

♟xd5! ♟xa1 18 ♟e7 ♟d8 19 ♟xc8 ♟xc8 20 ♟c4+ ♟c6 (forced; 20...♟b8?? hangs a piece to 21 ♟f4+ ♟a8 22 ♟xa1) 21 ♟xf7 when Black is busted.

Question: OK, but can Black try to back up the c4 point with 6...b5 7 a4 ♟a5?

Answer: Houdini refutes the plan with the untried 8 ♟e2+! ♟e7 9 ♟b2! ♟c6 10 axb5 ♟xb5 11 ♟a3 ♟b4 12 ♟xb4 ♟xb4 13 bxc4 with an extra pawn for White.
7 axb3 ♟b4!?



Continuing to provoke. Safer is 7...♟d6 8 ♟d3 ♟c6 9 0-0 ♟ge7 with only a minimal edge for White, B.Bok-E.Rozentalis, Skopje 2014.

8 ♟e5!?

Carlsen invites Black's bishop into c3.

8...♟e7

Question: Why didn't Black accept the invitation?

Answer: 8...♟c3? walks into 9 ♟f3! (double attack) 9...♟xd2+ 10 ♟xd2 (the owner of the bishop-pair is a credential worth much in such an open position) 10...♟f6 11 ♟b5+ ♟d7 (11...♟bd7 12 ♟b4 is also wretched for Black) 12 ♟xd7 ♟bxd7 13 ♟b4 and Black's king is caught in the middle of the board.

9 ♟d3 ♟bc6

Not 9...♟c3? 10 ♟f3!, and if 10...0-0 11 ♟xh7+ ♟xh7 12 ♟xc3 when White wins a pawn.
10 0-0!?

A pawn sacrifice. Carlsen continues to incite the b4-bishop, refusing to cover c3 and d4 with 10 ♟b2.

10...♟c3?!

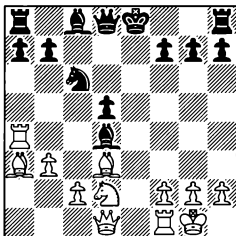
At last, Black agrees, but I think he is just asking for it. Once again, Black rejects the safe

route 10...0-0 11 ♖b2, with just a minimal edge to White.

11 ♖a4 ♗xd4

After 11...♗xe5 12 dxe5 ♗xe5 13 ♖e1 ♗f6 14 ♗h5 White gets loads of compensation for the pawn. If 14...♗f8 15 ♖f4 ♗g6 16 ♖xf6! gxf6 (16...♗xf6?? loses instantly to 17 ♗a3+) 17 ♗f1 with a wicked attack to come. I don't believe Black survives, despite the extra exchange and pawn.

12 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 13 ♗a3



Question: Did White get sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn?

Answer: More than enough, with development lead and Black's king unable to castle kingside.

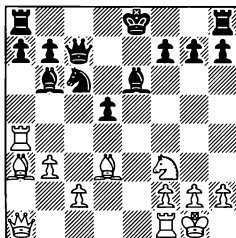
13...♗e6 14 ♗f3 ♗b6 15 ♗a1

One wrong look, and you risk irrevocably offending Black's haughty queen, who veers left, in order to threaten right. Retiesque stuff. Black is unable to protect g7.

15...♗c7

Nikolic isn't too concerned about g7, since he plans to castle long next move.

Not 15...f6? 16 ♖e1 ♗f7 17 ♖f4! (threat: ♗g5+) 17...h6 (or 17...♗c8 18 c4! when Black's position crumbles) 18 ♗e5+ ♗xe5 19 ♗xe5 ♖e8 20 ♗h5+ ♗g8 21 ♗g6 and Black can resign, since 21...♗f5 is met with 22 ♖xe8+ ♗xe8 23 ♗xf5 ♖e1+ 24 ♗f1.



16 b4!?

The offer of g7 is met with stony silence. A move aimed at discouraging queenside castling and an example of Carlsen's non-materialistic philosophy, embraced in his youth.

Question: Is q7 poisoned?

Answer: Not at all. Let's take a look: 16 ♖xg7 (this is the move your greedy writer would play in a flash) 16...0-0-0 17 ♗e1 ♜h8 18 ♛ff6 and although Black attacks along the g-file in theory, I can't find a logical way to proceed with the attack.

16...f6?!

Now Black's woes magnify tenfold. Alternatives were:

a) 16...0-0-0?! 17 ♖b2 f6 18 b5 ♘a5 (this knight is tied to defence of a7, as a horse to her plough; after 18...♙e7? 19 ♖e1 ♙f7 20 ♖xa7! ♙xa7 21 ♖xa7 ♚he8 22 b6 ♗b8 23 ♗a4 ♙d7 24 ♘d4 Black is unable to withstand the pressure) 19 ♘d4 ♙d7 20 ♗a2 ♘b8 21 ♖a1 when Black is in danger of imminent collapse along the a-file. After 21...♚he8 22 h4 ♙xd4 23 ♙xd4 b6 24 ♗xd5 White regained his sacrificed pawn and dominates.

b) 16...0-0! looks like Black's only prayer: 17 b5 ♖e7 18 ♗e1 ♕g6 19 ♖b2 d4 (the Chess-Base square sign: only move) 20 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 21 ♖xd4 ♖f4 22 ♖e4 a5 23 bxa6 ♗xa6 24 ♗xa6 bxa6 25 ♗xa6 when Black is down a pawn, but can offer stiff resistance.

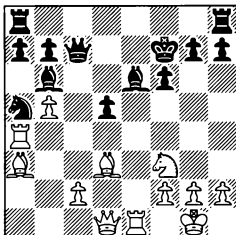
17 ♖e1 ♔f7

If 17...♙e5 18 ♜xe5 fxe5 19 b5 0-0-0 20 ♜xe5 ♜f7 21 ♜e3! d4 (Black can't touch the rook: for example, 21...♙xe3? 22 fxe3 ♜f6 23 ♙b2 ♜g5 24 ♙d4 ♙h3 25 ♙f1 ♜hf8 26 ♜xa7 and he won't survive) 22 ♜f3 ♜c7 23 ♙b2 ♜d6 24 ♙f1 ♙b8 25 ♜d3 when the d4-pawn falls.

18 b5 a5

Nikolic struggles to contain multiple outbreaks in his defensive barrier and shelters a profusion of chronic problems, concerning his king's safety. 19 ♘d4 is both thematic and strong. But in the seams of the position is hidden an even more powerful one.

The alternative was 18...♔d8 19 ♖h4 h5 20 ♜d1 ♕g8 21 ♔d4 when White dominates.
19 ♜d1!



The white queen's services are once again needed on the kingside. Such a move, which displays remarkable understanding of the position's subtle needs, has a way of branding its way to our recollection. This astounding prelude to a multifaceted combination gives us the feeling that we are allowed in on the great secret of the mind of genius, now about to be revealed. The unReti shot, transferring the queen back to her square of origin, soon brings Black's king to his knees. Both ♕f5 and ♔g5+ hover over the black king's head and the *Houdini* evaluation soars to +5.57. Psychologically, such a move is very difficult to make and displays remarkable flexibility of mind. Long force of habit has a way of constraining creativity in adults, but not as much for kids. The remainder is cadenced like a perfect poem, with each word in its perfect place.

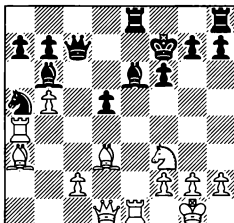
19...♞ae8

Alternatively:

a) 19...♜d7 allows White's rook access to f4: 20 ♞f4 (threatening a cheapo on e5) 20...♕g8 21 ♔d4 ♕xd4 22 ♞xd4 b6 23 c4 when d5 falls and Black's game crumbles.

b) 19...♔c4 walks into 20 ♕f5! ♞he8 (20...♕xf5 21 ♜xd5+ ♕g6 22 ♔h4+ forces mate; the black king wears the plain sack cloth of the penitent's garb, and is now paraded in the streets for all to witness his newfound humility) 21 ♕xe6+ ♞xe6 22 ♜xd5 and wins. A losing position is similar to a family enduring the Black Plague, in that when one member dies, you have no time to mourn, since you are frantically tending to other stricken family members.

c) 19...g6 20 ♔g5+! fxg5 21 ♜f3+ ♕g7 22 ♞xe6 ♞hf8 23 ♜xd5! ♞xf2 (there is nothing better) 24 ♞xb6 ♜xb6 25 ♕c5 wins.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen end Black's resistance after 19...♖ae8?

Answer: Clearance/deflection. White's queen, having returned from her adventure to a1, now seeks a new one on the other side of the board.

20 ♖g5+!

That which was once a discussion in a hypothetical context, makes a smooth transition to the here-and-now. This is selective tormenting of Black's king, the way summer fleas find your writer's flesh and blood delicious, yet inexplicably never seem interested in biting my wife or dogs.

20...fxg5 21 ♜f3+ ♜g8 22 ♜xe6! 1-0

After his fall, ugly purple bruises appear like not-so-holy stigmata on the e6-bishop's rear end. Now comes the deflection shot: 22...♜f7 23 ♜f5! (the wizard raises his arms and the air above him begins to quiver with power; Black can't do much about the threat ♜xe8+, followed by ♜e6+ and ♜f8 mate) 23...g6 (23...♜d8 24 ♜e7 is an immediate game-ender) 24 ♜xe8+ ♜xe8 25 ♜e6+ ♜g7 (the black king's piteous weeping and wringing of hands do little to boost morale in his rapidly deserting followers) 26 ♜b2+ d4 27 ♜xd4 forces mate. "His glorious Grace's untimely passing left a void in our hearts which can never be filled," lies the rook, whose heart seems rather delighted by the king's death.

Game 6
M.Carlsen-G.Kamsky
Khanty-Mansiysk 2005
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6

The Kan Variation.

5 ♖d3

5 ♖d3 and 5 c4 are White's two main tries here.

5... ♞c7

Black's most popular response. 5... ♖c6 and 5... b5 are also commonly played.

6 ♖d3

Other set-ups:

a) 6 ♖e2 b5 7 0-0 b4 8 ♖a4 ♖b7 (Kasparov offers e4, guided by the principle: open the position when leading in development) 9 c3! ♖f6 (Topalov wisely avoids the ultra-risky 9... ♖xe4!? 10 ♖f3 ♖f6 11 cxb4 ♖xb4 12 ♖e3 when Black lags dangerously in development) 10 cxb4 ♖xb4 11 ♖e3 0-0 12 ♜c1 ♖c6 13 ♞d3 ♞a5 14 ♖c5! with an edge for White, who picks up the bishop-pair, G.Kasparov-V.Topalov, Sofia 1998.

b) 6 g3 ♖f6 7 ♖g2 d6 8 0-0 ♖c6 9 ♜e1 ♖e7 10 ♖xc6 bxc6 11 e5 dxe5 12 ♜xe5 is a theoretical position where White may stand a shade better, due to his slightly superior structure, A.Karpov-O.Dzuban, Riga 1988.

c) 6 ♖e3 ♖c6 7 ♞d2 (White plays the position in English Attack style, undaunted by the possibility of ... ♖b4) 7... ♖f6 8 0-0-0 ♖b4 9 f3 ♖e7 10 ♖b3 d5 11 e5 ♖d7 (11... ♞xe5?? loses material to 12 ♖f4 ♞h5 13 g4) 12 f4 b6 13 ♖d4 ♖c5 14 a3 ♖e4 15 ♞e1 ♖xc3 16 ♖xc3 ♖xc3 17 ♞xc3 ♞xc3 18 bxc3 a5 and the ending is about even, M.Carlsen-V.Ivanchuk, London 2013. Carlsen, clearly off form this game, went on to lose, which nearly cost him the tie for first place in the Candidates' tournament, and the right to challenge Anand for the world championship.

6... b5

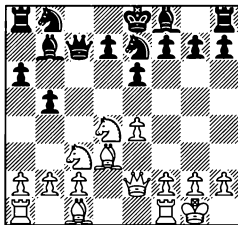
Kamsky plays it in pure Kan fashion, avoiding 6... ♖f6 and 6... ♖c6.

7 0-0 ♖b7 8 ♞e2

After 8 ♜e1 b4 9 ♖ce2 ♖f6 10 ♖g3 ♖c5 11 ♖b3 ♖d6 12 ♖d2 ♖c6 Black equalizes, since he retains control over f4 and e5, S.Tiviakov-V.Anand, Tilburg 1992.

8... ♖e7?

Inaccurate. Instead, 8... ♖f6 and 8... ♖c5 are fully playable here.



Exercise (combination alert): Here we have a rare combination alert in the opening. Black's last move is a mistake. How can White forcefully exploit it?

9 ♖e1

An opaque fog hinders visibility and makes it difficult to spot the answer. It isn't easy to find combinations in the opening, mainly because in this stage of the game we tend to be on autopilot, not searching for them. In this case White refutes Black's last move with:

Answer: 9 ♖xb5!!, a piece sacrifice. This may not be a theoretical discovery of epoch-making significance, but at least it refutes 8... ♖e7. If Black accepts, with 9... axb5?, he won't survive after 10 ♖cxb5! as his queen must keep watch over both c7 and d6: 10... ♖b6 11 ♖e3 (threatening a discovery/fork shot on e6) 11... ♖d8 (11... ♖c8? is met with the crushing 12 ♖xe6!) 12 ♖f3! ♖a6 13 ♖e5 (there are too many knights, threatening too many forks) 13... ♖g6 14 ♖xf7+ ♖c8 15 ♖h5! with a crushing position for White.

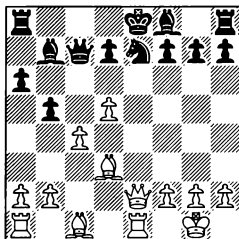
9... ♖bc6 10 ♖xc6 ♖xc6

If Kamsky's intention was to draw Carlsen into sacrificial speculation on d5, then it succeeded. After 10... ♖xc6 11 a4 b4 12 ♖a2 ♖g6 13 ♖d2 a5 14 ♖b5! ♖c7 (14... ♖xc2?? loses to 15 ♖ac1 ♖xb2 16 ♖xd7+!) 15 c3 ♖d6 16 g3 bxc3 17 ♖xc3 0-0 18 ♖ac1 White still exerts slight yet nagging pressure.

11 ♖d5!?

And so Kamsky gets his wish. This is an example of a purely intuitive sacrifice. In some games, there is a terrifying point of ethereal beyondness, which once passed, makes us realize we can never again return to our old, safe, rational life.

11... exd5 12 exd5+ ♖e7 13 c4



Question: White gets only one pawn for the piece. Is it enough?

Answer: I believe so. Black remains miles behind in development and his king remains eternally unsafe on the queenside, which seems the only option for it.

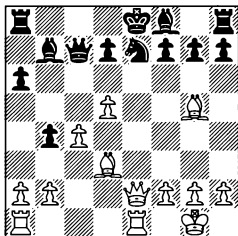
13...b4!?

Question: Doesn't this move make a mockery of the b7-bishop?

Answer: The b7-bishop's hurt feelings are subordinate to the Black's king's life! The trouble is if Kamsky opens queenside lines with 13...bxc4 14 ♖xc4 then White can follow with b3, ♗b2 and then post rooks on either the c or e-files, when it's difficult to see how Black's king evades the coming storm.

14 ♖g5!?

Kamsky experiences the convergence of all his woes on e7. Maxim Notkin suggested the breezy 14 b3. White should have full compensation there as well, but I prefer Carlsen's more vigorous choice.



14...f6

Question: Why must Black weaken, when he had 14...d6?

Answer: Your suggestion appears too slow and White's e7 pin needs to be broken as quickly as possible. White can play 15 ♖c2!, intending a nasty check on a4: 15...h6 16 ♖a4+ ♔d8 17 ♖d2, and now if 17...♗c8 (17...a5? 18 ♖ac1 ♗c8 19 c5 dxc5 20 ♖b5 ♖a6 21 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 22 ♖xc5+ ♗b7 23 d6 ♗c8 24 ♖c6+ ♗b6 25 ♖e3 ♖xd6 26 ♖cc1+ ♗c7 27 ♖xa8+ wins) 18 ♖xb4 White picks up a second pawn for the piece and I just can't imagine Black unraveling at this stage.

15 ♖h5+!

The position's mystery deepens. An overactive imagination, once fired up, generally leads one in the direction of excess. But not this time.

15...g6!

In case you didn't know it, Kamsky is one of the best defenders in the world. He avoids the natural yet perhaps disastrous 15...♔d8?! (Black's queenside castling intent goes up in smoke) 16 ♖h4! d6 17 ♖g3 ♖c8 18 ♖ac1 (threat: c5) 18...♜c5 19 ♖f4! (intending to swing back to e3) 19...♜d4 20 ♜f3 ♘g6 21 ♖xg6 hxg6 22 ♖e3 ♜h4 23 ♖b6+ ♔d7 24 h3 ♖e7 (or 24...♜h5 25 ♜b3! when there is no way to defend against the coming ♜a4+ and the defence collapses) 25 ♜e3 f5 26 c5! when Black is crushed.

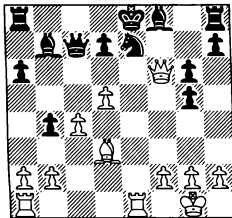
16 ♜f3!

An habitual gardener develops an innate instinct in the recognition of abnormal growth, and then rooting it out. In this instance, Carlsen spots an anomaly on f6. Carlsen doesn't get tricked into regaining some of his material, and then losing the initiative after 16 ♖xg6+? hxg6 17 ♜xh8 fxg5 18 ♜f6 (or 18 ♜xe7+? ♔xe7 19 ♜e1+ ♔f7 and White's attack goes inert) 18...0-0-0 when White's attack is no more and it is Black who is winning.

16...fxg5!

Kamsky once again finds the best defence. After 16...♖g7? 17 ♖f4 (17 ♖xf6?? is met with the simple 17...0-0! when Black is winning) 17...d6 18 ♜e6 0-0-0 19 ♜g3 ♖f8 20 ♖xd6 ♜xd6 21 ♖xd6 White's rook and two pawns are worth more than Black's minor pieces.

17 ♜f6



17...0-0-0!

A soldier in the field may ignore mutilation if his life depends upon him continuing to fight. In moments of desperation, the capacity of the human brain to concoct ingenious escape routes is unlimited. Kamsky buys his king precious time at the cost of returning the extra material. His decision is based on the thought: to take an incorrect stance is understandable; but to do nothing at all is unpardonable. The attempt to preserve material with 17...♖g8?? fails miserably to 18 d6 ♜d8 19 ♜xe7+! ♖xe7 20 ♜e1.

18 ♜xh8 ♜d6?!

The wrong square, since White soon gains time with a c5 threat. More accurate was 18...♜f4!.

19 ♖e4!

Intending c5. Once again, Carlsen isn't fooled into the false path with 19 ♜xh7?! ♜f6!
20 ♖e2 ♜f5 when Black unravels nicely and stands no worse.

19...♜b8 20 ♖ac1 ♜f4

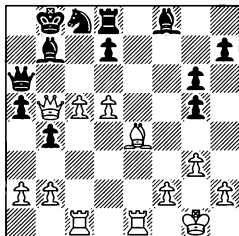
20...♖c8 21 c5! (anyway!) 21...♜f4 22 g3 is similar to the game continuation.

21 g3 ♜f7 22 ♜d4!?

Carlsen's decisions sometimes send forth waves of incredulity to the more pragmatic-minded among us. In his youth, he shied away from materialism (although today, as world champion, he steals material with Lasker, Korchnoi and Fisher-like élan). Here White could take another kingside pawn by 22 ♜e5+ d6 23 ♜xg5, but Carlsen interpreted it as a distraction.

22...d6

22...♜c8 prevents White's next move, but allows 23 c5 a5 24 ♜d3! ♜f6 25 ♜b5 ♜a6.



Exercise (combination alert): It's White to play and win material.

Answer: Pawn promotion. Black is unable to defend against both c7+ and ♜xb7+ after 26 c6!!.

23 ♜b6!

Now b4 falls, after which Black's king will never be safe.

23...♖d7 24 ♜xb4

The queen airily dismisses the b4-pawn with a disparaging wave of her hand.

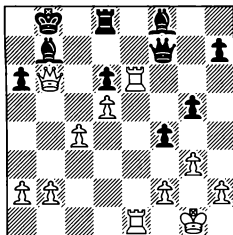
24...♜f5 25 ♖xf5!

An excellent strategic decision. Carlsen decides to exchange off his last minor piece to take control over the e-file, and free himself of worry about counterplay arising from ...♜d4.

25...gxf5 26 ♖e6 f4 27 ♖ce1 ♖d8

Covering his last rank.

28 ♖b6



28...♞c8

Question: How does the ending look for Black after 28...♞c7?

Answer: It looks busted for Black after 29 ♜xc7+ ♜xc7 30 ♞f6 ♜b6 (30...fxg3?? 31 fxg3! leaves Black helpless against the coming ♞ef1, when the f8-bishop is trapped) 31 ♞f7 ♜c8 32 ♞xh7 fxg3 33 hxg3 ♜f5 34 ♞h5 ♜d3 35 b3 ♜g7 36 ♞xg5 ♜c3 37 ♞e3! ♜d2 38 ♞xd3 ♜xg5 39 f4 ♜f6 40 g4 ♜c5 41 g5 ♜d4+ 42 ♜g2 a5 43 ♜g3. White's four extra pawns should beat Black's extra bishop.

29 b4!

There is no thought to consolidate his structure with a stabilizing move like 29 b3.

29...fxg3

The c4-pawn can't be touched. If 29...♞xc4?? 30 b5! axb5 31 ♞e8+ ♞c8 32 ♜xb5 ♜xd5 (there is nothing better) 33 ♞xc8+! ♜xc8 34 ♞e8+ ♜c7 35 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 36 ♞xf8 wins.

30 hxg3 h5

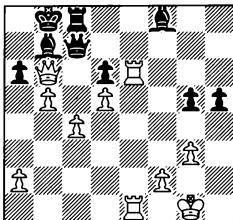
Both sides attack, yet Black's attempts to expose White's king feel like a caricature of his opponent's on the other side. Otherwise, 30...♞c7 31 ♜xc7+ ♜xc7 32 ♞f6 ♜b6 33 c5+ ♜b5 34 c6 ♜a8 35 ♞fe6! and the coming ♞e8 is unstoppable.

31 b5

Houdini prefers the consolidating 31 ♞e4 h4 32 g4 ♜f3 33 ♞e8 ♜a8 34 ♜c7 ♜xe4 35 ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 36 ♞xe4 ♜d7 37 f4 gxf4 38 g5. The passed g-pawn soon costs Black a bishop.

31...♞c7!

There is little choice now, since White arrives first after 31...axb5? 32 ♜xb5 h4 33 ♞e8 ♜a7 34 ♞xc8 ♜xc8 35 ♜a5+ ♜b8 36 ♜d8 threatening ♞b1+: 36...♜f5 37 ♜b6+ ♜a8 38 ♞e3 is curtains for Black.



32 ♖xc7+

Not all attacking games lead to mate. Sometimes we cash in our attack for other forms of currency. In this case, a superior ending for White.

32... ♗xc7 33 a4 axb5 34 axb5 ♕b6 35 ♖e8?

In a rare display of irresolution, Carlsen allows the f8-bishop to fly the coop. Now White's initiative is an old man, creeping to his death. Carlsen allows Black's g7-bishop to escape the bind. Black continues to struggle after 35 ♖f6! ♖d8 36 ♖f5, although implementation of his advantage to the full point is still no easy ascent.

35... ♗g7

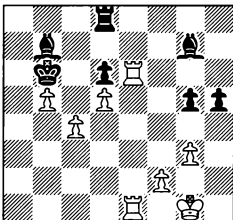
Free at last!

36 ♖e6

Black looks okay after 36 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 37 ♖e8 ♗g4.

36... ♖d8?

Black doesn't stand worse after 36... ♗c3! 37 ♖1e4 ♖d8.



Exercise (combination alert): After a blunder like this, we endure emotions which are difficult to convey into mere words. How did Carlsen force the win of material?

Answer: Pin/deflection/double attack. Black's king is driven away from protection of the b7-bishop.

37 c5+!

Rationality is that always unwelcome guest, who never ceases to annoy our ambitions. This is the shot which Kamsky must have overlooked.

37...♟xc5

It's hard to tell if the black king's shake of the head indicates refusal, or if it's just a shudder. It's not easy to shake that disgusted sense of self-loathing when we allow ourselves to be ensnared by a trap/cheapo. Kamsky finally dissolves the iron pawn chain, yet Carlsen demands a miser's price for the privilege. 37...♟xb5 38 ♚b1+ also wins.

38 ♚e7

Double attack.

38...♙d4

The trouble is 38...♙c3 fails to 39 ♚c7+ ♟d4 40 ♚d1+ when White picks off a bishop.

39 ♚xb7

Now Black's resistance evaporates, the way a flea's trajectory inadvertently collides with a candle's flame.

39...♚f8 40 ♚c7+! ♟xd5

40...♟xb5 41 ♚b1+ ♟a6 42 ♚c2 ♙b6 43 ♚a2+ ♙a5 44 ♚ba1 wins the other bishop.

41 ♚d1!

Threat: b6 and b7.

41...♚b8

41...♚xf2?? doesn't quite cut it after 42 ♚xd4+ which undermines the defender.

42 ♚g7! g4 43 ♚g5+ ♟c4 44 ♚xh5

Carlsen consolidates easily, winning another pawn, as well as dooming g4.

44...♙c5 45 ♚g5 ♚xb5 46 ♚xg4+ ♟c3 47 ♟g2 ♙a3 48 ♚gd4 1-0

Game 7
M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov
Biel 2007
Philidor Defence

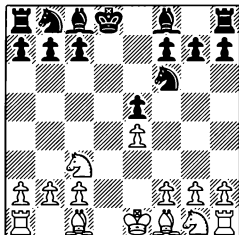
1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♟f6 3 ♟c3 e5

I considered this move order Black's most reliable pathway into Philidor's Defence.

4 ♟ge2

Instead, 4 ♟f3 reaches the main line.

Question: Isn't Black at a serious disadvantage if White ruins castling with 4 dxe5 dxe5 5 ♖xd8+ ♜xd8?



Answer: I still play this line from Black's side (even in must-win situations!) and can tell you from experience that White experiences a very difficult time extracting an advantage. In fact, White scores below 50% from this position in the database (although the stats may be skewed, since this line is favoured only by endgame specialists from Black's side). For example: 6 ♖c4 (6 ♖g5, 6 ♖f3 and 6 f4 are also played here) 6...♗e6!? (6...♗e8 is also viable) 7 ♗xe6 fxe6 8 f3 ♗c5 9 ♖ge2 ♖c6 10 ♖g5 ♗e7 11 0-0-0 h6 12 ♗h4 a6 when the doubled pawns are more a strength than a weakness and I actually prefer Black's position, G.Hernandez-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2003.

4...♖bd7 5 g3

White generally plays for a slow, kingside build-up with the fianchetto line. Instead, after 5 f3 c6 6 ♗e3 b5 7 d5!? ♗b7 8 dxc6 ♗xc6 9 a3 a6 10 ♖g3 g6 11 ♗d2 ♗e7 12 ♗e2 ♗b8 the position looks more like Najdorf Sicilian than Philidor's Defence, R.Kasimdzhanov-G.Hernandez, Benidorm (rapid) 2004.

5...c6

Philidor specialist GM Christian Bauer suggests 5...b5!?, and if 6 ♖xb5 ♖xe4 7 dxe5 (I prefer White after 7 ♖g2 ♗b7 8 0-0) 7...♖xe5 when if White gets greedy with 8 ♗d5?? (of course, White should play 8 ♖g2 ♗b7 9 0-0 with an edge), Black has 8...♖f3+ 9 ♖d1 ♖xf2 mate.

6 ♖g2!?

Carlsen refuses to bother stalling Black's queenside expansion with 6 a4.

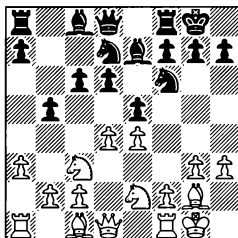
6...b5

Radjabov begins Black normal queenside expansion plan.

7 a3

Keeping the disruptive ...b4 at bay. White can also strike in the centre with 7 d5 ♖b7 8 a4 a6 9 0-0 ♙e7 10 dxc6 ♙xc6 11 ♘d5, O.De la Riva Aguado-C.Bauer, Mondariz 2000, "with a slow positional play turning around the d5-square – a kind of position Magnus probably wanted to avoid striving for more direct actions," writes IM Maxim Notkin.

7...♙e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 h3



Question: What is the point of this move?

Answer: Dual purpose:

1. White's bishop can now rest at e3, without fear of ...♘g4.

2. Now that Black has castled kingside, White has the option of g4, with attacking intent.

9...a5

9...♙b7 isn't bad either but the text looks more purposeful.

10 g4 ♙a6 11 ♘g3

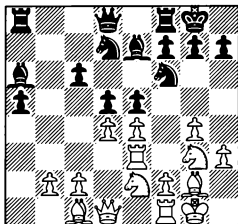
11 b4 slows Black down on the queenside, at the high cost of weakening c4. After 11...♙b7 12 ♖b1 axb4 13 axb4, as in A.Beliavsky-K.Mokry, European Team Championship, Haifa 1989, I like Black's chances after 13...♘b6.

11...b4

11...exd4! looks more logical, since it applies the principle: counter in the centre when attacked on the wing. Following 12 ♗xd4 b4 13 ♘ce2 d5! 14 axb4 axb4 15 e5? (correct is 15 exd5 when *Houdini* analysis runs: 15...♘xd5 16 ♙xd5 cxd5 17 ♗xd5 ♙f6 18 ♖d1 ♘e5 19 ♗xd8 ♘f3+ 20 ♙g2 ♖fxd8 21 ♖xd8+ ♙xd8 22 ♙e3 ♘h4+ 23 ♙h2 ♘f3+ with a draw) 15...♙c5 16 ♗f4 ♙xe2! 17 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 18 exf6 (18 ♘xe2 is met with the clever 18...♘xe5!, winning an important central pawn) 18...♙xf1 19 fxg7, as in E.Paehtz-Zhu Chen, Batumi 2012, Black has a clear advantage after 19...♖e8 20 ♙xf1 ♗b8! when White is obliged to allow a queen swap, ruining her attacking plans.

12 ♖ce2 bxa3?! 13 ♜xa3! d5 14 ♜e3!

It's easy to get lost in the big picture and miss the smaller, more subtle shifts. This move was probably played under the assumption that Carlsen had to recapture with his b-pawn. Black achieves dynamic equality with 12...d5! 13 exd5 ♖xd5, I.Papazov-R.Ruck, Tallinn 1997.



"The rook feels safe in the crowd. The central pawns cover it from attacks of the enemy pieces," writes Notkin. The rook isn't merely hiding on e3. It also pressures Black into resolving the central pawn tension, since it adds heat to e5. A once quiet position transforms into one with the ability of a full range of creative expression. In entering such decisions, fear tends to march side by side with hope. This astoundingly confident move proves to be a brilliant strategic decision which blends harmoniously with the position's particular cadence.

Question: Doesn't this violate the principle: don't lift your rooks into a crowded middlegame?

Answer: It certainly does, but Carlsen clings to a ephemeral idea/belief that his rook constitutes a strength, rather than a weakness on e3. Of course, such a decision requires supernatural assessment abilities. White's rook eventually swings into the kingside theatre via the third or even fourth rank.

14...dxe4!

Otherwise, 14...exd4?! 15 ♖xd4! (the 'pin' is just background noise, like the early morning twittering of sparrows) 15...♙c5 (15...♙xf1? is met with the zwischenzug 16 ♖xc6 ♜e8 17 exd5 ♙xg2 18 ♖xe7+ ♜h8 19 ♖g6+ hxg6 20 ♜xe8 ♜fxe8 21 ♜xg2 which leaves Black busted, since White's queen and two pawns are worth much more than Black's two rooks) 16 ♖xc6! (White is prepared to sacrifice two exchanges) 16...♜b6 17 exd5 ♙xf1 18 ♙xf1 ♙xe3 19 ♙xe3 ♜xb2 20 g5 ♖e8 21 ♙d3 g6 22 ♖e7+ ♜h8 23 ♙xg6! threatens ♙d4+, winning Black's queen. White has whipped up a winning attack.

15 ♖e1

There is no rush, since the e4-pawn isn't going anywhere, so Carlsen, with his leisurely last move, breaks the pin on his f1-rook. Feeble was 15 ♖xe4?! ♠d5 followed by ...exd4.

15... ♗c7

15... ♠d5 16 ♖xe4 ♠f6 17 ♖e3 ♠d5 is met by 18 ♙xd5 cxd5 19 dxe5 ♠b6 20 ♠d4 with a winning position for White.

16 ♠f5 ♙d8?

The miserly bishop stints on his duties and even on his prayers. Up to this point, Radjabov defended with precision. This move, however, only gives voice to Black's coming confusion and looks like a case of too much respect for his dark-squared bishop, and too little respect for Carlsen's f5-knight. "The bishop retreat conclusively disrupts the already poor coordination of the black pieces, dividing them into two camps," write Adrian Mikhachishin and Oleg Stetsko. Black minimizes his disadvantage with the more natural 16... ♖fe8 17 ♠xe7+ ♖xe7 18 ♠g3 exd4 19 ♗xd4 ♙d8 20 g5 ♠f8 21 ♗a4 ♠d5 22 ♖xe4 ♙b5 23 ♖xe7 ♠xe7 24 ♙f4 ♙xa4 25 ♙xc7 ♙d7 26 ♙xa5 ♙xc2. White stands better with the bishop-pair, but Black's position remains fully playable.

17 g5

Shooing away the defender of e4. Computers are deadly in such positions and the following analysis shows us why: 17 dxe5! ♠xe5 18 g5 ♠d5 19 ♖xe4 ♠g6 20 ♠eg3 (threat: ♠h5, targeting g7) 20... ♙c8 21 h4 ♠ge7 22 ♠xg7! ♠xg7 23 ♠h5+ ♠g8 24 c4! wins, since if 24... ♠b4 25 ♙f4 ♗b6 26 ♠f6+ ♠h8 27 ♗h5 ♙f5 28 ♙e5! forces mate. The trackers have no problem picking up the fugitive black king's trail in the wilderness.

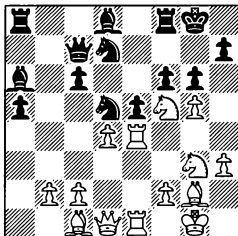
17... ♠d5 18 ♖xe4

The rook, a tourist who remains uneasy in an unfamiliar part of town, continues to thread his way carefully in the middle. It's hard to remember a game where one side's rook acts like a minor piece, the way Carlsen's rook does this game. The position, if it were a diagram, almost looks like a misprinted one.

18... ♙f6!

Radjabov supports e5, avoiding 18... exd4? 19 ♗xd4 f6 20 ♠f4 when "White has decisive pressure," according to GM Lubosh Kavalek.

19 ♠eg3! g6!



An excellent decision, based on the philosophy: if you have a choice in a life-and-death decision, then why not exercise it? Once again Radjabov finds the only way to stay alive. Still, his move only provides a tiny measure of relief against Carlsen's unrelenting kingside pressure.

Question: Doesn't this move weaken all the squares around his king?

Answer: He couldn't have been happy to weaken the dark squares around his king like this. Still, Radjabov realized he wouldn't survive 19...♙c8? 20 ♜xg7! (the knight's mutterings of revolution find sympathetic ears in his followers) 20...♜xg7 21 ♖f5+ ♜h8 22 g6! ♜g8 (not 22...hxg6?? 23 ♜h4+ ♜g8 24 ♜g4 g5 25 ♜h5 ♖7b6 26 ♜g6+ and mate next move) 23 g7+ ♜xg7 24 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 25 ♜h5 ♖f8 26 ♜h6+ ♜g8 (the king, now mad with fear, obsessively rakes his hands through his hair) 27 ♜e8 ♜e7 28 ♜xc6 ♖c7 29 dxe5 when Black's position collapses.

20 ♜h6+ ♜g7

Otherwise, 20...♜h8 21 dxe5 fxe5 (21...♖xe5 22 ♜d4 ♜b6 23 ♜xb6 ♜xb6 24 b3! ♖f7 (24...♖c3 25 ♜f4 ♖d5 26 ♜xd5 cxd5 27 ♜b2 wins) 22 ♖g4 is a strategic nightmare.

21 dxe5

Houdini prefers 21 gxf6+! ♜xf6 22 ♖g4 ♜h8 23 c4! ♖f4 24 dxe5 ♜xg2 25 ♜xg2 ♜g7 26 e6 ♖f6 27 e7 ♜fe8 28 ♜h6! with a crushing position.

21...fxg5

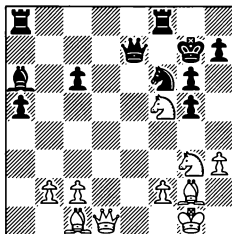
This allows White's coming combination. However, 21...fxe5 fails to save Black after 22 ♖g4 ♜e7 23 ♜xe5! ♖xe5 24 ♜d4 ♜c5 25 ♜xc5 ♜xg4 26 ♜xd5 ♖e5 and now 27 b4! is decisive, preparing to place his bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal.

22 e6!

The e-pawn's march creates dysfunction in the harmony in Black's camp.

22...♜xh6

22...♖f6 walks into 23 e7! ♕xe7 24 ♜xe7+! ♜xe7 25 ♜xe7+! ♝xe7 26 ♜hf5+!, forking king and queen.



Question: True enough, but doesn't Black get two rooks for it?

Answer: Almost irrelevant, since Black's exposed king has no chance bouncing around in the middle. After 26...gxf5 27 ♜xf5+ ♜f7 28 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 29 ♕xg5 *Houdini* rates at '+5.14' – completely resignable for Black.

23 e7!

This advance proves to be a universal weapon.

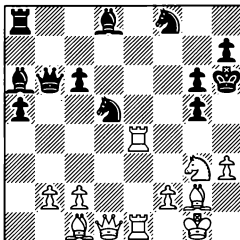
23...♝b6

The old queen hobbles around with the gait of a crone and shuns her king, as if he were a leper, but if 23...♕xe7 24 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 25 ♜xe7 ♜ad8 26 ♝d4 when the dual threats of mate on g7 and h4 end the game.

24 exf8 ♝+

A shocking violation of that most sacred law: always underpromote if you can. Much cooler was 24 exf8♖+!

24...♜xf8



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen found a beautiful computer shot to end the game. Do you see it?

Answer: Pin/Double attack. White pins the g6-pawn in order to threaten Qf5 mate, and also threatens a pin the other way, with Rxd5 .

25 Rxe6!!

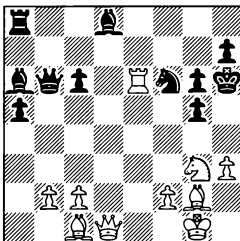
Angry attackers boil forth like wasps from a struck hive.

25... Qxe6 26 Rxe6

White's rook, knight and bishop conspire to form an evil pact against Black's king and queen. White menaces both Qf5 mate and also Rxd5 .

26... Qf6

26... Qg7 is met with 27 Rxd5 .



Exercise (combination alert): Black's last move covers both threats, yet still the sensed weakness of Black's king protrudes like a beer belly. Find Carlsen's dazzling finish.

Answer: Annihilation of the defensive barrier.

27 ♖xg5+!

"How natural it is to sense the essential goodness of human nature at a time like this," declares the bishop to Black's king, who vehemently disagrees with the bishop's view of humanity.

27...♗xg5

Instead, 27...♗g7 28 ♜xf6! ♖xf6 (the bishop, realizing that fighting for his body is a lost cause, begins to pray for his soul) 29 ♜d7+ forces mate.

28 ♜d2+ 1-0

28...♗h4 (Black's king is incapable of uttering his hated sister's name without hissing it) 29 ♜f4+ ♗g4 30 ♜xg4 is mate. The wounded king's breath emits a wet gurgle and then goes silent, as the rise and fall of his chest grows still.

Game 8

L.Aronian-M.Carlsen

Nice (blindfold) 2010

King's Indian Defence

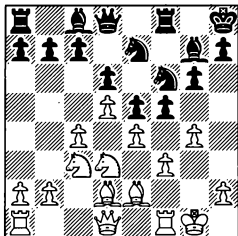
1 ♖f3 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♖g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 0-0 6 ♖e2 e5 7 0-0 ♖c6 8 d5 ♖e7 9 ♖e1

The dreaded 'Long Variation' of the Classical King's Indian. This line is a memory contest, where those who dare enter must be familiar with close to 30 moves of theory. I have a feeling that in 10 years the number will reach move 40, so maybe we'll have GMs who reach the time control, each having consumed one minute on their clocks?

9...♖d7 10 ♖d3 f5 11 ♖d2 ♖f6 12 f3 ♗h8!?

Slightly offbeat, although Black can later play ...♖eg8 and ...♖h6, swapping off the bad bishop. 12...f4 is Black's main move here.

13 g4!?



Aronian responds with an oddity of his own. 13 ♖c1 is the theoretical move.

Question: Doesn't White's last move expose his king to attack?

Answer: It can, as it did in this game. Yet the move in a strange way makes White's king safer, as well, since his king's defenders are granted more room to post around him.

13...c6 14 ♖g2!?

This may be theory, but in this game Carlsen's coming play puts to question this move's soundness. 14 ♕f2! a5 15 a3 ♗d7 avoids what happened to Aronian in the game, as in M.Taimanov-L.Kavalek, Montilla 1977.

14...b5!

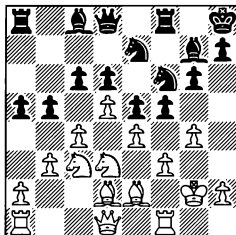
Question: Isn't Carlsen playing on White's strong wing?

Answer: Black can't make headway against White's king by solely concentrating on the kingside, so he softens White's central grip by challenging the pawn front at every conceivable point on the chain.

15 b3

This move was new at the time. 15 ♖b4 bxc4 16 ♕xc6 ♕xc6 17 dxc6 was H.Unrath-H.Marzik, Wuerttemberg 1992, when Black looks fine after 17...♗e6 18 ♖c1 ♖c8.

15...a5



16 ♖f2

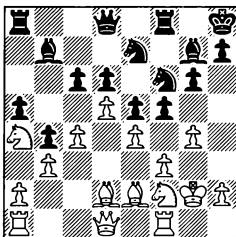
Question: Why isn't White opening the centre when attacked on the wing?

Answer: Theoretically, White would like to do just this. The trouble is doing so activates Black's pieces: for example, 16 dxc6 bxc4 17 bxc4 ♖xc6 and I actually prefer Black's position.

16...b4!

The start of a deep plan, the first step of which is to reduce White's influence over d5.

17 ♖a4 ♗b7!



Carlsen places his bishop on the same diagonal as White's king.

Question: Isn't b7 is a still a long way from g2?

Answer: Not if Black sets up a sacrifice on d5 to blast open the centre.

18 ♖c1?

Alternatively:

a) 18 a3? fxe4 19 fxe4 cxd5 20 exd5 ♟fxd5! saw Black happily follow the Carlsen play-book and win, A.Gallego Alcaraz-D.Arenas, Bagre Antioquia 2014.

b) 18 ♙d3! blunts the power of Black's coming sacrifice.

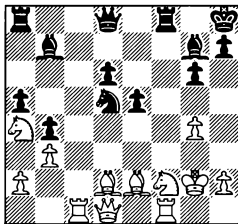
Question: Can't Black continue exactly as Carlsen did in the game?

Answer: He can, but White is infinitely better set up to deal with the coming sacrifice on d5. For example: 18...fxg4 19 fxg4 (19 ♟xg4?! is met by 19...♟h5 with a clear advantage for Black, whose knight is about to invade the f4 hole) 19...cxd5 20 cxd5 ♟exd5 (after 20...♟fxd5?! 21 exd5 ♟xd5 22 ♙e4 ♟h4 23 ♟b6! ♟xb6 24 ♟xb7 ♚a7 25 ♙c6 d5 26 ♟h1! ♚xf1 27 ♟xf1 ♟xg4+ 28 ♟g3 White's piece is worth more than Black's three pawns) 21 exd5 ♙xd5+ 22 ♟g1 e4 23 ♙c4 when I don't believe White stands worse and his king is much better off than what Aronian got in the game.

18...fxe4 19 fxe4 cxd5 20 exd5 ♟exd5!

The culmination of Black's intent.

21 cxd5 ♟xd5



Threat: ...♟e3+. Now White's harmony scatters, as when a person carrying a manuscript suddenly walks into a gust of wind, which sends pages flying in every direction. For the sacrifice, Black gets two healthy central pawns, an explosion of piece activity down the h1-a8 diagonal and endless attack/initiative. For Aronian, this was all compounded by the fact that this was a blindfold game, which makes the defender's survival probability rate dip that much further.

22 ♖g1

There is no safe square for White's king:

a) 22 ♖g3 ♜e7 23 ♜e4 ♜xf1 24 ♜xf1 ♜f4 25 ♜e1 d5 and if 26 ♜ec5 ♜f6! wins, due to the ...♜h4+ threat.

b) 22 ♖h3 ♜f4+ 23 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 24 ♜c4 ♜g5 25 ♜c7 (or 25 ♜xf4?? ♜h6+! 26 ♖g3 exf4 mate) 25...♜af8! 26 ♖g3 ♜f3+! 27 ♜xf3 ♜f4+ 28 ♖h3 (the king bows coldly and takes his leave of Black's queen) 28...♜xf3 29 ♜c1 ♜e2! 30 ♜xf4 ♜xf1+ 31 ♖h4 exf4 and White is down two pawns in a hopeless situation.

c) 22 ♜f3?? ♜xf3! 23 ♜xf3 (or 23 ♜xf3 ♜c3+) 23...♜f4+ wins the queen.

d) 22 ♜e4 ♜f6 23 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 24 ♜f3 ♜xe4! 25 ♜xe4 ♜f2+ 26 ♖h1 ♜ac8 27 ♜e1 d5! 28 ♜xf2 ♜xc1+ 29 ♜xc1 ♜xf2 when Black threatens both ...dxe4 and ...♜f1+. If 30 ♖g1 ♜xa2 31 ♜xd5 ♜a1 wins.

22...e4!

Opening the g7-bishop's diagonal. White's position grows florid with a fever which continues to rise to near-fatal levels.

23 ♜xe4

The only try, otherwise White can resign.

23...♜d4+ 24 ♜f2

After 24 ♜f2?? ♜f6 25 ♜e1 ♜f4 the threat to mate on h3 forces resignation, but 24 ♖g2 was given as best by Mikhalechishin and Stetsko. Black can continue 24...♜e7 25 ♜f3 ♜xf3! (the rule of thumb for this position seems to be: White's light-squared bishop is worth more than a black rook) 26 ♜xf3 ♜f6 27 ♜ce1 ♜xe4 28 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 29 ♜d3 ♜a7 when he is up a clean pawn with the safer king.

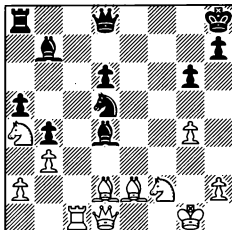
24...♜xf2

"When I played this, I believed that I was winning on the spot, but then immediately noticed his only defence," writes Carlsen. When we notice a combination which we believe could finish us, and by some miracle our opponent misses it, we feel the blessed relief of the acquitted.

25 ♜xf2?

Aronian frittered away a shining opportunity to complicate with 25 ♜g5!. Why is it that some combinational patterns are married to our minds in familiarity, while with others, we miss the pattern over and over? This, Carlsen's recommendation, is a double attack which puts maximum strain upon Black to force the win: 25...♜f6! 26 ♜xf6+ (26 ♜xf6 is met with 26...♜e3!! 27 ♜d4 ♜g2+ 28 ♖h1 ♜xe2+ 29 ♜e4+ ♖g8 30 ♜xd8 ♜c8!! 31 ♜c7 ♜e8! when White is demolished) 26...♜xf6 27 ♜d4 ♜f4! 28 ♜f1 ♜xe4 29 g5 ♜e6 30 ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 31 gxf6 ♜f8 32 ♜d1 d5 33 ♜b6 ♜f4 34 ♜d7 ♜f7 35 ♜c1 h5 36 ♜e5 ♜xf6 and Black's win still requires some technique.

Blindfold chess is that mental asylum where thoughts flux from clarity to blurred, non-sensical notions. An obscuring veil is cast upon the position's truth and after 25 ♜xf2 all of White's dreams fade to invisibility. Carlsen is fortunate Aronian missed 25 ♜g5!, after which the complexity level rises exponentially.



Exercise (planning): The ill begin to infect the healthy in White's camp. After 25 ♖xf2 White's taut position is stretched to its outer defensive limits. Find one powerful move and you render White's resistance meaningless.

Answer: Pile on to f2 and h2.

25... ♛h4

The pestilent queen sickens all who touch her life with a starburst of ill-will.

26 ♖e1

If White tries to protect f2 with his bishop, Black switches the target to h2 with 26 ♙e1 ♗e5 (the bishop laughs openly in the white king's face, asking: "Fool! Do you truly believe God listens to your prayers?") 27 h3 ♛g3+ 28 ♔f1 (the king attempts to sneak away without bidding his adieu to his tyrannical sister) 28... ♕e3 and mate! The king's long awaited death sentence is finally meted out.

26... ♖f8

White's forces are pinned down on f2, like a collector's butterfly specimens on a cork board.

27 ♙f3 ♖xf3 28 ♛e4

The queen's nervous titter betrays her true feelings. Not the most effective double attack we have ever witnessed, but we must remember that this was a blindfold game.

28... ♛xf2+ 0-1

After 29 ♔h1 (White's king is a man of few words; when he does speak, it is generally profanity in the direction of Black's meddlesome queen) 29... ♛xd2 30 ♛e8+ ♔g7 the checks soon run out and White gets mated.

Game 9
M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura
 Monaco (rapid) 2011
Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♙f6 4 e3 a6 5 ♚c2

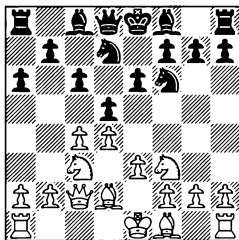
5 ♘f3 is White's main line.

5...e6

This is quite common, but I'm not a big believer in Black's move order, since the Semi-Slav formation doesn't always fit well with an early ...a6. In my opinion 5...b5 and 5...g6 feel like a better fit with an early ...a6.

6 ♙f3 ♙bd7 7 ♙d2

Also logical is to back up c4 with a pawn: 7 b3 ♙d6 8 ♙b2 e5!? 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 dxe5 ♙xe5 11 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 12 ♙d3 0-0 13 ♙e2 ♚a5+ 14 ♙c3 ♙xc3+ 15 ♚xc3 ♚xc3+ 16 ♙xc3 ♙d7 17 f3 ♚fc8 18 ♙d2 gave White a pleasant edge in the ending, with control over d4, as well as an isolated d-pawn and a potentially bad bishop for Black, P.Leko-Ni Hua, Saratov 2011.



7...dxc4!?

Question: Isn't the rule of thumb for Black in such positions to always wait for White's light-squared bishop to move, before playing ...dxc4?

Answer: Correct, since taking immediately on c4 essentially hands White a free move. Still, Nakamura's choice is book. Black's slightly passive position in V.Tkachiev-M.Sebenik, Legnica 2013, after 7...♙d6 8 e4 dxe4 9 ♙xe4 ♙xe4 10 ♚xe4 ♙f6 11 ♚h4 c5 12 0-0-0 probably didn't appeal to Nakamura.

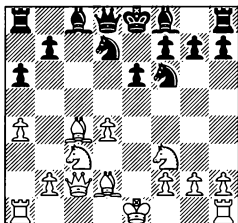
8 a4!

The pawn isn't running away. I think this is White's most accurate move, preventing the tempo-regaining ...b5. Following 8 xc4 b5 9 e2 b7 10 e4 xe4 11 xe4 b8 ! (perhaps slightly more accurate than 11... b6) 12 O-O c5 13 h4 e7 Black equalized after achieving the freeing ...c5 break, C.Bauer-E.Reinhart, Kemer 2007.

8...c5

8...b5? of course fails to 9 axb5 cxb5 10 xb5 b7 11 a3 when c4 is certain to fall.

9 xc4 cxd4 10 exd4



The position reached is a Queen's Gambit Accepted, but with White's extra c2 for free, since Black took two moves to achieve the ...c5 break.

Question: Is the extra c2 so great for White? After all, the queen sits on the open c-file and may be misplaced. Also, if White later plays d3 , he may be vulnerable to ... d5 and ... b4 tricks.

Answer: I think this is exactly Nakamura's thought: White's 'free' move comes at a cost.

10... b6

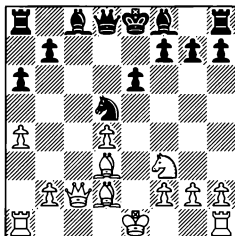
Nakamura has experience from White's side as well: 10... e7 11 O-O O-O 12 ac1 b6 13 d3 h6 14 b3 (White returned his 'free' move) 14... bd5 15 xd5 xd5 16 c4 d7 !? 17 xd5 exd5 18 e5 and White continues to exert nagging strategic pressure, H.Nakamura-Ni Hua, London 2009.

11 d3

A new move in the position. White's bishop takes direct aim at Black's kingside. The more strategic route is to keep watch over d5, with 11 b3 e7 12 O-O O-O 13 ac1 d7 14 e5 c8 15 d3 c6 , G.Meier-P.Acs, German League 2011. Here also, I prefer White.

11... bd5 12 xd5 xd5 !

A questionable pawn offer. This move distracts a defender from the kingside and leaves Black seriously lagging in development. 12... xd5 13 O-O e7 may be Black's best shot at equality.

**13 0-0**

Carlsen ignores the offer and increases his growing development lead.

Question: Can White grab h7 and get away with it?

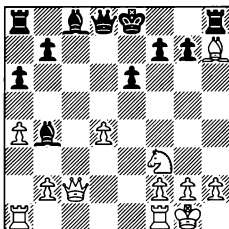
Answer: Houdini says yes, but to my human eyes it appears as if Black gets compensation with a gain of time and an open h-file after 13 ♖xh7 ♕d7 14 ♖e4 ♖c6 15 ♜b3 ♕d6 16 0-0 f6 17 ♜fe1 ♜f7. Houdini isn't intimidated and still prefers White.

13...♕b4?!

When momentum goes careening out of control, it is then that we are in danger of losing our footing. Nakamura, a habitual embracer of chaos, goes too far in this overly optimistic idea to provoke and complicate. This attempt to delve counterplay where none exists, only makes his situation worse. When we try an eccentric idea and then lose the game, later on our suffering increases upon the sickening realization that it was self-inflicted, and therefore deserved.

After the text, Black falls dangerously behind in development. There are some chess sins for which atonement is beyond reach. I speak of course of the original sin: falling behind in development in the opening. Maybe Black should cut his losses with 13...♕d6 14 ♕e5 ♜c7 15 ♜b3!? 0-0 (or 15...♕xe5 16 dxe5 ♜xe5!? 17 ♜fe1 ♜d6 18 ♖e4 0-0 19 ♜ad1 when White exerts strong pressure for the pawn and can probably soon win it back, while maintaining an edge) 16 ♜fe1 ♕d7 17 ♜ac1 ♖c6 18 ♖e4, although I still prefer White who exerts central pressure and may soon begin a kingside attack by swinging his queen to h3.

14 ♕xb4 ♕xb4 15 ♕xh7!



Excellent judgment. White's three pawns plus enduring initiative are worth more than Black's extra piece.

15...g6

Not much choice since Black is just down a pawn with zero compensation after 15...d7 16 e4.

16 xg6 fxg6 17 xg6+ f8

The startled king swallows a gasp and attempts to regain his composure, as best he can.

18 e5

Threatening mate on the move. White stands clearly better since Black continues to lag in development, with his queenside still dormant.

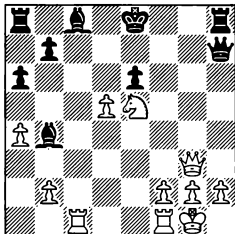
18...e7 19 a1 h7

Nakamura threatens his own mate in one.

20 g3!?

White can also partially ignore the threat and act like nothing has changed with 20 fd1! xh2+ 21 f1 h1+ 22 e2 h5+ 23 f3 h6 24 xh5 xh5 25 c4! d6 26 dc1. White regains the sacrificed piece and emerges a pawn ahead in the ending after 26...e7 27 xc8 xc8 28 xc8 xe5 29 dxe5 xe5+ 30 f2, with good chances for White to convert.

20...e8 21 d5!



This is turning into a 'How to Attack' clinic. Carlsen logically opens lines to Black's exposed king.

21...♙d6

21...exd5? is met with 22 ♘g6 ♙e6 (22...♙g8?? 23 ♙fe1+! is crushing) 23 ♙e5 ♙xg6 24 ♙xh8+ ♙f8 25 ♙c7 when Black remains under severe pressure.

22 ♙fe1 ♙d7

Houdini doesn't like this move, but how else can Black bring out his queenside pieces?

23 h3

Carlsen rejects a pair of equally tempting alternatives:

a) 23 ♘xd7 ♙xg3 (or 23...♙xh2+ 24 ♙xh2 ♙xh2+ 25 ♙f1 ♙xd7 26 dxe6+ ♙e7 27 g3 ♙ac8 28 ♙xc8 ♙xc8 29 ♙g2 ♙xg3 30 ♙xg3 and White should convert) 24 ♙f6+ ♙d8 25 ♘xh7 ♙h4 26 g3 ♙xh7 (26...♙e7? is met with 27 d6!) 27 gxh4 exd5 28 ♙ed1 ♙xh4 29 ♙xd5+ ♙e7 30 ♙c7+ ♙e6 31 ♙d3 ♙g8+ 32 ♙f1! with excellent conversion chances for White.

b) 23 f4, and if 23...♙g8 24 ♘xd7 ♙xd7 25 ♙f3! ♙g7 26 dxe6+ ♙e8 27 ♙cd1 when White's four pawns are worth more than Black's lone extra bishop.

23...♙xe5!?

Houdini raises a censuring eyebrow at this move, which appears to be a high-risk attempt to ameliorate his numerous strategic difficulties. It certainly is tempting to eliminate White's monster knight. In doing so, Nakamura hands over the key defender of his dark squares. I played around with alternatives, and Black ended up losing every time, so the move isn't a mistake if everything else loses.

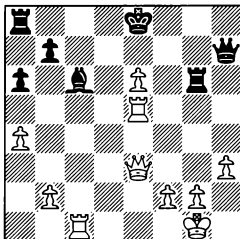
24 ♙xe5 ♙g8 25 ♙e3

Carlsen hammers away at e6.

25...♙g6 26 dxe6

26 ♙c7 ♙c8 27 ♙xb7 also looks rough for Black.

26...♙c6



Exercise (planning): On the surface, Black's position doesn't appear as a frayed old rope, on the verge of unravelling. Carlsen picked up four pawns for the piece. On Black's side of the ledger, Nakamura's king looks safe and it appears as if he may be generating threats on Carlsen's king. Come up with a plan for White to seize the initiative for good.

Answer: Sacrifice the exchange, eliminating Black's only active piece. Black's extra rook won't save his eternally exposed king.

27 ♖xc6!

When an attack begins to run out of material to invest, we feel like strung out heroin addicts, who lack further means to enter our private, drug-induced oblivion. Carlsen, now virtually in the endgame stage, amazingly continues to sacrifice, never running out of his drug of choice.

27...bxc6 28 ♜e4!

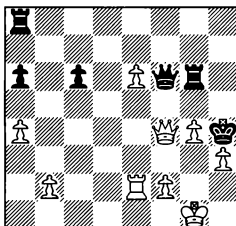
Target: c6.

28...♜g7!

Nakamura defends accurately, while under tremendous pressure, avoiding:

a) 28...♜c8? hangs a rook to 29 ♜g5! ♜g7 30 ♜xh7! ♜xh7 31 ♜g8+ ♜e7 32 ♜xc8, which regains the lost rook, with a completely winning rook and pawn ending.

b) 28...♜e7 29 ♜b4+ ♜f6 30 ♜d4 ♜a7 31 ♜c3 ♜e7 32 ♜e2+! (the e3-square must be kept open for White's queen) 32...♜g5 33 ♜e3+ ♜h5 34 g4+ ♜h4 (34...♜xg4+ 35 hxg4+ ♜xg4 36 f3+! forces mate) 35 ♜f4! ♜f6.



Exercise (combination alert): It's White to play and force mate.

Answer: Overloaded defenders. Black has no good answer to the dual mate threats on h5 and g3 after 36 ♖e5!!

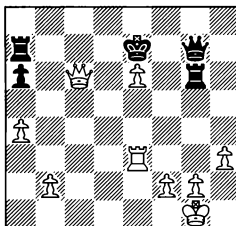
29 ♜xc6+

Thus c6 falls, after which Carlsen picks up his fifth pawn for the rook, plus an enduring attack.

29...♜e7 30 ♜c5+ ♜e8 31 ♜c6+ ♜e7 32 ♜e3 ♜a7

This involved byway fails to secure the rook.

33 ♜c5+ ♜e8 34 ♜c6+ ♜e7



Exercise (combination alert): Black's degraded position is ripe for exploitation. How should Carlsen continue?

Answer: Ignore defence of g2 and run Black's a7-rook out of squares. The sickly a7-rook adds his needs to Black's already ample burdens.

35 ♖b6!!

The queen's invisible leash of power oppresses and brings to heel the a7-rook's ambitions. Carlsen's comp-like continuation is far more clear than a line like 35 ♖c5+ ♕e8 36 ♜b3 ♖c7.

35...♜xg2+

35...♜a8 is met with 36 ♖c5+ ♕e8 37 ♖c6+ ♕e7 38 ♖xa8 when Black's wishes elude his grasp. White not only wins the rook, but furthers the insult by retaining coverage on g2.

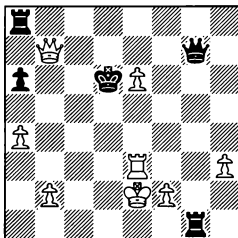
36 ♔f1

"The time you could inflict harm upon my person is long past, and in fact, never even existed," the king informs the rook.

36...♜g1+ 37 ♔e2

"Despite having an extra rook, Black is helpless," writes GM Mikhail Golubev.

37...♜a8 38 ♖b7+ ♔d6



Exercise (critical decision): Should White grab the en prise a8-rook?

Answer: No. The attack comes first.

39 ♜d3+!

The lash is applied to Black's king, until the white of bone begins to show.

The hasty 39 ♜xa8?? allows Black a draw: 39...♜xb2+ 40 ♔f3 (40 ♔d3 ♜b1+ 41 ♔d2 ♜a2+ 42 ♔d3 ♜b1+ is perpetual check) 40...♜f6+ 41 ♔e4 ♜g6+ 42 ♔d4 ♜d1+ (the rook, a willing co-conspirator, abets his queen in an attempt to frame in the White's king's escape routes) 43 ♔c3 ♜c1+ 44 ♔b4 ♜b1+ 45 ♜b3 a5+! 46 ♔xa5 (the king's face distorts into an ugly grimace, in his futile efforts to evade pursuers) 46...♜c5+! 47 ♔b4 ♜e1+ 48 ♔a3 ♜a1+ and draw.

39...♙xe6

After 39...♙e5 40 ♜xa8 the trouble is Black's king is in the way of his intended ...♜xb2+.

40 ♜c6+! 1-0

The wraith-like queen materializes from nowhere, applies her taint, and then dematerializes before the enemy is able to pinpoint her location and strike back. After 40...♙f5 41 ♜d5+, it's mate if 41...♙f4 (or 41...♜e5+ 42 ♜xe5+ ♙xe5 43 ♜xa8 and isn't it infuriating when the wealthiest, who have the most to give, refuse to share the least?) 42 ♜c4+ ♜d4 43 ♜xd4. "Behold before you, the sum total of your life's efforts," says the queen to Black's king, as she points to the gallows pole.

Game 10
M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura
 Wijk aan Zee 2013
Sicilian Defence

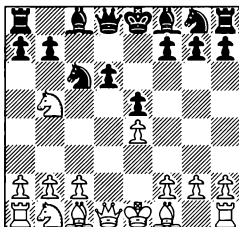
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e5

The Kalashnikov Variation of the Sicilian.

Question: What separates the Kalashnikov from the Pelikan?

Answer: In the Kalashnikov, Black holds back ...♘f6 when ...e5 is played. 4...♘f6 5 ♘c3 e5 is the Pelikan.

5 ♘b5 d6



6 g3

Question: This line isn't supposed to be very dangerous for Black, is it?

Answer: Correct. Carlsen's choice is considered a theoretically harmless sideline, with which he tests Nakamura's memory and also leads him into possibly unfamiliar waters. This is an instance of Carlsen applying Larsen's opening playbook, which I talked about in the Introduction. 6 ♖1c3 and 6 c4 are far more common.

6...h5!

And apparently Carlsen's opening ambush succeeds, or perhaps Nakamura steered clear of the theoretical move to avoid Carlsen's preparation. 6...♟f6 is Black's main move: 7 ♟g2 ♟g4! 8 ♟f3?! (8 ♟d3 looks better) 8...h5 9 h3 ♟xf3 10 ♟xf3 ♟a5+ 11 ♟5c3 d5! when White's pieces are tangled and behind in development. So.Polgar-E.Schmittziel, Budapest 1991.

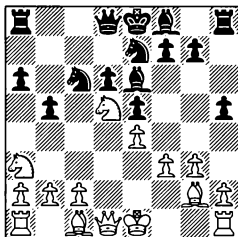
7 ♖1c3 a6 8 ♟a3 b5

A new move. If you play ...h5 earlier, then 8...h4 is the logical follow-up: 9 ♟g2 h3!? (I'm not so sure about this move, as the h3-pawn could become a target later on if pieces get swapped away; I would keep the h-pawn fluid with 9...b5) 10 ♟f1 b5 11 ♟d5 ♟ce7 12 ♟g5 f6 13 ♟e3 ♟xd5 14 ♟xd5 ♟b8 15 0-0-0 was J.Nunn-N.Short, Wijk aan Zee 1990. I prefer Black's position after 15...♟b7! 16 ♟e6+ ♟e7, since e4 is loose and White's a3-knight is out of play.

9 ♟d5 ♟ge7 10 ♟g2 ♟g4!

Carlsen said he expected Nakamura to trade on d5: 10...♟xd5 11 exd5 ♟e7 12 c4 ♟d7 13 0-0 h4 looks okay for Black, despite his development lag.

11 f3 ♟e6



Nakamura begins to foster a theory built upon a false premise. Carlsen called this decision "very strange".

Question: It looks natural to me. Why did Carlsen think the move is "strange"?

Answer: Because now Black is unable to play ...♟xd5?? as it would hang a piece, and ...♟xd5

(as was later played in the game) seriously weakens Black's light squares. More natural was 11...♗d7, after which ...♕xd5 is in the air.

12 c3 h4 13 ♖c2 ♗xd5?

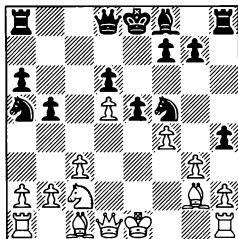
Consistency isn't such a great thing if you are on the wrong course to begin with. Nakamura's decision debilitates his light squares for the remainder of the game. GM Golubev suggests 13...♖a5 14 ♖ce3 ♕xd5 15 ♕xd5 ♜c8 when Black retains a playable position.

14 exd5 ♖a5 15 f4

Freeing his g2-bishop and challenging Black's centre.

15...♕f5

GM Alexey Korotylev said the following line favours White as well: 15...hxg3 16 hxg3 ♜xh1+ 17 ♗xh1 ♕f5 18 ♜d3 g6 19 ♗e4 ♜b6 20 ♖f1 when White threatens f5 and if Black moves the knight, his position gets even worse. For example, 20...♕g7? 21 ♗e3 ♜c7 22 fxe5 when White wins a pawn, since Black can't recapture with 22...dxe5?? as 23 d6 wins on the spot) 21 ♗xg6! fxc6 22 ♜xg6+, favourably regaining the piece with the ♜f7 threat.



16 g4!!

I wouldn't even have considered such a move and would have automatically played the safe 16 ♜d3.

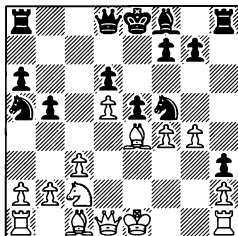
Question: Didn't White just fatally weaken his own king with his last move?

Answer: I was stunned when Carlsen played his move, which also appeared suicidal to me. Somehow Carlsen understood that his grip on the light squares keeps his king safe and it is Nakamura's king who is endangered. This is an example of Carlsen's lethally perfect intuition in positions of great complexity, which guides him to astonishing decisions the rest of us would incorrectly reject.

16...h3

Nakamura logically opens h4 for his pieces. When it comes to intensity levels for each side's potential attack, we note an asymmetrical pace, with Black's side appearing faster – and if we came to such a conclusion, we would be dead wrong.

17 ♖e4



The question of which piece should enter h4 begins to press upon Nakamura.

17...♖h4

When we believe in something with all our heart and then it fails us, we tend to turn our faith to its opposing force.

Question: Isn't a queen check on h4 devastating for White?

Answer: Not at all. If the queen swoops into h4, Black simply doesn't have enough pieces to bother White's seemingly weakened king. For example: 17...♖h4+ 18 ♖f1 ♖h6 (the human move; *Houdini* prefers the meek retreat 18...♖e7) 19 ♖g1 g6 20 g5! ♖f5 21 ♖b4 exf4 (after 21...♖g7 22 ♖d3 White stands clearly better) 22 ♖g4 ♖h5 23 ♖e2 (threatening a nasty discovery) 23...♖e7 24 ♖xf4 ♖c4 25 ♖xf5! gxf5 26 ♖e1 0-0-0 27 ♖g3 ♖xe2+ 28 ♖xe2 ♖h4 29 ♖f3 (e7 and a6 hang, leaving Black's rickety position on the verge of collapse) 29...♖xf4 30 ♖xf4 ♖xg5 31 ♖d4 ♖e3+ 32 ♖f2 ♖g4+ 33 ♖g3 when Black struggles and doesn't generate full compensation for the exchange.

18 0-0!

"Here I thought I was just much better," said Carlsen, after the game.

18...g6

After 18...♖e7 19 ♖h1 exf4 20 ♖xf4 ♖g5 21 ♖c1 ♖f6 22 ♖b4 0-0 23 ♖e3! the h3-pawn is loose. If 23...♖e8 24 g5 ♖c4 25 ♖g3! ♖xe4 26 ♖xh4 ♖e7 27 ♖f3! and the threat to load up major pieces on the h-file induces Black to hand over the exchange with 27...♖xf4 28 ♖xf4 with a winning position for White.

19 ♖h1

White dominates the light squares, so Carlsen places his king on the safety of that colour.

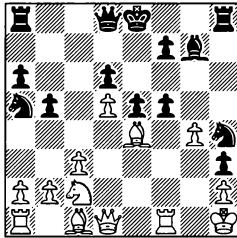
19...♗g7!?

Perhaps Black should risk 19...f5!? when Carlsen intended 20 ♖d3. Now if 20...e4 21 ♗e2 ♗g7 22 ♖g1 ♜c7 23 gxf5 gxf5 24 ♖g3 Black's position is difficult, but better than what he got in the game.

20 f5!

Increasing his grip on the light squares and smothering Black's counterplay. After 20 fxe5 dxe5 (20...♗xe5?! allows 21 ♖d4) 21 ♖b4 0-0 22 a4 f5 23 gxf5 gxf5 24 ♗c2 e4 25 axb5 axb5 26 ♜h5 ♖f3 27 ♗d1! ♖e5 28 ♖g1 ♜f6 29 ♗g5 ♜g6 30 ♗h6! ♖g4 31 ♗xg4 ♜xh6 32 ♜xh6 ♗xh6 33 ♗xf5+ ♖h8 34 ♗xe4 Black is down two pawns and can resign, since 34...♜f2 fails to 35 d6 ♗f4 36 ♖g4 ♜f8 37 ♖h4+ ♖g8 38 ♖xh3.

20...gxf5



21 gxf5

The human move. *Houdini* prefers 21 ♗xf5!? ♖xf5 22 ♜xf5 ♜d7 23 ♜f3 0-0-0 24 b3 e4 25 ♜xe4 ♗xc3 26 ♖b1 ♜c7 27 ♗e3 when Black's pieces fail to coordinate well and he suffers from multiple pawn weaknesses.

21...♖g2?

Black's best chance may lie in 21...♗h6 22 ♗xh6 ♜xh6 23 f6 (after 23 ♜g4 ♖d7! Black may be okay) 23...♜h8 24 b3 when Black continues to struggle, but is better off than in the game's continuation.

22 f6!

Line opening. Black has a choice of taking, which fatally opens the f-file or backing up to f8, when his pieces can barely move.

22...♗f8

Close proximity to a diseased thing begets disease in yourself. The bishop's once sterling qualities now come into question and White's choking f6-pawn poisons the harmony

in Black's defence. However:

a) 22...♙xf6 fails to change events: 23 ♜f3 ♜h4 24 ♙g5! (double attack/deflection) 24...♜f4 25 ♙xh4 ♙xh4 26 ♜g1 when the defence must hold out against the siege with scant provisions and White has a completely winning position.

b) 22...♙h6? 23 ♜h5 ♜f4 24 ♙xf4 exf4 25 ♜xf4 and Black is hopelessly tangled in a deadly pin.

23 ♜f3 ♜c7 24 ♜b4 ♜b7

Preparing to challenge White's bishop's post on e4.

25 ♜c6 ♜c5 26 ♙f5

Challenging e4 didn't help Black a bit, who now worries about the undermining ♙xh3 as well.

26...♜d7

Houdini frowns on this move, yet everything else loses as well.

27 ♙g5

Clearly White's intimidating bishops firmly believe in a non-separation of church and state.

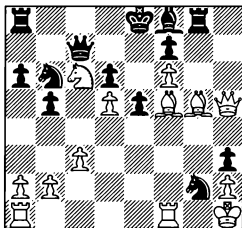
27...♜g8

27...♜b8 is met with 28 ♜xe5! dxe5 29 d6 ♜a7 30 d7+! ♜d8 (30...♜xd7 31 ♜c6 ♜d8 32 ♜e6+! fxe6 33 ♙g6 is a sweet mate) 31 ♜d5 when Black is crushed.

28 ♜h5

In the dim light of the room, the queen's expression is unreadable, the uncertainty of which makes Black's king all the more anxious.

28...♜b6



Exercise (combination alert): Black intends to undermine the c6-knight with ...♜xd5 next. The fact that all the necessary conditions are assembled for White's combination is no guarantee of success. We must still find the correct continuation. What would you play?

Answer: Pin. White threatens to cut off the black queen's communication to f7 with ♖e7 next.

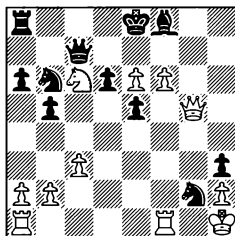
29 ♖e6!

"Your treason comes at a price: pain, imprisonment, humiliation in this life, and the flames of hell in the next," the bishop lectures Black's king. Carlsen had to factor in Black's coming deflection trick.

29...♠xg5

The rook, diminished and close to exhausted, makes a final wild lunge at his oppressor, choosing to die a hero's death. 29...♜b7 30 ♖e7! is brutal.

30 ♜xg5 fxe6 31 dxe6 1-0

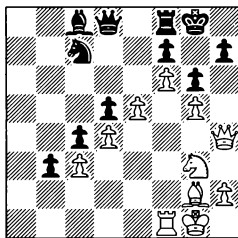


Black is helpless. The trouble is a mob's thirst for violence is unslakable by logical argument. Now if Black tries 31...♜xc6 (31...♖f4 32 f7+ ♜xf7 33 exf7+ isn't of much help to Black), then follows its grim sequel: 32 f7 mate. Black's king wills his eyes to disbelieve what they see.

Chapter Two

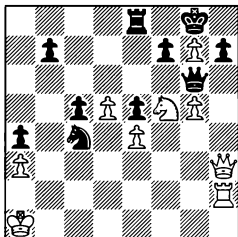
Carlsen on Defence and Counterattack

In a chess game our perceptions can be distilled and divided into two states: either the absence or the presence of the position's truth. If we carry even a seed of the former, our thought processes quickly manifest it as misfortune on the board. In this chapter we look at how Carlsen reacts while under the strain of defence. Resistance in inferior positions is a place where Carlsen convincingly outstrips his colleagues. Examples from the chapter:



In this first diagrammed position, Carlsen was in a battle for perhaps the most important game of his life. He played Black versus a desperate Anand in their 2013 Chennai match. The score was +2 for Carlsen. If Anand won, he was right back in the match; if Carlsen could pull off the win, it all but guaranteed his new world champion's crown. I remember watching this game, thinking: "If Carlsen survives this one, he is a magician."

On the kingside, white weapons are being discharged everywhere, much like the ending of every *Quentin Tarantino* movie. Anand threatens ♖h6 followed by ♜f4 and ♜h4, forcing mate on h7. Carlsen calmly promoted his b-pawn to a new queen and then promptly sacrificed it to end White's mate threats. Apparently the computers have worked this position out to a probably draw, but Carlsen managed to pull off the full point, thanks to Anand's future blunder.



In the second diagram, improbability passed the dreaded barrier of impossibility and Black had no chance of survival. White's salivating pieces view Black's king with greedy eyes of acquisition. In such positions logic and rational thought are almost rendered obsolete, pushed aside by the needs of raw calculating power. Every effect is the result of a previous cause or collection of causes. Here, Carlsen, after messing up matters earlier in the game, found himself in the unenviable spot of defending Black versus a surging Hikaru Nakamura, who was about to score his first ever win over him. *Houdini* rates this at +15.85 – about the equivalent of a queen, rook and extra pawn. Unbelievably, Carlsen managed to squirm, and confuse his way out of this one as well, when Nakamura failed to find a few put-away combinations.

Game 11
M.Carlsen-M.Vachier Lagrave
 Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2006
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘c6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♜c7

The Taimanov Sicilian.

6 ♙e3

With this move White often aims for an English Attack formation, with ♜d2, f3 and

0-0-0. This system tends to lead to sharper positions than 6 ♖e2 and 6 g3.

6...a6 7 ♗d3

Carlsen changes his mind and switches back to the traditional kingside castling lines. 7 ♗d2 leads to the English Attack formation after 7...♟f6 8 0-0-0 (8 f4 can still be played here: 8...b5 9 e5 ♟g4 10 ♗g1 ♗b7 11 0-0-0 ♟xd4 12 ♗xd4 ♗e7 13 ♗d3 f5 14 h3 ♟h6 15 ♖hg1 and White's extra space gives him an edge, S.Karjakin-P.Svidler, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014) 8...♗b4 9 f3 ♟e5 (as mentioned in a note last chapter, Carlsen lost a disastrous game to Ivanchuk after the slightly unusual 9...♟e7) 10 ♟b3 b5 11 ♗d4 ♗e7 12 ♗f2 d6 13 ♟b1 0-0 14 g4 with a familiar English Attack opposite-wings castling position, G.Kasparov-Ye Jiangchuan, Bled Olympiad 2002.

7...♟f6 8 0-0 ♟e5

With the strategic threat of ...♟eg4.

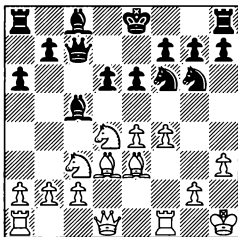
9 h3 ♗c5

One of the benefits of the Kan/Taimanov formation is that Black isn't obliged to develop his bishop on e7 every time. In this case Vachier Lagrave posts his bishop to a more ambitious square.

10 ♟h1

Not such a bad precaution with Black's bishop hovering on the g1-a7 diagonal.

10...d6 11 f4 ♟g6



Question: Isn't Black's knight simply going to get kicked with an eventual f5?

Answer: A posting on g6 is common to Kan/Taimanov formations. Black anticipates the coming f5, planning to then roost on e5.

12 ♗e1

The queen can head for h4 after shooing away Black's g6-knight with f5.

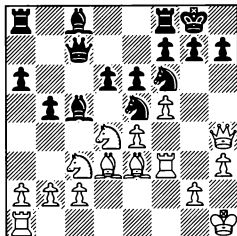
12...0-0 13 f5

Carlsen hands over control of e5; otherwise White risks his attack coming to a standstill.

13...♖e5 14 ♖h4

This is possible because Black's bishop isn't posted on its traditional e7-square.

14...b5 15 ♖f3!



This is a known sacrificial theme in the position, the idea of which is: after Black takes the exchange on f3 (declining isn't really an option, since White's rook slides over to g3 and he gets to attack free of charge), White recaptures with gxf3, which opens the g-file and allows ♖g1. Black's king is then left with an absence of defenders.

Question: This plan looks almost winning for White! Does Black have a defence?

Answer: The greedy comps are not so impressed with White's attack and actually give Black a winning advantage at this point. We humans obviously disagree, since there are 30 games in my database from this position, scoring 50%. I think it's one of those positions which in the ultimate reality of compworld is a shade unsound, but among us flawed humans, is not so easy to navigate from Black's side.

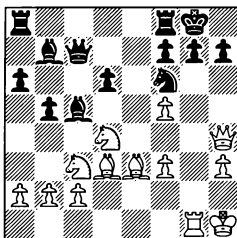
15...exf5!

Principle: open the centre when attacked on the wing. Also possible is the immediate capture on f3: 15...♖xf3 16 gxf3 ♖e8 (after 16...♖b6 White can play the yet untried 17 e5 dxe5 18 ♖g1 exf5 19 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 20 ♖xf5 ♖fd8 – 20...♖xe3? is met with the deflection trick 21 ♖d5! when Black must hand over his queen, with an inferior position at the end – 21 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 22 ♖e4! ♖xe4 23 ♖xh7+ ♖f8 24 ♖xe4 ♖ab8 25 ♖xg7+ ♖e7 26 ♖g5+ with compensating play for the exchange) 17 ♖g1 g6 was G.Garcia-G.Vescovi, Cali 2001. White may have enough to maintain the balance: for example, 18 ♖ce2 e5 19 ♖h6 ♖xd4 20 ♖xd4 exd4 21 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 22 ♖xh7 ♖b8 23 fxg6 fxg6 24 ♖h8+ ♖e7 25 ♖h4+ ♖d7 26 ♖xg6.

16 exf5 ♖xf3 17 gxf3 ♖b7

Reminding White that his king is somewhat exposed as well.

18 ♖g1



Exercise (combination alert): White threatens ♖xf6. However, it is Black's turn to move and his trick arrives first. Do you see a counterattacking shot from Black's side?

Answer: Pin/overloaded defender.

18...♙xf3+!

White is ill-equipped to fight with his wounds still so raw from the last skirmish.

19 ♖xf3 ♙xe3 20 ♖xf6

The queen approaches Black's king in a deferential manner, which she doesn't adhere to internally.

20...♙xg1 21 ♖g5

White is down two exchanges, but threatens to mate with f6 and also threatens the hanging g1-bishop.

21...♖c6!

Everyone is miraculously covered, as the queen vents her rage upon fresh targets. Also promising is 21...♖c5! 22 ♖xg1 f6.

22 ♖e4

22 ♖e4 is met with 22...♖c5 23 ♖xg1 ♖xg1+ 24 ♖xg1 ♖ac8 when Black's two rooks look slightly more valuable than White's three minor pieces.

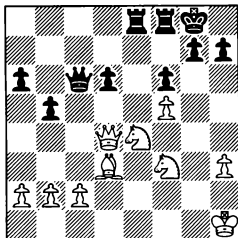
22...f6

The alternative is 22...♙e3 23 ♖xe3 d5 24 ♖g3 ♖fe8 25 ♖f4 f6 with advantage to Black.

23 ♖xg1 ♖ae8

Black can also try and simplify with 23...♖d5 24 ♖d4 ♖ae8 25 ♖e6 ♖xe6 26 fxe6 f5 27 ♖g5 g6 28 ♖h2 ♖xe6 29 ♖c3. Black's rook and two pawns mean more than White's two minor pieces since his king looks less exposed than White's.

24 ♖d4



Question: How do you assess this position?

Answer: Black defended precisely and came out slightly ahead after Carlsen's semi-shady opening sacrifice. Black's two rooks and pawn look distinctly more promising than White's three minor pieces, mainly since White's king doesn't appear all that safe. Now watch how accurately Carlsen defends and slowly improves his position.

24...d5!

Handing over c5 isn't such a great idea. Black should be more patient and play 24...♞e7, not worrying about the ending after 25 ♜xd6 ♜xd6 26 ♘xd6 ♞d8 27 ♘e4 ♞d5 28 ♘c3 ♞c5 when he retains an edge.

25 ♘c5 ♞e7 26 ♜g2

There is no rush to enter e6.

26...g6?!

Black struggles for equality after this move. He had to try 26...♞d8 27 ♘e6 ♞dd7 28 ♘c5 ♞a7 with dynamic equality.

27 ♘e6

27 fxg6 hxg6 28 ♜xg6? ♞g7 29 ♘h4 f5 30 ♜f3 ♜d6 31 b4 ♞f6 32 ♜xf5 ♜g3+ leaves White's king in deep trouble.

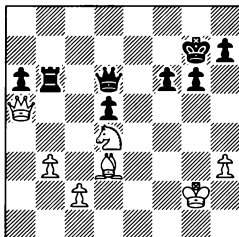
27...♞xe6

Black can't tolerate an entrenched piece this deep in his territory.

28 fxe6 ♜xe6 29 a4! bxa4 30 ♜xa4

Carlsen begins to apply pressure on both black isolanis and now stands slightly better.

30...♞b8 31 b3 ♞b6 32 ♜a5 ♜g7 33 ♘d4 ♜d6



Exercise (planning): Come up with a plan for White to improve his position:

Answer: Step 1: play c3 (preventing ...♞b4) and b4.

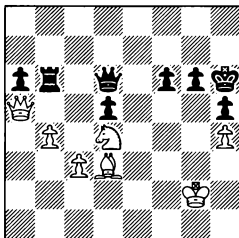
34 c3!

Intending to follow with b4. The inaccurate 34 ♖e2 is met with 34...♞b4!.

34...h5 35 h4 ♖h6

Houdini prefers both h7 and f7 as superior squares for Black's king.

36 b4



Step 2: now White threatens the simple ♖e2 and ♖f3, after which d5 falls. Black is curiously helpless to stop it, and further, White's king remains magically immune from perpetual check attempts.

36...♞b8?!

I have seen boxers in the ring, whose force of will exceeds their bodies' tolerance. They tend to be the ones who end up grievously damaged.

Question: Why did Black just give away the a-pawn?

Answer: In some positions all indicators say there exists a combination, or at least some counterplay, yet it doesn't exist. The danger for us then is when this unsupported nothing rests in our thoughts, as a something. I don't know if Vachier Lagrave feared his ultra-passive position was slowly degrading and tried a desperate counterattack, or if he just got overoptimistic and played for a win. In any case, Black refuses to putter about, engaging in pleasant trivialities in a situation he judges calls for emergency measures, presumably going after White's exposed king, with the thought: the longer Black lingers, the more difficult it will be to begin a counterattack.

Black's best bet is to stay passive and shuffle with 36...♖h7! 37 ♔e2! (now White kindles a promising initiative) 37...♗g7 38 ♔f3 ♜b8 39 ♜xd5 d5 (a bitter emblem of White's past pain, is now expunged from existence; we get a disorienting feel of Black simultaneously holding his own, while losing ground) 39...♜xd5 40 ♔xd5 g5 when White may stand better, but I don't think this is so easy to win.

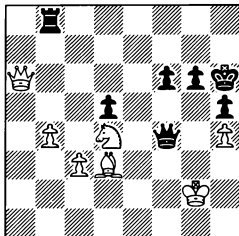
37 ♜xa6

Now White may be winning, since he emerged with a passed b-pawn.

37...♜f4??

In time pressure, the only way to manage our growing confusion is to identify a strategic or tactical focal point, and then work from there. It's easy to repent a past transgression; atonement for the sin, however, comes at a far higher cost.

Black may yet save the game in the long run after the correct 37...♜xa6! 38 ♔xa6, since White's b-pawn ties down Black's rook. For example: 38...g5 39 ♖f5+ ♖h7 (39...♗g6 40 ♖e7+ picks off d5) 40 b5 (now Black's problem is: he can never play ...♗g6, or even ...♗g8, since ♖e7+ wins d5) 40...gxf4 41 ♖e7 (41 ♖h3 ♗g6 42 ♖e7+ ♖f7 43 ♖xd5 ♖e6 44 ♖b4 ♖d6 45 ♖xh4 ♖c5 46 ♖xh5 ♜g8 47 ♖h4 ♜a8! 48 ♗g4 ♖c4 49 ♖a2 ♖b3 50 ♖b7 ♜d8 51 ♖b4 ♜b8 52 ♔c6 ♖xc3 53 ♖d5+ ♖c4 54 ♖c7 ♜b6 is drawn) 41...♗g7 42 ♖h3 ♖f7 43 ♖xd5 ♖e6 44 c4 ♖e5 45 ♖xh4 f5 46 b6 f4 47 b7 f3 48 ♖g3 h4+ 49 ♖xf3 ♖d6 50 ♗g4 ♜h8 51 ♖h3 ♖c6 52 ♖h2 ♜b8 53 ♖h3 ♜h8 when I don't see how to make progress for White. Of course, this is a comp defending Black. In practical terms, a human would be far more likely to blow it and lose defending the black pieces.



Exercise (combination alert): Black may or may not have been busted, but his last move certainly expedites his bustedness. On the surface, the position appears as barren to combinational possibility as an unsown field. Yet if we look closer, the move walks into Carlsen's diabolical trap/cheapo, and the black queen's non-existent counterattack is similar to the small child who reaches up in an attempt to grasp the full moon. White's intent lies hidden, as if behind a screen of smoky glass. Do you see Carlsen's trick?

Answer: Interference.

38 ♖f5+! 1-0

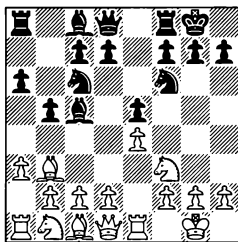
A shot like this may seem as if it is the product of blind luck, rather than some grand universal design. But this is an illusion. Carlsen clearly set it up in advance. "To disobey my commands after being lengthily advised, is an act of folly," the knight warns Black's king. After 38...gxf5 (38...♙h7 39 ♜a7+ ♙h8 40 ♜g7 is mate) 39 ♜xf6+ ♙h7 40 ♙xf5+ ♙g8 41 ♙e6+ White wins the queen and quickly forces mate.

Game 12
M. Carlsen-L. Aronian
Morelia/Linares 2008
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♙c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♖f6 5 0-0 ♙e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♙b3 0-0 8 a3

The Anti-Marshall lines are all the rage these days. I don't claim to understand their attraction, since Black should equalize in all of them. Of course, the alternative is to accept the Marshall Gambit and risk getting mated.

8...♗c5!



Question: Didn't Black just lose a tempo with his bishop?

Answer: Aronian feels he is justified in repositioning his bishop to a more active location, based on the fact that White has responded so passively with his last move. 8...d6 and 8...♗b7 are more commonly played here.

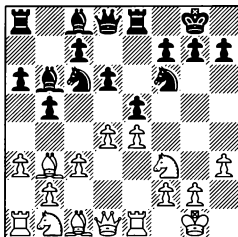
9 c3

Now a3 and c3 seem to be a duplication, both giving air to White's b3-bishop. White's justification: why not, since Black moved his dark-squared bishop twice? White's alternative is 9 d3 d6 10 ♗g5 h6 11 ♗h4 g5! 12 ♗g3 (12 ♖xg5? is unsound; Black defends efficiently after 12...hxg5 13 ♗xg5 ♖d4 14 ♗a2 ♗g7 15 c3 ♗e6) 12...♗g4 13 c3 ♗b6 14 ♖bd2, but Black had equalized and I actually prefer his chances, A.Grischuk-V.Tkachiev, New Delhi 2000.

9...d6 10 d4

White can also attempt a slower route with 10 h3 ♗b6 11 d3 h6 12 ♖bd2 ♗e7 13 ♖f1 ♗g6 14 ♖g3 ♗b7 15 ♖f5 ♗c8 16 d4 ♗e6 17 dxe5 ♗xb3 18 ♗xb3 dxe5 19 ♗c2 ♗e8 20 c4! bxc4 21 ♗xc4 when Carlsen stood a shade better due to his superior pawn structure, M.Carlsen-P.Leko, Nice (blindfold) 2008.

10...♗b6 11 h3 ♗e8!



A new move and a provocation which hopes to improve upon old theory. "Very tricky. Aronian invites Carlsen to attack him, probably very much aware that the young Norwegian cannot resist the temptation," writes GM Jacob Aagaard.

Question: What is the point of Black's refinement?

Answer: In essence, Aronian hopes to save a tempo and apply immediate pressure to e4, without wasting time on 11...h6. Then after 12 ♖e3 ♜b7 13 ♝bd2 ♜e8 14 ♜c2 ♝b8? 15 dxe5 (this leads to nothing; 15 a4 ♝bd7 seems like a better try for an edge, although even here, I don't believe Black experiences any real problems) 15...dxe5 16 ♜xb6 cxb6 17 a4 bxa4 18 ♜xa4 b5 Black equalized, P.Svidler-P.Leko, Monaco (rapid) 2006.

Instead, after 11...♜b7 12 ♜c2 ♜e8 13 d5 ♝e7 14 a4 ♝g6 15 ♜e3?! (15 axb5 axb5 16 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 17 ♝a3 c6 18 dxc6 ♜xc6 19 c4 looks even) 15...♜xe3 16 ♜xe3 c6 17 dxc6 ♜xc6 18 axb5 axb5 19 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 20 ♝bd2 (Black stands better after 20 ♜xd6 ♝xe4) 20...♝f4 Black has an edge due to his more active pieces, M.Tseitlin-L.Yurtaev, Hartberg 1991.

12 ♜g5?!

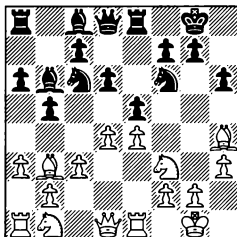
Overoptimistic. Carlsen now experiences difficulty in supporting his centre. 12 ♜c2 was a safer and superior choice.

12...h6 13 ♜h4!

"White has lost the opening battle, and with his knight undeveloped he is unable to hold the d4-pawn. Therefore Carlsen renews the pin, not hesitating to sacrifice the pawn," write Mikhachishin and Stetsko, who give Carlsen's move an exclamation mark. When we lose a theoretical fight, it feels as if we are mathematicians who solved a difficult theorem on the chalkboard at the university, only to discover that the janitor erased it overnight. The move may be bold, but it's also unsound, as Aronian convincingly demonstrates.

It isn't in Carlsen's nature to back down and meekly accept a slightly worse position after 13 dxe5! ♝xe5 14 ♜e3 ♜xe3 15 ♜xe3 ♜b7 16 ♝bd2 c5 17 ♜c2 ♝g6 with a drab, slightly

inferior position for White's side. Nevertheless, at least from a comp's standpoint, this is White's best path for survival.



13...exd4!

An accurate move order.

Question: Why can't Black toss in 13...g5 first?

Answer: White's piece sacrifice looks promising after 14 ♖xg5! ♟hxg5 15 ♜xg5 ♜e7 16 ♜e3! ♞a5 17 ♜g3 ♜f8 18 ♜a2 with an enduring attack for the piece.

14 cxd4 g5! 15 ♜g3

Now White's g5 sacrifice fails miserably after 15 ♜xg5?? ♟hxg5 16 ♜xg5 ♜xd4 with a winning position for Black.

15...g4!

No player in the world understands the Black side of a Ruy Lopez like Aronian. With his last move, he places an enormous burden on Carlsen's now wobbly centre.

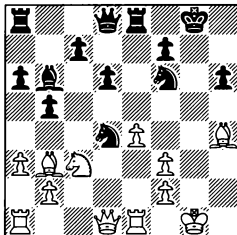
16 ♟xg4 ♜xg4 17 ♜h4

White best practical chance. Carlsen wisely jettisons d4-pawn, seeing that his position sinks quickly after 17 d5? ♜d4 18 ♜bd2 ♜h5 19 ♜h2 ♜f6 20 ♜f1 ♜f4 21 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 22 a4 f5! when White's game is on the verge of collapse.

17...♜xd4 18 ♜c3 ♜xf3?

A violation of the principle: don't break a pin, unless forced to do so. This move may throw away Black's win. Black is in command after 18...c6! cutting off ♜d5 tricks: 19 ♜a2 ♜g7 20 ♜d3 ♜xf3 21 ♟xf3 ♜e5! (...♜h5 is coming, which breaks the irritating pin) 22 ♜g3 ♜g5 23 f4 ♜g4 24 ♜e2 ♜xe2+ 25 ♜xe2 (25...♜xe2?? walks into 25...♜xg3+) 25...♜h5 26 ♜f1 ♜f6 27 ♜f3 ♜g6 and White's position creaks in complaint at the burden of his multiple ills.

19 ♟xf3



19...♔h8?

The wrong square for the king. Aronian, in my opinion, is the best pure calculator in the world, even better than Carlsen (yes, I know this is going to offend Carlsenites). But here we see a rare example of an analytical hole, where he mistakenly enters a defective combination. Sometimes life makes the choice for you, rather than the other way around. Aronian may have been frustrated to find that all his other options lead to draws. For example:

a) 19...c6 only leads to a draw after 20 e5! intending ♖e4 next, but Black has 20...♘d7! 21 ♙xf6 ♜h3 22 ♜e3 ♜xb3 23 ♜e4 ♜g3+ 24 ♔h1 ♜h3+ with perpetual check. Aronian may have seen this line and decided to go for the full point.

b) 19...♔h7 is a stronger version than Aronian's, which placed his king on h8. In this one, at least Black doesn't lose. Indeed, after 20 ♘d5 ♜g8+ 21 ♔h1 ♘g4! 22 ♙xd8 ♘xf2+ 23 ♔h2 ♜axd8 24 ♘f6+ ♔h8 25 ♘xg8 ♜xg8 26 ♙xf7 ♜g7 27 ♙h5 ♘xd1 28 ♜exd1 ♜g5 29 ♙g4 h5 30 ♙c8 ♘xf3+ 31 ♔h1 ♙d4 32 ♜ab1 c5! (not 32...a5? 33 ♜d3 ♜g3 34 ♜f1 ♙f2 35 ♜c3 c5 36 ♙b7 ♜g1+ 37 ♜xg1 ♘xg1 38 ♜d3 ♙d4 39 ♜xd4! cxd4 40 ♔xg1 and White should win the ending) 33 ♙xa6 h4 34 ♙xb5 ♜g3 35 b4 ♜h3+ 36 ♔g2 ♜g3+ it's perpetual check. White overpresses if he plays for the win with 37 ♔f1?? h3 38 ♔e2 ♘g1+ 39 ♜xg1 ♙xg1 40 e5 h2 41 ♙c6 dxe5 42 ♙h1 ♙d4 43 bxc5 ♙xc5 44 a4 ♜a3 when Black wins.

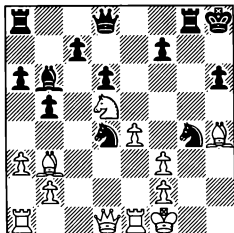
20 ♘d5

Of course.

20...♜g8+ 21 ♔f1!

Sometimes we understand a move's outer appearance and still miss its hidden intent. Carlsen has seen deeper and understands that Black's coming combination fails. 21 ♔h1?? ♘g4 22 ♙xd8 ♘xf2+ 23 ♔h2 ♜axd8! Black regains the queen with a winning position.

21...♘g4



The d8 witch bids her family to do her dark work for her. The birds outside my bedroom window (reminding me of Black's frantic attackers) scream hysterically each morning around 5 a.m., perhaps convinced that the world ends at sunrise. This was Aronian's devious idea behind his 19th move. He threatens both ...♘h2 mate and also ...♚xh4. It feels as if White's position is a flimsy, tattered construct, which could disintegrate at the slightest prodding. However, there is a flaw in Aronian's calculations.

In some variations, if there is contamination in the part, the line is likely to be contaminated in the whole. The Latin phrase: *falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*.

Exercise: How did Carlsen cross Black's intent?

Answer: Removal of the guard. Now there is no mate on h2 and White emerges with a winning position.

22 ♚xd4+!

Correct, unlike:

a) 22 ♖xd8?? ("lead me not into temptation, for my flesh is frail," prays the bishop, as he views Black's queen with unseemly eyes of lust) 22...♘h2 mate.

b) 22 ♖g3? ♘h2+! 23 ♖g2 (or 23 ♖xh2?? ♚h4 24 ♖e3 ♚xh2 and White collapses) 23...♘xf3 is a winning position for Black.

22...♖xd4 23 ♖xd8 ♘h2+

When we attempt a heroic attack and still lose, we grow bitter at the thought that all our toil and sacrifice came to nothing. The knight voluntarily enters his own coffin on h2. Otherwise Black is just down a piece after 23...♖axd8?? 24 fxg4.

24 ♖e2 ♖axd8

Who knows? Maybe Aronian calculated accurately to this point and simply misassessed, misperceiving his h2-knight as a strength, rather than a weakness. He threatens ...♖g2 and ...♖xb2. Carlsen's next move demonstrates that it is White who is now in control.

25 ♖ad1!

Now we get a sense of relaxation and expansion from White's side, the way a once spasmed muscle reacts when in a hot bath. Maybe Aronian expected 25 ♖h1? ♗g2 26 ♜e3 ♗dg8! when White is unable to capture g2 and matters are not as clear.

25...♗xb2

Aronian decides that an eloquent argument for mercy is wasted on a ruthless person, and that this is no time to fret or mourn a past strategic indiscretion. So he makes do with the best he has. Attempts to retain a bead on f2 fail. After 25...♗a7? 26 ♜f4! White covers g2 and there is no good way to halt the coming ♖h1, trapping the h2-knight.

26 ♖h1!

Now that ...♗g2 isn't available for Black, Carlsen asks his opponent how he plans to extricate his trapped knight.

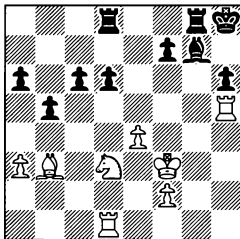
26...c6 27 ♜f4 ♗e5 28 ♜d3

White's claim to h2 is greater than his opponent's and he wins a piece. Black is unable to pick up enough pawns for it.

28...♜xf3

Aronian collects a meagre sum for his past toils. So in the end, the piece is lost. Black's troubles begin to shift from a premalignant state to an invasive, malignant one.

29 ♜xf3 ♗g7 30 ♖h5!



Superb technique. Carlsen convincingly proves that Black's three pawns simply aren't enough, when compared to White's extra piece and ferocious activity. His last move confines Black's attempts to mobilize his queenside pawn majority and Carlsen's advantage correlates in exact proportion to his domination of the light squares.

30...d5

Nobody has an appetite for a fight in a depleted state:

a) 30...♗d7? walks into 31 ♜c5 winning a pawn.

b) 30...♗g8 31 ♖f5 ♜g8 32 ♜f4 ♗d7 33 ♜h5 ♜h8 34 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 35 e5 and if 35...d5 36

♠g1+ ♖h7 37 ♜c2 forces mate. The dungeon master on c2 arrives with glowing orange tongs in hand, which hint of terrible torments to come for Black's king.

31 exd5 ♜d6 32 ♞f5 cxd5 33 ♜c1!

Now we see why Carlsen is sometimes compared to Capablanca. Black's pawns are secondary to White's piece activity. ♜c7 is in the air.

33...♞f6

33...♜f6 34 ♜c7 ♞f8 35 ♜f4 ♜d8 36 ♜xf7 ♞xf7 37 ♜xf7 is also completely hopeless for Black, whose king awaits mute for his upcoming execution.

34 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 35 ♜c6

Targeting f6, h6 and a6.

35...♖g7 36 ♜f4

Threat: ♜h5+. Carlsen methodically wears away the remnants of Black's resistance.

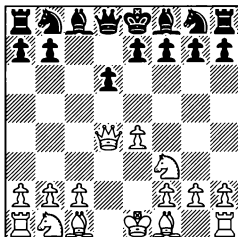
36...♜g5 37 ♜h5+ ♖h8 38 ♜xa6 d4 39 ♖e4

Threatening not only the d-pawn, but also f4.

39...♠g6 40 ♜a7 1-0

Game 13
M.Carlsen-G.Jones
London 2012
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♞xd4!?



Here we go again. Carlsen deviates from mainstream theory to try a strange sideline to pry his opponent from pet Sicilian systems early on.

Question: This looks illogical, since Black can either gain a tempo on White's queen or pick up the bishop-pair after ...♟c6, correct?

Answer: Correct. I think the main reason this isn't that great a line is the fact that White's f3-knight is misplaced where it sits, since it blocks him from both f3 and f4. In any case, I don't think Carlsen was necessarily trying for an advantage out of the opening, more than just an adventure – and he certainly got his wish this game with Jones' cooperation!

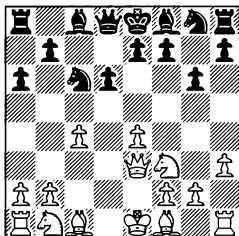
4...a6

Jones would rather pick up the tempo than the bishop-pair. After 4...♟c6 5 ♖b5 ♙d7 6 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 7 ♜c3 ♜f6 8 ♙g5 e6 9 ♜d3 ♙e7 10 ♜d4 (if this move is played, then one wonders why White didn't take on d4 earlier with the knight) 10...0-0 11 0-0-0 ♜c8 12 f4 ♜a5 13 ♜b1 ♜fd8 Black got a perfectly acceptable Open Sicilian-style position, since White wasted time with his queen, S.Karjakin-A.Grischuk, Moscow 2010.

5 h3!

Okay, I freely admit that Carlsen isn't playing the opening phase like a ball of fire. This is a rare move in an already offbeat line. The idea is to prevent future ...♙g4 and ...♜g4 ideas. 5 c4 is most commonly played here.

5...♟c6 6 ♜e3 g6 7 c4



7...♙g7

Question: Can Black try 7...♙h6 to swap off White's good bishop?

Answer: It looks artificial to me and I prefer White's position after 8 ♜c3 e5 9 ♙xh6 ♜xh6 10 ♜d2 ♜g8 11 ♟c3. The weakness of d6 is more meaningful than the fact that Black left White with a potentially bad bishop.

8 ♙e2 ♜f6 9 ♟c3 0-0 10 0-0 ♜d7

Jones already has the coming ...f5 idea in mind. Black can easily get squeezed if he reacts too quietly in such positions: for example, 10...♙e6 11 ♖d1 ♘d7 12 ♜b1 ♞c8 13 b4 a5 14 a3 h6 15 ♘d5 axb4 16 axb4, B.Macieja-A.Korobov, Lublin 2012. White increased his space gains and sits with an unchallenged knight on d5. I don't like Black's counterplayless position.

11 ♜b1 a5

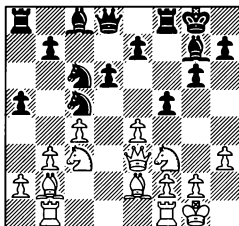
Question: Why is Black willing to take on a hole on b5?

Answer: With his last move, Jones sets up a queenside dark-square strategy, handing over b5 as a concession. He essentially admits that there is no good way to break with ...b5. He eventually wants to stir up counterplay with ...♘c5, ...♘b4, or ...a4.

12 b3

IM Colin Crouch gives this natural move '?!' suggesting 12 ♘a4 which prevents ...♘c5. However, this seems rather a temporary situation, since Black can play for ...b6 and then ...♘b5. For example: 12...b6 13 b3 ♘c5 and then what? Retreat of the a4-knight is an admission of a loss of time, while something like 14 ♖d1!? allows Black sufficient counterplay: 14...♘xa4 (by no means obligatory; he can also play the much safer 14...♜b8) 15 bxa4 ♜b8 16 ♙b2 ♜c7 17 ♖d2 ♙e6 18 ♙xg7 ♜xg7 19 ♖db2 ♘e5 looks okay for Black. So I disagree with Crouch and feel that Carlsen's last move was a good one.

12...♘c5 13 ♙b2 f5!



An ultra-aggressive response, and I believe one necessary to the position's requirements. Jones agrees to weaken his central light squares, like d5 and e6, in exchange for added piece activity. However, the weakening of the central light squares remains an abiding long range fear for Black, whose brow may have creased with worry of an uncertain future. Black can also take a safer route with 13...a4 14 ♘b5 axb3 15 axb3 ♙xb2 16 ♜xb2 when I still prefer White, who can expand with b4 and e5 ideas, D.Vargic-V.Zivkovic, Bol na Bracu 2013.

14 exf5 ♖xf5 15 ♜bd1 a4

Black managed to create serious queenside pressure.

16 ♖a3!?

Carlsen complicates, unsatisfied with a safer continuation like 16 ♜xa4 ♜xa4 17 ♖xg7 ♜xg7 18 bxa4 ♜xa4 19 c5 ♜f6 20 ♖b5 ♜e4 21 ♜c3 ♜a5 22 ♜xa5 ♜xa5 23 cxd6 exd6 24 ♜d4 when it's difficult to see Black losing this position.

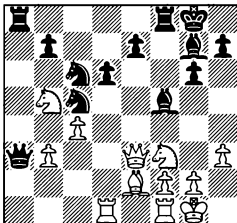
16...♜a5

Crouch suggests the radical 16...♖xc3!? which violates the Dragon formation taboo of trading away the powerful dark-squared bishop for a knight: 17 ♜xc3 (White can also refuse to cooperate with 17 ♖xc5!? ♜a5 18 ♖d4 ♜xd4 19 ♜xd4 axb3 20 axb3 ♖xd4 21 ♜xd4 ♜b6 22 ♖f3 with an edge) 17...♜e4 18 ♜c1 (Crouch gave 18 ♜b2) 18...axb3 19 axb3 ♜xa3 20 ♜xa3 ♜c3 21 ♜fe1 ♜xd1 22 ♖xd1 and Black looks okay to me.

17 ♜b5

White may be able to pull off a microbe of an edge after 17 b4 ♜xb4 18 ♖xb4 ♜xb4 19 ♜d5 ♜a5 20 ♜xe7+ ♜h8 21 ♜xf5 gxf5. I still prefer White due to his slightly superior pawn structure, although Black may be okay here due to his powerful piece activity.

17...axb3 18 axb3 ♜xa3!?



In every society there are written and unwritten laws. A violation of the latter is the greater crime. The normally talkative white queen is suddenly rendered dumbstruck by her a3 sister's outrageous antics. The evil genie is allowed out of her bottle, and predictably, chaos ensues. "The needs of the one (herself) outweigh the needs of the many (everyone else!)," preaches the narcissistic queen, whose world forever revolves around me, me and me. Uniqueness is synonymous with danger, while conventionality, its reverse, at least provides us with the comfort which comes with familiarity. With Black's last move, we arrive at a convergence between chaos and belligerence.

Question: Why on earth did Black give away his queen for only two minor pieces?

Answer: By all outer appearances, the queen is virtuous, just and kind. If we had the power to see into her heart, we would revise our initial observation. I like Black's move, if only from a practical standpoint. Jones proves himself to be a rather shrewd reader of his opponent's intent and decides with his last move to deny him. Rather than give Carlsen a tiny edge, which he is likely to milk to a full point, Jones plays a move which sets the board on fire:

1. Black's minor pieces exult in soaring activity.
2. Black dominates the dark squares.
3. b3 is also likely to fall.

Is it sound? Well, from a computer's black-and-white, unemotional outlook, no. But from a human perspective, such a move may well have worked against a less formidable opponent than Carlsen. 18...♖f6 is a very reasonable alternative, but so much less interesting than Jones' sacrificial idea.

19 ♖xa3

This is the third game in a row where Carlsen finds himself up a queen.

19...♞xa3 20 ♖d2 ♗d4

"Behold, sinner: before you stands the instrument of God's righteous retribution," proclaims the bishop. White's queen gets pushed around and note that ...♗c2 is also in the air. Such a position is not so easy to defend from White's side.

21 ♜g3 ♗e5

If looks were whiplashes, the queen's glare would flay Black's impudent bishop to the bone. This provokes f4, which weakens White's dark squares further. However, 21...♗c2! may be better and after 22 ♞de1 ♞a2 23 ♗f3! ♗d3 24 ♗d5+ ♖h8 25 ♖f3 ♗f6 26 ♗xc6 ♗xf1 27 ♞xf1 bxc6 28 b4 ♖d3 29 c5 dxc5 30 bxc5 ♖xc5 31 ♖e5 ♖e4 32 ♜e3 ♗xe5 33 ♜xe4 ♗f6 34 ♜xc6 Black's chances to hold the game with a fortress are excellent.

22 f4 ♗f6 23 ♗g4

Carlsen slowly begins to activate his sleeping pieces.

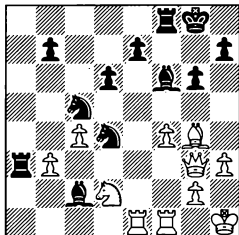
23...♖d4

The comp suggests 23...♗d3! 24 ♞fe1 ♗c2 25 ♞c1 ♞a2 26 ♗f3 ♖d4 when it's still not so easy for White to find an unravelling plan.

24 ♖h1

A wise precaution against future ...♖e2+ fork tricks.

24...♗c2 25 ♞de1



25...♖h8

Question: Why isn't Black taking b3?

Answer: It walks into an annoying pin. If 25...♖dxb3 26 ♜f3 ♖h8 27 ♜fe3 h5 28 ♖xb3 ♜xb3 29 ♖f3 h4 30 ♜f2 ♜xe3 31 ♜xe3 ♖d3 32 ♜a2 ♖g7 33 ♖xb7! and White should consolidate.

26 ♜e3 h5

Still refusing to play 26...♖dxb3.

27 b4

The computer prefers 27 ♖d1!.

27...h4

Alternatively, 27...♖d3 28 ♖f3! ♖xf3 29 ♖f5! (after 29 ♖xf3 h4 30 ♜g4 ♖f2+! 31 ♜xf2 ♜a1+! 32 ♖h2 ♖f5 33 ♜g5 ♖xg5 34 fxg5 e6 Black remains worse, but may even here have some drawing chances) 29...h4 30 ♜xf3 gxf5 31 ♜e2! (threat: ♜xc2!, to which there is no good defence) 31...♜c3 32 ♜xc2! ♜xc2 33 ♜xd3 wins.

28 ♜f2 ♖d3 29 ♜g1

The queen awakens in a sweat, having heard a scream, which was the voice of her own dream. She looks in the mirror and barely recognizes the gaunt, hollow-cheeked expression which gazes back at her. The only move, and also a good one. Moves like this necessarily require a certain diminution of one's dignity. However badly he is getting pushed around by Black's minor pieces, the *Houdini* evaluation continues to rise for White's side, now at a whopping '+3.43' (however, be warned: in positions of such murk, the scales of evaluations never find comfort in a point of balance).

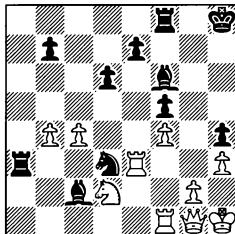
Carlsen's defensive edifice shivers with complaint from the fearful strain of Black's nightmarish piece activity, yet continues to absorb the punishment without breaking. Black's attractive pieces are like grandma's fine china: it looks nice in the cabinet, but never

actually gets to be used. Despite Black's super-activity, he continues to feel the lack of a clear target in White's position. Still, the fire of Black's initiative isn't quite extinguished. Black probably gets full compensation for the queen if White overreacts with 29 ♖xd3?! ♙xd3 30 ♜d1 ♜fa8.

29...♙f5?!

Every piece off the board helps White inch closer to his goal of consolidation. Black should get out of the annoying d3 pin with 29...♜aa8.

30 ♙xf5 gxf5



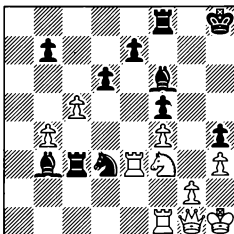
Exercise (combination alert): White has access to a strange, comp-like continuation which wins more material. This one is not deep, as much as inhumanly strange. If Carlsen missed it, we are also unlikely to solve it, but give it a try:

31 ♙f3

Answer: Simplification/pin/overloaded defender. The bizarre 31 ♜c1! was correct. The rook is a conduit of pure mischief. White either simplifies further or picks up two pieces for a rook: for example, 31...♙xc1 (or 31...♜c3? 32 ♜xc2 ♜xc2 33 ♜xd3) 32 ♜xa3 ♙e2 33 ♜e3 ♙g3+ 34 ♙h2 ♜g8 35 ♜b6 (the loss of b7 is terminal for Black) 35...♙h5 36 ♜xb7 ♙xf4 37 ♜a8 when White consolidates and wins easily.

31...♜c3 32 c5 ♙b3

32...dxc5 33 bxc5 ♜c4 34 g4! ♙xf4 35 g5 ♙g7 36 ♜xe7 leaves White on top.



Exercise (critical decision): Analyse 33 ♖e1 ♗d4 and then correctly assess the position at the end of the variation. Does it work for White?

Answer: Simplification. It works. White need not fear the coming ...♗d4.

33 ♖e1! ♗d4 34 ♖xd3 dxc5

The reservoir of Black's resistance begins to run low. Carlsen's idea is that 34...♗xd3 is met with 35 ♗xd3! ♗xg1 36 ♗xb3 ♗d4 37 cxd6 exd6 38 ♗d3 ♗g7 39 ♗xd6 with an easy consolidation win to follow.

35 ♗f2!

Threat: ♗xh4+. White's pieces slowly unravel.

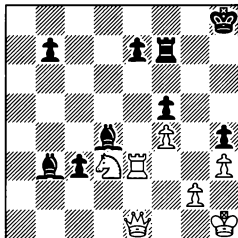
35...♗f7 36 ♗c1

The practical move, forcing more simplification.

36...cxb4

After 36...♗xd3 37 ♗xh4+ ♗h7 38 ♗xh7+! (once again, simplification to a won ending is Carlsen's theme) 38...♗xh7 39 ♗xd3 (the bishops dangle helplessly, impaled by the rook's war trident) 39...♗a4 40 bxc5 White, up two exchanges, wins easily.

37 ♗xc3 bxc3 38 ♗e1! 1-0



More simplification. Carlsen refuses to allow the small ember of Black's remaining activity to glow brightly. 38...♙xe3 is met with 39 ♜xc3+ ♜f6 40 ♜xb3 ♜b6 41 ♜c3+ ♜g8 42 ♜e1 when Black's resistance comes to a conclusion.

Game 14
V.Kramnik-M.Carlsen
London 2012
English Opening

1 ♖f3 c5 2 c4 ♘c6 3 ♖c3 e5

Botvinnik's formation versus the English, where Black gives up temporary control over d5, in exchange for central pawn influence.

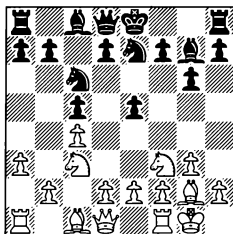
4 g3

Perhaps an attempt to evade Carlsen's preparation. Kramnik's normal preference in this position is 4 e3: for example, 4...♖f6 5 d4 e4 6 ♘e5 g6 7 ♙e2 ♙g7 8 0-0 0-0 9 b3 cxd4 10 exd4 ♜e8 11 ♙f4 d6 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 13 ♜c1 d5 14 ♜d2 ♙a6 15 ♜fd1 ♜c8 16 h3 dxc4 17 bxc4 ♘d7 18 ♘a4 with an edge for White, who has the superior structure and also greater central control, V.Kramnik-I.Nepomniachtchi, Moscow 2011.

Carlsen also plays the white side of this position: 4 d3 d6 5 a3 a5 6 g3 ♘ge7 7 ♙g2 g6 8 ♙g5! (it is in White's best interest to destroy all potential defenders of d5) 8...♙g7 9 ♙xe7 ♜xe7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘d2 ♙e6 12 ♜b1 ♜fc8 13 ♘d5 (I wouldn't occupy d5 just yet; maybe he should play something calmer, like 13 e3) 13...♜d8 14 b4!? (naturally, this isn't forced; Carlsen offers a pawn for the light squares) 14...axb4 15 axb4 ♙xd5 16 ♙xd5 cxb4 with equal chances. White can regain his pawn if he is willing to hand back the light-squared bishop, M.Carlsen-Wang Hao Stavanger 2013.

4...g6 5 ♙g2 ♙g7 6 0-0 ♘ge7 7 a3

7 d3 is slightly more common here.



7...a5

Question: This move weakens b5. Can Black get away with avoiding his move?

Answer: Yes, Black can also play without ...a5, at the cost of allowing White an easy b4: 7...0-0 8 b4!? (once again, Carlsen speculates with a very sound pawn offer; more normal is 8 d3) 8...cxb4?! (this isn't a great idea, as White now gets powerful Benko Gambit-like queenside pressure; Black minimizes White's edge with 8...d6 9 ♖b1) 9 axb4 e4 (9...♟xb4 10 ♟a3 ♟ec6 11 ♟d5 e4 12 ♟xb4 exf3 13 ♟xf3 ♟xa1 14 ♟xa1 offers White monster dark-square compensation for the exchange) 10 ♟g5 f5 11 b5 ♟e5 12 ♟b3 h6 13 d4!? exd3 14 ♟f3 (14 c5+ ♟h8 15 ♟h3 dxe2 16 ♟xe2 looks promising for White, who is happy to offer an exchange on a1) 14...dxe2 15 ♟e1 d6 16 ♟xe2 and White got more than enough pressure for the pawn, M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura, Stavanger 2013.

8 ♟e1

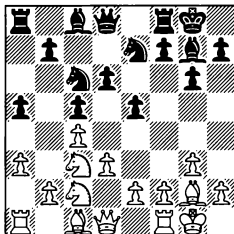
Question: What is the point of this retreat?

Answer: It's a standard manoeuvre in the Botvinnik English. White plans to swing his knight to c2, after which it can either play for ♟e3 and ♟ed5, or stay on c2 to bolster his thematic b4 break.

8...d6 9 ♟c2 0-0

This is the usual move. Otherwise, 9...♟e6 10 ♟e3 0-0 11 d3 f5 12 ♟ed5 ♟h8 13 ♟b1 h6 14 ♟d2 ♟b8 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 ♟xb4 17 ♟xb4 cxb4 18 ♟xb4 d5 19 cxd5 ♟xd5 20 ♟b5! with advantage to White, in a position very similar to what Kramnik got versus Carlsen, V.Kramnik-B.Gelfand, Nice (rapid) 2008.

10 d3



10...♖b8?!

Carlsen once confessed that his goal as White in the opening versus Kramnik was to equalize! This side line appears to be inaccurate. "Here Magnus mixes up the moves. He had probably prepared 10...♗e6 11 ♖e3 ♜b8 12 ♖ed5, about which there is a lot of theory, and at the board he believed he could play more accurately, assuming that I would play ♖e3 anyway," writes Kramnik.

11 ♜b1 ♗e6 12 b4!

Kramnik plays for b4, rather than the expected ♖e3 manoeuvre to control d5.

12...axb4

After 12...b6!? 13 ♗d2 cxb4 14 axb4 d5 15 cxd5 ♖xd5 16 bxa5 bxa5 17 ♜xb8 ♖xb8 18 ♖e4 ♖a6 19 ♖a3 the a5 passer/isolani is more of a liability than a strength for Black, Z.Ribli-L.Eperjesi, Hungary 1973.

13 axb4 cxb4!?

Carlsen agrees to a long, unpleasant defence of his soon-to-be b-pawn isolani. Now weakness erupts, sprouting vengefully in Black's camp. Neither does Black fully equalize after 13...b6 14 b5 ♖d4 15 ♖e3 when the weakness of b6 gives White a nagging edge.

14 ♖xb4 ♖xb4 15 ♜xb4 d5 16 cxd5

The simplest, but perhaps most promising is 16 ♗a3!? dxc4 17 dxc4 ♖c6 18 ♜b1 ♜xd1 19 ♜fxd1 ♜fd8 20 ♗d6 ♜a8 21 ♜xb7 e4 22 ♖xe4 ♗xc4 23 e3 and White was able to convert his extra pawn, M.Taimanov-A.Suetin, Leningrad 1957.

16...♖xd5 17 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 18 ♜b5!

Kramnik imposes a stressful constraint upon his opponent's activity level.

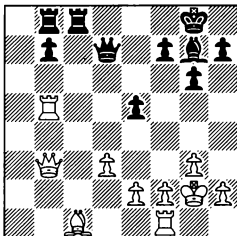
18...♗xg2

Neither does 18...♗c6 offer Black relief after 19 ♗xc6 bxc6 20 ♜c5 with endless pressure to follow on the c6 isolani, M.Cebalo-F.Antognini, Leukerbad 2011.

19 ♗xg2 ♜d7 20 ♜b3

Kramnik's plan is simple: pile up on b7 and then win it.

20...♖fc8



A new move. However, 20...♖c6+ is met by the simple 21 f3 with a clear advantage to White, who just relentlessly goes after b7.

21 ♖b2

Perhaps Kramnik didn't want to worry about 21 e4 ♖c3. White retains winning chances after 22 ♖xb7 ♖h3+ 23 ♔xh3 ♖xb3 24 ♖d7 with an extra pawn, although conversion won't be so easy.

21...♗d6

Question: If Black plays 21...♖c6+ 22 ♔g1 ♖c2 23 ♖xc2 ♖xc2 24 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 25 ♖xe5 b5 does his newly passed b-pawn offer enough to hold the game?

Answer: Let's take a look: 26 ♖b1 b4 27 ♖b3 ♔g7 28 ♔f1 (now White threatens ♖e4, picking off Black's b-pawn) 28...♖a2 (or 28...f5 29 ♖e7+ ♔h6 30 h4 ♖a2 31 ♔g2 ♖b6 32 ♔f3 ♖c2 33 ♔f4! threatening f3! and g4, with mating intent; now 33...♖c3 34 ♖xc3 bxc3 35 ♖c7 ♖b4+ 36 ♔e3 ♖b3 37 f3 ♖a3 38 ♔f4 ♖a4+ 39 e4 is an easy win for White) 29 ♖e4 ♖a4. A lateral defensive post is considered the worst for a rook. It's hard for me to believe Black will save this in the long run.

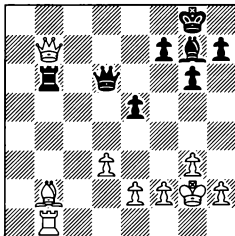
22 ♖b1

Black's forces feel bogged down to defence of b7, as if waterlogged pieces of wood.

22...♖c5 23 ♖b6 ♖c6!

A fateful decision. Carlsen feels that Kramnik's claim to b7 is greater than his, so he hands over the pawn, rather than go completely passive with 23...♗d5+ 24 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 25 ♖a3 (intending to slide over to d6) 25...♖f8 26 ♖c1 ♖d7 27 ♖1b5 ♖g7 28 ♖b2 f6 29 g4! ♖e7 30 h4 when Black is horribly tied down and his position lapses into a deep, counterplayless gloom.

24 ♖xb7 ♖xb7 25 ♗xb7 ♖b6!?



Exercise (critical decision/composition alert): White finds himself caught in an unpleasant pin along the b-file. He has a choice of queen checks on a8 and c8. Which one would you play?

Answer: The c8 check is White's only defence.

26 ♖c8+!

Not 26 ♖a8+?? ♜b8! 27 ♜a2 ♜b7+ 28 e4 when White is unable to extricate himself from the eternal pin and may even be losing here.

26... ♜f8!

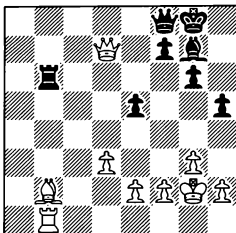
26... ♜f8?? loses instantaneously to the pin/overloaded defender shot 27 ♜a3!.

27 ♜d7!

Question: I don't understand this move, which seems to simply ignore his b-file pin. Does White even threaten anything?

Answer: White's last move is one of inescapably sinister suggestiveness, where he plans ♜c1!, intending ♜c8, at the same time breaking the nasty pin on the b-file. He advances in dispersed formation, with singular intent of target. Kramnik understands that Black can't make any use of the pin on the b-file, due to odd, computer-like tactics on White's part. I watched this game live, and the overwhelming number of titled players (including your writer) guessed that no one in the world was capable of saving such an inferior technical ending versus Kramnik. We were all proven wrong.

27... h5!!



Black is the high-wire walker, now on his final stretch before completing the act. An idea of terrible defensive potency takes root in Carlsen's imagination, with a shocking move, of which Kramnik wrote: "I was amazed. It almost looks like resignation, as Black seems to pass, but as it turned out there is no more for White than what I managed to squeeze in the game." Carlsen attempts to shift the nature of the position, from the incremental to the cataclysmic, by ignoring White's ♖c1 and ♖c8 with this multipurpose idea:

1. Black creates air for his king, covering against back-rank tricks.
2. Black sets up for a shade of counterplay with ...h4.
3. Most importantly, Black correctly ignores White's ♖c1/♖c8 pinning intent, understanding that he achieves a fortress draw in the ending.

28 e4!

Removing his e-pawn from the vulnerable second rank, while cutting off ...♖a8+ tricks. The trouble is d3 becomes a weakened, backward pawn, and a new source of counterplay for Black. The really shocking point of Carlsen's move is that he holds the game after the expected 28 ♖c1 (the long-wished-for opportunity falls into White's lap – and remarkably, it fails to win; instead, the hasty 28 ♙a3?? hangs a full rook to 28...♖a8+ 29 f3 ♖xb1) 28...♖xb2! 29 ♖c8 ("Now I see you and there is no escape. From this point on, you will be the slave of two masters: me and your own fear," White's rook informs Black's pinned queen; as it turns out, he is wrong on both counts) 29...♙xe2 30 ♖xf8+ (the fallen queen's spirit will not be quenched by the death of her physical body) 30...♙xf8 31 ♖d5 ♖d2 32 h3 ♙g7 33 ♖c4 ♙f6 with an easy fortress draw for Black.

28...♖d6!

White's queen is too active, so Carlsen, refusing to fall into Kramnik's multiple traps, offers a swap. The seemingly powerful 28...♖b8?? is dismantled by the stunning 29 ♙xe5! (Black's queen must endure the bishop's drunken, disgusting kiss) 29...♙xe5 30 ♖xb6 ♖xb6 31 ♖e8+ ♙g7 32 ♖xe5+ with two extra pawns.

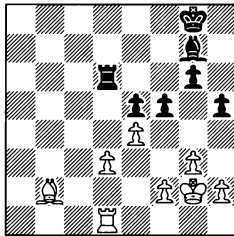
28...♖b4? is met with a similarly dirty trick: 29 ♙d4!. The world's riches and power are

not enough to satisfy the bishop's overwhelming ambition. After 29...♖xb1 (or 29...♖xd4!? 30 ♖xd4 ♜xb1 and such a version of giving the queen by Black leaves White with many active options; after 31 ♖d8+ ♔h7 32 f4! Black's fortress is no guarantee and I believe White can win this version) 30 ♖d8+ ♔h7 31 ♜xb6 White retains excellent chances to convert.

29 ♖e8+ ♖f8 30 ♖d7 ♖d6 31 ♖xd6

Fine. Have it your way. The result all researchers fear is the dreaded 'inconclusive'. It's almost impossible to predict with accuracy if the remaining position is won for White, or drawn. As play develops, we sense a queasy pivot, from forward motion to a defensive drawback, as the second phase of the game begins to go badly for White's side.

31...♜xd6 32 ♜d1 f5!



Carlsen continues to remain as active as possible, pre-empting White's coming f4 ideas.

33 f3!

I have a feeling Black holds the ending after 33 ♜e1 ♜xd3 34 exf5 gxf5 35 ♜xe5 ♔f7 36 ♜f4 when the game is just too simplified for White to make progress. However, Kramnik suggested the plan 33 ♔f3! ♜b6 34 ♜c3 ♜b3 35 ♜c1, intending ♔e2, ♜c2, ♜d2 and then Kramnik's rook is free to get active. He estimated his chances to win at 50/50 with this plan.

33...fxe4 34 fxe4 ♜b6 35 ♜c3 ♜b3 36 ♜a1?

The bishop senses a distinct diminution of his manna and previous status, falling in title from archbishop of the realm, to apprentice shoveller of the royal stables. The idea is to continue to train an eye on e5, tying down Black's bishop. The trouble is White's bishop is tied down far more, after which white options drop heavily.

Correct was 36 ♜c1, although even here, pulling out a win looks like a near-impossible task, considering Black's active defenders, coupled with the reduced material on the board. Instead, IM Colin Crouch in *Magnus Force*, suggests 36 ♜e1 ♜b2+ 37 ♜f2 ♔f7 38 h3 followed by kingside pawn expansion. I think Black should hold the game after 38...♜f6 39

♟f3 g5! 40 g4 h4!. Sometimes principles are meant to be deliberately violated. Now any bishop move from White is met with ...♞h2 and after 41 ♖a1 ♙e7 42 ♖a5 ♟e6 43 ♞d5 ♙f6 I don't see how White makes progress.

36...♟f7 37 ♟f3 ♟e6 38 h3 ♙h6 39 ♟e2 ♙g5 40 ♞g1 ♙h6 41 h4

Kramnik places his kingside pawns on the wrong colour of his remaining bishop, perhaps concerned by the line 41 g4 h4!?, after which his h3-pawn is a potential target after 42 g5 ♙f8 43 ♞c1 ♖a3.

41...♟d6 42 ♞d1 ♟e6 43 ♞f1 ♞b4!

Making certain White doesn't get away with a d4 break. Carlsen raises a disturbing question to his opponent, which has no answer: how do you generate progress?

44 ♞d1

After 44 ♙c3 ♞b3 45 ♙d2 the simplest is 45...♙xd2! 46 ♟xd2 ♞b2+ 47 ♟e3 ♞g2 48 ♞f3 ♞g1 49 ♟f2 ♞d1 50 ♟e2 ♞g1 when White is unable to make progress.

44...♞b3 45 ♞g1 ♟f6 46 ♞h1 ♟e6 47 ♞d1 ♟f6

White is unable to make progress, so Kramnik gives it one final try.

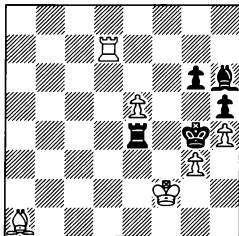
48 d4!? ♞e3+ 49 ♟f2 ♞xe4 50 dxe5+

50 d5 ♟f5! 51 d6 ♙e3+ 52 ♟f3 ♙b6 53 d7 ♞e3+ 54 ♟g2 ♞e2+ 55 ♟h3 ♙d8 56 ♞d6 ♞c2 57 ♞d5 ♞e2 is also drawn.

50...♟f5 51 ♞d7

Avoiding 51 ♞d6 ♙g7, which picks off e5.

51...♟g4!



Active defence. Carlsen, not simply content to await developments, makes a direct play for White's now vulnerable kingside pawns.

52 ♞d6 ♙e3+ 53 ♟e2

53 ♟g2 g5 is also sufficient for a draw.

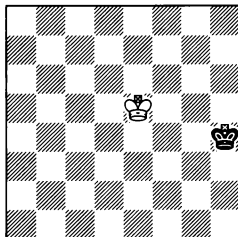
53...♙f4+ 54 ♟d3 ♞e3+ 55 ♟c4 ♙xe5 56 ♞xg6+ ♟f3 57 ♙xe5 ♞xe5

Now it's a dead draw and Kramnik could have offered it here.

58 ♖g5 ♗e4+

Even a player rated in the range of Elo 400 isn't going to fall for 58...♗xg5?? 59 hxg5 and White queens first.

59 ♖d5 ♖g4! 60 ♖e5 ♖xg3 61 ♗xh5 ♗xh4 62 ♗xh4 ♖xh4 ½-½



I'm almost certain this position is a book draw. "Once he (Carlsen) got into trouble, he was making all the best moves; sometimes not even the first choices of the computers, but better moves," wrote Kramnik.

Game 15
S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen
Sandnes 2013
Ruy Lopez

Before this game, Karjakin had won four in a row versus the world's elite. He came close to making it number five, if not for Carlsen's resourceful defence.

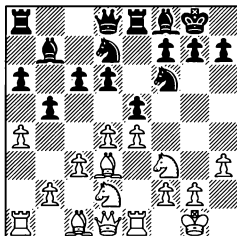
1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♖f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♗e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♖b8

The Breyer Variation of the Ruy Lopez. Black retreats in order to redeploy his knight to d7, allowing his c-pawn the flexibility to move forward.

10 d4 ♖bd7 11 ♖bd2 ♗b7 12 ♗c2 ♗e8 13 a4

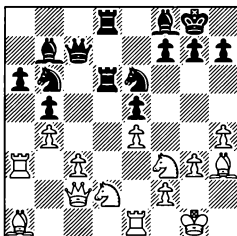
More common is 13 ♖f1 ♗f8 14 ♖g3 g6 15 a4 c5 16 d5 c4 17 ♗g5 h6 18 ♗e3 ♖c5 19 ♗d2 h5 20 ♗xc5 dxc5. White may stand a shade better since his passed d-pawn outweighs Black's dark-square control, A.Grischuk-G.Kamsky, Nalchik 2009.

13...♗f8 14 ♗d3 c6



15 ♖c2!

A prepared surprise for Carlsen, who defeated Karjakin in the 2010 World Blitz Championship after the more common continuation 15 b3: 15...♜c7 16 ♜c2 ♜ac8 17 ♜b2 ♜h5 18 ♜f1 ♜f4 19 b4 ♜b6 20 axb5 cxb5 21 dxe5?! dxe5 22 ♜b1 ♜cd8 23 g3 ♜e6 24 h4 ♜a4 25 ♜a3 ♜d7 26 ♜a1 ♜ed8 27 ♜a2 ♜b6 28 ♜h3?! ♜d6. Black already stands significantly better, but Karjakin's next move is a blunder: 29 ♜c2?.



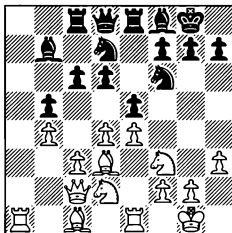
Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win.

Answer: Pin/weak back rank. 29...♜d4! 30 ♜b1 (30 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 31 ♜b3 ♜xb4 is also completely hopeless for White) 30...♜xf3+ 31 ♜xf3 ♜d3 0-1, S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen, Moscow (blitz) 2010. 32 ♜g2 is met with 32...♜c4 33 ♜a2 ♜xe4! winning, due to White's loose back rank.

15...♖c8

Logically placing the rook on the same file as White's queen. 15...g6 is played more often.

16 axb5 axb5 17 b4



Question: Doesn't b4 hurt White, who plays on Black's strong wing?

Answer: It isn't so clear if Black is the sole owner of queenside play. For the moment both sides strive to make gains there. One idea behind playing b4 is that moves like ...c5 can be met with bxc5, followed by d5, creating a passed d-pawn.

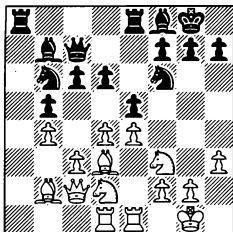
17...♗c7

A new move. 17...g6 18 ♖b2 ♕h5 19 g3 exd4 20 cxd4 d5 21 ♖c3 ♖b6 22 e5 was N.Short-L.Portisch, Wijk aan Zee 1990. Black's knight gained access to c4, while White may generate a kingside attack with his majority on that wing. White stands better since his knight can also jump into the corresponding c5 hole, via b3.

18 ♖b2 ♖a8

Challenging the a-file. 18...c5?! looks premature after 19 bxc5 dxc5 20 dxe5! c4 (if 20...dxe5? 21 ♕xe5 ♖xe5 22 c4 when White either picks up a pawn or an exchange) 21 exf6 cxd3 22 ♗xd3 ♕xf6 23 e5 ♕d7 24 ♗xb5. Black has the bishop-pair and excellent play on the light squares, but is it worth two pawns? I doubt it.

19 ♖ad1 ♖b6?!



Question: Why give this move a dubious mark?
Black simply fights for control over c4.

Answer: While the move doesn't hinder White's coming c4 break, it does weaken e5, a fact which Karjakin shortly seizes upon.

20 c4! bxc4 21 dxc4

And Black has found himself in a really unpleasant position. Whatever he does, White's initiative is strong," writes GM Mikhail Golubev.

21...dxc4 22 e4

Black must worry about e5 and also f7.

22...h6

After 22...exd4 23 e4xd4 d5 (otherwise, 23...d7?? 24 g5 dxe5 25 ex5 wins, and 23...xe4?? is met by 24 d5! f6 when White wins with the pretty shot 25 g5!; Black is pinned and overloaded every which way) 24 e5! c5 25 b3! d4 26 ex4! dxe4 27 g5 e7 28 ex5 White regains the sacrificed exchange, with a clear advantage.

23 dxe5 dxe5 24 e3

White had an option of 24 c3 d6 25 b3 c8 26 exd6! cxd6 27 dxe5 e6 28 c2 e8 29 d1 c7 30 d3 and advantage White. For the exchange, he gets a pawn, the bishop-pair, a c5-outpost for his knight and potential kingside attacking chances.

24...a6

Carlsen hopes to unload his passive b7-bishop.

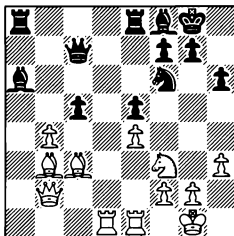
25 b3!

"May the light of my unsurpassed beatitude fall upon you, the impure," prays the obnoxious bishop to his a6 brother, who wishes his b3 colleague would just shut the hell up. Good judgement. White's bishop is stronger.

25...c5?!

Carlsen hopes to eliminate his weak c-pawn and liquidate to a drawish position. However he mistimes it. Black minimizes his disadvantage with 25...♙b5.

26 ♜b2!



Targeting e5.

26...c4!

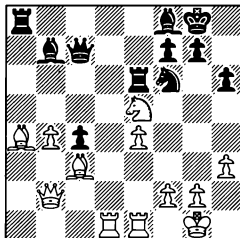
Carlsen picks the most palatable line in a nest of treacherous choices. Black is unable to survive 26...cxb4? 27 ♙xe5 ♜b6 28 ♙d4 ♙c5 29 ♙xc5 ♜xc5 30 e5: for example, 30...♙h7 31 ♙d5 ♜ad8 32 ♜b3 ♜e7 33 e6 f5 34 ♙c6 ♜xd1 35 ♜xd1 ♜c8 36 ♙d7 ♜f6 37 e7+ ♙h8 38 ♙e5! ♙g5 39 ♜d5 ♙h7 40 ♜d8 is crushing.

Likewise, after 26...♙d7 27 ♜xd7! ♜xd7 28 ♙xe5 ♜xe5 29 ♙xe5 cxb4 30 ♜e3! ♜c8 (in order to meet ♜f3 with ...♙c4) 31 ♜g3 g5 32 ♜a2 ♜e7 33 ♙b2 ♙b5 34 ♜f3 ♙e8 35 e5 ♜c5 36 e6 f5 37 ♜b1 Black's position remains under tremendous strain.

27 ♙a4! ♜e6 28 ♙xe5

Most would label the knight's actions as theft. He prefers to call it 'appropriation'. There goes an important central pawn.

28...♙b7



29 ♖c2?

A position of such complexity threatens to exceed understanding's reach. After completely outplaying Carlsen, Karjakin fails to find the strongest continuation. White should play 29 ♖b5! ♖a6 30 ♙d7 ♜b6 31 b5 ♙xb5 32 ♙xb5 ♜ab8 33 ♙a5 c3 34 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 35 ♙xc3 ♜xb5 36 ♙d3 ♙d7 with a healthy extra pawn, although the fact that all the remaining pawns are on one side of the board increases Black's drawing chances.

29...♜ae8 30 f4

This weakening move is obligatory if White wants to hang on to his extra pawn. Suddenly, White is forced into weakening his kingside and Black's pieces hum with activity. *Houdini* now rates the position at even, with Black obtaining full compensation for the pawn, while I actually prefer Black's side, since from a practical standpoint, White's moves are not so easy to find.

30...♙d6!

Watch how in the next few moves, Carlsen undermines e5 from every angle.

31 ♜h2

Golubev called his move "absurd looking", but White's options don't look all that appealing. For example:

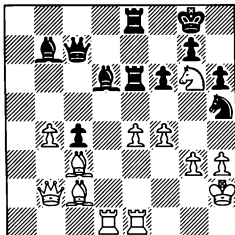
a) 31 g3 ♙xe5! (the hard-riden and now spent knight is eliminated) 32 ♙xe5 ♜xe5! 33 fxe5 c3 34 ♜a1 ♜xe5 35 ♜e3 ♙xe4 36 ♜a7 f5 when Black gets a pawn plus attacking chances for the exchange, with dynamic equality at a minimum.

b) 31 ♜e3 g5! 32 g3 gxf4 33 gxf4 ♜h7! and White's king looks more exposed than Black's.

31...♙h5!

Carlsen seeks an attacking fulcrum as a marker to lend rational to that which is inherently chaotic. A powerful undermining idea, where f4 and e5 appear wobbly and Karjakin must agree to new concessions by weakening his king.

32 g3 f6! 33 ♙g6



Exercise (critical decision): The armies collide and intertwine in the middle. Black's candidate moves are 33...♙xe4, regaining the lost pawn, and the piece sacrifice 33...♜xf4. Which one should Black play?

Answer: Sacrifice on f4, since White is unable to accept. Carlsen has been behind in material for quite some time now, a deficiency he seeks to restore.

33...♜xf4!

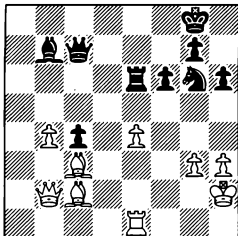
Once we latch on to the correct idea, it is no time to shirk the details and allow educated deductions to be upgraded to the level of actual facts. Now the white king's armour cracks open like a walnut, leaving exposed tender flesh. This is the counterattack's logical continuum.

33...♙xe4?! allows White to hang in there with 34 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 35 ♙xe4 ♖xe4 36 ♜c2 ♜xg3 37 ♜xg3 ♖e3+ 38 ♜h4 ♙xf4 39 ♜f5! ♖xc3 40 ♜e6+ ♜h7 41 ♜f8+ ♜h8 42 ♜g6+ with a draw.

34 ♖xd6!

When there is a dangerous job ahead, the general tends to send his most expendable unit to do the dirty work. Karjakin finds the only path to keep him alive, in view of 34 ♙xf4?? ♙xf4+ 35 ♜h1 ♖xe4! 36 ♙xe4 ♖xe4 37 ♜g1 ♙d2!!, and if 38 ♜xd2 ♜g3+ 39 ♜f1 ♜xh3+ 40 ♜f2 (40 ♜g2 hangs the queen to 40...♖xe1+) 40...♜f5+ mates.

34...♜xg6 35 ♖xe6 ♖xe6



Question: How would we assess this position?

Answer: White's shortcomings are made painfully evident by the following:

1. White's king is unsafe.
2. White's e-pawn is weak.
3. Black controls e5.

36 ♖d4?!

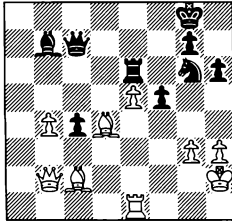
36 ♖b1 h5! 37 ♜d2 h4 38 ♜e3 ♞e5 doesn't look all that easy for White, but it is better than what happened in the game.

36...f5!

Carlsen takes advantage of White's last move, which leaves the e1-rook in an unprotected state.

37 e5

Neither can White survive 37 ♜c3 fxe4 38 ♖b3 ♖d5 39 ♖d1 ♞h4 with a dominating position.



Exercise (combination alert): This is not a situation where we can take comfort in generalities. White's wobbly position comes apart if you find Black's correct continuation.

Answer: Piece sacrifice. A deteriorating position either tends to collapse from the sides inward, or from the middle out. White's distress is an example of the latter category. Karjakin is unable to withstand Carlsen's computer shot, since he can't hang on to his extra piece, due to Black's numerous mating threats.

37...♖xe5!!

Not 37...♖c6?? (the ambitious queen, like Eve in the garden of Eden, hungers for the forbidden) 38 ♗xf5 and it is White who wins.

38 ♗xe5 ♖c6!

Threatening mate on the move.

39 ♖g1

Everything loses. Black attacking variations, as if to some silent and invisible signal, begin to synchronize in patterns around White's king:

a) 39 ♗xf5?? walks into the double overload shot 39...♖xe5!.

b) 39 ♗e4 (perhaps White's best practical chance) 39...fxe4 40 ♖e3 ♖e7 41 ♗d4 ♖d7 42 ♖a1 ♖d5 43 ♗c3 ♖f7 (threat: ...♖f2+) 44 ♖g1 (44 ♖e1 is met by 44...♖d1! 45 ♖e2 ♖d3 with a winning position) 44...♖d3 45 ♖e1 ♖d7 46 ♖h2 ♗c8! (target: h3) 47 ♖xd3 cxd3 48 h4 ♖c6 49 b5 ♖c5 50 ♗b4 ♖c4 51 ♗d2 ♗b7 52 ♖e3 ♖xb5 and White won't survive down two pawns with a continually endangered king.

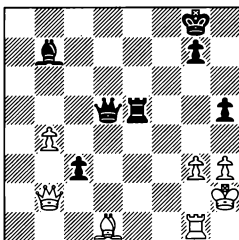
39...♖d5!

Threatening the bishop, and also a deadly check on d2.

40 ♗xf5 ♖xe5 41 ♗g4 h5! 42 ♗d1

42 ♖d1 is met with the pretty queen sacrifice 42...♖xd1! 43 ♗xd1 ♖e1 44 g4 h4!, cutting off the white king's escape route and forcing the win.

42...c3!



Black rules the board.

43 ♖f2

Alternatives fail miserably:

a) 43 ♜b3 ♜e2+! wins.

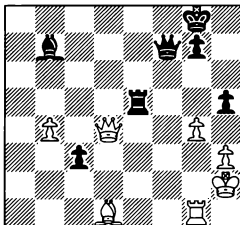
b) 43 ♜xc3 ♜a2+ 44 ♜c2 ♜xc2+ 45 ♜xc2 ♜e2+ mates.

43...♜f5 44 ♜e3 ♜f7!

Threatening a killing check on f2.

45 g4 ♜e5! 46 ♜d4

If 46 ♜xe5 ♜f2+ 47 ♜g2 ♜xg2 mate. White's king discovers that it isn't all that easy to dis-associate himself from his sister.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen force mate?

Answer: There is no good way for White to elude a deadly discovered check.

46...♖c7! 0-1

"Corona mundi," declares the arrogant queen, then adds in English (she realizes her brother ditched Latin class as a kid and doesn't understand a word of what she just said): "I am the crown of the world!". After 46...♖c7! 47 ♜g3 ♜e1 48 ♜b3+ ♜h8 49 ♜d5 ♜e2+ 50 ♜g2 ♜xg2+ the delusional white king's aspirations for immortality are shattered by his impending death.

Game 16

M.Carlsen-L.Aronian

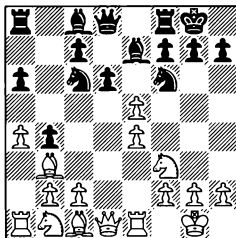
Sinquefield Cup, Saint Louis 2013

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♜e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♜b3 0-0 8 a4

Another anti-Marshall Gambit line.

8...b4 9 d4 d6 10 dxe5!?



Question: No fighting spirit for Magnus today?

Answer: Carlsen led the tournament, needing only a draw in this, the final round, for clear first place. He faced the number two ranked player in the world, who desperately needed to defeat him in order to tie for first place, so his milquetoast opening line may actually be a rather clever psychological decision.

10...dxe5 11 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 12 ♘bd2

Despite the simplification, there are still chances for both sides. White owns c4, while Black controls greater queenside territory.

12...h6 13 a5!?

Clearing a4 for his bishop and fixing a6 as a potential future target. The move also imperils White's own a-pawn.

13...♙c5

Aronian senses play on f2.

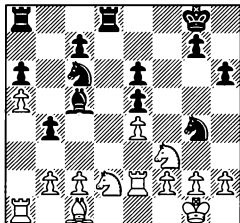
14 ♙c4!?

This may be an indicator that Carlsen may be secretly playing for a safe win. If he wanted a draw, a more clear path would be through piece swaps, with a line like 14 ♙a4 ♜xa5 15 ♜xe5 ♜g4 16 ♜xg4 ♙xg4 17 ♜b3 ♜xb3 18 ♙xb3 ♙e6 and the position remains equal, while inching closer to a drawn final result.

14...♜g4 15 ♝e2 ♙e6!

Only two results come from ambition: reward or suffering. The player's intent travels along separate strata: Carlsen hopes to draw and win clear first place in the tournament, while Aronian refuses to cooperate with Carlsen's play-dull-and-win-the-tournament strategy, responding with ingenious strategic truculence. His idea is barely amenable to classification, agreeing to a structural risk to imbalance the position.

16 ♙xe6 fxe6



Question: Why did Aronian agree to a self-inflicted wound to his structure?

Answer: It's debatable if Black's structure degraded with the trade, since he also increased his central control. I don't see an effective plan to exploit Black's alleged pawn weaknesses. If a weakness is unexploitable by the opponent, then is it really accurate to label it a weakness?

17 h3 ♜f6 18 ♝e1

Played in order that ...♜d4 won't arrive with tempo.

18...♞ab8 19 ♜c4

Attacking e5.

19...♖b5!

Hey, I said “attacking e5”! Aronian defends e5 tactically, while increasing pressure on a5. I now prefer Black’s position.

20 b3

The e-pawn isn’t really hanging, since 20 ♖fxe5?! ♖xe5 21 ♖xe5 ♕xf2+ 22 ♖xf2 ♜xe5 23 ♕f4 ♜c5 24 ♜e2 g5 25 ♕h2 ♖f7 leaves White tied down to numerous pawn weaknesses.

20...♕d4 21 ♕b2 ♜c5!

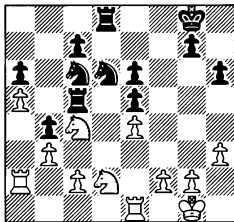
Black’s rook covers e5, while applying pressure to a5 and c2. Instead, after 21...♕xb2 22 ♖xb2, and if 22...♖xa5?! 23 ♜a4 ♖f8 24 ♜e1 ♖c6 25 ♜xa6 White regains the pawn favourably.

22 ♜a2 ♕xb2 23 ♜xb2 ♖e8!

Fantastic positional play, intending ...♖d6. Aronian insidiously continues to make progress, mainly through inciting minor skirmishes in areas where Carlsen is ill-prepared. Apparently, all of Carlsen’s meticulous precautionary measures were taken in vain, since Black stands better. Aronian, through his almost supernatural feel for Ruy Lopez structures, has outplayed Carlsen, who now finds he must contend with the uncomfortable prospect of losing a final game as White, and choking to his surging opponent.

The question arises: if Black stands better, then where did Carlsen go wrong? I am unable to place the exact spot, and in my research, numerous annotators found themselves in the same dilemma. Such is the level of subtlety of world-class strategic play.

24 ♜a2 ♖d6 25 ♖fd2



25...♖b7?!

The obvious choice. Aronian concentrates on the a5 weakness, yet the move may be an inaccurate plan, which allows White to maintain equality.

Question: Black’s choice seems absolutely logical to me. Why would you question a move where Black picks up a pawn in an ending?

Answer: Well, after Black picks up a5, how does he remove his knight from this inferior post, without hanging a6? I don't see a way, and neither did Aronian during the game. I would think about a slow tie-down with 25...♖b5! 26 ♖b1 ♜f7 27 f3 g5 when White has nothing useful to do, while Black dominates the dark squares and leisurely gains space on the kingside.

26 ♖f3 ♜f7

26...♖bxa5 allows 27 ♖fxe5! (overloaded defender) 27...♖xe5 28 ♜xa5 ♜xa5 29 ♖xa5 ♜d2 30 ♜c1 g5 31 ♜f1 ♜f7 32 ♜e1 ♜d6 33 ♜e2 and White looks fine.

27 ♜f1 ♜f6 28 ♜a4

Reminding Aronian that he too has a few weak pawns, in this case, b4.

28...♖bxa5

So Aronian won a pawn and looks to be on the cusp of one of the greatest comeback victories of his career. Carlsen, however, now hunkers down, entering Maginot line mode (except in his case it worked).

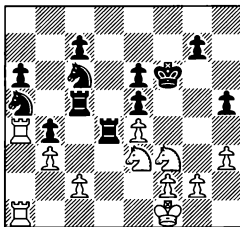
29 ♖e3

Black's extra pawn isn't going to be so easy to convert, since if the a5-knight ever attempts to return to play, Black drops a6.

29...h5

In order to cut out future ♖g4+ cheapo attempts.

30 ♜e1 ♜d4



Exercise (critical decision): Black just offered us a full exchange to solidify his queenside and central initiative. Should we accept, or should we decline with 31 ♖e1?

Answer: We should decline the offer.

31 ♖e1

31 ♖xd4?? exd4 32 ♖c4 ♖xc4 33 bxc4 ♜xc4 34 ♜a2 a5 is completely hopeless for White, whose rooks are no more than glorified pawns.

31...♙e7

Question: Why isn't e4 hanging?

Answer: It is and it isn't. White's last move offers it indirect coverage, since Black should avoid 31...♜xe4!? 32 ♜d3 and if 32...♜b5?! (after 32...♜b7! 33 ♜xc5 ♜xc5 34 ♜4a2 ♜d4 Black probably gets full compensation for the exchange here, but no more), White has 33 c4! (overloaded defender/pin) 33...bxc3! (Black loses a rook, yet gets some compensation for it) 34 ♜xe4 ♜xb3 35 ♜a2 ♜cd4 36 ♜c4 c2 37 ♜e1 when ♜c1 is coming and my feeling is that White should consolidate with accurate play.

32 f3 ♜d2

Upon a quick glance, White appears busted, down a pawn, weak on the dark squares and with his opponent's rook invading the seventh. The reality is, Carlsen's position is far more sturdy than it first appears.

33 ♜d1

Well, at least that is one issue put to rest.

33...♜d6!?

Still playing for the full point. 33...♜xd1 34 ♜xd1 makes the position even more draw-ish. Perhaps here, Aronian should have been content with a drawn result.

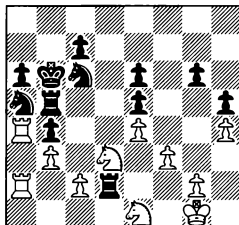
34 ♜da1 ♜d7 35 ♜d1 ♜d2 36 ♜f2! ♜c8

Maybe Aronian is contemplating bringing his king to b6 to free his c5-rook of babysitting duties.

37 ♜fd3 ♜b5 38 h4!

Black must be alert to future ♜f2, ♜g3 and ♜g5 ideas. Note that Carlsen avoids the 'combination' which regains his lost pawn with 38 ♜xb4?! ♜xb4 39 ♜xa5 ♜b7. Here I think Black has all the chances, due to his powerful d2-rook.

38...♜b7 39 ♜1a2 ♜a7 40 ♜g1 ♜b6 41 ♜f1 g6 42 ♜g1



La, la la, la la. Carlsen's king seems to be daydreaming, while humming a pleasant tune.

He begins to feel like a Vonnegut-style specimen in an intergalactic zoo, who paces aimlessly in a glass display for the alien populace's amusement. Carlsen correctly does nothing, asking Aronian how he plans to make progress.

42...♖b7 43 ♜f1 ♜c8

Okay, the bring-the-king-to-b6 plan didn't pan out. Aronian can't put his finger on a plan to an advantage, which is now long gone.

44 ♜f2 ♞d8 45 ♞ed3

Okay, this isn't funny anymore.

45...♖b7 46 ♜e2 ♖b6

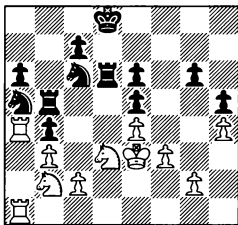
After 46...♜d4+?! 47 ♜e3 ♜dc6 48 ♜h3! ♖b6 49 ♜g5 ♞e8 50 g3! ♜a7 51 f4 exf4+ 52 gxf4 I think it is now Black who fights for the draw, despite his useless extra pawn. *Houdini* rates White up nearly a full pawn at this point.

47 ♜e3 ♖b7

Mysteriously, Black now stands worse and Aronian offered a draw with his last move. However, Carlsen's mind oscillated between extremes. Unbelievably, he no longer was satisfied with a draw and declined, even though down a pawn. This is a sign of colossal self-assurance and also a predatory killer instinct on par with that of Alekhine, Larsen, Korchnoi, Fischer and Kasparov. Carlsen is one of those world champions who feeds on success, almost as if enlargement of ego generates further power on the board. White may even be close to winning here, but it takes exceptional technique and alertness to substantiate the claim.

48 ♜d1 ♜c8 49 ♜1b2! ♞d6 50 ♞a1 ♜d8?

Black is unlikely to hang on, even after the correct sequence 50...♞d4 51 g3 ♞d7 52 f4 exf4+ 53 gxf4 since his pawn configuration is askew, riddled with weaknesses.



Exercise (combination alert): Black, possibly dulled by his extra pawn, may not believe he can ever lose. He can after 50...♜d8, but only if you find Carlsen's coming idea.

Answer: Double attack/overloaded defender.

51 ♖c4!

“Your arrogant belief in your own infallibility has undone you,” gloats the knight to the now not-so-confident d6-rook, adding: “We shared an ordeal which broke you, yet tempered me and made me all the more powerful.” The taut strings abruptly snap and Black’s position, a defective marionette, crumples.

51... ♖xc4+

I don’t know about you, but when I am in the process of getting cheapoed, my tormented psyche conjures up nightmarish past associations in other games, where I endured a similar fate.

52 bxc4 ♜b8 53 c5!

The clotted mass of would-be Black invaders disperses in confusion after this second shot.

53... ♜d7?!

When we decide upon a course of action which makes our already bad position worse, it’s as if we subconsciously try and get a head start on our future despair. This looks like an aftershock blunder, prompted by his last one. Now Black’s game goes spinning out of control.

Aronian had to try 53... ♜xd3+!, although I don’t believe he saves himself in the long run: 54 ♖xd3 a5 55 ♖c4 ♕e7 56 ♜a2 ♖d7 57 ♜b2! ♕e7 58 c3 ♖d7 59 cxb4 axb4 60 ♜a6 ♜f8 61 ♜b3 ♜b8 62 f4! ♖d4 (62...exf4?? hangs a piece to 63 ♜d3+) 63 ♜b2 b3 64 fxe5 ♖c6 65 ♜d2+ ♖c8 66 ♜xc6 b2 67 ♜d1! (White is willing to give up his rook for the b-pawn, but not on the second rank) 67...b1♗ 68 ♜xb1 ♜xb1 69 ♜xe6 with a winning rook and pawn ending for White.

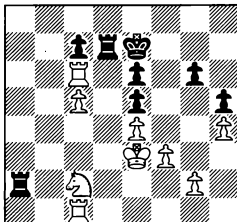
54 ♜xa6 b3

Desperation. 54... ♖d4 is met with 55 ♜a8! ♜xa8 56 ♜xa8+ ♕e7 57 ♖xe5 ♖xc2+ 58 ♕e2 and miraculously, Black’s rook has no safe place to run without getting forked.

55 ♜xc6 bxc2 56 ♖e1!

The idea is to meet 56... ♜d1 with 57 ♖xc2!. 56 ♜xe6! is possible too, since 56... ♜b1?? is met with 57 ♜a8+ ♜b8 58 ♜xb8 mate.

56... ♕e7 57 ♖xc2 ♜b3+ 58 ♕e2 ♜b2 59 ♜c1 ♜a2 60 ♕e3



White slowly unravels.

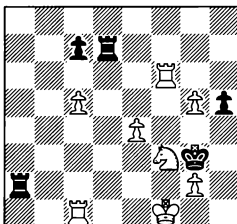
Question: Why isn't Black resigning here?

Answer: White has one minor issue remaining. How to free his entombed c6-rook. So Aronian plays on, hoping for a miracle.

60... ♖f7 61 f4

Easier was 61 ♖b4! ♜xg2 62 ♖d3 ♜e7 63 ♜b1 ♖f6 64 ♜b7.

61... ♖f6 62 fxe5+ ♜xe5 63 ♖e1 ♜a3+ 64 ♖f2 ♜d2+ 65 ♖f1 ♜d7 66 ♖f3+ ♖f4 67 ♜xe6 g5 68 hxg5 ♖g3 69 ♜f6 ♜a2



Exercise (combination alert): White can defend against the Black's seventh rank threats with the simple 70 ♖e1. But if you find a better move, you either win heavy material or force mate. How?

Answer: Clearance of the third rank with tempo devastates Black's king.

70 ♖e5! 1-0

70...♙dd2 is met with 71 ♖c3+ ♖h4 72 ♖h3+ ♖xg5 73 ♖f5+ (White's rook pair and knight represent a collection of parts from a single entity, bent on the black king's destruction) 73...♖h6 74 ♖fxh5+ ♖g7 75 ♖g3+ ♖f8 76 ♖f5+ ♖e7 77 ♖g7+ ♖e6 (Black's king is the unfortunate desert hare in the middle of a stampede of wild horses) 78 ♖g6+ ♖e7 79 ♖f7+ ♖e8 80 ♖g8 mate.

Game 17

V.Anand-M.Carlsen

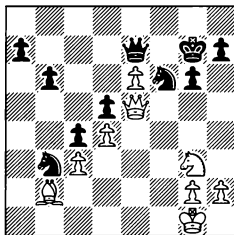
World Championship (Game 9), Chennai 2013

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 f3

Because of his close call in this game, Carlsen has been under heavy theoretical fire in this ultra-aggressive line of the Nimzo-Indian, with this world championship game, two tries by Nakamura, and one versus Karjakin (we examine two of his encounters in this chapter).

Compare with this classic: 4 e3 d5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 exd5 (this structure is similar to the Anand-Carlsen game) 8 ♙d3 0-0 9 ♘e2 b6 10 0-0 ♙a6 11 ♙xa6 ♘xa6 12 ♙b2 ♘d7 13 a4 ♖fe8 14 ♘d3 c4 15 ♘c2 ♘b8 16 ♖ae1 ♘c6 17 ♘g3 ♘a5 18 f3 ♘b3 19 e4 ♖xa4 20 e5 ♘d7 21 ♖f2 g6 22 f4 f5 23 exf6 ♘xf6 24 f5 ♖xe1 25 ♖xe1 ♖e8 26 ♖e6! ♖xe6 27 fxe6 ♖g7 28 ♖f4! ♖e8 29 ♖e5 ♖e7.



Exercise (combination alert): How did White dismantle the defence?

Answer: Deflection/pin/annihilation of the king's position: 30 ♖a3!! ♜xa3 31 ♕h5+! gxh5 32 ♜g5+ ♜f8 33 ♜xf6+ ♜g8 34 e7 (to Capablanca's dismay, there is no perpetual check) 34...♜c1+ 35 ♜f2 ♜c2+ 36 ♜g3 ♜d3+ 37 ♜h4 ♜e4+ 38 ♜xh5! (38 ♜g5?? allows Black to draw with 38...♜xg2+ 39 ♜f5 ♜e4+ 40 ♜g5 h6+! 41 ♜xh6 ♜e3+ 42 ♜xh5 ♜h3+ 43 ♜g5 ♜g2+) 38...♜e2+ 39 ♜h4 ♜e4+ 40 g4 ♜e1+ 41 ♜h5 1-0, M.Botvinnik-J.Capablanca, AVRO, Rotterdam 1938. This game is annotated in *Botvinnik: Move by Move*.

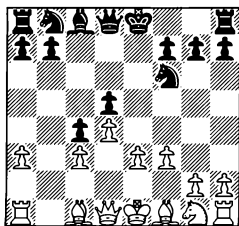
4...d5

A few months later, against Nakamura, Carlsen tried 4...c5. We look next at one of these games. Then came 4...0-0 5 a3 ♖xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♕h5 (...♜h4+ is in the air) 7 ♕h3 f5 8 e3 d6 9 ♖e2 c5 10 0-0 ♕c6 11 g4 fxg4 12 fxg4 ♕f6 13 ♕f2 h6 14 e4?! (I think White would be better off keeping things fluid with 14 ♖d3) 14...e5! (principle: block the position when your opponent has the bishop-pair) 15 d5 ♕e7 16 g5 hxg5 17 ♖xg5 ♜e8 18 ♜d3 by when Black stands structurally better and holds an edge, S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen, Shamkir 2014.

5 a3 ♖xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 exd5

Inviting Anand to attack him. Black's king is safer in the line 7...♕xd5 8 dxc5 ♜a5 9 e4 ♕e7 10 ♖e3 0-0 11 ♜b3. However, I prefer White due to the bishop-pair and possible pressure down the b-file, C.Lakdawala-B.Baker, San Diego (rapid) 2009.

8 e3 c4!?



Carlsen attempts to throw Anand off with a rarely played side line.

Question: An example of the Larsen playbook?

Answer: Correct. By playing a little known side line, Carlsen hopes to inoculate himself from the heavily prepared Anand's theoretical wrath.

Question: Doesn't the move violate the principle keep the centre fluid if you are later going to come under attack (on the kingside in this case)?

Answer: Of course, such risks carry within them the seed of potential penalties, as well. Yes, it is a deliberate violation of the principle. Carlsen has faith in his king's ability to avoid checkmate on the kingside, so he stakes out queenside space and a majority on that wing, planning ...dxc6, ...dxa5, ...dxb3, ...b5, ...a5 and ...b4. Of course this takes a long time, which Black's king may not have. The more popular moves are 8...O-O, 8...Wc7 and 8...dxf5.

9 dxe2

The plan is to eventually transfer the knight to g3, in order to enforce e4.

9...dxc6 10 g4!

Very intimidating.

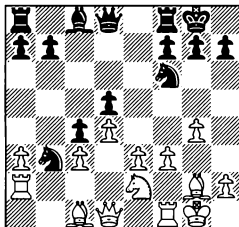
10...O-O!

Well, maybe not so intimidating to Carlsen, who castles directly into the teeth of Anand's attack. Alternatively:

a) 10...h6 11 dxc6 dxc6 12 O-O dxc6 13 Na2 O-O (Black might consider 13...dxe6 intending to castle queenside) 14 dxc6 dxc6 15 Wf1 Ne8 16 e4!? (Kasparov doesn't bother protecting his g-pawn and offers it in homage to his attack) 16...dxe4 17 fxe4 dxc6 18 dxc6 Wf4 19 h3 dxc6 20 e5 dxc6 21 Wf2 dxc6 22 dxc6! (uncovering on f7) 22...Ne7? (22...dxe6 was necessary) 23 dxc6 Wxf2+ 24 fxc6 with a strategically won game for White, G.Kasparov-J.Polgar, Tilburg 1997.

b) 10...dxa5 11 dxc6 O-O simply transposes to the game.

11 dxc6 dxa5 12 O-O dxc6 13 Na2



With the intention of swinging over to the kingside, via the second rank.

13...b5

Question: Why isn't Black taking the c1-bishop, to relieve White of the bishop-pair ?

Answer: Black would then waste four moves to swap for a piece which only moved once. So Carlsen decides to leave the knight where it stands and continue the queenside/central undermining strategy with ...b5, ...a5 and ...b4.

14 ♖g3

GM Mikhail Krasenkow suggested 14 a4!?, which I wouldn't play, since it shifts the focus of the game to the queenside, Black's realm.

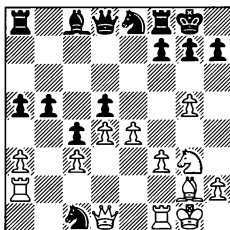
14...a5

A new move in the position. Carlsen has no time to lose and prepares to pry open the centre and queenside with a quick ...b4-break. Watch how easy it is for Black's king to get overwhelmed if he slips up: 14...♞e8 15 g5 ♖d7 16 e4 ♖b6 17 ♠af2 ♖a4 (17...a5, intending to undermine with ...b4 next, looks okay for Black) 18 ♛c2 ♞b8 (once again, I would go for 18...a5) 19 f4 ♜b7?! (Black should keep the centre fluid with 19...♛a5 20 ♞f3 dxe4) 20 e5 a5? 21 f5 ♛b6? (21...b4 is Black's only chance) 22 e6! ♖xc1 (22...fxe6 23 f6 is a winning attack for White) 23 exf7+ ♜xf7 24 g6+ ♜g8 25 f6 when Black's king is pried open and he has no chance of survival, A.Liu-C.Wu, U.S. League (Internet) 2013.

15 g5

Krasenkow suggested 15 e4!?, after which Black can respond with 15...dxe4 16 ♜g5 h6 17 ♜xf6 ♛xf6 18 fxe4 ♛b6, intending to undermine d4 with the ...b4 pawn break.

15...♖e8 16 e4 ♖xc1?



Carlsen decides that this exchange may be a necessary emendation, and that his original plan requires a course change.

Question: Didn't you say earlier that this swap loses time for Black?

Answer: I would have to check the transcripts, but I take you at your word. I think it is the mark of a flexible mind. In this case, Carlsen is willing to essentially lose three tempi to reduce the attacking force trained against his king. GM Alex Baburin gave the move a '?!' mark. I'm not so sure about that, since there was no clear win later on for Anand's side. In fact, this could be another case of Carlsen's near-omniscient intuition at work. And who can argue with success? He did manage to avoid getting mated this game.

17 ♖xc1 ♠a6!

Dual purpose:

1. Now that Black's rook is protected, it enables the ...b4 break.

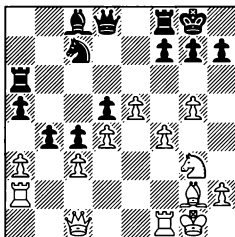
2. Black's rook may later swing over to the kingside in order to assist his king.

3. Black's rook suppresses sixth rank pawn breakthroughs on e6 and g6 (but not f6, as Anand played in the game).

18 e5 ♘c7

I would be more likely to play a quick 18...b4!? to distract White from his kingside attack. I like Black's position at the end of the line 19 axb4 axb4 20 ♠xa6 ♙xa6 21 cxb4 ♖b6 22 ♘f5 ♘c7 23 f4 ♖xb4. *Houdini* rates at dead even here. This version of White's attack doesn't feel as intimidating as the one Anand got in the game.

19 f4 b4



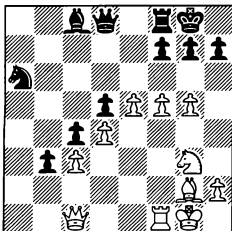
20 axb4!?

I'm not so sure about his move. It may not be correct to open queenside lines for Black. White's choices:

a) 20 f5 b3!? (a move like this is only played with the assumption that there is no mate on the other side of the board) 21 ♠af2. I don't know how to assess this position. Either White mates and wins with glory, or doesn't and gets slowly ground down on the queenside.

b) 20 a4!? (in order to keep Black's knight out of b5) 20...b3 21 ♠af2 ♙d7 22 ♖a3 ♖e8 23 ♠a1 when White can continue to slowly build with his pawns on the kingside. Of course, at some point, White must just hand over a4 and play directly for mate.

20...axb4 21 ♠xa6 ♘xa6 22 f5! b3!?



It takes enormous confidence to make a move like this against an attacker as gifted as Anand. 22...bxc3 is the move to play if you suspect that you are about to get mated.

23 ♖f4

Otherwise:

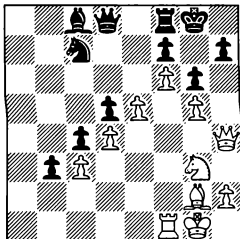
a) 23 f6 g6 24 ♖f4 ♘h8! 25 ♖h4 b2 26 ♖h6 ♙g8 27 ♙f4 b1♖+ 28 ♙f1 ♖d1! 29 ♙h4 ♖h5 30 ♘xh5 gxh5 31 ♖xh5 ♙f5 32 ♖xf7 ♘c7 (seizing control over e6) 33 ♙g2 ♙g6 (33...♙xg5?? walks into the deflection trick 34 ♙h5! and White is winning) 34 ♖e7 ♖xe7 35 fxe7 ♙e8 36 ♙h6 ♙xe7 37 h4 ♘g7 38 ♘f2 ♘b5 39 ♙xd5 ♘xc3 40 ♙xc4 ♙d7 when White is the one fighting for the draw.

b) 23 ♘h5 ♘c7 24 ♖f4 ♘b5, and if 25 ♖h4? toying with f6 ideas, Black has a trick of his own: 25...♙xf5! 26 ♙xf5 b2 27 ♙f1 ♘xc3. There is no mate and Black wins on the queenside.

23...♘c7 24 f6

Anand's dream of attack is a void, begging to be filled. So he tears at Carlsen's king, as if ripping a nail from a wooden board. At this stage, people were going nuts on the internet, with definitive claims of a looming mate over Carlsen's head.

24...g6 25 ♖h4



Exercise (critical decision): Black's knight can play to e6 or e8. Which one would you choose? Be careful. Only one of them works.

Answer: e8 is the correct square.

25...♔e8!

The only move, but the trouble is, it cuts off the f8-rook and black king from the remainder of their forces. They remain where they are, frozen in perplexity.

25...♔e6?? loses to 26 ♖h6 b2 27 ♙h3 ♜c7 28 ♜f5! ♜d8 (or 28...gxf5 29 ♙xf5 ♜d8 30 ♜xh7+ ♜f8 31 ♜h8 mate) 29 ♔e7+! (this move interferes with the queen's coverage of g7) 29...♜h8 30 ♙xe6 ♙xe6 31 ♜g7 mate. The black king closes his eyes and buries his arms over them, yet his terrible vision remains behind eyelids tightly clamped shut.

26 ♜h6

The Amazon queen, full of ardour, draws Black's king closer to her. Black's king, simultaneously spellbound and fearful of the white queen's approach, steels himself with the thought: "The devil only appears to us in the form of heavenly beauty, in order to tempt us."

Another possibility was 26 ♔e2 ♙e6 27 ♜f4 ♜a8 28 ♙f3 b2 29 ♔xe6! (this is now the correct timing) 29...fxe6 30 ♙g4 ♔g7! (not 30...♔c7?? 31 ♜f2! ♜f7 32 ♜xb2 and Black, having lost his trump b-pawn, can resign) 31 ♜h3 ♜a1 32 ♙xe6+ ♔xe6 33 ♜xe6+ ♜h8 34 ♜b6 ♜c1 35 ♜b4 ♜e3+ 36 ♔g2 ♜e2+ with perpetual check.

26...b2

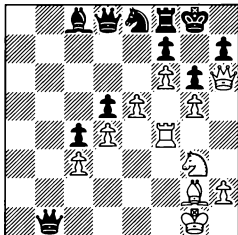
Played so that any rook lift from White allows Black to queen with check. Such remarkable nonchalance. Carlsen plays like a man unconscious to the looming threats to his king, as if their reality never once occurred to him, and as if only material matters over the board.

27 ♜f4!

White's battle-hardened troops, tempered by violent past campaigns, are psychologically prepared to take on heavy casualties for the coming fight. Spectacular stuff. Anand allows Carlsen to queen with check in order to pursue his attacking dreams. We world championship game watchers are a rather emotional lot, and there were screams of hysteria over the internet, claiming that Anand was in the process of forcing mate, while allowing Carlsen to promote a pawn with check. The true assessment according to the more emotionally stable comps: the game is even.

Likewise, after 27 ♖e2 ♙e6 28 ♜f4 ♚a5 29 ♜xe6 fxe6 30 ♙h3 ♚a6! 31 ♙g4 ♜f7 32 ♜h3 ♜c7 33 ♜g2 ♚a1 34 ♜c2 ♜f8 35 f7+! (in order to lure Black's rook away from b8, after which White picks off b2) 35...♜xf7 36 ♜b1 ♜f4 37 h3 the passer falls and the game remains dead even, according to *Houdini*.

27...b1♚+



Exercise (critical decision): 'Cheapskate' is generally a derogatory term, while in a chess game, actually may be a virtue. Black is up a full queen, but his king is under dire threat. White has two logical choices: block on f1 with either the bishop or the knight. In one version, White holds his own; in the other Black consolidates and wins.

28 ♜f1??

The false lustre of a non-existent mate guiles the knight's eyes, and the seed he plants never takes root.

Answer: Anand still saves the game with 28 ♙f1! ♚d1! 29 ♜h4 ♜h5 30 ♜xh5 gxh5 31 ♜xh5 ♙f5 32 g6! ♙xg6 33 ♜g5 (intending h4 and h5) 33...♜xf6 34 exf6 ♜xf6 35 ♜xd5 ♜f3 36 ♜c5 ♜xc3 37 ♜f4 ♜d8 38 ♜xc4 ♜e1, with equal chances and a probable draw.

28...♜e1! 0-1

Nobody wants to mess with Black's twin queens, who carry their revolvers in couples. Anand must have been kicking himself. It's humiliating when we make a move, believing it

to smite our opponent with a terrible blow, only to discover that our killing shot is rendered perfectly harmless by a simple response which eluded our analysis. Carlsen's idea is to meet ♖h4, simply with ...♜xh4, after which there is no mate for White. If White had blocked on f1 with his bishop, Black wouldn't have this resource available.

Anand probably calculated the faulty variation: 28...♜d1?? 29 ♖h4 ♜h5 30 ♖xh5 gxh5 31 ♜e3 ♜e6 32 ♜xd5!. Overloaded defender, after which Black must give up his queen, or face ♜e4 next. However, Black wins after Carlsen's move, 28...♜e1!: 29 ♖h4 ♜xh4 ("You will regret your past bravado, and your childish attempts to overthrow me, while amusing, were also ineffective," Black's queen lectures her ambitious h6 sister) 30 ♜xh4 ♜a5 when there is no mate and White finds himself a rook down.

Game 18
H.Nakamura-M.Carlsen
Zurich 2014
Nimzo-Indian Defence

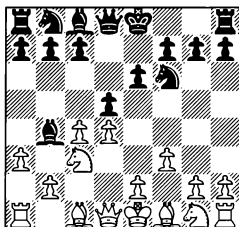
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♜b4 4 f3

Nakamura, obviously influenced by Anand's play from last game, hopes to get a crack at Carlsen's king as well in this line.

4...d5

Since Carlsen came out of the opening so badly, a few months later he tried 4...c5 5 d5 0-0 6 e4 d6 on Nakamura and beat him again, H.Nakamura-M.Carlsen, Shamkir 2014.

5 a3



5...♜e7

Question: Black's last move loses time. Isn't it more logical to exchange on c3?

Answer: 5...♗xc3+ is in fact, Black's main move here. As we saw last game, exchanging on c3 also strengthens White's centre and gives him the bishop-pair. So Carlsen switches plans, just to keep one step ahead of Nakamura's pre-game preparation.

6 e4

Logically expanding in the centre.

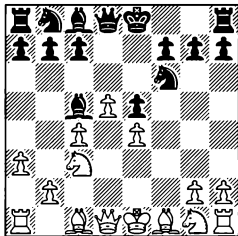
6...dxe4

The safer move. 6...c5 7 cxd5 exd5 8 e5 ♘fd7 9 ♖xd5 cxd4 10 ♗xe7! ♜xe7 11 f4 f6 12 ♜f3 fxe5 13 ♗c4! gave White the bishop-pair and a dangerous development lead for the pawn in A.Beliavsky-B.Spassky, Linares 1990.

7 fxe4 e5

Carlsen stakes out a dark-square share of the centre for himself, before White is allowed to play e5.

8 d5 ♗c5



The bishop seizes an important diagonal, which cuts a swath through the dark squares.

9 ♗g5

Slightly offbeat.

Question: Why not first play 9 ♜f3?

Answer: This is White's main move, which allows Black to rid himself of a problem piece, his c8-bishop with 9...♗g4 (or 9...a5 10 ♗g5 0-0 11 ♗d3 ♗g4 12 h3 ♗xf3 13 ♜xf3 ♜bd7 14 0-0-0 ♗e7 15 h4 ♜e8 16 ♗e3 ♗c5 and Black looks okay if the dark-squared bishops come off the board, I.Khenkin-M.Feygin, Belgian League 2007) 10 h3 ♗xf3 11 ♜xf3. However, really I don't think it makes all that much difference, since White can't refrain from ♜f3 forever. So Black's ...♗g4 and ...♗xf3 is delayed, not prevented.

9...0-0 10 ♜f3

Question: Can White fulfil his intent with 10 h3 which prevents ...g4 and ...xf3?

Answer: He can, but at the cost of a precious tempo. Black looks okay after 10...h6 11 g4, as in N.Murshed-P.Mithrakanth, Kolkata 1993. At this point, I would toss in 11...a5 to suppress b4 and give the dark-squared bishop air on a7 if necessary. However, after 12 f3 b7 13 d3 c6 14 d2 a4 I still prefer White slightly with 15 0-0-0.

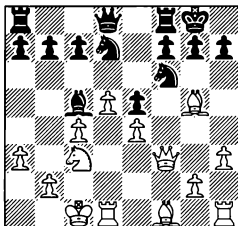
10...g4

This logical move is apparently new, in this little-played position with 10...a5 and 10...h6 being previously played.

11 h3 xf3

There is no sense in backing up to h5, which gives White g4 for free for his attack.

12 xf3 b7 13 0-0-0



We have opposite wing attacks.

Question: Does White's extra space and open f-file give him an advantage?

Answer: I suspect White stands better. Maybe Carlsen felt okay with Black due to his dark-square control.

13...d4!

Intending ...c5 next.

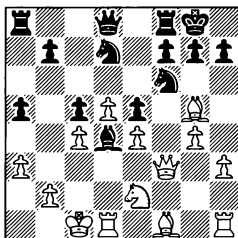
14 e2

Attacking d4 and heading for the kingside, via g3.

14...c5 15 g4

Nakamura understandably scoffs at the pawn offer and continues his attack. White gives up the initiative if he gets tempted to win a pawn with 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 xd4 exd4 17 xxd4 b6. Black gets plenty of compensation with an open b-file and access to squares like c5 and e5.

15...a5?!



I think this move is at the heart of Black's coming difficulties and White's attack is the real thing, whereas Black's is merely a simulacrum. The idea is to lift his rook to a6, helpful in attacking, as well as defending along his third rank. The trouble with Carlsen's plan is that it condemns Black to a pure piece attack on White's king, which is easily defended. There are two forms of blindness on the chess board:

1. We simply don't understand the nature of the position, yet continue to search for its truth.
2. We fall into a state of distorted understanding, where we are certain that South equals North.

Of the two, the latter form is the more dangerous and generally leads to our near certain defeat. Here we see a rare moment when Carlsen falls prey to number two on the list.

Question: What do you suggest instead?

Answer: Black needs pawns in the mix to generate sufficient queenside counterplay. I believe 15...a6! intending to pry open the queenside with ...b5 is obligatory, after which Black looks close to even.

16 ♖b1 ♜a6 17 ♙g3

I don't trust Black's position. White's attack looks very natural to play and he can cover b2 laterally, via h2 and d2.

17...g6?

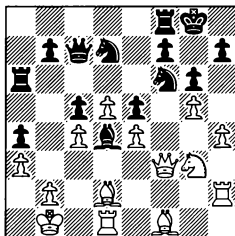
This is a concession which presages Black's coming woes and only accentuates Carlsen's numerous problems. His position quickly begins to decline after this decision. Carlsen makes a deal with the devil, keeping White's knight out of f5, at the dreadful cost of weakening all the dark squares around his king, and also allowing White a confrontation point with h4 and h5.

Black should avoid the weakening move and play 17...a4 18 ♖f5 ♜a5 19 ♙c1 (19 h4 ♜b6 20 ♙c1 ♜c3 21 ♜xc3 ♙xc3 is okay for Black, who managed to remove the queens from the board) 19...♙e8 20 g5 ♙d6 21 ♙xd6 ♜xd6 22 h4. I still prefer White, but his attack doesn't look anywhere near as potent as the one Nakamura got in the game.

18 h4 a4 19 ♜h2

An attacking and defensive move.

19...♜a5 20 ♙d2 ♜c7 21 g5



A single glance tells us White's attack progresses at a quicker rate than Black's.

21...♙e8 22 h5 ♜b6 23 ♙c1

I don't see a way to make progress on Black's queenside attack. Since his fateful 17th move, Carlsen's position continues its creep to decline. *Houdini* assesses at '+1.63', a winning position for White.

23...♜b3 24 ♜g4

Getting ready to swing over to h4.

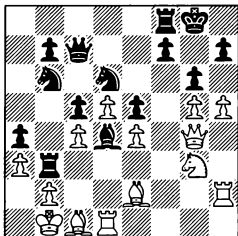
24...♙b6

Intending to pile up on c4, which Nakamura ignores.

25 ♙e2!

If Black doesn't do anything, White simply triples major pieces on the h-file and obliterates Black's king.

25...♙d6



Exercise (critical decision): Black's king churns with discomfort. It appears as if 26 ♖dh1 and 26 ♗hg6 are virtually interchangeable. The comps disagree, claiming that one line ends Black's resistance. Which move would you play?

26 ♖dh1

White remains in control after this move, but even stronger is:

Answer: 26 ♗hg6! ♗hg6 27 ♖e6+! (this is the move both sides probably underestimated) 27...♗h8 (after 27...♗f7 28 ♖dh1! ♗xe6 29 dxe6 ♖xg3 30 ♖xh7 White forces mate) 28 ♖dh1 ♖xg3 29 ♖xh7+ ♗xh7 30 ♖xh7+ ♗xh7 31 ♗xd6 ♖f2 32 ♗c7+ ♗h8 33 ♗xb6 ♖xe2 34 d6 and the push of the d-pawn ends Black's resistance.

26...♗xb2!?

It seems like the bishop's faith has been tested past human tolerance this day. Temptation inflames his blood, past the power of prayer to hold his unlawful actions in check. Sometimes the duration between thought and action is an eternity, and sometimes it is instantaneous. There is a great difference between wishing and doing, as vast as the gulf between the wish to visit a place and actually embarking on the journey.

Carlsen decides that any 'normal' move loses, so he takes refuge in the irrational. *Houdini* hates his move. As a human, I like it, because it distracts White from his kingside attack and increases his practical difficulties in converting it to a win. Carlsen refuses to restrain his newfound sense of annoyance with the conciliatory 26...♗d7 27 ♗h4 ♖xg3 28 ♗hg6 ♗fg6 29 ♗xg3 ♖xe4 30 ♗g2 ♗f5 31 ♗a2 when Black is completely busted.

27 ♗xb2 ♖bxc4 28 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 29 ♗hg6 ♗b6!?

After 29...♖xb2 30 g7! ♖d3+ 31 ♗c2 ♖b4+ 32 ♗d1! ♖b1+ 33 ♗e2 ♖b2+ 34 ♗f3 ♖b3+ 35 ♗g2 ♖b2+ 36 ♗g1 ♖b1+ 37 ♖f1 Black is out of ideas and is crushed on the kingside, since White threatens the f8-rook and also ♗f5.

30 g7

Even more lethal is the line 30 gxf7+! ♖xf7 31 ♔h5! ♜xb2+ 32 ♕a1! ♜xh2 33 ♔f6+ winning, as 33...♗g7 34 ♜xh2 forces mate.

30...♜d8 31 ♜h4 ♜xb2+ 32 ♕a1 ♜xh2 33 ♜xh2 ♜g6 34 ♔f5

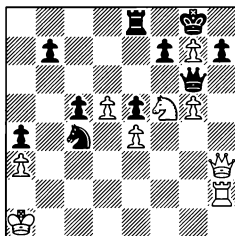
Threatening a nasty fork on e7.

34...♜e8 35 ♜g4!

Threat: ♜h6.

35...♜b6 36 ♜h3 ♜g6

Black's rotting position emits the corrupt stench of approaching death. Nakamura sits on the cusp of a dramatic first win over Carlsen. *Houdini* evaluation '+15.85!' – the equivalent of an extra queen and rook, plus two pawns. But to reach it, White must find a nearly-impossible-to-see combination.



Exercise (combination alert/critical decision): Take your time here. Our candidate moves are 37 d6, intending ♔e7+, or 37 ♜f1, attacking Black's knight and clearing the h-file for shots with his rook. Which one would you play?

37 d6?

After this move the evaluation falls to '+0.48', about half a pawn. White wins with:

Answer: 37 ♜f1! b5 38 ♜xh7!! (a mob hit man's job is to execute, not to sit in judgment of his victim; I admit this move is pretty hard for any human to find, but a human is perfectly capable of finding 38 d6! which also works after 38...♔xd6 39 ♜h6 ♜xg5 40 ♜xd6, with an extra piece and a winning attack) 38...♜xh7 (taking with the king walks into a quick mate after 38...♔xh7 39 ♜h1+ ♔g8 40 ♜h8) 39 ♔h6+ ♜xh6 (or 39...♔xg7 40 ♜xf7+ ♔h8 41 ♜xe8+ ♔g7 42 ♜f7+ ♔h8 43 ♜f8+ ♜g8 44 ♜xg8 mate) 40 gxf6 ♜b8 41 ♜f6 b4 42 h7+ ♔xh7 43 ♜xf7 ♜g8 44 d6! ♔xd6 45 ♜h5+ ♔xg7 46 ♜e5+ ♔f7 47 ♜xd6 wins.

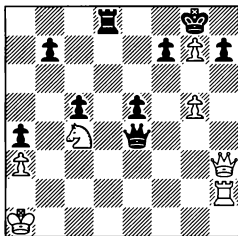
37...♔xd6

Obviously the only move. Carlsen hands over a piece for quite a bit of compensation.

38 ♖xd6 ♜d8 39 ♖c4

Now the evaluation falls to dead even. Neither does White win after the supposed improvement 39 ♖c8 ♜xg7 40 ♖e7 ♜d1+, since playing to b2 walks into a deadly queen check on b6, forcing mate. After 41 ♖a2 ♜e6+ 42 ♜xe6 fxe6 43 ♜h6 ♜d7 44 ♖c8 ♜d2+ 45 ♖b1 Houdini worked out a draw for Black. Indeed, 45...♜g2 46 ♖b6 ♜xg5 47 ♜h3 ♜g6 48 ♖xa4 c4 49 ♖c2 b5 50 ♖c3 ♜g2+ 51 ♖c1 h5 52 ♖xb5 ♜g5 53 ♖d6 ♜g4 54 ♜h1 ♜e2 (or 54...h4 55 ♖xc4 ♜g3 56 ♖d2 h3 57 ♖d1 ♜g4 58 a4 ♜g3 59 ♖e2 ♜a3 60 ♜g1+ ♜f4 61 ♜f1+ ♜g4 with a draw) 55 ♖xc4 ♜xe4 56 ♖d2 ♜a4 57 ♜g1+ ♜f4 58 ♜h1 ♜xa3 59 ♜xh5 is drawn.

39...♜xe4



40 ♜h5?

No medicine can cure when regret is the source of our pain. On the eve of time control, our once clearly outlined paths are leaves tossed about by the breeze. In the frantic blur of time pressure, geometric patterns merge into clarity within our minds and then, just as quickly, fade to oblivion. Nakamura missed or rejected 40 ♖e3! ♜d3 41 ♖f5 ♜d1+ 42 ♖b2 ♜d2+ 43 ♜xd2 ♜xd2+ 44 ♖b1 ♜d1+ which is perpetual check.

40...♜d3!

The fury of White's attack is spent and the unthinkable occurred: Black now has too many pawns for the piece. The computer evaluation swings to '-2.51', and Black is winning. Carlsen plays the remainder with ruthless, comp-like precision.

41 ♜h4 ♜f5 42 ♜e2 b5 43 ♖d2 ♜xg5

The queen, who judges all through the measurement of her own cruel nature, rains death on the remainder of White's stray pawns. Also winning is 43...♜xa3+ 44 ♖b2 ♜g3.

44 ♜xd3 ♜xh4 45 ♖e4

After 45 ♜xb5 ♜d4+ 46 ♜b2 h5 47 ♖b1 ♜xb2+ 48 ♖xb2 h4 49 ♖c3 h3 50 ♖f1 ♜xg7 51 ♖c4 ♜g6 52 ♖xc5 ♜f5 53 ♖b5 ♜f4 54 ♖xa4 e4 55 ♖b4 e3 White is too slow.

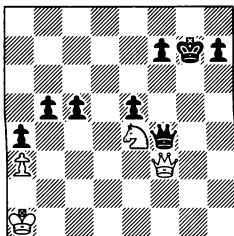
45...♜xg7

Five pawns is too many for one knight.

46 ♖f3

46 ♜xc5 ♖d4+! 47 ♖xd4 exd4 is an easy win for Black.

46... ♖f4!



Black's queen speaks few words. The ones she does utter are always either to correct or command her exasperated f3 sister. Carlsen braids together separate concepts, initially at odds, and binds them to forge a single entity. On f4, Black's queen is perfectly placed to prevent perpetual check attempts.

47 ♖g2+

Of course, all queen swaps lose. White's only chance is to deliver a lucky perpetual check with his queen/knight combo.

47... ♜f8 48 ♜b2 h5 49 ♜d2

Once again, the queenside pawns are taboo: 49 ♜xc5?? ♖d4+, picking off the knight.

49... h4 50 ♜c2 b4! 51 axb4 cxb4

White's pawns are bled dry and now in a non-existent state of desiccation.

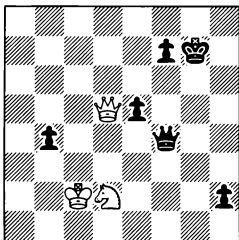
52 ♖a8+ ♜g7 53 ♖xa4

The loss of the a-pawn is irrelevant, since it bought Black time to push his h-pawn.

53... h3 54 ♖b3 h2

One step away.

55 ♖d5



Exercise (combination alert): This one is easy.
How did Carlsen threaten pawn promotion?

Answer: Interference. The e-pawn is immune and now White must deal with a secondary promotion threat.

55...e4! 56 ♖h5 e3 57 ♘f3 e2!

The h-pawn remains alive, due to the e-pawn's promotion attempt. Also, note that White's king is unable to approach the e-pawn.

58 ♜b3

58 ♜d3 walks into a glorious underpromotion finish after 58...♞xf3+! 59 ♞xf3 e1N+!. Oh, the sweet bliss.

58...f6!

Far more accurate than 58...♞xf3+ 59 ♞xf3 e1 ♞60 ♞g2+ ♜f8 61 ♞xh2 when Black still requires work to achieve his win.

59 ♘e1 ♞g3+ 60 ♜a4

"Oh! Ah! Fascinating! Please do go on with your informative and entertaining discourse," chirrups White's king, whose g3 sister's endless lecturing fills him with an aching weariness which barely allows him to keep his eyes open.

60...♞g1!

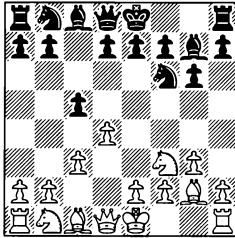
The practical choice. The queen wields cruel orders upon those who dare oppose her, or whose beliefs are not in accord with hers. Still no checks for White. *Houdini* claims Black escapes the perpetual attempt after 60...♞xe1 61 ♞g4+ ♜f8 62 ♞c8+ ♜e7 63 ♞b7+, but why on earth allow White this lone hope?

61 ♞xe2 ♞a7+! 0-1

The Homeric narrative finally comes to its lengthy conclusion. After 62 ♜xb4 h1 ♞63 ♞g4+ ♜f8 64 ♞c8+ ♜e7 White runs out of checks.

Game 19
M.Carlsen-F.Caruana
Vugar Gashimov Memorial, Shamkir 2014
King's Indian Defence

. d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 g3 ♗g7 4 ♗g2 c5 5 c3



Essentially playing the position like a version of the Slav a move up.

Question: I realize first place in the tournament was on the line, but wouldn't you describe Carlsen's last move as overly solid and that he throws away any hope of a first-move advantage?

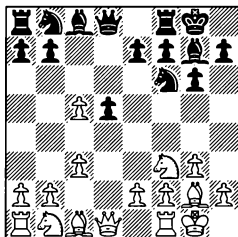
Answer: That is a polite way of putting it. My old friend IM Tony Saïdy, a somewhat hot-headed purist when it comes to matters of bravery, deemed Carlsen's move "craven". Of course this enraged your c3-loving writer (who sometimes opens a game with 1 ♘f3 c5 and now follows with the brilliant 2 c3!, intending to play a Slav a move up), and also GM Yasser Seirawan, who disagreed with Tony. Now I ask quite reasonably: why is the Slav just fine when we play it as Black, but suddenly a chicken variation when we play it a move up? 5...d5!?

An exceptionally bold choice from Caruana, who declines to play a more solid line like 5...cxd4 6 cxd4 d5 when it isn't so easy to extract anything from White's extra tempo. Personally, I think Caruana's decision was a poor one. Such Catalan-style gambits may be completely sound as White, but down a move, I'm not so confident in their inherent dependability. Maybe I'm displaying a Slav-player's bias, but in the past, I grabbed too many pawns like this as Black and got away with it. I would be in ecstasy if I got the same type of position a move up.

6 dxc5

Carlsen refuses to play it safe with something like 6 O-O and takes the bait.

6...O-O 7 O-O



7...a5

Double edged. Black hopes to regain the sacrificed pawn later on, while preventing b4.

Question: This all sounds favourable for Black.
So what is the “double edged” part of the move?

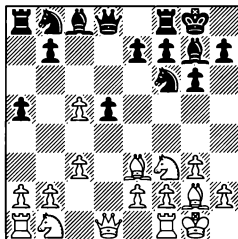
Answer: ...a5 offers White an occupiable hole on b5, which may come back to bite Black in late middlegames or endings, even if he regains the pawn.

Instead, 7...dxc6 8 ♖b3!? ♗a5 9 ♗a3 ♗c7 10 ♕g5 ♖e4 11 ♕e3 e5 12 ♖bd2 f5 13 ♜ad1 ♖f6 14 b4 ♜e8 15 ♖b3 ♖e4 16 b5 ♖e7 17 ♗c1! b6?! (17...♗d7 18 a4 ♜f8 looks correct) 18 ♖g5! bxc5 19 c4! d4 20 ♖xe4 fxe4 21 ♕g5 ♕b7 22 ♕xe7 ♜xe7 23 ♗c2 ♜f8 24 ♕xe4 saw White manage to blockade Black's central pawn mass and dominate the light squares, G.Kamsky-S.Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2009. This game is annotated in *Play the London System*.

Question: Why can't Black just play 7...♖e4, threatening to regain his pawn without allowing White b4?

Answer: The move allows White a little trick to gain the advantage with 8 ♖g5! ♖xg5?! (Black would be better off with the take-back 8...♖f6) 9 ♕xg5 h6 10 ♕e3 e6 11 ♗d2 ♖h7, as in M.Fominykh-A.Shlakich, Moscow 2006. White retains his extra pawn and stands clearly better after 12 ♜d1! ♖c6 13 c4! when 13...d4?? (13...dxc4 14 ♗c2 also looks good for White) is met with 14 ♕xc6 bxc6 15 ♕xd4 with two extra pawns and a winning position.

8 ♕e3



This move is new.

Question: Doesn't White's bishop get chased off with a coming ...g4?

Answer: This actually occurs later on, and it may be Black's knight which is more misplaced and vulnerable on g4, than White's bishop one e3, who is happy to move elsewhere. Others:

a) After 8 c4 ♖a6 9 ♜c3 dxc4 10 c6! White stands better, P.Froehlich-D.Smerdon, Canberra 2004. 10...bxc6 is met by 11 ♜e5, regaining the pawn with a slightly superior structure.

b) 8 ♜a3 ♖a6 9 ♜b5 (White simply returns the pawn in order to seize b5) 9...♜xc5 10 a4 ♜d7 11 ♜e3 ♜xb5 12 axb5 ♜d6 and the position looks dynamically balanced, I.Efimov-P.Vezzosi, Sestola 1992.

8...♜c6 9 ♜a3

Carlsen keeps an eye out on the now tempting b5-square.

Question: I understand that b5 is a hole in Black's camp, but I fail to see the significance. How does the loss of b5 hurt Black's position?

Answer: If Black ever plays ...e5 or ...e6, then White can think about ♜b5 and ♜d6 invasion ideas.

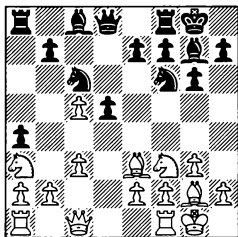
9...a4!?

The idea is to make available a5 for a black piece. On the down side, the move allows White to activate his queenside majority with b4, so it's a tradeoff.

Black can also immediately harass the e3-bishop with 9...♜g4: for example, 10 ♜g5 h6 11 ♜d2!? (the adventurous line; 11 ♜c1 avoids Black's coming ...e4-e3 idea) 11...e5 12 ♜b5 ♜e7 13 ♜d6 e4 14 ♜d4 ♜xd4 15 cxd4 e3 (15...♜xd4?! 16 ♜xh6! ♜f6 17 e3! favours White)

16 fxe3 ♖xe3 17 ♗xe3 ♜xe3+ 18 ♖h1 ♗xd4 19 ♗xd5 (f7 is under heavy fire) 19...♗e6 20 ♗xe6 fxe6 21 ♜c2 (hitting threatening g6) 21...♖h7 22 ♖xb7 a4 23 ♜ad1 ♜xf1+ 24 ♜xf1 ♜f8! (threatening White's vulnerable back rank) 25 ♜d1 ♗e4+ 26 ♜f3 ♗xb2 27 ♖d6 ♜c6 28 ♖c4 ♗g7 29 ♜d6 ♜b7 30 ♖g2 ♗e4 31 ♜d3 ♜c6. Now White can take a repetition draw if he wants one with 32 ♜d6, or play for the full point with 32 ♖d6 ♜xc5 33 ♜xf8 ♗xf8 34 ♖e4.

10 ♜c1!



Question: This looks convoluted to me. What is the idea?

Answer: Multipurpose:

1. White covers his e3-bishop, so that his structure remains intact if Black goes after it with ...♖g4 and ...♖xe3.
2. Black must be on the lookout for ♗h6, swapping off the powerful Catalan g7-bishop.
3. White clears d1 for a coming ♜d1, which pressures d5.

10...e5!?

Caruana continually picks the most aggressive option. He grabs the centre at the cost of weakening both his d-pawn and the d6-square. I think it's still Black's most logical choice. If not ...e5, then what?

11 ♜d1 ♗e7 12 ♖b5!?

Carlsen isn't worried about ...♖g4 since d5 hangs. The alternative is the more cautious 12 h3.

12...♗e6

Idea: ...♖g4.

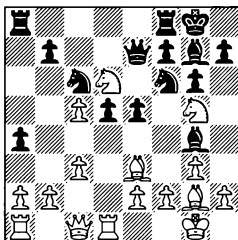
13 ♖g5!

Carlsen has a knack for taking a crazy, insupportable notion, and then proving it playable. This is an example of Carlsen's amazing intuition, which guides him infallibly toward

the path grounded in comprehensive understanding of the position's core elements.

The 'normal' move 13 h3, which I would have played without a second thought, and which I believe most IMs and GMs would play, is met with 13...♖a5! 14 c4 dxc4! 15 ♖c3 (or 15 ♜d6?! ♜d5 16 ♜g5 ♜xe3 17 ♜xe3 ♜h6! 18 f4 exf4 19 gxf4 ♜c8! 20 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 21 ♜xb7 ♜xb7 22 ♜xb7 ♜b5 23 ♜d6 ♜xb2 24 ♜f2 c3 25 ♜ac1 ♜g7 26 a3 ♜c6 and I should add a period to this run-on sentence of a line and end it here; White is tied down by the supported c3-pawn and fights for his life) 15...a3 16 bxa3 ♜d7 when Black's activity continues to grow and I prefer his position over White's.

13...♜g4 14 ♜d6!



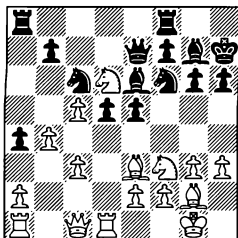
14...h6!

A move which displays Caruana's staggeringly high understanding, as well.

Question: Why isn't e2 just hanging?

Answer: If Black takes e2, White has the powerful response 14...♜xe2? 15 ♜xd5! ♜xd5 (15...h6 is met by 16 ♜d2 with a clear advantage) 16 ♜xd5 (f7 comes under heavy assault) 16...♜d8 17 ♜c2! ♜g4 18 ♜e4! ♜d7 19 ♜c4 when White zones in on f7 with a one-tracked mind. After 19...♜e6 20 ♜xe6 fxe6 (or 20...♜xe6 21 ♜xb7 and the 4 vs. 1 queenside majority is decisive) 21 ♜g2 White, although down an exchange for a pawn, dominates strategically, ruling the light squares and taking control over multiple holes. Also, Black's remaining pawns are a tattered mess.

15 ♜f3 ♜h7 16 h3 ♜e6 17 b4!



Principle: push your pawns on the side of your majority, which Carlsen activates with his last move.

17...axb3 18 axb3 ♖xa1 19 ♜xa1 ♕e4!

Preparing to go after White's king, with ...f5.

20 ♖d2!

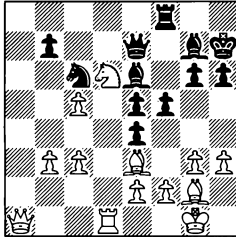
Carlsen avoids Caruana's strategic trap 20 ♖e4?! dxe4 21 ♖d2 f5 (...f4 is a serious threat) 22 ♖e4 (22 ♖c4? allows Black a powerful attack after 22...f4 23 ♖c1 e3 when a good chunk of White's army mills about aimlessly on the queenside) 22...♙xb3! 23 ♜b1 ♙c2 24 ♖d6 ♙xb1 25 ♜xb1 e4 when Black stands better, slightly up material.

20...f5?!

The nature of opportunity is that it tends to have a short shelf life. Both sides conducted the game brilliantly up to this point, but here Caruana, driven by the ambition to go after Carlsen's king, goes astray. Such a move tends to be banged out with unpremeditated intent. It is only later, when the light of reason emerges, that we begin our slow descent into remorse.

Black should go for 20...♖xd6! 21 cxd6 ♜xd6 22 ♖c4 ♜d8 23 ♙c5 (it's easy to see why Caruana rejected this line, since it appears as if White has completely taken over the initiative) 23...♜h8 24 ♙xd5! ♙xd5 25 e4. Now, Black has an enterprising defensive idea with the queen sacrifice 25...♙xe4! (Caruana may have underestimated this resource) 26 ♜xd8 ♜xd8. Black obtains a rook and bishop for the queen, but also domination of the light squares. Moreover, White's king will never feel totally secure. *Houdini*, who displays tendencies of a capitalist robber-baron, prefers White here, but some of us more spiritually inclined humans may actually be okay with Black. I think chances are dynamically balanced, and White's position may actually be harder to play, since Black holds the initiative. In any case, sound or slightly unsound, this compromise must suffice in lieu of sour alternatives.

21 ♖2xe4! dxe4



22 ♖b1

When in thrall under such unformulable chaos, sometimes it's just as effective to take an educated guess, rather than actually calculate – especially if you are Magnus Carlsen. Watching this game live online, I was stunned by Carlsen's decision to allow Black ...f4, and ...e3, which on the surface, appears to decimate the white king's protective pawn barrier. Of course, Carlsen had seen much deeper into the heart of the position than your befuddled annotator. I expected 22 ♗d2 b6 (22...♗xb3?! 23 ♜b1 ♖e6 24 ♜a3 ♗d5 25 ♜xb7 also favours White) 23 b4 bxc5 24 bxc5 when White stands better.

22...f4 23 ♗d2 e3 24 ♗e1

No worries. White's king is far safer than appearances indicate.

24...♗f5

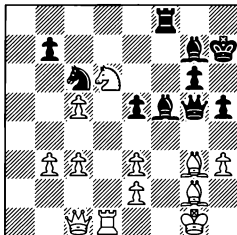
After 24...exf2+ 25 ♗xf2 fxg3 26 ♗xg3 ♜g5 27 ♜d3 ♗f5 28 e4 ♗e6 29 b4 White's king remains safe, up a pawn.

25 ♜c1 h5?

We must be careful not to allow an inspiration to turn into a distraction. An unsound idea, no matter how externally attractive, must be discarded. In such hair trigger positions, your first mistake can also be your last. This reminds us of a person who picks wild mushrooms, fries them up and eats them over pasta, hoping and wishing they are edible, rather than poisonous. Caruana's last move just gives away another pawn and pushes his position from inferior to losing.

Black's idea is to cut off White's queen from her defensive duties by blocking e3 with a white pawn, and possibly also to introduce his dark-squared bishop into the attack, via h6. He hopes his kingside activity level is a counterbalancing leverage against White's extra material, yet fails to meet that mark. He should play 25...exf2+ 26 ♗xf2 fxg3 27 ♗xg3 ♗f6 28 b4 ♗g5 29 e3 and hope for the best.

26 fxe3 fxg3 27 ♗xg3 ♜g5



Exercise (planning): Black's attack looks intimidating. He threatens the hanging g3-bishop, which is unable to move, due to ... Qxh3 . Where is Carlsen's defensive resource?

Answer: Principle: meet a wing attack with a central counter.

28 e4!

After this move, Black's latent strategic troubles are so deeply ingrained within his position, that they reach the level of ineradicable. White should also consolidate after the less dramatic 28 Qxf5 gxf5 29 Qh2 Qf6 30 Qh1 Qg6 31 Qg1 .

28... Qxg3 29 Qd3 !

A useful tempo-gaining *zwischenzug* is tossed in, before Carlsen regains the piece.

29... Qh4 30 exf5

The f5-bishop's all-encompassing fear is that death will come to him, while his many sins remain uncleansed.

30... gxf5 31 e4!

Once again e4! is played for an encore performance. All is made clear:

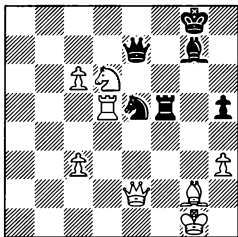
1. Carlsen's domination of the light squares is far more important than Black's on the dark squares.
2. Black's initiative retreats and fades like a sullen morning fog, encountering the sun. His assault has had scant impact on White's king, who remains safe enough, despite the lack of pawn cover.
3. White's extra pawn is the single verifiably existent object, when contrasted with Black's attacking chances, which are embroidered upon a fabric of illusion.
4. Black's kingside pawn majority isn't going anywhere, while White's rolls on the queenside, with b7 in dire need of defence.

Conclusion: Black is busted.

40...bxc6 41 bxc6 ♖e7

41...♘f3+?? fails miserably to 42 ♙xf3 ♜xd5 43 ♚c4 ♜d8 44 c7.

42 ♘d6



Exercise (planning): White's forays into Black's territory seem to be recurring with increasing frequency and duration, and Carlsen continues to make progress by subtle, almost imperceptible degrees. How did Carlsen consolidate?

42...♜g5

Answer: Seize control over c7, enabling his passed c-pawn to surge ever closer to the queen-ing square.

43 ♘b5! ♜e6 44 ♜d8+ ♙h7 45 ♜e4+

A precautionary measure to tie up Black's rook in an annoying pin.

45...♜g6

No choice since 45...♙h6?? walks into 46 ♜d6.

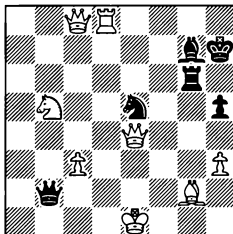
46 c7

Guess what he plans next?

46...♜a6 47 c8♜

The duplicitous, newly crowned queen smiles, realizing that her previous manipulations led to delightful results. There is no mate or perpetual check. This chapter seems to be full of unfair 2:1 queen ratio games.

47...♜a1+ 48 ♙f2 ♜b2+ 49 ♙e1 1-0



The odds of White's athletic king outrunning the corpulent queen's amorous advances are high: 49...♔c1+ 50 ♚d1 ♕g5 51 ♔cf5 (the coven of white witches and their demonic familiars begin to gather around Black's king, eager to perform their dark bidding) 51...♕g3+ 52 ♜f1 and Black's nuisance checks are at an end.

Chapter Three

Carlsen on the Dynamic Element

In this chapter we examine Carlsen's approach to the initiative and his eye for deeply hidden combinational patterns. In my opinion, he is the number one in the world in both categories, at the time of writing, and likely to distance himself further as his strength increases over the years. A deep belief in the possibility of a miracle is the necessary ingredient in his handling of initiative.

One quirky trait I noticed in his games, is that he often refuses to consolidate into favourable technical positions (which Capablanca and Fischer would jump on, if given a chance), if he believes he can subdue the opponent quicker by retaining pieces on the board. He prefers to keep the position in flux, unafraid even when the patterns sort themselves out into unfamiliar geometries. The reason is his deeply abiding faith in his supernatural intuitive powers – one could almost call it a sixth sense. At crucial points, we get a bewildering sense of Carlsen's concrete functions melting into a dream-state of immateriality, where he simply drifts from one startling intuition to another.

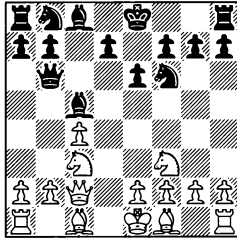
Once Carlsen gets hold of the initiative, the powerful arms of his comp-like intuition hold down and chloroform opponents, whose frantic struggling gradually goes limp. The game which sticks out in my mind is the penultimate one of the chapter, versus Gelfand. It's difficult to find an example throughout chess history where one side mimicked a computer's initiative-driven play more than this game.

Game 20 **M.Carlsen-E.Shaposhnikov** Aeroflot Open, Moscow 2004 *Nimzo-Indian Defence*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♚c2 c5 5 dxc5 ♙xc5

“With this move Black signals his intentions to adopt a solid ‘Hedgehog’ formation. More popular are 5...♖a6, intending to recapture on c5 with the knight, and the flexible 5...0-0,” writes GM John Emms in his ChessPub Nimzo-Indian column.

6 ♖f3 ♜b6



Question: Isn't this move somewhat amateurish, since Black's queen will obviously need to move again from b6?

Answer: Black understands this and is willing to pay the price. He seeks to force e3, which pens in the c1-bishop behind the chain, but I see your point, because White can simply develop the bishop at b2.

7 e3

7 e4!? is probably overly ambitious on White's part: 7...♖g4 8 ♖d1 ♖c6 9 h3 ♖ge5 10 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 11 ♖e2 0-0 12 0-0 d6 13 ♖c3 ♖d7 14 ♖f4 ♖ac8 15 ♖ad1 ♖c6 16 ♖d2 ♜c7 17 a3 a5 18 ♖fd1 was D.Haessel-R.Kaufman, Calgary 2012. At this point Black can try the enterprising 18...f5!, after which I prefer his side.

7...a6 8 b3

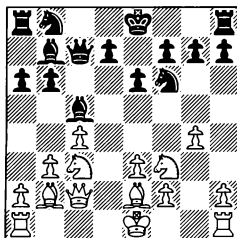
Carlsen logically prepares to fianchetto his c1-bishop.

8...♜c7

Question: Can Black skip the Hedgehog formation and go for an isolani position with 8...d5?

Answer: Sure, that is an untried possibility, although I'm not so certain it equalizes. Play may run 9 ♖b2 0-0 10 ♖d1 ♖d8 11 cxd5 exd5 12 ♖d3!? ♖c6 13 0-0 (threat: ♖a4, now that Black has no check option on b4) 13...♖b4 14 ♖a4! ♖xc2 15 ♖xb6 ♖xb6 16 ♖xc2 when White managed to remove queens from the board and stands better due to Black's isolani.

9 ♖b2 b6 10 ♖e2 ♖b7 11 g4!?



Well, what else can you expect from a 13-year-old? Genius rarely suffers pangs of conscience when it contravenes the normal order of things. Carlsen, who isn't in the habit of leaving a challenge unanswered, travels a dangerous path, unheeded of the peril involved. As usual, he seeks to deprive his opponents of their anchor of theoretical familiarity. I actually prefer Carlsen's choice and believe it is White's only real chance for an edge. If White castles, then he gets a rather limp set-up versus the Hedgehog.

Question: Is the move sound?

Answer: In some cases, bravery, like other noble traits can be pushed to extremes. So much so that they no longer represent virtues – but not here. In this instance, I think Carlsen's move is fully justified, since White's king is obviously destined to castle queenside. 11 O-O is the solid alternative, and White's main move, but after 11...♗e7 12 ♖ad1 White's set-up feels rather harmless against the coming ...d6 Hedgehog formation.

11...♗xg4?!

I think this move is unwise and plays into White's intent. Black should treat White's idea with greater respect with 11...h6 12 ♖g1 ♗c6 13 a3 ♖c8 14 h4 h5! 15 gxh5 (White reaches a very sharp situation after 15 g5 ♗g4 16 ♗e4 ♖f8, with approximately balanced chances) 15...♖f8 16 ♖d1 ♗a5 when I would be happy to take Black's side, S.Foisor-R.Hernandez Onna, Balaguer 2003.

12 ♖g1 ♗xh2

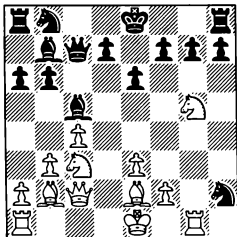
In for a penny... This is the logical follow-up to his last move. Otherwise:

a) 12...♗e5? 13 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 14 ♖g3 (threat: ♗d5) 14...♖c7 15 ♗e4 ♖b4+ 16 ♗f1 g7 falls and Black's position nears collapse.

b) 12...♗f6? 13 ♖xg7 ♖f8 is met with 14 ♗b5! axb5 15 ♖xf6 ♖e7 16 ♖c3 ♗c6 17 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 18 ♖f6 ♖f8 19 ♗g5 when Black is busted.

c) 12...f5 looks playable to me, although after 13 h3 ♖f6 14 ♖xg7 ♕f8 15 ♖g1 ♖g8 16 ♖xg8 ♖xg8 17 0-0-0 ♖f6 White continues to lead in development and stands slightly better.

13 ♖g5!



One cannot describe Carlsen as a respecter of boundaries.

Question: What is the idea behind this move?

Answer: Carlsen poses problems for his opponent by leaving the h2-knight endangered in an offside limbo.

13...♖c6

Another facet to Carlsen's idea is that 13...h6?? is met by the shot 14 ♖xf7! when the burden of adverse consequence must be carried, stemming from Black's 11th move: 14...♖f8 (Black gets slaughtered after 14...♖xf7?? 15 ♖g6+ ♖e7 16 ♖xg7+ ♖d6 17 ♖b5+!, and if 17...axb5 18 ♖e5+ ♖c6 19 cxb5+ ♖d5 20 0-0-0+ ♖e4 21 ♖d3+ ♖d5 22 e4 mate; pawn mates are as blissfully beautiful as underpromotions) 15 ♖xg7. Black is completely busted, since 15...♖xf7 is met with the familiar 16 ♖g6.

14 0-0-0 ♖e5?

Black must concoct a method to bridle his opponent's wild spirits:

a) 14...d5! is necessary to keep White's other knight out of e4. 15 ♖a4 ♖b4 16 ♖b1 ♖f8? was C.Horvath-A.Horvath, Gyula 2013, although now White has 17 ♖h5! with a winning position.

b) 14...f5? fails to 15 ♖ce4!, with the idea of 15...fxe4?? 16 ♖xe6! dxe6 17 ♖xg7 with a crushing position for White.

15 ♖ce4!

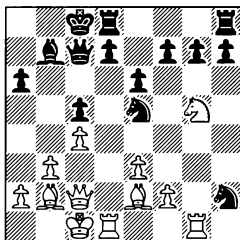
Suddenly White's pieces breathe fire, while Black's knight remains unrescued from h2.

15...0-0-0 16 ♖xc5

This decimates Black's dark squares. Black's c5-bishop, having performed his daily, ritual abasement, continues to feel humble.

16...bxc5

16...♖xc5? is even worse for Black after 17 ♖e4! ♙xe4 18 ♜xe4 ♘c6 19 ♗h4 and the stranded h2-knight drops.



Unbelievably, in the only other game in the database from this position, White agreed to a draw in a winning position. *Houdini* evaluation '+1.96'.

Exercise (critical decision): It isn't easy to see where one variable ends and another begins in this vast tangle. White has three logical candidate moves: 17 f4, 17 ♙xe5 and 17 ♖e4. Two choices out of the three give White winning positions, while the other allows Black undeserved counterplay. Which one would you go for?

Answer: 17 f4!

Welcome! Please come into my home. Carlsen correctly rejects 17 ♙xe5? (this move comes across as a refreshing rainfall to a drought-ravaged garden) 17...♜xe5 18 ♖xf7 ♜a1+ 19 ♖d2 ♜f6 20 ♖xh8 ♜xh8 when Black gets a pawn for the exchange and his knight escapes via f3. When we pray for a miracle in a completely lost position, are we not irrationally asking for salvation to arise without a preceding cause? Yet, as we all know, on rare occasions, just such miracles sometimes occur.

After 17 ♖e4! too, the vault of Black's defensive resources runs empty: 17...d6 18 ♜xg7 ♖hf3 19 ♙xf3 ♖xf3 20 ♙f6 ♜df8 21 ♜g3! and White wins material.

17...♖ef3

If 17...f6 18 ♖e4 ♖ef3 19 ♜xg7 "and the Black knights on f3 and h2 look rather comical" writes Emms.

18 ♖xf7 ♖xg1 19 ♜xg1 ♖f3 20 ♜xg7?!

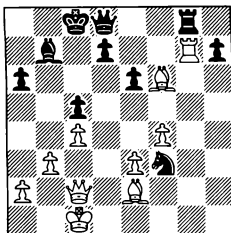
This line contains a hidden flaw for White, who should have continued 20 ♙xf3! ♙xf3

21 ♖xh8 ♜xh8 22 ♙xg7 ♚e8 23 ♜xh7 with an extra pawn and the better game.

20...♜hg8 21 ♖xd8 ♜xd8?

Black missed the resource 21...♜xg7! 22 ♙xg7 ♜xd8. Now White is unable to take h7, since if 23 ♜xh7 (after 23 ♙d1 ♜g8 24 ♜c3 ♙e4 25 ♙xf3 ♙xf3 26 ♙e5 ♜g1+ 27 ♖b2 ♜d1 28 ♜a5 d6 29 ♜xa6+ ♖d7 30 ♜a7+ ♖c8 31 ♙c3 ♜e2+ 32 ♖a3 ♜xe3 Black should make a draw) 23...♜a5! 24 ♜d3 ♜xa2 25 ♜c2 ♜xc2+ 26 ♖xc2 d6 Black should hold the draw.

22 ♙f6!



The surly lout of a bishop is clearly in search of trouble. This is a tempo-gaining shot which allows White to dig deeper into Black's position.

22...♜f8 23 ♜xh7

The queen sees no reason to make a request for something she already seized through force. White won a pawn, with the bishop-pair and with dominantly entrenched pieces, deep in Black's territory.

23...♜h8 24 ♜g6

Carlsen wants to wring every drop of potency from his remaining attackers. He smells blood and rejects a promising ending after 24 ♜f7 ♜xh7 25 ♜xf8+ ♖c7 26 ♜h8.

24...♜h1+ 25 ♖b2 ♜g1 26 ♙g5!

Threat: ♜g8.

26...♜xg5?

Alternatives:

a) 26...♜d6?? 27 ♜e8+ ♖c7 28 ♜d8+ ♖c6 29 ♙xf3+ mates.

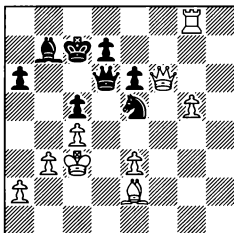
b) 26...♖c7?? 27 ♜g8, and if 27...♜f5 28 ♜xf5 exf5 29 ♙xf3 ♙xf3 30 ♙d8+ leaves White up a full exchange and pawn.

c) 26...♖h4! is Black's only move in the position: 27 ♜f6 ♜xf6+ 28 ♙xf6 ♜xg7 29 ♙xg7 ♖f5 30 ♙f8! leaves White up a pawn, with the bishop-pair in the ending, and after 30...d6 31 ♙d3 ♖d7 32 e4 ♖g3 33 e5! dxe5 34 fxe5 ♙e4 35 ♖c2 ♙xd3+ 36 ♖xd3 ♖c6 he has good chances to convert.

27 fxg5 ♖e5 28 ♜f6 ♜d6 29 ♜g8+ ♔c7

The king's accommodations trend from luxurious to spartan, within the span of just a few short moves, and with each passing move his palace feels less and less palatial.

30 ♣c3! 1-0



Oh, no you don't! After 30... ♖c6 Black, endowed with only frugal providence, can do little about White's passed g-pawn, as it heads for the promotion square: 31 g6 ♜g3 32 ♜f4+ and the queens come off the board.

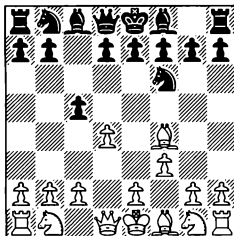
Game 21
M.Carlsen-S.Ganguly
Dubai Open 2004
Trompowsky Attack

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♔g5

The Trompowsky Attack, which Carlsen embraces on occasions when he is nervous about a theoretical fight against a particularly booked up-opponent.

2...♘e4 3 ♙f4 c5 4 f3 ♘f6

In my opinion this is an inferior line for Black, which allows White a favourable Sicilian Dragon-like position. 4...♖a5 5 c3 ♘f6 6 d5 is Black's more fashionable, and probably superior line.



5 dxc5

Question: Why give up control over the centre rather than push past with 5 d5?

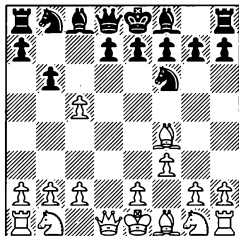
Answer: I advocate 5 dxc5 in my Tromp book (books are food for the mind, which needs nourishment as much as the body, and it would be pure folly on your part to not immediately order this excellent book!), because Black loses time regaining the c5-pawn.

5...b6

I suggested this was Black's best move in the position in *The Trompowsky: Move by Move*. Black lands in an inferior Sicilian Dragon on other moves. For example:

a) 5...♘a6 6 e4 ♚a5+ 7 ♜c3 ♜xc5 8 ♚d2 ♜e6 9 ♜e3 g6 10 ♜c4 ♜g7 11 ♜ge2 0-0 12 0-0-0 d6 13 ♜b1 ♚c7 14 ♜b3 ♜d7 15 g4 ♜c6 16 h4 ♜c5 17 h5 ♜xb3 18 cxb3. White's attack is clearly faster than Black's, which hasn't even started, C.Lakdawala-B.Cuarta, San Diego (rapid) 2014.

b) 5...♚a5+ 6 ♚d2 ♚xc5 7 e4 d6 8 ♜c3 ♜c6 9 ♜e3 ♚a5 10 ♜c4 g6 11 ♜ge2 ♜g7 12 ♜b3 ♜d7 13 0-0-0 0-0 14 ♜b1 ♚fc8 15 h4 h5 16 ♜g5 was C.Lakdawala-K.Griffith San Diego 2011. Once again, White is better off than in a normal Dragon since 16...♜e5?? is impossible, due to 17 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 18 ♜d5 ♚xd2 19 ♜xf6+ exf6 20 ♚xd2 when d6 falls.



6 ♖c3

6 e4! is White's most accurate continuation: 6...bxc5 7 e5 (White gains time) 7...♖g8 (7...♗h5 8 ♗e3 g6 9 ♗d2 ♖c6 10 ♗c4 ♗a6 11 f4 also looks better for White) 8 ♗c3 ♗c6 9 ♗b5 ♗d4 10 ♗ge2! (playing for a development lead) 10...♗xb5 11 ♗xb5 ♜a5+ 12 ♗ec3! a6 13 ♗d6+! (13 ♗a3! ♜b4 14 ♗d2! is also very favourable for White, who leads massively in development in a relatively open position) 13...exd6 14 exd6 (for the piece, White obtains a massive development lead and open e-file to attack, while Black has a frozen f8-bishop – more than enough compensation) 14...♜b4 15 ♜e2+ ♗d8 16 ♗d2 ♗b7 17 0-0-0 ♗f6 18 ♜he1 ♗xd6? (it's suicidal to open the d-file; 18...♜b6 was necessary) 19 ♗e4 saw White regain the sacrificed piece with a winning attack, S.Mamedyarov-T.Nedev, Dresden Olympiad 2008. This game is annotated in *The Trompowsky: Move by Move*.

Question: Why can't White accept the b6 offer?

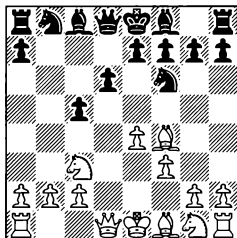
Answer: It is possible to accept the gambit, but it feels to me like it plays into Black's hands, with a development lead and dark-square control for the pawn after 6 cxb6?! ♜xb6. Maybe White should offer b2 with something like 7 e4!? ♜xb2 8 ♗d2 ♗c6 9 ♜b1, which is not so bad for him. But why enter this line when 6 e4! puts Black under pressure?

6...bxc5 7 e4

Black's open b-file and central majority don't make up for White's development lead.

7...d6?

Black should settle for 7...♗c6 8 ♗b5 ♗d4 9 ♗ge2, with a continuing development lead for White.



Exercise (planning): The Trompowsky has a way of throwing off otherwise theoretically well-prepared opponents. Black's last move was in violation of principle. How did Carlsen exploit it?

Answer: Open the game and create confrontation when leading in development.

8 e5! dxe5

8...d5?? fails miserably to 9 d5! dxf4 10 fxa8 when Black is down the exchange and remains behind in development. If 10...f6 11 b5+ d8 12 e4 consolidates.

9 fxd8+

The sisters nod slightly in cold acknowledgement.

9...fxd8

Black's hopes for continued survival while so disastrously lagging in development are predicated upon a single, delicate factor: queens have come off the board.

10 0-0-0+

This logical move was new in the position. After 10 ex5 d6 11 0-0-0 d7 12 g3 b7 13 e4 c8 Black found himself fatally behind in development in G.Campitelli-E.Mendez Ataria, Buenos Aires 1998.

10...dbd7 11 ex5 b7 12 dh3!

Now Black must be on the lookout for g5 tricks.

12...fc8 13 g3 h6 14 c4

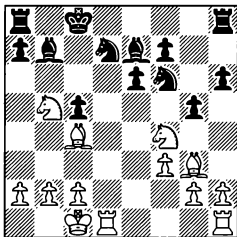
Tempting since it develops with tempo. Even stronger is 14 f2! e6 15 dfe4 dxe4 16 dxe4, which applies maximum pressure on Black's position, when he is unlikely to survive.

14...e6 15 df4 e7 16 db5

The diversity of Black's symptoms indicate a position beyond salvation, and his position sags in regret for past indiscretions. The d6-square, apparently the social hub of the position, is an obvious sore spot for Black. His king is jammed in on c8 and his a8-rook remains

out of commission for an extended period. It is a miracle that Ganguly managed to develop his pieces.

16...g5



17 d3

Question: I realize queens are off the board, but a knight sacrifice on e6 looks rather tempting. Is it sound?

Answer: According to the materialistic comps, it is. I'm amazed that the normally reckless 13-year-old kid Carlsen refused to lay out capital, despite long-established activity wealth. After 17 dxe6! fxe6 18 h1e1 a6 (or 18...e5 19 e5xe5 when Black can't survive, with his king so exposed; now if Black eliminates the bishop-pair with 19...dxe5? then 20 e5xe5 h7 21 e6+ b8 22 f5 g7 23 e7! e7xe7 24 d8+ e8 25 xc8+ b7 26 d6+ wins) 19 d7c7 a7 20 e6xe6 c6 21 d7d7+! d7d7 22 e7xe7 xc7 23 xc7xc7 White's rook and two pawns are worth considerably more than Black's bishop and knight, mainly since White continues to hold the initiative with a rook on the seventh rank.

17...e5d5!

The bishop, sick and tired of confining himself with pious platitudes, decides to allow himself to get drawn into an argument with his powerful c4 brother. A strong defensive move, which blocks the d-file and allows Black's king an unravelling route on b7.

18 d5xd5 d5xd5!

The correct recapture. 18...exd5?? opens the e-file for White, which is decisive: 19 h1e1 f8 (19...d8 20 e7+ e8 21 d6 d8 22 e7xe7 d7 23 d7c7+ forks the a8-rook) 20 d7c7 b8 21 d5xd5! and Black can resign, since 21...dxd5 is met with 22 e8+ b7 23 e8xb8 dxb8 24 xc5+, winning more material. After 24...c6 25 xb8 xc5 26 c8+ the knight is lost as well.

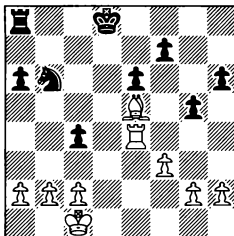
19 h1e1 a6 20 d6+ e6xd6 21 e6xd6

No rest for Black. Now c5 is under fire.

21...c4 22 ♖e5 ♙xe5 23 ♙xe5 ♜d8 24 ♞e4

And now c4 is threatened. White's development lead extends deep into the ending and never fades.

24...♙b6 25 ♞xd8+ ♔xd8



Exercise (planning): A development lead is an abstract entity. How did Carlsen convert its energy into hard currency, forcing the win of material?

Answer: No one seems to be minding the store on the kingside. Black's h-pawn falls.

26 ♙g7!

The bishop's writ of authority didn't extend to the jurisdiction of the kingside – until now. The kingside compound is a place of eerie desolation, which Carlsen alertly exploits with his last move.

26...♙e7

26...h5 27 ♞e5 fails to change matters.

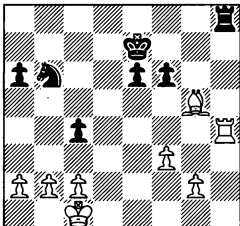
27 ♙xh6 f6

Threat: ...♞h8, followed by ...♞h7, trapping White's bishop.

28 h4 gxh4

After 28...♙g8? 29 hxg5 fxg5 30 ♞g4 ♙f6 31 f4 Black drops a second pawn.

29 ♞xh4 ♞h8 30 ♙g5!



The 'pin' is not an issue for White.

30...Rg8 31 Re3

The g2-pawn isn't hanging, since White generates a threat on Black's knight.

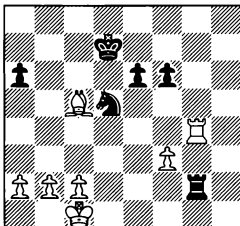
31...d5 32 Rc5+ d7 33 Rxc4!

White's win is easier in this line over 33 g4 c3.

33...Rxc4

White picked up a pawn and now controls a 3 vs. 1 queenside pawn majority. Also his bishop is superior to Black's remaining knight.

34 Rg4!



Black threatened ...Rg3.

34...Rh2

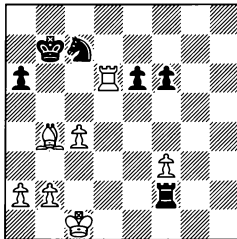
Question: Can Black swap rooks and make a fight out of it due to his king position after 34...Rxc4 35 fxg4 dxc6?

Answer: The extra pawn should prevail: for example, 36 ♖f2 ♜f4 37 ♜d2 (how easy it is to throw away all our past effort in time pressure or through fatigue with a boneheaded continuation like 37 c4?? to keep Black's king out of d5; oops, after 37...♜d3+ White hangs a piece) 37...♜d5 38 ♖g3 ♜g6 (38...♜e4 39 ♖xf4 ♜xf4 40 b4! wins; if 40...♜xg4? 41 a4 ♜f4 42 b5 axb5 43 a5 ♜e5 44 a6 ♜d6 45 a7 Black is one move too slow) 39 ♜d3 f5 40 c4+ ♜c6 41 gxf5 exf5 42 ♜d4 f4 43 ♖f2 ♜d6 44 ♜e4 ♜e5 45 b3 ♜c6 46 ♖e1! ♜c5 47 ♖c3! when f4 falls and Black's king and knight are both denied entry to the queenside.

35 c4 ♜c7 36 ♜d4+ ♜c6 37 ♖b4! ♜f2 38 ♜d6+!

Suspicious, unwanted activity takes place in the nervous black king's vicinity. Carlsen doesn't even bother with covering f3, since his rook/bishop team are able to inflict decisive damage.

38...♜b7



Exercise (planning): White can drop back and protect his weak f3-pawn with ♜d3, but need not bother, since there is an idea which is far stronger. Can you find it?

Answer: Pin. White gets a toehold on c7 and Black's resistance melts.

39 ♖a5!

Threat: ♜d7. "Remove him to the chamber of correctitude, where he will contemplate the readjustment of his attitude to one of obedience," orders the bishop, as he points an accusatory finger at Black's cowering knight.

39...♜f1+

Alternatively, 39...♜a8 (clearly, the knight is afraid to speak his mind; he freezes, as if a mouse, paralysed with fear, under the rattlesnake's hypnotic stare) 40 c5 ♜xf3 41 c6+! (at last, the white attackers get easy access to Black's king) 41...♜b8 ("I resolve the profundities of the universe through the power of my infallible, divine intuition," declares Black's king, as he fails to sense the danger to his own life) 42 ♜d8+ ♜a7 43 ♜d7+ ♜b8 44 ♜b7+ ♜c8 45

♖e7 (threatening mate) 45...♜b8 46 ♜xe6 ♜c7 47 ♜d6 ♜c8 48 ♜d7 ♜e6 49 ♜e7, which either wins the knight or mates: 49...♜d8 50 ♜e8 ♜d3 51 c7 forces mate.

40 ♜d2 ♜f2+ 41 ♜e3! ♜c2

41...♜xb2 42 ♜d7 picks off the knight.

42 ♜d3 ♜c1 1-0

After 43 ♜b6+ ♜a7 44 ♜c6 ♜a8 45 ♜xe6 Black's pawns fall, one by one.

Game 22

S.Agdestein-M.Carlsen

3rd matchgame, Norwegian Championship Play-off, Oslo 2006

English Opening

It's never an easy thing to play your coach. Even harder is when you are the coach and one of your students has the colossal gall to beat you.

1 c4 ♜f6 2 ♜c3 e5 3 ♜f3 ♜c6 4 e3

4 g3 is White's most popular move in the database.

4...♜b4 5 ♜d5

I'm not a big fan of this line for White, who allows his f3-knight to get kicked back by a push of Black's e-pawn. Slightly more common is to first insert 5 ♜c2 0-0 6 ♜d5, in order to prevent Black from playing ...e4.

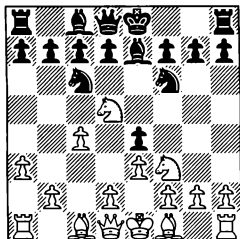
5...♜e7

Carlsen's trademark: he plays a little known side line. However, this time there is no reason to dodge mainline theory. Black normally chases White's knight with 5...e4! 6 ♜g1 0-0 7 a3 ♜d6. I think it's hard for White to claim an advantage here, since Black scores over 50% in the database from this position.

6 a3!?

This move, deliberately provoking ...e4, is possibly inaccurate. Instead, White can toss in 6 ♜c2! d6 when after 7 b4!? (7 a3 is what one would expect here) 7...♜e6 (I'm not sure who comes out ahead in the exchange; after 7...a5!? 8 b5 ♜b4 9 ♜xb4 axb4 the game is probably even) 8 ♜xe7 ♜xe7 9 ♜b2 White hopes to milk his bishop-pair, R.Hübner-V.Smyslov, Velden 1983.

6...e4!



Question: What is the attraction for White of this line?

Answer: It's a very provocative idea. White lures Black's e-pawn forward, under the assumption that the pawn represents a clear target and a weakness, rather than a strength. This may be so, but as Carlsen demonstrated in the game, Black can sacrifice the pawn for a daunting development lead. Carlsen's last move is new in the position and looks like an improvement over the previously played 6...a5 and 6...d6.

7 ♖g1

Question: White's last move loses a lot of time. Can he consider 7 ♖d4?

Answer: I think it's a radical solution. The damage to White's structure is more troubling than his lag in development when he retreats to g1. After 7...♟xd5 8 cxd5 ♟xd4 9 exd4 c6 10 ♙c4 b5 11 ♙a2 ♙b7 12 ♚h5 O-O Black leads both developmentally and structurally.

7...0-0 8 ♚c2 ♙e8

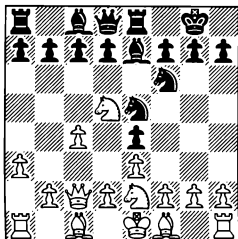
Indirectly covering e4.

9 ♖e2

Remember, White's idea is to make Black regret ...e4 and turn it into a weakness.

9...♟e5!

Carlsen is happy to offer e4 for a serious development lead. Another way to sacrifice e4 is 9...d6 10 ♖g3 ♙f8 11 ♟xf6+ ♚xf6 12 ♟xe4 ♚g6 13 d3 ♙e6 14 ♖g3 d5. It feels to me like Black obtains loads of compensation for his pawn, with a massive development lead.



10 ♖xf6+?!

Agdestein accepts the challenge the wrong way.

Question: Why not first play 10 ♖g3?

Answer: Your suggestion looks like a clear improvement over the game continuation. After 10...♗xd5 11 cxd5 ♗d3+! (this way Black gets the bishop-pair and potential for future light-square domination) 12 ♕xd3 exd3 13 ♖xd3 a5 14 0-0 b6, which threatens a cheapo on a6, Black may have full compensation for his pawn, with the bishop-pair, a development lead and control over the light squares – or perhaps not quite enough. In any case this is a far better version for White than he got in the game.

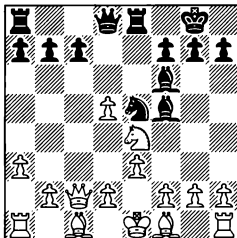
10...♕xf6 11 ♖c3 d5!

Carlsen interprets the landscape from the angry lens of a natural attacker. This way he hangs on to his cramping e-pawn and rapidly develops his queenside. Perhaps Agdestein expected 11...♗d3+?! 12 ♕xd3 exd3 13 ♖xd3 d6 14 0-0 when I don't think Black obtains compensation for the pawn, since White's king remains safe and lines are closed for now.

12 cxd5!

Far worse is 12 ♗xd5?! ♕f5 13 ♕e2 c6 14 ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 15 0-0 ♖ad8. Black stands clearly better, despite White's extra pawn, since he leads massively in development and soon builds up a dangerous kingside attack.

12...♕f5 13 ♗xe4?



When it comes to a 100% terminal disease, prevention itself is the cure. It's too late once the illness takes hold. White designs the general outline of a plan efficiently, only to stumble in the construct of its implementation. Agdestein, whose mercantile zeal reaches a boiling point – with desire for material overweening rationality – wilfully opens lines, daring Carlsen into an attack whose potency he greatly underestimates.

White should head for survival mode with an inversion of his original intent with 13 ♖a4 ♜d7 14 ♙e2 ♜b6 15 ♜b3.

13...♙h4!

White's lack of development begins to take on near fatal proportions.

14 ♜a4

After 14 d3 ♜xd5 15 b4 ♜xd3+ 16 ♙xd3 ♜xe4! 17 0-0 (17 ♙xe4 ♙xe4 18 ♜d2 ♜g5 19 ♙b2 ♜d8 20 ♙d4 b6 21 0-0 c5 is a winning attack for Black) 17...♜g4! 18 e4 ♜xe4! (this rook is getting downright annoying) 19 ♙xe4 (19 f3 ♜d4+ 20 ♙h1 ♜e7 21 ♙xf5 ♜xa1 also looks good for Black) 19...♙xe4 20 ♜c5 ♙xg2 21 ♜xd5 ♙xd5 Black is in control with two pawns for the exchange and domination of the light squares.

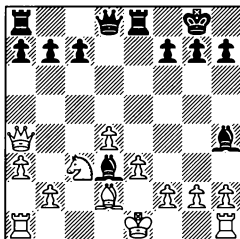
14...♜xd5 15 ♜c3 ♜d8!

Carlsen refuses to be distracted with 15...♜d3+ 16 ♙xd3 ♜xg2 17 ♙xf5! ♙xf2+ 18 ♙d1 ♜xh1+ 19 ♙c2 ♜xh2 when matters are not clear at all.

16 d4 ♜d3+ 17 ♙xd3 ♙xd3

Troubles pile up for White's king in perfect ratio to the duration of his light-squared bishop's absence, and this nagging disquieting fear runs through White's mind for the remainder of the game.

18 ♙d2



Exercise (planning): White plans to castle queenside. Carlsen steps on power's doorstep, but has yet to enter. How did he put a crimp in White's intention?

Answer: Line opening/double attack/attraction/pin. White's king is unable to castle kingside and is endangered horribly on both the queenside and in the middle.

18...b5!

White reels after this powerful blow.

19 ♖b3

19 ♜xb5?? walks into the double attack/pin shot 19... ♜g5!, and if 20 ♜c3 ♜xe3+! 21 ♜xe3 ♜xe3+ 22 ♜d1 ♜xf2 when White collapses.

19... ♜xd4?

A mistake which allows White to swap queens. *Houdini* prefers 19... ♜c4! 20 ♜c2 ♜xd4 21 0-0-0 ♜b6 when the queens remain on the board.

20 0-0-0?

In a darkened cell, the only thing which distinguishes one day from the next is the nature of our thoughts. The players swap errors. Agdestein misses a way to minimize Black's raging initiative with 20 ♜d5!. This move acts as an expectorant on Black's attack, forcing him to remove queens from the board. After 20... ♜c4 21 ♜xc4 bxc4 Black's attack is on the wane and he is forced to do more with less.

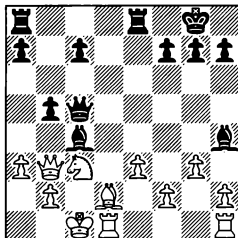
20... ♜c5?!

Lasker said that if a player missed a tactical or strategic idea on one move, he will very likely miss it on the next one as well. 20... ♜b6! prevents the queen swap.

21 g3?!

21 ♜d5! once again forces queens off the board.

21... ♜c4



At least now the bishop's angry gaze is averted from c2 and b1, which allows White's king to try and slip into the corner.

22 ♖c2 ♗f6 23 ♔b1

If 23 ♗b1 ♜b6 24 ♗c3 ♗e7 25 ♗d2 ♗e6 26 ♔b1 c5 when ...b4 is coming with a winning attack.

23...a5

This attack now just plays itself.

24 f3

Intending ♗e4. The immediate 24 ♗e4?? hangs a piece to 24...♗a2+! 25 ♔c1 ♜xc2+ 26 ♔xc2 ♜xe4.

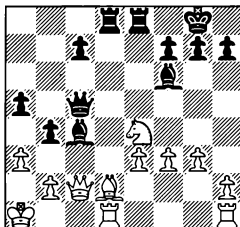
24...♜ad8! 25 ♔a1

White's queen thinks to herself: "Fate has shackled me to a weak willed man," upon seeing her king running for his life. 25 ♗e4?? this time walks into 25...♜xe4! when White can't recapture either way, due to ...♗d3.

25...b4!

Malevolent forms swim all around the dazed white king's vision. Carlsen, seeing a combination, allows White his intent.

26 ♗e4



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen continue the attack?

Answer: Removal of the guard/double attack.

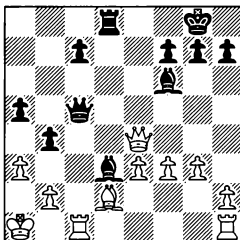
26...♖xe4! 27 ♜xe4

Not 27 fxe4?? b3 28 ♜c1 ♜xa3+! 29 ♔b1 ♜a2 mate.

27...♙d3!

One blow follows upon the heels of the last one. Carlsen's attackers harass the white king and queen, the way a slight acquaintance presumptuously acts as if you were old friends. Black threatens White's queen and also ...bxa3.

28 ♜c1



Exercise (combination alert): Black has two winning continuations here. Pick one:

Answer: Simplification/pin. Black comes out with a crushing bind in the ensuing ending.

28...♟xc1+!

Black can also play directly for mate with 28...♟f8! when terrible threats hang in the air, unanswered: 29 ♜c6 bxa3 30 ♔a2 (30 ♙c3 axb2+ 31 ♟xb2 ♜b4+ mates) 30...axb2 31 ♜c5 b1♟+! (clearance) 32 ♜xb1 ♙xb1+ 33 ♟xb1 ♜xd2, with a winning attack and an extra piece to boot.

29 ♙xc1 ♙xe4 30 fxe4 bxa3

This pin is deadly.

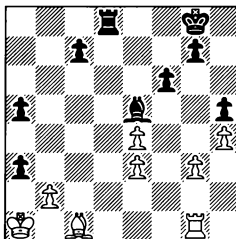
31 h4

White has the choice of losing to a lateral or a horizontal death pin:

a) 31 ♔a2 axb2 32 ♙xb2 ♜d2 33 ♜b1 ♜xh2 34 ♟b3 (the king appears before his tormentors as a threadbare mendicant) 34...♜xb2+ 35 ♜xb2 ♙xb2 36 ♟xb2 h5 intending ...g5 and ...h4.

b) 31 ♟b1 axb2 32 ♙xb2 ♜b8 is also game over.

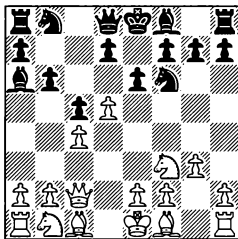
31...h5 32 ♜f1 ♙e5 33 ♜g1 f6! 0-1



White finds himself in an inescapable pin twilight zone. If he decides to follow the letter and spirit of his original intent to its doomed conclusion, there follows 34 ♔a2 (34 ♟b1 axb2 35 ♙xb2 ♜b8 36 ♜g2 ♟f7 37 ♟c1 ♜xb2 38 ♜xb2 ♙xb2+ 39 ♟xb2 ♔e6 is a hopelessly lost king and pawn ending) 34...axb2 35 ♙xb2 ♜d2 36 ♜b1 ♟f7 37 ♔a3 ♜xb2 38 ♜xb2 ♙xb2+ 39 ♟xb2 ♔e6. A race to promote tends to become a matter of joint concern – but not when one side is up about 10 tempi. Black's insufferable king continues to strut and swagger, lording his superior powers over his brother. We transpose to the dead lost king and pawn note above.

Game 23
M.Carlsen-V.Ivanchuk
Monaco (rapid) 2007
Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 g3 ♙a6 5 ♚c2 c5 6 d5



This fashionable pawn sacrifice line is contested regularly at the highest levels.

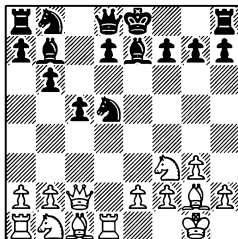
6...exd5 7 cxd5 ♙b7

Note that d5 isn't hanging yet, since 7...♘xd5?? loses on the spot to 8 ♚e4+.

8 ♙g2 ♘xd5

Black scores poorly after 8...♙xd5 9 ♘c3 when White gains a valuable tempo: for instance, 9...♙c6 10 e4 ♙e7 11 ♙f4 0-0 12 0-0-0! (I would play it safe with 12 ♚d1) 12...♘a6 13 ♚e2 ♘b4 14 a3 ♚c8 15 ♙b1 a5 (White simply ignores the b4 offer) 16 ♘e5 when Black's position was under pressure and White has ample compensation for the pawn, B.Gelfand-L.Aronian, Dortmund 2006.

9 0-0 ♙e7 10 ♚d1



Question: What does White obtain for the pawn sacrifice?

Answer: A development lead and pressure down the d-file, on d6 and d7. According to theory White obtains full compensation for his investment.

10...♖c6

Of course, the d5-knight remains protected tactically, due to the b4 fork trick. Carlsen plays this position from both ends: 10...♜c8 11 ♔g5 h6 12 ♕xe7 ♜xe7 13 e4 0-0 14 ♜c3 ♜bc6 15 ♜d2 ♔a6 16 ♔h3 ♜g6 (Carlsen decides to return the pawn in order to unravel) 17 ♔xd7 ♜b7 was L.Aronian-M.Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2007. White retains slight but nagging pressure after 18 ♜ad1.

11 ♜f5

We suspect disrespectful overtones from the queen, in her dealings with Black's nervous king. This looks more logical to me than 11 ♜a4 ♜f6 12 ♜h4 g6 13 ♔h6 ♔f8 14 ♔xf8 ♜xf8 15 ♜c3 ♜g7 16 ♜f4 when the queen ends up on the kingside after all. The game looks dynamically balanced, with White retaining full compensation for the pawn, L.Aronian-S.Karjakin, Jermuk 2009.

11...♜f6 12 e4

Now e5 is a serious threat which induces a concession.

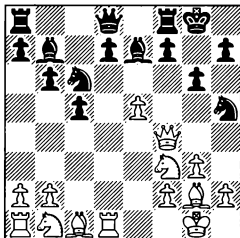
12...g6

Perhaps the best of Black's options:

a) 12...0-0?! 13 e5 ♜e8 14 ♜xd7 ♜c8 15 ♜c3! with pressure for White. Black shouldn't play 15...♜b8?! which is met with 16 e6!, leaving him in serious trouble.

b) 12...d6!? 13 e5 ♜d7 14 ♜xd7+ ♜xd7 15 exd6 ♔f6 16 ♔e1+ ♜f8 17 ♜c3 when the d6 passer looks more a strength than a liability, while Black's coordination is hampered by his king's position on f8.

13 ♜f4 0-0 14 e5 ♜h5



15 ♖g4

A theoretical novelty and an attempt to improve over the previously seen:

a) 15 ♖h6 ♘d4 (*Houdini* gives Black a clear edge after 15... ♗c7! 16 ♚e1 ♚fe8, intending ...♙f8) 16 ♘xd4 ♙xg2 17 ♙xg2 cxd4 18 g4 ♚c8!! 19 ♚xd4 (not 19 gxh5? g5! with the idea: ...♚c6, trapping White's queen; after 20 ♙xg5 ♙xg5 21 ♗d6 f6 White's king is left dangerously exposed) 19... ♘g7 20 ♘c3 f5 and White looked a tad overextended, L.Aronian-P.Leko, Moscow 2006.

b) 15 ♗c4 d5 16 exd6 ♙xd6 17 ♘c3 ♘a5 18 ♗d3 ♙c7 19 ♗c2 ♗e7 20 ♚e1 ♗d7 21 ♙g5 f6 22 ♙h6 ♚fd8 23 ♚ad1 ♗f7 was B.Gelfand-P.Leko, Jermuk 2009. White still retains some pressure for the pawn after 24 ♘b5, but has no advantage.

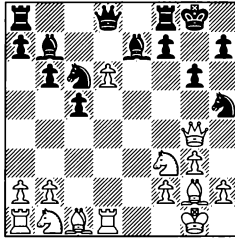
15...d5!?

Black seeks to free himself at any cost.

Question: Isn't this dangerous, with White's rook posted on d1, the same file as Black's queen?

Answer: Optically the move does appear dangerous. Under the microscope of the comps, it may be fine though, since White doesn't appear to have anything concrete. *Houdini* suggests the safer 15... ♗b8! to remove the queen from the d-file: 16 ♘c3 ♘xe5! (16...d6 is also reasonable for Black) 17 ♘xe5 ♙xg2 18 ♘xd7 ♗b7 19 ♘xf8 ♘f6 20 ♗h4 ♘h5 and now if White gets ambitious with 21 ♙g5 ♙xf8 22 ♚d2 ♚e8, Black stands better with a pawn for the exchange, the bishop-pair and domination of the light squares.

16 exd6

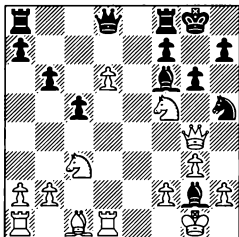


16...♙f6?

The bishop acts with deference, as proper manners demand, in the powerful d6-pawn's presence. Ivanchuk reluctantly decides he can no longer shoulder the responsibility for care and protection of White's d-pawn, so he decides to cut his losses, abandoning his previous venture of surrounding and winning it. A move based on the philosophy: enduring suffering without lashing out in return is a kind of investment. But in the end, the hoped for return is always revenge. Ivanchuk clenches his teeth and girds himself for the coming wave by embarking upon a radical measure to arrest what he perceives is decline in his position. Now, though, the passed d-pawn turns into a monster, choking Black's coordination.

Question: Why didn't he recapture on d6?

Answer: He should have, but feared White's initiative. *Houdini* proves that Black holds his own in the line after 16...♙d6! 17 ♙g5 ♚b8 (the throbbing veins in the queen's forehead pulse and writhe like agitated worms, every time her wishes are thwarted) 18 ♚d7 ♙c7 19 ♙c3 ♙d8 20 ♙d5 ♚c8 21 ♚xc8 ♙xc8 22 ♙xd8 ♙fxd8 23 ♙g4 ♙g7 24 ♙f6+ ♙f8 (24...♙h8?? 25 ♙g5 ♙xd1+ 26 ♙xd1 ♙e8 27 ♙xf7+ ♙g7 28 ♙xe8+ ♙xe8 29 ♙d6 ♙d8 30 ♙xc6! ♙xc6 31 ♙f5+ wins) 25 ♙xh7+ ♙e7 26 ♙e1+ ♙e6 27 ♙hg5 and Black stands no worse. 17 ♙c3 ♙d4 18 ♙xd4 ♙xg2 19 ♙f5!!



Question: It feels like Carlsen picks and chooses just what laws he follows and those he breaks. Isn't it madness to allow Black's light-squared bishop free reign of the h1-a8 diagonal?

Answer: Fair winds or foul, Carlsen is intent upon this dangerous voyage, and subsequent analysis backs up his decision. The knight pokes at the dark-squared weaknesses in Black's camp. This counterintuitive decision is an example of Carlsen's remarkable intuition, which pushes past even the computer's horizon of understanding. White allows Black's monster light-squared bishop to remain on the board, realizing that his f5-knight is even stronger. The comps don't like this line for White, but if you play it forward about eight or nine moves, White always ends up in a winning position.

Carlsen goes for the kill, rather than the squeeze. After 19 ♖xg2 ♕xd4 20 ♖b5 ♕g7 21 ♖c7 ♖f6 22 ♗f3 ♜b8 23 ♜b1 ♗d7 24 ♕g5 ♖e8 25 ♖a6 ♜c8 26 ♕e7 ♕d4 27 ♕xf8 ♗xf8 28 b4 ♖xd6 29 bxc5 bxc5 Black lacks full compensation for the exchange, yet this line is nowhere near as powerful as Carlsen's choice.

19...♗c6 20 d7!

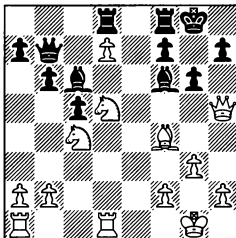
The d-pawn suffocates Black's defensive coordination.

20...♗c7

Certainly not 20...♗xd7?? 21 ♖h6+ ♗h8 22 ♜xd7 when the d7-bishop's smug smile fades like sunlight at dusk.

21 ♖d5 ♕xd5

No amount of fasting or prayer brings the bishop the grace he so desperately desires. So Carlsen gets to remove the light-squared bishop from the board after all. The true depth of Carlsen's idea is seen after 21...♗e5, which is met with 22 ♖fe3 ♜ad8 23 ♖c4 ♗b8 24 ♕f4 ♗b7 25 ♗xh5!!.



For Black's king, the kingside is as dangerous a place to live as pagan Rome was to the early Christian: 25...gxh5 26 Qxf6+ Qg7 27 Qxh5+ Qg8 (or 27...Qg6 28 Qd6+! f6 29 g4 Qf7 30 Qxf6 Qh1 31 Qe3 Qh8 32 Qe1 h6 33 Qe5 Qf8 34 Qc3 Qf3 35 Qd5! Qg8 36 Qf5 Qb7 37 Qfd5 mate) 28 Qf6+ Qh8 29 Qe5 Qh1 30 Qe3 h5 31 Qd6 h4 32 Qc1! (with the intent to lift to c4 and then h4) 32...b5 33 Qxc5 hxg3 34 hxg3 Qf3 (Black floats rudderless, awaiting White's murderous assault on his king) 35 Qd4 b4 36 Qg5 a6 37 Qh7+! f6 (if 37...Qxh7 38 Qg7+ Qh8 39 Qh6 mate) 38 Qxf8 Qxf8 39 Qxf6, which mates quickly.
22 Qxd5 Qfd8 23 Qe3!

White can also play the immediate 23 Qh6+! Qg7 24 Qf3! (even stronger than 24 Qxh5 Qxd7 25 Qh3 Qd5 26 Qe3 Qxb2 27 Qe1) 24...Qc6 25 Qg2 Qab8 26 g4! Qxd7 27 Qxd7 Qxd7 28 gxh5 when Black doesn't have compensation for the piece.
23...Qxb2 24 Qh6+!

The distance between the white attackers and Black's king is not so great, as the crow flies. However, the king discovers that knights don't travel like crows.

The text is the human move. The comps give 24 Qad1!!, allowing the f6 knight fork! After 24...Qf6 25 Qe7+ Qg7 26 Qf4 Qb7 27 Qe2 Qd4 28 Q1xd4! cxd4 29 Qe5 Qxd7 30 Qh6+! Qxh6 31 Qf5+! Qh5 32 Qxf6 Qg4 33 Qh6+ Qh3 34 Qh4 mate the astonished king's blushing face is a study in embarrassment.
24...Qf8?

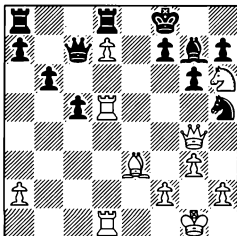
This is a decisive mistake. However, even after 24...Qg7 25 Qad1!! (White is willing to hand over a full exchange to hang on to d7) 25...Qf6 26 Qc4 Qxd5 27 Qxd5 Qf8 28 Qg4 Qh8 29 Qf4 Qd8 30 Qd6 Black is completely helpless. If 30...Qg8 31 Qh6 Qg7 32 Qxg8 Qxg8 33 Qe7! wins.

25 Qad1!

White's universe revolves around d7, and Carlsen is willing to pay for the privilege of keeping it on the board with an exchange.

25...Qg7

Black loses as well if he wins the exchange with 25...♟f6 26 ♜c4 ♟xd5 27 ♜xd5 when he must give up a full rook on d7 to avoid mate on f7.



Exercise (combination alert): Does a billionaire look at his bank accounts and vast holdings and think to himself: “Good enough?”. It is human nature to continue to want more, even if in a state of bounty. The d7 passer asphyxiates Black and there are two ways to win. Find one of them and Black’s hopes lie in a heap of rubble.

Answer: Removal of the guard/annihilation of king’s cover.

26 ♜xh5!

White attackers strike, inflict damage, and then rapidly melt into the mist to evade pursuit. The mundane 26 ♜f3! also works after 26...♟f6 27 ♜d6 when there is no reasonable defence to the coming ♜xf6.

26...gxf5 27 ♜f5 1-0

The terror the queen engenders in the simple townsfolk smothers their will to rise up against her. When they attempt to mutter rote protection prayers, they are struck dumb, unable to summon even a word. It’s mate after 27...♟xh6 28 ♟xh6+ ♟e7 29 ♜e4+ ♟f6 30 ♜e1! (threat: ♜h4+, followed by ♜g5 mate) 30...♟g8 31 ♜e7+ ♟f5 (Black’s king seethes, feeling that he has been the victim of a reprehensible level of neglect by those who swore to defend him) 32 ♜xf7+ ♟g4 33 ♜e6+ ♟f3 34 ♜e2. “Your protest of superficial plausibility does not merit my attention,” says White’s queen to Black’s king, whose plea of clemency she denies.

Game 24
M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov
 Nanjing 2009
Sicilian Defence

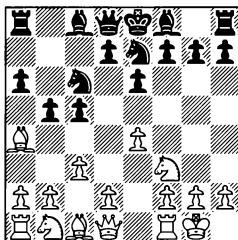
1 e4 c5 2 d3 c6 3 b5 e6 4 0-0

This slower build-up is more popular than an immediate swap on c6. After 4 bxc6 bxc6 5 b3 d6 (intending ...e5, so White beats him to it) 6 e5 dxe5 7 dxe5! d5 (7...d4 is met with the startling 8 b2!, and if 8...xb2? 9 c3 a3 10 f3! – double attack on c6 and f7 – 10...d7 11 xf7+ d8 12 0-0 with a blistering attack which far outweighs Black's extra piece) 8 f3 e4+ 9 f1 f5 10 c3 f6 11 d3 e7 12 e2 d5 13 d2 b4 14 e1 0-0 15 e4 f6 16 h3 e5 I already prefer Black's position, since his central space outweighs the potential weakness of his doubled c-pawns, L.McShane-T.Radjabov, Moscow 2012.

4...d7 5 c3

The positions reached can resemble both the Ruy Lopez and the Advance French. White can also clear f1 for his bishop with 5 e1 a6 6 f1 d5 7 exd5 cxd5 8 d4 f6 9 e3 cxd4 10 dxd4, as in V.Topalov-T.Radjabov, Stavanger 2013. Black's position looks satisfactory after 10...d7.

5...a6 6 a4 b5



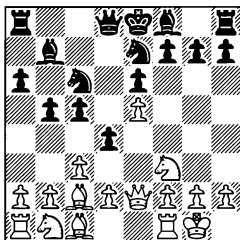
Question: Isn't White losing a lot of time, with b5, a4 and c2?

Answer: No more than he would in any line of the Closed Ruy Lopez, which the position resembles.

7 c2 b7 8 e2 d5

Radjabov veers from the move played in a previous game against Carlsen: 8...g6 9 d4

cxd4 10 cxd4 ♖c8 11 a3 ♕e7 12 ♖c3 0-0 13 ♙d1 ♘a5 14 g3 ♖c4 15 h4! (Carlsen sacrifices a pawn for a kingside initiative) 15...♗xa3 16 bxa3 ♜xc3 17 h5 ♜c7 18 ♙d3 ♖h8 19 ♙b2 ♖b3 20 ♜ac1 ♜a5 21 d5 ♙xa3 22 ♙xa3 ♜xa3 23 ♜e3 f5? (after this weakening thrust, White stands better; instead, White is the one fighting for the draw after 23...♜c3 24 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 25 ♜c1 ♜a5 26 ♖e5 ♜d8 27 ♜a7 ♜g5 28 ♜c7 ♜xe5 29 ♜xb7 exd5 30 exd5 ♜xd5 31 ♜xd7 ♜xh5 32 ♜xa6) 24 exf5?! (24 ♖e5! d6 25 ♖d7 ♜e8 26 dxe6 leaves Black busted) 24...♙xd5 25 ♖e5 ♜d8 26 fxe6 dxe6 27 ♙xh7+ ♖xh7 28 ♜xa3 when Radjabov probably didn't get enough for the exchange, but managed to hold a draw, M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov, Linares 2009.
9 e5 d4!



Question: What is the idea behind this move?

Answer: With this move Radjabov attempts to dam the flow of White's central space gains by pre-empting the coming d4.

Question: Is there a cost to it?

Answer: Three issues:

1. The move gives White's pieces access to e4.
2. The d-pawn can later be artificially isolated and attacked by a future cxd4.
3. Black, already slightly behind in development since his kingside lies dormant, gives away a precious tempo to achieve his strategic aim.

Instead, 9...♜b6 10 ♙d1 (GM Mikhail Golubev suggests 10 d4!? cxd4 11 cxd4 ♖xd4 12 ♖xd4 ♜xd4 13 ♙d1 with "plenty of activity"; the position looks like a French, Milner-Barry Gambit, and White may obtain practical chances with a development lead and attacking chances due to his e5-pawn) 10...d4 is similar to the game, V.Tkachiev-J.Pinski, Geneva 1997.

10 ♖e4 ♜b6

The queen seeks a favourable vantage point for the coming battle. 10...♟d5 is Black's main move here.

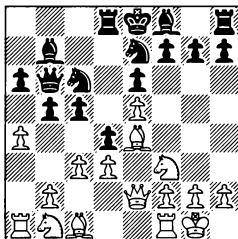
11 d3

Alternatively, 11 cxd4 ♟xd4 12 ♟xd4 cxd4 13 d3 ♖xe4?! (I would play 13...♟d5 when it appears like Black reaches dynamic equality) 14 ♜xe4 ♜c8 15 ♟d2 ♟c6 16 ♟f3 ♖e7 17 ♜g4 ♟f8 and Black is in trouble since his h8-rook remains out of the mix for quite some time, G.Cabrilo-M.Andrijevic, Sozina 2004.

11...♞d8

This move is new. Black logically backs up his d-pawn. However, his lag in kingside development remains a concern. Previously seen was 11...♟g6.

12 a4



Question: Isn't White in violation of the principle: avoid confrontation on your opponent's strong wing?

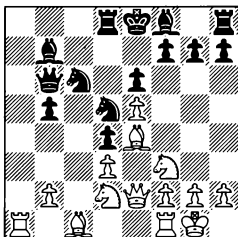
Answer: Black's kingside has yet to be developed, so Carlsen hopes to create confrontation when Black isn't ready for it on the queenside and in the centre.

12...♟d5

Question: Why does Black allow his d-pawn to be weakened when he can swap it away with 12...dxc3?

Answer: I think your suggestion is playable as well. After 13 bxc3 b4 14 ♖b2 ♟d5 15 c4 ♟f4 16 ♜e3 ♟g6 17 ♟bd2 ♟a5 18 h4 *Houdini* rates it at dead even, while I slightly prefer White, due to the coming push of his h-pawn.

13 axb5 axb5 14 cxd4 cxd4 15 ♟bd2



15...♖f4?!

Sometimes we lash out to duck the drudgery of a prolonged defence.

Question: This looks like a goose chase. Why not just develop with 15...♗e7?

Answer: Radjabov may have feared the line 16 ♖b3 0-0 17 ♗g5! ♗xg5 18 ♗xh7+!? (maybe this is the move which concerned Radjabov, whose mind probably boiled with a half dozen speculations, all of which are not so easy to confirm with verifiable accuracy) 18...♖xh7 19 ♖xg5+ ♖h6 20 ♗g4 ("Since my kind hints and loving guidance failed to sway you, perhaps the lash will," says the queen to her h6 brother) 20...♖xe5 21 ♗h4+ ♖g6 22 ♗g3 f6 23 ♖xe6+ ♖f7 24 ♖bxd4 ♗g8 25 ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 26 ♖f5 ♖g6, but Black looks okay here to me. This is a difficult line to enter from a psychological standpoint, though, since Black's king gets bounced around, with Carlsen doing the bouncing.

16 ♗d1 ♖b4?!

A phantom plan with no legitimate merit isn't likely to promise great rewards at its conclusion. Radjabov wants to occupy the d5 hole at a dangerous cost in time. He should veer from his unprofitable line of inquiry with 16...♖g6! 17 ♗xg6 hxg6 18 ♖e4 ♖b4 19 ♗g5 ♗c8. *Houdini* assesses at dead even, but I like White, who has the safer king. This is still better than what Radjabov got in the game.

17 ♖b3!

Uncovering on the f4-knight.

17...♗xe4 18 dxe4

Now Black's d-pawn may become weak and he is also denied use of d5.

18...♖fd3!?

Radjabov seems to be unconcerned about his undeveloped kingside. I would go into emergency mode and play something like 18...♖g6 19 ♖fxd4!? ♖xe5 20 ♗a5. White wins b5, but at least Black gets to complete kingside development with 20...♗e7 21 ♗h5 ♖ed3

22 ♖e3 g6 23 ♜e2 ♜b7 24 ♜d1 e5 25 ♜xb5 0-0 26 ♜c3. This isn't so great for Black, down a clean pawn, although better than what he got in the game.

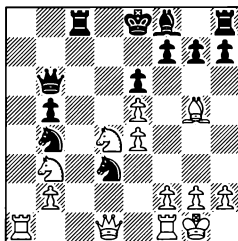
19 ♙g5!

Now d4 falls since Black has a loose back rank.

19...♜c8

Of course, 19...♜d7?? is impossible due to 20 ♜a8+.

20 ♜fxd4



Black's problem isn't so much that he is down a pawn. Instead, it's his chronic development lag and inability to castle which plagues him.

20...♜xb2

Otherwise, 20...♜xe5 is met by 21 ♜a5! ♜bc6 22 ♜xb5 ♜a6 23 ♜a1 ♜xa1 24 ♜xa1 ♜xd4 25 ♜xd4 with an extra pawn and continuing pressure for White.

21 ♜e2 ♜c4 22 ♜fc1!

White's pieces roil in activity, like an accidentally bumped wasp's nest. Black's numerous defensive issues:

1. The c4-knight is pinned.
2. c4 is an unstable square, mainly since b5 can be undermined with ♜a5.
3. Black's unmoved f8-bishop breaks his own impressive record of broken commandments (thou shalt not remain undeveloped in the middlegame) in a single day.

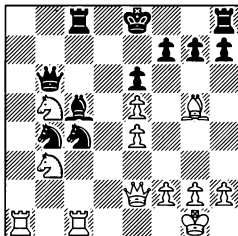
22...♙c5

For the bishop, whose entire universe consists of light and dark, true and false, good and evil, there is no room for greys of moderation. This move loses material, but I don't have a better suggestion: for instance, 22...h6? (prolonged passivity tends to forment rebellion in the agitated defender's mind and heart) 23 ♙e3, and now if 23...♜b8 24 ♜xe6! fxe6 25 ♜h5+ ♜d8 26 ♜d1+ ♜c7 27 ♜f7+ ♜c6 28 ♜d7 mate.

23 ♜xb5!?

Carlsen decides to play a middlegame, rather than a potentially winning ending which

arises after 23 ♖xc5! ♜xc5 24 ♙e3 ♖c6 (24...♜xe5?? 25 ♜cb1 wins the knight) 25 ♖xb5 ♜xb5 26 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 27 ♜xc4 ♖e7 28 ♜xc8+ ♖xc8 29 ♜b1 f6 (29...0-0 30 ♜b7 paralyses the knight) 30 exf6 gxf6 31 ♜b7 0-0 32 ♙c5 ♜f7! 33 ♜xf7 ♖xf7 and White wins, since Black's knight remains frozen on c8.



Exercise (critical decision): Black's choices are 23...0-0, 23...♜xb5 and 23...♙f2+. Only one allows Black any chance at all of survival. Which one would you play?

23...0-0?

When under fire we all sometimes resemble the actor who rehearses tirelessly to craft his or her role, and then when the curtain rises, freezes and forgets all the lines. Correct was:

Answer: 23...♙f2+! (the past may be unchangeable, but the present is not) 24 ♜xf2 ♜xb5 25 ♜d4 0-0 26 ♙e7 ♖c6 27 ♜c5 ♜xc5+ 28 ♙xc5 ♖4xe5 29 ♙xf8 ♜xf8 and with a pawn and a solid position for the exchange, it appears as if Black has reasonable expectations of holding a draw. However, after 30 ♜c5! f6 31 ♜b5 h6 32 ♖c5 ♖d4 33 ♜ba5 it won't be so easy to hold the draw, and yet this is still by far the best Black has of all his possibilities.

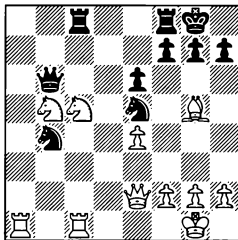
Instead, 23...♜xb5?? walks into the pin trick 24 ♜a5! ♜b6 25 ♜xc4 ♙xf2+ 26 ♜xf2 ♜xf2+ 27 ♖xf2 ♜xc4 28 ♜a8+ ♖d7 29 ♜xh8 and the extra piece wins for White.

24 ♖xc5

Now Black loses material in every variation.

24...♖xe5

After 24...♜xc5 25 ♙e7 ♜xb5 26 ♙xc5 ♜xc5 27 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 28 ♜xc4 ♖d3 29 ♜a5 Black fails to obtain his pawn for the exchange and loses, while 24...♜xc5 walks into 25 ♖d6!, winning on the spot.



Exercise (combination alert): After 24...♖xe5 Black's position appears to be a clear case of bureaucratic inefficiency, with too many employees duplicating tasks. Carlsen found a method to increase his already decisive advantage. What is it?

Answer: Attraction/knight fork.

25 ♖e7! 1-0

The bishop generates the purest of motivations: an insatiable desire to acquire the property of others. After 25...♗fe8 26 ♖d6! the knight is intent upon his baleful errand, and Black finds himself arrears in material and very likely to increase his existing debt: 26...♗xc5 27 ♗xc5 ♗xc5 28 ♖xe8 ♗xe7 29 ♗a8! g6 30 ♗d2 is deadly.

Game 25 P.Svidler-M.Carlsen Nice (blindfold) 2010 Sicilian Defence

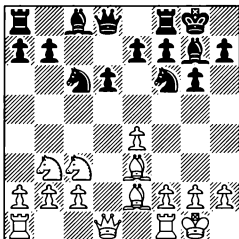
1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 g6 6 ♖e2

The more quiet Classical Dragon. Svidler avoids a fight immersed in theory with 6 ♖e3 ♖g7 7 f3 0-0 8 ♗d2 ♖c6.

6...♖g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♖e3

8 ♖g5 is White's main line: 8...♖c6 9 ♖b3 ♖e6 (Black can also play 9...a6 intending ...b5) 10 ♖h1 ♗c8 11 f4 ♗d8 12 ♖f3 ♖c4 13 ♖f2 e6 14 ♗d2 ♗c7 15 ♗e1 h6 16 ♖h4 ♗d7 17 ♗ad1 saw Karpov milk his micro edge to victory, A.Karpov-A.Miles, Bad Lauterberg 1977.

8...♖c6 9 ♖b3



Question: Why does White voluntarily retreat his knight to b3?

Answer: Usually for two reasons:

1. White suppresses Black's freeing ...d5 break.
2. White owns more space, so it is in his best interests to avoid a future ...dxd4 swap.

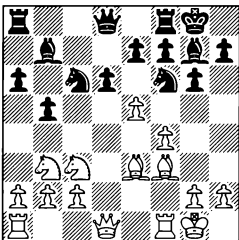
9...a6!?

The main line is 9...a6 10 f4 ♖c8 11 ♕h1 ♜d8 12 ♖g1 d5 (Black achieved the ...d5 break after all) 13 e5 ♘e4, as in V.Anand-B.Gelfand, Linares 1992. If 14 ♘b5 then Black can speculate with the undermining 14...g5!?, with an unclear position.

10 f4 b5 11 ♖f3

Clamping down on Black's ...d5 ambitions.

11...a6 12 e5!?



Svidler is the first one to start trouble.

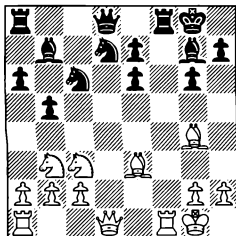
Question: Isn't White undermining his centre with his last move?

Answer: White plans to follow with fxe5 and e6, sacrificing his e-pawn to hand Black doubled e-pawns.

12...dxe5 13 fxe5 d7 14 e6 fxe6

On the plus side, a sluice-gate opens along the f-file for Black's rook.

15 g4



White regains the sacrificed pawn and at the same time isolates Black's remaining e-pawn.

Question: It appears to me as if Black's pawn structure remains untended, in sullen disrepair. Does this mean that White stands clearly better?

Answer: At first glance it appears as if White got the better of the deal, but having analysed the position with *Houdini*, I'm not so sure, since Black's piece activity also spiked. In fact, having played around with it, I actually prefer Black here.

15...xf1+ 16 xf1 ce5 17 xe6+ h8 18 d1 c7 19 f4

A new move in the position and an attempt to improve upon a previous Carlsen encounter, which went 19 e2 f8 20 d4 (perhaps White should have tossed in 20 a3) 20...b4! 21 e4 f4! 22 g5? (22 d2 a5 23 g3 f3 24 xe5 xe5 25 xf3 xf3 26 d5 f8 27 g2! is dead even according to *Houdini*) 22...h6! 23 xd7 hxg5! with a clear advantage for Black, whose pieces are ominously active, R.Djurhuus-M.Carlsen, Molde 2004.

19...f8! 20 g3

Instead, 20 xd7?? is met with 20...c6! 21 xb7 xf4 22 b6 f3+! 23 gxf3 xf3 24 xf4 xf4 and Black is winning since his queen and bishop are worth far more than

White's pieces, as the white king is seriously endangered here.

20...♖f6 21 ♖c5?!

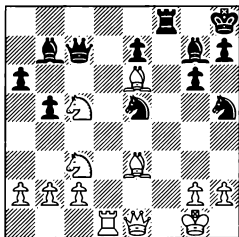
Carlsen seizes the initiative after this slip. Correct was a line like 21 ♜f1 b4 22 ♖a4 ♜xc2 23 ♖ac5 ♙c6 24 ♜c1 ♜e2 25 ♜e1 ♜c2 when a draw is the logical outcome. Of course, White is unable to take the 'hanging' e5-knight due to the g2 mate threat.

21...♗h5!

Up until now, it felt like the initiative has been White's exclusive province, but no longer.

22 ♜e1?

22 ♜h3 ♖f4! was the move Svidler feared in his post mortem analysis. After 23 ♙xf4 ♜xc5+ Black's pieces are super active and he stands better, but not nearly as much as in the game.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move allowed Carlsen a devastating combination. Black's attack, seemingly without basis, hangs in the air without visible support. Yet an unspoken threat burns like a brand. How would you continue in Carlsen's position?

Answer: Annihilation of the white king's cover.

22...♙xg2!!

All of White's troubles form in sweaty condensation on the light squares around his king, who must go through a period of adjustment from his loss of status, from sovereign ruler of the empire to errand boy, shoe polisher, tool sharpener, beer fetcher and stable boy/dung shoveller.

23 ♙xg2

The king casually dismisses Black's bishop, the discussion in his mind now a closed matter. He soon discovers the bishop's allies have a lot more to say. There are two kinds of pris-

ons:

1. The kind where we are locked up on the inside of our cell.

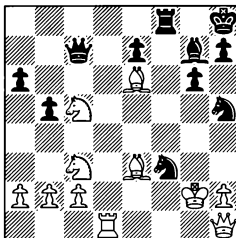
2. The kind where we are the ones on the outside, and all we desire is to be locked up, out of our reach.

White's king is an example of the latter category, since he is now all alone, separated from his defenders.

23...♠f3!

The contagion spreads to f3. Double attack on e1 and h1, which forces White's next move.

24 ♖h1



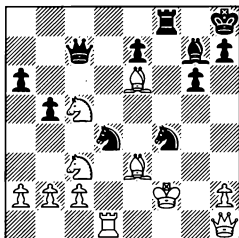
Exercise (critical decision): Black's knights continue to peck at White's king from here and there, like disgruntled hens, while white defenders flit about with insect-like aimlessness as Black's attack gains momentum. We have a choice of two logical candidate moves: 24...♠h4+ and 24...♠f4+. One wins, while the other allows White back into the game. Which one would you play?

24...♠f4+?

The wrong one!

Answer: 24...♠h4+! is crushing after 25 ♖h3 (or 25 ♖g1 ♜e5 26 ♠f2 ♜g5+ 27 ♖f1 ♜xc5 when the bodies of White's army are left to rot on the blood-soaked ground, while the air above is black with feasting flies) 25...♠f3+! 26 ♜xf3 (if 26 ♖xh4 ♠f6+ 27 ♠g5 ♜f4+ 28 ♠g4 ♠xg5 mate) 26...♠xf3 when White's king has no chance against the black swarm.

25 ♠f2! ♠d4 0-1



Svidler resigned here in a position which *Houdini* only rates at '-1.14'.

Question: How can he fight on?

Answer: The presumed finality of White's demise remains in question after 25...♘d4. Svidler had to find the inhuman 26 ♘d7!!, which your writer would never see in a million years sighted, much less blindfolded. The knight refuses to play the role of cringing victim, and instead takes up a stance of defiance. Now White's dying enthusiasm is lit by a tiny spark of hope, in an otherwise hopeless undertaking.

Following 26...♘h3+! 27 ♖e1! (Black looks like he is winning after 27 ♖g2 ♗c6+ 28 ♙d5 ♗xd7 29 ♜xd4 e6 30 ♖xh3 ♙xd4!) 27...♘xc2+ 28 ♖d2 ♘xe3 29 ♘xf8 ♘xd1 30 ♗a8 ♗d6+ 31 ♖e1 ♙xc3+ 32 bxc3 ♖g7 33 ♙xh3 ♗e5+ 34 ♖xd1 ♗h5+ 35 ♖c1 (the king retires with an unmistakable expression of relief at the thought of putting distance between himself and his sister) 35...♗xh3 36 ♖b2 ♗xh2+ 37 ♖b3 Black's passed h-pawn (and g-pawn if necessary) are ready to roll forward, but *Houdini* rates this at '-0.88' – only about one pawn up for Black. So it won't be all that easy for Black to pull off the win even here, since White's queen and knight may generate perpetual check threats. Of course this is all moot, since no human was ever going to find 26 ♘d7!! in a blindfold game.

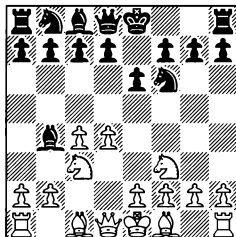
Game 26

M.Carlsen-V.Ivanchuk

Grand Slam, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2011

Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♘f3

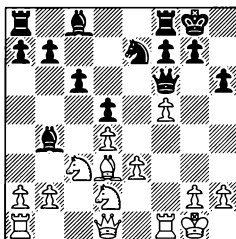


This is White's third most chosen Nimzo-Indian option, popularized by Kasparov, who played this line in his 1985 world championship match against Karpov. The positions can transpose back to the more popular 4 ♖c2 line, or reach independent positions, depending on how both sides play it.

4...b6

Important alternatives are:

a) 4...d5 5 ♗g5 ♜bd7 6 cxd5 exd5 7 ♜d2!? c6 8 e3 ♜f8 9 ♗d3 ♜g6 10 0-0 0-0 11 f4 h6 12 ♗xf6 ♜xf6 13 f5 ♜e7? (13...♜g5! is correct) was L.Aronian-S.Mamedyarov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.



Exercise (combination alert): Mamedyarov's last move was an error and Aronian found a hidden combination. Where is it?

Answer: Either knight to e4 traps the queen: 14 ♖de4! dxe4 15 ♜xe4 ♜h4 16 g3 ♜h3 17 ♜f2 ♜xf1+ 18 ♜xf1 and Aronian converted his advantage to take the full point.

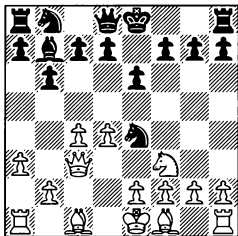
b) After 4...c5 5 g3 ♜c6 6 ♗g2 ♜e4 7 ♗d2 ♜xc3 8 bxc3 0-0 9 0-0 f5 10 ♗e3! ♜xc3 11 ♜d3 cxd4 12 ♜xd4 ♜e4 13 c5! White stood a shade better in G.Kasparov-A.Karpov, 13th matchgame, Moscow 1985. His bishop-pair, development lead and pressure on the b- and d-files mean more than Black's extra pawn.

c) 4...0-0 5 ♗g5 c5 6 ♜c1 cxd4 7 ♜xd4 h6 8 ♗h4 d5 9 e3 e5 10 ♜f3 g5!? 11 ♗g3 d4 12 exd4 exd4 13 ♜xd4 ♜b6 was R.Wojtaszek-V.Tkachiev, European Team Championship, Legnica 2013. I still prefer White, due to his bishop-pair in the open position after 14 a3 ♜xc3+ 15 bxc3 ♜d8.

5 ♜c2 ♗b7 6 a3

We transpose to a position which can also be reached from the 4 ♜c2 move order.

6...♜xc3+ 7 ♜xc3 ♜e4



A bit of a side line. Normal is 7...0-0, after which 8 e3 and 8 ♗g5 occur.

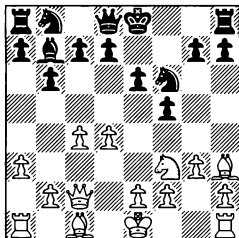
8 ♜c2 f5 9 g3

Instead, 9 e3 0-0 10 ♗e2 d6 11 0-0 ♜d7 12 b4 ♜f6 13 d5! (principle: counter in the centre when attacked on the wing; this pawn sacrifice is necessary for White's survival) 13...♗g6 (13...exd5 14 ♗b2 ♜g6 15 cxd5 ♗xd5 16 ♗c4 greatly reduces the potency of Black's attack and offers White excellent compensating play on the queenside) 14 ♜d4 ♜g5 15 g3 exd5?! (Black gets in trouble after this move; better is 15...♜e5! 16 ♜xe6 ♜xe6! 17 dxe6 ♜g6 when Black intends ...♜g5!, with a dangerous attack, Y.Drozdzovskij-A.Grischuk, Odessa 2007) 16 cxd5 ♗xd5 17 ♗c4 ♜xc4 18 ♜xc4+ ♜h8 19 ♜c6 ♜d8 20 ♜xc7 ♜e5 21 ♜a2 ♜f8 22 f4! ♜g4 23 ♜e7 ♜g8 24 ♜g2 saw Kramnik survive the onslaught and he went on to win by plundering Black's queenside pawns in V.Kramnik-J.Polgar, Sofia 2005. This game is annotated in *Kramnik: Move by Move*.

9...♜f6!?

Question: Why would Ivanchuk voluntarily retreat a well placed piece?

Answer: The move does appear a bit eccentric to me as well. I think the idea is that Ivanchuk was worried about White playing a future d5, and so with his last move suppresses it.
10 ♖h3!?



This startlingly original idea was new at the time of the game. Optically, it appears as incongruous as attending a rap concert where the background music of Debussy complements the violent lyrics.

Question: This almost looks like a random move.
Why would White aim his bishop at a wall on f5?

Answer: Most eccentric ideas also contain within their continuum, unpleasant consequences should matters stray from the original intent. However, this one seems quite sound and free of negative after-effects. The f5 wall isn't as sturdy as it appears. Carlsen intends to undermine it with a future d5, and if ...exd5, then ♕xf5, aiming his pieces at Black's king.

Question: Can't Black ruin this plan by tossing in ...g6?

Answer: The cost of weakening all the dark squares around his king is too high, especially since Black swapped away his dark-squared bishop. White would transfer his dark-squared bishop to the a1-h8 diagonal and play d5 anyway.

10...0-0 11 0-0 a5

Suppressing b4 and preparing ...♘a6. However, this plan does nothing to halt White's intent, which is to achieve the d5 break. 11...♞e8! looks like an improvement, since Black's

queen prepares to chase away the h3-bishop. 12 d5! ♖h5 13 ♗g2 exd5 was D.Balokas-H.Stefansson, Plovdiv 2012, where I still prefer White's position after 14 ♜d1.

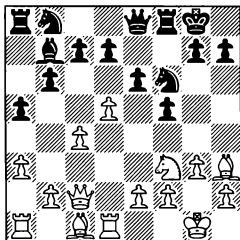
12 ♜d1

White can also toss in the immediate 12 d5! with an edge, since the position begins to open for his bishops.

12...♗e8

Black can also drive White's queen from f5 with 12...♗e4 13 ♛c3 ♗e8 14 ♗f4 ♖h5 15 ♗f1! d6 16 ♗g5! ♜e8 17 ♗xe4 fxe4. I prefer White's position: he has the bishop-pair, the potential to open the queenside with a c5 break, and a relatively safe king.

13 d5!



Principle: meet a wing attack with a central counter. Carlsen achieves his intent and can claim a slight yet nagging strategic edge due to his bishop-pair.

13...♗a6 14 ♗f4 exd5?

My observation has been that most positional players view an uncertain future as a kind of nervous suffering, while tacticians interpret uncertainty as a kind of adventure. Black must eventually capture on d5 (which opens the position for White's bishops), but it is mistimed.

Black should first toss in 14...♖h5! 15 ♗g2 exd5 16 ♗d4 ♜ae8 17 cxd5 ♗xd5 18 ♛c4 ♜e4!. This exchange sacrifice gives him plenty of compensation on the light squares: for example, 19 ♗f3 ♗g6 20 ♗xe4 fxe4 21 ♗e3 c6 when Black has a pawn for the exchange, a stable knight's post on d5, and has hopes for a potential light-squared assault on the king-side.

15 ♗xf5 dxc4?!

"The young are so very wilful," mutters Black's queen, as she watches her former e-pawn move further forward, against her counsel. Black's last move violates the principle: don't open the position when your opponent owns the bishop-pair.

Black should play to minimize his disadvantage with 15...♗e4! 16 ♗h3 ♖h5 17 ♗g2 a4!

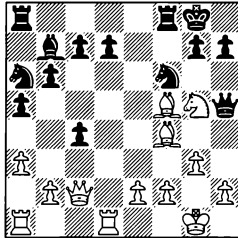
18 cxd5! (Black looks okay after 18 ♖xa4?! ♕ac5 19 ♜c2 dxc4 20 ♜xc4+ d5 21 ♜c2 ♖e6 22 ♜e3 c5) 18...♕ac5 19 d6! cxd6 20 ♜xd6 ♜f7 21 ♜f4 ♖b3 22 ♜c7! d6 23 ♜xb6 ♖xa1 24 ♜xa1. White stands better, with a pawn for the exchange, the bishop-pair, a safe king and multiple pawn targets on Black's end. However, this still looks better than the position Ivanchuk got in the game.

16 ♖g5!

Carlsen abandons his former agrarian way of life and prepares for the coming war on the kingside.

16...♜h5

Not 16...g6? 17 ♜xd7! ♖xd7 18 ♜xc4+ ♖g7 19 ♖e6+ ♖h8 20 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 21 ♖xf8 ♜d5 (21...♜xf8?? 22 ♜e5+ wins Black's queen) 22 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 23 ♖d7 with an extra pawn and a winning position for White.



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen's gift is his uncanny ability to out-assess rivals. Both sides deliberately entered this position. Ivanchuk mistakenly reasoned that his position is okay. The trouble is, it contains a hidden combination here. Take your time and try to find it.

Answer: Deflection/queen trap.

17 ♜xd7!

The rook blasts his way through on to the seventh rank. Black remains in the game after 17 ♜xd7? ♖c5! 18 ♜f5 ♖h8 19 f3 ♜ae8.

17...♖h8

The point behind Carlsen's move is shown in the line 17...♖xd7? 18 ♜xh7+ ♖h8 19 ♜g6 ♜g4 20 f3 and Black's queen is unexpectedly trapped on an open board.

18 ♜e7!?

Initiative over material. Carlsen isn't satisfied with being up a mere pawn after 18 ♜d4

♠c5 19 ♜xc4 ♙d5 20 ♜c3.

18...♙d5

"Now white minor pieces start a little dance," writes GM Alex Baburin.

19 ♙g4!

The bishop's faith wavers. He comes to the realization that his previous beliefs were incorrect. So he forsakes honesty and embraces deception. *Houdini* likes 19 ♜e5! ♙xf4 20 gxf4 when White threatens ♜e3 and ♜h3. Moreover, after 20...♜ae8 21 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 22 f3! he has a strategically won game.

19...♞g6

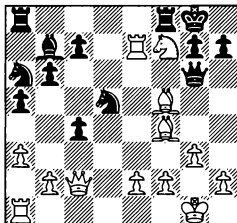
Black's stunned queen experiences difficulty in drawing breath to respond to the white bishop's outrageous proposal.

20 ♙f7+! ♙g8

20...♜xf7?? hangs material to 21 ♞xg6 (removal of the guard) 21...hxxg6 22 ♜xf7.

21 ♙f5!

One glance tells us that Black is in deep trouble. The question is: how deep?



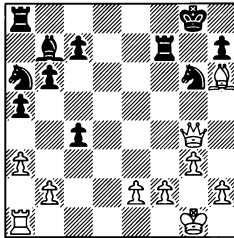
Exercise (critical decision): A bully tends to seek out an easy victim, shunning a potential victim who may fight back. The question here is: should Black's queen continue to allow the bullying to continue by playing 21...♞h5, or should she decide she has had enough and try the desperado queen sacrifice 21...♞xf5? Be careful. One of them loses quickly.

Answer: Desperado it is. Black has no choice but to sacrifice his queen.

21...♞xf5!

A tacit acceptance of an unpleasant fate is still a lot better than immediate annihilation. This is not a time for irresolute measures: 21...♞h5? 22 g4! with a crushing grip on the position and after 22...♞h4 23 ♙g3 ♞h3 24 ♙g5 ♞h6 25 ♜e5! ♠c5 26 ♞xc4 ♙h8 27 h4 ♜ad8 28 e4 ♙f6 29 ♙f7+ ♜xf7 30 ♞xf7 Black can resign.

22 ♖xf5 ♜xe7 23 ♜h6+! gxf6 24 ♖g4+ ♜g6 25 ♕xh6 ♜f7



Question: Black got a lot of material for the queen.
Do the minor pieces hold their own versus White's queen?

Answer: It does appear that after a long drought of privation, the heavens opened and gifted Black with their bounty. After all, a rook and two minor pieces for a queen and a pawn is mathematically favourable for Black. This time though, the alchemical fusing of opposite forces goes inert, due to a single quality absent in Black's position: the x-factor of an exposed king.

26 ♜d1 ♜e8 27 h4!

The black king gets a foretaste of his coming destruction, as another attacker is utilized. The threat: h5.

27...♜c5!

Ivanchuk finds the most tenacious defence, gathering up the frayed and tattered remnants of remaining resistance. After 27...♜h8? 28 h5 ♜f8 29 ♖xc4 ♜fe7 30 ♖d4+ ♜g8 31 ♖g4+ ♜h8 32 ♕d2! h6 33 ♕c3+ ♜h7 34 ♖d4 (threatening mate on the move) 34...♜d7 35 ♖d3+ Black lacks a playable block.

28 h5 ♕c8 29 ♖xc4

29 ♖g5?? allows Black a cheapo draw after 29...♜f5 30 ♖g4 (not 30 ♖c1?! ♜xh5 31 ♖xc4+ ♕e6 and it is Black who can now begin to play for the win) 30...♜f4! 31 ♖g5 ♜f5, with a forced repetition draw.

29...♜e5 30 ♖h4 ♜c6 31 ♜d5!

Carlsen pursues his attack with the delicacy of an elephant stomping over a field of flowers. Now Black must worry about ♜g5+.

31...♜e6

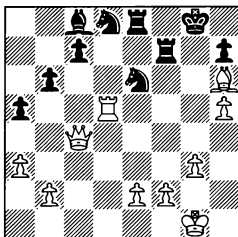
31...♜xe2?? walks into mate after 32 ♖d8+!

32 ♖c4

Carlsen unconsciously catches glimpses of a powerful idea, yet the details waver, shimmering away from consciousness. *Houdini* found 32 ♖a4! ♙b7 33 ♖g4+ ♕g7 34 ♜g5 ♜ee7 35 f4! ♜d4 36 f5! ♜dxf5 37 ♜xf5! ♜xf5 38 ♙xg7 and White wins.

32...♜cd8

32...♜e7 was a little more accurate, but there is no way Black can hold out in the long run: for example, 33 ♖a4 ♜ef8 34 ♜d2 ♕g7 35 e4! ♙g4 36 f4 ♙xh5 37 ♜d7 c5 38 ♖b3 (threat ♜xe7) 38...♜e8 39 ♖xb6 ♙f3 40 ♙xg7 ♜xg7 41 ♖xc5 is completely hopeless for Black.



Exercise (combination alert): Threats whirl around Black's king hallucinogenically, like carousel animals. Black's last move was a blunder in an already lost position. How did Carlsen end resistance?

Answer: Pin. Black's problem is, he needs his pinned e6-knight to defend his king.

33 ♖g4+

Black's sleeping king is awakened with a start by a savage poke in the ribs.

33...♜g7

Instead, 33...♜h8 (the king's glazed, uncomprehending stare is one of a new-born infant, dazzled by his alien surroundings, so different from the womb) 34 ♙d2! ♙b7 35 ♙c3+ ♕g7 36 ♜d7 ♜xd7 37 ♖xd7 ♜g8 38 h6 forces mate.

34 ♖xc8 1-0

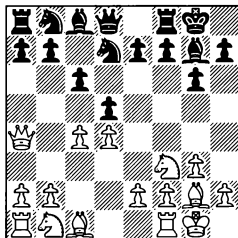
It's a toss-up as to which black piece is the most incompetent. The white queen's vote goes to the recently deceased c8-bishop.

Game 27
M.Carlsen-B.Gelfand
 Zurich 2014
Grünfeld Defence

1 c4 g6 2 d4 ♟f3 3 ♟f3 ♟g7 4 g3 c6 5 ♟g2 d5 6 ♟a4

Carlsen spurns symmetry stemming from the line 6 cxd5 cxd5, which tends to be one of the duller lines of the Neo-Grünfeld.

6...0-0 7 0-0 ♟fd7!?



Threat: ...♟b6. Gelfand's speciality.

Question: What is the point of retreating an already developed piece, moving it twice.

Answer: It does violate the principle: don't move the same piece more than once without cause in the opening. Now the words "without cause" are important, since Gelfand has a clear purpose behind his move. He plans to transfer the knight to b6 and develop the b8-knight to a6. This opens his g7-bishop's diagonal and gives him a piece preponderance on the queenside. Such ...♟fd7-b6 manoeuvres are common in Grünfelds, especially the g3 variety. More common, though, are 7...♟bd7 and 7...dxc4.

8 ♟c2

Instead, 8 cxd5 ♟b6 9 ♟d1 cxd5 10 ♟c3 ♟c6 11 h3 (11 ♟f4 ♟f5 12 ♟c1 ♟c8 13 b3 is also dead even, E.Pigusov-A.Huzman, Sverdlovsk 1987) 11...♟f5 12 ♟f4 ♟c8 13 ♟c1 ♟d7 14 g4! (14 ♟h2 is equal and safer) 14...♟e4 15 e3 f5 was N.Sedlak-M.Rodshtein, Valjevo 2012. The game remains balanced after 16 g5.

8...♟f6!?

Perhaps a tacit draw offer, hoping Carlsen will play his queen back to a4.

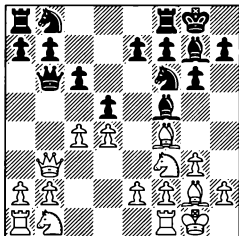
Question: Hmm. Yet another infraction of sacred opening principle. Didn't White pick up a move, since White's queen took two moves to reach c2, while Black's knight expended three to reach f6?

Answer: Correct. However, I'm not all that sure how important this tempo is, since Black can win it back with a future ... xf5 . More in the spirit of the line, though, is $8\dots\text{dxc4}$ $9\ \text{xc4}$ b6 $10\ \text{c2}$ a6 $11\ \text{c3}$ g4 $12\ \text{d1}$ b4 $13\ \text{b1}$ c8 $14\ \text{g5}$ d4d5 $15\ \text{c1}$ e8 $16\ \text{h6}$ dxc3 $17\ \text{bxc3}$ hxh6 $18\ \text{hxh6}$ xf3 $19\ \text{xf3}$ e5 $20\ \text{dxe5}$ xe5 $21\ \text{d4}$ f8 . Black stands at least equal, since he owns the superior pawn structure, L.Fressinet-B.Gelfand, Paris/St Petersburg 2013.

$9\ \text{f4}$ f5

Okay, there goes White's extra tempo.

$10\ \text{b3}$ b6



$11\ \text{bd2}$

A new move in the position, but not exactly an earth-shattering theoretical novelty which will keep the folks at Chesspub abuzz for weeks. $11\ \text{c5}$ doesn't promise White anything either: $11\dots\text{xb3}$ $12\ \text{axb3}$ bd7 and White's queenside space doesn't really amount to anything here, Nguyen Huynh Tuan-Phan Ba Thanh, Chiangmai 2013.

$11\dots\text{e4}$

Otherwise, $11\dots\text{bd7}$ looks more solid, while $11\dots\text{xb3}$ $12\ \text{dxb3}$? (or $12\ \text{axb3}$ with a structure similar to the game's continuation) $12\dots\text{a5}$ $13\ \text{dxc5}$ fd7 ? $14\ \text{dxb7}$ is met with $14\dots\text{a7}$ $15\ \text{dxc5}$ dxc5 $16\ \text{dxc5}$ dxc4 $17\ \text{e5}$ b7 when Black's rook applies pressure down the b-file. White can just simplify with $18\ \text{b3}$, which looks about even.

$12\ \text{e3}$ xb3

The sisters greet one another politely yet a tad frostily.

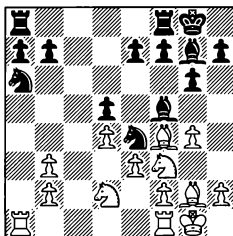
13 axb3

Carlsen prefers to open the a-file rather than go for 13 ♖xb3 ♜d7 14 ♖a5 f6! 15 cxd5 cxd5 16 ♙c7 ♜fc8 17 ♜fc1 b6 18 ♜c6 ♜xc7 19 ♜xe7+ ♜f7 20 ♜xc7 ♜xe7 21 ♜ac1 ♙f8. I don't think Black stands worse in this unbalanced ending.

13...♖a6 14 cxd5 cxd5

Neither party seems disposed to take action. This is about to change. We sense stillness within activity, the way sparrows in a tree may suddenly grow quiet at the approach of one of the neighbourhood cats.

15 g4!!



A skilled sculptor finds a way to chip and hack animation from otherwise cold stone. Some moves are double exclams, not for their inherent strength, but for their depth of creativity. This one qualifies as the latter. There lies an intimation of insolent defiance behind the g-pawn's outer appearance of courtesy toward the f5-bishop. Sometimes a show of bravado can be a substitute in lieu of a clear idea – but not in this case. We who watched this game live over the internet were staggered by Carlsen. His style isn't one which normally thrives on contradictions, but when the mood is upon him, he certainly does a great imitation of Korchnoi or Larsen at their most aberrant.

Question: This move looks like lunacy, giving away a pawn for basically nothing. What compensation does Carlsen get?

Answer: I was afraid you were going to ask that question! Carlsen's plan isn't so easy to articulate, but I will try. For the pawn:

1. White finds a quirky way to blast open the centre.
2. With the centre open, White's bishop, coupled with the rook's pressure down the a-file, puts an enormous strain on Black's now shaky queenside.

Believe it or not, *Houdini* gives Carlsen's idea glowing approval with the thumbs up

sign, preferring White's position at the end of every variation. I expected something far calmer, like 15 ♖a5 e6 16 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 17 ♜fa1 intending ♜b5.

15...♙xg4

"Negotiating with a lunatic is a waste of time," thinks the bishop to himself. Now, shifting events fall upon Gelfand with bewildering rapidity.

Had Gelfand foreseen the full ramifications of Carlsen's idea, he may have considered partially chickening out with 15...♜xd2 16 ♜xd2 ♙e6 (the only move) 17 ♜b1! ♜b4 18 ♜c3 b6 (or 18...♜fc8 19 ♖a5 b6 20 ♜b5! ♜d3 21 ♙g3 ♙xg4 22 ♜xd5 ♙f8 23 ♜b4 ♙e2 24 ♙xa8 ♜xb4 25 ♜xb4 ♙xf1 26 ♜xf1 ♜xa8 27 ♜c4 when White's rook invades the seventh rank and Black is the one fighting for the draw) 19 h3, although admittedly this isn't so tempting for Black. By magic, White stands clearly better, since Black's queenside is weakened and prone to infiltration, and his pieces are passively placed.

16 ♜xe4 dxe4 17 ♜d2 f5

If White regains the sacrificed e4-pawn, he stands better, so Gelfand responds logically, walking into the teeth of Carlsen's idea.

18 f3! e5?!

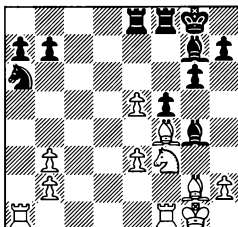
Gelfand places faith in his internal voice, which begs him to remain true to his aggressive style and fight for the initiative. He plays the move with the philosophy: if a risky action is never undertaken, there is a 100% probability that potential rewards will never transpire. So he decides to tend to domestic issues, rather than waste precious resources and energy into a war which can never be won on the queenside. Yet this attempt to seize an initiative may be an overreaction, and a sign that Carlsen's idea worked wonders on a psychological level. White's activity isn't curbed even an iota by this blocking sacrifice, which denies White's knight use of e5.

Sometimes the indirect, laid back approach can be more efficient than the more direct one. Gelfand should just cooperate with 18...exf3! 19 ♜xf3 ♜ad8 20 h3 ♙xf3! (or 20...♙h5 21 ♜e5 ♙xe5 22 ♙xe5 ♜d7 23 ♖a5 ♜fd8 24 ♜fa1 ♙e2! 25 ♙f4 ♜f7 26 ♜f2 ♙d3 27 ♙f3 ♙e4 28 ♙e2 ♜b4 29 ♜xa7 ♜c8 when Black doesn't stand worse) 21 ♙xf3 e6 22 ♙xb7 ♜b4 (now it's risky for White to grab a7 and walk into a self-pin) 23 ♖a4 ♜d5 24 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 25 ♜c1 e5 26 dxe5 ♙xe5 27 ♜xa7 ♙xf4 28 exf4 ♜f7 29 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 30 ♜c7+ ♜f6 31 ♜xh7 ♜b5 32 ♜d7 ♜xb3 33 ♜g2 ♜xb2+, with a draw.

19 dxe5 exf3 20 ♜xf3

Now ♜d4 is in the air and Black's queenside is threatened with collapse.

20...♜ae8



21 ♖a5!

Multipurpose, giving his advanced e-pawn coverage and denying Black ...c5 ideas.

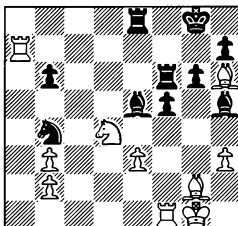
21...c4 22 d4!

Unleashing his light-squared bishop. This looks even stronger than 22 ♖xa7 ♗xf3 23 ♗xf3 ♗xe5 24 ♖xb7 ♗xf4 25 exf4 ♖b8 26 ♖d7 ♖fd8 27 ♖fd1 ♗xd7 28 ♖xd7 ♖c8 29 ♖d4 when Black will be hard pressed to save himself in the ending, where he is down a pawn, while White's owns the superior minor piece.

22...b6 23 ♖xa7 ♗xe5 24 ♗h6 ♖f6!

After 24...♖f7? 25 ♖a4 ♗d6 26 h3 ♗h5 27 ♖fa1! ♖fe7 28 ♗f1! ♗f7 29 ♗g5 White wins the exchange, since 29...♖b7?? is met by 30 ♗c4+ ♗f8 31 ♖a7 with a mating attack.

25 h3 ♗h5



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen found a startling shot in the position. This one isn't so easy. What would you play here?

Answer: Deflection.

26 ♖c2!

The oily knight tends to affect a blatantly ingratiating smile in the presence of his b4 cousin.

26...g5!

If in the normal course of events, we are destined for defeat, our best course may be to embrace the abnormal in order to confuse. Gelfand finds the only move to remain alive.

Instead, 26...♖xc2? 27 ♔d5+ (the bishop confesses in advance for the sin he is about to commit) 27...♗fe6 (not 27...♜h8?? 28 ♔g7 mate) 28 ♖c1 ♔f3 (if 28...♖b4?? 29 ♔xe6+ ♗xe6 30 ♖c8+ and White mates next move) 29 ♔xe6+ ♗xe6 30 ♖xc2 ♔c6 31 ♔g5 ♔g7 32 ♗d2 leaves White up a full exchange, with initiative.

27 ♔xg5 ♗g6 28 ♗xf5 h6 29 ♔xh6

The cruel vivisection of Black's kingside continues unabated. Carlsen once again rejects the option of entering a favourable technical ending after 29 ♖xb4 ♗xg5 30 ♗xg5+ hxg5 31 ♔d5+ ♜f8 32 ♖c6 ♔xb2 33 ♜f2.

29...♗xh6

Alternatively, 29...♔f3 30 ♗g5 ♗xg5 31 ♔xg5 ♔xg2 32 ♖xb4 ♔xh3 33 ♖d5 ♔e6 34 ♖e7+! ♜g7 35 ♖c6+ ♜g6 36 ♖xe5+ ♜xg5 37 ♖f3+ ♜f5 38 ♜f2 when b3 is safe and White should convert.

30 ♖xb4 ♔xb2

30...♔g6 31 ♗f2 ♜h8 32 ♖d5 is also unlikely to save Black.

31 ♖d5 ♜h8 32 ♗b7

Gelfand's energetically futile resistance does little to slow White's increasing piece activity. A second pawn falls. Note how ineffective Black's bishop-pair is in this wide open position. The reason is that they are denied targets in White's camp.

32...♔d1 33 b4 ♗g8 34 ♖e7

Carlsen goes for Black's king rather than bother with 34 ♗xb6 which also wins.

34...♗xh3?? isn't playable, due to 35 ♖e7! ♗g7 36 ♗f8+ ♜h7 37 ♖f5 ♗g4 38 ♗f7+ ♔g7 39 ♗bb7, winning.

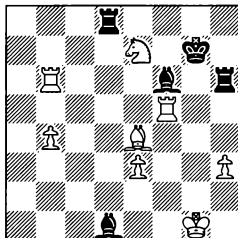
34...♗d8 35 ♔e4!

This move effectively ties Black's d8-rook to the back rank.

35...♔f6

35...♗d2?? walks into 36 ♗f8+ ♜g7 (the squealing king is dragged from his hiding place, under his bed) 37 ♖g6+! ♗d7 38 ♗xd7 mate.

36 ♗xb6 ♜g7



Exercise (combination alert): White should win if he simply plays 37 ♖b7, protecting the knight. Instead, Carlsen found yet another shot, in a shot-filled game. It's White to play and win material.

Answer: Clearance.

37 ♖f2! 1-0

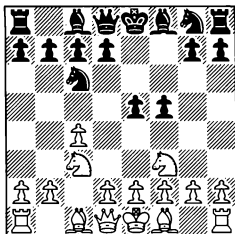
Yet further glum tidings come Black's way. The threat is a knight fork on f5. Now if Black plays 37...♗xe7 (37...♗g4 38 ♔d5! wins material as well, since two black pieces hang), then 38 ♗g2+ drives Black's king away from protection of h6 and after 38...♗f7 39 ♗xh6 Black's current bank account is indistinguishable from outright poverty.

If you play through this game without seeing the names, you would swear a computer played Carlsen's side, whose moves were eerily inhuman throughout the game.

Game 28
P.Svidler-M.Carlsen
Stavanger 2014
English Opening

Is Svidler a difficult opponent for Carlsen? His disastrous final round loss to Svidler in the 2013 Candidates tournament nearly cost Carlsen his shot to challenge Anand for the world championship. And here, Carlsen's failure to win (which *The Week in Chess* called Carlsen's "scandalously bad" misadventure) allowed Karjakin to take first at the Norway Chess 2014 super-GM tournament, leaving Carlsen in a very strange zone, to which he is unaccustomed: second place.

1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♙c6 3 ♚f3 f5



Very ambitious.

Question: Is this turning into a kind of English versus Dutch?

Answer: You can look at it that way, or think of it as a reversed Grand Prix Attack versus the Sicilian.

4 d3

Svidler plays it as if on the black side of a Sicilian. White can also try the more forceful 4 d4 e4 5 ♘g5 ♙b4 (I would probably opt for the line 5...♙f6 6 e3 h6 7 ♘h3 g5 8 f3 exf3 9 ♙xf3 d6 10 ♚f2 ♙e7 with dynamic equality, J.Lautier-P.Nikolic, Horgen 1994) 6 ♘h3 ♙f6 7 e3 ♙xc3+ 8 bxc3 d6 9 ♚f4 0-0 10 h4 ♙e7 11 c5! ♙d8 (11...dxc5 12 ♙a3 gives White a strong initiative) 12 ♙b3+ ♙e6 13 ♙c4 ♙e8 14 ♙a3 when Black found himself under pressure in the centre and queenside, *Comp Fritz Primergy K800-V*.Kramnik, Frankfurt 2000.

4...♙f6 5 g3 ♙b4

Question: Wouldn't it be better to place the bishop on c5, in order to take aim at f2?

Answer: It's actually a thought, since White already tossed in d3, so now e3 and d4 comes at a loss of tempo for White: 5...♙c5 6 ♙g2 d6 7 0-0 0-0 8 e3 ♙b6 (I would play 8...a6 to preserve the dark-squared bishop) 9 ♚a4 ♙e8 10 a3 ♙d7 11 ♘xb6 axb6 12 b3 ♙h5. I'm not sure how to assess this position, since I tend to like Black's kingside space and attacking chances, but White's bishop-pair shouldn't be underestimated either, L.Valdes-A.Romero Holmes, San Jose 2013.

6 ♙g2

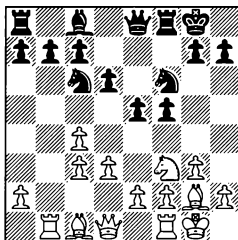
White can also avoid the change to his structure with 6 ♙d2 0-0 7 ♙g2 d6 (7...e4!? 8 dxe4 ♙xe4 9 ♙c1 d6 10 0-0 ♙xc3 11 ♙xc3 ♙e7 12 b3 a5 13 ♙d4 looks just a shade better

for White) 8 0-0 ♗d7 9 a3 ♖xc3 10 ♗xc3 ♜e8 11 e3, but Black looks okay to me, having rid himself of his bad bishop, N.Grandelius-H.Tikkanen, German League 2011.

6...♗xc3+

Generally Black hands over the bishop as quickly as possible, and then switches his structure to favour his remaining bishop. I think Black came out of the opening well, since he gets obvious kingside attacking prospects with the coming Grand Prix plan: ...♜e8, ...♜h5, ...f4 and ...♗h3. I don't see an easy way for White to open either the queenside or the centre.

7 bxc3 d6 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♖b1 ♜e8



Multipurpose: Black intends to eventually switch over to kingside attacking mode with ...♜h5. Also, on e8, Black enables ...b6 to untangle his queenside.

10 ♜b3?!

I think Black actually stands better after this move, with hindsight of Carlsen's coming new idea. Maybe White should think about the immediate 10 c5! ♜h5 (White takes over the initiative if Black accepts with 10...dxc5!? 11 ♗a3 e4 12 dxe4 fxe4 13 ♘d2 e3 14 ♗xc5 exd2 15 ♗xf8 ♙xf8 16 ♜xd2 b6 17 ♜f4 when *Houdini* says Black is okay, while I like White, who holds the initiative, with very little material investment; instead, 10...d5 11 ♗g5 ♜h5 was E.Ubilava-J.Kristiansen, Kecskemet 1989, and again I prefer White after 12 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 13 ♜b3) 11 cxd6 cxd6 12 ♗a3 ♖d8 13 ♜d2, discouraging ...f4 and thinking about ♜g5. I prefer White due to the open lines on the queenside, R.Vaganian-R.Dzindzichashvili, Saint John 1988.

10...b6!

A new move and a possible improvement over 10...♗h8 and 10...♜h5. Carlsen leisurely secures his queenside structure before beginning his kingside assault. Now both ...f4 and ...e4 are in the air, and I don't see compensating central or queenside play for White.

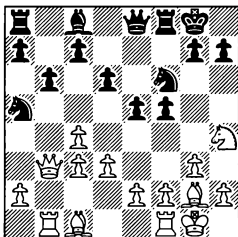
11 ♘h4?!

The knight decides to sulk on the periphery. This is the inception of a god-awful plan,

which lands Svidler in a terrible mess against a reigning world champion. The attempt to exploit the long diagonal turns out to be a waste of time for White.

White gets nothing now for the pawn sacrifice 11 c5+? ♖e6 12 ♜a4 dxc5 13 ♘g5 ♙d7 and his initiative runs out of fuel. Maybe White should, though, be thinking about survival mode with 11 ♙g5, in order to play ♙xf6, to reduce Black's kingside attacking force.

11...♘a5!?



12 ♜a3?

The queen's unbecoming frown mars what would have been a beautiful face.

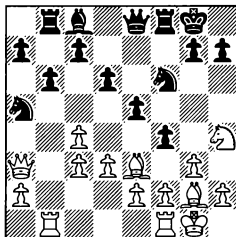
Question: Isn't White's queen simply out of play on a3?

Answer: Absolutely correct. Svidler perhaps conjured some notion about a c5 trick, which never came to pass. In doing so, his queen is led on an expedition into the hinterland, when Black is about to launch a kingside attack. The funny thing is, this is a mistake a club-level player would never make. Only a 2750+ player would try this move, having (incorrectly) seen too many moves ahead. Correct is the obvious 12 ♜c2.

12...♞b8 13 ♙e3?

An effect doesn't necessarily arise from a single cause. Svidler, who decides to ignore the mountain of empirical evidence, decides to go with his heart, compounding his error by continuing with his c5 fantasy, which never crosses reality's boundary. Now he invites Black's very dangerous next move.

13...f4!



Carlsen is alert to the discrepancy on the kingside and decides to confront his opponent on that wing. We deduce the following properties in Black's attack:

1. White's queen is nowhere to be seen and isn't about to help out her king any time soon.
2. White's bishop has conveniently posted itself on e3, after which ...f4 comes with tempo.
3. This in turn means that White's knight will be left dangling on h4, costing Svidler more time.

Conclusion: White is busted, mainly due to his eccentric ♖h4?!, ♜b3?!, ♜a3? and ♙e3? queenside fantasy. Such pawn sacrifices are almost rote in Grand Prix structures. This time the idea's potency is greatly magnified by the fact that White's queen is on vacation on a3, unable to help in the defence of her king.

14 gxf4

Not much choice. White is unlikely to survive the loss of tempo with 14 ♙d2.

14...♜h5

Thanks for the free tempo! The white queen's hand subconsciously cups her throat upon seeing her mean spirited sister enter the other side of the room.

15 ♖f3 ♙h3

Carlsen continues to propagate his subversive agenda along the kingside light squares, unsatisfied with a mere strategic edge with 15...e4 16 ♖g5 exd3 17 exd3 h6 18 ♖e4 ♖xe4 19 dxe4 ♙h3 20 f3 ♙xg2 21 ♖xg2 ♖xc4 22 ♜b3 ♜f7 when Black's powerful knight clearly outshines White's remaining bishop.

16 ♙xh3

16 fxe5?? loses to 16...♖g4 17 ♜fc1 ♙xg2 18 ♖xg2 ♜xf3 19 exf3 ♜xh2+ 20 ♖f1 ♖xe3+! 21 fxe3 ♜f8 22 f4 ♜d2! 23 ♜e1 ♜xd3+ 24 ♖f2 dxe5 with a winning attack for Black: 25 ♜bd1 ♜c2+ 26 ♖f3 ♜h2! (contemplating ...e4+) 27 ♜e7 ♜h3+ 28 ♖f2 exf4 f4 is a repository for White's pain.

16...♜xh3 17 ♖h1

Svidler hopes to turn a vice into a virtue, looking for play along the newly opened g-file.

17...♖be8

Another attacker joins the fight.

18 ♜b2

Too little, too late. White's queen covers e2, in an attempt to return to her defensive duties. 18 ♜g1?? loses on the spot to 18...exf4 19 ♙c1 ♜xe2 20 ♜g5 ♜xd3 21 ♜b4 ♜e4.

18...e4! 19 ♜g5

19 dxe4 undermines the defence of c4: 19...♜xe4 20 ♜g1 ♜xf4! 21 ♜g2 ♜g4 22 ♜xg4 ♜xg4 23 ♜g1 ♜e6 and ...♜xc4 is coming, with a strategically won game for Black.

19...♜h5 20 dxe4 ♜g4

Threatening mate on the move.

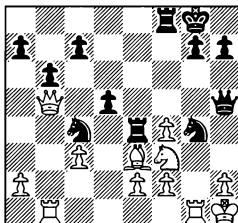
21 ♜f3 ♜xc4

Even this knight which languished on a5 has something to contribute to Black's steadily growing attack/initiative.

22 ♜b3 ♜xe4 23 ♜g1 d5

Carlsen completes his light square domination with disarming ease, and Svidler's position is close to collapse. *Houdini* evaluates at a whopping '-3.30' – the equivalent of more than three pawns up for Black.

24 ♜b5



Exercise (critical decision): Black's cup runneth over and we sense an atmosphere of dire imminence upon White's wobbly defensive construct. Before Carlsen lies an array of strategic wealth: a) 24...♜xf4, smashing White's pawn barrier and adding another attacker to the fray. b) 24...♜xf2+, intending to decimate White's kingside light squares after 25 ♙xf2 ♜xe2. c) 24...c5, calmly cutting White's queen out of the equation. d) 24...♜xc3. Nothing fancy. Just eliminate a key defender. All four lead to Black's advantage. However, three of the lines are winning for Black, while the other allows White hope. Your job is to avoid the odd-man-out line. Which line would you play?

24...xfxf4?

The world champion picks the fanciest and worst option, with this deflection trick. Here we see a rare example of Carlsen's nearly infallible intuitive process taking an extended vacation. He plays the only move which keeps White in the game. One curious thing I have noted in my own games over the years, is this: oddly enough, for the winning side, it is better to have just one winning line, rather than three or four. The problem is you get dazzled by all the glitter and sometimes pick the non-existent win number four, just as Carlsen did in this instance.

Answer: Lines 'b', 'c' and 'd' are all crushing. For example:

b) 24...xfxf2+! (the knight unnerves all those within close proximity to him) 25 xf2 xf2 (both f2 and f3 hang simultaneously) 26 g3 xf2 27 bg1 g6 28 d7 f7 29 c8+ g7 30 h3 d6! 31 e6 f5 32 xf5 xf5 33 g5 e7 34 xh7+ f6 35 xe7 xe7 36 e1+ d7 when White's position is a ruin and he can resign.

c) 24...c5! 25 c6 cxe3 26 fe3 f2+ 27 g2 h3! and if 28 ge1 g4+ 29 f1 xe3 30 xd5+ f8 and there is no reasonable defence to...xf4.

d) 24...cxe3! 25 fe3 f2+ 26 g2 h3! with a crush similar to line c.

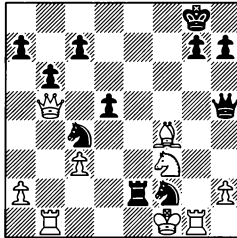
25 xf4

The bishop rises to the challenge to silence his drunken heckler.

25...xf2+ 26 g2 xe2

Threat: ...h3 mate. Optically, this looks brutal for White.

27 f1!

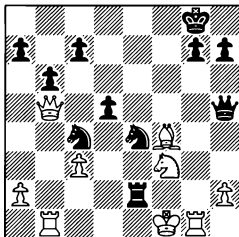


Svidler unearths his only chance. A smugly lazy smile of contentment curves on the king's face, as he witnesses the black attacker's distress. Sometimes an idea can be simultaneously inspiring and ridiculous. It is a geometric miracle that Black doesn't have an instantaneous win here. If not for this stunning resource, White would have to resign. If I ever write *Svidler: Move by Move*, I plan to cut and paste this game (maybe with some added jokes) into the Defence chapter.

27...♞e4!

Carlsen finds his only resource to play for the win.

One deep point of Svidler's idea is that 27...♞xf3 allows White 28 ♖g3! ♜e4 29 ♜d7!!, letting the b1-rook fall with check. After 29...♞xb1+ (29...g6 30 ♜c8+ ♜f7 31 ♞xc7+ ♜g8 32 ♜d8+ is still drawn) 30 ♜xe2 White threatens two separate mates on the move and Black must take a draw with 30...♜d1+ 31 ♜xf2 ♜c2+ 32 ♜e1 ♜b1+ 33 ♜e2 ♜c2+.



Exercise (critical decision): White's king is under assault and we must find little patches of meaning from the jumble. His options after 27...♞e4: a) Go Neville Chamberlain on Black and try appeasement, with 28 ♜xe2 ♞xc3+ 29 ♜f2 ♞xb5, and hope you get enough for the queen. b) Go Winston Churchill, fighting to the last man, woman and child with 28 ♖xg7+. Only one of the two keeps White alive. Which one?

Answer: Only the desperado rook sacrifice on g7 keeps White in the game.

28 ♖xg7+!

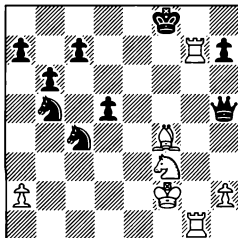
The rook never denigrates an enemy behind his back. Instead, he prefers to offend him face to face, and g7 is fodder for White's malice.

28 ♜xe2? doesn't cut it for White. After 28...♞xc3+ 29 ♜f2 ♞xb5 30 ♖xb5 ♜f5 31 ♖h6 g6 Black's queen and four pawns should be decisive against White's two rooks and minor piece, since White's king is eternally exposed and Black's king remains relatively safe.

28...♜f8?!

Carlsen keeps winning chances alive only with acceptance of the offer. After 28...♜xg7! 29 ♜d7+ ♜f7 30 ♜g4+ ♜g6 31 ♜d7+ it looks like perpetual check, but Black has a tricky way out: 31...♜h8! 32 ♜c8+ ♜g8 33 ♜xg8+ ♜xg8 34 ♜xe2 ♞xc3+ 35 ♜d3 ♞xb1 36 ♜xc7 ♞ba3 37 ♜b8 ♞b5 38 ♞d4!. It isn't clear if Black can pull out the win, but this was still Carlsen's best chance.

29 ♜xe2! ♞xc3+ 30 ♜f2 ♞xb5 31 ♖bg1!



The unthinkable occurred: White's initiative looks equally as dangerous as Black's, whose king finds himself in serious danger.

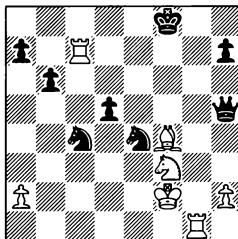
31...♖c3?!

Carlsen reels from the sudden shift of events. He should play 31...♖bd6! 32 ♜g8+ ♔f7 33 ♜1g7+ ♔f6! (33...♔e6?? walks into 34 ♖g5+ ♔f5 35 ♜f8+ ♔g4 36 h3+ ♔h4 37 ♜g3 mate) 34 ♜xc7 d4! (Black gives his king air on d5) 35 ♖xd4 (Cutting off both f5 and e6 from Black's king) 35...♜d1 36 ♜f8+ ♔g6 37 ♜g8+ ♔f6 with perpetual check.

32 ♜xc7

Houdini suggests 32 ♜g8+! ♔f7 33 ♜1g7+ ♔f6 (the king mutters insults at a volume just below his tormentor's level of hearing) 34 ♜xc7 ♖e4+ 35 ♔g2 when White's king looks safer than Black's. "For us mere mortals, human beings, the lines around here, and the similar positions, are virtually incalculable," writes GM Mikhail Golubev.

32...♖e4+



Exercise (critical decision): Now the game is dead even, according to *Houdini* – conditional upon White finding the only move. He can play his king to g2, e2 and e1. Only one of the squares is correct. Which one?

Answer: e1 is the only safe haven for White's king.

33 ♖e1!

The other two lead to problems:

a) 33 ♖g2?? ♜g4+ 34 ♙g3 ♜e3+ 35 ♖h1 ♜xf3+ 36 ♜g2 ♜xg2 mate.

b) 33 ♖e2? ♜c5 34 ♜c8+ ♜f7 35 ♜c7+ ♜f6 36 ♜c6+ ♜e6! (there is no perpetual check and Black threatens ...♜e8! trapping the c6-rook) 37 ♜g5 ♜e8 ♜d4 ♜xc6! 39 ♜f5+ ♜g6 40 ♜g5+ ♜xg5! 41 ♜xc6 ♜f5 42 ♙xg5 ♜xg5 43 ♜xa7 ♜f4 leaves Black up a pawn in the ending, with the better king position to boot.

33...♜c5

This leads to perpetual check, but Black had nothing better. 33...♜xf3?? walks into 34 ♙h6+ ♖e8 35 ♜g8+ ♜f8 36 ♜xf8 mate.

34 ♜c8+ ♜f7 35 ♜c7+ ♜f8

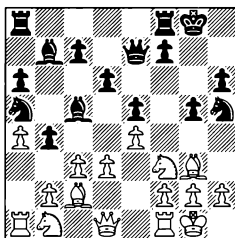
35...♖e6 36 ♜d4+ ♜f6 37 ♜c6+ fails to change anything.

36 ♜c8+ ♜f7 37 ♜c7+ ♜f8 ½-½

Chapter Four

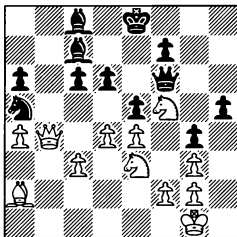
Carlsen on Exploiting Imbalances

I believe Magnus Carlsen is the strongest pure positional player in the world today, and is capable of milking even the subtlest, gossamer edge to victory over the world's elite players. Chess is a strange game where two unbelievably gifted players can disagree on an assessment – and maybe both be right. The difference with Carlsen over his peers: he tends to be just a bit more right than everyone else when it comes to the subtlest levels of assessment, which in turn allows him to implement virtually untranslatable unbalancing shifts into a reality over the board. When his ideas come into visible formation from the mists, it feels to us like we are astronomers, whose eyes are dazzled when a previously undetected star swims into our line of vision.



Carlsen was White against Sokolov, and very clearly the imbalance factor has clearly

gone miserably awry for him. Black not only leads in development, but also seems to be in the process of seizing initiatives on both sides of the board. Also, Black will soon pick up the bishop-pair. Now let's fast forward 20 moves, and we reach this position:



What an imbalance difference:

1. Black's initiative, which once raged unchecked, slowly subsided and is no more.
 2. White's knights dominate over Black's bishop-pair.
 3. Black's pieces feel unmoored (especially his knight), wandering about in their new structureless environment.
 4. Black suffers on the light squares.
- Such is Carlsen's strategic magic.

Game 29
J.Lautier-M.Carlsen
Khanty-Mansiysk 2005
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3

The Rubinstein Variation of the Nimzo-Indian.

4...0-0 5 ♗d3 d5

5...c5, 5...b6, 5...d6 and 5...♗xc3+ are also played here.

6 ♘f3 c5 7 0-0 dxc4 8 ♗xc4

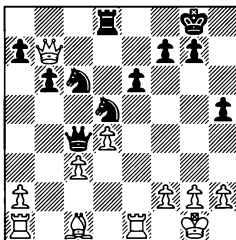
The players head for a classical isolani position.

8...♗bd7

Another line runs 8...cxd4 9 exd4 b6 and then:

a) 10 ♗e2 ♗b7 11 ♖d1 ♗xc3 (the position alters from isolani to hanging pawns, with White picking up the bishop-pair) 12 bxc3 ♗c7 13 ♗b2!? ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3? (I tend to like

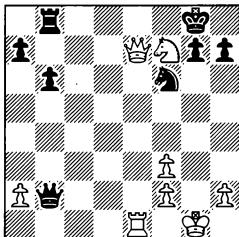
Black's chances in positions after 14 gxf3 ♖c6, but a natural attacker may like White, who may use the open g-file against Black's king with ideas like ♖h1 and ♖g1) 14...♗xc4! 15 ♗xa8 ♖c6 16 ♗b7 ♖d5! (White's queen is cut off and Black's knights attain Nimzowitsch's dream posts) 17 ♖e1 ♖b8 18 ♗d7 ♖d8 19 ♗b7 h5 No draw! 20 ♖c1? (White had to try something like 20 g3, but his position doesn't appear so healthy after 20...h4).



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win heavy material.

Answer: White's queen is trapped and the only way to extricate it is to hand over heavy material: 20...♖a5! 21 ♗xa7 ♗c6! 22 ♗a6 (White's queen, desperately hoping to escape, expresses deep regret at the brevity of her visit and mutters something about an urgent appointment) 22...♖c4 23 ♖b1 ♖c7 0-1, E.Vladimirov-G.Kasparov, Batumi (rapid) 2001. This game is annotated in *The Caro-Kann: Move by Move*.

b) 10 ♖g5 ♖b7 11 ♖e1 ♖bd7 12 ♖c1 ♖c8 13 ♗b3 ♖e7 (the odd 13...♖a5 avoids White's coming combination) 14 ♖xf6! ♖xf6 (14...♖xf6 15 ♖b5 looks slightly uncomfortable for Black) 15 ♖xe6!? fxe6?! (15...♖c7! 16 ♖g5 ♗xd4 17 ♖xf7 ♖c5 18 ♖d8+ ♖h8 19 ♖xb7 ♗xf2+ 20 ♖h1 ♖xb7 21 ♗c4 ♗d4 looks okay for Black) 16 ♗xe6+ ♖h8 17 ♗xe7 ♖xf3 18 gxf3 ♗xd4 19 ♖b5! ♗xb2?! (19...♗d2 was necessary) 20 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 21 ♖d6 ♖b8 22 ♖f7+ ♖g8.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and force the win.

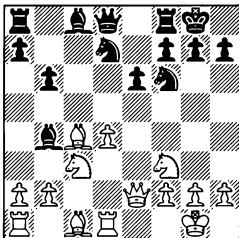
Answer: Discovered check/smothered mate threat/weak back rank: 23 ♖e6! ♜f8 (23...h5 24 ♜g5+ ♜h8 25 ♜f5 ♜f8 26 ♜g6 ♜xa2 27 ♜e7 ♜g8 28 ♜e6 wins) 24 ♜d8+! ♜h8 25 ♜e7! 1-0 Black's rook has no place to go, since g8 allows a smothered mate, V.Kramnik-G.Kasparov, London 2000.

9 ♜e2 b6 10 ♜d1 cxd4

Black can also stubbornly refuse to cooperate and play 10...♙b7 11 d5 exd5 12 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 13 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 14 ♜xd5 ♜e7 15 a3 ♙a5 16 e4 with a minimal edge to White, who has the superior majority and the more active pieces.

11 exd4

11 ♜xd4 ♙b7 is, of course, much too mild to hope for an opening edge.



11...♙xc3!

I think the correct decision. Carlsen decides to immediately enter a hanging pawn position, handing over the bishop-pair in the process.

· **Question:** Why can't Black play a pure isolani position after 11...♙b7?

Answer: It allows White the annoying 12 d5 ♙xc3 13 dxe6 ♙xf3 14 gxf3 fxe6 15 bxc3 ♖c7 16 ♙xe6+ ♜h8, as in V.Topalov-L.Aronian, Stavanger 2013. I prefer White's bishops over Black's structural edge after 17 ♙e3.

12 bxc3 ♖c7 13 ♙b2

Lautier backs up c3, preparing to move his c4-bishop and then play c4. Instead, after 13 ♙a3 ♜e8 14 ♜ac1 ♙b7 15 ♜e5 ♜xe5 16 dxe5 ♜e4 17 ♜d4 ♜c5 18 ♜e1 ♜ed8 we arrive in a classic case of superior activity and attacking chances, versus superior structure. Whose side you prefer probably depends upon your style, O.Cvitan-I.Saric, Split 2011.

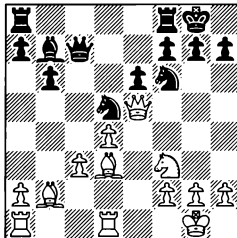
13...♙b7 14 ♙d3 ♜d5!

"A strong move by Carlsen. He actively seeks an exchange with ...♜f4, after which he would stand at least equal," writes Nimzo-Indian specialist GM John Emms in *The Nimzo-Indian: Move by Move*. 14...♜g4?, threatening ...♙xf3, followed by ...♖xh2, is met with 15 ♙xh7+! ♜xh7 16 ♜g5+ ♜g8 17 ♖xg4 when Black has nothing to show for his lost pawn.

15 ♖e4

We chess players tend to experience an almost sacred sense of ecstasy when we allow our minds to contemplate an upcoming, vulgar mate in one threat, dreaming of the trillion-to-one possibility that our opponent may fall into it.

15...♜f6 16 ♖e5!



A new move and an improvement one over 16 ♖h4?! ♜f4 17 ♙f1? (White should cut his losses and hand over the bishop-pair with 17 ♜e1 ♜xd3 18 ♜xd3 ♜ac8, with advantage to Black, who controls the light squares) 17...♙xf3 18 gxf3 ♜6h5 19 ♜e1 f5! when ...♙f6! is in

the air and Black's knights rule with an iron dark-square blockade on the kingside. White lacks compensation for his structural woes as well, B.Melander-K.Tikkanen, correspondence 1986.

16...♖ac8

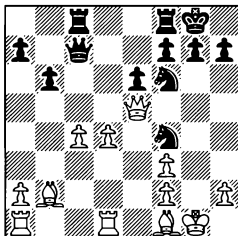
Question: Isn't it in Black's best interest to remove queens immediately with 16...♕xe5?

Answer: This gives away a tempo and is a concession, violating the principle: don't be the one to release piece or pawn tension, unless forced to do so. White stands slightly better after 17 ♖xe5 ♖ac8 18 c4 ♖b4 19 ♙f1 ♗fd8 20 ♖ac1.

17 c4!? ♖f4 18 ♙f1 ♙xf3

The most basic equation of the business world is to produce cheaply and sell dearly. Carlsen is willing to part with both bishops to inflict damage upon White's structure. Now the position's topography alters with bewildering rapidity. I think his move is slightly more accurate than 18...♖h3+ 19 gxf3 ♙xf3 20 ♗xc7 ♖xc7 21 ♗d3 ♙a8 22 d5! exd5 (not 22...♖xc4?? 23 ♙xf6, and if 23...gxf6 24 ♖g3+ ♖h8 25 ♙xc4 when Black drops a rook) 23 ♙xf6 gxf6 24 cxd5 ♗d8 25 ♙g2 and the likely result feels like a draw.

19 gxf3



Rival visions collide.

Question: Doesn't Black stand clearly better now that White's pawns have been damaged so badly?

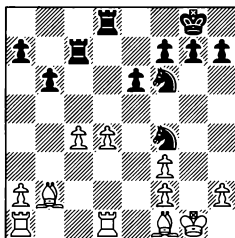
Answer: I'm not so sure. White allowing both ...♙xf3 and ...♖h3+ isn't quite as preposterous as first impressions would indicate. White's pawns take on the kind of craggy grandeur which is simultaneously ugly and exciting to behold. His remaining pieces look quite active

and, for now, I don't see any way for Black to exploit White's weakened f-pawns.

19...♖fd8

After 19...♖xe5 20 dxe5 ♖h5 21 ♖d7 ♖fd8 22 ♖ad1 ♖xd7 23 ♖xd7 g5 24 a4 ♖a8 I don't think White can lose, with his rook posted on the seventh rank.

20 ♖xc7 ♖xc7



We arrive in a highly unbalanced ending.

21 a4!

Lautier learns to adapt to his new strategic deformity. The idea is a5 and axb6, after which Black must nurse an isolani target on b6.

21...h6 22 a5 ♖h7!

Carlsen thinks about ...♖g5 and also the manoeuvre ...♖f8 and ...♖fg6, which backs up his f4-knight's posting.

23 axb6 axb6 24 ♖a3

The game appears to be heading for a draw after 24 ♖c1 g5 25 ♖a6 ♖b8 26 h4 ♖f8 27 d5 exd5 28 cxd5 ♖xd5 29 hxg5 hxg5 30 ♖xg5 ♖c5 31 ♖h4.

24...♖f8 25 ♖da1 ♖cc8 26 ♖b3 ♖8g6!

Carlsen decides not to get tied down to b6, and instead sacrifices it to take the initiative, seeing that he soon regains his investment.

27 ♖xb6 ♖h4 28 ♖a3!

I would be more inclined to give away f3, with 28 ♖h1 ♖xf3 29 ♖d1 g5.

28...♖f5

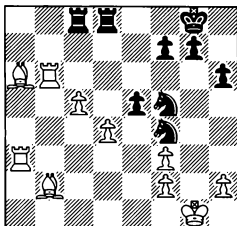
The d-pawn falls.

29 c5 e5!

An opportunity arises in answer to Carlsen's longings for confrontation. He plays for the full point, rejecting the line 29...♖xd4 30 ♖d6 e5 31 ♖xd4 exd4 32 ♖a4 ♖e6 33 ♖h3 ♖xc5 34 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 35 ♖xd4 with a likely draw, despite White's damaged structure.

30 ♖a6??

White should go into emergency mode with 30 dxe5 ♖xc5 31 ♖a1 ♔h4 32 ♜b3 ♜c2 33 ♜c1 ♔e2+ 34 ♙xe2 ♜xe2 35 ♙a1 ♜dd2 36 ♜f1 when Black has all the winning chances, despite White's extra pawn.



Exercise (combination alert): The bishop arrives, freshly incensed and ready to make trouble. White's last move was a mistake, where he tumbles from parity to poverty in a single move. It allows Black a trick which wins material. Do you see it?

Answer: Weak back rank.

30...♔xd4!

Now White's fortunes unravel before his eyes, and his position faces the spectre of hardship and desperate privation.

31 ♜d6

When we are obliged to endure such indignities, they feel like live embers burning in our psyche. White's now dour faced a6-bishop is obliged to swallow his disappointment with a phoney smile in the direction of Black's tempting c8-rook.

31 ♙xc8?? walks into a back-rank mate after 31...♔d2+ (Black's knight seeks to crush those who dare to transgress his ultimate authority) 32 ♔f1 ♜d1 mate. "Even great kings are not exempt from the laws of impermanence, enfeeblement and mortality, Your Grace," gloats Black's rook to White's king, who with monumental effort, can do no more than point a pitifully frail, accusatory, trembling finger at the rook.

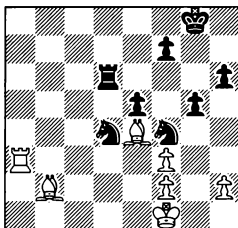
31...♜xd6 32 cxd6 ♜d8

Now d6 falls as well, leaving Black up two clean pawns. Annotators love to say: "The rest is technique". This statement may be fine at the GM level, but you and I know perfectly well that we have botched positions this overwhelming in the past.

33 ♔f1 ♜xd6 34 ♙d3 g5

34...♔xf3?? would be a tad hasty, since White pulls off a back-rank trick of his own, after 35 ♖a8+ ♜d8 36 ♜xd8 mate.

35 ♖e4?



Exercise (combination alert): White's position is a litany of deprivation.

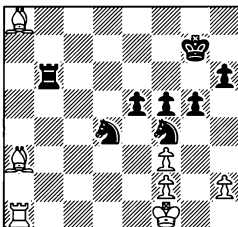
His last move was a blunder in an already hopeless position. How can Carlsen win yet more material and force immediate resignation?

35...♔g7?

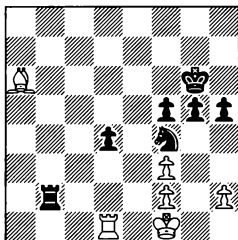
Carlsen's alertness wanes, missing:

Answer: 35...f5! (weak back rank (once again!)/double attack; this shot accelerates White's decline in vast magnification) 36 ♖d3 (36 ♖a8 walks into the deadly 36...♔c2! when there are only spite checks before Black's rook delivers mate on d1; Black's knights are the carnival barkers, endlessly bawling inducements to potential customers) 36...♔xf3 and the problem is, White's 'combination' fails miserably after 37 ♖c4+ ♔g7 38 ♖xf3?? ♔d1 mate. 36 ♖a1 ♖b6 37 ♖a3 f5! 38 ♖a8?

Otherwise, 38 ♖c5 ♖b5 39 ♖xd4 exd4 40 ♖c6 ♖b3 when White lacks constructive ideas.



50...♖b2! 51 ♙xd4 exd4 52 ♙a6



Exercise (planning): Same question: how does Black make progress?

Answer: Add the king to the mix. Carlsen threatens to transfer his king to c3, after which he escorts his d-pawn forward.

52...♙f6! 53 ♙c4 ♙e5 54 ♖e1+ ♘d6 55 ♖d1 ♙c5 56 ♙a6 ♘d5 57 ♙e1 ♖a2 58 ♙b5

Instead, 58 ♙f1 ♖a3 wins the f3-pawn.

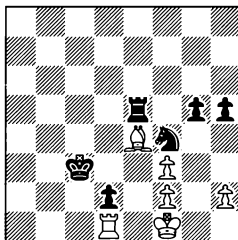
58...♙c5!

Black's f5-pawn doesn't matter. The push of his passed d-pawn is decisive.

59 ♙d7 d3 60 ♙xf5 ♘d4 61 ♖b1 ♖e2+ 62 ♙f1 d2!

Ah, yes, the old weak back rank again. White's rook is tied to the first rank.

63 ♙c2 ♖e5 64 ♖d1 ♙c3 65 ♙e4



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win.

Answer: Simplification/pawn promotion.

65...♖xe4! 66 fxe4 ♜c2 0-1

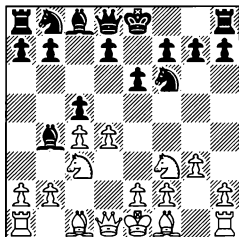
Game 30

D.Jakovenko-M.Carlsen
Tal Memorial, Moscow 2007
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6

Our game position can also be reached via the Anti-Benoni move order 2...c5 3 ♟f3 cxd4 4 ♟xd4 e6 5 ♟c3 ♟b4 6 g3.

3 ♟c3 ♟b4 4 ♟f3 c5 5 g3



Romanishin's line of the Nimzo-Indian.

5...cxd4 6 ♟xd4 0-0

Karjakin specializes in 6...♟e4: for example, 7 ♜d3 ♟xc3 8 bxc3 ♟e7 9 ♟g2 ♟c6 10 ♟b5 0-0 11 ♟f4 e5 12 ♟c1 ♟a5 13 0-0 d6 14 ♟a3 ♟e6 15 ♟xd6 ♟xd6 16 ♜xd6 ♟e8 17 c5 ♟c4 18 ♜xd8 ♟exd8 19 ♟c1 ♟ac8 20 ♟xb7 ♟xc5 when Black attained full compensation for the pawn and the players agreed to a draw in just a few moves, V.Anand-S.Karjakin, Monaco (blindfold) 2011.

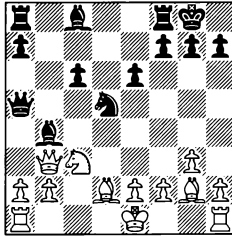
7 ♟g2 d5

Principle: open the position and create confrontation when leading in development.

8 cxd5 ♟xd5 9 ♜b3 ♜a5

9...♟c6 10 ♟xc6 bxc6 11 0-0 ♜a5 12 ♟d2 ♟xc3 13 bxc3 transposes to the game.

10 ♖d2 ♜c6 11 ♜xc6 bxc6



Question: Why did Black agree to an isolated c-pawn?

Answer: Firstly, it got him an open b-file, and secondly, White is about to get the same treatment on c3.

12 0-0

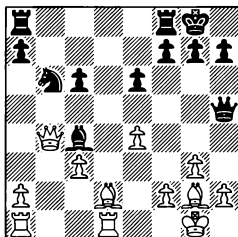
Question: Why not 12 ♜c1 to avoid the weakened pawns?

Answer: Believe it or not, your suggestion is unplayed in my database. I don't really like White's position after 12... ♜b8 13 0-0 ♖xc3 14 ♖xc3 ♜xc3 15 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 16 bxc3 ♖a6 17 ♜c2 c5. If anyone stands better, it is Black.

12... ♖xc3 13 bxc3

White logically hangs on to his only hoped for trump in the position, his bishop-pair. After 13 ♖xc3 ♜xc3 14 bxc3 ♖a6 15 ♜b4 ♜e5 Black looks just fine, M.Willsch-P.Schlosser, German League 2005.

13... ♖a6 14 ♜fd1 ♜c5 15 e4 ♖c4 16 ♜a4 ♜b6 17 ♜b4 ♜h5



This position was all the rage at the time it was played. Depressingly enough, this is a starting book position. When I was a kid, most players were out of their theory radius before move ten. Now we all must work so much harder to keep from being left behind theoretically.

Question: Does White have an edge due to his bishop-pair and the fact that Black's queenside pawns stand a tad more vulnerable than White's?

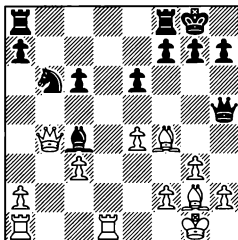
Answer: Some theoreticians believe so. I'm not so sure, since Black control over light squares like c4, d3 and e2 shouldn't be underestimated. It probably comes down to style. From my viewpoint, Black's position, although certainly playable, remains charmless, from a perspective of active counterplay.

18 ♖f4

White's alternatives:

a) 18 ♖e3 ♖e2 19 ♔d2 ♔ab8 20 ♖xb6!? (20 ♖c5 ♖c4 21 ♖xf8 ♔xb4 22 ♔d8 ♔b8 23 ♔xb8 h6 is more dangerous for White than it appears, since Black eventually swings his knight into the attack as well) 20...axb6 21 ♗d6 was G.Kasparov-V.Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2000. White may still hold a microbe of an edge after 21...♔fc8 22 a4.

b) 18 ♔e1 c5 19 ♗a5 ♔fc8 20 ♖e3 ♖e2 21 ♖f4 ♖d3 (or 21...e5 22 ♖e3, V.Kramnik-V.Anand, 10th matchgame, Bonn 2008, when Black should be okay after 22...f6) 22 ♔ad1 ♖e2 23 ♔c1 ♖d3 24 e5 ♖c4 25 ♗a6 g5! 26 ♖e3 ♖xe3 27 ♗xd3 ♖xg2 28 ♖xg2 ♔d8 and the players agreed to a draw in just a few moves in this equal position, D.Jakovenko-S.Karjakin, Poikovsky 2011.



18...c5

Question: Doesn't 18...e5 simply gain a tempo?

Answer: It does, but also the move blocks the scope of White's g2-bishop. After 19 ♖e3 ♗e2 20 ♜e1 ♝c4 21 ♛c5 ♜fd8 22 ♜ab1 h6 23 h3 ♝xe3 24 ♛xe3 ♙c4 Black had equalized in E.Najer-D.Jakovenko, Moscow 2006.

Instead, 18...♗e2 19 ♜e1 c5 20 ♛b3 e5 21 ♙c1 ♜ac8 22 a4 ♙c4 23 ♛b2 (A.Grischuk-B.Gelfand, Mexico City 2007) 23...♗e6, which clears c4 for the knight, looks dynamically balanced.

19 ♛b2

Black's queen radiates indifference, which infuriates her attention-seeking a5 sister all the more. 19 ♛a5 is an attempted improvement, which is also *Houdini*'s top choice: 19...e5 20 ♗e3 ♗e2 21 ♜e1 ♝c4 22 ♛a6 was I.Cheparinov-M.Carlsen, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007 (22 ♛xc5?! ♜fc8 favours Black, who will take on e3 next move). At this point Black can equalize with 22...♜fb8 23 ♗xc5 ♜c8 24 ♗b4 ♗g4, claiming full compensation for the pawn due to his light-squared bind.

19...♜ad8 20 ♜e1?!

The passions of the heart tend to take precedence over the calm voice of the head. An ambition awakens in White, which he would do better to quench. This looks like a misguided attempt to avoid swaps and keep the game complicated. But in doing so, White hands his opponent a concession.

Handing Black control over the d-file is borderline dubious. Mikhalechishin and Stetsko suggest the superior 20 f3!. Even then, I'm not so sure White can claim an edge.

20...♜d7

Black logically prepares to double rooks on the gifted d-file, while keeping an eye out on a7, in case White tries ♛a3 tricks.

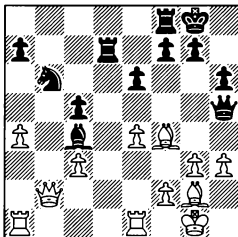
21 h3

Maybe contemplating a future g4!? at some point.

21...h6

Making luft for his king. Black's move is more accurate than 21...♖fd8 22 ♔a3!, which induces Black to lose a tempo after 22...♜c8.

22 a4!?



This move may not be as wonderful as it looks, because now White must be on guard to protect his a-pawn.

22...♙a6!

Clearing c4 (without blocking the d-file) for his knight, in case of a5.

23 ♜a2?!

I don't understand this move. I think Jakovenko should risk weakening his king with 23 g4!? to challenge the d-file after 23...♜h4 24 ♜ed1.

23...♜fd8 24 a5 ♘c4 25 ♙f1

After 25 e5? g5? 26 g4 (if 26 ♙c1?? ♜d1 27 ♙a3 ♜xe1+ 28 ♜xe1 ♜d1 29 ♜xd1 ♜xd1+ 30 ♜h2 ♘d2! 31 ♙xc5 ♙e2! when Black has a winning attack and threatens a nasty knight check on f3) 26...♜g6 27 ♙e4 ♜g7 28 ♙g3 ♘d2 29 ♙c6 ♜d3 30 ♜c2 ♜h7 White is in serious trouble.

25...e5 26 g4

The only move. 26 ♙e3? ♘xe3 27 ♜xe3 (27 ♙xa6?? ♜d2, and if 28 ♜b3? ♜f3 forces mate) 27...♜d1 is awful for White.

26...♜g6 27 ♙xc4 exf4!

27...♙xc4?! 28 ♜xc4 exf4 29 ♜xc5 unnecessarily gives White a pawn for his defensive troubles.

28 ♙d5

Shutting out Black's rooks – for now.

28...f3!

Threat: ...h5!.

29 c4?!

White should give up an exchange for a pawn after 29 ♖e3! ♙e2 30 ♖xe2 fxe2 31 ♜xe2 ♜b8 with some hope to save the game.

29...h5! 30 ♜h2!

A move played with the philosophy: perishables left too long in storage tend to spoil. So Jakovenko makes a frantic effort to curb his opponent's steady inroads with a daring idea, as if in a contest or a dare to scale the heights of recklessness.

30...♜f6

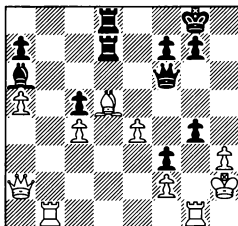
The queen affects a posture of vapid, calculating simpering, when in reality her mind is attuned to endless schemes and plots, all directed toward White's king. 30...hxg4?! plays into White's hands: 31 ♖g1 was Jakovenko's defensive/offensive idea.

31 ♖g1 hxg4

31...♜f4+! is more accurate. I can't show you the remainder of the line, since it would give away the answer to the coming combination alert exercise.

32 ♜ab1?

After 32 ♜xg4? ♙xc4! 33 ♙xc4 ♜d2 34 ♙xf7+ ♜f8 Black wins, but 32 ♜ad1! would have prevented Black's coming combination.



Exercise (combination alert): Normally, in slowly degrading positions, the realization of our hopelessness tends to sink in by degrees – but not here. Carlsen tapped into a wellspring of power by finding a crushing breakthrough shot. Where?

Answer: Attraction/annihilation of defensive barrier/pin.

32...♙xc4!!

Double exclams are often so counterintuitive, and so paradoxical, that our reason tends to summarily dismiss them from our analytical choices. “A single noble spirit, such as myself, is worth more than a hundred of weak character,” declares the conceited bishop, who

comes to the realization that silent prayer isn't as effective as a violent outburst. The unlikely c4-square turns out to be the epicentre of White's contagion.

33 ♖xc4

33 ♖xc4? allows 33... ♜d2 34 ♖xf7+ ♔h8 35 ♜e6 ♜f4+ 36 ♔h1 ♜xf2 with a forced mate in three moves.

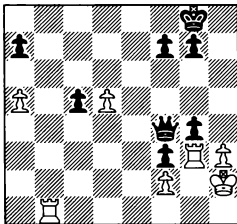
33... ♜f4+ 34 ♜g3 ♜xd5!

The clever idea behind Carlsen's bishop sacrifice on c4. Black wins material.

35 ♜xd5

Want mingled with prolonged oppression makes a deadly cocktail, which transforms even the meekest Dr. Jekyll into the nastiest Mr. Hyde. So Jakovenko is obliged to appropriate funds to further his I-refuse-to-get-mated project. 35 ♜c1 ♜d2 is also hopeless.

35... ♜xd5 36 exd5



Exercise (planning): A dark cloud, heavy with evaporation and ready to drench any second, looms over White. Come up with a clear winning plan for Black:

Answer: White is helpless to prevent the push of Black's c-pawn, while his g3-rook is pinned and unable to help.

36... c4! 37 ♜d1

Jakovenko gropes for a plan, with the crazy desperation of Jack Nicholson, seeking to escape his freezing maze in *The Shining*. He hopes to forge the weapon of his deliverance in the form of his passed d-pawn. The trouble is: Black's passer is the more dangerous.

37... c3! 38 d6 c2 39 ♜d3!? ♜c4!

Black's most accurate finish. Black's queen refuses to be put off by the rook's platitudes.

40 ♜e3 ♜c6

40... ♜f1! forces mate.

41 ♜d3 ♜c5 0-1

If 42 ♜e3 c1♜ 43 d7 ♜d4 44 ♜e8+ ♔h7 45 d8♜ ♜xf2+ 46 ♜g2 ♜xg2 mate.

Game 31
B.Gelfand-M.Carlsen
 Monaco (rapid) 2011
Benko Gambit

1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5

Carlsen plays just about everything. Here he enters the Benko Gambit.

3...b5 4 cxb5

Gelfand accepts.

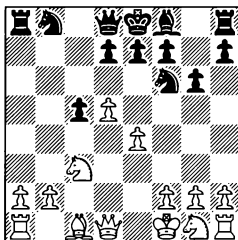
4...a6 5 bxa6

5 b6, 5 e3, 5 ♞c3 and 5 f3 are also played here.

5...g6 6 ♞c3 ♟xa6 7 e4

Currently the world's elite players are trending toward this line, which is quite safe and possibly offers White a tiny edge.

7...♟xf1 8 ♔xf1



Question: Doesn't the fact that Black disrupted White's castling mean full compensation for the pawn?

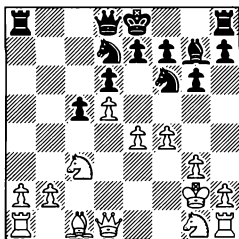
Answer: Obviously, whose side you prefer depends upon style. I would say almost, but not complete compensation. White generally develops with the following set-up: ♞f3, g3, ♟g2, ♟e1 and then tries to achieve the e5 break.

8...d6 9 g3

This move tends to transpose to ♞f3 lines, which is Carlsen's preference when he has White in this position: 9 ♞f3 ♟g7 10 g3 0-0 11 ♟g2 ♞bd7 12 ♟e2 ♟b6 (12...♟a5 13 e5!? looks a bit early and after 13...dxe5 14 ♞xe5 ♞xe5 15 ♟xe5 ♟a7 16 ♟d1 ♟d8 17 ♟e2 ♟ad7

18 ♖f3 c4 19 ♙e3 ♜xd5 20 ♜xd5 ♞xd5 21 ♞xd5 ♜xd5 22 ♜xd5 ♞xd5 23 ♞c1 ♙xb2 24 ♞xc4 ♙a3 25 ♞c3 ♞a5 Carlsen was unable to convert his microscopic edge, M.Carlsen-D.Andreikin, Astana (blitz) 2012) 13 a4! ♞fb8 14 ♜b5 ♜e8 (Black prepares to challenge the b5 outpost) 15 ♙g5 ♜d8 16 ♞a3 ♜b6 17 b3 ♜d7 18 ♞a2 f6?! (this weakening move gets Black in trouble; perhaps he should settle for 18...h6 19 ♙f4 ♜c7 20 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 21 ♙d2! with an edge for White) 19 ♙c1 f5 20 exf5 gxf5 21 ♞d1 ♜f6 22 ♜e6+! ♜xe6 23 dxe6 ♜e4 24 ♜h4! c4 (Black is also unlikely to save himself after 24...♞f8 25 a5) 25 bxc4 ♜xc4 26 ♜c7 ♜c3 27 ♜xa8 ♜xa2 28 ♜c7 ♜c3 29 ♞d3 ♞c8 30 ♜b5 ♜xb5 31 axb5 ♞c5 32 ♞b3 ♜a5 33 ♞b1 and Black is down a pawn with a bad position to boot. Carlsen consolidated and went on to win in M.Carlsen-V.Bologan, Biel 2012.

9...♙g7 10 ♙g2 ♜bd7 11 f4!?



Gelfand opens a door to a place he would be wise not to enter. He widens the scope of his ambitions with a risky plan, which also happens to be *Houdini's* first choice. In this case, I think the comp steers Gelfand down a borderline dubious plan. Gelfand rejects White's normal 11 ♜f3 plan and surprises Carlsen by playing in King's Indian Four Pawns Attack style (well, three in this case).

Question: This plan looks really dangerous. Doesn't White have both the initiative and an extra pawn in this case?

Answer: I don't think so. White scores well below the 50% mark with it and GM Glenn Flear actually gave the move a '?!' mark, describing it as "more unwieldy than threatening". The problem with such an aggressive plan is twofold:

1. The move costs White a precious developing move, in a position where he already lags.
2. White risks overextension and weakens his own king.

The main line with 11 ♜f3 is more solid and sees White receive an additional tempo for

his main preoccupation (to complete development whilst consolidating the queenside).

11...0-0 12 ♖f3 ♙e8

Carlsen interprets e5 as a real threat and halts it for the moment. Black has access to multiple options:

a) 12...♙a6 13 ♙e1 (13 ♖e2 ♗a8 14 ♙d1 ♙b6 15 h3 ♙a4 was C.Queva-V.Lazarev, Be-thune 1997; Black stands well after 16 e5 ♙e8 17 ♙xa4 ♙xa4 18 b3 ♙a5 19 a4 ♙c7 20 ♖c4 ♙d8 when he regains the sacrificed pawn) 13...♙b6 14 ♖e2 ♗a8!, O.Renaux-L.Guidarelli, Marseilles 2004. I actually prefer Black's side after this triple-purpose move:

1. Black makes it next to impossible for White to achieve e5 without dropping his d5-pawn.

2. Black adds pressure down the a-file.

3. Black clears b8 for his other rook.

b) 12...♖b8 (Black loads up on the e5-square, frustrating White's attempts to achieve the break) 13 ♙e1 ♙e8 14 ♙e2 ♙c7 15 e5?! (White achieves his break, but at grave risk of overextension) 15...♖b7! (Black deftly switches targets to the d5-pawn) 16 exd6 exd6 17 f5? (an attack cannot be causeless, without gathering the necessary rudiments, and in this case I see none; White's position was already sour, but this move pushes him over the edge) 17...♙xc3! 18 bxc3 ♙xd5 19 ♖c2 ♙e5! 20 ♖e4 ♙a4!! (a pretty deflection shot, after which White's position crumbles) 21 ♖xa4 ♙xc3 and White can resign, C.Hoi-J.Hodgson, Copenhagen 1985.

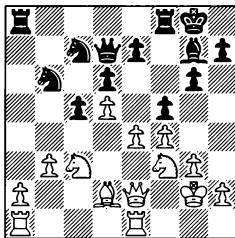
13 ♙e1 ♙c7 14 ♙d2

Otherwise 14 e5 weakens d5 and can be met with 14...♙b6.

14...♙b6 15 ♖e2

This is a preventative measure, designed to prevent ...f5. As it transpires, the preventative move didn't prevent anything.

15...♖d7 16 b3 f5!



Black's position quivers with restlessness and unfilled ambition. This move is merely a minor pattern in a yet-to-be revealed grand design of dismantling White's once impressive centre.

17 a4

After 17 exf5 ♖xf5 18 ♜xe7? ♜xe7 19 ♜xe7 ♜cxd5 White loses material.

17...fxe4 18 ♜xe4 ♜f5 19 ♜xf5

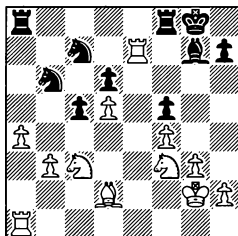
White fails to obtain full compensation for the exchange after 19 ♜xe7?! ♜bxd5 20 ♜xd6 ♜xc3 21 ♜xc7 ♜d5, which looks dubious for him.

19...gxf5

Carlsen decides to take control over e4, rather than recapture with the rook. Now d5 is the infant left out in the cold, heartlessly abandoned by its mother.

20 ♜xe7!?

If 20 ♜ad1! ♙f6! leaves Black clearly better since d5 falls, after which he dominates the centre and retains queenside pressure, especially down the b-file. The b6-knight is correct.



Exercise (planning): Gelfand, unsheathes his intent and decides to forfeit his claim upon a material advantage with an unbalancing exchange sacrifice for a pawn and the dark squares. White's last move is based upon the philosophy: a short, glorious life surpasses a long, uneventful one. Which knight should Black use to capture d5?

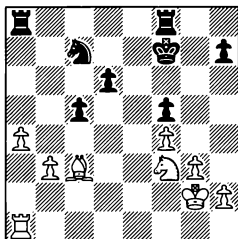
Answer: 20...♜bxd5!

Carlsen avoided the trap 20...♜cxd5? 21 ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 22 a5 ♜e7 23 ♜b5 ♜bd5 24 ♜xd6 ♜fb8 25 ♜b1 when it is White who stands slightly better, with two pawns for the exchange.

21 ♜d7 ♜xc3 22 ♜xg7+

After 22 ♙xc3? ♙xc3 23 ♜c1 ♜d5 24 ♜xd6 ♜e3+ 25 ♜f2 ♜g4+ 26 ♜g2 ♙b4 White doesn't have enough for the piece.

22...♜xg7 23 ♙xc3+ ♜f7



Question: How would you assess this position?

Answer: Let's assess:

1. White has a pawn for the exchange – not quite enough.
2. White controls the dark squares.
3. Black has a central majority, which can be protected with his king.
4. b3 remains a target for Black's rooks.
5. For the exchange, Gelfand gets a pawn plus some good pieces, but his problem is that Black is ready to bring his rooks into play to bear down on the b3-pawn. So he opts to react quickly.
6. If White moves his rook off the a-file, he must contend with undermining ideas like ...c4.

Conclusion: White doesn't have enough for the exchange.

24 ♖d1 ♜e7 25 b4?

What to do in a situation where it is folly to mount an offensive, and also folly to defend? Such tactical vistas tend to stimulate a natural attacker's instincts cruelly, by tempting them with an array of irresistible possibilities. The danger, of course, is that they go overboard. When we undergo torment, either mental or physical, its duration can't be measured in real time, since a few seconds in hell feels like eternity. Nature designed Gelfand to attack, not defend. It may have occurred to Gelfand that this move resembles a suicide mission. If the thought did occur to him, it is briskly shoved aside by adrenaline's will. In such unpleasant defensive situations, we always feel better after a burst of intemperate violence.

White's last move smacks of desperation and he would be better off living within his means, without ostentation, with 25 ♖a1 ♜fb8 26 ♜d3 ♜b4! (or 26...c4 27 bxc4 ♜xa4 28 c5! dxc5 29 ♖e5 c4! 30 ♜d2 ♜b3! 31 ♖xc7 c3 32 ♜e2+ ♜e4 33 ♜f2 ♜b2 34 ♖e5 ♜c4 35 h3 ♜xf2+

36 ♖xf2 h5 37 ♔d4 c2 38 ♔e2 c1♚ 39 ♖xc1 ♜xc1 40 g4! and Black's win may not be so easy with material reduced to this degree) 27 ♔d2. At least in this version White continues to hang on.

25...♜xa4 26 bxc5 dxc5 27 ♙e5 ♔b5 28 ♜b1 ♜b4 29 ♜a1

White is busted. Carlsen now carefully urges his passed c-pawn closer to its queening square.

29...c4 30 ♜a6 ♜c8

Endgame principle: place your rook behind your passed pawn.

31 ♜b6

If 31 ♔h4 c3 32 ♖xf5+ ♔d7 33 ♙xc3 ♜xc3 34 ♜h6 ♜b2+ 35 ♖h3 ♜cc2 36 ♜xh7+ ♔e6 37 ♖g4 ♜xh2 and Black will convert.

31...c3

Carlsen ignores the pin. His c-pawn's threatening manner is one of sly suggestions of terrible pain to come.

32 ♜b7+ ♔e6 33 ♙xc3

If 33 ♔g5+ Black runs away with 33...♔d5 34 ♔d7+ ♔c4.

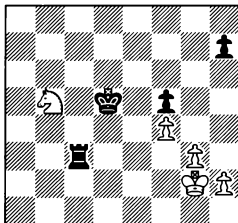
33...♜xc3 34 ♜xb5

Gelfand seizes upon his best chance.

Question: Did Carlsen just get cheapoed?

Answer: No. Some traps are worth falling into. Carlsen has seen deeper.

34...♜xb5 35 ♔d4+ ♔d5 36 ♔xb5



Exercise (combination alert): White's prolonged defence is a wad of tired, flavourless, overchewed gum. Carlsen worked out a way to exploit White's knight placement. Let's see if you can do the same.

Answer: 36...♖c5! 37 ♖a3

Otherwise, 37 ♖a7 (to a homeless person, the hunt for nutrition, shelter and physical safety occupies every waking moment) 37...♗d6 38 ♗h3 ♗c7 39 ♗h4 ♗b6 and the knight falls.

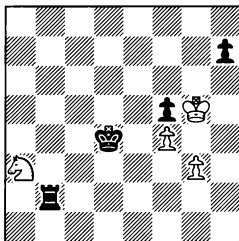
37...♖a5! 38 ♖b1

White's knight, now completely alone, struggles with an overbearing sense of estrangement from all which was familiar and safe. There was not much choice, since 38 ♖c2? loses instantly to 38...♖a2.

38...♖a2+ 39 ♗h3 ♗d4!

The knight has no place to hide.

40 ♗h4 ♖xh2+ 41 ♗g5 ♖b2 42 ♖a3



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and pick off more material.

Answer: Double attack.

42...♖b3! 43 ♖c2+ ♗e4!

Oh, nyet you don't! Carlsen managed to hang on to f5, while winning a pawn and leaving White's knight in grave danger. He sees no need to enter 43...♗d3 44 ♖e1+ ♗d2 45 g4 ♗xe1 46 ♗xf5 which also wins for Black.

44 ♗h4

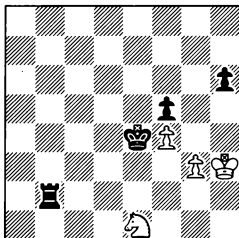
44 g4 ♖g3 is hopeless.

44...h6! 45 ♗h3

45 ♗h5 ♖xg3 46 ♗xh6 ♗xf4 is curtains for White.

45...♖b2! 46 ♖e1

Alternatively, 46 ♖a3 ♗d5! when Black's king simply waltzes over and picks up the stranded knight. Note that White's king is frozen in place, since 47 ♗h4?? walks into 47...♖h2 mate.



Exercise (combination alert): White's knight emits an unpleasant 'gulp!' sound, since he notices that Black's ill-tempered king and muscular rook resent his presence. Lines of communication are not sound in White's army, like a bad connection in a long distance phone call. Black to play and force the win of the knight.

Answer: 46...♖b1! 47 ♖c2

Or 47 ♖g2 ♖h1 mate.

47...♗d3 0-1

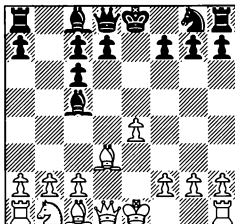
When I was a child, I remember that in a game of tag, the worst fate which could befall a participant was to be the dreaded 'it', which in this case is obviously White's knight. After 48 ♖a3 ♖b3 White's Humpty-Dumpty-like knight is on the verge of a great fall.

Game 32 M.Carlsen-F.Caruana Biel 2011 Scotch Game

1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♖xd4 ♗c5 5 ♖xc6 bxc6!?

Black's normal line commonly runs 5...♗f6 6 ♗d2 dxc6 7 ♖c3 ♗e6 8 ♖a4 ♗d8 9 ♗d3 ♗d4 10 0-0 a6 11 ♖c3 ♖e7 12 ♖e2 ♗b6 13 ♗f4 ♖g6!. The soundness of such moves is a necessary article of faith in this line of the Scotch Game. Short correctly intuited that his piece activity compensates his damaged structure after 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 back in his 1993 match with Kasparov.

6 ♗d3



6...Wh4

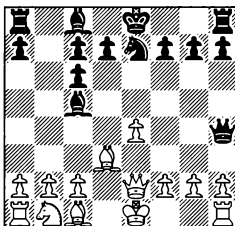
Nothing gladdens our hearts more than threatening a vulgar one move mate. Instead, 6...d6 7 e5 d5 8 Wg4 g6 was J.Mieses-D.Janowski, Hastings 1895, where I like White's attacking chances after 9 h6.

7 We2!

Question: Why not just castle?

Answer: Immediate castling is also a line. Perhaps Carlsen wanted to keep castling long options open. After 7 0-0 d6 8 Wf3 0-0 9 e5 (or 9 f4 d6 10 e5 d5 11 g3 Wg4 12 Wxg4 h4 13 exd6 hxd6 and Black's piece activity should make up for his structural damage) 9...d4 10 f4 d4 11 g3 dxe5 12 Wf5 d6 13 h4 h4 14 xf5 hxb2 15 d2 xa1 16 xa1 ab8 I prefer Black's rook and two pawns over White's minor pieces, who at the moment lack specific targets, N.Huschenbeth-E.L'Ami, Vlissingen 2013.

7...d7



Caruana hopes to surprise Carlsen with a rare move.

Question: Why place the knight on e7 when f6 was available?

Answer: A couple of reasons:

1. Black doesn't need to worry about e5 tricks with his knight on e7.
2. Black now obtains future ...f5 options.

After 7...♟f6 8 h3 (to keep a black minor piece away from g4) 8...d5!? 9 g3 (9 exd5+ is met by 9...♟d8 10 0-0 ♟xh3! with tremendous complications, not unfavourable to Black) 9...♞h5 10 ♞xh5 ♟xh5 11 ♟c3 ♟f6 12 ♟f4 ♟b4 13 exd5 ♟xd5 14 ♟d2 ♟xc3 15 ♟xc3 ♟xc3+ 16 bxc3 ♟e6 Black equalized, V.Ivanchuk-V.Malakhov, Warsaw (rapid) 2009.

8 ♟c3

A new move and a probable improvement over the passive 8 ♟d2 d6 9 h3 ♟g6. Black looks active after 10 ♟f3 ♞h5 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♟e3.

8...0-0 9 ♟e3 ♟b6 10 0-0 d5!?

More ambitious than 10...d6 11 ♞d2 ♟e8 which also looks fine for Black.

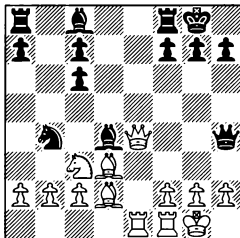
11 exd5 ♟xd5 12 ♟d2

There is no logical reason to straighten out Black's pawns in dentist-like fashion with 12 ♟xd5?! cxd5 13 ♞f3 ♟e6 14 ♟fe1 c5. Here Black received everything he wanted, since his once doubled pawns are straightened out and he controls a good chunk of the centre.

12...♟d4 13 ♟a1! ♟b4!

Going after White's most powerful piece, the light-squared bishop, whose potency enhances from the fact that the position is wide open. 13...♟xc3?! 14 bxc3 ♟b6 15 ♞f3 is awkward for Black, who will probably drop his c6-pawn.

14 ♞e4!



Another example of Carlsen's remarkable assessment abilities. To the naked eye, White appears to be heading for big trouble.

14... ♖xe4

The black queen emits an odd, adenoidal grunting sound in response to her sister's intrusion.

15 ♖xe4 ♖a6

Question: Isn't White in trouble now, due to this move?

Answer: It appears as if Black seized the initiative, but Carlsen has seen deeper into the position's truth and understands that Black will not be able to extract anything from the coming pin on the a6-f1 diagonal. Instead, 15...f5? is met with 16 ♖b5! when suddenly Black's knight and bishop hang: 16...fxe4 17 ♖xd4 c5 18 ♖xb4 cxb4 19 ♖xe4 with an extra pawn in the ending for White.

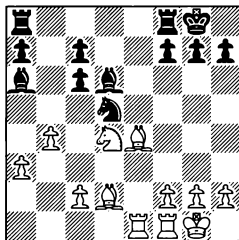
16 ♖e2 ♖c5 17 a3 ♖d5 18 b4!? ♖d6?!

Black may have two superior options.

a) 18... ♖b6! 19 a4! ♖fe8 20 ♖f3 ♖xe2 21 ♖xe2 a5 22 bxa5 ♖xa5 23 ♖xa5 ♖xa5 24 ♖b5! ♖d8 25 ♖xc6 ♖b4 26 ♖b5 c6 27 ♖d1 ♖xd1 28 ♖xd1 ♖f8 29 ♖c4 ♖xa4 30 g3 ♖e7 is equal.

b) 18... ♖ae8! 19 ♖d3 (after 19 ♖f3 ♖d6 20 ♖d4!? ♖xf1 21 ♖xf1 ♖e7 22 ♖b3 ♖d8 I don't believe in White's full compensation for the exchange) 19... ♖xd3 20 cxd3 ♖d6! (not 20... ♖b6 21 a4 a6 22 a5 ♖a7 23 ♖f4 when Black may have trouble defending his queenside pawns) 21 ♖d4 c5 22 ♖c6 a6 23 g3 f5 and Black looks just fine.

19 ♖d4!



An unseen enemy can't be overcome by routine military strategies. The reckless knight has never paid much attention to the consequences of his actions. All which matters to him is how he can gratify his desires in the present moment. Carlsen decides that the best way to break Black's annoying pin is to completely ignore it! How galling when an opponent meets our tangled scheme with a farcically simply (yet powerful) solution. Caruana may have expected the meek 19 ♖d3 ♖xd3 20 cxd3 c5 when Black gets the better side of equality.

19... ♖xf1 20 ♜xf1

Question: Did Carlsen get enough for the exchange?

Answer: The future means more than just tomorrow. More than enough. Besides the exchange, White obtains:

1. A pawn, since c6 falls.
2. The bishop-pair in an open position.
3. A dangerous queenside pawn majority.
4. Domination of the light squares.
5. Black's rooks are denied entry into White's position, and lack targets.

Conclusion: Black labours under multiple strategic handicaps and is faced with a dreary, counterplayless future. He is the one who struggles to equalize, not White.

20... ♖b6

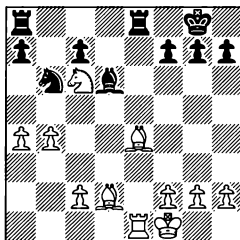
White also looks slightly better at the end of the following lines:

- a) 20... ♜fe8 21 ♖xc6 ♖b6 22 g3.
- b) 20... ♜ae8 21 ♖xc6 ♖f6 22 ♖f3 ♜xe1+ 23 ♖xe1 a6 24 g3 ♜e8 25 c4.

21 ♖xc6

Also to be considered was 21 ♖xc6!?, seizing control over e8, when the mute rebuke of the bishop's glare is more stressful to Black's rooks than if he screamed curses.

21... ♜fe8 22 a4!



Activating his queenside pawn majority. The a-pawn takes a menacing step forward, contemplating punitive action.

22... ♜f8

Caruana does his best, within the severe constraints of his position. Instead, after 22... ♖xa4? (the rats scamper away when the lights are suddenly turned on in the room) 23 ♖e7+! ♜xe7 24 ♖xa8 ♜xe1+ 25 ♜xe1 Black finds himself facing White's bishop-pair and

superior structure. Of course, h2 isn't hanging: 25...♙xh2?? would be a stunt similar to Fischer's boneheaded ...♙xh2 in his matchgame versus Spassky: 26 g3 h5 27 ♖f1 traps Black's bishop.

23 a5 ♘c4 24 ♙c1

24 ♙c1! takes aim at central squares. I have a feeling that Carlsen rejected this move because it blocks the flow of his c-pawn. However, White remains better after 24...♙f4 25 ♙d5 ♙d2 26 ♚d1 ♙xc3 27 ♙xc4 ♚e4 28 ♙d5 ♚h4 29 ♚d3 ♙b2 (most certainly not 29...♙xb4?? 30 ♘xb4 when the a8-rook hangs and Black is unable to recapture on b4) 30 h3 as Black remains in an unpleasant bind.

24...a6

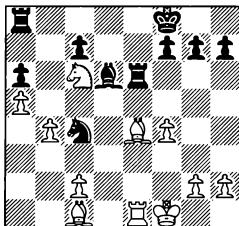
Houdini suggests the line 24...f5!? 25 ♙xf5 ♚xe1+ 26 ♖xe1 ♘e5 27 ♘xe5 ♚e8! 28 f4 ♙xe5 29 ♖f2 ♙d4+ 30 ♖f3 ♚e1 31 ♙d2 ♚f1+ 32 ♖e4 ♙g1 (Black threatens both ...♙xh2 and ...♚f2) 33 ♙g4 ♙xh2 34 Bf3. Even here I like White, who has an active king, a queenside pawn majority and pawn targets on a7 and c7.

25 f4?!

Carlsen allowed Caruana a trick with his inaccurate last move. 25 c3! retains the bind.

25...♚e6??

Both players missed 25...♘e3+! (attraction/overloaded defender; the knight inserts his head into the lion's mouth, hoping he has been well fed) 26 ♚xe3 ♙xf4 when Black regains the sacrificed piece with one pawn interest. After 27 ♚f3 ♙xc1 28 ♙d5 f6 White still has plenty of compensation for the exchange, but his potential win is pretty much gone, now just a dream from the hazy past. I don't believe Black stands worse anymore since he levelled the pawn count.



Exercise (combination alert): Black picks up a thread of a plan, but not its whole. 25...♚e6 was a major blunder, after which Black is irrevocably lost. White to play and win material.

Answer: Trapped piece. White's light-squared bishop places calming hands on the black rook and knight's shoulders. Black's dangling knight has no place to run.

26 ♖d5!

Sheep tend to grow agitated when they smell the wolf nearby.

26...♖f6

The rook staggers from the shock of the sudden unveiling of the truth. He sneaks out, the way a chastised third grader creeps out from the principal's office. After 26...♖xe1+ 27 ♜xe1 ♖xb4+ 28 ♜xb4 ♖e8+ 29 ♜f2 ♜xa5 30 ♜xa6 ♖c8 31 ♖a3+ ♜g8 32 ♖c5 White's bishops rule, while Black's rook and knight are induced into fatal passivity.

27 ♖e4 1-0

Annoying white pieces stick to Black's hanging knight like discarded gum on a shoe. Black's loose knight isn't running away, so White pauses to cover f4. 27...♜xa5 28 bxa5 ♖e8 29 ♖c4 g5 (the g-pawn's attempts to intimidate remind us of a Chihuahua, mimicking the Pitbull's fury) 30 ♜f2! ♖xf4 31 ♖xf4, and if 31...♖xf4+ 32 ♖xf4 gxf4 33 ♖c4 ♖a8 34 ♜f3 is completely hopeless for Black.

Game 33
M.Carlsen-I.Sokolov
Wijk aan Zee 2013
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♖b5 a6 4 ♖a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 b5 6 ♖b3 ♖b7 7 d3

As mentioned earlier, Carlsen tends to favour the slow d3 Ruy Lopez, rather than play for c3 and d4, with 7 ♖e1 ♖c5 8 c3 d6 9 d4 ♖b6 10 ♖e3 0-0 11 ♜bd2 h6 12 h3 ♜b8!? (an odd idea, but perhaps Kamsky intends a future ...♜a7 to force resolution of the central tension; 12...♖e8 is normally played here) 13 d5 ♜e7 14 ♖xb6 cxb6 15 ♖c2, which was V.Anand-G.Kamsky, Las Palmas 1995. Black, having swapped away his bad bishop, looks fine after 15...♜g6.

7...♖c5

The aggressive Arkhangelsk line, where Black isn't satisfied with the traditionally passive e7 post for the dark-squared bishop.

8 a4

As usual for such positions, White tickles the b-pawn, hoping to induce it forward.

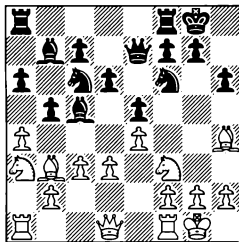
8...0-0

8...b4 can be met by 9 a5, with play similar to Carlsen-Aronian from Chapter Two.

9 ♖g5

White pins, taking advantage of the fact that Black's dark-squared bishop abandoned its normal post on e7. White can also try and force light-square weakening by inducing Black's b-pawn forward: 9 ♜c3 b4 10 ♜d5 ♜xd5 11 ♖xd5 d6 12 a5 ♖b8 with approximately balanced chances, M.Adams-J.Emms, British Championship, Hove 1997.

9...h6 10 ♖h4 d6 11 c3 ♜e7 12 ♘a3!?



In his desire to leave theory, Carlsen tries a rare yet borderline dubious idea. White should play 12 ♘bd2.

12...♘a5!

Sokolov offers a pawn for the light squares with this new move, which is a big improvement over 12...♘a3?!. This overreaction is exactly what White is after 13 ♜xa3 b4 14 ♜a1 bxc3 15 bxc3 ♘a5, P.Sardy-A.Vajda, Eger 2004. White stands a shade better due to his bishop-pair. Likewise, 12...b4?! doesn't make sense, since it drives White's knight to where it wants to go after 13 ♘c4.

13 ♘c2?!

Compounding his previous dubiousity with another one. Carlsen planned 13 axb5, but then saw 13...♘xb3 14 ♜xb3 ♜fb8! 15 ♜c2 ♘xa3 16 ♜xa3 axb5 when Black is on the slightly better end of equality. This is still better than the text, though, after which White struggles.

13...b4! 14 ♘b1

A sad admission of a mishandled opening. Carlsen agrees to the loss of two tempi, rather than a gaping hole on b4, with 14 cxb4?! ♘xb4, with advantage to Black.

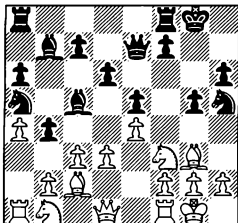
14...g5!

Hostilities have yet to erupt in full bloom, yet we sense an unspoken, internal declaration of war on Black's part. He is the first to breach the peace in an attempt to seize the initiative, at the slight cost of weakening his kingside light squares.

15 ♘g3

The g5 piece sacrifice is unsound, mainly since Black easily slips out of the pin after 15 ♘g5? hxg5 16 ♘xg5 ♜e6.

15...♘h5



Black holds a mild initiative on both wings.

Question: If Carlsen won this game, shouldn't it be in the Defence chapter?

Answer: I was thinking about placing the game there. But Carlsen's handling of his knights versus Black's future bishop-pair made this game a better candidate for this chapter.

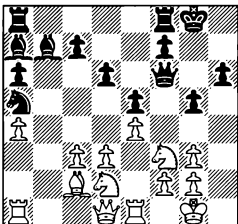
16 ♖bd2 ♗a7?!

I think this is the point where Sokolov lost his edge. He offers another pawn in exchange for the initiative. White, however, isn't obliged to accept. IM Colin Crouch suggests the superior 16...♖xg3! 17 hxg3 ♜f6 when White remains under unpleasant pressure.

17 ♜e1

Carlsen ignores the provocation. 17 cxb4 ♖xg3 18 hxg3 ♖c6 19 b5 ♖b4 20 bxa6 ♗xa6 offers Black Benko Gambit-like queenside pressure for the pawn.

17...bxc3 18 bxc3 ♖xg3 19 hxg3 ♜f6



Question: It feels to me like Carlsen is in big trouble. Is this a correct assessment?

Answer: On the contrary, I feel like White's game improved to a marked extent, when compared to a few moves ago. Let's examine:

1. Black claims ownership to the bishop-pair.
2. Black controls the dark squares and threatens ...g4, targeting f2.
3. White controls the light squares and has some potential for planting a knight on f5.

I would say Black holds only a tiny edge. Now watch how in the coming moves Carlsen nurtures his imbalance by slowly increasing his grip over the light squares.

20 ♖e2 ♜fb8!?

I'm not so sure Black should be playing a rook to the b-file, since swaps relieve White, who is under some pressure. Perhaps he should consider 20...♙c8.

21 ♜ab1 ♙c8

Black's light-squared bishop keeps an eye on both a6 and f5.

22 ♘f1

Obviously e3 will be the best post for the knight, where it watches c4, d5, f5 and g4.

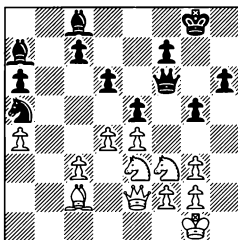
22...♜xb1?!

A time-wasting plan and a violation of the principle: don't break piece or pawn tension, unless forced to do so. Black had two superior alternatives:

a) 22...♙e6 23 ♘e3 ♙xe3 24 ♜xe3 c5 25 d4 ♘c4 26 ♜d3 ♘b2 27 ♜e3 (27 ♜e2 is met by 27...cxd4 28 cxd4 g4 29 ♘h2 h5 when Black stands well) 27...♘c4 with a repetition draw, which feels like a logical continuation.

b) 22...♘c6 23 ♘e3 ♘e7 sees Black logically transfer his knight to the kingside, where it watches over the sensitive light squares d5 and f5.

23 ♜xb1 ♜b8 24 ♜xb8 ♙xb8 25 ♘e3 ♙a7 26 d4!!



Ardour has a way of brushing aside logic's argument. When a flash of insight occurs, it isn't us who have the idea; it is in reality, the idea which has us, urging us closer and closer to it. Carlsen concocts a daring plan, tinged in madness, yet backed up with iron calculation skills. This move appears to be an oversight which loses a pawn to ...g4. Once again Carlsen has seen into the position's heart and worked out a way to seize control over the light squares.

26...g4?!

A long nursed resentment finally makes the transition to open hostility. Sokolov is prepared to articulate his case for the initiative by committing to a weakening thrust and an irrevocable step. Winning and losing sit side by side, our fates removing us from one into the arms of the other are separated by the slightest degree of arc. This turns out to be an ill-advised barter for Black.

Sokolov remains unconvinced of the efficacy of his opponent's idea, and chooses to ignore all the warning signs. So he understandably takes the bait, when he would have been better off ignoring the provocation with 26...♟f8. Sometimes courage calls for inaction, the way a conscientious objector refuses to fight in an unjust war.

27 ♖d5 ♜d8 28 ♜h4 c6!

Sokolov, perhaps feeling a premonition, avoids a false path. Black's concerns are well founded. 28...exd4? is met with 29 ♜d2! ♜g5 30 ♜xg5+ hxg5 31 ♜e7+ ♟f8 32 ♜xc8 dxc3 33 ♜xa7 gxh4 34 gxh4 ♜c4 35 ♙d1 ♜a3. Black wins back the piece, but can't save himself in the knight ending: 36 ♜c6 c2 37 ♙xc2 ♜xc2 38 ♜h2! when constriction swaddles Black's remaining pieces, as if on a mummy. The ideas behind Carlsen's calculation which started with 26 d4:

1. ♟g3 and ♟xg4 will win a key pawn for White.
2. If Black responds with ...♟e8 and ...♟d7, then a6 falls to ♜b8+ and ♜xa6.
3. Meanwhile, White's newly passed h-pawn will promote.

Conclusion: Black is hopelessly busted.

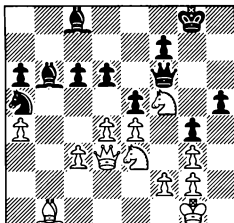
29 ♜e3

White's good fortune is clearly by design than accident.

29...h5

After 29...exd4? 30 ♜ef5 ♜g5 31 cxd4 ♙b8 32 ♙d3 ♙c7 33 f4! gxf3 34 gxf3 ♜f6 35 f4 ♙b6 36 ♜g2 the a6-pawn is threatened, e5 is in the air, and Black can't play 36...♙xd4?? due to 37 e5! dxe5 38 ♜xd4, when 38...exd4 is met by 39 ♜e8+ ♜g7 40 ♜xc8 and Black can resign.

30 ♜hf5 ♜f6 31 ♜d3 ♙b6 32 ♙b1!



Incrementally, Carlsen continues to improve his position, this time transferring his dormant light-squared bishop to its best post on a2. The war of light squares versus dark clearly tilted in White's favour.

32...♟f8 33 ♖a2 ♙c7 34 ♜b1! ♚e8 35 ♜b4!

Carlsen applies pressure, this time adding heat to a5 and d6.

35...♞d5!?

Absence of restraint is the trademark of the desperate. When we are unable to grasp the totality of our desires, we make do with an abbreviated version. This risky attempt to rekindle the initiative fails to rejuvenate Black's depleted position. Understandably, Sokolov, tired of defending, lashes out by attempting to open the game for his bishops and destabilizing the f5-knight.

The move has the effect of energizing White's light-square control even further. However, if Black waits, his position deteriorates after 35...♟f8 36 ♖c4!, and if 36...♞xc4 37 ♜xc4 ♙b7 38 ♞d5! ♜d8 39 ♞xc7 ♜xc7 40 dxe5 dxe5 41 ♜c5+ ♟g8 (41...♟e8 is met with the crushing 42 ♜d6!) 42 ♜e3 f6 43 ♜h6 ♜f7 44 ♞d6 ♜e7 45 ♜g6+ ♟f8 46 ♞f5 wins, since 46...♜d8 is met by 47 ♜g7+ ♟e8 48 ♜xb7.

36 ♖b1! exd4 37 cxd4 dxe4 38 ♙xe4 ♙e6?!

38...♙d7 was necessary.

39 ♜c5!

Threats: ♙xc6+ and ♜a7.

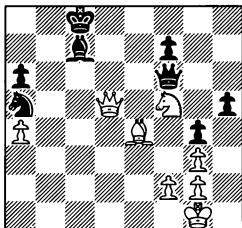
39...♟d7 40 d5!

Door hinges groan in complaint and then give way to the shiver of shattering wood. This move fractures remnants of the defensive carapace. Black's king is endangered by the opening of the centre.

40...cxd5 41 ♞xd5 ♙xd5 42 ♜xd5+

The queen opens her arms to swoop in the d-pawn, the way a mother greets a child who just returned from two weeks at summer camp.

42...♟c8



A brand new imbalance arises. Carlsen plays upon the principle: opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker.

43 ♖e3!

Carlsen isn't the least bit concerned about handing Black a4. His goal is Black's king.

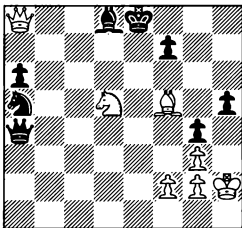
43... ♜a1+ 44 ♖h2 ♜xa4 45 ♜a8+ ♔d7 46 ♖d5

Houdini suggests the line 46 ♙f5+! ♔e7 47 ♜a7 ♔d6 48 ♜xa6+ ♜c6 49 ♜d3+ ♔c5 50 ♜c3+ ♔b6 51 ♜d4+ ♜c5 52 ♖d5+, which wins a piece.

46... ♙d8?

A blunder in a hopeless position. Now Black's fading position recedes into itself. Black offers greater resistance with 46... ♜c6 47 ♜h8 ♜e6 48 ♖f6+ ♔e7 49 ♖g8+ ♔e8 50 ♙d5! ♜g6 51 ♖h6+ ♔d7 52 ♙xf7 ♜g5 53 ♖f5! ♙d8 54 ♜e5 ♜f6 55 ♜d5+ ♔c8 56 ♖d6+ ♔b8 57 ♖e4 ♜b6 58 ♙xh5, although here the mangled pieces of Black's position don't make a pretty sight. White wins.

47 ♙f5+ ♔e8



Exercise (combination alert): A quiver of apprehension runs through Black's king. White to play and win.

Answer: 48 ♖c8! 1-0

A haughty sense of condescension has always been the keynote to the queen's personality. She approaches with the demeanour of a Pitbull, now somewhat moody, since the Pomeranian stole her best backyard bone.

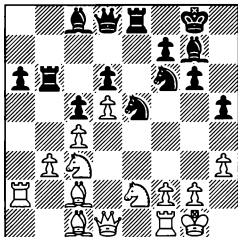
Question: I don't understand. Why did Black resign?

Answer: Attraction/pin. Nothing can be done about White's coming trick. For example: 48...♘c4 49 ♔d7+! (the bishop is willing to offer his prayers, but never his blessings to the black king and queen) 49...♞xd7 50 ♘f6+ when Black's queen, clearly frustrated with her defenders' ineptitude, massages her temples with her fingertips.

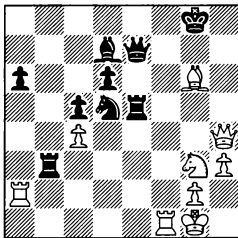
Game 34
M.Carlsen-L.Van Wely
Wijk aan Zee 2013
King's Indian Defence

1 c4

Compare the pawn structure (and Black's lack of active counterplay) in this game, to Carlsen's game: 1 d4 c5 2 d5 d6 3 e4 g6 4 c4 ♔g7 5 ♘c3 ♘f6 6 ♔d3 0-0 7 ♘ge2 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 exd5! (this position is no fun at all for Black; White gets a space advantage and a potential attack, without cost) 9...♘bd7 10 b3 (covering against ...♘e5) 10...a6 11 a4 ♘e5?! (this is one of those shallow rapid game moves we all play from time to time; Black will lose time to White's future f4) 12 ♔c2 ♜b8 13 a5 ♜e8 14 h3 b6 15 axb6 ♜xb6 16 ♜a2 h5? (and this is just asking for it; Black weakens his king's pawn cover for some abstract attacking idea of his own).



C.Lakdawala-D.Aldama, San Diego (rapid) 2014, continued 17 f4 Qe7 (after 17...Qe4!? I planned to decline the sacrifice and bulldoze through with 18 f5, with a clear advantage for White) 18 f5 Qf8 19 fxg6 fxg6 20 g5 (I didn't want to deal with Black's trickery after 20 Qf4 Qg4!?) 20...Re5 21 Qd2 Qd7 22 Qg3 Qe7 23 Qc4 (I wasn't interested in winning the exchange for the dark squares with 23 Qf4) 23...Qh7 (after 23...Qxe4 24 Qxe4 Qe8 25 Qf6+ Qxf6 26 Qxf6 Qe2 27 Qh6 Qe3+ 28 Qxe3 Qxe3 29 Qd8! Black can resign, since he drops at least two pawns) 24 Qxf6+ Qxf6 25 Qxf6 Qxf6 26 Qxg6 Qxb3 27 Qf4 h4 (27...Qg7 28 Qf5 Qe8 29 Qc2 is decisive, since White threatens both the b3-rook and also Qf5+) 28 Qxh4 Qxd5.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and force mate in three moves.

Answer: Deflection: 29 Qf8+! 1-0. It's mate after 29...Qg7 30 Qh7+ Qxf8 31 Qh8.

1...g6 2 d4 ♟f6 3 ♞c3 ♟g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♠e2 0-0 6 ♟g5

Averbakh's line of the King's Indian.

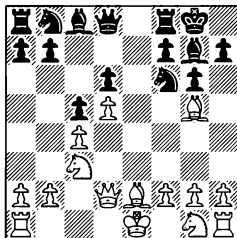
6...c5

Black's main move, after which the structure may later rearrange itself into Benoni patterns. 6...h6, 6...♟a6, 6...♟bd7 and 6...c6 are also played.

7 d5 e6

Now the game will turn into a Benoni.

8 ♜d2 exd5 9 exd5



The positional player's dream: a safe edge with zero counterplay for the opponent.

Question: Isn't it more dynamic to capture toward the centre?

Answer: Recapturing with the c-pawn is also possible, but I prefer Carlsen's choice. I now reveal to you the deepest, darkest fear of Benoni players world-wide: most of them hate it when you recapture symmetrically, since White simply achieves a safe space advantage, while denying Black his or her unbalanced pawn majority. I find this position rather unpleasant for Black, without discernible counterplay.

9...♜b6

Question: What is Black's idea behind his last move?

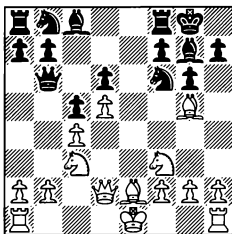
Answer: Two points:

1. Black breaks the annoying f6 pin.

2. Black prepares the freeing manoeuvre ...♟f5 and ...♟e4, which not only ensures help-swaps, but also increases the pressure on b2.

9...♠e8 is Black's most common response, but after 10 ♟f3 ♟g4 11 0-0 ♟bd7 12 h3 ♟xf3 13 ♟xf3 White's extra space and bishop-pair are meaningful.

10 ♖f3



10...♗f5

Preparing ...♗e4.

Question: Can Black try the same idea ...♗e4 freeing idea in conjunction with 10...♗e8?

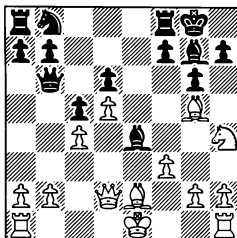
Answer: Black requires ...♗f5. He falls too far behind in development after 10...♗e8 11 O-O ♗e4? 12 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 13 ♗d3 ♗e8 14 ♗ae1 ♗d7 15 ♗f4! (Black is in serious trouble; White threatens ♗e7, followed by ♗g5) 15...♗xb2 (or 15...♗a6 16 ♗e7!, and if 16...♗f8 17 ♗g5! f5 18 ♗h4 h5 19 ♗xf8 ♗xf8 20 ♗e7 ♗d8 21 ♗fe1 when there is no defence to the coming ♗h7) 16 ♗xd6 ♗b6 17 ♗f4 ♗a6 18 ♗e7! f5 19 a3 ♗b2 20 ♗e3. White is on track for a winning kingside attack, since Black is unable to unravel.

Instead, after 10...♗g4 11 O-O ♗bd7 12 h3 ♗xf3 13 ♗xf3 White can claim a comfortable opening edge, with the bishop-pair and central space.

11 ♗h4! ♗e4

11...♗d7?! 12 O-O ♗e8 (J.Schot-A.Heuzeveldt, correspondence 1993) 13 ♗f4 ♗d8 14 ♗fe1 looks miserable for Black, who is caught in an eternal pin.

12 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 13 f3



13...♖xb2?!

“My sister’s loss is my gain,” thinks Black’s queen, with a wide smile on her greedy face. Now there is no way to reconstruct that which Black’s own war has torn asunder. This move may be book, but I’m convinced of its inferiority, since it allows White to force a promising ending. Instead, Black can play the little tried 13...h6! 14 ♕xh6 ♕xh6 15 ♖xh6 ♖xb2 16 0-0 ♕c2 17 ♖ac1 ♖e8 18 ♗d2 ♗f6 19 ♖xc2 ♖xh4 20 ♖b2 b6 21 f4 ♘d7 22 ♖b3 ♗h8! 23 ♖d3 (halting ...♗d4+) 23...f5 when his position isn’t so bad, P.Dolinski-W.Niewiadomski, correspondence 2007.

Question: Why can’t Black play 13...♕xb2?

Answer: White secures a winning position after 14 ♖d1! when 14...♕f5? 15 ♘xf5 gxf5 16 0-0! (even stronger than 16 ♕h6 ♗b4 17 ♖xb4 cxb4 18 ♕xf8 ♖xf8 19 ♕d3) 16...♖e8 17 ♖b1 ♕d4+ 18 ♖h1 ♗c7 19 ♕d3 gives him a winning attack, since in this version, Black ends up with similar structural woes, but with queens remaining on the board to add to his king’s misery.

14 ♖c1 ♕f5 15 ♘xf5 gxf5 16 ♖xb2

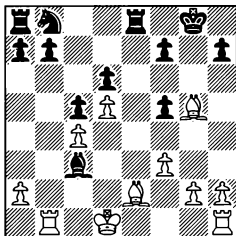
White’s queen can do no more than to unclench her teeth and face her sister’s upcoming visit with the resignation of the condemned.

16...♕xb2 17 ♖b1!

A new move and a huge improvement over 17 ♖c2 ♕e5 18 f4 ♕d4 19 ♕d3 ♖e8+ 20 ♖e2 ♖xe2+ 21 ♖xe2 ♘d7 22 ♕xf5 ♖e8+ 23 ♖d2 ♘b6 24 ♕d3 ♖g7, E.Bukhman-R.Nezhmetdinov, Daugavpils 1973. Black’s position is far more coordinated than the one Van Wely got versus Carlsen.

17...♕c3+ 18 ♖d1 ♖e8!?

Otherwise, 18...b6 19 ♕d3 ♖e8 20 ♖b3 ♕d4 21 ♕xf5 with a miserably passive game for Black.



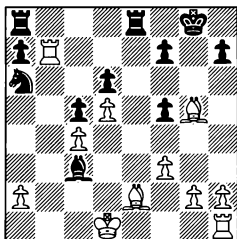
Exercise (planning/critical decision): Van Wely doesn't want to go passive, so he offers b7, realizing it is Black who is better developed, and who eventually takes over the newly-opened b-file. White is given a choice of two plans: a) White can play it safe with 19 ♖b3 ♗e5 20 f4, followed by ♗d3, which wins the f5-pawn, with a nagging edge for White. b) White can abandon caution and play 19 ♖xb7. The trouble is Black responds with ... ♘a6 and challenges the b-file. White, who is behind in development may have to hand over the file later and potentially allow Black's rook on to his seventh rank. However, if White can get away with 'b', then he not only picks up b7, but also gets f5 as bonus. Which line should he play?

Answer: Counterintuitively, White gets away with 'b'.

19 ♖xb7!

Carlsen, allows himself to fall deeply behind in development, unwilling to play it safe by gathering a small edge after 19 ♖b3 ♗e5 20 f4 ♗d4 21 ♗d3.

19... ♘a6



White's issues:

1. Black is about to shift a rook to b8 and challenge the b-file.
2. White must worry about ...♙b4.

Exercise (critical decision): White's choices are 20 ♖b3, going into damage-minimizing mode by sealing the b-file, or 20 a3, which hands Black the b-file, but keeps Black's knight out of the picture. We must proceed with extreme caution, as if on a narrow mountain trail in the early morning fog. What does your intuition tell you to play?

Answer: 20 a3!!

Danger tends to follow a person with a feverish imagination. Sometimes we confuse the difficult with the impossible. In this case there simply is no contradiction, despite numerous signs which indicate otherwise. Carlsen severely restricts the knight's movements. It takes terrific defensive intuition to realize that White gets away with such a luxury when already lagging in development. Carlsen, who moves with the nocturnal stealth of a black cat on a moonless night, counterintuitively allows a black rook to enter his seventh rank, once again refusing to play it safe with 20 ♖b3 ♗d4 21 ♗d2 ♖g7.

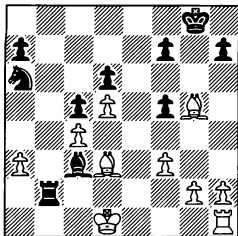
20...♖ab8 21 ♖xb8 ♗xb8!?

To look for a needle, one must first find the haystack. An admission that his original infiltration plan isn't working out.

Question: Why such a genteel measure, when the point of Black's strategy is to infiltrate with a rook down the b-file?

Answer: It was, but I think an awful realization swept over Van Wely, with a true understanding of his dire predicament. After the natural 21...♖xb8, Black fully expects a burst of counterplay anon. However, how lengthy an anon is not so easy to gauge. At first sight it

certainly feels as if White's forces are pinned down, as if under a rock slide. Indeed, 22 ♖d3 ♜b2 looks incredibly dangerous for White.



If I had calculated to this point, I would automatically reject the line for White. Carlsen's intuition, however, is a wee bit more refined than that of your not-so-gifted writer's, whose instincts in such situations are rather low on the Darwinian talent scale. After 23 ♖xf5 ♜xg2 24 ♖f4 ♚c7 (or 24...♖e5? 25 ♖xe5 dxe5 26 ♜e1 ♚g7 27 d6 ♜f6 28 f4!! ♜g8 29 ♜xe5 with a winning position for White) 25 ♖h3 ♜a2 (25...♜g6 26 ♜e2 leaves Black hopelessly passive and White's win is just a matter of time) 26 ♖xd6! ♜a1+ 27 ♚c2 ♜xh1 28 ♚xc3 ♜c1+ 29 ♚b3 ♚a8 30 ♖xc5 ♚b6 31 d6 ♚xc4 32 d7 ♚a5+ 33 ♚b4 ♚c6+ 34 ♚b5 ♚d8 35 ♖f5 ♖e1 36 ♖d4 ♜d1 37 ♖f6 White wins.

Question: Carlsen couldn't possibly have seen all of this when he played 20 a3. How did he know he could get away with the crime?

Answer: I don't understand what mechanism within his mind told him he could get away with allowing Black a rook on his seventh rank, but computer analysis backs up his decision. As I mentioned in the Introduction to this book, the only players in chess history with similar supernatural intuition were Morphy, Capablanca and Fischer. Clearly, Carlsen now joins this stratospheric group, who played chess as if they recalled something which they already understood from a previous life.

22 ♖d3 ♚d7 23 ♚c2!

Deadly accurate. 23 ♖xf5?! allows 23...♚e5 24 ♚c2 ♖d4 and White must either hand over the c4-pawn or return the bishop-pair.

23...♖d4 24 ♜b1

Black has no time for ...♚e5, since he has his own seventh rank to cover.

24...♚b6 25 ♖f4! ♖e5

After 25...♜d8 26 a4! ♚xa4 27 ♜b7 a5 28 ♜b5 ♜a8 29 ♖xd6 ♚c3 30 ♜b8+ ♜xb8 31 ♖xb8

a4 32 d6 ♖f8 33 d7 ♜e7 34 ♙xf5 ♜a2 35 ♙c7 ♜b4+ 36 ♖b1 ♜c6 37 ♜a2 White's king simply strolls over to take the a4 straggler. Black is unable to challenge with 37...♙e5??, since he loses a piece after the deflection trick 38 d8♞+! when the white bishop's lips curve into a bleak smile at the thought of his e5 brother's distress.

26 ♜e1 ♜g7 27 ♙g3

Threat: f4, winning a piece.

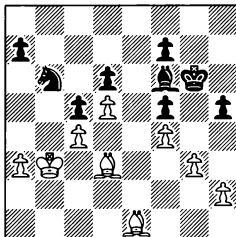
27...♜e7 28 f4 ♙f6 29 ♜xe7 ♙xe7 30 ♙e1 h5

30...♜g6 (Black's king withdraws behind what he hopes to be a barrier of impenetrability) 31 h3 (31 g4?! is premature, since Black can play 31...♜g7! 32 gxh5 when White's win is endangered, since Black tricked White into doubled, isolated f-pawns) 31...h5 32 g3! is similar to the game continuation.

31 g3! ♙f6 32 ♖b3

White's king secures c4 and now ♙xf5 becomes a very real threat.

32...♜g6



Exercise (combination alert): The black king's temporary control over f5 is hollow acclaim. Carlsen made one powerful move and Black resigned. Find the theme.

Answer: Pin. The f5-pawn, flayed raw, now lays exposed to the elements. There is no defence to the coming g4.

33 h3! 1-0

Black finds himself in morose contemplation of his coming fate and decides to resign.

Question: Why resign when only one pawn down for Black?

Answer: At Carlsen's level, with one extra pawn, the bishop-pair and more space, White's win is a certainty. For example: 33...♙d4 34 g4 hxg4 35 hxg4 ♜f6 36 ♙xf5 ♜e7 (the unwill-

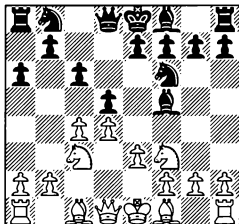
ing king is pressed into the service of protecting his vulnerable d6-pawn) 37 g5 ♖e3 38 ♙g3 ♙d2 39 ♙c2 ♙e3 40 a4 ♙d2 41 ♙d3 ♙d7 42 ♙c2 ♙e3 43 a5 ♙d4 44 ♙f5 ♙b8 45 ♙d3 ♙a6 46 ♙e1 ♙c7 47 ♙e4 ♙a6 48 ♙c8 ♙c7 49 f5 ♙d8 (49...♙e5 50 f6+ ♙e8 51 a6 leaves Black gasping for air) 50 ♙b7 ♙d7 51 ♙g3 ♙e7 52 f6+ ♙d7 53 ♙c6+ ♙d8 54 ♙xd6 and the ruthless bishop likens his d6 prisoner to livestock, to be sold or bartered way to the slaughterhouse on a whim.

Game 35
M.Carlsen-G.Kamsky
St. Louis 2013
Slav Defence

1 ♙f3 ♙f6 2 c4 c6 3 d4 d5 4 ♙c3 a6

The ...a6 Chebanenko Slav lines are slowly gaining popularity and may one day catch up with Black's two main options, 4...e6 and 4...dxc4.

5 e3 ♙f5



6 ♙d3

Question: It's a mystery why Carlsen willingly enters such sleep-inducing opening lines. Why doesn't he play something sharper?

Answer: Carlsen's move algorithms, like those of devoted adherents of minimalism before him, Capa and Fischer, tend to veer to the simple and the straightforward. As a Slav guy, I am always happy when White offers this kind of swap, since it eases Black's slight cramp. 6 ♙b3, White's main move, is usually met with 6...♙a7 7 a4 e6 8 a5 ♙bd7 9 ♙e2 ♙d6 10 0-0 h6 11 ♙d2 0-0 12 ♙fd1 ♙e7 13 ♙e1 ♙e8 14 ♙ac1 ♙e4. I would be happy with Black's position, V.Mikhalevski-B.Avrukh, Acre 2013.

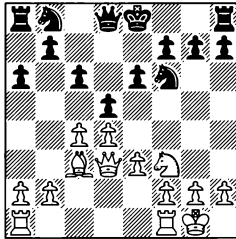
6...♙xd3 7 ♜xd3 e6 8 0-0 ♙b4

Preventing e4 ideas from White and a more aggressive choice than 8...♙e7 9 e4 dxe4 10 ♜xe4 0-0 11 ♜d1 ♜bd7 12 b3 ♜c7 13 ♙b2 ♜ad8. I don't believe that White's extra space means anything here, E.Tomashevsky-G.Kamsky, Tromsø 2013.

9 ♙d2 ♙xc3!?

A clear indication that Kamsky is unintimidated by his opponent. Safer is 9...0-0 10 ♜fd1 a5 11 a3 ♙e7 12 e4 dxe4 13 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 14 ♜xe4 ♜d7 15 ♙f4 when Black looks solid enough, although he must be on the lookout for ♜d3 lifts to the kingside, L.Aronian-V.Topalov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

10 ♙xc3



The first imbalance arises: bishop versus knight.

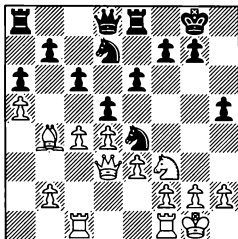
Question: Isn't White's bishop in the category of bad bishop?

Answer: There is potential but not yet, while the pawn structure still remains fluid. We are reminded of Tartakower's joke about the worst bishop still being superior to the best knight.

10...0-0 11 a4

This move is new. Previously, after 11 ♜d2 b5?! (a violation of the principle: avoid confrontation when lagging in development; it's safer to first toss in 11...♜bd7) 12 cxd5 cxd5 13 a4! bxa4 14 ♜xa4 ♜b6 15 ♙b4 ♜c8 16 ♙c5 ♜b7 17 ♜fa1 Black found himself under pressure, tied down to his a-pawn, E.Bacrot-P.Stoma, Warsaw (rapid) 2011.

11...♜bd7 12 a5 ♜e4 13 ♙b4 ♜e8 14 ♜ac1 h5!?



Question: What on earth is this all about?

Answer: The move isn't as radical as it looks. Black simply gains useful kingside space, possibly in preparation for a future ...g5 and ...f5. I don't see a good way for White to exploit the move, despite its rather outrageous outer appearance.

15 ♖e5

Clearing the way for f3 to eject Black's e4-knight.

15... ♜c7

Question: Does swapping on e5 help or hurt Black?

Answer: In the majority of cases in such structures it hurts Black, unless you spot some anomaly. In this case, I like the looks of White's bishop over Black's knight after 15... ♖xe5 16 dxe5 f5 17 f3 ♖g5 18 ♜c3.

16 ♖xd7 ♜xd7 17 ♜e2?!

This move doesn't make all that much sense, since Black was going to retreat the knight anyway after a coming f3. GM Jon Ludvig Hammer suggests 17 f3! ♖f6 18 e4! with an edge for White, who begins to capture central space.

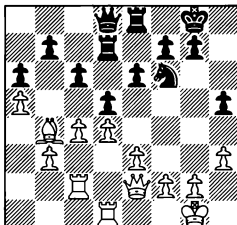
17... ♖f6 18 ♜fd1 ♜c7 19 h3

I would opt for 19 f3 to restrain Black's knight from either e4 or g4. White can think about futures involving e4 at the correct moment as well.

19... ♜ad8 20 b3

A useful move, to give White options to recapture on c4 with a pawn if he chooses.

20... ♜d7 21 ♜c2 ♜d8



22 ♖cc1?

Carlsen, not normally one to duck a skirmish, this time elects to temporize, egging Black on to attack his king.

Question: Can White still play for f3 and e4?

Answer: Carlsen missed his chance to do so on his 17th move, and at this point Black looks reasonably well placed for f3 and e4 tries. For example: 22 f3 ♜c7 (now if White does nothing, Black can think about ...e5 ideas) 23 e4!? dxe4 24 fxe4 ♜f4 25 e5 ♜e4 26 ♜d3 ♜g3 27 ♜e1 ♜f5 28 ♜c5 ♜g5 29 ♜b6 h4 30 ♜f2 ♜c8 and it's not easy for White to find a plan to make progress, although I still prefer his side.

22...h4!?

Kamsky may have interpreted Carlsen's swaying back and forth over the last few moves as a sign of weakness and decides to play for the win.

23 ♜e1

Now the bishop eyes a potential target on h4.

23...♜e4 24 ♜g4

Threat: f3, winning a pawn.

24...g5

Now bloodshed is inevitable. If given a choice, I would love to play the black side here: ...f5 is coming, and worse, I don't see an obvious point of counterplay for White.

25 cxd5

Principle: meet a wing attack with a central counter.

25...f5!

More accurate than 25...exd5 26 f3 ♜g3 27 ♜xg3 hxxg3 28 ♜xg3 ♜xe3 29 ♜e1 ♜xe1+ 30 ♜xe1 f6 31 f4 ♜g7 32 fxg5 fxg5 33 ♜e3, which leaves Black's king uncomfortably exposed. Note too that a5 isn't hanging, since if 33...♜xa5?? White forces mate with 34 ♜e8+ ♜h7 35 ♜h5+ ♜g8 36 ♜e8.

26 ♚f3 cxd5 27 ♜c2

At last, Carlsen is given something to do. He hopes to generate counterplay along the newly opened c-file. Visually, it still appears as if Black's kingside attack should prevail.

27... ♜g7

Now ...g4 is coming.

28 ♜dc1!

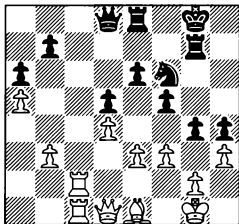
The court is abuzz with gossip concerning the white queen's mental competency. The flicker of an idea, once just a notion, now begins to take on corporeal form. Hey, I said "...g4 is coming"! Amazing sang froid: White refuses to move his queen. Carlsen ignores Black's 'threat', and is willing to take on a high-risk venture by willingly provoking his opponent, hoping to redeem past lethargic play.

28... ♖f6!

Question: Isn't 28...g4 crushing?

Answer: Apparently not. It looks murderously powerful, but *Houdini* easily waves it off after 29 ♜f4! gxh3 30 f3! ♜g3 31 ♜h2! hxg2 32 ♜xg2 when White regains his sacrificed pawn. After 32... ♜b8 33 ♜xb8 ♜xb8 34 ♜xg3 hxg3+ 35 ♜xg3 it's advantage to White in the ending, since he owns the open c-file and has possibilities of ♜g3-f4, seizing king-dominance in the coming ending.

29 ♜d1 g4 30 f3!



Carlsen displays startling ingenuity in a position which most would consider barren of counterattack possibility. The negotiations enter a more delicate stage and Carlsen dangles a fat bribe before his opponent. White easily defends via the second rank and threatens to seize an advantage with ♜xh4.

30...gxh3

If 30...g3 31 ♜b4 and advantage White, since the kingside is nearly sealed and he owns the only open file on the board.

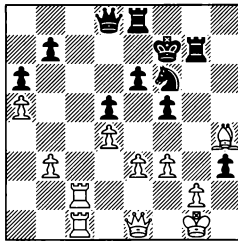
31 ♖xh4

Black's dark squares grow ever weaker. "The attacker has become the attacked," writes Hammer.

31...♟f7?!

Kamsky is unable to awaken from an ever deepening attacking delirium. After 31...hxg2 32 ♖e1! ♜e7 33 ♜c7 ♜f8 34 ♜xg7+ ♜xg7 35 ♖g3! both ♖e5 and ♜c7 are in the air. Note how now the bishop looks clearly superior to Black's remaining knight. Here White can also play for a risk-free win with 35 ♜g3 ♜xg3 36 ♖xg3 ♜e7 37 ♜xg2 when it won't be so easy to hold the draw for Black, since White owns the c-file, the superior minor piece and control over the dark squares.

32 ♜e1



32...hxg2?

Now Black's fortunes turn to dust. He had to try 32...♟g8 33 g3 ♟h7 34 ♟h2, but even here White's king is safe and h3 falls if a few pieces get traded off the board.

33 ♜c7+ ♜e7 34 ♖xf6!

Even stronger was 34 ♜c8! ♜d7 35 ♖xf6 ♟xf6 36 ♜h4+ ♟g6 (36...♟f7 37 ♜h5+ ♟f6 38 f4! is zugzwang; if 38...♜g6 39 ♜f8+ ♜f7 40 ♜h4+ ♟g7 41 ♜h8 mate) 37 f4 when Black is in zugzwang. If 37...♜e8 38 ♜8c7 ♜xc7 39 ♜g5+ ♟h7 40 ♜h5+ ♟g8 41 ♜xe8+ ♟h7 42 ♜xc7 wins.

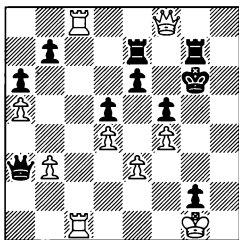
34...♟xf6 35 ♜c8 ♜d6 36 ♜h4+

White has a blistering attack and his own king remains safe for now, thanks to Black's traitorous g-pawn, which shields White's king from checks.

36...♟f7 37 ♜h5+ ♜g6 38 f4 ♜a3 39 ♜h8

The queen passes by the defenders, silent and unnoticed as a shadow. White threatens mate on the move. Black tries frantically to save his king, coming across as one of those movie surgeons who continue to pound on his long dead patient's chest, yelling "Live, damn you, live!".

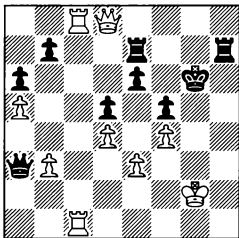
39...♖g7 40 ♜h5+ ♜g6 41 ♜h8 ♜g7 42 ♜f8+ ♔g6



Exercise (planning): The heavy heel of White's oppression once again falls upon the black king's neck. Continue Carlsen's attack.

Answer: Remove the g2-pawn. Black's discovered checks are worthless and White opens the g-file to go after Black's king via g1.

43 ♜xg2! ♜gf7 44 ♜d8! ♜h7



Exercise (planning): Medics and stretcher bearers arrive, hoping it isn't too late to assist Black's grievously wounded king. How did Carlsen force mate?

Answer: The key is to add another attacker along the g-file.

45 ♖g1 ♗a2+ 46 ♜f3+ ♜f6

Black's king rails against his would-be defender's reprehensible ineptitude, going out kicking and screaming, the way a petulant child throws a tantrum at the mall.

47 ♗g8!

The queen's blood-coated axe tells the story without words. The threat: ♖g6 mate.

47...♗h3+ 48 ♖g3 ♖xg3+ 49 ♗xg3 1-0

The queen's long silent consternation is broken with a monumental tantrum aimed at her f6 brother. White threatens mate in two, starting with ♖f8+ and Black's remaining defenders prove inadequate: 49...♖g7 (or 49...♗b1 50 ♖f8+ ♖f7 51 ♗g5 mate) 50 ♖f8+ ♖f7 51 ♗g5 mate.

Game 36
M.Carlsen-F.Caruana
Zurich 2014
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♖f6 4 d3

I don't think these anti-Berlin-ending lines promise White any edge out of the opening, but they do have the benefit of avoiding the reams of theory involved in the theoretical ending line: 4 0-0 ♖xe4 5 d4 ♖d6 6 ♗xc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 ♖f5 8 ♗xd8+ ♜xd8 9 ♖c3, and now White must be ready for 9...♜e8, 9...h6, 9...♖e7 and 9...♗d7. Of course, Carlsen plays the black side of the Berlin and is intimately aware of the theory, but in this instance decides to challenge Caruana in the middlegame.

4...♗c5

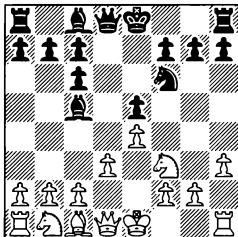
Black lifts the bishop to the outside of the pawn chain before playing ...d6. Also very playable is 4...d6 5 c3 g6 6 ♖bd2 ♗g7 7 ♖f1 0-0. To my mind Black is ahead of schedule from a normal Closed Ruy Lopez, since he usually must waste time with the manoeuvre ...♗e7, ...♖e8, ...♗f8, ...g6 and ...♗g7.

5 ♗xc6!

Giving the game a kind of Exchange Lopez feel. More common are the lines 5 0-0, 5 c3 and 5 ♖c3.

5...dxc6 6 h3

6 ♖xe5?? is a major blunder. Black responds with the double attack 6...♗d4 7 ♗e3 ♗xe5 8 d4 ♗xe4 9 dxc5 ♗xg2 10 ♖f1 ♗h3 and White can comfortably resign.



6...♞d7

Question: Why does Black retreat an already developed piece in the opening?

Answer: This manoeuvre is typical for such structures, as f6 isn't such a great post for Black's knight. By transferring it to d7, he makes room for ...f6, and then transfers the knight to either g6 or e6, via f8. Just a few days before this game was played, Nakamura tried 6...♙e6 7 ♜c3 ♚d6 8 0-0 0-0-0?! (8...a5!, intending to castle kingside, looks about even) 9 a3 ♜h5 10 ♜a4 ♙b6 11 ♜xb6+ axb6 12 a4 f6 13 ♙e3 ♜f4 14 a5 with a dangerous initiative for White, although Nakamura managed to pull off the win, V.Anand-H.Nakamura, Zurich 2014.

7 ♙e3

7 ♜bd2 and 7 0-0 are also played here.

7...♙d6

Question: Same question: why back off?

Answer: Principle: the side with the bishop-pair should avoid swapping one of them off.

8 ♜c3

This move is new in the position. The intention may be to later transfer the knight to g3, via e2. The very next round saw 8 ♜bd2 0-0 9 0-0 ♙e8 10 ♜c4 ♜f8 11 d4 exd4 12 ♚xd4 c5 13 ♚d3 b6 14 ♜xd6 (14 ♙ad1 is met with 14...♙b7 when Black has a nice position) 14...♚xd6 15 ♚xd6 cxd6 16 ♙fd1 ♙b7 17 ♙xd6 ♙xe4 18 ♜e1 ♙ad8 19 ♙ad1 ♜e6 with an even game, likely to head for a draw, V.Anand-M.Carlsen, Zurich 2014.

8...c5

This clamps down on potential d4 breaks from White, but on the down side, bogs down the position even more for Black's bishops.

9 0-0 ♠f8 10 ♠d2

Freeing the way for f4 and also ♠c4.

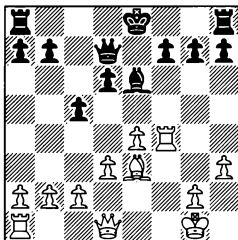
10...♠g6

Oh, no you don't.

11 ♠c4 ♠e6 12 ♠e2!?

Carlsen fights for the f4-square, hoping to play a future f4, which opens the f-file.

12...♣d7 13 ♠xd6+ cxd6 14 f4 exf4 15 ♠xf4 ♠xf4 16 ♠xf4



A new imbalance arises: the presence of opposite-coloured bishops. So far neither side can claim an edge.

16...b6!?

Question: What is the point of this move?

Answer: Black backs up his c5-pawn, preparing the freeing ...d5! break. Safer is 16...0-0! when White can't get anything from 17 ♣h5 f6. And now White is unable to play 18 ♠h4?? due to 18...g5! winning material.

17 ♣h5!

Carlsen's last move makes Black think twice about castling kingside. After 17 d4 f6! 18 ♣d2 0-0 19 ♠d1 ♣b7 20 d5 ♠f7 White's e- pawn is a potential target to pile up on, with ideas like ...♠g6 and doubling rooks on the e-file.

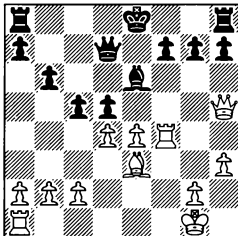
17...d5

Question: Is castling kingside all that unsafe for Black?

Answer: I think it's too dangerous and just begs White into an attack after 17...0-0? 18 ♠h4 h6 19 ♠f1! (19 ♠xh6 is too early: Black survives after 19...gxh6 20 ♠f1! f6 21 ♠ff4 ♠f7 22 ♠xh6 ♠h7 23 ♣xf6 ♠e8 24 ♣g6+ ♠g7 25 ♣h5 ♠h7 with a draw) 19...f6 (19...f5? is met by 20

♙xh6 with a winning position for White) 20 ♖g6! (now Black must lose a pawn) 20... ♗f7 (20... ♖h8?? is just suicide after the completely obvious 21 ♙xh6) 21 ♜xh6! ♗xg6 22 ♜xg6 with a healthy extra pawn for White.

18 d4!



Principle: open the position and create confrontation when leading in development.

18...c4!

Caruana wisely closes lines.

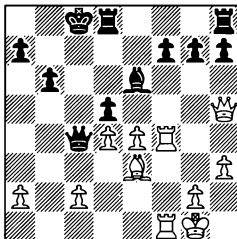
19 b3!

Same principle.

19... ♗c6?!

This natural move gets Black into serious trouble. Caruana wants to keep queenside castling options open, which appears to be a misappraisal of his chances on that side of the board. Believe it or not, Black is better off leaving his king dead centre with 19... ♜c8! 20 ♜af1 cxb3 21 cxb3 ♜c2 22 e5 ♜xa2 23 ♜4f3 h6. To the human eye, this looks very dangerous for Black. *Houdini*, however maintained equality, no matter what I tried as White: for example, 24 ♗h4 (or 24 ♜g3 g6 25 ♗h4 ♗e7 26 ♙g5 ♗b4 27 ♜gf3 ♜e2 28 ♙e3 ♗c3 29 ♗f6 ♜h7 30 ♜c1 ♜c2 31 ♜xc2 ♗xc2 32 ♙f2 ♖d7 when Black stands no worse and may even play for a win by pushing his queenside pawn majority) 24... ♗b5 25 ♗g3 g5 26 ♜xf7 (this looks crushing, but isn't) 26... ♙xf7 27 e6 ♙xe6 28 ♗b8+ ♖e7 29 ♗xh8 ♗xb3 30 ♙f2 ♗c2 31 ♗g7+ ♖e8 32 ♗xh6 ♖d7 33 ♗xg5 a5 34 ♙h4 ♗e4 35 ♗d8+ ♖c6 36 ♗a8+ ♖b5 and White must take the perpetual check, since both the mate on g2 and ... ♗xh4 are threatened: 37 ♗e8+ ♖a6! (Black can't get greedy with 37... ♖b4?? because of 38 ♙e7+ ♖c3 39 ♗c6+ ♖d3 40 ♜f3+ with a winning attack) 38 ♗a8+ with a repetition.

20 ♜af1 0-0-0 21 bxc4 ♗xc4



Exercise (planning): How should White continue his attack?

Answer: Sacrifice the exchange on f7, after which White picks up at least one pawn while retaining attacking chances.

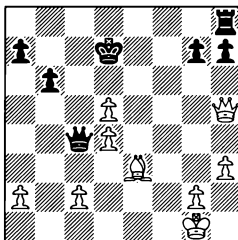
22 ♖xf7!

The dispute is modified by the uninvited entry of a third party. This shot creates an unbridgeable chasm between the two sides. It immediately becomes clear that only one will survive the coming ordeal. "This exchange sacrifice gives White some winning chances without any real risk," writes GM Alex Baburin.

22...♙xf7 23 ♜xf7 ♜d7

White's seventh rank control must be challenged.

24 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 25 exd5



Once again, Carlsen's uncanny ability to out-assess his opponents comes into play. Black simply doesn't have time to pick up c2.

Question: So what? Even if White hangs on to c2, isn't Black okay, since White lacks force to generate a mating attack?

Answer: Well, I'm not so certain about your claim of the black king's absolute safety. I see your point though. It feels as if White's potential for attack is effaced through simple privation. If one seeks to attack, an army is required. And armies require capital, which White seems to lack. The trouble with this theory is White in a sense does have plenty of material to attack with from the following factors:

1. Black's king is clearly exposed and will have a terribly difficult time finding safety.
2. White's bishop is more potent an attacker than Black's remaining rook is a defender.
3. White doesn't have to play for mate. He can play for pawn promotion with his advanced d-pawn; if he breaks the c4 blockade and achieves c4 and c5, Black will be completely lost.

Conclusion: It feels as if every muscle fibre in Black's position aches with strategic complaint. Black is on the cusp of losing, if not already there.

25...g6

Not 25...♖xc2?? 26 ♖g4+ ♜d6 27 ♜e6+ ♜c7 28 d6+ ♜b7 29 ♜e7+ ♜a6 30 d7 ♜xa2 (or 30...♜c7 31 ♙g5, which forces promotion and wins) 31 d8♜ ♜xd8 32 ♜xd8 with an easy win for White, who pushes his other passed d-pawn. The presence of White's remaining bishop ensures that there will be no perpetual check for Black.

26 ♖g4+ ♜c7 27 ♜e6! ♜b7

Once again, c2 is taboo: 27...♜xc2?? 28 ♜e5+ picks off the rook.

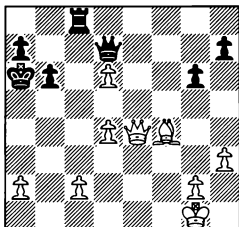
28 ♜e7+?!

This inaccuracy endangers White's win. Correct is 28 ♜f6! ♜e2 29 ♜e7+ ♜a6 30 d6 h6 31 d7 ♜d8 32 ♜h2! ♜xd7 33 ♜xd7 ♜xe3 34 ♜d6! with a technical win, since White's d-pawn is on the move, while Black is denied even a check.

28...♜c7 29 ♜e4 ♜d7!

Black may just barely hold the game after 29...♜d8 30 ♙g5 ♜d7 31 ♙f4 ♜c4 32 d6+ ♜c6 33 ♜e6 b5! 34 d5 ♜c8 35 ♜h2 ♜d8 36 ♜e4 ♜d7 37 a4! ♜e8 (37...bxa4?? 38 c4 allows the central white pawn roller to surge) 38 ♜d4 ♜c8 39 axb5 ♜xc2 40 ♜a4 ♜c5 41 ♜a6+ ♜a8 42 b6 ♜xd5 43 bxa7 ♜b5! when he remains under pressure, but isn't losing.

30 d6+ ♜a6 31 ♙f4 ♜c8



The key for Black's survival is to deny White c4.

32 ♖h2!

Discovering the position's mysterious essence proves elusive. 32 ♜e2+! forces c4, since 32...b5 33 a4 h5 34 axb5+ ♜xb5 35 ♜e6 ♞d8 36 ♙e5 g5 37 ♙f6 ♞d7 38 c4 ♜a4 39 c5 is decisive.

32...♞c4?

Why is it that what we mull over in our head seems so clear and obvious, and then when time comes to implement it over the board, it clouds over with the mud of the trenches? Endless defensive toil has a way of consuming our energy, setting us up for fatigue errors. Both sides drift, perhaps due to looming time pressure, which has a way of dimming our vision of the battlefield. Black's last move results in contamination of his defensive line, the way a rusty faucet gushes out in an unappealing glass of water, with a dirty orange/brown tint to it. 32...b5!, denying White the c4 break, is Black's best chance for survival.

33 ♙g3!

33 ♜e7 may be too early, since Black achieves a light-squared blockade after 33...♜xe7 34 dxe7 ♞c8 35 ♙c7 ♞g8 36 d5 ♖b7 37 d6 ♖c6 38 ♖g3 ♖d7 39 ♖f4 ♞g7 40 ♖g5 ♞f7 41 g4 b5. I don't see a way for White to make progress. He can even lose if he tries too hard: 42 h4 ♞f2 43 ♖h6 ♞xc2! 44 ♖xh7 ♞g2 45 g5 ♞xa2 46 h5 (46 ♖xg6?? b4 and Black is faster in the race) 46...b4 47 h6 b3 48 ♖g8 ♞a4 49 h7 ♞h4 50 ♖f8 ♞f4+ 51 ♖g8 ♞h4 is drawn.

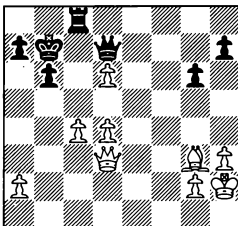
33...♞c8

Caruana probably intended 33...b5 and then feared 34 ♜e7! ♜xe7 35 dxe7 ♞c8 36 ♙c7! ♞g8 37 ♙d6! (37 d5? ♖b7 38 d6 ♖c6 may allow Black a draw due to his iron blockade of the light squares) 37...♖b6 38 ♙c5+ ♖c6 39 ♙xa7 ♖d7 40 ♙c5 ♞a8 41 a3 when White should be able to convert with three pawns for the exchange.

34 ♜d3+! ♖b7

34...b5? loses to 35 a4! ♖b6 (the king squirms in exasperation) 36 axb5 ♜xb5 37 c4! ♜xc4 38 d7!. Overloaded defender. White wins.

35 c4!



At last. Black has no chance as White's central pawns begin to roll forward in concert.

35... ♖c6 36 ♜b3 ♔a8

36... ♜xc4?? loses to the now familiar trick 37 d7.

37 a4 ♜e8 38 a5!

We clearly feel an ominous quality to the a-pawn's approach.

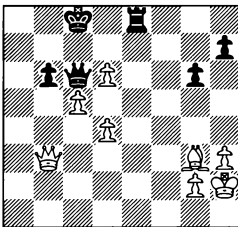
38... ♜b7

38... bxa5 39 c5 a4 40 ♜c4 ♜c8 41 ♜e6 ♜b7 42 d5! ♜xc5 43 ♜e7+ ♜b6 44 d7! ♜xe7 45 dxc8N+! is a sweet underpromotion shot which wins (of course, promoting to a queen also wins).

39 c5

After 39 d5! ♜c5 40 a6+! ♔a8 (40... ♜xa6?? walks into 41 ♜a4+) 41 d7 ♜d8 42 ♜f3! Black can't touch d6 and White threatens d6+ and ♜b7 mate.

39... ♜c8 40 axb6 axb6



Exercise (combination alert): Black's defensive burden seems to have intensified tenfold over the last few moves. 41 cxb6 is good enough to win, but Carlsen's move is stronger and more efficient. What did he play?

Answer: Deflection/double attack.

41 d5!

Step 1: Deflect Black's queen from c6.

41... ♖xc5

Black's queen lives the life of a wage-slave, barely earning enough to keep a roof over her king's head, clothes on their bodies, and the ability to keep starvation at bay. So she greedily gulps down White's c-pawn.

42 ♖a4!

Step 2: Threaten Black's rook, as well as mate on a8.

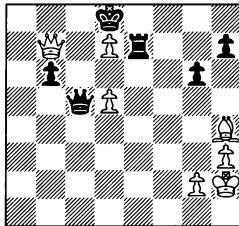
42... ♜e3!

Black's most tenacious try. Caruana attempts to wring every fibre of labour from his already sweating defenders. 42... ♜d8 is met with 43 ♖a8+ ♔d7 44 ♖b7+ ♔e8 45 ♖e7 mate.

43 ♖a8+ ♔d7 44 ♖b7+ ♔e8 45 ♖d7+

The forward d-pawn wedges snugly into the black king's throat, as a fish bone, accidentally swallowed.

45... ♔d8 46 ♙h4+ ♜e7



Exercise (combination alert): White can't take on e7, since the resulting position is drawn. Find one last shot and you end Black's resistance.

Answer: Deflection.

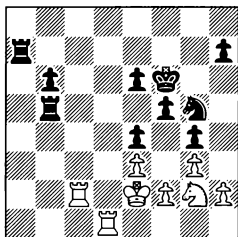
47 ♖c8+! 1-0

"Personal sacrifices are necessary for the welfare of the many," declares White's queen, as she awaits applause. 47... ♖xc8 48 dxc8 ♖+ ♔xc8 49 ♙xe7 wins a piece.

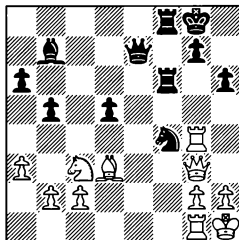
Chapter Five

Carlsen on Accumulating Advantages

Carlsen has been most often compared to Capablanca in the way he slowly accumulates strategic plusses, finagling his way through with the art of the "little combination". One of the more disorienting games of the chapter is his strategic masterpiece versus Kramnik from Wijk aan Zee. It's almost disorienting to watch how Carlsen – who deftly anticipated Kramnik's intent, and who treated his own pieces delicately, as if made of fine china – slowly brought his great opponent to complete strategic inertia, down two pawns and his king, mired in misfortune, with hopelessly weak second and first ranks.



His French win versus Karjakin was also remarkable, in that the French is merely an afterthought in Carlsen's repertoire. So supernaturally subtle are Carlsen's strategic gains, that it is difficult to pinpoint Karjakin's error.



Here Carlsen's pieces began to seep through the fissures of White's defensive line, as myriad burning torches flicker in the night, giving White's king an idea of the attacking force which approached. In this position, all doors for White which were previously opened are now slammed shut, and he is nearly in zugzwang.

Game 37
M. Carlsen-Z. Azmaiparashvili
 Khanty-Mansiysk 2005
Modern Defence

1 d4 d6 2 e4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 f4

The Austrian Attack, perhaps White's most aggressive system versus the Modern Defence.

4...a6

4...♘f6 transposes to the Pirc.

5 ♖f3

5 ♙e3 b5 6 ♖f3 ♘d7 7 ♙d3 is another common transpositional path.

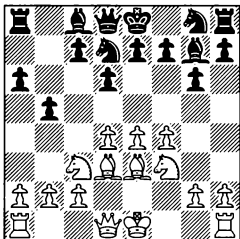
5...b5

Black's ambitious goal is normally to undermine White's centre with ...♙b7, ...♘d7 and ...c5. White must also watch out for ...b4 tricks. Of course this line is awfully risky for Black since by its nature, he or she falls behind in development.

6 ♙d3 ♘d7 7 ♙e3

7 e5 is slightly more common. After 7...c5 (I advocate 7...♘h6 in *The Modern Defence: Move by Move*) 8 ♙e4 ♙b8 9 ♘e2 ♘h6 (Black retains some control over f5, while preparing to castle) 10 c3 cxd4 11 cxd4 (Black looks fine after 11 ♘exd4 ♘c5 12 ♘c6 ♙c7 13 exd6 exd6 14 ♙d5 ♙b6 15 ♙e2+ ♘e6 16 ♘cd4 0-0 17 ♘xe6 ♙xe6 18 ♙xe6 ♙e8) 11...e6 12 0-0

♖b6 13 h3 ♜f5 whose side you prefer is a matter of taste, S.Karjakin-G.Kamsky, Russian Team Championship 2014.



7...c5!?

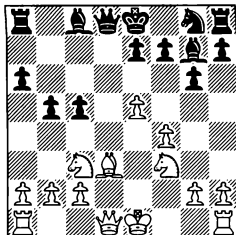
Question: Isn't Black violating the principle: don't open the game and encourage confrontation when lagging in development?

Answer: Correct. Black's last move is book, but not a move I would play. I honestly believe it is dubious to open so soon and don't see a path to equalize if White knows theory. I play the position with 7...♗b7 8 e5 ♖h6, fighting for the light squares and leaving ...c5 for much later. Black constructs a moat of defenders around his king, hoping to keep the hungry white attackers at bay.

8 dxc5!

Principle: open the game when leading in development. I think this is White's strongest move in the position, which scores around 85% in my database. More common is 8 e5 and Black has a tough time equalizing lately from this position as well: for example, 8...♟b7 9 ♟e4 ♟c8 10 ♟xb7 ♟xb7 11 dxc5 dxe5 12 ♟d5! ♟xd5 13 ♟xd5 ♟c8 14 ♟b6 ♟xb6 15 cxb6 was A.Grischuk-E.Bacrot, Dubai (rapid) 2002. Now Black's best hope for equality lies in the line 15...♟f6 16 fxe5 ♟d5 17 ♟d4 0-0 18 0-0-0 when he has yet to claim equality.

8...♘xc5 9 ♙xc5 dxc5 10 e5



"All knowledge comes useful to the detective," declared the sleuth:

1. Black is seriously behind in development.
2. White owns central space.
3. White has possibilities of creating quick confrontation with a4.
4. I don't believe Black's control over the light squares makes up for it.

10...Ra7

This move is new, and an improvement over 10...b7 11 e4! ♖xd1+ (11...b6 may be necessary, but even here, Black's position doesn't look like a picnic after 12 ♗xb7 ♜d8 13 ♖e2 ♖xb7 14 a4 b4 15 ♖e4 ♖c8 16 ♜d5), which lands Black in an awful ending: 12 ♜xd1 ♗xe4 13 ♜xe4 ♜c8 14 ♜d5 c4 15 ♗e2 ♜h6 16 ♜hd1 0-0 17 ♜d7 ♜fe8 18 ♜a7 ♜c6 19 ♜dd7 ♗f8 20 ♜d4 ♜b6 21 ♜c3 and Black is unable to hold it together on the queenside, B.Heberla-M.Kuraszkiewicz, Warsaw 2006. Azmaiparashvili's move may be superior and take Black's position from awful to simply unpleasant – not such a great achievement.

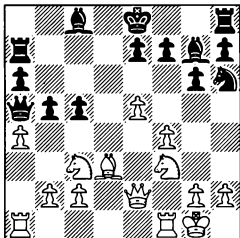
Question: If this is the case, then what was the root of Black's early difficulties?

Answer: I'm convinced the early ...c5 lines, although book, should actually be annotated with '?!', and replaced with the ...h6 plan.

11 ♖e2 ♜h6 12 a4!

Black is unprepared for this early confrontation.

12...♖a5 13 0-0





13...b4

Mutations and non-uniform patterns continue to sprout and blossom throughout Black's degrading structure.

Question: This move creates a gaping hole on c4. Why not play 13...c4?

Answer: Black's options appear to be tightly constrained. Your suggestion fails tactically to 14 ♟f2!. White's designing queen is not the Madonna everyone believes her to be. White threatens both ♟xa7 and also axb5. Black fails to achieve compensation after 14...b4 15 ♟xa7 cxd3 16 ♟b5! 0-0 17 ♟fd4 when White rules, with the initiative and extra material.

14 e4 **0-0** **15** f2

Targeting c5.

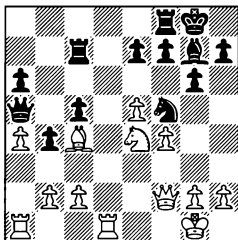
15...♖c7 16 ♘fd2

Threatening ♖c4, trapping Black's queen. Carlsen dominates the central light squares and owns the c4 hole.

16...♗e6?!

The beginning of a dubious strategic plan. Black intends to chop White's knight when it reaches c4, which leaves White with a very favourable opposite-coloured bishop position. Black should just endure the c4 pest and minimize his difficulties with something like 16...♖b6 17 ♘c4 ♜c6 18 h3 ♕f5, with a playable game.

17 ♖c4 ♗xc4 18 ♗xc4 ♞f5 19 ♜fd1



The strategic income gap between rich and poor continues to widen, as Black cries out his poverty:

1. The presence of opposite-coloured bishops favours White, the potential attacker.
 2. Black looks terribly weak on the light squares, with White owning c4.
 3. White owns the d-file.
 4. Black's pieces just sit there with nothing to do. Even ...♘d4 gets ejected with c3.
 5. Black's queenside pawns will be potentially weak in almost any ending.
- Conclusion: Black is strategically busted.

19...♜b6 20 c3

Seizing control over d4.

20...h5!?

With his last move, Black gives only perfunctory attention to his own king's safety. It's understandable that Black wants to secure f5 for his knight, but in doing so, he further weakens light squares. Of course, from a structural standpoint, this initiates a potentially environmentally destructive process to Black's already weakened king. I don't have any better suggestions though, since 20...♜c6 21 ♜e2 a5 22 e6 f6 23 ♜d7 is a slow death for Black.

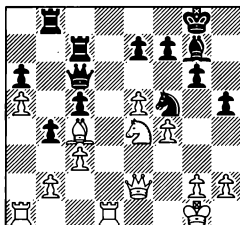
21 a5

Fixing a6 as a potential future target.

21...♜c6 22 ♜e2 ♜b8

22...♜h6 23 g3 doesn't alter the landscape. Here White can also force a winning ending after 23 ♜d5 ♜b5 24 ♜xb5 axb5 25 g3 ♜e3 26 ♜d3 ♜xd5 27 ♜xd5 bxc3 28 ♜xc3 ♜b8 29 a6 and Black soon loses material. As far as I know, pawn promotion is the only renewable resource available to us on the chess board.

23 ♜d5 ♜b5 24 ♜c4 ♜c6



Black's queen senses the bishop's inappropriate attentions toward her are something other than spiritual guidance.

25 ♖d5

White has two promising lines in 25 e6! f6 26 g3 ♘h7 27 ♜d5, or simply 25 ♜d5! when c5 falls, with a winning position for White.

25... ♚e8

The haughty queen strives mightily to master her surging emotions. If 25... ♚b5 26 ♚xb5! with a winning ending, no matter which way Black recaptures: for example, 26... ♜xb5 (after 26... axb5 27 a6 ♜a7 28 cxb4 cxb4 29 ♖b7 Black is paralysed and can resign here as well) 27 ♘g5 e6 28 ♖xe6! when unspoken threats hang in the air and 28... fxe6 29 ♜d8+ ♖f8 30 ♜xf8+! (attraction/fork) 30... ♗xf8 31 ♘xe6+ ♗e7 32 ♘xc7 wins.

26 ♖c4

Carlsen may be playing psychological games with his opponent, pretending he wants a draw.

26... ♖h6!?

A subtext issue rises to the surface: is Carlsen satisfied with a draw in a winning position, while Azmai refuses it in a losing position? Black's appalling risks push him to the edge of his existence. Azmai, at the time rated 100 points higher than his young opponent, perhaps suicidally played for the win, or maybe he just knew Carlsen wouldn't take the repetition draw. If he had played 26... ♚c6 Carlsen would have undoubtedly rejected the repetition offer by tossing in 27 ♜d5! bxc3 28 bxc3 e6 29 ♜xc5 ♚b7 30 ♜xc7 ♚xc7 31 ♖xa6 with a winning position.

27 g3 ♜d8

Black's position feels utterly destitute of helpful plans. 27... ♚c6 is powerfully met with 28 ♜d5! ♚e8 29 ♖xa6.

28 ♖xa6 ♜xd1+ 29 ♜xd1!

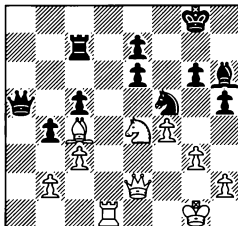
More accurate than 29 ♚xd1 ♚a8 30 ♚d3 bxc3 31 bxc3 ♜a7 32 ♖c4 ♜xa5 when Black is better off than in the actual game.

29... ♖a4 30 ♙c4 ♜xa5

Black has regained his pawn, a fact which gives him little comfort in the coming moves, since the return from Black's initial investment is immeasurably abysmal.

31 e6! fxe6

31...f6 is met with 32 ♖xf6+! ♜h8 33 ♜d8+ ♔g7 34 ♜g8+ ♜xf6 35 ♜e5 mate.



Exercise (combination alert): White's energy trajectory is directed squarely at Black's king. How did Carlsen force mate?

Answer: Clearance.

32 ♖f6+!

Dreadful threats tumble forth from all directions around Black's king.

32... ♜h8

The king hopes to escape with just a flesh wound, yet keep his life. If 32...exf6 33 ♜xe6+ ♜f8 34 ♜xf6+ ♜e8 (the king is the errant third grader making that long, awful walk to the principal's office) 35 ♜d8 mate.

33 ♜d8+ ♔g7 34 ♜g8+ 1-0

It's mate next move.

Game 38
V.Malakhov-M.Carlsen
Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2005
Giuoco Piano

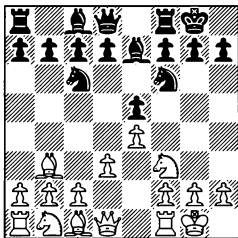
1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 ♙c4 ♖f6 4 d3

This is a good way to enter Lopez-like positions, without allowing Black a choice of numerous side variations.

4...♙e7

Black can also post more aggressively on c5: 4...♙c5 5 c3 d6 6 ♖b3 a6 7 ♜bd2 ♙a7 8 ♜f1 h6 9 ♜g3 0-0 10 0-0 ♙e6 11 h3 ♜d7 12 ♙e3 ♜e7 13 ♜h4 ♜g6 14 ♜hf5 ♜e7 15 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 16 ♙xa7 ♜xa7 17 f4 c5 was M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura, London 2011. I still prefer White after 18 ♙xe6 ♜xe6 19 ♜f3 ♜h7 20 ♜f5, although Black should be okay here with accurate defence.

5 0-0 0-0 6 ♙b3



6...d6

Question: Why doesn't Black free himself and attempt to take the initiative with 6...d5?

Answer: Your suggestion is also played, at the risk of weakening e5: 7 exd5 ♜xd5 8 ♜e1 ♙g4!? (Kasparov offers a pawn sacrifice for Marshall Gambit-like compensation) 9 h3 ♙h5 10 g4 ♙g6 11 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 12 ♜xe5 c6 13 ♜f3 ♙f6 14 ♜e2 ♜h8 15 ♙xd5 cxd5 16 ♜c3 ♙xc3 17 bxc3 ♜c8 18 ♙a3 (*Houdini* prefers to attempt consolidation with 18 ♙d2 f5 19 g5 d4 20 c4 b5 21 cxb5 ♜xc2 22 ♙f4) 18...♜e8 19 ♜xe8+ ♜xe8 20 ♜xd5 ♜xc3 21 ♙b4 ♜xc2 22 ♜e1 ♜c8 23 ♜xb7! (playing on Black's weak back rank) 23...h5 24 ♙xc8+ ♜xc8 25 d4 hxg4 26 hxg4 f5 27 gxf5 ♙xf5 28 ♙c5 and Black's chances to draw are probably higher than White's chances to win, due to the opposite-coloured bishops and reduced pawns, V.Kramnik-G.Kasparov, Novgorod 1995.

7 c3 ♙e6 8 ♙c2

Malakhov seeks to retain the light-squared bishops, perhaps in preparation for d4 and d5.

8...d5

Carlsen seizes the opportunity to free his position.

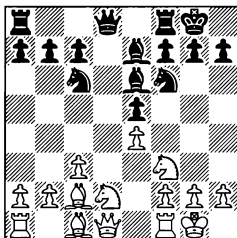
9 ♜bd2

Black's e5-pawn is this time sufficiently covered after 9 exd5 ♖xd5 10 ♖e1 ♗d6 11 ♜bd2 ♖e8 with equality, H.Mestre Bellido-N.Lopez Paniego, Mondariz 2004.

9...dxe4

Carlsen is okay with a clarified structure against his then higher-rated opponent. Black can also retain the central tension with 9...a5 10 ♖e1 ♜d7 11 exd5 ♗xd5 12 ♜c4 ♗f6 13 ♜e3 ♗e6 14 h3 ♜c5 15 ♜g4 ♗xg4 16 hxg4, C.Rossi-P.Vezzosi, Chianciano 1989. White may be able to extract an edge due to his strength on the light squares after 16...h6 17 ♗e3 ♜e6, although it may be offset by Black's extra control over the dark squares.

10 dxe4



Question: The meek shall inherit the earth? Why would Malakhov, who at the time outrated Carlsen by 100 rating points, allow Black such effortless equality?

Answer: Carlsen had just turned 15 years old when this game was played. Malakhov, a strong, experienced GM, not unreasonably assumed he would outplay a kid GM in such a static position, which requires strategic ability more than tactical skills. Even as a mid-teenager, Carlsen displayed himself capable of outplaying his GM elders in quiet positions.

10...♜d7 11 ♖e2 ♖e8

Question: This looks odd. What is the point behind it?

Answer: Black intends to challenge White's light-square strength on the queenside, by ...f6 and ...♗f7.

12 ♜c4 f6 13 ♜e3 ♗f7 14 ♖d1

My tendency would be to remove Black's good bishop from the board with 14 ♗b3.

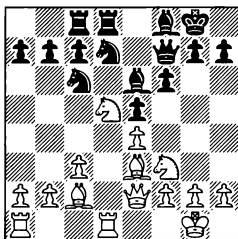
14...♗fd8 15 ♜d5 ♖ac8

Actually c7 didn't require defending. Black can dare White with 15...♜b6!, and if 16

♟xc7 (I don't believe White's bishop-pair means anything after 16...♟e7+ ♜xe7) 16...♟c4 17 ♜e1 ♜xd1 18 ♜xd1 ♜c8 19 b3 ♜xc7 20 bxc4 ♟a5 Black regains the pawn with a nice outpost on c4 and the superior structure, which more than makes up for White's bishop-pair.

16 ♟e3 ♟f8!

An improvement over an earlier game from this mini-match: 16...♟c5? 17 ♟xc5 ♟xc5 18 ♜b5! b6 (Black begins to drop pawns after 18...♜f8 19 b4 ♟d7 20 ♜xb7) 19 b4 (19 ♜xc6 ♟d7 20 ♟xf6+ gxf6 21 ♜d5 is also possible) 19...a6? (Black should settle for 19...♟b8 20 bxc5 c6 21 ♟xf6+ gxf6 22 ♜a4, with advantage to White) 20 ♜xc6 ♜d6 (this move fails to trap White's queen) 21 ♟xf6+! gxf6 22 ♜xd6 cxd6 23 ♜xb6 with a winning position for White, V.Malakhov-M.Carlsen, Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2005.



17 ♜d2 a6?!

This move unnecessarily disallows future ...♟b6 ideas. 17...♟b6 18 ♜ad1 ♜d7 looks more natural.

18 ♜ad1

It isn't going to be easy to eject White's d5 outpost.

18...♟cb8!?

Intending ...c6, at a cost of time and weakening the queenside dark squares.

19 h3 ♜e8

19...c6? 20 ♟b6 ♜c7 leaves Black tangled up.

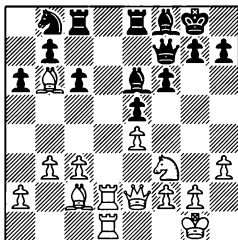
20 b3

This enables White to play ♟b6 next move without hanging a2. He can also try 20 a4! c6 21 a5. Now after 21...cxd5 22 exd5 ♟xh3 23 gxh3 e4 24 ♟d4 f5 25 f4 ♟c5 26 ♟h2 White looks slightly better in this complex position. Black can't play 26...♜xd5?? due to 27 b4! ♟d3 28 ♟b3 ♜c4 29 ♜xd3 exd3 30 ♜xd3 ♟h8 31 ♜d2 with a winning position for White: for example, 31...♜ec8 32 ♟f3 ♜b5 33 ♟xc4 ♜xc4 34 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 35 ♜d8 wins.

20...c6 21 ♟b6?!

This move loses the initiative. Swaps help Black, who is the more tangled. White has a better shot of an edge after 21 Qb4 .

21... Qxb6 22 Qxb6



Exercise (planning): After his next move, Carlsen seized the advantage. How?

Answer: 22...c5!

We sense unspoken overtones from this move's outwardly mild-mannered appearance. Suddenly White's dark-squared bishop finds itself in danger. This fact induces his next weakening move.

23 c4

23 Qd3 c4 24 Qxc4 Qxc4 25 bxc4 Wxc4 26 Qd3 is also unpleasant for White, who must now defend numerous pawn weaknesses on the queenside.

23... Qc6

Advantage Black. Both sides have respective holes on d4 and d5. The difference is the positioning of the knights. Black's is perfectly placed on c6, with entry to d4 next, while White's f3-knight remains a million miles away from d5.

24 We3 Qd4 25 Qd3 Wh5

Also possible was 25... Qc6 26 Qa5 b6 27 Qc3 b5!.

26 Qe2 Wf7 27 Qe1

Maybe White dreams of a future involving Qc2 , Qe3 and Qd5 . Carlsen doesn't give him time.

27... Qc6 ! 28 Qa5 b5

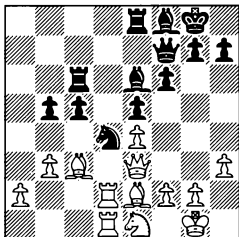
More accurate is to first chase the bishop to c3 with 28...b6! 29 Qc3 b5!, and now White must play 30 cxb5 axb5 with a serious advantage for Black.

29 cxb5?

Black's activity level dramatically increases after this move, while White's pulsates with

worry. White should try and hold the line with 29 ♖c1.

29...axb5 30 ♖c3



Exercise (critical decision): We note incontrovertible signs of decay in White's position, reminding us of a wilting flower, desperately in need of water. Black has access to a counterintuitive plan which leads to a winning position. What would you play?

30...♖a8

This move keeps up the pressure, but even stronger is:

Answer: 30...♖xe2+! is very difficult to find, since we are not inclined to take White's passive bishop with our powerfully posted d4-knight: 31 ♖xe2 b4 32 ♖b2 ♖a8 33 ♖c1 c4 34 bxc4 ♖xc4 (now a2 falls) 35 ♖d3 ♖ac8! (threat: ...♖xd3, followed by ...♖xc1; Black can also try 35...♖xa2 36 ♖xb4 ♖xc1! 37 ♖xc1 ♖xb4 38 ♖dc2 ♖e6 39 ♖b5 ♖f8 with good chances to convert) 36 ♖b2 ♖xa2 37 ♖xe5 ♖b3 38 ♖e1 fxe5 39 ♖xe5 ♖e6 40 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 with a winning position for Black. His passed b-pawn will cost White material.

31 ♖d3 ♖ca6 32 ♖c1 ♖xe2+!

All eyes peer intently upon the knight, as if witnessing a miraculous event. Carlsen finds the correct plan.

33 ♖xe2

"I must expunge this dispenser of radical thoughts, before his ideas gain currency amongst the ignorant masses," thinks White's queen of the knight.

33...c4!

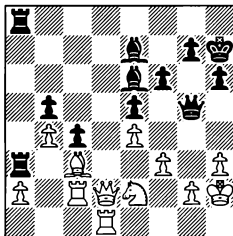
Viral pandemics have a history of originating from densely populated areas.

34 b4?!

After this move White's position deteriorates even further. He had to try 34 bxc4 bxc4 (better than 34...♖xc4 35 ♖e1, and if 35...♖xa2? 36 ♖xa2 ♖xa2 37 ♖xa2 ♖xa2 38 ♖d8 ♖b7 39 ♖b4 ♖a8 40 ♖d1 ♖xd8 41 ♖xd8 ♖f7 42 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 43 ♖d5+ ♖f7 44 ♖xb5 with a likely

draw) 35 ♖b2 ♕a3 when he remains under pressure, but with a better position than he got in the game's continuation.

34...♖a3 35 ♜c2 h6 36 ♜h2 ♜h7 37 ♜d2 ♜h5 38 f3 ♕e7 39 ♜e2 ♜g5



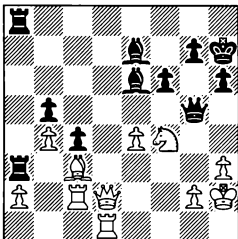
Carlsen offers White entry to a difficult ending...

40 f4?

...which he rejects. When we feel cornered, fear and resentment strive for supremacy. If resentment wins the argument, then we automatically lash out. Sometimes a monumental act of will can change a seemingly predestined result – but usually it doesn't. This is a move played with the philosophy: when we are not powerful enough to overcome an enemy, the next best thing is to harass him by causing mischief. So Malakhov decides there is no sense in allowing the ghosts of past regret to haunt him. This move violates the principle: don't open the game when the opponent owns the bishop-pair. When we speculate like this, our feelings tend to be regret at our decision, mingled with expectancy of the potential reward. White should try 40 ♜xg5 hxg5 41 ♕e1 ♜d3 42 ♖b1 and pray his position holds.

40...exf4 41 ♜xf4

Dark thoughts of revenge still linger in the knight's psyche. White can't save himself after 41 ♜xf4 ♜xa2.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen dramatically increase his advantage?

Answer: Attraction/pin/double attack.

41...♖xc3!

White's quasi-initiative certainly didn't last very long, as Black's surfaces with buoyant ease.

42 ♜xc3

After 42 ♜xe6 ♜e5+ 43 ♜f4 ♜d3! 44 ♜c1 ♜xd1 45 ♜xd1 ♜xf4+ Black wins easily, since he threatens b4, e4 and ...♜d6.

42...♜xb4 43 ♜xe6 ♜e5+

Simpler is 43...♜xd2 44 ♜xd2 ♜xc3 45 ♜c2 ♜e5+. White is unable to put up any resistance in this ending.

44 ♜h1 ♜xe6

The queen tires of the knight's apeish antics and decides upon corrective measures.

45 ♜b1 ♜xc3

The bishop, having grown weary of his long abstention from all earthly pleasures, begins to eye White's queen with strange new eyes.

46 ♜xc3

White's queen copes with life's difficulties with tears and fermented beverages.

46...♜xe4 47 ♜b2

Alternatively, 47 ♜xb5 ♜xa2 48 ♜g3 ♜a1+ 49 ♜h2 ♜d4 (threatening mate) 50 ♜f3 ♜d6+ 51 g3 ♜d2+ 52 ♜g2 c3 and wins.

47...♜d8

47...♜xa2! 48 ♜xa2 ♜b1+ 49 ♜h2 ♜xa2 is also a trivial win for Black.

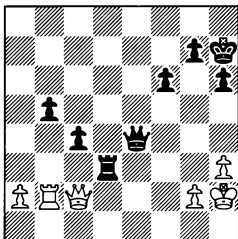
48 ♜h2

48 ♜xb5 is met by 48...♜d3, threatening White's queen and also ...♜xh3+.

48...♖d3

The rook takes on the air of a professor, dealing with a slow pupil, in his dealings with White's queen.

49 ♛c2



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and win heavy material.

Answer: Removal of the guard/discovered attack.

49...c3! 0-1

50 ♖xb5 is met with 50...♗xh3+! 51 ♔xh3 ♛xc2. White's queen is a little taken aback when her subjects greet her unfortunate fall with raucous laughter.

Game 39
M.Carlsen-V.Ivanchuk
Morelia/Linares 2007
Grünfeld Defence

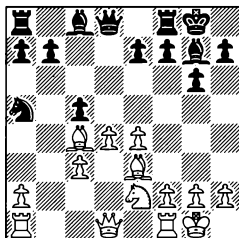
1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♟c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♟xd5 5 e4 ♟xc3 6 bxc3 ♟g7 7 ♟c4

The old school line of the Grünfeld comes with a mountain of theory.

7...c5 8 ♟e2 ♟c6 9 ♟e3

9 d5 isn't particularly effective for White: 9...♟a5 10 ♟b5+ ♟d7 11 ♛a4 b6 12 0-0 a6 13 ♟xd7+ ♛xd7 14 ♛c2 0-0 15 ♟g5 ♟c4 and Black already looks comfortable, L.Christiansen-B.Gulko, Estes Park 1987.

9...0-0 10 0-0 ♟a5



Ivanchuk is the first to vary from the most deeply analysed theoretical lines. Most commonly, tabiya positions are reached via 10...g4 11 f3 d5 12 d3 (12 xf7+ xf7 13 fxg4 is another well beaten line, which probably leads to a draw) 12...cxd4 13 cxd4 e6 14 d5 xa1 15 xa1 when White sacrifices the exchange for heavy compensation.

11 d3 b6

Black plays to stabilize his centre, rather than toss in an exchange on d4. After 11...cxd4 12 cxd4 b6 13 d2 b7 14 a1 c8 15 d5 c4 16 xc4 xc4 17 d4 d6 18 xg7 xg7 19 d4 b4 20 e3 fc8 21 h4 chances look about balanced. White's kingside attacking ideas will not be so easy to pull off due to Black's c-file and central counterplay, L.Van Wely-P.Svidler, Dortmund 2005.

12 fc1

Question: Why isn't a pawn hanging on c5?

Answer: Black obtains heavy compensation after 12 dxc5 bxc5 13 xc5 c7 14 d4 e5 15 e3 c4 16 xc4 xc4. He has the bishop-pair, pawn targets and initiative for the pawn - not such a great deal for White, who scores well below 50% from this position.

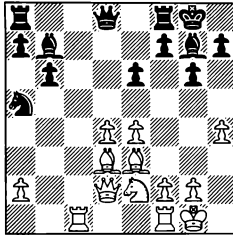
12...cxd4

Ivanchuk decides to swap after all. After 12...e5 13 a4 (Black still gets plenty of compensation from 13 dxc5 e6 14 c4 bxc5 15 xc5 h6 when c4 which will soon come under heavy fire, R.Ponomarev-A.Kovchan, Kiev 2011) 13...d7 14 a3 e6 15 d5 d7 Black will probably try and re-route his knight to d6, via b7, and play for ...f5, K.Sasikiran-G.Kamsky, Dresden Olympiad 2008. I prefer White slightly after 16 c4 since he owns more space.

13 cxd4 e6 14 d2 b7

The players remain within the body of theory.

15 h4



White clears the path to convey his h-pawn up the board in the hope of softening the black king's front with a coming h5. 15 ♖h6 is White's main line, hoping to weaken the dark squares around Black's king.

15...♖e7

Alternatives:

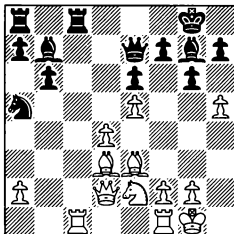
a) 15...♖d7 16 ♕h6 ♜c6 (Black looks okay after 16...♞ac8) 17 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 18 ♕b5 a6 was G.Kasparov-C.Lutz, Frankfurt (simul) 1986. White stands better after 19 ♜c3 axb5 20 d5+ ♜d4 21 ♜xd4+ ♜q8 22 ♜xb6 ♞a6 23 ♞c7 ♜xb6 24 ♜xd7.

b) 15...Qc6 was J.Stocek-P.Eljanov, Mallorca Olympiad 2004. I prefer White's chances after 16 e5, although *Houdini* calls it even.

Question: Is there a queen trap involved in 15...♚xh4?

Answer: Yes. At end of the line, Black is okay materially. The trouble remains his weak king: 16 ♔g5 ♜g4 (16... ♜h5?? 17 ♔g3 ♜g4 18 ♔e2 and in this version Black only gets a single piece for the queen) 17 f3 ♜h5 18 ♔g3 ♔xd4+ 19 ♚f2 ♔xf2+ 20 ♔xf2 ♜h2 21 ♚h1 ♜xh1 22 ♔xh1 and Black's king is in grave danger, J.Ryan-M.Saunders, England 1990.

16 h5 ♖fc8 17 e5!



Carlsen commits to an ambitious attacking plan along the kingside dark squares.

Question: Isn't the cost of handing over d5 very high?

Answer: Maybe it would be if Black's knight were easily available for d5, or if d4 were weak. I think it was a good strategic decision on Carlsen's part, since his kingside dark-square play looks more promising than what Black is offered with the d5 hole.

17...♖xc1

An increased level of sophistication doesn't necessarily correspond to a similar rise in efficiency. A new move, but I'm not so certain this is Black's best plan.

Question: Why not? Ivanchuk logically wants to swap away rooks to reduce White's attacking force.

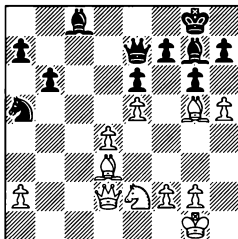
Answer: As the game proceeds, the trade-off of rooks doesn't seem to help Black's king much. He should apply the principle: meet a wing attack with a central counter, with 17...♜d8 18 f3, as in S.Andrew-R.Stone, Lansing 1989. Now Black should continue 18...♜xc1 19 ♜xc1 ♜c8 20 ♜g5 ♜xc1+ 21 ♜xc1 ♜d7.

However, 17...♜c6 18 ♜g3 ♜a5?! is too wishy washy, A.Krutko-S.Vokarev, Ekaterinburg 2008. White seizes a violent kingside initiative with 19 ♜g5 ♜d7 20 h6 ♜f8 21 ♜f4 when 21...♜xc1 22 ♜xc1 ♜c8 23 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 is met with 24 ♜h5!. Black is unable to accept, since 24...gxh5?? walks into mate after 25 ♜xh7+!.

18 ♜xc1 ♜c8

GM Ruslan Scherbakov suggests 18...♜d8. I still like White slightly more after 19 ♜g5, since 19...♜d5 20 f3 ♜d7 21 ♜f6! still looks quite dangerous for Black, who must be on a constant lookout for his kingside dark squares.

19 ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 20 ♜g5



20...♠c7?

"Fine. I can take a hint," spouts Black's offended queen, as she grabs her purse and leaves in a huff. This turns out to be a counterfeit path. Now Black's position radiates lost opportunity and found worry. His last move unleashes vast, unforeseen ramifications. Alternatives were:

a) 20...f6? 21 exf6 ♟xf6 22 ♟xf6 ♟xf6 23 ♟c3 ♟b7 24 ♟c7 ♟d5 25 hxg6 hxg6 26 ♟f4! when White has a strong attack. If 26...♟c6 27 ♟xg6 with a winning position for White, since 27...♟xd4?? is met by 28 ♟h7+ ♟f8 29 ♟d6+ ♟f7 30 ♟d7+ ♟e7 31 ♟g8+ ♟f6 32 ♟h5+, winning Black's queen.

b) 20...♚d7! is Black's best move in a position where everything looks bad: 21 ♠f6 ♖c6 22 ♛g5! ♙xd4 23 ♙xg7 ♜xg7 24 ♜f6+ ♜f8 25 ♖f4 gxh5 26 ♙xh7 ♜c7 27 ♙xh5 is going to be very tough for Black, yet still his best chance to save the game.

21 f6l

Before, there were only anecdotal accounts of White's coming attack, which now moves into the realm of empirical fact.

21...♘c6

Black can put up slightly stiffer resistance with 21...♟b7 22 ♙xg7 ♜xg7 23 ♜g5 ♜g8 24 ♜f6 (threat: h6) 24...♜c8 25 ♜f4 ♜f8 26 hxg6 hxg6 27 ♜xe6! fxe6 28 ♜xg6+ ♜g7 29 ♜e8+ ♜f8 30 ♜xe6+ ♜f7 31 ♜g4+ ♜f8 32 ♙g6 ♜e7, although White's four connected passed pawns should win.

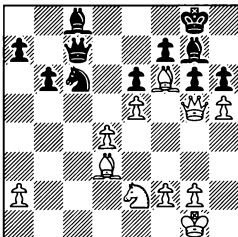
Instead, with 21... ♖xf6 22 exf6 ♜d8 23 ♜g5 White threatens hxg6, followed by a decisive bishop's sacrifice on g6. 23... ♜e8? doesn't help, since 24 ♖f4 is decisive.

22 🖐g5!

Everyone slinks away when White's queen appears, peevish and irritated as the devil with a toothache. Carlsen continues to creep in along the dark squares. Threat: ♖xg7, followed by h6+ and ♗f6.

22...h6

If 22...♙f8 23 hxg6 fxg6 24 d5! exd5 25 ♖xg6 hxg6 26 ♜xg6+ ♙g7 27 ♖xg7 ♜xg7 28 ♜xc6 and wins.



Exercise (planning/composition alert): Black's last move is a desperate attempt to arrest White's kingside progress, by developing antibodies to a potentially lethal virus along the dark squares. Find White's strongest plan.

Answer: Double attack/pin. Black faces double-tiered hindrances to the fulfilment of his wishes.

23 ♜c1!

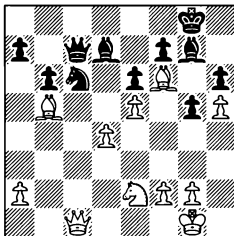
This move effectively suffocates Black's hopes. White attacks g6, but at the same time threatens pin tricks on c6, which leave Black defenceless.

23 ♜h4! is also winning: 23...♙b4 (23...g5?? is met with 24 ♜e4 intending to infiltrate h7) 24 ♖xg7 ♜xg7 25 ♜f6+ ♜g8 26 ♖e4 with either a winning attack or a decisive gain of material.

23...g5

We can only endure stoical silence for so long, before we decide to lash out at our persecutor. 23...♖b7 24 hxg6 fxg6 25 ♖xg6 is completely lost for Black, who is not only down a pawn, but also suffers a wretched position.

24 ♖b5 ♖d7



Exercise (combination alert): We sense that something is off kilter in Black's position, like a mis-set alarm clock which goes off in the middle of the night, disturbing slumber with a Led Zeppelin song. With his last move, Black's bishop sounds the all clear, apparently a tad prematurely. Having digested the data and gleaned the facts, it's time to strike. How did Carlsen win a piece in this position?

Answer: Clearance.

25 d5! exd5 26 ♖d4

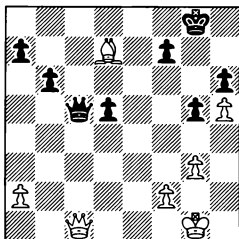
Three attacking; two defending. Black collapses. The insufferable knight has a 'what do you think about that?' look on his face.

26... ♙xf6 27 exf6 ♜d6 28 ♙xc6 ♜xf6 29 ♙xd7 ♜xd4 30 g3

Two pawns for a piece are not enough, especially with so many ready targets for White's queen and bishop.

30... ♜c5

Likewise, 30... ♜c4 31 ♜a3 ♜c7 32 ♙a4 ♜e5 33 ♜e3 and if 33... ♜a1+ 34 ♙g2 ♜xa2 35 ♜e8+ ♙g7 36 ♜e5+ ♙f8 37 ♙c6 ♜c2 38 ♙xd5 ♜c5 39 ♜b8+ ♙g7 40 ♜b7 ♜f8 41 ♜xa7 wins.



Exercise (planning): Ivanchuk, having endured a series of setbacks, seeks solace in an ending. Should White swap and enter the bishop versus two pawns ending?

Answer: The ending is an easy win for White, since he forces a blockade of Black's passers.

31 ♖xc5 bxc5 32 ♙c6!

Rendering Black's passers null and void.

32...d4 33 ♙b5

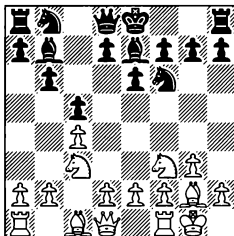
Black's c and d-pawns are forever frozen in place.

33...♙f8 34 f4 gxf4 35 gxf4 1-0

35...♙e7 36 ♙f2 ♙e6 37 ♙c4+ ♙f6 38 ♙f3 ♙e7 39 ♙e4 ♙f6 40 a3 a5 41 a4 is zugzwang; ♙d5 follows.

Game 40
V.Kramnik-M.Carlsen
Wijk aan Zee 2008
English Opening

1 ♖f3 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 c5 4 g3 b6 5 ♙g2 ♙b7 6 0-0 ♙e7



7 d4

It was Kramnik himself who popularized 7 ♖e1.

Question: So why didn't he play it?

Answer: Probably for two reasons:

1. Carlsen had experience from Black's side.
2. Carlsen undoubtedly expected it and prepped for 7 ♖e1.

Later 7...d6 (after 7...♗e4 8 d4!? ♜xc3 9 bxc3 ♙e4 10 ♙f1 0-0 11 ♜d2 ♙b7 12 e4 ♜c6 13 d5 ♜a5 14 ♜b3! d6 15 ♜xa5 bxa5 16 ♜b1 White achieved a favourable Nimzo-Indian structure, R.Ponomarev-M.Carlsen, Moscow 2008) 8 e4 a6 9 d4 cxd4 10 ♜xd4 ♜c7 (not the classic trap 10...♜bd7? 11 e5! dxe5 12 ♙xb7 exd4 13 ♙xa8 when Black didn't have compensation for the exchange, C.Lakdawala-B.Baker, San Diego (rapid) 2010) 11 ♙e3 ♜bd7 (11...♜xc4?? 12 ♜c1 ♜b4 13 e5! dxe5 14 ♙xb7 ♜a7 15 ♜c6 wins) 12 ♜c1 0-0 13 f4 ♜ac8 14 g4 (the position takes on the demeanour of an Open Sicilian) 14...♜c5 15 ♙f2 g6 16 g5 ♜h5 17 ♙e3 e5 18 ♜de2 exf4 was seen in P.Svidler-M.Carlsen, Moscow 2009. The position remains unclear after 19 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 20 ♙xf4 ♜d8 21 h4 ♜e6.

7...cxd4 8 ♜xd4

This counterintuitive move is considered best by theory. Black equalizes after 8 ♜xd4 ♙xg2 9 ♙xg2 ♜c8 10 ♜d3 ♜c6 11 b3 ♜xd4 12 ♜xd4 0-0 13 ♙b2 ♜b7+ 14 e4 d6 15 f3 a6. He achieved multiple freeing exchanges and stands no worse, V.Ivanchuk-D.Jakovenko, Astrakhan 2010.

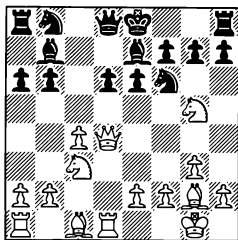
8...d6 9 ♜d1

This is the most common move. Last year Kramnik tried 9 ♙g5 in his rapid match versus Aronian.

9...a6

In order to cover against ♜b5.

10 ♖g5!?



The idea is a direct assault on d6, by later playing one of the knights to e4. 10 b3 and 10 ♗g5 are the alternatives.

10...♗xg2 11 ♔xg2 ♖c6

This is one of the few Hedgehog formations where Black actually gets to tempo White's queen with ...♖c6. Normally Black develops the knight to d7.

12 ♜f4

The queen's most active square. Of course, ...e5 isn't so tempting for Black, since it weakens d5 and gives him a bad, remaining bishop.

12...0-0

Perhaps more accurate than 12...♞a7 13 ♖ge4 ♞d7 14 ♗e3 ♖e5, G.Kasparov-Z.Ribli, Skelleftea 1989. White may be able to extract an edge with 15 ♗d4.

13 ♖ce4

13 b3 ♞a7 14 ♗b2 ♖e5 15 ♖ce4 was preferred in U.Adianto-Wang Zili, Beijing 2000. At this point Black equalizes with 15...♖xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♞d7 17 ♗xe5 dxe5 18 ♞xd7 exf4 19 ♞xd8 ♞xd8 20 gxf4 f5 21 ♖g5 ♞d2. Black's seventh rank rook posting gives him more than enough compensation for the pawn.

13...♖e8!

Better than 13...♖xe4 14 ♜xe4! ♗xg5 15 ♗xg5 ♜c7 16 ♗f4 when White continues to exert slight yet nagging pressure, G.Amann-A.Kranz, Goetzis 1997.

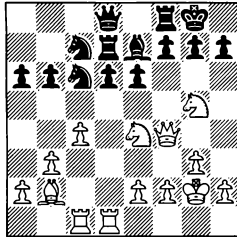
14 b3 ♞a7 15 ♗b2 ♞d7

The ambitious 15...b5 is also possible. 16 ♖f3 bxc4 17 bxc4 f5 18 ♖c3 ♞b7 19 ♞ab1 ♜c8 looks okay for Black.

16 ♞ac1 ♖c7!

A new move at variance with the theoretical norm. We witness the birth of an ambitious and original idea, which hands White serious practical difficulties in the coming middlegame. Carlsen said that he had been surprised by Kramnik's choice of 10 ♖g5, so

this idea may have been an over-the-board inspiration. It isn't as easy to reproduce in the lab, that which nature effortlessly produces outside it.



Question: What does Black hope to gain with a knight on c7?

Answer: The c7-knight serves two purposes:

1. It helps engineer the ...b5 break.
2. More importantly, the knight covers e6, which enables Black to proceed with ...f5!?, followed by a kingside pawn storm. Previously, 16...♖a8 and 16...h6 were played here.

17 ♖f3 f5! 18 ♛c3 g5!?

Here we go. Sometimes we instinctively choose the overt over the subtle, perhaps because our Cro-Magnon DNA demands homage, from time to time.

Question: Isn't this move madness for the following reasons?

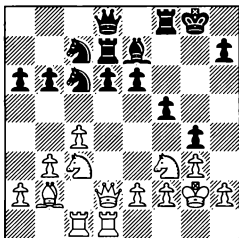
1. Black exposes his king, with the hopes of attacking White's well protected king.
2. The power of White's b2-bishop is greatly enhanced by the weakening of the a1-h8 diagonal.
3. Black loosens his kingside and central pawn structure.
4. The centre is still fluid, so Black may be vulnerable to an early opening, which fits with the principle: meet a wing attack with a central counter.
5. Kramnik is White!

Answer: I remember watching this game live, and I thought Carlsen's plan was overly ambitious as well. When comparing the threat levels of the opposing forces, Black's appears starkly inefficient. However, the word "appears" is meaningful: as it turns out, large-scale implementation of White's plan to burst open the centre extends beyond his limited re-

sources. After analysing the game, I now believe Black's plan is sound.

The key difference between the theoretical and the practical is our sense of involvement, our stake, is so much higher over the board. When chess writers speak of 'objectivity' it is generally hailed as a virtue, since the dreaded non-objective decision allows our prejudices to colour and possibly distort our perceptions. However, in this writer's opinion, it is a mistake to push objectivity too far, since in doing so we distance ourselves from our own likes and dislikes, our feelings and perceptions, joys and sufferings. Was Tal really 'mistaken' when he unleashed his patented semi-sound sacrifices (most of which brought him victory)?

19 ♖d2 g4!



20 ♘e1

Question: Why this meek retreat when White has d4 for his knight?

Answer: That is what I would have played. Perhaps Kramnik feared that 20 ♘d4 is met with the annoying 20...♗g5! 21 e3 (21 ♖xc6? fails to 21...♗xd2 22 ♖xd8 ♗xc1 23 ♗xc1 ♜fxd8 when White doesn't have full compensation for the exchange) 21...♗e5 when f3 is weakened. I still agree with you, in that Black manages to weaken f3 in both versions, so we argue: why not post on d4, rather than the passive e1-square?

20...♗g5!

Carlsen forces e3, which weakens f3 and all the light squares around White's king.

21 e3 ♜ff7

Defending his d7-rook is a useful precaution, in case White later tosses in c5.

22 ♖g1

A safety measure. Kramnik doesn't want his king on g2, vulnerable to tricks along the h1-a8 diagonal.

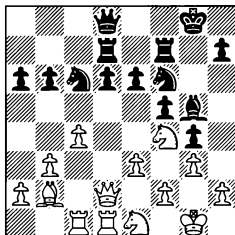
22...♗e8!

The knight has done its job on c7 and now Carlsen transfers it to the kingside, weaving its way to e4 to serve his attacking ambitions.

23 ♖e2

Kramnik clears the long diagonal and perhaps prepares a knight transfer to f4, at the cost of weakening e4 further.

23...♗f6 24 ♖f4



Notice how White is unable to counter Black's kingside build-up with an easy central counter.

24...♜e8

Covering e6.

25 ♜c3 ♜g7!

Enabling ...♗e4.

26 b4!

Kramnik, sensing the storm coming, hurries with a central pawn counter.

26...♗e4 27 ♜b3 ♜ge7 28 ♜a4?!

The queen isn't fooling anyone with her feeble pretence at defiance. This plan is slow. White even looks very slightly better after 28 h4!, as pointed out by GM Nigel Short, after the game. There is no such thing as an absolute safeguard, but this one comes close: 28...♗h6 (after 28...gxf3?! 29 ♖xf3 ♗h6 30 ♖f3 Black's king may be in more danger than White's) 29 ♖ed3 with dynamic equality.

28...♗e5! 29 ♜xa6?

The conceited queen compares herself with all sentient beings in the universe, and to her mind, a.s.b.i.t.u come in a distant second. The mind erupts in turmoil between 'Yes!' and 'No!' when viewing such a tempting yet high-risk venture. When you take step 'a', sometimes it's better to refrain from step 'b'. "The strength of inertia is staggering," write Mikhailchishin and Stetsko. White should enter emergency mode, applying the principle of a central counter with either:

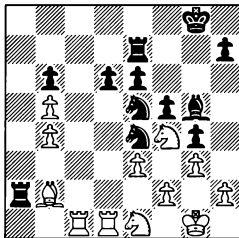
a) 29 c5!? b5 (or 29...dxc4!? 30 c6 dxc7 31 dxc4 b5 32 Wa5 bxc4 33 dxe6! dxc6 34 dxcg5 dxcg5 35 Wxf5 dxc3+ 36 g2 h5 37 dxc3 Wf7 38 Wxf7+ dxf7 39 d5 g6 40 dxc3! gxf3+ 41 dxc3 h3 when White probably has enough for the exchange to hold the game) 30 Wb3 dxc4 31 cxd6 dxd6 32 dxd6 dxd6 33 h4! dxf4 34 exf4 de4 35 d1 and Black still looks slightly better, due to his domination of the central light squares, which means more than White's command of the dark.

b) Sometimes we should just admit when we have taken a wrong turn and do an about face. 29 Wb3 is psychologically very difficult to play, since it admits that 28 Wa4 was misguided.

29...dxc4! 30 Wb5!

I think Kramnik had originally planned 30 Wxb6??. The queen arrives for her visit, but is dismayed by the lack of a marching band to greet her. Kramnik now realized that he is hopelessly lost after 30...dxc4 31 Wd4 dxc6! White loses heavy material, no matter how he proceeds. This line is what I call the iceberg factor: a deeply hidden move at the end of a long line which actually flips an assessment from winning to losing – predicated upon Black finding the hidden 31...dxc6!. Black wins with 32 dxc6 33 Wd3 dxc6+.

30...Wxb5 31 cxb5 dxc4



How painful when we observe a lack in our position, yet are powerless to fix it. Black's flows are indefinable, yet lurk just under the surface of observation. White experiences serious difficulties in this ending, as he faces fresh perils:

1. White's king remains unsafe and all of Black's forces are more active.
2. White's main difficulty is how to remove those nasty e4- and e5-knights.
3. Black controls a healthy 5 vs. 4 kingside pawn majority, while White's doubled b-pawns essentially leave him a pawn down.

32 dxc8+

There is no good reason to improve Black's king position. Better would be 32 dxc3.

32...dxc3 33 dxc3 dxc6!

Black also holds a serious advantage after 33... ♖xd3 34 ♖xd3 ♜f6 35 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 36 ♜c6 ♜b7.

34 ♖xe5+?!


White has better chances to save the game after 34 ♙xe5! dxe5 35 ♖c6 ♜b7.

34...dxe5?!

Carlsen was in time trouble and recaptured incorrectly. Better was 34...♙xe5 35 ♖xe5 dxe5 36 ♔d3 ♜f6 when White's position is near collapse. He is unable to play 37 ♜b8?? due to 37...♜d7 38 ♜xb6 ♜a3 39 ♔b2 ♜xd1+ 40 ♔xd1 ♜a1, winning.

35 ♖c2

35 ♔d3?? is met with the shocking 35...♗xf2! (the knight hopes to augment his already considerable prestige with his noble sacrifice) 36 ♖xf2 e4, regaining the initial investment with a huge profit.

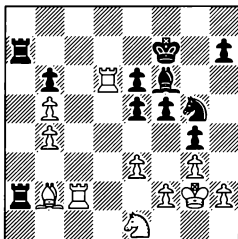
35...Nea7 36 ♔g2?! 

Perhaps Kramnik intended f3. White can minimize his discomfort levels by centralizing his king with 36 ♔f1!.

36...♘g5! 37 ♖d6

Better than:

- a) 37 ♔d3?? fails to 37...e4.
b) 37 f3?? walks into a simple tactic after 37...gx f3+ 38 ♔xf3 ♕xf3 39 ♖xf3 e4+.



Thus White attacked Black's b-pawn in the hopes of tying him down to a weakness.

Exercise: How did Carlsen react?

Answer: Offer b6 to create eternal back rank mating threats. In fact, the threats are so powerful that White is unable to grab b6.

37...e4! 38 ♖xf6 ♔xf6

The b6-pawn remains immune.

39 ♖f1

Instead, 39 ♖xa2?? ♖xa2 (the b6-pawn, looking stale and inedible, isn't so tempting a target for the rook) 40 ♖xb6?? (the rook consumes a meal as dangerous for digestion as ground glass, substituting for sugar on his morning oatmeal) 40...♙h3 is a game-ender.

39...♖a1!

The position grows more and more pliable to Carlsen's vision. Black simply threatens to double rooks on his eighth rank.

40 ♖e2

White's king thrashes about like a newly caught trout, desperate to disentangle itself from the hook. 40 ♖xb6?? ♙f3 41 ♖e2 ♖b1 mates, since nothing can be done about the coming ...♖a1.

40...♖b1! 41 ♖d1

White's rook was born with a terrible birth defect: a missing backbone (although he vehemently disputes this, claiming his spine is of a gelatinous nature, like a worm's). White gives away both his b-pawns, the equivalent of resignation, but 41 ♖xb6?? is met with 41...♖d7! and 42 ♖d2 walks into 42...♙f3 43 ♖xd7 ♖xe1 mate.

41...♖xb4 42 ♙g2 ♖xb5

Black has two extra pawns and a dominating position.

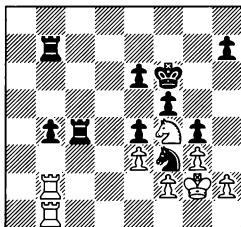
43 ♙f4 ♖c5 44 ♖b2 b5 45 ♖f1 ♖ac7 46 ♖bb1 ♖b7 47 ♖b4 ♖c4

Carlsen patiently breaks down the blockade.

48 ♖b2

Or 48 ♖db1 ♖xb4 49 ♖xb4 ♙f3 50 ♖g2 ♖b8 51 h3 ♙e1+ 52 ♖h2 ♙d3 53 ♙xd3 exd3 54 ♖d4 b4 55 ♖xd3 b3 56 ♖d1 b2 57 ♖b1 ♖e5 and it's time for White to resign.

48...b4 49 ♖db1 ♙f3 50 ♖g2

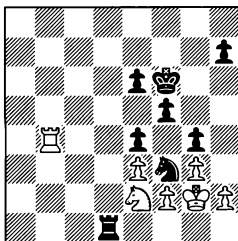


Exercise (planning): Extraction of a plan from such a geometrically problematic grid is no easy task. How does Black make progress?

Answer: Play on White's eternally weak back rank.

50...♖d7! 51 h3

After 51 ♜xb4?? ♜xb4 52 ♜xb4 ♜d1 53 ♜e2...



Exercise (combination alert): Force Black's win.

Answer: Attraction/discovered attack: 53...♜e1+! 54 ♔f1 ♜d3+ picks off a rook.

51...e5

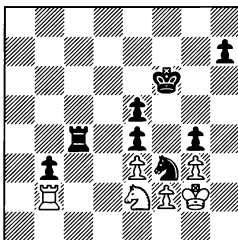
Powerful, now that White no longer has ♜d5+.

52 ♜e2 ♜d2! 53 hxg4 fxg4 54 ♜xd2 ♜xd2 55 ♜b2 ♜f3 56 ♔f1 b3!

Pushing the b-pawn, since it is tactically protected.

56...57 ♔g2

57 ♜xb3?? walks into the knight fork 57...♜d2+.



Exercise (planning): Only one more strong move is required and you begin to rake in the profits by forcing White's resignation.

Answer: Simplification.

57...♖c2! 0-1

58 ♜xc2 bxc2 59 ♜c1 ♜e1+ 60 ♜f1 ♜d3 wins.

Game 41

M.Carlsen-V.Kramnik

London 2009

English Opening

The favourites clashed in the first round.

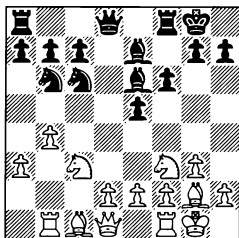
1 c4

Carlsen has a lot of respect for Kramnik's opening preparation, and so chooses to play the English Opening, which he doesn't play so often.

1...♞f6 2 ♞c3 e5 3 ♞f3 ♞c6 4 g3 d5 5 cxd5 ♞xd5 6 ♠g2 ♞b6

6...♠e7? 7 ♞xe5! is one of White's traps if Black gets careless in the opening.

7 0-0 ♠e7 8 a3 0-0 9 b4 ♠e6 10 ♜b1 f6

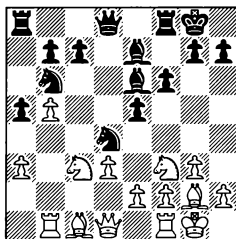


The first 10 or so moves of most popular opening lines tend to be routinely familiar to those who play them, to the point of being nondescript. These Reversed Dragon set-ups are considered fully playable, with the condition that Black plays in super-solid fashion with an early ...♞b6 and ...f6. Carlsen was probably happy to reach a position in which he is familiar (he played Dragon as Black in his younger days), even if the position may be equal in theory's eyes.

11 d3 a5

Black's most confrontational continuation. This move and 11...d4 are Black's two main lines. After that alternative, 12 d2 c6 13 e3 b5 14 b5 cxb5 15 b3 d7 was M.Carlsen-S.Karjakin, Nice (rapid) 2010, when 16 c5 xc5 17 bxc5 a4 18 d2 is roughly balanced. If 18...xc5 White has compensation after 19 b4 dxd3 (19...f8 20 d4 a6 21 dxe5 favours White, who soon regains his investment with a profit) 20 xf8 xf8 21 a4.

12 b5 d4



13 d2

Question: Can White get away with swapping on d4?

Answer: That is a also a line. In my opinion, exchanging on d4 probably isn't in White's best interests, since Black's d4-pawn creates two unwanted issues:

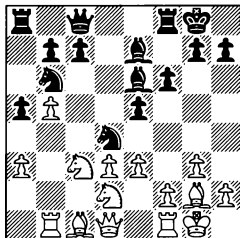
1. e2 can become a target down the newly opened e-file.
2. White must be on the lookout for Black's knight entry to c3.

After 13 dxd4 exd4 14 a4 d5 15 h3 e8 I already prefer Black's side, although the comps say the game is even, D.Contin-K.Georgiev, Arvier 2012.

13...c8

Intendingh3 to swap off White's powerful light-squared bishop, while avoiding 13...d5? 14 xd5! xd5 15 e3 f7 (or 15...e6?? 16 e4 when the bishop is trapped and Black can resign) 16 exd4 xd4 17 d4 f5 18 e2 d7 19 d4c3 and Black fails to extract full compensation for the piece, K.Georgiev-A.Goldin, Vrnjacka Banja 1998.

14 e3



Question: Doesn't this weaken d3?

Answer: It does, but it's worse to allow Black's knight eternal occupation of d4. White must play this move sooner or later, trusting in his ability to hang on to his now weak and backward d3-pawn.

14...♘f5 15 ♖c2 ♜d8

Black logically places his rook on the d-file to pressure d3, as a counter to White's pressure on b7.

16 ♟b2 a4

Black artificially isolates b5, enabling a possible future piece infiltration to b3, at the cost of weakening his own a-pawn.

17 ♜fc1

White eyes a new target: c7.

17...♘d6 18 ♘de4

In such structures, White generally attempts to transfer a knight to c5 to pick up the bishop-pair.

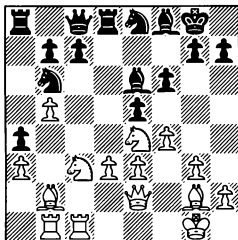
18...♞e8

Kramnik backs up c7. Also possible was 18...♟b3 19 ♖e2 ♘f7.

19 ♖e2

A new move at the time and a clear improvement over 19 ♘e2? ♟b3 20 ♖c3 ♜d7! which left White in trouble, since b5 and d3 hang simultaneously, O.Cvitan-L.Milman, Pula 2007. Carlsen gets his queen off c2, where it was vulnerable to ...♟b3, and also prepares a central counter with f4.

19...♟f8 20 f4



Question: Doesn't this move weaken White's structure?

Answer: A bit, yes, but I don't see another active plan for White, and Carlsen isn't the kind who likes to just await events when he doesn't stand worse.

20...exf4

Pretty much forced. Kramnik hands over control of the centre to White, hoping to generate counterplay by attacking it in the future.

21 gxf4 ♖d7 22 d4

There is no reason to hold back and retreat with:

a) 22 ♖f2?! was D.Norwood-P.Villegas, Monaco 2013. Black looks better after 22...♗d6 when b5 comes under heavy fire.

b) 22 ♜d1?! ♙g4 (swaps help Black in this position, since he is more cramped) 23 ♙f3 ♙xf3 24 ♜xf3 f5 25 ♗g3 ♗d6 when b5 is weak and I already prefer Black.

22...c6!

Kramnik agrees to a loosening of his queenside structure in an attempt to free himself and become active on the queenside. I prefer the safer 22...♙c4 23 ♜f2 ♙d3, after which Black looks no worse, D.Reinderman-S.Haslinger, Delft 2011. However, here Black should avoid 23...♙xb5? 24 ♗c5 ♙xc5 25 dxc5, and if 25...♗c8?? 26 ♜d1 ♙d3 27 ♙d5+ wins material.

23 ♗c5!

More complex than 23 bxc6 bxc6 24 ♗c5 ♙xc5 25 dxc5 ♗d5 26 ♗xd5 ♙xd5 27 e4 Bb, when Black is compensated for White's bishop-pair by his control over the d-file.

23...♙xc5 24 dxc5 ♗c4?

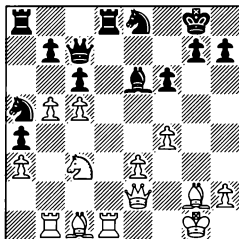
Kramnik may be trying for too much in the position. I think it's inaccurate to allow White to challenge the d-file. The natural. 24...♗d5 25 ♜f2 ♗xc3 26 bxc6 bxc6 27 ♙xc3 ♙b3 leads to a dynamically balanced position similar to the above note.

25 ♖d1 ♜c7 26 ♙c1

Carlsen wants to hang on to his bishop-pair. His move also allows him a future e4, since f4 is now protected.

26...♘a5

26...cxb5? 27 ♜xb5 ♘a5 allows 28 ♘d5 ♜f7 29 ♘b6 ♜xd1+ 30 ♜xd1 ♜a6 31 ♘xa4 when White picks off a pawn.



27 bxc6

Question: Why isn't a4 hanging?

Answer: A mistake. Black regains the pawn immediately after 27 ♘xa4? ♙c4 28 ♜e1 ♜xd1 29 ♜xd1 ♜d8 30 ♜e1 cxb5!. Not only did Black regain the sacrificed pawn, now White must deal with a4 and c5 hanging simultaneously.

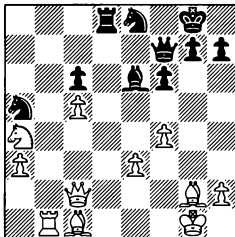
27...bxc6 28 ♘xa4?!

Too early. I'm not so sure Carlsen should be happy with his recent acquisition. White seizes the advantage with 28 ♜b4! ♘b3 29 ♘xa4 ♘xc1 30 ♜xc1 f5. Carlsen saw this line and felt "Black has some counterplay". Maybe so, but it isn't enough to justify being a pawn down as Black. After 31 ♜c3 *Houdini* rates White at about a half pawn up here.

28...♜xd1+?!

In such complications it feels as if neither party can come up with an idea. The manuscript becomes illegible, with both parties attempting to outdo the other in inaccuracy. Kramnik returns the favour. Black should play 28...♘b3! 29 ♘b6 ♜a5! when he threatens c5, as well as ...♘xc1, followed by ...♜xa3. White's pawns remain in a state of dilapidation, and repairs are not going to come cheaply.

29 ♜xd1 ♜d8 30 ♜c2 ♜f7



Now ...♗b3 is in the air. Kramnik deliberately steered for this position, feeling he had compensation for the pawn.

31 ♖c3 ♜h5!

Threatening c5. In positions of such complexity, our tendency is to live day to day, without much thought for the future. And why not? One tiny slip and there is no future. So far there hasn't been much accumulation of small advantages on Carlsen's part. That is about to change and from this point he gradually outplays Kramnik strategically.

Houdini suggests 31...♗b3! 32 ♜b2 ♜e6 33 h3 with nearly full compensation for the pawn.

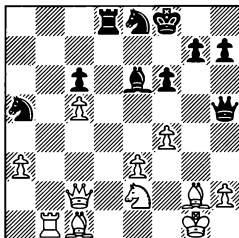
32 ♖e2

Covering c5, while preparing to transfer the knight to d4, its best square.

32...♗f5?

The bishop turns his eyes heavenward, in the affectation of a saint – which no one believes him to be. The normally dutiful participant of Sunday church service decides to play hooky and hopes to commit all seven deadly sins in a single day. This simply loses a tempo, since e4 is useful to White. This is the point where the game swings dramatically in Carlsen's favour.

Houdini found the problem-like 32...♜f8!!, when apparently somebody is attempting something on someone else, somewhere on the board.



Question: I realize that you are experiencing difficulties assimilating the intent of Black's last move. Do you think maybe you could be more specific?

Answer: Fine. Black intends ... b3 . Another point of the move is that 33 d4 is met with $33... \text{xd4!}$ 34 exd4 e5 35 a2 (the deep point of $32... \text{f8}$: Black is now not in check) $35... \text{d1+}$ 36 f2 exb1 37 wxb1 b3 38 f3 wxc1 39 wxc1! ? (the game will likely end in perpetual check after 39 wxb3 wxf4) $39... \text{xc1}$ 40 exc6 c7 41 e3 b3 and I think only White can lose this ending.

33 e4 e4

When a writer suffers from writer's block, one obsessive thought runs through the mind: "Produce, or else!". We chess players reproduce this exact feeling when our clocks begin to run low in a complex situation. Black puts up greatest resistance with $33... \text{h3}$ 34 e3 exg2 35 xg2 c7 .

34 g3 f7

$34... \text{d1+?}$ is met with 35 f1! (most certainly not 35 wxd1?? wxc5+ , winning) $35... \text{f7}$ 36 h3 h5 37 f2 f8 ($37... \text{d8?}$ 38 d2 b3 39 wxb3 exd2+ 40 wxd2 wxb3 41 dxc5 wins a piece) 38 b6 , which leaves Black completely busted.

35 f1

Covering c4. Black is down a pawn with a bad position to boot.

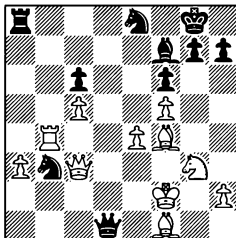
35... e6 36 c3! a8

$36... \text{b3??}$ drops material to the undermining 37 f5 .

37 b4! d7 38 f5

Carlsen begins to take over the entire board.

38... f7 39 f4 d1 40 f2 b3?



When we place our faith in an incorrect plan, it is as if we strive for a debilitating ideal. It's ironic that chess positions tend to reach their complexity peak between moves 25 and 40 – a stage which requires glacial deliberation. Instead, we find ourselves in a starring role in a slapstick comedy, having to bang out 12 moves in three minutes, to reach the time control.

Exercise (combination alert): Black's last move was the commencement of an incorrect idea which aids and abets the process of his own destruction. How did Carlsen increase his strategic advantage?

Answer: Attraction/pin(s). Black is forced into dual, unbreakable pins.

41 ♖e2!

Carlsen responds to Black's infiltration 'threat' with a contemptuous counterpoint. "You trespassed upon my kind and forgiving nature once too often," lectures the bishop, who is not in the habit of dealing mercifully with those who dare violate the sanctity of his holy realm. The death blow arrives with almost casual insolence, without a trace of blood-lust or frenzy. White's last move forces Black's queen to b1, where she languishes in a deadly pin.

41... ♛b1

Kramnik finds his position at loose ends.

42 ♗c4!

The bishop's unsavoury reputation is well deserved. Not only is Black's b3-knight in grave danger, but now unpleasantness for Black's king along the a2-g8 diagonal is inevitable.

42... ♜xa3

Now Black's knight is pinned both laterally and horizontally.

43 ♕e2 1-0

The numbers don't add up to a happy ending to Black's story. No more checks on a2. Carlsen plays the mop-up phase with silken smoothness. The b3-knight is pinned, while the e8 model languishes without a single square. After 43...♖f8 44 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 45 ♜c4+ ♜f8 46 ♜b7 and White forces mate. After a murder, the first question a police detective asks herself is: "Who stands to profit most from the victim's death?". In this case, White's queen and rook are prime suspects.

Game 42
S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen
Wijk aan Zee 2010
French Defence

1 e4 e6

A shocker for Karjakin. Carlsen has only played the French a handful of times in his career, with this one being the first.

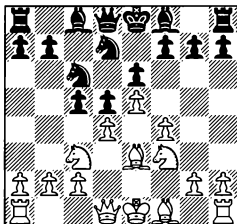
2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 ♟f6

The Classical. 3...♜b4 is the Winawer, while 3...dxe4 enters the Rubinstein French.

4 e5

Karjakin almost always goes for this line when given a possibility.

4...♟fd7 5 f4 c5 6 ♟f3 ♟c6 7 ♜e3



7...♜e7

When a (future) world champion takes up an opening variation, it automatically becomes an important endorsement. This line is fast gaining in popularity, having been taken up by several of the world's elite players. Black decides that castling comes first. Only then will he think about centre and kingside. Alternatives include:

a) 7...a6 is Black's most popular line. After 8 ♜d2 b5 9 dxc5 ♜xc5 10 ♜d3 ♜b6 11 ♜f2 b4 12 ♟a4 ♜xf2+ 13 ♜xf2 ♜xf2+ 14 ♜xf2 a5 15 ♜ac1 ♜a6 16 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 17 c4! bxc3 18 ♜xc3

White led in development in the ending, and Black had a long way to go before he claimed equality, S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen, Monaco (blindfold) 2011.

b) In *The Classical French: Move by Move*, I advocate 7...cxd4 8 ♖xd4 ♙c5 and 8...♗b6.

8 ♗d2

Later after 8 a3 0-0 9 ♗d2 b6 10 g3 ♖h8 11 h4 f6 12 exf6 ♜xf6 13 ♙h3 ♙d7 14 ♜d1 cxd4 15 ♜xd4 e5! 16 ♜xc6 ♙xc6 17 fxe5 d4 18 exf6 ♙xf6 19 0-0 dxc3 20 ♗xd8 ♜axd8 21 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 22 b3 ♜e8 Carlsen took over the initiative in the ending, V.Ivanchuk-M.Carlsen, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2011.

8...0-0 9 ♙e2

9 dxc5 is White's main option.

9...a6

Intending to expand on the queenside with ...b5 next. Black can also play more quietly with 9...b6 10 0-0 ♙b7 11 ♜d1 (intending c3) 11...cxd4 12 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 13 ♙xd4 ♜c5 14 ♜c3 ♜c8 15 ♜ad1 ♙a6 16 ♙xa6 ♜xa6 17 f5 exf5 18 ♗d3 ♜c5 19 ♗xf5 ♜e6 when he can claim dynamic equality from the opening, I.Nepomniachtchi-Wang Hao, Beijing 2013.

10 0-0 b5 11 ♖h1

A rare move. Karjakin probably wanted to avoid Carlsen's preparation, so he avoided the main line: 11 a3 ♗b6 12 ♜d1 a5 13 c3 a4 14 ♜f2 ♜a5 15 ♜ad1 ♙b7 16 ♙d3 ♜c4 17 ♗e2 ♜xe3 18 ♗xe3 b4 19 f5 ♙a6?! (19...bxc3 20 bxc3 cxd4 21 cxd4 ♙a6 looks like Black's most accurate move order) 20 f6! gxf6 21 ♗h6 when White has a strong attack.

Instead, after 11 ♜d1 b4 12 dxc5 ♜xc5 13 ♜f2 ♙b7 14 ♜d4 ♜e4 15 ♜xe4 dxe4 16 ♜b3 ♗c7 Black came out of the opening well, in this position which resembles an Open Sicilian, N.Kosintseva-B.Grachev, Moscow 2010.

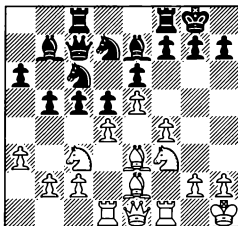
11...♗c7

11...b4 is also played here.

12 a3 ♙b7 13 ♜ad1

White backs up d4. Also logical is to back up his e5 point with 13 ♜ae1.

13...♜ac8 14 ♗e1



This move was new at the time. We sense an unspoken declaration of war on the king-side.

Question: What is White's idea?

Answer: As in many lines of the Scheveningen Sicilian, White plays this manoeuvre, planning to swing his queen into the attack, via g3 or h4. Karjakin's move is an attempt to improve upon 14 dxc5 ♖xc5 15 ♔d4 ♚e4 16 ♖xe4 dxe4 17 c3 ♙c5 18 ♖xc6 ♜xc6 19 ♙xc5 ♜xc5 20 ♜d4 ♙d5 21 ♜xc5 ♜xc5 when Black stood no worse in the ending, I.Karim-V.Korchnoi, Gibraltar 2012.

14...cxd4

Carlsen, sensing White's kingside attacking intentions, counters in the centre.

15 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 16 ♙xd4 ♙c5!

Black continues to harass in the centre. Before now, Carlsen's motivation felt formless, without colour or shape of any kind.

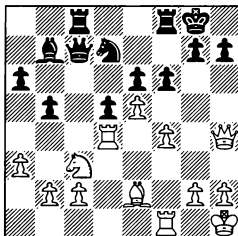
17 ♜h4?

The queen hopes to solidify her growing popularity with the masses. Amazingly, Carlsen makes it look like a forced win for Black from this point. Mikhalchishin and Stetsko call this move "surprisingly naive".

Question: Why label White's last move a mistake, when this was White's plan all along?

Answer: Carlsen's last two moves essentially defanged White's plan. The trouble is the queen will actually be misplaced on h4 and White's centre gets dismantled. Just watch. White should go for the more modest 17 ♜f2 ♙xd4 18 ♜xd4 ♜c5 with an equal position.

17...♙xd4 18 ♜xd4 ♜f6!



Timing is everything in chess. Black vigorously counters in the centre before White is able to generate anything on the kingside.

19 ♖d3

Question: Doesn't White just stand a shade better after 19 exf6 ♜xf6?

After all, Black is the one with the backward e6 weakness and a bad b7-bishop.

Answer: The position is deceptive. Black is the one who stands slightly better for the following reasons:

1. The weakness of e6 is an illusion. The pawn is easily defended.
2. White's intended attack is no more. Not only that, his attackers are misplaced, especially his queen and d4-rook.
3. f4 is an easy target for Black rooks and queen. White is unable to play g3, since this involves a deep weakening of the light squares around his king.
4. White's back rank is weak and he must be on constant lookout for timely ...e5 breaks.
5. Watch in the notes how in the coming dozen or so moves, Black's "bad" bishop comes alive, once he breaks the d4 blockade and engineers ...d4. In my Classical French book I go off on multiple rants about how this bad bishop is often not such a bad piece after all.

Conclusion: White's attack is designed for show, more than efficiency and he is the one fighting for equality, not Black.

19...h6!

A weakness is only a label if the opponent is denied a method of exploitation.

20 exf6

20 ♖h3 is met with 20...♙c5 21 exf6 ♜xf6. Once again, White's attack is non-existent, his pieces look misplaced, and his f-pawn remains under pressure.

20...♜xf6

White's superiority is a hazy concept of the past, the way colour is to a person who goes blind later in life.

21 f5!?

Karjakin insists upon pursuit of his mythical attack, loosening his structure further. However, I couldn't find even a single line which equalized for White. For instance, 21 ♖g4 ♜cf8 22 ♜f3 ♙b8! (threat: ...♙c6) 23 ♙g6 ♙h8! 24 h3 ♙c6 25 ♜d1 ♜xf4 26 ♜xf4 ♖xf4, and if White attempts to regain his lost pawn with 27 ♖xe6? Black meets it with 27...♙e5 28 ♙d3 ♙f3! when the perpetrator remains out of retaliation's reach: 29 gxf3 ♖xf3+ 30 ♙h2 ♖f2+ 31 ♙h1 d4+ with a winning attack.

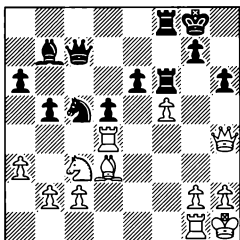
21...♜cf8

Black increases pressure on the pinned f-pawn.

22 ♙g1

This move is a sign that matters have gone terribly wrong for White. The unpinning 22 ♙e1? is met with 22...♙c5! when the intended 23 fxe6?? loses to instantly to 23...♙xd3. White is unable to recapture, since his back rank is loose on f1.

22...♖c5!



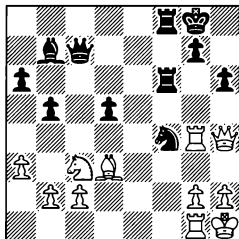
Carlsen sets into motion a complex set of pulleys, tripwires and levers, to achieve his aim. Initiative over material. Carlsen disdains the offer 22...e5?! 23 ♖xd5 ♙xd5 24 ♜xd5 ♖b6 (trapping White's rook) 25 ♜e4 ♖xd5 26 ♜xd5+ ♔h8 when White has a pawn for the exchange, no weaknesses and an e5 target. In short, he has excellent chances of holding the game.

23 ♙xe6 ♖xe6 24 ♜g4

Question: Why can't White just pick off a pawn with 24 ♜xd5? If Black takes the rook, White recaptures with his knight, forking c7 and f6.

Answer: Black has no intention of recapturing on d5. He can play 24...♖f4! applying pressure to both d5 and g2: 25 ♜d4 ♖xg2! (every good investor seeks minimal risk, coupled with maximum return; a possibility which once felt remote and theoretical, now steps into present day reality) 26 ♜g3 ♖h4+ 27 ♙e4 ♜xg3 28 hxg3 (28 ♜xg3 loses to the tactic 28...♖f5!) 28...♖f3!, and if 29 ♙xf3 ♜xf3 30 ♔h2 ♜f2+ 31 ♔h3 ♜xc2 when the ending is hopeless for White.

Instead, 24 ♖xd5 is met with 24...♙xd5 25 ♜xd5 ♖f4 26 ♜d4 ♜c5!. White must sacrifice the exchange on f4, since 27 c3?? walks into 27...♖xd3 28 ♜xd3 ♜xg1+! 29 ♔xg1 ♜f1 mate. 24...♖f4!



That which was previously a mere footnote, now transforms into a major theme. White faces ...d4, opening the sleeping b7-bishop's path to g2.

25 ♖g3

Otherwise:

a) 25 h3? (White hopes to provide his king much needed ventilation) 25...♙c8! 26 ♖g3 g5! (threat: ...♖g6!, activating the threat to take White's queen) 27 ♖g4 ♙xg4 28 ♖xg4 ♖e5 with a material advantage and strong initiative.

b) 25 ♖e2 ♖xd3 26 cxd3 ♖e7 27 ♖d4 ♖e3! (threat: ...♖xf1+, followed by ...♖f1 mate) 28 h3 (28 ♖f3 d4 is also hopeless for White, who is unable to clog the f-file) 28...♖f1 29 ♖xf1 ♖xf1+ 30 ♖h2 ♙c8 31 ♖g6 ♖g1+ 32 ♖g3 ♖f2+ wins the white queen.

25...♖e7!

The queen is most ingenious in concocting false charges against the innocent, fighting for control over both e4 and e2. We sense an energy from Black's side, which oozes bondless, unconstrained will to acquire more and more. Carlsen gradually builds a case against White's king, with cumulative prosecutorial toil. He seems to own the entire board and threatens ...d4 next. White is close to zugzwang, if not already there.

26 ♖xf4!?

This is more a symbolic adjunct of defiance, rather than a real counterattack. Adversity tends to change a person in one of two ways:

1. We meekly submit to our fate.
2. We grow bitter and lash out at our problem.

This appears to be a clear case of number 2 on the list. Karjakin, whose generosity clearly outstrips his bank balance, sacrifices an exchange in a desperate bid to reduce Black's mounting kingside pressure. Alternatives fail too:

a) 26 ♖e1?? walks into the familiar back-rank cheapo 26...♖xd3. White has to think about what he plans to do about Black's coming ...♖f1+.

b) Carlsen gave the line 26 h3 d4 27 ♖d1 (27 ♖e2 ♖xe2 28 ♙xe2 ♙c8! wins the ex-

change) 27...♙c8 28 ♜e1 ♜f7 29 ♜h4 ♙b7 (target: g2) 30 ♜g1 ♙xg2! 31 ♜xg2 ♜f3 32 ♜g4 ♜e8 when there is no good way to defend against the coming ...♜e1+: for example, 33 ♙h2 ♜e1 34 ♜h5 ♜c7+ forcing mate.

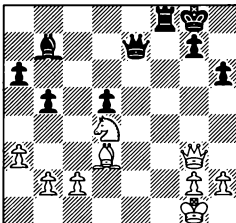
26...♜xf4

The rook uses one hand to shake hands, and the other to pick pockets.

27 ♙e2 ♜f1

Principle: the side ahead on material should seek swaps.

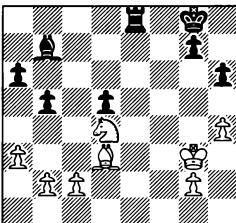
28 ♙d4 ♜xg1+ 29 ♙xg1



Exercise (planning): Come up with Black's best plan in the position:

Answer: Simplification. White has no way to dodge a queen swap, after which he can only mount token resistance in the ending.

29...♜e8! 30 h4 ♜e1+ 31 ♙h2! ♜xg3+ 32 ♙xg3



Exercise (planning): Black can play 32...♖e1, going after White's queenside pawns, or 32...♜f7, activating his king. Which move is more accurate?

Answer: Principle: activate your king in an ending.

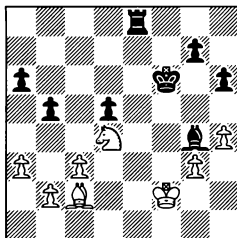
32...♜f7!

Carlsen prefers to utilize the services of his king, rather than go for 32...♖e1?! which walks into Karjakin's diabolical strategic trap: 33 ♜f4! ♖b1 34 b3 ♖a1 35 ♜e5! ♖xa3 36 ♜d6 and White's counterplay level rises considerably, when compared to what he got in the game.

33 ♜f2

Covering the e1 infiltration square. After 33 ♜f4 ♜f6 34 g4 g5+ 35 hxg5+ hxg5+ 36 ♜g3 ♖e1 White has no chance.

33...♜f6 34 g3 ♖c8 35 c3 ♖g4 36 ♖c2



Exercise (planning): Come up with a clear plan to increase Black's advantage:

Answer: Black needs open lines to enter White's position with his rook.

36...g5!

The intention is to open another file, in order to infiltrate White's position with the rook.

37 hxg5+

Alternatively, 37 ♖b3 gxh4 38 gxh4 ♜e5 39 ♜e3 ♖f8 40 ♜c6+ ♜d6 41 ♜b4 ♖f3+ 42 ♜d4 (or 42 ♜d2 ♖f2+ 43 ♜c1 a5, and if 44 ♜xd5 ♖e6 45 c4 bxc4 46 ♜c3 ♖h2 47 ♖d1 ♖xh4 wins) 42...a5 43 ♜xd5 ♖f5! (threat: ...♖d3mate) 44 ♜e3 ♖f4 mate.

37...hxg5

Now White's king is stuck watching both h2 and e1 rook-entry points.

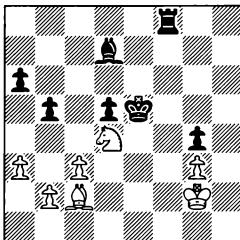
38 ♖b3 ♜e5 39 ♙c2 ♜f8+ 40 ♜g2

40 ♜e1 is met with 40...♜h8! when the rook enters h2.

40...♙d7 41 ♜f3+ ♜f6 42 ♙b3 g4!

The triumph of the “bad bishop”. Every black pawn on the board is the wrong colour and yet this is the correct plan. Carlsen seizes control over f3, after which Black’s king may rest on e5, without worry of ♜f3+.

43 ♜d4 ♜e5 44 ♙c2



Exercise (planning): Carlsen needs to find a way for his rook to enter White’s attempted fortress. How did he achieve it?

Answer: Line opening.

44...a5!

Legitimacy at last! Carlsen finally places a pawn on the correct colour of his remaining bishop, intending ...b4, opening queenside lines for his rook.

45 ♙d1

This allows Black’s king in, but if 45 ♙d3 b4 46 axb4 axb4 47 ♜e2 ♜a8 48 cxb4 ♜a2 49 b3 ♜d2 50 ♙a6 ♜b2 and Black wins easily.

45...♜e4 0-1

46 ♙e2 ♜e3 is game over.

Game 43
M.Carlsen-V.Topalov
 Nanjing 2010
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♙c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♙f6 5 0-0 ♙e7 6 d3!?

When White interprets a Closed Lopez in this manner, he moves warily, with deliberate ambiguity to reveal his plan just yet.

6...b5 7 ♙b3 d6 8 a4

8 c3 is played slightly more often.

8...♞b8

8...♙d7, 8...b4 and 8...♙b7 are also played here.

9 axb5

There is no sense in allowing ...♙a5 and ...b4 tricks, so Carlsen releases the pawn tension.

9...axb5 10 ♙bd2

Earlier after 10 ♙c3 0-0 11 h3 ♙b4! (Aronian prepares ...c5, gaining useful queenside space) 12 ♙e2 c5 13 ♙g3 ♙e6 14 ♙xe6 fxe6 15 c3 ♙c6 16 ♞e1 ♜d7 17 d4 exd4 18 cxd4 c4 19 ♙g5 h6 20 d5?! exd5 21 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 22 ♜xd5+ ♞f7 23 ♜d2 ♙e5 24 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 Aronian, now with the superior majority and minor piece, went on to defeat Carlsen, M.Carlsen-L.Aronian, 1st matchgame, Elista 2007.

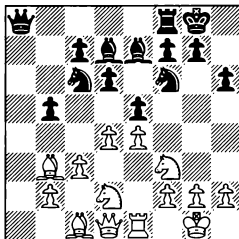
10...0-0 11 ♞e1 ♙d7

11...♙d7 and 11...♙e6 are alternatives.

12 c3 ♞a8

Topalov elects to re-take the a-file, which he earlier vacated.

13 ♞xa8 ♜xa8 14 d4 h6

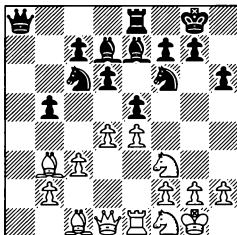


Topalov decides his king's claustrophobic dwelling requires ventilation. However, in doing so, he also agrees to a weakening of f5 and g6. This is new in the position and probably no improvement. This move itself could be the seed planted to Black's future light-square issues on the kingside. He may be better off avoiding weakening, going for 14...♖b8 15 ♖f1 b4 16 ♖e3 bxc3 17 bxc3 ♜a5 18 ♖d5 ♗g4. Black exerts central pressure and looks comfortable, M.Golubev-D.Kigel, Odessa 2010.

15 ♖f1

This manoeuvre, transferring the knight to g3, in preparation for kingside play, is so standard in the Ruy Lopez, that it barely needs mentioning.

15...♞e8



16 ♖g3

Question: Why transfer the knight to g3, when e3 is more central?

Answer: The trouble with e3 is that it weakens White's control over his e-pawn. If 16 ♖e3? exd4! (16...♖xe4?? is met by 17 ♖d5 with a fatal double attack on c7 and e4), with the idea of 17 cxd4 ♖xe4 18 ♖d5 ♗d8! and Black absconded with an extra pawn, while everyone remained covered.

16...♜c8?!

This move feels immaterial to the circumstances at hand.

Question: Black's last move looks a bit eccentric, but I don't see what is wrong with it. Why the dubious mark?

Answer: Carlsen answers: "His ...♜c8 allowed the knight to go via h4 and g6 to trade off his dark-square bishop, after which f4 initiates a crushing attack".

GM Mikhail Golubev suggests 16...♗g4 17 h3 ♗xf3 18 gxf3 when I still slightly prefer

White, whose light-square control and bishop-pair mean more than his potential pawn weakness on the kingside. In fact, the open g-file may help White attack. Instead, Houdini likes 16...b4!? and if White continues with the same plan, 17 ♖h4, then Black can try 17...bxc3 18 bxc3 ♜a1 19 ♕hf5 ♜xc3 20 ♔d2 ♜b2 and I don't think White has anything better than to take a repetition draw with 21 ♔c1 ♜c3. Black must also agree to the draw, since 21...♜a1? is met by the tricky 22 ♕xg7! with a strong attack.

17 ♖h4!

As in many closed Lopez games, the central war inevitably spills over to the kingside. Now there is no way for Black to decrease his steadily increasing pain on the light squares.

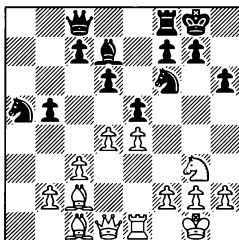
17...♔f8

The proscribed solution refuses to sit easily within the turmoil of Topalov's troubled mind. *Houdini* suggests the inhuman defence 17...♔a5! 18 ♔c2 g6! when 19 ♔xh6?? hangs material to 19...♕g4!. Of course, White isn't required to blunder on his 19th move and can simply play on Black's kingside pawn weaknesses. Still, this looks like a better bet for Black than the move he played.

18 ♕g6!

The knight begins to interrogate his f8 suspect.

18...♖a5 19 ♕xf8 ♜xf8 20 ♔c2



Advantage White, who owns the bishop-pair and who continues his kingside build-up.

20...♞e8

Alternatively, 20...c5 21 dxe5 dxe5 22 ♖h5 ♖xh5 23 ♜xh5 ♞e8 24 ♞e3! ♞e6 25 ♜g3 ♜c6 26 f4! with a brewing kingside initiative and attack.

21 f4!

Principle: open the position when you own the bishop-pair.

21...♔g4

Houdini suggests 21...♖c6 22 fxe5 dxe5 23 d5 ♖e7 24 ♜f1 which looks completely unappealing to my human eyes.

22 ♕d3

The queen lies in wait with the stealth of a hungry crocodile, whose eyes barely break the surface of the muddy river water. She threatens b5, but also harbours dreams of entry to h7 in the distant future.

22...exf4!

Topalov begins a project where his potential rewards are greatly outweighed by the risks. This opens the f-file, increasing White's kingside attacking prospects. I don't see a way out for Black, though. For example:

a) 22...♗b7 23 fxe5 dxe5 24 h3 ♖e6 25 d5 ♙d7 26 ♜f1 ♘h7 27 ♗f3 ♗b6+ 28 ♙e3 ♗g6 29 b3 ♘b7 30 c4 with a strategically won game for White, who dominates both wings and also holds the bishop-pair. There is no way for Black to keep the f-file from opening.

b) 22...exd4? 23 cxd4 and not only is b5 hanging, but Black has no good response to the coming e5, with a winning attack.

23 ♙xf4 ♘c4 24 ♙c1

Threat: b3, followed by ♗xb5.

24...c5

Not all central counters are effective. White simply ignores this one.

25 ♜f1

White's angry position pulses with significance. Now Black must be on alert for ♜xf6 and ♙xh6 tricks.

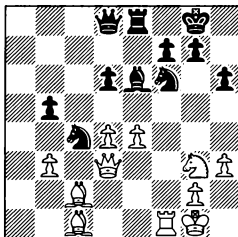
25...cxd4 26 cxd4 ♗d8

Covering against tricks on f6.

27 h3 ♙e6

Instead, 27...♙d7? 28 b3 ♘b6 29 e5! (opening the queen/bishop battery on h7) 29...dxe5 30 dxe5 ♜xe5 31 ♜xf6! ♜e1+ (31...♗xf6 32 ♗h7+ ♘f8 33 ♙a3+! forces mate) 32 ♘h2 ♜xc1 33 ♗h7+ ♘f8 34 ♗h8+ ♘e7 35 ♜xf7+ picks off Black's queen.

28 b3



28...♚a5!?

Absolute desperation. The queen flails about, the way a drunk fights off an attack of imaginary insects. Topalov seeks to inject a welcome element of irrationality, in an otherwise depressingly rational situation, but his idea is marred by almost insurmountable hindrances.

Question: What would Topalov's chances to hold be if he just took his medicine with 28...♘b6 29 ♚xb5?

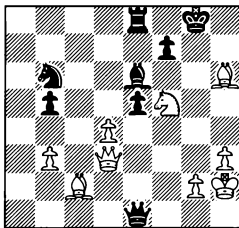
Answer: Not very high. This line is the equivalent of resignation, since a clean pawn behind, with a terrible position versus the World's number one ranked player, strikes me as awful odds for Black.

29 ♜h2!

Carlsen plays *Houdini's* inhuman top choice of moves. We humans who play like humans would consider alternatives like 29 bxc4, 29 ♖xf6 and 29 ♙xh6, all of which are very strong for White as well.

29...♘h7

The knight retreats from the proceedings with an unfathomable expression. 29...♘b6 is met with 30 e5 dxe5 31 ♖xf6! (White attackers stick to the black king's ribs like conscientious leeches, determined to suck their victim dry) 31...gxf6 32 ♙xh6 (threatening mate on the move) 32...f5 33 ♘xf5 (threat: ♚g3+; note that Black lacks ...♚e1+, due to White's 29th move) 33...♚e1.



Exercise (combination alert): White to play and force mate.

Answer: Clearance: 34 ♘e7+! ♖xe7 35 ♙h7 “Your pretences to innocence are transparent falsehoods to even the smallest children among us,” lectures the queen dryly to Black's king.

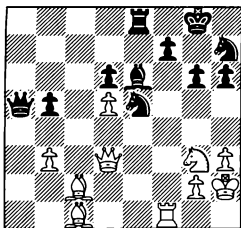
30 e5

Carlsen opens lines to h7.

30...g6 31 d5!

Now follows a staccato interchange of hostilities, which go horribly wrong for Black.

31...♙xe5



Exercise (combination alert): White is presented with a quickly fading window of opportunity. If we fail to act, we risk squandering our good fortune. The position's geometric elements rise up from the chaos to form a clear combinational pattern. How did Carlsen proceed?

Answer: Queen sacrifice.

32 dxe6! 1-0

A calculation like this doesn't require elaborate visualization or assessment power. White gets way too much for the queen after 32...♙xd3 33 exf7+ ♔f8 34 ♙xh6+ ♔e7 35 fxe8♙+ ♔xe8 36 ♙xd3. Who among us doesn't fly into a violated sense of proprietary outrage when our opponents rudely carry off with our material? Black's remaining knight is doomed as well.

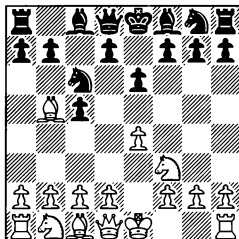
Game 44
M.Carlsen-B.Gelfand
London Candidates 2013
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5

The Rossolimo line of the Sicilian has virtually become White's main line over 3 d4 here. The Lopez-like move, which was once played to avoid theory, is now swaddled in it.

3...e6

Black's other main choices are 3...g6 and 3...d6.



4 0-0

Question: I don't quite understand the concept of playing fxb5 , and then *not* taking on c6. Could you explain?

Answer: Well, taking on c6 doesn't come without cost. First, White hands over the bishop-pair. Secondly, it's not clear if Black's pawn structure actually degrades after 4 fxc6 bxc6 since White handed Black a newly-opened a-file and increased central influence. Also, think about the Ruy Lopez: after $1 \text{ e4 e5 2 f3 c6 3 fxb6 a6}$, White plays 4 fxa4 far more often than taking on c6 with the Exchange line. But saying all this, I always chop on c6 as White in the Rossolimo, but mainly because I'm one of those quirky players who tends to prefer knights over bishops.

4...d7

Since White refused to chop on c6 last move, Black doesn't give him a second chance, this time covering c6 with his other knight.

5 e1

This creates a nook for White's bishop on f1. If you recall, Carlsen's game against Radjabov from Chapter Three went $5 \text{ c3 a6 6 fxa4 b5 7 fxc2 fxb7 8 e2 d5 9 e5 d4!}?$.

5...a6 6 f1

$6 \text{ fxc6 dxc6 7 d4 cxd4 8 dxd4}$ is thought to be comfortable for Black: $8...d6 9 \text{ dxc6 bxc6 10 g4 e5 11 g3 e6 12 b3 h5 13 c4 h4 14 f3 h3 15 g3 e7 16 c3 0-0 17 f3}$ was V.Ivanchuk-T.Radjabov, Odessa 2008. I prefer Black after $17...a5$.

6...d5 7 exd5

Principle: open the position when leading in development.

7...xd5 8 d4

The same principle applies.

8...♟f6

Black's main move, which scores close to 50%.

Question: Why a voluntary retreat?

Answer: For these reasons:

1. Black's knight is going to get kicked by c4 anyway, if his retreat is not a tempo loss.
2. Black applies pressure to d4, attempting to force an immediate resolution of central pawn tension.

9 ♞e3 cxd4

Gelfand veers from his normal 9...♞e7 10 c4 0-0 11 ♞c3 cxd4 12 ♞xd4 ♞e5 13 h3 ♞d7 14 ♞c1 (or 14 ♞b3 ♞c7 15 ♞ad1 ♞fd8 16 ♞c2 ♞c5 17 ♞xc5 ♞xc5 18 ♞b4 ♞xb4 19 ♞xb4 ♞c6 20 ♞d3 ♞e8; for now, White's pawn majority looks slightly better than Black's on the kingside, but not enough to worry Black, who should equalize in the coming moves with accurate play, E.Bacrot-B.Gelfand, Elancourt 2013) 14...♞c8 15 ♞b3 ♞c5 16 ♞ed1 (16 ♞xb7 ♞b8 17 ♞xa6 ♞a8 18 ♞b7 ♞b8 allows Black a repetition draw) 16...♞c7 17 ♞c2 ♞xe3 18 ♞xe3 ♞fd8 19 ♞a3 ♞e8 when Black completed his development successfully and the position looks close to balanced, J.Polgar-B.Gelfand, London 2013.

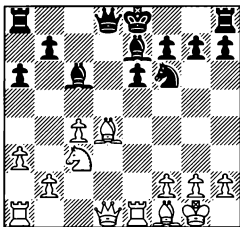
10 ♞xd4 ♞d7 11 c4

White activates his queenside pawn majority.

11...♞xd4

Principle: the cramped side benefits with swaps.

12 ♞xd4 ♞c6 13 ♞c3 ♞e7 14 a3



A new move at the time. White plans to roll his majority forward with b4 soon. Carlsen's move is an attempted improvement over 14 ♞d3 0-0 15 ♞ad1 ♞c7 16 ♞e5 ♞a5 17 ♞g3 ♞fd8 18 ♞d3 ♞d7 19 a3, J.Wallner-C.Srienzi, Feldkirch 2013. So White ends up needing a3 anyway and Black looks okay after 19...g6.

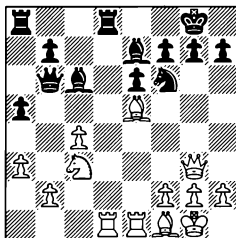
14...a5!?

A radically committal pathway to halt White's intent, since the weakening of b5 is possibly more significant than the stalling of White's queenside pawn majority. White looks slightly better after 14...0-0 15 b4.

15 ♖d3

Carlsen prepares to complete development with ♖ad1.

15...0-0 16 ♖ad1 ♜c7 17 ♙e5 ♜b6 18 ♜g3! ♜fd8



Of course, b2 is poisoned: 18...♜xb2?? 19 ♖d5 ♜xa3 20 ♖xf6+ wins a piece.

19 ♜xd8+!

This move gains time. Carlsen correctly rejects 19 ♖d5 exd5 20 ♙d4 ♙c5 21 ♙xf6 which looks quite strong, until you notice Black's tactic: 21...♙xf2+! (deflection) 22 ♜xf2 ♜xf2+ 23 ♙xf2 gxf6 when White is the one struggling for the draw.

Instead, after 19 ♙c7 ♜xd1 20 ♙xb6?! (20 ♖xd1 ♜d4 21 ♖c3 ♙c5 22 ♙e5 ♜g4 is equal) 20...♜xe1 Black's two rooks are worth more than White's queen here, since the queen lacks targets.

19...♜xd8

Of course not 19...♜xd8?? which walks into the elementary skewer 20 ♙c7.

20 ♜d1 ♜b6

Sometimes the natural move is weaker than the unnatural. With hindsight, Black can minimize his disadvantage with the odd 20...♜f8.

21 ♙d4!

Forcing Black's next move.

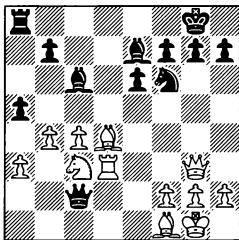
21...♜b3 22 ♜d3!

The b-pawn is in no need of protection. Now Black must worry about rook swings over to the kingside. The flashy 22 ♖d5 fizzles after 22...♜xd1 23 ♖xe7+ ♙h8 24 ♙xf6 gxf6 25 ♜f4 ♙g7 26 ♜g3+ ♙f8 (26...♙h8 is drawn by repetition) 27 ♜g8+ ♙e7 28 ♜xa8 a4 29 ♜a5, which is equal.

22...♖c2

Once again, 22...♖xb2?? loses instantly to 23 ♘d5.

23 b4!!



In 1610 Galileo offended the powers that be by declaring that the sun, when examined telescopically, contained dark blemishes. The implication: the heavenly bodies were imperfect – a conclusion which violated scriptural precedent. In the same way, Carlsen's violent departure from the normal, jarringly announces that all is not well in Black's position. The b-pawn is guilty of a serious breach of the treaty. Carlsen rips open a hidden seam, discovering a secret compartment where lies a stash of great value. This move must have come as a shock to Gelfand.

Question: I realize that White wants to activate his queenside pawn majority and Black's dark-squared bishop is tied to defence of f6, but what about the opening of the a-file? Doesn't allowing Black's rook entry to a1 seriously endanger White's king?

Answer: In a variation with many random variables floating about, we don't need to grope about blindly, just because we lack the calculation skills. If we are able to identify certain fundamental guideposts, we become like soothsayers who can foresee the future. White's decision does indeed appear suicidal. Here is where Carlsen's supernatural intuitive powers took over. Somehow he understood that his newly activated majority was more important than the black rook's entry into his position.

23...axb4 24 axb4

Now b4 can't be touched, and White threatens to seriously disrupt with b5 next.

24...♞h5!

Gelfand finds the only move to keep him alive:

a) 24...♞a1?? gets hit with 25 ♕xf6! when Black is unable to recapture, due to his loose back rank.

b) 24...g6?? 25 b5 ♖e8 26 ♜e5! ♠a1 27 ♜f3 when 27...♜c1 is met with the tricky 28 ♜d1! ♠b1 (28...♜xd1 29 ♠xa1 ends Black's back-rank insurgency and wins heavy material) 29 ♜xf6 ♜xd1 30 ♠xg6+! (Black's king gets a raucous welcome from her lowbrow enemies, who whoop with joy at the thought of the beating he is about to receive) 30...hxg6 31 ♜g7 mate.

25 ♜e5! ♠f6!

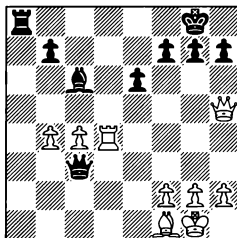
The bishop emerges from his meditative trance and springs into action. Once again, Gelfand finds his best defensive opportunity within a tangle of bad ones. Black's other counterattacking attempts fail:

a) 25...♠a1?! fails to 26 ♜b8+ ♠f8 27 ♜d1! (interference/discovered attack; the budding Professor Moriarty on a1 meets his match in White's criminally devious knight) 27...♠e4 28 ♠c5 h6 29 ♜xf8+ ♜h7 30 ♜d6 ♜xd3 31 ♠xd3 ♠xd1+ 32 ♠f1 ♠xd6 33 ♠xd6 ♜f6 34 f3 ♠c2 35 ♜f2, which will be a very tough ending for Black to hold. White's advantages include:

1. The vastly superior pawn majority.
2. The bishop-pair.
3. An already active king.

b) 25...♜f6? 26 b5 ♠a1 27 ♜e2! ♜xe2 28 ♜xe2 ♠e4 29 ♠e3 (threat: ♠xf6, followed by ♠xe4) 29...♠a3 30 ♠xf6 ♠xe3 31 ♠xe7 with two minor pieces for the rook and a winning ending.

26 ♜xh5 ♠xd4 27 ♠xd4 ♜xc3



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen force Black into a passive position?

Answer: Weak back rank.

28 ♜a5!

Now Black is forced to abandon the a-file and post his rook passively.

28...♠f8 29 ♜b6!

Covering both d4 and b4. Carlsen threatens to push his opponent into fatal levels of passivity after the coming b5 push.

29...e5 30 ♖d1

Carlsen isn't interested in trading his powerful rook for Black's passive f8 model. Also promising was the line 30 ♖d8 g6 31 b5 ♗e4 32 ♖d7 ♜c1 33 ♜d6 when Black remains under heavy strategic pressure.

30...g6

Gelfand creates a bit of air for his king.

31 b5 ♗e4 32 ♜f6

Carlsen goes after the e5-pawn. *Houdini* likes 32 ♖d7.

32...h5?!

It was necessary to prevent ♖d7 with 32...♗f5!.

33 h4?!

The arena of confusion expands. Both sides are winging it, the way we gauge the distance of an oncoming car at night, by the luminosity of its headlights. Carlsen should have seized the seventh rank with 33 ♖d7!, after which Black can barely move.

33...♗f5!

Now he sees it.

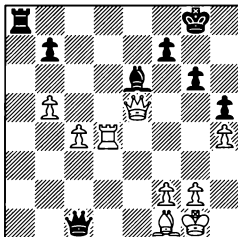
34 ♖d5 ♜c1?

Gelfand, eager to unload his e5 burden, decides to sacrifice the nuisance, rather than risk getting tied down to it. 34...♖e8 35 c5 ♜b2 36 c6 bxc6 37 ♜xc6 ♖c8 38 ♜f6 ♗e6 39 ♖d6 is very tough for Black.

35 ♜xe5

The queen is a thief who ransacks valuables in a home of wealthy people on vacation.

35...♗e6 36 ♖d4 ♖a8



Gelfand uses White's initiative lull to activate his rook to try and generate threats to White's king.

37 ♖e2!

Carlsen covers his two sensitive points: f1 and c4.

37...♟h7

37...♠a1?? allows 38 ♠d8+ ♟h7 39 ♖e5! ♖xf1+ 40 ♟h2 ♖g1+ 41 ♟g3 ♠a3+ 42 f3 ♠xf3+ 43 ♟xf3 ♖f1+ 44 ♟g3 and Black is out of checks.

38 ♠d1!

Reclaiming control over his first rank.

38...♖c3 39 ♖e4

Now b7 is threatened.

39...♠a1?

Gelfand builds upon that which will soon be apparent as an architectural misadventure. The passive 39...♠a7! is not in Gelfand's nature, but in this case it was his best chance to save himself: 40 b6 ♠a2 41 ♖xb7 ♖b2! (White no longer has ♖b6 as a way of protecting f2) 42 ♖f3 ♖xb6 43 ♖f6! (threat: ♠d8 and mate on h8) 43...♖b2 44 ♖xb2 ♠xb2 45 ♠c1 when Black remains down a pawn but still has chances to hold the draw. For a player as habitually active as Gelfand, choosing 39...♠a7! is so psychologically unlikely, that it's like a sober person who tries to logically argue with an addict in the throes of tripping out. The problem is, the sober person doesn't see the imaginary spiders.

40 ♠xa1 ♖xa1 41 c5

White's deadly 2 vs. 1 majority rolls on.

41...♖c3 42 ♖xb7!

Criminals don't tend to congregate in large groups, since the fewer the conspirators, the larger the individual takes. For this reason, White's queen never takes on partners in the commission of a crime. The drumbeat of White's initiative quickens its pace. This is in effect a piece sacrifice. The comps like Carlsen's decision over the more prosaic 42 b6 ♖xc5 43 ♖xb7 which should win as well.

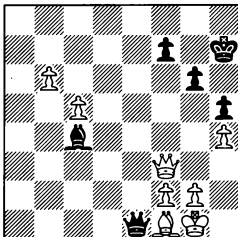
42...♖e1

Threat: ...♠c4...

43 b6?!

...which Carlsen allows, but with an inaccurate move order. The mop-up operation goes about as smoothly as \$6 an hour teenage carnival workers, dismantling complex equipment when the county fair ends. This sacrifice, if mishandled, can easily morph into reckless dissipation. White slows Black down with 43 ♖e7! ♠c1 44 b6 ♠c4 45 b7 when the b-pawn is a tempo ahead of the game continuation.

43...♠c4 44 ♖f3



Exercise (critical decision): The turns on this foggy road are many and the visibility low. Black can take on f1 with either queen or bishop. Only one line allows him to put up resistance. Which one would you play?

44... ♖xf1+?!

When a line which holds promise is before us and we decline to enter it, we become like actors experiencing stage fright. Black can put up much greater resistance with:

Answer: 44... ♜xf1! 45 ♖xf7+ ♜h8 46 ♜f6+ ♜h7 47 ♜h2 ♜e8! (47... ♜e4?? 48 ♜f7+! ♜h6 49 ♜f3! breaks Black's light-squared blockade and 49... ♜e5+ 50 g3 ♜xc5 51 b7 ♜c7 52 ♜f4+ wins) 48 ♜f4! ♜d7 49 ♜f3! (once again, the blockade is broken) 49... ♜c4 50 b7 ♜c7+ 51 g3 ♜b5 52 ♜d5 when White is going to need to bring his king over to the queenside, coupled with pushing his kingside majority. White's win is not so automatic here, despite the comp's rosy assessment. Note that 52... ♜c6?? (or 52... ♜a6?? 53 c6) is met with the overload/pawn promotion trick 53 b8♜!.

45 ♜h2

Black's queen and bishop are out of position to halt the passers.

45... ♜b1 46 b7 ♜b5

The black queen's face is a mask of exasperation, similar to the guest whose host is about to show vacation photos.

47 c6 ♜d5 48 ♜g3 1-0

White takes control over the queening square.

Chapter Six

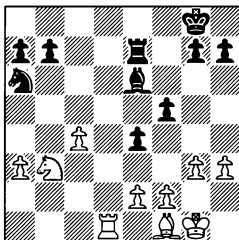
Carlsen on Endgames

A quote by IM John Watson caught my eye: "The position is probably drawn, but at this point in Carlsen's career it seems that any edge is enough to exploit, even against the world's best players." As it turns out, Watson is correct. I was astounded by how many 'dead drawn' endings Carlsen continues to win against world-class opposition. So in this chapter I did something a little different from past books: I mostly annotated endings which should have been drawn, yet through some mystical force – Carlsen, who zigzags to his goal, like lightning to a golfer – managed to win, mainly by spotting unforeseen anomalies, which threw his opponents' carefully rehearsed plans off kilter.

When we drift away from the correct course, we become acutely aware of our sense of detachment from the position's reality. And the worst part of it is, we are often powerless to take counterbalancing measures. Somehow this happens to Carlsen's world-class opponents in the ending. He incrementally places little burdens upon the defender's shoulders, which imperceptibly push them deeper and deeper into the soft ground.

Game 45 **T.Radjabov-M.Carlsen** London Candidates 2013 *Nimzo-Indian Defence*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♖c2 d6 5 ♘f3 ♘bd7 6 g3 0-0 7 ♙g2 e5 8 0-0 c6 9 ♠d1 ♠e8 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 a3 ♙xc3 12 ♖xc3 ♖e7 13 b4 ♘b6 14 ♙e3 ♘g4 15 ♘d2 f5 16 h3 ♘xe3 17 ♖xe3 e4 18 ♠ac1 ♙e6 19 ♖c3 ♠ad8 20 ♙f1 c5 21 bxc5 ♘a4 22 ♖b4 ♘xc5 23 ♘b3 ♠xd1 24 ♠xd1 ♘a6 25 ♖xe7 ♠xe7



Question: An assessment?

Answer: Let's assess:

1. Black owns the better queenside pawn structure, since White has three pawn islands to two, plus two potential target isolanis.
2. Black controls more kingside space.
3. c5 is a hole which Black may later occupy.
4. Black has potential for king position and may even edge his king up to e5.
5. White controls the d-file for now. If Black challenges, White swaps rooks, slightly increasing his drawing chances.
6. White's knight eyes the d4 hole as a future roosting spot.
7. The biggest winning barrier for Black is that White can protect his pawn weaknesses as many times as Black can attack them.

Conclusion: From my perspective, an edge for Black, whose position is full of promise, yet actualization of his expectations is not so easy to transform into a point. *Houdini* isn't impressed with Black's advantages and rates the position at even.

26 e3 ♖f7

Question: Since White owns the d-file, isn't it logical for Black to challenge it?

Answer: Ideally, he would like to do so. The trouble is after 26...♠d7 27 ♠xd7 ♠xd7 28 c5 ♜c7 29 ♜a5 ♠c6 30 ♠c4+ ♜f8 31 ♜f1 ♜e7 32 ♜e2 Black has trouble making progress. For example, 32...♜e6 33 ♜b3 ♜g5 34 ♜d4 g6 35 h4 ♜f7 36 ♠xf7 ♜xf7 37 ♜d2 when White stands no worse. In fact, I prefer his position.

27 ♠e2 b6

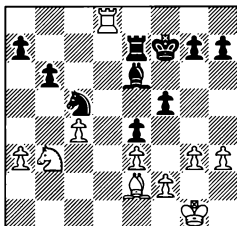
Backing up control over c5 and fixing c4 as a future target.

28 ♖d8

The rook begins to assert itself.

28...♙c5?

If 28...♙c7 29 ♖a8 ♙c5 30 ♙xc5 bxc5 31 h4 and I think White should hold this without too much sweat.



29 ♙d4?

Question: Are you suggesting by your interesting mark that White should swap knights, rather than occupy the d4 hole?

Answer: Possibly so. Now Black's knight looks more menacing than White's. I have a feeling that at this point, Radjabov began to grow optimistic and may have harboured dreams of the full point, when he should be thinking about how to draw. I don't think Black can win after 29 ♙xc5 bxc5 30 ♖b8 ♙f6 31 ♖b5 ♙c7 32 h4 h6 33 ♙f1 g5 34 hxg5+ hxg5 35 ♙e1 ♙e5 36 ♙d2 ♙d6 37 ♖b8 ♖h7 38 ♖a8 ♙e5. *Houdini* continues to rate Black's position as better, but from my perspective, Black's winning chances seem far smaller than White's chances to draw.

29...♙f6 30 ♙f1

White begins the centralization process for his king.

30...♖d7 31 ♖f8+ ♙f7

Carlsen refuses to swap rooks.

32 ♙e1 g6 33 h4 h6

Keeping ...g5 options on the table.

34 ♖c8 ♙e6 35 ♖f8+ ♙f7

A sign of frustration. Carlsen isn't making progress, and finally agrees to swap rooks...

36 ♖h8?

...which Radjabov declines! As I mentioned earlier, Radja plays this position as if it is White, not Black, who is after the full point.

36...♖c7 37 ♜b5

Even a below average intelligence kindergartener is unlikely to walk into 37 ♜xh6?? ♜g7 when White's rook is trapped.

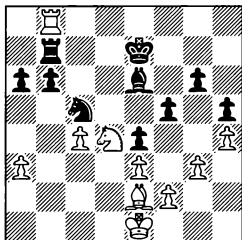
37...♜d7 38 ♜d4 h5

A small achievement for White, who managed to fix Black's kingside pawns, all on the same colour as the remaining light-squared bishop.

39 ♜f8+ ♙f7 40 ♜c8 ♜e5 41 ♜a8 a6

This keeps White's knight out of b5, at the cost of weakening b6.

42 ♜c8 ♜d6 43 ♜c6+ ♜f6 44 ♜d4 ♙e6 45 ♜f8+ ♜e7 46 ♜a8 ♜d7 47 ♜b8 ♜b7



The question arises: should White continue his policy of avoiding a rook swap, or will a rook swap at this stage ensure him a draw?

48 ♜xb7+!

We note a peevish droop to the white rook's normally smiling face. The players' assessments are at a variance, as Radjabov decides to test a boundary. He agrees to swap rooks, confident in his ability to erect an impenetrable barrier to Black's infiltration attempts. I think he is correct, but from a practical standpoint, 48 ♜a8 seems to be a less complicated way of attaining a draw.

48...♜xb7

Now ...♜a5, ganging up on c4, is in the air.

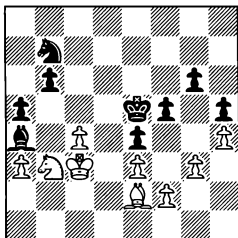
49 ♜d2 ♜d6 50 ♜c3 ♙f7 51 ♜b3

It certainly looks like White built an impregnable fortress. At this point, all the internet pundits (including your writer) loudly proclaimed a drawn result.

51...♜e5 52 ♙f1 a5!

Principle: place as many pawns as possible on the opposite colour of your remaining bishop.

53 ♙e2 ♙e6 54 ♙f1 ♙d7 55 ♙e2 ♙a4



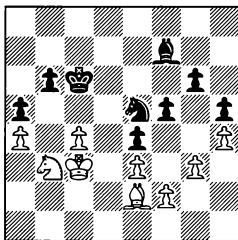
Question: What happens if White allows ... xb3 ?

Answer: Even that position should be drawn. From a practical perspective, it may be unwise on White's part to allow Black a potential good knight versus semi-bad bishop situation. I played out several scenarios, and with *Houdini* defending, White held the draw each time. From a human overview, I prefer Radjabov's move.

56 d4 c5 57 b2 e8 58 c3 f7 59 c6+ d6 60 d4 d7 61 b5+ c5 62 d4 e5
63 b3+

Get out of my house!

63... c6 64 a4? !



A violation of the principle: don't place pawns on the same colour of your remaining bishop. Radjabov grows restless and makes a shaky decision, under the banner of creating

a fortress. The trouble is the move creates a secondary target on a4 and increases Black's winning chances. 64 ♖d4 should hold the draw without a problem.

64...♙d7 65 ♜d4 ♙d6 66 ♜b5+

An inaccuracy. I don't see Black's progress after 66 ♜b3. Now if 66...♙e8 White has 67 c5+!, transposing to the game.

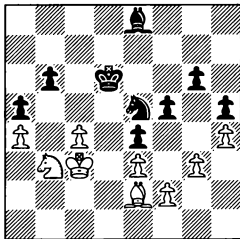
66...♙c5 67 ♜d4 ♙e8 68 ♜b3+!

Accurate defence:

a) 68 ♙d1? ♜d3 69 f3 ♜f2 70 ♙c2 exf3 71 ♜xf3 ♜h1! when g3 falls.

b) 68 ♙b3? ♙d7! (zugzwang) 69 f4 exf3 70 ♜xf3 ♜g4 and e3 drops.

68...♙d6



Exercise (combination alert): It's not easy to swindle a suspiciously vigilant adversary, yet it feels as if Carlsen has done just that. After all, there is no way for White to protect a4. Find Radjabov's trick and he remains in the game:

Answer: Simplification/deflection.

69 c5+! ♙c7!

After 69...bxc5 70 ♜xa5 ♙xa4 71 ♜c4+ ♜xc4 72 ♙xc4 ♙e7 73 ♙d5 ♙b5 there is no way for Black to make progress, since his bishop must keep White's king away from c4, while his king is tied down to protection of g6.

70 ♙d4 ♜c6+ 71 ♙c3

71 ♙d5?? is a rather clever helpmate: 71...♙f7 mate.

71...♙e7 72 cxb6+ ♙xb6 73 ♜d2 ♙xa4

Black won a pawn at the cost of allowing White serious central counterplay.

74 ♜c4+!

The blow of losing a4 is absorbed by White, like a sponge. This forces Black's king into an unfavourable position, where he is vulnerable to a discovered check.

74...♟a6 75 ♖a3+

Simpler is 75 ♖d6+! ♟a7 76 ♙c4! ♟b6 77 ♙f7 (tying Black down to the defence of his pawn chain ensures the draw) 77...♙b5 78 ♖xb5 ♟xb5 79 ♟b3! when Black's knight is badly tied down to defence of g6 that I don't see a way for him to make progress.

75...♟b7

75...♟a7! is more accurate.

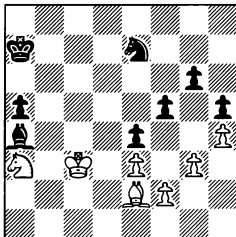
76 ♖c4 ♟a6

Radjabov's clever point is that 76...♖c6?? hangs a piece to 77 ♖b2!, which leaves Black's bishop dangling in mid-air.

77 ♖a3+

Once again, 77 ♖d6+! ♟a7 78 ♙c4! should allow White a draw.

77...♟a7!



78 ♟d4!?

Question: Is Radjabov playing for the win again?

Answer: I don't think so. He sees that his hoped for repetition draw attempt fails after the pin trick 78 ♖c4? ♙b5! when suddenly, Black is just up a clean pawn.

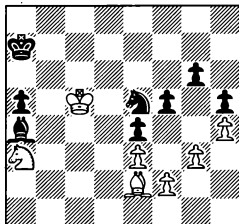
White should still hold the draw after the correct 78 ♙c4!. With this move, White seeks to augment his already considerable piece activity. After 78...♙e8 (covering against ♙f7) 79 ♙e6 a4 80 ♖c4 ♟b8 81 ♖d6 ♙c6 82 ♟b4 ♟c7 83 ♟c5 a3 84 ♙a2 ♙d5 85 ♙xd5 ♖xd5 86 ♖b5+ ♟d7 87 ♖xa3 ♖f6 88 ♖c4 (threat: ♖e5+ and ♖xg6) 88...♙e6 (Black threatens to go after f2 with ...♖g4 next move) 89 ♖b2! ♖g4 90 ♖d1 White's knight saves the day and holds the draw.

78...♖c6+ 79 ♟c5

After 79 ♖d5 ♖b4+ 80 ♟d4 (or 80 ♙e6 ♖d3 81 ♟f6 ♖xf2 82 ♟xg6 ♖h1 83 ♙g5 ♖xg3 84 ♙c4 ♙e8 85 ♟f4 ♖h1 86 ♟xf5 ♟b6 87 ♟xe4 ♟c5 88 ♟d3 ♖f2+ 89 ♟c3 ♖e4+ 90 ♟b2 ♖f6

91 ♖e2 ♜g4 92 ♜c2 and White should hold the draw with accurate play) 80...♗e8 81 f3 exf3 82 ♖xf3 the e4 push is in the air and I don't believe Black can win with so many pawns coming off the board.

79...♜e5!



Exercise (critical decision): Black is up a pawn, but it shouldn't be enough against White's super king. His choices: a) 80 ♜c4, challenging Black's knight and attacking a5. b) 80 ♜d4, covering against ...♜d3+ ideas. Choose carefully, since only one of the choices holds the draw.

80 ♜c4?

The wrong path. Missing a clear draw when it is within our grasp is a little like a hungry person going to a 53-course buffet and returning with a sprig of parsley on his plate.

Answer: Black can't make progress if White covers against the ...♜d3+ trick with 80 ♜d4!.

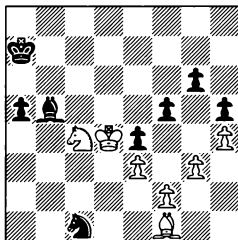
After this move the aperture of Black's opportunity becomes choked with dirt. Radjabov probably feared 80...♜d3 and perhaps worried that he couldn't hold the ending with bishop versus knight and an outside passed a-pawn. However, 81 ♖xd3 exd3 82 ♜xd3 ♖b3 83 ♜c3 ♖f7 84 ♜c2 ♜b6 85 ♜d4 ♜c5 86 ♜f3 ♜d5 87 ♜g5 (the perfect spot for the knight, which denies Black's king entry to e4) 87...♗e8 88 ♜b3 a4+ 89 ♜b4 and now if Black tries a distraction sacrifice to allow king entry, it isn't sufficient after 89...a3 90 ♜xa3 ♜c4 91 e4 fxe4 92 ♜xe4 ♜d3 93 ♜f6 ♖f7 94 f3 ♜e3 95 ♜xh5! (avoiding dirty tricks like 95 g4?! g5! which keep Black's hopes alive a bit longer) 95...gxh5 96 g4, which is drawn.

80...♜d3+! 81 ♜d4

Not much choice, since after 81 ♖xd3 exd3 82 f3 ♖b3 83 ♜d2 a4 84 ♜b4 ♖d1 85 e4 fxe4 86 fxe4 ♜b7 87 ♜c4 ♜c7 88 ♜c3 ♖c2 89 ♜a3 ♜d6! 90 ♜c4+ (of course the king and pawn ending after 90 ♜xc2?? dxc2 91 ♜xc2 ♜e5 is completely resignable for White) 90...♜c6! 91 ♜b4 a3! Deflection. 92 ♜xa3 ♜c5 93 ♜d2 ♜d4 94 ♜b2 ♖d1 95 ♜c1 ♖a4 96 ♜b2 ♖c6 97 e5 ♖d5 98 ♜c1 ♜xe5 White can resign.

81...♖c1?

Nobody trusts the knight, who greets people with an artificially constructed affability. So potent is her malice, that her thoughts are physically felt. Carlsen regards the f2 offer with disinterested silence. With a low clock, he probably couldn't work out a 100% certain win in the line 81...♖xf2 82 ♖xa5 (82 ♜e5 ♙b5 wins) 82...♙h1, but Black does win: for example, 83 ♙c4 ♙e8 84 ♜e5 ♜b6 85 ♖b3 ♖xg3 86 ♜f4 (86 ♜f6 is met with 86...f4! 87 exf4 e3 88 ♖c1 ♜c5 89 ♙d3 ♜d4 90 ♙xg6 ♙xg6 91 ♜xg6 ♜c3! 92 f5 ♜c2 93 f6 ♜xc1 94 f7 e2 95 f8♜ e1♜ and wins, since h5 is secured) 86...♙h1, winning.

82 ♙f1 ♙b5!

Gusts of light crackle and swirl in the wake of the wizard's incantation. This pin is annoying for White.

83 ♖xa5!

One requires relaxed inhibitions to test out such blatant speculation. Perhaps the players were coming down to the dregs of a sudden death control. In such situations, thoughts of mischief course through our minds, and concepts of before and after vanish. We simply live within the intensely impacted moment of eternal nowness. The position begins to resemble one of those ultra-bloody season-ending *Game of Thrones* episodes. Radjabov's last move was made with the philosophy: raw power is sometimes enough to overwhelm subtlety. So he sacrifices a piece in desperation, hoping to eliminate all the pawns from the board with the help of his active king.

If 83 ♜c3 ♜a6 84 ♜d2 ♖b3+ (84...♖a2 85 ♜d1 ♖b4 is also quite promising) 85 ♜c3 a4 86 ♜b4 ♖c1 87 ♖d2 ♙xf1 88 ♖xf1 ♖d3+ 89 ♜xa4 ♖xf2 90 ♜b4 ♜b6 91 ♜c4 ♖g4 92 ♜d4 (92 ♜b4 ♜c6 93 ♜c4 ♖e5+ 94 ♜d4 ♖f3+ 95 ♜c4 ♜d6 96 ♜b3 ♜d5 97 ♜c3 ♜c5 breaks the white king's attempted opposition) 92...♜b5 (now the black king and knight league themselves against their white counterparts, slowly making inroads) 93 ♜c3 ♜c5 94 ♜b3 ♖f6 95 ♖d2 ♖d5 96 ♖f1 ♜b5 (zugzwang; Black king and knight form a cabal, dedicated to the destruction of White's remaining pawns, each of which is nailed down like a bull's eye target)

97 ♖c2 ♗b4 98 ♗b2 ♖c4 99 ♖c2 ♖b4+ 100 ♖d2 ♗b3 101 ♖d1 ♖c3 102 ♗e2 ♖d3 103 ♖h2 ♖e5 104 ♖f1 ♖f3! (zugzwang number two) 105 ♗f2 ♖d3 (and number three) 106 ♗g2 ♗e2 when it's zugzwang number four and Black wins.

83...♙xf1

"In most transactions, one party tends to come out better off than the other," says the black bishop soothingly to his flustered f1 colleague.

84 ♖c6+ ♗b6 85 ♖e7 ♖d3!

White's dilemma: his pawns begin to fall as well.

86 ♖xg6 ♖c7 87 ♖e7 ♙h3

The bishop secures f5, as well as h5.

88 ♖d5+ ♖d6 89 ♖f6 ♙g4 0-1

90 f4 is met with 90...♖c1 91 ♖c3 ♖e2+ 92 ♖d2 ♖xg3 ("Did you really believe that your bumbling efforts would unseat me?" the knight asks White's king) 93 ♗e1 ♗e6 94 ♖e8 ♖e2 95 ♖d2 ♖g1 and h4 falls.

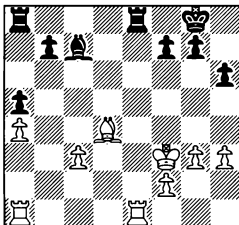
Game 46

M.Carlsen-F.Caruana

Grand Slam, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2012

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♖d2 ♖f6 4 ♖gf3 ♖c6 5 c3 ♙d6 6 ♙e2 0-0 7 0-0 a5 8 ♙e1 e5 9 exd5 ♖xd5 10 ♖c4 ♙e8 11 ♙f1 ♙g4 12 h3 ♙h5 13 g3 ♖b6 14 ♖xb6 cxb6 15 ♙g2 b5 16 a4! b4 17 ♙e3 ♙c7 18 ♗b3 h6 19 ♗c4 bxc3 20 bxc3 e4 21 dxe4 ♙xf3 22 ♙xf3 ♖e5 23 ♗e2 ♖xf3+ 24 ♗xf3 ♗d3 25 ♗g2 ♗xe4 26 ♙d4 ♗xf3+ 27 ♖xf3



Question: Both parties have split queenside pawns.
Is the game likely to head for a draw?

Answer: IM John Watson answers: "Only White has chances here. The position is probably drawn, but at this point in Carlsen's career it seems that any edge is enough to exploit, even against the world's best players. I won't analyse this ending (for want of time and insight), but I suspect it will appear in many books over the years." I add: I disagree that the position should be drawn with proper play, and think Black is in bigger trouble than appearances indicate, for the following reasons:

1. White's open b-file allows him to endlessly pressure Black's b-pawn.
2. White's queenside pawns, on the other hand, appear rather safe.
3. White's king is out, several tempi ahead of Black's.

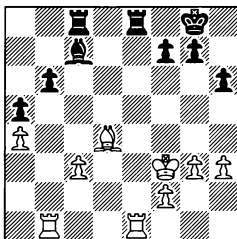
These three factors place Black's game in grave danger.

27...b6

Black has to play this move sooner or later. Now both queenside pawns are on the same colour as his remaining bishop. I would play 27...h5! discouraging White from g4 expansion ideas.

28 ♖ab1 ♖ac8

Indirect defence. White is tactically unable to take b6.



29 ♕e4!

Now Black can't afford to swap rooks since White's king would enter the queenside via d5.

Question: Can White sacrifice the exchange for two pawns with 29 ♕xe8+ ♕xe8 30 ♕xb6 ♕b8 31 ♕xa5, when his king can help his two passers forward?

Answer: You must analyse the line further. Just a few ply more and we see that White only gets one pawn for the exchange after 31...♕xb1 32 ♕xc7 ♕c1 33 ♕e5 ♕a1. The a-pawn falls and it is Black who has all the winning chances.

29...g6?!

Intending ...f5. This may seem crazy, but I think this is the point where Caruana lost the game. It is critical for Black to prevent White's future encroaching h4 and h5. Therefore, Black should play 29...h5!. I'm not sure if this would save him in the long run, and it's always dangerous to posit an unproven guess as a fact, but with the hindsight of having seen the remainder of the game, where Black allowed White g4, I don't see any way Caruana saves the game.

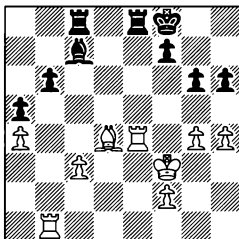
30 g4!

Now there is no way to counteract White's intent, as ...f5 will come at the cost of another target. And, most importantly, White is able to fulfil his h4-h5 intent later on.

30...♟f8

30...f5? 31 gxf5 gxf5 32 ♖xe8+ ♜xe8 33 ♖g1+! ♟f8 34 ♖g6 wins material.

31 h4!



Now h5 is in the air, after which h6 becomes a secondary fixed target.

31...♜xe4

Question: A concession?

Answer: A concession, but not a mistake. Black is virtually out of choices. His position is close to an idea-zugzwang. I tried 31...♟d8, but 32 h5 gxh5 33 gxh5 ♜e7 34 ♖g1 ♜c6 35 ♜eg4 ♜ee6 36 ♖g8+ ♟e7 37 ♜h8 ♟c7 38 ♖gg8 ♟d6 39 ♖g7, and if 39...♟e7? 40 ♜hh7 wins. **32 ♟xe4 ♜e8+ 33 ♟d3!?**

Uncharacteristically cautious play from Carlsen. Playing the king to d3 isn't so bad, since White can play ♟c4 anytime he pleases. I would have played 33 ♟d5 in a flash. Still, *Houdini* rates the position at only an edge for White after 33...♜e6.

33...♜e6

Caruana covers b6 laterally, which is preferable to having a rook on b8.

34 ♟e3!

Targeting h6, which induces Black's king away from the centre.

34...♟g7

Black's problem is that he isn't able to get away with 34...h5? 35 gxf5 gxf5 36 ♖b5 when White picks off h5.

35 ♜b5!

Now h5 is coming.

35...♙d8 36 h5 ♜d6+

36...g5 is now met by 37 f4! gxf4 38 ♙xf4 ♜c6 39 c4 ♟f8 40 ♙e3 when Black is tied down to two weaknesses and isn't likely to save himself.

37 ♟c4 ♜c6+ 38 ♟d5 ♜e6

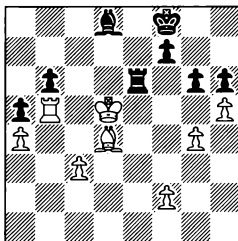
Of course, 38...♜xc3?? 39 ♙d4+ is a pretty stupid way to lose a chess game.

39 ♙d4+!

White's goals are framed within the context of his control over the dark squares.

39...♟f8

Much stronger than 39...♙f6?? (by swapping away bishops, Black hopes the origin of his suffering on the dark squares will gradually be eradicated; in reality, the opposite occurs) 40 ♜xb6 ♜xb6 41 ♙xb6 ♙xc3 42 ♟c4 ♙e1 43 ♟b5 ♟f6 44 f3 gxf5 45 gxf5 ♟g5 46 ♙xa5 ♙g3 47 ♙d8+ ♟xh5 48 a5 when Black is way too slow in the mutual queening race: 48...♙b8 49 a6 ♙a7 50 ♙b6 ♙b8 51 ♟c6 ♟h4 52 ♟b7.



Exercise (planning): After 39...♟f8, how does White make further progress?

Answer: Push the f-pawn, in preparation for f5, which hems Black in further.

40 f4!

The greater a player's ambition, the greater the susceptibility to cataclysmic change across the board. Is there such a thing as 'limited warfare?' From my experience, a violent clash, even a small one, tends to grow. The politically disaffected f-pawn decides to fer-

ment revolt on the kingside and now Black must worry about f5. Carlsen's choice is more energetic than 40 hxg6 ♖xg6 41 f3, which has the benefit of splitting Black's pawns. This is the likely line I would play over the board.

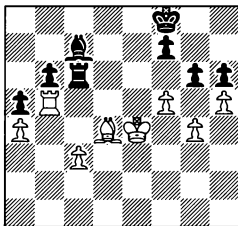
40...♗c7 41 f5

Carlsen's position keeps getting better and better.

41...♞d6+ 42 ♖e4

Now Black doesn't have access to ...♞e6+.

42...♞c6



Exercise (planning): White seems to be at an impasse. Black covers all his weak pawns for now. A palaeontologist may be able to deduce the entire skeletal structure from just a few bones. In the same way, we must discover the existence of a deeply hidden idea, with very little raw data to guide us. How can White make progress?

Answer: Go after h6 with the rook.

43 ♖b1!!

The purest of motivations is when we set out to destroy a foe. Psychologically, such a re-treating move from an already well-posted piece is unbelievably difficult to find. Carlsen's idea is hxg6 and ♖h1, targeting h6. In general, undirected wrath, when spread over too many targets, tends to diffuse – but not this time.

43...♗e8

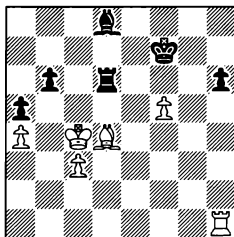
Question: If White plans ♖h1 and hxg6, then why can't Black simply clog up the h-file with 43...gxh5 44 gxh5?

Answer: Your idea covers against ♖h1 ideas, but opens up new problems by fatally opening the g-file: 44...♗e7 45 ♖g1 ♗f8 46 ♞g7 ♗h2 47 ♞h7 ♗e7 48 ♞h8 and a well-timed f6+ will pick off Black's h6-pawn.

44 hxg6 fxg6 45 ♖h1! ♜f7 46 ♜d5

Most certainly not 46 ♖xh6?? gxh5+ and White's rook falls.

46...♖d6+ 47 ♜c4 gxf5 48 gxf5 ♙d8



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen make progress?

Answer: Interference/removal of the guard/simplification.

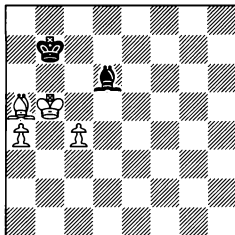
49 f6! ♙xf6

Instead, 49...♜g6 50 ♖g1+ ♜f7 51 ♖g7+ ♜e6 52 ♖h7 picks off h6, when Black can resign.

50 ♖xh6 ♙e7 51 ♖xd6 ♙xd6 52 ♜b5

White king and bishop view Black's queenside pawns with the eye of people about to swat a pair of annoying insects.

52...♜e6 53 ♙xb6 ♜d7 54 c4 ♜c8 55 ♙xa5 ♜b7



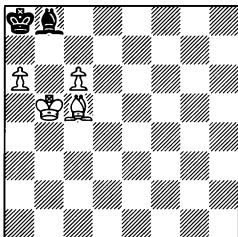
Question: Why isn't Black resigning? White wins easily by pushing both c and a-pawns forward.

Answer: Admittedly, Black's position quivers like a raw egg, thrown into a frying pan's hot oil. Still, matters are not that simple. White must be aware of one trap:

56 ♖b4!

White must finesse his c-pawn up the board, without allowing Black to sacrifice his bishop for it. 56 c5?? allows Black to draw after the simple 56...♙xc5! 57 ♜xc5 ♚a8. This position is drawn, due to White's bishop being on the wrong colour of the queening square.

56...♙f4 57 c5 ♚a7 58 c6 ♜b8 59 a5 ♚a7 60 a6 ♚a8 61 ♙c5 ♙b8



Exercise (planning): Work out a clear path for White to force his c-pawn through, without allowing Black to sacrifice his bishop for it:

Answer: 62 ♜c4

Step 1: Transfer the king to its most potent post, d7.

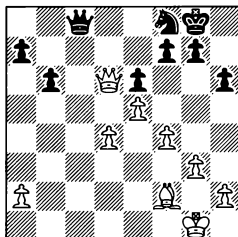
62...♙c7 63 ♜d5 ♙d8 64 ♜e6 ♙c7 65 ♜d7 ♙a5

Step 2: Prepare ♙d8!, after which White promotes.

66 ♙e7! 1-0

Game 47
B.Gelfand-M.Carlsen
 London Candidates 2013
Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♙f3 d5 4 ♙c3 ♙bd7 5 ♙g5 c6 6 e3 ♚a5 7 cxd5 ♙xd5 8 ♙c1 ♙xc3 9 bxc3
 ♙a3 10 ♙c2 b6 11 ♙d3 ♙a6 12 0-0 ♙xd3 13 ♚xd3 0-0 14 e4 ♙fe8 15 e5 h6 16 ♙h4 c5 17
 ♙d2 cxd4 18 cxd4 ♙ac8 19 ♙c4 ♚b5 20 f4 ♙c7 21 ♚xa3 ♙xc4 22 ♙xc4 ♚xc4 23 ♙f2 ♚c7 24
 ♙c1 ♚b7 25 ♚d6 ♙f8 26 g3 ♙c8 27 ♙xc8 ♚xc8



Question: We have a position with opposite-wing majorities and also bishop versus knight. Who stands better?

Answer: In such cases, we must gauge the potential speed of the majorities and also king safety:

1. Black's majority is more potent when it comes to actually promoting to a new queen.
 2. White's majority is more potent when it comes to stripping Black's king of cover.
 3. Numbers 1 and 2 are a wash. Two factors which slightly tilt the ending in Black's favour:
 - i. The queen and knight attacking factor, based on the endgame principle: queen and knight make a potent attacking team in an ending.
 - ii. White's kingside pawns are on the wrong colour of his remaining bishop, and will not be easy to shift to light colour squares.
- Conclusion: Black stands slightly better.

28 d5

White logically eliminates his d-pawn to free his bishop and roll his kingside majority.

28...exd5 29 ♖xd5 g6!

White's kingside pawns are all stuck on dark squares, while Black's queen and light-squared pawns exert a pervasive influence upon the kingside light squares. If White can't find a way to activate his majority, switching it to light colour, his pawns remain frozen and his majority ineffective.

30 ♜g2

Perhaps thinking about h3 and g4.

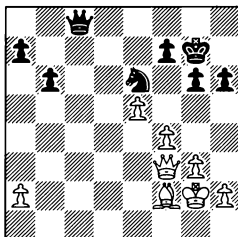
30...♗e6

Now the h3 and g4 plan doesn't look so great, since f4 will be weakened.

31 ♖f3

Thinking about a disruptive f5.

31...♜g7



32 a3!?

Question: Why did White back down from 32 f5?

Answer: Gelfand probably feared the ending after 32...gxf5 (after 32...♗g5 33 f6+ ♜h7 34 ♖d5 ♗e6 it will be difficult for Black to make queenside progress, since his pieces must keep constant vigil over his king) 33 ♖xf5 ♖a6 34 ♖g4+ ♗g5! 35 h4 ♖b7+ 36 ♜f1 ♖f3! 37 ♖f4! (37 ♖xf3 ♗xf3 and e5 falls) 37...♖xf4 (or 37...♖d3+ 38 ♜g2 ♗e6 39 ♖f6+ ♜g8 40 ♖xh6 ♖d5+ 41 ♜f1 ♖xe5 42 ♖d2 and White looks okay here, although I still prefer Black's chances) 38 gxf4 ♗e4 39 h5 f6 40 ♜g2 (40 ♗d4 is a pawn sacrifice after 40...♗g3+ 41 ♜f2 ♗xh5) 40...fxe5 41 fxe5 ♗xf2 (only White has the winning chances after 41...♗c3?! 42 ♗e1! ♗xa2 43 ♗d2! when a sacrifice on h6 is in the air, after which Black's king is unable to stop both White passed pawns) 42 ♜xf2, but White draws the king and pawn ending by a single tempo after 42...♜f7 43 ♜e3 ♜e6 44 ♜e4 b5 45 a3 a5 46 ♜d4 b4. Normally the outside passed pawn wins. Not here, though, since White's lucky king makes it back by a single tempo: 47 axb4 axb4 48 ♜c4

♙xe5 49 ♜xb4 ♜f4 50 ♜c5 ♜g4 51 ♜d4 ♜xh5 52 ♜e3 ♜g4 53 ♜f2.

32...h5 33 h4

Gelfand decides that this drug requires intravenous injection and can't be delivered in to his system orally. The idea is to block ...♘g5 tricks after White plays f5. It's already too late for 33 f5?: Black responds with 33...♘g5, threatening both ...♘xf3 and ...♞xf5. After 34 f6+ (34 ♞f4 ♞xf5 35 ♞xf5 gxf5 leaves White struggling) 34...♜h7 35 ♞d5 ♞h3+ 36 ♜g1 h4 White's punctured kingside light squares leave him in serious difficulties.

33...♞c2!

Keeping an eye on White's f5 break, while activating his queen.

34 ♞b7 ♞a4

Attacking a3, while defending a7.

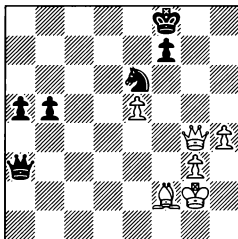
35 ♞f3 b5

Carlsen rolls his queenside majority forward, which gives Gelfand his moment to open the kingside and go after Black's king.

36 f5 gxf5 37 ♞xf5 ♞xa3 38 ♞xh5

Matters altered radically. Now both sides hold super majorities on their respective wings. One tiny difference which favours Black is that he has two passers, while White only owns one.

38...a5 39 ♞g4+ ♜f8



Exercise (planning): In mutual queening races, the tiniest inaccuracy can cost a player the game. White can immediately push his passed h-pawn with 40 h5, or he can play 40 ♞h5, intending ♞h8+ and then to support the h-pawn's march after that. Which move is correct?

40 h5?!

An inaccurate move, after which White experiences difficulties in moving his h-pawn

forward. White missed a golden drawing opportunity with:

Answer: 40 ♖h5! a4 41 ♜h8+ ♕e7 42 h5 ♜d3 43 h6 ♜e4+ 44 ♔g1 when White's h-pawn is too fast and Black must agree to perpetual check after 44...♜b1+ 45 ♔g2 ♜e4+.

40...♜c1!

Dual purpose, halting h6 and threatening to support his own pawn with ...b4, ...b3 and ...b2.

41 ♜e4 b4 42 ♙e3

Gelfand activates his bishop, while seizing control over h6.

Question: Isn't Black's a-pawn hanging after 42 ♜a8+?

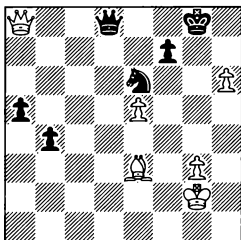
Answer: White doesn't have time to take it. Black forces promotion after 42...♔g7 43 ♜xa5 b3. The b-pawn goes through and White lacks perpetual check.

42...♜c7!?

Stronger is 42...♜c8! which disallows White a8 checks: 43 ♜h7 (43 h6?? b3 threatens ...♜c2+ and White is losing) 43...♜c6+ 44 ♔g1 b3 45 ♜h8+ ♕e7 46 ♜f6+ ♕e8 47 ♜h8+ ♔f8 48 e6 (White is obliged to hand over his e-pawn to halt Black's b-pawn) 48...fxe6 49 ♜e5 ♜d5 50 ♜c3 ♔f7 51 h6 e5 and it's still very tricky, but Black should win.

43 ♜a8+ ♔g7 44 h6+ ♔h7 45 ♜e4+ ♔g8 46 ♜a8+ ♜d8

This move engenders a misperception in Gelfand's mind.



Exercise (critical decision): White comes to a cross-roads of plans: a) Swap queens with 47 ♜xd8+ and then race the king over to try and win Black's virtually unguarded queenside pawns. b) Retain queens with 47 ♜c6. One path loses, while the other holds promise for a draw. Which path should he take?

47 ♜xd8+?

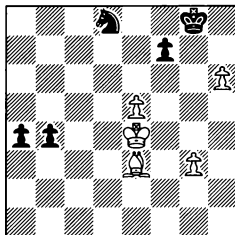
White, contriving a desperate scheme, is inclined to force the issue, since he felt his position was in a downward trajectory, when in reality, waiting was so much more effective. Gelfand chooses this path for better or worse, and the latter seems to be the case, setting him up for an unfortunate aftermath. Some ideas are so odd, that we must assume them as remnants from seepage of the subconscious mind. Vast ambition, when in an under-capitalized state, is a bad combination. It's not always possible to prevail from sheer force of desire and will alone. When we begin an unsound idea and it fails, we are the bumbling addict who makes a 36:1 long shot bet on double sixes. When the dice fall otherwise, he pulls at his hair and asks heavenward: "How did this happen?". White's path to a potential draw lay in:

Answer: Gelfand probably rejected 47 ♖c6! based on the philosophy: the nature of White's difficulties is that they are unlikely to waft away on their own accord. Decisive action must be taken immediately, or he faces slow death. However, the comps say White may just be able to hold the game in this strategy. After 47...b3 48 ♙c1 ♘f8 49 ♜b5 ♜d1 50 ♜e8! ♜e2+ 51 ♙h3 ♜f1+ 52 ♙h2 Black's win is in question, since 52...♜xc1 is met with (52...♜d3 53 ♙a3 ♜e2+ 54 ♙h3 ♜h5+ is also a draw) 53 h7+! (deflection; the most effective attacks are the ones engineered so that the separate parts act as a collective, single organism) 53...♙xh7 54 ♜xf7+ ♙h6 ("The best way to resolve conflict is through respectful dialogue – never through violence," Black's king reminds White's queen) 55 ♜xf8+ ♙g5 56 ♜f6+ ♙g4 57 ♜g6+ it's a draw.

47...♙xd8

GM Alex Baburin writes: "I gave this position to *FinalGen*, but it is estimated that it would take 658 hours (!) to get it sorted. It would be a miracle if White saved this endgame. That miracle did not happen."

48 ♙f3 a4 49 ♙e4



This is the position Gelfand envisioned. He felt Black's unguarded queenside pawns should fall. Watch how Carlsen keeps them alive.

49...♖c6!

It soon becomes clear that Gelfand's perceived way out is manifestly unfeasible.

50 ♖c1

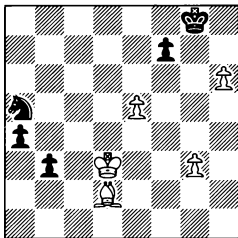
To neglect the full analytical rigor of even a single move in such a forcing line, is akin to suicide. If 50 ♜d5 a3! 51 ♖c1 ♖a5!, which is nightmarish geometry for White, whose punitive expedition ends in travesty. His king is unable to play to c5, since that allows Black a knight fork on b3. This is probably what Carlsen saw and what Gelfand missed when deciding to swap queens.

50...♖a5! 51 ♖d2 b3!

Carlsen overloads White's bishop, who is unable to take Black's knight due to the queening threat.

52 ♜d3

Covering against the threatened ...b2.



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen continue his queenside pawn promotion project?

Answer: Overloaded defender.

52...♖c4!

Defenders fly every which way, like drops of rainwater on a car's wheel. The superhero knight displays his previously secret anti-gravatic properties.

53 ♖c3

53 ♜xc4?? allows Black to promote with 53...b2.

53...a3!

The knight remains immune.

54 g4

54 ♜xc4?? b2 is the same old story.

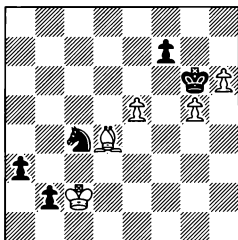
54...♖h7 55 g5 ♜g6 56 ♙d4

Of course, g5 isn't hanging, since Black must keep an eye on White's passed h-pawn.

56...b2

The pawns are close to reaching their goal, without challenge.

57 ♜c2



Exercise (combination alert): How did Carlsen end the game?

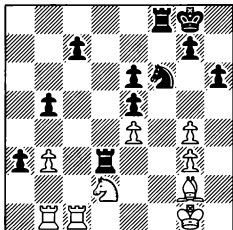
Answer: Overloaded defender.

57...♙d2! 0-1

The knight bows false benevolence before White's pieces, for now concealing his true intent: he hopes to broach the delicate matter of the bishop's upcoming surrender signing. After 58 ♙xb2 axb2 59 ♜xb2 ♙c4+ 60 ♜c3 ♙xe5 61 ♙d4 ♙f3+ all of White's pawns fall.

Game 48
A.Naiditsch-M.Carlsen
 Turin Olympiad 2006
Two Knights Defence

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♙c6 3 ♙c4 ♙f6 4 ♙g5 d5 5 exd5 b5 6 ♙f1 h6 7 ♙e6 fxe6 8 dxc6 ♙c5 9 d3 0-0
 10 ♙e3 ♙xe3 11 fxe3 ♙d6 12 ♙d2 ♙xc6 13 e4 ♙c5 14 ♙b3 ♙b6 15 ♙e2 ♙d7 16 g3 a5 17
 ♙h3 a4 18 ♙d2 a3 19 b3 ♙e8! 20 ♙f2 ♙c6 21 0-0 ♙h5 22 ♙e3 ♙g4 23 ♙g2 ♙xc2 24 ♙fc1
 ♙b2 25 h3 ♙ad8 26 ♙ab1 ♙xa2 27 ♙a1 ♙b2 28 ♙ab1 ♙a2 29 ♙a1 ♙b2 30 ♙ab1 ♙d4 31
 ♙xd4 ♙xd4 32 hxg4 ♙xd3



Question: Does Black have full compensation for the piece?

Answer: More than enough:

1. Black has three pawns for the piece.
2. All of White's pawns are isolated and potential targets.
3. Black has a deeply entrenched passed pawn on a3, which ensures that White's pieces will be tied up watching for its potential promotion.
4. White's king is insecure, vulnerable to sudden assaults from Black's two rooks and knight.

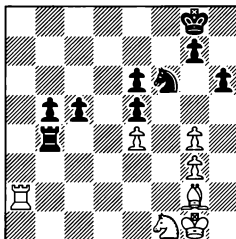
Conclusion: White finds himself in a counterplayless vacuum, bedevilled by multiple strategic woes. He is the one fighting for the draw.

33 ♖f1 ♚a8!

Endgame principle: place your rooks behind your passed pawns. Carlsen lets c7 fall in exchange for b3, after which he gains two connected passed pawns.

34 ♜xc7

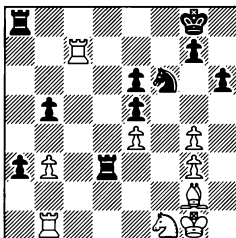
This natural move probably isn't White's best. He puts up greater resistance with 34 b4! a2 35 ♜a1 ♜d4 36 ♜c2 ♜xb4 37 ♜cxa2 ♜xa2 38 ♜xa2 c5.



Question: Isn't this an easy win for Black, with two connected passed pawns?

Answer: I was thinking along the same lines. Then I tested the position, playing Black versus Houdini and the win was not easy at all. An example: 39 ♖a8+ ♜f7 40 ♖a7+ ♜f8 41 ♖a8+ ♜e7 42 ♖a7+ ♜d7 43 ♜e3 c4 44 ♙f1 g5 (or 44...♜d8 45 ♜f2 ♜b2+ 46 ♜f3 c3 47 ♖a8+ ♜c7 48 ♖a7+ ♜c6 49 ♖a6+ ♜b6 50 ♖a5 g6 51 ♙d3 ♜d7 52 ♖a8 ♜c5 53 ♜c8+ ♜b6 54 ♙c2 g5 55 ♜h8 ♜c7 56 ♜h7+ ♜c6 57 ♜h8 b4 58 ♜c8+ ♜b5 59 ♜b8+ ♜a6 60 ♜c8 ♜b3 61 ♙xb3 ♜xb3 62 ♜c2 ♜b6 63 ♜e3 ♜b1 64 ♜xb4 ♜xb4 65 ♜xc3 and White holds the draw) 45 ♜f2 ♜d8 46 ♖a8+ ♜c7 47 ♖a7+ ♜c6 48 ♖a6+ ♜b6 49 ♜f3 ♜b3 50 ♙e2 ♜c5 51 ♜f2 ♜b4 (otherwise, 51...♜b2 52 ♖a7 ♜d4 53 ♖a6 ♜a4 54 ♜xc4 ♜xe2+ 55 ♜xe2 ♜c5 56 ♜d6+ ♜xc4 57 ♜d1 ♜xe4 58 ♜xe6 ♜f2+ 59 ♜e2 ♜xg4 60 ♜c6+ ♜d4 61 ♜d6+ ♜c5 62 ♜d8 ♜f6 63 ♜e3 h5 64 ♜f8 ♜g4+ 65 ♜d3 h4 66 ♜c8+ ♜d5 67 ♜d8+ ♜c6 68 gxh4 gxh4 69 ♜h8 h3 70 ♜e2 when the force of Black's initiative declines, reaching an unsteady equilibrium with White's; White holds the draw, although of course, with a human playing White, I believe the chances to lose are higher than White's chances to hold the draw) 52 ♖a7 ♜a4 53 ♜f3 ♜c3 54 ♖a8 ♜b1 55 ♜c8+ ♜d6 56 ♜f2 ♜d7 57 ♜b8 ♜b3 58 ♜h8 ♜d2 59 ♙d1 ♜xe4+ 60 ♜f3 ♜d2+ 61 ♜e2 ♜b2 62 ♜xh6 e4 63 ♜h7+ ♜d6 64 ♜h8 c3 65 ♙c2 b4 66 ♜d8+ ♜c6 67 ♜c8+ ♜d7 68 ♜c5 ♜d6 69 ♜c8 ♜e5 70 ♜c5+ ♜d4 71 ♜c8 b3 72 ♜d8+ ♜c5 73 ♙d1 ♜c4+ and Black wins.

Returning to 34 ♜xc7:



34...a2?!

Restlessness is often the by-product of ambition. If one acts on sudden impulses, then one should also prepare for disappointment. In a head-scratching decision, Carlsen gets ahead of himself, shooting his passed a-pawn too far forward. Black should anchor his passer with 34...b4! 35 ♔f2 a2 36 ♖a1 ♟xb3 37 ♜c2 ♟ba3 38 ♟b2 b3 39 ♞d2 ♜c8! (threat: ...♜c2) 40 ♞xb3 ♞xg4+ 41 ♔f3 h5 42 ♙h3 (42 ♔e2?? ♟b8 is completely hopeless for White) 42...♜c3+ 43 ♔g2 ♜cxb3 44 ♟xb3 ♟xb3 45 ♟xa2 ♞e3+ 46 ♔f2 ♔f7 47 ♟a7+ ♔f6 48 ♟a6 ♞g4+ 49 ♙xg4 hxg4 when he is capable of converting, despite two sets of doubled isolanis: 50 ♟a2 ♟f3+ 51 ♔g2 ♜e3 52 ♟a4 ♜e2+ 53 ♔g1 ♞d2! (intending ...♞d4!) 54 ♟a1 ♞d4 55 ♟f1+ ♔e7 (Black needs to transfer his king to d4 or d3 to gang up on White's e-pawn) 56 ♜e1 ♞d3 57 ♔f2 ♞d2+ 58 ♔f1 ♔d6 59 ♜c1 ♞d4 60 ♜e1 ♔c5 61 ♜c1+ ♜c4 62 ♜e1 ♔d4 63 ♜e2 ♔d3 e4 falls and Black wins.

35 ♟a1

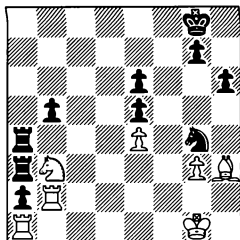
Probably played with a huge sense of relief. Now a2 falls, in exchange for b3.

35...♟xb3 36 ♜c2 ♟ba3

Black begins the defence of his now extended a-pawn with dull reluctance.

37 ♟b2 ♟a5 38 ♞d2?!

White should hold the draw with 38 g5! hxg5 39 ♞d2 ♔f7 40 ♙f1!, ganging up on b5. After 40...♟xg3+ 41 ♔f2 ♟aa3 42 ♙e2 ♟h3 43 ♟axa2 ♟h2+ 44 ♔e1 b4 45 ♟xa3 bxa3 46 ♟a2 ♟h3 47 ♔f2 g4 48 ♙f1 ♜c3 49 ♔g2 ♞h5 50 ♞c4 ♞f4+ 51 ♔g1 ♔f6 52 ♟xa3 White holds the game. 38...♞xg4 39 ♞b3 ♟a4 40 ♙h3!



This move complicates Black's chances to win. Perhaps Carlsen expected 40 ♖c1? ♜xg3 41 ♜bxa2 ♜xa2 42 ♜xa2 h5 43 ♖h1 ♜e3 44 ♜e2 ♜xe2 45 ♖xe2 g5 when Black's four extra pawns beat White's piece.

40...h5 41 ♜xg4

White is happy to unload his clunky bishop for Black's dangerous knight.

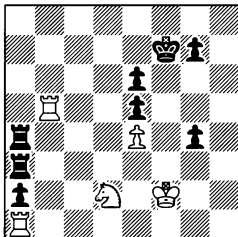
41...hxg4 42 ♖d2?!

42 ♖c1! may just save the game for White: 42...♜xg3+ 43 ♖h2 ♜c3 44 ♖e2 ♜e3 45 ♖g2 ♖f7 46 ♜axa2 ♖f6 47 ♜c2 ♜xa2 48 ♜xa2 ♜xe4 49 ♜b2 b4 50 ♖c1 ♜c4 51 ♖d3 e4 52 ♖xb4 ♖g5 53 ♖c2 ♖f4 54 ♖e1 ♜c3 55 ♖c2 ♜d3 56 ♖e1 ♜a3 57 ♜f2+ ♜f3! 58 ♜b2 (not 58 ♖xf3?? gxf3+ 59 ♖f1 g5 60 ♜a2 e3 61 ♜a4+ ♖f5 62 ♜a3 e2+ 63 ♖f2 g4 64 ♜a1 e5 65 ♖e3 e4 66 ♜a5+ ♖g6 67 ♜a1 g3 and Black's pawns can't be halted) 58...♜e3 59 ♖f1 ♜c3 and *Houdini* held the position as White.

42...♜xg3+

So subtle is the ending, that both sides continue to commit inaccuracies. After the precise 42...b4! 43 ♖f2 ♖h7 44 ♖c4 ♜f3+ 45 ♖g2 b3 46 ♖d2 ♜c3! 47 ♖xb3 (or 47 ♖f2 ♜b4! 48 ♖g2 ♜c2 49 ♜xc2 bxc2 when there is no defence to the coming ...♜b1) 47...♜b4 48 ♜axa2 ♜cxb3 we reach the winning ending for Black, covered in the notes to Black's 34th move, above.

43 ♖f2 ♜ga3 44 ♜xb5 ♖f7



Exercise (planning/critical decision): White has a choice of three candidate moves: a) 45 ♔e2, sliding his king to a more central location. b) 45 ♖xe5, a free pawn, so why not take it? c) 45 ♜b2 dropping back for defence, and also threatening ♜c4. This is a clear case for Darwinian natural selection. Which plan should we embrace and which should we allow to die?

45 ♔e2?

The king steps on one of life's banana peels. He has no interest in reshaping his past, mainly since he isn't certain about his status concerning the statute of limitations.

Answer: White holds the game after 45 ♜b2! (it's crucial for White to tie Black's rooks down to a2) 45...♙f6 46 ♜c2! (intending ♜c4!) 46...♙g5 47 ♜c4 ♜h3 48 ♙g2 ♙f4 49 ♜axa2 ♜xa2 50 ♜xa2. White holds the draw, since 50...♙xe4 is met with 51 ♜d6+! ♙f4 52 ♜a4+ ♙g5 53 ♜e4+ ♙f5 54 ♜g3+ and Black can't make progress.

However, after 45 ♜xe5? ♜b4 46 ♜c5 g3+ 47 ♔e2 ♜b2 (threat: ...g2! and ...g1♚) White is paralysed: for example, 48 ♜cc1 ♙f6 49 ♜f1+ ♔e5 50 ♜f7 ♜c3 51 ♜xg7 ♜cc2 52 ♜d7 ♜b1, winning.

45...♙f6?!

The second best move. Black wins with the immediate 45...♜h3! (this move renders White's intent inoperative) 46 ♜b2 ♜h2+! and everything loses. For example, 47 ♔e3 ♜a3+! 48 ♜b3 ♜h3+ wins a piece, or 47 ♔e1 g3 48 ♜axa2 ♜h1+ 49 ♔e2 g2! 50 ♜f3 ♜xa2 51 ♜xa2 g1♚! (deflection) 52 ♜xg1 ♜h2+ 53 ♙f3 ♜xa2 and Black wins.

46 ♔d1?!

Now the connective tissue which held White's game together begins to decay. Indulging an old, negative propensity encourages new ones. White's king heads the wrong way. Naiditsch is so worried about Black's queenside passers, that he underestimates Black's passed g-pawn on the other side of the board. White should back track with 46 ♙f2!.

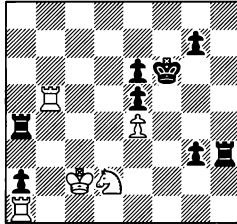
46...♖h3!

This move shears away a chunk of White's defences. Threat: ...♖h1+. When you set a trap for an opponent, you are the shopkeeper who fears his rich potential customer may walk out the door, without buying anything.

47 ♜c2

So the king expended a lot of energy, to post himself on the wrong side of the board, which isn't much of an accomplishment, reminding us of the man who pumps his fists in the air and yells "Sweet!" when he wins a hand of solitaire.

47...g3!



Reminding White that he needs to worry about the passer on the kingside as well. Black's ideas include ...g2 and also ...♖h2+, followed by ...♖d4.

48 ♖b3

48 ♜b3 ♖d4! 49 ♜c4 g2+ 50 ♜b4 ♖h1 ends the game.

48...♟g5

Endgame principle: the king is a fighting piece in the ending. Use it. The king's services are needed to help push forward the g-pawn's promotion agenda.

49 ♜b2

The king casts a furtive glance behind his back, to see if his enemies follow him. This fails, but I lack a constructive counterproposal. *Houdini* suggests 49 ♖b7 g6 50 ♜f3+ ♜f6! 51 ♖d7 g2 52 ♜g1 ♖c4+ 53 ♜d1 ♖b3! 54 ♖xa2 ♖b1+ 55 ♜e2 ♖xg1 56 ♜f2 ♖b1 57 ♜xg2 ♖xe4 with an easy win.

49...♟g4 50 ♖c3

50 ♖xa2 ♖xa2+ 51 ♜xa2 g2 52 ♖b1 ♖h1 ends the game.

50...g2 51 ♖cc1

Covering against ...♖h1.

51...♖e3 52 ♜c2 ♟g3

The king continues to press forward, the way my insistently affectionate dogs demands attention when I'm busy working on this chess book.

53 ♖b2 ♗f2

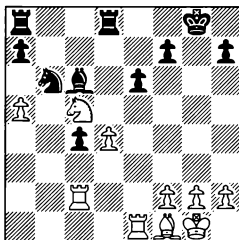
"I suggest you reflect well before you again dare to challenge my authority," Black's king warns his b2 brother. The king serves the function of the midwife, who assists in the birth of the g-pawn.

54 ♠c2 ♠e2 0-1

White's most pessimistic fears have been exceeded and his position lies in ruins. There is no defence to the coming ...g1(♗).

Game 49
M.Carlsen-V.Kramnik
Tal Memorial, Moscow 2013
Trompowsky Attack

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙g5 d5 3 e3 c5 4 ♙xf6 gxf6 5 dxc5 e6 6 ♘f3 ♘d7 7 c4 dxc4 8 c6 ♘b6 9 ♘bd2 c3
10 bxc3 bxc6 11 ♗c2 ♙g7 12 ♙d3 f5 13 e4 ♗f6 14 ♠c1 0-0 15 0-0 c5 16 ♠fe1 ♠d8 17 a4 c4
18 ♙f1 fxe4 19 ♘xe4 ♗f5 20 ♘d4 ♙xd4 21 cxd4 ♙b7 22 ♘c5 ♗xc2 23 ♠xc2 ♙c6 24 a5



Question: Isn't Black just losing? After all, when he moves his knight, White picks up c4, with an extra pawn in the ending.

Answer: Kramnik isn't losing – on condition that he finds the correct idea. In fact, let's turn this into an exercise:

Exercise (combination alert): In this position, Kramnik found the only idea which keeps him afloat, in fact dynamically even. What would you play here?

Answer: A temporary piece sacrifice, which Kramnik immediately regains.

24...♖xd4!

"A key trick, which I had not seen coming a few moves ago," writes Carlsen.

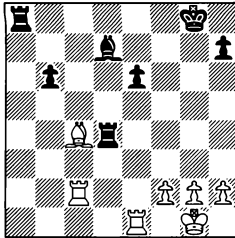
25 axb6 axb6

The point: White's knight isn't going anywhere.

26 ♖xe6

Even if we are unable to predict an opponent's moves, at least we can react with a quick response.

26...fxe6 27 ♜xc4 ♜d7!



Question: How would you assess this position?

Answer: Approximately even. White gets to pick on three isolanis, while Black is the only one with a passed pawn.

Question: Why go passive when he had d5 available for the bishop?

Answer: Carlsen described the line as not such a great practical choice. After 27...♜d5?! 28 ♜xd5 exd5 29 g3 only Black can lose, since he is in danger of seventh rank invasions from White's rooks.

28 h3 ♜f7 29 ♜b3 ♜e7 30 ♜ce2

Targeting e6.

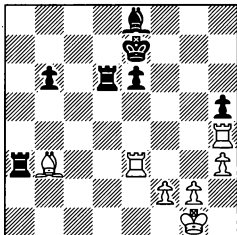
30...♜d6 31 ♜e4

From e4, the rook can swing over to b4 or h4, seeking pawn targets. Carlsen claimed that White's side may be a bit easier to play, "with the more compact pawn structure and active pieces".

31...♜a3 32 ♜1e3

Threat: ♖h4.

32...h5 33 ♖h4 ♙e8



Exercise (planning): Carlsen came up with a well thought-out plan to make progress. Come up with a concrete plan of your own.

Answer: Target the h5-pawn with the following steps, not necessarily in this order:

1. Transfer the king to h4.
2. Transfer White's bishop to the d1-h5 diagonal.
3. Play a rook to the fifth rank. In this way White can place three attackers on h5, which suddenly isn't so easy to defend.

34 ♖h2! ♙g6 35 ♖b4

Clearing h4 for his king, and reminding Black that he has a pawn target on the other wing as well.

35...♙f6 36 ♖g3 e5

Question: Why did Black weaken his e-pawn by pushing it forward?

Answer: I'm not sure if his pawn is actually any weaker on e5. I think Kramnik's reasoning is that he wanted to cut off ♖b5 ideas to help protect his h5-pawn, which seems to grow weaker with each move.

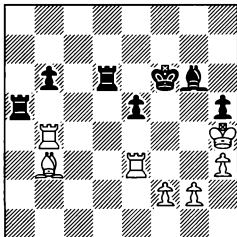
37 ♖h4!

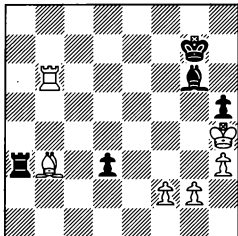
White's once hidden plan begins to assume shape as a distinct entity, with unified intent. Now ♖f3+, followed by ♖g5 is in the air. This prompted Kramnik to sacrifice a pawn to energize his position. Instead, 37 ♖b5 is met with 37...♙a5 when 38 ♖xe5?! runs into 38...♖d3+ 39 ♖h4 ♖xb3! 40 ♖xb3 ♖xe5 41 ♖xb6 ♙e8 42 g4 hxg4 43 hxg4 with a likely draw, but with Black having some chances, in case he can win both remaining white pawns.

37...♖d4+!

The humours may be out of balance in Black's position, with the dark bile in prominence. One of the beautifully anomalous traits of chess is that it is possible to embrace a logically suspect idea and still make it work. Kramnik reasons this is no time to hold back and temper the defence with a restraining hand. Some players fight frantically for initiative – even in passive positions – not because they want to, but because something within their psyche compels it.

Having written a book on Kramnik, I was rather shocked to find that, contrary to popular belief, he is more aggressive than the majority of his elite colleagues, and very rarely gives in to supine acquiescence to an opponent's whims. Carlsen gave his move a '?!', while I think it's a reasonable option. The comps work out a draw with passive defence after 37...♗a5.





Kramnik places his faith in his passed d-pawn. I still think he should hold the position.

41. ♖d1

Attacking h5, while continuing to cover d1, Black's promotion square.

41... ♜a2

41... ♜h6?? walks into 42. ♖xh5.

42. ♖g3

42. ♖xh5 should also lead to a drawn result after 42... ♖xh5 43. ♖xh5 ♜xf2 44. g4 ♜f6 45. ♜b7+ ♜f7 46. ♜b1 d2 47. ♜d1 ♜d7 48. ♖g5 ♜d3 49. h4 ♜d4 50. ♖f5 ♜h6 51. h5 ♜d5+ 52. ♖e4 ♜d7 53. ♖e3 ♜g7 54. ♜xd2 ♜xg4.

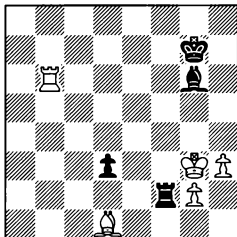
42... h4+?

It's a mistake to allow White two connected passed pawns. Black should hold the position after 42... ♜a1! 43. ♖f3 ♜a4! 44. ♜d6 h4+ 45. ♜h2 ♖f5 46. g4 hxg3+ 47. ♖xg3 (47. fxg3? hangs the h-pawn to 47... ♜a2+). Now White's passers are split, and therefore defanged: 47... ♖f7 48. h4 ♖e7 49. ♜b6 ♜c4 50. ♜b2 ♖e6 51. h5 ♖f6 52. ♜b8 d2! 53. ♜d8 ♜c3! (threat: ... ♖e4) 54. ♖g2 (54. ♖f4 ♜c4+ 55. ♖g3 ♜c3 repeats the position) 54... ♜d3 55. ♜xd3 ♖xd3 56. ♖d1 ♖e4+ 57. ♖g3 ♖g5 58. f4+ ♖h6 59. ♖f2 ♖c6 60. ♖e3 ♖e8 61. ♖xd2 ♖xh5 62. ♖xh5 ♖xh5 63. ♖e3 ♖g6 64. ♖e4 ♖f6 and the king and pawn ending is drawn.

43. ♖xh4

43. ♖f3? hangs a piece to 43... ♖h5+ 44. ♖e3 ♖xd1 45. ♖xd3 ♜xf2 46. ♜b4 ♜xg2 47. ♜xh4 when only Black has the winning chances. He can play on for an eternity, trying to milk rook and bishop versus rook.

43... ♜xf2 44. ♖g3



Exercise (planning/critical decision): Black may well be losing here, no matter what he plays. He has access to two plans: a) Play 44...♖f6 and offer to enter a bishop versus bishop ending. b) Play 44...♖a2, retaining rooks on the board. One plan puts up a fight; the other loses. Which route should Black take?

44...♖f6?!

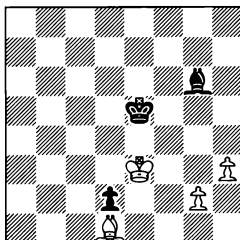
Black's rook arrives with quivering lower lip and hurt feelings, anxious to challenge the sixth rank offender on b6. With the swap of rooks, a key role is left unfulfilled in Black's camp (the ability to try and push his d-pawn forward). Now Black's hoped for counterplay fails to materialize and he finds himself down a pawn for zero compensation. The bishop ending is hopeless.

Answer: He had to try 44...♖a2 and hope for the best.

45 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 46 ♜f4 d2!?

Desperation. If 46...♜e6 47 h4 ♜f6 48 g4 d2 49 g5+ (most certainly not 49 h5?? ♜xh5! 50 gxh5 ♜g7 and Black draws, due to the wrong-coloured bishop) 49...♜e7 50 h5 ♜b1 51 ♜b3 ♜a2 52 ♜c2 ♜b1 53 ♜d1 ♜h7 54 ♜e3 ♜e6 55 ♜xd2 ♜f5 56 g6! ♜g8 (or 56...♜xg6 57 ♜c2+ ♜f6 58 hxg6 and no more h-pawn, so White wins) 57 ♜e3 ♜g5 58 ♜d4 ♜f6 59 ♜c2 ♜g5 60 ♜e5! ♜xh5 61 ♜f6 ♜d5 62 g7 ♜h6 63 ♜g6 ♜g8 64 ♜e8! (zugzwang) 64...♜e6 65 ♜f7 and White wins.

47 ♜e3 ♜e5



Exercise (planning): Should White take the hanging d2-pawn?

Answer: Not yet. It's crucial to first keep Black's roving king out of f4.

48 g3!

48 ♖xd2?? is drawn after 48...♗f4 49 ♙f3 (or 49 g4 ♖g3) 49...♙f7 50 ♖e2 ♖g3 51 ♖e3 ♙e6 52 ♙c6 ♙xh3 53 gxh3 ♖xh3 and I predict a drawn result.

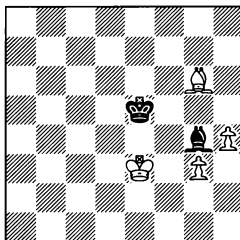
48...♙f5 49 h4 ♙e6 50 ♖xd2

Now is the right time.

50...♖e4 51 ♖e2 ♙g4+ 52 ♖e1 ♙e6 53 ♖f2

And now ♙f3+ is coming.

53...♖e5 54 ♖e3 ♙d7 55 ♙c2 ♙g4 56 ♙g6



White must proceed with care. Just as in his game against Caruana, if Carlsen allows Black to sacrifice his bishop for White's g-pawn, the position is drawn, assuming Black's king is able to reach h8. So White must be careful about how he freights his fragile g-pawn forward.

56...♔d7 57 h5 ♖f6

Or 57...♙e6 58 h6 ♜f6 59 ♔d3 ♙g8 60 ♜f4 ♙f7 61 g4 ♙g8 62 ♙f5 ♜f7 63 g5 ♜f8 64 g6 ♙b3 65 ♜e5 ♙g8 66 ♜f6 and there is no defence to h7, next.

58 ♜f4 ♙e6 59 ♙e4 ♜g7

Black's king backs away, rigid with resentment as the laughter of White's army chases him.

Question: It feels as if Kramnik keeps giving ground with his king when there is no need. Why not stand his ground on f6?

Answer: The king won't stay there for long: for example, 59...♔d7 60 h6 ♙e6 61 ♙h7! ♔d7 62 g4 and g5 is coming. Now if 62...♙xg4 63 ♜xg4 the position is not a draw, since Black's king is unable to reach h8: 63...♜f7 64 ♜f5 ♜e7 65 ♙g8 ♜f8 66 ♙c4 and White promotes.

60 ♜g5 ♔d7 61 h6+ ♜h8 62 ♜f4

White can also play the immediate 62 ♙f5.

62...♙e6 63 ♙f5 ♙f7 64 g4 ♙h5

The bishop rudely laughs in the white king's face, in the most unparochial possible manner.

65 g5

Oh, no you don't! "You compound one treason with another?" White's king asks Black's bishop. Instead, 65 gxh5?? is still a draw, since both h-pawns are worthless, and worthless plus worthless still equals worthless.

65...♜g8 66 ♙e6+ ♜h7 67 ♜f5 ♙g6+ 68 ♜f6 ♜h8 69 ♔d7

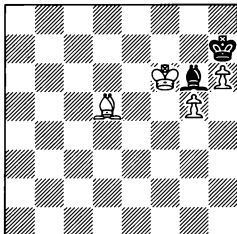
Carlsen isn't a likely candidate for the numbskulled 69 ♜xg6?? and stalemate.

69...♙h5 70 ♙c6 ♜h7 71 ♔d5!

Zugzwang.

71...♙g6

The black bishop's motivation of an eternal blockade is polluted by aspirations far beyond his reach. However, 71...♙e8 is met with 72 ♙f7 ♙c6 73 g6+ ♜xh6 74 g7.



Exercise (combination alert): White has a simple combination which forces the win. How?

Answer: Deflection.

72 ♖g8+! 1-0

After 72...♜h8 73 ♜xg6 there's no stalemate for Black, since he must play 73...♜xg8.

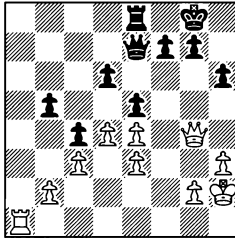
Game 50

V.Anand-M.Carlsen

World Championship (Game 6), Chennai 2013

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 ♘f6 4 d3 ♙c5 5 c3 0-0 6 0-0 ♞e8 7 ♞e1 a6 8 ♙a4 b5 9 ♙b3 d6 10 ♙g5 ♙e6 11 ♘bd2 h6 12 ♙h4 ♙xb3 13 axb3 ♘b8 14 h3 ♘bd7 15 ♘h2 ♞e7 16 ♘df1 ♙b6 17 ♘e3 ♞e6 18 b4 a5 19 bxa5 ♙xa5 20 ♘hg4 ♙b6 21 ♙xf6 ♘xf6 22 ♘xf6+ ♞xf6 23 ♞g4 ♙xe3 24 fxe3 ♞e7 25 ♞f1 c5 26 ♜h2 c4 27 d4 ♞xa1 28 ♞xa1



28...♚b7

Nobody watching this game doubted that the end result would be anything but a draw.

Question: Why can't Black win a pawn with 28...exd4 29 exd4 ♚xe4?

Answer: If we continue the line further, we see that White wins it right back after 30 ♚xe4 ♚xe4 31 ♚a8+ ♚h7 32 ♚b8.

29 ♚d1

Intending to recapture on d4 with his rook, if necessary.

29...♚c6 30 ♚f5!?

I think this isn't a good practical decision, since White unnecessarily takes on weakness.

Question: Is it so awful if White breaks the central tension with 30 d5?

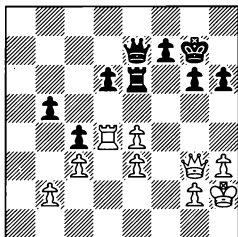
Answer: I think White can also play this way. It may even be an improvement over Anand's choice. I couldn't come up with an iota of an edge for Black: 30...♚b6 31 ♚d7 ♚a8 (or 31...♚d8 32 ♚e7 ♚f8 33 ♚e1 b4 34 cxb4 ♚xb4 35 ♚f1 ♚xb2 36 ♚xd6 ♚e2 37 ♚f3 c3 38 ♚g3 c2 – anyway! – 39 ♚xh6 g6 40 ♚xg6+ fxg6 41 ♚xg6+ with perpetual check) 32 ♚f1 f6 33 ♚e6+ ♚h8 34 ♚xf6 gxf6 35 ♚xf6+ ♚g8 36 ♚g6+ ♚f8 37 ♚f6+ and the game is drawn by perpetual check, since 37...♚e8 38 ♚h8+ ♚f7 39 ♚xa8 ♚xe3 40 ♚c6 ♚f4+ is still a draw. 30...exd4!

This move gives Black a microbe of an edge, allowing him to pick on White's doubled e-pawns.

31 ♚xd4 ♚e5 32 ♚f3 ♚c7 33 ♚h1 ♚e7 34 ♚g4 ♚h7 35 ♚f4 g6 36 ♚h2 ♚g7

Both sides putz around, hoping the other will take action.

37 ♚f3 ♚e6 38 ♚g3!?



The white queen's lips tighten in distaste at the unpleasant thought of having to take orders from one of lesser birth, such as Black's rook. Once undertaken, such radical decisions are irrevocable. Brute force doesn't always need to be used to persuade an opponent. Its mere availability is sometimes enough to extract a concession. The defensive mindset is to exist in a culture of constant surveillance and paranoia, where no one and any one is deemed a potential threat to the system. A fateful decision. Anand is tired of defending (even though Carlsen hasn't proven he can make progress), and decides to play forcefully, sacrificing a pawn for activity.

Question: Do you believe this was a sound decision?

Answer: Sound, yes, from a computer's perspective, but impractical from a human's. Why play down a pawn when White can just keep defending e4, asking Black how he intends to make progress? I played out multiple scenarios after 38 ♖f4 where the queen absentmindedly goes about her business. *Houdini* was unable to make the slightest progress.

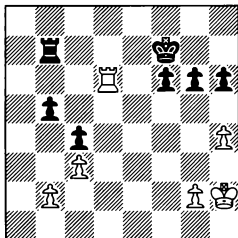
38...♗xe4 39 ♖xd6 ♗xe3

A long line is 39...♖xd6+ 40 ♗xd6 ♗xe3 41 ♗b6 ♗e5 42 ♖g3 h5 43 h4 ♖f8 44 ♖f3 ♗e7 45 g3 ♖d7 46 ♖f4 ♗f5+ 47 ♗e3 ♖c7 48 ♗a6 ♖b7 49 ♗d6 ♗f1 50 ♖d4 ♗f3 51 ♖c5 ♖c7 52 ♗a6 ♗xg3 53 ♗a7+ ♖d8 54 ♗xf7 ♗g4 55 ♖d6 ♗e8 56 ♗f6 ♗xh4 57 ♗xg6 ♗h2 58 ♖c6 ♗xb2 59 ♗h6 b4 60 cxb4 c3 61 ♗xh5 c2 62 ♗c5 ♖d8 63 ♖b5 ♗a2 64 ♗c4 ♖d7 65 ♖b6 ♖d8 66 b5 ♖d7 67 ♖b7 ♖d8 68 b6 ♗b2 69 ♖a7 ♗a2+ 70 ♖b8 ♗b2 71 b7 ♖d7 and White can't make progress.

40 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 41 ♗d5 ♗b7 42 ♗d6

Black is tied down to passivity, but a pawn is a pawn.

42...f6 43 h4 ♖f7



44 h5!?

Absolutism tends to look down on shades of grey. Anand, following his initiative-at-all-costs policy, gives away a second pawn. I believe this is another impractical decision. White draws easily if he simply await events with 44 ♔g3 ♚e7 45 ♚b6 ♚e5 46 ♔f3 ♚f5+ 47 ♔e4 h5 (47...♚f2 48 ♚xb5 ♚xg2 49 ♚b7+ ♔e6 50 ♚b6+ is also a draw) 48 ♚b7+ ♔g8 49 g3 when Black is unable to make progress.

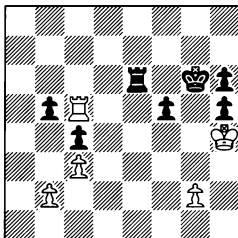
44...gxf5

This creates an indelible stain upon Black's structure, but it also means a second pawn in Black's bank account. And as we all understand: pawns matter in endings.

45 ♚d5 ♔g6 46 ♔g3 ♚b6

This way Black can play ...f5, without fear of ♚d6+.

47 ♚c5 f5 48 ♔h4 ♚e6!



Endgame principle: keep your remaining rook active at almost any cost. Carlsen seizes

upon his one sliver of hope, bravely severing all diplomatic relations with b5.

49 ♖xb5 ♜e4+

Black's king seizes control over g5 and begins to march up the board.

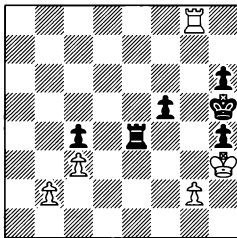
50 ♔h3

White's king is clearly the type who feels uncomfortable when in the society of strangers.

50...♔g5

Black's king and rook creep closer to White's king.

51 ♜b8 h4 52 ♜g8+ ♔h5!



The h5 hole is a snug fit for Black's king, but at least he doesn't have to worry about rook checks.

53 ♜f8 ♜f4 54 ♜c8 ♜g4 55 ♜f8 ♜g3+ 56 ♔h2 ♔g5

The king is cast adrift, now at the mercy of the sun, wind and tides. Now Carlsen's king gets access to f4.

57 ♜g8+ ♔f4!

Carlsen decides to give White's past offers the raspberry and now is willing to give up all his extra pawns to activate his king.

58 ♜c8

Now c4 falls and more importantly, Black's king is allowed entry into the heart of White's underbelly.

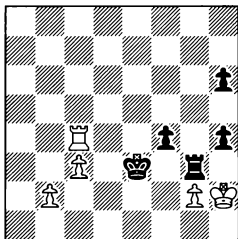
Question: Doesn't White put Black in zugzwang if he enters the king and pawn ending with 58 ♜xg3 hxg3+ 59 ♔h3 h5 60 ♔h4?

Answer: It is Black who wins after 60...♔e3 61 ♔xg3 f4+ 62 ♔h4 ♔f2 63 ♔g5 ♔g3 64 ♔f5 h4 when Black's threat looms with terrible clarity. There is no defence to ...♔xg3, followed by ...h3.

58...♔e3 59 ♖xc4

The rook endangers all those within his reach.

59...f4



Exercise (planning/critical decision): White has two candidate moves: 60 b4, activating his queenside passers, and 60 ♖a4, blocking Black's intended ...♔f2 by keeping an eye on the f4-pawn. Pick White's correct path and all will be well; choose incorrectly and White's future is a numbing one.

60 ♖a4??

The white king's eyes clamp shut in exasperation at his rook, who continues to make a public exhibition of himself. This move loses a crucial tempo.

Answer: White should begin to push his majority with 60 b4! h3! 61 gxf3 ♖g6 62 ♖c7 f3 63 ♖e7+ ♔f2 (or 63...♔d2 64 ♖f7 ♖g2+ 65 ♔h1 ♔e3 66 b5 ♖b2 67 ♖e7+ ♔f2 68 c4 ♔g3 69 ♖g7+ ♔f2 70 ♖g6 ♔e2 71 ♖e6+ ♔d3 72 ♔g1 ♔xc4 73 ♖xh6 with a drawn position) 64 b5 ♖g2+ with perpetual check.

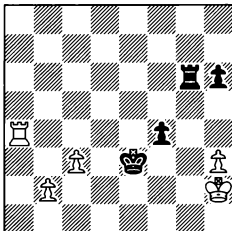
60...h3!

Those who live in poverty cannot afford the high price of scruples. Black's pawns begin to suffer staggering mortality rates. Carlsen isn't sobered by his recent losses of income and refuses to play it cautiously. In this way Black earns himself a passed f-pawn.

61 gxf3

This is remarkable, in that Black went from up two pawns to down one, and is now winning!

61...♖g6!



The f-pawn is too fast, supported by Black's king.

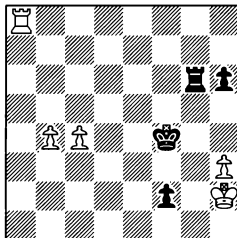
62 c4

Question: Why can't White force Black's king into f2, where it inhibits the push of the f-pawn?

Answer: Black wins anyway, after 62 ♖a8 f3 63 ♜e8+ ♔f2 64 b4 ♜g2+ 65 ♔h1 ♜g1+ 66 ♔h2 ♜e1! 67 ♜d8 ♔e2 68 ♜e8+ ♔f1 69 ♜f8 f2 70 b5 (or 70 ♔g3 ♜e3+ 71 ♔h2 ♔e1 72 ♔g2 ♜e2 73 ♔g3 f1♙ 74 ♜xf1+ ♔xf1 and wins) 70...♔e2 71 c4 (71 ♔g2 fails to 71...♜g1+ 72 ♔h2 f1♙) 71...f1♙ 72 ♜xf1 ♜xf1 73 b6 ♔f2! 74 c5 ♜b1 75 h4 h5 and it's zugzwang. Either pawn push on the queenside drops both pawns, or else White walks into a helpmate after 76 ♔h3 ♜h1. **62...f3 63 ♜a3+ ♔e2 64 b4 f2 65 ♜a2+ ♔f3 66 ♜a3+ ♔f4!**

Black's king meekly acquiesces to the white rook's verbal abuse. No more checks. Forced retreats tend to injure our pride, more than the actual infliction of damage to our position. **67 ♜a8**

Otherwise, 67 ♜a1 ♜e6! (threat: ...♜e1) 68 ♜f1 ♔f3 69 c5 ♜e1 70 ♜xf2+ ♔xf2 71 b5 ♜b1 72 b6 ♜b5 and Black wins.



Exercise (combination alert): This is more of an anti-combination alert than a combination alert. How should Black continue?

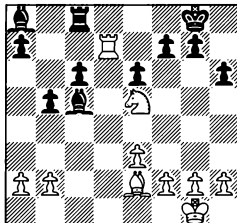
Answer: Support the queening process.

67...♖g1! 0-1

"You will live out your remaining days in darkness, sharing your bread with rats," predicts Black's rook of White's king. I hope nobody fell for 67...f1?? 68 ♜f8+ (oops!) 68...♔e5 69 ♜xf1 and it is White who wins.

Game 51
M.Carlsen-L.Van Wely
 Foros 2008
Semi-Slav Defence

1 c4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗xf6 ♜xf6 7 e3 ♘d7 8 ♜c2 ♜d8 9 ♗d3 ♗e7
 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♜ad1 dxc4 12 ♗xc4 b5 13 ♗e2 ♗b7 14 ♘e4 ♜b6 15 ♜c1 ♜fd8 16 ♜fd1 ♜ac8
 17 ♘c5 ♘xc5 18 dxc5 ♜xd1+ 19 ♜xd1 ♜xc5 20 ♜xc5 ♗xc5 21 ♜d7 ♗a8 22 ♘e5



Question: White is down a pawn in the ending, but his pieces are far more active and his rook controls the seventh rank. Which side has the better of the bargain?

Answer: I would say the position is dynamically balanced, with White's tremendous activity being offset by Black's extra pawn and for now, less than impressive bishop-pair.

22...♖b6!?

Van Wely returns the pawn in order to unravel.

Question: Why did he avoid the simple 22...f6?

Answer: Maybe he should have hung on to his extra material, but I can't blame him. Black can barely move after 23 ♘g6 e5 24 ♙f3 ♜b8 25 g4. This appears intimidating. Van Wely probably analysed this far and may not have found a path for Black to unravel from White's kingside light-squared bind. *Houdini* analysis continues: 25...♙b6 26 ♘e7+ ♗f8 27 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 28 ♘xc6 ♜c8 29 ♘xa7 ♜c1+ 30 ♗g2 ♜c2 (Black threatens both ...♙xe3 and ...♙xb2) 31 ♗f3 ♙xa7 32 ♙xa7 ♜xb2 with a drawn ending.

23 ♘xf7

Black's king engages in a disapproving throat clearing, upon viewing the knight's unseemly antics.

23...♜c7

The rook wraps himself around his b6 defender like a poultice, challenging White's control over the seventh rank.

24 ♘e5!

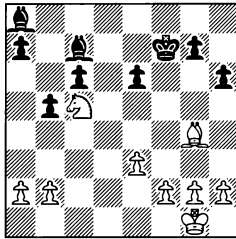
Carlsen avoids a minor strategic trap after 24 ♘hx6+?! gxh6 25 ♜d8+ ♗g7 26 ♙xa8 ♜d7 27 ♗f1 ♜d2 28 b3 ♙xa2 29 ♙g4 e5 30 ♙e8 ♜b2 31 ♙d7 (31 ♙e6 e4 is at least even for Black) 31...♙xb3 32 ♙xc6 b4 33 ♙xe5 ♜c3. Only Black can win here, due to his more advanced passed pawns.

24...♖xd7 25 ♖xd7 ♗c7!

Van Wely avoids the ending arising from 25...♗f7? 26 ♖xb6 axb6 27 f4 b4 28 ♗f3 when Black's bishop is trapped in eternal servitude to the c6-pawn: 28...e5 29 ♗f2 exf4 30 exf4 ♗e6 31 g4 ♗b7 32 ♗g3! ♖d6 33 ♗h4! ♗e6 34 ♗h5 ♗f6 35 ♗e4 ♗a8 36 h4 ♗b7 37 g5+ hxg5 38 fxg5+! ♗f7 39 ♗g4 ♗c8+ 40 ♗f4 c5 41 b3 ♗a6 42 ♗d5+ ♗e8 (or 42...♗g6 43 ♗c4! ♗b7 44 ♗e2 ♗c6 45 h5+ ♗f7 46 ♗c4+ ♗e7 47 ♗e5 ♗f3 48 h6 gxh6 49 g6! ♗h5 50 g7 ♗f7 51 g8♗ ♗xg8 52 ♗xg8 and White wins) 43 ♗e5 ♗e2 44 ♖d6 ♖d8 45 ♗f7 when there is no defence to h5 and h6.

26 ♖c5 ♗f7 27 ♗g4!

Black's king can't seem to take a step without stubbing his toe on some infernal harassing white piece.



Exercise (planning): In this position Black has a choice of two plans, one passive, the other aggressive: a) Just hold the fort down with 27...e5. b) Sacrifice a pawn with 27...♗d6 28 ♖xe6 c5, freeing the bishops and activating the queenside pawn majority, at the cost of a pawn. One path leads to arduous suffering; the other to a draw. Which one would you play?

27...e5

The c7-bishop finally musters the courage to stand up to his c5 persecutor, but then when the moment arrives, he feels as if his vocal chords are paralysed and fails to utter even a syllable. Untaken actions push roughly, screaming for motion, in a position of paralysis.

Answer: I would have gone for the pawn sacrifice line. Refusing to give up material when necessity demands it is a risky business, similar to the miser who insists on shaving with an old, rusty razor to save a few pennies.

Question: Last game you criticized Anand for *not* going passive, and this game you criticize Van Wely for taking the passive route. How is a player supposed to know when to sacrifice, and when to remain quiet?

Answer: The problem is there is no fixed answer. Sometimes the passive, fortress path works and sometimes it is more appropriate to lash out at your aggressor. This is where that mysterious and much sought after property called intuition comes in. GM Mikhail Brodsky suggests the aggressive pawn sacrifice 27...♔d6!. Meek sufferance morphs seamlessly into open defiance. Black sacrifices a pawn to free his queenside pawn majority and his a8-bishop: 28 ♖xe6 (not 28 b4? a5 29 a3 ♜xc5 30 bxc5 a4! 31 ♔d1 ♜f6 32 f4 e5 33 ♜f2 exf4 34 exf4 ♜e6 35 ♜e3 ♜d5 36 ♜d3 ♜xc5 when Black should win) 28...c5 29 ♖f4 g5 30 ♖e2 ♜e5 31 b3 c4 32 f4 ♜g7 33 bxc4 bxc4 34 ♜f2 c3 35 ♜f5 ♜d5 36 ♜b1 ♜c4 37 g3 g4 38 e4 (or 38 ♜e1 ♜xe2 39 ♜xe2 ♜f8 40 ♜d3 ♜c5 41 ♜c2 a5 42 ♔d1 h5 43 ♜b3+ ♜e7 and Black should hold the draw) 38...♜xe2! 39 ♜xe2 ♔d4 40 e5 h5 (Black holds a draw, since ...♜g1 remains a serious threat) 41 ♜f5 ♜g1 42 ♜f1 ♜e3 43 ♜g2 h4! 44 ♜f1 h3! (fixing h2 as an eternal target) 45 ♜e2 ♜g1 46 ♜xg4 ♜xh2 47 ♜xh3 ♜xg3 48 e6+ ♜f6 49 ♜d3 ♜xf4 50 ♜xc3, with a draw.

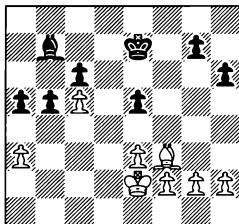
28 ♜f3

Now Black must find a way to unlock his miserable a8-bishop.

28...♜e7 29 ♜f1 ♜b6 30 b4 a5 31 a3 ♜xc5!

This impatient swap gives Carlsen hope. 31...♜d6! holds the game: 32 ♖e4+ ♜d5! (threatening to sneak into c4) 33 ♖d2+ ♜d6 34 ♜e2 ♜b7 35 ♜d3 ♜c8 (at last, Black enables the freeing ...c5 break) 36 ♖e4+ ♜c7 (36...♜d5?! 37 ♜c3! axb4+ 38 axb4 ♜d7 39 ♖g5+ ♜d6 40 ♖f7+! wins a pawn, since 40...♜e6 is met with 41 ♜g4+ ♜xf7 42 ♜xd7 c5 43 ♜xb5 cxb4+ 44 ♜xb4, although even this position should be drawn due to the opposite-coloured bishops) 37 ♜c3 ♜e6 38 h3 ♜d5 39 ♖g3 g6 40 ♖e4 ♜xe4 41 ♜xe4 g5 with a near certain draw.

32 bxc5 ♜b7 33 ♜e2



This position favours White, mainly since he has the superior majority and Black has yet to solve unemployment issues concerning his bishop.

33...♙a6 34 ♖d2

Not 34 ♙xc6? b4+ 35 ♖d2 bxa3 36 ♖c3 ♙c4! 37 e4 a2 38 ♖b2 ♙b3! 39 ♙d5 a4 40 h4 g5, drawing.

34...♖d7 35 ♙e4 g5

Inhibiting f4. IM Jack Peters gave the line 35...b4? 36 axb4 axb4 37 ♙d3 ♙b5 38 ♖c2 ♙a4+ (38...b3+ 39 ♖c3 b2 40 ♙f5+ wins b2) 39 ♖b2 ♖e6 40 ♙e4 g5 41 g4 (zugzwang) 41...♖e7 42 ♙c2 ♙b5 43 ♖b3 ♙e2 44 ♙f5 and b4 falls.

36 ♖c3 ♙c8 37 g3

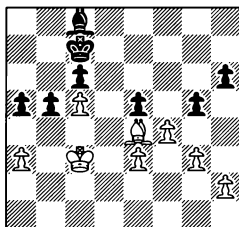
Intending f4. It's a mistake to swap bishops with 37 ♙f5+ ♖c7 38 ♙xc8? ♖xc8 when Black has all the chances, since his outside pawn majority ties White's king down.

37...♖c7

Question: Why not fix White's kingside pawns with 37...g4?

Answer: I think your suggestion is actually a pretty good idea. After 38 ♖d3! a4 (not 38...♖c7? 39 ♙g6 ♙e6 40 ♖e4 b4 41 axb4 a4 42 ♖d3 a3 43 ♖c3 ♖b7 44 ♙e4 ♖c7 45 ♖c2! ♖d7 46 ♖b1 ♖c7 47 ♖a1 ♖d7 48 ♙b1! ♖c7 49 ♙a2 ♙f5 50 ♙b3! when White clears a2 for his king and Black's once proud passed a-pawn falls) 39 f4 gxf3 40 ♙xf3 ♖c7 41 g4 ♙e6 42 ♖c3 e4 43 ♙xe4 ♙xg4 44 ♖d4 ♙d7 45 ♙f3 ♙e6 46 e4 ♖d7 I don't see a way to make progress, since 47 ♖e5? walks into 47...b4! 48 ♖d4 bxa3 49 ♖c3 ♖e7 50 e5 ♙d5! 51 ♙g4 when White is the one fighting for the draw.

38 f4



Exercise (critical decision/planning): Black has two routes: a) 38...gxf4 39 gxf4 exf4 40 exf4, exchanging off as many pawns as possible. b) 38...g4, in order to erect an impregnable fortress on the kingside. Only one plan draws. Which?

38...g4?

A violation of the endgame principle: the defending side should seek pawn swaps.

Answer: After 38...exf4! 39 exf4 gxf4 40 gxf4 ♖e6 41 f5 ♜f7 42 ♜d4 ♜d7 43 ♜e5 ♜c4 White is unable to make progress, since 44 ♜f6 a4 45 ♜b1 b4 46 axb4 a3 47 h4 ♜d5! (not 47...a2?? 48 ♜xa2 ♜xa2 49 ♜g7 ♜e7 50 f6+ ♜e8 51 h5 ♜b3 52 ♜xh6 ♜f7 53 ♜g5 ♜c4 54 h6 ♜g8 55 ♜f5 ♜h7 56 b5! and White wins, no matter which way Black captures on b5) 48 ♜g6 is met with 48...♜e4! 49 ♜a2 ♜e7 50 h5 ♜d3 51 ♜b3 ♜b1. Once again, White can't make progress and 52 ♜xh6 ♜f6 53 b5 cxb5 54 c6 ♜xf5 55 c7 b4 56 ♜a2 ♜d7 57 ♜h7 ♜f5+ 58 ♜h6 is drawn.

39 f5!

Not 39 fxe5? ♜e6 40 ♜g6 ♜d7 41 e4 ♜e7 42 ♜f5 ♜d7 when neither side is able to make progress.

39...♜d7

Instead, 39...♜d7 40 f6!, and if 40...♜e6?? (or 40...♜b7 41 ♜f5+ ♜e8 42 ♜e6 ♜a6 43 ♜c2 ♜f8 44 ♜d3! b4+ 45 ♜c2! bxa3 46 ♜b3 ♜b5 47 ♜xa3 ♜e8 48 ♜b3! ♜f8 49 ♜a4! when White wins the king and pawn ending) 41 ♜f5+! wins a piece.

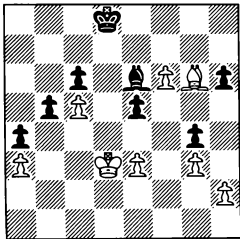
40 f6 ♜d8

After 40...♜e8 41 ♜f5 the dual threats of f7 and ♜xg4 are decisive, while 40...♜e6?? is met with the overload trick 41 ♜f5!.

41 ♜d3 a4

Keeping White on guard for ...b4 tricks. After 41...♜e8? 42 ♜g6+ ♜f8 43 ♜e4 b4 44 axb4 a4 45 ♜xe5! a3 46 ♜b1 ♜e8 47 e4 ♜f7 48 ♜d6 White has too many pawns.

42 ♜g6 ♜e6



Exercise (calculation): Can White get away with 43 ♜e4? Work out the details.

43 ♜c3?

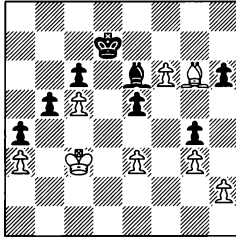
The king hopes to give Black's potential a1 promotion square some defensive padding, but it wasn't necessary. My odd philosophy: in every chess game I budget for at least one goofy lapse. This way, when I do blunder, I avoid the accompanying shock. This seriously endangers White's win, which he had with:

Answer: 43 ♖e4! and suddenly, the once friendly geometry twists and contorts with malicious intent against Black. Now 43...b4 fails to 44 ♜xe5 bxa3 45 ♜xe6! a2 46 f7 a1 ♜ 47 f8 ♜+ ♜c7 48 ♜d6+ ♜b7 49 ♙e4, forcing mate.

43...♜d7?

Van Wely proceeds with his intent, despite increasing evidence of adverse conditions. The king's nervous chewing of his lower lip doesn't quite give off the confident body language his defenders had hoped for.

I couldn't find a win for White after 43...♙d5! 44 ♙h5 ♙e6 45 ♜d3 ♙c4+!.



Exercise (combination alert): The defence reaches a saturation point, where one tiny push is enough to plunge him into the abyss. Find one accurate move and you place Black in zugzwang.

Answer: 44 ♙e4!

The bishop glides closer, blending in with the shadows. He seems to be everywhere at once, as if there were three of him. Now Black finds himself in zugzwang.

44...♙f7

44...♜c7 walks into the now familiar overload trick 45 ♙f5!.

45 ♙f5+

The bishop refuses to shrink from the king's gaze. White wins a pawn, which is decisive.

45...♜e8

Or 45...♙e6?? 46 f7! ♜e7 47 ♙xe6, winning.

46 ♙xg4

White's king takes issue with the brazen bishop's nerve. The trouble is 46 ♖d3 ♗c4+ 47 ♜e4?? now fails miserably to 47...b4! and neither white king or bishop is able to halt the pawn promotion.

♙d5 47 ♙h5+

Of course, ...♜f7 must be prevented.

47...♜d7 48 ♙g6 e4

Otherwise:

a) 48...♜e6 49 e4 ♙c4 50 ♙e8! ♜xf6 51 ♙xc6 and there is no defence to ♜b4.

b) 48...♜d8 49 g4 (White activates his kingside pawn majority) 49...♙f3 (49...♙e6 50 ♙e4 ♜c7 51 h4! wins) 50 ♙f5 ♜e8 51 h4 and g5 follows, with an easy win.

49 g4

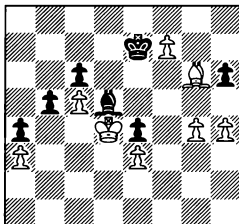
Intending h4 and g5.

49...♜e6 50 f7 ♜e7 51 h4! ♜f8

Likewise, after 51...♙xf7 52 ♙xe4 ♙e8 53 ♙f5 ♜f7 54 e4 ♜f6 55 ♜b4 (zugzwang) 55...♜g7 56 e5 ♜f7 57 ♜c3 ♜e7 58 g5 hxg5 59 hxg5 ♜f7 60 ♙e4 ♙d7 61 g6+ ♜g7 62 ♜d3 ♜g8 63 ♜d4 ♜g7 64 e6! ♙xe6 65 ♙xc6 White wins.

52 ♜d4 ♜e7

52...♜g7 53 h5 ♙xf7 54 ♙xe4 ♙e8 55 ♙f5 ♜f7 56 e4 ♜f6 57 e5+ ♜g7 58 ♙e4 ♜f8 59 e6 ♜e7 60 ♜e5 leaves Black once again in zugzwang.



Exercise (critical decision): Would you play 53 h5, or 53 ♙xe4? Be careful on this one!

Answer: 53 h5!

Now it's zugzwang. Instead, 53 ♙xe4?? allows Black to draw with 53...♙xe4! 54 ♜xe4 b4! 55 ♜d3 b3 56 e4 ♜xf7 57 ♜c3 ♜f6 58 ♜d3 ♜f7 and the position is in stasis, with both kings tied down to their respective passers.

53...♙xf7

Alternatively, 53...♜f8 54 g5! ♙xf7 (54...hxg5 55 h6 ♙xf7 56 h7 ♜g7 57 ♙xf7 g4 58 ♙g6!

b4 59 axb4 a3 60 c3 g3 61 xxe4 wins) 55 gxh6 (not 55 xf7?? xf7 56 g6+ xf6 57 xe4 b4! 58 d3 b3 59 e4 e6 60 e5 e7, which is drawn; how can such a simple looking ending contain so many baffling pitfalls for both sides?) 55...xd5 (or 55...xg6 56 hxg6 g8 57 e5! b4 58 f6! bxa3 59 h7+ h8 60 f7 a2 61 g7+ xh7 62 g8+ h6 63 g6 mate) 56 h7 g7 57 h6+ h8 58 f5 and again it's a decisive zugzwang.

54 xxe4 e8

After 54...xd5 55 xxd5 cxd5 56 g5 hxg5 57 h6 f7 58 c6 White promotes first.

55 f5 f6 56 e4 g5 57 c8

Threat: e5, e6 and d7.

57...f4

57...f6 58 f5 g5 59 e5 xh5 60 d7! g6 61 xc6 also wins.

58 e5 b4

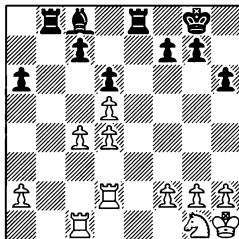
Instead, 58...g5 59 e6 xg4 60 d7 xh5 61 e7+ wins Black's bishop and the game.

59 axb4 a3 60 c3 xe5 61 b3 1-0

Believe it or not, I spent more time attempting to work out the mysteries of this game's 'simple' bishop ending than on any other game in the book.

Game 52
M.Carlsen-L.Aronian
London 2012
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 f3 c6 3 b5 a6 4 a4 f6 5 d3 b5 6 b3 c5 7 c3 0-0 8 d5 xd5 9 xd5
xb8 10 0-0 e7 11 xe5 xd5 12 exd5 e8 13 d4 f8 14 b3 b7 15 c4 d6 16 f3 f6 17
e3 c8 18 d2 g6 19 h1 h6 20 a1 e7 21 g1 g5 22 xg5 xg5 23 fd1 bxc4
24 bxc4 xd2 25 xd2



Question: Does White have winning chances with his extra pawn?

Answer: Actually, I feel that Black has full compensation for the pawn, and the main reason Aronian lost this game is that he overrated his own chances and pressed too far for the win. Let's take stock:

1. Black's rooks own both open files.
2. Black's bishop is likely the superior minor piece when compared to White's remaining knight.
3. White's 3 vs. 2 central/queenside majority is crippled, since Black is not obliged to take when White plays c5.

Conclusion: Black has full compensation for the pawn and the position is balanced.

25...a5

Perhaps Aronian dreams of ...a4, and ...a3, followed by ...b2.

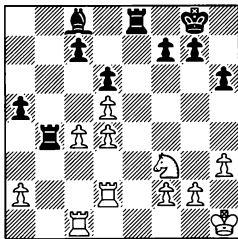
26 h3

In order to play f3 without fear of ...g4.

26...b4

Aronian targets c4.

27 f3



27...f5

Question: Why not increase the pressure on c4 with 27...a6?

Answer: Your suggestion is possible, but doesn't seem to bother White much after 28 dxc2. **28 c5!**

Aronian isn't the only one playing for the win. Carlsen risks weakening d5 with his last move, worrying Black with ideas of cxd6, followed by bxc6.

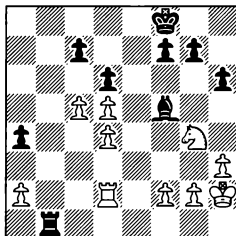
28...♟f8

Aronian inches his king closer to d6 in case it later needs protection. 28...♙e4 comes close, but White escapes after 29 ♜e2 f5 30 ♜h2 ♜eb8 31 ♙h4! ♜xd4 32 cxd6 cxd6 33 f3 ♙d3 34 ♜d2 ♜bb4 35 ♙g6 ♟f7 36 ♙h8+! ♟f6 37 ♜cd1 ♜b8 38 ♜xd3 ♜xd3 39 ♜xd3 ♜xh8 40 ♜a3 ♜a8 41 ♜e3 when he doesn't stand worse.

29 ♙h2

Intending to swing the knight over to e3, its best post.

29...♜eb8 30 ♙g4 ♜b1 31 ♜xb1 ♜xb1+ 32 ♜h2 a4!?

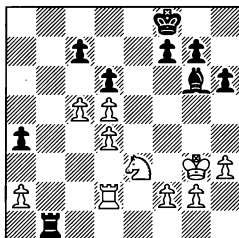


The stylistic interpretations of the two players are so varied, that they may as well be attempting communication by speaking two different languages. Aronian tends to be the emotional bar patron, the two fisted confrontationalist, always looking to pick a fight, while Carlsen's style strikes us as a cold, emotionless assassin, who kills not for any sadistic joy in the act, but simply to make a living. Aronian may be overestimating his own chances, while underestimating the power of White's knight. He intends to go after White's a-pawn, but he may have been wiser to jump on a draw with 32...♙xg4! 33 hxg4 ♜b5 34 ♜c2 ♜b4 35 ♜d2 ♜b5, with a draw by repetition of moves.

33 ♙e3

Now White stands a shade better.

33...♙g6 34 ♟g3



Carlsen activates his king.

34...♖b4

Question: Why didn't Aronian play 34...a3, intending ...♖b2 next?

Answer: White responds with 35 f3, and if 35...♖b2!? 36 ♕c4! ♖b4 37 ♕xa3 White wins a second pawn, although now his knight is in limbo on a3. Analysis continues: 37...f6 38 h4 h5 39 cxd6 cxd6 40 ♖d1 ♗e7 41 ♗f4 ♖a4 42 ♕b5 ♖xa2 (Black wins one of his pawns back) 43 ♖e1+ ♗d7 44 ♖e6 ♖a6! (passive defence is necessary; Black is busted after 44...♖xg2? 45 ♖xd6+ ♗e8 46 ♖b6) 45 ♕c3 ♖b6 46 ♖e2 ♖b4 47 ♖d2 ♗f7 48 ♗f5 ♗e7 and Black may well hold the position, but it is obvious that White is the one pressing for the win.

35 ♗f3

This cuts out ...♗e4 ideas.

35...♗e7 36 ♗e2

Getting his king out of the way for f3. Carlsen intends a slow kingside pawn expansion later on.

36...♗d7 37 f3 ♖b5!

This secures the draw if Black wants one (which he doesn't!).

38 ♕d1

White feels an endless sense of defensive weariness to his weak central pawns, the way a man condemned to life in prison without the possibility of parole feels in viewing the nauseating uniformity of the bars of his prison cell. After 38 c6+ ♗e7 39 ♕d1 (! don't see another way for White to make progress) 39...♖xd5 40 ♕c3 ♖a5 41 ♖b2 d5 42 ♖b8 ♗d6 43 ♖d8+ ♗xc6 44 g4 a3 45 f4 ♗e4 46 ♗e3 ♖a6 47 ♕xe4 dxe4 48 ♗xe4 ♗b7 49 ♖d5 Black should hold the game.

38...♖b4!?

I'm not so sure this is relevant to the task at hand. One grudge replaces another. It

seems that Aronian's obsession with winning hasn't diminished even an iota. Sometimes we voluntarily invite danger into our life, perhaps in order to prove we have power over our fears. Aronian is under the misimpression that it is he who stands better. After this move he stands worse. He again rejects the drawish line 38...dxc5 39 Qc3 Bb4 40 dxc5 c6! 41 Qe3 Bc4 42 Qe2 Bxc5 43 dxc6+ Qxc6 44 Bb4 Qb5 45 a3, which is even and should lead to a drawn result with correct play.

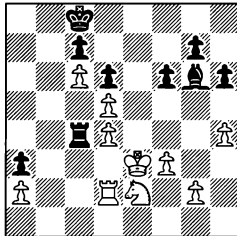
39 c6+ Qc8 40 Qc3

Now everything is secure and White remains up a pawn – admittedly not such a great pawn, but at least it's extra.

40...f6

Alternatively, 40...Bc4 41 Qe4 Bb4 42 Qd3! a3 43 Qc3 Bb6 44 Qf2 Bb5 45 Qd1!, and if 45...Bxd5? 46 Qb4 when a3 falls and White gets serious winning chances. Also, Black's rook is confined to its lateral fifth rank prison.

41 Qe3 Bc4 42 Qe2 a3 43 h4



Progress doesn't come easy for White. His natural plan is kingside expansion.

43...Bb4?

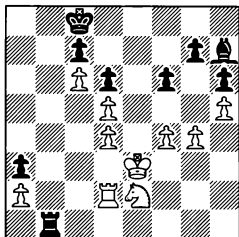
This turns out to be a calamitous decision, resulting from still being in win mode rather than draw mode. Grogginess is perhaps nature's way of protecting our mind from harsh reality's angry glare. Now the aggregation of Black's strategic woes take on a fatal cumulative effect.

43...Qf7! should just barely save the game after 44 Qf4 (or 44 Qe4 g5! 45 Qf5!?) and Black should still hold the game here: for example, 45...Qxd5 46 h5 Bxc6 47 Qxf6 Bb6 48 Qc3 Bb2 49 Qd3 Qc4 50 Qe3 Bxc2 51 Qg6 g4 52 fxg4 Bxg4+ 53 Qxh6 Bxd4 54 Qg3 Qf4 55 Qg7 Qf7+ 56 Qg6 Qf8 57 Qh3 Qe6 58 Qe3 Qd7 59 h6 Qg8+ 60 Qf6 Qf8+ 61 Qg7 Qg8+ with a draw) 44...g5 45 Qd3 Bc1 46 Qe2 Qg6+ 47 Qe3 Qh1 48 hxg5 fxg5 49 f4 Qe1 50 fxg5 hxg5 51 Qf3 Qd8 52 Qc3 (52 Qg4 Bb1 53 Qxg5 Bb2 54 Qd1 Qxe2 55 Qxg6 Qxg2+ 56 Qf6 Qxa2 57 Qd3 is drawn) 52...Qh5+ 53 g4 Qf7 and it's hard to see a path for White to make progress.

44 g4 ♖b1

Now White's advantage has grown to serious proportions. Likewise, after 44...♖b2 45 ♖c3 ♜f7 46 h5 ♜d8 47 ♜d1 ♜e7 48 ♜e1 ♜f8 49 ♜h1! ♜g8 50 f4 ♜g2 51 ♜e4! ♜xg4 52 ♖b5 f5+ 53 ♜xf5 ♜xd5 54 ♜h3 ♜g2 55 ♜xc7 ♜xc6 56 ♜xa3 ♜d7+ 57 ♜e4 ♜g4 58 ♜d5 ♜d2 59 ♜g3 ♜xh5 60 ♖e6 White has serious chances to win, despite the reduced pawn count.

45 h5 ♜h7 46 f4!



Intending f5, ♖f4 and ♖e6.

46...f5!

Aronian buries his own bishop in desperation. Now Black's bishop is forever cut off in his tiny realm, the way a serial killer in a movie can never come forth from behind the screen to harm the watcher.

46...♜g8 is met with 47 f5! ♜e1 (certainly not 47...♜xd5?? 48 ♖c3 ♜e1+ 49 ♜f2 when White wins the bishop) 48 ♜f2 ♜b1 49 ♖f4 ♜b5 50 ♖e6 ♜xd5 51 ♖xg7 ♜b5 52 ♖e6 ♜xe6 53 ♜xe6 ♜d8 54 d5 ♜e7 55 ♜f3 ♜b2 56 ♜e3 ♜e8 57 ♜d3 ♜b4 58 ♜f2 ♜e7 59 g5! (clearance) 59...hxxg5 60 ♜h2 ♜b2 61 ♜h1! and the push of White's h-pawn is decisive.

47 g5 ♜h1

Or 47...♜d8 48 g6 ♜g8 49 ♜d3 ♜e7 50 ♖c3, and now if 50...♜h1 51 ♜c4 ♜xh5 52 ♖b5 ♜d8 53 ♜d3 ♜h2 54 ♜xa3 ♜c2+ 55 ♖c3 ♜e7 56 ♜a7 when Black is crushed once he drops his c-pawn.

48 ♖g3 ♜h3 49 ♜f3 hxxg5

49...♜d8 is met with 50 ♜e2.

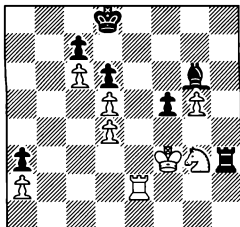
50 fxxg5 g6

After 50...♜g8 51 ♜f4 ♜xd5 52 ♖xf5 the dual threats of ♖e7+ and ♖xg7 win.

51 ♜e2!

Threatening mate on the move. Black's king is about to say something, but White's rook raises a hand in a gesture to restrain him before even a word is uttered.

51...♜d8 52 hxxg6! ♜xg6



Exercise (planning): Come up with a winning plan for White:

Answer: Plant a rook on e6 and follow with g6.

53 ♖e6!

The rook narrows his eyes at Black's nervous bishop, producing angry wrinkles.

53...♗f7

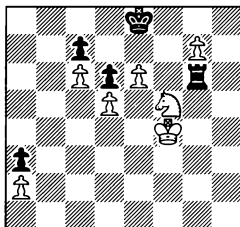
Control over e6 is the point upon which Black's salvation or damnation hangs.

54 g6!

Damnation it is.

54...♗g8

The bishop surrenders to a will more powerful than his own. The e6 offer is untouchable: 54...♗xe6 55 dxe6 ♖h6 56 g7 ♖g6 57 ♖xf5 ♗e8 58 ♗f4 (zugzwang) 58...♗d8 (instead, 58...♖g2 is met with 59 ♖g3, while after 58...d5 59 ♗e5 Black can resign) 59 d5 ♗e8.



Exercise (combination alert): How can White put Black away here?

Answer: Deflection/pawn promotion: 60 ♖xd6+! and Black can't touch the knight.

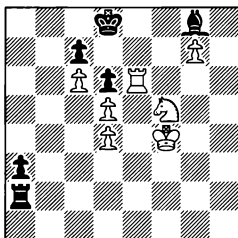
55 g7 f4 56 ♜xf4

White's towering king sneers at his cowering d8 cousin, saying, "Your bumbling incompetence stains our family's good name."

56...♞h2 57 ♖f5

The knight is a blur of motion, making others around him appear frozen in place.

57...♞xa2



Exercise (combination alert): White's job is only half complete.

Black is only a few moves from promoting his newly passed a-pawn. He won't get the time. Work out White's forced win:

Answer:

Step 1: Threaten mate on the move.

58 ♞f6!

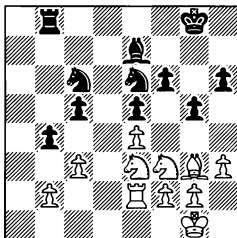
The sneaky rook walks on tiptoes and only speaks in whispers.

58...♞e2 59 ♞f8+ 1-0

Good fortune washes over Carlsen's position in waves. After 59...♞e2 60 ♖xd6! (Step 2: Sacrifice the knight on d6, in order to make way for the coming pawn check on c7) 60...cxd6 61 c7+ (Step 3: Deflection) 61...♜xc7 62 ♞xe8 a2 63 ♞a8 White is just in time to halt the a-pawn.

Game 53
V.Bologan-M.Carlsen
 Biel 2012
Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♙c6 3 ♜b5 d6 4 0-0 ♙d7 5 ♚e1 ♜f6 6 h3 e6 7 c3 d5 8 d3 a6 9 ♜a4 b5 10 ♙c2 dxe4 11 dxe4 e5 12 a4 ♙e7 13 axb5 axb5 14 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 15 ♙g5 ♙e6 16 ♙a3 b4 17 ♙b1 0-0 18 ♜a4 h6 19 ♙h4 ♜d8 20 ♙bd2 g5 21 ♙g3 ♙d7 22 ♜b3 ♙f8 23 ♜c2 f6 24 ♙c4 ♜a6 25 ♜e2 ♜b8 26 ♙e3 ♜xe2 27 ♙xe6+ ♙xe6 28 ♜xe2



Question: I see multiple advantages for White: 1. Holes, ready to be occupied by a knight on f5, d5 and c4. 2. Black has a terrible bishop, with every pawn on the board on the wrong colour. 3. Black's position is in general, riddled by light-squared weakness. Is my assessment correct?

Answer: I think you misassessed and I actually prefer Black's position for these reasons:

1. White may have access to all the holes you mentioned, but I don't see the particular effectiveness of a white knight on any of those squares, since Black can simply work around it.

2. White's 'good' bishop looks as if he is bogged down in a vat of molasses, and is actually in worse shape than Black's 'bad' bishop, who still has range of motion, while White's is trapped behind a wall of black pawns.

3. Black can soon seize the open a-file.

4. Black can target both the b2- and c3-pawns.

Conclusion: White is the one in serious trouble, maybe even completely lost, despite *Houdini's* incorrect near-even assessment.

28...♖a8

Carlsen seizes the open a-file, with potential to pressure either c3 or b2.

29 h4 ♖a2

Threat: ...bxc3.

30 ♟f1 ♟f7 31 ♙h2

White also remains under pressure after 31 ♜e1 ♙d8 32 ♜d5 ♙a5: for example, 33 f3 b3 34 ♜d2 ♜e7 35 hxg5 hxg5 36 ♙f2 ♜xd5 37 exd5 ♜d4! 38 ♜d1 ♜b5 39 c4 ♜d6 40 ♙xc5 ♜xc4 41 d6 ♜xb2 42 ♜c1 ♜a4 43 ♜d3 ♜d2 and Black wins, since d3 hangs and ...b2 overloads White's rook.

31...♜a5!

Seizing control over c4.

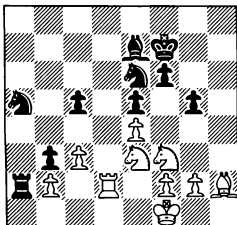
32 hxg5

A measure of doubt begins to seep into White's move choices. I would think about 32 h5 to pin down a target on h6.

32...hxg5 33 ♜d2

Black promotes after 33 ♜e1 b3 34 ♜d2 c4 35 f3 ♜c5 36 ♜d1 ♜a4 37 ♜e2 ♜b7 38 ♜d2 ♜d6 39 ♙g1 ♜b5 (threat: ...♜axc3) 40 ♙e3 ♙a3! 41 bxa3 ♜bxc3 42 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 43 ♟f2 ♜xe4+ 44 fxe4 ♜xd2+ 45 ♙xd2 b2.

33...b3!



Carlsen derives relentless strategic pressure from his queenside bind, pinning down b2 as an eternal target. Black threatens ...c4, ...♜c5, ...♜d3 (or ...♜a4), and ...♙c5, with a crushing queenside bind. This looming strategic menace induces Bologan to try a desperate sacrifice on his next move.

34 ♙xe5!?

The bishop, who regards himself as a great healer, 'lays hands' on the sick and infirm – an act which fails to heal and tends to make his own afflictions grow worse. To some players, to think and to act is synonymous. Your unfortunate writer fits into the opposite category of the player who thinks an awful lot, but rarely progress to step two.

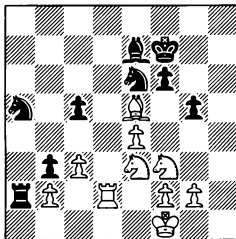
Question: Isn't White's last move a case of ambition (or is it desperation?) clearly exceeding the position's speed limit?

Answer: I think White is busted, no matter how he plays the position: for example, 34 ♖e1 is met with 34...♙d4!:

a) 35 cxd4 exd4 36 ♜d5 ♜c4 37 ♞e2 ♞a1! 38 f4 d3 39 ♞f2 d2 is crushing.

b) 35 ♞d1 ♞xb2 36 cxd4 exd4 37 ♙f5 ♞a2 38 g4 b2 39 ♜d3 ♜c4 40 ♙g2 ♞a3 41 ♙xb2 ♙xb2 and Black's two passers carry the day.

c) 35 ♜d3 ♜b5 36 ♜d1 ♞a1 37 ♙e2 ♜c4 and White can resign.



Exercise (planning): White just sacrificed a piece in pure desperation. Do you see something stronger than the immediate acceptance? The solving of the solution requires every ounce of our ingenuity.

Answer: Deflection. Carlsen recognizes that b2 is far more important than White's offered piece.

34...g4!!

Carlsen stands back, refusing the offer with chilly disinterest. A once submerged idea breaks the position's surface. When it becomes a contest between our preferences and reality, the former must yield. This just doesn't look like one of those positions which allows an active imagination tangible scope for fantasy in planning, but in this case, looks are deceptive. Clashing concepts merge and melt into a unified whole. Carlsen decides to elaborate on Bologan's idea with a deadly tweak.

Carlsen's move is infinitely stronger than 34...fxe5 35 ♙xe5+ ♙e8 36 f3 when White can at least make a fight of it.

35 ♙xg4

When we are on the butt end of such practical jokes, it feels an awful lot like a custard pie slowly being pushed into our face. After 35 ♖h2 fxe5 36 ♖hxcg4 ♖f4! 37 ♖xe5+ ♔e6 ("Careful little man, so that you do not encroach upon a station above yours," the king reproaches White's knight) 38 ♖f3 c4 Black has an extra piece and also a crushing bind.

35...♖c4!

Black knight and rook crouch for the spring, exchanging significant glances and conspiratorial smiles. Bye, bye b2, after which Black's b-pawn becomes an overwhelming threat to promote.

36 ♜e2

The rook resents the c4-knight's overfamiliarity.

36...♖xb2!

Ruthless technique. The knight ploughs on with his pet project with the undiminished gusto of a man in love. Carlsen denies White even the faint hope of saving the game after the inaccurate 36...♜xb2?! 37 ♜xb2 ♖xb2 38 ♖d2 fxe5 39 ♖xb3.

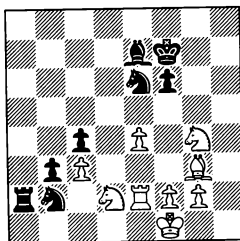
37 ♖d2

If 37 ♔g3 ♖c4 and not a thing can be done to prevent the coming ...b2.

37...c4!

Covering b3, which remains far more important than grabbing Black's hanging e5-bishop.

38 ♔g3



Exercise (combination alert): Black to play and force the win.

Answer: Weak back rank/pawn promotion.

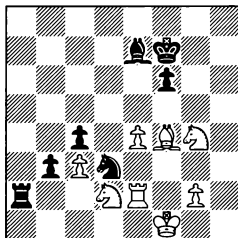
38...♖d3!

The knight dematerializes himself and reappears on d3, like a fakir showing off his magical powers by fading in and out of corporeal reality.

39 f4

Or 39 ♖xc4 ♖a1+ 40 ♜e1 ♜xe1 mate.

39...♖exf4 40 ♙xf4



Exercise (combination alert): There is something far stronger than recapturing on f4. The frail white king's life hangs in the balance, just this side of death. What did Carlsen play instead?

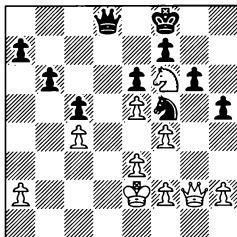
Answer: Back-rank mate.

40...♖a1+ 0-1

The rook looks upon White's king with the anticipatory glee of a Vice President, who has just been told that the President's heart surgery hasn't gone well. His delighted gaze is a burning reminder to White's king of the imminent danger to his life: 41 ♖b1 ♜xb1+ 42 ♙c1 (White's first rank seems to be a dumping ground for unwanted pieces) 42...♜xc1+ 43 ♜e1 ♜xe1 mate. The king wishes he could be elsewhere, but, of course, elsewhere is exactly where he isn't.

Game 54
M. Carlsen-S. Agdestein
 Stavanger 2014
Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖f3 b6 4 g3 ♙a6 5 b3 d5 6 ♙g2 ♙b4+ 7 ♙d2 ♙d6 8 ♖c3 0-0 9 0-0 dxc4 10 ♖e5 c6 11 bxc4 ♜c7 12 ♙f4 ♙b7 13 ♜c1 ♖h5 14 ♖e4 ♖xf4 15 gxf4 c5 16 ♜d3 ♙xe5 17 ♖g5 g6 18 ♜h3 h5 19 dxe5 ♖c6 20 ♖e4 ♖d4 21 ♖f6+ ♜g7 22 ♜fe1 ♖f5 23 ♜c3 ♜h8 24 ♜d1 ♜ad8 25 ♜cd3 ♜d4 26 e3 ♜xd3 27 ♜xd3 ♙xg2 28 ♜xg2 ♜d8 29 ♜f1! ♜f8 30 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 31 ♜e2



Question: How would you assess this ending?

Answer: Let's assess:

1. Black owns a healthy queenside pawn majority, from which he may later be able to extract a passed pawn on that wing. White's kingside majority is unable to create a passer.
2. White's e5-pawn wedge gives him dangerous control over key dark squares like g5, f6 and d6. This means f7 provides Carlsen a fixed target.
3. White's king appears somewhat safer than Black's, which is meaningful, since queen and knight make a dangerous attacking pair.

Conclusion: A battle arises between the forces of volatility and immovability. The position may be approximately balanced, yet White's position looks easier to play, since he will be the one who generates threats.

31... ♖c8

Agdestein cuts off infiltration ideas on b7 and c6, and is content to await events.

32 a3

Question: What is the point of this move?

Answer: Carlsen ensures that if Black ever plays ... ♖a6, then a2 won't hang with check.

32... ♕e7

The careless 32... ♖a6?? walks into 33 ♖a8+ ♕g7 34 ♖g8+ ♕h6 35 ♖h8 mate.

33 h3

Another waiting move.

33... ♕d8!

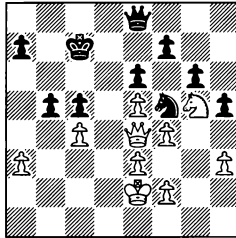
Agdestein realizes that his king will never be safe on the kingside, so he prepares to remove him to the safer queenside zone. 33... ♖a6?? still fails miserably after 34 ♖a8! ♖xc4+

35 ♖f3 when White threatens ♖e8 mate, and if 35...♗a4 36 ♖b7+ ♕d8 37 ♖b8+ ♕e7 38 ♖c7+ ♕f8 39 ♖d8+ ♕g7 40 ♖g8+ ♕h6 41 ♖h8 mate.

34 ♖e4 ♕c7 35 ♖h7

Intending ♖g5, tying Black down to f7, now that Black's king is not there to do the job.

35...♖e8 36 ♖g5 b5!?



Black falls prey to temptation, striving to create a queenside passed pawn. In doing so, he further exposes his king. Carlsen would have a harder time making progress if Black goes into fortress mode with 36...a6 37 ♖d3 ♕b7 and then does nothing.

37 ♖d3 a6

Question: Why doesn't Black play 37...bxc4 to create a passed c-pawn?

Answer: I think the exposure to his king overrides the fact that he creates a passed pawn: for example, 38 ♖xc4 ♕b6 39 ♖b3+ ♕c7 40 a4 ♖d7 41 a5 ♖h6 42 ♖e4 ♖c6 43 ♖c4 and c5 falls.

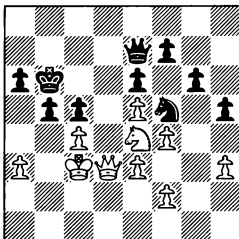
38 ♕d2

Carlsen's king is transferred to the queenside to help deal with Black's potential future passed pawn on that wing.

38...♕b6

Black would love to trade queens, but this is impossible since f5 would fall.

39 ♕c3 ♖e7 40 ♖e4



40...♞c7

Question: Why not create a supported passer or passers, with 40...b4+?

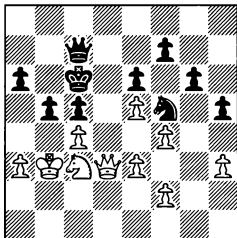
Answer: Same answer as before: Black's king becomes fatally exposed after 41 axb4 cxb4+ 42 ♖b3 when c5+ is in the air. If Black tries to hang on to b4 with 42...a5?? then follows 43 c5+ ♖c7 44 ♔d6 ♞d7 45 ♞a6 and Black can resign.

41 ♖b3 ♖c6

After 41...♞c8 42 ♖b2 ♞a8 43 a4! bxa4 (not 43...b4? 44 a5+ ♖c6 45 ♔d6 ♞d8 46 ♞e4+ ♖d7 47 ♞b7+ ♞c7 48 ♞xc7+ ♖xc7 49 ♔xf7 when Black is down a pawn and unlikely to save himself) 44 ♖a3 ♖c6 45 ♔f6 ♞c8 46 ♞d1 ♖b7 47 ♞xa4 ♞c6 48 ♞d1 (if 48 ♞xc6+ ♖xc6 49 ♔e4 ♔h6 50 ♖a4 ♖b6 51 ♔g5 a5 52 ♔e4 ♔f5 53 ♖a3 ♔h6 54 ♖b3 ♔f5 55 ♖a4 ♔h6 56 ♔d6 ♖a6 when White is unable to force a zugzwang and Black should hold the game) 48...♖c7 White still has practical chances, but my feeling is Black should hold with correct play.

42 ♔c3

Carlsen urges resolution of the queenside pawn tension.



Exercise (critical decision): Should Black maintain the pawn tension by playing 42...♖a5, intending ...b4 next, or should he allow Carlsen his intent by playing 42...bxc4+ in order to create a passed c-pawn?

42...bxc4?

This opens the queenside and allows White infiltration. The more complex the position, the more restricted we are in the details of our overall plan. Black lands in fatal trouble after this impatient move. At times we have all been the butt of one of Caissia's unfunny jokes, when the geometry of a position betrays us, despite all logical indications say it shouldn't.

Answer: Black should hold the game after 42...♖a5! which significantly curtails White's ambitions: 43 ♜b2 b4! (in this way, Black's king hopes to wrap himself into a cocoon of safety on the queenside) 44 ♜e4 (after 44 axb4 ♜xb4+ 45 ♜c2 ♜c7 46 ♜e4 ♜d7 47 ♜a8 ♜xc4 White is the one fighting for the draw) 44...♜xa3+ 45 ♜xa3 bxa3+ 46 ♜xa3 ♜h6 47 ♜a4 ♜b6 48 ♜g5 a5, which leads to the probably drawn ending we talked about in the notes to Black's 41st move, above.

43 ♜xc4

Black's king, a6, c5 and f5 all provide White with choice targets.

43...♜b6+ 44 ♜c2 ♜a5

44...♜b7 45 ♜e4+ ♜c7 46 ♜xb7+! ♜xb7 47 ♜e4 ♜b6 48 ♜b3 ♜b5 49 a4+ ♜c6 50 ♜c4 c5 revolves within White's orbit and Black won't save the game.

45 ♜e4+!

The queen stares transfixed at a8, like a woman who has just seen a vision.

45...♜c7

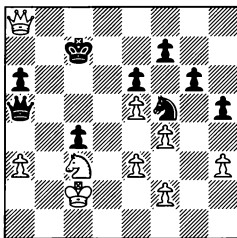
The song the king was singing dies on his lips, and all the world's joy drains from him, as he realizes his sister rings his doorbell.

46 ♖a8!

Carlsen continues to gnaw at Black's exposed flank. At last. White's queen infiltrates.

46...c4?!

46...♟a3?? walks into the dirty pin trick 47 ♖b5+!, but Black puts up greater resistance with 46...♟d7: for example, 47 ♜b7+ ♕e8 48 ♜b8+ ♟d7 49 ♟b3 ♕e7 50 a4 h4 51 ♟c4 ♟d7 52 ♜b7+ ♟d8 53 ♟d3 ♕e7 54 ♕e4 ♜b4 55 ♜a8+ ♟c7 56 ♜a7+ ♟d8 57 ♕d6 ♜b3+ 58 ♕e2 ♜c2+ 59 ♟f1 (the king responds to his irritating sister's insult with an almost imperceptible quiver of vexation) 59...♜d1+ 60 ♟g2 ♜d5+ 61 e4 ♜c6 62 ♕xf7+ ♕e8 (if an undertaker were to walk by and take a good look at Black's king, he would be sorely tempted to begin the embalming process at once) 63 ♕d6+ ♟d8 64 ♜xc5!, although by now White wins.



Exercise (planning): How did Carlsen exploit Black's last move?

Answer: Infiltrate f8.

47 ♜f8!

Now Black's position is in turmoil, as if beaten with an egg whisk. The multitasking queen, a model of efficiency attacks f7, covers a3 and prevents ...♕h6. It gets harder and harder for Black to remain on the credit side of the ledger.

47...♟d7 48 ♕e4 ♜a4+

The queen, the cruel stepmother, jealous of her f8 daughter's beauty, arrives for the fight weaponless.

49 ♟c1

How frustrating for Black. No checks.

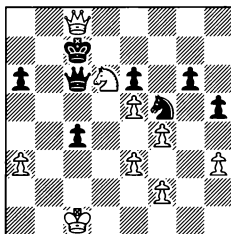
49...♜c6 50 ♜xf7+

The first domino falls. It's unlikely that Black budgeted for his expense when he played 42...bxc4.

50...♖c8 51 ♜d6+! ♜d8

Likewise, 51...♜xd6 52 ♜xe6+ ♜c7 53 ♜e7+ ♜d7 54 exd6+ ♜c6 55 ♜xd7+ (the king and pawn ending is an elementary win for White) 55...♜xd7 56 ♜c2 ♜xd6 57 ♜c3 ♜d5 58 f3 ♜c5 59 a4 a5 60 e4 h4 61 f5 gxf5 62 exf5 ♜d5 63 f6 wins.

52 ♜f8+ ♜c7 53 ♜c8+



Carlsen slowly ventilates Black's king, who at one time looked swaddled with defenders.

53...♜b6 54 ♜b8+! 1-0

Question: I realize Black's king can't play to a5.
But what is wrong with c5? Why did Black resign?

Answer: 54...♜c5 (or 54...♜a5 55 ♜b4 mate) 55 ♜b4+ ♜d5 56 ♜d2+! ♜c5 57 ♜a5+! wins Black's queen, since the only legal move is to block on b5.

Index of Openings

Benko Gambit 249
Dutch Defence 30
English Opening 111, 180, 221, 316, 326
Four Knights Game 23
French Defence 46, 334, 366
Giuoco Piano 301
Grünfeld Defence 215, 309
King's Indian Defence 67, 155, 269
Modern Defence 295
Nimzo-Indian Defence 137, 145, 166, 206, 232, 242, 357
Philidor Defence 59
Queen's Gambit Declined 15, 373
Queen's Indian Defence 188, 421
Ruy Lopez 96, 119, 129, 262, 285, 343, 394, 409
Scotch Game 256
Semi-Slav Defence 401
Sicilian Defence 51, 81, 89, 103, 195, 201, 348, 417
Slav Defence 38, 73, 278
Trompowsky Attack 172, 386
Two Knights Defence 379

Index of Complete Games

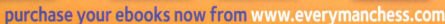
Agdestein.S-Carlsen.M , 3rd matchgame, Norwegian Ch'ship Play-off, Oslo 2006	180
Anand.V-Carlsen.M , World Championship (Game 6), Chennai 2013	394
Anand.V-Carlsen.M , World Championship (Game 9), Chennai 2013	137
Aronian.L-Carlsen.M , Nice (blindfold) 2010	67
Bologan.V-Carlsen.M , Biel 2012	417
Carlsen.M-Agdestein.S , Stavanger 2014	421
Carlsen.M-Aronian.L , London 2012	409
Carlsen.M-Aronian.L , Morelia/Linares 2008	96
Carlsen.M-Aronian.L , Sinquefeld Cup, Saint Louis 2013	129
Carlsen.M-Azmaiparashvili.Z , Khanty-Mansiysk 2005	295
Carlsen.M-Caruana.F , Biel 2011	256
Carlsen.M-Caruana.F , Grand Slam, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2012	366
Carlsen.M-Caruana.F , Vugar Gashimov Memorial, Shamkir 2014	155
Carlsen.M-Caruana.F , Zurich 2014	285
Carlsen.M-Dolmatov.S , Aeroflot Open, Moscow 2004	30
Carlsen.M-Ganguly.S , Dubai Open 2004	172
Carlsen.M-Gelfand.B , London Candidates 2013	348
Carlsen.M-Gelfand.B , Zurich 2014	215
Carlsen.M-Ivanchuk.V , Grand Slam, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2011	206
Carlsen.M-Ivanchuk.V , Monaco (rapid) 2007	188
Carlsen.M-Ivanchuk.V , Morelia/Linares 2007	309
Carlsen.M-Jones.G , London 2012	103
Carlsen.M-Kamsky.G , Khanty-Mansiysk 2005	51
Carlsen.M-Kamsky.G , St. Louis 2013	278
Carlsen.M-Kasparov.G , Reykjavik (rapid) 2004	15
Carlsen.M-Kramnik.V , London 2009	326
Carlsen.M-Kramnik.V , Tal Memorial, Moscow 2013	386
Carlsen.M-Nakamura.H , Monaco (rapid) 2011	73
Carlsen.M-Nakamura.H , Wijk aan Zee 2013	81
Carlsen.M-Nielsen.P.H , Sigeman, Malmo & Copenhagen 2004	38

Carlsen.M-Nikolic.P , Wijk aan Zee 2005	46
Carlsen.M-Nyysti.S , Helsinki 2002	23
Carlsen.M-Radjabov.T , Biel 2007	59
Carlsen.M-Radjabov.T , Nanjing 2009	195
Carlsen.M-Shaposhnikov.E , Aeroflot Open, Moscow 2004.....	166
Carlsen.M-Sokolov.I , Wijk aan Zee 2013.....	262
Carlsen.M-Topalov.V , Nanjing 2010	343
Carlsen.M-Vachier Lagrave.M , Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2006	89
Carlsen.M-Van Wely.L , Foros 2008	401
Carlsen.M-Van Wely.L , Wijk aan Zee 2013	269
Gelfand.B-Carlsen.M , London Candidates 2013	373
Gelfand.B-Carlsen.M , Monaco (rapid) 2011	249
Jakovenko.D-Carlsen.M , Tal Memorial, Moscow 2007	242
Karjakin.S-Carlsen.M , Sandnes 2013	119
Karjakin.S-Carlsen.M , Wijk aan Zee 2010.....	334
Kramnik.V-Carlsen.M , London 2012	111
Kramnik.V-Carlsen.M , Wijk aan Zee 2008	316
Lautier.J-Carlsen.M , Khanty-Mansiysk 2005	232
Malakhov.V-Carlsen.M , Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2005	301
Naiditsch.A-Carlsen.M , Turin Olympiad 2006	379
Nakamura.H-Carlsen.M , Zurich 2014	145
Radjabov.T-Carlsen.M , London Candidates 2013	357
Svidler.P-Carlsen.M , Nice (blindfold) 2010.....	201
Svidler.P-Carlsen.M , Stavanger 2014.....	221



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