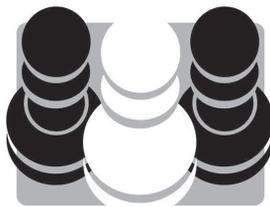


Under the Surface

By

Jan Markos



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Preface

Invitation to the World under the Surface

When I was 15 years old, I played for the first time at the Chess Olympiad, representing Slovakia. It was held in Istanbul, and I can still remember the bustle of the markets, the morning calls from minarets, and the dishes full of dill.

However, what most stuck in my mind were encounters with the best players in the world. When I had a day off, or whenever I had finished my game, I spent long hours standing above chess boards, over which were leaning Ivanchuk, Gelfand, Adams, Korchnoi or Svidler.

And I was happiest when I could see them analysing. Around the table with the chess board, there always gathered a crowd of people, holding their breath while watching how the soul of the position was revealed under the hands of the super-grandmasters. Those players could see much deeper and more sharply than all of us. They could see a direction where we were lost. They could see a deep sea full of colourful fish and coral, where we saw only the glistening surface.

It was then I learned that the significant difference between a club player and a professional is not that the grandmaster can see much further, or that he calculates much more accurately or faster. This might all be true, but the significant difference can be found elsewhere. Grandmasters can see deeper. And this book invites you to study the depth of chess. It invites you beneath the surface. I would like to show you how a strong player perceives chess, what he focuses on, and how he thinks about a position. Understanding is pure happiness, and I would like to share this happiness with you.

I write mostly about phenomena I haven't seen discussed in chess literature before, but which I consider to be important. These phenomena also require new terminology, new words. That's why you are going to read about a *magnetic skin* made of pawns, bishops as *billiard balls*, and a *freezer* for storing tactical motifs. I was looking for metaphors that would be as precise as possible, and that would be easy to remember. At the end of the book, there is a glossary of these new expressions.

Even though this book is not about trivial topics, I did my best to explain them as simply as possible. It is intended for the general chess public – for players who work hard to improve their game, but also for those who play only for pleasure. Chess coaches might especially profit from this book, as they can use its chapters as teaching material for training sessions or lectures.

I wanted to make the text readable even without a chess board, while travelling to work, or on vacation at the seaside. Therefore, in this book there are many diagrams and lots of words, but only a few variations. If a specific line leading to victory is missing, it is not because of negligence, but because I would like to invite readers to find it themselves, to work on the position on their own. All of the moves and evaluations are, of course, computer-tested.

Many of the examples in the book are from my first-hand experience. Not that I think that my games are better than those of other chess players. The reason is practical: finding a good example is difficult and, moreover, I know my games the best. Other examples come from games played by world-class players, or from games in which I was personally involved, as a teammate or as a coach. A small portion of the examples come from computer chess.

The book is divided into seven parts. The first is about general laws that apply to the chess board. In the second part, we will gradually get to know pawns, knights, bishops, rooks and queens, and we will talk about their special characteristics. The third part is dedicated to peculiarities of time in chess. In the fourth part, we will examine together how to find the best move as often as possible. The fifth part is about openings, the sixth about computers. And, finally, the seventh part is about the beauty of chess.

This book would never have come into existence without the many hours that I spent training my students. They were the ones on whom I tested the thoughts contained in the book, checking whether they are comprehensible and beneficial. Thank you, Anna, Jakub, Vaclav, Marek, Jan, Stefan, Juraj, Van and everyone else, for your willingness to experiment and enter uncharted territories!

I would like to dedicate this book to my father, who has taught me that life has a depth which is worth searching for.

And that is pretty much it for the introduction. There is only one wish left: that you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. And I also have one request: write to me about what you like about the book, what you would like to read more about in the future, or what you would improve or change about it. I'm really curious to know your opinion (jan.markos@gmail.com).

Now, take a deep breath! A mutual journey under the surface is awaiting us.

Jan Markos
Bratislava, Slovakia



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Chapter 10

Anatoly Karpov's Billiard Balls

On the inability of bishops to move from one flank to the other

Although the internet era has brought plenty of chess training material to the web, it is still difficult to find out how the best players in the world think about the game.

Partly it is because top grandmasters make many decisions intuitively and find them natural and self-evident. How do you explain to another person something that you feel is obvious?

Partly it is because nowadays most annotations are made in a hurry, and consist more of computer lines than explanations in words.

Still, there are some excellent sources on the internet. For example, press conferences from super-tournaments are always instructive. It is a pleasure to watch Carlsen, Kramnik, Nakamura and other great players, explaining their victories literally minutes after the game has ended. And, of course, it is good to have at home as many books from the top grandmasters as you can get. For example, Gelfand's *Positional Decision Making in Chess* is a gem. Even grandmasters are buying this book to learn something new about strategy.

This chapter was inspired by a small sentence uttered by Karpov in one of his commentaries. I don't think he had any intention of educating his audience, but for me, his commentary had the value of gold.

Karpov said: **"Bishops are rebounding from the edges of the board, similarly to billiard balls rebounding from the edges of the table."**

A witty comparison, is it not? I think this is what Karpov is saying:

For bishops, there is no direct road from one flank to the other. Bishop needs to 'rebound' somewhere. However, such a rebound is often difficult to achieve – it needs to take place either in the depth of my own camp (where my own pieces often obstruct the way), or else in the depth of my opponent's camp (where the squares are carefully guarded).

For example, from h4, you can transfer a bishop to c3 by two routes – via e1 (but this could be prevented by a pawn on f2 or a rook on e1), or via f6 (but, for example, an opponent's pawn on g7 would thwart this).

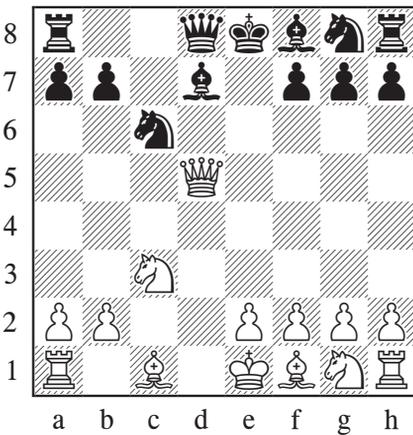
To sum up, often it is surprisingly difficult to transfer a bishop from one flank to the other. It is therefore better to decide beforehand where the bishop should be developed. It is quite possible that it will stay there for the rest of the game.

The first example belongs in the UNESCO World Chess Heritage:

Vasja Pirc – Alexander Alekhine

Bled 1931

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 cxd4
5.♖a4† ♕d7 6.♗xd4 exd5 7.♗xd5 ♘c6



Black’s compensation for the sacrificed pawn is based on his lead in development. His pieces can develop freely, and White will surely lose another tempo, as his queen is too exposed. Therefore, White must handle the position very carefully. Pirc decided to develop his bishop to g5, attacking the opponent’s queen. What could be more natural?

8.♗g5?

In fact, this move is a serious mistake. The dark-squared bishop should have stayed on the

queenside, protecting the weak b2-pawn. But now it will never get back, as White will need to play e2-e3 in order to develop his kingside.

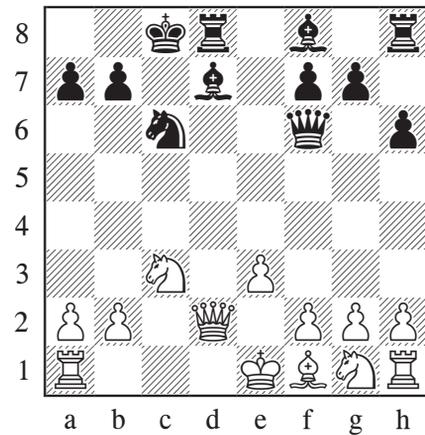
Nowadays, 8.e3 or 8.♘f3 are more common.

8...♘f6 9.♗d2 h6 10.♗xf6

A sad necessity.

10.♗h4 g5! 11.♗g3 ♖a5 gives Black an advantage, for example: 12.e3 ♜d8 13.♗c1 ♘e4 Black has a dangerous initiative.

10...♗xf6 11.e3 0–0–0



Without the dark-squared bishop, White’s queenside is very weak. It is definitely not suitable to house the white king. However, Pirc is optimistic:

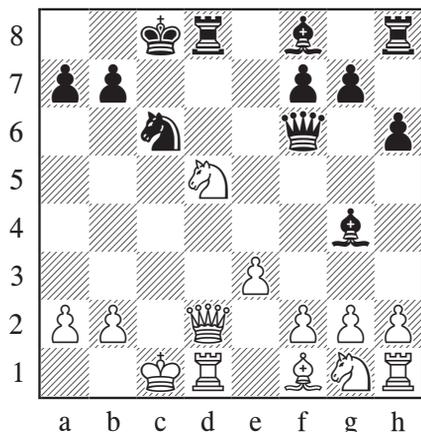
12.0–0–0?

12.♘f3 or 12.♘ge2 would give better chances for a successful defence.

12...♗g4

Of course, White had anticipated this move and prepared his reply:

13.♘d5



However, he did not anticipate Black's response:

13...♜xd5! 14.♞xd5 ♘a3!!

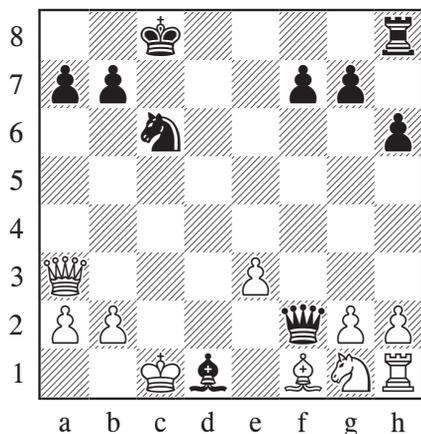
Where is White's dark-squared bishop when it is needed most? White now loses.

15.♞b3

15.bxa3 leads to a massacre: 15...♞a1† 16.♙c2 ♘xd1† 17.♞xd1 ♞xa2† 18.♙c3 (or 18.♙c1 ♞xa3† 19.♙b1 ♞d8 20.♞c2 ♞b4† 21.♙c1 ♞e1† 22.♙b2 ♞d2→) 18...♞xa3† 19.♞b3 ♞a1† 20.♞b2 ♞xf1→

15...♘xd1 16.♞xa3 ♞xf2

The rest is agony. White's pieces are undeveloped and his king is weak.



17.♞d3

17.♙xd1 ♞xf1† 18.♙c2 ♞xg2†→

17...♘g4

17...♘a4, with the threat of ...♞e1† followed by mate, is even stronger.

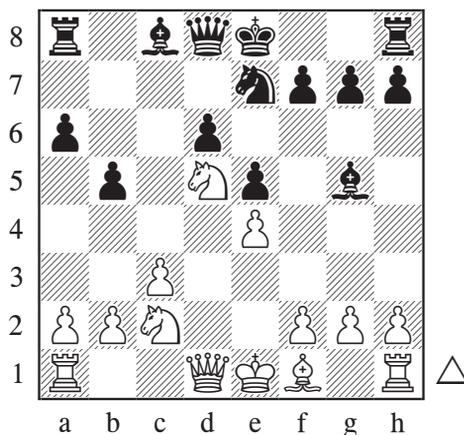
18.♞f3 ♘xf3 19.♞f5† ♙b8 20.♞xf3 ♞e1† 21.♙c2 ♞c8 22.♞g3† ♞e5† 23.♙b3 ♞d1† 24.♙a3 ♞c5

0-1

The following four examples are from my own praxis. I will start with the ones that were less pleasant for me:

Zbynek Hracek – Jan Markos

Germany 2007



White played:

13.h4!.

This move quite seriously weakens White's kingside. It will not be easy for him to castle there, as the black queen could contemplate taking the h4-pawn. So, why does Hracek play such a move? Does he want to attack on the kingside?

Not at all! With the h2-h4 move, White prepares an initiative on the queenside.

Standing on the g5-square, Black's dark-squared bishop could in some circumstances be transferred to the queenside via d8. White has already exchanged his dark-squared bishop, and therefore a bishop on b6 could seriously hinder his active plans on the queenside. However, after the bishop is forced to the h6-square, its possibilities will be much slimmer. The only transfer route to the queenside will be through White's camp. And White will be careful enough not to allow the bishop to swing via d2 or e3.

The game continued:

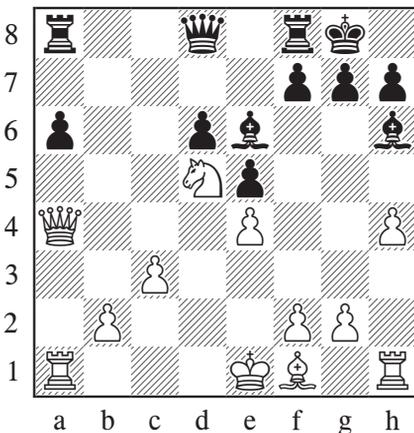
13...♗h6 14.a4 bxa4 15.♖cb4 0-0 16.♙xa4 ♜xd5 17.♜xd5

Unsurprisingly, all this is theory. All White's forces are concentrated on the queenside. Black would love to open the game and cause problems to the white monarch, but this is unfortunately not possible, as the d5-knight dominates the board.

17...♗e6?

A serious mistake.

With the bishop on h6, Black needs to obtain at least some control over the dark squares with 17...a5!, with good chances for equality.



18.♙a5! ♙b8 19.b4

Now White is simply better. For Black it will be difficult to protect his a6-pawn in the long run.

Also in the following game, my billiard balls somehow slipped off the table and got lost on the floor:

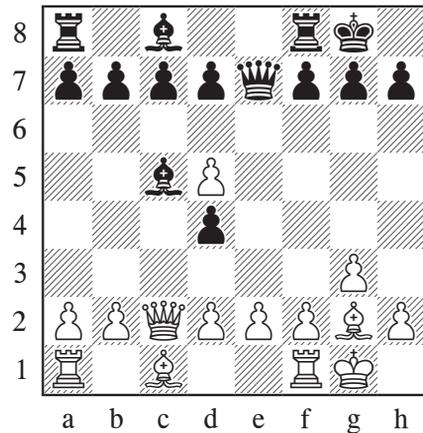
Evgeny Tomashevsky – Jan Markos

Ohrid 2009

1.c4 e5 2.♞c3 ♞f6 3.♞f3 ♞c6 4.g3 ♗b4 5.♞d5 ♜xd5

It is perhaps safer to play 5...e4 or 5...♗c5.

6.cxd5 ♞d4 7.♞xd4 exd4 8.♙c2 ♙e7 9.♗g2 ♗c5 10.0-0 0-0



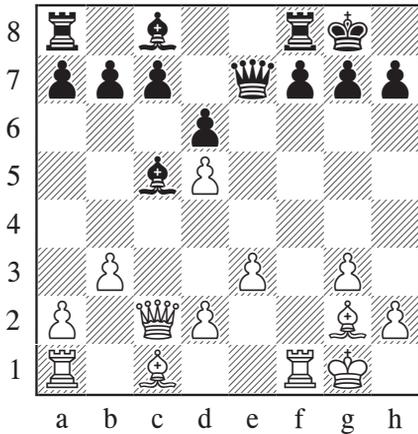
In my preparation, I thought that Black should easily equalize here. Oh, how I was mistaken!

11.b3!

White's dark-squared bishop heads for the long diagonal, where it has no opposition.

11...d6 12.e3 dxe3 13.fxe3!

I had underestimated this move. After 13.dxe3 Black is fine.

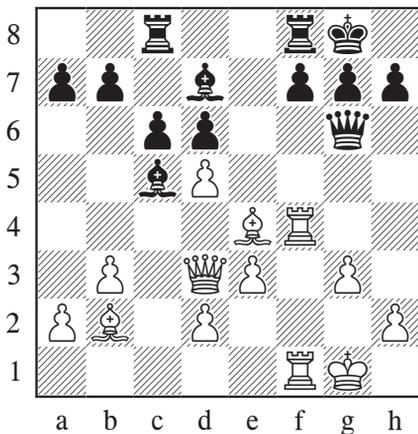


A seemingly innocent line of the English Opening has turned into a nightmare for me. After a couple of careless moves, I have landed in a position where my pieces (especially the c5-bishop) don't have much to do, whereas White can transfer all his pieces to attack my kingside. It is possible that Black's position can no longer be defended. In any case, I did not manage to get any counter-chances and was simply steamrollered.

13...♔d7 14.♕b2 ♖g5 15.♗f4 ♜ac8 16.♞af1 c6

The problem with this move is that it doesn't threaten anything, as taking on d5 would only create weaknesses in Black's camp.

17.♞d3 ♖g6 18.♕e4!



All White's pieces are attacking my kingside. White is winning.

An apparently unambitious opening also caused Black huge problems in the next game, from the Slovakian Team Championship.

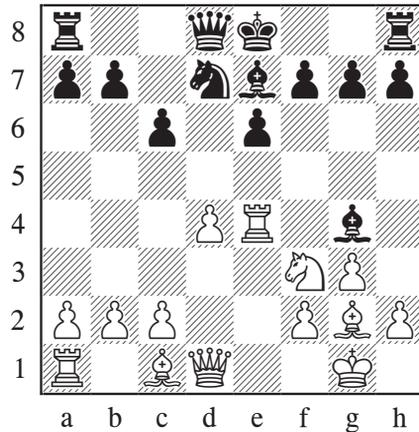
Jan Markos – Tomas Petrik

Slovakia 2010

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 d5 3.♕g2 c6 4.0-0 ♕g4 5.d4

In Chapter 19 on *The Scheme*, we will focus more on the 5.d3 set-up.

5...♖bd7 6.♖bd2 e6 7.♞e1 ♜e7 8.e4 dxe4 9.♗xe4 ♗xe4 10.♞xe4



It may seem that Black has equalized without difficulties. All his pieces are developed. He has succeeded in exchanging a pair of knights, so he has no problems with lack of space. Also, his light-square bishop has avoided being stuck behind the pawn structure.

However, in reality, Black's position is strategically rather dangerous. He lacks counterplay. It is almost impossible to successfully prepare the ...e5 break. The ...c5 break would make White's g2-bishop really happy. And the g4-bishop has left the queenside and will probably never return.

White’s plan is simple. He will transfer his queen and knight to the queenside. The ideal place for the knight would be the a5-square. After that, Black will be outnumbered on the queenside with all the unpleasant consequences. (Please note that White avoided playing h2-h3 in the previous moves, so that the g4-bishop would now be attacked by his rook.)

Petrik played:

10...♘f6?!

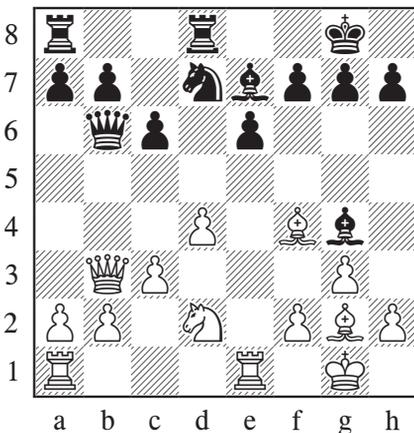
It is hard to criticize such a move, developing the knight with gain of tempo. However, Black’s knight had been protecting the important e5-square, and the bishop does not stand well on g4. It is therefore better to play 10...♙f5 or 10...♙h5.

11.♞e1 0-0 12.c3 ♜b6 13.♜b3 ♘d7!?

Black admits his mistake and protects the vulnerable e5-square.

In Panchanathan – Harikrishna, Philadelphia 2010, Black parted with the bishop pair with 13...♙xf3. However, after 14.♙xf3 ♜fd8 15.h4 ♜d7 16.♙g2 ♞ad8 17.♜xb6 axb6 18.a4, White was slightly better.

14.♙f4 ♜fd8 15.♘d2



All White’s pieces are aiming at his opponent’s queenside. Petrik needs to play actively to stay in the game.

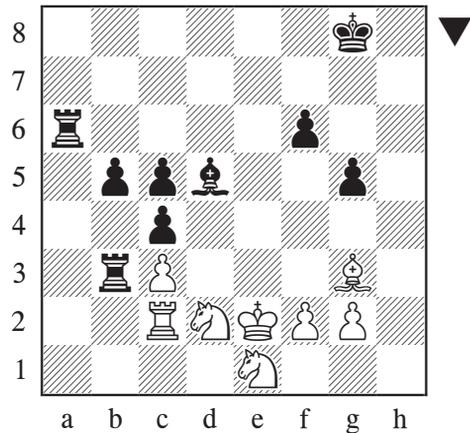
15...g5! 16.♙e3 ♜xb3 17.axb3 ♘b6 18.♘e4 h6 19.c4

Now White’s knight has better prospects than its counterpart. White is better, as all his pieces are able to put pressure on Black’s queenside.

The following combination is possible only because the g3-bishop is completely out of play, unable to help with the defence of the queenside.

Dominik Csiba – Jan Markos

Banska Stiavnica 2011



32...♞aa3!

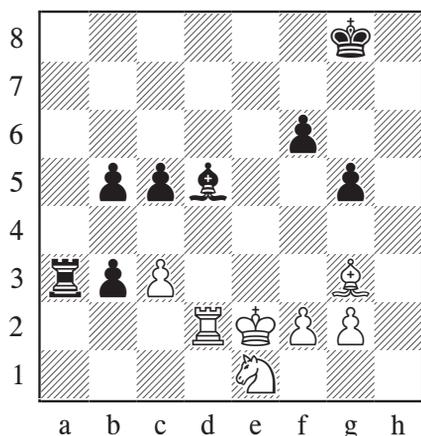
Black sacrifices an exchange in order to create a strong passed pawn. Interestingly enough, he will be able to promote this pawn with the help of only two pieces. White has three pieces close to the queenside, but they are awkwardly placed and will not be able to resist.

33.♘xb3

Otherwise the c3-pawn falls.

33...cxb3 34.♖d2

34.♖c1 is also bad, for example: 34...b4 35.cxb4 ♕e4! 36.♘d3 ♕xd3† 37.♙xd3 b2†→ This discovered check is why Black removed the c3-pawn with 34...b4.



34...♖a2 35.♘d3 ♕c4

Unfortunately for White, this pin decides.

36.♙d1 ♕xd3 37.♖xd3 ♖a1†

0–1

When I saw the following game for the first time, I felt a lot of admiration for Magnus Carlsen. The Norwegian has created a strategic gem. The main topic of the game is the inability of Black’s dark-squared bishop to move from one wing to the other.

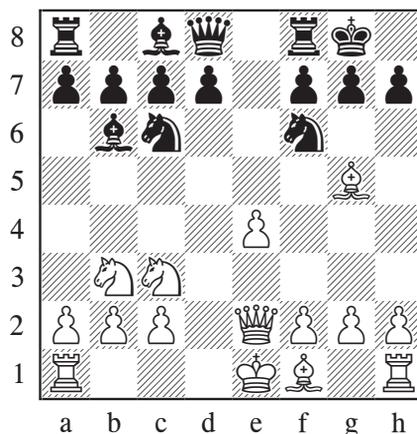
Magnus Carlsen – Etienne Bacrot

Nanjing 2010

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♘xd4 ♕c5 5.♘b3

Not the first choice of White players; more usual is 5.♕e3. However, with the move played, White forces the opponent’s dark-squared bishop to b6. Will the bishop be missed on the kingside?

5...♕b6 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.♙e2 0–0 8.♕g5!

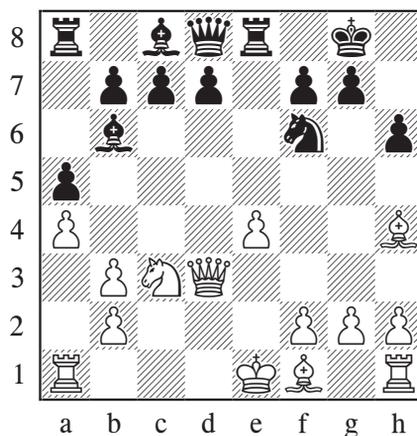


Yes, the bishop is missed already! White has created a very unpleasant pin. It is surprisingly difficult for Black to neutralize it. He can’t move away with the queen, as White would create doubled pawns on the f-file; and the plan of ...h6 followed by ...g5 would terribly weaken Black’s king.

8...h6 9.♕h4 a5 10.a4 ♘d4 11.♙d3!

Carlsen is consistent. He prefers to let his opponent spoil his pawn structure, rather than allow the b6-bishop back into the game via the d4-square.

11...♘xb3 12.cxb3 ♖e8

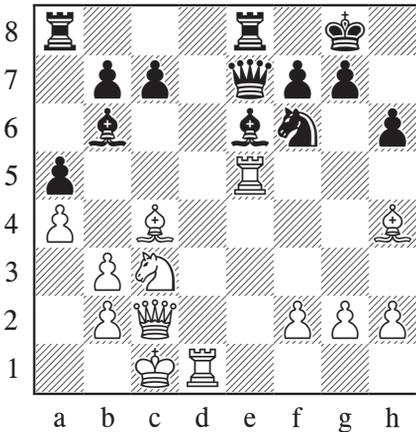


13.0-0-0

This strengthens the impact of the pin. With the kings on opposite flanks, every pawn move on Black's kingside will be felt much more. The white king looks quite vulnerable on the c1-square, but in fact it is pretty safe. At the moment, the king is hiding behind the wall of black pawns which prevent Black from utilizing the queenside files, and in case of need the king can retreat to a safe haven on a2.

13...♘d5? would be too optimistic. After 13...g5 Black wins material.

13...d6 14.♖c2 ♘d7 15.♙c4 ♙e6 16.♞he1 ♞e7 17.e5! dxe5 18.♞xe5

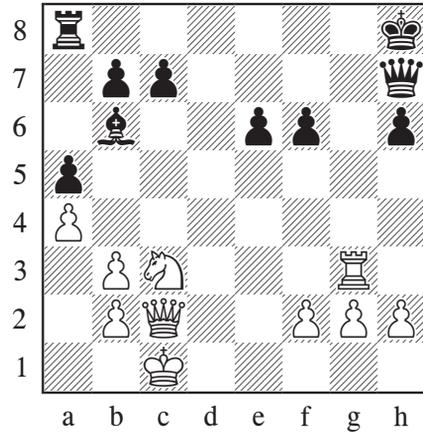


White has succeeded in breaking in the centre, and pins yet another piece to the black queen. Bacrot refuses to stand passively in chains, and retreats with the queen. However, White is then able to blow up the kingside.

18...♞f8 19.♙xf6 gxf6 20.♞e2 ♞g7 21.♙xe6 ♞xe6 22.♞xe6 fxe6 23.♞d3

The rook lift is a clear sign that a direct attack on the opponent's king has begun.

23...♙h8 24.♞g3 ♞h7



25.♞d2!

A beautiful, multifunctional move. White's queen attacks and defends at the same time.

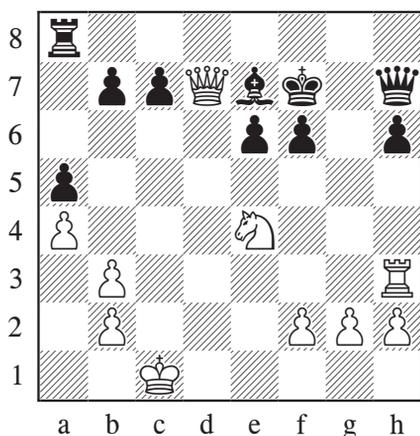


It attacks the h6-pawn, while preventing the black rook from going to the open d-file. As a by-product, the queen also controls the d4-square, so that the black bishop cannot return to the kingside.

25...♙c5

Bacrot decides to try to get his bishop to the kingside anyway, albeit by a more complicated route. However, it is too late.

26.♖e4 ♕e7 27.♞h3 ♔g7 28.♞d7 ♔f7



29.♖g5†!

With a simple yet lovely blow, White transforms the game into a won endgame. The rest is simple:

29...fxg5 30.♞f3† ♔g8 31.♞xe6† ♔h8
 32.♞f7 ♕d6 33.♞xh7† ♔xh7 34.♞f7† ♔h8
 35.g3 ♞a6 36.♔b1 ♕b4 37.f4 gxf4 38.gxf4
 1-0

I had absolutely no problem finding examples for this chapter. There are so many games in which the main story is a sad bishop standing in an offside position on one of the flanks! Nimzowitsch himself writes about these bishops as being “on a desert”. However, in no book on strategy have I seen it explicitly stated that bishops have problems moving from one flank to the other.

It was Karpov’s inconspicuous sentence that focused my attention on this phenomenon. And now I have brought it to your attention.