Joel Benjamin

Bobby Fischer's Best Games

The Lasting Legacy of the American World Champion

New In Chess 2026

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Preface

My previous works had all stemmed from my own personal book ideas, so I was surprised when New In Chess asked me to write a book on Bobby Fischer's best games. I've never been a rabid Fischer fan as I can't quite put aside his personality deficiencies. But upon reflection, it seemed like something of a natural fit. The timing and manner in which my chess career began leaves a sense of connection to Fischer (as I will explore in my introduction), leaving me to believe this to be a wholly appropriate project for me.

My first thought was to brush up on the Fischer literature, so I asked my friend and teaching/writing colleague Harold Scott if I could borrow a copy of Fischer's *My Sixty Memorable Games* (I eventually found where my own copy – in descriptive notation – was hiding). Harold readily agreed and dumped twenty other Fischer-themed books in my lap! And new Fischer books keep on coming, more than thirty years after his last game and fifty years after his principal career ended. People seem to enjoy every detail of his unusual life, but for me, the magic remains in the quality of his body of games.

Upon examining the gamut of books, it became obvious to me (and slightly depressing) that it is probably not possible to come up with a completely original take on Fischer. Most of what I thought of on my own has already been anticipated to some degree by the many fertile minds that have delved into the world of Bobby Fischer.

However, I still feel confident that readers will appreciate this new entrant into the Fischer chronicles. My focus is on the chess; my interest in reporting the drama of Fischer's life is just to provide context for his decisions on the chessboard. As time goes by, the games become more nuanced as computers shape our perceptions of the strength of the moves we know so well. Just in the last few years, the reappraisal of Fischer's classic win over Petrosian in Game 7 of the 1971 Candidates Match has been dizzying, and I welcome the opportunity to weigh in on that and other developments in analysis.

I stand on the shoulders of giants, as the old saying goes. Two analysts of Fischer's games are particularly fascinating to me. Bobby Fischer's *My Sixty Memorable Games* is the ultimate primary text. Fischer used the word 'memorable' to convey the personal nature of his comments, which are invaluable for understanding him as a chess player. I think we also see a favoring of strategy over tactics. Fischer's analysis has a number of holes. Obviously he didn't have access to a chess engine. Also, he probably wasn't giving maximum effort in getting every detail right for the book. With humility, working in 2026, I can easily correct a lot of his analysis.

That last part is also true about Garry Kasparov's *My Great Predecessors*, the series that is currently being re-released with enhancements by Popular Chess. Kasparov could use computers to aid his analysis, but they were relatively primitive by today's standards. Kasparov, who is extremely analytically driven, produced many new discoveries with a backdrop of highly sophisticated judgment comparable to Fischer's. He was also aided by more than three decades of experience since the abrupt termination of Fischer's career (and another five since the last game in *My 60 Memorable Games*).

Dissecting Fischer's games is something of a research project. I found the historical discussion and perception of these games fascinating to recount. But the project can be a bit disillusioning at times. Quite a few of Fischer's 'great' moves turn out to be not as accurate as we thought for a long time. Frequently his opponents did not provide the quality of resistance we had previously concluded. Computers have shown us how easy it is to make mistakes, and we constantly look for them. It takes a little of the aura away from any subject we might study.

Still, there is always a place for individual style and artistry, and the engine is not the only arbiter of greatness. I hope to capture what was truly special about Fischer's approach to chess, what made his contribution to chess so vast and instructive.

The choice of games

Game selection is challenging for any author on Fischer. He has played so many excellent games that one book can't cover them all, yet so many books on Fischer have been written that nothing has really fallen between the cracks. Everyone wants to find lesser-known gems, but there are also many perennial favorites that cannot be ignored. Greatness can be defined in many ways. Some games are played superbly by Fischer, some are great fights, some are defended poorly by his opponents. Some games made the cut because certain moves and decisions illustrate something enlightening about Fischer's approach, or how we as fans comprehend these games.

Along the way I realized that the selected games are heavily weighted towards the white pieces. This really couldn't be helped; I would not want to remove favorites just to balance the numbers. In any case, I feel his play with Black is sufficiently strongly represented.

There are also no 'fighting draws' in the main section. A handful of non-wins could possibly have been included, but I did not want to go beyond my quota of 64 games. That 'magic' number represents not only the squares on the chessboard, but also the years of Fischer's life.

The structure of this book

This book is organized chronologically, allowing us to see not only the progression of Fischer's strength, but the development of his philosophy and adjustment to various challenges he encountered along the way. Through exploration of the moves of these great games, we can see not only Fischer's style and approach, but also how our perspective on chess has changed through the passage of time.

As a first-time Fischer author I have only just realized how segmented his career was. There were all sorts of off-the-board dramas that plagued Fischer over the years; perceived injustices, collusion of opponents, failed negotiations, incompetence and unfairness exhibited by arbiters and organizers, etc. These hassles, coupled with the stress of trying to produce chess on a magnificent level, drove Fischer underground for lengthy breaks multiple times. Somehow, each time Fischer was able to come back rejuvenated, with renewed motivation to continue his ascent. This pattern dissolved after he reached the summit and could not find a way past his demons.

Beyond the pull of this narrative, I needed to examine the contributions of Fischer to our knowledge and understanding of the game itself. Fischer showed expertise, often in a rather unique way, in many phases of the game. I have included introductory chapters on the opening and endgame, though I haven't forgotten the middlegame. The main chapters are also sprinkled with attacking 'spotlights' as well as opening and endgame ones, emphasizing the impact of these games on those aspects. (Some games could be highlighted for two or even three of these aspects!) There is also a puzzle section of Fischer tactics, often delving into Fischer's less celebrated body of work.

INTRODUCTION

A Personal View of the Fischer Boom

When asked to write a book on Fischer's games, I immediately thought to explore a handy reference I've owned since childhood, *Bobby Fischer's Chess Games*, by Wade and O'Donnell. Dusting off my old copy, I saw from the inscription that the book was a prize for a tournament I won at the Manhattan Chess Club in 1976. While all American chess players of a certain age are in some way connected to Bobby Fischer, the connection is particularly strong in my case.

I learned how to play chess in 1972. I don't remember much specifically from the Shelby Lyman Show on the World Championship Match, other than an unknown speaker with a British accent reading out the moves of the day in English descriptive notation. I had hardly played anyone outside my family when I entered my first tournament in December 1972, the Greater New York Elementary School Championship. I only knew about the event because my mother received a flyer from tournament organizer Bill Goichberg. Phyllis Benjamin was running one of the earliest elementary school chess clubs in America. The principal at P.S. 222 had given teachers free rein to suggest topics for a club. Would my parents have thought of chess if Bobby Fischer hadn't been in the headlines?

The tournament was a ball of confusion. In my first game I dispatched a little girl in four moves. (Fortunately, when I started to put the pieces away, there was a witness to confirm the checkmate for my confused opponent.) Many of the kids, like that first opponent, started the game by pushing their rook pawns. Fischer's triumph convinced many parents that their children could be a future superstar, but not many of these youngsters had the fundamentals down yet.

If you weren't around at the time, you cannot grasp how big a phenomenon Bobby Fischer was in his home country. The match with Spassky was covered by national network news on a nightly basis, as if it were the World Series. Grandmaster Larry Evans reported on the action wearing an ABC network blazer.

The Fischer Boom produced a host of 'Fischer babies' who would eventually dominate the American chess landscape for many years. Yasser Seirawan, Larry Christiansen, Nick de Firmian and John Fedorowicz are the biggest names, while Michael Rohde and Michael Wilder deserve honorable mention. As an eight-year-old in 1972, I was the youngest and likely most directly impacted by Fischer, but his star inspired the older boys as well. Nick patterned his opening repertoire, which he rarely deviated from throughout his career, on

Fischer's games. The Najdorf Sicilian and Benoni with Black, and the Sozin Sicilian, the Ruy Lopez, 3.♘c3 against the French with White – these were all mainstays of the Champion.

Fischer's triumph provided an indirect impetus for many changes in American chess culture. I had been playing tournament chess regularly for a few months in the spring of 1974 when a group of local chess masters visited a junior tournament I was playing in. The members of U.S. Chess Masters offered free trial lessons, and I was happy to take them up on their offer. Bruce Pandolfini, who had made a name for himself from The Match, taught this naive 1300-rated youngster not to grab so many gambit pawns. I had no idea that chess lessons were a thing. Fortunately, my parents heeded my pleas and got me coaching. Bruce passed me on to George Kane, the most polished teacher, and between him, Julio Kaplan and Sal Matera, I was guided all the way to International Master.

But what made these guys think that chess teaching could be a real business? The Fischer Match created a new market of students for them. It still amounted to a meager living, especially with tournament purses still quite modest, but it enabled more young players to pursue their dreams.

Bill Goichberg had been running tournaments since the 1960s. He wasn't a creation of the Fischer boom, but business gained a lot of purpose from then on. Many people don't realize that Goichberg originated the national scholastic tournaments, now run by U.S. Chess (and without Bill's significant cash prizes). The National Elementary was the last of these events to debut, just in time for me to win the first one. Goichberg was particularly focused on scholastic/junior chess at the time. He kept his own Continental Chess Association ratings and published a list of the top players in each list. I was pleased to make the list and amazed by the older kids with a '2' at the start of their ratings!

The changes were not restricted to junior chess. Large open tournaments like the World Open sprouted up, providing incentive for American masters and lures for some foreign stars as well. 'Internationals' and 'Futurities' introduced many players to Elo ratings and title norms. Many players got their first ratings around the time I did in 1976, and the U.S.A. saw a flood of IM titles circa 1980.

Of course, chess in this pre-internet world was still largely contained to major population centers, and most Americans saw little benefit without getting to these places. But what we had, we would not have seen without Bobby Fischer. The problem is that what happened was a drop in the bucket compared to what might have been. If only he had continued to play after winning the World Championship. The money would surely have rolled in, and many boats would have risen with the tide. But we will never really know.

The Essence of Fischer

What kind of chess player was Bobby Fischer? Obviously a very, very good one, but beyond that we can come to some conclusions about what type of player he was.

He was at heart a strategic player

Fischer's ideal game was to accumulate advantages, transform advantages, or in some cases, nurse a particular advantage to the end of the game. His technique was excellent, and unsurprisingly, he won a lot of highly instructive endgames.

He was willing to attack but felt much more comfortable when able to maintain control

His attacks tended to arise organically from building his position, but in messier positions he often preferred simpler moves, not relying quite so much on his calculation. This is in contrast to a more natural attacker like Kasparov, who generally went in the direction his calculation took him. Fischer was a more intuitive player.

He sought clarity in superior positions

That seems at first like a statement that would be true about anyone, but we see instances of Fischer sacrificing a chance for a bigger advantage to maintain one he felt more confident about.

He had great faith in his technique

This connects to the previous point. Fischer never doubted his ability to win with a material or other long-term advantage. That enabled him to avoid what he felt was unnecessary speculation.

He preferred open, fluid positions

We see this preference repeatedly in his handling of the Ruy Lopez, though it was probably more pronounced in his early days. This accounts somewhat for his generally mediocre results against the French. True, the King's Indian was a favorite of Fischer's for many years, but it was often a dangerous choice against elite grandmasters.

He loved bishops

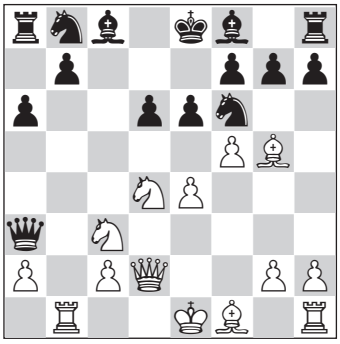
Fischer has been called the greatest player with bishops in history. We will see a lot of Fischer's prowess in the 'Fischer Endgame'. But to play with a bishop against a knight, or with the bishop pair, Fischer would make surprising decisions. On several occasions in this book, from different stages in his

career, he swaps an outposted knight for an inactive bishop. This is arguably the area in which Fischer was most stylistically unique.

His passion for bishops did not lead Fischer to constantly make exchange sacrifices. He had strong respect for the advantage of a rook over a minor piece, and won several key games with a rook versus a bishop and pawns.

Opening Example 5
Lubomir Kavalek
Bobby Fischer
Interzonal, Sousse 1967

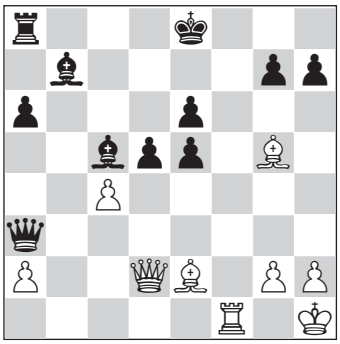
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♕b6 8.♕d2 ♕xb2 9.♖b1 ♕a3 10.f5



The lines emanating from this move were in their infancy. Kavalek was likely inspired by Fischer's adoption of this move from the white side.

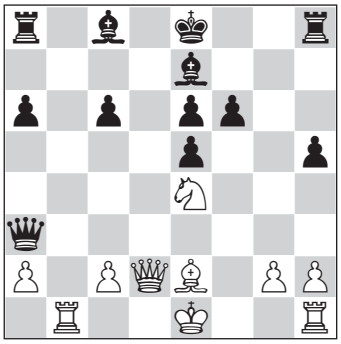
10...♘c6 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.e5 dxe5!

13...♘d5 had appeared in a few games, most notably in Fischer-Geller, Monaco 1967: 14.♘xd5! (stronger than 14.♘e4) 14...cxd5 15.♗e2 dxe5 16.0-0 ♗c5+ 17.♔h1 ♖f8 18.c4 ♖xf1+ 19.♖xf1 ♗b7.



Now Fischer went wrong with 20.♗g4? dxc4 21.♗xe6? (21.♕c2 keeps the game going) 21...♕d3 22.♕e1 ♗e4!, and with White's initiative snuffed out, Black won in a few moves: 23.♗g4 ♖b8 24.♗d1 ♔d7 25.♖f7+ ♔e6 0-1. From the analysis diagram, White keeps a decisive initiative with 20.♕c2! e4 21.♗g4 (White can also flick in 21.♗h5+), and White has won almost every game from here.

14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘e4 ♗e7 16.♗e2 h5

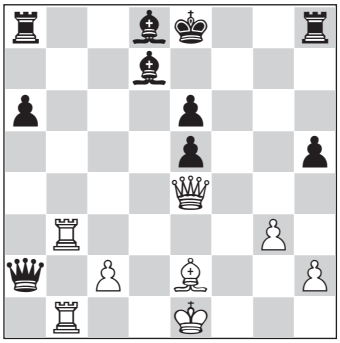


There's now a significant fork in the road:

A) The knee-jerk 17.0-0 is ineffective, because Black will have a critical check on the g1-a7 diagonal in the ensuing tactical melee;

B) After 17.♖b3 ♕a4 (17...♕xa2? loses to 18.0-0) White has the additional surprising option of 18.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 19.c4 (19.0-0 is playable, but Black can simplify with 19...♕d4+ or 19...♕h4 20.♕d6 ♕d4+!) 19...♗h4+ (19...♖a7 and 19...c5 are apparently okay, but 19...♗e7? 20.0-0 gives White the ideal version of the piece sac) 20.g3 ♗e7 21.0-0 h4, but the weakening of White's kingside provides Black with at least equal chances;

C) Thus 17.♖f1 later emerged as a serious option: 17...f5 18.♖f3 ♕xa2! (greed is good because of the tempo on the b1-rook; not 18...♕a4? as 19.♘d6+ is too powerful) 19.♖fb3 fxe4 20.♕c3 ♗h4+ (Black's options are limited because of the threat of ♖a1, trapping the queen, as well as threats to take things with the white queen; 20...♗d8 immediately is the only other playable move) 21.g3 ♗d8 22.♕xc6+ (22.♖a1 ♗a5 returns the piece with equality) 22...♗d7 23.♕xe4 (23.♕xa8 ♕xc2 24.♖3b2 is another dynamically equal option)



analysis diagram

23...♔e7 (or 23...♕a5+ 24.♔f1 0-0+ 25.♖f3 with a draw in the offing) 24.♖d1 ♕a4 25.♖b4 ♗a5 (or 25...♕a5 26.c3 ♖c8 27.♕g6 ♖f8 28.♕g7+ ♖f7 29.♖xd7+ ♔xd7 30.♕xf7+, which is also a draw) 26.♕h4+ ♔e8 27.♗xh5+ ♖xh5 28.♕xh5+, and the marauding queen delivers perpetual check, but no more. The upshot of the line is some forced moves but ultimate inescapable equality. I'm a bit impressed that most of this was discovered without engines.
I remember the theory exploding in the 1980s and being completely baffled by all of it!

17.c4?!

It's a big ask to get it right on the first try, but this is the weakest response.

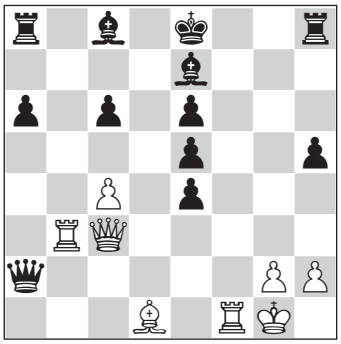
17...f5 18.♖b3 ♕a4 19.0-0

19.♘d6+ ♗xd6 20.♕xd6 ♕a5+ 21.♔f2 ♖a7 gives an edge for Black.

19...fxe4 20.♕c3?

Experience has shown what the engine tells us right away – this move isn't very good. But after 20.♔h1 c5 Black is still the happier camper.

20...♕xa2! 21.♗d1



21...♖f8?

The win was available with an intermediate check – 21...♗c5+ 22.♔h1 ♖f8 23.♗xh5+ ♔d8 24.♖d1+ ♗d7. Equally decisive was the tempo-winning 21...♖g8 22.g3 when Black has a host of winning moves, like 22...♖a7 23.♕xe5 ♖d7, or 22...♖g5.

22.♗xh5+ ♔d8 23.♖d1+ ♗d7 24.♕e3!

Kavalek takes advantage of the missing in-between-check.

24...♕a5

24...♔c8 25.♕b6 forces Black to cough up his queen or a rook to avoid mate.

CHAPTER 2

The Fischer Endgame

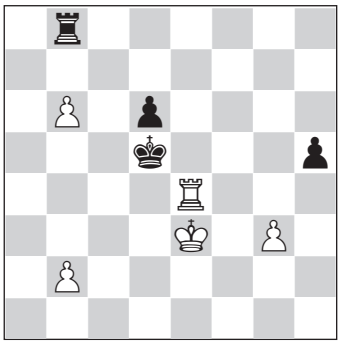
Fischer's strategic, technical approach demanded formidable endgame play. Fortunately, the endgame was a strength for Fischer, and we will see many fine examples in the main game section. In this introductory chapter, I want to focus on two aspects of Fischer's endgame play. The first highlights his tremendous determination to win, even with apparently little to work with. He knew how to keep the game going, looking to pounce on any mistake he could coax from his opponents. Younger fans can think of what we have seen from Magnus Carlsen in recent years, who has been outlasting opponents in sudden death time controls, with critical decisions made playing on the increment. Fischer won many long games despite his opponents being able to rest and work out a defense during adjournment.

Bisguier boss

Arthur Bisguier won the first game he played against Fischer, but Bobby retaliated eight times while poor Arthur never even sniffed a second win. The last of these games, one of my favorite Fischer endgames, appears as Game 40. But right from the beginning, Bisguier (who was thought to be a good endgame player when I encountered him as a teenager) found that he could never be truly safe in the endgame against Fischer.

Endgame Example 1
Bobby Fischer
Arthur Bisguier
U.S Championship, New York 1958

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.c3 d6 9.h3 ♘a5 10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7 12.♘bd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♗d7 14.♘f1 ♖fc8 15.♘e3 ♘c6 16.a3 a5 17.d5 ♘d8 18.♗d2 a4 19.♗b4 ♗f8 20.♗d3 ♘b7 21.♕e2 ♕b6 22.♘d2 ♘c5 23.♔h2 g6 24.♖ac1 ♗h6 25.♗b1 ♖c7 26.♕f3 ♗g5 27.g3 h5 28.♔g2 ♔g7 29.♖f1 h4 30.♕e2 ♖h8 31.♖h1 ♘h5 32.♘f3 hxg3 33.fxg3 ♗f4 34.♗e1 ♕b8 35.♗f2 ♕c8 36.h4 ♗g4 37.♖c3 ♗d7 38.♘f1 ♗h6 39.♘1d2 ♘f6 40.♗e3 ♗xe3 41.♕xe3 ♘g4 42.♕e2 ♘b3 43.♖xc7 ♕xc7 44.♘xb3 axb3 45.♘h2 ♕c4 46.♗d3 ♕d4 47.♘xg4 ♗xg4 48.♕xg4 ♕xd3 49.♖f1 ♖f8 50.h5 ♖h8 51.♕f3 ♕xf3+ 52.♖xf3 gxh5 53.♖xb3 ♖b8 54.♖b4 f5 55.exf5 ♔f6 56.a4 ♖a8 57.axb5 ♔xf5 58.b6 e4 59.♔f2 ♔e5 60.♔e3 ♔xd5 61.♖xe4 ♖b8



This game has actually been something of a struggle for Fischer, but it is petering out into a draw. White can't save the b6-pawn, as 62.♖b4 ♔c5 63.♖b3 ♔c4 forces the rook to vacate.

62.♖h4 ♖xb6 63.♖xh5+ ♔e6 64.♖h2 ♔e5 65.♔d3

White has to ditch the g-pawn to keep the game going.

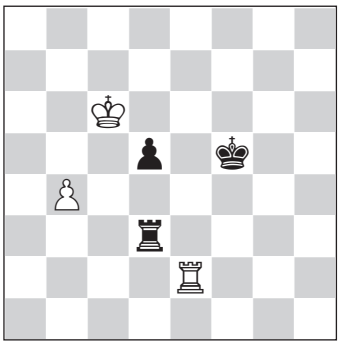
65...♖b3+ 66.♔c4 ♖xg3 67.♖e2+ ♔f5

A glimmer of hope for White, as the black king is slightly cut off. But 68.b4 ♖g4+ 69.♔b5 d5 offers no winning chances.

68.♔d5 ♖d3+ 69.♔c6 d5

69...♖d4 would be even simpler, as the b-pawn does not get anywhere.

70.b4



70...d4??

Missing a clear draw with 70...♖b3 71.♔c5 ♖b1 72.♖d2 (72.b5 d4 73.♖d2 ♔e5 74.♖xd4 ♖xb5+ also draws) 72...♔e6 and Black's king gets back in time.

71.♔d5 ♖d1 72.♖f2+!

The king gets dangerously distant.

72...♔g4 73.♔c4?

Fischer's one slip. 73.b5 ♔g3! 74.♖b2 d3 75.b6 wins.

73...d3?

His second blunder with the d-pawn! Coordination is more important than speed here: 73...♔g3 74.♖b2 ♔f3 75.b5 ♔e3 76.b6 ♖c1+ 77.♔d5 ♖c8 draws.

74.♔c3 ♖b1

74...♔g3 75.♖d2 ♖xd2 76.♔xd2 ♔f4 77.♔xd3 ♔e5 78.♔c4 ♔d6 79.♔b5 ♔c7 80.♔a6 and wins.

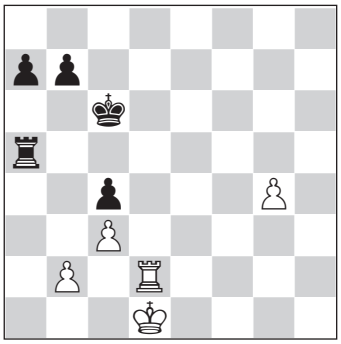
75.♖d2 ♔f4 76.♖xd3

The king is cut off, producing a routine finish.

76...♔e4 77.♖d8 ♖c1+ 78.♔b3 ♔e5 79.♔a4 ♔e6 80.♖d2 ♖c7 81.b5 ♖d7 82.♖xd7 ♔xd7 83.♔a5 ♔c7 84.♔a6 ♔b8 85.♔b6 ♔c8 86.♔a7 1-0

The next year Fischer won with arguably even less to work with.

Endgame Example 2
Bobby Fischer
Arthur Bisguier
U.S. Championship, New York 1959



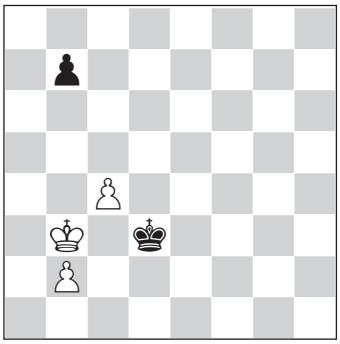
40...♖d5?!

It's a strange decision to force a pawn ending when White has the outside passed pawn. After 40...♖g5 41.♖d4 b5 Black's counterplay should comfortably secure a draw.

41.♔e2 ♖xd2+ 42.♔xd2 ♔d5 43.♔e3 ♔e5 44.♔f3

Fischer temporizes, as 44.g5 ♔f5 45.♔d4 ♔xg5 46.♔xc4 ♔f6 47.♔d5 ♔e7 leads nowhere.

44...a5 45.♔e3 a4 46.g5 ♔f5 47.♔d4 ♔xg5 48.♔xc4 ♔f4 49.♔b4 ♔e3 50.♔xa4 ♔d2 51.♔b3 ♔d3 52.c4 ♔d2 53.♔a4 ♔c2 54.♔a3 ♔d3 55.♔b3



55...b6??

A strange blunder, as Bisguier had already found the correct move 55...♔d2!.

56.♔b4 ♔c2 57.♔a3 ♔d3 58.♔b3

Zugzwang.

58...♔d2 59.♔a4 ♔c2 60.b4 1-0

White simply pushes the pawn through.

Here is one more example of Fischer winning through sheer force of will.

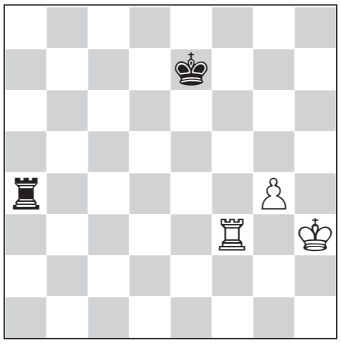
Endgame Example 3

Bobby Fischer

James Sherwin

Interzonal, Portoroz 1958

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 a5 10.d3 ♗b7 11.♘bd2 a4 12.♗c2 ♘b8 13.♘f1 c5 14.d4 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♘c6 16.♘g3 g6 17.♗d2 ♖e8 18.d5 ♘a5 19.b3 ♗c8 20.bxa4 bxa4 21.♗xa4 ♗d7 22.♗xd7 ♘xd7 23.♗b4 ♕b6 24.a3 ♘c5 25.♕e2 ♖eb8 26.♘d2 ♘ab3 27.♘xb3 ♘xb3 28.♖ab1 ♘d4 29.♕d3 ♕a6 30.♕xa6 ♖xa6 31.♖b2 ♖ba8 32.♖a1 ♖a4 33.♘f1 ♘b5 34.♗d2 ♖xa3 35.♖xa3 ♘xa3 36.♖b7 ♔f8 37.♘e3 ♖c8 38.f3 h5 39.♗b4 ♘c2 40.♘xc2 ♖xc2 41.♖b6 ♔e8 42.♗xd6 ♗xd6 43.♖xd6 h4 44.♖a6 ♖c1+ 45.♔h2 g5 46.♖a2 ♖f1 47.♖a6 ♖d1 48.♖b6 ♔e7 49.♖b2 ♖f1 50.♖b3 ♖d1 51.g4 ♖d2+ 52.♔g1 ♖d1+ 53.♔f2 ♖d2+ 54.♔e3 ♖h2 55.♖b7+ ♔f6 56.♖b6+ ♔e7 57.♖b7+ ♔f6 58.♖b6+ ♔e7 59.♖h6 ♖xh3 60.d6+ ♔d7 61.♖f6 ♖h2 62.♖xf7+ ♔xd6 63.♖f6+ ♔e7 64.♖g6 h3 65.♖xg5 ♔e6 66.♖h5 ♔f6 67.♔d3 ♔g6 68.♖h8 ♔g7 69.♖h4 ♔g6 70.♖h5 ♔f6 71.♔e3 ♔e6 72.f4 exf4+ 73.♔xf4 ♖h1 74.♔g3 ♖e1 75.♔xh3 ♖xe4 76.♖f5 ♖a4 77.♖f8 ♔e7 78.♖f3

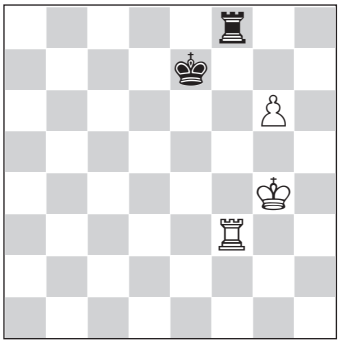


Sherwin wilts after defending successfully for so long:

78...♔e6??

78...♖a8! is the right idea. Fischer drew in this manner with Gligoric a year later in the Candidates Tournament! 79.♔h4 (79.g5 ♖f8! draws) 79...♖h8+ 80.♔g5 ♖g8+ and the checks force a retreat.

79.♔h4 ♖a8 80.g5 ♖h8+ 81.♔g4 ♔e7 82.g6 ♖f8



83.♖f5!

The key move. Now 83...♖xf5 84.♔xf5 ♔e8 85.♔e6 ♔f8 86.♔f6 queens the pawn.

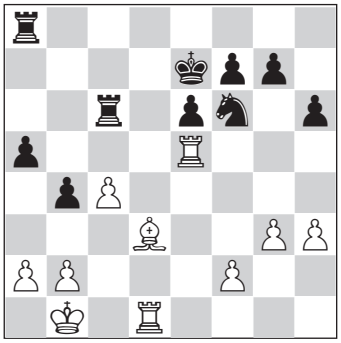
83...♖h8 84.♔g5 ♖h1 85.♖f2 ♖h3 86.g7 ♖g3+ 87.♔h6 ♖h3+ 88.♔g6 ♖g3+ 89.♔h7 ♖h3+ 90.♔g8

Black resigned.
This determination to win from nothing persisted throughout his career. Regarding Game 2 of Fischer's Candidates Match with Taimanov, Tal wrote, 'I, and not only I, would not have played on in this position, whatever the tournament situation – it is a pure waste of time.' Fischer's killer instinct was matched by very few players. As games dragged into the endgame, this attribute became particularly fruitful.

The King of Bishops

The title of this chapter projects an intentional double meaning. As well as a general preference for this minor piece, rook(s) and bishop vs rook(s) and knight has come to be known as the Fischer Endgame, because of Fischer's prowess with that material balance. We will see classic examples in the game section. In some of the games, the bishop appeared dominant from the outset, but in a surprising number Fischer managed to transform the position to benefit his minor piece. Here I will give a couple of instances of Fischer bamboozling world-class players in this ending.

Endgame Example 4
Bobby Fischer
Tigran Petrosian
Bled 1961



27.♗e4

This move, offering to trade the beloved bishop for the knight, indicates a willingness to accept a draw. Sensing these thoughts, Petrosian offered a draw – a strange development, as I would think that back then, as it has been throughout

CHAPTER 7

Don't Call It a Comeback (1970)

The novel *Match of the Century*, pitting a lineup of Soviet all-stars against the best players from the rest of the world, may just have been the key to resurrecting Fischer's career. Fischer may not have been excited to play on a team, but he had long investigated the possibility of playing a match with a Russian champion of some sort, so that part must have appealed to him. Though Fischer was widely regarded as the top non-Soviet player, his inactivity, coupled with Bent Larsen's strong results, emboldened the great Dane to lay claim to board one. Fischer would normally resent the implication that someone was better than him, but he surprised everyone by putting forth no objection to playing board two. This avoided a premature confrontation with Boris Spassky, who Fischer would have to go through for the world title. Thus far, Fischer had lost two games to Spassky without registering a single win. Petrosian, on the other hand, no longer presented the same riddle. 'Iron Tigran' came to the table without a lot of competitive desire. Fischer put up two wins followed by two draws, winning the mini match comfortably, 3-1. (Who knows how that affected Petrosian's psyche for their ultimate battle in 1971?) This confident victory started a magical year where Fischer seemed more dedicated than ever to see his title quest to the finish. In the first game, Fischer's surprising opening choice brought out very tentative play from the ex-champ.

Game 47

Bobby Fischer	**2720**
Tigran Petrosian	**2650**

USSR vs the Rest of the World, Belgrade 1970

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♗d3

While he mostly lived on a diet of Ruy Lopez and Sicilian, Fischer struggled against the Caro-Kann. His early futility was noticeable enough for Mikhail Tal to feign a Caro-Kann by pausing his pawn on c6 before advancing it to c5. Realizing that the Two Knights Variation didn't work for him, Fischer branched out. He won a nice game versus Euwe in the Panov Variation, and here surprises Petrosian with the Exchange Variation, a theoretical afterthought at the time.

4...♘c6 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♗f4 ♗g4 7.♕b3

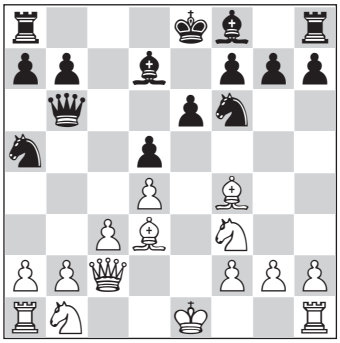
7...♘a5?!

This move has been under a cloud since this game. Black has two paths to a solid middlegame: 7...♕c8 8.♘d2 e6 9.♘gf3 ♗e7 and 7...♕d7 8.♘d2 e6 9.♘gf3 ♗xf3 10.♘xf3 ♗d6.

8.♕a4+ ♗d7

Kasparov suggested 8...♘c6, which I confess I had never thought of myself. The bad bishop stays outside the pawn chain while the free move ♕a4 doesn't change the position that much.

9.♕c2 e6 10.♘f3 ♕b6



11.a4!

Fischer correctly judged the importance of preventing Black from making a favorable bishop swap. 11.♕e2 performs the same function; presumably Fischer didn't want to make it harder to develop his b1-knight, but on e2 the queen remains active while the e5 outpost will soon be occupied.

11...♖c8

Black cannot make good use of the exposed b3-square:

A) 11...♘b3 12.♖a2 ♖c8 13.0-0 ♗e7 14.♕d1 (or the simple 14.♘bd2) 14...0-0 15.♘e5 ♖fd8 16.♖e1 ♗e8 17.♗c2 ♘a5 18.♘d2 and White has mobilized effectively;

B) 11...♕b3 12.♕e2! ♘c4 (12...♗xa4? 13.♖xa4 ♕xa4 14.♗b5+) 13.♗c1!, and while Black seems to be gaining ground, his queen is not at all safe. Possible disasters include 13...♗e7? 14.a5! 0-0? 15.♘bd2 and 13...♗xa4? 14.♘bd2.

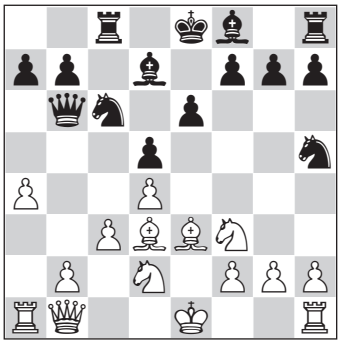
12.♘bd2

Along the lines of the comment at move 11, 12.0-0 looks good: 12...♘c4 (12...♘c6 13.♕e2 ♘h5 14.♗c1 and White pushes forward with 15.♘e5) 13.b3 ♘a5 14.♘bd2 with an edge.

12...♘c6 13.♕b1

Failing to trade the bad bishop sowed the seeds of strategic defeat in Black's position. Petrosian must act quickly before the bind sets in.

13...♘h5 14.♗e3



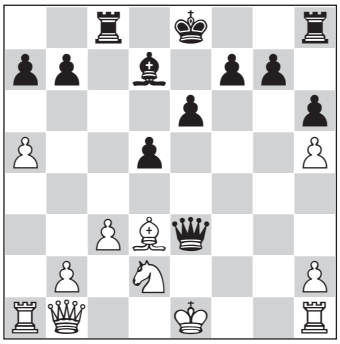
14...h6?

White capturing the h-pawn was not Black's biggest problem. Even so, the best option to avoid that was 14...f5!?. True, White can play 15.g4!?, but the accurate response 15...fxg4

16.♘g5 ♗d6! 17.♗xh7 ♘f4 produces a dynamically equal position.
White's initiative jumps off from occupying e5, so 14...♕c7! would have eased Black's problems. It is not at all clear that White should even take the h-pawn, as 15.♗xh7 ♘f4 16.♗xf4 ♕xf4 offers Black sudden dominance on the dark squares, with excellent practical chances.
Even 14...♗d6 15.♘e5 ♕c7 16.f4 f5 was preferable to the text.

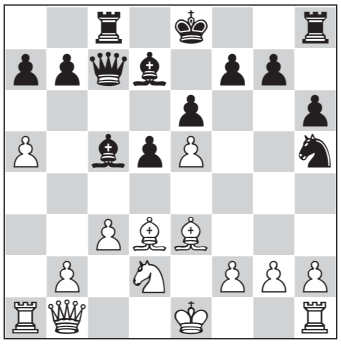
15.♘e5 ♘f6?!

In fairness to Petrosian, he was not ignorant of White's threat, but he badly miscalculated. The more desirable 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗c5 would have been met by 17.a5!. This puts the h5-knight at risk. Petrosian analyzed 17...♕c7 (17...♕d8 is effectively met by 18.♘f3! ♗xe3 19.fxe3 f5 20.0-0 with a nice edge, but not 18.g4? ♗xe3 19.fxe3 ♕h4+ and Black wins) 18.g4 ♗xe3 19.fxe3 ♕xe5 20.gxh5 ♕xe3+



analysis diagram

21.♗e2 ♗b5 22.♕d1, and expected White to consolidate his extra piece comfortably. But if we continue with 22...d4!, Black has essentially full compensation for the piece. Stockfish gives 23.♘f1 (23.c4 d3 24.cxb5 ♖c2; 23.cxd4 ♗xe2 24.♕xe2 ♕xd4) 23...♕xe2+ 24.♕xe2 ♗xe2 25.♔xe2 dxc3, etc.
Modern analysts improve White's play with 21.♔d1!. Timman gives 21...0-0 22.♔c2 e5 23.♕g1 and Black has 'insufficient compensation for the pawn'. True, but how bad is it compared to the strategic mess Petrosian landed in?



analysis diagram

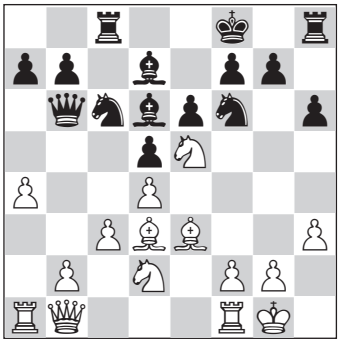
Moreover, Fischer might well have eschewed complications with 18.♘f3 ♗xe3 19.fxe3 f5 20.0-0, with a definite but not decisive advantage.
Petrosian described his choice as 'effectively capitulation'. An elite grandmaster rarely accepts such a miserable position when there is an opportunity to fight out of it. It's a sign of bad form or lack of confidence for Petrosian that he passed up the chance to muddy the waters.

16.h3

Looking for the knockout with a pawn advance, though White can also keep control with his pieces, for example 16.0-0 ♗d6 17.♖e1 ♕c7 18.♗f4, setting the trap 18...♘h5? 19.♘xf7!.

16...♗d6 17.0-0 ♔f8?!

Most likely, Black would have had a better chance by castling and gutting out the attack with his rooks at least connected. Petrosian was known for his unconventional notions on king mobility.



18.f4

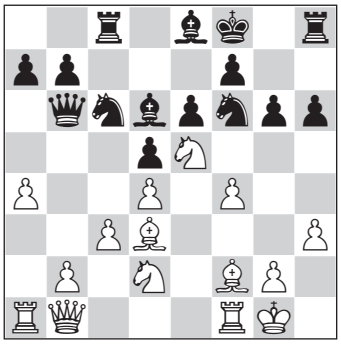
Black's rejection of development encourages a completely different idea in 18.c4!?. Some possibilities include 18...dxc4? 19.♘xd7+ ♘xd7 20.d5, winning, and 18...♘xd4 19.a5 ♕b4 20.♗xd4 ♗xe5 21.♗xe5 ♕xd2 22.c5 when with two bishops and Black's backward development, Stockfish assesses a decisive advantage for White.
I don't think Fischer saw this idea, and I haven't seen it suggested by any annotators. I suspect he wouldn't have thought it worth the bother. As we have seen time and time again, Fischer always preferred clear, strategic continuations.

18...♗e8

The pesky pawn move again sinks Black in the line 18...♘xe5 19.fxe5 ♗xe5 20.a5!.

19.♗f2 ♕c7

Timman suggests Black could have defended more tenaciously with 19...g6,



analysis diagram

preparing to bring the king to g7. I find this comment a bit strange as Jan's 'great predecessors' both salivated over piece sacrifices here. It was actually Kasparov with early 21st-century tech who got it wrong:
A) 20.♗xg6 fxg6 21.♘xg6+ ♔g7 22.♘xh8 ♔xh8 23.f5 is not clear; Black has several options here.
B) Fischer, with stone knives and bearskins, called it correctly with 20.f5! gxf5 21.♗xf5 exf5 22.♕xf5, and now Kasparov's proposed defense 22...♔g7 does survive after 23.♕xc8? ♘e7 or 23.♗h4? ♗xe5, but not after 23.♘ec4!! dxc4 24.♗h4 and White has a winning attack; for example, 24...♘d7 25.♘xc4 ♕c7 26.♗f6+ ♔f8 27.♗xh8 or 24...♗e7 25.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 26.♕xf6+ ♔g8 27.♖ae1 ♕d8 28.♕f4.

20.♗h4 ♘g8?!

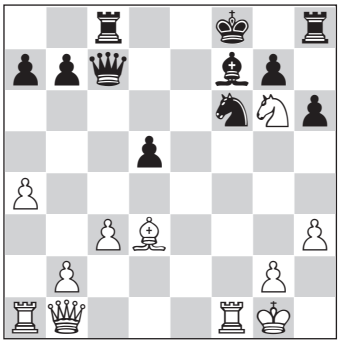
Such abject passivity can hardly be recommended. Black could have tried to battle it out with 20...♘h5 21.f5 (21.g4? ♘xf4 22.♖xf4 g5 turns the tables) 21...♘xe5 22.dxe5 ♗c5+ 23.♔h1 ♕xe5 24.fxe6 ♗d6! 25.♘f3 ♕g3+ 26.♕xg3 ♕xg3, and Black is close

to solving all his problems. White might do better to build with 21.♕e1, when 21...g5!? 22.fxg5 hxg5 23.♕xg5 ♘xe5 24.dxe5 ♕xe5 25.♘f3 is still unpleasant for Black but with chances to fight.

21.f5 ♘xe5 22.dxe5 ♗xe5 23.fxe6 ♗f6

23...f6 would be a slightly different type of suffering.

24.exf7 ♗xf7 25.♘f3 ♗xh4 26.♘xh4 ♘f6 27.♘g6+!



We have another quintessential Fischer move, believing in the power of the bishop over the knight in this open position. This book contains three defeats of Petrosian, and in all of them Fischer triumphs with a bishop over a knight.

27...♗xg6 28.♗xg6 ♔e7

Well, Petrosian is known for his king marches! Bringing the king to the middle, and hopefully the queenside, represents his best chance now.

29.♕f5 ♔d8 30.♖ae1 ♕c5+ 31.♔h1 ♖f8

Both players advocated 31...♖c6, but it wouldn't have changed the outcome: 32.b4 ♕b6 (32...♕d6 33.b5, and after chasing the rook off, White brings the rook into e6 and wins; 32...♕f8 33.b5 ♖d6 34.c4 dxc4 35.♕e5 ♔c8 36.♖d1 and the king is in a deadly crossfire) 33.a5 ♕c7 34.c4! ♖xc4 35.b5 ♖f8 36.♕e6 ♖c5 37.b6 axb6 38.axb6 ♕d7 39.♕e5 ♖c6 40.♕b8+ ♕c8 41.♕g3! ♕d7 42.♕a3, and wins.

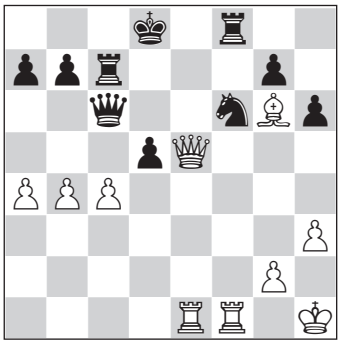
32.♕e5!

This nice centralization efficiently traps the black king.

32...♖c7

32...♕c7 is nicely met by 33.♕xd5+!.

33.b4 ♕c6 34.c4!



Busting open the center ends any resistance.

34...dxc4 35.♗f5 ♖ff7 36.♖d1+ ♖fd7 37.♗xd7 ♖xd7 38.♕b8+ ♔e7 39.♖de1+ 1-0

It's mate after 39.♖de1+ ♔f7 40.♕e8#. This may have been the most important game of Fischer's career! This ego boost carried Fischer through the year, his most prolific and productive one to date. First up was the 'Tournament of Peace'. Fischer racked up 13/17, taking first place by two points over Vlastimil Hort.