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Endgame Virtuoso Magnus Carlsen

Volume 2

The World Champion Shows His Superior Skills

New In Chess 2023

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PREFACE

The Best and Most Artistic Endgames of the World Champion in 2018-2022

Magnus Carlsen became the world's number one chess player in 2010 and ever since he has been the dominating player in the world. In chess, one has to be very versatile to become a world-class player and especially versatile to earn the unofficial title of world number one.

Computers have fundamentally changed our game forever, and Magnus is the first World Champion who started playing chess when computers already had a reasonable level, and whose career was affected by computers virtually from the start. The programs have affected chess in that they minimized the advantage one can obtain in the opening, and more equal positions in regular games generate longer games and more endgames. Computers have eased chess learning and have helped humans to understand chess better. They did not only improve our understanding in the opening and the middlegame, but raised our level in the endgame as well.

Playing endgames on an artistic level was one of the key elements of Carlsen's incredible success from early on in his career. It is very hard to compare giant players from different eras, but whichever way we choose, the Norwegian grandmaster is one of the greatest players of all time and certainly the very best of his generation. His exceptional endgame skill brought him not only countless points, but also several vital wins in his battles for the world crown. If he had not beaten Teimour Radjabov at the finish of the Candidates Tournament in London in 2013, possibly he would have had to wait for several more years to obtain the title. Saving the piece-down ending of the sixth game in his World Championship Match against Fabiano Caruana was important for retaining his title. In addition, his superior endgame play enabled him to win the vital first game of the play-off of that match. His first and key win against Ian Nepomniachtchi in his last title defence match took place in an endgame.

In my opinion, only Anatoly Karpov was as fantastic at endgames as Carlsen is. Actually, when it comes to saving difficult endgames, the Norwegian player is possibly the best ever. Bobby Fischer was also great at this, but the American played much fewer games.

New in Chess published my first *Endgame Virtuoso Magnus Carlsen* book that covered his career until 2018. I believe that in these couple of years

since this first book, Magnus produced enough new endgames to make it worthwhile to have a close look at these endgames as well, especially as the Norwegian World Champion has been able to maintain his incredible level in endgame play. In addition, Carlsen has played so many rapid and blitz games in recent years, it is worth looking closely at them too.

Computer engines have surely improved Carlsen's understanding of the endgame, so looking at his endgames with this modern tool enables us to dive more deeply into his endgame treatment. Sometimes it is inevitable that I go a bit deeper in my analyses, but it is my intention to explain the concepts with words as well.

The success of the first book generated the idea of coming up with a second volume. In many ways, this book is the same as the first one – the way I analysed these masterpieces has not changed. But I have added a few more texts about his tournament performances and the progress he made in them, less so about his rapid and blitz tournaments. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to interview Peter Heine Nielsen, who works for Magnus and was his second at five world championship matches. His words have certainly raised the level of my work.

World champions whom we rightly admire – Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, even Fischer (I intentionally restrict myself to the names of the giants I have been fortunate to write books about) – were clearly the best players in the world for less than five years only. Magnus has been the best for at least a decade and, believe me, he produced many more fantastic endgames than anybody ever did in such a relatively short time span. It is very much worthwhile to devote a new volume to what he has created in the endgame in this very recent period.

You can learn a lot from Magnus Carlsen's best endgames, but you can also just enjoy them – they often provide artistic pleasure. If you already like endgames, then you will enjoy this book. If not, I still suggest you read it; you may start liking them.

Tibor Karolyi
Soltvadkert, February 2023

CHAPTER 2

2019: big payoff

The huge work Carlsen and his team had invested for the Caruana match affected his results in the next year, and it paid off. But surely that was not the only element of his stunning accomplishments; probably, Magnus was not fully satisfied with his results from the last two years.

Carlsen was phenomenal for the greatest part of this year. He played more or less the same events as the year before, and won them all. The biggest gap he created was two points in a mere nine games, at the Gashimov Memorial. In some rare cases, first place was tied. Magnus was invulnerable now – he lost not a single game with a classical time control throughout the whole year. His exceptional performances were reflected in his Elo rating, which rose to 2872.

Carlsen finished the year phenomenally as well. He won the World Rapid Championship, and that was not all: he was victorious at the World Blitz Championship, too. It was a year such as even the greatest of champions will only rarely produce.

Carlsen's first event in 2019 was the annual Tata Steel Chess Tournament in Wijk aan Zee, a place he has fond memories of. As a 13-year-old boy, he achieved his first grandmaster norm there, and he had already won it a record six times.

He started Tata Steel with four fighting draws. Timman wrote something interesting in *New In Chess* magazine: 'After three draws he seemed to have made a principled decision: accepting his relative lack of form, he could concentrate on winning endgames. His intended motto may have gone something like this: no more heavy-duty opening preparation, go for equal positions and wait for your opponent to make a mistake.'

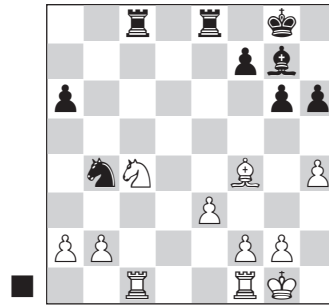
In live Elo points, after the fourth draw in a row Magnus was only three points above Caruana. In Game 5, he beat Jorden van Foreest convincingly. In the next game, Mamedyarov sacrificed two pieces for a rook and two pawns. The position was balanced for a long time, but in the endgame the Azeri grandmaster made a losing move and Carlsen punished him for it. Timman analysed it for *New In Chess*, finishing with the remark, 'Especially psychologically, this was a strong game.'

In the next round, Fedoseev won a pawn, and this was the only game in which Magnus was in danger of losing.

Game 16

Vladimir Fedoseev
Magnus Carlsen

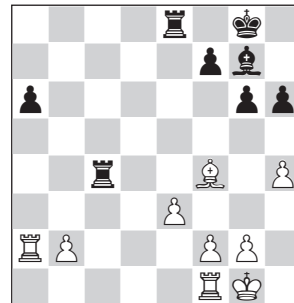
Wijk aan Zee 2019



26...dxa2

Carlsen naturally reduces the number of pawns and aims to liquidate all White's queenside pawns.

27.♖a1 ♜xc4 28.♞xa2



28...♙e5!

Exchanging light pieces and simplifying into rook endgames usually helps the defender.

29.b3

On 29.♙xh6, 29...♜xh4 holds.

29...♜b4 30.♙xe5 ♜xe5

31.♞xa6 ♜xb3

It is an accomplishment to eat up all of White's queenside pawns,

but White's two rooks can cause problems in some cases, so it is too early to relax.

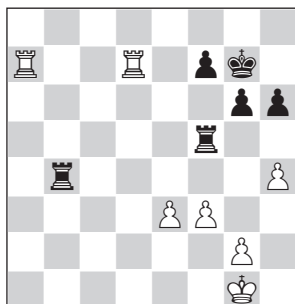
32. ♖d1 ♜b4

Carlsen forces matters. Black could also have held in a somewhat passive way with 32...♞b7 33.g4 ♜e4 34.♞d4 ♞xd4 35.exd4 ♞b4 36.♞d6 ♝f8 and White cannot win.

33. ♞d7 ♝g7

Reducing the number of pawns by 33...♞xh4?! was possible, but it would help White: 34.♞f6 ♞f5 (34...♞eh5 35.f4) 35.♞dxh7 ♞xf6 36.♞xf6 ♝g7 37.♞d6. Black can probably hold this, but it would be a long ordeal for him at least.

34. ♞aa7 ♞f5 35.f3



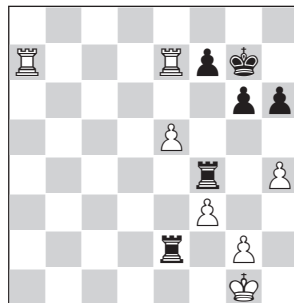
35... ♞b2!

Timman: 'A strong little move that keeps the king in place.' Slightly surprisingly, 35...♞xh4? would have lost to 36.e4! ♞f6 37.g3! ♞h5 38.f4! ♞b5 39.e5 ♞f5 40.e6. But Black has another effective defensive plan, keeping one rook on f6 or f5 and the other on e6. Black has time for this: 35...♞f6 36.e4 ♞bb6! 37.♝h2 (37.e5 ♞f5 38.♞e7 ♝f8 and Black holds) 37...♞be6 (37...h5) 38.♞a8 ♞a6 and Black can defend.

36.e4 ♞f4 37.e5 ♞e2

37...♞b6 38.♞e7 ♝f8 would have saved the draw as well.

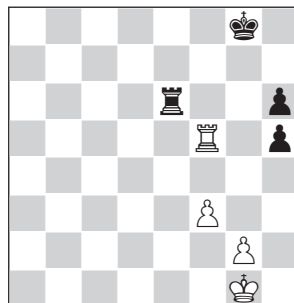
38. ♞e7



38... ♞f5!

Timman: 'Black temporarily sacrifices a second pawn in order to get a theoretical endgame.'

39.e6 ♝f8 40.♞xf7+ ♞xf7 41.♞xf7+ ♝g8 42.♞e7 ♝f8 43.♞f7+ ♝g8 44.h5 gxh5 45.♞f5 ♞xe6



46. ♞xh5

Timman writes: 'As he pointed out at the final press conference, Carlsen was very satisfied with his well-calculated defence in this endgame.' Now it is a theoretical draw.

46... ♝g7 47.♝f2 ♞a6 48.g4 ♞a2+ 49.♝g3 ♞a3 50.♞d5 ♝f6 51.♝f4 ♞a4+ 52.♝e3 ♞a1 53.f4 ♞g1

54. ♖d6+ ♔g7 55. ♖f3 ♕e1 56. ♖b6
 ♖g1 57. ♕e6 ♖a1 58. ♖e4 ♖a4+
 59. ♖f5 ♖a5+ 60. ♕e5 ♖a7 61. ♖d5
 ♖f7+ 62. ♖e4 ♕e7+ 63. ♖d4 ♕e1
 64. ♖d7+ ♖f6 65. ♖d6+ ♖g7 66. ♖d5
 ♖g1 67. ♖e6 ♖xg4 68. ♖d7+ ♖g8
 69. f5 ♖f4 70. ♖f6 ♖f1 71. ♖d8+ ♖h7
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 1/2-1/2

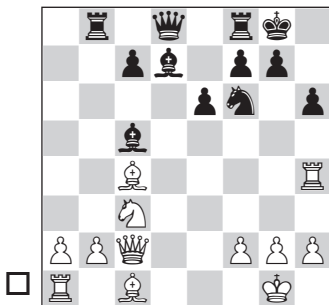
In an eventful game with Vishy Anand, the Indian legend got close to a draw in a knight ending, but at move 70 he blundered the game in one move. The Indian grandmaster called it a disaster. Possibly his age played a role. When he was young he must have beaten great players in a similar way.

We join the game with Duda fairly early on.

Game 17

Magnus Carlsen Jan-Krzysztof Duda

Wijk aan Zee 2019



17. ♖xh6!

Carlsen's piece sacrifice leads to an endgame.

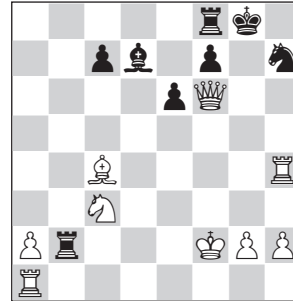
17... ♖xh6 18. ♖d2 ♖h7!

Black can reach the ensuing endgame with several different knight moves. On 18...h5?, White's most precise win is 19. ♖g5+ ♖h8 20. ♖h6+ ♖g8 21. ♖e4.

19. ♖xh6 ♖xf2+!

This sacrifice, which has to be accepted, keeps Black in the game.

20. ♖xf2 ♖f6+ 21. ♖xf6 ♖xb2+!



This intermediate move restores the material balance, but still it doesn't fully equalize.

22. ♖g1!

In endgames, kings stand well in the centre, but this time this is the right place for the white king. After 22. ♖e3 ♖xf6 23. ♖f1 ♖g7, Black would equalize as the g2-pawn is hanging.

22... ♖xf6 23. ♖f1!

As Peter Heine Nielsen, Carlsen's helper, commented after the game, Magnus had prepared this and knew that the sacrifice on h6 was advantageous for White. The position looks innocent for Black, but it isn't.

23... ♖g7?!

Duda gives material for the purpose of neutralizing White's attack.

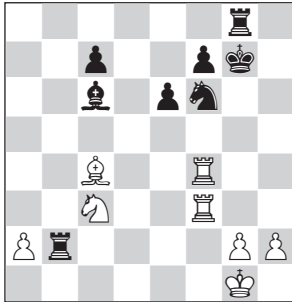
Possibly, he guessed that he had

fallen for Carlsen's preparation and wanted to surprise his opponent. But his move is not optimal. After Black's best move, White's advantage is smaller: 23...♖e8 24.♖f3 f5 25.♖g3+ ♘g7 26.♖e2 ♖c2 and Black stops the unpleasant ♖f4 or ♖d4.

24. ♖f3 ♖g8 25. ♖hf4!

Both sides aim to attack, but White's punch hurts first.

25... ♖c6



26. ♖xf6!

If 26.♖g3+?, 26...♖h8! is the more precise king move (26...♖f8 27.♖xg8+ (on 27.♖xf6, Black wins back the piece on the c-file) 27...♖xg8 28.♖f2 and White has a small edge): 27.♖xg8+ ♘xg8 and Black holds.

26... ♖xf3 27. ♖xf3

Carlsen has obtained two light pieces for a rook. His advantage is almost decisive, but the win is not certain.

27... ♖d8!

Duda correctly activates his second rook.

28. ♖f2

White could have considered pushing the a-pawn quickly: 28.a4 ♖c2 (28...♖dd2 29.♖f1) and after

29.a5 ♖c1+ 30.♖f2 ♖d2+ 31.♖e2 ♖a1 32.a6 ♖c2 Black is likely to defend, but White has an improvement along the way: he would keep an edge after 29.h3!.

28... ♖b4

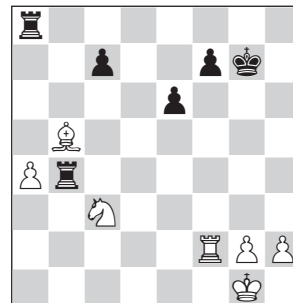
I prefer 28...♖dd2!? 29.♖xd2 ♖xd2 30.♖b3 ♖g6 when perhaps Black has slightly better chances to draw than White has to win. It's a close call.

29. ♖b5?!

Magnus plays for a wrong idea, misjudging something that is hidden under the surface. The subtle 29.♖f1!! would have been stronger. White aims to play ♖c2 and push the a-pawn. After 29...♖d6 30.♖b5!! c6 31.♖f1, White is likely to convert his advantage.

29... ♖a8 30.a4?!

30.♖c2! ♖a5 (on 30...c6, 31.♖e2 wins) 31.♖e2 ♖c5 32.♖f2 and White could press.



30...c6!

Nielsen wrote: 'Magnus underestimated Black's strong resource at move 30.'

31. ♖e2

On 31.♖xc6, 31...♖c8! wins a piece. Duda diverts the bishop to force the

white knight to defend the a-pawn for a while.

31...♖a5?!

The other rook should control the a-pawn from behind: 31...♜b3! 32.♜f3 ♖a3 and it would be very hard for White to make progress; for example, 33.♔f2 ♜b8! 34.♙d1 ♜b2+ 35.♗e2 ♖a1 and Black should be able to hold.

32.♜f3

The rook will have a glorious role in this game. My guess is that even Magnus did not anticipate this yet.

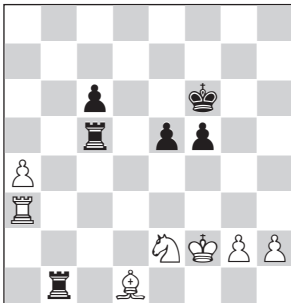
32...f5 33.♔f2 ♜c5 34.♙d1

The bishop takes over the knight's duty of defending the a-pawn.

34...e5?!

Pushing the pawn allows White to improve his rook, but it requires skill to uncover it: 34...♜b2+! 35.♔f1 ♜e5 36.♜f2 (36.♗e2 ♜b1) 36...♜b4 and Black has chances of salvation after 37.♖a2 ♜f4+ or 37.♜e2 ♜c5.

35.♗e2! ♔f6 36.♖a3! ♜b1



37.♔e1!

The king stops Black's play against White's light pieces.

37...e4?!

This gives up the f4-square, but 37...♖a5 would have been almost

equally difficult to defend; for instance, 38.h4 ♖a7 39.♗c3 ♜b2 and White has good chances to win with 40.g3 or 40.♙e2.

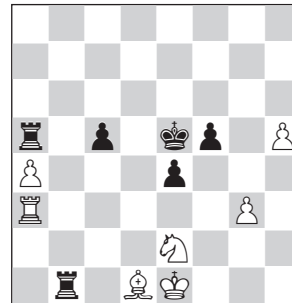
38.g3?!

On 38.a5? ♜bb5 39.a6 ♖a5! Black wins the white a-pawn. But pushing the h-pawn would have been stronger: 38.h4! ♖a5 39.h5 ♔g5 (39...♔g7 loses to 40.♖a2! ♔h6 41.♗c3) 40.♜g3+ ♔h6 41.♗f4 ♖xa4 42.♗e6 ♖aa1 43.♜g6+ ♔h7 44.♗g5+ ♔h8 45.♜d6 and White wins.

38...♔e5! 39.h4 ♖a5! 40.h5 c5?

This pawn move locks out the rook on a5.

Instead, 40...♖a7 would have kept both rooks active: 41.a5?! (41.♗c3 ♜b8 and Black has decent chances to escape) 41...♜b5 42.a6 ♜b6 43.♖a5+ ♜b5 44.♖a4 ♜b6 45.h6 ♔f6 46.h7 ♔g7 47.♗d4 ♜bxa6 48.♗xf5+ ♔xh7 49.♖xe4 ♖a1! 50.♗e3 ♖7a2. Thanks to his active rooks, Black may hold.



41.♔d2!

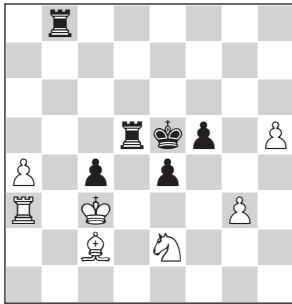
Carlsen improves his king.

41...c4 42.♔c2 ♜b8 43.♔c3

If 43.♗f4, 43...♔d4 could have been played.

43...♜b1?!

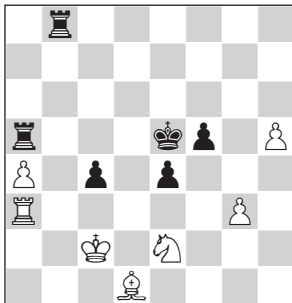
Duda misses a chance to invade on the second rank with 43...♖d5! 44.♙c2 and now:



analysis diagram

44...♜bd8!! 45.♞a1 (after 45.a5 ♜d2 46.♟f4 ♜f2!, Black's rooks are active enough to keep the balance) 45...♜d2! 46.♞e1 ♜2d3+ 47.♙xd3 cxd3 48.♟f4 ♜c8+ 49.♚d2 ♚d4 and Black defends.

44. ♙c2 ♜b8



45. ♙c1!

Carlsen finds a way to make progress by vacating the c2-square.

45... ♜b6 46. ♙c2 ♜d6 47. ♟f4!!

Carlsen finds no way to push the a-pawn, so he changes his plan. Objectively, this new plan can be thwarted by Black, but it is still a fantastic idea. On 47.♞a2, 47...♜b6 (47...♞a8? 48.♜b2) 48.♟f4 ♚d4

would resist. We will see one of the points of the text at move 52.

47... ♜c5?

With 47...♞a7! 48.♞e3 ♜g7, Black could have held by tying the rook to the defence of the g3-pawn.

48. ♞e3!

Carlsen sticks to his plan. If 48.♞a2, Black has other ways to improve the rook, trying to invade on the b-file: 48...♜b6! or 48...♜cc6! as well. But on 48...c3?, 49.♙b3 would have been strong, and on 48...♚d4? White has 49.♙d1!.

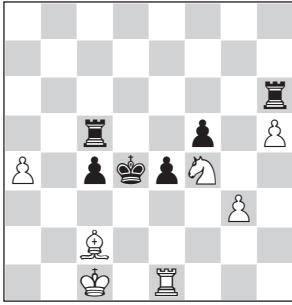
Or if 48.♞a1 ♚d4 (48...♜b6?! 49.♚d2!) 49.♚d2 c3+ 50.♙e2 ♙c4 and White would be only a bit better.

48... ♚d4

48...♜d8 49.♞e1! ♜d6 50.♞h1! (here we see the point of Carlsen's rook moves) 50...♜c7! (50...♜cc6? 51.♟g2!; 50...♜c8? 51.h6) 51.♟g2 ♜d3 52.♞h3 (52.♙xd3 cxd3+ 53.♙b2 ♚d4 is a draw) 52...♜f3 53.h6 ♞h7 54.♟f4 ♜f1+ 55.♚d2 ♜f3 and Black has chances to hold.

49. ♞e1 ♞h6?

Duda misses a golden opportunity to improve his king, which would have enabled his d-rook to invade on the second rank: 49...♙c3! 50.♟e2+ (after 50.♞h1 ♜d2 or 50.♞e2 ♜c8 51.♜f2 (51.♞h2 ♜g8) 51...♙b4 52.♟e2 ♜d5, Black should not worry) 50...♙b4 (Black makes it much more difficult for White to improve his position than in the game) 51.♜f1 ♜cd5 52.♙b2 e3 (if 52...♜d2?!, 53.♜xf5! wins) 53.♜f3 ♜e5 and Black holds.



50. ♔d2!

Carlsen improves his king and pushes back Black's pieces.

50... ♖e5 51. ♘e2+ ♔c5 52. ♖h1!

Covering the h5-pawn and thus getting ready for ♔c3. I suspect that Carlsen anticipated this transfer when he played his 47th move.

52... ♖e8

If 52... ♗b4, 53. ♖b1+ (53. ♔e3!)

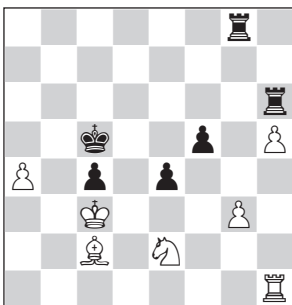
53... ♗a5 54. ♘f4 would have won.

53. ♔c3!

The king is superbly placed on c3.

53... ♖g8

On 53... ♖b8, 54. ♘d4 wins.



54. ♖b1!

The rook is now strong on another file, and White is helped by a small tactic.

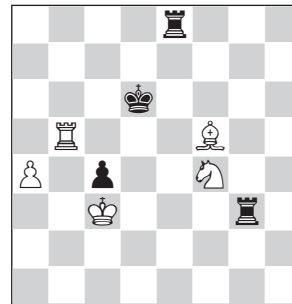
54... ♖xh5 55. ♗xe4! ♖e8 56. ♘f4!

Carlsen finds a tactical idea which wins another pawn.

56... ♖g5 57. ♖b5+ ♔d6

58. ♗xf5 ♖xg3+

Black takes White's second-to-last pawn, forcing White to play accurately.



59. ♔d4!!

This is Magnus at his magical best.

He stops ... ♖e5 and, importantly, moves closer to Black's king to attack instead of grabbing Black's last pawn.

According to Nielsen, taking was possible, but this time this is an analysis mistake by the very strong grandmaster. It would be interesting to know whether he discussed the game with Magnus: 59. ♔xc4? ♖e5 60. ♖d5+ (60. ♖b6+ ♔c7 61. ♖b5 ♔d6 is a repetition only) 60... ♖xd5 61. ♘xd5 ♖a3 62. ♘c3 ♔c6! and according to the tablebases, this position is a draw.

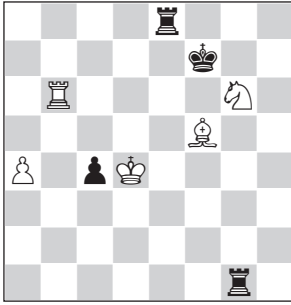
59... ♖g1

If 59... ♖e1, 60. ♖b6+ ♔e7 61. ♘d5+ wins.

60. ♖b6+ ♔e7 61. ♘g6+

61. ♘d5+ ♔f7 62. a5 would have won as well.

61... ♔f7



62. ♖e5+

Magnus sends the black king far away.

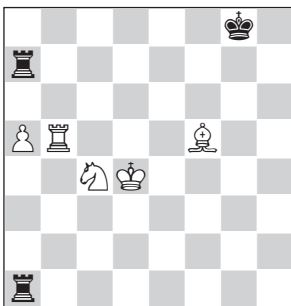
62... ♜g8

On 62... ♖e7, 63. ♖b7+ wins as on 63... ♖f6, 64. ♖f7+ ♖g5 65. ♗f3+ would be decisive, or 63... ♖f8 64. ♖f7+ ♖g8 65. ♗h7+.

63. ♗xc4

On 63.a5??, 63... ♖d1+! would have worked.

63... ♖a8 64.a5 ♖a1 65. ♖b5 ♖a7



66. ♗e4

Magnus threatens to trap the rook with ♗b7. 66. ♖c5 would have won as well.

66... ♖c7

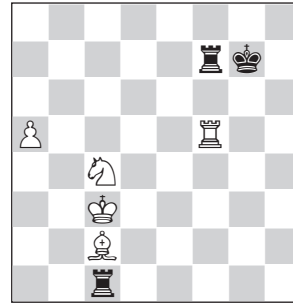
The rook cuts off the king.

67. ♖f5 ♖g7 68. ♗c2 ♖c1

On 68... ♖c8, Nielsen shows an instructive line: 69. ♖b5 ♖f8

70. ♖c3 ♖a2 71. ♗b3 ♖a1 72. ♖b4 ♖e7 73. ♖b7+ ♖f6 74. ♗a3 ♖c6 (74... ♖a8 75. ♖b6+ (75. ♗c4? ♖xa5) 75... ♖e7 76.a6) 75. ♖b6 ♖xb6+ 76.axb6 and White wins.

69. ♖c3 ♖f7



70. ♖xf7+! ♖xf7 71. ♗a3! 1-0

White has six winning moves, but not all moves will do. For example, if it were Black to move, ... ♖e7 would draw.

Duda could have forced Carlsen to checkmate him with bishop and knight. As a young player I was told that a candidate master surely can solve this problem, but I can recall that Bela Lengyel, a decent IM, was not able to checkmate his opponent within 50 moves in a regular game.

Carlsen won the event for a record seventh time, scoring 9 points out of 13 games. He won three endgames.

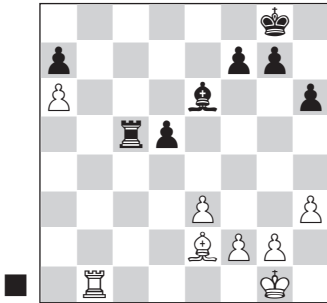
Carlsen continued the year at the Gashimov Memorial in the Azeri capital. In round two, he played Anand, and again he got an endgame against his predecessor.

Game 18

Magnus Carlsen

Viswanathan Anand

Shamkir 2019

**29...g6?!**

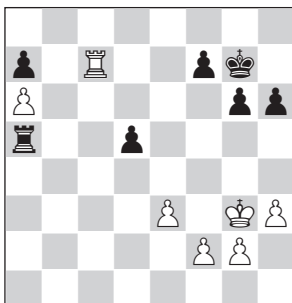
Anand's move allows Carlsen to play on. Keeping an eye on the a6-pawn with 29...♙c8! would have prevented any squeezing; for example, 30.♖b8 g6 31.♙g4 (31.♖a8 ♜c7) 31...f5 32.♙f3 ♙g7 33.♙xd5 ♙xa6 and Black holds easily.

30.♖b7 ♜c1+ 31.♙h2 ♜c2

32.♙b5 ♜b2!

Pinning the bishop is the only way to avoid losing.

33.♙g3 ♙c8 34.♖b8 ♙g7 35.♜xc8 ♜xb5 36.♜c7 ♖a5

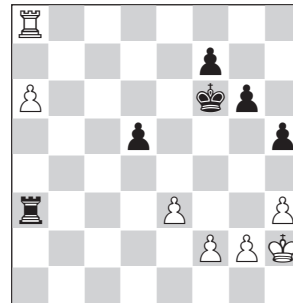
**37.♖xa7**

Carlsen wins a pawn, forcing Anand to play precisely.

37...♙f6??

After the superb 37...♖a3!!, Black threatens to push the d-pawn: 38.♙f3 (in case of 38.♙f4 ♙f6! 39.f3 ♖a2, Black holds) 38...d4 39.♙e2 dxe3 40.fxe3 ♙f6 41.♙d2 ♙g5 42.♙c2 and Black can defend with several moves; for example, both 42...f5 and 42...♙h4 are fairly simple.

38.♖a8 ♖a3 39.♙h2 h5

**40.a7!**

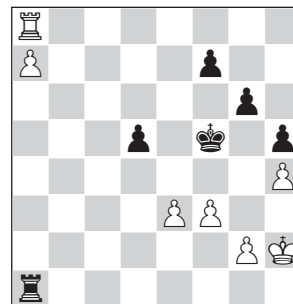
White takes a responsible decision. Black can't save the d-pawn.

40...♖a2

After 40...h4 41.g4 hxg3+ 42.fxg3 White wins by walking with the king towards the d-pawn.

41.h4 ♙f5 42.f3 ♖a1

42...♙f6 loses to 43.♙g1.

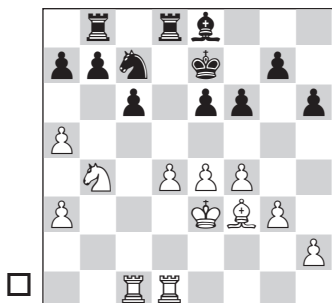
**43.g3 1-0**

Game 102

Magnus Carlsen

Vincent Keymer

Almaty Wch Rapid 2022



Magnus has several good position-building moves like 28.h4, 28.♖c5 or 28.♗d3, but he takes action:

28.e5 ♘d5+?!

Impatiently, the German grandmaster tries to ease the pressure. 28...♗dc8!, to prepare the knight move, was better, for example, 29.♗d2 ♘d5+ 30.♙xd5 cxd5 31.♗dc2 ♙d7. Black would have been clearly worse, but he would still have had reasonable drawing chances.

29.♙xd5 cxd5 30.♖c7+ ♗d7

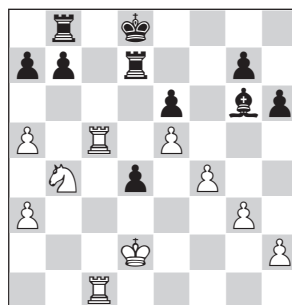
31.♗dc1 fxe5

It is not clear who would benefit by closing the position with 31...f5, but Black has no time for it as 32.a6 wins.

32.dxe5 ♙d8 33.♗7c5 d4+

After this push, Black may lose the d-pawn, but waiting passively would be almost hopeless; for instance, 33...♙g6 34.♙d4 ♙f5 (34...♙e8 35.f5) 35.a6 ♙e8 (35...♗a8 36.a4) 36.♖c8+ ♗xc8 37.♖xc8+ ♙e7 38.♙c5 and White wins.

34.♙d2 ♙g6

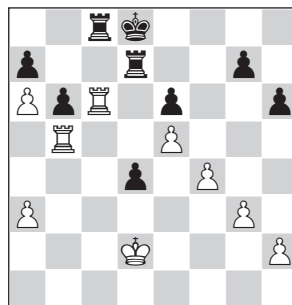


35.a6

Carlsen tries to invade on the queenside. 35.g4 ♙e4 36.f5 would have won as well.

35...♙e4 36.♗b5 b6 37.♘c6+ ♙xc6 38.♗xc6 ♖c8?

Black could have created some play on the kingside with 38...♙e7 39.♗b1 ♗f8 40.♙d3 g5 41.♗f1 h5. After 42.♖cc1, Black should be lost, but it would have been better than the game.



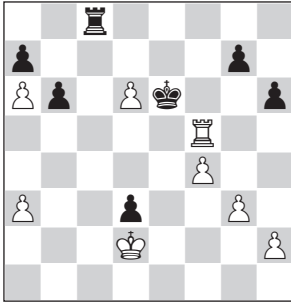
39.♗xe6

Carlsen has several easy wins. 39.♗xc8+ ♙xc8 40.a4 ♙c7 41.♙d3 would also have won effortlessly.

39...d3 40.♗d6

Exchanging a pair of rooks is the simplest.

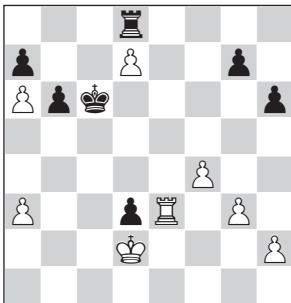
40...♗xd6 41.exd6 ♙d7 42.♗f5 ♙e6



43.d7

This pawn paralyses Black.

43...♖d8 44.♗e5+ ♔d6 45.♗e3 ♚c6



46.♗xd3

The black passed pawn falls, and now the white king invades.

46...♚b5 47.♚e3 ♚xa6 48.♚e4 ♚b7 1-0

After a last-round blitzkrieg demolition of Maghsoodloo, Carlsen won the event scoring 10 points out of 13 games. Keymer and Caruana tied second/third with 8½ points.

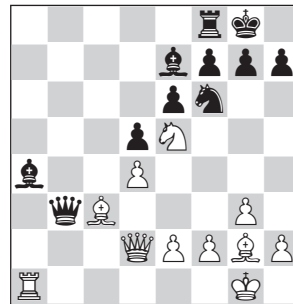
It seems Carlsen is still the best, but this event suggests that the gap with others is narrowing. But of course, who knows what happens when Magnus plays at his magical best?

Carlsen started the World Blitz Championship with two convincing wins. The third game was a closer call.

Game 103

**Ivan Cheparinov
Magnus Carlsen**

Almaty Wch Blitz 2022



21.♙b2

Cheparinov exchanges queens. He could also have played 21.♘d3 ♘e4 22.♙xe4 dxe4 23.♘c5 ♙xc5 24.dxc5 resulting in a dead draw.

21...♗c8 22.♙xb3 ♙xb3 23.♙e1

23.♖a7 was more active.

23...♙d6

Magnus plays on; he might take on e5 to unbalance the position a bit.

24.♗b1 ♙c2 25.♗b7

Cheparinov doesn't mind the exchange. 25.♖c1 would have been pretty drawish.

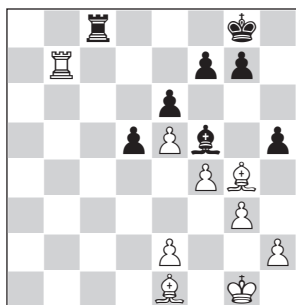
25...♙xe5 26.dxe5 ♘g4 27.f4

27.♙c3 would have been safer, but Cheparinov's move is perfectly fine.

27...h5 28.♙f3 ♙f5 29.♙xg4?

After this careless capture, White's position becomes passive. 29.h3 ♖c1 30.hxg4 hxg4 31.♚f2 gxf3 32.exf3

♖c2+ 33.♔e3 must be a draw. Also after 29.♙f2, it is hard to imagine a way for Carlsen to play for a win.



29...hxg4!

This capture gives slightly more practical chances. In the next moves, Carlsen improves his king quite a bit.

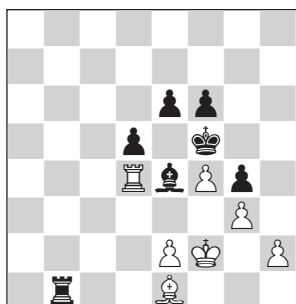
30.♖b2 ♖c1 31.♔f2 ♔h7 32.♞d2 ♞b1 33.♞d4 ♔g6 34.♙d2 ♙e4 35.♙e1 ♔f5 36.♞d2

Cheparinov just waits and says to his opponent: ‘Try to win this if you can.’ 36.♖b4! ♖c1 37.♖b7! would have forced Carlsen to defend something and would have held fairly easily.

36...f6!

Magnus gets the upper hand by changing the pawn structure.

37.exf6 gxf6 38.♞d4



38...e5!

Carlsen creates a pawn majority in the centre, which is a bit of an accomplishment. White’s pawn majority on the kingside has no importance.

On 38...♖b2, 39.♔f1 would have been the answer.

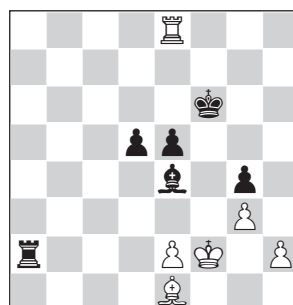
39.fxe5 fxe5 40.♞b4 ♞a1

Depriving White of the c3-square with 40...♖c1!? looked a bit stronger.

41.♞b8 ♞a2

41...d4 was preferable.

42.♞f8+ ♔e6 43.♞e8+ ♔f6



44.♔f1?!

44.♙c3! would have obtained the draw instantly; for example, 44...♖c2 (44...d4 45.♙xd4 exd4 46.♞xe4 d3 is a draw) 45.♙xe5+ ♔f7 46.♞b8 ♙d3 47.♖b2 and White has no problem at all.

44...d4 45.♞f8+!

The Bulgarian grandmaster correctly takes action. The ‘catch me if you can’ attitude no longer works, as the black bishop will move to the a6-f1 diagonal.

45...♔e7 46.♙b4+ ♔e6

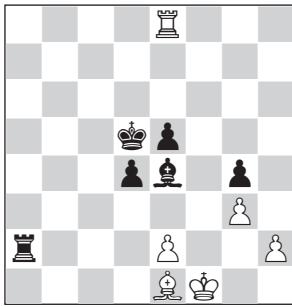
After 46...♔d7 47.♖f6 ♙c2 48.♖d6+, White holds.

47.♞e8+ ♔d5

Magnus plays a sly move, creating a threat.

48. ♖e1??

Cheparinov relaxes for a second; the punishment by Magnus the Executioner will be very heavy. Attacking the e5-pawn would have provided the draw: 48. ♖f8 ♖f5 49. ♖g7 ♖e6. Black could still press, but White has a clear-cut draw with 48. ♖d8+! ♖c4 49. ♖d6! d3 50. exd3+ ♖xd3+ 51. ♖e1.



48... ♖f5!!

Magnus vacates the e4-square for his king. Maybe Ivan just expected 48... ♖c2 to immediately have a go at the e2-pawn. Then, 49. ♖d8+ ♖e4 50. ♖d2 ♖d1 51. ♖e1 would have held.

49. ♖d8+

Black has no defence.

49... ♖e4 50. ♖e8

White can't prevent the bishop getting to the diagonal: 50. ♖d6 ♖c8! (50... ♖e3?! 51. ♖d5 ♖e4 52. ♖a5 and White may hold) 51. ♖g6 ♖d5 and Black wins with ... ♖a6.

50... ♖d7 51. ♖b8 ♖e6 52. ♖b4 ♖c2

Now it is all over.

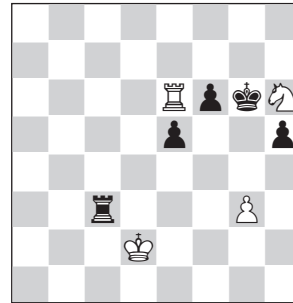
53. ♖a4 ♖c4 0-1

An amazing squeeze!

Game 104

Fabiano Caruana
Magnus Carlsen

Almaty Wch Blitz 2022



49... ♖c8!!

A sly move. Taking White's last pawn would have resulted in an easy draw after 49... ♖xg3 50. ♖g8 ♖f3 51. ♖e2 ♖f4 52. ♖xf6.

50. ♖e3??

Caruana falls for the trick. 50.g4! would have rescued the knight and drawn: 50...h4 (after 50... ♖f8 51. ♖f5 hxg4 52. ♖g3 ♖g5 53. ♖e3, White holds without much trouble) 51. ♖f5 (51. ♖e3 h3 52. ♖f2 ♖h8 53. ♖f5 h2 54. ♖g3 h1 ♖ 55. ♖xh1 ♖xh1 56. ♖g3 is a draw) 51...h3 52. ♖e7 ♖g8 (52... ♖g5 53. ♖h7) 53. ♖e3 h2 54. ♖h4+ ♖h6 55. ♖f5+ and White would be safe.

50... ♖h8! 0-1

Carlsen wins the knight and keeps all his pawns.

Eventually, Magnus won the World Championship scoring 16 points out of 21 games. In nine games that lasted more than 40 moves, Carlsen scored 8 points. His exceptional endgame skill was a key factor in winning this title.