

The Essence of Chess Strategy

Strategic Elements

Volume 1

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Volume 1**

Boroljub Zlatanovic

Thinkers Publishing 2022



Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
☉	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
≈	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
△	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

*To my beloved family
and dear mentors*

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Foreword

I have known Boroljub since childhood. When I think of him, the first word that comes to my mind is “PASSION”. Be it chess or football, the Dunst Opening or the Nimzovich Defense, he always seemed to be able to reach heights due to his devotion and dedication to whatever he was currently busy with. It isn’t surprising that this finally results in his encyclopedic knowledge of whatever area he chooses to focus on. I will mention an interesting episode.

At some point in his life, Boroljub developed an affection for game shows. It didn’t take too long before he became a TV celebrity, giving correct answers to incredibly difficult questions in super diverse areas. I vividly remember almost falling off my chair while I was watching him on “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire“, thinking how can this guy know EVERYTHING?? Quiz show producers simply stopped inviting him under the threat of bankruptcy! When he started teaching, he continued doing it with the same enthusiasm. This sentiment can be felt throughout this book, and together with great material, it gives the reader that little extra something, that can’t be described by words, but only felt.

I really hope that you will enjoy the book, and I recommend that you read through the chapter about “Bad Pieces” attentively – it will bring you quite a few points in the future!

GM Dragan Solak, 2022.

Preface

“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” Sun Tzu

Mostly basing my chess work on this statement of the great Chinese military theoretician, I have managed throughout my chess coaching career to implement many of his principles, and even establish them as being valid for the game of chess. I think the statement above should be taken as an axiom. Thus, strategy must be the leading chess topic, and definitely based on logic. Moreover, strategy must tower over all other chess topics and sub-topics; strategy is the ultimate chess idea and it sublimates and determines other principles.

How to learn strategy? Can it be learned? It can be, of course. And these volumes are the perfect guide to learn (or, more precisely, to learn to understand) strategy.

My idea is to throw light on all the strategic concepts in these volumes. To help you navigate more simply, I have divided all the material into two volumes. This first one is exploring the elements of strategy, explaining typical and essential principles in detail. The second one is about pawn structures. Of course, structures themselves actually mean nothing without recognizing patterns and principles from the elements (because pawn structures are used to determine the values of pieces, for instance). That is why volume two can be considered as an advanced level of strategy. Generally, examples will be based on material adopted from volume one and upgraded.

Volume one is divided into nine chapters and the titles suggest the topic explained in detail. Examples are arranged from less to more complex and I recommend that the reader not skip examples inside the chapters. Moreover, I would ask the reader to go through the chapters in the order in which they are presented in the book, because the most important topics come first. For instance, centralization is the leading principle and it must be kept in mind while working on other topics!

Dear reader, I hope you will recognize the passion, love and devotion I have put into these volumes. Moreover, I hope you will help me to get better in future, so please email any ideas and suggestions to me at borzlat@gmail.com.

Boroljub Zlatanovic, Serbia, 2022.



The Center

I, together with many eminent strategists, consider the center as the ultimate strategic element. And thus, centralization as the ultimate strategic principle. It is a well-known fact that domination (or at least good control) of the center is a precondition for a flank attack. But how to gain control of the center? And what to do if the opponent holds the advantage in the center? How to punish anti-centralizing moves? Is it absolutely essential to occupy the center? And how to do that, using pawns or pieces...? Is it good enough to control the center from a distance?

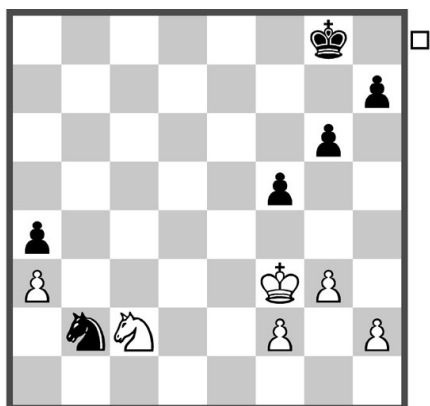
All these questions may look confusing. But do not worry! Dear reader, you will find answers to all these questions and a lot more. You will be fully equipped not only with centralizing concepts, but with all the concomitant principles as well. And, as the ultimate chess idea, centralization will be underlined in all the future chapters, whenever it is important to remind you about its importance and to explore its benefits. I am sure this chapter and this book will help you so much, and centralization based on logic will become your strong strategic weapon.

We will start with some endgame examples, continue with more complex middlegame examples, and eventually present some whole games.



Game 1

♙ Zlatanovic, Boroljub (2270)
 ♚ Marcetic, Nikola (2295)
 🌐 Yugoslavia 1995



This diagram is from the author's practice. It is evident that White is much better, thanks to his king's activity. The black king simply cannot get to the center as fast as the white one. Moreover, the black knight is in danger of being locked out. Both the black pieces are so passive, and this makes the evaluation clear. The exposed a4-pawn just aggravates Black's problems. But, I am sure, even without such an exposed pawn Black would have no serious chances to hold – White's superb centralization gives him chances on both flanks.

33. ♙e3

White naturally uses his active king before the black king enters the center.

33... ♔f7?!

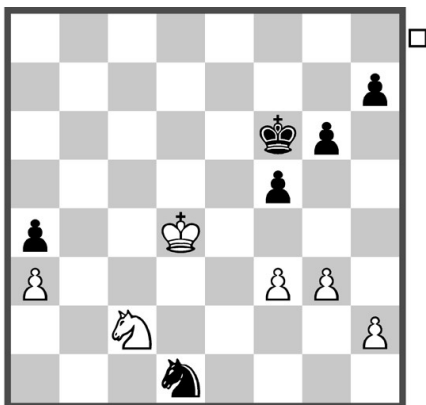
A natural move, which makes White's task simpler.

33... ♞c4+ would be a better defense. Still, after 34. ♔d4 ♞d2 35. ♔d3! ♞f3 36. h4 followed by attacking the a4-pawn White will be set for victory.

34. ♔d4 ♞d1

34... ♔e6 35. ♞e3! Black will lose his knight!

35. f3 ♔f6



Position after: 35... ♔f6

36. ♞b4!

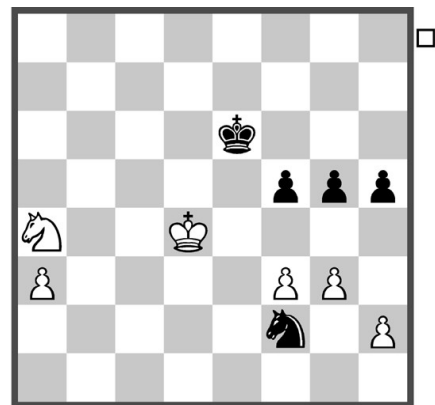
White's king is perfect in the center. It paralyzes both the black knight and the black king. So the white knight must collect the a4-pawn. It goes to

attack that pawn with the help of a check.

36... g5 37. ♞d5+ ♔e6 38. ♞b6 h5

Black tries to organize something, but there is no real action on the kingside. Black can only hope to complicate White's task by reducing the pawn material on the kingside.

39. ♞xa4 ♞f2



Position after: 39... ♞f2

40. ♞c5+

Once again White takes care to exclude the black knight from play. Superb centralization makes that possible.

40... ♔d6 41. ♞d3 ♞h3

41... ♞d1 loses after, for instance, 42. f4 g4 43. a4.

42. f4

White wants to keep the black knight out of play forever. There is no sense in rushing to advance the a-pawn. Sooner

or later it will deflect the black king away from the kingside.

42... h4

Trying to complicate.

43. gxh4!

Maybe not so obvious, but it is definitely not complicated to find this move.

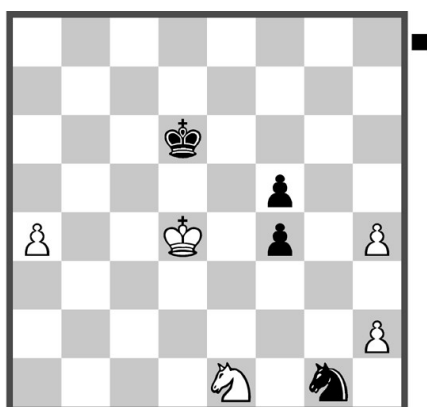
43... gxf4

43... gxh4 44. ♔e3 The knight is lost.

44. a4

Right now. Black is unable to take care simultaneously of both the a- and h-passed pawns.

44... ♞g1 45. ♞e1



Position after: 45. ♞e1

Keeping control of the f3-square.

45... ♞e2+ 46. ♔c4 ♞g1 47. ♔d3

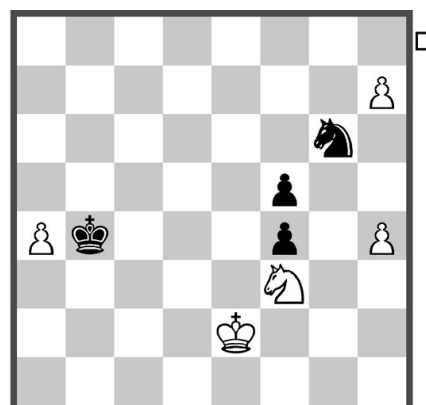
I just continued following the same strategy.

47. h5 would also win easily after, for instance, 47... f3 48. ♞d3 ♞h3 49. h6 ♞g5 50. ♔d4.

47... ♔c5 48. h5!

Now!

48... ♞h3 49. h6 ♞g5 50. h4 ♞f7 51. h7 ♞e5+ 52. ♔e2 ♞g6 53. ♞f3 ♔b4



Position after: 53... ♔b4

Here, being irritated by my opponent's resistance to the very end, I allowed myself to do something I would never advise to anyone else.

54. ♞e5?

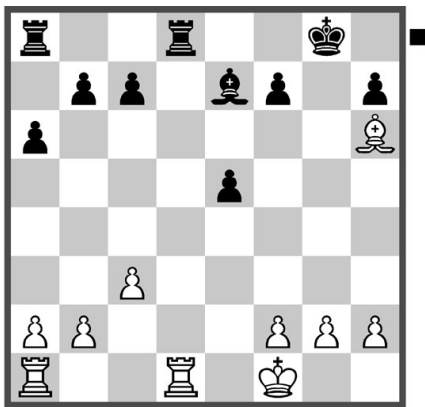
54. h5 would show more respect to the opponent and to the game of chess.

54... f3+ 55. ♔f1 ♞h8 56. h5 ♔xa4 57. ♞g6

1-0

Game 2

♙ Znosko Borovsky, Eugene
 ♚ Alekhine, Alexander
 🌐 Paris 1933



A simple and boring position? How is it possible to create anything there? Yes, Black has slightly better centralization, especially after the next obvious move.

17... f5!

But is that so drastic? Well, it can be. Let's see how the virtuoso Alekhine, of course with some help from his opponent, proves there are many possibilities and superbly realizes his advantage.

18. ♖xd8+?!

White goes for simplifications against his terrible opponent.

18. ♔e2 looks more normal. Then with the obvious 18... ♔f7 Black will keep some plus.

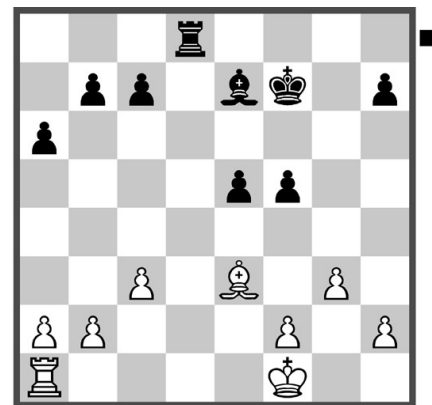
18... ♖xd8 19. g3?!

White already faces some problems.

A) 19. ♔e2?! f4! And there is the problem of the bishop out of play on h6.

B) 19. ♘e3? would surprisingly lead to a lost position after 19... f4!.

19... ♔f7 20. ♘e3



Position after: 20. ♘e3

20. ♔e2 was also possible, and perhaps better.

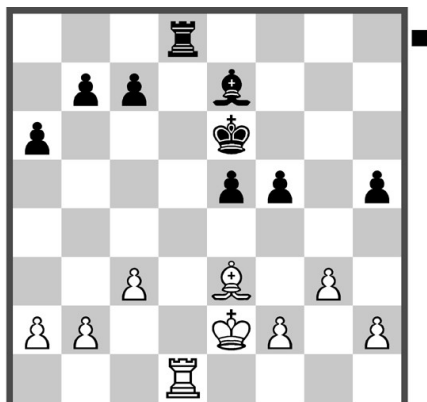
20... h5!

Typical of the great Alekhine! Detecting that White is hesitant, he goes for active play. Psychologically, he forces White to go deeper and deeper into defense.

21. ♔e2

21. h4 ♔e6 could not satisfy White – Black will gain another advantage because White's kingside pawns are fixed on the color of the bishop.

21... ♔e6 22. ♖d1



Position after: 22. ♖d1

22... ♖g8!

Black naturally keeps the rooks on the board.

22... ♖xd1 would give Black nothing because after 23. ♔xd1 White would be able to erect a strong barrier with pawns on b3 and f3.

23. f3

23. h4 ♖g4!

23... h4!

If you want to learn to play in a direct and straightforward way then Alekhine is an excellent mentor.

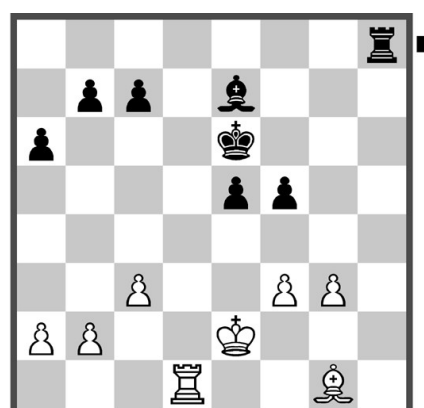
24. ♗f2

24. gxh4? ♖g2+ is just winning.

24... hxg3 25. hxg3 ♖h8

Black has got rid of his potentially weak pawn and opened a file for his rook. Those are real benefits but still nothing definite is apparent.

26. ♗g1



Position after: 26. ♗g1

26. c4 was probably better. The idea is to put the pawns on light-colored squares to set up a barrier and to make them safe from attacks by the enemy bishop.

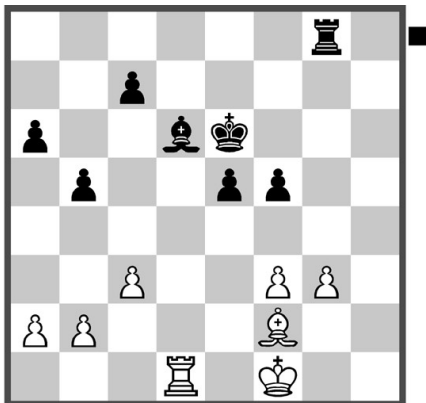
26... ♗d6

26... b5! was better, to prevent White's play as explained in the previous note.

27. ♔f1?!

27. c4!

27... ♖g8 28. ♗f2 b5



Position after: 28... b5

Finally Black plays this move, fixing the white pawns and gaining space. It is easy to see how centralization enables active play on both flanks. After playing on the kingside and making some progress there, Black switches to the queenside. White, having such passive pieces, must play on the side where his opponent decides to operate.

29. b3 a5 30. ♔g2

30. a4? just hastens defeat after 30... bxa4 31. bxa4 ♖b8.

30... a4?!

30... ♖h8 first is more methodical. Then 31. ♖h1? would not satisfy White due to 31... ♖xh1 32. ♔xh1 ♔d5 with the idea of ...e4.

31. ♖d2?

31. ♖h1 was evidently better. White still has some chances with an active rook.

31... axb3 32. axb3 ♖a8

White has definitely been outplayed.

33. c4 ♖a3

33... b4 was another good option.

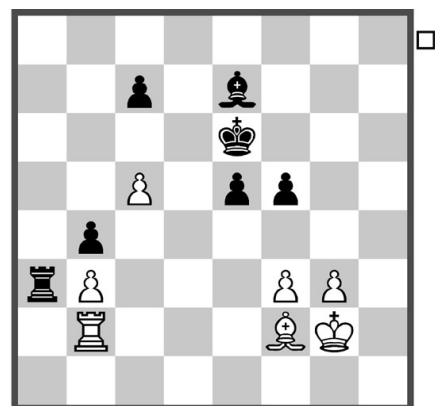
34. c5

Desperation.

A) 34. cxb5 ♖xb3--+

B) 34. ♖b2 bxc4 35. bxc4 ♖c3--+

34... ♙e7 35. ♖b2 b4



Position after: 35... b4

This move effectively isolates the c5-pawn. The game is practically over.

36. g4 f4!

Excellent. Black keeps the white pieces passive.

37. ♔f1 ♖a1+ 38. ♔e2 ♖c1 39. ♖a2

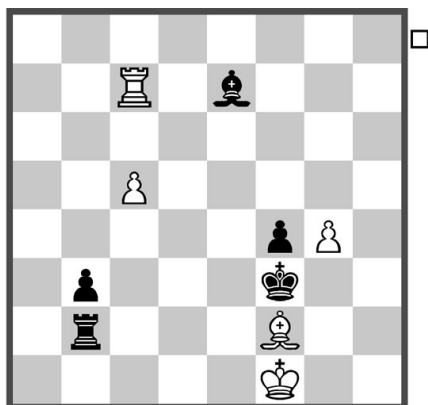
♖c3 40. ♜a7 ♔d7 41. ♜b7 ♜xb3

Black wins material and the result is decided.

42. ♜b8 ♜b2+ 43. ♔f1 b3 44. ♔g1 ♔c6 45. ♔f1 ♔d5

Again centralization.

46. ♜b7 e4 47. fxe4+ ♔xe4 48. ♜xc7 ♔f3



Position after: 48... ♔f3

And centralization produces a mating attack.

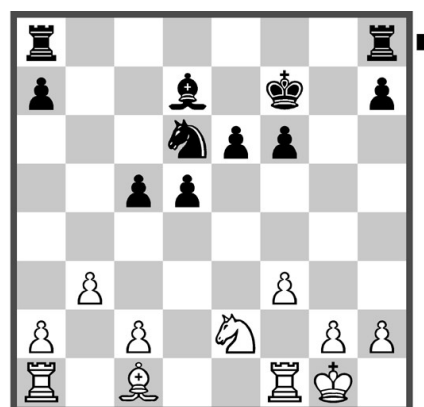
49. ♜xe7 ♜xf2+ 50. ♔e1 b2 51. ♜b7 ♜c2 52. c6 ♔g3 53. c7 f3 54. ♔d1 ♜xc7 55. ♜xb2 f2

White resigned. Without making any bad mistakes White lost, almost smoothly. The logical consequence of playing with passive pieces against a centralized army.

0-1

Game 3

♖ Bogoljubow, Efim
♜ Reti, Richard
♗ Moravska Ostrava 1923



In our next diagram the position is much better for Black. His central pawns will soon put enormous pressure on White's position, forcing his troops to retreat in panic. Black will easily finish his development, posting his pieces behind his pawns and supporting them. Strategically, White has been totally outplayed.

19... e5 20. ♗a3 ♜ac8

The right rook. The other rook will be needed on the d-file, in order to prepare the advance of his pawns.

21. ♜ad1 d4

An instructive moment. In order to achieve full harmony the pawns and the knight should be placed on squares of

the same color and the bishop on squares of the opposite color! At the same time Black restricts White's minor pieces, especially the bishop, and secures the e3-square for his knight.

22. Nc1 Nf5

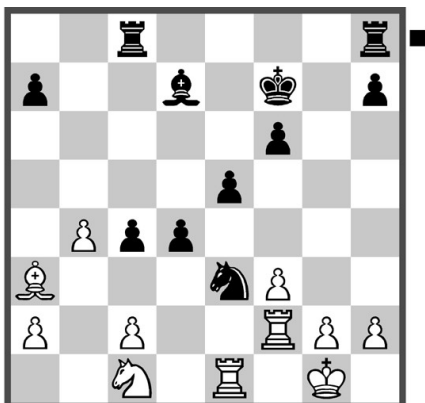
Black has found a target, the pawn on c2.

23. Rf2 Ne3 24. Re1 c4

Direct play. White is just lost – a triumph of centralization.

24... Bf5 was also a good move, but the move played is better.

25. b4



Position after: 25. b4

In this hopeless situation for White there are many winning plans. Black found a really beautiful maneuver.

25... Ba4! 26. Ree2 Nd1 27. Rf1 Nc3 28. Ref2 Nb1?

But Black fails to carry out his maneuver the right way. He had missed White's 30th move.

28... Nb5 29. Bb2 c3 30. Ba1 would win easily – White is really playing without a bishop. A perfect example of how a centralized army easily crushes the opponent's troops. This time it is not about destroying, it is about imprisoning.

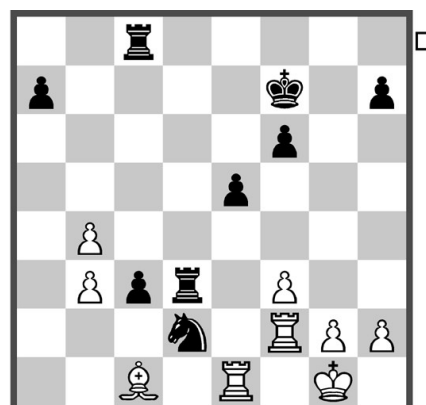
29. Bb2 c3 30. Nb3

This move delays resignation. Black is forced to find more good moves to convert his advantage into victory.

30... Bxb3! 31. axb3

31. Rxb1 Bxa2 32. Ra1 cxb2

31... Nd2 32. Re1 Rhd8! 33. Bc1 d3! 34. cxd3 Rxd3



Position after: 34... Rxd3

The series of forced moves has finished. White is close to defeat.

35. ♖xd2 ♜xd2

Black transforms the endgame into a trivial one

36. ♜a1 ♔e6 37. ♔f1 ♜xf2+ 38. ♔xf2 c2 39. ♜c1 ♔d5 40. ♔e3 ♜c3+ 41. ♔d2 ♔d4

White is in zugzwang.

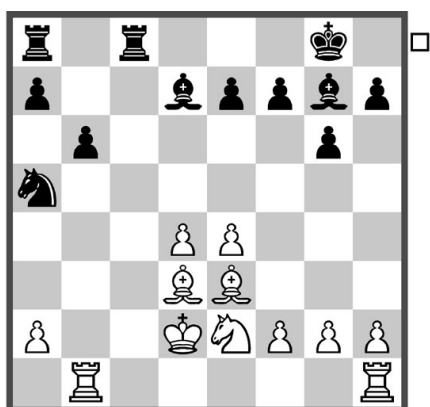
42. h4 ♜d3+

White resigned.

0-1

Game 4

♖ Jussupow, Artur (2665)
 ♜ Khalifman, Alexander (2650)
 ♁ Ubeda 1997



White is obviously better. His pawn center is so powerful and it makes a perfect shield for his pieces and his king, at the same time causing some disorder in Black's army.

16. ♖a6

White takes control over the c8-square, aiming to seize the c-file.

16. ♜hc1 was another logical approach, with the idea of directly switching to a minor-piece endgame.

16... ♜d8

16... ♜c7 17. ♜hc1 ♜xc1 18. ♜xc1±

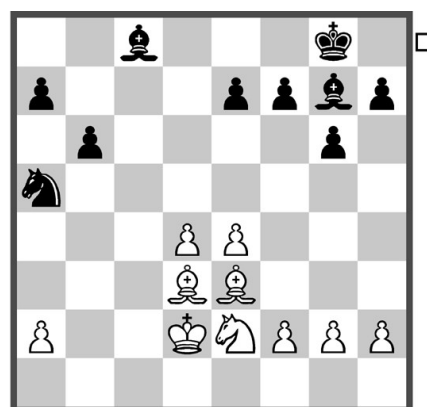
17. ♜hc1 ♖c8 18. ♖d3

When you have a space advantage and a mobility advantage it is useful to keep pieces on the board.

18... ♖b7 19. ♜c7 ♜ac8 20. ♜bc1 ♜xc7 21. ♜xc7 ♜c8 22. ♜xc8+

22. ♜xe7? ♖f8 23. ♜e5 [23. ♜d7? ♖b4+ 24. ♔d1 ♖c6-+] 23... ♖b4+ 24. ♔d1 ♖c6∞

22... ♖xc8



Position after: 22... ♖xc8

The situation has crystallized. After the more or less forced exchange of all the rooks, we have a minor-piece endgame. White has kept a stable advantage due to his better mobility and more space. All of that due to the powerful pawn center. However, White must take care about further exchanges of pieces – Black’s queenside majority has traditionally been seen as a plus.

23. ♖c3

Eyeing the b5- and d5-squares.

23... ♞c6 24. ♞b5

White tries to provoke the advance of the black pawns. That would make infiltration easier.

24... ♞a6 25. ♚c3 ♚f8?!

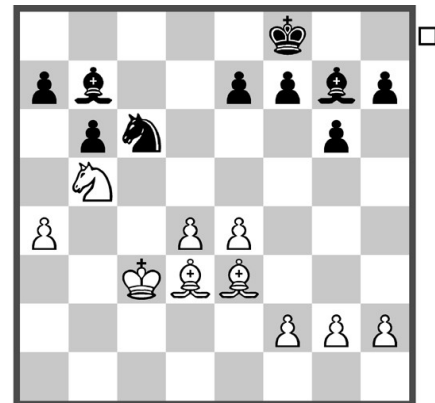
The king goes towards the center, but this is not the best plan.

25... e6!? was a logical move. Black would try to prevent White’s further expansion and reactivate his bishop via f8.

26. a4!

The pawn is safe there and it liberates the bishop.

26... ♞b7



Position after: 26... ♞b7

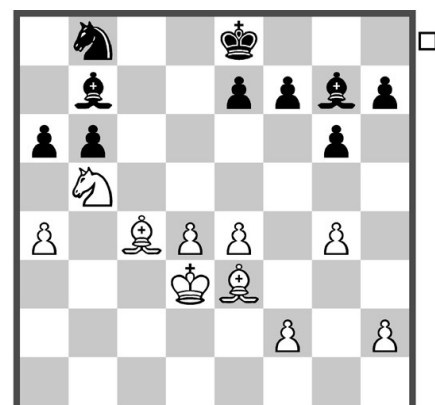
27. g4!?

White expands on the kingside, according to the principle that one should play on the side where one is stronger. Also, this move was played to deter the potential ...f5 strike, which could disrupt White’s center.

27... ♚e8 28. ♞c4 ♞b8 29. ♚d3

Of course, not 29. ♞xa7 ♞xe4.

29... a6



Position after: 29... a6