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Preface

1980. Alexander Panchenko won a strong Chigorin Memorial in Sochi, making his second GM norm. He was in a great mood, as the nicest prospects were opening up before him. Then everything changed...

Alexander Nikolaevich himself described this turning point in his life as follows: 'At one moment, as my wife and I were having dinner with Yuri Balashov, Tikhomirova came over and asked to speak to me. Vera Nikolaevna explained that we needed to think about the younger generation and invited me to work as a trainer at the newly-opened All-Russian School of Grandmasters. To say that this suggestion came as a surprise would be to say nothing at all. I was just 27, and still a developing player. I was full of plans for my chess career.'

But he agreed and begun work.

He had a lot to learn before the first session of the school. He had to study books on teaching – Korchak, Makarenko, Sukhominsky and Uspensky. He also sought advice from experienced teachers and trainers.

Panchenko's trainer in Chelyabinsk was Leonid Aronovich Gratvol, a teacher from heaven. Alexander Nikolaevich remembered how he taught and tried to follow his advice.

Eleven years of work at the All-Russian School of Grandmasters, a great deal of unworked material, tested schemes of study, etc. – all this continued the work of V. E. Golenishev, in preparing players to master level at sport. Viktor Evgenievich wrote some wonderful books – a programme of preparation from Fourth Category to First, books which were reprinted numerous times but are now hard to find.

Panchenko had to spend a great deal of time to prepare his lectures. In the pre-computer era, this was not so simple and it took time to collect material, think it over and prepare everything. Alexander Nikolaevich never plagiarised other people's work, but did everything himself, from scratch.

From 1997, he worked in Kazan, leading a group of promising players, including A. Ilyin, M. Ackarov, T. Chitiskova, S. Shaidullina and the author of these lines; many of us became masters.

The chess part of these lectures is in this book, which you, dear reader, hold in your hands. But also the way Panchenko presented the material was important, so that his pupils could absorb it and employ it in their own games. In this, he was a great master. On the basis of the stories told by his pupils, Rublevsky, Sorokin, Scherbakov, Volzhin and others, and also my own impressions, we have tried to recreate this well-known trainer's method of teaching chess.

The search for chess truth was his life's work. Alexander Nikolaevich Panchenko gave his pupils systematic knowledge in all areas of the game, and taught them to understand the game correctly. He studied fundamental positional devices and 'typical positions'. He had them solve studies and problems (he had an excellent card-index) and often had them play out positions on the chosen theme.

Panchenko had his method, which involved starting everything from the endgame, and only then using this as a basis for studying other aspects of the game: technique, tactical mastery, openings... he employed the ideas of Capablanca and Smyslov, that in order to understand the secrets of chess, one must start with the endgame.

M. Sorokin: 'Sometimes, one had the impression that insufficient attention was given to questions of attack, creative play generally, and the intuitive sides of chess; especial attention was always devoted to the technical side. This was despite the fact that Alexander Nikolaevich was himself an exceptionally sharp, all-round talent, who as well as many finely-judged defences, also carried out numerous sparkling attacks. He taught what was realistically possible and necessary to teach in a group situation: technique, the taking of practical decisions, but he also gave out serious individual work and gave precious advice on its organisation. He stressed individual work (or one-to-one with a permanent trainer) to develop the player's individual talent.'

One defining characteristic of his lessons was that one did not only listen, but also had to answer specific questions. After a lesson, he would often organise a competition to solve problems on the chosen theme, with points being counted up, and then mistakes analysed afterwards. The participants needed to show concentration and hard work, as it was not simple to absorb, understand and deeply feel a large quantity of professional-level information.

In studying the middlegame, Panchenko's signature tune was the defence of difficult positions and prophylaxis.

In non-chess terms, the main thing one remembers is the warmth and care he showed towards his pupils. He was interested not only in chess successes, but also devoted a great deal of attention to their general, non-chess development. I remember that after one not very successful tournament, he gave me a book by his favourite poet, Boris Pasternak, and advised me to read it and to understand what the author was saying. The cure worked.

D. Evseev told about another characteristic of Panchenko as a trainer: 'During lessons, the biggest comedian in the room was Alexander Nikolaevich himself. If a position involved one side having to wait passively, without undertaking anything, he coined the term "scratching his leg". Or: "It's better to win the queen than give mate." Of course, he meant this in the sense that it was, as a general rule, better to take material and secure a decisive advantage that way, than to calculate long and complicated variations, which might turn out not to be mating after all. But he was a sharp attacking player himself. Once, with obvious pleasure, he showed us his win over Igor Novikov in the semifinal of the USSR Championship (Pavlodar 1987), in which he carried out a beautiful attack, with many sacrifices. Thus, on move 38, instead of taking the queen with a decisive material advantage, he played a forcing variation leading to mate. In answer to the question that he had himself said that it was better to take the queen in such cases, he smiled and said 'Giving mate is more fun!'

Another device of Alexander Nikolaevich's was to tell little stories, about chess history, great players (with some of whom he had himself played – Petrosian,

Polugaevsky, Geller, etc), about his chess school, trips abroad in Soviet times, and about life in general. It was clear that he loved to talk about days gone past. He would sink back into a certain tournament or game and re-live the experience. The connection with the past and with the chess heritage occupied a significant place in the preparation of his pupils. It is thus not surprising that classical examples occupy a central place in this book also.

In the first edition of this book the subject of attack appeared only in Chapter Four, under 'Playing with an advantage'. Now it has its own chapter, thanks to Alexander Nikolaevich, who read a lecture on the subject, covering the most beautiful games and ideas, from the time of the start of organised chess up to the period of Kasparov. All we had to do was choose the examples to use and organise the material, systematising it appropriately and adding a theoretical part.

The examples were computer-tested (an essential thing these days), but this had little influence on the assessments and conclusions drawn in the first edition. At the end of the book there is some additional material from the lectures. It presents schematically the different aspects of chess: defence, handling advantages and playing equal positions. If you think of a game of chess as an exam, as it often is, then this small test should help you pass with an excellent mark.

The book contains material passed down from generation to generation. Now every reader has the opportunity to familiarise himself with the best theoretical work and practical advice on the subject of the middlegame. And you will be able to complete this course of instruction much quicker than many grandmasters.

Alexander Nikolaevich Panchenko was a Teacher with a capital T. He lives on in his pupils, and his working methods are preserved in this book.

Artyom Timofeev,
International Grandmaster,
Winner of the Russia Cup,
And the Russian Championship Higher League

Foreword to the First Edition

This book by Russia's Honoured Trainer and international grandmaster Alexander Panchenko is based on lectures given by the author at sessions of The All-Russian School of Grandmasters, which operated under his leadership from 1981 to 1992, and was devoted to preparing players of the top class.

The material from the lectures has been completely reworked for this book, on the basis of games played in recent years.

It should be pointed out that many well-known players studied under Panchenko, and went on to become grandmasters: M. Ulibin, R. Scherbakov, S. Volkov, S. Prudnikova, Y. Shumiakina, A. Galliamova and others, including the author of this Foreword.

In the theoretical section of the book, the main emphasis is on the technique of defence. As Panchenko said, 'It is impossible to become a strong player without being able to defend'. In this regard, he looks at the main methods and devices that players use to defend inferior positions, such as exchanging pieces and heading to the endgame, fighting against the most powerful enemy piece(s), defending the weakest squares, improving the worst-placed piece(s), deflecting the opponent from his main plan, sharply changing the character of the position, etc. Later, he examines the subject of counterplay, in place of passive defence.

Exploiting counterplay always involves some risk to the players and requires full concentration of the forces. The main task is to fight for the initiative at all costs, and in the process to make use of the principle of economy (only the minimum pieces needed for defence!) and to counterattack with the greatest possible number of forces, not being afraid to sacrifice. Panchenko considered that mastering the methods of defence and counterattack would reduce the number of games that a player lost. This theme is related to that of realising an advantage, where the author looks at the main factors which influence the player who has the advantage. He looks systematically at the effect of such things as weakened attention, marking time, thinking over obvious moves and time trouble, and he gives examples of instructive realisations of advantage, in which he highlights factors such as decisiveness, playing for pressure and realising material and positional advantages in the endgame.

The author does not dodge questions of playing equal positions, prophylaxis, and the battle between heavy pieces. He devotes special attention to the fight between two pieces and a rook, a subject which receives too little attention in chess literature, although it arises in practical play quite often. Studying the remaining chapters of the book – opposite-coloured bishops in the middlegame and the battle between knight and bishop, allows the players of such positions to acquire basic knowledge of how to conduct the middlegame battle.

The material is packed into the book, with many examples of the chosen subjects. The book is characterised by the originality with which it is constructed and

the witty aphorisms it contains, many of which were invented by the author, and by the accurate formulations of the tasks involved.

From his great training experience, Panchenko also drew a large number of test positions for solving or playing out. He also indicates the time to be spent on each position, which will make many of the tests very hard for a lot of players.

I believe Alexander Panchenko's book will prove very interesting to chess players, and will be greeted with the same enthusiasm as his endgame textbook was upon its publication in 1997. The latter became the principal textbook for playing endgames, for a whole group of players.

Sergey Rublevsky,
International Grandmaster,
Four-time Olympic champion

Chapter 3

Counterplay

Some players (Kortchnoi, Polugaevsky, Larsen, and many others) sometimes prefer active counterplay to stubborn, but passive defence. This is always associated with risk for both players and requires a great deal of strength. The main thing with such play is to strive for the initiative at all costs. It is not always possible to be sure who has the advantage, since each side will have its own pluses and minuses, and the battle usually rages on different flanks, the principle being ‘The Devil take the hindmost!’. Here everything is decided by accurate calculation and strong nerves. It is essential to commit to the defence only the minimum number of pieces required (the principle of economy!) and to attack with the greater part of one’s forces, not shirking before sacrifices.

As Lev Polugaevsky put it: ‘There are two types of defender. On the one hand, there is the prophylactic defender. I belong to the other group, which says openly to the opponent: “Come on then, attack as much as you like, but bear in mind that rather than passive defence, you will encounter active counterplay”’.

In the following example, Black strives for the initiative from the first few moves.

Shipov
Lev Polugaevsky

Yalta 1962

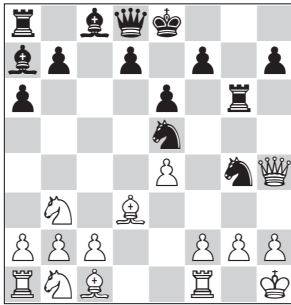
1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 a6 5.♙d3 ♙c5 6.♞b3 ♙a7 7.0-0 ♞c6!?

Black allows 8.♞g4, intending to go over to a counterattack, with a pawn sacrifice. His aim is to break through to the f2-pawn.

8.♞g4 ♞f6 9.♞xg7 ♖g8 10.♞h6 ♞e5 11.♙h1

Better was 11.♙f4, placing his opponent's strategy in doubt. Now, however, Black's tactics prove justified.

11...♞g6 12.♞h4 ♞fg4!



13.♞xh7

13.♞xd8+ ♙xd8 14.♙g1 is bad because of 14...♞f3+.

13...♞f6!

Black consistently exploits his trump – the weakness of f2. If immediately 13...♞xf2+, then 14.♞xf2 ♙xf2 15.♞h8+.

14.f4 ♞h6 15.♞g8+ ♙e7 16.h3 ♞h8 17.fxe5

Better is 17.♞g5.

17...♞xf1+ 18.♙xf1 ♞xg8 19.♙f4 19...♙b8!

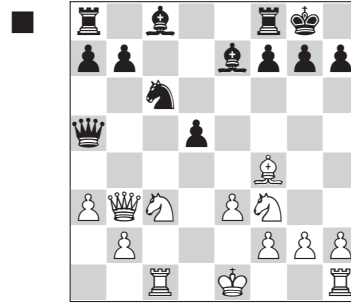
The mate threat indirectly defends the black knight: see, for example, 20.hxg4 ♞h8+ 21.♙g1 ♙a7+ or 21.♙h2 ♙xe5.

20.g3 ♞xe5 21.♞c3 b5 22.♞a5 ♙c7 23.b4 d6

And Black realised his extra exchange.

Mark Taimanov
Bent Larsen

Vinkovci 1970 (13)



White is better. After 1...♞d8 both 2.♞b5 and 2.0-0 are possible, and Black faces a difficult battle for a draw. But he did not want to defend passively and instead went in for a counterattack, which involves weakening the black king and carries great risk with it.

1...g5! 2.♙g3 g4 3.♞d4

If 3.♞e5, then 3...♙f6 4.♞xc6 bxc6 5.0-0 ♙e6 with a complicated position, but another possibility was 3.♞d2!? d4 4.♞c4 ♞f5 5.♞e2 dxe3 6.0-0 with an attack for the sacrificed pawn.

3...♞xd4 4.exd4 ♙g5 5.0-0

Now what?

5...♙xc1 6.♞xc1 ♙e6 7.h3

White goes in for an interesting combination, but Black finds a defence.

7...gxh3 8.♙e5 f6 9.♞e4 fxe5 10.♞g3+ ♙g4!

10...♙h8 or 10...♙f7 are bad because of 11.♞xe5.

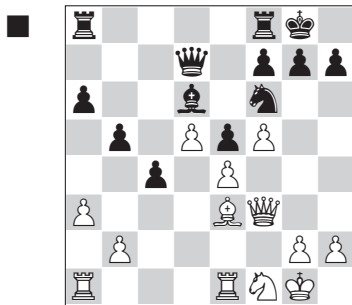
11.♞xg4+ ♙h8 12.♞g5 ♞d2 13.♞c7 ♞xf2+! 14.♙h2 ♞xg2+ 15.♞xg2 hxg2

And Black won.

Counterplay rarely arises of its own accord (unless via a forcing move, such as 1...g7-g5!? in the previous game). It has to be prepared. One must find the enemy's weakness (not always easy) and direct all possible forces against it. First we identify the area for the counterattack, then the counterattack itself follows.

**Ion Balanel
Laszlo Szabo**

Moscow 1956 (4)



Black's position looks dangerous, as g2-g4-g5 is threatened, with an attack. Decisive measures are needed.

1...♖fc8!

Black prepares counterplay on the queen-side, where he has a pawn majority.

2.g4 c3

Of course, not 2...h6.

3.b3 c2! 4.g5 ♘e8 5.♔d2 ♚e7!

6.b4 a5! 7.bxa5 ♖xa5! 8.♙xa5 c1♚

9.♖axc1 ♖xc1 10.♖xc1? ♚xc5+

11.♚g3 ♚xc1



Thus, there remains no trace of White's attack.

12.♚b3?

Better is 12.♙b4.

12...♙c5+ 13.♔g2 ♘d6 14.♙b4

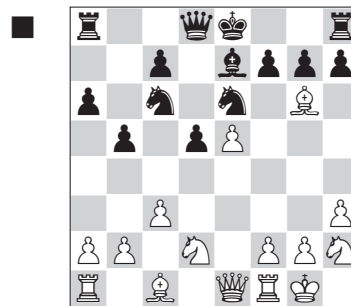
♘xe4 15.♙xc5 ♚xc5 16.♘e3 h5

17.a4? bxa4

White resigned.

**Alexander Alekhine
Akiba Rubinstein**

Vilnius 1912 (5)



After 1...hxg6? Black is condemned to a difficult defence. By playing

1...fxg6!

he intends a counterattack along the f-file. There followed:

2.♘b3

Better is 2.f4 0-0 3.♘b3 with approximate equality.

2...g5!? 3.♙e3

3.f4!?

3...0-0 4.♘f3 ♚d7 5.♚d2?

This move allows an exchange sacrifice, which justifies 1...fxg6!; better was 5.♚e2.

5...♖xf3!

Of course!

6.gxf3 ♘xe5 7.♚e2 ♖f8 8.♘d2

♘g6 9.♖fe1 ♙d6

White's position is lost, but he still has an original try:



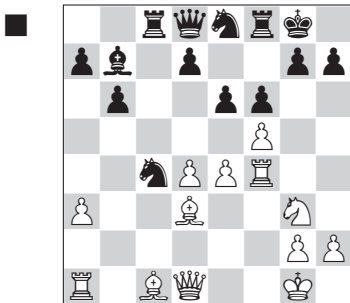
10.f4!? ♟exf4 11.♖f1 ♟xh3+
12.♔h1 g4 13.♗e2 ♗f5

White resigned.

The following game is a classical example of a counterattack.

Efim Geller
Machgielis Euwe

Zurich 1953 (2)



1...b5!

«The start of a wonderful plan. It is obvious that, given the extremely limited space on the kingside, any defensive measures with pieces (...♖f8-f7, ...♗d8-e7 etc.) are doomed to failure. But Black has another resource – counterattack! The bishop on b7, the rook on c8 and the knight on c4 occupy excellent positions and it only remains to include the queen. The basis of the counterattack is Black’s superiority on

the central squares. By playing ...b6-b5, Black further strengthens the position of his knight and allows a path out to b6 for the queen» (Bronstein).

2.♖h4 ♗b6 3.e5 ♟xe5 4.fxe6 ♟xd3
5.♗xd3

5.exd7 ♖xc1.

5...♗xe6 6.♗xh7+ ♔f7 7.♔h6

The white pieces have gone too far and now Black goes over to a counterattack.

7...♖h8! 8.♗xh8 ♖c2 9.♖c1

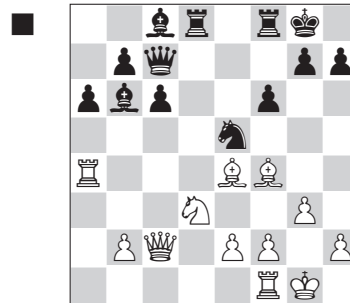
More tenacious is 9.d5! ♔xd5 10.♖d1 ♖xg2+ 11.♔f1 ♖a2.

9...♖xg2+ 10.♔f1 ♗b3 11.♔e1
♗f3 0-1

In the following game, Black also achieves a decisive counterattack.

Milan Vidmar
Machgielis Euwe

Nottingham 1936 (2)



With the unexpected and strong move

1...g5!

Black goes over to the counterattack:

2.♔xh7+

After 2.♔xe5 (2.♟xe5 gxf4! 3.♟c4 ♔a7 with the idea of ...b7-b5) 2...fxe5 the sacrifice on h7 is inadequate: 3.♔xh7+ ♔xh7 4.♟xe5+ ♔f5. 3.♗b3+ is also bad because of 3...♔h8 4.♟xe5 ♔xf2+ 5.♖xf2 ♗xe5 with an extra pawn for Black. 3.♟xe5 is refuted by

3...♙h3 4.♖b3+ (4.♙g2 ♙xg2 5.♗xg2 ♖xe5 6.♖b3+ ♖d5+) 4...♗h8 5.♙g2 ♙xf2+!, and if 6.♖xf2, then 6...♖b6!!, winning for Black. Better is 3.e3, somewhat stabilising the position.

2...♖xh7 3.♙xe5 ♙a7!

Bad is 3...fxe5 4.♖b3+ and 5.♖xb6.

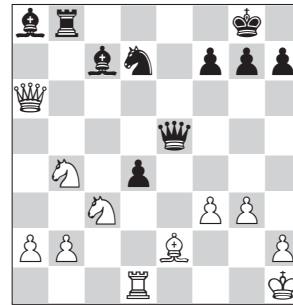
4.♙c3 b5 5.♖aa1 c5 6.♖c1 c4 7.♗e1

7.♗b4 ♖h3 with a mating attack.

7...♙b7 8.♗f3 g4 9.♗g5 ♖f5

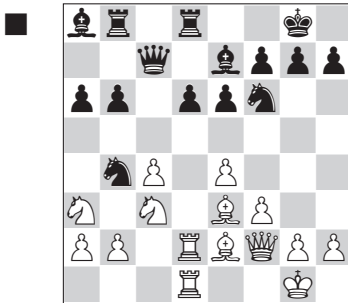
And White resigned.

Or 13.♗e4 ♙xe4 14.fxe4 ♖xb4 15.♖c8+ ♗f8.



**Roy Dieks
Slavoljub Marjanovic**

Manila 1974



Black seizes the initiative with a typical blow in the centre.

1...d5! 2.cxd5 exd5!? 3.e5

It was essential to play 3.exd5 with rough equality.

3...♖xe5 4.♙xb6 ♖xb6!

After 4...♖d7 5.♙d4 White is better.

5.♖xb6 ♗d7 6.♖a5 ♖b8!

With the idea of 7...♙d8 and 8...♗c5, trapping the white queen.

7.♗c2 ♙g5!

Worse is 7...♙d8 8.♖xb4 with a complicated game.

8.♗xb4 ♙xd2 9.♙f1

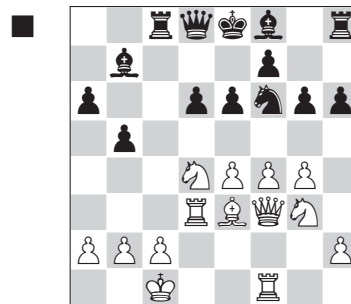
Better is 9.♗f1.

9...♙e3+ 10.♗h1 ♙b6 11.♖xa6 ♙c7 12.g3 d4 13.♙e2

13...♗f8! 14.♖c4 dxc3 15.bxc3 ♖e8 16.♖d2 ♙xf3+ 0-1

**Viktor Kupreichik
Vladimir Tukmakov**

Ashkhabad 1978 (8)



White has a weak pawn on e4 and Black plays against this.

1...h5! 2.gxh5

If 2.h3 or 2.g5, then 2...h4! with advantage to Black.

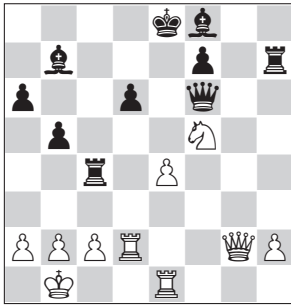
2...♗xh5!

On 2...gxh5 Tukmakov gives the following beautiful variation: 3.f5 e5 4.♗e6! fxe6 5.fxe6 h4 6.♙g5 ♙h6 7.♙xh6 ♖xh6 8.♗f5 ♙xe4 9.♖xe4! ♗xe4 10.♗g7+ ♗e7 11.♖f7#.

3.f5 exf5 4.♗dx5 gxf5 5.♗xf5

5.♖xf5 ♖c7! 6.♖c3 ♗xg3 7.hxg3 ♖d7 8.♖xd7+ ♗xd7 9.♖xf7+ ♙e7.

5...♖h7 6.♔b1 ♕c7 7.♞d2 ♜c4
8.♙d4 ♜e6 9.♞e1 ♞c4! 10.♜g2
♘f6 11.♙xf6 ♜xf6



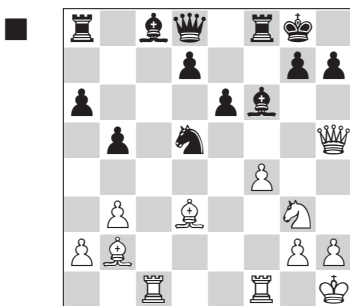
12.♘xd6+ ♙xd6 13.♜g8+ ♙f8
14.♜xh7 ♜h6 15.♜xh6 ♙xh6
16.♞de2 ♔e7 17.b3 ♞d4 18.♔b2
b4 19.c3? ♞d2+ 20.♞xd2 ♙xd2
21.♞e2 bxc3+

And Black won.

Often, the move to a counterattack starts with a sacrifice of material (sometimes the return of extra material) and obtaining in return other advantages (an advantage in forces in a certain sector of the board, badly placed enemy pieces).

Fridrik Olafsson
Mikhail Tal

Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959 (25)



1...g6!

Returning the pawn in the hope of seizing the initiative. On 1... h6 there is the strong reply 2.♙e5 with the threat of 3.♜g6.

2.♙xg6

After 2.♜e2 ♙xb2 3.♜xb2 ♘xf4 Black has a material advantage which is fully adequate for victory.

2...♜e7!

Of course, Mikhail Tal had anticipated this position in advance and had seen that after 2...hxg6? 3.♜xg6+ ♔h8 4.♘f5! White wins. Now, however, Black goes over to the counterattack.

3.♙xf6 ♘xf6 4.♜f3 ♞b8 5.♙d3
♙b7 6.♜e2 ♔h8

Black's pieces come to life.

7.♞ce1 ♞be8 8.♘f5

White panics.

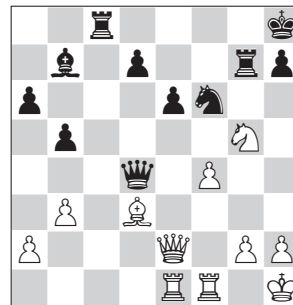
8...♜b4 9.♜b2 ♞c8 10.♞g3

Retreating.

10...♜c3 11.♜e2

In the event of an exchange of queens, Black's material advantage is enough to win.

11...♞g8 12.♘e4 ♜d4! 13.♘g5 ♞g7!



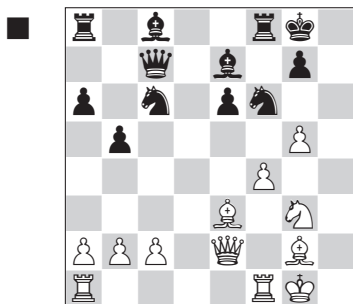
Almost imperceptibly, White has difficulties.

14.♜e3 ♜xe3 15.♞xe3 ♞c3 16.♞h3
b4 17.♔g1 e5! 18.♞g3 e4 19.♙c4
d5 20.♙e2 d4

And the powerful passed pawns decided the outcome.

Efim Geller
Alexander Panchenko

Moscow 1982



1...♙b7!

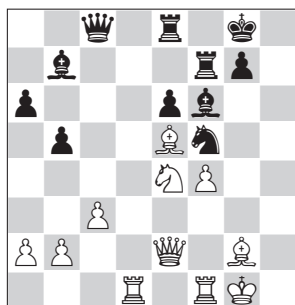
Black returns the piece, in the hope of exploiting the bad position of the white king and the white pawn weaknesses.

2.c3 ♖ae8 3.gxf6 ♙xf6 4.♙c5 ♜f7 5.♘e4 ♘e7!

Underlining Black's obvious advantage. The knight heads for the eternal outpost on f5, and if it is exchanged, then the strength of the black bishop pair will have its say. In this respect, it was worth considering the forced transition into a queen and rook ending, although here too, the white king is in danger.

6.♙d6 ♜c8 7.♜ad1 ♘f5 8.♙e5?

A time-trouble oversight.

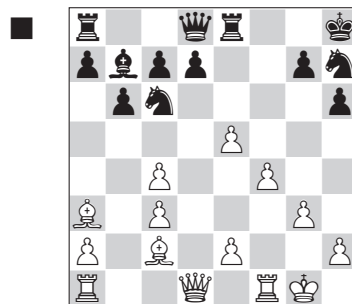


8...♙xe4 9.♜xe4 ♘g3 10.♜g6 ♘xf1 11.♙e4 ♙xe5

White resigned.

Veselin Topalov
Boris Gelfand

Novgorod 1997 (8)



White threatens the unpleasant move 2.♜d3 with an attack. Gelfand returns the piece, liquidating all the threats and going over to the counterattack:

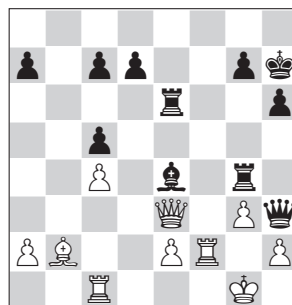
1...♘xe5! 2.fxe5 ♜xe5 3.♙xh7

Otherwise the knight comes into the battle with great effect.

3...♙xh7 4.c5 ♜e8 5.♜d3+ ♙e4 6.♜d2 ♜e6

Having broken in on the light squares, Black wins quickly.

7.♜f2 bxc5 8.♜af1 ♜e8 9.c4 ♜h3 10.♙b2 ♜g5 11.♜c3 ♜e6 12.♜e3 ♜g4 13.♜c1

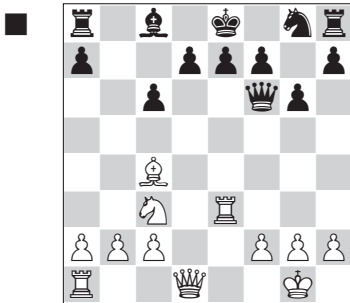


13...h5 0-1

There is no defence against ...h5-h4.

Sometimes, returning the extra material is essential to a successful defence.

Jan Timman
 Viktor Kortchnoi
 Brussels 1991 (5)



Black has an extra central pawn, but is massively behind in development. There is the very unpleasant threat of ♞c3-e4 . Kortchnoi takes the correct decision – he gives back the extra pawn, to complete his development, and gradually equalises.

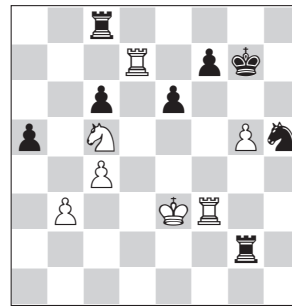
1...d5! 2.♙xd5 ♙f5!

Taking the piece would subject Black to a huge attack.

3.♙f3 h5 4.♚e2 ♖b8 5.♘a4 ♕f8! 6.♗e1 ♜b4 7.b3 ♔g7 8.♞c3 ♙g4! 9.♚e3 ♙xf3 10.♚xf3 ♚xf3 11.♞xf3 e6 12.♞d1 ♘f6 13.c4 ♜bb8 14.♞fd3 h4!

Creating counterplay on the kingside.

15.f3 g5! 16.♘c5 a5 17.♕f2 g4 18.♞d6 ♜bc8 19.♕e3 h3 20.♞g1 hxg2 21.♞xg2 ♜h3 22.♞g3 ♜xh2 23.fxg4 ♜xa2 24.g5 ♘h5 25.♞f3 ♞g2 26.♞d7



26...♕g6 27.♞xf7 ♞xg5 28.♘e4 ♞g4
 Draw.

