

Opening Repertoire Queen's Gambit Declined: Tarrasch

Cyrus Lakdawala



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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 40 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

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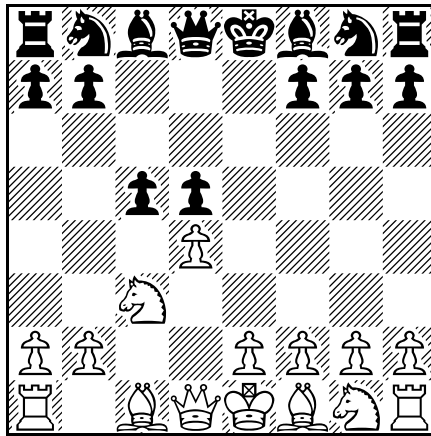
The Slav: Move by Move

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Introduction

“He who fears an isolated Queen’s Pawn should give up Chess” – Siegbert Tarrasch



When we meet the opponent’s Queen’s Gambit with the aggressive Tarrasch Variation, we agree to the following bargain: I will swap the integrity of my pawn structure in exchange for complete freedom, enhanced piece activity and maybe even a mild initiative – a rare luxury for someone playing the black pieces.

We essentially seize control over the present in exchange for the future, since if our piece activity comes to nothing, we may later reach an ending where our isolated d-pawn, the square in front of the pawn, or maybe our hanging d- and c-pawns could become targets and morph into monuments to the memory of our failure to make use of our previous initiative.

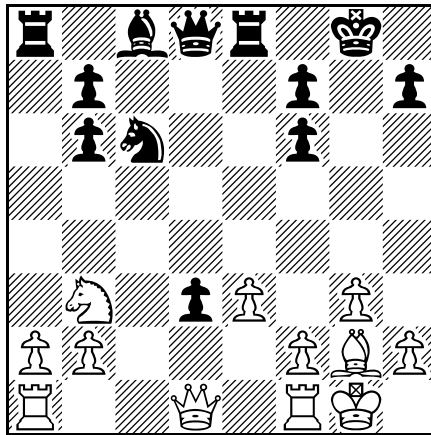
This happens so often: I get a new student who is around 10 years old. Typically, this student is a decent tactician, strong with the initiative and attack for his or her age, and absolutely pathetic when it comes to strategic chess, pawn structure, simplified positions or endings. Their previous answer to queen’s pawn openings is solid, like the old Orthodox line against the Queen’s Gambit, or a closed position requiring subtle understanding of pawn structure, like the King’s Indian. With this old repertoire the kid loses over and over. I

switch them to the QGD Tarrasch and suddenly their results rise dramatically against queen's pawn openings, since they enter open positions where their pieces come alive and the student's natural tactical prowess and aptitude with initiative begin to shine.

The Tarrasch is what I would categorize as a low-maintenance opening, in that even when the lines differ, they somehow still feel the same. I have seen with students that even when they forget their lines and wing it, they still get away with the crime – provided they understand the essential structures, plans and typical tactical motifs.

The following factors typically arise from the QGD Tarrasch:

i. A dynamic versus static barter of inferior structure in exchange for instant freedom and enhanced piece activity. We chess players understand when a chess book is overpriced, reasonably priced, or a bargain. The same goes for chess sets, chess lessons and entry fees to tournaments. What we as QGD Tarrasch players must learn to price is our position's dynamic advantages versus the opponent's static assets. Would you like an example?



Are there any theoretical opening tabiya positions left, whose full range of possibilities remain undiscovered? The above diagram may well be one of them. I warned you. When you agree to a structure as ugly as Black's, we essentially reach the 'I'll see you in hell!' point of the game. It's not a pretty sight and strategic do-gooders need not apply. Be careful though, since pre-conceived bias is an obstacle to true understanding. The above diagrammed position, covered in this book, believe it or not, is still theory and Black's position is considered by *Stockfish 15* to be even.

ii. Our isolani which can be a monster in the middlegame, since it is we who control greater central influence, can turn into a liability in late middlegames or endings. When I show the QGD Tarrasch to a young student for the first time, I am often (idiotically) asked: "Isn't the isolated queen's pawn weak?" My Vulcan blood begins to boil, the way Mr. Spock's did in the Pon Farr episode, since the student dared to challenge the teacher's infallible, grey-haired wisdom. I pause in exasperation, as if to say to the student: 'Of course Black isn't in deep trouble! We get enhanced piece activity and greater central influence

for it! Then when the dramatic pause comes to its suspenseful conclusion, I reveal the deep secret and announce: "Of course Black isn't in deep trouble! We get enhanced piece activity and greater central influence for it!"

iii. If White exchanges the knight on d4 for ours on c6, we get a structure known as hanging pawns, which very much like the isolated queen's pawn, tends to be a valuable resource in the middlegame and not so much if the position simplifies to an ending, where the hanging pawns can easily mutate into fixed targets and holes on our side.

iv. Tarrasch players didn't sign on to die well in the service of the isolani. Even if we later lose our isolani, our energized piece activity is still often enough to hold the game, a pawn down.

v. A typical Tarrasch player loves open positions with initiative or attack, and dislikes closed/solid positions where Black must endure patiently in the opening phase to try and equalize. When we play Tarrasch we essentially join an anarchic political group who believes that Black – not White – deserves the initiative!

vi. The initiative is perishable goods, which need to move quickly or risk spoilage. A repeated warning: most QGD Tarrasch endings will *not* be in our favour, unless we managed to extract some kind of concession with our initiative in the middlegame.

Is QGD Tarrasch Right for You?

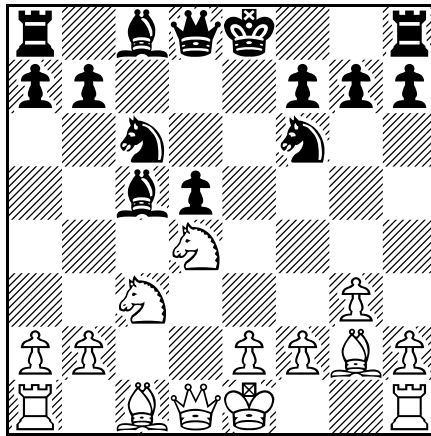
When we find an opening which is a perfect fit for our style, the sense of belonging feels as if we are now members of a family, who love us for ourselves, despite our flaws. What traits do we need to be an effective Tarrasch player?

i. As mentioned above, the typical Tarrasch player tends to prefer open games to closed. To Tarrasch players, the black side of the Orthodox Queen's Gambit Declined lines are as ominous as a first date with an unsuitable bore, where you continually yawn and give your date some lame excuse about not getting enough sleep last night.

ii. We no longer want to live in the small, dull town, where Wednesday night and Saturday night feel pretty much the same. Tarrasch players refuse to slowly crawl to drawish equality with the black pieces. Instead, we attempt to seize the initiative right away, even if it means a difficult ending later on, if we misplay it.

iii. To summarize: Tarrasch players favour energy over structure and are willing to take on all kinds of damage to our pawn structure, if in return we receive enhanced piece-power and the initiative.

Dubov's Variation versus the Main Line



Let's embrace Big Brother New Theory and corner a niche market with this position, which when looked at closer, gives us a "Luke, I am your step-father" feeling of disorientation. The diagrammed position above looks familiar/not familiar, since in this book we embrace a line popularized by GM Daniil Dubov. The line may be trendy at the top. It hasn't yet reached the level of mainstream at club level. This is good news for us since it means that we get to confuse opponents with this move order to the main line, where Black plays 7...c5xd4, followed by 8...♗c5.

Your club level opponents will not be able to find complete coverage of it in any Tarrasch book (except for this one). The line is completely sound and one wonderful aspect of it is that it seriously limits White's responses, when juxtaposed with the normal/tangled QGD Tarrasch Main Line positions where remembering our theory is akin to attempting to recall a dream, upon awakening. White's two major options here are to exchange on c6 or move the d4-knight to b3. That's it. Just two lines to learn, which when compared to myriad lines we need to learn, the new normal lines of the Tarrasch Main Line are a theoretical bargain for our side.

In this book we also cover Black's responses to the Reti and Catalan. Outside the jurisdiction of this book are the lines 1 g3, 1 f4 1 b3 and, of course, 1 e4. When we played chess as children, we did so with a sense of wonder. Then we began to live our wonder-crushing lives of obedient chess citizens, as we grew up. The QGD Tarrasch – an opening not just for kids – is one where we attempt to return to a time when we played for the pure joy of it. When it comes to our opening choices, objective truths don't really exist. All which matters is:

- i. Does the opening suit your style?
- ii. Do you enjoy playing it?
- iii. Do you win with it?

If your answer to these questions is "Yes!" then play it, whether theory approves or not.

Opening Repertoire: Queen's Gambit Declined Tarrasch

Throughout this book, I've made good use of the thoughts, writings and annotations of leading Tarrasch experts Carl Schlechter, Savielly Tartakower, Max Euwe, Emanuel Lasker, Tomislav Paunovic and Hans Hecht.

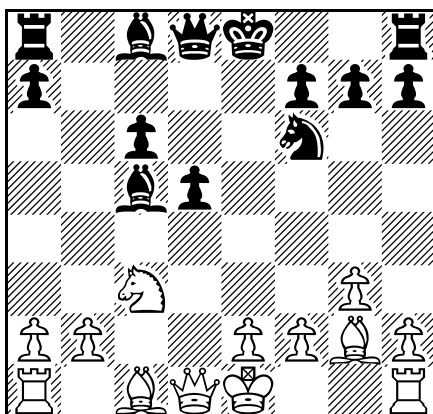
Good luck with your adventures with the Queen's Gambit Declined Tarrasch.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego, November 2022

Chapter Three

Dubov's Variation: 9 ♘xc6

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 g3 ♘f6 7 ♙g2 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♙c5 9 ♘xc6 bxc6



The QGD Tarrasch isn't always about an isolani. Hanging pawns also play a prominent role within the opening. In this chapter White hands us the hanging pawns formation after 9 ♘xc6 bxc6. It's up to us to prove that their dynamism compensates for their potential to turn into weaknesses later in the game. The hanging pawns formation was a term coined by Steinitz. Hanging pawns are side by side on adjacent files, separated from other pawns. Just like an isolani, hanging pawns can be both a strength or a weakness:

1. Black can apply pressure on both the e- and b-files with rooks.
2. The hanging pawns control more centre for now than White's lone e2-pawn, which has yet to be pushed.
3. The hanging pawns can be used as hooks for other pieces, especially on e4.
4. If Black achieves a forceful ...d5-d4 push later on, it is supported by the c5-pawn.

5. The hanging pawns in a favourable version, are flexible and keep our opponents guessing where we plan to push – or not push – them.

6. If blockaded by White, we hand our opponent holes to place pieces. For example, if in this current version, White later creates an iron blockade on c5 and d4, then White's pieces may occupy the powerful centralized squares.

7. Just as with an isolani, if too many pieces get swapped away, our hanging pawns can later become targets and even fall.

Conclusion: Just as with the isolani, hanging pawns tend to be a contest between static versus dynamic forces.

Game 16
M.Rodshtein-D.Dubov
Netanya 2019

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♗c3 c5 3 g3 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 cxd5 exd5 6 d4 ♘c6 7 ♖g2 cxd4

Hey, what is this? Let's all remain calm. It's not as if civilization's light is nowhere to be seen. As mentioned last chapter, this move is the gateway to a new(er) formation and a strong candidate to replace the old 7...♗e7 Tarrasch main line. Let's try out Dubov's line, rather than the main line 7...♗e7 which is played at a 10:1 ratio in my database.

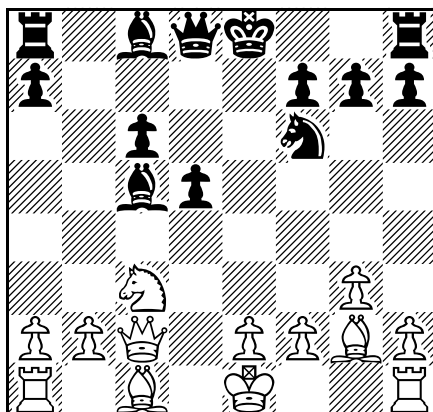
8 ♗xd4 ♗c5

This is the starting tabiya position of Dubov's Variation. In an era where openings are played in the ritualized fashion of a Japanese tea ceremony, it's refreshing to see a line which actually induces our opponent to think.

9 ♗xc6

9 ♗b3 is the other major line we need to learn, which we'll come to next chapter. Last chapter we already examined 9 ♗e3 and 9 e3.

9...bxc6 10 ♖c2



The queen ends up here sooner or later. The idea is to follow with ♖a4, after castling, fighting for control over c5. In the coming games we look at White's main line, 10 0-0.

10...0-0

Alternatively, 10...♗b6 11 ♖a4 0-0 12 ♖xb6 ♜xb6 13 ♙g5 ♖e4! 14 ♙xe4 dxe4 15 ♙e7, as in L.Lenic-M.Sebenik, Internet (blitz) 2020, where Black stands no worse after 15...♞e8 16 ♙c5 ♜a6.

11 0-0 ♗b6

We don't plan to move the bishop back to e7 and, instead, play it to the far more aggressive b6-square, where it fights for c5 and d4, as well as hitting e3 and f2. We are not concerned about the coming ♖a4 and welcome ♖xb6.

12 ♖a4

In such Dubov Tarrasch structures we *don't* fear ♖xb6, since ...axb6 improves our structure, enhances our ability to occupy the centre and also opens the a-file, which is a decent deal for Black.

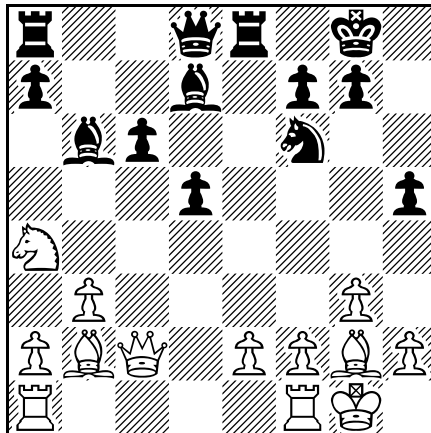
12...♙d7

Also playable is the more aggressive counterattack on e2, with 12...♙a6 which we look at later in the Shabalov and *Stockfish* games.

13 b3

Instead, 13 ♖c5 ♞e8 14 ♞e1 ♙g4 (threat: ...♙xe2, overloading White's queen) 15 b4 a5 16 ♖b7?! was R.Bruij-O.Elgersma, Almelo 2021. Here Black missed 16...♜e7! 17 bxa5 (17 ♖xa5 ♜xb4 18 ♙d2 ♜b5 leaves White busted) 17...♙xf2+! 18 ♙xf2 ♜xb7 and White is strategically lost.

13...♞e8 14 ♙b2 h5!



Going ...h5-h4 chips away at White's kingside structure.

15 e3

15 h4 is Aronian-Carlsen, which we look at next game.

15...h4

Opening Repertoire: Queen's Gambit Declined Tarrasch

This looks more consistent than the also played 15...♗e4.

16 ♖xb6

White would have to be on the lookout for sacrifices if this bishop is left on the board for too long. The engine already slightly prefers Black's position.

Instead, 16 ♖c3 can be met with 16...♗c7.

16...axb6 17 ♖c3!

This way Black is prevented from moving the knight to either e4 or g4.

17...♖c8

I like the plan 17...h3! 18 ♗h1 ♖e7, intending ...c6-c5.

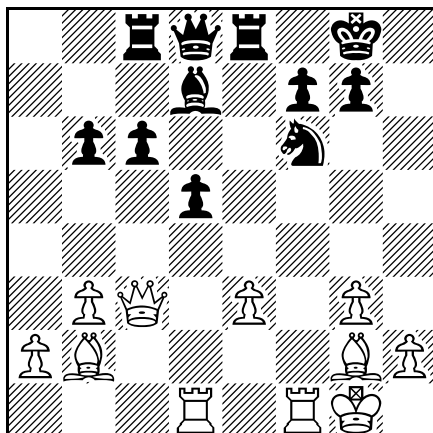
18 ♖ad1

18 gxh4!? is admittedly ugly, yet White may stand no worse.

18...hxg3!?

Black stands better after 18...h3! 19 ♗f3 ♗f5, intending ...♗e4.

19 fxg3!?



GM Rodshtein picks energy over structure. His e3-pawn is an eyesore and Black controls the hole on e4. As compensation, White gets the open f-file and the potential for attack.

The engine prefers the structure-preserving 19 hxg3.

19...♖e6 20 e4!

Principle: *Open the position when you own the bishop-pair.* The engine assesses the game at dead even.

20...♖f8

This way Black's knight can move, since White's mating threat on g7 is negated.

20...♖e7 is also an option.

21 ♖f4

After 21 exd5 ♗xd5 22 ♖d2 ♖e7 23 ♗f3 (23 ♗xd5?! is a bad idea since it weakens too many light squares in White's camp) 23...♖e8 the engine still calls it dead even.

21...♖ce8 22 exd5 ♗xd5

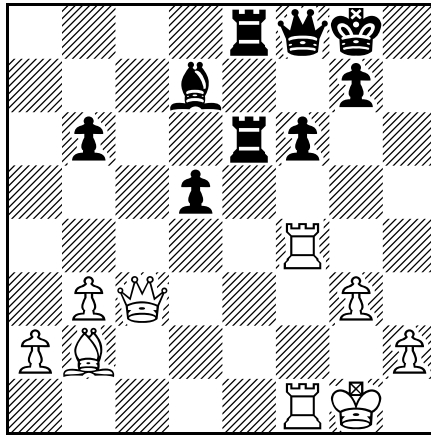
Forking white queen and f4-rook, forcing White's next move.

23 ♖xd5

This is not a move White really wants to play, but, of course, if he doesn't, he loses material.

23...♗xd5?? is an unsound misjudgement: 23...cxd5 24 ♖xd5 ♗e1+ 25 ♗f1 ♗xf1+ 26 ♔xf1 ♖b5+ 27 ♔g1 ♗d8 28 ♖g2 f6 and White is completely busted.

23...cxd5 24 ♗df1 f6



It comes down to a battle of opposite-coloured bishops and corresponding attacks. Black's bishop proves to be the more potent force since White's kingside light squares g2 and h3 are weak.

25 ♗d3 ♗f7! 26 ♖d4!

Wisely clogging ...d5-d4 diagonal-clearing ideas.

26...♗xd5? does Black a big favour by opening the h1-a8 diagonal after 26...♖c6. The engine has White completely lost here.

26...b5

He wants to discourage a2-a4.

26...♗e4 is also an option.

27 g4!

White needs counterplay with a coming g4-g5 and the game begins to sharpen.

27...♗e4! 28 h3 ♗e6 29 ♗f2?!

White should be only slightly worse after 29 ♗xe4 dxe4 30 ♗e3.

29...b4

29...♗d6! 30 ♗d2 ♗e6 31 ♔g2 ♖e8! intends to bring the bishop into play via g6. If 32 ♖f2? d4! leaves White busted.

30 ♗d1

He may have been better off aiming for swaps with 30 ♗f4.

30...♗d6!

Opening Repertoire: Queen's Gambit Declined Tarrasch

Now White must watch out for ...♖xd4, followed by ...♔g3+ ideas.

31 ♖g2 ♗c8

Dubov doesn't yet see the idea 31...♖8e6 32 ♖g3 ♖e7 33 ♗c2 ♗e8! with advantage for Black.

32 ♖g3 ♖e6

Principle: *The player with the greater attacking chances should avoid a swap of queens.*

33 ♗h2 ♗e2 34 ♗g1

34 ♗d2 is more accurate.

34...♖e4 35 ♗xe2 ♖xe2+ 36 ♖g2

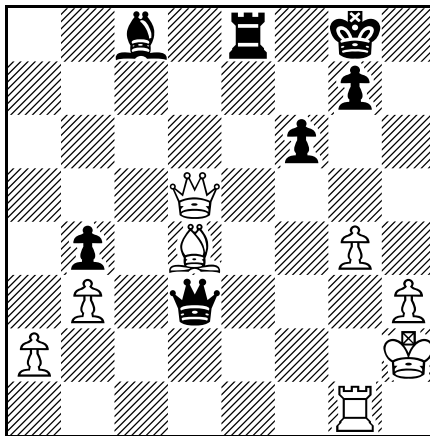
White should probably hold the game with the more accurate 36 ♗g2.

36...♗d3!

Offering one measly, in-the-way d5-pawn isn't a sacrificial attack on a Wagnerian, operatic scale.

Even more accurate is 36...♗a6! (threat: ...♗e2) 37 ♖f3 ♗e4.

37 ♖xd5+?



Principle: *Don't confuse your opponent's bait, as your opportunity.*

As was the case before, it's a bad idea to open this diagonal for Black's bishop. After opening the h1-a8 diagonal, White's chances are about the same as asking for fresh fruit or vegetables at a liquor store.

He should have gone for the admittedly uncomfortable line 37 ♗f2 ♗e2.

37...♗e6 38 ♖c6

Attacking Black's rook.

38...♗f7 39 ♗f2 ♗e2 40 ♖c5 ♗c2

He doesn't want to allow a queen swap with ♖c8+ and ♖f5+.

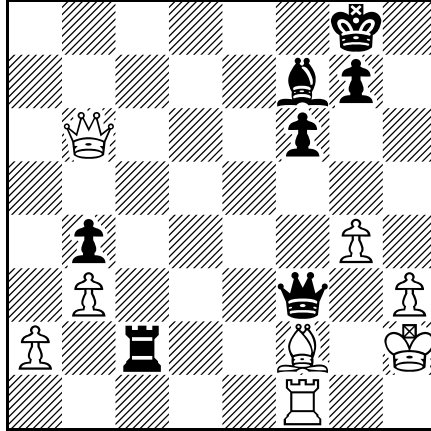
Also deadly is the immediate 40...♖f3 41 ♗g2 (after 41 ♗f1 ♗g6! White is in zugzwang and nothing can be done about the coming ...♗e4) 41...♗d5 42 ♖c8+ ♗h7 43 ♖f5+ ♖xf5 44 gx5 ♗xg2 45 ♗xg2 ♗xa2, which wins easily.

41 ♖b6 ♖f3!

White's defensive foundation is undermined by twin wrecking balls.

42 ♖f1

42 ♖g2 is met with 42...♗d5.



Exercise (planning): White plans to meet 42...♗d5 with a queen check on b8, followed by ♖g3. Black is still winning in this line, but do you see a more efficient win for Black?

Answer: Angle for a clearer shot by first moving the king to h7, after which there is no defence to the coming ...♗d5.

42...♖h7! 0-1

Now ...♗d5 beckons with an irresistible invitation. Note that ♖e3 doesn't work since it's not a swap because White's f2-bishop is pinned.

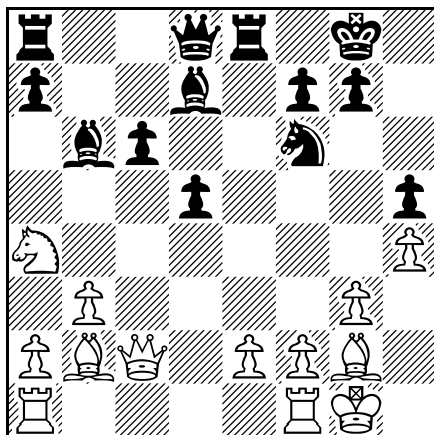
The next game is clear proof the term "justice will prevail" tends not to be all that accurate when it comes to rapid games and their ensuing, farcical time scrambles.

Game 17

L.Aronian-M.Carlsen

World Rapid Championship, Moscow 2019

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖f3 d5 4 ♖c3 c5 5 cxd5 exd5 6 g3 ♖c6 7 ♗g2 cxd4 8 ♖xd4 ♗c5 9 ♖xc6 bxc6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♖c2 ♗b6 12 ♖a4 ♗d7 13 b3 ♖e8 14 ♗b2 h5!? 15 h4



This makes White's pawn structure somewhat inflexible, yet at the same time weakens Black's on h5, since, as we see later on, there is no way Black can tolerate ...g7-g6 with White's dark-squared bishop on the long diagonal.

After 15 h3 ♖e4! White must watch out for tricks on g3 and f2, and 16 e3 ♗g5 looks dangerous for him.

15...♖e4

Threat: ...♖xg3.

15...♞g4?! is not the correct square for the knight as 16 ♖xb6 axb6 17 e4! is in White's favour, since the game begins to open for the bishop-pair.

16 e3

Alternatively:

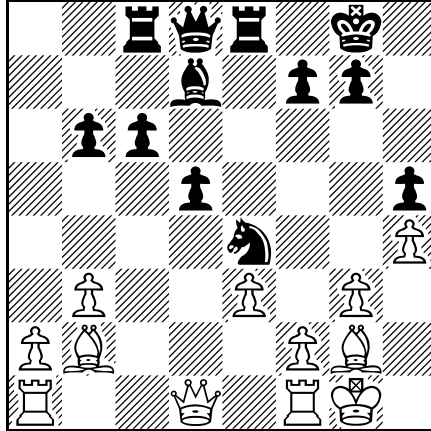
a) 16 ♜ac1?? is a monster miscalculation since 16...♖xg3 17 ♖xb6 ♖xe2+ is a zwischenzug. White must resign.

b) 16 ♖xb6 axb6 is similar to the game continuation.

16...♜c8

Now ...c6-c5 is on, prompting Aronian to pick up the bishop-pair to un-hang Carlsen's central pawns and improve Black's structure.

17 ♖xb6 axb6 18 ♗d1!



Aronian makes the defence of h5 awkward.

Next game we look at 18 ♖ad1.

18...♗f5!?

Careful with that axe, son! Magnus, anxious to violate the tentative peace, is willing to sacrifice a pawn to gain time for his initiative.

18...♗g4 leads to huge complications, where chances are still even if played correctly by both sides: 19 f3 ♖xg3 20 fxg4 ♖xe3! 21 ♖f2 (21 g5?? ♖e2+ gives Black a winning attack, no matter where White moves the king) 21...♗xh4 22 ♗xg7! (the bishop can't be touched, due to a queen check on d4, followed by ♗xe3) 22...♖e4 23 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 24 ♗f6! ♖xg4+ 25 ♗xg4+ ♗xg4+ 26 ♖g2 ♖h7 27 ♖xg4 hxg4 is even, according to the engine, with a high probability of a drawn result.

19 ♗xh5 ♗d7

Threat: ...♗g4, trapping White's queen.

20 ♗d1

The engine calls for the radical 20 ♗xe4!?, giving White an edge after 20...♗xe4 21 f3. To my human eyes, Black receives full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

20...c5

There's full compensation for the sacrificed pawn here though, says the engine.

21 ♖e1

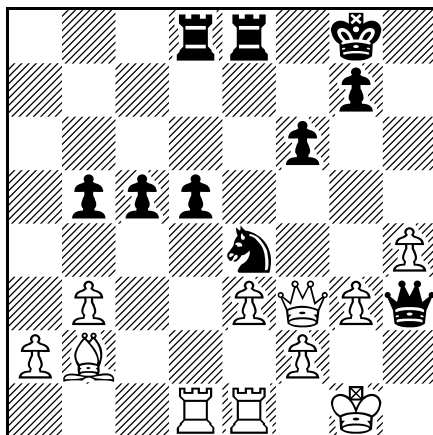
This is a touch slow.

Instead, 21 g4!? ♗xg4 22 f3 ♖g3 23 fxg4 ♖xf1 24 ♗xf1 ♗xg4 25 ♗f4 ♗xf4 26 exf4 ♖e2 27 ♗e5 ♖d2 28 ♗c3 ♖c2 29 ♗e5 ♖d2 is a repetition draw.

21...♖cd8

21...♖c6!, intending to swing the rook to the kingside, looks dangerous for White.

22 ♖c1 ♗h3 23 ♗f3 f6 24 ♗xh3 ♗xh3 25 ♖cd1 b5



Magnus received full compensation for the sacrificed pawn:

1. Black controls the centre.
2. Black's pawns are both fluid and dangerous, worrying White about breaks with...c5-c4, ...b5-b4 and ...d5-d4.
3. Black's knight is the superior minor piece, since it will be difficult for White to engineer f2-f3 to eject it from e4.
4. White's king looks slightly unsafe.

26 ♖g2 ♜e6

Of course Magnus isn't interested in a queen swap, when down a pawn.

27 f3!?

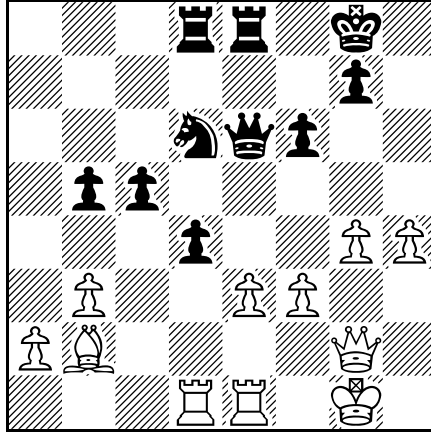
Clearly this weakens the pawn front around the white king. But if not this, then White can only shuffle and wait.

27...♞d6 28 g4

Principle: *When you make territorial gains, make damned certain that whatever you conquer remains conquered, otherwise you risk overextending later in the game.*

Aronian prevents ...♞f5, while contemplating a future g4-g5, softening up the a1-h8 diagonal. The cost, of course, is a weakening of his king and the future risk of overextension.

28...d4!?



Less committal would be 28...b4.

29 ♖d2!?

Alternatively:

a) 29 exd4?? ♜xe1+ 30 ♜xe1 ♜xe1+ 31 ♔h2 ♜de8 when the coming ...♜e2 will be fatal for White.

b) 29 e4?! b4!, intending ...♗b5 followed by ...♗c3, is in Black's favour.

c) 29 ♜c2 ♜d5 30 ♔g2 looks OK for White.

29...♜d5!?

29...dxe3 30 ♜d5 ♜xd5 31 ♜xd5 ♗f7 32 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 33 ♜xe3 ♜d2 34 ♔c3 ♜xa2 35 ♜e8+ ♔h7 36 ♜e7 ♔g8 37 ♜e8+ is a repetition draw.

30 exd4 c4!?

Throughout this game Magnus, refusing to conceal vast ambition, continually takes the law into his own hands by rejecting any continuation which leads to a draw. Here 30...♜xf3 31 ♜g2 ♜xe1+ 32 ♜xe1 ♜f4 33 dxc5 ♗f7 34 c6 ♜d2 35 ♜e8+ ♔h7 36 ♜e4+ ♜xe4 37 ♜xe4 ♜xb2 38 c7 ♜c2 39 ♜c4! (interference) 39...bxc4 40 c8♜ cxb3 41 ♜f5+ g6 42 ♜xf6 b2! 43 ♜xf7+ ♔h8 44 ♜f8+ is perpetual check.

31 ♔a3?

The game is just unclear after the correct 31 ♔f2 cxb3 32 axb3 ♜xb3 33 ♜c3 ♜d5.

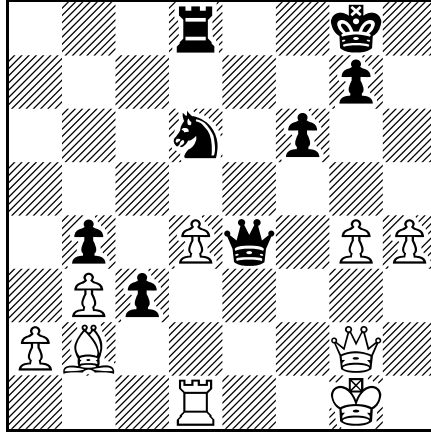
31...♜xf3 32 ♜g2 ♜xe1+! 33 ♜xe1 ♜c3! 34 ♜d1 b4

34...♗f7 is also in Black's favour.

35 ♔b2 ♜e3+ 36 ♜f2 ♜h3 37 ♜g2 ♜e3+

137...♜xh4! is quite awful for White, whose king is too exposed.

38 ♜f2 ♜e4 39 ♜g2 c3!



40 ♖c1

40 ♜xe4 ♘xe4 41 ♙c1 c2 42 ♖d3 ♜c8 43 ♜e3 ♘c3 44 a4 ♘a2 45 ♙b2 (45 ♜e1? ♜c3 wins easily for Black, if b3 falls) 45...c1♙+ 46 ♙xc1 ♜xc1+ is lost for White.

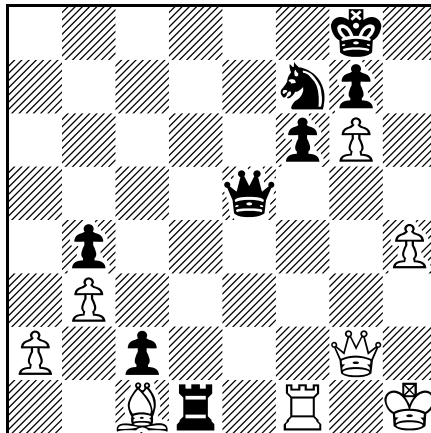
40...c2 41 ♜f1 ♜xd4+ 42 ♙h2 ♜e5+ 43 ♙g1 ♜c5+ 44 ♙h2 ♘f7

It's clear that White's exposed king, coupled with the power of the c2-pawn, means that Aronian is busted.

45 g5 ♜e5+ 46 ♙h1

46 ♜g3? ♜d1 is game over.

46...♜d1 47 g6

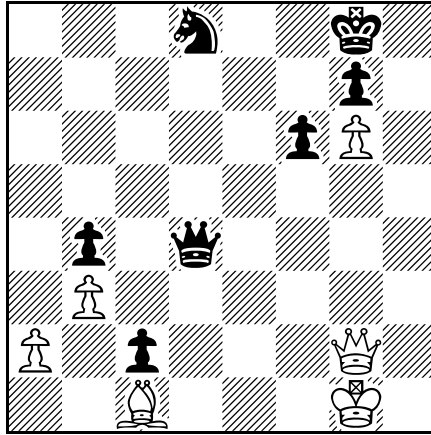


Hercules killed his entire family and gained redemption by accomplishing impossibly heroic deeds. Aronian attempts the same and comes incredibly close to saving a game where at this point, *Stockfish 15* has Black up by '10.77'! This is a prayer, more than an attack. Aronian hopes the pawn may later allow White's queen to create back-rank threats.

47...♖d8 48 ♜f3 ♜xf1+ 49 ♜xf1 ♜e4+ 50 ♜g2 ♜xh4+

White dropped a depressing number of pawns over the last 10 moves.

51 ♖g1 ♜d4+?



Instead, 51...♜e1+ 52 ♜f1 ♜e4! is completely lost for White. If 53 ♜c4+ ♜xc4 54 bxc4 ♜e6 55 ♖f2 b3! 56 axb3 ♜c5 with deadly dual threats on d3 and b3.

52 ♖h2?

52 ♖f1! ♜d1+ 53 ♖f2 ♖f8 (after 53...♜xc1?? 54 ♜d5+ Black is mated) 54 ♜a8 won't be so easy for Black to convert.

52...♜d1?

52...♜c5! 53 ♜e4 ♖f8 54 ♖g2 ♜c6 leaves White busted.

53 ♜e4!

Threatening a back-rank cheapo on e8. The engine has the game back to even.

53...♖f8

After 53...♜d6+ 54 ♖g2 ♜c6 55 ♖f3 ♖f8 56 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 57 ♖e4 ♜e5 58 a3 bxa3 59 ♜xa3+ ♖e8 60 ♖d4 ♜xg6 61 ♖d3 ♜e5+ 62 ♖xc2 White should hold the draw, with some difficulty.

54 ♜xb4+ ♖e8 55 ♜b5+ ♖e7 56 ♜c5+ ♖e6 57 ♜c8+ ♖e5 58 ♜b2+?!

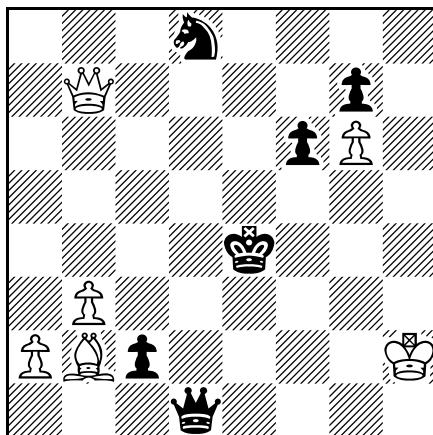
58 ♜b8+ ♖f5 59 ♜b5+ ♖xg6 60 ♜e8+ will be perpetual check.

58...♖e4?!

In the chaos of mutual time pressure, the players experience difficulty discerning what is what and which is which.

With 58...♖f4! 59 ♜c7+ ♖g4 60 ♜g3+ ♖f5 61 ♜f2+ ♖xg6 62 ♜g3+ ♖f7 63 ♜c7+ ♖g8 64 ♜c4+ ♜f7 Black dodges the perpetual check.

59 ♜b7+??



Let me guess: you profess puzzlement at why a player who hovers around the 2800 mark just placed his queen on an en prise square? In rapid games, forget about unravelling your position's deepest mysteries. We must settle for the avoidance of cheapos and pray we don't hang stuff! Now you know even world-class players drop queens when they have almost no time on their clocks and live off their bare subsistence welfare state of the clock's increment.

59... ♖xb7 0-1

Oops. White's once reasonable chances to hold the game flopped into a disreputable sprawl.

Game 18
I.Wang-C.Lakdawala
 San Diego (training game) 2022

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5

My relationship with several openings, including the black side of Najdorf, Dragon, King's Indian and QGD Tarrasch is double-edged. Yes, there is yearning on my part to play Tarrasch (and the other openings listed), yet I can't ever get myself to bring from my lips the word 'love', as this game proves, since stylistically, I'm just not right for her. As you may have guessed, I don't normally play QGD Tarrasch and am on a visitor's/teacher's temporary pass.

5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 g3 ♘f6 7 ♙g2 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♙c5 9 ♘xc6 bxc6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♚c2 ♙b6 12 ♘a4 ♙d7

In a couple of games' time we look at 12... ♙a6.

13 b3 ♚e8 14 ♙b2 h5

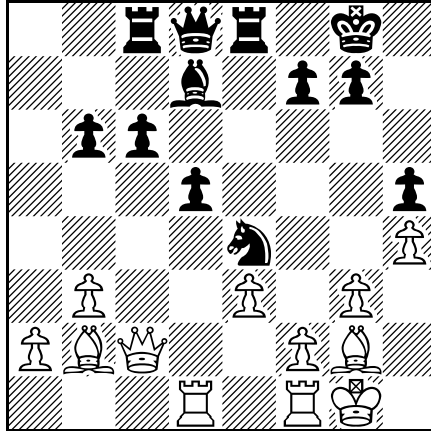
Please meet the least artistic player in chess history. Monkey see, monkey do! I had al-

ready looked at Magnus' two games in the line and liked what I saw with the push of the h-pawn.

15 h4 ♖e4

Threat: ...♗xg3.

16 e3 ♜c8 17 ♗xb6 axb6 18 ♜ad1



The engine doesn't like this move as much as Aronian's queen retreat to d1, which we saw last game, and it already prefers Black after my next move.

18...♙f5

Threatening the cheapo ...♗xg3.

19 ♙a1

Sneaky! Isaac sets up a counter-cheapo.

19...♗d6?!

No, I refuse to fall for your vulgar cheapo! In doing so I retreated unnecessarily.

Instead, 19...♗xg3?? hangs a piece to 20 ♜b2, but after 19...♜d7 20 ♜b2 f6 Black stands better since White has no plan but to await events.

20 ♜e2 ♙g4

I thought this would create weakness, but now I'm not so certain since it allows Isaac to create counterplay with f2-f3, followed by e3-e4.

Maybe I should have opted for 20...♜d7 21 ♜xh5! ♙g4 22 ♜g5 f6 23 ♙xf6 ♙xd1 24 ♜xd1 ♗e4 25 ♙xe4 ♜xe4. Two pawns are decent compensation for the loss of the exchange, and the engine rates the game at approximately even.

21 f3!

I thought he would chicken out and play the strategically dubious 21 ♙f3?! ♜d7 with a clear advantage to Black, who will swap away the steward of White's light squares.

21...♙e6

21...♙f5 is still met with 22 e4!.

22 e4!

Opening Repertoire: Queen's Gambit Declined Tarrasch

Principle: *Open the position when you own the bishop-pair.* In this case the move's power is enhanced further by the fact that Black's knight would be pinned if I opened the d-file with an exchange on e4.

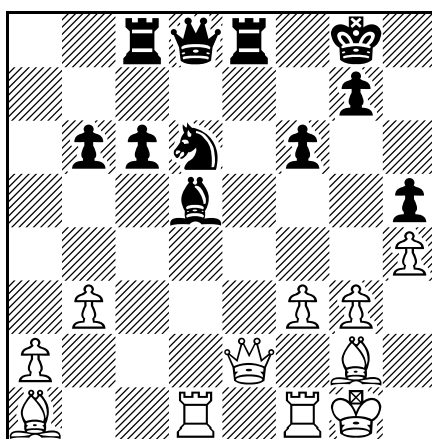
22...f6

After 22...dxe4? 23 fxe4! ♖g4 24 ♙f3 ♜e6 (24...♞e7?? 25 ♙xg4 hxg4 26 ♞xg4 leaves Black totally busted, since 26...f6 is met with the simple 27 ♙xf6) 25 ♙xg4 hxg4 26 ♞xg4 ♜g6 27 ♞f4 ♞e7 28 h5 ♜e6 29 e5 Black lacks sufficient compensation for the missing pawn.

23 exd5

23 ♞d3 ♗f7 is about even.

23...♙xd5!?



Are contradictions reversed truths? Dammit, I have been outed. This move proves that I am an anti-isolani QGD Tarrasch imposter.

The engine, a true QGD Tarrascher, opted for the isolani route with 23...cxd5. The engine rates both captures at dead even.

24 ♞d3 ♞c7

It's a good idea for the queen to get off the d-file.

25 ♙h2

He covers the tender g3-square.

25...♜cd8 26 ♞g6

26 ♜d2 is also an idea.

26...♞f7

What raw, animal magnetism. I'm kidding of course and 'courage' is not a word which normally pops into our mind when we go over the games of noted chess fraidy-cat, C. Freddy Lakdawala.

Begging for swaps is also an anti-QGD Tarrasch move since real Tarraschers love mid-ldgames and a red-blooded one would have gone for a more complex position with

26...♗f7.

27 ♖xf7+

27 ♖c2 is also approximately even.

27...♖xf7

I bring the king closer to the centre and there is no reason to decentralize my bishop.

28 ♖d2!

It's difficult to catch this kid in a trap. Isaac alertly evades the trap 28 ♖fe1? ♖xe1 29 ♖xe1 ♖a8 30 ♖e2 ♗xb3!, picking off a pawn.

28...♗f5 29 ♖c1?!

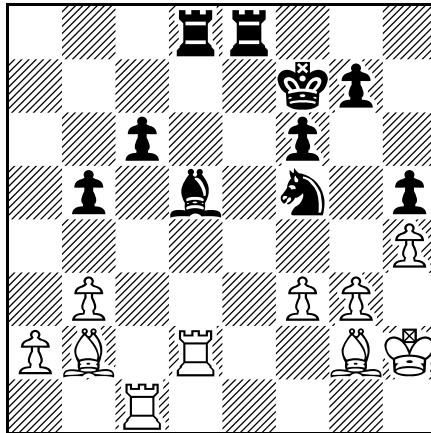
29 ♗h3 ♗e3 30 ♖ff2 c5 is still close to equal.

29...b5?!

Black gets a slight edge with either 29...c5! or 29...♗e3!

30 ♗b2?

The position is approximately even after 30 ♗c3!.



Exercise (combination alert): White's last move allows a combination.

Do you see it?

Answer: Step 1: Sacrifice the bishop on f3.

30...♗xf3!

White's position is jerked erect from its former slumber. While it's true that I didn't really deserve to win this game, can't you be happy for me that I did?

31 ♖xd8 ♖e2!

Ah yes, the old accidental combinational win.

Time for an embarrassing confession: I originally hallucinated and actually intended 31...♖xd8? 32 ♗xf3 ♖d2+ 33 ♗h3 ♖xb2, misbelieving there would be cold financial gain

Opening Repertoire: Queen's Gambit Declined Tarrasch

involved. I completely forgot about the fact that both my c6- and h5-pawns are hanging. The game is a likely draw after 34 ♖xh5+ g6 35 ♖f3 ♗d4 36 ♖xc6 ♜xa2.

32 ♜g1 ♜xb2

Now ...♗e3 is in the air.

33 ♜d3

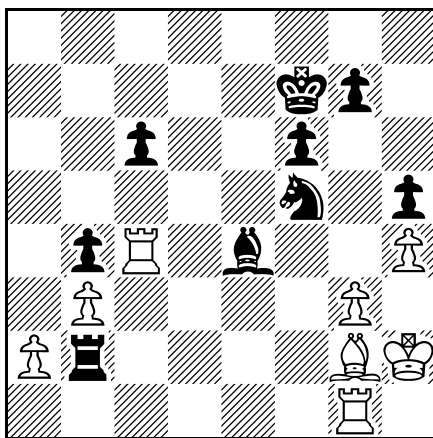
33 ♖h3 fails to 33...♖g4+ 34 ♖h2 ♜xa2 35 ♜d3 ♖e2 36 ♜c3 ♗d4 (threat: ...♗f3+) 37 ♖h1 b4 38 ♜e3 ♗f5!, which runs the rook off protection of the g3-pawn and regains the exchange with a winning position.

33...♖e4!

Removal of the guard. The goal is to seize control over e3. Now White feels a doomsday inevitability from the pressure.

34 ♜c3 b4 35 ♜c4

35 ♜c5 ♗e3 also wins.



Exercise (planning): Find Black's cleanest win.

Answer: Simplification.

35...♖xg2! 0-1

36 ♜xg2 ♜xg2+ 37 ♖xg2 ♗e3+ 38 ♖f3 ♗xc4 39 bxc4 c5 leaves Black up a pawn in the king and pawn ending.

Game 19

H.Melkumyan-M.Carlsen

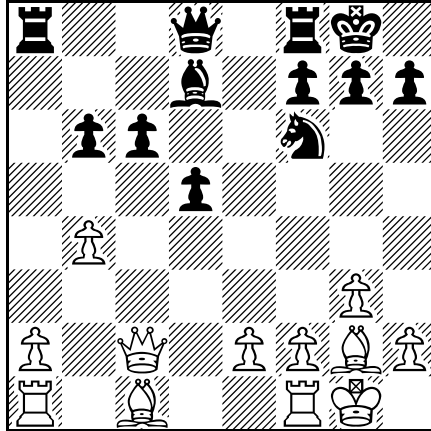
World Rapid Championship, Moscow 2019

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗f3 d5 4 ♗c3 c5 5 cxd5 exd5 6 g3 ♗c6 7 ♖g2 cxd4 8 ♗xd4 ♖c5 9 ♗xc6

bxc6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♔c2 ♘b6 12 ♞a4 ♙d7 13 ♞xb6

White refuses to mess around and grabs the bishop-pair immediately. Of course, as mentioned last game, this greatly improves Black's structure, while opening the a-file for Black's rook.

13...axb6 14 b4



The ideas:

1. White makes it more difficult for Black to play ...c6-c5.
2. White hopes to be able to create a passed pawn with a2-a4 and a4-a5 later on.

Instead, 14 a4 ♖e8 15 b4 ♗e7 (15...♞e4 16 ♙e3 h5 17 ♞fd1 h4 18 ♜a3 ♗e7 19 ♙xe4 ♗xe4 20 ♗xe4 ♜xe4 21 ♞d4 ♞xd4 22 ♙xd4 c5 23 bxc5 bxc5 24 ♙xc5 ♞xa4 25 ♞xa4 ♙xa4 26 gxh4 ♙b5 is completely drawn, D.Fridman-D.Wagner, Magdeburg 2021) 16 ♙e3 ♗xb4 17 ♞fb1 ♗g4 18 ♙f3 ♗h3 19 ♞xb6 was H.Melkumyan-R.Lovkov, Internet (blitz) 2020. Black stands no worse after 19...♞g4 20 ♙xg4 ♙xg4!, intending ...d5-d4!, going after the e2-pawn.

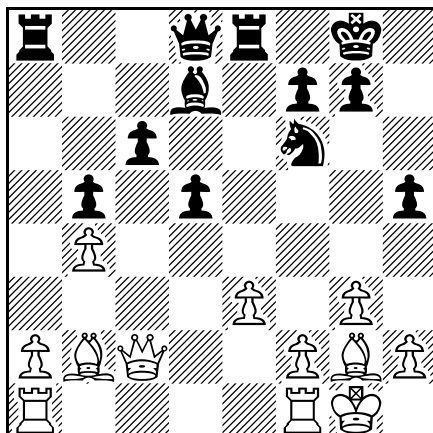
14...b5!

Say goodbye to normalcy. Despite its ugly outer appearance, this is a strong strategic decision which:

1. Removes the force from White's attempted a2-a4 and a4-a5 plan.
2. It leaves a hole on c5, which Black doesn't really care about since only a white knight (which he doesn't own) would be effective on either c5 or a5.
3. Black's backward c6-pawn is easy to defend.
4. The move is in harmony with the Principle: *The power of the opponent's bishop-pair is reduced if you remove the fluidity of the structure and make it more rigid.*

Instead, 14...♞e8, as in N.Sunilduth Lyna-A.Firouzja, Internet (blitz) 2020, looks just a touch inferior for Black after 15 a4.

15 ♙b2 ♞e8 16 e3 h5!



We all know by now that the push of the h-pawn is a source of Black's future counter-play.

17 ♖c3!

We have seen this manoeuvre before as well, which ties down Black's knight due to the mate threat on g7.

17 a4 ♖xa4 18 ♗xa4 bxa4 19 ♕xa4 ♘e4! is equal.

17...♗c8!

Now ...♗h3 is in the air and Carlsen prepares to go after the white king.

18 ♗fd1

18 ♗fc1 is met with 18...♗a6, intending ...♗h3 all the same.

18...♗h3 19 ♗h1 ♗f5! 20 ♗d4!

The c6-pawn can't be touched: 20 ♗xc6?? ♗ac8 (...♗c2 is a deadly dual threat on the b2-bishop and f2-pawn) 21 ♗xd5 ♗g4! 22 ♗xb5 ♘xd5 23 ♗xd5 ♗f5 and White is busted.

20...♗e6

This move indicates that Magnus is going for the full point.

After 20...♗g4 21 f3 ♗xe3 22 ♗xd5! ♗g6 23 ♗d6 ♗g5 24 ♗xg7+ ♗xg7 25 ♗xg7 ♗xg7 26 fxg4 ♗xg4 27 ♗xc6 ♗a4 the game likely ends in a draw.

21 ♗f4

Black looks just a shade better after this move.

21 ♗h4! ♗ae8 22 ♗e1 ♗g4 23 f3 d4 24 ♗xd4 ♗xe3 25 ♗xe3 ♗b1+ 26 ♗g2 ♗c2+ 27 ♗g1 ♗b1+ is drawn.

21...♗g6

Now g7 is covered, which means Black can move his knight to e4.

Stockfish, for some inexplicable engine reason, prefers 21...♗h7. Confession: I don't understand why this would be better than placing the queen on g6.

22 a3

Now the evaluation rises in Black's favour. The engine again wants 22 ♗h4.

22...♖e4! 23 ♔d4

After 23 ♙xe4?! ♚xe4 24 ♜xe4? (24 f3 is necessary) 24...dxe4 25 ♚c2 ♜f5 White is unlikely to survive the punctured light squares around his king.

23...♗d6

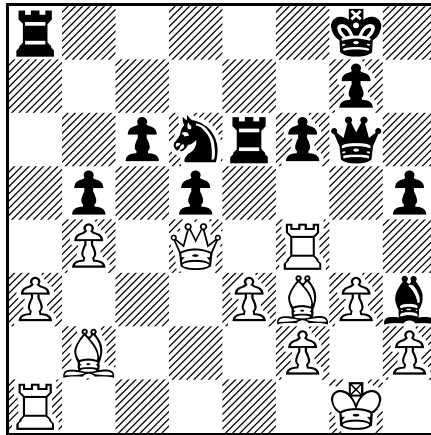
Taking aim at both c4 and f5.

Black stands better after 23...♗g5!.

24 ♙f3!

Taking aim in turn at Black's h-pawn.

24...f6!?



When Caissa's devil speaks to you, his voice isn't sibilantly evil, as Hollywood would have us believe. Instead, it is with the honeyed sweetness and gentility of a pretend blunder, in order to win your trust. Is there such a thing as a soft-spoken rant? Tal, Caissa's old devil, would certainly approve of Magnus' enterprising/risky last move. Sacrifices are fickle entities. In this case Magnus gives away his h-pawn (again!) in exchange for light-square counterplay.

Safer was 24...♚h6! 25 ♙xh5! ♗f5! 26 ♚d1 g5! 27 ♜xf5 ♙xf5 28 ♙e2. White should have enough dark-square play to justify the loss of the exchange for a pawn.

25 ♚d1!

White attempts a citizen's arrest of the h5-pawn.

Magnus may have expected 25 ♜h4?! ♗f5 26 ♙xh5 ♚g5 27 f4 ♚xh4 28 gxh4 ♗xd4 29 ♙xd4 ♙f5 when White doesn't have enough for the exchange due to his multiple pawn weaknesses and leakage along the light squares.

25...♙g4 26 ♙xg4 hxg4 27 ♜xg4

For the second time in the book, Magnus speculates by giving away his h-pawn.

After 27 ♚xg4 ♚xg4 28 ♜xg4 ♚a4! 29 ♜d4 ♗c4 30 ♙c1 g5 Black achieved full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

27...♜f5

