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PREVIEW 1

Introduction

Dear Reader!

It was a daunting task. I have always enjoyed reading good chess books, but I never thought that one day I would be able to write a book myself. Fortunately, I had a helper in my son Edward. He did a tremendous job of selecting and systematizing my problems and studies. Without his support, the book would hardly have seen the light. But finally, it happened and I would like to briefly describe what you can find in it.

I decided to divide the book into four parts. In the first and the most difficult and time-consuming part of the book you will find my memorable games. I emphasize that these are my most memorable games, not my best games so out of 25 games given here there are a few draws and one loss. If I had decided to collect my best games the selection would have been quite different. It should therefore come as no surprise that as many as seven games with world champions found their way into the book. My only game with the great Mikhail Tal, one each with Vasily Smyslov and Vladimir Kramnik, and two each with Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov, with whom I have a positive personal score. The other games are also very dear and memorable to me: some of them were exceptionally important from a sporting point of view, others had a rich creative content. But even so, the selection process for the book was very rigorous. You will find unexpected ideas, positional maneuvers, tactical blows, as well as mistakes, oversights, mutual time trouble and — on the whole — everything that we call ‘the chess struggle’. The important issue was what kind of analysis should be done? I myself never liked books overloaded with computer lines as it is clear that no one calculates them over the board and they are all found only after the game. I decided to leave the computer



Vladimir Akopian

lines only in those cases where they either reveal the beauty of the game or are very instructive.

The second part consists of my 50 most memorable fragments. There you will see both instructive and curious examples. Here too the selection process was quite strict. While the memorable games cover the period of 1991-2010, the fragments cover the span from 1982 till 2016. And since they cover my early years as well, you will find some of them that did not find their way into databases.

The third part of the book contains my 75 studies, in 50 of which White must draw and in 25 must win. I have many more but except for a couple of examples I decided not to include the most difficult and interesting rook studies in the book. Maybe one day I'll write a separate book on those ones. I have to say that composing studies is much more difficult than problems; it's just a hell of a job. I myself have refuted so many "studies" (including studies by the most famous authors) that they would be enough for several books, thus rendering the well-known idea that there are no correct studies, only unrefuted ones, almost unshakable.

And finally, the fourth, my favorite part of the book, featuring my 150 best chess problems. I should talk about this in greater detail: I was 12 when I composed my first problem. It was later published in the article by the famous composer and study-maker Alexander Sarychev, whom I had had the great fortune to meet. Yet, despite this positive experience at a young age, it was only much later that I composed a significant number of problems. On a personal note, I prefer three-movers and four-movers, as I believe one manages to express the thematic idea more fully, which is intrinsically much harder to do in two-movers because of their short solution. On the other hand, in the more-movers, the main idea can be overshadowed due to the complexity of the solution. Complexity of the solution is what for some time kept me from creating the so-called monster problems. But here you will find everything from mate in 2 up to mate in 25! By the way, even today's computers are powerless against some of the monsters given in the book.

And so, I hope that in each of the 300 snippets presented in the book, be it games, fragments, studies or problems, the reader will find something worthwhile. At least, the author really strove for that.

I would like to express my gratitude to Thinkers Publishing, led by Daniël Vanheirzeele, for their editorial support and clear guidance throughout the preparation of this book. Their professionalism and attention to detail helped ensure a smooth and efficient production process.

Vladimir Akopian
Los Angeles, 2025

Chapter 1

Games

Game 1

Akopian, Vladimir - Ulybin, Mikhail

Dutch Defense A90

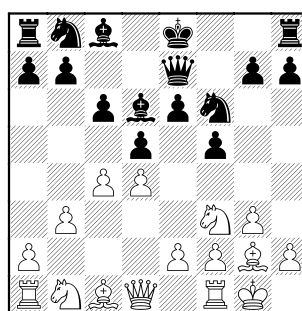
Mamaia, 1991

I have been playing against Mikhail Ulybin since 1985 and we have already played over two dozen games. In 1986, in Odessa, we played a six-game-match for the right to represent the USSR at the World Under 16 Championships in Argentina. And even though in our encounters the advantage in the score is heavily on my side, all the duels were usually tightly-fought and often ended in a draw. This game was of great importance as I was half a point behind my opponent, who was my main rival in the event. Finally, I won the tournament and became the World Junior Champion due to this victory. Ulybin shared first place with me but was second on tiebreak.

1.d4 e6

Ulybin was always willing to play the French, and I had already avoided it with 1.d4, so...

**2.c4 f5 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♙g2 c6 5.♘f3 d5
6.o-o ♙d6 7.b3 ♚e7**

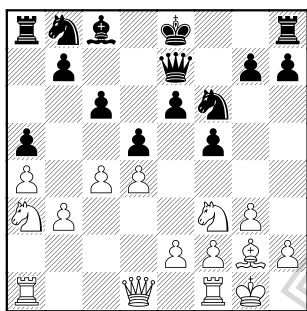


8.a4

Three years prior to this game, at the Botvinnik-Kasparov school in a training game against Ulybin, I opted for

8.♙b2 where, after 8...b6 9.♖c1 ♙b7 10.♙a3, Ulybin reacted poorly with 10...c5? (10...♙xa3) and quickly lost: 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♘c3 ♘e4 13.♚d1 ♘xc3 14.♖xc3 o-o 15.dxc5 ♙xc5 16.♙xc5 bxc5 17.♖e5! ♖f6 18.♖xf6 ♗xf6 19.♘e5 ♗d6 20.♘c4 ♗a6 21.♗xd5 ♘c6 22.♗xf5 ♘a5 23.♗xc5 ♙xg2 24.♗xa5 ♗xa5 25.♘a5 ♙h3 26.f3 ♗e8 27.♙f2 1-0 Akopian-Ulybin, USSR 1988. Later I switched to 8.♘e5.

8...a5 9.♙a3 ♙xa3 10.♘xa3



10...b6

Two other moves were played against me later:

10...o-o 11.♘e5 ♘bd7 12.♘d3 b6 13.♖c2 ♙a6 14.♗fc1 ♗ac8 15.♖b2 ♘e4 16.b4 axb4 17.♘xb4 ♙b7 18.e3 c5 19.♘d3 cxd4 ½-½ Akopian-Kramnik, Moscow 1991;

10...♘a6 11.♘e5 o-o 12.♖d2 ♘b4 13.♘c2 ♘xc2 14.♖xc2 ♘d7 15.♘d3 and White has the upper hand, Akopian-Tseshkovsky, Moscow 1992

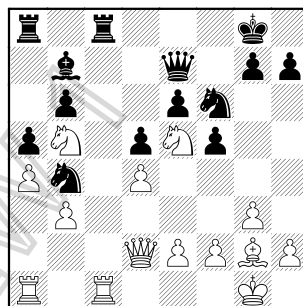
11.♘e5 o-o 12.♖c2 ♙b7 13.♗fc1 ♘a6 13...♘bd7 leads to White's advantage after 14.cxd5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♘xd5

16.♘c4, and White is also somewhat better after the solid 13...♘fd7 14.♘d3.

14.cxd5 cxd5

14...♘b4?! allows 15.d6! ♖xd6 16.♖b2 ♗ad8 17.♘ac4 ♖c7 18.♗d1 with advantage.

15.♘b5 ♗fc8 16.♖d2 ♘b4



17.h3

White has a good knight on e5 but this does not give anything by itself as often happens in the Stonewall system. I did not see a specific way to improve my position and decided to wait, creating at the same time the eventual idea of a g3-g4 advance.

17...♘e4

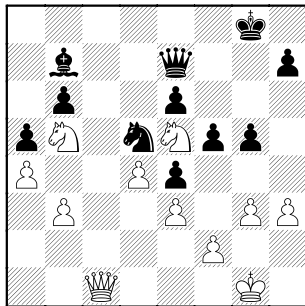
This is pretty logical but during the game I was not sure what to do if Black also waits, say with 17...♖d8 as 18.g4 ♘e4 19.♙xe4 dxe4 20.gxf5 exf5 is not dangerous for Black.

18.♙xe4 dxe4 19.♗xc8+

There is no longer any benefit in keeping the tension on the c-file. If 19.♘c4 Black can simply play 19...♗c6.

19...♖xc8 20.♖c1 ♖xc1+ 21.♗xc1 ♘d5
22.e3 g5?!

I was happy to see this move played as it was not necessary at all. Much simpler was 22...h6 with equal play.



23.♗d1!

Targeting the h5-square, but the position is balanced anyway.

23...♙a6

Getting rid of the knight on b5.

24.♗h5 ♙xb5 25.axb5 ♖g7 26.♙h2

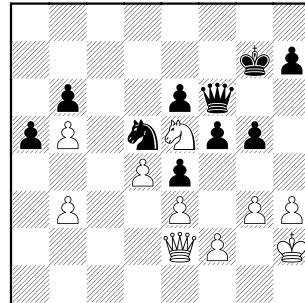
Although the black king is exposed, it is still very difficult to create anything dangerous, so I decided to delay active measures until the time scramble.

26.♘c6 ♗f6 27.♗e8 after 27...f4! simplifies into a draw: 28.exf4 gxf4 29.♘d8 fxf3 30.♘xe6+ ♙h6 31.fxf3 e3 32.♗f8+ (Certainly not 32.♘f4 ♘xf4 33.♗xe3 ♗xd4!) 32...♗xf8 33.♘xf8 ♘c3.

26...♘c7 27.♘c6

The following try also leads to equality: 27.g4 ♘xb5 28.h4 gxh4 29.gxf5 exf5 30.♗xf5 ♘d6.

27...♗f6 28.♗e2 ♘d5 29.♘e5



29...♗e7

In *Chess Informant* I gave 29...f4 30.exf4! (30.gxf4 gxf4 31.♗g4+ ♙h8 is equal (but not 31...♙h6? 32.h4! winning)) 30...gxf4 31.♗xe4 fxf3+ 32.♙xg3 with advantage to White, but after 32...♗g5+ 33.♗g4 (33.♙h2 ♗f5) 33...♗xg4+ 34.hxg4 ♘c3 the game is heading for a draw.

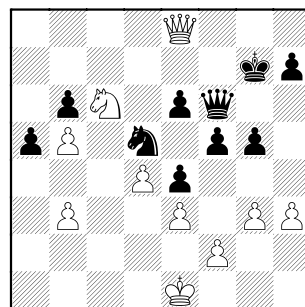
30.♙g2 ♗d8 31.♗h5 ♗e7 32.♙f1 ♗f6

33.♙e1 ♗e7

Here 33...f4 was also possible with an equal game after 34.gxf4 gxf4 35.♗g4+ ♙h8.

34.♘c6 ♗f6 35.♗e8

The last attempt in mutual time trouble, which suddenly worked.



35...f4!

Just in time to create sufficient counterplay.

Black gets into trouble after the careless 35...♙f7 36.♚c8!

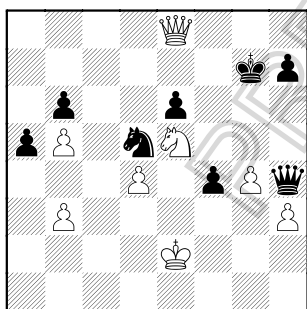
36.exf4 gxf4 37.g4

37.♘d8 leads to nothing after 37...fxg3 38.♘xe6+ ♔h6 39.fxg3 e3 40.♙f8+ (40.♘f4 ♘xf4 and 41.♙xe3? fails to 41...♙e6!) 40...♙xf8 41.♘xf8 ♘c3 42.♘d7 ♘xb5 43.d5 ♔g7 44.♔e2 ♘d4+ 45.♔xe3 ♘xb3 46.♘xb6 ♔f6 and a draw.

37...e3 38.♘e5

38.♘d8 exf2+ 39.♔f1 ♘e3+ (39...♙g6 40.♘xe6+ ♔f6 is also safe) 40.♔xf2 ♘xg4+! 41.hxg4 ♙xd4+ and Black gives perpetual check.

38...exf2+ 39.♔xf2 ♙h4+ 40.♔e2



The last critical position.

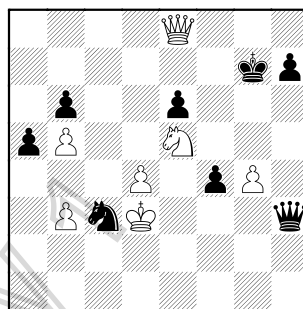
40...♘c3+?

Having only a few seconds for his 40th move, Ulybin goes astray and loses the game while the draw was within his reach: 40...f3+! 41.♘xf3 (41.♔d3 ♙f6) 41...♙xh3 42.♙d7+ ♔h8 (also possible is 42...♔f8 43.♙d6+ ♔g7 44.♙e5+ ♔f8

45.♙h8+ ♔e7 46.♙g7+ ♔d8 47.♙f8+ ♔c7) 43.♙d8+ ♔g7 44.♙g5+ ♔f8 and White runs out of resources.

41.♔d3 ♙xh3+

41...♙g3+ loses to 42.♔c4!



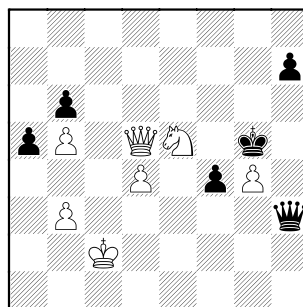
42.♔c2!

Now Black is lost. He was probably only counting on 42.♔c4? ♙f1+ 43.♔xc3 ♙c1+ 44.♔d3 ♙e3+ 45.♔c2 ♙e2+ with perpetual check.

42...♘d5

42...♘e4 43.♙f7+ does not change anything.

43.♙f7+ ♔h6 44.♙xe6+ ♔g5 45.♙xd5 1-0



Game 2

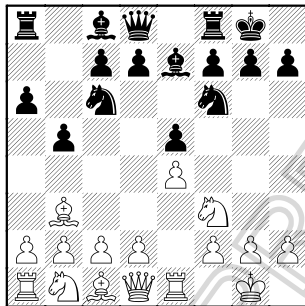
Akopian, Vladimir - Adams, Michael

Ruy Lopez C88

Oakham, 1992

This game took place in the last round of a very strong youth open where I was invited as the under-20 World Champion, and had a huge importance for the final rankings. Before that I had lost a drawn endgame to Shirov (which is given later in 'Selected Fragments'), and was therefore in a fighting mood.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.o-o ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 o-o

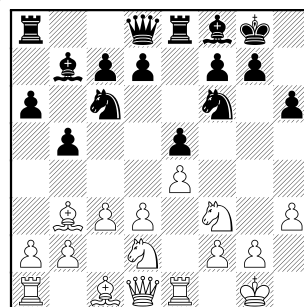
**8.h3**

Avoiding the Marshall Attack, which was one of Adams favorites back then. The other common way to avoid it is 8.a4 b4 9.d3 d6 10.a5 ♙e6 11.♘bd2 ♞c8 12.♙c4 (12.♘c4) 12...h6 13.h3 ♞e8 14.b3 ♙f8 15.♙b2 ♞d7 16.♞e2 ♙xc4 17.♘xc4?! (17.bxc4) 17...g6 and Black was fine in Akopian-Svidler, Wijk aan Zee 2004, although later I managed to win the game.

8...♙b7 9.d3 h6

The alternative is 9...d6 10.a3 ♘b8 (10...♘a5 11.♙a2 c5 12.♘bd2 ♙c8 13.c3 ♙e6 14.♙xe6 fxe6 15.b4 ♘c6 16.♞b3 ♞c8 17.bxc5 dxc5 18.a4 with some edge, Akopian-Beliavsky, Palma de Mallorca (ol) 2004) 11.♘bd2 ♘bd7 12.♘f1 ♞e8 13.♘g3 ♘c5 14.♙a2 ♘e6 15.♘f5 ♙f8 16.♘h2 ♙h8 17.♘g4 ♘xg4 18.♞xg4 ♞f6 19.h4 and White was somewhat better in Akopian-Kramnik, Belfort 2004.

10.♘bd2 ♞e8 11.c3 ♙f8

**12.a4!?**

I also considered 12.♘f1 ♘a5 13.♙c2 c5 when Black is fine.

Probably best for White is 12.d4 d6 13.♙c2 ♘b8! 14.b3 ♘bd7 15.♙b2 with a slightly better game

12...♘a5

A more active move than 12...d6 which, however, was also reliable.

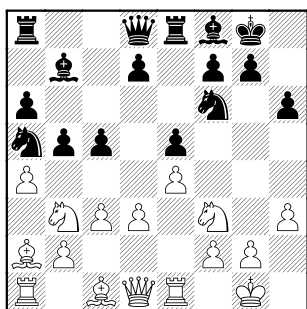
Black does well to avoid 12...d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.d4!

13. ♖a2

13. ♖c2 c5 14. d4 cxd4 15. cxd4 d5 does not present any difficulties for Black either.

13...c5 14. ♘b3!?

But not 14. ♘f1 c4! and White faces difficulties.

**14...♗c6**

This is pretty good but nine years later Black played against me the much simpler:

14... ♗xb3! 15. ♖xb3 (15. ♗xb3?! d5!) 15... ♗c7 16. c4 bxc4 17. ♖xc4 d5 18. exd5 ♗xd5 19. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 20. ♖d2 ♗ad8 21. ♗c2 ½-½ Akopian-Tkachiev, Enghien les Bains 2001.

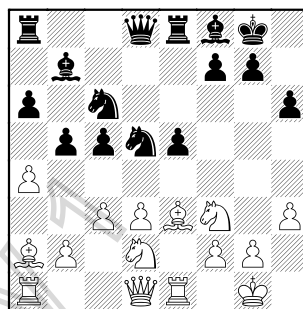
15. ♖e3 d6

15...c4 was also good enough: 16. axb5 axb5 17. dxc4 bxc4 18. ♗bd2 ♗a5! 19. ♖xc4 (19. ♗xc4 ♗xc4 20. ♖xc4 ♖xe4) 19... ♗xc4 20. ♗xc4 ♗xa1 21. ♗xa1 d6 22. ♗fd2 ♗xe4 23. ♗xe4 ♖xe4 24. ♖b6 ♗a8 with equality.

16. ♗bd2 d5?!

This attempt to seize the initiative is hasty and only creates problems.

16... ♗c7 is risky due to 17. ♗h4! ♗e7 18. ♗f3! but correct was 16... ♗a5! 17. b4 cxb4 18. cxb4 ♗c6 19. ♗b3 ♗d7 with an equal game.

17. exd5 ♗xd5**18. ♗e4!**

Although White gives up his dark-squared bishop, in return his pieces gain activity and start eyeing the black king.

18. axb5 axb5 19. ♗b3 fails to 19... ♗a5!

18...♗xe3 19. ♗xe3 ♗a5

In order to close the a2-g8 diagonal with an eventual ...c5-c4 but this move was also possible right away: 19...c4!? 20. dxc4 ♗xd1+ 21. ♗xd1 bxa4 22. c5 ♗ad8 23. ♗ee1 and White is slightly better.

20. ♗fd2!

Preventing 20...c4 and freeing the third rank for the rook.

20...♗c8

20... ♖d5 would have been a blunder in view of 21. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 22. ♗f6+ gxf6 23. ♗g4+ ♖g7 24. ♗g3 ♗f8 25. ♗xg7+ ♗e7 26. ♗e4.

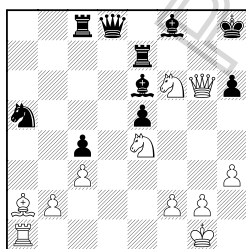


Vladimir Akopian

21.axb5 axb5 22.♖f3 c4

Missing White's reply.

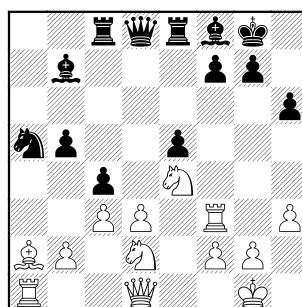
Correct was 22...♗e7 23.♖g3 ♘h8 24.♗h5 c4 (not 24...g6 25.♙xf7! ♗xf7 26.♗xg6 ♗g7 27.♗xh6+ ♗h7 28.♗e6 crushing) 25.♟f6 g6 (25...gxf6 26.♗g4) 26.♗xg6 f6 27.♗xg6 ♙d5 28.dxc4
a) 28...bxc4 29.♞de4! ♙e6 (29...♗c6 30.♗d1!)



30.♙b1! (if 30.♞g5 then 30...♗d3! (not 30...h5 31.♙b1! and Black is helpless despite his huge material advantage: 31...e4 32.♙xe4 ♗c5 33.♗e1! ♗d2 34.♗e3 ♗d1+ 35.♞h2 ♞c6 36.♗f3! ♗xf3 37.♙xf3 ♞e5 38.♗h5+ ♞g7 39.♗xg5+ ♞h8 40.♗h4+ ♞g7 41.♙e4 and White

should win) 31.♗xd3 cxd3 32.♞xe6 d2 33.♞e4 ♗b7 34.♞xd2 ♗xb2 35.♞e4 ♙e7 36.♙d5 ♗b5 37.c4 (37.♗d1 ♞c4) 37...♞xc4 38.♗a7 ♗xd5 39.♗xe7 ♞d2 with a draw) 30...♗d1+ (if 30...♞b3 31.♞g5 ♗d1+ 32.♞h2 h5 33.♙f5! crushing; 30...♞c6 31.♞g5! ♗d1+ 32.♞h2 h5 33.♙e4! ♗xa1 34.♗h5+ ♞g7 35.♗h7+ mating) 31.♞h2 ♗c1! 32.♗xa5 ♗f4+ 33.g3 ♗f5 34.♗xf5 ♙xf5 35.♞d6 ♙xb1 36.♞xc8 ♗f7 37.♞g4 h5 38.♞xe5 ♗xf2+ 39.♞g1 ♗xb2 40.♞d6! with a better endgame.

b) 28...♞xc4! 29.♞de4 ♙e6 30.♞g5 h5 31.♗h5+ ♞g7 32.♙b1 e4! 33.♗xg5+ ♞f7 34.♙xe4 ♙g7 35.♗g6+ ♞f8 36.♞h7+ ♞g8 37.♞f6+ and a draw by perpetual check.

**23.♞f6+! gxf6**

This seems forced but still, the lesser evil would have been 23...♞h8 24.♞xe8 ♙xf3 25.♗xf3 ♗xe8 26.♙xc4 ♞xc4 (26...bxc4? 27.♗xa5 cxd3 28.♗xd3) 27.dxc4 bxc4 28.♗a5! with a considerable advantage.

24.♗g3+ ♙g7 25.♗g4 ♞f8

The black king has to run to the center.

26.♗xg7+ ♞e7 27.♗xh6 ♗g8

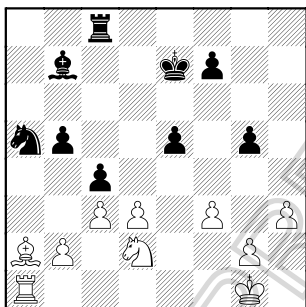
The other two continuations fail as well:

27...cxd3 28.♙xf7 ♖xf7 29.♗h7+ ♔e6
30.♞xd3 ♗c7 31.♗xc7 ♞xc7 32.♞xa5;
27...♞h8 28.♗g7 ♗d7 29.♘f1 ♞cg8
30.♗xg8 ♞xg8 31.♞xg8 cxd3 32.h4.

28.♞xg8 ♗xg8 29.f3 ♗g5

29...cxd3 allows 30.♙xf7! while
29...♗d8 30.dxc4 ♗b6+ (30...bxc4
31.♗e3 is hopeless) 31.c5! ♗xc5+ 32.♔h2
♘c4 33.♙xc4 bxc4 34.♗h4! is also lost.
But now it all comes to an end even
quicker.

30.♗xg5 fxg5



31.♙xc4!

The decisive blow after which Black suffers great material losses.

31...♘xc4

or 31...bxc4 32.♞xa5 cxd3 33.♞xe5+.

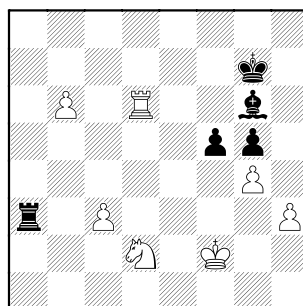
32.dxc4 bxc4 33.♞a7 ♞b8 34.♘xc4

White has won a second pawn and the rest is pure technique.

34...♔e6 35.b4 e4 36.fxe4 ♙xe4 37.♞a6+ ♔e7 38.♘d2 ♙d3 39.♞c6 ♞a8 40.♔f2 f5 41.♞c7+ ♔f6

41...♔d6 42.♞c5 ♞e8 43.♘c4+ does not change anything.

42.♞d7 ♙b5 43.♞d5 ♙e8 44.g4 ♙g6 45.♞d6+ ♔g7 46.b5 ♞a3 47.b6 1-0



Game 3

Tal, Mikhail - Akopian, Vladimir

Sicilian Defense B51

Barcelona, 1992

This is my only game with the 8th world champion. No game I have played in my career has had as much speculation as this one; the game was destined to become well-known in chess history,

but let's start from the very beginning. This was my first major round-robin tournament, and being under-20 World Champion, I wanted to perform to the best of my abilities. I was doing

well and shared first place two games before the end of the event. In the last two rounds, I had to play with White against Viktor Korchnoi and then with Black against Tal; those were my first games against both chess giants. On the eve of my game with Korchnoi, Tal offered me a draw through the tournament translator. My answer was that I couldn't make a decision right away since my perspective depended on my game with Korchnoi. However, I missed a not very difficult win against Korchnoi, and thus had to decide what to do next. I have to say that I was always against making short draws, and besides, I had a unique opportunity to play against Mikhail Tal himself! Here, I recall a similar episode when I faced another famous player, Vladimir Bagirov, in Capelle-la-Grande in 1999. I had the black pieces against him in the first round. While making his 13th move, Bagirov offered me a draw. Again, as here with Tal, I refused—not out of any confidence that I'd crush them, but I wanted to play a worthy game against an opponent who I probably would not play again. Sadly, that happened to be the case. So, back to our game with Tal, and I decided to play at full strength in the last round and asked the translator to inform Tal about my decision. I want to point out that I had no personal contacts with Tal himself, and only right before the game, Mikhail Nehemievich caught me in the street and without referring to previous negotiations, asked:

“Volodya, what are your plans for today's game?”

“I'd like to play with you, Mikhail Nehemievich,” I answered.

“No problem,” Tal answered, and we headed to the tournament hall.

As you see, everything was pretty simple. So how did this game become so famous that it occasionally pops up in the press, flavored with speculation and idle gossip? For instance, the distorted version of this story was described by Maxim Dlugy and Ivan Sokolov in their latest books, and even people who have no idea about what happened in reality still take that fake for granted. In fact, this whole fiction goes back to a distorted interpretation in the very first of Genna Sosonko's articles on this subject. I don't know if he was misinformed or if he just decided to embellish the story for his own amusement, but this is how such myth was created! By the way, Tal himself always liked to embellish things, but as one of the Icelandic sagas says: “A tale is but half told when only one person tells it!” In any case, Sosonko could have talked to me before writing. In his essay “My Misha” in *New In Chess*, written shortly after Tal's death, there is the following quote. “In the last game, assuming that it would be a quick draw, he played 3.♗b5 in the Sicilian, offered a draw and received a refusal. In a lost position, already under attack, his young opponent himself offered a draw. That was the last