

Learning chess with
Vladimir Simagin
A quest for beauty

Mihail Marin



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Vladimir Pavlovich

Disclaimer

Anticipating a question many may ask, I will explain how the idea of writing this book came up.

So, “Why Simagin?”

The ample gallery of post-war Soviet grandmasters features a wealth of more resounding figures than Simagin. It suffices to mention that he never won the Soviet championship, nor did he ever finish on the podium. True, Chessmetrics place him in 22nd place on the 1949 world-ranking list, but how significant could that be in a country where so many world champions and candidates were born?

In his foreword to his best game collection (see above), Simagin himself mentions the frequent situation featuring a discrepancy between his inner contentment with respect to the quality of his play and the cruel reality illustrated on the tournament cross-table.

I will “render unto the sceptics the things that are the sceptics”: from a purely sportive point of view, Simagin was just one of the many Soviet grandmasters. However, continuing to paraphrase the famous phrase involving Caesar’s name until its logical end, we should also render “unto the chess students what is the chess students’!” I am referring to Simagin’s best games, of course.

I would also add that we are all chess students. Regardless of whether we are amateurs or grandmasters, we are bound to permanently aim at improving.

Simagin, the chess alchemist

When the publisher invited me to write a book on Simagin, I immediately remembered my old “vision”, but also the unequalled feeling after having played over his games.

As he himself confesses, Simagin treasured the game of chess as a harmonious whole. However, if we divide the game into the usual parts namely the opening, the positional middlegame followed by the tactical culmination or the endgame, I would say that he was not equally strong in all of them.

Simagin unleashed many profound and original ideas in the opening. This must have been one of the reasons why, for many years, he served Smyslov as a second, contributing from the backstage to his world

crown conquest. It also explains why most chapters in this book focus on specific systems or variations. While writing the book, I was amazed by Simagin's impact over the later development of theory and by his perennial ideas.

It is worth adding that all these games are instructive in all their phases. Sometime after the war, Botvinnik started a new fashion, according to which one should analyse the opening in tight connection with the ensuing middlegame structures and plans.

Simagin was unarguably widely regarded as a tactician. His frequent combinations are brilliant and his comments on the tactical phases are excellent. His native talent must have been mainly of tactical nature.

In the remote times when the games used to be adjourned after move 40, opening preparation and endgame play had something in common: the possibility of analysing the respective positions at home. Simagin was an outstanding analyst, as reaffirmed by his endings examined in the book.

With all the due respect, I have the feeling that Simagin was less strong in positional fight. Most of his mistakes, both during the game and in analysis, occur precisely in this phase. He might have faced difficulties reconciling his original thinking with the widely approved patterns.

In order to soften the tone displayed in the disclaimer a little, I would mention that among Simagin's victims in the games below we find world title candidates, challengers and even world champions. Simagin had a huge potential strength, indeed, but could not use it in every game. The latter explains why his lifetime record against, say, Petrosian, was rather poor.

Translation issues

When available, I have quoted Simagin's comments from the book "Simagin. Luchshie partii" (Best games), published in Moscow 1963. Russian and English are slightly incompatible languages, but when translating the comments, I have pursued two main aims.

Firstly, I have tried to maintain all the tiny nuances from Simagin's discourse. As a simple example, the adjective "plohoi-/a" means bad, but "neplohoi-/a" involves certain indeterminacy, depending on the context and intonation. Literally, it translates as "not bad", but it could also mean "pretty good" or only "decent".

Secondly, I have aimed at staying as close as possible to Simagin's laconic and impersonal literary style. This resulted in a frequent usage of the passive voice, not too recommendable in English, but quite normal in Russian. Simagin was a modest person and would write "it was proved" and not "I proved".

Having all these said, time has come to enjoy Vladimir Pavlovich' most instructive games.

Mihail Marin,

Bucharest, December 2020

White strengthens his pawn control in this area, while also opening the g-file for the purpose of an attack.

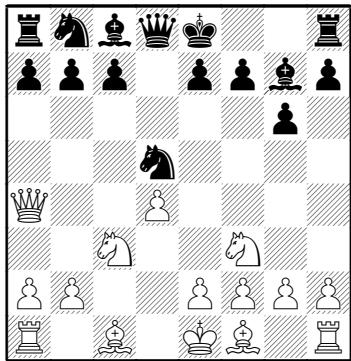
In the two games below, Simagin displayed his usual creativity in the process of exploiting the weaknesses induced by this type of exchange.

Alexander Chistiakov
Vladimir Simagin

USSR ch Moscow 1952

Grünfeld Defence [D90]

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 g6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$
4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 5.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}a4+$



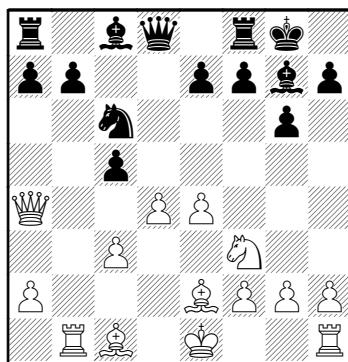
6...c6!?

In order to play this move, one needs to understand the Grünfeld either very well, or not at all! In the resulting exchange variation structure, Black will need to attack the centre with ...c6-c5 anyway, meaning that White will have an extra tempo with respect to the normal lines. As shown in

the comments below, the queen is not necessarily better placed on a4 than on d1, though.

The usual continuations are 6... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and 6... $\mathbb{Q}c6$.

7.e4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 8.bxc3 0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ c5
10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$



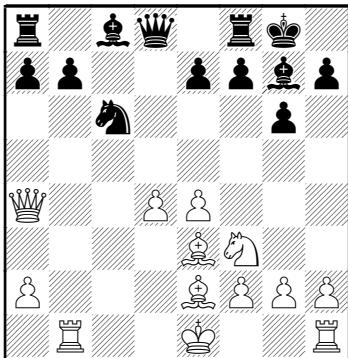
11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

In the similar position from the 8. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ system, the critical continuation is d4-d5, but with the queen on a4 this does not work: 11.d5? $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ (unfortunately, 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ is not available) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ (13. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ allows e6) 13... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ Black is a pawn up and has a fantastic knight on d4.

11...cxd4!?

A curious inaccuracy. If Simagin wanted to undermine the d4-pawn with ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, he should have done it at once with 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, as 12.d5? is impossible due to 12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$.

12.cxd4



12.... $\mathbb{Q}g4?$

After this move Black will land in a very difficult position.

12.... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$

Threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ would have yielded him an entirely viable position.

13. $\mathbb{B}xb7$

Pinning the knight. Moving away with the queen does not promise much: 13. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 14.d5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ with comfortable play. Alternatively, 13. $\mathbb{W}a3$ allows 13... $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ with reasonable play for Black, who has got the extra tempo ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ during the developing process.

13... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}b5$

14. $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{B}fc8$ 16.d5 is ineffective because Black can free himself from the pin with ... $\mathbb{W}g4!$ threatening ... $\mathbb{W}xg2$ with a double attack.

14.... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15.d5 $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 16. $\mathbb{K}f1$

16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{W}g4+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ is unclear

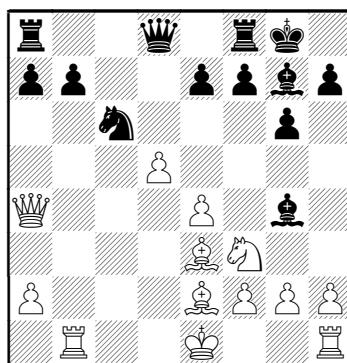
16.... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

17. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ offers Black ample compensation for the pawn, due to the uncastled white king and the control on dark squares.

17.... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

With his king's rook still undeveloped, White cannot count on an advantage.

13.d5!



13.... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

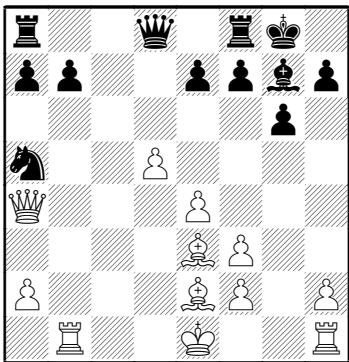
13.... $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 14. $\mathbb{K}f1$ exposes the bishop, without achieving much. In the game, the king willingly went to f1 anyway.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

There was nothing wrong with 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, but Chistjakov preferred to play for a positional kingside attack. His decision was entirely sound, as the next phase of the game will show.

14.... $\mathbb{Q}a5$

A passive, but safe, square for the knight. 14... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ leads to a quick disaster after 15.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb7+-$.



15.h4!

The signal to the attack.

15...h5 16. $\mathbb{R}g1$

This and the next move justify $gxf3$.

16...b6 17.f4 $\mathbb{R}c8$ 18.f5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$

Simagin displayed his pieces harmoniously and his position would have been fine if he hadn't had the chronic weakness on g6.

19. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$

A strong prophylactic move, anticipating ... $\mathbb{Q}h2$. 19. $f4xg6$?! $f4xg6$ opens the f-file for Black's rook, without making any progress with the kingside attack.

The hurried [a] 19. $\mathbb{R}c1$ offers Black a free tempo over the game continuation: 19... $\mathbb{R}c1+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h2$ with a probable draw by repetition. The point is that

23. $\mathbb{Q}f1?$ releases the pressure on g6, allowing 23... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$.

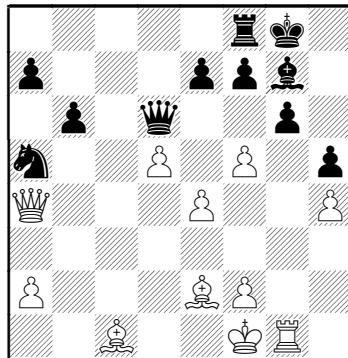
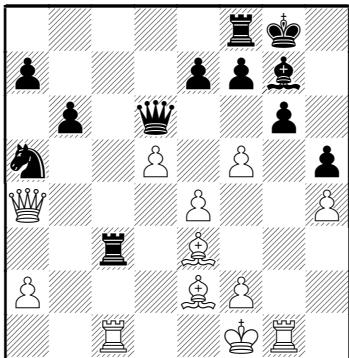
The merits of White's last move are obvious if we consider [b] 19. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ as an attempt to reach the same position as in the game: 19... $\mathbb{R}c3$ 20. $\mathbb{R}c1?$ $\mathbb{Q}a3!$ The point is that the forced 21.e5 allows 21... $\mathbb{R}xe3+$! (with check!) 22. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ with fantastic compensation for the exchange.

Anticipating a bit, the main theme in the next phase will be the move order choice. Moves such as ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}h2$ (later also ... $\mathbb{Q}h3+$) are very committal and one needs to choose the optimal moment for playing them. According to Vladimir Vukovic in his book "Art of attack in chess" one should start his attack (or, as in Simagin's case, counterattack) with the more flexible moves, leaving the highly committal for the culminating stage. This makes sense, as, if the opponent manages to take all the preventive measures in an incipient phase, the attacker could rethink his whole plan. However, we will see that Vukovic' principle needs careful handling.

19... $\mathbb{R}c3$

In this moment, the move order is not important as 19... $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{R}c3$ 21. $\mathbb{R}c1$ transposes below.

20. $\mathbb{R}c1!$



Now is a good moment for this move, exchanging Black's active rook and weakening his back rank defence.

20...♜xcl+

20...♜a3? runs into the familiar **21.e5!**

In the absence of the intermediate check on e3, Black is lost.

21...♝xe5

The queen exchange **21...♜xa4** **22.exd6 exd6** does not reduce the strength of White's attack after **23.fxg6**

22.♛e4 White has a decisive attack, with **♝xh5** to follow soon, for instance.

22...♚h7 **23.fxg6+ fxg6** **24.♝xh5** with a decisive attack.

21.♝xcl

Black has a free tempo to organise his counterplay, but the move order remains an essential issue. His main candidates are **21...♜c8** and **21...♚h2**. Simagin must have thought that moving with the queen away from the centre is too committal, so he chose:

21...♜c8?

In fact, this only helps White to improve his bishop's placement, without creating real threats along the c-file. Moreover, the rook will be vulnerable to **...♝a6** or later to **...♚d7**.

21...♚h2 was the best chance to stay in the game. White would need to sacrifice a pawn in order to maintain the initiative.

22.♚a3

22.♝e3 leads to a draw by repetition according to a familiar pattern? **22... ♚h3+** **23.♚e1 ♚h2** **24.♝f1?! ♚xh4!?**

22...♚xh4 **23.♚f3**

White has regrouped properly

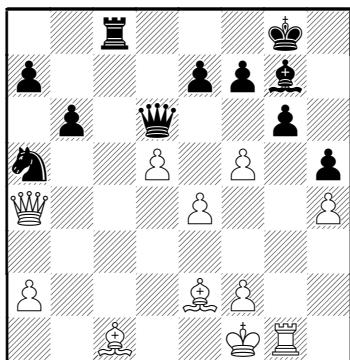
and all his pieces are targeting the enemy kingside. Besides, the black queen is in some danger.

23... ♕f6 24. ♘g5 ♔a1+

This check reduces the pressure along the g-file but opens new perspectives for the rook. If 24... ♕d6 25. ♘f4 ♕f6 26. ♘g5 with the crushing threat e4-e5.

25. ♔g2 ♕e5 26. ♘c1 followed by ♘f4 and ♘c7 with strong initiative.

Black's position is far from easy in these lines, but White would have needed a bit of clear planning after sacrificing the pawn.



22. ♘a3?

As tempting as it might have been to drive the queen away from its central position, this move places the bishop an a vulnerable square failing to anticipate the perpetual check danger at the same time.

22. ♘e3! was correct, preventing the queen's repeated manoeuvre along the third rank. Even

though optically it could seem that Black has a harmonious position, his pieces would have very reduced mobility. The rook is pinned to the back rank in order to avoid ♕e8+ and the queen needs to defend g6. We can talk about some sort of middlegame Zugzwang, leaving Black without any hope to save the game. Here are a few illustrative lines.

22... ♘d8

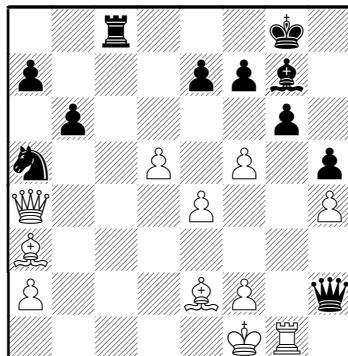
The most neutral move Black could think of. 22... ♘h2 weakens the king's defence without creating effective threats. 23. ♕d7 ♘f8 24. fxg6 with a winning attack.

22... ♘h7 over defends g6 but exposes the king. The most direct win is 23. ♘xh5! gxh5 24. ♕d1! An elegant queen switch, yielding a decisive attack.

23. fxg6 fxg6 24. ♕c2

Threatening the decisive e4-e5. 24... ♘e5?! runs into 25. ♘xh5!

22... ♘h2!



With the third rank available, this creates enough counterplay.

23... $\mathbb{Q}a6?$

The last two moves clearly show that Chistiakov chose the wrong direction for his attack. Both his bishops navigated to the queenside weakening the defence of his king.

Now was a good moment to force Black to deliver the perpetual check with a move targeting the kingside. For instance:

[a] 23. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 24. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 25. $\mathbb{B}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ drawn.

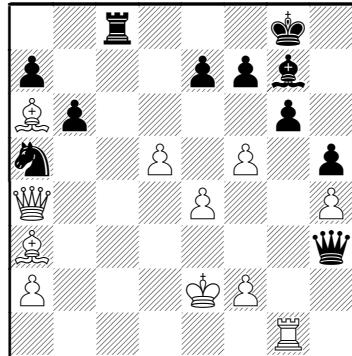
[b] 23. $f\text{xx}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ leads to the same result.

23... $\mathbb{Q}h3+?!$

In order to avoid spoiling the aesthetical effect of Simagin's next move, I will now mention only that this check misses a winning chance.

24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

We can see that the idea behind 23.. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ was clearing this square for the king. 24. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ or 24. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ lead to an immediate draw.



At first sight, things remain critical for Black. The rook and the g6-pawn are hanging and there is no perpetual check in sight. Simagin's answer must have come as a complete shock for his opponent.

24... $b5!!$

This is the only saving move, and quite a paradoxical one. During the whole middlegame, Black based his play on his stability on dark squares, with the small queenside group as an important part of it. At the same time, White seemed to have the control over the light squares. Now, however, things turn dynamic. Black challenges White on light squares, ruining his stability on dark squares.

The main elements involved are interference (referring to the a4-e8 and f1-a6 diagonals) and the queen's overloading, as White needs to defend c2. The immediate [a] 24... $\mathbb{B}c3?$ allows 25. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

25... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 26. $\mathbb{f}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ runs into 27. $\mathbb{E}g3!$ Deflecting the rook. 27... $\mathbb{E}xg3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c8.$ White wins the queen as if 30... $\mathbb{E}g4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b2+$ mates next.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ Black does not have a perpetual, for instance

26... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$

26... $\mathbb{E}c2+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ wins as there is no check on d3.

27. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and the a6-bishop once again proves useful.

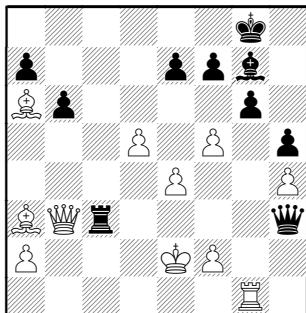
[b] **24... $\mathbb{Q}b3?$** hoping to interfere the d1-a4 diagonal is insufficient, too, but requires a bit more of an effort from White.

25. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$

25. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ allows the knight to join the fight: $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ with material equality and a probable draw by perpetual.

25. $\mathbb{axb3?}$ $\mathbb{E}c2+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ wins.

25... $\mathbb{E}c3$



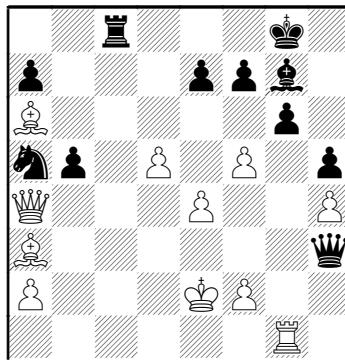
Apparently, Black's counterattack has broken through, but this is just an illusion:

26. $\mathbb{E}g3!$ All other moves lose,

but this exchange sacrifice wins.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe7.$

The d-pawn is unstoppable.



25. $\mathbb{Q}xb5?$

Chistiakov decides to maintain the potential threat $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ underestimating the strength of Black's attack.

[a] **25. $\mathbb{Q}xa5?$** would leave c2 and d3 undefended, making things simple for Black:

25... $\mathbb{E}c2+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ mates next.

26... $\mathbb{Q}c3+$ winning the queen.

The intermediate move [b] **25. $\mathbb{E}g3!?$** drives the queen away from the third rank, would have led to interesting play:

25... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}c4!?$

Again interference! It appears that the queen stands well on the fourth rank, too!

27. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$ 28. $\mathbb{E}e3$

The endgame resulting from

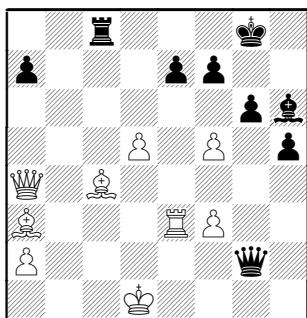
the exchanges on c4 would remain dangerous for Black due to the d-pawn, but he can reach a draw by perpetual:

28... $\mathbb{g}4+$ 29.f3 $\mathbb{g}2+$ 30. $\mathbb{e}1\mathbb{g}1+$

30... $\mathbb{h}6$ is less effective than later in the main line, as after 31. $\mathbb{x}e7$ Black does not have anything better than delivering the perpetual check with 31... $\mathbb{g}1+$ anyway.

31. $\mathbb{e}2\mathbb{g}2+$

White cannot escape the perpetual as 32. $\mathbb{d}1?$ loses to 32... $\mathbb{h}6$.



33. $\mathbb{e}2$

33. $\mathbb{d}3\mathbb{f}1+$ 34. $\mathbb{c}2\mathbb{b}8!$ with a decisive attack, for instance 35. $\mathbb{b}3\mathbb{e}2+$ 36. $\mathbb{c}3\mathbb{g}7+$

33... $\mathbb{f}1+$ 34. $\mathbb{e}1$

34. $\mathbb{c}2$ allows $\mathbb{x}e2+!$

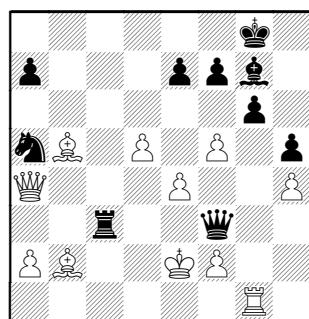
34... $\mathbb{x}f3+$ clearing the f-file for the following manoeuvre.

35. $\mathbb{e}2\mathbb{f}1+$ 36. $\mathbb{e}1\mathbb{f}4$ attacking c4 and threatening ... $\mathbb{d}2$ mate.

[c] **25. $\mathbb{x}b5!$** was the other move leading to a draw after correct

play.

25... $\mathbb{c}3$ 26. $\mathbb{b}2\mathbb{f}3+$



White still needs to be careful.

[c1] **27. $\mathbb{e}1?$** is bad for at least two reasons.

27... $\mathbb{c}4!$

A familiar move. Chistiakov gives only 27... $\mathbb{e}3+$ with a draw by perpetual, but Black can aim for more: 28.fxe3 $\mathbb{x}e3+$ 29. $\mathbb{f}1\mathbb{f}3+$ 30. $\mathbb{e}1\mathbb{x}b2$ with a decisive attack.

28. $\mathbb{x}c4\mathbb{x}e4+$ 29. $\mathbb{f}1\mathbb{x}c4$

Black has restored the material equality and has a winning attack. White's pieces are hanging, g6 is safely defended.

[c2] **27. $\mathbb{f}1!$** keeps White safe.

27... $\mathbb{c}8$

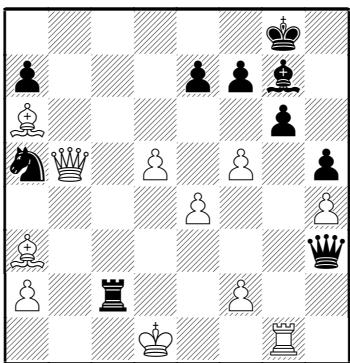
One of the possible rook retreats, leaving the bishop hanging on b2. 27... $\mathbb{h}3+$ 28. $\mathbb{e}1$ extinguishes Black's initiative.

28. $\mathbb{a}3\mathbb{b}3?$ An attempt at keeping the game on. 28... $\mathbb{h}3+$ 29. $\mathbb{e}2\mathbb{c}3$ would reach the same position as after Black's 25th move earlier in this line.

29. $\mathbb{W}xb3$ $\mathbb{B}c3$ 30. $\mathbb{W}b1$ $\mathbb{X}a3$
 31. $\mathbb{A}e2$ $\mathbb{W}h3+$ 32. $\mathbb{E}g2$ $\mathbb{W}xh4$
 33. $f\#g6.$

Black could force a draw by perpetual or keep playing in a position with mutual chances due to the opposite-coloured bishops and both kings' exposure.

25... $\mathbb{E}c2+$ 26. $\mathbb{K}d1$



26... $\mathbb{W}c3$

After this natural move, the game will flow towards a draw.

During the game, it may not be easy to foresee that the exchange sacrifice **26... $\mathbb{W}xa3!$** yields Black a decisive attack.

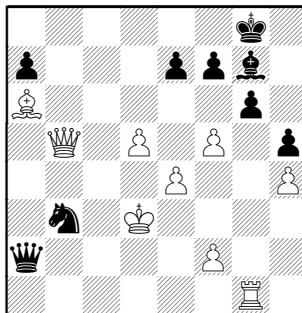
27. $\mathbb{K}xc2$

27. $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{K}h7$ 28. $f\#g6+$ $\mathbb{K}h6!$ only weakens White's king defence, without troubling his rival at all.

27... $\mathbb{W}xa2+$ 28. $\mathbb{K}d3$

The critical move, yielding the king some relative freedom. After 28. $\mathbb{K}d1$ the win is easy to find by calculating a few moves: 28... $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 29. $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 30. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ wins the rook.

28... $\mathbb{Q}b3!$

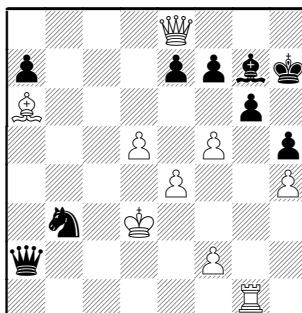


This is the key move, involving the knight in the attack. Black threatens ... $\mathbb{W}d2+$ followed by ... $\mathbb{W}c3$ mate. As usual, such an attack with opposite-coloured bishops is decisive, but Simagin might have thought that his king was in some danger, too.

29. $\mathbb{W}e8+$

29. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 30. $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{K}h7$ threatens both ... $\mathbb{W}xa6+$ and ... $\mathbb{W}e2/c2+$, winning the rook. White can try 31. $f\#g6+$ $f\#g6$ 32. $e5!?$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 33. $\mathbb{A}c4$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ but Black would have a material advantage already, while his attack would go on.

29... $\mathbb{K}h7$



30.♗xg6!?

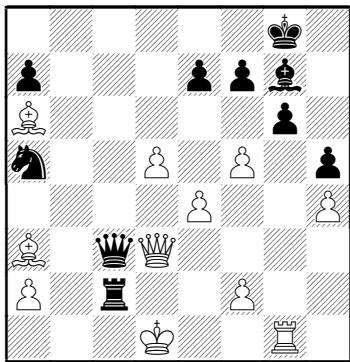
This move, defending the bishop and hoping for a perpetual, was suggested by my old friend GM Suat Atalik when I showed him the game during a broadcast on IBM TV. 30.fxg6+ ♔h6 is hopeless.

30...♛d2+ 31.♔c4 ♛c3+

31...♞a5+ mates by two moves earlier, but I have kept the variation I found during the broadcast without the engines' help.

**32.♔b5 ♞d4+ 33.♔a4 ♛b3+
34.♔a5 ♜a3+ 35.♔a4 ♞b3+
36.♔b5 ♜c5#**

27.♝d3



After Black's missed opportunity, White is safe now.

27...♝xa2

Simpler was 27...♝xd3+ 28.♝xd3 ♜c3 29.♝b4 ♜xd3+ 30.♔c2 ♜d4 31.♝xa5 ♜xe4 with a probable draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

28.♜xc3 ♜xc3 29.♝xe7 ♜d2+!

As pointed out by Chistiakov,

29...♝al+ 30.♔c2 ♜xg1 31.♔xc3 is dangerous for Black. Indeed, after 31...gxg5 32.♝b4 the d-pawn is threatening and the knight is in trouble.

30.♔e1

Of course not 30.♔c1? ♜b3+ 31.♔b1 ♜b2#

30...♝xd5+

The endgame is about equal and the game soon ended in a draw.

**31.♔e2 ♜d2+ 32.♔e3 ♜d7
33.♝a3 ♜h7 34.fxg6+ fxg6
35.e5 ♜xe5 36.♝d3 ♜g7 37.♝g5
♝c7 38.♝b4 ♜b6+ 39.♔e4 ♜c6
40.♝c3 ♜d7 41.♝b5 ♜d6 42.f4**

½-½

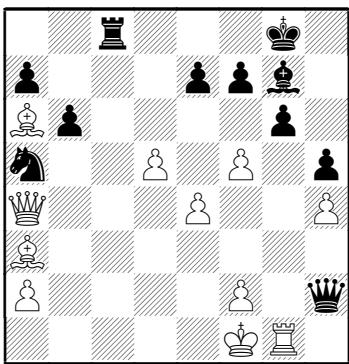
White's activity compensates for the pawn. Chistiakov gives the following he had worked out: 42...♝d8 43.♝c5 ♜e7 44.♝e5 ♜b6 45.♝c7!? Not the only move. 45...♝xb5 46.♝xb5 ♜xc7 47.♝b7 ♜d6 48.♝xa7 ♜h6 49.♝xe7 ♜xe7 50.f5= The white king will reach h1 in time.

A far from perfect game, but quite an instructive one! Simagin did not include it in his book, most probably because of its peaceful result, but Chistiakov used it with brief comments to pay homage to Simagin on the 70th anniversary of his birth. There is no doubt that 24...b5!! was the main reason behind Chistiakov's choice and this is the

main reason I have included the game in this book myself.

However, there is even more about this brilliant idea. Let us return to the position before

23... $\mathbb{Q}a6$



Reiterating the optimal move order issue, 23... $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ is a premature commitment. The queen should not have given up the control over f2 so easily. Now was an even better moment for

23... $b5!!$

Depending on White's answer, Black could strengthen the attack on f2 with ... $\mathbb{B}c2$, ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, or both.

24. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$

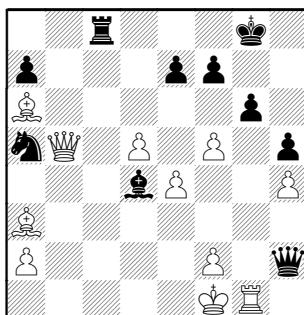
The most demanding answer, keeping both d4 and c2 defended. The difficulty of working out the following lines consists of the fact that Black's attacking move order differs from one answer to another.

[a] 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ maintains the latent possibility of $\mathbb{Q}e8+$, meaning that the only winning move

is

24... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

24... $\mathbb{B}c2$ allows a surprising queen recycling: 25. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 26.fxg6+ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ defending f2. Black should already start the "peace negotiations" with, say $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ with a perpetual.

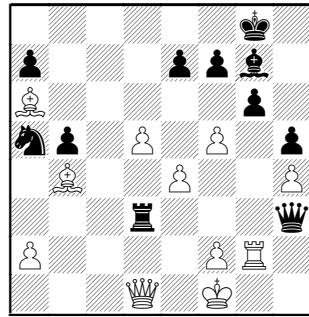
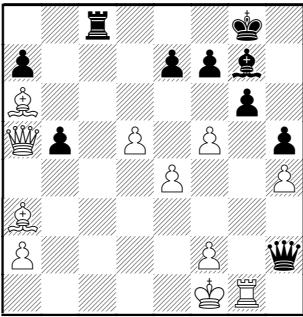


25. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Alternatively, 25. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ Starting a forced manoeuvre, designed to gain one tempo. 26. $\mathbb{Q}gl$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 27. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{B}c2$ wins.

25... $\mathbb{B}b8!$

Threatening 25... $\mathbb{B}b1$. 26. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ The knight joins the attack, using the fact that the bishop has to defend b1. 27.fxg6 f6 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}c3!?$ The white king cannot survive the combined attack of all Black's pieces. After [b] 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ Black's candidate moves switch parts.



24...♝c2!

24...♝d4? 25.♛d2 parries all the threats and wins.

25.♛e1

25.♝g2 allows a decisive forced manoeuvre with checks:
25...♚h1+ 26.♝g1 ♚h3+ 27.♝g2
♝d3+ 28.♚g1 ♚d1+ 29.♚h2 ♜e5+
30.♝g3 ♞xf2+ wins.

**25...♝d4 26.♝g2 ♚h1+ 27.♝g1
♞f3 28.♝g2 ♞xa3** attacking the bishop and threatening ...♝c1.

I must confess that from all the lines resulting after 23...b5!! I managed to work out all the details without the help of the engines only after 24.♛xb5.

[c] 24.♛d1 is passive and allows a massive invasion.

**24...♝c3 25.♝b4 ♚h3+ 26.♝g2
♝d3**

Black's activity looks crushing, but he needs to work out few concrete details in order to prove a convincing win.

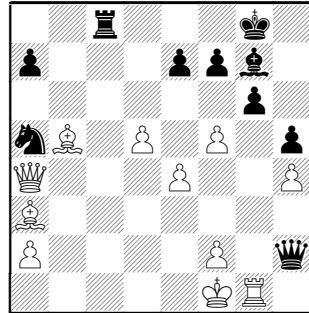
27.♛e2

If 27.♛c2 ♜c4 28.♝xb5 the most spectacular win is 28...♝g3!!
29.fxg3 ♜e3+.

27...♝d4 28.fxg6

White seems to have stopped the first wave of attack and started his own counterplay, but the next move puts things in the right places.

28...♝g3!! 29.fxg3 ♚h1+ mating next.



24...♞c4!

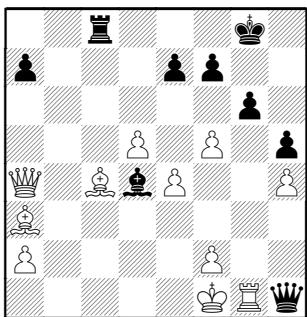
This move, preparing ...♝d4, is

easy to see, but its consequences require some further analysis.

25.♕xc4 ♔d4 26.♗g2

Keeping the queen active for the time being. 26.♗c2 loses to 26...♝xc4!

26...♛h1+ 27.♔g1



27...♛xh4!!

This is not just a display of greediness before switching to the winning plan. It is essential to eliminate the pawn controlling g5. The premature 27...♛f3? 28.♗g2 ♜xc4 runs into 29.♗e8+ ♔g7 30.♗xg6+! fxg6 31.♗xe7+! ♔h6 32.♗g5+ This is the whole idea. Without the h4-pawn, White does not have a perpetual. 32...♔h7 33.♗xg6+ ♔h8 34.♗h6+ ♔g8 35.♗g6+ drawn.

28.♗g3 ♛h1+ 29.♔g1

29.♔e2 ♛xe4+ is no improvement.

29...♛f3 30.♗g2 ♜xc4

Without the aforementioned resource, White is lost. The rook is taboo due to 31...♝d1

mate.

I can testify that analysing the position after the missed 23...b5 and 26...♛xa3 over the board was exhausting and it did not reveal the whole truth. With the engines' help, things are simpler, but we can understand Simagin for choosing the move order keeping the calculating process within human ranges.

One may argue that the behind the scene variations are more beautiful and instructive than the game itself, but we should also keep in mind that Simagin might have anticipating the hidden beauties when conducting his middlegame play. One way or another, the game offers to us all, author, readers and reviewers, the possibility of testing and improving our tactical abilities and satisfy our taste for refined aesthetics.

Leonid Shamkovich

Vladimir Simagin

Leningrad Chigorin Memorial
1951

Grünfeld Defence [D90]

**1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5
4.♘f3 ♜g7 5.♗b3 dxc4 6.♗xc4
0-0 7.e4 ♜g4**

“A system of development worked out and introduced into the practice by Grandmaster V. Smyslov.” (Simagin)