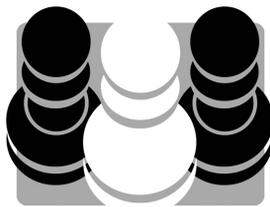


Positional Decision Making in Chess

by

Boris Gelfand

with invaluable help from Jacob Aagaard



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Foreword by Jacob Aagaard

I am the ghost writer for this book, though the word writer does not fully explain what I have been doing. I have analysed positions, asked questions, recorded the answers, typed in everything and applied my moderate experience with chess writing to improve the structure and order of what had been said.

Although this is all work that a writer does, the most important element is missing. The ideas in this book and the reasoning behind them comes from Boris and not me. If you want to know what I think, please buy *my* books (and I mean that, please buy my books!).

I have dreamed about being involved in a project like this for a very long time. As a grandmaster I understand quite a bit of what is happening in top-level games, but obviously my understanding of the game is not at the same level as a World Championship challenger. I have wanted to be able to use my skills as an experienced writer and trainer to ask the right questions and obtain insights from him that you would not get if he was writing the book himself. Actually, it was especially the “obvious” things that fascinated me about this process. Whenever something was obvious to Boris, I knew that it might not be obvious to many others; and that his explanation would be very instructive.

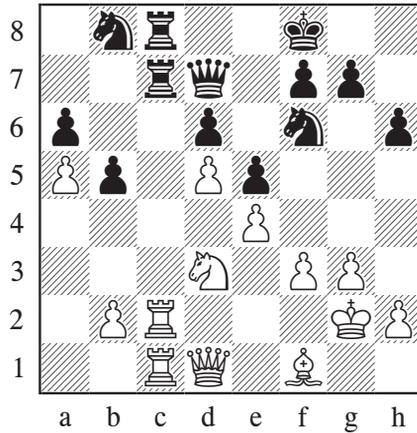


The authors in conversation at the Tromso Olympiad in 2014

This position is the cleanest example.

Boris Gelfand – Daniel Campora

Cesme 2004



White to play

Boris quickly and confidently made his next few moves, and would not have spent any time explaining them had I not asked him why he played as he played. The explanation was short, clean and crisp. It was also incredibly illuminating. See more on page 116.

This has been one of the most interesting projects in my career and I want to thank Boris from the bottom of my heart for agreeing to work with me on it.

Jacob Aagaard
Glasgow, April 2015



1988

I see myself as a well-educated player and am always happy when I am able to play games that show this. The following game is quite interesting from this perspective. In it I managed to play the entire game based not only on one idea, but on the same idea as the above game. The b7/c6-pawns are fixed and vulnerable and I managed to get a knight to a5.

Boris Gelfand – Alexander Morozevich

Astana 2001

Alexander Morozevich is a highly creative grandmaster from Moscow. He has always gone his own way and tried to reinvent the game of chess, which at times is very impressive, but at other times has been a liability for him. He played in the World Championship tournaments in 2005 and 2007 and peaked in the world rankings in 2008 where he was placed 2nd. He has not done as well in recent years, but is still often found either just inside or just outside the top ten. It is well known that Morozevich played a lot of training games with

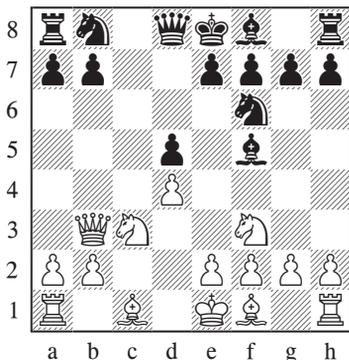
friends and trainers, in person or online. In 2001 when this game was played, Morozevich had just emerged in the World elite and this was how he did it. He played rare openings, often provocative and dubious-looking. But he had analysed them deeply and as said, gathered a lot of practical experience in training games.

Probably people remember his 11...g5 in the Slav, which is now the main line. He played the Chigorin and in the French he popularized some sharp variations with ...gxf6 in the Burn Variation. His contribution to opening theory in that period was huge and is still felt today, especially through the style of preparation, involving very risky and concrete play, but also creating big problems for the opponent to solve, if he wants to try to refute it. The opponent is forced to think independently and play very energetically from the beginning, as in this game.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗f3 a6

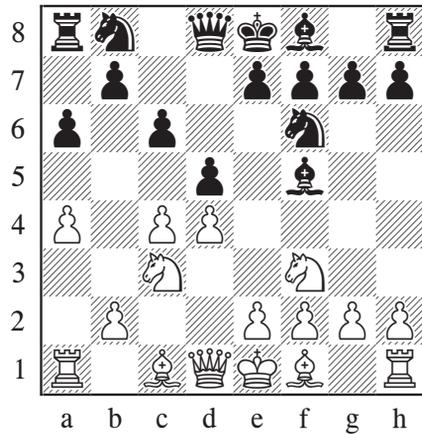
Again the Chebanenko Variation. At the time this game was played, this variation was quite novel and the ideas of it not yet fully mapped out. At first it was developed by especially Bologan, but later on both Kasparov and Topalov played it for a while, adding a lot of new ideas to the theory.

Comparing with this game it makes sense to illustrate Black's idea based on 4...♗f5, which is met by: 5.cxd5! (5.♗b3 ♗b6 is known to cause Black fewer problems; but in the game the a-pawn has moved and the queen would no longer be defended.) 5...cxd5 6.♗b3



Black cannot defend both the b-pawn and d-pawn with any of the moves that he wants to make. Retreating the bishop is unpleasant, but probably still best. A young Egyptian GM avoided this retreat when playing against me. After 6...♗b6 7.♗xd5 ♗xd5 8.♗xd5 e6 9.♗b3 ♗b4† 10.♗d2 ♗c6 11.e3 ♗c8 12.a3 ♗xd2† 13.♗xd2 Black had hardly any compensation for the pawn in Gelfand – Adly, Dresden (ol) 2008.

5.a4 ♗f5



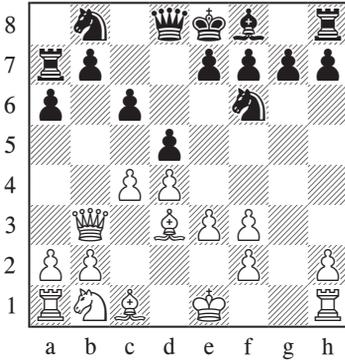
In the Malakhov game we saw 5...e6. Compared to this, 5...♗f5 is the natural move. In the Slav Defence it is always nice if you can develop the bishop and play ...e6. The drawback is that it weakens the b7-pawn, which obliges White to play ♗b3 immediately. If Black has time to play ...e6, he would be able to defend the pawn with ...♗c7.

6.♗b3 ♗a7

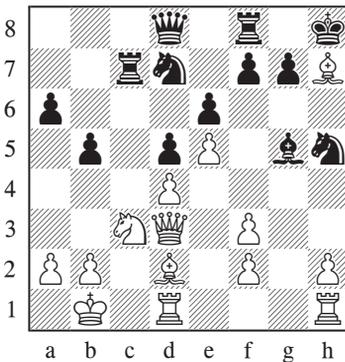
This might seem incredibly odd, but actually it is quite a common idea in the Chebanenko and one of Morozevich's ideas at the time. He won a good game against Anand in the Dortmund tournament where Anand collapsed, losing four games and winning none.

Anand – Morozevich, Dortmund 2001

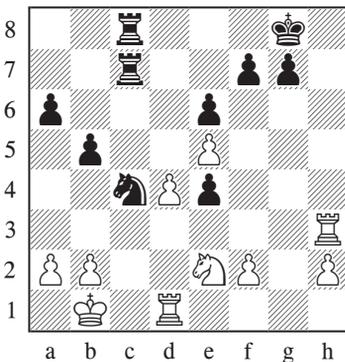
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♗d3 ♗g4
6.♝b3 ♗xf3 7.gxf3 ♞a7



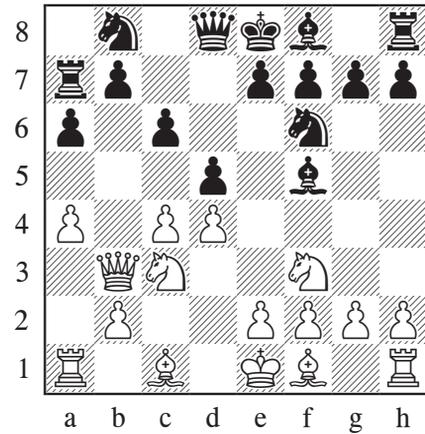
8.♗c3 e6 9.♝c2 ♗e7 10.♗d2 0-0 11.0-0-0
♗bd7 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.e4 ♖h8 14.e5 ♗h5
15.♗xh7 b5 16.♖b1 ♞c7 17.♝d3 ♗g5



18.f4 ♗xf4 19.♗xf4 ♗xf4 20.♝e3 ♝h4 21.♗c2
♞fc8 22.♗d3 ♗b6 23.♗e2 ♗xd3 24.♞xd3 ♗c4
25.♝f3 ♝e4 26.♝xe4 dxe4 27.♞h3† ♖g8 28.♞d1



28...♗xb2 0-1



The rook is of course badly placed on a7, but Black is banking on this being a temporary inconvenience. If he gets time to play ...e6 and ...♗bd7, he would be able to develop in a carefree way. Later on White would not be able to prevent the rook from coming back into the game, as we can see from the Anand game.

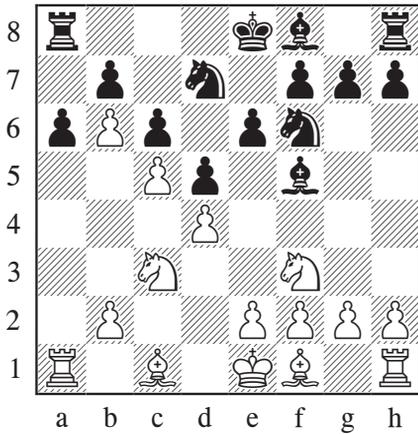
Clearly it is a provocation and it forces White to play very energetically, to go forward and do something. If Black were given time to finish setting up his structure, there would be nothing wrong with his position. He would have no weaknesses and be able to play ...♗e4 or ...♗h5 with good play. It would be hard to suggest anything sensible for White to do to put pressure on Black.

7.a5

This has a simple point. I want to play ♝b6, which can only be prevented with the concession 7...dxc4.

My evaluation of this move was that it would give me an advantage in the long term and even though I knew he had prepared something, I was very optimistic about my chances.

7...e6 8.♝b6 ♝xb6 9.axb6 ♞a8 10.c5 ♗bd7



This was clearly still part of my opponent's preparation. I was out of book after five moves, while my opponent was still playing really fast.

11.e3

This is the pawn structure I was aiming for.

11.♖f4 is also possible and it is tempting to put the bishop on the other side of the pawn chain, but if I get a knight on a5 and develop the kingside I will have a serious advantage. Therefore it is not so important if my bishop is developed or not; so I quickly get my other pieces out and castle to safety. Getting the knight to a5 is so important that everything else dims in comparison.

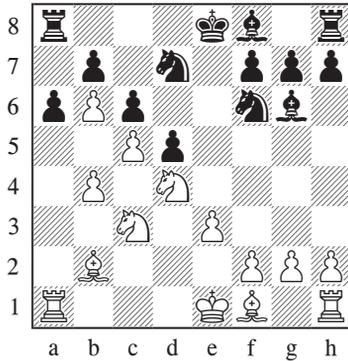
Another point is of course that Black is not intending to allow me to get everything as I want it, without offering some resistance. We should consider seriously how he intends to deal with this simple plan. Once we do so, it becomes apparent that he is planning on sacrificing a piece at some point for 2-3 pawns and activity. If you know your opponent is planning to sacrifice a piece against you, it makes sense to get your pieces into the game and keep your position compact.

These were my reasons and they are all reasonable. But I have to say that I cannot see

anything wrong with 11.♖f4 either. Maybe it is also a good move. But I wanted to keep things under control, as whenever it gets out of control, Black will have achieved the game he wanted.

11...♙e7

White also does not need to be afraid of: 11...e5 12.b4 exd4 13.♗xd4 ♙g6 14.♖b2



White enjoys a nice advantage.

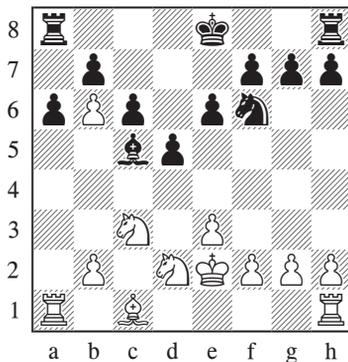
12.♙e2

I could also play 12.♗d2, but the idea was to develop before heading for a5 and this is what I did.

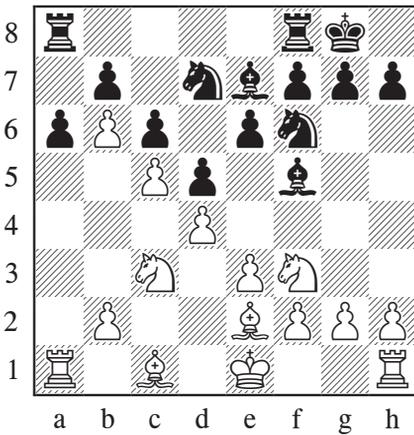
12...0-0

I assume that one of his ideas was to exchange the bishop for a knight to prevent it from coming to a5. But it was never really possible.

12...♙g4 does not work at this point: 13.♗d2 ♙xe2 14.♗xe2 ♗xc5 15.dxc5 ♙xc5



White has 16. ♖a4!, when Black does not have a good way to win the third pawn.



13. ♖d2!

The knight is headed for a5, as planned.

White's play in this game is all about timing. If he castled at this point, 13.0-0, Black would have enough time to play 13... ♗g4, when after 14. ♖d2 ♕xe2 15. ♖xe2 the knight is poorly placed on e2. Black plays 15... ♖xc5 16. dxc5 ♗xc5. White is potentially still better here, but Black has managed to get three pawns for his piece and has good practical chances. If White wastes time and does nothing, Black will still be able to improve his position.

Another point concerning this variation is that Black has managed to change the course of the game. I was very happy to have the b7-pawn as a target, so why should I allow my opponent to escape this path so easily? This is one of the main things I learned from Rubinstein.

13...e5

This is how he planned to play, but in my analysis for this book, I found it not that easy to prove an advantage against:

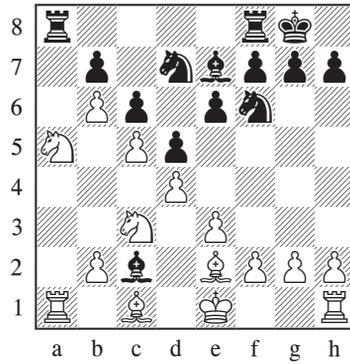
13...a5

The first moves I checked turned out to be very tricky.

14. ♖b3

This looks like it wins a pawn, but Black has an avalanche of tricks.

14... ♗c2 15. ♖xa5

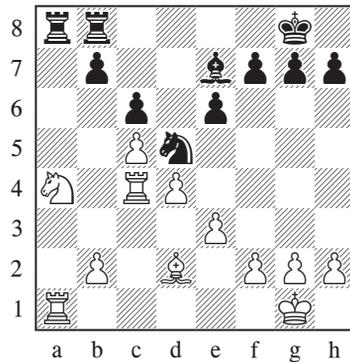


15... ♖xb6!

If White takes the knight, Black gets ... ♗b4 in with an advantage.

16. ♗d2 ♖c4! 17. ♗xc4 dxc4 18.0-0 ♗d3 19. ♖fc1

The position still looks difficult for Black, but if we dig deeper, we can see that it is actually complicated. White should be careful not to fall for some crafty tricks like: 19... ♖fb8! 20. ♖a4?! ♖d5 21. ♖xc4? ♗xc4 22. ♖xc4



22...b5! 23. cxb6 ♖xb6

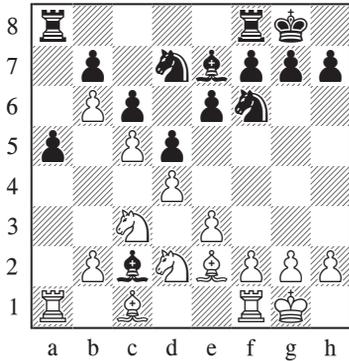
White loses a decisive amount of material.

So the best way for White would be to prepare ♖b3 by castling short.

14.0-0! ♗c2

Black has to prevent the knight from coming to b3, as Black will no longer have the ... cxb6 and ... b4 trick, because the rook on a1 is no longer hanging.

Imagine that the first moves were 14...e5, then 15. b3 c2 to provoke this situation, White has 16. xa5 xb6 17.cxb6 b4 18. xc6 and White keeps his advantage.



15. e1 !

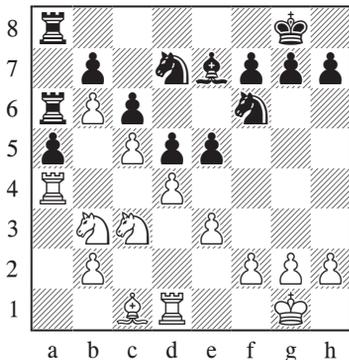
I am not sure if this is too subtle, as this move does lose a tempo when Black takes the bishop on d1 on the next move.

The key idea is that after 15. d1 d3 16. e1 e4 ! Black is managing to make things a little murky. White is probably still better, but as said, I want to keep things under control.

15...e5 16. d1 xd1

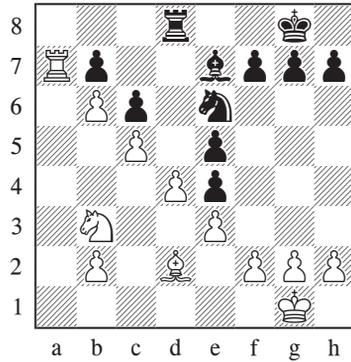
16... d3 17. b3 is entirely in White's favour.

17. xd1 a6 18. b3 fa8 19. a4



Black is suffering. In the long run he cannot defend the a-pawn. At this point we are of course speculating about what would happen in a game, but we can add a few moves to show a possible course it could take:

19... f8 20. d2 e6 21. da1 e4 22. xe4 dxe4 23. xa5 xa5 24. xa5 d8 25. a7



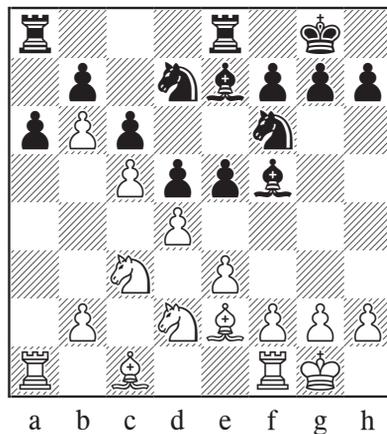
Black is too late with his counterplay. Once the b7-pawn falls, his position will no longer be tenable.

25... d7 26.d5!

The b7-pawn can no longer be defended.

So the final conclusion is that after 13...a5 Black will not be able to hold the pawn.

14.0-0 fe8



15. b3

One of Black's tricks is that 15.b4? loses to 15...exd4 16.exd4 ♖xb6! and Black wins a pawn. 15.b4 would of course be the dream way for White to play, but the tactics do not work.

15...♗f8 16.♗d2?

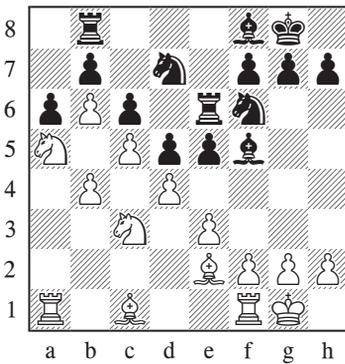
It was only when I had the time to go really deep that I realized that this natural-looking move might be superfluous. I do not think that it entirely spoils the advantage, but as can be seen in the notes to the next move, the bishop is actually better placed on c1 if Black defends optimally.

16.♗a5!

This is therefore best.

16...♖ab8 17.b4 ♖e6

17...♗xb6 does not fully work here. White should reply 18.dxe5! ♖xe5 19.cxb6 ♗xb4 20.♗d2, when Black does not have sufficient compensation. An important point is that after 20...d4? White wins with 21.♗e4! or 21.♗b1!.



18.f3!

This is the key move. Rather than trying to prove the advantage immediately, White should improve his position as much as possible. At the same time the rook will be passive on b8 and Black will struggle to find squares for all his pieces (the concept of Space Advantage is crucial to understanding Rubinstein's games and we shall have a look at this concept in Chapter 3).

18.♗xb7 ♖xb7 19.♗xa6 ♖b8 20.♗e2 might look attractive at first, but it is important for White to keep control.



Here Black can change the course of the game with: 20...♗xb6! 21.cxb6 ♖xb6 22.♗c8 ♗d3 23.♗xe6 fxe6 24.dxe5 ♗xe2 25.♖e1 ♗a6 26.exf6 ♗xb4 Black has decent compensation.

18...h5

18...♗xb6 is even worse at this point. Black has to respect White's main threat of 19.g4! when White wins after both 19...♗g6 20.dxe5 ♖xe5 21.f4 and 19...♗c2 20.dxe5 ♖xe5 21.♖a2! and White wins a piece without any real compensation.

19.♖d1

White is preparing his position slowly. At some point he will strike on b7, a6 or c6, giving Black big problems. Although nothing immediate exists here, it is hard for me to believe that Black would hold this position in a practical game; which is what counts in the end. Again, it is not easy for Black to change the course of the game.

16...♗c2?

Morozevich becomes impatient, but the tactics do not work out well for him.

The attempt to create counterplay down the e-file does not work. After 16...♖e7 17.♗a5 exd4 18.exd4 ♖ae8 White could just play 19.♗f3, but more importantly he can

change the nature of his advantage with the tactical strike 19. ♖xb7! ♜xe2 20. ♗xe2 ♜xe2 21. ♕c3. Black has two minor pieces for a rook, but they have no mobility. White will exchange the black rook and win quickly – or slowly. It does not matter; the result is still 1–0.

It was only while preparing the material for this book that I realized that the best defensive try for Black is connected with anticipating ♗b3-a5 with:

16... ♞ab8!

The idea is to play ...h5, ...g6 and ...♕h6 to activate the passive f8-bishop. White must still be careful that Black does not manage to sacrifice a piece under good circumstances.

17.f3!?

I believe that this is the most attractive idea. 17. ♗a5 exd4 18. exd4 ♗xc5 19. dxc5 d4 would lead to deep complications. Maybe White is a bit better somewhere, but I do not think this is a sensible way for White to play.



17... ♕c2!?

Black probably has to provoke this concrete action. This is his one chance to give up a piece for three pawns. He should not have been given the chance, but sometimes we make mistakes. We can only reduce the amount of mistakes we make, not eradicate them entirely.

I like White's position after 17...g6 18. ♗a5 h5 19. b4 ♕h6 20. ♕c1! and I fail to see how Black is going to be able to improve his position. It is likely that White will gradually improve his position on the kingside, while all the time considering sacrifices on a6, b7 or c6.

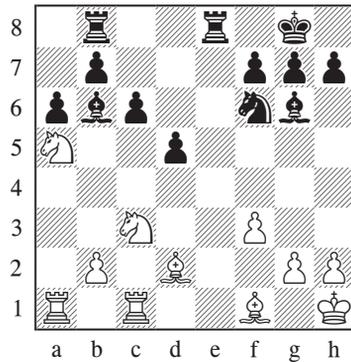
18. ♗a5 exd4 19. exd4 ♗xc5!

This has to be played before White plays b2-b4 and locks down the queenside in a favourable structure forever.

20. dxc5 ♕xc5†

20...d4 does not work out well. For example: 21. ♗e4 ♗xe4 22. fx e4 d3 23. ♕f3 ♕xc5† 24. ♖h1 ♕xb6 25. ♕f4 and Black is facing unpleasant questions.

21. ♖h1 ♕xb6 22. ♞fc1 ♕g6 23. ♕f1



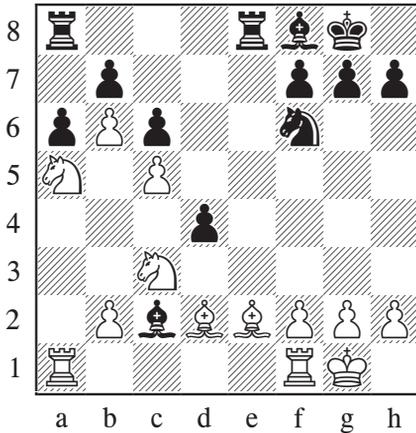
Black has three pawns for the piece, but White has a nice structure. He will play b2-b4 at some point and clamp down the black queenside. Still, winning this endgame would take a long time. White would have to eliminate all the black pawns on the queenside and then break through slowly on the kingside. Even so, I like White's position. It might not be easy to win, but it is favourable and he can play on forever. Black's task seems pretty depressing to me.

17. ♗a5 exd4

It is too late for Black to play passively. After 17... ♞ab8 maybe the simplest is 18. ♞fc1 ♕f5

19.♙xa6!? bxa6 20.♘xc6 ♖bc8 21.♗a5 and the two passed pawns are clearly better than Black's extra piece.

18.exd4 ♗xc5 19.dxc5 d4



20.♙f3

While it is not possible for White to retain all of his pieces, it is important to hold on to the valuable bishop.

20...dxc3 21.♙xc3

It is not clear if Morozevich overlooked something or if he just lost patience. Black has not managed to solve the problems with the b7-pawn with his tactical operation. Actually they look more urgent than ever.

21...♗e4

White wins in all lines:

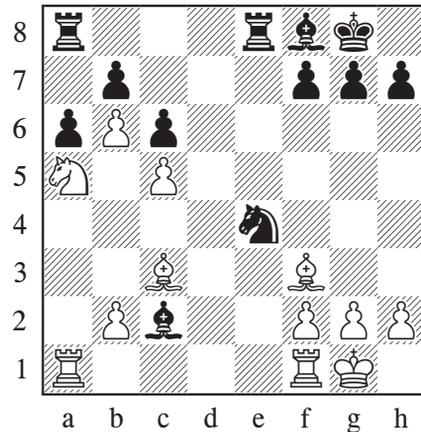
21...♖ab8 22.♙xf6 gxf6 23.♗xb7! and Black's position collapses.

Against 21...♙xc5 White has several options, but I saw the simple 22.♙xf6 gxf6 23.♖fc1 ♙xb6 24.♗c4 and White wins a piece.

I find the following line quite instructive. Against 21...♙e4 I would play: 22.♙xf6 gxf6 23.b4!



White retains the favourable structure. White has no reason to be concerned about doubled pawns in front of the king. We should only care about the things that are truly important. Black's bishop on f8 provides him with no counterplay. White's strategic operations have been entirely successful. We now see that the dark-squared bishop has been bad all of the game and that this has been a big part of Black's problems. In this line White has of course been entirely successful in keeping his best piece, while leaving his opponent with his most impotent piece. Petrosian was known for being great at exchanging the right pieces, but Rubinstein was not bad at this either.



22.♖fc1 ♙d3 23.♗xb7

White's strategy has succeeded entirely. Nothing really happened in the rest of the game. We were a bit short on time and there

is always the chance that something strange could happen. But in this game it did not.

23...♖ab8 24.♙xe4 ♜xe4



25.♞d1

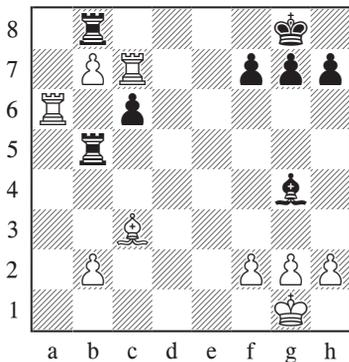
25.♘d6 is also good, but the active idea in the game looks nice.

25...♙e2 26.♞d7 ♙g4

After 26...♖e7 I had planned 27.♞xe7 ♙xe7 28.♞e1! with the point 28...♞xb7 29.♞xe2 ♙xc5 30.♞e8† ♙f8 31.♙b4 and White wins.

27.♞c7 ♞c4 28.♞xa6 h5

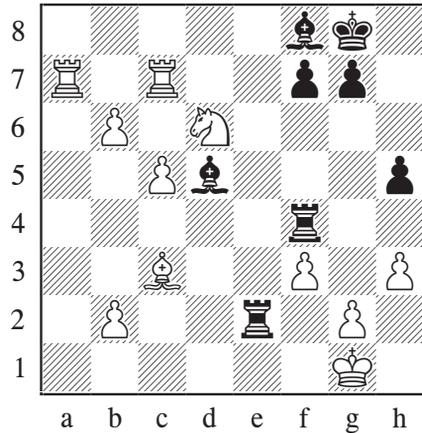
28...♙xc5 29.♘xc5 ♞xc5 30.b7 ♞b5 is of course a completely winning position for White.



A human would find some slow plan to convert the advantage, but the computer

points out a nice trick: 31.♞a5! ♞b6 32.♞g5! and everything must go.

29.♞a7 ♙e6 30.♞xc6 ♙d5 31.♞c7 ♞e8 32.h3 ♞f4 33.♘d6 ♞e2 34.f3



34...♞xg2† 35.♙xg2 ♞xf3 36.♙g1 1-0

It is hard to guess what went wrong with Morozevich's home preparation for this game; obviously only he can tell. I certainly did not have the feeling of playing a surprising or genius move at any time, though I do think I handled the challenges of preventing his counterplay quite well. Morozevich was one of the first to work deeply with computer programs, so maybe at some point he simply believed the evaluation of the computer, which evaluates the position as acceptable for Black even to this day. Probably his training games also went well and he felt confident enough to try it in a big tournament game.

One of the myths of Morozevich has always been that he is very creative and plays with a lot of improvisation. Obviously he is very creative at the board, but we should not forget that this creativity in the opening is based on a lot of home analysis. The public have a tendency to not understand that about the conception of

the most innovative ideas; they do not see how much preparation it requires between tournaments to be creative. Luckily this does not in any way diminish his achievements in this area; being creative at home is very difficult as well, as anyone who has ever tried can testify.

My own playing style does not usually bring as much enthusiasm from the chess fans as that of Morozevich, but in the struggle between dynamics and statics, sometimes someone has to take the more conservative side. I do not personally think this makes the games dull, though I am aware that at times the real battle is going on under the surface, making it harder for some people to comprehend. Hopefully the more verbal explanations in this book will help unlock the thought process behind this kind of strategic game for a lot of people.

In general I would like to add that I am a strong believer in the value of a chess education built on thorough knowledge of the classics. Any attempt to emulate the engines and their 2,000,000 moves a second is doomed to fail. We need to supplement calculation with all other weapons available. And one of these is intuition, which is strongly rooted in pattern recognition.

When you have “uploaded” a lot of chess patterns to your brain in your childhood, you will often have a very strong suspicion regarding what the right move is in a position, even though you have no idea why...



Moscow 2012