

IM Dejan Nestorović GM Nikola Nestorović

MODERN CHESS DEFENSE

Learn to Defend and
Strike Back with Venom



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CONTENTS

SIGNS	5
FOREWORD	6
PART I INSTRUCTIVE GAMES	7
CHAPTER I CORRECT DEFENSE	9
<i>L. D. Nisipeanu 2693 - S. Mamedyarov 2757</i>	11
<i>A. Morozevich 2741 - V. Anand 2786</i>	14
<i>K. Sasikiran 2690 - L. D. Nisipeanu 2693</i>	17
<i>I. Chigladze 2342 - D. Paravyan 2511</i>	20
<i>A. Grischuk 2774 - H. Nakamura 2816</i>	26
<i>L. Aronian 2758 - A. Dreev 2662</i>	35
<i>A. Predke 2667 - S. Vokhidov 2624</i>	40
<i>H. Niemann 2698 - C. Aravindh 2607</i>	45
CHAPTER II POOR DEFENSE	51
<i>E. Safarli 2583 - M. Rodshtein 2684</i>	53
<i>M. Perunovic 2615 - B. Firat 2480</i>	56
<i>J. Timman 2635 - L. Van Wely 2605</i>	60
<i>R. Kasimdzhanov 2657 - T. Lei 2469</i>	64
<i>V. Chizhikov 2229 - J. Rovira Vila 1889</i>	68
<i>H. Ni 2641 - M. Marin 2551</i>	70
<i>M. Kekelidze 2477 - V. Baklan 2612</i>	75
<i>D. Dubov 2683 - V. Artemiev 2731</i>	80
<i>N. Vitiugov 2732 - M. Bluebaum 2643</i>	85
<i>L. Aronian 2767 - A. Grischuk 2766</i>	89
<i>L. Javakhishvili 2474 - T. Hoang 2466</i>	94
<i>A. Grischuk 2667 - V. Malaniuk 2511</i>	98
<i>G. Kamsky 2741 - Y. Seirawan 2643</i>	106
<i>L. Aronian 2729 - M. Vachier-Lagrave 2718</i>	111
<i>I. Saric 2690 - I. Nepomniachtchi 2770</i>	113
<i>L. Mendonca 2627 - K. Sychev 2540</i>	114

CHAPTER III KING IN DEFENSE	121
A. Kashlinskaya 2448 – H. Nezdad 2425	123
M. Annaberdiev 2459 – S. Zhigalko 2689	126
S. Ganguly 2636 – P. Eljanov 2650	131
F. Caruana 2844 – S. Mamedyarov 2764	137
F. Caruana 2828 – I. Nyzhnyk 2638	143
G. Sax 2600 – A. Sokolov 2600	151
R. Kasimdzhanov 2670 – A. Morozevich 2707	158
F. Vallejo Pons 2660 – A. Naiditsch 2639	167
I. Nepomniachtchi 2716 – D. Bocharov 2600	174
Chapter IV DEFENSE IN CRITICAL MOMENTS	181
N. Abdusattorov 2744 – D. Navara 2667	183
I. Nepomniachtchi 2767 – A. Giri 2746	185
G. Vidit 2730 – B. Cheng 2583	191
Chapter V DEFENSE IN ENDGAME	197
R. Rapport 2726 – N. Nestorovic 2455	199
A. Sarana 2717 – S. Gumularz 2571	201
Chapter VI DEFENSE IN VARIOUS OPENINGS	205
A. Hunt 2462 – Y. Hou 2605	207
H. Martirosyan 2662 – S. Brunello 2499	214
M. Carlsen 2864 – E. Hansen 2606	216
M. Carlsen 2863 – I. Nepomniachtchi 2784	220
A. Firouzja 2744 – A. Giri 2745	224
R. Praggnanandhaa 2757 – A. Mishra 2604	228
V. Anand 2791 – W. So 2788	235
PART II EXERCISES	241
SOLUTIONS	256

FOREWORD

The book about **defense** is created as an endeavor to help players who struggle with issues that are rarely written about. Namely:

How to organize a proper defense?

How to perry opponent's threats and thwart his plans?

How to create a strong counter-attack?

After a careful study of interesting and instructive examples we decided to divide the material into several logical chapters:

1. **Good Defense.** Learn and draw conclusions about how the best players think when solving the problems of defense in practical play.
2. **Poor Defense.** Examples of incorrect defense can be found at practically all levels. We believe these examples show exactly how demanding defense is.
3. **The King.** Modern ways of king evacuation, or keeping the king in the center. Also, we explain how the king "thinks" and takes care of himself in dangerous situations.
4. **Critical moments in the game.** Games and game fragments that tackle with the moments when the fate of the game is decided and how the best players react in those situations.
5. **Defense in inferior endgames.** Defense is not only about the king that is threatened in a game, and it is not just about thinking of the king's safety. It is highly instructive and practical to apply defensive principles in endgames as well.
6. **Openings.** Presentation of modern openings and typical defensive reactions in the Italian, the Ruy Lopez and the Grunfeld Defense.

Finally, the book ends with 50 demanding exercises that should reenforce the knowledge you have gathered after a careful study of all examples.

We hope you will enjoy studying the presented material and successfully progress in this extremely demanding area of chess.

GM Nikola Nestorović
IM Dejan Nestorović

H. NIEMANN 2698 - C. ARAVINDH 2607

Sitges 2022

In the following game an interesting theoretical novelty in the early stage quickly brought the position to a boiling point. Niemann had to find an excellent plan to thwart the threats to his king.

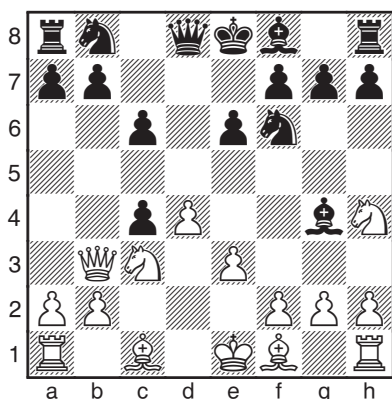
1.c4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙f5!? The Semi-Slav Defense.

5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4! Before Black solves the problem of the light-squared bishop, White correctly begins to disturb him. Black is obliged to show his intentions with the bishop.

6...♙g4!? One of the three equally viable possibilities, the choice is a matter of taste.

7.♙b3 The development of the queen to b3 temporarily postpones the 'bishop's story' and creates a direct threat to capture the pawn on b7.

7...dxc4!?



New views on the position! Black has offered a pawn sacrifice on b7. How to react? In the database there is only one Van Forest game and it did not provide a complete answer about the correctness of the idea.

7...♙b6! It is considered mandatory to defend the pawn, ♙c7 is also possible.

8.♙xb7! If the pawn is already attacked, and it remained undefended, then it is considered a matter of principle to see what the opponent has prepared.

8...♘bd7 Obligatory move.

9.h3 ♙h5 10.♙xc6! White finally captures the pawn. Apparently Black wants to take advantage of the fact that he has gained several tempi by attacking the queen and that the white king is not sure how to resolve the 'security issue'. In practical play, this should be a sufficient reason to get compensation.

10...♖c8 11.♙a4!? It is time to withdraw.

11.♙b5!? Seems more precise because it takes away the possibility that Black immediately comes with a knight to d5.

11...♘d5! Takes advantage of the

given opportunity and attacks the knight on h4. White also needs to think about controlling the b4–square from which threats can appear.

12. ♘f3 is the best move.

12... ♙xf3 By exchanging knights, it appears that short castling is no longer an option.

13. gxf3 ♙b4 14. ♙d2 0–0 15. ♙g2

Development of the piece, but also potentially depriving the king of the square. For now, the choice seems to be just a matter of taste.

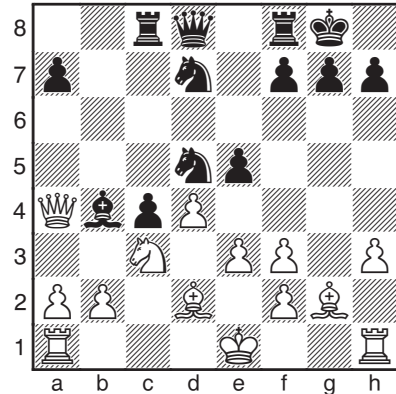
15. ♙e2 Appears to be a good development. **15... f5!** Maintains the knight

and potentially threatens to advance in a favorable moment. Of course, everything depends on the choice of where White will take his king. **16. ♖f1!** If an immediate castling was not possible, maybe an improvised one is? **16... ♞7b6 17. ♚c2 ♜c6 18. f4 (18. ♞xd5!? ♞xd5 19. ♙xb4 ♞xb4 20. ♚a4 ♚d6 21. ♙g2!±) 18... ♙xc3 19. ♙xc3 ♞c8 20. ♙f3 ♞d6 21. ♙g2! ♚h4 22. ♙h2** And in both lines, White resolves the issue of his king's safety and thus obtains a slight advantage.

15...e5!?



Hans Moke Niemann

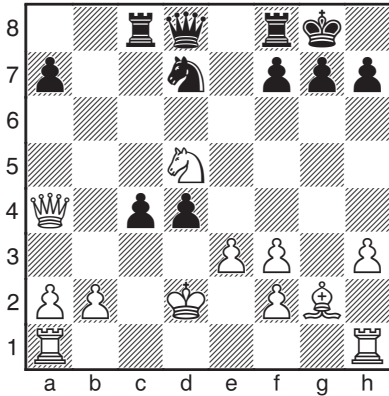


A critical moment in the game! Black decides to start the initiative in the direction of the white king with a piece sacrifice. Aravindh does not allow Niemann to arrange the pieces freely and complete the development.

15... ♞7b6 16. ♚c2 f5 17. f4 ♙xc3 18. ♙xc3 ♚h4 19. ♙e2!±

16. ♞xd5! There is no doubt that the sacrifice must be accepted.

16...♙xd2+ 17.♚xd2 exd4

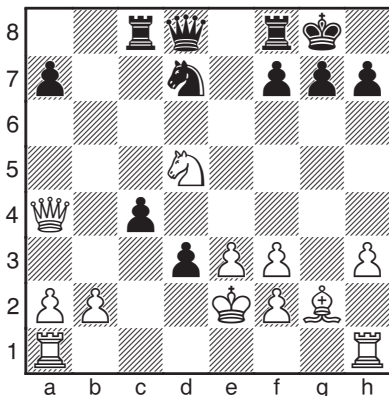


After a few mandatory moves Niemann must pay attention to the opponent's threats and make a defensive plan for this king.

18.♙e2! Excellent reaction! The main threat is the advancement of the pawn with ♞c5. For now, Niemann decides that it is safest for the king to remain in the center.

18.♖ad1?? The development move is crumbling. 18...♞c5!+-

18...d3+



Certainly the best.

18...♞c5? 19.♚xc4+- And now, there is no square for the knight to jump to with a check - for example to e4. White has taken the material and at the same time repelled all direct threats.

19.♙d2! First to the right, then to the left. The king now has the role of a good blocker of Black's pawns. End-game experts claim that everything is easy and that White easily wins.

19...♞b6 20.♞xb6 ♚xb6 21. ♚a3! The most precise continuation because the queen takes control of all critical squares and pawns.

21.♖hb1!? Certainly a possible continuation. 21...♚g6 A good attempt to attack the bishop, the pawn on f2 with the centralization of the rooks can be dangerous.

a) 22.♖g1? This logical move is a serious mistake. 22...♚f6! 23.♚a3 ♖b8 24.♖ab1 ♚h4 25.♖gf1 c3+!! A terrible blow that puts White in a very unpleasant situation. 26.♚xc3! (26.bxc3?? ♖xb1 27.♖xb1 ♚xf2+--+) 26...♖fc8 27.♚d4! ♚g5! 28.♖fc1! Now, this is the only move that prevents White's defeat. (28.♙h1? ♚a5+ 29.♙d1 ♚xa2 30.♖c1 ♚b3+ 31.♙d2 ♖c2+ 32. ♖xc2 ♚xc2+ 33.♙e1 ♚e2#) 28... ♚xg2±;

b) 22.♙h1! The only good move. 22...♚h6 23.♚a3 ♚h4 24.♖f1 ♖b8 25.♚c3+- Only when all the

white pieces reach optimal squares we can say that the threats have disappeared and that the material will be valued.

21...♖c5 22.♚c3! The queen aims to come to c3, because that is the ideal square for her, both for attack and defense.

22.♗hc1 An excellent alternative. **22...♖b5 23.♖ab1 ♖a5 24.♚c3 ♖xa2 25.♔e1!** It is still not too late to castle. **25...♖a4 26.♔f1** Finally, the king is safe.

22...♗g5! Only the threats by Black can keep the game alive.

23.♔f1! For a certain time, the coordination of the pieces is interrupted because each one is occupied with a specific defensive task.

23...♖b8 24.♖b1!? Niemann chooses to play all the development moves before he opens the position with b3.

24.b3!? It could have been tried with the untying. **24...cxb3 25.♖b1 b2 (25...♖a5 26.♚xb3! ♖xa2+ 27.♚xa2 ♚xb1 28.♚xb1 ♖xb1 29.♔xd3+-) 26.♔xd3** The bishop has waited for the moment to get an important role in defense and winning the material.

24...♖b5 A serious temptation for White.

25.b3! This is the only way to play for a win.

25.♔c1? A mistake that originates from the concept itself. If White decides not to open the position by inertia, the game can continue. But now it is a concrete mistake! **25...♚a6! 26.♗g1** The unique way for the rook to enter the game. **26...g6**

a) **27.a3?** And the pawn cannot be saved. **27...♖b3! 28.♚d4 ♚a5!** Threats are ♚e1, ♖a3 and Black leads an overwhelming attack. (**28...♖xa3-+);**

b) **27.♗g4! ♚xa2** Forced moves follow. **28.♖xc4 ♖b3 29.♖c8+ ♖xc8 30.♚xc8+ ♔g7 31.♚c4!** The unique possibility not to lose the game. (**31.f4 d2+!-+)** **31...d2+! 32.♔xd2 ♚xb1 33.♚xb3 ♚xf1** A queen endgame with equal chances arises.

25...♚a6!? Threat!

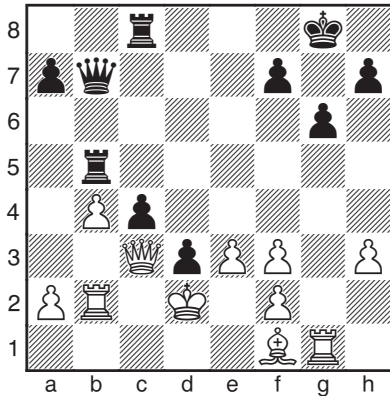
26.♖b2 Defense!

26...g6 27.♗g1! Every free move is used to introduce the rook into the game.

27...♖c8 28.b4 It seemed that the position would open up, however, White assesses well that Black's connected pawns are no threat to the white king. On the contrary! Black is trying to close the lock while White is trying to advance the pawns to divert Aravindh's attention.

28.a4!?

28...♚b7



Another threat.

29. ♖g4! Excellent transition to counter-attack.

29... ♙xf3 30. ♖f4 Defense and counter-attack towards the capture of the c4 pawn.

30. ♗xd3!? The pawn on d3 could have been taken, but Niemann estimates that the black pawns are good for his 'king's health'. **30... ♙xf2+ 31. ♗e2 a5 32. ♖xc4 ♖d5+ 33. ♔c1 ♙g1+ 34. ♔c2+-** Here the king must think a little about advancing himself.

30... ♙c6 31. a4 ♖g5 32. b5 ♙h1 33. ♗xd3! Everything is prepared, and the time of the final resolution is coming. It is very important that all the white pieces are actively involved.

33... ♖g1 34. ♗e2! There follow several moves that are related to controlling important squares from which the black pieces could create a threat.

34... ♖a1! Threat!

35. ♖xc4! The only way to create a shelter in view of the ♙e1 threat.

35... ♖d8+!?

35... ♙e1+ The best chance. **36. ♔d3 ♖d8+ 37. ♖d4 ♖xd4+ 38. exd4 ♙xf2**

a) **39. a5??** You can always make a mistake! When it seems that the end is near, special attention is necessary to remove the last threats. **39... ♙g3+ 40. ♔c4 ♙c7+ 41. ♔d3 ♙g3+ 42. ♔d2 ♙e1+ 43. ♔d3 ♙g3+ 44. ♔c4** Draw. (**44. ♔c2??** If you want to win at all costs, then defeat also becomes a realistic option. **44... ♖c1+!-+);**

b) **39. ♔c4!!** The king must continue on his path to safety and that costs a few more pawns. **39... ♖xa4+ 40. ♔b3 ♖xd4 41. ♗c4 ♙g1 42. ♖e2!?** There are still technical problems but the main issues have been solved. (**42. ♖d2+-**)

36. ♖d4! The final arrangement of the pieces allows the king to reach the b3-square where he will finally find refuge.

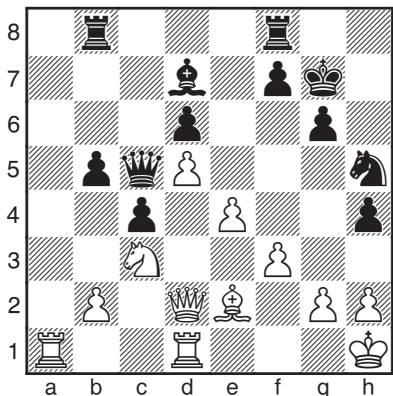
36... ♖e8

36... ♖xd4+ 37. ♙xd4 ♙c1+ 38. ♔d3 ♖a3+ 39. ♔e4+-

37. ♔d3! ♙xh3 38. ♔c2 ♙f5+ 39. ♔b3 a6 It is time to think about counterattacking on f7. ♗c4 follows with further inclusion of the queen. It is time for resignation.

L. ARONIAN 2729 - M. VACHIER-LAGRAVE 2718

Zagreb blitz 2024

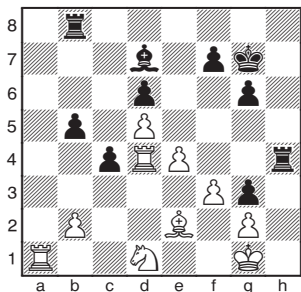


26...♘g3+!? Super interesting tactical blow that requires good calculation from both players.

27.hxg3 hxg3 28.♖d4+ ♖xd4 29.♗xd4 ♗h8+ 30.♔g1 ♗h4 Critical position for which it was necessary to find the right remedy – defense against mate on the h-file.

31.♕d1? Aronian chooses the wrong path and gets defeated in a very effective way.

31.♘d1!



A unique way to ensure the white king's safe future. The idea is to sac-

rifice the knight on f2 and then Black can choose to take it or not? In any case, the white king remains alive and well! **31...♖bh8 32.♘f2** Now everything becomes absolutely unclear. More precisely, one can even talk about a slight advantage for White. Of course, now we are talking about purely strategic parameters. **32...♔f6 (32...gxf2+ 33.♔xf2±) 33.♖a7 ♔e5 34.♖d1 gxf2+ 35.♔xf2 ♖d8 36.♔e3!** White could look to the future with much optimism.



Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

A. FIROUZJA 2744 - A. GIRI 2745

Zagreb Rapid 2024

Firouzja tested a new approach of playing in a typical Italian position. This game is a variation on the theme of knight sacrifice on g5.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♘f6 4. d3 ♙c5 5.c3 a5 6.0–0 d6 7.♖e1 0–0

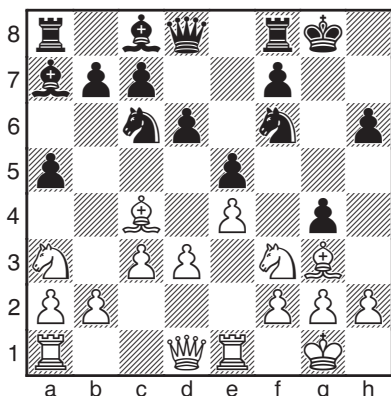
7...h6 Gukesh prefers h6!?

8.♙g5 A serious crossroads for White. The ♙g5 continuation is gaining more and more supporters and is certainly becoming one of the key weapons in the fight for initiative.

8...h6 9.♙h4 g5! The aim is to limit the mobility of the dark-squared bishop.

10.♙g3 ♙a7 11.♘a3!? Aims to get to the f5- or d5- square via c2–e3.

11...g4

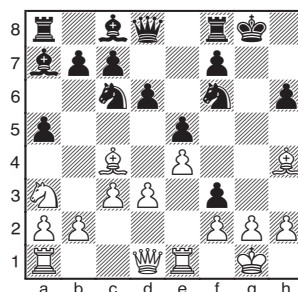


12.♙h4! An incredible motif! Until recently this tactical motif was not even seen and now there are several variations on this theme. The idea is practically the same as when a knight is sacrificed on g5 to use the binding along the h4–d8 diagonal. Black benefited a bit because he was not obliged to give up the h-pawn which can certainly have practical significance.

12.♘h4!? In this position ♘h4 was previously played 'without thinking' because what is more logical than the desire to jump to the f5-square? **12...♘h5 13.♘c2 ♔g5**∞ Practice shows that the position is in the realm of uncertainty.

12...♔g7 This is always a mandatory move. So far the idea has been verified in two high-level games.

12...gxf3



A small check of the correctness of the piece sacrifice. **13.♔xf3 ♔g7**

14.♖ad1! There is nothing concrete, so White aims to introduce the rooks by playing d4 and continue to create initiative that will cover the lack of a piece. **14...h5** Threatens ♕g4 and opens the 6th rank which can have significance for further developments. **15.h3 ♖e7 16.♗c2 ♖h8**

a) **17.♗e3 ♕xe3 18.♖g3+!** (18. ♖xe3 ♖h6!?) **18...♗h7 19.fxg3**;

b) **17.♖g3+** Precision! Must take away the possibility of the rook to come to h6 and significantly strengthening the defense. **17...♗h7 18.d4 ♖g8 19.♖f3 ♖g6** For defense it is

of immeasurable importance that the rook appears in some version on the 6th rank. **20.♗h1!? ♕g4!?** If Black has no intention of just defending, motifs like ♕g4 appear primarily due to the existence of the black h-pawn. (**20...♕d7** A calmer version where Black accepts being under pressure. **21.♗e3 ♖f8**) **21.hxg4**

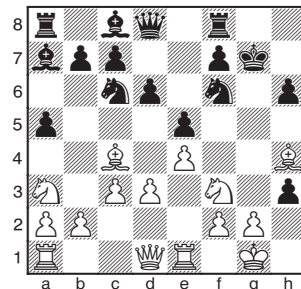
21.hxg4 22.♖f5 ♖h8 23.g3 ♖g7 24.♗g2 ♖xh4!! Defense turns into a pure counter-attack. Black does everything to neutralize the opponent's initiative and turn the character of the position. **25.gxh4 ♖f8!** A strong threat of ♗e7 with trapping the queen appears. White is now obliged to make energetic decisions and accept sacrifices. **26.h5! ♗e7 27.♗e3!** A position has arisen with extremely rich content where any result is possible.

13.h3! White insists that the opponent accept the knight sacrifice. In two previously played games White tried to gain advantage with moves ♗b5 and ♗d2. So far – unsuccessfully. Firouzja is on the move with a new idea.

13.♗b5 ♕b6 14.d4 gxf3 15.♖xf3 ♖e7 16.♖g3+ ♖h7 17.♖f3 And a draw by repetition, as in S. Sevan 2698 – L. Dominguez Perez 2745, USA 2023.

13...gxf3! If he must capture something why not the knight? Giri is on the right path.

13...gxh3!?



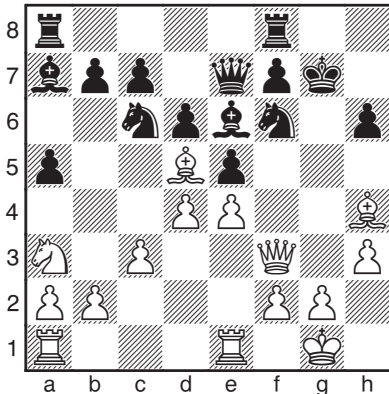
A possibility that will certainly be investigated. **14.♗b5 ♕b6 15.d4 hxg2 16.♖e3!** The advance of the d-pawn allows the rook to quickly get involved in the game on the 3rd rank. **16...♖e8** Mandatory untying. **17.♗h2!** The path to the g3-square is open. There is no doubt that complications with chances for both sides will follow.

14.♖xf3 ♕e6 15.♕d5! Firouzja continues with the desire to strength-

en the pressure in the center.

15. ♖g3+ White has the option to draw at any moment which is certainly not a negligible factor when thinking about piece sacrifice. 15... ♔h7
16. ♖f3=

15... ♖e7 16.d4!

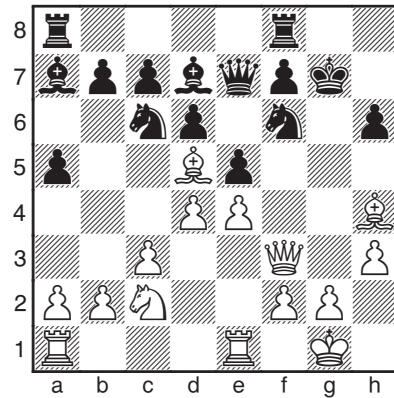


Creates pressure on the e5–pawn. The threat is ♕c6 with de5 and after ♖g3 the pawn falls.

16... ♕d7?! Could be better. A somewhat passive option.

16... exd4! The best reaction which is not easy to choose. This is a very difficult calculation. 17. ♕xc6 bxc6
18.e5! A motif that creates confusion in the defense of the black position. (18. ♖g3+=) 18... dxe5 19. ♖xe5 ♖fd8! 20. ♖ae1 d3! 21. ♗c4 d2 22. ♖d1 ♖d5 23. ♖xd2 ♖ad8 24. ♖f4= After excellent defense Black obtains a sufficient counterplay. Definitely both sides have reasons to be satisfied.

17. ♗c2



The knight is hurriedly approaching the scene of the battle.

17... ♗xd5!! A phenomenal defensive motif – transformation and untying.

18. ♖g3+

18. ♕xe7? ♗dxe7 19. ♗e3 f5! Black gains a clear advantage. The character of the battle has changed. Now Black is aiming for initiative, three minor pieces are far better than a queen.

18... ♔h7 19. exd5! The correct choice. It is not time to think about taking the queen.

19. ♕xe7 ♗dxe7 20. ♖ad1 f5=

19... f6 20. dxc6 ♕xc6 The transformation has brought a completely different type of position, as both sides are striving for initiative. The g–file can play into Black's hands and there is no sign of an attack on the black king or material advantage. Active white pieces guarantee an uncertain duel in the further course of the game.

21. dxe5 dxe5 22. ♗d4! ♕d7 23. ♖d3+ ♔h8 24. ♗f5 ♖h7 25. g4!

Energetic play is mandatory, otherwise Black can take the initiative.

25...h5 26.♖ad1 ♕e6 27.♔g2! ♖g6 28.f3∞ Real complications are over and a resolution where chances are equal is visible.

28...♔h7 29.♗e4 ♕b6

29...♖ad8 30.b3∞

30.c4 ♖ad8 31.♗g3 hxg4 32. hxg4 ♗xe4 Exchange of queens has brought an endgame with absolutely equal chances.

33.♗xe4= ♖xd1 34.♖xd1 ♔g6 35.c5 ♕a7 36.b3 f5! 37.gxf5+ ♕xf5 38.♕f2 ♕e6 39.♕g3 ♔f5? There is no reason for the king to be so exposed.

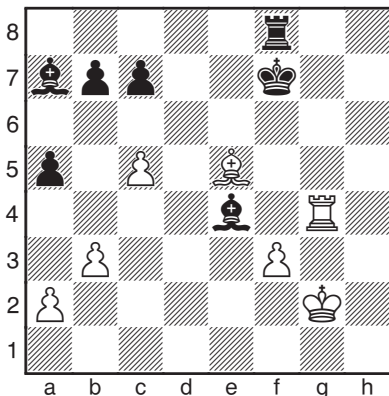
39...♖e8=

40.♖h1! By seizing the important file White obtains a clear advantage.

40...♕f7 41.♖h7 ♔g6 42.♖h4± ♕d5?

42...♔f5±

43.♖g4+± ♔f7 44.♕xe5 ♕xe4



45.♖f4+! Firouzja uses just one moment of the opponent's wandering to transition to a bishop endgame where everything will be a matter of technique.

45...♔e8 46.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 47.fxe4 ♕xc5 48.♕xc7+ A flawless conversion of material and positional advantage follows.

48...a4 49.bxa4 ♔e7 50.♔f3 ♔d7 51.♕f4 ♔e6 52.♔e2 ♔d7 53. ♔d3 ♔c6 54.♔c4 ♕b6 55.♕e5 ♕d8 56.♕d4 ♕c7 57.♕c3 b6 58.♕d4 ♕g3 59.♔d3 ♕c7 60. ♔e2 ♔d7 61.♔f3 ♔e6 62.♕e3 ♕d8 63.♕f4 ♔d7 64.♔g4 ♔e6 65.♕g3 ♕e7 66.♕c7 ♕c5 67.a5 bxa5 68.♕xa5 ♕a3 69.♕c3 ♕d6 70.a4 ♔d7 71.♔f5 ♔c6 72.♕e5

72.e5?? ♕xe5=

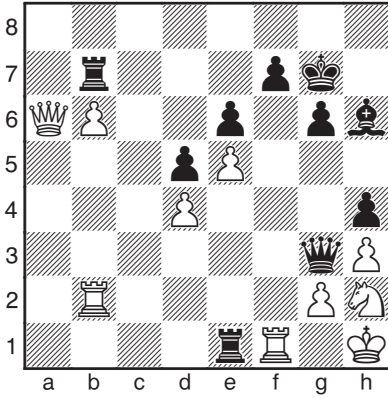
72...♕b4 73.♕d4 ♕d6 74.♕e3 ♔b7 75.♕f4 ♕b4 76.e5

The idea is patented!

1 : 0

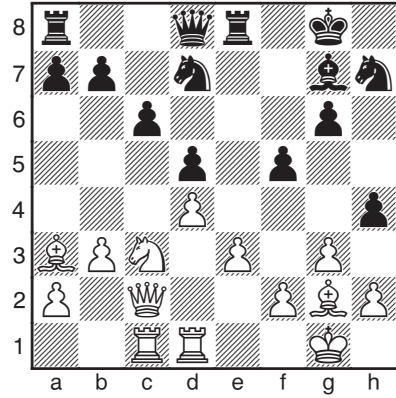
Conclusion : I am sure that the elaboration of this and similar types of positions will come very soon. Giri brilliantly set up the defense, found a series of wonderful solutions and came out of the complications with an equal position. Unfortunately, he was led to defeat by poor play in other phases of the game.

21. V. Ivic 2582 -
F. Meissner 2362
Belgrade 2021



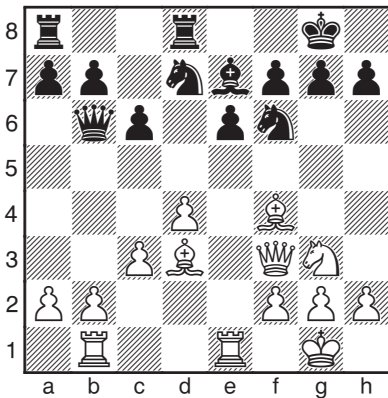
1... ?

23. L. Pantsulaia 2567 -
Z. Kozul 2617
European Team Championship
Reykjavik 2015



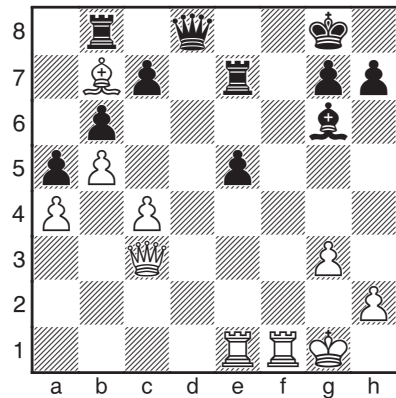
1. ?

22. M. Kyrychenko 1739 -
J. Helmer 1575
European Championship U10
Budva 2013



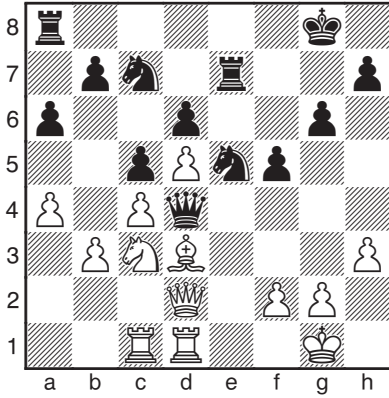
1. ?

24. S. Atalik 2572 -
D. Nestorovic 2387
Veliko Gradiste 2016



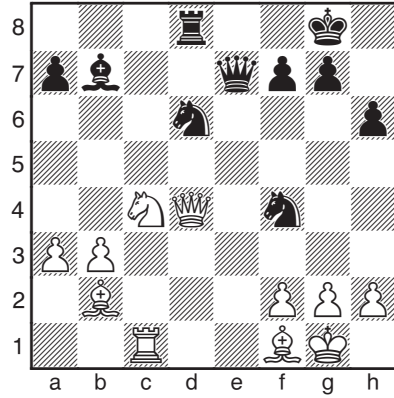
1. ?

25. P. Wenninger 2347 -
A. Audi 2219
Pardubice 2017



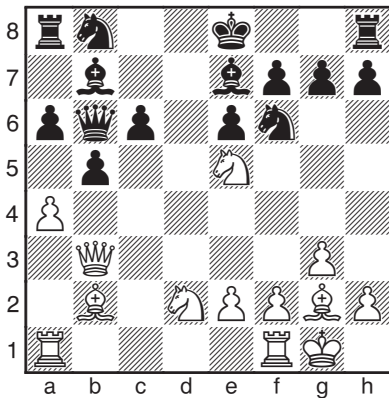
1... ?

27. V. Plat 2562 -
T. Vanczak 2350
Budapest 2020



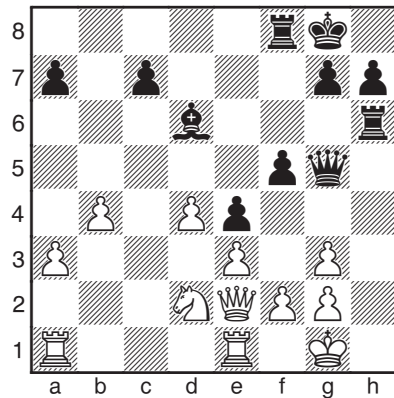
1... ?

26. M. Manko 2159 -
W. Zabrzanska 1999
European Youth Championship
Prague 2024



1. ?

28. V. Kramnik 2770 -
E. Bareev 2670
European Club Cup
Kazan 1997



1... ?