

Introduction

The first point I'd like to make at the very start of this book is that we are all innovators. Innovation in chess is simply part of the game. Whenever we play, we come armed with, at least, some pre-existing understanding about general plans and specific variations. When that knowledge runs out, we are wholly reliant on our own moves. The possibilities are for all practical purposes endless. We are on an endless quest to improve our knowledge and its practical application in our own games.

Of course, the greatest innovators do all this much better than the rest of us. On the basis of hard work and a much deeper knowledge base, they tend to come to the board armed to the teeth with extensive, pre-prepared innovations. At the board, they also apply that knowledge and understanding much better than most of us. They can improvise well and consistently generate more high quality innovations over the board than we might dream of creating.

This book celebrates the play of five undoubted giants of chess innovation. It aims to show how these players developed some of their most innovative ideas and how we might all learn from them. They all worked hard. Their many innovations have had enviably high success rates. Each of these players has unquestionably grasped and applied what was best in present and immediately past methods of play and moved chess on.

“Innovation” in chess has perhaps most commonly been associated with the discovery of new moves in the opening. Indeed, the common term “opening novelty” has a long history going well back at least to the 19th century. Properly considered, however, innovation is about much more than just coming up with new opening moves. It certainly includes the discovery of new stratagems and tactical motifs as well as the development of whole new game plans.

In this much fuller sense, innovation, in its many guises, is at the very heart of success in chess. This book seeks to put a spotlight not just on some great new opening moves, but also on more generally innovative methods of play that unite opening ideas with ways to play the middlegame (and even many endgames). If we can all learn to innovate like this, perhaps we too might have it within ourselves to become world-beaters – like each of my own five giants of innovation.

My five innovative giants – in brief

Wilhelm Steinitz, first world champion, almost single-handedly established the ground-rules for modern positional chess. One of the world's most creative openings analysts as well as a player of the highest over-the-board achievements, his innovations were predominantly positional/systemic in nature, at a time when the chess world was ready for this. Steinitz evolved many whole new systems of play, making them work by repeatedly discovering many new moves to revive them when they came under challenge.

Emanuel Lasker, second world champion, thoroughly absorbed and built on Steinitz's legacy. He played essentially correct positional chess, but restored tactics to much greater prominence. Lasker tended mainly to seek new ideas in soundly-based, existing classical opening systems, often discovering them at the board (as well as in home preparation). No mindless respecter of "rules" and a ferocious calculator, Lasker played an energetic, probing and remorseless kind of "total" chess that, in retrospect, we can now see as thoroughly modern.

The sixth world champion, Mikhail Botvinnik, had a Steinitz-like gift for rigorous research, synthesis and systems development that helped him forge the major outlines of many of our most asymmetrical and dynamic modern openings. He helped take chess out of its immediate post-classical age and to embrace much more risk than before. Insisting that the modern innovation was generally to be found in the early middlegame, Botvinnik also fostered a steely-minded, modern scientific approach to digging these out.

Twice a world championship challenger, Viktor Korchnoi, gave a welcome boost to the role of inspired tactics in post-Botvinnik chess. Like Lasker, who drew greatly from Steinitz's pioneering positional/systemic way of thinking, Korchnoi absorbed all the best ideas of the Botvinnik years. Based on a Botvinnik-like commitment to hard work and disciplined research, allied to a highly belligerent playing style, Korchnoi developed a capacity to innovate freely in virtually all of the newest and most complex modern openings.

The current top-class game benefits from all the accumulated knowledge of the past 150 years and is played in the shadow of massive games databases and

powerful chess engines. New ideas now have much reduced shelf-lives, compared even to the years of Korchnoi's prime. In this world of ultra-rapid change, chess has become even sharper. Vassily Ivanchuk, one of the modern greats, is a one-man byword for contemporary ingenuity, surprise and subtle innovation, with the deftest touch for sound and sudden attacks, replete with lively combinations.

How you might get the best out of this book

Like most writers, I write books that I hope that I'd like to read. I like to be informed and entertained. I also like books that might help me gain a few rating points. I like a firm focus on ideas and analysis that concentrates on explaining a game's key turning points – expressed in fluent prose, at least as much as in key moves and variations. I hope that I have annotated the games in this book in that spirit. I look for sufficiency in technical grasp and, above all, for inspiration.

Each of the games in this book has also been annotated with one eye to a player who might wish to learn more about the specific opening under discussion. This book is not meant to be a substitute for further research, of course. But I hope that it will set the reader on the right lines to undertake such work if they wish to. I hope that I have brought out sufficient of the key ideas, key moves and key variations to help you decide quickly whether this or that line may be for you and, if it is, how and where you might deepen your investigation.

Most of the lines considered in this book are recognizably mainstream and can therefore be recommended with confidence, although there are one or two fairly obvious exceptions, perhaps particularly in the chapter on Steinitz, where I give due warning. That said, however, never underestimate what an ingenious, well-prepared and determined player can manage to make work in chess. Take Steinitz again, and his uncompromising 4...♙h4 in the Scotch, for example. If you know more about how to play such ambitious lines than your opponent, you might be surprised at how well you score with them.

Even if you don't want to try to use this book as a hunting ground for new ideas, however, I still hope that you will gain much from considering how five great players have gone about the process of successful innovation. This is a fine art and I certainly believe that we can all learn much from how such great players go about it. We are all creative, and in the information age, we must all start somewhere and believe in ourselves. Use the most modern computer databases and engines to extend your own researches, by all means, but over the board, don't forget that you are completely on your own and must fight without them.

Craig Pritchett,
Dunbar, August 2011

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Chapter Five

Vassily Ivanchuk (1969-)

“I study a lot, as I love chess and want to play and keep it fresh. I work hard, because I hope to polish my style. I want to be in constant progress.”

— Vassily Ivanchuk, in *New in Chess* (2008)

From around the early 1990s, just as Viktor Korchnoi’s star was beginning to fade, chess began to enter its computer age and changed radically. As a youngster, Ivanchuk may have learned his early trade without the aid of computers. As he entered his twenties, however, it was clear that anyone who wished to stay at the top in chess would have to embrace the new technology. Success in chess had always required hard work, alertness to new ideas and constant creativity. It now also demanded first-class skills in the use of computers.

Ivanchuk made the transition easily.

He could see at once that computers offered him the chance to extend and deepen his game. Computers may not give all the answers, but they certainly equip you with an unparalleled research base and set of interrogation tools. Steinitz would have died for the opportunity. Lasker and Botvinnik would have relished the challenge. After a career of using brainpower only, Korchnoi couldn’t ignore them and took to them, too.

Computers have certainly extended our understanding of what might be playable in chess. As a result, we still confidently expect to find many new moves and ways of playing, even as our knowledge expands. Computers have also driven us to play more pragmatically. Due to the easy availability of massive games databases, we can be sure that others will start to scrutinize and seek to unpick our new ideas, al-

most as soon as we have played them. Against this we can try to develop new refinements in anticipation or switch to new lines.

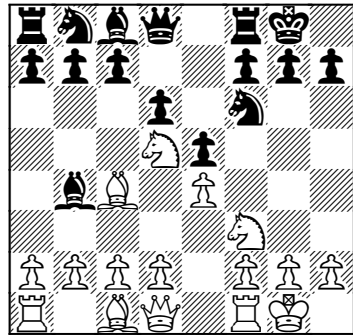
Ivanchuk picked up on all of this very early. In a 1990 interview in *New in Chess*, he confessed that while he “used to be more of an investigator ... of late I have more and more turned into a practical player.” Today’s top players can’t get by without being both outstandingly creative and exceptionally pragmatic. They certainly need to innovate well, but they must also develop an ability to assimilate and play almost anything very quickly and mask their intentions.

Ivanchuk is both a player’s player and a people’s player in this regard. Michael Golubev once asked rhetorically how long a match might have to be for Ivanchuk to repeat an opening – some 14-16 games, he ventured. Ivanchuk has earned the respect of all of his peers and his wide fan base for such enterprise and for his enviable universality. Strategically profound, Ivanchuk also calculates with piercing accuracy. He always loves to win, wherever he can, by playing brilliant combinations and lively attacking chess.

Ivanchuk’s gifts and passion for the game resonate widely. Take the following fine combinational gem as a sparkling taster. With White against the Chinese player, Bu Xiangzhi, at the Pearl Spring tournament (Nanjing 2008), Ivanchuk wanted above all to

avoid his opponent’s solid Petroff Defence and force an original fight. The result: in a rarely played Vienna Game, Ivanchuk spirits up a completely new approach for White and confounds his opponent, starting on his 6th move.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♞f6 3 ♙c4 ♚b4 4 ♞f3 0-0 5 0-0 d6 6 ♞d5



White’s 6th move had scarcely been played before and certainly not with Ivanchuk’s intention to continue directly with d2-d4 rather than d2-d3 (or c2-c3 and d2-d4). If Black exchanges knights on d5, White will recapture with his e-pawn, after which White’s remaining knight will be active on the kingside, while Black’s bishop on b4 must still find a way back into play. It may not be much but it sets Bu new problems and it’s something.

Play continued:

6...♙e6!?

6...♞xd5 7 exd5, and if 7...e4 8 ♞d4 ♙c5 9 ♞e2 may be better, but White can still usefully play d2-d4.

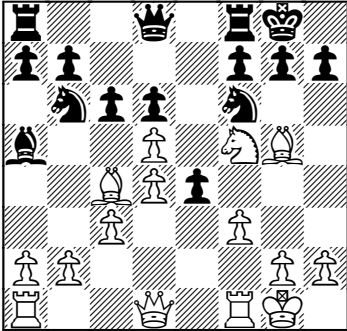
7 d4 ♙xd5 8 exd5 e4?

8...exd4 9 ♖xd4 was perhaps very slightly in White's favour but now essential.

9 ♖h4 c6 10 c3 ♕a5

Or if 10...cxd5 11 ♕b3 ♕a5 12 f3! with a powerful attack.

11 ♕g5 ♖bd7 12 ♖f5 ♖b6 13 f3!



So that if 13...♖xc4 14 fxe4, followed by 15 ♖xg7, with a crush.

13...h6 14 ♕h4 e3

Or if 14...♖xc4 15 fxe4 with similar consequences.

15 ♖d3 ♖xc4

Or 15...cxd5 16 ♕b3 ♖e8 17 ♖xe3 and wins.

16 ♖xc4 ♖d7 17 ♖xe3

And a pawn up, White went on to win.

This is a very simple game, yet how impressively conceived and played by White. Immediately attractive to players of all strengths, it has an almost Mikhail Tal-like innocence and magic to it that cannot fail to raise the spirits of anyone who enjoys beauty in chess. Computers certainly haven't dulled

Ivanchuk's chess. They have instead fired his imagination and fuelled his considerable capacity to innovate.

But before embarking on the wonderful journey through Ivanchuk's games that, I trust, now follows, let me first quote Korchnoi on our continuing need for humility before the vastness of the challenges in modern-day chess. Commenting on a particularly complex opening, in his *My Best Games: Vol.1*, Korchnoi – one of the world's greatest-ever players – admits that he is “afraid of giving recommendations in an opening system where 100s and 100s of games have now been played.”

I like that comment and commend its spirit to anyone who wishes to improve his or her game. Faced by this ever-increasing output, annotators and consumers of annotations should be wary. While it is possible, indeed essential, to seek to interpret, explain and guide in annotation, it is most unwise to be too judgemental about particular moves or plans, unless they can be shown to be demonstrably correct or incorrect. Most chess, excluding blunders, remains extraordinarily fuzzy. The game would otherwise be too easy and we'd give it up.

Shirov stunned by a bombshell queen sacrifice in a Botvinnik Slav

Ivanchuk may not have been a child prodigy but he certainly made an early mark in chess and was a favourite stu-

dent of Mikhail Botvinnik's. He tied for the world junior championship with Joel Lautier in 1988 (Lautier placed first on the tie break). In the same year he also became a grandmaster and entered the world top ten. Aged 21, Ivanchuk won his first big tournament at Linares 1991. He also competed in the 1991 World Championship Candidates' series, losing in the quarter-finals to Artur Yusupov.

Since then, Ivanchuk has always been one of the world's top players, competing regularly in super-tournaments and in various individual world championship and team events. Although he has never become world champion, he is often rightly considered to be one of the greatest players never to have won the title, bracketed alongside only the great Paul Keres and Viktor Korchnoi, from the recent past. Ivanchuk still remains young enough to qualify for a future title challenge, but his age may tell against him unless this happens fast.

In his early years, Ivanchuk's quest for the title may have been handicapped by a certain perceived eccentricity and other-worldliness. Vishy Anand and Gata Kamsky certainly both showed greater self-discipline and focus in this regard than he did. During 1994, Anand and Kamsky both played in each of the two (post-1993) Professional Chess Association (PCA) and FIDE world championship qualifying series. Ivanchuk would only play in the "offi-

cial" FIDE series (but failed to qualify) with the result that he had no second chance.

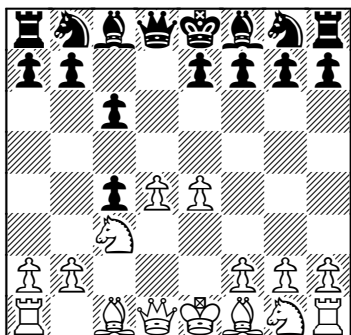
Ivanchuk therefore simply had to watch, as Anand challenged Kasparov for his PCA title in 1995, and Kamsky took on Karpov for the FIDE crown in 1996. World number 2 in 1991-92, Ivanchuk's world ranking had slipped but he remained as competitive as any of Kasparov's possible challengers and might easily have filled Anand or Kamsky's shoes in either of these matches. If not against Kasparov, still clear world number one at the time, I'd have fancied his chances against Karpov.

Ivanchuk still performed well outside the FIDE qualification cycle. He tied 1st/2nd with Karpov at Reykjavik 1991, and 1st/2nd with Kasparov at Dortmund 1992 and Novgorod 1994; he finished in outright 1st place at Munich 1994, Linares 1995 and Wijk aan Zee 1996. In the last of these events, Ivanchuk played one of the great new moves of the decade. His opponent was the fiery Latvian grandmaster, Alexei Shirov. They contested a hotly theoretical line in one of the game's most difficult openings – a Botvinnik Slav.

Game 29
V.Ivanchuk-A.Shirov
Wijk aan Zee 1996
Semi-Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 c3 f6

The Slav move ...c7-c6 raises the early possibility for Black that he can grab White's gambit pawn and hang to it by playing ...b7-b5. The plan is doubtful in this position, as White can regain his pawn and hope for an edge after 3...dxc4 4 e4,



and if 4...b5 5 a4 b4 6 ♖a2 ♗f6 7 e5 ♗d5 8 ♕xc4, or if 4...e5 5 ♗f3 exd4 6 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 7 ♗xd4 ♕c5 8 ♕e3 ♗f6 9 f3 b5 (or 9...♗bd7 10 ♕xc4) 10 a4 b4 11 ♖a2 ♕a6 12 ♖c1.

4 ♗f3 e6

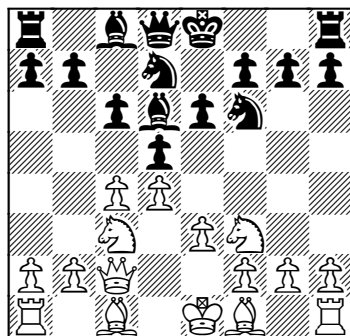
Here, however, 4...dxc4 5 a4 ♕f5 6 e3 e6 7 ♕xc4 ♕b4 leads to one of Black's solid main lines. Black can also aim for a transposition into a line of the Queen's Gambit Accepted by playing 5...e6, and if 6 e3 c5 7 ♕xc4 ♗c6 8 0-0 cxd4 9 exd4.

5 ♕g5

This move guarantees a sharp struggle, but taking on Botvinnik's Variation is a high risk strategy. Both sides are advised to avoid this bewildering line unless they are armed to the teeth with up to date theory. Bot-

vinnik tended only to play Black. With White, he generally steered for the more controllable positional waters of the Meran Variation (5 e3 ♗bd7 6 ♕d3 dxc4), which he also happily defended with Black.

White can also play for an edge with 5 e3 ♗bd7 6 ♖c2 ♕d6

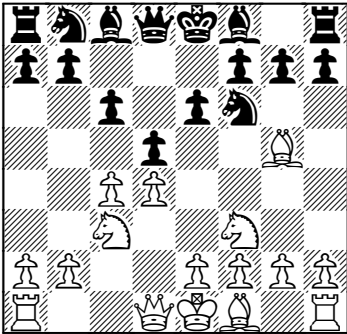


7 ♕d3 (7 g4 is more double-edged). V.Ivanchuk-P.Leko, Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010, then saw White nag away at Black's game well into the middlegame after 7...0-0 8 0-0 dxc4 9 ♕xc4 a6 10 ♖d1 b5 11 ♕d3 ♖c7 12 ♕d2 c5 13 dxc5 ♖xc5 14 a4! (an important undermining) 14...bxa4 15 ♖xa4 ♕b7 16 ♖c4 ♖a7 17 ♗e4 ♗xe4 18 ♕xe4 ♕xe4 19 ♖xe4 ♖ac8 20 ♖d4 ♕c5 21 ♖c3 ♖cd8 22 ♖c2 ♖fe8 23 ♗g5 g6 24 ♕a5 ♕b6 25 ♕c3 with extra space and a continuing initiative and an eventual win.

After 7 b3, another Ivanchuk favourite and a good positional alternative to 7 ♕d3, V.Ivanchuk-L.Aronian, Linares 2009, continued 7...0-0 8 ♕e2 b6 9 0-0 ♕b7 10 ♕b2 ♖c8 11 ♖ac1 c5 12 dxc5! (a

good plan that, along with his 14th move, supports the manoeuvre ♖h4-f5) 12...bxc5 13 ♖fd1 ♕e7 14 g3 ♖fd8 15 cxd5 exd5 16 ♗h4 ♘b8 17 ♙f1 ♗e5!? 18 ♙h3 ♖c7 19 ♙g2 d4?! (19...♙dc8 improves) 20 ♗f5 ♕e8 21 exd4 cxd4 22 ♗xd4 ♙xg2 23 ♙xg2 and White won.

V.Ivanchuk-A.Riazantsev, Moscow 2005, saw the earlier divergence 5...a6 6 b3, which led to good play in the centre for White after 6...♙b4 7 ♙d2 ♗bd7 8 ♙d3 0-0 9 0-0 ♕e7 10 ♖c2 e5 11 dxe5 ♗xe5 12 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 13 cxd5 cxd5 14 ♗e2, due to the vulnerability of Black's isolated d-pawn and White's grip on the central dark squares. Play continued 14...♙d6 15 ♗g3 ♕e7 16 ♙c3 h6 17 ♖b2 ♖e8 18 ♙xf6 ♕xf6 19 ♕xf6 gxf6 20 ♖ac1 with a clear positional advantage and an eventual win.



5...dxc4

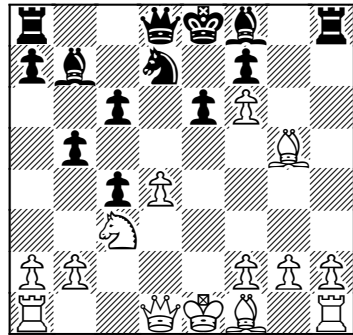
Black can also invite the complications of a slightly different gambit that arises after 5...h6 6 ♙h4 g5 7 ♙g3 dxc4 8 e4 b5. Ivanchuk often sidesteps this line by playing the quieter 6 ♙xf6

♕xf6, after which White will try to build on his extra pawn in the centre and additional space.

6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♙h4 g5 9 ♗xg5 hxg5

Alatortsev's 9...♗d5!? 10 ♗xf7 ♕xh4 11 ♗xh8 ♙b4, and now either 12 ♖c1 or 12 ♕d2, is a riskier and much rarer beast. But White needs to be aware that this line exists and be prepared for it.

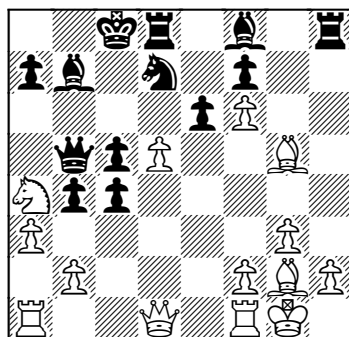
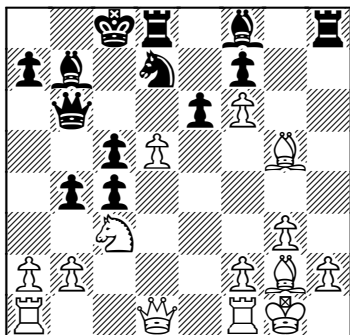
10 ♙xg5 ♗bd7 11 exf6 ♙b7



12 g3

White can only hope to achieve anything by fianchettoing his king's bishop. The main Botvinnik plan, based on the moves ...♙b7, ...♕b6 and ...0-0-0, is particularly effective after 12 ♙e2. Black safeguards his king, exerts pressure on the d-file, and establishes a threatening queenside pawn mass. A.Denker-M.Botvinnik, USA-USSR radio match 1945, continued 12...♕b6 13 0-0 0-0-0 14 a4?! (14 ♙f3 is better) 14...b4! 15 ♗e4 c5 16 ♖b1 ♖c7 17 ♗g3 cxd4 18 ♙xc4 ♖c6 19 f3 d3 20 ♖c1 ♙c5+ 21 ♗h1 ♕d6 22 ♖f4 ♖xh2+ 23 ♙xh2 ♖h8+ 24 ♖h4 ♖xh4+ 25 ♙xh4 ♖f4 0-1.

12...c5 13 d5 ♖b6 14 ♙g2 0-0-0 15 0-0 17...♗b8 or 17...♗e5.
b4



Black begins the menacing advance of his queenside pawns, creating an immediate crisis on the d-file (around d5). By kicking the knight to a4, however, Black also presents White with line opening opportunities on the queenside (based on a2-a3). Black's queenside pawn mass can be a potential game-winner in many endgames, but first up comes a double-edged middlegame with chances for both sides.

16 ♗a4 ♖b5

Shirov didn't wish to tempt fate. V.Ivanchuk-A.Shirov, Novgorod 1994, had previously gone 16...♖a6 17 a3 ♙xd5 18 ♙xd5 ♗e5 19 ♖e2 ♗xd5 20 axb4 cxb4 21 ♗c3 ♖c6 22 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 23 f3 ♙c5+ 24 ♙g2 ♗d3, which may still not be clear but led to a win for White.

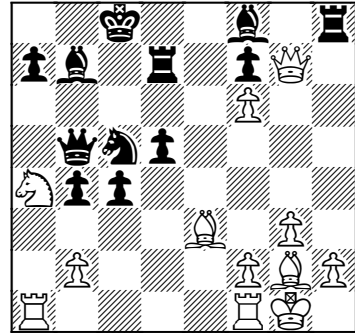
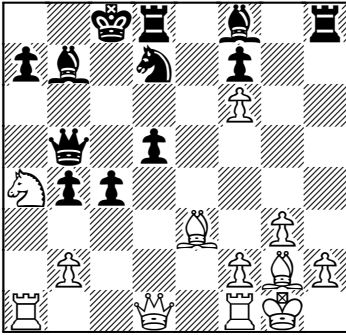
17 a3

All established theory and still critical – Black now has a major choice between Shirov's reply in the game and either

Both of these knight moves were under a cloud at the time. White can play the same dangerous queen sacrifice against them, as in G.Kamsky-V.Kramnik, New York (1st matchgame) 1994, which went 17...♗e5 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♖d4 ♗c6 (also essential if Black's knight was on b8) 20 dxc6 ♗xd4 21 cxb7+ ♙c7 22 ♙e3 e5 23 ♗c3 bxc3 24 bxc3 ♙c5 25 cxd4 ♙xd4 26 ♗fb1 ♖c5 27 ♗a6 ♗b8 28 ♙c1, followed by ♙a3 and White won.

Black may be able to improve with 21...♙b8, a move that had already been played as far back as 1990, but very badly. As I write, the jury still seems to remain out on the strength of this line. After 22 ♙e3 e5, and if 23 b3 c3, Black may enjoy roughly equal chances (though this sequence and conclusion needs a lot more tests). White can also consider 20 ♗b6+ axb6 21 dxc6 ♙xc6 22 ♙xc6 ♖xc6 23 ♖g4, retaining his queen, but 23...♙c5 may then be all right for Black.

17...exd5 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♙e3



It isn't clear whether White can expect any more by playing 19 ♖e1, after which V.Topalov-A.Shirov, Sofia 2009, continued 19...d4 20 ♗xd4 ♙xg2 21 ♙xg2 ♗xg5 22 ♗xc4+ ♔b8 23 ♖ac1 ♙d6 24 ♗c6 ♗d2 25 ♙g1 ♖xh2 26 ♖e2 ♗d3 27 ♖e3 ♗d2 28 ♖e2 and was shortly drawn.

19...♗c5 20 ♗g4+ ♖d7

This move improves on old theory. G.Agzamov-M.Chandler, Belgrade 1982, had previously gone 20...♔b8?! 21 ♗d4 ♗xa4 22 ♗xa7+ ♙c7 23 ♖xa4 ♖a8 24 ♗xa8 ♙xa8 25 ♖xa8 c3 26 bxc3 bxc3 27 ♙f4+ ♙d7 28 ♖d1 with more than enough attacking compensation for the nominal material deficit and a fairly quick win for White. Black might also try 20...♙c7!? 21 ♙f4+ ♙c6 22 ♗xc5 ♙xc5 23 ♖fd1, but I'm not sure I'd trust this for Black.

21 ♗g7!!?

The kind of magnificent queen sacrifice we'd all like to make! With hindsight, it may not be entirely correct but it's enormously complex and it seems to have come as a shock.

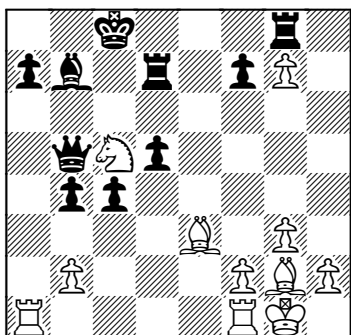
Shirov had probably expected 21 ♗xc5 ♙xc5 22 ♙xc5 ♗xc5, which was already known at the time but had been little researched. L.Van Wely-A.Shirov, Monaco (blindfold rapid) 2004, much later continued 23 ♖fe1 ♙c7 24 h4 ♖hd8 25 ♖e5 a5 26 h5 ♙c6 27 h6 a4 and Black's queenside pawn mass thundered down the board to win.

So Shirov must have found an antidote to Ivanchuk's queen sacrifice!? Perhaps – but before returning to that debate, let's consider whether White can improve on Van Wely. I played alongside A.Muir-J.Aagaard, Scottish Championship, Oban 2005, which diverged with 24 ♖e5 a5 25 ♖ae1 b3 26 ♖e7 ♙c6 27 ♗g7 ♖hd8 28 ♗xf7 c3 29 bxc3 ♗xc3 30 ♖xd7+ ♖xd7 31 ♗e6 ♖d6 32 ♗e7+ ♖d7 33 f7 ♖xe7 34 ♖xe7+ ♙d7 35 f8♗ b2 36 ♖xd7+ ♙xd7 37 ♙h3+ ♙c7 38 ♗c8+ ♙d6 39 ♗xc3 b1♗+ 40 ♙f1 1-0.

This game indicates that White may be able to achieve more by focusing on early penetration on the e-file and

weakening Black's grip on his d-pawn. White applied a similar idea in S.Feller-N.Brunner, Nancy 2009, which saw 24 ♖f5 a5 25 h4 ♙c6 26 h5 a4 27 h6 a3 28 bxa3 b3 29 a4 ♙b7 30 ♖ad1 ♖xh6 31 ♖e7 ♖xe7 32 fx7 ♖xe7 33 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 34 ♖xd5+ ♖c6 35 ♖b5+ ♙c7 36 ♖d5 f6 37 a5 c3 38 ♖xb3 c2 39 ♖c1 ♖e2 40 a6 and White won.

21...♙xg7 22 fxg7 ♖g8 23 ♙xc5



23...d4?

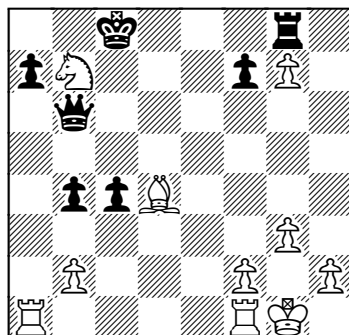
This move, however, is demonstrably flawed and probably loses. Black fatally allows White to keep his g7-pawn in play for too long and quickly regrets it. The immediate 23...♖xg7 is critical. R.Ponomarev-A.Shirov, Wijk aan Zee 2003, later continued 24 ♙xd7!? ♖xd7 25 ♖xa7 ♖g6 26 ♖fa1 ♖e6 27 ♙d4 ♖e2 28 h4 ♖d2 29 ♙e3 ♖xb2 30 ♖1a5 b3 and Black won. E.Bacrot-M.Carlsen, Dortmund 2009, instead went more dependably 24 ♙d4 ♖c7 25 ♙xb7 ♖g6 26 ♖a5 ♖xb7 27 ♙xd5 ♖b8 28 ♙e5 ♖b6 29 ♙xc7 ♖xc7 30 ♖fa1 a6 31 ♖xa6 ♖xa6 32 ♖xa6 c3 33 bxc3 bxc3 34 ♙e4 with an eventual draw.

During the game, both Ivanchuk and Shirov appear to have thought that after 23...♖xg7, White could reply 24 ♙h3 with good play. After the game it became clear that Black can then connect his rooks and open up the long light diagonal, with “definite counterchances” (Ivanchuk), by playing 24...f5! 25 ♙xf5 d4!, and if 26 ♙xd4 ♖gf7. Black might also be able to play 23...♖c7!?, against which Ivanchuk apparently intended 24 ♙xb7 with what he considered to be a continuing initiative. Weaker is 23...♙c6?!, which allows 24 ♖a6, followed by ♖fa1 with a probable win.

24 ♙xb7+ ♖xb7 25 ♙xb7 ♖b6

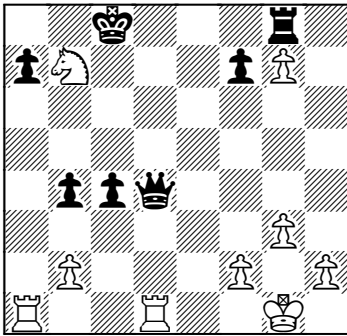
This is Black's only chance to stay in the game. Otherwise White's bishop reaches d4 and White will secure his pawn on g7, completely dominating Black's rook, with an easy win. After 25...♙xb7 26 ♙xd4, and if 26...a5 27 ♖fe1, threatening both ♖e7+ and ♖e5, White's rooks will decisively get at Black's king and f-pawn and/or all of his queenside pawns.

26 ♙xd4!



White must now show that his knight can perform as well as his bishop, but he just has enough to do this. White may lose his pawn on g7, but he can still put sufficient pressure on Black's queenside pawns and vulnerable king to win, either in an attacking middlegame or a theoretically winning endgame. In all of this, Black's rook remains a spectator on g7 for at least one critical tempo.

26...♖xd4 27 ♖fd1

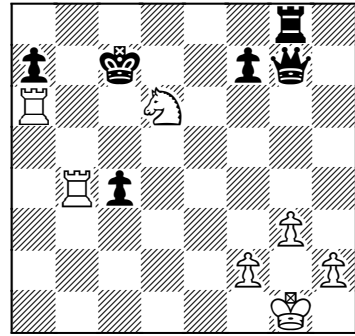


27...♖xb2

White's winning margins are tight, but he can also get over the finishing line in the rook and pawn endgame arising after 27...♖xd1+ 28 ♖xd1 ♖xb7 29 ♖d4 ♖xg7 30 ♖xc4, and if 30...a5 31 ♖f4! ♖b6 32 h4 ♖b5 33 b3!. White also consolidates after 27...♖xg7 28 ♖xa7 ♖b8 29 ♖da1 ♖e8 (or if 29...♖d4 30 ♖a5! ♖c5 31 ♖b7+ ♖c8 32 ♖xf7) 30 ♖d6 ♖e1+ 31 ♖xe1 ♖xa7 32 ♖xc4, as White can then play his rook to the third rank, followed by b2-b3 and the gradual advance of his g- and h-pawns. 28 ♖d6+ ♖b8 29 ♖db1 ♖xg7

Black's queen alone (without his rook) isn't able to defend against White's rampant rooks and knight. After 29...♖d2 30 ♖xc4 ♖c3, White wins by playing the elegant 31 ♖a4 b3 32 ♖a5! ♖a8 33 ♖a3! ♖xg7 34 ♖c6 ♖b7 35 ♖xa7, or if 29...♖c3 30 ♖xa7.

30 ♖xb4+ ♖c7 31 ♖a6



By defending his knight, White threatens to win by playing either ♖b7+ or ♖xc4+. Black is defenceless.

31...♖b8

Black finally gets his rook into play, but it is too late to save him. The resulting queen vs. two rooks endgame is a trivial win for White, as his rooks can quickly round-up the black c-pawn.

32 ♖xa7+ ♖xd6 33 ♖xb8 ♖g4 34 ♖d8+ ♖c6 35 ♖a1 1-0

Topalov blitzed in a g2-g3 English

The latter half of the 1990s saw a continuing period of change and not a little confusion in top-class chess. In 1996, Kasparov's PCA collapsed, when it lost its main sponsor, Intel. Kasparov