

NEIL McDONALD

DYNAMIC DEFENCE

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About the Author

Neil McDonald became a grandmaster in 1996 and a FIDE trainer in 2017. He is a regular coach of the England Junior team at international events. Neil has written numerous books on openings, endgames, tactics and strategy as well as biographies of famous players. He lives in Gravesend in Kent, England.

Also by the Author:

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Introduction

Most attacking moves in a game of chess are no more than easily countered threats to enemy pieces or pawns. We might use them to assert our control over an important square, or to clear a minor obstacle in the path of our chosen plan. Sometimes an aggressive gesture tells the opponent to back-off when he or she attempts an incursion into our territory. Such attacks are little more than gentle prods. Indeed they are hardly distinguishable from manoeuvres or developing moves.

Things are very different when a player has the *initiative* (that is, the ability to make continuous threats and force the opponent to respond to them), and uses it to start a large-scale attack. Then standard defensive responses include fortifying the squares around the king, sending reinforcements to provide him with extra protection, and trying to exchange off the attacking pieces. All these 'classical' methods of safeguarding the king are vital and we'll see many examples of them in this book. But *dynamic* defence goes beyond these techniques. It doesn't just prepare to meet the thrusts of the attacking pieces and hold firm against them, it aims to steal the initiative from the opponent.

An all-out attack on the king requires the participation of a large part of the forces at a player's disposal. When called up for battle some of the pieces, perhaps *every* piece, will have to desert their run-of-the-mill duties, such as keeping the centre guarded, resisting pressure on the other side of the board, or protecting their own king. They can't carry out ordinary positional tasks and also join the charge in a limited sector of the board.

For this reason if the assault fails to achieve its objectives the attacking pieces are likely to find themselves wrong-footed and unable to revert to their previous roles. Likewise, their pawn structure might have become overstretched or ragged and no longer capable of guarding key squares.

The purpose of *Dynamic Defence* is to show how to resist an attack and, by widening the struggle, take advantage of the disorganisation of the over-committed enemy pieces. It involves taking the fight to the opponent, not simply building an invincible fortress.

Or at least that is the general aim of this book. We shall also explore dynamic themes in which the safety of the king is not of key importance, such as using a counterattack to avoid defeat in an endgame.

I hope you enjoy the games in this book and emerge as a dynamic defender!

Neil McDonald,
Gravesend, October 2021

Game 5
A.Naiditsch-M.Adams
 Dortmund 2013
Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♙g5 ♙e7 5 ♘f3 ♘bd7 6 e3 h6 7 ♙h4 0-0 8 ♙d3

In the Queen's Gambit the smallest details decide whether White keeps a permanent edge or Black comfortably equalises. Here, for example, 8 ♖c1 or 8 ♗c2 would be more precise, so that if 8...dxc4 White can recapture with 9 ♙xc4 'in one go' without spending a move putting the bishop on d3.

8...dxc4

Conceding the centre makes sense now Black has in effect gained a tempo.

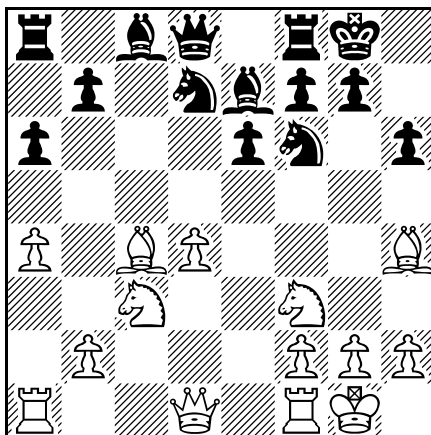
9 ♙xc4 a6 10 a4

Not allowing Black to gain a second tempo after 10 0-0 with 10...b5, when 11 ♙d3 ♙b7 solves Black's problem of how to develop his light-squared bishop. Then after 12...c5 next move he would be playing for the advantage.

10...c5

This is Black's characteristic freeing move, but it's not as strong as 12...c5 in the note above as the bishop on c8 is still passive and a queenside expansion with ...b7-b5 has been prevented.

11 0-0 cxd4 12 exd4



Question: With the appearance of the famous Isolated Queen's Pawn (IQP) the nature of the middlegame struggle has been established. Can you suggest a good manoeuvre for Black?

Answer: 12...♞b6

A knight loves to have a centre post from which it can't be dislodged by an enemy pawn. Therefore it gallops to d5 with no more ado and gains a tempo by attacking c4.

This is all well and good, but you might retort that the bishop on c8 loves an open diagonal equally as much, so why not 12...b6 and 13...♙b7 to activate it? This would be a fair point if the bishop could be safely deployed to b7, even though 12...b6 leaves the knight on d7 sadly circumscribed. However, these considerations are blown out of the water by the fact that 12...b6 can be answered with 13 d5! when 13...exd5 14 ♞xd5 ♞xd5 15 ♚xd5 (attacking a8) 15...♞a7 16 ♙xe7 ♚xe7 17 ♞fe1 ♚f6 18 b3 leaves White with small but persistent pressure. It might not trouble Black much, but it's not fun either and the winning chances that an unbalanced pawn structure gave him have vanished.

When discussing how to deal with an enemy passed pawn, Nimzowitsch came up with the motto 'first restrain, next blockade, and thirdly destroy!'. The same applies to the IQP in this instance: firstly, Black should restrain the advance 13 d5, then block the pawn with his knight and, thirdly, if the chance arises, destroys it.

A more dynamic (and risky) form of restraint has been employed by Korchnoi, namely the counterattacking 12...♚a5 13 ♚e2 ♙b4 as a prelude to ...b7-b6 and ...♙b7. The chance to play ...♙xc3 coupled with the queen's influence over d5 takes the sting out of a d4-d5 advance.

Finally, should you prefer to exchanges pieces with 12...♞d5!? (so that if 13 ♙xe7 ♞xe7 or 13 ♙xd5 ♙xh4), I'd probably have to agree it eases the cramp in Black's position.

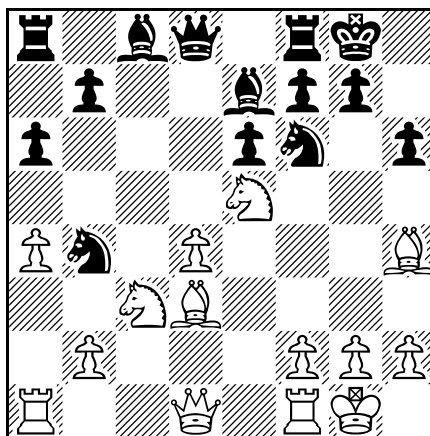
13 ♙d3

Also possible is 13 ♙b3 to keep some influence over d5, but the German Grandmaster is laying the foundations for an all-out attack on the black king.

13...♞bd5 14 ♞e5

A supported central post for the knight is one of the perks of having an IQP.

14...♞b4



Question: Can you think of two ways in which this move interferes with White's centralisation/ attacking build-up?

Answer: After the immediate 14...♙d7 White could reply 15 ♖c1 centralising his rook. So Adams utilises the b4-square (a hole in White's queenside) to force the bishop back to b1, when the rook remains blocked in – or so it seems.

At the same time the black knight is guarding the c2- and d3-squares, so that White is deprived of a queen and bishop combination against h7 after ♙b1 with ♖c2 or ♗d3. For this reason after 14...♙d7 15 ♖c1 ♙c6 16 ♙b1 it would still be a good idea for Black to play 16...♞b4!.

15 ♙b1

It would be unappetising to allow an exchange on d3 or retreat the bishop into passivity on e2.

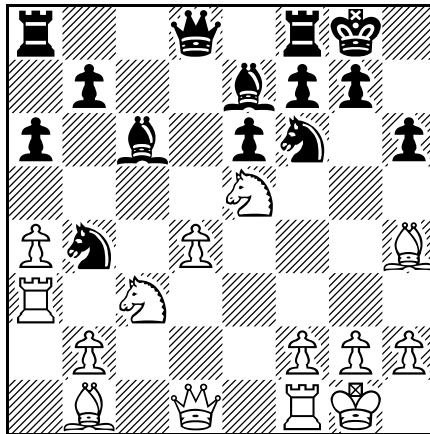
15...♙d7!

The bishop will get onto the a8-h1 diagonal after all.

16 ♖a3

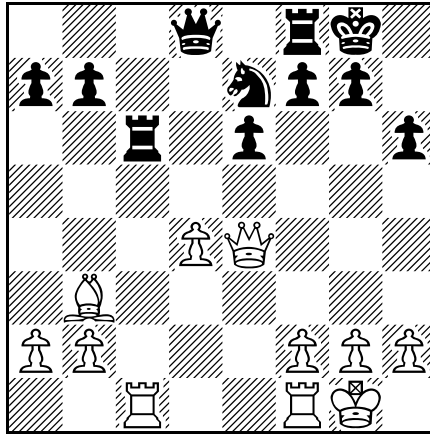
The rook nonetheless finds a route into the game which is consistent with White's attacking aspirations.

16...♙c6



Question: It might appear that White can get rid of the IQP and emerge with a tiny edge after 17 ♞xc6 ♞xc6 18 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 19 d5 exd5 20 ♞xd5 ♙xb2 21 ♖c2 (threatening mate on h7) 21...g6 22 ♖xb2 ♗xd5 23 ♖xb7 and the white bishop is superior to the black knight, though with best play it should be a draw. But can you see Black's big positional mistake in this sequence?

Answer: if I may be allowed to wander back to the distant past, as a keen young player I read the daily reports from the 1981 world championship match in Merano between Karpov and Korchnoi. The diagram position was reached in game nine after Black's 18th move.



Here Korchnoi played 19 ♖c3 and it transpired after 19...♔d6 20 g3 ♗d8 21 ♗d1 ♗b6! that he had big problems due to the weakness of the IQP. Karpov went on to win a model game.

I remember being puzzled why Korchnoi didn't get rid of the IQP with 19 ♗xc6 ♘xc6 20 d5 exd5 21 ♙xd5 when only he could have any advantage due to the better minor piece. I guessed that this was too boring for Korchnoi, who wanted to carry on attacking with 19 ♗c3. A couple of years passed and then in 1984 I got to read Karpov's comments on the match in his book *Chess at the Top*. Here he points out that he intended to answer 19 ♗xc6 with 19...bxc6!. This stops White liquidating with d4-d5 and increases his grip on the d5 square. Black can then build up against the IQP with moves like ...♗b6, ...♗d8 and ...♞f5 (as far as the knight move is compatible with the defence of the c6-pawn). White is in a bad way as his light-squared bishop can't help guard d4, whereas all three black pieces can attack it.

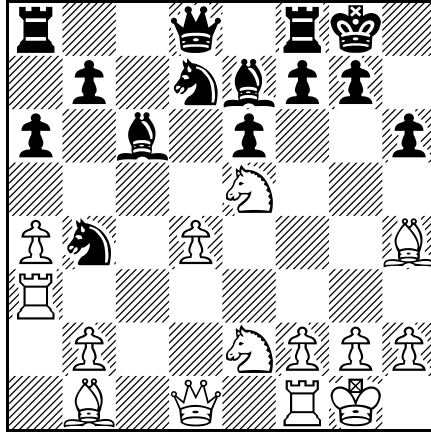
Back in 1981 I could only see that 19...bxc6 split up Black's pawns, but by 1984 I could fully appreciate Karpov's comment. That's how we develop as players.

With this in mind, I hope you can see the positional flaw in the variation given after the game move 16...♙c6. On 17 ♘xc6 Black should reply à la Karpov with 17...bxc6!. The binds restraining the IQP have been strengthened (the advance d4-d5 is a distant dream) and pressure can be increased against it by bringing the rooks to the d-file.

17 ♞e2

White's preparations for an attack continue with ♗g3 and ♞f4 being on the cards. The build-up looks a bit slow and primitive, but if Black responds with insufficient vigour it could become a juggernaut.

17...♞d7!



If your opponent wants to attack then exchange off a couple of his pieces!

18 ♕xe7

Instead 18 ♕g3 fails to avoid exchanges after 18...♖xe5 19 ♕xe5 ♕d6 (also interesting is 19...f6 20 ♕f4 f5, shutting out the bishop on b1 and entrenching Black on the light squares in the centre). If instead after 18...♖xe5 White recaptures 19 dxe5? to get rid of the IQP then 19...♚xd1 20 ♜xd1 ♜fd8 leaves him with no good way to contest the d-file. He would be practically lost after 21 ♜e1 ♜d2. In this scenario the rook on a3 would be totally wrong-footed as it can't help with the defence of the first rank.

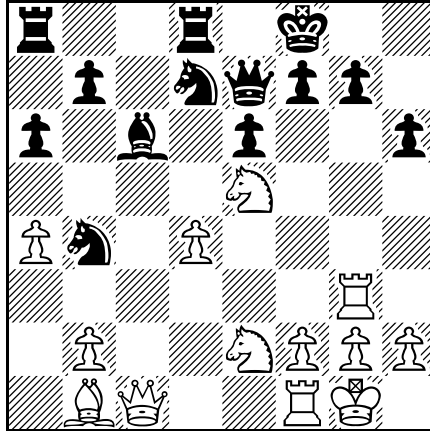
18...♚xe7 19 ♜g3 ♜fd8

Threatening to win the knight on e5, so White removes his queen from the pin on the d-file and attacks h6.

20 ♚c1 ♖f8

Adams judges his king will be safer near the centre.

After 20...♖xe5 21 dxe5 ♖h8 22 ♖f4 ♜d4 Black possesses the d-file, but he has to be careful. For example, after 23 ♚e3 he should try 23...♚d8 or 23...♚c5, as the natural 23...♜ad8 allows 24 ♜xg7! ♖xg7 25 ♖h5+ ♖g8 (or 25...♖f8 26 ♚xh6+ ♖e8 27 ♖f6+ ♚xf6 28 exf6 and White wins) 26 ♚xh6 f5 27 ♖f6+ ♖f7 28 ♚h7+ ♖f8 29 ♚g8 mate.



21 ♖h7?

A turning point in the game. Naiditsch is seduced by the pretty tactical threat 22 ♜xh6!! gxh6 23 ♜g8 mate. But all that glitters is not gold.

Instead the un-glitzzy 21 f4! would add oomph to the white attack. It turns the f-pawn into a battering ram and allows the hitherto dormant rook on f1 to join in the battle. For example, consider these variations after 21 f4! ♕xa4? (a stupid pawn grab) 22 f5!:

a) 22...♜xe5 23 f6! gxf6 24 dxe5 fxe5 25 ♜xh6+ ♖e8 26 ♜g7 ♕b5 27 ♕g6 ♕xe2 28 ♕xf7+ ♖d7 29 ♕xe6+ ♖d6 30 ♕b3+ ♖d7 (if 30...♖c5 31 ♜xe7 wins) 31 ♜xe7+ ♖xe7 32 ♜e6 mate.

b) 22...exf5 23 ♜xf7! ♖xf7 24 ♜c4+ ♜e6 (after 24...♖e8 25 ♜xf5 or 24...♖f8 25 ♜f4! White also has a winning attack) 25 ♜xg7+ ♖f6 26 ♜xf5+ ♜xf5 27 ♜f7 mate.

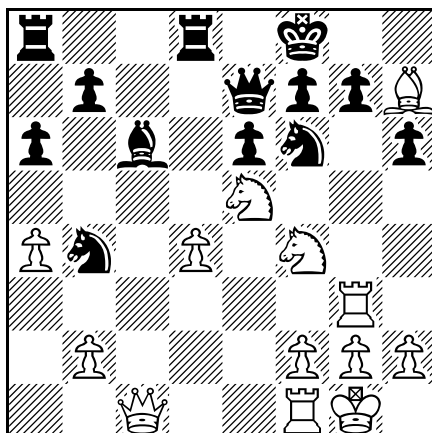
Black should complete development with 21...♜ac8!: for instance, 22 ♜d2 (if 22 f5 ♕xg2 23 ♜xd7+ ♜xd7 24 ♜d2 ♕xf1 25 ♜xb4+ ♜d6 26 ♜xd6+ ♜xd6 27 ♖xf1 e5! 28 ♜b3 – but not 28 dxe5 ♜d1+ 29 ♖f2 ♜xb1 and Black wins – 28...exd4 29 ♕d3 the endgame is balanced) 22...♜d5. Now 23 ♜c3 is unclear, whereas 23 f5 might lead to a draw by repetition after 23...♜xe5 24 dxe5 exf5 25 ♕xf5 ♕d7 26 ♕g6 ♕e8 27 ♕f5 ♕d7 28 ♕g6, etc.

We might conclude that if Naiditsch had carried on playing logically rather than sought adventure, the attack and defence would have cancelled out each other with the natural result being a draw.

21...♜f6!

Stopping White's threat by covering the g8-square as well as attacking the bishop.

22 ♜f4



Question: It's easy to see why White strayed from the correct path. He has a large armada in the shape of a bishop, two knights and a rook hovering near the black king, with his queen at hand to back them up. Already there is the impressive threat of 23 ♗fg6+ fxg6 24 ♖xg6+ winning the queen. But can you see a good defensive move for Black that breaks up the attack?

Answer: 22...♗e8!!

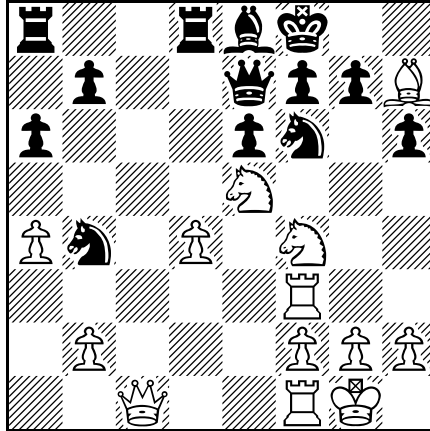
The bishop guards the g6-square through the f7-pawn to stop White's threat of 23 ♗fg6+.

I always associate putting a bishop on e8 with the former world champion Emanuel Lasker who placed it there in Queen's Gambit structures throughout his long career: for example, against Henry Bird in 1890 and Ragozin in 1935. As far as I know he only lost one time with an early ...♗e8 manoeuvre, but it was against Capablanca in their 1921 world championship match, so that's the game that goes down in history.

You can also see the 'Lasker' bishop on e8 doing a great job in frustrating an attack in Kramnik-Vallejo Pons in Chapter Six.

23 ♖f3

If instead 23 ♗b1 ♖xd4 leaves White a pawn down with a fading attack.



Question: Choose how materialistic Black should be: 23...♖xh7 (very greedy), 23...♗xd4 (greedy) or 23...♞c6 (not greedy)?

Answer: 23...♞c6!

Here we see another good feature of 23...♞e8 – it vacated the c6-square for the knight’s homecoming.

After 23...♖xh7?? 24 ♜fg6+ wins the black queen, while 23...♗xd4? allows White to reignite his attack with 24 ♜h5! when 24...♖xh5 25 ♜g6 is a nice smothered mate which justifies White putting the bishop on h7 after all, while otherwise Black has to deal with the threat of 25 ♜xf6 gxf6 26 ♜xh6 mate. The best way is 24...♞c6! (that move again) when after 25 ♜xc6 ♞xc6 26 ♗xf6 Black should avoid 26...gxf6 27 ♜xh6+ in favour of 26...♗d5! 27 ♞g6 and, wait for it, 27...♗g5! ignoring the attack on f7 to set up the threat of a so-called Windmill with 28...♗xg2+ 29 ♜h1 ♗xf2+. But what human would play like this when there is the much safer option of 23...♞c6 available?

24 ♗d1

Since White resigns two moves later he might as well have tried 24 ♜h5!?. If then 24...♜e5, hoping for 25 dxe5 ♜xh7, White can muddy the waters with 25 ♗xf6: for example, 25...♗xd4 when if 26 ♜e3 (26 ♗xh6 ♜g4 wins for Black) 26...♗d5! 27 ♜g3 ♜g6! refutes the attack. But 26 ♞b1!? just accepting being a pawn down would leave Black with work to do.

However, after 24 ♜h5!?, 24...♞xd4! is more incisive: 25 ♗xf6 ♜xf6! (but not 25...♜e2+? 26 ♜h1 ♜xc1? when 27 ♜g6 mate is that pretty mate again) 26 ♜xf6 ♜e2+ 27 ♜h1 ♜xc1 28 ♜xe8 ♗ac8! when c1 is defended. White’s knight on e8 is sure to drop, leaving him a lot of material down in the endgame.

24...♗xd4

‘First restrain, second blockade, third destroy’. White’s over-committal play on the king-

side has lost the IQP.

25 ♖xd4 ♜xd4 26 ♖d3 ♜c6! 0-1

The knight springs back again and provokes resignation. White could resist if his losses only amounted to a pawn, but after 27 ♜xc6 ♕xc6 his bishop has no way out of the self-inflicted trap on h7.

Game 6
V.Belov-A.Alavkin
 Russian Team Championship, Sochi 2004
French Defence

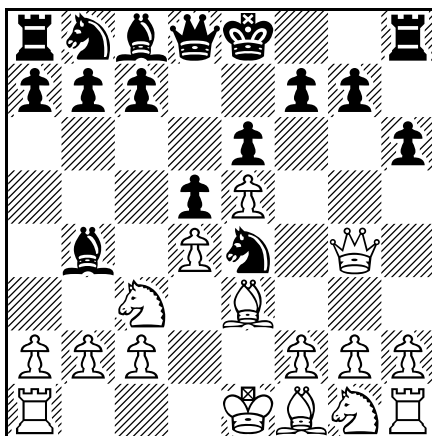
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 ♕g5 ♖b4

The McCutcheon Variation of the French. Rather than deal with the pin on f6, Black responds by counterattacking against c3.

5 e5 h6 6 ♕e3

Other options include 6 ♕h4 g5 7 ♕g3 ♜e4 8 ♜ge2 c5 and 6 ♕d2 ♕xc3 7 bxc3 ♜e4 8 ♜g4 g6 9 ♕d3 ♜xd2 10 ♜xd2 c5 when in either case Black is somewhat loose on the kingside, but trusts in his queenside activity to give him dynamic equality.

6...♜e4 7 ♜g4!



7...g5

Black has to meet the threat to g7 as 7...♜xc3? fails to 8 ♜xg7 ♖f8 (after 8...♜e4+ 9 c3 White will regain his material with a huge advantage) 9 ♕d2! ♜xa2 (he can't save the knight so sells it as dearly as possible) 10 c3 ♜xc3 11 bxc3 ♕e7 12 ♜f3 and Black is in very poor shape: his king is trapped in the centre and the demolition job on his kingside will be completed with ♕xh6.

The game move is the most provocative response to the threat to g7. Rather than meet

it with the quiet 7...g6 or 7...f8, Alavkin wants to use his kingside pawns to push back the white queen.

8 a3 h5 9 ♖d1 ♗xc3+?

The wrong way to capture. Giving up the dark-squared bishop to win a pawn is not in the spirit of Black's energetic opening play.

Here 9...dxc3! 10 ♖d2! ♗a5 11 bxc3 c5 maintains counterplay against the c3 point. Then 12 dxc5 ♖c7 13 ♘f3 b6! is highly obscure. Instead White should avoid 12 ♗xg5 ♖b6! when 13 ♗f6? ♖b2! is suddenly winning for Black due to the double threat to a1 and c3. Or if 13 ♘e2 cxd4 and White can't recapture with 14 ♘xd4 as 14...♖b2 is again fatal for him.

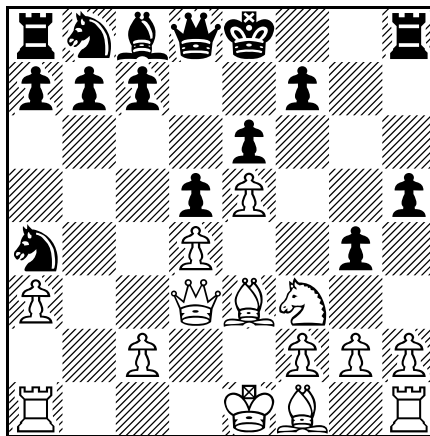
10 bxc3 ♘xc3

And here more active is 10...c5.

11 ♖d3 ♘a4

The knight is forced to the edge of the board as if 11...d4 12 f3 traps it.

12 ♘f3 g4



Question: How can White exploit the dark square holes in the black kingside?

Answer: 13 ♗g5! ♖d7 14 ♗f6

Black's decision to exchange his strong bishop at move nine for a measly pawn has left him under strong pressure on the kingside without a shred of counterplay on the queenside.

14...♖h6 15 ♘h4?

A poor decision. I assume Belov wanted to take away the g6-square from the black rook in preparation for 16 ♖e3 ♖h7 17 ♖g5, when 18 ♖g8+ would be a winning threat. But he has underestimated the strength of Black's exchange sacrifice on f6. As a consequence the white knight is left stranded on h4, with no safe moves either forward or backwards. It also plays no part in the defence of its king.

Dynamic Defence

Compare this with the situation after 15 ♖d2!, keeping the knight centralised. If then 15...♙c6 16 h3! quickly dismantles Black's kingside as there is no time for 16...♘d7 17 hgx4 ♘xf6 due to 18 g5! ♗h8 19 exf6 and White is winning. Meanwhile the attempt to get at the white king after an exchange sacrifice is easily defeated as the knight on d2 provides him with extra shielding: 15...♗xf6 16 exf6 ♙d8 17 ♗h7! ♗xf6 18 ♙g8+ ♚e7 (or 18...♚d7 19 ♚b5+ c6 20 ♚xa4 ♙xd4 21 ♗xf7+ ♚d8 22 0-0 ♙xa4 23 c4, which leaves White bags of material up) 19 ♗xc8 ♘a6 20 ♗xa8 ♙xd4 21 ♗d1 ♗e5+ 22 ♚e2 ♘c3 23 0-0 ♘xe2+ 24 ♚h1 and Black can resign.

Also strong for White was 15 ♘g5!: for example, 15...♗xf6 16 exf6 ♙d8 17 ♗h7 ♗xf6 18 ♚b5+ ♚d7 (transposing is 18...♚e7 19 ♗g8 ♚d7 20 ♘h7) 19 ♗g8+ ♚e7 20 ♘h7! (threatening mate on f8) 20...♗h6 21 ♚xd7 ♘xd7 22 ♗xa8 ♗xh7 23 0-0 and White wins.

15...♗xf6!

Alavkin seizes the chance he has been given to redeem himself from his 'sin' against dynamism at move nine by playing from now on with great verve and skill.

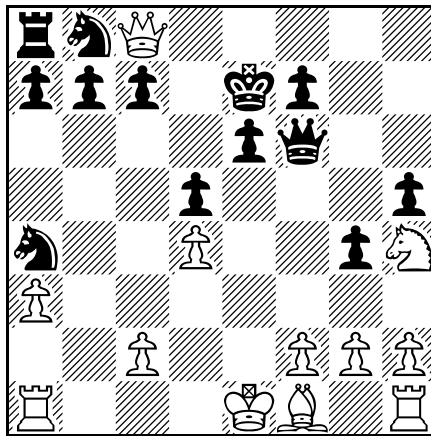
16 exf6 ♙d8 17 ♗h7

White also has to act fast as 17 ♚e2 ♗xf6 gives Black a pawn for the exchange and a more solid pawn structure. Besides the white knight would remain on a silly square.

17...♗xf6 18 ♙g8+ ♚e7

He has to jettison c8 as there was no hope in 18...♚d7 19 ♚b5+ c6 20 ♚xa4 ♙xd4 21 ♗xf7+ ♚d6 22 0-0 ♙xa4 23 ♘g6.

19 ♗xc8



Question: How should Black keep up his attack?

Answer: 19...♘a6!

Holding onto the c7-square is worth more than a rook as it means the white queen is banished from the defence of her king. Instead after 19...♗xd4 20 ♗xc7+ ♘d7 21 ♗d1 she

remains in the thick of the action guarding the c3- and e5-squares as well as pinning the knight on d7. Therefore the black attack would have inadequate energy.

20 ♖xa8 ♜xd4

The black queen is wonderfully centralised. In contrast White's coordination is terrible: a queen temporarily shut in on a8, a knight buried on h4, a rook hanging on a1 and a king stuck in an open centre. Is that discomfort compensated enough by two rooks, give or take three pawns? Objectively Black's initiative is sufficient to hold a draw with best play – no more and no less. But mistakes are inevitable in such an unbalanced position when humans are playing, with any result being possible.

21 ♜b1 ♜c3+ 22 ♚d1 ♜d4+ 23 ♙d3

Not agreeing to a repetition with 23 ♚e1 ♜c3+ 24 ♚d1 ♜d4+ 25 ♚e1, etc.

A disaster for White would be 23 ♚c1?? ♜f4+ 24 ♚d1 ♞c3+ 25 ♚e1 ♞xb1 when mate looms on d2.

23...♞c3+ 24 ♚e1

White hands back a rook to keep the game alive.

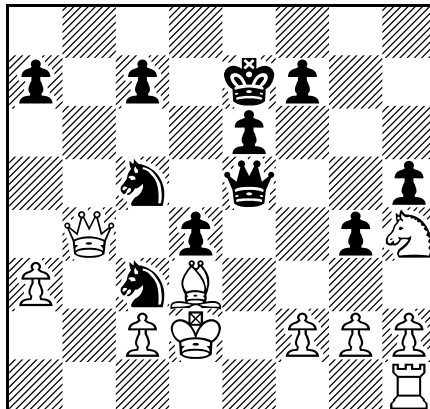
After 24 ♚c1 ♞a2+ 25 ♚d2 ♜xf2+ 26 ♚d1 ♜e3!! (threatening mate on c3, so the white queen guards the square) 27 ♜h8 d4 (renewing the idea of ...♞c3 mate) 28 ♞f5+ (or the immediate 28 ♜b3 when 28...♜c1+ 29 ♚e2 ♜e3+ draws) 28...exf5 29 ♜b3 (hoping for 30 ♜e1) 29...♜c1+ 30 ♚e2 ♜e3+ 31 ♚f1 ♜c1+ 32 ♚e2 ♜e3+ it's again a draw by repetition.

24...♞xb1 25 ♜xb7 ♜e5+ 26 ♚d1 ♞c3+ 27 ♚d2 ♞c5 28 ♜b4

Belov's queen has returned from the wilderness, but he is now 'only' a rook up and his king is plagued by the tricky black knights.

28...d4!

An economical move which defends two knights from capture.

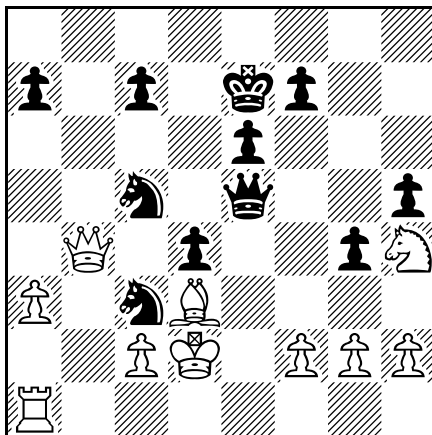


Question: Black threatens 29...♜f4+ 30 ♚e1 ♜c1 mate. Try to work out the best way to counter it out of these four options: 29 ♜a1, 29 ♚c1, 29 ♞f5+ and 29 ♜b2.

29 ♖a1?

If 29 ♖c1?? ♘a2+ wins the queen, while upon 29 ♖b2? Black has a decisive initiative after levelling the material balance with 29...♗g5+ 30 ♔e1 ♖xh4 when 31 ♖b4 ♗g5! once again threatens mate on c1. Remember White can't castle as he has already moved his king, so his rook is hopelessly out of things on h1.

Answer: In fact, White should realise the danger and settle for a draw by arranging to exchange off his passive rook with 29 ♘f5+! exf5 30 ♖e1 ♘3e4+ 31 ♙xe4 fx4 32 ♖xe4! ♗xe4 33 ♖xc5+ ♔e6 34 g3!. Black is temporarily a pawn up but a7, c7 and h5 are all hanging. Then 34...♖f3?! fails to 35 ♖c4+! when he will lose a pawn next move with check, unless he agrees to 35...♗d5 36 ♖xc7.



Question: 29 ♖a1? gets the rook on the left side of the king so that if now 29...♗g5+? 30 ♔e1 is suddenly great for White as c1 is guarded. But can you see a better move for Black which neutralises the annoying pin on c5?

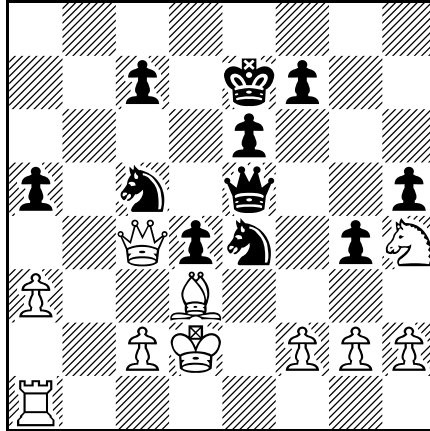
Answer: 29...a5!

Forcing the white queen to break the pin as 30 ♖xa5?? loses her to a discovered attack, most cleanly with 30...♗g5+ 31 ♔e1 ♘xd3+ 32 cxd3 ♖xa5.

30 ♖c4 ♔f8?

For the first time since beginning his counterattack on move 15 Alavkin fails to find the most incisive move.

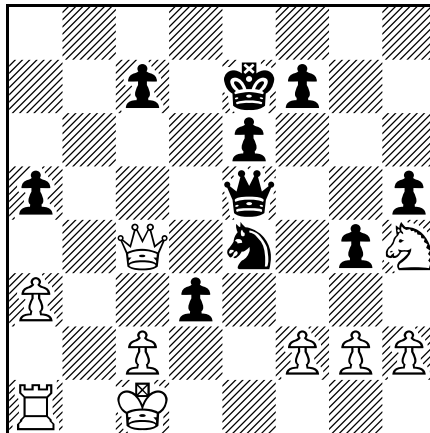
The best way to keep up the initiative was 30...♘3e4+!. This backwards move with the knight feels counter-intuitive, as you'd imagine the other horse should be giving the check:



a) After 31 ♔d1? ♜xd3! (a vital reason for keeping the knight on c5) White is lost: 32 cxd3 (or 32 ♜xd3 ♜xf2+, which wins the queen) 32...♞c3+ 33 ♔c2 ♜e2+ with a winning attack as 34 ♔b3 a4+ 35 ♔b4 ♜b2+ 36 ♔a5 ♜b6 is mate.

b) If 31 ♔c1 a second retreat of the knight does the job: 31...♞d6!. The white queen is driven to a terrible square while the way is cleared for an invasion by her opposite number: 32 ♜a2 ♜e1+ 33 ♔b2 ♜xf2! when both d3 and h4 are hanging. After 34 ♞d1 ♜xh4 as well as massive pressure, Black has three pawns for the exchange and intends to add another one with 35...♜xh2.

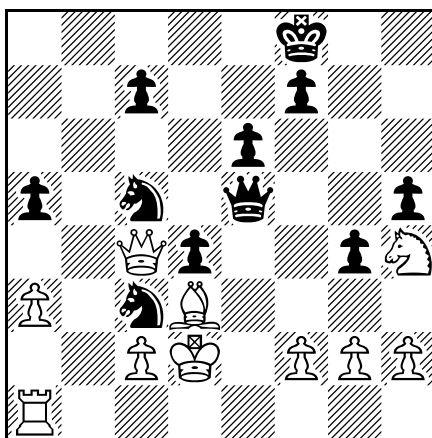
c) Upon 31 ♙xe4 ♞xe4+ White is mated after 32 ♔d3? ♜xf2+ 33 ♔d2 ♜e3, while 32 ♔e1? d3! threatens both the rook and 33...♞d6+ winning the queen. So 32 ♔c1 d3!.



Now after 33 ♞a2 d2+ 34 ♔d1 ♜f4! the threat of 35...♞xf2+ is decisive, while 33 ♞b1 d2+ 34 ♔d1 ♞c3+ 35 ♔xd2 ♞xb1+ continues White's torment. And 33 c3? is even worse as 33...♜f4+ 34 ♔b2 ♜xf2+ 35 ♔b3 ♜c2 is mate.

Nonetheless. White can resist strongly with 33 cxd3!. One of the great things about having an extra rook is that you can always give it back to stay alive. After 33...♖xa1+ 34 ♔c2 ♜f6 35 ♜xc7+ (at last White's queen has freedom and picks up some pawns) 35...♞d7 36 ♜xa5 ♜a2+ 37 ♔d1 ♜xf2 38 ♜xh5 ♞f6 39 ♜g5 ♔d6 White remains in deep peril as his king can still be attacked after 40...♞d5 and the knight on h4 remains a ghastly piece, but he is a pawn up and his queen has escaped from the tangle on the queenside.

Returning to Alavkin's 30...♔f8:



31 g3

In a practical game it was virtually impossible for White to find the subtle way to escape his problems. But 31 a4!! clears the a3-square for the king, so that in the event of 31...♞3e4+ 32 ♔xe4 ♞xe4+ 33 ♔c1 d3 34 c3!! (another move you could hardly find in advance over the board, especially if the preceding hard fight had left you short of time) 34...♜f4+? (Black should satisfy himself with having enough activity to hold the balance with 34...♞xc3) 35 ♔b2 ♜xf2+ 36 ♔a3! the king has a safe haven. On the previous move, with the white pawn on a3, the variation with 33 c3? ended with the white king being mated on b3. Such a small change can make all the difference.

31...♞5e4+

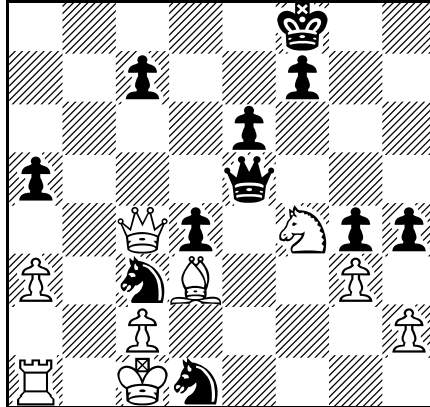
Still powerful was 31...♞3e4+!

32 ♔c1 ♞xf2 33 ♞g2 h4 34 ♞f4?

White is understandably eager to get his knight back into the game, but it was doing a good job guarding e3. Instead 34 gxh4 is unclear.

34...♞fd1!

The black knights have clamped themselves around the white king like a pair of hungry octopuses.



Question: It looks like the end of the road for White as there doesn't seem any good way to stop 35...♔e3 mate. But can you find something special for him?

Answer: 35 ♔xe6!

An elegant defensive resource. Objectively White might still be losing, but he survives to the endgame. Instead 35 ♖g2 h3 would be hopeless.

35...♔xf4+!

Selling the queen as dearly as possible as 35...fxe6?? loses to 36 ♖g6+ and 37 ♖xe5, while 35...♔xe6? 36 ♖xe6+ fxe6 37 gxh4! gives White enough counterplay.

36 gxf4 fxe6 37 ♔d2 g3?

We won't look too deeply at the endgame as the quality of play suggests it occurred in a time scramble.

The game move is too impatient, whereas 37...♖e3! would deny White counterplay as 38 ♔e1 c5 39 ♔xe3? fails to 39...♖b1+! (deflecting the white king) 40 ♔c1 dxe3 41 ♔xb1 g3 42 hxg3 hxg3 43 ♔f1 e2! 44 ♔xe2 g2 and the pawn queens.

38 hxg3 hxg3 39 ♔f1?

Here 39 ♔e4! ♖e3 (if 39...♖xe4+ 40 ♔xd1 c5 41 ♔e2 also looks defensible for White) 40 ♔f3 followed by 41 ♔g1 would allow White to pick up the g-pawn when he should hold the draw.

39...♖e3 40 ♔d3 c5 41 ♔h3 ♖cd5

Now the white rook and king become active.

Instead 41...♖cd1! looks like the last chance to keep strong winning chances.

42 ♔e4 ♖c3+ 43 ♔e5 ♖xc2 44 ♔g1 d3 45 ♔xg3 d2 46 ♔g4 d1 ♔ 47 ♔xd1 ♖xd1 48 ♔d3 ♖b2 1/2-1/2

After 49 ♔c3 ♖e1 50 ♔xe6 White is active enough to hold the draw. If necessary he could give up all his pieces to eliminate Black's two pawns as the two knights can't then force mate – not every defence has to be dynamic!

Game 7
S.Mamedyarov-L.Aronian
 FIDE Grand Prix, Nalchik 2009
 Vienna Game

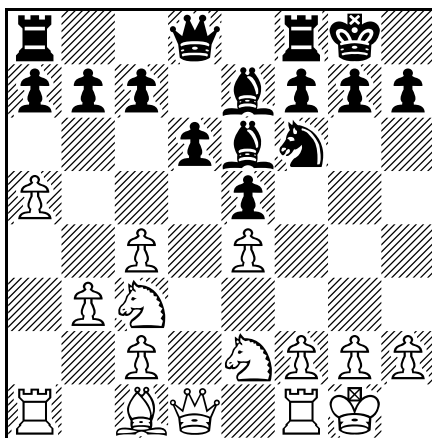
1 e4 e5 2 ♖c3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4

In a bid to escape the dense thickets of opening theory White tries an antiquated variation of the Vienna Game.

3...♗f6 4 d3 ♘a5

The players will debate the relative value of White's pressure down the d-file versus Black's bishop-pair.

5 ♘ge2 ♙e7 6 0-0 0-0 7 a4 ♗xc4 8 dxc4 d6 9 b3 ♙e6 10 a5



A committal decision.

Instead White could build up methodically with 10 ♘g3 c6 11 ♙a3 ♚c7 12 ♚e2 ♜fd8 13 ♜fd1 aiming at the pawn on d6, though it is all rather toothless: for example, 13...♙g4!? (provoking a loosening pawn move) 14 f3 ♙e6 15 ♜d3 ♘d7 16 ♘f5. White has a nominal edge, but Black's position remains solid. A grandmaster game continued 16...♘c5 17 ♘xe7+ ♚xe7 18 ♜d2 a5 19 ♜ad1 b6 20 ♚e3 f6 21 ♘e2 ♜d7 22 ♘c3 ♜ad8 23 ♙h1 ♙f7 and here they called it a draw with 24 ♙g1 ♙e6 25 ♙h1 ♙f7 26 ♙g1 ♙e6 27 ♙h1 ♙f7 1/2-1/2 in V.Nevednichy-V.Georgiev, Sunny Beach 2009. Black may be lacking space, but he is perfectly centralised and there are no holes in his structure. An example of a *non-dynamic defence* achieving its aim.

White's attempt at an initiative lacked bite as it exclusively used the *pieces*. Therefore Mamedyarov decides to utilise his *pawns* on both wings to put more pressure on Black. That might sound like a good idea, but if you attack a player who is well-centralised and has the bishop-pair, you had better be careful that you aren't overextending your pawn structure.

10...c6

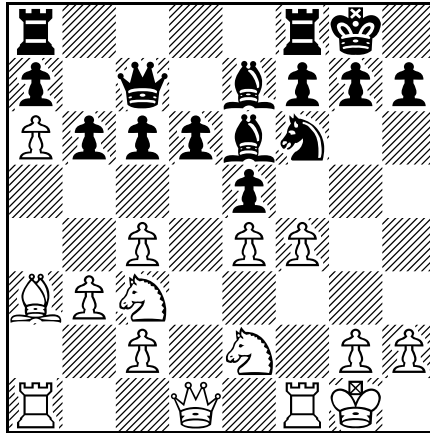
Necessary at some point to stop a white knight invading on d5.

11 a6 b6

Black keeps his queenside pawns intact. On the other hand, his queen is more restricted now that she can't go to b6, which could be an important factor once White compromises his control of the a7-g1 diagonal with his 13th move.

Mamedyarov might also have hoped the pawn on a6 would become an asset in an end-game.

12 ♖a3 ♜c7 13 f4



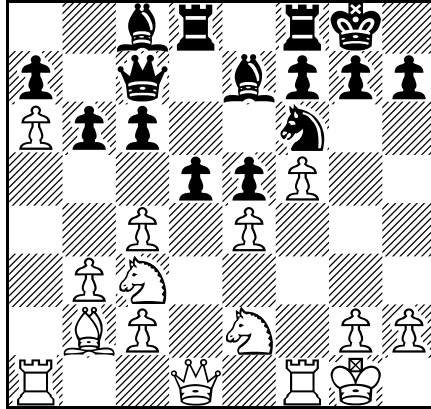
The next stage in his plan to gain the initiative. However, Black is by no means obliged to defend passively against it.

13...♜ad8

Centralising the rook and preparing a counter-punch with ...d6-d5.

14 ♖h1

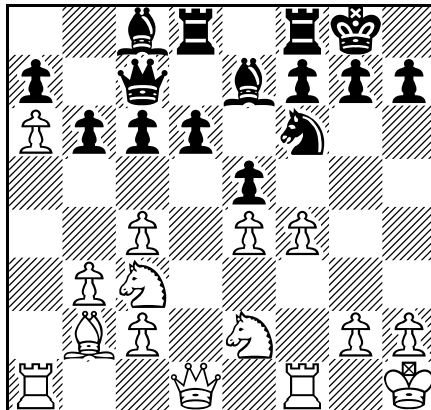
White would like to seize space with 14 f5 and after 14...♙d7? consolidate with 15 ♘g3 when he maintains a grip over the d5-square. But Black can play dynamically with 14...♙c8! when we see a drawback of advancing the pawn to a6 as 15 ♘g3 would meet with 15...♙xa6 winning a pawn (also the sharp 15...d5! would be good for Black). If, instead, 15 ♙b2 to guard a6 then the black centre breaks free from its binds with 15...d5!.



If then 16 cxd5 b5! prepares 17...b4 to chase away the knight from c3 followed by 18...cxd5, regaining the pawn with excellent chances. Instead 16 exd5 b5! 17 cxb5 cxb5 18 ♖g3 (not 18 ♖xb5 ♜b6+ winning a piece; incidentally it is to rule out this check that White played 14 ♜h1 in the game) 18...b4 19 ♖ce4 ♖xd5 20 ♜e2 f6 is again splendid for Black. White's pawn advances have left him with holes extending across the board from a6 to f4.

White's fate is an example of what can happen when a player's strategy depends on restraining the opponent's pawn breaks. If it goes wrong then the pent up energy released by moves like 15..d5! and 16...b5! in the variation above will wreck his position.

14...♜c8 15 ♜b2



Question: White has taken precautions against the ...d6-d5 break by evacuating his king from the a7-g1 diagonal and putting potential pressure on e5 with his bishop. Therefore Aronian chose a more positional approach. Can you see a way to reroute the black knight to a better square?

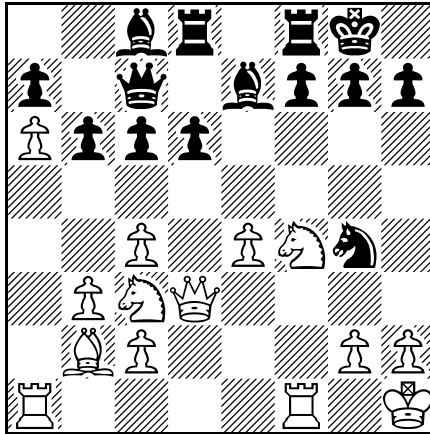
Answer: 15...♖g4

Getting full value from the holes left in the white centre by 13 f4. After a pawn exchange on f4 next move the e5-square will become a beautiful post for the black knight. The threat of a fork on e3 gains time for its journey there.

16 ♜d3

Since the white queen will end up back on the second rank he might as well play 16 ♜d2.

16...exf4 17 ♞xf4



Question: It's time to remember an old piece of advice: 'If you see a good move don't play it! Look for something better!' I know 17...♞e5 feels good, but can you suggest a masterful prophylactic (preventive) move for Black? (Think about how you might restrain the white queen.)

Answer: 17...♞h4!

A starting chess player might be attracted by this move as it threatens a fork on f2. But Aronian wants to reduce the energy of White's set-up by denying his queen the g3-square.

If instead 17...♞e5 (a highly natural move) 18 ♜g3 plans 19 ♞h5 g6 (don't forget about the white bishop lurking on b2, as 19...♞g6? would allow 20 ♞xg7! when 20...♞xg7 21 ♞d5+ wins the black queen) 20 ♞f6+ ♞xf6 21 ♝xf6 with some pressure.

Even if there were no direct threats the white queen would be well-placed on g3. It would have been very easy for Black to play 17...♞e5, putting the knight on a fine square, but forgetting that chess strategy isn't just about making good moves, it is about stopping your opponent from playing good moves.

18 ♜e2

Guarding the f2-square, but this is a lamer post for the queen than g3.

18...♝fe8

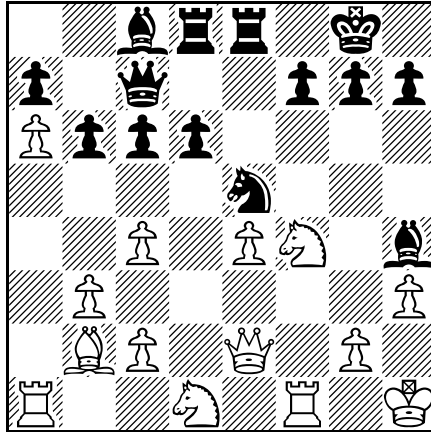
Dynamic Defence

Completing the centralisation of the rooks and showing his opponent he is unafraid of an attack down the f-file: on the contrary, Black is aiming to exert pressure of his own on the isolated e-pawn.

19 h3 ♖e5

The knight's arrival on this splendid square is all the better for being delayed.

20 ♞d1

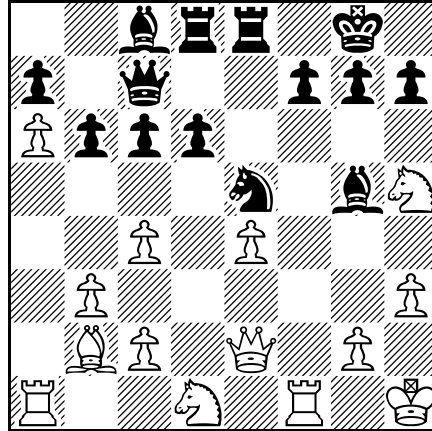


Question: White still hopes to build up an attack on the kingside with ♖e3 and ♞f5. But can you see how Aronian deters 21 ♖e3 with a bishop move?

Answer: 20... ♗g5!

Using the bishop again for a new piece of prophylaxis. If now 21 ♖e3 Black can win a pawn with 21... ♗xf4 22 ♖xf4 ♞g6 23 ♖f2 ♖xe4. A more refined version which keeps the strong bishop is 21... ♞g6 22 ♖xg6 ♖xe4! and Black will regain his piece a pawn up.

21 ♖h5



Question: White removes the knight from f4 and puts it on an aggressive square. He is therefore ready to play 22 ♖e3 and develop his kingside initiative. Black would like to evict the knight from h5, but if 21...g6 it can jump forwards: 22 ♖f6+ ♗xf6 23 ♖xf6 and White has attacking chances. Can you suggest a way for Black to prepare ...g7-g6 which doesn't allow the knight entry to f6?

Answer: 21...♕e7!

The queen lends her hand to guarding the f6-square whilst also increasing the pressure down the e-file.

22 ♖e3

Now the e4-pawn falls off the board.

Karpov once said that you should judge every position on its own merits and not be influenced by what has happened earlier in the game. By that logic White should return the knight to c3 and focus on holding together his centre. But psychologically it would be very hard for him to play 22 ♖c3 and admit that his plan has failed.

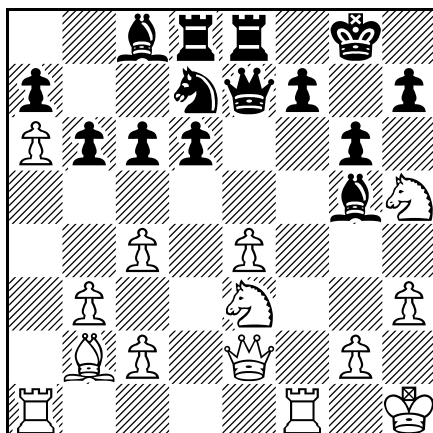
22...g6 23 ♖f4

After 23 ♖g3 ♗h4! the bishop continues to plague White.

23...♖d7!

A powerful retreat.

24 ♖h5



Question: You might like to decide if you think Black should take the knight on h5 or the pawn on e4. Try to weigh up the risks and gains of either move.

Answer: 24...♔xe4!

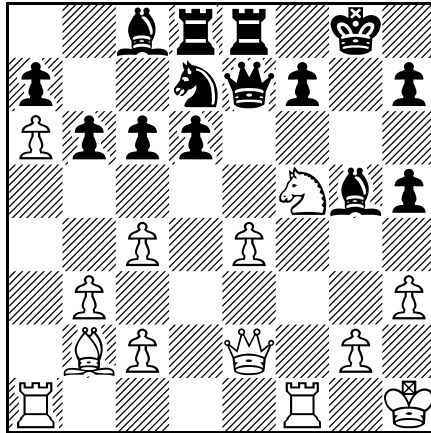
Without doing any calculation it is obvious that White has an initiative against Black's broken kingside after 24...gxh5 25 ♖f5, attacking the black queen, and then 26 ♕xh5. The white queen, bishop, knight and rook on f1 would all be directing their fire at the black king who is sitting precariously on g8.

I'm reminded of a story about Emanuel Lasker's game with William Winter at Nottingham in 1936. After a long think Winter decided to risk a knight sacrifice. Lasker replied quickly by spurning the piece offer and grabbing a pawn instead. In the words of Winter in *Kings of Chess*:

"After the game was over a spectator asked him (Lasker) what would have happened had he taken the Knight. 'I do not know,' he replied. 'I was playing a strong master and if a strong master thinks for half an hour and then plays a knight where I can take it, I think that it will not be healthy for me to take, and I let it alone.'

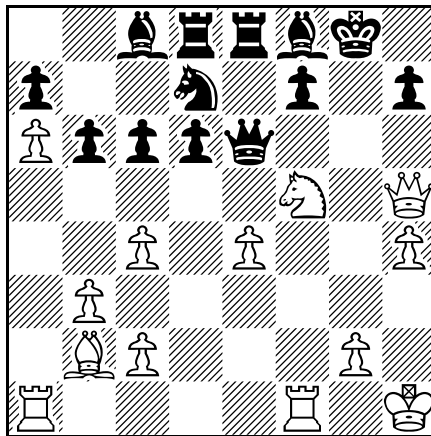
Such a pragmatic approach might have been partly inspired by Lasker being 67 years old and playing in his last major event. He was sensibly conserving his energy by not allowing himself to be dragged into sharp positions.

Aronian had no need to risk accepting the knight when he had a safe path to a winning position. On the other hand, I'm sure he would have explored 24...gxh5 25 ♖f5 in detail if it was the only way to eke out an advantage.



Let's look at a couple of variations. Firstly, if 25...♖xe4? 26 ♖xh5 gives White decisive threats against g5 and f7. For example, 26...♗f6 27 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 28 ♖g5+ will mate on g7, while 26...f6 allows a pretty finish: 27 ♖xg5+!! fxg5 28 ♘h6 mate.

So Black has to prefer 25...♗e6! 26 h4! (an important intermezzo as 26 ♖xh5 ♖g6 is very safe for Black) 26...♗e7 27 ♖xh5 ♗f8 (now 27...♖g6? would lose as the bishop is no longer on g5 guarding the h6-square: 28 ♘h6+ ♗f8 29 ♖xf7+ and mates).



Here 28 ♘d4 would allow White to recoup material upon 28...♖g6 29 ♖xg6+ hxg6 30 ♘xc6 ♘c5 31 ♘xd8 ♖xd8, but the resulting endgame after 32 ♖ae1 ♘xa6 would be very unpleasant for him. White's loose structure would be an easy target for the black minor pieces, whereas his rooks don't have much scope.

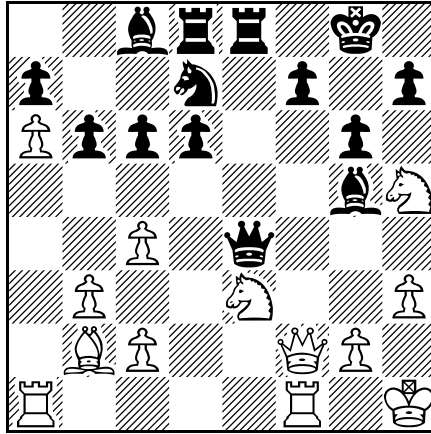
Instead 28 ♖f3 continues to strive to attack, though it can be repulsed by precise play: 28...♗e5 29 ♖g3+ ♗h8! (not 29...♗g6? 30 ♘h6+ ♗xh6 31 ♖xh6 f6 32 h5 when White crashes through the g-file) and now 30 ♖g4 is well met by 30...f6!, defending g8, or if 30

Dynamic Defence

♙f1 ♜d7 31 ♞f4 f6! breaks the pin on the knight just in time to stop 32 ♞fg4 when the threat of mate on g8 is lethal. White still has some attacking chances, but not enough for a whole piece.

So objectively speaking 24... gxf5 would have won for Black, but it would have been crazy for him to endanger his king when the game move keeps solid control of the position.

25 ♞f2



The threat of mate on f7 allows White to break the pin on his knight.

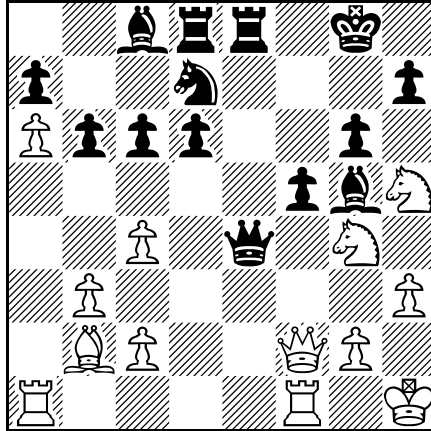
25... f5!

White's queen and rook on f1 are not only blocked from attacking f7, but also denied contact with the f6-square where the power of four of his pieces intersected.

If instead 25... ♞e7? White can fish in troubled waters with 26 ♞ae1! when grabbing either knight would be a catastrophe for Black after 26... gxf5? 27 ♞f5 or 26... ♙xe3? 27 ♞f6+ ♞xf6 28 ♞xf6 . So best play is the forcing line 26... ♞de8! 27 ♞g4! ♞xe1 28 ♞xe1 ♞xe1+ 29 ♞h2 gxf5 30 ♞h6+! (a temporary sacrifice which keeps up the attack) 30... ♙xh6 31 ♞g3+ ♞f8 32 ♞xd6+ ♞8e7 33 ♞xf6+ ♞e8 34 ♞xc6 ♞d8 35 ♙a3 ♞7e6 36 ♙d6 ♞xd6 37 ♞xd6 ♙xa6 . White has run out of pieces to support his queen. Objectively Black is winning with his extra material, but it won't be easy due to his exposed king and vulnerable pawns.

The game move avoids a lot of unnecessary risk.

26 ♞g4



Question: White has to do or die. It's finally time for Black to snatch some material. I'm just checking which knight you think he should take?

Answer: 26...gxh5

Not 26...fxg4? 27 ♖f7 which is mate.

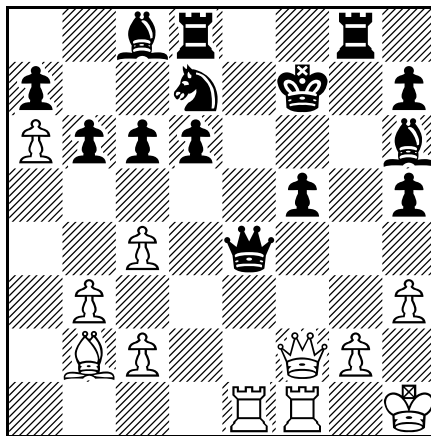
27 ♘h6+

The black kingside holds together after 27 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 28 ♗xf5 h6!, leaving White a piece down. Or if 27 ♗ae1 ♖f4! forces another winning simplification – Black can afford to give up a bishop as a second white knight is hanging on g4.

27...♗xh6 28 ♖g3+ ♚f7 29 ♗ae1 ♗g8

Simpler than 29...♖xc2 which also wins.

30 ♖f2



Question: Mamedyarov has a beautiful attacking set-up and is even trapping the black queen. If the material balance was anywhere close to equal he would be doing fine. Alas for him he is two pieces and a pawn down. How does Black exploit his superiority in numbers?

Answer: 30...♖xg2+!

When you have a huge material advantage it makes sense to give back some of it to break the enemy attack. Aronian had prepared this decisive simplification last move or else he would have saved his queen with 29...♖xc2.

31 ♖xg2 ♖xg2 32 ♔xg2 0-1

If instead 32 ♖xf5+ safest for Black is 32...♔g8 when after 33 ♔xg2 ♕e5 34 ♖xh5 ♕f4 35 ♖g1 ♖f8 he can gradually exploit his two minor pieces versus a rook advantage. But the bolder 32...♔g6! is much stronger: 33 ♖ff1 (after 33 ♖ef1 ♖xc2 it's all over) 33...♖xc2 34 ♖e6+ ♔g5 35 ♕c1+ (or 35 ♕d4 ♖f8 36 ♕e3+ ♔h4 37 ♖e4+ ♔xh3 and it's the white king under attack) 35...♖xc1 36 ♖xc1 ♕f6 37 ♖g1+ ♕f5 38 ♖ee1 ♕e4 39 ♖gf1+ ♕e5 40 ♖f7 ♖d7 41 ♖f3 d5 and White's attack is at an end, leaving him far too much material down.

I suspect that Aronian would have played 32...♔g6 even if short of time as he would have known intuitively that his king would escape the attentions of the white rooks sooner or later.

After the game move Black can defend f5 with 32...♕c5 when the a6-pawn drops leaving him with two minor pieces and three pawns for a rook. With no attack in sight White resigned.

Game 8
A.Aleksandrov-K.Supatashvili
Batumi Open 2001
Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♕b4

The Nimzo-Indian allows Black to imbalance the game in a positional rather than a tactical manner. Its strategy is therefore a happy medium between the aggression of the King's Indian Defence and the solidity of the Queen's Gambit.

Or at least that's the opinion of its fans. Its detractors would shake their heads in disbelief and wonder out loud: 'Why on earth would Black prepare to give up the important dark-squared bishop for a knight on only the third move of the game?'

4 e3

The Sämisch variation usually begins with an immediate 4 a3 when 4...♕xc3+ 5 bxc3 c5 6 e3 0-0 7 ♕d3 ♗c6 transposes to the game.

4...c5