

# Jimmy Liew

## The Chigorin Defence

**move by move**

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# About the Author

**Jimmy Liew** is an International Master and a two-time Malaysian champion. He has represented Malaysia in eight Chess Olympiads and is a certified FIDE trainer.

**Also by the Author:**

*The Veresov: Move by Move*

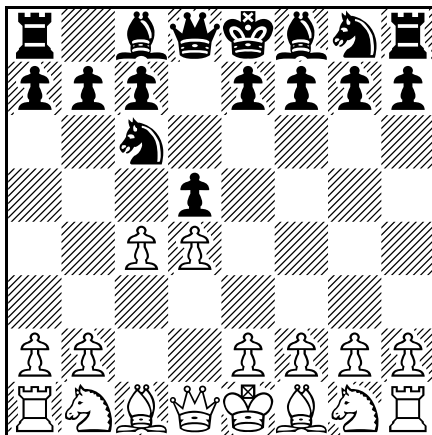
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# Introduction

History records that the Russian master, Mikhail Chigorin, was the first player to formulate the opening system with ...♘c6 that bears his name. Chigorin was born in 1850 near St. Petersburg and was one of the best chess players of his time. He was never world champion but was one of the main challengers, contesting (and losing) two matches against Wilhelm Steinitz.

Chigorin first tried 2...♘c6 against another great player, Harry Pillsbury, in the St. Petersburg “Four Masters” tournament in 1895/96. In their first game, Pillsbury quickly built up a strong position, won material, and converted it precisely. This was certainly not the most auspicious start for a new opening – but Chigorin persevered with it, scored a win and a draw in their next two games, and won again in London three years later. He continued to employ 2 c4 ♘c6 (and his companion line 2 ♘f3 ♕g4!?) in the top tournaments of his day, albeit with mixed results.



Notably, Black refuses for the moment to support the d5-pawn with either ...e7-e6 or ...c7-c6, relying instead on piece play to put pressure on the white centre. He also blocks the c-pawn from advancing to c5, which is Black's typical break in the Queen's Gambit.

One of the key themes of the opening is allowing the exchange of White's c-pawn for Black's d-pawn, establishing a white majority in the centre – in return Black obtains quick

## *The Chigorin Defence: Move by Move*

and easy development. This theme is seen in several of the main lines, such as 3 cxd5 ♔xd5 4 e3 e5 5 ♘c3 ♙b4 (Chapter One, Games 3-16), 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 dxc4 5 e4 ♙g4 (Chapter Two, Games 32-37), and 3 ♘f3 ♙g4 4 cxd5 ♙xf3 5 gxf3 ♔xd5 6 e3 e5 7 ♘c3 ♙b4 (Chapter Three, Games 48-54). In all of these, Black must be prepared to give up a bishop for a knight, sometimes *both* bishops, in order to maintain the activity of his other pieces.

The Chigorin is therefore often regarded as a dynamic opening but somewhat anti-positional, and to be more of an occasional/surprise weapon than a mainstream one. Nonetheless, numerous grandmasters have used it regularly and successfully – including (by database games total) Igor Miladinovic, Nenad Fercec, Ilja Zaragatski, Alexander Morozevich, Aleksandr Karpatchev, Alexander Raetsky, Robert Rabiega and Petr Tishin.

At the very least, Black's non-conformist knight move takes the fight to the opponent from the beginning of the game, which can lead to very interesting play at all levels of chess.

Jimmy Liew  
Puchong, Malaysia,  
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This is a perfect position for White in the Chigorin! He has a mobile centre, the bishop pair, and active rooks on half-open files.

**21...♘f5?**

Trading b7 for h4 only makes White's central pawns stronger. Black had to sit tight with 21...b6 and hope that White overplays his hand; for instance, if 22 e4?! ♘c6 23 ♖c3 (Dautov), then 23...f5! mixes it up a bit.

**22 ♜xb7 ♞xh4 23 ♔f2 ♜b8 24 ♜b3 ♜b6 25 ♙d3 ♜fb8 26 ♜gb1 ♔f8?**

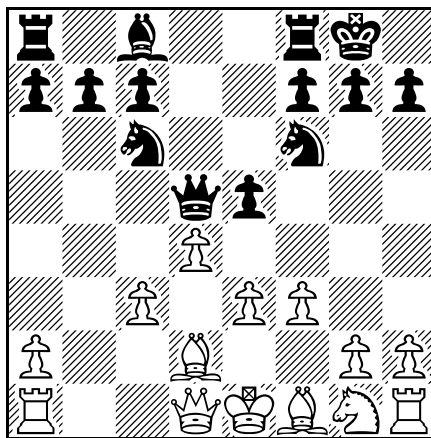
In a hopeless position Black makes a final mistake.

**27 ♙b4 ♔e7 28 ♙xd6+! 1-0**

If 28...♔xd6, the fork on c5 wins material.

*Game 7*  
**A.Beliavsky-A.Yermolinsky**  
 Madrid 1998

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♘c6 3 cxd5 ♜xd5 4 e3 e5 5 ♘c3 ♙b4 6 ♙d2 ♙xc3 7 bxc3 ♞f6 8 f3 0-0**



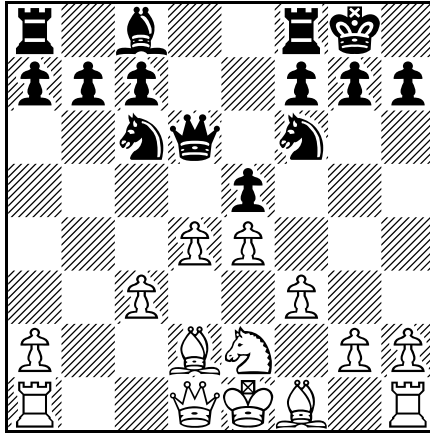
This time Black doesn't hinder the white pawn expansion. Instead, he aims to exert pressure on the centre, utilizing his lead in development, and gain meaningful counterplay before White is able to consolidate.

**9 e4**

White is not obliged to push his pawns at once. He can also try to develop his kingside first, though he needs to be careful since the natural 9 ♙d3?! runs into 9...exd4 10 cxd4 ♘xd4! 11 exd4 ♜xd4, as shown by Morozevich, when Black has huge play against the king in the centre. For example, 12 ♙e2 ♙f5 13 ♙g5 ♜e5 14 ♔f1 ♜ad8 15 ♜c1 ♜fe8 16 g4 was A.Rychagov-A.Morozevich, Moscow (blitz) 2001, and now 16...♙d3! 17 ♙xd3 ♜xd3 is just winning for Black, according to the engines, as White has virtually no moves.

## The Chigorin Defence: Move by Move

White does better with 9 ♖e2, after which another Morozevich game continued 9... ♗d6 10 ♜f2 (10 e4?! transposes to the main game; instead, 10 ♖g3 encourages 10...h5 and ...h5-h4, while 10 ♗c2 ♜e8 11 ♜d1, as in V.Dydyshko-L.Klima, Ostrava 2005, might be met by 11...b6 12 ♜f2 ♜a6) 10... ♜e8 11 ♗b3 b6 12 ♗b2 ♖a5 13 ♖g3 c5 14 ♜d1 ♜e6 15 ♜b5 ♜ed8 and Black had good counterplay in A.Karpov-A.Morozevich, Moscow (blitz) 2001.  
**9... ♗d6 10 ♖e2?!**



**Question:** Why is White giving up the d4-pawn?

**Answer:** He isn't; he has a tactical way to regain the pawn, but it seems Beliavsky mis-assessed the resulting position.

The main move is 10 d5, which we'll examine in the next two games. As Morozevich indicates, White does best to resolve the tension in the centre immediately, as otherwise he risks a destructive piece sacrifice; for example, 10 ♜e3 exd4 11 cxd4 ♜e8 12 ♖e2 (or similarly 12 ♗d2 ♜f5 13 ♜e2 ♜xe4!, as in M.Gagunashvili-G.Souleidis, European Cup, Rethymon 2003) 12... ♖xe4! 13 fxe4 ♜xe4 14 ♗d2 ♖b4! 15 ♜f2 ♖d5 16 ♖c3 ♜xe3 17 ♖xd5 ♜e4 18 ♜d3 ♜e6 19 ♜f5 ♗xd5 20 ♜xe6 ♜xe6 and Black had more than enough for the exchange in M.Freeman-P.Raupach, correspondence 2008.

**10...exd4 11 ♜f4**

If White plays 11 cxd4 first, then 11... ♖xd4 12 ♜f4 ♗b4+ 13 ♜d2 ♗d6 13 ♜f4 will be a draw by repetition.

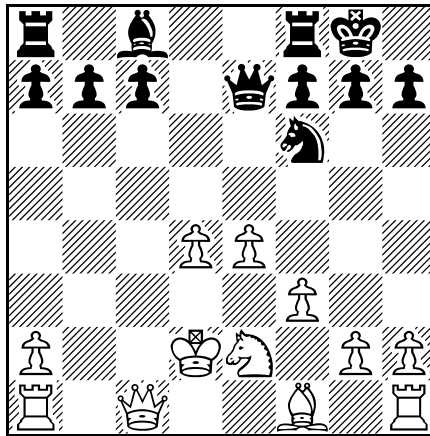
**11... ♗a3! 12 cxd4**

Not 12 ♜xc7? ♜e6 13 cxd4 ♜ac8 14 ♜g3 ♖b4 15 ♜f2 ♖c2 16 ♗c1 ♗e7 17 ♜b1 ♖a3 and Black wins material.

**12... ♖b4 13 ♜c1**

13 ♖g3 should be met by 13... ♜d8!, when the threat of ... ♜xd4 is rather awkward, and if 14 d5 then 14... ♜e8! targets the pawn; whereas 13... ♗c3+?! 14 ♜f2 is fine for White.

13...♖d3+ 14 ♔d2 ♘xc1 15 ♚xc1 ♚e7



This simple retreat highlights White's problem: his king is in the wrong place.

16 ♚c3?!

As Yermolinsky indicates, White should save time by opposing queens with 16 ♚c5, when 16...♚d8 (Black does not want the queens off) 17 ♚c1 c6 18 ♔e3 is still unclear.

16...♗d8 17 ♚c1

Not 17 ♔c1? ♗d6 18 ♚d2 ♘d7 19 ♖c3 c6 20 ♔c4 b5 21 ♔b3 a5 and White is clearly in trouble; but running the other way with 17 ♔e1 and 18 ♔f2 was sensible.

17...c6 18 ♚c5 ♚e8

18...♗xe4!? 19 fxe4 ♚xe4 comes into consideration too.

19 ♔e3

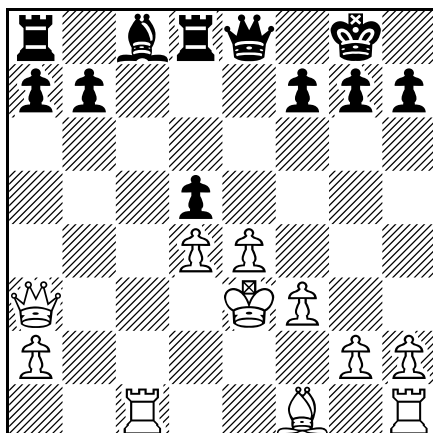
Not yet 19 ♖f4?! because of 19...b6! 20 ♚xc6 ♗xd4+ 21 ♔e3 ♔d7 and White has to take on a8, since 22 ♚c2? ♚e5 23 ♔d3 g5 24 ♖e2 ♘d5+ 25 ♔f2 ♖b4 is crushing.

19...♘d7 20 ♚a3 ♖b6 21 ♖f4?!

This brings an opposing pawn into contact with his centre. Yermolinsky gave 21 g4 as best, enabling White to keep his pawn frontage secure if Black swipes at it with ...f7-f5.

21...♘d5+ 22 ♖xd5 cxd5





### 23 ♖c7?

He had to try 23 e5! f6 24 f4 fxe5 (the immediate 24...♖g6 can be met by 25 ♔d3!, since 25...♗xg2?? 26 ♖cg1 ♗h3 27 ♖g3 ♗h6 28 ♖hg1 turns the tables) 25 dxe5 (not 25 fxe5?! ♗g6 26 ♔d3?? ♗g5+ and the white king is unable to survive the onslaught) 25...♗g6 (after 25...g5 26 ♔d3 gxf4+ 27 ♔h2 ♗xe5 28 ♖he1 ♗d4+ 29 ♔f1, White is over the worst) 26 ♔f2 ♗h6 27 g3 g5 (Black continues to chip away at the white king's sheltering pawns) 28 ♖g1 ♖f8 29 ♔e1, though Black still looks to have the better chances.

### 23...dxe4 24 fxe4

Otherwise 24 ♗e7 exf3 just wins a pawn.

### 24...♔e6

The temporary sacrifice 24...♖xd4? is tempting, seeing as 25 ♔xd4 ♗d8+ 26 ♔e3 ♗xc7 is winning, but White has the rather obvious 25 ♗e7! ♗xe7 26 ♖xe7 ♔f8 (or 26...♖d8 27 ♔c4) 27 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 28 ♔xd4, which gets him out of danger and even offers him a slight initiative.

### 25 ♖xb7

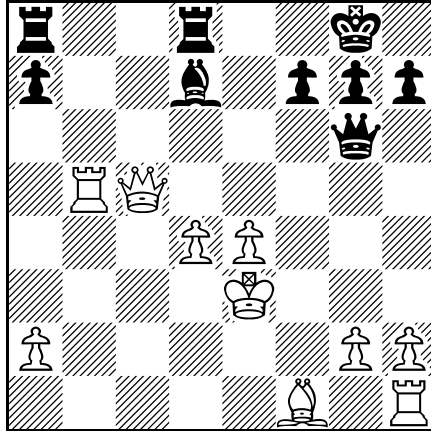
If 25 ♔d3 then 25...♖xd4! does work, while 25 d5 ♔xd5 26 ♖e7 ♗f8! 27 exd5 ♖xd5, threatening ...♖e5, is even worse for White.

### 25...♗c6

Not 25...♔d5?? 26 ♖e7 and White can safely take the bishop.

### 26 ♖b5 ♔d7 27 ♗c5 ♗g6!

Stronger than 27...♗h6+ 28 ♗g5 ♔xb5 29 ♗xh6 gxh6 30 ♔xb5, when White has chances to hold the game as all the black pawns are weak.



**28 ♖b7?**

A mistake in time trouble. 28 ♖g5 ♗xb5 29 ♖xg6 hxg6 30 ♗xb5 was still necessary, although Black's winning chances have improved.

**28...♗c6 29 ♖e7 ♖h6+ 30 ♗f3**

Other squares are no better: 30 ♗e2 ♖ac8 31 ♖f5 ♗e8 or 30 ♗d3 ♖ac8 31 ♖f5 ♖xd4+! 32 ♗xd4 ♖d2+ 33 ♗d3 ♖d8+ wins.

**30...♖f6+ 31 ♗e3 ♖xd4 32 ♖xd4**

Or 32 ♗c4 ♖ad8! 33 ♖f1 (33 ♖xf7? allows 33...♖xe4 mate) 33...♖xc4 34 ♖xf6 ♖xc5 35 ♖xf7 ♖g5 and White will not survive for long.

**32...♖xe7 33 ♗d3 ♖d8 34 ♖c4 ♖g5+ 35 ♗f2 ♖d2+ 36 ♗e2 ♖f4+ 37 ♗e1**

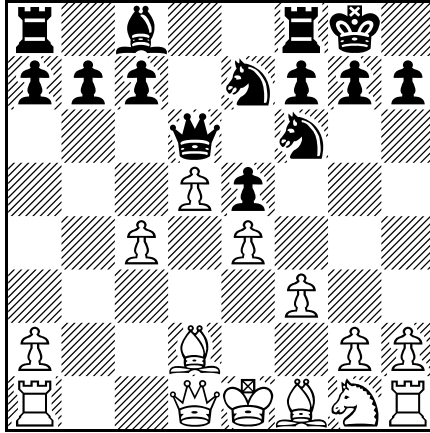
Or 37 ♗f3 ♖d2+ 38 ♗e1 ♖e3+ 39 ♗e2 ♖b2 40 ♖d3 ♖b6 and the twin threats of ...♖b1 and ...♗b5 will win material.

**37...♗xe4 38 ♖f1 ♖d2+ 39 ♗f2 ♗d3 0-1**

Since 40 ♖g4 ♖e8 41 ♖e1 ♖e6 and a check on f6 is devastating.

*Game 8*  
**J.Piket-A.Morozevich**  
 Wijk aan Zee 2001

1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♘c6 3 cxd5 ♖xd5 4 e3 e5 5 ♘c3 ♗b4 6 ♗d2 ♗xc3 7 bxc3 ♘f6 8 f3 0-0 9 e4 ♖d6 10 d5 ♗e7 11 c4



So White has built the big centre. If he manages to develop safely behind it and castle, he should stand better, so Black needs to hurry with his counterplay. The natural break is with ...f7-f5, which means moving the f6-knight.

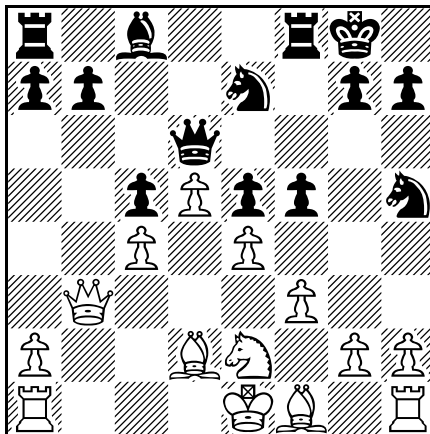
**11... ♖h5!?**

Black more usually plays 11... ♘d7, eyeing the tempting outpost on c5, from where the knight blockades the c4-pawn, attacks e4, and controls the d3-square. Morozevich has a different plan in mind, involving pure kingside play in the style of the King's Indian Defence.

**12 ♗b3!**

Exploiting the black knight's absence from the queenside and threatening ♗b4, which Black must now prevent.

**12...c5 13 ♘e2 f5**



**14 ♘c3**

**Question:** Hasn't Black blundered? Can't White just take on f5 and follow up with 15 g4 - ?

**Answer:** Not really, because Black obtains a very strong attack if White accepts the challenge. This was actually tried in S.Richkov-L.Lacrimosa, correspondence 2004: 14 exf5?!  $\text{dxf5}$  15 g4?  $\text{d}h4$  16 gxh5  $\text{dxf3+}$  17  $\text{c}d1$ , when Black could have played 17... $\text{e}g4!$  18  $\text{c}c1$  (or 18  $\text{e}e3$   $\text{d}d4$ ) 18... $\text{d}xd2$  19  $\text{c}xd2$   $\text{a}f3$  20  $\text{b}b2$   $\text{a}af8$  21  $\text{a}g1$   $\text{h}h6+$  22  $\text{c}e1$   $\text{e}e3$  23 h3  $\text{e}hx5$  and White has no hopes of surviving.

#### 14...b6?!

This move seems unnecessary. 14... $\text{c}g6$  15 0-0-0  $\text{d}f6$  is more to the point, trying to encourage an exchange on f5, which will bring the e7-knight into the game, or if 16  $\text{a}e1$  then 16... $\text{f}xe4$  17  $\text{d}xe4$   $\text{d}xe4$  18  $\text{f}xe4$   $\text{e}d7$ , looking for queenside counterplay with ... $\text{a}a6$ , ... $\text{b}b8$  and ...b7-b5.

#### 15 $\text{e}d3$ $\text{c}g6$

Black should perhaps play 15... $\text{d}f4$ , and if 16  $\text{e}xf4$   $\text{exf4}$  17 0-0 then 17... $\text{f}xe4$  18  $\text{d}xe4$   $\text{h}h6$ , followed by ... $\text{d}f5$ , with a strong initiative on the kingside. White can avoid this with 16 0-0  $\text{d}xd3$  17  $\text{d}b5$  and stands slightly better – even so 17... $\text{c}g6$  18  $\text{c}xd3$   $\text{a}a6$  19  $\text{d}c3$   $\text{f}xe4$  20  $\text{f}xe4$   $\text{e}d7$  looks preferable to the position Black gets in the game.

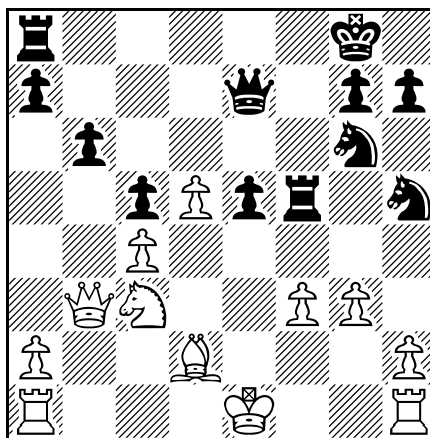
#### 16 g3!

Black will not get a second chance to put his knight on f4.

#### 16... $\text{c}e7$

Morozevich later considered 16...f4!? 17 g4  $\text{d}h4$  18  $\text{e}e2$   $\text{d}f6$  to be the lesser evil, “trying to erect a blockade on the dark squares.”

#### 17 exf5! $\text{e}xf5$ 18 $\text{e}xf5$ $\text{a}xf5$



#### 19 $\text{d}e4$

19 0-0 is also good for White; whereas 19 g4? again allows Black a strong attack after

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19... ♖h4+ 20 ♔d1 ♜xf3 21 gxh5 ♘e7!, followed by ... ♗f5-d4. This is what Morozevich is looking for: tactical chances in a position which was worse.

**19... ♗f6 20 ♙g5**

Still not 20 g4?, this time because of 20... ♗xe4 21 gxf5 ♖h4+ 22 ♔d1 ♗f2+ 23 ♔c1 ♗xh1 24 fxg6 ♗f2 25 gxh7+ ♖xh7, when Black has recouped the material and now has great chances against an insecure white king.

**20... ♖f8 21 ♙xf6 gxf6 22 0-0-0! ♜h5 23 h4 ♜h6**

You know your position is really bad when you resort to moving your rook to such a square.

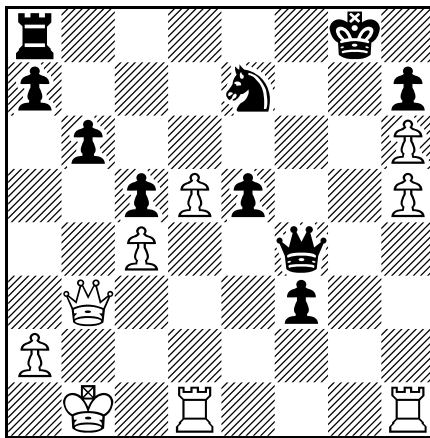
**24 h5**

Piket plays to shut the h6-rook in completely. The engines give another solution in 24 ♖e3!? f5 25 ♗f6+! ♖xf6 (or 25... ♔g7 26 g4!) 26 ♖xh6 e4 27 ♔c2! and Black has nothing.

**24... ♗e7 25 g4 f5!**

The only way to develop any counterplay.

**26 g5 fxe4 27 gxh6 ♖f4+ 28 ♔b1 exf3**

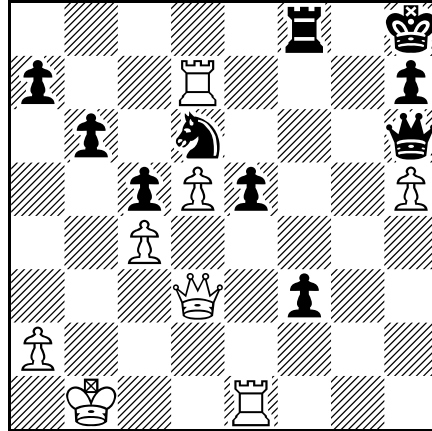


Morozevich must have been delighted to get this position: there is a material imbalance and he has passed pawns and a nimble knight which will happily settle on d4, e3 or even on d6. Yes, he is still losing, but it's not so easy for White to prove it with the clock ticking, and Piket duly goes wrong.

**29 ♖d3?!**

Missing a forced win with 29 ♜hg1+ ♔h8 30 ♜gf1! ♜f8 (Black can't push the e-pawn because 30... e4? 31 ♖c3+ mates) 31 d6 ♗c6 32 d7 ♔g8 33 ♖d3 ♗d4 34 ♜xf3! ♖xf3 35 ♖xf3 ♗xf3 36 d8♖ etc (Morozevich).

**28... ♗f5 30 ♗de1 ♗d6 31 ♜hg1+ ♔h8 32 ♜g7 ♖xh6 33 ♜d7 ♜f8**



**34 ♖c3??**

This is the real mistake. Morozevich shows a draw with 34 ♖f1 e4 35 ♖c3+ ♖f6 36 ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 37 ♖g1 h6 38 ♖d8+ etc, but White could still have had more after 35 ♖c2!; for example, 35...♖f6 (or 35...♗e8 36 ♖xe4 ♗f6 37 ♖e5) 36 h6 ♖e8 (or 36...♗f7 37 ♖xe4 ♗g5 38 ♖d3 ♖xh6 39 d6) 37 ♖xf3! (it's mate if Black takes the rook) 37...♖d4 38 ♖c3 and White should win.

**34...♖f6 35 h6? f2 36 ♖f1 ♖f5+ 37 ♔a1 ♗e4**

37...♗xc4! was even stronger (Morozevich).

**38 ♖d3 ♖xd7 39 ♖xe4 ♖f5 40 ♖xf2**

40 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 41 d6 ♖f7 42 d7 ♖xd7 43 ♖xf2 ♔g8 44 ♔b2 ♖d6 is a straightforward winning endgame for Black.

**40...♖xf2 0-1**

*Game 9*  
**T.T.Hoang-G.Antal**  
 Budapest 2002

1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♗c6 3 cxd5 ♖xd5 4 e3 e5 5 ♗c3 ♗b4 6 ♗d2 ♗xc3 7 bxc3 ♗f6 8 f3 0-0 9 e4 ♖d6  
 10 d5 ♗e7 11 c4 ♗d7