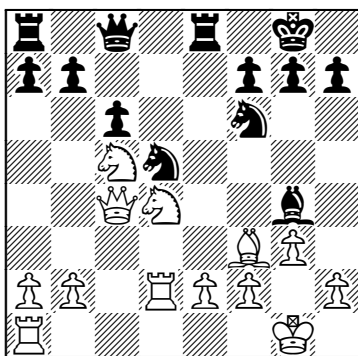


Game 8
R.Réti-A.Alekhine
 Baden-Baden 1925
Réti Opening

1 g3 e5 2 ♘f3 e4 3 ♘d4 d5 4 d3 exd3 5
 ♙xd3 ♘f6 6 ♙g2 ♙b4+ 7 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 8
 ♘xd2 0-0 9 c4 ♘a6 10 cxd5 ♘b4 11
 ♙c4 ♘bxd5 12 ♘2b3 c6 13 0-0 ♖e8 14
 ♖fd1 ♙g4 15 ♖d2 ♙c8 16 ♘c5 ♙h3 17
 ♙f3 ♙g4 18 ♙g2 ♙h3 19 ♙f3 ♙g4



Here Alekhine wrongly claimed a draw by three-fold repetition. It has been suggested that this was a psychological ruse to persuade his opponent to put his bishop on an inferior square. After all, having protested his right to continue the game, it was somehow embarrassing for Réti to agree to a draw with 20 ♙g2.

20 ♙h1 h5!

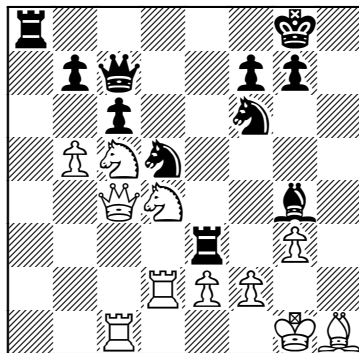
Alekhine pre-empts White's queenside push with a pawn advance of his own on the kingside. As we shall see, the retreat of White's bishop to h1 and the softening up of the g3-pawn in-

crease the latent energy of the black pieces.

21 b4 a6 22 ♖c1 h4 23 a4 hxg3 24 hxg3 ♙c7 25 b5

Réti begins an immediate attack on the queenside. Instead, the preliminary 25 e4 would drive the black knight from the centre and avoid all the unwelcome tactics that follow. On the other hand, Réti loved to hold back his centre pawns, and doesn't want to obstruct his bishop's view of the c6-square.

25...axb5 26 axb5 ♖e3!



Psychology and dynamism! Alekhine doesn't give his opponent a second chance to dislodge the knight from d5 with 27 e4. Therefore Réti is denied a quiet, 'neat' game where he can demonstrate his talent for strategy.

How did Alekhine find this idea? Well, remember what we said in the Bronstein extract above:

If you are attacking the opponent's king with a queen and rook, try to find a way to give a close-up check with your queen, no matter how crazy it looks.

Here the black queen is staring at

the g3-square which has been undermined by both 20 ♔h1 and 23...hxg3. A crazy rook move to attack it is 26...♖e3, which opens the way for a close-up check after 27 fxe3 ♜xg3+. Once we start looking at this, we don't have to see beyond 28 ♔g2 ♞xe3 to realize that White is being mated on g2. The fact that the white queen is hanging after 28...♞xe3 is of no objective relevance, but it is a great confidence booster: 'If I'm dreaming and it isn't forced mate on g2, no matter as White won't have time to save his queen!'

27 ♞f3?

Réti loses his composure and immediately makes a serious blunder. It is often the case that rushing defenders towards an endangered king causes more trouble than the original threat. The knight was performing an important role on d4, guarding both the b5- and e2-pawns. Even worse, retreating it to f3 shuts in the bishop on h1, which loses influence over the centre. This reduction in the energy of the white pieces allows Alekhine to begin a series of tactical operations.

The logical move was 27 ♔f3!, challenging the black bishop and strengthening, rather than weakening, White's hold over the e2-square.

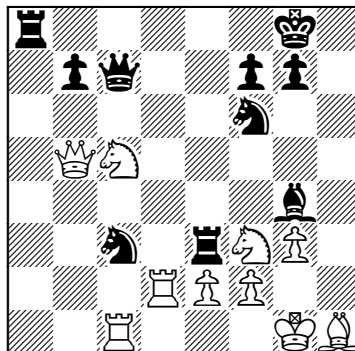
27...cxb5

White has lost control and is hit by wave after wave of attacks, with never a moment to catch his breath.

28 ♜xb5

If Réti had kept his knight on d4 he could have replied 28 ♞xb5, and so avoided all the grief that follows.

28...♞c3!



Alekhine aims first of all to conquer the pawn on e2. It is a perfect target for the following reasons:

1) It is on a tactically sensitive square, being the distance of a knight's fork from the rook on c1 and king on g1.

2) It is performing a vital defensive role in guarding f3 against the attack of the black rook and bishop.

3) It can be attacked with gain of time by simultaneously hitting the white queen.

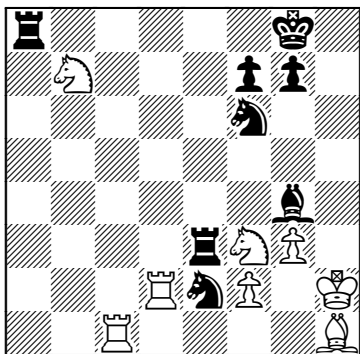
Black still has a rook hanging on e3, but he knows that, after White saves his queen, he will get in first with ...♞xe2+ attacking the white rook on c1. *Therefore no variations needed to be calculated here.* It was only necessary to notice that after 29 ♜c4 b5! the white queen has to give up her defence of e2.

29 ♜xb7 ♜xb7 30 ♞xb7 ♞xe2+ 31 ♔h2

Up until here Alekhine hasn't needed to calculate much. He has always had the luxury of knowing that 31...♞xc1 will be at least okay for him. In fact, this would give him a tiny, but

meaningless, advantage after 32 fxe3.

Therefore at this point Black needs to start looking at other moves. He gets nowhere special with 31...♙xf3 32 ♙xf3 ♖xc1 (or 32...♗xf3 33 ♗xe2) 33 fxe3 etc. Instead, 31...♗xf3 32 ♗xe2 ♗xg3 33 ♖xg3 ♙xe2 leaves him with an extra pawn. That's better, but still it is virtually impossible to win. So what other moves are there? If you examine the position enough, you should be able to come across Alekhine's actual move.



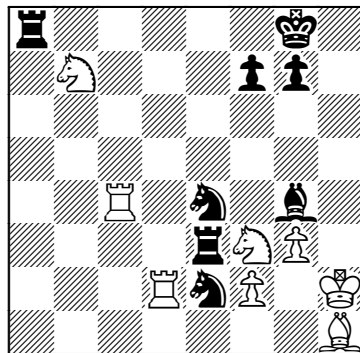
31...♗e4!

Black attacks both the rook on d2 and the pawn on f2. It is worth repeating that he is risking absolutely nothing in leaving the rook hanging on e3. After 32 fxe3 ♖xd2 material is equal, but with both the white rook on c1 and the knight on f3 hanging. Therefore Black is bound to get in first when it comes to grabbing material. And so it proves after 33 ♖xd2 ♖xc1 when he wins the exchange, or 33 ♗c2 ♖xf3+ 34 ♙xf3 ♙xf3 winning a piece.

Instead, 32 ♗d8+ ♗xd8 33 fxe3 has been suggested as the best chance for White, but this is entirely hopeless after

33...♗d5! 34 ♗c4 ♖2xg3. White not only loses a pawn but will drop more material as his king is so badly placed; for example, 35 ♙g2 ♖f1+! 36 ♙xf1 (if 36 ♖g1 ♗d1 37 ♙xf1 ♙xf3 and wins with 38...♖d2 due to the pin on f1) 36...♙xf3 and there is no good answer to the threat of 37...♗h5+ 38 ♙h3 ♖g5 winning a piece, as 38 ♖g1 ♗h1 is mate. Alekhine didn't need to see all this – it was quite sufficient to get as far as 34...♖2xg3 and conclude that Black is a pawn up with a strong initiative.

32 ♗c4!



Réti tries to confuse matters with his clever rook move. If now 32...♙xf3 33 ♗xe4!! is a move worthy of one of his endgame studies. Then 33...♙xe4 (after 33...♗xe4 34 ♙xf3 equalizes) 34 fxe3 ♙xh1 35 ♖xh1 ♖xg3+ 36 ♖g2 gives White a survivable endgame.

32...♖xf2

Alekhine's rook has been hanging on e3 since move 26! But now he removes the threat, winning a pawn and leaving g3 weaker.

33 ♙g2

Hoping for 33...♙xf3 34 ♙xf3 ♗xf3

35 ♖xe2 with good drawing chances. Unfortunately for Réti, not only is he a pawn down but his opponent can also target his king.

33...♗e6!

Beginning a regrouping of his pieces. He attacks the rook on c4 and wins time for his next move which obliges the white king to walk into a discovered attack.

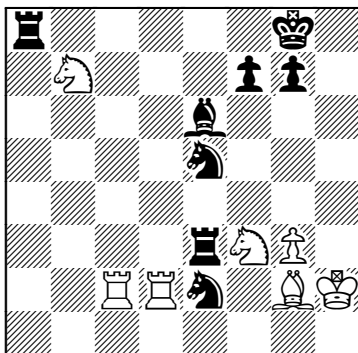
34 ♖cc2

Réti attacks e2. If he tries 34 ♖c5 then 34...♖aa3! is crushing.

34...♗g4+ 35 ♖h3 ♗e5+

I suspect it was at this point that Alekhine conceived his final combination. Everything could be worked out due to the small number of pieces on the board and the forcing nature of the play – as you will see, White has hardly any choice with his moves.

36 ♖h2



36...♖xf3! 37 ♖xe2 ♗g4+ 38 ♖h3 ♗e3+!

38...♖f6!? was an interesting alternative, threatening mate on h6. Then after 39 ♖xe6 fxe6 40 ♖xg4 ♖a4+ White is mated by 41 ♖h3 ♖h6 or 41 ♖g5 ♖f5+ 42 ♖g6 ♖g4 mate! However, White

could fight on in a losing position with 39 ♖h4!.

39 ♖h2 ♗xc2 40 ♗xf3 ♗d4 41 ♖f2 ♗xf3+ 42 ♖xf3 ♗d5! 0-1

The white knight is lost.

A brilliant display of power play by Alekhine. Once he had been given his chance with 26...♖e3!! he kept Réti under relentless pressure.

William Hartston makes an interesting comment on this game in *The Kings of Chess*:

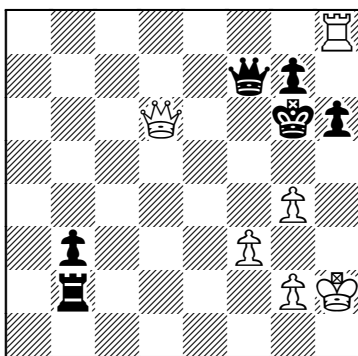
“From the 26th move (...) a sequence of mind-boggling combinations take over the board, eventually involving all the pieces. Such chess, even at the highest level, is not calculable; it is intuition backed up by the calculation of the essential variations at each stage. The human mind is capable of no more. Yet Alekhine’s notes give no indication of the unfathomable nature of such play, of the doubt that must have existed in his mind while playing the game.”

I would qualify this slightly by adding that, although Alekhine might have doubted if his advantage would be enough to win, he was always in a position to bail out with a slight, if unrealizable, advantage. There was never a stage in the complications in which he didn’t have an obvious way to remove the tension and therefore all danger. What I find most enthralling about the game is how close it came to burning out to a draw, but Alekhine always found a way to maintain the dynamic element. As Hartston himself remarks,

“as a triumph of imagination and judgment in conditions of obscure visibility, it is quite magnificent.” Alekhine considered it to be one of his two most brilliant tournament games, the other being against Bogoljubow (see Chapter Four).

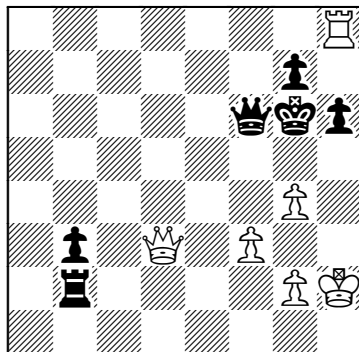
Sometimes you have to rely on intuition

Here I wish to return to the Bronstein-Korchnoi game given earlier in the chapter. At move 37 let’s see what would have happened if Korchnoi had avoided the bait on f3 and instead captured on b2. After **37...♖xb2** there might now follow **38 ♜h8+ ♔g6 39 ♜d6+**.



If now **39...♔g5?** a nice computer might tell you it is mate in eight moves beginning with **40 ♜f8!**. (If Black does the sensible thing and saves his queen with **40...♜c4** it is a much quicker mate: **41 ♜f5+** and **42 ♜h5**, or **41 ♜e5+** and mate on f5 or h4 as Black prefers.) But Bronstein didn’t have to see that in advance – it was quite enough to spot

that **40 ♜e5+** and **41 ♜xb2** picks up the rook. So that means Black has to play **39...♜f6!**, when **40 ♜d3+** is the checking reply.



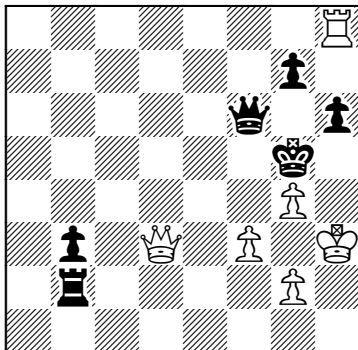
In his earlier calculations, I suspect that Bronstein stopped about here as his intuition told him that there would almost certainly be a way to exploit the exposed black king. In contrast to the game, in which Black was always threatening **...♜xg2** mate, White can afford the luxury of a quiet move or two to pick off either the black rook, queen, or king. And as a ‘safety valve’ White always has a draw if he keeps on checking the black king.

Analysis confirms that Bronstein’s intuition was correct. Black loses his queen after **40...♔f7 41 ♜d5+ ♔e7** (if **41...♔g6 42 ♜h5** mate, or **41...♜e6 42 ♜f8+ ! ♔e7 43 ♜e8+** etc) **42 ♜d8+ ♔e6 43 ♜e8+ ♔f7 44 ♜f8+** and wins.

Instead, **40...♔g5** is a harder nut to crack. White would like to play **41 ♜d5+?! ♔f4** (if **41...♔g6** it’s mate on h5) **42 ♜e8(??)** when the threat of **43 ♜e4** means it is checkmate to the black king in nine moves – unless Black plays

42...♖h4+! when it is checkmate to the white king in three moves.

Instead, the quiet **41 ♖h3!!**,



stopping ...♖h4 ideas, leaves Black with no good answer to the threat of 42 ♖d5+ ♖f4 43 ♖e8. For example, after **41...♖e5 42 ♖f8 g6** (to stop the killer check on f5), White has 43 f4+ winning the queen or, better still, **43 ♖d8+** forcing mate.

I doubt very much – nay, it is impossible! – that Bronstein had seen 41 ♖h3!! when he played 35 ♖b6. In the actual game, it was essential after 37...♖xf3 to have noticed 39 ♖xh6+!! in advance as Black was threatening mate in one. In contrast, Bronstein had to trust his intuition that a move like 41 ♖h3!! would exist in the position after 37...♖xb2. In any case, he wasn't taking a risk as he could take a draw as he pleased.

Hence we have seen that when making a combination, some tactics must be seen in advance (39 ♖xh6+!!), whereas in other cases we have to rely on our intuition and cross bridges as we come to them (41 ♖h3!!).

A game saved by combinative power

In the following game Alekhine is positionally busted after 18 moves. But rather than tamely submit to the loss of a pawn he makes an unsound, but tricky knight sacrifice. This heaped a lot of psychological pressure on his opponent, who of course didn't know whether or not the World Champion was bluffing.

The result was the proverbial triumph of spirit over matter – the force of Alekhine's personality breathed an unstoppable power into his pieces.

Game 9
K.Opocensky-A.Alekhine
 Prague 1942
Old Indian Defence

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♘c3 ♘bd7 4 ♘f3 e5 5 g3 c6 6 ♙g2 ♙e7

Here we see Alekhine's antipathy to the kingside fianchetto. Having played 5...c6 he doesn't want to weaken the d6-pawn any further and so keeps the bishop defending it. No doubt Bronstein would have played 6...g6, when 7 0-0 ♙g7 8 e4 0-0 is similar to his games with Zita and Reshevsky – see Chapter Eight.

7 0-0 0-0 8 ♖c2 exd4?

A modern player would trust in the c6/d6/e5 pawn centre, and stand his ground with, say, 8...♖c7 or 8...♖e8. We shall also discuss this topic in Chapter Eight.

Instead, Alekhine reasons that “the pawn on d6 is weak, I should get rid of it with ...d6-d5 in the style of the Grünfeld. Hence taking on d4 followed by ...♖b6 and ...d6-d5 is the way to proceed.” Such false logic will lead him close to defeat.

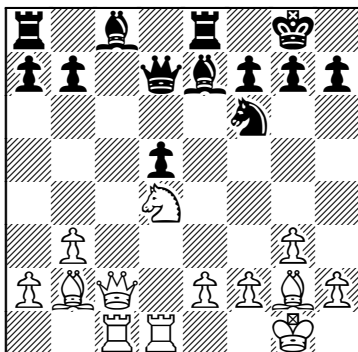
9 ♖xd4 ♖b6 10 b3 d5 11 ♜d1!

Now Black would be busted after 11...dxc4 12 ♖xc6 ♜e8 13 ♖b5! threatening 14 ♖c7 trapping the queen.

11...♜d7?

Even so, Alekhine should make do with 11...♜d7, though he remains in an uncomfortable position after 12 cxd5 ♖fxd5 13 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 14 ♜b2.

12 cxd5 ♖bxd5 13 ♖xd5 cxd5 14 ♜b2 ♜e8 15 ♜ac1

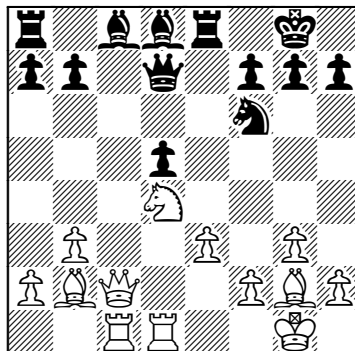


White has a perfect development, a game free of weaknesses and the chance to attack d5. Meanwhile the black queen on d7 and bishop on c8 make a horrid impression.

15...♜d8

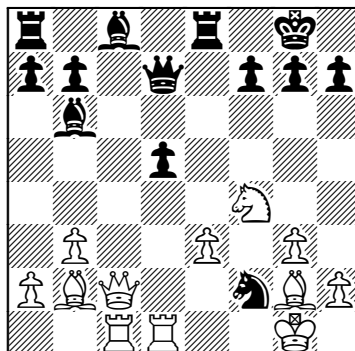
The bishop stops an invasion on c7 and seeks activity on b6. Of course, it would have been much simpler to have put the bishop on g7 in the opening...

16 e3!



If Black does nothing then the simple plan of 17 ♖e2 and 18 ♖f4 will win the d5-pawn whilst keeping a crushing positional superiority. Therefore Alekhine has to employ all his tactical ingenuity to set his opponent problems.

16...♖e4! 17 ♖e2 ♜b6 18 ♖f4 ♖xf2!

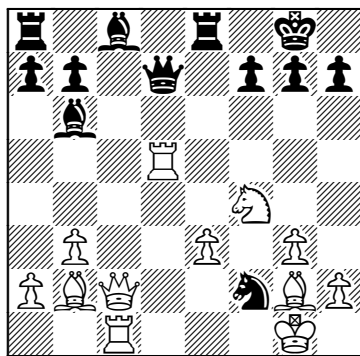


One can imagine how Karel Opoensky must have been feeling at this moment. He has all his pieces on excellent squares, while Black’s rook on a8 and bishop on c8 are shut out of the game. So the complications *must* work out in White’s favour. But how nerve-

wracking it must be when the greatest tactical genius of the age (perhaps of any age) sacrifices a piece to attack your king!

19 ♖xf2?

The win was to be had with 19 ♖xd5!



a) After 19...♗g4? the knight can be captured with the queen: 20 ♖xf2 ♕xe3 21 ♖xe3 ♖xe3 22 ♖d8+ and mates.

b) If 19...♗e7 the e3-point can be shielded with 20 ♖e5, followed again by taking on f2, unless Black gives up his queen with 20...♗xe5, which fails to 21 ♕xe5 ♖xe5 22 ♖xc8+! ♖e8 (taking the queen allows another back rank mate) 23 ♖xa8 (simplest) 23...♖xa8 24 ♕xf2 and Black must resign.

c) Perhaps Alekhine was planning to give up his queen at once with 19...♕xe3 20 ♖xd7. If now 20...♕xd7 21 ♕xb7 is objectively best but, personally, playing Alekhine I would simplify with 21 ♖xf2 ♕xf2+ 22 ♕xf2 with an easily won endgame (22...♖ac8 23 ♕xb7!). Alternatively Black might try 20...♗g4+ 21 ♕h1 ♕xd7 (if 21...♗f2+ 22 ♖xf2 simplifies and stays a piece up) 22

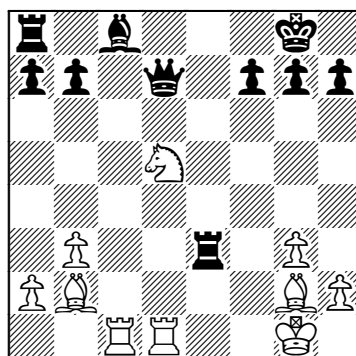
♖f1 ♕b5 23 ♖f5 ♕xf1 (or 23...♗f2+ 24 ♖xf2) 24 ♖xg4 and wins.

As you can see, Opocensky had to find the unusual manoeuvre ♖xd5 and ♖e5 in variation 'b' and also notice the back rank trick with ♖xc8+. If Alekhine had chosen variation 'c' the Czech master would have had to convince himself that Black could achieve nothing after the discovered check on his king with 20...♗g4+. This isn't at all easy with a ticking clock and the World Champion sitting opposite you.

Even though objectively he should have lost, Alekhine was entirely correct to gamble in this fashion. If he had quietly accepted the loss of a pawn he would most likely have been ground down in the endgame, if he had survived that long. Certainly he would have had zero winning chances. Whereas after the sacrifice all three results are possible: win, loss or draw.

Opocensky feels he has the win of a lifetime in his grasp, and believes he can achieve it with a positional queen sacrifice.

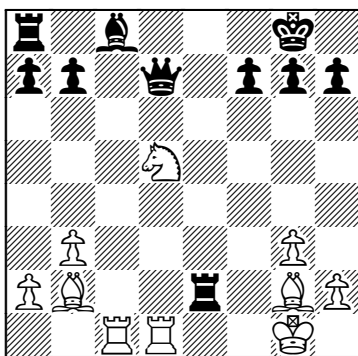
19...♕xe3 20 ♖xe3 ♖xe3 21 ♗xd5



The white rooks control open files and the knight threatens to pick up an enemy rook in one move (22 ♖xe3) or two moves (22 ♖c7 and 23 ♖xa8). Alekhine sees that the second threat can be ignored.

21...♗e2!

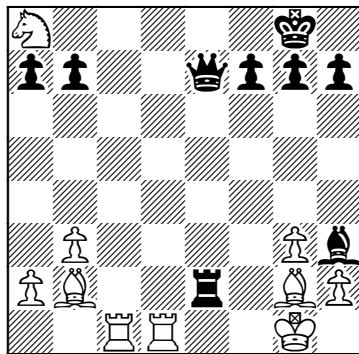
As we shall see this is a counterattack against both white bishops, not just the one on b2. White is obliged to go ahead with his combination as 22 ♖f6+ gxf6 23 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 just leaves him material down.



22 ♖c7 ♗e7 23 ♖xa8

Opocensky has a rook, bishop and knight for the queen and a one-move threat in 24 ♗xc8+. But he has lost control as Black can draw with 23...♗xg2+ 24 ♔xg2 ♗e2+, when the white king can't evade the checks. Alekhine finds something even stronger.

23...♕h3!!



The World Champion has achieved a beautiful coordination amongst his three remaining pieces. The miserable bishop that spent almost half the game shut in behind the queen delivers the killer blow. If White replies 24 ♕xh3 he is mated in four moves beginning 24...♗e3+ 25 ♔h1 ♗f3+. If 24 ♕e4 (a desperate attempt to block the e-file), rather than 24...♗xe4 25 ♕a3!? ♗g5, my computer program wants to reply with the rather surreal 24...h5!. I'll leave you to work that out!

24 ♗d8+ ♗xd8 25 ♕xh3 ♗xa8 0-1

White wins the queen but loses the battle after 26 ♗c8+ ♗xc8 27 ♕xc8 ♗xb2.

The next time you mess up the opening, remember this game and come out fighting!