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5 The Age of Universality

Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Following New Dynamism, a new era dawned, lasting from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. I call this period *The Age of Universality*. During that time we saw the rise of a number of players that *synthesized* the lessons from all previous eras – players who were able to handle all kinds of positions, albeit still with each player having his own distinct style. They had absorbed the teachings of Morphy, Steinitz, Nimzowitsch, Bronstein and all the other giants that we have discussed so far. Some of these earlier legends had distinct strengths but also distinct weaknesses. The players of the Age of Universality too had multiple strengths but few weaknesses. While they may not have invented new paradigms like Steinitz or Nimzowitsch, they *synthesized* and *executed* the teachings of chess history and thereby elevated chess to a new level. These were players like Spassky, Fischer, Larsen and Karpov.

Some contemporary chess fans mainly remember Boris Spassky as losing in the legendary match with Fischer in Reykjavik 1972. That is a shame because Spassky was one of the greatest in chess history and in my opinion he was the world's first really universal chess-player. I remember a description of Spassky by former World Correspondence Champion Jørn Sloth – a countryman of mine – from a book that I read as a teenager, *Bogen om Skak* (The Book of Chess): “Spassky's first coach was Grandmaster Tolush, an attacking master *par excellence*. His influence is clearly visible in Spassky's early games. Later he gets Grandmaster Bondarevsky as his coach. Together with him he develops the more positional sides of his game. His style becomes universal. He can do anything – almost perfectly.” An apt description.

Spassky's problem in relation to the 1972 match was that he peaked a few years before

Fischer. Had the match between these two greats been played perhaps five years earlier, we might have seen a different winner. In fact, Fischer had never beaten Spassky before the match in Iceland, having on the other hand lost three out of five previous games.

Let's see two very different games from Spassky's second World Championship match against Petrosian – the one in 1969 that finally secured Spassky the World Championship (Petrosian won their first meeting in 1966 to stay World Champion).

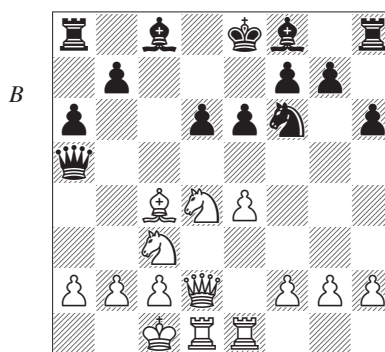
Spassky – Petrosian

World Ch match (game 19), Moscow 1969

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6

The sharp Najdorf Variation is probably not consistent with Petrosian's cautious style but at this point the World Champion was trailing by a point.

6 ♘g5 ♘bd7 7 ♘c4 ♖a5 8 ♚d2 h6 9 ♘xf6 ♘xf6 10 0-0-0 e6 11 ♖he1 (D)



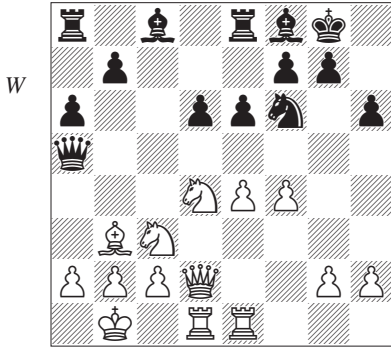
This line is hardly seen any more these days. Black has secured the two bishops but at the cost of lagging seriously behind in development. White has centralized his whole army.

11...♘e7?!

This move is to a certain extent the decisive error. Petrosian prepares to castle kingside but

runs directly into a devastating attack. A better choice was 11...♔d7 followed by 12...0-0-0, as suggested by Petrosian's second Boleslavsky.

12 f4 0-0 13 ♖b3 ♜e8 14 ♚b1 ♙f8 (D)



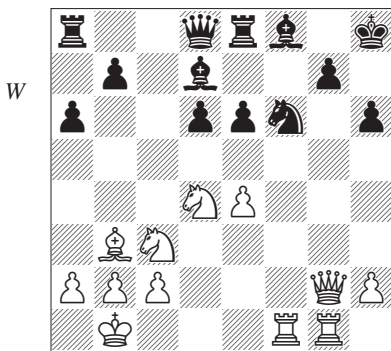
15 g4!

Spassky the attacker! A pawn is a small price to pay for the open g-file. Notice that Black cannot really decline the offer because of the h6-pawn 'sticking out'. It is well-known that you should try to avoid weakening your king-side with pawn moves, as they may become a target. This is a case in point; Black cannot allow White to play g5.

15...♗xg4 16 ♜g2 ♗f6 17 ♜g1 ♙d7 18 f5 ♙h8 19 ♜df1!

Spassky follows Tal's advice of increasing the Attacking Ratio. More pieces to the king-side!

19...♜d8 20 fxe6 fxe6 (D)



21 e5!

Spassky includes the c3-knight into the attack with devastating consequences.

21...dxe5 22 ♗e4! ♗h5

22...♗xe4 23 ♜xf8+! and 22...exd4 23 ♗xf6 followed by 24 ♜g6 both lead to mate.

23 ♜g6! exd4

After 23...♗f4 Geller gives the cute line 24 ♜xf4! exf4 25 ♗f3! (the quiet move, threatening 26 ♗e5) 25...♜a5 26 ♗f6! ♜f5 27 ♜xh6+! and Black is mated.

24 ♗g5! 1-0

Here too mate follows after 24...hxg5 25 ♜xh5+ ♙g8 26 ♜f7+ ♙h7 27 ♜f3! e5 28 ♜h5#. Notice that even the bishop on b3 is included in the mating attack!

Petrosian won the 20th game to get within one point, but in the 21st game of the match Spassky *de facto* secured the World Championship. This time it was a positional rout.

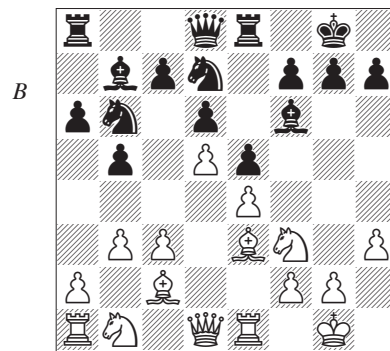
Spassky – Petrosian

World Ch match (game 21), Moscow 1969

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♗f6 5 0-0 ♙e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♙b3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 ♗d7

An old line, popularized in the 1940s and 1950s by Keres and Smyslov, amongst others. It is still occasionally seen.

10 d4 ♙f6 11 ♙e3 ♗a5 12 ♙c2 ♗c4 13 ♙c1 ♙b7 14 b3 ♗cb6 15 ♙e3 ♜e8 16 d5 (D)



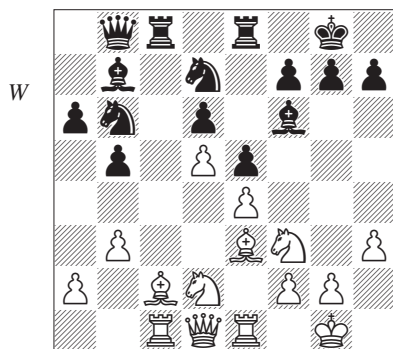
The contours of the position are starting to show. White aims at building a space advantage whereas Black may attack the centre by ...c6 and/or ...f5.

16...♜c8?!

Here and in the following few moves, Petrosian plays too passively. Black has to act fast before White builds a grip on the position, exploiting his space advantage. In a more recent high-level rapid game, the right way for Black was shown: 16...♙e7 17 ♗bd2 c6! 18 c4 cxd5 19 cxd5 f5! 20 exf5 ♗xd5 21 ♗f1 ♜c8 22 ♙d2

♞f6 23 ♞g5 ♖d7 24 ♜c1 b4 25 ♞e6 ♞c3 26 ♙xc3 ♜xc3 27 ♙b1 ♜ec8 28 ♜xc3 bxc3 29 ♙c2 ♖c6 30 ♞e3 d5, and Black was better and eventually won in Anand-Svidler, Rapidplay, Haifa 2000.

17 ♞bd2 c6 18 c4 cxd5 19 cxd5 ♖c7 20 ♜c1 ♖b8 (D)



21 a4!

Having obtained a stable space advantage, Spassky initiates a common plan in the Ruy Lopez: undermining Black's b-pawn. Notice how accurately Spassky carries out this strategic plan over the next few moves, and eventually annihilates the pawn.

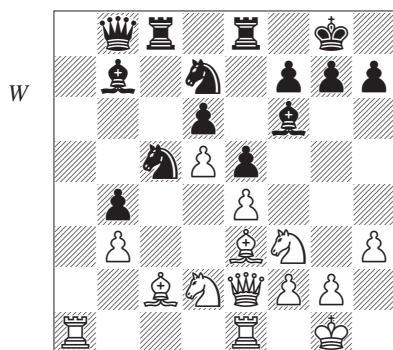
21...♞c5

After 21...bxa4 White can simply retake with 22 bxa4 and start playing on the b-file, or he may try 22 b4! followed by 23 ♜a1 and 24 ♙xa4, taking the c5-square from Black's knights.

22 axb5 axb5 23 ♜a1 b4!?

A tough call. Black gives up the c4-square to avoid being suffocated by an eventual b4 advance by White.

24 ♖e2 ♞bd7 (D)



25 ♙d3!

A powerful positional move. Spassky rightly judges that the two bishops are not worth much in this closed position and prepares 26 ♙b5. Black must take.

25...♞xd3 26 ♖xd3 ♙a8 27 ♞c4

A wonderful square for the knight.

27...♞c5 28 ♙xc5!

Again White does not mind parting with his bishop. The knights are superior to the bishops here.

28...♜xc5 29 ♜a4! h6 30 ♖d2! ♙e7

Black could not save the b-pawn as 30...♜b5 is met by a small tactical blow: 31 ♜xa8! ♖xa8 32 ♞xd6.

31 ♜ea1 ♙b7 32 ♖xb4

The master of positional play, Petrosian, has been positionally outplayed. Black is lost.

32...f5?!

This bid for activity comes much too late. Here it just loses further material.

33 ♜a7! ♜c7 34 exf5 ♖c8

34...♙xd5 is not possible because of 35 ♖xb8 ♜xb8 36 ♜xc7. Two pawns down, Black may as well have resigned but understandably Petrosian needed some time to accept the loss of the World Championship.

35 ♞e3 e4 36 ♞d4 ♙f6 37 ♜f1 ♙a6 38 ♜xc7 ♖xc7 39 ♖a4 ♜a8 40 ♞d1 ♖b8 41 ♞c6 ♖b7 42 ♖xe4 ♖xb3 43 ♜e1 ♙c3 44 ♜b1 ♖a2 45 ♞b4 ♖a4 46 ♖e6+ ♙h8 47 ♖xd6 ♙e2 48 ♞c6 ♖a2 49 ♜b8+ ♜xb8 50 ♖xb8+ ♙h7 51 ♖g3 ♙h5 52 ♙h2 ♙e1 53 f6! 1-0

53...gxf6 54 ♞f5 ♙g6 55 ♖c7+ mates. This victory left Spassky two points up with three games left.

Spassky did not hold the title long. While he seemed saturated after winning the title, the chess world observed the rapid ascent of another young prodigy: Bobby Fischer. I occasionally give lectures for business executives entitled 'Chess and Strategy', and in these lectures I call Fischer 'Master of Execution'. Fischer's games are very clear; when playing over his games you can always follow the logical evolution of his strategic ideas. There are no 'do-nothing moves'; all moves seem to be part of a coherent strategic plan. Like Spassky, Fischer was capable of playing all kinds of positions. In his commemoration article about Fischer in *New In Chess*, Timman tracks the beginning of

Fischer's ascent to the throne back to the second leg of the Piatigorsky Cup in Santa Monica 1966. Here Fischer had an amazing run, beating players like Larsen, Najdorf, Reshevsky, Ivkov and Portisch. However, he still failed to catch Spassky, who won this super-tournament half a point ahead of the American. Let's see Fischer's win against Lajos Portisch.

Portisch – Fischer
Santa Monica 1966

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♖b4

The Nimzo-Indian – a relatively rare opening in Fischer's games, as he usually preferred to have his bishop on g7 as in the King's Indian, the Grünfeld or the Modern Benoni.

4 e3 b6

"Other moves have been analysed to death" – Fischer in *My 60 Memorable Games*.

5 ♗e2 ♖a6 6 ♗g3

According to Fischer, this is "inconsistent", and it is true that 6 a3 is more common here.

6...♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 d5 8 ♖f3!?

Fischer is critical towards this move and prefers 8 cxd5 with equal play. Perhaps Portisch was tempted to try the text-move because a few years earlier he had faced it as Black and had to struggle to draw after 8...♖d7 9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♗xa6 ♗xa6 11 ♖e2 ♗b8 12 0-0 0-0 13 c4 ♗e4 14 cxd5 ♗xg3 15 hxg3 ♖xd5 16 ♖a3 ♖e8 17 ♖ac1 c6 18 ♖c2 ♗d7 19 ♖fc1 ♖ac8 20 ♖f3 ♖a5 21 ♗d6 c5 22 ♖f5 ♗f6 23 ♗e5 ♖c6 24 dxc5 bxc5 25 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 26 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 27 ♖xc5 (Bronstein-Portisch, Budapest 1961 – Black did manage to draw).

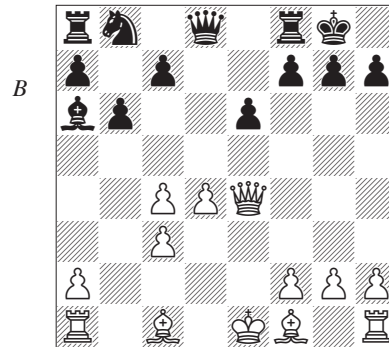
8...0-0 9 e4 dxe4!

Or perhaps Portisch was hoping for 9...dxc4, as Fischer played against Saïdy at the US Championship in New York 1965/6. After 10 ♗g5! h6 11 h4! (rather than Saïdy's 11 ♗d2) White has a strong attack according to Fischer.

10 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 11 ♖xe4 (D)

11...♖d7!

Fischer awards this move two exclamation marks and Evans, in the preface to the game in *My 60 Memorable Games*, calls it "a positional trap". Fischer was brilliant in determining such positional nuances. White is invited to capture two rooks for the queen, but as Fischer has correctly judged, the queen is superior to the rooks



here. Rooks need open files to display their strength, and the c4-pawn is going to fall.

12 ♗a3 ♖e8 13 ♗d3

13 0-0-0 comes into consideration (Fischer).

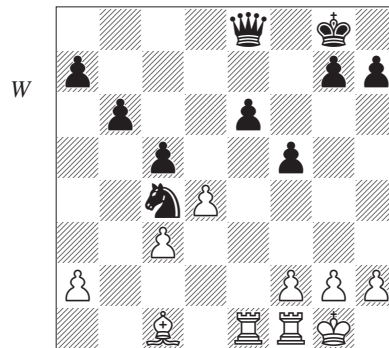
13...f5 14 ♖xa8?!

Portisch cannot resist the temptation, but the quiet 14 ♖e2 was better.

14...♗c6 15 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 16 0-0 ♗a5 17 ♖ae1 ♗xc4

This is not bad but Fischer, with his customary self-critical approach, labels it "too routine". 17...♖a4! was even stronger.

18 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 19 ♗c1 c5 (D)



Let us take stock. Material-wise White is doing all right but his rooks are not active and the knight on c4 dominates the bishop. Black is clearly better and as usual Fischer's technique is impeccable.

20 dxc5

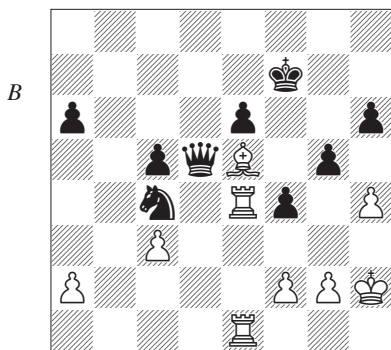
20 d5 is simply met by 20...e5, when the d-pawn can safely be blockaded by the knight.

20...bxc5 21 ♗f4 h6 22 ♖e2 g5!

Gaining space on the kingside and harassing the bishop even further.

23 ♗e5 ♖d8 24 ♖fe1 ♗f7 25 h3 f4! 26 ♗h2 a6 27 ♖e4 ♖d5 28 h4 (D)

28 ♖4e2 was better but insufficient in the long run after 28...f3 29 gxf3 ♜d2!.



28...♞e3!

Winning material, as now 29 f3 loses to 29...♞d2 30 ♖g1 ♞f2 (Fischer).

29 ♖1xe3 fxe3 30 ♖xe3 ♞xa2 31 ♖f3+ ♔e8 32 ♙g7 ♞c4 33 hxg5 hxg5 34 ♖f8+ ♔d7 35 ♖a8 ♔c6 0-1

Fischer – Spassky

World Ch match (game 6), Reykjavik 1972

1 c4!?

A remarkable move. Fischer had been a 1 e4 player all his career, but in Reykjavik he played the text-move four times, achieving two wins and two draws.

1...e6

In game 8 Spassky chose 1...c5 but lost that game horribly too.

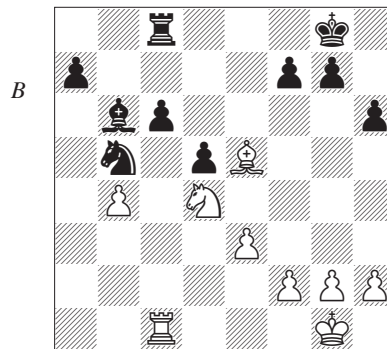
2 ♞f3 d5 3 d4 ♞f6 4 ♞c3 ♙e7 5 ♙g5

Game 14 was a comedy of errors. After 5 ♙f4 0-0 6 e3 c5 7 dxc5 ♞c6 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♙e2 ♙xc5 10 0-0 ♙e6 11 ♖c1 ♖c8 12 a3 h6 13 ♙g3 ♙b6 14 ♞e5 ♞e7 15 ♞a4 ♞e4 16 ♖xc8 ♙xc8 17 ♞f3 ♙d7 18 ♙e5 ♙xa4! 19 ♞xa4 ♞c6, Fischer squandered a pawn by 20 ♙f4?! ♞f6! 21 ♙b5?! ♞xb2 22 ♙xc6 ♞c3! (oops!) 23 ♞b4 ♞xb4 24 axb4 bxc6, which Spassky then blundered away again after 25 ♙e5 ♞b5 26 ♖c1 ♖c8 27 ♞d4 (D):

27...f6? 28 ♙xf6! ♙xd4 (28...gxf6 29 ♞xb5, and the c-pawn is pinned) 29 ♙xd4 ♞xd4 30 exd4 ♖b8 31 ♔f1 ♖xb4 32 ♖xc6 ♖xd4 33 ♖a6, and a draw was soon agreed.

5...0-0 6 e3 h6 7 ♙h4 b6

The Tartakower Variation – or, as the Russian-speaking part of the world labels it, the



Bondarevsky-Makogonov Variation. This line was an old favourite of Spassky's, which he had played many times with excellent results. However, following this loss, Spassky reverted to the solid 7...♞bd7 in game 12 and drew without too much trouble.

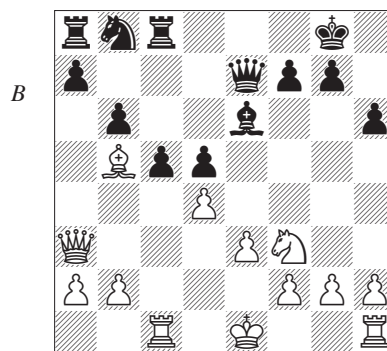
8 cxd5

This line is rarely played nowadays, as several paths to equality for Black have been shown. It is not because of the opening that Fischer wins this game; it is in his superior handling of the subsequent middlegame.

8...♞d5 9 ♙xe7 ♞xe7 10 ♞xd5 exd5 11 ♖c1 ♙e6!

This is more active than 11...♙b7 from Petrosian-Spassky, Santa Monica 1966.

12 ♞a4 c5 13 ♞a3 ♖c8 14 ♙b5!?



An interesting and subtle idea invented by Furman, curiously later Karpov's long-time coach. White hopes to induce weaknesses in Black's position. Fischer was always well aware of the developments in Soviet chess, sometimes even more so than the Soviets themselves!

14...a6

Not bad, but it was later established that 14...♞b7! is Black's best here. That led to a