

Cyrus Lakdawala

The Alekhine defence

move by move

EVERYMAN CHESS

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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

Also by the Author:

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Series Foreword

Move by Move is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate – as much as possible – lessons between chess teachers and students.

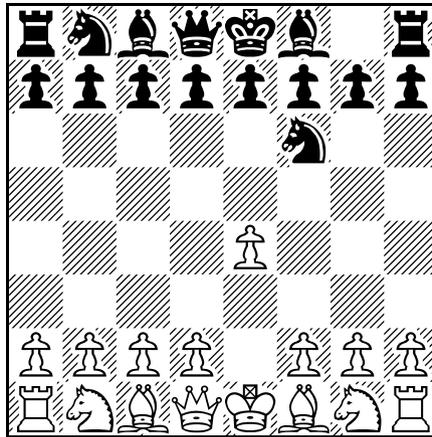
All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms,
Everyman Chess

Introduction

Open Rebellion on Move One



The only openings worth playing are the ones which reflect our inner nature. Some of us fall under the category of defensive and counter-attacking player --provocateurs, more than aggressors. With our very first move in the Alekhine's, we agree to sign on the dotted line of an intricate contract. A certain percentage of our behaviour patterns are in response to atavistic fears our ancestors embedded within our cells: In a hostile environment, it's more desirable to go on the attack than to defend. Our opening spits in the face of this ancient fear. If there is truth to the statement: "The meek shall inherit the earth," then perhaps 1...♘f6! may be one of Black's best responses to 1 e4. Yet there is nothing meek about our opening. We disrupt symmetry on our very first move. A skilled defender senses the enemy's pulse, watches his eyes to discover the direction of schemes, anticipating moves and plans, even before they enter the opponent's head. The key requirements we hone to play the Alekhine's with a degree of skill are coolness under fire and counterattacking ability.

The Universal Equation

The equation of all of history's great failures of military command follows our Alekhine's Defence game plan: Temptation + Undermining = Overextension:

1. Initially, the aggressor seizes power and territory through bold, unexpected action.

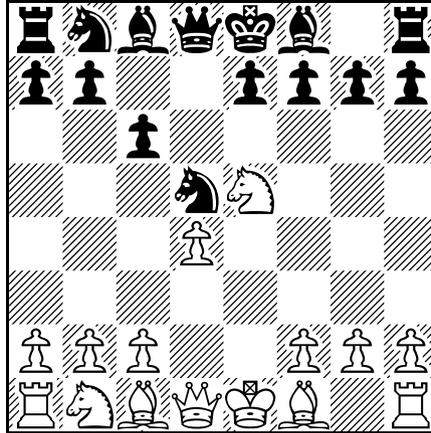
2. Instead of consolidating gains, the aggressor continues to expand with unbridled ambition.

3. The aggressor overextends, retreats in disarray and bungles the war.

If you don't believe me, just ask Napoleon, Hitler and Bush how well their campaigns worked for them! This is how we win with the Alekhine's. We first willingly cede territory to our opponents. If they manage to consolidate gains, they earn an edge. If not – and in my experience, at the club level, there are many more if-nots than if-sos – we engage the insurgency, undermining and counter-attacking our now overextended opponents. Our endless harassment/hit-and-run strategy consists of a poke here, a prod there, and then before White is enabled retaliation, we melt into the shadows, with no enemy for him or her to engage.

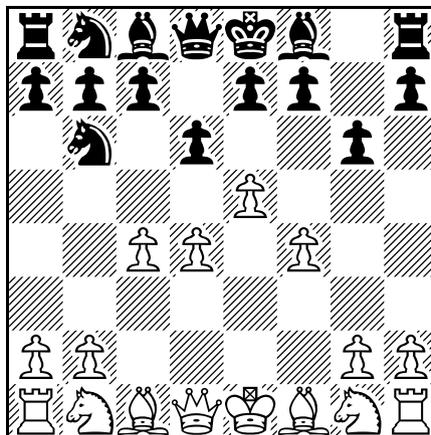
Our provocative first move (in attacking the e4 pawn) almost appears somewhat masochistic, begging White to push our knight around. In fact, White's e-pawn's push to e5 is a grave temptation, as inviting the mailman's ankle to a belligerent Chihuahua. From a hypermodern vantage, our opening choice makes perfect sense. We invite White to boot us around, allowing him or her to seize the centre, with the sole intention of later dismantling it from the wings. As most chess players understand: A move's outer unaccountability or unorthodoxy doesn't necessarily indicate the move's incorrectness. If the inherent idea behind the move is sound, then the move itself is vindicated, even when cloaked in paradox. The Alekhine's Defence is a battlefield strewn in misunderstanding. Contrary to the belief of some, the opening is sound and Black doesn't wander into the hinterlands of the impermissible. Perhaps the opening was born of the hypermodern need to rebel against the ruling forces, who declared: Both sides *must* strive to occupy the centre with their pawns. As early as the second move, 2 e5, formal geographical boundaries are brazenly violated by White. We ask ourselves: Does our radical first move rule-bend truly qualify as a time-wasting idea, if all of White's "free" moves are simply pawn moves? Our opening is designed by nature to bear burdens and we get shoved around in the name of the hypermodern edict: Freely offer the opponent the centre to chip away at it from the wings, later on.

In the book, we must prepare for White's attempt at the slow strategic squeeze, as in the Main Line after 1e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♞d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♞f3 dxe5 5 ♞xe5 c6!?



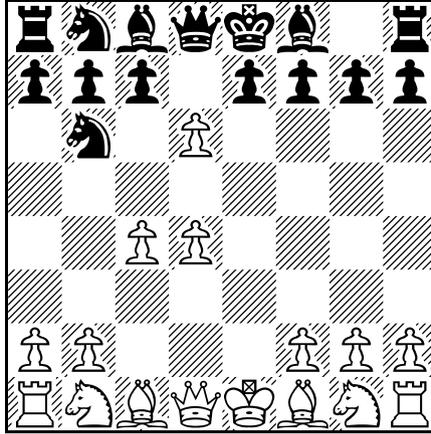
White plays it safe and relies on a slight central superiority, against our wall of solidity.

Or, we prepare for blitzkrieg mode, as in the savage Four Pawns Attack, which we meet with the ultra-provocative Sergeev Variation via 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 f4 g6!?, which we willingly enter with virtually zero margin for error:

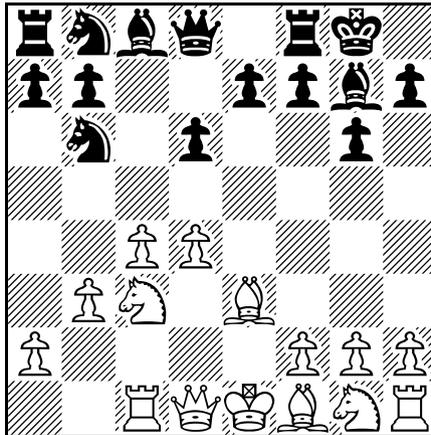


The Problem of the Hated Exchange Variation

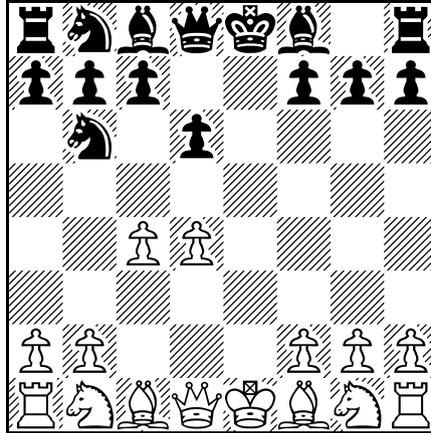
I played Alekhine's Defence all through the 1980's and 90's, only to abruptly give it up in the early part of the next decade. Why? The hated Exchange Variation with 1 e4 ♗f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 exd6. All of a sudden, over 50% of my opponents played this way on me.



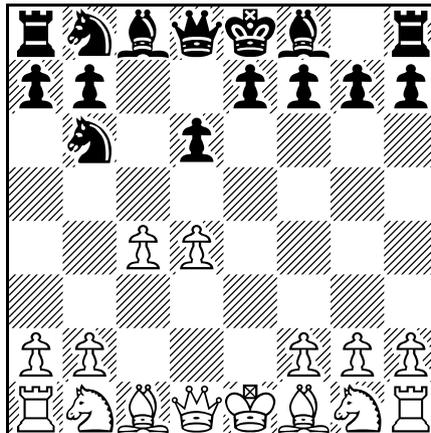
Now the problem was in the 80's, I always recaptured with my c-pawn, which led to dynamic positions. But in the 90's, the dreaded Voronezh system arose with 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♞d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♞b6 5 exd6 cxd6 6 ♞c3 g6 7 ♕e3 ♕g7 8 ♖c1 0-0 9 b3.



Black's score dipped dramatically from this starting position, and the majority of pundits claimed (and continue to claim today) that the 5...cxd6 Asymmetrical Exchange line was borderline unplayable. This left 5...exd6 for Black:



I don't know about you, but I'm not so wild about Black's arid position. Black sits solidly but it's difficult to beat a lower rated player from the Petroff-like position. Then IM John Watson, who writes the Alekhine's Defence section of *Chesspublishing.com* uttered a shocking statement: He told me the "refuted" 5...cxd6 line is actually fully playable – even against the dreaded Voronezh system. I didn't believe him at first but then became obsessed with his claim. I worked on the 5...cxd6 line for a good chunk of this book, and was amazed that the *Houdini* engine felt the same way John did. Thus, in this book, I added a supplementary chapter of the Asymmetrical Exchange.



The history of Alekhine's Defence

The Alekhine's Defence may have first been played by the Edinburgh Chess Club in an 1860 correspondence match versus the Berwick chess club (Source: *Chess History Centre: Chess Notes*). Saidy and Lessing (others have made this same claim) in *The World of Chess* incorrectly state that Alexander Alekhine 'introduced the defense which bears his name (1 P-K4

N-KB3), but, oddly enough, never played it again.' This can't be right, since my database contains 19 Alekhine's Defence games by the namesake. Alekhine did indeed play it again, scoring a very decent 66% with Black, starting with this one:

F.Saemisch-A.Alekhine
Budapest 1921

1 e4 ♖f6 **2 e5** ♗d5 **3** ♗c3 **e6**

and the players went on to draw a rather tediously dull game. If Alekhine had the foresight to purchase this excellent book, he would have played 3...♗xc3! instead.

Later, the Austrian GM Ernst Grunfeld took up the opening's mantle. In the 70's, the opening got a major legitimacy boost through Bobby Fischer's deadly use of it. Fischer scored a whopping 71%, unleashing it twice in his World Championship match against Spassky, and drawing blood with it in the introduction's mind-blower of a game. Today, the Alekhine's is deemed mainstream, with many of the world's top players – Ivanchuk, Nakamura and Kamsky come to mind – depositing it in the account of their repertoires. Russian/Irish GM Alex Baburin, however, must be considered the opening's current day high priest, utilizing it as his main weapon to 1 e4. Alex's games are peppered throughout the book, and when he embraces or rejects a line, we can follow his example with confidence.

Game 1
B.V.Spassky-R.J.Fischer
28th World Championship, Reykjavik 1972

I distinctly remember my father and I excitedly going over this most mystifying of games on my 12th birthday, which we eagerly extracted from the newspaper. I remember my father asking: "How on earth could a World Champion lose with the opponent's (Fischer's) rook entombed?" I ask myself the same question today, 42 years later, and still don't have an answer! Such was Fischer's magic.

1 e4 ♖f6

A historical moment: This is the first time the Alekhine's Defence was used in a World Championship game. Final score: The Alekhine's won one and drew one (It may have helped that Fischer was on Team Alekhine's!). This epic game is one of my favourite Alekhine's Defence battles of all time.

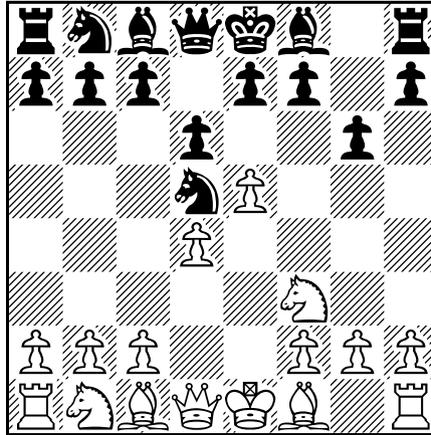
2 e5

Our knight is such an inviting target, that it appears to White like a doormat with the word "Welcome!" written in bold letters.

2...♞d5

We must get used to it. In the Alekhine's, our knight hops about like an agitated grasshopper, grappling with some secret sorrow.

3 d4 d6 4 ♞f3 g6



Question: Are we covering this position in the book?

Answer: No, this game is here for a historical perspective. Black's last move was popular at the time but has receded from fashion since.

In the 19th game, Fischer deviated with 4...♙g4:

5 ♙e2 e6 6 0-0 ♙e7 7 h3 ♙h5 8 c4 ♞b6 9 ♞c3 0-0 10 ♙e3 d5 11 c5 ♙xf3 12 ♙xf3

Today, we know that 12 gxf3! gives Black a rough time theoretically.

12...♞c4 13 b3 ♞xe3 14 fxe3 b6 15 e4 c6 16 b4 bxc5 17 bxc5 ♚a5 18 ♞xd5!? ♙g5! 19 ♙h5! cxd5 20 ♙xf7+! ♚xf7 21 ♚xf7

The players went on to draw after further adventures, B.Spasky-R.Fischer, Reykjavik 1972.

5 ♙c4 ♞b6

Also playable is 5...c6:

6 0-0 ♙g7 7 h3 0-0 8 exd6 exd6 9 ♚e1 ♞c7 10 ♙g5 ♙f6 11 ♙h6 ♚e8 12 ♚xe8+ ♞xe8 13 ♙b3 d5 14 c4

Houdini rates the game at dead even. I think White's game may be easier to play, since he continues to lead in development and controls the initiative, G.Kasparov-V.Ivanchuk, Las Palmas 1996.

6 ♙b3 ♙g7 7 ♞bd2

Clearly, Fischer's surprising choice of Alekhine's Defence threw Spasky off his match prep. This looks too passive to extract an edge. Spasky, like Capablanca before him, was firmly in the category of "lazy" World Champions, who didn't work on opening prep the

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way the Alekhine, Botvinnik and Fischer camp did. Both 7 ♖g5 and 7 a4 score well for White. There's no need to go into these lines, since we don't cover this position in the book.

7...0-0 8 h3

Normal is 8 0-0 ♖c6 9 ♗e1 dxe5 10 dxe5.

8...a5

A new move.

Black can also go after the bishop pair with 8...♖c6 with good play for Black:

a) 9 ♗e2 ♖a5 10 0-0 ♖xb3 11 axb3 I like Black's bishop pair and light square control over White's central space, A.Caldeira-D.Lima, Sao Paulo 2005.

b) 9 a3 dxe5 10 dxe5 ♗e6!? looks interesting. Black's control over the light squares and increased activity easily compensate for the weakening of his structure after 11 ♗e6 fxe6.

9 a4?!

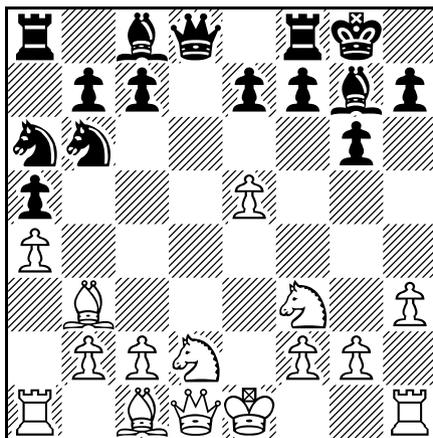
A potential weakening and in fact, as it turns out, a potential, semi-dubious pawn sac.

Question: How on earth is White's last move a pawn sac?

Answer: Please see the game's continuation where the a4 pawn gets blocked, surrounded and subsequently plucked!

The passive response 9 a3 a4 10 ♗a2 ♖c6 doesn't fit Spassky's dynamic style, but is clearly better than what White entered in the game.

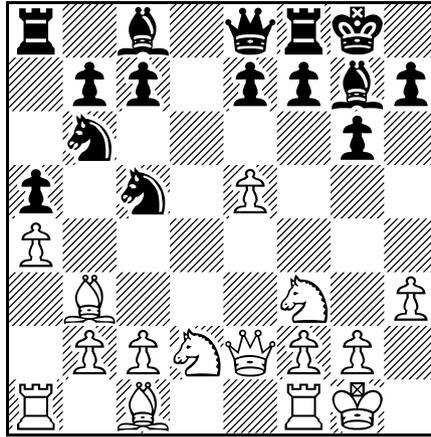
9...dxe5! 10 dxe5 ♖a6!



Question: Why post the knight to a6 when c6 is available.

Answer: The a6 square isn't the final destination as ...♖c5 is in the air, going after a4 and also White's powerful light squared bishop.

11 0-0 ♖c5 12 ♕e2 ♖e8!



A move of vast ambition and in my opinion, excellent judgment. Fischer, like Korchnoi and Lasker before him, was always ready to go pawn grabbing, even at the cost of handing the opponent an initiative. In this case I just don't believe in White's alleged compensation. Also tempting would be to simply pick off the bishop pair and play for a light square strategy.

After the more prosaic 12...♗xb3 13 ♗xb3 ♕e6, Black looks at least equal to me.

13 ♗e4! ♗bxa4!?

Fischer refuses to play it safe with 13...♗xb3 14 cxb3 ♗d5 15 ♖c4 c6. I actually prefer Black, due to the bishop pair and his control over key light squares. Still, White's extra space and aggressive piece placement shouldn't be underestimated.

14 ♕xa4 ♗xa4 15 ♖e1 ♗b6

The knight having done its dirty work returns back into the game.

16 ♕d2 a4 17 ♕g5 h6 18 ♕h4

Daring Black to play ...g5.

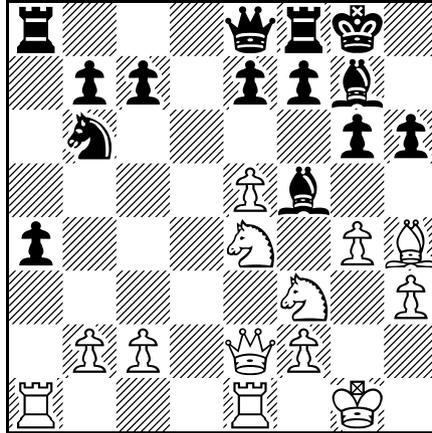
18...♕f5

Houdini likes 18...g5! 19 ♕g3 ♖c6.

I think g5 sacs are unsound, as long as Black has ...♕f5 later on.

19 g4!?

When tact and gentle persuasion fail, Plan B is to dust off the baseball bat. This move makes it abundantly clear that Spassky has little interest in engaging in a respectful and rational debate over the kingside. *Houdini* doesn't approve but Spassky, down a pawn, is willing to risk overextension, and isn't about to sit around and allow his initiative to fade.



Question: Does White really have an attack here for his pawn?

Answer: White's attack (or its absence!) is a bit like an abstractionist's painting: It could be anything and it could be nothing. For example, your initiative-challenged writer's handling of such positions, sadly, tends to be a tad shy of infallible and I would almost certainly get crushed by a player 200-points lower rated. Spassky, on the other hand, is not so bad with the initiative!

19...♙e6 20 ♘d4 ♙c4 21 ♚d2 ♚d7

Fischer begins to unravel. His domination of the light squares and extra pawn count for more than White's kingside buildup.

22 ♜ad1 ♞fe8

Black can also take on e5 to destroy White's choking e-pawn, but at the cost of weakening his king.

For example, after 22...♙xe5 23 ♚xh6 ♙g7 24 ♚c1 a3 25 bxa3 ♘d5, *Houdini* still likes Black here.

23 f4

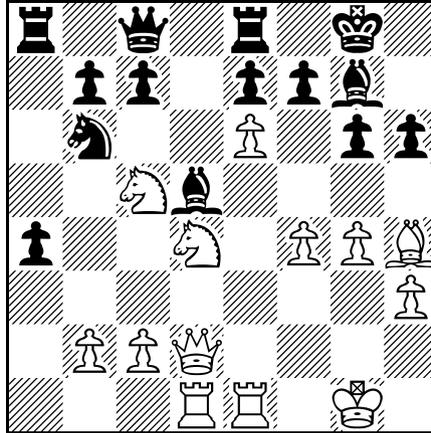
At some point, White wants to achieve f5.

23...♙d5

Principle: *Centralize when attacked on the wing.*

24 ♘c5 ♚c8 25 ♚c3

White's game begins to go downhill after this move. Perhaps it's time to go psycho with 25 e6!



This is a good practical try.

Houdini's analysis runs: 25...♞c4 26 ♖c1 b6 27 exf7+ ♕xf7 28 ♞ce6 ♟xe6 29 ♞xe6 ♟xb2 30 ♖b1 a3 31 c3! a2 32 ♖e4 a1♖ 33 ♜xa1 ♜xa1 34 f5! ♞d6 35 fxc6+ ♕g8 36 ♖e3 ♟xc3 37 ♖xc3 ♖xe6! 38 ♖xa1 ♖xg6 with advantage to Black.

Even here, conversion won't be so easy. Black's bewildered king, who once expected to find himself passing through the shadow of the valley of death, unexpectedly discovers that he remains very much alive. The question remains: Could Fischer have found all of Black's defensive resources? White's attack looks easier to find than Black's defensive ideas in this line.

25...e6 26 ♖h2

Spassky still hopes to engineer f5 but it's too slow.

26...♞d7 27 ♞d3?

a) 27 ♞e4 and Black takes over the initiative with 27...a3! 28 bxa3 ♜a4!

b) 27 ♞xd7 fails to inspire as well. Still, options a) and b) look better than the game continuation for White.

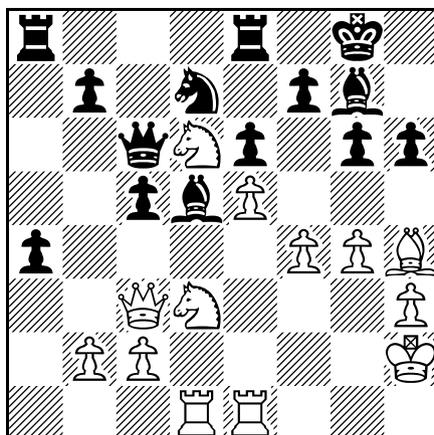
27...c5!

Fischer seizes the initiative with a well calculated sequence.

28 ♞b5

28 ♞e2 b5 looks hopeless for White.

28...♖c6! 29 ♞d6



Exercise (combination alert): How did Fischer demolish White's dream of attack and crush down the insurgency in its inception?

Answer: Simplification/queen sacrifice.

29... ♔xd6! **30** exd6 ♙xc3

He gets it right back.

31 bxc3 f6!

Fighting back on the dark squares, his weak colour. White is busted:

1. He is down a pawn in an ending.

2. White's structure is a wreck, especially on the queenside.

3. Black owns a passed a-pawn, which may soon run down the board to tie up White's forces.

32 g5!

Spassky resourcefully finds White's only chance for counterplay.

32... hxg5 **33** fxg5 f5

Now add two central passers to the list.

34 ♙g3

Spassky regains some degree of dominance on the dark squares.

34... ♖f7

Fischer should follow the principle: *Passed pawns should be pushed* and play 34...a3! 35

♘e5 ♘xe5 36 ♙xe5 ♚ed8! 37 ♖f1 intending ♖f4 and ♚h4 which is now met with 37...♚a4!

35 ♘e5+!

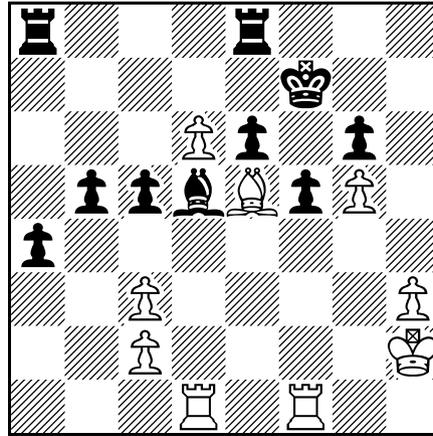
A pure opposite coloured bishops greatly increases White's drawing potential in the ending.

35... ♘xe5 **36** ♙xe5 b5?!

In winning positions, our greatest threat is the unforeseen consequence of an inaccu-

racy. Fischer missed another consolidation chance with 36...♖ed8 37 ♜f1 ♔e8! 38 ♜f4 ♔d7 39 ♜h4 ♔c6 40 ♜h7 ♜d7 41 ♜h6 ♙f3 42 ♜e1 ♙h5 and Black wins.

37 ♜f1!



Principle: *Opposite coloured bishops favour the attacker*, (even if it's an ending). Despite White's discouraging exterior, there lies hidden opportunities. Out of nowhere, Spassky generated serious threats: His rook is determined to set in motion a nefarious scheme to take down Black's king with ♜f4, ♜h4 and ♜h7.

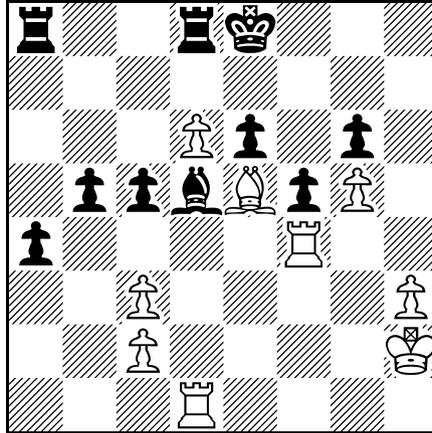
Exercise (planning): We now know Spassky's dangerous plan.

Now come up with a defensive plan for Black to counter White's intention:

37...♜h8?

If you point a gun at an enemy's head, pull the trigger, and it misfires, then are you still a killer, if nobody gets hurt? Fischer forges through this and overturns that, yet fails to locate the correct plan. This semi desperado move misses the heart, inflicting only a flesh wound, and may actually have thrown away the win. Black defends if he finds:

Answer: 37...♜ed8! 38 ♜f4 ♔e8!



The king's face, surreptitiously peering from behind a curtain, is hastily withdrawn. The point: Black's king will be perfectly safe on c6 or b6.

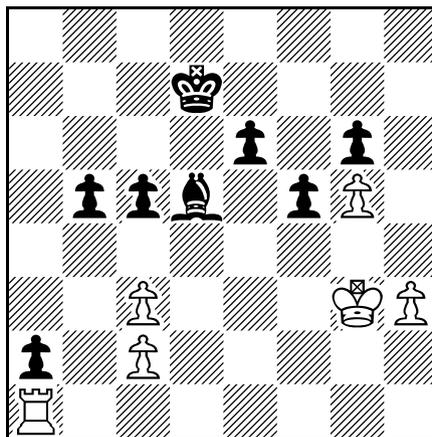
39 ♖h4 ♕d7 40 ♜h7+ ♕c6 41 ♝c7+ ♕b6

Black's king easily circumvents danger, expertly navigating around all obstacles.

42 ♜g7 ♜g8 43 ♜h7 a3

The a-pawn will cost White the game.

44 ♙f6 a2 45 ♜a1 ♕c6 46 d7 ♜gd8! 47 ♙xd8 ♜xd8 48 ♕g3 ♜xd7 49 ♜xd7 ♕xd7



This is a hopeless ending for White, with his rook paralyzed on a1 (We discuss this theme much more later in the game!).

38 ♙f6!

Question: Why not take the rook?

Answer: Spassky recognizes that his bishop is at the moment more valuable than Black's rook. He needs it to help stop Black's passed a-pawn.

38...a3 39 ♖f4 a2 40 c4! ♙xc4!

The correct capture.

40...bxc4 41 d7 c3 42 ♙xc3 ♖hd8 43 ♖h4 ♔e7 Forced, otherwise White draws. 44 ♙f6+ ♔xd7 45 c4 ♖e8 46 cxd5 e5 47 ♖a1 ♔d6 48 ♖c4 ♖a3 49 ♖c2 ♖ea8 Black still holds the advantage, due to his deeply passed a-pawn but White still has his chances here, with the extra piece.

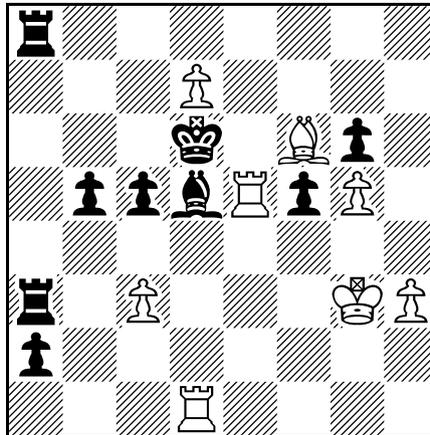
41 d7 ♙d5 42 ♔g3 ♖a3+ 43 c3 ♖ha8 44 ♖h4

Threatening perpetual check.

44...e5!

Black's king needs air. 44...a1♔? allows White immediate perpetual check with 45 ♖h7+ ♔g8 46 ♖h8+.

45 ♖h7+ ♔e6 46 ♖e7+ ♔d6 47 ♖xe5!



The ramifications of Fischer's previous inaccuracies embrace him without any sign of letting go. Spassky's level of resistance can only be described as demonically inspired. Suddenly, Black's world is on fire. The ♙d5 hangs, and White menaces his own queening threats. Aswirl in the static of half-conceived ideas and partially elaborated notions, arises a plan to win from Fischer's mind which touches at the position's hidden core. Black has a choice of three branches:

a) Make a new queen with 47...a1Q.

b) Terminate the d7 menace with 47 ...♔xd7.

c) Before doing anything, pick off c3 with 47...♖xc3+ and create three connected queen-side passers. The bad news for Black may be: None of the three wins. But only one allows him to continue to play for one.

47...♖xc3+!

The creation of three connected passed pawns is Black's best practical chance and his

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only hope of a win. Even here, I think White still should hold a draw:

a) 47...a1♚?? 48 ♖exd5+ ♜c6 49 ♖d6+ ♜b7 50 ♖xa1 ♖xa1 51 d8♚ ♖xd8 52 ♜xd8 and White wins.

b) 47...♜xd7 48 ♖dx5+ ♜c7 49 ♖xc5+ ♜b6 50 ♖xb5+ ♜a6 51 ♖b2! a1♚ 52 ♖e6+ ♜a5 53 ♖e5+ ♜a6 and draw, since 53...♜a4?? isn't much of a winning try no thanks to 54 ♖b4 mate!

48 ♜f2

48 ♜f4?? ♖f3 mate!

48...♖c2+ 49 ♜e1

Spassky keeps finding only moves.

49 ♜e3?? ♖a3+ 50 ♖d3 f4+! 51 ♜xf4 ♖f2+ 52 ♜e3 ♖xd3+ 53 ♜xd3 ♜xd7 54 ♖xd5+ ♜c6 55 ♖d8 ♖xf6! is curtains for White.

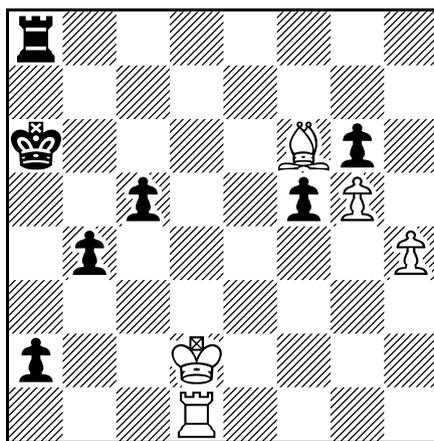
49...♜xd7! 50 ♖exd5+ ♜c6 51 ♖d6+ ♜b7 52 ♖d7+ ♜a6

There is no perpetual check and Black's three pawns mean more than White's piece.

53 ♖7d2!

White's best chance.

53...♖xd2 54 ♜xd2 b4 55 h4!



Just in case Black forgot: White soon attains a dangerous passer of his own, after h5.

55...♜b5 56 h5 c4 57 ♖a1!

57 hxg6?? c3+ 58 ♜c2 a1♚ 59 ♖xa1 ♖xa1 60 g7 ♖a8 halts the lead g-pawn's queening attempt.

57...gxh5 58 g6 h4!

White discovers that the creation of a passed g-pawn wasn't free. Black's newly passed h-pawn has designs on the h1-square.

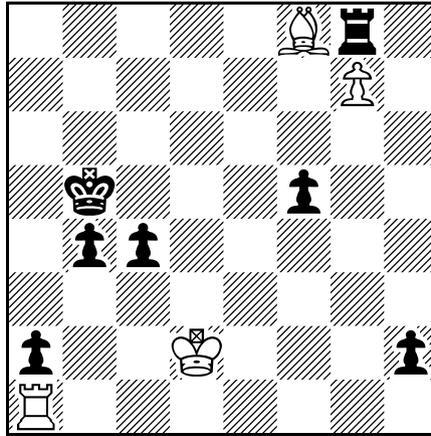
59 g7

Insufficient is 59 ♜xh4 ♖g8 60 ♖xa2 Also, 60 ♖g1 c3+ 61 ♜d3 ♖xg6 wins. 60...♖xg6 and Black's three pawns will beat White's lone piece.

59...h3 60 ♖e7!

Threat: ♖f8.

60...♖g8 61 ♖f8 h2



The murder went along smoothly, but what to do with the body on g8? Black's once esteemed rook is seen in a new, negative light, a revelation as startling as when you discover a person considered to be a friend, trashing you behind your back.

Question: I can't figure out who is winning, drawing or losing here. Can you?

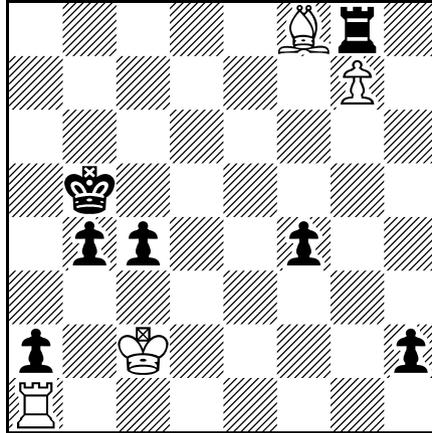
Answer: Not really. It's almost as if White is up a rook *and* a bishop, since Black's rook is a caricature of its former rookness, cowering on g8. Yet Spassky faces a contingency which probably never entered his head: Even a draw is no guarantee for White! The trouble is Black still possesses five passed pawns. *Houdini* assesses at -4.01 – completely winning for Black. But I couldn't tell you at a glance who was winning or losing if my life depended on it! After having heavily analyzed the ending, I think it's actually a draw but with all the winning chances on Black's side. So *Houdini* may be way off in its assessment.

62 ♖c2

Spassky transfers his king to b2 to activate his own rook.

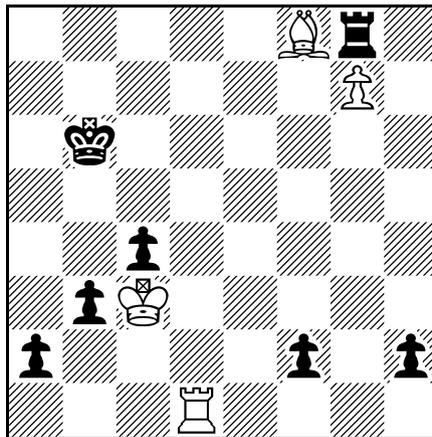
62...♖c6!

A bizarre notion, which previously floated nebulously in the recesses of Fischer's mind, surfaces to the conscious level. Black, down essentially a rook and a partial-bishop, astoundingly plays for the win! To make the claim that the position is deceptive, is colossal understatement. Only Black can win. Fischer seizes upon his lone chance: Transfer his king to the centre and kingside. *Houdini* originally misassessed 62...f4 as an easy win for Black.



When I played it out, I drew easily as White!

After 63 ♖d1 b3+ 64 ♘c3 f3 65 ♗d5+ ♘c6 66 ♗d1 f2 67 ♗d6+ ♘c5 68 ♗d8+ ♘b6 69 ♗d1, there is no way for Black to sidestep the impasse and the position is drawn.



63 ♖d1

The more accurate path to the draw lies in the following lines:

a) 63 ♖h1! ♘d5 64 ♘b2 b3 65 ♗xh2 c3+ 66 ♘a1 ♘e4 67 ♗h3 ♘d4 68 ♗g3 f4 69 ♗f3 c2 70 ♗xf4+ ♘c3 71 ♗f3+ ♘d2 72 ♘a3! ♗xg7 73 ♗xb3 is drawn.

b) 63 ♘b2! b3 64 ♗h1 ♘d5 65 ♗xh2 transposes and draws as well.

63...b3+ 64 ♘c3 h1♚!

Fischer, as always, was delicately attuned to the position's most cloaked nuances. If I were restricted to a single word to describe Fischer's chess in its prime, it would be: Indomitable. Here he takes a stab at a wild surmise, more than an actual gamble. What to do when there is no solution to the problem? Go rogue and violate the law. Fischer – like Cap-

tain James T. Kirk, the only Starfleet Academy cadet in history to pass the no-win, solutionless Kobayashi Maru test (he cheated and altered the rules!) – refuses to divvy up the spoils and demands something closer to a 100%–0% cut for himself! This deflection shouldn't win but it's his last hope of provoking an error.

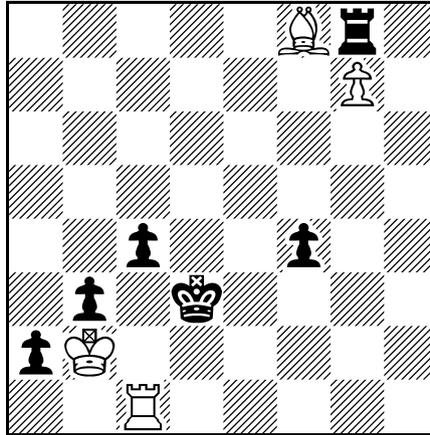
Question: Wouldn't it be wiser for Black to first push his f-pawn to f3 or f2, and only then play ...h1 Q?

Answer: White draws in any case after 64...f4 65 ♖d6+ ♔c7 66 ♖d1 f3 67 ♖b2 ♔c6 68 ♖d6+ ♔c7 69 ♖d1 with *Houdini* still claiming a -3.85 win for Black!

65 ♖xh1 ♔d5 66 ♖b2!?

Simpler is 66 ♖e1! f4 67 ♖d1+ ♔e4 68 ♖e1+ ♔f3 69 ♖a1! and Black can't make progress. If 69...♔e2 White can play 70 ♖xc4! f3 71 ♖xb3 f2 72 ♖xa2+ with a draw.

66...f4 67 ♖d1+ ♔e4 68 ♖c1 ♔d3



Exercise (critical decision): Okay, to arms! Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of the party. This is not a pick-and-choose situation. White's fate hinges upon divining a single saving move. Spassky must pick from two lines of defence: 69 ♖d1+ or 69 ♖c3+. One draws, the other loses. What can we deduce from such scant and paradoxical data? Work out the drawing line.

69 ♖d1+??

The solution is obscured by blankness in Spassky's mind. A nervous strain/fatigue error costs Spassky a well-deserved draw for his otherwise heroic defence. Now White's resistance is determined but in the end futile, like Poland's in 1939. The geometry fails for White in this line. White draws with

Answer: 69 ♖c3+!

The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move

White draws if the rook engages in a lateral pattern. Black's king is clearly the ring-leader. If he can be confined and tamed, then Black's entire construct fails and he must agree to the draw.

a) 69...♖d4 70 ♜f3 ♕e4 71 ♜c3 ♖d5 72 ♜f3 with a repetition of moves.

The position remains in a holding pattern, the way planes circle an overcrowded airport, awaiting an open runway.

b) 69...♕e2 70 ♜xc4 f3 71 ♜c1 f2 72 ♖xb3 f1♚ 73 ♜xf1 ♖xf1 74 ♖xa2 is drawn as well.

69...♕e2

"Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here!" roars White's defiant rook, as he shakes a fist in the black king's face. "Hi, I'm coming in now," is the black king's rather rude response.

70 ♜c1 f3!

No need to protect c4.

71 ♕c5

When we invest love in someone (g7), and then the object of our love abruptly leaves our life, the result is a feeling of betrayal. This allows the life-imprisoned g8-rook undeserved parole and hence White must be in a state of total desperation.

Also futile is 71 ♜xc4 when after 71...f2 72 ♜e4+ ♖f3 73 ♜e7 f1♚ 74 ♜f7+ ♖g2 75 ♜xf1 ♖xf1 The kingside pieces cancel each other out and essentially it's a king and pawn ending, with Black up two pawns. 76 ♖a1 ♖e2 77 ♖b2 ♖d3 78 ♖a1 ♖c2 It's zugzwang and Black wins.

71...♜g7

This move soothes--a cold compress to a fevered brow. In a triumphant return from self-imposed exile, the long-out-of-play rook grasps for self-expression in its new world of unfettered freedom.

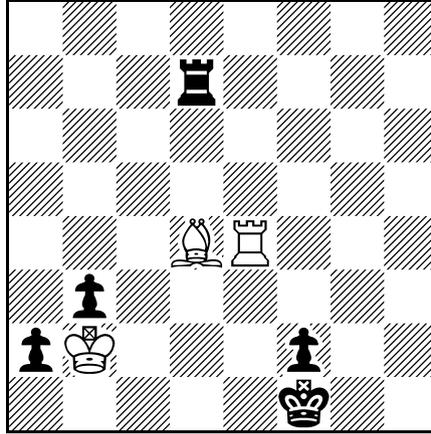
72 ♜xc4 ♜d7!

With the deadly threat to check on d2. The plot unfolds with unexpected twists and turns, and White has no way to cope – much less rally – from this idea. The simple 72...f2! 73 ♕xf2 ♖xf2 also does the job. Both 74 ♜a4 or 74 ♜c1 can be met by 74...♜g1 winning.

73 ♜e4+

73 ♕b6 ♜d2+ 74 ♖a1 ♜d1+ ends the game.

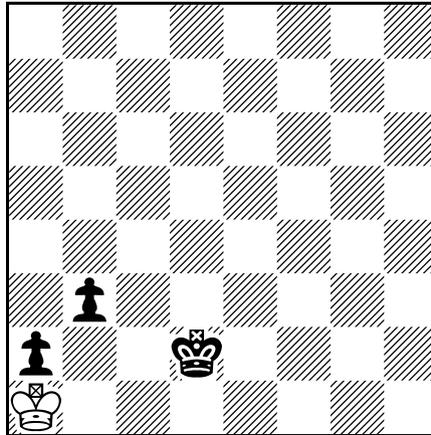
73...♖f1! 74 ♕d4 f2! 0-1



Doom tumbles upon White, as if from an Edgar Allen Poe short story. What a battle!
Black wins. 74...f2! 75 ♖f4

No better is 75 ♙xf2 as 75...♗d1! 76 ♗a4 ♖b1+ 77 ♔c3 ♙xf2 ends the game.

75...♗xd4! 76 ♗xd4 ♔e2 77 ♗f4 f1♖ 78 ♗xf1 ♙xf1 79 ♔a1 ♔e2 80 ♖b2 ♙d2 81 ♔a1.



Question: Isn't this king and pawn ending drawn?
Black can't approach without delivering stalemate.

Answer: Black breaks the stalemate tricks with a timely deflection. Like this:

81...♙d3! 82 ♖b2 a1♖+!

Deflection.

83 ♙xa1 ♙c3!

No stalemate.

The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move

84 ♖b1 b2 85 ♖a2 ♖c2

Black finally queens.

Summary: Even the unfortunate *Houdini* was stumped by this game, and in several stages, found itself twiddling its fingers, dazed in a solutionless netherworld of easy wins for Fischer's side, which weren't wins at all!

Dedication

Many thanks to Nancy, for her tireless proof reading. To IM John Watson for browbeating me into adding the Asymmetrical Exchange chapter and urging me to discard childhood fears of the formally scary boogie man, the Voronezh system. And lastly, many thanks to Editor GM John Emms and Correspondence SIM Junior Tay for their edits of the book. May your opponent's expression ruffle into quizzical, ambitious patterns, upon seeing you play 1...♗f6!.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego 2014

The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move

Good enough but much simpler is 74 ♖xe3!. The rook saves the day, as welcome a sight as the brandy-hauling St. Bernard to the snowbound mountain climber in the Alps.

74...fxe3 75 ♔xe3 ♖c2 76 ♔d3 ♖c5 77 ♔xd2 is drawn.

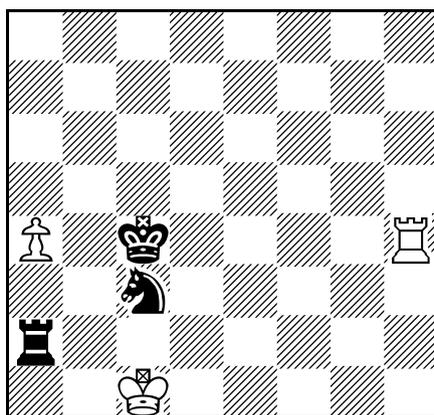
74...♗xd1 75 ♔e2

By a miracle, Simon managed to eliminate Baburin's final pawn and the game should be a draw.

75...♗c3+ 76 ♔xd2 ♗e4+ 77 ♔e2 ♖c2+ 78 ♔d1

White's disoriented king, a stranger in his own body, freezes in indecision. This looks like a time pressure decision. Why voluntarily go to the back rank when he could play 78 ♔d3 which should easily draw?

78...♖h2 79 ♔c1 ♖a2 80 ♖h4 ♔d4 81 ♖h3 ♗c3 82 ♖h4+ ♔d3 83 ♖h3+ ♔c4 84 ♖h4+??



We all pay for our mistakes, and if we are lucky, learn from them as well. Life plays strange tricks on us, snapping us out of our complacency. Unexpectedly, the heavens open and gift Baburin with the full point. 84 ♖h8 of course is an easy draw.

84...♔b3

Oops. White's embarrassed king wears the hangdog look of a magician whose trick backfired before an expectant audience. Black's king smiles at his brother and asks: "Fool! Did you really believe I would share power with you?"

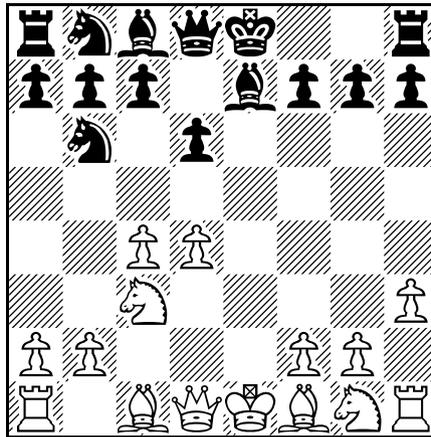
85 ♖b4+ ♔xb4 0-1

Not quite stalemate, thanks to the a4-pawn.

Summary: Black should get a cramped but solid position after the plan ...♗g4, ...♗h5, ...♗g6 and then ...d5.

Game 19
A.Volokitin-V.Ivanchuk
Aerosvit GM, Foros 2006

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♞b6 5 exd6 exd6 6 ♜c3 ♙e7 7 h3



Question: Does White have the luxury for a non-developing ornament like this one?

Answer: He probably does since the position remains non-confrontational for the moment. White's idea is to enable the g1-knight's development to f3, without allowing ...♙g4.

7...0-0

7...♙f5 8 ♞f3 0-0 9 ♙e2 ♗c6 10 0-0 ♙f6 transposes to our next game.

8 ♞f3 ♙f6 9 ♙e2

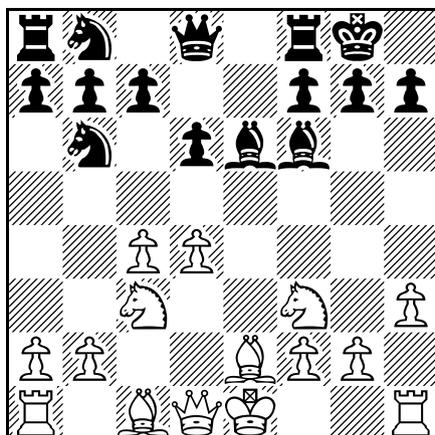
IM John Cox comments: "A pretty common position in which Black's next few moves are invariably ...♙f5, ...♞e8 and ...♗c6 (actually more often than not Black plays some or all of these moves before ...♙f6) but Ivanchuk as so often has his own ideas."

Question: Isn't 9 ♙d3 more accurate, since it cuts out ...♙f5?

Answer: Black eventually chases the bishop away after 9...♗c6 10 0-0 ♞e8 11 ♙e3 ♗b4 and now White must back off to retain the bishop pair. After 12 ♙e2 ♙f5 Black still achieved...♙f5 after all.

9...♙e6!?

A clear breach of our opening's etiquette, and obviously not the normal move in the position, but Ivanchuk ventures he can improve on nature's design. Nature also equipped Ivanchuk with a mind constructed with a boundless imagination over the chessboard, which allows him to concoct moves like his last one, a new move at the time and a dynamic answer to 7 h3. Ivanchuk obviously provokes d5, after which he plans to chop on c3, and stick White with a set of sickly queenside pawns and a c5 hole. Next game we examine the more normal 9...♗c6.



10 d5!?

Volokitin can't resist the urge to gain a tempo and accepts the challenge.

Question: I don't see the big deal in Ivanchuk's idea if White simply plays 10 b3 steering the position into normal waters, correct?

Answer: There is a lot more to Ivanchuk's idea than meets the eye.

After 10...d5 11 c5 ♘6d7!

The first point of Ivanchuk's idea: Normally in such situations, Black must play the clunky ...♘c8, since d5 would hang--but not here, since Black cleverly tossed in ...♙e6. This means Black can retreat his knight to the superior d7-square.

Question: What is so great about d7?

Answer: Ah, this brings us to the second point of Ivanchuk's idea: Black threatens ...♘xc5!, which induces White's passive next move.

12 ♙b2

Normally, the bishop is posted on the superior e3-square.

Maybe 12 ♚d3 is slightly more accurate, but even here Black gains a tempo and forces White's queen to an awkward square.

12...♘c6 13 0-0 ♜e8 14 ♙e3

White still gets hit by the stock pseudo-sac.

14...♘xc5! 15 dxc5 d4 16 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 17 ♜ad1 ♘xe2+ 18 ♚xe2 ♚e7 19 ♘e4

Black stands at least equal, V.Malisauskas-V.Sergeev, Lubawka 2009.

Back to 12 ♙b2:

12...♘c6 13 a3 b6 14 ♙b5 ♘e7 15 b4 bxc5 16 dxc5 ♜b8

White must fork over the bishop pair since retreating the bishop walks into ...a5 tricks,

S.Farago-N.To, Hungary 2007.

10...♙xc3+

This is a dream come true. Black finally gets a juicy imbalance in this normally dreary line!

11 bxc3 ♙d7

Cox suggests 11...♙f5 which leaves d7 open for a knight. I think this may constitute a slight improvement over Ivanchuk's move.

12 0-0

12 ♙e3 ♘a6 13 0-0 ♘c5 14 ♙d4 ♖e7 15 ♙e1 ♙ae8 16 ♙f1 ♗d8 17 ♖c2 ♙xe1 18 ♙xe1 ♙e8

Each swap helps Black, who clearly wants an ending due to his superior structure.

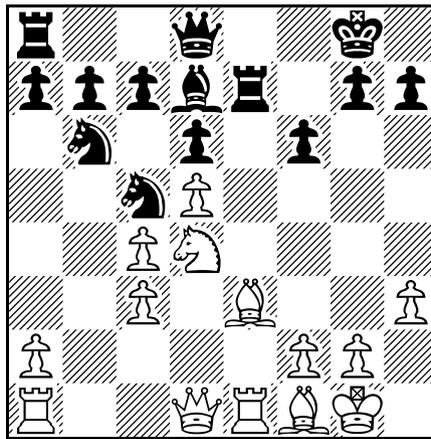
19 ♙xe8+ ♙xe8 20 ♖f5 f6 21 ♖f4 ♖e7 22 ♖c1 ♘bd7 23 ♙e3 ♙g6 24 ♘d4 a6 25 ♘b3 ♖e4! 26 f3 ♖b1 27 ♖xb1 ♙xb1

White is struggling in the ending, M.Klenburg-V.Sergeev, Oberwart 2009.

12...♘a6 13 ♙g5!

Inducing a weakening of e6.

13...f6 14 ♙e3 ♘c5 15 ♙e1 ♙e8 16 ♙f1 ♙e7 17 ♘d4



Question: Who stands better here?

Answer: The position may be dynamically equal. Stylistically, I prefer Black. Let's count up the plusses and minuses:

1. White's queenside pawns are shattered and a potential problem for the ending.
2. White owns the bishop pair, not such a big deal since in this blocked position, Black's knight pair easily holds its own.
3. White's monster knight continually eyes e6, keeping Black on guard for this possibility.

The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move

- White owns extra space due to his d5 and c4 pawns.
- Black's knights are powerfully placed, wedged into queenside dark squares.

17... ♖f8

To make room for the e8 rook.

18 ♞b5 ♟xb5!

Question: Shouldn't this move be branded with a dubious mark? Black just swapped away his second bishop and in doing so, straightened out White's structure.

Answer: He did but at the same time consider this:

1. Even though White's queenside doubled pawns got straightened out, his structure remains somewhat rigid, favouring knights. Black's entrenched knights continue to be the equal of White's for now, unimpressive bishops.

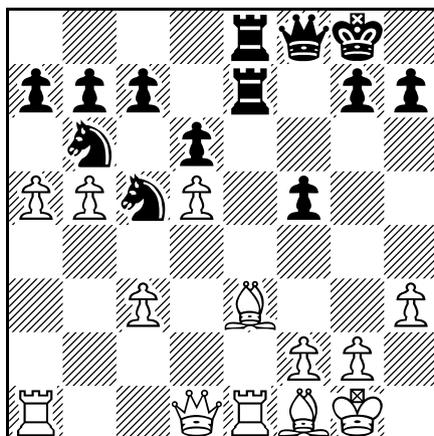
2. Black no longer has to fear a continual e6 invasion with this knight.

Conclusion: Not such a bad deal for Black, who continues to retain dynamic equality.

19 cxb5 ♜ae8 20 a4 f5!

Black begins to harbour the seed of kingside attacking ambitions.

21 a5



21 g3 ♖f7 22 a5! ♞bd7

Weaker is 22... ♞xd5? as 23 ♟c4 ♜e5 24 f4! wins material.

23 ♜e2 ♖g6 24 ♟g2 ♞f6

I prefer Black, mainly since I don't see a logical plan for White. There are all sorts of ways Black can make trouble in the centre and kingside.

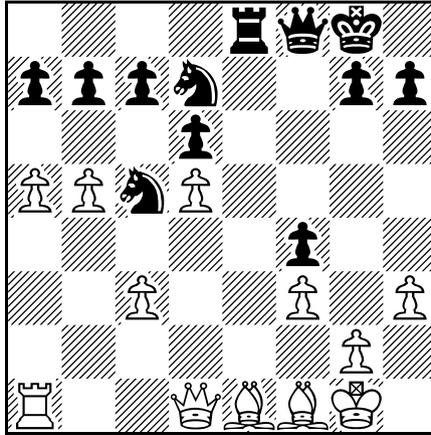
21...f4!

We note a clear decrease in Ivanchuk's amiability over the past few moves, which now bubbles over into open hostility. Now a Black knight has access to e5, without fear of f4.

22 ♟d2

Inferior is 22 axb6? As 22...fxe3 23 fxe3 axb6 simply earned White weak pawns and a bad bishop versus good knight.

22...♖xe1 23 ♗xe1 ♞bd7 24 f3!?



This weakens all the dark squares around White's king but has the benefit of freeing White from constant worry about an impending ...f3.

24...♖f6 25 ♖c1 b6 26 axb6 axb6 27 ♗f2 h6 28 ♗d4 ♖g5 29 c4 ♞f6

Heading for g3. *Houdini* assesses this position at dead even here but my gut tells me that assessment is incorrect, and Black's labours over the past moves have been well spent. Black has all the play and his knights begin to romp on the kingside. If White chops either knight, he ends up with a bad bishop.

30 ♖a1 ♞h5 31 ♖a7 ♖e7 32 ♖c2 ♞g3 33 ♖a1

A clear indication that White doesn't know what to do and can only await developments.

33...♖g5 34 ♗h2 ♗f7 35 ♗g1 ♞d7

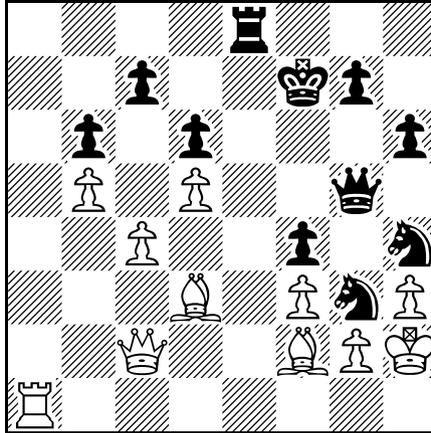
Preparing to transfer closer to White's king via e5.

36 ♗h2

The king creeps closer to the door, bracing for sudden flight, except there is no place to flee.

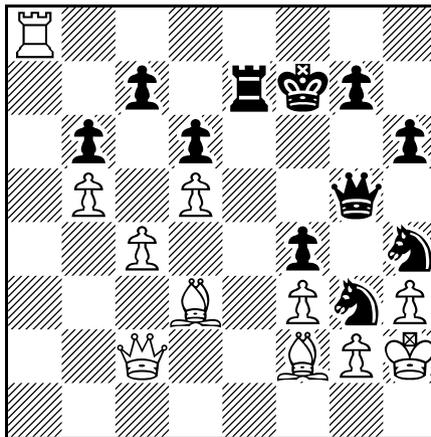
36...♞e5 37 ♗f2 ♞g6 38 ♗d3 ♞h4

Problems, (or their non-existence) like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder. *Houdini* claims the position is even. But to the human eye, it becomes clear that Ivanchuk's earlier idea of handing White both his bishops yielded belated fruit. Black's queen and knight pair make an ominous impression. White may still be okay if he keeps his guard up.



39 ♖a7 ♜e7 40 ♖a8?

The supremacy of the knights is manifestly clear and White should act upon this with the self-preservatory retreat 40 ♖a1 to cover his first rank.



Exercise (planning): The instinct to remain active plucks at Volokitin's sleeve. With his last move, White makes war against an elusive target, an apparition, when he should see to the needs of his first rank. This seemingly minor alteration turns his world upside down. Come up with a plan for Black to extract a winning position.

Answer: Transfer the g3-knight to e3, after which White collapses on the dark squares.
40...♞gf5!

Now the knights run amuck. The machinery, once set in motion, is impossible to turn off. Black threatens mate on the move, almost as an incidental in the position.

41 ♖f1

The greatest agony for a chess player is to see one's ambition thwarted and frustrated by an alert opponent.

Volokitin now notices that 41 ♖xh4 is met with the shocking 41...♗xh4!. The knight is immune. 42 ♖a1

White becomes acutely aware of a hidden and unpleasant undercurrent: His back rank is weak and his sojourn to a8 was a waste of a precious move. Also, 42 ♖xf5?? leads to mate after 42...♗g3+ 43 ♖g1 ♖e1 with a sorry end.

42...♗g3+ 43 ♖g1 ♖e1+ 44 ♖xe1 ♗xe1+ 45 ♖h2 ♖g3 46 ♗b1 ♗xb1 47 ♖xb1 ♖f6

This is a completely hopeless ending for White, since Black's king strolls along the dark squared path and wipes out the queenside pawns.

41...♖e3!

The knight attaches itself to e3 like a postage stamp.

42 ♖xe3 fxe3

White is busted:

1. He is choked by Black's deeply entrenched e-pawn.
2. He bleeds on the dark squares.
3. His bishop is no match for Black's knight.
4. His king, understandably, finds himself ill at ease in the presence of Black's queen and knight, and hopes to be elsewhere – anywhere else – with the greatest of urgency.
5. Black concentrates on the breaking of the e2-blockade to the exclusion of all other issues, and there isn't much White can do about it.

43 ♗e2

Necessary but the principle applies: *The queen is the worst blockader, since an attack by any piece forces it to relinquish the blockade.* 43 ♖d3?? walks into the interference trick 43...e2!.

43...♖f5 44 ♖a2 ♗f4+ 45 ♖g1 ♗d4

Threat: ...♖g3.

46 ♖h2

White has two suicide attempts in:

- a) 46 ♖c2?? ♖g3 47 ♗d3 ♗a1 ends the game.
- b) 46 ♗d3?? e2+ 47 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 and White drops a piece.

46...♗e5+ 47 f4

Volokitin is forced to exhaust a portion of his wealth for little in return but a stay of execution. Yet there wasn't much choice, since 47 ♖g1 ♖g3 smashes the blockade and wins on the spot after 48 ♗d3 e2.

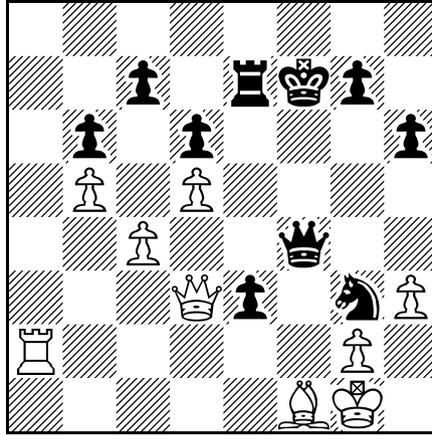
47...♗xf4+ 48 ♖g1

White's king emerges from the ordeal feeling a bit like a plucked, headless chicken.

48...♖g3

The relaxed knight continues to wallow, deep in the heart of White's territory.

49 ♗d3



Exercise (combination alert): Black contrives to collect on an old debt. He has two methods of forcing the win. Find one of them.

Answer: Transfer a rook to d2.

49...♖e4!

But even simpler is

Answer #2: 49...e2! Attraction. 50 ♙xe2 ♖xe2! 51 ♖xe2 ♚f1+ 52 ♚h2 ♘xe2.

50 ♙e2 ♖d4 51 ♚b1 ♖d2! 0-1

The rook is a tyrant who drives all who fear him into hiding. 51...♖d2 52 ♙f3 e2 and the e2 blockade is shattered.

Summary: Maybe the dynamic 9...♙e6!? should be upgraded to 9...♙e6!, since it hands White original problems.

Game 20

D.Ledger-A.Baburin

Europe-Americas, Mermaid Beach 1998

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 exd6 exd6 6 ♘c3 ♙e7 7 h3 0-0

Question: Can Black can also consider 7...♙f5 before White plays ♙d3?

Answer: Sure, your move is playable but this doesn't bother White a bit since in the early h3 lines, he tends to develop the bishop to e2, not d3, which allows him to sufficiently reinforce d4 from Black's coming ...♗c6 and ...♙f6.

8 ♗f3