

Thomas Engqvist

Petrosian

move by move

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About the Author

Thomas Engqvist is an International Master from Sweden. He has over 30 years' experience as a chess coach, teacher and writer. He has recently worked with players at world championship level in both junior and correspondence chess.

Engqvist was born in 1963 and started to play chess in a club in the small town of Enköping during the autumn of 1976. He gained the International Master title in 1993 when he was 29 years old. He earned the title after winning an IM tournament in Titograd (Podgorica) 1991 and coming third in the Swedish Championships of 1992 and 1993. He had the opportunity to become Swedish Champion by winning the last-round game in one of these championships, but failed despite obtaining a winning position. His highest FIDE rating was 2440 which was achieved in 1994.

He has been a member of one of the strongest clubs in Sweden, SK Rockaden, since 1995. He has played for the first team for nearly twenty years and helped the team to win the Swedish Team Championship on several occasions.

As a chess coach he helped Stefan Winge gain second place in the World Correspondence Chess Championship in 2012 – Winge narrowly missed out on winning the title after failing to convert a clear advantage in the crucial last game. He has been a coach at the Peng Cheng Chess Club in Senzhen, in the south of China. There he helped many players including the Chinese player Zhu Yi who was runner-up in the World Under-12 Championship in 2012.

On a creative level he managed to refute one of the former main lines in the Slav Defence, Winawer Countergambit: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖c3 e5 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♗f3 e4 6 ♗e5 f6 7 ♙a4+ ♗d7 8 ♗g4 ♙f7!! This happened in the game Wiedenkiller-Engqvist, Swedish Championship, Gothenburg 1990. Not long after, Kasparov started to play 4 dxe5 d4 5 ♗e4 ♙a5+ 6 Bd2 and this became the new main line.

His official work is as a teacher at a municipal school. He teaches Swedish as a second language and English. His formal education at university is comparative film, literature and English.

Dedication

To Jun

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Introduction

“I never treated chess as an instrument for achieving great sporting success. For me the most important thing was the inner contents of the fight, the inner state of the two opponents at the board.” – Tigran Petrosian (1929-1984)

The first thing I had to ask myself, before embarking on this project, was why write another book with Tigran Petrosian’s games when this has already been done? The main reason, except for the excellent and pedagogical *Move by Move* format, was to gain a clearer and updated picture of Petrosian’s style and contributions to the chess world.

The most important writings in the Anglo-Saxon world about Petrosian are the six game collections written by: Peter Hugh Clarke, Vik Vasiliev, O’Kelly de Galway, Andy Soltis & Ken Smith, Eduard Shekhtman, and Raymond Keene & Julian Simpole. The first three books were written a relatively long time ago. The books by Clarke (Bell 1964) and O’Kelly (Pergamon 1965) were written five decades ago prior to Petrosian’s win over the formidable Mikhail Botvinnik in 1963. The Russian book by Vasiliev was translated into English for Batsford/RHM by Michael Basman in 1974.

We had to wait until 1990 when another book was written about Petrosian, this time by Soltis & Smith who wrote *Petrosian the Powerful* (Chess Digest). However, surprisingly it didn’t cover any games from 1967-1981. Of great service has been the compilation work by Shekhtman, *The Games of Tigran Petrosian*, in two volumes which covers all the available games from 1942-1983. The game collection *Petrosian vs. the Elite – 71 Victories by the Master of Manoeuvre 1946-1983*, written by Keene & Simpole in 2006, has the value that it covers some games not previously annotated in chess literature.

In 2004 Garry Kasparov published his groundbreaking *My Great Predecessors*. In volume three he opines about Petrosian’s contribution to our chess heritage. Even Kasparov’s painstaking analysis can in some cases be strengthened and adjusted with the help of modern software like *Rybka 4* and *Houdini*.

Some Biographical Details

If this is your first book about Petrosian some background facts are helpful before playing through the games in chronological order, so that you can trace this great player’s development gradually. Petrosian was born on the 17th of June 1929 in Tbilisi, Georgia of Armenian parents. He started to play chess at the relatively late age of twelve. Many of his con-

temporaries like Boris Spassky, Paul Keres and Anatoly Karpov started at the early age of five, or at the age of six like Vassily Smyslov and Bobby Fischer.

Petrosian was taught the game of chess by an unknown boy in the summer of 1941 in a Pioneer's camp. It took him only a year to become one of the strongest players at the Tbilisi Pioneers' Palace. The desire had by then been awakened in him to make a deep study of the game and his first serious chess book was *Chess Praxis* by Nimzowitsch which laid the foundation for his prophylactic style.

Petrosian needed only eleven years to score his first GM-result, so evidently it didn't mean anything that he was a late starter. He became the ninth world champion in 1963, when he defeated Mikhail Botvinnik, and he kept the title until 1969 when he narrowly lost to Spassky. Between these matches he defended the highest title a chess player can achieve by beating Spassky in 1966. Except for 1965 and 1968, when he already was world champion, Petrosian played in every Candidates cycle from 1952 to 1980. No one else has come close this record.

Petrosian's Style

According to the English player and writer P.H. Clarke, in his preface to *Petrosian's Best Games of Chess*, the 9th world champion was a pragmatist. Clarke defines the meaning of that abstract word like this: "One who does what is needed to meet the requirements of a position and, on the whole, makes no attempt to impose his own wishes on it."

Petrosian didn't agree he was a pragmatic player in his *Chess Logic*, and we should respect and pay attention to what he wrote about himself. However, his definition of pragmatism was different: "A pragmatic approach in chess occurs when a chess-player for the sake of the result (win, draw) offers an incorrect sacrifice or performs other manoeuvres of analogous character, leading the opponent into error, and serving an unwarranted gain. In this case victory or draw is not the result of disclosing the truth in chess."

Of course, it's not an easy matter to decode such a great and original player. Botvinnik expressed this opinion too and wrote that it's impossible to decode Petrosian's style. Keene in his book about Petrosian, noted the following characteristics: "Petrosian's more subtle and long-range ploys, designed of course to baffle the opponent, may also end up bewildering the reader; the note of mystery to which Clarke referred, a quality shared by Nimzowitsch amongst Petrosian's intellectual forebears, and one also described by contemporaries as witchcraft."

Later Kasparov wrote: "Petrosian had a very distinctive style, the key to which even the greatest players couldn't locate". When you read such lines from such a formidable player you'll realize that Petrosian is a challenging and enigmatic player to deal with and, above all, to understand.

It's always difficult to pinpoint a chess player's style, particularly a great player who was so strong in all aspects of the game. However, Petrosian is a special case indeed; he's not the player to put an label on even though many have tried to do so. Pal Benko wrote in his biography (*My Life, Games and Compositions*, Siles Press 2003) that Petrosian played strange-

strangely. Botvinnik, sometime after the 1963 match, acknowledged he lost because he couldn't adjust to Petrosian's inexplicable style.

If you think about one of the more popular labels, that Petrosian was a careful player, it really depends on the period of the game or the game itself, as well as his opponent, tournament situation and mood. Another fundamental problem with categorizing a player is that the playing style sometimes changes during a life time.

World-renowned players who radically changed their styles are Adolf Anderssen, Wilhelm Steinitz, Alexander Alekhine and Mikhail Tal. They all changed from an attacking style to a more positional conduct of the game and this is actually a typical trait of many players. After all, we live in a dynamic reality and putting labels on players is too easy a way out, instead of grabbing the bulls by its horns and dealing with the complex reality.

We can find several games where Petrosian undoubtedly took calculated risks, especially against less strong opposition. In this collection I'm especially thinking about Games 47 and 48. If we exclude Petrosian's youth, because young players normally play riskier chess, 1957 is generally regarded as a year when he played risky chess. According to Petrosian himself, he played his strongest chess in the period from 1958-1963, when he was reaching the pinnacle of his talent.

When putting a label on a specific player we actually fall in a trap because we are limiting our outlook of that specific player. This may even include such statements as when Petrosian defended himself of the accusation that he was dull: "They say I play boring chess; I could play more interesting and also lose." This statement doesn't mean he played dull chess and it's not clear what the essence of 'dull chess' means in this context. If you have a cautious and deep positional style does that imply you are a dull player? Petrosian's playing style must be regarded as enigmatic and almost too deep to comprehend even for professionals. You can really feel that his vision of the game had philosophical depth and this is also confirmed, not only from his games, but also from his own writings in *Chess Logic*. His almost perfect intuition of how to attain maximum harmony and flexibility between his pieces may be unsurpassed to this day. One extraordinary example is Game 22, where he really showed that he was the master of harmony.

It's hard to be Petrosian's equal and emulate him since he emphasized and put so much weight on the harmonious factor alone. When you study his games in depth you feel he had his own solutions and evaluations about harmony and the principle of coordination. He had a rare philosophical outlook of how a game of chess should be played. Petrosian was a formidable defensive player, but to be that good in the art of defence you must paradoxically be a very good attacking player. Petrosian had the reputation of being able to withstand an attack before his opponent had even thought about the attack. About this quality, which must be regarded as some kind of sixth sense, Fischer praised him by saying: "Petrosian has a knack of snuffing out such dreams twenty moves before they even enter his opponent's head!". A good example is Game 38. Of course, Petrosian can be regarded a genius in this respect, a genius in his own right. Together with Capablanca he has the reputation of being the hardest player to beat in chess history.

Petrosian and the Impact of Chess Psychology

A further aspect of the game is the impact of psychology, i.e. the consideration of the opponent and the analysis of his strengths and weaknesses. Surprisingly little in chess literature has been written about Petrosian's attitude regarding psychology. The aforementioned Fischer quotation possibly says something important about Petrosian's general state of mind.

Psychology was most probably one important part of Petrosian's overall method of dealing with his opponents and he was probably more influenced by Lasker's psychological approach than is commonly supposed. It seems he didn't ignore psychological factors to the extent that Bobby Fischer did, who famously said: "I don't believe in psychology, only in good moves." Or José Raúl Capablanca who put most emphasis on technical issues, or Aki-ba Rubinstein who was preoccupied with finding the best moves.

Of course, these examples may be seen as generalizations because even Fischer occasionally played psychologically. During the 1972 world championship it wasn't easy for Spassky to predict Fischer's choice of openings. If we study Petrosian's games carefully we notice how he always tried to play openings which didn't fully suit his opponents and in this way he prevented his opponents from playing on their home ground. Instructive examples are Games 30 and 41, but there are many other examples too on this topic.

Another interesting aspect of psychology is that you can often observe in Petrosian's games moves without any apparent meaning, the so called art of 'doing nothing'. Maybe this is actually what Benko was referring to when he called Petrosian's playing style "strange". One of the ideas of the concept of doing nothing is that as long as the equilibrium is not disturbed, you can sometimes play the most incomprehensible move available of the reasonable options. The main motive is to confuse the opponent and thus lay the psychological foundation to out manoeuvre them.

My overall ambition has been to be as explicit as possible in my annotations when I have discovered such 'doing nothing' moments in the games of our hero. In many positions in Petrosian's games there were several playable moves and sometimes he played moves which most players would disregard automatically. In this way Petrosian's vision of the game was different, but also more profound and deeper. He sometimes considered and even played superfluous moves, ones that normally are not part of a player's vision, lying outside the box.

Of course this had a huge psychological impact on his opponents, as well as those watching, who, from time to time, had to expect the least expected move. Boris Spassky said he had great problems foreseeing Petrosian's moves in their match. Spassky also said that "It is to Petrosian's advantage that his opponents never know when he is going to play like Mikhail Tal."

Petrosian created his own reality and expressed his beliefs through his chess. He created a reality on the chessboard that was a projection of his own creative will. He was above all an expert in the art of waiting for the opponent's mistakes. Even in clearly won positions he had the ability to show patience and not to hurry. However, sometimes he waited too long, instead of forcing the play in his favour, as in Game 19.

Petrosian's Contributions

Petrosian has pointed out that he was playing according to the following programme: “Restriction of the opponent’s possibilities [prophylactic play], strategic play over the entire board, the encirclement and gradual tightening of the ring around the enemy king”.

Indeed, his contribution to the area of prophylactic chess was considerable. A game where he defends against an attack many moves in advance for the purpose of weakening it is Game 8. Elsewhere Game 13 is a very interesting game for the perspective of prophylaxis, but of course there are many other games where he used the device of prophylaxis since it was part of his general strategy.

Another contribution connected with Petrosian is the exchange sacrifice. However, in the case of Petrosian the exchange sacrifice was sometimes an exchange for *nothing* and that was his revolutionary idea. Sometimes he undertook a positional exchange sacrifice without obtaining anything dynamic in return. A famous game which ended in a draw is Reshevsky-Petrosian, Zurich 1953, which isn’t found in this collection. In this collection you can study Games 15, 29, 35, 39, 40 and 59 if you are especially interested in his exchange sacrifices.

Quite often too Petrosian was focused on a weak complex of squares of the same colour. There are many instructive examples of this like Games 4, 12, 18 and 59.

Regarding his view of chess, Petrosian said that chess was chess and must be treated according to iron logic. Another formulation by him was: “Chess is a game by its form, an art by its content and a science by the difficulty of gaining masters in it.” According to Nikolai Krogius, logic received a new interpretation in Petrosian’s games.

As a matter of fact Petrosian even wrote a dissertation called *Chess Logic – Some Problems of the Logic of Chess Thought* (Yerevan 1968), where he ascertained that “a correct philosophic treatment of the nature of chess may even influence directly the practical strength.”

The complication with solving a chess position is that there are several logical systems available and the chess player must be aware about these methods simultaneously. Games 34 and 39 are instructive examples showing Petrosian’s deep interpretation of dynamic strategy. One critical position in Game 39 compares how Petrosian actually solved a positional problem and how Capablanca hypothetically would have played. The pedagogical idea is to obtain a better understanding of the meaning of dynamic strategy, so as to be able to trace this idea in other games. This was a very important contribution by Petrosian which supplemented the theories of Steinitz. Petrosian was to a great extent walking in the footsteps of Nimzowitsch who also supplemented Steinitz’s theories, but Petrosian went beyond Nimzowitsch’s ideas.

Petrosian's Handling of the Pieces

One possible solution to the enigma of Petrosian’s original way of playing chess may be that he handled the pieces and pawns in a different and more delicate manner compared with other players. Like Francois-André Danican Philidor, pawns were extremely sensitive

and important to him, for the simple reason that they can't move backwards once they have moved forward. When you move a pawn you must be sure you don't need it in that last position anymore. One very typical game where Petrosian put great emphasis on playing brilliantly with his pawns is Game 34. Victor Korchnoi once expressed the view that against Petrosian you must be cautious with your pawns.

The pieces require another kind of treatment compared with the pawns. If the position isn't time sensitive, you can in reality move the pieces anywhere on the board because they can move backwards and in all directions when needed to. One typical example is the variation in the French Defence which was sometimes played by Petrosian: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 b6 5 a3 and now the extraordinary move 5...♙f8!. You can also answer 5 ♙g4 or even 5 ♘f3, which contains no threat, with 5...♙f8. The position after the blocking 4 e5 is not so time sensitive and so ...♙f8 becomes a logical possibility to maintain flexibility in the position with future pawn breaks like ...c5 and/or ...f6.

It was certainly a typical trait for Petrosian as a whole to keep maximum flexibility in his position. In general terms, if we in a random position move a bishop to g2, it can still move to an adjacent diagonal at any moment if needed to; we can play ♙h3 and occupy the diagonal h3-c8, or ♙f1 to control the diagonal f1-a6. The idea is to use the bishop maximally instead of just using the diagonal h1-a8 as a springboard for manoeuvring. Such small manoeuvres on the adjacent diagonals Petrosian used to the outmost.

Petrosian also played very skilfully with his knights. I especially recommend Games 6, 25 and 30 here. One of his most original manoeuvres on ranks and files with a major piece takes place in Game 14 where he used his queen's rook in a highly striking manner. This game is regarded as one of his best. When I played through Petrosian's games I was particularly impressed how he played with his rooks. I don't refer to mysterious rook moves à la Nimzowitsch, but rather mysterious rook moves à la Petrosian. This is an important development as he took Nimzowitsch's art of playing with rooks to an even higher level.

In this respect I'm especially impressed by Games 12, 13 and 14 which were played during 1954-1955. However, if you look at the mysterious Game 58 Petrosian didn't even move his rooks during the whole game. It's not easy to understand why he didn't play the natural and best queen's rook check at a crucial moment, but the other rook on h1 managed to be developed without being moved.

Finally, Petrosian played originally with his king in many games and this is one of his trademarks. There are many examples, but some highlights are Games 29, 30, 36, 47, 48 and 57. Some games where he showed nice touches with the queen are Games 8 and 22, while the attacking Game 24 contains a beautiful queen manoeuvre from a geometrical perspective. The reason Petrosian was so skilful with handling the pieces was because he valued flexibility very highly and this is one of the key words to think about when studying his games.

Acknowledgments

I'm truly grateful to John Emms who gave me the opportunity to write my first chess book about one of my favourite players. Without the faithful support of my beloved wife Jun the book would never have become a reality. My goal has primarily been to write a book I wanted to read myself and I hope many readers will realize the many chess insights I've discovered while studying Petrosian and which I now want to share with you, dear reader.

My good friend, the violinist and chess enthusiast Jacob Engelstoft, has suggested that I should tell you my ten favourite Petrosian games. My personal favourites in chronological order are: Games 12, 13, 22, 28, 30, 34, 39, 41, 43 and 57. Of course I'm fond of the other 50 games as well, but if I have to suggest 10 games it would be the aforementioned ones. So here is a short cut if for some worldly reason you don't have time to play through them all.

I wish you a happy and exciting adventure when you play through Petrosian's games. My recommendation is that you stop after every question, exercise and diagram because it's particularly at these moments that you can compare your own ideas with the mighty Tigran's. I can guarantee that a diligent study of Petrosian's games will increase your playing strength, enrich your play and, above all, put your opponents at a serious disadvantage if they haven't read this book. Now let us start...

Thomas Engqvist,
Sweden,
April 2014

Chapter Two

The Move to Moscow

In the autumn of 1949 Petrosian moved to Moscow. “He was dressed in a light coat, summer shoes and had a few chess books under his arm – these were all he owned.” In the 17th USSR Championship he won four games, lost eight and drew seven. Those games were invaluable lessons for his shining future since he met giants like Bronstein, Smyslov, Geller, Taimanov and others.

In an amazingly short time Tigran managed to develop from a promising master into one of the Candidates for the world championship. Here he plays one of the tail-enders, the very experienced grandmaster Grigory Yakovlevich Levenfish (1889-1961), who was 60 years old at the time. He was famous for his deep knowledge of rook endings which also was his favourite ending. He wrote the famous work *Rook Endings* together with Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov (1921-2010), which was published in 1957.

Game 5 G.Levenfish-T.Petrosian USSR Championship, Moscow 1949 *King's Indian Defence*

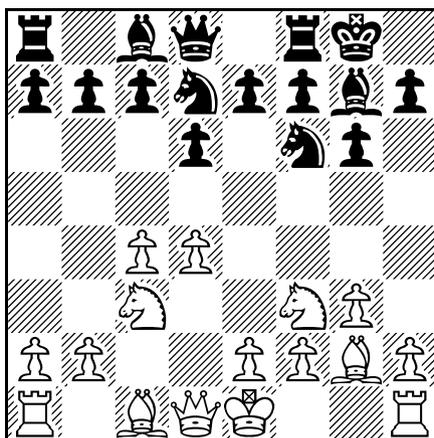
1 d4 ♘f6 **2 c4** g6 **3** ♗c3 ♕g7 **4 g3**

The advantage of this set-up is that it reduces the attacking chances against the white king.

4...0-0 **5** ♕g2 **d6**

The King's Indian was popularized by Bronstein and Boleslavsky in the 1940s and 1950s. The Candidates tournament in Zurich 1953 was the epitome for the King's Indian revolution where 25% of games were played with this opening. Later on Fischer and Kasparov helped to consolidate this exciting, energy-demanding and dynamic opening.

6 ♖f3 ♗bd7



The classical set-up against the solid fianchetto variation has been used by such players as Kasparov, Bronstein, Najdorf and Geller. The more active knight move 6...♖c6 was popular in the 1960s when Black wanted to provoke d4-d5 in analogy with the Alekhine's Defence. The main variation is 7 0-0 a6 8 h3 ♖b8 followed by ...b5 with sharp play.

7 0-0 e5 8 e4 ♖e8

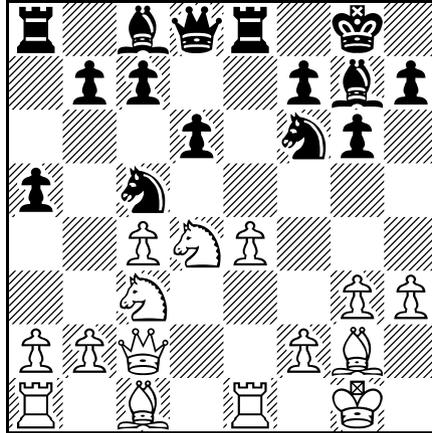
A typical move in the King's Indian to provoke White into blockading d4-d5. Black would then step back with the rook to f8 and play for the ...f7-f5 break.

The most common variation nowadays is 8...c6 9 h3 ♗b6.

9 ♖e1

Two rounds later S.Furman-T.Petrosian continued 9 ♗e3 ♖g4 10 ♗g5 f6 11 ♗c1 ♖h6 12 h3 ♖f7 13 ♗e3 ♖f8 14 ♗d2 ♖e6 15 d5. By subtly manoeuvring Black had managed to provoke White from releasing the tension in the centre. If White didn't play the immediate d4-d5, Black would on his next turn play ...c5 and force the d4-pawn to make a decision under worse circumstances because of the possible knight jump to d4. The game continued 15...♖eg5 16 ♖xg5 ♖xg5 17 f4 exf4 18 gxf4 ♖f7 by when Black had equalized.

9...a5 10 h3 exd4 11 ♖xd4 ♖c5 12 ♗c2



Exercise: Where would you like to move the knight on f6 in this position?

Answer: 12...♞g4

A clever tactical move which threatens the centralized knight on d4 without allowing White harmonious development with ♕e3 and ♖ad1.

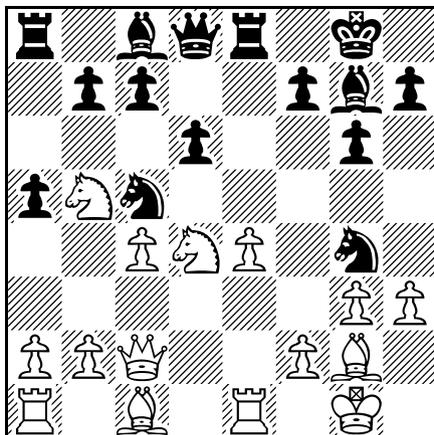
12...♞fxe4? wins a pawn, but the price is high. After 13 ♞xe4 ♕xd4 14 ♕g5 ♖d7 15 ♞f6+ Black must give up his King's Indian bishop with 15...♕xf6 16 ♕xf6 and now it's White who is in charge of the long dark-square diagonal. A piece of advice: never give away your dark-squared bishop unless you are sure what you obtain in return is worth more than the King's Indian bishop.

Another set-up is 12...c6 followed by 13...♞fd7.

13 ♞cb5

Levenfish was normally strong in theory, but now it seems that his tactical inclination tempted him to make a move which mirrors Petrosian's move.

More logical is to put pressure on the important c5-knight with 13 ♞b3 when Black faces an important decision. Either he chooses the quiet 13...♞xb3 which obviously has the disadvantage that the pawn on c4 will be defended as in G.Stahlberg-S.Reshevsky, Zurich 1953, or the sharper 13...♞e5!? 14 ♞xc5 dxc5, which is more in the spirit of the King's Indian Defence, as in I.Lipnitsky-I.Boleslavsky, USSR Championship 1952.



Exercise (critical decision/calculation): After 13 ♖cb5 what is Black's best continuation?

Answer: 13...♗e5

Petrosian's style was sometimes very reminiscent of the great Capablanca when he steered away from complications and played natural moves.

The strong tactical player Levenfish probably calculated 13...♗xf2!? and then:

a) 14 ♖xf2? ♗d3 15 ♖e2 ♗xe1 16 ♖xe1 c6 and White loses material.

b) 14 ♗xf2 c6 15 ♗f4 cxb5 16 ♗xb5 ♖b6 (or 16...♗e6 17 ♗e3) 17 ♗f1 followed by ♗ad1 with mutual chances.

14 ♖d1 c6 15 ♗a3

A more testing move in the spirit of Levenfish's earlier play is to play 15 ♗e3!, with the idea to answer 15...cxb5 with 16 ♗xb5 followed by ♗xd6. However, Petrosian would probably play 15...♗f8, forcing the decentralizing 16 ♗a3 and then at least Black's King's Indian bishop has turned out to be an Old Indian bishop.

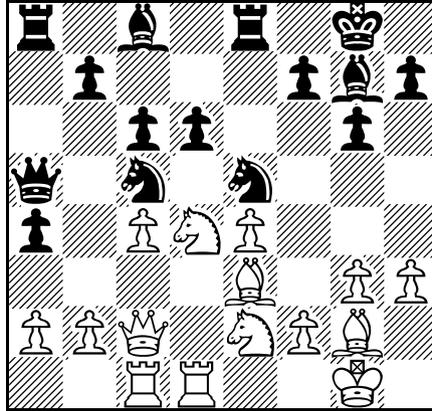
15...♖c7

The white rook is absent from e1 so 15...♖e7 seems more active.

16 ♗e3 ♗ed7

Petrosian cleverly transposes to a normal set-up of the King's Indian where the knight on a3 is misplaced.

17 ♗b1 a4 18 ♗c3 ♗e5 19 ♗ce2 ♖a5 20 ♖ac1

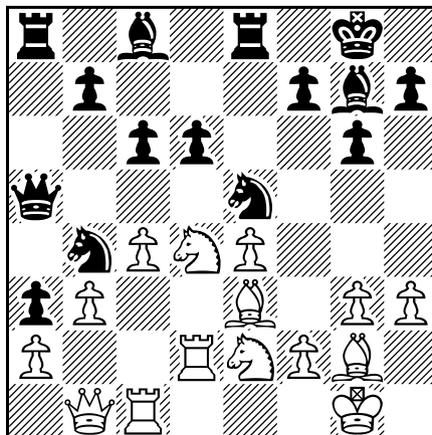


Question: How can Black make progress?

Answer: 20...a3!

This secures the b4-square for a black knight to control important squares on d3 and d5 while putting pressure on the a2-pawn. The a3-pawn might also give the fianchettoed bishop an outpost on b2 and, above all, lay the foundation for marvellous variations which wouldn't be possible without this pawn. This is what happens if you give Black too much freedom to do what he wants.

21 b3 ♘a6 22 ♖d2 ♞b4 23 ♙b1



Exercise (critical decision/calculation): How can Black exploit his more active position? Warning: this is a difficult one!

23...d5?

Answer: Extraordinary complications would arise from 23...c5! 24 ♖c2 (if 24 ♖b5 d5! with the point 25 exd5?? ♙f5 and Black is winning; when Black manages to activate all his minor pieces in this fashion there are normally one or several tactical motifs inherent in the position, and in such positions you need to think: if you seek, you will find) 24...♙xh3! 25 ♙xh3 ♖xa2! 26 ♚xa2 ♜f3+ 27 ♚g2 ♜xd2 28 b4 cxb4 29 ♙xd2 ♙b2 30 ♙xb4 ♚e5 by now with an equal position.

These variations give you a picture of how difficult it is to play an opening like the King's Indian. I suggest you check the variations with your computer to see how rich the King's Indian really is in its play, rather than that I show you a lot of meaningless variations.

24 cxd5 cxd5 25 exd5?

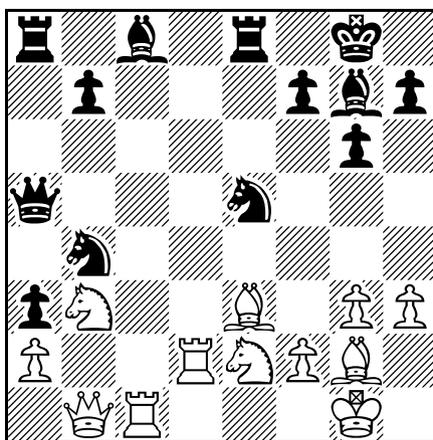
The confounded knight on e2 ought to have moved back to c3 where it belongs, thereby putting pressure on the centre.

25...♜xd5

Black can be happy having two centralized knights in the centre.

26 b4 ♜xb4 27 ♖b3

White wants to unsettle the black queen, but his position is not easy when it comes to concrete variations.



Exercise: Where to place the queen?

27...♚b5?

The wrong square.

Answer: 27...♚a6 is objectively better with a balanced game and may even have led to a draw by repetition after 28 ♜c5 ♚a5 29 ♖b3.

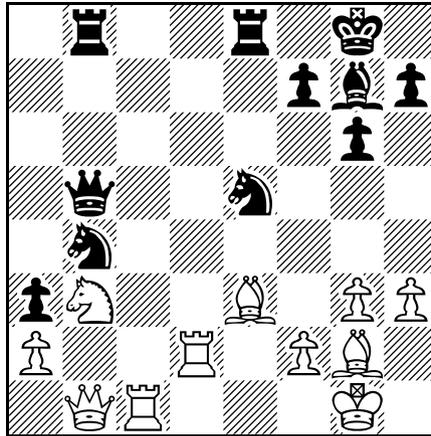
28 ♜ed4! ♚a4 29 ♜c5 ♚a5 30 ♖xb7?

Better is 30 ♖e4!, giving White two strong centralized knights with strong positional pressure on the black position. Particularly the knight on b4 is a problem for Black as he has no pawn to support it. If the other knight supports it with 30...♗ec6 then the variation 31 ♜c5 ♜a4 32 ♘b5 is problematic.

30...♙xb7 31 ♙xb7

The tricky 31 ♘b3 ♜b5 32 ♜c5 ♜a6 33 ♜a5 ♜f6 34 ♙xb7 doesn't change the state of affairs. The long and relatively forced variation 34...♜ab8 35 ♙d4 ♜xb7 36 ♙xe5 ♜xe5 37 ♜a8+ ♙f8 38 ♜dd8 ♜e2 39 ♜xf8+ ♙g7 40 ♜g8+ ♙h6 41 ♜c1+ g5 42 f4 ♜b6+ 43 ♜c5 ♜xc5+ 44 ♘xc5 ♜b5 45 fxf5+ ♙h5 wins for Black.

31...♜ab8 32 ♘b3 ♜b5 33 ♙g2



Exercise: How should Black decide the game?

Answer: 33...♗c4!

Better than 33...♗xa2 34 ♜xa2 ♜xb3 35 ♜xb3 ♜xb3 36 ♙d5 which isn't so convincing.

34 ♜xc4

The variations 34 ♜e2 ♗xe3 35 ♜xe3 ♜xe3 36 fxe3 ♜e2 and 34 ♙f1 ♗xd2 also win easily for Black.

34...♜xc4 35 ♙f1 ♜c3 36 ♙f4 ♙e5 37 ♙xe5 ♜xe5 38 ♜d1 ♗xa2! 0-1

The knight on b3 was certainly a unfortunate piece in this game and the knight on b4 was really something.

Petrosian's debut in the final of the USSR Championship resulted in 16th place out of the 20 participants. However, the most important lesson he obtained for the future was the importance of continuous meetings with grandmasters and masters.

Game 6
V. Simagin-T. Petrosian
Moscow Championship 1950
Nimzo-Indian Defence

The original and strong combinative player Vladimir Pavlovich Simagin (1919-1968) was a careful analyst with as deep a theoretical knowledge as it was diversified. He became an International Master in 1949 and Grandmaster in 1962. They played each other on 17 serious occasions and Petrosian won ten, lost one and drew the rest. Here is the first game Petrosian won.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4

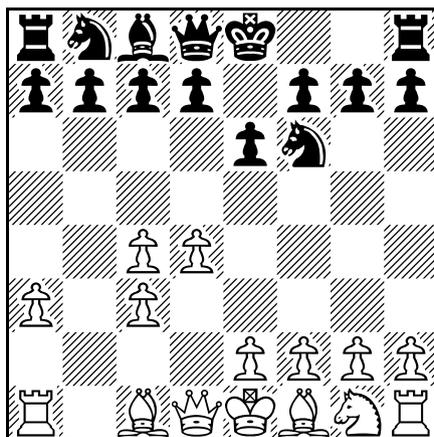
The Nimzo-Indian Defence is a solid opening, hindering White's expansion in the centre with e2-e4 and at the same time keeping Black's own pawn centre flexible.

4 a3

The Sämisch variation baptized after the German Grandmaster Fritz Sämisch (1896-1975) is a sharp method of securing the two bishops and obtaining many chances in the centre. However, the price is to waste a tempo and at the same time make a rather useless move. The pawn is better placed on a2 where it might secure an outpost for a knight on b3 in some positions. The most historically famous game is F.Sämisch-E.Grünfeld, Karlsbad 1929, which Sämisch won in enterprising style.

During the 1950s the Sämisch was actually regarded as one of the most dangerous weapons, but nowadays it's not so popular. More popular is the traditional 4 ♙c2 or the more quiet 4 e3 (Rubinstein's variation), although this has the disadvantage that it allows the ultra-solid Hübner variation: 4...c5 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 ♙d3 ♙xc3+ 7 bxc3 d6.

4...♙xc3+ 5 bxc3



5...♖c6!?

This very difficult treatment of the Sämisch was popular at the time. Among its practitioners were players like Smyslov and Keres. Black wants to put pressure on the weak pawn on c4 immediately with the plan ...b6, ...♙a6 and ...♖a5. This plan is risky since Black will lose time and White can use this time to build a strong centre and create conditions for a dangerous attack on the kingside.

A relatively modern game in the Sämisch would continue 5...0-0 (or 5...c5 immediately) 6 e3 c5 7 ♙d3 ♖c6 8 ♗e2 b6 9 e4 ♗e8 10 0-0 ♙a6 11 f4 f5 (Black has to stop White from playing f4-f5) 12 ♖g3. This is one of the tabiya positions in this variation. A.Yusupov-A.Karpov, Linares 1993, continued 12...g6 13 ♙e3 cxd4 14 cxd4 d5 15 cxd5 ♙xd3 16 ♗xd3 fxe4 17 ♗xe4 (or 17 ♖xe4 ♗xd5) 17...♗xd5 18 ♗xd5 exd5 19 ♖ac1 ♖c8 20 f5 ♗d6 21 fxg6 hxg6 22 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8 with an equal game.

6 f3

More aggressive than the set-up beginning with 6 e3 followed by 7 ♙d3 and 8 ♗e2.

6...b6 7 e4 ♙a6 8 ♙g5

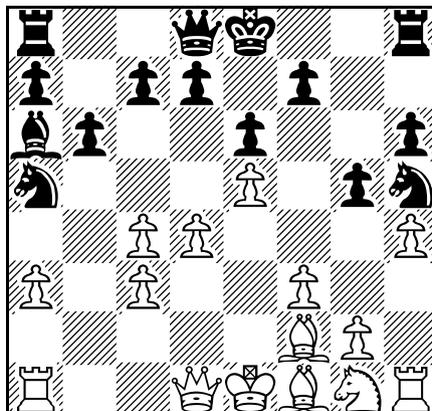
A.Kotov-P.Keres, Budapest 1950, continued more energetically with 8 e5 ♗g8 9 ♗h3 ♗a5 10 ♗a4 ♗e7 11 ♙d3 0-0 12 ♙g5 h6 13 ♙h4 d5 14 ♙b1, with complications.

8...♖a5 9 e5

Y.Geller-V.Smyslov, USSR Championship 1949, continued, after transposition, with 9 ♗a4 h6 10 ♙h4 ♗c8 11 ♗h3 and now Smyslov should have continued 11...♗b7, threatening ...♗xe4. This is one of the points of playing 9...h6, luring the bishop to h4. If White continues with 12 ♙d3 Black has the strong move 12...♗c6.

9...h6 10 ♙h4 g5 11 ♙f2 ♗h5

It's unusual to place both knights on the rim, but it actually also happened in M.Filip-T.Petrosian, Yerevan 1965. The differences between these games is that in this game Petrosian played very actively with his knights, whereas against Filip he manoeuvred the knights back to g7 and b7, but won that game too after deciding the issue with one of his knights.

12 h4

Question: Can Black fight for the initiative?

Answer: 12...f5!

The best way to fight for the initiative. Petrosian didn't want to act as defender after the relatively forced variation 12...♙xc4 13 hxg5 ♖xg5 14 ♘h3 ♗g6 15 g4 ♙xf1 16 ♚xf1 (of course, not 16 gxh5? ♗g2 17 ♜xf1 ♗xh3 and White loses another pawn) 16...♞g7 17 ♘f4, where White has enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn. The black knight on g7 is a very bad piece indeed and it's easy to understand why Petrosian didn't want to enter this position.

13 exf6?

This move only helps Black to find a good location for his queen. Kotov and Yudovich wrote in *The Soviet School of Chess* that White has to continue 13 hxg5 ♖xg5 and now:

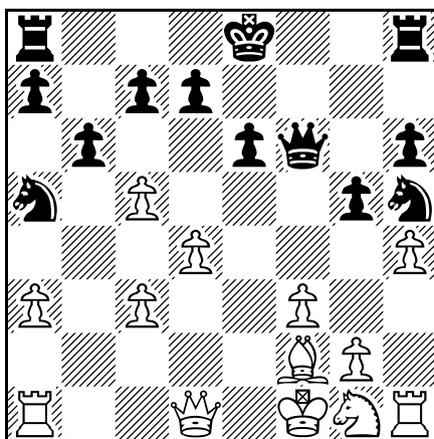
a) 14 ♘h3 ♗g6 15 g4 which retains good play. The triad of the Hungarian analysts, Barcza, Alfödy and Kapu, continued the analysis of this position in *Die Weltmeister des Schackspiels* with 15...fxg4 16 fxg4, but overlooked the obvious 16...♗e4+. Better is 16 ♙d3 ♗f7 17 fxg4 ♘f4 18 ♙e4 (or 18 ♘xf4 ♗xf4 19 ♙g6+ ♚d8) 18...0-0-0 19 ♙h4 d5 with sharp play.

b) 14 g4 fxg4 15 fxg4 ♘f4 16 ♘h3 ♘xh3 17 ♜xh3 ♞g8 18 ♗f3 ♞b8 19 ♙e3 ♖xg4 20 ♗xg4 ♞xg4 21 ♜xh6 with an equal position.

13...♗xf6 14 c5

14 hxg5 hxg5 15 g4 has no effect any more since the rook is defended, so Black continues 15...♘f4.

14...♙xf1 15 ♚xf1



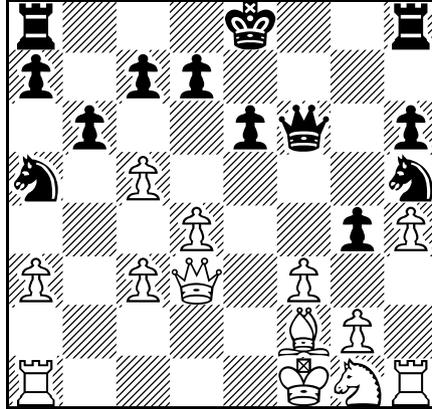
Exercise: What is Black's best move?

Answer: 15...g4!

The active queen and the king's knight on the rim make this pawn break possible. 16 f×g4?? isn't playable because of 16...♘g3+, forking the king and the rook. White will now not be able to develop his king's rook for a very long time.

16 ♖d3

White threatens 17 f×g4 since the g3-square is now defended by the queen.

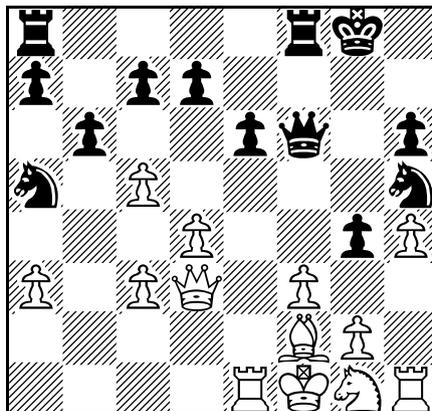


Question: How should Black deal with this?

Answer: 16...0-0!

A radical solution to Black's problems. He prevents the capture on g4 because of the mate on f2 and at the same time he solves all his development problems. What more can you ask for with only one move available? Petrosian normally always had the right timing for when and when not to castle.

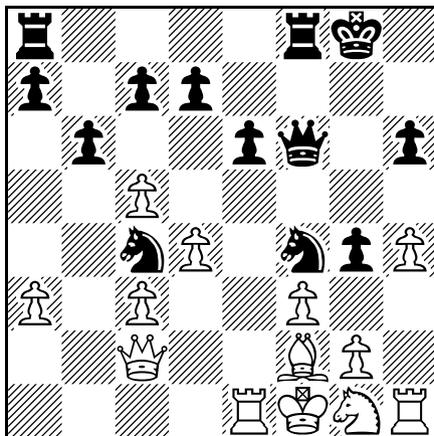
17 ♖e1



Exercise: Can you suggest a continuation for Black over the next two moves?

Answer: 17...♞f4 18 ♚c2 ♞c4!

Both rim knights have now incredibly established themselves on the fifth rank and are controlling important squares really deep in White's territory. It's not common to see two knights on the edge become centralized like this. Petrosian knew how to use all squares available, even distant ones like a5 and h5 when manoeuvring his pieces. Indeed, this position with the knights controlling the squares e2, d2, e3 and d3 deserves a diagram.



19 g3

A beautiful variation demonstrating the strength of the dancing knights is the following variation given by Kotov and Yudovich: 19 fxg4 ♞d3 20 ♜e2 ♞e3+ 21 ♜xe3 ♚xf2+ 22 ♚xf2 ♜xf2#. They think that White could continue his resistance by playing 19 ♟g3, but after the rim move 19...♞h5! 20 ♟f2 ♜ab8 it's only a matter of time until White has to resign. He is practically a rook down with that trapped rook on h1.

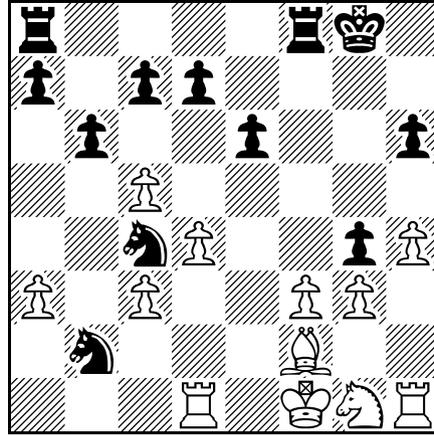
19...♚f5! 20 ♜c1

20 ♚xf5 ♞d2# is another example of the triumphing knights.

20...♚d3+

20...♞d3 also wins.

21 ♚xd3 ♞xd3 22 ♜d1 ♞db2!



Black's 'leapers' ride roughshod over White's position.

23 ♖a1 gxf3

Here White should really have resigned. The rest of the game is not for sensitive souls.

**24 ♘h3 bxc5 25 ♔g1 ♘d3 26 ♔h2 ♖ab8 27 ♖a2 ♗b3 28 dxc5 e5 29 g4 e4 30 g5 e3 31 gxh6
exf2 32 ♘xf2 ♗xf2 33 ♖xf2 ♔h7 34 ♖d1 ♖f7 35 c6 d6 36 ♖d3 ♗b2 37 ♔g3 ♖xf2 38 ♔xf2
♘e5 39 ♖d4 ♘xc6 40 ♖a4 ♔xh6 0-1**

What struck me most with this marvellous game is how well Petrosian handled the pair of knights which was in the spirit of the Russian Grandmaster Chigorin. Petrosian refuted the well-known maxim of Tarrasch who was of the opinion that a knight on the rim is always bad. He's right from a static perspective, but if you look at things dynamically, even corners can be used as a springboard for a manoeuvre deep into enemy territory.

Chess is full of such exceptions to the classical theories and Petrosian was particularly keen at refuting superficial theories in his games while creating his own sense of piece harmony. This game is a really instructive example of his dynamic strategic style.

Game 7

I.Veltmänder-T.Petrosian

USSR Championship, Sverdlovsk 1951

Nimzo-Indian Defence

According to Chessmetrics.com, loganess G. Veltmänder (1921-) was no.79 in the world on the May 1951 rating list. His highest rating was 2553 on the April 1951 rating list.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♔c2

One of the best ways of dealing with the Nimzo-Indian Defence is the Classical variation, but it entails the loss of tempo since the queen was already well placed on d1, protect-