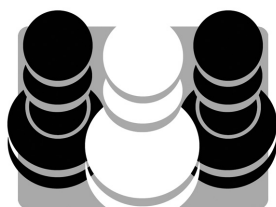


Grandmaster versus Amateur

Edited by

Jacob Aagaard & John Shaw



Quality Chess
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Preface

This is the third collection of essays by various grandmasters that Quality Chess has published, and the first such collection dealing with a topic other than the Sicilian Defence. Once again we were able to assemble an enviable line-up of contributors, each of whom approached the subject in their own way with their own ideas and experiences.

The idea for this book came from our good friend Jesse Gersenson, but the concept is not entirely new. A long time ago Max Euwe authored a book entitled *Chess Master vs. Chess Amateur*. It was only after the project was up and running that we were alerted to the existence of this book. To avoid ripping off the Dutch World Champion we deliberately avoided reading his book, instead preferring to do our own thing, and we hope the readers will agree when we say that the results are pleasing!

The authors and their projects are as follows.

Jacob Aagaard (born 1973 in Denmark)

Danish/Scottish grandmaster with a top rating of 2542. Most notable successes include winning the 2007 British Championship (the tournament where he completed his GM-title) and the Arco Open several times.

As an author his greatest successes have been winning the ChessCafe Book of the Year 2002 for *Excelling at Chess* and more recently the English Chess Federation's Book of the Year 2010 (for *Attacking Manual 1+2*).

Jacob was a co-founder of Quality Chess in 2004.



Unknown amateur congratulates Jacob on winning the ECF Book of the Year at the 2010 London Chess Classic.

Chapter 1 – Danes Eat Fish for Breakfast

Rather than embarrass the audience with national stereotypes, Jacob presents five different scenarios from his own games where grandmasters prevail over amateurs. Along the way he identifies several underlying causes for their success, offering a wealth of practical advice for amateurs wishing to bridge the gap.

Chapter 8 – Fish Eat Danes for Supper

In this chapter Jacob shows some of his least proud moments, as well as explaining how they came about. Rather than turning the chapter into a sea of sick excuses, he uses the examples to highlight the ways in which the amateur can optimize his chances of beating a grandmaster.

Peter Heine Nielsen (born 1973)

Danish grandmaster with a peak rating of 2700. Peter has won a number of opens and the gold medal on board one in the 2005 European Team Championship, but his greatest achievement was undoubtedly reaching the last 16 in the 2011 World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk. Outside the tournament hall Peter has worked regularly with Anand, since shortly after they met in the 2001 World Championship knockout tournament in Moscow. Since 2005 Peter has been Anand's chief second with considerable success, although the World Champion has pointed out that Peter has the drawback of being "impossible to hide" (on account of his towering height).



Chapter 2 – *A Tale of Three Stories*

Peter starts by identifying three typical ways in which a Grandmaster – Amateur game might play out, before providing an example of each scenario from his own practice. With a hearty balance of insight, anecdotes and good humour, Peter's chapter is as entertaining as it is instructive.

Pavel Eljanov (born 1983)

Ukrainian grandmaster with a peak rating of 2761, placing him at sixth in the world at the time. Pavel is a regular on the Ukrainian national team, including its gold medal performance at the Calvia Olympiad in 2004. His biggest tournament success was in May 2010, when he won the Astrakhan Grand Prix tournament by a full point. Recently he seconded Boris Gelfand during his victory in the 2011 Candidates tournament in Kazan.



Chapter 3 – *From Amateur to 2700*

Of the seven contributors to this book, Pavel was the only one who had not previously written for Quality Chess. Nevertheless it quickly became clear that he was a real 'find' for this book, and in this chapter he shares his views on a number of topics, including the role of talent, chess education, psychology, opening preparation and choosing the right plan. The reader is guided through a number of his successes and failures which played a role in his ascension from amateur to world-class grandmaster.

John Shaw (born 1968)

Scottish Grandmaster without a peak rating. (Okay, 2506 then.) John's biggest achievement is that he was rated 1745 at the age of 19, and thus devoid of natural talent, and yet still managed to become a grandmaster at the ripe old age of 37. Over the years John has given such illustrious players as Bacrot, Eljanov and Shirov a tough fight, and eventually a draw as well. He has been a regular on the Scottish national team for almost two decades, and is a three-time Scottish Champion. He wrote two books for Everyman before co-founding Quality Chess in 2004. He is almost finished with his long-awaited treatise on the King's Gambit and promises it will be out soon...

**Chapter 4 – From 1700 to Grandmaster – and Back**

In his characteristically humorous and self-deprecating style, John describes his journey towards the Grandmaster title, offering plenty of personal insights into the reasons for both his successes and shortcomings.

Boris Avrukh (born 1978 in Kazakhstan)

An Israeli grandmaster with a peak rating of 2668, Boris was a regular for the Israeli team from 1998 to 2009. During this period he won both gold and bronze individual medals, as well as the overall silver medal with the team at the Dresden 2008 Olympiad. Boris is the winner of numerous open tournaments and a renowned theoretician. In recent years he has written four highly acclaimed books in the hugely successful *Grandmaster Repertoire* series, and has worked as a trainer and second for World Champions of yesterday and tomorrow alike.

**Chapter 5 – The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**

In this chapter Boris presents five highly instructive games, exploring the various factors that contributed to the respective successes of both the grandmasters and the amateurs. The games have been divided into three categories, each of which has been named after a famous movie, for no particular reason apart from sounding more interesting.

Tiger Hillarp Persson (born 1970)

A Swedish Grandmaster with a peak rating of 2618, Tiger is known for his deeply original and creative approach to chess. He has won many opens and has been a regular on the Swedish national team since the mid-nineties. Tiger's fame stems not so much from the final results of his games, but more for their unusually rich content. Win, lose or draw, he is never boring. Aside from his active playing career he also found time to write *Tiger's Modern* (Quality Chess 2005), which was widely acclaimed.

**Chapter 6 – *The Ulysses Effect***

Never one to take the conventional route, Tiger begins with a bizarre-sounding quote from James Joyce's classic novel. He then examines the meaning and reveals how it helped him to raise his chess level from that of an aspiring amateur to a sabre-toothed grandmaster!

Mihail Marin (born 1964)

Romanian grandmaster with a peak rating of 2616. Mihail has represented Romania in ten Olympiads and won an individual bronze medal in 1988. Although he has been successful in his long playing career, his main achievements have been away from the board. He has for example worked as Judit Polgar's second, including at the 2005 San Luis World Championship, the only occasion in chess history when a woman has taken part in a World Championship contest.

While admitting a certain bias, we would argue that Mihail's greatest achievements of all are his books. *Learn from the Legends* (Quality Chess 2004) won the ChessCafe.com Book of the Year award in 2005. IM Jeremy Silman said in his review "I can't recall having seen a better book in the last two decades." More recently Mihail wrote three volumes on the English Opening in the *Grandmaster Repertoire* series, which inspired a number of top-level players to include this opening in their repertoires.



Chapter 7 – *It's an Amateur's World!*

In this, the penultimate chapter of the book (the last being Jacob's second chapter as detailed above), Mihail paints a warm and engaging picture of two amateurs, Dr Victor Țacu ("the good Doc") of Romania and Jose Miguel Ridameya Tatche ("Don Josep") of Spain. Mihail has become acquainted with both of these enthusiastic amateurs over the years, both personally and over the board. After reflecting on his own career, including his experiences with these two colourful characters, Mihail's conclusion is perfectly summed up by the chapter title!

We hope that this book will be enjoyed by grandmasters and amateurs alike, and without further ado, we invite the reader to turn the page and get started.

Andrew Greet,
Quality Chess
Glasgow, October 2011

Key to symbols used

| | |
|----|--------------------------------|
| ± | White is slightly better |
| ∓ | Black is slightly better |
| ± | White is better |
| ∓ | Black is better |
| +− | White has a decisive advantage |
| −+ | Black has a decisive advantage |
| = | equality |
| ± | with compensation |
| ↔ | with counterplay |
| → | with attack |
| ↑ | with initiative |
| ∞ | unclear |
| ? | a weak move |
| ?? | a blunder |
| ! | a good move |
| !! | an excellent move |
| !? | a move worth considering |
| ?! | a move of doubtful value |
| □ | only move |
| # | mate |

Mihail Marin

It's an Amateur's World



After graduating from the Polytechnic Institute back in 1989, I finally found myself in a position I had dreamed about for a long time: that of being able to dedicate most of my available time to studying and playing chess. My results over the final years of studentship strongly suggested the possibility of embracing the chess professional life, but, quite paradoxically, my next important 'move' took me entirely in the opposite direction. Indeed, how else could one describe my decision to spend the next season of the Romanian Team Championship playing for a modest second division team, comprised of amateurs, despite having been offered attractive contracts by the strongest first division teams?

It is hard to remember my exact train of thought from more than twenty years ago, but I must have had my own rather subjective reasons of taking such an important decision. The 1987 team championship had caused me a deep feeling of frustration. Despite being the only Romanian player to have qualified for the Interzonal, I was confined to play on the fifth board. According to the Romanian Federation rules, the teams had to field their players in the strict order of their international title. By the time the championship took place, I was still a FIDE Master, waiting for the next FIDE congress in order to be awarded with the International Master title. True, in 1988 I was promoted to the second board, but I was probably too immature to put the aforementioned unpleasant situation behind me.

My decision to step back to an inferior level two years later was meant as some sort of moral compensation for my seriously injured ego. Finally, I would be the unchallenged top board of my team and cause great fear among my opponents! As expected, I scored an "astronomical" result (all my opponents were

mere amateurs), but the draw conceded in the game below was the main reason for my team's failure to qualify for the first division.

Țacu – Marin

Romania 1989

Victor Țacu is the most colourful Romanian chess amateur I have ever met, and one that perfectly suits the inner meaning of the term. Despite being a successful medical doctor, his true lifetime passion has always been chess.

Obviously the time he could dedicate to chess was quite limited, but he nevertheless aimed to maintain a professional attitude towards his beloved hobby. There is a small paradox involved here. Sometimes, only an amateur can really break free of any inhibitions and play a move just because he believes in it, or he likes it, even though the ultimate consequences cannot be predicted and the risks involved are quite big.

Dr Țacu always tried to keep up with the newest theoretical developments and he was always among the first Romanian players to get the latest *NIC Yearbook* or *Chess Informant*. About thirty years ago, when I was a teenage Candidate Master, he allowed me to step into what he considered his chess sanctuary. I remember the image of a room in which there was hardly any breathing space left. All the walls were covered by shelves overloaded with chess books, and the majority of the floor also was employed for the same storage purpose!

In fact, new (or very old) books as well as new opening ideas are among Dr Țacu's favourite subjects of conversation. Even nowadays, at the age of 72, he orders a bunch of Quality Chess books every few months and calls me regularly asking for advice regarding one new title or another. The balance between our general chess culture and knowledge has not always been like that, though. In the early

eighties we once met in the centre of Bucharest by pure chance and he told me in a low voice, as if to keep the secret from the people passing by us, "They've got Bronstein's Zurich '53 in Russian at the Crețulescu library – go there quickly and buy one for yourself! Tomorrow it may be sold out!" I am ashamed to confess that I had no idea what he was speaking about, but got the book anyway. It took me several years to understand the value of this book, my excuse being that at that time I had not learned Russian yet!

Despite the friendship we had developed since we first met, I sat down for the next game with just one result on my mind: a crushing win.

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 d6 4.♗c3 g6 5.e4 ♕g7

This variety of Benoni, characterized by a delayed ...e6, was regularly employed by Karel Hromadka and rightly bears his name. During the 1980s it became something of a Romanian specialty as it was used regularly by grandmasters Gheorghiu and Ghițescu. The latter offered to be my trainer when I was a Candidate Master, and thanks to his help I was able to qualify for the Interzonal seven years later.

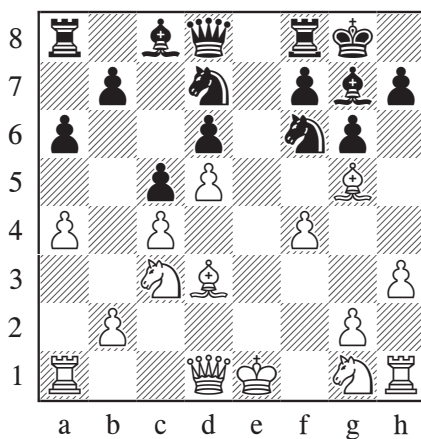
As a devoted amateur, faithful to the national values, my opponent also played the Hromadka System on a regular basis. As we will see, this was far from the only Romanian specialty in his repertoire.

6.h3 0–0 7.♗g5 e6 8.♗d3 exd5 9.exd5 ♗bd7 10.f4 a6 11.a4

The systems of development based on h2-h3 against the King's Indian (to which we have transposed after exd5) is usually attributed to Makogonov by theoreticians. In Romania however, many consider the combination of h3 with ♗g5 as a national variation, and not without reason. Top Romanian players have employed it regularly over more than

half a century; from its recent heroes I would mention the ever stubborn (in a good sense) Mihai Șubă.

White's approach is quite ambitious. He aims to restrict Black's minor pieces and get a stable space advantage. Ever since I began searching for an antidote, I had the feeling that White's decision to make so many pawn moves with his king still in the centre should enable Black to obtain promising counterplay.



11...♔e8†!

Black has to escape the pin immediately if he is to cause problems to his opponent. If White is given time to complete his development with ♗ge2 and 0–0, he should be able to consolidate his space advantage.

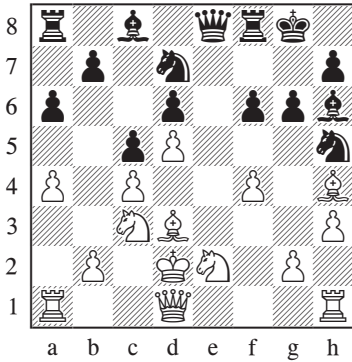
12.♗ge2 ♗h5!

By threatening ...f6 followed by ...♗xf4, Black keeps his momentum and questions the position of the g5-bishop.

13.♗e4

This was played almost instantly. My opponent seemed to know what he was doing; indeed I also had come to the conclusion that the text move is the critical test to the whole line. White has several other possibilities to parry the threat, but none of them is entirely satisfactory.

13.♔d2 is quite weird, as the king will need a lot of time to reach a safe square. 13...f6 14.♕h4 ♕h6!



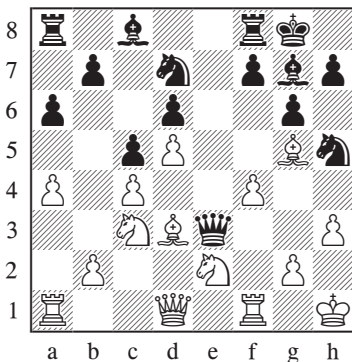
Immediately exerting some pressure against His Majesty. 15.♖f1 f5 16.g3 ♘df6 Black is close to completing his development while White's forces lack coordination, Partoş – Korchnoi, Bucharest 1966.

In a relatively strong student tournament, I had faced 13.♔f2. In this case the opposition of the f8-rook with the white king gives Black the opportunity to commence active kingside operations: 13...f6 14.♕h4 g5 15.♕g3 f5 Black was developing a nice initiative in Vasilescu – Marin, Bucharest 1986.

The most natural move is:
13.0–0

However, this does not solve the problem of the g5-bishop, which becomes apparent after:

13...♖e3† 14.♔h1



14...♘e5!

This move had been mentioned by Partoş in his annotations to the game mentioned in the note to Black's 17th move below. Almost twenty years later, Mihai Şubă allowed this trick in a rapid game against Judit Polgar (at Debrecen 1992 if I remember correctly). Despite being a specialist of the Romanian system, he apparently did not know the analysis of his former countryman. This unpleasant experience induced him to switch to the 10.♘f3 ♖e8† 11.♔f1 line.

Partoş's analysis continues:

15.fxe5 ♗xg5 16.exd6 f5!†

Black has excellent play on the dark squares.

As we see, Romanian players of different generations have been trying to make the line work and Dr Țacu must have been aware of most of the analysis given above.

The move played in the game is largely a product of the process of elimination. Since the alternatives all offer Black good play, the knight move is the only serious option remaining. But even this is not enough to guarantee a smooth ride for White. The delay in development and the weaknesses left behind by the kingside pawns make this whole line rather suspicious for him and, as Dr Tarrasch was kind enough to point out, "In bad positions all moves are bad!"

Concretely, White threatens the deadly ♘xd6, forcing Black to adopt radical measures.

13...f6 14.♕h4 ♘xf4!

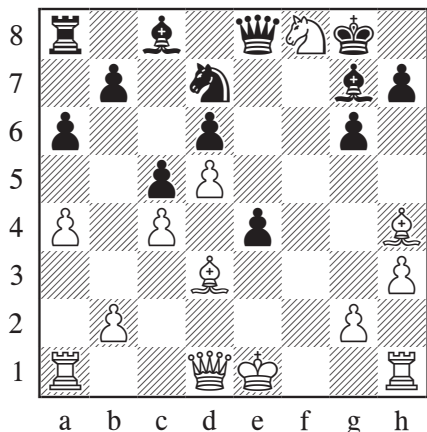
A thematic move, underlining the fact that White has neglected to castle.

15.♘xf4 f5 16.♘e6

An important element in White's plan. The e6-square is used to obstruct the e-file, at least temporarily.

16...fxe4 17.♘xf8

All these moves were played rather quickly, and it was here that I finally delivered my novelty.



17...exd3!

Correctly evaluating the dynamic factors of the position. White will either remain with his king in the centre or give up another pawn or two.

The less enterprising 17...♖xf8?! also offered Black some compensation for the exchange, although he eventually lost in Partoş – Ostojic, Bucharest 1973.

18.♖e6

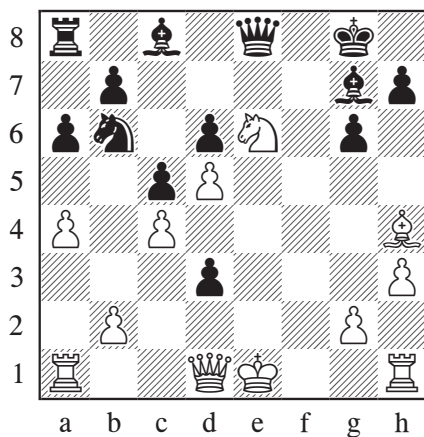
The knight returns to block the e-file. In fact, the whole assessment of the position depends largely on the knight's stability. Unfortunately I was unable to find my old notes and cannot remember my original analysis, but I recall that rather soon I was on unknown territory.

18...♖b6!

An important move. Several white pawns are hanging now, and there is a threat to shake White's position with ...♗xe6.

By this moment, I fully expected that my opponent would understand the seriousness of his situation and go down psychologically

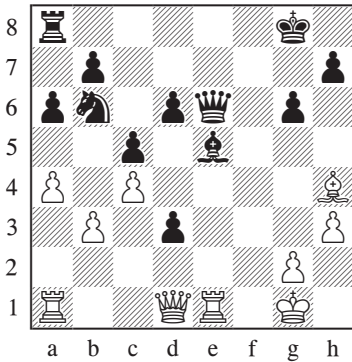
rather quickly. I was thus surprised to notice that the good Doc maintained his initial excitement. His body language seemed to suggest that he considered his position as quite promising, which I must confess I found rather irritating. Only now I understand that this interpretation could have been correct if my opponent had been a professional player. As an amateur, Dr Țacu enjoyed the thrill of competing in a complicated game against a much stronger player with every beat of his heart, possibly without thinking too much about the objective evaluation of the position.



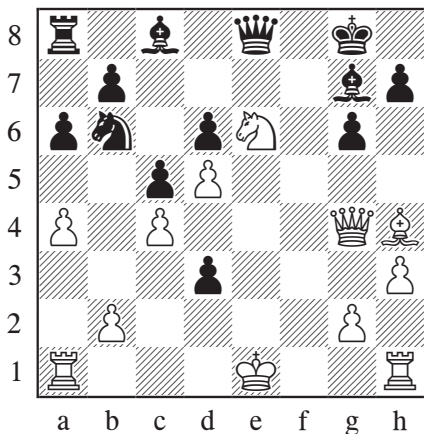
19.♗g4!

Just as with 13.♖e4, this is the most principled move, aiming to maintain the outpost on e6. And just as on that occasion, it tends to increase White's problems, since his previous play has been a bit too adventurous.

In my comments for *Chess Informant*, I suggested 19.0–0 as a safer way out of the complications. After 19...♗xe6 20.♖e1 ♗e5 21.dxe6 ♗xe6, White should avoid 22.♗xd3 ♖xc4, with two pawns for the exchange and excellent piece coordination for Black. Instead, the critical move is 22.b3!?, aiming to restrict the enemy knight. I had ended my comments with this last move, without giving any clear evaluation.



For the sake of the truth, it should be mentioned that Black retains a strong initiative with: 22...♖f5! 23.♖a2 ♕f4 The threat of ...♗h2† forces White to block the bishop's retreat, leaving it in a delicate situation. 24.g3 ♗d4† Black has completed his centralization and has several promising plans at his disposal. He can sacrifice his knight on c4, obtaining a threatening pawn majority, or open the centre with the more cautious ...d5. The h4-bishop can be molested with ...h6, and ...♖f8 at any moment would increase the pressure against White's position.



19...♕d4!

Preventing White from castling. It is interesting to note that both kings are under some pressure and the final result will largely depend on who will be able to deliver concrete threats first.

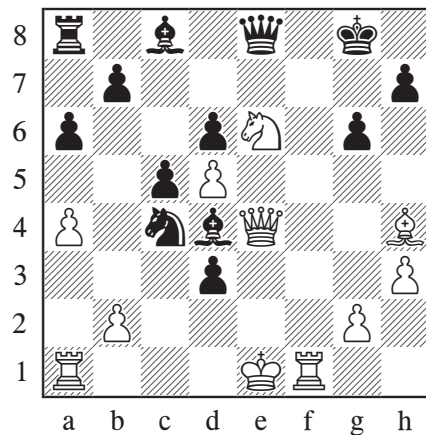
20.♖f1

The only reasonable move, but it is quite symptomatic of White's poor coordination that he does not threaten ♖f8† yet, as the knight is pinned along the c8-g4 diagonal.

In my comments I had mentioned 20.♖c1?! as a possible alternative. Just as 22.b3 from the earlier variation, this is aimed at preventing the knight's activation via c4, but after 20...♗xa4 the threat of ...♗b4† immediately puts White in a critical position.

20...♗xc4 21.♖e4

Finally the threat of ♖f8† has become real and Black has to eliminate the enemy knight.



21...♗xe6 22.dxe6

The net surrounding the white king is tighter than that of his counterpart, but White only needs one move (e6-e7) to create the decisive threats of ♖f8† and ♗e6†.

22...♗c6?!

Possibly intimidated by the great enthusiasm my opponent continued to exude, I started to panic. The plan of transferring the queen to a5 or b4 is rather slow, and Black should have opted for a more forcing continuation.

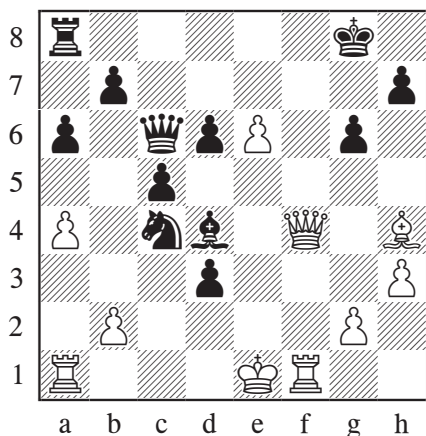
The simplest is 22...d5!. White needs to

keep the e6-pawn defended in order to avoid immediate disaster, but after 23.♖xd5 (or 23.♖g4) 23...♗e3 Black retrieves the exchange, reducing White’s attacking possibilities and retaining a winning position.

22...♗e3! threatening ...d5 or ...♗xf1 is just as good.

23.♖f4!

Exchanging queens would annihilate White’s counterattacking chances, leaving him helpless against the compact mass of enemy pawns. The last move threatens a check on f7, forcing a perpetual check at least.



23...d2†?

This hurried check dismantles the net around the white king.

The right move was 23...♖c7!, covering the f7-square while threatening ...♖a5† as well as ...♗e8. White has nothing better than 24.♖f7† ♖xf7 25.exf7† ♗f8‡ when Black’s king is safe and his powerful pawn mass should decide the game.

I must admit that my memories about this game ended abruptly somewhere around the 15th move. Psychologically, I had little incentive to remember the way I had misplayed

a promising position, despite being the clear favourite. Quite a pity, because the way I see it now, the game is rather interesting.

I had the sense that things were different with my old friend though. During our occasional meetings in the decades that followed after the game, he constantly reopened the subject, mentioning some new idea that he got. In my years as a “true professional chess player”, I did not find it useful to overload my memory with details about an old game from the second league. More recently I changed my opinion, and now consider a regular return to the games from one’s youth to be an excellent method of self-improvement.

Pushed by curiosity, I called Dr Țacu just a few weeks before writing this text and, without too much of an introduction, I asked him what he remembered about our game. He immediately pointed out that he should have castled on move 19, and that in the final position he got prematurely scared when accepting the draw.

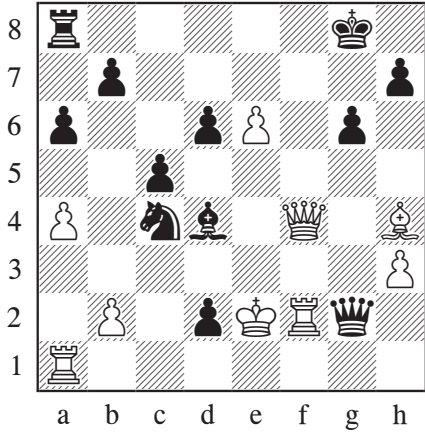
The second assertion is only partly justified (see the note at the end of the game), but it became obvious that for him this had been a memorable game; one that he thought about once in a while, and probably even replayed on the board for the nth time again and again. One happy aspect of being an amateur is that one can remain focused on the artistic side of the game, by not being in a permanent rush to win prizes and rating points.

24.♗e2 ♖xg2†

Now is too late for 24...♖c7? as there is no check on a5, so 25.e7 is just winning for White.

25.♗f2

This simple move keeps trouble away from the white king. The rook is taboo because of mate in two, and so Black has to retreat his queen.



25...♞d5

This move was accompanied by a draw offer, which was accepted.

1/2–1/2

Given the exposed position of both kings, a perpetual check is inevitable. The Doc was right in thinking that after 26.♞f7† ♔h8 27.♙f6† ♙xf6 28.♞xf6† ♔g8 29.♞f7† ♔h8 he is not forced to keep checking, but if he tries an active move such as 30.e7, Black forces a draw himself by means of 30...d1=♞† 31.♞xd1 ♞e4† 32.♔f1 ♞h1† and so on.

I believe that the key moments for understanding what actually happened in this game, as well as the strengths and limitations of the typical amateur prototype, are the moves 13.♘e4 and 19.♞g4.

We can expect a chess book lover like Dr Țacu to have an excellent chess culture. This led him to know – or rather *feel* – that if everything had been okay with his general strategy, these ambitious moves were the only ones to allow him to fight for an advantage. Also, he had faith (perhaps too much of it) in the opening system because it had been employed by several strong Romanian players from different generations.

The only problem was that, having only limited time available for study, he was unable

to test this system of logical thinking with concrete and thorough analysis (as I had done). Objectively speaking, this should have led him to a defeat, but in every negative thing there is a positive part too. Being convinced about the correctness of his play, Dr Țacu kept displaying overwhelming optimism, which eventually inhibited me and caused me to miss a relatively simple win.

We will dig a bit deeper into this theme by examining two extreme cases, taken from the practice of my old friend. In the first of them, unjustified optimism was severely punished, but in the second a much stronger opponent succumbed spectacularly.

Voiculescu – Țacu

Bucharest 1982

The 1982 Troianescu Memorial in Bucharest remains ingrained in my memory as the first really strong open tournament in which I took part as a junior. I was only 17 at the time, but I achieved a respectable score of 6/10. It was also one of the first times my attention was drawn to the colourful figure of Dr Țacu. I was on my way to including the Hromadka Indian in my repertoire, which made me follow the following game with certain interest.

In what looked like a normal position with better chances for White, the good doctor decided to sacrifice a pawn.

