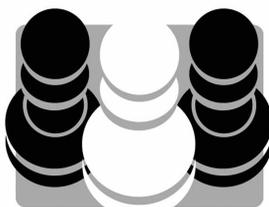


Carlsen's Assault on the Throne

By

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Foreword

“This is the beginning of a new era,” Nigel Short tweeted after Game 9 of Magnus’s World Championship match with Vishy Anand. He was a bit early. Magnus still needed half a point to secure the title. Now we can say for sure: a new era has started!

The World Number 1 also being World Champion is significant. Vishy Anand has been a truly worthy champion. And so were Veselin Topalov and Vladimir Kramnik. However, we have been lacking a real king. I grew up with Anatoly Karpov winning almost every tournament he played, and later Garry Kasparov was even more impressive. Now a new king has arrived on the throne. And Magnus has the potential to stay there for decades. We may have witnessed the crowning of the king of our generation.

Magnus has proved he is now the best in the world. Kasparov said recently he couldn’t see any other young contenders. So perhaps the main challenge will simply be handling the situation. The world is at Magnus’s feet. The opportunities are endless. And that’s a scary situation. Magnus has been modeling for the clothing brand G-Star Raw and was nominated as one of the sexiest men in the world by *Cosmopolitan*. *Time Magazine* even had him on the list of the 100 most influential people in the world. What’s next? And how will that affect his chess?

And how will the enormous wealth affect him? I studied sociology for a year a long time ago and I learned the expression *anomie*. This is something that can happen when, for example, you win a huge sum in the lottery. “Normlessness” it is called. What is there left to strive for? Why go to work and actually do anything? Everything has already been achieved.

So there will be challenges ahead, off the board as much as on it. The wolves out there in the wider world may actually be as much of a threat as Kramnik, Aronian and the other chess players.

At *The Norwegian College for Top Athletes*, the school where I work and where Magnus trained for the first ten years of his career, we learn that you have to improve 20 percent every year just to keep up with your rivals. Magnus has spent an enormous amount of time on chess. He is of course a fantastic talent, but it hasn’t come by itself. Explaining everything by just calling him a genius is much too simplistic. He has worked hard, and I am sure he will work just as hard in the future, or perhaps even harder, to maintain his status as Number 1 in the world.

Magnus has already had a revolutionary impact on the level of interest in chess in Norway. It has exploded beyond our wildest dreams. The main TV channel secured the rights to show the games live. Many people laughed at the prospect of a hundred hours of chess on TV. “It’s just two people sitting there thinking, what’s fun about that?” Those critics certainly had to chew their words. It was an enormous success.

During the last game the website of the biggest bank in Norway crashed because so many employees were following Magnus on the net. *VG*, the biggest tabloid and news site in Norway and Magnus’s sponsor, also covered everything in great detail. And all the other newspapers have been writing about chess.

The owner of a chess shop in Norway mentioned his sales had increased eightfold, so TV reporters visited him to report his story! In a monthly kid's tournament we organize, we now have 300 players wishing to enter. Normally there are 30 or 40.

Suddenly chess seems to be the biggest and most popular sport in Norway. Magnus has become a huge hero and the general opinion is that this is the biggest ever achievement in Norwegian sports history. If Magnus can give chess the same boost globally, then we really are talking about a new era. Magnus has the potential to make this a reality. I believe he also has a strong enough back to bear everything that will come with it.

Simen Agdestein

Asker, 26th November 2013



Publisher's Foreword

It has been a dream of ours almost since the inception of Quality Chess to do an “instant” book on the World Championship. It almost happened a few times, but in the end we did not have the nerves for such a colossal undertaking. In 2012 I covered the match between Anand and Gelfand in Moscow for various magazines as a journalist, but I was still overwhelmed by the task of doing a book about it.

It was only in the spring of 2013 when I mentioned this idea to my sometime co-author Nikolaos Ntirlis (Nikos) that the project became real. He talked to our mutual friend Sotiris Logothetis, Tournament Director at the 2011 European Team Championship, several European Club Cup finals and technical manager at the 2013 London Candidates, convinced Sotiris he could do this, and then went back to me, stating: “You have to do the book now.”

Sotiris asked to bring on board Grandmaster Vassilios Kotronias, as the chess expert for the book, sharing in confidence that besides being maybe the greatest Greek chess hero of all time, he was also Sotiris's favourite chess author. As Kotronias and Quality Chess already had a good working relationship, ever since he brutally demolished both John and me over the board (while still in his preparation, but in such obscure lines that his analysis was done before computers), it proved easy to find a common vision: not only should the book be great, it should also be out quickly.

In what follows there is a clear division of labour between Vassilios and Sotiris – Vassilios wrote Part 1 and, in the rest of the book, he analysed and annotated the games, while Sotiris wrote everything else. So when you see a game heading, you can imagine Sotiris stepping aside and Vassilios taking over.

It is not a novel idea to put out a book on the World Championship quickly after the match has finished. Several books were published quickly after the 1972 match, outselling by many thousand percent the great books that were later published by such highly-esteemed chess authors as Larsen, Timman and Gligoric.

With instant access via the Internet, there is no need for us to worry about runaway sales for this book. Still it has been hugely rewarding for us artistically to combine the idea of publishing a good book with the idea of having it out in time for Christmas. With the limited financial rewards chess publishing offers those that cannot stay away from it, it is important to do something fun once in a while.

Quality Chess would like to congratulate Magnus Carlsen on becoming the 16th undisputed World Champion. Despite his big lead in the world rankings at the start of 2013 it was by no means obvious that he would manage to take the title. And as you will see in this book, he very nearly did not.

Jacob Aagaard
Glasgow, 26th November 2013

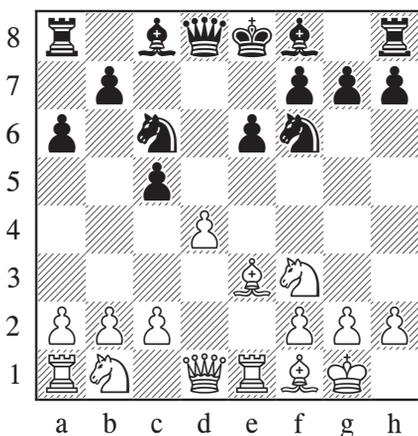
Magnus Carlsen – Boris Gelfand

Round 10, 27th March 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 e6 4.0–0 ♘ge7
5.♞e1 a6 6.♙f1

Peter Heine Nielsen seems to have spotted a soft spot in Gelfand's preparation and Carlsen is able to secure an advantage from the opening. Nielsen was Anand's chief second in the Moscow match and thus had plenty of time to cook up ideas against Gelfand in the Rossolimo.

6...d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.d4 ♘f6 9.♙e3



9...cxd4?!

Probably this was the place where Gelfand went wrong in the opening. He had to defend this position in three further games in 2013 and in all of them he went for 9...♙e7.

In the first encounter, the game immediately became complicated: 10.dxc5 ♞xd1 11.♞xd1 ♘g4 12.♙f4 ♙xc5 13.♙g3 h5 14.♞d2 h4 15.♙xh4 ♘xh2 16.♙xh2 ♘d4 versus Svidler in the Alekhine Memorial in St Petersburg.

Later games continued with 10.c4, when after 10...0–0 11.♘c3 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘e5 13.h3 ♙d7 Black is probably entirely fine. Here Anand played 14.♞c1 in the Tal Memorial and Bacrot 14.♞b3 in Elancourt.

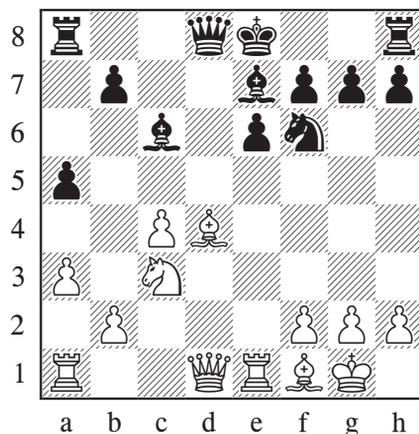
All three games ended in draws.

10.♘xd4 ♙d7 11.c4 ♘xd4 12.♙xd4 ♙c6
13.♘c3 ♙e7

Carlsen would be happy with his opening at this point. White has a slight technical advantage because of his greater space and the three vs. two advantage on the queenside.

14.a3! a5

It is debatable if this is a good decision. But White is also slightly more comfortable after 14...0–0 15.b4, where the bishop on c6 feels a bit squeezed.



15.♞d3!

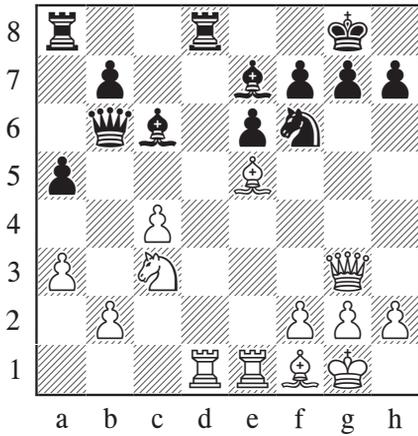
The start of Carlsen's powerful play in this game. The pieces are rearranged so they all appear on the best possible squares.

15...0–0 16.♞ad1 ♞c7 17.♙e5!

Accurately played. Black is not allowed to harmoniously complete his development. Carlsen manages to combine strong positional play with vigorous prophylactic action and razor-sharp calculation.

17...♞b6 18.♞g3 ♞fd8!

Gelfand lost this game, but his play was still great. At this point he did not fall for 18...♞ac8? 19.♙d4! ♞c7 20.♞xc7 ♞xc7 21.♙b6! when White wins a pawn and very likely also the game.



19. ♖xd8†

Accurately played. Black cannot recapture with the rook.

19. ♕c7? ♖xd1 would force White to take back with the knight to avoid being worse.

And 19. ♖d5? exd5 20. ♕d4 as Carlsen was contemplating for a while, does not work on account of 20... ♕c5 21. ♕xf6 ♕xf2† and Black is at least not worse in the ending.

19... ♖xd8 20. ♖d1 ♖b6?

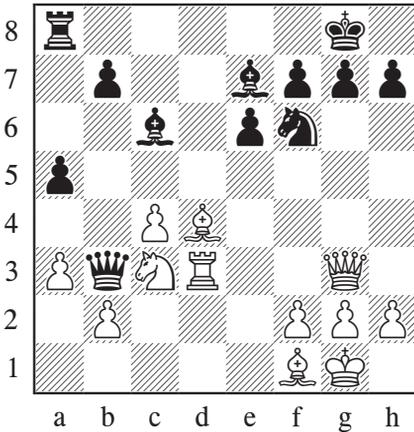
After the game Gelfand was criticized for this move, but he explained the exact reasons for choosing it. True, 20... ♖f8 was a cautious move, but Gelfand had not given up hope of winning the tournament. The move played was an attempt to win the game and enter the race for first place. However, he had made a calculation error, as we shall see later on.

21. ♕d4 ♖b3 22. ♖d3

Carlsen was also not interested in forcing a draw with 22. ♖d5?! ♖xd1 23. ♖xe7† ♖h8 24. ♕xf6 gxf6 25. ♖h4 ♖g7 26. ♖g3† though it is doubtful Gelfand would have gone for the



draw either. Most likely he would have played 26...♔f8!? 27.♔g8† ♕xe7 28.♖xa8 and here continued with 28...a4 with even chances, rather than forcing a perpetual with 28...♙xg2.



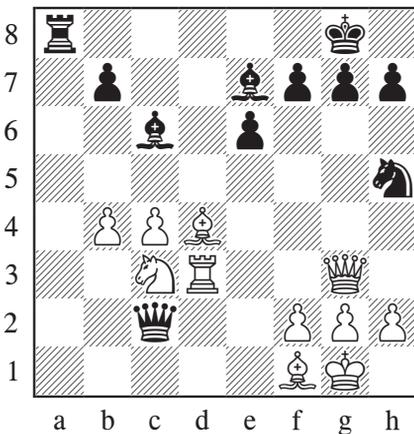
22...♖c2

22...♖xc4?? loses the queen to 23.♙xf6 ♙xf6 24.♖d8†.

23.b4 axb4 24.axb4

White's majority is advancing on the queenside, but he has some problems on the first rank. Here it is all about who has seen furthest.

24...♘h5



25.♖e5!

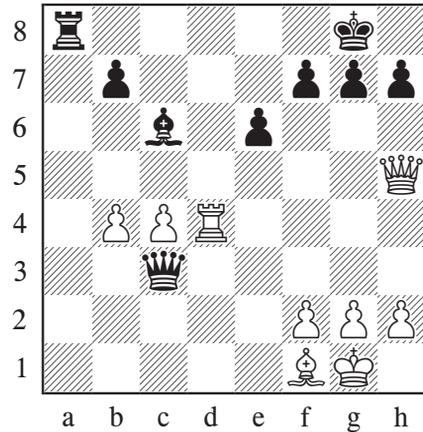
As an interlude we can mention that the computer gives 25.♖e3!? with the idea 25...♙xb4 26.♖g5! and White has the advantage after 26...f6! 27.♖xh5 e5 28.♖f5, though Black keeps it to a minimum with 28...♖f8!.

25...♙f6

Originally Gelfand had planned to play 25...♖a1, when the following position arises by force: 26.♖d1 ♖xd1 27.♘xd1 ♖xd1 28.♖b8† ♙f8 29.♙c5 h6 30.♖xf8† ♕h7 Here he had prepared to meet 31.♖xf7 with 31...♙e4! when Black is winning. But along the way he had noticed that White plays 31.♖d6! with a big advantage. For this reason he changed direction.

26.♖xh5 ♙xd4 27.♖xd4 ♖xc3

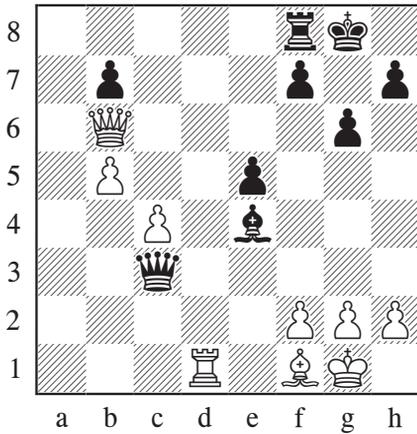
To humans, normal grandmasters and everyone else, the next move is not something we see too far in advance. But both players *had* and quickly played their next few moves.



28.♖a5!! ♖f8 29.♖b6

White has managed to put the black queenside in a chokehold.

29...e5 30.♖d1 g6 31.b5 ♙e4



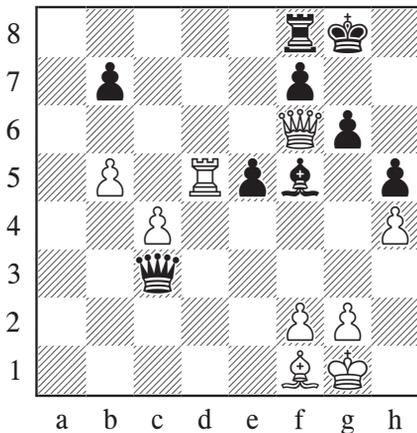
32.♙f6?

Carlsen loosens the grip. There were quite a lot of good moves here, with Balogh's 32.♞d7! being the most convincing. Black is paralysed. For example: 32...♙g7 33.♙d6 ♞e8 34.♙c7 ♞f8 35.♞e7 and White wins a pawn.

32...h5

I think a better shot would have been 32...♙f5! with the following point: 33.♞d5 ♙e6 34.♙xe5 ♙xe5 35.♞xe5 ♞c8 and here White cannot play 36.c5, as Black will have ...♙d7 and ...f6 ideas, most likely regaining the pawn and securing the draw. Instead White must play 36.♞e4, when after 36...♙f8 Black has reasonable drawing chances, though White keeps the upper hand with 37.♞d4! cutting off the king.

33.h4 ♙f5 34.♞d5



34...♙c1!?

Gelfand chooses to keep the queens on, looking for active counterplay.

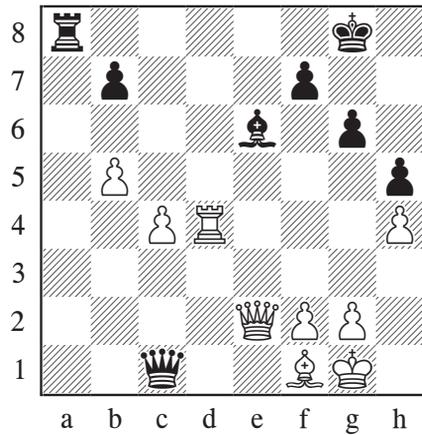
34...♙e6 35.♙xe5 ♙xe5 no longer works in quite the same way. After 36.♞xe5 ♞c8 White has 37.c5! as Black cannot play ...f6 without seriously weakening the g6-pawn. Still, Black is not without drawing chances.

35.♙xe5 ♙e6 36.♞d4 ♞a8

Black is threatening counterplay on the back rank. Carlsen blocks it with another nice little tactic.

37.♙e2!

Preparing ♞d1. But can't Black take control of the back rank first?



37...♙h7?

A passive move that allows White to consolidate.

37...♞a1? does not work. White wins with 38.♞d8† ♙h7 39.♙e5! and Black will soon run out of checks.

37...♙a1!? was a better try. Black is considering ...♞a2 and after 38.♞d1 ♙f6! White cannot defend his h-pawn in any satisfactory way. For example 39.♙e4 ♞a2! with counterplay. For

this reason White should play 39.c5! and keep a technical advantage.

38.♞d1 ♚c3 39.♞e4!

With the queen centralized, White is in control.

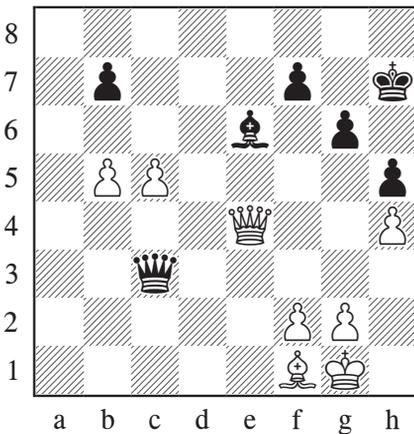
39...♞a1?!

Exchanging the rooks is wrong; all chances of active counterplay disappear. But there were no pleasant alternatives.

Something like 39...♞b8 might be better, but it looks awful all the same.

40.♞xa1 ♞xa1 41.c5 ♞c3!?

A final trap.

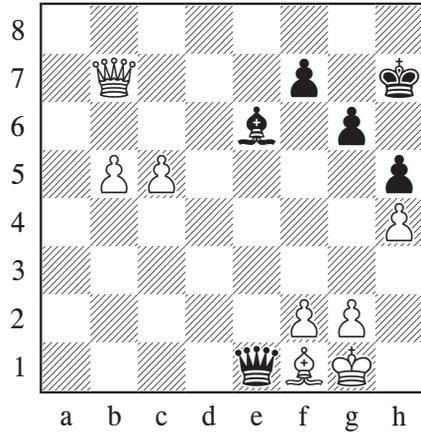


42.♞xb7

And Carlsen falls for it! Unfortunately for the trickster, it is not enough.

42...♞e1

Carlsen had completely missed this, but he said he did not get nervous, as he quickly realized that he was winning anyway.



43.b6

The computer gives other ways to win the game, some with a higher evaluation. But Carlsen preferred the variation that required least calculation and thus reduced the chance of oversights.

43...♞c4 44.♞f3 ♞xf1† 45.♞h2 ♞b1 46.b7 ♞b5 47.c6 ♞d5 48.♞g3 1-0

