

Zenón Franco

Spassky

move by move

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About the Author

Zenón Franco is a Grandmaster from Paraguay, now living in Spain. He represented Paraguay, on top board, in seven Chess Olympiads, and won individual gold medals at Lucerne 1982 and Novi Sad 1990. He is an experienced trainer and has written numerous books on chess.

Also by the Author:

Test Your Chess

Anand: Move by Move

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Introduction

When Everyman suggested that I should write about Spassky, I greeted this idea with enthusiasm. There is very little literature about our 10th world champion and it was a pleasant challenge to present the best games of Boris Vasilievich Spassky.

I would have liked to have operated as in all my previous books by using the player's own comments as a starting point and then amplifying them, trying to explain the ideas more clearly. Unfortunately Spassky has left us very little to work with; of all the world chess champions he is the one who has written the least, and he is possibly also the one about whom the least has been written.

The name of Boris Spassky forms part of the collective memory of every chess player of my generation. His name is linked for ever with that of Robert Fischer, and their match in Reykjavik gave a huge boost to the popularisation of our game. Time and again I have come across people just a bit younger than me who say "I learned to play as a result of the Fischer-Spassky match". For many years, their names were the most well-known ones among non-chess players.

This match took place at a time when, according to Spassky himself, Fischer was the best player in the world. Spassky often said that he himself was the best in the world between 1964 and 1970, "even better than Fischer, although not by much".

Since I was born in South America it was very difficult for me to see Spassky playing 'live', so I consider myself very fortunate to have seen him play in the Buenos Aires Olympiad in 1978 and I even played against him in the 'Clarín' tournament in Buenos Aires in 1979.

Later on when I was press officer for the León tournament I was lucky enough to hear many of his reminiscences about his career and the history of chess.

Spassky produced some chess masterpieces that are very well known. I suppose that in almost any discipline the basic 'problem' involved in writing about something that is very well known is how to add something new. With Spassky this is a bit easier than writing about his opponent Fischer, for example, about whom so much has been written, for the reason mentioned above; insufficient attention has been given to Spassky's work, and he himself has not been interested in telling us much about it.

It is surely impossible for a relatively experienced chess player not to be acquainted, even superficially, with Spassky's victories against Fischer before the 1972 match (the King's Gambit and the two Grünfelds), his win against Bronstein (the finish of which even

appeared on the silver screen), his work of art against Larsen, etc. However, even though these are his best known games, I considered that most of them ought to have their place in this book.

Finally I should like to say that in analysing fairly deeply a large number of Spassky's games, it was a pleasant experience to view games from before the computer age, from a time when 'theory' stopped and the 'real' game began much earlier than is the case today.

In Spassky's best games it was possible to see harmony being established on the board, gradually everything seemed to be in the right place at the right time. It is a sensation very similar to what one feels when admiring works of art.

The Structure of the Book

The structure of this book will be different from my last one (about Anand), where after a description of his style of play the games were presented chronologically, with brief details of Anand's career interspersed.

We will begin with a discussion of Spassky's style, illustrated with game extracts which can also be used as training exercises. Then come the forty annotated games, grouped to match some of Spassky's statements: "My forte was the middlegame", which can be seen in his handling of the initiative, his 'universal style' and his specialisation in certain openings, which he explained thus: "I played my systems and did not particularly like to learn new ones. I relied on my skill in the middlegame. By the way, it was the same for Capablanca. Overall, of course, I knew the openings badly, but in my own systems I felt confident". Spassky also pointed out that his games had contributed towards a better understanding of the Ruy Lopez, which he played with both colours.

In the game annotations I have included many references to other games by Spassky which are relevant to the opening used, as well as a few games by other great champions, even in the form of supplementary games in some cases. These are closely related to the main game and contribute to a better understanding of it. The supplementary games are annotated in less detail.

That being said, the 40 games are organised as follows:

Chapter 1: Universal Style (7 games)

Chapter 2: Initiative and Attack (7 games)

Chapter 3: Ruy Lopez (7 games)

Chapter 4: Sicilian Defence (5 games)

Chapter 5: Exchange Variation against the Grünfeld (3 games)

Chapter 6: Sämisch Variation against the King's Indian (3 games)

Chapter 7: Queen's Gambit (3 games)

Chapter 8: King's Gambit (3 games)

Chapter 9: Leningrad Variation against the Nimzo-Indian (2 games)

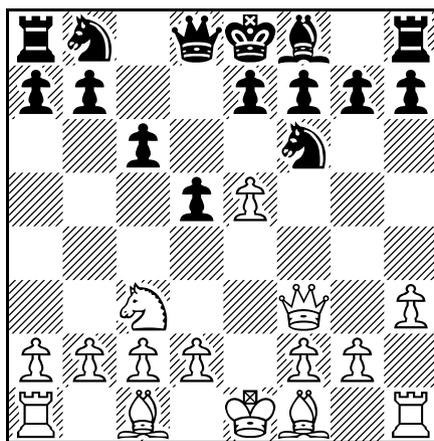
When Spassky was interviewed in 1970, after the USSR – Rest of the World match in Belgrade 1970, he said, “It is hard to single out one of your games. The game that is dearest to me is the one I played 10 years ago with the Leningrad player Reshko. But tastes change with time...”

It is an impressive attacking game, with one sacrifice after another. Subsequently his opinion kept changing and new games were added to his first choice.

This game was played in the 32nd Championship of Leningrad, in which Spassky dominated the field and played several fine attacking games, He finished with 14 points out of 17, two and a half points ahead of Geller.

Game 10
B.Spassky-A.Reshko
Leningrad 1959
Caro Kann Defence

1 e4 c6 2 c3 d5 3 f3 g4 4 h3 xf3 5 xf3 f6 6 e5



Question: An ambitious move which gains space but closes the position. Is it the best though? At first sight it would appear to be better to continue development with 6 d3 or 6 d4.

Answer: Yes, it is ambitious, but it is difficult to know what is best here. Be that as it may, 6 d3 is the most popular continuation. 6 d4 is also worthy of consideration, a move that Fischer played a lot in simultaneous exhibitions. White stands well after 6...dxe4 7 xe4 if Black responds docilely with 7...bd7, but White does not have much after the critical 7...xd4! as Fischer also pointed out.

6...♘f7 7 ♔g3

Question: An idea for White in such positions is the pawn sacrifice 7 e6. Is this good here?

Answer: The sacrifice is justified if it succeeds in keeping the black pieces incarcerated, but here that is not the case, so it is unsound. A possible continuation is 7...fxe6 8 d4 e5 and Black frees his position, remaining with a strong pawn centre after. For example, 9 dxe5 ♘xe5 10 ♔g3 ♘f7 11 ♙d3 e5 12 0-0 ♘d7 with advantage to Black.

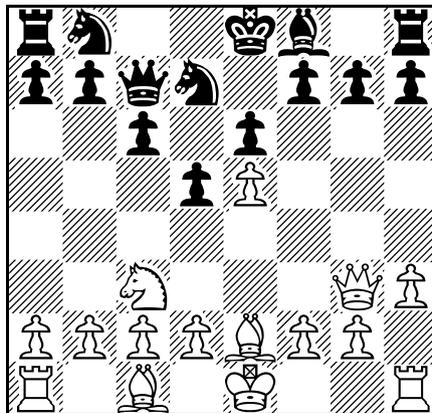
Question: OK, you have convinced me, but why the strange 7 ♔g3 instead of 7 d4? Isn't this an obvious developing move?

Answer: 7 d4 is playable, of course, and might even be objectively the best, but this could only be ascertained after post-mortem analysis.

Spassky played 6 e5 to reach a complicated position and not a position in which Black could achieve a good game by simply playing obvious moves. After 7 d4 e6 (or 7...♘b6 first), we would reach a sort of French Defence position but without the usual 'bad bishop' on c8, so Black would be fine.

With the text move White shows that he had another idea. The queen move not only defends the e5-pawn but also puts pressure on g7, preventing the immediate development of the bishop on f8.

7...e6 8 ♙e2 ♔c7?



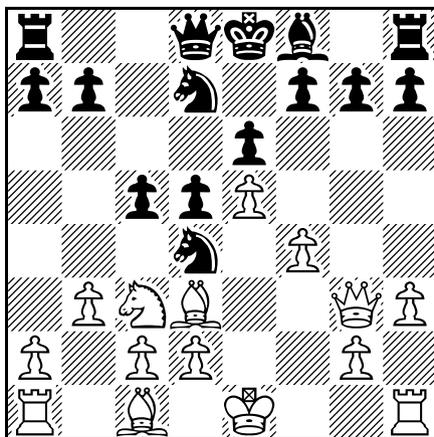
A weak move.

Question: Why is it weak? It gains a tempo by developing the queen with an attack on the e5-pawn.

Answer: The defence of the e5-pawn with f4 is something that figured in White's plans in any case, so in reality it does not gain any time.

One problem is that if Black subsequently plays ...c5, the queen finds itself exposed to an eventual ♖b5; another is that it is not a move that is either necessary or useful.

Black could instead play the immediate 8...c5! followed by ...♗c6, when the threat of ...♘d4 is annoying, given the unusual deployment of the white pieces. For example 9 f4 ♗c6 10 b3 (not so much to let the c1-bishop out as to 'stabilise' the bishop on d3, preventing ...c4) 10...♘d4 11 ♕d3 and if White could just play 12 0-0 his set-up would be fully justified, but it is Black's move.

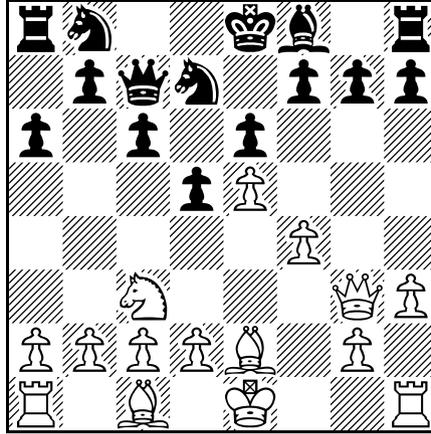


Exercise: Show that 'all that glitters is not gold'. What should Black play?

Answer: Black highlights the lack of coordination among the white pieces with 11...c4! 12 bxc4 dxc4 13 ♕e4 ♗c5 when the threat of 14...♗xe4 15 ♗xe4 ♗xc2+ forces concessions, for example 14 ♖e3 ♗xe4 15 ♖xe4 ♖h4+ and White has to move the king.

9 f4 a6

We can see clearly the defect with Black's previous move as 9...c5 would allow 10 ♗b5.



Exercise: How do you think that Spassky intended to continue here?

Answer: By minimising the strength of 10...c5 with...

10 b4!

Of course, not the natural 10 d4 since then Black's game is easy and probably advantageous after 10...c5 11 ♕e3 ♖c6 and White is unable to solidly support his centre. Black is fine after 12 0-0-0 cxd4 13 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 14 ♖xd4 g6! followed by expansion on the queenside with...b5, ...♗c8, etc.

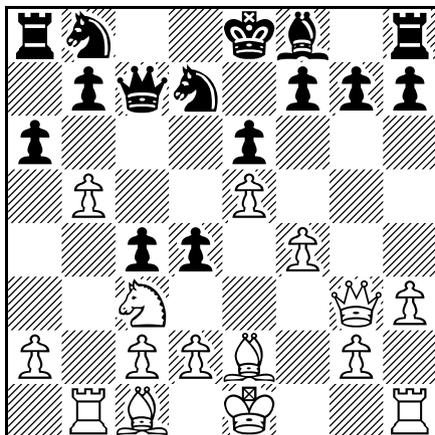
10...c5

Spassky's suggestion of abandoning the kingside and sacrificing a pawn with 10...♕xb4 with the idea of answering 11 ♖xg7 ♗f8 12 ♖xh7 with 12...c5, followed by ...♖c6 and ...0-0-0, is a good practical option, but today's engines view it with scepticism.

11 b5 c4 12 ♗b1

It is necessary to defend b5. Instead, 12 0-0?! is a dubious pawn sacrifice after 12...axb5 since 13 ♖xb5? loses to 13...♗b6+ or 13...♗c5+.

12...d4



13 ♖e4

There was an alternative version of the pawn sacrifice which would also close the a-file: 13 b6! and after 13...♞xb6 14 ♖e4 ♞8d7 there is a choice between several attractive moves: 15 ♗d6+, 15 0-0, 15 ♕f3, 15 ♕a3, etc.

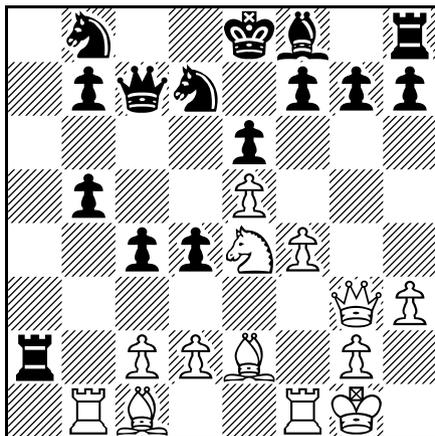
With the text move Spassky shows that he is not afraid to sacrifice more pawns in order to open more lines.

13...axb5 14 0-0

Not 14 ♜xb5?? on account of 14...♞c6. However 14 ♗d6+! ♕xd6 15 exd6 followed by 16 ♞xg7 was a promising alternative. Once again Spassky opts to further activate his forces instead of playing with the pieces that he has already developed.

14...♞xa2

14...♗c6 would be answered with the quiet 15 d3, but not 15 ♜xb5?! d3! 16 cxd3? ♗d4.

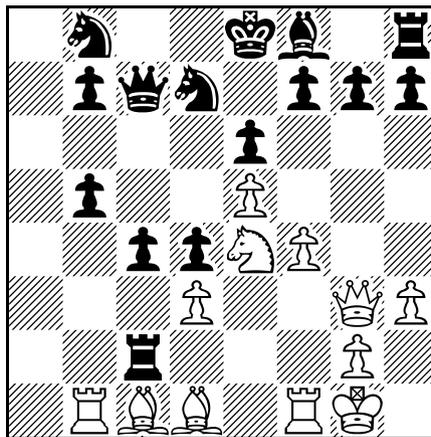


15 d3

Question: What? Sacrificing a third pawn? Isn't this going rather over the top? White does not seem to have anything, even against the black king, that might justify it.

Answer: White is certainly not approaching the game in a conservative manner. He is definitely not attracted by the sort of position that might arise after 15 ♖d6+ ♗xd6 16 exd6 and now 16...♗c5! Hanging on to the b5-pawn is the most important thing, given that this restricts the activity of both the rook on b1 and the bishop on e2. 17 ♗xg7 ♗f8, with threats of 18...d3+ and 18...♗xc2, and the d6-pawn is weak. Instead 16...♗xd6? 17 ♗xg7 ♗f8 18 ♗xb5 is too risky. White would be only one pawn down and his pair of bishops and better development would be starting to tell.

15...♗xc2! 16 ♗d1



Exercise: Three extra pawns! What is Black's best way to continue?

Answer:

16...♗a2?

Black wants it all. Now White's lead in development will start to make itself felt.

It would have been interesting to sacrifice the exchange with 16...cxd3! 17 ♗xc2 dxc2 and obviously there is sufficient compensation after 18 ♗xb5 ♗c4!? (or 18...♗c6 19 ♗d3 ♖c5 or 19...♖a6) 19 ♗xb7 d3.

Another idea is 16...♗xc1 17 ♗xc1 c3, which would also be interesting.

Exercise: What is the snag with the text move?

Answer:

17 f5!

White sacrifices a fourth pawn, but the black king will suffer the consequences. Black's position will begin to totter after the opening of lines.

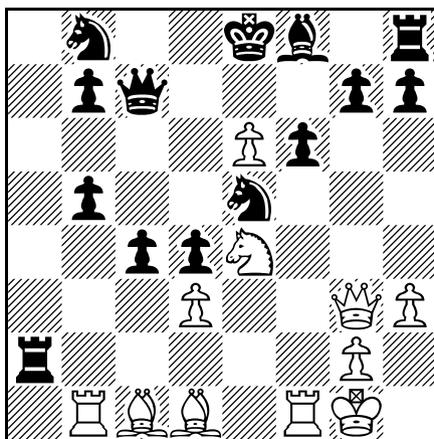
17...♞xe5

Worse is 17...exf5 18 ♜xf5, with ideas such as 19 ♜xf7 and 19 ♘d6+.

If 17...♞xe5, it is possible to play 18 ♔f4 and ♔xb8, or 18 fxe6 when 18...♞xe6? fails to 19 ♜e1! (or 19 ♜xb5) with a winning attack.

18 fxe6 f6

After 18...fxe6 the black king remains very exposed. One possible continuation is 19 ♔f4 ♘bd7 20 ♜xb5 and after 20...♞a5 there are several strong lines, such as 21 ♔xe5 (21 dxc4 and 21 ♔h5+ are other good possibilities) 21...♞xe5 22 ♔a4! ♞xa4 (or 22...♜xb5 23 ♔xb5+ ♔d8 24 ♞a1! and it is not possible to defend against White's attack by all the white pieces) 23 ♜xe5 ♞c8 24 ♜xf8+! (24 ♘g5 and 24 ♔g5 also work) 24...♔xf8 25 ♜c5, with rapid demolition. The black queen must defend b8 and d6, and 25...♞d8 26 ♜c7 is untenable.



Exercise (difficult): Black seems to have escaped the worst by closing the game. How can White demonstrate that this is not the case?

Answer:

19 ♜xf6!!

The opening of lines against the black monarch is decisive. Today's engines do not approve of this sacrifice at all at first, but they gradually change their opinion. The sacrifice cannot be the objectively best, but over the board its effect is devastating.

The continuations 19 ♜xb5 cxd3 20 ♔f4 and 19 ♔h5+ ♔d8 20 ♜xb5 both give White the advantage in a quiet manner, but we know that Spassky did not approach this game in a quiet manner.

19...gxf6

The influence of the rook is just too strong, so it has to be taken. If 19...♞bc6 then 20

♖f7, and after 20...♔c8 there are many natural moves that win, such as 21 ♗h5 or 21 ♖xg7, though the most spectacular is 21 ♖xg7! ♗xg7 (or 21...♖xe6 22 ♗f6+ ♗d8 23 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 24 ♖xf8+ ♗c7 25 ♖xb5 with a material advantage and an attack; the immediate threat is 26 ♗d5+) 22 ♗d6+ ♗d8 23 ♗g5+ ♗e7 24 ♖xe7! and wins.

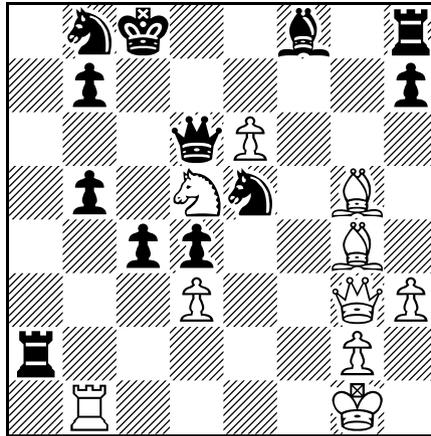
20 ♗xf6+ ♗d8 21 ♗d5 ♖d6

If 21...♖g7 the simplest is 22 e7+.

22 ♗g5+ ♗c8

Instead 22...♗e8 loses in several ways, the quickest mate being with 23 ♗c7+ ♖xc7 24 ♗h5+.

23 ♗g4!



Threatening 24 e7+.

Exercise (difficult): How can Spassky's rook sacrifice be called into question?

Answer:

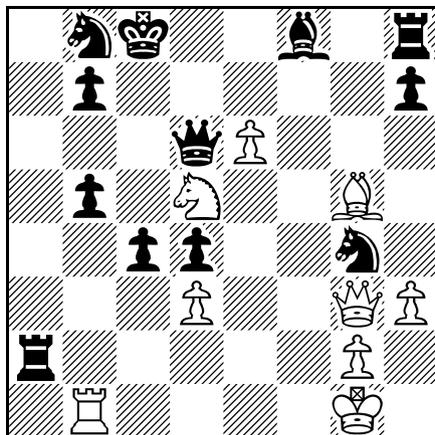
23...♗xg4?

This threatens the queen and seems to save the game, but it will soon be seen that it loses easily.

Also losing is 23...♗bd7? after 24 exd7+ ♗xd7 25 ♗xd7+! ♗xd7 26 ♖g4+ ♖e6 (26...♗c6? 27 ♖c8+ leads to a rapid mate) 27 ♗b6+ ♗d6 28 ♗xc4+! etc.

23...♖xd5 is no use either, since it allows White to promote after 24 e7+.

The most tenacious, and the reason for the engines' doubts, is 23...♗g7! 24 ♗e7+ ♗c7 25 ♗f5 and now 25...♖a3! (25...♖xe6 is inferior in view of 26 ♗xg7 ♖d5 27 ♗f3 etc., while 25...♖c5 allows 26 ♗e7 ♖d5 27 ♗f3 ♖xe6 28 ♗d6+ ♗b6 29 ♖xb5+! ♗a7 30 ♗xb7! winning) 26 ♗f4 ♗bc6 27 ♖xb5 ♗f6 28 ♗f3, with a tricky position that the engines manage to hold as Black.



Exercise: Finally a relatively simple task for you.
How can Black's mistake be punished?

Answer:

24 e7!

But not 24 ♖xg4? ♙h6! and Black is on top.

After the text move the queen is immune in view of 25 e8♚ mate, so White regains all the sacrificed material with interest.

24...♙xe7

Returning material with 24...♖xg2+ does not help: 25 ♖xg2 ♙g7 26 ♖xg4+ ♘d7 27 ♖xb5 (or even better 27 ♖a1!).

25 ♖xg4+ ♘d7 26 ♘xe7+ ♙c7 27 ♙f4!

This forces the knight to 'put its head into the lion's mouth', after which the game is over.

27...♘e5 28 ♖g7 ♙b6 29 ♙xe5 ♖e6 30 ♙xd4+ 1-0

Audacious Play in a Quiet Tournament

As mentioned in Game 2, Spassky shared first place in the 31st Championship of the USSR in Leningrad in 1963. Although it might seem strange, coming first was not the main target that year. The goal which was merely to finish in one of the top six slots in order to qualify for the 'Zonal Tournament of Seven' in 1964, which would in turn grant the opportunity to reach the next stage, the Interzonal Tournament to be held in Amsterdam in 1964.

After two consecutive failures in the key Soviet championships of 1958 and 1961, which were also zonal tournaments, Spassky played more cautiously in many of his games in the 1963 event, taking risks only on very few occasions. He drew 14 games and won 5. Thus he

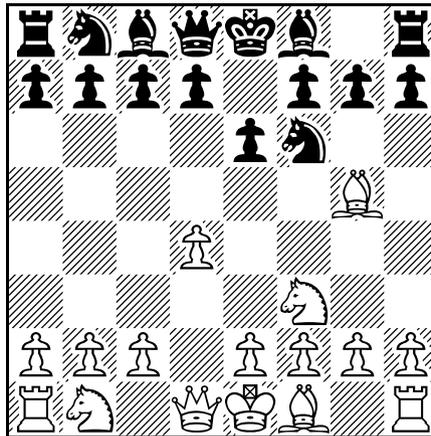
met his goal of qualifying for the zonal. There Spassky also achieved his target, finishing in first place and qualifying to play in Amsterdam.

One of the few games in which he took risks was the one we shall look at next. In a Torre Attack Spassky sacrificed a pawn for reasonable compensation. White seized the initiative, which grew and grew, culminating in a mating attack against the black king which never managed to escape from the centre.

There are also two further games in Spassky's practice which help us understand the opening better.

Game 11
B.Spassky-V.Osnos
 USSR Championship 1963
Torre Attack

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♗f3 e6 3 ♕g5



Spassky employed the Torre Attack from time to time, including, rather surprisingly, in his first match for the world title against Petrosian in 1966.

3...c5

Kasparov considers that it is useful to insert 3...h6, and if White responds with 4 ♕h4, as we shall see, the inclusion of these two moves gives Black more flexibility, while after 4 ♕xf6 ♖xf6 the two bishops compensate for White's advantage in space. This line has been played a lot.

In the above-mentioned game against Petrosian, it has been said that Spassky played on the first Armenian World Champion's home turf, since Petrosian himself had played several model games with the Torre.

Question: I know that this is not a technical question, but you said “the first Armenian World Champion” – is this a prediction? Or has there already been more than one?

Answer: I’m not the right person to allocate nationalities, but some (perhaps many) Armenians definitely consider that they already have two World Champions. In Armenia in 1997 the present writer was told: “We have two World Champions, Petrosian and Kasparov” (his mother is Armenian).

We shall examine the seventh game of the 1966 match in Supplementary Game 11.1.

4 e3 ♖b6

The natural move 4...b6?! it is not good on account of 5 d5!, as Petrosian himself had already shown in 1958. It is notable that Karpov committed the same inaccuracy against Yusupov in their match in London in 1989. Part of the tactical justification is that after 5...exd5 6 ♗c3 ♙b7 7 ♗xd5 ♙xd5 8 ♙xf6 ♖xf6 9 ♖xd5 Black cannot play 9...♗xb2? because of 10 ♗d1 ♖b4+ 11 c3! ♗xc3+ 12 ♗d2 ♖c1+ 13 ♙e2 and White wins. In the stem game, T.Petrosian-J-Kozma, Munich 1958, Black played 9...♗c6 10 ♙c4 ♙e7 11 0-0-0 and White held the advantage. Thanks to his early break with 5 d5 he controls the d5-square and has given Black a weak backward pawn on the d-file.

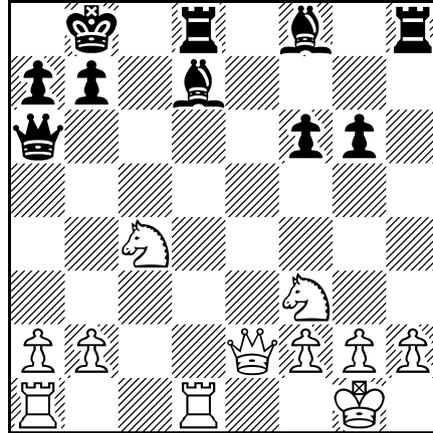
After Spassky’s painful defeat against Petrosian, we shall take a brief look at a more pleasant memory, B.Spassky-A.Matanovic, Havana 1962, in Supplementary Game 11.2.

5 ♗bd2

Spassky employed this sacrifice in the 1960’s and 1970’s. In the 1980’s he preferred the more modest 5 ♖c1.

5...♗xb2

This continuation is the most consistent with his previous move. The game B.Spassky-A.Zaitsev, USSR 1962, continued 5...d5 6 ♙xf6 gxf6. Now Spassky continued to offer the b2-pawn with 7 c4 and after 7...cxd4 8 exd4 dxc4?! (8...♗c6 seems better, not helping White’s development) 9 ♙xc4 ♗c6 10 0-0 ♙d7 (if 10...♗xd4?! then 11 ♗e4! and Black’s lack of development is already starting to tell) 11 d5! exd5 12 ♖e2+ ♗e7 13 ♙xd5 0-0-0 14 ♙xf7 leaving White with an extra pawn and the better position. After 14...♗g6 (14...♗xb2? loses to 15 ♗fc1+ ♙b8 16 ♗ab1, followed by ♖e4, and the black king is defenceless) 15 ♗c4 ♖a6 16 ♗fd1 ♙b8 17 ♙xg6 hxg6



Spassky failed to play the strongest move. He chose 18 ♖xd7?! ♗xd7 19 ♕e8+ ♔c7 20 ♜e3 (20 ♜ce5! was better) 20...♗c6, and White's advantage has evaporated.

Exercise: Instead of 18 ♖xd7, White could White have played?

Answer: The winning move was 18 ♜f5! exploiting the loose rook on h8. After 18...♗h7 19 ♖xd7 ♗hxd7 20 ♜xd7+ ♗xd7 21 ♕e8+ ♔c7 22 ♖c1 White would have an extra pawn and the attack.

6 ♙d3

Kasparov suggested 6 ♙xf6 gxf6 7 ♙e2, "with sharp play precisely in the style of Spassky!", something which he also achieves in the game.

6...cxd4

After 6...d5 the game B.Spassky-A.Miles, Tilburg 1978, continued 7 c4 ♗c3! 8 ♜e5 ♜c6 9 ♖c1 ♗a3 10 ♜xc6 bxc6 11 ♗c2 ♖b8! and Black had emerged very well from the opening.

Instead of 7 c4, it is better to insert the moves 7 ♙xf6 gxf6, then after 8 c4 ♗c3 9 ♙e2 cxd4 10 ♖c1 ♗a5 11 cxd5 ♜a6 12 ♜xd4 ♗xd5 13 0-0 ♙e7 14 ♙f3 White had greater activity and compensation for the pawn in V.Salov-J.De la Villa, Szirak 1987.

7 exd4 ♗c3 8 0-0 d5

Restricting the knight on d2. The careless 8...♙e7?? loses to 9 ♜c4 (threatening 10 ♙d2) 9...♗b4 10 c3! ♗xc3 11 ♖c1 ♗b4 12 a3.

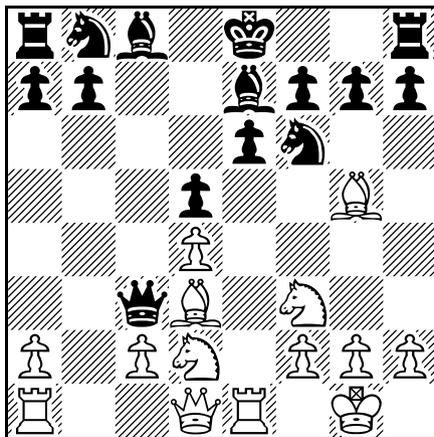
9 ♖e1 ♙e7

Black proceeds with his development, which is the most sensible course of action since he already has an extra pawn. It would be very dangerous to neglect his development. For example, after 9...♜c6 10 ♖b1 ♜xd4 11 ♜xd4 ♗xd4 12 ♙b5+! the black king is caught in the centre and can scarcely be defended. If 12...♙d7 White plays 13 ♙xf6 ♗xf6 14 ♙xd7+ ♜xd7 15 c4! while 12...♜d7 allows 13 ♗h5.

Also unconvincing is 10...♜b4, trying to exchange the d3-bishop. White can play 11 ♖b3

Spassky Move by Move

♔c6 (or 11...♔c7 12 ♘b5+ ♘d7 13 ♘xd7+, followed by ♔b1!) 12 ♘e5 ♔a4 (preventing the check on b5) 13 ♘f1, or the more imaginative (computer-like!?) move 13 ♘e2, planning ♘h5.



Question: I found your previous commentary convincing, but now that I look at the board I see that the position is not open, Black is ready to castle and has no weaknesses, and 10 ♘e5 allows 10...♔xd4, so I'm wondering – where is White's compensation for the pawn?

Answer: Certainly, the compensation is not so obvious as in other cases. There is nothing immediate, but it should not be forgotten that White has a notable advantage in development.

Exercise: White must now look for a way to improve the placement of his pieces. How did Spassky achieve this?

Answer:

10 ♔e3!

It is notable that the engines prefer other moves, such as 10 ♘b3, with the idea of defending d4 and then playing ♘e5, but a master would worry about the future prospects of the knight on b3, so this would not be the first option he would consider.

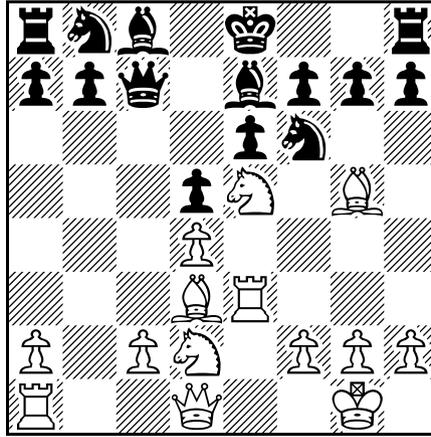
Another move that the engines like is 10 ♔b1, which is fine, since it is a useful move occupying an open file. However Spassky's choice is more energetic. The immediate threat is 11 ♘b5+, and the rook might come in useful later on the third rank.

10...♔c7

It was also possible to play 10...♘c6, after which White would still continue 11 ♘b5 and after 11...♔a5 12 c4 the position is complicated but the white pieces are more active.

11 ♖e5

The first advance. The knight becomes active.



11...♗c6

Exercise: Why did Black not play 11...0-0?

Answer: On account of the simple continuation 12 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 13 ♙xh7+! ♔xh7 14 ♚h5+ and ♜h3, with mate to follow. The influence of the move 10 ♜e3 is already starting to be felt.

12 c3

A quiet move, defending the d4-pawn and leaving Black with the difficult decision of what to do next.

Question: Wasn't it better to defend the centre pawn with 12 ♗df3?

Answer: There is no definitive answer. The advantage of 12 c3 is that it prevents Black from castling, on account of the line we saw above, starting with 13 ♙xf6. In contrast, after 12 ♗df3 Black can play 12...0-0.

12...♗xe5

A difficult decision. Black cannot castle on the kingside and he needs a couple of tempi (12...♗d7, plus defence of the f-pawn) before he can think about castling queenside, so he opts to simplify. In theory, being a pawn up, this should be correct unless there is a clear refutation, which there isn't. Nevertheless, 12...♗d7 deserved serious consideration.

13 dxe5 ♗g8

Better than 13...♗d7 14 ♙xe7 ♗xe7 15 ♚h5, or 15 ♚g4, followed by opening the game with c4, and the inclusion of more pieces with ♜ae1 or ♜c1. Here it would be very risky to play 15...♚xc3?! in view of 16 ♚g5+ ♗e8 17 ♗b3, threatening 18 ♚xg7.

14 ♖f3

Naturally White declines to exchange on e7 in order not to facilitate the development of Black's knight.

14...h6?!

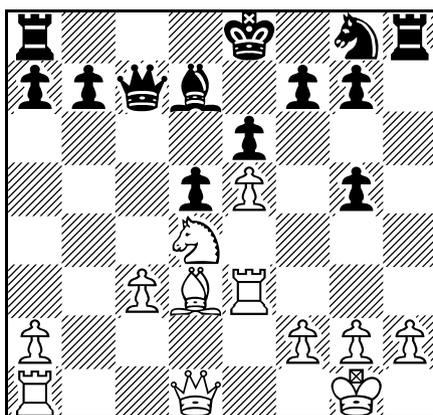
At the cost of a tempo Black seeks to develop the knight. No better was 14...♙xg5 15 ♖xg5 h6 16 ♖h5! with great activity and the plan of 17 ♖f3. Then if 16...♔f8 (not 16...g6? 17 ♙xg6) White wins with 17 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 18 ♙g6, followed by ♖f3+ giving White a winning attack.

It was better to play 14...♙d7, even though White has good compensation after 15 ♖b1 0-0-0 ♖e2! with the plan of ♖eb2 seeking to provoke ...b6, after which he would play a4.

15 ♙f4 ♙d7 16 ♖d4 ♙g5

Of course not the suicidal 16...♖xc3? on account of 17 ♖xe6! destroying Black's position. With the text move Black wants to solve the problem of his knight on g8. The obvious alternative was 16...0-0-0, which White might answer with 17 ♖b1 and then perhaps 18 ♖e2, as we mentioned above. It is also worth considering 18 ♙b5, to exchange the bishops and then play ♖b5-d6, depending on what Black does.

17 ♙xg5 hxg5



Exercise: The pawn structure has changed. What do you think Spassky played now?

Answer:

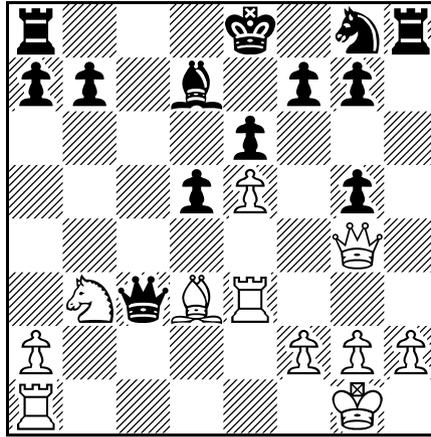
18 ♖g4!

Now there is a weakness on g5 which requires attention. Spassky does not hesitate to activate his pieces, even at the cost of another pawn.

18...♖xc3

Understandably Black accepts the challenge, not wanting to 'undevelop' with 18...♖d8. Now he is not only attacking the rook on a1 but he also threatens 19...♖h6, which would drive away White's queen from the defence of the d4-knight.

19 ♖b3



Question: White is two pawns down and now he has to retreat his knight. Is this not a sign of failure?

Answer: Nobody likes to retreat a knight from the centre, I grant you that, but it should not be forgotten that Black still has problems with his king. Generally king safety is a decisive factor, while the two pawns deficit will be reduced to just one right away.

19...♖h6?

This is a clear error. Black is trying to clarify the situation, focusing on defence. The position will indeed clarify, but in White's favour.

Instead of blocking the h-file it was better to play 19...♖e7! with the idea of the manoeuvre ...♗b4-h4, for example 20 ♗xg5 ♗b4, or 20 ♖c1 f5! 21 ♗xg5 ♗b4, and we would still have a complicated struggle in prospect, with no clear advantage to either side.

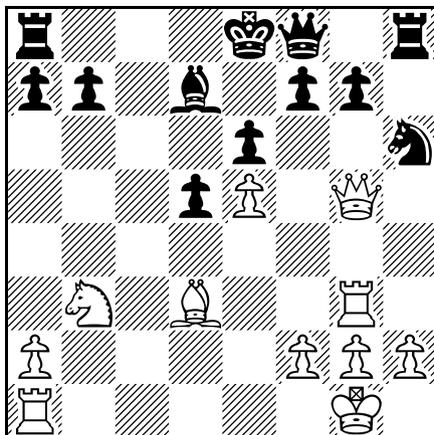
20 ♗xg5 ♗b4 21 ♖g3

Of course White is in no hurry to capture on g7 which would allow Black to castle long.

21...♗f8?!

Black loses the thread with this passive move. Instead 21...g6 22 ♖h3 ♗f8 23 ♗f6 fails to inspire confidence, since Black is passive. Now if 23...♖c8 24 ♖b1! is strong, threatening 25 ♖a5 b6 26 ♖b7, and if 24...b6 25 ♖a6 followed by ♖d4.

It was better to play 21...♗e7, answering 22 ♗xg7 with 22...0-0-0, and even though 23 ♖c1+ ♖b8 24 ♖h3 ♗f8 (not 24...♖dg8? 25 ♖xh6 ♖xg7 26 ♖xh8+ ♖e8 27 ♖b5) 25 ♗g5 leaves White with some advantage on account of his greater activity. But at least Black would have solved the problem of his king.



Exercise: What did Spassky play now?

Answer:

22 ♖c1

Of course, as we see so many times in Spassky's games, the last piece is brought into in play. Here the obvious idea is an invasion on c7.

22...f6

Black cannot contest the file with 22...♖c8 because of 23 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 24 ♗b5+ ♗d7 25 ♖c3! winning.

23 ♗e3!

There were many strong moves here, even 23 ♗xg7, but with this retreat White shows clearly his desire to avoid an endgame. The black king is defenceless, the white pieces have access to many weak points, and it is impossible to defend everything.

23...f5

Preventing ♗g6+, but the decisive blow will come on the other flank.

24 ♗c5 f4

This loses, but there is no defence. The b7-pawn was under attack and there was also a threat of 25 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 26 ♗b5+. If 24...♖c8 White plays in the same way: 25 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 (or 25...♖xc1+ 26 ♗xc1 ♗xd7 27 ♗b5+ ♗d8 28 ♖c3) 26 ♗b5+ ♗e7 27 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 28 ♗g5+ mating.

25 ♗g6+ ♗e7 26 ♗a3! 1-0

If 26...♗c6 White plays 27 ♗xb7+ (first undermining the bishop) 27...♗d7 28 ♗c5+ ♗e7 29 ♗xe6+ ♗xe6 30 ♖xc6+, etc.