Cyrus Lakdawala

Fischer

move by move

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About the Author

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

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Introduction

"I'm young, I'm handsome, I'm fast, I'm pretty, and can't possibly be beat" – Muhammad Ali

Bobby Fischer, like Ali, grew bigger than his sport, and he bent our perceptions on how well a human can play chess. His life was one of legend, power, hubris and eventual self-destruction. More than any other great player, Fischer's triumphs and falls plumbed the depth of human experience. He was simultaneously extraordinary and pathetic, and the inevitability of his fall was on par with the lives of Hamlet and Willie Loman. His is essentially a feel-bad story, of rags to riches, to borderline-crazy recluse.

The most dominant chess player who ever lived was born March 9th, 1943, in Chicago. Even as a child, Bobby lived his life with the supreme confidence of one who knows he is cut out for big things. I sense that he loved chess because it had the power to take him somewhere else, out of his deep, inherent unhappiness – if only temporarily.

By the age of 14, he won the U.S. Championship, eight titles in all, each by a point or more. His 1963-1964 11-0 sweep of the championship may never be repeated. By age 15, Fischer qualified at Portoroz to become the youngest ever candidate for the world championship cycle. By 1970, he won the Palma de Mallorca Interzonal by an astounding 3.5 points ahead of his nearest competitor. By 1971 he was ranked number one in the world chess rankings. Then came his legendary match victories.

6-0, 6-Oh my God!

"Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy." – The Buddha

First, Soviet GM Mark Taimanov fell by a typo-like 6-0 score. Many top players at the time interpreted this as an anomaly, of maybe Taimanov being horribly off form. Nobody expected Fischer to repeat this performance against the legendary GM Bent Larsen, then ranked equal 3rd/4th in the world. Yet Fischer did just that. If you just barely defeat an opponent, people may think you were lucky; brutalize an opponent, and future opponents learn to fear you.

Now Taimanov and Larsen were more resilient than most. If I were a world class player and lost to someone 0-6, I would most certainly suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, and would require antidepressants and therapy for years to come. Vasily Panov wrote: "Both (Fischer and Larsen) consider themselves the world's strongest chess players, and, of

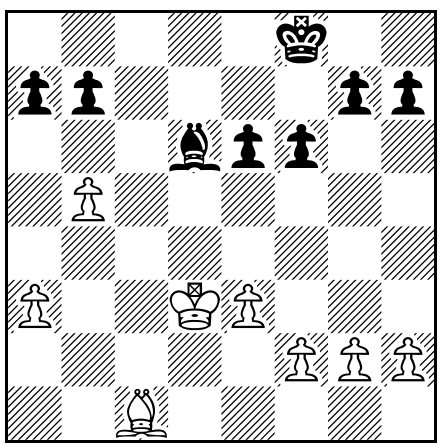
course, they are jealous towards each other, like Miss America and Miss Denmark."

Larsen declared before that he would win the Candidates' matches and then the world title, and that "Fischer will never become a world champion", because he supposedly "always fears to lose a game". Before the match, Larsen boasted that he wasn't intimidated by Fischer, who he felt was cocooned by an undeserved legendary reputation. He claimed he would draw first blood, then get inside Fischer's head. Then after defeating Fischer, Larsen predicted he would go on to become world champion. Boy, was he proven wrong! After losing a razor-close first game (which you can play over in Chapter Four), which was as suspenseful as a Hitchcock film, Larsen just collapsed.

At this point, so enlarged was Fischer's legend, that I suspect his future opponents, Petrosian and Spassky, imputed hidden meaning into even his ordinary moves. Fischer then went on to dismantle former World Champion Tigran Petrosian by a dominating 6.5-2.5. Normally, Petrosian had a knack for sucking the life out of an otherwise dynamic position, like flies into the nozzle of a vacuum cleaner, but not this time. At age 10, I remember reading a quote by some GM, asked to predict the outcome of the match. He replied: "What happens when a man who wins nearly every game he plays, meets a man who draws nearly every game he plays?"

The Match of the Century

Then show time, the 1972 world championship match against Spassky. It started disastrously for Fischer. In game one, in a completely drawn ending from this diagrammed position, Fischer committed an inexplicable beginner's blunder:



Now, you, me and every other player in the world rated over 800 would play 29...♔e7. Instead Fischer played the insane 29...♗xh2??, after which he duly got his bishop trapped, after the painfully obvious 30 g3. Fischer's beginner's blunder left the chess world in slack-jawed disbelief. Your writer was at the time a dorky 11-year-old E-player, and even I knew the move was idiotic.

So Bobby just threw away game one. He claimed the cameras in the playing hall disturbed his concentration and refused to play game two with them on. The organizers had banked on income from the televising of the match and refused. Therefore Fischer failed to show up for game two, forfeiting. The entire match was in jeopardy. Those who dealt with Fischer soon learned: don't expect compromise from an essentially irrational personality. The nervous match organizers backed down and agreed to have Spassky and Fischer play in a back room, sans cameras or live spectators.

'Compromise' was a word alien to Fischer's unamenable mind, which interpreted the world in blacks and whites, with no room for shades of grey. So starting the match 0-2, Fischer proved the prognosticators all wrong, by trouncing Spassky in the remaining games of the match, winning it by a score of 12.5-8.5 (which was really 7.5 for Spassky, since it included the forfeit loss, which no writer is going to put in a best games collection).

Now Spassky could have walked out after two games, and nobody could blame him. But he was a gentleman, and also, there was the psychological factor: Fischer was the older brother, stronger, smarter, meaner and always one or more steps ahead – so much so that virtually every GM of his day felt dwarfed by his immensity. Spassky in 1972 was the reigning champion, and Fischer the challenger. Yet didn't it feel like it was the other way around, where Spassky was the one who had something to prove?

"I have a minus score (against Spassky). I lost three and drew two. I was better than him when I lost those games. I pressed for the win. My overall tournament record is much better than his. I'm not afraid of him, he's afraid of me," claimed Fischer in an interview prior to the match. To his great credit, Boris remained to finish the match, and they produced some beautiful chess.

Was Fischer Mentally Ill?

What happens if a group of people worship a god, and then the god loses his mind? Fischer was a man whose disturbed psyche was profoundly unfit for an ordinary life. He was even more unfit to deal with fame, renown and financial success. He was a societal misfit with the courage to realize his misfitdom. Of course it's futile for a person like me, whose grounding in psychology is merely that of an interested lay person. I'm not qualified to try and probe into Fischer's swiftly degenerating mental status, since I'm not a psychiatrist or psychologist (I'm currently working on another book with Columbia Psychology professor Joel Sneed, and boy do I need his help here in this book).

No matter how irrational a person becomes, he or she rarely reaches a point where they are oblivious to their own sense of misery. Fischer was a man who couldn't be beaten on the chess board, yet was beaten in life by his own mind states. To the paranoid mind, every stranger is a potential enemy. His rising paranoia fast embraced a conspiratorial world view of a cabal of Communists, Jews (yes, Fischer was Jewish himself, although he vehemently denied it later in his life), and later the entire United States, out to get him.

Kasparov wrote: "Apart from chess, Fischer had nothing... After becoming World Champion, Fischer could not play anymore. This was the danger: he achieved perfection, and

everything after this was already less than perfect." Of course there are myriad books on Fischer's life, which he crowded with controversy. So in this one we just touch on his chess games, not his life.

Fischer's Style: the Fischer-Capa Connection

"The great Cuban José Capablanca had played this way half a century earlier, but Fischer's modern interpretation of 'victory through clarity' was a revelation." – Garry Kasparov

Intuition is that ethereal quality which we can't taste, hear, smell, touch or see. Yet we still place our trust in it. Fischer's intuition was on par with Capablanca's, where he just knew the right idea, seemingly without analytical contemplation. On the chess board Fischer had a taste for the orderly, which was strangely at odds with his disorderly mind. Few huge tasks are completed without exertion, yet Fischer in his prime, like Capablanca, had the gift of defeating world class players, seemingly without resistance. He was the sighted mariner living in the world of the blind, oriented and guided by the stars which the rest of us were unable to see.

Fischer wasn't an amphibious player, equally suited to strategic and irrational positions. He excelled in the former, which made him vulnerable to the Tals and Gellers of the world, in the latter. Fischer was above all a strategist, an aggressive Capablanca. His pieces exuded a flow of performing in efficient unison and his deadly strategic encroachment had a way of grappling the enemy, pulling him closer. He found hidden defects in his opponent's positions with an optometrist's eye for anomaly in the his patient's retina. He somehow mysteriously tamed chaos into pure mathematics. Fischer, like Capa, had an almost magical way of chasing a distant complication, which when reached, revealed itself in utter simplicity. He unearthed the central principle of its natural process – its beating heart – around which the position hinged.

I have to admit that I always found it odd that a person of Fischer's disputatious nature was capable of such harmonious, flowing chess. We all harbour different interpretations of the word 'acquire'. To a natural tactician, a chaotic position is something to be cherished, while for a positional player, the fact that queens have been removed from the board is a cause for joy. Fischer is a candidate for the latter category.

Like Capa, Fischer ruled in the realm of endings and clear positions. Like Capa before him, Fischer was renowned for his almost instantaneous capacity to uncover a position's elemental factor, no matter how deeply hidden. Intuition isn't merely a guess. Instead, it is actual analysis done secretly in some back room in our subconscious mind. Fischer also never endured that shivering sense of dislocation the rest of us experience, when our clocks run low – mainly since he tended to move with astounding speed and almost never got into time pressure.

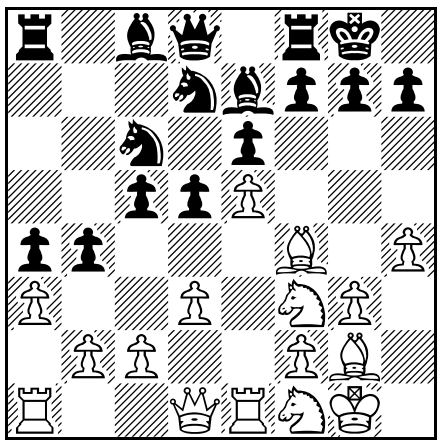
Fischer's armour wasn't chinkless, since he lost games via overextension, pushing past

tolerable limits trying too hard to win. He was also a notorious material grabber, whether earned honestly or ill gotten didn't seem to matter to him. Yet these unauthorised withdrawals from his opponent's bank accounts were not done without taking on appalling risks. In some cases it almost appeared as if Fischer provoked opponents to a degree to which he hoped to be contradicted.

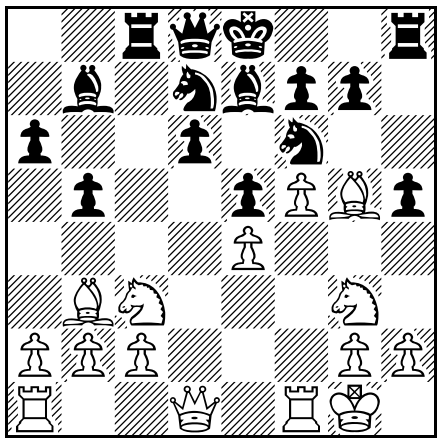
Fischer's Openings and Contributions to Theory

In the opening phase, Fischer, like Botvinnik and Alekhine before him, intimidated opponents. He memorized theory the way ancient poets recited the *Iliad*. And he was a font of creativity, always ready with a prepared novelty in virtually every opening he played. In this book, prepare yourself for some stock scenery. This book, unlike other players' games collections, lacks a broad demographic cross-section of opening lines. The reason? Fischer's incredibly narrow opening repertoire.

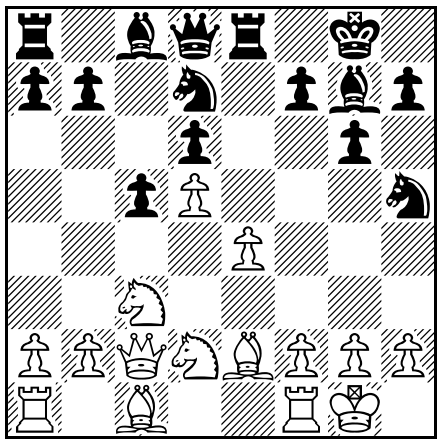
Fischer's Alma Mater lines were: Fischer-Sozin Sicilian, Najdorf Sicilian, King's Indian and King's Indian Attacks (which remain to this day, authoritative blueprints on how to handle the line), which we visit over and over again. These, and other favourites laid claim to Fischer's lifetime allegiance. As for opening preparation, Fischer dominated his rivals, continually surprising them, sometimes with sound ideas, and sometimes with single game, semi-sound ambushes, which were also implements of his craft: For example:



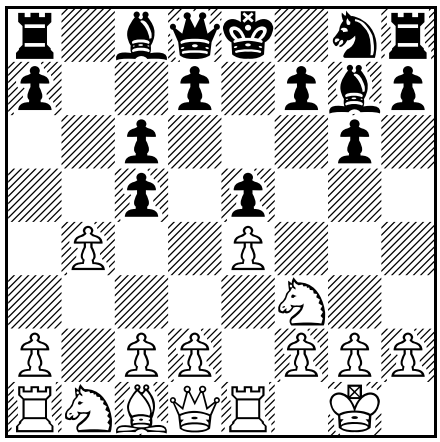
In Fischer-Myagmarsuren 1967, Bobby just challenged precedence with 13 a3!!. Now you may ask why this innocuous move is so strong? Well, it prevents Black from puncturing the queenside dark squares with ...a3. Fischer correctly judged the slight opening of the queenside doesn't hurt White. The idea is so strong that it remains White's main move in the position even today.



At the same tournament, Fischer, as Black against Robert Byrne, just unleashed the devastating novelty 13...h5!!, a move which in a single stroke undermines e4 and which depopularized his own beloved Fischer-Sozin Sicilian.



Imagination is often stifled by the fear of committing a blunder, but not this time. This is one of the most shocking opening novelties of all time, and one played in a world championship game. Fischer just played 11...♘h5!?, goading Spassky to chop the knight and seriously devalue Black's kingside pawns. Spassky did just that, but followed with uncharacteristic over-caution and got strategically crushed. As it turns out, Fischer's novelty was dubious, yet did exactly what it was designed to do in a single game: confuse and disorient the opponent.



In the final diagram, Fischer once again confused Spassky in their 1992 rematch, with a crazy yet sound Wing Gambit idea arising from a Rossolimo Sicilian.

Fischer, the Greatest of them all?

Fischer is in all probability, the most idealised (and hated!), and most over-praised player in the chess pantheon. I swore to myself that I would be objective when beginning this book, yet found myself gushing over his many double exclams. Fischer faced powerful intellects across the board, who were all vanquished by his telepathic intuition, which overrode his opponents' intellect and logic.

Then when he became world champion, his chess came to a standstill. In a way Fischer was the worst world champion of all, since he refused to play even a single serious tournament or match game during his tenure. It's almost as if he channelled Nietzche, thinking: "That which doesn't beat me, makes me stronger." And how can one lose if one never plays a game?

Fischer was a prodigious worker who studied chess (in his head), virtually every waking hour. He claimed to have deeply studied over 1,000 books, and even studied the great romantics like Adolf Anderssen and Paul Morphy – which should be a lesson to young players who only study opening books and databases.

I don't really know what 'greatest' means, since there are so many categories. A few months ago, a group email discussion raged among players which included GMs Yasser Seirawan and Jim Tarjan, and IMs John Watson, Jack Peters, Jeremy Silman, Tony Saidy, John Donaldson and yours truly. We agreed on the following categories (although I added a few) which constitute 'greatness':

Creativity: Here, the greatest may be Anderssen, Reti, Nimzowitsch, Bronstein, Korchnoi, Larsen, Tal, Petrosian, Ivanchuk – only two of which became world champions.

Irrational positions: This was Fischer's weakest category. My candidates: Andersson, Las-

Lasker, Bronstein, Tal, Spassky, Korchnoi, Kasparov, Anand, Morozevich, Nakamura.

Attacking ability: My candidates for greatest in this category would be Anderssen, Morphy, Alekhine, Keres, Bronstein, Geller, Tal, Spassky, Fischer (although the inclusion of Fischer in this category may be debatable, since his attacks invariably flowed from strategic superiority), Kasparov, Topalov, Anand.

Defence and counterattacking ability: Lasker, Capablanca, Petrosian, Korchnoi, Fischer, Karpov, Kramnik, Carlsen.

Strategic understanding and planning: Morphy, Staunton, Tarrasch, Steinitz, Capablanca, Euwe, Botvinnik, Smyslov, Petrosian, Fischer, Karpov, Kramnik, Carlsen.

Intuition: Morphy, Capablanca, Smyslov, Fischer, Karpov, Kramnik, Carlsen.

Tactical ability and combinational vision: Anderssen, Morphy, Alekhine, Keres, Bronstein, Tal, Fischer, Kasparov, Topalov, Anand.

Feel for the initiative: Morphy, Alekhine, Keres, Bronstein, Geller, Tal, Botvinnik, Spassky, Fischer, Kasparov, Anand, Topalov.

Calculation ability: Lasker, Korchnoi, Kasparov.

Opening research ability: Alekhine, Botvinnik, Fischer, Kasparov, Anand.

Endgame technique: Rubinstein, Lasker, Capablanca, Fischer, Karpov, Kramnik, Carlsen.

Peak strength: No other world champion dominated like Fischer did from 1970-72.

Longevity: Lasker, Smyslov, Korchnoi, Karpov.

In my lists, Fischer leads in the categories. Obviously, there is no such thing as 'greatest player', since it's impossible to know if Morphy was stronger (for his era) than Capablanca or Fischer were for theirs. I can't say Fischer was the best chess player of all time, but I do know that his games have almost become the standard by which other great players are judged.

I would think it would be exasperating for great players to be compared to Fischer, and have their chess skills judged lacking. Appreciation of art comes more from the observer, than the object itself. One tourist can look upon the Mona Lisa and think: "Eehh. Big deal!", while another may be entranced by her smile. Players either like or dislike Nimzowitsch, Larsen, Tal or Petrosian's games. With Fischer's games, there is no debate. I haven't met a single player who dislikes Fischer's chess games or his style. Have you?

Post World Championship Blues

After his triumphant 1972 match with Spassky, Fischer basically fell off the grid, living the life of a recluse, only to resurface in 1992, for his rematch with Spassky. Fischer won this one decisively, but neither player was the same man of 1972. Still, the combustible Spassky/Fischer combination brought out the best in both, and they produced some pretty games. This is where it gets depressing.

In 1992, war-torn Yugoslavia (Sveti-Stefan/Belgrade was the site of their rematch) was under a U.N. embargo. First, the U.S. State Department forbade Fischer to play the match (although nearly all of us harboured a secret Edward Snowden-like stick-it-to-the-man

sympathy for Fischer at the time, and clearly wanted him to play). You guessed it. Fischer called a press conference and 'loudly' spat on the State Department letter. The unamused U.S. government immediately demanded income tax on Fischer's winnings in the match. Fischer refused to pay.

He made anti-American, anti-communist, anti-Semitic remarks on multiple radio stations. I still remember his interview with a Filipino radio station the day after the 911 attack, where Fischer made vile, blood pressure-raising statements, which I won't repeat here, since they are all available on the internet. In 2004 he was arrested in Japan. The U.S. State Department revoked his passport (he shouldn't have spit on that letter!), and he was held in a cell for eight months, under constant fear of deportation and prosecution to the U.S. In 2005, Iceland granted Fischer citizenship. He lived out his life there and died of renal failure (he irrationally refused treatment for a urinary tract infection, which then morphed into kidney failure) in 2008, at age 64, the same number of squares on the chess board.

The Games Selection in the Book

One problem with a book on Fischer is that there are a million other books on the same subject. IM Byron Jacobs suggested that I look for some unknown games, rather than his well-known masterpieces. So I would guess that the ration is around 70% of his familiar games, and 30% of games you may not have seen.

In the following game, GM Leonid Stein, a master of complex positions, lured Fischer into an irrational position – Fischer's bête noire. So we get a glimpse of Fischer in his worst possible position, against one of the top GMs in the world, and still he pulls off a victory.

Game 1
R.Fischer-L.Stein
Sousse Interzonal 1967
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5!?

GM Leonid Stein was mainly a Sicilian player, so he clearly came to the game with prepared analysis against Fischer's Ruy Lopez.

2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♗b7 10 d4 ♘a5!?

This is a bit of an odd mix of variations. Today, most players choose 10...♖e8, the Zaitsev variation, which hadn't really come into existence when this game was played.

11 ♗c2 ♘c4?!

Stein was clearly trying to confuse Fischer by taking him out of theory, early on. In doing so, he confuses himself, reaching an inferior version of the Breyer variation. Black is better off playing 11...c5 12 ♘bd2 cxd4 13 cxd4 exd4 14 ♘xd4 ♖e8 15 ♘f1 ♗f8 16 ♘g3 g6. Black's d-pawn isn't weak and his pieces are active, B.Vuckovic-R.Rapport, Plovdiv 2012.

12 b3 ♘b6

Game 12
S.Reshevsky-R.Fischer
5th matchgame, New York/Los Angeles 1961
Semi-Tarrasch Defence

In 1961, Reshevsky, the dominant U.S. player of the pre-Fischer era, challenged Fischer to a match. GM prognostications: Petrosian, Larsen, Keres and Gligoric all favoured the 50-year-old Reshevsky over the 18-year-old Fischer, even though Fischer had just won the U.S. Championship. When the score stood at 5.5-5.5, Reshevsky was awarded the match when Fischer, in what was his first – but certainly not his last – dispute with the organizers about the playing time, forfeited when he refused to show up for the 12th game.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6

Reshevsky dismantled Fischer's KID in the first game of the match, so he tries his luck with another line.

3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5

The Semi-Tarrasch.

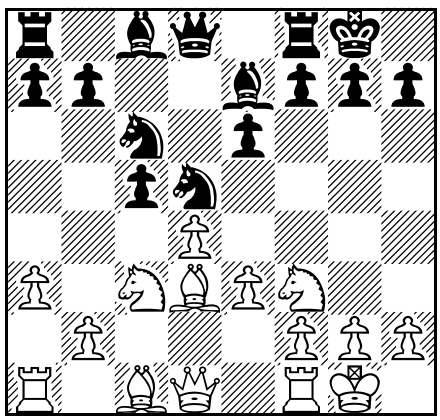
5 ♘f3

The main line runs 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3 c5 7 ♘f3 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♗b4+ 9 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10 ♕xd2 0-0 11 ♗c4.

5...c5 6 e3

Reshevsky prefers a classical isolani position over 6 e4 ♘xc3 7 bxc3, transposing to the main line.

6...♘c6 7 ♗d3 ♗e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 a3



Question: Why does White toss in a3 in such positions?

Answer: a3 is useful for White, since he plans to set up a queen/bishop battery, aiming at h7, with ♗c2 and ♕d3. First playing a3 prevents tricks like ...♘b4.

9...cxd4

Fischer agrees to the isolani position. There is something to be said for playing 9...♘xc3 10 bxc3 when White's a3 move isn't all that useful and pretty much represents a wasted tempo.

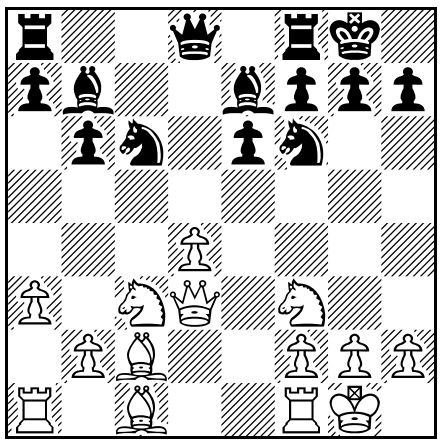
10 exd4 ♘f6

This move, although book at the time, allows White a favourable isolani position. 10...♗f6 and 10...♘xc3 are also played here.

11 ♗c2

Preparing the battery aimed at h7.

11...b6 12 ♕d3 ♗b7



13 ♗g5

13 ♖e1! is White's most promising path and after 13...♖c8 he has:

a) 14 ♗g5 (threat: ♗xf6 and ♕xh7 mate, which in turn induces Black to weaken the dark squares around his king) 14...g6 15 ♖ad1 ♘d5 16 ♗h6 ♖e8 17 ♗a4 a6?! (Black should perhaps risk 17...♘xc3 18 bxc3 ♗xa3 19 ♘g5 ♗e7 20 ♕e3 when he at least gets a pawn for White's initiative) 18 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 (18...exd5 gives Black better defensive chances than he got in the game) 19 ♕e3 ♗f6 20 ♗b3 ♕h5? (20...♕d7 21 d5 exd5 22 ♕xb6 is admittedly unpleasant for Black, but still better than the game continuation) 21 d5 ♘d8, V.Smyslov-A.Karpov, Leningrad 1971. After 22 ♗g5! Black's defence flops.

b) 14 d5! ♘a5 (14...exd5?? 15 ♗g5 g6 16 ♖xe7! wins on the spot) 15 ♗g5 sees White's central pressure assumes terrible potency and Black is forced to hand over the exchange with 15...♖xc3 (after 15...g6 16 d6 ♗xd6 17 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 18 ♕xd6 ♗xf3 19 gxf3 Black lacks compensation for the piece, S.Pavlov-A.Ivchenko, Kiev 2010) 16 ♕xc3 ♕xd5 17 ♖ad1 with a clear advantage to White.

13...g6 14 ♖fe1 ♖e8

I would go for the immediate 14...♘d5.

15 h4!

Today this is White's highest-scoring line and probably his most accurate move, since he doesn't quite know if his a1-rook belongs on c1 or d1.

15...♖c8

Alternatively, 15...♕d6 16 ♖ad1 ♖ad8 17 ♗b3 and Black's position remains under pressure, since he must watch out for sacrificial ideas on e6.

16 ♖ac1

The alternative is to post the rook to d1.

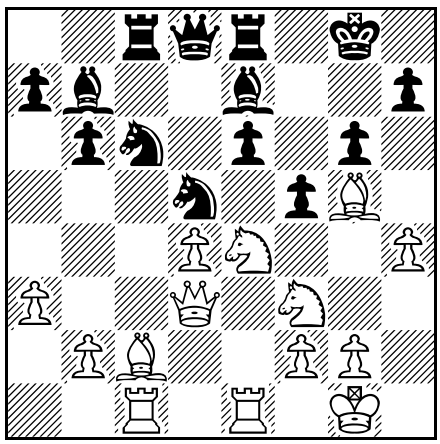
16...♘d5

Exchanges tend to benefit the cramped side. However, Reshevsky refuses to co-operate with his next move.

17 ♘e4!?

Reshevsky decides to march his army in the direction of the kingside. He wants more than just the pull he gets from 17 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 18 ♗b3 ♕d7 19 d5.

17...f5!



Prolonged defence is a cumbersome business, not suited to everyone's nature. Fischer's last move is played with the philosophy: complications have a way of cloaking our strategic weaknesses in darkness.

Question: Isn't this a terribly weakening move?

Answer: Normally, this kind of rowdy behaviour is frowned upon in isolated queen's pawn establishments, and it does feel like it's foolish to pick a fight in a neighbourhood populated by numerous enemies and few friends. It does indeed weaken both e6 and e5. However, it follows the principle: *Meet a wing attack with distraction in the centre*. Also, the move introduces a distorting element which contaminates White's harmony and makes

his following moves much harder to find. So I think Fischer's move, re-upholstery on old furniture, perfectly fits his sagging position's needs.

GM Robert Hübner suggested 17...♕c7, but I don't like Black's position after 18 ♗a4! f6 19 ♗d2 ♗f8 20 h5 with mounting pressure for White, all across the board.

18 ♘c3!

Black's d5 outpost is challenged.

18...♗xg5 19 ♘xg5

Stronger than the recapture with the pawn. Reshevsky goes after e6.

19...♘f4

Fischer seizes upon his only chance to confuse matters. His move menaces White's queen and the d4-pawn, as well as worries White about ...♘xg2 tricks.

20 ♕e3!?

The riskiest of White's options:

a) After 20 ♕g3 ♘h5 21 ♕e3 ♘xd4 Dvoretsky claimed an advantage for Black, which *Houdini* disputes with 22 ♗a4! when Black's position feels quite loose to me. I don't see great responses: for example, 22...f4 23 ♕h3 ♗c6 24 ♘xe6! ♘xe6 25 ♗b3 ♔g7 26 ♖xe6 ♗d7 27 ♖d1 ♗xe6 28 ♗xe6 ♖xc3 29 ♕xc3+ ♕f6 30 ♖d7+ ♔h8 31 ♕xf6+ ♘xf6 32 ♖d6 ♔g7 33 ♖c6 ♖e7 with an approximately even ending.

b) 20 ♕f3 ♕d6 21 g3 ♘d5 22 ♘xd5 exd5 23 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 24 ♕c3 f4 25 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 26 ♕xe1 fxg3 27 ♕e8+ ♕f8 28 ♕e6+ ♔g7 29 fxg3 ♕e7 30 ♕xe7+ ♘xe7 once again with an equal ending.

20...♕xd4 21 ♘b5!

Now the complications increase exponentially. Reshevsky eyes a juicy fork square on d6.

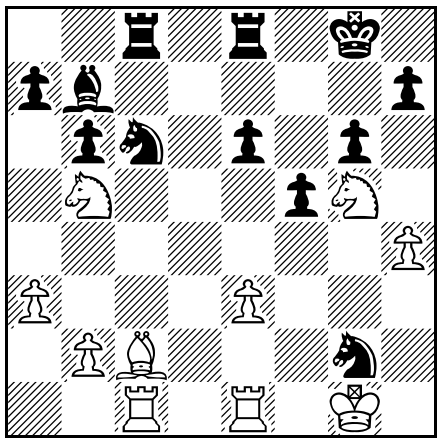
21...♕xe3

"Best," says Fischer, while Kasparov criticizes it. The alternatives:

a) 21...♕xb2 22 ♘d6 ♘xg2 23 ♔xg2 ♘d4+ 24 ♗e4 fxe4 25 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 26 ♘xc8 ♘c2 27 ♘e7+ ♔g7 28 ♘xe6+! ♔f7 29 ♕f4+ ♔xe6 30 ♖e2 ♕c3 31 ♘c8!? (a move only a comp can find) 31...♕xc8 32 ♕g4+ ♔d6 33 ♕xc8 ♗xc8 34 ♖xc2 ♗f5 35 ♖d2+ ♔c5 36 ♖c2+ ♔d6 37 ♖d2+ ♔c5 with a draw by repetition.

b) Reshevsky and Fischer considered 21...♕d5? to be the critical move. However, under comp analysis, White holds the advantage after 22 ♕xf4 ♕xb5 23 h5 ♕xb2 24 hxg6 hxg6 25 ♘xe6 ♘d8 26 ♘d4 when Black's king is seriously exposed.

22 fxe3 ♘xg2!



Our collective heads begin to spin from the complications. No matter how carefully we plan, in virtually every game we play there arises at some point a capricious or unforeseen element to challenge us.

23 ♔xg2

The king implies a query through his gaping, open mouth.

23...♘d4+?!

This move should lead to a lost ending. Better was 23...♘b4+! 24 ♗e4! ♘d3! 25 ♗xb7 ♖xc1 26 ♖xc1 ♘xc1 27 ♘xe6! ♖e7 28 ♗d5 ♖d7 29 ♘c3 ♔h8 30 ♔f3 ♘d3 31 b3 when White stands better in the ending, but Black is better off than the way the game actually transpired.

24 ♗e4!

"Confess your sins to me and I will whisper them into God's ear to plea for forgiveness," says the bishop, who is more handy with a sword than with scripture. "I can still hear the audience gasping with each blow," wrote Fischer.

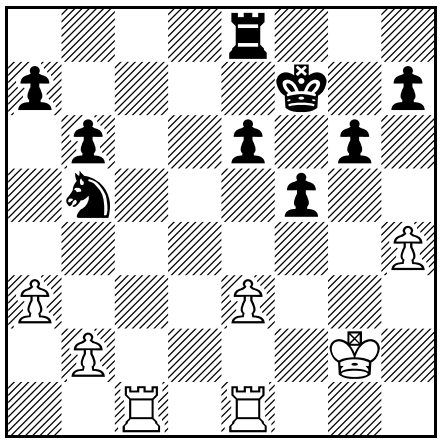
24...♗xe4+ 25 ♘xe4

Black is down a piece and threatened with a fork on f6. Fortunately, it's his move.

25...♘xb5 26 ♘f6+

This is some crazy geometry. White wins the exchange, but this is really the beginning of the story, not its end.

26...♔f7 27 ♘xe8 ♖xe8



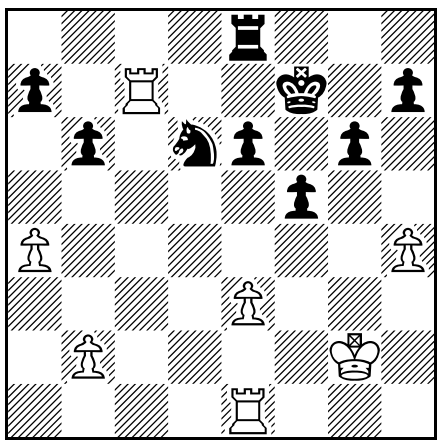
Question: Who stands better here?

Answer: Black has obtained two healthy pawns for the exchange, normally more than enough. Here, however, White's rooks threaten to infiltrate down the open c- and d-files, which in turn threaten Black's pawns. White is the one with winning chances. *Houdini* assesses White up by '0.49', the equivalent of half a pawn. So in essence, Black must make do with a meagre fund of defensive resources.

28 a4!

Reshevsky clears the way for infiltration on c7. His move is more accurate than 28 ♖ed1?! ♖e7 29 ♔f3 ♘c7 with ...♘d5 to follow, and according to Fischer, Black is no longer in danger of losing.

28...♘d6 29 ♖c7+



Exercise (critical decision): Should Black challenge White's seventh-rank control with 29...♖e7? Or should he ignore the threats to his pawns and play 29...♔f6? One line puts up greater resistance than the other.

Answer: In this case, activity supersedes material concerns.

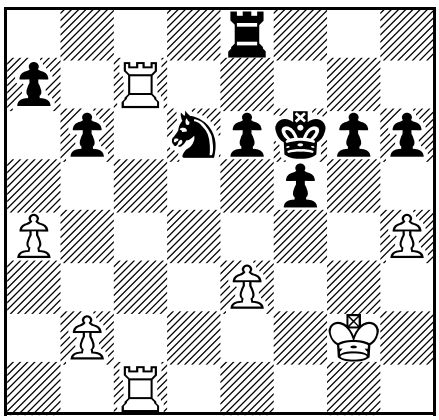
29...♔f6!

Both lines lose a pawn for Black, so there is no reason to go passive, with a line like 29...♖e7? which Fischer called "hopeless": for example, 30 ♖ec1 ♘e8 31 ♖xe7+ ♔xe7 32 ♖c8 ♔d7 33 ♖a8 ♘c7 (or 33...a5 34 ♖b8 and Black can resign) 34 ♖xa7 ♔c8 threatens to trap the rook next move with ...♔b8. However, White wins by a single tempo after 35 a5!, which either frees the rook, or allows 35...b5 36 a6 ♔b8 37 ♖b7+ ♔c8 38 ♖b6 winning.

30 ♖ec1!

Masterful insight by Reshevsky, who correctly prefers to retain control over the open c-file, rather than be bribed by 30 ♖xa7?! ♖c8 31 ♖e2 ♖c4 32 ♖d7 ♔e5 33 ♖xh7 ♖xa4 when Black should hold the game without too much effort.

30...h6



Black may be busted, but Fischer continually finds the best practical moves.

Question: What is Fischer's plan?

Answer: Fischer plans ...g5, creating a kingside passer. He then plans to go for a direct end-game attack against White's king, with his own rook, knight, king and pawns. This menace, along with Black's threat to win the queening race, makes the win extraordinarily difficult for White, despite Houdini's healthy '+1.68' assessment.

31 ♖xa7

GM Artur Yusupov suggested 31 b4!?. There is no way the human brain (with a clock ticking at the board) is capable of fathoming the true extent of such a decision, but when

we crank up the comps, we come much closer to the truth. *Houdini* miraculously saved itself playing Black after 31...♖a8 32 ♖1c6 ♖d8 33 ♖xa7 ♘e4 34 ♖a6! g5 35 ♖axb6 ♖d2+ 36 ♔f1 f4 37 exf4 gxf4 38 ♖xe6+ ♔f5 39 a5 ♖d1+ 40 ♔e2 ♖d2+ 41 ♔e1 ♖a2 42 ♖xe4! ♔xe4 43 ♖xh6 ♖a1+ 44 ♔d2 ♖b1 45 a6! (after 45 ♖b6? f3 Black holds the game) 45...♖xb4 46 h5 f3 47 ♖f6 ♖b2+ 48 ♔c3 ♖b8! 49 h6 ♔e3 50 h7 f2 51 a7 ♖c8+ 52 ♔b4 ♔e2 53 ♔b5 f1♕ 54 ♖xf1 ♔xf1 55 ♔b6 ♖f8 56 ♔b7 ♖f7+. The game ends in a draw, as after 57 ♔c6 ♖f6+ 58 ♔d7 ♖f8 59 ♔e7 ♖a8 White is unable to make progress.

31...♘e4 32 ♖a6 ♖d8!

There is no point in defending something which can't be defended. 32...♖b8? 33 ♖c6 and b6 falls all the same, except that Black got tricked into a passive rook's position.

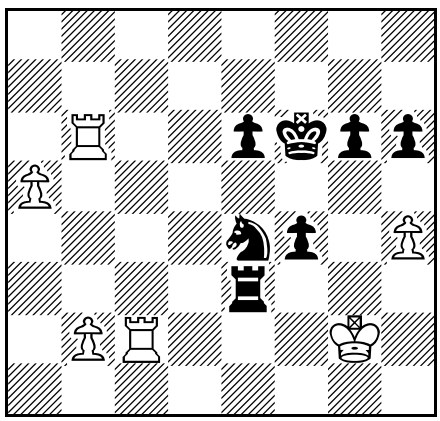
33 ♖c2?

In winning positions we must be vigilant against floundering in that dulling sense of well being where we enjoy it so much, that we subconsciously resist change. Yet to win, change *must* take place. Reshevsky, with little time on his clock, incorrectly expends a tempo on a defensive move. White wins with 33 ♖xb6! ♖d2+ 34 ♔f1! (not 34 ♔f3?? ♖f2 mate or 34 ♔h3?? g5! and White must hand over a rook to avoid mate after 35 ♖g1 g4+ 36 ♖xg4 ♘f2+) 34...g5 35 ♖cc6 f4 36 ♖xe6+ ♔f5 37 exf4 gxf4 38 a5 f3 (threatening mate) 39 ♖xe4 ♔xe4 40 a6 when Black can no longer generate mate or perpetual threats.

33...♖d3 34 ♖xb6

34 ♔f3? is met with 34...♖b3 when Black no longer stands worse.

34...♖xe3 35 a5 f4!



Exercise (planning): Fischer managed to generate serious threats on White's king, since ...f3+ is in the air and ...g5 is coming. The question is: can White promote his a-pawn without getting mated, or allowing Black to promote first? The answer is yes. But only if White hands back the exchange to remove some of the steam from Black's threats. White can accomplish this by playing either 36 ♖f2, or 36 ♖b4. Only one of the lines wins. How would you continue?

36 ♖f2?

When you possess in your arsenal a last resource, why use it early when less extreme measures suffice? With his flag about to fall, Reshevsky makes an unfortunate decision. He realized that he must return the exchange, but does it the wrong way. He thought, quite reasonably, that Black's rook had no way to return to halt the march of his a-pawn.

Answer: Correct was the problem-like 36 ♖b4!! f3+ 37 ♔f1 f2 38 ♖xf2+ (the key to the art of accumulation is to give back some but not all of your wealth to keep in check an opponent's initiative) 38...♘xf2 39 ♔xf2 ♖e5 40 ♖a4 ♖f5+ 41 ♔e3 ♔e5 42 a6 ♖f8 43 ♖b4! ♔d5 44 a7 ♖a8 45 ♖b7 is hopeless for Black.

> ***Question:*** What is the difference between the two versions of handing back the exchange?

Answer: In this version, it is *White*, not Black who decides the moment.

> ***Question:*** Why does White have to give up the exchange at all? Can't he just push his a-pawn?

Answer: Black draws after 36 a6? f3+ 37 ♔f1 ♖d3 threatening mate on d1. Now White is unable to play 38 ♖c1?? (38 ♔e1 ♖e3+ 39 ♔f1 ♖d3 repeats, while after 39 ♔d1 f2 40 ♖xf2+ ♘xf2+ 41 ♔c2 ♖e5 Black certainly stands no worse and may even be winning, despite the comp's '0.00' assessment) 38...♖d2 39 ♖b3 ♖f2+ 40 ♔g1 (or 40 ♔e1 ♖e2+ and mate next move) 40...♖g2+ 41 ♔f1 ♘g3+ 42 ♔e1 f2+ and Black wins.

36...♘xf2 37 ♔xf2 ♖e5!

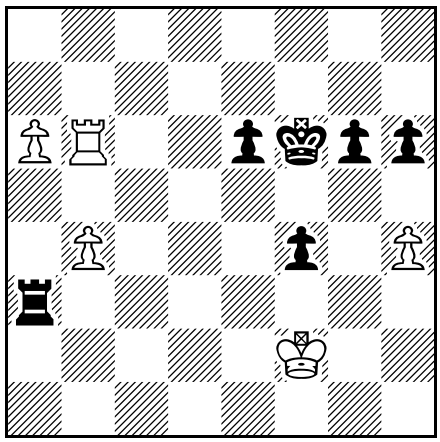
Opportunity turns its shining face to Black and Fischer plays the remainder of the game with an air of increasing assurance. This move carries an attitude of irresolution, which in reality camouflages Fischer's true intent: he induces b4 to get his rook behind White's passed a-pawn.

After the mundane 37...♖d3? we note a precipitous decline in Black's counterplay after 38 a6 ♖d7 39 b4 g5 40 ♖b5 g4 41 ♖a5 g3+ 42 ♔e2! (42 ♔f3?? ♖d3+ 43 ♔xf4 g2 44 ♖a1 ♖a3! allows Black to draw) 42...g2 43 ♖a1 ♖g7 44 ♔f2 e5 45 b5 e4 46 ♖g1! ♖c7 47 ♔xg2 f3+ 48 ♔f2 ♖c2+ 49 ♔g3 ♖a2 50 ♖b1 ♖g2+ 51 ♔f4 f2 52 a7 ♖g1 53 a8♕ ♖xb1 (Black is about to promote, but White has a way to force the win of f2) 54 ♕d8+ ♔e6 55 ♕e8+ ♔f6 56 ♕e5+ ♔f7 57 ♕d5+ ♔f8 58 ♕a8+ ♔g7 59 ♕a7+ ♔f6 60 ♕xf2 and White wins.

38 b4 ♖e3!

There is a clear sense of emancipation from Black's side, which is felt, more than actively expressed. Now Fischer's rook gets behind the passed a-pawn, and his own pawns begin to advance.

39 a6 ♖a3



40 ♖c6??

Reshevsky blunders on the final move of the time control. This move loses a critical tempo.

White holds the draw with 40 b5! g5 41 hxg5+ hxg5 42 ♖b8 g4 43 b6! g3+ 44 ♔g2 ♖a2+ 45 ♔f3 g2 46 ♖g8 ♖xa6 47 ♖xg2 ♖xb6 48 ♔xf4.

40...g5 41 hxg5+ hxg5 42 b5 g4 43 ♖c8

Both Fischer and Kasparov felt this move was a mistake. I don't believe White has any path to save the game. For example:

a) 43 ♖c1 ♖a2+ 44 ♔f1 f3 45 ♖b1 g3 46 b6 ♖h2! 47 ♔e1 ♖h1+ 48 ♔d2 ♖xb1 49 a7 f2 50 a8♕ f1♕ when there is no perpetual check and Black wins.

b) 43 b6 g3+ 44 ♔f1 f3 45 ♖c1 ♖xa6 46 ♖b1 ♖a2 47 b7 ♖h2 48 ♔g1 f2+ 49 ♔f1 ♖h1+ 50 ♔g2 (the king's palsied hands give us an accurate picture of his state of mind) 50...♖xb1 and wins.

43...♔f5 44 b6 g3+ 45 ♔e1

Alternatively, 45 ♔g2 ♖a2+ 46 ♔g1 f3 47 ♖c1 ♖g2+ 48 ♔f1 ♖h2 49 ♔e1 ♖e2+ 50 ♔f1 ♔g4! 51 b7 g2+ 52 ♔g1 ♔h3 53 ♖f1 f2+! 54 ♖xf2 ♖e1+ 55 ♖f1 ♖xf1 mate.

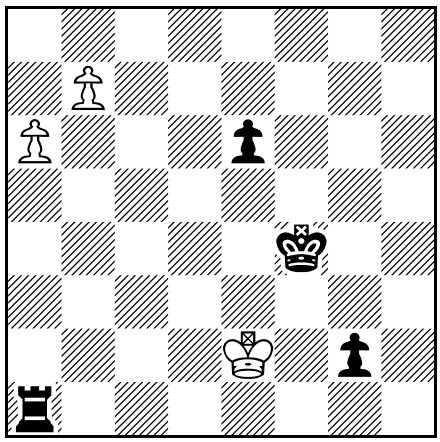
45...♖a1+ 46 ♔e2 g2 47 ♖f8+

If 47 ♖g8 ♖xa6 48 b7 ♖b6 49 ♖xg2 ♖xb7 and Black wins.

47...♔e4 48 ♖xf4+

A desperado. After 48 ♖g8 ♖a2+ 49 ♔d1 f3 50 a7 ♔d3 51 ♔c1 f2 52 ♖g3+ ♔c4 53 ♖g4+ ♔c5 54 ♖g5+ ♔d6 Black forces mate.

48...♔xf4 49 b7



49...g1♕?!

The move which achieves the goal to promote. GM Isaac Kashdan pointed out the simpler win 49...♔e4! 50 b8♕ ♖a2+! 51 ♔e1 g1♕ mate. Sigh, I still can't underpromote in *ChessBase 13*. Will someone please tell me how?

50 b8♕+ ♔f5

Black's job is to dodge perpetual check.

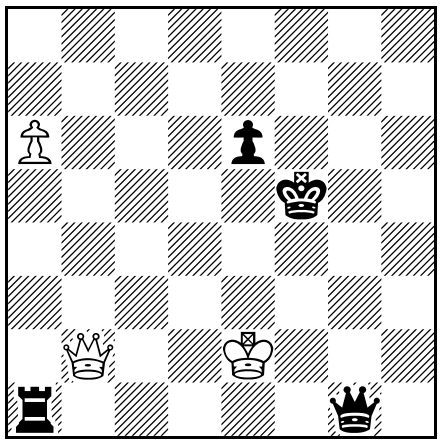
51 ♕f8+ ♔e4 52 ♕a8+ ♔d4 53 ♕d8+

To Black's king, his sister's booming commands make him feel like an early Christian being summoned by a lioness in the Coliseum.

53...♔c4 54 ♕d3+ ♔c5 55 ♕c3+ ♔d6 56 ♕d2+

56 ♕b4+ is met with 56...♕c5.

56...♔e5 57 ♕b2+ ♔f5 0-1



Reshevsky resigned here.

Question: How does Black dodge perpetual check?

Answer: Let's turn this into a calculation exercise. Try and play through the remaining moves of the game without moving the pieces.

Exercise (calculation): Black wins after 58 ♕c2+ ♔f6 59 ♕c3+ e5 60 ♕f3+ (after 60 ♕c6+ ♔g5 White runs out of checks) 60...♔g7 61 ♕b7+ ♔h6 62 ♕c6+ ♔g5 when White's checks run out, and the violence once inherent in his position passes like a sudden squall at sea, which dies down with time. 10-ply if you made it to the end without moving the pieces. What an analytical nightmare of a game!

Game 13
G.Tringov-R.Fischer
Capablanca Memorial, Havana 1965
Sicilian Najdorf

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♕b6

The dreaded Poisoned Pawn line of the Najdorf. As the years advance and pass by, your possibly senile writer grows more and more muddleheaded, to the point where I hate to memorize long opening variations. So I shake my head in disbelief when I think upon a time when I actually played this position from Black's side.

8 ♕d2 ♕xb2 9 ♖b1 ♕a3 10 e5

Today, this line is considered rather shady for White, and more commonly played are the variations 10 f5, 10 ♗e2 and 10 ♗xf6.

10...dxe5 11 fxe5 ♘fd7 12 ♗c4

Today, most experts on the white side usually go for 12 ♘e4, which was first played by Tal: 12...h6 13 ♗h4 ♕xa2 (one must have a high degree of confidence in one's own attacking abilities to enter such a line two pawns down) 14 ♖d1 ♕d5 15 ♕e3 ♕xe5 (make that three pawns down; 15...♗c5?! allows 16 ♘xe6! ♗b4+ 17 c3 ♕xe6 18 cxb4 when White's development lead and dark-square power compensated him for his missing pawn, A.Shirov-Wang Hao, Russian Team Championship 2009) 16 ♗e2 ♗c5 17 ♗g3, Yu Yangyi-Wei Yei, Chinese League 2014. Maybe it's stylistic, but I prefer Black's side.

12...♗b4!

This was Fischer's improvement over 12...♗e7?! when White has 13 ♗xe6!.