

Arkadij Naiditsch
Csaba Balogh

Positional masterpieces of 2012–2015



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KEY TO SYMBOLS

=	Equality or equal chances
±	White has a slight advantage
∓	Black has a slight advantage
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
∞	unclear
∞̄	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with initiative
→	with an attack
Δ	with the idea
□	only move
N	novelty
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+	check
#	mate

INTRODUCTION

Useful information for our valued readers.

- »» The book contains the 50 positional masterpieces from 2012 to 2015.
- »» The games were selected and analyzed by the authors GM Arkadij Naiditsch and GM Csaba Balogh.
- »» Most of the games are taken from the highest-level tournaments, such as Wijk aan Zee, FIDE Grand Prix series, Olympiads etc.
- »» Most of the games are played by top Grandmasters: Carlsen, Anand, Kramnik, Aronian, Caruana and many, many more of the world's best chess-players.
- »» The games are sorted in chronological order, from 2012 through to 2015.

EDITORIAL PREFACE

We are proud to present our last book in a series of 5 — “Positional masterpieces of 2012–2015”.

It was very interesting work trying to select and analyse the 50 positional masterpieces from the past 4 years: the choice was so wide! We were aiming to find the most exciting, spectacular and, of course, useful attacking ideas which might also occur in our own practical games.

The main idea behind this book stands out clearly: We try to reduce the importance of opening theory, and rather get inside the workings of the best chess-playing brains on the planet in an attempt to explain the most complex attacking ideas in a simple and understandable way to any chess lover.

Another very important point of the book which we are proud of is, we have not used much ‘engine’ assistance during our commentary on the games. We try to see the game the way we would do in a practical game, which makes the commentaries very special — which in practice puts the reader fully in the shoes of the world-class players; this is exactly the best way to improve our own chess level.

Sadly, nowadays, we have more-and-more computer analyses and we can hear chess amateurs judging the play even of Carlsen. Yes, you can find tactical mistakes with an engine at home — but the question is, can you do the same during your practical game over the board?! Chess is a game where everyone is making mistakes — and this is what it is all about in the current book!

We would advise all our readers to take out a real chessboard and enjoy these beautiful masterpieces. This is how we learned to play chess and this is why we still enjoy every wonderful game, even after almost 20 years of being professional chess players!

Yours,

Arkadij Naiditsch & Csaba Balogh

GAME 1

▷ **L. Dominguez Perez (2730)**

▷ **I. Ibragimov (2539)**

Russian league

09.04.2012, [Co2]

Annotated by Csaba Balogh

We are facing a typical battle in the French Defense advance variation. Black gets a good position out of the opening, but does not find the right plan. With some nice manoeuvring, White takes over the initiative and finishes the game with a pretty mating attack.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♘c6
5.♗f3 ♗ge7

The third most common move after 5... ♖b6 and 5... ♕d7

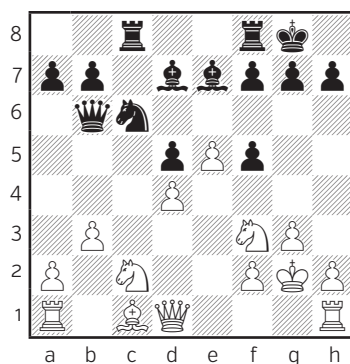
6.♗a3 cxd4 7.cxd4 ♗f5 8.♗c2 ♖b6
9.♕d3

There are still many games for the given position, but now Black deviates from the mainline with a logical move.

9... ♕d7

Preparing to bring the rook to c8. One of the biggest experts in the French Defense, the Armenian GM Rafael Vaganian, played an instructive game against Nigel Short: 9... ♕b4+!? 10.♖f1 in this opening, it is not such a big problem for White to move his king, since the position is closed and in a few moves he can undertake artificial castling with g3 and ♖g2 (10.♗xb4 would lose a pawn 10...

♖xb4+ 11.♕d2 (11.♖f1 ♗fxd4) 11... ♖xb2) 10... ♕e7 11.g3 the d4-pawn is always poisoned in this line, now after exchanging all the pieces on d4, ♕b5+ wins the queen 11... ♕d7 12.♖g2 ♖c8 (12... ♗fxd4? loses again after 13.♗fxd4 ♗xd4 14.♕e3! ♕c5 15.b4!+- winning a piece) 13.♕xf5 exf5 we will see this structure in our game as well 14.b3 0–0 Black had equalized and after

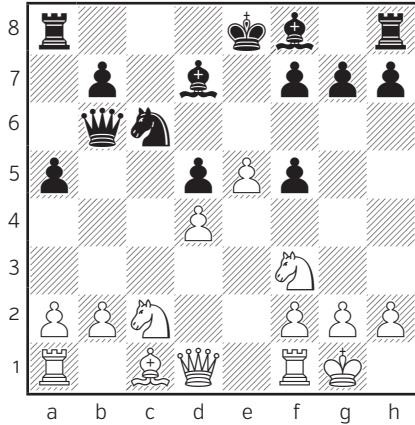


15. ♕g5? a big mistake, he already has a big advantage 15... ♕xg5 16.♗xg5 f4!! the bishop comes to f5 and the d4-pawn won't be around for much longer 17.gxf4 ♗e7! ♖g6 threatens to win one of the knights 18.♗e3 and at this moment Black missed the win in the Short-Vaganian, Montpellier 1985 game with 18...h6! 19.♗f3 ♖g6+ 20.♖f1 ♕b5+ 21.♖e1 ♖e4 Black is completely winning.

10.0–0 a5

A strong move, as Black should organize his play on queenside. 10... ♗cxd4? just as in the previous line, the d4-pawn is indirectly protected: 11.♗fxd4 ♗xd4 12.♕e3! ♕c5 13.b4! ♗xc2 14.♕xc5+-

11. ♖xf5 exf5



Here we have this peculiar structure. Generally, we can say it is fine for Black, and fans of the French Defense should never be worried about this slightly strange pawn-structure, but still the position requires exact play.

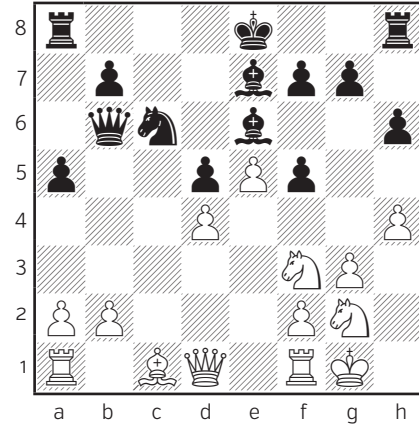
12. ♖e3!

Dominguez plays logically. He has a nice square on f4 which he plans to occupy with the knight.

12... ♖e6 13.g3! ♖e7 14. ♖g2! h6

A useful move. Black should keep his dark-squared bishop, not letting White exchange it at a given moment with ♖g5.

15.h4



15...0-0

I have seen some games in this structure where Black kept his king in the center. It is in complete safety there. 15...♖d7!? 16. ♖f4 ♖hc8

16. ♖f4 ♖fc8

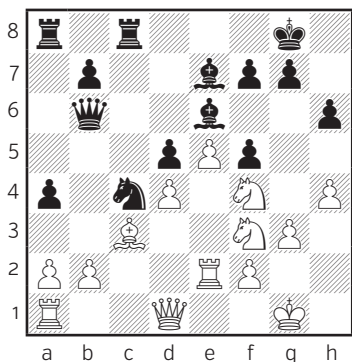
Black prepares for the invasion on the c-file after ...♖b4, something that White must prevent...

17. ♖e1!

Just to have ♖e2 available on ...♖b4. Until this point Black has played well, but now he chooses the wrong plan...

17... ♖c7

It is logical to double on the c-file, but White can easily neutralize the threats there... In my opinion, it was better to play 17...a4 to install the knight on c4 18. ♖e2 ♖a5 Black seems to be completely fine 19. ♖d2 (19. ♖xa4? is not working 19...♖b3!; 19. ♖g2 ♖c4 20. ♖e1 ♖c7) 19...♖c4 20. ♖c3



and now we see a typical plan for this structure, which might look a bit scary for somebody new to it: 20...g5! 21. ♖xe6 ♔xe6 with a comfortable game.

18. ♖e2

White defends the b2-pawn in order to develop with ♗e3.

18... ♖ac8 19. ♗e3

The position of Black's rooks seems to be nice, but in fact they don't really do anything. Black no longer has the ...a4, ...♘a5-c4 plan. It is already not easy to suggest something for him, while White has a clear idea now, which we will see in the game...

19... ♘b4 20. ♘e1!

The plan was anyway to transfer the knight to d3.

20... ♔b5

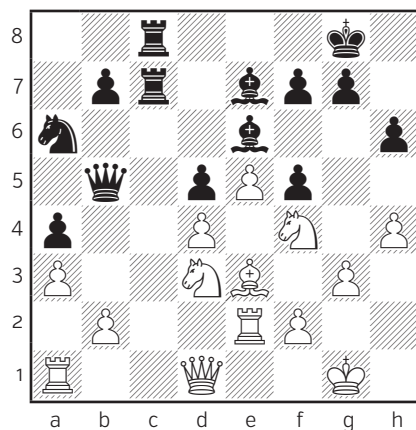
20...g5!? was possible again, but now it is more risky than before 21. ♘xe6 ♔xe6 22. hxg5 hxg5 23. a3 ♘c6 24. f4! could be slightly better for White.

21. a3 ♘a6 22. ♘ed3

Black is out of counterplay. He tries to maneuver with the pieces, but there is no weakness in White's camp to target.

22... a4

it is already too late, the knight has no opportunity to come to a5.



23. ♖d2!

A very deep move! It opens the diagonal for the queen, so White prepares for a kingside attack with g4!

23... ♗f8?!

Another bad idea, but the position was already quite unpleasant. Black underestimates the g4 plan... The bishop was better placed on e7, from where it was staring at the h4-pawn. Even after the logical 23... ♖c4 24. ♘xe6 fxe6 25. g4! was working. White is better anyway.

24. g4!

This creates two threats: the direct one is to take on e6 — then on f5 — and attack with ♔h5, ♘f4. The

positional idea is to push g5, disturbing Black's king.

24... ♖d7

24... ♔d7 was more logical, but the position is bad anyway 25.g5! hxg5 26.hxg5 g6 27.♔g2 White prepares to bring the rooks to the h-file, just as in the game and 27... ♖e7 would drop a pawn 28.♗f4 ♖e8 29.♖xa4

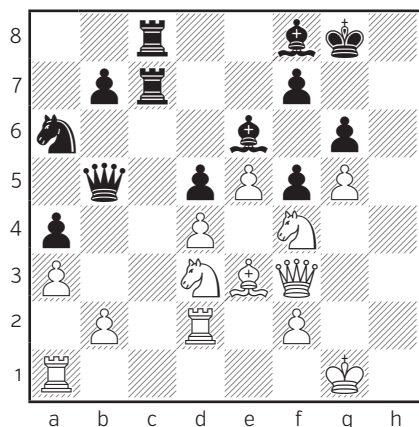
25.g5! hxg5

Black did not want to open the h-file, but to accept gxh6 is not much fun either. 25...g6 26.♖f3 ♕e6 27.gxh6+- 27... ♕xh6 loses to ♗xe6

26.hxg5 g6 27.♖f3

Developing with tempo.

27... ♕e6



28.♔g2!

Preparing for ♖h1. You should note that the Black rooks on the c-file still don't do anything.

28... ♖c4

28... ♕g7 29.♖h1 ♖c2 White only gives up his strong knight for the bad bishop, when it is winning on the spot. 30.♗xe6! fxe6 31.♖xc2 ♖xc2 32.♗f4 ♖e8 33.♖h3+-

29.♖h1 ♗c7 30.♖dd1!

Really nice maneuvering! Dominguez prepares for doubling.

30... ♕g7 31.♖h4 ♖d7

31...♔f8 The king has no chance to run away from the danger-zone 32.♖h7! say stop to the king! 32...♗e8 33.♗xe6+ fxe6 34.♗f4+-

32.♖dh1 ♖d8 33.♖g3!

White has time for everything. First he defends the g5-pawn and wants to play ♖h7, ♖h4. Black can do nothing against this...

33... ♗b5 34.♖h7 ♗xd4 35.♖h4

Black resigned! A very nice game by Dominguez... It is really enjoyable to watch his games because all his moves are very easy to understand.

1-0

■ GAME 2

▷ R. Wojtaszek (2706)

▶ A. Fedorov (2609)

Czech league

23.04.2012, [E62]

Annotated by Csaba Balogh

Radoslaw Wojtaszek, one of Anand's seconds, won a very nice game in the Czech League. We will study the typical maneuvers of the King's Indian Defense combined with great tactical elements at the end.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♕g7 4.♘f3 d6 5.g3

The g3 system is one of the most popular setups against this opening.

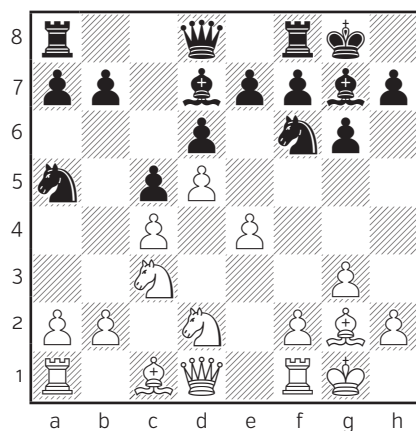
5...0-0 6.♕g2 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♕f5

A "sideline", but still with almost 1500 games in the database. On neutral moves, Black wants to play ♘e4. 7...a6 is the most often seen move. Another sideline is 7...♖b8.

8.d5 ♘a5 9.♘d2

A logical reaction, White defends the c4-pawn and intends to occupy the center with e4. The mainline is 9.♘d4, although it would fall in with the idea of 7...♕f5. 9...♕d7! Black retreats with the bishop to d7 and after White protects the c4-pawn, he pushes ...c5 and achieves a comfortable position.

9...c5 10.e4 ♕d7



11.♖c2

A standard plan — White prepares to fianchetto his c1-bishop.

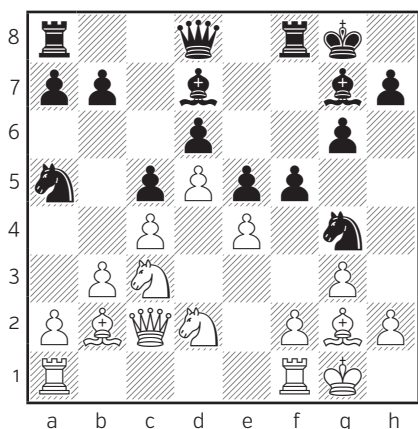
11...e5

11...a6 would lead us to the main pawn-structure of the King's Indian g3 system, e.g. 12.b3 b5 13.♕b2 ♖b8 14.♗ab1 e5 with thousands of games in the pawn formation. In general, theory considers White's chances to be slightly better.

12.b3 ♘g4

Instead of creating tension on the queenside with ...a6 and ...b5, Fedorov — who has played this opening his whole life — initiates direct play on the kingside.

13.♕b2 f5

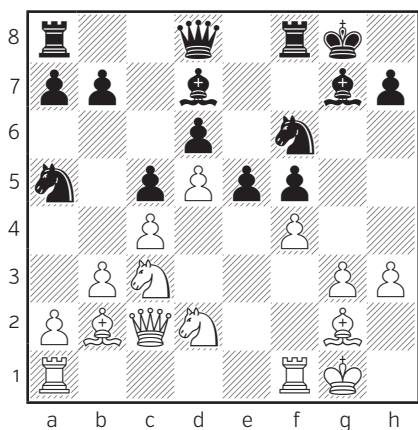


Black wants to push ...f4 with a very dangerous attack, which has to be prevented. In similar structures White reacts with a typical response by pushing f4 himself. It is clear that in the present game White is not prepared well-enough for this move, so Wojtaszek plays the other known method of countering the ...f4 threat.

14. exf5! gxf5

Black, of course, could not give up control over the e4 square.

15. h3 ♘f6 16. f4!



Forcing Black to close the center, and the maneuvering part of the game will begin.

16... e4

16...exf4 Opening the position would be punished in an instructive way: 17. ♖e2!! fxg3 18. ♘f4!! With this double pawn sacrifice, White completely paralyzes Black's pieces. The next move would be ♖ae1 or ♖f3-g3. A very nice picture, where the White pieces are dominating the whole board!

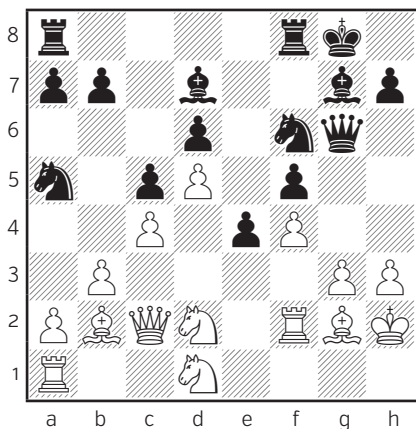
17. ♘d1!

The knight is a great blockading piece, and is heading to e3. In general, White has a really long-term idea, to play g4! It would open the position of his own king, so it needs huge preparation. However we will see in the game how effective it can be if White pushes it at the right moment.

17... ♕e8!

Black plays logically as well. He transfers his queen to its ideal square on g6. It temporarily prevents the ♘e3 idea, due to the concrete ...♕g6, ...♘h5 threat. The next two moves by White will be prophylactic against this idea.

18. ♔h2! ♕g6 19. ♖f2!

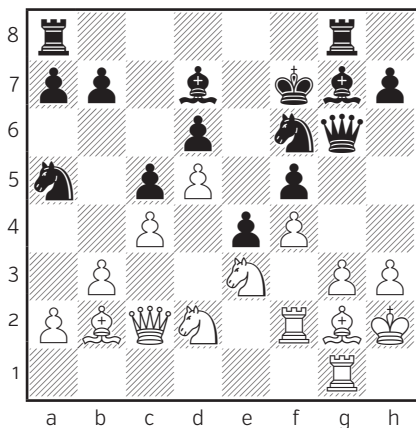


19. ♖e3 ♗h5

19... ♔f7?

A logical move, which is actually a serious mistake. Black should have forced the knight to go to f1, and we will soon understand why... 19... ♗h5! 20. ♖f1 ♜f7 21. ♖de3 ♔h8 22. ♕h1 ♜g8 23. ♜g2 with a really sharp, double-edged position.

20. ♖e3 ♜g8 21. ♜g1!



This is the point! And the reason why Black's 19th move was a mistake. By

having the rook on g1, White's chances to push g4 at the right moment increase a lot.

21... ♕h6?

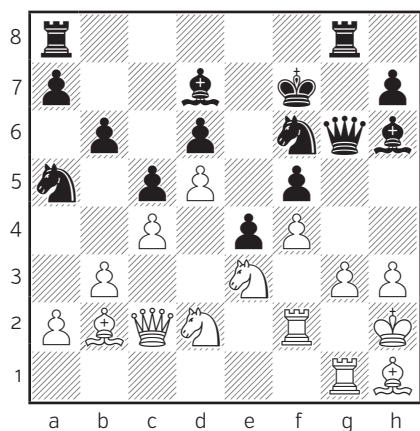
Another mistake, after which the g4-push becomes deadly. White was already better anyway. Let's see what happens if Black fights differently against g4. We will see a really nice regrouping of the pieces in both cases. 21... ♕h6! 22. ♕f1! ♜h6 23. ♕e2 ♜g6 Black pins the king and doubles his rooks on the g-file, which was actually the idea behind the 19th move. However, White has a great knight maneuver! 24. ♗df1 ♜ag8 25. ♖g2! One knight is going to h4 and the other one to e3. The f5-pawn becomes a real weakness!

21...h5 White uses the same plan that we saw in the other line: 22. ♕f1! ♔e7 23. ♕e2 b6 24. ♗df1 ♜ae8 25. ♖g2! ♔d8 Black's king would like to run away from the "battlefield" but, as we will see, there is no safe place for him in this game. 26. ♗h4 ♜h7 27. ♖e3 ♔c7 28. a3! After paralyzing Black's pieces, White can organize a queen-side attack.

22. ♕h1!

Wojtaszek already foresaw his next two moves. We understand soon why the bishop went to h1!

22...b6



27. ♖xg4

27. ♘g5+ was even easier 27... ♔f8
28. ♘f5 +-

27... ♙xg4 28. hxg4

and g5 is coming, Black is helpless.

28... ♙h4+ 29. ♖h3 ♙xg4 30. ♘g5+!
♙xg5 31. ♙xh7+

A very instructive game. We learned many ideas of how to play with this pawn structure.

On 22... ♔e7 the same thing happens as in the game...

1–0

23. g4!!

This seems like committing suicide, but in reality it leads to winning the e4-pawn — and is why the bishop has to be on h1 now — which means the collapse of Black's position!

23... fxg4 24. ♖g3!!

This was the brilliant idea! It stops the ...g3 threat, and Black is helpless against ♘xe4.

24... ♖ae8

24... ♙h5 25. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 26. ♙xe4 gxxh3 27. ♙f3! +- opens the diagonal for the queen to take on h7! 24... ♘h5 does not work, because of 25. ♙xe4 +-

25. ♙xf6!

White wins huge material now in all lines.

25... ♙xf6 26. ♘xe4 ♙e7

To protect the d6 pawn.

■ GAME 3

- ▷ I. Nepomniachtchi (2716)
 ▶ Y. Quesada Perez (2625)
 47th Capablanca Mem Elite
 Havana CUB (6)
 10.05.2012, [A18]
 Annotated by Csaba Balogh

A highly impressive performance by Ian Nepomniachtchi, who is known for his fast playing style, spending between 30 and 60 minutes for the whole game!

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e6 3.e4

Generally, White plays this move order to avoid the Nimzo-Indian Variation (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4), but it gives Black some extra options.

3...d5

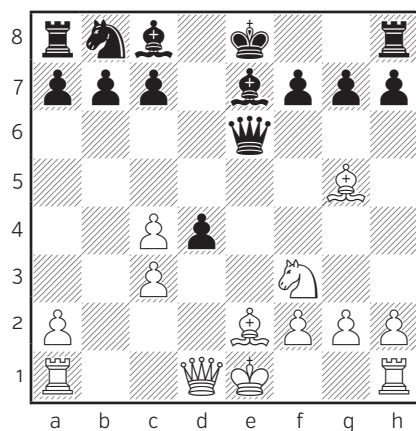
3...c5 is the other move.

4.e5 d4

A well-known push with thousands of games in the database.

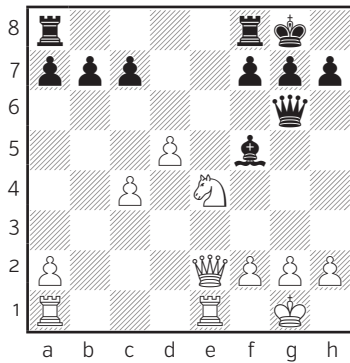
5.exf6 dxc3 6.bxc3 ♖xf6 7.d4 e5 8.♘f3 exd4 9.♙g5 ♖e6+ 10.♙e2 ♙e7

We are at the first critical position of our current game. We can still see more than a hundred games that include players like Kasparov, Aronian, Kramnik and Karpov. Anyway, Nepomniachtchi deviates from the mainline — which was played by all of the top guys — with a move that seems to give White an advantage.



11. ♙xe7!?

Let's first take a look at a very instructive rapid game from the highest-level. 11.cxd4 ♙xg5 12.♘xg5 ♖f6 13.♖d2 o-o 14.o-o White is better developed and has the advantage in the center. However, Black's idea in the whole line is to quickly put pressure on the d4-pawn, forcing the center to move, giving him different kinds of counterplay. For example, in case of d5, Black gets the possibility to undermine it with ...c6. 14...♘c6 15.d5 ♘d4 16.♘e4 ♘xe2+ 17.♖xe2 ♖g6?! This seemingly logical move got punished by Aronian in a really nice fashion! (I found 17... ♖e5 to be an improvement, and on 18.♖fe1 ♙f5 Black seems to equalize. Probably this is the reason why Nepomniachtchi looked for an alternative for White, and found the 11. ♙xe7 move.) 18.♖fe1 ♙f5



Black seems to be fine, but Aronian comes up with a temporary pawn sacrifice. 19. ♖g3! ♙d3 20. ♕e5 ♙xc4 21. ♗f5! White threatens with ♖e7, and on 21... ♗h8 (21... ♗f6 22. ♗e7+ ♗h8 23. ♗xc7±) 22. ♗e3! This move was the point of the maneuver that started with 19. ♖g3! White obtains a very strong passed-pawn on d5 after taking on c7. 22... ♙d3 23. ♗xc7 ♙e4 24. ♗f4 ♗fe8 25. f3 ♙d3 26. ♖ad1 Black would be fine, if he had a ‘blockader’ knight on d6. 26... h5 27. ♖d2 ♙b5 28. ♖ed1 ♖ad8 29. d6 ± Black has huge problems. The end of the game was also very spectacular: 29... ♙c6 30. d7 ♖e6 31. ♗c4 ♗f6 32. ♗xf6 gxf6 33. ♗a5 ♗g7 34. ♖d4 f5 35. ♗f2 b6 36. ♗xc6 ♖xc6 37. ♗g3 The White king is going to support the d7-pawn, and would also like to collect the weak kingside pawns. 37... ♖c2 38. ♗f4! ♗g6 39. ♗e5! ♖e2+ 40. ♗d6! A great run! 40... ♗f6 41. ♖d5 ♖xg2 42. ♗c7 ♖gg8 43. f4 ♖gf8 44. ♖g1 ♗e7 45. ♖d6 1–0 Aronian-Kramnik, Moscow 2011. It is very rare to see Kramnik losing in such a way, even if it was “just” a rapid game!

11... ♗xe7 12. cxd4 0–0 13. 0–0

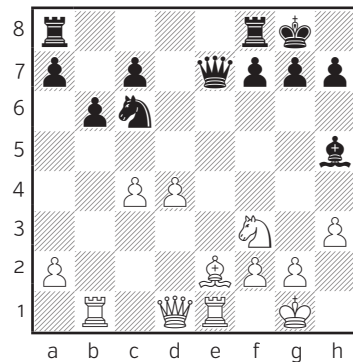
Just as explained in the previous line, Black has to put pressure on the center.

13... ♙g4

The most logical move to eliminate the defender. 13... ♖d8 seems a bit too slow 14. ♖b1! White provokes weaknesses, and after 14... b6 15. ♗e5! is very strong 15... ♙b7 16. ♙f3 c5 17. ♙xb7 ♗xb7 18. d5± with a clear advantage, thanks to the protected passed-pawn on d5 and the powerful knight.

14. h3 ♙xf3

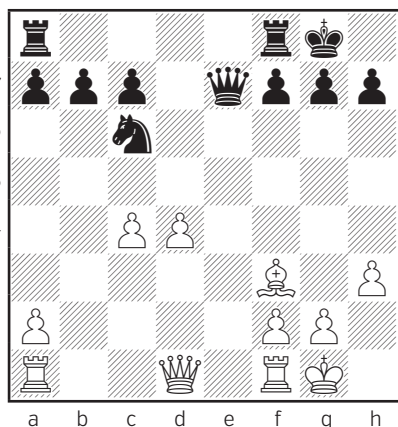
Black decides to force matters, but as we will see, he is not in time to consolidate the position. If Black decides instead to hold the tension with 14... ♙h5 White must react energetically 15. ♖b1! b6 16. ♖e1! ♗c6



17. ♗a4! I think that this concrete move is the only way to get an advantage. (On 17. d5 ♙xf3 18. ♙xf3 ♗e5 and Black is fine! This is what he is aiming for in this opening.) 17... ♗f6 18. ♗e5! ♙xe2 (18... ♗xe5 19. dxe5 ♗g5 (19... ♗xe5? 20. ♙f3 +-)) 20. ♙h5 ♗xh5 21. ♗c6 with an obvious advantage.)

19. ♖xc6± Just as in the Aronian-Kramnik game, the knight becomes much stronger than the bishop. The knight restrains Black's pieces, while the bishop has no real target.

15. ♕xf3 ♖c6



16. ♖b1!

16. ♕xc6 bxc6 Black does not need to worry about the doubled-pawns, as they are doing a good job holding the c4-d4 pawn duo, and so he can start to attack the d4-pawn.

16... ♖ad8

16... ♖ab8 would cost a pawn
17. ♕xc6! bxc6 18. ♖xb8 ♖xb8 19. ♖a4 ±

17. ♖e1 ♖f6

Things are developing very logically, but unfortunately for Black the complications work out badly for him.

18. ♖xb7!

By exchanging the pawns, White opens the position — thus favoring the bishop against the knight.

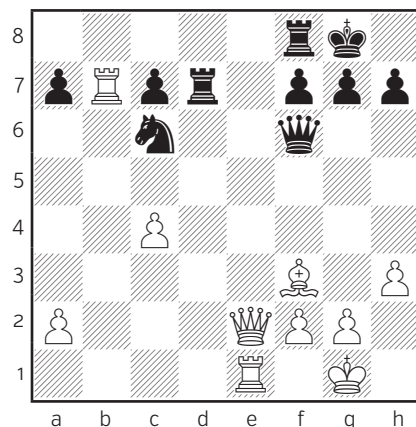
18... ♖xd4

18... ♖xd4 19. ♖xc7 ♖xf3+ 20. ♖xf3 ♖xf3 21. gxf3 ± The endgame looks quite promising for White, he is not only a pawn up, but also has an active rook on the 7th rank.

19. ♖e2

It is very hard to hold the c7-pawn, therefore Black is in serious trouble.

19... ♖d7



19... ♖d6 is met by the very strong
20. c5! ♖xc5 21. ♖xc7 ♖d6 22. ♖e8!!
winning the c6 knight!

20. ♖e8!!

Nepomniachtchi's play is extremely strong! He uses the weak back-rank. Imagine how horrible it would be to have around 10 minutes left, while your opponent makes such moves with 1 hour and 30 minutes on his

clock. Black has to find only moves to avoid losing immediately.

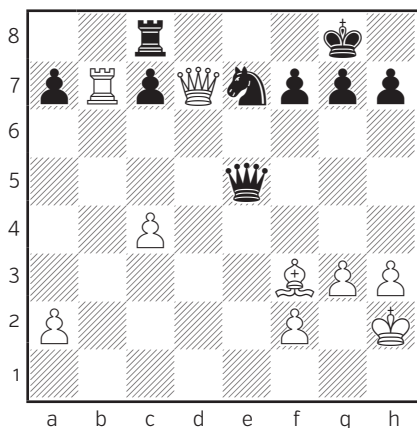
20... ♖e7!

20... ♔d6 would not solve the danger on the 8th rank 21. ♕xc6 ♖xc6 22. ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 23. ♖b8+ +-

21. ♖xe7 ♞xe7 22. ♖d7!

Black cannot keep the material balance for long. White's pieces are dominating the board, while the c7- and a7-pawns are just falling.

22... ♖a1+ 23. ♔h2 ♖e5+ 24. g3 ♖c8



24... ♞g6 25. ♖xc7 ♖f6 26. ♖c6 +-

25. ♖b3!

Not the only winning move, but the best practical one for sure. Black is forced to exchange queens due to the ♖e3 threat, transposing into a losing endgame.

25... ♖d6

25... ♖e6 26. ♖xe6 fxe6 27. ♖b7 +-

26. ♖d3! ♖xd7 27. ♖xd7 ♔f8 28. ♕b7!
The first pawn falls. Black is lost.

28... ♖b8 29. ♖xc7 ♔e8 30. ♕a6 ♔d8
31. ♖xa7 ♖b2 32. ♕b5!

The f2-pawn does not play an important role with queens off the board. Black cannot create any threats around the king, while the a- and c-pawns start to run.

32... ♖xf2+ 33. ♔g1 ♖e2 34. c5 ♖e5
35. a4!

Black resigned since he can't take on c5 due to ♖d7! I am pretty sure, that after this convincing victory by White, we will see the move 11. ♕xe7 more often in practice.

1-0