

First Steps : the Queen's Gambit

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About the Author

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Also by the Author:

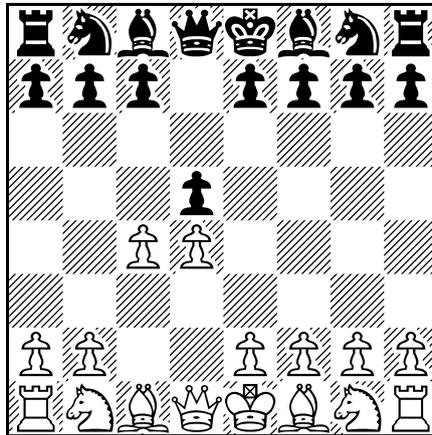
Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon

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Introduction

1 d4 d5 2 c4



There are many chess openings to choose from, but few have the depth and interest of the Queen's Gambit. It is correct to say that the improving player should have a good knowledge of the strategical and tactical ideas of the Queen's Gambit if he or she wants to improve.

I am pleased to author this basic guide to what is a fascinating opening. I've split the book up into sections, written as I would like to read and learn the opening myself. First we cover the wide range of common themes that occur in Queen's Gambit positions and then we go on to look at the wide range of variations available to Black after 2 c4.

Throughout, we will feature a large number of illustrative games. I am not biased towards either White or Black. The lines will be presented to you and then you may make your choice. The freedom to play chess as we wish is one of the strongest attractions of our favourite game.

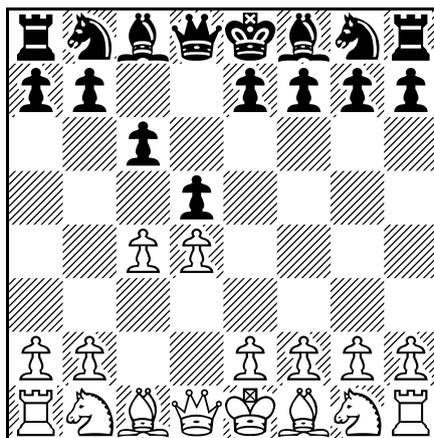
I do hope that this book will serve as a decent introduction and that you will be inspired to try out some ideas mentioned here. After that you can start to do your own further research on one of the most classical of all the major chess openings.

Andrew Martin. November 2016

Chapter Six

The Slav

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6



The Slav defence, characterized by $2...c6$, is one of Black's best replies to the Queen's Gambit. It is both solid and flexible. Black can often switch to attack in many lines. The Slav is immensely popular at the highest levels because of the variety of approaches that Black can bring to bear and there is no reason why amateurs should not play it too. The Slav is an all-round, all-purpose defence.

In chess terms we note that Black keeps the diagonal open for his bishop on c8. The bishop often deploys to either f5 or g4 and then Black follows with $...e7-e6$, setting up a triangle of pawns in the centre. Black may capture on c4 instead, develop the bishop and then play $...e7-e6$ again, forming a small centre, restraining White. Let's see these ideas in action.

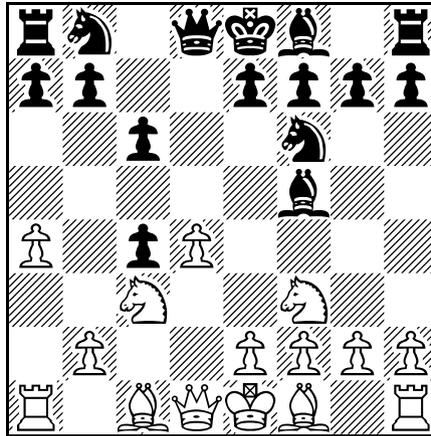
Game 37
M.Parligras-D.Solak
 Kragujevac 2016

We deal with the main line first.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4

This looks like anti-positional play, but Black really is threatening to keep his pawn with ...b7-b5. Hence the main line here is 5 a4.

5 a4 ♙f5



The Euwe Variation, named after the famous Dutch ex-world champion. Black brings the bishop out and stops e2-e4 for the time being. White's chances in this line usually revolve around whether he can play e2-e4 successfully or not.

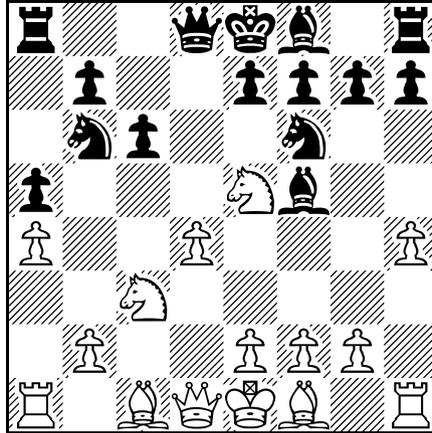
6 ♘e5

Making room for f2-f3 and then e2-e4. Black must play accurately and sharply.

6... ♘bd7 7 ♘xc4 ♘b6 8 ♘e5

8 ♘xb6 ♗xb6 9 f3 ♖d8 simply gives Black too much play.

8...a5 9 h4!?



One of those modern twists, which simply aim to make the position as complicated as possible. White gains space on the kingside and maintains his threat of f3 and then e2-e4. Black must look after his light-squared bishop.

Tip: In the Slav, Black's bishop on c8 can be a very important piece.

9...e6

Vishy Anand tried 9...g6 recently in the game L.Aronian-V.Anand, Leuven 2016. Play continued 9...g6 10 h5 gxh5! 11 e4 ♖g6 12 ♙e3 e6 13 ♙d3 ♖bd7 14 ♖xd7 ♜xd7 15 f3 ♙g7 16 ♜d2 0-0 17 ♖e2 ♜fd8. Here Black has an extra doubled pawn, whereas White dominates the centre. Note how the pawns on f3 and e4 shut the light-squared bishop on g6 out of play. The computers say that Black is okay, but it is noticeable that as soon as he tries to do something, his position instantly becomes worse, so I prefer White here.

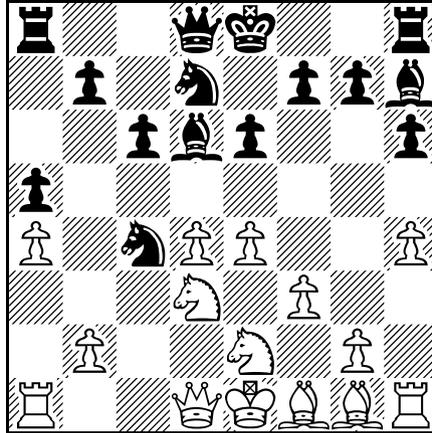
The game concluded: 18 ♙g5 c5?! (maybe 18...e5 was a better way to get some play) 19 ♙b5 ♜c7 20 ♜c1 b6 21 0-0 ♜ac8 22 ♜e1 h6 23 ♙h4 ♜b8 24 ♙a6 ♜c7 25 ♙g3 ♜a7 26 ♙xc7 ♜xc7 27 dxc5 bxc5 28 ♜f2 ♖d7 29 ♙b5 ♙xb2 30 ♜c2 ♙a3 31 ♜e3 ♙b4 32 ♜xh6 ♖e5 33 ♖f4 c4 34 ♖xg6 (White finally removes the useless bishop, on his terms) 34...♖xg6 35 ♜xc4 ♜g3 36 ♜xh5 ♙d2 37 ♜g4 ♙e3+ 38 ♙h1 ♜e5 39 f4 1-0.

An instructive game that teaches us that Black must fight very hard in this variation to keep his light-squared bishop active.

10 f3 h6

Necessary, to provide a retreat for the bishop.

11 e4 ♙h7 12 ♙e3 ♖fd7 13 ♖d3 ♙d6 14 ♖e2 ♖c4 15 ♙g1



15...0-0

Another remarkable example of the dormant light-squared bishop was seen in the game A.Demuth-V.Keymer, Bad Ragaz 2016. Black tries to be as aggressive as he can, but cannot win the battle of the tactics with his bishop on h7 excluded from play: 15...♖b6 16 ♖c2 ♗b4+ 17 ♘c3 ♗e7 18 d5 ♖d8 19 dxe6 fxe6 20 0-0-0 ♖c8 21 ♖b3 b5 22 ♗f4 ♗de5 23 ♗d4 ♗f6 24 axb5 a4 25 ♖b4 cxb5 26 ♖xb5+ ♗f7 27 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 28 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 29 ♗d7 g6 30 g4 1-0. The final position tells its own story.

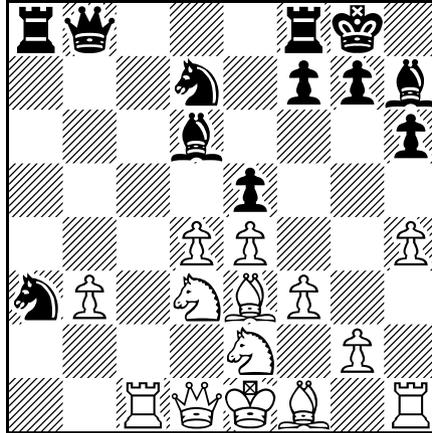
16 ♖b3 b5!?

Solak is willing to sacrifice a pawn to try to expose the white king. This seems like a good idea as it has cost White development time to build his centre. All the same I prefer the more patient 16...♗cb6 17 ♗e3 ♗h8 18 ♖c1 ♖e7 keeping all options open. Black can look to play ...c6-c5, ...e6-e5 or ...f7-f5 according to circumstances.

17 axb5 cxb5 18 ♖xb5 ♗db6 19 ♖c1 ♖c8 20 b3 ♗a3 21 ♖xa5 ♗c2+ 22 ♗d1 ♖a8 23 ♖d2 ♗a3 24 ♗e3

White is clearly better although, as we will see, there are still plenty of opportunities for Black to confuse and complicate.

24...♖b8 25 ♗e1 ♗d7 26 ♖d1 e5



27 d5?

Tempting, but I think 27 g4! was the move, restraining Black's next.

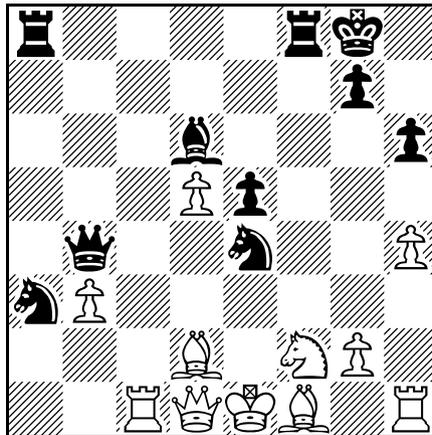
27...f5!

Bringing both the rook on f8 and our old friend on h7 to life. The tables are turning.

28 exf5 ♗xf5 29 ♖g3 ♗h7 30 ♖e4 ♗xe4! 31 fxe4 ♖f6 32 ♖f2 ♔b4+

The game has turned rapidly with White now fighting for his mere existence. It seems that White must be very careful indeed if he lets the light-squared bishop into the game.

33 ♗d2 ♖xe4!



Black is even able to sacrifice his queen.

34 ♖xe4

Taking the queen was horrendous, e.g. 34 ♗xb4 ♗xb4+ 35 ♔e2 ♖xf2 and Black wins.

34...♔xe4+ 35 ♔e2 ♔g6

35...♖c2+! is a little cleaner. Perhaps time trouble affected the game? After 35...♖c2+ 36

♔d1 (36 ♖xc2 ♗xc2 37 ♗c4 ♖a1+ 38 ♔e2 ♗d1+ 39 ♔e3 ♖a2 wins) 36...♗d4! 37 ♖h3 e4 38 ♗c4 ♖xf1+ 39 ♗xf1 ♕b4! and Black has a crushing attack in every variation.

36 ♗d3

36 ♔d1 e4 37 ♗e3 ♕f4 38 ♗d4 e3 wins.

36...e4 37 ♗h3 e3 38 ♕xe3 ♖ae8 39 ♔d2 ♕b4+ 40 ♔e2 ♖c2 0-1

Black must be very alert after 6 ♖e5 and show great care to avoid being reduced to a passive position.

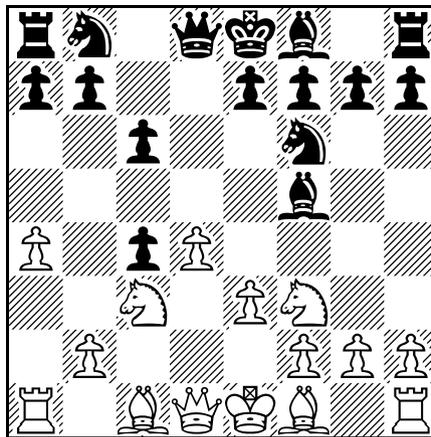
Game 38

L.Gofshtein-M.Sadler

Ischia 1996

We now move on to the most common variation of all in the Slav Defence.

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♖f6 4 ♖c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♕f5 6 e3



White plays it simply. He will regain his pawn on c4 and follow up with 0-0, ♗e2 and e4. A very logical plan, but Black has plenty of good ways to meet it.

6...e6 7 ♕xc4 ♕b4 8 0-0 ♖bd7 9 ♗e2 0-0

Quick development is the name of the game for Black. He cannot stop e4 in the short, medium or long-term and so instead readies himself to meet it.

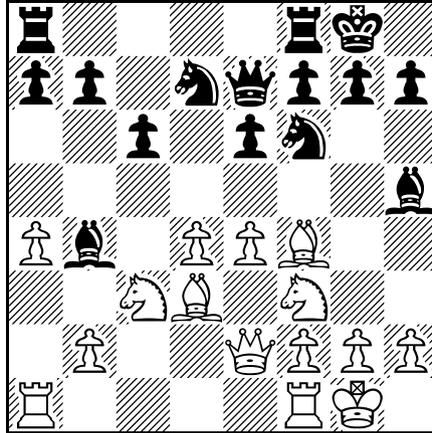
10 e4 ♕g6!

The struggle revolves around whether the White central pawns be maintained or become attacked by active Black pieces.

11 ♕d3

11 e5 ♖d5 12 ♖xd5 cxd5 13 ♕d3 ♕xd3 14 ♗xd3 h6 15 ♗b5 ♗e7 leads nowhere for White, as he cannot take on b7: 16 ♗xb7 ♖xe5! 17 ♗xe7 ♖xf3+ 18 gxf3 ♕xe7.

11...♕h5! 12 ♕f4 ♗e7!?



A new move at the time this game was played. Any of 12...♖e8, 12...e5, 12...♙a5 or 12...c5 can also be chosen according to taste. Black is preparing ...e6–e5 and so White puts a stop to that.

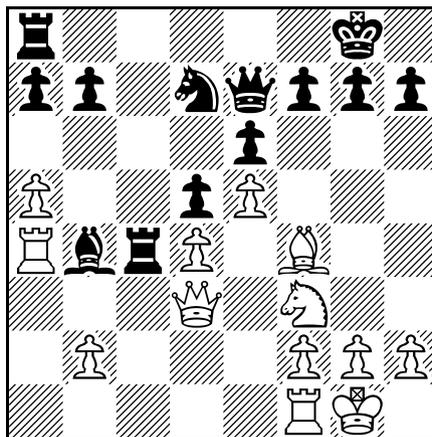
13 e5 ♞d5 14 ♞xd5 cxd5

The pawn structure is pleasant for Black, with his light squared bishop active on h5.

15 ♙e3 ♜fc8 16 a5

16 ♞e1 a5 17 ♞c2 ♟g6 is equal.

16...♟g6 17 ♜a4 ♟xd3 18 ♙xd3 ♜c4



Black has a very harmonious position.

Tip: To assess a position look around and ask yourself whether you have any pieces which are difficult to develop to good squares. If the answer is yes, you may be worse.

Black has no such problems here.

19 h4?

I think 19 ♔g5 is probably best, forcing Black's queen to a more passive square, but White still can't really work up much of an edge. After 19... ♖f8 20 ♙d2 ♙xd2 21 ♖xc4 dxc4 22 ♗xd2 b5 the game is equal. Meanwhile 19 ♘g5 is a waste of time as 19... ♘f8 is a good reply.

19...h6

19... ♘c5!? 20 dxc5 ♖xf4 was another option.

20 h5 ♘c5!

This is better now, as the pawn on h5 is out on a limb.

21 dxc5 ♖xf4

Black is better. Contrast the pawn formations and one immediately sees why.

22 a6 bxa6 23 c6

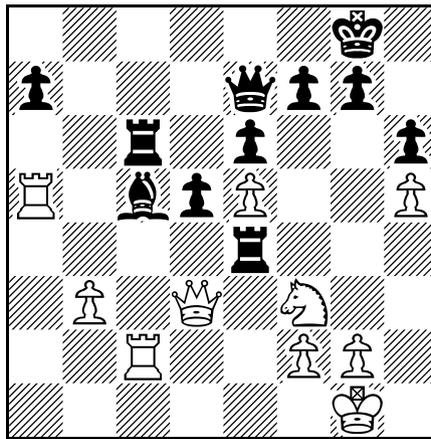
23 ♗xa6 ♗xc5 24 ♗b7 ♗f8 25 ♖d1 a5 wins.

23...a5! 24 ♖c1 ♖c8 25 b3 ♖c7 26 ♖c2 ♖e4 27 ♖a1 ♙c5 28 ♖xa5

If 28 ♖ac1 then 28... ♙b6.

28...♖xc6?!

Letting White back in. 28... ♙b6 29 ♖a1 ♖b4 will keep White thinking about his ragged pawns.



29 ♖b5?

This is a clear mistake. Instead 29 ♗b5! forces 29... ♙xf2+ 30 ♖xf2 ♖c1+ 31 ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 32 ♙xf1 ♖b4 and after 33 ♖xa7 ♖xb5 34 ♖xe7 ♖xb3 35 ♙e2 when White is the only one playing for a win.

29...♗c7! 30 ♖a2 ♙b6

Black has anchored his position and converts without difficulty.

31 ♙h2

31 ♖a4 ♖c3 32 ♗d2 ♖c2 doesn't help.

31...♖c3 32 ♗d2 ♗c6 33 ♖xb6

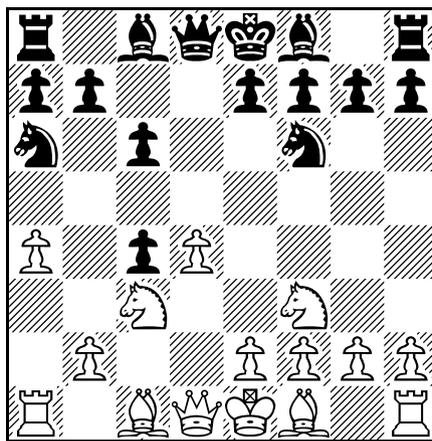
33 ♖a4 ♖c2 34 ♗d3 ♖xa4 35 bxa4 ♖xf2 also wins.

33...axb6 34 ♖d4 ♜h4+ 0-1

I would say that Black has an active and coordinated position after 6 e3. At lower levels this is a line that Black could play without burning the midnight oil for too long.

Game 39
F. Berkes-P. Zhang
Taiyuan 2006

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♖c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♗a6!?



Since White has created a hole on b4 the black knight aims to hop into that square without delay. This is an excellent positional idea, but it does allow White to play e2-e4 right away.

Tip: They say that a Knight is badly placed on the edge of the board. This may be true, but if you have a plan to improve its position then things might not be that bad.

5...a5!? is an idea of Israeli grandmaster Yasha Murey with the same theme of ...♗a6-b4 coming up. 5...a5 slows down any White expansion on the queenside, but of course it is a pawn move when Black could be getting his pieces developed. The jury is still out on this interesting concept. Play may proceed 6 e4 ♗g4 7 ♗e3 e6 8 ♗xc4 ♗a6 9 0-0 ♗b4 and Black has a decent game.

6 e4 ♗g4 7 ♗xc4 ♗xf3

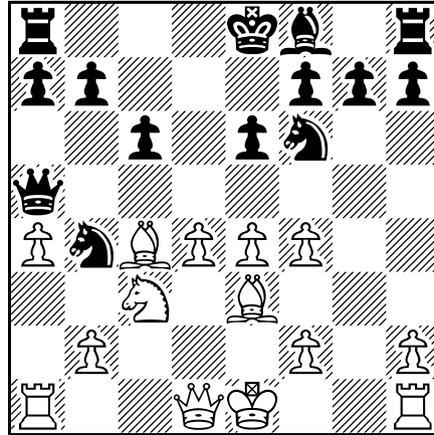
One of the points of this line is to saddle White with doubled pawns.

8 gxf3 e6 9 ♗e3

I have often wondered whether 9 ♗xa6 bxa6 10 ♗e3 was any good for White. Black's queenside pawns are a wreck, yet strong players continue to allow this possibility and White hardly ever

plays 9 ♙xa6 . The half open b-file gives Black an active opportunity and therefore 10... ♖b8! 11 ♗e2 a5 is an adequate reply. The b2-pawn is a target and Black can increase pressure with ... ♖b4 and ... ♗b8 .

9... ♗b4 10 f4 ♗a5



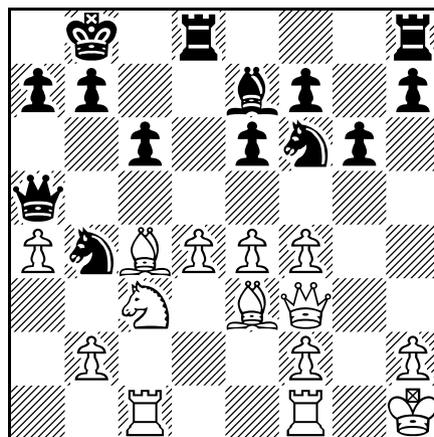
11 0-0

11 ♖g1 with ♗g5 in mind, is another way, but Black remains solid, e.g. 11...0-0-0 (11... g6! ? is possible) 12 ♗b3 g6 13 ♖g5 ♗c7 14 a5 h6 15 ♖g1 ♘b8 .

11...0-0-0 12 ♖c1

12 ♗e2 is rather planless here, but it has been tried. Black should keep developing and hope to weather the storm, e.g. 12... ♘b8 13 ♖ad1 ♙e7 14 f5! ? (an attempt to make White's rather static position work) 14... exf5 15 f3 ♗hf8 16 ♙h1 ♖d7 when Black is solidly placed and one can hardly imagine that White has enough for a pawn.

12... ♘b8 13 ♗f3 g6 14 ♙h1 ♙e7

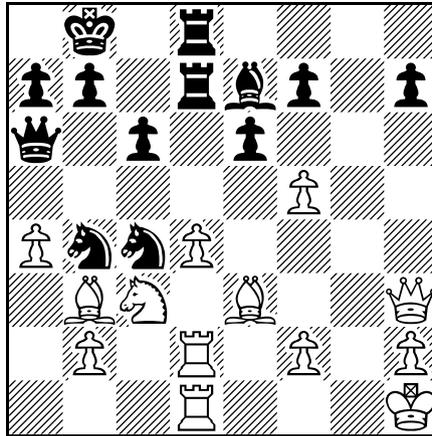


A typical position from this line has been reached. White has to find the best way forward. You would think that his best chance was to press on the light squares with either f4-f5 or d4-d5, but those moves are difficult to arrange. Moreover, White's king is not completely secure. All in all, the 5...♘a6 variation is a good practical bet as White may struggle to get it right.

15 ♖g1 ♘e8 16 ♗gd1 ♘c7 17 ♚g2 ♗d7 18 ♗d2 ♗hd8 19 ♗cd1 ♘a8! 20 ♚h3 ♘b6 21 ♘b3 ♚a6 22 f5!

After a period of manoeuvring, White tries his only chance to break in. Greedy players might have considered 22 ♚xh7 ♘f6 23 ♚h3 but Berkes obviously thought that this might expose his king.

22...gxf5 23 exf5 ♘c4



24 ♘xc4?!

24 ♗e2 e5 25 dxe5 ♗xd1+ 26 ♘xd1 ♘xe5 27 ♗d2 was a better defence, but the position is congested and confusing.

24...♚xc4 25 fxe6 fxe6 26 ♚xh7 ♘d6 27 ♚e4 ♘xh2!

A move that induces a state of panic in White's camp. White's king position is stripped away.

28 d5??

He has to remain calm and find 28 f4 ♘g3 29 ♗g1! ♗g8 30 ♗h2! ♗dg7 31 ♚e5+ when Black has yet to break through.

28...♗h8

Suddenly, White has no defence.

29 ♘xa7+ ♚a8 30 ♚xc4 ♗g7 31 ♗d4 ♘f4 0-1

An abrupt end to an unusual game.