

**Daniel Naroditsky**

# **Mastering Positional Chess**

**Revised and updated edition, New In Chess 2026**

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## **Publisher's Foreword**

In the autumn of 2025, I was travelling to Charlotte, North Carolina, with various objectives. I was playing in the Fall ALTO tournament with a friend, who was playing his first over the board tournament (and won his first game!), and was to discuss book projects with two authors. But a few days before my flight, I got the devastating news that Daniel Naroditsky had passed away at only 29. Later we would learn that he had died from a freak accident, having taken over the counter medicine in inappropriate quantities. His heart stopped while he was watching TV late at night.

It was already the strong desire for New In Chess to reissue Daniel's two books, written when he was very young and full of enthusiasm. Daniel had obvious reservations, feeling that the content was outdated. Being one of the world's top commentators and chess educators, Daniel knew what he was talking about. His reservations were founded in facts. Thus, when we talked to Daniel's family and told them of the great many messages we had received concerning reissuing these books after his death, it was agreed that we would edit and update the books, as we would as if they were a freshly submitted manuscript.

Chess engines have obviously pointed out many improvements to the almost twenty-year-old analysis. We have corrected them as we would any other new book, so that the narrative makes sense, and the chess is correct. This has been a surprisingly easy job and a great pleasure for us. I have personally updated this volume. Some of the choices I made could be debated. I did the best I could to keep Daniel's voice intact, while making sure the book would be read in the future, not for the memory of the author's life, but for the quality inside.

*Jacob Aagaard*  
CEO, New In Chess  
April 2026

## Preface

Daniel (born on 9 November 1995) started playing chess when he was six and a half years old (Summer 2002). His dad taught him how to play chess, so he would have something to do in his free time. Daniel played with his four-and-a-half year older brother Alan all summer, and after a few months Daniel had a natural ability to place pieces on the board – something which usually comes with many years of experience. Indeed, love for the great game runs in the family – Daniel’s grandfather played chess quite well, and collected chess books; Daniel’s Dad, Vladimir, played chess competitively in his youth, and Daniel’s brother Alan has been a Top 100 player in the United States in his age category for many years. Alan and Daniel have traveled together to numerous chess competitions and discussed their games with each other for endless hours. There is also a large library of chess books at home – collected over three generations now – both in English and in Russian.

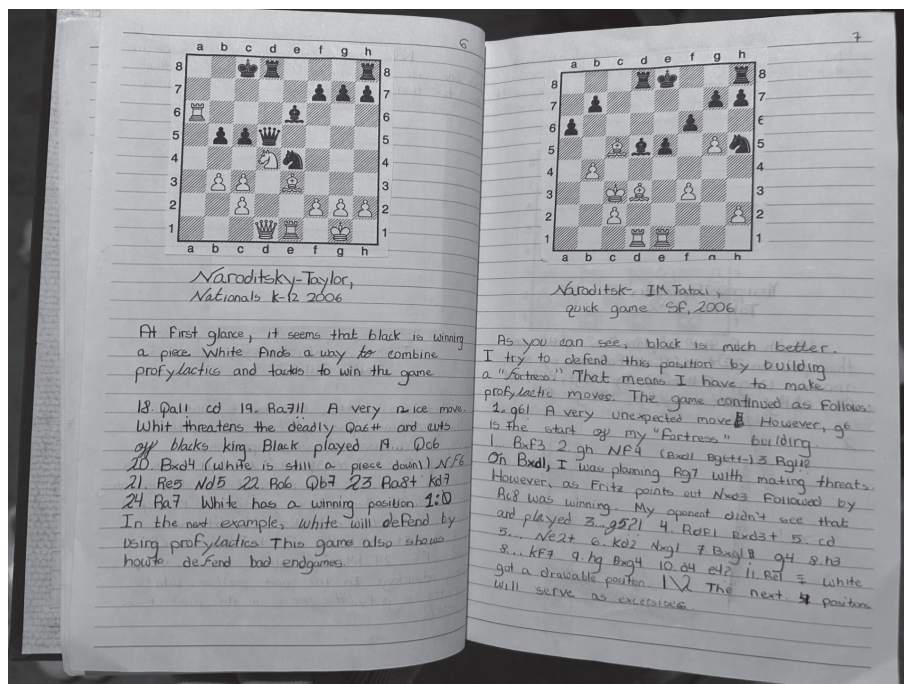
A few months after he learned the rules of the game, Daniel played in his first tournament (2003 Scholastic Championship of California), and won all five games easily. This tournament served as the trigger, and after it Daniel became very serious about chess. His love for the game became more apparent every day, and he would spend many hours at the board just moving the pieces (we purchased several chess sets, and for Daniel, they replaced model train sets or Lego blocks). We hired a professional chess coach, and Daniel started to take weekly lessons. We did not have to wait long to fill up our bookcases with his trophies. Very soon, it became clear to us that we needed a more seasoned coach to accommodate Daniel’s rapid rate of improvement. Armenian-born IM Armen Ambartsoumian became that coach.

A few years later, when he was about ten years old, Daniel was playing first board in an adult tournament. At that time, he was still relatively unknown on the United States chess scene. We walked him to the playing hall and directed him to his board. A few minutes later, he came back crying, telling us that the Tournament Director would not allow him to sit down – Daniel was told that he was in the wrong section, and kids were playing elsewhere. He looked very young even for his years, but his inner maturity exhibited itself during one of the master classes conducted by Garry Kasparov in New York (bi-annual sessions to which the best young players are invited). Kasparov could not help laughing when he asked Daniel about his opening repertoire, and Daniel began with ‘When I was young, I played...’ Everybody who knows Daniel agrees that his intellectual development is far beyond his years.

After numerous successes and failures, Daniel’s then coach GM Gregory Kaidanov told him that if he wanted to become serious about his chess (his rating at that

time was about 2000), he needed to study positional play. As is the case with most young chess players, Daniel was much more attracted to combinations and sacrifices rather than careful maneuvering. Nevertheless, he started to read books on positional play in English and in Russian, but was not easily satisfied, and his coach suggested that Daniel should analyze his own games, and make annotations. Daniel would spend hours filling notebooks with small, calligraphic characters and diagrams he printed from ChessBase.

Since when he was about four years old, Daniel enjoyed writing and kept countless notebooks of his thoughts and short stories. Daniel loved writing in his notebooks much more than just typing on the computer. Writing is inevitably slower, and allows you to comprehend the material much better. It has always been aesthetically pleasing for Daniel.



Daniel even wrote a journal for this book by hand. Here is an excerpt.

In the summer of 2008, Daniel started to ask us strange questions about the book publishing business, and one of the last pages of his notebook contained an autobiographical section. Daniel always had curiosity for many unusual subjects: capitals of small countries, birth and death dates of famous composers, and numbers of hospital beds per capita in third world countries, just to name a few. We treated his questions about book printing as one of these curiosities (we knew he was writing a book, but never thought that a 12-year-old could create publishable material).

However, a year and several notebooks later, he showed us the finished product, and we decided to ask for the opinions of his coaches. After receiving positive reactions from GM Gregory Kaidanov and GM Lev Psakhis, chess historian and popular author IM John Donaldson recommended that we send one chapter to a few publishers. After choosing, editing and sending the largest chapter, we received an email from the publisher of New In Chess, Mr. Allard Hoogland. He loved the excerpt, and expressed his surprise that a high quality work was written by such a young author. After we sent the entire manuscript, the book was accepted for publishing. That is how this book came into being.

The process of writing this book definitely helped Daniel to achieve three California scholastic championship titles, two national championship titles, and finally, in November of 2007, the title of World Youth Chess Champion. Most importantly, we hope that becoming an author and completing this book will inspire Daniel to achieve any goals he sets for himself.

Vladimir Naroditsky and Lena Schuman,  
Daniel's parents  
October 2009

# Foreword

The Mechanics' Institute Chess Club of San Francisco, founded in 1854, has produced many fine junior talents over the years. One need only mention future International Master Jay Whitehead who finished second, ahead of Garry Kasparov(!), in the 1977 World Cadet Championship, and future Grandmaster Vinay Bhat, who won a pair of bronze medals competing in World Youth Championships in the 1990s. When Daniel Naroditsky first joined the Mechanics' six years ago at the age of seven it didn't take long to realize he was going to keep the tradition of excellence alive.

Even early on it was clear that unlike most kids his age Daniel loved to study chess just as much as to play it. Coming up in an age in which his peers were using ChessBase, Fritz and Rybka to acquire chess knowledge, he was decidedly 'old school', learning as much from books as from computers. Most notably Danya, as his friends affectionately call him, had an outstanding memory that allowed him to instantly recall the birth dates of famous chess players and musical composers (music is another of Daniel's passions, and his brother Alan is a top level pianist as well as an Expert strength player). Besides possessing a near perfect recall of material he had read, Daniel also stood apart from his peers in his love for the history of the game, something most young chess players only develop an interest in much later in life.

Daniel quickly moved through the ranks at the Mechanics', earning his Expert title at 10 and his Master ranking the following year. He came to international attention when he won the World Youth under 12 Boys Championship in Antalya, Turkey, in the fall of 2007. Daniel is now a FIDE Master closing in on the International Master title. This is quite impressive, but there are plenty of junior players who have progressed more quickly. What makes Daniel unique is what you are holding in your hands. While the age at which players become Grandmasters has been steadily dropping the past twenty-five years, the age at which chess authors have their first book published has not.

*Mastering Positional Chess* is unique. No book on chess has had a younger author than the present one. Arturo Pomar's *Mis Cincuenta Partidas con Maestro* (1945) and Bobby Fischer's *Games of Chess* (1959) were published when their nominal authors were 14 and 15 respectively, but the extent of their involvement in preparing the books is in doubt, so the previous record holder is Murray Chandler. The future Grandmaster, at age 15, wrote a privately-printed book *A White Pawn in Europe*, giving his games from the World Junior Championship and English tournaments from the second half of 1975. Another name that should be mentioned is Grandmaster Larry Evans, who wrote two well-received books on Vienna 1922, and David Bronstein, at ages

16 and 18 respectively. The record for youngest female author appears to be held by Alexandra Kosteniuk, whose *How I Became a Grandmaster at Age 14* (2001), was published when she was 17.

Started in 2006, when the author was only ten(!) years old, *Mastering Positional Chess* was written for a very specific reason. Young Daniel realized his lack of positional understanding was causing him to lose many games. He set out to correct this deficiency in a most ambitious way by collecting classic examples on a variety of positional themes and subjecting them to extensive analysis. Having done this, Daniel then clarified things in his own mind by putting into words what he had learned not only from the classics, but his own games.

*Mastering Positional Chess* is, in some ways, a book from earlier times in that it offers the reader a significant amount of explanatory prose. Yes, analysis is given, but only what is needed, not more. The author repeatedly reinforces the points he wishes to make not only through the illustrative games he offers, but also in the summaries and exercises.

Youth may be lacking in experience, but compensates with bravery! Throughout his first book you will find young Daniel challenging many assessments made by famous players. Older authors are prone to hedge their bets and tone down their criticism, but Daniel calls it like he sees it. He may not always be right – though he has tried hard to find the truth – but Daniel’s candor is refreshing. Readers will not find *Mastering Positional Chess* boring. What they will find is a lot of information about positional chess and how to apply it to their own games.

Well done Daniel!

John Donaldson  
October 1st, 2009

I saw a lot of Daniel from 2010-2015, during which time he made tremendous progress: IM in 2011, GM in 2013, Member of the US team at the 2015 World Team Championship. The latter event, in Armenia, was the last occasion when I spent a lot of time with Daniel, including a 40 hour journey via Paris and Atlanta to San Francisco we took together on Air France and Delta.

Later, in 2017 through 2019, I saw Daniel much less often as he completed his studies, and only very rarely after that when he moved to Charlotte.

Recently, I pulled my copy of *Mastering Positional Chess* down from the shelf with sadness. I confess to still not coming to terms with Daniel’s passing, nor that of his father Vlad, who died suddenly in late 2019. These are two great losses I think about often.

John Donaldson  
May 2026

## Introduction

Nowadays, many players hugely underestimate the importance of positional play. Certain writers promise the reader gigantic rating gains if they solve tens (or even hundreds) of tactical problems a day. Many players follow this advice for a while, and it certainly is a good idea to solve tactical problems. I have done the same thing for most of my chess career. Nevertheless, when I started getting constantly outplayed, I realized that tactical practice was not the only way to improve one's playing strength. The more I studied positional chess, the more I understood the importance of positional play.

I realized that in order to create positions where tactical motifs could be utilized, it is vital to understand positional ideas at least at the basic level. Yes, reading a book on tactics is often a more entertaining task than reading a book on positional chess, but if you want to excel at chess, you have to delve deeper into the chess realm, and appreciate not only visually-pleasing combinations, but much more subtle positional ideas. As I soon learned, winning with an extremely subtle maneuver is often a lot more aesthetically pleasing than executing a smothered mate.

If I could pinpoint the most important time when my studies came into use, it would certainly be the World Youth Chess Championship in 2007. Being a 'veteran' of this prestigious annual event, I understood that most opponents did not pay attention to positional chess. Therefore, when I was playing my games, I steered the game into positional tracks and every time my opponent would make a mistake that handed the advantage or the initiative over to me. I won game after game in the same fashion – systematically improving my position until my opponent would make a mistake. No matter how strong he was, he made a mistake every time. In the last round, my studies helped especially. I needed a win for first place, but was playing a very strong player from Russia. In a quiet Najdorf, my opponent made one tiny-looking inaccuracy. Immediately, my pieces poured into the weaknesses he had created, and he could not defend against the vicious onslaught.

However, it's impossible to learn positional chess only by reading. In order to improve, I started to write notes on my own games with the goal being to raise the level of my positional play. In a short while, the messy notes started to take shape. As my chess level progressed, I found a lot of mistakes to correct and a lot of analyses to redo, but after two years of work I finally finished the typed manuscript. Suddenly, my private notes turned into a more formal manuscript, which I showed to my chess friends and teachers. They liked it, and encouraged me to continue my work. After two years, I was ready to share it with other chess players!

This book is geared towards players aiming to improve their positional understanding, and towards advanced players who want to add to their arsenal of ideas. In other words, my goal is to equip you with enough positional motifs to

help you to move on to more complicated material. I'm sure that no matter how strong you are, you will find some helpful material in this book.

I feel that now is a great moment to talk about why I chose the chapters that I did in this book. First of all, why did I allocate so much space to *paralysis*? I think that *paralysis* in the middlegame is a concept that is of paramount importance. Knowing techniques to impede the development of your opponent's pieces is crucial. As we shall see in the chapter, there are many games where grandmasters masterfully neutralized the activity of the opponent's pieces, and thus quickly won the game. The reason I chose the subjects in the other chapters is because I felt that they simply were the most important when studying positional chess. For example, *prophylaxis* is another concept that tactical players tend to underestimate. As we shall see, the most innocuous-looking moves are often the precursor to a decisive combination.

Although there are many great books on positional chess, I think that this book is a bit different. First of all, I tried to pick games in which the players were approximately equal in strength. Secondly, besides showing classic games, I picked games in which the players made mistakes, since in almost all of today's games up to grandmaster level, errors are unavoidable. When I was only beginning to play serious chess, I thought that books written by strong grandmasters were flawless. To me, grandmasters were like gods – everything they wrote was law, and nothing could be debated. To my utter surprise, I discovered that the appealing outer layer of text hid many mistakes, which sometimes changed the evaluations of every single line given.

Also, another illusion of flawlessness has come along in recent years – the illusion that the computer will solve all problems. Very often, even grandmasters will categorically accept computer analysis. It is this addiction that usually leads to something I call 'Silicon Syndrome'. A prime example is the following: a computer-addictive master is playing a very important game. On every move, he asks himself, *What would Fritz do here?* This constant questioning leads to big time trouble and, often, to big blunders. Therefore, in chess, the more verbosity there is in the annotations, the better! Summing up, in practical play, there will be no computer to assist you, so it is verbal annotations, phrased in human language, that you will be able to retain and apply in your own games.

IM Fred Reinfeld once said: 'It seems to me that little effort is exerted as a rule (by most writers) to make the study of a book an interesting and pleasant occupation.' Apart from packing this book with a multitude of great positional ideas, I have tried to make it as enjoyable and readable as possible. After all, the purpose of reading a chess book is not only to learn from it, but to enjoy it as well!

Daniel Naroditsky  
December 2009



**Game 24** French Defense□ **Bent Larsen**■ **Lajos Portisch**

Interzonal tournament, Amsterdam 1964

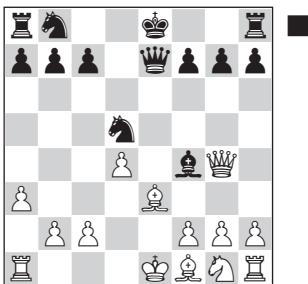
**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘b4 4.exd5 exd5  
5.♚f3?!**

An interesting move invented by Larsen. The idea is that the queen will be well placed on f3 and may go to g3. Later, a good line was found for Black, though.

In the main line, White doesn't get anything more than equality after 5.♘d3 ♘c6!?. Fressinet-Ponomariov, Pamplona 2005, continued 6.a3 ♘a5 7.♘e3 ♘f6 8.h3?! 0-0 9.♘ge2 ♘e7! 10.0-0 c6 11.♘g3 ♘g6 with a good game for Black.

**5...♘c6**

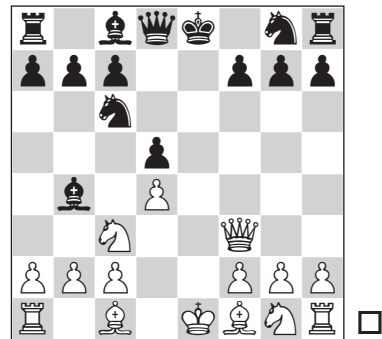
This isn't a huge mistake, but after the correct 5...♚e7+! White's pieces are not ready to meet this unpleasant check: 6.♘e3 (after 6.♘ge2 ♘c6 7.♘e3?! ♘f6 Black has an edge, Shilan-Kaidanov, Tan Chin Nam Cup 2002, but 7.♚d3! would have kept the balance, although it is a weird way to play) 6...♘f6 7.a3?! ♘g4 8.♚g3 ♘d6 9.♚h4 ♘f4! 10.♘xd5?! ♘xd5 11.♚xg4.



This was Bates-McDonald, British Team Championship (4NCL) 1999, where Black missed 11...♘c6!, which is winning

on account of 12.0-0-0 ♘xe3+ 13.fxe3 ♘xe3 14.♚xg7 0-0-0 15.♚e1 ♘xd4 16.♘d3 ♚c5, and the white position collapses.

Overall, after 5...♚e7+! White has to play carefully to equalize. However, the check isn't easy to find if you don't know this move.

**6.♘b5**

Larsen finds the best move; White has to develop actively in order to fight for the advantage.

**6...♘ge7 7.♘f4**

Here, the alternative 7.a3 ♘xc3+ 8.♚xc3 a6 would have led to a rather flat position.

**7...0-0**

The time has come for White to decide which way he will castle. Obviously, castling kingside is the safer option; the game will probably end in a quick, boring draw.

However, Larsen wasn't this type of player – he was always ready to take even the biggest risks.



**11.h4!?**

Suddenly, Portisch realized how strong White's attack was. First of all, it came out of the previous play – Black's pieces are scattered while White's pieces are all in action, and the best way to defend against a premature attack is to start an immediate counterattack.

**11...♘c4?**

Leaving the kingside undefended, hoping to create counterplay on the queenside, but it is too slow.

Even 11...♙f5 12.h5 was slightly better for White.

**12.h5!**

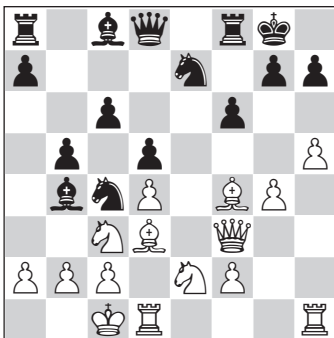
Exposing the weak dark squares in the black position.

**12...f6!?**

The first concession; the f6-pawn will be a hook.

However, I don't think that getting mated after 12...♖a5? 13.h6 g6 14.♙c7! ♖xc7 15.♖f6 ♘f5 16.♙xf5 was part of Portisch's plans.

**13.g4**



White has only made three pawn moves, and already his attack seems much stronger than Black's. Portisch

has a knight on c4 and a bishop on b4, but what do these pieces accomplish apart from looking nice? The answer is: nothing. The problem is that in order to actually make the attack strong, Black needs to bring his queen and a8-rook into action, but this will take a huge amount of time; by then Black's monarch will be dead.

**13...♖a5**

Turning back was hardly an option; 13...♙d6?! 14.♙xc4! bxc4 15.♖g3 ♙xf4+ 16.♘xf4, with a huge attack and a positional advantage.

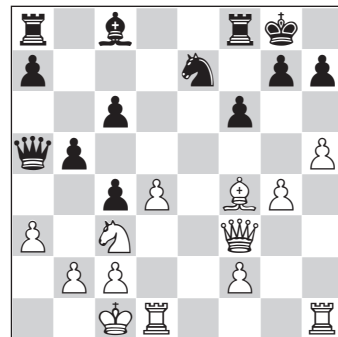
**14.♙xc4!**

The time has come for concrete action. Now that Black has activated the queen, Larsen eliminates the annoying knight, which was threatening to take on b2 in some cases.

**14...dxc4**

No better was 14...bxc4 15.a3! ♙xc3 16.♘xc3, followed by ♙d6.

**15.a3 ♙xc3 16.♘xc3**



This is what happens when one refutes a premature attack. Black's position is a complete jumble of weak squares and a horrible pawn structure. Portisch tries to

keep things under control, but fails since the position is already beyond repair.

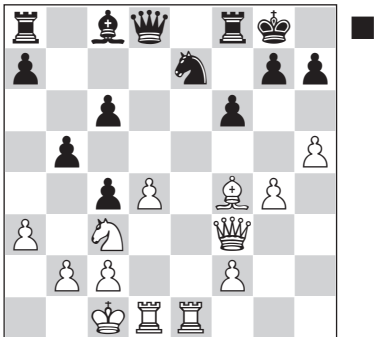
**16... ♖d8**

Black is still trying to keep the fire going by preparing ...a7-a5, but White's water supply is nearly infinite!

**17. ♖he1!**

Larsen avoids the trap: 17. ♗xb5? would have been met by 17... ♖d5!, and the tables are turned.

But 17.d5! was utterly devastating. After 17... ♗xd5 18.h6! g6 19. ♖he1, Black does not have any reasonable moves at all. The key plan is to meet lines involving ...♗b7, with ♖h1, ♗e4 and an invasion on the dark squares.



**17...a5?!**

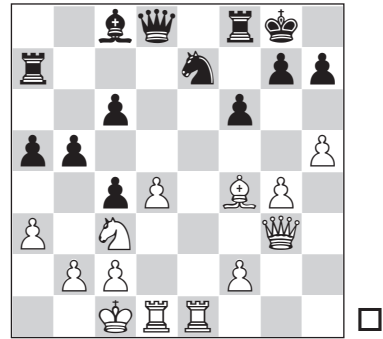
Portisch is already desperate; it's clear that he has no way of stopping the numerous breakthroughs (on d5, h6, g5, etc.)

17...h6 had to be tried, though, for reasons we're about to see.

**18. ♖g3**

Today we know that 18.h6! should almost always be played in such scenarios, giving Black no decent reply.

**18... ♖a7**

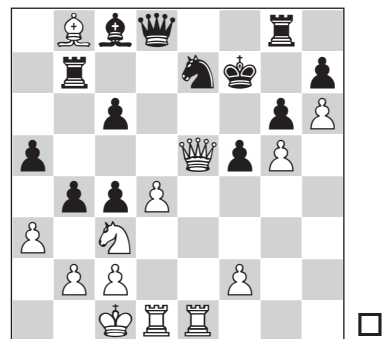


Portisch defends against one threat, but cannot defend against the other!

**19.h6!**

White's advantage is decisive; resigning was already a possibility here, but Portisch lets Larsen demonstrate his wonderful, albeit strange, technique.

19...g6 20. ♗d6 ♖e8 21. ♖f4 ♗f7 22. ♗e5 f5 23. ♗b8! ♖b7 24. ♖e5 ♖g8 25.g5 b4



26. ♖f6+ ♗e8 27. ♖xc6+ ♗f7 28. ♖f6+ ♗e8 29.d5 ♖f8 30. ♖c6+ ♖d7 31. ♗d6 ♖f7 32. ♗xe7 bxc3 33. ♗b4+ 1-0

Black's attack seemed completely natural, unlike in the previous game. However, this didn't stop Larsen from correctly asserting that since he hadn't made any mistakes, the attack could not be justified. He quickly refuted it by means of a few highly accurate moves.

**Remember, if you make natural developing moves, a sudden attack on your king is generally unsound.**

**Game 25** Sicilian Defense

□ **Bradley Sawyer**

■ **Daniel Naroditsky**

Tulsa 2008

**1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 d6 3.f4 g6 4.♗f3 ♕g7  
5.♖b5+!**

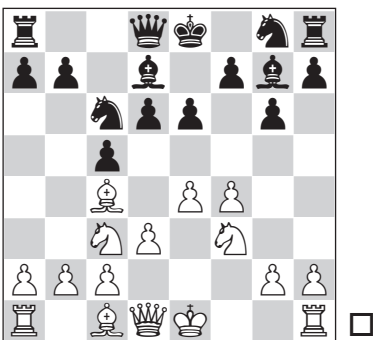
The only way to put Black's system to the test. The immediate 5.♖c4 ♗c6 6.0-0 e6 7.d3 ♗ge7 8.♖e1 0-0 9.f5?! is met by the simple 9...gxf5!, when I don't see how White gets enough compensation for the pawn. Khachiyan-Naroditsky, Western Class Championship 2008, continued 10.♖h4 ♗g6 (10...f6! gave Black a serious edge) 11.♖h5 fxe4, where 12.♗g5! h6 13.♗ge4 ♖h4 14.♖xh4 ♗xh4 15.♗xd6 would have led to equality.

**5...♕d7 6.♖c4**

This is White's idea – the bishop is awkward on d7, and after ...e7-e6, the d6-pawn will be a temporary weakness.

**6...♗c6 7.d3 e6**

Although 7...♗a5 seems to be an easier way to equalize, there is nothing wrong with the text either.



**8.f5!**

White has to play for quick attack to justify his set-up. 8.0-0 ♗ge7 allows the black king to escape too easily.

**8...gxf5!?**

Although this may seem very weakening, White has no way to exploit Black's weak squares. However, he thought that he could make use of the fact that I wasn't fully developed yet.

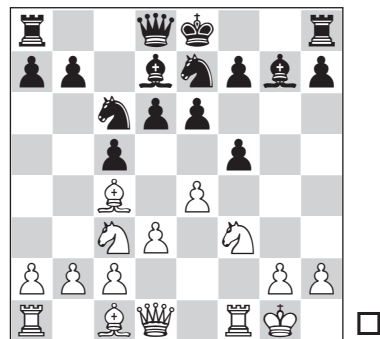
**9.0-0**

My opponent thought he would get a strong attack in return for the pawn.

Here, I had to stop and convince myself that I hadn't made any mistakes, and White's attack could not be too dangerous. Then I started looking for concrete ways to defend.

**9...♗ge7**

First finishing development. 9...♗d4!, to quickly eliminate the f3-knight, was a bit more challenging.



**10. ♖b5?**

My opponent played this quickly – he later told me that this had been his idea. However, he didn't understand the fact that a knight on d6 will only look nice, but in truth can easily be trapped after ...a6. Moreover, Black's king stands no worse on f8 than on e8!

10. ♖e1? allows Black to show the flexibility he has maintained. After 10... ♖g8!, the opening of files on the kingside favors Black, who will put his king on the queenside.

Correct play was thus to rush with 10. ♘g5! h6 11. ♘xf7!, when after 11... ♖xf7 12. exf5 ♘xf5 13. ♖xf5+ ♔g8 14. ♖f1 ♔h7, the chances are about even.

**10...d5!**

In order to refute White's attack, it's vital to take immediate action.

The slow 10... ♗c8? was much worse after 11. ♘g5!, with a winning attack.

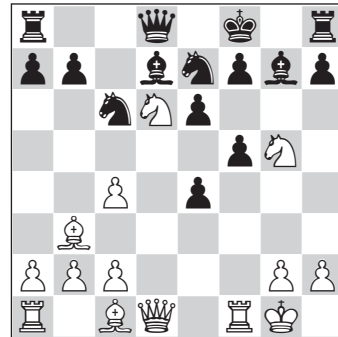
**11. ♘d6+**

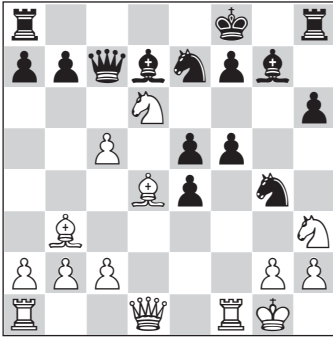
My opponent later told me that he thought White's position was much better. In truth, he is already close to losing; he can't take advantage of the king's position on f8.

**11... ♖f8 12. ♗b3 c4!**

Again, tactics come to strategy's aid. The time has come to start calculating concrete variations. The text move locks White's bishop in its own camp, and achieves a strong pawn mass (f7/e6/f5/e4), which completely covers up any other weaknesses Black has. However, the game is still not quite over.

**13. dxc4 dxe4 14. ♘g5**



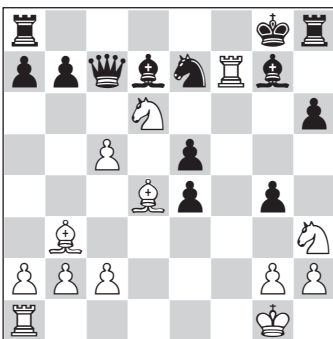


Before we go on, I'd like to tell the reader that at the start of the round, Jerry Hanken, a writer for *Chess Life*, who was well known for his love of queen sacrifices, offered a \$100 prize to anyone who sacrificed their queen and won the game. No wonder my opponent played:

### 19. ♖xg4!!

I was so rattled by this move that I had to sit there for five minutes before I actually started thinking. At first, as I learned later, everybody (a lot of people started watching at this point) thought that 18...e5 was a huge blunder and White was winning. However, I noticed an interesting thing: if I accept the Trojan Horse gift, after 20. ♖xf7+ ♔g8 I didn't see what exactly White would do!

### 19...fxg4 20. ♖xf7+ ♔g8



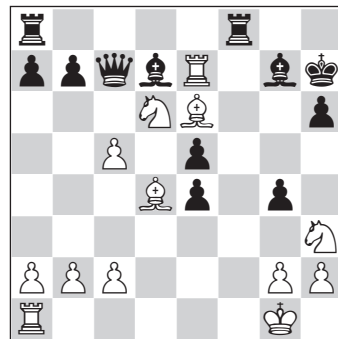
### 21. ♖xe7+?

Neither of us spotted 21. ♖f5!!, which is even close to winning: 21... ♖xf5 22. ♖xe7+ ♔h7 23. ♖xc7 exd4 24. ♖f4 ♖hc8 25. ♖xb7, with a serious advantage for White.

### 21... ♔h7 22. ♖e6

22. ♖f4!?, putting another piece under attack, but creating the deadly threat of 23. ♖h5, was also possible. Here, 22... ♖d8 looks winning, but White has the brilliant move 23. ♖d5!, and after 23... ♖xe7 24. ♖xe4+ ♔g8 25. ♖d5+ the game is drawn!

### 22... ♖hf8!



### 23. ♖xd7?

Instead of this natural move, 23. ♖xd7! ♖c6 24. ♖f5! would have achieved the draw. Now, 24... ♖xe6? would lose to 25. ♖xg7+ ♔h8 26. ♖e7 ♖xf5 27. ♖xe5, winning the queen. Better would have been 24... ♖xf5! 25. ♖xf5+ ♔g8!, and White only has enough activity for a draw. For example: 26. ♖f4!? exd4! 27. ♖e6+ ♔h8 28. ♖g6+ ♔h7 29. ♖f5 ♖xc5 30. ♖e7+ ♔h8 31. ♖g6+, etc.

### 23... ♔h8 24. ♖b5? ♖d8 25. ♖xg7 exd4

White has three pieces for the queen, but he can't save them all, so he resigned.

So far in this chapter we have only seen games where one side attacks the king. Sometimes, getting pressured along the central files and on the queenside may be just as difficult to defend against. The problem is that the player who is exerting the pressure is playing without any risk; therefore, psychologically, it's hard to defend when 'there is no end'.

Take a look at the following game:

**Game 26** Modern Defense

□ **Boris Gulko**

■ **Zurab Azmaiparashvili**

Pamplona 1996

**1.d4 d6 2.e4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.f4 ♘c6  
5.♙e3 ♘f6 6.♙e2 0-0 7.♘f3 e6 8.h3 b6  
9.0-0 ♙b7 10.e5 ♘d5?**

A grave positional error, burying the bishop on b7. 10...♘d7 and ...♘e7 would give Black a reasonable game.

**11.♘xd5 exd5 12.♖d2 f6 13.exf6!**

White's structural advantage is immense.

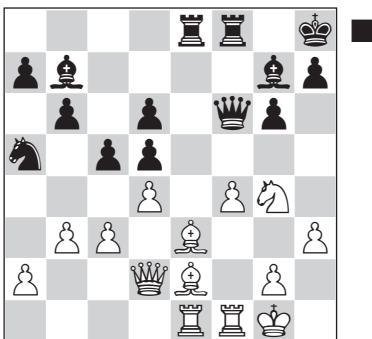
**13...♗xf6 14.♞ae1 ♞ae8 15.c3 ♘a5**

The knight achieves little out here.

**16.b3 c5 17.♘h2**

17.f5! gxf5 18.♙g5 was even stronger.

**17...♙h8 18.♘g4**



Black is worse, probably lost – White has a space advantage and better placed

pieces. Also, it's not clear where Black should put his queen: on d8, f7, or f5?

He decided to play actively, hoping that counterplay would work for him down the line. Like in some of the previous examples, these active moves were perhaps not the best ones according to the engines, but the problems were difficult to solve for White and did not allow him to consolidate the position.

**18...♗f5!?**

Azmaiparashvili provokes ♙d3, when his queen will have a square on h5.

18...♗f7 was objectively best, but after 19.♘h2!, with ♘f3 and ♙b5 coming, the position would have been bad for Black.

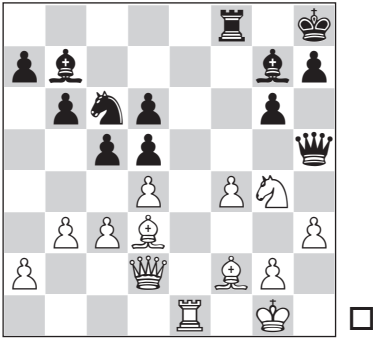
**19.♙d3 ♗h5 20.♙f2!**

The back rank is weak and Gulko seeks to exploit it, while the black queen is slightly awkwardly placed on h5.

**20...♞xe1**

It's not easy to just give away an important file, letting the opponent infiltrate with his rook. However, Azmaiparashvili understood that if he let Gulko trade all the rooks, the endgame would be critical because of his queen's position on h5.

**21. ♖xe1 ♜c6**



Black has prevented ♖e7 and achieved some counterplay, making the path to a win narrow and hard to achieve.

**22. ♖e6! cxd4 23.cxd4**

The radical 23. ♖e1!, with the idea of 23...dxc3 24. ♖e8, followed by invading with the queen, would have been very strong.

**23... ♜d8 24. ♖e7!**

Simplest. Black intended to meet 24. ♖xd6 with 24...♜f7 25. ♖e6 ♜c8, but here 26. ♜f6! ♖h6 27. ♖c6 ♜xh3 28. ♜xd5! would have kept the advantage. This sort of line shows the accuracy White has to demonstrate.

**24... ♜c8!**

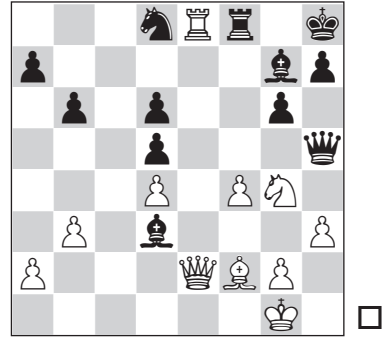
The only way to fight, activating the dormant bishop.

**25. ♖e2 ♜f5 26. ♖e8!**

White continues to soften the enemy back rank.

**26... ♜xd3**

The time has come for White to prove that the advantage is real.



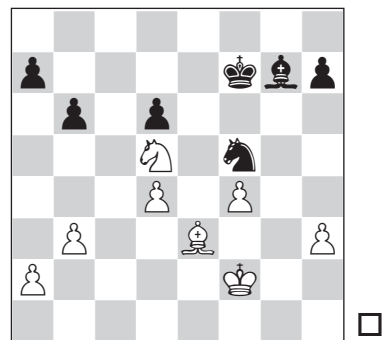
**27. ♖xf8+ ♜xf8 28. ♖xd3?**

28. ♖e8! ♖f5 29. ♖xd8 ♖xf4 was critical. Here White had to find 30. ♜g3!! in advance. After 30...♖f1+ 31. ♜h2 ♜g7 32. ♜xd6 ♜xd6+ 33. ♖xd6 ♜e4, 34. ♖e7+! wins. Black has to play 34...♖f7 (34...♜h8 35. ♖e5+! ♜g8 36. ♜f6+ ♜f7 37. ♖e8+! ♜xf6 38. ♖f8+ picks up the queen), when after 35. ♖e5+ ♜f8 36. ♜f6, White can slowly improve his position.

**28... ♜e6 29. ♜e3 ♖f5?**

A good idea, but poorly timed. 29...♜g7! 30. ♜h2 ♖f5 was slightly more accurate. White is not really better here.

**30. ♖xf5 gxf5 31. ♜f6 ♜c7 32. ♜h5 ♜e8 33.g4 ♜g8 34. ♜f2 ♜f7 35. ♜g3 ♜g7 36. ♜e2 ♜e6 37.gxf5 ♜g7 38. ♜c3 ♜xf5 39. ♜xd5 ♜g7**



**40. ♖c7?**

40. ♖f3! ♙xd4 41. ♙d2 retains a good deal of the practical advantage.

40... ♙xd4 41. ♙xd4 ♘xd4 42. ♖e3 ♘f5+ 43. ♖e4 ♘g3+! 44. ♖f3

On 44. ♙d5, 44... ♘e2 was an important resource.

44... ♘f5 45. ♘b5 a6 46. ♖c7 a5 47. ♖e4 ♘g3+ 48. ♖f3 ♘f5 49. ♖e4 ♘g3+ Draw.

No matter how unpleasant it is to defend against positional pressure, it's important to never give up. If you succeed, your opponent will be psychologically affected and may make an important mistake – even strong grandmasters do this.

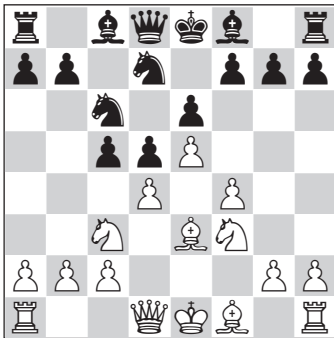
**Game 27** French Defense

□ **Friso Nijboer**

■ **Viktor Korchnoi**

Arnhem 1999

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.f4 c5 6. ♘f3 ♘c6 7. ♙e3



**7...a6!?**

In my opinion, this is the best move in this position. Black's other two main alternatives are 7... ♘xd4 and 7... ♙b6.

The idea of 7...a6 is to prepare ...b5. However, Black falls slightly behind in development and he has to be very careful. For those who are considering this variation with Black, take a detailed look at the famous game Kasparov-Radjabov, Linares 2003, where Kasparov lost a beautiful battle.

**8. ♙d2 cxd4**

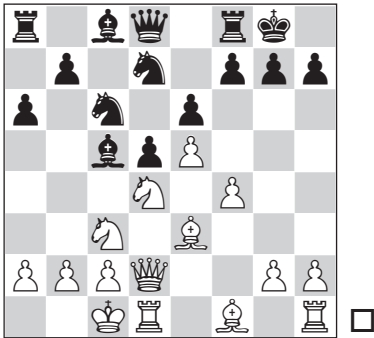
Transposing back to the main line 7... ♘xd4. Although some very strong players have played this move, it isn't really in the spirit of the position.

After the main move 8...b5!, the best reply is 9.a3!, stopping a further advance. This position is very entertaining and double-edged. The Kasparov-Radjabov game continued 9... ♙b6 (9... ♙a5!? is a better try, played by some of the greatest players of the 21st century) 10. ♘e2!. The knight helps overprotect the important d4-stronghold and is ready to maneuver to g3 in order to prepare f4-f5. Radjabov decided to close the center: 10...c4?! (10...b4!? was better) 11.g4 h5 12.gxh5 ♙xh5 13. ♘g3 ♙h8 14.f5.



White's position looks almost crushing, but Radjabov found the impressive 14...exf5 15.♘xf5? (15.h4! is surprising and would have secured a real advantage; White wants to play ♔h3 before taking on f5, and after 15...g6 16.h5, things are accelerating for White on the kingside) 15...♗f6!, and after 16.♗g3 ♖g4, the position was about equal. Kasparov went on to play strongly, but at the culminating moment he made a bad mistake, allowing Radjabov to take over the initiative and win with a dazzling final combination.

9.♗xd4 ♔c5 10.0-0 0-0



**11.h4**

The traditional move. The idea of this move is twofold. Firstly, the pawn may act as a battering ram against Black's kingside pawns. Secondly, White's rook can easily come into play by means of ♖h3.

This game and others made Nijboer come up with 11.♗b3!, which is now the main try for White.

11...♗xd4 12.♔xd4 b5 13.♖h3!?

White has tried a lot of things in this position, but practical results have largely been disappointing. Black's problems are the potentially chronic

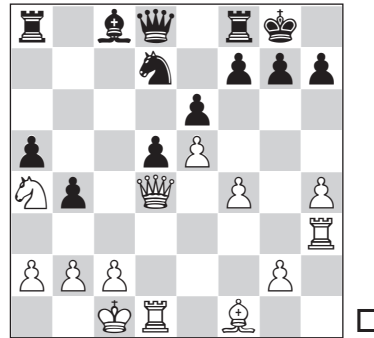
weakness of the light-squared bishop and the d4-square, but he has definite chances to attack White's king.

13...b4! 14.♗a4!

An accurate move.

After 14.♗e2?! a5 15.♖e3 ♗c7 16.♔xc5?! ♗xc5 17.♗d4, in Polgar-Shirov, Eurotel Trophy, Prague 1999, strongest would have been 17...♔a6!, solving the problem of the light-squared bishop. After 18.♔xa6 ♖xa6 19.♗b5 ♗d7 20.♗d6 ♗b7 21.♗xb7 ♗xb7, Black has a large advantage.

14...♔xd4 15.♖xd4 a5



The players have reached a theoretically important position. At first glance it may seem that White has a dream French position, but in truth things aren't completely black-and-white (excuse the pun), and Black has his counterchances (i.e. ...♔c8-b7-c6). Nijboer, a fearless attacking player, goes full tilt:

**16.c4?**

The weakening of the queenside is problematic.

First of all, we have to understand what White does if Black just takes, i.e. 16...dxc4?. The answer is simple: 17.♗c5 ♖a7 18.♗xe6!, winning.

**16...bxc3?**

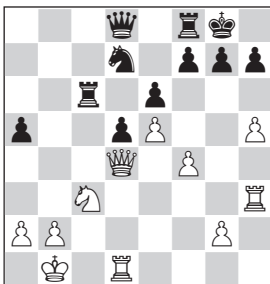
Also inaccurate. 16...♗b7! would have focused on Black's needs more than White's, leaving Black much better.

Around here, Nijboer, with more time on his clock and a great position, decided that a pawn sacrifice would only add to the quality of the game. He probably forgot a saying by Australian IM C.J.S. Purdy: 'You play in tournaments to win games, not to paint pictures.' However, as we shall see, the alternative was not better.

**17. ♖xc3**

Why not simply 17.♖xc3...? Without any sacrifices, White establishes a blockade and a steady advantage if Black plays slowly.

Let's take a look at Black's not insignificant defensive resources: 17...♗a6 (Black has to trade his bad bishop) 18.♗xa6 ♖xa6 19.h5 ♖c6. Black must immediately start using the c-file and the c4-square for his knight. Otherwise he will get swept away by the armada of white pawns on the kingside, hungry for royal blood. Notice that Black's main point is that f4-f5 is met by ...♔g5+, winning the pawn. In order to make the attack effective, White has to combine the assault with prophylaxis, beginning with 20.♖b1!.



analysis diagram

At first I analyzed 20...♔b6!? 21.♔xb6 ♖xb6 22.♗e2!, when a critical position arises.

Before we take a look at this endgame, it's important to remember the following:

**When you have a choice whether to continue defending against an attack or transposing into a slightly worse endgame, almost always choose the latter.**

Why? There are two main reasons.

First of all, you have only a slim chance of playing perfectly when defending, while it's much easier to play for the attacking side.

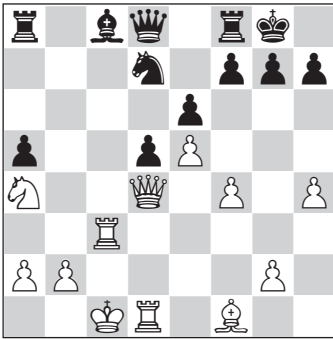
Secondly, you have huge drawing chances in a slightly worse endgame, and your opponent might be psychologically unprepared to switch from tactics to positional play.

In the position we are looking at, Black has great drawing chances due to the b-file and the c4-square for his knight. Things are by no means easy, but with active play, like 22...♗c4 23.♗d4 ♖b6 24.b3 f6!, Black will equalize.

However, White's king is more exposed, so Black should not exchange queens. Correct is 20...♖c4! 21.♔e3 ♔b8! 22.♖d4 ♗b6, and Black's pieces are flowing freely, giving him a real advantage.

Here Korchnoi, one of the best defenders of all time, remembered another golden rule in defense he himself had stated:

**'When under attack, I take all the sacrificed material and tell my opponent, go ahead, mate me!'**



**17... ♖xh4!**

One is tempted to say ‘typical Korchnoi’, but of course making such a move isn’t easy at all. The main reason is that the h-file is opened. This seems deadly for Black, but it’s hard to make use of this.

**18.g3**

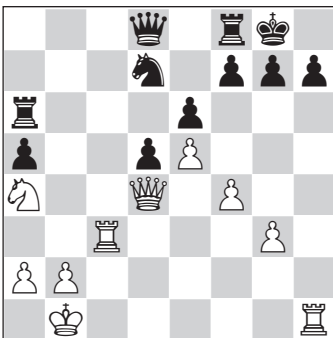
18. ♕d3? ♕a6! only wastes a tempo.

**18... ♖d8**

The full retreat is the most practical. This was not easy to foresee, but Korchnoi demonstrated his wonderful abilities and calculated all of this.

**19. ♖b1 ♕a6! 20. ♕xa6 ♖xa6 21. ♖h1!?**

21. ♖dc1! was a simpler way to equalize.



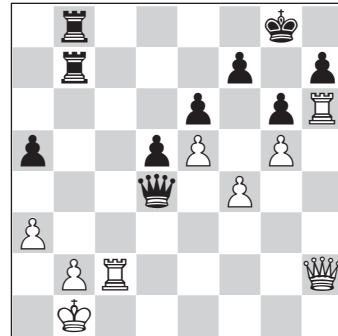
**21... ♖a8! 22.g4 ♖b8**

22... ♖b8!? was another way to arrange the pieces.

**23.a3**

23. ♖ch3!? h6 24.g5 ♖b4 25. ♖g1 ♖xf4  
26. ♖xh6! ♖f1+! 27. ♖xf1 gxxh6 would have left all three results open.

**23... ♖b6 24.g5 ♖xa4 25. ♖xa4 ♖b6**  
**26. ♖c2 g6 27. ♖h6 ♖b7 28. ♖h2 ♖fb8**  
**29. ♖c2 ♖d4**

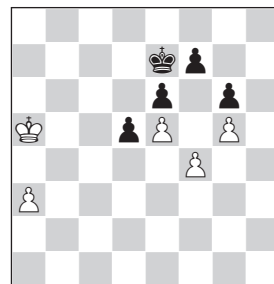


Another critical position. Now, Nijboer seems to lose the thread entirely:

**30. ♖a1??**

30. ♖a2 a4 31. ♖d2! would have led to a defensible endgame.

However, the draw was best secured through the transition into a pawn endgame: 30. ♖xh7! ♖xb2+ 31. ♖xb2 ♖xb2+ 32. ♖xb2 ♖xb2+ (32... ♖d3+ 33. ♖c2! ♖f1+ 34. ♖c1! ♖b5+ 35. ♖b2 transposes or repeats) 33. ♖xb2 ♖xh7 34. ♖b3 ♖g8 35. ♖a4 ♖f8 36. ♖xa5 ♖e7.



analysis diagram

The endgame looks dangerous, with the protected passed pawn on d5, but White can set up a blockade and hold the draw with 37.♖b5 ♕d7 38.a4 ♕c7 39.♖c5 ♖b7 40.♖b5 ♖a7 41.♖a5.

30...♗b3 31.♔a2 ♔a4

White resigned.

There is no defense against 32...♗xa3+, mating.

## Summary

Before we move on to our next, culminating game, let's summarize the golden rules we have stated so far:

- A. Never ever give up; even in completely losing positions, look for moves that create the biggest practical difficulties for your opponent** (see Naroditsky-Tuvshintugs).
- B. When you see that your opponent is lost, stop and try to find ways to completely eliminate his counterplay** (see Karpov-Kasparov).
- C. If your opponent makes a move that you completely missed, immediately start calculating – don't get too upset and make a mistake out of distress** (see Sawyer-Naroditsky).
- D. When you have a choice between continuing to defend against a huge attack or to transpose into a worse ending, almost always choose the latter** (see Nijboer-Korchnoi).
- E. Never be afraid to accept sacrifices, no matter how strong your opponent may be** (see Perez Marco-Naroditsky and Nijboer-Korchnoi).

These five rules alone will make you much better at defending, but it's also important to try not to blunder if you get into time trouble. Yes, we know that, but it's easier said than done, right? The usual 'I blundered in time trouble' story is as follows: a player is under attack from the opening and spends a lot of time finding defenses. As the culminating/critical point nears, he has almost no time and obviously blunders.

Avoiding this is no easy task, but there are several methods of time management. First of all, if you find yourself under attack early in the game, try to plan out your time. For example, if it's move 15 and you have 30 minutes to reach move 40, you have to force yourself to move quickly, even if you are under a strong attack. This seems to be daunting, and it is. But it is possible.

Our next game will combine everything: Black walked straight into a draconian attack from the start and spent almost all of his time on finding a way not to lose in the opening. Black had to find several forced moves, and still found himself clearly worse. When White finally made a mistake, he took advantage of it, finding extremely difficult moves.

This grueling, beautiful marathon of a game is an underestimated gem.