

CHESS MIDDLEGAME STRATEGIES

Volume 3
Strategy Meets Dynamics

by

Ivan Sokolov



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY TO SYMBOLS	5
PREFACE	7
CHAPTER I. KARPOV'S KING IN THE CENTER	9
Game 1. G. Kamsky — A. Karpov	10
Game 2. A. Shirov — A. Karpov	20
Game 3. A. Shirov — A. Karpov	27
Game 4. V. Topalov — A. Karpov	34
Game 5. L. Portisch — A. Karpov	38
Game 6. V. Kramnik — V. Anand	42
CHAPTER II. GELLER/TOLUSH GAMBIT PLANS & IDEAS	49
Pure Geller/Tolush Gambit	49
Game 1. E. P. Geller — V. Smyslov	50
Game 2. E. P. Geller — W. Unzicker	60
Game 3. G. Kasparov — M. Petursson	67
Geller/Tolush — Similar Positions	72
Game 4. A. R. Salem — F. Caruana	72
Game 5. L. Ding — J. Duda	81
CHAPTER III. ANTI MOSCOW GAMBIT TYPICAL PLANS & IDEAS	93
Game 1. I. Sokolov — A. Dreev	93
Game 2. H. Nakamura — L. Ding	101
Game 3. A. R. Salem — V. Fedoseev	112
Game 4. V. Kramnik — V. Anand	120
Game 5. I. Sokolov — I. A. Novikov	131
CHAPTER IV. SPACE VS FLEXIBILITY	141
Game 1. S. Ganguly — E. Iturrizaga	142
Game 2. N. D. Short — E. l'Ami	147
Game 3. M. Vachier-Lagrave — V. Fedoseev	151

CHAPTER V. POSITIONAL EXCHANGE SACRIFICE	157
Game 1. Y. Seirawan — Z. Kozul	157
Game 2. P. Svidler — V. Bologan	164
Game 3. J. Lautier — V. Topalov	168
Game 4. G. Kasparov — U. Andersson	174
Game 5. A. Karpov — U. Andersson	184
Game 6. V. Topalov — P. Svidler	195
Game 7. J. H. Timman — G. Kasparov	199
Game 8. G. Kasparov — A. Shirov	206
Game 9. A. Karpov — B. Gelfand	210
Game 10. V. Ivanchuk — V. Kramnik	216
Game 11. N. Mitkov — S. Rublevsky	222
 CHAPTER VI. OPEN FILE	 229
Game 1. E. Sutovsky — B. Jobava	229
Game 2. I. Sokolov — R. Vazquez Igarza	235
Game 3. N. Vitiugov — I. Bukavshin	244
Game 4. M. Adams — Y. Wang	250
Game 5. A. Firouzja — A. Lenderman	256
Game 6. L. Aronian — W. So	265
Game 7. Yu Yangyi — Wen Yang	271
 CHAPTER VII. G-PAWN STRATEGIES	 277
Game 1. T. Radjabov — S. Vidit	277
Game 2. L. Portisch — A. Karpov	288
Game 3. J. E. Granda Zuniga — Wesley So	294
Game 4. E. Bacrot — A. Sokolov	298
Game 5. J. Smeets — I. Sokolov	307
Game 6. A. Grischuk — S. Mamedyarov	316

KEY TO SYMBOLS

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
▷	better is
≤	worse is
N	novelty
+	check
#	mate

PREFACE

Dear reader,

The book you are now holding is my third and final in the series on “Chess Middlegame Strategies.” In this book I have taken strategic themes from specific openings and combined these with standard strategies such as the open file, space or flexibility. Indeed, the subtitle for this book is “Strategy Meets Dynamics” and that is a good definition of what this book is about.

The book contains 43 annotated games divided among seven chapters. Within these pages you will find strategic plans related to typical pawn structures arising from the Geller/Tolush Gambit or the Anti-Moscow Gambit. By taking the time to study those chapters you should come away with a deeper understanding of the subtle nuances in pawn structures and the dynamics that arise. In addition, you will learn different strategic/dynamic ideas and this will strengthen your practical play in such positions.

The chapter on ‘Karpov’s King in the Center’ is where you will be surprised at how often the 12th World Champion, playing Black no less, deliberately gave up the right to castle. Not only will you gain perspective on when you might wish to leave your king uncastled you will also see how Karpov arranges his pieces so that each move is in harmony with those before and after the king move. Lastly you will improve your knowledge, from both sides of the board, of this particular variation of the Caro-Kann.

The open file theme is one that has been written on extensively. What I have tried to do here is show some modern approaches to this concept.

Perhaps the one dynamic theme that often amazes players is the exchange sacrifice. I have included no less than 11 annotated games in this chapter sorted by the different objectives that the player is trying to accomplish. There is plenty of knowledge to be absorbed by studying these games.

Finally, the work concludes with the daring, some may even say swashbuckling, aggressive g-pawn push! This aggressive move is used as a means to seize

the initiative. I have laid this chapter out based upon opening variations and you may find it useful as opening preparation as well as ideas for dynamic play.

My aim in this book, as well as its two predecessors, is not only to help you improve your middlegame understanding but to give you new and different ideas/concepts to employ in your own play.

In addition to the chess improvement that is offered I also hope that you will simply enjoy playing over the selected games.

Ivan Sokolov
Lelystad, Netherlands, August 7th, 2019

CHAPTER I. KARPOV'S KING IN THE CENTER

Anatoly Karpov was the 12th World Champion. His reign lasted from 1975–1985 and then from 1993–1999 during the split championship period. With a peak Elo rating of 2780 and 102 months as the number one rated player in the world we can learn a thing or two from him. His classical style, endgame technique, deep understanding of positions and harmonious piece play is something one can wish to emulate.

At some time around 1993 he came up with an idea which I will paraphrase as “Castling is overrated”!

Competing in the Dortmund super tournament in 1993 Karpov introduced an idea whereby he connected his rooks and made an immediate threat against the opponent. Karpov was playing none other than Gata Kamsky who had challenged him for the world champion's crown in an 18-game match held in Elista (Kalmykia) in 1996. Karpov won the 20 game match and retained his title with a score of 10.5–7.5 (+6=9–3). By the time of the Dortmund meeting both players knew each other's style quite well.

As with all chess games nothing is one-sided. While Karpov did connect his rooks, Kamsky responded with a principled knight move which included sacrificing a pawn. As a result he was able to remove Karpov's dark-squared bishop in the transaction gaining counterplay against the black king.

A careful analysis of the following games will reveal how White players try to restrict Black from castling with either ♔g4 or ♔h4 only to be caught off guard when they suddenly realize that their queen may be trapped and they must surrender several tempos to relocate the queen.

The first four games, with further Karpov games given in the notes, come from Karpov's favorite Caro-Kann variation. Thanks to Karpov this variation was very popular back in the 1990s when masters contemplated positions instead of switching on an analysis engine. I was very skeptical of this concept when Dutch GM Jan Timman first showed it to me during an analysis session. After additional reflection

on how many times my own queen (placed on either g4 or h4) became a target and how difficult it was to really attack Black's seemingly exposed king I began to warm to this idea.

Game five shows Karpov applying the same idea in the Queens Indian while game six shows Vishy Anand connecting his rooks, by applying 'Karpov's King in Center' idea while scoring an important win in his 2008 World Championship match versus Vladimir Kramnik.

A few important observations:

- Karpov's king in the center is safer than it looks.
- White players beware! White's queen hastily brought to g4 or h4 can easily become a target!
- Karpov's idea can easily be applied in similar positions.

I hope you enjoy the chosen games that illustrate this concept.

- Kamsky-Karpov, 1993
- Shirov-Karpov, 2001
- Shirov-Karpov, 2002
- Topalov-Karpov, 1997
- Portisch-Karpov, 1996
- Kramnik-Anand, 2008

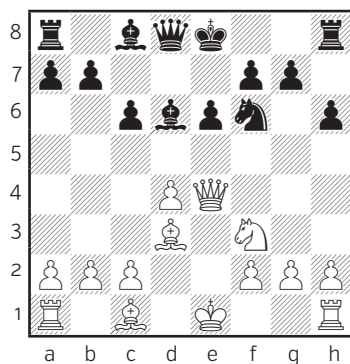
1

► G. Kamsky

► A. Karpov

Dortmund 1993

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘d2 dxe4 4. ♘xe4
 ♘d7 5. ♘g5 ♘gf6 6. ♙d3 e6 7. ♘1f3
 ♙d6 8. ♚e2 h6 9. ♘e4 ♘xe4
 10. ♚xe4 ♘f6



This pawn structure gives White more space for the time being while Black will seek to liberate his game by pushing his pawn from c6 to c5. White seeks to restrict Black's development and places his queen on a seemingly aggressive square.

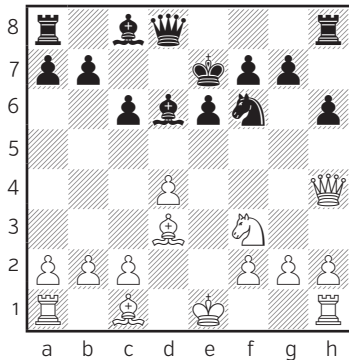
11. ♚h4

After this game 11. ♚e2 became the main line for White.

It looks as if Black will have problems bringing his king to safety. Should he castle kingside he runs

the risk of a strong attack by White which may end up in checkmate for the black king. The idea of castling queenside is simply not attractive. Karpov comes up with an ingenious concept.

11... ♖e7!



Black keeps his king in the center creating the threat of 12...g5! White's aggressively placed queen is now a liability.

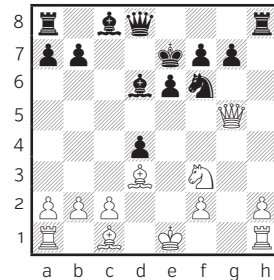
Black's king, although looking a bit strange on e7, is quite safe. Realizing what Black is up to Kamsky takes a pragmatic approach.

12. ♖e5!

White sacrifices a pawn in order to win Black's bishop pair, gain a lead in development and try to target the black king.

a) 12.g4? looks rather reckless and plays into Black's hands 12...c5! (12...

g5 13. ♖h3 c5 also looks good for Black.) 13.g5 hxg5 14. ♖xg5 cxd4.



White is already in serious trouble 15. ♗d2?! (If White is pawn grabbing he should do it at once with 15. ♖xg7 although Black has a better game after 15... ♖g8 16. ♖h6 ♖a5+ 17. ♖e2 ♗d7 18. ♗g5 ♗e5±.) 15... ♗d7 16. ♖xg7 ♖g8 17. ♖h6 ♗c6 18. ♖e2 ♖c7± Black had a large advantage in De Firmian,N (2590)-Epishin,V (2635) Newark 1995.

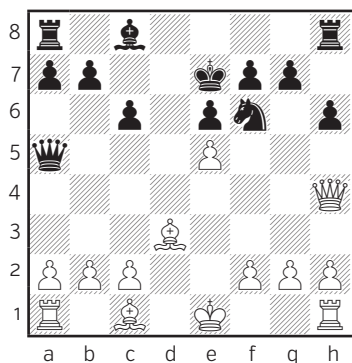
b) A relatively calm solution for White was 12. ♗f4 when Black gets an equal game after 12... ♗b4+ 13. ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 14. ♖xd2 (14. ♗xd2?! looks like a dubious pawn sacrifice 14...g5 15. ♖g3 ♖xd4±) 14... ♖a5+ 15.c3 c5=.

12... ♗xe5!

Karpov correctly judges that the pawn sacrifice must be accepted.

If 12...g5 White plays 13. ♖g3 and has a comfortable initiative.

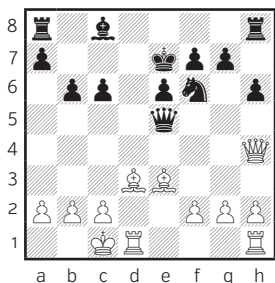
13.dxe5 ♖a5+



14.C3

White's pawn on c3 will later limit his queen's mobility thus he might have been better off leaving it on c2.

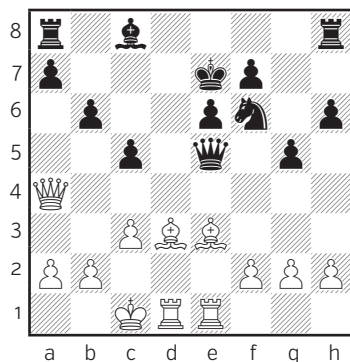
14. ♖d2!? may be an improvement on Kamsky's play. 14... ♙xe5+ 15. ♗e3 b6 (15... ♙xb2 looks rather risky for Black as White obtains strong counter play via 16. ♗c5+ ♕e8 17.0-0 or 16.0-0.) 16.0-0-0



16...g5 (16... ♖d8 17. ♖he1 ♙a5 18.a3 with good compensation for the sacrificed pawn in Golubev,M (2492)-Drozdoskij,Y (2627) Odessa 2010.) 17. ♙a4 c5 with this pawn still on c2 White's queen, once placed on a3, would have more mobility and the

position may be an improvement over the game.

14... ♙xe5+ 15. ♗e3 b6 16.0-0-0 g5
17. ♙a4 c5 18. ♖he1



18... ♗d7

When computers first started playing chess they were materialistic and would not hesitate to grab a pawn. In this position such pawn grabbing would be bad for Black after 18... ♙xh2?! White gets a strong attack with 19.g3 ♙g2 20.b4!→.

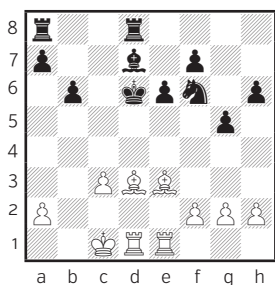
19. ♙a3

There is no immediate threat against the queen so Black continues his development.

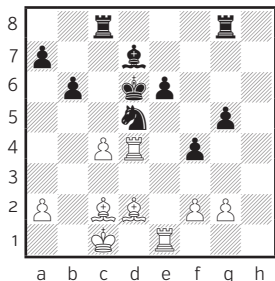
19... ♖hd8 20.g3

Here White had an interesting possibility with 20.b4!?. The threat is ♗e3xc5 which forces 20... cxb4 21. ♙xb4+ ♙d6 (21... ♕e8??

22. ♖xb6+-) 22. ♔xd6+ ♕xd6 resulting in the following position.



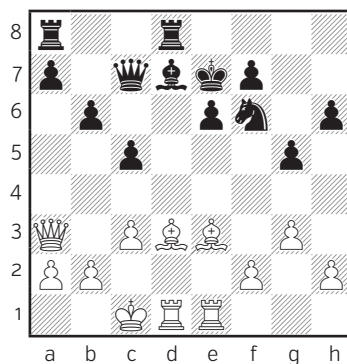
Although it is White to move, he does not have a deadly discovered check. This is likely a position of 'dynamic balance' where play may continue 23. ♖e4+ ♗d5 24. h4 ♖g8 25. hxg5 hxg5 26. c4 ♖ac8 27. ♗d4 f5 28. ♖c2!? (28. ♖xd5 exd5 29. ♖xd5+ ♕c7= leads to a draw) 28...f4 29. ♖d2.



Now Black must march with his king! 29... ♕c5! 30. ♗de4 ♗f6 31. ♗e5+ now Black can retreat with 31... ♕d6. (Black's other option is to choose to be 'brave' or 'greedy': 31... ♕xc4 32. ♖b3+ ♕d4+ 33. ♕b2 and the computer says this position is "0.00" but it looks like a mess to human eyes.) 32. ♖b4+ ♕c7= White has compensation for his sacrificed pawn but not more.

Now Black's queen needs to move.

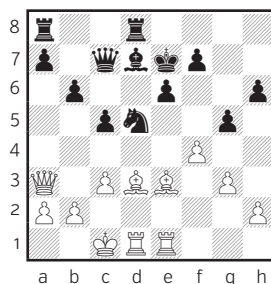
20... ♕c7



White has enough compensation here but needs to open lines toward the black king by removing the pawns which shield the king. White's queen on a3 is out of play and can only be useful if White manages to either push b2-b4 or use the a3-f8 diagonal pin to place his bishop on d4. Kamsky tries to make use of the pin.

21. ♖d4

21.f4 Trying to immediately open the position looks like another logical try. After 21... ♗d5



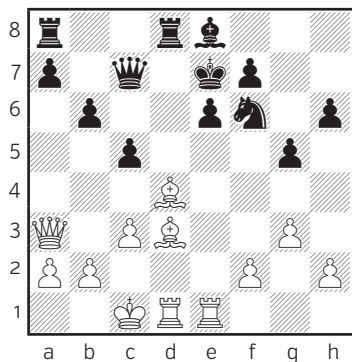
22. ♔d4! looks like the critical line here.

a) 22. ♔d2 is artificial: 22...gxf4 23.c4 ♘e3 24. ♔xe3 fxe3 25. ♔c2 ♔c6 26. ♚xe3 ♝xd1+ 27. ♝xd1, now Black can be ambitious with 27... ♞g8 (27... ♞d8 is easy equality) 28. ♚xh6 ♚e5. With his centralized queen, only Black can be better here.

b) 22. fxg5 ♘xe3 23. ♝xe3 hxg5 and the engine gives around 0.00 but it is obvious that White is trying to keep the balance here.

22...f6 is very sharp. The engines give many 0.00 variations, but it is easy for a human to go wrong in such complex situations.

21... ♔e8!



21... ♔c6? is a mistake due to 22. ♔e5 ♚d7 (22... ♚b7?? drops the queen to 23. ♔a6+-) 23.b4! now the black

pawn defense crumbles leading to a big advantage for White.

22. ♖b1

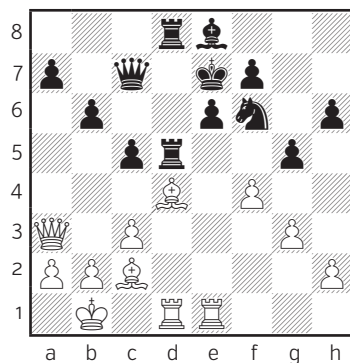
22. ♔e5 does not bring anything to White after 22... ♚c6.

22... ♞d5

Karpov goes for the most logical plan. He doubles his rooks on the d-file planning to exchange them (starting to force exchanges in general) — a good plan when you are a pawn up.

The engine is witty enough to point out that 22... ♔c6!? now works with White's king on b1. A repetition of position occurs after 23. ♔e5 ♚b7 24. ♔a6 ♔e4+ 25. ♖a1 ♚c6 26.c4 ♘g4 27. ♔b5 ♚b7 28. ♔a6. Karpov may well have seen this but he is up material and not happy with a draw.

23.f4 ♞ad8 24. ♔c2



Now Karpov wants White to make a decision regarding his d4-bishop.

24... ♖5d6

This move forces a few trades.

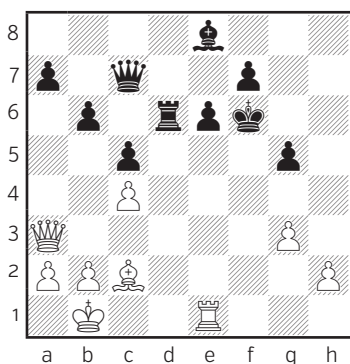
24... ♖c6!? was a good alternative since after 25.fxg5 hxg5 White lacks a clear plan of attack and after the natural 26. ♖f1 ♘g4 the advantage goes to Black.

25. ♖xf6+

White gives up his bishop pair but gains some threats against the black king.

25. ♖e5 ♖xd1+ 26. ♖xd1 ♔d7 looks better for Black.

25... ♖xf6 26.fxg5+ hxg5 27. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 28.c4



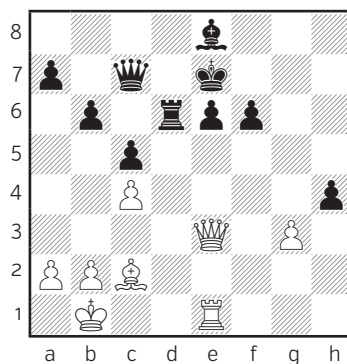
Opening the third rank to the white queen. Black has traded quite a few

pieces, but his king is now somewhat exposed. The position is one of dynamic balance.

28... ♔e7

28... ♖g7 was probably safer 29. ♖e3 f6 (29... ♖d8!? leads to an unclear position after 30. ♖e5+ f6 31. ♖e4.) 30.h4 ♖g6 31. ♖xg6 ♔xg6 32.hxg5 ♖d7 a draw is the most likely result after 33. ♖f3 e5 34. ♖h1 ♖f5+ 35. ♖xf5+ ♔xf5=.

29. ♖e3 f6 30.h4 gxh4



31.gxh4

31. ♖h6?? is a blunder because Black's king runs to safety on the queenside 31...hxg3 32. ♖g7+ ♔d8 33. ♖xf6+ ♔c8.

Once again, the silicon brain says the position is easy 'o.oo'. To humans those positions are difficult to play, and we are now going to see

several big mistakes. Even for great players it is easy to err in complex positions.

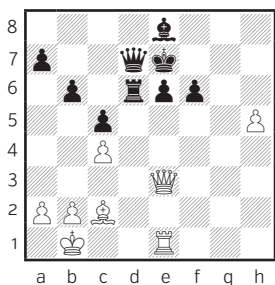
31... ♔d7

a) 31... ♔d8? running to the queen-side does not work for Black due to simple 32. ♕f3.

b) 31... ♖f7 can lead to a draw by 32.h5 ♖xh5 33. ♗h1 Black now needs to find the tactical defense: 33... ♕d7! 34.a3 ♕e8 35. ♖g1 ♕f8 36. ♗h1 ♕e8=.

32. ♕h6

a) 32.h5? is a blunder here as after

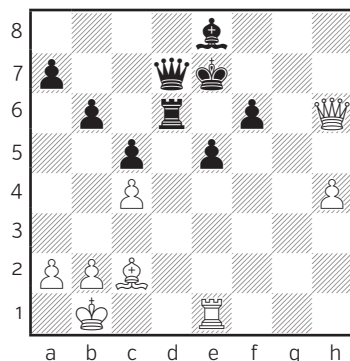


32... ♖xh5 33. ♗h1 Black is a tempo up compared to our 31... ♖f7 line and White does not have a threat. 33... e5

b) 32.a3!?∞ is a computer engine proposal. White has now removed all of Black's back rank ♖d1+ motifs and White has, due to Black's unsafe king, good compensation for his sacrificed pawn. As a reminder

this might be an easy 0.00 position to the computer but to humans this is very unclear and easy for either side to win or lose.

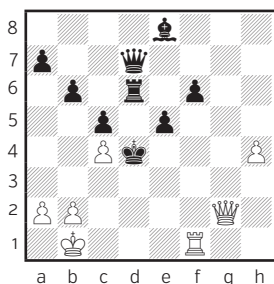
32...e5



33.h5?!

Kamsky correctly understood his h-pawn to be a 'power' here but this move is not precise.

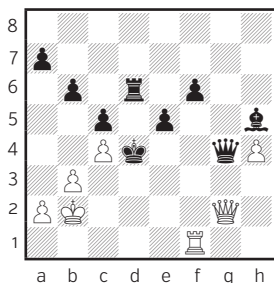
33. ♕g7+ was White's best and after 33... ♔e6! (33... ♖f7 34.h5; or 33... ♔d8 34. ♕h8 both look very risky for Black as White's h-pawn is very strong.) White can make an entertaining draw with 34. ♖f5+ (34. ♕g4+ ♔e7 is a move repetition, since 35. ♖f5? loses to a nice tactical shot due to his back rank problems: 35... ♖g6!-+) 34... ♔xf5 35. ♗f1+ ♔e4 36. ♕g2+ ♔d4. Black's king is his most active piece but considering the long-term prospects White should be happy with a draw.



37.b3! (37.♖d1+?? ♔xc4-+.) Now Black has several possibilities, but all of them lead to no more than a draw. 37...♙h5 is the riskiest choice.

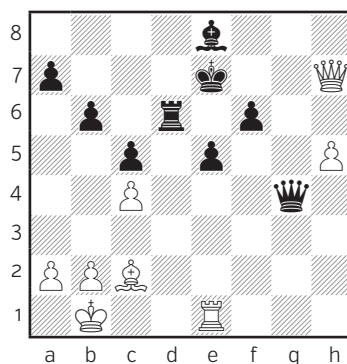
[37...♔c3 38.♚g3+! ♜d3 (38...♔b4 39.♚e1+ ♔a3 40.♚c1+=) 39.♚e1+ ♔d4 (39...♜d2?? 40.♜f3+ ♔b4 41.♔c1+-) 40.♚f2+ ♔c3=]

38.♔b2 now it is Black who must find the only move to draw: 38...♚g4!



39.♚f2+ ♔d3 40.♚c2+ ♔e3 41.♜e1+ ♔f3 42.♜f1+ (42.♚e2+ going for the black queen does not make much sense for White as only Black can be better after 42...♔g3 43.♜g1+ ♔xh4 44.♜xg4+ ♔xg4=.) 42...♔e3=.

33...♚g4! 34.♚h7+



In the heat of the battle Karpov makes a losing blunder!

34...♔d8?

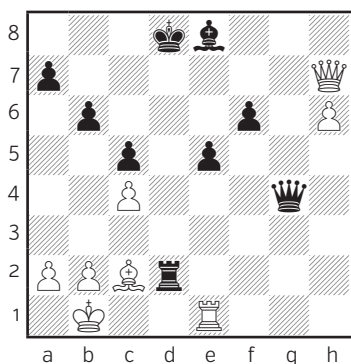
Karpov's desire to bring his king closer to safety on the queenside is easy to understand. However, White's h-pawn is now terribly strong and fast.

34...♔f7! was winning for Black as White must deal with his back-rank problems. The pride of White's position, the h6 pawn, will either be removed or stopped as 35.♜h1 is forced.

[35.h6 ♚xc4! 36.b3 (36.♔b3 ♚d3+ 37.♚xd3 ♜xd3 38.♜h1 ♜d8-+) 36... ♚g4 37.♜h1 ♜d8-+]

35...♚f3! (35...♚xc4 36.b3 ♚e2 37.♔g6 ♜d1+ 38.♜xd1 ♚xd1+ 39.♔b2 ♚d2+=) 36.♜g1 ♚xh5-+

35. h6!+- ♖d2



36. ♖f5?

36. ♖h8!+- pinning Black's bishop and promoting the h-pawn was easily winning for White. After 36... ♖e7 (36... ♖xc2 37. ♖xc2 ♖xc4+ 38. ♖b1+- and White will queen his h-pawn.) 37. h7 ♖h2 38. ♖f1 ♖g5 39. ♖g8 ♖h6 40. ♖e4 the threat of h-pawn promotion has tied up Black's queen and rook and now after 40... ♖h4 41. ♖g1+- the weak position of Black's king proves decisive.

36... ♖xf5?

Being a pawn up and having a weak king (and likely little time on clock) Karpov decides a queen swap makes sense. True...in general it does...but now White's h-pawn is impossible to stop!

36... ♖h4! saved the game. After 37. ♖e4 ♖xh6 38. ♖a8+ ♖e7 39. ♖xa7+ ♖d7 40. ♖xb6 ♖g6 41. ♖xc5+ ♖f7.

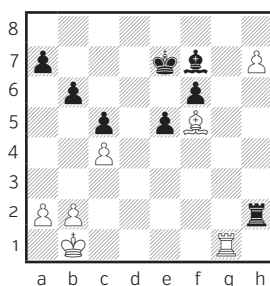
Although a pawn down Black is not worse thanks to his passed e-pawn e.g. 42. ♖xg6+ ♖xg6+ 43. ♖a1 ♖c2 44. a3 ♖d1+ 45. ♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 46. ♖a2 e4=.

37. ♖xf5

Securing the advance of the h-pawn, this ending is lost for Black.

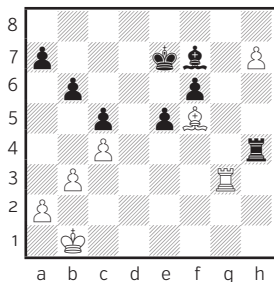
37... ♖d7

37... ♖h2 offered more resistance but not enough to change the outcome after 38. h7 ♖e7 39. ♖g1 ♖f7.

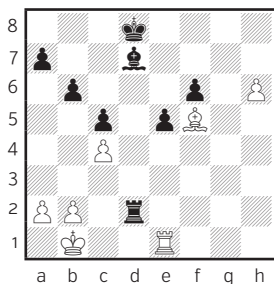


Now White needs to be clever and win a tempo. The correct move is 40. ♖g7!! (40. ♖g8 allows Black to draw by building a fortress 40... ♖xh7 41. ♖xh7 ♖xg8 42. ♖xg8 f5; Another error would be 40. ♖g3? due to the bad position of the white king Black replies with 40... ♖e6-+) 40... ♖f8 41. ♖g3! when ♖h4 is arguably the best defense but it does not help. (41... ♖e7 now loses immediately because White improves his king with 42. ♖c1! and his h-pawn queens with the help of ♖h3 or ♖h3: 42... ♖e6

43. ♖h3 or 42... ♜h4 43. ♜h3 or 42... ♜f8 43. ♖h3.) 42.b3 ♖e7



White will now improve his king position to the point where the bishop against two pawns ending does not allow Black the previous fortress. 43. ♖b2 ♖f8 (43... ♖e6 always loses to 44. ♜h3.) 44. ♖c3 Black is doomed to only making rook moves 44... ♜h6 (44... ♖e7 45. ♜h3-+) 45. ♜d3! ♖g7 46. ♜d7 ♜h5 47. ♖e6 ♜xh7 48. ♜xf7+ ♖g6 49. ♜xh7 ♖xh7 50. ♖d3 ♖g6 51. ♖e4+-.



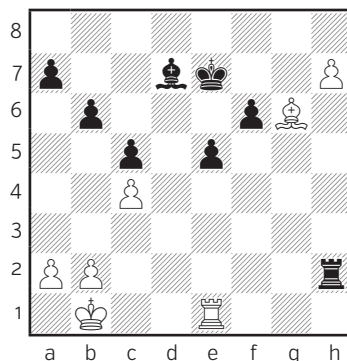
Most likely in time trouble Kamsky makes a terrible blunder!

38. ♖g6??

38. ♖c1! was winning on the spot. After 38... ♜d4 39. ♖e4! the h-pawn

queens 39... ♜xc4+ 40. ♖d2 ♜d4+ 41. ♖c3+-.

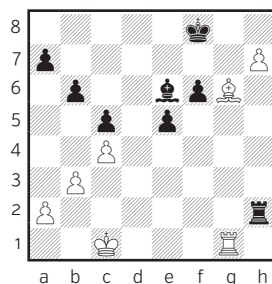
38... ♜h2 39.h7 ♖e7



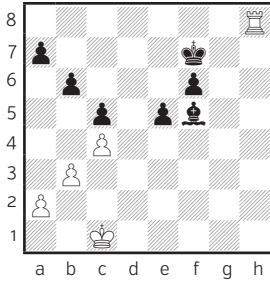
The last move before the time control often turns out to be 'the fatal one'!

40. ♖d3?

A losing blunder. 40. ♜g1 was still drawing after 40... ♖e6 (40...f5?! allows White to promote his pawn and could only bring Black trouble after 41. ♜g5! ♖f6 42. ♖h5 and now Black has to look for a 'study like' solution 42... ♖xg5 43.h8♙ ♜h1+ 44. ♖c2 ♖c6! hoping to make a draw.) 41.b3 ♖f8 42. ♖c1



Black is still the one who needs to be precise to reach a draw: 42...♔g7! 43.♙f5+ ♚f7 44.♙g6+ ♚g7 45.♙f5+ ♚f7. White can attempt to win with 46.♖g8 ♙xf5 47.h8♔ ♖xh8 48.♖xh4 reaching the following position.



Black's passed connected pawns provide enough counter play to hold the balance 48...♙g4 49.♖a8 f5 50.♖xa7+ ♚f6 51.♖a6 f4 52.♖xb6+ ♚f5 53.♖b8 e4 54.a4 e3 55.♚c2 (55. a5?? f3-+) 55...♚e4 56.♖e8+ ♚d4 57.♖d8+ ♚e4 58.♖e8+=.

40...♙e6-+

40...f5 was also an easy win: 41.♖xe5+ ♚f6 42.♖d5 ♖xh7-+.

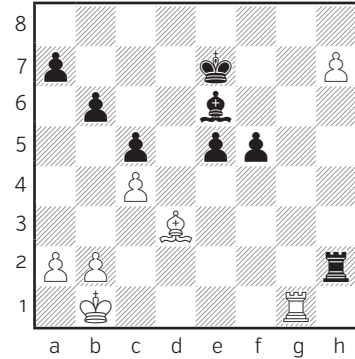
41.♖g1

41.♙g6 does not help as White's h-pawn eventually falls to 41...f5 42.♖xe5 ♚f6 43.♖e1 ♙d7 44.♖d1 ♚xg6 45.♖d6+ ♚xh7 46.♖xd7+ ♚g6 47.♖xa7 f4-+.

41...f5-+

The rest of the game does not need comments. Black's pawns simply

roll, and White cannot create any counter threats.



42.♖g7+ ♚f6 43.♖xa7 e4 44.♙e2 f4 45.b3 f3 46.♙d1 ♙f5 47.♚c1 ♙xh7 48.♖b7 ♚e5 49.♖xb6 ♖xa2 o-1

2

► A. Shirov
► A. Karpov
Linares 2001

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♖c3 dxe4 4.♖xe4 ♖d7 5.♖g5 ♖g6 6.♙d3 e6 7.♖1f3 ♙d6 8.♚e2 h6 9.♖e4 ♖xe4 10.♚xe4

