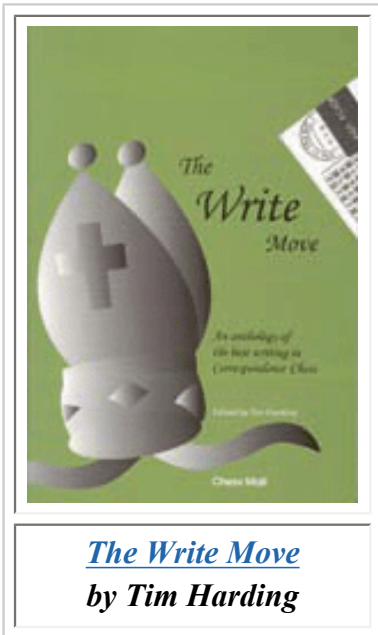




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



The Write Move
by Tim Harding

The Spanish Marshall Revisited

I think [Kibitzer 24](#) (May 1998) was the last time I wrote on the Spanish Marshall in this column. This month I will show you the anatomy of a Marshall Attack correspondence game. You may think: why all this fuss over a short draw that is in the books until a few moves from the end, but it took months to play this game and as we go along I shall explain why. Much research and analysis was needed and many critical choices had to be made – well in advance. This was particularly the case because of the importance of the event: the final of the Correspondence Olympiad. My team, Ireland, had never before qualified for a final and Portugal, my opponent's country had only played once before at this level, so there was plenty at stake.

I shall be interested to hear any feedback from readers, but of course you may want to keep your discoveries to yourself and put them to use in your own games! I am aware that more recent games may have possibly been played in some of the sub-variations below. This article shows the state of knowledge at the time the game was played.

Antonio Brito Moura (Portugal) – Tim Harding (Ireland)

15th Correspondence Olympiad Final, Board 6, ICCF webserver, 2006-7

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Rxe5 c6 12 d4 Bd6 13 Re1 Qh4 14 g3 Qh3 15 Re4 g5 16 Qf1



This move was known, but not considered strong, thirty or forty years ago; after that it became almost forgotten. ICCF grandmaster Janis Vitomskis of Latvia did not mention it in his study of the 15 Re4 line on the CD-ROM *The Total Marshall*, edited by the two of us and Martin Benedik, although the database on the CD included all examples known at that time. In recent years the move has been revived and it featured in a spectacular game from the Kramnik-Leko title match. Or maybe he was influenced by a game played in Turin Olympiad? Kramnik

made a terrible misjudgement in that game with Leko (which of course Moura would not repeat) probably because of relying on inadequate computer analysis done beforehand. As Black in this game, my first decision was important, and analysis had to take into account where did Moura think he had found something new?

16...Qh5

Black has to take a huge decision immediately: exchange queens or not? In all, I was involved as author or co-author on three books for Batsford on the Marshall Attack. The first was with IM Bob Wade in the early 1970s, then an algebraic edition (without a co-author) later in the 1970s. Finally in the 1980s, GM John Nunn asked me to take the minor role on a third book, in which he wrote the chapter on the 15 Re4 variation. He favoured this reply, but first we must examine the alternatives.

16...h6 would protect the g5-pawn and leave the decision about exchanging queens to White, but I did not take this option very seriously.

The main divergence, 16...Qxf1+, is not an unreasonable choice, although Black has sacrificed a pawn. There are many variations in the Marshall where Black can safely exchange queens, and indeed sometimes White needs his queen to hold the position together while he completes his queenside development. Black, on the other hand, likes to exchange queens if he can establish a firm bind. This, however, is not one of those cases. Computers tend to like 16...Qxf1+, but Nunn was unsure about it. I avoided the exchange in the end. Many recent games have tended to be in this line, but I like queens on in the Marshall unless there is something definite to be gained.

17 Kxf1



Again Black has a choice, with 17...Bh3+ and 17...Nf6 coming into consideration. A recent game went 17...Bf5 18 Nd2 Rad8 19 Re1 Rde8 20 Nf3 g4 21 Bh6 gxf3 22 Bxf8 Rxf8 23 Bd1 Bg4 24 a4 Rd8 25 axb5 axb5 26 Ra6 c5 27 dxc5 Bxc5 28 Rc6 Ba7 29 Ra6 Bc5 30 Rc6 ½-½ (S. Karjakin-Grischuk, Turin olm 2006). I wondered if my opponent had some improvement in mind on this.

Now we return to the game, with **16...Qh5**.



17 f3

White supports the rook on e4, watches g4 and importantly gives his queen somewhere to go in case of ...Bh3. Kramnik actually played 17 Nd2 and the same position arose via 17...Bf5 18 f3, but 17 f3 is White's most flexible move.

Two examples of what can go wrong are the

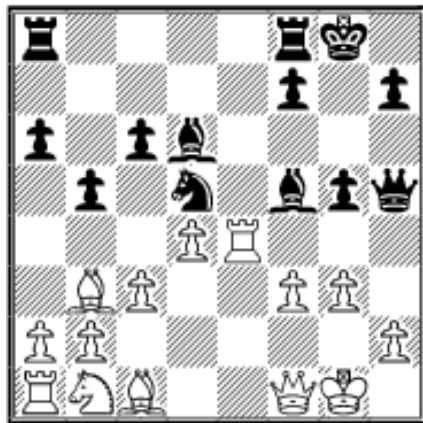


alternatives:

a) 17 Nd2 f5!? (17...Bf5 18 f3 returns to the game line.) 18 Re1 f4 19 Ne4 Bh3 (19...Bg4!?) 20 Qd3 (20 Qe2 Bg4 21 Qd3 might be better, to have the black bishop on a different square. Note that 21 Qf1?? here would not lead to a draw by repetition, because Black wins by 21...fxg3 22 Nxc3 Bxc3 23 hxg3 Bf3.) 20...Rae8 21 Bd2 (To unpin the knight, but maybe 21 a4 is better.) 21...Bf5 22 c4 (22 a4!?) 22...Ne3! 23 c5 +? (This loses immediately; White had to try 23 Qe2 Bg4) 23...Kg7 24 Bxe3 Bxe4 25 Bd1 fxg3 26 fxg3 Qh3 0-1, B.Sambuev-A. Khrushchiov, Moscow 2006.

b) 17 Re1 Bh3 18 Bd1 g4 19 Qe2 Kg7 and Black already has the initiative. 20 Bb3 Rae8!? (Maybe not best, as White could now have traded queen for two rooks.) 21 Be3 c5!? 22 a4 c4 23 Bc2 f5 24 Nd2 f4 25 Ne4 fxe3 26 fxe3 Bc7 27 axb5 axb5 28 Ra7. Here, in A. Gauquelin-R. Haag, ICCF Email thematic 2003, Black withdrew (because of illness) in a probably winning position.

17...Bf5



17...Bh3?! was the older move, rarely played now and possibly refuted. 18 Qf2 f5 (18...Nf6? 19 Re1 was seen in the game Cardoso-Quinones.) 19 Re6 f4 20 Rxd6! fxg3 21 hxg3 Rxf3 22 Rxd5!+- Nunn. Instead 18...Rae8, as in a couple of early post-war Marshall games, may actually be all right for Black if subjected to modern computer analysis. I leave this for readers to examine.

17...f5 18 Re1 Bd7 19 Nd2 Kh8 20 Qf2 Rae8 21 Rxe8 Rxe8 22 Nf1 f4 23 Bd2 g4, supposedly favouring Black, was an old line from an

Informator monograph, but what was the source of it? There is probably plenty of scope for improvement on both sides.

After 17...Bf5, the chances are about equal. Old assessments in Black's favour are suspect, since White defended badly in the old exemplar game Krylov-Rodriguez, corr 1959, which continued 18 Bxd5 cxd5 19 Re1 Rae8 20 Be3 Bh3 21 Qf2 f5 22 Na3? f4 23 gxf4 gxf4 24 Bd2 Kh8 25 Kh1 Rxe1+ 26 Rxe1 Rg8 27 Rg1 Rxg1+ 28 Kxg1 Qg6+ 29 Kh1 Qd3!! 0-1. White is paralyzed with no answer to the threat ...Be7-h4.

In reality the material situation (Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn, but maybe no more) is not permanent: White is angling to sacrifice the exchange and pick up the g5-pawn in the process.

18 Nd2

A few recent games have seen 18 Re1 instead. Then 18...Rae8 19 Nd2 Bh3?! 20 Qf2 Rxe1+ 21 Qxe1 Rd8 22 Qf2 Be6 23 Ne4 Be7 24 Bd2 a5 25 Re1 a4 26 Bc2 Qg6 27 b3 axb3 28 axb3 Qg7 29 Bc1 Bf5 30 Bb2 Bg6 31 c4 Nc7 32 Bd3 f5 33 d5 Qf8 34 d6 fxe4 35 dxe7 Qxe7 36 Bxe4 Bxe4 37 fxe4 Rd3 38 Bf6 Qf7 39 Rf1 h6 40 Qe2 bxc4

41 Bxg5 1–0 was Z. Nowak – F. Balabaev, AK-2005-A–00008 Chessfriend.com webserver 2005. Instead of this Black should probably play 19...Nf6 20 Rxe8 Rxe8, which is similar to the note below on 18...Rae8, but White seems to have lost a tempo.

After 18 Nd2, we come to Black's second huge decision point: follow Leko or not? With best play White probably has the edge in both lines. In a high-level correspondence game like this, it may take months to "leave the books" which both players know, because, before committing themselves, they are spending hundreds of hours examining all the options and if they see a possibility a few moves ahead they may use computers to examine the consequences in many overnight sessions. Then the computer evaluations and suggestions are re-checked, both by the human brain and by other computer analysis engines.

18...Nf6

After thirty days "clock" time, I eventually decided to follow Leko and play ...Nf6, as I don't like being down on material with no attack. Before that game, this knight move was supposed to be bad. I think the ...Nf6 line more obscure and White has more options to go wrong. I did not think he would follow Kramnik's play any further and I was right about that.

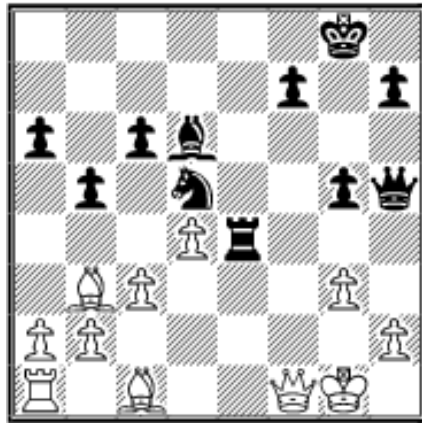
Simply taking the exchange at once by 18...Bxe4? is definitely bad here. Black needs to keep this bishop. White can choose between:

- a) 19 Nxe4 Be7 20 g4!? Qg6 21 Ng3 and White has excellent compensation, according to Rogers in *BCM*; this continuation stems from Shamkovich.
- b) 19 fxe4 Ne3 20 Qf3 seems to be what Leko saw; if 20...Ng4 21 Nf1, wins for White according to his *Informator* notes. The queen swap also clearly favours White.

So 18...Rae8!? is the alternative for Black to pre-empt whatever improvement White is planning. That move is not mentioned in *New in Chess* or *Informator*, although it was recommended by Dutch analyst Abram C. van der Tak. In notes to the Kramnik game, *British Chess Magazine* called it Black's "none too attractive" main alternative.

I was somewhat put off this idea in the end when I found the following game: 19 a4 (I think White got this idea from the Fritz computer program!) 19...Bxe4 (19...Bh3 may be better, but several queen moves are possible in reply.) 20 Nxe4 Re6 (20...Be7? 21 axb5 axb5 22 Ra6 is too strong; if 22...Rc8 23 Bxd5 cxd5 24 g4+–.) 21 axb5 axb5 22 Nxg5 (22 Bxg5!?) 22...Rg6 23 f4 Qg4 24 Bd1 Qf5 25 Be2 Rh6 26 h3 Be7 27 Bd3 Qd7 28 f5 c5 29 Ne4 Rb6 30 dxc5 Rb7 31 Ra6 Rc8 32 Qf3 Rbb8 33 Bh6 Bf8 34 Rd6 1–0, P. Osorio – J. Grabner, ICCF webserver WS/M/027 corr 2005.

If Black can find an answer to 19 a4, he still has to reckon with the main line which goes 19 Rxe8 Rxe8 20 Ne4 Bxe4 21 fxe4 Rxe4, when Black has regained the pawn, but positions on both sides are loose, so this looks like another critical position for analysis.



Now Elyakim-Krempel, corr 1990, is the game to examine: 22 Bd1 g4 23 Qf2 (Maybe to stop ... Ne3xd1; also 23 Bd2 c5 24 Qg2 Re6 led to an eventual draw in Vayser-Lambert, Rochade email 2005) 23...Re6 24 a4 b4 (Obviously, opening the queenside for White's rook is undesirable.) 25 Bd2 (25 c4!?) 25...bxc3 26 bxc3 c5!. This game seemed about equal until White blundered at the end.

Now back to what actually happened in Moura-Harding after **18...Nf6**.

19 a4!?N

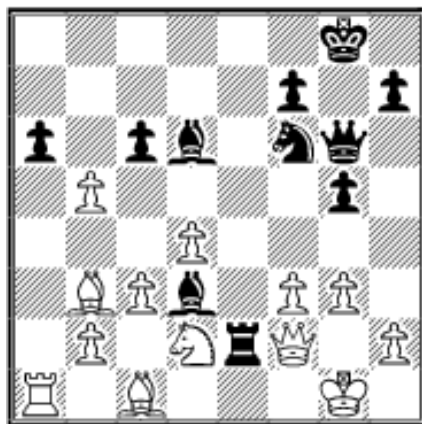
White renews his exchange offer. This is not actually a new move, inasmuch as it was Shipov's suggestion, mentioned in *ChessBase Magazine* notes. Yet it had not been played before in any game I had seen.

I had guessed this might be Moura's plan. The older line, as played by Kramnik, is 19 Re1 Rae8 20 Rxe8 Rxe8:



Now 21 Bd1 Qg6 22 Be2 "unclear" is one suggestion, but Kramnik played **21 a4** and the reply was **21...Qg6**. Kramnik's team had studied this position about an hour before the game. The choice, according to the notes to this game in *New In Chess Magazine*, was between "a drawish knight manoeuvre and a daring pawn move they had briefly looked at." He played the daring pawn move, but, as *NIC* says, if they had run the computer a bit longer they would have seen it "wasn't a courageous winning attempt but a jump into the abyss."

Kramnik-Leko went **22 axb5 Bd3! 23 Qf2? Re2!**



Now if 24 bxa6 Rxf2 25 Kxf2 Qh5 (25...Qh6!?) 26 Kg1 (26 Kg2 g4) 26...Bxg3! (26...Qh3 is another line given in *New In Chess*) 27 hxg3 Qh3 28 a7 Qxg3+ 29 Kh1 and now, instead of taking perpetual, Black has 29...g4!! 30 a8Q+ Kg7 and wins – Leko. That wasn't Kramnik's plan anyway.

The Russian grandmaster played **24 Qxe2 Bxe2 25 bxa6**, following his home-based computer preparation, but Leko found the refutation at the board, although short of time: **25...Qd3**. Only now did Kramnik, who had originally thought this led to a perpetual, started to think. After 26 a7, Fritz8 (and probably other

computer engines) at first shows White winning hugely as he will queen with check, but put 26...Qe3+ on the board and suddenly Fritz realizes it's over – for White! 27 Kg2 Bxf3+ 28 Nxf3 Qe2+ 29 Kg1 Ng4 30 a8Q+ Kg7. Despite White's free move he is lost, e.g. 31 Qxc6 (31 Qb7 Qf2+ is the same.) 31...Qf2+ 32 Kh1 Qf1+ 33 Ng1 Nf2# So Kramnik tried **26 Kf2**, but had to resign after **26...Bxf3 27 Nxf3** (27 a7 Qe2 + 28 Kg1 Qg2#) **27...Ne4+ 0-1**

Going back a few moves, *BCM* claimed an advantage for White with 23 Qd2!, instead of 23 Qf2?. That is a better queen move, but Leko demonstrated a draw against it by 23...Be2! (not 23...axb5 24 Ra7.) 24 Qc2 (24 Bc2? loses to 24...Qh5 25 Qe1 Bxf3 26 Qf1 Bd5 27 Qxf6 Bxg3! and in *Informator*, Leko gave the finish 28 Nf3 Re1+ 29 Nxe1 Qxh2+ 30 Kf1 Qh1+ 31 Ke2 Qxe1+ 32 Kd3 Qe4+ 33 Kd2 Bf4 +.) 24...Bd3 25 Qd1 drawing by repetition (Leko). Finally, if 24 Qe1 (not in Leko's notes), then 24...Bd3 leads to a draw by repetition, rather than 24...Bxb5 25 Ne4 Nxe4 26 Bc2, which is good for White according to GM Ian Rogers in *BCM*.

After 21 a4 Qg6, the “drawish knight manoeuvre” is 22 Ne4. After 22...Nxe4 23 fxe4 Bxe4 24 Bxg5 (24 axb5 Bd3 Kramnik) 24...bxa4 25 Bc4, there are two possibilities:

a) 25...Bd5, when GM Knaak in *ChessBase Magazine* said White has the better pawn structure, but his king is too open: 26 Bxd5 cxd5 27 Qf6 a3 28 Qxg6+ (28 bxa3 Qxf6 29 Bxf6 Rc8 regains the pawn.) 28...hgx6 29 bxa3 Rc8 (I am unsure I like this; White has a tiny edge.) 30 Bd2 (holding the extra pawn; is this really OK for Black?) 30...Rb8 31 Kf2 Rb2 32 Ke2 f6 33 Kd3 Kf7 34 a4 f5 35 a5 Rb3 36 Kc2 Rb8 37 Kd3 Rb3 38 Ra2 Ke6 39 Kc2 Rb7 40 Bf4 Be7 41 Kd3 Rb5 42 Re2+ Kd7 43 Bc7 ½-½, B. Perez-S. McLeod, corr 2005.

b) 25...Rb8!? 26 Re1 Bd5 27 Bxd5 cxd5 28 Bc1 h5 with counterplay, according to Leko in *Informator* 91/312.

I also had to reckon with the possibility that White might try another interesting untested idea, namely **19 Qg2**. I was rather relieved when White finally did not play this; I wonder how deeply he considered it.



A recent correspondence game, not well known, went: 19...Qg6 20 Re3 Rae8 21 Ne4 Nxe4 22 g4 Ng3 23 hxg3 Bd3 24 Qd2 Rxe3 25 Qxe3 Bxg3 26 Qxg5 Re8 27 Be3 Qxg5 28 Bxg5 Kg7 29 Kg2 Bd6 30 Rd1 Re2+ 31 Kf1 Re5+ 32 Rxd3 Rxg5 33 Re3 h5 34 Re8 hxg4 35 fxg4 Rxg4 36 Ra8 Rg6 37 Ra7 Rf6+ 38 Ke2 Bf4 39 Kd3 Bc1 40 Kc2 Be3 41 Rxa6 c5 42 Rxf6 Kxf6 43 dxc5 Bxc5 44 a3 Ke7 45 Bd5 f5 46 b4 Kd6 47 Bf7 Bf2 48 Be8 f4 49 Bxb5 f3 50 c4 Kc7 51 c5 Be1 52 Kb3 Bd2 53 Bd3 Be3 54 Kc4 Bc1 55 a4 Bd2 56 a5 Kb7 57 Be4+ Ka7 58 Bxf3 1-0, A. Borzenko – T. Taylor,

7th European Team Championship prelims, ICCF webserver 2005-6.

Black needs something better than this. Before committing myself to 18...Nf6, I had

to find something.

a) 19...Bh3 20 Qf2 Rae8 21 Rxe8 Rxe8 22 a4 (22 Bc2 Kg7 also led to tricky lines.) and now I analysed 22...Bf4, but it did not work.

b) 19...Nxe4 20 Nxe4, when the problem g-pawn falls and White then has two pawns for the exchange. This is not dissimilar to the game except for the posting of his queen. I would probably have played this, but I am glad I did not have to.

19...Nxe4

Black has no good option but to accept the exchange here; and it is important to retain the bishop. 19...Bh3 accomplishes nothing and the white queen has several choices in reply. 19...Bxe4 20 Nxe4 Be7 looks defensive and, moreover, inadequate. 19...c5 and ...Qg6 also did not stand up to serious scrutiny.

20 Nxe4

20 fxe4?! is less to be feared here. Black can choose between 20...Bh3 and 20...Be6.

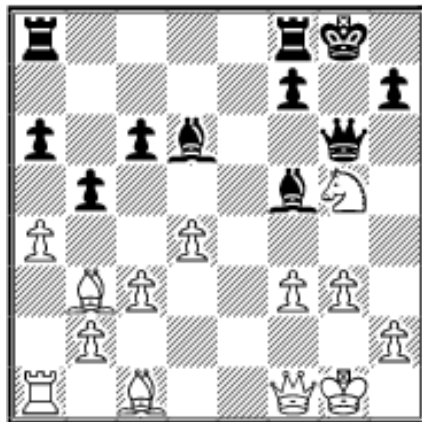
20...Qg6

This seems clearly best; the immediate capture of the rook is what White wants.

21 Nxd6

He played this fairly quickly (after two or three days). So hundreds of hours of evaluation of the choice to be made after his main alternative was no longer of any practical use – hence this article!

My analysis hitherto had chiefly concentrated on the immediate capture of the black g-pawn. Let's look at 21 Nxd6:



Black has two markedly different possibilities here.

a) 21...c5?! This may be preferred by the Fritz family of programs, but I think it is not best. It is hard to be certain because of the hugely complicated possibilities from here. After 21...c5, Black has several good ways to meet 22 Qg2, but White can also choose 22 Ne4 or 22 Bd5; of these, 22 Bd5 is perhaps the most dangerous.

a1) 22 Bd5 may lead to approximate equality, but I didn't trust this for Black: 22...Rad8 23 axb5 axb5 24 Qxb5 h6 and now:

a11) 25 Ne4 Bxg3! 26 Ra6 (If White takes the bishop on g3, the reply ...Rxd5 should give Black at least equal chances.) 26...Bd6+ 27 Kh1 Bxe4 28 Bxe4 Qh5 29 Qe2

Rfe8 (threatening ...Rxe4!) 30 Qf2 cxd4 31 cxd4 Kh8, followed by ...Rg8 and Black should be OK.

a12) 25 Nxf7 (25 Bxf7+ comes to the same.) 25...Rxf7 26 Bxf7+ Kxf7 27 Qc4+ Be6 28 d5 Bf5 29 Qh4 Rd7 30 Qxh6 Qxh6 31 Bxh6, when White has five pawns for a bishop, but maybe Black can regain one pawn? Only White has winning chances, I think.

a2) 22 Ne4 when:

a21) 22...Bxe4?! is an example of why it is very dangerous to trust computer analysis in the Marshall. 23 fxe4 cxd4 24 Bd5 dxc3 (Nor is moving the rook entirely satisfactory.) 25 axb5 Rac8 26 Rxa6 cxb2 27 Bxb2 Rc2 28 Qf6 Rc1+ 29 Kg2 Rc2+ (My computer thought it saw draw by repetition, but it is *not* forced. In fact, Black could well be losing this.) 30 Kf1! (30 Kh3?? 30...Rxb2+ 31 Kxh2 Qxg3+ 32 Kh1 Qh2#, 30 Kg1 Rc1+ 31 Kf2 Kg2 is an obvious repetition.) 30...Rc1+ 31 Kf2 (31 Ke2?? Qh5+) 31...Bc5+ 32 Kg2 Rc2+ 33 Kh1 (Now there is no mate by ...Rxb2+, as the bishop does not control g3.) 33...Qxf6 and Black has to go into an endgame with R v B+2P of which the b-pawn is dangerous. Of course 33...Rc1+?? no longer works as his rook defends the queen.

a22) 22...c4 was also examined, but it reduces pressure on White's position; the bishop is happy to retreat to c2.

a23) 22...cxd4! is probably playable, however. Then 23 Bd5 (23 cxd4 also comes into consideration.) 23...dxc3!? (Rook moves come into consideration too. 23...Rad8 24 axb5 axb5 25 Qxb5 puts White two pawns ahead; Black has piece activity, but is it enough?) 24 axb5 (Probably better than taking the rook) 24...Rae8 25 bxc3 Bxe4 26 fxe4 Rxe4 27 bxa6 (27 Bxe4 Qxe4 threatens ...Bc5+ and leads to a draw.) 27...Re5 28 Bg2 Rfe8 29 Be3 Rxe3 30 a7 Rxc3 31 a8Q Bc5+ and White has only a nominal advantage after the liquidation on a8.

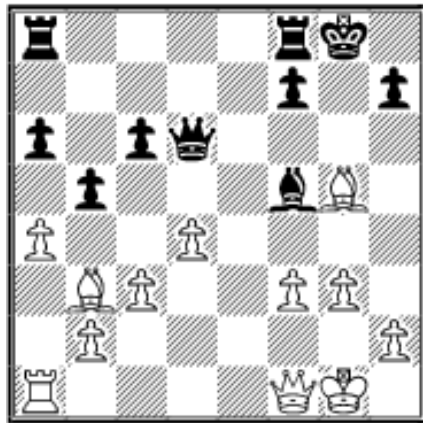
b) 21...Rae8! This was the line I examined second as a reply to 22 Nxc5, and at the time it seemed fine. Then:

b1) 22 axb5!? Bd3!? 23 Qd1 axb5 was a line I thought good for Black on account of 24 Ra6? h6 25 Ne4 Bxe4 26 fxe4 Bxg3! and Black should win: 27 Rxc6 Bd6+ 28 Kf2 Rxe4 or 27 hxg3 Qxg3+ 28 Kf1 (only move) 28...Rxe4 and ...Rg4. Here 24 Ra7!? was actually a possibility I failed to consider during the game. It could be critical; White must put pressure on f7, as the previous line shows.

b2) 22 Ne4 Bxe4 23 fxe4 Rxe4 24 Bc2 Rfe8 (24...f5 also received attention.) 25 Bxe4 (25 Bd2 Bxg3 leads to a draw.) 25...Rxe4 26 Qf2 (26 Qf3 Re1+ 27 Kf2 Re6 28 Qd1 Rf6+!, e.g. 29 Kg2 h5 30 Bd2 h4 31 Qe1 hxg3 32 hxg3 Qh5 33 Qe8+ Kg7 and only Black has winning chances.) 26...bxa4 (Is this best or just a trap?) 27 Bd2 (27 Rxa4? Qg4) 27...h5 28 Qf3 h4 29 Be1 c5 30 Bf2 (30 dxc5 Bxc5+ or 30 d5 c4) 30...cxd4 (Or take on g3 first?) 31 cxd4 hxg3 (31...Rg4) 32 hxg3 Rf4 (32...Re6) 33 Qc3 (33 Qe2 Rg4 34 Qxa6 Rxg3+ 35 Bxg3 Qxg3+ 36 Kf1 looks like perpetual, but it needs verifying) 33...Rg4 34 Kg2= also needs more detailed analysis.

Now we return to the game, where my opponent just played **21 Nxd6**.

21...Qxd6 22 Bxg5



His twenty-second move was played instantly, of course. White could exchange first on b5 and a8, but then Black would be the only player left with a rook, and that could only be to my advantage. Now I did not move for over thirty days, because I was just too busy even to look at my games.

22...Qg6!

I decided to “put the question” to his bishop at once.

22...Rfe8!? 23 Bf4 Qg6 24 Qg2 Bd3 (Probably best) 25 Be5 c5 (or 25...bxa4!?, but I rarely like this move) 26 Bd5 Rad8 27 f4 cxd4 28 cxd4 is pretty unclear; for example, after 28...bxa4 29 Bc6 Re7.

23 Qc1

Clearly 23 h4 is loosening, and the various bishop moves give me different options for continuing. The queen move looks awkward, but it does prevent my option of ... Bc2.

23 Bf4 Rfe8 transposes to 22...Rfe8 23 Bf4 Qg6 above.

One line I examined in some depth was 23 Be7 Rfe8 24 Re1 Be6 25 Rxe6 (25 Bxe6 Rxe7 26 Re4 Qh6) 25...fxe6 26 Bc5 Rab8. These types of position with an exchange against two pawns are very hard to evaluate. One variation in my notes goes 27 Qc1 bxa4 28 Bxa4 Rec8 29 Bc2 Qh5 30 g4 Qh4 31 Qe3 Re8. Although all Black's pawns are isolated, White has no passed pawn either. Pawn advances seeking to create passed pawns could create entries for my rooks.

23...Rfe8

Rooks belong on open lines and this move preserves the bishop's options for another turn. Of course not 23...Rae8?? 24 Bh6. 23...Bd3 was only considered briefly, although it may be playable in conjunction with ...Rfe8 next move: 24 axb5 (24 Bf4 Rfe8 25 Be5 is probably better.) 24...axb5 25 Rxa8 Rxa8 26 Bf4 Bc4 27 Bxc4 bxc4 Black's pawns are shattered, but my rook has more prospects now he has only one bishop.

24 Bf4

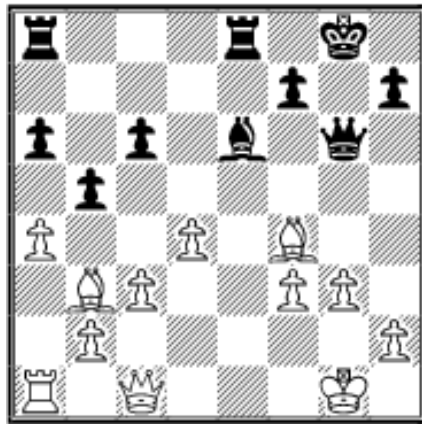
Also possible were:

a) 24 Qd2 Bd3!? (In fact 24...Be6 may be safer.) 25 Be3 (But 25 Rd1 is probably

better.) 25...Ra7 26 axb5 cxb5 27 Rd1 Rae7 28 Qxd3 Rxe3 29 Qxg6+ hxg6 30 Bd5 Re2 31 b3 Rb2. This is a variation, proposed by a computer engine, which is probably untenable for White. He either has to concede the b-pawn at once or allow Black to double rooks on the seventh rank, and we all know what Nimzovitch said about that.

b) 24 axb5 axb5 25 Rxa8 (only move) 25...Rxa8 is, despite the tempo lost with my rook (compared with the 23...Bd3 24 axb5 line), a variation that I assessed as offering only winning chances to Black. My rook is unopposed and has an open line, so White must defend with care. A possible continuation is 26 g4 (White can also try for an immediate draw by 26 Bf4 Be6 27 Bc2 Bf5 28 Bb3 etc. or play 26 d5.) 26...h6 (26...Bd3!? 27 Bh6 Re8 28 Qd2 Qf6 29 Bf4 b4 30 Bd1 Bc4 31 Be5 is messier.) 27 Bf4 (27 Bxh6 Bxg4 draws, e.g. 28 fxg4 Qxg4+ 29 Kf2 Qh4+ 30 Ke2!? Qg4+ 31 Kd2 Qg2+ 32 Kd3 Qg6+.) 27...h5 28 h3 (28 g5) and here 28...Bd3 is unclear, but 28...hxg4 29 fxg4 (29 hxg4) 29...Bxg4?! 30 hxg4 Qxg4+ is unsound, as his bishop can reach g3. So 27...Re8!? is probably wiser.

24...Be6 ½-½ (!?)



Here I offered a draw and after a few days my opponent accepted.

24...Re2?! is a red herring, which computers may think at first is good for Black, but actually turns out to White's advantage; for example, 25 Bd1 Re1+ 26 Kf2 (26 Kg2!?) 26...Ree8 Black has to back off, because if (26...Rh1 27 Kg2 Bh3+ 28 Kxh1 Qd3 29 Be2! Qxe2 30 Qd2 Qxf3+ 31 Kg1. Now Black has no play left and remains permanently a pawn down, unless he likes the look of the shattered pawn structure after 31...

31...bxa4. His drawing chances depend entirely on the opposite-coloured bishops.

24...Bd3 was another line I rejected after some analysis, although there is nothing very clear for White. I just thought offering the bishop exchange was the right strategy.

After **24...Be6!**, the exchange by 25 Bxe6 is to Black's advantage, if anything, because White now lacks a minor piece to guard against a rook entering his position. Therefore, Black would have some prospects of exploiting his advantage of the exchange in the long run, whereas White's extra two pawns will be hard to convert into a dangerous passed pawn. Both the queen and rook recaptures on e6 come into consideration, but this is probably correct.

I think it is too risky for White to avoid a repetition by 25 Bc2 Bf5 26 Bb3 Be6 etc. Here 26 Bd1 looks unconstructive; after 26...Rad8 all my pieces are in play and I don't see how Black can stand worse. The immediate 25 Bd1 would concede me a good central square: 25...Bd5.

Finally, upon exchanges by 25 Bc2 Bf5 26 Bxf5 Qxf5, White once more has to

worry about an eventual penetration by a rook into the light squares. 27 Be5 (27 g4!? Qd3 28 Bg3 Re6) 27...f6 28 Qf4 Qxf4 29 Bxf4 Kf7 30 Kf2 Ke6 and the black king becomes active on the light squares, which should guarantee enough play for a draw.

I think I shall go back and re-examine the lines with 16...Qxf1+ after this experience.

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