

## Misha Interviews...

Misha Savinov

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## Interview with Ernesto Inarkiev

*At the recent European team championship in Izmir, Turkey 18-year-old grandmaster Ernesto Inarkiev achieved one of the best performance ratings (2794). A week later he only scored 50% at the Chigorin Memorial Open in St. Petersburg, despite being one of the top rated players at the event. Such ups and downs are characteristic of his chess career. Yet, as long as the overall trend is positive, he remains optimistic. The resident of Elista, named after legendary Che Guevara, is one of Russia's top under 20 players and has already participated in two chess Olympiads. He is an adherent of the sporting approach to chess and a regular student of Mark Dvoretsky.*

**Misha Savinov:** Ernesto, have you ever had a better performance rating than the 2794 you achieved in Izmir?

**Ernesto Inarkiev:** I am not sure, but most likely, no. This is my best result so far. In the Hoogeveen Open it was just slightly over 2700.

**MS:** And in terms of rating?

**EI:** I added 14.3 Elo points. I once collected 25 points during the Russian championship Under-20 and added more than 97 points between two rating lists, when I was much younger and weaker (smiles).

**MS:** Which team did you play for?

**EI:** I played for Tomsk-400 (formerly known as Tomsk-YUKOS-400 – M.S.), together with Khalifman, Smirnov, Jakovenko, Bocharov, and Khasin. Unfortunately, our leader, Morozevich, was unable to join us for the occasion. We kept waiting for him until virtually the last minute, but in vain.

**MS:** How did Morozevich's absence affect your team's goal in the competition?

**EI:** Our initial goal was first place. Champions of Russia in any discipline,



but especially in chess, simply cannot set any other goal. However, since our team was weakened, we did not have a clear objective, only to do the best we could. On the whole, this was a disappointing tournament. Our team is rather young and, therefore, unpredictable; capable of either excellent or disastrous results. We collapsed against NAO, losing 1-5 in Round 4. After three rounds there were three teams with a 100% score: Tomsk, NAO, and Beer Sheva. I suggested jokingly that it was time to use our secret weapon – Morozevich! The point was that Pavel Smirnov and I had both scored 3 out of 3, but we had to have black against NAO, while with Moro on Board 1 we would have white ... And our terrible score did not fully illustrate the course of the match. Khalifman drew quickly with black. Dmitry Jakovenko lost after just two hours of play – Vallejo came up with strong novelty, Dmitry could secure a draw, but felt obliged to play for a win and lost in unfavorable complications. Bocharov on Board 5 had a very pleasing edge against Radjabov, +/- at least. Smirnov confronted Grischuk and Pavel had a draw in hand, but wanted to play for a win considering the match situation. My position was regarded as clearly hopeless, so one could expect 3-3 or 2½-3½ at worst. And then everybody collapsed – Smirnov lost, Bocharov messed up in time trouble and lost as well, only I managed to escape with a draw.

**MS:** This was also the start of Bocharov's troubles?

**EI:** Yes, he lost three games in a row. Bocharov tried too hard, declined many draws, and made some mistakes subsequently.

**MS:** Who were your opponents on Board 4?

**EI:** I faced two strong grandmasters: Lautier (NAO) and Filippov (Kazan). Curiously, Tomsk lost both matches, 1-5 to NAO and 2½-3½ to Kazan. Our match against Kazan was unique. The situation was very clear – we had an advantage on two boards, Smirnov vs. Yandemirov and Bocharov vs. Iljin. My task was to play solidly. I tried to set problems for my opponent, as I had white, but did not succeed, and the game was drawn. Smirnov failed to convert a completely winning position. Amazingly, he had analyzed everything at home and stopped when the computer showed a decisive advantage for White. As Pavel told me, he just sat there and awaited his opponent's resignation. Finally, Bocharov lost his game after declining yet another draw ... Of my other opponents, the weakest one was about 2340, and the rest were around 2500.

**MS:** Did your team meet for training sessions prior to the event?

**EI:** Not exactly for a training session, but yes, we came to Turkey a week before the championship, which was a good idea as it helped to establish a true team spirit.

**MS:** How would you explain the drastic difference between your nearly

2800 performance in Turkey and subsequent collapse in St. Petersburg?

**EI:** Well, people say that the ratings of Russian players are still undervalued, but I don't know if this was the case at the Chigorin Memorial. I was obviously out of form. So the reason was, most likely, my tiredness. I lost too much energy during the team event. The nervous tension is great; you concentrate on your teammates' positions and virtually play six games each day.

**MS:** How do you define poor form?

**EI:** The main indicator is time trouble. Even the simplest moves require too much time. Really poor form becomes apparent in blunders or misunderstanding elementary problems. When you analyze your poor-form game in normal conditions, you don't understand how on earth you accepted such an anti-positional exchange, for example. While at the board the evaluation was just the opposite.

**MS:** You seem to accept risks quite often and some classical players consider your openings with black to be strategically shaky. Could this contribute to your ups and downs? Or don't you consider it risky?

**EI:** Well, there is a difference in concepts. I consider chess a sport. A martial art! (This is Ernesto's favorite definition of chess – M.S.) You have to defeat your opponent, period. And when your opponent plays on a similar level of skill, it is mental toughness that decides the outcome. Even with black. Yes, classical chess discipline forces us to first equalize, but I opt for equalizing with a counter-attack to follow. Drying positions out to make draws is clearly a misconception.

**MS:** What does tournament success depend on? Is it possible to program it? Or does it depend on both objective factors and flukes?

**EI:** I don't think it is correct to talk about flukes in chess! Such an approach is ill-advised. Mark Dvoretsky, in one of his lectures, suggested comparing two chess players: The first is of a higher class, but he is in poor form, prone to time trouble and rusty; the second is not so skilled, but more determined, well prepared and physically fit. The second player will, without a doubt, do better in any given tournament. Therefore, a sporting approach brings success. Also, maintaining concentration is critically important. It is really difficult to remain concentrated during the whole tournament.

**MS:** Concentration – is this an element of psychological, mental preparation?

**EI:** Psychological – yes, but it is also a matter of physical fitness!

**MS:** And how do you stay fit?

**EI:** I started to play football after the European Championship in Portugal. There are two football pitches near where I live so I play with my neighbors and friends.

**MS:** What is your role on a team?

**EI:** I am a right winger, trying to help my team both in attack and defense.



### **Kyrgyz Period**

**MS:** Do you remember your first game against a grandmaster?

**EI:** Yes, it was the Kyrgyz Championship 1998. Curiously, my opponent was Leonid Yurtaev (now Yurtaev is Inarkiev's trainer – M.S.). However, there was no intrigue in that game. I played Black and lost quickly in a King's Indian.

**MS:** Did you experience a kind of piety towards grandmasters?

**EI:** Naturally! But things changed quickly, as in that same year I made a couple of draws against other GMs and even won one game.

**MS:** Who was the victim?

**EI:** Viktor Kupreichik. We met during the chess Olympiad, where I played for the Kyrgyz team and had a well prepared opening. It was quite accidental. In a local tournament prior to the Olympiad I had to confront an old master who always plays the Pirc. I prepared a sharp sideline variation and won that game. So, after Kupreichik responded to 1.d4 with 1...g6, I decided to go for a Pirc and won in similar fashion.

**MS:** Were you born in Kyrgyzstan?

**EI:** Yes, in a small village in the Osh region. My parents worked at the industrial complex: mother was vice-chairman of the trade union committee and father had a mid-level management position. When I was 6, we moved to the capital, Bishkek (which was called Frunze in those days). I attended school in Bishkek until 2000, when we moved again, this time to Elista, Russia.

**MS:** When did you start playing?

**EI:** In 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, there was a small chess club and somehow I won my first tournament. Naturally, I became interested in chess and signed up for classes after regular school lessons. I also played thousands of games with anybody I could. Whenever I saw people playing I always asked if they would play me. I terrorized my parents' friends and colleagues, not to mention other children. We had some basic lectures at the chess school, but the main training was, of course, practice. Although I still remember some early lectures.

**MS:** For example?

**EI:** I'll never forget the lecture about the K+P vs. K endgame. Your king has to fight for critical squares, which are those in front of the pawn. In order to help us remember that, our teacher put small draughtsmen on those squares. If your king steps on the draughtsman, your pawn queens (smiles).

**MS:** Did you read any chess books at that time?

**EI:** Chess books in that region were scarce, but I started to work on chess more seriously when I was 11 or 12, already being a Master of Kyrgyzstan.

**MS:** They were scarce even in Russian?

**EI:** Yes, even in Russian. For example, Dvoretzky's books were released in the Ukraine and Russia, but we had none of them in Kyrgyzstan. One of my first chess books was *600 Endgame Positions* by Portisch and Sarkozy. After that I studied *Endgame Theory and Practice* by Panchenko.

**MS:** Mark Dvoretzky's opinion about the latter book is rather critical, do you know why?

**EI:** As far as I understand, Dvoretzky contends that Panchenko's book is simply a collection of endgame position, but not a proper endgame manual. It misses a certain link, which exists in Panchenko's personal lectures. I attended his lecture in Elista, so I think I understand what he means. Nevertheless, at that time it was one of the best endgame books.

**MS:** When did you meet Mark Dvoretsky? How did you begin working together?

**EI:** It was in the spring of 2001. My colleagues told me that Dvoretsky was arranging a session of his chess school. I had read a lot about the Botvinnik School and was greatly interested; it was my dream to participate in such a training camp and I wasn't going to miss the opportunity. To my surprise, after the session the trainers awarded me with a "Best Student" title.

**MS:** How did they choose you? Was it based on points acquired during the exercises?

**EI:** These points had a partial influence, but Dvoretsky and his helpers based it more on their personal feelings. After the session Mark Izrailevich suggested I work with him regularly.

**MS:** What did he change in your chess?

**EI:** We worked on too many areas to select one. But, first of all, he made me more professional. I started to pay more attention to all aspects of training and maximized its efficiency.

**MS:** And what was your rating?

**EI:** I was an international master with 2470; I received the title in 2000. It took two years to get another norm after the Olympiad in 1998.

**MS:** When did you change your federation?

**EI:** Four years ago. In 2001 I had already participated in the Russian Under-16 Championship. I received an offer to move to Elista in 1998, during the Olympiad, but at that time I decided to stay in Kyrgyzstan because my chess improvement was smooth and steady. In 2000, however, I changed my mind. I was closer to major tournaments and I entered a great chess environment. In Russia you do not just meet stronger opponents – even mere communication on chess topics is important! And, last but not least, Elista is a real chess city.

**MS:** Were able to get some support there, too?

**EI:** Yes. I have regular financial support; the government covers my travel and training expenses. We have a very good support system for chess players. Many promising children from Kalmykia qualify to the Russian championships in younger age groups – U-12, U-10. One of the strongest is Sanan Sjugirov. The President's decree about chess support appeared in 1995, and now we have a whole generation of talented juniors. It is possible that the future of Russian chess belongs to them.

## **Chess Highlights**

**MS:** Tell us about your best results in junior chess?

**EI:** My first success was winning the Asian Championship Under-16 in 1999. Doesn't sound too good, eh?

**MS:** Well, the Asian Championship – India, China: could be a strong event. Was it?

**EI:** Actually, no. I was top rated and won the title quite easily. Next I took 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Russian U-16 Championship when I was 14. Actually, I tied for first, but Boris Grachev won it on tiebreak. Tiebreaks never worked in my favor! However, a good thing about that silver medal was that I qualified for the European Championship, which I proceeded to win. Mamedyarov from Azerbaijan finished second. My next and last title is the Russian U-20 Champion. I was in great tournament condition thanks to good form and furious anger...

**MS:** Why?

**EI:** Prior to the championship I took part in my first Aeroflot Open and finished on “-3.” So in the championship I won nearly all my games and finished 2 points ahead of the field. After that I took part in the World Junior Championship, but it did not work out well. I did not play well until the end of the event and finished on 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>. That was my last junior tournament. Now I only play in regular opens.

**MS:** You had a couple of good results – tied for 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> in the 2004 Linares Open, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> in the Hoogeveen Open, and you shared first place in the Czech Open for the second year in a row. Which was the most memorable tournament?

**EI:** I don't like to single out one, as I had many memorable tournaments. The most recent, however, is the easiest to remember. I am talking about the European Championship. My goal was to qualify for the FIDE World Championship and to achieve that I needed to finish at “+3.” Things started to go wrong from the start. I was in great shape, which resulted in an excellent performance ... in blitz between rounds! My tournament results were quite the opposite and I had “-3” with six rounds to go. I achieved good positions, but was unable to convert them, and I declined draws only to resign later on. The problem was not chess – it was psychology. And somehow I fixed it. I scored six straight wins, including games against grandmasters Bocharov, Roiz, Tregubov, and Pelletier to qualify for the knock-out championship! But this gave me something more valuable than mere qualification – it gave me faith in my ability. Now I know what I am capable of.

**MS:** Do you want to change anything in your play?

**EI:** We are not talking about working on openings – everybody has to do this on a regular basis. In my last tournaments I tried to play more maneuvering middlegames. I want to diversify my style. This is important to develop ones skill and improve.

**MS:** What are your tournament plans?

**EI:** I do not have any offers pending, so my next tournament will probably be the Aeroflot Open in Moscow. So far I am going to stay in Elista.

**MS:** Resting, training, playing football...?

**EI:** Right! Also, I will attend classes at the university. Elista is a great place. The best in the world!



**MS:** Do you have a favorite chess player?

**EI:** I would designate Robert James Fischer. I like his approach to chess, his ideas (not his ideas expounded in recent interviews, of course!). Fischer's uncompromising attitude is very useful in modern chess. His perfectionism was exceptional – I believe that Fischer thought the champion of the world does not have right to err. Maybe this was one of the reasons why he quit chess. Also, I admire his 2780 rating, which he achieved in 1972. Imagine: without a proper team, without a computer, without other 2700+ players! His 2780, even today, would be enough to secure the number two or three spot on the rating list. This is unbelievable. Actually, all the world champions are great sportsmen and deserve the deepest respect. But Fischer is the most brilliant champion for me.

**MS:** Do you include Khalifman, Anand, Ponomariov and Kasimdzhanov on

the champions list?

**EI:** Without a doubt.

**MS:** And Kramnik?

**EI:** No. He defeated Kasparov, but it was a single match. There was no qualification cycle. I think it was wrong. Kramnik had a reputation, but each championship cycle in history brought up new names and re-assessed old reputations.

**MS:** There is a suggestion to substitute a proper championship cycle with an ACP Tour as qualification to a Masters tournament, with the winner of the latter playing against the classical champion. Would that be a proper cycle in your opinion?

**EI:** (Pause) No. I don't think it is fair to become eligible through playing in regular events. There should definitely be a special qualification competition. Dealing with the pressure of such a tournament would show the players true colors. Winning right here and right now is what counts.

**MS:** Do you like the knock-out format?

**EI:** Yes, I do, despite being unsuccessful with it in Libya. First of all, it is spectacular. Second, I don't like tie-breaking systems such as Buchholz, progress, and others. They all favor this or that style of play. For example, Buchholz favors solid players: don't lose games and you'll be on top. Breaking ties using rapid chess is the lesser evil. Knock-out is good. The only better system is double elimination! When you participate in single elimination, you know that one mistake could send you home, and this is a weird feeling that I don't recommend experiencing.

**MS:** And, finally, where do you think we could get the money for all these qualification cycles and double elimination championships?

**EI:** It is obvious to me that chess should become a part of the education system. I simply do not see any alternative to training one how to think. Later, when more people acquire some basic chess knowledge, it would be easier to attract attention to the content of play. This is the correct approach to popularizing chess. With a high enough level of chess culture it would be possible to raise interest in the content of a game, rather than just showing the facial expressions of the players or their hands moving the pieces back and forth.

**Ernesto Inarkiev Annotates**

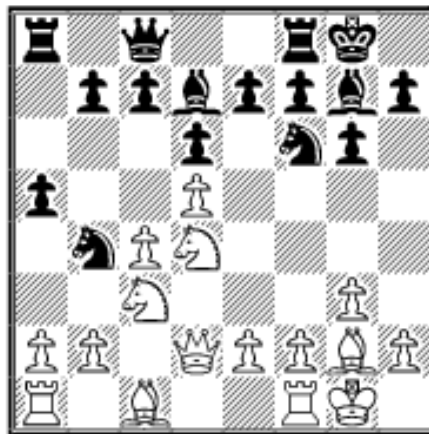
*Bocharov, D. - Inarkiev, E*  
European Championship 2003

**1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.c4 Bg7 4.g3 0-0 5.Bg2 d6 6.Nc3 Nc6**

The Fianchetto variation of the King's Indian Defense is not overloaded with long and forced variations, so the battle usually begins in the middlegame.

**7.0-0 a6 8.Qd3**

A rare continuation; more popular moves are 8.d5 and 8.h3. My opponent has employed 8.Qd3 previously, but during preparation I did not pay much attention to it, hoping to solve any problems at the board.

**8...Bd7!? 9.d5 Nb4 10.Qd2 a5 11.Nd4 Qc8N**

A new plan that I uncorked during the game. Black prepares Bd7-h3, exchanging the light-squared bishops, followed by play against White's center with c7-c6 and e7-e6.

11...Ng4 brought Black success in Borovikov - Ponomariov, Kramatorsk 2001: 12. Rb1 c5 13. dc Nc6 14. Nc6 bc 15. b3 Bf5 16. e4 Be6 17. Bb2 Rb8 18. Ne2 Bb2 19. Rb2 Qb6 20. Rc2 a4 21. c5 dc 22. ba Rfd8 23. Qc1 c4 24. Nf4

Bc8 25. Rc4 Ba6 26. Rc6 Qa7 27. Rc7 Qd4 28. Re1 Qf2 29. Kh1 Rbc8 30. Rc8 Rc8 31. Qa1 Rc2 32. Rd1 e5 33. a5 Rb2 34. Qc1 ef 35. Rd8 Kg7 36. Qc3 Kh6 0-1

**12.Re1 Bh3 13.Bh1!?!?**

A standard idea. White avoids the bishop swap, keeping control over the central squares. I wonder what the white king would say about it, as it doesn't have any legal moves.

**13...Ng4!?**

Black opts to activate his pieces before opening up the center. 13...e5 is also possible.

**14.Nf3**

The threat was 14...Bd4 followed by Nc2. 14.f3? is weak because of 14...Ne5, and after 15.b3 Ned3! with a decisive advantage for Black.

**14...h6**

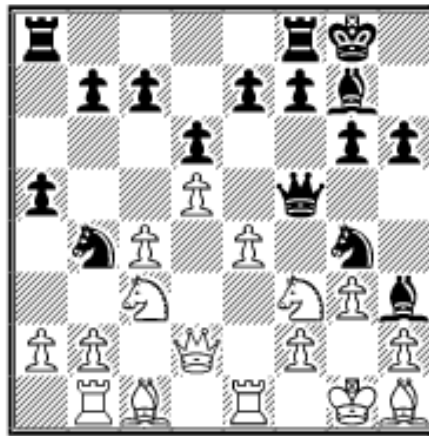
Prevents 15.Ng5 and prepares the queen's transfer to the kingside.

**15.Rb1**

White wants to play on the queenside with a3 and b4.

**15...Qf5**

On 16.a3 I prepared 16...Na6, and after 17.b4 e5 followed by Qh5-f5 with an initiative, but...

**16.e4!?**

Bocharov fights for the initiative. This is a key moment in the game. On 16...Qh5 White has the unpleasant Ne2-f4 and a queen retreat would surrender the initiative.

**16...Qh5!**

Piece activity is paramount!

**17.a3 Na6 18. Ne2 e5!**

Black gives up material, but keeps his pieces active. Worse is 18...g5 because of 19.Ned4 and b2-b4, when my initiative evaporates.

**19.dxe6**

Otherwise f7-f5.

**19...fxe6 20.Nf4 Rxf4 21. Qxf4 Nc5 22. Qd2 a4!**

Restricting the opponent's pieces. Without this move my sacrifice would hardly be correct, so I had to foresee it when playing 16...Qh5. On the straightforward 22...Rf8 White would gladly play 23.b4 (with the idea Bb2), and on 23...Na4 there is 24.Qc2 with a clear advantage. Now, however, it is not easy for White to parry all the threats.

**23.Qe2**

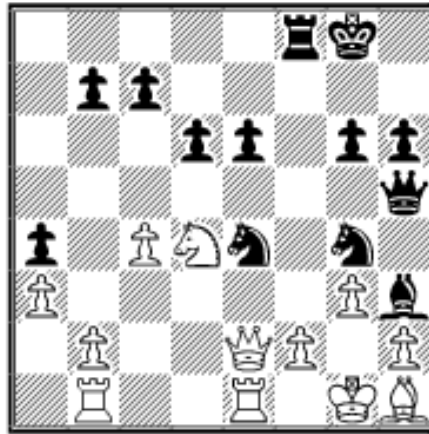
Weak is 23.Qc2 Rf8 24.Bd2 because of 24...Nf2! 25.Kf2 Bg4 26.Kg1 Bf3 with an advantage for Black.

**23... Rf8 24. Be3?**

After this mistake Black has an edge. Stronger is 24.Bd2, when I could go for either a combination 24...Bd4!? 25.Nd4 Rf2 26.Qf2 (bad is 26.Qd1? with an irresistable attack) 26...Nf2 27.Kf2 Nd3 with unclear play, or play 24...g5!? and my active pieces secure clear compensation for the exchange.

**24...Nxe4 25.Bd4?**

A decisive mistake.

**25...Bxd4 26.Nxd4**

**26...Bg2! 27.h4 Bxh1 28.Kxh1 Qe5**

28...d5! would win on spot.

**29.Qxg4 (the only move) 29...Nxf2+ 30.Kg2 Nxc4 31.Rxe5 Nxe5**

The rest is a matter of technique.

**32.Nxe6 Rf7 33.c5 Re7 34.cxd6 cxd6 35.Nf4 Rc7 36.Rd1 Rc2+ 37.Kf1 Nc4 38.Rd4?**

A time trouble blunder.

**38...Nd2+ White resigns.**

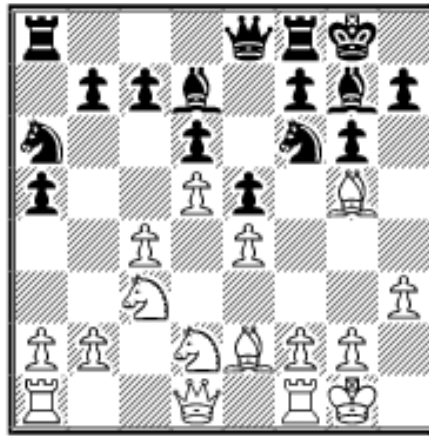
*Socko, B. - Inarkiev, E.*

Skanska open (5), 2004

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3 0-0 6.h3 e5 7.d5 a5 8.Bg5 Na6 9.Be2 Qe8 10.Nd2 Bd7**

This is a typical King's Indian position. With 6.h3 White employed a solid but not very popular line and here he had to choose which side of the board he wants to play on: the queenside with 11.b3!? (with idea a3, Rb1 and b4); or the kingside with 11.g4.

**11.0-0?!**



Not a good moment to castle. Now we have transposed to the Petrosian variation, in which White would not play the weakening h2-h3.

**11...Kh8!**

The quickest way to create kingside play. Black plans Ng8 and f5-f7.

**12.b3 Ng8 13.Rc1**

White's queenside counterplay comes too late, so he switches to defense.

**13...f5 14.exf5 gxf5 15.f4**

Now the idea behind 13.Rc1 becomes clear: the knight on c3 is protected.

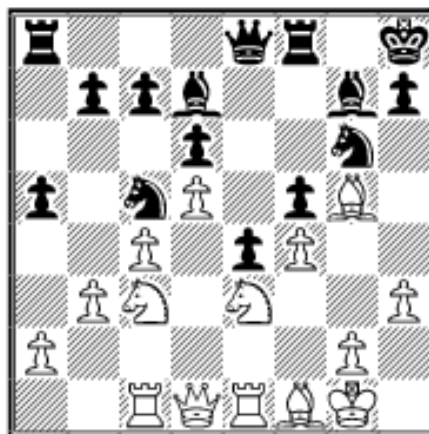
**15...e4**

Usually positions with this pawn structure are acceptable for White, but in this case his bishop on g5 is badly misplaced.

**16.R•1 N•5! 17.Nf1 Ne7! 18.Ne3 Ng6**

Black threatens h7-h6.

**19.Bf1**



Black achieves an edge with an elegant combination.

**19...h6! 20.Qh5 Nxf4 21.Qxe8 hxg5!**

The point. White's queen has no place to hide.

**22.Qe7!?**

Bad is 22.Q•8 R•8 followed by Nd3.

**22...Bf6 23.Qxd7 Nxd7 24.Nb5 Nc5! 25.Nxc7 R•8 26.Nb5 Be5**

Black has a structural advantage: the pawns g5, f5, and e4 are very dangerous.

**27.Rcd1 Nfd3 28.Bxd3 Nxd3 29.Rf1 Bf4 30.Nc2 Kh7 31.Ncd4 Be3+**

Simplifying the position.

**32.Kh2 Bxd4 33.Nxd4 Kg6 34.g3?!**

A risky move that weakens the king's shelter, but it was not easy to defend, as White has no clear counterplay, while Black has various plans. I wanted to begin the attack with Rf7, Rh8, g5-g4. Also possible is a5-a4.

**34...Rf7 35.Ne6 Rh7 36.h4?! gxh4 37.Nf4+ Nxf4 38.gxf4 Kf6**

The ending is technically winning for Black.

**39.Rg1 Re8 40.Rg5 e3 41.Rdg1 Rh6 42.Re1 Rg6 43.Rh5 e2 44.Rxh4 Rg4  
45.Rh3 Rxf4 46.Kg2 Rg8+ 47.Rg3 Rxd3+ 48.Kxd3 Re4 49.Kf3 Ke5  
50.Rxe2 Rxe2 51.Kxe2 Ke4 52.Kf2 b6 53.Ke2 a4 54.Kf2 axb3 55.axb3  
Kd4 White resigns**



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