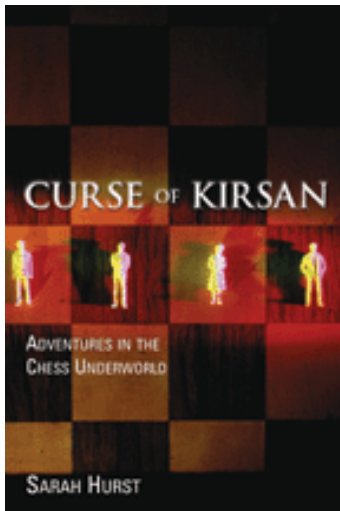




COLUMNISTS

## Misha Interviews...

### Misha Savinov



## Interview with Darmen Sadvakasov

*Darmen Sadvakasov. Born in 1979 in Kazakhstan. Grandmaster, World champion under 20. Current FIDE rating – 2613.*

**Misha Savinov:** What was the last tournament you played?

**Darmen Sadvakasov:** I just finished playing in the championship of Kazakhstan! The last round was today.

**MS:** How did you do?

**DS:** I won it – for the fourth time already: 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2006. I did not play in 2005, nor did some of the other strongest players in the country. Our relationship with the chess authorities was dire, but now the situation is improving.



**MS:** What was the problem?

**DS:** The federation did not do anything; they undermined the status of the national championship and failed to support regional chess and talented youngsters. There was also a very strange story about our Olympic team. We all wanted to play for the country – me, Kazhgaleyev and others. We were even ready to play for free, but the federation sent a junior squad without any explanation ... However, the staff is changing, and we all hope for the best.

**MS:** Who played in the championship?

**DS:** All the best players participated, except Vladimirov, who is coaching our national team. There were Kazhgaleyev, Kotsur, and Ibraev.

**MS:** I found a trivia question on the web: who is the top player of Kazakhstan. The correct answer was Darmen Sadvakasov. However, those who answered “Evgeny Vladimirov” appealed, and it was accepted, so both answers were counted as correct. What do you think – who is number one?

**DS:** Actually, this is a question for our team trainers. Probably, I am number one, since I won four out of the last six championships. But Vladimirov rarely plays, and holds his rating above 2600; I play more often, and my Elo fluctuates more. Right now it is 2613.

**MS:** Do you remember your current rating by heart?

**DS:** Sometimes I don't! I remember it today, because after the tournament I tried calculating how many points I gained. I told Murtas Kazhgaleyev: look, I won a game against you and gained 5 points, and I got ½ from the rest of the field. This is having finished on +6! (laughs)

**MS:** Were there any interesting games?

**DS:** The games were great: very tense, very fighting.

**MS:** Is there anything in common between Kazakh players in regards to their style of play?

**DS:** What do you mean by the style of play?

**MS:** I'd say it is leaning towards certain decisions in positions without a single solution.

**DS:** Aha, I like this definition! I should keep it in mind.

**MS:** Grandmaster Pavel Kotsur once said that he has original style, like many other Kazakh players. He added, however, that this was because of a lack of schooling. But chess players are often critical of themselves.

**DS:** Well, we are all original in that sense. Each one of us has his own background. I was fortunate to work with good trainers; they tutored me, and gave me a good foundation. Murtas studied with a champion of France. And today's chess is such a sport that you just download games from the net and learn from others. Or you turn on *Fritz*, and within a month your style resembles the engine. Thus, most modern players have a very direct, concrete style.

**MS:** Do you remember your first tournament?

**DS:** Yes! I went to Anapa [a Black Sea resort] with my parents when I was 5. There was a championship for children 7-10 years old. I won the tournament, and the director of the local chess club presented me with a wooden eagle, which he crafted himself.

**MS:** Did you keep your early games?

**DS:** I have some notes, but I do not review them, maybe someday.

**MS:** They would be very useful in a biographical book.

**DS:** I am not planning on writing my biography. I am not yet feeling ripe for it.

**MS:** What kind of feeling do you need?

**DS:** A certain inner readiness. Like you wake up one morning, have coffee, and suddenly realize you want to write a biographical book!

**MS:** You started playing at the age of four, when did you start taking it seriously?

**DS:** That depends on what is meant by “seriously.”

**MS:** Actually, it is more interesting to know your definition of “seriously”!

**DS:** Okay (thinking). I was taught by my father, who is a first category player. At 7, I started to attend a chess school, and studied more or less regularly. I probably started taking it seriously at 19, when I began working on chess professionally. That is, after I became a junior (under 20) world champion. At that time, one could surely describe my approach as original (laughs). I arrived at the championship without any openings, and my preparation was reading Panchenko’s endgame book. I was trying hard to outsmart my opponents in the middlegame and endgame.



**MS:** You succeeded! But, do you think it is realistic to play like that in modern professional chess? Abandoning serious work on the openings in favor of more general chess studies?

**DS:** I think it is enormously difficult. Such an approach requires too much energy. And you are not always able to outplay the opponent – after all, he can be in good shape or play strong moves or avoid mistakes.

Recently I found that I became a real puncher with white, however, my score with the black pieces is less than satisfactory. Although not all of my white wins and black losses are rooted in the opening, which displays the value of opening preparation. The opening is not only about getting an advantage. Playing white, you also choose the character of play. You can obtain a position that is comfortable for you.

**MS:** Do you have an opening that is the most comfortable for you?

**DS:** I think every player has a pet opening or variation that he understands especially well, allowing him to refute an opponent's novelties at the board. For Dreev it is the Meran; for Yurtaev it is the King's Indian: he invents new ideas, lives by it ... I have a taste for the Najdorf. However, the Najdorf is too popular now – no matter how hard you work on it, it is never enough. I have played this variation since my childhood, thanks to Vladislav Emilyevich Nasybullin. When I turned 13, he started teaching me, and apart from other things showed me the Najdorf.

**MS:** Was it influenced by Garry Kasparov's opening preference?

**DS:** Of course, I examined Kasparov's games, but to be honest I studied Gelfand's games.

**MS:** What are your likes and dislikes at the board?

**DS:** (thinking) I like digging deeply into a position, so that I suddenly stop hearing background noises and other distracting sounds. I like feeling physically tired after a game, which means I gave all I had. I don't like it when people come to the table, study my position and begin their shaking head and clacking their tongue. This is disturbing indeed!

**MS:** How much time do you prepare before a game?

**DS:** This depends on many factors. If the game is really important, I can spend 3-4 hours. I did so before the game against Ivanchuk, missing a dinner and a group photo session. I totally forgot about that one. And I still failed to guess his opening, although I did win the game! On average, I don't think it takes more than an hour.

**MS:** Does player-specific preparation mostly consists of examining his opening repertoire and recalling your personal antidotes to it?

**DS:** Yes, this is the main part, but you also see his general playing habits. Is

he aggressive or not? Does he possess endgame technique? There are spectacular players who can deliver unexpected blows, like Aronian. Looking at his games is enjoyable by itself, and it also makes you more alert at the board!

**MS:** Which players influenced you most?

**DS:** Probably, Yury Razuvaev and Sergey Dolmatov. After I became world champion under 20, I obtained support in Kazakhstan and was able to work with these excellent trainers. They built a chessplayer of me, shaped my openings, my preferences ... One cannot deny Dolmatov having his own style when he played actively! And I think the foundation of my chess was laid by Nasybullin.

**MS:** What do you consider your main achievements?

**DS:** Winning the junior championship and winning matches against Korchnoi and Karpov are the main ones. I am also proud of being a 4-time champion of Kazakhstan.



**MS:** You were considered an underdog in both those matches.

**DS:** I had a very low rating at that time, 2520. In 2001, I had 2585, but then I played in the Astana supertournament, which was organized to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the independence of our republic. I was greatly upset following this tournament, because I ended on -6 without a single win. You know, I was 22, I had won the national championship, won a few opens, studied hard, but after you give 100% effort, it really hurts. The two draws with Kasparov were not much of a consolation. The match with Korchnoi served as a turning point – I won it and began to rebuild my rating.

**MS:** Korchnoi considered the match controversial.

**DS:** He thought he would beat me easily, because he prepared for three days. But I prepared for three months! I examined all his books, prepared a few completely new openings. Our attitude to the match was fundamentally

different. He arrived with his wife, and I came with Dolmatov.

**MS:** Are you still on speaking terms with Korchnoi?

**DS:** When I see him, I always greet him with respect. All I can say is that had I used any computer aid, the score would have been about 8-0. After four games, I led 3-1, but it could easily be 4-0 by positions. I knocked him out of his openings! In the fifth game he played 1.Nf3 d5 2.b3, and in the seventh – 1.♣4 and Najdorf with Bg5. Misha, have you ever seen Korchnoi playing Najdorf with Bg5?!

**MS:** Your most memorable games were probably played in those matches?

**DS:** I won two games against Victor Lvovich, and two against Karpov (lost one). The most memorable one is probably the last game with Karpov. Recently I read the fifth volume of *My Great Predecessors*, and found out that before our match Karpov had been in a similar situation twice: the score being 3½-3½, and he having White in the final game. Karpov had won in both cases, against Gelfand and Anand, despite having difficulties at the start. I am glad I did not know it before.

It was an 8-game match, 4 classical games + 4 rapid games, counted together. I won the classical part +1, then made two draws in rapids and lost the seventh game. After having two winning positions as White in the first half, I suddenly risked losing the whole match, as I had to play Black in the last game. However, I managed to win the game and the match.

**MS:** Were you ever selected as one of the best sportsmen of Kazakhstan?

**DS:** After I won the world junior championship, the president awarded me with an order and a State Prize in Sports nomination. This Prize is awarded by a jury, which takes into account all of the best sporting achievements of Kazakhs. As we have no formal voting for Sportsman of the Year, this is the highest honor one can actually receive.

**MS:** Is football the most popular sport in Kazakhstan?

**DS:** No! The most popular sport is boxing. It brings a few medals every Olympics. Cycling is very popular too, especially as there is a very strong professional team with Vinokurov, Kashechkin and some other Kazakh riders. Our Prime Minister is a former cyclist and master of sport; he is also a president of the cycling federation. Wrestling is common, both Greco-Roman and freestyle, but Greco-Roman is probably rated a bit higher.

**MS:** Where is chess in these rankings?

**DS:** Chess is way behind. We are not an Olympic sport, and there isn't much attention paid to it. However, this year chess was included into the

Asian Games, which will take place in Qatar in December, and this fact alone has significantly raised interest in the Ministry of Sport.

**MS:** What is your education?

**DS:** I am a translator. I know three languages – Kazakh, Russian and English.

**MS:** What is your mother tongue?

**DS:** Russian. My generation speaks Russian more, even those who are Kazakh by origin. We all studied in Russian-speaking schools. I graduated from Eurasian National University in Astana. This is the top college of our country. Almost every president visiting Astana comes to the university to meet students or read a lecture.

**MS:** Like Moscow State University in Russia...

**DS:** By the way, the Eurasian National University hosts a branch of the MSU! Moscow teachers come to work, and those studying can complete their education in Moscow.

**MS:** There is cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in the field of education then!

**DS:** I think Russia and Kazakhstan have a very good relationship generally – in education, economics, and chess too.

**MS:** Do you just play chess, or do you give lessons and write books?

**DS:** I don't write books. Sometimes I give simuls, but those are free. There is a chess club at the university, and sometimes I hold lectures there, too. There are trainers working at the club, and we ask all the best players visiting Kazakhstan to drop in – there were Korchnoi, Karpov, Spassky, Morozevich, etc.

**MS:** How many tournaments do you play per year?

**DS:** Way too few, in my opinion! I take part in 6-8 tournaments. Kazakhstan is too far from Europe and America, so traveling is a problem, as the tickets are very costly. The chess federation does not support the players; we receive some funding from the Ministry of Sport and city authorities.

**MS:** Do you have a goal in chess, and is it connected to any rating mark? Many people say they want 2700.

**DS:** 2700 is not bad, and this goal becomes more realistic every year

because of inflation. However, I think it is more interesting to win the Asian championship, or advance to the final of the World Cup, or to win a prestigious tournament. I go from one goal to another. My last goal was to play well in the national championship. There was a period when I tried planning, but it turned out rather unrealistic. A true goal is to play strong in every game. Even if you lose, you lose in a tight struggle, and the opponent knows that beating you is a big thing. You convert better positions, do not lose points because of stupid oversights, etc. This is what we all want.

**MS:** Do you play on the net?

**DS:** I play blitz, sometimes on the ICC, but more often on Playchess.com.

**MS:** Do you think that Internet blitz has the potential to replace classical chess?

**DS:** It is unlikely. Blitz may remain the only version of chess if the classical becomes extinct, but I don't want it to happen.

**MS:** Who will you root for in Elista?

**DS:** I rate both players evenly. It is interesting to see the match. I will not dare give a prediction: the players are very strong. We all know that Kramnik is very tough in matches.

**MS:** Are there any legal dirty tricks in chess?

**DS:** Probably, there are some. I saw one trick where a player slowly moves the queen from c1 to c8 (with the opponent under time pressure), and then quickly puts it on h6. This ruins the concentration of the opponent, so it may be called a trick. I do not do such things, but sometimes I notice them.



**MS:** Is it fair to play on time in a dead drawn position, like Leko did to Grischuk in Dubai?

**DS:** It is hard to say. This year I played Chess-960 against Vallejo. My position was winning; at some point I had 6 minutes against 4, then a minute and a half against 50 seconds. Then Vallejo suddenly offers me a draw in a position where I have like a queen against his rook. I reject automatically, glance at the clock and see that I have 4 seconds against his 5. We speed up, I offer a draw, but he rejects, and flags me. After the game he said, it is your fault; I offered you a draw. I don't know whether it's fair, but it is certainly legal.

**MS:** There is a saying that chess is a fight of character. Do you agree?

**DS:** Yes. Sometimes I read Korchnoi's annotations and see the character! His position is worse, clearly worse, and he must defend for the rest of the game with no chance to turn the tables – yet he writes: come on, much stronger people have tested me, do you think I will lose now? This is how character tells! Some other player would become very upset by the prospect of playing an inferior position, and probably lose it, yet Korchnoi makes a draw because of his character!

**MS:** How did you earn your first money? Was it a chess prize?

**DS:** I earned my first million in a Russian tournament – one million rubles that is! I was 14, and the monetary value was about \$200 dollars. But I was quite happy.

**MS:** What would you say to Kasparov if he sat at the next table?

**DS:** Well, in Astana, after our first draw, I inquired to Garry Kimovich about the position, and he replied with a single phrase: “Pass me the scoresheet.” After the second draw we moved to a skittles room and analyzed the game for a while. Both draws were very interesting and tense, I had an extra exchange in each of them, but Kasparov has compensation. But if he sat at the table next to me... you mean here, in the Internet café in Pavlodar? Of course, I would invite him for a *bish barmak* (Kazakh national dish; beef pie – M.S.) and a cup of *kumys*!

**MS:** What books do you read?

**DS:** During the national championship, I read *The Flanders Panel* by Perez-Reverte, *The Ferret Chronicles* by Richard Bach, and *The Financier* by Theodor Dreiser.

**MS:** How many days did the tournament run?

**DS:** Eleven days.

**MS:** What would you like to change in the world of chess?

**DS:** I would try to make chess a more professional sport. Grandmaster earnings are laughable, considering their effort. I remember after a Dubai Open, Sergey Fedorchuk and I relaxed on a beach: he shared 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>, I finished 4<sup>th</sup>. We drank some juice, and were both very happy. However, I could not help but feel that if we were two tennis players in this same situation, one of them would have earned \$1,000,000, and another one \$300,000. That’s more than a hundred times our prizes. Chess is not a professional sport now. Almost all chess players are only able to make a living; our earnings are incomparable to those of other sportsmen.

**MS:** How much money do you need to be happy?

**DS:** I don’t need money to be happy.

**MS:** Okay, what do you need?

**DS:** That is a tough question: peace of mind, an opportunity to express myself creatively, love. This is not about material things; owning the latest BMW can make me happy for a short time only, and it has nothing to do with contentment.

**MS:** Do you have principles that you never break?

**DS:** I have principles, but I do not dare say I never break them. Everything

changes, and we are not parrots to repeat the same things all the time.

**MS:** Is there a place where you would like to live when you grow old?

**DS:** You'd better ask me where I want to spend my youth! I will answer your question about old age in 40 years, okay? And as for today ... a city is better than a village, because youth means action. I like Kazakhstan. I really like Astana, the city where I was born and grew up. You are welcome to visit it! I can be a good guide.

### Darmen Sadvakasov Annotates

*Ivanchuk (2710) – Sadvakasov (2595)*

1st Samba Cup (7) 2003 [E12]

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 b6 4.a3 Bb7 5.Nc3 d5 6.Bg5 Be7 7.Bf6 Bf6 8.cd ed**

This structure occurred in Hansen–Short during the same round, and Short won. At dinner Nigel pointed out that giving away a bishop is unnatural and such habits must be duly punished.

**9.Qb3 Nc6N!?**



I didn't know the move Qb3, but I knew that Black's position is very solid, albeit passive. However, with the knight on e7, Black can fight for the initiative by •5. White can try preventing it, but then the e7-knight comes to d6, which is an ideal square for it.

**10.O-O-O?!**

This is too ambitious. 10.Nd5 Nd4  
11.Nf6 Qf6 12.Nd4 (12.Qa4 Nc6)

12...Qd4 13.e3 is equal. Therefore 10.Rd1 Ne7 is better.

**10...Ne7**

10...Na5!? 11.Qa4 (11.Qc2 O-O 12.e3 c5) 11...Qd7.

**11.g4!? g6 12.h4**

12.Ne5!? O-O 13.f4 with the idea of occupying the e5-square with the knight. After 13...c5, the position becomes complicated.

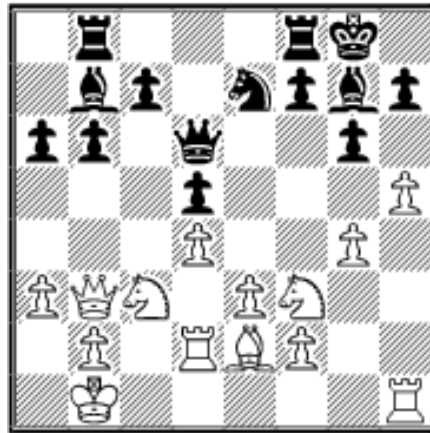
**12...Qd6!**

The e5-square is now under control. Black only has to secure the queen's position by ...a6.

### 13.e3 a6 14.h5 O-O!

With Black having a dark-squared bishop he should not worry about this attack, while counterplay associated with c5 is quite dangerous.

### 15.Be2 Bg7 16.Kb1 Rab8 (16...c5 17.Na4!) 17.Rd2?!



Followed by a draw offer. But the text move shows that White starts defending. A draw offer after 17.hg! would have been stronger. Actually, the move is stronger, too! 17.hg! hg (17...fg is dangerous because of 18.Ne4!) 18.Rh4 c5 19.Rdh1 leads to a double-edged game.

### 17...c5

This move is very natural. I could not resist the temptation and declined the offer.

### 18.Qd1 c4 19.hg fg!

19...hg 20.Ng5 Rfd8 (if 20...b5, then 21.Rh8! Bh8 22.Qh1 Kg7 23.Qh7 Kf6 24.Qh4 with an attack Shirov-style; for example, 24...Qc7 (24...Kg7 25.e4! Qf4 26.Qh7 Kf6 27.Qh6! Qg5 28.e5 Qe5 29.de Ke5 30.Qh2 Ke6 31.Ne4!, attacking) 25.e4 (25.f4!?) 25...de 26.d5 Nd5 27.Rd5) 21.Rh4 (21.Rh7 f6) 21...b5 22.Qh1 Qf6 23.f4 with unclear position.

### 20.e4?

After this mistake, the weakness of the f-file becomes fatal for White. His position remains quite solid in case of 20.Qg1 b5 21.Qh2 Qh2 22.Rh2, planning Ne5 and f4.

### 20...Qf4! 21.g5 b5 22.e5

Better is 22.Rh4 Qf7 23.e5 (23.Ne5 Qf2 24.Rh1 Qf4 25.Nd7 de -/+) 23...Bc8-/+,

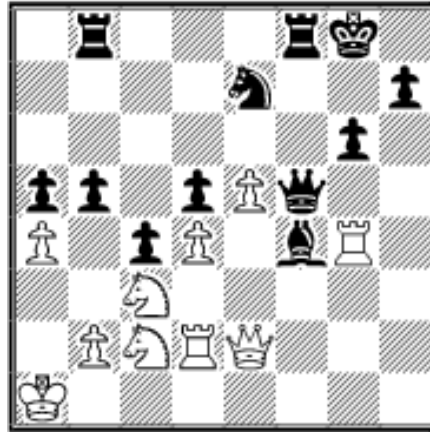
### 22...Bc8! 23.Rh4 Bg4! 24.Ka1 Qf5 → 25.Ne1 Be2 26.Qe2 Qg5

26...a5 is also okay.

**27.Rg4 Qf5 28.Nc2 a5 29.a4 Bh6**

Or 29...b4 30.Nb5 Bh6 —+.

**30.f4 Bf4?!**



Somewhat complicating the task. 30...b4 31.Ne3 Qd7 32.Nb5 Bf4 is a simple win. However, the beauty of the final position in the game compensates for this inaccuracy.

**31.Rf4 Qf4 32.ab Qf1 33.Ka2 Qe2  
34.Re2 Rf4**

Black could simply advance pawns, but I was under time pressure and decided to bring the king to the center.

**35.Ka3 Kf7**

35...h5!? 36.Ka4 h4 37.Ka5 g5 —+.

**36.Ka4**

36.e6 Kf6 37.Ka4 Rb6 38.Ka5 Re6 39.Rh2 h5 40.b6 Kg7 —+.

**36...Ke6 37.Ka5 Nf5 38.b6**

38.Rd2 h5 (38...Rf3 39.Nb4!).

**38...Nd4 39.Nd4 Rd4 40.Ka6 Rf4 41.Ka7 Rg8 42.Nb5**

42.b7 d4 43.Nb5 d3 44.Rd2 Rff8.

**42...Re4 43.Rd2**

43.Rf2 Ke5 44.b7 Re3.

**43...Ke5 44.b7**

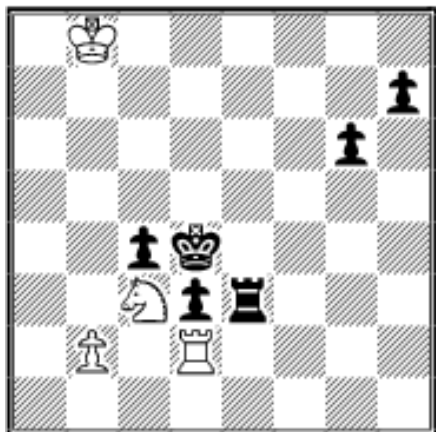
44.Nc3 d4 45.Ne4 Ke4 46.b7 d3 47.b8Q Rb8 48.Kb8 Ke3 49.Rh2 d2.

**44...Re3! 45.Nc3**

45.Nc7 d4 46.b8Q Rb8 47.Kb8 d3 48.Rd1 Re2 49.Rb1 d2 50.Rd1 Kd4 51.Nb5 Kd3 52.Nc3 Re1) 45...d4 46.Nb5 d3!, not the only, but surely the

most efficient and exciting winning move.

**47.Nc3 Kd4 48.b8Q (48.Rh2 Re7) 48...Rb8 49.Kb8**



**49...Re2!! 50.Ne2**

50.Re2 de 51.Ne2 Kd3 52.Nc3 Kc2  
53.Na4 h5 54.Nb6 Kb3.

**50...Ke3! 0-1**

Complete domination!

*Sadvakasov (2577) – Dao Thien Hai (2564)*

Asian Teams Jodhpur (7) 2003 [C42]

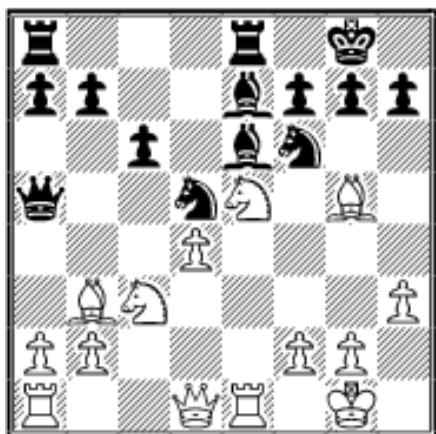
**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Ne5 d6 4.Nf3 Ne4 5.d4 d5 6.Bd3 Nc6 7.O-O Be7 8.c4 Nf6 9.h3 O-O 10.Nc3 Nb4 11.Be2 dc 12.Bc4 c6 13.Ne5!?**

A rare continuation.

**13...Nbd5**

13...Bf5 14.Qf3 Qc8 (14...Nc2 15.Qf5 Na1 16.Be3) 15.Bf4 is good for White.

**14.Re1 Be6 15.Bb3 Re8 16.Bg5 Qa5N?!**



An inaccuracy. 16...Qd6 is probably a better try. White can continue 17.Qf3 Rad8 18.Rad1 with certain pressure. After 16...h6 17.Bh4 Nd7 18.Bg3, White has an advantage.

**17.Qf3 Rad8 18.Rad1 Qc7**

Admitting the error on the move 16. Black does not want to change the structure by exchanging on c3, but then he has a problem finding useful moves.

The tension in the center favors White, because he has a space advantage.

**19.Bc2**

Still, Black's position is very solid, his pieces are centralized, and a great deal of effort is required to break his defense.

### 19...g6?!

This weakens the f6-square, and the pressure on the black knights increases. I was ready to spend two more tempi by •3 and Qd3 to provoke g7-g6.

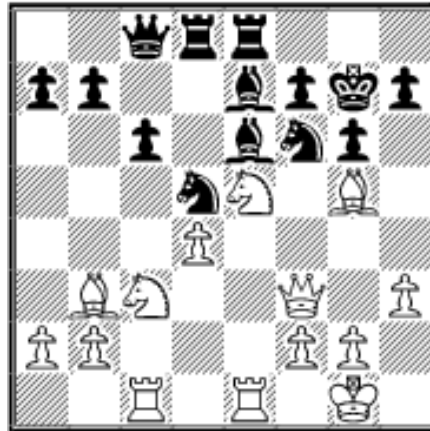
### 20.Bb3

The mission is accomplished, and the bishop returns to base, where it exerts pressure on d5.

### 20...Kg7 21.Rc1!

Holding the balance becomes more and more difficult, and Black finally cracks.

### 21...Qc8?



the bishop to g3 by 22.Bh4!?

During the game I thought that after 21...Qb8, White wins by 22.Nf7!? Kf7 (if 22...Bf7, then 23.Re7 Re7 24.Nd5 Nd5 25.Be7+—) 23.Nd5 cd (stronger is 23...Rd5!) 24.Re6 Ke6 25.Re1 Kf7 (25...Kd7 26.Bf6 Bd6 27.Rc1) 26.Re7 Ke7 27.Qf6 Kd7 28.Bf4!. But the computer points out 28...Re1! 29.Kh2 Rf8!. Although, here 30.Ba4 b5 31.Bb5 Qb5 32.Qf8 gives White a couple of pawns for the exchange, and the initiative. On 21...Qd6, I planned to bring

### 22.Nf7! Bf7

22...Kf7 23.Nd5 Bd5 24.Re7.

**23.Re7! Re7 24.Nd5! Nd5 25.Be7 +— Re8 26.Bd6 Qf5 27.Be5 Kg8 28.Qg3 Be6 29.Re1 Qf7 30.a3 Nb6 31.Bc2 Bf5 32.Bd1 Nd7 33.Re3 Ne5 34.Bb3! 1–0**



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