



COLUMNISTS

Inside Chess

Yasser Seirawan



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Yasser Annotates

Alburt–Seirawan, U.S. Championship 1990

Lev Alburt (2530) – Yasser Seirawan (2635)
U.S. Championship (2) 1990
Modern Defense [A42]

1.Nf3 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.c4 d6 4.Nc3 e5 5.e4 exd4 6.Nxd4 Nc6 7.Be3 Nge7 8.Nxc6!

The exclamation mark is not because this is White’s best move (8.Be2 is theory’s recommendation), but rather because of what the move accomplishes. White gets an easy position to play while exchanging pieces, thus reducing my chances to create any chaos.

8...bxc6

A mistake is 8...Nxc6? because of 9.c5 with a better game for White, as his minor pieces are more effective.

9.Bd4 f6?!

A concession not easily made. By blocking in my dark-squared bishop, it’s easy to see that White achieves a distinct plus. I felt it was necessary because 9...0-0 10.Bxg7 Kxg7 11.Qd4+ f6 12.c5 d5 13.0-0-0 yields such a static position.

10.c5!

An absolute necessity. If White permits c6-c5, Black’s game springs to life.

10...d5 11.Be2 0-0 12.0-0 Rb8

Although this is not a bad move, it is inexact. Best was 12...Be6 with rough equality. The difference is that Black should save time playing ...Bc8-e6-f7.

13.Re1 Be6 14.exd5

Without prejudice, White undoubles Black’s pawns in order to force a draw.

14...cxd5 15.Bb5! Bf7 16.Qa4



Black has come to an important crossroads. It’s easy to see that he is stymied in the center and has a weakened queenside. He must either take great risks or force a draw by 16...a6! 17.Qxa6 (17.Bxa6 Ra8 18.Qb5 c6 with good play for Black) 17...Ra8 18.Qb7 Rb8 =. Since a draw equals a lost match, I (not so bravely!) plunged ahead to a forced queen sacrifice.

16...Nf5

Burning my bridges.

17.Ne2!

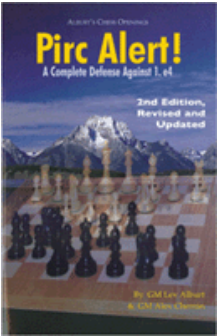
Left to his own devices, White intends b2-b4 and Re1-d1 with a grip on the center and good queenside prospects.

17...Be8 18.Bxe8 Rxe8 19.Bc3 Re4 20.Qxa7!

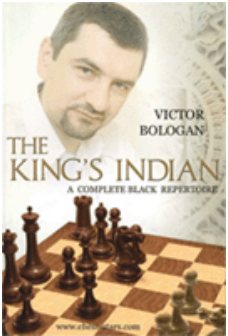
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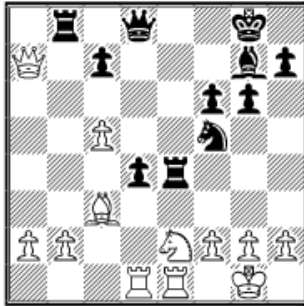
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White must not back down from the challenge as 20.Nd4 Nxd4 21.Rxe4 (21.Bxd4 Qe8 and Black is better) 21...dxe4 22.Qxd4 Qxd4 23.Bxd4 Re8 24.Bc3 f5 clearly favors Black.

20...d4 21.Rad1



We have been on a collision course up to this position, and we are both of the opinion that White is slightly better. I had no choice but to press on.

21...dxc3 22.Rxd8+ Rxd8 23.f3!

Unfortunately, I had missed this little move in my analysis on move sixteen. My main line had run 23.Qxc7?! Rd2 24.Qb8+ Bf8 25.Qb3+ Kg7 26.Qxc3 Rxe2 27.Rxe2 Rxe2 28.c6?! Bc5!, reaching a crazy position beyond my ability to calculate. Circumstances dictated that I had to trust that I'd be able to trick Lev. As it turns out, I'm hoist on my own petard. With 23.f3! White escapes back-rank mate and sidesteps having to part with his knight. But Black still retains some pressure.

23...Re7 24.bxc3 Bh6?

From this point on, my play is on a rather Neanderthal level. Black has a lot of practical chances, but I completely blow them all. The obvious and direct plan must involve the activation of my bishop, and White can't prevent it! After the comparatively forced 24...Rde8! 25.Qa6 Re5! intending ...Bg7-f8, White would still have a full-bodied scrap on his hands. Eventually I find this plan, but only after wasting many tempi.

By the way, a likely continuation from the above position is 24...Rde8 25.Qa6 Re5 26.g4 Nh4 (26...Nh6!? with ...f6-f5 may be a good idea) 27.Kf2 Bf8 (27...Re3!?) 28.Rb1 Rxe2+ 29.Qxe2 Bxc5+ 30.Kf1 Rxe2 31.Kxe2 with an easy game for White. Despite this line, Black has other promising deviations that make life tough for White.

Unfortunately, my game move completely fails in its noble aim to activate my bishop, losing precious time.

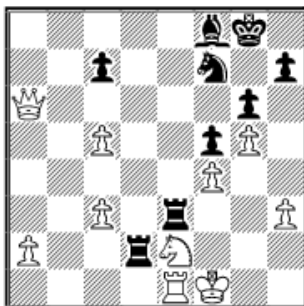
25.Qa6 Rd2?! 26.f4! Bf8!

At last, I blunder upon the right idea.

27.g4

With this move Lev offered me a courtesy draw. Strangely enough, this gave me some hope. I interpreted his offer to say, "Look here, I'm completely winning. Do you want to save a few rating points with a draw?" The position was certainly not that clear to me. Perhaps Lev would become overconfident, or try to "punish" me.

27...Nh6 28.h3 f5 29.g5 Nf7 30.Kf1 Re3?



I seem determined to misplace my pieces. Pressing the f4-pawn and controlling the c4-square is eminently better. Although White is by no means in concrete shoes, Black's plan of ...Nd8-e6xf4 holds a lot of promise.

31.Qa8

It is critical to prevent Black from developing his minor pieces.

31...Rd8!

Unfortunately, 31...Nd8 is met by 32.Nd4 Rxh3 33.Re8, winning at once. While White's queen controls the h1-a8 diagonal, Black can't generate enough mating threats. Don't forget about White's own trumps, especially the little one on a2!

32.Qc6 Rde8

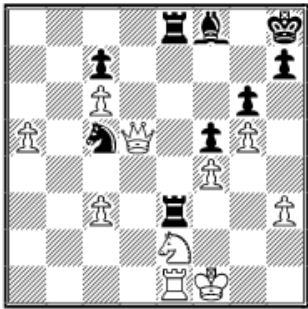
To think that Black could have had the same position with his pieces on better squares and several tempi more! But incredibly enough, the position still holds promise!

33.a4 Nd8 34.Qd5+ Kh8 35.c6?!

It's easy to understand White's desire to prevent ...c7-c6 kicking his queen. And the text does seem remarkably greedy. (That's why I like it enough for the exclamation!) After 35.a5! c6 36.Qd4+ Bg7 37.Qd2 Nb7 38.a6 Nxc5 39.a7, White is too fast. The text just loses a crucial tempo.

In many of these variations, it's easy to see why Black's rook on e3 (move thirty) would be so much better on e4.

35...Ne6 36.a5 Nc5??



Tossing the game away with one move. I was mesmerized with bringing my knight to d3 (where it does nothing) and stopping White's a-pawn (which 36...Nc5?? doesn't do). On the other hand, after 36...Bc5!, I see real and imaginary problems for White. Now 37.a6 Bb6 (planning ...Ne6xf4 or ...Re3-e4 and ...Ne6xf4) 38.Qd2 Rf3+ 39.Kg2 Rf2+ 40.Kg3 Rd8! 41.Qa2 Nxf4 42.Qf7 Nh5+ 43.Kh4 Rf4+ is an example of passive defense.

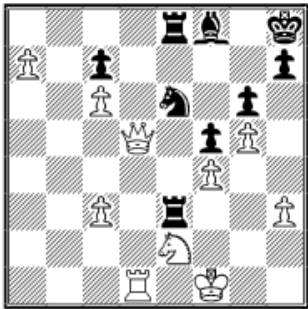
What is White's best? I don't know! I'm so disgusted with 36...Nc5?? that it's difficult to view 36...Bc5 objectively.

37.Qd4+! Kg8 38.a6!

Winning on the spot.

38...Nd3 39.Qd5+ Kh8 40.Rd1 Nc5 41.a7! Ne6

In this position I offered a draw. After all, rating points are rating points.



42.Rb1!

Yes indeed. Rating points do matter.

42...Rxe2 43.Rb8 Nxf4? 44.Rxe8 Rxe8 45.Qd4+ Kg8 46.Qxf4 Bd6 47. Qa4 Ra8 48.Qb3+ 1-0

A disappointing loss, but one to a true gentleman. Later we joked that we merely traded titles, as Lev was last year's U.S. Open Champion. Maybe next year we can trade again.

