

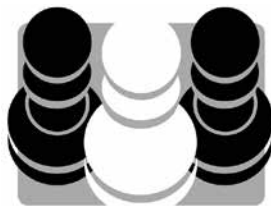
Chess Survivor

The Last of the Greats

By

Andor Lilienthal

Translated and compiled by Douglas Griffin



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Translator's Foreword

I first became aware of Lilienthal's work *Zhizn' – Shakhmatam* (generally translated, somewhat awkwardly, as 'A Life to Chess') in August 2004. At that time, monthly articles by the celebrated trainer Mark Dvoretsky appeared on the website www.chesscafe.com, under the title *The Instructor*. Dvoretsky dedicated three successive columns to *Lilienthal's Strategic Victories*. In the foreword to the first article, he wrote:

“In his younger days, Andor Lilienthal played sharp attacking chess; in his most famous game, he executed a brilliant queen sacrifice against Capablanca. But there are few who know that – by the end of the 1930s, when Lilienthal shared first in the 1940 Soviet Championship with Igor Bondarevsky, and twice defeated Mikhail Botvinnik in great style – he had achieved such creative harmony that he also played a number of classic positional games. I am offering a few of those games for your attention. You will see not only the moves, but also Lilienthal's comments (from his games collection). I would hope that you will be as impressed as I was by the level, both of the play and of the commentaries of this gifted grandmaster...”

Soon afterwards I managed to obtain a copy of Lilienthal's book. It was produced in the USSR by the state publishing house *Fizkultura i Sport* in 1969, and contains 60 annotated games, as well as a short, and fairly sketchy, autobiographical introduction.

Lilienthal's book is reproduced in full here. Additional biographical information – including details of his tournament and match record – and 17 additional games with annotations (many by Lilienthal himself) are also presented. It has been a privilege to work on the English translation and I hope that its publication by Quality Chess will go some way to raising awareness of the outstanding chess legacy of this remarkable man.

Douglas Griffin
March 2024

Publisher's Foreword

The book you hold in your hands is *Chess Survivor – The Last of the Greats* by Andor Lilienthal. We pondered what to call it in English, as the original Russian version might translate as “A Life to Chess” which we felt did not do justice to Lilienthal’s life and career.

In the pages that follow, Lilienthal will offer a few words of his own about himself and his book. But there are a few stories to add...

When FIDE introduced the grandmaster title in 1950, Lilienthal was one of the 27 names on that original list. And when he died at age 99, he was the last survivor of that historic group. This inspired our title. In his long career, Lilienthal met or played all the World Champions of the 20th century. In fact, that understates it – Lilienthal won a game against Lasker, whose reign began in the 19th century. And some 21st-century champions, such as Vladimir Kramnik, certainly met Lilienthal, even if they did not play any serious games. One might say that Lilienthal was connected to three centuries of chess.

Lilienthal’s quality of play matched his longevity. In the pages that follow, we will see some spectacular wins, annotated by the man himself. The most famous is his win against Capablanca in 1935 (see page 70). Equally famous is the story that when Bobby Fischer saw Lilienthal in the audience during his 1992 return match against Spassky, Fischer immediately said: “Pawn e5 takes f6!” – a reference to that Capablanca game. Fischer and Lilienthal became friends, and Fischer stayed with Lilienthal for a month after the match. According to Spassky, Fischer would allow only three chess players to carry his coffin at his funeral – Spassky, Portisch... and Andor Lilienthal. A testament to Lilienthal being universally liked and admired.

In addition to his playing successes, Lilienthal had a great influence on 20th century chess via his work as a coach, including training the World Champions Vasily Smyslov and Tigran Petrosian.

Douglas Griffin translated Lilienthal’s book from Russian and, as he mentioned on the previous page, added 17 games to the 60 that Lilienthal annotated. Quality Chess would like to thank Douglas for his fine work. But now it is time to hear from Andor Lilienthal...

John Shaw
March 2024

A Few Words About My Book

The reader will find in this book 60 of my games and fragments from my games. These are my best games, which were won by me or drawn (with the exception of one, which I lost to Alekhine). Perhaps the chessplayer presenting the reader with his creative achievements ought to also include losses in such a book, if he considers them to be characteristic of his style of play. This, however, happens rarely, and I decided not to break the tradition.

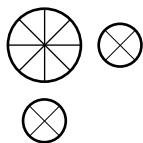
The games appear in chronological order. This permits the reader to follow the creative path of the author, as it also allowed the author himself to do.

The games included in the book are far from mistake-free. No-one has yet been able to play chess perfectly. I learned from my mistakes. Now let my delusions, as exposed by analysis, serve to the benefit of the reader. I hope, however, that to this end the reader can make use not only of the mistakes...

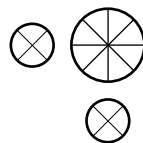
All the games have been annotated by me afresh. The openings, the theoretical evaluations of which, as is well known, change frequently, correspond to the contemporary insights of theory.

As concerns the contents of the games – they, as with almost any chessplayer who has many tournaments behind him, are varied. There are some in which a single strategic idea pervades the whole game, from the opening to the endgame; there are sharp tactical skirmishes, there are some with prolonged positional manoeuvring.

However, all of this the reader will see for themselves, in becoming familiar with the games, which are presented as evidence by the author.



ASPHYXIATION



GAME 40

Andor Lilienthal – Alexander Kotov

14th USSR Championship, Moscow 1945, *Nimzo-Indian Defence*

[*Translator's note:* An editorial comment in the original publication points out that this game was awarded a prize as one of the best in the tournament.]

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.e3 b6

The idea of this continuation is to develop the bishop either on b7, from where it will exert pressure on the squares e4 and d5, or on a6, in order to immediately attack the white pawn chain.

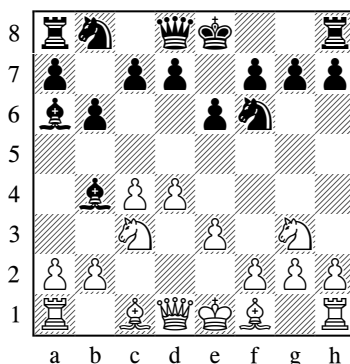
5.♗ge2

White does not intend to spoil his pawn structure and wants to drive back the bishop with a2-a3. This plan was worked out by A. Rubinstein, and now the whole 4.e3 variation has obtained the title of the 'Rubinstein System'.

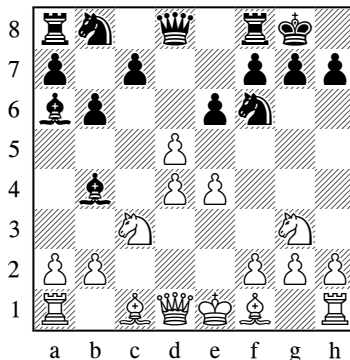
5...♘b7

A few years after this game, in the 7th game of his match against Botvinnik, D. Bronstein played 5...♘a6. After 6.a3 ♘e7 7.♗g3 d5 8.cxd5 ♘xf1 9.♗xf1 exd5 10.♗g3 ♔d7 11.♖f3 ♗c6 12.0-0 g6 Black achieved an excellent position in Botvinnik – Bronstein, Moscow (7) 1951.

Later, attempts were made to improve White's play by means of 7.♗f4 (instead of 7.♗g3), and also 6.♗g3 (instead of 6.a3). For example, after 6.♗g3 play might continue:



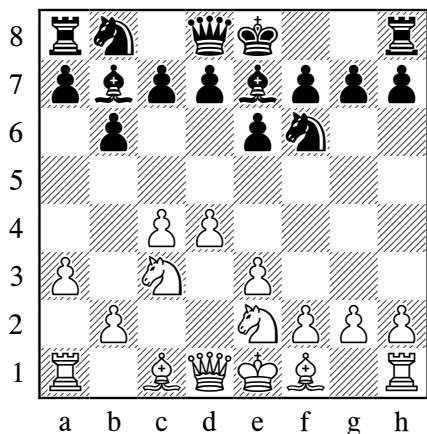
6...0-0 (It is better for Black to exchange on c3 with 6...♘xc3† 7.bxc3 and to attack the enemy centre with 7...d5. But also then 8.♘a3! ♘xc4 9.♘xc4 dxc4 10.0-0 ♔d7 11.e4 promises White good prospects.) 7.e4 d5 8.cxd5



8...♘xf1 (Or 8...♘xc3† 9.bxc3 ♘xf1 10.♗xf1 exd5 11.♘g5! and White is better.) 9.♗xf1 exd5 10.e5 ♗e8 11.♗f5! With an advantage for White.

6.a3 ♖e7

In the case of 6...♗xc3† 7.♘xc3 Black does not lose time but cedes to the opponent the advantage of the two bishops.

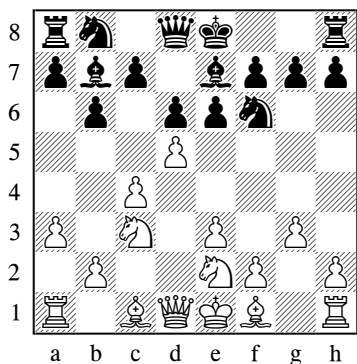


7.d5

A strong move, successfully employed by Botvinnik in a game against Ragozin, Sverdlovsk 1943. A year later, in a game against Koblencs at the 13th USSR Championship Semi-Final, Baku 1944, I also obtained an advantage in the same way... What, then, had my opponent prepared?

7...a5

In the above-mentioned game Ragozin played 7...d6* and then ...c7-c6, aiming at the undermining of the centre. The most unpleasant plan for Black is 8.g3.



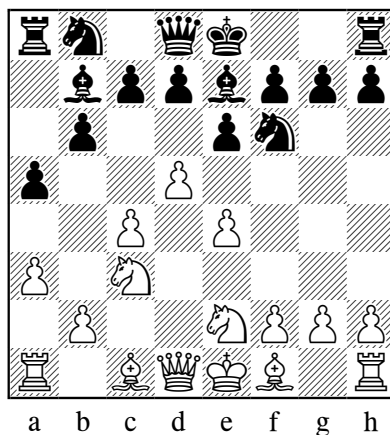
If 8...c6 then 9.dxe6 fxe6 10.♘d4 ♖c8 11.♗h3!

If instead of 8...c6 Black continues 8...♘bd7, then 9.♗g2 0-0 10.0-0 with the threat of 11.dxe6. After 10...e5 11.b4 White has excellent prospects.

[*Translator's note: In fact, Ragozin played first 7...0-0, and only after 8.♘g3 he went for 8...d6.]

By playing 7...a5, Kotov wanted to prevent b2-b4. However, as a result the light squares on the queenside are weakened. Ultimately, White nevertheless carries out the advance b2-b4, and therefore the plan chosen by Black proves to be unsuccessful.

8.e4



8...e5

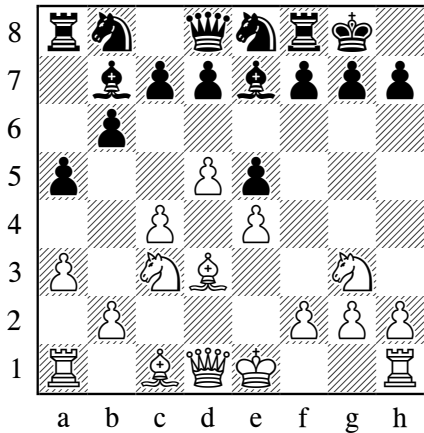
A King's Indian set-up with the fianchettoed light-squared bishop and the other bishop on e7 is disadvantageous for Black. However, he was obliged to prevent the advance of the e-pawn.

On 8...d6, strong is 9.♘d4 and then 9...♗c8 10.g3, or 9...e5 10.♘f5.

9. ♖g3 0-0 10. ♕d3 ♜e8

Black prepares to ease the defence with the exchange of dark-squared bishops (...♗e7-g5), but this is easily prevented, and then the knight on e8 occupies a prospectless position for nothing.

Preferable is 10...d6 and then ...♞e8, intending ...♜bd7-f8-g6.

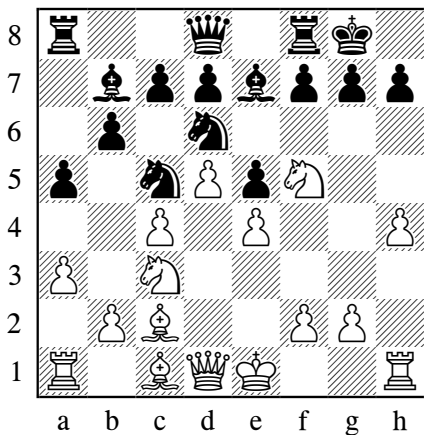


11. h4! ♜a6

Clearly, impossible is 11...♗xh4? in view of 12. ♖h5.

If 11...♜d6, then 12. ♞b1, preparing a pawn offensive on the queen's flank.

12. ♜f5 ♜c5 13. ♕c2 ♜d6



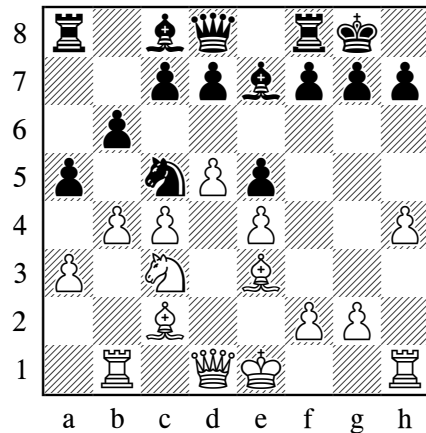
14. ♜xd6

White renounces the advantage of the two bishops and prefers to exchange knights!

The point is that after 14. ♜xe7† ♞xe7 Black obtains definite counterplay. On 15.b3 there could follow 15...f5; while in the case of 15. ♞e2 there is 15...a4! with the threat of 16...♕a6.

The exchange of knights is the start of operations on the queen's flank. The bishop on b7 is blocked by the enemy structure and, in order to bring it into play, Black has to spend time.

14...♕xd6 15. ♕e3 ♕e7 16. ♞b1 ♕c8 17. b4

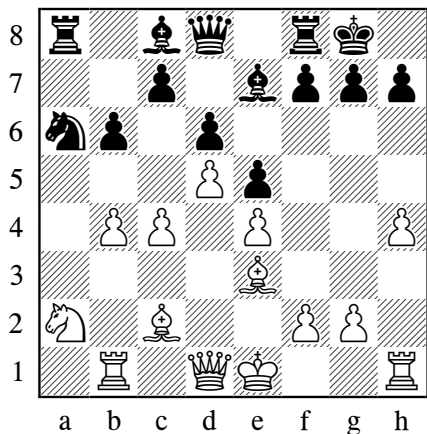


17...axb4

More resilient is 17...♜a6. Opening the a-file, as will later become clear, is to White's advantage.

18. axb4 ♜a6 19. ♜a2 d6

This move creates an incurable weakness inside the black camp (the c6-square), but Black cannot otherwise bring the c8-bishop into play. Besides, White would gradually have prepared the break c4-c5 with ♕d3, ♞d2, 0-0 and ♞fc1.

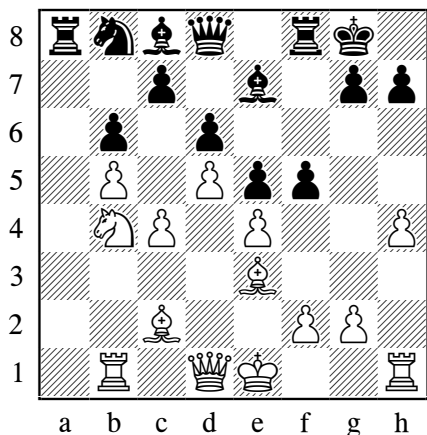


After the opponent's last move White's plan changes:

20. b5 ♖b8

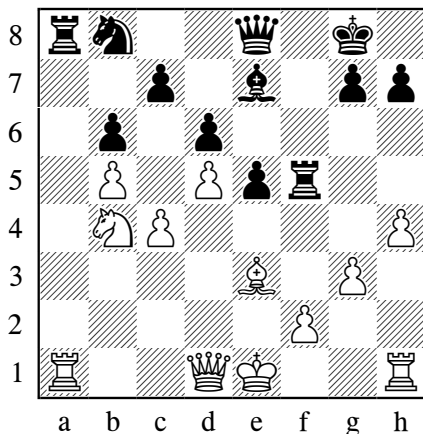
After 20...♗c5 I would have continued, as in the game, with 21.♘b4 in order, at a suitable moment, to exchange on c5 and invade with the knight to c6.

21. ♘b4 f5



White's advantage on the queen's flank is obvious, and Black undertakes an attempt to obtain counterplay. However, after this another square (e6) becomes weak. Moreover, the exchange of bishops will emphasize the weakness of the whole light-square complex (a6, c6, e6).

22. exf5 ♙xf5 23. ♙xf5 ♖xf5 24. g3 ♔e8
25. ♖a1



25... ♗d7

If 25...♖a1 26.♙xa1 ♔g6, then 27.♙a7 ♖f8 28.♗d2!, and on 28...♙e4 White replies 29.♖c1, after which the c7-pawn is lost.

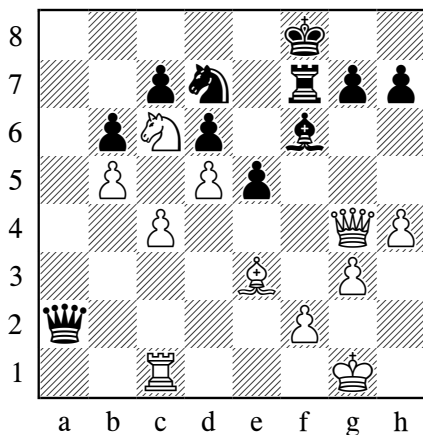
26. ♖xa8

The preliminary exchange of rooks is stronger than the automatic 26.♘c6. By continuing with 26...♖c8, Black could defend tenaciously.

26...♙xa8 27. ♘c6 ♖f7 28. 0-0 ♙f6 29. ♙g4 ♙a2 30. ♖c1

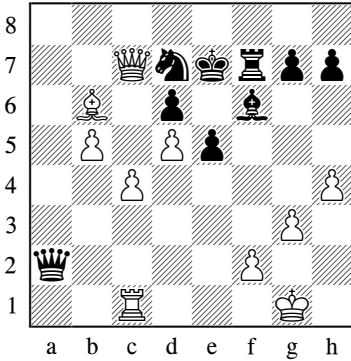
The queen is freed from the defence of the c4-pawn.

30... ♔f8



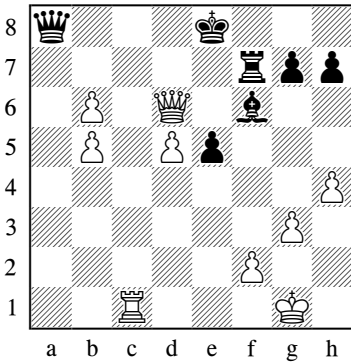
31. ♖b8! ♕e8

On 31... ♖xb8 I had calculated this variation:
 32. ♖c8† ♕e7 33. ♖xc7† ♖d7 34. ♗xb6



a) 34... ♖f8 Mate was threatened on d8. 35. c5 ♖xd5 Clearly, the only move. 36. c6 ♖e6 37. ♖d1 White has the huge threat of 38. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 39. ♗c5! ♖xc5 40. ♖xd7#.

b) It is better to defend against mate with 34... ♖a8, but once again 35. c5! gives White a decisive attack: 35... ♕e8 36. ♖xd6 ♖xb6 37. cxb6



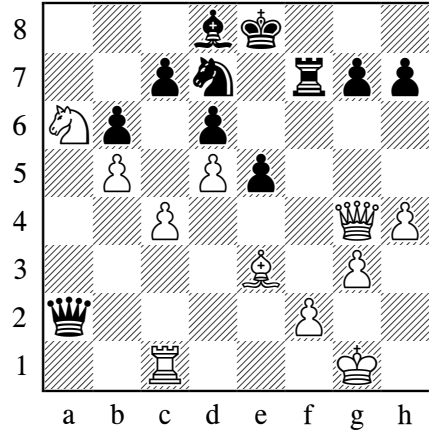
The deadly 38. ♖e6† is threatened. On 37... ♗d8 there follows 38. ♖e6† ♖e7 39. ♖g8† ♕d7 40. ♖c7† ♕d6 41. ♖c6† ♕d7 42. d6, and White wins.

32. ♖a6

White is naturally not tempted by the win of a pawn with 32. ♖xd7 ♖xd7 33. ♖e6† ♖e7

34. ♖g8† ♕d7 35. ♖xh7. After 35...e4 Black obtains counterplay.

32... ♗d8

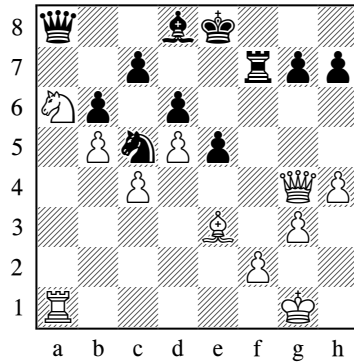


33. ♖b4 ♖a8

The attempt with 33... ♖b2 34. ♖c6 ♖xf2 fails to 35. ♖e6† ♕f8 36. ♗xf2 ♖xc1† 37. ♕g2.

34. ♖a6 ♖f6

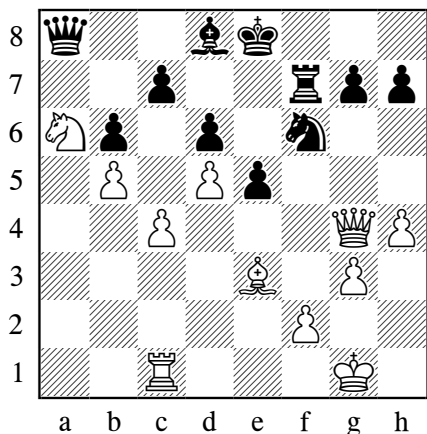
On 34... ♖c5 very strong is 35. ♖a1.



If 35... ♖xa6, then 36. bxa6, and White wins. On 35... ♕f8 with the aim of removing the king from the threatened jump of the knight, there follows 36. ♖a2!.

There remains to examine 35... ♖b7, but it allows 36. ♖b4 with the terrible threat of 37. ♖c6 and 38. ♖a7. Black is not saved by 36... ♖b3. White all the same plays 37. ♖c6.

After the possible 37...♖xa1 38.♚e6† ♕e7 39.♗g5 ♖c2 40.♗xe7 ♖d4 41.♖xd4 ♗xe7 42.♚g8† ♔d7 43.♖c6 the struggle is concluded.



35.♚h3

The h3-c8 diagonal must be kept under fire; otherwise, the black queen comes into play via the c8-square.

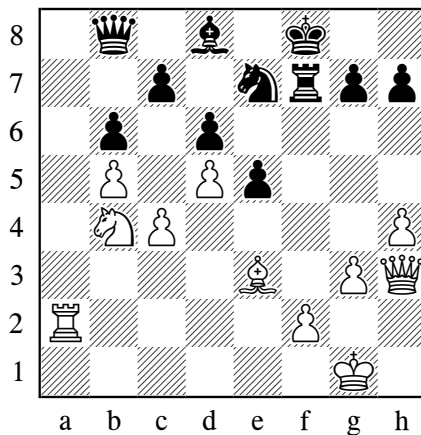
35...♔f8 36.♗c2

The beginning of a manoeuvre that guarantees the invasion of the rook on the a-file.

36...♖g8 37.♗a2 ♖e7

There was threatened 38.♖b4 ♚b7 39.♖c6 and then 40.♗a7, depriving the queen of a retreat square.

38.♖b4 ♚b8



39.♗g5!

The invasion square (c6) is controlled by the enemy knight; therefore, it must be exchanged. Black is defenceless.

39...h6 40.♗xc7† ♗xc7 41.♖c6 ♚e8 42.♗a7 ♔g8

The pawn cannot be defended. If 42...♗f6, then 43.♗b7.

43.♗xc7

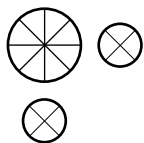
Black resigned.

1-0

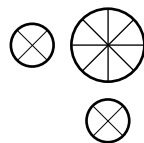
[*Editor's Note:* During July and August of 1947, a training tournament was held in the Estonian coastal city of Pärnu. Its training character was determined by the participation of Keres and Smyslov, who were scheduled to participate in the World Championship tournament in the Netherlands six months later. However, the tournament was officially titled 'Tournament of the Strongest Masters of the USSR', and not without reason. Apart from Botvinnik, Levenfish, and Ragozin, the lineup was packed with the top players of that time. It might have been because of the training nature of the event that it produced an unusually high number of fighting games. Paul Keres eventually came out on top, with Kotov in 2nd place and Lilienthal in 3rd. Three of Lilienthal's victories were chosen for this collection, while three more games from the same event are presented in the Additional Games segment at the end of the book.]



Smyslov, Lilienthal, Kotov, Bronstein and Simagin – Pärnu 1947



ACTIVITY OVER EVERYTHING

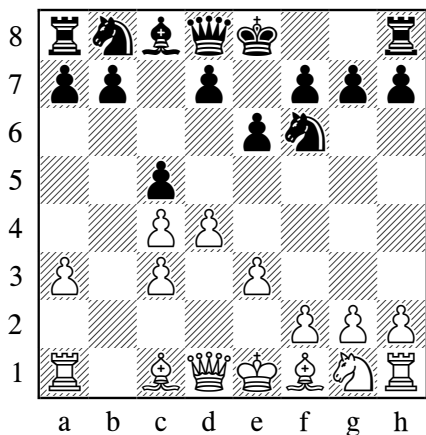


GAME 44

Andor Lilienthal – Vasily Smyslov

Pärnu 1947, *Nimzo-Indian Defence*

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3



6...♗c6

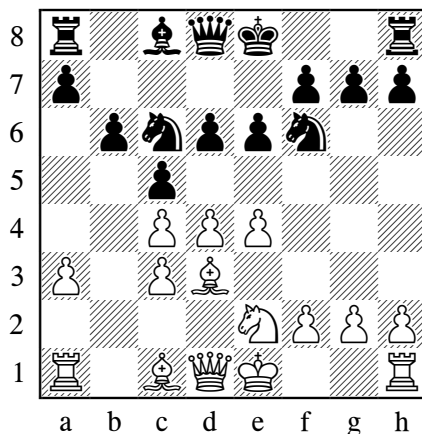
Black aims at exploiting the weakening of the opponent's queenside structure, later playing ...b7-b6 and ...d7-d6. This plan is more logical than 6...d5. A hand-to-hand fight in the centre is advantageous to White, since it permits him not only to free himself of the doubled pawns, but also to broaden the sphere of operation of his bishops.

7.♗d3 b6 8.♗e2 d6

Light is shed on this opening in the notes to Game 50. As is pointed out there, most energetic of all is 8...♗a6.

9.e4

White is obliged, without losing time, to begin operations in the centre and on the king's flank, since Black threatens to bring the c4-pawn under fire.

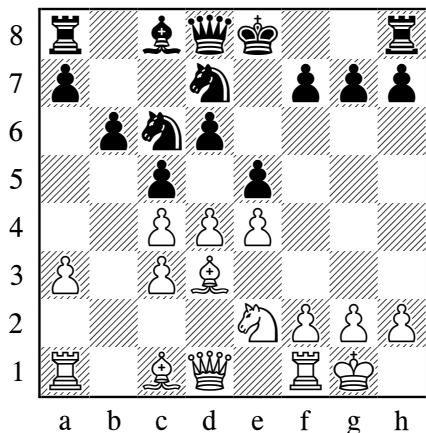


9...♗d7

In the game Lilienthal – Najdorf, Black castled short instead of playing 8...d6, and then withdrew the knight from the threatened pin with 9...♗e8.

Smyslov employs a different plan. By leaving the king in the centre for the time being, he prepares long castling. But here too it is first necessary to avoid the pin on the knight. Black then intends ...♗e7 and ...e6-e5. By leaving the d3-bishop 'in imprisonment', it will be possible to get to work on the weaknesses of the opponent's queen's flank.

10.0–0 e5



11.f4

Possible was 11.♘g3, exploiting the fact that to take at d4 is not good on account of 12.♗f5. This forces Black to reply 11...g6.

In the later game Botvinnik – Keres, 19th USSR Championship, Moscow 1951, White continued 11.♖a4 and after 11...♖c7 12.d5 ♘a5 13.♗g3 0–0 14.♖d1 ♜e8 15.♗f5 achieved an advantage. But Keres could have played more strongly with 11...♙b7. If 12.d5 ♘a5 13.♗g3, then 13...g6 followed by 14...♖e7 and ...0–0.

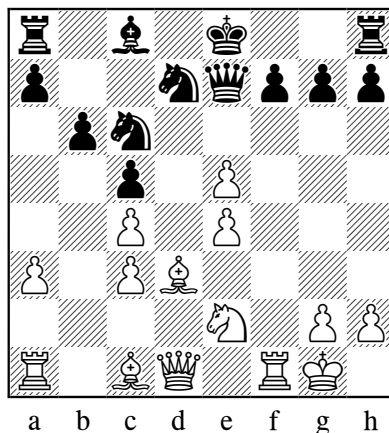
The text move is associated with an idea that was original for that time.

11...♖e7 12.fxe5

A move which proved to be a surprise for my opponent.

The typical continuation would be 12.d5 ♘a5 13.♗g3.

12...dxe5 13.dxe5



This looks strange. White voluntarily presents the opponent with an outpost at e5 and, moreover, isolates the c-pawns. But in return the white knight reaches d5!

13...♗dxe5 14.♗f4

A slight digression: inspired by this game, the idea of transferring the knight to d5 was successfully implemented by Geller in a game against Lipnitsky played in the 19th USSR Championship, Moscow, 1951.

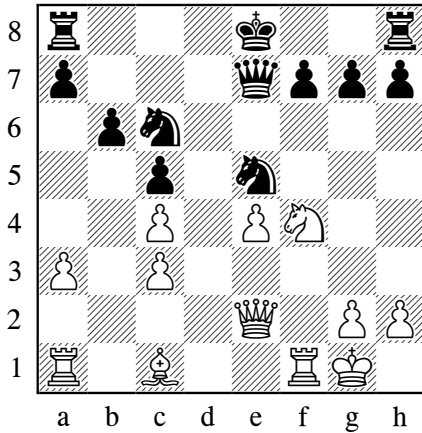
Let us return to the position after Black's 10th move. Geller played 11.♗g3 and on 11...g6 he uncorked 12.dxe5!. After 12...dxe5 13.♖e2 ♖e7 14.♞d1 ♙b7 15.♗f1! 0–0–0 16.♗e3 ♘a5 17.♗d5! White's advantage was obvious.

14...♙g4

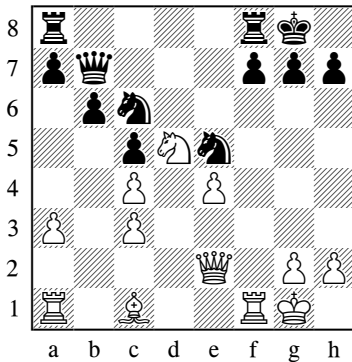
The bishop on c8, which is not restricted in its operations, is 'good', while the bishop on d3, constrained by its own pawns, is 'bad'. Therefore, the exchange undertaken by Black is doubtful. Meanwhile, the bishop on c8 could have prepared itself for another exchange – against the knight about to appear on d5.

Hence, more logical was 14...0–0, in order on 15.♗d5 ♖d8 16.♙f4 to continue with 16...♙e6.

15.♙e2 ♙xe2 16.♖xe2

**16...f6**

It was necessary for Black to castle: 16...0-0
Then on 17.♘d5, it is possible to reply
17...♙b7 followed by ...♗fe8-e6.

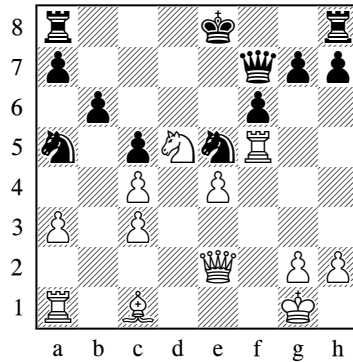


Evidently, Smyslov feared the attack after
18.♙h5 because of 18...♘xc4? 19.♗f6 and then
♗h6; or even 18.♗f6?! gxf6 19.♙h5. However,
he missed the quiet manoeuvre 18...♗fe8,
which is 'sobering' for White in both cases.

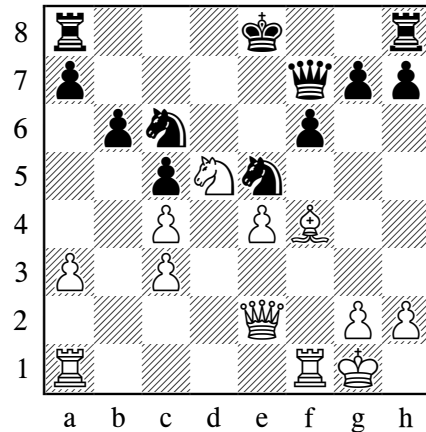
Therefore, I reckoned on continuing 18.♗f5,
and on 18...♗fe8 replying 19.♙f4, intending
20.♗f1. The active disposition of the white
pieces compensates for the weakness of the
queenside pawns.

17.♘d5 ♙f7 18.♙f4

Possibly more accurate is 18.♗f5, with the
point that 18...♘a5 can be answered with:



19.♙g5! Against 19...♘axc4 White has
20.♘xf6†, while 19...♘ex4 gets refuted by
20.e5!.

**18...0-0 19.♙xe5 ♘xe5 20.a4**

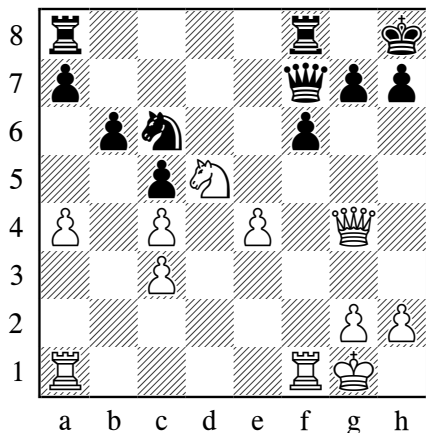
Threatening 21.a5. If Black takes on a5, the
pawns on a7 and c5 will become weak. If Black
permits White to exchange on b6, the b-pawn
will be subjected to a siege. Thus, the following
move is forced.

20...♘c6 21.♙g4

Threatening 22.♘xf6†, which invites Black
to go back to e5 with the knight.

21...♗h8

This also defends against the threat of
22.♘xf6†, but now, by sacrificing a pawn,
White seizes the initiative.



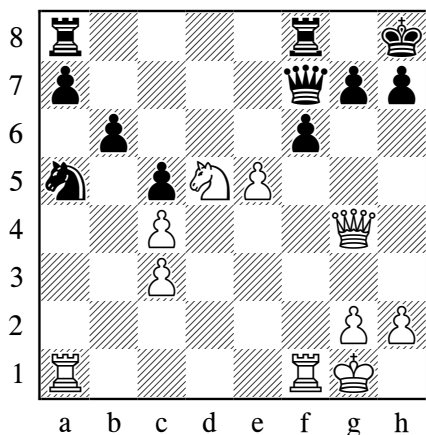
22.a5 ♖xa5

The idea of the sacrifice consists in the deflection of the knight from the e5-square. The weak e4-pawn unexpectedly becomes strong.

On 22...bxa5 I planned to continue with 23.♖fb1 (also possible is 23.♖g3 with the threats of 24.♖d6 or 24.♖e3). If 23...f5, then 24.exf5 ♖xf5 25.♖xf5 ♖xf5 26.♖b5 with advantage to White.

23.e5

Threatening 24.exf6, and also 24.e6.



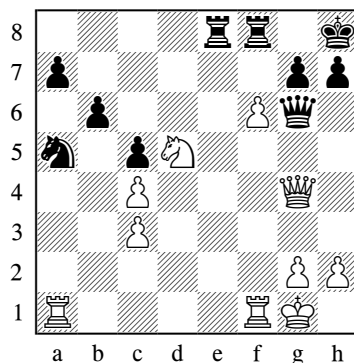
23...f5

Relatively the best solution was 23...♖g6.

If 24.♖xg6 hxg6 25.e6, then 25...♖ae8.

But 24.♖f4! retains the advantage for White. For example, 24...♖ae8 25.♖c7 ♖e7 26.e6 with the threat of 27.♖d6.

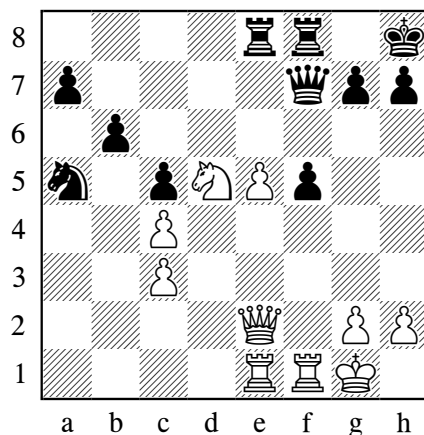
If 23...♖ae8 24.exf6 ♖g6 (recommended by Keres in commentary to this game), then:



25.♖xg6 hxg6 26.f7! ♖e5 27.♖f3 ♖xc4 28.♖f4 White wins. Also of no help is 26...♖e6 (instead of 26...♖e5) 27.♖f4 ♖f6, in view of 28.♖xg6+ ♖xg6 29.♖ae1.

The move played by Smyslov leads to an endgame in which the passed e-pawn gives White a decisive advantage.

24.♖e2 ♖ae8 25.♖ae1



25...♞e6

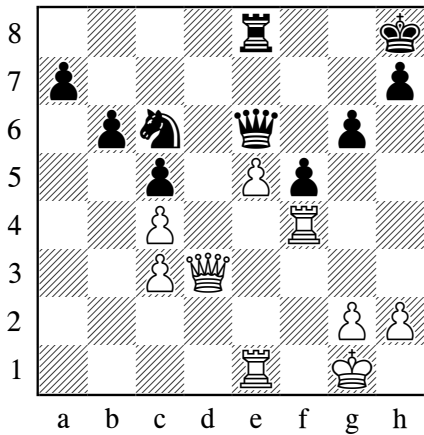
In order to hold up the advance of the pawn, Black has to give up an exchange. But how was one to advise him?

On 25...♘c6, decisive is 26.e6 ♖g6 27.e7 and 28.♞e6.

26.♘f4 ♜fe8 27.♘xe6 ♞xe6 28.♞d3 g6

Matters are not changed by 28...♞xc4 29.♞xf5.

29.♞f4 ♘c6



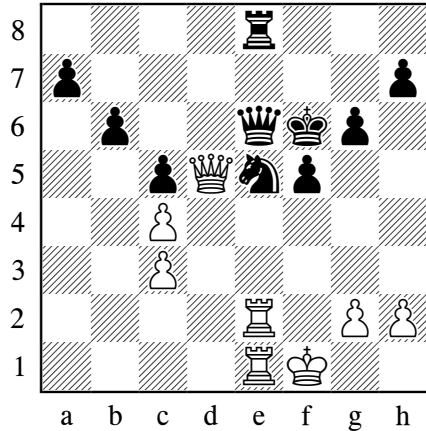
30.♞d5 ♘xe5

Having eliminated the dangerous pawn, Black threatens 31...♘f3†, but after the following simple move it becomes clear that the knight will perish under the pin. Clearly, even without 30...♘xe5 Black could not have saved the game.

31.♔f1!

There is no defence against the manoeuvre ♞f2-e2.

31...♔g7 32.♞f2 ♔f6 33.♞fe2



33...h5

In the case of 33...♞xd5 34.cxd5, the advance of the d-pawn decides.

The remainder is a matter of straightforward technique. There followed:

- 34.♞xe5 ♞xe5 35.♞xe5 ♞xe5 36.♞d6† ♞e6
- 37.♞f8† ♔e5 38.♞b8† ♔f6 39.♞xa7 ♔g5
- 40.♞d7 ♞e4 41.♞d8† ♔h6 42.h4 ♔g7
- 43.♞c7† ♔h6 44.♞xb6

Black resigned.

1-0