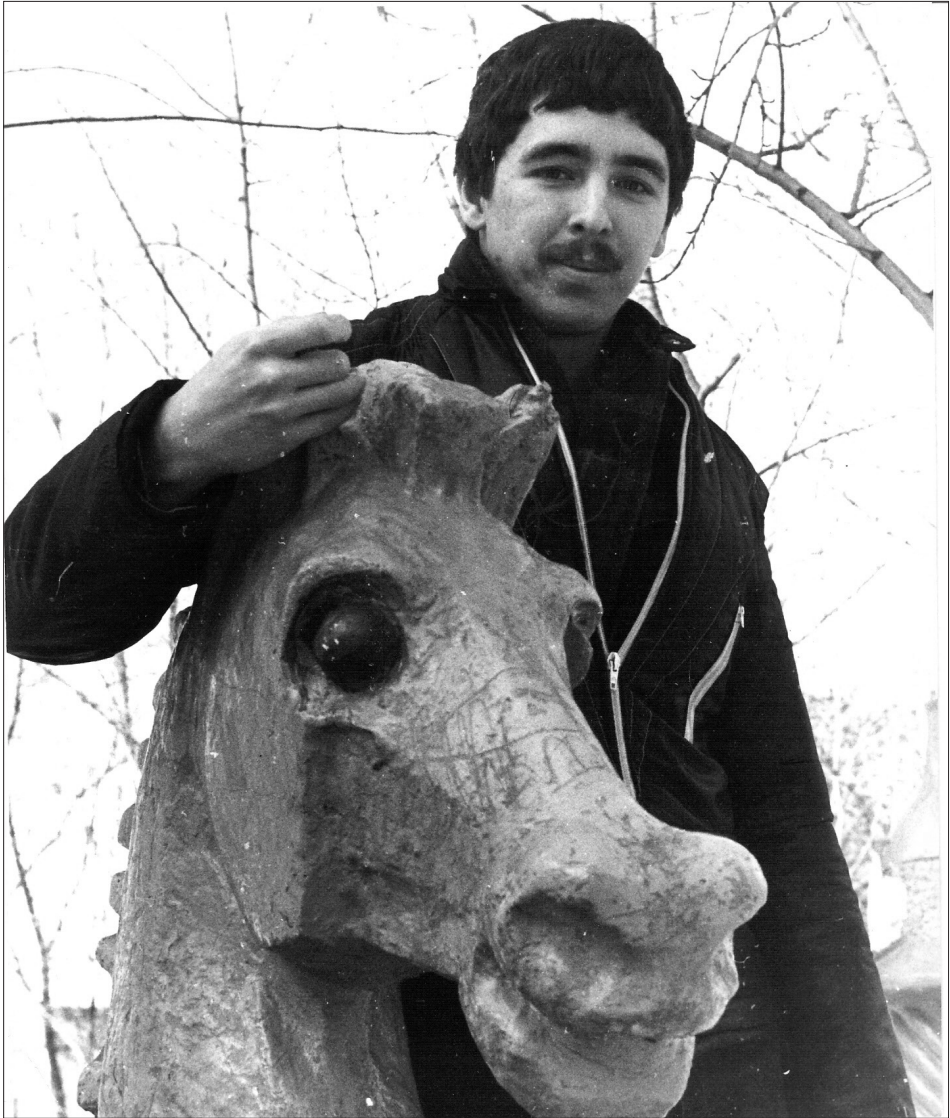


Dmitry Kryakvin

Speed Demon

**The Fascinating Games and Tragic Life of
Chess Grandmaster Alexey Vyzhmanavin**

New In Chess 2023



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Foreword by Viorel Bologan

This photo captures an exciting battle between Alexey Vyzhmanavin and Valentin Arbakov at one of the Moscow blitz championships – back then, they were held in the Sokolniki Park and attracted lots of spectators. Memories immediately come flowing back...

In summer 1989, I enrolled in the chess section of the Moscow Physical Education Institute (it was then called GTsOLIFK) and plunged into the Soviet capital's chess life. The competitions with a classical time control and the proverbial 'master's norm' had almost completely disappeared, but the Central Chess Club at Gogolevsky Boulevard held rapid tournaments almost every week – 15 minutes per game, with high entry fees (10 rubles; for context, a student's stipend was 45 rubles per month) and high prizes. The perennial favourites were the protagonist of this book, Alexey Vyzhmanavin, his friends Sergey Kiselev and Sergey Gorelov, and Valentin Arbakov, a phenomenal blitz player. Still, I managed to adapt rather quickly too: I remember sharing first place in one of these tournaments, winning 300 rubles and immediately paying them into my savings account. All in all, rapid and blitz chess against strong opponents helps young players gain experience. You just have to know when to quit.

Alexey Vyzhmanavin was a somewhat naive and ingenuous man, he was open to people and talking to him was always pleasant and easy. I remember an episode at the 1992 Manila Olympiad. I played for my

native Moldova, and Vyzhmanavin won a gold medal as a member of the Russian team. After the closing ceremony, Lyokha was in a very happy mood. When he saw me, he was genuinely glad, and, saying ‘I love you so!’, hugged me and picked me up from the floor. It was at this moment that I understood how a ‘bear hug’ really feels!

A couple of years later, we became neighbours in Strogino (a very green and pleasant district at the north-west of Moscow). Alexey had a ping-pong table in one of the rooms of his big flat, and we played the game often, even though, to be honest, he played much better than me. We talked a lot, took walks, went to tournaments together. I loved playing blitz with him, we constantly engaged in interesting theoretical duels. When he had White, for instance, we often tested the Sämisch System in the King’s Indian. Alexey probably analyzed it a lot together with his friend and namesake Dreev, and so they interpreted it in a similar way. Vyzhmanavin had supreme chess understanding and a true strategic talent. He was a natural: Lyokha learned chess very late, and he never had a coach or a mentor. This was not typical for Soviet chess, but Vyzhmanavin went his own way. He was an exceptionally talented person, but poorly adapted for stress and calamities.

I am glad to see the publication of this book, dedicated to his blessed memory. Grandmaster Alexey Vyzhmanavin achieved a lot in chess: he shone in the Intel Grand Prix rapid tournaments, won the Olympiad and the European Championships with the Russian national team and won the Armed Forces Championship many times. He was a very inventive and enterprising chess player, with deep and precise calculation skills. His best games featured in this book constitute great learning material. I must add that I rather liked the style of the book: it’s not a simple compilation of best games – it’s a history of his life, bright and tragic. The narration of the author, Dmitry Kryakvin, is complemented by the memories of Vyzhmanavin’s ex-wife Lyudmila and stories from his friends. Unfortunately, many talented Moscow chess players, Alexey’s contemporaries and friends, also died way too soon...

Without a doubt, the name of Alexey Vyzhmanavin and the best examples of his creative legacy should retain their place in the memory of the new chess generations.

*Viorel Bologan
December 2022*

Preface

Today, a young chess player probably wouldn't react quickly to the name of Alexey Vyzhmanavin, even though it was really famous a while ago. The seven-time Champion of the Soviet Armed Forces, a hero of the last Soviet Championship, Russian Republic Champion, Olympic and European Champion of 1992 as a member of the Russian national team, a brilliant blitz player who won a huge number of rapid tournaments and fought Vladimir Kramnik in that fatal game in the lights of the Kremlin stars. He battled such greats as Anatoly Karpov, Veselin Topalov, Viswanathan Anand, and defeated quite a lot of FIDE Top 100 players. But then, he burned down in literally two or three years and died at the turn of the century, forgotten by his contemporaries.

Why did this happen, and what pushed this incredibly talented player to such a tragic end? The researching of Vyzhmanavin's biography took eight long years to complete. Meeting Alexey's ex-wife in Berlin and talking with her for several long evenings was quite memorable (her memories constitute a large part of this book), as well as conversations with Alexey Dreev, Alexey Kuzmin, Vasily Gagarin, Sergey Kalinichev, Karen Izraelyants, Michal Krasenkov. I would like to thank all my friends and colleagues who helped with advice and corrections, especially the contribution of Viacheslav Durasov, who diligently combed through all Soviet and Russian press archives in a search for information about the grandmaster.

This book is not only about the brilliant chess player Alexey Vyzhmanavin and his fate, which was always so unfavourable since his very childhood. This book is also partially about the former glory of the Moscow chess school. Dozens of tournaments. Fantastically strong and balanced line-ups. Not a single day without chess. Was it all really happening? Could our predecessors imagine that we would wonder if the Aeroflot or Moscow Open will take place at all this year? Or think ruefully, how many grandmasters would take part in the Moscow Championship this year?

And the most, most important thought – a human is weak and mortal, and no matter what kind of shocks he lives through, his family serves as the most solid support at all times (the author's dedication is not an accident). After losing his family, Alexey remained alone with the most horrible demons of his past, which ultimately destroyed the great chess player.

In this book, you shall see 70 games by Vyzhmanavin with test questions; the purpose of these questions is to improve your positional play and calculation. The legacy of the first Russian Olympic Champion is interspersed with warnings, urging every reader not to repeat his tragic fate.

Dmitry Kryakvin

December 2022, Rostov-on-Don

to his next opponent. He still deviated from theory quite often, but consciously and knowing what he was doing.

Even after becoming a master and a grandmaster, Alexey still read and re-read some books from his library, and they served him rather well for years. The two-volume Alexander Alekhine game collection entitled *Alekhine's Chess Heritage* by Alexander Kotov had a special place in his library – of course, signed by the loving hand of his coach, Lyudmila Belavenets. Vyzhmanavin dreamed of becoming a pupil of Vladimir Yurkov, who worked with the biggest young Soviet star at the time, Andrey Sokolov. However, this never happened – Yurkov only took on promising kids with high category rankings. That's why Alexey was quite satisfied in the 1990s, when he overtook Sokolov both in Elo ratings and results – the latter fell out of the elite after his heavy Candidates match defeat against Karpov in 1987.

At some point, Alexey's mother left the family, not wanting to spend any more dull days with her husband. The children had grown up, and she couldn't bear to live with an alcoholic any more. Lyosha was still drawn to his mother, and she would visit sometimes to help with housework. Alas, his father did not make any steps to save the family and constantly told him that his mother had betrayed them. Soon, Tatiana was diagnosed with an incurable illness and died.

Alexey's father didn't lose his job for a very long time. There were a lot of reasons for that: he was a war veteran, from a working family, an invalid of labour, a party member! Very few Soviet citizens earned such a wage, but money quickly flew away after a few drunken gatherings with friends. However, the sinecure eventually ended... after that, Vyzhmanavin Sr. couldn't hold onto any job for more than a year, and his labour career ended selling newspapers in the Soyuzpechat kiosk (where Karen Kavaleryan and Alexey's other friends met him). Later, he was sacked even from that job. Therefore, any guests that came to Vyzhmanavin's household thought that the place was quite depressing, even though there was always food in the fridge. Perhaps that's why some of Alexey's friends mistakenly thought that his father was a 'street sweeper'.

We can speculate for a long time how a boy with such talent and love for chess would have fared in a different family, but what's done is done. He neglected school completely – nobody at home cared about his grades. Vyzhmanavin barely managed to graduate from secondary school, getting moderate grades in all subjects, and enrolled in a railroad workers' technical school. School grades were not important for admission – they produced specialists for laying sleepers and railway servicemen.

Meanwhile, the young chess player did actually have good learning capabilities – and chess talent had almost nothing to do with that. Years later, as he started to play in European open tournaments, he taught himself English from scratch and learned to speak it rather well.

But Vyzhmanavin was brought up by the Sokolniki Park, by the chess pavilion in the Hermitage Garden, by the playground in the Lefortovo Park – and his father was largely uninterested in his son's exploits. Later, he never once came to watch Alexey play in the big Moscow tournaments and Soviet championships that were held in the capital city. Once, Alexey came from an important competition where he took second place – this was an obvious success, and he happily ran into his father's room without even taking his shoes off. 'Why haven't you won?' his father answered scornfully, without taking his eyes off the TV. Alexey remembered this for his entire life and loved to recount it, smiling ironically. 'Can you imagine? He didn't know diddly-squat about chess, never came to my tournaments! And now, he asks: why haven't I won?!' Despite everything, Vyzhmanavin Jr. always loved his father and called him *Batya*.¹ He said that he would never be the same as his father, that he would be able to stop and overcome his pernicious habit in time. However, life only laughed at his words.

We are all products of our childhood, and what we discuss here and now is very important in understanding what happened to Alexey Vyzhmanavin later. Alexey didn't have any of the things that we love so much and sometimes value so little at home: warmth, loving and caring family members.

'Alexey started playing chess at the age of 14, similarly to Chigorin or Rubinstein. Nobody mentored him, he was left to his own devices, but he taught himself to work alone from the very outset. He was a true fanatic!' International Master Vasily Gagarin remembered his friend. 'We first met when we were both 17, in rather funny circumstances. The pavilion in the Sokolniki Park was one of the main chess centres in Moscow – they played any games there, not only chess, but also cards and *Zhelezka* – a famous game in Soviet times.² I was brought here by my friend Sergey Kiselev, whom I'd met much earlier in the Lyublino Young Pioneers' Palace. I rarely played in tournaments then because I studied in a university, but I

1 Russian term of endearment for fathers, roughly equivalent to 'Daddy' – translator.

2 *Zhelezka*, also known as 'Shmen', is a guessing game that involves serial numbers of banknotes – translator.

eagerly played blitz in my free time. We met Lyokha in the pavilion, who offered me to play with stakes – one ruble per game, giving me a solid handicap: two minutes versus one. We fought for a long time, and when they turned off the lights and told everyone to leave, he had a small plus; however, a month later, I managed to get my revenge – we shared 1st-2nd place in the Moscow Youth Trade Union Championship, and Alexey got the second prize because he lost to me in our head-to-head game.

We continued to play in the same competitions for a while, and also often met at someone's flat and played rapid training tournaments that included Gorelov, Kiselev and sometimes Andrey Kharitonov. Once Vyzhmanavin lost his first two games in such a tournament, but then declared that this was unfair and demanded to start over! He was very assertive, both on and off the chessboard, so we agreed, and he easily won the new tournament.

He had a huge talent, and if he had been lucky enough to be born into a prosperous family that could have given him a good education, Alexey could have easily joined the ranks of world champions. Of those chess players I got to meet, only Smyslov and Kramnik gave a similarly strong impression...

In the early 1980s, Vyzhmanavin rose like a rocket. He managed to break through the harsh sieve of qualification tournaments which was an integral feature of Soviet times, and got to the very top. Every other year, you could qualify for the Soviet Championship through the championships of the Soviet Republics, Moscow and Leningrad. Thus, the status of the so-called Higher League of the Moscow Championship was very high, and it was hard to qualify for that tournament. Lyokha first played there in 1981, where he scored great wins against Bronstein, Vaganian and Panchenko. Back then, he already played incredibly strongly, even though he didn't even have a rating. Or, more precisely, he didn't have an Elo rating – it was only calculated in the Soviet championships and sometimes, as an exception, in some other strong tournament; most of our chess players only had Soviet ratings.'

In addition to blitz chess for money, Alexey Vyzhmanavin also learned to play games of chance in the Sokolniki Park – and in these games, he was not a legend, a Moscow hero or the famous Speed Demon. He also met some rather colourful characters in the Hermitage Garden, who preferred high-stakes games – late-night roulette in flats, hiding from the militia raids in a rather dubious, motley crew. He had more success than the Gambler in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's eponymous novel, but good wins alternated with heavy financial losses.

In chess, however, Vyzhmanavin progressed very quickly and soon became a god-like figure for the huge army of visitors to the famous park, which attracted the worshippers of Mammon as well as those chess players who valued speed and skirmishes with hanging flags more than anything. The popular 1960s sports commentator Dalvy Khvan gave a very characteristic description of the atmosphere in the Central Chess Club Bulletin (No. 9, 1980):

‘No matter which alley of the park – there are more than ten of them – you wind up at, it’s easy to get to the comfortable, wide pavilion that hosts the chess and checkers club. It’s surrounded by dozens of chess tables. It’s especially charming here in summer and in the warmer days of spring and autumn.

Sokolniki is a Moscow park where, unlike in many other parks, a chess pavilion operates all year round. Moreover, there are no vacation days! The precise working schedule of the few workers allows you to enjoy the pleasure of your favourite game on any day of the week. The pavilion is popular, even though it’s located far from the centre of Moscow. Chess players from all corners of the capital city gather there. And to make everything more interesting, fascinating and valuable, the working plan includes a lot of different events.

I think that it’s great that the Sokolniki Park hosts the immensely popular Vechernaya Moskva Blitz Tournament. It’s held every year, attracting a huge number of spectators and fans. Our famous grandmasters play there; others qualify through a harsh system that includes hundreds of preliminary tournaments, both in the park itself and in other cultural centres of Moscow. Still, the main final is always held here.

The people disperse, still discussing the events. This time, Mikhail Tal finished behind Boris Zlotnik who won the Veчерka prize – otherwise, he would have taken his seventh or so Tula samovar (the prize) back to Riga. The hosts, meanwhile, prepared the chess pavilion for tomorrow’s guests.

The Hermitage Garden also has a good reputation among the Moscow chess players. The Hermitage is located in the very centre of Moscow. You aren’t surprised at all when you see guests in traditional skullcaps – they come from Uzbekistan. Here’s a man from Siberia who came to Moscow for a short business trip and spends his free evening in the chess pavilion. Sometimes, you may even hear foreign languages – I have seen many guests from England, France, even faraway Australia. Everyone who comes receives a good chess set to play. Would you like to play with a clock? Here you go! I must also point out that this is basically the only chess pavilion in Moscow where you can hire a chess clock.

I often see very young chess and checkers fans in the pavilion – mostly schoolchildren that live nearby. Yes, the Moscow Blitz Championship final is held in Sokolniki. But the Hermitage Garden probably hosts the most qualifying tournaments for this final. 1/8 finals, quarterfinals, then semi-finals. All those tournaments are held under the auspices of Vechernaya Moskva, but they also serve as the championship of the garden itself. See for yourselves. The Hermitage Garden hosted more than 1000 chess players during the mass competition. The line-up of the final of the Hermitage Garden Championship was quite impressive: thirteen masters, eight candidate masters and only one first-category player!

In the rain-soaked autumn days, the Hermitage Garden pavilion closes down until the next season... but almost everyone said the same thing: the Hermitage Garden pavilion should be working all round the year!

By the way, Dalvy Khvan himself also often played in Sokolniki and the Hermitage, usually against the well-known Moscow mathematics teacher Yuzef Mikhailovich.

The famous Valentin Arbakov was the king of Sokolniki; another high-rated player was Sergey Kiselev, a strong blitzzer and future master, who became a good friend of the park's young star. Arbakov gave incredible handicaps to his opponents, sometimes leaving himself a bare minimum of time: a minute or even less. Vyzhmanavin followed his example.

Yury Vasiliev, sports journalist and Sport-Express reporter, gave a very characteristic sketch:

‘Not everyone dared to sit at the table opposite Alexey Vyzhmanavin, the super-grandmaster of blitz whose star was rising rapidly at the time. Alexey would give himself 30 seconds on the clock (using a stopwatch!) versus 5 minutes for his opponents and managed to defeat some strong players. We looked, spellbound, at the mesmerizing flight of pieces and pawns and couldn't believe that it was physically possible to deliver a checkmate in 30 seconds! But it was enough for Vyzhmanavin. I still remember Alexey's pale face. It looms mysteriously over the board in the half-lit park, pale, with eyes unnaturally glistening from over-exertion, the face of a Gambler... the crumpled 5-ruble bills were quickly passed from hand to hand and disappeared into the trouser-pockets. As far as I remember, Alexey would almost always win...’

Many colleagues of Vyzhmanavin remembered that the Moscow player was incredibly competitive – he could play even ‘heads or tails’ for hours. Of course, not for free – he constantly needed adrenaline!

A young company of masters and strong candidates who frequented the park spent their time together, joyfully and carelessly. After winning some money, they would drink beer in the famous Zhiguli bar under the Valdai restaurant, snacking on the equally famous hot small shrimp. Alexey would often remember this golden time later – the youth and the spirit of freedom were intoxicating, he had not a care in the world, and his life was full of happy and joyful colours. The ability to go to the Arbat (a famous street in the centre of Moscow and a short distance from the location of the Central Chess Club) with a friend or some company, to spend money in the cafe and listen to music, gave him confidence and a feeling of small superiority over the simple workers who counted every kopeck and got back home with tired faces in the evening. The young chess player especially loved the night life of the Moscow centre... after some carousing, he could go out on the street and breathe in the fresh night air. Then he would hail a car, get to his home in 5-10 minutes and go to sleep. And in the morning, he would get up, believing fully that the new day belonged to him, that he could do anything as he pleased. In his youth, Alexey Vyzhmanavin swore that he would never get a ‘proper’ job.

In classical chess, Vyzhmanavin’s successes grew too. After his debut in the 1981 Moscow Championship final (6th, behind, inter alia, Gulko and Psakhis, but ahead of Yusupov, Bronstein, Vaganian, etc.) the unrated player immediately got a Soviet rating of 2490 and earned the master title!

The tournament included thirteen grandmasters and the average rating of the tournament was 2459 – an impressive number back then, there weren’t many players with such an individual coefficient. For context, Rafael Vaganian, one of the leaders of Soviet chess at the time, played *hors concours* and made a minus score! But the start, by an unrated player who failed to qualify for the star-studded final a year earlier, caused a real sensation: in the first round, Vyzhmanavin made a draw from a position of strength against the future runner-up Sergey Makarychev, and then created a true positional masterpiece against David Bronstein (hereafter, the author’s annotations from his article ‘The Self-Taught Guy from Moscow’ published on chesspro.ru have been used in some games – of course, with additions from modern analytical engines).

In the next Soviet Championship, the very last one to be held, and on the Swiss system, Vyzhmanavin did not compete for the victory, but played very well and shared 4th-9th places. The world was changing rapidly, the Soviet Chess Federation had no time nor resources to hold numerous qualifying competitions, and so, 64 players determined the new champion in an 11-round Swiss obstacle course. The prominent older-generation players took on the new generation of the young stars, such as Bologan, Rublevsky, Shirov, Tiviakov, Kramnik, and Dreev.

Vyzhmanavin started with a crushing defeat at the hands of Ionov, but then managed to turn things around and get a +2 score after eight rounds. Then he drew with Malaniuk and Rublevsky, and everything was decided in the last round, where Alexey faced Valery Chekhov, a strong grandmaster and one of the few Soviet players who had managed to win the World Junior Championship. As he tried to win in mutual time trouble, Chekhov sacrificed two exchanges, but Vyzhmanavin's nerves proved to be stronger in the ensuing complications. As a result, the former warrant officer shared 4th place. The win was shared by Elmar Magerramov and Artashes Minasian, with the Armenian player being declared the Soviet Champion on tie-break.

Vyzhmanavin's possibly most exotic trip of this period was to China, as a member of the Soviet chess delegation. This was when China was just starting to emerge as a strong chess nation. Its women players were already challenging for the world title, but most of the men had little international experience and so various tournaments were organized for this purpose.

Vyzhmanavin played brilliantly in the first half of the event, but losses to Miles and Budnikov (the latter after a blunder in a winning position) set him back and he did not compete for first place after that.

Alexey's performance as rating favourite at the Danish National Tournament in Copenhagen, called Unibank back then, was also nothing special. At the start, Vyzhmanavin lost to his old acquaintance David Bronstein who wanted to avenge his past losses.

Then he caught up to the group of leaders, defeating the strong Romanian grandmaster Mihai Suba.

Game 42

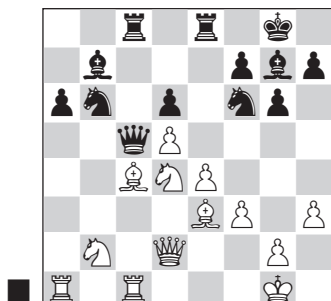
Alexey Vyzhmanavin

2590

Mihai Suba

2520

Copenhagen 1991 (7)



The 1980s were the peak of Suba's performances. He won the Romanian Championship three times, obtained his career best rating (2580), won a number of strong tournaments and twice qualified for the Interzonal. Mihai was also considered one of the main favourites of the Danish Tournament.

The black queen is surrounded and can only be extricated through extra-strong means.

25... ♖xe4!? 26. fxe4 ♜xe4 27. ♕xa6!

This blow was prepared beforehand: after 27... ♗xd5 28. ♕xb7 ♗xb7 29. ♜xc8+ ♖xc8 30. ♘d1, White stabilizes the position and converts his extra piece.

27... ♕xd4 28. ♕xd4!

After 28. ♜xc5? ♕xe3+, Black regains the queen with interest.

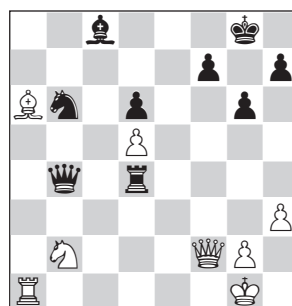
28... ♜xd4 29. ♗f2! ♗b4

The most resilient.

Much simpler for White to calculate was 29... ♗xd5 30. ♕xb7

♜xc1+ 31. ♜xc1, retaining the extra material.

30. ♜xc8+ ♕xc8



Question: Can White win material?

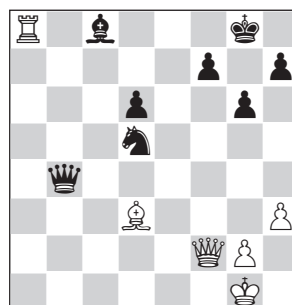
Answer: 31. ♘d3!

And still, Alexey Vyzhmanavin has the last shot in this tactical skirmish – White wins an exchange. Black was counting on 31. ♕xc8? ♜d2 or 31. ♜f1? ♕f5!.

31... ♜xd3

31... ♗c3 32. ♜c1.

32. ♕xd3 ♘d5 33. ♜a8



33... ♗c3

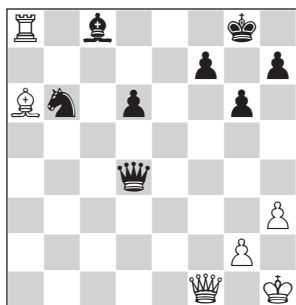
The Romanian grandmaster defends stubbornly. 33... ♗b7? 34. ♜a7, and the f7-pawn falls.

34. ♕a6 ♗a1+?

After this check, Black could have lost immediately. He had some

chances to build a drawing fortress after 34...♖e7 35.♖h4 ♖c7.

35. ♖f1 ♖d4+ 36. ♖h1 ♖b6



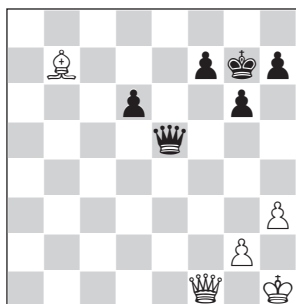
Question: This is also a simple puzzle, but a technical one this time: how to obtain maximum advantage from the pin along the 8th rank?

Answer: 37.♖b8 could bring great material gains to White.

37. ♖xc8+?

Grabbing the piece too hastily. It's not simple to win in the resulting position – Black will try to get a drawn ending where White has a light-squared bishop and the h-pawn, whose promotion square is of the wrong colour.

37... ♖xc8 38. ♖xc8 ♖g7 39. ♖b7 ♖e5



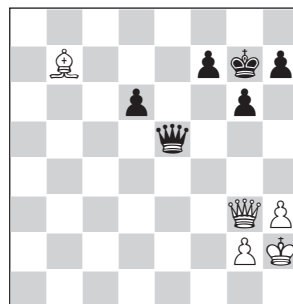
40. ♖f3

From a practical point of view, it was better to keep the queens

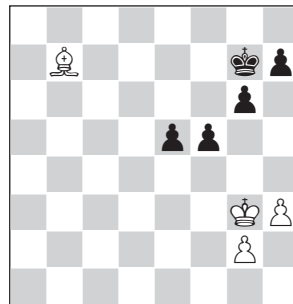
on the board for a while: 40.♖c4 ♖e1+ 41.♖h2 ♖e5+ 42.g3 – there's always time to trade them in a more beneficial way.

40... ♖e1+ 41. ♖h2 ♖e5+ 42. ♖g3?!

This, for instance, was a good time for the trade: 42.♖g1 ♖e1+ 43.♖f1. After Suba's strong reply, Black manages to trade the queens in such a way that the Romanian player's d-pawn ceases to be weak and isolated.



42...f5! 43. ♖xe5+ dxex5 44. ♖g3



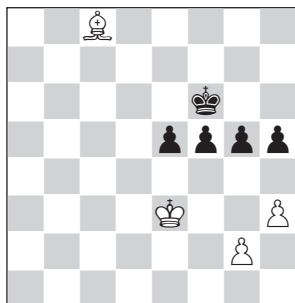
Question: Black can hold this, can't he? How should he place his pawns?

Answer: 44...♖f6 45.♖f2 e4 with a draw – the black king will control the centre of the board together with his pawns.

44...g5??

A gross blunder. Suba thought that in this defensive structure, he could counter the king walk with a pawn breakthrough, and missed White's winning idea. The bishop is usually a very strong piece on an open board!

45. ♖f3 h5 46. ♖e3 ♖f6 47. ♗c8



47...h4

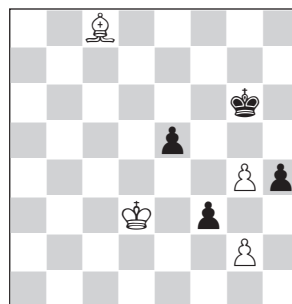
Passive defence doesn't help:

47...♖g6 48.♖d3 ♖f6 49.♖c4 g4 (49...♖g6 50.♖d5) 50.h4 f4 51.♖d5 f3, and the last subtlety is to avoid the pawn trade – 52.g3!

48.♖d3 ♖g6 49.♖c4 g4 50.hxg4 f4
50...fxg4 51.♗xg4 was obvious, but Black was counting on the

pawns closing off diagonals for the bishop.

51. ♖d3 f3



Question: Won't the black rook pawn promote?

Answer: 52. ♗b7!

An easy refutation! After 52.gxf3 h3 53.♗b7 h2 54.f4 exf4 55.♖e2 ♖g5, there's indeed a draw on the board.

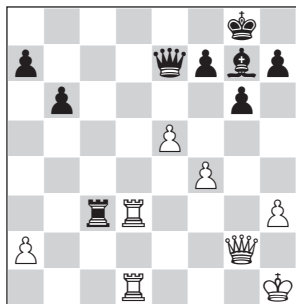
52...fxg2 53.♗xg2 ♖g5 54.♗h3 ♖f4
55.♖e2 e4

The bishop on h3 lures the black king into a deadly trap in all lines: 55...♖g3 56.g5 ♖xh3 57.g6 ♖g2 58.g7 h3 59.g8♚+, and White wins.

56.♖f2 e3+ 57.♖e2 ♖g3 58.g5 1-0

However, in the decisive game against one of the greatest Scandinavian talents of the time, Lars Schandorff, Vyzhmanavin suffered from bad luck – in a puzzling position, Alexey lost on time on move 38, just two moves before the time control. Schandorff shared the win as a result, and the Moscow player shared 7th-8th places with 5.5 points, behind a group of players (Malaniuk, Suba etc.) who scored half a point more.

He played much better in a strong open in Ostend, Belgium. Anthony Miles, who was living his second youth, won again, Michael Adams took second place, and Vyzhmanavin, Alexey Kuzmin and Mikhail Gurevich finished behind the Englishmen. In the penultimate round, Vyzhmanavin lost to Miles in their head-to-head encounter for first place, but immediately bounced back, defeating Colin McNab of Scotland with Black.



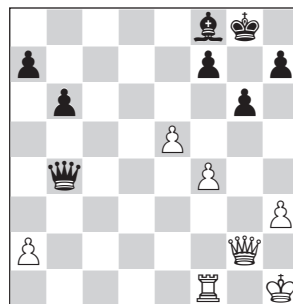
34...♖xd3

Question: How would White win if Black avoided the rook trade with 34...♗c4?

Answer: Everything is ready to smash through the eighth rank: 35.♖d8+ ♕f8 36.f5! ♖xe5 37.♗a8 ♗e4+ (37...♗e7 38.♖xf8+ ♗xf8

39.♖d8) 38.♗xe4 ♖xe4 39.♗a8 with a quick win.

35.♖xd3 ♖b4 36.♖f3 ♕f8 37.♖f1



37...♗c4?

The decisive mistake. Black should have targeted the e5-pawn with 37...♗d4 and then tried to push his queenside pawns forward.

38.f5!

And White converted his big advantage in mutual time trouble.

In the knockout part, Vyzhmanavin continued to amaze his supporters – he made a comeback against Shirov and then defeated him in the Armageddon, then easily knocked out Korchnoi. In the semi-final, he faced Kramnik who had sensationally eliminated Kasparov. Anand faced Ivanchuk in the other battle for the final – the Indian grandmaster proved stronger.

Game 64

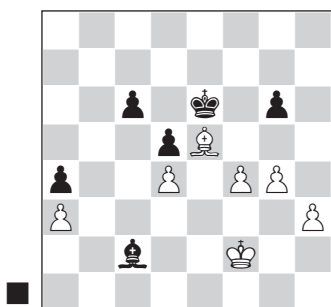
Alexey Vyzhmanavin

2610

Viktor Korchnoi

2615

Moscow 1994 (2)



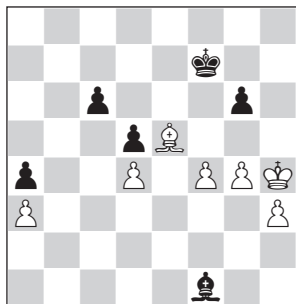
49...♔f7?

The decisive mistake – now Black is mathematically lost.

The correct continuation was 49...♕d3 50.♔g3 ♕f1, trying to stop White from creating connected passed pawns.

50.♔g3 ♕d3 51.♔h4 ♕f1

It's too late now for Black to try to get his king back: 51...♔e6 52.♔g5 ♕c2 53.h4 ♕d3 54.h5 gxh5 55.f5+ ♔f7 56.♔xh5, and White wins easily.



Question: Black attacks the h3-pawn and doesn't let the white king go forward. How did Vyzhmanavin win?

Answer: White played **52.f5! gxf5 53.gxf5**.

The black king is now too passive and cannot interfere with White's plan – to win the bishop for the f- and h-pawns.

53...♖g8 54.♖g4 ♘a6 55.♖g5 ♘c8 56.h4 ♖h7

The pawns are unstoppable: **56...♖f7 57.h5**.

57.♘f4 ♖g7 58.h5 ♘d7 59.h6+ ♖f7 60.♘e5 ♖g8 61.♖g6 ♘e8+ 62.♖f6 ♖h7 63.♖e7

The white king breaks into the opponent's camp, and now it's over.

63...♘h5 64.♘f4 ♖g8 65.f6 ♘g6 66.h7+ ♖xh7 67.f7 ♘xf7 68.♖xf7
Black resigned.

Later, Vladimir Kramnik said at the press conference that he understood well what a strong blitz player Vyzhmanavin was, so he wanted to beat him in the rapid games. Alexey, on the other hand, made an easy draw with White and then cunningly escaped with Black. How did he prepare for this match? Did he study variations, or something? In front of his amazed wife, Alexey opened... the Alekhine two-volume book and played through a random game of the fourth World Champion, joking all the way and saying that he would defeat the mighty opponent in the style of Alexander Alexandrovich.

And then the crucial moment came. The favourite got Black in the Armageddon. Kramnik easily parried his opponent's attempt to get an advantage out of the opening, but Vyzhmanavin had more time on the clock. The pieces were leaving the board, but White still maintained a time advantage, and it was clear that Alexey thought that this might play a decisive role. The hands flashed over the board, the traded pieces came off, and then Vladimir traded the last pair of rooks too hastily. Vyzhmanavin's eyes shone, he subtly transferred his bishop to attack the opponent's pawn chain, and it turned out that the future World Champion was losing two pawns!

The hall erupted! The Sokolniki Park regulars gathered in the last rows – they obviously rooted for their old comrade. They also eagerly placed money bets on the ongoing games and quietly, avoiding too much attention, drank the liquor they secretly brought.

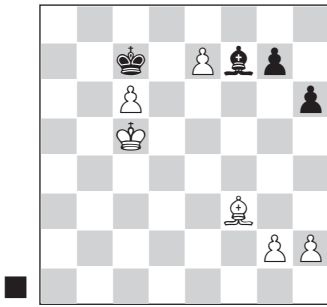
The end was near. Kramnik desperately manoeuvred with his bishop, trying to stop the advance of the white passers, but Black's last defences could easily be brought down by zugzwang.

Game 65

Alexey Vyzhmanavin 2610

Vladimir Kramnik 2710

Moscow Armageddon 1994



For instance, White easily wins here after something like 53...♙e8 54.h4 g5 55.h5 ♖f7 56.g4 ♙e8 57.♙e4, invading the g6-square. Or he could simply put his bishop on the h3-c8 diagonal, wait until Black captured the c6-pawn and promote the e7-pawn, winning a piece. Vyzhmanavin thought for a second, leaned over the board... and then the players shook hands.

'AAAAAAAH!' the choir of the park players screamed. Everyone thought that Kramnik had resigned. Chief arbiter Andrzej Filipowicz rose his hands, calling for silence. And then a sign 'Draw' suddenly appeared on the stage. The visual appearance of the opponents proved that the announced result was not a mistake – the happy Kramnik left the stage with long strides, and Vyzhmanavin, completely stunned, stayed in his chair.

'What really happened? Alexey's own answer was terse: "It was a lapse of reason. For a second, I thought that the draw was enough for me to progress into the final!" As he offered the draw, Vyzhmanavin saw his opponent's eyes and understood everything immediately. Evil tongues said in some preposterous articles based on fabricated facts that after his loss, Vyzhmanavin drank himself blind and slept right on the steps of the Kremlin Palace. I'm sure that Alexey did have a dose of something mind-numbing in the evening, but it's a known fact that he did receive the huge \$15,000 prize together with his wife and then went home by taxi.

It would be wrong to say that this loss somehow broke Alexey. Despite this upsetting elimination, Vyzhmanavin still qualified for the three next tournaments thanks to his great result. The capitals of France, England and United States awaited him! However, it took the grandmaster three weeks to recover, even though in his best years, he had an immunity to losses and immediately wanted to bounce back.

By the way, Anand defeated Kramnik in the final, and Vyzhmanavin was mentioned at the press conference. Vishy reacted with his characteristic humor:

‘Is this prize the biggest in your career?’

‘Not the biggest, but one of the biggest.’

‘Are you happy with your playing in the final?’

‘Yes, generally I am. I played well.’

‘Would it be harder to play against the brilliant blitz player Vyzhmanavin than against Kramnik, who rarely plays blitz and doesn’t prepare for it specifically?’

‘If I had a losing position against Vyzhmanavin, I would have waited for a draw offer!’

Meanwhile, Vyzhmanavin and Kramnik met two more times in the 1994 Intel Grand Prix! In London, Vyzhmanavin defeated Mainka, one of the players who won the qualification there, in the round of 16, and then deservedly lost to Kramnik, who cleanly won with White. In New York, the rough diamond from Sokolniki was eliminated by Predrag Nikolic, but the battle of Paris gave chess fans another dazzling duel of the former Russian national team partners for their enjoyment. Vyzhmanavin knocked out Matthew Sadler and then had a great chance to defeat Vladimir in the Armageddon.



He had Black this time, but Alexey confidently outplayed his formidable opponent and then managed to lose in an endgame where he had four pawns against three: he first blundered his passed pawn that almost got promoted, and then, in the last seconds, got a lost pawn endgame. The

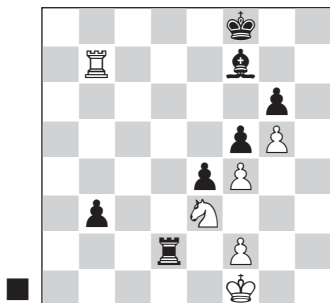
Paris battle was as dramatic as the Moscow one, but there was no-one in Paris to turn it into a legend.

Game 66

Vladimir Kramnik 2725

Alexey Vyzhmanavin 2610

Paris Armageddon 1994



Black has an extra passed pawn and a won position, even though he only needs a draw! And then, another grimace of fate followed...

53...b2?

Instead of the simple 53...a2.

54.♔e1

Oh, the horror! Black has to give up his pride and joy.

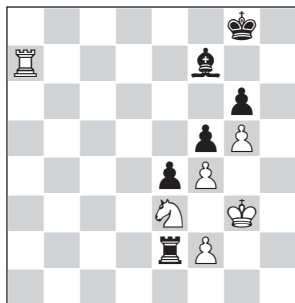
54...♞d7 55.♞xb2 ♠a7 56.♞b6 ♔g7

57.♔f1 ♠a1+ 58.♔g2 ♠a2 59.♔g3

♞d2 60.♠a6 ♞e2 61.♞d1 ♞e1

62.♞e3 ♞g1+ 63.♔h2 ♞e1 64.♠a7

♞e2 65.♔g3 ♔g8



A great practical player, Kramnik did nothing for a long time and only then started to execute an active plan – this looks a bit similar to the events of the sixth World Championship game between Carlsen and Nepomniachtchi.

66.♞g2 ♞d2 67.♞e3 ♞d3 68.♔g2

♞c3 69.♔f1 ♞d3 70.♔e2 ♞c3 71.♠a5

♞d3 72.♞c2 ♞c3 73.♞d4 ♞c4

74.♞b5 ♞c5 75.♠a8+ ♔g7 76.♞d6

♞c7 77.♔e3 ♞d7 78.♞b5? ♞b7?

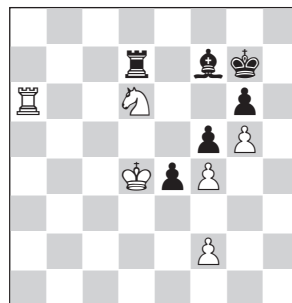
Alexey, having only seconds on the clock, missed 78...♞d3+! 79.♔e2 ♔c4, which would immediately have secured the semi-final for him.

79.♞d6 ♞d7

It's better to keep the rook active: 79...♞b3+ 80.♔d4 ♞d3+ with the idea 81.♔e5?? ♞d5#.

80.♠a6 ♞c7 81.♔d4 ♞d7

81...♔f8! was more precise, getting the king closer and keeping the rook active.



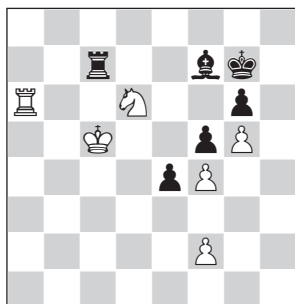
Kramnik has managed to achieve a lot – the d6-knight is strong, and Black should be wary of going into

a pawn endgame (which happened in the actual game).

82. ♖e5

The correct move was 82. ♖c5!, and White found it after a repetition of moves:

82... ♜e7+ 83. ♚d4 ♝d7 84. ♖c5! ♜c7+



Question: Do you think that this position is still drawn or not? Can you find a way to improve White's position?

Answer: The computer is ruthless – after 85. ♖b6! ♝d7 (not 85... ♜c2 86. ♜a7) 86. ♖c6 ♜e7 87. ♜b6, Black is defenceless against the threat

88. ♜b7 with the subsequent

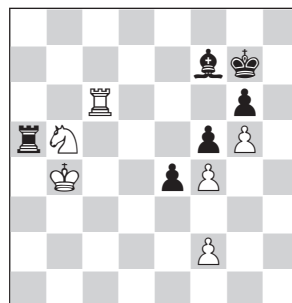
85. ♜c6 ♜a7 86. ♚b5 ♜a5?
86... ♜a2!.

Nevertheless, Vyzhmanavin earned \$40,000 in the Grand Prix. Very serious money for a player who was not a member of the top elite. His family finally moved away from the cramped flat, buying a big four-room apartment. It seemed that everything was only starting for Alexey. But, as it turned out, the three-round bout against Kramnik was the swan song of the great hero of Sokolniki Park.

Still, Vyzhmanavin performed well in the few classical tournaments he played in 1994 (the Grand Prix series took a lot of time and effort). In Elenite (15th category), he finished in mid-table and in a strong tournament in Alushta, he shared second place.

87. ♖b4?

With seconds left on his clock, Kramnik didn't take control of the seventh rank with 87. ♜c7!.



87... ♜xb5??

A horrible blunder in time trouble – of course, Black had to win the f2-pawn: 87... ♜a2!.

88. ♖xb5 ♜e8 89. ♖c5 ♜xc6

90. ♖xc6 ♖f7 91. ♖d6

Alas, Black cannot hold the opposition, and the white king easily captures the g6-pawn.

91... ♖f8 92. ♖e6 ♖g7 93. ♖e7 ♖g8

94. ♖f6 ♖h7 95. ♖f7

Black resigned. Such incredible speed shown by the players! They made almost 100 moves in an Armageddon!