

Sergey Kasparov

The Hedgehog

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About the Author

Sergey Kasparov was born in 1968 in the city of Baku. Since the age of seven, he has been engaged in chess section in the Palace of Pioneers – the same place where namesake and world champion Garry Kasparov was also taught. He has taken first place in numerous international tournaments and acquired the grandmaster title in 2007. He is now a leading on-line chess coach.

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Introduction

Dear chess lovers, grandmaster Sergey Kasparov is glad to greet you! I was born back in the days of the USSR, in Baku. You might remember that my great namesake Garry also began his career there.

For those who are new to the Hedgehog, as is perhaps known, Black places his pawns next to each other on the sixth rank to take control of all the squares in front of them on the fifth rank. One can compare the structure to the spines of a hedgehog. Such lined-up pawns create a flexible structure so that the enemy always has to take into consideration the possibility of one of the 'spines' producing some bite by moving forward.

Due to this analogy the pawn set-up a6, b6, d6 and e6 is called *the Hedgehog*. Furthermore, Black's strategy in the given structure is in a way similar to how a real hedgehog fights its enemies even when they are stronger. One is curled up or manoeuvring within one's own camp, preparing for the right moment to counter attack.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since Sergey Shipov's fine work *The Complete Hedgehog* was published earlier this century. New technologies make chess theory develop more and more rapidly. A novelty applied in, say, the Philippines might become public knowledge just few days later when the game appears in the database. In case of an online tournament broadcast, it becomes available to the whole world even immediately.

I will try to share with you my own experiences in the Hedgehog and supplement them with some topical and instructive games of strong players which have been played since Shipov's book appeared. Throughout, I have tried to choose the freshest examples available and to be original, of course, although in many cases modern practice proves that Shipov's assessments were correct.

As in all my books, from the very beginning I kindly ask you to keep in mind that *the author's opinion doesn't claim to be the absolute truth*. I also didn't aim to cover all the lines of the Hedgehog, since that would result in a much bigger book. From a philosophical standpoint, the deeper you move along the variations, the more questions you come up with. It means there is no limit for opening study, but the author and the publisher have to confine themselves to a certain scope. Besides, I guess the reader would be bored to follow too many ramifications some 25-30 moves deep.

Hence, I have focused on the lines which have occurred in my own praxis during the last few years and on the most important thematic general ideas, while trying to remain objective throughout. To further assist the reader, I have included quite a lot of diagrams. In-

The Hedgehog Defence

deed, some chess players may even be able to go through the book without using a chess-board.

As always, I couldn't have created this work without assistance of my wife, WIM Tatiana Kasparova (technical aspects), and my daughter, Yeva Kasparava (Russian-English translation).

I wish you a productive study of the opening and heartily hope you enjoy reading!

Sergey Kasparov, Belarus
September 2017

Chapter Eleven

Black's Counterplay: ...g7-g5

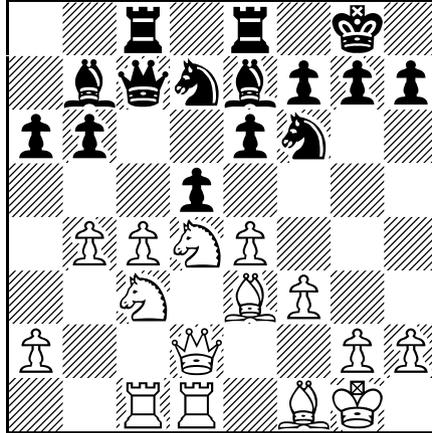
The plan of a kingside advance is interesting and promising. The idea is very controversial, but such aggression fits in well if one wants to play for a win as Black. In the Hedgehog Black is used to playing second fiddle, manoeuvring and awaiting the opponent's mistakes. However, in this case there is quite a concrete pawn approach and, as is known, pawns can't go backwards.

Your author has been on both sides of this variation, so knows all about its many complexities. We'll begin with a very meaty fight, where White didn't try to stop the advance of the g-pawn, but carried out an advance of his own on the queenside.

Game 88 A.Rotstein-S.Kasparov Jesolo 2007

1 f3 f6 2 c4 c5 3 d4 cxd4 4 xd4 b6 5 c3 b7 6 f3 d6 7 e4 e6 8 e3 e7 9 e2 0-0 10 0-0 a6 11 d2 bd7 12 fd1 c8 13 ac1 c7 14 f1 b8

14...fe8 is a curious option, which hopes for 15 b4 when the pawn can become vulnerable after 15...d5!?

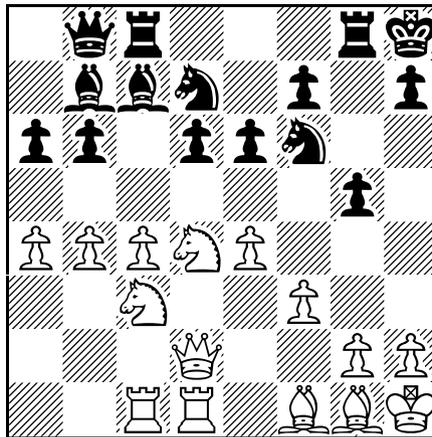


After 16 cxd5 ♗xb4 or 16 ♖f4 e5 17 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 18 cxd5 ♜b7 the situation is very clear.

15 a3 ♗d8 16 ♔h1 ♗c7 17 ♗g1 ♔h8

This move is clear proof of Black's aggressive intentions. He won't tread water while White expands on the queenside.

18 b4 ♜g8 19 a4 g5



The race begins. The computer definitely sides with White, but I should state that over the board it is never easy when your opponent calmly rolls their pawns towards your king.

20 a5 g4

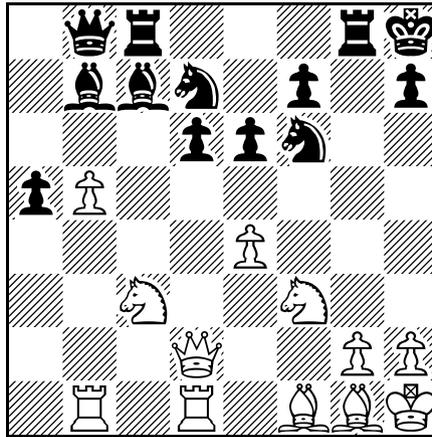
Who is faster?

21 b5

This looks logical, since any delay would be bad. Indeed, White should hurry to open the a- and b-files and so distract Black from the kingside. However, *Stockfish* is unimpressed by

such natural exchanges and now the position is for sure most unclear.

21...gxf3 22 ♖xf3bxa5 23 ♜b1?! axb5 24 cxb5



White's last few moves were rather poor, hence he already faces difficulties. Black has an extra pawn and White's only stronghold in the centre on e4 is about to fall. However, 24 ♜xb5 is also sub-optimal, in view of 24...♚a8.

24...♚a8

Playing by general motifs, I was too lazy to calculate the concrete variation 24...♙xe4 25 b6 (weaker is 25 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 26 ♚d4+ ♘ef6 when Black has two extra pawns, although it's not yet absolutely all over) 25...♙xb1 26 bxc7 ♚xc7 27 ♖xb1. This position is hard to assess fully, but Black's material advantage is huge: a rook and three pawns against two bishops.

25 b6 ♙b8?!

25...♙d8 is stronger.

26 ♜a1 ♜g7 27 ♜db1

The situation is quite tense. On occasion the black queen may be 'mated' down the a-file.

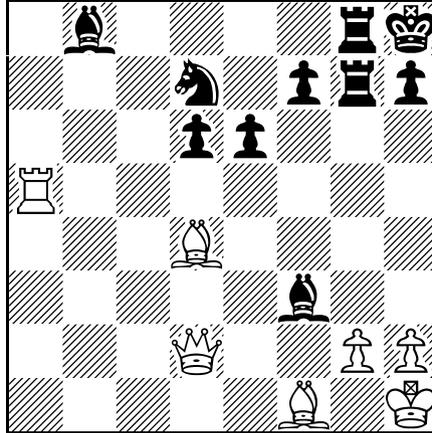
27...♜cg8?!

The immediate 27...♘xe4!? looks more to the point.

28 ♜b5 ♘xe4 29 ♘xe4 ♙xe4 30 b7!

Finally the German Grandmaster finds the way to trap the most powerful piece of the opponent.

30...♙xb7 31 ♜bxa5 ♚xa5 32 ♜xa5 ♙xf3 33 ♙d4



33...e5?!

33...e5 is more accurate and only after 34 g2 then 34...e5. Both bishops are *en prise* here and the position is about equal.

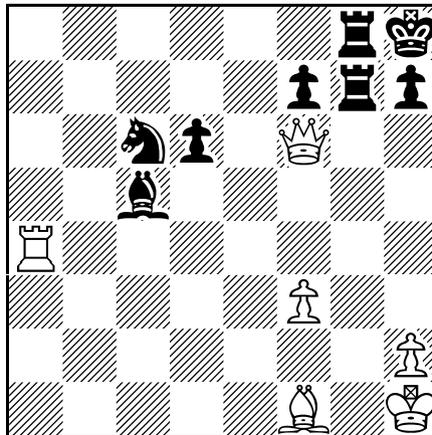
34 gxf3 exd4 35 xd4 e5 36 a3 c6

36...d5 is also interesting, after which 37 f4 c6 38 f6 exf4 39 h3 e5 40 hx7+ hx7 41 d3+ g6 42 xc6 looks like a draw.

37 f6 a7 38 a4

Spotting the threat of ...d4.

38...c5



39 d3?!

Time-trouble. Arkadij could have kept up the pressure by playing 39 g4 e5 40 xg7 xg7 41 h3.

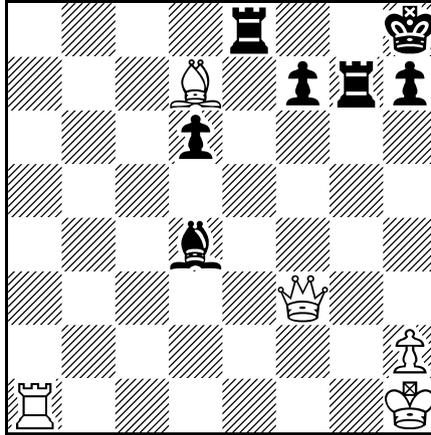
39...e5 40 f5

Alternatively, 40 ♖xh7 ♜d7 41 ♚a1 ♜xh7 42 ♜h4+ ♜g6 43 ♜g4+ ♜h7 44 ♜h4+ with a draw.

40...♜e8

Implying threats along the first rank.

41 ♜a1 ♜xf3 42 ♜d7 ♜d4 43 ♚xf3



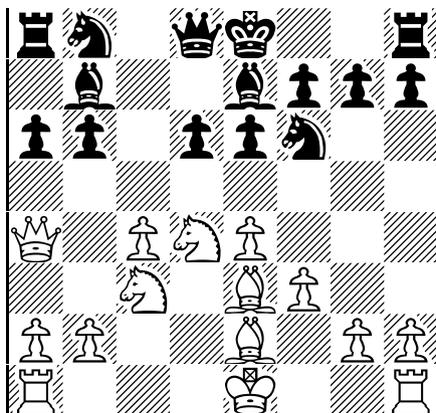
The only way, but also a sufficient defence against the very strong bishop on d4.

43...♜eg8 44 ♚d1 ♜g1+ ½-½

A game in Davos was also quite complex. Up to the run-up to the time control the situation was absolutely unclear, although, as usual in this variation, Black enjoyed plenty of counterplay.

Game 89
O.Hirn-S.Kasparov
 Davos 2014

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 b6 3 e4 ♙b7 4 ♘ge2 e6 5 d4 cxd4 6 ♘xd4 d6 7 ♙e2 ♘f6 8 f3 a6 9 ♙e3 ♙e7 10 ♚a4+



A fairly rare move in practice.

10...♘fd7

This way the c6-square remains in the grip of the knight on b8. Probably one can just play 10...♘bd7 too, and if 11 ♘c6 ♙xc6 12 ♚xc6 0-0. White has the bishop-pair, but lags in development, while ...♘d7-c5 and ...♗a8-c8 are threatened.

11 0-0 0-0 12 ♗ac1 ♘f6 13 ♗fd1 ♚c7 14 ♙h1 ♘bd7 15 ♚c2 ♗ac8 16 ♚d2

White spends a lot of tempi on the queen's manoeuvres, ♗d1-a4-c2-d2, which is why the check on a4 is not popular.

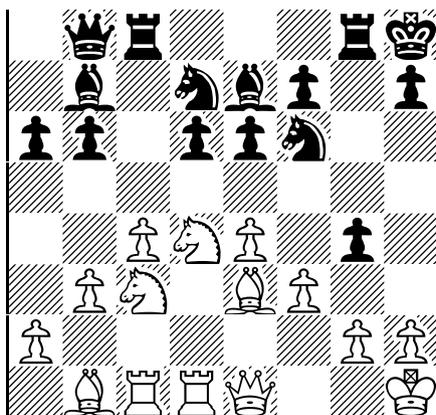
16...♗b8 17 ♗e1 ♙h8

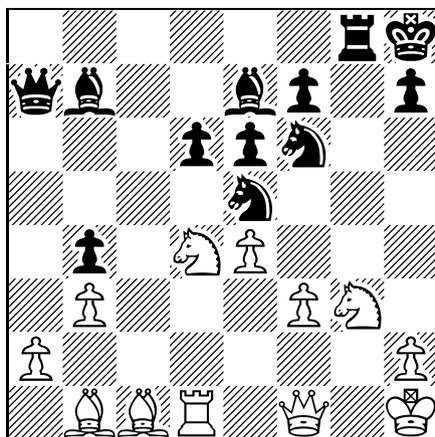
Black begins his build-up.

18 b3 ♗g8 19 ♙d3 g5 20 ♙b1

The bishop's transfer to the b1-h7 diagonal consolidates the pawn on e4 and in the case of ...g5-g4, White can now push f3-f4, keeping lines closed.

20...g4





Black's position is preferable due to the fact that the pawn on b4 constricts White's queenside majority.

28...♔c5

It seemed at first that it was time to blow up the enemy's foundations in the centre with 28...d5, but things are not so clear after 29 ♖b2 dxe4 30 ♘xe4 (weaker is 30 fxe4 ♞eg4) 30...♞xe4 31 ♖xe4 and then what?

29 ♖b2 ♔b6?

Time-trouble mistakes begin. It was better to retreat, if at all, to a7.

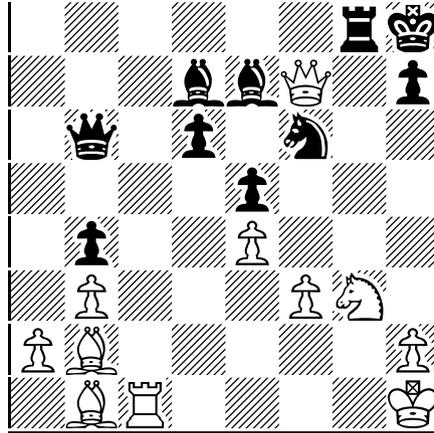
30 ♔h3?

And here the computer-like 30 ♔b5! is stronger. White doesn't fear the loss of f3 and after 30...♔xb5 31 ♘xb5 ♞xf3 (or 31...♞d8 32 ♖xe5 dxe5 33 ♞xd8+ ♖xd8 34 ♞d6) 32 ♘xd6 White has a won position, since b7 and f7 are hanging.

30...♖c8 31 ♞c1 ♖d7 32 ♔h6 ♔b7 33 ♔f4 ♞g6 34 ♞de2 ♔b8 35 ♔e3 ♞g8 36 ♞f4 ♔d8 37 ♞d3! ♞xd3 38 ♔xd3

Threatening e4-e5, but it would be more accurate to play 38 ♖xd3 e5 39 ♖c4 with a dynamic balance.

38...e5 39 ♔c4 ♔b6 40 ♔xf7?



40...♖e3?!

The calm and cool 40...♙d8! could have won. Then all of Black's minor pieces protect each other and it is possible to send the queen on a raid deep into the enemy camp: for example, 41 ♖c4 ♙b5 42 ♖xb4 ♙e2 43 ♖xb6 ♙xf3+ 44 ♙g1 ♙xb6+ 45 ♙f1 ♗g4 with a rout.

41 ♗f1 ♗g7

Here a 'surgery' would have been timely: 41...♗xg3 42 hxg3 ♖e2 43 ♖c4 ♖xb2 and Black is obviously better.

42 ♖c4 ♙h3 43 ♖c1?

After the correct 43 ♙c1 ♖b6 44 ♗g1 ♗h5 45 ♖e2 ♙g5 there is only compensation for the pawn.

43...♖b6 44 ♗g1??

Black has the upper hand after 44 ♖e1 ♙xf1 45 ♖xf1 ♗g6, but with plenty of play lying ahead. Now, though, it is almost impossible for White to protect f3.

44...♖f2 0-1

45 ♖d1 would run into 45...♗h5 with a lethal attack.

I have been on the other side of the barricades too. In Belgium a local player closed the long dark-squared diagonal with the reckless ...f7-f6. This weakened the pawn on e6, which is rare for Hedgehog structures.

Game 90
S.Kasparov-D.Sadkowski
 Braaschat 2015

1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗c6 5 ♗b5 d6 6 c4 ♗f6 7 ♗1c3 a6 8 ♗a3 b6 9 ♙e3 ♙e7

The Hedgehog Defence

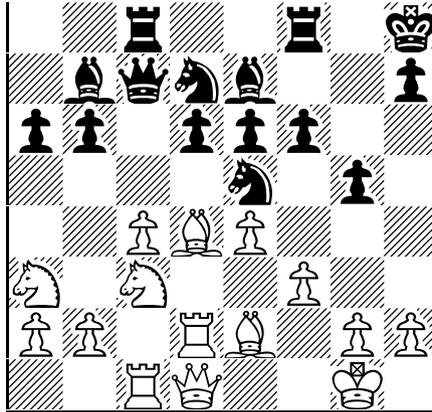
10 ♖e2 0-0 11 0-0 ♙b7 12 ♜b3 ♞d7 13 ♚ad1 ♜c8 14 ♞d2 ♝c7 15 ♚c1 ♞ce5 16 f3

Let's skip the previous moves; our subject begins here.

16...g5

This is not only an advance, but also prevention against f3-f4. The non-Hedgehogesque 16...f5!? is also possible, and if 17 exf5 ♜xf5 with counterplay.

17 ♜d1 ♙h8 18 ♙d4 f6



I doubt the advisability of such a set-up. Pushing the f-pawn is a rare sight in the Hedgehog. The negatives are obvious: the light squares are weakened, especially the a6-pawn, and Black's minor pieces can't use f6. Returning with 18...♙g8 was better.

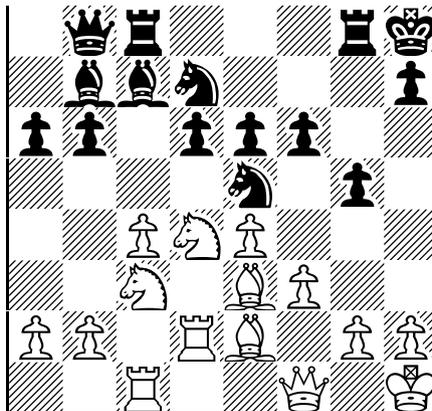
19 ♙e3 ♜g8 20 ♙h1

One can save a tempo with 20 ♝f1, intending 20...g4? 21 f4 ♞f3+ 22 ♙xf3 gxf3 23 ♝xf3.

20...♜b8 21 ♝f1

Amongst other things, this guards the pawn on c4 which allows the knight to leave a3.

21...♙d8?! 22 ♞c2 ♙c7 23 ♞d4



Now you can see the result of the advance ...f7-f6. The pawn on e6 requires constant care and at some point the sacrifice ♖d4xe6 may happen followed by the leap of the remaining knight to d5.

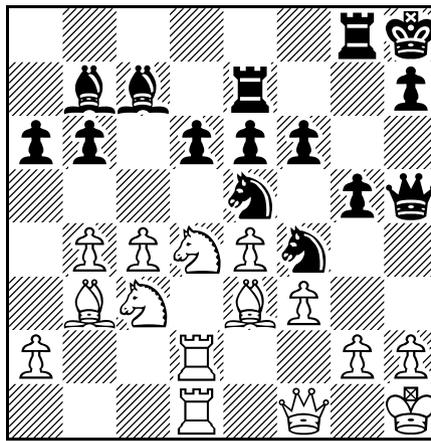
23...♖ce8 24 ♖g1 ♗g6 25 b4 ♞f4 26 ♙d1!

This is a good idea. Firstly, it keeps as many pieces as possible on the board and Black remains cramped as he has less space. Secondly, the bishop is regrouped to b3, from where it will cast grasping glances at the e6-pawn.

26...♞e5 27 ♙e3

Just in case White takes aim at the knight on f4, so the advance ...g5-g4 will be even harder for Black to arrange.

27...♖e7 28 ♙b3 ♜e8 29 ♖cd1 ♞h5



This is the key moment of the game. Either now or on the next move one has to make a responsible decision as White's pieces are currently very active and harmoniously grouped.

30 ♙xf4

A sudden 30 b5! would have been very strong. It may look strange, but the thing is that Black fails in fixing his situation on the queenside: for example, 30...a5 31 ♙xf4 gxf4 32 ♞xe6! ♖xe6 33 c5 ♖ee8 34 c6 ♙c8 35 ♞d5 with an overwhelming superiority for White and 35...♙d8 runs into 36 c7.

30...gxf4 31 c5

31 ♞xe6! ♖xe6 32 c5 is still promising, although with slightly less impact than above.

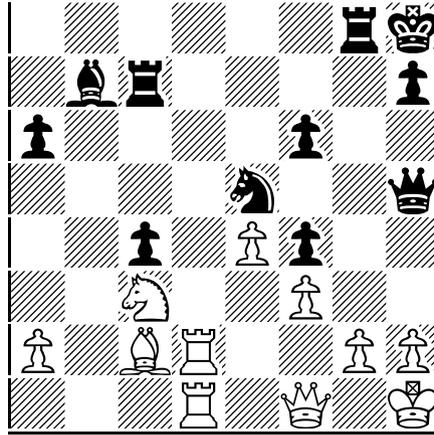
31...dxc5 32 bxc5 bxc5 33 ♞xe6 c4!

Do you see the difference? Now there is this resource.

34 ♞xc7

34 ♙xc4 would be more accurate. After 34...♞f7 (if 34...♞xc4 35 ♞xc4 ♙a5 36 ♞xf4 ♞e5 37 ♞cd5 no one can doubt White's advantage) 35 ♙b3 ♖xe6 I should have continued the variation for one more move. Alas, I didn't find the manoeuvre 36 ♞e2!, retaining the advantage.

34...♖xc7 35 ♘c2



The situation has stabilized. Due to his better pawn structure White's odds are better, but the 'permanent' knight on e5 is very powerful and it is necessary to consider threats like ...♘e5xf3.

35...♖cg7 36 ♖d8

The exchange of at least one pair of rooks is good for reducing the tension down the g-file.

36...♙g5 37 ♖xg8+ ♖xg8 38 ♖d2 ♘c8 39 ♘d5 ♘e6 40 ♘c3?!

The last few moves before the first time control do not abound with accuracy. 40 ♙f2 would have been better.

40...♖g6?

The start of a self-destructive reorganization.

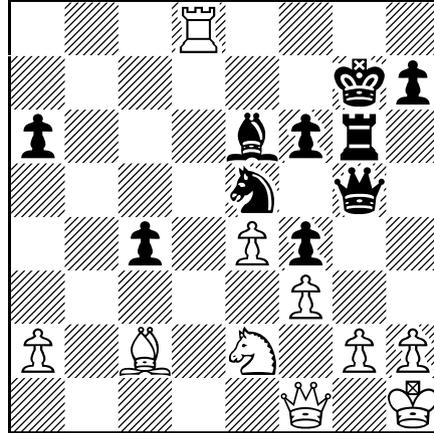
41 ♖d8+

The simple 41 ♖d6 is strong, attacking the bishop and the pawn on a6 simultaneously. Swoops like 41...♘h3?? don't work: 42 gxh3 ♘xf3 43 ♘e2 and Black is lost.

41...♙g7?

Better was 41...♖g8 42 ♖d6 ♘c8.

42 ♘e2!



Patently this manoeuvre was overlooked by the Polish player. It suddenly turns out that there is no real defence against White's numerous threats.

42...c3 43 ♖f2

43 ♘d4 is also possible, and if 43...f5 44 ♖a8 leading to victory.

43...♘f7

Or if 43...♙xa2 44 ♘d4 and the knight heads for f5.

44 ♖a8 ♖a5 45 a4 ♙c4 46 ♘xf4 ♖g5 47 h4 ♗e5 48 ♖g3+ 1-0

48...♙h6 49 ♖g8 spells the end.

Now let's observe how this line is handled by some strong players. A Serbian Grandmaster demonstrated that the idea of exchanging the f-pawn for the g-pawn is risky for White. Indeed, Black quickly obtained a significant advantage.

Game 91
M.Nemeth-R.Markus
Hungary 2012

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 c4 ♘f6 6 ♘c3 ♖c7

A Swiss Grandmaster carried out a suspicious pawn sacrifice after 6...d6 7 ♙e2 ♙e7 8 0-0 b6 9 ♙e3 ♙b7 10 f3 ♘bd7 11 ♖d2 0-0 12 ♖ac1 ♙h8 13 ♖fd1 ♖g8 14 b4.