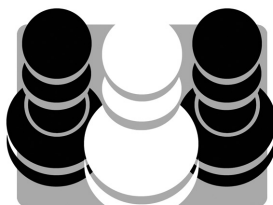


# Advanced Chess Tactics

By

**Lev Psakhis**



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# Contents

Key to Symbols used	4
Preface	5
1 Attacking in the Benoni	7
2 Attacking with Hanging Pawns	47
3 IQP Positions: Attacking the King with Pieces	69
4 IQP Positions: Attacking with the h-pawn	105
5 IQP Positions: Versus the c-pawn	131
6 Attack in the Sicilian Labyrinths	153
7 Attack in the Catacombs of the Caro-Kann	215
8 Attacking in Rare and Non-Standard Openings	279
9 57 Exercises	321
Solutions	332
Game Index	361
Player Index	362

# Preface

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Throughout most of my life I have been a chess professional. Spending six to eight months a year at tournaments, I fully satisfied my chess hunger. Later, somewhat to my surprise, I realized that I was playing the game less and less, and teaching it more and more. Then in 2006, I finally took my leave of the game as a player. I wiped away the odd few manly tears, “hung my skates on the wall” and started leading the far from easy life of a chess coach. This gave me the chance to look at the game from the other side of the fence.

I endeavoured to work only with talented players, and was quite astonished to find how even the very strong ones were lacking in classical chess education. There is a kind of blind faith in openings. A typical view is, “I’m going to learn a new line in the Najdorf, or maybe two, maybe five, and I’ll beat everybody.” This goes with an obvious neglect of other equally important aspects of the game. True, for grandmasters rated over 2650, good opening knowledge is essential – but then *they* aren’t reading these lines, are they?

What do you need for good results in tournaments? A sensible knowledge of the openings, making use of a fair dose of common sense; an understanding of basic strategic laws (how to handle positions with various pawn structures, how to play against weaknesses, and so forth – the study of games by Petrosian, Karpov and many others is a great help here!); improvement of your tactical skill, with good precise calculation of variations two to four moves long; a flair for the attack (in *this* department, games by Kasparov, Tal, Alekhine and Judit Polgar will not only give you great pleasure but afford invaluable help); and of course, good play in the endgame. Material on the level of Mark Dvoretsky’s *Endgame Manual* is in my view fully adequate for the vast majority of grandmasters, while players in a somewhat lower category can be quite content with less.

The object of analysis in this book is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of chess – that sovereign entity, *the attack!* We may take any amount of pleasure in playing against a weak pawn or, say, against a poorly placed knight in the enemy camp; but it’s only when we conduct an attack on the opponent’s king that the blood’s adrenalin content soars and our heart tries to leap out of our chest. Such a splendid feeling! Not that I have any wish whatever to isolate the business of attack as some kind of separate component of chess. I even devised this motto: Attack is the continuation of strategy by other means. I only hope General Carl von Clausewitz won’t take me to court for plagiarism!

A few words about the structure of the book: attack in chess has many facets, and several systems can be devised for classifying the examples. For instance a scheme would be possible with such headings as attacking with the two bishops, giving mate with your last remaining pawn, sacrificing a rook, and so forth. I decided to try a somewhat different scheme: attacking in various specific openings, and attacking in positions with certain typical pawn structures. How far I have succeeded in this, you must judge. As they say, you cannot get a quart into a pint pot. Naturally I am not hoping to teach you how to checkmate all your opponents in (let us say) the Sicilian Defence, within the confines of a single book. That would of course be impossible! I have simply tried to convey my views on positions that contain attacking chances – and to share my experience

of playing them, using typical or sometimes *not* so typical devices. Many splendid openings had to be left out, and this is not down to my opinion of them but merely to the shortage of space. Now, about the games: selecting them was not a simple task, considering that so many works on tactics and aggression were on the chess book market and that I was categorically opposed to repeating other people's analyses. It is for this latter reason, and not at all out of unbridled narcissism, that I have included many games of my own. But that is not all. For several years now, inspired by Garry Kasparov's immensely interesting work *My Great Predecessors*, I have been diligently studying the games of the great former generation that included Mikhail Tal, Boris Spassky, Leonid Stein, Viktor Korchnoi, Tigran Petrosian and many another illustrious names. It frankly amazed me to ascertain how many games from that era, which is not so very distant, had remained practically uninvestigated. It seemed to me quite a senseless idea to analyse the brilliant victories of Kasparov, Anand or Topalov for the thousandth time; in a country like India, for instance, where I have spent a fair amount of time coaching with delight and gratitude, these games are known in every nursery school! It therefore seemed entirely reasonable to focus primarily on games played by the giants of that earlier generation. Many of the games, naturally, are wins by Mikhail Tal, and this of course is not surprising. Few players have conducted as many brilliant attacks as the Hussar from Riga. Some games will strike you as familiar – this was impossible to avoid – but all of them are supplied with some *fundamentally* new analysis, allowing you to look at them from an entirely new angle.

Who is this book intended for? I think (hope) that chess players ranging from 2000 to 2600 will find something useful and interesting in it. While writing it, I visualized a typical reader as a young International Master who doesn't want to rest content with what he has already achieved. But of course, players in a considerably weaker class can also benefit from the book. There is just one proviso. I have tried to write in a lively, individual manner, but the study of the material demands quite serious work. And to this end, it is highly desirable to use that antiquated device, a *chessboard*. Don't forget that improvement (and not just in chess) can result only from independent work. The best coach in the world can only help you with useful advice and a selection of important material – it is still up to you to assimilate it!

A few practical hints:

(1) Don't go out of your way to calculate long variations. A capacity for *precise* calculation to a depth of 2-4 moves is usually quite enough.

(2) An attack may be prepared over quite a long stretch of time, but when carrying it out, do so at top speed without letting your opponent get his bearings.

(3) Don't relax too soon, even if it seems to you that the goal is already attained – your opponent may take a completely different view.

(4) Most importantly: constant time-scrambles are the worst sign of a poor chess education!

In conclusion I would like to say that writing this book was hard work for me, but very interesting too. I hope you will enjoy it.

Lev Psakhis  
Rishon le Zion, Israel  
October 2011

# Chapter 1

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## Attacking in the Benoni



Tel Aviv 1990  
My last game against the great Mikhail Tal

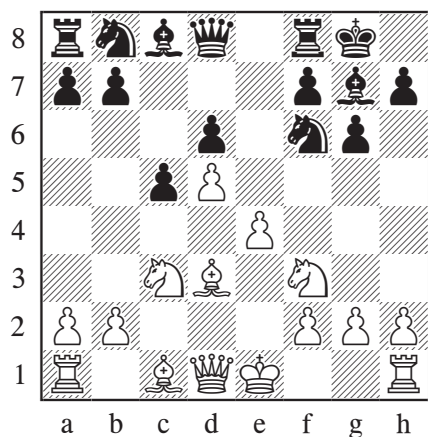
The Benoni is an opening for people with excellent tactical vision and nerves of steel. You almost always feel distinctly anxious about Black's position: White has an advantage in space, and often in development too. Why, then, have so many strong and enterprising players included this opening in their repertoire? It is sufficient to recall the names of Tal, Fischer, Stein, Topalov, Gashimov and Ljubojevic; indeed your obedient servant himself belonged to this exclusive club for decades. The reason is simple; unlike many other openings that are a good deal safer, the Benoni enables Black to fight for the initiative (and often obtain it!) literally from the very first moves. Of course it means accepting a certain risk, but who said that that was such a bad thing? It's hard to find any other opening in which we have so many opportunities to show our tactical and aggressive skills. Who worries about the fact that our opponent has plenty similar chances of his own? There will be a fight, and may the stronger player win.

It should therefore come as no surprise at all that I have chosen the Benoni as material for my opening chapter.

### Isaak Birbrager – Mikhail Tal

USSR 1953

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.♘f3 ♕g7 8.♙d3 0-0



### 9.0-0

Interestingly, 9.h3!? at this point would give a standard position from the 1990s. After the move played, Black could have equalized with no particular trouble.

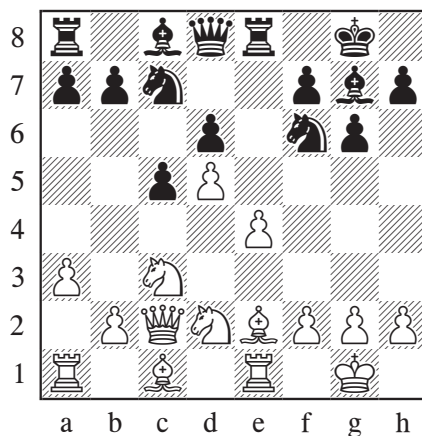
### 9...♘a6

According to the present state of theory, 9...a6!? 10.a4 ♕g4 is stronger. Then after, for instance, 11.h3 ♕xf3 12.♗xf3 ♜bd7∞ Black can face the future with optimism.

### 10.♘d2 ♘b4

A strange move, but let us not forget that Tal was just sixteen at the time. In our day, players of that age are already seasoned veterans, but in 1953 it was quite a different matter!

11.♙e2 ♖e8 12.a3 ♘a6 13.♖e1 ♘c7 14.♙c2



### 14...♖b8

A standard plan; Tal prepares to activate his queenside pawns with ...b5. Black can hardly count on adequate counterplay otherwise.

### 15.a4

Likewise a standard reply – perhaps *too* standard. White had at least two other plans at his disposal.

In the first place he could have played 15.♖b1! and answered 15...b5 with 16.b4!±.

Secondly, he had available an interesting continuation in 15.♖c4 b5 16.♗a5 ♕d7 17.♗c6 ♕xc6 18.dxc6 ♖b6 19.♙f4 ♗xc6 20.♗ad1 with strong pressure that fully compensates for the sacrificed pawn.

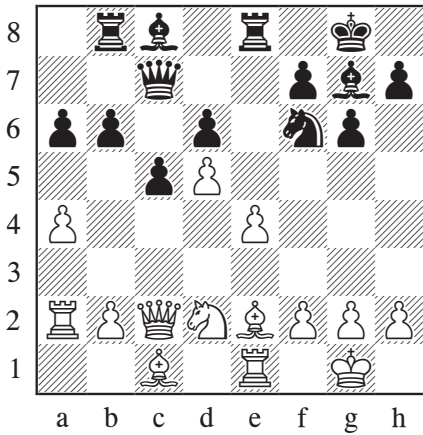
**15...b6 16.♗b5?!**

I don't like this move much. The main defect of Black's position is his lack of space, so practically any exchanges are in his favour – and White is only helping to bring them about. For the alternatives, see the note to Black's 13th move in the next game (Gurgenidze – Tal).

**16...a6 17.♗xc7**

The optimistic 17.♗a7?! ♕b7 18.♗c6 ♕xc6 19.dxc6 d5! actually hands the initiative over to Black. White's problems with his development make themselves felt.

**17...♗xc7 18.♖a2**

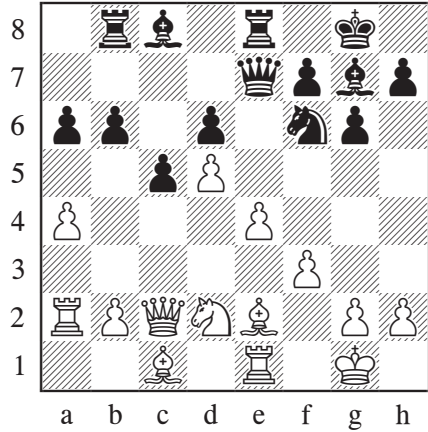


**18...♗e7!?**

Not a bad move, subjecting White to unpleasant pressure down the e-file. But Black would also have quite a good game after the prosaic 18...b5 19.axb5 axb5. White can then choose between 20.b3!?? and 20.b4 c4 21.♙b2, although the latter results in a pawn structure in which he definitely misses his knight on c3.

**19.f3?**

A risky move; the modest 19.b3! would lead to a game with mutual chances after 19...♗xe4 20.♙d3 f5.



Black now has an interesting tactical choice.

**19...♗h5!**

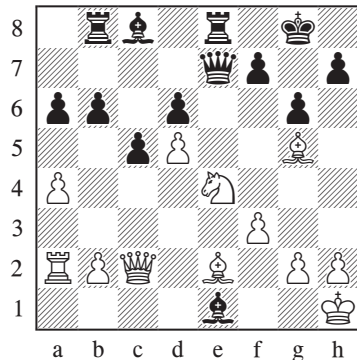
An excellent move, with the aim of seriously getting to grips with the weak dark squares in the opponent's camp. Tal was, no doubt, strongly tempted to follow a different course, with a piece sacrifice:

19...♗xd5 20.exd5 ♙d4† 21.♖h1

White can pin no hopes on 21.♖f1?? ♗e3+.

21...♙f2  
It would also be interesting to try 21...f5!?, taking control of e4.

22.♗e4! ♕xe1 23.♙g5



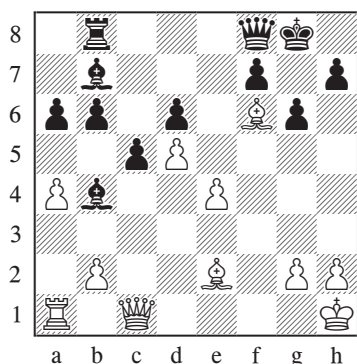
23...♖f8!

The outwardly active 23...♖e5?! meets with the powerful retort 24.♖c1!, and seeing that Black cannot be happy with either 24...♙b7 25.♞a3 ♙b4 26.♞e3 or 24...♙f2 25.♙f6 ♖h5 26.b3!?! – defending the bishop on e2 and winning easily – there only remains 24...♙b4 25.♙f6 ♖h5 26.b3!?, and if 26...♞xe4 27.fxe4 ♙g4 then 28.♙xa6↑ with a large plus for White.

24.♞a1

Approximate equality results from both 24.♖c1 ♞xe4! 25.fxe4 ♙f2 26.♙f6 ♙d4 27.♙xd4 cxd4 and 24.♘f6† ♖h8 25.♘e8 ♖xe8.

24...♞xe4! 25.fxe4 ♙b4 26.♙f6 ♙b7 27.♖c1!?!⇒



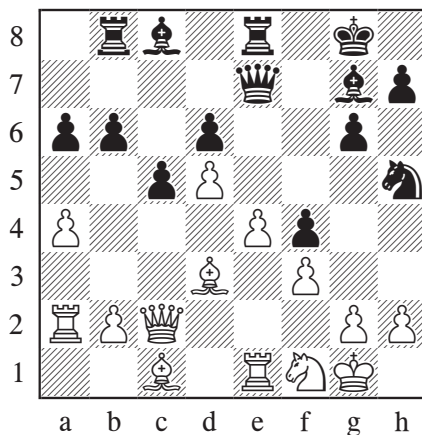
White of course has excellent compensation for the pawn, but does he have a genuine advantage? At any rate, in all these variations Black may be risking more than his opponent. Tal was certainly right, then, to choose the move he did. (Still, it would be interesting to know which variations he worked out, and in which ones he was rather following his renowned intuition.)

20.♘f1

White already has to walk on a knife edge. His knight can't stray too far from the king, since after 20.♘c4 b5 21.axb5 axb5 22.♘e3 (I don't think you could find many players who

would want to continue with 22.♘a5 ♙d4† 23.♘f1 ♖h4+!) 22...♙d4, Black is threatening to play ...f5 at a suitable moment, and it isn't entirely clear how White is going to guard the dark squares on the kingside.

20...f5↑ 21.♙d3 f4!



22.g4!

Birbrager has to keep on finding what are virtually only moves. Thus, the natural 22.♘h1 would lose quickly to 22...♖h4 23.♞e2 (or 23.♙d2 ♙d4+!) 23...♙d4, when White lacks a suitable defence against the simple threat of 24...♘g3†!.

22...♙d4† 23.♘h1

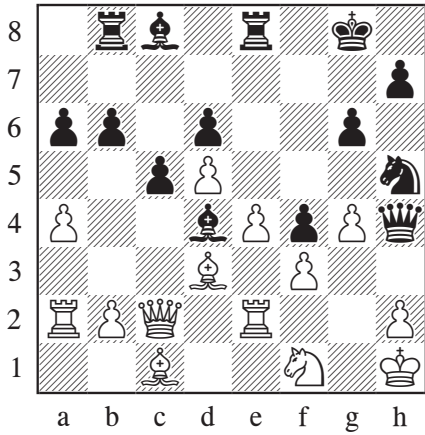
This time, if White wishes to lose the game in short order, he can continue 23.♘g2?. Then after the forced moves 23...♖h4 24.♞e2 ♙xg4! 25.fxg4 f3† 26.♖xf3 ♞f8+ he can simply stop the clock!

23...♖h4 24.♞e2

On 24.♞e2, Black has 24...♙f2!.

There is no salvation in 24.gxh5 either. After 24...♖xe1 25.♙xf4 ♖h4 26.♙xd6 ♖f6! 27.♙xb8 ♖xf3† 28.♖g2 ♖xd3 29.♞a3 ♖xe4+ Black's two mighty bishops will bring him the long-awaited point.





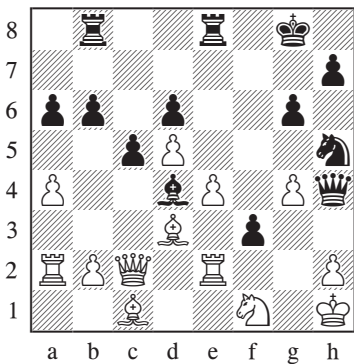
24...♖h3?!

Tal's first error in the game. At this point Black had a pleasant choice.

For one thing, he could play 24...♘g3+!? 25.♘xg3 fxg3 26.♖g2 gxh2 27.♗e2 ♖f8↑, though in this line White would retain decent defensive possibilities.

Secondly, Black had the very strong: 24...♙xg4! 25.fxg4 f3!

For a while I was fascinated by the variation 25...♗h3! 26.♗d2 f3 27.gxh5 ♖xe4! 28.♖f2 ♖e2! 29.♙e3 ♖xc2 30.♙xc2 ♙xe3 31.♘xe3 ♖e8, when Black has a plus – but is it sufficient for victory?



26.gxh5

Or 26.♖f2 c4!, hitting White in the most awkward place. The weakness of his e-pawn

is his undoing: 27.♙e3 ♙xe3 28.♖xf3 ♗xg4 29.♖xe3 cxd3 30.♗xd3 ♘f4 31.♗d2 ♖xe4+ and White's defensive possibilities are exhausted.

26...fxe2!? 27.♗xe2 c4!

Once again exploiting the same motif; this is stronger than 27...♖f8 28.♙e3.

28.♙xc4

White simply has no other move; given his overall development problems, he would lose at once after 28.♙c2 ♖f8+.

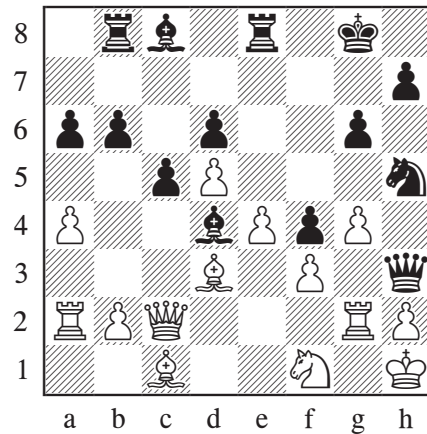
28...♖xe4 29.♙e3

29.♗g2 ♖g4 30.♘g3 ♖f8+ leaves White with no hope of salvation either.

29...♙xe3 30.♘xe3 ♗f4 31.♖a3 ♖be8+

Black wins the knight, and with it also the game.

25.♖g2

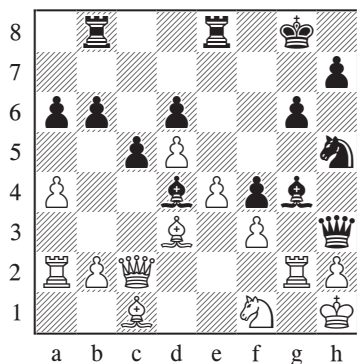


25...♗xf3?

This second error running could have deprived Black of the victory he deserved – but as we know, mistakes never come singly.

The positional 25...♘f6!? was not at all bad; with ...g5 coming next, Black would have a clear initiative.

But the strongest line was the tactical solution: 25...♙xg4!



26. ♖xg4

26...f3 27. ♖f2 c4! 28. ♗xc4 ♖xe4 29. gxh5 ♖e2! 30. ♗xe2 ♗xf2 31. ♘e3 ♗xe3 32. ♗d3 f2 33. ♗e2 ♖f8 34. ♗f1 ♗xh5 35. ♗xe3 ♗xd5† 36. ♗g2 ♗xd3–+ This long but completely forced variation has left White in an absolutely hopeless position.

26... ♗xf3† 27. ♗g2 ♗h3! 28. ♖a3!? f3 29. ♖f2 ♖e5! 30. ♗xa6 ♖f8†

Black has a large plus. Incidentally, try not to forget the methods of attack (...c4! and ...♖e2) which crop up in several variations – perhaps you will manage to carry out something similar in your own games.

26. ♘d2

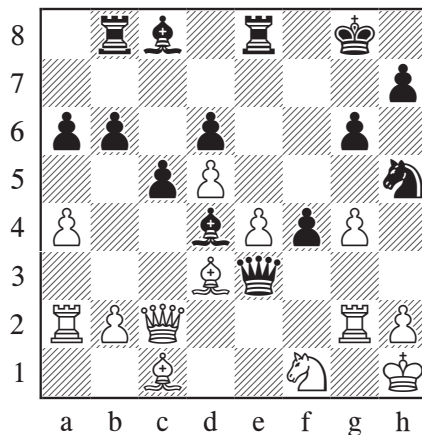
White is not to be envied after 26.gxh5?, when Black is offered a wonderful choice. He can play 26...♖xe4! 27. ♗e2 ♖xe2 28. ♗xe2 ♗xe2 29. ♖xe2 ♗b7, successfully targeting both the king and the misplaced rook on a2. Or he may prefer 26...♗h3! 27. ♖a3!? ♖xe4 28. ♗xa6 ♗e3, and White obviously has to pay a high price to avoid immediate loss. Beautiful variations!

Now, however, the white knight intends to persecute the black queen perpetually, and the position appears to have taken on a drawish character. In such situations we have to decide how much risk we are prepared to take in order to pay for the right of playing on; but beware – sometimes the price becomes excessive!

26... ♗e3

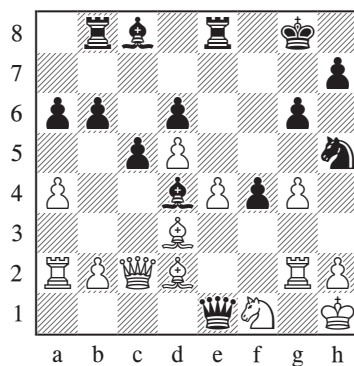
Avoiding the draw isn't so simple; after 26... ♗h3 27.gxh5 ♗xh5 28. ♗e2± White's chances are already preferable.

27. ♘f1



27... ♗f3

It seems to me that at this moment Mikhail Tal might easily have been a prey to his emotions. It's obvious that a drawn result didn't suit him at all. I can understand this very well – I have been in similar situations plenty of times myself – but why he didn't choose the comparatively "normal" 27... ♗e1! is unclear to me. The best reply would probably be 28. ♗d2!? (28.gxh5 ♗h3 29. ♗xf4 c4! is unpleasant for White after either 30. ♗d2 ♗xg2† 31. ♗xg2 ♗xd2† 32. ♘d2 cxd3† or 30. ♗xc4 ♖f8! 31. ♗d2 ♗xg2† 32. ♗xg2 ♗xe4†–+), when the struggle could continue with:



28...♖h4 29.gxh5 ♘h3 30.♙c3 ♘xg2†  
 31.♖xg2 ♙xc3 32.bxc3 ♖xh5 33.♙xa6 ♖e5  
 giving approximate equality, but White would  
 have a couple of reefs to negotiate.

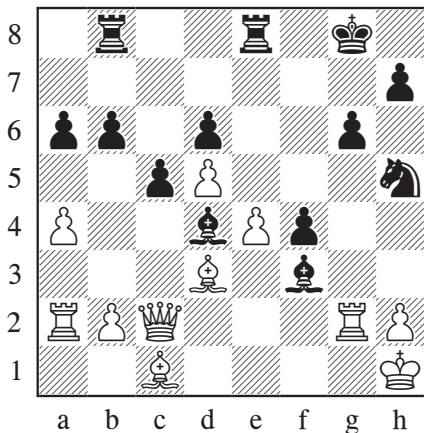
**28.♘d2**

Practically forcing a draw, and indeed 99%  
 of opponents would now have settled for the  
 half point – but on this day Birbrager was up  
 against an exception to the general rule!

Incidentally, 28.♖a3 ♘f6 29.♘d2 was weaker  
 in view of 29...♖h3 30.♙b5 ♖xg2†! 31.♙xg2  
 axb5, when Black holds the initiative despite  
 parting with his queen.

**28...♙xg4?! 29.♘xf3 ♙xf3**

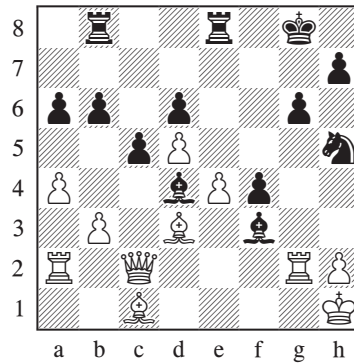
It is time to catch our breath a little. The  
 fact is that Tal has made an outright sacrifice of  
 queen for rook – or more precisely, we might  
 say, for a minor piece; for who would want to  
 part with the light-squared bishop, the pride  
 of Black's position, by taking on g2 without  
 dire necessity? Black does of course have  
 some compensation for the queen, but it is  
 psychological more than anything else. White  
 was simply dumbstruck by such a rapid change  
 in the situation, and most likely he was in time  
 trouble – which immediately left its mark on  
 the course of the game.



**30.h4!?**

It's hard for me to criticize this move; White  
 takes control of g5 and gives his king a square.  
 Let's look at two further possibilities that he  
 had available:

Black should not have any real problems after  
 30.b3!?, which brings the a2-rook into play  
 but has its defects:



30...♖xe4! 31.♙xe4 ♖e8 32.♖c4 ♖xe4 33.h4  
 ♙e5! 34.♖xa6 ♖e1† 35.♙h2 ♖xc1 and it's  
 quite impossible to predict how this will all  
 end!

Interesting complications also arise from:  
 30.♙d2 ♖e5

How easy it would now be to miss the threat  
 of 31...♘g3†!

31.h4□ ♖f8 32.♙h2!

Or 32.♙c3 ♘xg2† 33.♖xg2 f3 34.♖h3!?! f2  
 35.♙xd4 cxd4 36.♖a1 ♘f4 37.♖g3 ♘h5  
 38.♖g4 ♘f4± and White still has to prove  
 his advantage.

32...♙xg2 33.♙xg2 f3† 34.♙h2 ♘f6!

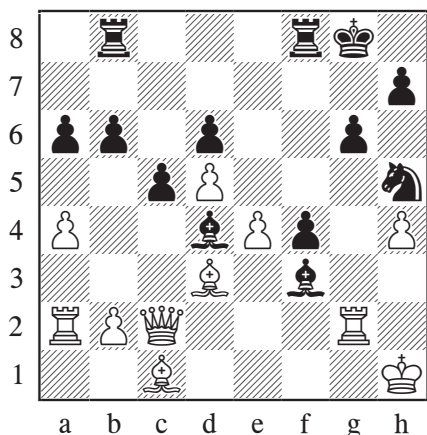
And now in the event of:

35.♙f4 ♘xe4 36.♙xe5 ♙xe5† 37.♙h3 f2  
 38.♙g2 ♖f4

The real fun is only just starting!

As we can see, playing a position like this for  
 White is not at all a simple matter, so it's no  
 surprise that his nerves are the first to crack.

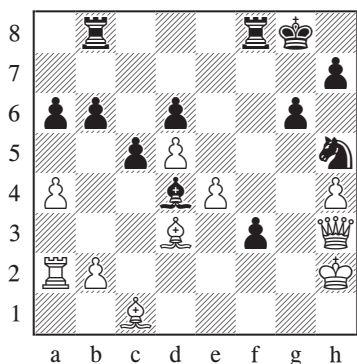
30...♖f8



31.♗e2??

The decisive mistake, in what was probably a won position! White had a wide choice of lines that should have led to victory after a certain amount of nervous tension – for example 31.b3!? or 31.♖a1!? or 31.♖a3!? b5 32.axb5 axb5 33.♗h2.

And finally, the following variation was possible: 31.♗h2!? ♗xg2 32.♗xg2 f3 33.♗h3!?



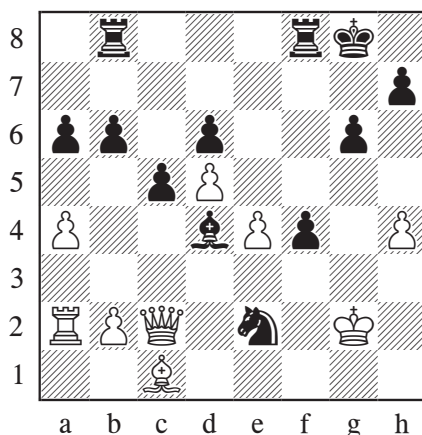
33...c4! 34.♗f1 ♗e5† 35.♗g1! (better than 35.♗h1? ♗g3†) 35...♗d4† 36.♗h1 ♗f4 37.♗xf4 ♖xf4 38.♗e6† ♗g7 But to be fair I would add that the position is not at all simple to assess correctly.

I think if I had to explain what happened in this game in one word, I would say “bewilderment”.

White completely lost control of the events on the board – and retribution was swift!

31...♗g3† 32.♗h2 ♗xg2 33.♗xg2 ♗xe2-+

By now Black has both a material plus and an attack. The affair quickly heads towards its logical conclusion.



34.♗xe2

Bowing to the inevitable! The game could have ended prettily after:

34.♖a3♣ f3† 35.♖xf3 ♖xf3 36.♗xf3 ♖f8† 37.♗g4

White has no chance of salvation in the endgame after 37.♗xe2 ♖f2† 38.♗d3 ♖xc2 39.♗xc2 ♗f7-+.

37...h5† 38.♗g5

38.♗h3 ♖f2 would end the game even more quickly.

38...♗g7! 39.♗xe2

Or 39.e5 ♖f6! 40.♗e4 ♗xe5 41.♗e3 ♗g3 42.♗d3 ♖f5† 43.♗xf5 ♗xf5 44.♗d2 ♗h6! and the white king will be mated from the f7-square!

39...♗h7 40.♗xa6 ♖f7! 41.♗e2 ♗g7-+

And White can only defend against mate next move by sacrificing his queen!

34...f3† 35.♗xf3 ♖xf3 36.♗xf3 ♖f8† 37.♗g3 ♗e5†

A good alternative would have been 37...c4!?

**38. ♖g2 ♕f4**

And White called a halt to his pointless resistance.

**0–1**

Well, what can be said or written about this? The black pieces were played by one of the rare geniuses in all of chess history, a fearless and irreproachable warrior. Although objectively Tal had still to reach his true strength, his famous style is already plain to see. Black obtained a fine position out of the opening and increased his pressure, but at a certain juncture he committed two errors running and ought to have settled for a draw. No doubt this prospect frightened the young player more than the risk of defeat, and what ensued was a simply stunning queen sacrifice – which, though incorrect, gave chances of continuing the fight. Birbrager failed to withstand this pressure and was crushed!

### Bukhuti Gurgenidze – Mikhail Tal

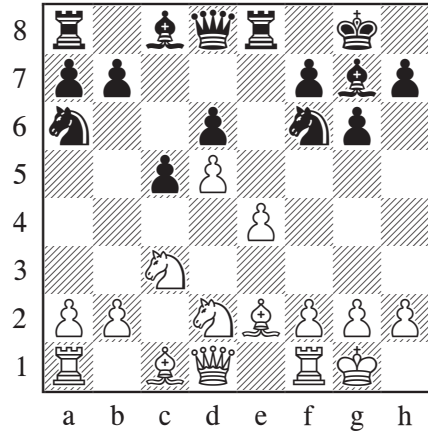
USSR Championship 1957

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘f3 g6**

The Benoni remained an important weapon in Tal's opening repertoire throughout his chess career. He employed it regularly, and nearly always with success; clearly the sharp, unclear positions that arise in this opening were absolutely in keeping with the great champion's style.

**7.e4 ♕g7 8.♕e2 0–0 9.0–0 ♖e8**

I too used to play the Benoni frequently, but at this point my preference diverged from Tal's. My favourite variation was 9...a6 10.a4 ♕g4, hoping for an advantageous exchange of this bishop at the appropriate moment. I also played lines with ...♘a6 from time to time, but my inclination lay elsewhere.

**10.♘d2 ♘a6****11.♖e1**

A rare move – which of course is not to say a bad one. The line seen much more often is 11.f3!? ♘c7 12.a4, and with precise play White can count on a small plus.

**11...♘c7 12.a4 b6 13.♖c2**

13.♕f3 is well met by 13...♕a6!?, while 13.f3 guarantees White no advantage after the standard 13...♘h5!?

It seems to me that the most natural and strongest continuation is 13.h3!?. Then after, for example, 13...♕a6?! 14.♕xa6 ♘a6 15.♘c4↑ White has an easy and pleasant game.

**13...♘g4!?**

A strange move with a single idea – to sacrifice the knight on f2, given the chance. The aim is quite simple, and in the former USSR it was only likely to come off in a schools tournament! That it worked just as well in such a strong event as the national championship is amazing.

In this position Black usually plays:

**13...♖b8!?**

We have transposed to the position after Black's 15th move in Birbrager – Tal.