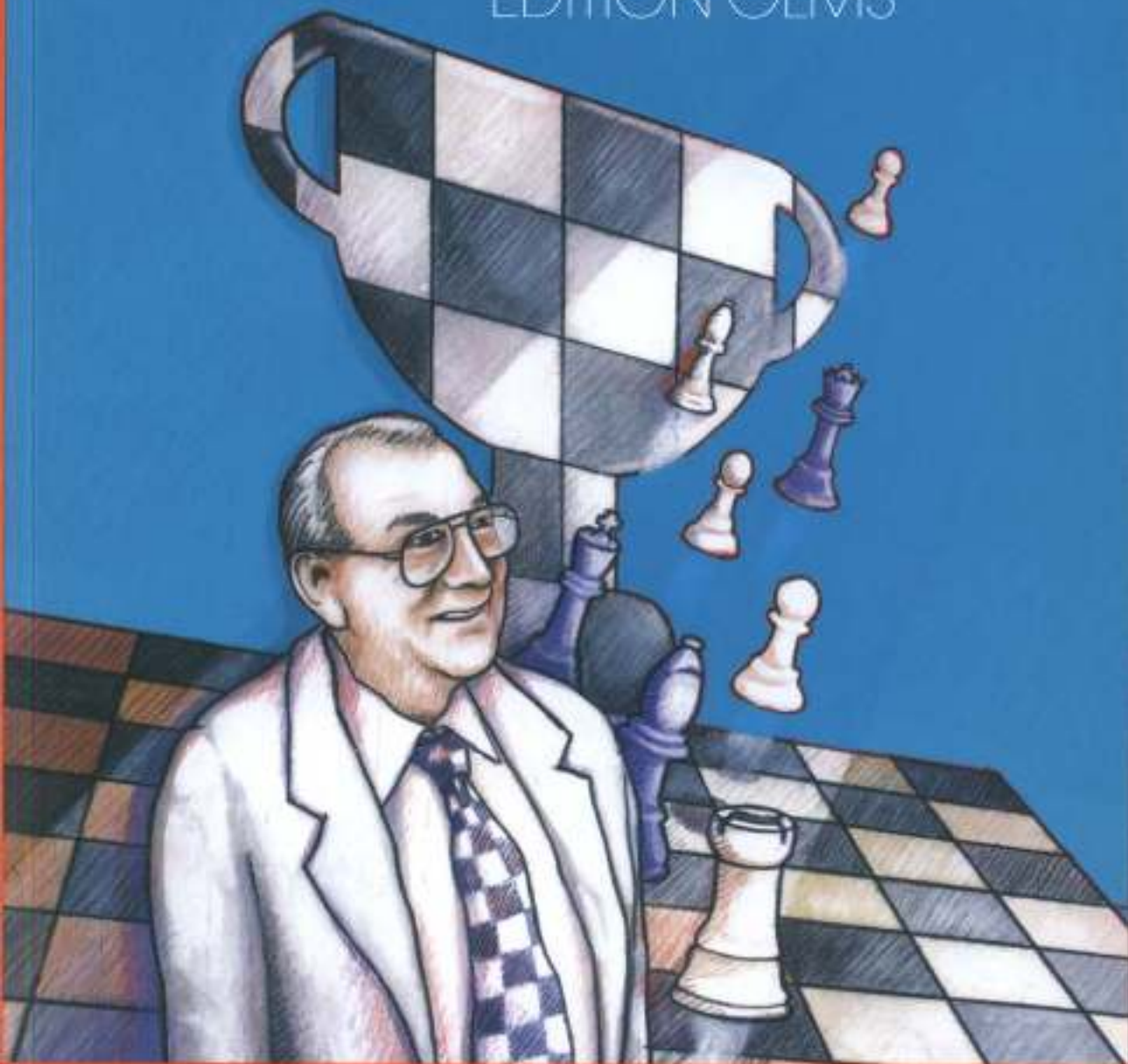


**Victor Korchnoi**

# **MY BEST GAMES**

Progress in Chess

EDITION OLMS



Updated and revised anniversary edition



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# **Progress in Chess**

Volume 30 of the ongoing series

Editorial board

GM Victor Korchnoi

GM Helmut Pfleger

GM Nigel Short

GM Rudolf Teschner

2011

EDITION OLMS



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victor Korchnoi

# My Best Games

Updated and revised  
anniversary edition

Two volumes in one

Edited and translated  
by Ken Neat

2011  
EDITION OLMS



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## Foreword

A decade ago Edition Olms published a collection of my selected games in two volumes, containing my best games with White, and my best games with Black. Now, to mark the occasion of my 80th birthday, the publisher has decided to bring out this combined, single volume, for which I have annotated an additional ten games, including several from the last few years.

A young grandmaster compiling such a book would probably have to rack his brains over where to find a hundred and ten games that he had won. But I had to choose these out of well over two thousand that I have won... Not everyone approved of my choice. Sometimes even the translator of these books was surprised. I must tell the reader about the criteria by which I selected these games.

The games cover a period of more than half a century – from 1951 to the year 2003. The first criterion by which I was guided was that the games should be more or less evenly spread over the different decades.

I have played against players of four generations, and against hundreds of masters and grandmasters. My second most important criterion was definitely to give games against representatives of all four generations. And in general: the more opponents, the better!

In my career I have played dozens of diverse opening positions. There are many different aspects to chess, and I wanted to reflect this in my book. Avoid repetition! The greater the number of positions, dissimilar one from another, the better!

The fourth criterion – only the fourth – was the quality of the games. They should contain few bad mistakes, especially by me. However, they had to be fighting games, not those where the play is all one way. Well, and in a fierce struggle, mistakes are inevitable...

And one more thing. Chess is my life, and these games are fragments of this life. And, naturally, I wanted to accompany each such fragment with a conversation with chess enthusiasts. If during the course of a game I found there was nothing to disclose to the readers, I rejected it, however good the game!

In the preparation of this second edition I should like to mention the tremendous help of my diligent and accurate supporter, Mr. Ken Neat.

Whether I have succeeded with my book, it is not clear. But I very much hope that, as he delves into it, the reader will not be bored...

*Victor Korchnoi*  
*Wohlen, January 2011*



## Preface

There are chess players whose names are known to all lovers of the game, although they have never been world champions. One is Nimzowitsch. Another is Rubinstein. Victor Korchnoi is also one of these. He has played creditably in matches for the world championship, he has won major tournaments in which all the strongest players were participating, and his contribution to the game has been no less significant than that of those who have officially stood at the very summit of the enormous chess pyramid.

I first saw Korchnoi nearly fifty years ago at a chess festival in the Leningrad Pioneers' Palace. I had just gained a draw with Spassky in a simultaneous display, and, my heart beating with happiness, I went over to another display that was being given by a young man, smoking cigarette after cigarette, and with a characteristic facial expression. It was Victor Korchnoi. A boy, behind whom I stood, was being given advice by those who had not found a place in the display. Not having decided what move to make, the boy asked Korchnoi, who had come up to his board, for permission to miss this turn. And at that instant Korchnoi uttered a short word, which many were to hear, including me on more than one occasion, in reply to a draw offer. Korchnoi said 'Nyet'.

His uncompromising nature, motivation, and eagerness for a struggle are well known. These qualities, together with

imagination in chess, are usually typical of youth, and with age they normally fall away. Experience is accumulated, novelty loses its attraction, and there is hardly anything to excite the imagination or to urge one on, as in one's younger years. With Victor Korchnoi this has not happened. He is still searching, analysing, preparing for tournaments, and playing.

Korchnoi often says about himself that he was never a child prodigy: both the master title, and that of grandmaster, as well as his further ascent up the chess hierarchy, were achieved by him with considerable difficulty, accompanied by rises and falls. Perhaps this is so. Although, without enormous talent it is not possible to achieve such outstanding results and to remain for so long among the world's chess elite. But apart from enormous chess talent, tenacity and character, there are two qualities that distinguish Korchnoi among his many colleagues: his boundless love for the game, and his absolute honesty in analysis. Honesty, which at times is merciless with regard to his opponent, but in particular to himself. It is this quality that makes the book, which the reader now has before him, not only a splendid textbook on chess, but it also paints an accurate portrait of one of the most remarkable masters of the game,

The title of Korchnoi's first book, published more than two decades ago, was '*Chess is my Life*'. It is in fact his life's

conception, born on a cold Autumn day in the hungry Leningrad of 1944, when a thirteen-year-old youth went along to the chess club in the Pioneers' Palace. A conception to which he has remained true to this day.

I am sure that the grey matter concerned with chess occupies a much greater volume in Korchnoi's brain, than is the case with any other player. Greater even than with those glittering names that are to be found today at the top of the strongest international tournaments and in matches for the world championship.

After concluding a game, Victor is not in a hurry to leave the tournament hall. He moves from board to board, stopping by positions that attract his attention. He stands in a characteristic pose, occasionally rocking from side to side, and from his glance directed at the board, the rapid rising and lowering of his eyebrows, and his entire facial expressions, one can follow the unceasing working of his brain, occupied in the analysis of variations of a chess game.

In recent times he has often said: 'I play chess in order to show young lads that there is still something they can learn from me...' At the tournament in the Dutch town of Tilburg in 1998 Korchnoi reprimanded some young grandmasters: 'Why didn't you play on in this position? You had chances. Dangerous? Then you'd be better not playing chess at all, if you find it dangerous...'

'And you, aren't you ashamed of agreeing a draw after half an hour with White against Anand? Isn't it interesting – to play Anand? Is it every day that you have the chance to play Anand? Yesterday against Kramnik I too could have taken on

d5 in the Slav and would definitely not have lost, but I don't play that way, and I never will play that way, if I think there is a variation that leads to an advantage. Even if the position turns out to be dangerous and complicated. After all, it is dangerous for both players...'

In the late sixties and early seventies I helped Victor to prepare for his candidates matches for the world championship. It would happen that, after a long day spent analysing, in conversation over dinner I would notice that he was looking past me, his replies would become vague, and I knew that within a short time there would follow a reply such as: 'In the position where we cut short our analysis, things are by no means so good for Black. If White plays, say, ♖b5, what will you do?...' The process of analysis, the search for truth, can go on endlessly for Korchnoi, and this search is no less important for him than the fruits of the work itself.

Once, after he had found a new idea as a result of a lengthy analysis, I advised him not to employ it in a tournament that seemed to me less significant, but to keep it for some more important event. 'For another tournament I'll think up something else', replied Victor 'I don't store up innovations.'

As a rule, Korchnoi's discoveries are not simply a move or a manoeuvre in the opening, strengthening a variation or refuting a generally-accepted evaluation. In most cases it is a matter of a whole complex of ideas, a new concept in a particular defence or variation. And although his name does not figure in the theory of the openings, Korchnoi's discoveries have provided the impetus



for the development of many of them over the decades. Korchnoi's handling of positions from the French Defence, where the presence of an isolated pawn is more than compensated by good piece play, of the Tartakower Variation in the Queen's Gambit, and of the Open Variation in the Ruy Lopez, which was considered not altogether satisfactory after the 1948 match-tournament and was revived by Korchnoi at the very highest level, right up to matches for the world championship, have forced the evaluations of many opening set-ups to be revised. The variation of the Grünfeld Defence, which is today regarded as the main one in this opening and which causes Black a mass of problems, was first genuinely employed by Korchnoi. Many variations of the King's Indian Defence, which Victor considers to be a very difficult opening for Black, and in the depths of his soul even dubious, are inconceivable in the modern theory of the game without the name of Korchnoi.

In a book about the Benoni Defence, John Nunn writes about the 6 g3 variation: 'White's results have not been particularly good with this line, except for Sosonko, who always seems to win!'. I will disclose a secret: a brilliant game, won by Korchnoi almost forty years ago, made such an impression on me that I included this variation in my opening repertoire, and it has served me faithfully throughout all these years (Korchnoi – Tal, Yerevan 1962, Game 11).

When Korchnoi plays chess, he forgets about everything. Tal once told me that before a simultaneous display in Havana, Victor was asked: 'You will be playing Che Guevara. He is a rather weak player, but

he loves chess passionately. He would be happy, if he were able to gain a draw...' Korchnoi understandingly nodded his head. A few hours later he returned to the hotel. 'Well?' 'I crushed them all, all without exception!' 'And Che Guevara?' 'Che Guevara?' 'I also crushed Che Guevara – he hasn't a clue about the Catalan Opening!...'

Playing over the games from the last period, the reader will meet new openings, which up till then had not occurred in Korchnoi's games, and new variations, which he has begun developing only recently. He still wants to test and to try. He likes to repeat the words of Levenfish: 'If a player wants to play a new opening, this means that he is still developing'.

But it is not just the opening that interests him. Those who have analysed with him know that he is happy to study both a tactical middlegame, and a tedious endgame, or to seek a way to save a position that anyone else would hardly try and defend. To this day Victor continues to work hard and intensively on chess. A few years ago, at a training session with the Swiss team, in an analysis of a double-edged position Korchnoi overlooked a combination. The maestro was upset: 'Now I will have to spend at least an additional half an hour a day studying tactics', he informed his astonished listeners.

Twenty-five years ago in Amsterdam, Victor Korchnoi chose the path to freedom. For him the concept of freedom meant primarily the opportunity to play chess without being subject to the laws and demands of the now non-existent state, which demanded unquestioning obedience of all its citizens. He was not a

dissident in the direct sense of this word in the Soviet Union: danger threatened his chess career. The state, by taking his wife and son hostage, forced him to become a dissident.

The place of chess in world culture is less significant, of course, than literature, music or ballet. However, whereas the names of Solzhenitsyn and Rostropovich, Baryshnikov and Brodsky could be avoided being mentioned in the country which had thrown them out, by not publishing their books, and by completely keeping quiet about concerts and performances, with Korchnoi it was much more difficult. Regularly meeting at the chess board with representatives of the Soviet Union, playing matches for the world championship, he provoked the smouldering fury of the authorities, by constantly reminding millions of his former co-citizens of his existence. In reports in the newspapers, radio and television, his name was usually concealed behind the faceless word 'opponent' or 'challenger', and in official articles – 'turncoat' or 'traitor'. But for the reason that it was not printed and was pronounced only in a whisper, it resounded inside the country louder than any fanfare. At the time he made chess a matter of state importance, and happenings in matches for the world championship were reported to the leaders of the Soviet Union directly by telephone, like communiqués from a battlefield. A musical was made about his fate and about the events of one of those matches, and it played to packed houses in the best theatres of London and New York.

'I don't need to go anywhere now, I have no need to fight for anything. I am an amateur', he says. If the word 'amateur' is

given its original meaning, even then it reflects too faintly Victor Korchnoi's attitude to chess. For him chess is everything. He has been afforded a luck which is given to few: not only to do something which one is best at, but also to have a boundless love for it. Love? It is rather a fervent passion, an obsession, life itself, which without chess would become not simply uninteresting, but pointless.

The games that make up this book were played over a period of fifty years. Victor Korchnoi has defeated all the world champions, beginning with Botvinnik, and all the strongest players of the present and the past. Not only from his generation, but even from the following one, there is no one who battles on equal terms with the young, forceful, well-trained professionals. Some have given up the game for good, while others appear from time to time in tournaments for veterans. Playing chess when you are elderly resembles the cruel custom in ancient times, when slaves on galleys had their thumbs cut off: it was still possible to row, but not to throw a lance... Only Korchnoi continues to battle, as he has done all his life: giving his all. It has long ceased to surprise him that he is the oldest participant in a tournament, in most cases by a large margin from the second oldest player. He does not even feel himself to be old, since it is known that age is not so much the body becoming decrepit, as the indifference of the soul. He still experiences very emotionally what happens on the board, and he is affected by defeats even more keenly than before. It can happen that after a game a significantly younger opponent has to endure an angry tirade, which



gives not only an evaluation of the positions that occurred during play, but often they are informed of what Korchnoi thinks about their play in general, and sometimes about them themselves. But these descriptions, like also Korchnoi's thoughts about chess – as the reader will be able to see on many occasions – are normally apt, and unexpected. He advised a strong grandmaster, complaining that he had not won against an opponent who was significantly inferior to him in strength, despite the fact that he had an over-whelming position: 'You were pressing him so strongly, that there was nothing for him to do but make forced moves. You should have allowed him to move about a little, and, you see, he would have thought up something...' On one occasion, observing the play of a young French master at the onset of time trouble: 'Look, look, he has already begun advancing his pawns. This is a weakness of all trained strategists – myself included – in time trouble to begin playing with the pawns. You see, his position has already deteriorated...'

For him the age of a player does not play any role, because in chess, as also in literature or music, performers are not distinguished by years. Therefore, when

analysing a game with a young twelve-year old talent, he talks with him as he would with an adult: 'Do you notice that at the end of the variation suggested by you, your king is left undefended? What if I sacrifice a bishop?' he asks, paying no attention to the bright shining eyes and the trembling chin of his opponent.

A few years ago at a major international tournament, preparing for a game with a highly respectable grandmaster, Korchnoi said: 'I have noticed that he markedly tires towards the end of a game. So I have decided to wear him out, by maintaining the tension to the last hour of play'. His opponent was twenty-five years younger...

In one of the bitter days of 1940, Winston Churchill declared to the demoralised ministers of the French cabinet: 'Whatever you may do, we shall fight on for ever, and ever, and ever.'

Korchnoi has often repeated that he left the Soviet Union, in order to play chess. In this he sees his predestination, his fate. And however the rules of staging competitions change, and whichever new stars rise in the chess firmament, Victor Korchnoi will fight on for ever, and ever, and ever...

*Genna Sosonko*

# Games with White

## GAME 1

### KORCHNOI – KAMYSHOV

Chigorin Memorial Tournament  
Leningrad 1951

*Semi-Slav Defence*

I was no child prodigy. Chess knowledge did not come easily to me. I gained the master title at the age of twenty for my success in a tournament, a game from which I give here.

I quite quickly gained fame as a player who would take any pawns, even the most poisoned, and tenaciously defend them. The blame for this lay with games such as the following.

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 ♗f3 ♗f6 5 ♕g5 dxc4**

The World Champion sets the fashion! In the years of the young champion Mikhail Botvinnik, the so-called Botvinnik Variation with the capture of the c4 pawn and its subsequent retention was exceptionally popular. Very many played it, including myself...

**6 a4**

At that time I more often played 1 e4. I had prepared the variation with 6 a4 specially for my opponent.

**6...♕e7?**

This is a weak move, of course. After conceding the centre with ...dxc4, Black is obliged to play for the retention of his extra pawn (so as to have at least some compensation for the positional conces-

sion!); i.e. 6...♕b4 followed by ...b7-b5 was essential.

**7 e3**

Here 7 e4 was also good. But then in the event of 7...h6 White would probably have had to take on f6, since 8 ♕h4 could have been answered by 8...♗xe4.

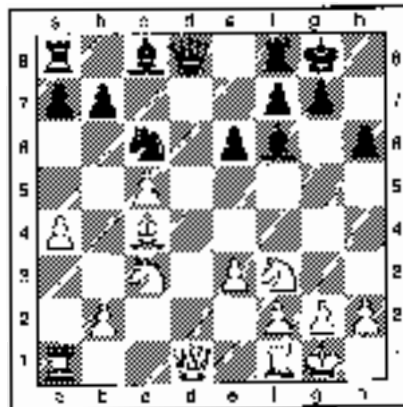
**7...h6 8 ♕h4 c5 9 ♕xc4 ♗c6 10 0-0 0-0?!**

It is hard to think of a more natural move in this position, but it turns out that it would have been more accurate to exchange first on d4.

**11 ♕xf6! ♕xf6**

Or 11...gxf6 12 d5 with advantage to White.

**12 dxc5**



White has won a pawn, and since he has a slight advantage in development and space, it will not be easy for Black to regain it.

**12...♕xc3**

If 12...♖e7 there could have followed





13 ♖d6 ♜d8 14 ♗xe7 ♙xe7 15 ♘e4 f5  
16 ♘d6 (16 ♘g3!?) 16...♙xd6 17 cxd6  
♜xd6 18 ♜fd1 ♜xd1+ 19 ♜xd1 ♙f7  
20 ♙b5. Perhaps Black would have  
managed to save the game, perhaps  
not... If instead 12...♗a5 then, along with  
13 ♙b5, which could have transposed  
into the game, also possible was the  
energetic 13 ♘e4 with strong pressure on  
the black position. Therefore Black took  
on c3 immediately.

**13 bxc3 ♗a5 14 ♙b5 ♜d8**

Or 14...♗xc3 15 ♙xc6 bxc6 16 ♗d6  
♙b7 17 ♜ab1.

**15 ♗b3 ♙d7 16 ♘d4**

As we see, White's extra pawn enables  
him to control important squares in the  
centre, on the d-file, and on the queenside,  
and thanks to his extra c-pawn he has an  
advantage in space...

**16...♜ac8**

If 16...e5 White would have replied  
17 ♘xc6 bxc6 18 ♙c4 ♙e8 19 ♗b4 ♗c7  
20 ♜ad1, still with a positional advantage.

**17 ♜fd1 ♗c7 18 h3**

White is not in a hurry to increase the  
pressure. As before it is difficult for the  
opponent to escape from the vice.

**18...♘a5**

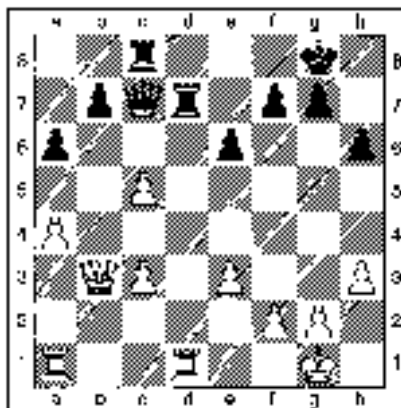
18...♘e7 would have lost by force:  
19 ♙xd7 ♜xd7 20 ♘xe6 ♜xd1+  
21 ♜xd1 fxe6 22 ♗xe6+ ♙f8 23 ♜d7  
♗xc5 24 ♜xe7 ♗xe7 25 ♗xc8+, but  
18...♘e5 came into consideration. In this  
case White would have continued  
19 ♙e2, still retaining his extra pawn.

**19 ♗b4 a6 20 ♙xd7 ♜xd7 21 ♘b3**

Had it been the queen's rook that was  
standing at d1, then ♘xe6 would have  
won. But the rook at a1 might have come

in useful on the b-file.

**21...♘xb3 22 ♗xb3**



**22...♜e7?**

It is clear that 22...♜xd1+ 23 ♜xd1 ♗xc5  
24 ♗xb7 would not have regained the  
pawn. Black has set himself the aim of  
regaining the c5 pawn, and for the sake of  
this he moves his rook off the only open  
file. Correct was 22...♜cd8 23 ♜xd7 ♜xd7  
24 ♗b4 ♜d2 with full compensation for  
the lost, or as one can now say, for the  
'sacrificed' pawn.

**23 ♗b4 ♙f8**

23...♗xc5 was not possible on account of  
24 ♜d8+ ♙h7 25 ♜xc8 ♗xc8 26 ♗xe7,  
while if 23...♙h7 White could have  
played 24 c6 bxc6 25 ♗e4+ g6 26 ♗d3  
a5 27 ♜ab1 – he has occupied both open  
files and stands slightly better.

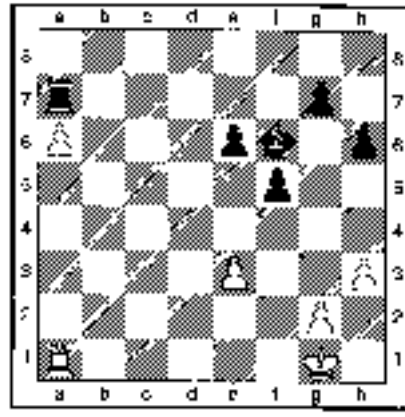
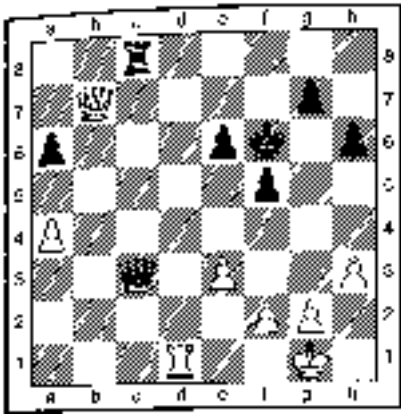
**24 ♜ab1 f6 25 ♗e4!**

24...♙e8 would also have been answered  
by 25 ♗e4, with a number of threats.

**25...f5 26 ♗f3 ♙f7 27 ♜b6**

Threatening ♜db1. Black is forced to take  
on c5.

**27...♗xc5 28 ♜xb7 ♗xc3 29 ♜xe7+ ♙xe7 30 ♗b7+ ♙f6**

**31 ♖xa6?**

White would appear to have conducted the entire game like a mature master, when suddenly... I cannot now understand how a player could restrain himself and not play his rook to d7! As jokers say in such instances: 'This move must be made even if it loses!'

**31... ♖b3 32 ♜a1?**

This is where the deficiencies in the young master's chess education manifest themselves, in time trouble, in a position where he has to fight for the initiative! Here too 32 ♜d7! was the correct move!

**32... ♖b2 33 ♖f1 ♜c2 34 ♜d1 ♖a3**

White is now thinking of playing to seize the initiative, but Black is on his guard – if the rook moves off the back rank there follows ... ♜c1.

**35 ♜a1 ♖b2 36 ♖b1!**

The last winning chance! Now Black has a difficult choice: whether to play an ending a pawn down, but with an active rook – 36... ♖xb1+ 37 ♜xb1 ♜a2, or...

**36... ♜xf2 37 ♖xb2+ ♜xb2 38 a5 ♜b7 39 a6 ♜a7**

...with material equality, but with a passive rook.

If this position were to be featured in a special book on rook endings, and I published such a book not long ago, I would have accompanied it with 8-10 diagrams and spent several pages describing this ending. Here I do not have such an opportunity, although this position is of interest both to a beginner, and to a player of very high standard...

**40 ♜a5**

Not an especially good move. If tempo play is expected, the king should hurry into the centre.

**40... ♖e7 41 ♖f2 ♖d6 42 ♖f3 g6 43 ♖f4**

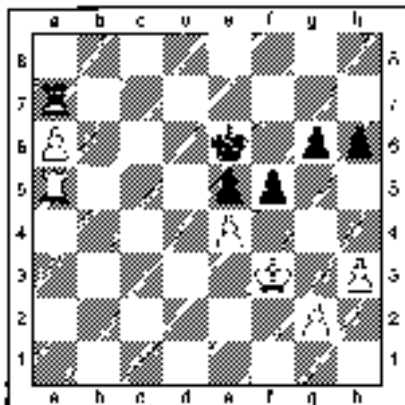
White fails to win by 43 ♖e2 ♖c6 44 ♖d3 ♖b6 45 ♜a1 (45 ♜e5 ♜e7 46 ♖c4 ♜c7+ 47 ♖b4 ♜c6) 45... ♜xa6 46 ♜xa6+ ♖xa6 47 ♖d4 ♖b5 48 ♖e5 ♖c4 49 ♖xe6 ♖d3 50 ♖f6 ♖xe3 51 ♖xg6 f4 52 ♖f5 f3, or 52 h4 ♖f2 53 ♖f5 ♖g3 54 h5 ♖h4 55 ♖g6 ♖g3.

**43... e5+ 44 ♖f3 ♖e6 45 e4?**

The king manoeuvre f3–e2–d3–c4–b5 would have won. After 45 ♖e2 ♖f6 46 ♖d3 ♖g5 Black's counterplay would have become dangerous. White should reply to 45... ♖f6 with 46 h4 g5 47 hxg5+ hxg5 48 ♖d3 and wins, while after



47...♔xg5 he should return to f3 and exploit the important weakening of Black's pawn chain.



#### 45...f4?

It is pleasant to assume an important appearance and with the benefit of half a century's experience to describe the mistakes of the young, about which they, the young, did not even guess...

On no account should Black have relieved the pawn tension in the centre! The play could have developed as follows: 45...♔d6 46 ♕e3 ♕c7 (46...h5!) 47 exf5 gxf5 48 g4 f4+ 49 ♕e4 ♕d7 50 ♖d5+ ♕c7 51 ♖xe5 ♖xa6 52 ♕xf4 – the black king is cut off from the kingside, and White wins easily. Or 48...fxg4 49 hxg4 ♕b8 50 ♖b5+ ♕a8 51 ♖b6 ♖g7 52 ♕f3 e4+ 53 ♕f4 etc.

The play is more lively after 45...♕f6. Now after 46 ♕e3 ♕g5 or 46 g3 ♕g5 Black has sufficient counterplay. Correct is 46 h4 ♕e6 47 ♕e3 ♕d6 48 ♕d3 h5 49 ♕c4 fxe4 50 ♕b5 ♖a8! The e-pawn equalises the chances: 51 ♕b6 ♖b8+ 52 ♕a7 ♖b1, or 51 a7 e3 52 ♕b6 e2 53 ♖a1 ♕d5 54 ♖e1 e4 55 ♖xe2 ♕d4 etc. After 49 g3!? Black is in zugzwang, but 49...♕e6 is possible. After 50 exf5+ gxf5

(50...♕xf5? 51 ♖a3 and Black stands badly) 51 ♕c4 ♕d6 52 ♕b5 ♕c7 it is not apparent how White can win.

#### 46 ♕e2

The winning manoeuvre.

#### 46...♕d6

46...g5 47 ♕d3 h5 48 ♕c4 g4 49 hxg4 hxg4 50 ♕b5 f3 51 gxf3 gxf3 52 ♕b6 f2 53 ♖a1 ♖f7 54 a7 ♖f8 55 ♖f1 ♕d6 56 ♖d1+ ♕e6 57 ♕c6! and White wins.

#### 47 ♕d3 ♕c7 48 ♕c4 ♕b8 49 ♕d5 ♖d7+

Or 49...♖e7 50 ♖b5+ ♕a8 51 ♖b6 with an easy win.

50 ♕xe5 ♖d2 51 a7+ ♕a8 52 ♕xf4 ♖xg2 53 e5 ♖f2+ 54 ♕e4 ♖e2+ 55 ♕d5 g5 56 e6 h5 Black resigns

## GAME 2

### KORCHNOI – SUETIN

USSR Team Championship,  
Leningrad-Belorussia  
Leningrad 1953

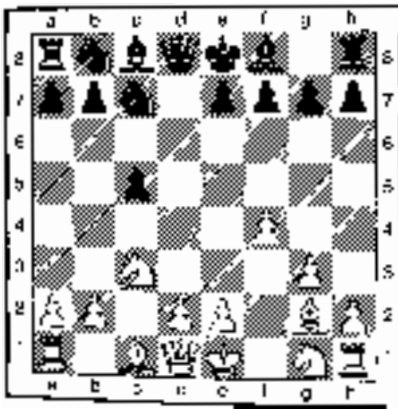
#### *English Opening*

A chess player's style changes with age. Young grandmasters normally have a leaning towards sharp, tactical play. Without especially bothering to search for the strategic subtleties of the position, they aim to create complicated situations, rich in combinative possibilities, where skill in calculating variations and tactical imagination are the main things. With the years, and with experience, a player acquires positional feeling, whereas with age his brain is no longer capable of

calculating variations so intensively. Naturally, a grandmaster's style becomes dry, and loses the brilliance of youth. But we will not prematurely mourn over elderly grandmasters: their games gain markedly in depth. Each to his own!

The following game is precious to me as a memory – every person finds it pleasant to recall his youth! But I also hope that the reader, when playing over this game, will gain pleasure from the full-blooded, far from routine, struggle.

**1 c4 ♘f6 2 g3 c5 3 ♙g2 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5  
5 ♘c3 ♘c7 6 f4**



Preventing Black from setting up a strong pawn centre by ...e7–e5. The move is purposeful, but pretentious. In the middlegame White will possibly be able to create an attacking position on the kingside; possibly, but not definitely. On the other hand, with the disappearance of his c-pawn and the premature advance of his f-pawn, White is bound soon to have problems on the central files, and if nothing comes of his attack, the d- and e-pawns will be incurable weaknesses in his position.

One point should be mentioned: out of the broad arsenal of opening systems, each player chooses weapons that suit him. White had available, for example, 6 d3 (a move that was already known in 1953 and is half-forgotten today) with the idea of 6...e5 7 ♖b3 ♘c6 8 ♙xc6+ bxc6 9 ♘f3 followed by an attack on the weak pawns on the c-file, or 7...♘d7 8 ♘f3, and, since the black knights are badly placed, after completing his development White will open the centre to his advantage by e2–e3 and d2–d4.

But it was 6 f4 that appealed to me then, and it was only after losing in crushing style to grandmaster Ragozin in 1956 that I was forced to review my tastes...

**6...♘c6 7 b3 e6 8 ♘f3 ♙e7 9 ♙b2 0–0 10 ♖c1 ♖b8 11 ♘e4 b6 12 ♖c2?!**

Of course, it would have been more cautious and solid to remove the king from the centre and then play ♘e5, preparing an offensive on the kingside, but White had a quite different idea, perhaps incorrect, but very tempting: the rook at h1 should take part in a direct attack on the king!

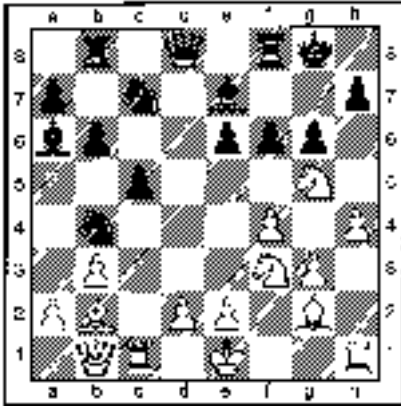
**12...♘b4**

An imperceptible (for the moment!) inaccuracy, which in the future will influence the course of the game. Correct was 12...f5 13 ♘f2 ♙a6 with advantage to Black (14 d3? ♘d5 15 ♖d2 c4!).

**13 ♖b1 ♙a6 14 ♘eg5 g6**

Bravely played. On positional grounds (the weakening of the e5 square) Black does not want to play ...f7–f5, but this would have been much safer on tactical grounds!

**15 h4 f6!**



### 16 ♖h3

Because of the insecure position of the white king, none of the sacrifices, so tempting in this position, leads to an advantage for White. For example:

(a) 16 ♖xh7 ♗xh7 17 h5 ♘d3+ 18 exd3 ♙xd3 19 hxg6+ ♗g7 20 ♚a1 ♙xg6;

(b) 16 h5 ♘d3+ 17 exd3 ♙xd3 18 ♚a1 fxg5 19 hxg6 (19 ♘e5 gxh5! 20 ♘c6 ♚d7 21 ♖xb8 ♗xb8 with full compensation for the exchange) 19... ♙xg6 (19... ♙f6 20 ♗xh7!) 20 ♙h8 ♙f6 21 ♙xf6 ♚xf6 22 ♚xf6 ♗xf6 23 fxg5 ♗f5, 23 ♖xg5 ♘b5, or 23 ♘e5 ♗d8 24 fxg5 ♗f5 25 ♘c6 ♗e8 with roughly equal play in all cases. 20 ♘e5 is also not dangerous: after 20... ♙f6 21 ♖xg6 hxg6 22 fxg5 ♙d4 23 ♙xd4 cxd4 24 ♗c6 ♘b5 it is rather White who is in danger.

### 16... ♚e8 17 ♘f2 ♗d8

At the board I was more afraid of the prophylactic move 17... ♘cd5, forestalling my intended plan of attack. Indeed, after 18 h5 gxh5 19 a3 ♘c6 the desperate 20 e4 ♘c7 21 g4 runs into the vigorous 21... e5!, opening the centre with an obvious advantage to Black. After

20 ♚e4! White would have retained reasonable attacking chances.

### 18 h5 gxh5

White was threatening to play 19 a3 ♘c6 20 hxg6 hxg6 21 ♘h4, winning a pawn. Since Black does not want to move his bishop from its attacking position – from a6 to b7 – the capture on h5 is more or less forced.

### 19 g4 ♘cd5?!

A further inaccuracy. The immediate 19... ♚g6 was correct. In the event of the exchange of queens, Black's position would be the more pleasant, especially since White would have lost a pawn – 20 ♚xg6+ hxg6 21 a3 ♘bd5, or 20 a3 ♚xb1 21 ♗xb1 ♘c2+! 22 ♗f1 (22 ♗d1 ♘e3+) 22... hxg4, while after 20 f5 exf5 Black parries 21 ♘h4 with 21... ♚g5!, attacking the d2 pawn. After 22 ♘f3 ♚g6 it is a draw, but Black can also risk playing for a win by 22... ♚g7. It should be added that also in the event of 21 gx5 ♚e8 or 21... ♚g3 Black's position is the more active.

Well now! This means that our intuition did not deceive us: during the game both players considered Black's position to be better!

### 20 ♗xh5 ♚g6?

After this mistake Black is now on the verge of defeat. He should have played 20... ♗f7 or 20... ♚f7. After 21 e3 White's position is the more pleasant, but it is not easy for him to demonstrate an advantage. In my notes made soon after the game I wrote that if 20... ♚f7 I was intending to sacrifice a piece – 21 ♘g5 fxg5 22 ♙e4 ♘f6 23 ♗xg5+ ♗h8 24 e3! (defending against ... ♗d4), and 'there is nothing that Black can do!' But in fact

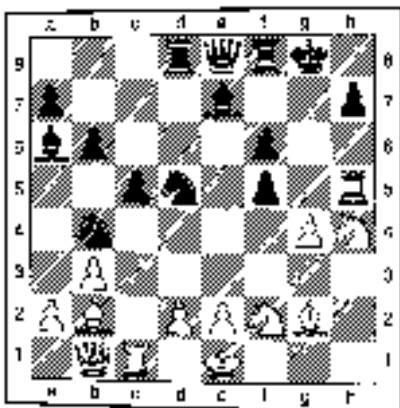
after 24...♖g8 White cannot reply 25 ♖h5 in view of 25...♗xh5!, which means that his attack is not so strong... And if instead of 24 e3 White plays 24 a3, then 24...♗d4! repels the attack.

**21 f5 exf5 22 ♖h4**

But here it is hard to offer Black any good advice!

**22...♗e8**

Or 22...♗f7 23 ♖xf5 ♗e6 (what else is there to do?) 24 ♖d4 ♗f7 25 ♖e6, winning the exchange.



**23 ♖xf5?**

After 23 ♗xf5 ♖f7 24 a3 White would have won immediately, whereas now...

**23...♖f4**

The picture again changes!

**24 ♗e4! ♗d6! 25 ♖xd6 ♖xg2+ 26 ♔f1 ♗xe4 27 ♖fxe4 ♖f4 28 ♖h2**

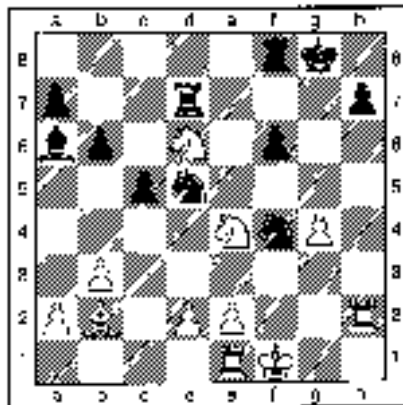
At the height of the tense struggle, effectively having failed to grasp what a crisis we had just gone through, from inertia both of us judged the position to be in favour of Black. Meanwhile, all White's pieces, with the exception of his rook at c1, are actively placed, Black's kingside pawns are weak, and if White should

succeed in switching to the f- or h-file his rook that is stuck on the queenside, Black will be unable to hold the position. Thus, in the event of 28...♖xa2 29 ♖a1 ♖b4 30 ♔f2 at the cost of a pawn White solves all his problems and seizes the initiative. If 28...♗d7, which I suggested as best immediately after the game, and also in my analysis published in 1954, there could have followed 29 ♖c3! with advantage to White.

**28...♖bd5 29 ♖e1?**

It is not so easy to hit on the correct idea, especially since it involves material sacrifices in the endgame! In this way, as becomes clear a few moves later, White loses an important tempo, and the evaluation of the position changes from 'better for White' to 'equal'.

**29...♗d7**



**30 d3!**

Now Black was threatening by ...♗fd8 to evict the knight from d6, and 30 ♔f2, which I had been intending to play, was bad because of 30...♗xe2 31 ♖xe2 ♖d3+. Thus the move d2-d3 is practically forced, but – and this does not often happen – at the same time it is the



strongest continuation.

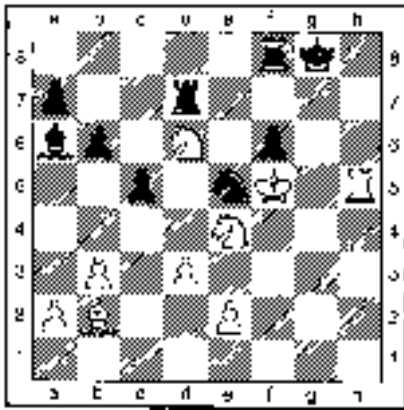
**30...♖e3+ 31 ♖f2 ♗xg4+ 32 ♖g3 ♗xh2  
33 ♖xf4 h5?**

Black misses his chance (if White had moved his d-pawn a move earlier, Black would not have had this chance): 33...♞g7 34 ♗xf6+ ♞xf6+ 35 ♗xf6 ♞g4+, and the game should end in a draw.

**34 ♞h1 ♗g4 35 ♞xh5 ♗e5**

35...♗f2 did not work in view of 36 ♗xf6 ♞g7 37 ♖e5, but more tenacious was 35...♞g7 36 ♗f5 ♗c8 (36...♗e5 37 ♗h6+) 37 ♗ed6 ♗xf5 (37...♗e6 38 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 39 ♞g5+) 38 ♗xf5 ♗e5 39 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 (39...♗g6+ 40 ♖f5 ♖xg7 41 ♞g5) 40 ♗xe5 fxe5+ 41 ♖e3! and White wins a pawn (but not yet the game).

**36 ♖f5**



Now Black is helpless. 37 ♖e6 followed by the capture of the f6 pawn is threatened. If 36...♖g7, then 37 ♞h3 followed by ♞g3+ is very strong. Black, dispirited by the course of the game, chooses the shortest way to lose.

**36...♗c6? 37 ♗xf6 ♞g7 38 ♖e6 ♗b4  
39 ♗xg7 ♖xg7 40 ♞g5+ ♖h7 41 ♗f7  
♞e8+ 42 ♖f6 Black resigns**

## GAME 3

### KORCHNOI – GELLER

21st USSR Championship, Kiev 1954

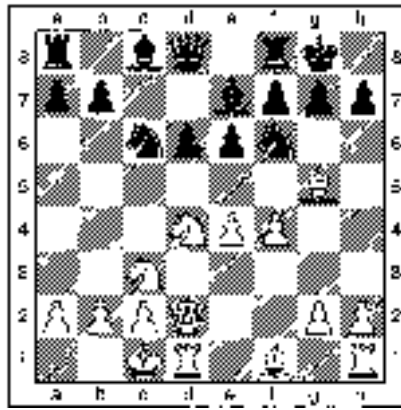
*Sicilian Defence*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4  
♗f6 5 ♗c3 d6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 ♞d2 ♗e7**

At the end of the 20th century another set-up is more often employed – 7...a6 8 0–0–0 h6.

**8 0–0–0 0–0 9 f4**

The most natural move. White begins an offensive in the centre and on the kingside. Life is also not easy for Black after 9 ♗b3.



**9...e5!?**

'An innovation!', I thought at the board. I did not know that six months earlier, in the Candidates Tournament in Zurich, Geller had already played this against Kotov. It is hard to refute on sight a well-prepared innovation. Kotov did not in fact try: he exchanged on c6 and on e5, then exchanged heavy pieces on the d-file,

and the players agreed a draw. And I? I had lost the previous day, and today I was dreaming of winning one back!

### 10 ♖f3

Despite the loss of a tempo by Black (...e7–e6, ...e6–e5), it is not easy to refute his idea. As a result of the castling on opposite sides, sharp play arises, with Black developing his initiative on the half-open c-file. 10 ♖xc6 bxc6 11 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 12 ♗xd6 ♗b6 13 fxe5 ♗d8 14 exf6 ♗xd6 15 ♗xd6 ♖g4 is not good for White. 10 ♖b3 ♖e6 11 f5 ♖xb3 12 axb3 ♗a5 or 12 cxb3 ♗c8 13 ♖b1 ♖d4 also does not promise him any advantage. After many years of practical experience, opening guides recommend 10 ♖f5! ♖xf5 11 exf5 exf4 12 ♖b1! d5 13 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 14 ♖xd5 ♖e5 15 c3 with some advantage to White. But even now, I think, not all grandmasters would agree (both for Black, and for White) with the variation given by me...

### 10...♖g4

With this developing move Black gains control of the d4 square.

### 11 h3

11 ♖e2 looks more natural. Since Black has brought out his bishop to g4, it is obvious that he will soon capture on f3, but I was impatient to open files and diagonals. Generally speaking, however, later games showed that White would not gain any advantage by quiet play. 11 h3 is more energetic.

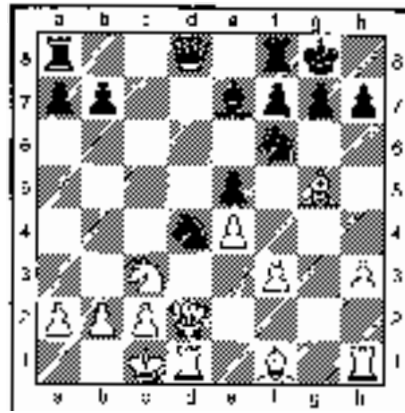
### 11...♖xf3 12 gxf3 ♖d4

In comments written soon after the conclusion of the game, I considered 12...h6 (now I would not bother looking at such a move). Then there would have followed 13 fxe5 dxe5 14 ♖xh6 or 13...♖xe5

14 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 15 f4 with advantage to White.

### 13 fxe5 dxe5

Of course, not 13...♖xf3? 14 exf6!



### 14 ♗g1?

But this is inconsistent! Logical and strong was 14 f4, contesting Black's domination of the dark squares. After 14...♖h5 15 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 16 fxe5 ♖f3 17 ♗e3 ♖xe5 18 ♖e2 ♖f6 19 ♖d5 White stands slightly better. If 14...♗a5?! 15 fxe5 ♖f3 16 exf6!, and now: 16...gxf6 17 ♖h6!, 16...♖xf6 17 ♖xf6 ♖xd2 18 ♗g1, 16...♖b4 17 fxg7 ♗fc8 18 ♗d5, or 16...♖xd2 17 fxe7 ♖b3+ 18 ♖b1 ♗fe8 19 ♗d5 ♖c5 20 ♖b5! – everywhere with a great advantage to White. The Yugoslav *Encyclopaedia* advises answering 14 f4 with 14...♖e6, but in this case too White's position is more pleasant after 15 ♗h2!

Logically we come to the conclusion that 12...♖d4 was not the best move. 12...♗c8 would have been stronger.

But White does not rise to the occasion. By deviating from the correct path for the sake of a dubious trap, he puts his position in jeopardy.



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