



All that Glitters is not Gold

Here's what master Maxim Notkin wrote in the forum of the website chesspro.ru.

"I'm playing the Ecuadorian Matamoros in Cappelle in 1996. After what they call a fascinating muddle, the following arises:



"I'm sitting there, calculating the variation 21.Kc2 h6 22.Ne6 fe 23.de Nb6 24. Qe4 d5 25.Qe5 Kd8 26.Ba5 Rxa5 27.Qb8+ Nc8 28.b6, and I see that it's extremely good. He has 4 pieces of differing value, but he can't do anything against my queen and pawns. And the position is so colorful that I won't hold back, I'll stick in another diagram.



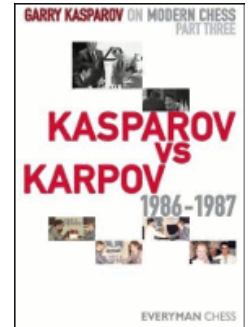
"After weighing everything up again, I move into action. On the 25th move my partner reaches for his king, I lean over the scoresheet and write Kd8, I lift my head... – and he's played 0-0-0!! And I had to switch to a battle for a draw, which was achieved after 25...0-0-0! 26.Ba5 Kb7 27.b4 cb 28.Qd4 Rd6 29. Bxb6 Rxb6 30.Qxd5+ Kb8 31.Qd8+ Kb7 and perpetual check.

"The worst part wasn't the fact that I'd missed the castling, but that when I was thinking about my 21st move, I hesitated – should I "win time" by means of 21.Ne4 Kd8 22.Ng5 Ke8 (Black has only moves with his king, I understood this perfectly well) and now 23.Kc2. And in the end I decided – why do I need time, when there's a forced win here! Even now, ten years later, I look at all this and I'm dumbfounded – how could I have been such a numskull?!"

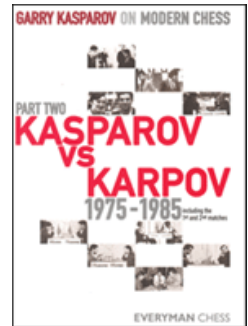
The story is good and instructive. It's just a shame that an analytical check of the position leads to different conclusions.

1) In the game, White would have preserved his decisive advantage if he had retreated the queen to a different square on the twenty-fifth move: 25.Qe3!

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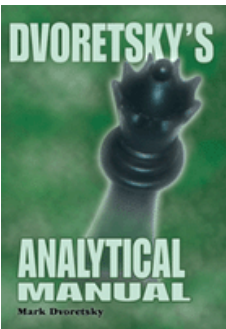


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(instead of 25.Qe5? 0-0-0!). Castling is already impossible; altogether bad is 25...d4 26.Qe4; if 25...Rc8, then either 26.Qf4, or 26.Ba5 Nc4 27.Qf4 Nxa5 28.Qa4; on 25...Rd8 the most energetic is 26.b4.

2) In the event of 21.Ne4! Kd8 22.Ng5 Ke8 23.Kc2 (as with the immediate 21.Kc2), Black shouldn't attack the knight. He plays 23...Nb6!, after which no direct means of breaking through his defenses are evident – the entire battle is still ahead.

3) After 21.Ne4 Kd8 22.Ng5 Ke8 (as in the initial position), the knight sacrifice on e6 is also carried out immediately, without the inclusion of the move Kc2. For example, 23.Ne6 fe? 24.de Nb6 25.Qe4 d5 26.Qf4+-. However, Black doesn't accept it: 23...Ra1+ 24.Kc2 Nb6!, and again the battle continues.

4) Taking into account the fact that in all the variations the opponent is supported by the blockading move Nb6, we come to the solution of the position: the pawn sacrifice 21.b6! (or 21.Ne4 Kd8 22.Ng5 Ke8 23.b6!, but here the opportunity to castle unfortunately has no significance). The important b5-square is freed up for the queen. On 21...Nxb6 decisive is 22.Qb5+ Nd7 23.Qc6 Rb8 24.Ne6!.

Maxim's version is rather more interesting, of course, but what can you do: the objective truth rarely coincides with our desires.

I am constantly encountering similar situations. In a book, a magazine, or on a website you find a colorful and instructive example that sometimes even passes the first test and gets into the "card-index." Then you study it more closely and you see that what appeared to be a clear and precise little picture is destroyed under the pressure of newly-discovered variations, or refuted by an idea you've come up with, or made dispensable by secondary solutions, and thereby also much less impressive.

Tskitishvili – Piliya

Tbilisi, 1984



White mated his opponent eye-catchingly: **31.Qxg7+!! Kxg7 32.Rh7+ Kf8 33.Rh8+ Bg8** (33...Kg7 34.R1h7#) **34.Rxg8+! Kxg8 35.Nxf6+ Kf8 36.Rh8+ Kg7** (36...Ke7 doesn't change anything) **37.Rh7+ Kxf6** (or 37...Kf8) **38.Rf7#**.

An additional charm of the combination comes from the circumstance that the apparently equivalent 31.Qh8+? doesn't work because of 31...Bg8! 32.Qxg8+ Kxg8 33.Rh8+ (33.Nxf6+ Kf8 34.Rh8+ Ke7!; 33.Ne7+ Kf8 34.Ng6+ Ke8) 33...Kf7!.

Alas, under scrutiny it became clear that White could also carry out his attack by another method: 31.Ne7! bc (31...Qxe7 32.Qh8+; 31...Kxe7 32.Bxf7; 31...Bxc4 32.Ng6+ Ke8 33.Qxg7) 32.Ng6+ Bxg6 33.Qxg6 with the irrefutable threat of 34.Rh8+. The same goal is achieved by the knight rebound to another square: 31.Nf4!.

In the next example it was a positional problem rather than a tactical one that had to be solved.

Spiridonov – Kasparov



Black has a superb position: a powerful knight in the center of the board against a "bad" bishop. However, he has to reckon with his opponent attempting to open lines for his pieces by means of 19.b4 or 19.c5 Qxc5 20. Qxc5 dc 21.Rd5.

In his book *The Test of Time*, Garry Kasparov asserts that the task is resolved with the ingenious and unexpected prophylactic move 18...Kf6!. By defending the knight Black neutralized the threat of 19.c5. "After the forced 19.b4 Qxb4 20.Rb1 Qa3 21.Rxb7 Rab8! his advantage is obvious." Significant here is the fact that the king is defending the e7-pawn.

I wouldn't have placed an exclamation mark next to the last move of the variation, as 21...Qxa2! looks to be even stronger. Then again, this is irrelevant. It's more important that before taking the pawn White should include 21.Qd2!, retaining a playable position.

But the main thing is that the forward exit that Kasparov proposed for the king, useful with c4-c5 or b3-b4, turns out to be not terribly successful with a different development of events. For example, White has a right to play 19. h3!?, preparing 20.Bg4. And in the case of 19.Qd2! Black must go so far as to return his king to g7, as 19...g5?! 20.Qc3 (or 20.h4 h6 21.Qc3) allows his opponent to seize the initiative in connection with the possibilities Qh3; Bg4; b4; Rd5.

So Kasparov's striking recommendation isn't the optimal solution, which must be sought by analyzing the standard moves. Thus the situation loses a significant portion of its attractiveness.

I suspect that there's no convincing way to solidify Black's advantage. For example, on 18...a5!? White can reply as Kasparov suggests: 19.c5 Qxc5 20. Qxc5 dc 21.Rd5 Kf6 22.Rxc5, although after 22...Rfd8 (with the idea of 23... Rd2 or 23...Rd4) he's still a little worse, and the question is only how much worse. In my opinion, preferable is 19.Qe6!? Rae8 (19...Nc6!? unclear) 20. Rd5 Rf6 21.Qh3 unclear.

With that we could also conclude our analysis of the game, but I'll show it to the end, to correct a few more inaccuracies and mistakes made by Kasparov in his commentary. I found some of them a very long time ago, when I was preparing this example for lessons with my students, and I found others many years later, by then with the help of a computer.

18...Rac8

The move is no worse (although, most likely, no better either) than the continuations given above, so Kasparov was unjustified in awarding it a question mark.

19.b4 (! Kasparov)

Here, too, 19.Qe6!? isn't bad.

19...Qxb4 20.Rb1 Qa3 21.Rxb7 Kf6



22.h4?! (threatens 23.Bg4!)

An inaccuracy that wasn't noted by Kasparov. He should have played 22.Qd2! g5 23.h4, obtaining the position after 23...h6 that should have arisen in the game.

On an immediate advance of the h-pawn there's a strong reply, guaranteeing an advantage for Black: 22...Rb8!. In the event of 23.Rfb1 Rxb7 24.Rxb7 Qxa2 already useless is 25.Bg4? because of 25...Qa1+. No better is 23.Rxb8 Rxb8 24.Qd2 f3 or 24.c5 Qxc5 25.Qd2 g5 26.hg+ Kxg5 27.g3 Ng6.

22...h6?! 23.Rd1?

White was forced to retreat his queen with a tempo: 23.Qd2 g5, and then choose either the move given by Kasparov, 24.Rb3 (but not 24.g3? f3! 25.Rb3 Qa4 26.Bxf3? Qxb3!) 24...Qc5 25.Rb5, or 24.Rfb1!?, not fearing 24...Nxc4 25.Bxc4 Rxc4 because of 26.Qd1(e2) with the idea of 27.Qh5.

Spiridonov was seduced by a naive trap: 23...Qxa2?? 24.Qxd6+!, giving his opponent time to exchange off the active b7 rook.

23...Rb8! 24.Rc7 Rfc8 25.Rxc8 Rxc8 26.Qb7



26...Qc5?

Why take the queen away from an active position? The advantage is preserved, for example, with 26...Rf8.

27.Qb2 Qb6

I've taken out the question mark that Kasparov placed next to White's move and the exclamation mark that was next to Black's reply. The fact of the matter is that the move 27.Rb1?!, recommended by the grandmaster, led to a difficult position after 27...Qc6!. And in the game itself White obtained sufficient counterplay.

28.Qc1 g5



The Bulgarian player wouldn't have been any worse if he had chosen 29.Qc3! (or 29.Qa3!) with the idea of 30.hg+ hg 31.Qh3. Here also the Black queen's unjustified retreat to the rear would have played a role, giving up important squares opposite it.

White lost the game only as a result of his subsequent series of mistakes.

29.Rd5? e6 30.hg+?

It's better to retreat the rook immediately – as Black controls the h-file.

30...hg 31.Rd1 Ke7?!

And again an inaccuracy that was awarded an exclamation mark by Kasparov. He should have gone into a mating attack without delay: 31...Rh8! with the idea of Qc7-h7. On 32.Qc3!? he should play not 32...Qc7?! 33.Rd3!, but 32...Qb7!. If now 33.Rd3, then 32...Qxe4 33.Qb2 g4+-. After 33.f3 Qh7 34.Qe1 (threatening 34...Qh2+ 35.Kf1 Qg3 36.Kg1 Rh2) the subtle move 34...a6!! is very strong, freeing up the a7-square for a deadly queen check. Finally, in the variation 33.Rxd6 Qh7 34.Qh3 Qxh3 35.gh Rxh3 36.Ra6 Rc3 there comes an ending that is lost for White.

The move in the game closes the seventh rank and thereby makes it difficult to transfer the queen to the kingside. White was obliged to reply 32.Qc3!, not fearing 32...g4? 33.Bxg4! Rxc4? 34.Qh3. Unsuccessful also is the "positional" 32...Rb8 because of 33.Qh3. He probably had to play 32...Rh8 after all, but then 33.Rc1 is possible with the idea of 35.c5. White's position remained difficult, but he was still capable of putting up a fight.

32.Qc2? Rb8 (even stronger is 32...g4!) **33.Qa4?** (more stubborn is 33.Qd2) **33...g4! 34.Qa3 Qc5**

34...g3! also won easily. Then again, in such situations, when any endgame is completely hopeless for the opponent, the player has a right to alternate attacking moves with offers to exchange queens.

35.Qc3 g3 36.Rf1



"Here I calculated the straightforward winning variation for about ten minutes just in case, as I'd already had sad experience of playing out solved positions in my opponent's time trouble."

Kasparov could have spent these ten minutes not only on the variation that occurred in the game, but also on another, more impressive one: 36...Rb1! 37. Rxb1 Qxf2+ 38.Kh1 Qxe2-+.

36...gf+ 37.Rxf2 Rb1+ 38.Bf1 Qe3 39.Qxe3 fe 40.Rc2 Nxc4 0-1

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