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Play like Karpov!

a fragment from

A. Karpov - Move by Move

a book by **A. Chumachenko**

Introduction. **A. Karpov - Move by Move** was born from an idea closely related to my chess playing history. In 1996, while still a Candidate Master, I was fortunate enough to attend the FIDE World Championship Match in Elista between Gata Kamsky and Anatoly Karpov. Having met the former FIDE World Champion, and being familiar with his games, the concept of this book was born. The idea of using A. Karpov's games to demonstrate how he evaluated and approached the problems of each position one move at a time is an excellent way to understand the mysteries of chess at the highest level. The study of the material for this book greatly helped me increase my playing strength. A year after its completion I successfully played in a number of chess events and became a 2320 Rated FIDE Master. The book contains about 360 Training Examples, all actual positions from Karpov's games, organized by training themes. Special attention is given to the positional thinking of A. Karpov. Over 70,000 moves were studied in order to answer questions about the evaluation of a position, the choice of plans, types of centers, exchange of pieces, etc. based on Karpov's play. In this article a small part of these training examples will be shown.

Thank you,

Andrey Chumachenko

Chess Magic: A view from within

To describe the first example of the former World Champion's creativity, we can't do better than quote Anatoly Karpov: *"Every chessplayer must understand the strategic value of the pawn sacrifice."*

Material balance is often the chessplayer's main concern and positional considerations are allocated to the background. However it is well known that other factors also determine a game's outcome and the material balance takes precedence only if these other factors are equal. Among these other considerations are piece and pawn placement or weaknesses. A good illustration of the priority of positional factors is the following example:

Taimanov - Karpov

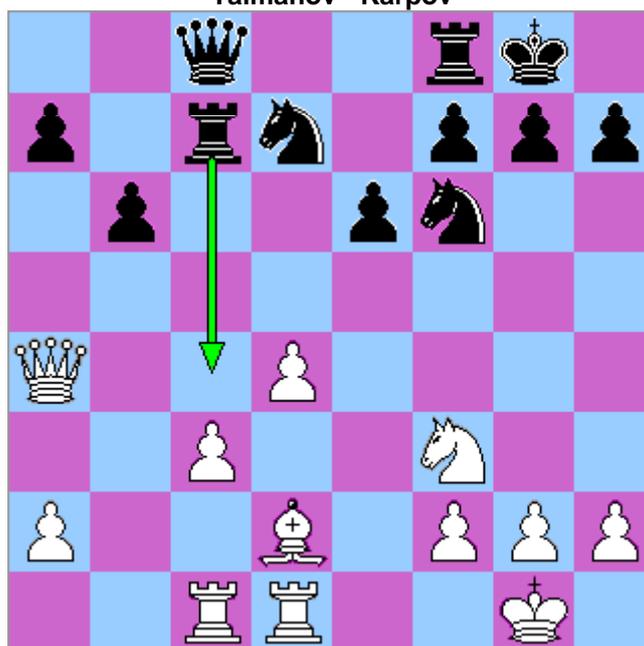


Diagram 1

In **Diagram 1** White's 17.Qa6-a4 avoided the exchange of Queens offered by Karpov and intended 18.c3-c4 activating the dark-squared Bishop and obtaining a promising position. Karpov decides that it is necessary to prevent this, even at the cost of the a-pawn. After 17...Rc4! Black wins control of key central squares, creates play on the c-file for the heavy pieces, and establishes a strong Knight outpost on d5. Karpov won back the pawn and, after a Rook sacrifice, won the game while his opponent was in time-trouble.



Diagram 2

In **Diagram 2** White has an obvious space advantage and consequently a superior position. In order to realize his advantage White must take some care. First it is necessary to find a clear plan for repositioning the White pieces. Here are the central ideas regarding this position as stated by A. Karpov:

- 1) *Black's only obvious weakness is the pawn at c5 and an attack on this square must be organized quickly as this will restrict Black's maneuverability*
- 2) *Place the King on f3 where there are no checks, it protects the Bishop at g4, opens the g1-a7 diagonal for the Bishop-Queen Battery and the second rank to maneuver the Rooks*
- 3) *White must fight for control of the h-file and develop an initiative on the Kingside. With White's next move he implements his plan, but it was a very difficult move to find."*

Karpov played 42.Qg1! Then followed the planned moves: Rh2 (with the threat of Qg1-h1), Kf3, Nb3 and, at the optimal moment, White opened the Queenside with the strong pawn lever a2-a3!

From these two examples and Karpov's commentary on them we can see that positional factors determined the choice of both overall plans and individual moves. Now we will examine a few typical Middlegame positions. Aron Nimzovich elucidated the importance of studying typical Middlegame positions, emphasizing that [discussing the games of Capablanca] "thus this works". Put another way, we can say that by the pragmatic study and understanding of how the leading chess players handle a given position, we can learn both how "this works" and glean ideas to use in similar positions. This approach seemed to become an immutable law for the youthful Karpov. The description of him as an "outstanding technician! Typical of Capablanca" expresses how deeply he learned these lessons. GM Salo Flohr said, more to the point,

"... from his first tournaments Karpov demonstrated an understanding of simple positions, an acute ability to maneuver, to construct deep endgame plans, and to formulate and implement strategies to realize the smallest positional advantage that astonished the chess world".

The following examples will convince us of the truth of Flohr's comments.

Karpov loves to play against the Isolated Pawn, and does so with great success, as we shall soon see. However, this doesn't mean that he completely avoids these positions himself. The Isolated Pawn presents us with some of the most complex of all typical Middlegame positions. The Isolated Pawn is both a strength and a weakness. The power of the Isolated Pawn is due to its ability to disrupt the opponent's position by being the vanguard of an attack, of controlling important squares in the center, and by providing open files, "e" and "c", for quick, active Rook play. Therefore, since exchanges typically weaken the Isolated Pawn, the Middlegame is where the side with the Isolated Pawn necessarily attempts to generate an attack. This is how Anatoly Yevgen'evich uses the Isolated Pawn:

Karpov - Timman

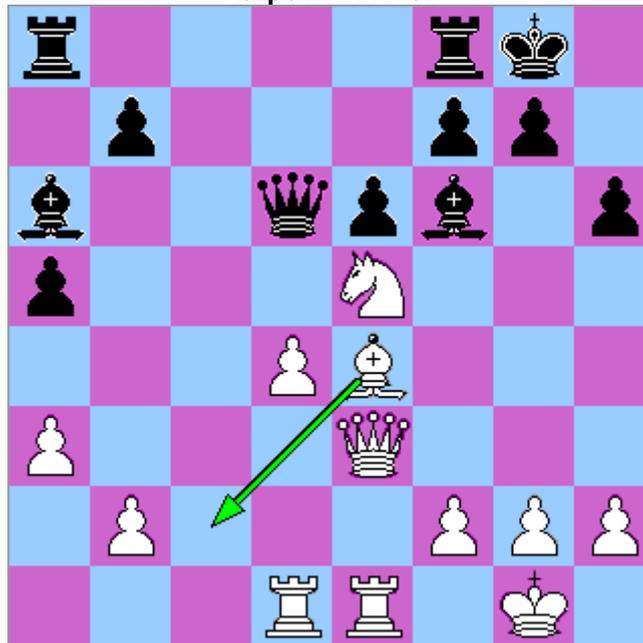


Diagram 3

A cursory examination of **Diagram 3** suggests that Black has nothing to fear. Yet White has completed his development and has better control of the center, especially the Knight at e5, while Black has not completed his development and his Bishops are not particularly well placed, although the Bf6 can be exchanged for the Ne5. Karpov, however, acutely noticed several nuances in this position that allowed him to conduct an irresistible attack. Two features of the position allow this: first, the weakness of the b1-h7 diagonal and second, the remoteness of the Bishop at a6.

Since Black will have to develop his Rooks, Karpov uses these tempi for the attack: 23.Bc2! this modest move sharply changes the evaluation of the position. It is very difficult to defend against the threat of 24.Qe4. If 23...Qd5 then 24.Bb3 and White will construct his battery, this is the reason for 23.Bc2 and not 23.Bb1. Neither does 23...Bxe5 solve the problem as after 24.dxe5 and a subsequent Qe4 White generates an attack. In the game, Black played 23...Rfd8 and lost in only 7 more moves! Black prevented Qh7 but fell victim to the standard tactic of d4-d5!

Now we will examine an example of how Karpov plays against the Isolated Pawn. There are many of these creative examples by the former World Champion and a few games cannot demonstrate all the methods he employs. In these positions I have tried to select simple, clear illustrations of Karpov's creativity and technique. I cannot do better than quote Karpov himself,

"In these typical positions, the primary task of the side with the Isolated Pawn is lasting control of the squares in front of the Pawn".

What is the weakness of the Isolated Pawn? Lacking adjoining support from other Pawns, it needs to be constantly defended, as do the weak squares around it. This is particularly difficult to defend in the Endgame since both mobility and support begin to dissipate. As GM Semyen Furman, one of Karpov's coaches, joked - the Isolated Pawn is like the solitude of a man in old age. As a rule, the Isolated Pawn can be considered a "Luxury" so long as it has an advantage in development and actively placed pieces.

There are standard methods for fighting the Isolated Pawn. The three basic methods are: First, the exchange of pieces and the transition to the Endgame. Second, the Blockade of the Isolated Pawn with the idea of preventing its advance and generating play on the weak squares around the Isolated Pawn. Third, introduced into chess practice by A. Rubenstein, is the transformation of the Isolated Pawn into the "Pawn Pair" called Hanging Pawns by the exchange of Pawns, i.e. with the Isolated Pawn on d4, the exchange is on c3 or e3. If on d5, the exchange is on c6 or e6 and the subsequent pressure keeping the Pawns fixed.

The following game demonstrates several typical stages in the fight against the Isolated Pawn.

Korchnoi - Karpov

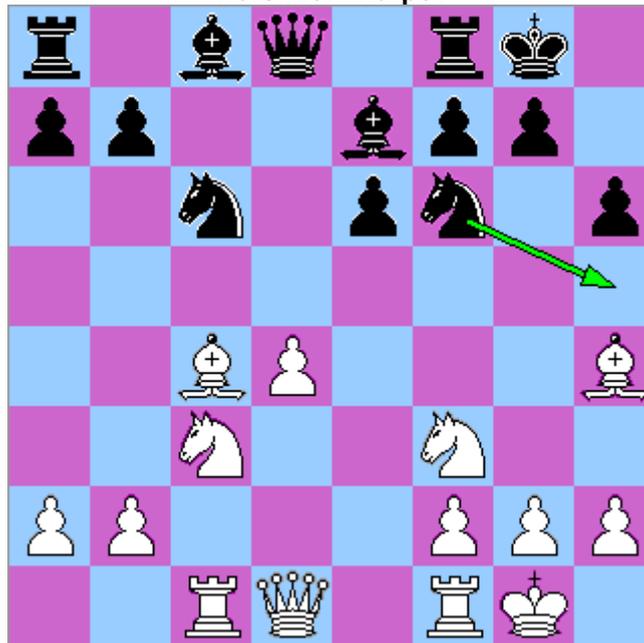


Diagram 4

Diagram 4 is a fairly typical Queen's Gambit Accepted position. Its special feature is that White's dark-squared Bishop has moved from the c1-h6 diagonal to h4. This nuance prompted Karpov to deviate from the standard method, with the Bishop on the c1-h6 diagonal, of playing the Queen's Gambit Accepted, i.e. the maneuver Nc6-b4-d5, occupying the square in front of the Isolated Pawn. In this position the former Champion played differently - 11...Nh5! Why? What did Karpov see to make him deviate from what, to all accounts, was the routine 11...Nb4?

In this case, the Bishop at h4 created an idea for a different solution to the problem. The exchange of Bishops is useful to Black, but after 11...Nd5 12.Bg3 allows White to avoid this and 11...Ne4 fails to the simple Bxe7. After 11...Nh5! the game continued 12.Bxe7, bad is 12.Bg3 Nxd3 13.hxd3 Bf6 and White has an immediate problem in defending the Pawn d4, ...Nxe7.

Black's concept of temporarily placing a Knight on the rim while taking d4 under control with the other Knight didn't force a big advantage. In fact after 13.d5 exd5 the Isolated Pawn is gone and the game is equal. It simply forced an advantageous exchange for Black and helped free his position. Several moves later in this interesting game the following position arose:

Korchnoi - Karpov

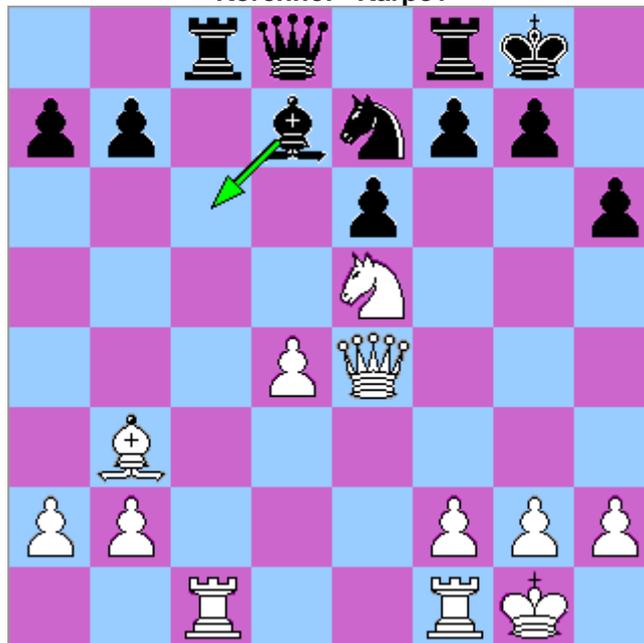


Diagram 5

The position in **Diagram 5**, from the same game as **Diagram 4**, arose after the exchange of Knights on e4. While exchanges, as a rule, are not advisable for the side with the Isolated Pawn, White's position appears sufficiently imposing. Between the strong centralization of White's pieces and the possibility of organizing a Kingside attack after Bc2, a possible sacrifice with Nxf7, or the possibility of the natural break with d4-d5 Black doesn't look to be able to

block the Isolated Pawn. White, however, made an error with a series of ill-conceived moves to exchange white-squared Bishops and ease Black's defense.

Karpov's strong 17...Bc6! overlooked by both Korchnoi and the entire press room of Grandmasters, changed the evaluation of the position. This is how Karpov commented on this move,

"An important finesse. Black is not afraid of the Isolated Pawn after the double exchange at c6 since the Knight will both defend c6 and attack the White Pawn at d4, while the scope of the White Bishops is limited."

After 19.Nxc6 Rxc6 Korchnoi chose to avoid the Rook exchange and soon was sorry for this oversight. Black developed strong pressure on the d4 Pawn and tied the White pieces to its defense eventually winning and increasing his lead in the match to 4-1.

The following position is similar to the Korchnoi-Karpov example above. This game was important to Karpov since he had lost the second match game with this same variation of the Caro-Kann Defense. Here Karpov uses a new plan with 12...Qb6. After White's Isolated Pawn was successfully blockaded, Karpov began a systematic siege of d4.

Kamsky - Karpov

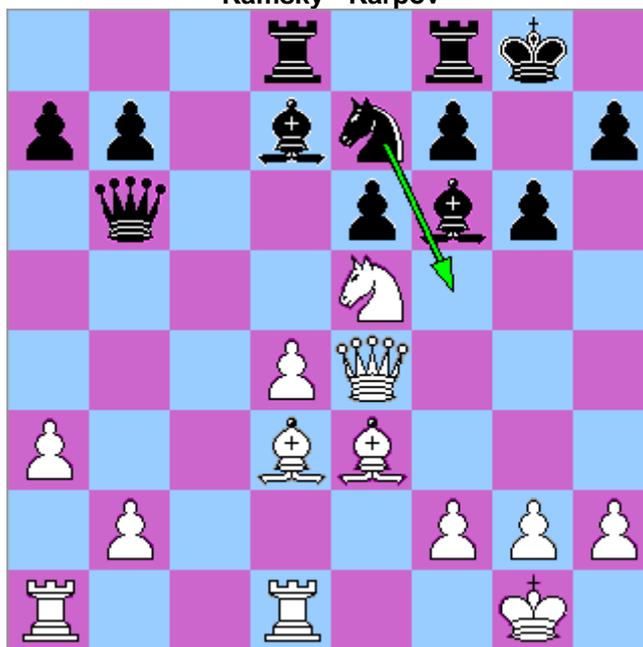


Diagram 6

In **Diagram 6**, Karpov's next move, 18...Nf5!, is characteristic of his style and there are many games with a similar position. Why did Karpov play 18...Nf5 rather than 18...Nd5, 18...Bc6, or 18...Ba4? The answer to this question is in the specific characteristics of the position. First, Black is not concerned with the exchange of the light-squared Bishop, if exchanged, the pressure on the d4 Pawn via the d-file would be easy to organize. Second, Black leaves d5 available for the Bishop, which is where it is headed via c6 (the immediate 18...Bc6? Is bad because of 19.d5!). Finally, from f5 the Knight will be able to exert pressure on the d4 Pawn and help defend the King.

Anatoly Karpov has been awarded many important victories with these multipurpose moves!

These few examples pale before the entire corpus of Karpov's creative heritage. The book contains 360 positions from this great legacy. I will conclude with this final position given special emphasis by Anatoly Karpov!

Karpov - Uhlmann

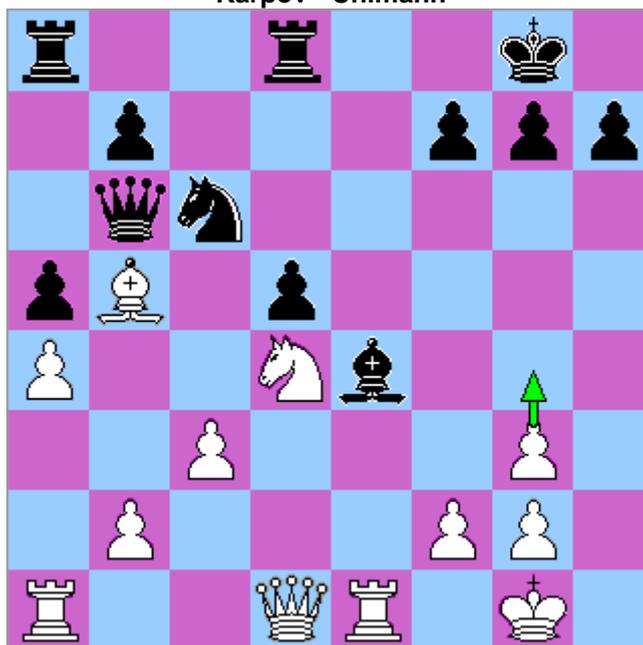


Diagram 7

At first glance, in **Diagram 7**, 22.g4!! has nothing to do with the methods of fighting the Isolated Pawn. The idea behind the move is difficult to understand, so let's allow Karpov to explain it for us:

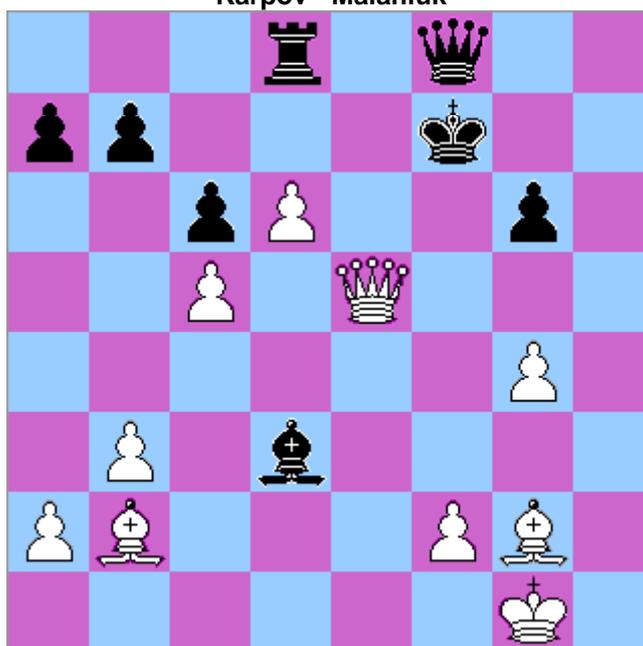
"I get the greatest satisfaction from such moves: White saw that the future Endgame would consist of major pieces with white-squared Bishops. The mobility of the Black light-squared Bishop is restricted by the Pawn at d5 and further reduced by the Pawn at g4, which will continue to cause it trouble. Critics object, 'but you place a Pawn on the same color square as your Bishop!' Yes, but my white-squared Bishop 'works' along other diagonals".

Karpov is rightly renowned for his methods and ability of restricting the mobility of his opponents' pieces. In this game, as in many others, it regularly led to victory!

Practice

Now it's the readers' task to play as well as Karpov! First two tactical exercises from the former World Champion:

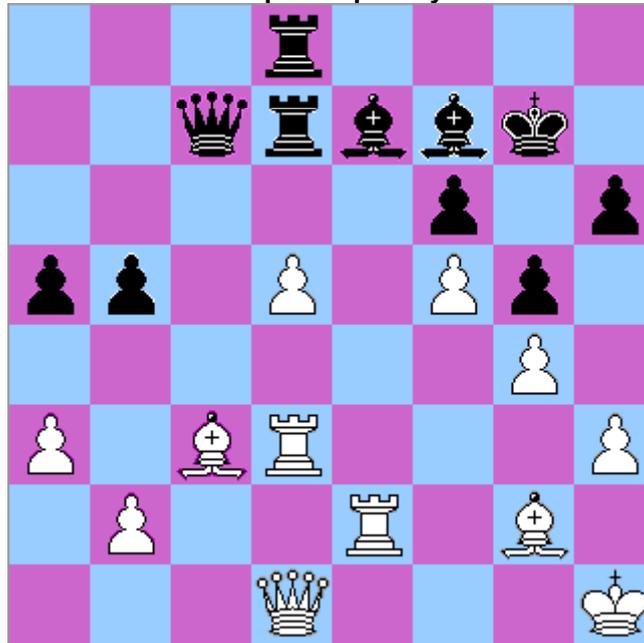
Karpov - Malaniuk



Position 1 - White to move

Solution At the End of this Article

Karpov - Spassky



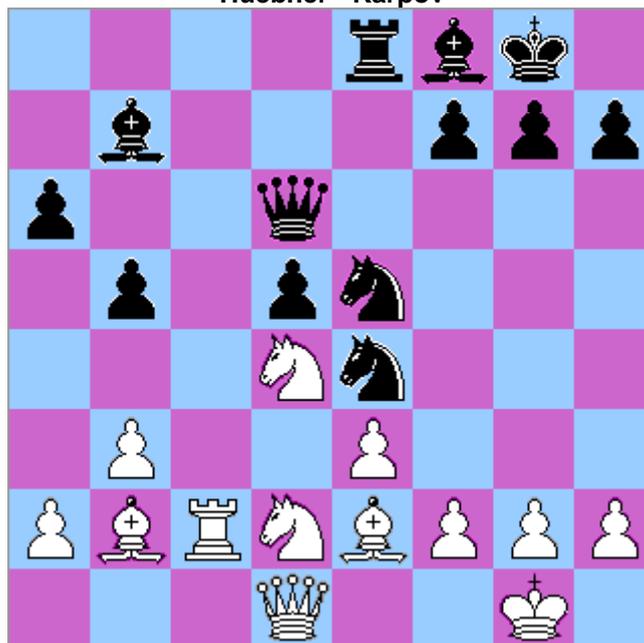
Position 2 - White to move

Solution At the End of this Article

Now you have three exercises to test your positional understanding. If you can solve them, you might consider studying to become a chess professional!

Position 3 in the diagram is approximately equal with the prospect of prolonged maneuvering. How did Black begin?

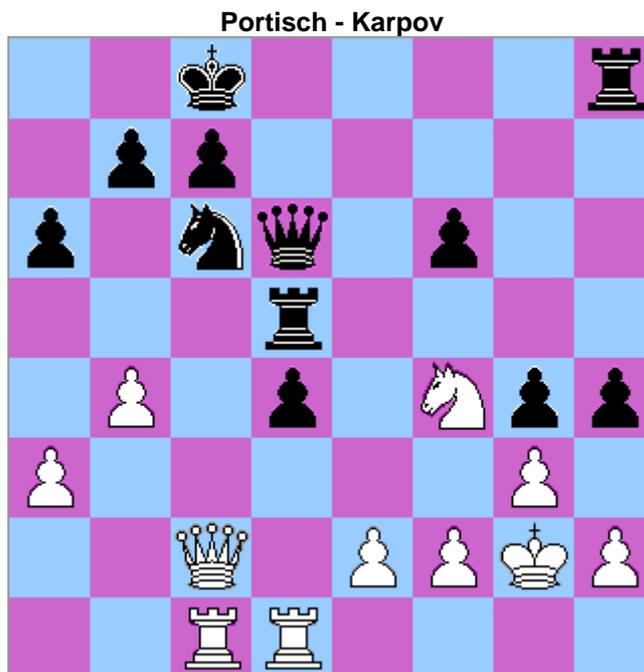
Huebner - Karpov



Position 3 - Black to move

Solution At the End of this Article

The following position is more dynamic and tactical than the previous. In **Position 4**, White's 25.Nf4 created several threats to Black and defends the White King. What is your plan to continue Black's attack? See how your solution compares to Karpov's!



Position 4 - Black to move
Solution At the End of this Article

Finally, in **Position 5**, White's last move was 25.h3 and Black responded 25...Qd8. How did White continue?



Position 5 - White to move
Solution At the End of this Article

Solutions

Position 1. Karpov - Malaniuk

This one is simple. White plays 35.Bd5+! with mate in 3 moves.

Position 2. Karpov - Spassky

White's position is ripe for decisive action but it is necessary to calculate precisely. Karpov played 39.Rxe7! Rxe7 40.d6 Qc4!

White had to see this resource for Black before beginning his combination. Karpov saw it! He played 41.b3! and Spassky resigned, since the capture on e7 is now unavoidable. For example, 41...Qxb3 42.Qb3 Bxb3 43.dxe7 Rxd3 44.e8=Q.

Position 3. Huebner - Karpov

If we analyze positions that are similar to one another, Karpov's ability to implement a variety of plans and tactics is surprising. The Queen move in this position is very difficult to understand. Only by considering Black's 22...Qd8! beyond its immediate role, can we begin to understand its multifaceted nature.

Karpov played 22...Qd8! Since the Queen is needed on h4 to begin the attack, why not 22...Qh6? Black's subtle maneuver was followed by White's inaccurate 23.Qa1, taking the Queen away from the defense of the Kingside. With 22...Qd8! Black concealed his planned Kingside attack, which would have been revealed by playing 22...Qh6! From d8 the Queen, depending on circumstances, can also be immediately rerouted to the Queenside, perhaps after playing Bf8. Besides all this, Karpov's move does not allow White counterplay which is possible after 22...Qh6 23.Rc7 or 23.Nf5. Prophylactic thinking, the ability to know what your opponent wants to do and understanding how it needs to be done and then being able to prevent it, is Karpov's criterion for choosing the best move. He consistently restricts what you can do!

Position 4. Portisch - Karpov

It is assumed that Karpov does not often sacrifice material, even if a Pawn sacrifice will benefit the position. I disagree with this assumption! The number of sharp, tactical games of Anatoly is sufficient proof. Here Portisch is the victim of Karpov's incisive sacrificial play. 25...f5! forces White to accept the gift and, as a result, Black maintained the Initiative and won the game. Another multifaceted move by Karpov creates numerous threats against the White King while eliminating White's threats, like 26.Ng6 or 26.Qg6. After 25...f5! Black threatens to create a Queen - Rook battery along the h-file with 26...Qh6. The game continued 26.Nxd5 Qxd5+ and 27.e4 was not possible.

Position 5. Karpov - Andersson

The surprising 26.h4! is Karpov's move! Let's try to understand his thinking.

This position, as was the Huebner position given above, is one of dynamic equilibrium. Both sides require Prophylactic thinking with subtle maneuvering. Thus 25.h3! and 26.h4! are exactly of this type of play, intricate placement of pieces and Pawns from square to square. Frequently the goal of such maneuvering is to attack targets and weaken the opponent's position, or to prevent the same in our own position. One thing is clear - Karpov has an uncanny ability to lull his opponent to sleep! Here the idea of h2-h4 required two moves to be fully effective.

The secret is fairly simple. If 25.h4, White loses a pawn after 25...Nxe4. With the Queen on d8, this square is no longer available to the Rook at d7 and now, after 26.h4! Black cannot play Nxe4 because of 27.Bb5 winning the exchange. It is important to note that Karpov's plan provided an Endgame advantage, after 26...Nf6 27.Nxf6+ Qxf6 28.h5 Ne7 29.Qf4! the transition to the Endgame was forced, where the White Bishops are very strong and only the extraordinary defensive skill of the legendary Swedish GM saved the Draw after almost thirty difficult moves.