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Then & Now

Alan Trefler: from World Open Champion to Tech Visionary

The UNDERDOG
Who Scraped the Sky

A half-century ago, **Alan Trefler** had the kind of tournament every amateur dreams of — and then barely played again. **What happened?**

BY **JON JACOBS**

Courtesy of US Chess

THE MOST STUNNING tournament outcome in U.S. chess history unfolded 50 years ago this Fourth of July weekend, when Alan Trefler, rated 2045, tied for first at the third annual World Open with a score of 8/9.

Any remotely similar result would trigger stern calls for a Fair Play investigation today. But in 1975, chess engines worthy of the name did not exist. So Trefler's remarkable achievement inspired admiration and wonder from the chess public, not cynicism.

Sounds like the meteoric launch of a storied chess career, doesn't it? Instead, Alan's immersion and early success in chess placed him on a career path leading away from chess competition. Teaching computers to work out rule-based solutions to business problems carried its own mix of intellectual challenges and rewards, and soon inspired him to start a company where he remains CEO today.

As the author of a future book of great upset games by club players (*The Fish That Roared*), I felt compelled to seek out Alan Trefler, whom I had met at tournaments twice during the 1970s, and to learn his story.

The Starting Point

Alan Trefler grew up in Brookline, Mass., an affluent suburb about a 20-minute train ride from downtown Boston. He learned to play chess from his father, Eric, a Holocaust survivor from Poland. In his freshman year at Brookline High School, members of the school's chess team encouraged him to enter a tournament at Boston's Boylston Chess Club. After losing all five games in his first event, he began reading chess books and improved rapidly.

That school year, the Brookline chess team planned a trip to the 1970 High School National Championships in New York City. "I was strong enough to be fifth board," Trefler remembers. "But because I was a freshman, they didn't send me; they sent a senior instead."

Alan was shut out of his chance to share in a great triumph — Brookline High returned from New York as the National High School champions. "It pissed me off so much, I told them I was going to beat them all," he said. And he did: Within two years he was the school's best player.

The Setting

The World Open has been a fixture in Philadelphia almost continuously since 1977, but the Continental Chess Association started it in New York in 1973. Among the elite non-U.S. GMs it attracted over the years are Anand (at age 16, way back in 1986!), Svidler, Michael Adams, Larsen, Van Wely, Gheorghiu, Yusupov, and many more.

The '75 event was held in the Hotel Roosevelt, a ritzy midtown Manhattan hotel that's now a shelter for migrants. The tournament's two sections that year attracted 815 entrants, a U.S. record for open tournaments at the time. The $20,000 prize fund — about $120,000 in today's dollars — also set a record for open chess tournaments. (For comparison, the 2025 World Open's guaranteed prizes total $208,000 in the top six sections.)

Although lacking world-class names, the 1975 installment attracted much American talent: GMs Pal Benko, Walter Browne, and Nicholas Rossolimo; IMs Arnold Denker and Bernard Zuckerman, and many up-and-coming stars who went on to become GMs or IMs within a few years. (Note that FIDE titles then were far rarer than today, especially among Americans.) I played in the 1975 World Open myself, and two of Trefler's victims are still friends of mine.

For Alan Trefler, entering the World Open in 1975 was something of a lark. He'd done well in tournaments through high school and his first two years at Dartmouth College and had defeated some masters. But he says, "It was a big deal for me to put together the money" to travel to New York, pay the entry fee and stay four nights in a hotel room, even shared with three friends. "It was a pretty

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> *I felt like I was playing extremely well, so I wasn't nervous."*

arduous thing, but I thought it would be exciting to go. It was being promoted as the biggest chess tournament of the year and I thought that would be fun."

Round by Round

The first round gave Alan little hint of what was to come. Ranked 115th on the pre-tournament wall chart, the 19-year-old lost to

Trefler gives a simul at Dartmouth as an undergraduate

Courtesy of US Chess

Orest Popovych (2295), who'd ranked number 13 in the U.S. three years earlier. "I didn't play very well in the first game," Alan says now. "But I decided I would dig in and see what I could do. And the next day it went well."

After fairly routine wins over Mykola Dumyk (1777) and Bill Frangos, Trefler-Small (1700) was a wild affair that saw Trefler in big trouble more than once before pulling out the win.

From there Trefler took off, winning seesaw battles against Lawrence Lipking (2223) and Jon Frankle (2194), then winning with remarkable smoothness against Robert Wachtel (2308). "When I began moving up to be in the top 10 boards, that was really pretty sobering," Alan says. "As I rose on the leaderboard and to the more rarefied tables it did get a lot of attention and comments." At the same time, he remembers, "I felt like I was playing extremely well, so I wasn't nervous."

On the last day, Trefler was paired in Round 8 against Julio Kaplan (2462), an international master from Puerto Rico who won the World Junior in 1967 ahead of future Candidates Robert Hübner and Jan Timman and future GM Raymond Keene. "I'm playing the former World Junior Champion!" Alan remembers thinking. He was basically lost on move 13, but won a wild game of tactical blows.

On the next board Michael Rohde, a 15-year-old future GM, upset GM and future six-time U.S. Champion Walter Browne to move into a first-place tie with Alan and two other contenders before the final round.

And in Round 9, Trefler completed his tournament of a lifetime by knocking off Rohde (2296) in another surprisingly smooth game which has been widely published, including in GM Robert Byrne's *New York Times* chess column soon after the tournament.

But the tournament's greatest drama unfolded only after Trefler had finished dispatching Rohde on Board 2. On Board 1, GM Pal Benko and future IM Robert Gruchacz traded down to a pawnless position where Benko had the theoretically drawn endgame of rook and bishop versus Gruchacz's lone rook. Trefler, assured of at least a tie for first, looked on, hoping it would end in a draw and leave him as sole winner of the tournament and $3,000 first prize.

"For a long while, it looked like I was going to be sole number one. [Benko] had a draw on his board and he just wouldn't end. He wouldn't give in," Trefler says ruefully.

Pal Benko dominated large opens for much of the 1960s and '70s. He won or tied

Courtesy of US Chess

for first in eight U.S. Opens between 1961 and 1975. He was also a renowned composer of endgame studies and wrote a *Chess Life* endgame column for decades. So it wasn't a great surprise to see him persevere and bring home the full point. "That was pretty painful to watch," Alan recalls. "But, you know, that's why he's Benko: That's why he's such a great, great player."

Alan's excitement outlived the disappointment of not becoming sole champion: "The whole thing was an amazing experience. I went with some friends to Howard Johnson's in Times Square to celebrate, with pistachio ice cream."

His $2,250 winnings (equivalent to about $13,400 today) amounted to about 40% of a year's tuition, room, and board at Dartmouth.

A Turn Toward Computers

Trefler's moment of triumph proved a career watershed that, surprisingly perhaps, ultimately pulled him away from tournament chess. "I had to make a decision as to whether I really wanted to apply myself to a career in chess," he explains. Quickly realizing he could never earn a living from playing the game, he entered only "a handful" of tournaments thereafter. His rating peaked at around 2300, and he never attained a FIDE rating. Alan thinks he played his last tournament before graduating college in 1977.

Instead, his interest in the game led him to get involved with researching computer chess, becoming the subject matter expert for his college's research project. Dartmouth had a computer chess program that's listed in the December 1975 *Chess Life & Review* with a provisional rating of 1210 based on 14 games; Trefler says he helped the program reach 1600 strength — a significant achievement for that era.

The experience led him to explore the broader topic of how to automate strategies for decision-making, and "It was really a fascinating opportunity and it set me on my career," says Alan. "Just thinking about how do you capture the rules and logic that people apply to what they do, and how do you apply that to how a computer can work? You didn't focus on brute force; you focused on trying to use rules of thumb to guide the moves. We didn't have the brute force to be able to do it the way you would do it today."

After graduating from Dartmouth in 1977

and spending a few years working in technology firms, he founded Pegasystems in 1983. It grew into one of the world's largest enterprise software companies, focused on helping its clients automate business processes. Based in Cambridge, Mass., Pegasystems had $1.5 billion in revenue last year and employs about 6,000 people. Trefler continues to serve as its CEO. His younger brother Leon, also a former tournament chessplayer, is Pega's chief of clients and markets.

Playing With and Against Kasparov and Carlsen

Although his last rated game was decades ago, Alan continues to enjoy playing chess. He gives a simultaneous exhibition each year against 15 to 20 clients at his company's annual PegaWorld conference. And in 2010 he played a pair of tandem games teamed with and against Magnus Carlsen and Garry Kasparov, after bidding $10,500 in an auction to raise money for Anatoly Karpov's election campaign for the presidency of FIDE.

"In the first game I was teamed up with Kasparov," Alan recalls. "He is incredibly intense. And incredibly competitive in a way that I am not." Even though it was "just kind of a fun exhibition game," Alan says Kasparov "was really passionate about trying to win."

Unlike a consultation game, partners in a tandem chess game aren't permitted to discuss moves with each other. "You could see him trying to predict my mistakes and trying to prevent them," Alan says. "Which worked badly: We ended up losing."

In the second tandem game Alan partnered with Carlsen against Kasparov and hedge fund manager NM Boaz Weinstein. Magnus "was just completely reacting," Alan says. "He was fun, open, played very naturally, and we destroyed Kasparov."

Synergies Among Chess, Technology, and Business

Trefler believes chess can help young people develop an analytical framework for solving technology and business challenges. "Some of the things I learned from chess are in-

credibly valuable in my day-to-day life and were valuable in setting up Pegasystems."

One takeaway from chess was "the whole idea of candidate moves. You identify a set of candidates, typically based on pattern recognition, and then you have the discipline to analyze all the candidates. You don't just go for the first thing that you think of. Having a structured way of considering alternatives is, I think, hugely important" when designing projects. And he says employers today respect a job applicant's interest and ability in chess, making it an asset on resumes.

The 69-year-old CEO isn't thinking about stepping down any time soon. "I like what I do," he says. "Learn new things, lead a team that does hard things, get to make clients and staff happy. Sounds better than retirement."

Games Section

FRENCH DEFENSE, MC-CUTCHEON VARIATION (C12)
Orest Popovych (2295)
Alan Trefler (2045)
World Open (1), New York, 07.02.1975

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Bb4
The McCutcheon Variation, though less popular than the main lines 4. … Be7 and 4. … dxe4, has always had its share of enterprising adherents.

5. e5 h6 6. Bd2
Trefler's Round 5 game went 6. exf6 hxg5 7. fxg7, as we'll see.

6. … Bxc3 7. bxc3 Ne4 8. Qg4 Kf8
The alternative is 8. … g6. Either way, short castling is not in Black's plans.

9. h4 f5!?
ChessBase shows no GM practice with this move, even now. Standard is 9. … c5 10. Bd3 Nxd2 11. Kxd2 with a small plus for White.
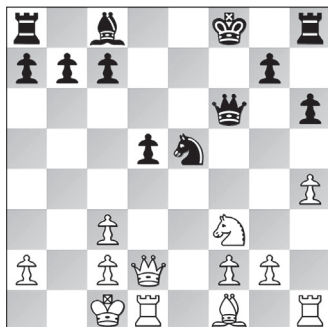
10. exf6 *e.p.*
Stockfish sees a major White advantage after 10. Qf4 or 10. Qd1 but the continuations it gives are not convincing.

10. … Qxf6 11. Nf3 Nc6 12. Qf4 Nxd2 13. Qxd2 e5 14. dxe5 Nxe5 15. 0-0-0

(see diagram top of next page)

If Black hoped for a messy, double-edged

POSITION AFTER 15. 0-0-0

position when essaying the McCutcheon, he certainly got his wish.

15. ... Be6?
It's equal after 15. ... Nxf3 16. gxf3 Be6 according to Stockfish. The doubled f-pawns prevent White from lifting a rook to f3 — an important avenue for harassing Black's exposed king -- while the half-open g-file is less useful.

16. Nxe5 Qxe5 17. f4?!
Either 17. h5 or 17. Re1 was the right way to go. For example, 17. Re1 Qd6 18. h5 Re8

19. Bd3 Bf7 20. Rxe8+ Bxe8 21. Qe3 c5 22. Rh4 (threatening Rh4-f4+) 22. ... Bf7 23. Rf4 Kg8 24. g4 and Black cannot untie himself. If then 24. ... b6 25. Bf5 Qd8 26. Bg6 Bxg6 27. hxg6 will soon lead to forced checkmate.

> **❝**
> *If Black hoped for a messy, double-edged position ... he certainly got his wish."*

17. ... Qd6 18. f5 Bf7
Not 18. ... Bxf5? 19. Qf2 Qf6 20. Rxd5 regaining the pawn with a strong initiative for White, who can meet 20. ... Be6 with 21. Qc5+!, when 21. ... Qe7 22. Bd3! Bxd5 23. Qxd5 leaves Black with no good defense to 24. Rf1+.

19. Rh3 h5 20. c4 Qf6 21. Qb4+ Kg8 22. cxd5 Rd8 23. Bc4
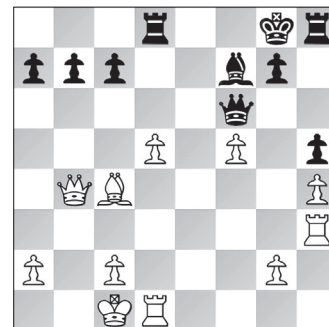
Despite his pawn minus, Black is still holding his own here against his higher-rated opponent. But now he goes overboard, pitching two more pawns in hopes of a counterattack.

23. ... b5?
He could have maintained the balance with 23. ... Qa1+ after either 24. Qb1 Qe5 25. Rf3 Rh6 or 24. Kd2 Qd4+ 25. Rd3 Qxh4.

24. Qxb5 Kh7 25. c3?
Missing the stronger 25. Qb2.

25. ... Qh6+ 26. Kc2 Rb8 27. Qc5 Rb6?, and White won.

Trefler's 2024 simul at the PegaWorld user conference

Courtesy of US Chess

Alan's notation ends here. The game may have continued, but White is consolidating his material advantage and Black is clearly lost after 28. Qxc7, or other moves such as 28. Qe7 or 28. Bb3.

SICILIAN DEFENSE, ACCELERATED DRAGON (BY TRANSPOSITION) (B38)
Alan Trefler (2045)
Mykola Dumyk (1777)
World Open (2), New York, 07.03.1975

A smooth crush. Black got the worse of it in a Maroczy Bind and never found a way to get back in the game.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. Nf3 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nc6 5. Nc3 g6 6. e4 d6 7. Be2 Bg7 8. Be3 a6 9. 0-0 0-0 10. Qd2 Re8 11. Rfd1 Bd7 12. Rac1 Rc8 13. h3 h5 14. f4 Nxd4 15. Bxd4 e5 16. fxe5 dxe5 17. Bf2 Bc6 18. Qe3 Qe7 19. Bh4 Qe6 20. Rf1 Kh7 21. Nd5 Ng8 22. Rc3 Rf8 23. g4 hxg4 24. hxg4 f5 25. gxf5 gxf5 26. exf5 Qd6 27. Qh3 Bh6 28. Rg3 Bxd5 29. cxd5 Qxd5 30. f6 e4 31. f7 Qc5+ 32. Kh1 Ne7 33. Qe6 Rc6 34. Qxe4+ Ng6 35. Bd3 Qb6 36. Rxg6 Rxg6 37. Bf6 Qc6 38. Qxc6 bxc6 39. Rg1, Black resigned.

FRENCH DEFENSE, MC-CUTCHEON VARIATION (C12)
Bill Frangos (1820)
Alan Trefler (2045)
World Open (3), New York, 07.03.1975

Another blowout. After misplaying the white side of the McCutcheon Variation and handing Trefler a strategic advantage by move 10, Frangos tried to fix his doubled pawns but lost a pawn to a double attack. Black's extra pawn became an advanced passer and White never had much chance, resigning on move 32.

1. d4 e6 2. e4 d5 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Bb4 5. e5 h6 6. Bd2 Bxc3 7. Bxc3
Less ambitious than recapturing with the pawn (the normal continuation).

7. ... Ne4 8. Nf3
After the usual 7. bxc3 White could play 8. Qg4, but it's pointless here -- with the bishop off the c1-h6 diagonal, Black can simply castle.

8. ... c5 9. dxc5?! Nxc3 10. bxc3
Black's strategically better: With White's dark-squared bishop having been ex-

changed, the first player lacks the usual compensation for their fractured pawn structure.

10. ... Qa5 11. Qd2 Nd7 12. Bd3 Nxc5 13. Nd4 Bd7 14. c4?
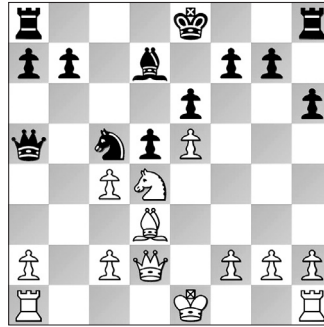
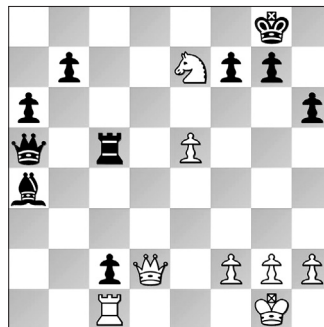Aiming to trade off one of the doubled pawns is well motivated, but it fails tactically.

14. ... Nxd3+ 15. cxd3 Qc7
A double attack that nets a pawn.

16. Qe2 dxc4 17. 0-0 c3 18. Rfc1 0-0
Black has a clean extra passed pawn and a winning advantage.

19. a4 a6 20. Ra3 Qc5 21. Nc2 Rac8 22. d4 Qa5 23. Qd3 Rc7 24. Ne3 Rfc8 25. Nd1 c2 26. Ne3 Rc3 27. Rxc3 Rxc3 28. Qd2 Bxa4 29. d5 exd5 30. Nxd5 Rc5 31. Ne7+

31. ... Kh8!
Avoiding the awkwardness that could follow the thoughtless 31. ... Kf8?!. After 32. Qd6 only 32. ... Qc7 preserves the win (*32. ... Ke8??* is a selfmate starting with *33. Nf5*) and with difficulty at that: 33. Ng6+ Ke8! (*33. ... Kg8 34. Qf8+ Kh7 35. Ne7* would be still more awkward for Black, who must trade queen for knight but still wins thanks to his monster c-pawn together with White's weak back rank) 34. Qf8+ Kd7 35. Qxf7+ Kc6 36. Qf3+ Kb6 followed by ... a6-a5 and ... Kb6-a6 when the black king painstakingly reaches shelter, enabling His Majesty's officers to finish the job. This whole line neatly illus-

trates how even hopeless positions such as White's at move 31 often contain real resources that require serious attention to neutralize.

32. Qf4 Rxe5, White resigned.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, SÄMISCH VARIATION (E84)
Alan Trefler (2045)
David Small (1700)
World Open (4), New York, 07.04.1975

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 d6 3. Nc3 g6 4. e4 Bg7 5. f3 0-0 6. Be3 Nc6 7. Nge2 Rb8 8. Qd2 a6
White now embarks on an off-book sequence that lands him in difficulties. He chose the same continuation in his crucial Round 8 game.

9. g4
A rarely seen move that shows poor cumulative results in ChessBase. The main alternatives known to theory are 9. Nc1, 9. h4, and 9. Rc1.

9. ... b5 10. Ng3?! e5 11. Nce2?!
White wants to maintain control over d4, since after 11. d5 Nd4 capturing twice on that square would be disastrous for him. But he pays a high price in lost time for development — as becomes evident both in the next note and in the actual game by move 16.
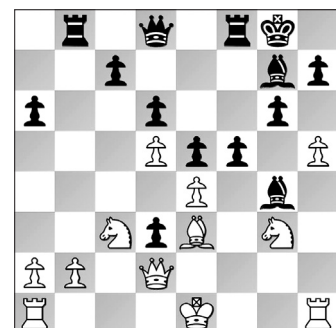
11. ... bxc4
Still stronger was 11. ... exd4 12. Nxd4 Nxd4 13. Bxd4 c5, as IM Julio Kaplan played against Trefler in Round 8. Stockfish then accords Black a decisive advantage based on getting the rook to b2, even at the cost of sacrificing a knight in some lines.

12. d5 Nb4 13. Nc3 Nd3+
Better was 13. ... c6 14. dxc6 Be6.

14. Bxd3 cxd3 15. h4 Nxg4!? 16. fxg4 Bxg4 17. h5 f5

Courtesy of US Chess

A sharp position with dynamically equal chances. But now White gives his opponent an opportunity for a stunning shot.

18. Bh6?
Better was 18. Bg5 Qd7 19. hxg6 hxg6 20. Qg2 — a hairy situation that Stockfish rates as equal but in human terms must favor Black, with three pawns and an attack in return for the sacrificed piece.

18. … f4?
Overlooking 18. … Rxb2!! 19. Qxb2 Bxh6 when the prettiest line is 20. hxg6 (better is *20. Nf1* but Black's still winning after *20. … fxe4 21. hxg6 Qg5*) 20. … d2+, when either 21. Kf1 (or *21. Kf2*) 21. … fxe4+ leads to eventual forced checkmate.
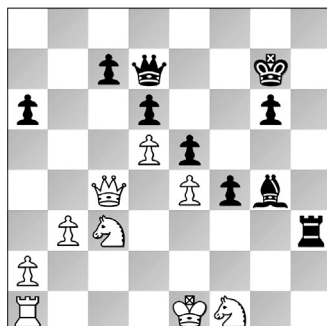
19. Bxg7 Kxg7 20. hxg6
The h-file ends up serving as a Black super-highway. Therefore it was wiser to keep it closed with 20. h6+, or even 20. Nf1.

20. … hxg6 21. Nf1 Qd7
Better is the immediate 21. … Rh8.

22. b3 Rh8 23. Rxh8 Rxh8 24. Qxd3 Rh3 25. Qc4

White's small material edge of knight versus two pawns is outweighed by his exposed king and uncoordinated pieces, as well as his opponent's connected passed pawns. But Black's next move gives away his advantage by needlessly allowing White to castle.

25. … Rf3?!
Best was 25. … Rh1 followed by … Bg4-h5 and getting the g-pawn moving.

26. 0-0-0 Qc8?!
Another error, allowing the valuable bishop to be exchanged for the hapless f1-knight. It was wiser for Black to return the rook to h3, admitting his previous move was wrong-headed.

27. Nh2 Rg3 28. Nxg4 Rxg4

White has gained an advantage for the first time in the game. The task for Black is to get the g-pawn going and position the heavy pieces to support that advance.

29. Kb1 Rh4 30. Rc1 Kf6 31. Nd1 Rh7?
Black should ignore the threat against the c-pawn and simply play 31. … g5. After 32. Qxc7 Qxc7 33. Rxc7 g4 Black's passed pawns are worth more than White's knight, and the black rook can stop the passed d-pawn that White will create after Rc7-d7xd6.

32. Nf2 g5 33. Qc6?!
Straightforward defense, restraining the g-pawn with 33. Rg1 Rh4 34. Qe2, would have kept White on top.

33. … Rh2 34. Qc2 Rg2?
This awkward placement both impedes its own pawn's advance and exposes the rook to attack when the white queen gets to f1 or f3. Worst of all, it gives up the h-file — which ultimately proves decisive. Best was 34. … Rh4 with equal chances, since grabbing the c-pawn is still suicide.

35. Rh1 Kg6 36. Qd1 g4 37. Rh4!?
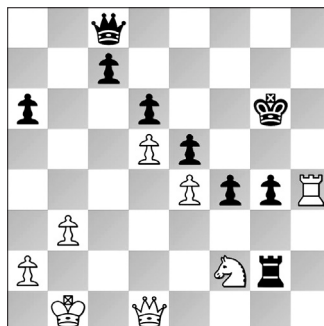
This knight sac is sound, but 37. Qf1 f3 38. Rh4 was even better. Then the desperado tactic 38. … Kg5, analogous to the next note, would fail to 39. Qc1+! Kxh4 40. Qh6+ Kg3 41. Nh1 mate.

37. … Rxf2?
The stubborn 37. … Kg5! baits a trap: Now White's planned 38. Qh1 fails due to 38. … Rg1+! (on *38. … Rxf2??* the heavy pieces force checkmate starting with *39. Rh5+*) 39. Qxg1 Kxh4 40. Qh2+ Kg5 41. Qh7 f3, leaving White only a tad better. However, White should prevail after the accurate 38. Rh7! Qg8! 39. Rh2!! (*39. Qh1 Qxh7 40. Qxh7 Rxf2* is an equal ending according to the engines) 39. … Rxf2 40. Rxf2 Qh7 41. Qe2.

38. Qh1!
The h-file will be overrun.

38. … Qf8 39. Rxg4+ Kf6 40. Qh4+ Kf7 41. Qxf2, Black resigned.
A three-ring circus of a game!

FRENCH DEFENSE, MC-CUTCHEON VARIATION (C12)
Lawrence Lipking (2223)
Alan Trefler (2045)
World Open (5), New York, 07.04.1975

1. d4 e6 2. e4 d5 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Bb4
Trefler's third time playing Black in this tournament — and his third McCutcheon French!

5. e5 h6 6. exf6
Surprisingly, the third-most common move in ChessBase, after 6. Bd2 and 6. Be3. The engines assess it as no worse than the main lines, but its historical results are a good deal weaker.

6. … hxg5 7. fxg7 Rg8 8. h4
The only reasonable try for advantage.

8. … gxh4 9. Qg4 Qf6 10. Rxh4 Bd7 11. Nf3
White may do better to cling to the advanced g-pawn longer with 11. Rh7.

11. … Nc6 12. 0-0-0 0-0-0
And here the engines advise Black to recover the pawn while they can: 12. … Rxg7 13. Rh8+ Ke7 14. Qh4 and then either 14. … Rgg8 or 14. … Rxh8 15. Qxh8 Rg4, with Black slightly better in either case.

13. Rh7
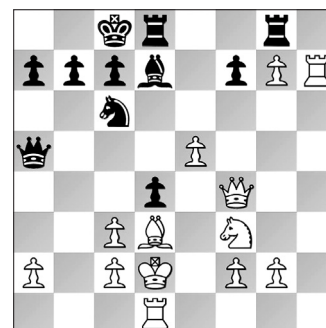Now the engines view the chances as clearly favoring White.

13. … Bxc3 14. bxc3 e5 15. dxe5 Qe7
Not 15. … Nxe5? 16. Qd4, winning material.

16. Qf4 Qa3+ 17. Kd2
King in the center notwithstanding, White's two-pawn lead should be sufficient for victory.

17. … Qa5 18. Bd3 d4

Courtesy of US Chess

19. Nxd4?!

Needlessly complicating matters. White should calmly retreat the king toward the kingside and concentrate on undermining Black's blockade of the g7-pawn: (a) 19. Ke1 Qxc3+ 20. Kf1 Nb4 21. Qxd4 Qa3 22. Bc4; (b) 19. Ke2 dxc3 20. Qf6 Nb4 21. Rh8; or (c) 19. Qf6 dxc3+ 20. Ke1 Qb4 21. Rh8, with a won game in each case.

19. ... Nxe5 20. Bb5?!

The simplest way was 20. Be2 with a winning advantage.

20. ... Ng6 21. Bxd7+ Rxd7 22. Qg4?

White would stay on top after 22. Qf6 Rd6 (or *22. ... c5 23. Rh8! Rxd4+ 24. Qxd4! cxd4 25. Rxg8+*) 23. Rh8! Rxf6 24. Rxg8+ Kd7 25. Rd8+ Kxd8 26. g8=Q+ Kd7 27. Ke2! when discovered checks with the knight threaten more than just the queen. For example, 27. ... Qa6+ 28. Ke1 Nf4 runs into 29. Qd8+!! Kxd8 30. Nc6+ followed by 31. Rd8 mate.

22. ... f5
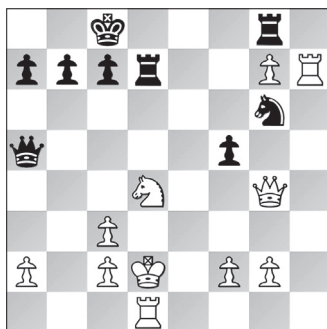
23. Qxg6?

A final blunder, allowing a forced checkmate. The best chance was 23. Rh5, though Black's still somewhat better after 23. ... b6 24. Qxf5 (not *24. Rxf5? Rxd4+ 25. Qxd4 Qxf5*) 24. ... Qxf5 25. Rxf5 c5.

23. ... Rxd4+ 24. Ke2 Qe5+ 25. Kf3 Qf4+ 26. Ke2 Qe4+, White resigned.

FRENCH DEFENSE, ADVANCE VARIATION (C02)
Jon Frankle (2194)
Alan Trefler (2045)
World Open (6), New York, 07.05.1975

1. e4 e6

Trefler's conduct of this game illustrates at multiple points why the French was Aron Nimzovich's favorite defense.

2. d4 d5 3. e5

The Advance Variation, popular in Nimzovich's time, is less common at top levels today. Nimzovich elaborated Black's optimal strategy of building pressure against the d4-pawn, then opening the f-file and finally sacrificing an Exchange on f3 to capture d4 and dominate the central squares.

3. ... c5 4. c3 Nc6 5. Nf3 Qb6 6. Be2

Decades ago 6. Bd3 was standard. Nowadays that move and 6. Be2 appear equally often, but 6. a3 is far more popular than either, and has yielded superior results for White.

6. ... cxd4 7. cxd4 Nh6 8. b3 Nf5 9. Bb2 Bb4+ 10. Kf1 Bd7 11. g4 Nh6 12. h3 0-0 13. a3 Be7 14. b4?!

According to Stockfish, 14. Nbd2 would maintain equal chances. One wild engine continuation goes 14. ... f6 15. exf6 Bxf6!? 16. g5 Bxd4 17. Bxd4 Nxd4 18. gxh6 Nxe2 19. Qxe2 Bb5 20. Nc4 dxc4 21. a4! Ba6 22. b4 Qxb4 23. Qxe6+ Rf7 (*23. ... Kh8?? 24. hxg7+* with mate to follow) 24. Ne5 c3+ 25. Kg1 Qe7 26. Qxf7+ Qxf7 27. Nxf7 Kxf7 and the advanced c-pawn assures Black an equal endgame despite a slight material disadvantage.

14. ... f6 15. exf6 Rxf6!

16. Nc3

It doesn't work to play 16. g5?. After 16. ... Rxf3 17. Bxf3 (*17. gxh6 Rf7* is even worse for White) 17. ... Bxg5 we reach a structure similar to those explored in Nimzovich's century-old analysis of the 6. Bd3 line. Black's greater central influence (after an eventual ... Be7-f6 and ... Nh6-f5), together with White's vulnerable d4-pawn and weak king position, far outweigh the small material deficit.

16. ... Raf8 17. Na4 Qc7 18. Rc1 Rxf3?!

Hoping to sidestep the threatened b4-b5

Trefler with a replica of the 1975 World Open winner's check

without pausing his attack, Black undertakes a sacrifice that erases his advantage.

A tactical solution was available starting with 18. … Nf7! 19. b5 Ng5! 20. bxc6 Bxc6!, with a further continuation that only an engine could either love or calculate.

But the straightforward human rejoinders 18. … a6 and 18. … b5 would also maintain Black's plus. Although 19. g5 (after 18. … a6) would still force Black to give up an Exchange, both the pawn and the tempo he would pick up in that line are more valuable than the compensation he obtains in the game continuation.

19. Bxf3 Qf4 20. Kg2 Nxd4 21. Bxd4 Bxa4 22. Qd3

The chances have tilted in White's favor. Although the material balance — a pawn for the Exchange — is the same as in previous notes that favored Black, there is a large difference in piece activity here: White's dark-squared bishop is powerfully centralized, rather than being stuck behind a d4-pawn, while the Black knight is denied the f5-square.

22. … Bc6?!

Better is 22. … Bd6 or 22. … Nf7, controlling the crucial e5-square.

23. Qe3 Qf7
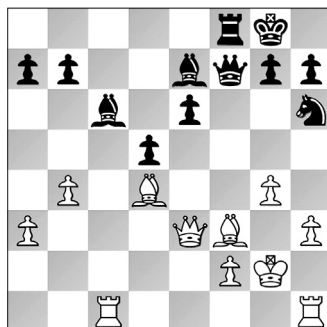
This move in conjunction with Black's previous one contains a hidden drop of poison that White overlooks.

24. Rhe1?

White could end Black's resistance with 24. b5! Bxb5 (on *24. … e5* White can consolidate his material advantage with *25. bxc6 exd4 26. Qb3 bxc6 27. Rxc6*) 25. Rc7, but also 24. Be2 and even 24. Rxc6 bxc6 25. Re1 would keep White comfortably on top. In the latter case White is temporarily a pawn behind but his two bishops and strong initiative more than compensate.

24. … e5!

And here comes Nimzovich again! The cheeky black pawn is taboo. If 25. Qxe5 Qxf3+, and if 25. Bxe5 the d-pawn manifests its "lust to expand" with 25. … d4!, also winning the f3-bishop.

25. b5 exd4 26. Qb3 d3! 27. Re3?

White is understandably flustered by the turn the game has taken in the past few moves. He could maintain equal chances with 27. Qxd3, according to Stockfish. After 27. … Bxb5 28. Qxd5 Bxa3 29. Rc3! Bb4 30. Qxb5 Bxc3 31. Re3! White regains his piece due to the threat of Bf3-d5, and once again superior piece activity compensates for a pawn minus.

27. … d4 28. Qxf7+ Kxf7 29. Rxe7+ Kxe7 30. bxc6 bxc6 31. Rxc6

The rook endgame after 31. Bxc6 Nf7 32. Be4 Ne5 33. Rd1 Kd6 34. Bxd3 Nxd3 35. Rxd3 Kd5 is won for Black.

31. … Nf7 32. Rc7+ Ke6 33. Kf1 Ne5 34. Bd1 Rb8 35. Ke1 Rb1 36. Kd2 Rb2+ 37. Ke1 d2+ 38. Ke2 d3+ 39. Ke3 Rb1 40. Kxd2
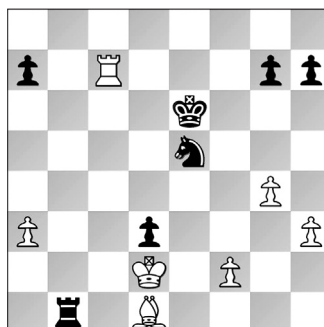
40. … Rb2+??

The final move of the time control. In his notes to this game in the September 1975 *Chess Life & Review*, Trefler says he had anticipated this position three moves earlier and had planned the winning 40. … Kd5 (with 41. … Nc4+ to follow), but with his flag about to fall he neglected to play it. While it might appear that the position will soon repeat, Black has unwittingly given his opponent a way out. Actually, two ways out …

41. Ke3 Rb1 42. Kd2??

White returns the favor, repeating the lost position. Both 42. f4 Rxd1 43. fxe5 and 42. Ba4 Re1+ 43. Kd2 Re2+ 44. Kc3 Rxf2 45. Rxg7 lead to equal endgames.

42. … Kd5

After this it's all over.

43. Rxg7

After 43. f4 Nc4+ 44. Kxd3 Rxd1+, it doesn't matter whether the king runs rightward or leftward — Black will gradually harvest all the white pawns while holding onto one of his own to eventually bring home the point.

43. … Kd4 44. Rxh7 Nc4+ 45. Ke1 Nb2 46. Rd7+ Kc4 47. Kd2 Rxd1+ 48. Ke3 Re1+ 49. Kd2 Re2+ 50. Kc1 Kc3 51. Rc7+ Nc4 52. Kd1 Ra2, White resigned.

GRÜNFELD DEFENSE (D91)
Alan Trefler (2045)
Robert Wachtel (2308)
World Open (7), New York, 07.05.1975

A *tour de force*. White gives his much higher-rated opponent the kind of strategic spanking you expect to see when an established pro faces an amateur.
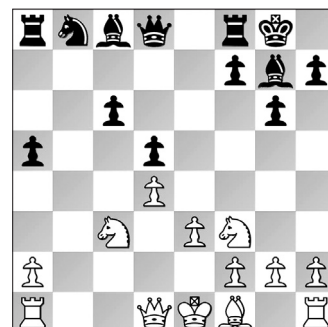
1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5

Like Trefler's McCutcheon French, Wachtel's Grünfeld signals his intent to enter a complex strategic and tactical battle and aim for a full point with Black.

4. Nf3 Bg7 5. Bg5 Ne4 6. cxd5 Nxg5 7. Nxg5 e6 8. Nf3 exd5 9. e3 0-0 10. b4 a5

Departing from book. The moves 10. … c6, 10. … Be6, and 10. … Qd6 have appeared in GM practice.

11. b5 c5 12. bxc6 *e.p.* bxc6

The structural goalposts are set: White will target the outpost on c5 and the backward c-pawn; Black will seek to exploit his two bishops and drum up counterplay on the king's wing.

13. Rc1 Qd6 14. Be2 f5?!

The kind of move that in the 1970s was labeled "anti-positional" — Black makes his half-bad light-squared bishop (what author and IM Silas Esben Lund would call a "Double-Edged Bishop," or DEB) still worse. Black's goal is to advance the pawn to f4 at

the right moment. But when he achieves that advance it ends up doing more harm than good. Be careful what you wish for!

15. 0-0 Kh8 16. g3 h6 17. Na4 Ra7 18. Nc5 g5 19. Nd3 f4

As the saying goes, having said A, one must say B. Consistent though it is, Black's idea backfires against his own king's position.

20. exf4 gxf4 21. Nde5

Black was probably looking for something like 21. Nxf4 Rxf4 22. gxf4 Bh3, which Stockfish assesses as greatly in White's favor, but is still rife with attacking possibilities for both sides.

21. … Rc7?!

Maybe eyeing a … c6-c5 break. But the lesions Black opened up on his own kingside soon force him to keep his attention on that wing.
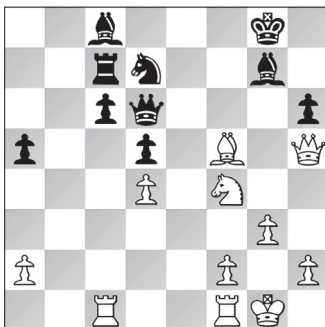
22. Bd3 Rf6

If 22. … Bf5 23. Nh4 Bxd3 24. Qxd3 Kg8 25. Neg6 fxg3 26. hxg3 Re8 27. Rce1 Qd8 28. Nf5 Rd7 29. Nf4 and the fork threat Nf4-e6 will cost Black material. If 29. … Bf8?? 30. Nxh6+ leads to mate or great material gain.

23. Nh4 Kg8 24. Qh5 Nd7 25. Nf5 Qf8 26. Ng6 Rxf5

It's even worse after 26. … Qd8 27. Nfe7+ Kf7 28. Rfe1.

27. Bxf5 Qd6 28. Nxf4

With an overwhelming material advantage that Trefler continues to exploit flawlessly, finishing off without a hitch.

28. … Nf6 29. Qh3 Bxf5 30. Qxf5 Ne4 31. Qe6+ Kh7 32. Qxd6 Nxd6 33. Ne6 Rc8 34. Nxg7 Kxg7 35. Rfe1 Kf6 36. Kg2 Nb5 37. Red1 Nd6 38. Rc2 Nc4 39. Re2 Nd6 40. Rde1 Nf5 41. Rd1 Rb8 42. g4 Nd6 43. Rde1 Ne4 44. f3 Ng5 45. h4 Nf7 46. Re6+ Kg7 47. Rxc6 Rb2+ 48. Kg3 Rxa2 49. Re7 Kf8 50. Ra7 Re2 51. Rc8+ Re8 52. Rxe8+ Kxe8 53. Rxa5, Black resigned.

KING'S INDIAN DEFENSE, SÄMISCH VARIATION (E84)
Alan Trefler (2045)
IM Julio Kaplan (2462)
World Open (8), New York, 07.06.1975

Trefler and his formidable opponent compose a rich symphony of tactical blows and counterblows.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. f3 0-0 6. Be3 Nc6 7. Nge2 a6 8. Qd2 Rb8 9. g4 b5 10. Ng3?! e5 11. Nce2?!

Repeating Trefler – Small from Round 4. White fared none too well from the opening in that game; he fares worse in this one.

11. … exd4!

Even stronger than his Round 4 opponent's choice of 11. … bxc4.

12. Nxd4 Nxd4 13. Bxd4 c5!

Black already has a decisive plus.

14. Bc3

The main alternative, 14. Bf2 bxc4 15. Bxc4, leaves White dead busted after 15. … Nxg4! 16. fxg4 Rxb2 17. Qf4 Qa5+ 18. Kf1 Rb4 19. Rc1 Rxc4! 20. Rxc4 Qb5.
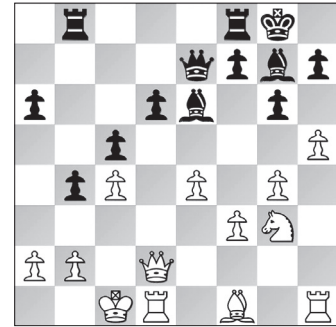
14. … b4 15. Bxf6 Bxf6?

From Trefler's notes to this game in the September 1975 *Chess Life & Review*: "Black is hoping for 16. 0-0-0, when … Bc8xg4 wins. However, 15. … Qxf6 looks crushing. Now

Black begins to let his advantage slip."

16. h4! Qe7

White equalizes after 16. … Bxh4? 17. Qh2 Bxg3+ 18. Qxg3 Qe7 19. 0-0-0 Rb6 according to Stockfish.

17. 0-0-0 Bg7 18. h5 Be6!?

Black plans a sacrificial idea to target the white king. Instead he might have headed for a big edge with less risk by playing 18. … g5 19. h6 Be5 20. Nh5 Kh8, or 18. … b3 19. a3 h6.

19. Be2?

19. g5! would restore equal chances according to Stockfish. The idea is to continue with f3-f4, Bf1-d3, and then f4-f5. To prevent this, Black must play … f7-f6 or … h7-h6. But the former hangs the d6-pawn (since the saving … Bg7-e5 is no longer available) and the latter gives White chances for counterplay in the center and kingside.

Analyzing positions from the Round 9 game against Rohde

19. ... Bd4

Black misses his chance to keep a big edge by closing up the kingside with 19. ... g5.

20. f4 d5!? 21. f5!?

It's equal after 21. cxd5 Bxd5 22. Kb1 Bxe4+ 23. Nxe4 Qxe4+ 24. Bd3 Qe3 per the engine.

21. ... dxc4!?

White's idea was that on 21. ... gxf5 22. cxd5, Black must retreat the bishop since 22. ... Bxd5? is refuted by 23. Nxf5 Qxe4 24. Qg5+ Kh8 25. Rxd4. But Black could keep an edge in that line with 22. ... Bd7 or 22. ... Bc8. The game move is an enterprising (but not quite sound) piece sacrifice aimed at demolishing the white king's pawn cover.

22. fxe6

It was better to throw in 22. hxg6 first.

22. ... c3 23. exf7+?

Gives Black an important tempo to position his queen for both defense and counterattack. White could have kept winning chances alive with 23. Qh6!.

23. ... Qxf7 24. Qd3

On the alternative 24. Qg5 Black can maintain equality with either the simple 24. ... Qxa2 25. Qd5+ Qxd5 26. exd5, or the complicated and rather funny 24. ... Be3+ (to prevent a forced queen trade after an immediate ... Qf7xa2) 25. Qxe3 Qxa2 26. Bc4+! (one good queen deflection deserves another!) 26. ... Qxc4 27. Qg5 Rf2 28. Rd8+ Rxd8 29. Qxd8+ Kg7 30. Qe7+ Kg8 31. Qe8+ Rf8 32. Qd7.

24. ... b3
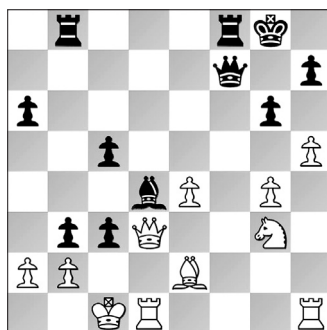
Black's attack looks terrifying but White can survive if he keeps his cool.

25. axb3 Rxb3 26. Qc4 cxb2+ 27. Kb1 Rc3

Not 27. ... Rxg3? 28. Rdf1 Qxc4 29. Bxc4+ Kg7 30. h6+ Kh8 31. Rxf8 mate.

Dynamic equality still prevails. Again quoting Trefler from 50 years ago: "Black

now has less than one minute to get to move 40 and the time control. White tries to complicate to take advantage of this."

28. hxg6 hxg6?
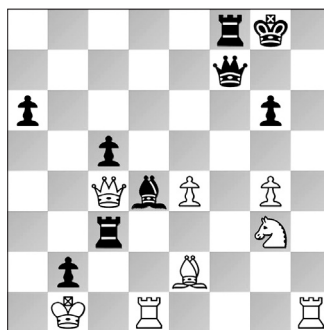
Just the kind of error that comes naturally with time pressure. Black could have held on with 28. ... Qxc4 29. Bxc4+ Rxc4 30. gxh7+ Kh8.

29. Rxd4! cxd4

Not much better is 29. ... Rxc4 30. Bxc4 cxd4 31. Bxf7+ Rxf7 32. Rf1.

30. Qxd4 Qf6

If instead 30. ... Rc1+ 31. Kxb2! (but not *31. Rxc1?? bxc1*=Q+ 32. Kxc1 Qf4+ 33. Kd1 Qxg3 and Black wins!) 31. ... Rxh1 32. Bc4.

31. Bc4+ Rxc4

If 31. ... Kg7 32. e5! is even better than 32. Qd7+ Rf7 33. Bxf7.

32. Qxc4+ Kg7 33. Qc7+ Rf7 34. Qb8 Rf8 35. Qxb2 Qxb2+ 36. Kxb2 Rf2+ 37. Kc1 Rf4 38. Rf1 Rxg4 39. Rf3 Rg5 40. Kd2 Rb5 41. Rd3 a5 42. Ke3 a4 43. Ra3 Ra5 44. Ne2, Black resigned.

BENONI DEFENSE, TAIMANOV VARIATION (A67)
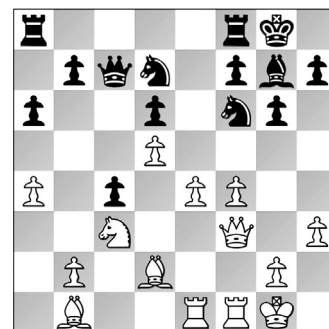**Alan Trefler (2045)**
Michael Rohde (2296)
World Open (9), New York, 07.06.1975

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. Nc3 exd5 5. cxd5 d6 6. e4 g6 7. f4 Bg7 8. Bb5+ Nfd7 9. Bd3 0-0 10. Nf3 a6 11. a4 Nf6 12. 0-0 Bg4 13. h3 Bxf3 14. Qxf3 Nbd7 15. Bd2 Qc7 16. Rae1 c4 17. Bb1

(see diagram top of next column)

17. ... b5

Engines want Black to grab the b-pawn by playing 17. ... Qb6+. GM Robert Byrne in his *New York Times* chess column said that would

POSITION AFTER 17. Bb1

allow White too strong an attack with 18. Be3 Qxb2 19. Bd4 Qb4 20. e5. But Stockfish points out an ingenious escape route: 19. ... Nxe4!! 20. Bxg7 (Black wins after *20. Rxe4? f5! 21. Bxg7 fxe4*) 20. ... Nd2!! 21. Qf2 Kxg7 22. Qd4+ Kg8 23. Rf2 Nb3! with a slight plus for Black.

18. Kh1 Rfe8?!

Here, unlike in the previous note, the engines' move choice reflects Benoni themes: 18. ... b4 19. Ne2 Rab8 or 19. ... a5, with White slightly better in either case.

19. axb5 axb5 20. Nxb5 Qc5 21. Nc3 Rab8 22. Re2

Black lacks real compensation for the pawn.

22. ... Qc7

Of course the b-pawn was immune: 22. ... Rxb2 23. Na4.

23. Nd1 Nc5 24. e5!

The thematic pawn advance in this structure, which together with his next move gives White a winning advantage.

24. ... Nfd7 25. e6! fxe6 26. dxe6 Nxe6

No better is 26. ... Nf6 27. f5 with a won position.

27. f5 gxf5 28. Bxf5 Ne5 29. Qh5 Nf8 30. Bc3 Neg6?

It was slightly better to play 30. ... Nfg6 or 30. ... Kh8.

31. Ref2?

Not the most incisive, but still comfortably winning. But 31. Bxg6 would force Black to part with his queen after either 31. ... hxg6 (or *31. ... Nxg6*) 32. Qd5+ followed by Rf1-f7.

31. ... Be5 32. Be4 Rb5 33. Ne3

Renewing the threat of Be4-d5+.

33. ... Re7 34. Nd5 Qd8 35. Nxe7+ Qxe7 36. Qg4 Bxc3 37. Rxf8+ Qxf8 38. Rxf8+ Kxf8 39. bxc3, Black resigned. ♟