

(28) Bronstein,D - Gulko,B C08

Moscow, 1968

Boris: It was the first tournament where I played with grandmasters. Petrosian was the World Champion at that time and he was playing in this tournament, the Moscow Championship. Bronstein was the leader with two rounds to go.

Joel: Your opponent was one of the great players of all time, right?

Boris: Yes, and despite it being 16 years after his draw in the World Championship match with Botvinnik in 1952, he was still one of the best. Because of the game, Petrosian was able to catch him and they tied for first place.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bb5+ Nc6 6 Ne2

Boris: A novelty at the time. The idea behind this move is that black cannot pin the knight with Bc8-g4 and from e2 it is easier to attack (in one move) the d5 pawn. After this game, the continuation with 6 Ne2 was forgotten but 10 years later it became popular when Karpov played it several times.

Joel: You voluntarily accept an isolated queen pawn (IQP). Can you say why?

Boris: Isolated pawns have their advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are open files for rooks and control of important central squares (e4 and c4). I like this variation and played it very successfully. This position was researched very deeply in the Karpov-Korchnoi match 1979 with Korchnoi taking the black side of the position. In the end, Karpov was able to demonstrate some plans that made this variation unpleasant for black.

6...Qb6!?

Boris: The move 6 Ne2 lost its popularity after the brilliant game Yudasin-Vaganian USSR championship 1983, which continued 6...Nf6! 7 0-0 Bd6 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 Nb3 Bb6 10 Nbd4 0-0!! 11

Joel: That sequence seems very obvious to me. The ideas are probably much deeper than I can appreciate. It seems to me something a 1600 would play in a blitz game without thinking.

Boris: It's very strong because he just played 10 c3 with the obvious idea of taking back on d4 with the pawn. Therefore, I took on d4 pretty quickly.

Joel: Do you think he played 10 c3 intending to react to the capture of the pawn with 11 g4 or do you think he realized after you played 10...cxd4 that he had a better continuation in 11 g4?

Boris: He was a good psychologist and he clearly played 10 c3 hoping I would take on d4. By taking the pawn on d4 I over estimated my position. Instead of opening the position I had to close it with 10...c4, and if white plays against the bishop on h5 with 11 f4, black has to sacrifice a piece with 11...0-0-0! 12 g4 Nxc4 13 hxg4 (if 13 Ng3 black suddenly wins with 13 Nxd4!) Bxc4 with good compensation for the piece.

Joel: Why not 11...Bxe2 so that black doesn't lose a piece?

Boris: It is better to lose a piece and have a good position than save material and lose the position. After 11...Bxe2 12 Qxe2+ black cannot castle and is in trouble despite equal material.

Joel: What about 12...Be7?

Boris: In that case white has the very strong 13 b3 intending Bc1-a3.

11 g4! Bg6

Boris: Bad for black was 11...dxc3 12 Nxc3 Bg6 13 g5 and after the knight moves 14 Nxd5 gives white a decisive attack.

12 Nxd4 0-0-0

Boris: Black has to choose this extremely risky way because if 12...a6 he would lose a piece after 13 Re1+ Be7 14 Qe2! 0-0 15 Bxc6 bxc6 16 a5! (not 16 Qxe7 because of 16...Rfe8).

13 a5!

Joel: Why can't black just take the pawn with 13 Nxa5?

Boris: The natural 14 Qa4 doesn't promise much because of 14...a6! But 14 g5! would have been very strong. For example, 14...Ne4 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 b4 Nc6 17 Qg4+ Kb8 18 Bxc6 bxc6 19 Be3 and white wins or 14...Nh5 15 Qa4 a6 16 Be2 Nc4 17 Nxc4 dxc4 18 Qd1! winning the knight on h5.

13...Qc7 14 a6 Nxd4 15 axb7+ Kb8

Black uses white's advanced b-pawn for cover.

16 cxd4



White is ready to attack the last bastion of black's king, the pawn on a7. How should black proceed? (difficulty level 3)

Joel: I would like to attack the king but it doesn't seem so easy. Black doesn't have a lot of pieces on that side of the board and against a move like h7-h5 white can just play g4-g5 closing the kingside. Therefore, I think I would play the prophylactic 16...Bc2.

Boris: Absolutely correct! It is important to prevent white's queen from getting to a4.

16...Bc2! 17 Qe2 h5 18 g5!?

Boris: The decision of a strong grandmaster. If you are a computer, you would calculate the wild complications that follow after 18 Nf3! hxg4 19 Ne5 Rxh3 20 Nc6+ Qxc6 21 Bxc6 Be4 22 f3! Rg3+ 23 Kf2 Rxf3+ 24 Ke1 Bb4+ 25 Bd2 Bd3 26 Qe5+ Bd6 27 Rxf3 Bxe5 28 Rxd3 and white is winning.

18...Ng4! 19 f4!



Boris: Correct!

Joel: What is so interesting about that exercise is that the move is quite easy to see once you know the plan but being able to see white's plan is virtually impossible. I would have never seen that idea in a million years. I would have just kept looking for opportunities when it would be safe to take the knight.

Boris: You know, Bronstein takes the knight now but I think he had not to do this. It is very difficult, however, not to take something when the drawbacks are not so obvious but this is a statement about human nature. This was demonstrated by the Trojan horse, which allowed finally the Greeks to enter the city of Troy. They didn't need this horse but finally decided to take it not understanding the consequences.

19...f6! 20 hxg4 hxg4



What white has to play? (difficulty level 5)

Joel: I want to keep the kingside closed and was thinking about 21 g6 but I see now that such a move accomplishes very little since white could just take on g6.

Boris: Yes, that would just waste a tempo. After 21 g6 it would better not to take the pawn with 21...Bxg6, which would also lose time since the pawn doesn't play any significant role in this position, but to play 21...Qb6 winning the d4 pawn and developing the initiative.

The goal for white is to reach the black king and black's goal is of course to reach white's king. White is ahead in creating threats because it is his move and he would like to jump on a6 with this queen threatening mate. White has an extra piece but in this position it does not make that much difference in terms of who will mate first.

21 Ba4?

In the time of the game, I considered two moves: 21 Bd3?! after which I prepared 21...Bc5! 22 dxc5 Qxc5+ 23 Kg2 Rde8 24 Ne4 Bxd3 25 Qxd3 Rxe4 with a very unclear position due to the vulnerable position of white's king; and the stronger 21 Ra6! including the rook in the game and threatening after 22 Rc6 to win the c2 bishop. After 21...Bf5 22 Rc6 Qxb7 23 Ra6! the position looks bad for black.

Joel: Why does the rook return to a6?

Boris: It prepares Bb5-c6. I wasn't afraid of 21 Qxg4 because strong grandmasters look for ways to attack not defend.

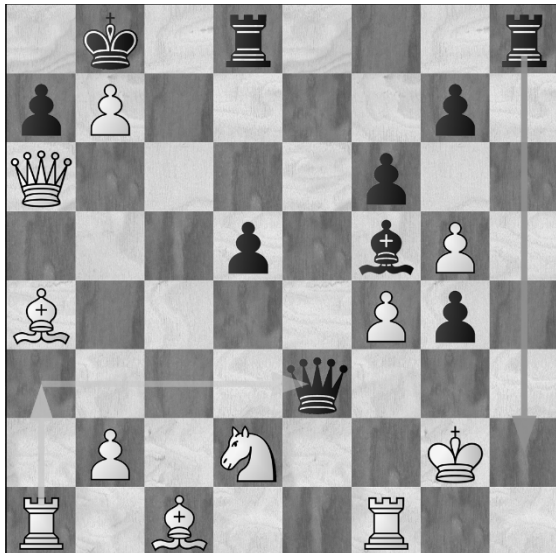
Joel: How would black follow up?

Boris: 21...Qb6 attacking on b5 and d4 and suddenly white is on the defensive. Bronstein played the move the computer considers strongest but I think they are both wrong!

21...Bf5!

Boris: I was glad to protect the g4 pawn because it restricts white's pieces

22 Qa6



What is black's threat if it were his move? What is white's only defense? (difficulty level 4)

Boris: Do you have any ideas?

Joel: I am trying to calculate 25...Rh2+ but I am having trouble after 26 Kxh2. I am looking at 26...g3+ Kg2 and 27 Rh8 when 28 Bh3 would be mate.

Boris: But white has 27...Qd6+ and white mates first. What other checks do you have after 26 Kxh2?

Joel: 26...Qh3+ 27 Kg1

Boris: And? Do you see any more checks?

Joel: 27...Qg3+ 28 Kh1 Rh8#

Boris: Correct. Now, how does white defend?

Joel: Well, 25 Rh1 loses to 25...Rxb1.

Boris: Yes, why exchange your very important defensive rook?

Joel: 25 Nf3 loses to 25...gxf3+.

Boris: Right. It is important that you include all your pieces in both attack and defense. What piece is not working?

Joel: Oh, I see, 25 Ra3.

Boris: Right, this is the only defense.

25 Ra3! Be4+ 26 Nxe4 Qxe4+ 27 Kg3

Boris: White threatens 28 Qxa7+ Kxa7 29 Bc2+ transposing to an endgame with an extra piece so black's first task is to hide his queen from the light square bishop.

27...Rh3+ 28 Kxg4 Qg2+ 29 Kf5



Black has to decide whether to give a perpetual check or continue the game. What would you do?
(difficulty level 5)

Joel: I think I would take a perpetual since (in fantasy) I am playing David Bronstein and a draw is a great result. Although that's a bit of a joke, it does bring up the fact that this is 1968, it is your first big grandmaster tournament, and your playing Bronstein. I know you went on to win this game so you obviously were able to find something that I don't see, but psychologically, how did you not simply take the perpetual as a good result?

Boris: A draw would have been a good result but a win would have been at least twice better. Generally I was self-confident enough to look for a win. It is also a question of the estimation of the position. If a perpetual is the only option, of course, you have to take it but I saw more.

Joel: I guess if you see an easy perpetual than you should look for more since you know you can draw.

Boris: Right, so you have to figure out a way to reach white's king. Do you see any?

Joel: Nothing other than 29...Qe4.

Boris: You have to find a way to include the rook on d8 in the attack.

Joel: 29...d4 loses to 30 Qxa7+ Kxa7 31 Bc6+

Boris: True, is there another way to include the d8 rook in the attack?

Joel: Maybe 29...fxg5?

Boris: Correct!

29...fxg5!



When you are up material it is generally recommended to trade pieces. Here white has 30 Rxh3. Is that the best move or is there a better alternative? (difficulty level 6)

Joel: Black is just about to play 30...Rf8+.

Boris: Right, can you prevent it?

Joel: Yes, with 30 Be8 threatening mate.

Boris: So what does black have to do?

Joel: 30...Qe4+

Boris: Right and so by playing 30...Be8 white can force black to take a draw. What about 30 Rxh3? What does your intuition tell you?

Joel: It is what I would play, it's the natural move.

Boris: It is impossible to calculate all of the possibilities during the game and so Bronstein played according to the rules and exchanged rooks but 30 Be8 was stronger forcing a draw.

Now the computer states that by playing 30 Re1!?! Rxa3 31 Qa5!?! (in the case of 31 bxa3 Qh3+ black would win) white can obtain an advantage. This, however, is a variation from the fantasy world of the Matrix and the Terminator. Humans don't think like this so such variations are generally not available to us. This variation illustrates Nimzowitch's idea that the nest attacking moves are usually beautiful whereas the best defensive moves are usually ugly. Bronstein here made a mistake because he had a choice, which is the most difficult aspect of chess. For example, Bronstein played 25 Ra3 immediately because he didn't have a choice.

30 Rxf3? Rf8+ 31 Kg6

If white moves his king in the other direction he will lose his queen, e.g., 31 Ke5 Qe4+ 32 Kd6 Rf6+

31...gxf4+ 32 Kh7 Qxh3+ 33 Kxg7 Qh8+ 34 Kg6 Rg8+ 35 Kf5



Until now black's moves were forced. Now he is faced with four checks. Three of them are losing and one is winning. Can you find the winning check? (difficulty level 3)

Joel: I like 35...Qh7+ because this move allows black to check the white king in the center of the board after 36 Kxf4.

Boris: That is not check it is checkmate! Yes, all other moves lose but 35...Qh7+ wins either the king of the queen.

35...Qh7+! 36 Ke5 Qe4+ 37 Kd6 Rg6+ 38 Kc5 Rxa6 39 Bxf4+ Kxb7 40 Bb5 Ra5 0–1

After the game we analyzed it together for a long time. He concluded the post-mortem with one of his typical paradoxical phrases: “It is not a pity to lose such a game but it is a pity not to win it.”

Joel: How did you feel after beating Bronstein?

Boris: The game was very exciting so I was of course pleased. The next day I defeated the leader of the tournament, the late grandmaster Lieberman. It was his only defeat of the tournament but in the final round I lost to Petrosian, which prevented me from qualifying for the Soviet championship and allowed Petrosian to catch Bronstein and tie for first.