

About the Author

Dr Colin Crouch is an International Master, a tremendously experienced tournament player and a highly regarded chess writer. His books have received great acclaim for their thoroughness and originality.

Also by the Author:

Rate Your Endgame

Chess Secrets: Great Attackers

Modern Chess: Move by Move

Why We Lose at Chess

Analyse Your Chess

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Preface

Many books get written as a result of illness, of being stuck in bed. This is another of these examples. In the spring of 2012, I found myself with swollen legs and could barely walk. I could climb upstairs only with hands and feet, and it seems that my hands were taking too much of the strain, trying to pull myself up the stairs, or out of the bath, or into bed. So my arms became damaged as well.

When I felt myself strong enough to get up and sit in front of the computer, I wanted to play through some really top-level games of chess. The timing was fortunate for me. I noticed that there was a friendly match between Aronian and Kramnik coming up soon, and then the World Championship between Anand and Gelfand, just a month later. Although I was starting to walk again a little, I was still in and out of hospital. To play through world-class games was a lifeline to me to the outside world.

I blogged each of the games of the two matches, without any real thought about publishing in book format. I soon appreciated that, with a little extra effort, fully revising all my earlier notes and adding further games, this might be of unusual chess interest – not necessarily because of the strengths and weaknesses of my own writing, but because I had stumbled on unusually good timing.

This became fully clear after these two matches, and then the next really big tournament, the Tal Memorial. Remember that at the start of the 1960s, Tal beat Botvinnik to become world champion at the age of 23, a then unprecedented display of chess youth and vigour. Tal's health deteriorated very early on and, while he remained a strong and dangerous grandmaster through to the end of his life, he was never the dominant force his admirers had hoped for.

Given this context, the Tal Memorial of Moscow 2012 was a strong reflection of what he had himself achieved just over fifty years earlier. This time, though, there were three grandmasters, all in their early twenties or teens, aspiring to show that they too could soon become world champions. After a tense battle, Carlsen (21), Radjabov (25) and Caruana (19) came out first, second and third, against opposition of vastly over 2700 strength.

This must surely herald the switch of the generations. Anand will of course aim to remain World Champion for as long as possible, but eventually younger players will take

Fighting Chess: Move by Move

over. Could this be Carlsen, with his admirable ability to avoid defeat? Or Caruana, a few years younger? Or Giri, who is even younger? Or one of a small number of other players?

Colin Crouch,
Harrow,
November 2012.

Introduction

This book is based on the idea that every move is important, any mistake by either player is significant, and any mistake by the opponent should be pounced upon. The theme in this book is based on what can loosely be described as “positional chess”, on giving nothing away to the opponent, and on being alert to opportunity given by the opponent.

I am fascinated that the strongest players avoid losses to a remarkable extent, even when play appears sharp and double-edged. How, I wondered, do these top grandmasters keep their balance? The statistics are awe-inspiring. In six games against Kramnik, Aronian lost only once. In six games against Aronian, Kramnik lost only once. In twelve games against Anand, Gelfand lost only once. In twelve games against Gelfand, Anand lost only once. Four losses out of 36. Few club players, playing against opponents of their own strength, could achieve such a low percentage of losses. What is the secret of the top players?

Personally, in my own games, I find I have wins and losses, very rarely draws, and even more rarely do I achieve solidly played draws. I would love to know how to turn these losses into draws, except I suspect that the answer is relatively simple. I am usually good enough to find wins against players up to about IM strength, but quite often, in declining health, I get tired, and cannot think clearly enough, and so I lose.

I was also startled, when going through recent games, that players somewhat younger than me (I am in my mid fifties) can occasionally lose their sharpness, and sometimes make uninspired mistakes. Just before the World Championship, Anand handled the opening dreadfully against Tiviakov, in the German Bundesliga, and was straightforwardly ground down in a Sicilian, where Anand played ...e7-e5, and lost control of the d5-square and the files and diagonals nearby. Kramnik, too, in his first game against Aronian, played almost unrecognisably. Could they, on bad days, play almost as badly as me?

One bad loss happens, but it is important, if at all possible, not to start a string of bad losses. It is a question of match survival. In the two matches being examined, all four players lost a game, but they did not lose any further games. The problem is, if anything, more the opposite, an excess of “animal spirits”, a belief that if you have won one game, you can play whatever you like, and you are immune to mistakes. Both Aronian and Gelfand suffered from this.

I felt slightly disappointed with the World Championship match, not because it was “boring”, but rather because there seem to have been several opportunities for both sides

to try for an edge in many lines. Too often, the initiative tended to fizzle out much too quickly. If your position is clearly level throughout, then you have every right to offer or accept a fairly quick draw. If, on the other hand, one of the players had even the slightest of edges, that player should try to make the opponent suffer. A win plus four draws is better than five draws.

If the reader feels slightly disconcerted that there is such a switch between the first person and the third person, the second person – you – can have your point of view in the analysis. Imagine that I am sitting in my room, with the computer, trying to make sense of what is going on in a series of difficult positions, while being aware that the two players involved are vastly stronger than me. I know, however, that they occasionally make mistakes, as they do occasionally lose games. I am trying to assess, perhaps with the help of the computer, what is going on in a string of moves; to decide whether the player is seeing things more clearly than me, and finds a much better move than I was thinking of; or whether the player has made a mistake in a critical position, which I noticed; or whether, if the player and I chose different moves, both moves might be equally valid.

Watching live chess games is one of the best ways of sharpening a player's thinking. There is an immediacy which cannot be achieved just by going through games which have already been played, recorded and analysed. For a writer, maybe it is a useful prod for the reader to invite him, or her, to be asked what the player should be thinking, in a new position, in a book. Hence plenty of questions and answers.

After the live game, I try to analyse further, and I have been blogging it up. All the games in the Aronian-Kramnik match and the Anand-Gelfand match are written up in my blog, *shakthinking*, usually a day or two after the game. I thought about deleting my comments in these games, before publication, but I decided against it. The *shakthinking* notes were merely an earlier draft, with, I have to admit, many typos (it's difficult with only half of one eye working), and if I am able to find mistakes in my earlier annotations, then of course I can try to correct these mistakes for a later draft. It might still be useful for some readers to compare before and after notes.

Which leaves this to the more detailed questions of the reader. I am asking you, in effect, the same questions as I asked myself in playing through the games live. If I felt that a player has pushed a pawn too early, for example, I want to re-analyse the position. If I find that the player's move was, after all, correct, that is fine, and I have learned something. If I find that the player has got it wrong, and I cannot see any way to disprove the argument I have made, then this is also knowledge. What I am asking you, the reader, is to go through the same exercises yourself.

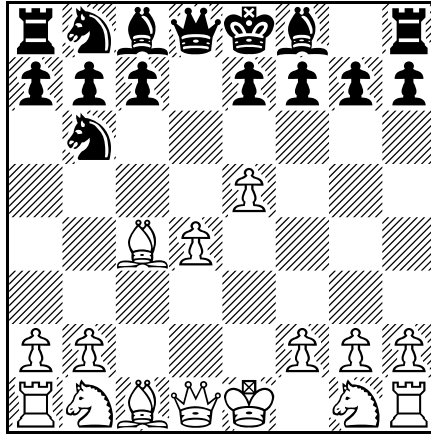
Many of the exercise are open-ended. Remember that most of the games in this book end up in draws, and so there is no clear-cut winning line, or winning plan, that needs to be found. Instead, we are dealing far more with positional uncertainty. If there are apparently four reasonable moves in a given position (and the reader can check out these moves on the computer), which of these is the safe equalizing line? Or on a different set of four possible moves, one might give a fractional edge; another might be about equal; another

might end up, after some tactics, with a repetition; while another, apparently equally promising, might end up with a slight disadvantage.

These exercises are based mainly on positional chess, on giving nothing away to the opponent. More specifically, they are based on fighting positional chess, on recognizing that your opponent will want to give nothing away, while you yourself do not want to give anything away. There is no assumption, in fighting positional chess, that everything will end up with a quick handshake after around a dozen moves; nor even in a quick win after a blunder by the opponent. No, these games are played out to the end, and well contested.

14th June 2012
A.Morozevich-H.Nakamura
 Tal Memorial, Moscow 2012
Queen's Gambit Accepted

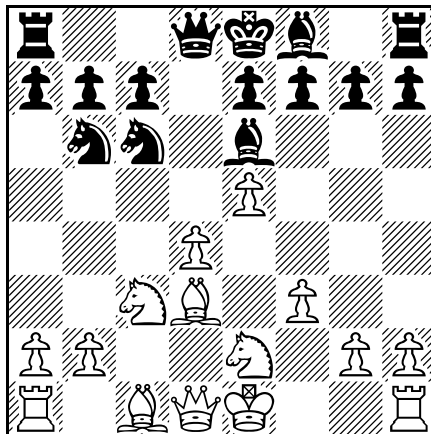
1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘d5 5 ♙xc4 ♗b6



6 ♙d3

A necessary retreat. The position is now tense, but about level. White has more space in the centre, but his d- and e-pawns are loose. Black has less space, but he is able to manoeuvre effectively within that space.

6... ♘c6 7 ♗e2 ♙g4 8 f3 ♙e6 9 ♗bc3



9... ♗d7

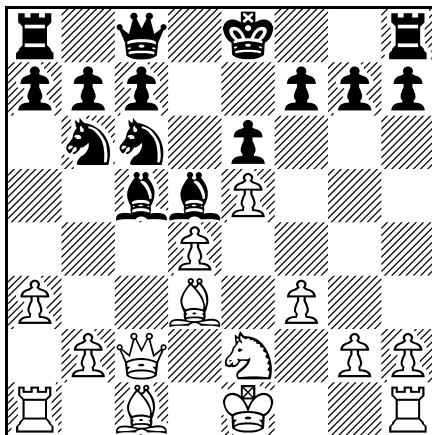
Fighting Chess: Move by Move

Nakamura runs a tight ship. In an earlier game, A.Morozevich-Ar.Timofeev, Russian Championship, Moscow 2011, Black tried a more open defence with 9...♙xc4 10 ♙xc4 ♘xc4, when Morozevich choked up Black's kingside with 11 e6 fxe6 12 0-0. For trivia followers, the next retreat by White was at move 24, after 12...♘b6 13 ♘e4 g6 14 ♘c5 ♚d6 15 ♘xb7 ♚d5 16 ♙e3 ♙g7 17 ♘f4 ♚f5 18 ♚c1 ♘xd4 19 ♙xd4 ♙xd4+ 20 ♚xd4 e5 21 ♚b4 ♚xf4 22 ♚b5+ c6 23 ♚xc6+ ♙f7, and now 24 ♘c5. White was already close to winning, but the knight cannot be expected to move forward from b7.

10 ♘e4 ♙d5 11 ♘c5 ♚c8 12 a3 e6 13 ♚c2

All roughly equal so far.

13...♙xc5

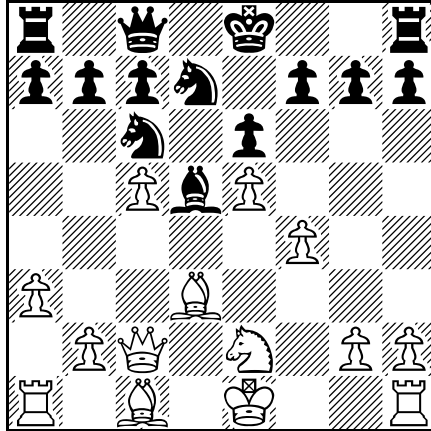


Question: How should White recapture?

14 dxc5?!

This leaves both the e5- and c5-pawns unnecessarily exposed. 14 ♚xc5 is still about equal.

14...♘d7 15 f4

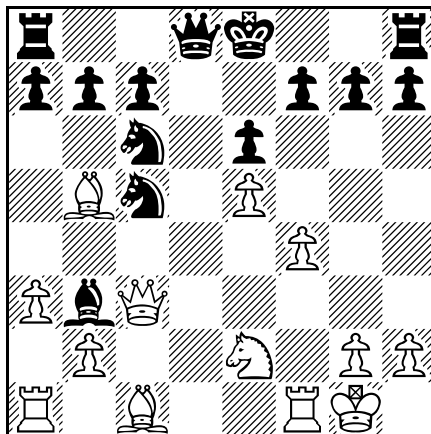


Question: How can Black take over the initiative? Look for a tactical attempt to exploit the weak c5-pawn. The second, more difficult, question is whether Black has a genuine advantage.

15...♙xg2

This is certainly playable and should have been equal, but Morozevich later treated it as a gambit and ended up losing.

The computer suggests that 15...♚d8!? is a considerable improvement, with a clear advantage for Black, the main line being 16 0-0 ♗b3 (a sudden tactical resource) 17 ♙c3 (best; after 17 ♙xb3? ♖xc5 and 18...♙xd3, Black wins a pawn safely) 17...♘xc5 18 ♗b5.



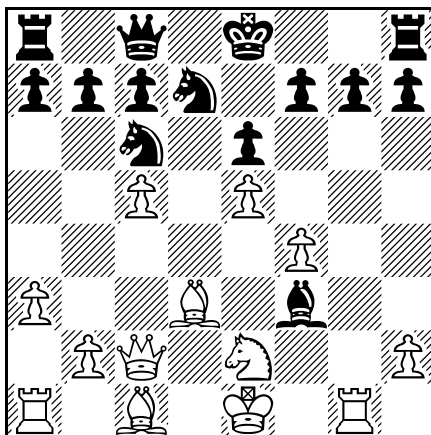
Although Black is again a pawn up, he has too many pieces under pressure to be completely happy (and yes, this is a human response, not a computer response). The position is

extremely complicated, Black's minor pieces are hanging, so why should he try to calculate much further?

Play on a move or so and we reach 18...♔d5 19 ♘d4 ♙a4! 20 ♙xc6+ (or 20 ♙e3 ♙xb5 21 ♘xb5 ♘a6) 20...bxc6, when Black seems to keep an edge – but how many chess players would be confident to calculate all this in advance?

Nakamura seems to have missed a very difficult line, though Morozevich's game was not easy anyway.

16 ♖g1 ♙f3



Question: What next for White?

17 ♙e3?

Unnecessarily allowing Black an extra tempo, which should have won the game for him relatively comfortably.

White should have preferred 17 ♖xg7, and if 17...♔d8, then maybe 18 ♘g1!? ♙h5 19 ♖xh7 (19 ♙xh7 ♘d4 is possible for White, but he will need to be careful with the queen) 19...♖xh7 20 ♙xh7 ♘d4 21 ♖c3 (again, he needs to handle the queen safely with the king being exposed) 21...♔h4+ 22 ♖g3 ♖xg3+ 23 hxg3. The position is tense, but about equal.

White could instead try to complete his development (finally!) with 18 ♙e3, but after 18...♔h4+ 19 ♘g3 ♖h6 20 ♖g5 0-0-0, Black, with his own pieces now developed, looks to have slightly the more flexible position.

In a complicated early middlegame, where various pieces have not yet been brought into play, it is often a difficult judgment as to what priority should be given between development, or taking a pawn, or bringing the already developed pieces into more active play. Here, taking the pawn should have been preferred. It is not just the number of pawns that needs to be considered; it is also that White, by taking on g7, would have damaged Black's kingside structure.

17...g6

Whereas now, White must struggle.

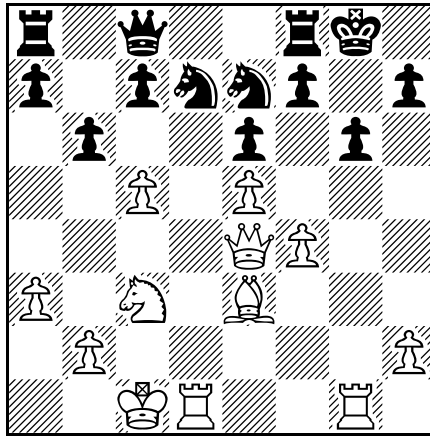
18 0-0-0 ♞e7 19 ♙e4 ♙xe4 20 ♚xe4 b6

Or perhaps 20...♞d5.

21 ♞c3

Preventing the opposing knight from reaching d5.

21...0-0



Question: It's starting to look desperate for White. He is a pawn down, and Black is nearly ready to play ...♞f5, after which there is no hope of an attack against the king. What can White do next?

22 c6! ♞b8 23 f5!

Magnificent gambit play. White is already a pawn down, but he is ready to sacrifice two more, not so much to provide clear compensation, just to open up lines to attack the king. Win or lose, Morozevich showed resourcefulness. Without these pawn sacrifices, he would quickly have gone under.

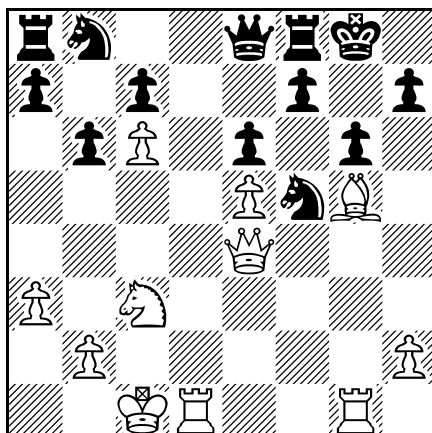
Despite the end result, affected by time trouble, Morozevich had given himself good chances to hold the game.

23...♞xf5 24 ♙g5

And the bishop is now in full play. If it reaches f6, Black will have to be worried about mating attacks on g7, or along the h-pawn.

24...♚e8

Black needs to bring his queenside pieces into play.

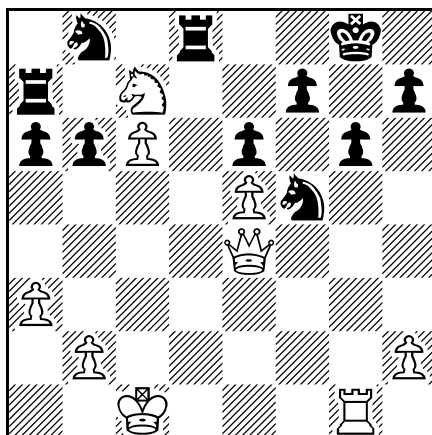


Question: What now? There is an obvious move, but how far can you calculate it?

25 ♖f4?

Amazingly, Morozevich did not try it. Here 25 ♖d8 forces Black to give up the queen, since 25... ♗xc6?? 26 ♙xb8! ♗xe4 27 ♙xf8+, followed by ♗xe4, wins a piece.

Therefore he has to play 25... ♗xd8 26 ♙xd8 ♙xd8. Black is slightly ahead in material (having rook, knight and two pawns for the queen), but his pieces are undeveloped. We play on with 27 ♗b5 (this has to be done quickly) 27... a6 28 ♗c7 ♙a7



29 ♗a8! (the various computers suggest this move) and, after 29... ♗xc6, White makes his first retreat since move six by 30 ♗xb6, with a likely draw after 30... ♙c7 31 ♗b1. This would have been a far tidier finish.

In the game itself, it is perhaps kindest not to try to analyse every move in depth, as

both players were clearly short of time. The main creative part of the game has been and gone. Now all White can do is try to find decent moves to reach the fortieth.

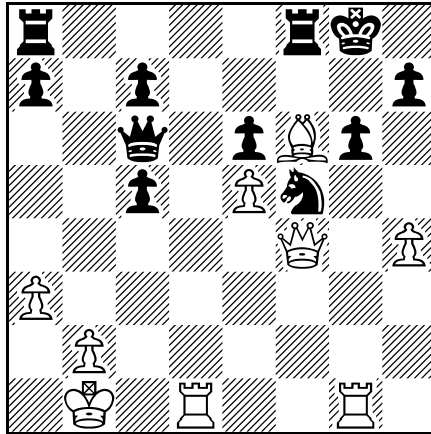
25...f6

It is understandable that Nakamura did not want to risk 25...♖xc6 in time trouble. White might, for example, try 26 ♔b1 followed by ♕e4; or there might be other possibilities. We'll leave it at that. Any slight mishap could easily end up with a quick defeat, not something he would have liked.

26 ♖xf6 ♗xc6

Black has jettisoned his f-pawn in order to create more space for his pieces.

27 ♔b1 ♘d7 28 ♘e4 ♘c5 29 ♘xc5 bxc5 30 h4



Question: Quick assessment, as Black is in time trouble. What would you do if you had to make a move in a minute?

30...♖f7?!

A loss of tempo. This rook move is unnecessary for his defence.

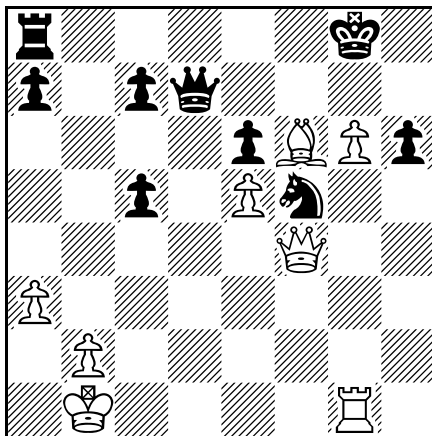
The computer suggests 30...c4, though after 31 ♖c1, it is difficult to believe that Black has any significant edge.

The correct continuation, it seems, is 30...♖ab8, and if 31 h5, only then 31...c4, and Black is still genuinely better. For example, after 32 hxg6 h6 33 g7 ♖fc8 34 ♖c1 c3 35 ♖c2 ♖b3, he will double up on the b-file. Black continues his attack until the very last moment, playing a defensive move only when absolutely necessary. The general ratio is something like three attacking moves to one defensive move, when there are attacks against kings on opposite flanks. This is only an approximation, of course, but it is a reminder that it is best not to be over-defensive in an advantageous but sharp position.

Maybe a quick-thinking reader would be able to envisage this in a minute. For the rest of us, the important point is that Black, by pressing through with his attack immediately,

has gained crucial time.

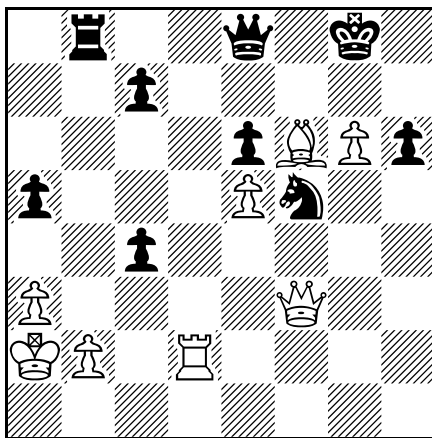
31 h5 ♖d7 32 hxg6 h6 33 ♖xd7 ♔xd7



34 ♔f3

After all the strange vicissitudes, the game is now level again. Unfortunately, in time trouble it did not remain equal.

34...♖b8 35 ♖d1 ♔e8 36 ♖d2 c4 37 ♔a2 a5



Question: What should White play here? Again, make your decision quickly.

38 ♔d1??

According to Morozevich, just about any reasonable move would have been fine, other than the one actually played. He missed his opponent's pawn hack.

38...c3! 39 bxc3 ♘e3

Suddenly, all his pieces are after the white king. In contrast, White's advanced g-pawn merely blocks any attack against the black king.

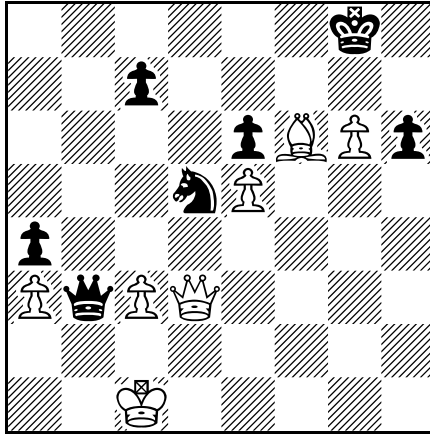
40 ♖e2 ♘d5 41 ♚d3

If 41 ♖c4, Black has an instant win with 41...♚a4 42 ♗xa4 ♘xc3+ 43 ♙a1 ♜b1 mate.

41...a4

Followed, if allowed, by ...♜b3.

42 ♜b2 ♜xb2+ 43 ♙xb2 ♗b8+ 44 ♙c1 ♗b3



White's bishop is useless.

45 ♗a6 ♗xc3+ 46 ♙d1 ♘e3+ 47 ♙e2 ♗c4+ 0-1

A strange game.

Round Eight: Caruana-Kramnik

In truth, this was hardly a great game by Kramnik. Once a player, even a great player, has started to hit the mid thirties, tiredness will occasionally set in, and more frequent mistakes will occur. Kramnik had, in the previous two rounds, played two very long and tiring games, the latter being a loss (see below). Resilience can start to decrease, even if only slowly, and there will be dangers of further losses.

Of course, only a really strong player would be able to exploit such minor weaknesses, and Caruana is indeed such a strong player. He had, at the time of this game, slightly more than a decade before needing to worry about similar signs of decline. His current problem, as exemplified in his game against Morozevich, is that he can still make mistakes through inexperience. His peak will come some time, perhaps, in his late twenties.

As for the long games by Kramnik: it took him 36 moves to win Tomashevsky's a-pawn, to reach an endgame with rook, knight and four kingside pawns, versus rook, knight and three kingside pawns. This was going to be a long struggle, and Tomashevsky lasted out until move 83. Then against McShane, just after the time control, the players reached an intense queen and rook ending with three pawns on each side, two of them passed.