

World Chess Championship 1948

The Hague-Moscow

PAUL KERES



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List of symbols

†	Check
!	A strong move
!!	A brilliant move
!?	An interesting move
?!	A dubious move
?	A mistake
??	A blunder

Publisher's preface

DUE TO THE KEEN reception of my translation of Paul Keres' *World Chess Championship 1948*, it is already time to publish a third edition. How did this project get started? After learning it was one of Garry Kasparov's favourite books, I decided to translate it from Estonian to English. Much can be said about Garry, but he does not readily offer compliments or recommendations. Hearing of his high praise for this book, I understood I had found a treasure the chess world had overlooked. I worked on the book for four years, in tandem with my regular studies and work, and finally achieved my goal of publishing it in 2016, on the 100th anniversary of the birth of Paul Keres.

What is so remarkable about *World Chess Championship 1948* by Paul Keres to make it worth studying by new generations of chess players when there are so many more recent books featuring updated theory and ever stronger players? There are good reasons why this book remains relevant today. First is the historical significance of the tournament. The 1948 World Chess Championship occupies a unique place in chess history. Elite international chess tournaments were rare occurrences in World War II, and the 1948 World Chess Championship is considered the world's most paramount chess event since the 1938 AVRO tournament. The 1948 lineup was incredibly strong; the five participants included one former and two future world champions. The competition ended with Mikhail Botvinnik being crowned as the new world champion, heralding the start of the Soviet hegemony of international chess that would prevail for decades to come.

Second is the quality of the games and comments. Books from the pre-computer era usually contain substantial analytical errors. However, all the analyses in this book were checked with chess engines. But there were practically no significant mistakes, and this was in a book written in 1949 under conditions far from ideal for Keres. What makes *World Chess Championship 1948* unique, aside from Keres' profound analytical ability, is the exceptional clarity with which he explains what is going on in the games using an abundance of verbal comments instead of a forest of bare

variations. In my opinion, the instructional benefit of studying the games of past masters also surpasses the value of studying today's best players because their plans were much more straightforward in those times.

This book was the first I translated, and it motivated me to start my own company, Verendel Publishing, which aims to publish high-quality, timeless chess books. This goal is focused not only on our books' content but also on their production qualities. People today can easily and quickly access information online, and a screen can be its delivery portal. But it can never replace the feeling of luxury when holding a book in your hand. With every turn of the page, you will experience a sense of craftsmanship, depth of content quality, and lofty production values.

This edition has been significantly improved compared to the two previous ones. Philip Jurgens (Canada) has done a terrific job reviewing the whole book again, giving the grammar, diction, and syntax a final lift. Photos have been added and colourized with modern techniques to enhance the reader's feeling of the tournament's atmosphere. Most of the photographs appear courtesy of the Nationaal Archief of The Netherlands, the Soviet World News Services (1948), and the tournament book *Wereld-Kampioenschap Schaken 1948* by Max Euwe.

Since my first book, I have published two other great successes, namely *Akiba Rubinstein* by Yuri Razuvaev and Valery Murakhveri and *Gideon Ståhlberg - An Epoch in Swedish Chess, Volume I: The Musketeer Years 1908-1939* by Peter Holmgren. Many more books are yet to come, and I hope you will accompany me on this journey. Nothing makes me happier than receiving feedback from my readers, whether you have found a typo in the book, have a suggestion for a future publication, or just enjoyed reading the book. If you liked the book or even improved your game, tell me because then I know that the time and effort spent on this work was not in vain, which keeps me 'in the game'.

With these words, I invite you, dear reader, to travel back to 1948. Let us embark on this voyage into the heart of chess mastery, guided by the incomparable Paul Keres.

Jan Verendel
Stockholm, November 2024

I

FIRST CYCLE

Round 1

0 Euwe - Keres 1

½ Smyslov - Reshevsky ½

Bye: Botvinnik

In the game Euwe-Keres, White achieved a considerable positional edge after the opening, but at the decisive moment he did not find the correct plan and lost all his advantage. While playing on for a win, let's say under the "influence of inertia", Euwe did not pay attention to Black's small combination in the centre, after which his king came under a devastating attack. Black missed a quick win in time trouble, but even so, at the adjournment White was a piece down with a hopeless position. And after the resumption of the game, the ex-World Champion had to fill in his first loss in the tournament table.

Smyslov and Reshevsky played the Chigorin Variation in the Spanish Opening, where Black chose a continuation considered as unfavourable by theory, and soon found himself in a cramped position. An unmotivated exchange in the centre by Reshevsky gave White the opportunity to start a very strong kingside attack by 25.♘d5!. Smyslov did not notice this opportunity, and continued the game without a well-thought-out plan. Hence Black soon achieved equality, and even the somewhat more favourable game. But due to impending time trouble, he chose a simplifying continuation, and thereafter the players quickly agreed on a draw.

Tournament position after the first round: Keres 1, Reshevsky and Smyslov ½, Euwe 0.

*No 1. Ruy Lopez***M. Euwe — P. Keres**

The Hague, 2nd and 3rd March

1.e2-e4	e7-e5
2.♘g1-f3	♘b8-c6
3.♙f1-b5	a7-a6
4.♙b5-a4	d7-d6

This so-called “Steinitz Deferred Defence” gives Black a somewhat more constricted position than the usual 4...♘f6, but it leads to theoretically less studied positions and hence offers more opportunities for different kinds of novelties. A good proof of the viability of the 4...d6 system is the fact that it was often successfully used by World Champions Capablanca and Alekhine. The 4...d6 line was seen in many games in the tournament, and Black can be fully satisfied with the outcome of the opening.

5.c2-c3	...
----------------	------------

Euwe made this move without long thought, and the fact that he used the same move again in later games shows that he apparently considers 5.c3 to be the strongest continuation for White at this point. Naturally a verdict of the strongest move is almost impossible at such an early phase of the game and the preference of one development system over another depends more on each player’s taste and playing style. However, practical experience shows that a reasonable opinion seems to be that the sharp variation 5.♙xc6† bxc6 6.d4 offers White the best hopes of an opening advantage. True, Black would in this case get the bishop pair, but as compensation White has the better development and good attacking chances.

5...	♙c8-d7
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Very interesting here is 5...f5, which was the continuation preferred by Capablanca. The possibilities after this move will be discussed in more detail in the game Euwe-Keres from the third cycle.

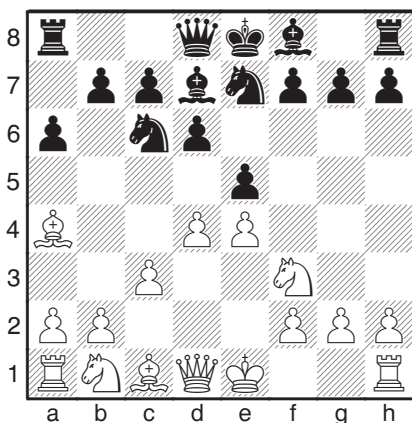
6.d2-d4

♞g8-e7

This interesting system of defence is very old, and was often used by World Champion Steinitz, though usually omitting the moves 3...a6 4.♙a4. With the text-manoeuve Black plans to develop his knight to g6, from where it protects the e5-point and later threatens to occupy the strong square f4 in several lines. The drawback of the move is the loss of time that is entailed with the knight development, and especially the weakening of the central square d5, where White soon places his knight.

Even though many theoreticians consider the text-move to be inferior, and also in the tournament Black did not achieve any considerable success with it, I still believe that 6...♞ge7 is a playable system of defence. If Black, for instance, continues with 6...g6 7.0-0 ♙g7, he will find himself facing much more unpleasant problems than in the game after the simple exchange 8.dxe5.

In addition, 6...♞f6, which would lead the game into the so-called Kecskemet variation, would yield Black a good game.



7.♙a4-b3

...

After Black has secured the e5-point by ...♞e7-g6, the light-squared bishop no longer has any prospects on a4, and for that reason its transfer to the a2-g8 diagonal is fully justifiable. Furthermore it occurs here with

the gain of a tempo, since Black has to play 7...h6 in order to thwart the threat of 8.♘g5.

7...	h7-h6
8.♘b1-d2	...

The value of this move depends on whether White subsequently has to fear the ...g7-g5 advance. In the game Ahues-Rubinstein, San Remo 1930, White continued with 8.♙e3 and after 8...g5 sacrificed a piece by 9.♙xg5 hxg5 10.♘xg5 d5 11.exd5 ♘a5. As later analysis proved, instead of the game-move 12.dxe5, White could have gained an advantage with the continuation 12.d6! ♘xb3 13.♚xb3 ♘d5 14.♘xf7 ♔xf7 15.dxc7 followed by ♚xd5†.

However, this whole line is not very convincing. Because, first of all, White lost an important tempo by the manoeuvre ♙c1-e3xg5 that he could have used for his development (for example 8.0-0), and secondly Black, instead of 8...g5, should have proceeded with the quiet 8...♘g6; after this White's bishop would simply be unfavourably placed on e3, blocking the path of White's knight on its way to d5 via e3.

Smyslov's idea to play 8.♘h4 would also not have been dangerous, since Black can either answer this by 8...♘a5 9.♙c2 g5 10.♘f5 ♘xf5 11.exf5 ♚f6, or by 8...♘c8 9.♘f5 g6 (9.♚h5 ♚e7), in both cases with a satisfactory game.

8...	♘e7-g6
------	--------

Here Black could have played 8...g5 if he wished, since now the piece sacrifice was not possible. However, in my opinion the main drawback of ...g7-g5 is not the sacrificial possibility on g5, but the general weakening of Black's position without the gain of any genuine counter-chances in return. For example, White could play 9.dxe5 dxex5 10.♘c4 and get a positional advantage after 10...♙g7 11.♘e3 as well as after 10...♘g6 11.h4 g4 12.h5!.

The conclusion is that White at this point does not have any reason to prevent Black from playing ...g7-g5, and thus his move 8.♘bd2 should be considered as fully playable.

9. ♖d2-c4 ♘f8-e7

9... ♗h4 would not have given anything here since, among other possibilities, White could have answered with the simple 10. ♖e3. Before going for an attack, Black has to finish his development.

10. 0-0 0-0
11. ♖c4-e3 ♘e7-f6

It is true that with this move, Black applies some pressure on the central square d4, but he thereby places his bishop in a somewhat exposed position, enabling White to create various tactical threats after the transfer of the knight to d5. Hence 11... ♗e8 looks better, with the intention to answer 12. ♖d5 with the retreat 12... ♘f8. In the game Bronstein-Keres, Moscow 1948, White continued with 12. ♗e1 ♘f8 13. ♘c2, but did not achieve any significant advantage after 13... ♗h4 14. ♖xh4 ♗xh4.

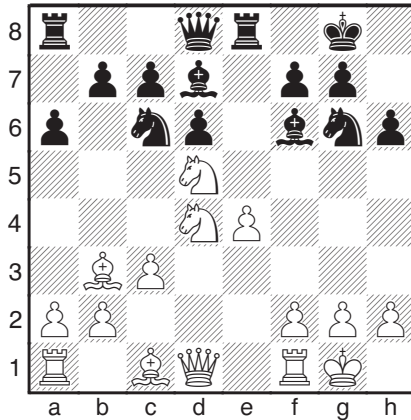
Moreover, also possible was 11... ♗h4 12. ♖xh4 ♘xh4, since 13. f4 exf4 14. ♗xf4 ♘g5 followed by ... ♗e7 is tolerable for Black.

12. ♖e3-d5 e5xd4

In the game Smyslov-Reshevsky from the third cycle, Black played the weaker 12... ♗e8 and after 13. dxe5! got into great difficulties. The text-move is stronger and forces White to recapture with the knight, since 13. cxd4 would be awkward in view of 13... ♘g4; if however Black would play 12... ♘g4 immediately, then simply 13. h3 ♘xf3 14. ♗xf3 and 14... exd4 is not dangerous due to 15. ♘xh6.

13. ♖f3xd4 ♗f8-e8

After the exchange of the central pawns, Black slightly relieves his cramped position, even though White still maintains a small spatial advantage. With the text-move, Black poses his opponent problems about how to protect the e4-pawn.



14. ♖d5xf6† ...

Such an exchange is not recommended unless there is urgent need, since first of all Black is even more freed, and secondly the position is further simplified and offers fewer attacking possibilities. In that respect 14. ♘c2 was certainly more interesting, retaining the tension in the position, even though White also in this case should not have any special advantage. Black could, for example, continue with 14... ♞xd4 15. cxd4 ♙b5 16. ♖e1 c5 and obtain adequate counterplay by attacking White's centre.

Also the move 14. ♖e1 has its drawbacks; Black would then play 14... ♞a5 15. ♘c2 c6 16. ♖xf6† ♚xf6 and now White is unable to carry out the essential f2-f4 advance.

Although with the game continuation White makes some concessions, he still assures himself a good position with the bishop pair and a slight initiative.

14... ♚d8xf6
15. f2-f3 ...

White must initially wait with the active f2-f4, since now the preparatory move 15. ♘c2 would already be suspect due to the pawn sacrifice 15...d5!, for example: 16. ♖xc6 bxc6 17. exd5 cxd5 18. ♚xd5 ♘c6 with dangerous counterplay. Furthermore, after 15. ♘c2, it is also possible to

continue along the lines of the previous variation with 15...♖xd4 16.cxd4 ♕b5 17.♞e1 c5.

15... ♖g6-f4

By this sally Black, it's true, threatens ...♖xd4 followed by ...♞xd4†, but after the parrying of this threat he just loses time and ends up worse off. A good plan instead was 15...♞ad8, with the intention of answering 16.♕e3 with 16...♖a5 17.♕c2 c5 with good counterplay.

16.♖d4xc6 ...

White could not proceed with developing his pieces normally, since 16.♕e3 would be answered by 16...♖a5 17.♕c2 ♞g5 18.♞d2 ♖c4 with an excellent game for Black. The text-exchange is not good either, since now Black has the possibility of assuring himself the control of important central squares.

However, after the simple 16.♖h1 Black would have had great difficulty in justifying his knight sally.

16... ♕d7xc6?

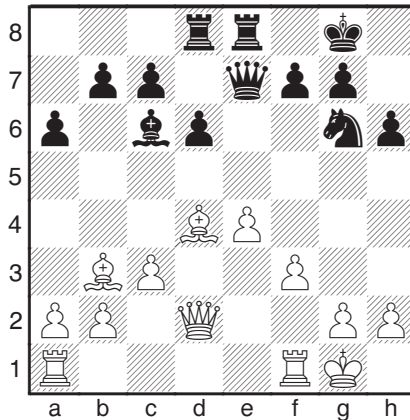
Surprisingly, Black abstains from the favourable opportunity to play 16...bxc6, which would after 17.♕e3 c5 have deprived the white bishop of the strong d4-square, and in some lines enabled Black to apply pressure on the b-file. It seems that Black in this case could have achieved an equal game. But now White can develop his pieces unhindered and start a dangerous advance on the kingside, against which Black has difficult in finding a satisfactory defence.

17.♕c1-e3 ♞a8-d8
18.♞d1-d2 ♖f4-g6

Now the consequence of Black's 15th move becomes apparent: the knight is forced to retreat, leaving Black in a completely passive position. No

better than the text-move was the retreat 18...♖e6 due to 19.♞ae1, since Black would then have had greater difficulties stopping the f3-f4 advance than in the game. Black must play the following moves with the utmost care in order to avoid immediately falling into a lost position.

19.♙e3-d4 ♚f6-e7



20.♞a1-e1 ...

White's position is superior and, by correct play, probably won. In order to achieve the win, the following kingside attack had to be well prepared, and in so doing Black's only counter-chance, which lies in the ...d6-d5 thrust, had to be quashed. By the text-move White prepares the f3-f4 advance, but this plan still looks premature and yields Black unnecessary counterplay on the queenside.

The correct continuation, in my opinion, was to play 20.c4!. This move would have permanently deprived Black of all hopes of carrying out the liberating ...d6-d5 thrust, and at the same time it would also thwart the possibility of ...♞d7 followed by ...♙a4, as occurred later in the game. In addition, the very strong 21.♞c3 would become a threat. It appears Black would thereafter have been unable to defend himself against ♞ae1, ♞c3, ♙c2 and f3-f4.

Another tempting possibility for White would have been the pawn

sacrifice 20.f4 ♖xe4 21.f5 which after 21...♗h4 22.♖f4! ♖xg2† 23.♖xg2 ♗xg2 24.♖g4 would have assured him of a clear advantage. However, Black can improve with 21...♗e2! and seize the advantage.

20... ♖e7-d7

Black now manages to exchange off one of White's strong bishops, since White can no longer prevent the positional threat of 21...♗b5 followed by ...♗a4 or ...d6-d5. Even though several commentators still consider White's position to be clearly better, I tend to believe that Black already has sufficient defensive resources, and that White spoilt his best chances on the previous move.

21.c3-c4 ...

If White instead tries to avoid the exchange of bishops and plays 21.a3, then 21...d5! 22.e5 ♗b5 23.♖f2 b6 would follow, and White is already in difficulties.

Neither would 21.♗c2 ♗b5 22.♖f2 d5 give White an advantage, and if now 23.e5, then 23...c5 24.♗xc5 ♗xe5 with sufficient counterplay for Black.

Konstantinopolski's recommendation of 21.♗h1, to answer 21...♗a4 by 22.♗xg7! ♗xb3 23.♖xh6, also fails to cause Black any difficulties on account of 21...d5.

The relatively best attacking chances were offered to White by the sharp continuation 21.f4, to answer 21...♗xe4 by 22.♗xg7 ♗xg7 23.♖d4† ♗g8 24.♖xe4. Although the position of Black's king would in this case have been somewhat weakened, the outcome of the game would have been far from clear; Black can, for example, continue with 24...♖f5 and obtain satisfactory defensive chances.

But after the text-move Black overcomes his last difficulties and achieves complete equality.

21... ♗c6-a4
 22.♗b3xa4 ♖d7xa4
 23.♖d2-c3 f7-f6

24.f3-f4 ...

Initially Euwe had planned to sacrifice the bishop by 24.♔xf6, but later considered this to be too risky and decided to first open up the third rank for his rook in order to support the attack. In fact, Black now manages to prevent the sacrifice and repulses White's attacking attempts. Thus the f3-f4 advance turns out to be just a weakening of the e4-point. If White could not risk continuing along his initial plan with 24.♔xf6 gxf6 25.♖xf6 ♘f8, which after 26.e5 ♖d7 or also 26.b3 ♖d7 27.♖xh6 ♗e6 would yield Black sufficient defensive resources, and after the repulsion of White's attack perhaps even hopes of an advantage, then it was better to abstain from a future weakening of the position and simply continue with 24.b3, followed by ♗f2 with a roughly equal position.

24... ♔g8-h7
 25.b2-b3 ♖a4-d7
 26.♖c3-f3 ...

White still hopes to create some attack, but this attempt turns out to be incorrect, and even forces him to temporarily take up a defensive position. If White did not want to defend passively against the threat of 26...c5, by for example 26.♔h1, he could have chosen the interesting double-edged attacking continuation 26.f5 ♘e5 27.♖g3 ♖f7 28.♗f4. However, from an objective point of view this would not have given him any genuine winning chances, thus the simple continuation 26.♖a5 with a roughly equal position had to be preferred.

26... b7-b5
 27.♖f3-d3 ...

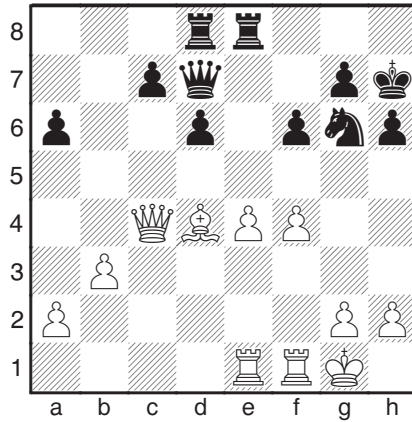
But this retreat is bad, and gives Black the more promising game. The simple 27.♗c1 with an equal game had to be played.

27... b5xc4
 28.♖d3xc4? ...

A mistake which yields Black a clear advantage. As Euwe said in the analysis that took place after the game, he had assessed the result of the following combination as favourable for him due to the passed pawn on the a-file. But in fact Black's attack turns out to outweigh White's passed pawn.

White had to play 28.bxc4 with an almost equal game, but Black still has some hopes of an advantage due to White's pawn weaknesses.

Now an interesting tactical battle takes place, which is made even sharper by the mutual time trouble.



28...

c8xe4!

As a result of this small combination, Black gets a strong passed pawn on the e-file, which combined with the following attack on the king turns out to be very dangerous for White. The following moves are almost forced.

29. **e1xe4**

d6-d5

30. **c4xa6**

d5xe4

31. **d4-e3**

d7-g4!

White would still be able to achieve a tenable position if he could bring his queen back into play in time. But with the text-move Black initiates a direct mating attack and threatens 32...**d3** as well as the manoeuvre ...**g6-h4-f5**. White is defenceless against the combined attack of three black pieces and the e-pawn.

32. ♖a6-c4 ...

Attacking the pawn on e4 and in so doing, hoping to win time for the defence. But the attacking continuation chosen by Black reveals the flaw in this plan. However there is no defence available against the abovementioned threats, since for example after 32.h3 ♖g3 33. ♖e2 Black gains a winning position by 33... ♗h4 34. ♕h1 ♗xg2.

32... ♗d8-d3!
33. ♗e3-c1 ...

Naturally not 33. ♖xe4 due to 33... ♖e2 winning a piece, but also 33. ♖e1 f5 (the simplest!) followed by ♗h4 or ♗xf4 is hopeless for White. Black's attack quickly attains a terrible strength.

33... ♗g6-h4!

Also apparently sufficient for a win was the simple 33...f5, but the pawn sacrifice offered by the text-move is more effective and leads to a forced win. White's following moves are almost forced.

34. ♖c4xe4† ...

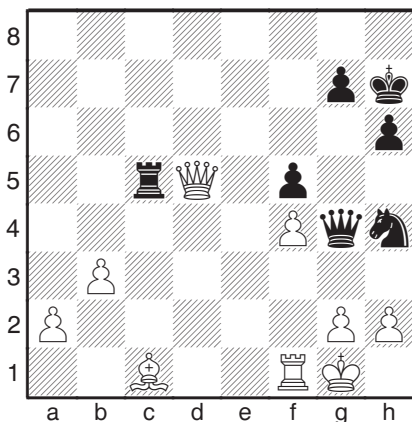
After 34. ♖c2 the simplest reply is 34...f5, threatening ...e4-e3-e2 as well as ...♖c3.

Now an interesting combination takes place, where the main motif is the tying of the white queen to the defence of g2.

34... ♖f6-f5
35. ♖e4-b7 c7-c6

In time trouble, Black chooses a forcing line, which finally gives him an endgame with an extra piece for two pawns. The same outcome, but with one more pawn for Black, would have been given by the simple 35...♖c3, which threatens ...c7-c6 as well as ...♖c2, for example: 36. ♖d5 c6 37. ♖d2 ♖xc1!.

36. ♖b7xc6 ♜d3-c3
 37. ♖c6-d5 ♜c3-c5!



Now White has to play 38. ♖d2 as in the game, or once more move the queen along the h1-a8 diagonal when 38... ♜c2 wins. The loss of a piece is unavoidable in any case.

38. ♖d5-d2 ...

A better move order to reach the game position was 38. h3 ♖g3 39. ♖d2 ♜xc1 40. ♖e2, but of course it would not change the outcome of the game.

38... ♜c5xc1!

The point of the combination! As can easily be seen, White cannot capture the rook in any way, and now has to play the endgame a piece down. The following inaccuracies, which fortunately do not change the outcome of the game, were caused by severe mutual time trouble.

39. h2-h3? ...

Here 39. ♖f2 had to be played, although Black would also then have retained an easily won position after 39... ♜c3. Black could have answered the text-move by 39... ♗f3† winning the queen.

39... ♔g4-g3?
40. ♖d2-e2 ...

After 40. ♖f2 Black wins easily by 40... ♖xf2† followed by ... ♖c2†.

Now Black wins another pawn and achieves a simply won endgame. The following part of the game is no longer of any real interest.

40... ♔g3xf4
41. ♖f1xc1 ♖f4xc1†
42. ♔g1-h2 ...

In this position the game was adjourned and Black sealed his move. Achieving the win no longer involves any difficulties, and Black only has to continue carefully, so that White's queenside pawns will not become too dangerous.

42... ♖c1-f4†
43. ♔h2-g1 ...

After 43.g3 the simplest reply is 43... ♖d6.

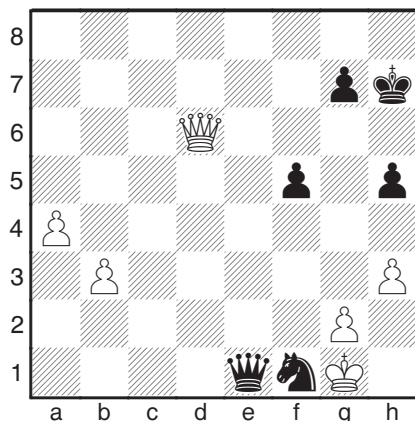
43... ♘h4-g6
44. ♖e2-c2 ♘g6-e7
45. a2-a4 ♖f4-d4†
46. ♔g1-h2 ♖d4-e5†
47. ♔h2-g1 ♘e7-d5

Now White's pawns have been stopped (48.a5 ♘b4) and Black can start to carry out the second part of his plan: to create a mating net around White's king.

48. ♖c2-d1 ♘d5-c3
49. ♖d1-c2 ♔h7-g6

Freeing the queen from the defence of the f5-pawn.

50. ♔g1-h1	♚e5-e1†
51. ♖h1-h2	♞c3-e2
52. ♚c2-c6†	♔g6-h7
53. ♚c6-c5	♞e2-g3
54. ♚c5-d6	♞g3-f1†
55. ♖h2-g1	h6-h5

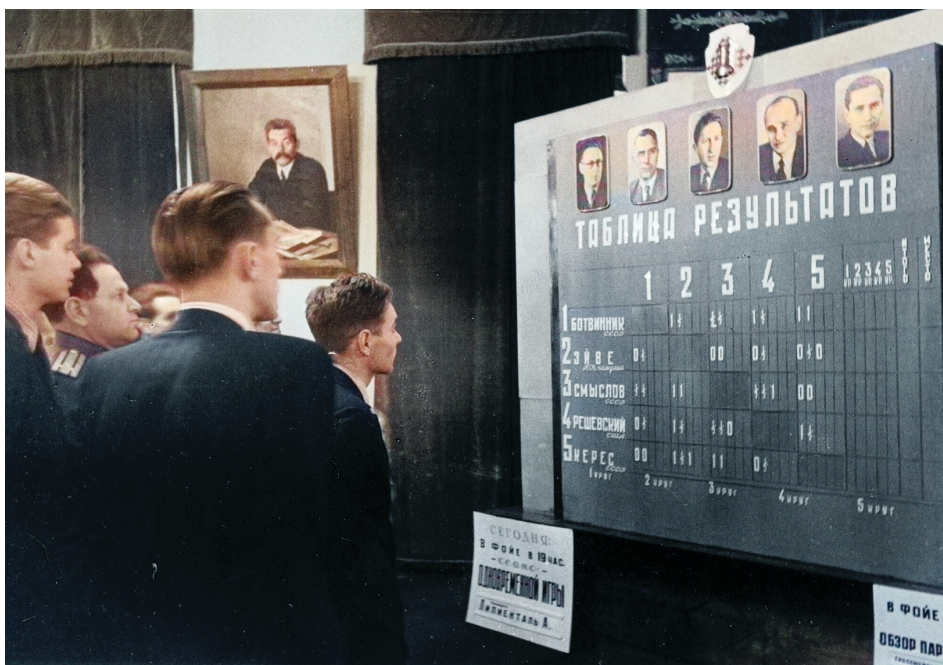


56. ♚d6-f4 and at the same moment, **White lost on time**; after 56...♞e3† 57. ♖h2 h4 there is no longer any defence against the threat of ♞e3-f1†-g3† followed by mate on h1.

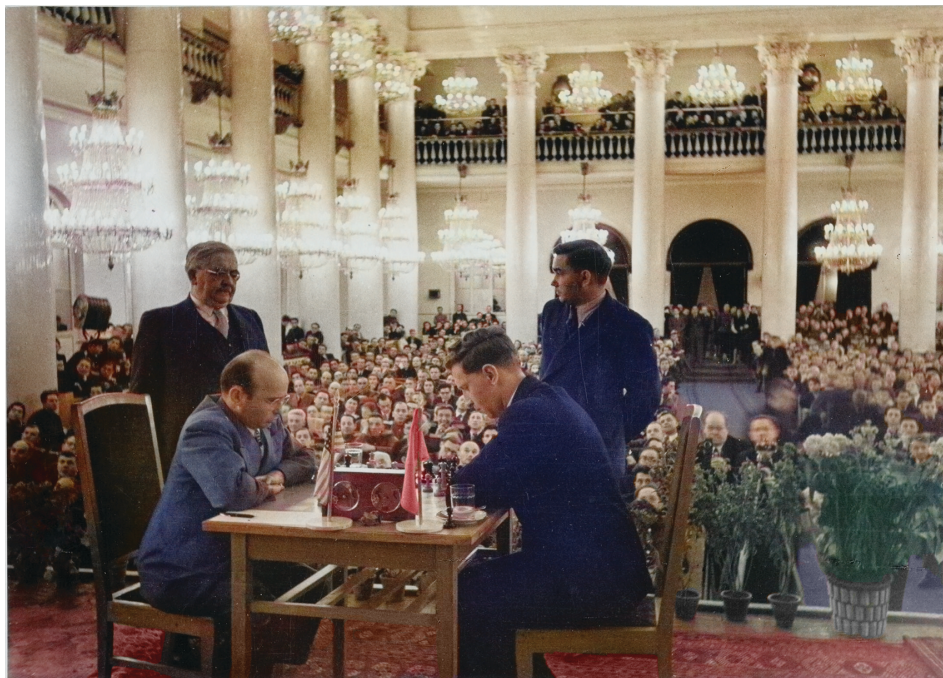
An interesting game where, after a difficult opening, I managed to grab the initiative by a tactical manoeuvre, and create a promising position where I was able to carry out an excellent mating attack.



The Hall of Columns inside the House of Trade Unions, Round 11. Moscow, 11 April.



Spectators study the crossstable in the foyer of the House of Trade Unions. Moscow, April.



Smyslov-Reshevsky, Round 11. Moscow, 11 April.



Spectators intently follow the Round 11 Smyslov-Reshevsky game on the demonstration board posted outside the hall. Moscow, 11 April.



Botvinnik-Euwe and Keres-Smyslov in Round 12. Hall of Columns, Moscow, 13 April.



Reshevsky-Botvinnik in Round 19 on the stage of the Hall of Columns of the House of Unions in central Moscow, 3 May.