Levenfish – Petrosian
12th round, 17th USSR Championship, Moscow, 30th October 1949

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.g3

It is still not so long ago that the continuation 4.e4 d6 5.f3 e5 6.d5 was considered strongest. Subsequently White castles long and with the move g2–g4 prevents Black’s counter-blow...f7–f5. Recently the following improvement has been elaborated for Black: 6...Nh5 7.Be3 f5 8.exf5 gxf5 9.f4 Nf6!. (Translator’s note: This had occurred in the game Batuev-Aronin, 16th USSR Championship Semi-final, Leningrad 1947.)

4...0–0 5.Bg2 d6 6.Nf3 Nbd7 7.0–0 e5 8.e4 Re8 9.Re1 a5 10.h3 exd4 11.Nxd4 Nc5 12.Qc2!


12...Ng4!


13.Ncb5!

I could not find anything better. After 13.Ndb5 Ne5, 14.Bf1 will already not do on account of 14...Nf3+, while 13.Qd1 Nf6 leads to a repetition of moves.

(Translator’s note: Subsequently, 13.Nb3 was tried here in the game Lipnitsky-Boleslavsky (20th USSR Championship, Moscow 1952), which continued 13...Ne5 14.Nxc5 dxc5 15.Rd1 Bd7 16.Nb5! Qc8 17.Kh2 a4 18.f4 Nc6 19.Be3, and White stood better.)

13...Ne5 14.Rd1 c6 15.Na3 Qc7 16.Be3 Ned7
Black wants, by means of 17...Nf6, to provoke the move f2–f3, weakening the position of the white king.


Now Black has no other way to hold back the development of White’s initiative, which threatened to begin an attack with f2–f4, g3–g4, Ne2–g3 etc.

21.b3 Na6 22.Rd2 Nb4 23.Qb1!

A critical moment. White now threatens to complete the regrouping Rcd1 and Nc2, after which his advantage will be obvious. For Black there remains nothing other than to begin an action in the centre.

With the move in the text White prepares an interesting combination with the sacrifice of a pawn.

23...d5 24.cxd5 cxd5 25.exd5 Nxd5 26.b4! Nxb4

Obviously forced.

27.Nb3 Qb5

When I went in for the sacrifice of a pawn, I did not calculate the subsequent variations, but was directed by a general assessment of the position. The black queen now comes under the concerted attack of six(!) White pieces: two rooks, two bishops and two knights, and moreover the queen, having a limited number of squares for retreat, must additionally defend the b4–knight. It seemed to me that in the position there is a forced win, and I spent too much time and search in the pursuit of the ‘blue bird of happiness’.

No good, for example, is 28.Rc5 Qa4 29.Nc3 Qa6 30.Ra5 Bf5!. (Translator’s note: In fact, after the simple 31.Rxa6 Bxb1 32.Rxa8 Rxa8 33.Nxb1 White is left with an extra piece. On 28.Rc5 Black must evidently continue instead 28...Qa6! 29.Ra5 Bf5!, when he escapes material loss.)
Clearly, the secret of the position in the diagram consists not in forcing continuations, but in further increasing the pressure: for example, 28.Nc3 Qa6 29.Nc5 Qa5 30.N3e4!, and no defence against the threat of 31.Nd6 is apparent. If 30...Bf5, then 31.Nxb7 Qa4 32.Nbd6, while on 30...Nec6 there follows 31.Nd6 Rf8 32.Ncxb7, and White regains the pawn with a continuing attack.

(Translator’s note: The variations here are exceptionally complicated and practically impossible to calculate over the board. However, with the benefit of an engine it may be established that after 28.Nc3 Qa6 29.Nc5 Qa5 30.N3e4 Nec6 31.Nd6 Black has the resource 31...Rxe3! 32.fxe3 (32.Nxe8 Rc3!) 32...Bb2!, thus: 33.Rc4 Nxa2 34.Ra4 (34.Nb3 Qg5!) 34...Qxd2 35.Rxa8 and now:

I. 35...Nc3 is not so clear after 36.Rxc8+ Kg7 37.Ne8+ Kh6 38.Qf1 Qxe3+ 39.Kh2 (but not 39.Qf2? Ne2+ 40.Kf1 Nxb3+ 41.Kg1 Qc1+ 42.Kh2 (43.Bf1 Bd4!) 42...Be5!, and Black wins) 39...Ne2 (39...Qxc5? loses by force: 40.Rxc6! bxc6 41.Qf4+ Qg5 42.Qxf7 Qe5 43.Qf8+ Kh5 44.Bf3+ Kg5 45.h4#) 40.Ne4, etc.

II. Instead, Black should continue 35...Qxd6 36.Rxc8+ Kg7, etc., with the better chances.

28.Ned4 Qa4 29.Nc5 Qa5
30.Nxb7??

30.Ncb3 led to a draw.

Also quite good is 30.Bxb7 Rb8 31.Ncb3 Qa4 32.Bg2. If after 30.Bxb7 Black goes in for an exchange sacrifice – 30...Bxb7 31.Bxa8 Qxa8 32.Qe4, then he achieves nothing. (Translator's note: This variation should, however, be continued: 32...Qxe4 33.Nxe4 Ned3 34.Rb1! (forced) 34...Rxe4 35.Rxd3!, when 35...Nxd3 fails to 36.Rb8+ Bf8 37.Bh6.

30...Bxb7 31.Bxb7 Rab8 32.Nb3 Qb5 33.Bg2 Nc4

White has overlooks this obvious move. Also winning, however, is 33...Nxa2.

34.Rxc4 Qxc4 35.Bf1 Qc3 36.Bf4 Be5 37.Bxe5 Rxe5 38.Qd1 Nxa2

White resigned.

In conclusion I wish to present an excerpt from the report of master V. Simagin on this game, from the Tournament Bulletin. Simagin writes: “In a King’s Indian Defence with the exchange ...e5xd4 Levenfish manoeuvred inaccurately (Nc3–b5–a3–b1), after which Black obtained fully equal play. The further course of the game developed unfavourably for White, who was forced (!!!) to give up a pawn. Petrosian conducted the whole game well and gained a third victory.” As they say, comment is superfluous...