CARLSEN

VS.

KARJAKIN

WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

NEW YORK 2016

By

International Grandmaster Lev Alburt
& National Master Jon Crumiller

Includes round-by-round game analysis by former WORLD CHAMPION Vladimir Kramnik
CARLSEN

vs.

KARJAKIN

World Chess Championship
New York 2016

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead-up to the Book</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Authors</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlad’s Overview of the Match</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules &amp; Regulations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 1: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 2: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 3: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 4: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 5: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 6: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Match in Pictures - Before the Games</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 7: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 8: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergey’s Selection: 48. ... Nd3!</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 9: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 10: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 11: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 12: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlad’s Take on the Tiebreak</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiebreak Game 1: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiebreak Game 2: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiebreak Game 3: Karjakin-Carlsen</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiebreak Game 4: Carlsen-Karjakin</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Match in Pictures - During/After the Games</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score Table</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Openings</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo Credits</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Long live the King!”

Within the chess world, this hurrah is heard every two years as a new King of Chess is crowned. The 2016 World Chess Championship Match was a tense, exciting affair, confounding some pundits who predicted that Magnus Carlsen would retain his title without much difficulty. Instead, Sergey Karjakin put up maximum resistance, forcing the match to be decided in the final-day Rapid Tiebreaks, with Carlsen finally prevailing over his rival.

The authors are pleased to present this book for your interest and enjoyment. Here are a few important notes about the book’s contents and the process of bringing it all together.

Whereas the two World Championship contestants were bound by their ticking clocks, and made many of their moves with only seconds to spare, the authors of this book had the advantage of being able to spend many hours, days, and even months to analyze the games. Another major advantage was our ability to use all available resources, including the top chess engines Komodo and Stockfish, as well as prior analysis by several top Grandmasters, as we sought to uncover the best moves and ideas in each position. In doing so, it became clear that the games were played on the world-class level that one would expect from these two outstanding players. Of course we also found some second-best moves (and mistakes) that inevitably occur in the heat of battle. Our efforts to point out these second-best moves, and point out some stronger moves that could have been played, are certainly not an indictment of the players. To the contrary, our meticulous analysis of the games has increased our respect and admiration for their mastery of the game. It is important to note the differentiation between the possible criticism of any particular move and our overall view of the contestants’ exceedingly strong play.

Regarding the use of powerful computer engines, it should go without saying that their use has become mandatory for any serious work on the game of chess. However, a possible pitfall of modern chess authorship is an overreliance on the engines’ assessments, as though the engines actually understood—and could explain to mere mortals—the deep concepts and ideas within a chess position. They can’t. Such understanding and edification can only be made by true Masters. Hence the book has been written, to a large extent, by top grandmasters themselves, including co-author Lev Alburt and, especially, former World Champion Vladimir Kramnik. Complementing their human expertise is the close scrutiny of the top silicon experts. So the reader can be assured that all analysis within this book has passed the meticulous inspection of the best chessplayers on the planet—both human players and computer engines.

At the end of each game, a graph shows a top engine’s numeric assessments of each move over the course of the game. These assessments are certainly not definitive truth,
because (as we have all experienced) these assessments change constantly, and sometimes dramatically, as the computer search depth increases. And the engines, while very strong, are not infallible. Ultimately, the “truth” of many chess positions is beyond reach of anyone or anything. Still, the computer assessment graphs are helpful as a graphical illustration of the progress of each game.

Time is also a major factor: the time spent on each move as well as the time remaining for upcoming moves. After each move, we show the time remaining (in minutes) on the player’s clock. There were two unofficial sources of clock times, and they did not always agree; hence we rounded to the nearest minute. And when the increment-per-move built up to an additional minute on a player’s clock, the time is rounded down to the prior move’s time.

The authors welcome your comments, questions and corrections, which can be addressed via email to gmlevalburt@aol.com or jon@crumiller.com.
LEAD-UP TO THE BOOK

The authors were fortunate to observe the World Championship match first-hand and close-up: analyzing current positions with grandmasters and lesser-lights while the games were underway; kibitzing on the high-class impromptu blitz games; reminiscing with longtime chess friends; observing the players through a soundproof glass wall; mingling with celebrities (chess and otherwise); and enjoying an occasional refreshment from the vodka bar. Here, they recall the events that helped enable their close connections to the match.

GM Lev Alburt learned of the match’s selected city during his dinner with the FIDE President, while important details of the match were still in the early formative stages.

The World Chess Championship Match in New York City was the brainchild of FIDE (International Chess Federation) President Kirsan Nikolayevich Ilyumzhinov. Despite many obstacles, some foreseen, some unexpected, Ilyumzhinov persevered and eventually prevailed: by all accounts, the Carlsen-Karjakin match was a huge success.

GM Lev Alburt and FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov enjoying a fine dinner and refreshments at the Russian Samovar Restaurant in Manhattan, October 2015.
I was ecstatic to learn that the greatest chess event would take place—in Manhattan! And, anticipating a truly great match, I began to plan how to produce a book worthy of such a match.

**NM Jon Crumiller** describes the experiences that brought him closer to the match, and that inspired him to co-author this definitive book on the match.

One of my chess passions is collecting and researching chess sets of bygone eras: the 19th, 18th, and earlier centuries. I have been able to share some of my research, interwoven with photos of my collection, in a monthly online column for Agon Limited’s official site, worldchess.com. Then in early 2016, Agon officials asked if I would co-author a book on rare and beautiful chess sets, and the *MasterWorks* book project was born. The book’s release was timed to coincide with the World Championship match.

It was a thrill to attend the opening gala, where I had the opportunity to chat with the World Champion and his parents, and mingle with friends from the chess world. Then the match commenced. Before the fifth game, the *MasterWorks* book was launched, in the VIP area, and I was interviewed by news media teams from around the world. The first media team was from Norway, and I expressed gratitude to the interviewer, telling him: “Of course I am a big fan of Magnus Carlsen... after all, I am Norwegian, my mother was born in Drammen!” (a small city just southwest of Oslo.) The interviewer’s eyes widened as he exclaimed, “I live in Drammen!”

My close connections to the match—partly due to the *MasterWorks* project, partly through my Norwegian heritage, and partly due to my lifelong devotion to the game—led me to team up with my chess teacher and friend, Grandmaster Lev Alburt, to co-author this book. I hope that our readers will find the analysis as interesting and instructive as we did while we were striving to unlock the secrets of the complex and fascinating games from this historic World Championship match.
GM Lev Alburt lived for many years in Odessa, a Ukrainian city located on the Black Sea. He won the highly competitive Ukraine championship three times, in 1972-1974. He won the European Cup Championship twice, in 1976 and 1979.

In the days when there were still a Berlin wall and a tight KGB-guard on “Soviet” GMs, Alburt defected while at a tournament in then West Germany.

In 1979, he came to the U.S., making his home in New York City. He won the U.S. Championship three times—in 1984, 1985 and 1990.

Famous for providing aspiring players easy access to master-level ideas, Alburt is the only top-echelon GM to devote his career to teaching non-masters. The Comprehensive Chess Course, which he co-authored and published, is a long-time best seller.

Lev provides lessons through the mail, over-the-telephone, and face-to-face. Write to GM Lev Alburt at PO Box 534, Gracie Station, New York, NY, 10028, or call him at (212) 794-8706, or email him at gmlevalburt@aol.com.

Renowned player, teacher and writer

Mentored by world champion & pre-eminent teacher Mikhail Botvinnik

♦ Inductee into U.S. Hall of Fame
♦ Three-time Ukrainian Champion: 1972-1974
♦ Twice European Cup Champion: 1976, 1979
♦ Chess Life Columnist
JON CRUMILLER

NM Jon Crumiller is best known in the chess world for his world-class collection of antique chess sets, some of which have been displayed in two exhibitions held at the World Chess Hall of Fame in St. Louis. Jon conducts extensive research on the origin and evolution of antique chess sets, and regularly shares his research with the chess-collecting community.

Jon’s tournament experience stretches back to the Fischer-boom years in the early 1970’s, and includes a state championship and numerous other victories. He has earned the US Chess Federation National Master title in both over-the-board and correspondence chess. Jon relishes the occasional opportunity to play with, and against, some of the top players in the world. He teamed up successfully with Garry Kasparov in London in a charity game against Nigel Short and Rajko Vujatovic, and fought to a draw against Magnus Carlsen in a simultaneous exhibition. A one-on-one game versus Vladimir Kramnik did not finish with such a successful result! Ever the competitor, Jon remarks that one of his favorite ways to end a game is by winning.

Jon and his wife Jenny live in Princeton, New Jersey, and have three children and two grandchildren. Jon is co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Princeton Consultants Inc., a mid-size consulting firm specializing in business optimization and operational efficiency. Jenny is an elected official on Princeton Council, the governing body of Princeton.
INTRODUCTION

"Magnus Carlsen vs. Sergey Karjakin is shaping up to be one of the most exciting matches of the last 100 years." ~GM Judit Polgar

The world champion, known for his mastery of positional chess, often emerged victorious in situations where no win seemed possible. The challenger, known for his dominance in tournament play and success in match play, entered the championship with most observers nevertheless doubting his chances against such a strong opponent. The two arrived in New York City for their World Championship match while in the background the city was reeling from social, political, and cultural change, with immigration a top concern. The recently elected president was decidedly pro-business and a conservative icon.

Against this backdrop the two began play, and the challenger took an early lead. However, the champion eventually righted his ship, tied the score, and then went on to show his superior understanding and nerves and raced across the finish line.

And so Wilhelm Steinitz won the first official world championship match in 1886 over his great rival from Poland, Johannes Zukertort. When this match was contested at 80 Fifth Avenue, only a couple of miles north of (and a 130 years removed from) the 2016 Magnus Carlsen vs. Sergey Karjakin World Championship match at the South Street Seaport on the east side of Manhattan island, the Seaport was in its prime as a working market and port (and only about 20 miles from Caldwell, New Jersey, the birthplace of Grover Cleveland, the aforementioned U.S. President and icon). It was the first time either an official or unofficial world championship was located not just in New York but anywhere other than London or Paris.

By the time this 55th (an arguable number) World Championship started on November 11, 2016, the Seaport was squarely on the rebound from the devastation caused almost precisely four years before the championship by Hurricane Sandy, which flooded the Seaport and caused a transformation from major New York City tourist attraction to abandoned ghost town. Other than the newness of the restaurants and shops and the fact that some locations were still closed, when spectators arrived for the match they would have been hard-pressed to tell that a disaster had so recently occurred as they marveled at the freshly-constructed tournament hall (work continued almost right up to the minute the doors first opened to the public) styled in fashionable industrial-chic.

The 2016 festivities kicked off on Thursday, November 10 on a cool and windy fall day with a press conference that featured the usual official statements from the organizers and sponsors and some attempts by the assembled world chess press—and, notably, some mainstream media outlets—to get the players to say something quotable. One ques-
tion echoed Steinitz/Zukertort: “Who is the best player in the world right now?” In 1883, at the prestigious London event that Zukertort convincingly won, a toast was made “to the best chess player in the world,” and both Steinitz and Zukertort stood up to receive their glory (the story may be apocryphal). No story for the ages emerged this year though, as Carlsen answered sensibly, “That’s going to be decided in the next couple of weeks. But if I may be so bold, right now, I am.”

He was certainly right to feel this way, especially against Karjakin. Coming into the championship, Carlsen was +18 -8 = 21 when playing the challenger, across all sorts of time controls and tournaments. This is a dominating score for two contemporaries—though if limited to classical time controls, their scores were closer to even. The two have been playing each other since 2005 in events ranging from Corus to the Amber rapids/blindfolds and the World Blitz Championships. On day one of the match, Carlsen was 25, just days from 26, and Karjakin was 26; they first played each other at ages 14 and 15.

Carlsen’s peak FIDE rating of 2882 is 94 points higher than Karjakin's peak 2788, with the not-so-incidental fact that Carlsen’s peak is also the highest rating ever (Garry Kasparov’s record rating that Magnus surpassed was 2851.) Carlsen’s top rating was also “fresher,” achieved in 2014, while Karjakin’s dated back to 2011—though the difference between 2788 and his start-of-match rating of 2772 is statistically insignificant.

But to truly understand the players and the context, it is necessary to go back even more years.

**Sergey Karjakin**

“I will be world champion. If not now, then later.” ~Sergey Karjakin

Sergey learned chess at the age of five while living in Crimea. He was born a mere 100 meters from the local chess club in Simferopol and raised in this peninsula where both modern and world history cover seemingly every square inch. His talent was quickly noted and his rise was also quick—by the age of 12 he was serving as a second to Ruslan Ponomariov in the 2002 World Championship match that Ruslan won against Vassily Ivanchuk. In that same year Sergey set the record as youngest grandmaster ever by earning the title at the age of 12 years, 7 months.

Both Ruslan and Sergey had been trained at the Kramatorsk chess school in Eastern Ukraine. Sergey’s father Alexander Karjakin, in the documentary film *Feeding the Dragon*, said that he and his wife, Tatyana Karjakina, had “…sacrificed everything so that [Sergey] could become a world champion.”

IM Alexander Alexikov was Sergey’s trainer at the Kramatorsk chess school and said of Sergey: “It’s like a dragon that eats everything. It comes over, and you have to keep
feeding it. It eats everything you feed it, and then demands more.”

Sergey confirms this, stating in the documentary, “As a nine-year-old, I could easily work nine hours a day. At that time, it was the best place for me to be. Nothing could have been better.”

But the support in Ukraine dried up. From the ages of 13-19 he had no support, and since national chess federations abhor a player vacuum, the Russian Chess Federation stepped in with an offer in 2009 to finance his training. Not only did Sergey accept this and move to Moscow, he changed from Ukrainian to Russian citizenship. It wasn’t just chess that seemingly motivated his move—Karjakin became a staunch Putin supporter. The Karjakins are ethnically Russian, so he had always considered himself Russian first. Sergey got to the Championship by winning the 2016 Candidates Tournament, held from March 11-30 in Moscow, over second-place finishers Fabiano Caruana and Viswanathan Anand, including a dramatic last-round win against the American Caruana. Karjakin had qualified for the Candidates by winning the 2015 World Cup.

**Magnus Carlsen**

“[Chess] is almost always in the back of my mind.” ~Magnus Carlsen

In the documentary film *Magnus*, Carlsen’s father Henrik said that his son was “Very often lost in thought when he was young. When he was four years old he had got a new lego train …. And he sat for six hours to finish it.”

The future world champion wouldn’t even eat since he was so absorbed in the task at hand. But completing the train did not end the obsession: He then spent hours processing what he had done. Henrik told his wife Sigrun, “I think he could become a good chess player.”

These traits, which would center him at the focus of hundreds of camera lenses and picture-taking smartphones as an adult, caused problems for the young Magnus. He described himself as an outsider, different from his peers. He was even subject to bullying, something hard to imagine now looking at the square-jawed, fit young man he has become, even a model for the hip Dutch clothier G-Star RAW.

By 2004 he was playing Garry Kasparov at the Atlantsal event in Iceland. Though only an IM, ranked 786th in the world at the time, he managed to draw the ex-world champion. In video of the event, Kasparov displays his discomfit in the game, not even trying to hide his emotions. Tellingly, Magnus was cool, calm, and confident. The young Magnus proclaimed, “I felt that I could fight as good as him.” By 2013, Kasparov was writing the blurb praising Carlsen in *Time* magazine, which had named the Norwegian as one of the most 100 influential people in the world, chosen for inspiring a young generation
to play chess.

Carlsen became world champion in 2013 by defeating Viswanathan Anand 6½-3½ in Anand’s hometown of Chennai, India. A rematch was held in Sochi, Russia in 2014, and Carlsen won again 6½-4½.

Venue

"Chess isn't easy. It's hard work." ~Magnus Carlsen

The night before the first game an opening gala was held at the Plaza Hotel, hosted by the star of the hit HBO series *Entourage*, Adrian Grenier. The color selection ceremony for game one took place, with Carlsen getting white for the first game. Back at the Sea-port the next day, Hollywood A-lister and noted chess fan Woody Harrelson made the actual ceremonial first move for game one. While the organizers promised that every game would similarly feature a first move made by someone varying from celebrities to representatives of nonprofit organizations of note, they weren’t quite able to pull that off. Other notable visitors included former FIDE World Champion Alexander Khalifman and Russian press secretary to Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Sergeyevich Peskov (though he attended primarily in his role as chairman of the board of supporters of the Russian Chess Federation).

Sponsor Agon managed to capture within the world championship’s gravitational pull the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, Director of New York’s Hayden Planetarium and a frequent late-night TV guest. Tyson made the opening move to game eight and also sat in the commentary booth where he told the crew headed by lead commentator Judit Polgar, “I love the pageantry, the excitement, the energy,” and they discussed if chess was sport, science, or art. Tyson made the interesting point that if we had an English word that combined the three, this wouldn’t even be a debate point. (Maybe “chess” is the word that already fits that bill?)

The commentary booth was a “fishbowl” right next to the spectator’s seating area. This spectator's area had video monitors showing the players and sound from the commentary piped in and doubled as the press conference room after each game.

If attendees preferred, there was a viewing room where you could directly ogle the players. Illuminated only by the light that filtered through the glass from the players’ room, one could observe the players who were angled at a 45-degrees from the room. This gave spectators a mostly rear view of one player and a mostly-head on view of the other; normally you would expect to see both players in profile. The setup was a practical ne-
cessity due to the second viewing area within the VIP lounge, the up-to-$1,200 per ticket area. Mere mortals paid up to $50 for admission tickets that were capped at 400 per day. This number was reached only a couple of times; online viewers paid $15 (later discounted to $7) to watch online with commentary. So both viewing windows had essentially similar views. There were no seats in the viewing room; when it was crowded enough and if you were not tall enough, you could be blocked off from the players entirely. The crowds ranged on any given day from about a dozen to so many that the line snaked throughout the venue.

So what was the advantage then of being at the Seaport over simply watching online? Agon Limited’s Communications Director Andrew Murray-Watson offered, “Historically, spectators have to check their cell phones and must sit quiet as church mice. Here, they can follow along on their phones, can get a bite to eat, and can listen to the commentary team.”

Still, with roughly half a million hits on the official website nyc2016.fide.com in just the first 48 hours (“And this doesn’t include our partner sites,” Murray-Watson clarified) it seemed that the pay-per-view model the organizers promoted is the wave of the future for top-level chess. Agon Limited CEO Ilya Merenzon stated as much at the opening press conference and had previously said at the Candidates tournament, “Chess has been on the sideline of sport business for a long time. But now it has changed. Not only because of us or because of Magnus Carlsen. But also because the world changed. It’s the world’s biggest computer game now.”

The enhanced online experience, including Video 360°, Virtual Reality, Multi-Camera View, and Commentary, was a gimmick possibly ahead of its time. At the initial press conference, champ and challenger were shown the headset needed for the full virtual experience, and though they were polite in their comments out of respect to the sponsors, it was obvious by their confused smiles that they were at best bemused by the object. Fans who want the “skin-to-skin” contact of no glass between themselves and their heroes will have to keep this “virtual” direction in mind if they plan to attend future events. Carlsen and Karjakin were, however, in the same room as the spectators for the post-game press conference. Being able to sense the charisma that seemingly radiates from Magnus and Sergey when you are in the same room with them is something that is doubtful to ever be captured completely by virtual reality.

Still, spectators were kept happy with amenities that included a cafe that was reasonably priced for New York ($10 for a sandwich, for example). The merchandise shop offered souvenirs that were inexpensive relative to other types of events like concerts or pro sporting events. T-shirts for $25, sweatshirts for $40, ballcaps for $22, tote bags for $10, and souvenir pins for $5 were the main offerings.
The Authors

"You have to fight for every last thing there is, even if it takes energy." ~Magnus Carlsen

The best chess annotators take Carlsen’s fighting approach in their attempt to get to the heart of a position. If you’ve bought this book, you’ve likely bought others that proved to be either data dumps or that contain disheartening, long lines that simply end with something like “+.05.” You won’t have any such disappointment in this book as GM Lev Alburt and NM Jon Crumiller have sweated bullets to make sure they have gotten their analysis not only simply right, but also stated in such a way as to be clear and entertaining to players of all levels.

I’ve been editing GM Lev Alburt’s “Back to Basics” column in Chess Life for more than a decade now. What always strikes me about his handling of this popular column (in which readers rated below 1800 send in an annotated game and he then adds his own instructive commentary) is with what a light hand he handles his notes. He never scolds, never cajoles—he suggests, he advises. His goal is to educate both the annotator and the magazine’s readers.

Considering his background I’ve always found this amiable approach remarkable. Not only was he three-time champion of Ukraine, he then defected to the United States in 1979 and for the sake of balancing the books became a three-time U.S. champion. This is obviously a man of deep passions and convictions, yet both in person and in writing he is extraordinarily gentle, kind, and gracious.

These traits can be found “between the lines” of the notes to the games within this book. Writing with a clear, direct style, he tries to find the truth in the positions and then makes sure he communicates this in the educational manner well-honed as the author of at least 20 books dating back to 1995’s Chess Tactics for the Tournament Player. Other books of note include the twins Chess Openings for White, Explained and Chess Openings for Black, Explained.

In his writing partner and co-author (and student of many years) National Master Jonathan Crumiller, readers will find a complementary style. Jon is expert in the use of analysis engines and as I have worked on this book I have been privy to the reams of data he has run through the computer trying to get at the crux of complex positions, rejecting many lines (something the data-dump books seldom do!), looking deeper here and there, and occasionally finding a curious or exceptional line. I’ve seen notes written to himself such as “Let Komodo run overnight here.” You can be sure that as you work through the annotations within this book no stone (or triple-weighted pawn) was left unturned. This is not to suggest that his role was only to flip a silicon switch and simply sit back and wait. Jon contributed to
the book in a very real chessic sense as he worked with Lev providing ideas, explanations, wording, and concepts.

I first became aware of Jon when we produced a cover story in the September 2013 issue of Chess Life about the exhibition “Prized and Played” at the World Chess Hall of Fame, a world-class museum in St. Louis, that featured his extensive collection. Jon’s collection includes not just the over 600 ornamental and playing sets he has amassed, but also chessboards, timers, books, and chess miscellanea, mostly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. He was a major contributor to the 2016 book Masterworks: Rare and Beautiful Chess Sets of the World.

So your authors cover a broad spectrum of the ever-rich chess world. What could be missing? How about a world champion. GM Vladimir Kramnik, who has written the “Vlad’s Viewpoints” boxes that appear throughout the book at timely intervals, was world champion from 2000-2007. He first ascended the throne at the age of 25 after having been pegged as a future champion just like the protagonists in this book, positioning him as uniquely qualified to provide his insights. Vlad has written four other books as well, but this is his first participation in a book project in a decade. His perspective as the current world-number-two (as of the book’s writing) is worth the price of admission in itself as he tells you at key points in each game what may be happening “behind the scenes” within each of the competitors’ minds. Don’t look to Vlad for deep analysis—Lev and Jon have that well-covered—look to Vlad for his unique perspective on what it takes to succeed in chess at the world-championship level.

But his perspective emerges from more than just chess experience. In his 2000 book Kramnik: My Life and Games, co-authored with Iakov Damsky, Kramnik wrote, “Perhaps, in order to achieve the goal of becoming world champion, it is better to devote oneself entirely to chess. But I am a different kind of person. I like life in all its manifestations, and it is very hard for me to restrict myself to chess alone.”

That approach to life and chess will be found throughout this book. On the following pages you will find the rules and regulations for the match and an overview from Kramnik, followed by the meat of the book with the game annotations. No matter your playing level, whether you be class level or titled, you will find much to feast on.

Daniel Lucas
Atlanta, July 2017
VLAD’S OVERVIEW OF THE MATCH

GM Vladimir Kramnik provides in-depth commentary on the match, with insights and analysis that only a former World Champion (and still one of the world’s top-ranked players) can have.

At the time of this book’s writing, Kramnik is #2 in the world, with only World Champion Magnus Carlsen ahead of him by ten points on the rating list.

How would you describe Carlsen’s and Karjakin’s styles? How do their styles compare against each other, and against your own world championship match experience?

There are normally two types of world championship matches: Matches between opponents with similar styles of play and matches between opponents with differing styles. My successful classical world championship match in 2000 with Garry Kasparov is an example of the second situation. I was playing very positional chess, whereas Garry is well-known as a dynamic and aggressive player. In that situation, it is extremely important to bring the match, the games, into your territory.

In the other situation, such as the Carlsen—Karjakin match, the contestants were not so different. They’re both positional players with great technique, trying to win games in a slow, positional manner. So the contest was more about nuances and better preparation. Certain new ideas appeared, but exactly what occurred in the openings became less important.

What are the strongest attributes of each player? Are their styles similar to any past champions?

Carlsen and Karjakin are fantastic players. Magnus has great positional understanding and incredible technique. His style is extremely close to Anatoly Karpov. I have actually never seen two other world champions whose play is so similar—Karpov and Carlsen. They share similar strong points and weak points, if one can talk about weak points considering how great these two players are. Karjakin is somewhat different—an incredibly strong, “well-educated” player, truly a classical player, with an innate feeling where to put his pieces. He has a lot of knowledge in the openings and also a lot of knowledge of structures—what to do in different types of structures. He is a very healthy player. He is also a very tough defender, which we saw in this match. But that was already well known before the match.
What about their strategies for the match? How effective was each player’s strategy?

Magnus’ strategy was built on how to take advantage of his own strong points. He believed he needed to slowly outplay his opponent in very long games—including physically outplaying him, slowly sapping the energy from his opponent, so that his opponent could not withstand the pressure of many small problems, or defending a slightly worse endgame. At some point the opponent would make a mistake, and Magnus’ fantastic technique would prevail. But Karjakin is a player who is exactly strong on the opposing end; i.e. defending slightly worse positions or endgames. He can play on for hours and hours without collapsing. He has saved many worse endgames in very long games, against me too. So the main strength of Magnus, winning long games, is congruent to the main strength of Karjakin—defending long games. Thus Magnus had to choose one of two strategies—to keep on trying to win long games and hope that at some point he manages to break through, or to play totally differently. In my opinion, he should have gone for the second way. He should have tried a different type of chess, and of course there would be a risk, because the type of chess he plays is usually quite successful. Carlsen’s playing differently might mean playing more aggressively, or perhaps playing for complications, to try to decide a game in different ways. Because to just try to win an equal or very slightly better position against Karjakin is a formidably difficult task. In better shape, Magnus would have won game three and for sure game four, but if Karjakin had not made mistakes that he usually doesn’t make, he wouldn’t have gotten into the positions he did in games three and four. Lots of intrigue ran through this match, but finally, somehow, Carlsen’s strategy was not really working for him. Still, even now, after the match, it’s hard to say if it was the right or wrong decision to keep playing solid chess against Karjakin.

Karjakin had a perfect strategy for the match. His strategy was obviously very defensive, very patient, tenacious. And we saw how well it worked, up through game nine. But the main point of a defensive strategy is to be able to be ready to counterattack at the right moment, not to be too passive. And Karjakin played too passively, he decided to play too safe. That wasn't the fault of his strategy, it was how he executed his strategy.
How does a world championship contestant choose which openings to play in the match? How well did Carlsen and Karjakin do with their choice of openings?

When I played against Garry, his incredible preparation was apparent. He had access to a lot of powerful computers at that time, which I did not have at my disposal. Moreover, I wasn’t then used to working closely with computers. So it was clear that I should avoid by all means forcing lines as much as I could, and try to steer the game into positional chess—preferably endgames. Then the opening choices became obvious. In our match, it was clear to me that the outcome would depend very much on what type of position we would have on the board. Half-a-year before the match, I made a general list of openings I might try to play with Black against 1. e4, and the Berlin was number one by a big margin, exactly right for that particular match. I was also able to rehabilitate the Berlin, and it proved to be a good opening. It’s still “on the market,” so to speak, and it is still a very hard nut to crack. But back then, it was quite a different story. The theory was not so well developed as now. Nowadays it’s much more difficult to find a new opening like that.

In the Carlsen—Karjakin match, the two were just trying to find at least something in the lines they usually play. To my taste, they were both a bit too predictable in the opening choices. I was sure that Karjakin was going to play the Berlin, and I was sure that Carlsen was going to play many different types of Ruy Lopez, but not the Berlin. And that’s exactly what happened. As I see it, their preparation lacked any surprise. Sometimes it’s not a problem to be predictable—if you’re well prepared. Still, I had expected at least something out of the ordinary. But both their strategy and their openings were foreseeable.

Nowadays it’s very difficult to get any real advantage as White, due to the influence of computers—because chess is a drawish game. If both players play well, it’s a draw. There were certain disputes a half-century ago, when people were trying to determine if White is winning in the starting position. But now it’s completely obvious that chess is objectively a draw. In higher levels of play, and especially with very powerful computers, players are finding more and more ways to draw in various openings. Even in openings that were previously supposed to be dubious, computers find some way to make a draw in certain critical lines. So draws are a modern tendency, and there’s not much we can do about it.

I would say that now preparation with White requires much more time and much more effort than preparation with Black. With Black, you study a solid opening like the Berlin, or the Marshall, good according to theory, and that’s it. But with White, you must break through this drawish wall, and this requires a lot of work. That’s why nowadays it’s very common among top players to have the following type of opening repertoire: Play just
one or two openings with Black but vary with White, playing every possible different opening, just to catch opponents in a special line. Most ideas nowadays for White are just for a single game because the line doesn’t really give any objective advantage. After the game, your opponent switches on his own powerful machines and finds a way to draw, even if it was very difficult over the board.

For a match you have to find several ideas like this, and of course it takes a lot of time because so much is already known. In a match before 2000, I always considered that to hold as Black was the major problem, but now it’s the other way around. Now it’s how to force problems with White. I don’t even go as far as gaining an advantage with White, but simply how to pose practical problems. Both players are classical and play solid openings, thus I was expecting that White would be struggling to get the advantage in this 2016 match.

Which player did you expect to win the match? How and why did your expectations evolve as the match progressed?

Before the match, I figured the chances were 60-40 in favor of Magnus, maybe even as close as 55-45. After game two, I thought Karjakin had serious chances; it became closer to 50-50 in my own estimation. After game four, I began to consider Karjakin as the favorite. The reason is that I had thought the most difficult part of the match for Karjakin would be the beginning, especially the first two games, or the first four games. If he managed to maintain the balance through those games, then he would have at least equal chances. And I also had the feeling, even after two games, that Magnus was not choosing the right strategy in this match.

Karjakin’s problem was not his strategy. His problem was that he was not in his best shape. Toward the end of the match, it had nothing to do with strategy; it was more psychology. After game nine, I thought it was 80-20 for Karjakin. Strategically, he did everything right, but to put it very straight, I think he collapsed after game nine. In game ten, his level dropped enormously, and Magnus grabbed his chance. If Karjakin had managed just to maintain the average level of play that he had shown earlier, I think he would have then won the match.
How was the overall quality of play in the match?

Regarding the match in general, there were not too many mistakes, not more than in other matches. But the mistakes that did occur were so obvious, so bad, and usually not made in time trouble nor caused by miscalculation. There were quite a few basic strategic mistakes that I would never expect from players of their level and their style. I was very surprised at the time, and I can still find no logical explanation. A player miscalculates or even blunders badly during the last moments before reaching time control or in a very complex situation on the board. Or sometimes he blunders from sheer exhaustion. But in this match, there were some mistakes that cannot be attributed to these factors. That probably had something to do with the psychology, with the tension. Still, this was really surprising for me. But overall I wouldn’t say that the total number of mistakes was very high, just that the quality of mistakes was surprising.

How well did each player do? What was their level of play, starting with the challenger?

In game ten, Karjakin was simply not there. He started to shake. He was making lots of mistakes. So close to the title, he couldn’t hold up against the pressure. His mistakes were not so much caused by chess problems. The problem was more Sergey’s quality of play rather than his strategy. On this level, a player shouldn’t make two or three blunders in one game. It’s too many.

What about the champion, how well did Magnus Carlsen play during the match?

Magnus’ play was also far from flawless. And many of the mistakes were not caused by chess. Even before the match, Magnus hadn’t been playing well. At a certain point in the match, Magnus became discouraged. Feelings of discouragement don’t arise from the score of the match alone. The problem is that a player feels discouraged when he is playing badly. If you’re playing fine, but something doesn’t seem to click—for example, perhaps an opening isn’t working—you don’t necessarily become despondent. But if you feel as though you are simply playing badly, that’s much worse. A player might feel even less confident with an equal score in that situation than minus-one. So for Magnus, game eight was a real shock.

Boris Gelfand’s quote, “You play only as well as your opponent allows,” also comes to mind. How did their level of play affect their outlook as the match progressed?

Of course, Carlsen was aware that he was not even playing on his average level. Then with only a few games left, my guess is that he was feeling that he was losing the match. And I thought game nine was a very good game from Karjakin, which makes what happened in game ten more difficult to explain. In game nine, for the first time in the match, Karjakin was really pushing. He could have played it safe and made a draw after the opening. His position was a bit more pleasant. For the first time in the match, however, he played aggressively—and very well. Actually, game nine was the best game of the match. Both Sergey and Magnus played very well, in my opinion. After game eight, I got the feeling that Karjakin became very confident, finally gaining the confi-
dence that he had been lacking the whole match to that point. And after this, I just couldn’t see what could stop him from winning the crown. In the openings, Magnus couldn’t find any keys, and Karjakin was simply playing better. So it seemed very unlikely that Magnus could come back, taking into consideration his shaky play. But then came game ten, and I saw the situation reverse. Karjakin was making bad decisions, taking lots of time to make obvious moves. It’s very strange because he had all reason to be confident after games eight and nine, in which he played very well. But then in game ten, he just collapsed, losing everything he had gained with such great effort and confident play in the previous games.

Did this match remind you of any of your own world championship matches? If so, how?

As I was following this match, I kept recalling all the similarities with my 2004 Classical match against Peter Leko in Brissago, Switzerland. Karjakin’s style nowadays is similar to Leko’s. In fact, during the New York match, Sergey played exactly like Leko did against me in Switzerland. He tried to be very safe—taking no risks at all as White and being well-prepared and very solid with Black. And he didn’t mind making draws, even with White. Similarly, Leko did not press me hard with White—draw-draw-draw—and he was confident with Black. The same sequence overtook Magnus that had also happened to me. I was not very experienced in 2004, and I could not handle the psychological pressure in this type of match. It seemed like wrestling in the mud; it was hard to keep a hold on your opponent. Or in a tidier sports analogy, Leko played like a famous Italian soccer team, very defensively—scoring little but never missing a goal. Such an approach is very unpleasant to deal with, and it’s a very effective style. I hadn’t been able to break through with White; I was not getting a complicated fight with Black. So the score remained equal. Then in game eight, I did not have to go for a win, I just couldn’t stand it anymore psychologically. Interestingly, in the very same game number as in the Carlsen-Karjakin match—I made a major opening failure, really, a computer-use blunder. I hadn’t checked the evaluation carefully and I lost with White out of the opening, without making a single move of my own. Computers were much weaker then than now, so the computer made a big mistake. But all-in-all, I went into a very sharp game because I could not stand it anymore, and I think something very similar happened to Magnus.

There was absolutely no reason for Carlsen to go crazy in his game eight as he did. There were several decisions—such as 24. bxc4, and later 35. c5 as well—that showed that he was trying to win by any means, even though he was not down in the match. It was clear that he had simply decided it was “now or never.” Objectively there was no need for this at all; I think it was purely psychological. And the same thing happened to me in

You play only as well as your opponent allows.

Boris Gelfand
the match against Leko: I felt that I wanted a sharp game, no more of these boring, drawish lines. Then as it turned out, I won the last game of the match. I was -1, and that match was 14 games—the final few games quite similar to the final few games of the Carlsen-Karjakin match. Comparing game 12 of my match with game nine of the current match, I played very riskily with White and was on the very edge of losing but managed to hold. Leko would have practically captured the match if he had beaten me in game 12.

The story is the same with Karjakin against Carlsen in game nine. And then Carlsen won game ten, as I won the last game of the match with Leko, and exactly for the same reason. Not because I was in great shape—in fact physically I was not in good shape at all, and the match was fully in Leko’s hands. But he played too defensively and couldn’t handle the pressure. He had almost lost game 13 with White, in which he was trying desperately to make a draw from a slightly better middlegame, and ended up in a very difficult endgame, which he saved by a miracle. That was already a sign. Then in the last game I was White, and he just became too defensive. I won a nice endgame. So he had all chances to win the match, but it was too close, and he became too nervous and too passive. And I think it’s exactly the same thing that happened in game ten with Karjakin. So all-in-all, the two matches were incredibly similar. I would say I was in the role of Carlsen. I was not in best shape, but I was trying to put fire on the board, to be aggressive and win a game. But just as Magnus couldn’t manage it, at some point I went crazy as he did. And then, when it was almost a hopeless situation, in both matches our opponents became too nervous—and they gave us the title.

What’s your overall assessment of the match?

The drama and psychology and tension of the New York match was incredibly exciting. Indeed, from the point of view of psychology and drama, I think this was one of the most interesting matches in a long time. Maybe these two things are connected with each other, because when players play very well, without blunders, the games are rarely exciting. But here there were a lot of ups and downs, and perhaps that excites public attention.

I’m pretty sure neither Magnus nor Sergey is satisfied with their match on a purely chess level. No doubt they can do better. But the public was happy to see such tense battles.
The main rules & regulations for the match, as obtained from FIDE’s 28-page official document, “RULES & REGULATIONS FOR THE FIDE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH (FWCM) 2016”, are summarized below.

**The Match**
- The FIDE World Chess Championship Match will be held between two participants: World Champion Magnus Carlsen and his Challenger [Sergey Karjakin]
- The winner of the match will be declared World Champion for the 2016-2018 cycle
- The match will consist of 12 regulation games and, if necessary, tie-break games
- No postponement of any game shall be allowed
- [Almost half of the official FIDE document is used to describe the Rules of Chess, including how each piece moves, how a game is won or drawn, etc.]

**Prize Fund**
- The prize fund, provided by the organizer, is a minimum of 1,000,000 euros
- The prize fund will be divided 60% for the winner and 40% to the loser if the championship match ends within the 12 regulation games. If the match goes to tiebreak, then the winner shall receive 55% and the loser 45%

**Regulation Games**
- The first player to score 6.5 points or more in regulation will win the match [win=1-point, draw=½-point]
- The schedule for regulation games is one game per day for two consecutive days, then a rest day, then repeating this cycle
- Drawing of lots to determine piece colors for game 1 will occur during opening ceremony
- Players alternate piece colors for each game, except that the colors shall be reversed after game 6 (the player getting white in game 1 shall play game 7 with black)
- Time control is 100 minutes for first 40 moves, 50 minutes for next 20 moves, 15 minutes for the rest of the game plus an additional 30 seconds per move starting from move 1 [clock times are cumulative, so any additional time is added to the time already on their clocks]

**Tiebreaks**
- If the players’ scores are level after the 12 regulation games, then tiebreaks will be played, starting with rapid tiebreaks
- Tiebreaks will all be held on the same day
- Ten-minute break between each tiebreak game, unless otherwise decided by the Chief Arbiter
Rapid Games
- Four tiebreak rapid games shall be played
- New drawing of lots for colors
- Time control 25 minutes per player with increment of 10 seconds after each move
- The players do not need to record the moves; an arbiter shall record the moves

Blitz Games
- If the scores are level after the 4 tiebreak games, then blitz match(es) shall be played
- New drawing of lots for colors
- Time control for each game is 5 minutes plus 3 seconds increment after each move
- A match of 2 games shall be played to determine the winner
- In case of a level score, another 2-game blitz match will be played to determine a winner, up to a maximum of 5 blitz matches

Armageddon Game
- If there is no winner after 5 blitz matches (total 10 games) then one sudden-death game will be played
- Player who wins the drawing of lots may choose color
- The player with the white pieces shall receive 5 minutes, the player with the black pieces shall receive 4 minutes; after the 60th move, both players shall receive an increment of 3 seconds starting from move 61
- In case of a draw, the player with the black pieces is declared the winner

Playing Conditions
- Players shall arrive at least 10 minutes before the start of play for security checks
- Only the players and stewards shall be allowed in the actual playing area except with the permission of the Chief Arbiter or his Deputy
- Both players will have access to the same rest room
- Both players shall use the same rest lounge area which shall be on/at the stage and visible by the Arbiter and the spectators

Players’ Responsibilities
- Players are required to wear suits during the playing session
- Players may not wear or use any accessories with advertising or promoting the players’ sponsors without FIDE’s prior written permission
- During play, a player is forbidden to have a mobile phone and/or other electronic means of communication in the playing venue. If it is evident that a player brought such a device into the playing venue, he shall lose the game; the opponent shall win
- Players must be present for at all official functions during the match, such as Media Day, Opening Ceremony, Closing Ceremony, etc.
- Immediately after completion of a game, both players must take part in the post-game press conference, of not more than 20 minutes duration.
**The Trompowsky:**
A surprise opening choice! Already Carlsen is trying to disrupt Karjakin’s opening preparation for the match by forcing him to worry about unexpected, offbeat openings.

**Black decides to trade pieces:**
He goes into a slightly inferior ending instead of challenging White to sacrifice a pawn. Karjakin’s decision shows that his strategy for the match is to play cautiously, taking no chances, at least in the early rounds.

**White needs to stop the back-rank mate:**
But his choice of 20. g3 allows Black eventually to strengthen his position with … f5 and … Bf6. Instead, White could place his pawn on g4, preventing that maneuver, causing Black to remain somewhat cramped and on the defensive.
**GAME 1**

**Introduction**
The match begins! Carlsen starts out with an unusual—and unexpected—opening. Karjakin plays a strong main line that leads to equality but then plays quite passively, seeking piece exchanges. Instead of trying to increase the pressure, Carlsen allows Karjakin to reach a solid, stable endgame position, and a draw soon follows.

**Surprise! The Trompowsky Opening**

**Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin**

1. d4 (1:40)  
2. Bg5 (1:40)

The champion avoids the best-trod paths of “theory.” But it has become impossible to find a reasonable opening scheme that isn’t already the subject of a dossier of computer research. Rather than attack his opponent’s opening citadel head-on, Carlsen probes it on the periphery. And perhaps he keeps some secrets of his own for later games.
The on-site crowd buzzed with an “alternative fact” theory. Did Carlsen play the opening, commonly called the Trompowsky, in a nod to recently elected President Donald J. Trump? In fact, an early pre-match rumor put the event in midtown’s Trump Tower—not a stranger to chess events, since it hosted the candidates’ playoffs in 1995—instead of the final location downtown at the South Street Seaport.

The challenger’s response is statistically the most reliable. Other acceptable choices include 2. … Ne4, 2. … c5, 2. … e6, 2. … g6, or even 2. … b6.

3. e3 (1:40)

A subtle move. A true “Trompowskian” would immediately (and happily) take on f6, which leads to complex, sharper play after the ambitious 3. … gxf6, or to simpler, solid play after 3. … exf6—in both cases with approximate equality. With this trade, White is doubling Black’s pawns and is also weakening some of Black’s kingside squares. These are long-term strategic advantages, but in order to gain them, White must also take a risk by giving Black his own long-term advantage: the two bishops.

3. … c5 (1:40)
4. Bxf6 (1:40) gxf6 (1:40)

Taking with the g-pawn is overwhelmingly the most popular choice, despite the fact that in some lines it leads to the sacrifice of a pawn. The alternative 4. … exf6 leads to an edge for White as Black’s d-pawn will be in constant need of protection—which the c-pawn will be unable to provide after 3. … c5.

5. dxc5 (1:40) Ne6 (1:40)
6. Bb5 (1:40)

Moves like 6. c3 or 6. a3 that try to hold onto the pawn are met by 6. … e6 7. b4 a5, with an active game for Black.
Analysis after 7. ... a5

6. ... e6 (1:21)

For Karjakin, the opening theory has ended, and he spent almost 20 minutes comparing this move with 6. ... Qa5+.

7. c4 (1:39)

Rejecting familiar pawn-grabbing lines, Magnus goes for a small edge—and he became a world champion by being a chess alchemist who turns modest advantages into victories!

7. ... dxc4 (1:20)


9. Ngf3 (1:38)

After briefly checking the position, Magnus repeatedly invites Sergey to play ... c4-c3, which here leads to equality. This pawn-push is a common maneuver in many such positions: One side gives back the pawn; but to capture it, the opponent must compromise his pawn structure.

9. ... 0-0 (1:21)

10. 0-0 (1:37) Na5 (1:12)

A high-level defensive statement in which Black declares, “If you want to win back a pawn, exchange a couple of pieces!” Can White’s tiny opening edge be nurtured to lead to some winning chances if Black defends well?

Time watch: White is still in his preparations, using less than three minutes of his time, while Black has consumed 28 minutes, just a bit over 25% of his 100 minutes for 10 of 40 moves—right on budget and quite normal.

A natural defender will love the attitude that comes with 10. ... Na5:

“Want your pawn back? Then exchange some pieces!”
A useful prophylaxis (in chess, the term means a way to prevent your opponent from successfully carrying out his plan), clearing the c-file. Now it’s Carlsen’s turn to think. How can he pursue that elusive real edge? For both players, the real battle begins now. A Botvinnik-trained champion—a Karpov, Kasparov or Kramnik—would probably ask himself here: “In what games, has this—or a similar—pawn structure occurred? And what plans were tried?”

11. Rc1 (1:35) Be7 (1:09)

Position after 11. ... Be7

After 14. Qc3 Black could (and should) have played … b6 instead of the solid but inferior … Qd5, which leads to an unpleasant endgame. It’s clear that he didn’t play … b6 because he didn’t like his position after 15. Ne4. (If instead 15. Nxc4, Black has … Rac8, when White must be marginally worse.) But 15. Ne4 is risky for White. He has certain compensation for the pawn: 15. Ne4 e5 16. Rfd1 Qe6 17. Ng3 Rfd8 18. Nh4 and he gets his knight to f5. But Black can then play 18. … Bf8.

12. Qc2 (1:21) Bd7 (1:07)
13. Bxd7 (1:18) Qxd7 (1:07)
14. Qc3 (1:17)

Position before 14. ... Qd5

Probably White has just enough compensation for the pawn, but he is definitely not better. I would personally choose to play Black here. If things go wrong, then White can end up losing the game. So this moment is characteristic in that it shows the main weakness of Karjakin in the match: He was ready to defend, and he did it well, but he was psychologically not ready to sharpen the game when needed.
An important moment: Black needs to decide whether to continue with his exchange-simplify-draw strategy, or whether to put White to the test by challenging him to sacrifice a pawn.

14. ... Qd5 (0:59)
15. Nxc4 (1:09) Nxc4 (0:59)
16. Qxc4 (1:09) Qxc4 (0:59)
17. Rxc4 (1:09)

In this kind of position, grandmasters move the f-rook (allowing the king to move toward the center files), while beginners will typically move the a-rook. Here, of course, both moves lead to the same position; Karjakin, however, thought for two minutes. And rightly so—the situation on the board has changed substantially, from a middlegame into an endgame. This is a time to stop and think, even if only briefly.

17. ... Rfc8 (0:57)
18. Rfc1 (1:09) Rxc4 (0:57)

Yes, the rook + bishop duo is quite effective and statistically stronger than rook + knight. (Contrarily, the queen normally combines most effectively with the knight—look up Dvoretsky’s “Theory of Redundancy”.) But this is all statistics. The real position above favors White due to two main factors: Black’s damaged kingside pawns and White’s control of the key, open, c-file. While the d-file remains for Black’s use, Black’s rook will feel restricted and will be unable to penetrate after White’s K(g1)-f1-e2.

19. Rxc4 (1:09)

Black activates his rook, but an issue of greater importance is preventing White’s rook from penetrating Black’s position. The simple solution is to play ... Bd6, either on this move or the next, and Black maintains the balance (or so speaketh the chess-engine Komodo, unperturbed by a human’s perception of Black’s passivity.)

Still, the d-file is the best place for the black rook, and Black gains a tempo by threatening checkmate.
Position before 20. g3

Strong chessplayers try to fulfill multiple objectives with each move. In this position, Carlsen is threatened with a back-rank mate, so he must thwart the threat. There are various ways to do so, but there is one way—playing 20. g4! (or first 20. Kf1 followed by g4)—which also accomplishes another major goal: It prevents Black from grabbing key squares and activating his pieces with ... f5 followed by ... Bf6.

20. g3 (1:07) Rd7 (0:55)
21. Kf1 (1:07)

Magnus usually excels when trying to squeeze something out of a slightly better position. But in this game, and in similar positions in the match, his play was not very convincing. Surely he could have posed more problems for Karjakin further on.

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

I do not like 20. g3. White should try to put a pawn on g4 to prevent ... f5, either by 20. g4, or by 20. Kf1 Rd7 (not 20. ... Rd1+, which leads nowhere after 21. Ke2 Rb1 22. Rc2; White will soon invade the seventh rank) 21. g4. Normally, Magnus is very strong in this type of position, where he can probe about to test his opponent’s defenses. He often succeeds in squeezing a point out from seemingly drawish endgames like this one.

Vladimir likes 21. e4, which is another way of preventing ... f5 (followed by 22. Ke2, and a Magnus-style knight maneuvering).

21. ... f5 (0:53)

If 21. ... Rd1+, then 22. Kg2, with the threat of 23. Rc7.

22. Ke2 (1:07) Bf6 (0:53)
23. b3 (1:07) Kf8 (0:49)
24. h3 (1:07)

White now can play, at some moment, g3-g4 and then retake on g4 with his h-pawn. A concern for Black, yes, but a small one. Another plan: bringing the rook to the eighth rank, but that doesn’t look dangerous for Black either.

24. ... h6 (0:42)
25. Ne1  (0:51)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Carlsen’s 25. Ne1 was another quite strange move. I don’t understand why he didn’t try 25. g4 here with the idea of 25. ... fxg4 26. hxg4. Then it’s quite difficult for Black to get to play ... h5 to exchange the weak h-pawn. White can put his knight on d2 and play f4, Ne4, Kf3, a4, and the knight can sometimes go to h5 through g3. It’s still unpleasant for Black, even if objectively defendable.

25. ...  Ke7  (0:36)

No longer is the White rook allowed on the eighth rank: 26. Rc8 Rd8 27. Rc7+ Rd7. As the game showed here, the exchange of rooks makes the draw even more likely.

26. Nd3  (0:48)  Kd8  (0:34)

27. f4  (0:44)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

The final mistake is 27. f4. I cannot understand this strange move which simply blocks the position, requiring White to exchange a lot of pawns to improve it. I would still suggest 27. g4 here, because after ... fxg4 28. hxg4 Rc7, the endgame is drawish but White still has some practical chances due to the weak h6-pawn.

27. ...  h5  (0:25)

This move is possible since the f4-square is occupied by the pawn and thus unavailable for the white knight. Still, Sergey spent one-quarter of his remaining time on it.

28. a4  (0:31)  Rd5  (0:18)
These last two moves cost Black almost half of his time!

29. Nc5  (0:24) b6  (0:18)
30. Na6  (0:22) Be7  (0:16)

This stops Nb4, as the rook endings here are absolutely drawish.

31. Nb8  (0:17) a5  (0:16)

Moving the a-pawn away from danger.

32. Nc6+  (0:11)

Trying to find some winning chances, Carlsen now fell behind Karjakin in time. Fortunately for the champion, the position is easy for White to play, even with very little time and 30 seconds per move.

32. ... Ke8  (0:16)

33. Ne5  (0:10)

Pawn endgames are usually the most winnable, but not this one: 33. Nxe7 Kxe7 34. Rc7+ Rd7 35. Rc8 Rd8 36. Rxd8 Kxd8 37. Kd3 Kd7, and the game will end in a draw.

33. ... Bc5  (0:16)
34. Rc3  (0:07) Ke7  (0:15)
35. Rd3  (0:07)

Or 35. Nd3 Kd6 =.

35. ... Rxd3  (0:15)
36. Kxd3  (0:07) f6  (0:15)
37. Nc6+  (0:03) Kd6  (0:14)
38. Nd4  (0:03) Kd5  (0:14)

The exchange on d4 also leads to a draw, but why should Black be the one to ask for it?
GAME 1

Position after 38. ... Kd5

39. Nb5  (0:03)  Kc6  (0:11)
To stop the maneuver Nc7-e8-g7.

40. Nd4+  (0:01)  Kd6  (0:11)
41. Nb5+  (0:48)  Kd7  (1:01)
42. Nd4  (0:48)  Kd6  (1:01)

½ - ½

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

This game turned out to be characteristic of the match. Both players showed unexpected weaknesses. Magnus usually plays very well in such endgames, but here he made mistakes. Meanwhile, Karjakin defended well but played too cautiously and defensively, not grabbing his chance at the right moment to put his opponent to the test.
Karjakin decides to play it safe:
By releasing the tension in the center with 18. dxe5, he steers the game towards piece exchanges and ultimately a likely draw.

Carlsen could have chosen 26. ... c5!
It isn’t a winning move, but it would force White to play accurately in order to maintain the balance.

White doesn’t take advantage of an error.
Black’s 26th move is a mistake. White could apply some pressure to Black’s position with 27. Rd1 instead of 27. Rb1.
GAME 2

Introduction
Karjakin shows that 1. e4 will be his main weapon when he has the White pieces. Similarly, Carlsen reveals that he feels comfortable playing the Black side of the Ruy Lopez—the main lines, excluding the fashionable Berlin Defense.

For over 120 years this challenging move was, and remains, more popular than all other Black’s replies combined.
Before a match the competitors make extensive opening preparations. It’s clear that Karjakin was aiming mainly for e4, and he didn’t know exactly what his opponent was going to play. It’s possible that your opponent will develop a strategy of changing opening lines all the time, but that is becoming less popular nowadays, because it’s simply too difficult to prepare a lot of good lines with Black.

In general, the opening knowledge of top players is very detailed, so it’s hard to surprise your opponent. Because Black is currently doing well in most of the solid openings, it is logical for a player to prepare one or two openings (or two-to-three different lines within an opening) and to stick with his main weapon. That’s why it became clear to Karjakin after this game that Carlsen was going to play the black side of the Ruy Lopez for most of the match, or even the entire match.

Karjakin was not aggressive in this game. He wanted to probe a little bit, which at this stage of the match is understandable. It’s his first match for the world championship so at the beginning he would be trying just to settle in. The main fear in your first championship match is to get crushed at the beginning, especially against an opponent like Carlsen, and never finding your way back into the match. I understand Karjakin’s strategy: Play very safe, solid chess. But perhaps it was a bit too safe because he could have tried, with practically no risk, to get a small advantage at some point.

4. Ba4 (1:40)


4. ... Nf6 (1:40)

And “No!” to various sidelines, too numerous to mention.

5. 0-0 (1:40)

Apparently, too early for d2-d3.

5. ... Be7 (1:40)

In the Karpov-Korchnoi 1978 World Championship match in the City of Baguio, the Philippines, the Open Ruy (with 5. ... Nxe4) took center stage in a great theoretical duel. Not anymore.
And, in a classical (pre-21st-century) sense, the theory ends. In the 1981 Encyclopedia of Chess Openings, where the Open Ruy is analyzed by Korchnoi himself, 6. d3 receives only about a quarter page, while 6. Bxc6, certainly not in the mainstream, is covered over more than four pages. What was Sergey avoiding by rejecting 6. Re1—the Marshall Gambit perhaps?

The move 6. d3 signals a modern way of playing the White side of the Ruy Lopez. In the past—even going back to the earliest days of the Ruy Lopez’s opening in the 15th century—the “Spanish Torture” would include the plan of c3 and d4, hitting fast and hard at Black’s center. But recent computer analysis has strengthened Black’s position in variations like the Marshall Gambit, to the point where White can no longer afford to take the fast track; Black is able to equalize relatively easily in those lines.

6. ... b5 (1:40)
7. Bb3 (1:39) d6 (1:40)
8. a3 (1:39)

White doesn’t want to exchange his light-squared bishop for Black’s knight. In the past, preserving the bishop was universally achieved by c2-c3. Karjakin, however, wants the c3-square for his knight.

8. ... 0-0 (1:40)

The most common move is 9. ... Bg4, but Magnus chooses a less popular line. Karjakin remains well prepared.

10. Ba2 (1:39) Be6 (1:40)

Black is not concerned about a possible capture on e6, which would open the f-file for his rook. Yes, it will double his pawns, but they would then cover more squares in the center.

11. d4 (1:39)

This move cannot be viewed as a waste of chess time—just consider the odyssey of Black’s queen knight.

11. ... Bxa2 (1:40)
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

12. Rxa2 (1:39)  Re8 (1:40)
13. Ra1 (1:32)

So far both players knew what was going on and firmly knew what to do. For Karjakin, the real game begins right now, and after six minutes of thought, he decides to bring his rook to its more-promising (starting) position. The attempt to win a pawn with 13. dxe5 dxe5 14. Nxe5 leads only to equality (at best) for White.

13. ...  Nc4 (1:18)

An immediate 13. ... c5 is also thematic, but in this position White can exchange central pawns, followed byBg5 to exchange bishop-for-knight, utilizing the d5-square for his own knight.

Carlsen is also out of his opening preparation, as he thought for 22 minutes before playing 13. ... Nc4.

14. Re1 (1:25)  Rc8 (1:13)

A subtle move (called a “mysterious rook move” by Nimzovich) that anticipates the eventual possibility of opening the c-file—for example, after 15. d5 c6.

15. h3 (1:13)

Making luft—air for the king. Karjakin could follow a different path with 15. b3 Nb6 16. Bb2, but the game would still be close to equal.

15. ...  h6 (1:12)

This is also a luft-creating move. On an immediate ... Bf8, there could follow 16. b3 Nb6 17. Bg5, with an unpleasant pin. Because White intends b3 anyway, perhaps Black should have voluntarily retreated his knight to b6.

16. b3 (1:12)  Nb6 (1:12)
17. Bb2 (1:09)

Another option that keeps the pressure on Black’s position is 17. dxe5 dxe5 18. Qxd8 Bxd8. If instead 18. ... Rexc8, then 19. Nxe5 Bd6 (if 19. ... b4, then 20. Na2 Be5 21. Nc6, with advantage) and White again gains a tempo with 20. Nc6.

I’m not sure about 13. ... Nc4. It’s not a bad move, but I think ... c7-c6 was more to the point. Black can play his queen to c7, then ... c6-c5. The knight is losing two tempi to get to b6 (Nb8-c6-a5-c4-b6 versus Nb8-d7-b6), but with White’s pawn on b3, it doesn’t stand so well on b6 anyway. Magnus wanted to avoid having his knight on the edge of the board, but 13. ... Nc4 loses a bit of time.
17. ... Bf8 (1:08)

Position after 17. ... Bf8

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

In this position White has a small plus, but I think Karjakin decided to play too safely. Why should White be in such a hurry to release the tension? For example, 18. Qd2 followed by Rad1.

18. dxe5 (0:53) dxe5 (1:08)
19. a4 (0:53)

“Why should White be in such a hurry to release the tension?”

19. ... c6 (1:01)
20. Qxd8 (0:53) Rxd8 (1:01)
21. axb5 (0:53) axb5 (1:01)
22. Ne2 (0:48)

Position after 22. Ne2

22. ... Bb4 (0:56)
23. Bc3 (0:44) Bxc3 (0:56)
24. Nxc3 (0:44) Nbd7 (0:56)
25. Ra6 (0:42) Rc8 (0:56)
26. b4 (0:33)

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

I don’t think 19. a4 is the right idea because … c6 is the correct move for Black anyway. White could still be a bit better after 19. Qxd8 Rxd8 20. Na2, which is very logical, attacking the pawn on e5 and intending to reposition his knight to d3. White has a small plus. I don’t think Sergey would manage to beat Magnus in this position, but at least he could make him suffer a bit, without any risk to himself. But after 19. a4 c6, it’s completely equal.
A very interesting moment arises after 26. b4. The position is pretty much equal, but Magnus’ move 26. ... Re6 is clearly inaccurate. It seems that he missed a very simple tactic after 26. ... c5. No doubt, he saw the move ... c5. It’s a very natural move, and then it’s White who must play accurately to make a draw, as Black is slightly better. Normally Magnus would have certainly played it, and I can offer only one explanation for why he didn’t: After 27. Nxb5 cxb4 28. Nd6, he just didn’t see the move 28. ... Re6 and then 29. Nxc8 Rxa6. It’s not important for the outcome of the game, which would probably end in a draw anyway, but it’s a danger sign for Magnus because he missed a simple tactic even though he had plenty of time on his clock.

After 26. ... Re6, if Karjakin had played Rd1 instead of Rb1, he could have pressed on a bit. Of course, it’s still a draw, but after 27. Rb1 the position was quickly liquidated after ... c5. So, 27. Rd1 was more precise and natural because White keeps up a little bit of pressure.
“When Magnus missed a simple trick by not moving 26. ... c5, it became clear that he was not yet ‘fully there.’”

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Karjakin followed his strategy of playing safely. However, he played too passively and should have tried 18. Qd2, or 19. Qxd8 and 20. Na2. In general, it was a well-played game by Magnus, but his tactical mistake leading him to play 26. ... Re6 leaves an unsatisfied “after-the-game” feeling.

The official game commentaries explained that it was a fine, normal, game, and overall that was true, but there was the one moment when Magnus missed a simple tactic by not moving 26. ... c5, and it became clear that he was not yet “fully there.”
Karjakin missed a transitional opportunity. Sergey could have transitioned into a drawish rook ending by playing 23. ... Re8. White could then play 24. Nxd6, doubling Black’s pawns, but that is of no consequence in this position because Black’s active rook and king can easily defend his weaknesses.

Commentators are unanimous! They’re united in their support of 42. Rb8+ instead of 42. Re5+, but the variations resulting from either move are vastly complex, and the win for White, if it exists, is still very far off.

After a fierce battle, White missed a shot. White missed some chances to win and Black missed some chances to draw, but the game could culminate in one final winning opportunity for White after 72. Rf7+!. Even here, though, it is a narrow, winding path to the win.
GAME 3

Introduction
A wildly complicated game! First Carlsen misses chances for an advantage; then Karjakin fails to steer the game toward a harmless draw. Eventually a complex ending is reached, the kind in which Carlsen usually shines—and he does for a while—before Karjakin’s tenacious defense, coupled with several second-best moves by Carlsen, allows Karjakin to escape by the skin of his teeth.

Sergey shows his readiness to defend the Berlin Wall! This variation of the Ruy Lopez was in hibernation for many years, until re-awakened by our special contributor Vladimir Kramnik in his successful World Championship match win over Garry Kasparov in 2000. Since then it has become one of Black’s most reliable defenses against the Spanish Torture.

Ruy Lopez [C67]

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

1. e4 (1:40) e5 (1:40)
2. Nf3 (1:40) Nc6 (1:40)
3. Bb5 (1:40) Nf6 (1:40)
It’s likely that Karjakin was inspired by Kramnik’s success, as Sergey adopted the Berlin defense one year later, in 2001, as an aspiring eleven-year-old – which is also surprising because young players are usually unwilling to defend long, tedious endgames.

Game three was an interesting, exciting, and somewhat strange game. Finally, Magnus played 1. e4 to see what Karjakin had prepared, and as expected, Karjakin played the Berlin.

Magnus played the 5. Re1 line, which he has also played many times before. It is actually a line that suits his style because White gets a very small (almost disappearing) plus, but without risk so he can press a bit in a very symmetrical position. However, it’s very difficult to win in this line against a classical player like Karjakin, especially in classical time controls. But at the beginning of the match, you want to press just a bit. And to see what your opponent will do. This is a logical try from Magnus.

World championship tradition runs deep, and until now the players have been following a game from an earlier world championship match that also took place in New York City—130 years ago! In that game, Wilhelm Steinitz played 10. Re1 (as Carlsen himself played later in this match) against Johannes Zukertort. Black managed to win that game after 39 moves.
GAME 3

I was surprised by Karjakin’s preparation (or lack of it), because he started to think after 10. Re2. It’s not a very common move, but the opening variation with 5. Re1 is a main line, definitely to be expected against the Berlin, at least once in the match. Many players have tried to play it against me, including Magnus, Hikaru Nakamura, and others. I’ve played perhaps ten games as Black in this position, but I’ve never experienced real problems. So Karjakin should have looked at all possible moves in the position after 9. … Bf6, and 10. Re2 has already been played. It is a rare but known move. If White does not gain some initiative within the next five-to-seven moves, and Black manages to develop his pieces, it’s just a draw. But it is clear that Karjakin was out of his preparation after 10. Re2.

The move has a little twist to it. For instance, after … Re8 you can play 11. Bf4, and if … Rxe2, you recapture with the bishop or queen.

The response … b6 is OK. Sergey is using Re2 as a target to gain a tempo with … Ba6, but in some lines the pawn can be worse on b6 than on b7. I don’t see what is wrong with … Nf5 instead of … b6, as it seems to equalize as well. If 11. d5, then … d6, but now, in that type of position, the rook is badly placed on e2. It should be on e1, and that’s the point. Probably, White will have to move it back to e1 one day losing a tempo. That tempo should be enough for Black to equalize.

10. ... b6 (1:17) 11. Re1 (1:40) Re8 (1:15)

I didn’t like this move, and in general I didn’t like how Karjakin handled this part of the game. Again, I would suggest 11. ... Nf5 here; e.g., 12. c3 d5, and now, compared to the same position with the pawn on b7, Black has a plan of playing … c5. In this case, the move … b6 would have been a useful move.

After 11. ...Nf5, if White plays 12. d5 then … Re8 should equalize. Another option is 11. ...Nb7, as played in Kasimdzhanov-Melkumyan (½-½, 30 moves, Baden-Baden, 2016), taking advantage of the fact that the b-pawn has moved. If White plays 12. d5 then the knight will have access to the c5-square, where it will be well-placed.


Position after 13. Qxe1
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

Tempting Black to play 13. ... Bxd4?, which loses to 14. Bxd6 Bxb2 15. Bxc7!.
If instead 14. ... cxd6, then White wins with 15. Qe4, hitting the rook—15. ... Bxb2 16. Qxa8 Qf8 (other moves also lose; e.g., 16. ... Bxa1 17. Ba6) 17. Nc3 Bxa1 (or ... Bxc3 18. Rd1 +) 18. Nd5!, and despite being two pawns up at the moment, Black’s position collapses under the pressure—for example, 18. ... f5 19. Qxc8 and 20. Ne7++; or 18. ... Kh8 19. Ba6. Black can avoid those threats with 18. ... Bf6, but White’s positional bind is too strong: 19. Nxf6+ gxf6 20. Qxa7, and the b-pawn will fall, after which White’s a-pawn will simply cruise down the board.

13. ... Qe7 (1:15)

Black’s position is difficult to play. One try is 13. ... Qf8, but White maintains the pressure with 14. Be5 Qe7 15. Qc3.

14. Ne3 (1:26) Bb7 (1:09)
15. Qxe7 (1:26) Bxe7 (1:09)

Position after 15. ... Bxe7

16. a4 (1:26)

In the line 16. Re1 Kf8 17. Bd3 h6,

Magnus’ 16. a4 is not the right move. It is not of much use because ... a6 is useful for Black anyway, who often needs to cover the b5-square.

A better, very natural move is 16. Re1. The idea is that Black doesn’t have 16. ... Re8 because of 17. Bxd6, when the doubled d-pawns are a significant structural weakness. So, there are certain problems for Black after 16. Re1. Probably, Black will play 16. ... Kf8, but then there is the pretty move 17. Bd3, and White is threatening to take on h7. Black’s position is tenable, but White has the initiative.
White should not play 18. Bxd6 Bxd6
19. Nb5, which appears strong. But
Black has a saving grace: 19. ... Bf4 20.
g3 a6!, as shown by Komodo. Instead,
White’s advantage remains intact after
18. Be5.

16. ... a6  (1:05)
17. g3   (1:22)

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

The move 17. g3 has the right idea be-
hind it, which is to exchange bishops,
but it doesn’t work tactically because
after 17. ... g5, Black has solved all of
his problems and is simply not worse.
If the bishop moves, then 18. ... Nf5 is
strong, so White is practically forced to
Bg2 Bxg2 20. Kxg2 f5, and it’s time to
shake hands. The position is com-
pletely equal.

A more aggressive try would be 17. g4.
It’s clear that White wants to play Bg2
and then use the d5-square for his
knight, which is the right plan. Also,
17. g4 takes away the f5-square from
Black’s knight on d6. After 17. g4 f5!
18. g5, White’s advantage is very
small, because 16. a4 was an inaccurate
move.

Achieving a pleasant plus in a position
where he is usually very strong, build-
ing up small advantages, but then see-
ing his advantage totally disappear in a
way that should allow Karjakin to draw
quickly is, again, a dangerous warning
sign for Magnus.

It’s clear that White’s advantage goes
away if he doesn’t play actively; his plan
was right, he wants to play Bg2, but he
played 16. a4 and 17. g3 very quickly,
which is perplexing because it is still the
beginning of the game with lots of time
left.

17. ... g5    (0:56)
18. Bxd6 Bxd6 (0:56)
19. Bg2 Bxg2 (0:56)
20. Kxg2 f5   (0:48)

**Position after 20. ... f5**

21. Nd5 Kf7   (0:58) (0:48)
22. Ne3 Kf6   (0:45) (0:38)
23. Ne4        (0:45)

**Position after 23. Ne4**

23. ... Bf8    (0:38)
But now it is time for Sergey to also make uncharacteristic mistakes. I cannot explain why he did not play 23 ... Re8, which immediately leads to a dead draw. It’s a move that you play a tempo in a blitz game to take the open line. The only reason not to play it would be the threat of the rook endgame, but the rook endgame is so obviously drawish: 24. Nxd6 cxd6 25. Ra3.

25. ... Re2 26. Rb3 Rxe2 27. Rxb6 Ke6, and Black is not even worse because his king is active; or even 25. ... Re8 26. Rb3 Re6. After 23. ... Re8 there is absolutely nothing White can do, and it’s just a draw. So, 23 ... Bf8 was one of those odd mistakes in the match that is difficult to explain. It’s also very uncharacteristic of Sergey, because we have seen him hold much worse positions. Usually, he would hold this position 10 times out of 10; yet here he almost lost it.

Now after 23. ... Bf8 24. Re1, White takes the open line and is a bit better. The knight is a little better than the bishop because the bishop is limited by White’s pawns, which à la Capablanca, you put on black squares to limit the bishop, and then the knight starts to jump. It’s still drawish, but at least White gets something.

Magnus played very well from this point on, and at the first time control he actually had a technically winning endgame.

24. Re1 (0:45) Rd8 (0:38)

A prophylactic move; Black plans to play ... b5, and after Ne5, the d7-pawn will be defended.

25. f4 (0:44) gxf4 (0:35)
26. gxf4 (0:44) b5 (0:35)
27. axb5 (0:44) axb5 (0:35)
28. Ne3 (0:39) c6 (0:35)
An alternative was 29. Ra1, utilizing the a-file for his rook, but Carlsen has decided that the g-file is better for his purposes.

29. ... Ra8 (0:30)
30. Rg1 (0:31)

White now threatens 31. Rg5. Black’s antidote is 30. ... Bh6, after which White could continue his aggression with 31. Rg3. Then passive defense would be insufficient, as after 31. ... Rf8 (with the idea of meeting 32. Rh3 with 32. ... Kg6) 32. d5 Black’s position is both passive and unpleasant.

But active defense holds the balance: 31. ... Ra4!, e.g., 32. Rh3 (or 32. c3 Ra2) 32. ... Kg6 33. Nxf5 Kxf5 34. Rxf6 Rxd4, with equality.

Many difficult positions can be rescued by seeking active counterplay, rather than waiting for your opponent to build up a winning assault.

30. ... Ra2 (0:29)
31. b3 (0:29)

31. ... c5 (0:20)

According to GM Dmitry Kryakovin, writing in 64 Magazine, Karjakin was tempted by the following line, which looks logical for White, as he wins two pawns … but then finds himself in a deadly headlock: 32. d5 c4 33. bxc4 Bc5 35. cxb5 Ra3 36. Re1 Rc3!

It’s an interesting exercise to plug this position into one of the top chess engines and see how long it takes the computer to realize that White is lost. The reason is that White is in a strategic bind, and Black wins with a series of longer-term maneuvers; meanwhile, White can do nothing to break the pin on his knight!

Black wins by moving his king to the queenside and winning the b-pawn (as
long as he is careful to avoid a saving tactic for White: \( \ldots \) Kxb5 Rb1+!, followed by Rb3, and the deadly pin no longer exists). The move \( \ldots \) d7-d6 might be necessary to set up the win. Then at some moment, after Black’s king gets close to White’s pawns, he liquidates the pieces into that winning pawn ending.

But this daydream remained behind the scenes, as Karjakin’s risky \( \ldots \) c5 was well met by Magnus. Instead of \( \ldots \) c5, Sergey could attempt to hold the position with \( \ldots \) d5: 32. Rg5 Ke6.

\[
\text{ANALYSIS DIAGRAM}
\]

Position after 32. \( \ldots \) Ke6

33. Rxf5Bg7 34. Rh5Bxd4, and Black is near-equal; or 33. Rh5Bg7 34. Nxf5Bf6, and Black should hold the position.

32. Rg8 \( (0:24) \) Kf7 \( (0:16) \)

33. Rg2 \( (0:24) \)

With the excursion R(g1-)g8-g2, White has improved his rook’s position and forced Black’s king back.

33. \( \ldots \) cxd4 \( (0:16) \)

Not 33. \( \ldots \) Kf6? 34. dxc5 Bxc5 35. Nxf5!, winning a pawn, because if 35. \( \ldots \) Kxf5, then 36. Rg5+ and 37. Rxc5.

34. Nxf5 \( (0:24) \) d3 \( (0:16) \)

Black’s best chance—he uses the doomed d4-pawn to disconnect White’s pawns.

35. cxd3 \( (0:24) \)

Black plays a general-purpose move that leaves the initiative firmly in White’s hands. Stronger was 35. \( \ldots \) Ra3, a forcing move that ties White to the defense of the b-pawn. After 35. \( \ldots \) Ra3 36. Rb2 Bb4 37. Rb1 Ra2, White’s rook has been forced into a passive role, while Black has increased mobility. Another option after 35. \( \ldots \) Ra3 is 36. Rb2 Bb4 37. Ne3 Bc3 38. Rb1 b4, and Black should hold—for example, after 39. Nd5 Ke6 40. Ke4 Ra2 41. Nxc3 bxc3 42. Kd4 Rhx2 43. Kxc3 Rf2.
Karjakin invested nine minutes in 37. ... Rb1, sensing the difficulties holding the position.

Time control reached! An additional fifty minutes is added to the clocks.

41. Kf5 (1:03) Rd1 (0:52)

42. Re5+ (0:52)

The position after 42. Rb8+ Ke7 holds much promise for White, but even the top computer engines are unable to find a clear path to a definitive win. Black’s best chances consist of constantly attacking White’s weaknesses—the pawns on b3, d3, and h2—and threatening to liquidate into a drawn ending. Meanwhile, Black’s forces do an admirable job of keeping the White pieces at bay.

Even the riskier 42. Rb8+ Kf7 can’t be easily dismissed:

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

42. Rb8+ was quite a clear-cut win. It’s much more logical to put the rook somewhere active. 42. Rb8+ Ke7 43. Ke4 looks like a fairly simple win—for example, ... Re1+ 44. Kd5. Now the king is active, the rook is active, and the knight is active. It’s strange and should be frustrating for Magnus to miss this line, because that’s the simplest, most obvious, and logical way of playing. Continuing that variation, with 44. ... Rf1 45. Nf5+ Kf7, maybe Magnus thought that things here are not completely clear, but after (e.g.) 46. Ke4 Re1+ 47. Ne3, it looks winning.

The text move 42. Re5+ was a bit surprising to me. After 42. Re5+ Kf7 43. Rd5 Rxd3, Karjakin trades one pawn, and then the pawn on b3 also becomes a target. The point is that White should not exchange d-pawns. It’s a conceptual mistake, because Black’s chances to attack the b-pawn are increased. From this moment on, White’s winning is no longer a trivial technical task, with perhaps only a 60% chance of success.
43. Nf3 Bd6 44. Ng5+ Ke7 45. Rh8 Rxd3 46. Rh7+

46. ... Kd8 47. Rh3 Rc3, where White makes visual progress, but Black continues to resist.

42. ... Kf7 (0:50)
43. Rd5 (0:52) Rxd3 (0:44)
44. Rd7+ (0:51)

Tactics also abound in this difficult endgame—for example, in the line 46. ... Kd7 47. Re2 Be5 48. Rd2

44. ... Ke8 (0:42)
45. Rd5 (0:51) Rh3 (0:42)
46. Re5+ (0:48) Kf7 (0:41)

Karjakin thought for 13 minutes and continues to find strong defensive moves. The game is closer to a draw, but Carlsen continues to find ways to pose big problems for his opponent.

47. ... Bg7 (0:28)
48. Nc6 (0:42)

Threatening 49. Nd8+, and the pawn remains safe: If 48. ... Rxb3 49. Nd8+ Kf8 50. Ne6+ Kf7 51. Ng5+ Kf8 52. Nxh7+ Kf7 53. Ng5+ Kg8 54. Kg6, winning.
54. ... Rb5+ (0:22)

49. Kg4 (0:37)

If 50. Nxb4, then Black approaches the draw with ... Rb5 51. Re4 h5+ 52. Kf3 Bf8, and after the knight moves, ... Rxb3.

50. Nd8+ (0:31)

Even with limited material, White is keeping things complicated—and indirectly protects the b3-pawn.

50. ... Kg6 (0:23)

51. Ne6 (0:30)

54. Re3 (0:24) h4?! (0:18)

The problem now is that White has access to the g4-square, and the black pawn is on the same color as his bishop, so many of the endgames arising after a possible trade of rooks are no longer tenable for Black. Stronger was 54. ... Rc5 55. Re7+ Kh6 56. Kf5 Rxb7 57. Kg6 Kg7 58. f5+ Kg6 59. Re6+ Kf7, and again, Black’s counterattack against White’s weak pawns will enable him to hold the position.

55. h3 (0:23) Rc1 (0:15)

55. ... Kf7 would lead Black closer to the draw, as pawn endgames are not winning for White: 56. Ng5+ Bxg5 57. fxg5 Kg6 58. Rxc3 bxc3 59. Kd3 Kxg5 60. b4 Kf4.
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 60. ... Kf4

Black draws by one tempo—61. Kxc3 Kg3 62. b5 Kxh3 63. b6 Kg2 64. b7 h3 65. b8(Q) h2. This is a well-known position in which the queen cannot beat a rook pawn on the seventh rank. (A win is possible if White’s king is close enough, but here it is too far away.)


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 61. Kf3

And now 61. ... Rd5! should clinch the half-point, at least on the top-grandmaster level: 62. Kf4 (or 62. Ke2 Kg7) Rd4+ 63. Re4 Rd3 64. Re6 Kg7 65. Nd6 Bd8. But after a long think, Karjakin played 61. ... Bg5?! (0:15)

... and Black’s troubles flare up again for real.

62. Re4 (0:21) Rd3+ (0:15)
63. Kg4 (0:21) Rg3+ (0:15)
64. Kh5 (0:21)

Over the past several moves, Karjakin has defended perfectly according to the chess engines, and the draw is almost in his pocket.

61. Kf3 (0:28)

Position after 64. Kh5
64. ...  

A mistake that could have been decisive. 64. ... Kf8 keeps Black in the game: 65. Ne5 Bd8 66. Rxb4 Rg5+ 67. Kh6 Rxf5

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 67. ... Rxf5

68. Ng6+ Kf7 69. Nhx4 Bxh4 70. Rhx4, and Black draws comfortably with 70. ... Rf3.

65. Ne5+  (0:21)  Kf6  (0:13)

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 65. ... Kf6

66. Ng4+  (0:21)  Kf7  (0:11)

Karjakin now realized that his intended 66. ... Kxf5 loses: 67. Re5+ Kf4 68. Rxe7 Rxb3 (68. ...Rhx3 69. Rf7+ Kg3 70. Nf2 and White wins) 69. Kxh4 Rc3 70. Rf7+!

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 67. ... Rf7+

An intermezzo that forces the black king too far away from the action. 70. ... Ke4 71. Nfx2 Kd4 72. Rf4+ Ke3 73. Kg3!, and White will be able to push the h-pawn to victory, while preventing the b-pawn from inflicting any counter-damage.

67. Re6  (0:16)  Rhx3  (0:06)

Position after 67. ... Rhx3

68. Ne5+  (0:15)  Kg7  (0:06)
69. Rxe7+  (0:12)  Kf6  (0:06)
White’s strong play has led to a winning position, which would come to fruition after the logical move 70. Re8!. A long but calculable variation is based on the pattern-recognition of which piece configurations are winning, with White’s forces holding the Black king at bay against the weak b-pawn, with sample lines such as 70. Re8 Kxf5 (if 70. … Rxb3 then 71. Kg4 wins) 71. Nc6 Rh1 72. Nd4+ Kf4 73. Re2 h3 74. Kh4 h2 75. Ne6+ Kf3 76. Rb2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANALYSIS DIAGRAM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Position after 76. Rb2</td>
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76. … Ke4 77. Nc5+ Kd5 78. Na4, and the b-pawn is safe and sound; meanwhile, Black’s h-pawn is doomed.

But the clock continues ticking relentlessly and the tension is peaking, so Carlsen misses that opportunity and instead plays a move that allows Black to stay in the game.

70. Nc6  (0:12)  Kxf5  (0:04)

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<tr>
<th>ANALYSIS DIAGRAM</th>
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<td>Position after 70. … Kxf5</td>
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Alas for Black, his clock is ticking relentlessly too, and he misses 70. … Rc3!, which leads to a clear draw: 71. Re6+ (forced) Kxf5 72. Nd4+ Kf4 73. Kxh4 Rd3 74. Ne2+ Kf3 75. Nc1 Rd1 76. Re6 Ke3 77. Rc2 Rd2 78 Rc8 Rd1.

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<th>ANALYSIS DIAGRAM</th>
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<td>Position after 78. … Rd1</td>
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Black’s king cannot be prevented from fulfilling its role in the attack against the weak b-pawn and its defenders.

But 70. … Kxf5, as played in the game, leads to a different story: White is again winning! But the excitement is not yet over…

71. Na5  (0:08)
Position after 70. Na5

71. Re1 also wins.

71. ... Rh1 (0:04)

Position after 71. ... Rh1

The motifs in this position: Black uses the h-pawn as a distraction while ultimately attempting to attack and win the b-pawn with his king or rook; whereas White seeks a piece configuration that protects the b-pawn and can’t be undermined (while also preventing the h-pawn from doing any damage).

The way to accomplish White’s goals is with the in-between move 72. Rf7+: 72. ... Ke6 73. Rf2 h3 74. Kh4 Ra1 75. Nb7 Ra3 76. Rd2 Ke5

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 73. Kg4

Among the many instructive variations is one demonstrating the fight between the rook and the passed pawn: 73. ... Ra1 (undermining a defender) 74. Nc4 Kd3 75. Kxh4 Ke2 76. Rf3 Rb1 77. Na5 Ra1 78. Nc6 Kb2 79. Nd4 Rd1 80. Ne6 (seeking a stable position defending the b3-pawn) Rd6 81. Re3 Rxe6 82. Rxe6 Kxb3.
The White king is so far away that it appears as though Black will draw comfortably, but no! A couple of instructive techniques force the win: 83. Kg3 Kc3 84. Rc6+ (gaining a tempo by checking the king away from the pawn) ... Kd2 85. Rb6 (back to the right file—with a tempo) Kc3 86. Kf3 b3 87. Ke2 b2 88. Kd1, winning.

As an alternative after 73. Kg4, Black can try to run for the pawn immediately, only to be thwarted: 73. ... Kd4 74. Rc7!, a standard maneuver, cutting off the king.

Black now has just enough time to distract White with the dangerous h-pawn.

72. ... Ra1 (0:02)
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<th>Move</th>
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<th>Piece</th>
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<td>73.</td>
<td>Rb5+</td>
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<td>74.</td>
<td>Rxb4+</td>
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<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Rg4+</td>
<td>0:06</td>
<td>76.</td>
<td>Ne4</td>
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<td>77.</td>
<td>Rh4</td>
<td>0:03</td>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Rg4+</td>
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### Final Position

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

72. Rf7+ was winning, but as a professional chess player I know that it’s so difficult to find the clincher when you are very tired. It’s the last time control and you need to examine a very long and precise calculation. Even though not finding the move is an error, I don’t consider it a true mistake, because it’s something that is a little above human ability. It can happen to anyone, including Magnus.

But the main problem at this point is that it already became difficult to win. After 42. Rb8+ the win is “in your fingertips.” But now after almost seven hours, a situation arises where you must calculate accurately. It’s not easy. Of course, Karjakin’s stellar defense factors in. He defended brilliantly after the first time control. It was incredibly difficult to defend this position in general, but especially against Magnus. Normally in this type of position Carlsen is completely merciless and faultless, winning in a machine-like fashion. But again, Magnus spoiled his advantage, not playing his best in the type of position where he is normally at his best. So besides the fact of a disappointing result, it was a bad signal for the defending champion. Normally he wins nine out of ten positions of this kind.

This game must have certainly boosted Karjakin’s confidence, because he made some mistakes but still managed to hold. I know from experience that when you manage to hold against the hallmark of your opponent’s chess strength, it gives you a lot of confidence. Twice now in the first three games he has defended a worse endgame against Magnus. Even once would be an achievement against him. From Magnus’ perspective, this must have been quite frustrating because in both games one and (especially) three he got the type of position he wanted but was unable to realize the victory.
It was a good game in general, besides the several mistakes. The level of play was pretty high in this game. But the mistakes were odd. That Karjakin did not play 23. ... Re8, which is the most natural move, and that Carlsen didn’t play 42. Rb8+, which is also the most natural move, are both very strange. It was a disappointing result for Carlsen. He played incredibly strongly from moves 24 to 40. And Karjakin, from move 41, also played extremely well. All-in-all, this was a very good, entertaining game of chess.
White makes an unforced error.
White’s position becomes strategically lost due to several factors, including his weak, immobile pawns on the queenside, as well as Black’s two powerful bishops and dominance in the center.

... f4 permits White to build a fortress.
Instead, Black could have maintained excellent winning chances by keeping the position open and dynamic.

A fortress doesn’t need a brick wall.
A chess fortress does not require an impenetrable wall of squares. In this position, Black’s king and light-squared bishop can penetrate at will, but White is able to successfully defend any weak point in his position. Hence the fortress holds.
**Introduction**

Reality can be stranger than fiction. Karjakin blunders twice in a row—a tactical oversight on move 18, followed by a strategic lapse on move 19—to put him on the very brink of defeat. But Carlsen may have fallen prey to GM Alexander Kotov’s concept of *Dizziness due to Success* (“My position is overwhelming—I can win this way, I can win that way!”) which can lead to careless play. And indeed, a miracle happens: the move 45. ... f4? locked up the kingside, and White was then able to construct a last-ditch fortress. Result: Draw!

**Ruy Lopez [C88]**

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

1. e4 (1:40)  
2. Nf3 (1:40)  
3. Bb5 (1:40)  
4. Ba4 (1:40)  
5. 0-0 (1:40)  

6. e5 (1:40)  
7. Nc6 (1:40)  
8. a6 (1:40)  
9. Nf6 (1:40)  
10. Be7 (1:40)

Black is ready to play a classical Ruy Lopez, or even a Marshall Gambit; these days the latter is one of those super-solid defenses that Vladimir refers to. Our guess: Marshall.
Position after 5. ... Be7

6. Re1 (1:40) b5 (1:40)
7. Bb3 (1:40) 0-0 (1:40)
8. h3 (1:40) Bb7 (1:40)
9. d3 (1:40) d6 (1:40)

Position after 9. ... d6

10. a3 (1:40)

Chess theory changes continually. An old Encyclopedia of Chess Openings (ECO) from 1981 gives only the move 10. c3, which leads to equality, whereas today 10. a3 is the main line.

10. ... Qd7 (1:40)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

During Karjakin’s match preparations, he must not have been able to find anything new for White in the Marshall, or else he was not looking in that direction. So, he decided to play the most fashionable anti-Marshall lines, such as 6. d3 in game two, and 8. h3 followed by 9. d3 as in this game. It’s a very popular line and I’ve played it often with both colors. It was a “topic of discussion” in my match with Peter Leko, (I played it from the White side), so this is yet another parallel with that match. Leko played 9. ... d6 and I couldn’t break through. Since then, people have realized that Black can also equalize with 9. ... d5, a Marshall-like pawn sacrifice considered dubious at the time, but since then it has been carefully checked and it is now doing well. The d5 push happens later in this match, but in this game, Carlsen plays 9. ... d6, which is the old main line. Garry Kasparov played this a lot as White. I remember playing him once from the Black side of this line, and somewhere between 2000 and 2007 it was a topical line in the Ruy Lopez.
GAME 4

A well-established move in opening theory, having been played by GMs including Levon Aronian, Gata Kamsky, and Ruslan Ponomariov, but Karjakin starts to think… for ten whole minutes.

11. Nb2 (1:40) Rfe8 (1:39)

This move is fine, and follows in the footsteps of Gashimov-Aronian 2010 and Anand-Nava 2007. White is ready to meet 12. … Nd8 with 13. d4.

12. c3 (1:30)

As played by Navara against Anand, but the time spent by Carlsen on this move implies that the theory has ended for both players, and they are now “on their own.”

12. … Bf8 (1:32)

13. Nf1 (1:24) h6 (1:31)

The position is a typical Ruy Lopez. For centuries, the classical way of playing the Ruy Lopez is for White to try to play c3 and d4, but now Black, with the Marshall pawn sacrifice … d5, seems to be doing well. At least nobody has been able to break it down over many years. So lately White has started playing d3, a slower method with many different variations. It’s clear that the lines with d3 should be less dangerous for Black, but it’s a long game and White can still apply some pressure. The assessment often depends on whether Black can manage to play … d5 sooner or later, under good circumstances. If White stops … d5, or else finds something concrete against … d5 if Black plays it, then White can generate pressure and gain an advantage. Therefore, the main question in this position is whether Black can play … d5 under favorable circumstances.
The position after 13. ... h6 is an important moment. I was a bit surprised that Karjakin played 14. N3h2 fairly quickly at this stage of the game—he thought for three minutes before playing it—but it seems as though the move was not part of his preparation. 14. N3h2 is logical, but it doesn’t give White anything, as was shown in the game. So, it’s quite strange that he played it so quickly.

If White can manage to get his knight to g3, with the pawn push d4 and Be2, he will have a very nice plus. On the other hand, if Black can manage to play …d5, he should. 14. Ne3 is one way to stop … d5, but there is also a minus: it is much more difficult to play d4 because the e-pawn is not protected. After 14. Ne3, Black should play … Nd8 to maneuver his knight to e6. The game may continue, for instance, 14. Ne3 (to temporarily stop …d5) …Nd8 15. Nh2 d5. It’s a very tense position and a lot depends on tactical nuances. 14. Ng3 is the most natural move, but then 14. … d5 seems to work fine. The position after 15. exd5 Nxd5 is very sharp and tense, and requires further analysis.

Of course it’s logical to play 15. Qf3 after having played 14. N3h2, but after 14. … d5, White could also consider 15. Ng4. Then if … Nxa4 16. Qxa4 Qxa4 17. hxg4, White can pretend to be a bit better in this endgame, which is very much in Karjakin’s style. 15. Qf3 is an ambitious move, and after 15. … Na5, then 16. Ba2 is forced. Black’s position might appear to be in danger, with possibilities such as Bxh6, but everything seems to hold just in time. Now the game proceeded with 16 … dxe4 17. dxe4 Nc4, a very good maneuver.
Now comes a very strange moment: Karjakin thought for 12 minutes, then played 18. Bxh6. As he said after the game, he had simply missed the strong reply 18. … Qc6. Indeed, aside from … Qc6, Bxh6 would be a very strong and natural move. Possibly he was calculating 18. Bxh6 Nxe4 and after 19. Rxe4 Bxe4 20. Qxe4 gxh6 21. Ng4, White has fantastic compensation.

Maybe the computer can find a defense here, but to human eyes, White is simply much better. But this is all irrelevant due to … Qc6. On the world championship level, a player should not miss a move like … Qc6. It is not a difficult move to see. Instead of 18. Bxh6 White could have played 18 Ng4, e.g., 18. … Nxd4 19. hxg4, and it’s close to equal.
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

Karjakin’s 19. Bxc4 is one of the most shocking moves of the match. It was one of several moves in the match that are impossible to explain. 19. Bxc4 (after 16 minutes of thought, it should be noted) is a panicked move, a psychological breakdown, probably as a result of having missed 18. ... Qc6. There was no reason to panic after 18. ... Qc6. It was certainly an unpleasant surprise, but Sergey still had a lot of time left, and his position is not too bad. He could play 19. Bc1, and after ... Nxe4 20. Ne3, it’s clear that Black has a very nice position along with some initiative, but it’s still not too far from equality. But after 19. Bxc4, White is strategically lost. And of course, Karjakin is a strong enough player to understand that, so it’s a decision that is impossible to explain. 19. Bxc4, frankly, is not even an option; it’s not even a move I would consider. I would consider playing 19. Bg5 to see if I can give up the b2 pawn. Then if I see it’s not working too well, I could just play the bishop back to c1. The position after 19. Bxc4 is strategically so bad that, even if White exchanges queens (otherwise he is in danger of getting mated on the long diagonal), the chances of survival are very slim. Simply an unexplainable moment.

Dvoretsky’s “rule of redundancy” leads to the same conclusion.

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

Also very good would have been 21. ... Qg6. I like it more than 21. ... Nd6, but either way Black should win here with proper technique. It’s not even very complicated for players of this level. Black needs to be accurate here, but nothing more than mere accuracy is required because the position is slowly but surely winning for Black.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Position after 21. Ng3</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>bxc4 (0:58)</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Be3 (0:50)</td>
<td>Nxe4 (0:57)</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Ng3 (0:49)</td>
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Carlsen’s 21. ... Nd6 is a move in accordance with GM Josif Dorfman’s rule that two bishops are even more effective when teamed up with a knight. Mark

22. Rad1 (0:36) Rab8 (0:51)

Activating the rook with long-term threats against the b2-pawn.

23. Bc1 (0:32) f6 (0:47)
24. Qxc6 (0:32) Bxc6 (0:47)
25. Ng4 (0:31) Rb5 (0:43)
26. f3  (0:25)  f5  (0:39)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

So far, Magnus has played very well. I’m not sure I would have played 26 … f5. I would probably try to maneuver, e.g., 26. … Kf7, on general principles, then maybe … g5 and … Kg6 at some point, slowly improving the position. But it’s a matter of taste. 26 … f5 is good enough.

27. Nf2  (0:23)  Be7  (0:38)

If left unchallenged, Black would maneuver his pieces to dominating squares—e.g., his knight to c5 and bishop to h4—hence White aims to gain some space, and some squares, by playing the move f3-f4. Black could have prevented the move 28. f4 with 27. … Kf7 28. f4 exf4 29. Rxe8 fxg3 30. Rxf8+ Kxf8.

Carlsen decides to go for the more tactical 27. … Be7. Sergey is struggling to find some kind of defense, but it’s really a difficult task. It’s a situation where all roads lead to Rome. Not only does Black have two very powerful bishops, but he also has (effectively) an extra pawn, because the pawn on c4 is holding back the three pawns on a3-b2-c3.

31. Nh1 (no other square is available!) Ne4 and White is completely tied up. (Alternatively, the move 27. … g6 leads to the same outcome.)

28. f4  (0:17)  Bh4  (0:35)
GM Anish Giri in *New in Chess* writes about this move, “Allowing lots of exchanges, but I noticed that offering trades that increase his advantage is one of Magnus’ trademarks. The quality of a good positional player—Capablanca, Rubinstein, these kinds of guys.”

29. fxe5 (0:17) Bxg3 (0:33)
30. exd6 (0:17) Rxe1+ (0:33)

Carlsen initiates another advantageous exchange.

31. Rxe1 (0:17) cxd6 (0:32)

“Activation” by 32. Re7 would be met with 32. … Re5, virtually forcing another exchange that improves Black’s position: 33. Rxe5 dxe5, after which the e-pawn will prove extremely dangerous. If instead 33. Bg5, then 33. … Rxe7 34. Bxe7 Bf4, and Black’s bishop takes control of crucial squares in White’s position.

32. … Kf7?! (0:27)

An important consideration for Black is to determine which pieces to exchange and which pieces to keep on the board. This move leads to the subsequent exchange of the remaining rooks, after which Black’s chances for success are reduced. Better for Black would be to keep the rooks on the board with 32. … Re5, which can help attack White’s weak pawns and squares, e.g., 33. Nh1 f4 34. Nhxg3 fxg3 35. Kf1 Be4 with strong threats; or 33. Kf1 Re6 with the idea of 34. … Rg6.

33. Rd4 (0:13) Re5 (0:25)
34. Kf1 (0:13) Rd5 (0:22)
35. Rxd5 (0:12) Bxd5 (0:22)
36.Bg5 (0:08) Kg6 (0:14)
A committal move that gives Black an additional target. Instead, 37. Bd8 makes no such commitment and asks Black, “How are you going to make progress?” In that case, brute-force plans don’t quite work for Black, e.g., 37. Bd8 Bf4 38. Nd1 Be4 (to try to attack the knight and force the win of White’s queenside pawns after … Bc1) 39. Bb6 Bc2 40. Be3

40. Bxf4 Kxh4 and the opposite-colored bishops ensures the draw for White) 40. Ne2.

 ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 40. Ne2

The critical positions arise after 40. … Bxh4 41. Bxh4 Kxh4 42. g3+ Kg4 (or … Kh3) 43. Kf2.

 ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 43. Kf2

This position provides an excellent example of the principle that endgames require a different approach: often the focus is not on individual moves, but rather on longer-term plans.

So, looking at this position in terms of a plan, rather than individual moves: Black’s plan is to [1] get a passed kingside pawn, then [2] maneuver his king to support this pawn while also threatening to penetrate on the queenside, and finally [3] using the kingside pawn as a sacrificial diversion in order to successfully attack the queenside pawns. And this

Karjakin spent four out of his five remaining minutes analyzing 39. Nf4+, and now: 39. … Kg4 (not 39. … Bxf4?...
three-step plan works for Black.

Karjakin’s move 39. Be7 maintains an equal pawn count, but allows Black to keep the powerful bishop-pair, plus a de facto extra pawn, which could win the game under normal circumstances.

39. Be7 (0:01) Bxh4 (0:12)
40. Bxd6 (0:01) Bd8 (0:10)
41. Ke2 (0:40) g5 (0:56)
42. Nf2 (0:40)

Position after 42. Nf2

GM Fabiano Caruana points out the move 42. ... Bd5!, which wins the game in a forceful manner: 43. g3 g4 44. Nd1 Bf3+ 45. Kd2 Bxd1 46. Kxd1 Bg5.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 42. Nf2

42. ... Kg6 (0:52)

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 46. ... Bg5

White can continue to struggle with 47. Ke2, but Black’s g-pawn still carries the day: 47. ... Be3 48. b3 cxb3+ 49. Kxb3 f4! 50. gxf4 (or 50. Kc4 f3 51. Kd3 Bf2 52. c4 Kg6 and the Black king is in time to stop the White c-pawn; then White can’t prevent the position with Black’s king on d8 or c8 and Black’s bishop on b6, followed by the move ... Bc7, winning) 50. ... g3 51. f5 g2 52. Bh2 Kg5, and Black’s king will capture the f-pawn and head back to h3 to round up the bishop.

Alternatively, after 42. ... Bd5 White could try 43. Kf1, but the refutation is swift and sure: ... f4 44. g3 Bf3 45. gxf4 g4.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 45. ... g4

White cannot hold this position, as the g-pawn is too strong. Instead, Carlsen took a longer-winded approach that should probably still lead to victory ... but didn’t. Strangely, he spent only four minutes on this crucial move.

42. ... Kg6 (0:52)

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 46. ... Bg5

White can continue to struggle with 47. Ke2, but Black’s g-pawn still carries the day: 47. ... Be3 48. b3 cxb3+ 49. Kxb3
e.g., 46. Nd1 Bxd1 47. Kxd1 Be3. The winning plan of … Bf4 and … g3 cannot be stopped.

43. ... Bb6 (0:30)

Played after 22 minutes of thought. Something, perhaps, went wrong.

The win is quite trivial here, especially considering Magnus’ technique. I was already preparing to go to bed (there is a six-hour time difference between New York and Switzerland), assuming the upcoming result, and then something really strange started to happen—one of the strangest moments in a match filled with strange moments. I had been waiting for Sergey’s resignation rather soon, but when 45. … f4 appeared on the board, I decided not to go to bed because I understood that now White had a chance. Otherwise, after a move like 45. … Be6, it is totally lost for White. What is especially strange is that Magnus thought for a very long time, more than 20 minutes, before playing 43 … Bb6. While he was considering 43. … Bb6 he had already decided to place the pawn on f4. But this is an incredibly strange decision. Despite all of this, I still thought Black should be winning after … f4. It’s quite a miracle that White has a fortress.

The next morning I started moving pieces on the board, and it turned out that the position (before 45. … f4) was even easier to win than I had thought. I tried different defensive methods for White, but none of it was even close to working. When you have the two bishops, you need to open up the position. That’s just basic logic. The winning plan in general is the following:

I. After … Be6, White’s knight eventually needs to come to f2, so Black can put a pawn on a4, bishop on d5, bishop on c7 (White will probably have his bishop on d4).

II. Then Black plays … fxg4, and after Nxg4, … Kf5. If the knight goes back to f2, then the pawn travels through g4 to g3, and eventually promotes. And if Ne3+, then … Ke4, because the bishop endgame is completely lost. Black can just invade with the king and then push the g-pawn.

So this is one of the biggest surprises of the match—why did Magnus play … f4, even if he, as he says, doesn’t believe in fortresses. I can understand it, because the position doesn’t look like a fortress, but why give White a chance when there was no chance?
Position after 45. Nd1

45. ... f4? (0:22)

The move 45. ... fxg4? also allows White to build a fortress, as 46. Ne3 Kh5 47. Bg3 prevents Black from making progress. But 45. ... Be6 keeps all options open for Black, in the form of three different plans: [1] play on the kingside, [2] penetrate with the king via the center, and [3] penetrate with the king via a long walk to the queenside. The third plan happened in the game, but Carlsen’s move 45. ... f4? hampered the other two plans. Karjakin is able to thwart the one plan, but he would not have been able to thwart multiple plans at once, i.e., the possibility that Carlsen could switch to one of the other plans at an opportune moment. A similar concept can be found in the strategy of “playing against two weaknesses”–attacking one weakness, then the other, and switching back and forth as required.

46. Bd4 (0:29) Bc7 (0:22)

Sometimes an opponent can successfully defend against any single concrete plan of attack, but he cannot defend against two plans—and the possibility of switching from one to the other.

Position after 46. ... Bc7

Black’s plan is to bring his king over to attack the queenside pawns, which he is able to achieve, but the king cannot win the pawns by himself.

47. Nf2 (0:28) Be6 (0:22)
48. Kf3 (0:27) Bd5+ (0:22)
49. Ke2 (0:27) Bg2 (0:22)
50. Kd2 (0:25) Kf7 (0:19)
51. Kc2 (0:25) Bd5 (0:19)
52. Kd2 (0:24) Bd8 (0:19)
A fortress does not need to consist of an impenetrable wall of squares; if every weakness can be successfully defended, the fortress holds.

Black has achieved the maximum, but White is able to defend all of his weaknesses and no further progress can be made.

White’s fortress cannot be breached, but Magnus keeps trying.
The fortress looks different, but it is still a fortress.

A fortress does not need to consist of an impenetrable wall of squares; if every weakness can be successfully defended, the fortress holds.

Any attempt to attack this pawn would require Black to abandon the c-pawn or f-pawn, with equality.
Position after 89. a4

89. ...  
90. Kf2  
91. Nf1  
92. Nd2  
93. Ke2  
94. Kf2

\[ \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2} \]

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

This game was a particularly bad sign for Magnus, because you simply cannot afford not to win this kind of position in a world championship match. It happens sometimes in a tournament or less-important event, because you are not as focused. But in a world championship match it usually means that after this, the player will have a hard time in the match, because it simply should not happen. After this game, I started to have a feeling that something can go really wrong for Magnus. It was also clear that Karjakin needed to seriously improve his play. But the start of the match was on Sergey’s side because his opponent was making uncharacteristic mistakes. In a world championship match, it’s quite important to feel that your opponent is vulnerable, that he makes mistakes and some strange decisions, and I think this game would have had a positive effect on Sergey and given him his confidence.
Carlsen vs. Karjakin—World Chess Championship

Computer Assessment
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

Position after 26. ... Bf5

White has an opportunity to expand.
Carlsen could get his kingside pawns rolling with 27. g4 followed by 28. f4.

Position before 32. a5

The a5-square is available!
White’s forces could penetrate on the queenside, either in the middlegame (by the queen or bishop) or in the endgame (by the king). Hence Black’s queenside is not safe—until Carlsen played 32. a5?—taking away those opportunities for penetration. Karjakin immediately maneuvered his king to the now-safe queenside.

Position before 42. ... d4

One of the classic themes of the match!
A theme in this World Championship match is pushing (usually sacrificing) a pawn in order to open lines for pieces. In this position, Karjakin played 42. ... d4!, transforming his bad bishop into a very good bishop—at the cost of only a pawn.
GAME 5

Introduction
This game features the first appearance of the Giuoco Piano (or Italian Opening) in the match. The Giuoco Piano is one of the oldest chess openings, appearing in the earliest chess manuals with “modern” rules (late 1400’s). On today’s top-GM level, the Italian is gaining popularity due to the solid defenses (Berlin Defense, Marshall Gambit) in the Ruy Lopez, and it shares several “themes” with the classical Ruy, such as White’s strong light-squared bishop on the diagonal a2-g8 and the attempt to dominate the center with pawns on e4 and d4. Magnus gained an advantage against the Ruy Lopez in Game Three, but Black’s play there certainly could have been improved upon. Thus, Magnus decided to try something new.

Giuoco Piano [C54]

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

1. e4 (1:40) e5 (1:40)
2. Nf3 (1:40) Nc6 (1:40)
3. Bc4 (1:40) Bc5 (1:40)
4. 0-0 (1:40) Nf6 (1:40)
5. d3 (1:40) 0-0 (1:40)
There are no fewer than 13(!) different moves played here by strong White players. Of course these moves allow for many transpositions as well, but there are still many various plans for both White and Black in this position.

6. \( a4 \) (1:40)

This move has been played by super-GMs including Levon Aronian and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave—and even Karjakin himself played it in two games soon after this match ended.

6. \( ... \) \( d6 \) (1:40)

More aggressive would be 6. \( ... \) \( d5 \), but Karjakin’s match strategy so far is to play as safely as possible.

7. \( c3 \) (1:40) \( a6 \) (1:40)
8. \( b4 \) (1:40) \( Ba7 \) (1:40)
9. \( Re1 \) (1:40)

Now 9. \( ... \) \( Ng4 \) (attacking the f-pawn, as does the bishop on a7) can be met by 10. \( Ra2 \), improving the rook’s position, followed by 11. \( h3 \).

9. \( ... \) \( Ne7 \) (1:40)

The repositioning of this knight (\( Nc6-e7-g6 \)) is a thematic maneuver in the Giuoco Piano as well as in some lines of the Ruy Lopez.

10. \( Nbd2 \) (1:40) \( Ng6 \) (1:40)

Now Karjakin thought for seven minutes, which is slightly surprising because this position would have been (or should have been) part of his opening preparation for the match.

11. \( ... \) \( c6 \) (1:33)
12. \( h3 \) (1:37) \( exd4 \) (1:13)

Karjakin spent twenty minutes here to
Game 5

formulate his plan, which is to exchange pawns and pieces in the center in order to minimize the pressure on Black’s position. However, his plan is not fully satisfactory. A better move was the simple 12. ... Re8 to maintain the pawn formation in the center. True, White could then prevent the central exchanges with 13. Bb3, but so what?

13. cxd4  (1:37)  Nxe4?!  (1:07)

In this case simplification does not lead to equality. Even here, 13. ... Re8 keeps the position close to equal.

Vlad’s Viewpoint

After 13. ... Nxe4 White could have played 14. Nxe4 d5 15. Bd3 dxe4 16. Bxe4 Be6 17. b5 and White has a pleasant plus, but it is probably holdable for Black. The material is much reduced, but White has a certain initiative. So, 14. Nxe4 would have been a good try. 14. Bxf7+ is more ambitious but double-edged. What is clear, though, is that Magnus was in an aggressive mood.

Magnus invested nine minutes of time to make his choice. The other main option is 14. Nxe4, which keeps the bishop-pair and continues the pressure against Black’s slightly-weakened queenside pawns: 14. Nxe4 d5 15. Bd3 dxe4 16. Bxe4 Be6 17. b5 Bd5! 18. bxa6 bxa6 and White can put more pressure on the c6-pawn than Black can put on the d4-pawn. Another offshoot variation after 14. Nxe4 has the appearance of near-equality, but the computer engines reveal what human eyes did not see: if after 17. b5 the natural-looking ... axb5? then 18. axb5 Bd5 19. Bxd5 Qxd5 20. bxc6 bxc6 21. Ra6!

Analysis Diagram

Position after 21. Ra6

The black bishop cannot move, and White can increase the pressure: 21. ... Qb5 (or 21. ... c5 22. Ba3) 22. Qe2 Qb7 (trying to break out of the bind) 23. h4! Bb6 24. Rxa8 Rxa8 25. h5 Nf8 26. h6 and Black’s king finds himself in jeopardy.
Back in the days of “Botvinnik’s” classical time controls, players like Efim Geller and Garry Kasparov could and did find such in-depth ideas, after one-hour-plus thought. But in this game—at such a critical juncture—only NINE minutes spent?!

14. ... Rxf7 (1:07)
15. Nxe4 (1:28)

Today’s strongest computer engines assess the position as slightly advantageous for White, but as is typical with many opening positions, its current assessment is subject to continuous and ongoing revision.

17. Ra3 (1:16)

An instructive rook lift, beloved by Mark Dvoretsky.

17. ... Bf5 (0:58)
18. Ne5 (0:56)

17. ... d5 (1:05)
16. Ne5 (1:16) h6 (1:01)

Vlad’s Viewpoint

In the game continuation after 15. Nxe4 d5 16. Ne5 h6, strategically White has a very nice position. If he manages to put the pawn on a5 and doubles rooks on the e-file, the knight on c5 is so strong that it is almost as though White is a pawn up, and his strategic prospects are good. But Black has the two bishops and open f-file and some concrete counterplay. It is not yet clear if there is a way for White to stabilize the position and get an advantage.

Carlsen’s 18. Ne5 looks logical and strategically good, but concretely it just doesn’t seem to work after 19. ... Qh4 due to tactics. But I wouldn’t criticize Magnus’ play between moves 13 and 20. His play was logical, he was playing for a serious advantage, and if some small nuance would work in his favor, he would be much better. But it simply didn’t happen this way.

18. ... Nxe5 (0:58)
19. dxe5 (0:56) Qh4 (0:33)
Though 20. Rf3 is a good move, we now have the same story for Karjakin as in the previous game: … Bxc5, which is very similar to Bxc4 in the last game, although clearly not a mistake, as Bxc4 was. In this position the exchange is not all that bad. Karjakin must have thought that his position was starting to look scary, so with 20. … Bxc5 he is at least escaping immediate danger. We all know now, as the computer shows, that 20. ... Bg6 gives Black a good game, but here I would not fault Karjakin because 20. ... Bg6 looks “humanly” dangerous: 21. Rxf7 Bxf7 22. e6. The e-pawn is running and the b7-pawn hangs somewhere along the line. But the computer shows that this line is fine for Black after 22. ... Bg6.

But he played 20. ... Bxc5 21. bxc5 Re8, and although Black is worse, this position is much better than in game four after Bxc4. But the problem is that, again, this position is very much in Magnus’ style, because White can press for a long time with no risk at all. One reason is the opposite-colored bishops in the middlegame. But Magnus did not play it well—surprisingly, because this type of position is exactly his cup of tea.

20. Rf3 (0:38)

20. ... Bxc5 (0:29)

Not ... Qxb4? 21. Ba3! Qa5 22. e6! and Black must part with his bishop.

21. bxc5 (0:38) Re8 (0:29)

22. Rf4 (0:37) Qe7 (0:29)

Again after 22. Rf4 Qe7, the problem for Black is that White is virtually a pawn up, because the c5-pawn is holding the entire flank, analogously to game four. Especially considering the opposite-colored bishops, Black will never manage to push ... b6, and then it’s as if White is up a pawn. By the same token, it’s difficult to convert it into a win, due to the opposite-colored bishops and the closed type of position. But endless suffering here is guaranteed for Black.
23. Qd4  (0:37)

Sealing the position.

23. ...  
Rf8  (0:28)

Black transfers his action to the half-open f-file.

24. Rf3  (0:34)

The rook has served its purpose by driving the queen away from h4, now it repositions, possibly to go to g3.

24. ...  
Be4  (0:23)

25. Rxf7  (0:32)  
Qxf7  (0:23)

26. f3  (0:32)  
Bf5  (0:23)

27. Kh2  (0:29)

In fulfillment of Vlad’s suggestion, careful analysis using the top computer engines renders the verdict that an immediate f4-f5 push doesn’t lead to an advantage for White, e.g., 27. g4 Be6 28. f4, and White will try to push the pawn to f5. It’s very dangerous for Black. Maybe it doesn’t work tactically, but it is a very serious try. Black needs to play ... g6, then at some point a pawn sacrifice with f5 can come. This very important moment needs to be carefully analyzed with a computer to tell if it was working or not, because this was a crucial moment. If it works, it’s really a killer, because if White manages to push g4 and f4-f5, it’s the end of the story. Or maybe Magnus just thought that sooner or later he will manage it anyway, though later it proved not so easy because Karjakin started to defend very well, as he usually does.
29. f5?! gxf5 30. Bxh6 Re8 31. gxf5 Bxf5 =, but White can build up more slowly: 29. Re2 Qh7 30. Rg2, and Black must play very carefully to prevent White from breaking through.

The lazy move 27. Kh2 (after only three-minutes thought) is another example of Carlsen’s lack of decisiveness, or even any attempt at perfection, in most of this match.

27. ... Be6 (0:20)
28. Re2 (0:29) Qg6 (0:18)
29. Be3 (0:29) Rf7 (0:17)
30. Rf2 (0:25) Qb1 (0:17)

31. Rb2 (0:19)

If 31. g4 then ... h5.

31. ... Qf5 (0:17)

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

There is a very important moment after 30. ... Qb1. It’s clear that White is preparing the g4-pawn push, and the natural way for Black to stop it is to play ... g5, but the problem is that with the king on g8 it’s very dangerous. Black could simply get mated. So in general the position is very unpleasant for Black. But here on move 31. Rb2, I think Magnus has lost much of his momentum already. Black has somehow managed to blockade the pawns, it’s difficult to get in g4 and f4 since Black will have ... h5, so White needs to re-group his pieces and then start to slowly push the pawns. But it’s easier said than done, and after having passed on the opportunity to play g4 and f4 on move 27, White will now need a long regrouping of his pieces in order to have another chance to do so.
Carlsen’s 32. a5 was very surprising to me, and it went almost unnoticed in all commentaries, but I think it’s a serious mistake. Sometimes White needs to enter with the bishop on that square, so the occupying pawn closes out that chance completely. And it gave a chance to Sergey to move his king to the queenside, which is essential in the position. With the pawn on a4, Black could never really put his king on c8, because White can play Qb4-b6, followed by bishop to a5, and Black can simply get mated. It would be almost impossible for Black to move his king to the queenside, and if he cannot move his king, he cannot easily play ... g5 to defend the kingside, when White starts to push his pawns. And there was absolutely no threat to the a-pawn on a4. Probably Magnus missed the idea of the king march to c8. Still, I see only disadvantages to 32. a5, absolutely no advantages, so it’s a very strange move that, in my opinion, kills all winning chances.

Always keep alert to the fact that your king—or your opponent's—might be safer on the other wing, as long as it has the time to get from one place to the other. This is an important maneuver to know.

After 32. a5, Sergey answered very strongly. The king maneuver f8-e8-d8-c8 is really a sign of a great defensive master, because he immediately sensed that small change in the position—the a5-square is not available to White anymore—so he moved his king to the queenside, followed by moving his pawn to g5. So now I think that there is no active plan for either side anymore; it is more-or-less a so-called positional draw.

### Position after 31. ... Qf5

32. a5  (0:17)  Kf8  (0:15)

It looks like Black is the one who now has the initiative and has various plans how to build up attacks—while White doesn’t. It is more pleasant to play this position for Black.

33. Qc3  (0:17)  Ke8  (0:10)
34. Rb4  (0:17)  g5  (0:08)
35. Rb2  (0:14)  Kd8  (0:08)
36. Rf2  (0:14)  Kc8  (0:08)
37. Qd4 (0:12) Qg6 (0:08)

Position after 37. ... Qg6

38. g4?! (0:10)

Risky. Now it is only Black who has opportunities for attack with an eventual ... h5. It was better to simply wait with 38. Qd2, after which Black cannot organize his forces for the pawn push ... g5-g4 without allowing White’s pieces to gain sufficient counterplay.

40. Kg3 (0:07) Rg8 (0:01)
41. Kg2? (0:51)

A mistake. White could prevent the breakthrough ... d5-d4 with 41. Qd4. Even more attractive is the move 41. Bxg5 which leads to immediate equality: 41. ... Qxg5 42. Qxg5 Rxg5 43. f4 Rg8 44. f5 practically forces Black to give back the piece with 44. ... Kd7 45. fxe6 Kxe6, otherwise the pawns become too strong. Alternatively, 41. Bxg5 hxg4 42. h4! puts a halt to most of Black’s attacking possibilities, with near equality.

41. ... hgx4 (0:43)
42. hxg4 (0:51)

Vlad’s Viewpoint

Magnus was still trying to prepare for pawn pushes on the kingside, but I think that White has already lost most of his chances—first by not pushing his pawns quickly, then by putting the pawn on a5. So it would be more logical to just settle for a draw, because after g2-g4, the black king is already in a safe place, but opening the kingside gives Black some counterattacking chances.

38. ... h5 (0:08)
39. Qd2 (0:09) Rg7 (0:05)
42. ...  d4!  (0:38)

The alternative 42. ... Qh6 looks scary for White and his king is under constant pressure, but he should be able to hold the position with accurate play, for example: 43. Bd4 Rh8 44. Kf1 Qg6 45. Ke2 Rh1 46. Rf1 Rh3 47. Qd3

I was watching online, and already after the time control I was starting to dislike White’s position. He is taking on too much risk for nothing, because practically he cannot win this position anyway, while his own king could come under attack. After 41. Kg2 it is an uncertain situation. My feeling is that Magnus was unhappy that he had spoiled a serious advantage, but now he didn’t know whether to continue to play for a win, which resulted in this series of strange moves. Here 42. ... d4 is a very natural move, and to Sergey’s credit, he did jump on the chance to play 42. ... d4 and started to play for a win.

43. Bxd4 doesn’t help White at all after ... Qh6 44. Kg1 Qh3 45. Qe2 Rf8 46. Rh2 Qg3+ 47. Rg2 Qxf3 48. Qxf3 Rxf3. This position is quite unpleasant for White.

43. ...   Bd5?!  (0:33)
Sergey sensed at this moment that it’s now White who is under pressure because the very bad black bishop suddenly becomes a very strong bishop. Some people will say he was close to winning here, with one very complicated line involving giving up the g5-pawn for a strong attack, but this line was far from obvious. So 43. … Bd5 is a very logical move. I think most players would play it also.

Black may have missed a real opportunity to play for a win with practically no risk, with 43. … Rh8. Even if White can theoretically defend the position, it is hard to find the right replies—move after move—over the board. After 43. … Rh8 44. Qe4 (not 44. Bd2? Qh7! 45. Kf1 Qb1+ 46. Ke2 Qb5+ 47. Ke3 Bc4 and the winning threat of 48. … Rd8 cannot be stopped) … Qh6 45. Kf1 Bd5

Magnus senses his own opportunity to sacrifice a pawn in order to free up his pieces.

44. e6! (0:34)

White now has enough room for his pieces to operate, e.g., if Black plays 45. … Kb8 then 46. Qc3 Ka7 47. Bd4 Qg6 48. Be5 and White is fine.

46. Qd3 (if 46. Qf5+ then … Kb8 47. Qd3 Qh1+, with a better comparative version of the position for Black) … Qh1+ 47. Ke2 Qa1 48. Bxg5 Qxe5+ 49. Be3 (most of White’s moves in this line are ‘only moves’—otherwise Black wins) 49. … Qb2+ and the attack rages on.
51. Rxe7  (0:26)  Re4!  (0:12)  
½ - ½

Final Position

Not the only move for Black, e.g., 51. ... Kd8! also draws, but this move immediately forces a drawn opposite-colored bishop endgame. The drawing technique is instructive: 52. Rxe4 Bxe4 53. Kf4 Bc2 54. Ke5 Kd7 55. Kf6 Ke8 56. Kg7 (otherwise the Black king arrives on g8, permanently blockading White’s g-pawn; and White has no further chances, as even after he strolls to the queenside and captures the b-pawn, Black then plays ... Bb5 and no further damage can be inflicted) ... Bd3 57. g5 Be2 58. g6 Bd3

There is no winning plan in this position. Black’s bishop attacks the g-pawn from behind, preventing the otherwise winning move Kh8.

These opposite-colored-bishop techniques (attributed to Samuel Kotlerman, a strong Ukrainian player in the mid-20th century) can even draw against two(!) pawns as shown in GMs Alburt & Krogius’ endgame manual, Just The Facts! (Chess Information and Research Center, 1999).
Magnus managed to defend very nicely with 44. e6, and finally he was able to exchange everything and make a draw. In summary, it was not a bad game at all. Sergey probably made only one wrong move, 20. ... Bxc5, and otherwise he played a good game. He was defending, then at the right moment he made this very strong king maneuver to c8, and counter-attacked with ... g5 and ... d4 at the right moments. His overall play was more confident. Magnus’ play was interesting, but then at some point around move 30 he started to drift. When a player has already missed most of his chances, there arises a certain anger at yourself that you didn’t play well. He certainly wanted to play for a win anyway, but he just didn’t see how.

That’s a very dangerous state of mind when you understand that there is no objective way, you don’t see any plan, but you play for a win anyway. It’s common for the opponent to get a counterattack in that situation. Of course Magnus saw ... d4 and ... Bd5, but maybe he thought that his opponent wouldn’t find a win, and he would be up a pawn. This is not the right way to play, a player shouldn’t get emotional, but this happens to everyone from time to time. He made the same psychological mistake in his next White game, and paid for it. After the game, Carlsen said that he was missing a move on his scoresheet, which is why he played 41. Kg2 so quickly. But it is not so much about the move 41. Kg2; his play starting with 38. g4 was leading up to the kind of problems which he finally experienced. He was trying to provoke Sergey into taking action, but that mindset is wrong when the position doesn’t justify it. However, he did save it well in moves 44 to 50.
**Black plays a Marshall-like gambit.**
Carlsen sacrifices a pawn and gets equal chances due to his active piece play.

**Position after 9. ... d5**

**Carlsen allows a discovered attack!**
The world champ moves his queen to a square that allows a discovered attack (Black’s queen will be attacked by White’s bishop on f4 if the rook on e5 moves away.) But Karjakin has no way to capitalize on it.

**Position after 21. ... Qd6**

**Black’s b-pawn is threatened.**
Carlsen could choose to defend it, but instead he makes the active choice to counterattack one of White’s weak pawns. Instead of simply reacting to a threat—“My opponent is attacking my pawn; therefore I must defend it”—stay on the alert for counterattacking possibilities.

**Position after 27. ... Qd7**
GAME 6

Introduction
After the adrenaline-spiked brawls in games three, four, and five, Karjakin and Carlsen follow an opening variation that will lead to a relatively peaceful draw—if both players (especially Black) have done their preparatory homework. And indeed they have, so each player earns a half-point for his careful opening preparation.

Ruy Lopez [C88]

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

1. e4 (1:40) e5 (1:40)
2. Nf3 (1:40) Nc6 (1:40)
3. Bb5 (1:40) a6 (1:40)
4. Ba4 (1:40) Nf6 (1:40)
5. 0-0 (1:40) Be7 (1:40)
6. Re1 (1:40) b5 (1:40)
7. Bb3 (1:40) 0-0 (1:40)
8. h3 (1:40) Bb7 (1:40)
9. d3 (1:40) d5 (1:40)
Vlad’s Viewpoint

Game six is a typical story of modern chess. Sometimes you are playing White, but you are not in a mood to burn bridges, and you do not mind much to make a draw and go and rest. You just try to “check the documents,” as we say in Russian. You play an opening line that, if your opponent has analyzed with a computer like you, then he has found a way to make a draw, and it will be an easy game for both players. But if not, and has to fight against it over the board, then it could be very dangerous for him. As it turned out, Magnus’ preparation was good, so it was basically a computer game, a Marshall-like position that led to a forced draw. It’s not necessarily the case that neither player wanted to play, it’s just that it happens like this on occasion in modern chess, the need to “check the documents.”

Carlsen deviates from the less forceful 9. … d6 that he played in game four.

10. exd5 (1:40) Nxd5 (1:40)
11. Nxe5 (1:40) Nd4 (1:40)

Both players are well prepared for this opening variation, as shown by the fact that they are still playing their moves quickly. Black has sacrificed a pawn but has adequate compensation: a space advantage, better development, the two bishops (after the upcoming move … Nxb3), and his strong light-squared bishop, which is unopposed on the long diagonal.

12. Nc3 (1:40) Nb4 (1:40)
13. Bf4 (1:40) Nxb3 (1:40)
14. axb3 (1:40) c5 (1:40)
This move is a novelty, although ... c5 has been played in similar situations such as Kasimdzhanov-Bacrot (2007) which resulted in a near-identical position by transposition after Karjakin’s move 15. Ne4, except that Kasimdzhanov’s rook was on c1. Probably that game would have been familiar to both players.

15. Ne4 (1:33) f6 (1:37)
16. Nf3 (1:33) f5 (1:32)

18. Nxc5 (1:27)

18. Bxg5 might appear to be a more aggressive way to recapture, but Black grabs the advantage with 18. ... Bxf3! (removing the defender) 19. Qd2 (not 19. Qxf3? Qxg5) ... Qd5 20. gxf3 Ne6. White’s kingside pawn structure is ruined.

18. ... h6 (1:31)
19. Ne6 (1:17) Qd5 (1:31)
20. f3 (1:17) Rfe8 (1:31)
21. Re5 (1:17)

21. Nc7 deserves attention, but it turns out that it is White who must walk the tightrope leading to perpetual check: 21. ... Qd4+ (21. ... Rxe1+ can transpose) 22. Kh1 Rxe1+ 23. Qxe1 Qxf4 24. Nxa8 Nxc2

Is White in trouble? No—as is often the case, a queen and knight coordinate very nicely together: 25. Qe8+ Kh7 26. Nb6! Nxa1 (or any other try) 27. Nd7!
… and there is no escape for Black from the upcoming perpetual check–28. Nf8+ Kg8 29. Nd7+ Kh7 30. Nf8+ etc.

21. ... Qd6 (1:31)

A discovered attack (Black’s queen will be attacked by White’s bishop on f4 if the rook on e5 moves away) always looks scary, but in this position the rook cannot cause any damage; hence the danger is merely illusory. Carlsen is not afraid of ghosts!

White has several choices here. 22. Qe2 leads to sharp positions where Black’s chances appear to be fine after 22. ... Rxe6 23. Rxe6 Qxf4. Alternatively, 22. Re2 looks threatening, but Black maintains the balance with ... Qd7 23. Nc7 Rxe2 24. Qxe2 Rc8 25. Re1 Qd4+ 26. Qe3 Nxc2 27. Qxd4 Nxd4.

22. c3 (1:16)

White’s pieces are quite active, but his weakened pawn structure gives Black equal chances. Karjakin quickly plays a safe move.

22. ... Rxe6 (1:28)
23. Rxe6 (1:16) Qxe6 (1:28)
24. cxb4 (1:16) cxb4 (1:28)
25. Rc1 (1:03) Rc8 (1:26)
26. Rxc8+ (1:03) Qxc8 (1:25)
27. Qe1 (1:02)
Black’s b-pawn is threatened and he could choose to defend it, but instead he makes the active choice to counterattack one of White’s weak pawns.

Instead of simply reacting to a threat—”My opponent is attacking my pawn, therefore I must defend it”—stay on the alert for counterattacking possibilities.

27. ... Qd7 (1:21)
28. Kh2 (0:56) a5 (1:19)
29. Qe3 (0:56) Bd5 (1:19)
30. Qb6 (0:56) Bxb3 (1:17)
31. Qxa5 (0:56) Qxd3 (1:17)
32. Qxb4 (0:56) Be6 (1:17)

½ - ½

“Your documents have passed inspection!”

Final Position
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

The Venue

Preparations

The Opening Gala

Press Coverage

Team Carlsen

Team Karjakin
The World Chess Championship Match was filled with intrigue and excitement, culminating in the rapid tiebreaks that decided the championship. The “inner story” of the match is captured in photographs taken throughout the course of the event.

This first photo album covers the events leading up to the start of the actual games: getting ready to play the match.

*Getting Ready to Play the Match*
South Street Seaport, circa 1900. This illustration is from a photochrom postcard published by the Detroit Photography Company.

The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in the United States (completed 1883). Cars, bikes, and pedestrians travel across the span between Manhattan and Brooklyn.
Sergey Karjakin enjoys the view before the match.

The Brooklyn Bridge in its late-day splendor is visible from the venue. The position on the monitor is during game one of the match.
Fulton Market in South Street Seaport, home of the 2016 World Chess Championship.

An outside chessboard was popular with the crowds, and the chess pieces were constantly in play.
The contestants and match schedule were plainly visible for all to see.

A chess map of Manhattan highlighted the current and historical chess sites.

The World Chess Championship placards guided the chess world to the correct location, and were also an interesting attraction for passersby.
Spectators entering the venue used the modern escalators marked with the Agon logo.

Chess players were always able to find a willing opponent in the spectator area.
One of the main spectator areas was equipped with tables, chess sets, and boards.

Large display monitors showed the move-by-move action, as top GM commentators, including Judit Polgar, explained the finer details.
The VIP room had special amenities including vodka bar, balcony, passageway to a one-way-glass room to observe the players, and, of course, VIPs.

Top GM Ian Nepomniachtchi gave a simultaneous exhibition for lucky chess aspirants.
VIPs from the chess world included GMs Fabiano Caruana and Max Dlugy, seen here playing blitz while kibitzers watched and occasionally commented.

The astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson experiments with the physics of chess. Tyson played the honorary “opening move” for game eight.
The contestants and their teams meet with organizers to check out the facilities and finalize details.

Magnus checks out the video gadget that enables spectators—from anywhere—to watch the game in 3D, as though they were standing next to the real chessboard.
Judit Polgar and Sergey Karjakin inspect the playing area.

All were smiling at the opening press conference—the calm before the storm.
The Opening Gala attracted celebrities from the chess world as well as the “outside” world.

Magnus Carlsen makes his appearance at the Opening Gala.
Food, drink, and good company were hallmarks of the Opening Gala.

Official duties were mixed in with the festivities: the players choose colors for the first round. Magnus will play White in game one!
Magnus Carlsen’s team makes its way to the playing venue: Magnus’ father Henrik and his coach/second, GM Peter Heine Nielsen.

Security was tight, and not just for the spectators: FIDE rules require electronic scanning of the players as well.
Each team had a room during the games for team discussion, analysis, and quite possibly, worrying about the game-in-progress.

Magnus and his father Henrik discussing today’s game.
Sergey Karjakin approaches the venue with his second, GM Vladimir Potkin.

The challenger is not exempted from electronic scanning.
Sergey and his #1 supporter, his wife Galia Kamalova.

A quiet moment precedes the upcoming rough-and-tumble game.
Members of the press enjoy a scenic view of the East River from the pressroom.

Photographers scramble to find the perfect angle for their next shot.
Media crews from around the world reported on the day’s moves, results, and (occasionally) surprises.

The Norwegian press endured some rough moments during the middle stretch of the match.
Sergey hands over the initiative.
In this theoretically important position, White can try for an edge with 11. Qc2. Instead, Karjakin thought for 17 minutes and played the inaccurate 11. Nd2, handing the initiative to Black.

Carlsen ponders and blunders.
Black is still slightly better, but after eight minutes thought, he blundered a pawn with 16. ... Rc8?

How to increase the pressure?
White can try to increase his nagging pressure with (e3)-e4-e5, but instead he plays 32. g4, allowing Black to neutralize White’s kingside play with 32. ... g5.
GAME 7

Introduction
Per the match rules: the players switch colors after six games, so Karjakin controls the white pieces for a second game in a row. He starts out with 1. d4 for the first–and last–time in the match, but is surprisingly unprepared and quickly goes awry. Carlsen gains a slight advantage, but doesn’t maintain it properly and then astonishingly blundered a pawn. White is up a pawn in the endgame where he can continue to annoy his opponent for many moves, but instead, without further ado, he simply allows a draw. A most perplexing game.

Chebanenko Slav transposed into Queen’s Gambit Accepted [D27]

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

1. d4 (1:40)  
d5 (1:40)

An infrequent response from Magnus, who has shown a marked preference for 1. ... Nf6 prior to the match.

2. c4 (1:40)  
c6 (1:40)

Both players have played the Slav Defense as Black.

3. Nc3 (1:40)  
Nf6 (1:40)

4. e3 (1:40)  
a6 (1:40)
This move would have looked quite strange to Grandmasters from prior eras—“What’s this, another pawn move? No development? And just look at those weakened dark squares.” However, in chess openings there are rules but there are also exceptions, and great opening theoreticians such as Chebanenko and Sveshnikov are capable of finding those exceptions. This Chebanenko Slav, which became popular in the 1990s, is still a main line in today’s Grandmaster practice and is considered to be quite solid.

5. **Bd3** (1:39)

An unusual, but perfectly sound, move. The move 5. Nf3 is by far the most frequently played move here, but transpositions are common in these types of openings.

5. ... **dxc4** (1:34)

After six minutes thought, Carlsen decided to use White’s bishop move to enter a standard Queen’s Gambit Accepted (QGA). This position is only rarely found in the historical repertoire of either player.

6. **Bxc4** (1:39) **e6** (1:34)

Position after 5. Bd3

Position after 10. ... Nc6

This variation is not found in the standard opening practice of either player, hence Karjakin’s preparation may not have been as rigorous as it could (or should) have been for these QGA lines.

The moves 10. ...Bxc5 and 10. ... Qxd1 (which is always followed by 11. Rxd1 Bxc5) are played almost exclusively in this position, including 100% of the time in top-GM games with classical time controls over the past five years. In those games, White’s winning percentage is a whopping 70%, with a performance rating that is 135 ELO points higher than expected.

11. **Nd2** (1:22)

Perhaps Sergey was familiar with the Kramnik-Tomashpolsky game in which the Nd2 maneuver took place, but that position was quite different because the queens had already been traded.

11. ... **Bxc5** (1:34)
openings against 1. d4, so to play it even once means that the amount of work on 1. d4 was serious, and a lot of precious time was seriously wasted. Sergey should have continued playing 1. d4 or he shouldn’t have played it at all, in my opinion. The time he had spent preparing for 1. d4 could have been better spent on his 1. e4 openings.

This line with 3. Nc3 and 9. Be2 (after 8. ... b5) was once considered to be completely harmless, but then I found a new and interesting way of playing with White and had prepared it in 2006 for my unification match with Veselin Topalov (he was playing this Chebanenko variation at the time). He didn’t play it against me in the match, so I used it only much later against Evgeny Tomashevsky (who played 10. ... Qxd1 in that game) in the 2012 Tal Memorial. I won that game, but then over time, slowly but surely, my opponents found some good antidotes. So I know this line very well because I more-or-less invented it. After 9. Be2 Be7 10. dxc5, the main move is 10. ... Bxc5 or 10. ... Qxd1, but already in 2006 I understood that 10. ... Nc6 is a very interesting move, and I analyzed it quite a lot. And then when Magnus played 10. ... Nc6 and Sergey started to think, it seemed as though Sergey was not prepared for 10. ... Nc6. I was surprised by this.

After a few unsuccessful attempts to break through with 1. e4, Karjakin went for 1. d4 this time. So that means he was seriously preparing to play 1. d4, but now we can conclude that his preparation failed, because it doesn’t make sense to play it only once in the match. Magnus could play many different

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

Karjakin must have mixed up something, because after 11. Nd2 he started to be on the defensive. The knight doesn’t belong on d2 in this particular position, and White cannot just allow Black to take on c5 so easily. After 11. Nd2 Bxc5 12. Nde4 Nxe4 13. Nxe4 Be7, only Black can fight for advantage. As I recall, my main move was 11. Qc2, which is the only way to try to get an edge. After 11. Qc2 Nb4 12. Qb3, there has been a lot of analysis in this complex position.

13. Nxe4  (1:19)    Be7  (1:33)
14. b3    (1:19)    Nb4  (1:24)
15. Bf3    (1:19)

A move that would give Black a small but stubborn advantage, had it been followed up properly with 15. ... f5.
In this somewhat symmetrical position, Black is a little better developed with a little more space. But he has to be very quick to capitalize on those advantages because if White finishes his development, he will equalize. So Black has to find some precise, accurate moves to apply some pressure. There are different ways to play, perhaps 15. ... f5, and Black keeps a small stable plus.


16. a3 (forced, either now or after the exchange of queens, due to the threat of ... Bf6 followed by ... Nxa2) and Black’s active play is apparent after either 18. ... Nd3 or 18. ... Qxd1 19. Rxd1 Bf6 20. Rb1 Rx7 21. axb4 Rd7.

16. Ba3 (1:14)
VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

This is another totally unexplainable move. It’s probably just equal already, but after 16. … Rc8, how could Magnus have missed 17. Nf6+? Because after 17. Nf6+, Black can only hope for a draw as he has no winning chances whatsoever. Not to mention that he is losing a pawn by force, but even if he missed that, why play 16. … Rc8 anyway? There are many moves that are completely safe. It’s absolutely mystifying. Maybe he really did miss 17. Nf6+, but that’s hard to believe. It’s a very strange mistake that shows that something was wrong with his state of mind at this stage of the match. With nice opening play, he achieved a slightly better position with Black after move 11 and then suddenly he is in trouble—and has to defend a quite annoying endgame.

Carlsen takes his time to decide which inferior endgame he would rather defend: same-colored bishops with equal material but with greater activity for White’s pieces, or opposite-colored bishops, but a pawn down (and a pair of rooks on the board in either scenario.)

After eight minutes thought, Magnus opts for the opposite-colored bishops.

Computer engines prefer the “same-colored bishops” route in this position because Black doesn’t give up a pawn, but the ensuing positions can become very problematic for Black due to White’s piece activity. After the sample line 19. … Rb8 20. Bxf8 Qxd1 21. Rxd1 Rxb7 22. Bb4 (22. Rd8 is only optically scary for Black, as after 22. … f5, Black is close to restoring the balance) … Bf6 23. Rc1 (not 23. Rd6?? Be7 -+) … h5 24. Kf1, and this position is clearly uncomfortable for Black.

When defending a worse position, there is often a choice between which type of disadvantage to defend.
bishop covers key squares, and his king is closer to the action.

20. Bxf8 (1:06) Qxd1 (1:06)
21. Rxd1 (1:06) Rxf8 (1:06)

Karjakin spent 11 minutes comparing 22. Bxa6 with its main alternative 22. b4, but his assessment was that 22. b4 did not offer any real winning chances: 22. ... Rb8 23. Bxa6 Kf8 24. Rf1 Ke7 25. Rxc1 Kd8 26. Rc5 Rb6 and the immobility of White’s bishop prevents White from devising a successful plan to make progress.

Similarly, 22. ... Rb8 23. Bxa6 Kf8 and now 24. Rb1 Rb6 25. Rc8+ Ke7 26. Rb7+(26. Ra8 Bc3 27. a3 Bb2 28. Bc8 Kd6 followed by ... Kc7 leads to an easy draw) 26. ... Kd6 27. Ra7 Bc3 28. Bb7 Bxb4 will also draw comfortably.

Magnus has given up a pawn, and in many commentaries people were saying that the game logically ended in a draw. But in fact, it is a very unpleasant endgame for Black in a practical game. Here I can criticize Karjakin for not grabbing his chance. I guess he was just happy that he had escaped a bad opening in which he had emerged worse as White. I would estimate that in a practical game it’s a 30% chance of winning. After all, White is up a pawn. I was expecting a very long evening for Magnus, but Karjakin didn’t push hard enough. Perhaps he didn’t believe he could win, but even if so, you should still torture your opponent as long as possible. Black’s problem is that he can never put his bishop on c3 because of a2-a4, otherwise it would just be a draw. The extra pawn is not significant for the moment, but it can become significant later on. White needs to start playing on the kingside, e.g., after 30. f4 h6 31. Kf3 Rc7 (see next key position diagram.)
The position after White’s pawn advance (e3)-e4-e5 can become dangerous for Black because the clock is ticking and White has several promising attempts to win. But the game should still be drawn if Black plays accurately.

White can choose between two pawn configurations on the kingside: [1] with white pawns on e5-f4-g5, which is preferred by the computer engines; or [2] white pawns on e5-f4-g4, with White trying to create weaknesses with f4-f5.

Against each of these two configurations, GM Alburt was able to take command of the Black pieces and draw versus Komodo 11, one of the top computer engines. Still, the arising positions are fraught with dangers for Black.

The following analyses of these two endgame configurations for White are not derived directly from the game continuation, but instead follow José Raúl Capablanca’s maxim that endgame play should consist of long-term themes, not concrete variations.
In the first scenario, Black can strive to reach this type of position:

![Diagram A](image)

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM A**

There are several necessary conditions for successful defense of this position. First, Black’s pawn on b4 is holding the a2 and b3 pawns; if the a-pawn ever advances, it will be captured with ... bxa3 (possibly en passant), and will still be defended by the bishop. In similar positions, the defending side must also ensure that the tactical break f4-f5 accomplishes nothing. With cautious play, Black cannot be zugzwanged. Black’s one major weakness, the f7-pawn, can never be attacked twice if Black defends carefully.

One idea for White may be to exchange rooks and then maneuver his king to b5 and bishop to c4; then after the sacrifice 1. a4 bxa3 e.p.to play 2. b4, because Black’s a-pawn is held by White’s bishop, and meanwhile the b-pawn is free to march.

Under normal circumstances 32. g4 would be a positional mistake, but I think Sergey decided that he would simply take a draw instead of trying to squeeze water from a stone. After 32. ... g5, White doesn’t have any more breaks on the kingside, so he was more-or-less acquiescing to a draw. But White is running no risk at all in this endgame. In fact, the black rook is stuck on the c-line because if he plays ... Rd7 at some point, then White has Be2 and gets the c-file, which is very unpleasant. So now Black cannot really do anything constructive. The logical plan for White is to start pushing the e-pawn; it’s clear that White has to play for f4-f5 here. The plan could be: g2-g3, perhaps Black plays ... h5 and White responds e4, trying at some point to push f4-f5 to open up lines and make the c4-bishop strong. Then he enters with the rook. The defense is not easy at all for Black. Perhaps it should still be a draw, but on move 83, not on move 33. Another plan is to play e3-e4 and then at some point e5, followed later by Ke4, which would help prepare f4-f5. He could even play f4-f5 with the e-pawn still on e4. Black can definitely hold with precise play, but only after a long period of suffering. It’s difficult to understand the decision to call it a day in a position where one can make his opponent work hard for a draw.
But even if White achieves all of these objectives, Black can still hold the position using the Kotlerman techniques (as shown in game five), or if the Black bishop is freed up via the c5-square (after an eventual b4-b5), then it will be able to capture the f4-e5 pawns in time to cover the promoting b8-square.

Another “dream idea” for White is to sacrifice his rook for Black’s bishop in a position where he can then capture the b-pawn with his king. But it does not appear that White can ever reach such a position.

White’s most serious winning attempt is to maneuver his rook to a7, penetrate with his king on the queenside, and maneuver the bishop to d7, to reach the following position:

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ANALYSIS DIAGRAM C
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Black’s position appears precarious, as moves such as … Kg7 and … Be7 run into Bxe6!, and … Rb8 loses to Kc7. But Black still has a saving move: … Kh8!.

The excitement is not yet over: after … Kh8 White can play the subtle Kc7. Then the temptation for Black is to hold the fort with … Be7?, which actually loses to the surprising a4! bxa3 e.p. followed by b4!

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ANALYSIS DIAGRAM D
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White wins, as Black will be forced to give up his bishop for the advancing b-pawn.

But the thread holding together Black’s position remains intact (from Diagram C) after 1. … Kh8 2. Kc7 Bc5! 3. Ra4 (or 3. Ra6 Rg8) 3. … Be7

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ANALYSIS DIAGRAM E
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This slight change in the position—White’s rook is on a5 instead of a7—makes all the difference in the world: now 4. a4 is not possible due to 4. … bxa3 e.p. 5. b4 and then 5. … Bxb4! and Black is saved because White’s rook is attacked. Black’s survival is almost miraculous!

Reverting to an earlier point in the endgame, before the white pawn phalanx e5+f4+g5 was established, White’s other try is to break through with the pawn push f4-f5.
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM F


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM G

Try as he might, White cannot break through. Black’s forces can hold onto the pawns on f7 and b4, and White is not able to trade pawns on the queenside to enable the b-pawn to advance.

So Black can hold against these plans with accurate play, but it is clear that the position prior to 32. g4 held long-term dangers for Black.

We now return to the anticlimactic finale of the actual game.

Vlad’s Viewpoint

I would guess that both players have reasons to be unhappy with this game.
Carlsen plays a risky move.
The champ leaves his king to fend for himself against the potential onslaught of Black’s pieces. But Karjakin chose not to attack.

Another risky choice by Carlsen!
If Black manages to get a knight to c5, White’s position will become strategically difficult.

SERGEY’S SELECTION:
“The most memorable move for me in the entire match was 48. … Nd3 in the eighth game. I felt that Magnus overlooked that move, expecting a natural 48. … Nxe4 with a draw – while I aimed higher…”
GAME 8

Introduction
A monumental game that turned out to be Karjakin’s finest moment of the entire match. In his own words, Karjakin referred to the situation prior to game eight as “the calm before the storm,” and he and his team were ready: “We sensed that Carlsen would try to seize the lead in this game, and therefore he would be willing to take more risk than usual.”

Carlsen chose an offbeat opening, seeking a complex middlegame and avoiding exchanges; as late as move 21, only two pawns on each side had been removed from the board! But he began to play very provocatively, and Karjakin could have seized the initiative by attacking swiftly and strongly on the kingside. Instead, Sergey followed his match strategy to play safely—too safely—and missed this opportunity. Magnus continued his speculative play, conceeding strategic advantages to his opponent to keep the position complex and unbalanced. His plan backfired, and Sergey emerged after the time control with a strong passed a-pawn, forcing Magnus to walk a tightrope to stay in the game. But Carlsen’s “win-at-all-costs” mindset prevented him from doing so, and Karjakin wrapped up the game with a strong sequence of moves, sacrificing his almost-queen in order to win Carlsen’s king. End result: the first decisive game, and Karjakin takes the lead!

Zukertort’s Opening [D05] ➔ Queen’s Indian [E14]

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

1. d4 (1:40)  Nf6 (1:40)

Carlsen resigns after Karjakin’s move 52. ... a2
Carlsen plays 1. d4 for only the second (and last) time in the match. As in Game one, Karjakin responds with 1. ... Nf6. Earlier in his career, Karjakin answered 1. d4 regularly with 1. ... d5, playing 1. ... Nf6 only occasionally; then in 2009 his opening repertoire started to transition to 1. ... Nf6 as his main response. Since 2015 he has answered 1. d4 almost exclusively with 1. ... Nf6.

2. Nf3 (1:40) d5 (1:40)

The opening guessing-game continues. After 1. d4 Nf6, Magnus has played various moves—2. c4, 2. Nf3, 2. Bg5 (in game one of the match), 2. Bf4, and even 2. a3. By contrast, the move 2. ...d5 has been played only rarely by Sergey in this position. His normal response is 2. ... e6. Before this match, games between these two players had usually continued 2. c4 e6 3. Nf3 b6.

3. e3 (1:40)

The Colle System is a quiet opening which, however, often precedes raucous middlegame play. Sergey, in 64 Magazine, claimed (“one-third jokingly”) that Magnus learned this line from him: “I am pleased that Magnus was so impressed by my victory over Anand [in the

Candidates Tournament] where I demonstrated an interesting conception after 1. Nf3 d5 2. e3, that quite soon, at the Baku Olympiad, he scored after his hooligan move 1. e3.”

Karjakin is referring to the game Carlsen-Hossain, Baku Olympiad (2016), which started 1. e3 Nf6 2. Nf3 e6. This game has a different move order, but many of the same ideas, and many possible transpositions.

3. ... e6 (1:38)

Karjakin spent several minutes deciding which of several good defensive systems he would choose.

4. Bd3 (1:40) c5 (1:37)

5. b3 (1:40)

Johannes Zukertort again makes his “presence” known in this match! Carlsen chooses the Zukertort variation, marked by 5. b3, which was played by the World Championship Candidate back in the 1880s.

5. ... Be7 (1:34)

More common is 5. ... Nc6, but after three minutes thought, Karjakin plays the flexible ... Be7.
This game was quite disappointing for Magnus in several ways, including in his choice of opening. He gave up trying to get even the slightest advantage as White. To me it shows that there was a serious lapse in his preparation, because he could have played this opening without any preparation at all. He got an equal position, equal and full of play, but in a world championship match the players normally try to pose some opening problems for their opponent.

Magnus Carlsen with a clear conscience.” Indeed, the natural and overall effective Nf3-e5 would neither surprise, nor shatter, a well-prepared Super-GM.

After 8. Nbd2 Bb7 (also good is 8. ... Ba6) 9. Ne5, Black’s most popular reply is 9. ... Nc6. But in Chess Openings for Black Explained (by GMs Alburt, Dzindzichashvili, and Perelshteyn), great opening guru GM Roman Dzindzichashvili gives a different solution via transposition, 9. ... Nbd7 10. f4 Ne4!

8. dxc5 (1:27)

Carlsen spent 12 minutes on his eighth move, perhaps checking whether this position is likely to transpose back to positions from prior GM games, as indeed it did. Anish Giri in New In Chess comments, “A typical example of a modern twist to an ancient variation. I would guess the authentic handling of this position is to establish a knight on e5 and start a kingside attack [Come on, Anish, you don’t ‘guess,’ you know!]. But then I imagine the computer would shout something like ‘-0.12’ and Peter Heine Nielsen would have trouble advising it to

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

equal position, equal and full of play, but in a world championship match the players normally try to pose some opening problems for their opponent.

6. 0-0 (1:40) 0-0 (1:34)
7. Bb2 (1:39) b6 (1:33)

Position after 7. ... b6

11. Nxe4 dxe4 12. Bc4 Nxe5 13. fxe5 Bg5
with a sharp position that is fine for Black.

Another plan for White is to play a la the Queen’s Gambit, 8. c4, but like the other two lines, this line doesn’t promise White an advantage.

**8. ... Bxc5 (1:33)**

Of the two recaptures, this one is the more solid.


**10. Qe2 (1:20) Nbd7 (1:32)**

**11. c4 (1:17)**

A different pawn push is not dangerous either: 11. e4 dxe4 12. Nxe4 Be7 13. Rad1 Qc7, “and Black has nothing to complain about” ~ Karjakin in 64.

**11. ... dxc4 (1:28)**

**12. Nxc4 (1:17)**

The simplest. This position (by transposition) was reached in the recent game Wojtaszek-Svane, 2015 World Championship Rapids.

**12. ... Qe7 (1:28)**

**13. a3 (1:06) a5 (1:28)**

Note how quickly Sergey plays: he has spent only 12 minutes whereas Magnus has already used over 30 minutes. Truly Karjakin is the master of the Zukertort.

**14. Nd4 (1:03)**
Several plausible options are available on almost every move. 14. ... Rfd8 is a natural move, but just as feasible are lines such as 14. ... e5 15. Nb5 e4 16. Bc2 Nd5, where Black has more space in the center. But here, after 17. Qh5, Karjakin asks, “... but where are my dividends?” Alternatively, 14. ... Bxd4 15. Bxd4 (15. exd4 Nd5 with typical d5-strongpoint play against the isolani) 15. ... e5 16. Bb2 e4 17. Bc2 a4 is equal. Black’s position looks good optically, but computers rate the position as equal or even slightly better for White.

15. Rfd1 (1:03) Rac8 (1:18)

This is the most natural move. Also interesting, and possibly more promising, is 16. Nb5. Then best for Black is 16. ... Nd5 to discourage 17. b4 (e.g. if instead 16. ... Nf8 then 17. b4 axb4 18. axb4 Bxb4 19. Nxb6 Rc6 leads to a small advantage for White.) After 17. Rac1 Nf8, white has a slight pull.

16. ... Nf8 (1:16)

16. ... Ne4 is a thematic move in this type of position, but it is not as effective here because White can respond with 17. f3, kicking the knight back to f6. Then after 18. Kh1 White’s pieces are somewhat more active. The text move, 16. ... Nf8, is part of a favorable regrouping that leads to equal prospects.

17. Qe1 (0:56)


However, White could threaten to play b3-b4 on move 18 with the preparatory 17. Nc2, which also prevents Black from playing the space-grabbing move ... e5 with tempo. Now if Black continues as in the game with 17. ... Ng6, then White is able to play 18. b4 axb4 19. axb4 Bd6 (19. ... Bxb4? 20. Nxb4 Qxb4 21. Ba3! Qb3 22. Rb1) 20. Nxb6 Bxh2+ (otherwise Black is simply a pawn down, with a worse position to boot) 21. Kxh2 Qd6+ 22. Kg1 Qxb6 23. b5, and White’s advantage is indisputable. So Black should
At this point, Black’s position is a bit more promising: He has certain options on the kingside, his bishops are more active, his knight is going to g6, and White is lacking any constructive plan. What he played, though, 17. Qe1 followed by 18. Bf1, is a bit too much. White’s position on the kingside is quite weak, and 18. … Ng4 is a strong, aggressive move. While watching the game live, I thought it didn’t look good for White. In any case he doesn’t have any advantage, but now one wrong move and he’ll just get mated.

I was contemplating what I would play here, and my conclusion was to try to make it safe, perhaps with something like 19. Nf3, and protect my king. I was very surprised by 19 Nb5. True, it’s aggressive and Magnus wants to win, but it’s really pushing your luck because Black’s position on the kingside is really powerful.

The move made by Carlsen, 19. Nb5, is definitely risky. Black’s queen and all of his minor pieces are eying the white king, yet White moves his knight in the opposite direction. Perhaps Magnus is justifying his risk by counting on Sergey’s match strategy of “safe and sure.”

Now the move that deserves immediate attention is 19. … Qg5!, bringing the most powerful piece into play. White must contend with the direct threats against his king, and an attempt at counterplay with 20. Nbd6? is insufficient: 20. Nbd6? Bxd6 21. Nxd6 N4e5!
GAME 8  

Black threatens 22. … Nf3+ and 23. … Nxe1.

Now White has two tries, 22. f4 or 22. Kh1, but neither move is satisfactory.

22. f4 Nf3+ 23. Kh1 (23. Kf2 Qh4+ wins immediately) 23. … Qh5 24. Qg3 Rxc1 25. Rxc1 Rxd6

White is able to recover the piece, but Black’s threats and piece activity put White on the brink of defeat, e.g., 26. Be2 h6! (freeing the bishop, which no longer must defend against back-rank mates) 27. Bd4 Qxh2+ 28. Qxh2 Nhx2, and White is down in both material and position.

The alternative try is 22. Kh1 (see Analysis Diagram A), but after 22. … Rxc1 23. Rxc1 Nd3!, White must find difficult moves to stay alive. 24. f4 (forced)

Qxg2+ (other moves also put White on the brink, and may be even stronger, but this line clarifies matters and demonstrates Black’s clear advantage) 25. Bxg2 Bxg2+ 26. Kxg2 Nxe1+ 27. Rxe1 Rxd6

Black is up a solid pawn, with an active rook to boot.

Therefore after 19. … Qg5 White must try to stay in the game with 20. h3 N4e5 (threatening 21. … Nf3+) 21. Nxe5 Nxe5 22. Bxe5 (giving up his superior bishop) 22. … Qxe5

After 23. b4 axb4 24. axb4 Bf8 White is out of immediate danger, but Black’s active pieces and the long-term advantage of the two bishops will put strong pressure on White for the remainder of the game.

Also scary-looking (for White) is 19. …

After 19. ... Bc6 (0:56)

Perhaps Magnus’ bluff worked. Sergey might have had too much confidence in his opponent’s assessment of the position, and decided that 19. ... Qg5 would

This was a strange move, especially because he played it relatively quickly. In this position, from a human perspective not helped by a computer, it’s not impossible that Black can win by force with some direct attack. So I would spend quite some time here trying to find a very concrete decision, because White has only one bishop protecting his king, and Black has four or more pieces potentially attacking.

Now we all know that 19 ... Qg5 is a very strong move, after which White has to play h3 or else he’s practically getting mated. So 19 ... Qg5 h3 20. N4e5 Nxe5 21. Nxe5 Bxe5 22. Qxe5 is practically the only way for White not to lose by force. Then he is simply stable and slightly worse with good drawing chances but will suffer for a long time. I remember thinking during the game that 19. ... Nh4 also looked very serious. It’s understandable that calculation is required and you might miss it, but it was strange that Karjakin played 19. ... Bc6 relatively quickly. The concentration of black pieces near the white king is terribly scary for White, so this is the moment for serious thought by Black, because he might simply take over. Again it was the same problem for Karjakin as in other games. He played 18. ... Ng4 because he understood that his position is very prospective on the kingside, but then at the decisive moment he decided to play solidly and safely. And there’s the rub: The reason he didn’t win this match is because he was not ready to seize his chances when Magnus gave them to him. Shades of game five when he did not play 43. ... Rh8.
lead nowhere. So instead he aimed for exchanges and simplification.

In his 64 magazine article, Sergey noted, “If I had such a position in one of my training games with Mamedyarov [Sergey’s frequent sparring partner], I have no doubt that I would have played 19. … Qg5, when after 20. h3 N4e5 21. Nxe5 Nxe5, and White must give up his strong bishop with 22. Bxe5 Qxe5 (22. Kh2 is impossible because of 22. … Nd3) and Black has a comfortable plus. The move 20. Nbd6 doesn’t work due to … Nf4! 21 Nxb7 Rxd1 22. Rxd1 Nh3+ 23. gxh3 Ne5+ 24. Kh1 Nf3 📖.”

Sergey’s line with 20. … Nf4 is certainly feasible and Black maintains his edge after 25. Bg2 Nxe1 26. Rxel b5, but 20. Nbd6 Bxd6 (as analyzed above) is a simpler, more forceful way for Black to consolidate his advantage.

Whatever time Sergey “saved” by playing a quick 19. … Bc6, he now spent 22 minutes on his next move, 20. … Bd5. What did he overlook the first time?

Note that it is now too late to get an advantage with 20. … Qg5, because after 21. h3 Rxd1 (forced; not 21. … N4e5 22. Nxe5 Nxe5 23. Bxe5 Qxe5 due to 24. Na7) 22. Rxd1 N4e5 23. Nxe5 Nxe5 24. Bxe5 Qxe5 25. Na7 with comfortable equality. Indeed, the c6-square was the wrong square for the bishop!

20. a4 (0:39)

Position after 20. a4

20. … Bd5 (0:34)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

This move is again too solid to my taste. I would search for something active for Black, because basically the aggressive ideas behind 18. … Ng4 have disappeared. Once you have played 18. … Ng4, you need to continue to be aggressive, instead of solid. It’s like one step forward, one step backward. The moves are conceptually inconsistent. Each of those moves (18. … Ng4, 19. … Bc6, 20. … Bd5) is OK, but not together.
21. **Bd4**  (0:30)

Position after 21. Bd4

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

Now White has managed to get a slight advantage due to Black’s inconsistent play.

21. ... **Bxc4**  (0:33)

The first exchange of pieces comes on move 21! Now Black is seeking wholesale trades, perhaps in anticipation of the upcoming time pressure.

22. **Rxc4**  (0:26)  **Bxd4**  (0:25)

23. **Rxd4**  (0:19)

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

After 21 ... Bxc4 22. Rxc4 Bxd4 it would have been very logical to play 23. Rxc8 Rxc8 24. Rxd4.

Analysis Diagram
Position after 24. Rxd4

It’s still within the drawing margin, but White, controlling the d-line, can press for a long time.

23. ... **Rxc4**  (0:25)

But Magnus found an unorthodox solution: 24. bxc4.

Position after 23. ... Rxc4

24. **bxc4**  (0:17)
VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

After 23. ... Rxc4 came the very, very strange decision to spoil his pawn structure by playing 24. bxc4. It’s the same story as his other mistakes in the match; instead of playing a very normal, logical move, he came up with something sophisticated and wrong. The concept behind 24. bxc4 is that Black can’t take on d4 because of exd4 followed by c5, but Black is not going to take on d4, and White’s pawns are really compromised. There is the potential for it to get even worse if the Black knight can arrive on c5. Then, without any big risks, Black will be better.

Magnus certainly understands that 24. bxc4 is anti-positional, but it’s clear that he was not in the right state of mind in this game. He has shown, by allowing 18. ... Ng4 and weakening his king, he wanted to win somehow, anyhow. Instead of outplaying his opponent slowly, he wanted to create a nervous situation in which Karjakin might make a serious mistake. But in general, you should try to win a game by playing good chess, not by hoping for a mistake by your opponent. Such strategy is risky and perilous.

24. ... Nf6 (0:18)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Now 24. ... Nf6 is inaccurate because there was a very simple solution: after 24 ... N6e5!, White is not even a tiny bit better. The problem is that he cannot take the d-line anymore because 25. Qd1 is just losing due to 25. ... Rxd4 and 26. ... Qh4. [25. Qd1 Rxd4 26. Qxd4 Qh4 27. Qf4 Nf3+!! and White gets mated. - Authors] So after 25. h3 Nf6 26. Qd2, now at least the pawn on f2 is protected, but Black has 26. ... Nc6:

Analysis Diagram
Position after 26. ... Nc6

In this endgame White should strive to push c4-c5 and make a draw before he ends up in a worse endgame with a Black knight on c5.

So 24 ... N6e5 was a very good and simple move, which for some reason Karjakin didn’t see or didn’t make. It would actually refute the entire idea of 24. bxc4, because the only point of that move is to gain control of the d-line. But if White is not getting control of this file then it just does not make any sense. But after 24. ... Nf6 25. Qd2 Rb8 26. g3, at least White has some trump cards now. I wouldn’t say that White is really better, but at least he controls the d-file. He has some advantages even if his pawn structure is always a potential danger.
Grandmaster Ernesto Inarkiev, the current European Champion, notes that Karjakin may have felt that 24. ... Nf6 25. c5 could become uncomfortable for Black, but as Inarkiev states, “White’s initiative is only sufficient for equality” after 25. ... bxc5 26. Rxd8+ Qxd8 27. h3 Nf6 28. Qc3 Nfd7 29. Na3, and White will capture the a-pawn, but his own a-pawn will not be going anywhere.

Another option is 26. ... Ne5, aiming to occupy the important c5-square with a knight.

27. Bg2 (0:12)
GAME 8

The move 28. h3 is preferable to 28. f4, but White’s advantage remains negligible if Black plays accurately, e.g., 28. … Qb4.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 28. ...Qb4

White’s c-pawn and a-pawn are attacked. The most natural reply is 29. Qd1, directly protecting one pawn and indirectly protecting the other (29. … Nxc4? 30. Bf1 +-). But Black simply continues 29. … Qc5, and the c-pawn is indeed threatened: 30. f4 Nxc4 31. Qb3 (31. Qe1 Ne5! 32. Qxc5 bxc5 and the knight is immune because White’s rook is attacked) … Rc8 and now White should force an immediate repetition with 32. Na7 Rc7 33. Nb5 Rc8 etc., because the move 30. Bf1 now backfires: 30. … Ne5! 31. fxe5 Qxe5 and Black’s pieces will gang up on the weak g3-pawn, leading to material equality (such as three pawns for the sacrificed piece) but with active chances for Black against the weak white king.

Other queen moves do little to advance White’s cause. After 29. Qc2 then Black maintains the balance with 29. … Qe7. Alternatively, 29 Qxb4 axb4 leads to a completely equal endgame, while 29. Qe2 Ned7 is also equal—but Black must stay alert: 29. Qe2 Qxa4? 30. c5! Qb3 31. c6 and White is in the driver’s seat.

28. … Ned7 (0:07)

Vlad’s Viewpoint

Now Magnus makes another strange decision. I was expecting 28. h3. It’s a very logical move because Black doesn’t really have a clear plan. Then maybe Kh2, followed by f4. Clearly White’s position is more pleasant. Nothing special, but he has some initiative. It’s clear that Carlsen was calculating this idea with 29. Na7, but it would be so much better to have the pawn on h3 and king on h2 in this position, because otherwise the king is a bit weak. But maybe he missed or underestimated 29 … Qa3. White’s king is very weak, so after 28. f4, White starts to run some risk.

29. Na7 (0:07) Qa3 (0:07)
Sergey comments on this position: “We shall find out soon, which far-advanced piece is more annoying in this time pressure—the knight or the queen.”

30. \textit{Nc6} (0:05) \textit{Rf8} (0:07)

### VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

From this moment on, Karjakin starts to play very well. It’s typical Karjakin in this match, he is playing a bit too solid, a bit too passive, but when he is on the ropes (when White’s knight gets to c6, it can become really dangerous), he is fighting hard and starts playing active moves.

31. \textit{h3} (0:04)

### VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

The move 31. \textit{h3} is kind of risky, whereas 31. \textit{Rxd7} was probably a draw: 31. \textit{Rxd7 Nxd7} 32. \textit{Qxd7 Qxe3+} 33. \textit{Kf1 Qc1+} 34. \textit{Kf2 Qxc4}.

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**Analysis Diagram**

Position after 34. ... \textit{Qxc4}

But it’s clear that Magnus is still playing for a win. To do that he has to give up his a-pawn, and the position becomes very double-edged. As we say, now all three results are possible.

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### VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Karjakin played this part of the game incredibly well. But in general it feels like you need to force him to do it. One day when he manages to play more aggressive chess, not simply because he was forced to by his opponent, he will improve even more. Karjakin clearly can play dynamic chess, but unfortunately he cannot force himself to do it very often.
A very tense and important situation in the game and in the entire match. Magnus spent three out of his four remaining minutes (before the time control) on his next move.

33. Rd8  (0:01)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Here, 33. e4 was a very interesting option. Or even g3-g4 at some point. Objectively Black is fine, but since they both have very little time, the situation gets out of control. With just a few minutes left on the clock in such a sharp position, of course mistakes will be made. And 33. Rd8 is quite logical. Maybe not the best move, but logical.

After 33. e4, Black must play accurately in order to avoid drifting into a worse position. Karjakin had foreseen the possibility of 33. e4 and was ready for it: 33. ... Nc5 34. e5 Nh5 35. Qf2

And now Sergey planned to play 35. ... f5! and in his own words, “I was quite satisfied after either 36. Rd6 g5! or 36. g4 hxg4 37. hxg4 Nd3.”

The move 33. g4 also looks aggressive, but Black has a choice of solid replies, such as 33. ... Qc3 or 33. ... Qb2 or 33. ... g6, or even the “inhuman” 33. ... g5!, all of which lead to equality.

33. ...   g6  (0:03)

34. Qd4  (0:01)

Natural and strong, although 34. Ne5 is a viable alternative. Black will scurry back to defend with 34. ... Qe7, after which 35. Rd6 Qc7 36. Rc6 Qd8 37. Qd4 Nc5 38. Qxd8 Rxd8 39. Rxb6 maintains equality.
34. ... Kg7 (0:03)

Vlad’s Viewpoint
Magnus was pushing hard the whole game in an attempt to win. Then in this situation with one minute left, it’s very difficult to change your mindset, to switch all of a sudden to try to make a careful draw. It’s clear that 35. c5 was made with “closed eyes,” because obviously it doesn’t work. It’s a purely emotional move rather than anything else, and he just wants to win by any means. There is no logical explanation for this move.

White threatens 36. Rxf8 Kxf8 37. Qxf6, because the a3-f8 diagonal is momentarily blocked, but this threat is easily parried. However, the text-move gives Black plenty of opportunities to go wrong: 35. ... Nxc5? 36 Rxf8 Kxf8 37. Qxf6, winning for White; or 35. ... bxc5? 36. Qd6! Rxd8 37. Nxd8 after which White’s queen will also attack the f7-pawn, with lethal effect.

35. c5? (0:01)

Analysis Diagram
Position after 40. ... g5

This is a very difficult endgame for White. First of all it’s not easy to hold the f-pawn for the moment. But 41. fxg5 hgx5 is probably lost. If the position is holdable, then it’s by a miracle. But, granted, 36. ... Qb4 is not an easy move to see.
35. ... Rxd8 (0:02)
Karjakin stays cool and seizes the advantage, avoiding the potential blunders.

36. Nxd8 (0:01) Nxc5 (0:02)
Probably either 36. ... Nxc5 or 36. ... Qb4 wins for Black, but it would be hard to play a move such as 36. ... Qb4 with confidence, as White’s c-pawn looks scary, especially with less than two minutes remaining on the clock. It’s understandable that Karjakin would want to snap off the pawn with 36. ... Nxc5, which is objectively a good move as well.

37. Qd6 (0:01)

Position after 37. Qd6

With both players short on time, Magnus takes aim at the weak f7-pawn, but Black has a winning reply, if only he can see it in the time scramble...

37. ... Qd3? (0:01)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Yes, 37. ... Qd3 is a mistake as 37. ... Qa4 is simply winning. But I know this situation when you have little time; the question is whether this move comes to your mind or not. If it does then everything is obvious; if he had seen 37. ... Qa4 then probably the game would have ended much quicker. But it’s a strange move for the queen, whereas 37. ... Qd3 is so natural. So it’s a move which, if he had had 10 minutes, it would be considered a mistake, but with only a couple of minutes on the clock, you see 37. ... Qd3, you see you are safe, and you just play it. This is normal, it has happened to me and to other players many times.

After 37. ... Qa4 38. Qxb6 (38. Bc6 Nce4 winning) ... Ncd7, Black is simply winning with his now-rampant a-pawn. But 37. ... Qd3 allows White to get back in the game with a neat tactic.

38. Nxe6+ (0:01)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Probably Karjakin did not miss this move, he just thought he was safe after 38. Nxe6+, so he went for it. After 38. Nxe6+ fxe6 39. Qe7+ Kg8 40. Qxf6, it is quite surprising that Black is not better here, because the a-pawn is terribly strong. But White is just in time to create counterplay against the king.
Despite his severe time pressure, Karjakin had seen 38. Nxe6+ and thought that he was winning because his queen protects the weak g6-pawn, therefore his a-pawn can run for a touchdown, but (in his own words) “I overlooked the coming blocking move 41. e4 [which blocks Black’s queen from its protection of the g6-pawn].”

writes, “After the time control I was full of optimism … I felt there were chances to win.”

38. ... fxe6 (0:01)
39. Qe7+ (0:01) Kg8 (0:01)
40. Qxf6 (0:01) a4 (0:01)

41. e4 (0:51)

As Karjakin noted, the e4-pawn cuts off the line of defense between the queen and the g6-pawn. White’s powerful queen compensates for Black’s dangerous a-pawn. Black must again play accurately to avoid finding himself in a worse position.

41. ... Qd7 (0:40)

Karjakin finds the only move that maintains the balance, and possibly more: he

Prelude to perpetual check? No! Black will not accede to a draw.

42. Qxg6+ (0:51) Qg7 (0:40)
43. Qe8+ (0:51) Qf8 (0:40)

An interesting moment arises with 44. Qc6. I don’t know if Magnus was again trying to play for a win, or if he was afraid that if 44. Qg6+ Kh8, then Sergey would not repeat moves. After the game Karjakin said that he was not planning to repeat, he was going to play 44. ... Kh8. But in any event, 44. Qc6 is a good move. In fact the position is equal, although from a human perspective, only Black has winning chances because the a-pawn is quite dangerous. If I were playing White I would be quite worried here, and I would try to calculate something to make a forced draw.
Objective, the game remains equal after 44. Qg6+ Kh8, and now, e.g., 45. e5 a3 46. Qb1.

44. ... Qd8 (0:37)
45. f5 (0:42)

Magnus makes use of his remaining forces to create threats against Black’s king. This move should be sufficient to achieve a drawn result, but as it turned out...

45. ... a3 (0:37)

The a-pawn continues its march to possible coronation.

46. fxe6 (0:42) Kg7 (0:37)

Position after 46. ... Kg7

Computer engines favor 46. ... Kh7 over 46. ... Kg7, but never mind. The subtle differences prove to be elusive to human players. Note that Sergey has made his previous two moves in less than a minute per move.

After 46. ... Kh7 47. e5 a2 48. Be4+ Nxe4 49. Qxe4+ Kh8 50. e7!, White escapes with a draw: 50. ... Qxe7 51. Qa8+ Kg7 52. Qxa2.

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

If Magnus had played 47. Qb5, then he would run no risk of losing anymore. I admit it’s a very difficult move to find. After 47. Qb5 if ... Nxe6, then 48. Qb4. At least this is what my computer shows. It must end in a draw after 47. Qb5.

Indeed, White is the one pressing the issue after 47. Qb5 Nxe6 48. Qb4.

47. e7 (0:34) Qxe7 (0:37)
48. Qxb6 (0:34)

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 48. Qb4

The a-pawn is threatened, and standard replies don’t work—the pawn can’t advance (48. ... a2 49. Qb2+ and 50. Qxa2) and Black can’t position his queen behind the pawn (48. ... Qa8 49. Qe7+ and 50. Qxe6). So 48. ... Qf8 is required, after which 49. Qxb6 keeps up the pressure on Black’s position: White has an extra pawn and Black’s a-pawn cannot advance. However, after the bold 49. ... Kf6, the position is becoming drawish.

47. e7 (0:34) Qxe7 (0:37)
48. Qxb6 (0:34)
Probably White now expects a draw after the obvious 48. ... Nxe4.

48. ...

Nd3! (0:37)

Position after 48. Qxb6

Position after 48. ... Nd3!

The most memorable move for me in the entire match was 48. ... Nd3 in the eighth game. I felt that Magnus overlooked that move, expecting a natural 48. ... Nxe4 with a draw–while I aimed higher ... Black transfers his knight to the ideal-for-blockade e5 square, restricting White’s bishop with his own pawn!

At that moment my opponent had to pull himself together and discover the only saving idea–to give up a pawn to activate the bishop with 49. e5. However, Magnus wasn't ready for such a sharp change in the position, and missed this opportunity, making further defense practically hopeless.

Yes, 48. ... Nd3 isn't necessarily a beautiful move, but occasionally such quiet moves are more effective than spectacular combinations.

I was able to surprise Magnus with this move, and perhaps with a little more luck it could have become the key to my victory in the match. In any case, 48. ... Nd3 brought me victory in the eighth game.
It’s clear that Karjakin is now playing for a win, because if he wanted a draw, 48. ... Nxe4 would immediately draw by force. But he is right to keep playing because Black has absolutely no risk. It is probably a draw even without the a-pawn. You just put the knight on e5 and it’s a draw anyway.

When I was following the game live, I was thinking that if Black gets his knight to e5, the position becomes terribly dangerous for White. From a practical standpoint, the move 49. e5 is just a complete must. So this is one of those awful, absolutely unexplainable mistakes, from a human point of view. Because after 49. e5, you have to check for 49. ... a2 to ensure that the pawn is not promoting, and it’s not promoting, not even close to it. After 49. ... a2 there is 50. Qd4, and the computer shows that then you just take the pawn.

[For example, 50. ... Qe6 51. Qa7+ Kf8 52. Qa8+ Ke7 53. Qa7+ Kf8 with a draw. — Authors]
49. ... Qc5  (0:35)  50. Qa6  (0:23) Ne5  (0:35)

To human eyes, it’s improbable and even amazing that this position is still drawn—but the top computer engines insist that it is, beginning with 51. Qb7+ or even 51. h4.

51. Qe6?  (0:20)

Another bad move that just doesn’t make any sense. I don’t see what the queen is doing on e6. It seems that 51. h4 might be the only way to continue resistance. Still, the king is marching and this a-pawn is always very close to promotion, the practical task of holding the position is almost unmanageable, especially with much less time.
Otherwise ... h5-h4 would win.

52. ... a2 (0:30)

0 - 1

If 53. Qxa2 (or 53. Qa6 Qd4, forcing 54. Qxa2) then 53. ... Ng4+ 54. Kh3 Qg1 55. Qb2+ Kg6.

Vlad’s Viewpoint

Karjakin found a beautiful and accurate way to win, 51. ... h5 followed by 52. ... a2. The problem is that White cannot play h4 anymore as Black would start marching the king. With White unable to play h4, he cannot get his bishop out of g2, and I don’t believe he can hold it anyway. But practically it was already quite bad after 49. Qa5. The end of the game is quite shocking. I don’t know what happened to Magnus from moves 49 to 52, it’s a total collapse for no clear reason. One huge mistake after another. I can understand why Carlsen said that he was in a dark place after this game. It’s really a big shock. With all due respect to Karjakin’s play, (especially from moves 30 to the end of the game), he was playing really well, but in a way, White was almost “forcing” his opponent to win. You try to get mated on the kingside, you didn’t manage that, then you try to lose in time trouble, but you didn’t manage that either. Then finally you lose it in the equal endgame.

The main problem is that he kept trying to win when there was no objective reason to do so. I can understand the anger and frustration which Carlsen felt after the game, because this is really too much. And after this game, it would be quite difficult to sleep and to recover your senses at all. Not only is he minus-one now in the match score, but he just played his worst game of the match, and it’s clear that he had no ideas in the openings with White. It was possibly the toughest loss he has experienced in his life, in his professional chess career. It’s very difficult to know how to come back.
Magnus makes a surprising choice.
He opts for a well-studied position where Black, a pawn down, struggles for a draw.

Bold and provocative—and correct!
Magnus chooses the move 32. ... Rb5.

Sergey chooses “safety first.”
Rather than forcing his opponent to make difficult decisions with only two minutes left on his clock, Sergey plays it safe.
**GAME 9**

**Introduction**

A pivotal game in the match, not due to what happened—a hard-fought draw— but due to what didn’t happen: Karjakin came very close to winning again, which would have put enormous pressure on Carlsen to overcome a two-game deficit with only three games to play. Instead, the match score remained at a one-game deficit for the World Champion—still within striking distance.

### Ruy Lopez [C78]

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

1. e4 (1:40)  
2. Nf3 (1:40)  
3. Bb5 (1:40)  
4. Ba4 (1:40)  
5. 0-0 (1:40)  
6. Bb3 (1:40)  
7. e5 (1:40)  
8. Nc6 (1:40)  
9. a6 (1:40)  
10. Nf6 (1:40)  
11. b5 (1:40)  
12. Be5 (1:40)
Position after 6. ... Bc5

7. a4 (1:40)

In past games, Sergey has normally played the classic 7. c3 here, but move order is not significant in this variation and transpositions are common.

7. ... Rb8 (1:40)

Carlsen has also played this position several times—from the white side—including twice against Alexei Shirov, in 2008 and 2010. Carlsen won both of those games.

8. c3 (1:39) d6 (1:40)
9. d4 (1:39) Bb6 (1:40)
10. axb5 (1:39) axb5 (1:40)
11. Na3 (1:39)

After 11. dxe5 Nxe5 the position is equal.

11. ... 0-0 (1:40)

Note that 11. ... Nxe4 is impossible (both here and on subsequent moves) due to 12. Bd5.

12. Nxb5 (1:39) Bg4 (1:40)

By transposition we are back in the main line. Sergey has played this position with White in four games versus top grandmasters at classical time controls, scoring two wins and two draws.

13. Bc2 (1:39) exd4 (1:40)

The alternative 14. cxd4 has faded from top-GM practice over the past several years due to 14. ... d5, a thematic hit in
the center, e.g., 15. e5 Ne4 or 15. Bg5 Bxf3 16. Qxf3 Nxd4, with equal chances.

14. ... Nxd4 (1:40)
15. cxd4 (1:39) Bxf3 (1:40)
16. gxf3 (1:39)

This is a well-studied position that is very familiar to both players. White has won a pawn and also has the two bishops, but Black has compensation (but is it full compensation?) due to White’s weakened pawn structure and vulnerable squares, as well as constant pressure against the b2-pawn.

16. ... Nh5 (1:40)

With this move and the next move, Black begins to exploit White’s kingside weaknesses by taking the f4-square under control.

17. Kh1 (1:39) Qf6 (1:40)
18. Be3 (1:39)

Position after 16. gxf3

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

I was surprised by Magnus’ choice of opening. This is a forcing theoretical line where Black can (at best) count on a draw, but Carlsen is minus-one in the match score, so his approach should have been to try and generate certain winning chances with Black. As White has several ways to reach a forced draw in this line, Karjakin had a pleasant choice: If you want a draw, you can take a draw, but if you want to fight, you can fight. Further, Karjakin is a specialist in this line and has played many games with it. Theory in this line can run up to move 23. Winning from this position is difficult because despite being a pawn up, White has a bad pawn structure on the kingside, and Black has a good square for the knight. But it’s also practically impossible to lose. It’s a best-case scenario for Karjakin: He is plus-one in the match score. He has a safe position. He has made a lot of theoretical moves so time trouble will not be a factor. He is in a position he knows very well. Finally, he can play for a win without much risk.

The computer shows that the position is almost equal; it doesn’t care so much about the pawn. But in a practical game, it’s difficult for Black to play against the two bishops because there are always little threats lurking. Magnus makes some inaccurate moves in this game leading to practical problems slowly arising. It’s the type of position that lends itself to computer analysis because it’s so tactical. Basically, you switch on the computer and see what it shows, and you can be sure that it’s right because there is not much strategic content in the game. It is a purely tactical, move-by-move scenario.
18. ...  c5!  (1:40)
Exploring the weaknesses of: the b2-pawn—if 19. d5?! c4!; the king’s cover—if 19. dxc5 then … dxc5 and 20. … Bc7.

19. e5  (1:37)

21. ...  cxb3!  (1:40)
Finally, on Black’s move 21, a novelty. In Nakamura-Kasimdzhanov, Tromsø 2014, White achieved an edge after 21. … c3 22. d5 Qxd6 23. Ra6 Nf4?! 24. Ra4 Ng6 25. Qd3± and now Black erred with 25. … Bc7? after which White could have secured a winning advantage with 26. Bf4!.

19. ...  Qe6  (1:40)
20. exd6  (1:28)
Sergey thought for nine minutes. Was he checking? Recalling?

20. ...  c4  (1:40)
21. b3  (1:26)
White is up a pawn and has the bishop pair, but his pawns are weak and his king under-protected.

23. **Ra6** (1:24) **Rfd8** (1:10)

Played after 30-minutes thought. More direct is the immediate 23. ... Qd7, for example 24. Rg1 g6 25. Bc4 (if 25. Rg4 then ... Qb7) 25. ... Rfc8 26. Qd3 Qh3 27. Bd5 Kh8!

24. **Rg1** (1:16) **Qd7** (1:04)
25. **Rg4** (1:13)

Defending the d4-pawn while preventing ... Qh3.

25. ... **Nf6** (0:58)
26. **Rh4** (1:13)

Ditto: defending d4, preventing ... Qh3.

26. ... **Qb5** (0:52)
27. **Ra1** (1:11)

White’s attacking chances are hindered by his weakened king position: His kingside pawns cannot advance because the
white king can quickly find itself in danger. Meanwhile, White cannot find a way to infiltrate Black’s position solely with piece play, despite several promising-looking variations that ultimately lead nowhere.

31. Rg5 attempts to dislodge the blockading knight, but Black stands firm with 31. ... Qe7 32. Bxd5 (32. Re4 Qa3) ... Rxd5 33. Re4 (not 33. Rxd5? Qxh4 and Black is better) ... Qd7 34. Rxd5 Qxd5, and Black is doing fine. Another dislodging attempt is 31. Rh5, which is possible due to the pinned g-pawn, but Black holds everything with 31. ... Qe6. The pin is not dangerous because White is also relying on tactics to keep up the pressure, e.g., 32. Qc4? Nxe3! 33. Qxe6 (33. Qxc7 Qxb3 34. fxe3 Qxe3) 33. ... fxe6 34. Bxe6+ Kh8, and the rook on h5 is no longer immune from capture. Or 32. Rgg5 Qf6! and White’s drafty king position saves the day for Black: 33. Bxd5 Rxd5 34. Rxd5 (34. Kg2 Rxg5+ 35. Bxg5 Qe6 36. Rh4 with only a small advantage for White) 34. ... Qxf3+ 35. Kg1 Ra8! 36. Qc3 Qg4+ 37. Kf1 Qd1+ 38. Qe1 Qf3!

31. Bg5  (0:44)  Re8  (0:32)
32. Qc4  (0:39)

A good try, as Black can go wrong in any number of ways, e.g., 32. ... Nb6? 33. Qxf7+ Qxf7 34. Bxf7+ Kxf7 35. Rxe7+ Ke6 36. Rxc7, or 32. ... Qb5? 33. Qxb5 Rxb5 34. Bc4 (34. Ba4 also wins) ... Ra5 35. Bd2. On the surface it appears as though Black’s only defense is 32. ... Qe6, after which White keeps up the pressure with 33. Ba2 Ra8 34. Rc1, but Black has another way to cut the Gordian knot:

32. ... Rb5!  (0:29)

Black holds the balance with this accurate move. Despite appearances, White cannot win the Exchange with 33. Ba4 due to 33. ... Qf5! and again White’s loose king position enables Black to hold the balance: 34. Qf1 (34. Rh4? Qxh3+ 35. Rg2 Ra4 and Black is clearly better; or 34. Bxb5? Qxf3+ 35. Rg2 Re1+ wins) 34. ... Rb1! 35. Qxb1 (forced; 35. Bc1 Ra8 or 35. Bd1 Nc3) 35. ... Qxf3+ 36. Rg2 Ne3 37. Qf1 Nxa4 38. Bh6 Kh8!
An important move to prevent White from freeing his pieces, e.g., if 38. ... Nb6?! then 39. Rh3 Qxh3? 40. Rg6+! hxg6 41. Qxh3. After 38. ... Kh8 White’s pieces cannot get untangled, so his advantage of the Exchange cannot be realized.

33. Qc2  (0:37)

Karjakin continues to pose practical problems, but Carlsen could now have achieved full equality with 33. ... Rb4, e.g., 34. Be3 (34. Bd2? Re2+) ... Reb8 35. Bxd5 Qxd5. Magnus missed this opportunity, and again finds himself having to struggle to stay in the game.

33. ... Ra8?!  (0:13)
34. Bc4    (0:32)

Sergey keeps the tension, while avoiding the same trap as before–34. Ba4 does not win the Exchange, instead leading to an immediate draw: 34. Ba4 Rxa4 35. Qxa4 Qf5!, and any further winning attempts would quickly backfire, e.g., 36. Rhg4? Qxf3+ 37. R4g2 Nc3 38. Qc4 Rg5 39. Qxc7 Ne4! 40. Qb8+ Kg7

White finds himself paralyzed, and indeed, lost! 41. Qb2 h6! 42. d5+ Kh7 43. Qd4 Rxd5 44. Qe3 Ng3+ is one of many lines, all of which will conclude with White’s checkmate or resignation.

So instead, the game would have to end with perpetual check after 36. Qxb5 Qxf3+ 37. Rg2 Qd1+.
Sergey played very well in the middlegame, with moves such as 32. Qc4, 33. Qc2, and 34. Be4 all keeping some tension in the game and always creating some small problem for Magnus to solve. The problems were not terrible, but he didn’t allow Carlsen a chance to force a draw at will. Then, close to the time control, Magnus went wrong and his position started to deteriorate. I wouldn’t say he did anything bad, it’s just that in a practical sense the position is very difficult to play.

35. Bd2 (0:28) Ra4 (0:10)

More accurate was the immediate 35. … Ra1 because White’s queen is less effective on c2 than on d3, as in the game continuation. The difference is that after 36. Rxa1 Rxal+ 37. Kg2, Black can play 37. …Qc6 38. Bh6 Ra4, with favorable exchanges coming: 39. Re4 Nf4+ 40. Bxf4 Rxc4

Position after 38. Kg2

A critical moment for Carlsen. White continues to ratchet up the pressure, and Black is walking through a minefield—each candidate move demands careful and accurate assessment, and one false step can lead to disaster. Which move should he play? Out of the many possible candidate moves, most queen moves or rook moves cause his position to deteriorate.

Black is much worse after 38. … Nf6 39. d5 (or 38. … Nb6 39. d5). Waiting moves with the king are not possible. He can try to hold the fort with 38. … Bd8, but after 39. Re4 the number of losing moves is vast: 39. … Bc7? 40. Bxd5! Qxd5 41. Qc3! winning, e.g. 41. … Qa5 42. Bh6; or 38. … Bd8 39. Re4 Bf6 40. Qb3! Nc7 41. Bh6 Ra8 42. Rf4 Ne8 43.
Qb4 Qd6 44. Qb7 and the game is over. Even after 38. ... Bd8 39. Re4 Nf6 (best) 40. Re5 Bc7 41. Rc5, the position is fraught with danger. Almost all of Black’s candidate moves produce a “thickets of variations,” as Alexander Kotov calls it in his classic book Think Like a Grandmaster, each demanding rapid and accurate assessment—and after all, Magnus has only seven minutes remaining to make three moves in order to reach the time control.

Another feasible move is 38. ... h5, which has the benefit of restricting some of White’s options, but it is difficult for a player (a human player, anyway) to make such a committal move with so little time remaining on the clock. After 39. Re4 Kg7, White has both the advantage and the complexity with 40. Qb3 Nf6 41. Rh4, or 40 Bb3 Ra3 Qc4, or even with 40. Re5!, e.g. 40 ... Ne7 (40. ... Bxe5 41. dxe5 Nb6 42. Qc3) 41. Bh6+! Kh7 (41. ... Kh8? 42. Qc3; or 41. ... Kg8? 42. Rxe7 Qxe7 43. Qxg6+) 42. Rxe7.

Faced with this dangerous scenario, it is possible that Carlsen quickly spotted that the “thickets of variations” are rapidly pruned after 38. ... Ne7, which compels White to “go for it” with either 39. Bxf7+ or 39. Qb3 (as analyzed in the nearby “Vlad’s Viewpoint”), or else he will have to allow Black to consolidate with 39. ... Nf5. But the calculations needed to assess these two options are not nearly as daunting as the vast thicket, and Magnus may have been able to quickly determine that his chances of survival—or even success, in a complicated variation such as 39. Qb3 Nf5 40. Bxf7+ Kg7 41. Rh3 Qc7—are good. Another consideration is that Carlsen is figuring that Karjakin’s match strategy will lead him away from the double-edged 39. Qb3. Furthermore, Magnus was down considerably on the clock—seven minutes to 27 minutes, and with 38. ... Ne7 he is buying time because Sergey must make a critical choice, and use his time to do so, during which Carlsen can also continue to study the position.

Hence the move 38. ... Ne7, which is viewed as “risky” in most circles, may have been an excellent practical decision, given the alternatives.

38. ... Ne7 (0:02)

39. Bxf7+ (0:01)
Frankly, it’s difficult to play 39. Qb3 in this position, and I’m not sure that it is winning anyway. 39. Qb3 Nf5 40. Bxf7+ Qxf7 could be enough for a draw–41. Qxf7+ Kxf7 42. Rxh7+ Ke6 43. Rxc7 Nh4+ (a very important resource).

The line could continue: 44. Kg3 (or 44. Kh3 Nxf3–the bishop is hanging and after it moves, 45. ... Rg1! with ... g5 and ... g4 coming–White is going to get mated!) Nf5+ 45. Kh3 and now Black can already take the d-pawn with 45. ... Nxd4. If instead 45. Kf4, then ... Nxd4 46. Be3 (after 46. Bc3 is the very important move 46. ... Ne2+ followed by 47. ... Nxc3 and 48. ... Rh1) 46. ... Nf5, and this position is, to me, closer to a draw, because of the bad white pawns and knight on f5. For instance, 47. Rc6+ (if instead 46. Kg5 then ... Rg1+) ... Kf7 48. Ke5.

Of course there are chances for White to win, but it may well be a fortress, especially if White can’t penetrate quickly with the king.

However, the real question posed to White arises if Black doesn’t take the bishop: 39. Qb3 Nf5 40. Bxf7+ Kg7.
Karjakin had a chance to play on Carlsen’s nerves with 39. Qb3, forcing him to make his own binding decision on move 40—the last move of the time control. But Sergey’s overall strategy for the match, reinforced by his plus-one lead with only a few regulation games to go, would prompt him to choose 39. Bxf7+, a no-risk move after which there are still only “two possible results” (draw or win for White), as opposed to the higher-risk 39. Qb3, which could conceivably lead into the uncharted territory of “three possible results.”

Despite the computer’s assessment, this position is not at all clear from a human point of view. It’s impossible for humans to play like this. So that’s why I do not consider 39. Bxf7+ to be a mistake; there are certain things that are practically beyond human abilities. Karjakin thought for a long time, over 25 minutes, but it’s almost impossible to calculate accurately. I can say that nine out of ten players would not choose 39. Qb3, so 39. Bxf7+ was actually a good try.

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The top computer engines agree with the assessment that 39. Bxf7+ leads to positions that Black should be able to hold. Likewise, 39. Qb3 Nf5 40. Bxf7+ Qxf7, as discussed by GM Kramnik, is also within the drawing margin. Ironically, the variation that puts Black under considerable pressure is the one that may have dissuaded Karjakin from playing 39. Qb3—after 39. ... Nf5 40. Bxf7+ Kg7
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

**Position after 46. ... Qxf5**

47. Bc3+ Kf7 48. Qc6 and Black is in deep trouble. Black’s best chance to survive is 41. ... Ra6 (instead of 41. ... Qe7, in Analysis Diagram A), preventing White from exchanging the strong knight on f5, and repositioning the rook to a more effective defensive role.

39. ... Kxf7 (0:02)

**Position after 39. ... Kxf7**

40. Qc4+ (0:01) Kg7 (0:01)
41. d5 (0:51)

**Position after 41. d5**

Not 41. Rxa7? Kxa7 42. Qf7+ Kh8 43. Bh6 Qxd4 44. Qxe7 Qe5 and Black wins.

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

This position looks dangerous for Black, but he is just in time. Good defense by Magnus combined with a bit of luck avoided what could have simply been a lost game.

41. ... Nf5 (0:41)
41. ... Be5 fails to 42. Bc3, e.g. 42. ... Qd6 43. Qf4! Re1 44. Qh6+ Kg8 45. Qxh7+ Kf8 46. Bxe1.

42. Bc3+ (0:51) Kf8 (0:41)
43. Bxa1 (0:51) Nhx4+ (0:41)
44. Qxh4 (0:51) Qxd5 (0:41)
After move 46 the position is a bit unpleasant for Black, but White has no winning chances. So a draw is the normal result.

46. ... Ke8 (0:34)
47. Qe4+ Qe7 (0:34)
48. Qd5 Bd8 (0:31)
49. Kf1 Qf7 (0:28)
50. Qe4+ Qe7 (0:26)
51. Be5 Qe6 (0:26)
52. Kg2 Be7 (0:26)
53. Qa8+ Kf7 (0:26)
54. Qh8 h5 (0:26)

Vlad’s viewpoint

More good luck for Black, as after 44... Qxd5 there is no mate and the pawn on h7 will not fall (45. Qxh7 Qg5+ 46. Kf1 Qc1+ is a perpetual). It looks like there should be something for White, but Black can always hold the position.

45. Qf6+ Qf7 (0:41)
46. Qd4 (0:33)

Black’s weaknesses are defended and no further progress can be made. The rest of the game was played very quickly.

55. Qg7+ Ke8 (0:24)
56. Bf4 Qf7 (0:26)
57. Qh8+ Qf8 (0:26)
58. Qd4 Qf5 (0:26)
59. Qc4 Kd7 (0:26)
60. Bd2 Qe6 (0:26)
61. Qa4+ (0:38) Qc6 (0:41)

Position after 61. ... Qc6

62. Qa7+ (0:35) Qc7 (0:41)
63. Qa2 (0:35) Qd6 (0:40)
64. Be3 (0:35) Qe6 (0:40)
65. Qa7+ (0:35) Ke8 (0:40)
66. Bc5 (0:35) Bd8 (0:40)
67. h3 (0:29) Qd5 (0:39)
68. Be3 (0:29) Be7 (0:39)
69. Qb8+ (0:29) Kf7 (0:39)

70. Qh8 (0:29) Qe6 (0:39)
71. Bf4 (0:27) Qf6 (0:39)
72. Qb8 (0:27) Qe6 (0:39)
73. Qb7 (0:27) Kg8 (0:39)
74. Qb5 (0:27) Bf6 (0:39)

½ - ½

Final Position

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

This was a very good game. The inaccuracies were completely human, absolutely normal, and were balanced by many good decisions. Magnus defended well at the end of the game while Karjakin played well throughout the entire game. In my opinion, this was a classic world championship game—a game that both players can be proud of.
Kramnik: “The worst move of the match.”
Karjakin missed a straightforward draw with 20. … Nxf2+. Not only was his move 20. … d5 a tactical mistake, it was a strategic mistake as well.

Position before 20. ... d5

Karjakin misses a prime opportunity.
The move 38. … c5! would foil Carlsen’s plans of attacking the queenside via b2-b4 or c3-c4.

Position after 38. Rf3

The deciding moment of the game.
Karajakin made a fatal mistake when he played 56. … Rhh7?, which allowed Carlsen to play the winning breakthrough 57. b5.

Position after 56. Rb1
**GAME 10**

**Introduction**
The perplexing trends of the match continue in this game: an uninspired opening choice; uncharacteristic tactical and strategic mistakes by both players; and then Sergey defending a difficult endgame with skill and tenacity. But Carlsen’s relentless pressure finally produces a win as Karjakin commits one last mistake. Result: The match is tied, with only two classical-time-control games remaining!

**Ruy Lopez [C65]**

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

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<tr>
<th>Move</th>
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<th>Russian</th>
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<td>e4</td>
<td>(1:40)</td>
<td>e5</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Nf3</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>d3</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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Game ten was probably the most crucial, and also the strangest, game in the match. Karjakin had shown powerful play in games eight and nine, and I thought the World Championship title was within reach for him. But game ten was a sudden collapse. He made so many strategic and tactical mistakes in this game—it’s like he ran out of steam and just disappeared, a shadow of his former self. The problem is not so much that Magnus equaled the score, but that Karjakin had lost all of his energy. That’s the feeling I got. Maybe he got too close to the title and just got too nervous. After this game, I thought his best chance would be to get to the tiebreaker, then hold in the rapids somehow and try to win in the blitz.

Magnus’ choice of opening was also strange, because he decided to play a sideline that is very easy with simple play for Black. It was a poor choice of opening for such an important game in the match. However, due to Karjakin’s play, it worked.

6. \( \ldots \) h6 (1:39)
7. Bh4 (1:40) Be7 (1:39)
8. 0-0 (1:40) d6 (1:38)
9. Nbd2 (1:40) Nh5 (1:31)

6. Bg5 (1:40)

A relatively rare line; much more common is 6. 0-0. It seems that Magnus’ strategy is to make a second-best move to take the opponent out of his own well-known theory. Anish Giri in *New In Chess* notes, “This strategy reminds me of Bxc6 in the second game of the match in Sochi, where Magnus went for a theoretical position a tempo down, but forced Anand to think over the board. Carlsen won that game.”
After 11. Nc4, instead of 11. ... Nf4 Black can play 11. ... Nd8, a move I like very much here. 12. Ne3 c6 is a very good way to solve any problems, e.g., 13. Bc4 Nf6 and then Black can follow up (e.g. after 14. Bb3) with 14. ... Ne6. The position is equal.

Another option for Black is to play 11. ... f5 immediately: 12. exf5 Bxf5 13. Ne3, and per Anish Giri, “Black has a comfortable position but nothing special.” Giri’s suggestion is that Magnus may have played 11. Nc4 instantly in order to bluff Sergey into thinking that
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

he (Carlsen) was prepared against 11. ... f5. Sure enough, Karjakin thought for seven minutes and played a different move.

Tempting for White after 11. ... f5 would be 12. Bxc6 bxc6 13. Nfxe5, as Black will be down two pawns after 13. ... Nf4 14. Nxc6 Qe8(!) 15. Qf3 fxe4 16. Qxe4, but after 16. ... Be6, White finds himself in a real quandary.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 16. ... Be6

17. ... d5 is threatened, not only forking queen and knight, but removing protection of the knight on c6. Nor does 17. N4a5 help, due to 17. ... Qf7 and White’s discombobulated pieces will have difficulty fighting against Black’s developed, well-organized forces.

11. ... Nf4 (1:24)
12. Ne3 (1:40) Qf6 (1:20)

After 12. Ne3, I think the move 12. ... f5 is a very testing and logical move. Once you decide to make this move, it’s not hard to calculate that everything works perfectly. After 12. ... f5 I don’t think he would have lost the game because it’s easy for Black to play the position. Further, if White takes twice on f5 then Black gets a lot of play, so I think it is better for White to play g3 immediately: 12. ... f5 13. g3 Nh3+ 14. Kg2 fxe4. It’s very nice for Black to open the f-file and the most logical way of playing.

But it seems to me that Karjakin was not ready to make any active moves today. Somehow, he had “Leko syndrome” (from game 14 of my 2004 World Championship match with Peter Leko). Two or three times Leko saw that he had active opportunities that he normally would have played (he told me this after the game), but he didn’t make a single active move in that game. And then slowly his position started to deteriorate. Such is the case with Sergey in this position.

Possibly Karjakin didn’t like the idea of giving up a bishop for knight, but Black is doing well after 13. Nxf5 Bxf5 14. exf5 Rx f5 15. g3 e4! 16. Bxc6 bxc6
17. Nd4 (17. dxe4? Qxe4 18. gxf4 Rxf4 and Black is better; or 17. Re1? Nh3+ 18. Kf1 Qf7 -+) 17. ... Rg5 18. Re1 Rf8, and Black is calling the shots.

Instead of capturing on f5, White can hold the balance (but nothing more) after 12. ... f5 with 13. g3 Nh3+ (13. ... fxe4 14. dxe4 transposes) 14. Kg2 fxe4 15. dxe4 g6, and Black’s activity and open f-file compensate for his somewhat weakened kingside.

13. g3 (1:16)

Magnus thought for a long time. Probably he had decided on 13. g3 but at this point he was weighing the trickiness/viability of 14. Kh1 as opposed to 14. Kg2.

13. ... Nh3+ (1:17)

The “sub-optimal” strategy Kramnik refers to has a possible explanation: Carlsen could be trying to confuse Karjakin by making a slightly mysterious and unpredictable (albeit second-best) move. Magnus knows that he has not been playing in top shape, and he needs to win, but he also understands that Karjakin’s psychological condition may be shaky as well.
14. ... Ne7  (1:14)
15. Bc4  (1:07)

The move 15. Qe2, as pointed out by Anish Giri, also deserves attention:  15. ... c6 16. Ba4 d5 17. exd5 cxd5 18. d4 e4 19. Nd2

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 19. Nd2

and now Black risks getting worse unless he tries to stick a dagger into White’s position with 19. ... Ng5 20. h4 Nf3!? 21. Nxf3 exf3 22. Qd3. The pivotal question in this position is whether Black’s f3-pawn turns out to be a strength or a weakness. However, it’s much more likely that Karjakin would follow a safer, more consistent line such as 16. ... b5 17. Bb3 Rb8 (or 17. Bc2 Rb8), with an equal position.

15. ... c6  (0:43)

Played after half-an-hour thought, perhaps deciding between this move and 15. ... b5.
16. … Ng6 now is really a bad move. It’s also a move which is difficult to explain, because the knight is doing nothing on g6. It’s a standard move when White has a pawn on g2, but when White has a pawn on g3, the knight is going nowhere from g6. It can never jump to f4 or h4, so it’s probably worse than on e7. There were several good moves here, the best being the simple 16. … d5 because it’s very dangerous for White to take the pawn on d5. 17. exd5 is not good because of … cxd5 18. Nxd5 Nxd5 19. Bxd5 Rd8. After 20. Be4 Bg4, White would give a lot to have his king on g2, but it’s on h1, so he must lose a tempo playing 21. Kg2. Then Black responds with 21. … Ng5. So White cannot really play 17. exd5. Probably after 16. … d5 White should play 17. Kg2 with equal chances. But of course 16. … d5 solves all of Black’s problems very easily. But again, you can see what it has in common with 12. … f5 and 15. … b5—these moves are all active. Karjakin is more than good enough to find this move, but it’s clear that not playing it was all about psychology; he just couldn’t force himself to even look at active moves. Even when you need only a draw, you still need to be able to play an aggressive move when the position requires it.

17. Qe2 (0:59)

A good move, but ironically it provides a purpose to 16. … Ng6: now White’s king is preempted from moving to g2 due to … Nf4+ (either knight).

17. d4 is also possible, after which Black should be able to hold the balance with 17. … exd4 18. cxd4 h5.

The idea of … h5 is not to play … h4,
which would accomplish nothing, but instead to be able to play ... Bg4 and then recapture with the pawn, e.g., 19. Kg2 Re8 20. Bc2 Bg4 21. Nxd4 hxg4 22. Ng1 Nxc1 23. Kxc1 Nf8, with equal chances.

17. ... a5 (0:28)
18. a4 (0:52)

I don’t like 18. a4, frankly. It’s not a bad move, but after 18. ... Be6 he gives Black the chance to bother the bishop on b3. I would use the chance to play 18. d4 right now, because it’s quite important for White to play d3-d4 in this position, and I don’t think 18. ... a4 would be such a big deal.

On the plus side, 18. a4 does freeze the weak pawn on a5, which (in many variations) requires protection from attack, if/when White places a knight on c4. But the a-pawn’s natural protector—the b-pawn, after moving to b6—is also subject to attack by the same knight on c4. So in some cases, Black’s rook must spend its time protecting the weak a5-pawn, therefore it cannot be used elsewhere for more productive purposes.

If a piece must be used to defend a weakness, then often that piece cannot be used elsewhere for more productive purposes.

White keeps a slight pull after 18. d4 a4 19. Bc2 Ng5 20. Nxd4 hxg4 (this pawn now helps prevent an eventual f2-f4 pawn break) 21. Rad1 Bh3 22. Rfe1, and White’s pieces are placed more effectively than Black’s (especially the knight on g6.)

18. ... Be6 (0:27)

19. Bxe6? (0:50)
Played after only two minutes and with plenty of time left on his clock?!?!

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

This was a very tense match moment. Black’s knight on h3 is now misplaced because he did not follow up with an active plan, and now after a move such as 18. Bc2 or 18. Nd2, the black knight is a real problem. There is no active play for Black on the kingside anymore, and once Black starts to remove the knight then White can play f2-f4, and the position has become quite unpleasant for Black—not a surprise after the few mistakes that Karjakin has made. But Magnus played 19. Bxe6, which would have been a good move if not for the small problem that it is a tactical blunder.

19. Nd2 is a good way for Carlsen to take advantage of Karjakin’s inconsistent play. After 19. ... Bxb3 20. Nxb3 Ng5 (otherwise the misplaced knight is a source of trouble for Black, e.g., 20. ... Rfd8 21. Qh5! Qe6 22. Nd2 d5 23. Nf5 Ng5 24. f4 Nh7 25. Nhx6+ gxh6 26 f5) 21. f3

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 21. f3

White’s fluid pawn structure provides many opportunities for expansion in the center or on the f-file. Carlsen is especially dangerous in this type of multi-option position.

Another option for Black is to scurry back with his knight, but after 19. ... Ng5 20. h4 Nh7 21. Ng4 Qe7 22. h5 Nh8 23. Bxe6 fxe6 (or 23. ... Qxe6 24. Ne3) 24. Kg2, White is calling the shots.

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 24. Kg2

19. ... fxe6 (0:27)
20. Nd2 (0:40)
We have reached one of the most critical moments of the entire match.

One of the most critical moments of the entire match comes after Carlsen’s move 20. Nd2.

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

After 19. … fxe6, 20. Nd2 is the only reasonable move in the position. It’s completely obvious at this point. Yet Magnus thought for a very long time, at least ten minutes, before playing 20. Nd2. This should be a hint to Karjakin that something is strange here, else why is Carlsen taking ten minutes to play what is obvious? White simply doesn’t have a choice at this point. It is quite surprising because Magnus probably saw rather quickly the trick with 20. … Nf2+ and 21. … Nh4+. He should have played 20. Nd2 promptly, at the very least so as not to give his opponent a hint that there is a tactic. Thinking for ten minutes and only then playing 20. Nd2 anyway merely shows your cards—you’ve told your opponent that you are worried about something. At this point Magnus understood that he had made a bad—an awful—mistake with 19. Bxe6. But he must be practical and move quickly. Even without a hint, however, 20. … Nxf2+ is not hard to find. With a hint, it is almost impossible not to find.

We have reached one of the most critical moments of the entire match.

Black’s 20. … d5? is a major moment. Frankly, I have to say that this wins the prize for “Worst Move in the Match.” Not only is it a tactical mistake, it is also a positional mistake. We all know 20. … Nxf2+ is a draw, but anyway, it is much better for Black to have his pawn on d6 than on d5. So for me it was really a shocking decision to see Black play 20. … d5. And in general, this part of the game, from move 12 to move 20, was played at a low level. If 20. … Nxf2+ and White wants to avoid a draw, he has to give a rook and two pawns for the two knights. [See second Analysis Diagram in notes after 20. ... d5.] But in that case Black is probably better—he is definitely not worse.
Indeed, Black can claim an immediate draw after 20. ... Nxf2+! 21. Kg2 Nh4+! 22. Kg1 (22. gxh4? Qg6+ 23. Ng4 Nxg4 and Black is clearly better) 22. ... Nh3+ 23. Kg2 Nxf2+ and a three-fold repetition is imminent.

Wesley So voiced a somewhat more favorable opinion of the line mentioned by Kramnik in which White gives a rook and two pawns for the two black knights: 20. ... Nxf2+ 21. Kg1 Nh3+ 22. Kg2 Ngf4+ 23. gxf4 Nxf4+ 24. Rxf4 exf4 25. Nc2 e5

The draw is still there, but is more complicated, after 21. ... Nxf2+: 22. Kg2 Qf7 (this strong move threatens 23. ... Nh4+ and 24. ... Qxh5) 23. Kg1 (23. Qe2 reverts to the same position as shown before, allowing 23. ... Nh4+! with a draw) 23. ... Qf6

Black plans 24. ... Qg5 (e.g. 25. Rae1 Qg5 26. Qxg5 Nh3+ followed by 27. ... Nfxg5) but now came the idea that was possibly missed by both players: 24. h4 looks strong for White—and would otherwise be strong—except that the tactic 24. ... Nf4! turns the tide. After 25. gxf4 Qxf4, White’s king will be subjected to a strong attack.
VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

The move 21. Qh5 is a strange decision because 21. ... Nxf2+ is also a draw, but if Sergey didn’t play it on the previous move, it’s not very likely that he would play it now. That part is logical. But what if he does? Because sometimes you make a mistake and you realize it immediately. After 21. f3, draw with 27. ... Nh3+ 28. Kh1 Nf2+ etc.; but having reached this position, he could have kept pressing forward: 27. ... Ng4! 28. Rxf8+ Rxf8 29. Nf1 Qh3 30. Nge3 Rf4.

White would have had a very nice plus. Of course if Black doesn’t play 21. ... Nxf2+ then White’s advantage seriously increases, but White is taking the risk since Black might still play 21. ... Nxf2+. It also shows that Magnus was not in good psychological shape, because he was trying his luck for no good reason. I’m sure that Magnus was happy to see 20. ... d5 instead of 20. ... Nxf2+, but after that, normally a guy would thank his lucky stars and play 21. f3 very quickly so as not to give his opponent any further chance of ... Nxf2+. But fortunately for Magnus, it worked.

White’s problem is that he cannot unweave the net around his king, and Black will continue to infiltrate, grabbing more pawns as he does, with a technically winning position.

Returning to Analysis Diagram A, with 24. h4 ruled out, White must settle for an equal position, e.g., 24. Rae1 Qg5 25. Qxg5 Nh3+ and 26. ... Nxg5, or accept a draw by repetition.
21. ...  
\textbf{Ng5}  
(0:19)

\begin{center}
\textbf{Position after 21. ... Ng5}
\end{center}

22. \textbf{h4}  
(0:34)

A strong alternative is 22. Rae1 to continue the slow buildup, but if Magnus was planning to trade queens to reach a less tactical position, then 22. h4 is the way to do it. 22. h4 leaves Sergey no choice but to exchange knights and queens (e.g., 22. ... Nh7 23. Ng4 Qf7 24. Nxe5 wins a pawn.) Carlsen spent less than a minute on 22. h4; so contrary to the principle of “if you see a good move, look for a better one,” and contrary to his normal practice, he saw a good move that reduces his overall risk and he played it.

Contributing factors to his quick decision may have been his prior shaky play, the overall match situation, and game-in-one-session time control, which limits the players’ depth of analysis.

22. ...  
\textbf{Nf3}  
(0:19)

23. \textbf{Nxf3}  
(0:29)

24. \textbf{Qxf3}  
(0:29)

Magnus was probably happy, and a bit relieved, to trade queens in order to reach the late-middlegame with a clearly superior position.

24. ...  
\textbf{Rxf3}  
(0:19)

25. \textbf{Kg2}  
(0:29)

26. \textbf{Rfe1}  
(0:29)

\begin{center}
\textbf{Position after 26. Rfe1}
\end{center}

\textbf{VLAD’S VIEWPOINT}

It might just be a matter of taste, but this is a strange decision because it just looks so logical for White to play 26. h5 followed by 27. Ng4. This is what you would play in a blitz game automatically, and it seems to me that it’s better than what he did. After 26. h5 Nh8 27. Ng4 Nd7, Black is completely tied up, and then you start to push on the queenside with a plan like Rb1 and b2-b4. It looks very difficult for Black. I believe that Magnus would have played this in nine games out of ten, but for some reason in this particular match he was choosing strange moves.

26. ...  
\textbf{h5}  
(0:15)

Sometimes the cure can be worse than the illness. Black prevents the plan of h4-h5 followed by Ng4, but now the g5-square becomes a strong landing spot for the White knight.
26. ... Raf8 would force White to contend with a direct threat, but White has his own resources to deal with it. Some players might concede piece activity with 27. Nd1, which reduces White’s advantage. It is possible that Carlsen was simply testing Karjakin’s intentions, and after 26. ... Raf8, he would just play his rook back to f1 (27. Rf1), threatening to win the e-pawn with 28. h5 Nh8 29 Ng4. There are two ways for Black to meet this threat; he can play 27. ... h5, similar to the game continuation, or he could vacate the f8-square for the knight in order to meet 28. h5 with 28. ... Nf8 29. Ng4 Nd7. Karjakin may have already decided to reposition his king to d6, hence he chose the move 26. ... h5 in order to follow up with 27. ... Kf8, etc.

Instead of 27. Nd1 or possibly repeating the position with 27. Rf1, an important question is whether 27. Re2 is a good move. If so, then White can continue to develop his pieces while also defending the f2-pawn. A critical line is 27. Re2 Nf4+ 28. gxf4 exf4: White’s knight is attacked and Black threatens f4-f3+, winning the rook. Black’s prospects appear to be on the upswing, but White dampens the enthusiasm with 29. Nf5!

White claims the advantage after 29. ... exf5 30. exd5, or 29. ... f3+ 30. Kxf3 dxe4+ 31. dxe4 Rd7 32. Rg1 exf5 33. e5, or even 29. ... d4 30. h5! (immobilizing Black’s kingside pawns) ... exf5 31. e5.

The excitement (after 26. ... Raf8 27. Re2) is not over: Black can play 27. ... dxe4. Now 28. dxe4 would prove unsuccessful because 28. ... Nf4+! works in this position: 29. gxf4 exf4 30. Nf5 fails to 30. ... exf5 31. e5 (31. exd5 is not an option, as it was in the previous position) 31. ... g5! and Black is better. So after 27. ... dxe4, Carlsen would have to see—and have enough confidence to play—the counterintuitive line 28. Nc4! exd3 29. Rd2 Rd7 30. Re1.

Black’s pawns are weak and immobile, e.g., 30. ... Rd5 31. h5 Nh8 32. Nxe5, or 30. ... Rf5 31. Re3. The variations after 28. Nc4 can lead into complicated and even mind-boggling positions, so in all probability Carlsen would have instead remembered the principle “do not rush,” and moved his rook back to f1.

27. Nf1 (0:25)

The knight scurries on its way to occupy the g5-square.

27. ... Kf8 (0:15)
The black king hurries over to help defend the central pawn phalanx. Karjakin cannot simply sit and wait, because Carlsen has several active plans at his disposal, e.g., b2-b4 to open up the queenside. This is a common theme in such types of long-manoeuvering positions: The side with more space and more pawn levers will seek active play on both sides of the board, which is difficult for the opponent to defend against. Carlsen has won many games from these types of positions.

Alexei Korotylev in 64 Magazine claims that 27. ... Kf8 is passive, and that the more active 27. ... Raf8 would make it tougher for White to carry out his longer-term plans, i.e. placing a knight on g5 and determining which pawn(s) to advance. Indeed, 27. ... Raf8 does slow down White’s plans, but ultimately he can achieve them anyway; so 27. ... Kf8 (as the king hurries over to d6) is itself an active plan that gives Black chances of saving the game.

28. Nd2 (0:23) Ke7 (0:15)
29. Re2 (0:17) Kd6 (0:15)

A common theme in such long-manoeuvering positions: The side with more space and more pawn levers should seek active play on both sides of the board.

The move ... c6-c5 comes into consideration at several points over the next ten moves, including here. Its objective is to hinder the pawn breaks b2-b4 and d3-d4, and it gives Black more room to manoeuvre on the queenside. But the conditions for this pawn advance need to be right, or else White can take advantage of its drawbacks: the b5-square is weakened, and in some cases, White can push b2-b4 anyway, forcing open lines on the queenside for his active rooks. If ... c5 is played immediately then White’s rook can quickly activate itself: 29. ... c5?! 30. Ra3 Kd6 31. Rb3 Ra6 (Black must prevent the rook penetrating further via b6) 32. d4! (helped by White’s active pieces) ... exd4 33. cxd4 Rc6 (33. ... c4 34. Rb5 and Black’s position is increasingly uncomfortable) 34. exd5 exd5 35. dxc5+ Rxc5 36. Rd3 and, in addition to Black’s other weaknesses, the d-pawn also becomes a target.
But the prospect of … c5 is always lurking in the background, and Karjakin missed a prime opportunity to play … c5 on move 38.

30. Nf3 (0:17) Raf8 (0:15)

30. … c5 again falters due to 31. Ra3 b6 32. Rb3.

31. Ng5 (0:17) Re7 (0:14)

Would 32. … c5 benefit Black, now that White’s rook has committed itself? No–32 … c5?! 33. b4! axb4 34. cxb4 cxb4 35. Rb1. The queenside is now wide open, to White’s advantage.

32. Rae1 (0:17)

Vlad’s Viewpoint

While White’s knight has reached g5, it took a very long time. Meanwhile Black has managed to get his king to d6 and both rooks are out. If instead (after 26. h5 Nf8 27. Ng4 Nd7) the black knight was on d7, it would be almost impossible to get the king close to the center; but in this position, the king is there, and Black has more-or-less consolidated. He is still worse, it’s still an unpleasant position due to the pawn on e5, but now it’s not so bad—maybe even objectively holdable.
Both 34. b4 and 34. d4 are strong moves, with 34. b4 ultimately leading to similar pawn structures and piece placements as 34. d4. The order in which White’s pawn breaks are played is not as significant here, because Black will respond similarly to each pawn break as they are played, resulting in the same type of position (white pawns on b4 and a5 vs. black pawns on b7 and c6; white pawn on e5 vs. black pawns on d5 and e6).

34. ... exd4 (0:10)
35. Nxd4 (0:13) g6 (0:10)

Preventing the white knight from landing on the f5-square in the event that Black’s e-pawn is unable to, either by exchanges (exd5 exd5) or possibly if Black intends to push his e-pawn forward.

36. Re3 (0:11)

Carlsen allows – or possibly provokes – the advance 36. ... e5, which would change the character of the position, possibly with greater risk for Black than his chosen response 36. ... Nf7. After 36. ... e5, Black’s central pawns would be under attack, but he would have more space to maneuver. The risks of 36. ... e5 are evident in variations such as 37. Nb3 b6 38. Rd1 Nf7 39. exd5 cxd5 40. Red3, and the d-pawn is lost; but Black can hold tight in this line with 38. ... Ke6, and although his position looks dangerous after 39. exd5+ cxd5 40. Nd4+ Kd6 41. Nb5+ Kc6, it is not clear how White can make further progress.
36. … e5 is therefore a valid option for Black, but once again, Karjakin’s match strategy—“safety first”—guides him to keep the position as static as possible.

The move 36. Nb3 has been suggested instead of 36. Re3, but 36. … b6 can prove to be useful for Black, e.g., 37. Nd4 Nf7 38. exd5 cxd5 39. Nb5+ Kd7 40. c4 Nd6 41. Nxd6 Kxd6.

Finally the conditions are right! 38. … c5 attacks the knight, so White no longer has the option of playing the (previously) effective b2-b4 break. After 39. Nb5 (39. Nb3 b6 40. Nd2 Rb8 or 40. … Rg8 and Black holds firm) 39. … Nh6 40. Rf6 Rg7 41. Nd6 Rb8

White’s pieces are optically impressive but they have no real prospects for improvement, e.g., 42. f3 Ng8 43. Rf4 Nh6 or 42. c4 Ng4 43. Rf3 d4 with an equal position.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>36. ...</td>
<td>Nf7</td>
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<td>37. e5+</td>
<td>(0:06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Rf3</td>
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<tr>
<td>38. ...</td>
<td>Nh6</td>
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<td>39.</td>
<td>Rf6</td>
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A player must always be wary of making a committing move just before the time control—chess history is replete with examples of model games that were spoiled by such a move—but this position is ripe for either 40. b4 or 40. c4. Whereas 40. b4 is fully consistent with a strategy of restraint, and is clearly a good move that can be made after minimal calculation, the move 40. c4 does indeed significantly change the dynamics of the position. Whether those changes would be to Carlsen’s advantage would require quite a bit of calculation and assessment, which in turn requires time—and time is not a resource that Magnus had at this moment.

After 40. c4, there are a half-dozen candidate moves requiring assessment. Some can be examined rather quickly, e.g., 40. ... c5?! 41. Nb3 Kc6 42. Nxa5+ Kb6 43. Nb3 d4 (the point of Black’s attempt—to try to lock up the position) 44. a5+ Kc6 45. Nc1! and White has too many trumps in the position: his knight’s ideal post on d3 and the strong pawn lever b2-b4, not to mention that Black is down a pawn. Similarly, 40. ... Ng4 41. cxd5 exd5 (41. ... Nxf6? 42. exf6 and Black loses on the spot due to the upcoming 43. dxe6+; or 41. ... exd5 42. Rf3, and White has succeeded in creating weaknesses on Black’s queenside) 42. Rd6+ Kc8 (42. ... Ke7? 43. f3 Nh6 44. Ne6! Rf7 45. Nc5, and both the b- and g-pawns are attacked) 43. f4 is clearly favorable for White, so this line would quickly pass Magnus’ inspection as well.

Also after 40. c4, the move 40. ... dxc4 seems counterintuitive, yet still it would need to be carefully examined. A sample line is 41. Rd1 Kc8 42. Nxe6 Rge7 (another sharp move deserving attention here is 42. ... Rf7!? 43. Rxg6 Ng4 44. Nf4 Rxe5 45. Rd4 Rd7 46. Rxd7 Kxd7 47. Nhx Nxf2 48. Kxf2 Rhx5 but
White’s pawns should be faster than Black’s) 43. Nf4 Rxe5 44. Rxc6 Ng4 with a sharp position that favors White.

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 44. ... Ng4

Much more difficult to assess quickly is 40. ... Nf5. After 41. Nb3 Kc7 (if 41. ... b6?! then 42. c5 is strong) 42. Nxa5 Ra8 43. Nb3 dxc4 44. Nc5 Nd4 45. Re4 Kb6! 46. Nxe6 (46. Nxb7 Rxb7 47. Rxd4 Kc5) 46. ... Nxe6 47. Rxe6 Rxa4 48. Rf6 Kc5

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 48. ... Kc5

The e-pawn is indeed dangerous and White’s chances are better, but there is no doubt that Black’s queenside pawns provide some counterplay.

These “thickets of variations,” especially with Carlsen’s limited time, most likely prompted him to play the consistent 40. b4—quickly—instead of the sharp and unclear 40. c4.

40. ... axb4 (0:07)
41. cxb4 (0:56) Ng8 (0:57)
42. Rf3 (0:50) Nh6 (0:57)
43. a5 (0:50) Nf5 (0:57)

Both players seek out the optimal squares for their pieces and pawns. A thematic plan for White would be to increase the pressure by creating a second weakness in Black’s position (in addition to the e6-pawn), in the form of either a weak pawn, a weak square, or an open file in order to penetrate with a rook.

44. Nb3 (0:50) Kc7 (0:49)
45. Nc5 (0:50)

A strong alternative is 45. Rc1 with pressure against the c6-pawn (and, by extension, Black’s entire queenside) due to possible threats of a5-a6 or b4-b5. The defensive move 45. ... Kb8 won’t do the trick for Black; White can hit hard with 46. a6 Rc7 (46. ... g5 is relatively better) 47. Rfc3 bxa6 48. Ra1! and Black’s queenside is crumbling.
Black should aim for counterplay immediately: 45. Rc1 g5 is his best hope. The game might continue 46. hxg5 Rxg5 47. Kh3 (the threat was 47. ... Nh4+)

Black will now have to decide which of two precarious moves will give some chances to hold: 47. ... Rg4 or 47. ... Ne7. (47. ... Kb8 48. a6! is not an option for Black.)

After 47. ... Rg4 48. b5 Ra4 49. bxc6 bxc6 50. Rfc3 (hitting the now-weak pawn on c6) 50. ... Ne7 51. Ne5 Rxa5 52. Nxe6+ Kd7 53. Nc5+ Kc7 54. Rb3

White’s trumps include the mobile pawn duo on the e- and f-files, the active position of his pieces, and Black’s weak pawns on c6 and h5. Black’s position is difficult to defend. But the alternative 47. ... Ne7 is no panacea: 48. Nc5 Rxe5 49. b5 d4 (49. ... cxb5 50. Nd3+ Kd6 51. Nxe5 Kxe5 52. Rb3 and White’s rooks will wreak havoc on the open board) 50. b6+ Kc8 51. Rb3! Rd8

52. a6 Rxc5 (forced) 53. Rxc5 bxa6 54. b7+ Kc7 55. Rhx5 d3 56. b8(Q)+! Rxb8 57. Rxd3
and Black will be hard-pressed to hold this position against White’s rooks and ready-to-roll g-pawn.

45. ... Kb8 (0:39)

Position after 45. ... Kb8

46. Rb1 (0:49) Ka7 (0:37)
47. Rd3 (0:46) Rc7 (0:30)

Position after 47. ... Rc7

48. Ra3 (0:28) Nd4 (0:27)
49. Rd1 (0:28) Nf5 (0:25)
50. Kh3 (0:28)

Vlad’s Viewpoint

Karjakin played his “trademark king maneuver” to a7, and he defended very well—up to a point. Watching live, I thought it was already close to a draw after 47. Rd3 Rc7. If you look at the position now compared to the one after move 25, here Black has a knight on f5 and his king is protecting the queenside, improving his position enormously. It’s clear that Magnus has spoiled a big part of his advantage; something has once again gone quite seriously wrong in what was a better endgame, a situation that is his cup of tea. But from this moment on with a draw almost on the board and after things have gone wrong, he started to concentrate and created some problems for Karjakin—as much as it’s possible to do in this position. And now again we see the same old story from Karjakin; he starts to play too passively.
Position after 50. Kh3

Position after 53. Rd2

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

The maneuver 50. Kh3 and 51. f3 was very good. Even so, White is faced with the difficult question of how to improve his position. He has a very nice knight on c5, but how to convert this to a win?

50. ... Nh6 (0:23)
51. f3 (0:27)

This move introduces the possibility of g3-g4, with its objectives of opening a file for White’s rooks and/or obtaining a passed pawn on the kingside.

51. ... Rf7 (0:18)
52. Rd4 (0:21) Nf5 (0:17)
53. Rd2 (0:18)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

It is difficult to break through with b5. But in the position after 53. Rd2, Black shouldn’t just stay put, because if so, sooner or later, White will prepare b5. So in my opinion, Black should threaten to create some counterplay such as with 53. ... Rg7. Trying to play ... g5. And if White plays f4 to stop it he totally dismisses the entire kingside, so it will be almost impossible for White to win with his pawn on f4. Probably White will have to play 54. g4, which is possibly what Karjakin was afraid of. But after 54. ... Nh6, Black starts to create counterplay. In my opinion it’s very close to a draw. But Sergey decided to stay passive which has served him well in many games before this. Here, however, it’s clear that if you just do nothing then one day White will push b4-b5. Carlsen played a very good game from here on out.
Black’s position is tenable after 53. ... Rg7 54. g4 Nh6 55. Rg2 Rge7. White can win a pawn with 56. gxh5 gxh5 57. Rg5, but Black’s pieces land on excellent squares after 57. ... Nf5 58. Rhx5 Rf8 (the knight must be protected, otherwise 59. Nxe6 and 60. Rxf5), and Black’s now-active pieces provide full compensation for the pawn: 59. Rg5 b6! 60. axb6 (60. Nd3 Rf8 61. h5 Rg7) 60. ... Kxb6 61. h5 Kxb5 =.

Ernesto Inarkiev in American Chess Magazine promotes the same idea—seeking counterplay with g6-g5—but with the other rook, via 53. ... Rg8. The tactical justification is that 54. Nxe6? is met with 54. ... Re7 55. Nf4 Rxe5, with equal chances. 54. f4 stops any ideas of counterplay with g6-g5, but it also nixes White’s chances on the kingside, because g3-g4 would no longer be effective, and Black’s knight is secure on the excellent f5-square. Another active possibility for White is 54. g4, but Black is fine after 54. ... Nh6 55. gxh5 (or 55. Rg2 hxg4+ 56. fxg4 Rf4! 57. Nxe6 Rxb4) 55. ... gxh5

Here 56. Nxe6 would again be countered tactically by 56. ... Re7 57. Nd4 Rxe5. Black holds the balance with his newly active pieces and the attackable targets in White’s position.

53. ... Rh7 (0:15)

A “mysterious rook move,” according to Aron Nimzowitsch. Such a rook move is played with the intent of discouraging (or, in this case, virtually preventing) the opponent from offering a pawn exchange that would open up the file for the rook; here, White cannot play 54. g4 due to … hxg4+ 55. fxg4 Rhx4+.

54. Rb3 (0:16) Ree7 (0:14)
In an almost-identical position later in the game, White broke through with 57. b5. The only difference is the placement of White’s rooks, currently on b3 and d2, as opposed to their placement on b1 and d3 after 56. … Rhh7, and this difference changes the assessment of b4-b5 in the two respective positions. After 55. b5 in the current position, the rook on b3 cannot perform the two required duties at the same time: recapture the pawn (after 55. … cxb5) and also keep Black’s knight off of the e3-square. So after 55. b5 cxb5 56. Rxb5 Ne3 57. Rdb2 (or 57. Rd3 Nc4) 57. … Nc4, Black’s defenses are standing firm.

The b7-pawn is protected and White cannot penetrate via b6; so the circumstances are not ideal for 55. b5. But this Sword of Damocles continues to hang over Karjakin’s head. From Carlsen’s perspective, the temptation of b4-b5 is present on every move, and he is looking for the right moment to play it.

55. Rdd3  (0:15)
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**
Position after 55. ... Rh8

55. ... Rh8  (0:09)

Another move made, another slightly different position, and another important moment to assess the consequences of the b4-b5 pawn break. Black’s saving grace is that his rook on the eighth rank can “come to the rescue” after 56. b5 cxb5 57. Rxb5 Rc8

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**
Position after 61. Kf4

After 61. ... Nd8 62. Kg5 Re8, all of White’s pieces are applying pressure, but there is no breakthrough on either the kingside or queenside. White’s king can win a pawn if he so chooses, but then Black’s rooks become activated, with full compensation—or more.
From Analysis Diagram A, another bold try is 61. … hxg4 62. fxg4 g5+ 63. hxg5 Nh8. But the knight’s temporary absence from the fray allows White to strike hard: 64. Ke3 Nf7 65. a6! bxa6 66. Ra3 (this is the right rook to move first to the a-file, as after 66. … Rxc5 67. Rxc5, White’s third-rank rook is on a3 attacking the pawn, not b3) 66. … Rc6 67. Rb5

Grandmaster spectators watching the game were asking themselves: Is Black in zugzwang? Not quite. It’s true that no pawn can advance without major concessions, and his rooks are currently ideally placed—the rook on e7 is protecting the e6-pawn as well as the b7-pawn, after White plays the inevitable b4-b5; and the rook on h8 is preventing g3-g4, due to … hxg4+ fxg4 Rxh4+, as seen earlier, and (more importantly) it is also ready to counter b4-b5 by maneuvering to c7, to protect the b-pawn while attacking the white knight. But Black does have several available moves. He can safely play 56. … Rhf8, as the move 57. g4 would not be fatal after 57. … Nh6. Likewise, his king can move to a8, and although White can hit hard from there, Black will survive the attack. Last but not least, Black’s position is still safe after 56. … Nh6. Instead, Karjakin chooses a move that allows Carlsen to play 57. b5 under favorable circumstances.

56. …  Rhh7? (0:08)

Perhaps misled by the almost-identical position reached after 54. … Ree7, with its subtle yet crucial difference—his knight can no longer access the e3-
square after 57. b5 cxb5 58. Rxb5—Karjakin makes a fatal mistake. There is no longer a black rook on the eighth rank, and therefore it cannot be repositioned to the c7-square to help defend against White’s queenside onslaught.

After the game Sergey mentioned 56. … Nh6 as a preferable option, and indeed it is. 57. b5 does not then work, as after 57. … cxb5 58. Rdb3 (more accurate than the immediate 58. Rxb5 Rc8 59. Rdb3 Nf5) Rc8 59. Rxb5 Rcc7 60. g4 Nf7, White is unable to defend the e-pawn without conceding his initiative, resulting in equal chances. Magnus could defer the pawn break with 57. Rdb3 but after 57. … Rc8 58. g4 Nf7 Black should be able to hold the position:

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ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 58. ... Nf7
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Now 59. Nd3 g5! provides equal chances after 60. gxh5 gxh4 61. Rg1 Rh8 62. Rg7 Rxhr5 63. f4 Rf5, with dynamic counterplay.

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ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 58. ... Nf7
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Anish Giri in *New In Chess* proposes the stronger alternative 59. Re1, and after 59. … Rf8 60. g5! (rendering Black’s knight almost immobile) 60. … Nd8 61. Kg3 Ref7 62. Rc1, White is winning, due to Black’s restricted knight. But Black need not acquiesce to immobility: after 59. Re1 he can play 59. … Nh6 60. Kg3 Rf8 61. Reb1 Rc8, again holding firm.

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ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 61. ... Rc8
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The game may continue with the logical 62. b5 cxb5 63. Rxb5 Rcc7 64. Kf4
Now Black is not able to play 64. ... Nf7 in this position (which, if White responded with 65. R1b3, would transpose to the identical position in Diagram A in the analysis following 55. ... Rh8)–due to the winning pawn break 65. a6!, with forcing lines: 65. ... b6 (65. ... bxa6 66. Ra1 Rc6 67. g5xh5 xg5 68. Rb5 Nd8 69. Rxa6+ Rxa6 70. Rxa6+ Kb8 71. Kg5 and White wins) 66. Rxb6 Rxc5 67. Rb7+ Rxb7 68. Rxb7+ Kxa6 69. Rxf7 Rc4+ 70. Kg5 hxg4 71. fxg4 Re4

Imagine here that the pawns had not been exchanged—that White still has a pawn on f3 and Black still has a pawn on h5–then White would win easily with Nxa6! because after ... Rc4+, White’s king will be safe on g3 and his threats are overwhelming. But due to the ... hxg4 fxg4 pawn exchange, 69. Nxa6 does not work in this position: 69. ... Rc4+ 70. Ke3 Re4+! and White must accede to the perpetual, or else–if he tries to avoid it with 71. Kf2 Re2+ 72. Kf1 Rf4+ 73. Ke1–Black wins with the surprising 73. ... Kb6! and Black’s threats are suddenly overwhelming, whereas White’s pieces have become spectators.

and Black cannot hold this rook ending: 72. Kf6 Rxg4 73. Kxe6 d4 74. Kd5, and the e-pawn will cost Black his rook.

But Black can fight back successfully from Analysis Diagram B above (after 64. Kf4) with 64. ... hxg4! (exchanging these pawns is the key) 65. fxg4 Nf7 66. a6 bxa6! 67. Ra1 Rc6 68. Rba5 Rec7

From Analysis Diagram C: 69. Rxa6+ Rxa6 70. Rxa6+ Kb8 and Black is fine, because 71. Nxe6 is countered by 71. ... Rc4+ 72. Kg3 Nxe5, and 71. Ra5 is met
by 71. ... Rc8 with an almost mutual-zugzwang position!

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

*Position after 71. ... Rc8*

Black with the move in this position would lose—e.g., 72. ... Rc6 73. g5 Kc7 74. Nxe6+ Rxe6 75. Ra7+ and 76. Rxf7—but White has the move, and his forces are almost immobilized by Black’s drawing threats. White cannot move the king (due to 72. ... Nxe5), cannot move the knight (due to 72. ... Rc4+), cannot move the h-pawn (due to 72. ... g5+), and 72. g5 fails after 72. ... Rh8 (a necessary move, which is why Black could not have played 71. ... Rc6 instead of 71. ... Rc8). So 72. Rb5+ Ka8 73. Rb7 Nh6 74. Rh7 Nxg4 75. Kxg4 Rxc5, and the rook ending will be drawn—by a whisker.

57. **b5** (0:12)

Played very quickly by Carlsen.

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

But Karjakin decided to stay put, and so b4-b5 eventually did get played. Maybe later Sergey still had certain drawing chances, but probably it’s already lost as Black’s position starts to fall apart after 57. b5.

57. ... **cxb5** (0:08)
58. **Rxb5** (0:12) **d4** (0:02)

Also deserving attention is 58. ... Re8, but White will still prevail—albeit with difficulty—in the forcing line 59. Rb6 Rc7 60. Nxe6 Rc6 61. Nf4 Rxe5 62. Nxg6 Re1 63. g4 Ng7 64. Rxc6 bxc6 65. Nf4.
then have a wide range of candidate moves, but he can only play one move; so which move should he play? The immediate 62. g4? fails to the simple tactic 62. ... Nhx4! 63. Kxh4 g5+. A leading candidate move would be 62. Rb3, but Black can still force White to finish the game with accuracy, after 62. ... Rc1 (62. ... Rxb3 fails to 63. Rxb3 Rc7 64. Nhxg6 Rc3 65. Rxc3 dxc3 66. Nf4) 63. Ne2 Rxe1 64. Rb2 Re7

A hallmark of strong players is fierce resistance, even in lost positions. Make your opponent earn it on every single move!

59. Rb6 (0:12) Rc7 (0:01)
60. Nxe6 (0:02) Rc3 (0:01)
61. Nf4 (0:17)

61. ... Rhc7?! (0:15)

Despite a feeling of inevitability, Karjakin could have put up stronger resistance with 61. ... Rg7. Carlsen would

Now White’s winning advantage is maintained with 65. f4 (the only decisive move; not 65. Nxd4? Nxd4 66. Rxd4 R1xe5 and Black has real drawing chances) 65. ... Rd7 66. g4 hxg4+ 67. Kxg4 Rh1 68. Kg5, and White’s active king successfully penetrates into his opponent’s position.

This may not be the only winning line;
62. Rf6 also provides opportunities for victory, but White’s path to success after 61. ... Rg7 is much narrower and trickier than after the simplifying 61. ... Rhc7.

62. Nd5  (0:16)

Some may prefer 62. Rgx6 which also wins: 62. ... Rxd3 63. Nxd3 Rc3 64. Rf6!, and White’s two extra pawns are decisive.

62. ...  Rxd3  (0:14)
63. Nxc7  (0:16)  Kb8  (0:13)
64. Nb5  (0:16)  Kc8  (0:13)
65. Rgx6  (0:09)  Rfx3  (0:13)
66. Kg2  (0:08)  Rb3  (0:12)
67. Nd6+  (0:08)  Nxd6  (0:12)
68. Rxd6  (0:08)

and White mates in 43 according to the tablebases, but things can easily go wrong: After 73. ... Kc6 and the natural move 74. Rf5? b5, the position is theoretically drawn. The margin is so close that if it were Black to move after 73. ... Kc6, the position would be a draw. One false step and all of White’s winning efforts would be for naught!

But after 68. ... Kc7 69. Rxd4 Rb5 70. Ra4, the win is straightforward: 70. ... Rxc5 71. Kf3 (the winning move) 71. ... Kd7 (or 71. ... Re6 72. Rc4+ Kd6 73. Rb4 Re5 74. Rxh7 Rxh5 75. Rb6+ Ke7 76. Rg6 +) 72. a6 bxa6 73. Rxh6

68. ...  Re3  (0:12)

68. ... Kc7 would hold out longer and pose more practical problems for White: 69. Rxd4 Rb5 (69. ... Kc6 70. Re4 wins; or 69. ... b5 70. axb6+ e.p. Rxb6 71. Kf3 wins). Now some sources give the variation 70. e6 Rxh5 71. e7 Re5 72. Rd5 (the only winning move!) 72. ... Rxe7 73. Rxh5

Position after 68. Rxd6

Position after 73. Rxa6

White will have no big problems winning this ending because the rook can force its way to g5 to ultimately win the h-pawn, then White can push the g- and h-pawns to victory. In addition, most
pawn endgames with doubled pawns on g3 and g5 are winning for White, which prevents Black from exchanging rooks on g5.

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

White wins

69. e6 (0:08) Kc7 (0:05)

Position after 69. ... Kc7

70. Rxd4 (0:08) Rxe6 (0:05)
71. Rd5 (0:08) Rh6 (0:05)
72. Kf3 (0:08) Kb8 (0:04)
73. Kf4 (0:08) Ka7 (0:04)
74. Kg5 (0:08) Rh8 (0:04)
75. Kf6 (0:07)

1 – 0

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

So all-in-all, it was a really bad day for Karjakin because from moves 12 to 20 he made many mistakes, then made mistakes while trying to hold a difficult endgame—a task which is one of his primary strengths. It was really a big disappointment for Karjakin, especially after he had seemingly hit his stride in games eight and nine.

But it was not a flawless game from Carlsen, either. In some parts of the game he played well, in other parts he made mistakes. Sergey played far below his level, definitely his lowest level of the match. But overall this was an interesting game. Maybe for top-20 players this kind of game would be a decent standard, but not for exceptional players like Magnus and Sergey.
Carlsen vs. Karjakin—World Chess Championship

Magnus Carlsen reacts to his victory in Game 10
Trading pressure for space:
Karjakin gains space on the kingside but releases the tension in the position. His likely motive is risk-free simplification, so he can split the point and move one step closer to the rapid playoff.

Carlsen seeks complications.
The position is quiet but Magnus tries to light up some fireworks anyway. His attempts, although praiseworthy, are handled correctly by his opponent, and the game ultimately fizzles into a draw.

Is it a strength or a weakness?
The advanced pawn is both a strength and a weakness: White must blockade it and Black must defend it. These forces cancel each other out, resulting in a drawn game.
GAME 11

Introduction
All tied up! The match score is again equal, so neither player is inclined to go out on a limb (or walk the plank, as it often turns out to be). A quiet line in the Ruy Lopez leads to a balanced middlegame. Carlsen tries to inject some tension into the position, but neither player can make any meaningful headway, and a draw is the logical outcome.

Ruy Lopez [C77]

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

1.  e4  (1:40)  e5  (1:40)
2.  Nf3  (1:40)  Nc6  (1:40)
3.  Bb5  (1:40)

The Ruy Lopez was clearly the favored choice of both players. Ten of the 16 games (including the rapid playoff)—over 60%—began with these moves, as recommended by the Spanish cleric Ruy López de Segura in his famous chess book, *Libro de la invención liberal y arte del juego del Axedrez* (Book of the liberal invention and art of the game of Chess), published in 1561.
Position after 5. ... Be7

This position was reached six times in the match: games 2, 4, 6, 11, 13, and 15. In each of those six games, Karjakin commanded the white pieces.

3. ... a6 (1:40)
4. Ba4 (1:40) Nf6 (1:40)
5. 0-0 (1:40) Be7 (1:40)

6. d3 (1:40) b5 (1:40)
7. Bb3 (1:40) d6 (1:40)
8. a3 (1:40) 0-0 (1:40)

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT
Magnus played a solid line, one of the most solid against this a3-Nc3 setup. But with precise reaction his opponent could have been a bit better with no risk.

Libro de la invención liberal y arte del juego del Axdedrez, written by Ruy López de Segura (1561). The book analyzes 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5, although the opening first appears in Lucena’s chess manual (1497). To put these dates in perspective: unlike the readers of Lucena’s book, Ruy López’s audience had the benefit of knowing that the earth revolves around the sun, rather than vice versa! Ruy López’ book includes practical advice for chess-players, such as: “...when playing if it is a clear day, and sunny, have your opponent facing the sun, because it will blind him; and if it were dark and playing by the light of fire, move with your right hand; because it disturbs the view, and the right hand will cast a shadow on the chessboard; so he will not be able to see where to play his pieces.”
Finally the game takes on a life of its own. Carlsen had tried 9. ... Na5 in game two and ended up in a slightly worse position. The first rapid game (played later) saw the move 9. ... Nb8, leading to equality. Then 9. ... Na5 again appeared in the third rapid game. Carlsen went on to win that game, thereby taking firm control of the playoff.

As was the case in a similar position in game two, Black would welcome Bxe6, which would open the f-file for his rook and would place another pawn (albeit a doubled pawn) in the center to cover important squares. An important consideration is that White’s knight has already been played to c3, which (after 10. Bxe6 fxe6) is not an effective square for the knight. Top grandmasters have attempted ... Be6 one move earlier, but White can try to take advantage of the fact that his knight does not yet occupy c3 by playing 9. Bxe6 fxe6 10. c3, with flexible options, as seen in Anand-Aronian in 2007 (1-0, 40 moves, Mainz Classic Rapid).


This move is becoming the preferred choice of top grandmasters. The other main move, 10. ... Na5, leads to a slight edge for White after 11. Nxf6+ Bxf6 12. Bxe6 fxe6 13. b4 Nc6 14. c3

White’s strategic pawn breaks can turn out to be more effective than Black’s due to the immobility of the doubled e-pawns.

11. Nxd4 (1:40)  exd4 (1:40)
12. Nxf6+ (1:40)

A serious alternative is 12. Nxe7+, as in Ivanchuk-Svidler 2013 (although the move order in that game was 11. Nxe7+ Qxe7 12. Nxd4 exd4.) That game continued 13. Bg5 (per Wesley So, this is “the most critical move and the only way to trouble Black”; although our analysis does not find any convincing way for White to gain an advantage) 13. ... Bxb3 14. cxb3 h6 15. Bh4 Qe6 16. f4 e5 17. b4 Rfe8 18. f5 Qe5 19. Bg3 Qe7 20. bxc5 dxc5 21. e5, with what may appear to be serious attacking chances for White, but Black has fully equal prospects after 21. ... Nd5.
In fact, Ivanchuk over-pressed with 22. f6 Qe6 23. fxg7 Ne3 24. Qd2 Nxf1 25. Rxf1 Qg6, after which he struggled to find sufficient compensation for the Exchange and eventually lost (0-1, 41 moves, Thessaloniki FIDE Grand Prix).

12. ... Bxf6 (1:40)
13. Bxe6 (1:40) fxe6 (1:40)
14. f4 (1:40)

14. Qg4 has been played more often, and may simply end up transposing to the game continuation; but in any case Black is equal after either 14. ... Qc8 or 14. ... Qd7. More recently, our special contributor Vladimir Kramnik essayed 14. a4 against Alexei Shirov, achieving some advantage in the opening (½-½, 54 moves, Sochi, 2017).

14. ... c5 (1:39)
15. Qg4 (1:40)

Until this moment both players had been moving quickly, but here Magnus paused for 13 minutes to check his analysis, to see if this move order—14. f4 followed by 15. Qg4, rather than vice versa—makes any real difference in the position.

15. ... Qd7 (1:26)
16. f5 (1:34)

16. ... Rae8 (1:18)

The game is equal after either 16. ... exf5 or after the move chosen by Magnus.

17. Bd2 (1:30) c4 (1:09)

Neither player is incurring any risk, but Carlsen attempts to stir the pot, just to see how his opponent will react.
A strange and unnecessary move by Karjakin, but not one that does any real damage to his position. GM Susan Polgar noted that 18. h3 would not be her first choice nor her second choice, nor even her third choice. But it may have prompted Magnus to see if he could try for more…

18. ... c3 (0:57)

Carlsen stirs the pot a little more to see if he can get a chance to work his magic in an unbalanced position.

**VLAD’S VIEWPOINT**

Then Magnus came up with the idea of 18. ... c3 followed by 19. ... d5, which is a very nice and interesting way of playing, but I think that instead, it was possible to play for a win with 18. ... e5. That was the only chance to play for a win. It’s a bit dubious strategically, but the position becomes unbalanced. Black should try to push pawns on the queenside, while White will probably try to push pawns on the kingside. It’s still probably pretty equal after 18. ... e5, but potentially there is fight in this setup.

The reason 18. ... e5 looks strategically dubious is that Black’s pawn has moved to the same color square as his bishop, thus limiting its mobility, but the slight advantage of 18. ... e5 is that the queenside pawn mass might be able to gain some momentum.

White’s most ambitious plan is to push g2-g4-g5 under favorable circumstances, but Black’s counterplay on the queenside comes much faster: 18. ... e5 19. Qf3 (to push the g-pawn) 19. ... Rc8 and now 20. g4 can be stopped in its tracks with 20. ... Qe7. Black’s counterplay then proceeds unhindered.

Rather than overextending himself on the kingside, White should counter Black’s action on the queenside, e.g., 18. ... e5 19. b3 d5 20. a4, and the balance is maintained.

19. bxc3 (1:16) d5 (0:56)

A nice attempt to muddy the waters. Karjakin must have quickly understood that 20. Bg5 is sufficient to maintain equilibrium, but he also has a wide choice of reasonable-looking moves to consider. Alas, several of those moves can lead to a worse position. Difficulties await after 20. fxe6 Qxe6 21. Qxe6 Rxe6 22. exd5.
Re2 23. Rf2 (White’s pieces are awkwardly placed; if instead 23. Bf4 then 23. … dxc3 24. Rac1 Bd4+ 25. Kh1 h6 and Black has a significant edge) 23. … Rxf2 24. Kxf2 Bg5+! 25. Ke2 Bxd2 26. Kxd2. Although the top computer engines eventually decide that White does have a narrow path to the draw, in the real-life game situation, White must walk on a very thin tightrope in order to maintain the balance.

From here, White would have to find 28. c4 Rxg2 29. Kf1. Other tries here are insufficient, such as 29. c5? Kf7 (now White cannot trade rooks because Black can then force a passed pawn on either side of the board, while Black’s king can hold up the two passed white pawns) or 29. Rc1? Rg1+ (same idea in a slightly different form) 30. Kd2 Rxc1 31. Kxc1 Kf7 32. Kd2 Kf6:

Black wins this pawn ending. He threatens to get a passed pawn on the kingside, then play a timely b5xc4, adding the newly passed d-pawn to the mix; or if White plays c4-c5, then the prior plan does the trick, with Black able to create passed pawns on both the kingside and queenside.

No better for White after 19. … d5 is the plausible-looking 20. Rae1. This confrontation of rook works only in Black’s favor: 20. … dxc3 21. Bg5 exf5

Again White must walk the tightrope: 22. Rxf5? loses to 22. … Bd4+ 23. Kf1 (otherwise 23. … Rxf5 wins a full rook) 23. … h5! 24. Qf3 dxe4 25. dxe4 b4! (an effective tactic, opening the square b5 for the queen) 26. axb4 dxe4 27. dxe4 g6 28. Rf4 Qb5+ and Black wins the errant bishop on g5.
So White must play 22. exf5, but after 22. ... h5! (a common motif) 23. Qf4 (not 23. Qxh5? Rx e1 24. Rx e1 Qx f5 and the bishop is lost) 24. ... Bxg5 24. Qxg5 Rx e1 25. Rx e1 Qx f5 26. Qx f5 Rx f5 27. Re6 Rf6, and White certainly has chances to hold this rook endgame, but Black is a pawn ahead with his king ready to enter the fray.

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 27. ... Rf6

A third (and better) option for White after 19. ... d5 is 20. c4, which allows him to reach equality after 20. ... dxe4 21. cxb5 (after 21. Qxe4 bxc4 Black has a slight edge) 21. ... e3 22. Bb4 exf5 23. Rxf5 Rf7 24. bxa6 Qc6 =.

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 24. ... Qc6

White can even force an immediate repetition with 25. Ra5 Bd8 26. Rf5 Bf6.

These variations are lengthy, but they are within reach of the world’s top grandmasters. So Karjakin took his time—26 minutes—to work out the intricacies of the position, and his reply kept everything under control.

20. Bg5 (0:50)

After 18. ... c3 and 19. ... d5, which are not bad at all—it’s quite a nice tactical try—then comes 20. Bg5 and the position gets very dry. I think Magnus was still trying something, but the position never really emerged from equality with a high drawish tendency.

20. ... Bxg5 (0:51)

21. Qxg5 (0:50) dxe4 (0:49)
The game steers directly toward the drawing haven, but both players must still be alert for traps. If here White had chosen 22. dxe4 then Black must avoid the natural-looking sequence 22. ... dxc3?! (fine, though, is 22. ... exf5 23. exf5 and only then 23. ... dxc3) 23. f6! Qd4+ 24. Kh2!, when the only move to avoid a big disadvantage—or even worse—is 24. ... Rf7. But not 24. ... Rxf6?? when 25. Rad1! wins on the spot!

22. fxe6 (0:43)


Position after 24. ... e3

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 25. Rad1

Note why 24. Kh2 is mandatory in this variation instead of 24. Kh1: otherwise Black could save himself, and even claim the advantage, after 24. Kh1 Rxf6 25. Rad1 Rxf1+ (check!) 26. Rxf1 Qxe4.

22. fxe6 (0:43)
The advanced pawn is both a strength and a weakness: White must blockade it and Black must defend it. These forces cancel each other out, resulting in a drawn game.

29. Qc6 (0:17)  Re6 (0:19)
30. Qc8+ (0:15)  Kh7 (0:19)
31. c4 (0:15)  Qd2 (0:16)

The game now ends quickly, as the draw is readily apparent and there are no opportunities for further traps or complications.

32. Qxe6 (0:15)  Qxe1+ (0:16)
33. Kh2 (0:15)  Qf2 (0:16)
34. Qe4+ (0:15)

½ - ½
I watched this game live with another former World Champion, Anatoly Karpov, and former Women’s World Champion Hou Yifan. We were in Romania where there was a small chess tournament, and we were watching Karjakin/Carlsen live and discussing the game. I remember we analyzed many different variations and possibilities, but somehow everything was leading to a draw. It was almost impossible to find a line which would lead to someone’s advantage, so a draw was the logical result of this game. Probably Karjakin wanted to play it safe after the beating he took in game ten, and Carlsen didn’t feel like risking too much in this game. He did try to win, but there was not much for either side to prove. It was a good, normal, solid game of chess that was always nearly equal, and it’s difficult to imagine any other result for this game.
Sergey Karjakin between moves during Game 11

Magnus Carlsen assesses the battle during Game 11
Peaceful, easy feeling:
Carlsen plays a theoretical novelty, but not one that upsets the tranquility.

The secret’s out:
Magnus reveals his intentions by initiating a series of exchanges, leaving only one possible result for the game: a quick, effortless draw.

One final trap:
The position is equal and simple… any reasonable move is good enough for a draw… right?
GAME 12

Introduction
This game turned out to be the fastest World Championship regulation game ever played – including Bobby Fischer’s famous game-two forfeit to Boris Spassky in 1972 (Fischer later won the match) and our special contributor Vladimir Kramnik’s game-five protest forfeit to Veselin Topalov in 2006 (Kramnik later won the match) – because those games required one hour to elapse before the forfeits were awarded!

Carlsen’s strategy (as he explained after the game) was to benefit from what became, in effect, several additional rest days, because Sergey had been forced to prepare diligently, whereas Magnus knew that he could steer the game into a well-known drawing line with no real winning chances for either side.

Ruy Lopez [C67]

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

1. \textbf{e4} (1:40) \hspace{1cm} \textbf{e5} (1:40)
2. \textbf{Nf3} (1:40) \hspace{1cm} \textbf{Nc6} (1:40)
3. \textbf{Bb5} (1:40)
Another World Championship game and another Ruy Lopez. Karjakin essayed the Berlin Defense (3. ... Nf6) three times, including game ten, which was his only loss during the 12-game match. Clearly his team had prepared for a repeat of the same opening variation, so he continued to rely on the Berlin Defense as his main stalwart against Magnus’ Ruy.

3. ... Nf6 (1:40)

Another World Championship game and another Ruy Lopez. Karjakin essayed the Berlin Defense (3. ... Nf6) three times, including game ten, which was his only loss during the 12-game match. Clearly his team had prepared for a repeat of the same opening variation, so he continued to rely on the Berlin Defense as his main stalwart against Magnus’ Ruy.

4. 0-0 (1:40)

Carlsen deviates from 4. d3 as played in game ten, and instead repeats the opening line from game three, until his tenth
move.

4. ... Nxe4 (1:40)
5. Re1 (1:40)

Once again Magnus avoids the famous Berlin Wall endgame, characterized by 5. d4 Nd6 6. Bxc6 dxc6 7. dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8.

![ANALYSIS DIAGRAM](image)

Position after 8. ... Kxd8

In his World Championship title defense against Anand in 2014, Carlsen played White against the Berlin Wall three times, including his match-clinching victory in game 14. But he has not played it in a classical game (as White) since then.

5. ... Nd6 (1:40)
6. Nxe5 (1:40) Be7 (1:40)
7. Bf1 (1:40) Nxe5 (1:40)
8. Rxe5 (1:40) 0-0 (1:40)
9. d4 (1:40) Bf6 (1:40)
10. Re1 (1:40)

This well-known position makes its first appearance in the match. As pointed out by our special contributor Vladimir Kramnik in his game three commentary, the 10. Re1 variation has become one of the main lines in the Ruy Lopez Berlin Defense.

10. ... Re8 (1:40)

Game four of the Steinitz-Zukertort World Championship Match, which was played 130 years ago(!) but only 2.5 miles away(!) at 80 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, now continued 11. c3 Rxе1 12. Qxe1 Nf5. This variation is still found in today’s grandmaster praxis, having been played as recently as May 2017 in Swiercz-Zherebukh ($\frac{1}{2}$-$\frac{1}{2}$, 31 moves, St. Louis Spring Classic-A). In a chess coincidence for the ages, the Steinitz-Zukertort Match moved from New York to St. Louis for games six through nine, which were played at the Harmonic Club at 18th and Olive – only 3.2 miles away from where the Swiercz-Zherebukh game was played at the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis! The first game of the 1886 match held in St. Louis (game six in the overall match) saw the same opening variation up to move six,
but White continued 6. Nc3.

Today’s most common retort to 10. Re1 is 10. … Nf5, which can transpose into the Steinitz-Zukertort game, but usually takes on a life of its own after 11. c3 d5.

11. Bf4 (1:40) Rxel (1:40)
12. Qxe1 (1:40) Ne8 (1:40)
13. c3 (1:40) d5 (1:40)
14. Bd3 (1:40) g6 (1:40)
15. Na3 (1:40)

Position after 15. Na3

Entering new theoretical territory but with the same expected result. The main move 15. Nd2 has been played at least 15 times at the top-GM level over the past several years— with all of those games having ended in a draw! The text-move 15. Na3 also maintains an equal game, with little opportunity for either side to stir up complications.

15. ... c6 (1:39)
16. Nc2 (1:40) Ng7 (1:38)
17. Qd2 (1:40) Bf5 (1:38)

Position before 18. Bxf5

Now Carlsen makes it clear that his intention is to exchange pieces and head for an early draw.

18. Bxf5 (1:40) Nxf5 (1:38)
19. Ne3 (1:40) Nxe3 (1:37)
20. Qxe3 (1:40) Qe7 (1:37)
21. Qxe7 (1:40) Bxe7 (1:37)
22. Re1 (1:40)

Position after 22. Re1

For the past four-and-a-half moves, each move has entailed exchanging a piece or offering to exchange a piece, so it would be easy to let one’s guard down—at precisely the wrong moment. Karjakin thought here for five minutes, making sure to avoid Carlsen’s simple trap: 22.
... Kf8?? loses to 23. Bh6+ Ke8 24. Bg5.

The twelve-game match has ended. Bring on the playoff!

But Sergey chose the safe and sufficient move.

22. ... Bf8 (1:32) 
23. Kf1 (1:40) f6 (1:32) 
24. g4 (1:40) Kf7 (1:32) 
25. h3 (1:40) Re8 (1:30) 
26. Rxe8 (1:40) Kxe8 (1:30)

A drawn result is imminent.

½ - ½
VLAD’S TAKE
ON THE TIEBREAK

GM Vladimir Kramnik has played in four World Championship matches: His famous victory over Garry Kasparov (2000), the drawn (albeit successful) title defense match against Péter Lékó (2004), his unification match win against Veselin Topalov (2006), and the loss to Viswanathan Anand (2008). These first-hand experiences at the highest level have provided him with the knowledge, insight, and credentials to comment on the 2016 match from a vantage point that very few players in history have ever attained.

While watching the high-pressure World Championship tiebreaks, what did you recall about your own World Championship tiebreak experiences?

I myself played one tiebreak, in the unification match in 2006 with Veselin Topalov. It was a level tiebreak. Of course we were tired, and there was a lot at stake, especially considering everything that had been going on around it. I was in a good state of mind and I just concentrated on the games and the moves I had to play. Somehow I managed not to think about the fact that I was playing the most important rapid chess games of my life. Topalov also played not badly at all. I managed to win the match.

Carlsen aimed for a quick draw in game 12. Was his strategy correct?

Magnus later claimed that he had planned to have a straightforward draw in game 12 in order to give himself more time to prepare for the rapids. But an additional day or two doesn’t make any difference in the playoff, especially since they had one rest day anyway. As Anish Giri tweeted after the game, and I liked his tweets: Magnus is a threat to himself, rather than a threat to Karjakin. Because he was uncharacteristically blundering and missing some moves, so he wanted the match to be decided in the four rapid games, where there is still room for a mistake, as opposed to one game, when there is not. In game 12, even as White, one mistake could be the final mistake. I didn’t see much risk for Magnus in that game, but apparently he had lost confidence in himself. So both players were lacking confidence, and that was the reason for the game 12 draw, in my opinion.

Leading up to the tiebreaks, how did you rate the players’ chances?

I expected an equal tiebreak, very equal. Maybe even to be decided in the blitz games, where I also rated the chances as equal.
What is the most important factor for the tiebreaks, as opposed to the 12-game match?

In tiebreaks it depends very much on your mental shape on tiebreak day. What happened before doesn’t matter so much, and even your relative strength doesn’t matter so much. What is important is to be in the right state of mind on that particular day. And for this tiebreak, it is clear that Magnus was in the right state of mind, and Sergey was not.

How did the players perform during the rapid tiebreaks?

Sergey played too slowly, he was thinking for too long. In rapid chess it’s important to make quick decisions; sometimes just to play a move that is not great, but you must play a move and push the clock. The time saved will become important when your opponent makes a mistake or miscalculation, which is unavoidable in rapid games. Then you will have enough time to handle it. But when the position is not so important, when you can play this move or that move and it doesn’t change things so much, then you just need to play such moves quickly, to save your time for the important moves.

One thing I noticed while I was watching live with the camera, something that was actually quite characteristic: When Karjakin was thinking on his moves, he was practically not physically moving at all. He was like a statue. Sometimes he would sit for two minutes at a time in one position. But this is a very bad sign in rapid chess. In these tiebreaks, you need a big push of adrenaline. If you have it, you physically move around more than in classical chess. And that’s a very good thing because it means you are awake, you are fully engaged. Carlsen was physically moving quite a lot, as players should do in quick time-control games. But Karjakin was in a statue position, and it was amazing, sometimes he didn’t move for three minutes. He was stuck, he was frozen. He was lacking that rush of adrenaline, which you need to win tiebreak events.

Could that problem be corrected between games? Can’t the coaches see it happening, and fix it?

It’s very difficult to adjust this mindset during the tiebreak match. Normally it has to be done before the games. It also can’t be done by the coaches; only the player himself can do it.

There are days when low energy can happen, it has happened to me sometimes, like rapid chess events where you play three or four games in a day. Sometimes you just feel emotionally empty, with no drive, no adrenaline. For some reason you are too slow, you are not precise, and it is just not working. Admittedly, it’s very bad luck for it to happen in the world championship tiebreak. But if your opponent is engaged and you are not, then you have almost no chance under those circumstances.

And Magnus was perfect in this regard, in my opinion. He was not too nervous and not too quiet. He was clearly a bit nervous, but in just the right dosage. But Karjakin was too quiet for rapid chess, not nervous enough, as strange as that may sound.
How different is the rapid time control from the classic time control? What “works” in the regulation games but not in the tiebreaks?

Karjakin had played his defensive strategy for the entire match, but in rapid chess, it simply doesn’t work. In general it is more difficult to defend than to attack, even if you are a good defender. In rapid chess you don’t have enough time, because you need to play accurate defensive moves. You need to calculate precisely, and that takes time. In the classical game you have time for it, but in rapid games, you don’t. In rapid you have to be quite active, you have to be ready to go into complications. Many mistakes are happening, and you have to be ready for a sharp battle, because it will occur, especially given that there are four rapid games. So it is difficult to hold onto the defensive side and then to take your chance when it comes. Karjakin continued to play in the same defensive manner, and I think it was a mistake.

Of course Magnus is great, he’s a fantastic player and it’s incredibly difficult to beat him, but Sergey should have tried everything possible to win it. Maybe you are not in the best shape, but it’s also possible that your opponent is in worse shape. So anything can happen. I understand that if Magnus would play his best chess, it’s very difficult for Sergey or anyone else to beat him, but who knew whether Magnus was going to play his best chess?

What are your thoughts about the outcome?

The tiebreak was pretty one-sided, which I didn’t expect. On this particular day Carlsen was very much superior and Karjakin didn’t have much of a chance. But it doesn’t mean that if they played again, the result would be the same. Maybe not. But on this particular day, maybe due to experience or other things, it’s clear that Carlsen was psychologically much better, and as a result, chess-wise he was much better as well.

It was absolutely deserved that Carlsen won. For Karjakin it was a big disappointment. All-in-all, he fought well, and in many ways it was a good match, a big clash, and very interesting. Maybe neither player was at his best, but there were a lot of interesting games and a lot of real chess content in the match. But I think Karjakin missed a very, very big chance to win it. Partly due to Magnus’ lack of form, and partly due to some mistakes in his preparation. Sergey might be satisfied in a way that he was fighting equally, but in the final analysis it is the result that matters.

Karjakin was closer than anyone else yet to beating Carlsen. Of course it was an incredible experience for him, a great learning experience, and I think he is capable of playing better than he played in the match. He is a very strong chessplayer.

What advice would you offer to Karjakin, for greater chances of success in the next World Championship cycle?

Sergey needs to free himself to be more offensive, more aggressive in his attitude and in his confidence, because his pure chess quality is very high. He is a bit too shy, he
needs to feel more confident that he can beat anyone. In the famous words of Tal – between the two evils of underestimating yourself and overestimating yourself, underestimating yourself is much worse. And I fully agree. It seems somehow in this match, that Sergey didn’t believe he can win. Even if you think your opponent is stronger than you are, which might be the case, you are still playing a world championship match, and it is all about winning. You go there to win. Then if it doesn’t happen, that’s too bad, but I had a feeling that Sergey decided that the final result was not too bad for him. But your attitude in the world championship match should be such: It’s about whether you win or you lose. If you win, you are in chess history. If you lose, whether you fought hard or not, it’s not so important. You are either world champion at the end of the match or you are not. In my opinion, that is the measuring point.

Sergey was a bit too shy to win the match. If he had been just a little bit more arrogant, so to speak, maybe he would be world champion now. So that’s a good lesson for him for the next cycle. He should have been more confident, more aggressive in his attitude, in a good way, in a sporting way.

What is the outlook for Carlsen as the next World Championship cycle approaches?

Every player goes through difficult periods. Maybe this is the first truly bad period for Magnus, it has been a half-year of playing below his level, which is not too dramatic. I’ve had a few periods in my career like that. You can’t let it go on for too long. The question is whether it’s just temporary bad form, or whether there is something he has to fix. One bad tournament can happen to anyone, even two bad tournaments, where you might be tired, or might not take it as seriously. But a match for the world championship is very serious. So it’s clear that he is in a certain crisis for the moment, but it’s also clear that he is fully capable of overcoming it. In any case, he doesn’t have a choice. Other players’ confidence is now very high, players such as Wesley So and Fabiano Caruana, and everyone is very strong, very hungry, very ambitious. The way Wesley So is playing, he is not playing any lesser than Magnus at this point. If Carlsen doesn’t improve his play, he is under great danger of losing his title sooner rather than later. But I believe he will improve his play and overcome his crisis.
Plan A, Plan B, Plan C
White has several interesting plans to choose from, ultimately choosing 18. Qe2 with a slow buildup.

How to recapture?
A recurring theme throughout the match was an exchange of bishops on e6, sometimes resulting in a critical decision: to recapture with the f-pawn or with a piece? In this position Magnus chose the inferior 19. … fxe6, whereas 19. … Qxe6 would lead to an equal position in which he might even find practical chances to play for more.

Instinct versus reason
Karjakin instinctively played 23. Nxd4, preserving his bishop, but in this position the better recapture is 23. Bxd4.
RAPID TIEBREAK: GAME 1

Introduction

The tiebreak begins and tensions are high: Today the World Championship will be decided! The rapid time limit for each game is 25 minutes for the entire game, plus 10 seconds per move increment.

Ruy Lopez [C77]

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

1. e4 (0:25) e5 (0:25)
2. Nf3 (0:25) Nc6 (0:25)
3. Bb5 (0:25)

No opening surprises. The players follow a well-trodden path from the earlier games in the match until Carlsen tries something different on his ninth move.

3. ... a6 (0:25)
4. Ba4 (0:25) Nf6 (0:25)
5. 0-0 (0:25) Be7 (0:25)
6. d3 (0:25) b5 (0:25)
7. Bb3 (0:25) d6 (0:25)
8. a3 (0:25) 0-0 (0:25)
9. Nc3 (0:25) Nb8 (0:25)

The move 9. ... Nb8 might look strange to a less experienced player (“Why is Black undeveloping his knight?”), but it is a common maneuver in the Breyer variation of the Ruy Lopez, made popular by Gyula Breyer (1893-1921), a strong Hungarian master and a leading pioneer of the “hypermodern” school of chess theory. The Breyer variation makes its appearance after the plan of c2-c3 and h2-h3 by White, all geared towards an upcoming d2-d4 pawn advance. The black knight then moves to the d7-square, which is its usual placement in the Breyer variation. An immediate ...c7-c5 is rarely played in the classic Breyer.

The game finally takes a different direction. In game two (and later, game fifteen) Magnus played here 9. ... Na5; in game eleven he played 9. ... Be6. Each of these variations (9. ...Nb8, 9. ...Na5, 9. ...Be6) is well-known, but the two most common variations on the GM level have been, at least until recently, 9. ... Bg4 and 9. ... Bb7.

Returning to our game, it is worth noting that the plan with ... c7-c5 is not effective after the move 9. ... Na5, because the knight is vulnerably placed: 9. ... Na5 10. Ba2 c5?! 11. b4!

and White gains a slight advantage after either 11. ... Nc6 12. Nd5 or 11. ... cxb4 12. axb4 Nc6 13. Nd5.

10. Ne2 (0:24)

Karjakin played this standard move fairly quickly, showing that he had prepared for the 9. ... Nb8 variation—up to a certain point.

10. ... c5 (0:25)

Different plans (and different move orders) are available for Black. A recent top-level game continued 10. ... Nb7
11. c3 Bb7 12. Ng3 c5 13. Re1 Rc8 14. Nf5, with an equal game; but from there, our special contributor was able to outplay the strong Indian grandmaster Pentala Harikrishna and bring home the full point (Kramnik-Harikrishna, 1-0, 42 moves, Gashimov Memorial, 2017).

11. Ng3 (0:24)

A common motif throughout the match: the queen’s knight quickly makes its way to g3 (for White) or g6 (for Black.) This maneuver was played six times during the match (in games 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, and 14), and in each of those games Karjakin was the player who executed the maneuver.

11. ... Nc6 (0:25)

12. c3 (0:24) Rb8 (0:25)

Black can offer the exchange of bishops immediately with 12. ... Be6, as has occurred in some recent GM games.

13. h3 (0:23) a5 (0:25)

14. a4 (0:22) b4 (0:25)

15. Re1 (0:18)

The four minutes spent on 15. Re1 might not seem like an ocean of time, but in a rapid game, it certainly is. In fact this was Sergey’s longest think of the entire game, and came on a relatively inconsequential move. Karjakin was fortunate that his time deficit did not seriously hurt him in this game (unless he could have found stronger moves later in the game.
that would have increased his winning chances), but his ineffective time management eventually took its toll in the third rapid game.

15. ...  
16. Bc4  

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Karjakin is already seven minutes behind on the clock even though nothing has really happened yet. We are only in the opening with the full game still ahead.

17. Be3  

A recent GM game continued 17. Nf5 Bxc4?! 18. dxc4 Qd7 19. Qd3 Qe6 (Onischuk-Howell, 1-0, 47 moves, World Rapid Championship, Doha Qatar, December 27, 2016) and now White can achieve an edge by maneuvering his knight to d5 via Nf3-h2-f1-e3-d5. Instead of 17. ... Bxc4, Black should have played 17. ... Bxf5 18. exf5 Qc8 to achieve an equal position.

17. ...  

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Instead of 18. Qe2, Sergey could have played 18. Nh4, which I liked very much when I first went over this game. Another intriguing idea is 18. Bb5 Na7 19. c4. It’s a bit original, but I think it’s very interesting and gives White nice prospects.


18. Qe2  

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Position after 17. ... Qc8

Another try for Black after 18. Nh4 is 18. ... Bxc4, which is playable here, but after 19. dxc4 bxc3 20. bxc3 Qe6 21. Qd3 Rb3 22. Nhf5, White’s position is again easier to play, especially in rapid chess.
From the prior Key Position diagram, the move 18. Bb5 can cause some practical problems for Black. The bishop is like a thorn in Black’s side: It closes the b-file and keeps an eye on the e8-square, where a rook might otherwise want to go. The position is near-equal according to the engines, but Black is faced with the question of choosing which type of atypical position he would like to play. Should he respond with 18. … Na7 in order to provoke 19. c4? If so, then a subsequent … Nxb5 would clearly be a mistake, because White is better after 20. axb5. But Black’s abundance of alternative moves, leading to different types of slightly unusual positions, would take time to sort through, especially as White continues to maintain a small initiative.

18. … Rd8 (0:18)
19. Bxe6 (0:11)

Another important moment in this game as 19. … fxe6 is quite a serious mistake. Magnus should have taken with the queen.

The frequent appearance of the Ruy Lopez and Giuoco Piano in this match provided opportunities (in five games) for an exchange of bishops on e6. In each case, there was always the question of whether White should indeed play Bxe6; and if so, sometimes Black had two choices as to how to recapture.

The main benefits of … fxe6 are having a pawn on e6 that covers the key squares d5 and f5, and that the f-file has been opened for Black’s rook. Counterbalancing these benefits is that the e6-pawn is usually a doubled pawn, and the possibility of an f-pawn break to challenge White’s central pawn (via … f7-f5) is no longer available. Black’s central pawns also tend to be less mobile, because a pawn advance can leave weaknesses in
its wake; an example is 20. ...d5? in game ten. One other potential downside is that Black’s e6-square is occupied by a pawn, meaning that it can “get in the way” of Black’s other pieces.

In the current position, Magnus may have underestimated the strength of the queen recapture, which leads to equality (as opposed to the game continuation 19. ...fxe6, after which White gains an edge.) After 19. ...Qxe6, White cannot hit the center with 20. d4 (as he did in the game after 19. ...fxe6) due to his weak e-pawn: 20. ...exd4 21. cxd4 Nxe4 22. Nxe4 Qxe4

Therefore after 19. ... Qxe6, White is the one who must be careful not to stray from equality by playing the immediate 20. c4 in order to keep Black’s counterplay to a minimum. It is here that Carlsen could seek practical chances, perhaps with 20. ... Kh7, followed by preparing his forces to facilitate an advance of his kingside pawns.

20. d4 (0:11)

Magnus must now find a way to limit the damage caused by 19. ...fxe6, so he decides to liquidate as many pawns as possible while also opening the b-file for his rook.

20. ... bxc3 (0:17)
21. bxc3 (0:11) cxd4 (0:17)
22. cxd4 (0:10) exd4 (0:17)

Another option for White after 19. ...Qxe6 is the tempting 20. Nf5, but Black can simply play 20. ...Bf8. Due to the upcoming threat of a central pawn break with ...d5, White needs to lock down the center and the queenside with 21. c4, but after 21. ...Nd4 Black is equal, or even slightly better.
RAPID TIEBREAK: GAME 1

It’s possible that Sergey’s time deficit made a crucial difference here. Ten minutes remained on his clock, whereas Magnus had 17, so he may have felt the need to move quickly; and he did, by playing a natural-looking move instead of the most accurate move.

Black’s position is somewhat worse after 23. Bxd4. Probably Magnus would prefer not to have to play ... e6-e5, either immediately or soon thereafter, because the d5- and f5-squares are weakened and Black’s bishop will suffer from restricted mobility; but the alternatives to ... e6-e5 would also leave Black having to deal with White’s nagging positional pressure. Fortunately for Magnus, his significant time advantage might help him navigate through those choppy waters.

But after Karjakin’s 23. Nxd4, Carlsen is able reduce the pressure without having to make concessions such as ... e6-e5. His defensive task has become easier, and he deftly steers the game toward a draw.

Another serious mistake is 23. Nxd4. After 23. Bxd4 Black’s position is very unpleasant—especially in rapid chess. I think it’s quite a considerable advantage for White after the bishop capture. But 23. Nxd4 is a standard, solid move leading to essentially a forced draw.

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

23. Nxd4 (0:10)

Carlsen is finally able to generate sufficient counterplay by attacking the a-pawn.

23. ... Nxd4 (0:17)
24. Bxd4 (0:10) Rb4 (0:17)

Karjakin agrees to trade off the a-pawns, heading that much closer to a draw.

25. Rec1 (0:09) Qd7 (0:17)
26. Bc3 (0:09)

26. ... Rxa4 (0:17)
27. Bxa5  (0:09)  Rxa1  (0:17)
28. Rxa1  (0:09)  Ra8  (0:17)
29. Bc3  (0:08)  Rxa1+  (0:17)
30. Bxa1  (0:08)

Position after 30. Bxa1

30. ...  Qc6  (0:17)
31. Kh2  (0:08)  Kf7  (0:12)

Magnus pondered for five minutes, perhaps checking to see if he might have any winning chances with a potentially passed d-pawn.

32. Bb2  (0:06)  Qc5  (0:12)
33. f4  (0:06)  Bd8  (0:11)

34. e5  (0:04)

Now if 34 ... Bb6, then 35. Qf1 with a draw soon to follow.

34. ...  dxe5  (0:10)
35. Bxe5  (0:04)  Bb6  (0:08)
36. Qd1  (0:04)  Qd5  (0:08)
37. Qxd5  (0:04)  Nxd5  (0:08)

½ - ½

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

Karjakin’s play in this first rapid game was a bit too slow and simple—not an inspiring effort.
Pressure builds and time runs short
Carlsen has just pushed forward with 23. b5, and Karjakin faces an important choice between moves such as 23. … c5, 23. … Qd6, 23. … Nd6, or 23. … Rb8. Instead, with pressure building and time running short, he played 23. … cxb5? which hands White a material advantage and limits the outcome of the game to one of two results: a win for White or, with difficult defense, a draw.

A provocative and correct decision
Karjakin has put up strong resistance, and now he makes a provocative decision to sacrifice his e-pawn to get the queens and knights off the board and enter a difficult—but probably drawn—endgame.

Slip-slidin’ away
Carlsen has made tremendous progress, and he can clinch the point with 62. Kf7. But with a single move, 62. Bg4, the win has slipped away.
Rapid Tiebreak: Game 2

Introduction
A nail-biter of a game. Carlsen came out of the opening with a small advantage, aided by Karjakin’s time deficit. The small advantage turned into a big advantage as Karjakin exchanged (sacrificed? blundered?) two minor pieces for a rook. Rapid maneuvering was required due to Sergey’s urgent time situation, and he put up strong resistance; then at a critical moment he sacrificed a pawn to get the queens and knights off the board, entering a difficult (but not necessarily lost) endgame with his rook fighting against Magnus’ two bishops. White missed several wins and Black missed several draws, but in the end, Karjakin’s defensive skill held up, and the game was drawn with a stalematting trick—much to Sergey’s relief and to Magnus’ consternation. The match is still tied with only two rapid games to go!

Gioco Piano [C54]

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

1. e4 (0:25) e5 (0:25)
2. Nf3 (0:25) Nc6 (0:25)
3. Bc4 (0:25)
The Giuoco Piano ("Quiet Game") makes its second appearance of the match, having been played previously in game five. Carlsen and Karjakin repeated the opening until move eight with an unimportant transposition of ... d6 and ... a6 on moves six and seven. But the "Quiet Game" has taken on a new meaning in today’s Super-GM practice, oftentimes reaching positions with similar characteristics to the classical lines in the Ruy Lopez, without having allowed Black the opportunity to play the Berlin Defense or the Marshall Gambit.

3. ... \( \text{Bc5} \) (0:25)
4. 0-0 (0:25) \( \text{Nf6} \) (0:25)
5. d3 (0:25) 0-0 (0:25)
6. a4 (0:25) a6 (0:25)
7. c3 (0:25) d6 (0:25)

8. \( \text{Re1} \) (0:25)

New territory for the match. Game five saw the move 8. b4, but Magnus chooses to expand in the center this time. Other popular GM-level moves are 8. h3 and 8. Nd2, but many of those games transpose into the same position on move ten, after White has played Re1-e1, h2-h3, and Nd2 in several possible move orders. Meanwhile, Black has played Be5-a7, Nc6-c7, and Ne7-g6. Another popular line at the top level is 8. Bg5 h6 9. Bh4 g5 10. Bg3. In several different openings after the moves Bg5, ... h6, Bh4, and ... g5, if the Black dark-squared bishop is not available to break the pin there is always the question of whether White can play Nxd5. In this Giuoco Piano variation, the answer is ‘no’ (if White intends to win) because Black has ample resources after 10. Nxd5 hxg5 11. Bxg5 Kg7 12. Qf3 Rh8, e.g., 13. Nd2 Kg6!? 14. h4? (14. Be3 is mandatory) 14. ... Bg4! 15. Bxf6 Qd7! 16. Qg3 Kxh6 and Black was firmly on top in Caruana-Nakamura (0-1, 32 moves, Paris GCT Blitz, 2016).

8. ... \( \text{Ba7} \) (0:25)
9. h3 (0:25) \( \text{Ne7} \) (0:25)
10. d4 (0:25) \( \text{Ng6} \) (0:25)

One of the standard chess themes of the match, maneuvering the queen’s knight to g6, repeats itself in this game. The knight transfer has served Black well on the top-GM level, with a record to date (from Black’s perspective) of three wins, two losses, and five draws. Of course, those results are not solely dependent on
this knight maneuver, but they do indicate that the system played by Karjakin is solid and successful.

This variation has become a topic of discussion at the top grandmaster level. Since the match, both Carlsen and Karjakin have played it as White and Black.

\[
\begin{align*}
&11. \text{Nbd2} \quad (0:25) \quad \text{c6} \quad (0:25) \\
&12. \text{Bf1} \quad (0:25)
\end{align*}
\]

Position after 12. Bf1

A theoretical novelty from Carlsen, played quickly, so he had likely prepared it beforehand. But it’s debatable whether f1 is the best square for the bishop (as opposed to d3 or b3) because now that the f1-square is occupied, a standard knight maneuver–N(d2)-f1-g3–is not available.

White’s bishop tried a different square, 12. Bd3, in Kramnik-Carlsen (1-0, 40 moves, Stavanger, 2017). Interestingly, after a normal Black response such as 12. … Re8, one of the top chess engines recommends repositioning the bishop anyway: 13. Bf1-d3. Computer engines have no regard for any psychological consequences of their moves. In that game, Kramnik did follow up with the maneuver N(b1)-d2-f1-g3.

Returning to the game: Karjakin invested four minutes before responding with an unexpected move of his own.

\[
\begin{align*}
&12. \ldots \quad \text{a5} \quad (0:21)
\end{align*}
\]

This move looks reasonable as it stops both a4-a5 and b2-b4, but neither of those moves was a big threat anyway. A more typical move would be 12. … Re8, after which Black can simply see what White wants to do while keeping his options open, e.g., a central pawn break with … d6-d5.

The move did prompt Carlsen to think for six minutes—a major time commitment in rapid chess—before making his reply. In all probability he was trying to determine how to take advantage of the positional consequences of 12. … a5: It has potentially weakened the b5-square, and the a5-pawn can now be used by White as a “hook” to open up the game.

\[
\begin{align*}
&13. \text{dxe5} \quad (0:19) \quad \text{dxe5} \quad (0:19) \\
&14. \text{Qc2} \quad (0:19) \quad \text{Be6} \quad (0:17)
\end{align*}
\]

VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

The second game continued in the same fashion. Again Karjakin was playing slowly and not too well. In rapid chess you can allow one of those two, but not both.

\[
\begin{align*}
&15. \text{Nc4} \quad (0:19)
\end{align*}
\]

The knight is well-placed here, putting additional pressure on both the a5- and e5-pawns, and also eyeing the weakened
d6 and b6 squares for possible future occupation.

15. ...  (0:19)  Qc7  (0:17)
16. b4!  (0:19)

Position after 16. b4

16. ...  axb4  (0:17)

This capture provides new opportunities on the queenside—for White. Instead, Karjakin could have kept the status quo intact with the waiting move 16. ... h6 to see what White would do. The capture 17. Nxa5 would lead to equality—or even more, from Black’s point of view—after 17. ... c5, it is White who must tread carefully due to Black’s new-found piece activity. The other possible capture, 17. bxa5, is met with 17. ... Bxc4. White has the long-term advantage of the two bishops, but Black can apply pressure against White’s weakened queenside pawns with equal prospects.

Other White responses to 16. ... h6 are readily dealt with as well. 17. Ba3 looks threatening, but it provides the perfect moment for 17. ... axb4 18. cxb4 b5!, with an equal and dynamic position after 19. Na5 Rfc8.

White cannot now attempt to win a pawn with 20. axb5 cxb5 21. Qxc7 Rxc7 22. Bxb5 due to the strong response 22. ... Rc2 23. Rf1 Rac8 and Black will soon harvest the e4-pawn, with some advantage.

Another option after 16. ... h6 is 17. Bb2, but the bishop is not particularly well-placed here because Black has no intention of opening the diagonal with ... axb4 cxb4. Instead, Black can opt for piece activity with 17. ... Nh5, e.g., 18. Nxa5 Rfd8

Now 19. Nb3 (trying to consolidate with an extra pawn) runs into 19. ... Ng3! with full compensation (or more) for the pawn due to White’s long-term weaknesses on the light squares after the capture of White’s light-squared bishop, e.g., 20. c4 Nxf1 21. Rxf1 f6 22. c5 Qf7

This was the idea behind the move 16. … axb4, but the resultant positions are somewhat better for White.

17. cxb4 (0:19) b5 (0:14)


Now Karjakin has a number of subtle queen moves that apply pressure (directly or indirectly) to the b4-pawn, such as 20. … Qd6 or 20. … Qb8, but subtlety requires time, and he is already short on time. So he decides to clarify the position via exchanges, which is a common tendency when one is faced with a ticking clock—but it can often turn out to be an incorrect decision.

18. ... bxa4 (0:14)
19. Rxa4 (0:19) Bxe3 (0:07)

But now Karjakin goes too far—on the clock, that is. His exchanges have indeed brought clarity, but Sergey took seven minutes—fully half of his remaining time—to decide on 19. … Bxe3, and his time deficit has become urgent.

On the board, White now has the two bishops and pressure against Black’s c-pawn. Instead of exchanging bishop for knight, the useful move 19. … h6 could have been made quickly and keeps Black in the game after 20. Nc4 (or 20. Ra6 Bb6 21. Rxa8 Rxa8 22. Nc4 Bxc4 23. Bxc4 Qe7, and White’s edge is small) 20. … Nd7 21. Bb2 Bxc4 22. Bxc4 Nb6

23. Ra5 Nxc4 24. Qxc4 Bb6 25. Rxa8 (or 25. Bxe5 Nxe5 26. Rxe5 Ra4 and Black is fine after either 27. Rac1 Qa7 or 27. Rf5 c5) Rxa8 26. Rc1 Ra4! and Black is OK.
20. Bxe3  (0:19)

20. Rxe3 is also good, but recapturing with the bishop is more challenging for Black to deal with.

20. ...  Rxa4  (0:07)
21. Qxa4  (0:19)  Nxe4  (0:07)

This capture itself is fine, but it might have been based on a miscalculation that led to an error two moves later.

22. Rc1  (0:13)

Magnus spent a full six minutes here deciding how to make best use of his advantage on both the board and the clock. He chooses the most forceful plan: a direct attack against the c6-pawn. Note that 22. b5? fails to 22. ... Nc3.

22. ...  Bd5  (0:07)
23. b5  (0:12)

Played quickly, but White now obtains a long-term material advantage.

The most natural and effective move is 23. ... c5. White’s passed b-pawn may look threatening, but Black can use b7 (or, in some cases, b6) as an effective blockading square. After 23. ... c5 24. Bc4 Bb7 25. Qb3 Rb8 26. b6 Qc7, White still has the initiative and at least full compensation for the pawn, but Black is holding firm.

Other superior alternatives to 23. cxb5 include 23. ... Qd6, 23. ... Nd6, and 23. ... Rd8, but the merits of 23. ... c5
should be readily discernible to a player who needs to play quickly and accurately.

23. ... Rb8 is a favored computer move but would not be very attractive to a player with a severe time deficit in a rapid game. A silicon player would confidently play a line such as 24. bxc6 Ne7 25. Qa7 Qxa7 26. Bxa7 Ra8 27. c7 f6 28. Bb8 Nd6

23. Qxe4 (0:12)

24. ... Qxc1 (0:07)
25. Qxd5 (0:12) Qc7 (0:07)

Karjakin abandons the b-pawn, but if he plays 25. ... Qb1 to try to insist on a trade of queens when White takes the b-pawn, Carlsen can insist on keeping the queens on the board with 26. Nd2.

26. Qxb5 (0:12) Rb8 (0:07)
27. Qd5 (0:12) Rd8 (0:02)

Another overly long think—five full minutes—and now Sergey must try to hold an inferior position with very little time on his clock. But he rises to the occasion, for the most part, and puts up tough resistance.
Statistically, the two bishops are much stronger than the rook and pawn, especially with queens and knights still on the board, because White can aim for strong attacking possibilities against Black’s king. Even as pieces come off the board, the bishops can prove to be devastating. But there is a critical factor that assists Black in his defensive efforts: all pawns are on the same side of the board, which may help keep the position on the drawing side of the fence.

28. Qb3  
Carlsen plays non-committal moves to try to force Karjakin to use up valuable time and possibly to err.

28. ... Rb8  
29. Qa2  

Position after 29. Qa2

Again trying to force Karjakin to use up more of his precious time.

29. ... h6  
30. Qd5  
Qe7  

It’s unclear why Sergey did not immediately play 29. ... Rd8, practically repeating the position that had been on the board three moves ago.

31. Qe4  
Qf6?!  

The queen is misplaced here, and White could take immediate advantage with 32. h4, threatening to push away the knight and win Black’s e-pawn. Attempts to save the pawn will require Black’s pieces to get locked into defensive positions, giving White a free hand to further increase the pressure. Stronger is 31. ... Qb7, with some time-saving/time-gaining moves on the agenda that maintain the tentative harmony between Black’s remaining pieces, e.g., 32. Qc2 Qb1 33. Qc7 Re8.

32. g3  
Rc8  

Position after 32. ... Rc8

Now 33. h4 would be nearly decisive because White can win the e-pawn without having to exchange knights, e.g., 33. ... Qc6 34. Qxc6 Rxc6 35. h5 Nf8 36. Nxe5; or else Black can try to defend the e-pawn with 33. ... Re8, but his handcuffed pieces will soon allow White to increase his domination.

33. Bd3  
Qc6!  

With his back to the wall, Karjakin seizes an opportunity to improve his position. Now Carlsen can win the e-pawn, but at the too-high cost of ceding the two bishops: 34. Qxc6 Rxc6 35. Bxg6 Rxc6 36. Nxe5 Ra6.
This ending is very close to a draw, as has been demonstrated in the recent games Nisipeanu-Kramnik (½-½, 146 moves, Dortmund, 2016) and Karjakin-Anand (½-½, 91 moves, Khanty-Mansiysk, 2014). One of the great classic games with this ending is Capablanca-Lasker, St. Petersburg 1914, in which Lasker’s renowned defensive technique held the draw despite Capablanca’s best efforts to win.

34. Qf5  (0:10)  Re8  (0:01)

Carlsen thought for five minutes, half of his remaining time, trying to figure out how to make headway against Karjakin’s defensive formation.

A highly provocative decision, which appears to be a very close analogy to Carlsen’s 38. … Ne7 in game nine; in fact the analogy is so close that … Ne7 was the provocative move in both instances!

It is very likely that Sergey’s e-pawn sacrifice was a conscious decision to “cut the Gordian knot.” The obvious alternative is 36. … Nf8, as Black would then retain his e-pawn, but then White can continue a slow-but-sure buildup by preparing the advance of his kingside pawns, leaving Black with an ongoing difficult defensive task and almost no time remaining to deal with the complications. Instead, Karjakin saw the possibility of liquidating into a risky ending, but one with opportunities for successful defense. Perhaps he had recalled that Carlsen was unable to win a fairly similar 2B-vs-R ending against Hikaru Nakamura in the 2015 Sinquefield Cup. It is also possible that Karjakin was familiar with some of the more rigorous analysis
that had been done of this same ending:

In reference to this endgame, GM Emil Sutovsky tweeted, “They got an ending we discussed with Gelfand back in 2014. The position is not examined in any endgame manual. Black should be able to hold with the best defence—not easy though.”

The issue is whether 36. ... Ne7 can be refuted with 37. Bh7+ or 37. Ng5. Other commentators have noticed the “White wins” scores given to these moves by the top engines, and then quote one or two variations; but the practical clarity of these assessments is very uncertain. The real question is how the players would have assessed these supposed refutations within the context of their high-pressure situation and with very little time left on their clocks.

Actually, the two moves 37. Bh7+ and 37. Ng5 converge into the same analysis, because 37. Bh7+ Kh8 38. Bc2 Kg8 necessitates the continuation 39. Ng5 Qd5 40. Be4 Qc4, which has transposed into the same position as after 37. Ng5.

So the computer line after 36. ... Ne7 is 37. Ng5. The knight is immune to capture after 37. ... hxg5 due to the straightforward 38. Qh7+ Kf8 39. Qh8+ Ng8 40. Bc5+ Re7 41. Bh7 f6 42. Bxe7+ Kxe7 43. Bxg8, which wins handily. So Black must instead play the obvious 37. ... Qc4 (keeping watch on f7, and also preventing 38. Bc5 because Black could then reply 38. ... Qc1+ 39. Kh2 Qxg5.) Then the computer line goes 38. Bh7+ Kf8 39. Ne4 Ra8

The computer assessment becomes less clear after 40. Qxe5 Qd5 41. Qb2 f5 42. Nc3 Qe5 “plus-over-minus,” but apparently White is still winning (or nearly winning) after 40. Kh2 Qd5. Then after many minutes of deep “thought,” the computer decides that White wins after 41. Bxh6 f5 42. Bxf5 (only winning move) Qf7 43. Bxg7+ (only winning move) Kxg7 44. Qh7+ Kf8 45. Qh6+ (only winning move) Qg7 46. Qd6 (only winning move) Kg8 47. Nf6+ (only winning move) Kh8 48. Qe6! (only winning move).

If White is able to work through the thicket of variations and find all the correct moves while avoiding false trails and traps, in much less time than it took the top computer engines, then he would deserve the title not of World Champion
but of Universal Champion! Of course Black would likewise have a very difficult defensive task during the onslaught, but there is no doubt that “anything can happen” under such circumstances.

The net result is that the line 36. … Ne7 37. Ng5 is anything but clear, thus Magnus decided to immediately proceed into the clearly favorable endgame. There is no third option: he must either pursue the attack with 37. Ng5 or else grab the e-pawn, because “slow build-up” moves such as 37. Kh2 would allow Black to re-group with 37. … Nd5.

37. Qxe5  (0:05)

37. … Qxe5  (0:01)


38. Nxe5  (0:05)  Ng6  (0:01)

The other possible knight moves are equally good: 38. … Nf5 39. Bxf5 Rx e5 or 38. … Ne6 39. Bxc6 Rxe5 all lead to the same ending.

39. Bxg6  (0:05)  Rxe5  (0:01)

40. Bd3  (0:05)

The critical endgame is now on the board.

Some general observations can be made. White’s two bishops are clearly stronger than Black’s rook, but in its simplest form—with no pawns on either side—the ending of two bishops versus rook is drawn in any “normal” position. If there are pawns on both flanks, then the ending is usually won quite easily by the marauding bishops. However, the current ending has pawns on only one flank, and furthermore, Black’s pawns are compact and difficult to attack. Any winning attempt will take many moves and much subtle maneuvering, and this process may also include advancement of White’s pawns up the board.

This endgame (or similar 2B-vs-R endings) has occurred several times in grandmaster play, and those games have shown the difficulties for both sides—as White (the stronger side) tries to win and as Black (the weaker side) tries to draw. Carlsen himself tried hard to win against Nakamura from the following position, but Black’s rook was able to prevent a coordinated attack on Black’s kingside.
pawns, with a drawn result (½-½, 95 moves, St. Louis, 2015).

**Carlsen-Nakamura**  
Position after 68. Bf4

A very similar 2B+3P vs R+3P endgame from Moiseenko-Efimenko also ended in a draw after lengthy attempts by White; the position shown here is after Black’s 33rd move, and the game continued for another 106 moves before the players agreed to split the point! (½-½, 139 moves, Kiev, 2013)

**Moiseenko-Efimenko**  
Position after 33. ... Rb4

Additional evidence that a compact pawn mass on one side of the board is difficult for the bishops to attack is given in Xu Jun-Short (½-½, 48 moves, Beijing, 2003):

**Xu Jun-Short**  
Position after 41. Rd1

An extra pawn usually helps the stronger side win, quite easily, by simply creating a passed pawn and forcing the weaker side to give up his rook for it, as in Bareev-Timofeev (1-0, 58 moves, Serpukhov, 2007):

**Bareev-Timofeev**  
Position after 44. Kf3

However, an important exception to that general principle is as follows: If the two bishops are escorting a rook pawn up the board, without an already-active king to assist, the game can be drawn because the weaker side will constantly threaten to sacrifice his rook for the bishop of the same color as the queening square, resulting in a drawn “rook pawn and wrong-colored bishop” ending, as in Aronian-Jakovenko (½-½, 106 moves, Warsaw, 2005):
With these general considerations in mind, the all-important question becomes: What pawn formation should Black use to try to defend the position?

Karjakin instantly chooses the formation with pawns on f6, g7, and h6. Commen-

**CONVERSATION WITH BORIS**

GM Boris Gulko  
USSR Champion  
U.S. Champion

GM Lev Alburt  
3-time U.S. Champion

*GM Boris Gulko is the only grandmaster who has won both the USSR Championship and the U.S. Championship. He has a lifetime positive score in tournament play against Garry Kasparov, even during the years when Kasparov was World Champion.*

**Boris:** In the mid-1990’s, my wife Anna Akhsharumova played in the U.S. Women’s Championship against Anna Hahn, and they reached this same 2B+3P vs. R+3P endgame. As far as I can tell, it’s a dead draw!

**Lev:** A dead draw? Why is that?

**Boris:** Because, you see, the two bishops cannot attack the same pawn!

**Lev:** Which pawn formation is most advantageous for the weaker side?

**Boris:** Any [compact] formation will do!

*Boris may be right—provided that the defender has plenty of time!*

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40. ...  

f6  

(0:01)
tators have rendered conflicting (and indeed opposite) opinions about this move; some analysts award an exclamation point whereas others render a question mark. This pawn formation looks solid, but it also creates a hole on g6 which was eventually occupied by the white king.

Other pawn formations have their own plusses and minuses.

The current pawn formation f7-g7-h6 leads to positions where the pawn on f7 comes under attack, and in many cases it could be difficult later to change your mind and play f7-f6 later. Hence it seems logical, and not detrimental, for Black to move the pawn to f6 now instead of later.

The pawn formation f7-g6-h5 offers White opportunities to penetrate on the dark squares.

The pawn structure f6-g5-h6 (with Black’s king on g7) is given in some sources as a possible saving grace, and could have occurred later. But it appears that White will be able to march his king, slowly but surely, to e6 or e7, and then force zugzwang positions that win the f-pawn, and with it, the game.

All of these complex endgame considerations would take a considerable amount of time to handle correctly—and neither player has such available time.

41. Kg2 (0:05) Kh8 (0:01)
42. Kf3 (0:05) Rd5 (0:01)
43. Bg6 (0:05) Ra5 (0:01)
44. Ke4 (0:05) Rb5 (0:01)
45. h4 (0:05)

Position after 45. h4

Magnus begins to march his pawns up the board.

45. ... Re5+ (0:01)
46. Kd4 (0:05) Ra5 (0:01)
47. Ke4 (0:05) Re5 (0:01)
48. Bd4 (0:05) Ra5 (0:01)
49. Be5 (0:05) Kg8 (0:01)
50. Kd5 (0:05)

Position after 50. Kd5

This “bridge-building” technique is one of the most important techniques in the 2B-vs-R endgame as it foils the rook’s attempts to stop the king’s advancement up the board.
50. ... Rb5 (0:01)
51. Kd6 (0:05) Ra5 (0:01)
52. Be3 (0:05) Re5 (0:01)
53. Bf4 (0:04) Ra5 (0:01)
54. Bd3 (0:04) Ra7 (0:01)
55. Ke6 (0:04)

The position may now already be lost for Black, but it is definitely lost after he captures the f-pawn.

58. ... Rb2 (0:01)
59. Bf5 (0:04) Rxf2 (0:01)

There is no longer a saving grace, but strange things can happen with the clock ticking as they do in this game!

60. Be6+ (0:04) Kh8 (0:01)
61. Bd6 (0:04)

Now any Black move other than 61. ... Re2 or 61. ... Rg2 will end in foreseeable mate, e.g., 61. ... Rb2 62. Bf8 Rb7 63. Bf7 and Black must give up his rook with 63. ... Rxf7 64. Kxf7, and White can announce mate in eleven! But 61. ... Re2 or 61. ... Rg2 also lose, although it takes a little longer.

61. ... Re2 (0:01)

White now wins with 62. Kf7 Re2 (if 62. ... Rb2 then 63. Bf8 Rb7+ 64. Kg6 f5 65. Bc5 Rc7 66. Bd4 h5 [otherwise 67. Bf7] 67. Bxf5 and White wins) 63. g4 h5 (forced) 64. gxh5 Rb2 65. h6 gxh6 66. Bf8 Rg2 67. Bf5
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 67. Bf5

67. ... Rg8 68. Bxh6 Rf8+ 69. Kg6 Rg8+ 70. Kxf6 Rg2 71. Be3 Re2 72. Bd4

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 72. Bd4

White will be able to force Black’s king out of the corner and promote his pawn.

62. Bg4? (0:04)

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 62. Bg4

Now Black draws by preventing Bd6-f8.

62. ... Re8 (0:01)
63. Bf5 (0:04) Kg8 (0:01)
64. Bc2 (0:04) Re3 (0:01)
65. Bb1 (0:04) Kh8 (0:01)
66. Kf7 (0:04) Rb3 (0:01)
67. Be4 (0:04) Re3 (0:01)
68. Bf5 (0:04) Rc3 (0:01)
69. g4 (0:04) Rc6 (0:01)
70. Bf8 (0:04) Rc7+ (0:01)
71. Kg6 (0:04) Kg8 (0:01)
72. Bb4 (0:04)

Position after 72. Bb4

72. ... Rb7? (0:01)

The woes of time pressure. Now White wins after 73. Be6+ Kh8 74. Bf8

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 74. Bf8

Now if 74. ... h5 then 75. gxh5 f5 76. h6 gxf6 77. Kxh6 and mate-in-five cannot be stopped, e.g. 77. ... f4 78. h5 f3 79.
Kg6 f2 80. h6 f1(Q) 81. Bg7+ Rxg7 82. hxg7#. After 74. ... Ra7 or 74. ... Rc7, White wins with 75. Bf7. The move 74. ... f5 holds out longer, but White wins after 75. gxf5 h5 76. f6 gxf6 77. Bf7 Rxf7 78. Kxf7 f5 79. Bh6, and he has the “right-color” bishop for the rook pawn’s upcoming promotion.

Instead of 72. ... Rb7, Black draws with 72. ... Rc6 because at the critical juncture Black has the saving move ... f5+.

73. Bd6? (0:04)

Carlsen returns the favor, and the position is again drawn.

73. ... Kh8? (0:01)

And now White is again winning. 73. ... Rb6 was mandatory.

74. Bf8 (0:04) Kg8 (0:01)
75. Ba3? (0:04)

And again drawn. The right idea is 75. Bc5, preventing the rook from moving to its third rank where it guards against Bf5-e6(+). White wins after 75. ... Kh8 76. Be6 Rb8 77. h5 Ra8 78. g5!
In this line (after 78. ... Ra6 79. gxh6) if instead 79. ... gxh6, then 80. Bf5 Ra8 81. Bd4 Rg8+ 82. Kxh6 and White’s h-pawn will get through.

75. ... Kh8 (0:01)

Now if 77. Bf7 then 77. ... f5+ saves the day.

77. Kf7 (0:04) Rb7+ (0:01)
78. Be7 (0:04)

76. Be6 (0:04) Rb6 (0:01)

Position after 75. ... Kh8

78. ... h5! (0:01)
79. gxh5 (0:04)

White can try 79. g5 but the result is the same, e.g.: 79. ... fxg5 80. hxg5 and White cannot attack the g7-pawn nor threaten the Black king, hence there is no way to make further progress.

79. ... f5 (0:01)
Position after 79. ... f5

80. Bxf5 (0:04)  Rxe7+ (0:01)
81. Kxe7 (0:04)  Kg8 (0:01)
82. Bd3 (0:04)  Kh8 (0:01)
83. Kf8 (0:04)  g5 (0:01)
84. hxg6 (0:04)

½ - ½

Final Position - Stalemate
To trade or not to trade
White played 29. Nxf6?! which would have opened the g-line for his opponent’s rook after the strong 29. ... gxf6. Even after the game continuation 29. ... Bxf6, the e5-pawn is no longer blockaded, leading to a strong strategic pawn sacrifice two moves later.

Line-opening pawn sacrifice
Carlsen plays 30. ... e4!, sacrificing a pawn to open lines and post his pieces on ideal squares.

Line-opening pawn counter-sacrifice
The counter-sacrifice 36. e5! would have opened lines for White’s queen and bishop, and bring him all the way back from the brink of defeat.
Rapid Tiebreak: Game 3

Introduction
The players repeat their opening from game two until Karjakin opts for 11. b4 instead of 11. d4. Carlsen plays aggressively and Karjakin’s time deficit starts to become a very serious factor. A strong pawn sacrifice enabled Magnus’ pieces to infiltrate, and Sergey is unable to adapt to the precarious situation. The decisive result: Magnus Carlsen wins the game and is one point ahead in the tiebreaks, with only one rapid game remaining!
Game 15 was really bad for Karjakin, which is strange since game 14 should have been a serious blow to Magnus. Alternatively, game 14 could have served to positively shake up Karjakin. It could have been a signal: You escaped miraculously in a position that was almost impossible to escape, so now it’s time to change—you cannot continue playing slowly and passively. But Karjakin’s play remained passive in game 15! This game was easy for Carlsen. He had a time advantage, a good position, and—most of the time—little risk. Still, there were a few moments when Karjakin could have made the situation sharper, even when it was already looking bad.

6. d3 (0:25) b5 (0:25)
7. Bb3 (0:25) d6 (0:25)

The players quickly rattled off their moves in this very familiar opening line.

8. a3 (0:25) 0-0 (0:25)
9. Nc3 (0:25) Na5 (0:25)
10. Ba2 (0:25) Be6 (0:25)
11. b4 (0:25)

This move had been played over the past several years by such great players as Viswanathan Anand, Fabiano Caruana, Leinier Domínguez, Dmitry Andreikin, and others.

11. ... Nc6 (0:25)

An unusual move, not seen on the top level before this game, but it is certainly a valid option to the much more common move 11... Bxa2.

12. Nd5 (0:25) Nd4 (0:25)

The position is similar to game 11 after 10. ... Nd4, except that White has been given (in effect) two “extra” moves: 10.
Ba2 and 11. b4. Whether those two extra moves favor one side or the other is a matter for debate, but it is clear that Carlsen was prepared for this position, whereas Karjakin began to think.

13. \( \text{Ng5} \) \((0:23)\)

This is the game’s theoretical novelty, played after two minutes thought. Also worth considering is a variation analogous to game 11: 13.Nxd4 exd4 14. Nxf6+ Bxf6 15. Bxe6 fxe6

Now the only difference between this position and game eleven is that White’s pawn is on b4 instead of b2. Again, the relative merits of those two positions are up for debate, but it appears to us that White’s pawn is better placed on b2 instead of b4.

13. \( \ldots \) \( \text{Bxd5} \) \((0:25)\)

14. \( \text{exd5} \) \((0:23)\) \( \text{Nd7} \) \((0:25)\)

Carlsen continues to play quickly and confidently.

15. \( \text{Ne4} \) \((0:23)\)

Inviting Black to play 15. \( \ldots \) f5, but other knight moves offer no real prospects for advantage, e.g., 15. Nf3 Nxf3+ 16. Qxf3 f5 and the position is dynamic but equal. Alternatively, 15. Nh3 is well-intended to stop \( \ldots \) f5 and \( \ldots \) f4, but is less accurate: 15. \( \ldots \) a5 16. c3 Nf5, and Black’s prospects are at least equal.

15. \( \ldots \) \( \text{f5} \) \((0:25)\)

Magnus plays the most aggressive continuation and Sergey is already faced with a major decision.

16. \( \text{Nd2} \) \((0:23)\)

This is a reasonable move, but it feels as though Carlsen is now able to start imposing his will on his opponent. An important alternative is 16. c3 fxe4 17. cxd4
A most unusual pawn formation—six central pawns, three white and three black!

After 17. ... exd3 (best) 18. dxe5 Nxe5 19. Bb1, White fights for the advantage by attempting to kick away Black’s knight with f2-f4, then recapturing the d-pawn.

Returning to the game: After the text-move 16. Nd2, Magnus is able to bring about an unbalanced position with dynamic chances for both sides.

16. ... f4 (0:25)

In spite of his somewhat passive play so far, Karjakin can still play for a slight advantage, mainly due to White’s two bishops (especially his unopposed light-squared bishop) and prospects for expansion on the queenside.

18. Bb3 keeps the bishop on the effective a2-g8 diagonal, and White keeps a moderate edge after 18. … a5 19. Bb2 Nb6 20. c4. The active pawn levers are on White’s side, so Black will need to be prepared to address a3-a4, c4-c5, and d3-d4. White has a slight edge.

Another option, 18. Bb1, points more directly towards Black’s king and envisages the pawn push d3-d4 under the right circumstances. After 18. … Nb6, that pawn push is possible straight away: 19. d4 exd4 20. cxd4

Computer engines rate the position as equal after 20. … Nxd4, and if Karjakin is indeed seeking a draw, he can earn it immediately after 21. Qh5 g6 22. Bxg6 hxg6 23. Qxg6+ with a perpetual. Other
20th moves for Black will allow White to consolidate his slight edge with 21. Nf3.

One other alternative for White is on the radar screen. The move 18. Re1, suggested by Anish Giri in New In Chess, anticipates 18. ... Qe8 with 19. d4, and now Black can choose from several different moves, each of which leads to a small White edge in a sharp, double-edged position: 19. ... Qg6 20. Bb1; or 19. ... Nh4 20. Qg4; or 19. ... Bf6 20. Bb1.

**Position after 18. ... Qe8**

This move is a strong response to 18. Ne4, leaving White’s knight without much to do, and putting some uncertainty into Sergey’s mind as to whether White will soon be facing a kingside attack.

18. ... Qe8 (0:25)

**Position after 19. ... Qg6**

The position is still objectively equal, but White starts to worry about Black’s chances on the kingside, and he makes an unnecessary concession with his next move.

20. f3?! (0:15)

Carlsen’s aggressive feints on the kingside have paid off. After 20. f3 the dark squares e3 and g3 are weaker, and the f3-pawn is a possible longer-term hook that could facilitate the advance of Black’s kingside pawns. Instead, 20. Qf3 would at least keep the balance, but the position is optically somewhat risky for White.

20. ... Bh4 (0:25)

21. a4 (0:15) Nf6 (0:25)

Magnus offers to exchange knights, perhaps posing a psychological temptation to Sergey: “Another trade, perhaps one step closer to a draw?” But Black would be the one to benefit from the trade after 22. Nxf6+ Bxf6 23. Ra2 h5 24. Qe2 h4 25. Bd2 h3.
22. Qe2  

The point. White’s pawn on b5 can now be readily attacked, and its defense would cause further concessions such as Bb3-c4 (not c3-c4? as the d4-square would be fatally weakened.)

24. Bd2  (0:15)  bxc3  (0:17)
25. Bxc3  (0:15)

Forced; 25. Nxc3 is impossible due to 25. ... Nd4 25. Qd1 Rxa1 26. Qxa1 Nxb3.

25. ... Ne3  (0:17)

The infiltration begins. Carlsen’s initiative is worrisome but mostly optical.

26. Rfc1  (0:15)  Rxa1  (0:17)

Carlsen lunges forth on the queenside. Black has the initiative on both sides of the board, and successfully combines both tactical and strategic threats.
26. \textbf{Rxa1} (0:15)

The alternative 27. Bxa1 attacks Black’s pawn on c7 and sets up some traps, e.g. 27. \ldots Rf7? (protecting the pawn) 28. Bxe5! dxe5 29. d6. However, after the counterattacking 27. \ldots Qe8, which Magnus played (after 27. Rxa1) in the game, the best play leads to approximate equality: 27. Bxa1 Qe8 28. Bc4 Qb8 29. Qa2 (a key move, as should have happened in the actual game) 29. \ldots Qb6 30. Kh1.

\textbf{Position after 28. ... Kh8}

Carlsen removes his king from the a2-g8 diagonal to prevent future tactics such as Bxe5. Now he threatens 29. \ldots Nfxd5. White should play 29. Qa2, which covers the pawn and opens the door for counterplay.
White is fine after either 29. ... Qg6 30. Rb1 or 29. ... Qb8 30. Kh1. Instead, Karjakin exchanges knights to protect the d-pawn.

29. Nxf6?! (0:15)

The open g-file, coupled with the dangerous knight and strong central pawn phalanx, would cause big problems for White after 29. ... gxf6 30. Bd2 (otherwise Black’s rook will take control of the g-file with devastating effect due to the knight on e3, assisted by the bishop on h4) 30. ... Nc2 (heading for d4) 31. Ra2 Nd4 32. Qd1 Nxb5, and the first weak white pawn is lost.

30. Ra3 (0:03)

Sergey spends fully 12 minutes thinking, and is now down to only three minutes. He hopes to weather the storm and escape unscathed, as he has done in so many games, but Magnus decides to open up key lines and squares as quickly as possible.
30. ... e4! (0:11)

The text-move that may not alter the objective “dynamic equality” assessment of the position, but who has time for objectivity? Black’s pawn sacrifice and ensuing activity are very hard to meet over-the-board. After the exchange of bishops, the queen will take its place on e5, controlling the long diagonal and threatening to infiltrate White’s position.

Several alternative moves would also maintain the balance, e.g. 30. ... Qg6 31. Bd2 Qg5 or 30. ... Qd8 31. Bd2 Nc2, but any of these moves might hand a psychological boost to Karjakin, whose position would no longer appear to be so shaky.

31. dxe4 (0:03) Bxc3 (0:11)
32. Rxc3 (0:03) Qe5 (0:11)
33. Rc1 (0:03) Ra8 (0:11)

34. h3 (0:03) h6 (0:11)
35. Kh2 (0:03) Qd4 (0:11)

The move 35. ... Ra3 instead of 35. ... Qd4 would prevent White from sacrificing back the e-pawn, and would keep the psychological pressure going strong – although objectively the position is still equal after 36. Qd2.
VLAD’S VIEWPOINT

White just needs to create some counterplay. So 36. e5 was an excellent chance, possibly even good enough to equalize. White’s position is not great, with this knight on e3 and the dark-square weaknesses, but then I started to think, “What would I do now?” Of course, the answer is just open up the diagonal for the bad bishop. It’s rapid chess; there is no time to worry about pawns and you just have to create some counterplay, because rapid chess and counterplay go hand-in-hand. You need to create some threats. And somehow Karjakin was psychologically not ready to take chances to create such counterplay. He was just very, very defensive. In a classical time control this approach can work, but in the rapids portion of the match that strategy is not working.

36. Qe1 (0:03)  36. ... Qb2 (0:11)

Karjakin’s problems multiply as he takes a passive stance and misses the opportunity to play 36. e5!. After 36. ... Qxe5 37. Bd3, the long b1-h7 diagonal swiftly provides counterplay via White’s queen and bishop tandem. Black should proceed with 37. ... Qe7 (the c7-pawn is threatened) 38. Kg1 (to play Bd3-b1 without facing ... Ng4+ followed by ... Qxe2) 38. ... Kg8 39. Bb1 Kf8 40. Qb2 and the chances are again equal.

Position after 36. ... Qb2

37. Bf1? (0:03)

White moves closer the point of no return. It is almost essential to play 37. Be2 Ra2 38. e5!
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

From Analysis Diagram A, Black can play 38. ... Qxe5, but the result is the same after another amazing and straightforward variation: 39. b6! Qg5 40. Qf2 Qg3+ 41. Qxg3 fxg3+ 42. Kxg3 Rxe2 43. bxc7

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 43. bxc7

Does White actually win?! No – due to chessboard geometry! 43. ... Rxc2+ 44. Kf4 (not 44. Kh4? Nf5+ 45. Kh5 Rg5#) 44. ... Nxd5+ 45. Ke4 Nxc7 46. Rxc7 and the rook endgame will be drawn.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM
Position after 46. Rxc7

Unfortunately for White, these variations are not possible after the text-move 37. Bf1.

37. ... Ra2 (0:11)
Now White’s last chance is 38. Rb1 Qf6 39. Be2, and the game is still not over, but…

38. Rxc7? (0:01) Ra1 (0:11)

0 - 1

There is no longer any salvation for White.

I still believe that Magnus is a great rapid chess player and much better at it than Karjakin, who is also very good but who was not in the right state of mind because he was not taking active measures nor making active decisions, even when doing so was an absolute must. When a player has only one minute on the clock and his back to the wall, you expect him to fight, to hit back, to do something. Sergey’s big mistake was psychological. He was not ready to take an aggressive attitude and fight.
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

Computer Assessment
Carlsen played the surprising 5. f3 against Karjakin’s Sicilian Defense. The most topical and double-edged move here is 6. ... d5 – bringing about a complex, unbalanced position with chances for both sides.

An opportunity arises for Black: after 22. g3, he could respond with 22. ... Bg5 to exchange the dark-squared bishops, then put the knight on d4.

The move 34. ... Ra1 would keep the pressure on White’s position, but Karjakin chose to trade one of his rooks for White’s knight and two pawns, thereby reducing his chances to pull off the upset.
**Rapid Tiebreak: Game 4**

**Introduction**

This game is a must-win for Karjakin. If he manages to emerge victorious (with the Black pieces), then the match will proceed to the blitz games, where his chances would be good, especially with the psychological boost of having succeeded with his back to the wall. But if he draws or loses, the match is over.

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**Sicilian Defense [B55]**

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

1. e4 (0:25)  c5 (0:25)

The first and only Sicilian Defense of the match. It is do-or-die for Karjakin, who knows that Carlsen will play solidly, with as little risk as possible, and will also continually try to steer the game towards a draw.

The opponents’ track record against each other in the Sicilian is very limited. Of their 45 classical and rapid games played before the match, only five Sicilians had appeared on the board, and Sergey had played Black in only two of them; but one of those two Sicilians was their most recent tournament game, a Carlsen victory in an offbeat variation, 1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. c3 Nf6 4. Bc2 (1-0, 40 moves, Bilbao Masters, 2016). The other game was a Karjakin win, ten years earlier (0-1, 50 moves, Cap d’Agde KO Rapid, 2006).
In the last game, Karjakin tried hard because he had to, but he got a terrible position out of the opening. It’s very difficult to win with Black in the last game of a match, though I actually managed to do so once against Garry Kasparov. We played a rapid match in Moscow in 2001, and I found myself one point down entering the last game with Black. I managed to win the game, much to my surprise. I found myself slightly worse but then managed to complicate the position, somehow things got murky and I managed to outplay him, and I won the game. But normally, a match player is unlikely to win with Black in the final game. The only chance is that your opponent starts to get terribly nervous, or tries to make a draw from the first move, or is not thinking about chess anymore. But Magnus is experienced and mentally strong, so he played this game absolutely like the score was equal. He was trying to play the best moves, and he played a good game. Karjakin never had any real winning chance at all.

2. Nf3 (0:25)  d6 (0:25) 
3. d4 (0:25)  cxd4 (0:25) 
4. Nxd4 (0:25)  Nf6 (0:25) 
5. f3 (0:25) 

Position after 5. f3

A surprise, Carlsen had played 5. Nc3 in all of his prior recorded games (59 games from 2002-2017). For that matter, Karjakin as White had played 5. Nc3 in all of his prior recorded games. However, as Black he had faced 5. f3 once before, and that game had continued 5. … e5 6. Nb3 Be6 7. c4 Nbd7 8. Be3 Rc8 9. Nc3 with unclear play, even though the game was drawn in 12 moves (Magem Badals-Karjakin, ½-½, 39th Olympiad Khanty-Mansiysk, 2010).

5. … e5 (0:25) 

The main reply, but other moves have been seen on the top-GM level: 5. … Nc6, 5. … a6, and 5. … e6 (in order of frequency).

6. Nb3 (0:25) 

The variation 6. Bb5+ Nbd7 7. Nf5 has been played occasionally on the GM level.
RAPID TIEBREAK: GAME 4

6. ... Be7 (0:25)

A less common but reasonable reply. Presumably this move was Karjakin’s preparation for the offbeat 5. f3, because he continues to move quickly for several more moves. But the big question is why Sergey didn’t play 6. ... d5, a move that would signal a big fight ahead, in which “all three results” (win, draw, loss) are possible.

Recent grandmaster experience with the 6. ... d5 variation has shown that the resulting positions are tense and hard-fought, with chances for both sides. One of the main lines is 7. Bg5 Be6 8. Bxf6 gxf6 9. exd5 Qxd5 10. Qxd5 Bxd5

This position is unbalanced, with Black having the long-term potential advantage of the two bishops, but also the long-term potential disadvantage of a damaged pawn structure. Such a position would have suited Karjakin’s need for double-edged play with some winning chances for Black. Amongst the games played with this variation in 2016-2017, two of them were top-level GM games: Topalov-Nakamura (0-1, 42 moves, St. Louis Showdown, 2016-11-14) and Harikrishna-Giri (0-1, 56 moves, Shenzhen Du Te Cup, 2017-03-25). Note that Black won both of those games.

Carlsen vs. Karjakin—World Chess Championship

White appears to be a solid pawn ahead—but how solid? Computer assessments show that Black has full compensation for the pawn in this dynamic position. Black won in 34 moves.

In summary, the move 6. ... d5 would have given ample opportunity for a heavy-hitting battle in the final rapid game, which is exactly was Karjakin was seeking. Instead, the passive 6. ... Be7 allowed Carlsen to lock down the position, and Karjakin obtained fewer chances to upset the apple-cart.

7. c4 (0:25) a5 (0:25)

The knight on b3 is awkwardly placed due to the Black pawns that restrain its mobility. One of the main questions for White is where he should put this knight so that it is useful (and not in the way). Carlsen’s choice is to eventually aim for the b4/d5 squares via N(b3)-c1-d3-b4.

8. Be3 (0:25) a4 (0:25)

This pawn thrust (a7)-a5-a4 puts the question to White’s knight, but has the long-term potential disadvantage of weakening squares along the b-file, including b4, b5, and b6.

9. Nc1 (0:25) 0-0 (0:25)
10. Nc3 (0:25) Qa5 (0:21)

Karjakin is now out of his preparation, having thought for four minutes before playing his tenth move.

11. Qd2 (0:24) Na6 (0:19)

This move is a theoretical novelty on the top-GM level, but it doesn’t inspire confidence in Black’s chances. The opening has been favorable for Magnus, as White’s position is solid and his pieces are harmoniously placed. Meanwhile, Black needs to determine how to create some tension on the board.

12. Be2 (0:23) Nc5 (0:19)
13. 0-0 (0:22) Bd7 (0:18)
14. Rb1 (0:22) Rfc8 (0:18)
15. b4 (0:22)
Carlsen continues to play strong, solid chess, taking no risks and giving no opportunities to his opponent. White is better: His pieces are well-placed and his position has no major weaknesses. Additionally, Karjakin is beginning to fall into a time deficit, as he has done during the critical moments of each of the rapid games.

15. ... axb3 (0:16)
16. axb3 (0:22)

16. Nxb3 is a good alternative, but Magnus sees no reason to complicate matters by burdening himself with a weak a2-pawn.

16. ... Qd8?! (0:15)
The move 16. ... Qb4 is more active and also more “annoying” for White.

17. Nd3 (0:22) Ne6 (0:15)

One of the weapons in White’s arsenal is the knowledge that Karjakin must avoid simplifications that would increase chances of a drawn outcome. Therefore, Carlsen can offer a simplifying piece exchange whenever the objectively best move for Black would be to exchange, because if Black must try to refrain from most simplifying exchanges, then he will need to make a second-best move to avoid it.

18. Nb4 (0:22) Bc6 (0:15)
19. Rfd1 (0:21) h5! (0:14)

Black pushes his h-pawn up the board, hoping to create weaknesses in White’s kingside, even at the possible cost of the pawn. The move provides longer-term counterplay, and there is also an immediate benefit as well: Magnus spends four minutes thinking about how to respond, which takes away much of Sergey’s time deficit.

20. Bf1 (0:17) h4 (0:14)
21. Qf2 (0:17) Nd7 (0:14)
Anticipating $\text{Nbd5}$ or $\text{Ncd5}$, Black strives to avoid exchanges, but this move also allows him to initiate a strategic maneuver that could provide more chances for success: trading the dark-squared bishops on $g5$ (which possibly entails sacrificing the $d6$-pawn) then planting a knight on the $d4$-square. For instance, after the engines’ top choice $22. \text{K}h1$, Black could respond with $22. \ldots \text{Bg5}$ $23. \text{B}xg5$ (also possible is $23. \text{Nc}2$, but Black will find good squares for his knights after $23. \ldots \text{Bxe3}$ $24. \text{Qxe3 Nf6}$, planning a subsequent $\ldots \text{Nh5}$ and $\ldots \text{Nhf4}$) $23. \ldots \text{Qxg5}$ $24. \text{R}xd6$

This position is very sharp after $26. \ldots \text{exd}4$ $27. \text{Ncd5}$, but is still in White’s favor as he will win the $d4$-pawn to restore material equality, and his control of the center bodes well for preventing further counterplay or facilitating favorable exchanges.

22. $g3$?!  (0:15)

This move has some plusses: It covers the $f4$-square and provides a route for White’s light-squared bishop to enter the fray. But it also weakens squares on the kingside and opens up a more favorable opportunity for the $\ldots \text{Bg5}$ plan—even though Karjakin did not take advantage of that opportunity.

22. $\ldots$ $\text{Ra}3$?!  (0:10)

Planning to double his rooks on the $a$-file, even though they will not have anywhere to go. The time was ripe for $22. \ldots \text{Bg5}$.
White has to make an immediate choice: Should he exchange bishops on g5 or allow Black to exchange bishops on e3? Note that 23. Rxd6? is not good due to 23. ... Qf8 24. Rbd1 hxg3 25. hxg3 Nd4.

The Exchange sac (for two pawns) does not work in this situation: 26. R6xd4 Bxe3 27. Qxe3 exd4 (the queen is attacked!) 28. Rxd4 Qxb4 and Black wins. So White must continue 26. Bxg5 Qxd6, with advantage to Black.

Instead (from Analysis Diagram A), 23. Bh3 Bxe3 24. Qxe3 Nd4 keeps the position razor-sharp.


Another way from Analysis Diagram A is 23. Nc2 with a complicated position, and important decisions to be made on almost every move, e.g., 23. ... Bxe3 24. Qxe3 (or 24. Nxe3) 24. ... Qe7 (or 24. ... Ndc5) 25. Rd2 (or 25. Rb2 or 25. Bh3 or 25. Qf2) 25. ... Ndc5 (or 25. ... Nf6 or 25. ... Rd8).

Also from Analysis Diagram A, if White decides to exchange bishops on g5 then the resulting position is double-edged with chances for both sides, e.g., 23. Bxg5 Qxg5 24. Nc2 Qe7 and now after
25. Bh3 (25. gxf4 is also possible), the game is wide-open and unpredictable.

But Karjakin chose not to pursue this path, and instead tried to keep the position complicated in other ways.

23. Bh3  (0:14)  Rca8?! (0:10)

The problem with this move is that the a3-rook needs a8 as a retreat square. So 23. ... Rcb8 was clearly preferable.

24. Nc2  (0:13)  R3a6  (0:09)

Now the issue with 23. ... Rca8 becomes apparent. The rook (currently on a3) is subject to repeated attack, which reveals another strong weapon at White’s disposal: He can repeat moves in order to threaten a three-fold repetition, which Black cannot allow. So Black must do something to prevent a three-fold repetition, and in doing so, his position will have to incur another weakness.

25. Nb4  (0:13)

Putting the question to Black’s rook.

25. ...  Ra5  (0:09)

26. Nc2  (0:13)

Position after 26. Nc2

With the big threat of 27. b4 and 28. b5, winning the bishop. Black cannot play 26. ... R5a6 due to the repetition-threatening 27. Nb4, so his move is virtually forced to keep the game going.

26. ...  b6  (0:09)

27. Rd2  (0:11)

Position after 27. Rd2

Magnus continues to slowly improve the placement of his pieces.

27. ...  Qc7  (0:03)

Sergey spends most of his time—six of his nine minutes—pondering his dilemma: how to create counter-chances from a slightly worse position?
28. Rbd1 (0:10) Bf8 (0:02)
29. gxh4 (0:10)

Position after 29. gxh4

A bold decision. After all, a pawn is a pawn, especially on the top level, so Magnus takes it. Now he is ahead in material, ahead positionally, and ahead on the clock. But his kingside has been weakened, and tactical and strategic opportunities might open up for Black. Meanwhile, Sergey is down to his final minute—literally and figuratively.

29. ... Nf4 (0:01)

Karjakin is a classical “Steinitzian” player—favoring bishops over knights—whereas Carlsen is fond of his knights. In this situation, though, the antidote to Black’s increasingly strong pair of knights is obvious: Get them off the board!

30. Bxf4 (0:10) exf4 (0:01)

Now the d7-knight threatens to land on the excellent e5-square, so Magnus removes this threat as well.

31. Bxd7 (0:10) Qxd7 (0:01)
Better chances to keep complications and pressure on the board were offered by 34. ... Ra1.

After 34. ... Ra1 Carlsen is facing some pressure, and he cannot overlook the potential of the currently-inactive bishop on f8, especially with both his queen and king lined up on the a7-g1 diagonal. White’s most natural move 35. Qd4 could run straight into 35. ... d5!.

This thrust would force Magnus to quickly decide whether or not White is OK, which is not immediately apparent due to Black’s newly-created threats, e.g. 36. exd5 Qg6+ 37. Kh1 Rxd1+ 38. Rxd1 Ra2 39. Qg1 (only move to avoid losing)

This might not be the type of position that the world champion would be 100% confident of drawing or winning, especially with little time left.

Equally questionable from Analysis Diagram C is 36. Qxd5 Qf6, when the pieces are still flying around the board, and anything could happen.

Magnus might also consider (from Analysis Diagram C) the move 36. Rxa1, but then he must be sure that 36. ... Be5! 37. Rxa8+ Qxa8 is also a draw—and indeed it is equal after 38. exd5 Qe8 39.
Kg2 Bxd4 40. Nxd4 Qe3 41. Rd1

...but not necessarily after 38. Qxc5? bxc5 39. exd5 Qe8! 40. Kg2 Qe3, with some winning chances.

Clearly, Carlsen would want to avoid these sharp positions, so (from Analysis Diagram B) he would rule out 34. Qd4.

In all likelihood he would play the prophylactic move 35. Kh1 (from Analysis Diagram B) to get the king off of the sensitive diagonal. But Black could jettison another pawn with 35. ... d5 36. exd5 Qf6, and the pressure is still on.

35. Nd4 (0:04)

But after the game continuation 34. ... Rxb3?! , more pieces come off the board, and some of the dynamic potential in Black’s position is lost.

35. Nd4 (0:04)

White prevents the b-pawn from advancing due to 38. Rb2 followed by 39. Rxb5.

37. ... Be7 (0:01)

The situation is dire but Karjakin fights on, seeking to use his few remaining pieces to cause trouble for White’s king.

38. Kg2 (0:04) Qe6 (0:01)
39. h5 (0:04)
Carlsen vs. Karjakin — World Chess Championship

Position after 39. h5
A good move, using the pawn to stop checks on g6.

39. ... Ra3 (0:01)
40. Rd3 (0:03) Ra2 (0:01)
41. R3d2 (0:03) Ra3 (0:01)

Carlsen’s rook is well posted on White’s fifth rank, not only protecting the h5-pawn and preventing the b-pawn’s advance, but also intending to pile up on Black’s f4-pawn.

43. ... Rc7 (0:01)
44. Qd2 (0:03) Qf6 (0:01)
45. Rf5 (0:03) Qh4 (0:01)
46. Rc1 (0:03) Ra7 (0:01)

Position after 46. ... Ra7
47. Qxf4 (0:02) Ra2+ (0:01)
GMs Peter Svidler and Jan Gustafsson were commenting on the match, and at this point they noticed the variation leading to Carlsen’s grand finale.

48. Kh1 (0:02) Qf2 (0:01)

Position after 48. ... Qf2

Sergey tries hard to look for something—anything—that might cause Magnus to stumble.

42. Rd3 (0:03) Ra7 (0:01)

Once again Black is unable to repeat moves and must therefore withdraw his rook from its active post.

43. Rd5 (0:03)
White is threatened with mate, but it can easily be stopped: Svidler said he was sure Carlsen would play 49. Qg3, which prevents mate and wins handily after the trade of queens. But Carlsen’s next move made it clear that Magnus had seen the finale, and was going to play it!

49. **Rc8+!** (0:02)

Svidler’s reaction: “Wow. I am very, very impressed.”

Karjakin can interpose the bishop with 49. ... Bf8, but the game would soon be over, e.g. 50. Rxf8+! Kxf8 (after 50. ... Kh7 the game concludes as it did in the actual game) 51. Rxf7+ Ke8 (or 51. ... Kg8 52. Rf8+ Kh7 52. Qf5+ Kh6 53 Rh8#) 52. Rf8+ Kd7

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 52. ... Kd7

53. Qf5+ Kc6 54. Rc8+ Kb7 55. Qd7+ Ka6 56. Ra8#.

49. ...  **Kh7** (0:01)

White is threatened with mate – and what is his follow-up? Is he lost?

50. **Qh6+!** (0:02)

1 - 0

No! Magnus pounds out an amazing queen sacrifice to win the match and retain his title.

Karjakin can choose how to get mated: 50. ... gxh6 51. Rxf7#

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 51. Rxf7#

**ANALYSIS DIAGRAM**

Position after 56. Ra8#
or 50. ... Kxh6 51. Rh8#.

A spectacular finish to a magnificent match!

Congratulations to World Champion Magnus Carlsen for his brilliant victory!

Congratulations also to World Vice Champion Sergey Karjakin for his hard-fought attempt to capture the title!

Of course the end of the game was beautiful, 50 Qh6+. But frankly the match was lost in game three for Karjakin. It could have been lost in game two, and already it’s very lucky if you have a second chance in the rapid match, but if you don’t use it, then you don’t get a third chance.
Sergey Karjakin resigns the game and the match as World Champion Magnus Carlsen retains his title.
THE MATCH IN PICTURES

The World Championship is a historic event, and its excitement and importance have been permanently captured by the professional photographers.

The Games

Presentation of Awards

Rapid Tiebreaks

Closing Festivities

MasterWorks

People
Sergey Karjakin surveys the board in anticipation of game one.

The World Champion arrives and the match is ready to begin!
Carlsen steps back for a moment while Karjakin studies the position.

Dusk falls across Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge as game one winds down to a drawn result.
Game two sees the first Ruy Lopez of the match, with Carlsen controlling the black pieces.

Magnus’ sister Ingrid keeps close tabs on how her brother is doing.
The action heated up in game three, and the players removed their jackets during the course of the game... whether the official rules allow it or not!

Sergey expresses satisfaction, and some relief, at having held Magnus to a draw in a very difficult ending.
The nerve-wracking game four commences, and will last for 96 moves—the longest game of the match.

Some frustration shows on Carlsen’s face after he was unable to convert game four.
Before game five, Agon released its new book *MasterWorks*, featuring “some of the rarest and most beautiful chess sets in the world.” Co-authored by Jon Crumiller.

A very rare 18th-century Burmese chess set displayed on a 19th-century chessboard. (The Jon Crumiller Collection)

A circa-1800 East India Company chess set with exquisite workmanship, presented in its original display case. (The Jon Crumiller Collection)
The action commences in game five, an extraordinarily double-edged game.

In game six, the first-move honors were fulfilled by economist Ken Rogoff, who is a chess grandmaster and former U.S. Junior Champion.
The players switched colors in the cycle starting with game seven, so Karjakin is playing his second “white” game in a row.

Carlsen is determined to play for a win today in game eight—perhaps too determined.
On the other hand, Sergey enjoys his finest moment of the match, as recapped in “Sergey’s Selection” in our game eight analysis.

After his painful loss in game eight, Magnus didn’t stick around for the mandatory press conference. He was fined 10% of his match winnings (reduced to 5% on appeal.)
Carlsen vs. Karjakin—World Chess Championship

Game nine: “The best game of the match” according to Vladimir Kramnik.

Carlsen finds himself in a difficult middlegame, but he fights his way out of it for a well-earned draw.
Carlsen played forcefully, and tied up the match with a crucial win in game ten.

Karjakin misses a draw right out of the opening, twice.
Game 11 started with a handshake of sportsmanship and ended with a handshake of peace, as both players seemed happy to decide the match in the Rapid Tiebreaks.

Game 12 was the shortest game of the match—indeed, it was the shortest game of any World Championship match.
Magnus pauses for a moment of reflection before the press conference.

The players voice sparse comments at the end of regulation play, as they look forward to the Rapid Tiebreaks.
Per the match rules, colors are chosen anew for the Rapid Tiebreaks. Karjakin will start out with the white pieces.

The players are ready, and the next several hours will determine who wins the World Chess Championship.
After months of preparation and weeks of tense action, Magnus can now breathe a sigh of relief. The title is his to keep, for at least two more years—and maybe many more.
The final press conference sees a jubilant Carlsen and a subdued Karjakin.

Agon CEO Ilya Merenzon congratulates the World Vice Champion.
Congratulations to World Champion Magnus Carlsen!
Decorations on the celebratory cake are perfect for the occasion, except perhaps for the illegal position on the board.
A close-up of the winner’s trophy displays the highest title in chess.

The event’s finale is christened in honor of the Champion and Vice Champion.
Andrey Filatov (President of the Russian Chess Federation), Dmitry Peskov (Head of the Board of Guardians of the Russian Chess Federation and Press Secretary for the President of Russia), and Sergei Kolushev, owner of the newspaper *Soviet Sport*.

Agon CEO Ilya Merenzon in the VIP room, enjoying the occasion.
Vladimir Putin meets with World Chess Vice Champion Sergey Karjakin.
"What do you want me to do?" ~Magnus Carlsen

At the Paris Rapids in early summer of 2017, the World Champion managed a clear first by a full point over Alexander Grischuk and a field of ten players. His recent rival Karjakin finished six points back in seventh place. Yet the burden of expectations appeared to be weighing on Magnus Carlsen’s shoulders and possibly was what caused a prickly reaction during a live interview with GM Maurice Ashley, as the following exchange took place:

“Magnus, you seemed to have some hiccups earlier today. You didn't really have smooth performances. This game wasn't that smooth either. It was a little bit unclear. What's your feeling overall as the game was transpiring?”

Carlsen testily responded, "What do you want me to do? I mean, I take the piece, of course, he hasn't done anything particularly wrong, of course, it's not going to be lost, I mean what do you want from me? … Do you want me to get a huge advantage from the opening and then to push it all the way ... Is that the only way you can win a smooth game? Is that your point?"

Ashley backpedalled in a politic way: "Not at all Magnus, but certainly the game was tricky enough. Let me just get your thoughts on how you've done so ..."

But the world champion was not letting him off the hook, continuing, "I'm just feeling that the whole—the way you're approaching it is—trying to belittle the whole thing. That's my only issue. ... I'm hopeful that I can continue to win—not so smooth games."

Carlsen had reason to feel uneasy despite yet another tournament win. A scant one month removed from his championship, he and Sergey made their way to Doha, Qatar for five days of speed chess. There, at the 2016 World Blitz Championship, Karjakin emerged as champion on tiebreaks over Magnus. In the podium photo, Karjakin is flashing a grin larger than the one displayed when first beating Magnus in game eight in New York. Magnus, however, looks like he would rather be anywhere else.

But perhaps more telling was the Altibox Norway Chess tournament held in June 2017. One of the strongest tournaments in history, it almost, but not quite, had all of the top ten players in the world playing. Chess observers can easily forgive Carlsen and Karjakin for finishing in ninth and tenth place respectively after playing so much chess at such a high level for the previous eight months. Carlsen won one game and lost two; Karjakin won none and also lost two (though one of those losses was in 44 moves to Carlsen).
Carlsen’s rating fell from 2853 after the championship to 2822 in July. This was his lowest rating since July, 2011 when he was at 2821.

The shocking part was how candid Carlsen was about his lack of confidence. He self-diagnosed with, “I managed to build myself up at least a bit for every game, but then it would all disappear very quickly. Basically I know that I can play, but I’m not so convinced about my ability to win games. My instincts in blitz are still good but in classical I am over-thinking.”

To be clear, we’re talking about a slump that others would kill for. Carlsen is world champion. He still tops the ratings list. This is a slump like Roger Federer or Tiger Woods (in his heyday) not winning a major championship was a slump. It may be nothing more than the statistical possibility of “regression to the mean.” But no matter what it is or what its cause, top-level chess competitors are separated by razor-thin margins, so any hint of weakness will boost the confidence of those entering the championship cycle that will ultimately decide who will challenge Carlsen one-on-one, as we now enter the 2018 World Championship season.

Carlsen’s future challenger come November 2018 will know that he is not playing a defending champion bursting with confidence (losing one of his major intimidation points) unless Carlsen has managed to shake his malaise. As GM Ian Rogers wrote in Chess Life after the Norway event, “After modest results this year in Wijk aan Zee, Baden-Baden and Stavanger, following his shaky world title defense against Karjakin, it may be that Carlsen no longer strikes fear into the hearts of his rivals.”

The Candidates Tournament to determine Carlsen’s challenger is scheduled for March, 2018. The field will be comprised of:

- The runner-up from the 2016 World Championship match (Already claimed by Karjakin, of course);
- The top two finishers in the Chess World Cup 2017;
- The top two finishers in the FIDE Grand Prix 2017;
- The top two players with highest rating who played in World Cup or Grand Prix; Wild card nomination of the organizers (Must be rated at least 2725 in any FIDE published rating list in 2017).

As this book went to print, the location of both the Candidates Tournament and the World Championship were unknown—other than it would not be in Norway, according to a press release from Agon (A group from Oslo had made a serious play to host the championship). Agon Limited is the exclusive official partner of FIDE and holds all commercial rights to the championship cycle.

What is known, however, is that world chess is in a most healthy state. Today’s chess world has all this going for it: Dynamic players filled with personality, any one of whom
can win against any other of their top-level opponents on any given day; sponsors such as Agon and benefactors such as Rex Sinquefield in St. Louis, Missouri; broadcast opportunities via the Internet that are only getting stronger as the technology both improves and gets cheaper; and a stable championship qualifying cycle—all of these are reasons for chess fans to rejoice during what is shaping up to be, just possibly, the Age of Carlsen.

Daniel Lucas
Atlanta, July 2017
## Regulation Games

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## Rapid Tiebreak Games

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The following table groups the 16 games by ECO code and compares the moves between the games, with shaded cells indicating which move differed from the game directly above it within the ECO grouping.

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</table>
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“The drama and psychology and tension of the New York match was incredibly exciting. This was one of the most interesting matches in a long time.”

Former World Chess Champion Vladimir Kramnik

It was a classic matchup, pitting the Irresistible Force against the Immovable Object. World Champion Magnus Carlsen of Norway is famous for grinding down his opponents. But in this second defense of his title, he faced Sergey Karjakin, the Russian grandmaster who is equally well known for his fierce resistance when under pressure.

Grandmaster LEV ALBURT, three-time US Champion, is one of the world’s most sought-after chess teachers. National Master JON CRUMILLER is Lev’s chess analyst partner and an expert in the use of computer analysis, a dominating influence in modern chess preparation and annotation. Together, they give one of the most detailed and objective analysis of a modern world chess championship.

No stranger to tense world championship matches, including his victory over Garry Kasparov in 2000, Vladimir Kramnik gives in this book his own insightful take on the critical moves. You’ll be treated to “Vlad’s Viewpoints” in every game. Sergey Karjakin himself recounts his most memorable moment in the match. Dan Lucas, Director of Publications of the US Chess Federation, and Al Lawrence, twice Chess Journalist of the Year, contributed their editing and writing expertise.