

# Sam Collins

## The King's Indian Defence

**move by move**

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# About the Author

**Sam Collins** is an International Master with two Grandmaster norms, and a former Irish and Japanese Champion. He has represented Ireland at seven Olympiads, winning an individual gold medal at Bled 2002. He has a wealth of teaching and writing experience, and has produced many books, DVDs and magazine articles on chess.

## **Also by the Author**

*The French Advance*

*Gambit Busters*

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*The Tarrasch Defence: Move by Move*

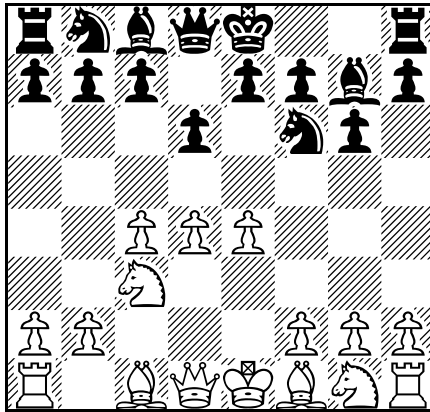
*Karpov: Move by Move*

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# Introduction

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6



The King's Indian (the main position of which is shown in the diagram, but which also includes some other systems) is an opening that needs little introduction for most players. It was Fischer and Kasparov's main weapon with Black in their peak years and continues to be featured in games at the highest level.

## Why Play the King's Indian?

The King's Indian has many obvious and subtle advantages, which I hope will become apparent from reading this book. I'd like to highlight two in particular:

### 1) Black plays for three results

"No white player playing 1 d4 likes to get mated. They like long endings where they're slightly better, they like to attack the isolated pawn, they like to have two bishops in the Nimzo-Indian, what they do not like is to get mated. And still, every now and again, they do, although by now we have 100 years of experience in this opening." – GM Rustam Kasimdzhanov.

In his instructive series on *How to build your 1 d4 repertoire* GM Jan Gustafsson describes the King's Indian as his "personal nemesis amongst chess openings", noting that top players use it to play for a win against weaker opponents and that he has suffered

more defeats in the King's Indian than in all other openings combined.

Of course there are systems within the King's Indian where White can play with less risk (such as the Fianchetto Variation, which is dealt with in the first part of the book), but the fact remains that strong players can get quickly mated with White in this opening if they make a few inaccuracies. Moreover, as we will see, Black is not merely relying on a rapid attack on the king, but can play a more positional game, for example by exploiting the weakness of d4, or by exerting pressure on White's queenside (perhaps in combination with a Benko-style ...b7-b5 sacrifice). Overall, despite the very broad range of systems at White's disposal, it is quite difficult to identify a safe line where White plays for an edge with no risk. This alone makes the King's Indian a very attractive opening, and one which may be played in most or all of your black games against everything except 1 e4.

## **2) The King's Indian is universal**

"The King's Indian is an opening you employ with Black against 1 d4, or basically against any other move which belongs to the so-called 'closed openings', so basically anything which is not 1 e4. 1 c4, 1 ♘f3, 1 d4, 1 g3, 1 b3, anything" – GM Rustam Kasimdzhanov

"The main advantage from a black point of view is that the King's Indian you can employ against pretty much anything and there's not much cunning White can use regarding the move order." – GM Jan Gustafsson

"I have more frequently favoured queen's pawn openings, and have found that a healthy mix of 1 d4, 1 ♘f3 and 1 c4 works well. Many players have the basis of a decent repertoire, but have failed to pay sufficient attention to the subtleties of different move orders." – GM Peter Heine Nielsen

A trend I have noticed in my own games, and in those of the players I follow, is that 1 d4 players often start their games with 1 ♘f3 and 1 c4. This certainly seems to be the case in elite tournaments, where White has struggled to demonstrate anything against the Grünfeld, and lower rated players have copied the trend. One of the practical advantages of the King's Indian, compared with the Grünfeld or the Nimzo-Indian, is that it is a complete system against closed openings and is not heavily dependent on White employing a particular move order. This cuts down on the amount of preparation required before a particular game – although, it must be admitted, there's plenty to study in the King's Indian main lines in any event. Perhaps the main benefit, if a less tangible one, is that Black knows that he can expect a similar type of position against all these first moves, and can build experience in these structures rather than, for example, learning a bespoke line against the English which he only plays every couple of months.

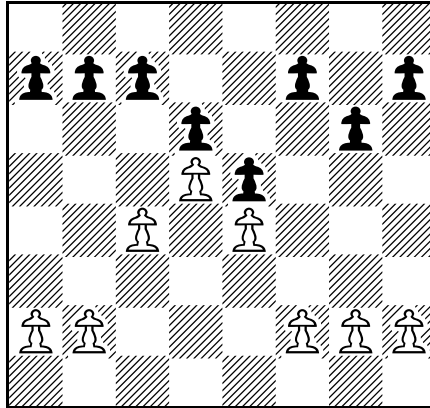
## **A (Very) Brief Structural Overview**

Partly because Black doesn't immediately contest the centre with pawns, White has a very broad range of possible ways to set up. I had to dispense with the idea of a detailed "structural introduction" section due to the sheer number of distinct pawn structures which can arise from this opening, in particular depending on whether Black challenges

the centre with ...e7-e5 or ...c7-c5, each of which gives White different options in reply. Even listing the main structural possibilities takes some time.

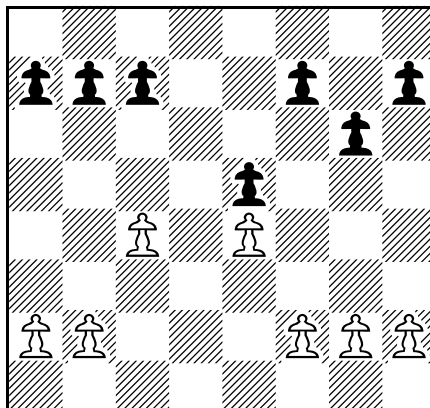
### 1) Black plays ...e7-e5

1. White answers with d4-d5.



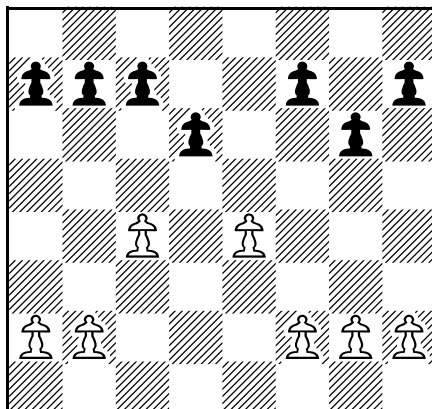
This is the pawn structure most characteristic of the King's Indian, though it can also arise from other openings such as the Breyer Ruy Lopez and the Old Indian (which is basically an inferior King's Indian). Generally speaking, White will play on the queenside (typically with c4-c5), while Black will arrange kingside counterplay with ...f7-f5 and, if White plays f2-f3, then a further ...f5-f4 and ...g6-g5-g4. This is the pure race situation, though many subtleties can be introduced in the systems where either side plays prophylactically (...a7-a5 or ...c7-c5 by Black, an early g2-g4 by White).

2. White takes on e5 and Black recaptures with the pawn.



This structure is outwardly symmetrical but the d4-square is an outpost. The combination of these two factors means that many inexperienced players rush into this structure with White (for example, in the Exchange Variation), hoping for an easy draw against a stronger player, only to be outplayed in convincing fashion. The structure is not inherently bad for White – for instance, when Black plays ...c7-c6 (which is often necessary), White has good plans based on c4-c5 and bringing a knight to d6 – but it does demand energetic play.

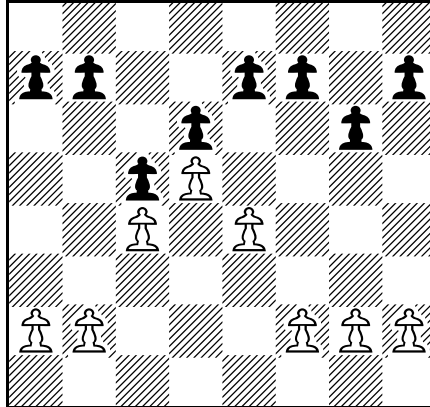
3. Black takes on d4 (or White takes on e5 and Black recaptures with a piece, resulting in the same structure).



I haven't recommended many lines resulting in this structure, with the exception of the Gligoric Variation. Exchanging Black's only pawn on the fourth rank is, in positional terms, a concession, and heightens Black's responsibility to generate active counterplay (a concept I discuss further at the end of the Introduction), relying on the King's Indian bishop on g7 which really shines in this structure. If you like these positions then I can recommend Dejan Bojkov's instructive book, listed in the Bibliography, where he built a repertoire largely around this structure.

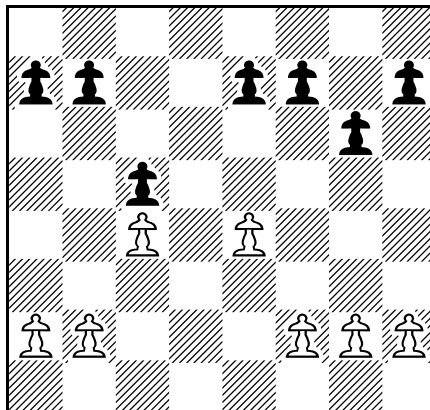
## **2) Black plays ...c7-c5**

1. White answers with d4-d5.



This leads to a family of structures known from the Benoni and the Benko. Black will typically aim for ...e7-e6 and ...e6xd5 when, as you can see, three different structures are possible depending on whether White takes on d5 with the c-pawn, the e-pawn or the knight. Black will also aim for queenside counterplay with ...b7-b5, sometimes sacrificing a pawn to achieve this end.

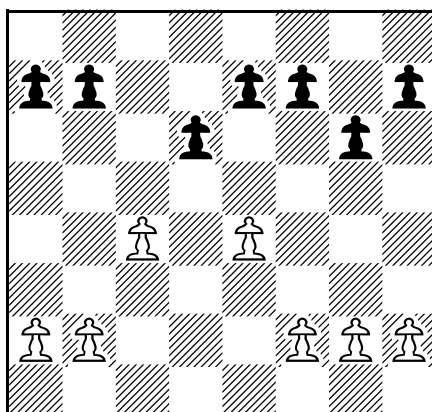
2. White takes on c5.



This is not a good structural trade from White's perspective and is almost exclusively connected with the idea of winning the pawn on c5, as we will see in the Sämisch. I like Black's compensation and I hope you will too.



3. Black takes on d4.



This leads to a Maróczy Bind structure, characteristic of many variations of the English and the Accelerated Dragon. Generally it tends to lead to positions which are slightly too passive for my taste, but in some lines I have recommended going into favourable versions.

## Model Players

Many strong players have adopted the King's Indian throughout their careers and it's a great idea to follow their games. Of course, the games of Fischer and Kasparov must be studied by anyone who wishes to improve, or just to enjoy classical chess heritage, and these include many wonderful King's Indians.

Of the modern elite, the King's Indian is regularly essayed by GMs Nakamura, Grischuk, Ding Liren, and Radjabov.

Several other GMs are worth following if you adopt this opening, of whom I would mention in particular Ilya Smirin (whose excellent recent book on his games in this opening is required reading), Arkady Naiditsch, Etienne Bacrot, Ivan Saric, Sebastian Mazé, and Gawain Jones. I am particularly impressed by Gawain's recent games which, despite a lot of variation with White, and with Black against 1 e4, show an astonishing faithfulness to the King's Indian against all levels of opposition, with excellent results.

## Two Final Thoughts on the King's Indian

This section is slightly unusual for an opening book, and players interested in the theory of the opening can probably skip it, but these concepts are central to my understanding of the King's Indian and the spirit in which it should be played.

### 1) Responsibility

One of the best descriptions I've heard of the nature of the positions arising in the King's Indian was that of my friend and coach GM Jacob Aagaard: namely that the level of responsibility in this opening is very high. In more concrete terms, from the opening moves

Black concedes central space and, unless he can quickly generate counterplay, will find himself in a prospectless position. In many lines of the Classical Variation, White is winning on the queenside, so Black will likely lose the game if his kingside attack fails. As we will see, Black often sacrifices material for positional gains or to seize the initiative, and such sacrifices also carry their own responsibilities, both in evaluating them correctly beforehand and in playing the position well thereafter.

I would put a gloss on this point by saying that the level of responsibility is high for both sides (as set out above, it is difficult for White to play without risk in this opening). One of the unusual features of the King's Indian is that many positions which are objectively lost for Black still retain prospects for counterplay, and White often draws or even loses such positions in practice. One of the first examples in GM Ilya Smirin's recent book on the King's Indian is the game between Yannick Pelletier and Andreas Skytte Hagen in Legnica 2013, where Black overcame a 200 point Elo deficit and won what was, objectively, a completely lost position against an experienced GM. I also like following the games of GM Mark Hebden in this opening, who very frequently gets half or full points from positions which are, objectively, dead.

## **2) Complexity**

The King's Indian is staggeringly complex. As you can see from the Bibliography, even in the last couple of years several large works have been published on this opening, including repertoires for both colours. GM Kotronias has produced a five-volume repertoire work on the opening (the first volume of which is 720 pages). The opening has been played in hundreds of thousands of games, and is a darling of correspondence players who are pushing forward theory with increasingly powerful engines.

This touches on another unusual aspect of the King's Indian, namely that computers are of limited assistance (they tend to assess most positions in the Classical Variation as winning for White because Black's standard attack takes so many moves to execute that the mate does not appear on the engines' horizons). As explained by Ilya Smirin in his wonderful book, the King's Indian "is a big enough opening to have enough dimensions not to get boring". As with responsibility, complexity cuts both ways, so let's get to work and bring White players out of their comfort zone.

## **Dedication**

I'm not normally in the habit of dedicating my chess books. However, I'd like to dedicate this one to up and coming Irish junior players, many of whom have risen through the ranks with astonishing speed, thanks to the efforts of great teachers like GM Alex Baburin and Daniel Lynch and the support of the Irish Chess Union. I strongly suspect that some of these talents will surpass previous generations of Irish players and obtain titles, even the coveted GM title. If they are to succeed in this goal, they had better know a good defence to 1 d4, so this book is written for them.

Sam Collins, Dublin, July 2017

**59...♖c6 60 ♗d3?**

Walking into mate in two. Instead, 60 ♗a6 ♖f2+ 61 ♔d2 ♗ge4+ 62 ♖xe4 ♗xe4+ 63 ♔e3 ♗c5 leaves White a full exchange down, but there are always drawing chances with such limited material.

**60...♖d2+ 0-1**

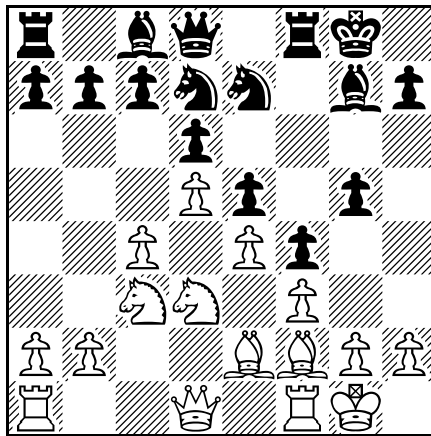
Since 61 ♔e1 ♖c1 mate follows.

I find this game rather inspiring, for two reasons. Firstly, as he has done in the past, Nakamura trusted his King's Indian in one of the most important competitions (moreover, against Kasimdzhanov, who is himself a King's Indian expert). Secondly, despite the exchange of queens on move 30, Nakamura spent the next 30 moves attacking the white king, ending in mate.

*Game 7*  
**W.So-H.Nakamura**  
Sinquefield Cup, St Louis 2015

When I started working on this book, this game was the first I wanted to include. It's a perfect King's Indian game by Nakamura.

**1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♖c6 8 d5 ♗e7 9 ♗e1 ♗d7 10 f3 f5 11 ♗e3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 ♗d3**



Now we look at alternatives to the immediate 13 ♖c1. This one is extremely logical. Black can no longer prevent c4-c5 since 13...b6?? would be horrible, only helping White to open lines; i.e. 14 b4 and White is close to winning.

**13...♗g6**

13...♗f6 comes to the same thing, since Black can't stop c4-c5 anymore.

**14 c5 ♗f6**

There is no good way for Black to resolve the tension, so taking on c5 isn't to be recommended. White has achieved his break, but Black has aggressively posted his knights on the kingside and is looking for an opportunity to push ...g5-g4.

**15 ♖c1 ♜f7!**

**Question:** What's the idea?

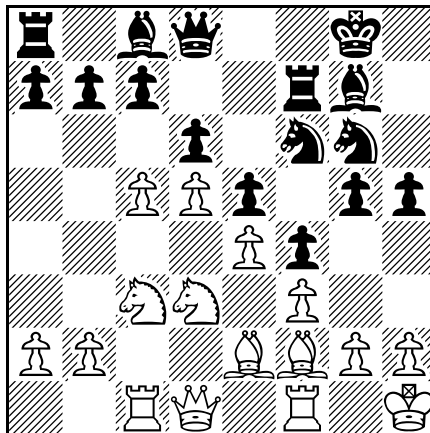
**Answer:** The same one we've seen before: this is the start of a typical KID regrouping (...♜f7 and ...♞f8), which has the effect of securing key squares and pawns on the queenside (c7 and d6 in particular), while improving Black's co-ordination for kingside operations; for example, ...♜g7 can be played to support ...g5-g4 and ultimately aim at the white king.

**16 ♞h1**

This prophylactic move is preferred by Shirov. We will look at 16 a4 in the next game.

**16...h5**

I like this aggressive approach. 16...♞f8 is another thematic move which has been contested between strong players, such as A.Shirov-D.Vocaturu, European Team Championship, Reykjavik 2015 (0-1 in 55). In the game, we see Nakamura opting for a different regrouping.



**17 cxd6?!**

I think this is where So mixed up his move order. The immediate 17 ♞b5! is better and leads to a critical position for the assessment of the whole line: 17...g4 (17...a6 18 ♞a3 ♞f8, as in L.Bruzon Batista-D.Arenas Vanegas, San Salvador 2016, is probably what So was aiming for: Black can't play ...b7-b5, so the knight is coming to c4 with strong pressure) 18 cxd6 cxd6 19 ♜c2! (this move is endorsed by Krasenkow, who is an expert on the white side of the King's Indian; 19 ♞xa7 ♞d7 20 ♜b3 was A.Merry-M.Hebden, Jersey 2016, when Krasenkow suggests 20...h4 as unclear) 19...♞e8 (I think Black should take time out for this move; 19...g3 is what Black wants to play but it's well met by 20 ♞c7! ♜xc7 21 ♜xc7 ♜xc7

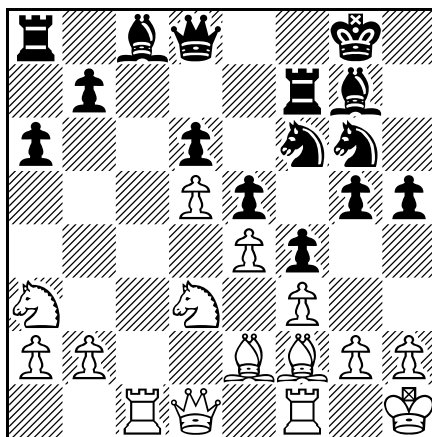
22 ♖xc7 gxf2 23 ♖fc1, which left White with dominant rooks in A. Shirov-E. Bacrot, European Cup, Bilbao 2014 – even Bacrot, one of the best King's Indian players, couldn't save the game; 1-0 in 51) 20 ♘xa7 ♕d7 21 ♖b3 g3 22 ♕g1 was T. Batchuluun-A. El Jawich, Abu Dhabi 2016; here I like 22... ♕f8 followed by ...gxf2 with an unclear position.

**17...cxd6 18 ♘b5 a6!**

This is based on a very concrete idea, because White has not yet played a2-a4.

**19 ♘a3**

After 19 ♘a7 ♕d7 20 ♖b3 g4 21 ♖b6 ♖xb6 22 ♕xb6 h4!, Black was pressing in G. Kjartansson-V. Kovalev, Riga 2015 (0-1 in 48). The knight on a7 looks like more of a liability than an asset.



**Exercise:** What is White's threat and how should Black respond?

**Answer:** The threat is ♘c4, aiming at the weak dark squares on the queenside. And the response:

**19...b5!**

This is why White normally starts with a2-a4 before commencing his knight tour. He will now need to spend several tempi getting his queenside play going, during which time Nakamura will attack the white king.

**20 ♖c6 g4 21 ♖c2 ♖f8 22 ♖c1 ♕d7 23 ♖c7**

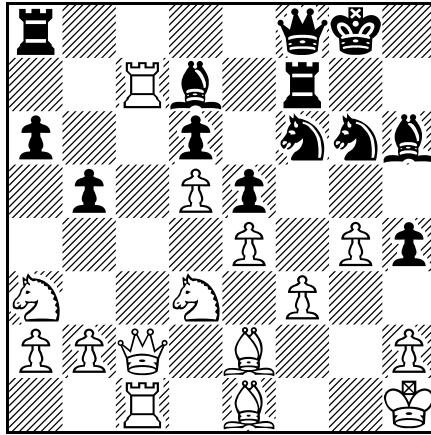
It's quite striking how little White has achieved on the queenside. Despite the resources devoted to that side of the board (including tripling heavy pieces on the c-file), he has provoked no weaknesses and has no targets and no pawn breaks. In the meantime, Black's kingside attack is just as dangerous as it looks.

**23...♕h6!**

An excellent regrouping. We often see ...♖f7 in combination with ...♕f8 so that the rook can operate on the g- and h-files. Here the f8-square is occupied by the queen but h6 is a

great alternative. An added bonus is that the bishop can find work on the c1-h6 diagonal, if and when the kingside opens, and will attack the rook on c1.

24 ♖e1 h4 25 fxg4 f3 26 gxf3



**Exercise:** How should Black continue?

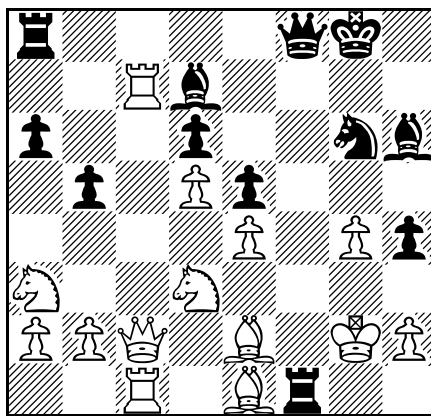
**Answer:**

26... ♗xe4!!

A beautiful shot, which it takes the computer a long time to assess properly.

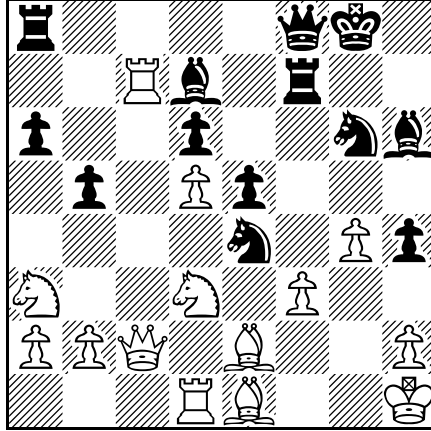
27 ♖d1!

Nakamura's concept is based on an amazing move after 27 fx e4 ♖f1+ 28 ♔g2.



**Exercise:** Can you find it?

**Answer:** 28...♙e3!! is the bone crusher. (The immediate 28...h3+ would only have led to a draw.) Black's threat, which is impossible to meet without decisive material loss, is 29...♖g1+ 30 ♔h3 ♗f1+!! 31 ♙xf1 ♙xg4 mate. In my view, this is far better than anything which occurred in the Immortal or Evergreen games.



**Exercise:** So has managed to find a move posing Black practical problems. There's only one good move, what is it?

**Answer:**

**27...♖xf3!**

Black is winning, since 28 ♙xf3 ♗xf3+ 29 ♔g1 (29 ♗g2 ♙xg4 wins the house) 29...♙e3+ 30 ♙f2 ♗xf2 31 ♗xf2 ♗f4 leads to a quick mate.

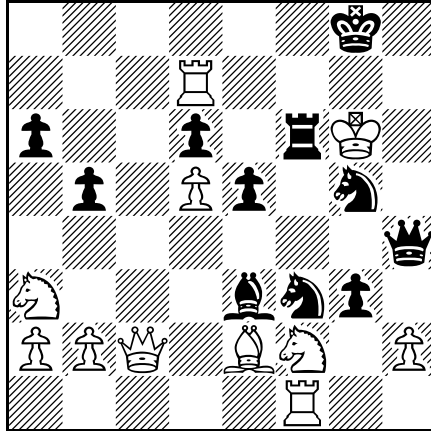
**28 ♖xd7 ♖f1+ 29 ♔g2 ♙e3**

Here 29...h3+! 30 ♔xh3 ♖f2!! was even better, but Nakamura's approach is more than good enough to win.

**30 ♙g3 hxg3 31 ♖xf1 ♗h4+ 32 ♔h3 ♗h6**

The white king is facing decisive threats.

**33 g5 ♗xg5+ 34 ♔g4 ♗hf3 35 ♗f2 ♗h4+ 36 ♔f5 ♖f8+ 37 ♔g6 ♖f6+!**



Wonderful – even if 37...♗e6 or 37...♘f7 forced mate one move faster.

38 ♖xf6 ♗e4+ 39 ♖g6

Or similarly 39 ♖f5 ♗d4+ 40 ♖g6 ♗g5 mate.

39...♗g5 mate

The most beautiful game of the 21st century. Nakamura won surprisingly easily against such strong opposition.

Game 8  
**D.Jakovenko-D.Fedoseev**  
 Taganrog 2011

1 ♘f3 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♖g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♗c6 8 d5 ♗e7 9 ♗e1 ♗d7 10 ♗e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♗f2 g5 13 ♗d3 ♗f6 14 c5 ♗g6 15 ♖c1 ♗f7 16 a4

