

Caviar to the Admiral *

by Grandmaster Raymond Keene OBE



The London Chess Classic concluded with an impressive final dinner at London's Savoy Hotel complex, the scene of the historic world championship challenge by Nigel Short to Garry Kasparov in 1993. Next door, Simpsons-in-the-Strand, hopefully soon to be reopened after a lengthy Covid-enforced closure, is famed in chess lore as the site of the Immortal Game between Anderssen and Kieseritski from 1851. The dinner was structured not just as a closing ceremony, but also a fundraiser for Malcolm Pein's increasingly, indeed exponentially successful charity, Chess in Schools and Communities, communities also including HM Prison Service, where chess is now considered a sovereign remedy in offender rehabilitation.

Amongst the numerous international luminaries thronging the Lancaster Ballroom of the Savoy, were the following. Celebrated chess set collector, Jon Crumiller, artist Barry Martin, Stephen Meyler, the coordinator with the organising RAC Chess Circle Committee, Henry Mutkin, doyen of the RAC and Jason Kouchak, composer, chess player and descendant of Admiral Alexander Kolchak (sic) briefly post-1917 "*supreme ruler*" of White Russia. Kolchak

For *TheArticle* (Recommended publication date Saturday January 6th, 2024)

suffered assassination by the Bolsheviks and interment beneath the ice of the Angara River, where Jason speculates that the Admiral may still remain cryogenically preserved in the sub-zero temperatures of the remote Siberian ice floes.

Jason was born in Lyon, France, educated at Westminster School and studied piano at the Royal College of Music and the University of Edinburgh. He has recorded five albums, two of which were laid down at Abbey Road, and toured globally as a classical pianist, with hosts including Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan. His performances include such venues as the Royal Festival Hall (London), Salle Pleyel (Paris), and the Mariinsky Theatre (Saint Petersburg). His forthcoming Ballet 'Arctic Inspiration' is hoping to be premiered as soon as there is peace, aiming, optimistically, for Winter 2024.

“Love is more important than victory.” (Jason Kouchak)

A story of love, betrayal and sacrifice in the cold winds of war; there will be red and white 'Chess Queens' (representing Russian generals in the Spring Offensive) and Ice Queens exploring the Arctic (as did Admiral Kolchak himself) before the first world war.



Jason Kouchak, wearing the dress coat of his illustrious forebear, Admiral Kolchak

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This week's games feature one of the celebratory clashes of consulting mental wits between the banqueting tables of guests at the Savoy, pitted against the Grandmasters from the London Classic tournament. It was a pleasure to observe my tablemate Grandmaster Matthew Sadler, who took the decisive initiative on deciding both our strategy and tactics, deploy his natural instincts for controlled aggression, resulting in an astonishingly rapid meltdown of the Classic team's forces.

White: **London Chess Classic Players**

Vs.

Black: **Table 18**

(**Matthew Sadler, Raymond Keene, Natasha Reagan, Stephen Meyler, Henry Mutkin, Barry Martin**)

Key to the following analysis:

Bold = move I suggested , agreed with or otherwise endorsed.

Italics= a move where I recommended an alternative which is cited, but not played.

Normal moves (neither bold nor italic) moves suggested by Matthew which I did not query or object to.

(Bracketed moves: conclusions from db/engine analysis).

1. e4 **c6** 2. d4 **d5** 3. e5 *Bf5*

I was more interested in ...c5. (But this thrust had been without a top-flight Black win, since David Navara deployed it successfully against Pouya Adani in March this year.)

4. Nf3 **e6** 5. Be2 **c5** 6. Be3 **cx**d4 7. Nxd4 **Ne7** 8. O-O **Nbc6** 9. f4 **Nxd4** 10. Qxd4 **Nc6** 11. Qd2 d4 12. Bf2 Bc5 13. Rd1 *Qe7?!*

I wanted ...Qb6 (Both this and ...O-O would have been better for Black than the text).

14. a3 Rd8 15. b4 **Bb6** 16. Bf3?!

(16. Bd3 is superior to the text, for example: 16... g5 17. Bxf5 exf5 18. Qd3 gxf4 19. Nd2 O-O 20. a4 a5 21. bxa5 Bxa5 22. Bh4 Rd5 23. Bxe7 Qxe7 maintains an equal position).

16... O-O 17. Qc1

(Ceding more ground. After 17. Kh1, Black retains no more than an edge after, 17... h6 18. Rc1 f6 19. Bh4 d3 20. c3 {20. exf6 gxf6 21. cxd3 Rxd3} 20... g5 21. exf6 Rxf6 22. fxg5 Rg6 23. Qe1 hxg5).

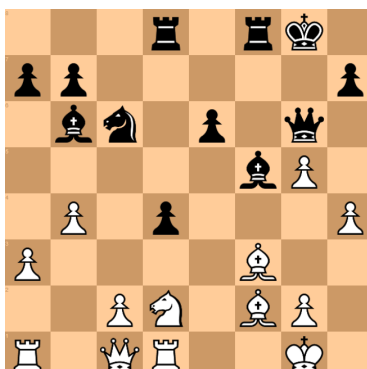
17... g5?

I wanted ...Rd7 followed by ...Rc8. (The engine preferred 17... f6! 18. exf6 Qxf6 19. Nd2 Bc7 20. Bxc6 bxc6 21. Bg3 Bb6 22. Kh1 Qg6, when Black would have enjoyed a space advantage and the initiative. It was agnostic about 17... Rd7, analysing that, 18. c4, completely equalises, and even slightly favouring the text ahead of this move).

For *TheArticle* (Recommended publication date Saturday January 6th, 2024)

18. Nd2 f6 19. exf6 Qxf6 20. fxg5 Qg6 21. h4?

(This is an error: White can keep the game level after 21. Re1 Bc7 22. Bg3 Bxg3 23. hxg3 Qxg5 24. b5 Na5 25. g4 Bxg4 26. Bxg4 Qxg4 27. Re4 Qg7 28. Qe1).

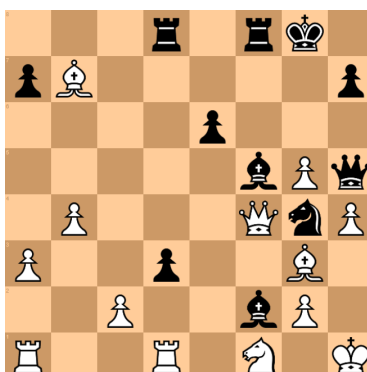


21... Ne5 22. Bxb7?

(A serious error. White should have preferred either 22. a4 or Rf1.)

22... Ng4 23. Bg3 d3+ 24. Kh1 Bf2 25. Nf1 Qh5 26. Qf4??

(The losing blunder: nevertheless, after the more resilient 26. Bxf2! Nxf2+ 27. Kg1 Qxh4 28. Bf3 Nxd1 29. Qxd1 dxc2 30. Qe1 Qxe1 31. Rxe1 Rd3 32. Kf2 Rc3 33. Rc1 Rb3, the threat of ...Rb1 is still overwhelming).



26... **Rd4** 27. Qxf2 **Nxf2+** 28. Bxf2 **Rxh4+** 29. Bxh4 **Qxh4+** 30. Nh2 **dxh4** 31. Rf1 **Bd3** White resigns 0-1

Our next game is part of an Anglo French tradition: the 30th occasion that the RAC tourists have competed in Paris against the GF/Cercle team and travelling with an amazing 18 players. The 18 representing a wide diversity of strength and experience. The French team, assembled from Paris and Geneva, has historically been very strong particularly on the top boards.

This encounter was no exception with the French winning 6 of the top 7 boards , the one win coming on board 1 , where the RAC's Stephen Meyler overcame French Grandmaster and Fide Deputy President Bachar Kouatly. The RAC went on to win strongly on the lower boards triumphing 10-8 with the game below being the decisive winning point.

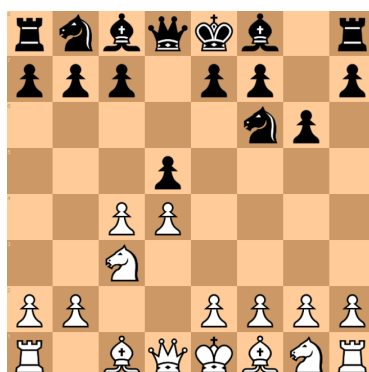
Stephen Meyler vs. Bachar Kouatly

Royal Automobile Club vs. Guy Fouchet Team, Cercle Inter Allié Paris, November 2023
with comments from Stephen Meyler (*in italics*)

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 d5

The Gruenfeld Defence. This hypermodern counter-attacking line for Black was first introduced into top-flight chess by Ernst Gruenfeld, in a 1922 match against Alexander Alekhine. Playing black, Gruenfeld won.

The defence was subsequently adopted by many world champions and championship candidates, including Viktor Korchnoi, Bobby Fischer, Garry Kasparov, Viswanathan Anand, Vladimir Kramnik and Magnus Carlsen.



4. cxd5 Nxd5 5. e4

In pre-game preparation I had here proposed 5. Bd2, considering that the stem game Petrosian vs. Fischer, USSR vs. World, 1970, leads to a microscopic endgame plus for White. Instead White demonstrates more bellicose intentions, choosing a line favoured by Bronstein, Spassky and Karpov.

5... Nxc3 6. bxc3 Bg7 7. Bc4 c5 8. Ne2 Nc6 9. Be3 O-O 10. O-O Bg4 11. f3 Bd7

In the notoriously aborted World Championship match between Kasparov and Karpov in 1984/5, and again, in 1985 when Kasparov finally wrested the crown from the decade-old champion; Kasparov had succeeded in mostly equalising Karpov's 1. d4 openings, utilising classical Queen's Gambit Declined and Queen's Indian Defence lines.

For the 1986 London/Leningrad World Championship rematch, Kasparov introduced 2... g6 with Black, resulting in several King's Indian and, crucially, Gruenfeld Defences (three with Bf4 and four in the Qb3 Russian Variation).

However, Kasparov only scored 2½/7. In Karpov's next challenge for the title (Seville, 1987), Kasparov played into the Exchange Variation of the Gruenfeld. He played a line known to be favoured by Karpov, after an alternative to the text move, 11... Na5. White has the options of

For *TheArticle* (Recommended publication date Saturday January 6th, 2024)

12. Bd3 and, less commonly, 12. Bd5, but Karpov was known to favour, and played, the extraordinary 12. Bxf7+, which became known as the Seville Variation.

This had previously been regarded as a poor move, because the resulting dark-square weaknesses had been believed to give Black enough compensation for the f7-pawn. Theory now understands that White is fine in this line, but, despite losing the first game, Kasparov then collected two draws and a win from the next three; a vital sequence, and critical to his retaining his title.

12. Qd2!?

A surprise for the Grandmaster: more common are, 12. Rb1 and Rc1. Even dxc5 has a better record.

12... Qc7

Theory, rightly or wrongly, now claims an advantage for Black in nearly all lines, including 12... Rc8, ...Qa5, as well as the text move.

13. Bf4 Qc8?!

13... e5 [Livaja-Georgescu, Tringov Memorial BUL, 2014, 0-1] is the recommended riposte, although only one game is noted. The engine assesses this as marginally better for Black, also preferring 13... Qd8 over the text. The white queen's rook, now coming into masked attack against the queen along the c-file, is certainly far from an ideal situation for the defender.

14. Rac1 a6?!

It was still not too late to play either 14.. e5 or ...Qd8, both of which were preferable.

15. Bh6 b5

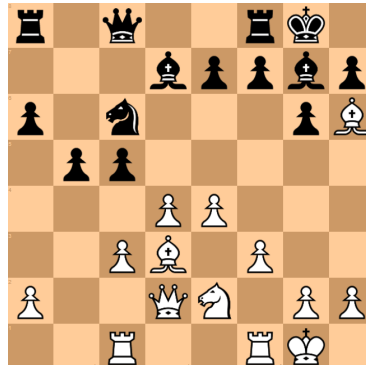
Eminently consistent, but perhaps either 15... Bxh6 or ...Qd8 represented a more resilient defence.

16. Bd3?!

White was perhaps better advised to exchange on g7 immediately. 16. Bxg7 Kxg7 17. Bd5 e6 18. Bxc6 Qxc6 19. h4, threatening h5 and eventually h6, underlines White's control of the black squares.

"I wanted to follow a plan and pose as many problems to my adversary as possible ,so that the opponent eventually makes a mistake or inaccuracy. My plan was very simple - eradicate the black squared bishop and then try and open up the game exposing the black

square weakness - I think it worked well. Bachar faced numerous difficult decisions and he chose correctly, in the main, until the fatal mistake ...Rc7."



16... e6

Weakening those black squares even further. Black was better advised to continue, 16... Qb7 17. Bxg7 Kxg7 18. Kh1 e5 19. d5 Nd8 20. c4 Qc7; or, 16... Qc7 17. Bxg7 Kxg7 18. d5 Ne5, with approximate equality.

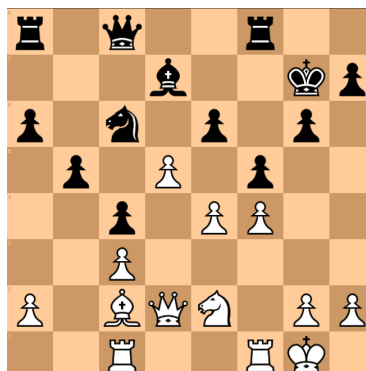
17. Bxg7 Kxg7 18. f4

More progressive was 18. c4! After 18... e5 19. d5 Nd8 20. Qc3 f6 21. cxb5 Bxb5, White plays 22. f4 with considerably more effect. After 18. c4 cxd4 19. cxb5, the masked vis à vis of the white rook against Black's queen, works in White's favour.

"18. f4 was the start of my plan to open the centre - really wanted to get in f5 but one tempo short.... but I'm intent on Kingside, maybe wrongly, not queenside."

18... c4 19. Bc2 f5 20. d5

An admirably aggressive thrust, which additionally vacates the d4-square for a White piece. But better, according to the engine and as we shall see, are either 20. Ng3 or the immediate 20. h4.



For *TheArticle* (Recommended publication date Saturday January 6th, 2024)

20... exd5 21. exd5

Stranding the bishop on c2. Better was 21. Qxd5, leaving the tension on e4 unresolved.

"21. exd5 was again following my plan - forcing evacuation of the knight enabling my Queen to get a great square d4. I then had to figure out how to get my pieces active , otherwise the pawn on d5 is very vulnerable. To me this is the critical phase of the game - the decisions Bachar had to make over the board were not easy but he chose correctly...."

21... Ne7 22. Qd4+ Rf6

"22., Rf6 recommended by the engines, looked to me to offer an opportunity to activate my pieces but required a sacrifice of a couple of pawns. I thought it was worth it as it would give some difficult decisions for Black."

23. g4

"23. g4 is certainly brave!!"

23... fxg4 24. f5

"24. f5 - 2nd pawn gets sacrificed... I had expected the Bishop to recapture not the Knight but the engines confirm Bachar got it right... At this stage the engines have it absolutely equal but White's position is far easier to play and more fun...."

24... Nxf5 25. Bxf5 Bxf5 26. Nf4 Kf7

"26., Kf7 a very natural move but a slight inaccuracy"

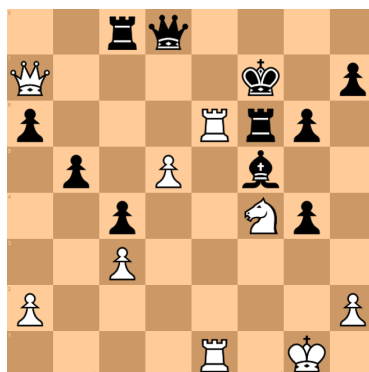
27. Rce1 Qd7 28. Re6

"28. Re6 whilst not the engine's choice has got to be the human choice. After the game Bachar confided that he was totally surprised that it was playable and he even considered resignation as his next move! But being a GM he didn't...."

28... Qd8 29. Rfe1 Rc8 30. Qa7+?

After a long period where, in spite of White's energetic aggression, both players had, in fact, assiduously maintained equality, White now blunders. White should play the natural 30. R1e5, where after 30... b4 31. Rxf6+ Qxf6 32. d6 b3 33. Re7+ Qxe7 34. dxe7 b2 35. Qd5+ Ke8 36. Qg8+ Kxe7 37. Qg7+ Ke8, the position is in stasis.

"30. Qa7+ is definitely not the strongest - a host of quiet moves are recommended, the quietest being Kh1 but it was the final decision for Bachar and he got it wrong with the losing Rc7."



30... Rc7??

A fatal error by the Grandmaster. Black can survive White's onslaught after, 30... Kg8 31. Rxa6 Rc7 32. Qa8 Qxa8 33. Rxa8+ Kf7, when Black is sufficiently overprotecting d6, and once mobilised, his kingside pawn majority and active King will prove decisive. After the text Black's king is forced into the firing line.

31. Rxf6+ Kxf6 32. Qd4+ Kg5

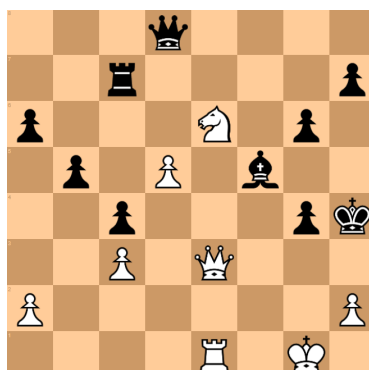
Black, having missed the crucial climax, is now simply lost. He could vary from the text with 32... Kf7, but after, 33. Ne6 Qe6 Bxe6 (33... Qe6 34. Qxf6+ Kxf6 35. Nxc7) 34. dxe6+ Ke8 35. Qh8+ Ke7 36. Qg7+ Kd6 37. Qe5+ Kc6 38. e7! his position remains hopeless

33. Qe3 Kh4

A suicidal manoeuvre in a terminal position. Black can wriggle a little by varying with, 33... Kf6, but after the following essentially forcing line: 34. Qe5+ Kf7 35. Ne6 we reach the same decisive formation for White, as in the previous note.

34. Ne6

Black did in fact now resign 1-0



White is threatening 35. Qh6 checkmate, against which mortal stroke Black's defences are wholly insufficient.

For *TheArticle* (Recommended publication date Saturday January 6th, 2024)

This was the fourth time Kouatly had played this line of the Gruenfeld Defence, and he had previously been undefeated, which makes this victory by Stephen Meyler, all the more memorable.

** For my title this week I offer apologies to William Shakespeare, Hamlet Act 3 Scene 2, whose wonderful metaphor I have both perverted and purloined!*

Ray's 206th book, "[Chess in the Year of the King](#)", written in collaboration with former Reuters chess correspondent, Adam Black, appeared earlier this year.

Now his 207th, "[Napoleon and Goethe: The Touchstone of Genius](#)" (which discusses their relationship with chess and explains how Ray used Napoleonic era battle strategies to develop his own chess style) has materialised, just in time to complement Ridley Scott's new epic biopic, 'Napoleon'.

Both books are available from Amazon and Blackwell's. It is hoped that reviews will be appearing in the august pages of *The Article*.