

Cyrus Lakdawala

Carlsen

move by move

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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

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Contents

About the author	3
Series Foreword	5
Bibliography	6
Introduction	7
1 Carlsen on the Attack	23
2 Carlsen on Defence and Counterattack	88
3 Carlsen on the Dynamic Element	166
4 Carlsen on Exploiting Imbalances	231
5 Carlsen on Accumulating Advantages	294
6 Carlsen on Endgames	357
Index of Openings	428
Index of Complete Games	429

Series Foreword

The *Move by Move* format is designed to be interactive, and is based on questions asked by both teachers and students. It aims – as much as possible – to replicate chess lessons. All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions and to complete exercises, to test their skills in key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms,
Everyman Chess

Game 9
M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura
 Monaco (rapid) 2011
Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♗f6 4 e3 a6 5 ♖c2

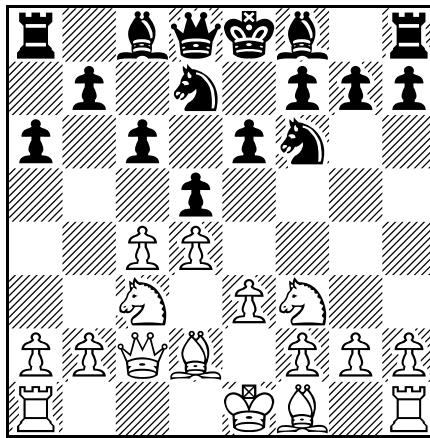
5 ♗f3 is White's main line.

5...e6

This is quite common, but I'm not a big believer in Black's move order, since the Semi-Slav formation doesn't always fit well with an early ...a6. In my opinion 5...b5 and 5...g6 feel like a better fit with an early ...a6.

6 ♗f3 ♗bd7 7 ♕d2

Also logical is to back up c4 with a pawn: 7 b3 ♕d6 8 ♕b2 e5!? 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 dxe5 ♗xe5 11 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 12 ♕d3 0-0 13 ♗e2 ♖a5+ 14 ♕c3 ♕xc3+ 15 ♖xc3 ♖xc3+ 16 ♗xc3 ♕d7 17 f3 ♖fc8 18 ♗d2 gave White a pleasant edge in the ending, with control over d4, as well as an isolated d-pawn and a potentially bad bishop for Black, P.Leko-Ni Hua, Saratov 2011.



7...dxc4!?

Question: Isn't the rule of thumb for Black in such positions to always wait for White's light-squared bishop to move, before playing ...dxc4?

Answer: Correct, since taking immediately on c4 essentially hands White a free move. Still, Nakamura's choice is book. Black's slightly passive position in V.Tkachiev-M.Sebenik, Legnica 2013, after 7...♕d6 8 e4 dxe4 9 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 10 ♖xe4 ♗f6 11 ♖h4 c5 12 0-0-0 probably didn't appeal to Nakamura.

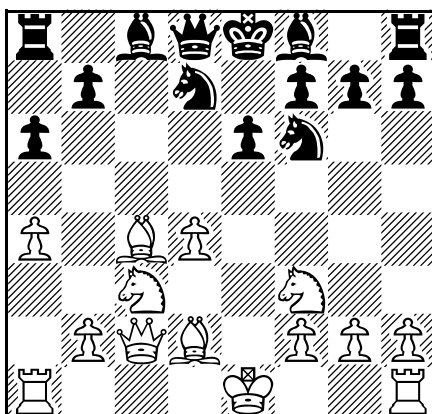
8 a4!

The pawn isn't running away. I think this is White's most accurate move, preventing the tempo-regaining ...b5. Following 8 ♟xc4 b5 9 ♟e2 ♟b7 10 ♞e4 ♞xe4 11 ♚xe4 ♚b8! (perhaps slightly more accurate than 11...♚b6) 12 0-0 c5 13 ♚h4 ♟e7 Black equalized after achieving the freeing ...c5 break, C.Bauer-E.Reinhart, Kemer 2007.

8...c5

8...b5? of course fails to 9 axb5 cxb5 10 ♞xb5 ♟b7 11 ♞a3 when c4 is certain to fall.

9 ♟xc4 cxd4 10 exd4



The position reached is a Queen's Gambit Accepted, but with White's extra ♚c2 for free, since Black took two moves to achieve the ...c5 break.

Question: Is the extra ♚c2 so great for White? After all, the queen sits on the open c-file and may be misplaced. Also, if White later plays ♟d3, he may be vulnerable to ...♞d5 and ...♞b4 tricks.

Answer: I think this is exactly Nakamura's thought: White's 'free' move comes at a cost.

10...♞b6

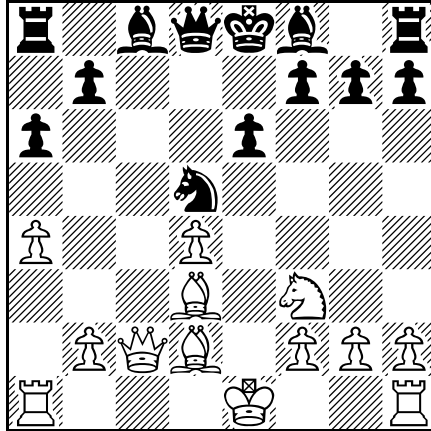
Nakamura has experience from White's side as well: 10...♟e7 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♚ac1 ♞b6 13 ♟d3 h6 14 ♚b3 (White returned his 'free' move) 14...♞bd5 15 ♞xd5 ♞xd5 16 ♟c4 ♟d7!? 17 ♟xd5 exd5 18 ♞e5 and White continues to exert nagging strategic pressure, H.Nakamura-Ni Hua, London 2009.

11 ♟d3

A new move in the position. White's bishop takes direct aim at Black's kingside. The more strategic route is to keep watch over d5, with 11 ♟b3 ♟e7 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♚ac1 ♟d7 14 ♞e5 ♚c8 15 ♚d3 ♟c6, G.Meier-P.Acs, German League 2011. Here also, I prefer White.

11...♞bd5 12 ♞xd5 ♞xd5?!

A questionable pawn offer. This move distracts a defender from the kingside and leaves Black seriously lagging in development. 12...♚xd5 13 0-0 ♟e7 may be Black's best shot at equality.



13 0-0

Carlsen ignores the offer and increases his growing development lead.

Question: Can White grab h7 and get away with it?

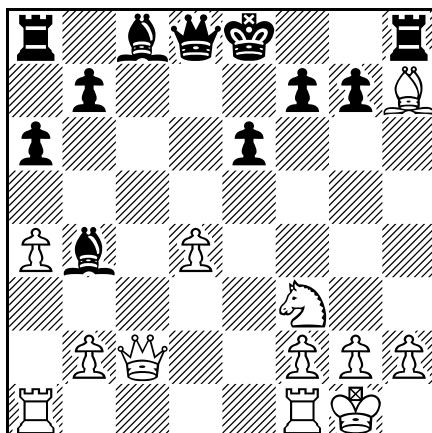
Answer: *Houdini* says yes, but to my human eyes it appears as if Black gets compensation with a gain of time and an open h-file after 13 ♔xh7 ♕d7 14 ♕e4 ♕c6 15 ♖b3 ♕d6 16 0-0 f6 17 ♗fe1 ♜f7. *Houdini* isn't intimidated and still prefers White.

13...♘b4?!

When momentum goes careening out of control, it is then that we are in danger of losing our footing. Nakamura, a habitual embracer of chaos, goes too far in this overly optimistic idea to provoke and complicate. This attempt to delve counterplay where none exists, only makes his situation worse. When we try an eccentric idea and then lose the game, later on our suffering increases upon the sickening realization that it was self-inflicted, and therefore deserved.

After the text, Black falls dangerously behind in development. There are some chess sins for which atonement is beyond reach. I speak of course of the original sin: falling behind in development in the opening. Maybe Black should cut his losses with 13...♕d6 14 ♘e5 ♖c7 15 ♖b3!? 0-0 (or 15...♕xe5 16 dxe5 ♖xe5!? 17 ♗fe1 ♖d6 18 ♕e4 0-0 19 ♗ad1 when White exerts strong pressure for the pawn and can probably soon win it back, while maintaining an edge) 16 ♗fe1 ♕d7 17 ♗ac1 ♕c6 18 ♕e4, although I still prefer White who exerts central pressure and may soon begin a kingside attack by swinging his queen to h3.

14 ♕xb4 ♕xb4 15 ♕xh7!



Excellent judgment. White's three pawns plus enduring initiative are worth more than Black's extra piece.

15...g6

Not much choice since Black is just down a pawn with zero compensation after 15...♙d7 16 ♙e4.

16 ♙xg6 fxg6 17 ♚xg6+ ♙f8

The startled king swallows a gasp and attempts to regain his composure, as best he can.

18 ♘e5

Threatening mate on the move. White stands clearly better since Black continues to lag in development, with his queenside still dormant.

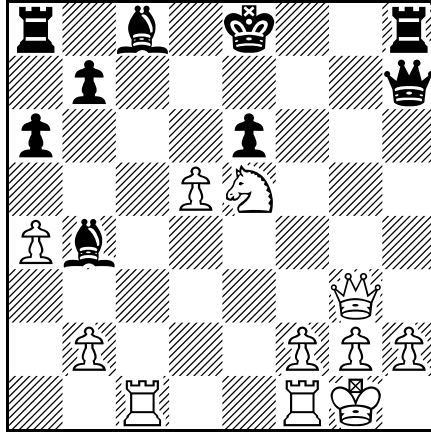
18...♚e7 19 ♖ac1 ♚h7

Nakamura threatens his own mate in one.

20 ♚g3!?

White can also partially ignore the threat and act like nothing has changed with 20 ♖fd1! ♚xh2+ 21 ♙f1 ♚h1+ 22 ♙e2 ♚h5+ 23 f3 ♖h6 24 ♚xh5 ♖xh5 25 ♖c4! ♙d6 26 ♖dc1. White regains the sacrificed piece and emerges a pawn ahead in the ending after 26...♙e7 27 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 28 ♖xc8 ♙xe5 29 dxe5 ♖xe5+ 30 ♙f2, with good chances for White to convert.

20...♙e8 21 d5!



This is turning into a ‘How to Attack’ clinic. Carlsen logically opens lines to Black’s exposed king.

21...♙d6

21...exd5? is met with 22 ♘g6 ♙e6 (22...♖g8?? 23 ♗fe1+! is crushing) 23 ♗e5 ♗xg6 24 ♗xh8+ ♙f8 25 ♖c7 when Black remains under severe pressure.

22 ♗fe1 ♙d7

Houdini doesn’t like this move, but how else can Black bring out his queenside pieces?

23 h3

Carlsen rejects a pair of equally tempting alternatives:

a) 23 ♘xd7 ♙xg3 (or 23...♗xh2+ 24 ♗xh2 ♙xh2+ 25 ♙f1 ♙xd7 26 dxe6+ ♙e7 27 g3 ♖ac8 28 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 29 ♙g2 ♙xg3 30 ♙xg3 and White should convert) 24 ♘f6+ ♙d8 25 ♘xh7 ♙h4 26 g3 ♖xh7 (26...♙e7? is met with 27 d6!) 27 gxh4 exd5 28 ♗ed1 ♖xh4 29 ♖xd5+ ♙e7 30 ♖c7+ ♙e6 31 ♗d3 ♖g8+ 32 ♙f1! with excellent conversion chances for White.

b) 23 f4, and if 23...♖g8 24 ♘xd7 ♙xd7 25 ♗f3! ♖g7 26 dxe6+ ♙e8 27 ♖cd1 when White’s four pawns are worth more than Black’s lone extra bishop.

23...♙xe5!?

Houdini raises a censuring eyebrow at this move, which appears to be a high-risk attempt to ameliorate his numerous strategic difficulties. It certainly is tempting to eliminate White’s monster knight. In doing so, Nakamura hands over the key defender of his dark squares. I played around with alternatives, and Black ended up losing every time, so the move isn’t a mistake if everything else loses.

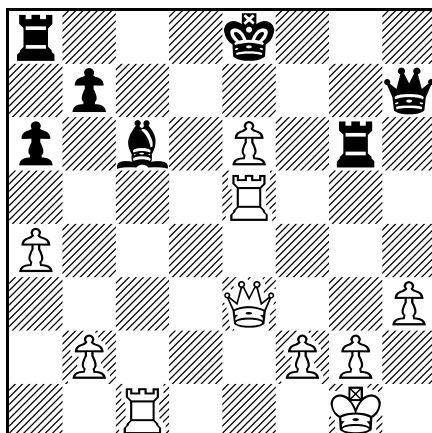
24 ♖xe5 ♖g8 25 ♗e3

Carlsen hammers away at e6.

25...♖g6 26 dxe6

26 ♖c7 ♖c8 27 ♖xb7 also looks rough for Black.

26...♙c6



Exercise (planning): On the surface, Black's position doesn't appear as a frayed old rope, on the verge of unravelling. Carlsen picked up four pawns for the piece. On Black's side of the ledger, Nakamura's king looks safe and it appears as if he may be generating threats on Carlsen's king. Come up with a plan for White to seize the initiative for good.

Answer: Sacrifice the exchange, eliminating Black's only active piece. Black's extra rook won't save his eternally exposed king.

27 ♖xc6!

When an attack begins to run out of material to invest, we feel like strung out heroin addicts, who lack further means to enter our private, drug-induced oblivion. Carlsen, now virtually in the endgame stage, amazingly continues to sacrifice, never running out of his drug of choice.

27...bxc6 28 ♖e4!

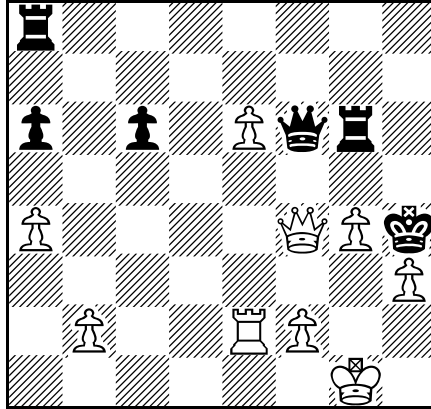
Target: c6.

28...♗g7!

Nakamura defends accurately, while under tremendous pressure, avoiding:

a) 28...♖c8? hangs a rook to 29 ♖g5! ♖g7 30 ♗xh7! ♖xh7 31 ♖g8+ ♔e7 32 ♖xc8, which regains the lost rook, with a completely winning rook and pawn ending.

b) 28...♔e7 29 ♗b4+ ♔f6 30 ♗d4 ♗a7 31 ♗c3 ♗e7 32 ♖e2+! (the e3-square must be kept open for White's queen) 32...♔g5 33 ♗e3+ ♔h5 34 g4+ ♔h4 (34...♖xg4+ 35 hxg4+ ♔xg4 36 f3+! forces mate) 35 ♗f4! ♗f6.



Exercise (combination alert): It's White to play and force mate.

Answer: Overloaded defenders. Black has no good answer to the dual mate threats on h5 and g3 after 36 ♖e5!!

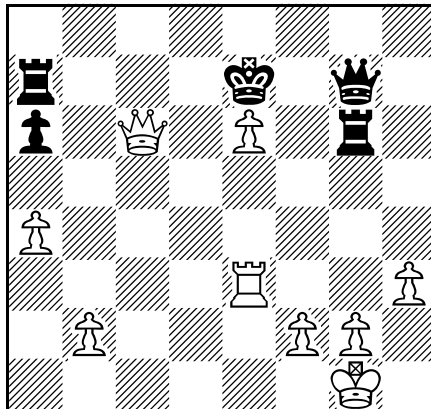
29 ♗xc6+

Thus c6 falls, after which Carlsen picks up his fifth pawn for the rook, plus an enduring attack.

29...♙e7 30 ♗c5+ ♙e8 31 ♗c6+ ♙e7 32 ♖e3 ♖a7

This involved byway fails to secure the rook.

33 ♗c5+ ♙e8 34 ♗c6+ ♙e7



Exercise (combination alert): Black's degraded position is ripe for exploitation. How should Carlsen continue?

Answer: Ignore defence of g2 and run Black's a7-rook out of squares. The sickly a7-rook adds his needs to Black's already ample burdens.

35 ♖b6!!

The queen's invisible leash of power oppresses and brings to heel the a7-rook's ambitions. Carlsen's comp-like continuation is far more clear than a line like 35 ♖c5+ ♕e8 36 ♖b3 ♖c7.

35...♗xg2+

35...♗a8 is met with 36 ♖c5+ ♕e8 37 ♖c6+ ♕e7 38 ♖xa8 when Black's wishes elude his grasp. White not only wins the rook, but furthers the insult by retaining coverage on g2.

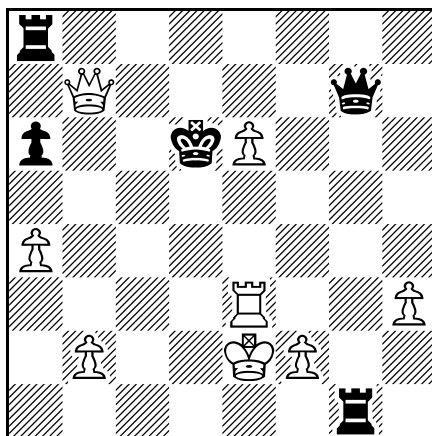
36 ♕f1

"The time you could inflict harm upon my person is long past, and in fact, never even existed," the king informs the rook.

36...♗g1+ 37 ♕e2

"Despite having an extra rook, Black is helpless," writes GM Mikhail Golubev.

37...♗a8 38 ♖b7+ ♕d6



Exercise (critical decision): Should White grab the en prise a8-rook?

Answer: No. The attack comes first.

39 ♗d3+!

The lash is applied to Black's king, until the white of bone begins to show.

The hasty 39 ♖xa8?? allows Black a draw: 39...♖xb2+ 40 ♕f3 (40 ♕d3 ♖b1+ 41 ♕d2 ♖a2+ 42 ♕d3 ♖b1+ is perpetual check) 40...♖f6+ 41 ♕e4 ♖g6+ 42 ♕d4 ♗d1+ (the rook, a willing co-conspirator, abets his queen in an attempt to frame in the White's king's escape routes) 43 ♕c3 ♗c1+ 44 ♕b4 ♖b1+ 45 ♗b3 a5+! 46 ♕xa5 (the king's face distorts into an ugly grimace, in his futile efforts to evade pursuers) 46...♗c5+! 47 ♕b4 ♖e1+ 48 ♕a3 ♖a1+ and draw.

39...♙xe6

After 39...♙e5 40 ♖xa8 the trouble is Black's king is in the way of his intended ...♖xb2+.

40 ♖c6+! 1-0

The wraith-like queen materializes from nowhere, applies her taint, and then dematerializes before the enemy is able to pinpoint her location and strike back. After 40...♙f5 41 ♗d5+, it's mate if 41...♙f4 (or 41...♖e5+ 42 ♖xe5+ ♙xe5 43 ♖xa8 and isn't it infuriating when the wealthiest, who have the most to give, refuse to share the least?) 42 ♖c4+ ♗d4 43 ♖xd4. "Behold before you, the sum total of your life's efforts," says the queen to Black's king, as she points to the gallows pole.

Game 10
M. Carlsen-H. Nakamura
 Wijk aan Zee 2013
Sicilian Defence

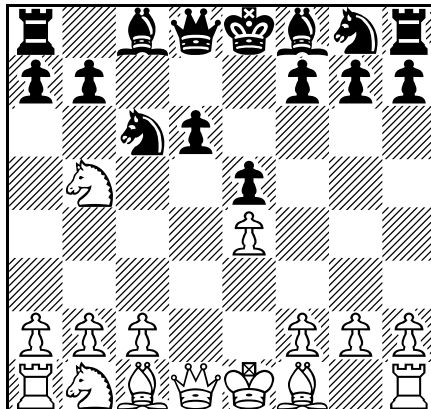
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e5

The Kalashnikov Variation of the Sicilian.

Question: What separates the Kalashnikov from the Pelikan?

Answer: In the Kalashnikov, Black holds back ...♗f6 when ...e5 is played. 4...♗f6 5 ♘c3 e5 is the Pelikan.

5 ♘b5 d6



6 g3

Question: This line isn't supposed to be very dangerous for Black, is it?