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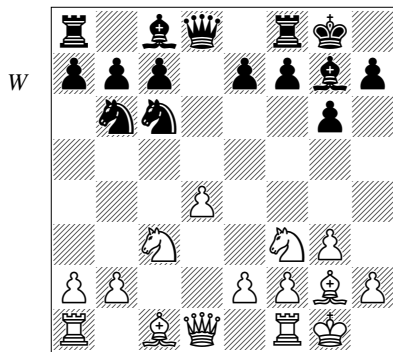
White has no more than perpetual check. Incidentally, this was one of Magnus's first super-tournament victories, when he was only 17 years old.

Game 14
Carlsen – Topalov
Paris rapid 2017

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗f3 ♕g7 4 g3

We saw the related but imprecise 4 ♗c3 d5 5 g3?! in Game 9, G.Meier-Carlsen.

4...0-0 5 ♕g2 d5 6 cxd5 ♗xd5 7 0-0 ♗b6 8 ♗c3 ♗c6 (D)



9 d5

More often White plays 9 e3, when Black can choose between the immediate 9...e5 and preparing this advance with 9...♗e8!?

9...♗a5 10 e4 c6 11 ♕f4 ♗ac4

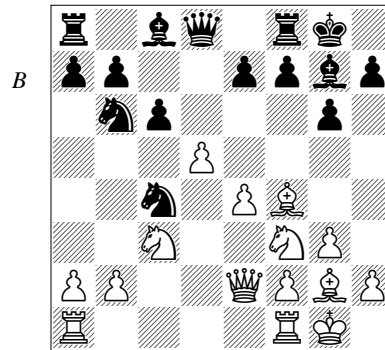
Or:

a) 11...cxd5 offers White the possibility of 12 ♗xd5!, while 12 exd5 is likely to transpose: 12...♕xc3 13 bxc3 is line 'b', while 12...♗ac4 13 ♗e2 is note 'a' to Black's 12th move below.

b) 11...♕xc3!? is an interesting try that had previously been used by Topalov's long-time assistant, Cheparinov. 12 bxc3 cxd5 13 exd5 ♗xd5 14 ♗d4 (14 ♗e1 ♗xd1 15 ♗axd1 ♗e8 gives White enough compensation for the pawn, but no more than that, Ragger-Cheparinov, European Ch, Aix-les-Bains 2011) 14...♗c5 15 ♗e1!? (15 ♗b3 ♗xb3 16 axb3 ♗xc3 17 ♗c1 ♗b4 18 ♗c7 ♕e6 =) 15...♕d7 16 ♗e5 ♗a3 17 ♗e1 with an unclear game and chances for both sides; e.g., 17...e6 18 ♕h6 ♗fe8 19 ♗b5 ♕xb5

20 ♗xb5 ♗ac4 21 ♕xb7 ♗ab8 and a draw was soon agreed in Jo.Adams-R.Jacobs, corr. 2016.

12 ♗e2 (D)



12...♕g4?!

Black should not seek to exchange this bishop. There are at least two better moves:

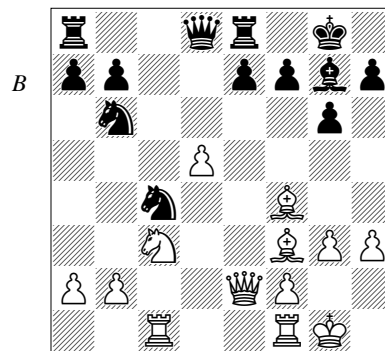
a) 12...cxd5 13 exd5 ♗xb2!? 14 ♗xb2 (14 ♗e5!? is unclear) 14...♗a4 15 ♗xa4 ♕xb2 16 ♗xb2 ♗xd5 and it is difficult to say which is better: three pieces or a queen and two pawns, Öztürk-M.Muzychuk, Tromsø Women's Olympiad 2014.

b) 12...e5!? leads to easier play; e.g., 13 dxe6 (13 ♕g5 f6 14 ♕c1 cxd5 15 ♗xd5 ♗d6 16 ♗xb2 ♗xd5 and it is difficult to say which is better: three pieces or a queen and two pawns, Öztürk-M.Muzychuk, Tromsø Women's Olympiad 2014.) 13...♕xe6 14 ♗ad1 ♗e7 with a complex game and chances for both sides.

13 h3 ♕xf3 14 ♕xf3 cxd5 15 exd5 ♗e8

Another minor inaccuracy. The rook move has little purpose; apparently the idea was to liquidate the central pawns, but this does not work out. The immediate 15...♗d6 is preferable.

16 ♗ac1 (D)



16...e5?!

Topalov wants to bring his rook into action with gain of time, but the main effect is to make White's f3-bishop very powerful.

After 16...♘d6 17 ♘b5 ♗c8!? White is a little better, but that is all. For example, 18 b3 (18 ♘xa7 ♗a8 19 ♘b5 ♗xa2 =) 18...a6 19 ♘xd6 exd6 20 ♗d2 ♙e5 ±. Note how the d5-pawn restricts the white bishop.

17 dxe6 ♗xe6 18 ♗c2 g5

This looks risky, but White's two bishops control a great many squares, so this move is relatively best, and certainly a good practical choice.

19 ♗fd1?

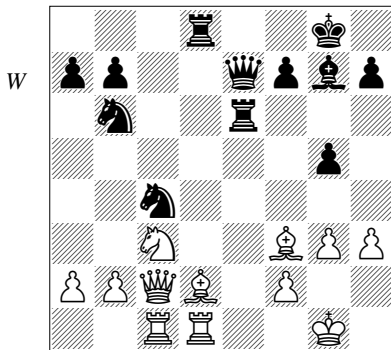
After the superior 19 ♗cd1! ♗e7 (with a rook on f1, an exchange sacrifice after 19...♗f6 20 ♙xb7 ± is useless) 20 ♙c1 ± Black has no compensation for his weaknesses.

19...♗e7?

Black should choose 19...♗f6! 20 ♙xb7 gxf4 (compare the previous note!) 21 ♙xa8 fxg3! (not 21...♘xa8? 22 ♘d5 +-) with serious counterplay. After 22 ♙g2 ♙h6! 23 fxg3 ♙xc1 24 ♗xc1 ♘e3 Black's active knights provide compensation for the pawn; e.g., 25 ♗d3 ♗e5 26 ♗e1 ♘bc4.

20 ♙d2 ♗d8 (D)

A tough choice. 20...♘xd2 21 ♗xd2 ♗e8 deprives White of the bishop-pair, but Black has an unpleasant position because of his lack of counterplay and the weaknesses left by the pawn on g5.



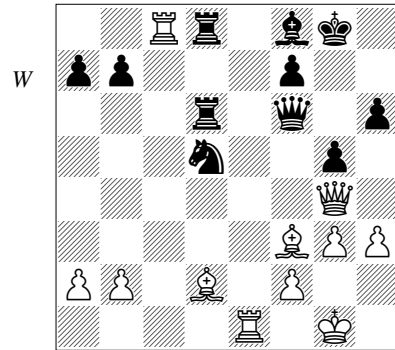
21 ♘d5!

Carlsen forces the exchange of the active knight on c4, giving White a big advantage thanks to his two bishops in an open position.

21...♘d5 22 ♗xc4 ♗ed6

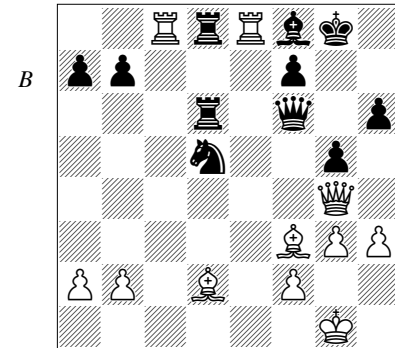
Somewhat better is 22...♘b6 23 ♗c2 ♗ed6 but after 24 ♙e3 ♗xd1+ 25 ♗xd1 ♗xd1+ 26 ♙xd1 Black faces a tough fight for a draw.

23 ♗e1 ♗f6 24 ♗g4 h6 25 ♗c8! ♙f8 (D)



26 ♙xd5?

It was worth delaying this capture a little while. The knight cannot leave d5 for the time being because of the move ♙c3, and this allows for the stronger 26 ♗e8! (D). Then:



a) 26...♘b6 27 ♗cxd8 ♗xd8 28 ♙c3 +-.

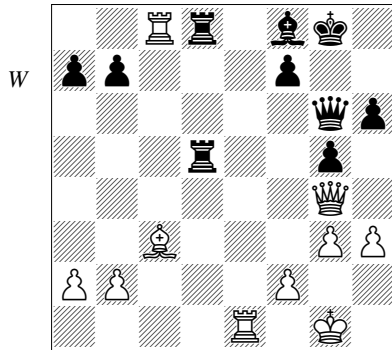
b) 26...♗xe8 27 ♗xe8 ♗xb2 (27...♘c7 28 ♙c3 +-) 28 ♗c8 ♗xd2 29 ♗xf8+ ♙g7 30 ♗h8 +- with mating threats.

c) 26...♗xc8 27 ♗xc8 (27 ♗xc8!? ♗xf3 28 ♗xf8+ ±) 27...♗xb2 28 ♙xd5 (28 ♗e4! +- is even better) 28...♗xd2 (28...♗d5 29 ♙b4 +-) 29 ♙xf7+! ♙g7 (29...♙xf7 30 ♗f5+ +-) 30 ♙b3 ♗f6 31 ♗c7+ ♙h8 32 ♗c2 and with such a weak king, Black's position is close to hopeless.

26...♗xd5 27 ♙c3 ♗g6? (D)

Not the best square for the queen. 27...♗d6 is stronger, since from here the queen controls

b4, and in some lines can move to d5. For example, 28 ♖e8 (better is 28 ♔g2 ±) 28...♗d1+ 29 ♔h2 ♗xe8 30 ♗xe8 ♗d5 and Black is OK.



Magnus Moment

Sometimes we face a choice between a concrete forcing move after which the opponent can be saved by a precise sequence of ‘only’ moves, or keeping a significant advantage after a normal move. There is no simple answer to this question – in each individual situation we need to assess how likely it is that the opponent will find the right defence, and how good our winning chances are after the ‘normal’ move. In this case, Magnus chose the forcing move, although I’m not sure that he had actually seen how Black could be saved, as this was a rapid game. Of course, Magnus is famous for his ability to squeeze wins out of slightly better endings, and there are many examples of him adopting the patient approach in superior positions.

28 ♗e8!?

Objectively stronger is 28 ♗f3 ♗xc8 29 ♗xd5 with a large plus for White thanks to his active queen, though after 29...b6 30 ♗d7 ♗a8 (30...♗c6?! 31 ♗d4) 31 ♗b7 ♗d8 32 ♗xa7 ♗c6 Black has fair chances to save the game.

28...♗xe8?

After this capture, Black has a hopeless game. However, it is far from obvious why 28...♗d1+! should be better. Following 29 ♔h2 ♗xe8 30 ♗xe8 Black has a study-like defence: 30...♗d3!! (30...♗b1? 31 ♗f3 +- threatening ♔b4) 31 ♗b4 (31 ♔e1 ♔g7 is unclear) 31...♗h1+! 32 ♔xh1 (32 ♔g2 ♗f1+ 33 ♔f3 ♗d3+ =) 32...♗f1+ 33 ♔h2 ♗xf2+ with perpetual check.

29 ♗xe8 ♗b1+

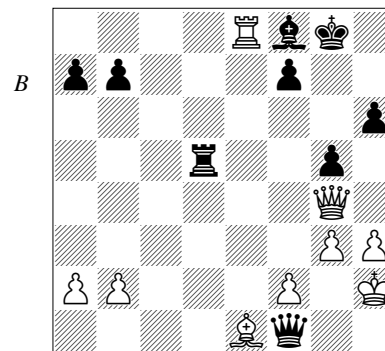
Not the most stubborn defence, but at this point there was no way to change the outcome of the game:

a) 29...♗c6 30 ♗c8 (30 ♗b8!?) 30...♗d1+ 31 ♗xd1 ♗xc8 32 ♗d4 +- with a decisive advantage.

b) After 29...f5 30 ♗e2 a5 31 ♗b8 +- the black king is too open, and his pawns are weak. 31...b6 is well met by 32 b4!?.

30 ♔h2 ♗f1 31 ♔e1! (D)

Simplest. Black can neither threaten the white king nor protect the f8-bishop. 31 ♗f3 ♗d1 32 ♗g2 also leads to victory.



31...♔g7 32 ♗f3 1-0

Black resigned because there is no defence against the threat of 33 ♔c3+.

What can we learn from this game?

1) Black clearly shouldn’t have exchanged off the white d5-pawn by playing 16...e5!?, as this opened up a beautiful diagonal for White’s light-squared bishop.

2) Perhaps Black should have preferred 20...♗xd2 to deprive White of the bishop-pair, as they proved strong in an open position. However, this was not an easy decision in this case, as exchanging on d2 would have also left Black in a difficult position, with little counterplay.

3) A very interesting moment occurred when Magnus played 28 ♗e8!?. I think if I had been playing this position, I would have chosen the same move even if I had seen how Black could make a draw, because it is very difficult to find the defence. What Magnus would have done in a game with a longer time-limit, only he can tell!