

# **Masterpieces and Dramas of the Soviet Championships**

Volume III (1948-1953)

**Sergey Voronkov**

**Masterpieces and Dramas of the Soviet Championships: Volume III  
(1948-1953)**

**Author: Sergey Voronkov**

Translated from the Russian by Alexei Zakharov

Typesetting by Andrei Elkov ([www.elkov.ru](http://www.elkov.ru))

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Front cover: photo by G. Yablonovsky of the third round of the 17<sup>th</sup> Soviet Championship, 1949

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## Introduction: Chess of the Red Propaganda

After World War II, a new, powerful and exciting generation of masters came to the fore in Soviet chess: including David Bronstein, Efim Geller, Tigran Petrosian, Yuri Averbakh, Mark Taimanov, and Viktor Korchnoi... However, there was an equally powerful and exciting pre-war generation blocking their way to the chess pinnacle – in their prime and still progressing, too: including grandmasters Mikhail Botvinnik, Paul Keres, Vasily Smyslov, Isaak Boleslavsky, Alexander Kotov, and Igor Bondarevsky... Simply listing these names is breathtaking: every player here was a star! The Soviet championships back then truly were the “tournaments of stars”.

It was then that the decades-long period known as “the golden age of Soviet chess” began. The Soviet world champions took turns on the throne, Soviet grandmasters dominated international matches and tournaments, their annotations were considered the best training material for the whole world, and Soviet chess books and magazines were deemed the gold standard for quality.

The status of chess players also changed. In 1948, grandmasters and masters started receiving stipends, which allowed them to concentrate fully on chess, without thinking how to make ends meet. A gold medal for the national champion was introduced in the same year. Chess players were granted the right to travel abroad – a privilege which was previously reserved only for Botvinnik (apart from him, only Ragozin was allowed to compete in an international tournament before the war) and of which, I should remind Western readers, almost all Soviet citizens were deprived. On the one hand, this meant that the best Soviet grandmasters joined the country's elite, but, on the other hand, they became highly dependent on the state. They knew: one careless word said abroad, any unsanctioned contact with a foreigner, the smallest attempt to disobey a superior's orders during a trip, and that was it – you were added to the no-foreign-trip list for a long time, with all the material and other consequences that this entailed.

David Bronstein once told me that in 1954, when he was in New York during the USSR – USA match, he found a cartoon in the *New York Times*, called “Kremlin's Puppets”: “Below, we were all gathered there: Smyslov, Bronstein, Keres, Averbakh, Geller, Kotov, Petrosian, and Taimanov, and above were the Kremlin higher-ups headed by Khrushchev, pulling our strings. This looked like a slap in the face. But now I think that this cartoonist was essentially right: we were indeed puppets, but didn't realize it.” Indeed, all our greats had to play the role of “Soviet chess players” abroad, not allowed to act independently. Even at the chess board, too – if the party “gave an

order”. The stakes in this black and white theater were incredibly high: in Stalin’s time, any tournament place other than first was considered a failure for Soviet grandmasters.

The contemporary reader most probably doesn’t know that it was no accident that chess experienced such hypertrophied attention and development in the Soviet Union: it was an important instrument of propaganda. In 1929, Nikolai Krylenko, the boss of Soviet chess (as well as being the Russian SFSR chief prosecutor and future Soviet People’s Commissar for Justice), reacted to the “bourgeois” call “Down with politics in chess” with proletarian straightforwardness, coming up with the slogan “Chess is a weapon of politics”, and Soviet chess players lived under that slogan ever since. The fact that we were “ahead of the whole planet” not only “in the area of ballet”<sup>1</sup>, but in the most intellectual of all games too, was supposed to be a symbol of the communist system being superior to the capitalist one.

The country caught “chess fever” back in 1925, when a huge tournament was staged in Moscow featuring Capablanca, Lasker, Rubinstein, Marshall and other stars of the West. The Soviet government, urged by Krylenko, funded it handsomely (this was the first tournament in the world to be directly sponsored by a state), but it was worth it. The breakthrough of the cultural blockade had to become – and it did become! – a preface to the breakthrough on other, much more important frontlines: economic and political. And the tournament itself was, possibly, the first attempt to engage in “team play”, of which the Soviet players were later repeatedly accused.

The tournament was won by Efim Bogoljubov. Back then, he was not yet “the renegade” who renounced his Soviet citizenship – he was the Soviet champion, so Krylenko was highly invested in his victory. The key to Bogoljubov’s success was his phenomenal score against other Soviet players – 8/9; it’s usually explained by the fact that he knew their game very well. Yes, this is true. But the opposite was also true: they had also adapted to his play – in the 1924 Soviet championship, Bogoljubov’s score was close to perfect, but in 1925, he lost two games and drew six. Yet, in this tournament, the Soviet masters went down against him without much fight, even though they didn’t fear Capablanca or Lasker, whom they were facing for the first time in their life! I’m sure that Bogoljubov did not play any active part in this, but Krylenko, as we shall see later, didn’t exactly restrain himself in his methods of achieving the aim...

The 1933 match between Salo Flohr and the leader of Soviet chess, Mikhail Botvinnik, was held in both Russian capitals, Moscow and Leningrad, with

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from a satirical song by Yuri Vizbor. – *Translator*

## Gold for the Cosmopolitans

16<sup>th</sup> Soviet Championship: Moscow, 10<sup>th</sup> November – 13<sup>th</sup> December 1948

It is a law of history that the winning nation  
Always embraces the idea of those  
Whom it defeated.

*A. Mezhirov, "Because the Border Is Insurmountable..."*

Although the championship was scheduled for early 1948, it only took place in November. It's understandable – the year was intense: the world championship match tournament, triumphantly won by Mikhail Botvinnik, was played in the spring, and the first ever Interzonal tournament took place in the summer, with David Bronstein emerging as the winner. From now on, these two names would be constantly mentioned together, as though confirming the old adage that opposites attract.

Botvinnik found a dangerous adversary in that puny, smiley youth. He felt it immediately when he lost to him in the 13<sup>th</sup> championship and barely managed to make a draw in the 14<sup>th</sup>, so he did everything he could to avoid meeting him in the future. Probably that's why Bronstein wasn't invited to the Chigorin Memorial in December 1947, even though his participation would have surely raised the tournament's level even further. "I know that Botvinnik was a little afraid of me," David Ionovich told me. "And when I wasn't allowed to play somewhere, I took it as par for the course." He even only made it to the Interzonal because of foreign chess federations' intervention, as the Soviet Federation didn't even include him in the candidates list!

But that's all by the way. There's another, more important question. If Botvinnik intended to create a consistent world championship system, why did he hurry so much with the match tournament, the line-up for which was assembled without any qualification?

Ten years had passed since the AVRO tournament, and Smyslov was not the only one to join the chess elite. "Of course it was unfair to exclude Najdorf from the tournament (*he was fourth in Groningen, defeating Botvinnik in line with a bet that he made*), especially after Fine's withdrawal," Bronstein insisted. "Why didn't they invite Boleslavsky, who finished as a runner-up in two Soviet Championships in a row, in 1945 and 1947? (*For context: Smyslov shared 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> places there.*) Of course it would have been more logical to hold an Interzonal tournament, and then, half a year or a full year later, a Candidates Tournament. I'm not saying that Boleslavsky, Najdorf or I would've won, but the results would have surely been different."





*In spring 1948, Mikhail Botvinnik became the world champion. Unlike the “mere mortals”, he was allowed to travel abroad with his wife and daughter. On the photo: with Vasily Valkov, the Soviet ambassador to The Netherlands, before the world championship tournament in The Hague.*

**Bogatyrchuk:** “An example of FIDE’s simplemindedness is the organization of the first tournament for the world championship. In this tournament, as it is known, three representatives of the USSR and two of other countries participated. Everybody but an extreme simpleton knows now very well that chess in the USSR is subordinated to politics and all the chess masters are no more than pawns in the hands of the Communist propaganda machine. According to this fact FIDE had a right to assume that in such an important political (from the point of view of Soviet propaganda) event as the world championship a sort of team work may exist among Soviet chess masters. **And if in a tournament of five players a team of three good masters would act together, then no Capablanca, Alekhine or Lasker would have the slightest chance of becoming champion (emphasis by me – S.V.).** I looked through all the games of this tournament, and some of the games of Soviet masters between themselves astonished me with their lack of ideas.

In particular, Keres, against Botvinnik, did not demonstrate any of his skill. The same Keres played with Euwe and Reshevsky in his old manner with striking geniality. Of course, this fact may be explained by Botvinnik’s

superiority, but I know the play of both and I am far from being sure of this superiority. The play of Smyslov with Botvinnik was also not as impressive as it was sometimes in the games with other masters.

Being aware of methods of Soviet propaganda I have no doubt that this weak play is rather the result of proper instruction than playing supremacy of Botvinnik. Other tournaments with the participation of Soviet masters permit to suspect the same teamwork. It is quite natural. Sporting achievement may only be based on skill, genius and experience when it is free from all influences, and especially from the pressure of politics, which, in Stalin's words, 'have the sole aim of benefit of one's state, and this aim justifies the means.'" (*Canadian Chess Chat*, No. 12, 1950, edited version.)

Fyodor Parfenyevich had tried to open Western society's eyes to the true state of affairs in Soviet chess in 1949, in his letter to *CHESS* – the most influential chess magazine of the time (see also the chapter "Chess of the Red Propaganda" in the second volume of *Dr. Zhivago of Soviet Chess*<sup>3</sup>).

Speaking of Boleslavsky, I remember David Ionovich saying bitterly, "Isaak never complained to me: he also realized that he had certain weaknesses in the eyes of Botvinnik, and perhaps the whole of society, too..." The hint is too transparent to fail to understand. Back then, the campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans" had started.

The myth of the dangers of cosmopolitanism had been actively promoted in society since the second half of 1947. The wheels of the Cold War had started turning, siege mentality was rampant in the country, and the newspapers



*Autograph on the reverse side: "USSR chess master D. I. Bronstein before going to Stockholm to play in his first international tournament. Moscow, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1948." From D. Bronstein's archive. Published for the first time.*

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<sup>3</sup> The full bibliography and championship tables are included at the end of the book. (S.V.)

created a new image of an enemy, “reactionary American imperialism” that “made cosmopolitanism its ideological banner”. Of course, common Soviet people didn’t know who “cosmopolitans” were, but they were handed an explanation: cosmopolitans are all those eggheads and Jews who don’t like the Russian people, don’t value our achievements and engage in “sycophancy before the West”. In one word, anti-patriots. And then it started...

In January 1948, upon Stalin’s personal order, the famous actor and film director Solomon Mikhoels was secretly killed (hit by a truck), and then the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which he chaired, was destroyed. The arrests started in December of that year. Professor Solomon Lozovsky, the former head of the Soviet Information Bureau, was one of those arrested. “On the way back from the courtroom, when the 70 year-old Lozovsky was stretchered out to the ‘black raven’ (*a prisoner transport vehicle*), the captain caught up with them, grabbed the defendant by the beard and, shaking a fist which was bigger than Lozovsky’s face before his nose, said, ‘Hey, Solomon, you damn Jew. If you say again one thing to me and another to the judges, if you again turn the whole process in the wrong direction, I’ll disembowel you, strangle you with your own guts, and there’ll be enough to hang your



*The top five players of the Tournament of Slavic Countries: Mikhail Botvinnik, Alexander Kotov, Vyacheslav Ragozin, Vasily Smyslov and Isaac Boleslavsky. Thankfully, the pogroms against “rootless cosmopolitans” hadn’t reached the chess world... From the author’s archive.*

children who still walk free. Do you understand? Stop getting on my nerves, I'm getting tired of fighting you.” (This testimony of a sergeant who carried Lozovsky was quoted in an article by the well-known historian and philosopher Dmitry Volkogonov.)

Life came full circle: the country that had defeated Nazism turned towards Nazism itself (see the epigraph; a similar thought was later expressed by writer Vladimir Tendryakov: “It’s been long known that the winners imitate their defeated enemies.”). In the same year, cybernetics was declared a pseudoscience, and the “people’s academician” Lysenko, with Stalin’s approval, damned “Weismannism – Morganism – Mendelism” in biology. There were also ideas of attacking “Einsteinism” in physics, but Kurchatov managed to explain to Beria that if they renounce the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, they wouldn’t be able to create atomic bombs...

Thankfully, chess players weren’t targeted during the pogrom of the “rootless cosmopolitans”. However, the rushed and illogical organization of the “M. I. Chigorin Chess Memorial Tournament of Slavic Countries” – honoring the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death(?) – was quite symptomatic. Why wasn’t chess struck by the wave of state antisemitism? It probably got an exception because of impressive successes in the international arena: the world championship was won by Botvinnik, a Jew, and two other Jewish players, Bronstein and Boleslavsky, won the Interzonal. If, say, Reshevsky had become world champion, and the Stockholm tournament had been won by Najdorf, then the Sports Committee might have received a memo that there were “too many Jews” in Soviet chess (and the Sports Committee would have taken the memo to heart: in April 1948, state security Colonel-General Arkady Apollonov was appointed chairman).

But on the everyday level, ethnicity-based troubles were, of course, unavoidable. Here are two very telling accounts.



*When Viktor Korchnoi was issued his first passport at the age of 16, he asked to list his nationality as Jewish. Photo by M. Volkovysky. From Y. Neishtadt’s archive.*

**Korchnoi:** “At the age of 16 (*in 1947*), I was due to receive my first passport (*the Soviet ID document, not a travel passport*). I went to the building’s superintendent. In the fifth column of the passport, I had to state my ethnicity. I thought that since my mother was Jewish, I was clearly 50% Jewish as well; the other percentage, from my father’s side, was less convincing. And so, I asked the superintendent to write that I was Jewish. When I came home, my Jewish stepmother made a huge scene, screamed at me that I was a fool, ran to the building’s superintendent and convinced him to write that I was Russian in my passport.” (From the book *Chess Without Mercy*.)

**Averbakh:** “In 1949, when antisemitism was rampant in the country, I was due to travel abroad for the first time, to take part in the Moscow – Budapest match. The Sports Committee personnel department gave me a large questionnaire, in which I had to describe my background and that of my closest relatives going back three generations. The official, his surname was Pavlov as I recall, looked through my answers and asked, ‘May I ask you confidentially: why do you state that your ethnicity is Jewish?’

I explained that in the first passport, issued back in school, it was written: ‘Father is Jewish, mother is Russian’. But then, when I came of age and had to change my passport, I was told that I couldn’t do that, and I had to specify one ethnicity. Ethnicity was never an issue for me – I was brought up as an internationalist, both at home and in school – and so I said, ‘I’ll take my father’s ethnicity.’

‘But your mother is Russian!’ Pavlov exclaimed. ‘Do you want advice from an old, seasoned man? Change your ethnicity immediately. The law allows you to choose.’

When I came home, I told my parents about this conversation. My mother supported the idea of changing my ethnicity. My father said nothing, but it seemed to me that he was upset.

Soon I went to the militia precinct with an application. The chief, a big-faced colonel, read it and grinned.

‘Why do all the Jews suddenly want to become Russian?’

‘Am I doing something illegal?’ I asked in return.

‘No, no, it’s all right!’ he said quickly, writing down his resolution...” (From the original Russian version of the book *Centre-Stage and Behind the Scenes*.)

When I was writing an article on the matter, I asked Yuri Lvovich whether antisemitism was felt in the chess milieu. He answered, “In chess, the fight against cosmopolitanism wasn’t as harsh as in other areas of culture. Perhaps it was because chess, unlike literature or music, where much depends on personal taste, has strict criteria: he who is stronger wins, and you can’t

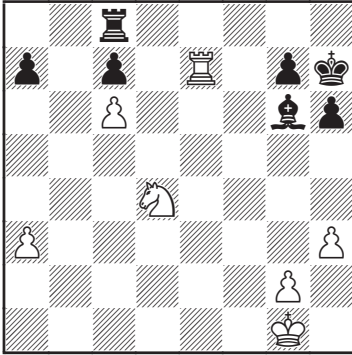
## Act One

No. 262

Geller – Taimanov

Moscow 1952, round 19

Annotated by P. Romanovsky



36...♙e8! Great play! In the endgame after 37.♘e6 ♖xc6

38.♖xc7+ ♔h8 39.♖xc7 ♖xc7 40.♘xc7, black has a chance to draw.

On the other hand, 37.♘b5! a6 38.♘a7 dispelled any illusions: 38... ♖d8 39.♖xc7 ♖d1+ 40.♔h2 ♖c1 41.♖e7 ♕xc6 42.♖c7, winning.

Black should have attacked the c-pawn from behind with 36...♕d3!, targeting the b5 square and forcing the transition to the very endgame where “black has a chance to draw”: 37.♘e6 (or 37.♖d7 ♔g6 38.♘e6 ♕e4) 37... ♕e4 38.♖xc7+ ♔h8 39.♖xc7 ♖xc7 40.♘xc7 ♕xc6.

37.♘f5 ♔g6 38.g4. The computer shows 0.00 here, insisting on the rook ending after 38.♘xc7 ♕xc6 39.♖e6+ ♔xc7 40.♖xc6. Analysis showed that it’s also drawn with best play!

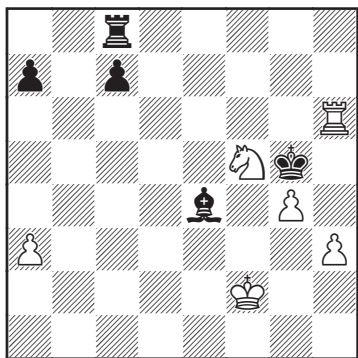


The game against Geller was fatal for Taimanov. Photo by N. Volkov. From V. Chepizhny's archive. Published for the first time.

**38...♔f6.** 38...♙f7 was better, and if 39.♖d7 then 39...♔f6 40.♗e7 ♖e8.

**39.♖xg7 ♙xc6** (39...h5!=) **40.♖h7 ♙e4 41.♖xh6+ ♔g5.** *The losing move! However, after 41...♔e5 black is still in serious trouble.*

**42.♔f2?** A mistake that should have led to a draw. It was necessary to play 42.♖h5+ ♔f4 43.♔f2 ♖b8 44.♗d4 or 43...♖d8 44.♗g3.



The game was adjourned in this position, and Taimanov sealed his move. Analysis showed that white couldn't win after the correct move.

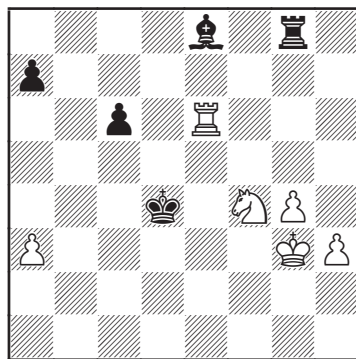
**42...♖b8?** Black should have played 42...♖f8. The main line: 43.♖h5+ ♔g6 44.♔e3 ♙xf5 45.♖xf5 ♖xf5 46.gxf5+ ♔xf5 47.♔d4 ♔g5 (exhausted by great nervous strain, Taimanov thought that this position was lost for black) 48.♔c5 ♔h4 49.♔c6 (the preliminary 49.a4 changes nothing: instead of 49...a5? black of course plays 49...♔xh3 50.a5 ♔g4 51.♔c6 ♔f5 52.♔xc7 ♔e6 etc.) 49...♔xh3 50.♔xc7 ♔g4

51.♔b7 a5! 52.a4 ♔f5 53.♔b6 ♔e6 54.♔xa5 ♔d7 55.♔b6 ♔c8, and black makes it just in time.

**43.♖h5+ ♔f4 44.♗d4 ♙g6 45.♗e6+ ♔e4 46.♖h6 ♖g8 47.♔g3.** The capture 47.♗xc7 would have led to unexpected trouble after 47...♔f4 48.♗e6+ ♔e5.

*Let's check: 49.♗g5 ♔f6 50.♗f3 ♔g7 51.g5, and black can't save the game.*

**47...c6 48.♗f4 ♙e8 49.♖e6+ ♔d4.**



**50.♖e1!** A pretty move: black can't play 50...c5 due to 51.♗e6+ ♔c4 (51...♔d5 52.♗c7+) 52.♖c1+. The game is lost for black, since the h- and g-pawns are ready to march ahead at any minute.

**50...♙f7 51.♖e7 ♙b3 52.♖d7+ ♔c4 53.h4 c5 54.g5 a5 55.g6 ♙c2 56.h5 ♔b3 57.g7 c4 58.h6 ♙h7 59.♗d5 c3 60.♖b7+ ♔xa3 61.♖c7 ♔b2 62.♗f6.** The idea is obvious: 62...c2 63.♗xh7 c1=♖ 64.♖xc1 ♔xc1 65.♗f6.

**62...a4 63.♗xh7 a3 64.♗f6 a2 65.♖b7+ ♔a1.** Or 65...♔c2 66.♖a7

♔b2 67.♘d5 c2 68.♖xa2+ ♔xa2  
69.♘b4+ and ♘xc2.

66.♘d5 (preparing for 66...c2  
67.♖c7 ♔b2 68.♖xc2+ etc.) 66...  
♖c8 67.♘b4 c2 68.♘xc2+ ♖xc2  
69.♖a7 ♖c1 70.♖xa2+. Black  
resigned.

## Act Two

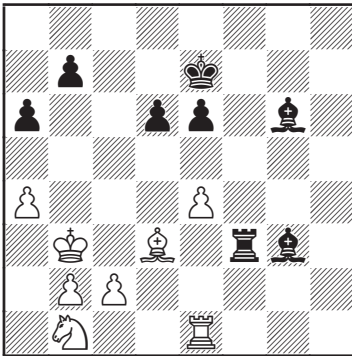
“We were both exhausted in the last round. After the game, Botvinnik admitted that he was pushing the limits of his energy and had to lie down at his home for the whole day before the game.” (Here and later, the unattributed quotes are from Suetin’s book *Outstanding Soviet Chess Players*.)

No. 263

**Suetin – Botvinnik**

Moscow 1952, round 19

Annotated by A. Suetin



41.♖g1? Black’s last move, made in time trouble (♙e5-g3), tempted white to make this mistake. He thought that black had no good

defense against the maneuver ♘d2. The simple 41.♖e2 with the subsequent ♘d2 gave white a draw.

“I was quite surprised to see Botvinnik’s note to this move in the book *Half a Century in Chess*. Botvinnik thinks that I ‘followed the method introduced by Bronstein against him in the 1951 match, hoping that he wouldn’t be able to find the right continuation after five hours of play.’ Unfortunately, it was all much simpler: I still don’t know much about that ‘Bronstein method’. However, my perennial flaw, impetuosity, was the simple reason for this mistake.

Of course, I came to the hotel in a gloomy mood. The threat of inevitable loss loomed over me.

Forgetting to rest and eat, I sat doing analysis until midnight. I unexpectedly found a helper, a very strong player. (*Could that have been Taimanov? Why else hide his helper’s name?... In addition, Mark’s participation in analysis could have explained why he was so sure that the game would end in a draw – see the text at the end of the game.*)

In short, I went to the game tired and hungry in the morning, but my mood was far from defeatist.”

41...♙xe4. The sealed move that Botvinnik thought on for 15 minutes. It turned out that the move 41.♖g1 cost white a pawn.

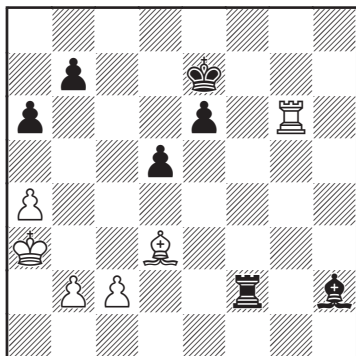
42.♘d2 ♙d5+. White hadn’t noticed this check when he made his rash rook move.



43. ♔a3 ♖f2 44. ♘e4. 44. ♖xg3 ♖xd2 45. ♖g7+ would objectively have caused black more trouble. But psychologically, the knight move was better because Botvinnik didn't analyze it for long, spent half an hour thinking on this and the next move, and again got into time trouble.

44... ♙h2 45. ♖g6 ♙xe4. 45... ♖f3 was stronger, retaining the extra pawn and two strong bishops. Now, with opposite-colored bishops, white has great drawing chances.

46. ♙xe4 d5 47. ♙d3.

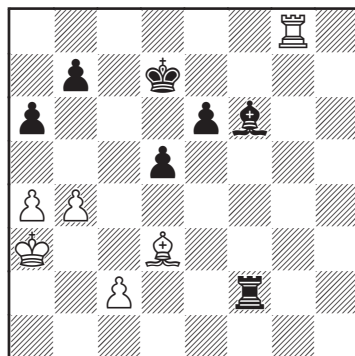


47... ♙e5. "The start of black's misadventure," Botvinnik wrote in *Analytical and Critical Works*. "The correct move was probably 47...e5 48. ♖b6 e4 49. ♖xb7+ ♔d6 50. ♙xa6 ♖xc2 or 50...e3, with a very dangerous position for black." But the computer recommends 47... ♙e5, evaluating Botvinnik's line as roughly equal. For instance: 50... ♖xc2 51. ♖b8 d4 52. ♖d8+ ♔e5 53. ♙b7 e3 54. ♙b3 ♖d2 55. a5 or 50...e3 51. c3 e2 52. ♙xe2! ♖xe2 53. a5 etc.



"After the game, Botvinnik admitted that he was pushing the limits of his energy and had to lie down at his home for the whole day before the game." (Suetin)

48. ♖g8 ♔d7 49. b4 ♙f6.



50. ♖g1! The only move, but it's enough to prevent the threat e6-e5. 50...e5 is met with 51. ♖d1 and then 52. ♙e4 or 52. c4, blocking the onslaught of central pawns.

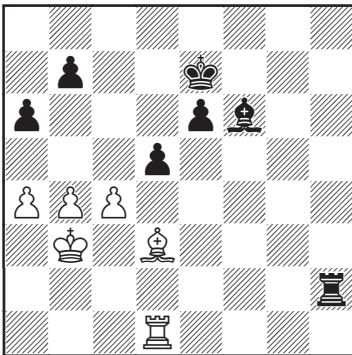
Let's check: 51...♔e6 52.c4 d4!  
 53.♙e4 (Botvinnik's line 53.♔b3  
 ♖f3 54.♔c2 ♗e3 is weaker) 53...b6  
 54.c5 bxc5 55.bxc5 ♗e2 56.♙b7 (or  
 56.♙d3 ♗e3 57.♔b4 ♗xd3! 58.♗xd3  
 e4) 56...a5 57.♔b3 e4 etc.

So, Botvinnik is right to call 50...  
 ♗h2 "an inaccuracy": "As soon as I  
 was able to move the e-pawn, I should  
 have done it."

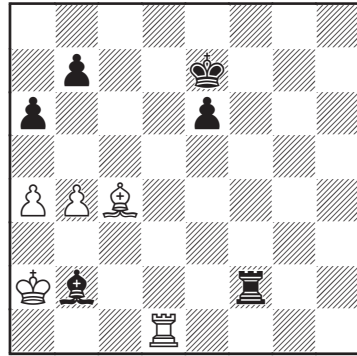
50...♗h2 51.♔b3 ♔d6 52.♗d1  
 ♙e7 53.c4! "Now a draw looks very  
 possible, and even though Geller  
 had already defeated Taimanov at  
 that point, I realized that I likely  
 wouldn't catch up with my young  
 competitor.

*'Likely wouldn't' – but what  
 else could I do, agree to a draw  
 immediately? And so the game  
 continued, even though I could only  
 hope for a miracle.'* (Botvinnik)

"To my growing surprise, the  
 draw became increasingly real. The  
 question was, would I have enough  
 energy for a prolonged struggle?  
 By the way, Botvinnik also looked  
 quite confused and unsure of  
 himself."



53...♗b2+ 54.♔a3 dxc4  
 55.♙xc4 ♗c2 56.♙b3 ♙b2+  
 57.♔a2 ♗f2 58.♙c4



58...a5. The best chance.  
 Otherwise, after 59.a5 and b4-b5,  
 white will trade the queenside pawns  
 with a clear draw.

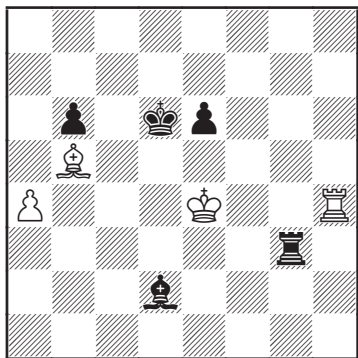


*"Botvinnik immediately made a move and  
 pierced me with such a cold and mistrusting  
 gaze that I returned and... started blundering."  
 (Suetin). From the author's archive.*

59. bxa5 ♖c3+ 60. ♔b3 ♖xa5  
 61. ♖b5 b6 62. ♔c4 ♔f6 63. ♔d4  
 ♜f4+ 64. ♔e3 ♔e5 65. ♜h1 ♜e4+  
 66. ♔d3 ♜g4 67. ♜h5+ ♔d6 68. ♜h8  
 ♔e5 69. ♜h5+ ♔f4 70. ♜h3 ♜g8  
 71. ♜h4+ ♔e5 72. ♜h5+ ♔d6  
 73. ♜h4. 73. ♜h3 was more precise,  
 with a drawn position.

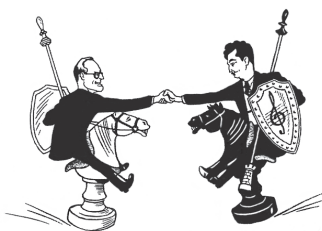
73... ♜g3+ 74. ♔e4. 74. ♔d4 or  
 74. ♔e2 were simpler ways to the  
 draw. “But it seemed that I got too  
 tired and just hungry at that point...  
 I decided to go to the cafeteria,  
 but Botvinnik immediately made  
 a move and pierced me with such  
 a cold and mistrusting gaze that I  
 returned and... started blundering.  
 By the way, I also noticed that  
 Botvinnik’s usual confidence was  
 returning to him.”

74... ♖d2!



75. ♖d3? The threat 75... ♜c3+  
 76. ♔d4 e5+ 77. ♔c4 ♜c3+ is very  
 dangerous, but with 75. ♜h5 (or  
 75. ♔d4 – Botvinnik), white still  
 retained great drawing chances.

75... ♖g5. Botvinnik gave this  
 move an exclamation mark, but 75...



— С победой.  
 — И вас также.

Рисунок И. Александровича

“Congratulations on your win.”

“And to you too.”

Before the last round, Taimanov was a point  
 ahead of Botvinnik, but they “rode” to the  
 finish together. A Hollywood-like happy  
 ending! Cartoon by I. Alexandrovich. From  
 Ogonyok magazine (No. 4, 1953).

♔c5! was a more precise continuation,  
 forcing 76. ♜h5+ ♖g5 etc.

76. ♜h5? This loses immediately.  
 76. ♜h8 was better, but even then,  
 after 76... ♜g4+ and ♜xa4, black  
 should win.

76... ♔c5! White resigned.

Botvinnik: “An incredibly rare  
 position! White can escape mate with  
 77. ♜xg5+ or 77. ♔e5 ♜xd3 78. ♜xg5  
 ♜d5+, but his position is still lost.

In the meantime, my competitor  
 Taimanov and his coach Flohr were  
 waiting for a draw, watching the  
 play-off in the Central Railway  
 Workers House of Culture (where  
 the championship was held). The  
 demonstrator came to them from time  
 to time to recount the latest news. Then,  
 there was a message: Suetin resigned!  
 “That is a lie!” both grandmasters  
 exclaimed at the same time. But when  
 the demonstrator showed them the  
 final position, they fell silent.”