

The Assassin vs The Magician

By RileyD, nwJ – Riley D. Driver 14-15 January 2015

This was the game of the day at ChessGames.com July 1, 2006 with the moniker “Tartar Sauce.” The Tartar name was given for good reason as it was the IM Rashid G. Nezhmetdinov, aka The Chess Assassin, a Tartar by birth, versus the GM (and former World Champion) Mikhail Tal, aka The Chess Magician, Latvian by birth, in the 1961 USSR Championship.

They played a total of four games against each other. Tal was Black in all four games, losing three and winning one - it was the only game to last more than 40 moves (45).

Most of the comments to the game below (the last one they played against each other) are from “Nezhmetdinov’s Best Games of Chess” by Nezhmetdinov himself, published/translated in 2000 by Cassia Editions.

IM Nezhmetdinov vs GM Tal

USSR Championship 1961

Sicilian Defense: Najdorf, Scheveningen Variation (B84)

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cd4 4. Nd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e6 6. Be2 Nbd7 (diagram)



Nezh notes that 6. ... Nc6 with a planned exchange on d4 later would be safer with B to d7 and c6 to follow allowing Black to properly take aim at e4.

7. O-O a6

Also possible was 7. ... Nc5 forcing White’s Bishop to f3 to protect the pawn on e4 and blocking the f-pawn. Nezh says, “The ex-world champion prefers a sharper continuation.”

8. f4 Qc7 9. g4

Nezh provides the following explanation for this move, “Establishes control over the central squares e4 and d5.”

9. ... b5 10. a3

Oddly enough this move was played to hold onto e4. “If instead the ‘active’ 10. g5 b4 11. gf then the position would have favored Black.”

10. ... Bb7 11. Bf3 Nc5

Tal goes after e4 in a big way, but Nezh believes the plan of h6 and Nb6 would be better. He also considered the move 11. ... e5 followed by 12. Nde2 Nc5 13. Ng3 ef 14. Bxf4 Nfd7 15. Nf5 Ne5 16. Ne3 with a real battle going on for the center with White having the better chances.

12. Qe2 e5

Why not 12. ... d5 13. ed O-O-O? Because 14. b4! with advantage to White

13. Nf5 g6

Nezh believes 13. ... Nfd7 was necessary, but even then after 14. Nd5 White has the initiative.

14. fe5 de5 15. Nh6!

Usually a "Knight on the rim is Grim." However, here Nezh says, "This Knight on the edge of the board will soon become one of the most important attacking pieces." He also notes 15. Bg5 would have led nowhere as 15. ... Ncd7 16. Ne3 Bc5 and the danger is over for Black.

15. ... Ne6 16. Bg2!

Not permitting the exchange of this Bishop.

16. ... Bg7 (diagram)



It may appear as if Black has completed his development and is ready to castle. Maybe against anyone it would be so, but not against the "Chess Assassin" as a decisive sacrifice comes his way now. There will be no castling for Black.

17. Rf6! Bf6 18. Nd5 Qd8

Not 18. ... Bxd5 as it would not work either, 19. ed Nd4 20. Qf2 Qb6 21. g5 Ne2+ 22. Kf1 Qxf2+ 23. Kxf2 Nxc1 24. gf and White is winning.

19. Qf2 Nf4 20. Bf4 ef4

20. ... Bxd5 would be better here and as move 19 as well trying to find a draw.

21. e5! Be5 22. Re1 f6 23. Nf6! Qf6 24. Qd4! (diagram)



White is down a Rook and winning!! It will soon be over.

24. ... Kf8 25. Re5 Qd8 26. Rf5 gf5 27. Qh8 Ke7 28. Qg7 Ke6 29. gf5 (diagram)



And it is over – Black resigned here with a King – Queen fork coming on the next move. 1-0.

End.