

Petrosian Year by Year

Volume II (1963-1984)

Tibor Karolyi and Tigran Gyoalyan

Petrosian Year by Year: Volume II (1963-1984)

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CONTENTS

Index of Games	4
Introduction to Volume II	9
1963	11
1964	40
1965	58
1966	71
1967	103
1968	121
1969	139
1970	174
1971	199
1972	230
1973	262
1974	283
1975	310
1976	333
1977	355
1978	372
1979	392
1980	409
1981	425
1982	449
1983	473
1984	488
Petrosian's Remarkable Exchanges	490
It's Your Move.....	502
Afterword to Volume II	513
Index of Themes	514

Index of Games

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
112	T. Petrosian	M. Botvinnik	Grunfeld Defence	1963
113	T. Petrosian	M. Botvinnik	English Opening	1963
114	T. Petrosian	M. Botvinnik	Grunfeld Defence	1963
115	P. Benko	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1963
116	T. Petrosian	V. Korchnoi	Fragment	1963
117	T. Petrosian	R. Byrne	Fragment	1964
118	T. Petrosian	A. Roizman	Fragment	1964
119	R. Naranja	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1964
120	T. Petrosian	L. Tapaszto	Fragment	1964
121	T. Petrosian	M. Bertok	English Opening	1965
122	T. Petrosian	J. Donner	Queen's Gambit Declined	1965
123	M. Filip	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1965
124	V. Korchnoi	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1966
125	B. Spassky	T. Petrosian	Queen's Pawn Opening	1966
126	T. Petrosian	B. Spassky	King's Indian Defence	1966
127	T. Petrosian	B. Spassky	Fragment	1966
128	T. Petrosian	A. Lutikov	Queen's Gambit Declined	1966
129	N. Minev	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1966
130	T. Petrosian	D. Bronstein	Queen's Gambit Declined	1967
131	T. Petrosian	F. Gheorghiu	English Opening	1967
132	T. Petrosian	V. Smyslov	Slav Defence	1967
133	T. Petrosian	V. Danov	Sicilian Defence	1967
134	B. Gurgenzidze	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1967
135	A. Dueckstein	T. Petrosian	Sicilian Defence	1968
136	T. Petrosian	A. Bykhovsky	Fragment	1968
137	O. Moiseev	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1968
138	M. Bobotsov	T. Petrosian	Queen's Gambit Exchange	1968
139	T. Petrosian	S. Gligoric	King's Indian Defence	1968
140	T. Petrosian	B. Larsen	Queen's Indian Defence	1968
141	B. Spassky	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1969
142	B. Spassky	T. Petrosian	Queen's Indian Defence	1969
143	T. Petrosian	B. Spassky	Fragment	1969
144	B. Spassky	A. Suetin	Queen's Gambit Accepted	1963
145	A. Suetin	V. Tseshkovsky	Fragment	1972
146	T. Petrosian	E. Vasiukov	Fragment	1969
147	I. Zaitsev	T. Petrosian	French Defence	1969
148	J. Diez del Corral	T. Petrosian	French Defence	1969
149	I. Zaitsev	B. Spassky	Fragment	1960
150	I. Zaitsev	O. Dementiev	Sicilian Defence	1970
151	L. Polugaevsky	T. Petrosian	English Opening	1970
152	M. Udovcic	T. Petrosian	King's Indian Attack	1970

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
153	V. Hort	T. Petrosian	French Defence	1970
154	T. Petrosian	M. Fuller	Fragment	1970
155	T. Petrosian	H. Liebert	Fragment	1970
156	T. Petrosian	D. Tomic	Fragment	1970
157	T. Petrosian	C. Van den Berg	Fragment	1971
158	T. Petrosian	A. Karpov	Fragment	1971
159	V. Korchnoi	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1971
160	T. Petrosian	V. Korchnoi	Fragment	1971
161	T. Petrosian	R. Fischer	Grunfeld Defence	1971
162	R. Fischer	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1971
163	V. Korchnoi	T. Petrosian	Meran Semi-Slav	1971
164	T. Petrosian	B. Spassky	Fragment	1971
165	B. Parma	T. Petrosian	Sicilian Defence	1971
166	T. Petrosian	M. Tal	Semi-Tarrasch Defence	1972
167	T. Petrosian	M. Matulovic	Leningrad Dutch	1972
168	T. Petrosian	H. Ree	English Opening	1972
169	L. Portisch	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1972
170	T. Petrosian	B. Larsen	Stonewall	1972
171	T. Petrosian	J. Diez del Corral	Fragment	1973
172	T. Petrosian	R. Keene	Fragment	1973
173	B. Enklaar	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1973
174	C. Langeweg	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1973
175	T. Petrosian	I. Radulov	Fragment	1973
176	T. Petrosian	A. Karpov	Queen's Indian Defence	1973
177	L. Portisch	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1974
178	T. Petrosian	L. Portisch	Fragment	1974
179	T. Petrosian	V. Korchnoi	Fragment	1974
180	T. Petrosian	B. Ivkov	Nimzo-Indian Defence	1974
181	T. Petrosian	D. Bronstein	Fragment	1974
182	T. Petrosian	L. Ljubojevic	Fragment	1974
183	T. Petrosian	Y. Kraidman	Fragment	1974
184	T. Petrosian	Y. Balashov	Nimzo-Indian Defence	1974
185	R. Cardoso	T. Petrosian	Sicilian Defence	1975
186	T. Petrosian	B. Gurgendze	Modern Defence	1975
187	T. Petrosian	L. Ljubojevic	Modern Benoni	1975
188	T. Petrosian	S. Garcia	Fragment	1975
189	T. Petrosian	A. Beliavsky	Fragment	1975
190	J. Klovans	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1975
191	T. Petrosian	I. Dorfman	Semi-Slav	1975
192	T. Petrosian	J. Peters	Fragment	1976
193	T. Petrosian	O. Romanishin	Fragment	1976

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
194	T. Petrosian	B. Larsen	Fragment	1976
195	T. Petrosian	A. Karpov	English Opening	1976
196	T. Petrosian	N. Rashkovsky	Modern Benoni	1976
197	T. Petrosian	V. Kupreichik	Slav Defence	1976
198	T. Petrosian	V. Korchnoi	Semi-Tarrasch Defence	1977
199	T. Petrosian	M. Suba	Fragment	1977
200	O. Romanishin	T. Petrosian	Irregular Opening	1977
201	T. Petrosian	Y. Balashov	Irregular Opening	1977
202	L. Portisch	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1978
203	T. Petrosian	A. Lukin	Modern Benoni	1978
204	T. Petrosian	A. Kochiev	Modern Defence	1978
205	A. Beliavsky	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1978
206	T. Petrosian	L. Espig	Old Indian Defence	1978
207	T. Petrosian	K. Kaiszauri	Leningrad Dutch	1978
208	T. Petrosian	V. Ciocaltea	King's Indian Defence	1978
209	T. Petrosian	G. Sax	Pirc Defence	1979
210	A. Lutikov	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1979
211	T. Petrosian	G. Guillermo Garcia	Benoni Defence	1979
212	O. Panno	T. Petrosian	English Opening	1979
213	T. Petrosian	G. Sosonko	Fragment	1980
214	T. Petrosian	D. Velimirovic	Old Benoni Defence	1980
215	T. Petrosian	B. Ivanovic	Fragment	1980
216	G. Kasparov	T. Petrosian	Queen's Indian Defence	1981
217	T. Petrosian	S. Martinovic	Modern Benoni	1981
218	D. Gazarek	T. Petrosian	Slav Gambit	1981
219	D. Campora	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1981
220	T. Petrosian	G. Sosonko	Fragment	1981
221	G. Kasparov	T. Petrosian	Queen's Gambit Accepted	1981
222	T. Petrosian	B. Ivkov	Pirc Defence	1982
223	T. Petrosian	R. Kholmov	Bogo-Indian Defence	1982
224	J. Timman	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1982
225	T. Petrosian	L. Psakhis	Fragment	1982
226	W. Browne	T. Petrosian	Fragment	1982
227	T. Petrosian	J. Pinter	Fragment	1982
228	L. Portisch	T. Petrosian	English Opening	1982
229	T. Petrosian	W. Browne	Fragment	1982
230	T. Petrosian	L. Psakhis	Fragment	1983
231	T. Petrosian	A. Beliavsky	Queen's Gambit Exchange	1983
232	L. Polugaevsky	T. Petrosian	Modern Defence	1983
233	T. Petrosian	L. Ljubojevic	Nimzo-Indian Defence	1983
A13	T. Petrosian	O. Panno	Fragment (exchanges)	1963

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
A14	T. Petrosian	L. Polugaevsky	Fragment (exchanges)	1963
A15	T. Petrosian	J. Rubineti	Fragment (exchanges)	1964
A16	T. Petrosian	S. Reshevsky	Fragment (exchanges)	1964
A17	T. Petrosian	S. Reshevsky	Fragment (exchanges)	1964
A18	V. Simagin	T. Petrosian	Fragment (exchanges)	1966
A19	T. Petrosian	D. Janosevic	Fragment (exchanges)	1967
A20	T. Petrosian	H. Mecking	Fragment (exchanges)	1971
A21	T. Petrosian	S. Gligoric	Fragment (exchanges)	1973
A22	T. Petrosian	H. Ree	Fragment (exchanges)	1973
A23	T. Petrosian	B. Huguet	Fragment (exchanges)	1973
A24	V. Tukmakov	T. Petrosian	Fragment (exchanges)	1973
A25	T. Petrosian	S. Gligoric	Fragment (exchanges)	1974
A26	T. Petrosian	B. Gulko	Fragment (exchanges)	1978
A27	T. Petrosian	Y. Balashov	Fragment (exchanges)	1978
A28	T. Petrosian	M. Vukic	Fragment (exchanges)	1979
A29	T. Petrosian	M. Vukic	Fragment (exchanges)	1979
A30	T. Petrosian	L. Bronstein	Fragment (exchanges)	1979
A31	L. Portisch	T. Petrosian	Fragment (exchanges)	1981
A32	G. Agzamov	T. Petrosian	Fragment (exchanges)	1981
A33	T. Petrosian	M. Vukic	Fragment (exchanges)	1981
A34	T. Petrosian	T. Miles	Fragment (exchanges)	1981
A35	T. Petrosian	T. Miles	Fragment (exchanges)	1981
B26	T. Petrosian	M. Tal	Fragment (test)	1963
B27	T. Petrosian	A. Olivera	Fragment (test)	1964
B28	E. Eliskases	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1964
B29	A. Foguelman	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1964
B30	T. Petrosian	S. Reshevsky	Fragment (test)	1964
B31	T. Petrosian	E. Mnatsakanian	Fragment (test)	1965
B32	M. Botvinnik	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1966
B33	T. Petrosian	Y. Estrin	Fragment (test)	1968
B34	T. Petrosian	A. Matanovic	Fragment (test)	1969
B35	T. Petrosian	J. Penrose	Fragment (test)	1969
B36	M. Najdorf	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1969
B37	T. Petrosian	R. Nicevski	Fragment (test)	1970
B38	T. Petrosian	H. Ree	Fragment (test)	1971
B39	T. Petrosian	A. Korolkov	Fragment (test)	1972
B40	T. Petrosian	N. Katishonok	Fragment (test)	1972
B41	T. Petrosian	R. Cardoso	Fragment (test)	1974
B42	T. Petrosian	F. Visier Segovia	Fragment (test)	1974
B43	T. Petrosian	A. Beliavsky	Fragment (test)	1975
B44	T. Petrosian	O. Rodriguez Vargas	Fragment (test)	1975

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
B45	T. Petrosian	B. Gurgenzidze	Fragment (test)	1975
B46	T. Petrosian	K. Grigorian	Fragment (test)	1977
B47	G. Botterill	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1977
B48	D. Janosevic	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1978
B49	T. Petrosian	B. Ivkov	Fragment (test)	1979
B50	T. Petrosian	M. Vukic	Fragment (test)	1979
B51	J. Fernandez Garcia	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1980
B52	D. Zecevic	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1980
B53	M. Matulovic	T. Petrosian	Fragment (test)	1981
B54	T. Petrosian	J. Timman	Fragment (test)	1982
B55	T. Petrosian	A. Veingold	Fragment (test)	1983

Introduction to Volume II

In Volume I, we covered the first half of Tigran Petrosian's career. Petrosian probably experienced the toughest childhood of all world champions. He achieved outstanding results in his youth in Georgia and produced a number of masterpieces. He started out as a tactician, but gradually transformed his play to match his personality and became a master of manoeuvring.

His strength gradually grew, and in the early nineteen fifties became a world-class player. In the 1956 Candidates event he purposefully tried to win against the very best players, but did poorly in the beginning. Perhaps he should have first tried to adopt such an approach once or twice earlier. Petrosian raised his level around 1958, but Tal had appeared on the scene and produced slightly stronger performances. Botvinnik played very little by then, and at the end of the fifties was possibly no longer stronger than Petrosian. Tal beat Botvinnik, but was unable to organise his private life in a way required to maintain his level, and in addition suffered health problems. By contrast, Petrosian was an exemplary family man who – in Soviet terms – provided superb living standards for his family.

After Tal's failure against Botvinnik, Petrosian produced the most consistent results among his rivals and became the strongest player in the world. He won the Curacao Candidates event. It was to his advantage that the match for the world championship against the 51-year-old champion was rather long.

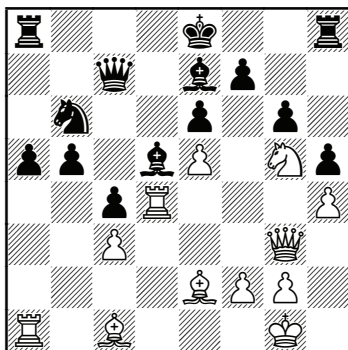
In Volume II, we start by looking at how Tigran beat the great but aging Botvinnik, and how he defended his title against Spassky. He became the first world champion to retain his title with a win since Alekhine in 1934 against Bogoljubov. We look at his tournaments and games in detail as the world champion. We also look at all his Candidates matches, including his historical matches against Fischer and Korchnoi. We will follow him all the way to his final event, in 1983.

In chess, players are mainly judged according to what they have achieved, but it is also valid to rate them according to how many masterpieces they produced. If one judges the greats in this way, Petrosian was on the highest level. He achieved everything that was possible in his time. He was the world and Olympic champion. Indeed, no other player has equalled his number of medals at Chess Olympiads and European Championships. Petrosian had a unique style. Many enjoyed his games and admired his play. We hope that our book will increase the number of Petrosian fans, and our explanations might help in this respect. We hope that we will be able to shed light on some of

his lesser-known masterpieces. Indeed, some of his majestic games have gone virtually unnoticed. Here is an example:

Gazarek, Danko – Petrosian, Tigran

Oberwart (3), 1981



19...♖xg5!! 20.♖xg5 ♔d7!!

Petrosian obtained a clear advantage with two stunning moves and went on to win. See Game 218 for full commentary. Artur Sarkisian told your Armenian author that Petrosian would come out with the aphorism: “If you have a pawn, you don’t need a brain”. This game shows that he used his brain even when he was ahead on material.

The records of the second half of Petrosian’s career are far more detailed than the first. We cover it in the same way as we did the first half in Volume I, going through his chess journey virtually game by game and analysing the best of them. We again provide “Petrosian’s Remarkable Exchanges” and “It’s Your Move” chapters.

Dear Readers, please join us in our exploration of the second half of Petrosian’s amazing career. You will enjoy it very much and learn a lot from his numerous masterpieces!

International Master
Tibor Karolyi
FIDE Master
Tigran Gyoalyan

3 plans for how to play: if he was in the lead, if it was level, and if he were to find himself trailing. According to Vasiliev, Petrosian believed that tactically he was not weaker than Spassky and interestingly Keres also mentions how strong Tigran was in that department.

Prior to the match Petrosian had played 10 games with Boris, winning one and drawing nine, but the last time they had faced each other was back in 1961. Spassky's results in 1964 and 1965 were more impressive than Tigran's: in 1964 he won the strong Belgrade tournament, the Soviet zonal, and the Amsterdam Interzonal in a 4-player tie. In 1965 he beat Keres 6:4 in the quarterfinal of the Candidates matches, Geller 5.5:2.5 in the semi-final and Tal 7:4, though his win in the final was less convincing than the result suggests. He also shared first place at Hastings.

Petrosian-Spassky World Championship Match

The event opened on the 9th of April, with the first game played on the 11th. The venue was the Variety Theatre in the heart of Moscow. It is worth looking at what changes and what type of attention the match drew in Petrosian's homeland. Your Armenian author remembers: "These matches were shown on the central channel of Armenian television. We received moves from Moscow, which were shown live by Master of Sports of the USSR, now Academician of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, Honorary Vice-President of FIDE, Vanik Surenovich Zakaryan. The Central Television of Armenia could switch off any transmission to show the moves of the current game. My task in the house was to set up the chess board and monitor every move. My father would return from work and we discussed the current position. Almost every day, Uncle Sergei, who, by the way, was my father's constant chess opponent, would come and visit. I must say that chess had become very popular in Armenia. In houses, and especially in courtyards, one could see people playing chess in Armenia, besides the popular game of backgammon. My father, a great chess lover, regularly played against friends in our house."

In game 1 Spassky was White and they followed the 1964 game Spassky-Matulovic, which saw a mainline of the ...♔f5 Caro-Kann. Petrosian's good preparation gave him easy equality. Keres writes that Petrosian told him how difficult it was to play the first game of his Botvinnik match because of the conditions in the theatre, with a lot of spectators and playing on the stage alone, which was unfamiliar to him. This time, it was Spassky who experienced this feeling. They played on; Spassky made a careless move, but Petrosian did not look deep enough and only made a reasonable move. While Spassky was thinking, Petrosian realised that he had missed winning a pawn. Petrosian

declared in an interview after the match that, while Spassky was thinking, he checked his pulse and it measured 140. Had Petrosian won the pawn, he could have pressed, but it would not have meant an easy win.

In the second game, they played a mainline Queen's Gambit Declined. Spassky equalised, but somewhat over-ambitiously sacrificed a pawn, after which he had to work for the draw, agreed to after Spassky's 50th move. Keres writes that Spassky could have been happy with the result of the first two games, but not the type of positions he obtained; hardly anybody could match Petrosian at positional play.

In the third game Spassky chose the Panov Variation against the Caro-Kann and played with the resulting standard isolated pawn. Petrosian equalized and then Spassky made a risky pawn sacrifice. Petrosian neutralised his play, but then got into time trouble and was unable to convert his advantage. The game was adjourned and Petrosian sealed the 43rd move, but they agreed to a draw without resumption. It had been a golden opportunity for Petrosian to take the lead.

In game 4 Spassky chose the closed variation against the Catalan and Petrosian got a clear advantage again, though he played cautiously and eventually found himself a pawn down. Spassky sealed the 41st move, but the rook ending was clearly not winning for Black and Petrosian's 44th move was the last of this draw.

In the fifth game Petrosian deviated in the Panov and played the risky 5...g6 variation. He offered an exchange of queens, and Spassky – after thinking for half an hour – swapped them. Petrosian's position was a bit unpleasant, but with some inaccurate moves he lost a pawn and got into trouble. But Spassky, when he was already winning, gave back the pawn and threw away the advantage. Petrosian's 40th move gave away another pawn, from then on he had to work hard, but was able to hold because of the limited material. Petrosian sealed his 42nd move and needed 79 moves to obtain his half share of the point. They had set a record: so far in a world championship match the players had never produced five draws in a row. In the sixth game, Spassky switched to the Semi-Tarrasch and drew effortlessly in 15 moves.

Game 125

Spassky, Boris – Petrosian, Tigran

World Championship Final,

Moscow (7), 1966

Queen's Pawn Opening

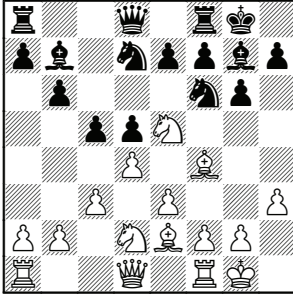
1.d4

Spassky starts roughly 50 percent of his games with 1.e4 and just slightly fewer with 1.d4.

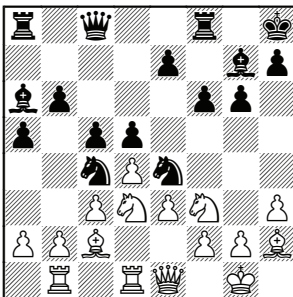
1...♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♙g5

Spassky employs Petrosian's weapon, but he himself played this variation a few times. Petrosian played a lovely game against the

somewhat-related London System a few years previously: 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♙f4 g6 4.h3 c5 5.c3 ♘bd7 6.♘bd2 ♙g7 7.e3 0-0 8.♙e2 b6 9.0-0 ♙b7 10.♘e5



10...♘e5! Petrosian starts a nice re-arrangement of his knights. 11.♘df3 ♘df6 12.♙b5 ♘d6 13.♙a4 ♖c8! Petrosian prevents White from exchanging pieces. 14.♙c2 ♘fe4 15.♖b1 f6 16.♘d3 ♘c4 17.♗e2 a5 Petrosian nicely gains space. 18.♖fd1 ♙h8 19.♙h2 ♙a6 20.♗e1



20...g5! Petrosian plays on both wings of the board. 21.dxc5? bxc5 and Black had gained a lovely advantage in the game Troeger, P – Petrosian, T, Hamburg, 1960.

3...d5 4.♘bd2 ♙e7 5.e3 ♘bd7

Tigran copies Reshevsky's play by developing the knight to d7.

6.♙d3 c5

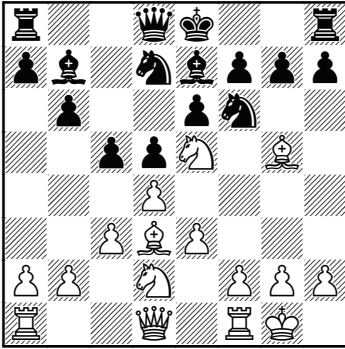
Petrosian is aware that if Black castles too early, White can launch a huge attack against the Black king; therefore he holds back on where he will place his king. Spassky had a game from this position two years earlier: 6...b6 7.c3 ♙b7 8.♖c2 c5 9.0-0 h6 10.♙h4 0-0 11.♖ae1 c4 12.♙e2 ♗c7 13.♙g3 ♙d6 14.♙xd6 ♗xd6 15.e4 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.♘d2 b5 18.♘xe4 ♗f4 19.♙f3 ♖ab8. The position was equal but Spassky went on to win an interesting queen ending in Spassky, B – Reshevsky, S, Amsterdam, 1964. There was also a game played the previous year to our main encounter and Petrosian possibly knew of it: 6...0-0 7.0-0 c5 8.c3 b6 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♙b7 11.♙xf6 ♘xf6 12.♘xf6+ ♙xf6 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♗e2 ♖b8 15.♘d2 ♙d5 16.♘e4 ♙e7 17.c4 ♙c6 18.♖ad1 ♗c7 19.f4 ♖fd8 20.♘g3 g6 Knezevic, M – Matulovic, M, Titograd, 1965.

7.c3 b6

Petrosian says that he wanted to play a move Spassky did not expect but this time please do not trust him, as he had surely prepared it. Dear readers, please do not pay attention to what active players say about the opening!

8.0-0 ♙b7 9.♘e5

Spassky sticks to his plan for the match and plays aggressively. White could also try playing for e4, but that doesn't offer a fight.



9...♞xe5! 10.dxe5 ♞d7
11.♙f4?!

According to the database this move is a novelty. It would be interesting to know what Petrosian would have played after 11.♙f4? ♞xe7 12.f4.

11...♞c7

Petrosian highlights 11...g5 as more vigorous, but Kasparov prefers the text move because of 12.♙g3 h5 13.f4 h4 14.♙f2.

12.♞f3

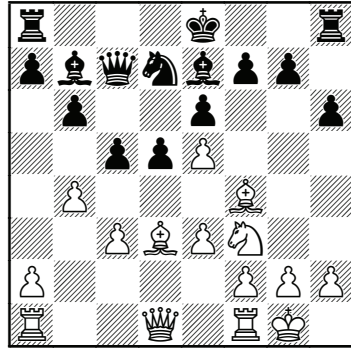
12.♞g4? g5 would win a piece, while after 12.♞h5 g6 13.♞h6 ♙f8 14.♞h3 ♙g7 15.♞f3 ♞xe5 16.♙b5+ White would have some compensation for the pawn, but after 15...0-0-0 Black would be somewhat better.

12...h6!

Petrosian attaches an exclamation mark to this move. It has several functions: Black can consider playing ...g5: it doesn't show yet where he wants to castle, and it also takes away the possibility of White playing ♞g5.

13.b4

Spassky, as in the match so far, wants to bring his opponent down by attacking him aggressively and sacrifices a pawn. On the other hand, Spassky no longer has a pleasant, safe continuation.



13...g5!

Spassky sticks to his earlier approach, but Petrosian changed his for this game. In the first few games he tried to win by looking for safety first, but Spassky survived all of these games. Maybe the fact that he was lost in the fifth game made him want to win more as he realised sooner or later he would lose a game. It is so unpleasant for the opponent when he faces a new approach. It worked magically for Petrosian when, after a few slow lines against Botvinnik's Grunfeld and after Botvinnik equalised, he went for a sharp opening battle. According to Petrosian, this time there was no other choice, although 13...cxb4 14.cxb4 ♙xb4 would be OK for Black.

14.♙g3 h5!

Petrosian's moves are not only surprising (from him), but strong as

well. 14...cxb4? 15.cxb4 ♖xb4 16.♗d4 would be risky against Spassky.

15.h4

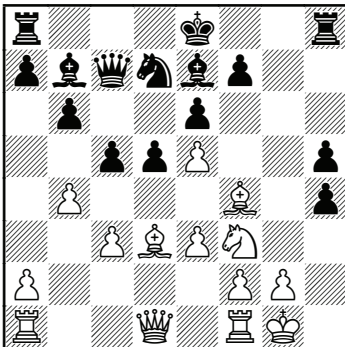
Petrosian says that 15.h3 would also fail to hold the e5-pawn: 15...0-0-0! and Black makes sure his king doesn't remain in the centre. This looks stronger than 15...g4 16.hxg4 hxg4 (16...0-0-0!?) 17.♗h2 ♗xe5 18.♗xg4 ♖d6 19.bxc5 bxc5 20.♖a4+, though White would not be worse. 16.bxc5 bxc5 looks ambitious for Black but also strong, though White would also get chances. (If 16...♗xc5 17.♗d4 ♗xd3 18.♖xd3 ♖c4 Black would have nice play against the c3-pawn.) 17.♖b1 g4 18.hxg4 hxg4 19.♗h2 c4 20.♖c2 ♗xe5 21.♗xg4 ♖d6 and Black stands a bit better.

15...gxh4!

Petrosian opens the g-file, which spells more danger for White. After 15...g4 16.♗g5 ♗xe5 17.bxc5 (17.♖b5+ ♖f8) 17...bxc5 18.♖b1 the position would be unclear.

16.♖f4

If instead 16.♗xh4? then 16...0-0-0 when Black will play ... ♖dg8 and his attack will be faster.



16...0-0-0!

Petrosian attaches an exclamation mark to this move, but now it is hard to do anything else. Of course, both his general strategy and long castling are very strong.

17.a4?!

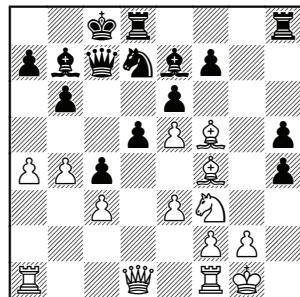
It is easy to criticise this move, but much harder to suggest something else. For example, after 17.bxc5 ♗xc5 18.♗d4 ♖dg8 Black would stand clearly better thanks to his play on the g-file. Maybe Spassky should just wait with 17.♖h1 and on 17...♖dg8 play 18.♖e2 or 18.♖b1 and see how Black plans to build the attack.

17...c4!

Petrosian closes the queenside. Doing so is practical as Black ensures he won't lose. He says that people present were surprised but explains that White can do very little with the d4-square. Maybe attacking with 17...♖dg8 is objectively even stronger.

18.♖e2

18.♖f5 – after the game Spassky pointed to this move to defend the g2-pawn, and many commentators also suggested it.



a) Taking the bishop would be unclear: 18...exf5 19.e6 ♔d6 20.exd7+ ♚xd7 21.♚d4 when White is two pawns down, but Black's pawns are shattered and therefore White would not stand worse.

b) 18...d4!! Crouch found this very strong move.

b1) 19.cxd4? exf5 20.e6 and here both Kasparov's 20...♚c6 and Crouch's 20...♔d6 21.♔xd6 ♚xd6 22.exd7+ give Black a dominant position.

b2) 19.♖xd4 ♗xe5 and Black is better after either 20.♚c2 ♚hg8 or 20.♔h3 a6.

18...a6!

Petrosian makes sure White can't open a file and attack on the queenside.

19.♔h1 ♚dg8 20.♚g1 ♚g4 21.♚d2

21.♖h2!?! Playing this early would take the sting out of the exchange sacrifice. Kasparov says that White's position would be pitiful after this idea of Suetin's as Black could manoeuvre the queen to g7 and carry out h3. But it is not simple to accomplish this. For example: 21...♚g6 (21...♖xe5 22.♔xg4 and White is still in the game) 22.♖f3 ♚hg8 23.♚d2, and now:

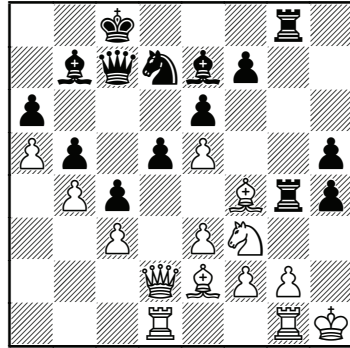
a) 23...♚d8 24.a5 b5 25.♖d4 ♚c7 when Black is clearly better.

b) 23...♔f8! Black first transfers the bishop to g7. 24.♔h2 ♔g7 25.♚d4 ♚g4 26.♚d2 ♖xe5 and Black has an edge with the exchange sacrifice.

21...♚hg8 22.a5?!

Barcza doesn't like this move as it allows the c4-pawn to be defended.

22...b5 23.♚ad1



23...♔f8!

Moving the bishop forces Spassky to reckon with the plan of ...f6, exf6 ...e5. "The challenger's position has become too alarming, and he decides on an extreme measure – to accept the exchange sacrifice – although it is well known that Petrosian never sacrifices anything against anyone in vain." (Tal)

24.♖h2?!

Spassky doesn't want to wait and immediately goes for the offered exchange, though both alternatives are better:

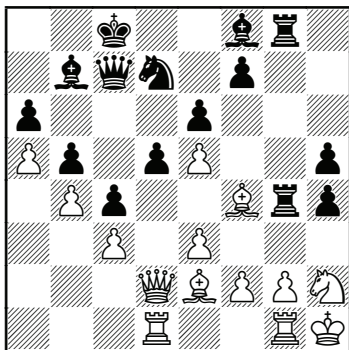
a) 24.♚c2 ♔g7 25.♔h2 ♚h8 26.♚d2 ♖f8 27.♚c2 ♖g6 and Black has a clear edge.

b) 24.♚de1 and now;

b1) 24...f6 25.exf6 (Black's advantage is clear after 25.♚d4 ♚d8 26.exf6 ♚xf6 27.♖e5 ♖xe5 28.♔xe5 ♚xd4 29.♔xf6 ♚d2) 25...e5 26.f7 (26.♖xe5 ♖xe5) 26...♚g7 27.♖xe5

♞xe5 28.♙xg4+ hxg4 29.e4 ♖xf7 30.exd5 and White stands worse.

b2) 24...♙g7!? 25.♖d1 (If 25.♞h2 ♙xe5 Black has a clear advantage.) 25...♞xe5 26.♞xe5 ♙xe5 27.♙xg4 hxg4 28.f3 and White's position is really difficult.



24...♙xe5!

Petrosian's strategic play prevails. The exchange sacrifice is really strong and in fact Black is now winning.

25.♞xg4 hxg4 26.e4 ♙d6

If 26...dxe4?? 27.♙xe5.

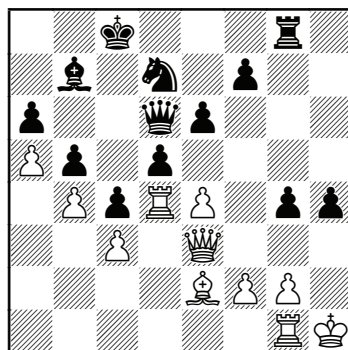
27.♖e3 ♞d7

"Played in Petrosian's style: before launching the decisive attack, Black strengthens his centre," wrote Averbakh. "A paradoxical manoeuvre. 27...g3 or 27...dxe4 suggest themselves. Even so, Petrosian's decision is more original and in practice more unpleasant for the opponent. Black believes in the strength of his position," were Suetin's words. Let's take a look at these moves! If 27...g3!? 28.fxg3 (28.f3 ♞g4!) 28...hxg3 29.♖gf1 f5 and Black wins, while Black also wins after

27...dxe4 28.♖xd6 ♖xd6 29.♖d1 ♖c7 30.♖d4 f6.

28.♙xd6 ♖xd6 29.♖d4

This accelerates the end, but there is no saving move for White. 29.f4! is relatively best, but after 29...f5 30.♖ge1 (30.e5 ♖e7) 30...h3 31.g3 (On 31.gxh3 e5 Black wins.) 31...fxe4 Black is winning. On Kasparov's 29.♖d2 29...♖e5 would win, and 29.exd5 ♙xd5 wins.



29...e5! 30.♖d2

30.♖xd5 ♙xd5 31.♖d1 ♞f6 32.exd5 ♖b8 and again Black wins.

30...f5!

"Euwe once remarked that Petrosian is a great master of pawn play. The present game is a good example of this and a splendid illustration of the ideas of the great Philidor." (Averbakh)

31.exd5

If 31.exf5 h3! or if 31.exf5 ♞f6! (Kasparov's 30...♖f6 wins as well) 32.f3 (On 32.♖h6 Crouch shows that 32...♞e4 33.♖xd6 ♞xf2+ checkmates.) 32...♞h5 33.fxg4 ♞g3+ 34.♖h2 d4! wins as Tal pointed out.

31...f4!

Black's pawn chain is simply irresistible.

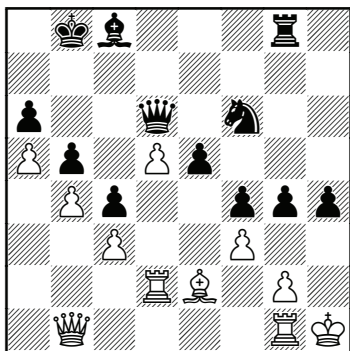
32.♖e4

On 32.♖a7 ♖h6 or 32...♔c7 would win.

32...♗f6 33.♖f5+ ♔b8 34.f3

34.♖e6 ♖xe6 35.dxe6 runs into 35...♗e4!

34...♗c8 35.♖b1



35...g3 36.♖e1 h3 37.♗f1

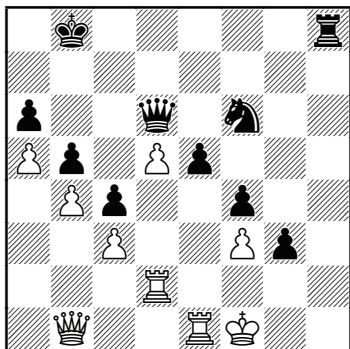
37.gxh3 g2+ 38.♔g1 ♖d7! wins.

37...♖h8 38.gxh3 ♗xh3 39.♔g1

If 39.♗xh3 ♖d7!

39...♗xf1 40.♔xf1

40.♖xf1 ♖d7 with 41...♖h3 or 41...♖a7+ would be decisive.



40...e4 41.♖d1

41.fxe4 f3! and Black lands checkmate.

41...♗g4!

Petrosian sealed this move, but after 41...♖d7 Black would checkmate by force.

42.fxg4 f3 43.♖g2 fxg2+ 0-1

Until this game the players had excelled at defending, but in this game Petrosian attacked beautifully, with great strength. Tal: "I don't know whether telepathy exists, but that evening the match participants were like artists, performing at the request of the spectators."

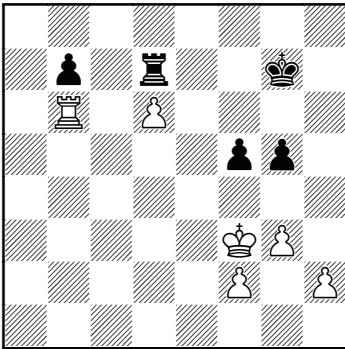
Petrosian: "One of my best games. It demonstrates my creative views – the utmost restriction of the opponent's possibilities, strategy over the entire board, the surrounding of the enemy king and the gradual tightening of the encirclement around it."

Your Armenian author remembers: "In 1966 my father (Artavazd Gyoalyan, chemical engineer and Honoured Technology Improver of Armenia) took a short holiday to go to Moscow and watch the match at the Variety Theatre. Then he recounted many times that during the 7th game, when Petrosian castled, he began to treat the spectators sitting next to them with chocolates, which he had bought in the theatre buffet. And he did it with joy, because after six

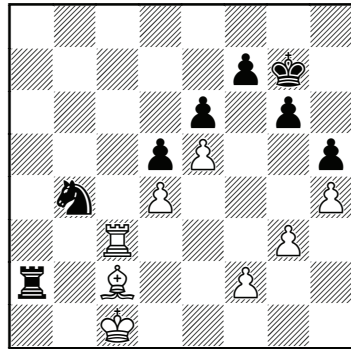
It's Your Move

We will now show some interesting positions from Petrosian's career. In some cases there are several good possibilities. The solutions are contained at the end of this section. In each position it is Petrosian to move.

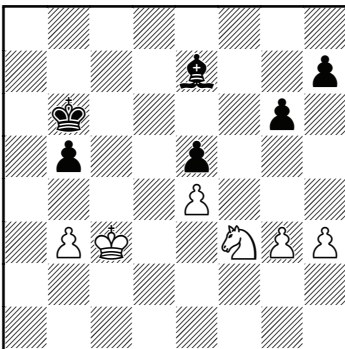
B26) Petrosian, T – Tal, M
Moscow Spartakiad (3.1), 1963



B28) Eliskases, E – Petrosian, T
Buenos Aires (3), 1964



B27) Petrosian, Tigran – Olivera, A
Buenos Aires (2), 1964



B29) Foguelman, A – Petrosian, T
Buenos Aires (12), 1964

