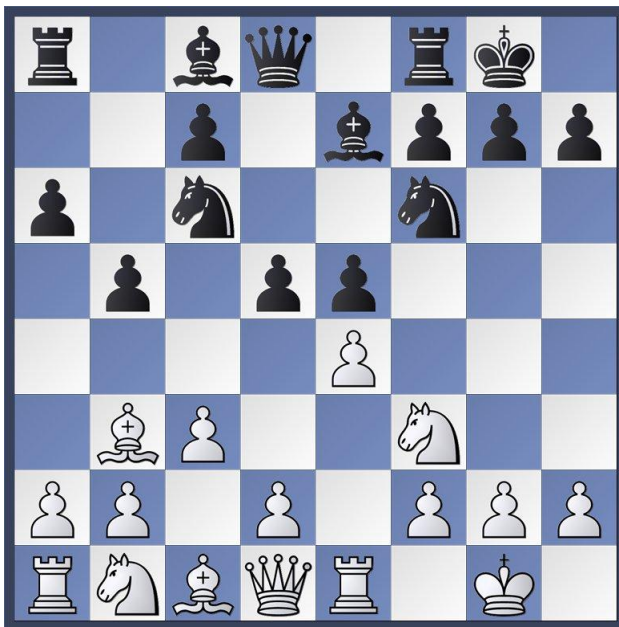


## How good is your chess?

I'm not giving away any secrets when I say that I invariably open the game with my e-pawn. Two squares. If my opponent replies in kind, then I generally play the Spanish; always have done. Anyone learning chess in the era of Bobby Fischer had to follow the great man. Anyway, this is classical chess at its best. I love the space advantage that White achieves in the main lines: there are options to attack on the kingside or queenside depending on circumstances. But there's a question that Fischer never answered satisfactorily: what should be done with the Marshall Gambit?

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5



Fischer last faced the Marshall in two games in the phenomenally strong Piatigorsky Cup, held in Santa Monica 1966, first against Donner, and then later against Spassky. Annotating the game in the official tournament book, Spassky himself writes 'The Marshall Attack, in my view, is quite sound'.

However, Boris wasn't to risk it in Reykjavik. A pity. I am sure the theory of the variation would have been greatly enriched - and it might have saved a slob like me a lot of hard work trying to find a killer response. As it is, I tend to fall back on 'Anti-Marshall' variations such as 8 a4 (instead of 8 c3).

Latterly the top players have favoured 8 h3 as a way of dodging the gambit (8...d5 doesn't work when the c3 square is available for the knight). But, frankly, both these moves are a compromise. Establishing the pawn centre with c3 and d4 is what full-blooded Spanish torturers want to do.

Why don't I like accepting the Marshall? For a mere pawn Black gets a long-term initiative. I don't like having to defend, at least, not with White. The number of leading players who are

comfortable playing the Marshall Gambit attests to its viability. But recently my eyes landed, magpie-like, on this jewel of an encounter. This is an idea I would like to use for myself.

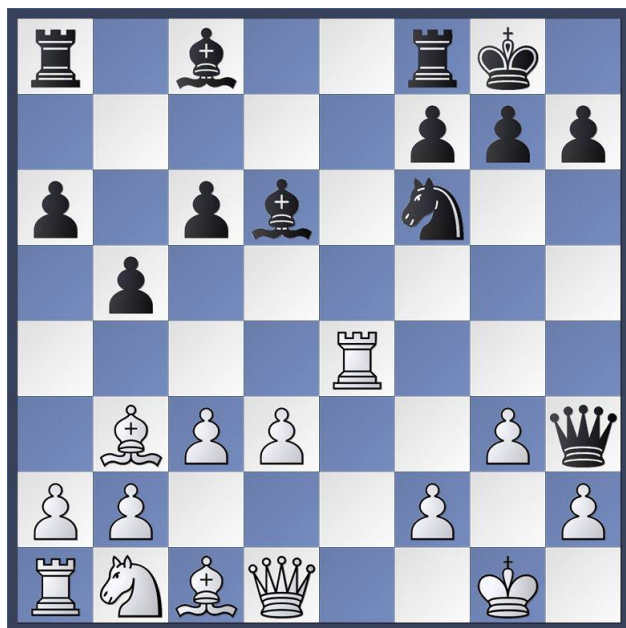
When pinching an idea, it is best to check it thoroughly (alright, so I will still have to do a bit of homework). But looking at who played the game already fills me with confidence: Judit Polgar is as sharp as they come, and Peter Svidler, on the receiving end, is certainly no slouch. The signs are promising. Marshall - where is thy sting?

Cover the page with a card with a card or sheet of paper, lowering it gradually to reveal it a line at a time. Begin after the first diagram. Whenever White has moved, stop and try to guess Black's reply which will be on the next line. Try to analyse as much as you would in a game – it could earn you bonus points. The article will test your standard of play or, if you prefer, just enjoy a fine game.

### J. Polgar – P. Svidler

Wijk aan Zee 2005

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0–0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0–0 8.c3 d5 9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.Rxe5 c6 12.g3 Bd6 13.Re1 Qd7 14.d3 Qh3 15.Re4 Nf6**



### 16.Rh4

One point. We begin with a forced move that, through my generosity, still earns a point. If instead 16.Re1, Black's attack breaks through: 16...Ng4, a little reminder of the ever-present danger lurking in Marshall positions.

But what is the rook doing out on the h-file? If I hadn't seen this position before, and I didn't know the players, I would be castigating White's play. However, as usual in chess, matters are not so simple. The rook may be temporarily offside, but we have to look at what Black's queen is

doing. Her majesty took two moves to get to h3, and now has to retreat. And f5 is not the best square in the world, blocking the bishop on c8; further regrouping will be necessary, and that takes time – a precious commodity in the opening.

### **16...Qf5**

#### **17.Nd2**

Six points. These early moves colour the whole game. Look at White's pieces on the queenside: if they do not enter the game quickly, Black's better coordinated pieces will build up a fierce attack. As usual, the first piece that should come into play is the knight. Why can't Black's queen capture the pawn? 17...Qxd3 would be met by 18 Rd4, winning the bishop on d6. The rook is not just an idle spectator.

Take a look at what happens if White plays 'more carefully', protecting the d-pawn first: 17.Bc2 Qg6! (allowing the bishop to enter the game) 18.Nd2 Bg4! (provoking a weakness) 19.f3 Bf5 20.Ne4 Rad8. The rook really does look silly on e4, and the pawns in front of the king are shaky. In fact, 17 Bc2 is not a careful move, it is simply a careless move, overlooking a tactic that speeds up development.

17.Bf4 (one point) is better motivated, offering an exchange, but if Black finds 17...Be7, targeting the rook, then White has problems to solve.

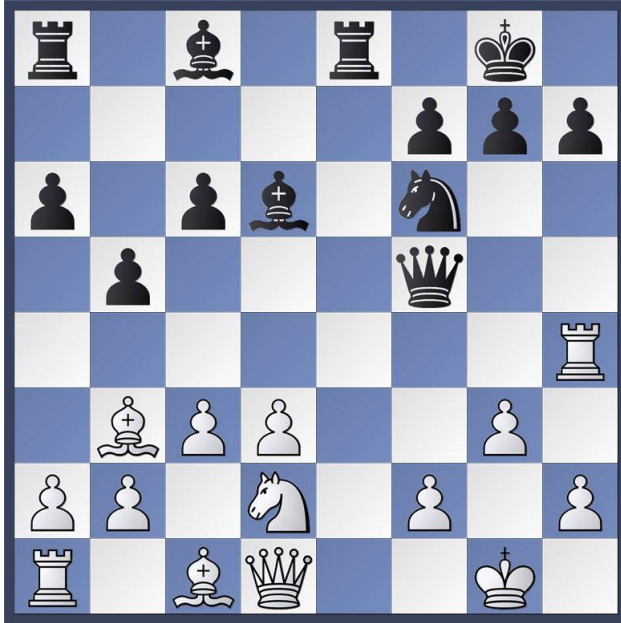
17 d4 (one point) is also reasonable as the bishop can drop back to c2 with tempo. However, bringing the knight into the game is preferable!

#### **17...Re8**

For those of you taking the opening theory seriously, this is where I should mention some precedents. Black can take the game into more tactical territory with 17...g5. While this is obviously critical, it seems to damage Black's kingside more than White's: 18.Rh6 Ng4 19.Ne4 Nxe6 20.Nxd6 Qg6 21 Qd2 Qxd6 22 Qxg5+ Qg6 23 Qxg6 hxg6 24 Bxe6 Re8 25 Be3 Bf5, with an approximately equal ending, Leko-Grischuk, Dubai 2002.

Then came the game Anand-Shirov Rapid Match, Mainz 2004, when the Indian sprung a novelty: 21.Ne4! Bg4 22.Qd2 Nf5 23.Qxg5 Bf3 24.Qf4 Bxe4 25.dxe4 Ng7 26.Be3 Rad8 27.a4 Rd7 28.axb5 axb5 29.Bd4. For the exchange White has two pawns, two excellent bishops, and a compact position. Anand kept control throughout and eventually won the ending by advancing his kingside pawns.

17...Re8 is Svidler's improvement on all this. It does look more sensible than burning boats with ...g5.



### 18.Ne4

Six points. A pragmatic decision, and I think an excellent one too. Polgar is happy to return the extra pawn, if it resolves her problems with development. More on that later.

White could have kept the pawn in various ways, but none fully snuff out Black's initiative. The danger is that the longer the rook stays where it is, the greater the chance of it remaining permanently offside.

18.Bc2 (two points) is probably the best of the bunch, then 18...Qg6 19.Ne4 Be7 20.Nxf6+ Bxf6 21.d4 Bf5 22.Bxf5 Qxf5 23.Rh5 Qg6 is playable for both sides.

18 Nf3 (one point) I don't like quite as much as the rook has even less chance of returning to the fray.

18 Nf1 is just too casual: 18...g5 19 Rh6 Ng4 is decisive.

### 18...Nxe4

### 19.Rxe4

Two points.

19.dxe4 (one point) is not bad, but the whole point of playing Ne4 was to bring the rook back into play, so this rather defeats the purpose. Black replies 19...Qg6 (19...Rxe4? 20.Qxd6). And although White is secure, I don't see that Black should have any difficulties: 20 Be3 Be7 21 Rf4 Be6 followed by occupying the d-file. The rook should be on the back-rank working together with its comrade.

### 19...Rxe4

## **20.dxe4**

One point.

### **20...Qxe4**

What has White achieved by giving back the pawn? Basically Polgar has managed to exchange off a couple of active black pieces (the rook on e8 and knight on f6) for two relatively inactive white pieces, the rook on h4 and knight on d2.

That's fair enough, but has too much been taken out of the position? Your challenge is to try to gain some advantage from this seemingly dry situation. Ask yourself, in what area of the game is White superior - a better pawn structure? A safer king? Or something else?

### **21.Bc2**

Five points. The queen needs to be expelled. We should first clear up 21.Qxd6. Black could force a draw by perpetual check, but does better to go for 21...Bh3 forcing checkmate.

21.Bxf7+ Kxf7 22.Qxd6 improves the variation, but only leads to a draw: 22...Qe1+ (22...Bh3 23.Qf4+) 23.Kg2 Qe4+ is perpetual check.

And there is more evidence that leaving the queen in its centralised position can be dangerous for White:

21.f3 Qe7 leaves White's king exposed. Likewise 21.Bg5 Bh3 22.f3 Bc5+ 23.Kh1 Qf5.

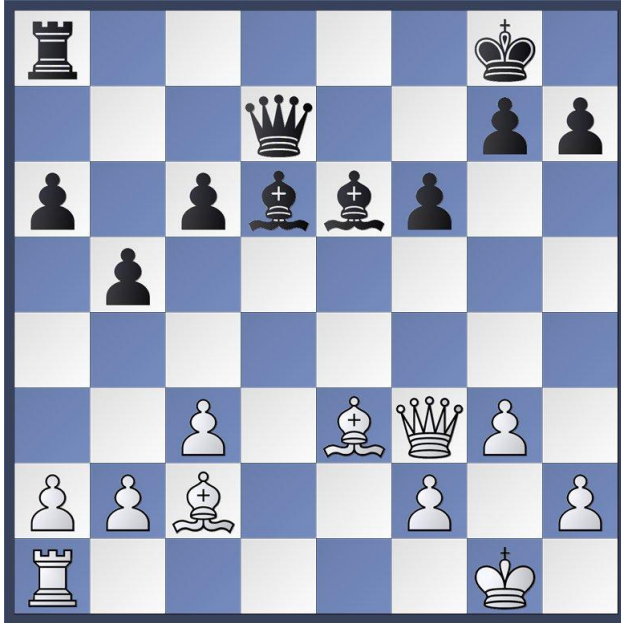
### **21...Qe7**

Black is very close to equalizing. In fact, I wonder if Svidler appreciated the danger at this point (I'm sure he did soon after). Defending a slightly worse position of this kind is difficult. At this moment, White has no direct threats, so Black has a choice of slightly worse positions to head for – but which one is the least bad?

For example 21...Qe6 is possible, when 22.Bf4 Bf8 is solid. White has a little initiative, but it is hard work to achieve a tangible advantage.

21...Qd5 would have been a difficult move to play as 22.Qxd5 cxd5 damages the pawn structure. It is certainly a compromise. However, exchanging queens takes some sting out of the position, and White has difficulties in making significant progress in this ending. For example: 23.Be3 Be6 24.Rd1 h5 25.Bb3 Rd8 26.Bb6 Rd7 27.a3 g5 28.f3 (28.Bxd5? doesn't win a pawn: 28...Bxa3 29.bxa3 Bxd5).





### 25.Rd1

Three points. Such an obvious pin is irresistible. All the elements are falling into place: White's pieces are active, and Black has several weaknesses that cannot be easily remedied – the h7-pawn, the c6 pawn, the pin on the d-file, a slightly exposed king. You can sense that a tactic is coming.

### 25...Rd8

I hope you spotted that 25...Bg4 failed to 26.Rxd6 Qxd6 27.Qxg4, with a winning position. Another two points if you did.

### 26.Be4

Two points. Another threat, and Black's position is close to collapse.

26.Bf4? would not be terribly good. In this case the tactics after 26...Bg4 are in Black's favour: 27.Rxd6 Bxf3 28.Rxd7 Rxd7 wins material.

### 26...Bxa2

This move loses by force – as I am sure you are about to demonstrate. Instead of this, how would you respond to 26...c5...?

White has two strong moves 27 Bd5 and 27 Bf4. Two points if you got either. Let's take a look at a couple of sample variations.

After 27.Bd5 White has the simple threat of exchanging on e6 and capturing on c5. If Black tries 27...c4, White infiltrates: 28 Bxe6+ Qxe6 29 Qc6, and the pins are just too much to bear.

Or 27 Bf4 Qe7 28 Bd5 causes similar difficulties.

### 27.Bb6

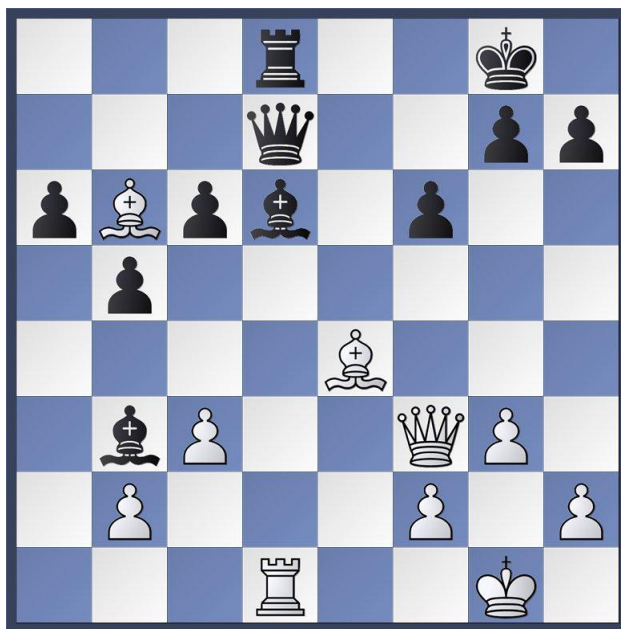
Six points. There are several tempting continuations for White, but this is the only one that actually wins material.

27 Bc5 does not have the same effect, for example: 27...Qc7 28 Qd3? Be7 is actually winning for Black.

After 27.Bxc6, Black can hold on with 27...Qe6. The position is obviously still good for White, but Black is not yet lost.

### 27...Bb3

Black is improvising in an attempt to scrape out of trouble. The 'normal' move 27...Rc8 simply loses a piece to 28.Bc5. And 27...Re8 crashes to 28 Bxc6.





### 29.Bxc5

Three points.

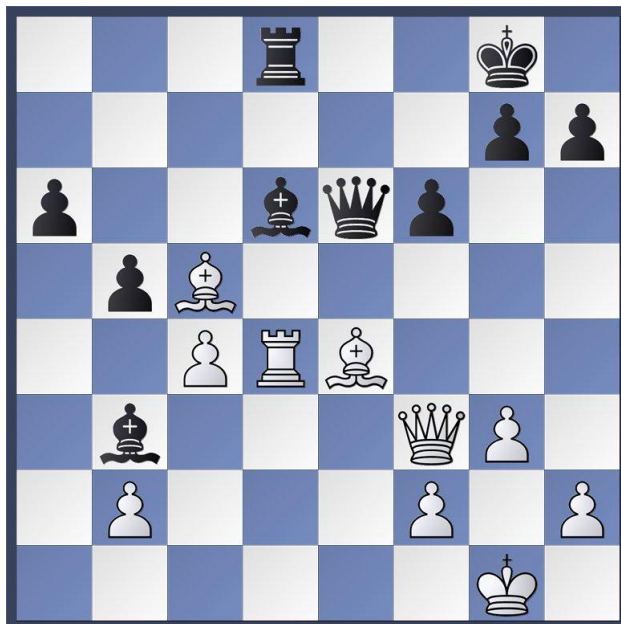
The same score for 29.Rd2. Now that d5 is available for a check, the tactics work in White's favour: 29...Re8 30.Bd5+ Bxd5 31.Qxd5+ Re6 32 Bxc5.

### 29...Qe6

### 30.c4

Two points. Typically, Judit Polgar finishes with a witty, tactical flourish. If 30...Bxc4 31.Rxc4, followed by Bd5 pinning queen to king.

Those of us with a more prosaic nature might have selected 30.Qd3 (two points) pinning and winning the bishop on d6.



**Black resigned.**

Now add up your points.

53-60 Grandmaster

45-52 International Master

36-44 FIDE or National Master

28-35 County player

19-27 Strong club player

11-18 Average club player

0-10 Unlucky

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