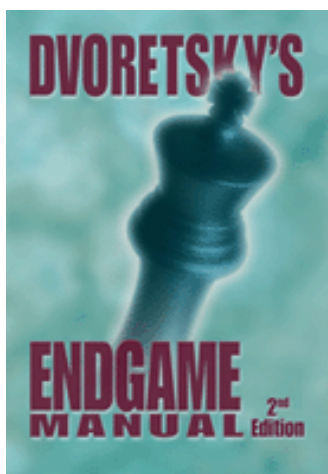




COLUMNISTS

The Instructor

Mark Dvoretsky



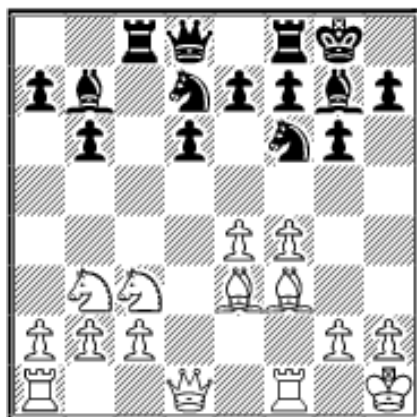
Simagin's Exchange Sacrifices

Today, the positional exchange sacrifice $Rxc3!$ in the Sicilian Defense has become a standard tactic that has probably been employed in thousands of games. But at one time it was an innovation, and one of the first players to make use of it was Vladimir Pavlovich Simagin. He wasn't terribly strong as a player – perhaps a middling grandmaster – but the depth of Simagin's ideas and the rich creativity of his play stood out, even compared to players who achieved considerably greater successes. Let me present some examples from Simagin's "Best Games," based upon his laconic annotations (given in *italic*). A question mark next to the diagram indicates that you can use the position as an exercise for solving.

Ravinsky – Simagin

Match-tournament Championship of Moscow, 1947

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cd 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be2 Bg7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Nb3 Nbd7 (8...Nc6) 9.Kh1 b6 10.f4 Bb7 11.Bf3 Rc8 12.Be3?!



B?

12...Rxc3!

A universal exchange sacrifice in the Sicilian Defense. Black obtains just one pawn for the exchange, but all of his pieces will take up excellent positions. In the sharp middlegame fight that follows, Black's minor piece will be no weaker than White's rook.

13.bc Nxe4 14.Bd4 e5 15.fe de 16.Qe1?!

The complications created by White lead to a decisive advantage – for his opponent! But after $16.Bxe4 Bxe4 17.Be3 Bc6!$, Black would still have a great positional advantage, in Simagin's opinion.

16...ed 17.Bxe4 Re8 18.Bxb7 Rxe1 19.Raxe1 dc 20.Re3 h5!

The decisive moment: Black secures his king's safety, after which his material advantage decides the game.

**21.Ba6 Ne5 22.Rxc3 Kh7 23.Rh3 Qd5 24.Bd3 Kg8! 25.Re3 Bh6 26.Rg3 h4
27.Rh3 Bg5 28.Be2 a5 29.Nc1? Bxc1 30.Rxc1 Qd2 0-1**

Black's exchange sacrifice turned up in many events to follow, eventually becoming a rather routine strategic technique, by which Black destroys the white center. However, Master Ravinsky was evidently not convinced of the correctness of White's strategy: ten years later, the following game was played between us.

Ravinsky - Simagin

Moscow 1957



W

In this position, White could have played 13.Nd2!, supporting his pawn center.

**13.Bd4? Rxc3! 14.bc?! Nxe4 15.Nd2 Nxd2
16.Qxd2 Bc6 17.c4 Qc7 18.Rad1 b6 19.Rf2
Ba8 20.h3 gf! 21.gf Kh8 22.Kh2 Rg8 23.Rg1
Qc6 24.Qg5 Qe4 25.Be3?**

After 25.f6! ef 26.Qd2 f5, Black's position would be preferable, but the fight would

continue.

25...Ng4+!! – Black wins the queen and the game.

Earlier still, Simagin discovered a different setup for his positional exchange sacrifice. Nowadays this can also be called typical, but it comes up far less frequently. I can count the number of examples known to me on the fingers of one hand.

Ljublinsky – Simagin

Moscow, match 1939

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 d6 4.d4 ed 5.Nxd4 g6 6.Be3 (6.Bb5) 6...Bg7 7.Be2
Nge7**

Usually in such positions, Black develops his knight to f6.

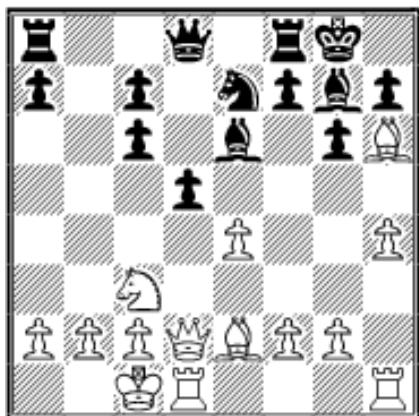
8.Qd2 0-0 9.h4

It would probably have been a good idea to castle long first, and only then play h2-h4. Black meets the immediate flank attack as he's supposed to – with a counterattack in the center.

9...d5! 10.Nxc6 bc 11.0-0-0 Be6 12.Bh6?!

Had White foreseen the complications which follow, then of course he would have played 12.Bd4, retaining a decent position.

12.h5!? was also worth a look.



B?

12...Bh8!

Similar exchange sacrifices have occurred a few times in my games. In a complex middlegame, an active black bishop is of course no weaker than a passive white rook. Nevertheless, it should be noted that such sacrifices are not always correct. In the present position, a number of factors may be defined as allowing me to predict that Black's

attack will be almost impossible to withstand. The most significant factors are these: 1) the open b-file, along which the remaining black rook will soon be operating; and 2) the mobile pawn center, which will soon be set in motion.

13.Bxf8 Qxf8 14.a3?

White had intended to attack, but must instead go on the defensive. The change of circumstance had a deleterious effect on him, and now he loses time. 14.Na4 was better.

In reply to 14.Na4, Black would play 14...de, with excellent compensation for the sacrificed exchange – even though, Simagin's opinion notwithstanding, I have some doubts as to the irresistibility of Black's attack. Another natural continuation for White would have been 14.h5.

14...Rb8 15.Bd3 c5! 16.ed?!

Here, too, 16.h5 was worth consideration.

16...Nxd5 17.Na4 Bd7!–+ 18.Qa5 Bxa4 19.Qxa4 Qh6+ 20.f4 Nxf4 21.Rd2 Bxb2+ 22.Kd1 Bc3 23.Rf2 Rb1# 0-1

A similar positional exchange sacrifice occurred in the game Byvshev – Tolush, USSR Championship semifinal, Leningrad 1954, which can be found in the exercise section of Dvoretzky and Yusupov's *School of Future Champions 1*.

All of the above serves as an introduction to the following game. It's far from error-free, but it was a very tense and interesting game. I hope you will like some of the ideas that I discovered during my analysis.

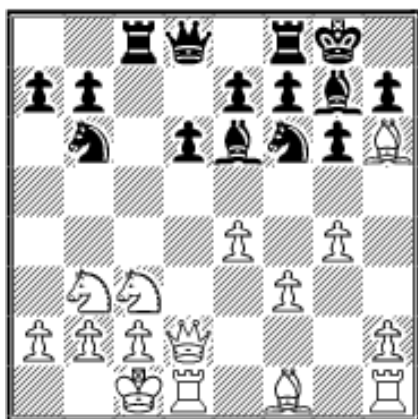
Panov – Simagin

Moscow Championship 1943

1.e2-e4 c7-c5 2.Ng1-f3 d7-d6 3.d2-d4 c5xd4 4.Nf3xd4 Ng8-f6 5.Nb1-c3 g7-g6
6.Bc1-e3 Bf8-g7 7.f2-f3 0-0 8.Nd4-b3?!

An inferior move; now White no longer has any reason to expect an opening advantage. The usual continuation is 8.Qd2.

8...Bc8-e6 9.Qd1-d2 Nb8-d7 10.0-0-0 Nd7-b6 11.g2-g4 Ra8-c8 12.Be3-h6



B?

12...Bg7-h8?!

Simagin's following note gives us insight into his objectivity and his creative tastes, to which he remained faithful his whole life.

In this position, the exchange sacrifice cannot be considered completely correct. In my game against Ljublinsky, the sacrifice gave Black a clear strategic benefit. But here, we have no

reason to assert that the game must finish with a driving attack. If the sacrifice can be considered reasonable, then it is only on psychological considerations. Master Panov is an excellent attacker, but considerably worse in games requiring lengthy defense.

I don't rate games with such psychological nuances very highly. A chess master, in my view, should play consistently, and strive for error-free games. I include this game here only because it was published in many places, but it has never received the proper annotation.

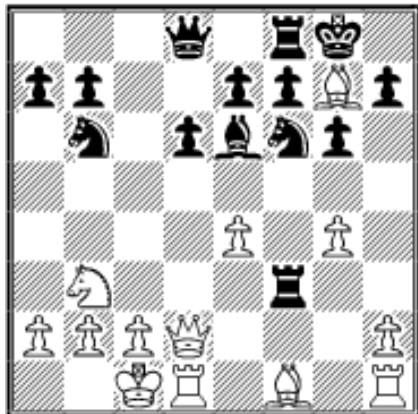
And how should he have played? In *ECO*, Efim Geller suggests 12...Bc4, with the idea of securing the important c4-square for the knight, but I don't find this recommendation convincing.

In my view, the positional exchange sacrifice noted at the beginning of this article suggests itself: 12...Bxh6 13.Qxh6 Rxc3! 14.bc Qc7, with full compensation, given the weakness of the queenside pawns.

Why didn't Simagin play this? Look at the date: he was aware of the Bg7-h8!? idea, because he had played it four years earlier. But the positional sacrifice of the exchange on c3 wasn't employed by him for another four years: in 1947. This is why it seems obvious now – because we have seen it in a number of analogous examples. To be the first to find such an idea over the board is very difficult indeed.

For gourmands, I offer the suggestion to examine a transposition of moves: 12...Rxc3!?. It has no independent significance, since after 13.bc, Black's best line would be to return to the same position by 13...Bxh6 14.Qxh6 Qc7. But

White has an additional possibility: 13.Bxg7, to which Black would reply 13...Rxf3.



W

On 14.Bxf8 Qxf8, Black's compensation for the exchange is quite sufficient. But White also has a rather unusual idea at his disposal: 14.Bxf6!? Rxf6 15.g5, when the rook is trapped. On 15...Rxf1 16.Rhxf1, White has the upper hand; and on 15...Rf3!, he has the reply 16.Nd4. But here, Black can obtain counterplay by 16...Bg4! 17.Re1! Rxf1 18.Rhxf1 e5 19.Nb3 Nc4 (unexpectedly winning the g5-pawn) 20.Qd5 Qxg5+ 21.Kb1

Be6 22.Qxb7 a5, with chances for both sides (joint analysis with Vadim Zvjagintsev).

13.Bh6xf8 Qd8xf8 14.Nb3-d4 Be6-c4 15.g4-g5 Nf6-d7 16.Bf1-h3

I am not commenting on White's moves, because they're good enough to retain the advantage, although they were clearly not the best available, as he probably could have varied somewhere.

16...e7-e6 17.Kc1-b1



B

Now how does Black continue? He would like to clear c4 for his knight, but 17...Ba6 is met by 18.Nxe6! And on 17...Qe7, 18.f4 Ba6 19.f5 Nc4 20.Qf2 looks strong.

GM Zvjagintsev suggested a curious positional idea: 17...h6!? 18.gh Kh7, diminishing the threat of the knight sacrifice on e6, and somewhat improving his chances in the event of later simplification, as his pawn structure has been improved. However, the advantage still remains with White.

Simagin attempted to solve the problem tactically, and he succeeded, but only because of later errors by his opponent.

17...Nd7-e5 18.f3-f4!

Simagin disparages this move, recommending 18.Qf2 instead – mistakenly so, in my view.

18...Ne5-f3!

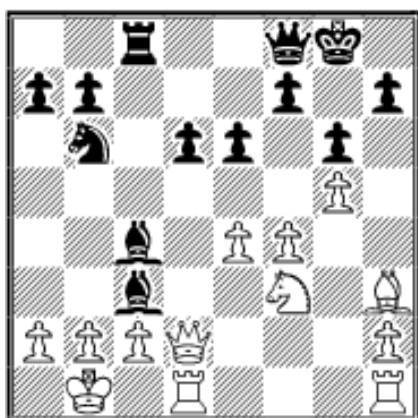
A clever idea.

19.Nd4xf3

White could also have declined the proffered sacrifice by 19.Qe3 Nxd4 20.Rxd4!

Quite right. This technique, which may be labeled “the cold shower” (declining to enter complications, even at the cost of returning the extra material, either wholly or in part), must always be considered when initiating combinative attacks. The resulting position is, in my view, markedly better for White, even though it would require accurate play. After 20...Bxd4, 21.Qxd4 Ba6 is unfavorable because of 22.f5. Zvjagintsev’s move, 21...h6, would be justified if White played the somewhat abstract continuation 22.Bg2?! hg 23.fg Ba6 24.h4 Nc4. But the blow 22.f5!/? is also unpleasant here, and 22.Rg1 hg 23.Rxg5 Qh6 24.Qe3+/- would also be strong.

19...Bg7xc3



W?

20.b2xc3?

The watershed moment of this game!

Simagin also examined the variation 20.Qxc3 Bxa2+ 21.Kxa2 Rxc3 22.bc Qc8!, and later evaluated it as favoring Black – probably correctly.

Here is another place where White could have had recourse to the “cold shower.” The simple 20.Qxd6! would have left Black nothing but to head for a pawn-down endgame: 20...Be2 21.Qxf8+ Kxf8 22.Bg2 or 22.Rd3, when Black would have faced a tough struggle to draw.

20...d6-d5!

Black has sacrificed a rook, but obtained a dangerous attack. Black’s attack was only enough to gain the draw.

21.Qd2-c1 Nb6-a4 22.e4xd5?

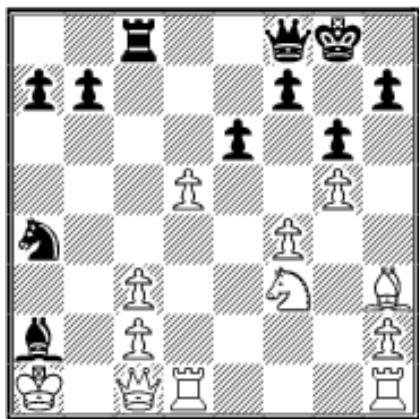
The text doesn’t deserve the exclamation mark Simagin rewarded it with. The position after 22.Ne5!/? Bxa2+ 23.Ka1 Qc5 looks uncomfortable, but I believe that White would be quite justified in anticipating a drawn outcome. Another possibility was: 22.Ka1!/? Qc5 (the immediate 22...Bxa2 would be weaker, in view of 23.Rd4! Nxc3 24.Qb2 de 25.Ne5 Bd5 26.Qb4) 23.Nd4!/? Bxa2!, with chances for both sides.

22...Bc4xa2+!

22...Nxc3+ 23.Ka1 Bxa2 was also strong.

23.Kb1-a1

23.Kxa2? would lose to 23...Nxc3+ 24.Ka1 Qb4! or 24.Kb3 Qc5! (Simagin)



B?

23...Qf8-c5?

The natural move, but not the best. 23...Nxc3! was far stronger.

How do we establish this? For White, it's positionally very important to destroy the pawn at e6, for the bishop at h3 to go to work. So, after the text, 24.de! was possible, whereas 23...Nxc3! 24.de?! Bxe6 25.Bxe6 fe would leave White defenseless. And if instead of 24.de White plays 24.d6, Black responds 24...Bd5 25.Rxd5 (there's nothing better) 25...Nxd5, and White's position is difficult. Black simply threatens 26...Qxd6, and on 26.d7?! comes 26...Rc4!, with decisive threats.

24.d5xe6 Na4xc3

Here, 24...Bxe6? 25.Bxe6 fe no longer works, because of 26.Nd4. And perpetual check, after 24...Qxc3+ 25.Ka2 Qc4+ is also insufficient for Black.



W?

Vassily Panov could not withstand the nervous tension of the battle and lost quickly.

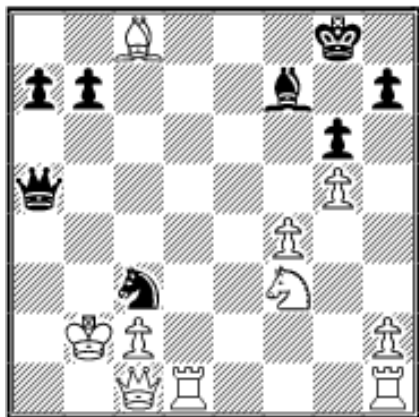
25.Rd4? Bxe6 26.Bxe6 fe

There is no satisfactory defense to the threatened 27...Qa5+.

27.Ra4 Nxa4 28.c4 Rd8 29.Ka2 Qb4 30.Re1 Rd3 31.Rxe6 Nc3+ 0-1

White had to choose either 25.ef+ or 25.e7. By itself, this choice is not too difficult, but the variations arising thereafter hold a number of engrossing subtleties.

First, let's look at A) **25.ef+? Bxf7 26.Bxc8 Qa5+ 27.Kb2**



B?

How does Black continue the attack? Simagin offered 27...Ne2 (adding an exclamation mark) 28.Rd8+ Kg7 29.Qa1 Qb4#! And if, instead of 29.Qa1, White plays 29.Be6!?, then 29...Qb6+! (but not 29...Nxc1? 30.Rd7! Qb6+ 31.Kxc1): 30.Bb3 (or 30.Ka1) 30...Nxc1 decides.

Nevertheless, White turns out to have an astonishing path to safety: 28.Be6!! (instead of 28.Rd8+?) 28...Bxe6 (28...Nxc1? 29.Bxf7+ Kxf7 30.Ne5+ Ke6 31.Kxc1; 28...Qb6+ 29.Bb3) 29.Rd8+! Kg7 (29...Qxd8? 30.Qe3+-) 30.Rd7+! Kf8 (30...Bxd7? 31.Qe3 Bc6! 32.Rf1+/-) 31.Rd8+ Ke7 32.Rd7+!, with perpetual check, since Black cannot play 32...Kxd7? 33.Qd2+.

Before playing Ne2, Black must take control of the d7-square with his queen.

27...Qb4+! 28.Ka1 Qa4+ 29.Kb2 Ne2! 30.Be6 Bxe6 31.Rd8+ Kg7 32.Rd7+ Kf8

The immediate 32...Qxd7 33.Qa1! Qb5+ 34.Ka3+ Kg8 is also strong. But in order to avoid the discovered check by the king, Black does well to improve his own king's position first.

33.Rd8+ Ke7 34.Rd7+ Qxd7

B) 25.e6-e7!

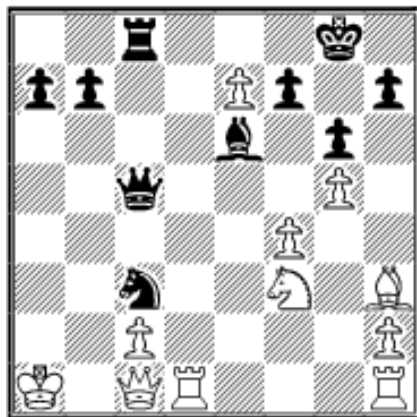
Only this move saves White. Black must now accept the draw. Here is the simplest and safest continuation.

25...Qc5-a5! 26.Rd1-d8+ Kg8-g7

White must take the rook (now, or after the preliminary 27.e8N+ Kh8), after which – as can easily be seen – Black gives perpetual check.

Curiously, Simagin doesn't mention 25...Qa5!. Instead, he analyzes two bishop retreats – 25...Be6 and 25...Bd5 – and shows that both of them lead to a draw. But in fact, both of them unexpectedly allow White a chance to play for the win.

25...Be6?!



W?

Simagin's variation runs 26.Rd8+ Kg7
27.e8N+ Kh8 28.Rxc8 Qa5+ with perpetual
check.

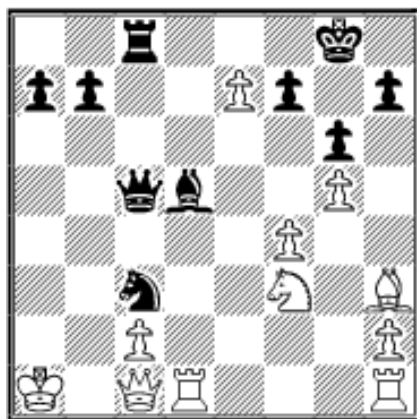
In such situations, analyzing with a computer
can teach us a great deal and expand our chess
horizons. In a practical game, almost any
player caught in so dangerous a situation
would be happy to force the draw. But for a
computer, the only thing that matters is that

White is a rook up – and consequently, any variation that does not end in quick
mate or perpetual check will be analyzed optimistically – by which, of course, I
mean a high plus score displayed onscreen.

In the present case, we are talking about **26.Bxe6!**. We would decide at once that,
after 26...Qa5+ 27.Kb2 Na4+, we would still have to repeat moves – how can the
king walk into such a rain of checks? But the computer is fearless: 28.Kb3! Nc5+
(28...Rc3+ 29.Ka2+–) 29.Kc4! Nxe6+ (or 29...Qa4+ 30.Kc3 Qa5+ 31.Kd4)
30.Kd3, and the king escapes under enemy fire to the right wing, while keeping
the extra rook

But **26...fe** is even harder to calculate. The only move to avoid the draw is
27.e8Q+! (temporarily diverting the rook from the knight's protection) **27...Rxe8**
28.Nd4!. Here, it looks as though White's winning. For example, **28...Qa5+**
29.Kb2 Na4+ 30.Ka2! (30.Ka3 Nc5+ is useless) **30...Rc8** (30...Nc5+ 31.Qa3+–;
30...Nc3+ 31.Kb3+–) **31.Qa3** (31.Qe3 Nc3+ 32.Kb2 Qa2+ 33.Kc1 e5! 34.fe
Qa3+ 35.Kd2 Qb4+ 36.Ke1 Nxd1+ 37.Kxd1 Rd8 38.c3 Qb1+ 39.Qc1 Qd3+
40.Ke1+/- is strong as well) **31...Rc3 32.Nb3 Rxc2+ 33.Kb1 Nc3+ 34.Kxc2**
Qxa3 35.Rd8+ Kf7 36.Kxc3+–.

25...Bd5!? is better than 25...Be6, but here too, White manages to keep some
tension in the struggle.



W?

Simagin only mentions 26.Bxc8 Qa5+ 27.Kb2
Na4+, after which White's only drawing line
is 28.Kb1!, since after 28.Ka1?, Black mates:
28...Nb6+! (28...Qc3+ 29.Kb1 Qb4+
30.Ka1=) 29.Kb2 Nc4+ 30.Kb1 Nd2+!
31.Kb2 Qb4+ 32.Ka1 Qc3+ 33.Qb2 Qa5+.

26.Rxd5! is much more interesting. Black
cannot reply 26...Qxd5? because of 27.Qa3
Qxf3 28.Re1 Re8 29.Bd7+–, or 26...Qb4?

27.e8Q+! Rxe8 28.Rd4 Qa5+ 29.Kb2 Na4+ 30.Rxa4+–. All that remains is
26...Nxd5!



W?

After 27.Bxc8 Qa5+ 28.Kb1 (28.Kb2 Qb4+) 28...Nc3+ 29.Kb2 Qb4+, once again it's perpetual check. The only way to avoid it is **27.c4!**. Playing to win might be even riskier than in the 25...Be6 variation, since there White had an extra rook, while here he has only an extra minor piece.

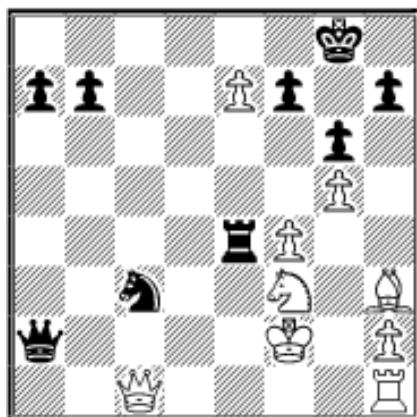
27...Qa5+ 28.Kb1 Nc3+ 29.Kc2 Qa4+ 30.Kd2

An alternative line is 30.Kxc3 Rxc4+ 31.Kd3 Rxc1 32.Rxc1 Qa3+ 33.Rc3 Qxe7 unclear. I don't know how to evaluate the final position. If the bishop stood on d5, then the pieces would probably be stronger than the queen. But here White's army is scattered and hard to consolidate, while Black's queenside pawns might become a powerful force.

30...Rxc4 31.Ke1

It's a draw after 13.Re1 Ne4+ 32.Rxe4 Qb4+! (32...Rxe4?? 33.Qc8+) 33.Kd3 Qb3+ 34.Kd2 Qb4+.

31...Re4+ (31...Qe8? would be much weaker: 32.Qa3 Nb5 33.Qe3+/-) **32.Kf2 Qa2+!**



W?

33.Qd2! (33.Nd2 Rxf4+) **33...Re2+ 34.Kg1!**

After 34.Kf1 Qa1+ 35.Ne1 Rxd2 36.e8Q+ Kg7, the powerful threat of 37...Re2 forces White to take the draw.

34...Qxd2 (34...Qb1+?! 35.Bf1 Qb6+ 36.Qd4 Qxd4+ 37.Nxd4 Rxe7 gives Black an inferior version of the same ending) **35.Nxd2 Rxe7+/-.**

Black only has two pawns for the piece. Of course, White's pieces are far from their optimal positions, so Black does have real saving chances. Still, there can be no doubt that it is Black who will have to fight for the draw.

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