

# 2020-2021 Candidates Tournament

## ROUND 13



### ITALIAN GAME (C54)

GM Kirill Alekseenko (2696)

GM Ding Liren (2791)

2020-2021 Candidates Tournament,  
Yekatarinburg, RUS (13.3), 04.26.2021

Annotations by GM Jacob Aagaard for Chess  
Life Online

**1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. d3 Bc5 5. c3 d6 6. O-O O-O**

After years of a German occupation of top chess, we are no longer in the grip of the Berliners, who have lost ground to the previously ridiculed Italians and their slow play. In other words: this is what everyone does these days. And after Ding Liren proved to be very solid in the Spanish, Alekseenko comes with nothing new.

**7. h3 h6 8. Re1 a5 9. b3**

A novelty of no importance that quickly leads to a transposition. Generally, I think it is an ugly move, but nothing is really bad here. 9. Nbd2 is the normal move.

**9. ... Bb6 10. Nbd2**



**10. ... Be6**

By transposition, this is the real novelty. Other lines: 10. ... Ne7 11. d4 Ng6 12. Bf1 (Svidler – Nakamura, Internet Blitz 2020), and 10. ... Re8 11. Bb5 Bd7 12. Bb2 Ne7 with equality (Sethuraman – Cheparinov, Caleta 2017).

**11. Nf1**

11. Bb2 Nh5! would also give Black good counterplay: 12. d4 Nf4 13. d5 Bxh3 14. g3 Ng2 with a big mess.

**11. ... d5 12. exd5 Nxd5 13. Qc2 Qf6 14. Ng3**



Ding has completely equalized. He now decides to sacrifice a pawn.

**14. ... Qg6!? 15. Kh2 Rad8 16. Ba3**

16. Nxe5?! Nxe5 17. Rxe5 Nxc3 is still equal in principle. But there is no point in taking on e5 if you do not at least get a pawn for it.

**16. ... Rfe8 17. Nxe5!**

17. Rad1 with complete equality existed too.

**17. ... Nxe5 18. Rxe5 c6!**

Another idea is 18. ... Nf4!? 19. Bxe6 Nxe6 20. Rd1 c5! 21. Re3 Bc7 with compensation.



GM KIRILL ALEKSEENKO  
AGAINST GM DING LIREN



# 2020-2021 Candidates Tournament

## ROUND 13



19. Bxd5



19. ... Rxd5

There is nothing wrong with this move on principled grounds, but I do not see the point in exchanging pieces for Black, if you are trying to win.

More natural was 19. ... cxd5! to my mind. 20. Re2 Bc7 21. Qd2 h5 22. Kh1 h4!? (22. ... Bxg3 23. fxg3 Bf5 24. Rxe8+ Rxe8 25. Re1 is equal) 23. Nf1 d4 24. c4! Bf5 25. Rd1 and I'd call this unclear. White is under pressure and some of his pieces are quite poor, but he has a pawn.

The engine calls everything equal these days and suggest hilarious things like: 25. ... Bxh3 26. gxh3 Qc6+ 27. f3!? (27. Kg1 Qg6+ satisfies the digital beast and its shameless longing for peace.) 27. ... Qxf3+ 28. Rg2 Re6 29. Nh2! (the only move) 29. ... Qxh3 30. Rdg1 Bg3 with compensation for the piece — or “equal” if you speak Stockfish...

20. Rxd5 Bxd5 21. c4 Be6 22. Re1 Rd8 23. Ne4 Bc7+ 24. Kh1 Qh5?!

It seems clear to me that Ding here could not find a way to continue.

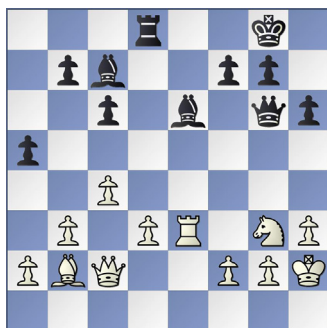
I believe he should play something where the bishop ends up on c6, like 24. ... b6!? with the idea ... c6-c5. The chances are about even. And in such a situation, being equal with an extra pawn is more enjoyable in my view.

25. Re3! Qe5 26. Ng3 Qa1+ 27. Kh2 Qf6

I think White's advantage is very very tiny after 27. ... Be5!? 28. Be7 Rd7 29. Bc5 Bf4, where White is not able to stabilize his pieces yet.

28. Bb2 Qg6

(see diagram at top of next column)



29. Kh1

I think White should have taken the chance to exchange his pawn advantage for a favorable piece configuration: 29. Be5! Bxe5 30. Rxe5 Rxd3 31. f3 b6 32. c5! bxc5 33. Ne2 Rd6 34. Qxg6 fxg6 35. Rxc5 Rd2 36. Nc3 and Black is not in serious trouble, but clearly White is pushing.

29. ... Bb6 30. Rf3 Bc7 31. Bc3

31. Qe2!? looked nice as well.

31. ... b5!?

I am not sure exactly what the idea is here, except there is a need to do something. Here 31. ... Bd7! 32. Re3 c5 improving the bishop is the most logical as far as I am concerned. Black is fine.

32. Qe2 bxc4 33. bxc4 a4 34. Qe3 Qg5!

With the white rook poorly placed, exchanging the queens is a reasonable proposition. And an opposite-colored bishop endgame is getting closer.

35. Qe1! Qg6 36. Qe3 Qg5 37. Qe1 Qg6 38. Qe2 a3!

Fixing the a2-pawn on a light square.

39. Bb4



39. ... Rb8

Black has plenty of chances to draw this game. For example: 39. ... Bxc4!? 40. dxc4 Qb1+ 41. Be1 Rd1 42. Re3 Ba5 and here it is actually White that has to make the draw. Now 43. Re8+



# 2020-2021 Candidates Tournament

## ROUND 13



Kh7 44. Qf3! Rxe1+ 45. Rxe1 Bxe1 46. Kh2 Qxa2 47. Qf5+ Kg8 48. Qc8+ does the trick.

### 40. Qe1 Rd8 41. Qc3 h5?!

Still going all out for a win.

After 41. ... Rb8 Black remains equal, *i.e.* 42. Qxa3 Bxc4 with a draw.

### 42. Bxa3 h4 43. Ne2 Bf5 44. Nd4

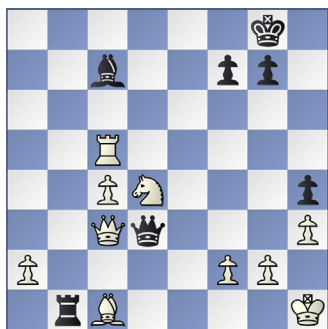


### 44. ... Be4?

A serious tactical mistake, but probably what Ding had been planning all long. He spent 9 minutes on this move and saw no reason not to play it.

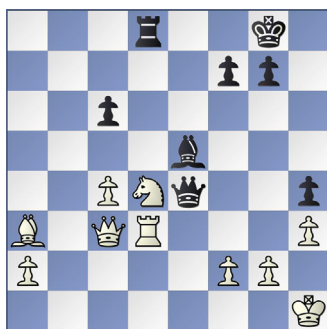
With normal play like 44. ... Bd7, Black would not have real compensation after 45. Re3.

But Black could have played 44. ... Rb8! with full compensation: 45. Rxf5 (45. Bc1 Bd7 46. Nb3 c5! This time there is going to be full compensation. For example: 47. Bf4 Bxh3! 48. gxh3 Qc6 49. d4 cxd4 50. Qd3 Bxf4 51. Nxd4 Qa8 52. Qf5 g5 with a very unclear position.) 45. ... c5! 46. Rxc5 Rb1+ 47. Bc1 Qxd3!



48. Qe1 Qe4 49. Nf3 Qxe1+ 50. Nxe1 Rxc1 51. Rxc7 Rxe1+ 52. Kh2 Re2 and Black will draw the rook ending.

### 45. dxe4 Qxe4 46. Rd3 Be5



### 47. Bc5??

This is a truly unexplainable move. Not just because it is missing the winning continuation, but also because there were plenty of moves that did not lose on the spot.

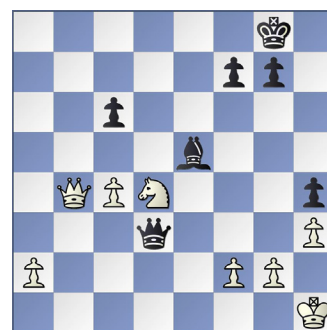
47. Bb2 is the most important move to consider. Ding had probably prepared: 47. ... c5 (47. ... Qf4 48. Nf3 Bxc3 49. Rxd8+ Kh7 50. Bxc3 also gives White a winning position. The three pieces from the pick 'n mix are far stronger than the queen.) and now 48. Nf3!! Of course Alekseenko missed this basic tactic. Probably he was not emotionally prepared for tactical chances to arise and thus not looking for them. It is not much of an explanation, but it is the best

I have. 48. ... Bxc3 (48. ... Rxd3 49. Qxe5 also wins easily.) 49. Rxd8+ Kh7 50. Ng5+ and White will win easily.

### 47. ... Rb8 48. Bb4

It is hard to grasp what Alekseenko was imagining. For example: 48. Rd1 Rb1 49. Qd2 Bf4 or 49. ... Qf4, and Black wins.

### 48. ... Rxb4 49. Qxb4 Qxd3



Black wins. White get to give a few revenge checks.

50. Nf3 Qf1+ 51. Ng1 Bd4 52. Qb8+ Kh7 53. Qf4 Bxf2 54. Qf5+ Kh6 55. Qf4+ Kg6 56. Qg4+ Kf6 57. Qf4+ Ke6 58. Qe4+ Kd6 59. Qf4+ Kc5 60. Qe5+ Kxc4 61. Qe4+ Kb5, White resigned.



CONGRATULATIONS TO GM IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI ON HIS VICTORY AT THE 2020-2021 CANDIDATES. HE WILL MEET GM MAGNUS CARLSEN IN A MATCH FOR THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN NOVEMBER.